

## BRASS at 25

### *A Quarter Century of Memories from the Business Reference & Services Section*

#### **Bobray Bordelon, Princeton University**

**RUSA BRASS Contributing Members** are Mark Andersen, Jennifer Boettcher, Bobray Bordelon, Judith Faust, Irwin Faye, Louise Feldmann, Ann Fiegen, Catherine Friedman, Gerald Gill, Susan Goshorn, Craig Hawbaker, Todd Hines, Kelly Janousek, Chris LeBeau, Mark Leggett, Stacey Marien, Rita Moss, Glenda Neely, Susan Neuman, Judy Nixon, Michael Oppenheim, Celia Ross, Andy Spackman, Suzanne Sweeney, Gary White, and Carol Womack.

In 2013, the Business Reference and Services Section (BRASS) celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary as a section of the Reference and User Services Association (RUSA) of the American Library Association. Mary Gaylord and Gerald Gill documented the origins of BRASS back to 1964 to the Business Reference Services Committee of RASD (Reference and Adult Services Division—the predecessor to RUSA). The Committee hosted programs approximately biennially and published occasional bibliographies. By 1986, program attendance had reached over 400. At the Midwinter 1986 meeting, the Business Reference Services Discussion Group was formed and met for the first time. At the 1986 Annual Conference, a subcommittee drew up a petition for formation of a section. On June 27, 1987 the RASD Board of Directors established BRASS.<sup>1</sup>

BRASS exists because of its many volunteers. The elected members (chair, vice-chair/chair-elect, past-chair, secretary, and three members at large) serve on the BRASS Executive Committee. Serving as BRASS secretary were Diane Strauss, Alice Littlejohn, Wendy Diamond, Leslie Hass, Tom Diamond, Lucy Heckman, Michael Oppenheim, Stacey Marien, Ann Fiegen, Mary Gilles, Christy Donaldson, Suzanne Sweeney, and Julia Martin. Serving as member at large were Rita Costello, Robert Rose, Judy Nixon, Susan DiMattia, Timothy Dixon, Linda Beckett, Susan Strehl, Barbara Butler, Robert W. Sears, Kelly Janousek, Susan Goshorn, Joanne Kosanke, Carol Krismann, Irwin Faye, Glenda Neely, Bill Kinyon, Jennifer Boettcher, Lynn Westney, Mark Andersen, Linda Dausch, Patricia Kenly, Greg Fleming, Chris LeBeau, Susan Neilson, Suzanne Sweeney, Kevin Harwell, Diane Campbell, and Rebecca Smith. The first past chair was Mary Gaylord who chaired the Discussion Group when the section was formed. Section chairs are presented in table 1. In its initial year as a section, BRASS consisted of an executive committee, the Business Reference Sources Committee, two program committees, two nominating committees, an ad hoc publications committee, and the discussion group.<sup>2</sup> The 2012–2013 BRASS roster listed the executive committee, one ad hoc committee, ten regular committees, five award committees, four support positions, twelve representatives, and the discussion group.

I had the honor of being the “middle child” of BRASS as the thirteenth elected chair of the section and am considered by many as the link between the “Old BRASS” and the new. While I have been active in various organizations, BRASS has always been my home and family within ALA. I have seen committees come and go, major partnerships with publishers enhance what BRASS can offer its members, interesting programs, discussion groups, and forums



BRASS Chairs at 25th anniversary event  
(photo by Suzanne Sweeney)

but the members are the heart of BRASS and what has kept me involved. I always look forward to the BRASS dinners and anniversary celebrations as a chance to see fellow business librarians as well as those who may not have remained business librarians but come back each year. This article could be easily filled with just my own fond recollections. One of my most memorable conferences was in Toronto for the 15th anniversary during the SARS scare. I received a phone call from the program chair, Lisa O'Connor, to fill in for a speaker at the last minute on a topic with which I had virtually no experience and for which the speaker had not provided a speech. I was also asked to not only cover the American side of business planning but the Canadian as well! At the same conference, I rushed to a grocery store to purchase a cake for the anniversary and had to pay more to cut the cake (a conference requirement since at a conference facility) than the cake cost. I chaired the planning committee for the 20th and served on the anniversary committee for the 25th and in both cases served as the go to person for reaching out to our "dignitaries" (many took part in this article). It was a delight catching up with old friends. BRASS provided countless leadership opportunities and sharpened my organizational skills. Being presented the Gale Award in my home state of Louisiana was also a highlight. BRASS led to other opportunities in RUSA and ALA. I treasure the many friendships I have made through BRASS the most as well as the many laughs shared. Some of my closest friendships were forged through BRASS.

For the twenty-fifth anniversary, presiding BRASS Chair, Ann Fiegen, said

"For 25 years BRASS IS . . .

- welcoming new business librarians.
- professional growth in the field of business information (how to find it and how to use it!).
- teaching and learning: guiding library users to business resources.
- education: preconference, programs, publications, guidelines, and listserv advice that are used daily to make choices and decisions that affect our users.
- member publishers, database developers, and our

Table 1. BRASS Chairs

Chair	Chair
1988–89 Mark Leggett	2001–02 Susan Goshorn
1989–90 Emily Batista	2002–03 Lydia Lafaro
1990–91 Craig Hawbaker	2003–04 Gary White
1991–92 Priscilla Geahigan	2004–05 Stacey Marien*
1992–93 Catherine Friedman	2005–06 Jennifer Boettcher
1993–94 Timothy Dixon	2006–07 Ryan Womack
1994–95 Theo Haynes	2007–08 Judith Faust
1995–96 Judy Nixon	2008–09 Rita Moss
1996–97 Susan Neuman	2009–10 Celia Ross
1997–98 Carol Womack	2010–11 Mark Andersen
1998–99 William Taylor	2011–12 Chris LeBeau
1999–00 Kelly Janousek	2012–13 Ann Fiegen
2000–01 Bobray Bordelon	

\* In 2004–2005, Michael Oppenheim was unable to serve as Chair due to illness. Stacey Marien volunteered to serve as chair and was appointed by the Executive Committee. In 2006–2007, Member at Large, Linda Dausch, stepped down and Michael Oppenheim was appointed by the Executive Committee to complete her term.

sponsors who work in conjunction with librarians and libraries to supply tools to enable our users to meet their goals.

- the opportunity to learn from the best leaders and to become one.

BRASS IS more than 800 members working every day in every kind of library."

Questions were sent to select members who were influential in the last twenty-five years of BRASS. While space does not permit all of the wonderful memories shared much less the many members that have contributed so much to BRASS, excerpts show what has made BRASS the vibrant section it is.

### 1. You were instrumental in the formation of BRASS, what were the biggest challenges and opportunities you saw in the newly formed section?

**Gerald Gill:** The biggest challenge was channeling all the enthusiasm from the group participants. Everybody wanted to help and so focusing everyone's time, talents, and energy took a lot of talking and email exchanges. Luckily business librarians are organizationally savvy and so they needed very little direction. The challenges were small compared to the opportunities. There were so many opportunities for ideas and participation, and in the early months the Discussion Group served as a ready source of both. Ideas from the group would form the basis of future programs and discussion

## FROM COMMITTEES OF RUSA

topics. The group served as an outlet for librarians who were interested in serving on the committee but whose role was limited because of membership constraints. The first organization meeting created a long list of topics members wanted to talk about. There was also the opportunity to be part of a new venture and the foundation of something new and useful in the everyday professional lives.

**Mark Leggett:** Forming committees and working on the group's structure took much of my time, as did helping to formulate the vision and goals of the group. As a new section there was the effort to integrate BRASS within the division and the larger ALA.

**Judy Nixon:** I recall a meeting of the Discussion Group when we first started talking about creating a section. One question was whether to remain with the division or with ACRL? The argument for RASD was that then we would have public librarians in the group. That has proved to be a very important part of BRASS through the years, adding their perspective on working with real business people, not just students and academics. In the early days we were searching for our own path: we created a listserv and a printed directory of all the committee members, and investigated giving an award. That entailed division procedures, finding funding, and then forming the first committee to select an award winner, Diane Strauss. Through the years we have honored those who wrote the "bibles" on business research and those who have been very active in the profession, building BRASS and writing articles.

### 2. What were your most memorable moments in BRASS?

**Leggett:** Meeting and learning from so many other business librarians and talking shop was paramount. What an enjoyable experience that was. The programs and discussion groups were tops. Working with publishers to provide needed business resources was so important, as well as improving existing materials. The establishment of scholarships and awards was a particularly good thing to be a part of.

**Craig Hawbaker:** One time, after a BRASS dinner in a rough area of a city, a group of us had a difficult time finding a willing taxi driver to come to our rescue. On another hectic occasion, I spent quite a few hours trying to help a fellow BRASS colleague find her poster session she had forgotten in a taxi. To complete the taxi theme, on a snowy Midwinter night in San Antonio I had a harrowing drive with a taxi driver who thought she recognized me as an acquaintance and threatened to blow my head off with her gun (which she waved frantically) if I caused any problem! However, the memory that sticks with me most is the year that I spent as BRASS chair. Throughout that year the two past chairs were knowledgeable and gracious guides while all of the committee chairs

and group leaders were so willing to actively participate and help me with whatever needed done. It was so much fun to be a leader in an organization that understood its mission and planned excellent programs and activities that allowed business librarians to shine within the ALA structure and their home institution while also reaching out to all reference and instruction librarians.

**Catherine Friedman:** There were many memorable moments, so it's hard to pick out those I would consider the "most" memorable. (A) being selected to chair the Business Reference Sources Committee of BRASS many, many years back. I was thrilled with this because it was my first leadership position in ALA and for me it was my first real stamp of approval from my peers. (B) serving on the BRASS Program Planning Committee for the 1991 Annual Conference. This was some of the most fun I've ever had working with a team of people on a program and then a publication. (C) being elected to serve as BRASS chair. I was elated and scared at the same time—who wouldn't be? The year proved to be a fun and exciting one for me. (D) organizing BRASS' 10th anniversary celebration and chairing BRASS' Ad hoc Section Review Committee at the same time. The latter, which covered the previous five years of activities, told me why we had so much to celebrate in the former. (E) being selected to receive the BRASS/Gale Group Award for Excellence in Business Librarianship, 2000. Wow, what an honor. I was actually speechless when I got the phone call—something that is, as you know, unusual for me. (F) a recent memorable moment was singing the BRASS song that Judy Nixon's husband wrote, set to the tune of the *Pirates of Penzance* at the BRASS 20th anniversary. It was great fun with great colleagues.

**Nixon:** I certainly recall the five year celebration of BRASS. I think that is the party that we wrote limericks at; there are lots of words that rhyme with BRASS. And the anniversaries. We have come a long way.

**Susan Neuman:** The BRASS programs are always memorable. I remember the first program and how we had to ask for more chairs to handle the crowd. The anniversary celebrations are also very memorable, getting to see all of the people who made BRASS happen.

**Carol Womack:** There are so many! Our first preconference in Miami. Our 10th anniversary party in DC. Our fabulous BRASS dinners. Our BRASS meetings while I was chair. I especially remember a contingent that met with me after one of these meetings and suggested that we shorten them—great idea! Working with our vendors, especially in creating new awards. Working with BRASS members, who were always so generous with their time and so willing to share their expertise and knowledge.

**Kelly Janousek:** The BRASS board meetings on Tuesday

morning when we would have fifty or more people in attendance providing information about all the components of BRASS committee work. In ALA you sometimes attend programs or other meetings which do not bring out many members, especially people who are engaged and concerned about the organization. AND the fact a bar to watch the Super Bowl football game was always close by.

**Susan Goshorn:** My most memorable moments in BRASS probably start with my earliest memories. When I first started going to ALA conferences, I attended MARS meetings because I was very interested in what we then called “electronic reference.” Imagine my surprise when I learned that there was a whole group of librarians who loved business reference! I likely first heard about BRASS from colleagues in Indiana. It might have been Mark Leggett who suggested I attend a BRASS Discussion Group meeting. I was hooked! I loved being around librarians who enjoyed the same focus on business reference and had similar challenges and situations. My first involvement was on a program committee, and it was a perfect introduction to all things BRASS. Now that I have retired and am now far from the workings of the library world . . . . I still read *American Libraries Direct!* . . . What I treasure most are the memories I have of the people who became friends and worked so hard to make BRASS a tremendous success. Everyone was always welcoming to anyone who attended meetings or expressed interest in BRASS. Conferences were invigorating because the programs and discussion groups always covered practical topics. Committee meetings, whether they were executive committee meetings or program committee meetings were a time to work hard but enjoy being with colleagues and friends.

**Gary White:** While I’ve always enjoyed the programs and discussion groups, my favorite memories are the social events—the BRASS dinners on Monday nights and the anniversary celebrations are highlights. I also enjoy the RUSA awards ceremonies each year where we can see BRASS members being recognized. I can’t leave out my very first ALA where I became involved with BRASS—Midwinter 1993. I showed up at the BRASS executive meeting not knowing anyone and immediately realized that I had found my home in ALA.

**Stacey Marien:** I ran for secretary in 2004 on the platform of “I’ll take the best darn minutes ever.” To my surprise, I won. I don’t know if it was my claim of creating the best minutes ever or the humor people saw in my party line but I was honored to be elected. Little did I know that a couple of months later, I would step in as the chair of BRASS. Due to a set of circumstances, the chair-elect could not serve, so I volunteered to take his place. I was then thrown into the world of ALA bureaucracy, but luckily my BRASS colleagues helped me navigate the system. I managed to fill out all the right forms and attend the proper meetings, and the end result was a successful program put on in Chicago of 2005.

**Michael Oppenheim:** It’s virtually impossible to single out even “just” several dozen or so. At the risk of being too personal, too serious, too maudlin—too “something”: having missed Midwinter 2004 due to cancer surgery, I also had to miss Annual 2004 due to my very extended recuperation. I will certainly never forget the utterly amazing surprise of receiving a phone call from Orlando, the evening of the Monday Night Dinner, and the incredibly joyful and profoundly moving experience of speaking with so many BRASS colleagues—Glenda, Bobray, Gary White, and many more—just to name a few! And also: *all* of the BRASS Anniversary celebrations, of course.

**Jennifer Boettcher:** After many years of competing with the GODORT program, the BRASS Chair Elect (Bobray) and I (the program chair) asked GODORT to do a combined program. We ultimately decided to do “Marketing.Gov.” We thought it would support government documents people who have business questions, business librarians who wanted free sources, and since this was 2001 we would get those librarians still trying to find ways to search on the Internet. We expected LARGE crowds. So we asked for a room for 300 and printed 200 handouts. We did get a crowd, but in such a large room it felt empty, and a lot of trees died for our ambitious dream. I was the chair of BRASS in 2006 when we went to New Orleans, my program was “Follow the Money—From Surpluses to School Buses: Understanding Public Finance.” A great subject of interest to anyone who has to read a government budget: trustees, library directors, academic librarians, and engaged citizens. I think we had fifteen in the audience. I will always remember the efforts of Crescent City Brewhouse to make our BRASS dinner a special event and as our group grew they kept saying no problem. I visit them every time when I’m in New Orleans. That was the year following my dad’s death and I thank all the great chairs who took on their leadership with the professionalism I expect from business librarians, I was not fully engaged. Other memories hopefully few remember. I was the lone presenter at an event talking about insights from my book “Industry Research Using the Economic Census.” While in the middle of the presentation, a bowel attack happened and had to leave the room quickly. I left with the instructions “talk about what you like about the Economic Census.” I came back and finished. So when someone asks what is the worst case scenario when presenting, know it could be worse. Those are moments; my memories of BRASS blend together. I remember the thrill of being put on a committee just because I said I was interested; the sense of home when I complain about a publisher with knowing everyone knows why, the joy of sitting with Irwin, Susan Neuman, Bobray, Michael, etc. in a hotel lobby waiting for the rain to stop, the delight when my questions get answered on BUSLIB-L by people I know, the comfort from the welcoming attitude when I invite someone to BRASS Dinner, the pride when I land on a BRASS webpage when I Google my need, and the bliss when I think of the all the strength that BRASS still has.



## FROM COMMITTEES OF RUSA

**Rita Moss:** Most memorable moment was probably the visit to the Commodity Exchange in Chicago in 2005. Can still hear the noise level! Followed by receiving the Gale Cengage award.

**Celia Ross:** I stumbled into BRASS back around 2003 or so. I had returned to an academic library setting (doing some business reference) after a year in a public library and a couple of years in a consulting setting. I was still a fairly new librarian overall. I had been trying to figure out where I “belonged” within the ALA committee alphabet soup, trying out some ACRL committees and the RSS section within RUSA, and one day I came across a description of BRASS and its committees and things just clicked for me. Suddenly I had a home in ALA. I tell people to be careful when they start hanging out with BRASS . . . I went from sitting in on a BRASS Education meeting to within a year or so being chair of that committee and then, not too long after that, chair of the entire section! I never felt at sea, though, knowing that I was surrounded by amazing colleagues and that help was just an email or a phone call away. The BRASS exec board, even as it changed over year after year, always served as an impressive panel of fearless leaders, sharing what they knew not only about business librarianship but also their knowledge of how to successfully navigate the ALA, RUSA and BRASS waters.

**Mark Andersen:** I joined BRASS shortly after joining the Business Department at the Chicago Public Library. Irwin Faye was the Assistant Department Head and was very enthusiastic about BRASS. So I decided to join and attend the executive committee meeting since it was in Chicago. Here was a group of people who were enthusiastic and welcomed me. I also had the GREAT benefit of having someone mentor me. I was able to understand how things worked, and I had someone to ask. Irwin answered all my questions throughout the conference and throughout the year! I had previously been at a university and joined ALA and applied for a committee because it was the thing to do. I did not know anyone and was a bit lost. I did not have anyone to explain how things worked, and I tried to get involved but it didn't click. Looking back I went to ALA and enjoyed the programs and really felt they were useful but my committee work, now, did not feel useful or making an impact or difference. So when I attended my first BRASS meeting, I saw the results-oriented work of the committees—there were web resources to locate, reference reviews and program planning. All was very practical, useful, and interesting. So I quickly felt that I saw the purpose of the Section. So when I was asked to be on a committee, I felt like I could make a contribution. Plus it was great to be actually contributing to the field, and the working with BRASS people was an extra bonus. They really cared about the field—not just theoretical but practical. BRASS members freely share information and NEVER judge or ask why you don't know something—from business concepts to ALA rules! So now I have been involved in BRASS for over a decade, and I have a great network of contacts throughout the country and at all kinds of libraries. They have contributed to

my understanding of the profession and have made my conferences both practical but also fun and interesting. BRASS members work hard and play hard. There is a seriousness of this group but also a caring group, more like a family.

**Chris LeBeau:** I came to BRASS back in early 2003 when I took a new position as a business librarian. Before that I had been very active in my state organization, but it was time to move up to the national level. I found this wonderful, specialized group called BRASS that fit my new position perfectly. I attended Midwinter and sat in on a program planning meeting to see what was what. I introduced myself to Gary White and David Flynn and that was the beginning of a new chapter in my professional life. I remember all this so well. It is hard to pick out most memorable moments; all the events seem to hold equal weight in my mind. I remember just about every program, every executive committee meeting, every conversation in the hallway between this hotel and that, every drink, every dinner, every inch of pavement trod in all those convention cities. Mostly I remember sensing the incredible brain trust of BRASS. And I remember sitting at executive committee meetings being a little terrified of, yet completely awed by someone named Bobray Bordelon who had command of every rule, every guideline, every committee charge, every protocol RUSA and BRASS could concoct. Here was leadership that would ensure BRASS trains ran on time. BRASS was an organization with purpose and passion. Other memorable moments: Jennifer Boettcher and Bobray running meetings; heated discussion groups with Bobray putting vendor's feet to the fire; going out for late night ice cream with BRASS friends in Anaheim; running to catch the New Orleans streetcar after dinner, I didn't know business librarians could run so fast; beautifully staged BRASS Anniversary parties; BRASS vendor receptions in high places: rooftop party in Chicago overlooking the lake and city; BRASS Publisher Forums.

**Andy Spackman:** My favorite BRASS meetings are usually the Discussion Groups—Bobray changing topics when things start going in circles. The time I confessed I thought the purpose of library instruction sessions was to prevent one-on-one reference interactions. And the many, many times I learned about new resources or got opinions about things I was considering.

**Irwin Faye:** It would be all the opportunities to meet great people in the profession. After that it would be the BRASS dinners and parties. The most important though was when I was not sure if I would continue in BRASS after that first few years. At that time, out of the blue, Theo Haines asked me to run for member-at-large. This changed everything for me and all the wonderful things that happened to me in BRASS after that was directly responsible to her faith in me. Of course all of this led to receiving the Gale Award which without doubt was the high point of my career.

**Louise Feldmann:** Definitely my most memorable moment

or experience with BRASS has to be the twenty-fifth anniversary celebration dinner. It was a wonderful evening with BRASS members.

**Gill:** There are so many it's hard to choose. I think my favorite center around creating BRASS. Every part of that process was fun and exciting and satisfying. From the beginning the idea of growing the committee into a discussion group and then to a section got nothing but positive support from the librarians who would drop in on meetings not quite sure what to expect on up to the president and executive secretary of RASD. I remember running, yes running, from board meetings to the conference center to type out a document, then back to a committee. In the Chicago Hilton I employed the hotel office center services to help with creating documents and then proofing and duplicating. Ah, the little details, the invisible details. Still all this was exhilarating. This was behind the scenes. Out with the members, many from the discussion group wanted to volunteer in some way.

**Glenda Neely:** The first memorable moment in my professional career was chairing the RASD Organization Committee when the petition came forward to create a new section for business reference. The Business Reference Discussion Group had become so large they couldn't get proper meeting space nor get everyone involved who wanted to participate. I had been involved with RASD, but I was a brand new business librarian looking for advice and knowledge. I KNEW it had great promise, but it exceeded our expectations. The BRASS dinners have been memorable because they resulted in social networking opportunities that enabled me to grow and advance. The 20th and the 25th Anniversary were like homecoming events. I finally saw the value of longtime professional contacts.

### 3. What role has BRASS played in your career?

**Leggett:** I certainly learned much from the organization and made excellent contacts. Invaluable. BRASS brought me out of my small world of business information into a much larger world of information.

**Hawbaker:** BRASS helped my career by providing top-notch programs and discussion groups which contained current and sometimes controversial insights, networking opportunities, continued education, and new research findings. As a result, I was able to take new ideas and research back to my university where I could implement new programs, try new instructional techniques, build a better collection, and improve services to students and faculty.

**Friedman:** BRASS has been pivotal to my career. It was where I first met librarians who were as interested in and excited about the type of library work I was. The result has been many wonderful and career-spanning professional and,

in some cases, personal relationships. BRASS was where I learned the importance and value of having a solid professional network. I found I could always turn to my BRASS colleagues to get answers to hard and complex questions—they never let me down. It was also where I first realized the power we had as a professional association—that we could have an influence on the environment in which we work to help us better serve our users. For example, we could talk to publishers and then influence how reference sources were produced. My involvement in BRASS also led to my participating in Gale Research Inc.'s Reader's Advisory and New Business Development Programs, which then led to my working with Gale to publish my book on finding commodity price information in 1991. This was a pretty big deal for me. It's also where I gained confidence and built my skills not just as a business reference librarian, but also as a team member and as a leader. I believe that BRASS helped me become a much better librarian and leader and put me on the trajectory which I have been on to this day.

**Nixon:** BRASS has been very important throughout my career as a librarian, even though I left the business field about ten years ago. First, the contacts with other business librarians, the networking and friendships gave me a “home” and “family” within ALA, which is a big organization. Everyone needs to find a group. Being part of BRASS was so easy and so helpful. BRASS provided colleagues to discuss ideas, library issues, go to lunch or dinner. I have always looked forward to seeing the “Old BRASS” every convention. Contacts I made in BRASS lead to many other career opportunities such as articles, presentations, and poster sessions. These lead to invitations to speak at conferences and to write chapters in books. Being elected member-at-large and receiving the Gale Award have been very important to my promotions at Purdue.

**Neuman:** The discussion groups always provided great intelligence regarding new products and services members were providing to users that could be taken home and implemented. Also meeting and working with business librarians provided a network of people to draw upon when information was needed. These colleagues were always willing to share information about what their libraries were doing for users and what products were most useful. BRASS activities also lead to more ALA involvement at the division level and higher which also enhanced my career.

**Carol Womack:** BRASS was responsible for accelerating my career as a business librarian. I signed on shortly after being hired in my first business librarian job at UC Irvine and was immediately invited to participate in BRASS committees. From there it was a matter of showing up and working with the most talented group of librarians ever. All of my management experience came from BRASS. The opportunities that were not provided by my day job came from BRASS. I have tried several times to retire from ALA activities after moving to a community college, but I always check on what is happening with BRASS at

## FROM COMMITTEES OF RUSA

ALA Midwinter and Annual. I'm looking forward to Las Vegas (Annual 2014) and one more BRASS dinner!

**Janousek:** As I played with other ALA divisions and committees, if there were procedures or processes that were not in place or working poorly—I would always return to BRASS to get “best practices” or “how to do it right” ideas. The foundation that BRASS has as an organization works and helped me to progress through other murky ALA committee structures and making me look like I knew what I was doing. When I ran for ACRL president in 2009, one of the “why we think you would be great” comments made by the nominating committee was my background with BRASS and the skill sets it gave me.

**Goshorn:** BRASS played an important part in my career. When I moved from a humanities position to one focused on business and technology reference, BRASS provided an opportunity for highly focused learning about providing business reference. Conferences and committee work always kept me informed on what was trending in the most progressive libraries as well as how colleagues from all types and sizes of libraries were dealing with challenges. The administration at my library was always interested, and usually supportive, of ideas I shared when I returned from conferences, regardless of whether it was a new service or resource to consider for the whole library or something focused on my own department. I can remember, too, seeing relief on the faces of some of our department librarians when I would share how BRASS colleagues were successfully dealing with a particular problem or issue that we were also facing. The people who make up BRASS made me a better reference librarian and a better manager. Although I have not been very good about keeping in touch with people, I remember so many BRASS members fondly and am thankful for how I was welcomed, and how everyone so freely shared their experiences . . . and their friendship.

**White:** BRASS was instrumental in my career. As a fledgling business librarian in the early 1990s, my colleagues in BRASS were so important in helping me to do my job effectively. I was also in a tenure-track job, so my involvement with BRASS certainly helped me get through that process. The relationships I built through BRASS helped me to develop strong collections and services in my own institution, which eventually helped me to move up into higher-level positions in my library. So BRASS was—and still is—very important to me.

**Marien:** I started as a newly hired business librarian at Elon College (now University) in the summer of 1997. I had no idea what I was doing. Thankfully, I had come out of library school having been mentored by Rita Moss. I knew there was an ALA group devoted to business librarians so I set out to join them. I spent the next several years cultivating my career as a business librarian, and BRASS was there every step of the way. I valued the opportunities to serve on committees and

actually participate in programs and events that were relevant to my job. The networking in BRASS was fantastic for a new librarian and everyone I met was more than willing to help me with both my career activities and any question I could not answer in my job. Even though I am no longer a member of BRASS (having switched to technical services several years ago), I consider BRASS my first home.

**Oppenheim:** BRASS has been the infrastructure of my career. Thanks to BRASS, I have forged friendships and professional relationships that have enriched my career beyond measure. As an English major who came to business through the side-door of government information, I cannot imagine what I would have done without the network of brilliant, creative, funny, empathetic, compassionate, tirelessly supportive, and endlessly generous colleagues in every corner of the country who have enlightened and supported me far more than they could ever know and infinitely more than I could ever repay. In the realm of clichés that exist for a *very good* reason, BRASS is a family, whose unconditional embrace has, without hyperbole, meant the world to me.

**Boettcher:** Sometimes I think I still have my job because no one wants to take on the questions I do. What has kept me sane is the outlet that BRASS has provided to try out new ideas, explore my leadership abilities, guide other librarians, and dig deeper into my interest in business librarianship (remember the public finance program.) I have been on seventeen different BRASS Committees at least once. I give to BRASS because it gives back in so many ways.

**Judith Faust:** BRASS was a central part of my career—not only did I help to create and manage valuable resources through BRASS, but I chaired committees and eventually BRASS itself, and that evidence of leadership of a national organization was definitely influential in my earning tenure and promotion at my university.

**Moss:** The part BRASS has played in my career I think again goes back to the relationships built and support offered from all members. I also feel that some vendor relationships have improved because of the common ground of BRASS.

**Ross:** Who knows where I would be without BRASS? It has been my north star over the past decade, and each and every one of my BRASS colleagues continues to inspire, teach, and support me along the way. Thanks to everyone in BRASS—I'm happy and proud to call you all colleagues and friends. Here's to many more years of BRASStasticness!

**Andersen:** Much of my professional success can be directly attributed to my BRASS membership. And I am grateful for all the BRASS members who took time to talk to me and all those I have worked with over the years. BRASS is the difference between a job and a profession.

**LeBeau:** I wouldn't be the librarian I am today without BRASS. BRASS informs the work I do, BRASS gives me opportunities to advance professionally and participate in scholarly sharing. I always bring back from BRASS more than I take to it. BRASS makes me smarter. I love being surrounded by all these crazy smart business librarians who lust for more information and strive to heighten their game. Business librarianship has opened many doors for me both on campus and in my community, and that would not have happened without BRASS. I value all my BRASS colleagues.

**Spackman:** When I was just starting as a business librarian I sent an email out on BUSLIB-L saying I wanted to focus my efforts and asking whether I should do it in BRASS or in SLA. I was immediately set upon by half-a-dozen BRASSers, and before I knew it I was sitting on a program planning committee, meeting the most wonderful people at conferences, and I've never looked back. BRASS has been my community and helped me become a business librarian in a way that my degrees or my job title never could.

**Faye:** This is the difficult part as it has done so much. When I first joined BRASS, I was a very shy person concerning public speaking. I had just taken a new job as the head of the Business/Science/Technology Department of the Sulzer Regional Library. One of my goals at that time was to become a good speaker. I started organizing business reference workshops and classes there. When I was able to do that, I volunteered for my first speaking assignment for the BRASS Business Reference in Public Libraries Committee. From that, I was able to volunteer to speak and also to coordinate programs for BRASS which finally made me confident to be the Business Reference Speaker at the Business101 pre-conferences. I would NEVER have developed skills as a speaker without BRASS. There were no other opportunities to speak at that level available to me. A few years later, a young business librarian and BRASS member came up to me during the discussion group and told me that she hoped one day to be able to speak as I did. Not only was this a wonderful compliment, it also showed that she was able to use BRASS as an organization to help with her own career goals. BRASS is an incredible welcoming organization for anyone willing to work hard. The opportunity to publish through BRASS helped me learn how to set up curricula and teach successful business reference and computer classes to library patrons, colleges and universities, and community organizations. As a member of various program planning committees, I learned how to create and promote major programs which information I was able to use in my career at the Chicago Public Library. Being a member-at-large also helped me to learn how to use an elected position to effect positive change in an organization. BRASS has done a lot for me and my career would never have been as fulfilling to me or as successful without it. I am not just saying this to write something nice as it is completely true. Being a loyal BRASS member, nearly eleven years after retirement attests to that.

**Feldmann:** When I was new to business librarianship, I discovered BRASS when looking for business librarian resources on the web. I joined and without knowing much about the organization offered to volunteer. I was put on the discussion group committee. Peter McKay was chair of the discussion group at the time and was just great. I served on that committee as a member for a couple of years and then as chair. I really got my feet wet with BRASS on that committee. I moved to membership and served as a committee member and chair of that, planning a couple of the membership receptions (my precursor to the 25th celebration—I have some sort of party planning capability in me!). The other business librarians who I have met and worked with in BRASS are just incredible. Their expertise is invaluable. On numerous occasions, I have emailed fellow BRASS members asking for advice. The networking, advice, and support I've gotten via BRASS have been invaluable.

**Gill:** As a business librarian the networks I built gave me access to the collective and individual knowledge of so many dedicated experts. The information and advice they offered played a direct role in helping me build the collection and alert me to new databases. They were available to help with research questions. The librarians in BRASS were my eyes and ears in other institutions so I learned much about best practices and how they solved similar problems. The vendor contacts I made were also important in not only learning about new products plus those under development but also new of what their client institutions were doing. All this had a direct positive impact on my career, making me a better business librarian. Coincidentally, my participation brought me in contact with more opportunities like offering ACRL continuing education courses on business information. BRASS was fertile with ideas and I benefitted in all these ways and more.

**Neely:** The people and contacts I made gave me confidence and opportunities to speak, participate on panels, and serve on boards and committees. By attending BRASS Discussion Group sessions I was able to keep up with new publications, database comparisons, obtain product evaluations from librarians, and meet some of the leaders in our field. Gary White invited me to contribute articles, and program planners included me in several conference events. The involvement with BRASS helped my research, my teaching, and my faculty requirements for tenure. It might sound emotional, but many colleagues and friends I've made in BRASS have been a second family to me, including Bobray, Michael, Judith, Irwin, and Catherine. Once I got involved I recruited other business librarians to experience the value of BRASS. Not only have BRASS members made a difference in my career, but their willingness to help me out when I was stumped or had run out of resources (Michael comes to mind) was invaluable. Thank you, BRASS friends!



## FROM COMMITTEES OF RUSA

**4. Two of our BRASS chairs have gone on to division presidencies—Friedman served as president of 2 divisions—RUSA and LLAMA; Gary White as president of RUSA. Jennifer Boettcher is currently serving as RUSA Councilor to ALA. What advice do you have for other aspiring BRASS leaders?**

**Boettcher:** I may not be on any BRASS committees right now, but being on RUSA Executive Board as RUSA Councilor has put BRASS in the room. My advice to people in BRASS is don't be shy, tell the leadership what you need, and soon you will be the leader.

**Friedman:** I have been fortunate to be elected to three offices in ALA—BRASS Chair, RUSA President, and then most recently, LLAMA President. My advice to aspiring BRASS leaders is twofold. First, find those people who care about something as much as you do, whatever that might be, and then work with them to make that something more of what you want it to be. BRASS was built by ALA members who felt the need for a professional home within that large organization. To get that, they took what was there and made it what it needed to be. And after twenty-five years it continues to serve that purpose. I also would say that they should take advantage of the professional opportunities presented to them—whether it is to learn something new, to meet someone new, to serve in a new role, or to take on a new responsibility. You never know where things will lead you. Looking back to my beginning in BRASS, I never expected that participating in the RASD Business Reference Services Discussion Group back in the late 1980's would prove to be so critical to my career. But it was, and I am continuously thankful to BRASS and my BRASS colleagues because of that.

**White:** Just jump in and volunteer to be a leader, and don't be shy about it. BRASS is a great support network, and I think many people tend to be hesitant or have self-doubts about their abilities to be effective leaders. But BRASS has a great system of mentors and role models and is really such a supportive environment. Many business librarians are not in leadership positions at their jobs, so BRASS is a great place to get leadership experience and to learn from other leaders. The other piece of advice is to go to as many events and meetings as possible and to network with colleagues in BRASS and the other sections of RUSA and ALA. Also contact the leadership of BRASS and RUSA and ask questions—the leaders of BRASS and RUSA are always willing to talk about their experiences and can help aspiring leaders with this process.

**5. Louise Feldmann organized the BRASS 25th celebration. What were your highlights from the celebration?**

**Feldmann:** I got to work with a fantastic committee of truly amazing librarians—Bobray, Mark, Celia, Michael, and Irwin. It was just a dream group to work with. The party was great and seeing everyone, including our vendor sponsors, having a great time was wonderful; the food, the flowers, the drinks, the swag. It all came together. Having so many BRASS members together, including those who have retired was fabulous. I was thrilled that everyone enjoyed themselves. I was so pleased that we pulled off a lovely evening.

**6. As BRASS enters its next 25 years as a section, let's take out our crystal ball. Andy Spackman served as Vice-Chair/Chair-Elect for the 25th and is the 26th Chair. Todd Hines will be the 27th Chair. What do you see in the future for BRASS in its next 25 years?**

**Hines:** I hope that BRASS can remain a place where business librarians are able to connect with other librarians in the profession and that we can continue to offer timely content to our members. The strength of BRASS has always been its dedicated members and I hope that we will continue to attract active, engaged librarians to BRASS.

**Spackman:** I see no slowing down for BRASS. We're becoming more connected through social media and virtual discussion groups, and the programming BRASS offers at conference remains robust. BRASS is currently involved in an IMLS Sparks grant for establishing guidelines and best practices in financial literacy education services in libraries, and BRASS is taking a leading role in the library world's response to *Harvard Business Review's* increasing access restrictions. Through initiatives like these, BRASS is extending its reach and working to support the interests of its members. In the future, as now, BRASS's great strength will come from the individual contributions of the remarkable people who form its membership.

*On behalf of BRASS, thanks to all of its members, committee members, chairs, representatives, sponsors, and RASD/RUSA staff for making the first 25 years as a section so memorable!*

## References

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