

The 1990s: A Decade of Consolidation

The fall program for 1990-91 had scarcely been announced when serious competition appeared. SILL scheduled two different experiences: a twelve-week “Current Affairs” lectures series and an eight-week “Great Decisions” seminar. The former met on Tuesdays and Thursdays at the United Church at 2 p.m. and consisted of lectures on domestic issues that would be important in the next decade. The latter met on Mondays also at 2 p.m. in Selby Library to view video tapes on a variety of international issues. The cost for the domestic series was \$15 for the series and \$2 for a single admission; the tickets, however, were by subscription only and space was limited. Subscribers to the series could attend the second as a free bonus.

Competition came from Manatee Community College’s Senior Program that planned a 20 lecture series meeting on exactly the same days and times. Why this was done was not clear. Perhaps it was a coincidence.

Regardless of the competition, the fall program was a success. Attendance was good and the speakers were as well. Far more people wished to attend the “Great Decisions” series than room permitted; over 100 called for the 35 available places. As a result, a Friday meeting group was added. The attendance in the other series, “Current Affairs,” was very good. The program in Venice did well also.

Two recurring issues occupied the Board following the success of the fall program. One was the problem of the disposition of tapes that were made of the lectures. Again there was a question about making the tapes available for public use, and again the decision was not to do so. The other issue concerned the increasing difficulty in getting speakers to come without being paid; and, if this were to be done, how the extra funds could be obtained.

As year 1990 ended, preparations were made for the 1991. Sun Bank had again agreed to pay the printing expenses, but the mailing of brochures had been delayed until December 14th. Another problem was a happy one. Anticipating an overflow crowd for another session of "International Challenges," SILL inaugurated a new seating policy for Gulf Gate Theater.

The theater's main auditorium held only 436 seats but the demand was uncertain because of those who bought season tickets competed for seats with those who bought series tickets. A season ticket admitted a buyer to any program in all the series; a series ticket admitted to all the lectures in one series. Both had legitimate claims to have guaranteed seats. Single ticket purchasers for one lecture had no such claim on the main auditorium but could obtain a seat in a second smaller room that was wired for sound.

The solution was to sell only 125 series tickets leaving the remainder of 311 seats open for season ticket owners. If more than 311 season tickets were sold, the extra purchasers would receive tickets that only were good for seats in the overflow theater. If they objected to this, SILL would return their money. However, those who held the initial season tickets had to claim their seats prior to 10:20 or else lose them. A further admonition said that no empty seat could be held for later arrivals.

More cooperation with the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* was obvious at the opening of the winter season in January 1991. The newspaper published the entire program with both the names of the presenters and their topics. The first series in Sarasota included the "Contemporary American Literary Scene," "International Challenges (Part I)," and "Jazz." The second series included "International Challenges (Part II)," "Enjoying Great Paintings," and "Wind Instruments." The Venice program had one series, "Today's World," that lasted for six weeks.

While the entire program seemed to be one of the most diversified ever offered in that there were three series on foreign affairs and four on the arts and humanities with lectures on literature, art, and music. Once again, the speakers were predominately from the local area's college professors and retired experts. Some did double duty – Barylski from USF spoke at both "Today's World" and "International Challenges (Part II)" on Russian themes while Dr. George Mayer of USF's History Department spoke on Barbara Tuchman in the "Contemporary American Literary Scene" and on U.S. foreign policy in "International Challenges Part II."

The big attraction for the winter program, however, was Nathaniel Howell, the former ambassador to Kuwait during the Iraqi invasion of that country in 1990. He spoke on the topic "Diplomatic Hostage – The Kuwaiti Story First Hand." Howell spoke on March 1st, the day the U.S. Embassy raised the flag again on the retaking of Kuwait. He was an anomaly in that he was not a retired State Department official but was active and on a tour of 21 cities.

An analysis of the 1990-91 year results showed impressive gains, both in attendance and in income. The two sessions on "International Challenges" outdrew any of the others by a factor of about three while the music program on wind instruments was the least attractive. The total income from all programs was \$24,186 with a total attendance of 13,430.

Expenses were also rising, particularly those associated with the Gulf Gate Theater such as costs of renting equipment and paying for professionals to run it. The Board was also giving out gifts. In February, the middle of the winter season, it voted to contribute \$1,000 to the Center for International Studies at USF. At the end of the season, in May, the Board gave the following grants: Selby Library, \$2000; New College Faculty Development Plan, \$600; Venice Branch AAUW, \$1,000; Venice Community Center,

\$175; Jazz Club of Sarasota, \$500; and Florida Wind Quintet, \$250. The total amount to be given was \$6,525, or about 2.5 percent of total income.

While SILL continued to pay the workers at Gulf Gate to run equipment and give gifts to two organizations that provided talent for programs (Jazz Club and Florida Wind Quintet) and not pay speakers. Perhaps this realization motivated the Board to, for the first time, pay speakers or, rather, give them a monetary “token of appreciation” rather than a gift. A motion to pay each speaker \$50 in the future passed.

That this amount was deemed inadequate was recognized by the Board in a subsequent motion proposed by Scott Behoteguy to appoint a committee to decide “the nature and amount of any recompense over and above \$50 for speakers.” The motion passed as did a suggestion immediately afterwards that SILL consider creating either a Foundation for Friends of SILL to increase financial support. In May the Board appointed such a committee to consider the establishment of a Friends of SILL organization (FOS), adding to funds for speaker compensation.

In addition to facing spending and raising more money, the Board had a continuing problem of finding adequate space as complaints about the size of Gulf Gate auditorium had necessitated the refund of \$82 to dissatisfied customers in 1991. Also, the appearance of new competitive programs raised concern, particularly the Ringling School Library Association Town Hall Series first getting underway.

By June, the arrangements had been completed for the fall sessions, “Great Decision” would be limited to 60 enrollees who would pay a \$10 fee and meet weekly in Selby Library from October 7 to November 18. The “Current Affairs” seminar would meet at Unity Church from October 8 to November 14 twice a week. The latter would concentrate upon local matters by using such persons as the Sarasota Chief of Police and the Superintendent of the Sarasota County Schools as lecturers. The First Bank of

Boston had agreed to pay for the program announcement in return for an advertisement in it.

The winter program planning was well under way with a proposed budget that was smaller than the previous year because of the belief that attendance would be lower due to the calming of international tensions. By October, the program had been largely decided upon. In the first series in Sarasota, three topics would be offered: "Literature as Propaganda," "Domestic Challenges," and "International Challenges (Part I)." In the second series, those programs would include "Another Look at the Best in Art," "Business of Entertainment," and "International Challenges (Part II)." In Venice the program on "Today's World" was on offer.

By November, the Treasurer was able to report that SILL's provisional period with the IRS had been completed, and it had been classified as a non-profit organization under 501 C#, allowing gifts to SILL to be tax deductible. The bad news was that attendance had fallen in the "Current Affairs" session, although the average in the other fall seminar "Great Decisions" had been good.

There was also favorable news on the publicity front as the *Sarasota Magazine* had agreed to include the complete winter program in its next issue. The Sarasota Arts Council had promised to put SILL on its calendar, and Steve Rabow got it listed in a tourist guide as well. Sun Bank had underwritten the brochure to the tune of \$1500. The latter went out on December 5th, earlier than in prior years.

But there was a cloud on the horizon, Gulf Gate Theater now had a new manager and there had been a change to new employees who were now mostly non-union. The new manager knew nothing about SILL and the staff was quite inexperienced. This meant educating them all making moving equipment into the overflow auditorium SILL's responsibility.

As a result of the uncertainty, there were those who wished to lower the speaker's honorarium to \$30. Others wished to exempt "International Challenges" speakers from this rule. No decision was reached when the winter program began, so the old policy still remained in effect.

Fears concerning the new management of Gulf Gate soon proved to be realized. The number of staff had been cut and the remaining staff had more limited hours. To help remedy the situation, the Board voted to authorize the President, Frank Knowlton, to negotiate for more assistance and better service.

Problems also emerged in the fall programs. "Current Affairs" had not performed well so some wished to discontinue it. "Great Decisions" was doing better but had the opposite problem of being too popular and, hence, needing more room. A motion to consider dropping "Current Affairs" passed but "Great Decisions" was not affected.

Another difficulty was with the very successful Friends of SILL of whom there were now 132 members. Should these all be invited to the year-end party? If so, this might strain the resources of the group. No decision was forthcoming.

At the beginning of the winter season, advance ticket sales exceeded all past experiences with nearly \$21,000 in tickets sold in Sarasota alone. Each series of "International Challenges" sold more than double the tickets of all the rest put together. While good news, it meant more room would be necessary for this series. It also meant more apologies to those who wished to attend but had been relegated to one of the two overflow theaters. Behoteguy's energy, wide contacts, and promotion had helped make this success possible.

Increasing advance sales had shown the need for improvement in both informing and registering customers. Because of the use of bulk mail, out-of-town people complained of slow receipt of brochures putting them at a disadvantage for buying season

tickets. The Board solved the question, for a time anyway, by going to mailing brochures first class. The pressure of calls on the registrar also called for resolution.

In April 1992, the Board reviewed the year's work which had generated quite a large surplus. Revenues totaled \$34,320 with \$30,189 coming from tickets sold in Sarasota, \$2,155 from Friends of SILL, and \$1,976 from Venice. SILL, as a result, now had \$49,088.53 in unrestricted funds, a welcome difference from the decline in earlier years. The art and entertainment programs had been the least attended in the program although the moderator, Herman Baar, rated the music program as satisfactory while Curtis Haug, moderator of the entertainment segment, rated it lower. The venue's evaluation was more positive than in the past as fewer listeners complained about the noise, lighting, and temperature.

Planning for the fall program also occupied the Board with particular attention to the lack of attendance in the "Current Affairs" program, where average attendance had fallen to 40. Several suggestions were made to increase audience levels: reducing the number of lectures from 12 to 6, offering them only once a week, and sending the fall program out to all who attended any of the year's programs. The latter suggestion followed the request of some "snow birds" who advised they would come early to attend if made aware of the fall program in time.

The seminar on foreign affairs based on "Great Decisions" was to be limited to 60 participants because of the desirability of having discussions.

Straws were already in the wind about future developments. The continued attraction of programs with an international theme meant an increased focus on that subject and a de-emphasis on local topics. Increased funds, along with pressure to attract speakers from outside a limited area, meant continuing efforts to bring in speakers with

more of a national reputation. A recognition of the role of winter visitors in the audience added to this pressure as well.

By the May Board meeting, the fall program had been lined out with both the planning for the domestic and foreign affairs programs well under way. The number of meetings offered would be cut and would be given once weekly instead of twice. The Unity Church would be the site of the former and Selby Library the second location.

Less thought had been given to the winter program although one very significant change first appeared when Behoteguy asked that "International Challenges" be moved from Wednesday to Thursday. The switch was made and became permanent.

Another significant issue also was contained in the report of the Friends of SILL Committee. This committee had been charged with developing objectives for the fund created from donations given to the Friends. The guiding principle was to use the money to "Do things that cannot be accomplished from normal SILL income." The committee listed five examples of such usage. One, to pay for a continuous advertisement in the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, was immediately rejected as having a negative impact on SILL's other publicity plans. Another, to give honoraria to specific speakers when approved by the committee, was accepted with caution, "lest moderators go beyond reasonable demands which the committee would have to deny." This admonition was not unambiguous.

By June, guidelines had been developed for the granting of such extra compensation. They included time and transportation costs of coming from overnight destinations, or matching a speaker's usual fee, or paying for an accompanying spouse. One member noted that payments should be less than \$600 or else the IRS had to be notified. At the same time, moderators could negotiate with the speakers without obtaining permission from the committee up to a certain (unnamed) maximum. In order

to be able to separate Friends of SILL funds, a new account with Century Bank was created in the summer.

As the fall season neared, the Board turned its attention to publicizing the two fall seminars and to plan for the following winter series. There was a suggestion that an additional program be given in the evening prior to the start of the regular season. This would be aimed at local community members. Once again, this suggestion reflected a growing assumption about the demography of the winter audience.

Advance tickets for the fall seminars sold well at \$10 for the Sarasota series (the Venice program was free). Once again, however, attendance was not so good in all the programs, even the free one in Venice.

Preparations continued for the winter series. The printing of the programs was to be paid for by Sun Bank (\$1700) and Lake House West (\$500). Two TV projectors for Gulf Gate to be used for overflow crowds had been ordered. Finally, publicity increased in December. In addition to articles in *West Coast Woman*, the *Venice Gondolier*, and others, the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* carried three articles listing the speakers, topics to be treated, and dates in both Sarasota and Venice. Dorothy Stockbridge, a staff writer, had a half-page article with selected board members pictures in the December 17th *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* that echoed the coverage given in the early years of SILL.

By December also, the results of the fall series were known. The seminars brought in \$1778 while Friends of SILL donated \$316 making the total fall income \$2,084. The average attendance was 66 persons. The winter series promised to be much more expensive because of the new policy of paying some speakers more than in the past. This amount varied from program to program. The total extra money available from Friends of SILL for expenses in the year was \$2500. Behoteguy asked for \$1850 for honoraria for “International Challenges I and II” while Alvin Skelly wanted \$600 for his

“Horizons of Adventure,” a lecture-slide show, leaving only \$50 remaining for honoraria for other programs. Behoteguy, in defense of his request, said that receipts would pay for all the \$6350 cost of the two programs. How this honoraria differential could be sustained was a question for future Boards.

Advance ticket sales appeared to bear out Behoteguy’s claim as the two “International Challenges” series sold 325 of the 561 ticket total outdoing the five others all together. The value of all advance sales was \$22,258, an increase of \$3320 over the previous year.

The program for the winter series had little change from the past few years. It was divided again into Series I and Series II in Sarasota with a single series in Venice. In Sarasota all sessions met at Gulf Gate Theater at 10:30 a.m.; in Venice all met at the community center at 10 a.m. The prices remained the same in each.

Several of the sessions repeated titles from the past. “Today’s World” had a long history in Venice as did “International Challenges” in Sarasota. Several days now were reserved for specific topics. In the Sarasota series, Tuesday was for literature in the first series, and for music in the second. In the fall of 1992-93, the title of the literary series was “The American Dream in Literature;” and in music, it was “Music of the Strings.” The Wednesday series in Sarasota varied: the first series was named “Society in Turmoil” and the second was “Horizons of Adventure,” a travelogue. Both of the programs in Series II were different in that one required separate staging and the other projection equipment.

Early returns from the 1993 season were positive; at the end of the first five weeks, receipts were up \$4,675 over the previous year. The fact that season ticket sales had increased at the expense of series tickets would probably mean that overall attendance would continue to increase through the entire winter program.

Such was the case. Attendance at the “International Challenges” was so large that SILL had to purchase another TV set, a cabinet for the new TV, and another remote microphone to be used in a third auditorium. This meant that the budget allotted to furniture and equipment was inadequate. However, there were sufficient funds from previous years to cover the shortfall.

Nonetheless, a special request from Behoteguy to pay \$300 in travel and lodging expenses for one speaker, Max Kampelman, of which \$500 would come from Friends of SILL and \$800 from the Board’s approval had to be rationalized. This obviously was a matter of concern since the total cost was considerably above the usual honoraria.

The differential payments signaled a subtle switch in the organizational structure. It had begun with a group of moderators as independent contractors who would create a series and would receive a \$100 grant to pay for the expenses (mailing, telephoning, etc.) of organizing the program. Now the moderator had a much larger budget to administer with fewer controls. Could this model be sustained with series costing varying amounts of money, all of which was drawn from common resources? If not, would other criteria and a different organization structure be required?

The Board had this problem as well as others to consider at the end of the 1992-93 year. One entirely new solution was necessitated by the death of an attendee in February, the first in SILL’s history since there was no protocol for what proved to be a difficult situation. Various suggestions that might have eased the situation ensued but no action was taken.

Changes in By-laws were probably the major accomplishment of the Board, at least in terms of continuing impact. In the preamble to the proposed changes, Frank Knowlton, the President of SILL, and Behoteguy, Chair of the Nominating Committee,

said the purpose of the new By-laws was to “retain the active involvement, to the extent possible, of long-term Board members” and to bring in “new blood.”

To do this, the new rules established three classes of members: regular members, ex-officio members (founders or former presidents) and honorary ones (former officers or members of the Board). The Board would consist of 24 members down from the 30 in 1993. An annual meeting was specified in April rather than March, a notice of meetings to be given by the Recording Secretary, and a definition of a quorum as a majority of the regular members. It reorganized the Board with the following officers: President; Vice-Presidents for Administration, Sarasota Programs, Venice Programs, Production, and Registration; and assistant for Registration; Treasurer and two assistants; and a Recording and Corresponding Secretary.

Among those who took office as a result of the new organization were five former Presidents who became ex-officio members: Evelyn Duvall, Rose Shulman, Alvin Skelly, Scott Behoteguy, and Frank Knowlton, Jr. Among those new to the Board was Mary Testa who continues to serve.

In addition to streamlining and tightening the Board’s oversight, SILL members discussed future plans. One continuing issues was the fate of the Fall Lecture Series (a name more accurately reflecting its nature). One of the problems was who would organize them; another was the scarcity of vigorous discussion because of the size of audience. Members, however, decided to continue the fall programs because it kept “SILL before the public as well as having intrinsic merit.”

Finally, despite the fact that SILL’s income was less than in 1991-1992, gifts to other groups were up \$2000 with \$2000 to Selby Library, \$1000 to USF International Affairs Center, \$1000 to the USF Foundation, and \$1000 to New College Faculty Development Grants Program. To counter rising costs, the Board devised two ways to

increase revenue. First, it would appeal more widely for Friends of SILL money by emphasizing its use for speakers (as it had in the winter program brochure); and, second, by raising the fee for season tickets from \$35 to \$40, the third consecutive year of increases. Single ticket prices remained the same.

The fall program planning was well on its way when the Board adjourned for the summer to meet again in October. The Venice fall program met first in the morning on September 20 and every two weeks thereafter until December 4. Sarasota's fall program began in the afternoon in October 14 and lasted six weeks at Unity Church. Both dealt with local issues and used local speakers. Sarasota had two series: "Current Affairs" and "Foreign Affairs," which was based on the "Great Decisions" series.

For the first time, however, since the earlier days of SILL, the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* published the fall schedule of the "Current Affairs" series prior to its opening along with the speakers' names and affiliations. It also noted that the "Foreign Affairs" lectures were sold out. This note seemed to show that the drive for more publicity was working.

Two new events were approved for the near and not so near future. Don Blivas, his architectural firm, and Lakehouse East-West asked to co-sponsor along with Sun Bank the costs of printing the brochure and a kick-off cocktail party for the winter program, and the Sarasota Music Archives asked SILL to co-sponsor a forum on the "Humanities and Musical Performance" in April. Board member approved both actions.

By November, the number of season tickets sold for the Sarasota fall series was known. Sixty-four had been sold for "Current Affairs" and seventy for "Foreign Affairs," providing total receipts of \$1,340.

Some questions regarding the \$57,243 surplus accumulated by SILL arose at this time. One question was whether it was proper for a non-profit to have a surplus that large

and another was should SILL invest this surplus. One suggestion to solve the dilemma was to donate more to other causes, but the objection to this proposal was that SILL lived “on the brink of disaster” since it could never be sure of a venue at Gulf Gate Theater and might have to find another with resultant higher expenses.

Another area that was discussed concerned the scheduling of lectures, speakers, and locations. For the first time, a member, Frances Bourne, suggested the “International Challenges” belonged together as one set in two locations. Then “big dollars” could bring in “major speakers.” She also said that “it would be wise” to have a fall program at Pineview School for students there. Another member added that perhaps an AAUW chapter could co-sponsor such a program as it had done in Venice. No discussion over the fact that the Venice program had been free to the public and that another free obligation would add to costs.

The last Board meeting prior to the winter program fixated on old problems: the temporary nature of venues, the lack of audience capacity, the need for a fourth auditorium, and the requirements for another projector.

The beginning of January showed mixed portents for the future. Advance ticket sales were 9.7 percent lower than a year earlier, and Hillary Clinton had turned down a request to appear. A completely new topic – “Issues Affecting Women” – had drawn the least interest in advance sales. But this was to change in the season.

One reason for this was Marjorie North, a columnist in the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, who had been asked to open the series on women which began on February 16. She appeared first in the “Things To Do” column in the newspaper in late January along with other series participants. North also promoted SILL’s program and her book *Sarasota: A City for All Seasons* in her own column on February 21 and 23. This publicity resembled in a smaller way that of SILL’s early years. Perhaps the Board had

learned a lesson from the experience of putting Waldo Proffitt on the program. It helped to have a newsperson aboard.

The other speaker who also received much attention was Robert Oakley, a former ambassador who had been the chief U.S. Representative to Somalia under Presidents Bush and Clinton during the problems there. Somalia had been prominent in the news in 1992 and his lecture in “International Challenges I” had caught the public eye.

Outside the “Issues Affecting Women,” the programs in the season were much the same as in the previous years. History was featured on Tuesdays in the first series (Humanities) and art on Tuesdays in the second series. The “International Challenges I and II” were on Thursdays for both series while the first series on Wednesdays was “Society in Turmoil,” a mix as in the past of social and economic issues.

Among the noted speakers were Dallas Townshend of CBS News, the first person from the field of national TV news, and Professor Jerry Pubantz who spoke both at the Venice series on “Today’s World” and “International Challenges II” and was the first active academic from outside the area to do so. Barylski spoke but once to open “International Challenges I.”

Another first was the increased emphasis upon persuading the attendees to join Friends of SILL. A full page ad in the brochure asked members to contribute ‘to continue the high caliber of expert speakers,’ another indication that more and more individuals from outside the community would be speakers. There was an additional reason for increasing FOS funds. The Treasurer had been paying speakers and their expenses from those funds to avoid IRS questions. This was one reason Board members had been encouraged to contribute to the funds.

How significant were the funds that had been used to pay for speakers and expenses? They had amounted to \$3,365 for travel and \$3,024 for volunteer appreciation

token gifts. The total of the two, a significant sum, reflected again SILL's mid-position between both paid and donated services. It also created problems of accounting: should FOS have a separate SILL non-profit number?

The end of the 1993-94 season came later than announced in brochures as a lecture on the Dali Art Collection in St. Petersburg was added for March 29. This later date did not prevent the Board from beginning reflections on the results of the year and planning for the next in April. The attendance at the women's series had not been as successful as hoped while the international series had again dominated overall. New deadlines were added for getting out information about the fall and winter programs. For the fall program, it was August 15; for the winter program, it was November 15, another indication of the need to inform northern visitors earlier.

Two issues remained to be tackled; one was the fate of the fall program and the other was the increasing funds surplus. The Board members decided to continue a fall program at the Unity Church with a series on "Religion for the Good Life" and another at Selby Library on "Foreign Affairs." Venice would repeat its fall program as well.

SILL increased its gifts to \$7000 by adding recipients or raising the amounts to former groups. A round table discussion ensued with members discussing how the surplus could be applied to an extension effort aiding schools and libraries, but no action was taken.

In a move designed to attract attention to the fall program, the Board decided to offer the program free to those who wished to attend.

The winter season 1994-1995 began with the usual promotional feature in the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* and an accompanying photograph. The weekly papers continued to list short items about lectures during the week as did the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* but the latter also continued to include photographs of certain speakers.

There were three changes in the winter program in Sarasota. The first Tuesday series topic was on “World Revolutions” instead of history while the other topics remained the same. The second series on Tuesday featured “Music in All Shapes and Sizes” instead of art, while “Publishing, Poetry and Theater” replaced women. Despite the changes in programming, the balance of arts and humanities remained about the same. Wednesday’s program, “Society in Turmoil” also had the same format of mixed topics of current interest. The “International Challenges III,” however reflected growth as it was now offered in Venice in place of “Today’s World.”

Prices had not changed and neither had some speakers. Barylski opened “International Challenges II” and Pubantz spoke twice, once in the same series and once in the new Venice “International Challenges III.”

Two notable Sarasota residents in creative efforts appeared for the first time. They were Dick Hyman, a well-known jazz pianist, and Dick Morris, the head of the Sarasota Film Society.

The outstanding speaker in the series, the one who received the most press, was Frederick Starr, President of the Aspen Institute and former President of Oberlin College, who spoke of the Russian-Chechnya conflict to 500 persons at the opening session of “International Challenges I.”

The literature program proved to be least popular while, once again international issues drew the largest crowds, even in Venice as a new program. Both music and world revolutions did quite well, taking second place after the international series. Despite its lesser attraction, the Board decided to retain “Society in Turmoil” for another season and ask Dick Hyman to return for a music program.

After discussion and some dissent, the Board voted in May to terminate the fall program which had been in difficulty for quite some time, although with the admonition

that a new Board could reverse the decision. Thus did SILL become a one-season phenomenon. It also set up a committee to recommend special events for SILL 25th anniversary for 1996. In June, it voted to increase fees to \$50 for a season pass, \$15 for a series, and \$3 for a single ticket. The new Board also reconsidered running a fall program but decided against revoking the earlier termination. The “Great Decisions” seminar would, however, continue to be run as a separate entity.

By fall, financial matters took the forefront once more. The 1994-95 season’s expenses had necessitated a dip into reserves and costs continued to rise. To cope, a decision was made to try to enhance FOS donations. There was a change in program format as well. On Tuesday, “Domestic Challenges” now covered two sections as “International Challenges” had done. On Wednesdays the series had two sections – music and art, and literature under the title “The American Century.” Thus all three days of the week had essentially one program each, but divided into two parts. Only one more step had to be taken to eliminate even this division.

In addition, the consolidation of the series into larger entities helped solved the ever-present problem of having never enough money to accomplish all of SILL’s goals. By continuing the “International Challenges” into a third segment in Venice on Fridays meant that speakers at the first series on Thursday could lecture again on Friday thus saving travel costs. Indeed, such duplication occurred six times in the planning winter program. Members recognized that even the budget increase of \$10,000 each for honoraria and travel passed in October 1995 could not last forever.

Another drain on resources was the lack of central monetary controls on the Program Committee moderators who invited the speakers, and a call for a policy to regularize the procedure resulted in the appointment of a committee to establish such rules. Moreover, concern over the increasing complexity of SILL’s financial affairs led

the Board to authorize Robert Bailey, Vice-President for Administration, to hire a CPA to ensure compliance with IRS rules for a cost not exceeding \$1000.

The winter season opened with a new brochure name – “Lecture Guide” and a message from President Behoteguy asking for donations for SILL and noting that this was SILL’s 25th Birthday. The new “Lecture Guide” also included a new program, an illustrated lecture entitled “our Amazing World,” a five-part series running in March.

Publicity had been very good with the newspapers replicating the coverage of the 1995 season. Perhaps it was too good as it helped stimulate a letter to the newspaper from an attendee from Nokomis who argues that SILL should schedule its programs at times that working people and young adults could attend. She also complained that on one occasion questions of a speaker in Venice were ended so that he could not speak at Pine View. She felt it was unfair to book him in only one school and asked SILL to go to others.

Behoteguy replied with a letter of his own detailing the efforts made by SILL to reach high school audiences – a TV program featuring Pine View and a lecturer the previous year as well as another program with a speaker and students from Riverview that year. He also said that there was another classroom visit, this time to Venice High School, later in February of the past year. He did not mention that SILL’s original goal was to further the education of older adults, but he argued SILL was trying hard to reach out to all.

At the end of 1995-96 year, the SILL board looked ahead. It decided to continue the fall “Great Decision” seminar with Dick Hart as moderator and to have the printed program for the fall ready to mail by September 1. As far as planning for the winter program in 1996-97, “Society in Turmoil,” already had the go-ahead with Bailey and Baar working on obtaining speakers. More emphasis on TV showed in the conversation

of Bailey, Behoteguy, and Skelly with representatives of that medium to discuss a greater presence for SILL, possible funding from Channel 40, the local ABC outlet, and more publicity. Finally, because of a financial shortfall, the Board cut its original gift budget from \$8000 to \$4200.

Meeting in September 1996, the Board learned that SILL had won a Golden Gavel Award for its outreach programs to the Sarasota Schools. It discussed an August 30 presidential letter proposing a Plan 2000 to analyze and project the future of SILL. An earlier proposal by newly elected President Bailey on July 26 to present a program at Van Wezel for the next year was also discussed with the recognition that this ambitious proposal would require much thought and effort. The members, however, did approve the use of all facilities of the auditorium for such an endeavor.

By October, the “Foreign Affairs” seminar based as usual on the “Great Decision” material had sold 41 advance tickets assuring good attendance. The Venice program was also still on schedule for the Venice Public Library.

Dr. Richard Hartman had less good news. As Vice President for Production, he had done the mailing list for sixteen years and now wanted to turn the task over to another Board member. He also warned members that the Gulf Gate Theater contract would expire after one more year and on a cautionary note, said a contingency plan ought to be created for an alternate venue.

Two other changes in SILL had long-term consequences. In October, members had been asked to provide resumes recounting their backgrounds and interests to be circulated among Board members to enable them to know their colleagues better. This move, re-emphasized one change in the organization – a switch from a Board composed of individuals who already knew each other to one where the members were not known.

The second changes were in Article I of the By-laws that defined SILL's mission. One specified that SILL "seeks to provide a learning stimulus for the residents of the greater Sarasota area." Another said that "It [SILL] offers a series of lectures in fall and winter on a wide variety of disciplines." to be made available to other groups through "...television and by contact with local schools." These greatly expanded the scope of the audience (not just older members) and the outreach through the media and visits to schools.

The big news in November was that all arrangements had been made for the Friends of SILL Inaugural 1997 season fundraising lecture on Monday, January 6 in Van Wezel Hall at 8 p.m. The speaker was to be Robert H. Stovall, then a panelist on "Wall Street Week" shown locally on the PBS station WEDU. The hope was that this would raise \$8000 to \$10,000 for SILL.

Final preparations for the winter season had been made. The lecture guide would be ready for mailing November 20 with costs to be covered by "an unprecedented number of sponsors," according to Baar in an optimistic claim. (Actually, there were seven.) For only the second time, the fall program brochure had gone out to the entire mailing list.

A new information sheet was being prepared by Bates to be distributed at sessions of the winter program which would contain speakers' biographies. This illustrated both the lack of more complete coverage of speakers in the local media, and the continuing appearance of speakers largely unknown to those attending the lectures.

Two straws in the wind showed that there was still concern over matters that might impinge on SILL's future: lack of venues and competition. Despite assurances from Gulf Gate Theater, run by Cobb interests, the possibility of losing that facility was not entirely eliminated. In addition, a survey done by Jane Jones, a Board member,

identified 19 course, lectures, and activities in the community that might be competition with SILL.

There was both good and bad news in December. The fall program had enrolled 53 in the “Great Decisions” series which had drawn \$530 in fees and had garnered \$195 for FOS, making a total of \$725. Unfortunately, the cost of the brochure and mailing was \$865, prompting a suggestion that the Program Committee review the viability of the series.

Most of the Board’s discussion at this time centered on compliance with new IRS regulations that impacted non-profits, those particularly affecting speakers. Although making more work for the Treasurer, members, particularly those acting as moderators of the “International Challenges” series, argued that 1099 forms should be sent to those speakers because of the honoraria they had received. Finally, the prominence of speakers was reflected when it was announced that four speakers were scheduled to sign copies of their books at Barnes and Noble in the coming season.

One concerning note was that advance sales for the Van Wezel event amounted to only 188 tickets, only 21 more than those season tickets for the winter program.

The winter program for 1996-97 was quite similar to that of previous years. Divided into two sessions, the Tuesday program in Sarasota was “Domestic Issues: Society in Turmoil,” while the Wednesday one was split into three topics – the first “A Quartet of Musical Impressions” and the second “Four Essential Elements of Art” and “Four Essential Elements of Theater.” “International Challenges” was on Thursdays. The Venice Session was also entitled “International Challenges” and utilized some speakers from sessions in Sarasota.

There were familiar names in the winter programs. Local speakers, Barylski and Bates appeared not a few times before. However, the major use of local talent came as it

had in the past in the segments on music and art. The “Domestic Issues” sessions had the most varied programs, with speakers on Vietnam, affirmative action, religion, politics, education, gambling, health care, and crime, a hodge-podge of topics.

All programs were well advertised, none better than the FOS’s Stovall lecture. Overall, 15 paid ads were placed in local papers, 22 radio spots ran on WUSF and WDUV, in addition to a number of press releases. But the Stovall lecture tickets were selling poorly; by January 3rd, only 275 advance tickets had been sold. This total lagged behind the number of advance season tickets sold (322) for the regular program. However, even that figure was less than in the previous year; and the amount of money received, although tallied a week earlier was \$318 less. Still the Information/Publicity Committee posited expansive future results; lecture attendance from 12,000 to 16,000, increased support for FOS, and increasing participation by vacationers and new arrivals in Sarasota.

Unanimous Board approval saved the “Great Decisions” seminar, still in Selby Library but moved to the winter instead of the fall as recommended by the Program Committee. The same Committee also held out the hope that the other fall seminar could be retained.

Finally, for the first time, Barnes and Noble agreed to displays in the theater lobby where speakers could sign books they had authored after their lectures.

The Stovall lecture proved to be a disappointment, bring in only \$4,820, as only 376 persons came despite extensive publicity. The loss to SILL amounted to about \$5000, causing the Board to vote against a special evening lecture for the next year. In spite of the loss, FOS hoped to reach their budgetary goal of \$15,000 for the year.

By March 1996, the financial picture was clearer and less grim. Total income amounted to \$62,421.26 with \$47,035.78 in expenditures. FOS had even received \$10,968 in contributions.

As far as the future was concerned, the 2000 Planning Committee recommended retaining a three-month program with the Wednesday series to be named “The Humanities.”

The shoe finally dropped in April when the Gulf Gate Theater announced it was closing. Fortunately, plans were already in place for a both replacement venue and storage of SILL equipment. The venues being considered were Hollywood 20, Holley Hall, and the Players Theater.

However, none of these was to become the new location. Instead the Board announced it had signed a contract to move to the theater in Sarasota Square Mall East in May 1997. This new move entailed continued negotiations and, perhaps, new equipment, both of which were being discussed.

The planning for 1997-98 began in earnest in October with the main concern being the impact of the move to the Sarasota Square Mall East Theater location. To inform as many persons as possible of this transfer, members agreed to authorize a letter containing information about the change and the coming winter programs to be sent to the entire mailing list.

Behoteguy presented at the same meeting the idea that his complete set of previous year’s lectures could be copied and sold for a \$10 donation. This later became the basis for sales of lectures at following sessions.

As the fall wore on, the need for further equipment expenditures abated, saving some funds while additional expenditures for publicity were authorized. The advance

ticket sales were ahead of previous years' series, so the coming winter series looked good.

The winter program echoed the one from the year past with the same division of emphases but with variations in titles. Tuesdays programs were under the rubric of "Critical Domestic Programs" instead of "Domestic Issues: Society in Turmoil." Wednesday programs were "Arts and Humanities" instead of three separate titles of music, art, and the theater. Instead of this triad, there was another: "The Heritage of Greece," "Vienna at the Turn of the Century," and "America Finding Itself." Thursday's program was still called "International Challenges," but Friday in Venice was now called "Today's World," a reversion to an older title.

But the last used almost exactly the same format as the previous year in that all but two lecturers were recruited from the Thursday "International Challenges."

One of the lecturers who appeared in programs later in Sarasota spoke for the first time in 1998. He was Paul Duke, moderator of "Washington Week in Review" and later one of the founders of "Forum for Truth," a lecture series in Sarasota bringing in noted public figures.

The new location in Sarasota Square Mall East Theater seemed quite satisfactory, but the usual small problems that arose from any move appeared. Some equipment adjustments had to be made. One of the microphones needed to be replaced, and the large TV monitor that had originally been used in Gulf Gate had been loaned to Selby Library for the "Great Decisions" seminar. But it was not the only difficulty with the Library which was soon to move to a new building at Five Points in downtown Sarasota. It would no longer have storage space to lend to SILL. The building the Library occupied was scheduled to house G-Wiz, a interactive children's science museum, Board member Don R. Blivas agreed to discuss the storage matter with the new museum while

President Hart and ex-President Skelly were delegated to meet with Selby Library officials regarding the use of rooms for SILL programs.

By March, one of the space problems had been solved as the new Selby Library, scheduled to be opened in August, said it would have a conference room that was free to be used by small groups. No action about continuing to use the old Selby Library for Board meetings was taken but Blivas, who was connected with G-Wiz, still was working on the issue. Satisfaction with Sarasota Square East Theater caused the Board to aim for a three-year lease to settle SILL's venue for that period of time.

As far as the winter program was concerned, it received general approval. Bates reported that she would create a guide for speakers to acquaint them with the kind of audience they would encounter. Board members asked for maps to be displayed of less well-known regions and time to ask more questions for direct contact time with the speaker.

The change in locale had reduced attendance somewhat from the previous year, primarily on Tuesdays and Thursdays, but receipts were slightly ahead, largely because of increases in ticket sales in Venice on Friday and in FOS donations. All in all, 1997-98 was a reasonably acceptable season given the shift in location.

End of the year review in April focused upon matters still unsettled and upon financial issues. Selby Library's move in August meant members would have to move materials out of the former facility with no new location as yet entirely determined. The need for new sources of funding was discussed and Dale Rieth volunteered to investigate obtaining a grant from the Venice Foundation. Finally, Sarasota Square East Theater proposed a new lease which would ensure a venue for the next season, but at a higher rate.

By May 1998, the question about both new Board membership and limited finances was paramount. A concern about the former prompted Knowlton to write a letter to the local Harvard Club asking for a notice to members about recruiting “qualified volunteers.” Members, however, rejected sending the letter opting for other means to attract new persons.

The concern about finances sparked a motion from the Treasurer on behalf of the Finance Committee to raise ticket prices. After much discussion and a vote on each level of ticket prices, the attempt failed. Probably the reason for the motion even being introduced was the fact that in the fiscal year, revenue was \$47,380 and expenses were \$47,126, almost a wash. Members discussed other means of raising money: grants, increased FOS donations, and corporate sponsorships. No action was taken, however, although members agreed that a motion to raise prices could be reconsidered again in the near future.

SILL’s donations to various organizations were down, reflecting money worries; instead of \$3500, \$2000 was given to Selby Library. Later in the year when Blivas reported that the new G Wiz would designate a room for SILL meetings, the board voted a donation to that facility of \$2500.

Other news was less encouraging. Sarasota Square East raised its rental fee and members noted the an increase in other adult educational programs. This increased mandated outreach and greater publicity for SILL as well as continued high quality lecturers. The total projected budget for 1998-99 was now \$62,000 and Board member and ex-President Petrie stressed the need to cut expenses as well as commending Treasurer Testa for her leadership in handling recent financial difficulties.

In response to the need for more publicity, Board member Thelma Sachs had contacted the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* promoting the use of more photographs and essay features on SILL members and programs.

Perhaps even more promising was the announcement that Leif Bjaland, the Artistic Director and Conductor of the Florida West Coast Symphony, had proposed a program in the “Music Appreciation” series to be held at Holley Hall with six sessions on Mondays and a special price of \$25, above and beyond the regular SILL season ticket cost of \$60.

Bjaland’s programs were to prove immensely popular and filled a gap in the week that had previously existed.

As if to confirm members’ fears about competing programs, President Hart in November read a letter announcing the opening of Pierian Springs Academy, a new lecture program in the Sarasota area. In response, members noted that growth in South County suggested SILL make a greater effort there with the Venice program.

Preparations were being made for the 1999 winter season. All was in order at Sarasota Square East. So was the “Great Decisions” seminar to be held for the first time in the new Selby Library for eight afternoons in the winter season. (The Music Archives in Selby library had also agreed to temporarily store SILL’s desk and files in it.)

The year ended on an optimistic note. Orders for the new music series had proven most numerous after the mailing of the 1999 brochures. The brochures still carried the Selby Library mailing address, but, oddly enough, did not include the “Great Decisions” seminar. It did include a plea for contributions to FOS saying that SILL had run a deficit for the past year. (This was true if donations to other organizations were included in expenses. However, SILL still had money in the bank.)

The new year began with the sad news of the death of Dr. Evelyn Duvall. Board members commemorated her service with a \$100 donation to the New College Library Association. An indication of how much SILL had grown was that at the same first Board meeting of the year, \$2000 went to the Publicity Committee to devote to work on that area. (This amount far outstripped early SILL total yearly expenditures when Dr. Duvall was active.)

Early sales presaged a good season; the “Music Appreciation” Series sold out and other programs looked promising as well. Each series retained the names from past seasons: “Critical Domestic Problems,” “Arts and Humanities,” “International Challenges,” in Sarasota and “Today’s World” in Venice. The Tuesday series, however, had a preponderance of outside lecturers including Roger Kimball, the Thernstroms (Abigail and Stephen), and representatives of the Cato Institute and the Heritage Foundation. The Wednesday speakers relied entirely on speakers from within Florida and a number from Sarasota, including Barylski, Joan Altabe, the Art and Architecture critic from the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, and Robert de Warren, Artistic Director of the Sarasota Ballet. The Thursday and Friday in Venice speakers were a mix of locals and experts from outside the area. Again, the practice was to use Sarasota lecturers the next day in Venice. Among those so used was Barylski, making a total of three SILL appearances in the year, and Martin Walker, European Bureau Chief of the *British Guardian*, who became a very popular lecturer often asked back.

An indication that SILL was considering entering the new technological age came in February when Steve Newton, a guest brought by Dan Cohen outlined the technicalities of acquisition of a website for SILL, and the Board assigned the Long Range Planning Committee to consider the proposal.

An experiment with audio tapes to be sold to the public had proven to be successful, particularly with the new “Music Appreciation” series. The Board decided, as a result, to give a set of the latter to the West Coast Symphony.

The winter season of 1999 was quite successful largely because of sold-out music crowds and the increase in Venice sales. Attendance at the Tuesday and Wednesday series was off slightly but Thursday’s had increased somewhat. The surplus, as a consequence, was up considerably to \$12,836.72, but the Board still limited gifts to \$2750.

There were clouds on the horizon, however. AMC management that ran Sarasota Square East asked for \$8400 for theater use in 2000, a raise from \$4000 budgeted in 1999. Even more serious was the news in April that the theater was for sale. Given the uncertain times, the Finance Committee recommended that single ticket prices be raised from \$3 to \$4, but the Board reserved a decision to a later date. A discussion on ticket costs took place in the fall with a decision to raise all prices. The new prices were: season tickets at \$70, series at \$40 (Venice was \$25), music \$30, and single tickets at 45.

Another issues that was largely concealed at the meetings, but did appear in the minutes was a discussion of the creation of programs. In the May minutes, Baar was assigned responsibility for six of the programs in the Tuesday 2000 series as he had been in 1999. This notice was re-iterated in June with the addition of this statement, “Final responsibility for approval of programs is the whole Program Committee’s.” Since this had been the policy for SILL in the past, at least on paper, why mention this in the discussion?

The answer was that Baar was Vice-president for Sarasota programs and had assigned Robert Bailey the sole responsibility for the first six weeks on Tuesday as moderator, the only such single assignment outside the new music program. The

Tuesday program, the first half at least, had a heavy conservative slant to which some members objected. Since overt division of opinion, particularly on ideological matters could prove to be an audience reducer, SILL needed to maintain a position of neutrality while at the same time encouraging a wide variety of expressions by its speakers.

Complicating the matter was the increasing use of outside speakers whose positions on issues were more ideological in an increasing partisan age. How could these persons be vetted by those who lacked considerable knowledge of the subject field? And how could SILL avoid being labeled as on one side or the other of the divide?

A good example of the issues involved the appearance of the Thernstroms. The topic of race had been pretty much avoided in SILL's lecturers although it remained one in the larger society. When SILL did finally include a question about racial preference in education in a lecture, the lecture voiced opposition to further help. To have avoided controversy, perhaps this topic should have been treated in a debate, a format later used by SILL with success.

In any case, the affirmation of the Program Committee's ultimate responsibility was considered a necessary one by the majority of the Board.

Development of the website proceeded apace, as Cohen reported that Comcast was working on one of six to eight pages, a facility that could be used to archive lectures as well as for many other purposes. As SILL moved into a new age, more publicity would be needed to have the new site fully utilized.

Planning for the new year, the SILL Millennium Program, took place during the summer. Bjaland had agreed to give four of six lectures in the "Music Appreciation" series, good news. Another piece of favorable information was that the former Ambassador to Saudi Arabia and Egypt had agreed to three special sessions (seminars) on the Middle East in January that would be limited to 25 applicants for 475. (This was

in response to requests for in-depth analysis of critical areas.) Less favorable was an attempt to obtain Thomas Friedman to speak for the Millenium celebration.

The year and the century ended on this note of growth but with continuing issues to address.