

The Annual Report of the Ontario Library Association

OLA 2008

Sam Coghlan, President

OLA lives, OLA learns.

Another year like no other, 2008 has proven again that OLA continues to be a “learning organization”. In a year that re-defined economic reality, the quiet resilience of OLA has ensured its members a continuous stream of service and programs to meet their professional and organizational needs.

Super Conference, although transpiring early in the new year, really is the culmination of OLA’s previous year. The record attendance at the 2009 Super Conference speaks to OLA’s ability to deliver programs and opportunities that applies even in a time of cutbacks and uncertainty. The combination of how-to (at all levels), of networking across sectors and of looking forward, reflects the essential ingredients to the continuing success of OLA in serving its members.

Super Conference also reflects the essential strength of OLA — the ability to serve members because that serving relies so heavily on the members themselves. OLA has found the necessary feedback loop that involves a vibrant collaboration of volunteers and OLA staff. With the departure of Larry Moore after more than two decades, one is tempted to speak of changes at the helm. In a year, when staff generally had less history with the association than the volunteers, a more suitable metaphor might have been of guiding a kite (in quite windy weather).

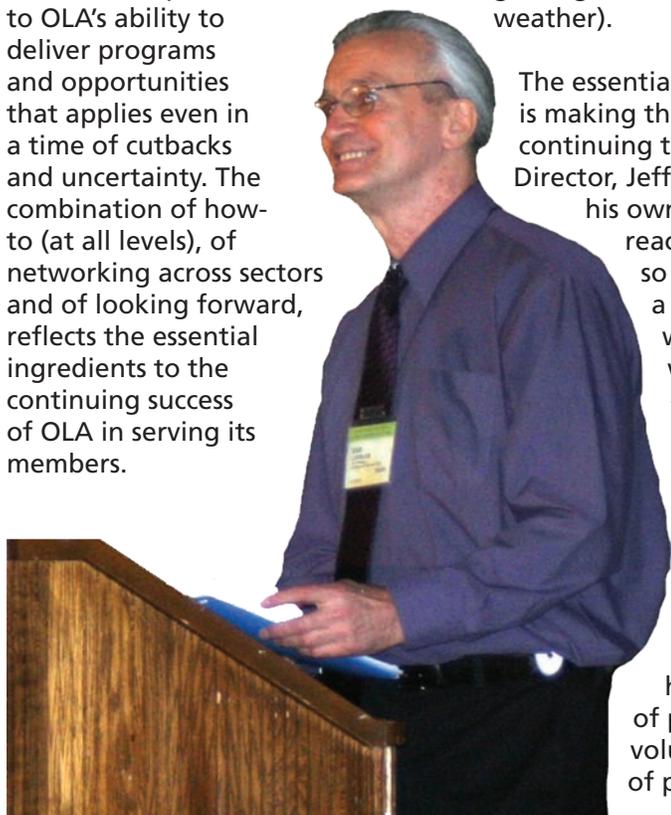
The essential fact is, that OLA is making the transition and continuing to thrive. As Deputy Director, Jefferson Gilbert started his own firm (gap. point. reach.inc.), he did not so much leave as forge a new relationship with OLA. The ways in which an organization can structure itself to perform its essential mission can be as myriad as the mind might imagine. With the vibrant mix of a small staff and an humongous number of potential member / volunteers, the number of possibilities presented

to OLA is multiplied

.... and OLA’s track record of realizing the possible is remarkable. Knowledge Ontario continues to create a new Ontario digitally. The Partnership continues to explore possibilities for multi-province collaborations. The Library Networking Group is still emerging. The Forest of Reading® continues to be a spectacular success. The divisions continue to push forward as demonstrated in their individual reports.

Someone once explained to me that a story can only be considered a novel if the characters in the story are changed in some essential way during the course of the story. Otherwise it is an anecdote. Being President of OLA is a novel experience. You cannot be part of the story of an organization that is always changing in essential ways and not go through changes yourself. My change consisted of finally “getting it” about the synergy of the divisions.

Libraries in Ontario reflect the province at large in that we are prone to restricting our scope of vision to only our respective silos. I studied at a few universities, so I have used academic libraries. My children attended school in the Ontario system much more recently than I, so I have wondered from time to time about school libraries. A good friend of mine works with



health libraries. But, pretty well, my focus as a librarian has been exclusively public libraries.

Until I became Vice-President of OLA!

A few years ago, somebody pointed out to me that silos are not bad in themselves. "When you see silos", she said, "recognize them as potential partnerships." OLA has been practicing that advice for over a century. As President I have come to understand the potential that exists when the divisions work together. It is no surprise to me that the idea to create Knowledge Ontario came from an OLA president.

The OLA Board currently includes four individuals who have a whole OLA mandate: vice president, president, past president, treasurer. The others come from the various divisions. In order to foster the awareness of all board members as to what is transpiring in the various individual sectors, at each of the four board meetings last year, we invited someone from each sector, but not from within OLA, to discuss advocacy challenges in that sector.

The board met with:

- ❖ David Allen of the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries
- ❖ Cynthia Archer and Leslie Weir of the Ontario Council of University Libraries (OCUL)
- ❖ Annie Kidder of People for Education

At a presentation to the Minister of Finance in a pre-budget consultation in Stratford, I was seated beside a dairy farmer and so referred to the power of working across traditional sectors by alluding to a three-legged milking stool. I went on:

The three legs of school, academic and public libraries not only encompass the entire continuum of lifelong learning, the stool provides the best combination of strength, reliability and efficiency. Like libraries do.

Another virtue of the three-legged stool is its flexibility. We can use libraries as a milking stool to milk as much as possible out of the knowledge economy. Students and citizens of all ages can use their library, of whatever type, as a stepping stool to get a leg up in life.

When you first think of a stool, you normally think of one used milking, for example. But a stool can be used for other actions as well, because as well as a stool, it's a tool.

And that's my point for today, that libraries (of all types) are also tools. Libraries are tools, but even more than just tools. Libraries come with the added value of professional expertise, wisdom and creativity. Librarians have been active in the field of information technology long before most people even thought about information. We have been innovators. Consider interlibrary loan. Consider Knowledge Ontario.

The need to have learning organizations has never been greater. The unrelenting certainty of unprecedented change has become evident, even in the economy. We have to learn how to be nimble if we hope to be able to dance our way through the chaos and the uncertainty. OLA may be a learning organization today and may have been in the past, but what is crucial is that OLA continues to live and learn.

As President, I had the privilege of awarding the President's Award for Exceptional Achievement. In making my decision of whom to honour, I considered what it will be like as we dance forward in time. I expect times of crisis and the need to deal with extreme pressures usually with unrealistic deadlines. It will be important, in such situations, to remain true to our core values. One value that is core to my librarianship is that of inclusion. Libraries must create opportunity for all.

The Working Together Project took inclusion to the streets. Public libraries in Vancouver, Regina, Toronto and Halifax stepped outside their walls to serve the marginalized in their communities. More significantly, they strived to



The President's Award for Exceptional Achievement went to the "Working Together" project.



The Partnership:

Front: Barbara Kelly, SLA, Lynn Somers, NSLA, Rae-Lynne Aramburo, NLA, Erin Palmer, NWTLA, Liz Kerr, OLA, Aimee Ellis, YLA, Lynne Jordon, BCLA, Lisa Milner, ABQLA, Yvette Frost, NSLA, Maria Morales, ABQLA, Wendy Rodgers, NLLA Back: Caroline Selinger, SLA, Amy Rankin, SLA, Su Cleyle, APLA, Jeff Gilbert, OLA, Renee Reaume, LAA, Karla Palichuk, LAA, Alane Wilson, BCLA, Donald Moses, APLA, Sam Coghlan, OLA, Trudy Amiraault, NSLA, Shelagh Paterson, OLA, Meredith Tutching, OLA

develop techniques to recognize and overcome invisible barriers created by class, wealth and circumstance.

That OLA values inclusion is evident from the ongoing commitment to assist First Nations communities and librarians develop their approaches for what we call librarianship. I look forward to learning from them.

In closing, 2008 surely counts as "interesting times". As President, I was privileged to work with a strong and dedicated board and capable, hard working, resilient staff.

I will not thank the individual board members but a great benefit of being President has been to get to know all of you and to work with you. Like fingers that make a hand functional, was it ever great to learn that you could all be counted on. I do need to specifically mention the Executive though as each of them were so necessary in making this transition

year a success: Past President, Esther Rosenfeld; President-Elect, Peggy Thomas; and, Treasurer, Sonia Lewis. What a crew!

Just learning about the unprecedented change and challenges that the OLA staff faced in 2008 would make me respect their resilience. Knowing them and working with them through some of the tough spots, however, makes me admire them and feel a tremendous amount of gratitude.

As President, my main point of contact was Shelagh who did an excellent job in her first year in a very challenging position. Shelagh listens to people and watches what's going on so completely, the fact that she has a firm handle on the way forward remains sufficiently subtle that others feel empowered to express their own voices. Shelagh brings assets that will be critically valuable as OLA chooses a direction but needs to remain nimble enough to navigate the appropriate routes.

If being President is a novel experience, the true story is not in hobnobbing with the board and the Executive Director. The plot really gets furthered through the efforts of all the staff and hundreds of volunteers. Just look at Super Conference! The Planning Committee itself includes over 25 volunteers! Then look at the Forest of Reading@! And all those events during the year! And don't forget the advocacy work and the lobbying!

I think the internet invented social networking because it wanted to be like OLA.

Thank you everybody for all you do!

I can hardly wait so see what we do next.

OLA President.