

RESETTING AND RECONNECTING AT FLA ANNUAL 2022

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CONFERENCE REPORT

ANTICIPATING

I was truly excited when Florida Library Association (FLA) President Phyllis Gorshe announced her theme for this year's conference: Reset & Reconnect. The keen anticipation was not just because it has a well-placed ampersand, though that is always welcome. After a strange and stressful couple of years trying to attain some sense of normalcy during a worldwide pandemic, this theme was an excellent reminder that rebuilding collective professional strength cannot be done alone; we must reconnect. Beyond the practical applications of networking, there is joy and motivation to be found in the presentations, events, and conversations that come with conferencing library-style.

What could be more motivating than a speech by Mirna Valerio^[1], the opening session keynote speaker (Valerio 2022). She is the author of the recently published memoir,^[2] and she is featured in the viral REI-produced documentary short, *The Mirnavator*.^[3] Mirna is a force to be reckoned with! She moved seamlessly between the hilarious, the informative, and the inspirational. Her lessons in resilience were excellent whether discussing running, mental health, or DEIA. I am someone who never jogs or runs but was then inspired to participate in the conference "Fun Run" on Wednesday, which was sponsored by ByWater Solutions.



Fig. 1 Matthew David, past FLA Secretary (Photograph, 2019.)

The run, which was more of a walk for me, was a perfect start to the closing day on its own. As a bonus, I met someone from the West Palm Beach Library who told me all about their annual Books, Art, and Music (BAM) ^[4] Festival, which is now very much on my list as an event I hope to help a library host someday.

ATTENDING

So many sessions, so little time! I was scheduled to present in my favorite annual session, the "Lightning Rounds," so that was my first stop. "Lightning Rounds" for years has been a well-attended session where a group of individual presenters from different libraries do five-minute introductions of a concept, project, program, or service. This year my topic was "Library Commercials in Programs" using statistics and other data from Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library initiatives. (For a copy of my handout, email me at matthewdlibrary@gmail.com).



Fig. 2 Florida Library Association Annual Conference logo (Image by Florida Library Association, 2022.)

As expected, I thoroughly enjoyed the wide variety of other libraries' projects shared. Years ago, I had heard of libraries compared to grocery stores. A new comparison by Janet Schalk from Pasco-Hernando State College was a breath of fresh air: libraries as compared to restaurants, especially when actively "serving" customers. Her round was called "Dishing Out Excellent Service: Industry Pro Tips for Libraries." Among her recommendations were show instead of tell, the wobbly table syndrome focusing on attention to detail, and a book, Zingerman's Guide ^[5] to Giving Great Service. This was just one of many stellar rounds, but I will shout out two more to demonstrate the range of projects: "Going Public with Health Literacy" by Jessica Daly of AdventHealth University and "The Walking Library" by Michelle Mosley of Osceola Library System. Each presentation illustrated in its own way the importance of reaching customers where they are.

¹ Mirna Valerio: *THE MIRNAVATOR*, accessed July 11, 2022. <https://themirnavator.com/>.

² Goodreads, Inc., "A Beautiful Work In Progress," accessed July 11, 2022. <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/34312042-a-beautiful-work-in-progress>.

³ Recreational Equipment, Inc. (REI), "REI Presents The Mirnavator," September 14, 2017. <https://youtu.be/c5-CSQcYeXk>.

⁴ BAM Festival, "ABOUT," accessed July 11, 2022. <https://www.bamwpb.org/about>.

⁵ Goodreads, Inc., "Zingerman's Guide to Giving Great Service," accessed July 11, 2022. https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/1007794.Zingerman_s_Guide_to_Giving_Great_Service.

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I always enjoy learning a topic that is a little over my head, which happened in a delightfully delivered “Alternative Universes: Alternate Reality Games (ARG) and Creative Website Design.” I took copious notes from Samma Fagan of Palm Harbor Library’s Mark Mazurek Gaming Center, [6]some of which I am still scratching my head over. The average length of her ARGs are six weeks, and she introduced several content rich resources and methods. The level of complexity is actually pretty flexible in this realm, and the process itself results in what libraries do best: active learning opportunities, stoking curiosities, community engagement and collaboration, and building trust through guidance. She also recommended the book, *Reality is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World.*[7]

Though it can sometimes be a disheartening topic, “The Role of Libraries in the Mis/Disinformation Age” delivered by Marlon Moore of Miami-Dade Public Library was a thorough, practical look at the barriers our profession faces.



Fig. 3 “West Oaks Wildflower Garden.”
(Photograph by Matthew David. Poster by Kathy Boyle and Sarah Qronfleh from the Orange County Library System. Poster presentation at the Florida Library Association Conference, Ponte Vedra Beach, FL, May 23-25, 2022.)

There were several pauses throughout the presentation to hear from attendees, which helped us **reconnect** and do a deep dive into these challenges together. There were also on-point reminders to what all types of libraries can do in the face of “alternative facts,” such as the development and application of policy and standards as well as an increased awareness of trends from state to state. The process is often complicated, but the goal is clear: to preserve the role of “the trusted librarian” in our organizations and communities. Marlon urged attendees to download the free report *Standing Up for Truth: The Role of Libraries in the Mis/Disinformation Age.* [8] Next, I presented additional information about library commercials in “What We’ve Learned This Year.” While I was not able to visit the other tables, I did get a quick glance at the information Teresa Steinmeyer of Palm Beach County Library System brought on youth service-learning projects. The highlight was Jane Goodall’s *roots & shoots*. Check out the lesson plans and toolkit on their website. [9]

In 2020, many libraries dove into offering virtual programs and instruction without time to properly review their options for creating videos and ensuring ADA accessibility. April Lafferty and Grisel Dominguez of FIU Hubert Library came to the rescue with their highly thorough session, “Refresh & Reconnect Your Instructional Videos.” So many aspects were covered such as discoverability, features for accessibility, and product comparisons of platforms such as ActivePresenter, Amara, Canva, iMovie, Otter.ai, Microsoft PowerPoint, YouTube Studio, and Zoom. It was hard to keep up with all of the book recommendations shared during “Slide into Our DMs: The Power of the BIPOC Bookstagram Community,” especially given the enthusiasm of the presenters, podcasters, and founders of *Vulgar Geniuses*, Dennie Wang and Veronica Smith.

6 Palm Harbor Library, “Mark Mazurek Gaming Center,” accessed July 11, 2022, <https://www.palmharborlibrary.org/teens/mark-mazurek-gaming-center>.

7 Goodreads, Inc., “Reality is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World,” accessed July 11, 2022, <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/7821348-reality-is-broken>.

8 WikiWisdom.net, “Standing Up for Truth: The Role of Libraries in the Mis/Disinformation Age,” accessed July 11, 2022, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c237f83f2e6b174633d77df/t/605baed18b968c465fb22740/1616621270133/standingupfortruth-report.pdf>.

9 Jane Goodall Institute, “For Educators: Empower the Next Generation of Compassionate Changemakers,” accessed July 11, 2022, <https://rootsandshoots.org/for-educators/>.

10 Goodreads, Inc., “Beasts of Prey,” accessed July 11, 2022, <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/56552953-beasts-of-prey>.

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Here are some of the examples they shared of influential, diverse reads:

- *Beasts of Prey* [10] (2022)
- *The Other Black Girl* [11](2021)
- *Punch Me Up to the Gods* [12] (2021)
- *Read Dangerously: The Subversive Power of Literature in Trouble Times* [13] (2022)
- *Sabrina & Corina: Stories* [14] (2019)
- *The School for Good Mothers* [15] (2022)

The readers' advisory and historical perspective continued with the session "Asian American & Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (AA & NH/PI) Representation in Comics," by Katharine (Kat) Kan from Bay County Public Library. During the talk I asked which AA & NH/PI authors and titles Kat would suggest for author visits. These are three she recommended:

- *Almost American Girl* [16] by Robin Ha
- *I Was Their American Dream: A Graphic Memoir* [17] by Malaka Gharib
- *The Magic Fish* [18] by Trung Le Nguyen



Fig. 4 "Fighting Discrimination through Literacy and Awareness" (Photograph by Matthew David. Poster by the Miami-Dade Public Library. Poster presentation at the Florida Library Association Conference, Ponte Vedra Beach, FL, May 23-25, 2022.)

WALKING AND LEARNING

Walking the exhibit hall was a trip! The Florida Library Association had a booth set up with an interactive display for attendee perspectives. (If you saw one with poor handwriting, it was mine!) I chatted with vendor reps, a couple who I have known for over 10 years, and collected lots of information to pass along to others upon my return to Tampa. I learned that Old Dominion University is offering internship course credit for their library school students, even for internships completed out of state. Need an aspiring librarian to intern, anyone? I was also interested to learn about the Lastinger Center for Learning at University of Florida, founded in 2002, and the expansive financial literacy workbooks and other resources from [FederalReserveEducation.org](https://www.federalreserveeducation.org/)[19] and [AtlantaFed.org](https://www.atlantafed.org/) [20].

The highlight of the exhibit hall was the poster sessions. As hot as it is in the Sunshine State, our services still have a place outside the walls of the library. This was on full display in the "West Oaks Wildflower Garden," presented by Sarah Qronfleh and Kathy Boyle with the Orange County Library System. Their garden was grant funded by the Florida Wildflower Foundation. Miami-Dade Public Library's poster, "Fighting Discrimination through Literacy and Awareness," showed how their Stronger Together Book Club can culturally do what we want our books to do—represent everyone through collections, partnerships, and programs. So many others, such as Volusia County's "We Are CapABLE" and Bethune-Cookman University's "The Black Fantastic, Curated Vocabularies," exhibited expert reminders of what libraries can do by filling gaps in the community.



Fig. 5 Catching up with colleagues Marina Morgan, a fellow FLA board member, and Steven Wade, a fellow graduate of SLLI – the Sunshine State Library Leadership Institute (Photograph by Matthew David. President's Reception at the Florida Library Association Conference, Ponte Vedra Beach, FL, May 23-25, 2022.)

9 Jane Goodall Institute, "For Educators: Empower the Next Generation of Compassionate Changemakers," accessed July 11, 2022, <https://rootsandshoots.org/for-educators/>.
 10 Goodreads, Inc., "Beasts of Prey," accessed July 11, 2022, <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/56552953-beasts-of-prey>.
 11 Goodreads, Inc., "The Other Black Girl," accessed July 11, 2022, <https://www.goodreads.com/en/book/show/55711688>.
 12 Goodreads, Inc., "Punch Me Up to the Gods," accessed July 11, 2022, <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/53968494-punch-me-up-to-the-gods>.
 13 Goodreads, Inc., "Read Dangerously: The Subversive Power of Literature in Troubled Times," accessed July 11, 2022, <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/49867396-read-dangerously>.
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PRESENTING, MARKETING & CELEBRATING

The gaps in my conference schedule were filled with meetings (board, committees, general assembly, and groups). I was honored to present FLA's financials at the closing meeting. The President's Reception was a blast with games, food, fundraisers, catching up with old friends and colleagues, and meeting new ones. Many colleagues **reconnected** with others in-person for the first time since the start of the pandemic.

PLANNING

A conference geared toward looking back at challenges and achievements would not be complete without also looking ahead. As is tradition, this year's incoming FLA President Shane Roopnarine took time during his address to announce next year's theme: The Next Frontier—Creating Learning, Engagement, and Services in the New Normal. He introduced the theme with a funny and familiar Star Trek reference—to move successfully beyond the reset we will have to “boldly go” where we can together. If this year's conference is any indication, we will find this future inside and outside the library, in person and online, through play and through trusted teaching, and yes: by walking and by running.

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