

Today's Graduate, Tomorrow's Leader: *Off to a Great Start!*

by Gerald V. Holmes and Mary Jo Howard

Last year, 4,363 new graduates entered the field of librarianship,¹ and their main goal is getting a job — any job! Add these to the thousands already employed in a very tight job market. Dr. Al Jones, Director of Library Services of Catawba College, recently challenged these new professionals,

to be very critical and discerning right up front and not to apply for jobs which hold no fascination or portend no sense of self-fulfillment. Students graduating from ALA-accredited master's degree programs are well-equipped to handle the challenges of librarianship, particularly the incorporation of technological innovations into traditional library service.²

As 1996 library school graduates land their first jobs in media centers, public and academic libraries, and private businesses as well as the public sector, many will be setting goals — laying the foundation for what can become an exciting and fulfilling career in a dynamic profession. If we were to ask these graduates their career goals, they would likely reply that they desire to develop expertise in a specialized area or, perhaps, to sample a wide range of sub-specialties within the library profession. Surely, many of these newcomers would envision themselves as leaders in yet unknown settings: as library managers or directors, as educators or officers in professional associations.

Preparation for leadership does not begin with attending library school

and entering a new profession. It begins with developing personal and professional goals along with the desire to pursue those goals. In that pursuit, looking for opportunities to gain skills, networking with people with similar goals, and developing the creativity within are essential.

Richard Lidstad, Vice-President of Human Resources for 3M, speaking to the 1995 graduates of the University of Minnesota Carlson School of Management's Emerging Leadership Program, states that within his area, "the number one issue globally is the identification, assessment, and development of leaders."³

For future library leaders, it is a must to learn the profession through job experience as well as professional organizations. One of the oldest groups uniquely geared toward the new professional is the New Members Round Table (NMRT) of the American Library Association (ALA).

New Librarians

Professional organizations can be overwhelming to a beginner encountering complex bureaucracy while navigating large conferences. Small sub-groups within such professional organizations can provide windows into the larger group and create a niche for that new person anxious to start a career path. New Members Round Table of the American Library Association (NMRT-ALA) is such a group — the entry point within ALA for many — and is well into its seventh decade, with a bright vision. This vision, NMRT's key ingredient, is

revealed in its mission statement that reads in part:

to help the individual member to become oriented to the profession and to encourage membership participation in its organizations, national, state and local; to promote a greater feeling of responsibility for the development of library service and librarianship; and to assist actively in the recruitment of qualified persons for the profession.⁴

In a 1983 article in *American Libraries*,⁵ Beth Bingham points out that membership in NMRT can also serve as a steppingstone to a position of leadership. In addition, R. M. Hersberger states that,

another major ingredient in successful library leadership is the ability to create and maintain an organizational climate where new ideas are welcomed. ... As part of fostering this type of inventive climate, the library director should help focus and channel ideas for change into meaningful services and programs, thereby demonstrating again the compatibility of organizational and personal goals.⁶

As new librarians enter the profession and are employed in mid- and entry-level positions, how can they learn the ropes? Obviously, on-the-job experience is a must. In addition, one of the best ways is through contacts with more

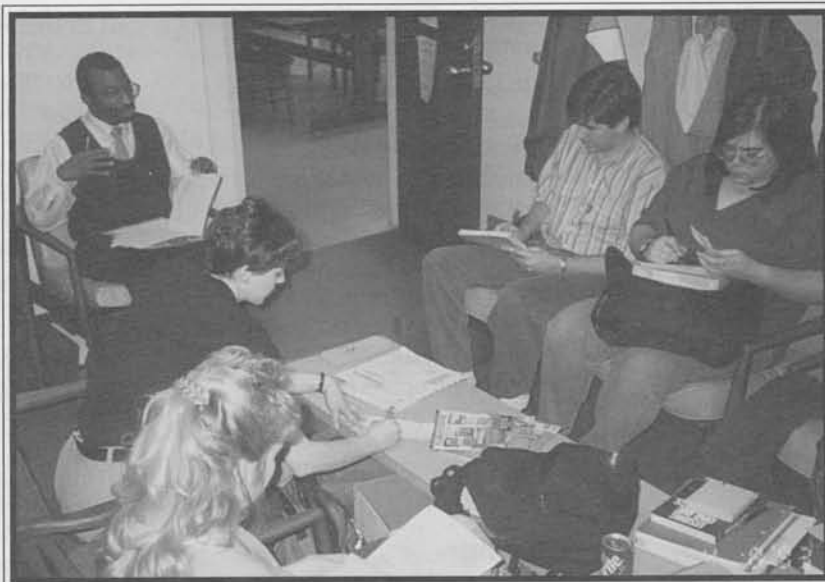
experienced professionals in library associations, whether specialized or geographically-centered groups. Librarians who advance from entry-level positions into middle and upper administrative positions frequently find that these associations and contacts are invaluable to their professional development.

While contemplating the idea of leadership, we consulted with Dr. Edward G. Holley, who retired in December 1995 from his position as William Rand Kenan, Jr., Professor in the School of Information and Library Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Dr. Holley responded with the advice that he received from his former teacher at the Peabody Library School in 1949:

In the introductory course he said that every new librarian should join three associations: the national association, ALA; the state association, Tennessee Library Association; and the regional association, Southeastern Library Association. Membership in the three associations would enable the graduate to keep up with developments in the field through attendance at conferences; meet other persons who might have ideas about solving current problems; and continue to learn about professional trends through the journals they published. That still seems to me excellent advice. I followed it, and wherever I moved I always made it a practice to join the relevant library associations.⁷

Programs and Services

NMRT has many programs and opportunities that can enrich the new librarian. NMRT's Library School Outreach Committee maintains a list of professional librarian volunteers willing to make presentations to library school students on the benefits of membership in ALA and,



NMRT Library School Outreach Committee, ALA-NMRT presentation to Kent State University and Information Science Students, April 8, 1993. From left to right: Adrienne Seba, Melizza Wagner, Gerald Holmes (presenter), Richard Brhel, Jolene Miller.

of course, NMRT. Members of the committee assemble current materials and information for use by these volunteers. NMRT volunteers relate well to these student groups since membership in the organization is limited to those librarians or students in library schools who have been members of ALA for ten years or less.

Other committees that are responsible for programs and services during the ALA midwinter and annual conferences include those in charge of the mentor program, the Students to ALA

participation by members leads to "membership-retention" in the organization.⁸ The quarterly newsletter, *NMRT Footnotes*, informs members of current developments, news about other members, career options and decisions, and announces future programs of interest to new professionals.

NMRT Career Support

Members also serve on NMRT committees that make awards and scholarships available. One example is the Olofson

Reception/Social, Exhibits Booth, Conference Orientation, the NMRT President's program, and publication of the conference newsletter, *Cognotes*. Each activity is designed to encourage full participation by library school students and new professionals during the conference. Those who feel the need for an advisor or mentor are encouraged to register for the mentor program during the annual conference. Susan Allen's article, "Special Attention to New Members Pays Off," reinforces the role that NMRT's commitment to active



NMRT Social, "Celebrating 60 in High Style," marked the sixtieth anniversary of the round table, July 1, 1991.

Past Presidents appearing left to right: Karin Ford, Mary Marcum Evans, Charles Kratz, Diane J. Graves, Marilyn Hinshaw, J. Linda Williams, June Breland, Beth Bingham, Fred Glazer, Nancy M. Bolt, Marvin H. Scilken, Myrtis Cochran Collins, C. David Warren.

Award, which provides money for a librarian to attend the annual conference. Recipients must have attended at least one, but no more than five, ALA annual conferences in order to qualify for the Shirley Anne Olofson Memorial Award. Established in memory of NMRT's former President, who was killed during her term in a tragic automobile accident, the award and endowment are made available through the generous support of OCLC.⁹

Another annual award administered by NMRT is the EBSCO/NMRT Scholarship, a \$1000 award toward a master's degree in a formal program of library education. Available through the generous support of EBSCO Subscription Services, the committee considers financial need, professional goals, and academic credentials before the winner is decided.

Finally, the 3M/NMRT Professional Development Grant is an annual award given to cover expenses of annual conference attendance, and to encourage professional development and participation by new librarians in national ALA and NMRT activities. A record of accomplishments in professional development is needed to qualify for this grant.

Membership in NMRT has been a definite asset in the professional career of its past presidents. For example, thirteen past presidents attended the ALA/NMRT Social during the 1991 Annual Conference in Atlanta. The event, "Celebrating 60 in High Style," marked the sixtieth anniversary of the round table. After the conference, several of the past presidents commented on the benefits they had realized as a result of active involvement in the organization. Two commented on NMRT's nurturing environment, which encourages creativity and vision.

Nancy M. Bolt, State Librarian and Assistant Commissioner for Libraries and Adult Education for the Colorado Department of Education, commented that the organization has been "invaluable to her in her career development."¹⁰ While an active member and President (1975-76) of JMRT, Nancy learned how ALA operates and how to get things done in the immense professional organization. She later became editor of *JMRT Footnotes* and served as President of the Public Library Association (PLA), as well as serving as a member of the ALA Executive Board and the ALA Council. Myrtis Cochran Collins, the Associate Librarian for Social Sciences at the University of California, Berkeley, was active in several JMRT offices before

becoming President (1989-90). Myrtis stated that she could

say with conviction that I am more confident and sure of myself when it comes to pursuing and taking on leadership roles in ALA, other professional organizations and in my current position. I attribute a lot of my professional growth to JMRT. When asked to run for JMRT President, I accepted because I wanted to give back to the new members of the organization what I felt was given to me.¹¹

Networking

Another comment focused on NMRT's encouragement of new members to network and meet new colleagues. Networking is defined as "the exchange of information or services among individuals, groups, or institutions."¹² Marilyn Hinshaw, Executive Director of the Eastern Oklahoma District Library System, commented on her career development after serving as JMRT President (1976-77).

JMRT gave me a network of contacts and the confidence to believe I could do just about anything I cared to do. The second job of my career was directly based on a contact within

JMRT. After that, the jobs were based on my experience, but it was critical to get that second job, which built and enlarged my experience. Both the network of friends and the confidence have played a prominent part in my library career.¹³

All of the comments emphasize the role that NMRT has played in the preparation of these individuals for leadership. Many of the librarians who pursue active involvement in professional library organizations early in their career benefit from actively learning and participating in the structure of the organization. Serving on committees and working closely with librarians on projects builds trust and enthusiasm for the project and the organization. The comfort and success of knowing that you completed the task or project and that you expanded your group of colleagues and friends is a fulfilling experience. Items that embellish resumes include completed projects within an organization and colleagues who can serve as references who will attest to the fact that you contributed to the success of the project while actively participating in the organization.

Conclusion

Membership in NMRT provides opportunities for new librarians to get involved in professional organizations. Membership also creates a desire to maintain active involvement in the organization. Individuals who enjoy working on joint projects, interacting with others in the profession, serving on committees, and assisting others in completing committee assignments can gain a great deal from NMRT activities.

These newcomers develop skills that will build confidence in their own abilities, while prompting others to participate and increase their involvement. New professionals typically are encouraged in their profession by the support shown for NMRT-sponsored programs by the library community. Ultimately, NMRT can be the first step in an exciting career full of opportunities



NMRT Board Leadership Development Breakfast, January 26, 1993. From left to right: Sharon A. Hogan, Candidate for ALA President and former NMRT member, Jennifer Abramson, 1992-93 NMRT President, and Elaine Yontz, Chair, 1992-93 NMRT Exhibitor Contact and Relations Committee.

for leadership and advancement in the library profession. To learn more about the opportunities within NMRT, the following addresses and telephone numbers will serve as your first step:

– for the State Association, contact the NMRT President of the North Carolina Library Association, c/o State Library of North Carolina, 109 East Jones Street, Raleigh, NC 27601-1023.

– for the Regional Association, contact the NMRT President of the Southeastern Library Association, c/o Joe Forsee, Director of the Division of Public Library Services, 156 Trinity Avenue, S.W., Atlanta, GA 30303-3600.

– for the National Association, contact the NMRT Staff Liaison at the American Library Association, 50 East Huron Street, Chicago, Illinois 60611 or call 1-800-545-2433.

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¹⁰ Marlena Ward, "Retrieving the Past," *NMRT Footnotes* 19 (January 1990): 1, 4.

¹¹ Myrtis Cochran Collins, Letter to authors, September 16, 1991.

¹² *Merriam Webster's Desk Dictionary*, 1995 ed., s.v. "networking."

¹³ Marilyn Hinshaw, Letter to authors, October 16, 1991.

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