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Support Staff

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## ALA Empowerment Conference

By **Karen H. Canary**

At the American Library Association's Conference for Support Staff, called the Empowerment Conference, this year's theme was Taking Charge in a Sea of Change. I decided to attend the Empowerment Conference again because I received a great benefit when I attended last year. I was happy I did attend. I learned a great deal not only about how to serve patrons better, but how to manage my life better. I attended a *Library Mosaics* tribute, a genealogy resources program, the Scholarship Bash and a program on how to achieve work/life balance. What a deal!

The kick-off session included a delicious breakfast and engaging speakers, Charlie Fox and Ed Martinez. Ed served as editor when *Library Mosaics: The Magazine for Support Staff* began in 1988. It was interesting to hear the ups and downs of getting a paraprofessional journal off to print and the financial hurdles. Thanks to founder Raymond Roney, the journal had a financial footing. Mr. Roney served as publisher for many years. Charlie came on board in 1998. By then the journal had evolved from a two-color cover to a full-color issue. I found Charlie and Ed entertaining and interesting. I have appreciated their efforts over the years because I have always enjoyed reading the articles in *Library Mosaics*. I will miss it very much [The magazine ceased publication in December 2005]. There was always something to inspire me or to help me do my job better.

By 4:00 p.m. on Saturday I was very tired, but I just couldn't miss Genealogy Basics for Reference Desk Personnel, sponsored by the [Reference and User Services Association \(RUSA\)](#). There were three speakers from three different genealogy resources. The first was Thomas J. Kemp from [American's Genealogy Bank](#). He told us about a new venture for News Bank. The new database will cover historical newspapers from 1690-1923. Modern obituaries start in the 1980's, but they are trying to go back to 1923. Members will have access to the Social Security Death Index, digital books and pamphlets of interest to genealogists from 1639 through 1819, local histories, local biographies, funeral sermons and memorial from 1600 through the 1850's, American State papers, pensions, widows' claims and many more types of material of interest to those searching their family history. They will be launching this database in September, 2006. There will be institutional access with off site access. This membership will be available to individuals as well.

The next speaker in the session was Paul S. Smart from Family Search. This is a free website available to genealogists. It is a database that was launched by the Church of Latter Day Saints (LDS) in May of 1999. It is helpful to know that it contains over one billion family names. LDS is microfilming family records in 45 different countries. Mr. Smart told us that over 6,000 films are added monthly. He also said that patrons who register with them will be notified if new information is received about the family of interest.

Mr. Smart told us about the Five Steps to Family Research. There is a link on their home page to get patrons started if they have little or no experience. Patrons can download software to help them as well. Personal Ancestral File (PAF) is a program that helps to organize family research. This program can be downloaded from the web page at no cost. There are many charts to print and hints on the website to help patrons with their research. The web site is [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org).

Bill Forsyth from ProQuest discussed the steps to finding your family. He showed examples of this process using [HeritageQuest](#) for a demonstration. HeritageQuest is a great resource that allows patrons to look up many primary source documents for their family research.

I was fortunate enough to have some time and energy available to attend the Scholarship Bash on Saturday Night. The Bruce Daigrepoint Cajun Band was a real treat for me. They played first and they were so appreciative of all of us in the audience. I couldn't help but tap my toes and move to the magnificent music. It was great. Mary Chapin Carpenter came on next and played a wonderful set. I love her acoustic style. A local music shop provided instruments as her band's were lost during the trip.

After a restful night's sleep and breakfast on Sunday morning, I arrived at the Morial Convention Center to attend the Professional Portfolio Development session lead by Linda Slusar from the [College of DuPage](#) in Glen Ellyn, IL. Linda is a sort of library hero to me because I have watched the "Soaring to Excellence" library staff teleconference series that she helped develop, and I enjoyed the format of series and the information it provided for me. Linda is very involved with many projects at the college. It was generous of her to take the time out of her busy schedule to help us in our career development.

Linda described what portfolio development is and how to tailor its contents so that it will work well for you whether you are looking for a job, going for a promotion or even using it to let your supervisor know what you have been up to from year to year. Linda gave us practical advice and resources to aid our efforts. One of the tips that I found most valuable was an annotated table of contents for the portfolio. This is a good way for busy managers to read through the material you have collected. We were advised to collect our best work for the portfolio. This is an opportunity to shine. Take advantage of it. Linda was approachable and encouraging. I enjoyed her session.

At 11:45 a.m. on Sunday, the ALA Library Support Staff Interests Round Table (LSSIRT) had a luncheon for us. We were treated to a tasty buffet, and Cali Williams Yost was our speaker for the event. Her book is called [Work + Life: Finding the Fit That's Right for You](#).

Cali spoke about how employers don't want their employees to leave the workplace because that would mean that they would have to hire and retrain new employees. This process takes valuable time. If an employee can come up with a solution for a problem, employers are most likely willing to listen. As long as the work gets done the employer is happy. There are some times in life when you may have to evaluate whether this job is meeting your current needs. Is there an adjustment you can make by involving your employer? Try to do things differently and talk it over with them. You can work with them to find a solution to situations that come up in your life.

This luncheon ended the [Empowerment Conference in New Orleans](#). I had a great opportunity to learn new things and meet new people. I still had more to do at the ALA Conference, but I appreciated the efforts of all of the people in LSSIRT that were involved in bringing this Empowerment Conference together. Please join us at the next Annual ALA Conference in Washington, D.C. in 2007.

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