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A Tribute to Alan Charnes

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Associate Director, Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries

Abstract

Friends and colleagues offer words of tribute and good wishes on the August 2011 retirement of Alan Charnes, Executive Director of the Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries.

Keywords: Alan Charnes, Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries



"Alan Charnes, *in situ*, at one of the many conferences attended each year."

Alan Charnes, Executive Director of the Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries (the Alliance), recently announced his decision to retire in August, 2011. Since Alan's name has been paired with "library cooperation" and "partnership" for 20 years and given his strong support of this publication, the editorial team thought it fitting to compose the following tribute. We asked George Machovec, the Associate Director of the Alliance, to provide an overview of Alan's work with libraries. We then invited a number of Alan's colleagues from the Alliance, and beyond, to offer their perspectives. Thanks to all who contributed, but thanks, especially, to Alan for his leadership within the Alliance library community and in library groups outside of Colorado.

"One of the Most Unique Library Collaborations: The Alliance under Alan"

In the early 1990s I was attending a quarterly CARL user group meeting on behalf of Arizona State University which had become a subscriber to the CARL system in the late 1980s. I was impressed by the man in a pin-striped suit, Alan Charnes, the new executive director of the non-profit Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries. He was a marked contrast to many of the other librarians sitting around the table, one knitting, another in Birkenstocks—the usual. Of course, I was not on the inside track so I was not fully aware of the drama surrounding the separation of CARL into two entities, the for-profit CARL Systems Inc (later CARL Corporation) and the non-profit Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries. By late 1992, I found myself having lunch with Alan at a library conference in Denver, interviewing to become his third employee at the Alliance. He's the best boss I've ever had.

Alan has provided solid and informed leadership in the Alliance over his twenty years as executive director. In the early years of the non-profit there was a singular agenda—the relationship with CARL Corporation and how to have this locally grown integrated library system meet our collective needs. But as time went on the organization began to evolve. One of the first moves into a broader agenda was the acquisition of a Sun Server to offer locally loaded Ovid databases to Alliance members. This move brought around two major changes—group licensing of databases and the development of an IT infrastructure. The licensing of digital products has become one of the cornerstones of the

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Alliance. The IT infrastructure at the Alliance opened up many new development opportunities.

In the mid-1990s, when it was decided to sell CARL Corporation (including UnCover), for which the Alliance was majority owner, Alan led and protected the Alliance interests through a complicated legal process. The Alliance emerged with revenue from the sale which set the organization on new footing. Funds from the sale helped acquire new databases, partially fund the migration of some libraries to a new integrated library system platform and provided additional funding for what was to become the Prospector Union Catalog. This portfolio has been a continuing legacy to the organization.

In 1996, the Alliance, through the University of Northern Colorado, wrote a grant to the State of Colorado and received \$640,000 for what is now named the Prospector system. Funding from the grant was augmented by the portfolio and the Alliance launched Prospector in 1999, the union catalog which has become one of the defining services of the Alliance. Once again, the political expertise to make this happen was lead by Alan. Prospector now serves over 40 libraries in Colorado, making it one of the most high impact library systems in the State.

Under Alan's leadership other key initiatives have blossomed. Database licensing has grown into a greater than \$10 million per year program, the Gold Rush A-Z/Linker/ERM service is now used by over 80 libraries around the United States and brings in strong net revenue to the organization, the Alliance Digital Repository (ADR) is a cluster of libraries using open source software to provide a platform for the new digital age. Collectively, these initiatives make the Alliance one of the most unique library collaborations in the country.

Alan, thank you.

George Machovec
Associate Director,
Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries

"Alan, the Constant"

My friendship and working relationship with Alan stretches over two decades and five different jobs. No matter whether I worked in for-profit, non-profit, national, regional, or state organizations, Alan was the constant who always played a key role in that library and information environment. When he first came to the Alliance, I was working at CARL Corporation, serving as the customer client liaison to the Alliance. He was always asking questions as he learned more about the library business. For many years he served on the State Library's AIRS [Acquisition of Information Resources Statewide] Committee and was instrumental in helping with negotiations for affordable databases not just for the Alliance but also in leveraging their participation to help other libraries throughout the state. Alan has always had a keen eye for hiring talent and bringing them to the Alliance office, which is demonstrated by the success of Prospector and other projects. And he has always been a part of my life outside of the library world as well, since we frequently were involved in civic engagement at the same political events, and even now we belong to the same health club. The academic library consortia world will be losing a strong supporter, and the Alliance a major part of its history. Congratulations to Alan for a long successful career and a well-deserved retirement!

Brenda Bailey-Hainer,
Executive Director,
American Theological Library Association,
Chicago, IL

"Consummate Manager"

It has been a great pleasure for me, personally and professionally, to work and interact with Alan Charnes. Alan is the consummate manager, and his many dedicated years of leadership as the Executive Director of the Alliance have left it in good fiscal, strategic, and operational standing. Alan leaves us with a distinguished legacy of having built the Alliance into one of the best regional library associations in the country.



Pat Burns
Dean of Libraries,
Vice President for Information Technology,
Professor of Mechanical Engineering,
Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO

“Fierce Negotiator; Savvy Advocate”

I wish Alan the best. He is a fierce negotiator and is politically savvy as an advocate for libraries. He is also an immeasurably kind individual. I will miss the knowledge and energy he brought to the Alliance, but more, I will miss that great smile.

Elizabeth W. Brodak,
Library Director,
John U. Tomlinson Library,
Mesa State University, Grand Junction, CO

“Alan Charnes-Big Picture Thinker, Master Collaborator”

It may be a cliché, but the Alliance is clearly a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. Alan has served Alliance member libraries very well, but he has also kept a vision alive of the Alliance as the foundation of improved library services for Colorado and Wyoming. Services such as Prospector (the premier library resource sharing network in the region), the regional courier network, Colorado statewide database packages – they all have been nurtured and sustained by Alan Charnes in one way or another. During times of budget constraint that often test collaborative will, he has applied his financial acumen and superb negotiating skills to seek consensus on essential services and develop strategies for support. I nominate Alan Charnes for an honorary Master of Library Science and Collaboration.

Carol Dickerson,
Director, Tutt Library,
Colorado College, Colorado Springs, CO

“All Boats Rise”

Shortly after I was hired as the Dean of Libraries at the University of Wyoming, I attended the annual ALA conference. Although I had yet to start my position, I was invited to an early morning breakfast with Alliance directors to

discuss Prospector issues. Somewhat crabby over a 7:00 am meeting and arriving in a desperate need for coffee, I walked into the meeting room and immediately, Alan Charnes introduces himself and welcomes me to the Alliance. The welcome was so warm and gracious, my caffeine needs disappeared and I knew there was something special about the Alliance. Due to Alan’s leadership, the Alliance is a model of collaboration with an informal tag line of “all boats rise.” The collegial nature of the Alliance is not an accident and through Alan’s leadership we are a cohesive partnership that advances each individual institution’s goals. Gracious and inclusive, Alan has led and managed the Alliance to its success that we take for granted today. He leaves behind a professional and personal gap that will not easily be filled. Alan’s influence will continue for many years and future accomplishments will be achieved due to the foundation that Alan established. On behalf of the University of Wyoming, I wish all the best for Alan in his retirement and thank him for his dedication and hard work.

Maggie Farrell
Dean, University Libraries,
University of Wyoming,
Laramie, WY

“Exemplar of Collaboration”

I remember the first time I met Alan. It was in April, 2001. I had been at Regis less than a month and our library was hosting an Alliance meeting of some kind. Alan arrived and immediately introduced himself, explained a little about the Alliance, and praised the role Regis had played in the consortium since joining a few years earlier. More than anything, it was Alan’s manner – his warmth, his relational approach, his enthusiasm – that signaled to me what the Alliance is really all about. It is a consortium focused on *how* we do things together as much as *what* we do. Over the years Alan has continued to be an exemplar of collaboration, and I have learned much from him. Thank you, Alan, and best wishes in your retirement.

Ivan Gaetz,
Dean of the Library,
Regis University, Denver, CO



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“Gentle Laugh; Right Words; Wit and Charm”

I’ve known Alan since we first met, back in the good old days of extraordinary library funding, no worries about legislative support of libraries, and everyone just played well in the sandbox. And since those days are waning quickly, suffice it to say his humor, repose, and generally calm demeanor then has followed to this day. I will forever treasure those AIRS and plethora of other long-forgotten strategic planning meetings, as I sat watching his bemused look while he took all the proceedings; always listening carefully, never distracted by the ubiquitous “crackberry” or other device. Then, just when things devolved into chair throwing, name calling, teeth gnashing and hair pulling, Alan’s gentle laugh would waft across the table, followed by just the right words to settle the tempestuous crowd. Things would get back on track and life would move forward under his still laughing gaze. As things wrapped up he might regale the assemblage with a story, yarn, or other entertainment. Then everyone would disperse to the four winds to await the next gathering for the effervescent but low-key Alan wit and charm. The good old days will never again be what they once were without you at the table.

Gene Hainer,
Colorado State Librarian

“Now-Let’s-not-Get-too-Fancy”

I have effusively complimented Alan Charnes so many times over the last few years that, upon seeing me, he starts looking for his hip waders. This time I will resist the hyperbole and simply state that Alan has been my most reliable source of good advice on running a consortium and is truly one of the people that make it fun to work in this field. I have known Alan for years, probably starting in the late 1990’s through our association in the Consortium of Consortia (now ICOLC). Having backed in to a consortial role, I was looking for advice, best practices, etc. and Alan was a true find, along with a few other ICOLC colleagues. The hallmarks of Alan Charnes are his sense of humor, ambition, strong ethics, cowboy boots and now-lets-not-get-too-fancy attitude. Of course, one of the best things I can say about Alan is that he travels

with Barbara ... good company! Upon hearing that Alan was retiring, my first reaction was, well that’s it then; I’m done too. I got over that and am prepared to soldier on, happy to know that the Colorado Alliance, our big sister to the east, is in good hands with George Machovec. Alan, have fun while we keep fighting the good fight and imagining you and Barbara cycling around Italy!

John F. Helmer
Executive Director,
Orbis Cascade Alliance,
Oregon and Washington

“Mover and Shaker”

It is hard to imagine the library community without Alan; he has been a fixture in our world, and for better, for a long time. His cooperation on AIRS (our state-wide database purchasing consortium), with *Collaborative Librarianship*, with the Colorado Academic Library Consortium, and with other conferences has made the Alliance a real ‘mover and shaker’ in Colorado. Alan will be missed.

Valerie Horton
Executive Director,
Colorado Library Consortium,
Headquarters, Centennial, CO

“A Real Mensch”

As one of the members of the Search Committee who selected Alan Charnes, I certainly knew he was the best candidate for the position but must admit I had no idea how exceptional his service would prove. He embraced consortial ideology and the Colorado (and later Wyoming) libraries. Under his leadership, the Alliance became a leader in U.S. consortial organizations. The Alliance was never stagnant and always responsive to the needs of the member institutions and the users of the many libraries. He did all this despite an avowed first love of baseball! But to me, he not only was an executive director of a formidable Alliance molded during his tenure, I also consider him a real mensch—a person to admire and emulate, with character and a sense of what is right and responsible—complete with a smile that lights up his face. Enjoy your re-



tirement, my friend. Your labor in the vineyards was well done, now enjoy the wine.

Joanne Lerud-Heck,
Director of the Library,
Colorado School of Mines,
Golden, CO

“A Legacy of Leadership and Drive”

When I agreed to serve as Chair of the Alliance’s Member Council, I knew that I would have a lead-in year as Chair-Elect and during when I would be able to get my affairs in order. Not unlike the summer when for vacation I rafted the Colorado and was told by the touring company to make sure my will was in order, “Just in case.” During that lead-in year, Executive Director Alan Charnes, in his typically graceful manner, assured me not to worry.

Well, during the year of my Chairmanship from the summer of 2010 through the fall of 2011, the Alliance as a consortium experienced truly significant changes and challenges. During my “reign,” Member Council established a Study Group to work with the Alliance Digital Repository (ADR) Steering Committee to consider the platform utility used by the ADR. I’m pleased to note that the work of the Group was exemplary and provided the Steering Committee with meaningful, actionable information. The end result was a reinvention of the ADR. Later during my term of service, ADR Director Jessica Branco Colati and Executive Director Charnes announced their resignation and retirement, respectively.

These two events – the reinvention of the ADR and the loss of two key leaders – are milestones along the river of life for the Alliance this past year. And I admit I did not prepare for these changes, as I did not anticipate them. My year as Chair simply coincided with what was frankly a tumultuous year for the Alliance, a year that tested the consortium. I was tested during my summer rafting trip but I came through unscathed and better for it; I experienced an exhilarating ride that tried my mettle, tested a few fears, and allowed me to grow in ways I hadn’t anticipated. So too was I – and the consortium – tested during the year I happened to serve as

Chair of Council. While the events of the year certainly shaped the course of my term, it was Alan who I must credit with providing steadfast and amiable leadership through the ups and downs, the slipping and sliding, always with a clear and firm sense of direction.

For nearly twenty years the Alliance was strong because of Alan, stronger now despite our tumultuous year because of Alan, and I am confident it will remain strong due to Alan’s legacy of leadership and drive. I wish Alan the best at his retirement and am confident that his legacy is the right kind of ballast for the white waters we in the academic library community are likely to face in the near and distant future.

Jerry Perry, Director
University of Colorado Health Sciences Library,
Alliance Member Council Chair, 2010/11
Medical Library Association President, 2011/12

“Clarity, Curiosity, Optimism”

I can’t recall where or when I first met Alan but, by early 1996, I do know I had come to know him. At that time, following an initial and small “birds of a feather” table session for library consortia at a CNI meeting, instigated by Lou Parker from North Carolina, we set up the first consortia listserv with seven subscribers. This has evolved into the current ICOLC [International Coalition of Library Consortia] listserv, now 568 strong.

Alan was one of those initial seven ringleaders that grew steadily in 1996 leading to the first ICOLC meeting in early 1997 in St. Louis with 56 attendees. But back then we just referred to ourselves as the Consortium of Consortia or COC. Alan volunteered to host our fourth meeting in Denver in fall 1998 and our attendance almost doubled to 97. So far there have been 22 North American meetings. Alan has missed only one. Only five others have done as well or better.

We will miss him greatly at the next one in spring 2012, ironically once again in Denver. The first time the projector was stolen at the hotel and Alan and I had to account for that small financial problem given the ICOLC’s meager, if



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non-existent, resources. No doubt that problem will not be repeated.

We will miss him greatly. Alan most often lets others foam at the mouth to the vendors and publishers when called in to be “grilled”. But then, most often, he will weigh with cool, concise, and clear comments and advice. Always good to have someone who helps clear and calm the air. We will miss that greatly.

We will miss his curiosity about how to go forward. We will miss his optimism about how to go forward, always framed with both a make the future happen attitude as well as a realistic attitude. We will miss the always positive influence and leadership he has brought to our activities.

Most of all we will miss the opportunity to say farewell as an ICOLC group, in person. We'll have to work on that one next year in Denver. But know, Alan, that your ICOLC friends and colleagues are grateful for your leadership and contributions and we will miss you. We wish you all the best.

Tom Sanville
Director of Licensing and Strategic Partnerships,
Lyrisis, Headquarters, Atlanta, GA;
past Director, OhioLINK;
Founding Member, ICOLC (International Coalition of Library Consortia)

“Leadership and Service: Words for Alan Charnes”

At Regis University our mission statement consistently proclaims that we are engaged in education for “leadership in the service of others.” Rarely have we seen our ambition more fully realized in one of our friends and partners than in the life and person of Alan Charnes. Standing alone, Alan’s lengthy career in public service modeled that ideal in and of itself. His demonstrably successful tenure at the helm of the Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries has only served to reinforce his standing both as a leader and as a servant of others – library patrons, students, faculty, public libraries, colleges, universities and in a very real way the higher education community of Colorado and Wyoming.

From the perspective of our university, Alan Charnes has earned graduate degrees in leadership and service several times over. And he has earned as well our respect, our appreciation, and our deep gratitude. Godspeed, faithful servant and fearless leader!

Allan L. Service, Ph.D.
Provost *Emeritus*,
Regis University,
Grateful Board Member, Colorado Alliance of
Research Libraries

“Setting a Standard”

The world of libraries has benefitted greatly from the leadership of Alan Charnes as Executive Director of the Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries (the Alliance). Alan’s firm belief that we achieve greater results by “working together” has set a standard that many consortial agencies strive for. Although he is not a librarian by degree or by direct work experience, Alan’s reputation as a leader in library consortial activities is known world-wide.

Thank you, Alan, for all you have done for libraries world-wide. You have set the stage for the next generation of activities that strengthen the notion that by working together we can better leverage our funds and provide more access to information.

Teri Switzer
Dean, Kraemer Family Library,
University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, CO

“Steady on the Tiller”

Digging through two years of email from Alan, looking for text to remind me of what I admire in him, I found many epistles like this: "J and G, Sounds good to me. Alan". Brevity is good. One relatively long note – four whole sentences – reminded me of a hand that has always seemed steady on the tiller. I even found an email with five whole paragraphs (the essence of an Alliance proposal for Marmot to join Prospector). In my experience Alan always writes, and says, just enough, and it's all good.



Jimmy Thomas
Executive Director,
Marmot Library Network,
Headquarters, Grand Junction, CO

**“A Brief Tribute to Alan
on the Occasion of His Imminent Retirement”**

I am honored to submit this brief message about Alan Charnes as he makes plans to take a well-earned retirement. Those of us who were members of the Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries (The Alliance) when Alan was hired as our next Executive Director and CEO were surprised and a bit perplexed that someone with no library experience would be at the helm. It soon became quite clear that the wisdom of the Alliance Board in selecting Alan was indeed sagacious. What the Alliance needed at the time of Alan’s hiring was someone with well-grounded knowledge of higher education, someone with a sound fiscal management & control background, and someone with administrative credibility. The Alliance at that time had gone through a separation and sale of CARL Systems, while creating a financial portfolio of invested funds. This, as we faced the advent of the web and the new world of digital information services. Thus, it was a time of culture change for the Alliance

and one that demanded forward-looking, informed, business-based leadership. Alan brought that type of leadership to the Alliance, creating a strategic plan, hiring the right staff to work the plan with the Board and library Deans/Directors, and charting the new course for a consortium that would soon achieve national and international stature for its programs, products and services, focused exclusively on enhancing access to information resources at the membership level.

My personal thanks to Alan as a member of the Board (and as a Library Dean) for his years of dedicated and devoted service to the library community, and more specifically to the Alliance. Much of the attribution for the added value of the Alliance to the people of Colorado, and for its current and future success as a leveraged, resource-sharing-focused collaborative, must go to Alan and the solid foundation he created for current and future generations of the Alliance membership. We remain in his debt.

James F. Williams II.,
Dean of Libraries,
University of Colorado Boulder

