

## Librarian's Shelf

By Karen Stuart

### Librarians in Chicago

Last week librarians from across the nation, and even around the world, converged on downtown Chicago for the American Library Association (ALA) Annual Conference. ALA is a professional organization for librarians that among other things, provides resources, education, and leadership to help librarians improve the services they provide to patrons. The annual conference they organize and host is designed to foster collaboration between librarians across disciplines, share experiences and research, educate librarians on changes in the profession and provide an opportunity for librarians to discover new ideas to improve the library where they work and better serve their patrons.

Not only do conferences offer education for librarians, they provide networking opportunities among librarians and between librarians and library product vendors. The exhibit hall is packed with over 500 vendors that provide products and services for libraries- from furniture to online resources and everything in between. Meeting with these vendors all in one place is a great way to compare and negotiate pricing, see and test available options, and of course acquire lots of free samples. Librarians, me included, have a tendency to gather anything that is being offered for free. As a result, we go a little crazy in the exhibit hall loading our numerous free tote bags with free swag; pens, books, headphones, chocolate... practically anything that's not tied down!

This was my first year attending the ALA Annual Conference and I picked up a lot: ideas to improve services, contacts in the profession to assist in new ventures, motivation to start new community partnerships, and of course swag. I traveled to Chicago with 27 other Nebraska librarians in a chartered bus so we were the lucky librarians who did not have to worry about the 50lb weight limit on airlines. ALA plans for this though, one of the exhibit booths is a Post Office to mail their free books home to their library.

There were many different conference sessions to choose from each day depending on your area of interest, and if your brain could not handle any more information, there were always entertaining options from which to choose. Music performances, skits, cosplay, gaming, and author meet & greets were just a few of the options. There were also meetings for the various interest groups and divisions of ALA. From the Public Library Association to Reference and User Services division there are lots of ways for librarians to get involved in the organization and the Annual Conference provides an opportunity for members to meet face to face.

I chose to attend sessions on a variety of topics, as my job as Reference Librarian of Columbus Public Library includes many different aspects. I attended sessions to help me improve our Spanish language collection and services and met quite a few librarians and vendors who were very enthusiastic about helping me do so. I also attended sessions about engaging the community and partnering with

organizations to provide new programs for our patrons. I participated in a discussion among librarians about the changing nature of reference material format, from print to online (such as our Chilton Auto Repair Manuals) and how to assist our patrons in finding that same information in a different way.

Now back from the conference the hard part begins for me: being patient while changes are implemented, programs are developed, and partnerships are made to better serve our community.