

## MSLA: An Evolving Organization



Pat Fontes, Nashoba Regional High School

*Editor's note: Pat stepped down in June after serving 20 years on the MSLA Executive Board, most recently as co-chair of the Legislation/Advocacy Committee.*

My start with our state organization was very rocky. When I moved back to Massachusetts in 1984, it was the dark ages before the Internet and I had no idea how to locate the state organization for school librarians. I did not know if such an organization even existed. Later, I finally got a name for the elusive organization – Massachusetts Association for Educational Media. No wonder I couldn't connect since neither "school" nor "library" was a part of the name!

I joined up in 1985 and could hardly wait to attend my first conference, but it was almost my last. It was in a Chicopee motel. One session was actually in a motel room; I sat in the back of the room – behind the bed!

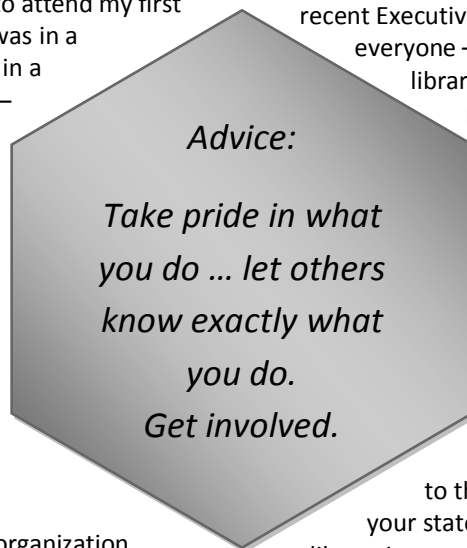
I tried one more conference and it went much better, so I stuck with MAEM. The next year, I volunteered my library in Hopkinton as a meeting place for the executive board and was appointed as Intellectual Freedom Chair. Over the next years, MAEM re-branded itself as the Massachusetts School Library Media Association/MSLMA. Apparently I was not the only member who wanted to see "school" and "library" in the name of the organization. With our new identity, our organization grew from a few hundred members to more than 800 members today. We were MSLMA until only a couple of years ago, when we decided to emphasize the "library" part of our organization, proudly proclaiming ourselves the Massachusetts SCHOOL LIBRARY Association.

Whatever the name of our organization may be, it has been the bedrock of my professional life. During the seismic shift from paper records to computerized records, it was difficult for an individual school librarian to learn how to automate a catalog. The workshops offered at MSLA conferences, newsletters and peer-to-peer networking enabled me to muster the nerve and knowledge to undergo the automation process. Thanks to networking and fellowship offered by MSLA, I've also learned everything from the latest YA literature, to the best reference resources and how to cope with the explosion of Web 2.0 tools.

It's also been my privilege to work with the most talented, enthusiastic and caring professionals. I'm proud to have had the opportunity to work with Audrey Friend, the late Joan Gallagher, Donna Guerin, Carolyn Markuson and Peg Hallissey. I'm even prouder to work with those who have served on more recent Executive Boards. Please forgive me for not listing everyone – there are so many hard-working school librarians who spend much of their personal time promoting and advocating for our students and profession.

If I have any advice to share with you, my colleagues, it would be to take pride in what you do and let others know exactly what it is that you do. School library work is not for the faint of heart or for the shy and retiring! Next, get involved. You don't have to spend hours traveling and sitting in meetings, but you can volunteer for an MSLA committee. Go to the State House for Legislative Day. Write to your state representatives and senators about school library issues. Write to your local news outlets about the value of school libraries and certified school librarians.

Looking back, I'm so glad that I decided to give the organization a second chance. I gave myself some great opportunities and got to know some terrific school librarians!



## Hats off to Diane Libbey!

Diane accepted a 2008 MassCUE Webbie Award in the category of "Department" at their annual conference dinner in November 2009. Diane is the Library Teacher at Westborough High School.

In 2007, MassCUE launched its recognition of excellence in school web site design at the classroom, building and district level through its first annual Webbie Awards program. More than 89 sites were reviewed in 2008 including "department" sites. The review committee provided all nominated sites with feedback, and a Webbie seal of participation for being reviewed. The committee reviewed each site's content using the criteria of ownership, disclosure, audience, content, and functionality.

View Diane's library webpage: <http://westborough.ma.schoolwebpages.com/education/staff/staff.php?sectionid=354>

