

50th Military Librarians Workshop

7 December 2006

Remarks by Janice R. Lachance, CEO, SLA

Thank you, Carol! Good morning everyone! I am so pleased to be with you for the fourth consecutive year and that's every year since I joined SLA! And what a year to be here, as you celebrate the 50th Workshop of the SLA Military Librarians Division. It always amazes me to see divisions celebrating anniversaries, and I know you all celebrated your golden anniversary in 2003. But I think you all can be very proud that you've come together once every year for so long to learn and perpetuate the important role you play in the military community and for many of you, our nation's democracy. Thank to the planners led by Shirley Laseter.

I want to thank your leadership for inviting me to come back. In particular, I want to thank Carol Jacobson for her exemplary service as chair of the division for the past year, and give Nellie Moffitt my best wishes as she takes on that role for 2007. I know that this division has always been active - and pro-active - within the SLA community. And your leadership always leads with class, determination, and skill. There's good reason for you to be proud of your division!

Given that we are gathered here on 65th Anniversary of Pearl Harbor Day, I also want to say thank you - not simply for your commitment to SLA (for which I am eternally grateful). I want to thank you for supporting the vast operations of the armed forces. No matter what entity you serve, you do the entire profession a great service by supporting those who defend and advance the cause of freedom. Thank you for your hard work and please give yourself a hand.

I want to bring you up-to-date, but I also want to leave time to answer questions. Last year, when we gathered in Las Vegas, I told you about the various initiatives that we were designing for 2006 to enhance your membership experience and the stature of the library and information profession around the world. I told you about our efforts to evolve your professional association so that it will be able to serve this profession well into the twenty-first century. And I also told you what you could expect from SLA in 2006. Today, I'd like to talk with you about where we've been since our last visit together, and where we are headed.

I am pleased to report that 2006 has proven to be a banner year in the history of the Special Libraries Association. Our efforts to drive growth in membership are starting to show results. Our focus on improving services for members has gained traction over the course of the year, and our use of technology in the delivery of those services is continually improving. Member engagement on professional needs and the association's future is at a very high level. We are expanding our influence around the globe. And best of all, we are about to complete a fourth consecutive year with an operating surplus while still investing in a range of strategic initiatives.

I think it is very important for all of you to know that the staff and the leadership of SLA take our fiduciary responsibilities very seriously, and that we consider ourselves the stewards of your investment in this association. We will continue to focus on your future and invest in it accordingly - as long as we are financially healthy.

Our commitment to growing the SLA community and your professional network begins with retaining the members we have. And we at SLA Headquarters invested significant time and effort altering our internal processes, training unit membership chairs, and communicating effectively to existing members about the value of their investment in SLA. We did all this to ensure that all members maintain an awareness of what they get out of SLA, so that when the time comes to pay dues, the commitment to participation continues.

This may seem to be an obvious assertion. But there are a few things all of you should know, since our members are our best sales people: 1) in the world of association management, it's common knowledge that it costs 5 to 6 times more to recruit a new member than it costs to retain an existing member; and 2) our member retention rates require improvement over time in order to secure greater membership totals.

As we progress into 2007, we are beginning to analyze the results of these efforts while simultaneously identifying new audiences for membership. We want to provide better tools to chapter and division leaders so they can actively recruit new members. As groups like our competitive intelligence and government information divisions grow, we are developing plans to attract new members to their ranks. You see, we're serious about not only ensuring SLA's survival into the future; we're serious about making it thrive.

Our focus on improving services for you yielded some great results in the last year.

We conducted the very first online association board of directors election, yielding an excellent turnout in member voting. This was an important step, as we now have the ability to conduct secure, efficient elections with a minimum of administrative work and cost.

We published *Getting Copyright Right*, a special collection of columns written for Information Outlook over 8 years by SLA member and copyright expert Lolly Gasaway. If you need a primer on how to handle copyright issues, this book is a great quick read.

We launched a new version of the SLA Web site, including a cleaner, more appealing look and integration of blogs and RSS feeds into the content mix. In fact, you may have noticed recently that we launched a special RSS Feed Reader on our Web site, courtesy of NewsGator. It's loaded with feeds we believe you'll find interesting, but you can add your own any time. It's a great way to get familiar with how RSS works.

We held one of the most successful SLA Annual Conferences in recent memory, in terms of attendance, quality programming, and financial success for SLA. This is important to remember, as the revenue

generated by our Annual Conference significantly offsets the costs of many services we provide to you annually.

We launched a strategic alliance with Information Today to drive greater rewards in the form of discounts for SLA members participating in their events and purchasing their products - and greater visibility for SLA to drive growth in membership.

We've also looked beyond our traditional partners to find new ways to deliver new benefits to you. We've developed a growing relationship with the Software and Information Industry Association so that we can forge an ongoing bridge between the profession and the industry that serves us. In fact, we've worked with SIIA on development of a one-day content rights management course for librarians and info pros. The course will launch in January and will be presented jointly by SLA and SIIA. Most importantly, SIIA will provide certification to anyone who takes the course and passes the exam. Look for more information about the course from SLA after the New Year.

As the former Director of OPM, you all should now I have a very soft spot for Federal employees and the important work you do. So, on the public policy front, we've been significantly involved in the effort to fight the Environmental Protection Agency's plan to close its entire network of libraries. We've been credited by a key group of 17 U.S. Senators as having a critical role in shining a light on the matter and making the public aware of the critical need for EPA libraries and information services. And we'll continue to protect and defend the roles of libraries, librarians, and all the info pros who serve America.

As we do around this time each year, we've published our annual Salary Survey, which now includes a special workplace study. Rather than simply providing salary data, we've included information we gathered from human resource professionals working where information professionals are employed. The publication is now available for purchase on the SLA Web site.

Just last month, we announced the launch of our new Click University Certificates program in Competitive Intelligence. By partnering with experts in the field, we've established an excellent program that focuses on one of the hottest disciplines in the field of information management. More important is that this effort will serve as an excellent model for developing certificate programs in other disciplines that you and others in the profession need in order to stay ahead of the curve.

And we are pleased to report that we are nearing completion of the selection process for acquiring a new association management system - a database-centered package of applications designed to help us operate more efficiently. Why does this help you? We envision that this new system will greatly benefit the manner in which chapters and divisions are managed by our volunteer leaders, thereby giving them more time to think about leading rather than managing administrative matters. We'll begin the process for building the new system early next year.

We also invested a significant amount of time this year to engaging you and your fellow members on the things that matter most to you: the value of the profession and of membership in SLA, the need for

improvements in the delivery of technology-based services to members, and exploring the future of your association so that it can remain competitive well into the future. Allow me to delve further into these topics for a moment.

First, in order to get a better sense of your value in your careers and how you value SLA, we conducted the SLA Membership Study, an endeavor that takes place every five years so that we can better understand your needs and concerns. We've yielded some great results from that effort, and you'll see more details in an upcoming issue of *Information Outlook*.

Second, we utilized the talents of a group of member-volunteers to examine our current state in the realm of technology and technology-based services. This technology review advisory group gave us excellent feedback on our online communities of practice, our use of blogs and RSS feeds, and even the needs of units in the selection of our new AMS. We are pleased to say that this kind of member involvement has generated a greater investment into the ongoing technology needs of the membership.

Third, you've likely heard over the past year about the presidential task forces that were exploring the future of the profession and SLA. I am excited to tell you that the work of those task forces has yielded excellent results that have not only been utilized in our planning for 2007; they are being used in what we are calling an exploration of the future of SLA in the global information community. The hard work of so many members on those task forces will now propel us forward as we begin to shape the future of SLA so that it is not simply prepared for what lie ahead - this association will actually define what lies ahead.

On Tuesday, you heard Bob Martin quote Peter Drucker, who said, "The best way to predict the future is to create it." That's SLA's philosophy.

Last year when we got together in Las Vegas, I reported to you that I had just returned from the World Summit on the Information Society, where I was a member of the US delegation. That event focused on the need to remove barriers to accessing information and bridging the digital divide in the global information society. It was an exhilarating experience for me, as it signaled the fact that SLA had finally arrived on the world stage as a significant player in the global information community. Well, I'm happy to report that 2006 marked another year of growth in our presence on the world stage.

First, my involvement in WSIS did not end with the event last year in Tunisia. One of the outcomes from the World Summit was the creation of a series of five annual Internet Governance Forum where nations can gather to talk about the state of the Internet and how it is managed. I was fortunate enough to join the US State Department and representatives of the industry once again at the very first IGF in Athens in October, and once again I served as a resource to the official government representatives, who incorporated your thinking, your experiences, and your views into their strategies.

Second, I was invited by the American Society of Association Executives to participate on a mission to China to explore how associations can collaborate with like organizations there to generate ideas and

support one another. This was my second visit there, and my first since SLA announced the creation of a provisional chapter in China. The one thing I learned is that you cannot simply hang your shingle there and expect to be successful. Growth into China for SLA will take time and lots of effort on the ground to recruit participants in the SLA community, but China's economy is growing exponentially every year.

Finally, I mentioned earlier that we are about to complete our fourth consecutive year with an operating surplus. As an association, we do not issue dividends like corporations do. Rather, we reinvest our profits back into services for you and your fellow members. And we'll continue doing that for 2007. I cannot say enough about the hard work of our Finance Committee, our Board of Directors, and our great staff at Headquarters, who do all they can to deliver a meaningful membership experience for you while ensuring that your membership dues are spent wisely.

As you can tell, we are NOT resting on our laurels. If there's one thing I never want to hear, it's concern that we aren't doing enough for the profession. The Board of Directors and I are teaming to push the boundaries of expectations for SLA, so that we can lead you to expect more and, hopefully, want more! The Board of Directors has approved our goals and budget for next year, and they are loaded with smart, aggressive, strategically important initiatives and projects.

Rest assured that our focus will remain on our strategic mission - learning, networking, and advocacy for the profession. But as I've told you here, we will particularly stay focused on growth of membership, enhancement of services and technology, engagement of members, global influence, and financial strength for SLA. You deserve it, the profession needs it, and we intend to deliver it. All of these accomplishments and plans for the future are built on one foundation - one that all of you must embrace as well - that we must adapt to the pace of change, not simply to change itself.

I like to quote Retired General Eric Shinseki, who is known for saying, "If you don't like change, you're going to like irrelevance even less." That quote is my mantra when I go to work every day and try to meet your needs. But I hope it will become yours too.

In many ways, we are stuck in annual planning processes - you have Congressional appropriations, I have an October Board meeting where my goals and next year's budget are approved, given I have more flexibility than you do - we have instituted monthly Board conference calls for example.

So that means you have to invest more of your time and resources into thinking ahead, into staying ahead of the curve.

The fact that you are here tells me you are already thinking along those lines. My job is to make sure you are not alone! So first - Carol said - volunteer!

At SLA, we are committed - and determined - to providing you with stimulating conferences, relevant learning opportunities and a safe, supportive place for experimentation - a type of risk-free laboratory

for developing the right mix of skills you need to succeed!

I couldn't have a better partner than the Military Librarians Division and I look forward to working with you again in 2007 and - if I'm invited - joining you in Kansas City for a fifth year in a row.

Thank you.