

The 12<sup>th</sup> annual conference of the Association for Rural and Small Libraries was held in Springfield, IL September 12-15<sup>th</sup>, 2018. It was the fastest selling and largest ARSL Conference to date. 49 out of our 50 states were represented and there were over 750 in attendance. The theme for the conference was “Linking Libraries in the Land of Lincoln”. Thankfully, I was able to attend this conference after receiving one of the scholarships awarded from WVLS. My travel companions for the trip were Cara Hart from Neillsville Library and Jamie Matczak from WVLS. It was an uneventful trip through the flat lands and cornfields of Illinois.

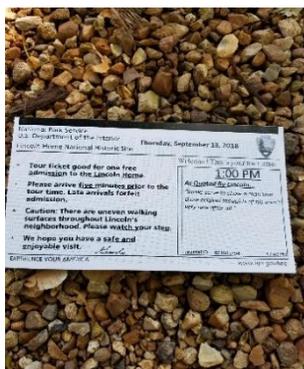


The evening Welcome Reception was at the Illinois State Library where we were able to tour a couple floors of the library. We walked past the capitol building on our way there.



The keynote speaker for the Opening Session was a President Abraham Lincoln impersonator who gave us his life history including the importance that libraries made in his education.

The first session I attended was “Attracting the Elusive Teen”. 3 presenters asked the audience to discuss the needs and wants of teens and then build on that to attract teenagers. The needs ranged from a safe place where they are accepted or to get away, free wifi, and privacy from their parents. The wants were simple: wifi and food. They added think positive when the teens walk in the door rather than thinking they are in your library for trouble. Also, be creative by motivating teens with challenges – offer to dye your hair, get a pie in the face, or be duct taped to a wall – to bring the teens in. Always have food!



Cara and I ate a quick lunch and then headed to Lincoln’s home for a tour. We missed Elizabeth Berg as the lunch keynote speaker; however, we did make it back in time so I could get the Loyal Library’s copy of her book “The Story of Arthur Truluv” autographed.



During the 2nd group of sessions, I attended “30 Ways to Make Your Small Library Extraordinary” presented by Jamie Matczak. An excellent presentation providing 30 simple yet practical tips to empower us to be great. They included: change our attitude (celebrate what we do have not what’s missing; instead of doing all things mediocre, do most things very well), fine-tune your staff (you may not like all your co-workers, but treat them all

with kindness; pick your battles), maintain your environment (make sure your service desk is clean and staffed with smiling people; use good cleaners so the library smells good; your staff should dress like they appreciate people coming into the library), keep up with tech tools (Slack, Noisli, Pixabay, CamScanner), and sustain self-care (use your vacation days, it's ok to say no, take social media breaks). Remember I work to live, not live to work.

My final Thursday session "Library Signage" was a great review of the positive and negatives of your library's signage. When possible integrate your logo or library name into the design of your signs (excluding out of order or temporary signs). In addressing problems, do not use handwritten signs, just state the facts, less is more, do not include "thank you, management" or "have a nice day". Be consistent in using a logo or style. Parents read children's signs so they don't need cute stuff.

The evening concluded with Dine-Arounds. Pick a restaurant and join colleagues for dinner & conversation.



After breakfast on Friday, Cara and I opted out of the ARSL Annual Membership Business Meeting and the Networking Hour to tour the Abraham Lincoln Museum. Tourist locations were within walking distance and the town was very clean. The presentation of Ghosts in the Library was inspiring: The history of books in our library are more than words on the page. Book suggestions were throughout.



The first Friday breakout session I chose was "After the School Bell Rings". We are looking to partner with the school and a local business to start an after school program at our library so I was looking forward to this one. Unfortunately, the presenter started by telling us they were fortunate to receive \$40,000 to remodel and set up hands on elaborate stations to have programs to educate students after classes. Even so, there were pointers: Know your "why you do something", call them classes not programs, do hands-on rather than sit-and-learn, keep materials fees under \$5.

Our Keynote speaker after lunch was Dr. Carla Hayden, our 14<sup>th</sup> Librarian of Congress, the first woman and the first African American to lead the national library. She spoke via live stream and was attuned to benefits of technology and the importance of small libraries. One of her goals is to make materials in the Library of Congress more available. "We have the largest collection of materials but it isn't beneficial unless you can share it."

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Friday session was Adulting 101. The presenter has basic classes on cooking, sewing, budgeting, personal safety, basic etiquette, getting a job, college prep, time management, basic nutrition and exercise. The classes are geared toward high school students. Many thought they could be good for elderly who might be on their own for the first time after a spouse dies.



NASA at My Library was my final session. CSLP and Star Net partnered to share resources for the 2019 SPL theme, A Universe of Stories. Pictures and videos were shown for activity ideas. We worked in groups to build spaceships.

Saturday morning allowed for 2 sessions. "Big Programs, Little Budget" was presented by a librarian in a town of 250 people. She spends a lot of time out of her library being an advocate for the entire town. She stressed not being afraid to ask friends and businesses for donations, discounts, and unique things to give. Telling stories instead of statistics plays on people's hearts thus making donations bigger.

The final session I chose was "How Relevant is Your Library". The presenter was able to re-establish a library that was about to close its doors into an important part of the community. Make a list of items people have asked for, pay attention to the interests of committees or group meetings in town, then make it available at the library: cake pans, seed collections, fishing poles, stamping materials, knitting needles, binoculars, flash cards, board games. It's not about "things", it's about responding to the needs and interests of your community.

After brunch, we were enlightened by a presentation from Gail Johnson and Pam Parr. It was a wonderful, lighthearted way to end the conference by reminding us that we all have it in us to reach our very best and make a difference to others every day.

Overall, the conference left me assured that our small library is vital to our community yet there is much more that I might be able to offer. I have plans for our staff to be more proactive in listening to our patron's needs, engaging them to find out where the interests other than books and movies are. I would like us to be more involved in the activities of community organizations, bringing the library to them rather than hoping they come to us. My biggest and most important goal is to become more involved with the staff and library at the public school. Thank you again to WVLS for the scholarship and opportunity to attend. The ARSL conference is a relevant, important resource that I can confidently recommend and look forward to in the future.

Teresa Hall, Director Loyal Public Library 10/9/2018

ARSL goes above and beyond in helping me meet my library's goals. The goals this year were to learn more about [technology](#), [community partnerships](#), and ways to get [teens](#) in the door.

I am always looking for budget friendly ways to use [technology](#). This year there was a workshop on data visualization using what you already have, such as Excel and Microsoft Word. Basic data visualization takeaways include:

- Never 3D
- Pie charts are rarely needed
- Tell a story/connect to home
- Simple graphs/Don't stuff with too much information
- Make sure visualization type matches the data type

In the past we have connected with a variety of [community partnerships](#) that have been hosted at the library. We've had great success with our community partnerships, but have been hesitant to host activities or events at a location other than the library. I believe this is mainly due to wanting to get people *in* to the library as a result of the event/activity. One workshop emphasized that it's ok to leave the library and provide services in other locations. Ideas included: a book bike at local sports events, storytime in the classroom, and library presence in the court house/jail. I am in communication with our local head start to provide a bilingual story time to the littles sometime this fall. We will also be contacting our court house to see what the library can do to help meet existing needs.

[Teens](#) are an elusive group for many organizations, not just libraries. I attended two workshops dedicated to teens, one describing "Adulthood 101" and one describing various activities their teens have enjoyed. Adulthood 101 is a series of mini classes that teach teens how to function as adults. These mini classes include volunteers that speak about FAFSA, job applications, resumes, cooking, laundry, social media, self-care, personal safety, and more. It essentially covers what a "life skills" class would cover. Many parents already teach their teens these skills, but often times they don't take the advice unless it comes from anyone BUT the parent. The second workshop suggested video game nights, nerf gun wars, painting, D and D nights, teen reading program, and anything dealing with food.

What my library lacks is how to get them in the door in the first place. Adulthood 101 suggested targeting the parents. The teens may come kicking and screaming, but the parents will bring them, and in end, their teens agreed that it was a worthwhile program. The second workshop suggested starting with the ones you do have. Strike up conversations, see what they want, start small, and over time by word of mouth the group will grow.

Neillsville Public Library can only benefit from sending an attendee to ARSL. I'm confident in implementing the data and community partner tips, and curious about implementing the advice to get more teens in the library. As with ARSL 2017, I came home with more small library librarian connections, and concrete ideas that can be put to use right away in our own library.

Thank you for sending me to ARSL 2018! You can expect an application from me for ARSL 2019☺ - Cara Hart, Neillsville Public Library



This was my ninth ARSL Conference that I have attended. I have said for a long time that it has been my “favorite conference,” and one that I recommend for directors of small libraries to attend. I was really excited that Cara Hart, the director in Neillsville, and Theresa Hall, the director at Loyal, would be going as part of receiving WVLS ARSL Conference scholarships.

The conference sessions are geared toward small and rural libraries, and they are practical. Having been a presenter at ARSL a few times, the conference committee stresses that session content should be hands-on. Attendees should walk away with tangible ideas that they can use at their library. This year’s conference also had attendees from all 50 states.

The conference in Springfield didn’t disappoint. My role and purpose as a system consultant at a conference such as ARSL is a little different than it might be for a library director. I had three main purposes. As an attendee, I was there to gather ideas and pass them along to people in WVLS, if I think they would be helpful. As a professional development consultant, I was there to seek potential speakers for WVLS. I have had great luck in the past in finding quality, lesser-known presenters at this conference. As a presenter, I was there to share my knowledge of libraries and serve as a representative of WVLS and Wisconsin to librarians around the country.

Of the three roles, my role as an attendee had the least amount of impact. There were 8 break-out sessions at the conference. Because I was a presenter for two of those sessions, I only had six sessions where I could be an attendee/audience member. I wanted to use this time wisely, so there were several sessions where I bounced between rooms. I wanted to get a quick snapshot of a speaker.

One of the sessions I attended was called “Meetings and Huddles and Briefings,” presented by Jean Bosch. Jean is the director of the Winterset Public Library in Iowa. This session focused on how she communicates with her staff. She invites everyone for “briefings,” which take place every day, 30 minutes before the library opens. They keep this meeting brief, about 15-20 minutes long. Often, they will meet where a new service is happening. Are there new graphic novels on display? They will meet in this area to talk about it, and to help the staff “sell” this to patrons. I really liked this idea! Jean also uses emails or fun signs to encourage staff to attend meetings. She said, “you need to sell it. If you don’t make a meeting fun, staff won’t want to attend.”



Curtis Rogers, Communications Director from the South Carolina State Library, also gave an excellent presentation on library signage. Many of things he spoke about were things I had heard of before, and it’s always good to have someone else repeat them. He reiterated that library signs need to look professional. They should have the same branding and contain the library’s logo. They should never be hand-written (we have computers and printers in our libraries, right?), and if they are ripped or in bad shape, they need to be redone. Our signage reflects on our library and on our environment, and poor signage makes it look like we don’t care about our appearance.

My role at the conference as a professional consultant was successful.

Curtis Rogers and another presenter named Chelsea Price agreed to speak for the Wild Wisconsin Winter Web Conference in 2019. Curtis will be giving his signage presentation in the Marketing track, and Chelsea’s presentation will be part of the Small and Mighty track. Chelsea is the director of the McServey Public Library in Iowa. Curtis requested a small fee for his presentation, and Chelsea is doing her presentation at no cost. I’m really excited that both of them will share their expertise with Wisconsin librarians in January.

My role at the conference as a presenter had me the most nervous, but it also brought me a great amount of satisfaction. Giving presentations is a skill that I'm always wanting to work on and perfect. At last year's conference, I saw a presenter named Simone Kirk who was excellent, attention-grabbing, and didn't use any notes. She was professionally trained by public speakers. It was my goal to give my presentation without notecards or reading notes from my laptop. I knew this would be a challenge and require a lot of practice. In the end, I didn't need to use notes. My presentation was called "30 Ways to Make Your Small Library Extraordinary," and I covered 30 things in different topic areas. Both presentations went very well, and I had active, participatory audience members. The ultimate compliment was when Simone attended my presentation and told me when it was done that she wouldn't have done anything differently. I was so flattered.



The ARSL Conference is one of my favorites, and I'm grateful that Marla supported me in attending and presenting. I am hoping that I will be able to do the same in 2019. It was also beneficial to have Cara and Theresa attend as part of the ARSL Scholarship. This conference is valuable for directors of small libraries, and it was nice to get to know both of them better. I hope I represented WVLS well as an attendee, consultant and presenter.

*-Jamie Matczak*