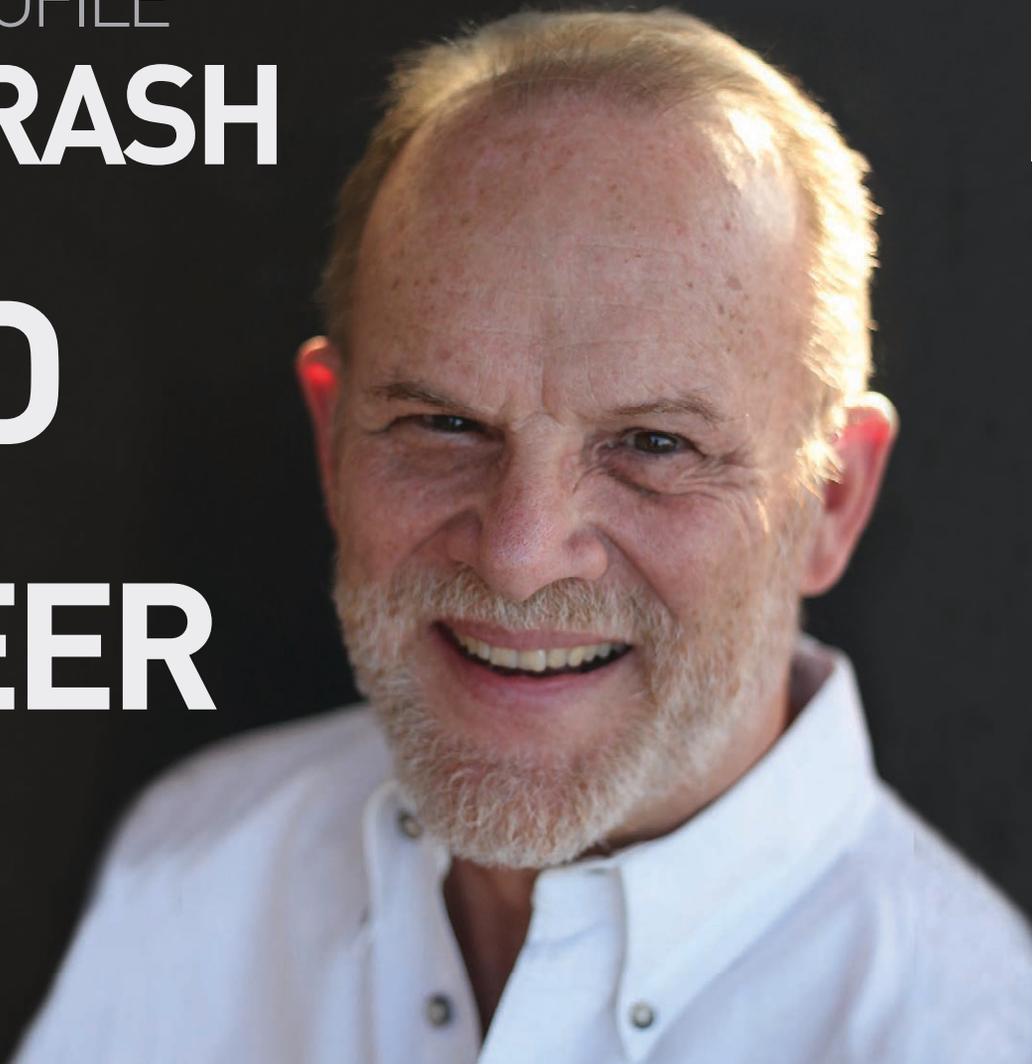


LEADER PROFILE

THE CRASH THAT LEAD TO A CAREER



MARK E. ESTES

- INFOPRO CONSULTING
- PART-TIME REFERENCE LIBRARIAN
- UNIVERSITY OF SAN DIEGO PARDEE LEGAL RESEARCH CENTER
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Mark E. Estes's career in law librarianship has spanned 40 years. How did it all begin? A fateful crash while trying to get on the U.S. Olympic cycling team landed him as a graduate teaching assistant for Al Coco, a then-prominent member of the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL). Since becoming a member of AALL, Estes has been extremely active, donating his time to several committees, chapters, publications, and programs. Although he has moved on from his last position at a county law library, he continues to be active in the law library community, volunteering his time for a profession he truly loves and working part-time at the University of San Diego Pardee Legal Research Center.

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Mark E. Estes

“During my time in law school I was racing bicycles. I tried to make the Olympic cycling team,” recalls Estes. “Right after spring break started, I crashed at a race, landed on my face, and took 60 stitches around my eye. That threw me off the cycling effort and ultimately led me to realize that come August, when school was about to start, that I wasn’t ready to enter the real world. I wanted to stay in school longer.” Fortunately, Denver offered a dual degree program with the library school and they had two teaching assistant positions in the reference desk area. One of those positions had become available that January, so Estes applied in mid-August and started in September on a joint degree program. In January he earned the graduate teaching assistant position.

Estes first learned about AALL from Al Coco. “When I was working for Al Coco, he was chairing the AALL Placement Committee,” recalls Estes. “He was also the first and only person to petition for a position on the nominations form for vice president. Up until that time only one person was nominated for each position, and you had to know somebody to get yourself nominated. He petitioned to get on the ballot, and he won. So that experience with him introduced me to the Association. AALL is a way to give back to the profession, to learn about the profession, and to further the role of law librarians in the world.”

He earned his JD and MLS from the University of Denver in 1977. His first job was as head law librarian and assistant professor of law at the University of LaVerne College of Law. He became the director of library services in 1980 at Holme Roberts & Owen LLP, which is now Bryan Cave HRO. While there, Estes worked to establish a print collection, then helped to convert the collection to an electronic format. In 2008, he once again changed library types and became law library director of the Bernard E. Witkin Alameda County Law Library.

Since joining the Association as a student member in 1977, Estes has dedicated a large portion of his career to volunteering. He served

as AALL President from 1992-1993. He also chaired the Economic Status of Law Librarians Committee, the Government Relations Committee, and was a member of the AALL Consulting Services Advisory Group. He was president of the Southwestern Association of Law Libraries and BayNet and has been an Executive Board member for the Colorado Association of Law Libraries. In 2016, he was inducted into the AALL Hall of Fame, and in 2018, he received the Marian Gould Gallagher Distinguished Service Award.

Here, Estes describes his leadership experiences, offers advice on scheduling strategic planning, and discusses the importance of professional development.

You retired this past year from your position at the Bernard E. Witkin Alameda County Law Library but have stayed active as a consultant. What made you decide to remain active in the profession?

I retired from the Alameda County Law Library because I needed to shorten my commute. For a year I had been staying in Alameda County and commuting most weekends to my home in San Diego. Since my retirement from Alameda, I have continued to serve on a task force for a commission on consultants and continue to read the newsletter. Most recently, I joined the San Diego Chapter of the American Association of Law Libraries (SANDALL). In early August I started working part-time at the University of San Diego Pardee Legal Research Center as a reference librarian. I can’t stop. One of my colleagues from Denver jokes that I bleed purple. AALL is very important to me and I believe it’s important to our overall cause for access to justice. I can’t imagine not doing something related to law librarianship. And going back to school, as it were, into an academic library is just delightful. I will continue to consult for county, government, and law firm libraries. I will also continue writing.

What role has AALL played in your career?

It’s given me an opportunity to practice skills—communication skills generally, writing more specifically—and a platform to be a speaker on a variety of topics. It also provided me with a chance to learn from others and drop what I’ve learned into other places so that skills can spread.

QUICK HITS WITH MARK E. ESTES

**Superpower you wish you had?**

The ability to type 100 words per minute.

Words to live by?

Save a reader time.

Book you've recently enjoyed reading?

I've got three: *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*; *The Cult of the Constitution*; and *The Water Dancer*.

Favorite travel destination?

Colorado: South Park and the Peak to Peak Highway in October to see the Aspen changing color on my motorcycle.

Guilty pleasure?

Riding on my motorcycle.

You have served on a number of AALL committees. What has been the most rewarding volunteer opportunity for you?

As president and a member of the AALL Executive Board, the chapter visits were rewarding because I got to listen to people from all over the country, I got to visit other libraries, get their ideas, and share those ideas with others. As vice president, coming up with the idea of creating the Members Open Forum. I thought of that idea because back in the tumultuous time of the early '90s the SISs, in particular the Social Responsibilities SIS, had lots of ideas to bring to the Association but no good way to bring those ideas to the business meeting for discussion. So, I thought of the open forum idea where people could raise questions and begin a discussion. Then I appointed the special committee that selected Roger Parent as executive director.

You were director at Alameda County Law Library for 10 years and, prior to that, you were the director of library services at Holme Roberts & Owen for 28 years. For those who have been in leadership positions for a long time, what do you recommend they do to ensure professional growth?

If you want to succeed as a leader, you've got to keep learning about your staff and your role within your parent institution and that

institution's role in the larger world. To me, that all encompasses professional development. Professional development isn't just belonging to your professional association. It's attending conferences. It's thinking about what you want to learn and suggesting programs. It's serving on a program as a panelist so that you learn and can share knowledge. You read the professional literature, and you read outside the professional literature on topics that are seemingly not related but in fact are.

Look for every opportunity to learn, there are some good things trending. If you want to succeed as a leader you've got to keep on finding ways to do new things to draw attention to your library. So be curious. That's the biggest thing you can do, keep your sense of curiosity alive.

What lessons have you learned from the leadership roles you've held in AALL?

Don't get too far ahead of your audience in dropping ideas. If you interact with me enough by now you know that I generate ideas and sometimes they go way out there. A leader can do that but if you're trying to take your group someplace, you have to be sure not to get too far ahead. Theodore White wrote *The Making of the President 1960* and used the wagon train analogy of leadership. The successful wagon train leader was ahead of his wagon train far enough to see what was over the hill but not so far ahead that the train lost sight of him. That's the key, you've got to be in just the right place. It taught me that you have to nourish an idea as well as your audience and bring them to the point where they understand what you're trying to accomplish. As a leader, both at AALL and in my career, I fear that often I realized this point too late. It's important that one checks in with all of the members of your team equally. You can't pay more attention to somebody who's close or who's first on your telephone list. You've got to be sure that you're checking in with everyone on your team so that everyone feels that you are engaged with them.

As a leader, how did you balance tending to immediate needs with strategic planning?

By really paying attention to Steven R. Covey's *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. I even got a chance to see Stephen Covey, and that was a great experience. Do the strategic things you have to do—schedule the time and honor that time. If you've got an appointment to do

strategic planning with yourself or your group at that time, nothing can interrupt it. It's like having an appointment with the executive director or a partner; you show up to the meeting when it's scheduled. Let people know, "I've got this time blocked off to do planning, that's what I have to do now without being interrupted." Other times I can deal with some fires, but for planning purposes I had to schedule the time. I think everyone has to do this because otherwise the urgent matters will always crowd out the important tasks.

What's the best career advice you received during your 40-plus years as a law librarian?

The best advice was to attend a government law library program in Williamsburg, Virginia. That was in January 1990, the year I was running for AALL vice president. Why was that the best advice? Because that put me in front of state, court, and county law librarians, and until that time, I had been in private law libraries and academia. These other organizations didn't know me. But on the recommendation of one state law librarian, I attended that conference. I learned a lot, and I met a lot of people. And I think that helped with the election.

What advice would you give to a colleague in the earlier stages of his or her career?

Invest in your retirement fund early by actively networking. Early in my career I was frustrated with the "Hi, hello, how are you?" part of the job. It took me 20-plus years to realize that, "Hi, hello, how are you?" gives the other person as well as yourself a chance to calibrate with you, and you with him or her. This is helpful because not everyone can process an introduction the same way. I can do a lot of things really quickly and that gives me trouble sometimes, sort of like answering a question too quickly on *Jeopardy!* We need the social nicety of the introduction to give each other a chance to have that moment of recall from our memory banks.

What aspect of legal information are you particularly excited about right now?

Well, I am excited and troubled about several things. Access to justice is terribly important, and while there are many wonderful, exciting aspects of technology, I worry that access to justice will continue to become an even more uneven playing field. The large firms and corporations who can afford to buy the latest technology get to use

all of these cool tools that speed the research process, the drafting process, and the keeping notes of where you've been and what you've done on the case, whereas self-represented litigants, small firm librarians, and small and solo practitioners do not. I've got to copy and paste any relevant information I find myself. I can't link relevant information to research I've already done to build that history. That's on me and the self-represented litigant, and I think that's unfair. I don't know how we as law librarians can do something to increase the fairness of it. But we've got to figure out a way.

For individuals who are approaching or have reached the retirement milestone, what benefit do you see for them in continuing their AALL membership and their involvement in activities with the Association?

Continued intellectual growth and engagement—as long as you continue contributing to the profession. It's more than simply being a member or making an extra donation, it's about furthering law librarianship, improving access to justice, mentoring new librarians, counseling those who have questions, and doing what we've always done best, which is seeing new connections and links to things that others don't. We've got to provide context to those things that the younger folks are suggesting, without throwing cold water on them. To me it's exciting to continue learning and seeing where I can get a chance to drop a couple of ideas based on what I've learned across all of these years and places. Why go stale? You can't shut down; it won't shut down. That's why I keep learning. ■

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