

Sticking to Practical Predictions

by Andrew Waller

Keynote speakers at library conferences often play "soothsayer," discussing what libraries will be like in the future. Pronouncements are made with firm conviction and certitude that libraries will head in one direction or another or will disappear altogether.

At this year's Saskatchewan Library Association conference, University of Regina library director Bill Maes was specifically charged with playing the role of visionary, speaking on the future of libraries in Saskatchewan. Though Mr. Maes was a fortune teller of sorts, he took a sensible "middle-ground," one likely close to reality for the library workers in attendance. He stated plainly that he does not know what the future of libraries in the province will be. He suggested rather than proclaimed directions for Saskatchewan libraries and posed questions that people involved in libraries will have to ask themselves as they move into the

future.

For instance, among many points, Mr. Maes stressed more than once that all libraries do not have the same mandate, something which can both help and hinder inter-library cooperation in the province. As well, much of his address focused on the Multi-Type Library System (MTLS), explaining how it might be a framework for the future of Saskatchewan libraries. He also noted that the state of libraries in years to come depends on the answer to a simple question: are libraries worth the money? He ended with a statement of confidence in libraries, saying that he feels that they are in good hands.

There were six "follow-up" speakers to Bill Maes. They responded to Mr. Maes' address and contributed worthwhile thoughts of their own.

Economist Peter Phillips from the University of Saskatchewan presented a detailed picture of the economy of the province and discussed the

implications of this economic situation to libraries in Saskatchewan.

Lynn Oliver, a government of Saskatchewan telecommunications policy analyst, talked about the lure of technology (technology should enhance services, not replace), access issues, information literacy, and the role of libraries. She also made a notable point about how people involved in libraries should not ignore policies made in related fields, such as telecommunications.

Margaret Baldock from the University of Saskatchewan library looked at the keynote topic from the perspective of a university library. She stressed cooperation in her remarks and reinforced Bill Maes' comments on the different mandates of libraries and how this matters when dealing with issues of change and cooperation.

A more personal touch was added by Ken Pontikes, the deputy minister in the Department of Municipal Government. He talked about his past experience of community libraries. As well, he echoed previous comments about technology, saying that it is a means to an end, not an end in itself.

Allan Johnson from Southeast Regional Library was the final speaker. He stressed that libraries should be about the delivery of services to people, wherever they happen to live, and that the people who receive the services should be the reward.

Saskatchewan Bibliography First Supplement

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