

The 47th MHLS Annual Meeting will be held on Friday, October 6, 2006 at the Culinary Institute of America, Hyde Park, New York. Our guest speaker will be *Gerald Nichols*, Director, Long Island University's Palmer Institute for Public Library Organization and Management. His topic will be "Marketing Library Services." Expect your invitation by early September.

ACROSS THE

BOARD

Future Focus: Seven Trends

In the last three years major studies of library service and attitudes have been released. The first was the 2005 OCLC Study, "Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources;" the second was the Americans for Libraries Council/Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation June 2006 Study, "Long Overdue: A Fresh Look at Public Attitudes about Libraries; and the third was the MHLS focus groups for the next five-year Plan of Service. The results show seven common themes.

(1)

Libraries are seen as having the potential to help solve community problems. The "Long Overdue" report states that Americans see libraries as potential solutions to many communities' most pressing problems, like adult literacy and helping new immigrants adjust to their new community. Participants in the MHLS focus groups also mentioned the growing use of libraries as locations for community events and social connections for families, teens and seniors.

(2)

Libraries are facing tougher competition for funding. Although many people, especially community leaders, recognize the importance of libraries in their community, they seem less able to support libraries with funding. Indeed many people have no understanding of how libraries are funded or the value they bring to the community. MHLS was not surprised by the findings announced in the "Long Overdue" report. We had heard echoes of this national pattern earlier in the year through our focus groups. Member libraries clearly communicated that their primary challenge is making the case for support in their communities.

(3)

Libraries have increased in value, but that has not been recognized. The number of resources in any library has increased exponentially, but non-user focus groups conducted by MHLS revealed that many people still think of libraries as buildings with books, and that we find those books using old fashioned card catalogs. Librarians reported that large numbers of people just don't understand how the library has changed in the past twenty years; that they don't realize what is available at the library or through the library's web site; that they don't understand how area libraries work together to provide better service. We are facing a *critical awareness deficit*, and need to work harder to help non-user's understand the value of libraries and to harness our supporter's enthusiasm so they will spread the good word for us.

(4)

Patrons are interacting with libraries online. The only surprise here is the degree to which this is true. The number of online users jumped by more than 23 percent from 2004-2005 (OCLC, 2005). We are reaching a tipping point where online usage will be a normal library function and the primary way some patrons interact with our libraries.

(5)

The Library building has become a community space. In all the studies this is a significant trend. People are looking for public space in their communities and libraries are there to fill the need. While this is clear, it is important for us to keep in mind that people expect our buildings to be clean, bright, well maintained and comfortable. They expect open hours that fit their lifestyle and expect a higher level of service from staff than they may have in the past.

(6)

People are learning technology at the library. Library staff report significant increases in the demand to teach people the basics of technology. It is more than just teaching email. For example, we have seen an influx of job seekers needing help with online applications, adding an extra dimension to staff responsibilities, which drives home the need to continually update staff skills. Another example is the recent addition of downloadable audio books to most library web sites. Libraries are continually implementing new advances. Staff must become more comfortable with technology and better skilled in educating patrons.

(7)

People have high expectations. Our society has become more customer-driven and as a result customers expect more. Staff report patrons want faster service, more immediate attention and more resources in more formats. The OCLC study suggested that our competitors are Google and Amazon which are continually implementing new services and raising the bar for service.

Two Crucial Challenges

(1) **Marketing/Advocacy/Awareness:** We need to find ways to educate the public about what we have, help community leaders see the value of libraries to their community, and show people that the small amount of tax money spent on libraries brings huge returns.

(2) **Quality Staff:** Our staff need to be of a caliber that can handle technology changes, find answers quickly, and deal with a wide range of patron attitudes and behavior. This means better training and offering better salaries and benefits to attract and keep more qualified workers.

These two critical areas will be a major part of the next MHLS Plan of Service to be submitted to the NYS Division of Library Development this fall. We thank all of the directors, staff and trustees who participated in our focus groups earlier this year. Their input will help us craft a long range plan that meets the current needs of member libraries and anticipates some of the challenges we will face in the coming years.

References

- OCLC Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources Report (2005) <http://www.oclc.org/reports/2005perceptions.htm>
- Long Overdue: A Fresh Look at Public and Leadership Attitudes About Libraries in the 21st Century (2006) (Americans for Libraries Council Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation); http://www.lff.org/long_overdue061306.html
- MHLS Plan of Service Focus Group Report (2006) <http://midhudson.org/mhls/services.htm>

TRUSTEE EDUCATION SERIES – FALL 2006

Twice a year, in the Smeans to serve on a public library Board. Feedback has indicated that after participating in the **MHLS Trustee Education Series** trustees have felt more confident in their role as a trustee, better able to understand the issues brought before them at meetings and more knowledgeable about where to go for help in the future. (*Don't forget the added incentive of \$50 to libraries if at least one of your trustees attends a MHLS Essential or Advanced Trustee Education Session in 2006. The System will mail checks based on attendance.*)

(1)

TRUSTEE ESSENTIAL EDUCATION SESSIONS

- **Saturday, September 16, 10 a.m. – 12 p.m.**
Hudson Area Association Library | 400 State Street
- **Tuesday, September 19, 6 p.m. – 8 p.m.**
MHLS Auditorium | 105 Market Street | Poughkeepsie
- **Thursday, September 21, 6 p.m. – 8 p.m.**
Saugerties Public Library | 91 Washington Avenue

Essential sessions are designed to educate public library trustees in:

- Background and Structure of Libraries in New York
- Roles and Functions of a Board
- Running Effective Meetings

(2)

ADVANCED TRUSTEE EDUCATION SESSIONS:

Building Community Support for Your Library

- **Tuesday, October 17, 6 p.m. – 8 p.m.**
East Fishkill Community Library | 348 Route 376 | Hopewell Junction
- **Saturday, October 21, 10 a.m. – 12 p.m.**
Catskill Public Library | 1 Franklin Street

Advanced sessions are designed to focus on issues benefiting and affecting libraries in our System.

(3)

2006 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE/DIRECTORS FORUM:

Legal Issues for Boards

- **Saturday, November 18, from 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.**
MHLS Auditorium | 105 Market Street | Poughkeepsie
Presented by **Gerald Nichols**, Director of the Palmer Institute for Public Library Organization & Management

Member Library Board Executive Committee members are encouraged to attend with their Library Director, but all Board members, Library Directors and others involved are welcome to attend.

- **Registration is required** for all Trustee Education Events. Register one of three ways for Trustee Education sessions:
 - (1) <http://midhudson.org>, then click on **Calendar**
 - (2) <http://www.midhudson.org/evanced/lib/eventcalendar.asp>
 - (3) call 845.471.6060 x46

(Essentials and Advanced sessions are presented by **Josh Cohen**, MHLS Executive Director; **Rebekkah Smith Aldrich**, MHLS Coordinator of Member Information; and **Merribeth Advocate**, MHLS Outreach and Education Coordinator)

DATE TO SAVE



Tuesday

September 26

10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Green Buildings

Workshop

This full-day workshop is devoted to increasing awareness and interest in energy conservation and environmentally friendly facility issues. The workshop will cover:

- ✦ Energy Efficiencies
- ✦ Renewable Energy
- ✦ Facility Maintenance
- ✦ Sustainable Design & Building Components (For both new construction and for buildings that are being renovated/expanded.)
- ✦ Funding *Green* Initiatives

A dozen area experts are being tapped to speak at this event. Speakers from NYSERDA, Eco-Con Buildings Systems, Environmental Services, the Town of Rosendale and Landsberg Engineering have already been confirmed. More information will be forthcoming.

Workshop fees include lunch. Please send checks, made out to MHLS, to the MHLS Business Office, 103 Market Street, Poughkeepsie, New York 12601. Register online through the MHLS calendar.

- ✦ \$10 fee for MHLS member libraries
- ✦ \$20 fee for all others (When registering, please choose "Non-MHLS library" from the "Select Your Library" drop-down list.)