

AALL in New Orleans: Law Librarians Rise to the Challenge

Drenched with sweat after working on a new Habitat for Humanity house for six hours in the July heat and humidity of New Orleans, Ron Wheeler of the Georgia State University College of Law Library exclaimed, “We’re very excited to be here and that so many people turned out!” Wheeler was in town to attend the American Association

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of Law Libraries (AALL) 100th annual meeting and conference. Along with over 100 other law librarians, he had come a day early to volunteer with several post-Hurricane Katrina rebuilding and recovery efforts.

Nearly 1,800 law librarians attended the AALL meeting July 14–17. The theme was “Rise to the Challenge,” and AALL President Sarah (Sally) Holterhoff, of Valparaiso University’s Law School Library, said the association wanted a theme that “would resonate with New Orleans and with law librarianship.” She noted, “‘Rise to the Challenge’ reflects both the courageous spirit of New Orleans after Katrina and represents how our roles as librarians are evolving.” She also emphasized that “rising to the challenge means being proactive, not waiting for something to happen to us.”

During the three days of the meeting, members attended 71 professional programs and workshops, several of which surveyed the chang-

ing face of reference services and discussed the use of blogs, podcasts, and instant messaging as new ways to provide information to, and interact with, patrons. Three programs examined aspects of the unique Civil Law heritage of Louisiana, and in one program attendees learned more about the struggles of Library Connection, the Connecticut consortium that successfully challenged a request for information under the Patriot Act (*AL*, June/July, p.30).

Support for a recovering city

Besides the meeting itself, many AALL members wanted to come to New Orleans to see for themselves how the city was doing almost two years after Katrina—and one year after the ALA Annual Conference became the first major convention to return to the city (*AL*, Aug. 2006, p. 42+). Like Wheeler, some wanted to personally help out with the recovery efforts, even for just a day. Wheeler, one of the primary organizers of the volunteer efforts, said that “many people wanted to do something to give back to New Orleans while we were in town having the meeting.” Besides the 65 law librarians who worked on the Habitat for Humanity houses, a small group of librarians helped the State Museum with a backlog of administrative and indexing work, and over 40 members worked at a local food bank and boxed up donated food

into over 14,000 meals ready for distribution.

AALL also sponsors a book drive every year at the annual meeting. This year, the recipient of the book drive was the New Orleans Recovery School District, the state-administered district now running most public schools in the city. Law librarians donated several thousand books and have given over \$7,000 in cash and bookstore gift cards.

Carol Billings, director of the Law Library of Louisiana, has been involved with the annual book drives since their inception in 1999. She said participation in this year’s drive was much greater than in previous years. “People wanted so much to help New Orleans, and helping with book donations is, of course, a natural fit for librarians.” Billings also said that “all the volunteers thought it was a great experience to help contribute to the recovery of New Orleans.” The city definitely appreciated their help.

—Brian Huddleston



Victoria Coulter of the University of Wisconsin Law Library—one of 65 volunteers who worked on a Habitat for Humanity house in New Orleans during the AALL meeting—helps her husband Brian (center) and Tod Olson of the University of Chicago Library put a floor joist in place.

PHOTOGRAPH: BRIAN HUDDLESTON