

Library Advocacy Day

by Toni Cox

This past April, I was privileged to be in the first cohort of the Virginia Library Leadership Academy (VALLA). I and twenty-two other librarians from around the state walked into the English Inn in Charlottesville and were treated to two days of instruction from Dr. Robert Burgin, past faculty member of the School of Library and Information Sciences at North Carolina Central University. For this intense forty-eight-hour journey, we ate together, walked together, and learned from each other and our esteemed instructor, who led us to explore questions such as Who are some leaders you admire? At the end of the program, we were introduced to our mentors, various

librarians in leadership positions throughout Virginia. A panel of leaders including VLA President

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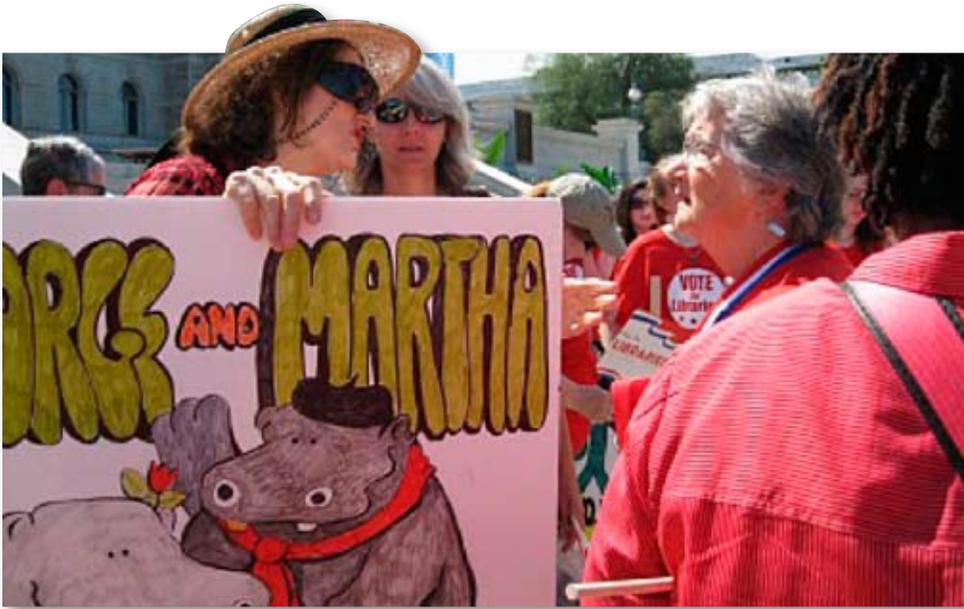
John Moorman and Librarian of Virginia Sandra Treadway made themselves available for questions.

In order to complete our induction into the cohort, we all selected

projects that would challenge us and move us forward. I selected attending Library Advocacy Day, June 29, 2010, to be held after the ALA convention at the Capitol in Washington DC. Librarians from across the country contacted their state coordinator to register for this event. Kevin Smith was the Virginia coordinator. He asked me to make an appointment to speak with my representative, Rick Boucher. I did so with trepidation, having never attempted anything as important as this. I've written letters to the paper and emails to Rick Boucher,

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Lynda Johnson Robb and Toni Cox with author Katherine Paterson. Photograph by Mary Brigid Barrett, The National Children's Book and Literacy Alliance. Reprinted with permission.

but speaking to him person-to-person was not something I would normally do. Still, Smith assured me that he would provide us with talking points from ALA; and the coordinator for VALLA, Elizabeth Hensley, encouraged me to push into my level of discomfort and great things could come of it.

So I made the journey alone from southwestern Virginia. It took me five hours to drive through thunderstorms and traffic. Since I made reservations barely a month before the journey, I was short on options, but managed to find a budget hotel, the Wolf Trap in Vienna. Friendly service and a nice mattress made my stay enjoyable. Close to the motel was, of course, a public library: the Patrick Henry Library of Fairfax County. This was a very busy place to be Monday evening at 7:00 p.m. The space, though small, was quite efficient, tucking information into every corner. Although the library was packed with people, I was dismayed to see the hours would soon be reduced; starting July 1, the library would close at 6:00 p.m. I hoped these would be summer hours only.

The next morning, I faced the adventure of parking and riding



in the metro from Vienna to DC. Forty minutes later, I exited Union Station and was treated to the streets of DC and a pleasant, balmy eighty-five degrees. Having worn long sleeves in an attempt to be formal (how do those men in suits do it?), I quickly started honing in on places to shop for short sleeves. The Library of Congress beckoned to me, a sacred, hallowed place of

quiet—the library of all libraries. I only had an hour before the rally, so I quickly located Thomas Jefferson's library, encased in glass, ancient books all, and then headed onward to the bookstore.

With a short-sleeved shirt now on, I exited the Library of Congress, where I happened upon a group of librarians sporting beautiful posters with children's book illustra-



tions and red shirts with the slogan “Vote for Libraries.” I approached the group, asking if this was where I would sign in to participate in Library Advocacy Day. A friendly woman took me into the fold and introduced herself as Lynda Robb. She then took me around to meet not one, but two famous authors, Steven Kellogg and Katherine Paterson. At that moment, my trip from southwestern Virginia was worth the travel time. My serendipitous stumble into this delegation’s march is something I will never be able to recreate. (This active group was the National Children’s Book and Literacy Alliance.)

We all marched to join thou-

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sands of librarians who had gathered by the fountain near the Capitol. When we got to the rally, frequently banned young adult author Lauren Myracle was there reading from her book *Violet in Bloom* (coming out this fall). Myr-

acle represents one of the authors whom libraries make available despite their controversial subjects.

Outgoing ALA President Camila Alire was there to work the crowd into activists shouting “We’re going to tell them” and marching into Congressional offices yards from the event. Rhode Island Senator Jack Reed and Michigan Congressman Vernon Ehlers both spoke on the importance of libraries and how the expense of ignorance far outweighs the expense of libraries. They discussed the disastrous effects of No Child Left Behind and how they are hopeful that this year’s revamped bill, the Elementary and Secondary Educa-



Senator Jack Reed with Steven Kellogg and the Children's Delegation

tion Act, will require each school to have a certified librarian.

The last stop, a visit to Rayburn, marked the end of my first trip to ALA. I was able to meet with Rich Boucher. He gave me five minutes of his time, and I handed him the folder from ALA's Office of Government Relations. He assured me that his office supports libraries. At the end of my visit, I was able to make it safely back home to Christiansburg, having traveled ten hours for an adventure-packed visit to the Capitol and what will, I hope, be the first of many to ALA. **VI**

