

The Motor City

Getting around and having fun

by William P. Kane



When you come to Detroit for the ACRL 9th National Conference April 8–11, you'll be happy to find yourself in the middle of a dynamic and changing city—a place

with some history both behind and ahead of it.

In just a couple years (on July 24, 2001, to be exact), Detroit will celebrate its tricentennial, but in just the past few years, Detroit's experienced an unprecedented rebuilding boom, and visitors to this proud city this spring will be uniquely positioned to witness firsthand some of these investments. Not only will you be able to learn from the conference programs and exhibits, but the host city will be a comfortable and fun place to look around and kick back for a few days.



Hart Plaza—near the Cobo Convention Center

Getting to your hotel

First things first—you have to get here. If you're flying in, you'll land at Detroit's Metropolitan Airport. Hard-traveling Detroiters would be the last people to sugar-coat Metro Airport's ambiance—it's big, it's crowded, and its décor is, well, functional. In 1997, Metro was ranked as the world's 5th busiest airport in terms of operations (landings and takeoffs), and 14th in

the world in numbers of passengers. The good news is that a new midfield terminal is under construction—to the tune of \$786 million—which will feature such items as overhead trams to transport passengers between gate connections and enhanced dining and shopping areas. The bad news is that the new terminal's expected completion isn't until 2001. However, there have been some recent and significant upgrades to the concessions and the curbside

pickup areas, which discerning travelers may regard as a good sign of the better things to come.

Though it's too bad the conference precedes the opening of the new airport, at least there won't be any kinks to work out—the place hums, and you should arrive on time and without a hitch. Just be prepared for a bit of a hike to the baggage claim (especially if you land at or near Gate C–25). Metro Air-

port is about 25 miles west of downtown Detroit, so once you grab your bag, the best bet is to either hail or share a cab to your hotel (around \$30), or take the commuter shuttle's door-to-door service (\$19 one-way); you can buy the shuttle ticket from the booth at the baggage claim.

If you're staying at any of the conference hotels, you can't miss; they're all first-rate prop-

About the author

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erties with reasonable big-city rates. As you'll discover on your ride to the hotel from the airport, or on your drive from elsewhere, the freeway system in southeast Michigan is a little intense: there's the Ford Freeway (I-94), the Jeffries Freeway (I-96), the Fisher Freeway (I-75), the Chrysler Freeway (also, oddly, I-75), the Southfield Freeway (M-39), and the Lodge Freeway (M-10)—each with lots of lanes that can move lots of traffic, and each, as you might expect from the city that put the world on wheels, leading right to downtown Motown. You'll no doubt be less than a mile from the freeway exit, regardless of which freeway or hotel.

If you're staying in Dearborn, you'll enjoy a convenient door-to-door shuttle to and from the Cobo Hall Convention Center. If your hotel is in downtown Detroit, you'll be within easy walking distance to Cobo; otherwise, you can rely on the PeopleMover (Detroit's answer to mass transit) to scoot around the downtown loop for just 50 cents.

Meanwhile, downtown Detroit is undergoing a dramatic facelift: the old Hudson's department store was recently imploded to make room for new retail and residential buildings; the Renaissance Center, a complex of office and hotel towers, is now home to General Motors' world headquarters; the grandstands for the Detroit Tigers' new downtown ballpark are rising; and construction is underway for a mega-entertainment complex home to three Vegas-style casinos.

So, once you're unpacked at the hotel and you have your conference name badge squared away, you can relax over a nice dinner or go out on the town to get the weekend started right.

Tours, restaurants, and receptions

Admittedly, though, you're already going to be plenty busy. The conference is packed with entertainment as well as programming. There are preconferences and local library and sight-seeing tours planned for Thursday, April 8, and the conference proper begins on Friday, April 9. If you have no plans on Friday for dinner,

sign up for a "dinner with colleagues," hosted by a local librarian at a local restaurant; check the hospitality booth in the convention center for sign-up sheets and menus.

Also on Friday evening, you're of course invited to the All-Conference Reception, to be held at the new Museum of African American History (MAAH). The MAAH is a beautiful facility, and you'll have a chance to see the compelling exhibits, to be entertained by some terrific local performers, and to meet your fellow conference attendees informally over drinks and dessert.

On Saturday, April 10, you'll have another chance to go out for "dinner with colleagues" before heading off to the conference-sponsored reception at the Henry Ford Museum in neighboring Dearborn, Michigan. The museum's scope and scale are spectacular, and you'll be intrigued by, among other things, how they managed to get that enormous locomotive through the front door. Both receptions are included in the conference registration, as is the transportation to and from same. (Please note: next month's issue of *C&RL News* will feature an article devoted to Detroit restaurants.)



Edison's Menlo Park lab at the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village.

Late night activities

There's still time after the conference receptions break up to get out and about. Detroit's a big music town, and there are any number of hotspots downtown where you can hear cool acid jazz or loud rock and roll. The Whitney [4421 Woodward, (313) 832-5700], a landmark Detroit restaurant, has a cozy piano bar on the third floor that's open late. JaDa [546 E. Larned, (313) 965-1700], a sleek new grill downtown, offers upwardly mobile food and music—a unique combination of delicious jazz and down-home soul food.

Near the Detroit Opera House, you can hang with the *apres arie* crowd at Intermezzo [1435 Randolph, (313) 961-0707]—a room with a loft-like feel and great northern Italian fare and one of the best-looking bars you'll ever see—where the moodswings range from mellow to jumping; it's fun, and you'll like it. For some alternative sounds, cab on over to Hamtramck's

nightclub scene and pay the cover charge to dance late to techno at clubs like Motor Lounge [3515 Caniff, (313) 369-0090] and Lili's [2930 Jacob, (313) 875-6555].

And don't forget to walk down Greektown's Monroe Street and cruise the strip of ethnic restaurants and watering holes, where you're just as likely to hear the sounds of both belly dancing and line dancing.

Canada next door

Don't forget that Windsor, Ontario, is just across the Detroit River from downtown, and you can conveniently cross the border via the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel. (*Ed. note:* Two forms of identification are required to go through customs, such as a driver's license, voter registration, passport, birth certificate, or visa.)

Though Windsor's a lovely city known for its fine restaurants and dramatic views of the Detroit skyline, the big news in Windsor and Detroit is the recent opening of Casino Windsor—a full service gaming and hotel facility.

With over 100,000 square feet of gambling tables and slot machines, and almost 400 hotel rooms and three restaurants, Casino Windsor is hopping 24/7. Plus, the current exchange rate means you can lose \$30 CAN for only \$20 US. Call (800) 991-7777 for details.

Major league sports

If you're coming into town early for a preconference, you may be able to check out the Detroit Red Wings' home game at the Joe Louis Arena on Wednesday night, April 7. The Wings are back-to-back Stanley Cup champions, and Detroit's a fanatic, Original Six hockey city, so tickets to most games are usually sold out, but you may have luck on a midweek game if you plan ahead.

Likewise, the Detroit Tigers open their 1999 season on the road, but if you're extending your stay in the city through Monday, April 12, you may be able to snag a seat for Opening Day—the last at historic Tiger Stadium—as play begins at the under-construction Tiger Ballpark in 2000. In either case, call (248) 645-6666 for ticket information.

Books

Unless you go on one of the local library tours, you don't see many books these days at library conferences. Like most of the country, the Detroit area has its share of good book stores—from chain superstores to eclectic little shops. Detroit is home to a unique combination of those two types that might be worth a stop: John K. King Used and Rare Books.

Housed in a former hanger factory, King Books has over 750,000 titles in stock on four floors. An amazing place, it's a stone's throw from the convention center; maybe you can talk yourself into spending a long lunch hour there. For information, call (313) 961-0622.

Comedy

A great time in Detroit can be had at The Second City, with its brand of sketch comedy that offers a rare, refreshing, and hilarious views of current social, political, and cultural life, including some often enough self-deprecating topics specific to the Detroit area. In the heart of Detroit's theater district and just a quick ride up Woodward Avenue, you can also catch a nice bite at a variety of nearby eateries. Showtimes are at 8:00 p.m. on Wednesday, Thursday, and Sunday, and at 8:00 p.m. and 10:30 p.m. on Friday and Saturday. Call (313) 965-2222 to reserve your tickets.

So whether you're coming to the ACRL National Conference from the other side of the world, country, or state, you'll find that there's no lack of things to do and places to see in Detroit. Your only regret will likely be that you didn't get to spend enough time exploring on your own, since it's the kind of place that folks tend to like more the more they get to know it.

In any case, you're sure to have a good time, and you'll leave convinced that all conferences should be held in places like historic Detroit, which offers easy access to fine dining, luxury accommodations, major league sporting events, fantastic museums and libraries, world-class theater, and late night boogie woogie—all at affordable prices. Here's hoping you live it up while you're here. ■



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