



LAC In Illinois: Past, Present, and Future

By Gabe Geltzer

Library Associates Companies (LAC) has had a presence in Illinois for nearly seven years. What makes this interesting for libraries is that the Los Angeles-based company has been able to participate in a state open to working with outside library staffing firms. LAC has made great strides in supporting the Illinois library community over the years.

Given that the role of the information professional is evolving almost as rapidly as the information technologies and interfaces with which those info pros work, LAC has embraced this evolution as they embark on a groundbreaking new venture, beginning in Illinois.

LAC has provided financial sponsorship for many SLA Illinois meetings and events, which have been attended and addressed by CEO Deb Schwarz and VP Keith Gurtzweiler. LAC staff have also sponsored tables and participated as vendors at conferences, and attended numerous other affairs and workshops targeted for information professionals in Illinois. This has boosted their presence in a key Midwestern market.

"It's important for us to have champions out there at the center of this evolution who can help us communicate our role to organizational stakeholders, and I think that LAC is doing its share to keep us in the conversation," says former LAC employee and SLA Illinois Chapter president-elect Dianna K. Wiggins.

Recently, LAC opened a new Midwest office in Illinois, appointing former Dominican GSLIS assistant dean Elisa Topper as site director of that program. Ms. Topper is a contributor with Libgig.com as she runs the show out of the new Chicago area office.

The DuPage Library System in Illinois contracted LAC as a preferred vendor to provide staffing services and support for its 132 members, including academic, public, school, and special libraries in 388 facilities in five Illinois counties for temporary, interim, and direct hire staffing.

LAC is a recruiting and consulting firm that places candidates into a range of organizations, including: libraries, software vendors, firms and companies, including emerging technology companies. Projects managed by LAC range from data analysis to strategic planning, contract evaluation, marketing and promotion.

LAC In Illinois

LAC began with an assignment at BP in November 2002. Tom Pardo, BP's manager of Information Services, was the Library Champion Award Winner in 2003 from the Illinois chapter of SLA. The Library Champion Award is presented to an organization, individual or other entity that has shown support to special libraries/information centers through speaking, writing or advocacy. Essentially, Tom is an advocate for library support in a corporation and he and BP brought LAC to Illinois.

Since then, LAC's presence has been expanding. Joyce Fedeczko has worked at BP on assignment from LAC for seven years as a project manager, a job for which she was placed by LAC. "The boots-on-the-ground in Illinois is what makes LAC different," she said. "And they have done a tremendous amount to assist and advocate for libraries in Illinois."

For example, in 2005 LAC was among the donors to the SLA Illinois holiday auction and in 2006, the SLA Vendor Relations Award was presented to Fedeczko for the "persistence and grace which have resulted in mutually beneficial relationships between the Chapter and its sponsors." At the same SLA meeting, LAC won the Library Partner Award, given to the vendor whose partnering with the Illinois chapter was noteworthy.

Over the years, LAC has supported Fedeczko's presence on panels, workshops and for hosting "dine-arounds" — events where Illinois librarians partner up with restaurants around the state to host a dinner for librarians where they share experiences in a social setting.

LAC sponsored the SLA IL 2008 fall workshop, where LAC's CEO Schwarz attended and hosted a table, pledging a sponsorship at the \$600 level. Other companies to do this were GSI, InfoCurrent and Knovel.

Fedeczko herself has been very active in SLA IL and the petroleum and energy resources division [DPER] of SLA, as she won the DPER Special Achievement award in 2008 and is the DPER chair-elect. Fedeczko won the SLA- Illinois Web 2.0/ Innovation Leader Award also in 2008, was on the SLA-Illinois nominating committee, and she continues serving numerous other library related organizations because LAC at BP supports such involvement for their staff in Illinois libraries.

LAC and BP

Nancy Maloney is the electronic resources librarian at BP and an LAC employee. "I joined LAC four years ago when I was hired to work at the BP Library," she said. On the ground level, LAC acts as a conduit, negotiating salary, and making sure employees are happy. "LAC has encouraged me to participate in the local library community by presenting at Illinois Library Association Annual meetings and Synergy — the Illinois Library Leadership program."

Via other LAC employees in IL like Nancy Maloney and Deborah Buschman, LAC has participated in the DuPage Library System [DLS] Technology and Marketing Committees, WebJunction Illinois Advisors Team and the SLA Program Planning Committee. And, awards for LAC employees in IL continue as Deborah Buschman was the DLS Support Staff award winner in 2009.

And with LAC's support, Nancy has been an ILA Membership Committee Intern, a WebJunction Illinois Subject Curator, a member of a panel presentation on Buzz Marketing at ILA Annual Conference, and taught a Buzz Marketing for Libraries workshop in Chicago for the Metropolitan Library System.

Outsourcing a "Bad Word"?

While outsourcing has a negative connotation, the state of Illinois is more receptive to companies such as BP delegating their librarian duties to outside firms.

"Illinois has never had much of a problem with outsourcing," says Teri Embrey, currently the Senior Librarian at Pritzker Military Library and former LAC employee at BP. "It's smarter on a budgetary level, on an infrastructure level, and the state is creative with how it parses out funding and uses levels of consortia." In other words, Illinois' motto should be "You don't have to do it alone."

"Individual libraries will pay into consortial projects to make their projects cheaper," says Embrey. Thus, the Illinois libraries and various consortia work together to keep costs down, so money is allocated to the right places, be it regional library services, special libraries, or next day delivery between libraries, etc.

Interconnected groups work together so well, as Embrey says, that "our patrons are really proud of their libraries and the librarians can concentrate on innovative services and technical services to improve the user experience."

British Petroleum especially has a corporate philosophy that allows them to concentrate on their expertise, and delegate what isn't in their realm of expertise to a company like LAC. Yet for many library professionals Maloney acknowledges that the outsource "thing" is a "scary word."

"Anytime you are in an outsource situation, people run the risk of not feeling part of a larger organization," Maloney says. "LAC makes us feel part of the team, and not just worker drones." That is what LAC does best — treating their employees as professionals, like hired consultants as opposed to just clock-punchers.

Topper adds, "As for the term outsourcing, it does not have to be a negative word that conjures up images of personnel cuts and jobs moving offshore. Carefully planned outsourcing can let you use your staff more efficiently."

"Groundbreaking Venture"

LAC's partnership with DLS is considered groundbreaking in that they are partnering with the library system as opposed to participating in an outright "for-profit" outsourcing situation. This benefits DuPage Library System members by having a committed company who cares about librarianship staffing and consulting — a "go-to person" if you will, while LAC benefits from the ability to promote and endorse themselves in the state with, literally, space.

"DuPage Library System member libraries receive a discount and LAC has an office. It's win - win," says Fedeczko.

As for the new LAC office in Chicagoland, the central hub of LAC's Midwestern presence, Topper says, "As more institutions find it difficult to support and staff a dedicated human resources office, services like this will become increasingly critical for libraries. By using LAC, libraries will benefit from faster job fill rates, with high caliber candidates, which ultimately means better customer service for their patrons. The libraries that are currently using our services know this value and are extremely satisfied."

"Deb Schwarz and her staff have proven to be helpful and responsive to our needs when we've reached out for help," adds Wiggins. "She stays active in the profession on top of promoting it for others — what more can we ask of someone in terms of understanding the issues?"