Riding the roller-coaster

Rivers of knowledge, **9th Special, Health & Law Libraries Conference 26–29 August 2001, Melbourne**

B ack in early 1999 when the idea of hosting the 2001 Special, Health and Law Libraries conference was raised, little did we realise the roller coaster ride we were about to embark upon. Christine McLaren (then national president of the ALIA Special Libraries section), together with Althea Ward (representing the Australian Law Librarians' Group) and Stephen Due (representing the ALIA Health Libraries section) formed a working party to get the initial planning underway. I was invited to join as the conference chair with Christine, Stephen and Althea each being the sectorial convenor for their group.

Our first tasks were to set the dates, select venues, and choose a theme. A look back over past conferences showed a strong link to the host city. 'On the edge', Perth alluded to their place on the far west; 'Synergy in Sydney' had a nice ring to it and the double play on 'synergy' being working together. The Yarra River had to feature, and so the 'Rivers of Knowledge' was born. The theme attempting to convey the 'flow' of information — from rain drops in the hills, running into streams, creeks and finally to the Yarra and Maribyrnong rivers and out to the bay and ocean.

The conference logo was the next priority. The choice of a blue (obviously for 'water' and the River — albeit the Yarra is more a shade of 'brown' at the best of times!) square that represented a computer screen, with the squiggle bottom representing the river, and then the open book pages on the corner that doubled to represent Melbourne's tall buildings. Did you see all that?

Our budget was revisited and seed funding received from the National Special, National Health, and the Australian Law Librarians' Group. We also received a $2000 grant from ALIA National Office and EBSCO Australia came to the party by prepaying $4000 of 'whatever' sponsorship/trade exhibition space they would take.

Costing out the trade exhibition stands proved an interesting exercise. Prices for the stand, equipment, electricity, and catering had to be calculated together with a component that was 'deemed' advertising income. At $2500 a stand, and with fifty stands being $125 000 shows considerable commitment by those who come to exhibit.

Then Christine McLaren decided she'd rather become a 'public' librarian and absconded to Gippsland. Peter Mathews (then EBSCO, now Eastend Booksellers) joined the committee. Around the same time, Stephen Due found juggling work and the time and travel from Geelong to Melbourne for the meetings too demanding. Fiona Capurro (Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital) became the Health convenor.

The Program sub-committee — Caroline Knaggs (convenor); Althea Ward (Law); Peter Mathews (Special); Fiona Capurro (Health); Tom Girke; Majella Pugh and myself — began to work on the call for papers which was issued in late 2000. We were pleased with the responses received and at the array of topics offered by those

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willing to share and contribute to the program. Without the speakers volunteering their time to prepare, write and present papers there would be no conference.

While the main focus was on the program, other sub-committee members were busy at work. Social — under the guidance of Jenny Wood — were busy preparing the 'fun' events. Publicity — under Michael Coates' direction — were busy spreading the word. Donna Sherba Ross and the sponsorship team were busy fine tuning the all important income raising sponsorship packages.

We then faced the challenge of slotting in sessions to cover all the papers received, mixing and matching to ensure a cross section of ideas and issues.

Sunday 26 August came too soon. After my brief welcome, Phil Ruthven, chairman, IBISWorld Pty Ltd then gave the opening address. As the founder of Australia's best known business information, forecasting and strategic services corporation, Phil gave a lively address. Bombarding the audience with facts and figures, he set out to show where we were heading. It would appear anyone in 'health' services was in the right field, as his forecast saw huge growth in that area with our 'ageing' population.

The opening keynote address on Monday was presented by Di Fleming, chief executive officer of Digital Harbour Pty Ltd. Using the analogy of Alice in Wonderland, Di took us through an algorithm for change. Di's presentation was followed by the opening of the trade exhibition area where delegates were refreshed with morning tea sponsored by Elsevier Science.

Keeping the show on time was no easy task. With fifty exhibition booths, we had to usher delegates back to the main auditorium to go 'digital dancing' with Richard Hulser, Infotrieve USA. Looking at where we are heading in the information industry with digital technology and its use and the ever increasing storage capacities being developed.

At the end of a busy day delegates demonstrated they were up to the challenge and came along to the RMIT Publishing sponsored pre-dinner drinks, which was followed by the conference gala dinner. The dinner sponsors, CCH, were delighted to see so many party on late into the night. The social committee's decision to use the gala dinner as an 'ice breaker' rather than the usual 'farewell' event proved a huge success.