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Notes from Mosier-Reports from the Mountains

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The Ninth Acquisitions Institute at Timberline Lodge was held May 16th-19th, 2009. Our keynote speaker last year was Terry Reese, Gray Family Chair for Innovative Library Services at Oregon State University. His address was titled “Open Data: Encouraging Open Source and Integration Between Vendors and the Library Development Community.”

Given that I’m one of the conference planners, I don’t want to indulge in too much self-promotion, and besides, the program will be reviewed and reported on elsewhere. However, in the interest of informing those of our readers who may not know about this little gem of a conference, let me say a few words about the Institute and the Lodge. It might be in order.

First, the program. In addition to the keynote address, we had nine presentations, running 45 minutes each. A question-and-answer session followed each presentation. All presentations are made before the group as a whole; we do not have breakout sessions.

Program content is the cornerstone of the conference. In addition to Terry’s keynote, other topics last year included collaborative collection development, streaming video, realigning budgets to support new access models, electronic resources, OCLC WorldCat Local and Acquisitions, gift operations, and coordination of library liaisons in small academic libraries. We’re in the process of establishing an additional website with previous conference programs and links to presentations — more on this later.

Next, the Lodge. Timberline was built in 1936-37 as a project of the Works Progress Administration. The Lodge sits at 6,000 feet on the south slope of Mount Hood, a little over an hour east of Portland, Oregon. With the major exception of six massive timber columns (whole trees, really) that came from what’s now the Gifford Pinchot National Forest on the Washington side of the Columbia Gorge, most of the timber materials were gathered within a mile of the building site.

During the depths of the Great Depression, the WPA sought to employ the unemployed, desperate people a living wage — and, just as important, a sense of self-worth and dignity. The results at Timberline are magnificent and enduring. For more information about the Lodge, including photos, visit their website at www.timberlinelodge.com. I’ll admit to being somewhat biased; it’s the best venue for a conference on the planet (and yes, the exterior Lodge shots for The Shining were filmed here).

Now, a bit about the history of the conference. This all started about twenty years ago, when Richard Brumley (then of Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, later Oregon State University) and Tom Leonard (then of the University of the Pacific, now director at St. Edwards University in Austin) and I were having a drink in the bar of the St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco during an ALA. The Charleston Conference had already established a name for itself; we pondered whether there were any issues obtaining to acquisitions, collection development, and technical services in the West that were different or unique from Eastern libraries. One thing led to another, as these ALA conversations tend to do, and at the end of the conversation we decided to build a meeting around this theme. The University of the Pacific has a conference center/destination resort in the Sierras, and Tom volunteered to look into the details of securing its use for this informal symposium. The facility is called the Feather River Inn, and hence in its first incarnation the conference was known as the Feather River Institute.

By the end of that first meeting we’d concluded that no, in fact, there really wasn’t anything all that different about acquisitions in the West, but we had a lot of fun and much stimulating conversation at that first conference, so we decided to make it an annual event.

The Inn was indeed a rustic setting — the main lodge, originally built as a ski lodge in the early part of the twentieth century, had been used as a boarding school for troubled boys in the 1960s, and they’d done a pretty thorough job of trashing the place. The upper floors had been condemned years before we started meeting there, so we just used the cafeteria, bar, and main fireplace room in the lodge, and found accommodation in cabins down the ravine (guilty?): some years heat and running water were in short supply. Despite this, the Inn provided a convivial and relaxed atmosphere, and inspired candid and unfettered conversation between librarians, vendors, and publishers.

Tom masterminded the first three meetings, before moving on from the U of P. We continued to meet at Feather River until the late 1990s, then, for a variety of reasons, we decided to relocate.

By that time the planning committee consisted of Bruce Hocking (then of Oregon State University), Nancy Sibbitt-Gibney (University of Oregon), and me. We decided an Oregon venue made just so much more sense. Although other locations were considered (Skamania Lodge, Edgfield, the Kennedy School), Timberline was our first choice — and the folks there were genuinely interested in us and our meeting. From the beginning they’ve been a delight to work with.

We meet every May the weekend following Mother’s Day. Informal dress is encouraged; be prepared for the possibility of snow (last year we had the most spectacular weather we’ve ever enjoyed, but we were very lucky). We deliberately build free time into the schedule to allow off-line conversations and networking.

The call for papers goes out at the end of August / early September, and we post the preliminary program on our website around ALA Midwinter. Conference registration is limited to 85 people, and we admit on a first-come, first-serve basis.

The Lodge offers several different types of rooms, ranging in price. There are singles, doubles, and rooms that can accommodate larger parties; attendees are encouraged to bring spouses, significant others, and/or their families. (Some mythology has grown up about the rooming at the Institute: (a) no, you don’t have to share a room, providing you register early and (b) no, the rooms are not all bunk beds with bathrooms down the hall. There are such rooms, usually utilized by skiers — we’ve occasionally had people book into them, but we seldom use them. They are cheap, though, and actually, fairly nice.)

The Lodge is fully ADA-compliant. WiFi is available in selected locations. Rooms are equipped with telephones and television. However, bear in mind this is a 1930s vintage hand-built structure, so don’t expect luxury — that’s not what this is all about.

An optional meal package is included; we strongly encourage attendees to take advantage of this. There are alternatives — the Lodge does have a fine restaurant, the Cascade Dining Room, as well as the Bar, which offers pub food — but part of the networking opportunities and conference experience comes with eating together. Once you’re at the Lodge you’re pretty much part of a captive audience — it’s six twisting miles of alpine road dropping two thousand feet to the village of Government Camp, and the route can get icy at night.

After lunch on Sunday we allow time (weather permitting) for attendees to ride the ski lift up to the Siletz Hut at 7,000 feet — the view can be absolutely spectacular! In 2009 several folks went snowshoeing with Faye; this year there wasn’t enough snow.

The Lodge curator offers a tour (she’s great!), and we arrange a wine tasting as well (the Lodge has one of the best cellars in the Northwest). Another tradition handed down from Feather River is “favorite readings” — attendees are asked to bring something to read (prose, poetry, ILS documentation (just kidding!). The readings take place in the Blue Ox Bar, a cozy room in the depths of the Lodge. (The Blue Ox occupies what was originally intended to be a wood storage area. However, near completion of the building the principal interior designer, Marjorie Hoffman Smith, realized there was no bar in the Lodge, and decided that just wouldn’t do. Today the Blue Ox is not open to the public, but is available for private functions.)

I would be remiss were I not to mention the generous financial support we receive from the vendor community — we try to keep this conference very affordable; without their help this would be well nigh impossible. There are no

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Little Red Herrings — A “Wall” by Any Other Name Remains Equally Insipid?

by Mark Y. Herring (Dean of Library Services, Dacus Library, Winthrop University) <herringm@winthrop.edu>

For those who keep up with such things, it now appears that the whole social network craze is well, a little forced, postured, and otherwise created out of thin air. It’s not unlike the so-called “HPOA Girl” who quit her job using a dry-erase board and caused an Internet sensation. Jay Leno, Steven Colbert, “Good Morning America,” et al, all wanted her on board. Everyone shook their heads in a knowing way; we hear you sister, and we wish we had done that. We all discovered that it was all postured from the beginning by a Website known for its antics (http://www.thechive.com). Then came the news that Wikipedia really was trying to fix its quality issues; but amid all that work, many young people didn’t really believe it to be that reliable anyway.

“Our goal,” said co-founder Jimmy Wales in an Ad Tech conference in November last year, “is to make Wikipedia as high-quality as possible. Britannica or better quality is the goal,” he said. While the online encyclopedia is much better than it was, it still has “issues.” So much so, that in May of this year, it began to look to experts for contributions by teaming up with universities. Openness is not the enemy of quality, of course, but it may make it harder to achieve without the intervention of those who know what they’re talking about.

Pew informed us early this year (http://bit.ly/cQdgi3) that “kids” don’t blog anymore, and it’s likely they never did. Only 14% of tweens and teens (12-17 years of age) still blog, down from 25% just four years ago. Apparently blogging is an “old person’s” task. The same Pew study points out that young people may well be “sick” of Twitter, and as for Facebook, they all have one but just aren’t that much into it anymore. Add to all this, the datum that the so-called “online generation” really isn’t as savvy as we thought. The “digitals natives” are not necessarily tech-savvy. The tech-savvy folks are 30-something, not 20 something. Digital natives are more likely to attend the “University of Google” for everything, regardless of its success or lack thereof (http://bit.ly/bvXGIM). While working on another project I ran across some data that might surprise readers about the “age” of the so-called social networking era.

According to Royal Pingdom in a study done earlier this year (http://bit.ly/bPpWOJ), it would appear that the average social networking user is a geezer, or she may as well be. In a study of 19 social networking sites, fully one quarter are 35-44, if you stretch that to 55, that age bracket accounts for nearly 45% of all users. And the female pronoun above is not merely for the sake of political correctness: more women than men use social networks. It doesn’t end there, either. The social network one uses correlates to one’s age. If you have a Bebo account, you’re probably 17 years of age or younger. On the other hand, if you have a Facebook or Twitter account, you are likely to be 35 years of age, or older. The average age of a Facebook, Digg, StumbleUpon, Twitter, Delicious, LinkedIn or Classmates user is thirty-eight, or older. Put your teeth continued on page 78