

Melissa D'Agostino

## Wall of fun facts

### Comaraderie, conversation, and teachable moments

**W**hen I began working at Towson University's Albert S. Cook Library, as the "low man on the totem pole," I got a desk situated so that I sat staring at a large expanse of blank, off-white wall. Knowing that a large number of my colleagues could see it as well, I pondered for weeks what I should put in the space. Then one day I was reminded of why I was drawn to reference librarianship in the first place: My love of learning random, generally useless, facts. Thus began my office-famous "Random Facts I Learned while Working at Towson" wall that draws visitors from all over the library.

When I started the project, I hoped to post facts I learned from students' questions at the reference desk, but as the semester progressed and the questions answered were typically about how to find a specific book or how to print, I allowed myself to post any facts I learned while in the library. I quickly learned that, in the world of random-fact-gathering, spontaneous conversations between librarians glean the best fodder.

We may be chatting about the stir-fry I brought for my dinner and wonder, what exactly are water chestnuts? As librarians, we can't just let that question float away but quickly turn to the resources at hand to find the answer (see below). And voila, I post it to my Wall to educate the rest of the staff.

The reference librarians at Cook Library have their offices split between two floors: about a half dozen are located on the fourth floor in individual offices, while the rest of the team has cubicles in a large open room on the third floor. As I and my Wall of Facts were located on the third floor, one of the unintentional outcomes of this project was to lure the librarians from the fourth floor down to see it. While the Wall of Facts was also located right next to the sole color printer, one of the fourth floor librarians noted

how she now loved to come down to pick up color print jobs, as she was always rewarded with a few new facts to learn.

Another librarian mentioned how the Wall of Facts boosted camaraderie and conversation between librarians—similarly to how many office workers gather at the water cooler for discussion, librarians gathered at the Wall of Facts to learn and share. In this manner, many librarians began contributing to the Wall as well, sharing facts related to those already existing, or offering unrelated tidbits for inclusion. I discovered that one of my colleagues was a seemingly never-ending source of word etymologies, and he found it very cool to see his trivia appear on the Wall.

New librarians that started after me reported that it made working at the reference desk more fun. One librarian observed that she subsequently saw the questions from students as a chance to learn new things rather than a "mundane task." One librarian new to the profession said, "I thought [the Wall] was reflective of the attitude within the entire reference department, to be as helpful as possible and to make every moment a teaching moment." She further noted that these effects of the Wall made her transition into a career at Towson seem less of a challenge and more of an opportunity.

Along those lines, I too found the Wall to be a great way to segue into my new position at Towson. Not only did gleaning facts from students allow me to interact with them on a slightly deeper level than strictly necessary, but the Wall also allowed me to network with, and really get to know, my new colleagues.

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Melissa D'Agostino is evening research and instruction librarian at Towson University's Albert S. Cook Library, e-mail: [mravelly@towson.edu](mailto:mravelly@towson.edu)

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## Happy New Year and 113th Congress

Happy New Year! It is now 2013, and the newly minted 113th Congress has been ushered in. As this column is “put to bed” nearly a month in advance, we do not yet know which members of Congress were appointed to key leadership positions on Congressional committees and subcommittees. However, tracking of committee appointments of individual congressional members may be done at the following Web sites: for the U.S. Senate, visit [www.senate.gov/general/committee\\_assignments/assignments.htm](http://www.senate.gov/general/committee_assignments/assignments.htm) and for the U.S. House of Representatives, see [www.house.gov/committees/](http://www.house.gov/committees/).

## Connecting with the New Congress

The Washington Office held a Webinar November 19, 2012, titled Election Update and Connecting with the New Congress. The one-hour session recapped the election results and what they mean for libraries. Advocacy consultant Stephanie Vance led the Webinar and previewed the makeup of the new Congress.

Vance outlined a list of issues with library implications that may come up in the 113th Congress. The list included the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the Workforce Investment Act, and Cybersecurity and Copyright legislation, among others.

Vance also gave library supporters tips on communicating with new legislators and suggestions on how to start the conversation. On the District Dispatch blog ([www.districtdispatch.org](http://www.districtdispatch.org)) you can find archived video of the Webinar, along with Vance’s “Legislator Intel Worksheet” and her “Yearly Advocacy Planning Worksheet” free for download. Simply type the word “Webinar” into the search box to find this Webinar and many others from the Washington Office.

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Corey Williams is associate director, ALA Office of Government Relations, e-mail: [cwilliams@alawash.org](mailto:cwilliams@alawash.org)

## E-book toolkit

E-book library lending, particularly around major publishers that refuse to offer their titles by selling or leasing to libraries, have dramatically raised prices or have introduced new restrictions. To assist libraries in informing the public about e-book lending practices, ALA recently released the “ALA E-book Media & Communications Toolkit,” a set of materials that will support librarians in taking action in their communities, available at [www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/ebooktoolkit](http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/ebooktoolkit).

The toolkit, developed by the ALA’s Digital Content and Libraries Working Group, comprised of librarians from all types of libraries, includes op-ed and press release templates, ALA talking points and answers to frequently asked questions about e-books (an invaluable resource), and helpful e-book data.

## Looking ahead

If only we had a crystal ball and we could look into the future to know whether we “fell” off the financial fiscal cliff and invoked sequestration (see the December 2012 Washington Hotline for additional information). In addition, perhaps the new year will bring about library-patron favorable e-book lending practices. *~*

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*(“Wall of fun facts,” cont. from page 37)*

*serendipity* (from the Persian tale “The Three Princes of Serendip,” who were always making accidental discoveries.)

- Jousting is the official state sport of Maryland. The official state team sport is lacrosse.
- The Library of Congress’s collection, as the largest in the world, fills an estimated 838 miles of bookshelves.
- Bison can jump 6 feet vertically into the air from a standstill.
- Delaware is the only state without a national parks.
- A blood pressure device is called a *sphygmomanometer*. *~*