From Your Guest Editor

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From Your Guest Editor:

As in past September issues of *Against the Grain*, Fran Wilkinson and Linda Lewis get us started. As usual they tackle the most pressing issues facing reference librarians and publishers. This year, the spotlight is on reference budgets. Academic and special librarians from a number of institutions reflect on the level of financial support for reference purchases, both print and electronic. Not surprisingly, few budgets are growing, but support is there, especially for buying electronic sources. Print remains viable, at least for smaller, specialized works, but with the unrelenting move to Web resources, CDROMs are fading from view.

In another centerpiece article, *Irv Rockwood*, editor and publisher of *Choice* offers his personal insights and impressions in “Reference Publishing: the View from Middletown.” *Irv* points to the difficulty in coming to a clear definition of reference publishing and then begins creating one of his own. Using data culled from the Reference Section of *Choice*, *Irv* discusses the obvious decrease in print reference titles, as well as a suspected growth in Web-based sources. He then comments on reference publishing’s changing line-up of publishers and its increasing consolidation of imprints. By combining these observations, *Irv* gives us a clearer picture of reference publishing evolving landscape, and as he says, “a justification, if there ever was one, for a follow up article.” (Needless to say, we hope to run that article in an upcoming issue of *ATG*.)

We also have interviews from two leaders in reference publishing. *Ron Boehm*, President and CEO of ABC-CLIO, shares his insights about a family run publishing house that has emerged as a major force. Discussing their start with AD&D services, their expansion into print encyclopedias, and now, their move into the eBook market, *Ron* sheds light on the development of ABC-CLIO. He concludes the interview with his personal vision for the company’s future, as well as for reference publishing.

About three years ago *Sage Publishing* took the plunge into reference publishing. It was a decision that many wondered about. *Rolf Janke*, Vice President and Publisher, *Sage Reference* talks about that decision and why it has worked. *Rolf* talks about their expanding line of reference titles, as well as the positive market response, and then hints at possible moves into electronic publishing.

We also have a feature article from *Alis Whitt* noting the possible impacts of virtual reference on collection development. Besides stressing the need for more reliable online reference sources, *Alis* makes some strong recommendations to electronic database publishers on how to improve their products to be more relevant in the virtual reference environment. In addition, we feature a review article from *Phil Powell* of a classic reference resource that has admirably adjusted to changing times. With the sixth edition of the *MLA Handbook*, *Phil* finds this venerable tool breaking into the 21st century more relevant than ever.

Tom Gilson, Guest Editor

Letters to the Editor

Send letters to <kstrauch@comcast.net>, phone or fax 843-723-3536, or snail mail: *Against the Grain*, MSC 98, The Citadel, Charleston, SC 29409. You can also send a letter to the editor from the *ATG* Homepage at <http://www.against-the-grain.com>.

Dear Editor:

As a great fan of Laura Gasaway’s columns, I have a suggestion. Ideally, I’d love to be able to search an archive of the columns. As an acceptable alternative, I’d find an index of the columns exceedingly valuable. On a number of occasions, issues have arisen (I have one now) that I know Laura has addressed but I’m befuddled as to how to find the specific column.

This really deserves to be an electronic knowledge base.

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Editor’s Note: Thanks for the suggestion Kent. This is coming soon. — KS

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