

Leslie B. Burger and Christine Hage

Meet the Candidates for ALA president

Vote in the election this spring

The ACRL Board of Directors posed the following questions to the candidates for ALA President, and *C&RL News* is pleased to publish their responses. Each candidate was given 1,200 words in which she could choose to offer a brief opening statement and to respond to the questions; the responses are identified under each of the six questions.

Opening statement

Hage: I am honored to be running for ALA President and premise my candidacy on the understanding that librarians and libraries are essential foundations for literacy, learning, and liberty. As ALA President I will advocate for libraries' role in literacy initiatives, equity of access to information, lifelong learning, and political action that ensures the protection of information liberties. My focus is on ALA's goal of 21st Century Literacy.

ALA members lend their expertise and energies to reaching diverse library patrons helping them to be informed, literate, lifelong learners and information users. As president, I will use past leadership experiences to guide how I encourage and support ALA's mission of enriching lives through libraries and library services.

Questions for ALA Candidates

1. If you were trying to recruit a person to our profession, what would you describe as the rewards and challenges of this profession?

Burger: Libraries change people's lives in profound ways whether it is obtaining a



Leslie B. Burger



Christine Lind Hage

job, seeking new skills, understanding current events, networking with others, completing a research project, or learning another language. We empower people by connecting them with knowledge that informs their actions. Our programs and services enrich people's lives, enhance teaching and learning, and advance careers. Librarians ensure that everyone has connectivity, content, and capability so they can thrive in the digital age.

Libraries bring diverse communities together in a public commons where everyone is treated equally regardless of wealth or social circumstance. We transform our communities by providing valuable resources and offering programs that allow people to explore important community issues to develop common solutions. Anyone who values the public sphere, enjoys helping others, and treasures making a

Leslie B. Burger is director of the Princeton Public Library, e-mail: lburger@princetonlibrary.org, and Christine Lind Hage is director of the Clinton-Macomb Public Library, e-mail: christine@cimpl.org.

© 2005 Leslie B. Burger and Christine Lind Hage

difference in society should find librarianship an exciting and rewarding career.

Hage: My 34 years as a librarian have taught me the value that librarians and libraries contribute to society. Librarians can be political activists protecting freedoms, patron-centered instructors guiding discovery and learning, preservers of information, innovators and inventors at the point where technology and information converge, or researchers who construct ways to manage the flow of data.

Librarians instruct people seeking to become literate and students learning to advance their basic research skills. They facilitate patrons who delight in discovering new information and scholars who need information to fuel their thinking and productivity. We are activists promoting and protecting access to and use of information in a free society. Librarians are key to the information age because we serve all society by organizing, managing, archiving, and protecting knowledge. Our technical and public service help to infuse new technologies, learning strategies, and information resources into and across diverse populations.

2. What knowledge, experience, and skills do you bring to the position of ALA President?

Burger: My broad range of experience includes working as a frontline librarian and public library director. In two state libraries, I worked with all types of libraries to build consensus and shape legislative policy affecting library funding and resources. As a consultant, I've worked with more than 100 libraries of all types in 12 states on issues ranging from strategic planning, needs assessments, facility studies, and digitization to organizational development. As an active participant in ALA committees, an ALA Council member, president of a division and two chapters, I've demonstrated how leadership can transform libraries. Within two years of coming to the Princeton Public Library I mobilized public support and raised more than \$18 million to build a new library.

As ALA President I will apply my broad experience along with my proven skills as a facilitator and consensus builder to advance

ALA's agenda in a way that will transform libraries for many years to come.

Hage: As a member of ALA since 1971, I have served on ALA committees and been a past-president of PLA and a member of Council since 1999. I have a demonstrated commitment to the association's activities, goals, and values. I've worked in public, school, academic, and special libraries. I currently direct Michigan's Clinton-Macomb Public Library serving over 160,000 people. My work ethic, dedication to the profession, and willingness to listen and learn from others are documented in the volunteer and consulting projects, committees, and public service I have designed, led, and worked to advance.

3. ALA is in the midst of a strategic directions planning process, how would you a) shepherd these directions once they are set; and b) work with divisions that already have their strategic plans in place?

Burger: The new strategic plan provides an ideal opportunity for ALA leaders to meet with divisions and units to align the organizationwide plan with their plans. This effort offers us the chance to reaffirm our priorities, set strategic directions, and align our budgets so we can achieve our mutual goals, guide our daily decision making, and allocate limited resources.

At the ALA Midwinter meeting in Boston I visited many ALA units learning that we have more in common than is generally perceived. We must coordinate existing plans with the new strategic plan to ensure that we are working on complementary goals. As president, I would establish a Planning Council with representatives from divisions, roundtables, and committees to sustain the planning effort well beyond its initial development.

Hage: As a member of the Core Values II Task Force, I realize that as a profession and association we share key values that are reflected in the work and strategic plans of the association's divisions. The divisions have given input to and feedback on the various drafts of ALA Head 2010, which should ensure that the document is responsive to the divisions' interests, needs, and existing strategic plans.

4. What do you see as your primary initiative(s) should you be elected ALA President?

Burger: As president I would support the priorities and values detailed in the new strategic plan. I would emphasize the importance of transforming services in every library so that no one is left behind in the digital age. ALA can showcase best practices and success stories in order to inspire struggling libraries to excel and provide advocates models for improving public and institutional support for libraries of all types.

My action plan focuses on developing a shared vision for improving library service, advocating a national policy and legislative agenda that secures financial support to implement the improvements; providing continuous leadership training so all library workers are competent and confident; recruiting the best, brightest, and most diverse work force to the profession; and building a strong grassroots advocacy network that can help us make libraries the topic of conversation and action throughout the country. I also want to ensure that ALA attracts and retains the next generation of leaders.

Hage: My primary initiative will be 21st Century Literacies: reading literacy and the emerging information literacies. ALA divisions are working on early literacy, family literacy, adult illiteracy, and information literacy (IL). ACRL's excellent Institute for Information Literacy with its Web site as well as its work to advance IL awareness, assessment, and instruction are laudable.

5. What measures would you take to lead the effort towards making our profession and ALA diverse enough to reflect our country's changing demographics?

Burger: ALA has made incredible strides towards increasing diversity in librarianship. I would continue growing the Spectrum Scholarships and encourage state chapters to establish similar programs as I did when New Jersey Library Association President. I would encourage ALA and its chapters to adopt many of the successful promotional efforts modeled through the becomealibrarian.org initiative to

attract a diverse new group to librarianship. I would work at the national level to ensure that federal funds now earmarked for education and recruitment efforts in IMLS are retained and awarded to underserved populations.

We can step up our marketing and promotional efforts to attract a more diverse work force to our ranks, look within our own organizations to recruit new people, provide support for their education, and offer more internship and career-shadowing opportunities for those who may be considering librarianship as a career. We must encourage diverse student employees already working in academic libraries to pursue graduate library education. And finally we need to continue our efforts to improve the salaries of librarians and library workers so librarianship becomes a viable career choice and one that provides them with a competitive wage.

Hage: Recruitment of diverse, well-educated, and professionally dedicated librarians is one of the most pressing issues facing the profession. I support: the ALA Spectrum Initiative; the Recruitment Assembly's efforts to develop a clearinghouse of best practices and resources for recruitment, retention, and mentoring; and NextGen/New Librarian Task Force to increase the "next" generation's voice in ALA.

I would also encourage programming in ways that address succession planning, mentoring, and developing a diverse workforce.

6. ACRL has been a leader not only in promoting virtual participation on committees, conferences, and special programs but also in implementing that virtual engagement of members who cannot afford to attend national conferences, etc. What is your position on making ALA more available for member participation virtually? If you support this, how would you lead ALA in this effort?

Burger: I am committed to retaining and increasing member participation in ALA. While conferences are important venues for involvement, I want to make sure that our younger, newer members find opportunities and an organizational structure conducive to their work style.

I wholeheartedly support efforts that encourage both virtual and in-person participation that is meaningful and rewarding. I am impressed with ACRL's use of new technology for continuing education and will encourage wider applications within the association such as ALA's new online community software to facilitate the work of committees. I would encourage ALA to examine its current and future organizational practices carefully to ensure the widest participation as well as affordable involvement for all members.

Hage: Virtual participation in ALA activities in the form of electronic members fits the emerging model of distance participation and membership. It is important for ALA to be inclusive in its mission and to widen our membership to include a spectrum of participants, especially those without the resources to support travel.

As PLA President, I appointed committees composed of ten attending members and two electronic members. Valuable committee work can occur outside of the conference experience and electronic members can participate and contribute to that work.

Electronic participation empowers members who may not otherwise be able to engage in ALA work. That involvement can broaden the Association's perspective, attract members, and model and practice the sharing of information through distance technologies.

While face-to-face participation should not be devalued, electronic participants offer new opportunities to understand how ALA can reach beyond conventional boundaries to connect with constituents.

7. As ALA President, you will preside over ALA Council. What issues do you think are inappropriate for Council discussion and debate? What leadership skills will you use to handle inappropriate discussion when presented?

Burger: The parliamentary rules that guide Council are designed to expedite our work as well as encourage democratic participation. Council operates most effectively when committees and staff present well-documented,

easy-to-understand reports that are fully vetted by a wide array of ALA members prior to coming to the floor.

As the Council's leader I would make sure that I am knowledgeable about parliamentary procedure so I can manage the meetings efficiently and effectively. In addition, I would employ many of the techniques that have worked so well for me with other groups making sure that all voices are heard, encouraging a healthy amount of discussion but knowing when it's time to move toward action, seeking consensus, and maintaining a healthy sense of humor and perspective.

While most Council business relates to the mission and goals of ALA, sometimes members choose to debate issues that reflect our collective conscience and values as an organization. As citizens of the world, our work does not take place in a vacuum. Our collective wisdom based on deliberative discussions best determines which issues are of concern and worthy of ALA action.

Hage: There are many relevant social, political, and humanitarian issues discussed in Council; however, the association is better served when its primary focus is on library issues. We must first have a clear sense of our own distinct mission and goals and how to accomplish those.

A leader helps to guide discussions to incorporate an open exchange of ideas and information, but also to stay focused on the agenda. Having clear goals, a focused and relevant mission, and a systematic approach to accomplishing tasks are foundational to good leadership, whether it be within the bounds of a conference, council, or conversation.

I will focus on ALA's primary mission, while representing the membership, listening to diverse ideas and perspectives, and guiding the association to new levels of professionalism and service.

8. As ALA President, you will preside over ALA Executive Board. There are times when confidentiality is critical in the decision-making process until all the pieces are in place. Meanwhile, ALA

Councilors are screaming for Board communication and action. As the spokesperson for the Board and for the Association, how would you handle this situation?

Burger: It is important for the Executive Board and Council to work in an atmosphere of mutual trust. The Executive Board oversees the management of the association and makes decisions on Council's behalf between conferences. In return, the Board must keep Council and, by extension, ALA's membership, well informed about its decisions. Frequent, open, and honest communication can effectively ensure a good working relationship with Council and members. As the spokesperson for the Board, I would immediately address problems so they do not fester. Operating in an atmosphere of trust can help us accomplish our shared vision.

Hage: When one is working with a group of activists and leaders such as ALA Council there is always an urgency for action that makes waiting for communication difficult. My experience on Council has taught me that thoughtful communication and planned action are worth the investment. Effective leadership reminds members of the group's past successes and reinforces the concept that the strength of the group is in its ability to be deliberate in its planning and actions.

I have served as director of large organizations and clearly know the importance of confidentiality. Librarians' professional preparation reinforces confidentiality as a professional ethic.

One way to balance the screams for action with the need for considerate planning is to build and earn trust between the Executive Board, Council, and staff. I have practiced this skill as a library director, project manager, and Council member. Honest, open, and respectful communication reinforces trust between people and allows a leader to work in the interests of the organization. Leadership calls one to consider the moment, but work toward the future.

9. As your presidential term ends, a) what legacy would you like to leave for

ALA; and b) how do you think your ALA colleagues will describe you in terms of your leadership of ALA?

Burger: I want every library to be better off when I leave the position of ALA President by creating a legacy of exemplary library service that will be the model for many years to come. I hope that I can energize and excite members to participate more fully in ALA because it will allow them to make a difference in their own libraries and in their professional careers. I want our conference programming to be more challenging and for members to be surprised by what we can achieve when we all work together. I also want to develop a new and diverse generation of leaders, ready, willing, and able to shape ALA's future.

I hope my colleagues will say that I helped to transform ALA through strong vision, commitment to collaboration, consensus building, and effective action.

Hage: An individual's legacy is measured in terms of what that person has done to advance the group. My candidacy is centered on identifying expertise within our group, leading the membership, and serving the association's interests. The President of ALA speaks for the association on a wide range of topics and must represent the full spectrum of interests, specializations, and expertise of the profession. The challenge of leadership will be to equitably represent all constituencies. I will listen to people and will encourage discussion and participation by all. I also will identify experts within each area of ALA and use a team approach with spokespeople who are best suited to articulate ALA mission and goals.

I hope that my colleagues will recognize my high ethical standards, tireless work ethic, and total commitment to the profession and association. I shall commit myself to identifying and working with leaders within our association so we might broaden our outreach. I also will work to cultivate future leadership.

The legacy of ALA should be that the association builds successive generations of consistently effective and visionary leadership that promotes libraries, learning, literacy, and liberty. ♪