

OPENERS

Passing the Torch in the Virginia Library Association Office

by Cy Dillon

In February 2011, VLA Executive Director Linda Hahne has been cleaning out files, moving box after box of material, and making sure that Lisa Varga, our new executive director, has her questions answered as she assumes the many responsibilities that go along with the title.

Linda, who had been a leading member of VLA's Paraprofessional Forum while she was business manager of the Norfolk Public Library, accepted the role of treasurer (with pay) for the association in January 1997. This unusual turn of events was the result of a financial crisis diagnosed by President John Stewart, President-Elect Liz Chabot, and the other officers in late 1996. They realized that VLA needed someone with highly developed business skills and absolute personal integrity to guide the organization's finances at a time when there was less than twenty thousand dollars in the treasury and the possibility of discovering more unpaid bills. Linda's energy level was also a good match for the situation. During her years working full-time for Norfolk Public Library, she raised two sons and finished degrees at Tidewater Community College and St. Joseph's College, and still had time to be active in VLA.

Because the officers were pleased with the first few months of Linda's work and because she was in the process of retiring from Norfolk Public, where she had worked since



Linda Hahne

1965, Linda was asked to take on the role of executive director in the spring of 1997. While she continued to do consulting work for NPL through 1998, Linda turned most of her energy toward making VLA solvent, and realized that having a successful annual conference was the key to financial health. The 1997 conference in Northern Virginia was a profitable one for VLA, but it also had one of Hahne's most anxious moments when a fire alarm interrupted the meeting and threatened to completely disrupt the schedule. In future years there would be other fire



Lisa Varga

alarms, a fire marshal visit, and the memorable day at the Homestead when the nametag holders didn't arrive until hours after registration. Through all this, Linda held things together, and made both the VLA Annual Conference and the VLA Paraprofessional Forum Conference events that satisfied association members and helped build VLA's cash reserves. She rates the Williamsburg Marriott as her favorite conference venue, but also enjoyed the Homestead and Koger Center.

Linda lists the 2003 VLA Annual Conference, when she received the

George Mason Award, as her most memorable VLA event, but the people and relationships over the years are the thing she will miss most in her retirement. She will not miss the stress of preparing for conferences, even though she sees making these meetings financially successful as her most satisfying accomplishment with VLA. It is worth mentioning that Linda's tenure also saw difficult budget years for libraries that reduced our membership and made financing VLA legislative advocacy and VLA scholarships very difficult at times. In fact, we lost the scholarship corporate sponsors over the years as the library marketplace became more difficult for all participants,

but the scholarships continue and so does an active advocacy program with a first-rate legislative liaison.

Lisa R. Varga has been named VLA's new executive director. Lisa has an MLS from Rutgers University, and she worked for Thompson & Thompson (now Thompson CompuMark), a division of Thompson Gale, before relocating to Fredericksburg in 2001. In Virginia, Lisa has worked as children's librarian at the Central Rappahannock Regional Library's Salem Church Branch, and became head of human resources and staff training for the CRRL in 2005. An active presenter at the VLA Annual Conference, Lisa is now facilitating

statewide training in technology in libraries in partnership with the Library of Virginia. We are fortunate to have Lisa to continue a tradition of sound and stable leadership for the association, and we can only wish that her first annual conference has no fire alarm and a keynote speaker who arrives on time.

When asked how she feels about the challenge ahead, Lisa says, "I am thrilled to be part of such a wonderful organization, and look forward to providing VLA members with the same level of outstanding customer service they are used to receiving from Linda Hahne." **VL**