

## **Kathleen Kennedy Townsend Speaks at Annual Conference**

The 2008 Annual Conference of the Maryland Library Trustees and Citizens for Maryland Libraries was held on November 8, 2008, in Baltimore at the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture. Members had an opportunity to report on this past year's accomplishments, usher in new leadership, and celebrate, if a bit belatedly, the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of CML, which was founded in 1982. The conference began with a delicious brunch, food to nourish the body, and concluded with a speech by guest speaker Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, who provided food for the mind and soul.

Townsend focused on advocacy, after noting that during these past several years, when Americans' civil liberties were compromised, it was libraries that stood up to injustice, fighting for our citizens' right to seek information without fear. She congratulated librarians for this.

Townsend's major focus, however, was on how library administrators, trustees, and concerned citizens can advocate for increased funding in tough financial times. Her pointers were practical and sometimes surprising. For example, she pointed out that having a controversy sometimes helps focus people to surge behind an institution or a movement to lend support. She used her own student volunteer initiative as an example, describing how the controversy that resulted when she first unveiled her plan helped crystallize her purpose of the project. Then high school students became galvanized in their support when other people raised obstacles to her efforts. With a clearer vision of the project and with the support of students and other citizens, she was able to effect a change in the Maryland high school curriculum, with a service requirement for students.

She also outlined steps to consider in building advocacy. First of all, citizens need to know why libraries are important, and one way to reveal that is through the stories of the good that libraries do for people. DLDS and MLA are already capturing stories for publication in the Libraries Change Lives in Maryland initiative, but Townsend reminded the audience that telling the right story to the right person can make all the difference.

Beyond stories, Townsend pointed out that providing statistics of library use is particularly important for federal funding, although generally people may not necessarily be moved by the facts so much as by the heart. That is all the more reason to have those good stories on hand. In addition, organizing supporters is important to form a kind of lobby of citizens to tell the stories, provide the facts, and show support for libraries. She also noted that libraries may want to consider partnerships with other organizations such as Social Services or public health agencies to secure funds for special projects.

In seeking money from foundations, Townsend urged audience members to ask the all-important question: Why would this foundation give money to our institution?

Foundations are known for their generosity towards hospitals, churches, and universities, but what about libraries? Finding the right donor for the library is essential.

Fundraisers are another funding source, but those planning a fundraiser need to have a firm sense of who they are, that is, just what it is that they are capable of doing successfully in order to raise money. She reminded members of the audience that for fundraising they need to consider what they like to do and allow the event to reflect that. Her own mother enjoyed many activities and so tended to organize fundraisers that revolved around those activities. Fundraising is hard work, so at least the event should reflect something that is fun and enjoyable for the organizers.

Kathleen Kennedy Townsend concluded with a question-and-answer session that focused mostly on her book *Failing America's Faithful: How Today's Churches Are Mixing God with Politics and Losing Their Way*. Copies of the book were on sale at the conference.

Donna L. Seibly  
Secretary, Maryland Library Association