

# REPORT OF **SHELAGH PATERSON** EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, OLA

At the time of writing this, the past two weeks have been interesting ones in the library world.

Mid-May had OLA at Harbourfront for the Festival of Trees alongside 8,000 young fans of reading. Kids waited in line-ups for more than an hour just to get an autograph from their favourite author. The roar from the crowd at each award ceremony shook the boats in the harbour and drowned out the sound of the planes departing from Billy Bishop Airport.

Contrast this with the news that just one week before this reading-fest, one school board in Ontario decided to eliminate the school library program—with the associate director of the school board blithely stating to the media that ‘no one was checking out books and we have the Internet anyway’ (to paraphrase). A young student promptly took action, organizing a demonstration and launching an online petition to save his school library program. Brave and heartbreaking that students would have to take such action.

The media ran with the story with a mix of incredulousness (*school library programs have been in jeopardy??!*) and support. Jian Ghomeshi, Super Conference 2011’s closing luncheon speaker, picked the story up on **Q**, stating, “the school librarian is an endangered species these days,” and asking, “who will be the guide through the informational woods?”

In the midst of this, Library Journal and McMaster University hosted The Future of the Academic Library which challenged the academic system to consider: What is the role of the librarian in an academic library?; Do students or even faculty care if the person in the library is a ‘librarian’?; and what should library schools be considering when accepting applicants?

How to provide service to students in a meaningful way, and with impact, was a persistent theme—one emphasized by the student panel who told us that they don’t want to hear “let me show you how to search,” they’d rather engage in a dialogue about how they are searching, what they need to get their assignments done and to have a presence when and where they need it.

Listening to their statements, I recalled the work going on in the school library sector, who have figured out a vision for a collaborative and whole school approach as presented in OSLA’s document *Together for Learning: School Libraries and the Emergence of the Learning Commons*. T4L, as we like to call this report, presents the idea of the library as an enabler of learning and includes a role for the student in the implementation of the vision. It is worth a read by the broader library sector: [www.togetherforlearning.ca](http://www.togetherforlearning.ca)

Although the theme of our recent conference was The Power of C!: Collaboration, I wonder: are we practicing collaboration as much as we can? There are two library organizations about to embark on significant transformation; the Canadian Library Association, our national and international representative on issues, and Knowledge Ontario—Ontario’s suite of digital library services. The success of the re-invention of these organizations will rest with us—our willingness to think big, see the potential and to commit to work together for the benefit of the entire library world and the general public.

I challenge our members to get even more involved in the issues and programs that are important for them. We need to ask questions about our relevancy, continue to build programs that serve library users, and strive to work more collaboratively. OLA is the playground in which this can happen.

As a ‘book-end’ to Mary Ann’s thanks to the board at the start of this annual report, I would also like to thank the 2010 board for their leadership in embracing the strategic directions identified by the broader membership and enthusiastically identifying key tactics that are needed to be in place to realize our vision. Our 2009 OLA board, led by Peggy Thomas, creatively launched our strategic plan consultation. Mary Ann Mavrincac, 2010 OLA president, was absolutely the ideal leader to launch the implementation plan. While change is usually good, it can be stressful—Mary Ann kept our focus on OLA’s need to keep moving forward, and be relevant to the library community, all while providing significant support to the staff team. We are so appreciative. I am also charged to work with such an energetic and creative staff who are committed to OLA.

Collaboration can naturally lead to innovation—the theme Tanis Fink, 2011 OLA president, has chosen for our next conference. The challenge is on to Imagine, Innovate, Impact!

