



Denver Alliance for Response Kick-off Forum

September 25, 2009

Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado

The Denver Public Library was host to the city's Alliance for Response Forum on September 25, 2009. The forum Planning Committee, led by Jim Kroll of the Denver Public Library and Annie Robb Levinsky of Historic Denver, was successful in bringing together members from the cultural and emergency communities. Thirty percent of the 90 attendees came from the emergency management, public safety, and security professions – the largest percentage at any forum to date.

The need for preparedness was stressed early in the program, when Diane Lunde from Colorado State University (CSU), described the 500-year flood that affected 81,000 linear feet of shelving at the CSU Library in 1997. The library's aggressive salvage campaign recovered the majority of the damaged collections. Carl Stewart, Preservation Librarian at University of Colorado at Boulder, offered practical advice on making emergency planning part of the daily routine.

Daniel Alexander, Director of the Denver Office of Emergency Management and Homeland Security, led a notable panel of emergency responders representing police, fire, and emergency medical services. The panel outlined how each of the services would respond to an emergency at a museum or library and what cultural institution staff could do to help. All panelists stressed the importance of communication, and they urged participants to update emergency plans and share them with local emergency services.

Captain Robert Kmak from the Denver Fire Department noted that most emergency responders understand the value of cultural collections but need to know institutional priorities. He recounted his "proudest moment" as a firefighter when he rescued an irreplaceable video tape documenting a woman's childhood memories as a slave.

During the lunch break, emergency and cultural representatives discussed ways to build on the new relationships and ideas created through the Alliance for Response Forum. Priorities for action included a statewide roster with key Chairs from both the heritage and emergency fields, inviting emergency professionals to help test disaster plans, and providing cultural institutions with more opportunities to build ties with emergency responders.

Alliance for Response is a national program on cultural heritage and disaster management sponsored by Heritage Preservation. Through a series of local forums across the country, the program builds bridges between museums, libraries, historic sites, and emergency responders before disaster happens.