

Friends of the Oberlin College Library Annual Dinner

November 3, 2012

Introductory Remarks by Ray English

Welcome back everyone. It's a great pleasure for me to introduce Molly Raphael, Oberlin Class of 1967. At the end of June of this year Molly finished her one-year term as President of the American Library Association. She then became the Immediate Past President. For those of you who watched the Olympics this summer, being Immediate Past President of ALA – as we librarians refer to the association – is a bit like taking a victory lap after you have finished a great race. The really big event is over, but you do still have to keep moving.

As ALA's president in 2011-12 Molly was the chief elected officer of the oldest and largest library organization in the world. ALA has approximately 61,000 members. Its mission is to provide leadership for the development, promotion, and improvement of library and information services and the profession of librarianship in order to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all.

As someone who followed Molly's work closely, I can tell you that she did an absolutely stellar job in carrying out that mission as ALA's president. She was an avid advocate for libraries in a wide variety of contexts. Her work included interviews and speaking engagement both in this country and abroad in which she made the case for the importance of libraries and the support they deserve. Her writings, such as her blog posts for *The Huffington Post* and at a site hosted by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation,

addressed significant library issues, such as the reluctance of some publishers to license electronic books to libraries. Her presidential initiative focused on offering a wide variety of resources and support for libraries that will help them engage more effectively with their communities.

As you might guess, serving as President has not been her only contribution to ALA. She served on both the association's Executive Board and on the ALA Council as well as numerous association-wide committees. She was also president of the Library Leadership and Management Association, one of ALA's major divisions. Early in career she founded ALA's forum on library services for the deaf.

Molly's 40-year career in public libraries culminated in her service as director of the Multnomah County Library in Portland, Oregon from 2003-2009. The largest public library in the state of Oregon, Multnomah received – under her leadership – the National Medal from the Institute for Museum and Library Services, the nation's highest honor for libraries. The award was in recognition of the Multnomah library's literacy programs and its outreach to language communities. Earlier in her career Molly held progressively responsible positions at the District of Columbia Public Library, serving as director of that library system from 1997 to 2003.

Molly has received several awards and honors throughout her distinguished career. They include the Alumni Achievement Award from Simmons College, where she earned her MLIS, and the Arthur Fleming Civil Rights Award for her work at Multnomah County to increase diversity within the library system.

I'm proud to say that Molly has been engaged with the Oberlin College Library for many years. She served on the Friends Council from 1997-2003 and played a major role in organizing our Alumni Librarian Conference, which was held here in 1999. Over the years she has been extraordinarily gracious in hosting receptions for Oberlin alumni at ALA conferences and in hosting Oberlin students who were interested in library careers for both winter term and summer internships in Washington and Portland. Molly also assisted us in kicking off the Oberlin Community Big Read in the fall of 2010.

Tonight Molly will be speaking about the status and future of America's libraries and also some of the issues she's worked on as ALA's president.

Please join me in giving a warm welcome back to Oberlin to Molly Raphael.