



A Year Unlike Any Other: A Letter to VLA's Membership

ESSAYS/COMMENTARY

JENNIFER RESOR-WHICKER 

**VIRGINIA TECH.**
PUBLISHING

ABSTRACT

In this President's letter to the Virginia Library Association membership, the author reflects on a challenging year. We saw libraries across Virginia close in the spring as we tried to stop the spread of COVID-19 in our communities. COVID-19 has changed a lot about how we deliver services in libraries, but it has not changed our mission or our desire to serve our communities. And while many of VLA's events, including the 2020 Annual Conference, had to be cancelled, VLA continued to move new initiatives and projects forward, including changes to the structure of the Lifetime Membership award, new affiliation with the Black Caucus of the American Library Association, approval of a new VLA logo, and the awarding of the 2020 VLA Presidential Citation. The author closes with an invitation to VLA members to the 2021 VLA Annual Conference in October.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Jennifer Resor-Whicker

Radford University, US

jrwhicker@radford.edu

KEYWORDS:

libraries; professional associations; community

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Resor-Whicker, Jennifer. "A Year Unlike Any Other: A Letter to VLA's Membership." *Virginia Libraries* 65, no. 1 (2021): 1, pp. 1-3. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21061/valib.v65i1.613>



Photo of Jennifer Resor-Whicker.

Dear VLA colleagues and friends,

This year has been a year unlike any other. Many of VLA's events, including the 2020 Annual Conference, had to be cancelled. With the exception of the January meeting, we had to move all of our Executive Committee and Council meetings online. Many events scheduled by VLA's committees and forums also had to move online. We saw libraries across Virginia close in the spring as we tried to stop the spread of COVID-19 in our communities.

COVID-19 has changed a lot about how we deliver services in libraries, but it has not changed our mission or our desire to serve our communities. We did our best to try to work from home during a crisis. We did our best balancing our many different roles as our home and work lives intertwined. We did our best to work with reduced staff. We did our best to find new and creative ways to meet the needs our patrons, sometimes with shrinking resources. I hope we all learned and accepted that our best was good enough as we tried to meet our commitments and accomplish all we needed to while also dealing with the mental and emotional toll of a global pandemic and the extent of systemic racism exposed by the Black Lives Matter movement. This has been a hard year for us all.

Through all of this, VLA continued to work behind the scenes. We made changes to the structure of the Lifetime Membership Award. This award is now decided on by the Executive Committee and not by a vote of the VLA membership. We decided to make this change because once one VLA member votes for the Lifetime Membership

nominee, they are granted this honor. Restructuring this award allows it to be decided on in April instead of August. Since this is awarded at the conference it helps to have it decided earlier for planning purposes.

The Executive Committee also restructured conference discounts. All VLA Council Chairs, members of the VLA Executive Committee, and members of the Conference Committee will receive a discount code for \$75 off their conference fees for the year(s) in which they are serving the Association. All presenters will also receive a discount of \$75. This includes up to two presenters per session, up to two presenters per poster, and up to two presenters per lighting talk.

After everything shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we began holding VLA Zoomversations as a way for VLA members to connect, network, and discuss what is going on in our libraries. We used the June 3 Zoomversation to curate an anti-racism reading list we posted along with a statement on racism and violence.¹

The VLA Council approved a new VLA logo. Thanks to the hard work of the VLA Librarians of Color Forum, we became an affiliate of the Black Caucus of American Library Association. In September, the VLA Council approved a Library of the Year Award that will be awarded for the first time in 2021.

I also had the privilege of issuing a VLA Presidential Citation. The 2020 VLA Presidential Citation goes to Kristi Jerome at Longwood University. The citation reads:

As Chair of the VLA Professional Associates Forum, Kristi spearheaded an effort to connect Professional Associates from all over the Commonwealth to meet and gather at Regional Workshops. This project was intended to connect library staff at a variety of libraries and in a host of positions to discuss workplace issues and share in continuing education experiences. In a time of constant change, Kristi kept the mission of the VLA Professional Associates Forum in focus, revising the bylaws of the group to more accurately reflect our current leadership landscape. In recognition of her service to the Virginia Library Association and to the VLA Professional Associates Forum, this VLA Presidential Citation is issued to Kristi Jerome.

I want to thank this year's Executive Committee and Council for all of their hard work. They continued to work for VLA under very trying conditions. Their dedication to Virginia libraries and the VLA membership is what makes VLA such a great organization.

This has been an unprecedented year for VLA. Joslyn Bowling Dixon was the 2021 VLA President, however,

in July 2020 she was named the Director of the Newark Public Library in New Jersey. I congratulate Joslyn on her new position. We definitely miss having her here, but we know she will do great things in New Jersey. At the request of the Executive Committee, I will again serve as your VLA President in 2021, and will also take on the duties of the VLA Past-President for 2021. I am honored to continue to serve VLA in this capacity, and I look forward to what this year has to offer.

In closing, I would like to invite everyone to join us for the 2021 VLA Annual Conference. It will be held at the Richmond Marriott in downtown Richmond, October 27–29, 2021. Tracy McPeck of the Central Rappahannock Regional Library will be the 2021 Conference Chair. I encourage everyone to think about what types of programs you would like to present for the conference. The call for proposals will go out at the beginning of 2021. Our keynote

speaker will be journalist and author Beth Macy. Her books include *Factory Man* and *Dopesick*. I look forward to seeing everyone in Richmond in October.

Take care,
Jennifer Resor-Whicker
VLA President and VLA Past-President

NOTE

- 1 “Anti-Racism Reading List.” *VLA.org*, June 2020. <https://www.vla.org/anti-racism-reading-list>.

AUTHOR AFFILIATION

Jennifer Resor-Whicker  orcid.org/0000-0002-8412-2974
Radford University, US

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Resor-Whicker, Jennifer. “A Year Unlike Any Other: A Letter to VLA’s Membership.” *Virginia Libraries* 65, no. 1 (2021): 1, pp. 1–3. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21061/valib.v65i1.613>

Submitted: 05 January 2021 Accepted: 26 January 2021 Published: 28 April 2021

COPYRIGHT:

© 2021 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

Virginia Libraries is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by VT Publishing.