Lake County Public Library
Keeps in Step with Technology

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Since 1959 the Lake County Public Library (LCPL) has been committed to harnessing technology to provide the best possible information service to its service area consisting of thirteen incorporated communities. These communities comprise a present population of 200,000 people. To meet this goal, LCPL has cooperated with other libraries and educational, cultural, community, and governmental agencies, and institutions. The library's catalog of holdings has been available to those outside the library through the generations, through book, microfiche, and automated catalogs.

Staff training has been an important part in the introduction of new technologies. Reference staff are trained in on-line searching, and all staff are trained in DYNIX searching. Classes are held twice a month to train patrons to use DYNIX and CD-ROM products. Internet training for both staff and the public is planned for the near future.

Through the years, the Lake County Public Library has produced holdings of its periodical and audio visual collections, a directory of organizations, and a directory of human resources, all in print form for use by school teachers, community organizations, businesses, and social service and governmental agencies. These organizations are contacted annually for update information and informed of the availability of products.

From the library's beginning, technology was used to provide the broadest possible access to information. From the first production of a widely distributed book catalog of library materials, to a recent state-of-the-art upgrade of the automated system, the Lake County Public Library has considered its role to be information provider utilizing national on-line databases and building local databases of community information. The first step was the production of the book catalog. This catalog was produced for twenty years using IBM punched card equipment. The catalog was transferred to microfiche in 1980, and again, widely distributed.

Early communication between the thirteen branches was via teletypewriter.

This device provided an efficient method of reserving books to be delivered to other branches for patron pick-up. In 1980 that technology was replaced by an on-line automation system, which also freed the staff from labor intensive functions like typing overdues and filing cards. Automated circulation of library materials also began in 1980.

In 1976 LCPL began cataloging titles on OCLC, and began retrospective conversion of its catalog to machine-readable form. The conversion of titles via OCLC made the collection heavily accessible to Indiana borrowers and libraries throughout the nation. In addition, LCPL began searching computerized databases on-line in 1984 in order to increase access to information. Computerized ordering of library materials began in 1986. Personal computers were installed in the Central Library Children's Department and in LCPL branches in 1985. Funding for these was made possible through Friends gifts. A system-wide literacy program was established in 1986, and through other donations and grants, all branches have computers for literacy self-instruction.

Four *INFOTRAC* computers were installed in 1988, and through networking, *INFOTRAC* and *Health Index* are available system-wide. In 1989, each branch had telefacsimile machines installed to speed delivery of materials to patrons. Also that year, school records were indexed, and that was made possible through an Indiana Heritage Research grant. Other technological strides have included the installation of a television satellite receiver in 1982 to provide individual and group access to international programming. Teleconferences have been held for area library staff members and businesses. A KU-Band satellite dish was installed in 1994 in order to receive courses via satellite within the state.

The 1995 upgrade of the library's computerized system rendered access to the library's catalog, some former CD-ROM databases, the *Community Resources Directory,* and LCPL's index to the largest local newspaper, all on the same computer terminals utilizing a commonality of search terms and methods. This provides greatly improved ease of use for library patrons, both from within the libraries and from homes and offices. In addition, the Lake County Public Library is now offering *HELPLINK,* an on-line information and referral system that networks human services agencies and organizations serving the county. *HELPLINK* provides electronic communication among member agencies and organizations, twenty-four hour access to the library's database of more than 900 social, educational, municipal, and health agencies and organizations, as well as up-to-date information about human services providers and their specific services. Grant funds from the Lake County Step Ahead Council

are being used to underwrite the first year's costs. During that year, *HELPLINK* will be available at no cost to subscribers. Thereafter, subscribers will be assessed a nominal fee per year.

Several high schools are linked to the Lake County Public Library through *DIALPAC. DIALPAC* enables students to browse the library's catalog and list of reserve books from the convenience of their school library. Students gain access to LCPL by dialing in via modem, then logging on to *DIALPAC.* Funded through a grant from the Library Services and Construction Act, modems and software were purchased for the eleven high schools in the Lake County Library District. The schools provided the computers. *DIALPAC* is also available to patrons at home, and businesses that have a microcomputer and modem. Information available to students and patrons includes titles of books, recordings, video and audio cassettes, compact discs, and periodicals, as well as the community information module.

The Lake County Public Library has also acquired equipment to support other services the library provides, including reading machines and assistive devices for persons who are hard-of-hearing or visually impaired. The Q Solution Bar Code Reading Machine that aids literacy students in reading was purchased with a gift from the Altruse Club of the Indiana Dunes. A light pen scans bar codes under the text in a book and the machine "reads" the words back to the student. Another similar piece of equipment, the Reading Edge, scans printed material including books and newspapers and in a matter of seconds converts print into a computerized voice for the visually impaired.

This year, LCPL will provide Internet access to all appropriate staff. In addition, the library is cooperating in forming a community network in which LCPL is a major component. These plans, and a program for distance learning, will keep the Lake County Public Library in step with technological advances in an ever changing world.