

President's Column

by John Moorman

This is my first column as president of the Virginia Library Association. What I want to accomplish with my presidential columns in the short time that I hold this office is to comment on what is currently facing the association and libraries in general and raise some issues for further discussion and thought.

By the time this column comes out, the Virginia General Assembly will have returned to action in Richmond. This session of the General Assembly will likely be the most difficult since the Depression years of the 1930s. Revenue available to fund state government functions and entities continues to decline, and there are discussions of 15 percent across-the-board cuts to state agencies. As each of us knows, this is on top of the already substantial cuts of recent years.

As all public and school libraries and many academic and special libraries throughout the Commonwealth depend upon state funding to assist them in providing services to their user communities, this economic situation has the potential to cause dire consequences across the board. With a General Assembly unwilling to consider new revenue sources and a governor committed to veto any that might reach his desk, the reality of the situation is that we as a library community need to plan to provide services with fewer resources at our command.

As we do this planning, we need to work within our strategic or long-range plans. What do these

plans say about our vision and values? Are our programs and services reflective of these visions and values? As funding for our library is being reduced, are we making service reduction decisions based upon these values and the institutional directions that result from them? If not, we had better begin so doing. In setting priorities for the services that will remain, we

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must reflect in those priorities the values and directions that we indicate in our planning documents are important to us and our user communities. As institutions, libraries, no matter the type, cannot continue to do all that we have done or might desire to do. This process of priority-setting will be difficult and painful. However, if libraries are to continue to provide effective services to our users, it must be done.

We also need to look at how we might work better across type-of-library lines to more efficiently serve our user communities. Most of us, no matter the type of library we work in, are not isolated from one another. Students enrolled in institutions of higher learning and K-12 schools use the public library on a regular basis for information relating to classroom instruction

or for outside information and reading needs. Public library users depend upon academic institutions for access to needed materials not found in their local public libraries. All of us depend upon databases for information provision to our user communities. Let us begin the process of working closer together so that all residents of the Commonwealth of Virginia may continue to receive quality services from the libraries that they use on a daily basis to meet their information and lifestyle needs.

I also cannot emphasize enough the importance of regular personal contact with government officials in this time of economic challenge. These individuals, whether on a local level or as our representatives in the Virginia General Assembly, are continually bombarded by constituents with demands for the limited funding available. Our voice must be heard in the din or we will open our institutions to deeper cuts than might otherwise be the case. Our association's Legislative Committee has coordinated a library user card campaign to let legislators know of the value of public libraries in their daily lives. If you are in a public library, I trust that your library participated in this campaign. Steps such as this are needed to regularly remind those who control the purse strings that libraries, depending upon their user communities, are either a core part of the educational process, vital for information provision and access in the corporate or special setting, or essential to the

continuance of a democratic society where free access to information in its many forms and formats is required for personal development and growth.

As we go about our daily work activities in these troubled times, remember that the Virginia Library Association stands ready to assist you in a variety of ways, including lobbying the General Assembly, providing discounts on services, and information sharing and programming. Your membership and your participation and input in your state association are vital if VLA is to effectively represent your concerns and needs. Keep both coming! **VL**

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