September 2005

From Your Guest Editor

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For the ninth consecutive year ATG dedicates our September issue to the vagary and variety of reference publishing. As they have done since we started, Fran Wilkinson and Linda Lewis kick things off with a group interview they have entitled “Reference eBooks: Does an eBook on the Screen Beat One on the Shelf?” Once again Fran and Linda elicited fascinating and informed responses from a panel of librarian experts. This time the topics under discussion include the ways that electronic reference books are being selected, purchased, and budgeted, as well as how they are being promoted and how patrons and librarians are reacting to them.

Keeping the focus on electronic collections we also have an interview with Diane Kovacs, consultant and author who has been a pioneer in e-collecting for reference. Her book, the Kovacs Guide to Electronic Library Collection Development: Essential Core Subject Collections, Criteria, and Guidelines, is well known to collection development and reference librarians alike.

Our other lead interview is with Erin McKeen, nationally known and respected lexicographer, and editor of the New Oxford American Dictionary. Erin had been profiled in the New York Times and interviewed on NPR and we are delighted that she shares her insights about the creation and publishing of this standard reference work. Her enthusiasm for, and love of, dictionary making is obvious in every answer she gives.

Naturally, we have a couple of articles that focus on reference publishing from the business side. Karen Christensen, co-founder of Berkshire Publishing follows up last year’s piece on quality in reference publishing with Making Reference: the Business Behind the Books. Karen guides us on a “soup to nuts” tour of how a publisher arrives at quality reference work. She skillfully combines explanation of profit and loss statements with discussions of the creativity and collaboration required for publishing success.

And, drawing on her 20 years of editorial experience, Sylvia K. Miller, discusses an essential part of any reference work. Her article Index Appreciation: A Publisher’s Brief Guide highlights the nitty-gritty of what goes into making a good index. Sylvia also contends that the indexer’s skill is needed more than ever in navigating the massive amounts of information available electronically. She insists that “without the analytical choices made by indexers, full text searching is often no more than a promising mishmash.”

We are also honored to have another article from Dave Tyckoson, the 2005 RUSA Isadore Gilbert Mudge-R.R. Bowker Award winner. Dave goes into the memory bank and pulls out a list of “Reference Classics that were ahead of their time.” Dave’s nominees range from “the famous (or infamous) Britannica 3” to my personal favorite, the Magazine Index viewable using COM readers, cutting edge technology of the 1970s. More than a nostalgia trip, Dave’s article reminds us where we have been, and how far we have come. For those of us who have been around for awhile, it has been an amazing journey and one that few of us could have imagined.

We hope that after reading through these amazing interviews and stimulating articles, you feel as good about this issue as we do. My usual advice still applies — sit back with your favorite iced beverage and enjoy.

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:

Permit a reference book publisher to congratulate you on Against the Grain. I learn from it.

The “Legally Speaking” article in the current issue (v.17, no.2, p.58) is splendid.

Cordially,
Matthew J. Bruccoli, President
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AGAINST THE GRAIN DEADLINES
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Yr. Ed. 🍻