

Snapshot

Linda Demmers

“Don’t be afraid to invent or re-invent yourself. If you have a passion for something, you can probably find a career in the library world that will let you have both.”

In keeping with the Hollywood theme of this month’s issue, InfoLink presents an exclusive interview with Linda Demmers ’73 LIS. Linda, a noted library facilities planner, is also married to a Hollywood producer. Desne Crossley, Associate Director of Major Gifts for Simmons, met with Linda at her home in L.A. to talk about library planning, following your passion, and why actors need librarians.

Q:

What’s it like to be a librarian in Hollywood?

You know what?—It’s fascinating! You’d think: what interest would people have in what *I* do? Actors can be voracious readers, and many are. There’s a lot of time spent on the set. Motion picture studios have

terrific art libraries. These libraries have enormous collections that are used for research by screenwriters, art directors, and production designers. If you want to find out what Korean War army uniforms looked like, or the menu at a Presidential Inauguration dinner, you can find that in a studio library. Someone once asked me to find a Princeton University ring. We never did find one, but we discovered that the eating clubs at Princeton have distinct neckties so we used that instead. The level of detail required to make a movie look authentic is mind boggling! The studio research jobs make wonderful, exciting careers.

My husband just produced a film that was shot in Boston: “The Game Plan,” which opened this fall and stars Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson. It was fun to come back and see Boston again. My favorite films that he has worked on? “The Truman Show” and “Tender Mercies.”

How did you get involved in library facility planning?

I started my career as the librarian at an architectural firm, but I was an academic library director when I got involved in my first building project. The first building I planned was the Annenberg Library & Communications Center at Pine Manor [College], which was a beautiful renovation and addition to a late 19th Century Richardsonian carriage house. One of the groups that toured it was the building committee from Phillips Academy Andover. I had been at Pine Manor seven years, when I was recruited to go to Andover. The Library at Andover was a historic building that needed renovation and expansion. I was library director at Phillips for about five years—through the library opening before I moved to California and became a consultant. A few years ago, I had the chance to work in New England again when I consulted on the Williams College Science Library, which was another extremely complicated, but beautiful project. It was completely luck that institutions where I worked were planning buildings. Over the past 20 years, I have built a reputation by word-of-mouth. I started out with an unlisted telephone number. Since then I’ve worked in Mississippi, Missouri, Miami, Massachusetts, California and quite a few places in between.

What types of workshops do you teach?

“Library Construction 101,” “Extreme Makeover or Gentle Remodel,” “Wayfinding and Retailing for Libraries,” and “Using

Libris Design” are all offered through the Infopeople project in California. These workshops are designed to give librarians the skills they need to do *their* part of the team’s work. In Library Construction 101, the class moves forward on a game board through the various stages of the project. Players start out with a bag of good will and try to end the project with a bag of good will.

In the renovation class, we break into groups to sort through a box of materials—fabric swatches, tiles, carpet, wood chips and paint samples planning the interior of a specific library space. The project teaches committee management, teamwork and flexibility, which we learn in library school—and how to pick carpet and paint colors, which we don’t learn in library school. Attendees learn how to use an architectural scale and read floor plans. When we talk about lighting, the librarians don’t need to pick the lighting fixtures, but they do need to know how to define the task, what a foot-candle is and the basic principles of energy efficiency. We remind them that they are the owners with a capital “O.” As clients, librarians aren’t always as assertive as they need to be. A building project is a good time to suspend standard operating procedure and examine how your organization functions, and what doesn’t function. Buildings don’t fix problems, but they can change patterns. It’s the perfect time to think about how you do business. It’s tempting to start with the fun stuff—picking colors and furniture, but a good building project starts with a program and a plan of service. From beginning to end, a library building project *could* be a 10-year commitment.



[Regarding retailing workshops, Linda showed Desne a portfolio of color graphics of libraries adopting the display and merchandising techniques of successful retailers. One of the lessons learned from stores is to place what you really want people to pick up in the *back* of the store like the milk, not the *front*—for instance, DVDs and CDs traditionally can be found in the front of libraries, in which case, customers may simply grab and go. Anything that’s displayed at the end of a row of books—no matter what it is—will get snapped up.]

How do you stay current in a rapidly changing field?

I’ve taught over 100 workshops and truthfully, I learn as much from the students as they learn from me. I attend regional and national conferences and frequently present at a symposium or serve on a panel, and I always learn from the other speakers.

What do you like best about your work?

I like the variety of different clients and locations and the puzzle that each project presents. What I liked least as a library director was personnel management issues and preparing the annual budget. I was lucky to find this niche—one with variety and flexible hours. Among the best aspects of the work are garnering support for the project and the “wow” factor of new library projects once they’re completed.

Interview continues

Q: **What are you passionate about professionally?**
 I'm passionate about the environment, about using the public trust well. I'm passionate about process. The process and organizational skills I learned at Simmons serve me in all my endeavors. We lived in New York State where it snows, and I always remember the old saying: "Shovel early, shovel twice." I say this to my clients to remind them not to get ahead of themselves.

What are you passionate about outside of work?
 My husband and I are both passionate about historic preservation. The Los Angeles Conservancy works hard to keep landmark buildings safe from developers. Sometimes we are successful and sometimes not. (As you can see from this house, we like old buildings....) I'm also passionate about cooking—life is too short to eat bad food!

How has your MLS been most valuable to you? How have you applied your LIS knowledge, especially to other areas of your life?
 I can tell you that if I didn't have 20 years experience as a librarian, I couldn't do what I do. There are only 25 library consultants who specialize in facility planning and many of them are not librarians. Library school gives you tremendous critical thinking skills, organizational skills, and way-finding skills. Organizing space or a website is no different from organizing books and information. You need to create a logical path for your users to navigate to the information, which in building planning is called site logic. Many architects and librarians think alike.

What advice do you have for people just entering the profession?
 You have to be *nimble*, not just flexible. There's a difference between the two, you know. You have to be able to change course quickly. This means you work with kids and with senior citizens. Teen libraries, and librarians who know the teen market, are in high demand. It's harder to find a job as a reference librarian, but webmasters, graphic artists, POD-masters, BLOG-masters, all now have a place in libraries. I would say don't be afraid to invent or re-invent yourself. If you have a passion for something, you can probably find a career in the library world that will let you have both.

What do you wish people knew more about?
 I wish that people knew how important the up-front planning time is. The amount of difference you can make in a project is a thousand-fold more important in the initial phases. An acoustical engineer I work with said that if you can only afford to have a little bit of his time, you should engage him as early as possible. Just seeing where spaces are located and looking for red flags is infinitely more effective than expensive wall and ceiling treatments included later. Lighting engineers look at light fixtures and opportunities for the use of natural daylight (called "daylighting"). We are big on the environment and sustainable architecture in planning public buildings. New buildings can achieve a LEED rating that recognizes a level of commitment in the prudent use of natural resources, both in the construction and life-cycle costs of a facility.

I invite everyone interested in library facility planning to visit the website I manage, librisdesign.org, which was funded by an LSTA grant. It provides one-stop shopping for information and

contacts on library building planning. This is a great resource for librarians and it's free!

And I wish more people in New England knew how terrific Los Angeles is. There is a shortage of librarians here, especially for children's and teen librarians. The weather is great...you can leave your ice scraper behind!

Describe your perfect day.
This is a perfect day. I had a business meeting this morning, spent time with my daughter, met a new person [Desne!], and I'll read a book tonight. **Interview by Desne Crossley**

Want more librarian movies?
 Need help finding other movies featuring librarians? Check out *Librarians in the Movies: An Annotated Filmography*. This site is maintained by a librarian at Brigham Young University in Idaho. Its introduction calls it "an ongoing attempt to expand our collective memory, to find a more comprehensive and defensible basis for our acceptance or rejection of the 'typical movie librarian' – whatever we think he or she is." The list contains about 550 movies "that in some significant or memorable way include a library or librarian." For your inner cataloger, the films are assigned groups based on the degree to which librarians are mentioned (ranging from "clearly identified as a librarian" to "mentioned in passing"). Find it at <http://emp.byui.edu/raishm/films/introduction.html>.

Congratulations to Peter Heron and Em Claire Knowles!
 The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) has named Professor Peter Heron the Academic/ Research Librarian of the Year. The award, sponsored by YBP Library Services, recognizes an outstanding member of the library profession who has made a significant national or international contribution to academic/research librarianship and library development.
 "Dr. Peter Heron was selected because of his substantive body of research over a career of more than 30 years," stated Award Committee Chair Cynthia Steinhoff in the ACRL press release. "Dr. Heron's work, which focuses on such varied topics as assessment, government information, service quality and leadership, addresses very real issues and questions that academic librarians face every day."
 To read the full press release, please see www.ala.org/ala/pressreleases2008/january2008/herono8.htm
 Assistant Dean Em Claire Knowles was elected to the ALA Executive Board at the midwinter meeting. She will serve a three-year term beginning in July 2008 and concluding in June 2011. For the full press release from the ALA, please see <http://www.ala.org/ala/pressreleases2008/february2008/ebo8.htm>