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I am two years into a library career, have been a library manager for one year and this was my second year at MLA. My job experience with libraries has been a whirlwind and I am incredibly grateful for the MLA conference to give me some grounding. MLA gives me the opportunity to talk to and learn from other people in the library field. I am inspired by the creativity of others and also learn from their mistakes. I come back to my library more knowledgeable and energized to serve the public.

I attended a total of six sessions. Three of these were focused on library programming, one was on e-books, one was on library advocacy and another was on state legislation affecting libraries. At all four of the programming sessions I took away ideas to incorporate into the library I manage. At the session on Summer Reading Programs I got several concrete examples of ways to organize the Summer Reading Program. Some of the information that was most helpful surrounded the topic of how to track time read and how to award prizes to Summer Reading Program participants. The session speakers talked of methods they had used which had not worked, then talked of what had worked best. Audience members also volunteered methods. As a result of this session, our library will be using a different method of tracking reading this summer, one of the methods explained by a session speaker.

Another programming session focused on the important impact nature experiences can have on children and how to bring children in the library more in contact with nature. The session speakers gave concrete examples of things that can be done in a library to bring nature into children's lives, such as having a nature table in the library where children can explore rocks, bark, pinecones, and other items from nature. Examples of excellent nature books were given, and other ideas for nature programming.

The third programming session I attended was titled "Geocaching in Libraries." The Northwest Regional Library System has in place a geocaching program, but this session gave me practical and achievable ways to get more people involved in our geocaching program. For example, I learned about websites where we can list our geocache so geocache fans can look it up and then go do the cache.

The session on e-books, titled "If You Encourage Them, They Will Come" focused on how to make e-books successful in a library. The session speaker gave specific examples of what works. One suggestion she made is to be sure to order enough romance because e-book readers check-out a lot of romance. Our library system launched e-books last summer and this session gave me several ways to improve this service to our patrons.

The other two sessions, "2011 Minnesota Legislative Session Rewind" and "Everyone Is a Library Advocate" complemented each other nicely. At the Session Rewind I learned about legislative action and non-action that affects libraries and got a summary of the general mood among government leaders regarding libraries. That is important information to understand libraries' concerns and needs. It is also useful when advocating for libraries. As I learned at the advocacy session, library advocacy opportunities can come up any time and we need to be ready to tell people how great libraries are, what a great taxpayer value we are and the role we play in our communities.

Once again, I am grateful for the opportunity to attend MLA and to bring the great ideas I heard about back to my library.