

From the Chair...

Dickens said it best: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness..." Was he thinking of our chapter?

It was the best of times...

Many give so freely of their time, talents, and treasures and the contributions are sincerely appreciated. I'd like to thank Nancy Tannery for exemplary leadership and for her continued support as liaison for the 2003 meeting in Philadelphia. To the Board, and retiring Treasurer Susan Walko, your significant contributions keep us moving forward and I will rely on your spirit of volunteerism.

We have many opportunities as medical librarianship extends to new technological developments such as PDAs and electronic delivery of information. We have new roles as consumer informatics and training take higher priority in our mission statements. What a great time to be a librarian and embrace a new lifelong learning model!!

It was the worst of times...

The competitive pressures in our industry make it harder to maintain one of our core strengths – sharing information unconditionally. I often refer to the uniqueness of librarianship, that even if we compete with other organizations, "librarians" share information for the good of patient and practitioner. As hospital libraries look at small budgets, more expensive resources and the potential to have to charge for every service, it is easy to see this as the "worst of times."

It was the age of wisdom...

As we see consumer health grow, we need to always remember that as information professionals we hold valuable keys to help

people understand and manage disease and life conditions. Just as we help clinical people diagnose and treat disease, we need to tap into the powerful resources to serve patients and their families and meet the ever-changing needs of healthcare.

It was the age of foolishness...

While we have more communication tools, we diverge from the primary focus of service and forget that the "how" is not as important as the "what." Also, by choosing not to attend regional learning opportunities or get involved in chapter activities, we all lose because each person offers a unique perspective and contribution that is needed to strengthen the whole. There are great benefits in the networking aspects of MLA.

I look forward to my time as Chapter Chair and list these as my primary goals:

1. To outline and promote the value of MLA membership on the regional level;
2. To identify the barriers that have impacted regional growth;
3. To reinforce the medical librarian's ability to grow and change through education, scholarship, and association participation.

I look forward to working with all of you in the upcoming year and know that your feedback is important. Please call or E-MAIL any ideas; the entire membership is needed to make this a successful organization. Let's turn up the heat and breathe some new life into the Pittsburgh Chapter of MLA.

Amy Haugh
Chapter Chair

TECHLINE: Open Source Software

Submitted by David Brennan, Barbour Library, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

Hello again – after a short hiatus, I've settled into a different sort of environment, but like any other library we deal with many of the same issues, such as providing access to a wide variety of information sources. Among other projects, including development of a library staff intranet site and installation of new photocopiers with printing and chargeback capabilities, I've been very busy on the migration of automation systems (from DRA Classic to Innovative Interfaces - a topic I'll be able to deal with *after* we complete the migration.) I still intend to write from the perspective of the smaller library, as the bulk of the technology literature is aimed at the larger institutions with dedicated IT staff.

I've also been doing some research on software for the public-access PCs in the library – research that has included “open source” software. Among the tangle of information technology jargon that we've accumulated in the last several decades, “open source” is a term that has been around for quite a while, but has gained wider exposure in the last several years with the success of the Linux operating system and Web server software, such as Apache.

Open source software is distinct from other methods of distribution in that the software and the source code are freely available for both use and modification by any interested party. Contrast this with commercial licenses which restrict the number of users and prohibit modification, with shareware, which is similar to commercial software, less expensive, and available for trial, and with freeware, which is freely available, but without the source code for modification. There is an important distinction to be made here between “freely available” and “free of cost.” Some distribution packages may indeed have a cost associated with them, particularly for a CD/printed manual combination, but with fast Internet connections, downloading a distribution package and burning your own CD is as close to free as you can get. Or as Christine Peterson of the Foresight Institute says, “think free speech, not free beer.”¹

Complicating matters is the volatility of the IT industry and companies that attempt to make money from the open source phenomenon by providing value-added services and tools to use with the base software package. Linux vendor

Red Hat is a prime example.

www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/network/2002/06/28/vendor.html?page=1>.

From the perspective of most end-users or libraries that don't have IT staff, freeware, and open source software are often the same animal. Open source software is usually the work of a group of developers that evolves into a community that supports it, while freeware is often the work of an individual. When that individual ceases development and support, the software becomes increasingly unusable since the source code is not available for others to modify.

So what does open source mean for the average library, and perhaps more importantly, what does it require of the average library in contrast to commercial software?

On the plus side, open source has the potential to save significant upfront costs. Given Microsoft's move to a “subscription-based” licensing scheme, open source would save those ongoing costs as well. Particularly from the office suite perspective, these costs are significant given Microsoft's 18-month upgrade cycle. If you support a PC lab with office software, using OpenOffice (for free vs. Microsoft Office for \$375 per seat) is a very attractive option – particularly since cross-suite document compatibility is improving rapidly. There are also many library-specific open source projects, something that barely appears on many software vendors' radar screens due to the small size of the potential market in comparison with more mainstream applications, for example, ILL and MARC utilities. There is also a sociological case to be made for using open source software, in that it is more congruent with the free flow of information than a restrictive proprietary system. Finally, there is the business case of not being locked into one vendor's support and upgrade scheme.

The major drawback to open source for the smaller library is that it requires several things:

1. *A higher level of technological expertise* – most open source software is not “plug-and-play” (which is why the popularity of

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The Future of Reference Service Is at Our Fingertips

Submitted by Tina Benedek, Gumberg Library, Duquesne University

In the past several years, researchers' behaviors have changed significantly. Students who used to ask librarians where to find information on a topic are asking Jeeves. Voters seeking information about a political candidate go to Google instead of the library and healthcare professionals are calling up WebMD instead of their medical librarian. Many librarians are noticing a significant drop in the number of queries at the reference desk and it seems likely that use of the Internet has contributed to this decline for several reasons:

- The number of options available on the Internet.
- The convenience of having answers available at your fingertips.
- The availability of information 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Many libraries have taken advantage of the Internet by adding an e-mail reference service. E-mail has benefits and drawbacks compared to face-to-face or telephone reference services. Perhaps the greatest benefits are that researchers can work from their own computers and librarians have a chance to think about their answers for more than fifteen seconds. Also, the researcher has a record of the answer to which she can refer. The largest disadvantage, however, is that the reference interview is often lost. If interaction occurs between the librarian and researcher it sometimes requires several e-mails back and forth. Another significant disadvantage is that answers are not instantaneous, unlike those provided by Internet resources.

Virtual Reference

Virtual reference blends the convenience of e-mail reference services with the real-time interaction that occurs in person or over the phone. Some systems allow communication in "chat" form, a few are beginning to use voice over IP, and some combine chat with technologies that allow librarians to push screens to the researchers.

Librarians should consider several criteria before they begin providing virtual reference services:

- The communities, needs, and situations for which virtual reference is appropriate
- The skill levels of the users and staff
- Resources needed to provide the service
- Training needs for staff
- Suitability of virtual reference vis-à-vis your library's mission
- Issues of privacy and copyright with the re-use of artifacts (logs of reference interactions)

Staffing is a concern when starting a virtual reference service. The experience of libraries that have implemented the service is that librarians cannot simultaneously staff the physical and virtual reference desks. One way to solve this dilemma would be to join a consortium of other libraries.

QuestionPoint (formerly Collaborative Digital Reference Service)

In June 2000, the Library of Congress launched a collaboration of libraries that provided professional reference service to researchers anywhere at anytime called the Collaborative Digital Reference Service (CDRS). It included academic, public, special, and national libraries. OCLC later became a part of CDRS and the two organizations recently changed the name to QuestionPoint. It has grown to more than 220 members.

The benefits of the QuestionPoint include:

- Worldwide access to anyone with an Internet connection
- Searchable archives for authoritative information
- An expert staff of librarians and subject specialists
- Knowledge of user behavior and needs
- An increase of library visibility
- Available reference service when the physical doors of the library close
- Librarians who are "stumped" by a patron's question can turn to QuestionPoint for assistance.¹

QuestionPoint is available on a subscription basis and is open to anyone; any type of library can participate regardless of size or collection.

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Stethoscoop

Submitted by Cindy Robertson, Heritage Valley Health System

◆ A “retiring” librarian? Sounds like a stereotypical remark made by someone who doesn’t know that librarians are anything but reticent, shy, and reserved. In this case, “retiring” librarian is a good thing, as **ELAINE (GRUBER) GABAUER** leaves her position as Patients’ Librarian at Mayview State Hospital to enjoy life to the fullest. Elaine has worked as a librarian for over 25 years in the Department of Public Welfare hospital system. She first worked as the Patients’ Librarian and the Staff Librarian at Woodville State Hospital. When Woodville closed, Elaine joined **BILL SUVAK, JR.** at Mayview State Hospital. Elaine has a married son, Chad, living in California and working in the computer field. Her last day of work is July 19, 2002 and her colleagues at Mayview honored her with a retirement reception at work on June 27. We truly wish Elaine and her husband Frank many years of happiness and fulfillment.

◆ Falk Library’s **ALICE KULLER** presented a poster titled, “Liaison Service to the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee” at this year’s MLA meeting. This committee is charged with overseeing animal research and husbandry throughout the University of Pittsburgh and its affiliated health system.

In order to comply with the USDA Welfare Act, principal investigators must consider alternatives to procedures that cause more than slight pain or momentary distress to animals used in research. The USDA suggests that investigators conduct multiple literature searches and provide detailed documentation of the essential details.

The poster described the “3 Rs” of animal experimentation: Replacement, Reduction, and Refinement. It also illustrated the systems developed to maintain the committee’s search and retrieval records on the library’s server.

Congratulations to Alice for her successful poster presentation as well as her role in this important endeavor.

◆ **BARBARA PALSO**, librarian at Uniontown Hospital, has recently been recertified by AHIP at the distinguished level. Congratulations to Barbara for all her impressive work.

◆ A note from **JAN PETRAK**, librarian at Westmoreland Regional Hospital in Greensburg, tells us of the sad loss of her mother after a lengthy illness. Genevieve Campbell passed away on June 13, 2002 at the age of 89. We extend our sincerest sympathies to Jan and her family at this difficult time.

Update and Correction

◆ **BETH BUTCHER** (soon to be Beth Butcher Delwiche), former librarian at Sharon Regional, tells us that she will be married by the time this column is published and living in Worcester, UK (an incorrect city was reported in a previous column). Beth sends her regards to everyone at Pittsburgh MLA. Her new email address in England is:

<b.butcher_delwiche@btInternet.com>.

We wish Beth and her husband every happiness and sincerely hope she continues to keep in touch.

Four Easy Ways to Get Your Information into Next Issue’s Stethoscoop

**Mail: Cindy Robertson
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Be sure to include your name, business address, and telephone number.

TechLine: Open Source Software (continued from page 2)

open source software is driven from the server side, not the desktop).

2. *Institutional commitment* – if you're required to use only Microsoft products or your institution is extremely strict about what software is used, then you don't have the luxury to experiment.
3. *Willingness to experiment and the initiative to dig more deeply than the help button* – unless purchased from a value-added vendor, there is no service contract, and no one to call for support, although major open source initiatives have extensive web sites and discussion groups that can be consulted.

If you've read this far and haven't been scared off, the next question is what kinds of open source software are available? You may already be using open source software and not popular is OpenOffice (formerly StarOffice) even

know it (Netscape anyone?) Among the mainstream applications, one of the more <www.openoffice.org>. It's a general office suite like Microsoft Office. There are even open source library automation systems. For more information, see <www.oss4lib.org> for a wide variety of open source programs.

The literature on open source software is extensive <www.opensource.org> and the number of publications related to libraries is growing. The latest issue of *Information Technology and Libraries* is devoted to this topic:

<<http://www.lita.org/ital/ital2101.html>>.

So is open source software ready for prime time? Maybe not yet, but for certain applications it is a viable alternative to commercial products.

¹ Bretthauer, David, "Open Source Software: A History." *Information Technology and Libraries*, 21:1 (March 2002): 9.

The Future of Reference (continued from page 3)

Members simply need Internet access, a browser, and e-mail. Several agreement options are available, such as submitting and answering questions, only asking questions, or only being available during specified times.² For more information about QuestionPoint, including how to participate, see <www.questionpoint.org>.

For more information on establishing virtual reference in your library, check out

- *Starting and operating live virtual reference services: a how-to-do-it manual for librarians* by Marc Meola & Sam Stormont New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, 2002.

Some other places to check for information (including vendors) are:

- 24/7 Reference <www.247ref.org>
- DocuTek Information Systems <<http://www.docutek.com/>>
- LivePerson <www.liveperson.com> - *business oriented but used by the*

University of Maryland Engineering and Physical Sciences Library

- LSSI/Virtual Reference Tool Kit <www.vrtoolkit.net/>
- Virtual Reference Desk <www.vrd.org/>

Libraries that have implemented virtual reference services have experienced dramatic results. Despite limited hours of availability, most have experienced large increases in digital reference interactions. As technology continues to advance, virtual reference will become an increasingly attractive option for all types of libraries.

¹ "Digital Reference Project Advances Library and OCLC to Develop Prototype." *Library of Congress Information Bulletin*. 60.3 (March 2001): 55.

² Diane Kresh. "Libraries Meet the World Wide Web: The Collaborative Digital Reference Service." *ARL Bimonthly Report* 219. (December 2001).

Don't Keep Mum About Achievements and Accomplishments!

Submitted by Ramune Kubilius, Galter Health Sciences Library, Northwestern University

This is an early invitation to look around for noteworthy accomplishments among all MLA chapter members. The Medical Library Association's Awards Committee and Juries will deliberate on nominations for awards and honors submitted by **November 1, 2002**. The awards will be presented at the 2003 Medical Library Association meeting.

The MLA web site provides more information on each of the various professional awards: the requirements, the sponsor(s) of the award, application forms, and a list of past award winners. Visit:

<www.mlanet.org/awards/honors/index.html>.

The awards honor a range of professional accomplishments for activities performed during various points in awardees' professional careers. Each award has its own sponsorship and was founded at a different moment in MLA's history.

The Louise Darling Medal, for example, is presented annually to recognize distinguished achievement in collection development in the health sciences. It was established in 1987 and first awarded in 1988, with a contribution by Ballen Booksellers International, Inc. It continues to be supported by Blackwell North America, Inc. Past award winners have included Jonathan Eldridge, Alfred N. Brandon, David Morse, and the National Library of Medicine Preservation Program for Biomedical Literature. The award honors achievement, leadership, cooperative efforts, and service. The accomplishments may be in publication, course work, a specific accomplishment or description of a methodology in the area of collection development.

MLA members (who are also members of their local chapters) have volunteered to serve on the Awards Committee and juries. We invite our colleagues to help us identify nominees who are the shining stars among us. The guidelines of some awards permit not only nominations, but also self-nominations. As the MLA information states, all awards are considered annually, but they are given only when nominees and candidates clearly meet or exceed requirements.

We invite MLA chapter members to be nominators and nominees for awards this coming year!

Ramune Kubilius, MALS, AHIP
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AND

Jury Chair, Louise Darling Medal for
Distinguished Achievement in Collection
Development in the Health Sciences



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Please send your comments, story suggestions, or questions to the Editor:

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