

TLA Annual Conference 2011, Austin

Libraries crossing boundaries

Attended by Paula Highfill, President

The Friends also subsidized attendance by City Librarian Steve Standefer

Day One

General Session I with Jamie Lee Curtis

Ms. Curtis is an actress and the author of many children's books. She spoke about her passionate belief in reading and in fostering children's imagination and potential. She told a poignant story about working on the board of several children's hospitals and coming in contact with the parent of a dying child who told her that what he would miss the most was the feel of his son on his lap when they were reading a book. She described knowing that her books could somehow contribute to the memories of this parent as "the proudest moment in my career."

Serve as volunteer assisting with LIFTA luncheon.

Opening Author Session

Luncheon sponsored by LIFTA

With Diane Mott Davidson, Richard Peck and Jacqueline Winspear

Various grants are awarded at this luncheon. Many Friends and board members from other libraries are in attendance providing a great opportunity for networking with peers. Also in attendance from Mansfield were Board members Suzonne Evans and Cindy Gray. All three featured authors spoke about their most recent works. Ms. Mott Davidson has been on the Mansfield Reads! selection list several times so I was very interested to hear her speak. She was quite entertaining and could be a very good candidate for a future Reads! program.

Session: Big Brother is Watching

Presented by Mary Beth Harrington

Texas Association of Non-profit Organizations

Ms. Harrington spoke on the role and responsibilities of NPO board members. She stressed the importance of knowing the legal and fiduciary requirements, of complying with state and federal regulations (especially stressing the registered officer and agent role) and of liabilities involved. She emphasized the importance of Directors and Officers insurance, relating several horror stories about lawsuits, law-breaking, etc. D&O insurance is something our board has talked about several times but never pursued. Ms. Harrington directed us to TANO.org for further resources. This will be added to the Mansfield Friends agenda in 2011. I also plan to look into membership in TANO.

Ms. Harrington also talked about the importance of compliance with federal, especially IRS, regulations. There is a Texas C-Bar legal Compliance Checklist available on line.

She stressed 501(c)3 status requirements, including the new regulation that requires all non-profits, regardless of sales income, to file Form 990N every year. This is something our treasurer has been on top of. We are not in danger of losing our non-profit status (the penalty for not filing.) She warned against “mission creep” which can negate some legal uses of funds. She also spoke about segregation of duties and the need for a Policies and Procedures manual. This is something we do not currently have in place.

Lastly, she touched on Advocacy by non-profits. Non-profits should be in the business of education not political action. A non-profit representative cannot legally say “you should vote this way” but can say “did you know that libraries are visited by 86% of our citizens each year and if our library closes 50% of them will have no internet access.”

Rally for Texas Libraries On the steps of the State Capitol

For the first time ever, the conference completely shut down so that all attendees could attend a rally for Texas libraries at the State Capitol while lawmakers were in session. Most attendees wore red and waved signs that said “Save our Libraries” and “Texans Love Libraries”. TLA President Maribel Castro spoke, some personal testimony was given by citizens for libraries and several lawmakers came out of their offices to observe and speak to the group. With the budget crisis in Texas, it felt empowering to join other TLA members to speak up for libraries.

Dinner with NTRLS staff members & Vance Hunt Representatives

Day Two

Session: Librarians + Authors + Students = A great writing workshop

I attended this workshop thinking I might get ideas for Mansfield Writes or the author visits to MISD libraries in conjunction with Mansfield Reads! It was presented by Texas Sweethearts and Scoundrels, a group of authors who donate their time to work closely with students in Texas schools to develop writing-based programs that improve reading skills and promote creativity. Although most of the ideas and workshops they had done would most likely not fit into our programming it was interesting to hear YA authors with so much enthusiasm. This could very well be a summer program for teens if we were looking for something new.

Session: Texas Authors Live

With Sarah Bird, Dixie Cash, David Hilton, Mari Mancusi, Anna Mitchael and Antoinette van Heutgen

I was especially looking forward to this session because I thought it might provide an opportunity to meet with Sarah Bird, an author who had been specifically recommended for Mansfield Reads! by Jeff Guinn. In addition we have often expressed the desire to feature Texas authors and more female authors. This session fit the bill! All of the authors were entertaining. Dixie Cash is formerly of Arlington and would be great for an

author visit or tea. She writes humorous romance and has a large catalog as well as large numbers of fans.

At the end of the session I was able to talk with Sarah Bird and tell her a little bit about Mansfield Reads! Before I got started good, she said “I want to do it!” She was very interested and gave me her business card to contact her. She and her publisher’s representative both recommended her latest book “The Gap Year” for me to read and suggest. Ms. Bird has written quite a few novels and also wrote a monthly column for Texas Monthly for five years. She is well known and has a humorous presentation style and would seem to be a perfect fit for our program.

Session: Legislative Update

With Gloria Meraz, Director of Communications, TLA , Joyce Baumbach, chair TLA legislative committee, and Marty deLeon, policy analyst

This session updated us on the current status of the legislative session. The budget cuts currently proposed are severe. All library advocates must reach out and contact their lawmakers stressing their support for libraries. Tips were given regarding how to reach your legislators and how to tell a personal story. The role that lay people play cannot be stressed enough. The TLA website has an action page with simple, easy to follow suggestions and current updates.

Session: Authors of Mystery for Adults

Susan Albert Wittig, Jeff Abbott, Joy Fielding, Jason Goodwin, Katherine Hall Page and Joe R. Lansdale

Naturally, authors are a big part of the reason we attend TLA. Two authors on this panel, Susan Albert Wittig and Joe Lansdale have been on the Reads! selection list. Mr. Lansdale’s book, *The Bottoms*, has made the list several times. See his website www.joerlansdale.com for some insight. Each of these authors is considered a mystery writer, but they all represent different types of writing. It was quite interesting to hear how authors approach their work and learn of their latest work. It is always insightful and helpful to hear many authors when considering Mansfield Reads! titles.

General Session II with Greg Mortenson, author of Three Cups of Tea

Three Cups of Tea has been included in almost every Mansfield Reads! selection list. Mr. Mortenson spoke of some his work in the book as well as his institute that continues his mission. A student from one of his schools who came to the US and earned a law degree also spoke.

Book Cart Drill Team Challenge

This event cannot be adequately described on paper. Suffice it to say that librarians dress up and run around doing choreographed routines to music while pushing book carts. Yes, there are fun things at TLA.

Day Three

Hands on Labs:

Social Networking Basics

Google Docs, Reader, and Email Tools – Unleash the Power of Google

These two labs were the sessions I hoped to benefit the most from at TLA. There was an additional cost to attend, but both sessions addressed topics that were quickly becoming more and more important to our group.

The first, Social Networking Basics, was to cover Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. Since we recently launched a Facebook page I was hoping to get a lot of insight into the tricks of getting your page out to lots of people, managing your page, how to navigate between personal and “admin” pages, etc. Unfortunately, the Facebook session was a little too basic. The presenter focused on how to set up a page and how to navigate it and spent almost the entire session on that. Since we were already passed that stage it really didn’t give me much of the insight I was looking for. Since the two hour session was quickly coming to close, the presenter skipped Twitter in favor of LinkedIn which is a professional networking and contact site. Since so many in the session were librarians who jobs are being endangered that made sense but did not apply to me. This session was not a good use of my time or money.

Sadly, the same could be said for the second lab session as well. The Friends have recently set up a Google docs account to manage our database (which is really just an excel spreadsheet – a big one). We did this to allow multiple people access so each person would have up to date information whenever an entry was made or altered. We use the database to record memberships, donations, sponsors, mailing address, event attendee responses, correspondence, etc. In this session, we broke into groups, accessed accounts and basically just worked with each other to try to do different things. It was not very instructive nor of much good for my needs.

Exhibits

I was able to visit the exhibit hall for a short time. There are normally so many things to see it is hard to make your time count, but this year I had very little time here so I knew what I was looking for. I visited the Texas Book Festival booth to gather information about their new outreach programs. They are now sponsoring “Evening With the Author” Events in Austin. There were 11 scheduled from March through August with more to come. I spoke with Blair Newberry, Director of Outreach, who told me that TBF is in the process of trying to expand the program to cities outside of Austin. This could definitely impact Mansfield Reads! if they begin events all over the state. Most of us book lovers would say the more the merrier when it comes to author visits. There are several other big author events that take place in Dallas and the Star-Telegram still sponsors a few in Fort Worth. TBF could bring more authors our way or, they could become competition for author’s schedules. No matter the outcome of TBF expansion, it is nice to have a contact at TBF.

I also visited a display from a large vendor, Demco, on the recommendation of our Library Advisory Board President, Suzonne Evans. She was intrigued with a new product they were showing - a library book vending machine! Like a RedBox for library books. A branch in a box! Put in your library card, out comes a book! Very interesting!

I made time to visit with Vance Hunt and their sales rep, Craig Tappe, who is an ardent library supporter. Mr. Tappe is a frequent speaker at library conferences and I expressed our appreciation for his efforts. He has offered to speak to our Friends group about fundraising in the future.

Summary

All in all, it is a whirlwind three days. Being around so many librarians and library supporters as well as writers and publishers is rejuvenating! It is also informative and inspirational. The Friends cover the cost for two officers to attend conference each year. In addition, all TLA members are invited to attend at their own expense. Please consider going at some point in the future. You will be glad you did.