

Northern exposure

Australian librarians impress American colleagues



Virginia Walsh

Executive director

Australian libraries: pathways to knowledge' was the theme for the Australian presence at the American Library Association's (ALA) conference in Washington during June. With the support of the Australian Ambassador to the United States His Excellency Andrew Peacock and his staff, ALIA co-ordinated arrangements for a stand within the exhibition. The National Library of Australia, RMIT Publishing and ALIA worked together to mount a lively display of information about our libraries, our professional association and Australian publications. Most particularly, information was displayed which promoted the 1998 Adelaide and 2000 Canberra biennial conferences, the Australian Libraries Gateway, bibliographic databases and online sites of interest.

ALA holds the biggest and one of the most prestigious library conferences in the world. This year 25 000 delegates attended. There were over 2000 conference sessions and 760 exhibitors. Yet within this vast array of exhibits and professional activities the ALIA stand attracted a great deal of attention. Lured by the enticing blow-up kangaroos, wombat, platypus and great white shark, that poster of the incredible library, free notecards from the NLA and a variety of lapel pins of koalas, kangaroos and library slogans, visitors enquired about a plethora of topics and issues. Interest in opportunities for trips to Australia for employment exchanges and (tax-deductible) conferences was high. Australian literature and professional information was also the subject of inquiry and interest. Visitors to the stand included ALA president-elect Ann Symons; eminent librarian on the world stage Norman Horrocks;

chair of the ALA Australian Studies Group Faye Christenberry from the University of Kansas; Joan Aliprand from the Research Libraries Group; Susan DiMattia who is president-elect of the Special Libraries Association and her husband Ernie DiMattia who is well known to many public librarians in Australia. A number of other librarians visited the stand including senior staff from the Library of Congress (who were interested in the NLA's CJK database) and staff from the National Library of Canada.

The Australian team

The very professional team which fielded questions across a broad spectrum of enquiries was 'anchored' by Margaret Phillips (NLA), Sandra Oxley (RMIT), Di Booker (ALIA 1998 biennial conference chair) and Ivan Trundle (ALIA). The duty roster also included John Shipp (ALIA President), Warwick Cathro (NLA), Kerry Webb (CSIRO), Mary Mortimer and Donald Denoon (Docmatrix).

At a conference session on library advocacy, I gave a presentation about the 'Lobby for Libraries' program and another Australian, well-known in the international library world, Maxine Rochester from Charles Sturt University, gave a paper on 'New ways to serve the rural library user: an Australian perspective'.

A reception for 700 international visitors and guests was held in the imposing atrium of the World Bank building. All conference delegates were invited to a reception at the Library of Congress which has been recently restored to its full grandeur and glory. This was also the venue for the inaugural banquet for incoming ALA president Ann Symons. It

proved a wonderful occasion for meeting colleagues from the United States of America and around the world and the Australian delegation received special note in the introductory comments of outgoing president Barbara Ford.

Outcomes

Our presence at the ALA conference as part of the exhibition was initiated by the offer of financial support from the Australian Embassy. It was in many ways an experiment and the success of this venture is not easily or immedi-

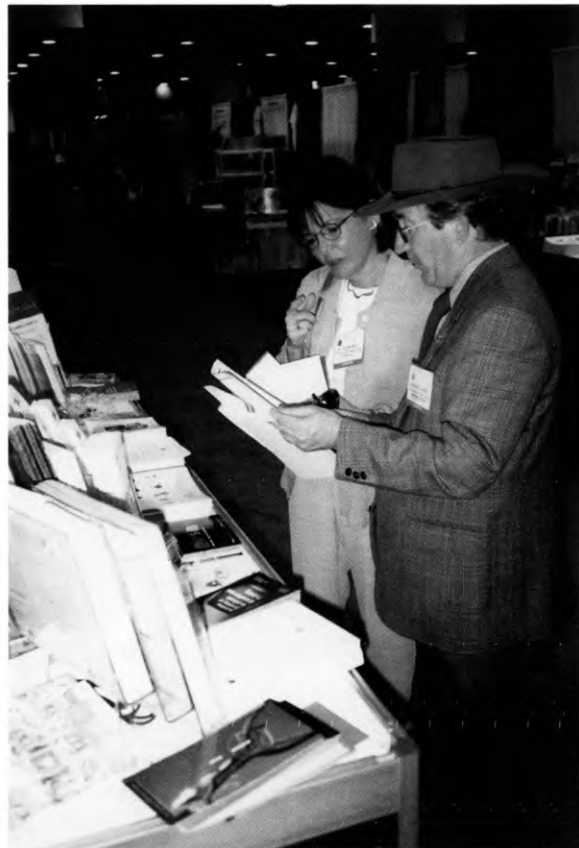
The Australian team at the stand: (l-r) Di Booker (1998 conference convenor); Kerry Webb (2000 conference convenor); Margaret Phillips (NLA); Jill Collier Indyk (director of cultural affairs, Embassy of Australia, Washington DC); John Shipp (ALIA president); Virginia Walsh (ALIA); Andrea Hay (project officer, cultural affairs, Embassy of Australia); Ivan Trundle (ALIA); Warwick Cathro (NLA); Michael Cobbin (Embassy of Australia librarian)



ately quantifiable. There are great benefits in the opportunities for the exchange of ideas and learning from the direct exposure to colleagues working in other countries. Copyright, internet censorship and library management issues, to name only a few, are priority concerns which we share in common with American libraries and we can benefit from studying their mechanisms for addressing these matters at close range. Expressions of interest in attending and exhibiting at ALIA conferences were strong as was interest in Australian literature, libraries and tourism. Information about Australian publishers and distributors was also sought as well as information about lists of books published in Australia. American attendance at the ALIA 1998 and 2000 conferences will provide some measure of success.

The Australian 'team' was satisfied that we made a good impression and excited a very positive response from visitors to the stand and we remain enthusiastic about evaluating opportunities for representation at

future ALA events. The cost of this representation will need to be subsidised by non-library interests such as the Australian Tourism Commission, the Department of Communications and the Arts or the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade if we are to fund an appropriately professional exhibit and provide for the breadth of inquiries raised by ALA delegates. There is also the opportunity to pursue sponsorship from 'Australian' entrepreneurs such as Rupert Murdoch and multinational corporations with a library-related Australian presence. ■



Jill Collier Indyk, director of cultural affairs, Embassy of Australia, Washington DC with Warwick Cathro from the National Library of Australia







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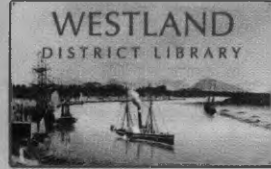
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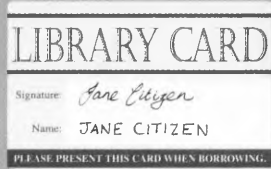
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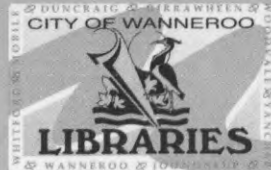
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