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PLA 2012 in PHL  
By Justine Gerroir

The city of Philadelphia in March was a great setting to host this year's Public Library Association's 2012 Conference. Daffodils sprouting, magnolia trees in bloom, Van Gogh exhibit at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (coming to Ottawa this Summer!) and a wonderful celebration of the 200<sup>th</sup> birthday of Dickens at the Rare Book Dept. at the Free Library of Philadelphia. Welcome signs lined the street outside the conference centre and a literal warm welcome was embraced by all attendees as the temperature on a few days reached and surpassed the 20C mark. And let's not forget the Reading Terminal Marketplace conveniently located across the street from the Pennsylvania Convention Centre where freshly baked good, fruits and veggies and treats (giant pickles! chocolates! smoothies!) were the perfect way to spend break time between sessions.

Before the conference was underway I had the opportunity to visit three different public library branches in South Philadelphia as part of the library tours facilitated by PLA 2012. The libraries I ventured to were : Thomas F. Donatucci Sr. Branch, Charles Santore Branch and Independence Branch. A friendly welcome to PLA 2012 attendees was expressed at all of the branches visited and informal chats about the branches, their history, their services, their staff were all incredibly informative. The public librarians I met during these informal library visits were more like magicians, restricted by budget restraints, they made services, collections, and outreach appear out of very little and when all rules of logic defies it. Each branch visited expressed a sense of individuality: Donnatucci has beautifully painted murals by Calvin Jones depicting Carnegie, Franklin and young library patrons, Santore has the first library patio I have ever laid eyes on (libraries need more patios!), and Independence Branch is home to the Barbara Gittings Gay/Lesbian Collection.

The conference kicked off with back to back Book Buzz sessions where panelists from publishing houses enthusiastically declared the next best reads for adult, teen, and children. The session also sparked some interesting discussion on current trends in reading, predictions on tablets and habits of future readers, micro publishing vs. self publishing, and thoughts on new buzzword of the day: transmedia. Questions arose such as : in this age of stories told over multi-platforms when does a book really reach a conclusive end? How are the lines between publisher and app developer blurring? How are end users playing an active role in supplying information to publishers and illustrators? Ideas and questions I am sure to be thinking about weeks and months ahead.

One common thread that was apparent in a majority of the sessions I attended at PLA 2012 was the patron experience and library space. In a session put on by key players Ruth Baleiko and Dri Ralph from King County Library System in Washington State (*Library Journal's* 2011 Library of the Year) a discussion of space as a means to stay relevant as an influential civic space emerged. They discussed the importance in empowering library patrons to discover, to find, to explore, to connect and to play. Highlighted in the session were KCLS braches with touch screens are available at entrances, art installations embedded in transparent blocks in the library's floor, barstool seating and a great deal of consideration paid to having library space that can function in more than one way.

Similarly, Rolf Hapel's session called "Transforming Public Libraries from Institutions of the Industrial Age to Change Agents for the Networked Society" also emphasized the library as an experience and as an adventure. Hapel described what it means to be a modern library: a space for learning, space for inspiration, space for performance, and space for meeting. He articulated that we are in an age where

our patrons will want to influence and to shape their surroundings and that we have to start thinking in terms of relational space instead of transactional space.

The conference also allowed many opportunities for collaborative learning. In addition to the regular sessions/programs PLA 2012 saw ConverStations where public library professionals could engage in meaningful discussions of current public library topics after a brief presentation. The ConverStation I attended was called "Storytimes Outside the Box" and touched upon the many innovative and unique ways public librarians are reaching out to their communities through exciting and engaging storytimes. Ranging from conducting storytimes on top of bales of hay at a local farmers market, or book walks where pages of picture books were posted along a walking path allowing for parents/caregivers and children to read as they strolled along, interactivity and community involvement was always the goal.

One of the most inspiring conference sessions I attended at PLA2012 was called "Zines, Records, and Nonconformist Media: Marketing through Alternative Collections" presented by Andrew Coulon, Matthew Moyer, Cheyla Scantling and Jessica Whittington of the Jacksonville Public Library in Florida. They cleverly challenged notions of what a library is, emphasized the library as a cultural hub and as a place that promotes cultural development and reinvigorates, and hailed the librarian as creative instigator, investigator, and curator. I cannot recommend enough about seeing what they are doing to incorporate local musicians and ultimately tapping into local talent, local history, and local pride to have "deep collections" that make people want to leave their house for.

And finally, a wonderful way to end PLA 2012 was with a Q & A with the delightful and witty Betty White. White touched upon her work with the Los Angeles Zoo, her interest in writing and her fondness for libraries and information. She even casually mentioned her close friendship with Mr. John Steinbeck (yes you read that right!)

Please feel free to check out my tweets from the conference @buddingbrarian, or search for #pla12 to read what was being tweeted by all the library folk during the conference. You may even make a new library friend in the twittersphere.

A BIG thank you goes out to OLA and OPLA for the opportunity for such an enriching experience. As someone who has been employed with libraries since I was a Page in highschool, it was a professional experience I am most grateful for. I strongly urge all OLA members to apply for this grant for the next PLA 2014 Conference in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Justine Gerroir  
Children's Specialist, White Oaks Branch, Oakville Public Library