

## Executive Director's Fall Meeting Report

Oct. 2, 2021

When I try to distill what the year 2021 has delivered to date, it's hard to find focal points. As difficult as 2020 proved to be, the year feels more singularly defined—The Year of Covid. But although the pandemic persists, it's not so simple to call this year simply Covid: The Sequel. 2021 is nuanced. Which is a nice way to say it's kind of insane. So much feels close to normal while so much else feels like living in a bizarro dimension.

**Tradeshow**—PNBA's completely normal totally bizarro big prize is this year's show. Events, exhibits, education—so much looks like we're used to, if not the Jr. size edition. But we are all in masks. We're requiring the sharing of medical records to get in the door. We significantly shuffled the schedule of the show for the first time in close to 20 years and brought in a new author coordinator under unique and complex circumstances. For months, staff have played the roles of medical and legal researchers, public relations pros, and generally sympathetic and often deeply empathetic human beings.

It's been a strain, and on paper you might interpret notes of regret. But in reality, I'd do it all again to be here. With so much out of our control, we had the chance to have at least a bit of say in how our year would play out. We created and offered access to something amazing and rewarding at a time when those options don't present themselves readily.

Emotion aside, the projections for this complex show have played out just about how we guessed. We registered 180 attendees and almost as many exhibitor representatives. We have 65 participating authors instead of the usual 90. It's a three-quarter show. The ledger still has a lot of holes, but it looks as if our revenues for author, exhibitor, and sponsor participation are close to projections. Our primary shortcoming may prove to be the drayage program. Between pubs packing light and extensive supply issues, booths maybe not be as deeply stocked with display samples and ARC piles may be modest.

When we return from the physical event we won't be able to gear all the way down right away as the Tradeshow Virtual Annex kicks off on Oct. 11. More authors, reps, education and giveaways for those who chose not to travel and for those who still have a quarter of their fall show capacity available after the ¾ experience in Portland! These events will also provide further opportunity to entice new members, much as last fall's virtual programs, as well as cross-pollinate indie regional association audiences as the Annex is being promoted to the Tri-West and registration is available to members of all indie associations.

**Membership**—Decisions we made to open access to last fall's programming to non-member booksellers and our discounted membership offer for the year have increased PNBA membership. Seven or eight new stores will send people to this show. Because we know the show wins members, we expect our member numbers to remain elevated next year, even with

a return to a normal dues structure. We have added new colleagues from rural small towns to the heart of our cities, and they are dipping into PNBA programming right off the bat.

**Holiday Catalog**—It was nice bounceback for catalog advertising this year, with a more than 10% increase in book placements. And with far fewer deals made than 2020 required to secure those titles, revenue is close to our quite hopeful budget figure. As for the stores, we added three new participants to the imprint and distribution list and increased the print run by nearly 15%. Slower to see commitments is the newsletter portion of the campaign. Shelf Awareness plans to put a charge into stores with efforts at the show and over the next few weeks.

**Looking Ahead**—I'm hesitant to start making many hard plans for 2022. Winter Institute has set itself into our calendars and there are decisions to be made around that in the coming weeks, but spring programming is going to remain in the wild card realm for awhile. I'd love to do a road show to an area of our membership with a reasonable cluster of stores, but we'd need a level of buy-in that would be hard to guarantee right now. The Tradeshow has such a firm history that provided a foundation for projections. A brand new out of the box doesn't lend itself to such informed forecasting. But it's a cool idea and I'm going to keep it orbiting nearby.