Crippling heat and humidity greeted the exhibitors and attendees at the American Library Association’s Annual Conference this year, which meant that in addition to goods, services and panels, the DC Convention Center also offered refuge in the form of air conditioning. Of course, the weather wasn’t the main concern of ALA—or their members or customers—this year; their concern was to see if ALA could continue its success from the 2009 Annual Conference in Chicago. Happily, it’s safe to say it could!

While the 2009 Annual Conference in Chicago was a record breaking show and a tough act to follow, this year’s show can easily be considered a continuation of last year’s success. Though total attendance dipped slightly from last year’s record breaking show, it still topped 26 thousand. And, with several changes both to the format of the show and on the show floor itself, many positives were taken. The first major change was the addition of the Friday night kick-off (the show used to open Saturday morning), and the complete doing-away-with of Tuesday as an exhibit day. Typically, Tuesday was the slowest day of the fair, and with its removal, the fair remained busy for the duration, rather than a steep drop off near the end. Additionally, the new opening was a huge hit for attendees and exhibitors alike, with traffic soaring these two new hours as attendees spent the entire time in the exhibit hall.
On the hall itself, among the company booths (such as Random House, HarperCollins, and of course Combined Book Exhibit) were the special pavilions. Among the pavilions was the return of “What’s Cooking @ ALA”—the cookbook pavilion co-organized by Combined Book Exhibit—and the newly created PopTop Stage. What’s Cooking was by far one of the most popular spots on the show floor, featuring cooking demonstrations nearly every hour, and an immensely popular exhibit of cookbooks, including those from John Wiley & Sons, Random House, Chronicle Books, and loads more. The PopTop Stage featured experts and authors in the fields of Romance, Travel and Mystery, and also featured industry discussions and a day of Graphic Novel speakers. These, along with the other pavilions, helped create a buzz in the exhibit hall unmatched in other years.

Away from the special areas were the general exhibits, and Combined Book Exhibit’s multiple-booth collective was in a prime location. Popular titles from Xlibris, Lulu, Renouf Publishing, Wheelbooks, History Publishing, and many others drove traffic into the booth and led to all of our exhibit catalogs being taken by the show’s end.

This year’s booth representatives were Jon Malinowski, Janet Fritsch, Peter Birch, Shelly Raines-Werner, and Seth Dellon. The 2011 ALA Midwinter Conference will be held in San Diego, CA in January, and the Annual Conference will be in New Orleans, LA in June.