

LIBRARIES ELEVATED - EVERYTHING FROM ARSL TO ZION

ARSL Annual Conference September 7-9, 2017

Dixie Convention Center in St. George, Utah

Julie Beloungy



After learning that I was one of six lucky recipients of the Association of Rural and Small Libraries (ARSL) scholarship through WVLS, I was thrilled, but also a little nervous – wondering if this conference could live up to the high expectations set at the conference I previously attended in 2015 in Little Rock, Arkansas. I shouldn't have worried, because even though the location was completely different, it was still the same wonderful people and educational sessions that I had expected.

The conference lasts for two and a half days, and they fill a lot into that time. Starting with a Welcome Reception on Wednesday night, to the closing speaker on Saturday, there is never a lack of things to do and take in. There is a sense of community and camaraderie that doesn't seem quite the same at the State conferences. Getting to share stories with other library staff from around the nation who are in similar size public libraries creates an atmosphere where you feel like you already know everyone. Joining a table by yourself for meals is never a problem because everyone is so friendly you quickly become comfortable and have no trouble sharing about yourself and your library.

The ARSL conference is a little different than our state conferences in that there are two Keynote Speakers everyday. Having the speakers over the breakfast and lunch breaks, packs more education (and entertainment) into the day but makes it seem like a break from the studious time in the breakout sessions. These meals also force mingling and with over 500 attendees this year, there are always lots of people to meet, and you never have the same conversation twice.



To kick off the Conference, Jill Nystull, gave a presentation that was honest and inspiring. She created the blog, 'One Good Thing' in 2011 and it has grown to reach millions of readers. She has also published the book 'One Good Life' in 2015 and a children's book, 'Jillee Bean and the One Good Thing' in 2014. She is a true success story and she shared how we could find our own passions in life by offering 20 ways to get started.



Jill Nystull

After the opening keynote speaker, it was time to get to the breakout sessions. There were eight!! choices at each time slot. It was always a very hard decision which one to attend because they all looked great and applicable to my job. This was where it was helpful to have the other WVLS Directors there because we tried to cover different sessions, with the intention to share information and handouts after the conference.

The first session I attended was the 'Nitty Gritty Policy Manual Makeover'. The presenters' biggest piece of advice was to make policies that were simple and positive. As I was listening to her presentation, I was already thinking back to our policy manual and how can I make updates and improve the image of our library. The following session was 'It's Not Bragging if it's True: Communicating Library successes with key stakeholders'. I was especially interested in this session and was reminded throughout the hour that 'Libraries are awesome!'. The speaker was energetic and entertaining and made some great points about how to spread the word about all of the things Libraries do in their communities. I realized that I need to be more vocal and proactive in sharing stories and even statistics because most people don't realized all the ways a library influences people's lives.

Breakout session modeling best practices at Board meetings



Other sessions were helpful in updating and reviewing Board meeting practices, (the session included a mock Board Meeting to highlight areas where trustees might run into issues, example, closed meetings).

The highlight of my conference was meeting author, Richard Paul Evans. He was the Keynote speaker at lunch on Friday and he is a true inspiration and engaging speaker. He was signing books before lunch and was kind enough to take a picture with those of us in line. A neat side note - as I was next in line, he took a phone call and quickly said to us with a smile – ‘It’s my wife, I always take her calls’..I thought that was sweet and made this famous author seem ‘real’.



Richard Paul Evans

I went to a session about Strategic Planning and getting the community involved in preparing the library for the future. Another session gave great, creative ideas for inexpensive displays and ways to catch a patron’s attention. The session, ‘Developing Dynamic Leadership for your Library’ provided information that they don’t teach in school. I have little training in leadership and hearing the information provided by the speaker, who is the director at the Billings, MT public library, was a great resource. I was also lucky enough to talk with him over dinner at the famous ‘Dine Arouds’ that ARSL is known for. Thursday night, 12 or so of us, signed up to meet and have dinner at Burger Theory and I sat next to this gentleman who had years of experience in libraries and is now running a library with an \$8 million budget.



Burger Theory-Dine Around Restaurant

On Saturday, the last day of the conference, I attended two sessions, ‘Getting Teens More than ‘In the Door’ at Your Library’ and this was another session that I was very interested in. A director from a small library in North Carolina has seen great success in getting teens into her library with a variety of programs that anyone could implement (ex: purchase a gaming magazine subscription). She went into detail about the ‘Library Lock-ins’ they have done, and while I’m not quite ready to do an overnight party with 30 teens, there are programs and events that we can tackle with the resources we already

have. The final session I attended was about Transforming People's Lives. It was a great way to end the conference because it reminded everyone that we are helping people every day and not even know it. Part of the session included sharing a time when you really helped someone, and after sharing, you realize the impact libraries have on people. They taught us how to go from just providing a book, to intentionally serving someone in a bigger way.

On my Dine Around, I was seated on the other side by the woman who was the Conference Chair and as I was talking with her, realized the impact that this conference has not only on small libraries but on the patrons that we all serve. I asked her how she manages to run her small library AND plan this conference, and she said that she knows the benefit in attending these conferences so to her it is worth it and her Board supports her time in planning. She also said to mention ARSL anytime a topic comes up or something that you learned here is applied at your library – that way the value is shared and spread around. I thought that was very fitting!

Thank you again for this opportunity to attend ARSL in 2017! Without the support from WVLS, I could never have afforded this great conference and I plan on sharing something I learned at ARSL every chance I get.



St. George is a beautiful city of over 82,000 people. It was 105 degrees the first two days, and it was 75 degrees the last two days. © I was able to visit the Public Library and the wonderful public plaza next to it in downtown St. George.