

Library consortium plans \$2.3M online database

BY MATT ROUSH

A VOLUME FROM THE SNAVA

A consortium of 21 Detroit area libraries has a \$2.3 million plan to create a huge, online database that they say will be a national model of library cooperation and online service and a boost to local economic development.

The Detroit Area Library Network is developing what it calls the Southeast Michigan Information Hub. The hub will offer access to traditional library resources as well as community information and data about economic development, health care and social services.

The hub will run on software called Horizon from Ameritech Library Services, a subsidiary of Chicago-based Ameritech Corp. (NYSE: AIT). Ameritech will manage the computer network that will process and transmit information on the system.

Those behind DALNET and the hub say it's unique on several fronts.

"First of all, this consortium is unique in that it crosses a variety of types of libraries," said Rob Lanesey, Ameritech public relations manager.

Indeed, the 21 participants in DALNET include public libraries, school libraries, university libraries, professional libraries and hospital libraries. Information will be instantly searchable in the hub database.

"But we're also going to go beyond the libraries," Lanesey said. "We're going to go to nontraditional resources like chambers of Commerce, (Small Business Administration) offices, local government offices and put that kind of information on this hub."

That way, users ranging from

entrepreneurs to researchers to people looking for information about a disease can search a variety of resources in one spot.

"We can group resources together by subject so people aren't hunting all over the Web for them," said Louise Bugg, director of technical services and systems at Wayne State University's library.

"What makes this very special is the fact that many institutions are collaborating... institutions that may not have worked together in the past," said Maurice Wheeler, director of the Detroit Public Library and vice chairman of the DALNET board.

DALNET also plans to make the information on the hub available to the widest possible audience, Lanesey said.

"If you own a computer, great, you can dial this up from home,"

he said. "But if not, you can go to the library and use their computer, and maybe someday you'll just go to a kiosk at the mall."

Lanesey offered two examples of how the hub could be used. One, he said, might be an entrepreneur who would otherwise have to visit the U.S. Small Business Administration office for brochures on writing up a business plan and obtaining financing, then visit another government office for information on traffic counts at Telegraph and Nine Mile roads in Southfield.

"It's our goal to get all of those disparate kinds of information and more onto this system," Lanesey said.

Another example, he said, might be someone just diagnosed as HIV-positive. That person could get the latest medical information from hospital libraries intended for health care professionals as well as information on community and support groups.

Wheeler said DALNET might in some ways be considered an encyclopedic online that not only would have subject-specific info that you would assume would be there but very different information from a variety of sources, some of which are now considered obscure.

The library will offer images and video clips as well as printed materials. It will offer as much direct-source material as possible, rather than simply noting where information can be found at other Web sites or in books at libraries.

A small test version of the hub is available on the Internet at webpac.wayne.edu.

The hub will be launched formally during a program at 11 a.m. Oct. 21 in Bernath Auditorium at Wayne State's David Adamany Undergraduate Library. Wayne State President Irvin Reid and Robert Cooper, president of Ameritech Michigan, will host the event. **COB**