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ARSL Conference

St. George, Utah
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Conference Goals

Before applying for the WVLS scholarship, I considered what I hoped to gain from this experience. As director of such a small library with limited money and employee hours, I was running low on ideas, energy and enthusiasm. My hope was to recharge and have a fresh perspective when I returned to work.

Specifically, I could narrow my goals to three areas: programming, marketing and simply bringing new people into the library. I've tried different types of programming for all ages with limited success. I needed to discover new types of programming that I can offer, the ones in the past were tired. As for marketing, once again I was in need of new ideas, beyond the typical and predictable. I also needed a fresh perspective to bring in residents that don't typically visit the library and show them the many ways it can be used, beyond checking out books.

I chose seminars based on those needs. There were also others that I wish I could attend, but unfortunately there were conflicts. I hated missing any information that could have been valuable and interesting. Nevertheless, I am pleased with those I went to.

Seminars

Three seminars immediately called to me, offering exactly the information and education I was looking for. They did not disappoint.

- “THE POWER OF MERCHANDISING” The great takeaway here was “put what they want where they can find it”. Sounds simple, but is sometimes lost when trying to manage a small space. This seminar was filled with great ideas for displaying materials, most of which cost little or no money. It all comes down to engaging patrons and having fun with the collection. There were a lot of practical and easy ideas that I could take home and immediately implement. Exactly what I was hoping to gain.

- “DESTINATION YOUR LIBRARY” We have all been dealing with declining circulation and finding new ways to bring patrons into the building and justify our budget. This seminar reinforced the idea of the library being a third space for the community. I had heard that before, but started looking at my library differently. What can I add to the library space to cultivate more interest? Attractive and welcoming decorating, fresh programming, creating a collaborative space, developing a new collection of “things”; I gained a lot here, and came home with concrete ideas that are reasonable to achieve, and require only some creativity and willingness to try a different approach.
- “BURSTING AT THE SEAMS” How do you survive the chaos of a small space? Without driving yourself crazy? Many of the rules for this were the same ones I could apply at home! Declutter, create clever storage solutions, categorize necessary tasks. With a small footprint it is vital that all available space is used, usually for more than one purpose. Once again practical, low cost ideas were offered and I thought of ways to make better use of the space I have.

All of the seminars were influential and changed the way I approached my work. Although, to be expected some were more practical for my library than others. Those that I haven't mentioned were also valuable, but perhaps not as applicable as these I've highlighted. I can't say there was a single one that I didn't leave with greater knowledge than I started the hour with. It was interesting to see and hear what other libraries had tried and what their results and conclusions were. Sometimes knowing what doesn't work-and why-can be just as valuable as why something was successful.

Wrap Up

My favorite aspect was the amount of audience interaction that was encouraged. The speakers gave great insight, but so did other audience members, many times voicing the very questions that were in my head. It is very satisfying to share information with colleagues, and ideally give as much information as is gained. Some of the best ideas that I brought home came from others in the audience. All the librarians/directors were so generous in sharing their ideas and offering problem solving ideas. And I found it amusing how we all defined “small” in very different terms!

Utah is a beautiful state; I haven't been there since a college ski trip. Too long ago to really want to say precisely! Unfortunately my time there was limited. Work and family responsibilities prohibited spending any more than the three conference days there. I heard about some great activities from others, though; I am already planning a trip there with my kids. They will love it and I look forward to experiencing the fun and adventure with them.