

From the President

Dave Fergusson, President

Having served over one year as President, I would like to comment on both the health of NCLA, the best state association top to bottom in the country, and the directions in which we find ourselves headed. I am having a good time working with everyone, including the Executive Board and administrative assistant Marsha Wells, and I would love to hear from as many NCLA members as possible. I try to respond to each one — but I do not hear from *enough* members, so please contact me if you'd like at 910 727-2556 or d_fergusson@forsyth.lib.nc.us.

The good news is that we have 1,765 individual members doing great things to improve libraries and our profession in North Carolina. The bad news is that we *only* have 1,765 members - and we need more to remain active and effective.

You probably know by now that NCLA's financial health has not been particularly good during the past few years. Why? Costs of operating have increased, including the administrative and personnel costs associated with maintaining an office. Even with the State Library's generous provision of office space, these costs have risen as we have instituted essential new accounting procedures and the software needed to facilitate efficient tax accounting. Income has decreased as membership has slipped, but certain costs, such as the cost of our award-winning journal *North Carolina Libraries*, do not decrease with membership. The initial cost of a print run is the main determinant of cost; the journal is actually being printed very economically. For these reasons and others, including the possibility that membership renewals have been affected by the recent switch to annual dues, operating expenses overtook operating revenue.

As a result, Dr. Robert Burgin of NCCU was asked to head a Financial Vitality Committee, charged with finding solutions. His committee, working very closely with the Finance Committee headed by Teresa McManus, came up with both short and long term solutions. They are outlined in detail in the minutes from the January 17 Board meeting printed in the back of this issue. Some may seem more palatable than others, but they are aimed at spreading costs around so that all segments of NCLA have a healthy structure upon which to build their activities. They are also aimed at increasing the importance of membership.

As a member, you really should receive value for your investment. In addition to receiving one of the best quarterly library publications in the nation, you gain access to groups of members working very hard to improve and contribute to specific interests and types of libraries. One of the new recommendations assures that members will receive a substantially lower rate when registering for any NCLA-sponsored workshop or training session, the quality of which has remained consistently high. NCLA members work diligently to arrange these opportunities, and for that reason Association members should receive real value. Without the benefit of our mailing lists, bulk mailing permits, our non-profit status, available office help, and the Association's name and reputation, these sessions would be harder to find and less likely to satisfy folks' specific needs.

Sure, there are cheaper professional associations. I did the research. You can join ISOH (International Society of Olympics Historians) for \$15.00 a year. More typical are the \$75.00 a year dues for YABA (Yacht Architects & Brokers Association) or even the IFEC (International Foodservice Editorial Council) dues of \$225.00 a year. For \$25.00-35.00 a year, NCLA looks *very* good.

In today's competitive climate, it has proven difficult to conduct an inexpensive public awareness campaign. I hope that you have seen the televised pro-library public service announcement featuring Tim Duncan and Tony Rutland of the Wake Forest basketball team. (We have learned much this year: Beta-SP tapes cost about \$30.00, not the \$2.99 VHS costs; local stations are reluctant to run PSA's that do not feature their own "talent;" telling a specific message creatively is not easy; and finally, one needs GOBS of MONEY.) I believe that we really have only scratched the surface in communicating the library "story" — explaining the potential value of all libraries to our users. As difficult as it will be, it must be done. No one else will do it, and getting the message out will affect the value realized by our patrons, as well as our own survival. You may be asked to do more in your area in the future.

Whew! I seem to have written a lot and left out a lot. The Association has finally taken judicious steps to alter its governance structure in the near future. The Biennial Conference in Raleigh, **Choose Quality: Choose Libraries**, October 8-10, is looking great. You will be voting on new officers and perhaps some changes in the Constitution and Bylaws soon. We can be proud of our inaugural Leadership Institute. I have cleaned out the treasury and bought a nice vacation condo in Aruba. *Just kidding* — were you paying attention? The Association is really making great progress. It only needs you and more like you. Convince every fellow librarian, paraprofessional, or trustee that you know to join. We need their ideas to keep growing. We do not want to lose anyone.