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An Open Discussion
with Al Gore and Mike Nelson

The Will to Create the Future:

American Library Association, New Orleans Conference

Public Issue #3:

Role of Libraries in Creating Information Community

It is a landmark year for the American Library Association. For the first time there is an Internet Room. People have been backed up to use the 14 machines -- to check their E-mail, to learn about Internet tools, and to discover the future.

There is a nervous air about ALA. Librarians are wondering where they fit in the new information age. It is a healthy nervousness but some worry when Congressma Jim Moran (VA) is quoted as wondering if the libraries have a role given their fiscal problems? And some have asked what Rick Boucher's (VA) commitment is to libraries as he describes the all electronic information future?

HR 1757, the House bill in committee on the NREN, is followed closely and the emphasis on education, health care, and libraries is applauded. In particular, people here were glad that the Science Subcommittee reaffirmed the government role in the information future when they recognized how much good had been done by creating what was first the ARPA net, and now Internet.

Others around the country are following ARPA's new lead in civilian technology and trying to map an education and community oriented future under ARPA funding.

Yesterday at 6:05 PM the MARBI committee (Machine-Readable Bibliographic Information Committee) made a leap forward as they approved Proposal No. 93-12 -- to add Curriculum Information to the USMARC Bibliographic record! Why is this significant? This approval officially sanctions connecting learning resources, such as books, software, etc., to the agenda of education. Groups such as the Education Products Information Exchange (EPIE), the Northwest Ohio Education Foundation, and private MARC vendors have waited anxiously for this confirmation.

There were 43 programs at ALA related to information technology and media. A number of these sessions were introductions to the Internet and to newer technologies such as CD-ROM and multimedia.

An impassioned presentation was made by Pam Berger (publisher/editor, Information Searcher) on the many new CD-ROM based products ranging from National Geographic's Picture Atlas of the World to Microsoft's Cinemania

to review movies.

In another session the guru of hypertext, Neil Larsen, presented an enlightening vision into arranging information for learning and productivity. One trick he uses is to break the entire world down in groups of five items (and below each of those five items). Three or four is just too few and six or more is too many.

Minutes ago, LITA (Library & Information Technology Association) sponsored a program entitled "Strategies for Meeting the Connectivity Requirements of the Future: Practical Advice for Library Planners. At this session Paul Gherman described the "Electronic Village Project," now underway in Blacksburg, VA.

This project, like others across the country, is attempting to pull together the electronic information community using resources such as the Cleveland freenet software, ISDN connections to homes, catalog shopping, home food delivery by "Peapod," and electronic town meetings.

Like the Indian River project of Florida described in Issue #2 of these pamphlets, there is a high, community wide energy about the possibilities for the technology. The regional Bell Operating Company (C&P) have already put \$6.5 million into the project. One of the roles described for libraries is to provide lower income groups with public access terminals to the system.

In summary, there are a lot of earnest librarians and information oriented people here who dedicate their lives to helping others find out what they need to know to work and to grow. The information future will involve the reconstruction of community involving parents, schools, and the libraries. The sensitivity of a dedicated librarian should not become lost in the rush to create information access and highways.

In the spirit of using the Internet, Internet addresses are provided for as many participants as I've been able to identify. Please inform me of any changes.

I am available for any questions about the Internet, Center reports, and current information technology events. Please call 617-862-7763 or write:

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