

LSCA to LSTA

by C. Ray Ewick, Indiana State Library

Concern with the continuation of funding for the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA) has caused us to step back to look at this program and to remember its past accomplishments as well as its future potential. In a period when all governmental programs, services, and funding legislation are being called into ques-

tion, it is essential to also re-examine the federal responsibility for the nation's libraries.

There can be no doubt that federal funding has greatly benefited the libraries of the country and of Indiana and its citizens. It has made new libraries

possible in unserved areas, constructed new buildings, developed innovative programs, and established cooperative partnerships. We in the library community have been able to progress tremendously because of this assistance. LSCA is a program which has evolved to meet our changing needs. It is not now the same program as when it started, and the direction it takes in the future will be more and more technically oriented.

Today we recognize that physical properties, whether buildings or materials, are really secondary to the contents of these properties, the information and services provided. Libraries are not simply buildings housing books and magazines, but are interactive agents of wisdom, knowledge, and information. In a rapidly changing society, such as ours, the importance of information is paramount. Our users, current and potential, want to rely upon us for providing what they need, when they need it, and in a format that is convenient for them to use. Now they need a new and different set of skills. Pat Breivik, of Towson (MD) State University, says, "You can't prepare people for lifelong learning without information management abilities." Our library users have been conditioned to expect quick and

efficient service from other service providers in our society, and they expect libraries to follow suit: information management will be a priority because the new technology will demand it and so will the library user.

More and more information is being accumulated electronically and plans are even being discussed

for a National Digital Library. While this project is highly worthwhile and exciting, it should not replace libraries and regional networks. Depending on one central location for all of our information needs would be problematic.

Access could be slow, and, more importantly, a centralized system would not be as responsive to local needs. Gathering and accessing local data and resource sharing will still require regional service providers. Regional digital library centers could link the national digital library to individual users, local libraries, and other networks. In addition, they would be more accessible to patrons in their area and could more efficiently gather and process local data into usable information.

To fund such an enterprise would require a substantial investment of local, state, national, and probably private moneys. Old funding formulas would be rethought. Narrow geographic jurisdictions in the library community would move toward broader alliances among other segments of society. These broader alliances would more effectively and efficiently address common information needs. The focus of the new library would expand beyond the physical walls of its building, or the geographic boundaries of its district, to where the information seeker is located in the home, business, classroom, or governmental unit. With the reach of electronic linkage, no one need be excluded and library service will extend as far as the imagination allows. This does not mean we should abandon our

With the reach of electronic linkage... library service will extend as far as the imagination allows. This does not mean we should abandon our local libraries; quite the reverse, we need to give them new structural opportunities to deliver even more services as members of larger networks — regional, statewide, and national.

"I love the library and all it opens up to everyone. You can take armchair trips to anywhere and learn everything... and it's all free."

Betty McKinzie

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The American Library Association has suggested a reinvention of the Library Services and Construction Act to the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA). My own vision for the role of a new LSTA is to strengthen all libraries through a new kind of cooperative effort. More extensive networking through technology will expand the resources available at every level. Appropriate federal funding will promote cooperative experimentation which would otherwise be cost prohibitive for local or state government. After all, the information superhighway is a national infrastructure. Federal leadership will be necessary if we are going to build interstate information high-

ways and join what is already becoming a *global network*. LSTA could provide the leverage to move libraries into the next phase of their development.

While libraries, as we know them, will most certainly remain and continue to provide the books, programs, and neighborhood centers, they will also

connect their neighborhoods to an even wider world of knowledge and information through technology. They will continue to provide equal access to the wisdom of the ages for everyone. To achieve this, we will need funding, such as LSTA, to establish centers like the national regional digital libraries webbed to local libraries and their users. We will all benefit from what Marvin Weinberger calls "information democracy" — making information, that is affordable to the few, available to everyone. And that, to me, is the purpose of a library.



Two fourth graders, Shanna Patford and Michael Long were assigned to dress up as famous people from Indiana. Shanna chose astronaut Frank Borman, and Michael decided on popcorn king Orville Redenbacher. They learned about their namesakes from materials obtained through interlibrary loan.