THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 26

10:00–11:30 a.m.

Opening General Session

President Lisa Lee Broughman opened the General Session by welcoming all 537 conference attendees (including 123 first-time participants) and announcing that the conference vendor exhibits had sold out for the first time in VLA’s history. Clearly, the 2013 conference had generated a great deal of interest, due in no small part to the creative efforts of Conference Co-chairs Megan Hodge and Rebecca Miller and their conference committee cohorts. President Broughman highlighted a handful of new conference features—for example, the “Unconference,” which allows conference goers to discuss topics of their own choosing in an informal setting—and the “Battle Decks” event, where you get to watch your colleagues compete in a battle of wits, creating on-the-fly presentations based on pre-selected images (clearly not an event for the introverts among us). Also for the first time, VLA Executive Director Lisa Varga would be hosting an AMA (Ask Me Anything) session, where she would make herself available to answer any questions.

The next order of business was the “Declaration for the Right to Libraries”—the cornerstone of American Library Association (ALA) President Barbara Stripling’s presidential initiative, Libraries

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS BY PIERRE COURTOIS

Jessica Scalph and Kevin Smith share the “Declaration for the Right to Libraries.”
Change Lives. ALA Chapter Counciilor Jessica Scalp explained how libraries across the country will be hosting signing ceremonies for this Declaration, which is intended to increase public awareness about the critical role that libraries play in communities across the country. Although time didn’t permit a full reading of the document, Scalp shared highlights of the Declaration and the foundations upon which they were built: Libraries empower the individual; libraries support literacy and lifelong learning; libraries are the great equalizer; libraries build communities; libraries protect our right to know; libraries strengthen our nation; libraries advance research and scholarship; libraries help us to better understand each other; and libraries preserve our cultural heritage.

Scalp encouraged all conference attendees to sign the Declaration—a notebook had been placed in a prominent lobby location for all to sign—and she encouraged all Virginia libraries to promote the Declaration for the Right to Libraries.

Before the keynote speaker was called up to the podium, President Elect Kevin Smith (director of the York County Public Library) accepted his new role in the VLA, acknowledging and thanking those who have made a special contribution to Virginia’s libraries. This year’s Champion of Change Award was then presented to Harriett Coulter, director of the Richmond Public Library, for her efforts to promote school readiness, while the Coretta Scott King—Virginia Hamilton Award for Lifetime Achievement was presented to Demetria Tucker, family and youth services librarian for the Pearl Bailey Library. Next, the 2013 Jefferson Cup Award winners were announced: Henry Cole, author of Unspoken (Scholastic Press), was the recipient of the Jefferson Cup Award for Younger Readers,
while Steve Sheinken, author of Bomb: The Race to Build—and Steal—the World’s Most Dangerous Weapon (Roaring Book Press), was announced as the winner of this year’s Jefferson Cup Award for Older Readers. The honor books for older readers are Come August, Come Freedom: The Bellows, the Gallows and the Black General Gabriel by Gigi Armateau and Impossible Rescue: The True Story of an Amazing Arctic Adventure (both released by Candlewick Press). The honor books for younger readers are Fifty Cents and a Dream: Young Booker T. Washington, released by Little, Brown & Co. and Barnum’s Bones: How Barnum Brown Discovered the Most Famous Dinosaur in the World, released by Farrar Straus. Altogether, the Jefferson Cup Committee reviewed almost 150 books.

Once the recognitions were completed, Megan Hodge stepped up to the microphone to introduce Keynote Speaker Liz (short for Elisabeth) Doucett, Director of Curtis Memorial Library in Brunswick, Maine, and author of Creating Your Library Brand (ALA 2008) and What they Don’t Teach You in Library School (2010). The theme of Doucett’s presentation was Trend Tracking.

After capturing the audience’s attention with a gimmick that works every time (an image of a painfully cute puppy dog labeled “I hate mornings”) Doucett moved quickly into the content of her insightful presentation on “trend tracking,” noting that the goal is to have fun with the topic and “don’t think of it as brain surgery.” Since libraries are now asked to be observers and interpreters of cultural change, it’s important that we remain open to new ideas so that we can remain relevant in our own communities, she explained.

Trends are like knitting, Doucett explained, where you take disparate ideas and pull them together. Pay attention to what’s going on around you and notice if there are patterns. Trends can be social (Woodstock is an example), technological, economic, environmental (like wind turbines), industry-related, or consumer-driven (like platform shoes), but all of these reflect changes that we want to know about. Trend tracking can help us find great ideas and can help libraries remain relevant. We want to “look for those pieces of yarn in the sock” because “If there’s change in the air, you want to know about it.” The worst badge we could ever wear is one that says, “Hello my name is Irrelevant.” We can prevent this by asking what we can do for our communities.

How do you “do” trend tracking? Doucett said that the first thing we want to do is hit the COMMIT button, even if we’re just committing to a half hour or an hour of our time each week. Next, we want to “Stop, Look, and Listen” (something we were all taught when we first learned to cross the street). And (contrary to what we typically hear) we want to watch TV (keeping abreast of hits like Madmen), read popular magazines (like People), watch teenagers, keep track of social networks, read the local paper, and look at what books are hot. She also suggests following “cool hunters” online such as Trendhunter.com, thecoolhunter.net, and coolhunting.com.

Steps that libraries can take to remain relevant within their own communities include the following: (1) If you find an idea that grabs you, think, “How can I use this in my library?”; 2) Look for patterns and connections in the ideas you come up with; 3) Identify trends (look at what you’ve written down and find commonalities (for example, do some of the ideas fall into a category like “Nostalgia,” perhaps reflecting a trend?); and 4) Brainstorm the implications. Ask yourself, is the trend important? You can work in teams, and let the ideas percolate. Library services based on trends might cover genealogy, local history, or “eating locally, thinking globally.”

Once you come up with a trend-influenced idea for a new library
service, you’ll want to finalize and summarize your idea in just two pages, which “works like gold,” according to Doucett. The two-pager should include a brief summary, source(s), value to the community and to the library, cost, timeline, resources, and potential issues. It will help you to get buy-in, get funding, and get to work.

Before closing, Doucett provided examples of library programs and services based on trend tracking. Within Doucett’s library system, these have included a library-sponsored “community events cafe,” where local residents get together at the library to talk about current events; a “build out day for the Little Free Library” (where patrons got together to help expand the Little Free Library program); Tech meet-ups (half an hour tech sessions based on the Apple Genius Bar concept); and “Curtis Creative Spaces,” where the work of local artists is featured on the Curtis Memorial Library website. “Ideas can come from anywhere,” Doucett reminded her audience, including the janitor at your library. An “open door” culture helps to keep the ideas flowing.

—Beth DeFrancis Sun, MCH Library, Georgetown University

1:00–2:00 p.m.

**VLA NMRT (New Members Roundtable) Forum Keynote Address**

Presenter: Naomi House, founder of “I Need a Library Job” (INALJ)

Naomi House works as a federal government contractor in the Washington, D.C. area, and is also
the founder of inalj.com, a site that lists library and information professional jobs. INALJ grew out of House’s own story, which she shared with session attendees.

When she was attending library school, House was working full time during the day and attending classes via online web sessions in the evenings. She also helped her husband fix up houses to sell, something she still does today. House knew that she would have to find work through online sources, since networking events are usually held in the evenings.

House said that she “wouldn’t expect that the way I found my job would be typical.” She explained there was a lot of luck involved in landing her position. Her job was only listed in two places, as federal employers struggle with knowing where to list jobs to find the right information professionals. She was also lucky that she had rapport with the staff who made the hiring decision, helping her to be hired over several applicants who already had their degree.

After she was hired, House was still getting emailed job postings and listserv updates, and she decided to compile the listings into PDF format and share them with her friends. But soon friends started sharing with friends, and the listing went viral. As a hand-compiled PDF became too much work, House set up a website and enlisted volunteers from across the United States and Canada, and
even a few in the Middle East, too. The website now has almost three million hits, a huge social media presence, and articles with tips for finding a job.

House brought far more than her personal story on her visit to headline VLA NMRT’s inaugural keynote address. She also brought a philosophy about employment for information professionals that she admitted may sound controversial at times. House is a big believer in pushing the boundaries of the traditional understanding of what jobs librarians can do. INALJ lists a wide variety of government and private-sector jobs that eschew the traditional library, and many of House’s tips centered around thinking outside the box: updating your profile on monster.com, searching non-library job sites for vendors, schools and government, trying to convince non-library industries that librarians can fill valuable information roles in their organizations. She also brought a long list of job keywords to look for, and highlighted jobs in competitive intelligence, prospect research, and information architecture as logical places to find a job.

Much of House’s point rested on admitting to the challenges in the job market. Traditional jobs for librarians are disappearing, and that means we have to be creative in finding a job that matches our personal skill sets. To that end, House pointed out that job seekers need to be willing to let go of “librarian” to some degree, keeping in mind that we are more than our degree.

House also covered a lot of practical facets of job search planning in her presentation. How mobile are you? Can you really live anywhere? Are you willing to go work in places that are not flooded with recent graduates from library school? How do you prioritize what you’re looking for in a job? Is it the title? She pointed out that casting your net too wide puts a burden on the job seeker to strategize.

The presentation ended with encouragement to take control of the job search, and a message to let go of those things not in your control. House told attendees that the hardest thing to do is send in a resume for a potential dream job and just let it go and continue with the next application. The search is on you, but the success of the search is not entirely on your shoulders.

— John Connolly, Virginia Libraries

Kimberly Knight and Mary Prisbrey explain how book dating works at the Arlington County Library’s Shirlington branch

1:00–2:00 p.m.

**ALA Library Support Staff Certification—What’s in It for Me?**

Presenter: Kathy Clevenger, Culpeper County Library

Kathy Clevenger, who recently completed the American Library Association’s Library Support Staff Certification (ALA LSSC), shared her experiences as a student and her reasons for spending her
finances and many hours of her time in order to receive this certification. An enthusiastic champion of lifelong learning, Clevenger said she believes that furthering your education makes you a better employee. She said this program helps those who work in libraries acquire new skills and increase their knowledge in the field of Library Science. Students in this program gain confidence in their abilities as they demonstrate their competence on the job.

Clevenger went on to provide basic information about the certification program beginning with the requirements for completing it. Competency sets for certification include knowledge of the foundations of library services, communication and teamwork, and technologies. Electives include classes related to access services, adult readers’ advisory services, cataloging and classification, reference and information services, supervision and management, and youth services. Students must prove they have met the competencies by either submitting a portfolio or by taking ALA LSSC-approved courses. They have four years to complete the self-paced program.

Issues that prevent people from enrolling in this program are finances and time, but these are obstacles that can be overcome, Clevenger said. There are educational grants available to help with expenses, and often an employee will help pay for these classes. VLA is in the process of creating a grant to help those enrolled in the program. The time issue is all about having the determination to make the time. Since continuing education is a must in the field of Library Science and knowledge makes one a more valuable employee, she feels this is time well spent.

A question Clevenger said she often hears is “I know my job, so why do I have to prove anything?” Her answer is that there is always something new to learn that will enhance your job performance. Networking with other students and faculty allows you to learn a better way to handle a similar job function. You may learn some new shortcuts during a class. Involvement shows you are interested in your job as a career, rather than just a 9 to 5 job. You will earn more respect from your co-workers.

Clevenger also shared her answer to another question she is often asked, which is “Will anyone appreciate all the work that I will do to achieve my certification?” She said many candidates have found that they receive more respect, even during the coursework. When helping to make decisions, candidates believe their ideas are now considered (instead of just being heard). As the candidate, you feel a sense of self-pride and accomplishment that is your own. That can’t be taken away from you.

Another question she is asked is “How is a certificate going to make me better at my job?” She shared a
Seats fill up fast during Thursday’s session, “A Universe of Information”

Attendees learn how to bring more adults into their libraries during “Programming from Zero to 60,” with presenters from Alexandria’s Beatley Central Library
lengthy list that includes increased knowledge, increased confidence, improved communication skills, and the ability to move forward in your organization.

A cheerleader for continuing education, Clevenger ended by reminding everyone of the popular saying—knowledge is power. She encouraged those who are interested to visit the ALA website at http://ala-apa.org/lssc to learn more about the program.
—Lydia Williams, Greenwood Library, Longwood University

1:00–2:00 p.m.

Book Dating... Not Your Typical Love Story

Presenters: Mary Prisbrey and Kimberly Knight, Arlington Public Library

For those looking to add a unique program to their library’s repertoire of patron attractions, the Book Dating program at Arlington County’s Shirlington branch library might just meet your demographic needs. Described as an innovative event for singles, where “book club meets speed dating,” presenters Mary Prisbrey and Kimberly Knight provided the attentive audience with an overview of how the program works, along with some tips to help avoid some of the pitfalls they had encountered along the way. But first Prisbrey reminded session attendees that all good relationships involve “chemistry,” and that it was the professional dynamic between Prisbrey and her supervisor, Kimberly Knight, that sparked the branch’s successful book dating program.

One of Prisbrey’s first assignments at the Shirlington branch was to create a program to help draw the area’s young professionals into the area, and Knight was elated with Prisbrey’s book-dating concept. Together, they would develop a program where books would be an entry way into a conversation which could, ultimately, lead to romance (because anything can happen when it comes to books).

One of the first tasks for Prisbrey and Knight was to sell the idea to the rest of the library staff. Here, they suggest keeping it simple (in this case, they stuck with a simple name, Book Dating for Singles). They also briefed the front-line staff, so that they could easily respond to questions from the public, and the staff feedback was very helpful. They also received questions as a result of some online publicity, which helped to shape and define the program. For starters, it would be used to attract younger singles into the library, and the library would not collect and disseminate personal contact information (participants would be on their own, if they wanted to get together again outside of the library setting). Each participant was to bring in a book that they would discuss, and each speed date would be timed at just three minutes.

One of the biggest challenges was to get enough men to participate in the program. And if way more women then men showed up at any given event, how could they move the participants around the room so that everyone was engaged in the process and pleased with the outcome (even if it didn’t result in a romance)? What do you do if 28 women and only one man shows up? At this point, Mary explained how she came into the library one day to discover an elaborate diagram that Kimberly had come up with. It looked something like this:

Y Y
Y Y
XXXXXXXXXX
X—> <== Y

In their attempts to make the most out of their new book-dating program, the team was determined to come up with an optimal configuration of male/female participants during each of the timed speed dates. They also did everything they could to encourage more men to join in. At times they recruited men who happened to be in the library when the program was about to begin. They also enticed men with door prizes such as Redskins paraphernalia and tickets to basketball games. (To participate in the drawings, all participants are required to have a library card.) Another fun part of the program is the pair of free tickets to a Signature Theater performance that one lucky participant walks away with. Refreshments are also provided, compliments of Friends of the Library or Shirlington area restaurants.

Participation on the Meet-up. com website has increased the book-dating program’s visibility and attracted more single men and women. One advantage of Meet-up is that event participants get to see who’s coming, and what the registrants look like, since you can post pictures. It also allows participants to get in touch with each other. But the Program’s presence on the website also led to some controversy over the age group(s) of the participants. In efforts to open up the program to more library patrons, the monthly sessions now alternate between “all ages,” young people (20s and 30s), and 40+ singles.

Before this session was over, Prisbrey and Knight invited volunteers up to the front of the room so that the audience could see, first hand, how the speed dating sessions worked. Each session (now four minutes, rather than three) began with the ringing of a bell, after which the paired singles discussed a current book (or audio/visual item) they were enjoying. The “brave” volunteers had little trouble striking up conversations, and they all appeared highly engaged.
Friendships have blossomed as a result of the program, and one couple that met in June is still an item. One event had 40 participants, and there have been very few “fails.” The event is held on the 3rd Sunday of every month at 6:00 p.m., which has proven to be a good time slot, and adjoining public library systems (Fairfax and Loudon Counties and the District of Columbia) are now hosting similar programs.

The program facilitators continue to tweak the program to attract more library patrons and improve program outcomes, and “people love it enough that they keep coming back,” says Prisbrey. [For more information on the Shirlington Branch book-dating program, see Virginia Libraries, Vol. 58, No. 2 at http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/VALib/v58_n2/sun1.html.]

—Beth DeFrancis Sun, MCH Library, Georgetown University

1:00–2:00 p.m.

Simply STEM! Easy to Implement Programming for Children.

Presenters: Craig Graziano, Rebecca Purdy, and Wini Ashooh, Central Rappahannock Regional Library

Teaming up to illustrate the close ties between the STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) initiative in the nation’s schools and any public library’s educational mission, Craig Graziano, Rebecca Purdy, and Wini Ashooh shared their success stories and creative programming ideas with a capacity crowd. At the start, the audience was reminded that STEM’s origins lie with Congress’ America Competes Act to promote excellence in technology, and STEM is more than just a buzzword. STAR-net, Science Technology Activities and Resources for Libraries (http://www.starnetlibraries.org/starnet.html)—a national education program created to inspire lifelong learning through inquiry and play—was highlighted as one of the strong supporters of public libraries and the STEM initiative.

After forming a STEM Committee, the Central Rappahannock Regional Library asked at least one member from each of its five main branches to serve as a STEM leader and resource person within their branch. Grant funding helped put staff at ease with STEM activities which led to colleagues incorporating STEM into their programs. Summer programming currently includes interactive, do-it-yourself (DIY) STEM activities such as crafts and demonstration aimed at Farmer’s Market shoppers and their children and Nature Adventure Packs that contain books, field guides, hands-on equipment, and related activities. Additionally several books used during storytime, including Mouse Point by Ellen Stoll Walsh, Rosie’s Walk by Pat Hutchins and Can a Jumbo Jet Sing the Alphabet by Hap Palmer, were also highlighted to illustrate STEM-related proficiencies embedded in library programming. The presenters also discussed the following proficiencies:

- Critical thinking and problem-solving
- Creativity and innovation
- Communication and collaboration
- Visual literacy
- Cross-disciplinary thinking
- Global awareness
- Initiative and self-direction

Peppered throughout the presentation were several engaging personal stories and useful insights. Keeping things simple was strongly encouraged. Whether engaging the senses, identifying colors or patterns or naming habits, the presenters encouraged attendees to conduct an inventory of one’s existing programming. Central Rappahannock Regional Library was surprised to learn that a lot of what they were already offering fit STEM-defined programming.

Resources used to develop the presentation were shared with attendees and are accessible from the presentation slides. For those of you who missed this presentation or wish to access cited resources, the slides are viewable online at http://www.vla.org/conferences/conference-presentations.

—Heather Groves Hannan, Mercer Library, George Mason University, Prince William Campus

2:15–3:15 p.m.

Building Influence: Getting Your Way When It Counts the Most.

Presenter: Priscille Dando, Fairfax County Public Schools

At the outset Presenter Priscille Dando stated the intended outcomes of her presentation: 1) to recognize the process for developing successful advocacy and communication plans, 2) to understand the practical tactics of data-based persuasive communication, and 3) to identify how message delivery influences success. She emphasized that you want to begin with the end, with what you wish to have happen in mind. (This is known as “backward” design in the field of education.) To successfully advocate for yourself, your programs, or your patrons’ needs, Dando stressed the importance of six planning elements: Analysis (don’t make assumptions, figure out what you need), Objective (be able to articulate clearly and concisely), Audience (be inclusive and think about who are the influencers and who are the resources), Evidence (compelling, convincing, and directly supports the claim or request you are making), Data (analyze and synthesize), and Deliver (present the message). Savvy
Right, the hunt is on! Susan Metallo (Loudon County Public Library) shares how to create scavenger hunt programs to help build family literacy.

Left, VIVA Director Kathy Perry keeps her audience entertained during the annual VIVA User Group Meeting.

Communicators understand that each conversation is an interview and an opportunity to be a problem-solver for someone else. Including data changes the conversation, she explained. Without supportive, compelling data used artfully as an advocacy tool, you are just another person with an opinion.

Conducting a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis is a good starting point, Dando explained. It's a purposeful process that stresses the strengths and crafts threats as opportunities. The message might need to be restated for different audiences, but focusing on the goal will produce results; and a good story that reaches listeners is an excellent secret weapon. The objective should drive the actions taken.

Dando closed by highlighting the importance of message...
delivery. Never underestimate a good first impression. Vetting a message through trusted allies to ensure what you think you are saying is what is being heard can be well worth the time and effort. Through this process one can strengthen the reasoning of the argument and prepare for questions.

For those of you who missed this presentation the slides are viewable online at http://www.vla.org/conferences/conference-presentations/.

—Heather Groves
Hannan, Mercer Library, George Mason University, Prince William Campus

"Rocking Billy Joel and other ways to incorporate play into storytime" gets participants up out of their chairs.

2:15–3:15 p.m.

The View From My Desk

Presenters: Margaret Howard, Chesterfield County Public Library; Laura Miller, Credo; Kathleen DeLaurenti, College of William and Mary; Kathy Lehman, Thomas Dale High School

This panel of presenters gave their audience an inside look at their jobs, offering a view of the challenges and surprises of academic, public, and school libraries as well as working for a vendor.

Kathy Lehman spoke about rising early to open the library for students. She told of how her school serves a very diverse population, and that the students at her school make heavy use of the library. It makes for a very full day. Students and teachers use the library for researching papers and projects, citing sources, using databases, and accessing library materials.
Kathleen DeLaurenti discussed the challenges of serving as a liaison librarian for music and art departments at the same time she runs a branch music library. She said that she has to be part manager, part metadata librarian, and part reference librarian. She gets to see many trends in libraries, getting to explore new practices like roaming reference. A major benefit of her job is getting to know and work with the students, and being able to do a wide variety of things.

Margaret Howard spends her day working to resolve problems or issues for her staff, striving to be proactive instead of reactive. Each person in her library is trained to be a generalist, meaning when you need somebody to fill in, there will always be somebody to help. Howard spends time planning programs for the patrons and handling the big challenges in her branch. But she also finds it very rewarding to help patrons in a real way.

Below, Exhibitors enjoy a break from their tables during the Vendors’ reception.
Laura Miller didn’t have any traditional library experience when she got her degree, but she worked two internships through her master’s program. The first internship was providing remote instruction for a library in Dubai, and the other was a paid internship at Credo. She went on to work at Credo, where she works on marketing and promotional campaigns with customer libraries. Even though Credo is based in Boston, Miller works from her home in Richmond and enjoys the flexibility of her job and the respect that Credo shows to librarians.

— John Connolly, Virginia Libraries

4:00–5:00 p.m.
Millions of Stories Waiting to be Found: Genealogy for the Non-Genealogist
Presenter: Nathan Flinchum, Roanoke Public Libraries

There are times when library staff will find themselves faced with...
questions about genealogy that they do not know how to answer. As one of these “accidental genealogists,” Nathan Flinchum of the Roanoke Public Library System has observed that researchers are of three varieties: seasoned, still learning but have some experience, and brand new.

Seasoned researchers are the easy ones to help. They want a quiet space where they can spread out materials they are working with and access to both print and online resources. They also want someone to listen to their stories. They just need you to show them the layout of the facilities, offer them a workspace, point them in the direction of the copy machine, and politely listen to their stories.

Researchers who have some experience under their belts will want to discover resources that may help with their research, assistance with sticky issues, someone to share their excitement with, and all the answers. So how do you help them? You listen and show interest; conduct a reference interview in order to filter out misinformation (and if needed, provide them with a different avenue for their research); introduce them to the resources you have available; show them how to do advanced searching; and then let them discover things on their own.

Beginners are challenging because they are often naïve and have unrealistic expectations. They want their family tree and instant access to all family information without doing too much research. So you begin by explaining the basics. You recommend some good resources for beginning their research, including family Bibles, letters, and diaries, and suggest they gather information from family members. You also offer advice on how they can organize the information they find. It helps if researchers set up a notebook with one name per page where information can be added as they work through the resources.

In order to be prepared to help researchers, library staff should be familiar with their library’s resources including the call number ranges where materials are located, the databases that will help researchers, and the location of computers researchers are allowed to use. Some of the databases that help genealogy researchers include Ancestry.com, Heritage Quest, Fold3, and Find It Virginia. Newspapers that include obituaries are a great resource. The National Archives indexes newspapers that can be borrowed via inter-library loan. A Google search often provides useful information since many family histories have been digitized and are now available online. Other resources include church directories and meeting minutes, association rosters and minutes, phone books, city directories, and WPA reports and projects. Nathan mentioned several free electronic resources that may be useful to genealogists, including Flickr: The Commons, TRELLO, Viewshare, and History Pin.

This session was filled with interesting information that would be helpful to the librarian assisting a researcher as well as anyone researching their family’s history.

—Lydia Williams, Greenwood Library, Longwood University

4:00–5:00 p.m.

Committees: Necessary or Necessary Evil?

Presenters: Candice Benjes-Small, Radford University; Katelyn Tucker, Radford University; Rebecca K. Miller, Virginia Tech

The presenters got their audience involved right away, asking them to write down their best and worst experiences with committees and share them with one another. The audience found that the best traits of good committees were clearly defined roles and objectives, positive personalities, and members who buy in to the committee goals and show respect to others.
The presenters then engaged in a discussion about how to make the best of committee membership. An important point is not to take on too much at once. The advice to “never say no in your first five years” is wrong. Prospective committee members should research the committee before saying yes. Market yourself and know your strengths. Keep a clear view of your goals throughout the process to discern how a committee will help you and how you can help the committee.

The presenters pointed out that sometimes there are opportunities to reinvent a committee or to create a new committee. The New Members Roundtable (NMRT) was an example of this, as the members went through the VLA process to create a new committee in 2012. Another example was the rejuvenation of the academic section of VLA, which ultimately turned into VLACRL.

There are several points committees might fall afoul of: clarity of mission, available resources, a reasonable timeline, and having authority. Not having one of these might constitute a red flag of caution for the committee members. Without resources or the authority to change anything, the committee might become a source of negativity instead of a vehicle of change.

Attendees engaged in a discussion on negativity, and what could be done to combat its presence in committee. Just one negative person can lower a team’s productivity 30 to 40 percent. Negativity can spread very easily in a committee, and the discussion led to a few ways to deal with negativity. Many of the solutions hinged on accountability for committee members or strong and organized chairing for meetings. With accountability, people are less likely to withhold effort, and organized and on-topic meetings prevent interpersonal problems or unfocused negativity.

The presenters also presented tools and technology advice for committees. Leaders should thoroughly evaluate their tools and ensure they fit the communication needs of the committee.

The session wrapped up with a final exercise: attendees wrote out their own SILO analysis: their strengths, interests, limitations and opportunities to determine their best committee fit.

— John Connolly, Virginia Libraries

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 27

8:00–8:45 a.m.

The Romance Genre from a Writer’s Perspective

Presenter: Christyna Hunter, Loudoun County Public Library/Lovettsville Library

For those in the audience who might make light of the romance novel, Chrystyna Hunter did a fine job arguing the importance of this popular genre during her 45-minute presentation. As of the last count, romance novels had cornered $1.438 billion of the book market share, with the second runner up at a lackluster $717.9 million (religious and spiritual books). Writers such as Nora Roberts (the first writer inducted into the Romance Writers’ Hall of Fame in 1986), Jodi Thomas (a writer in residence writer at West Texas A&M who is taken seriously academically), and Jayne Anne Krentz (best known for writing about “dangerous men” and adventurous women) have helped catapult the genre to a new level, cultivating audiences around the globe and capturing the attention of acquisitions librarians and program planners. Before offering tips on how libraries can better support this oft-overlooked genre, however, Hunter described how she fell in love with the genre. It started when she was introduced to romance novels while shelving books in a public library and gained momentum when she got into an email exchange with a fellow romance junky who complimented her writing ability and suggested she consider writing a romance.

Next Hunter provided a brief history of the romance novel, explaining how it really began with a book published in 1972 called The Flame and the Flower, which was much more explicit than its
predecessors and includes a rape scene. Although there's remorse expressed afterwards, Hunter explains that the book was very controversial when it was released. Later (by the 80's and 90's), the character of the women changed. Women now had a mind of their own, and they were “no longer the innocent little virgins they were before.” The genre continued to evolve when writers like Nora Roberts added the male point of view. Today, 93% of romance novels are written by women, although male writers such as Leigh Greenwood (a.k.a. Harold Lowery) have written many a hot-selling romance as well. By definition, romance novels have a happy ending (with relationships leading to marriage or some form of commitment). “Nicholas Sparks books are not romance novels because they don’t have happy endings,” Hunter explains. “He writes love stories.” There are many different romance sub-genres (historical romance, paranormal romance, etc.), with single title romance novels running at a 100,000 word count (with Harlequin and Silhouette series books averaging 50,000–75,000 words each). Publishers of romance tend to strictly adhere to these word counts, which can be one of the challenges for writers who want to break into the genre. This was one of Hunter’s biggest challenges when writing her first romance manuscript for publication; no matter how much she tried, she just couldn’t seem to pare the story down to meet the format requirements. She also explained that her first story included a main character with a disability (Hunter herself has a mild form of Cerebral Palsy, and she said she found it “cleansing” to write the story), which sets her own fiction apart from other romance novels.

For those interested in writing romance, Hunter suggests resources such as RomanceWiki.

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**VLA College and Research Library (VLACRL) Chapter Conference Within a Conference**

*By Esther E. Onega, Head, Charles L. Brown Science & Engineering Library, University of Virginia*

As an academic librarian, I was especially interested in attending the VLACRL-Conference-Within-a-Conference presentations. The three I describe here are all related to data and assessment to improve libraries and their mission in higher education. The first session, Assessment in Action (Thursday at 2:15), was a panel presentation by three University of Virginia (UVA) librarians—Matt Ball, Keith Weimer, and Anne Houston. Ball discussed how user input was sought in redesigning the public areas on the main floor of Clemons Library to change space from a large computer lab to accommodate laptops, mobile devices, and group and individual workspaces. He worked with the Library’s assessment team to gather information from focus groups and brief visitor paper surveys, in which themes for different kinds of spaces and ambience formed the basis for the plan that was actually implemented.

Keith Weimer and Anne Houston used data from the UVA Library’s annual user surveys; a local study to understand the research habits and needs of graduate students; and focus groups to create the Graduate Reading Room and adjacent conference room—a quiet place designed for research and scholarship in Alderman Library. This data is also informing decisions about a possible renovation to Alderman Library.

A bright and early 8:00 presentation on Friday morning got the day off to a thoughtful start. What’s Data Got to Do With It? Bringing Data Science into the Library was presented by Andi Ogier from Virginia Tech, and she discussed the differences between data scientists and data science librarians. What I will most remember from her presentation was an analogy, based on a quotation from Mike Loukides (O’Reilly Media, 2010), “What differentiates data science from statistics is that data science is a holistic approach.” She helped the audience understand this role by changing the quotation to, “What differentiates librarians from researchers is that library science is a holistic approach.” She also highlighted many specific skills and approaches to working with data that both data scientists and data science librarians need in their complementary roles.

The third presentation was Does What we Count Count? by Jim Rettig from the United States Naval Academy which was offered at 1:15 on Friday afternoon. His discussion focused on the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) statistics and their definitional misalignment with the federal government’s Integrated Postsecondary Data System (IPEDS) survey, both of which aim to assess academic libraries. Rettig urges both organizations to agree on definitions of data elements; only count things that actually matter; ascertain whether the data collected by libraries is reliable, valid, and consistent; and simplify data collection and reporting, possibly by using a “TurboTax” style data entry tool. He included examples of the challenges libraries face when trying to compile and find meaning in required statistics.
Romance Writers of America, The Popular Romance Project, and Smart Bitches, Trashy Books (a good site, once you get past the name). Good books on the topic include A Natural History of the Romance Novel (Pamela Regis), Reading the Romance (Janice Radway), and Romance Fiction: A Guide to the Genre (Kristin Ramsdell).

There are many ways that libraries can support the romance genre, Hunter explained. For example libraries might consider hosting a romance novel book club (or adding a romance novel to a general book club list every now and then); they can include romance novels in staff and library website reviews; and it helps to purchase more romance, catalog the titles, and attach genre stickers to the physical copies.

In closing, Hunter mentioned how Nora Roberts does such a great job with relationships, whether between friends, family, or lovers. “It’s not about hotness,” she explained, “it’s the emotional journey that counts.” We should respect the genre and take it seriously.

Christyna Hunter’s romance novels, Wildfire (2009) and The Butterfly’s Dance (2005), are available at Amazon.com.

—Beth DeFrancis Sun, MCH Library, Georgetown University

8:00–8:45 a.m.

Introduction to the RDA (Resource Description and Access) Toolkit

Presenter: Elizabeth McCormick, McConnell Library/Radford University

Elizabeth McCormick presented a walk-through demonstration of the features of the RDA Toolkit, which provides resources and reference material beneficial to the implementation of the new RDA cataloging standard. McCormick’s library has not yet fully adopted RDA, but she has been using the Toolkit to prepare for the switch.

The RDA Toolkit contains a full online and searchable version of RDA rules, and a full version of the AACR2 (Anglo-American cataloging rules, 2nd edition). It also has Library of Congress policy statements and a module for the recording and sharing of cataloging workflows between libraries.

The Toolkit requires a subscription, but is available for free on a 30-day trial. McCormick pointed out that the Toolkit is particularly handy for accessing recent rule changes that have not yet been included in the print guides to RDA.

McCormick demonstrated how the Toolkit can be used to map RDA fields in the MARC (MACHINE READABLE Cataloging) standard, allowing an easy crosswalk between RDA, AACR2, and the MARC standard. She also showed the workflow portion of the Toolkit—librarians may write out detailed workflows and policy statements. The workflows may be shared with other users of the Toolkit, and even shared externally so other libraries using the Toolkit may view them.

The RDA Toolkit is explicitly designed to help make the transition from AACR2 to RDA smoother. It presents visual relationship diagrams to illustrate the data structuring of elements in Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records (FRBR), and has the ability to easily jump between rule interpretations for AACR2 and the equivalent in RDA.

The Toolkit is searchable, and McCormick showed the boolean structure of the platform’s search features. She demonstrated a few tricks to make searching more powerful, such as using the command “w/2” to search a term within two words of another term. Users can save searches to access at any time. McCormick also pointed out that there are regular webinars to demo the features of the Toolkit.

For more information, visit www.rdatookit.org.

—John Connolly, Virginia Libraries

9:00–10:30 a.m.

Second General Session

By the second day of the VLA conference, the attendees’ enthusiasm had escalated to the point where it was a bit of a challenge to call the Second General Session to order. President Lisa Lee Broughman rose to the challenge, however, and once the conference goers were settled quietly in their seats, she was able to share a stream of good news: VLA has nearly 1,000 members (948 at the time of the conference, up 103 from last year); the VLA Jobline has been tremendously successful in 2013 (which means there are lots of jobs available); and the association has been able to provide more scholarship funding as a result of its solid financial status. Additional stipends were provided to Virginia recipients of the American Library Association (ALA) Emerging Leaders program; VLA’s administrative duties have been streamlined; and Lisa Varga now has a multi-year contract to continue her important and much appreciated work as Executive Director of the association. Under her direction, VLA’s online presence has moved to the cloud-based Web and the conference registration is now fully online. The audience was particularly attentive when Broughman shared the news that all VLA members would receive a free pass to an upcoming session with Thomas J. Craughwell, author of Thomas Jefferson’s Creme Brulee, in partnership with Random House.

President Broughman then called on VLA Treasurer Maryke Barber to give her report on the association’s financial affairs. Barber made it clear that the association
Below, the 2013 VLA Scholarship went to Simone Horst from Harrisonburg, Virginia

Bottom, Christopher Smith (Jefferson-Madison Regional Library System) receives the VLA Paraprofessional Clara M. Stanley Scholarship

Peter McIntosh, Jefferson-Madison Regional Library, recipient of the Trustee Award

is in great shape, noting that VLA’s income for 2013 is expected to exceed the goal by at least several thousand dollars. She reported that the jobline had brought in $10,600 in revenue, and that some of the VLA programs did more than just break even by actually earning a profit this year. The only negative piece of news was that VLA’s investment earnings were down as a result of market downturns. However, a new fund manager, Sean Allburn of Davenport & Company, has been selected to represent VLA’s interests.

The 2014 VLA election results were announced next, with Suzy Szasz Palmer (Longwood University) accepting the role of Vice President/President Elect, Shari Henry (Arlington Public Library) serving as Second Vice President, and Nathan Flinchum (Roanoke Public Libraries) serving as VLA Treasurer. The results were based on a 30% voting response rate from VLA members (lower than hoped), and all members in attendance were encouraged to submit a ballot during next year’s elections.

The next portion of VLA’s second General Session was devoted to scholarships, beginning with Sasha Matthews, the Scholarship Committee chair, reporting this year’s recipients of the VLA Scholarship and the Clara Stanley
VLAPF Scholarship awards. This year, the Stanley award went to Christopher Smith from Charlottesville, who works for the Jefferson-Madison Regional Library System and is pursuing his Masters in Library Science degree at the University of North Texas. The 2013 VLA Scholarship went to Simone Horst, from Harrisonburg, who has been employed as an Archives Assistant since May of 2012 and is pursuing her Masters in Library and Information Science degree from the University of South Carolina. Each of the recipients was presented with a check for $2,500.

Next, Awards & Recognition Chair Anne Driscoll stepped up to the mic to announce more winners: The Newport News Public Library (recipient of the Friends of the Library award); Elizabeth Hensley (the George Mason Award for Leadership); Peter McIntosh from the Jefferson Madison Regional Library (the Trustee Award), and the Fairfax County School Board (the Intellectual Freedom...
Committee Award) whose School Superintendent Jack Dale was lauded for upholding the freedom to use the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *Beloved*, by Toni Morrison, in the County’s English curriculum. Susan Thornley accepted the award on behalf of the School Board.

President Broughman then announced the recipients of the 2013 VLA Presidential Citation: Candice Benjes-Small of Radford University, Elizabeth Kocevar-Weidinger of Longwood University, and Luke Vilelle of Hollins University. During this award presentation, Lisa read the Citation aloud: “In recognition of their outstanding contributions as co-founders of the exceptionally successful Virginia Library Association College and Research Library chapter, for introducing new programming opportunities within the Virginia Library Association for academic librarians working in the Commonwealth, including the development of a peer-reviewed session track at the annual conference, this VLA Presidential Citation is issued to Candice Benjes-Small, Elizabeth Kocevar-Weidinger, and Luke Vilelle.”

Before passing the gavel to incoming VLA President Kevin Smith, Lisa thanked past president Connie Gilman; second vice president Mark Lenker, and treasurer Maryke Barber for all of their valuable work in their current capacities on the VLA Council. Although these positions will be filled by newly elected Council members, it doesn’t mean that their efforts to support VLA and Virginia libraries in general won’t continue. In fact, Mark Lenker’s new title is “Conference Chair” (alongside Kevin Smith).

Mark Lenker then shared just enough about next year’s conference to intrigue the audience and remind all in attendance that the VLA cannot be accused of taking itself too seriously! In keeping with the association’s “Double Dog Dare” tradition of having the courage to do something pretty outrageous, Lenker explained that the conference co-chairs have agreed to be “The Dudes” of the 2014 VLA Conference and are currently tossing around potential themes.
that include (1) Something to do with Star Wars, (2) Information Sharknado (a reference to the B-movie from the Syfy channel), (3) It smells like a man, and (4) 50 Shades of VLA. [Based on audience feedback, it sounds like the latter might be in the lead!] And if that wasn’t enough to entice Virginia library lovers to attend next year’s conference, Lenker shared the names of next year’s keynote speakers: Gene Ambaum and Bill Barnes, of the comic strip “Unshelved” notoriety, and Michael Stephens, Tame the Web blogger and Assistant Professor in the School or Library and Information Science at San Jose State University.

Next year’s VLA Conference will have a later time slot (Oct. 22–24), with Lenker admitting that he needs all the planning time he can get, and will be held in the same Doubletree by Hilton Hotel in Williamsburg.

Before the Second General Session was adjourned, Conference Co-chair Rebecca Miller stepped up to the mic to introduce Keynote Speaker Maureen Sullivan—a leadership role model whose lengthy list of accomplishments include “immediate past president of ALA,” 25-years worth of experience as an organizational developer, and a human resources administrator in the libraries at Yale and the University of Maryland (where she received her graduate degree in Library Science). Having just returned from a trip out west, Sullivan greeted the audience with a big “Howdy!” before sharing her pearls of accumulated wisdom. She talked about the importance of “turning outward” (which makes the community and the people the reference point for getting things done), and the role that librarians can take as a community convener. Towards this end, libraries are partnering with community-building organizations such as the Harwood Institute to help people at the local level to become innovators. A shared aspiration among libraries is to energize individuals and help everyone to achieve their full potential.

Sullivan acknowledged the opportunities presented by projects such as the Digital Public Library of America, but noted that it would be a “challenge to find the capacity within ourselves to provide the best service.” During a brief Q & A session, Sullivan said that associations are the best place to develop our leadership capacity, and that the key role of librarians today is to become adept at responding to change.

—Beth DeFrancis Sun, MCH Library, Georgetown University
Philip Young presented on the open ethos, a phenomenon that has gained a much higher profile through the rise of the internet and newer technologies in recent years. He specifically covered how calls for openness affect today’s academic libraries, and how academic librarians can identify opportunities to promote openness.

The presentation began with an examination of “open,” a term that has been vaguely defined as it has evolved over the years. A major component of open is the provision of access to material. Can you access the material, and are you allowed to redistribute the material? The open movement hinges on free access and free redistribution; the movement has been embodied in the open source software movement and has even lent itself to the language of institutional transparency, such as “open government.”

Young covered several milestones in the openness of academic materials, starting with the establishment of the world’s first scientific journal in Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society and tracing movements that promoted greater access to open materials up to 1998, with the foundation of the open source movement and a clearer drive for an open ethos.

Young pointed out that today research libraries have moved much closer to the creation side of the research process. The library is much more closely involved in the research process than in recent years. Nevertheless, librarians have their own professional societies with their own understanding of ethics and missions. Libraries facilitate openness by removing the price barriers to materials, promoting inter-library cooperation, and fighting censorship. Some libraries are beginning to explore open educational resources, such as open textbooks that reduce the cost of higher education.

There were plenty of suggestions for libraries that want to help promote openness for materials during the presentation. As librarians have long been the experts on fair use, open licensing, and copyright issues, Young suggested hosting a Wikipedia edit-a-thon, which engages students and helps acquaint them with the skills required to create knowledge. The
The 2013 Jefferson Cup Committee, below, and award-winning author Steven Sheinkin, left

event also encourages learning for students about licensing and the citation of sources. Young also suggested libraries could help improve openness by advocating for open formats, like PDF, putting an open license on metadata, using open source software, crafting an open access policy, and being organizationally transparent.

Young admitted that the issue of open access is far from settled, and that many challenges remain for libraries that wish to promote openness. First, he argued that openness itself isn’t sufficient to meet our goals. Simply opening access to data, such as government documents, budgets, and high-level research papers does not improve the lives of library patrons or citizens. There's simply too much data; libraries also have to raise
awareness of important open data and help find people to interpret that data. Further, openness has its limits: there are technology limitations (not everybody has internet or even a computer), language and culture barriers (openness of English materials does not help speakers of other languages), and accessibility issues (are open materials accessible to those with disabilities?). Young also pointed out that it’s often still a struggle to get university faculty to publish their work in an open format; faculty have concerns over priority claims to their research, and many academic fields are geared toward publication in the largest journals, most of which guard the content behind a pay wall.

Young concluded the presentation by discussing what libraries can do to overcome these limitations. Libraries need to engage the culture of “closed” and change it to one that values openness. Academic libraries in particular can influence trends at their libraries, and promote the creation and sharing of knowledge among faculty and students. Helping to define the meaning of open, particularly through a clear open access policy goes a long way to beginning this process.

Openness helps to redefine the relevance of a library. Young said that surveys of students and faculty found that most of them see the academic library as nothing more than a “wallet” for them, nothing more than an institution that purchases materials for them. A culture of openness helps libraries to more deeply engage students and faculty, as well as allowing the library to pursue its traditional ethical values. Working with students and faculty to create knowledge accessible to as many people as possible helps libraries to build trust with the communities they serve.

— John Connolly, Virginia Libraries

1:15–2:00 p.m.

Reinvigorating a Small College Library

Presenters: Shaunna Hunter and Brian Burns, Hampden-Sydney College

Shaunna Hunter and Brian Burns presented on their experience improving and redesigning the library at Hampden-Sydney College. The library building was constructed recently and it opened in 2007. The library had a new director in 2010, and its first external review in 2011. They said that the review provided the framework for their changes. Although the library had a new building, the building was in a very traditional style. By undertaking various levels of change, the library rose to the rank of fourth-best college library in the nation on the Princeton Review list of college libraries.

The presenters broke down the changes into three main categories: those that were costly, mid-level changes, and inexpensive changes. They started by highlighting the more expensive things, including purchasing ILLiad and the EBSCO Delivery Service. Several laptops the library had for bibliographic instruction were replaced with iPads and Bluetooth keyboards. They purchased twenty iPads, as well as a “Lock ’n charge” cart that allows a mobile charging station for iPad
storage. The library also purchased a Zeta book scanner for easy digitization of printed materials.

The library undertook several mid-level changes, which were not as expensive. They implemented LibGuides in place of the library’s main website. They also cut subscriptions to print periodicals and used those savings to purchase additional JSTOR packages and an e-book collection. The library staff surveyed all new students on campus about their technology requirements. They found that many students used Mac computers, a signal that the library needed to re-allocate more resources to provide that technology to students. Since the library only had three Mac computers, they decided to add more and aim for a 50-50 split for library computers as they replace old computers for new ones.

Hunter and Burns also talked about the physical reorganization they undertook to make better use of library space. They moved DVDs and AV materials out of a closed office and onto the main floor. They are also adding more movies for students; almost 15 percent of library circulation now is movies. They reported that the availability of movies is getting more students into the building. Further changes were made to make more efficient use of space. An area housing an unused reference index was re-configured into a study space, increasing space for study, tutoring sessions, and general visibility in that section of the library. Technical support staff were relocated closer to library
staff offices, reducing the distance between departments.

The presenters talked about inexpensive changes they made to improve service to students. They give away office supplies to students at a special desk designed just for the distribution of scissors, pens, tape, hand sanitizer and tissues. The library also circulates headphones to students. A pair costs the library only $10, and headphones circulated more than 3,000 times last year alone. Staff implemented a quiet study area near the library’s compact shelving space. They have seen lots of use in what was previously an almost unused portion of the library, with the only cost being desks, study carrels, and chairs.

The library also offers cell phone charging as a service. They purchased a large, multi-charger device, as well as a Lightning Charger for the iPhone 5. A separate wireless router was set up to process wireless printing within the library.

The presenters also explained how they re-worked the use of their 10 open study rooms. Before making changes, the study rooms were always locked and students had to have a key to access them. Using a free web program called OpenRoom, the staff set up a room booking management webpage that facilitated more than 3,700 reservations last year. The rooms are self-policing, and the staff has not had any cause to intervene yet to enforce reservations.

The presenters also discussed some of the work they’ve done to engage students at the college, especially reaching out to incoming freshmen. For freshman orientation, the library put on an event with nine holes of putt putt golf, taking students to all sections of the library and highlighting the library services that are available. They expanded the event to exam time, and the students love to visit the library for snacks and to reduce stress. The library staff also created an orientation video starring the school mascot, who introduced each area in the library. The library now offers a 15-minute workshop series on using library tools for students.

Hunter and Burns said it has been important to open the library up to other departments for events. Hosting open houses for other offices and hosting freshman matriculation has helped raise the library’s profile on campus.

— John Connolly, Virginia Libraries

3:15–4:00 p.m.

**Minecraft in the Library**

Presenters: Matthew Williams and Sarah Vaughan, Roanoke County Public Library

This presentation was one of the last of the conference, but enjoyed good attendance nevertheless. The presenters—Matthew Williams and Sarah Vaughan—described their public library program to host a server to allow teens to play the online game Minecraft.

Matthew Williams began the presentation with an overview of Minecraft. The game rose to internet popularity several years ago, and it is one part building game and one part horror survival game. Williams termed Minecraft a phenomenon, and said that might be underselling the game a bit. He said it’s a “good indicator of how the notion of play is changing for children and adults alike.” It’s also a great learning tool, serving as a
curiosity-driven exercise in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) skills.

Williams demonstrated the world that he built for the students inside the game. He constructed a giant tower with special puzzles and challenges; any players that manage to work their way to the top receive a special kit filled with tools and items to use.

A major element of the library's Minecraft server is the age limitations imposed. Williams said that the server is a safe place for ages 9 to 18, and is profanity-free (making use of a plug-in that filters profanity and even bans players for repeated offenses). The age restrictions prevent the logistical issues of having adults and children on the same server, and all communications between players are public; no private messaging is allowed. Accessories, plug-ins, and other downloadable tools and add-ons make the game easier to play.

All in-game staff (moderators and administrators of the server) are library employees. This does take a significant time commitment, so the library is exploring the possibility of piloting a program that gives some moderator privileges to teen users. Williams explained that moderation in a Minecraft server is important, as players sometimes wreck the buildings of others, an in-game transgression known as “griefing.” The library installed plug-ins on certain areas of the server that prevent that from happening, and moderators have the ability to roll-back changes with a single command.

The presenters demonstrated
some of the areas on the server. One area is dedicated to creativity, giving users access to all the building blocks and tools. Another holds a Hunger Games-style battle arena where players can do combat with one another. The library hosts regular contests on the server, even letting contestants design the logo for the server.

The library converted a Dell Optiplex 990 home PC running Windows 7 into their Minecraft server. The PC was backup hardware, and the library was lucky to be able to use it at little added cost. Williams described the machine as middle-range, and the biggest hardware cost was upgrading the computer’s RAM to handle the server load. Including software licenses and hardware upgrades, their four-branch library system spent less than $300 on their server. He said that the hardware requirements for a Minecraft server are not huge, especially if the server will serve a small or limited audience. Further, the server can be re-used for other games in the future.

The presenters discussed some of the challenges of running a server. Most day-to-day problems are interpersonal, as player conflict can easily spill over into real life, especially when players are sitting right next to each other in the computer lab. Williams observed that some kids just aren’t ready for online interactions in a server environment, and the library sometimes needs to make younger users wait until they are more mature. Setting clear rules and adhering to them without exceptions has been very beneficial for the library’s Minecraft community. The presenters also pointed out that there’s a steep learning curve in setting up and administering a new, full-time server. There’s a large time commitment to getting a server started, but once stable, it doesn’t need much supervision.

How can other libraries begin to use Minecraft in their libraries? Williams suggested starting small. The software for the game makes getting multiple computers linked together quite easy. If you know the IP address of the computer on which you begin a game, a networked game can be easily hosted. This is great for a one-night game event in the library. The game will be basic and not very versatile, but set-up is easy and the technical requirements are very low.

If libraries want to go large, they’ll need a mid-range computer with additional RAM, as well as firewall access for the server machine. It will take more time to get started, but can be made easier by using hardware the library already has. Williams suggested using spare hardware or even hardware that’s already in use, such as Envisionware server stations, which use a very similar concept to the Minecraft server configuration. A larger configuration will allow the library to customize and configure the server to allow young patrons to make it their own.

— John Connolly, Virginia Libraries
The Unconference

—By Nathan Flinchum, Roanoke Public Libraries

The Virginia Library Association’s 2013 Annual Conference was the first to feature an “unconference” component, based in part on the Open Space Technology format espoused by Harrison Owen beginning in the mid 1980’s.

The unconference stands apart from a traditional conference in a few key ways:

1. Unconference sessions are not scheduled in advance. Attendees volunteer to facilitate a particular topic by claiming an open time slot and filling in their desired topic. Many unconferences use post-it notes, whiteboards, or even web apps as central place for participants to post topics. At the 2013 Annual we used Tardis-themed note pads on easels. Traditional sessions had to be submitted by May for a conference in September; these unconference slots allowed topics that had come up since May to be addressed in a full session. In addition, staff members who may not have been involved in Virginia libraries prior to May had the opportunity to contribute a voice to the conference.

2. Unconference sessions are typically smaller and more interactive. Almost all of the unconference sessions took place around a large table or two. Instead of a presenter or presenters asking for questions at the end, these sessions were full of conversation on the topics at hand. No one was an expert; the conversation was the presentation.

3. Unconference sessions promote small but intense groups. This year’s largest group included about 15 participants and everyone contributed something to the discussion. The talk was lively and, at times, divisive, but the diversity of opinion and experience expressed in the sessions was a reminder of the varied roles, responsibilities, and realities of life in Virginia libraries.

As examples, here are some of the notes from two of the unconference sessions:

LAN (Local Area Network) Gaming and STEM—David Folmar of the Richmond Public Libraries was the facilitator of this session. As a recent hire with the libraries, Folmar wasn’t able to submit a session proposal in time. However, he had a couple of months of experience implementing gaming as a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) tool in the libraries. He was also looking for other libraries doing the same so that they could swap ideas, favorite games, and possibly organize cross-library play! Matt Williams (Roanoke County Public Libraries) and Natasha Payne-Brunson (Richmond Public Libraries) were also vocal contributors. Williams runs the County’s Minecraft platform which has over 400 patrons signed up! Other programs mentioned as either being used or being considered for use included: Ace of Spades, Age of Mythology, Game Star Mechanics, Artemis, Space Station 13, and Kerbal Space Program. A good deal of time was spent discussing the uses of Minecraft toward STEM learning and some of the add-ons that can be used to customize the game (Craft Book, MagicLauncher, and OptiFine, to name a few.) Transforming traditional library spaces into fun gaming spaces temporarily and inexpensively was also discussed. Challenges brought up by the group included getting administration buy in, funding equipment and software, and how to allow for free play while still maintaining some control over it. The group left with the possibilities of facilitating gaming across library systems throughout the State of Virginia and beyond.

Library Failure—I was happy to facilitate this session with an enthusiastic group of contributors. Representatives from the Williamsburg Regional Libraries, Richmond Public Libraries, Tidewater Community College, and many others were present to discuss initiatives their systems have tried that did not succeed. The group shared stories and then discussed possible solutions to common problems. How do you encourage people to come to programs (and to actually attend after signing up)? Some libraries use a club model instead of a la carte programming to build an audience that will regularly attend and share knowledge with one another. In particular, job clubs (clubs for job seekers with interview tips, résumé assistance, and support through the job search process) have been popular. Marketing events was also mentioned as an issue at many locations, both in terms of getting the word out in general and specifically in targeting people who may not normally use the library. Community partnerships were mentioned as a source of good programming ideas and a wider reach; in
Room 17 turns lively during VLA’s first Unconference

particular, the Richmond Public Libraries had a great success with the Girls Who Rock program to support girls and education worldwide. There was a great deal of discussion on how we actually determine success and failure with library services and whether libraries in general allow for failure (most said that libraries can’t afford failure from both a time and financial standpoint.) Finally, it was suggested (with much agreement) that part of the reasons programs have failed has been because staff were guessing about what patrons wanted rather than talking to them directly.