

From the President



Leading Inclusively All Year

By Laura Spears, 2020-2021 FLA President

What a year this has been! We have experienced a great deal since we began the year of Leading Inclusively last May, 2020.

When I was first elected to the role as president of the Florida Library Association (election in early 2019), I was completing a conference presentation in Scotland; planning a birthday trip to London a year later, and anticipating my first grandchild. I had no idea the issues we would face in simply living our everyday lives. One year later, we have experienced unimaginable loss of lives, freedoms, and livelihoods due to this devastating virus; the subsequent economic and social costs; and the ongoing discriminatory, destructive and sometimes fatal behaviors toward Black, Indigenous, People of Color, and the LGBTQIA+ community.

There's no denying the challenges we have faced as a society this past year. As president of the Florida Library Association, there have been many days where it was not clear how to help, what to say, or how to lead in ways that would make a difference. It seemed the daily priority was to let people stay safe, but we had to make sure that ALL people could stay safe. Regardless, I still asked you to take intentional actions, as library professionals, advocates, and leaders, to Lead Inclusively, embrace diversity, and adopt antiracist positions and views in an effort to further social justice and equity in our libraries. This theme has also fueled many of the efforts of the FLA Board and staff.

Looking back, because of COVID-19, we postponed our 2020 in-person conference, worked from home, met online, and grew better as an organization that advocates for health, wellness, and safety first for our communities, our colleagues, and ourselves. We waited to conclude our year of Leading Forward, established by Past President Eric Head by continuing to do just that – keep moving forward. And we added to Eric's message to ensure that ALL members of our library community are afforded the rights and privileges we all aspire to and expect.

So my message this year, Lead Inclusively, focused on the repercussions of these events, especially on those in marginalized communities. I asked members to actively seek out ways to ensure that all lives matter by ensuring that black lives matter; that no individuals - not Asian, Pacific Islander,

Muslim, Jewish, Native American – is treated as “other” or “them,” but that we explicitly, intentionally, create opportunities to build equity for those whose lives have been endangered and singularly diminished by exclusivity, racism, and inequality. I asked you to seek out inequities in your libraries, your practices, and your actions that could be transformed into ways that all can be included in the governance, the service, and the benefits that libraries provide.

To that end, our FLA Board and staff initiated the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Access Task Force. This group, led by Cheryl Wolfe and Kelvin Watson, developed values statements that articulate current ideals and aspirational standards for the work of FLA and for Florida libraries. The Task Force has created a newsletter that delivers current resources and events announcements to keep our members informed and engaged in anti-racist and social justice movements. We are planning quarterly book discussions featuring selections that will inspire meaningful conversations. Further, we will begin to examine the work of FLA and align our offerings, communications, and membership so that we truly represent ALL of the communities we serve.

The FLA staff – Lisa O'Donnell, Karen Layton, and Melissa Stocks, along with our diligent conference planner, Jeanice Caskey – reconfigured our May 2020 in-person conference into a brilliant, virtual showcase of library efforts, innovation, and creativity. While we are all tired of meeting up with colleagues through the computer screen, the conference delivered was fun and engaging, garnering positive feedback about increased access to more programs and posters with more time to spend questioning participants. And we still got to bid on the money suit!

In June, the Board approved the Paraprofessional Task Force to move forward to investigate the feasibility of establishing a Paraprofessional Certification program as a core benefit for Florida library employees. We have obtained a professional recommendation for our next steps forward which will include seeking funding for an individual to steer this project to completion.

The FLA staff completed a restructuring of the FLA groups – standing and ad hoc committees as well as member groups –



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to streamline some processes, create greater productivity, and also to allow the staff to support the groups better. It was not without its bumps and some groups got a late start but there has been so much energy and we look forward to more great work from all of these groups.

Because of COVID, we were not able to schedule an in-person Library Day in Tallahassee. To compensate for this, the Advocacy & Legislative Committee, led by Doug Crane, developed a virtual strategy that included a 3-minute advocacy video and a bounty of advocacy tools that are still available to you for communicating your own messaging to your local legislators. Incoming president, Phyllis Gorshe created tools for you to use for February's "Love Your Library" month and used her outreach to engage with key legislators in Tallahassee from her district. Lisa O'Donnell and our lobbyist, Robert Stuart, were able to set meetings with several legislative leaders to reinforce our message about the value of Florida's libraries, especially as we help our communities recover from the impact of the pandemic.

As we look forward to next month's hybrid conference, it is encouraging to know that we will likely be able to feel more

comfortable attending in person given the availability of vaccines to most Floridians. We will still use social distancing and require the use of masks, but I personally look forward to seeing friends and colleagues again. I know that many will not be able to attend in person and I hope you will join us online, as many of our programs are "on demand" or will be live-streamed.

Whether you are able to join in person or online, we are taking steps to grow as an inclusive organization and present an engaging, equitable, and meaningful conference. It bears repeating: with all of the events that have occurred this past year that we must proactively seek to demonstrate solidarity with our colleagues who are Black, Indigenous or other People of Color, as well as with those within the LGBTQIA+ communities. We have seen a great embrace of the Lead Inclusively theme by Florida's libraries, and I am honored to have served as your president this year.

Sincerely,

Laura Spears, PhD
 FLA President, 2020-2021

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As an expert in her profession, an up-coming mover and shaker, she's a bright star on the horizon. Didn't even she admit to herself that she was all that? Yet in spite of her superpowers she learns that her attempts to correct an injustice provoke heartless, cruel reactions, and she soon must ask herself if the storm is worth weathering; and, if so, at what cost. Her career? Her soul?

Join Reena on life's battlefield as the slings and arrows of ambition and treachery test her spirit. And if she can summon the courage to withstand them? Maybe she'll discover her heart along the way, and something even more important. Herself.



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