

APPENDIX B

EDITORIAL

Each of the Ohio models is a possible version of things to come!

A Glimpse of the Future in Ohio

I saw the future in Ohio. It was only a glimpse, and it left plenty of room for many other new models and styles. Still, if you want to watch academic and public librarians hard at work creating the library of the future, be sure to take a close look at Ohio. If you want to see new ideas about supporting libraries, new ways to adapt libraries to new information technology, and even a new solution to very difficult copyright problems, take a look at the libraries, librarians, legislators, trustees, and citizens of Ohio.

First check out Ohio's networks, consortia, state-level library agencies, and organizations. They are the working parts of a creatively designed, well-oiled time machine that deals with the political, economic, and technological future of libraries and their many partners and competitors.

Public libraries in Ohio successfully pulled off one of the nation's first efforts to escape from the prison of the property tax and the limitations and inequities of relying on that overburdened, unfair levy for public library support. Not only did they succeed in getting a mandated piece of the Ohio income tax for libraries, they convinced the state to finance the Ohio Public Library Information Network (OPLIN) to the tune of \$12.85 million in FY 1996/97.

In the two years since it was established, OPLIN has connected 577 of the state's 700 libraries to itself and thus to the Internet and World Wide Web. The network is now delivering some seven major databases it has under contract for Ohio public libraries from such firms as EBSCO, SIRS, CARL, and a pair of local medical information services.

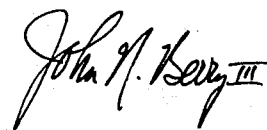
Sure, there are many difficult issues in this. OPLIN and the librarians of the state have to watch carefully to protect their slice of the tax pie and to maintain OPLIN funding. In recent months they've had to battle a concerted effort by certain Ohio fundamentalist Christians to censor library access to the Internet. Last month it looked as though the Ohio Senate might turn the filtering problem back to local libraries (see News, p. 13), but nothing is certain, and the Christian right is lobbying to force filtering into OPLIN. Still, OPLIN represents a magnificent achievement, bringing massive sources of information to some 6.7 million library users statewide.

The fantastic Northwest Library I saw is an im-

pressive innovation in itself, since it is a joint branch of both the Columbus Metropolitan Library and the neighboring Worthington Public Library. Supported by funds from both systems, and serving neighborhoods of both, the Northwest Library shows clearly the importance of the OPLIN initiative. Meribah Mansfield, director at Worthington, which operates the branch, showed me the library and its beautifully designed and arranged marriage of print and computer, both online and in the reading and reference rooms of the shared new physical facility. Busy citizens and their offspring were using it all to near capacity, and, again, I thought I could see a very effective version of the library branch of the future.

Equally impressive is the set of licensing contracts negotiated by OhioLINK, the consortium that has been joined by some 41 of the state's academic and research libraries. The most recent contract is a classic, an approximately \$23 million deal with publisher Elsevier Science that gives the 41 libraries three-year electronic access to all 1,150 of the publishing giant's scientific and scholarly journals (see News, p. 12). There are many more details to the deal, but the important thing is that a powerful group of libraries has been able to negotiate successfully with a powerful publisher, and, if all goes well, both will benefit, along with all the students, scholars, and researchers of Ohio. This is a model worth studying. It is one way out of the struggle to control costs of access to scholarly journals.

Sure, there are potential problems with all of these amazing innovations, but that's why we invented terms like "risk-taker." Rather than wait for the future to be imposed upon them, Ohio's librarians have boldly ventured out to create that future. We should all be doubly grateful, for in the process they have showed us not only new models for old programs, they have showed us a future to which librarians and both physical and virtual libraries are crucial and central to the society they serve.



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