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Special Libraries Association (SLA) 2006 Annual Conference: Conference Report

Mitchell Brown

The SLA Annual Conference 2006 at the Baltimore Convention Center was held 11-14 June in Baltimore, Maryland USA.

"We had excellent and intriguing speakers again this year and the entire program was jam-packed with topical and relevant content" said SLA chief executive officer Janice R. Lachance. The conference center is centered in the middle of downtown Baltimore, close to the harbor district with restaurants, museums, and historical monuments, including tall ships and floating nautical museum ships. This report represents a review of a sample of the conference programs and summary of the conference wide sessions.

The final attendance tally for SLA 2006 totaled 5,848 individuals from around the globe representing 33 nations. Of that number, 1,057 participants were first time SLA conference participants. SLA's INFO-EXPO, the largest information and knowledge management exposition in North America, featured 305 companies and organizations and 482 total booths. SLA welcomed 71 new exhibitors this year.

SLA 2006 officially began on Sunday, 11 June at the Baltimore Convention Center with the Grand Opening of the INFO-EXPO. Later that evening, 23 people were honored for their accomplishments in the information industry during the Opening General Session. SLA President Pam Rollo presented SLA Awards and Honors to the honorees, including an honorary membership to inventor and futurist Raymond Kurzweil. The SLA President's Award was presented to Professor Lisl Zach (Louisiana State University), for coordinating the SLA Task Force on Natural Disasters to seek ways of communicating with member of the regional chapter. Professor Zach

created an online web-based registry within days following Katrina making sure people were safe and providing housing and food for several members of her chapter in the weeks after Katrina and later Hurricane Rita hit southern Louisiana and Mississippi.

The session also included keynote remarks by American political reporter/commentator Gwen Ifill, of Public Television's *The News Hour* with Jim Lehrer, who told the crowd that she heavily depends on the researchers and librarians at PBS to prepare her daily for her programs. Ifill shared her perspective on changes in media and content sources available to consumers, and gave her opinion that it was a positive thing: "The growth in options helps us realize that we must seek out sources of news that are credible and reliable," said Ifill. She shared with the audience her experiences as moderator for the October 6, 2004 vice-presidential candidate debate between Dick Cheney and John Edwards, describing the challenge she faced keeping the questions probing to draw direct answers.

At the Annual Business Meeting on 13 June, CEO Lachance delivered her annual State of The Association address. She challenged the audience to envision what SLA will look like in the future, reenergized with new leadership and new strategies from members committed to make their shared vision a reality. SLA's ClickUniversity.com by Knowledge Inform (www.clickuniversity.com), an online teaching environment for professional development, celebrated its first year with plans for greater involvement with IFLA to create a competitive intelligence certificate programs. SLA continues to engage in strategic alliances with other information profession conferences, including Info Today (April 2006) and being a learning

partner with Computers in Libraries (Monterey, California, October 2004).

President Rollo presented incoming 2006-2007 President Rebecca B. Vargha with the "Chain of office", which symbolically passes leadership of the Association. President Vargha inaugural address discussed her leadership philosophy as well as the platform issues she will be addressing throughout her time in office, included growing membership ranks and planning for the SLA centennial celebration in 2009.

A new Board of Directors was also seated during the meeting. A 2005 bylaws amendment aligned the terms of SLA officers with the Association's fiscal year. As a result, this "class" of SLA leadership will be in office for a total of 18 months allowing the cycle to align properly beginning in January 2008. The outgoing Board of Directors received a series of reports from task forces on topics and issues ranging from expanding executive growth to the strategic alignment of SLA to meet the future needs of the profession. Working groups charged to explore areas for development and reports will be available from the SLA (www.sla.org) in November 2006.

SLA CEO Janice R. Lachance announced during the Association Business Meeting that she was entering the blogosphere with her own personal blog, InfoX, available at www.sla.org/infex. Lachance talks about why she chose to start a blog in her first posting:

It occurred to me that, as I travel around the world, I get to meet with, and talk to, the various stakeholders in the universe of information management. Much of my time is spent listening to chapter and division leaders, delegates from our sister associations, cutting-edge industry partners, government officials, CEOs and CFOs of *Fortune* 500 companies, uni-

versity deans, and, of course, SLA members. I am one of the people who have the rare opportunity to sit at this intersection and observe the exchange between and among all of them.

Lachance's blog will be focused on her observations and thoughts, "I hope to spark some good dialogue about the future of the profession and SLA."

Bloggers made their mark this year at the SLA Annual Conference. Many members and external media outlets reported on activities and, in many cases, "live blogging" the various sessions. For the second year, SLA staff and conference participants gave a detailed account of the conference's activities through the SLA Conference Blog (http://slablogger.typepad.com/sla_2006_conference_blog/) which provided commentary, photos, and event updates to participants on-site as well as members who couldn't attend. Division members submitted blogs for subject programming and division activities, including Physics-Astronomy-Mathematics Conference Blog (<http://dpam.blogspot.com/>), Science-Technology Division Contributed papers program "Open access and institutional repositories in sci-tech and

engineering libraries" (<http://units.sla.org/division/dst/>), SLA-Information Technology Blog (<http://sla-divisions.typepad.com/itbloggingsection/>) and Chemistry Division poster session (<http://units.sla.org/division/dche/2006/poster.htm>).

SLA has included podcasts from the Baltimore conference from some of the sessions for members who couldn't make it to the conference, and even if you did, for a few sessions that were recorded. Topics included leadership development, competitive intelligence programs, copyright in the digital age, pharmaceutical pipeline databases, public speaking, and the "What's on the information horizon" by Mary Ellen Bates. Podcast can be viewed at (<http://sla.learn.com/learncenter.asp?id=178409&sessionid=3-0C30D4C5-2BD8-4375-B496-BFDFCA34130A&page=109>). Also available online are pictures taken in the INFO-EXPO Hall with Brian "The parrot man", who rescues and rehabilitates parrots and other tropical birds (www.sla.org/content/Events/conference/ac2006/exhibitors/pictures/index.cfm).

The Closing General Session keynote remarks from Walter

Mossberg, columnist and author of the "Personal technology" column for *The Wall Street Journal*, were thought-provoking and addressed how technology changes the way we work and live. Mossberg discussed the need for someone, in media organizations and corporations, to manage research and information:

It is important for decision-makers to have someone who understands the context, can look for adjacencies, can seek out and report on the information. Executives don't have the time and expertise to search. Having a skilled researcher or librarian can pay huge dividends

SLA 2007 Annual Conference will take place in Denver, Colorado, USA. The theme for the event will be "Climbing to new heights". Scott Adams, creator of the *Dilbert* comic strip, will serve as one of the featured keynote speakers.

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