

# PNLA Leads! Institute

By Jay Peters.

Last October, 32 leaders in libraries, 8 mentors, 2 facilitators and 2 coordinators made the trek out to Schweitzer Resort, just outside of Sandpoint, Idaho, which is 2 hours east of Spokane. We were there to participate in the Pacific Northwest Library Associations bi-annual (in this case every two years) Leadership Institute known as Leads! (exclamation point is part of the name).

When we assembled on our first evening, John and Becky of Schreiber Shannon Associates, long-time Leads! facilitators, told us that, just as with Las Vegas, what happens at the Institute stays at the Institute.

They promptly asked us what he had heard about the experience. Answers were vague. Some participants spoke of asking colleagues about their experiences with Leads! and said that people were not especially forthcoming. One colleague had told a participant, "Wait and see what happens when you get there."

It was also rumoured that there would be tears. I wondered why I hadn't noted the word 'intensive' when I was reading the description. Inside, my stomach shrank a little.

Spirits, however, were high from the beginning and remained so throughout. I did not hear much grumbling, which can be rare in groups of more than about two.

## Idyllic Location

In choosing Schweitzer Resort, Leads! Coordinator, Mary DeWalt, chose the perfect spot for the retreat: the off-season ski resort allowed us to be a closed, 42-person community for the 5 days of the Institute. We were far enough away from civilization that it made sense to stay on-site, even during our limited free time.

We spent our precious free moments hiking on the mountainside and gazing at the ever-fascinating view of Lake Pend d'Oreille.

## Premium Facilitators

There were morning and afternoon sessions with John and Becky, who are excellent presenters: they are

one with their material which allows them to improvise; their energy is light and steady and there is a lot of variety in their approach. I never grew tired of listening to them (and I tend to fidget easily).

## Mentors Galore

After dinner, the Mentor Moments saw all of us clustered cozily around the fireplace, while the mentors from Idaho, Washington, Montana, Edmonton, Vancouver and Alaska shared their stories and insights.

These evening sessions were an excellent counterpoint to the day's active learning sessions. The mentors really added heft to the institute and their presence still resonates and inspires me.

## Overall Impressions

Meals were good. We wanted for nothing. When it was too dark to hike, there was a bar and a hot tub.

I can liken the experience to super-concentrated Library School 2.0 (without all the assignments). A few gleanings: always focus on your community, think bigger picture by considering all realms and ALWAYS be ready to give an elevator speech (It never hurts to look like you are ready for the television cameras either).

It was wonderful meeting so many members from the Pacific Northwest Library Association—an association that includes BCLA and other state and provincial associations.

## Thank you

I am grateful for the generous support of Coquitlam Public Library. I would also like to thank BCLA, who graciously contributed \$500 towards my tuition.

I highly recommend the experience for anyone interested in going farther in libraries. If you are wondering whether anyone shed tears, you may just have to attend the Leads! Institute yourself. (Then we can talk!)

*Jay Peters is a Reference Librarian  
at Coquitlam Public Library.*