

Celebrate Library Workers

Advocate for better salaries and support ALA-APA

by Jim Rettig

National Library Week will be celebrated April 12–18 this year. Tuesday of that week, April 14, is National Library Workers Day (tinyurl.com/akmrfu).

This isn't a Hallmark holiday with commercially generated greeting cards from grateful library patrons to library staff. But library workers who enjoy creating their own cards may want to make some for their colleagues. In other words, this is a little-known commemorative day, to date, for ourselves by ourselves.

National Library Workers Day is promoted by the American Library Association–Allied Professional Association (ALA-APA): The Organization for the Advancement of Library Employees (www.ala-apa.org).

When I have asked audiences at library conferences how many know about ALA-APA, perhaps 5% raise their hands. Created in 2001 to carry out two roles that lie outside ALA's tax-exempt status, ALA-APA was designed to develop certification programs and to advocate for better compensation for all library workers. ALA-APA Director Jenifer Grady explains that "ALA is for what people do. APA is for who people are."

Library workers are service-oriented. Our focused attention on the needs of those we serve all too often

eclipses attention to our own needs and advocacy for our own interests. ALA-APA works to advance those interests.

The shared vision of three ALA divisions to create a post-MLS public library administrator certification program provided the impetus to create ALA-APA. The program is growing gradually with 114 candidates to date and nine graduates who have earned certification. Participants praise the program for the increased knowledge and self-confidence they have gained. A complementary certification program for library support staff enters field testing this year. These programs have been designed as a service to interested library workers and as sources of organization revenue.

ALA-APA's practical tools help library workers be their own advocates. The Better Salaries Toolkit (tinyurl.com/af7ond) and programs on pensions, employee relations, and more during ALA Annual Conferences build confidence and can

make a difference.

Sources of revenue for ALA-APA are the public library administrator certification program, librarian and library support staff salary surveys, and subscriptions to the monthly online newsletter *Library Worklife*, which offers practical information on labor and workplace issues, such as interview blunders, the gender wage gap,

and performance management.

To expand and fulfill its advocacy role, ALA-APA needs additional resources. Personal donations are another revenue stream; alas, they are not tax-deductible. The organization's newest venture, an online store (tinyurl.com/bj8bpz), offers tote bags, T-shirts, and more to carry the message that "Libraries Work Because We Do."

Controversy has attended ALA-APA since its inception. It has not yet become the financially robust organization envisioned in its initial business plan. However, other than individual action on one's own behalf and collective action by local unions, it is the only organization we have to advocate for better compensation. Budget cuts have hit libraries as the economy has declined, with more cuts in the offing. Now more than ever, we need an organization that makes the case for our value as workers. If ALA-APA, the organization created to do just that, is to thrive and fulfill its founders' vision, it needs support from library workers.

Send cards if you wish on National Library Workers Day, but also take action. Send a contribution to ALA-APA, shop its store, purchase a personal or institutional subscription to *Library Worklife*, or at the very least ask your coworkers if they know about ALA-APA and its purpose. If they don't, tell them. It's not a secret. ■

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