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**American Libraries Association (ALA) 2024 Conference
June 27 – July 2, 2024, San Diego, California
Trustee Catherine Kitts**

The American Libraries Association's 2024 Conference was held June 27-July 2, 2024, at the San Diego Convention Center in San Diego, California. I had the pleasure of attending the conference on behalf of the Ottawa Public Library Board.

According to the ALA, the conference is one of the largest library events in the world and gathered an audience of more than 13,500 library professionals, educators, and industry experts. The six-day event features a diverse range of educational sessions and networking opportunities, bringing together thousands of librarians and library staff, educators, authors, publishers, friends of libraries, trustees, special guests, and exhibitors. The conference featured discussions on timely and enduring issues, reflections on the ever-evolving role of libraries, and updates on relevant legislation and policies. This year's programming focused on relevant themes including the emergence of artificial intelligence and its impact on libraries.

Public Libraries Tour

I was provided an opportunity to tour three public Libraries in the San Diego Area: San Diego Central Library, Imperial Beach Library, and the San Ysidro Branch. The tour focused on having participants understand how a library can be designed to be flexible for future changes and how sustainable goals can be included in library design. Given San Diego's perfect climate, it was also interesting to see how libraries there can be designed to include integrated outdoor areas.

Given our own central library is currently being constructed, I loved the opportunity to explore San Diego's Central Library and noted how spaces were designed with deep intentionality. The project's architect, Rob Quigley, led the tour and it was also interesting to hear how public consultation and feedback was incorporated into the design. I was struck by how long the project took to complete – 30 years! But left with much inspiration about what possibilities Ādisōke will unlock for OPL and the residents we serve.

The Imperial Beach Library and San Ysidro branches were smaller, local libraries which matched the unique character of the neighborhood's they were located in. Both branches had unique spaces for children and teens and gave me lots of food for thought about what could be possible for a new branch someday in South Orléans!

The tour complemented a session I attended later in the conference: “**Turning the Page: How to Design a Library for the Future**” where panelists shared innovative strategies and ideas on how to integrate a new building project with existing programs within the organization.

A major theme that emerged during the conference, beginning one day after the US presidential debate between President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump, was that it was being held against a backdrop of increasing censorship and book challenges. Thus, this was an important event for library workers to learn from each other and support each other through the 175 educational programs throughout the conference. ALA and Unite Against Book Bans hosted a second Rally for the Right to Read which spotlighted the courage and resilience of library workers who are protecting the freedom to read. A session I found particularly jarring, yet relevant, was “**Wake Up! It's 1984**”. Here, we heard troubling examples of willful misrepresentation, and practices used by extremist groups to undermine trust in public education and public libraries. This session confirmed trends we are seeing in the Canadian landscape – where misinformation is being weaponized to undermine public trust – however the scale and intensity of incidents targeting libraries in the United States painted a grim picture of what may be yet to come north of the border. Book challenges doubles from 2020 to 2021 in the United States as tensions between intellectual freedom and social justice grew.

During many sessions, the ALA emphasized the responsibility of libraries to represent all perspectives, challenge any form of censorship, foster free expression, be welcoming places and offer supportive conditions for expressions of knowledge, ideas, and opinions. Protecting intellectual freedom in libraries was defined as fundamental to the democratic value of free expression through guaranteeing free access to information. By safeguarding intellectual freedom, libraries - foster an environment where individuals can freely seek knowledge, challenge prevailing beliefs, and engage in critical inquiry, thereby promoting intellectual growth, cultural enrichment, and democratic participation within society. Upholding intellectual freedom ensures that libraries remain vibrant spaces that reflect the diverse voices and experiences of communities while also

preserving the principles of democracy and civil liberties. One session of note was **“Fostering Conversation and Connection Among Community Members with Contrasting Political Views”** where attendees were given practical tools to ensure libraries remain vital hubs of education, research, and community engagement, offering individuals the opportunity to explore a wide range of perspectives and ideas without censorship or restriction.

Conference sessions also focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion, which lie at the heart of many libraries' missions to serve diverse communities and bridge societal divides. Many sessions focused on how libraries are striving to create welcoming spaces where individuals from all backgrounds feel represented, respected, and empowered to engage with information and resources. Library professionals at the Conference discussed how their respective commitments to equity and inclusion are reflected in initiatives aimed at addressing systemic barriers, promoting cultural diversity, and amplifying marginalized voices within library collections and programming. One such session I attended on this topic was **“Sharing Knowledge: How the Victoria Native Friendship Centre and Greater Victoria Public Library Foster Reconciliation.”** It was interesting to hear from another Canadian library about how they have worked with Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations to strengthen partnerships and honour their own commitment to reconciliation against a backdrop of historical discrimination toward First Nations. I was able to draw parallels between their work and our own with Ādisōke. I wrote down the following quote which I will keep in mind as we advance our work: “Inviting you in is one thing, making you feel welcome is another.”

These are only a few examples of the thought-provoking content offered at this year's ALA, and I felt fortunate to be there among like-minded and passionate industry professionals. In sum, the ALA Conference served as a vibrant platform for librarians and library professionals to engage in meaningful discussions, explore emerging trends, and reaffirm their commitment to advancing library values. With a diverse array of presentations and keynote sessions, I had the impression that attendees left empowered and inspired to embrace the challenges and opportunities ahead, echoing the themes of intellectual freedom, innovation, sustainability and a commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion. The conference reinforced the pivotal role of libraries as catalysts for social change and advocates for intellectual freedom and equity and diversity in an ever-evolving landscape.

As an Ottawa Public Library Board Trustee, I appreciated the opportunity to attend this event to better understand issues facing other libraries and learn from fellow library professionals from across North America and the world.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to both Julie Tremblay (Library Board Assistant, Board and Strategic Services) and Alexandra Yarrow (Program Manager, Board and Strategy Services) for their assistance with all the administrative and logistical supports required for this conference. Additionally, my sincere thanks to the Board for their support of this educational opportunity in my role as Trustee.