

MPLA Leadership Institute
by Annie Epperson, CAL/MPLA Liaison

Two CAL representatives from Colorado libraries were selected to participate in the 5th annual MPLA Leadership Institute at Ghost Ranch in Northern New Mexico: Cindy Eubank, Branch Librarian at the Granby Public Library in Granby, and Michelle Wilde, Physical Sciences Librarian at Colorado State University in Fort Collins.

These two individuals were kind enough to share some thoughts about their experiences at the Leadership Institute with me. Both of them wrote of the physical beauty of the setting, as well as the strength of the mentoring and interactive learning that took place.

Cindy had this to say:

Getting up close and personal with a tarantula; the breath-takingly beautiful Georgia O'Keefe landscape; the glorious red sunset highlighting the Pedernal, of which Georgia O'Keefe jokingly remarked "God told me if I painted it enough, I could have it;" rising at the break of dawn to go hiking before workshops; cheering and shouting "C-o-a-l-i-t-i-o-n-s" during a skit about political influence. These were just some of the highlights for the 30 some librarians who attended the 2006 MPLA Leadership Institute at Ghost Ranch in New Mexico. But the best parts were those "Aha" moments when the walls came tumbling down and the light of the New Mexico desert shone through because of something that was said during the presentations and discussions facilitated by Maureen Sullivan and Mary Bushing, or during the presentations by our mentors, or during a scheduled visit time with a mentor, or during time spent sharing with a "learning partner." These are the moments that really make a

difference in a person's life, that can empower them, and perhaps lead them to choose one path in life over another. As Maureen Sullivan pointed out, one of the most important findings in the last 20 years is that leaders are not born, they are made.

I believe we also emerged with improved "librarian 2.0" skills as we embrace blogs, YouTube, Flickr, and MySpace as ways to stay in touch and communicate even after our Ghost Ranch time is over. I feel very gifted to have had the opportunity to participate in this wonderful Leadership Institute and not only develop my leadership skills, but to form many wonderful, lasting relationships with a group of very committed and passionate librarians. Many thanks to MPLA and CAL!

Michelle offered these thoughts:

This year I was lucky to have been chosen to be one of the two fellows from the state of Colorado. I initially applied to the Institute because I thought that it looked like an interesting opportunity, but I was a little skeptical about how much I would actually learn about librarianship from the experience. I needn't have worried; the MPLA Leadership Institute turned out to be the single most gratifying and relevant experience of my library career.

It is impossible to discuss the MPLA Leadership without mentioning location. The Ghost Ranch is a peaceful and spiritual place that encourages contemplation and introspection. The property is spread out, so the day is punctuated by short walks outside that allow the fellows to bask in the landscape. (I also found that these walks served to clear my mind so that I could be much more focused in the classroom.) Meals are served in a cafeteria (there are no restaurants), which really allowed the fellows to interact and get to know each other. The sense of camaraderie was reinforced by free time, in which many of the fellows chose to hike and enjoy the ranch.

In addition to a wonderful location, the educational component was first rate. The Leadership Institute is ably managed by Mary Bushing, Leadership Institute Coordinator, who serves as an instructor, but also is a sort of den mother and mentor. It is difficult to imagine the Institute without her energy and insight. The Institute Leader is Maureen Sullivan, whose wisdom and perspective provides the foundation of the Leadership Institute experience.

For me, the Leadership Institute came at a pivotal point in my career, and other fellows expressed similar feelings. I have been working professionally in libraries for 10 years, and after such a long tenure, I was losing sight of why I had chosen this profession in the first place. The MPLA Leadership Institute reenergized me professionally and personally, and best of all, it reminded me why I love being a librarian.

Two photos (courtesy M. Wilde):



Michelle Wilde (L) and Cindy Eubank at the Leadership Institute at Ghost Ranch outside Abiquiu, NM.



Participants were housed in Tumbleweed, pictured with Chimney Rock in the background.