

From the President

Pauletta Brown Bracy, President

Productive Engagement in Literacy

I welcome this quarterly opportunity to speak with the membership. As announced in the inaugural address, my biennial agenda will be characterized by “Productive Engagement.” In that regard, I expect to share with you important developments as this four-part agenda unfolds. Also, flexibility will prevail as any other pertinent matters exemplifying the initiative as revealed in professional productivity will be addressed. For this edition, I want to describe an organizational development of which I am most proud. The most recent roundtable added to our governance is the Literacy Roundtable which evolved from a very active Literacy Committee.

My most active involvement in NCLA began with membership on the Literacy Committee a few years ago. Concurrent with that service was leadership in the Durham County Literacy Council. A most memorable and cherished experience was my tutorial relationship with Bill, a middle-aged, especially conscientious adult learner. We met weekly and shared the joys of acquired reading skills and knowledge. My sensitivities about the plight of new readers were heightened and I resolved to maintain this social issue with its far-reaching educational and economic ramifications as a personal priority.

Statistics about our national literacy rates are abundant yet consistent in conveying the gravity of this challenge. Regarding the workforce, at least 50% of the unemployed are functionally illiterate, according to the U.S. Department of Labor. Children’s issues are distressing. The U.S. Department of Education (USDE) asserts that the average kindergarten student has seen more than 5,000 hours of television, having spent more time than is spent earning a bachelor’s degree. And, when we consider reading, the USDE pronounces that 44% of all American adults do not read one book in the course of a year.

A part of the Association’s mission is to promote literacy. And, a fine example of “productive engagement” is the Literacy Roundtable. Not only was the literacy effort raised in status from committee to roundtable, but an award was established to recognize an individual who has demonstrated a tremendously broad and stellar commitment to the cause of eradicating illiteracy. The charter recipient of the NCLA Literacy Award is Steve Sumerford, Assistant Director and Coordinator of Community Libraries and Development at the Greensboro Public Library (GPL). He has been active locally as a creator of new English as a Second Language and new English-speaker programs. His prolific grantsmanship has led to national programs of which GPL has prominently benefited. His national activities include chairmanship of the National Literacy Assembly of the American Library Association (ALA)’s Office of Literacy and Outreach Services, and the ALA Libraries Build Sustainable Communities Committee.

We applaud Sumerford’s contributions and realize how his “productive engagement” reminds us of those poignant statistics to which each is attached to a human being. Each one can be helped in some library, *somewhere in this state*, through a vital library literacy program, or an effervescent storyhour, or an irresistible collection of just *good* reading. Steve Sumerford is a model for us all.