

During its 125th anniversary celebration, Valparaiso University School of Law saw an increase in applications and fund-raising contributions.

Anniversary Celebrations

A Golden Opportunity for Public Relations

by Sally Holterhoff

Every day is the anniversary of something, as Oscar Wilde once rather cynically observed. “Most modern calendars mar the sweet simplicity of our lives by reminding us that each day that passes is the anniversary of some perfectly uninteresting event,” he wrote.

In the life of a person or an organization, a major anniversary—one that *is* interesting—comes along every so often. By tradition, milestones such as 10th, 30th, or 100th anniversaries are commonly selected for recognition. Etiquette books and greeting card companies remind us that 25 years is the silver anniversary and 50 years is the golden one. But with careful planning, almost any anniversary celebration can produce a groundswell of good public relations.

Anniversaries are often about relationships—public or personal or both. When we observe such an anniversary, we acknowledge and reflect on the development of a particular relationship between two individuals or among members of an organization or institution. In the case of corporate anniversaries—of a library, a

law firm, a law school, or a professional organization—the occasion can be an energizing experience for current employees or members and can provide a good excuse to reconnect with former colleagues. By focusing attention on the organization’s mission and accomplishments, an anniversary celebration can raise the profile of the organization and create goodwill with outside groups and the general public.

Just what needs to be done to make an anniversary celebration interesting and a source of good public relations? Creating a celebration that is both appropriate and fun involves research and planning that must begin months, maybe even years, in advance. Planning should begin with a goal for the celebration and an intended message to deliver. Decisions on how to mark an anniversary must take into account the size, resources, and target audience of the group or institution.

The prospect of looking back over years of history and records of past accomplishments may seem daunting—and dull—to some.

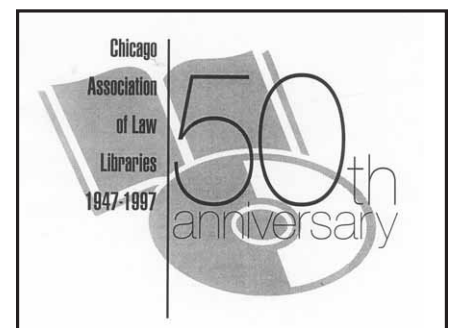
But anniversary celebrations don’t have to be exclusively about the past, and they don’t have to be boring. Reviewing what an organization has stood for and where it has been can inspire present-day activities and suggest directions for the future.

While I claim no particular expertise in the planning of anniversary observances, I am a member of several groups that have designed and carried out such celebrations in recent years or that are in the process of doing so. This has provided me with an up-close look at the following examples of anniversaries “done right” in order to deliver good public relations value.

Profile-Raising in the Legal Community

As the time approached for the 50th anniversary of the Chicago Association of Law Libraries (CALL), the chapter assigned the task of creating an appropriate celebration to a committee chaired by Mary Lu Linnane, associate director for technical services at Rinn Law Library, DePaul University College of Law. Looking back, Linnane explained that committee members identified two main goals for the 1997 celebration: to celebrate in a way that involved the entire CALL membership and to help raise the profile of law librarians, particularly in the Chicago legal community.

By soliciting contributions from a large number of sponsors, the committee was able to put on a half-day event that every member of the chapter could attend free of charge: a seminar (“From Then Until Now and Beyond: The Impact of Librarians on the Legal Community”) held at John Marshall Law School, followed by an



CALL hung eight-foot banners featuring its anniversary logo around Chicago in March 1997.

elegant reception at the Chicago Bar Association Building next door. Invited dignitaries included elected officials, attorneys, judges, and law deans. Each CALL member also received a copy of a

special 50th anniversary issue of the chapter's newsletter, the *CALL Bulletin*.

To catch the attention of Chicagoans, arrangements were made for eight-foot banners featuring the CALL anniversary logo to be hung from street poles around City Hall and along a prominent street throughout the celebration month of March 1997. The Chicago City Council passed a proclamation congratulating CALL, and so did the Illinois legislature.

"While the long-term effects are largely intangible, we know that celebrating our anniversary focused attention on law librarians as valuable professionals, for those within the Chicago legal community and beyond," Linnane said. "That, plus the strong feeling of goodwill created among our own members, made all the planning and preparation worthwhile." The CALL anniversary celebration subsequently received the AALL/West Excellence in Marketing Best Campaign Award for 1998.

Celebrating the Past and Forecasting the Future

Three years of planning by members of the Ohio Regional Association of Law Libraries (ORALL) preceded the celebration of the chapter's 50th anniversary in 1999. Kathy Carrick, law librarian and associate professor of law at Case Western Reserve University Law School Library, served as co-chair of the Anniversary Committee. Recently she reflected on the events of five years ago. "Celebrating this anniversary brought ORALL a renewed sense of unity and purpose and emphasized our role as a regional organization," she said.

The chapter began the festivities by hosting a champagne and dessert reception for ORALL members, friends, and invited dignitaries at the 1999 AALL Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C. The celebration culminated at the ORALL annual meeting that October in Columbus, Ohio. The opening reception was held at the historic Ohio State House. The next day's educational programs were followed by an elegant anniversary banquet, with featured speaker Bob Berring, director of the law library and professor of law at the University of California School of Law Library in Berkeley.

A special logo was designed for the ORALL anniversary, and it appeared on program materials, as well as on t-shirts that were sold and on commemorative coasters that were given to members. Joanne Beal, law librarian at the Dayton Law Library Association, compiled an impressive history of the chapter. Published

as a keepsake booklet and distributed to all members, the history compilation highlighted the growth of ORALL and the many information innovations produced by its members, while also offering projections about the future of the chapter and the profession.

Carrick summed up the results of the event. "The anniversary celebration really focused our attention as a chapter and helped us set a new agenda for the future," she said.

Celebration Boosts Recruiting and Fund-Raising

More recently and right here at home, I have been caught up in anniversary planning and events at the Valparaiso University School of Law, where we have been marking the school's 125th anniversary in 2003-04. Much attention has gone into research, design, and organization, making this anniversary an integral part of law school life throughout the year.

A striking commemorative poster by artist Mitch Markovitz represents the anniversary visually with a scene in the law school's courtroom, communicating the message of "125 years of teaching and learning." Coverage by the Chicago legal press has raised the visibility of the law school beyond our small city in northwest Indiana. A book documenting the school's past and present, *And, We Must Make Them Noble: A Contextual History of the Valparaiso University School of Law 1879-2004* by Michael Swygert, was published by Carolina Academic Press. After a series of special speakers and events throughout the school year, the anniversary festivities culminated in a black tie gala held at the Field Museum in Chicago on May 1.

Among Valpo law grads who have become law librarians is Doug Lind, collection development librarian at the Edward Bennett Williams Library of Georgetown University Law Center. A member of the class of 1992, Lind has been following the 125th anniversary events by reading the *Valpo Lawyer* alumni magazine and by checking the Web site, www.valpo.edu/law/125th/. "For me, hearing about the 125th anniversary has been a good reminder of my connection to Valpo School of Law and of why I'm proud to be an alum," he said.

While it is too soon to gauge the long-term effects of the 125th anniversary celebration at Valparaiso University School

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The Six R's—Tips for Making Your Anniversary a PR Success

Research—In order to pay tribute to the past, a search through old records or archives will be needed to identify significant events and key people. This is an opportunity for librarians to use their expertise in retrieving information. Displays of historical materials add to the mood of the celebration.

Reflect—To stay on track, it's important to identify the target audience (individuals or groups to whom the celebration is directed) and then articulate an appropriate message. A theme or slogan conveying that message can be effective in coordinating all activities, while a special anniversary logo will provide further emphasis.

Recognize—Anniversaries are the perfect time to honor past leaders and to express gratitude for their contributions to the organization's progress.

Reach Out—Planned activities should include at least one special occasion that brings the organization's leaders—past and present—together with current members.

Reinforce—Anniversary celebrations offer a perfect chance to identify and affirm the organization's strengths and build loyalty.

Rally and Recharge—The best celebrations are those that go beyond entertainment to create momentum for the organization's future. Besides creating great public relations, an anniversary celebration can provide inspiration and spark the enthusiasm necessary to capitalize on current activities and launch new initiatives.

of Law, increases in applications and contributions to the current fund-raising effort are seen as positive signs.

AALL's 100 Years of Leadership Point the Way to the Future

Speaking of anniversaries, AALL has a significant one of its own coming up before long. In 2006, the Association will be 100 years old. Carol Billings, director of the Law Library of Louisiana, chairs the Special Committee on the AALL Centennial Celebration. And the message selected as the celebration's theme is: The American Association of Law Libraries, 1906-2006: A Century of Leadership.

Beginning at the 2005 AALL Annual Meeting in San Antonio, anniversary activities will be held throughout the year, with the grand finale coming at the 2006 Annual Meeting in St. Louis. Members of the special committee have been hard at work for many months, following earlier planning done by the Task Force on Centennial Planning, chaired by Laura

Gasaway, director of the law library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Billings described plans for the upcoming celebration. "We'll be paying tribute to the leadership AALL and its members have shown by a century-long commitment to our mission and values," she said. "We also want to emphasize the importance of sharing this leadership and commitment with future generations of law librarians."

In addition to the satisfaction of recognizing a milestone, an anniversary can be celebrated in a way that produces a ripple effect of awareness and good feeling. Your library, law firm, or professional association will be portrayed in a favorable light to audiences you want to impress, and that image will be remembered for years to come—at least until it's time to reinforce it with another anniversary celebration.

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