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ALA Midwinter Meeting 2018: February 9-13, Denver, CO

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ALA Midwinter Meeting 2018: February 9-13, Denver, CO

by **Leah H. Hinds** (Executive Director, Charleston Conference) <leah@charlestonlibraryconference.com>

"Oh, the weather was cold and frightful, but the meeting was so delightful..." Denver showed us its characteristic split-personality weather, ranging from cold and snowy on Friday and Saturday, to beautiful blue skies and milder temps on Sunday, then back to cold and snow.

With attendance at just over 8,000 people, numbers were down marginally from 2017 and significantly from 2016. The vendors I spoke with, however, reported good traffic in the exhibit hall and a plethora of meetings to keep them busy. It was good to connect with our friends and supporters, and meet new faces as well.

I was especially interested in the **Future of Libraries Symposium** sessions, which were focused on exploring the many futures for academic, public, school, and special libraries. Sponsored by **ALA's Center for the Future of Libraries**, the Symposium considered the "near-term trends already inspiring innovation in libraries and the longer-term trends that will help us adapt to the needs of our communities." <https://2018.alamidwinter.org/symposium-about>

Peter Piccolo and Nina Sharma.

The Saturday morning plenary session was "Libraries Transform: Education Innovation," presented by **Peter Piccolo**, Executive Director of **Innovation** at the Imaginarium — Denver Public Schools Innovation Lab, and **Nina Sharma**, Managing Director at the **University of Denver's** Project X-ITE (Innovation, Technology and Entrepreneurship). **Peter** spoke on his experience at the Imaginarium and gave advice for creative innovation. Some key takeaways:

- If you're innovating, your heart should be at the least accelerated. Innovation is risky.
- Know the difference between good and bad failure, and how to learn from your mistakes.
- Be aware of structural barriers that create incentives or disincentives for leadership.
- Know what problem you're solving for!
- Look to other industries and "steal like an artist." Food trucks inspired the public school system to create a microschool.

Nina Sharma presented on various projects and events that were done through Project X-ITE at the **University of Denver**. "Project XITE is a cross-disciplinary community at the **University of Denver** that supports the next generation of entrepreneurial thinkers through collaborative events, experiential programming, and strategic global partnerships," (from <http://www.projectxite.org/>). Some key takeaways:

- Events included Denver Startup Week, StudioX, Project X-ITE Forum, and the Colorado Solutions Summit, which brought together unique teams of thinkers, doers, and problem-solvers to work together in curated mentoring teams to support Colorado companies.

Tom Gilson, Associate Editor for *Against the Grain*, and I stopped by for a meeting at the **Prenax** booth to talk with **Nancy Percival** and **George Rego**.

- (About Project X-ITE) "We get stuff done. We don't stop. Forward motion. And it drives everyone else crazy."
- We started our program without student advisors. It was the antithesis of human centered design. Quickly corrected by including their users on an advisory board. The Hunter Forum, sponsored by **Elsevier**, was focused on Library Impact and Value Across the University. Moderated by **Jean Shipman** of **Elsevier**, panelists included **Michael Levine-Clark**, **University of Denver**; **Emily McElroy**, **University of Nebraska Medical Center**; **Melissa Bowles-Terry**, **University of Nevada Las Vegas**; and **Dr. Regina Kilkenney**, **University of Colorado-Denver**.

Panel at the Hunter Forum.

The forum included topics such as:

- Leveraging the strategic goals of the university, how do libraries communicate value to administrators and become indispensable to their university? What metrics and qualitative information are used beyond traditional library statistics? (**McElroy**)
- Connecting the library to university values to create resonating messaging (**Levine-Clark**)
- Library educators are making a difference on institutional outcome metrics. Highlights from GWLA multi-institutional study on: The Impact of Information Literacy Instruction on Student Success (**Bowles-Terry**) (http://www.arl.org/storage/documents/publications/The_Impact_of_Information_Literacy_Instruction_on_Student_Success_October_2017.pdf)
- A University Administrator's Perspective and Panel Response (**Kilkenney**).

The Awesome Ideas Pitch was supported by the Libraries chapter of the **Awesome Foundation**, "an international organization that forwards the interest of awesome in the universe \$1,000 at a time." Eight finalists presented their ideas for projects to impact their community, demonstrate a new idea, or improve a tool or service. The eight finalists, in order of presentation, were:

- Making is for Everyone: Student Startup (**Jessica Davilla Greene**, **Claremont Colleges Library**)
- The Chatanooga Memory Project: a crowd-sourced digital history project (**Corinne Hill** and **Chris Cummings**, **Chatanooga Public Library**)
- Project Book Culture (**Stacy Linemann**, **Waseca-Le Sueur Regional Library System**)
- Free the Textbooks! (**Carrie Moran**, **Cal State San Marcos**)
- Getting Down with IoT (**Sandy Avila**, **University of Central Florida**)
- Health for the Healers (**Maggie Ansell** and **Ariel Pomputius**, **University of Florida**)
- Kids Storytelling Festival (**Christian Zabriski**, **Yonkers Public Library**)
- Punk: First Wave Documentary (**Nick Parker**, **Sacramento Public Library**)

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Two winners were selected, each to win a \$1,000 grant from the **Awesome Foundation**: one by audience vote and one selected by a panel of judges. The audience pick was “Free the Textbooks!” while the judges selected the “Kids Storytelling Festival.”

The Sunday morning plenary session was on Diversity and Equity, and featured inspiring talks from **Elizabeth Martinez** and **Binnie Wilkin**. They both spoke on their wealth of experience and knowledge in building diversity and equity in libraries and in the information industry as a whole, as well as forward-looking thinking on the same topic. **Binnie Wilkin** predicts, “Bold systems and new forms of networks will evolve as new generations who have grown up experiencing life in an age of connectivity become the decision-makers.” Video highlights of this and other Symposium sessions can be seen at <https://youtu.be/CYhn3QLqPpw>.

Another fascinating and cutting-edge session I attended was “Blockchain, Open Civic Data, and TV Whitespace: Three New Projects.” Moderated by **Sandra Hirsch** from **San Jose State University**, the session featured three IMLS funded projects at various institutions. **Sue Alman**, **San Jose State University School of Information**, spoke about a project dedicated to understanding blockchain technology and its potential uses in libraries. More information can be found on their blog at <https://ischoolblogs.sjsu.edu/blockchains/>. **Toby Greenwalt** of the **Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh** spoke on the Open Civic Data project aimed at connecting libraries and community information networks. They’re hosting workshops and two conferences in year one, and will offer stipends to partnerships for field testing their toolkit in year two. Updates and more info at <https://civic-switchboard.github.io/>. Finally, **Kristin Rebmann** from **San Jose State University** presented her project on TV Whitespace, technology to broadcast wifi into the community through unused television frequencies. <http://ischool.sjsu.edu/about/news/detail/ischool-associate-professor-awarded-grant-will-expand-libraries%E2%80%99internet-access>

Sunday afternoon featured a great panel discussion sponsored by the **LITA/ALCTS** Electronic Resources Management Interest Group titled “Vendor Relationships: Build, Negotiate, Transform.” The panel was moderated by **Michael Rodriguez**, **University of Connecticut**, and featured **Jason Chabak**, **ReadCube**; **Lindsay Cronk**, **University of Rochester**; **Allen Jones**, **the New School**; **Christine Stamison**, **NorthEast Research Libraries Consortium (NERL)**; and **Kimberly Steinle**, **Duke University Press**. Each panelist gave fantastic input on networking, collaboration across industries, and establishing successful relationships.

The Monday morning plenary session was on Civic Innovation, and featured talks from **Margaret Hunt**, **Colorado Creative Industries** and **Space to Create**, and **Jake Rishavy**, **Colorado Smart Cities Alliance**. **Hunt** spoke on the “Space to Create” project, generating affordable live/work spaces for the creative industries workforce and artists in rural communities, along with the Creative District Community Loan Fund, Art in Public Places, and grants to support the arts and career advancement grants for creative entrepreneurs. **Rishavy** spoke on the **Colorado Smart Cities Alliance** a statewide collaboration of public, private and academic sector leaders committed to accelerating the adoption of smart cities projects and initiatives in their respective communities.

Up next was a concurrent session titled “Sustainability Strategies for Libraries and Communities” that presented several great ways to get libraries involved with environmental friendly and sustainable practices. **Joe Mocnik** from **North Dakota State University** presented steps his institution is taking to move from coal burning heat to more renewable resources. **Am Brunvand** from **Utah State University** is teaching students information literacy from a civic engagement perspective, tying in sustainability with place-based knowledge and local advocacy groups. **Rebekkah Smith Aldrich** from the **Mid-Hudson Library System** spoke on the **NYLA Sustainability Initiative** (www.nyla.org/sustainability) and their implementation of a regional certification program, Sustainable Library Certification. The certification is currently available only for public libraries in New York, but they plan to expand to school and academic sectors soon. **Ben Rawlins** from **SUNY Geneseo** presented their OER initiative, **SUNY OER Services**, which included an Excelsior Scholarship of \$8 million to provide open educational resources to students at **SUNY** and **CUNY** to defray textbook costs.

The closing session on Monday afternoon featured **Bill Nye**, “The Science Guy,” and co-author **Gregory Mone**. Together they have authored a series of children’s books called *Jake and the Geniuses*. The pair met by chance at a coffee shop in California and got to know each other when **Mone** invited **Nye** to go surfing with him in Malibu the next day. The session was a fun-filled discussion that was a comfortable talk between friends. **Mone** posed questions to **Nye**, and he answered with characteristic wit and humor. Topics ranged from the realism used in the books (“No jet packs!”), to the importance of

Bill Nye and Gregory Mone at the Closing Session.

including female characters (“Half the humans are girls and women, so half the engineers and scientists should be girls and women.”). When asked, “What do libraries/librarians mean to you?” **Nye** responded that librarians help you learn to think, and the role of librarians is to help people figure out what is reasonable information and to teach critical thinking skills. 🐼

ALA Annual 2018 will be held in New Orleans, LA, June 21-26.