



Greater Philadelphia Alliance for Response Kick-off Forum

June 13, 2007

College of Physicians, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

The Philadelphia Alliance for Response Forum, held June 13th at the College of Physicians, attracted nearly 90 cultural heritage professionals and emergency managers for a day of presentations and discussion on working together to prepare for and recover from disasters.

Joan Decker, Commissioner of Records for the City of Philadelphia and one of the chief planners of the meeting, introduced the event and the sponsors, including the Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts (CCAHA), the Delaware Valley Archivists Group, the National Archives and Records Administration Mid-Atlantic Region, PALINET, the Philadelphia Area Consortium of Special Collections Libraries (PACSL), and the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC), as well as the City of Philadelphia and College of Physicians.

The audience was diverse, with representatives of a variety of museum types, libraries, archives, historical societies, local government, and commercial organizations with interest in the community.

Decker focused on the “driving reasons” behind the event: the national attention on cultural heritage disasters following Hurricane Katrina, Philadelphia’s long-standing reputation as a “treasure trove of history,” the need to minimize the impact of future disasters, and the importance of providing “a wake-up call on disaster preparedness for local cultural institutions.”

A surprise guest, Philadelphia Fire Commissioner Lloyd Ayers, encouraged the audience in their efforts to protect cultural heritage and pledged the fire department's support.

Jane Long, Vice President for Emergency Programs at Heritage Preservation, discussed the spectrum of disaster planning and response tools developed by her organization, then gave attendees an overview of the national Alliance for Response initiative. The program has helped 14 communities and over 500 cultural heritage institutions in just over two years, and local disaster response networks, partnerships, and projects have resulted from each of the previous forums.

One advantage Philadelphia has is a long-standing infrastructure of cooperating cultural heritage institutions. A panel presentation featuring three important groups gave attendees an overview of the rich quilt of assistance available in the area.

Evaluations of the meeting showed that a majority of the respondents wanted to be involved in future Alliance activities. Most urgent among follow-up activities were developing or updating institutional disaster plans, and implementing a method to build a disaster network that would allow institutions to work together on disaster preparedness and response. A variety of training needs were also suggested.

The forum was supported by Heritage Preservation through a grant from the Fidelity Foundation. Refreshments and a luncheon were sponsored by Munters Moisture Control.