National Library Week: A Law Firm Teaching Opportunity

BY KAREN B. BRUNNER

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National Library Week, proclaimed by President Eisenhower in 1958, is observed every April by libraries of all kinds throughout the United States. Sponsored by the American Library Association (ALA), it is a time to celebrate what libraries are all about. A theme is developed by the ALA Public Information Office, which also places articles and public service announcements in national media. ALA Graphics offers posters, bookmarks and other support materials for sale.

Public and school libraries have traditionally been the strongest supporters of National Library Week. The Special Libraries Association (SLA) offered its first publicity kit for celebrating National Library Week in 1990. The purpose was to assist special libraries in conducting activities that would focus the public’s attention on special libraries and the work of special librarians. SLA went a step further in 1991 by creating International Special Libraries Day, one day during National Library Week. The purpose of International Special Libraries Day is for special librarians around the world to pay tribute to the global partnerships they have formed and are continuing to form with colleagues across the seas. A separate theme is selected and promotional materials are developed to assist special librarians in celebrating the day.

National Library Week is primarily used to call attention to librarians and what they do. ALA themes in recent years have emphasized the role librarians play in providing information. For example, the theme in 1989 was “Ask a Professional. Ask Your Librarian.” Unlike many themes of the past, themes that emphasize the role of the librarian lend themselves to use in public relations efforts by libraries of all types. Yet, how many law libraries conduct annual celebrations of National Library Week?

I initiated National Library Week celebrations at Riker, Danzig, Scherer, Hyland & Perretti in 1986, several months after I joined the firm as library manager. We used the ALA theme “Get a Headstart at Your Library” and made our own bookmarks featuring the theme and names of materials found in the library. Since we were doing it for the first time, we limited our celebration to inviting every employee of the firm to join us for refreshments of home-baked goods and punch. The party was such a success that we received full financial support for the celebration the following year. Each year we continue our tradition of sending a personal written invitation to every employee of the firm asking them to join us for an afternoon of refreshments, games and information sharing. We use ALA and SLA materials and complement them with ideas of our own. For example, the year our library acquired an online catalog, our theme was “RDH&P Online” and we conducted continuous training sessions on the use of the catalog.

A major goal for me each year is to offer something for everyone while trying to incorporate a learning experience of some kind into the activities. Library staff members make up quizzes related to library materials that are geared to levels appropriate for both legal and non-legal staff of the firm. When appropriate, we emphasize special features of the library. The year the library moved into a new facility, we distributed maps and offered tours during the celebration.

Each year the invited guests include law librarians from nearby law libraries. Through the years, several other New Jersey firm librarians have started a tradition of celebrating National Library Week. Some have come to RDH&P parties and have been inspired to do something at their firm. But for some people, the ideas never become a reality. The two most common excuses given for this are lack of time and insufficient creativity.

In 1993, implementing a National Library Week event will be easier than ever before. For the first time, law librarians will have materials available to them designed for this purpose. The Research Instruction Caucus (RIC) of the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) is sponsoring a National Legal Research Teach-In during National Library Week, April 18-24, 1993. The theme is “RIP into Research: Research is Process.” With support from West Publishing and Mead Data Central, and the hard work of many dedicated law librarians, posters, bookmarks and research training kits will be available free to anyone who asks for them. RIC encourages every law librarian to get involved by sponsoring a training event at some time during National Library Week.

A training event can be whatever you want it to be. Use your imagination. If you have never
recognized National Library Week in your firm, it may be necessary to start small. Perhaps an article in the library or firm newsletter explaining National Library Week will be a good place to start. Follow up the article by inviting people to come to the library at a particular time one day of National Library Week. At that time, serve refreshments and distribute quizzes. People will enjoy talking as they try to complete the quiz and partake of the refreshments. Offer prizes to anyone who does well on the quiz. Vendors are a good source for prizes - everyone likes a new pen, mug or desk gadget. Those who come to the celebration will leave with a feeling that the library is a fun, comfortable place to be.

More elaborate teaching events could include conducting a seminar each day of National Library Week. One day could be a session for legal secretaries explaining what the secret is to legal citations and how to use everyday sources such as Martindale-Hubbell. A seminar for paralegals could focus on how the federal government works and what sources are generated by it. Attorney seminars could include a range of topics from administrative law to various subject areas such as environmental or tax law. If the firm is not open to holding optional seminars, try to arrange for a regularly scheduled session, such as a research skills update for second-year associates, to take place during National Library Week.

The training kits available from RIC contain ideas that will enable you to design an appropriate event for your setting. Take advantage of the work done by others and use it to draw attention to your library and staff. Emphasize the skills law librarians possess. National Library Week is the ultimate public relations opportunity. Be a part of it and make it work for you. You will be surprised at the results and will find it is not nearly as hard as you think. It is a chance for the library staff to get involved and be creative. Everyone will benefit from it.

With your help, RIC will be able to offer more support for National Library Week activities in 1994. We want to hear from you about your event. So, after it is over, give me a call to tell me what you did and how it worked out.