

Views from the Top

Making Libraries Great @ Spring Conference

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Photos by TINA WEISS

“Beautiful.”

Just one of the reactions to the spot picked for NYMA's Spring Conference. The brand new space of the Abraham Joshua Heschel Middle School Library – high, glassy walls spanning Manhattan's West End Avenue below and sunlight streaming over the tall carrels and desks inside – provided the proper venue for “Behind the Scenes: Acquisitions, Library Design and Programming – a Look at What Makes a Great Library,” held Wednesday, June 5th, with a focus on the role of human hands in creation and renovation. Given the right tools and vision, a library can become a glorious physical, as well as intellectual, sanctuary.

On Approval

In “Acquisitions: Art or Science?”, **Stephen D. Corrsin** (Curator, Dorot Jewish Division, New York Public Library), peppering his talk with sharp wit, drew on his many years of experience to map out the various aspects of this field. Oddly enough, acquisitions was something he had never trained for, rather fallen into. Yet though less technical than other fields of library science, acquisitions still requires knowledge of online systems.

He discussed the methodology of selecting and ordering materials. First and foremost, library acquisitions need a budget. How to determine what to purchase? In large research libraries, librarians rarely consult book reviews. Instead, they define the needs of the library and use those needs to create profiles with book vendors. These profiles, based on an individual library's subject areas and on non-subject parameters (NSP) – i.e. cost – tell book vendors what items to automatically ship. Dr. Corrsin also discussed patron-driven acquisitions (PDA), a newly emerging factor in the choice of library material.

Large libraries rely on approval plans, partly because publishers don't know how to market. These plans are acquired through the “middleman,” jobbers like Yankee Book Peddler, which will supply titles relevant to the library's needs – in the case of Dorot, obviously, Jewish content – or notify the library by sending slips with titles and information. Libraries have the option to refuse certain publishers.

Serials are broken down by frequency with subscriptions paid up; periodicals are billed for later. Electronic resources often operate like serials, with continuous publication or updates. Consortia – alliances where libraries and institutions work together and, if necessary borrow from each other – has proven especially advantageous for research libraries.



STEPHEN D. CORRSIN: “Knowledge of online systems is crucial.”

In the second half of his lecture, Dr. Corrsin laid out the history and holdings of NYPL's Dorot Jewish Division, among them incunabula containing medieval manuscripts. Dr. Corrsin himself is author of the recent *Jews in America: From New Amsterdam to the Yiddish Stage* (D GILES Limited), which was based on NYPL's extensive collections.

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He also let us in on Dorot's future plans: digitization of the American Jewish Committee's oral history; recordings and transcripts; and software update of Dorot's highly popular online Yizkor book program. As Dorot continues to grow in its collection development, so too will its commitment to Jewish literacy.

Space Case

Choosing a collection can be tough. But creating the right place for it is equal work. In "Building from the Group Up: An Exciting Journey," joint speakers **Robin Skolnik** (Librarian, Abraham Joshua Heschel Middle School) and **Stephanie Entin-Wald** (Librarian, Abraham Joshua Heschel Elementary School) detailed the process by which they planned, executed, and merged the movement of the Middle School and Elementary School libraries into a new building.

With the intensive help of architects, administrators, and interior designers, Ms. Skolnik and Ms. Entin-Wald created dedicated spaces in which to house their libraries. To prepare themselves for this task, they visited many other school libraries and spoke with librarians, identifying aspects of design that were worth copying – i.e. quiet study rooms, coat closets. An inner staircase would connect both the Elementary and Middle School libraries.

With the help of PowerPoint, the dynamic duo identified some of the important aspects of their design and the reasons for their decisions – i.e. student needs, access to books and other media. They also spoke about the trials of the move itself – i.e. measuring and mapping locations for furniture, unpacking days before school began – and were candid about the advantages and disadvantages of the new physical layout. They wished, for example, there were docks for iPod players.

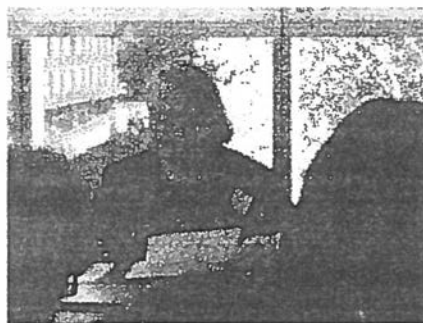
Nevertheless, the two speakers rejoiced over the greatest achievement – plenty of light and scenery! And – best of all – plenty of room.

"Remember," they stressed, "leave space to grow."

Program Guide

Can a library not only have but *be* more than the sum of its parts?

The final presenter, Elizabeth F. Stabler – Librarian, Ivan M. Stettenheim Library, Temple Emanu-El (New York, NY) – discussed the role of the library as community center. In "A Peek into Programming: Beyond Books and Reading in the Library," Liza gave advice on public programming in the context of Judaica libraries. She touched on all aspects – i.e. identifying possible presenters and topics, choosing a program time and format, reimbursing speakers, and arranging for proper A/V support.



LIZA STABLER: "I often feel like the buyer at a department store."

Much of her experience was acquired through her own longtime work with NYMA programs, many of which took place at Temple Emanu-El under her inimitable direction. (Liza is currently NYMA's wonderful Recording Secretary.) In addition, she has publicized many of Temple Emanuel's activities on *HaSafran*, the AJL website.

Finding a speaker involves looking anywhere and everywhere – *Publisher's Weekly*, *Jewish Review of Books*, or local authors. The Jewish Book Council also has a website. Liza has yet to Skype anyone, although who knows what the future brings. Beware of authors of new books, Liza warned, since they will incessantly bother you, the librarian, for publicity.

What kind of program to create? Here Liza often feels like the head buyer of a department store – searching for a broad array for subject fields. It helps that librarians are innately inquisitive. However,

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choice of program depends ultimately on the type of people you plan to invite or attract.

Programs can be arranged in a variety of formats – i.e. panel, lecture – and revolve around important dates or times of the year – i.e. Jewish holidays, anniversaries. It is important to respect the demographic. Gender, for example, will play a part: men usually won't come to hear women speakers, although women will come to hear both. Liza schedules her events at 6:30 p.m., which allows most of her audience to come after work. In addition, she keeps the events free.

How to find a speaker? Check him or her out. Not everyone is good in front of audiences. Inquiries can be made via *HaSafran* and other sources. Periodicals like *Jewish Review of Books*, *Publishers Weekly*, *Jewish Book World* (published by Jewish Book Council, which also has its own website) are helpful, especially for local authors. Initial contact can be made through authors' webpages, since they tend to do their own publicity. Professors are best, since faculties usually have their own

webpages. Just make sure to have the talk coordinated with whoever handles the library or synagogue calendar.

It is up to the librarian to handle payment for the speaker, not only for the event but for hotel, transportation, and other travel expenses. Usually the speaker will submit receipts. Certain issues must be discussed upfront and ahead of time, such as the character and intellectual level of the audience. To an author, such events are opportunities for book selling or signing. Liza will use synagogue bulletins, as well as webpages, to advertise.

Along with her triumphs, Liza has had her share of nightmare scenarios. What if the author didn't show up? Or spoke on a different topic? Times like these call for judgment and finesse.

Each lecture made the recurrent point: Behind every great library stands a great librarian. *Yasher koach* to our three presenters, and to NYMA president **Tina Weiss**, for another outstanding conference.

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platforms. She also stressed the importance of teaching students to distinguish between Google and better, more accurate and reliable (and possibly expensive) sources. Good databases have citation-making ability, reducing the chances of plagiarism. However, some teachers still accept plagiarized passages from Wikipedia.

Dollars & Sense

In the era of rising costs and shrinking budgets, how can libraries make a dollar out of ninety-nine cents? **Chaya Wiesman** – Librarian, The Ramaz Upper School, New York – addressed the challenge of "Making the Most of What You Have: In an Era of Diminishing Resources, How Can a Library Continue to Serve Its Patrons?"

Chaya, in her capacity as Ramaz librarian, augments the library's acquisitions budget lines by taking advantage of free funding opportunities. Unfortunately, in the last 10 years, some of these library

sources, such as an annual grant from the Avi Chai initiative as well as funds from New York State and federal governments, are no longer available. However, through its participation in Collective Collection Development (CCD), a program for high schools from the New York State Department of Education, Ramaz created an excellent collection in modern European history, as well as a "Pathfinder" for other libraries to participate in CCD — basically an Inter-library loan (ILL) program.

In fact, while other departments are beginning to require more term papers, none have the same stringency as the history department. Ramaz students, starting in the 9th grade, must write a history paper using three books and three articles from peer-reviewed scholarly journals. The number of required bibliographic citations increases each year: no encyclopedias or online sources are allowed.

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