

Library Network Keeps Patrons in Touch

By Gerald Scott
Staff Writer

It didn't get the attention it deserved.

A new computer network designed to become an easier on-ramp for Southeast Michigan residents to cruise onto the information superhighway was born Oct. 21.

It's called DALNET, for Detroit Area Library Network, and you'll be hearing more about it as it becomes more fully operational by 2000.

In the meantime, DALNET, Wayne State University and Ameritech Library Services penned an agreement establishing a technical infrastructure for the new network, which is a makeover of the current older DALNET library consortia.

DALNET is a uniquely diverse consortium, made up of 21 libraries, including public, community college, university, medical, law and art libraries located throughout Southeast Michigan. This consortium will team with Ameritech to build the hub using Ameritech Library Services' award-winning online library automation system, Horizon, and an Ameritech high speed data communications network with public access.

"The Southeast Michigan Information Hub is designed to serve people throughout the seven-county Detroit regional area in their lifelong educational, cultural, research, professional and creative endeavors," said Patricia Senn Brevik, DALNET president and dean of the Wayne State University Library System.

"It will enable DALNET libraries to reach beyond the walls of the library and deliver text, images, sound and video to the desktop level and eventually to public kiosks."

Brevik is the author of "Information Literacy: Educating Children for the 21st Century," a scholarly tome that examines how



WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY dean of libraries, Patricia Senn Brevik, is also president of DALNET, a consortium of area library computer networks promoting local and global on-line access. —file photo

people learn and how Americans are coping with — or are otherwise being overwhelmed by — the online information glut now flooding our society.

Brevik preaches resource-based learning to promote information literacy, or, the ability to critically analyze and use information rather than just necessarily having access to a data base. She cited the fact that there are 40,000 web sites dedicated to the "medical" field alone and that, theoretically, DALNET will eventually be able to help navigate a given user to get where they need to go in the shortest amount of time.

Another curious problem with on-line database access that Brevik cited is that the "local" has been sacrificed for "global" so that it's still difficult for Southeast Michigan computer users to find, say, specific Detroit-related information about small business start-ups or the best Detroit medical resources to combat breast cancer or prostate cancer.

Where DALNET is different, according to Brevik, is that it will not only offer access to traditional university- and public-level library resources, but also resources about economic development, health care, social services and related local metro Detroit community information. That's why DALNET's slogan is "Local

Information — Global Reach."

Brevik and other DALNET executives described the system as being the first of its type and, they hope, perhaps even a model computer system for the rest of the nation.

To access the fledgling DALNET system, visit the on-line access point through the University of Detroit Mercy's computer system at www.udmercy.edu/htmls/academics/libra-ry/lms or otherwise contact Rachel Huber of Wayne State University at (313) 577-4149 or e-mail her at abi623@wayne.edu.

DALNET's vision is anchored by industry-leading library automation technology from Ameritech Library Services of Provo, Utah, a subsidiary of Ameritech Corp. ALS provides software and information management services to over 7,000 libraries worldwide.

By 2000, all DALNET institutions will have migrated to Ameritech's Horizon with Resource Sharing software, a library automation system recognized by the Smithsonian Institute for "making great strides toward remarkable social achievement in education." In addition, Ameritech will also manage a high-speed data network that will connect all participating institutions using frame relay technology.

UD Mercy is the first DALNET

library to go live with the Horizon system.

According to Margaret Auer, dean of the UD Mercy Libraries and chair of the DALNET Board, the new system is already proving to be a hit on her campus.

"We are getting enthusiastic feedback from students and faculty," Auer said. "They are finding it easy to use and understand. We anticipated this reaction and are very pleased it has proven to be so positive."

Already serving over 500,000 people through its member institutions, DALNET was originally founded as a non-profit corporation in 1985. Its charter is to enable its members to better serve the information needs of their users through cooperative efforts among multi-type libraries in the Metropolitan Detroit area, and by sharing library automation.

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