

## Rhode Island Coalition of Library Advocates

NEWSLETTER

June 2015

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### WE MADE IT THROUGH WINTER 2015!

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There were obstacles along the way—you saw those drifts yourself, so you know all about it. We had to postpone our Annual Meeting from February 10 until April 7, but in the end we enjoyed it all: the catering, the conversations, the election of officers, and the rest. We recognized the achievements of GSLIS students Jennifer Grant and Kyle Litscher, winners respectively of the Linda Aldrich School Library Award and the William Bergeron Public Library Award, as they begin careers that promise to enrich Rhode Island's libraries. We applauded the Friends of the Knight Memorial Library for their creative fundraising and outreach. And we honored Robert Aspri, Executive Director of the HELIN Library Consortium, as our Sweetheart of the Year.

COLA was recognized, too, for "improving the quality of life for Rhode Islanders by supporting libraries of all kinds." Governor Gina Raimondo sent us a Certificate of Special Recognition and her best wishes for continued success by way of her Deputy Chief of Staff, Kevin Gallagher.

And our guest speaker, Brian C. Jones, surveyed trends in public library service, pointing out the benefits that make COLA's work worthwhile and also some warning signs that call for our continued efforts. On the positive side, participation in library programs has increased from 350,724 in 2010 to 407,551 in 2014—up more than 16 percent. Programs range "from English-as-a-second-language to gardening to computer training sessions," Jones told us, and along with one-on-one assistance and 1,397 public access computer terminals, they help job seekers. Meanwhile, AskRI.org (<http://askri.org>) gives Rhode Islanders access to a useful array of online tools for everything from homework to business and employment to genealogy. The value of library services has never been greater.

Of course there are still challenges for library advocates. The number of registered borrowers declined by nearly 19 percent between 2010 and 2014, and circulation has dropped. Are changing demographics and new technologies leading to decreased library use—or to kinds of library use that don't show up in traditional measurements? For a more complete summary of Jones's speech, see "Rhode Island libraries navigate the difficult shoals of the Digital Age; but warning signs abound for the future," *The Library Report* (April 9, 2015): [www.rhodeislandlibraryreport.org/](http://www.rhodeislandlibraryreport.org/).

## COLA LOBBIES FOR LIBRARIES IN WASHINGTON

Each spring, the American Library Association (ALA) hosts National Library Legislation Day (NLLD) – a two-day advocacy event where hundreds of library supporters, leaders and patrons gather in Washington, D.C. to meet with their members of Congress to champion national library issues..

This year, our well-rounded group of advocates from the Ocean State included COLA Board members Joan Ress Reeves and Tom Viall. Board member RoseEllen Reynolds, a long-term traditional member of our contingency, had to cancel her plans to join us because of a last-minute medical problem. Joan and Tom were joined by Ed Garcia, Director of the Cranston Public Library; Jack Martin, Director of the Providence Public Library; Sarah Hunicke, Library Media Specialist at the Portsmouth High School; and Karen Mellor, Rhode Island Chief Library Officer.

The ALA traditionally does an outstanding job of ensuring that attendees are well prepared for their appointments on Capitol Hill. On Monday, delegates from across the country join together to hear presentations from a wide variety of experts. We learn about the current “general atmosphere” of our congress, receive lobbying tips from representatives brought in by ALA, and then do a deep dive into each specific national issue and its real and potential impact on our libraries.

This year the core issues included the general Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) appropriation (federal funding that aids libraries); Net Neutrality (keeping the Internet free and open to all); copyright; and the Fair Access to Science and Technology Research (FASTR) Act (reducing the time publishers can charge for federally funded research). Among the hottest issues was the USA Freedom Act, which had just been approved by the Senate days before our arrival in Washington. Although ALA cautioned that the Bill was not perfect, it felt that the act was the best chance of reforming the most over-reaching aspects of the privacy and surveillance provisions within the Patriot Act.

The first day of our visit truly turned into “Rhode Island Day.” We were the recipients of the State Attendance Award for the largest number of attendees at NLLD based on our state’s population. The award included a private Monday afternoon tour of the nation’s capitol, graciously accommodated by the staff of California Representative Sam Farr. We were also honored to learn that with the support of Senator Jack Reed, Senator Sheldon Whitehouse had introduced an amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) that would add financial support of school libraries. It was a further reminder of how fortunate Rhode Island is to have such strong national leadership in support of our libraries. Our streak of good luck continued later that evening at the NLLD reception when Jack Martin’s name was selected in a random drawing for an American flag that had flown over the capitol in honor of National Library Day.

Our well-informed contingency ended the evening with a fantastic dinner at Bistro Bis. We toasted our “lucky day” and acknowledged the coincidence that it was also May 4– Rhode Island Independence Day.

On Tuesday we logged over four miles walking the hot and busy streets of Washington on our way to individual congressional visits. We were well prepared, armed with the information we had received the previous day, our carefully orchestrated talking points about how the issues had an impact on RI libraries, and leave-behind packages prepared by Karen’s team at OLIS. Thanks to the outstanding scheduling efforts of Karen Andrews at OLIS, our morning progressed like clockwork, meeting with the staffs of Representatives Langevin and Cicilline. After a relaxing lunch at the Senate Cafeteria we trekked back across Capitol Hill to the Senate complex where we personally had the opportunity to thank Brenna Barber, Legislative Assistant to Sheldon Whitehouse, for his school library-funding amendment. Last on our list of appointments was Senator Reed who, as always, took time out of his ex-

tremely busy schedule to meet personally with our group—yet another example of his unyielding support for our libraries.

This year's group proved to be a formidable team of advocates. Karen Mellor was well prepared in keeping our talking points on track. As directors of our larger local library systems, Jack and Ed did an amazing job sharing real-world stories of the positive impact library funding had on their communities. Sarah offered a clear perspective of the important role libraries play in our public schools while Joan and Tom each tackled national issues involving the Internet and copyright. Early on it was clear that the investment we had made in planning our meetings were paying positive dividends. Elizabeth Hang, Legislative Counsel to Representative Cicilline, complimented us on how refreshing it was to meet with such a well-prepared, well-versed group of advocates who could so clearly relate the importance of key federal legislation.

As rain clouds gathered across the humid late afternoon sky, our band of weary delegates bid each other farewell as we dispersed to our own individual travel plans. We agreed it had been an extremely successful visit. Only time will reveal the impact we and our fellow state groups have made on the federal policies that will affect our libraries in the future. As we hold those optimistic thoughts for a more positive tomorrow, we take pride in the fact that on this day we had participated in an important part of the democratic process: A small group of voices sharing the big impact strong libraries have in our little state, and across our entire nation.

*Thomas Viall*, Chair, Library Board of Rhode Island, for the RI NLLD delegation

#### ALPHABET SOUP: ACRONYMS, JARGON, AND WHERE TO BEGIN

If library acronyms and jargon get you down, you might want to bookmark this OLIS (Office of Library & Information Services) "Glossary of Library Acronyms and Terms of Importance to the Rhode Island Library Community": <http://www.olis.ri.gov/aboutus/glossary.pdf>.

And if you want to delve deeper into the significance of library issues facing the 114th Congress, a good starting point is the web page of the ALA Washington Office: <http://www.ala.org/offices/ogr-key-legislative-issues>.

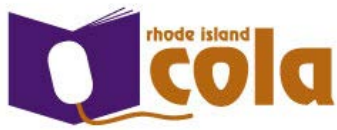
## TRUSTEES INSTITUTE A SUCCESS!

The morning of Saturday, March 21, some 45 trustees and library directors converged on the Cranston Public Library for what we hope will be the first annual Trustees Institute. It was co-sponsored by the Office of Library and Information Services (OLIS), the Rhode Island Library Association (RILA), and of course COLA.

Speaker Rick Blain, of Richard R. Blain & Associates, spoke about the art of fundraising, with special attention to understanding why people give, solicitation methods, preparing for the donor visit, and developing donor relations. The speaker was dynamic, and so was the audience—librarians and trustees alike raised significant issues, and the discussion addressed many of our nitty-gritty, on-the-ground questions.

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## FROM THE CHAIR

We Rhode Islanders are fortunate in our libraries—and in our library networks.

Public library services may vary from one municipality to the next, but through Ocean State Libraries we can access the holdings of public libraries statewide and arrange to pick up the books we need close to home: see <http://oslri.org/> for details. Through AskRI, we also have online access to homework help, encyclopedias, magazines, genealogy information, business and employment resources, databases, language tutorials, good book recommendations, and even reference librarians to answer our questions: see <http://askri.org/>.

State laws and state funding make all of this possible. State laws and state funding also affect the library support our children receive in K-12 schools and universities.

COLA is Rhode Island's statewide Friends group, and we invite you to join us in advocating for libraries of all types and the library systems that link them. We all depend on well-organized information, and RI libraries give it to us both face-to-face and online.

If you've renewed your membership for 2015, thank you. If not, thank you for renewing now, by mail or online at <http://colari.org>. We look forward to your help and support.

*Gale Eaton*, Chair