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## Ideas, Hints, and Tricks column

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*Ideas, Hints &* **TIPS****By Patricia Kenly and Bette Finn**

In an era of declining reference statistics, librarians can use outreach as a great way to enhance their reference and interpersonal skills. The reference benefits of participating in special events and creating and staffing exhibit booths extend beyond the obvious outreach benefits of promotion, collaboration, and collection development. Our experience has shown that engaging in outreach efforts such as focused campus/community events or library events has indeed sharpened our reference skills.

A campus-wide or community event such as Earth Day is an excellent opportunity to utilize these essential skills. At Georgia Tech, we were one of seventy exhibitors at this year's Earth Day celebration. Our Earth Day exhibit required significant research and display preparation. We considered environmental issues, such as the size of the ozone hole, the melting of glaciers, and endangered species. In finding the information, we also came across photos that we could use in our display (many from NASA and other federal agencies). Many people stopped to take a closer look at our striking images from government sites and our attractive raffle book cover, which gave us the opportunity to describe library services.

As important as the visual aspect of the booth, a core component was our in-depth, annotated bibliography of sources. We developed an online research guide (<http://libguides.gatech.edu/earthday>), co-authored with our colleague Lisha Li, to provide a launching pad to this valuable information. The guide prominently links to the bibliography as well as to selected



websites and resources on major environmental issues - hot topics, the

Gulf Oil Spill, air, climate, energy/fuel, health, sustainability, wastes, water, and weather. We encouraged people passing by the booth to pick-up our customized Earth Day bookmark, as well as our brochure, which contained a list of key resources as well as the web addresses to our library's homepage and to our online guide.

As another example, at our institution, for the past decade, the library has been invited by Career Services to give presentations at its annual Career Focus event. At this event, which helps prepare seniors for campus interviews, the business reference librarian presents four back-to-back sessions on researching company information. This is one of seven topics at the event, which typically attracts more than 400 students. These students earnestly seek this information; at the end of each session, many typically ask detailed questions about particular companies. The librarian has to be able to respond quickly – without the convenience of a computer nearby. Students have expressed appreciation that the handout, which is core to the presentation, has also been made available on the business librarian's online

research guide for Company Information (<http://libguides.gatech.edu/company>).

In the fall, during the second week of the semester, our library hosts a Welcome Back event for returning students. This is an ideal opportunity for us to inform students about the library's reference services, and to give to students a customized brochure of key library resources and services, compiled by the subject librarian for their major. An eye-catching display, as well as snacks (cookies, candy and chips), entice students to stop. Staffing this event requires one to be approachable and to have welcoming body language – skills that, though they appear obvious, require practice. We want to make a positive impression on our students - one that conveys that we are genuinely interested in helping them.

We strongly encourage reference professionals to become involved with outreach events such as these in order to develop and maintain skills important to successful reference service. Create outreach opportunities for yourself – whether on-campus, in the community, or in the library. From our experience, these events have been rewarding – they energized us and reminded us why we became reference librarians. See what happens; enjoy yourself!

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