

## Staff exchanges — practical hints

The growing interest in staff exchanges between librarians (*InCite* 19.11.82, 11.2.83, 25.2.83, 29.4.83, 25.11.83) prompts me to offer an account of my experience of an exchange in 1982/83.

The exchange was initiated in early 1981, by Ellen Howard, a reference librarian at the Health Sciences Library, University of Washington, Seattle, USA. Her first letter was publicised to Australian health sciences librarians through *Australian Medliner*. Prior to making official negotiations, we compared details of qualifications, experience, duties and library environments. We also explored the possibility of exchanging houses and cars. When all these factors were found to be compatible, the real work of arranging the exchange began.

The first step was to obtain the approval of our immediate supervisors, and of the respective university librarians. Approval was readily obtained, on condition that:

- i. no expenses would be incurred by the universities (ie. we would pay our own fares and removal expenses);
- ii. each university would continue to pay the salary of its own employee. (As a corollary of this, we would retain continuity of service and accommodation of leave credits and other benefits.)

Official negotiations were then undertaken by staff administration officers. Each university had to provide a sponsorship form to accompany visa applications. The US Consulate required a Form IAP-66, in order to issue an Exchange Visitor J-1 visa.

The Australian Consulate required a Form M.55(1-80)15, which is a sponsorship for a Temporary Residence visa. Issue of this visa also depends on satisfactory results of a medical examination of the applicant and any accompanying family members. My US visa was issued immediately on applica-

tion, but the Howard family were advised to allow three months for processing of their Australian visa applications.

These official negotiations took a long time to complete. They were complex and frustrating, so we found it a considerable advantage to be able to rely on the expertise of university staff officers with previous experience in arranging academic staff exchanges.

While the official negotiations were taking place, we considered the personal aspects of the exchange in more detail. At this point, we had to carefully consider whether our life styles were really compatible, as we realized we were going to have to place considerable trust in our exchange partner regarding personal property. While the exchange of houses and cars solved certain problems, it meant that we had to reach agreements with regard to payment of on-going domestic expenses. We decided that each would continue to pay her own mortgage, taxes, rates, insurance and repairs due to normal wear and tear. We would 'exchange' payment of utilities, car running costs, including routine maintenance, and payment for any repairs due to breakage or other inflicted damage. Our insurance companies had to be notified of the exchange, but raised no objections.

Other arrangements included assigning a Power of Attorney, packing and storing valuables and personal items, and finding volunteers among family and friends to provide orientation, support and information about local services to the incoming exchange partner. We were both able to meet some of our future colleagues socially before starting work, and this made the first days in the work environment much easier.

Although our work was similar, there were many local details to be learned, and

adjustments to be made. This included different policies, administrative styles, location of materials in complicated layouts, and new data bases. The change of status required some adaptation. For librarians with considerable experience, the sudden lack of responsibility, though understandable, was at times difficult to accept. In addition, we had to cope with cultural and language differences, and disruptions caused by the change of seasons. Ellen, with two small children to accommodate in pre-school, found the latter problem particularly difficult.

Staff at each host library must be prepared for some upheaval. They are taking on a 'new' member of staff without the usual formalities of application, interview and selection. They need to spend time in orientation and training of the exchange person, and they must be prepared to listen to the inevitable comparisons and criticisms. Some tasks may have to be reassigned for the whole year, or until the new person's skills are known. Staff goodwill is an essential component in the success of an exchange.

The preparations for a one-year exchange may seem long and tedious, but the rewards make the effort worthwhile. It was possible to use data bases and online systems which are so far unavailable or rarely used in Australia. There were opportunities to attend conferences, seminars and workshops on many professional topics. Visits to other libraries permitted observation of a variety of applications of new technology. No less important were the opportunities to meet colleagues, exchange ideas, and look at a variety of management styles and organizational practices. As a result, some plans for extending information services in my own library are already being implemented.

Although not all ideas and practices observed during the exchange are applicable or desirable here, the year spent in a different environment provided an opportunity to take a detached, objective view of the local situation, and to return to it with a refreshed outlook.

*Sandra Russell*

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### CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

## MARIA GEMENIS AWARD

for outstanding contribution to special librarianship

Nominations are called for the Maria Gemenis Award.

#### The award criteria are as follows:

The award will be made to a person who has made a significant contribution in the following areas —

- Willingness to share professional expertise.
- Breaking down the barriers of librarians in isolation.
- Successful promotion of the library/information service, achieving outstanding recognition from their parent organisation.

#### Rules of nomination:

1. Only members of the Library Association of Australia, NSW Special Libraries Sectional Group may be nominated.
2. No current member of the NSW Special Libraries Sectional Group Committee may be nominated.
3. Each nominee must have a proposer and a seconder, with the consent of the nominee.
4. The proposer and the seconder must submit a brief resume, in writing, about the nominee and send it to the Maria Gemenis Award at the address which has been nominated in the Call for Nominations.
5. The decision of the Committee will be final and no correspondence will be entered into.
6. The presentation of the award will be reported in the September issue of *Australian Special Libraries News* (or nearest date after presentation) and will include a photograph and the resume of the recipient.
7. Nominations should be reported in *InCite* and June *Australian Special Libraries News*.

Nominations will be received up to 30 April 1984.

Nomination forms are available from: **The Secretary, Special Libraries Section NSW Group, Library Association of Australia, 376 Jones Street, Ultimo NSW 2007.**

## SPECIALS UNION

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time-consuming process of seeking registration under the Trade Union Act. Some objections to the registration of the new Union were made by existing trade unions. This complicated the process and eventually resulted in hearings before the Deputy Industrial Registrar, after which registration was granted.

Although seeking registration was time and energy consuming for the officers of the Union, other industrial work was being carried out at the same time. Two sub-committees drew up detailed 'logs of claims' for conditions and salaries awards. One more hurdle has to be overcome before these applications can be lodged — registration of the Trade Union under the Industrial Arbitration Act. Application for this has already been made.

Any enquiries concerning the Union should be addressed to Cheryl Grant, General Secretary/Treasurer, Library and Information Staff Union, 7 Forsyth Street, West Ryde NSW 2114. Tel 807 4191 (home), 666 9841 (bus).

*Judith Hill*