Library Council of NSW – President’s message

The State Library of NSW has seen a transformative year of engagement with supporters who value this wonderful Library. Our Foundation benefactors, staff, Friends, volunteers and the broader community have demonstrated their commitment to opening up the Library to all, and continuing this institution’s role as a home of learning, research and creativity in NSW.

We are grateful to the NSW Government for its ongoing support for the Library’s collections and services and especially for its ten-year commitment to the Digital Excellence Program which is placing the State Library at the forefront of Australian cultural institutions.

STRONG SUPPORT

This year we celebrated the 25th anniversary of the State Library of NSW Foundation. Over these years the Foundation has raised $30 million for the Library, a marvellous achievement that has supported new acquisitions, preservation of heritage material, exhibitions, education outreach and digitisation.

Through its anniversary campaign, the Foundation invited supporters to take part in the vital restoration of the Mitchell building. By ‘sponsoring’ a chair or study table in the Mitchell Library Reading Room, donors have made it possible to restore this grand heritage space to be used and appreciated by researchers, students and the general public.

The exhibition Artist Colony: Drawing Sydney’s Nature was generously supported by the Bealberi Foundation and collection partners TAL & Dai-ichi Life and the NSW Government. This successful exhibition, accompanied by curator Louise Anemaat’s book Natural Curiosity, drew 30,000 visitors.

In April 2014 the State Library announced a partnership with News Corp Australia that has seen the two organisations work together to inspire a modern worldwide audience through access to the Library’s extraordinary collection of World War I diaries. The landmark three-year partnership will encompass digital and print media, tours to regional NSW and curriculum-based learning resources.

The Foundation has also provided seed funding for the acquisition of major additions to the collection including the Rose de Freycinet journal and letters documenting her voyage around the world from 1817 to 1820, and the exquisite Dutch map...
Nova Tabula, Insularum Iavae, Sumatrae (1598).

These new additions enhance the Library’s premier collection relating to early exploration.

Our volunteers have contributed 11,874 hours on a range of projects. A dedicated group has continued to transcribe World War I diaries; a number of volunteers have assisted with sorting and listing collection material such as architectural plans, photographic negatives, and oral history recordings. Another group has led exhibition and History & Heritage tours for 2172 Library visitors. Volunteers provided event and administration assistance, and acted as hosts in exhibitions and the Shakespeare Room. We sincerely thank them for enhancing the Library in so many ways.

PREMIER DESTINATION
Following the establishment of the Indigenous Services branch in 2013, the Library is becoming an important venue for sharing research into Indigenous languages and celebrating Indigenous culture. Next year will see the conclusion of the flagship Rediscovering Indigenous Languages project supported by Rio Tinto. The Library hosted the Hidden Gems symposium in August 2013, which explored the role of libraries and archives in the revitalisation of Indigenous languages and culture. The symposium achieved national and international media coverage. As part of Corroboree Sydney 2013 in November, the Library held a well-received ‘pop-up’ Corroboree Lounge where festival-goers could meet and discover local languages and family history links.

The Library’s vibrant awards program continues to bring together writers and readers to celebrate and promote excellence in literature and history. Gala events were held in September 2013 and May 2014 to announce the NSW Premier’s History Awards and Literary Awards. An exciting initiative, Going Places: Authors on Tour, was launched with the Copyright Agency’s support for a program of tours by award-winning authors to public libraries in regional NSW.

The Digital Excellence Program, in the second year of its decade-long plan, has continued to make outstanding progress in strengthening the Library as a pre-eminent online destination. This year the Library’s website attracted over five million visits, a rise of 20% since last year.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
The Library Council would like to thank our IFLA Honorary Fellow, State Librarian and Chief Executive Dr Alex Byrne. Alex’s vision, drive, clarity and dedication to this Library have carried us forward during the past year and will continue to do so. Our thanks also go to the staff of the Library — their knowledge, passion and care for our collections continue to enhance the State Library’s position as the leading cultural institution in NSW and as a national leader.

My personal thanks to the Library Council members who have supported this great Library and to the Foundation Board members who have helped raise much needed funds. My heartfelt thanks also to our generous donors and supporters, without whom we would not have been able to make such significant acquisitions, pursue so many important projects and begin our work on the Mitchell building.

I have had the privilege of being a member of the Library Council of NSW for the past eight years, and President for seven of those years. During that exhilarating time, I have learned so much about our great institution and the role that libraries play in the general community. Australian history and the development of this country can never be properly understood without reference to our collections. But of equal importance is the critical role that the 369 public libraries play in their communities. No community can prosper without a library to support it with so many services, no great city can be without a great library.

Digitisation and the eRecords project have achieved so much in providing access to the resources of the Library but there is still so much to be done. I have no doubt that our digital achievements will be mirrored by the very necessary redevelopment of our buildings and the construction of long-term storage for our unparalleled collection. Those plans are not only essential but also make real commercial sense and will in turn lead to another wave of exciting transformation for this amazing State Library.

Rob Thomas AM
President, Library Council of NSW