

## HELPING LIBRARY FRIENDS BECOME ADVOCATES

CML's 1st Maryland Regional Friends of Libraries Conference was held Saturday, September 15, at the Hyattsville Library of the Prince George's County Memorial Library System. To 35 attentive friends and librarians, Maryland State Librarian Irene Padilla made a presentation of the survey by Potomac, Inc. of Maryland adults and their use of and views about libraries. Public libraries are the most favorably perceived of the seven local services rated. The results of the 2003 survey were presented. In the next three paragraphs 2003 statistic are presented as given first, followed by 2006 statistics in parentheses.

Of those surveyed 76% (68%) rated public libraries as an "essential service". "Use the Internet" at 31% (53%) of those surveyed was the second highest use factor after "borrowing materials" at 41% (54%). For four factors queried, 70% to 81% (66% to 80%) of the respondents said the library was doing a "Good job". But from 12% to 24% (10% to 25%) said that the library "Could do better". These data are useful to make presentations to funding bodies to maintain (and increase) government support of public libraries.

In a short segment on Economic Development the most interesting finding is on "trip chaining", showing that as many as 75% (69%) of trips to the library result in visits to other nearby institutions or businesses. Thus, location of library outlets is significant for economic reasons.

In another section 90% (88%) of respondents say that libraries are a "good investment of tax dollars". 63% (61%) of respondents think that more support is needed from local government, and 68% (68%) think that more is needed from the State.

Both an Executive Summary and the full Final Report for 2006 may be found at: <http://access-somd.org/mdlibrarysurvey/>

One hour of the panel presentations is also available in video on the CML website under "CML Events".

The first Potomac, Inc. survey was very useful ammunition in securing major funding initiatives by unanimous vote in the sessions of the General Assembly in 2005 and again in 2006 that will result in an increase of over \$20 million in support of libraries by the State.

This presentation was all preliminary to show that knowing public attitudes about libraries IS essential in arguing for continuing and increasing support of public libraries.

Next on the panel was Lynne Bradley, who is the Director of the Office of Government Relations in the Washington office of the American Library Association. Bradley early in her career had worked in several public libraries in Maryland.

Bradley talked about critical library issues on the federal level and how citizen advocates can be very effective in influencing the outcome of legislation. She had a handout on 14 tips for success in lobbying. Such skills are essential for successful advocacy at all levels of government. Bradley said that “advocacy is only going to get harder” due to budget constraints and competing demands for government services. Advocacy “is not a tea party” but is “about participating in politics”. Her other handouts dealt with resources and tools available through ALA’s Washington Office, many available at: <http://www.alawash.org>.

Bradley’s knowledge, skill, and experience infused her remarks. Her enthusiasm for the cause of advocacy on behalf of all kinds of libraries was contagious—a real shot in the arm to friends who may have needed some motivation to keep up their efforts.

After a brief refreshment break (provided by Friends from PGCMLS and Enoch Pratt) there was a lively discussion, facilitated by CML Board member Pat Fisher. Padilla, Bradley, and Fisher were very responsive to audience questions, comments, and suggestions in the discussion period, which lasted over an hour. A fuller account of that discussion appears on another page of this CML website under “CML Events”. That discussion can be a guide to further steps to help energize Friends in Maryland for making their advocacy even more effective.

Others on the planning committee for this Conference were Barbara Simon, President of the Friends of Prince George’s County Library, CML Board members Sylvia Dodd and Bill Wilson, CML Executive Director Mary Mallery, and DLDS staff Daria Parry.

Prepared by Bill Wilson, Sept. 18, 2007; revised Sept. 24 and Nov. 17, 2007