

ONLINE NETWORKING IN JEFFERSON COUNTY, WASHINGTON

by

Judith B. Gunter

The library directors of the public and school libraries in Jefferson County, Washington shared a vision of an automated network which would dramatically increase resource sharing between libraries. Networks such as this have been set up between public, college and special libraries but the Jefferson County project in Washington State was one of the first to include high school and elementary school libraries. Population growth and economic instability coupled with the isolation of Jefferson County residents from any large library system were all factors in the decision to make this vision a reality.

In July 1991, a representative from the Dynix Corporation came to the Jefferson County Rural Library (JCRL) in Port Hadlock, Washington to demonstrate the capabilities of an automated system in a small library setting.

At that time JCRL held 40,000 volumes and had an annual circulation of 175,000 items. Staff was so excited about the possibilities of an automated system that we began planning ways to make this a reality for our library. We decided that this might be a perfect opportunity for local libraries to join together in a cooperative effort to expand our limited resources. A combined online database would give residents access to all the collections in the County.

The librarians from Jefferson County Rural Library, Port Townsend Public Library, and the school districts of Port Townsend, Chimacum, Brinnon and Quilcene met early in 1992. Queets/Clearwater, a small school district in the West End, did not wish to participate. We developed a plan to take to our respective boards. Dynix returned in March 1992 to do a demonstration for all board members and local officials. Following this meeting, which was a big success, each librarian asked his/her board for a formal commitment to the project. All but Port Townsend School District agreed to commit.

Library directors from each participating entity comprised the project board. We chose Cooperative Library Automated Network (CLAN) as the project name. The board agreed to:

- give all residents access to all CLAN collections,
- develop cooperative procedures that facilitate resource sharing and make it easy for patrons to use resources from all CLAN libraries,
- provide a base for improving and enhancing future cooperative efforts among the CLAN libraries.

In order to do this, of course, funding had to be found. The Federal Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA) allocates funds, through grants, to promote cooperative projects such as ours. A grant writer, a local resident and former library director, was hired to prepare the grant proposal with the aid of CLAN staff.

In March 1993 we went to the Washington State Library Commission hearing to find out if our request for \$190,000 would be approved. The total budget for the proposed online system was \$305,000. The Jefferson County Rural Library District appropriated \$75,000 for the project and the balance would be paid by all five entities. We were very

excited to hear that our grant application would be funded in full. Then the real work began.

Creating an online catalog system shared by libraries in a wide area required more technical expertise than any of the CLAN staff could provide. It was decided to hire a consultant to help direct that part of the process. It took longer than we anticipated, but we were really fortunate to find a project manager who has a Masters in Library Science and a lot of experience with automated library systems.

While we were waiting for our project manager, the CLAN librarians prepared a Request for Proposal (RFP) for the automated system which was sent out nationwide. We only received two bids and Dynix Corp was definitely the winner.

At this stage of the project it was found that we needed to have a legal interlocal agreement among the five entities before the CLAN group could enter into a contract. More delays ensued as this agreement was developed by the attorneys of Port Townsend and Jefferson County. The CLAN Board signed a contract with Dynix in December 1993 for \$240,000. This amount included all hardware, software, installation, and training on the automated system when installed. Each entity was responsible for costs associated with the retrospective conversion of records, installation of telecommunication lines, barcoding of all materials and other miscellaneous expenses.

CLAN staff, as well as many volunteers, gave of their time and talents throughout the project. During the retrospective conversion phase, they worked long hours to enter all records on the automated database. Staff used the Western Library Network (WLN) and Retro Link Associates (RLA) to get this job done. WLN and RLA "worked their magic" to turn these records into those acceptable to the Dynix system. All patron registration information had to be entered into the

system in order to issue new CLAN borrower cards complete with barcodes.

In February 1994, we received the first shipments of equipment from Dynix. The central processing unit (CPU) and telecommunications center, located at the County Library, is based on an IBM/6000 POWERserver which will support 50 terminals. Presently, CLAN is using 35 terminals.

Each CLAN member library is connected to the CPU either by a digital or analog telephone line. The libraries also have printers that can be used to generate daily reports, hold notices and overdue notices.

The JCRL Bookmobile travels through Eastern Jefferson County four days a week. It was decided to use a telxon unit programmed to check books in and out at each bookmobile stop. At the end of each day, the unit is plugged into a terminal in the main library. The data is then entered, reports are generated, requests are entered and overdues are sent to the printer. We hope to have a regular terminal on the bookmobile in the future.

The CLAN project manager resigned in March and the systems administrator for JCRL agreed to take on this additional responsibility. This staff person had been in on the project from the beginning and was becoming very computer literate! The project manager has to be able to troubleshoot with the Dynix team, coordinate activities at each CLAN library, and maintain close contact with the CLAN Board members.

Our CLAN Board met weekly for months discussing issues and arriving at compromises when possible over rules and regulations regarding circulation of materials. Trying to meld public and school libraries with differing philosophies of service was sometimes difficult.

Because we each shared a vision of the finished product and knew the advantages of resource sharing, we were able to negotiate successfully.

A Bibliographic Standards Committee was established with cataloging staff from the public and the school libraries. Courier Service to deliver materials is in place with twice a week service between Jefferson County Rural Library and Port Townsend Public Library. The Bookmobile acts as a courier to Brinnon and Quilcene once a week and an informal agreement was made to provide service to Chimacum when needed. As the use of the system grows, it may be necessary to increase courier service throughout the County.

Procedures were also written in "computerese." Each item type and patron type had to be translated into numbers that the computer could read. Rules regarding various types had to be entered such as: a video at JCRL checks out for one week, a patron may have two on a card, and a fine is levied when overdue.

The automated system:

- assigns a due date when the item is checked out
- tells staff, on the screen, if the patron already has the limit for this item type;
- sends a message to the printer to generate an overdue notice if an item is not returned on time.

Notices have to be separated and stamped for mailing by staff. It used to take one staff member eight hours a day each week to do the overdue notices which are now dealt with in much less time.

After the system was installed, each book, video, and magazine had to be entered into the Dynix database. Barcode labels were placed on each item. The barcode number was linked to the proper record by

using a light pen or barcode reader after bringing up that item's record on the screen. At JCRL we used staff and volunteers in teams of two at six terminals plus other teams to move books back and forth to the shelves. We finished entering and barcoding 30,000 items in five eight-hour days. Port Townsend Library completed their linking project soon after. Because schools were out for the summer, their linking projects were not completed until the fall.

Intensive training sessions followed the barcoding project. Representatives from Dynix headquarters in Utah provided the initial training for selected staff from each library who, in turn, trained staff at their libraries. Separate training sessions were held for circulation and cataloging procedures.

The CLAN libraries went online at different times but now all systems are online and working even better than expected. The patrons, both young and old, are enthralled with the new public access catalogs (PACS) and find them easy to use. We had scheduled extra staff to assist people but found they were not needed for long. It is a joy to see those who swore they would never touch a computer having such fun looking through the various screens, placing holds, and viewing their own records as if they had always done it.

The work of three years has culminated in a very successful cooperative online network. Our Jefferson County residents now have access to both public and school library collections of approximately 100,000 items. It is no longer necessary for CLAN staff to spend hours each day filing catalog cards and thousand of book cards. The CLAN Board still has some problems to work out such as access to the school collections during the summer when schools are closed, the very real possibility of having to hire a full time project manager when this first year of operations is up, and various other challenges that we know are out

there. Maintenance of the system hardware and software, through Dynix, is a necessary ongoing expense, but has been prorated according to the population served.

In the near future, the CLAN database will be accessible from any computer with a modem so that residents can look at the catalog from their homes or offices, check their records, and place requests for materials. An online community information file is being developed by Port Townsend Public Library to provide all CLAN users with information on organizations, groups, and associations in Jefferson County. And, with a great gift from the Friends of JCRL, a program called Voice and View will be installed on a computer which will provide access to the CLAN system for those who need larger print or need to have the screen read to them.

The CLAN database may not equal that of the Library of Congress but it does provide a way for those living in a rural area to expand their knowledge base and share resources while allowing patrons to participate more fully in the information age.