

Against the Grain

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Little Red Herrings — Giving Thanks: Libraries

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

I am probably alone in this, but every time I see one of those ALA READ posters, I bristle. Oh, I'm sure there is abundant market research to prove that these posters are effective in some way. But when I see them, I'm prone to wonder about several things. First, what money went into these posters — surely most were public service shots — and where did that money come from? Second, those eminentos appearing in the posters: have they been to a library, ever? Or, have they been to one recently? Sure, they doubtless live in a town where there is a library, but honestly, do we need to be reminded to read by some athlete who may have his own "issues," or some actress whose last movie may not be one any of us can see without blushing or boredom?

But let's set all that aside. This is a column about libraries and why we should give thanks for them. I know I don't need to preach this to the choir, so to say, but is there any other civic entity that provides so much for so many for so little? Stop for a minute and let that sink in. Where else can one go and get so much for so little? Libraries aren't exactly free, but they may as well be for all you get just by showing up.

I work in an academic library, but students aren't our only patrons, as I suspect this is the case with many other academic libraries, if not all. When I think of all those folks in and out of our building who are not degree-seeking, I marvel at the cornucopia of resources they have at their fingertips. Are they working on

a research project? We have what they need in spades. Are they creating the next great American novel? We have whatever they need to strike a match, light a fire, or create a conflagration of creativity. And it isn't just the subject matter for their topic. We also have the tools to craft them on, the consultants on hand to help them navigate the often rough waters of inspiration, not to mention the very suggestions needed to get that inspiration going.

Perhaps they are writing a screenplay or just trying to find some obscure fact they need to pull off that clever mystery play. The fact of the matter is that it's here, everywhere. Sure, they can Google around all day if they like, but they'll find, more often than not, that the time-savers we have here can set them more quickly on their stated task than a half day of running down that rabbit-hole that is too often the Google experience.

Suppose they're trying to start a business and they want to do some market research, not just for this city, but for any city? Then yes. Here. Again. In spades. Moreover, they may, with all the collaboration going on in the building at all hours of the day, even pick up some expert advice, free of charge.

But it doesn't even have to be something as far-flung as all these examples. It may be something far more mundane, like trying to chat

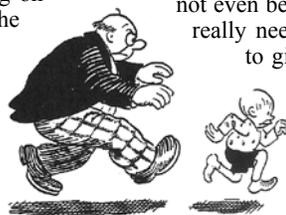
with your teenager, or trying to redesign your bonus room, or even move to a new house, to a new location, or to a new state. The fact of the matter is, we have it here. And it is here for the asking.

I don't want to go hyperbolic on readers, but honestly, is there a better or more public demonstration of what it means to live in a democratic republic than any one of the more than 116,000 libraries of all kinds in this country?

Libraries do all this with very little funding, often with even smaller staffs, and yet do it every day, every month, every year, and often amid the most tempestuous moments of change any business has ever had to endure in so short a time frame.

What I'd like to see rather than celebrities, athletes, or even politicians on READ posters would be everyday librarians and their everyday patrons reminding the world that this is what anyone can have, almost at any time, and just about anywhere you live in this country.

I know that by the time you read this column, Thanksgiving will be long past and may not even be a good memory. But you don't really need Thanksgiving to be reminded to give thanks for the many benefits we enjoy in this great country. I'm sure I'm biased, but librarians strike me as one of those things we aren't nearly thankful for, often or enough. 🍂



Don's Conference Notes

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ment this year, spearheaded by **Maria Aghazarian** of the **University of Wisconsin-Madison**, was collaborative note-taking. Check out a shared Google Doc containing notes from conference attendees on many other sessions to get a feel for what was covered.⁸ There was so much good material! In addition, all of the vision sessions are freely available on **NASIG's** YouTube channel, so feel free to check them out.⁹ Several other sessions were also recorded and will become freely available early next year, so I hope you will check them out as well.

Next year's conference will be held at the historic and beautiful Omni William Penn Hotel in downtown Pittsburgh on June 5-8. The conference theme will be **"Building Bridges: Connecting the Information Community"** and vision session speakers will be announced shortly. This is a wonderful event that is well worth attending. You are warmly welcomed to join the **NASIG** community! 🍂

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day, Inc. (ITI) and maintains the **Conference Calendar** on the **ITI Website** (<http://www.infotoday.com/calendar.asp>). He is the Editor of **Personal Archiving: Preserving Our Digital Heritage**, (*Information Today*, 2013) and Co-Editor of **Public Knowledge: Access and Benefits** (*Information Today*, 2016). He holds a Ph.D. degree from the **University of California, Berkeley** and has worked in the online information industry for over 45 years.

Endnotes

1. Abstract available online at <https://nasig2018.sched.com/event/DEpH/vision-i-soren-auer-towards-an-open-research-knowledge-graph>.
2. Abstract available online at <https://nasig2018.sched.com/event/DEpK/vision-ii-lauren-smith-communities-of-praxis-transforming-access-to-information-for-equity>.
3. Abstract available online at <https://nasig2018.sched.com/event/DEpN/vision-iii-lisa-macklin-open-access-how-accessible-is-it>.
4. See more detail about this project at <http://www.arl.org/focus-areas/scholarly-communication/toward-an-open-monograph-ecosystem>.
5. <https://dp.la>
6. See more detail at <https://www.library.unt.edu/policies/collection-development/collection-development-policy>.
7. <https://www.force11.org>
8. <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1oBfThhE2-Gy3N10es8Hd3MS8Wn5awMRxyTqJZm7HJwg/edit>
9. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uoaSD8TVbhg&list=PLfCwmKIU_VaS-NGG3A49nax0T5SNpAX4.