

11-2010

From the President: Professionalism & Community

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Recommended Citation

Joyce Manna Janto, *From the President: Professionalism and Community*, AALL Spectrum, Nov. 2010, at 6

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Professionalism and Community

As I'm sure I've said before, being president of AALL is an incredible honor. You get to travel to amazing places representing the Association, and you get to meet wonderful people and share ideas and experiences. But with the perks of being president, there are also responsibilities. To me, the most significant is writing this column. I can hear you saying to yourself right now, "What in the world is she talking about? This column is barely a page! How hard can this be?"

On one hand, you are absolutely correct. Writing a column of approximately 1,000 words isn't that difficult. On the other hand, you have to think of something to write about, and therein lies the rub. You see, due to publication schedules, the column you are reading now was written in the waning days of August. So, what tack do I take? Do I look at the calendar and write about things that will have happened by the time this copy of *Spectrum* is in your hands? Or do I write about an issue that has grabbed my attention right now and hope that it will still resonate with you in almost three months? Or do I try somehow to weave these things together?

As an academic, the issue that is first and foremost in my mind right now is the beginning of a new school year. Last week we welcomed 160 new members into the University of Richmond School of Law. As I gave tours, participated in orientations, and met with new advisees, it occurred to me just how much of our time was spent emphasizing that our newest members were joining the law school community. And it wasn't just me—speaker after speaker in session after session did the same thing.

The obvious question is why? Is it because we're a small law school where everyone knows everyone? Is it because we're a regional school and the majority of our students will end up practicing in the same general location, litigating, negotiating, or mediating against/with each other for the rest of their careers? Or is it because we feel that the notion of community is vital to the whole notion of professionalism?

I don't know about the rest of my colleagues here at Richmond but I stress community because I truly think that this issue—this value—lies at the very heart of professionalism. I checked on



dictionary.com and the classic definition of professionalism is "the standing, practice, or methods of a professional, as distinguished from an amateur." A secondary definition is "to pursue an activity for gain or livelihood." To me, professionalism is much, much more. It means to act in a professional manner, one that benefits not merely yourself but the entire community that has supported and nurtured you. It means to perform your duties in a manner that reflects well not just on yourself but also on your community. To me, a professional is someone who is a vital part of his or her community.

So what does it mean to be a part of the community? Does it mean to blindly accept the mores and activities of that community? To not make waves? I don't think so. One thing we have learned from history is that the unquestioning acceptance of community standards and decisions inevitably leads to a decline in that community. The community and its leaders become blasé; they begin to act in a manner not in the best interests of the community. It should be the duty of each and every member of the community to help shape, guide, and mold that community so that it can successfully face the future.

And in order to do that, you must be informed and involved. You must make a conscious effort to learn as much as you can about your community and its activities in order to make thoughtful, reasoned, and respectful contributions. And you must realize that policies must benefit the community as a whole, not just parochial interest. We are all busy people. Many of us have lost colleagues in the past two years and are now expected to provide the same levels of service with reduced personnel. But we still have the obligation to ourselves, our profession, and even to our employers to stay abreast of what is happening in our professional communities.

So what have I and others in AALL been doing to foster community? Well, between the time I am writing and you are reading this article, quite a lot. In September, many of you volunteered for an AALL committee. Many more of you submitted program proposals for the Annual Meeting. Members of the Annual Meeting Program Committee gave up countless hours reading and evaluating those proposals. Then in October, they gave up a weekend of their

precious free time to meet in Chicago to select those programs they felt were not only substantively strong, but also would appeal to the widest number of members.

During this time, members also participated in a webinar training to assist our colleagues in populating the national inventory of primary legal materials. In the last three months, some of you attended or spoke at chapter meetings. I and three other members of the Executive Board were visitors at some of those chapter meetings, bringing greetings and information from AALL Headquarters.

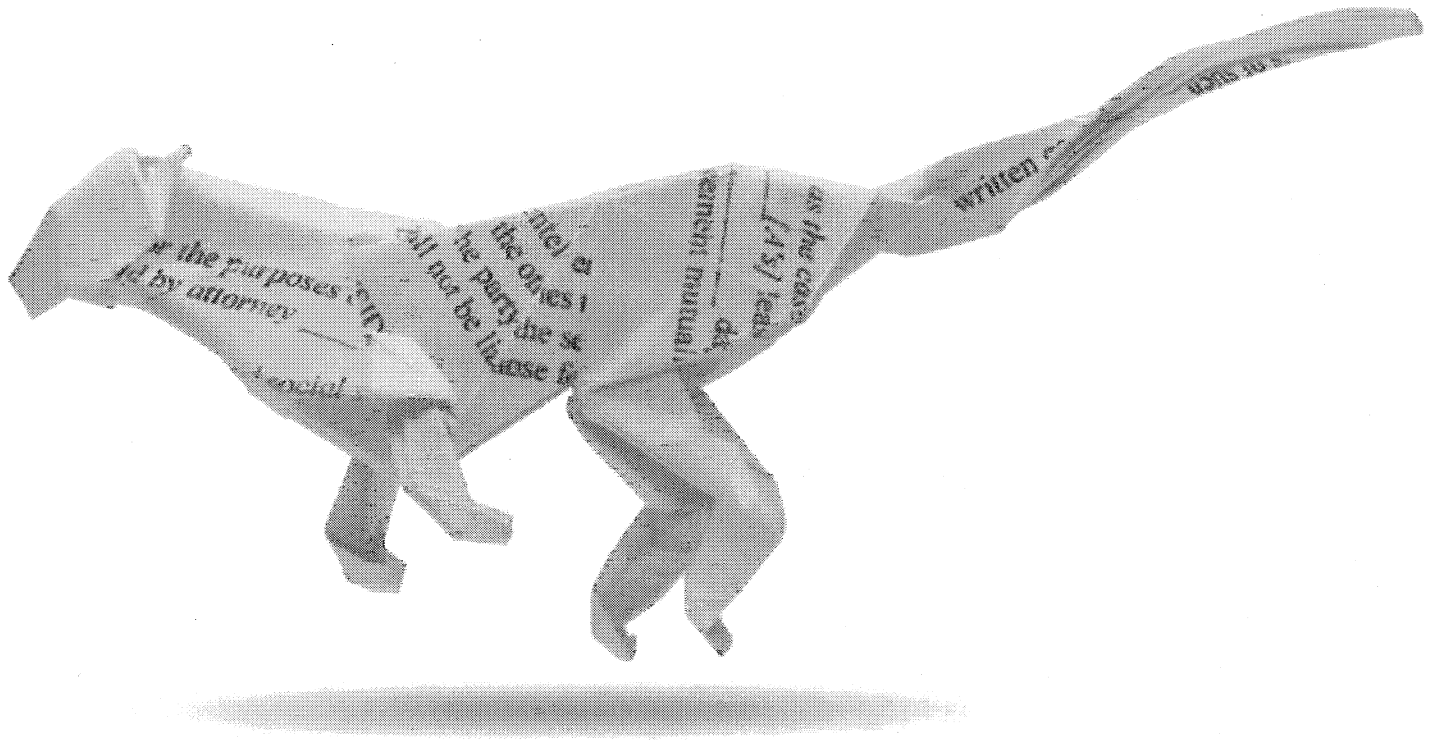
And in the midst of it all, we continued to provide excellent, professional service to those who use our libraries daily: those who have come to depend upon us to help them be contributing members of *their* communities. ■

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next month in spectrum

November is right around the corner. Here's just a taste of what you can look forward to in next month's issue of *Spectrum*:

- The current employment landscape for academic law library directors
- Why animal law is one of the fastest growing areas of legal practice
- How to measure the return on your social media investment
- A reading recommendation to help librarians stay relevant and essential
- The Tao of the circulation desk
- Members share the holiday gifts they would like to give their libraries



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