

Macie Hall – VRA DSA Remarks – March 13, 2014

Back in the middle of January, I was surprised one morning to get a call from Margaret Webster. I know Margaret is officially retired, but also know that she is involved in committees and projects and always interested in new things in the visual resources realm. I was sure that she had some exciting, emerging prospect to tell me about. So after we exchanged the usual pleasantries, I said something along the lines of, “So Margaret, what can I do for you?” And she said something like, “Oh, I think I’m going to do something for you!” When she told me that I was the 2014 Distinguished Service Award recipient, I was literally speechless. And for those of you who know me, you know that is very rare event. I continue to feel overwhelmed to be receiving this great honor from the organization that has meant so very much to me professionally and personally.

I want to thank Ann Woodward for organizing the nomination process. Ann has been a true friend and valued colleague for almost twenty years. We served on the VRA Board together and she provided remarkable support and great advice during that time. I feel very lucky to have her so close at hand on the same campus at Johns Hopkins. Thanks also to Margaret Webster and the members of the Awards Committee for their work, as well as to the VRA Board for their approval. And to all of you who wrote letters in support of the nomination, I cannot adequately express my appreciation for your kind words. I want give special recognition to a few VRAers who mentored and counseled me and “had my back” over the years: Chris Sundt, Tina Updike, Trudy Jacoby, and Kathe Albrecht. There are so many other VRA members without whose time and effort I would not be here – the colleagues I’ve worked with on various groups, committees, task forces, and the VRA and VRA Foundation Boards, are too numerous to mention by name, but you know who you are! I wish my husband, Jay VanRensselaer, could be with me this evening. I am so grateful for his love, support, and willingness to stand by me through thick and thin during my term as president of the Association.

There are many factors that make the VRA an outstanding professional organization. One of these is that it provides a nurturing environment for developing leadership skills. Since joining the VRA more than 25 years ago, I have been a recipient of the mentoring and professional sustenance provided by fellow members.

When I attended my first VRA conference in 1991 in Washington, DC, I remember feeling in awe of those in positions of leadership – the committee chairs, Bulletin editors, members of the Board. That year Joy Blouin and Helene Roberts were winners of the Distinguished Service Award.

A year later, along with some other VRA members, I attended a professional workshop in Italy led by Joy, and soon after that found myself becoming involved with all things VRA.

At that first conference I certainly did not see myself as a potential leader, but over time I discovered that leaders are not born but made, and that these are learnable skills, especially when one is given opportunities to take on management at various levels, and when one's colleagues are welcoming and accessible. And VRA provided so many terrific role models! The good news is that the mentoring and nurturing and the open opportunities for leadership are still hallmarks of our Association. Our smart, creative, and resourceful colleagues continue to inspire and challenge.

For those of you who are new VRA members or members who are not so new, but may not think of yourselves as leadership material, I hope that you will take advantage of these opportunities. In this all-volunteer organization, all you have to do is raise your hand and say, "I'll do that." That can be a little daunting the first time, but the rewards, both professional and personal, are tremendous. By participating in and chairing committees, planning Chapter events, arranging and speaking at conference sessions, and representing the VRA in various venues, you will learn skills and gain confidence that can help you to advance professionally. Serving on the VRA Board was one of the best things I ever did in terms of professional and personal growth; it is something that I hope more members will consider. Truth be told, it's actually a lot of fun. I know that our incoming President, Elaine Paul, will continue to make the cultivation of leadership a priority during her tenure, and I hope that all of you will step up in any way that you can to further that process, whether it be sharing your wisdom and knowledge by mentoring or simply volunteering for the first time.

I truly feel that I have reaped more than I have sowed in the VRA, and I am honored to join a group of esteemed colleagues as the recipient of this award. Thank you.