

VLA Paraprofessional Forum 2009 Conference Report

by Lydia Williams



The 2009 Virginia Library Association Paraprofessional Forum Conference was held May 17–19 at the Holiday Inn/Koger South Conference Center in Chesterfield County. This year's theme was "The Neighborhood Library: Your Connection to the World," and the conference provided informative sessions that reflected this theme. Conference attendees numbered 284, with the six VLA regions being represented. Out-of-state attendees were from Colorado, New York, North Carolina, and Washington DC. With a variety of concurrent session topics, an author banquet, interesting keynote speakers, and many opportunities for networking and professional development, this conference provided all attendees with something of interest and value to take back to their respective libraries.

Sunday's Author Banquet

The conference opened with the Sunday Author Banquet, which featured Virginia author Ellen Crosby as the guest speaker. Crosby provided some information that explained how her career as a fiction writer developed. Prior to becoming a novelist, Crosby was a freelance reporter for the *Washington Post*, a Moscow correspondent for ABC News Radio, and an economist at the U.S. Senate. She is the author of five novels. Her first novel, *Moscow Nights*, was written and published while she was living in London. This 2001 release, which was based on her experiences in the former Soviet Union

during the Gorbachev era, was so successful that she continued to write fiction. Since moving to Virginia, she has written a series of four murder mysteries, each one set in Virginia's wine country. The most recent release is *The Riesling Retribution*.

During her presentation, Crosby provided some insight into an author's world by sharing what she needed to learn in order to make her Virginia wine country mysteries seem authentic and believable. She shared information about how several owners of Virginia vineyards and wineries mentored her so that she would have an understanding of the world of vineyards and the business of running a winery. She talked about her appreciation of libraries and the services provided by library staff, mentioning some of the resources she has used in writing her books. It was

Cochair Kathy Clevenger welcomes everyone to the opening session.

Below is Virginia author Ellen Crosby, keynote speaker for the Sunday Author Banquet.



VLA President-Elect John Moorman welcomes the group on behalf of VLA.

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Ellen Crosby signs books following the banquet.



Satia Orange gives Monday's keynote address...

...and asks for audience participation.



an interesting session that allowed attendees a look into the world of this very talented and popular Virginia writer.

Monday's Opening Session

VLAPF cochairs Kathy Clevenger and Willow Gale provided opening remarks and a welcome on behalf of the VLAPF Executive Board dur-

ing Monday's general session. VLA President-Elect John Moorman further welcomed the group on behalf of the Virginia Library Association. Sam Clay, vice-chair of the VLA Foundation, took the podium and provided information about the foundation, sharing ways in which it provides support to all Virginia libraries. Food Bank representative Roy Peters shared general infor-

mation about the Food Bank and thanked conference attendees for their donations to assist this charitable organization.

Satia Marshall Orange, director of the American Library Association's Office for Literacy and Outreach Services, was the keynote speaker for the Monday morning session. She delivered a message that was both insightful and



Left, Cochair Willow Gale welcomes everyone to Tuesday's luncheon.

Above, incoming Cochair Lydia Williams addresses the group during Tuesday's luncheon.

thought-provoking. She took the conference theme, "The Neighborhood Library: Your Connection to the World," and used it as a springboard for the theme of her lecture, which was titled "Making Your Professional Soundtrack Productive." Orange shared her professional soundtrack, stating that libraries should be all about outreach and providing equitable access to the knowledge and information stored in our libraries. She believes that as we deal with customers, we need to put aside our personal prejudices, feelings, and beliefs and focus on providing good customer service to all. As we provide library services, we need to understand that all customers are dealing with their own personal fears and issues; we should learn to be tolerant and provide the same service to all who enter the library doors. She talked about the professional soundtrack that each of us should possess, and she said it should sound something like this: "Serving people is a privilege and a responsibility."

Orange used the late Judith Krug as an example of someone that library employees should emulate while developing this professional soundtrack. Krug, who was ALA Intellectual Freedom Director, was a forceful advocate for the right of librarians to stock their shelves without fear of censorship. According to Orange, Krug's soundtrack was all about intellectual freedom, which motivated her to become a catalyst for positive change. It is our responsibility to provide great customer service because as library personnel we have access to the resources needed to assist users in accessing the world of knowledge. As we lose money and staff, and as times become more difficult and trying, we must adapt and learn to do more with less while still providing good customer service.

Orange closed by encouraging attendees to write down at least one thing they learned during the conference, to think about it in relation to their jobs, and to share it with someone else. She also sug-

gested that we share what we learn with library directors so they will know we are interested in improving our knowledge and skills in order to provide excellent customer service. Our professional soundtrack should inspire us to make a difference in the way we provide customer service, thus impacting the world around us in a positive way.

Tuesday's Luncheon

Tuesday's closing session included a speaker, a banquet luncheon, special recognitions and awards, and the drawing for the scholarship raffle prizes. Incoming cochair Karen Jacobs and Lydia Williams facilitated this session, which opened with special recognitions and awards. In recognition for all they have accomplished during their year as cochair of the forum, Kathy Clevenger and Willow Gale received special plaques from the VLAPF Executive Board members. This year the VLAPF Awards Com-



Incoming Cochair Karen Jacobs introduces storyteller Linda Goodman.

Right, storyteller Linda Goodman speaks to a captive audience.



mittee selected Patricia Howe of Longwood University's Greenwood Library to receive the VLAPF Supporter of Paraprofessionals Award. Howe, who is head of Technical Services in the Greenwood Library, received an engraved plaque to commemorate this honor. As always, it is a privilege for the VLAPF Executive Board to announce the recipient of the VLAPF Clara Stanley Scholarship award. Although the winner was unable to attend the luncheon, it was an honor to announce that this year's recipient is Deborah Sweeney of the Augusta County Library.

The conference's closing luncheon featured storyteller Linda Goodman. Goodman is a member of the National Storytelling Association and the Virginia Storytellers Alliance. Over the years, her stories have been published in a variety of magazines and story compilations, and she is the author of *Daughters of the Appalachians*. Goodman pro-

vided a thoroughly entertaining presentation filled with childhood memories that brought to mind many of the thoughts, actions, and feelings we all experience during our youth. Goodman used all the tools of a great storyteller to engage the audience, taking her listeners along with her into the world created through the story. The audience seemed to feel each emotion evoked by not only the words, but also by Goodman's tone of voice and facial expressions. As she held the audience under her spell, she proved that even grown-ups love someone to tell them a great story.

The sale of unique and interesting raffle prizes in order to raise funds to finance the VLAPF Clara Stanley Scholarship has become a longstanding tradition at the VLAPF conference. Beth Johnson of Radford University was the winner of the beautiful quilt made by the ladies of Virginia Tech's University Libraries. Edmond Ross of

Virginia Tech's University Libraries was the winner of the P. Buckley Moss print, *Colonial Summer #12*, donated by the Moss Society and beautifully matted and framed by Christopher's Fine Arts and Framing of Farmville. The twenty-one raffle prizes provided by the members of the board and other generous supporters of the scholarship raffle got lots of attention, earning \$2,100 to fund next year's educational scholarship award.

MONDAY, MAY 18

10:45 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

Virtual Reality: Where Is It and Why Is It Relevant to Libraries?

Presenters: Benjamin Norris and Sharon Albert, Radford University

Benjamin Norris and Sharon Albert's presentation defined virtual reality and charted its develop-



Linda Goodman receives a standing ovation.

ment from the literature of science fiction and the romantic poets to its present incarnation in the form of Second Life. For Norris and Albert, virtual reality is defined as an artificial environment that is created with software and presented to the user in such a way that the user suspends disbelief and accepts it as a real environment primarily experienced through two of the five senses: sight and sound. The virtual reality platform Second Life was examined and the role of libraries in virtual reality was explored. Second Life was seen primarily as a recreational activity for its users. The problem of 3D representation was seen as the major obstacle to the successful presentation of library resources in virtual reality. In conclusion, the future of libraries in Second Life or any other virtual reality platform remained in question.

—*Benjamin Norris and Sharon Albert, Radford University*

Working Together at a Distance

Presenter: Ellen M. Krupar,
Virginia Tech

How many times have you thought, "If only I could get together with my committee member to work on this document," but the member is in another city, state, or even in another country? Now you can become that dynamic collaborative team by using wiki spaces. Ellen Krupar offered examples of this Internet solution to help when distance has committee members at a disadvantage. Wiki spaces can be public or private depending on the needs of the group. They allow members to contribute suggestions, revisions, etc. in one place versus sending many confusing emails and numerous versions that can get lost in the shuffle. Krupar's explanations and examples enlightened those who attended the session and left everyone in the audience

encouraged about using these tools to become that dynamic team.

—*B. Karen Jacobs, George Mason University*

The Wrinkles Project

Presenter: Kim Weitkamp,
Storyteller

The Wrinkles Project, created by Kim Weitkamp, is a nationwide endeavor to help communities learn how to gather stories from their "seasoned citizens" in an attempt to archive these for later generations. As an adolescent, Weitkamp realized the value of pulling these stories from her relatives to help her learn more about herself and her background. In the hour-and-fifteen-minute session, she did her best to pack in all of the information and "Memory Mapping" techniques she usually presents during a two-day workshop. She inspired attendees to take this

Pat Howe receives a special award from the VLAPF Board.

Below, Kim Weitkamp presents information about the Wrinkles Project.



information back to their libraries and communities and to use it in collecting their seniors' histories.

—*Kim Blaylock, Washington County Public Library*

Gossip & Lies: American Literature That Tells a Story

Presenter: Otis D. Alexander, Danville Public Library

Otis Alexander, director of the Danville Public Library, showed that through expression and drama, our youth can be stimu-

lated and encouraged to enjoy literature. Works by Robert Frost, Langston Hughes, Georgia Douglas Johnson, and Paul Laurence Dunbar (to name a few) were examined and read with an enthusiasm that would have any young individual wanting to hear more. Alexander even impressed the listeners with a little history lesson, sharing the fact that there was "rap" back in the 1950s, such as "Big Bad John," which was recorded by none other than Johnny Cash. With emotion and volume, participants spoke/shouted lines from various literary

works and departed with a greater appreciation for the written word.

—*Marcia Cramer, Pamunkey Regional Library*

Nuts and Bolts of the Summer Reading Program

Presenter: Enid Costley, Library of Virginia

Stressing the two major components of the summer reading program, 1) tallying books read and 2) programming, Costley discussed multiple ways of accomplishing a successful summer reading program. When requesting funding for your program, she stated that it is essential to do your homework, write a letter, state your case, and say "thank you" before a check is received. Building assets in your community by working with children and youth is essential. This session provided the basic information needed to help get a summer reading program underway.

—*Kathy Clevenger, Culpeper Public Library*



Winners of raffle prizes with their treasures.

Easy Steps to Project Confidence, Competence, and Credibility

Presenter: Debbie Crosby-Louis,
D. L. Crosby Image Consultants

First impressions are important, as Debbie Crosby-Louis demonstrated to the Easy Steps session attendees. By simply changing her shoes, Crosby-Louis showed her audience how simple changes can make the difference between a casual and professional appearance. This fun, information-packed session provided the attendees with helpful tips on professional wardrobe choices, improving self-esteem, business and social etiquette, and why good posture and a smile can make a difference. During the question-and-answer segment, Crosby-Louis addressed many wardrobe

questions posed by the audience.

—*Carole Lohman, University of Virginia*

1:45–3:00 p.m.

Grant Writing 411

Presenters: Virginia Kinman
and Mary Fran Bell-Johnson,
Longwood University

The mystery to successful grant-writing has been solved. Virginia Kinman and Mary Fran Bell-Johnson provided an excellent program on how to apply for grants along with sources to find out what grants might be available. Kinman and Bell-Johnson showed how to establish contact with a funding source. The next step would

be to write and submit a proposal and follow up on the process, saving all notes with each step taken. This session was quite beneficial for members in today's economy. There is definitely funding out there for the asking. One only has to know where it is and how to apply for it.

—*Marcia Cramer, Pamunkey Regional Library*

Intellectual Freedom: What Is It? And Why Is It Important?

Presenter: John A. Moorman,
Williamsburg Regional Library

VLA President-Elect John Moorman presented an informative session on intellectual freedom. His presentation was thought-provoking, covering library issues such as con-

fidentiality, censorship, and constitutional rights. Moorman cited Satia Orange's opening speech several times as he explained how intellectual freedom protects users' First Amendment rights in the library. The questions posed after the presentation were clever and reflected the intelligence of the assembled paraprofessionals.

—*Kathy Judge, Jefferson-Madison Regional Library*

Negotiation: Leaving Your Gremlins at the Door

Presenter: Tracy Pilkerton Cairnie

If you thought negotiation was only for diplomats or law enforcement officers dealing with hostage takers, you would be mistaken. Tracy Cairnie demonstrated how negotiation is an integral part of life both on and off the job. In part one of this two-part presentation, Cairnie explained the different functions of negotiation, discussed two major types of negotiation, and provided tips on how to conduct a negotiation that would provide better outcomes to problem-solving. In the second part of her presentation, the audience role-played different negotiation scenarios and did self-evaluations to determine their strengths and weaknesses in the negotiation process. Cairnie provided one-on-one assistance with the self-evaluations. All in all, the attendees came away with several tools to help them navigate professional and personal interactions.

—*Carole Lohman, University of Virginia*

3:15–4:30 p.m.

Changing the Rules: Google Scholar and Google Book Search

Presented by Edward Lener, Virginia Tech

Edward Lener presented a session

filled with information about Google Scholar and Google Book Search, as well as Google Labs, which provides information about new products being developed. Google Scholar makes searchable the full text of millions of books; searching is available to all, with no account number or registration required. It is the first interdisciplinary search engine available for use without charge. The database includes journal articles, conference papers, theses, dissertations, and a wide range of print materials. It does not include articles from popular magazines and trade journals. A drawback is that searching is not always dependable. When compared with the expensive databases to which we can subscribe, Google Scholar works equally well. Google works with publishers in indexing materials. Cross-links from one bibliography to another and to related articles are provided. Document delivery is offered for some results. According to Lener, Google Scholar is a simple system without a lot of bells and whistles. It is basically an index to literature rather than to the contents of an article. Lener also shared information about Google Book Search, which is a useful database when searching for specific books and magazines. It will pull up snippets of what has been searched, and it recognizes the WorldCat system to help in finding a book. It is a good tool to use when searching for obscure information. Full text is available for books published prior to 1922, which are now in the public domain, and for government publications. The system includes a viewer that can be customized for the user; the viewer can download an entire book. This session gave attendees an informative overview of these Google products that can be utilized in libraries to provide patrons with needed resources.

—*Lydia Williams, Longwood University*

Managing E-Books in the Catalog

Presenter: Philip Young, Virginia Tech

With more and more library patrons preferring to access the information they want and need electronically, it has become extremely important that we, as the keepers of that information, make accessing and navigating it as simple as possible for our patrons. Philip Young presented several ways in which we can implement more correct and easily retrievable records in our online catalogs. He thoroughly covered such topics as adding links to print records, vendor solutions, Google books, and batch records.

—*Kim Blaylock, Washington County Public Library*

The Power of Charm

Presenter: Rick Holt, George Mason University

Rick Holt, a motivational listener, kept the crowd on the edges of their seats with his upbeat ideas for working with any individual. He stated that 80 percent of our time with an individual should be spent listening, and only 20 percent should be spent speaking. He said that if put into practice, this would be a sure way to start a successful relationship. Holt shared the five A's of communication: acceptance, appreciation, approval, admiration, and attention. He said that by spending time with each person we come in contact with and showing respect, we can jumpstart successful interactions with others. And don't forget, KEEP SMILING!

—*Kathy Clevenger, Culpeper County Library*



*Rick Holt
shares tips
for effective
networking.*

TUESDAY, MAY 19

9:00–10:15 a.m.

Internet Security: The Dangers of SQL Injection

Presenter: Allison Scripa

Despite the very technical-sounding title, one did not need to be a computer geek to glean a lot of useful information from this session. Starting with a basic overview of the types of Internet security methods, Scripa provided an easy-to-understand explanation of SQL (Structured Query Language) Injection, which is a security issue, especially with databases that may include patron or employee names, addresses, and other personal data that could be used for identity theft or sold to spammers. She also

provided a simple test to determine a database's vulnerability to this type of attack and discussed ways to increase the protection for your computer data both at work and at home. Following her presentation, Scripa held a question-and-answer session.

—*Carole Lohman, University of Virginia*

9:00–10:15 a.m.

Moving from Motivational Listening to Effective Networking

Presenter: Rick Holt, George Mason University

My name is Sue. How do you do?

Do people remember your name when you introduce yourself?

Do you remember other people's names? Rick Holt (that's Holt like a lightning bolt but with an *H*) shared several tips to help us remember names and to help others remember your name during this interactive session. Holt's presentation effectively replaced some of the fear and discomfort at the very thought of networking with sound strategies and knowledge of what networking is all about. He explained what networking isn't: manipulative, schmoozing, just handing out your business card, or a waste of time. Instead, he showed that networking is something we do all the time on both a personal level and a professional level, and that the building of relationships sometimes overlaps these boundaries. Networking involves the giving



Top left, Sam Clay shares information about the VLA Foundation.

Above, Marion Eaton encourages good customer service.

Left, Ross Edmonds demonstrates basic web design.

and receiving of knowledge and/or resources and requires effective listening and active feedback. Session attendees left with great strategies for meeting people and a feeling of relief that networking is not such a scary thing after all. So when you meet new people, smile and repeat their names three to six times as you talk with them and/or introduce them to other people. Networking can be fun!

—B. Karen Jacobs, George Mason University

10:30-11:45 a.m.

Working with Deaf and Hard of Hearing Patrons

Presenter: Gary Talley, Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Talley had the attendees sitting on the edges of their seats while discussing his personal experience of losing his ability to hear. He was completely deaf within six weeks of noticing a problem. Still

unsure of the reasons for losing his hearing, he has adapted to his environment with all its new challenges, and now works with the Virginia Department of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. He emphasized the importance of meeting each individual's needs when working with the public. He stated that often it depends on whether the patron was deaf from birth (culturally deaf) or late-deafened (after the age of 19). Some may do well with written notes while oth-

Claire Hensley, Clare Reilly, and Mary Binda show how to use puppetry in library programming.



ers may communicate better with lip-reading. Stressing that overemphasizing words will only complicate things, he stated that 30–40 percent of language is from the lips and 60–70 percent is in-context guessing. Also, making sure there is good lighting so the patron can see you without shadows or back-lighting is important in helping to communicate with those who are hearing impaired. This session was filled with information to help in communicating with those who are deaf and hard of hearing.

—Kathy Clevenger, Culpeper County Library

A Taste of Literature

Presenters: Sue Carroll, Greenwood Library at Longwood University, and Paula G. Hill, Virginia State Parks

The presenters shared an innovative way for getting children excited about reading that they developed and implemented while working as volunteers in their children's school. Initially, this program was presented to elementary school children during "Reading Month." The objectives of the program were to expose children to a variety of literature by demonstrating the connection between literature and food and to allow parent-volunteers an opportunity to spend time in the classroom. Some of the books used were *Tony's Bread*, *Thunder Cake*, *The Boxcar Children*, and *Pee Wee Scouts: Cookies and Crutches*. They would read one of the books to the children and then provide the food as a snack. The presenters shared information about how to plan a shopping list based on the

number of children in a class, how to recruit volunteers, and how to get local businesses to assist with the baking needs. The session ended with treats baked by the presenters, including a Thunder Cake, Pee Wee Scout cookies, and Tony's bread. This session was not only informative, but also filled with fun.

—Lydia Williams, Longwood University

Beyond ADA: What Your Customers with Disabilities Want

Presenters: William and Cheryl Duke, W.C. Duke Associates, Inc.

This informative, interesting, and entertaining session was presented by Cheryl and Bill Duke of The Opening Doors®, an innovative



Left, Chris Dixon explains how to effectively manage work groups.

Below, Bill Fiege makes a point during his presentation on public speaking.

Bottom, Winston Barham and Brian Smith advocate "Greening Your Library."



multimedia skills-based customer service program on how to serve persons with mobility, hearing, or visual impairments.

The goals of the session were:

1) Learn how NOT to be manners-challenged or etiquette-impaired when meeting persons with disabilities. This would include welcoming your customers with disabilities, ascertaining exactly what the customer needs by speaking and interacting directly with the customer, and remembering that the information you need to help them comes from the customers.

2) Know proper terminology and "people first" language. Just because the blue signs at parking spaces may say "handicapped" doesn't mean you should use that

Randi Wines and Shiloh Campbell presented a session on urban fiction.



word. Use “people first” terminology, such as:

Person who is deaf or hard of hearing

Person who is blind or has low vision

Person who uses a wheelchair
Wheelchair user

Person with a cognitive disability

Person who has epilepsy

3) Use practical skills and information. Relax: people with disabilities have diverse personalities, like the rest of us do. If you ever have a question—what to do, how to do it, how to say it—the person with the disability is always your first and best resource.

The session went into specific skills and resources for assisting persons with specific disabilities and the equipment available, as well as low-cost and no-cost ways to provide services. For more information, contact cduke@wcduke.com.

com or visit <http://www.wcduke.com> or <http://www.accessiblevirginia.org/>.

—Jean Quible, Virginia Tech retiree


10:30-11:45 a.m.

Effective Management of Group Collaboration

Presenters: Christopher Dixon and George Oberle, George Mason University

“In any group there are effective leaders, but also effective members,” according to Christopher Dixon. Along with George Oberle, Dixon presented objectives toward building effective teams within the workplace. Their session showed how accomplishments are better achieved through collaboration. Building a team to accomplish a goal consists of a number

of components, including shared understanding, respect for diversity, trust, communication, conflict management, accountability, and time to allow for the process to occur. Dixon and Oberle also addressed the challenge of building a team. Ideas included how to work with members who are afraid to express an opinion, dealing with the member who won’t buy into the group, facing a member with his/her own agenda, how to work with dominant personalities, dealing with someone you don’t trust, and how to manage the team leader. At the conclusion of the session, Dixon and Oberle listed some important items to keep in mind for running successful meetings: set house rules, have an agenda, keep minutes, provide leadership, determine action items, and encourage teamwork.

—Marcia Cramer, Pamunkey Regional Library 

The social brings friends together for an evening of fun.

Below, the conga line has everyone up and moving to the music.

