



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“The National Business Travel Association is the world’s largest and oldest association dedicated to the advancement of the corporate travel industry... [They] collectively manage more than USD \$170 billion in global business travel expenditures each year.”

-NBTA conference,
Boston 2007

I recently had the chance to attend the annual NBTA Convention & Exposition in Boston. The packed opening reception was held at Boston Public Library, which was transformed for the evening with satin fabric laid along the wooden study tables, music in almost every room and lots and lots of food and drink consumed.

It was interesting to compare this convention to the annual American Library Association conference. The education seminars in particular were quite different. In fact, at first I wasn’t sure I would find one that interested me – or that I could even understand. With titles like “Best Practices in Travel Procurement” and “The Convergence of SMMP [Strategic Meetings Management Program], Travel Management and Procurement – the Pursuit of Common Ground,” I had to read the list a few times to make my choices. But I did find some – more than I could get to, it turned out, so I missed

“Exactly What is a Saskatchewan?” and “Confessions of a Road Warrior.”

I started with “U.S./EU Travel Security Challenges.” I admit I chose this partly because I was hoping to ask a Transportation Security Administration representative why some airport security agents take away my small fruit yogurts and some don’t. TSA’s Dave Bernier told us their budget is equal to or greater than the FBI’s and that in August, lighters will no longer be banned – a timesaver, since approximately 22,000 of these are confiscated every day.

In addition, he described some of the newer procedures they are using, like the SPOT (Screening Passengers by Observation Techniques) program, which is based more on behavior detection than on particular items. In response to my yogurt question, he told me they’re trying for consistency. I told him I would appreciate it.

Panelist Telmo Baltazar,

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who works for the EU commission in Washington D.C., emphasized the importance of developing cooperative security standards between the United States and the EU, since 15 million people travel back and forth every year.

Next was a discussion between former Continental Airlines CEO Gordon Bethune and former American Airlines President and Chair Robert Crandall, who created the first frequent flyer program. Peter Greenberg was the moderator and the topic was the state of the airline industry. Their discussion was fascinating and funny, especially because all three speakers were experienced and blunt – a wonderful combination. Their conversation included the passenger bill of rights, airport alliances, and the TSA, which Greenberg told

us either stands for Thousands Standing Around or Taking Scissors Away.

I also ate lunch with Colin Powell – and about 4,000 other people. Like ALA, NBTA brings in featured speakers who will – one hopes – give some good advice. Powell was relaxed and entertaining and his admonition that the United States has to “remain an open, generous, welcoming nation” seemed heartfelt. His personal comments about Gorbachev and other world leaders brought home the power this man once held.

My favorite seminar was probably most like an ALA program. “Corporate Social Responsibility” covered going green for hotels and car rentals, the chemistry of carbon dioxide, carbon offsets and what some

corporations are doing to be more socially responsible.

I had a great time and learned quite a bit about two topics not usually a part of ALA. First, these business people really know their marketing and librarians could learn a lot from them. And second, the vendors are members of NBTA and they are included in the educational seminars. I think this would be a great idea for ALA – we would all benefit from their insights.