President's Column

<div align="right">Patrick Mullin</div>

Forty years! In July 1966, the Library and Information Technology Association (LITA) was officially born at the American Library Association (ALA) Annual Conference in New York as the Information Science and Automation Division (ISAD). It was Bastille Day, and I'm sure for those who had worked so hard to create this new organization that it probably seemed like a revolution, a new day. The organizational meeting held that day attracted "several hundred people." Imagine!

I've mentioned it before, I know, but the history of the first twenty-five years of LITA is intriguing reading and well worth an investment of your time. Stephen R. Salmon's article "LITA's First Twenty-Five Years: A Brief History" (www.lita.org/ala/lita/aboutlita/org/1st 25years.htm) offers an interesting look back in time. Any technology organization that has been in existence for forty or more years has seen a lot of changes and adapted over time to a new environment and new technologies. There is no other choice.

Someone (who, I don't remember; I'd gladly attribute the quote if I did) once told me that library automation began with the electric eraser. I'm sure that many of you have neither seen an electric eraser, nor can you probably imagine its purpose. Ask around. I'm sure there are staff in your organization who do remember using it. There may even be one hidden somewhere in your library. A quick search of the Web even finds cordless, rechargeable electric erasers today in drafting and art supply stores.

The 1960s, as LITA was born, was still the era of the big mainframe systems and not-so-common programming languages. Machine Readable Cataloging (MARC) was born and OCLC conceived. The 1970s saw the introduction of minicomputer systems. Digital Equipment Corporation introduced the VAX, a 32-bit platform, in 1976. The roots of many of our current integrated library systems reach back to this decade. The 1980s saw the introduction of the IBM personal computer and the Apple Macintosh. The graphical interface became the norm or at least the one to imitate. The 1990s saw a shift away from hardware to communication and access as the Web was unveiled and began to give life to the Internet bubble. The new millennium began with Y2K. The Web predomi-nates, and increasingly, the digital form dominates almost everything we touch (text, audio, video).

Automation and systems evolved and changed over the years, and so did libraries. Automation, which had been confined to large air-conditioned and monitored rooms, moved out into the library. It increasingly appeared at circulation desks, on staff desks, and then throughout the library. Information technology (IT) spread into offices everywhere and into homes. Libraries had products and services to deliver to users. Users demanded more convenience. Of course, others knew this trend as well and provided products and services that users wanted. Users often liked what they saw in stores better than what the library was able to provide. Each of us attempts to keep up, compete, and beat those whom we see as our competitors. It's a moving target and one that seems to be gaining speed.

All the while, during these four decades, our association and its members continually adapted to the new environment, faced new challenges, and adopted new technologies.

We would not exist if we did not. I feel that we, as an association, are again facing the need to change, to transform ourselves.

IT, digital technology, automation (whatever term you want to use) affects the work of virtually every library staff member. Everyone's work in the library uses or contributes to the digital presence of our employer. IT is not the domain of a few.

LITA has a wonderful history and it has great potential to better serve the profession. What do we want our association to be? What programs and services can we provide that others do not? Who can we involve to broaden our reach? How can we better communicate with members and nonmembers? If we had a clean sheet of paper, what would we write? What would we dream?

We need to share that dream and bring it to life. I can't do it. The LITA board can't do it. We need your help. We need your ideas. We need your energy. We need to break out of our comfort zone. None of us wants the Strategic Plan (www.lita.org/ala/lita/aboutlita/org/plan.htm) we adopted last year to ring hollow. We want to accelerate change and move into a reenergized future.

I welcome your aspirations, ideas, and comments. I know that the LITA board does as well. Please feel free to contact me or any member of the board (www.lita .org/ala/lita/aboutlita/org/litagov/board.htm). LITA is your association. Where should we be going? Help us navigate the future.

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