

# What a Great Year: Going Up?

**Marci Powell**

**A**s I entered the elevator of the tall bank building, I faced forward as did everyone else. We dared not make eye contact. The ride was silent. It wasn't until the young child boarded and seemed rather scared that we began to interact. The joy he had found playing on the elevators as his mother took care of her business had turned to fear once he realized he was lost. He had no idea what floor his mother was on. The

quiet elevator became a place of compassion and understanding. Collectively, the group knew what each floor had to offer. After much prodding, the nature of his mother's business was discovered and a properly aligned company and its floor were matched. We successfully delivered the frightened child to his mother's arms.

Many step on board the elevator of distance learning ... some with the fear of not knowing where they are headed and what benefit each level can bring. Others ride in confidence, knowing what their level of distance learning brings, but not what is beyond. Collectively, our experiences and time spent on various levels of distance learning is great. Stepping on board the distance learning elevator journey ... and sharing together can provide great benefit to all. Collectively, our national and state members have explored many floors.

This year, hopefully, I have provided you with an overview of the various levels of distance learning from our national and state members' perspectives. As I write my final column as Senior Vice President of Chapters, I would like to provide you with an update of happenings in the chapters as well as snippets of things learned from

each other and the great discussion shared this year. It has been a jam-packed year of changes and growth.

Regular chapter presidents' calls were conducted monthly. Well attended, the calls served to keep all informed of chapter and national events. Many of those participating in the calls reported successful activities and conferences this year. California had a 40% increase in attendance at their summit last spring, while Texas had nearly 700 in attendance at their spring conference that boasted more than 100 breakout sessions. The Washington Metropolitan found it beneficial to members to partner with various organizations for several outstanding conferences and delivered regular news alerts keeping their membership highly informed. The Pan Pacific DLA was a key player in the success of the Global Learn Day, a 1-day virtually-attended conference using the Internet to connect distance learning professionals from across the globe.

At the invitation of President Darcy Hardy, several board members served as guest speakers on our monthly calls. Denzil Edge, Paul Bardack, Andy DiPaolo, Don Olcott, and Julie Young presented either an overview of the committee they chaired or an overview of the pro-



Marci Powell, Education Advocate,  
SBC, 4119 Broadway, Room 460,  
San Antonio, Texas 78209.  
Telephone: (210) 633-5602.  
E-mail: marci.powell@sbc.com

gram they oversee at their respective institutions. Presentations were highly informative and well received.

For example, Paul Bardack, Public Policy Committee Chair, shared insight into current distance learning legislation and lobbying activities in Washington. Paul met with members of the Appropriations and Authorizations Committee and the House Subcommittee on Education, among other groups. Additionally, Reggie Smith, cochair, met with the director of the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Technology. The USDLA Board issued a directive to focus on the Higher Education Act reauthorization, which needs updating in vocabulary and is currently focusing on the 50% Rule, the Financial Aid 15 Hour Rule, and the Americans with Disabilities Act. The Distance Learning Act will bypass states. The committee has become proactive by negotiating with the National Organization of Colleges and others to co-op lobbying expenses through coalitions.

USDLA board member Julie Young, chief executive officer for the Florida Virtual Schools, an Orlando-based organization, shared information about her organization. Employing more than 250 and serving over 30,000 students with over 80 courses, Florida Virtual Schools has grown at a rapid rate. They recently had more than 75,000 registrations for 2004-2005, from which they expect to have over 30,000 course enrollments. Some students change their minds or find something else while on a waiting list. Serving all students free of charge, they receive funding on a performance-based, credit completion basis. Currently, they have a 90% completion rate. Ongoing research and development projects are funded from the state.

Don Olcott, Jr., of Western Oregon University, shared some obser-

vations about the field of distance learning and provoked much discussion. He asked chapter presidents, "[h]ow has the mainstreaming of DL in universities helped us to understand the utilization of technology?" He then stated the belief that today's university is more comprehensive in nature, serving all students and staff, compared to the 1990s, when we were separate but equal. Other important factors include financial implications, political and strategic positions, identifying and cultivating champions, the role of blended learning in DL, integrating technologies into instruction, and advantages to mainstreaming DL across the university and how it effects the flow of money. He then asked, "[h]as our perspective of DL changed, noting that DL may now take place 5,000 feet away from the professor's office as well as 5,000 miles?" A variety of insightful comments ensued.

Andy DiPaolo, executive director of the Stanford Center for Professional Development (SCPD) and senior associate dean in the School of Engineering at Stanford University, spoke on "Challenges and Strategies in Online Learning." Andy provided an overview of his graduate-level distance education program at Stanford University, which has an enrollment in excess of 15,000 students and maintains a major focus on research. Located in Silicon Valley, they are a test bed for many of the world's best-known technology companies. Cisco Systems originated at Stanford, as did Sun Microsystems, Yahoo, and Google. They began offering distance learning courses via standard television broadcast, then transitioned to streaming media about 8 years ago. One of their early systems, called VexStream, has evolved into today's Microsoft Media Player. They were the first university to offer an online master's degree in electrical engineering and now deliver over

12,000 hours of online distance learning course work per year. Currently, 20% of Stanford's MA degrees in engineering are awarded via distance learning.

Andy was asked if respect for online degrees was as high as the respect traditional degrees receive. Andy replied that all students at Stanford enroll following the same process and are then offered distance learning opportunities as well as standard classroom-based instruction. All classes offered at a distance have the same expectations as residential programs, and there is no indication on the student's transcript that the course work was completed or the degree earned online or traditionally. The program has proven so popular that the university now requires companies to become contributing members before an employee can enroll. Many companies, such as Boeing, put these individuals on the fast track for promotions.

I found it most fascinating that Stanford shares all profits on distance learning courses, with one third going to the faculty member, one third going to the department, and one third going to the Office of Technology Licensing. The faculty member who develops the course also receives royalty payments every time the course is taught in the future even if they leave Stanford.

Presentations such as those mentioned have proven to be highly educational, providing a deep insight into best practices. The calls enabled communication and collaboration opportunities among states and institutions across the country. Chapter presidents have been able to take back information to share with chapter members.

We have 18 active chapters serving, four new chapters forming, and three expressing an interest in establishing a state chapter. Active chapters include Arkansas, Califor-

nia, Federal Government, Florida, Hawaii, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Missouri, Nebraska, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Pan Pacific, Pennsylvania/Delaware/New Jersey, Tennessee, Texas, Washington Metro, and West Virginia. Still forming are Kansas, Louisiana, Oregon, and New York, with Michigan, Colorado, and Illinois inquiring.

I encourage you to get involved in your state chapter and, if you do

not have one, consider starting one. Great benefit is found in networking with other distance learning professionals, both regionally and nationally. Don't face forward on the distance learning elevator and miss the great value of interacting with those who share your journey.

Finally, I wish to express what a joy it has been to share with you through this column in each issue. I will leave you in good hands, as Bill

Jackson, former Florida DLA president, becomes the next Sr. Vice President for Chapters. It has been an honor to serve with such wonderful distance learning leaders from across our great country. It has been a great privilege to board the distance learning elevator with you and explore what each floor has to offer. All aboard!

### **WHAT IS A DISTANCE LEARNING LEADER?**

A LEADER IS A VISIONARY CAPABLE OF ACTION WHO GUIDES AN ORGANIZATION'S FUTURE, ITS VISION, MISSION, GOALS, AND OBJECTIVES. THE LEADER GUIDES THE ORGANIZATION AND ITS PEOPLE WHO HAVE FAITH IN THE LEADER, AND HAVE A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING AND ACCEPTANCE OF THE ORGANIZATION'S WORTHWHILE AND SHARED VISION AND GOALS. A DISTANCE LEARNING LEADER HAS COMPETENCE IN KNOWING, DESIGNING, MANAGING, LEADING AND VISIONING DISTANCE EDUCATION.

—SIMONSON (2004)