

PAL-Reading Services Inc.
Annual General Meeting
September 9, 2015

President's Report 2014-2015

Where to begin? It has been an eventful year, to say the least.

Last September, our shelves were full of academic work, we had completed the tender process for our new contract with AERO, and we had an understanding with our landlord that our intention was to extend the leases of our office suites beyond February 2015, the end of our lease term. Things were definitely looking good, and if I thought I could base this report on the situation up to the end of the fiscal year, I would stop right now.

But these are extraordinary times and I think it only fair to tell you, the members of PAL, an up-to-date story. Bit by bit, our situation went downhill. In October, we were shocked to learn that Doreen Winkler, our Vice-President and great friend, had suddenly passed away. Her memorial service at Christ Church Deer Park was packed; it was evident how many lives she had touched with her empathy, intelligence and determination. Next, in November, the owner of 27 Carlton decided to sell the building, effectively negating the possibility of continuing our leases under the previous, rather generous terms. In March, the new landlord told us that, should we wish to renew our leases, the rent would be raised by 25%. On the AERO front, our new contract finally came through in April. To our dismay, we learned that the Ministry of Education had designated PAL as a secondary provider of services, which means that we will only get work if and when the primary provider cannot complete it. We did not receive any orders from them from the first of April until last week.

So things are definitely not looking good right now.

But, being an optimistic person generally, and a person who believes that all our reading is valuable, not just the reading we get paid for, I choose to think that this represents a wonderful opportunity for PAL to reach out and find more clients outside the Toronto area and expand our free service. The challenge will be to find ways to support ourselves while doing so.

To this end, we are pursuing various fundraising strategies. We took part in the inaugural Great Canadian Giving Challenge that was put on by CanadaHelps, and raised over \$15,000. Thank you so much to everyone who donated, or helped by spreading the word to family and friends.

We are sending out applications for funding to foundations that have helped PAL in the past, and also letters to personal friends who might be willing to donate. One way members can help here is letting us know if you have any connections to large corporations; often these entities have charitable policies that favour organizations in which their employees volunteer.

Our Treasurer, Martha Hirst, has prevailed upon a friend who is a fund-raising professional to talk to the board in October about the things we can and ought to do.

We have also determined to economize, renewing the lease only for Suite 504 and letting Suite 506 go. We have downsized our staffing, having made the difficult decision to terminate Pavlina's employment and thus lower our monthly expenses. We wish her well.

On the outreach side, I will be speaking at a meeting of the Weston Lions Club in February, at the invitation of Bruno Iaboni, whom some of you may know. He is the Chair of the Committee for Sight Preservation, Awareness and Action for Lions District A711 and a former client of PAL. It is our hope that the Lions may provide one pathway to finding more individuals who can use our services. Showing that there is robust demand will lend strength to our applications for funding.

We also should improve our presence on social media, but that is beyond this old dinosaur's capabilities. If any member has the skills and enthusiasm to work on our website, maintain a Facebook page, etc., or if any member knows anyone who might wish to volunteer in those capacities, that would be wonderful. Please get in touch.

And it is seeming more likely that there will be some kind of income stream from AERO, although we do not know how much.

To sum up, our situation is precarious, but not yet, in my opinion, dire. We have built up an enormous amount of social capital over the last 40 years, and we continue to provide a valuable service. I am committed to doing what I can to try and ensure that PAL survives.

Dealing with these issues has not been easy for the staff and board, and I realize that volunteers and clients may also have been impacted by the uncertain future. I thank you all for your support and your dedication and loyalty to PAL. It is my most fervent wish that I shall see you all next year.