



## AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein  
July 4, 2008

*“The Diversity Leadership Institute strives for the development of a cadre of enlightened library and information professionals who recognize and respect diversity leadership as a basic tenet of our profession, and within society overall.”*

-Valerie Bell, Chair, ALA  
Committee on Diversity

I have just spent five days at the American Library Association annual conference in Anaheim. There was so much to take in – the workshops, the exhibit hall, and the thousands of librarians walking the streets, filling the hallways, chatting on the shuttle buses, and engaging in listening, learning and exchanging ideas.

At a conference like this, there are programs for all kinds of librarians and every kind of interest. Usually I choose from a variety of offerings – whatever catches my interest. But this year I somehow ended up moving from one diversity event to another.

I started out at a pre-conference called “Diversity Leadership Institute: Fundamentals of Diversity.” Sponsored by the ALA Office of Diversity, this all day institute included speakers on topics such as “Diversity @ Our Libraries: Using Institutional Assessment to Transform Our Libraries” (Clara Chu, UCLA); “Diversity and the Bottom Line: Making the Business

Case for Diversity (Mark Winston, UNC-Chapel Hill); and, “Hitting the Mark: Recruiting Strategically for Diversity” (Patty Wong, County Librarian, Yolo County). Putting all the information together, we were presented with the compelling story of why and how libraries of all kinds should be reaching out and diversifying their work force.

One of the most powerful images of the day for me was a quote presented by Chu, from a Margaret J. Wheatley’s book, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*. Wheatley compares organizations to spider webs and notes that “If a web breaks and needs repair, the spider doesn’t cut out a piece, terminate it, or tear the entire web apart and reorganize it. She reweaves it, using the silken relationships that are already there, creating stronger connections across the weakened spaces.” In other words, she goes on to say, a system is capable of solving its own problems, and if a system

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is suffering, “this indicates that it lacks sufficient access to itself.”

Starting with this idea, Chu carefully guided us through an explanation of how to use assessment to ultimately increase the diversity in an institution.

Winston talked about the importance of not relying solely on an emotional or social justice argument for “investment in diversity.” Instead, he suggested using a more business-like approach, pointing out that large for-profit corporations have found a competitive advantage and financial success by doing just that.

One of Wong’s points was “diversity in the broadest sense: women, people of color, LGBT, people with varying abilities.” When I later attended the Diversity Fair, I encountered the same far-reaching interpretation of the word. There were services for older adults, people with disabilities, underserved populations, tribal college

libraries and more. Handouts included Maureen Sykes’ “Tip Sheet: Library Services to Students with Autism”; and the Transgender Resource Collection of the Oak Park Public Library (Illinois), along with their great annotated book list, called “Free to Be He and She,” which is a list of books featuring non-traditional gender roles.

I also enjoyed the exhibit hall, where vendors displayed an amazing variety of products related to libraries. Probably my favorite find was a book-cleaning machine: books are fed onto a conveyor belt through a glassed-in case, past natural bristle rollers and out the other side. I asked the young vendor, who spoke fluent Italian and less English, if it sanitized the books. Yes, he told me, and it removes mushrooms, too.

Fungus? I inquired, after thinking for a moment. Yes, he responded, smiling - fungus.