

'Tis the season...



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It must be conference season — or it certainly feels like it! I have just been to three in the last month — all of them different and all of them most successful.

The 10th Asia Pacific Special, Health and Law Librarians conference was held in Adelaide, and attracted more than 600 delegates. Speakers and delegates, who recognise that librarians do indeed have something to celebrate, carried the theme of the conference — *Celebrate the future* — forward. In her opening keynote address, Marianne Broadbent spoke about leadership and the attributes and skills we need to feel confident about going into the future. Philip Keane and his committee did a great job welcoming delegates to their city and presenting a well-organised, stimulating program and lively social events [see p16 for more details].

The 12th ALIA National Library Technician's conference was held in a hot and sunny Brisbane, with more than 550 delegates. The committee led by Yvonne Brock put in an enormous effort to ensure that everyone had an enjoyable and rewarding time. The theme — *Bridging services, embracing reality* — emphasised the important role that library technicians play in our sector. The opening keynote session by motivational speaker Bruce Sullivan really set the scene for a lively and interactive conference with lots of energy and fun. The truly amazing conference dinner not only featured masks and maracas, but also the presentation of two awards — the Dunn and Wilson award to Lothar Retzlaff, and the Library Technician of the Year award to Jackie Williams.

The 69th IFLA General Conference and Council World Library and Information Congress held in Berlin had as its theme *Access Point Library: Media — Information — Culture*. Berlin, too, was hot and sunny, and attracted 4500 delegates to the conference. At the opening session Professor Klaus Saur gave a short history of IFLA, and it was interesting to hear that IFLA was founded in 1928, with a number of German librarians present. Included in these members was Henrich Uhlendahl, the director of the German National Library, who held this position from 1924 until 1954 despite all of the contemporary political upheaval and changes. Professor Saur described him as 'legendary' — it is a long time to be a director of one library! The Nazis arrested him in 1933, but the international library world unleashed such a storm of protest that Goebbels immediately ordered his release. It was planned to hold an IFLA conference in Germany in the 1930s but IFLA always refused to meet in Nazi Germany. In 1956 an IFLA conference was held in Germany for the first time, in Munich. The meeting in

August was the first IFLA meeting in Berlin, the capital of re-unified Germany.

Professor Saur also said that the re-unification has meant that a broad-based network of university and special libraries supplies more books and information than any other comparable location in continental Europe. He said that German libraries are facing tough times with the current economic conditions and there have been budget cuts, staff cutbacks and reductions in important areas of library service and provision. And all this at a time when the German education system is under fire for the poor literacy levels being achieved in their schools.

So it was an interesting time to be in Berlin, and to see how the city is re-unifying. I was lucky enough to do a walking tour starting up in the east part of the city and working down to the west. The sense of what a momentous occasion 1989 must have been still is palpable in the city. About two kilometres of the Berlin Wall have been saved and tourists still gather at Checkpoint Charlie to remember when it was an American sector and a crossing point between east and west. The surreal nuclear bunker I toured as part of the Story of Berlin museum will stay with me for a long time.

Another of the IFLA keynote speakers was Adama Samassekou who is secretary general of the Preparation Committee of the World Summit on the Information Society. Mr Samassekou was the Minister of Education of Mali for seven years, and is currently president of the African Academy of Languages. A number of Australian delegates were lucky enough to meet him, as he attended the reception held at the Australian Embassy in Berlin. IFLA is urging library associations and institutions to advocate to their government representatives to the Summit that libraries are a global public good. Other areas that IFLA has identified that need to be highlighted are the growing gap between the information rich and in the information poor, and that library development programs should be promoted for poor rural and urban populations. It also calls for the elimination of fees for basic services, for assistance in developing local content for electronic information services, and providing equitable access to the internet.

Carla Hayden, the American Library Association (ALA) president, said when she spoke in Council in favour of the motion, that the Summit represents the best opportunity for the profession to make the case for libraries as key players in the movement to bridge the digital divide. You will be hearing more about the Summit in future issues of *inCite*. ■

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