

A UNIQUE PARTNERSHIP:
PUBLIC SCHOOL & PUBLIC LIBRARY
IN ANDERSON

by Frank W. Lucas



In April 1996, the Anderson Public

Library and the Anderson Community School Corporation¹ entered into a unique partnership in the area of technology. Since then, Anderson Community Schools has placed twenty computers in the Anderson Public Library, has acted as our Internet Service Provider, and has hosted our Web pages. We also have FTP access to the server for updating our pages...all without cost to the library!

The Anderson Public Library now has sixty-eight public access Internet terminals located throughout the building. Twenty-two Pentium computers are located in the Community Technology Center. All are connected to the Internet using ISDN lines.

However, in the early 1990's we were struggling like many other libraries. This is not really news. Libraries face constant struggles. This newest struggle was not only to catch up but to keep up with the technology wave. Customers were expecting and sometimes demanding more access to electronic resources. More and more reference sources were migrating from print to CD and then rapidly to Internet versions. The Internet, and all it offers, was fully engulfing the library profession.

The technology movement is not necessarily all bad, but it does present a few new obstacles. Obtaining necessary funding for this electronic revolution is of course the main consideration. Once equipment was purchased and installed, another obstacle arose to take it's place: training! Training the staff, and teaching our customers to use these new resources was quite challenging. In a few cases there was some concern convincing staff members and customers to fully embrace the Internet and other electronic resources. And, let's not forget the much debated issue among libraries: 'filtered' or 'non-filtered' access?

The Anderson Public Library suffered from all of these issues and more, in varying degrees. As with

many other libraries we were limited by budgetary restric-

tions and were also burdened with our share of the "technically challenged." Knowing our limitations, we began to prepare by utilizing focus groups to help us develop a logical plan for the electronic future. Our planning committee was comprised of 13 people and included community leaders, "movers and shakers," and those with technical expertise. Among them was a representative from the Anderson Community School Corporation.

This committee was charged with developing a long-range technology plan that included a computer lab, along with a timetable for completion of project phases. The result was a comprehensive plan outlining the technological needs of the community and of the library. However, technology, like time, "waits for no man." Rapid advances in the computer industry had complete disregard for our carefully planned timetable!

As we progressed (and occasionally digressed) through the planning stages, Anderson Community Schools was making significant advances in their efforts to make the Internet available in all school build-

ings. They expanded and improved their network by adding new equipment and updating old. Almost simultaneously Anderson Community School Corporation was successful in their bid for a Buddy grant, part of the Federal "Buddy System Project"² which places computers in the classrooms and homes of Indiana students to extend learning beyond the classroom.

Because of the great strides they had made, the School Corporation was in a position to offer their services as our Internet Service Provider (ISP) and host our Web site, without charge. Now this was an offer we couldn't refuse! It provided the Anderson Public Library with immediate, high-speed Internet access and could not have come at a better time. Other options were costly and would have significantly delayed our entry into the computer age.

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Anderson Community Schools then offered to place computers in the library through the A.C.T. Now! Grant. The generosity of an Indiana State Library Technology Grant allowed us to purchase infrastructure items, including a hub, router and cabling that provided an opportunity to offer a modest Community Technology Center for use by our customers.

Overnight we went from zero to ten computers. The night before the scheduled opening of the Technology Center, staff from the School Corporation and the Library worked frantically to install hardware, software and furniture. The next morning found them still making cable connections and configuring the computers to the network, just hours from the dedication. During National Library Week, on April 17, 1996, the newly created Community Technology Center (CTC) held a "grand opening," and we went headlong into the computer world.

As a partner in this project, Anderson Public Library agreed to provide space for a "community lab" where students involved in the project could come with their parents and participate in formal and informal training on Buddy System computers in the lab. Buddy family participants and other customers would benefit by being able to learn how to access local and worldwide information on the Internet terminals at the library as well as on their Buddy System computers at home. All of the library's information sources—electronic, media and print—would be available and staff members would assist participants. The Anderson Public Library would begin to fill a real need, that of bringing Anderson families up to date with new technologies, helping them learn to use these technologies, and empowering them in the use of local and worldwide information vital to them.

Under guidelines set by the Buddy System and the Anderson Community Schools, parents are required to attend two training sessions before being issued a take-home computer. The Anderson Public Library supplements this training to parents before and after they have computers in their home. Another part of the library contribution to this partnership includes staffing a Telephone Help Desk to assist parents, teachers, and children with minor troubleshooting when problems arise on their systems.

Anderson Public Library has conducted regular training sessions (see Figure 1) covering computer related applications for customers since September 1994. Before the opening of the Technology Center, we lacked the necessary equipment and therefore all of the earlier sessions were 'lecture' type presentations. Through feedback received from program evaluation sheets, customers continually asked for computers to use in training sessions. Since the Community Technology Center has been in existence, our customers have

had the benefit of "hands-on" training in the use of basic computer systems and Windows environments—beginning with Windows 3.1, Windows 95, and now Windows 98.

Training Sessions & Attendance

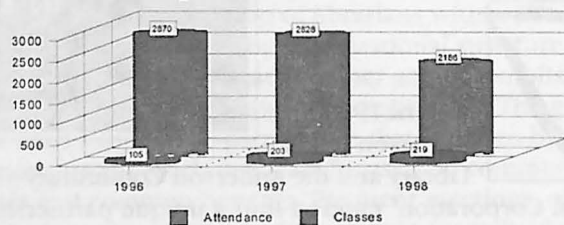


Figure 1

Between 1996 and 1998 the Community Technology Center offered 527 classes, with 7,884 in attendance. (See Figure 1.)

Classes for our youngest customers are offered monthly and teach children and parents how to access the Internet safely. Word processing, Internet and Windows classes are popular with area retirees.

Thanks to a grant from the Urban Enterprise Association, the library was able to hire one 15-hour per week employee to support the Telephone Software Help Desk for Buddy Project recipients and other customers. The Urban Enterprise Association renewed the grant each year for three years to provide funding for this part-time employee. An additional 15-hour per week employee was hired by the Library to supplement the technology team. With two part-time employees and one full-time, the Library was able to staff the Technology Center and the telephone help-line seven days a week.

Telephone assistance and in-person technical assistance have increased dramatically. In-person assistance has more than doubled each year from 1,979 in 1996 to more than 4,000 in 1997 and more than 10,000 in 1998. (See Figure 2.)

Computer usage has increased 400% compared to 1998. Indications are this upward trend will continue.

Computer Assistance

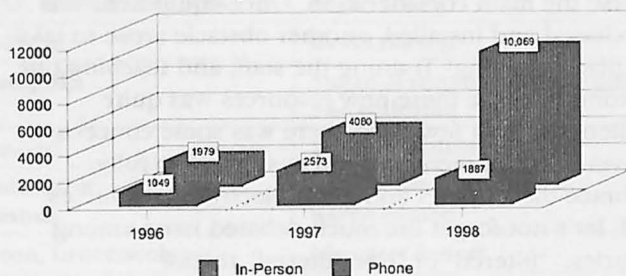


Figure 2

In the fall of 1996, a separate Indiana State Library Technology Grant provided Anderson Public Library with funds to add five computers in the Technology Center. In 1998, Anderson Community Schools placed an additional ten computers in the library: four in the CTC and six in the Children's Room.

Along with the Internet gateway, each station includes access to MS Works, a software program that includes a word processor, spreadsheet, database, and communications software. For customer convenience, we offer a choice of either Netscape or Microsoft Internet Explorer to browse the Internet. Also included is a typing tutor, and Telnet access to remote computers.

The library uses E-Menu from CARL Corporation³ as a secure menu system, and Fortres 101 for added file protection. High quality printing is offered to our customers using networked HP LaserJet printers. The cost is low—ten cents a copy for printing—and utilizes a VendaCard (debit card) that can be used with the printers, copiers, and public fax machine.

Our sincere thanks is extended to the Anderson Community Schools Corporation in general. Special thanks to Terri Austin, then Director of A.C.T. Now! and Project Partnerships, who graciously accepted invitations to speak at the Annual Conference of the Indiana Library Federation and also at an ILF District meeting. This partnership was also outlined at a Talk Table during a subsequent ILF Annual Conference. Terri is now Executive Director of Corporate Development for the Anderson School system.

In a recent evaluation, Nancy Carol Schwartz of Rockman et al⁴ said of the partnership: "In just three years, the Anderson Public Library's Community Technology Center has become an integral part of both the library and of the community, helping the library realize its mission of linking citizens to its own considerable resources and to the vast resources available online. As a partner in the A.C.T. Now! Project, the Anderson Community Library has produced a highly successful Computer Technology Center."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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REFERENCES

- ¹ Anderson Community Schools Corporation , 30 W. 11th Street, Anderson, IN 46016: www.acsc.net
- ² Buddy System Project: www.buddynet.net & www.acsc.net
- ³ CARL Corporation, 3801 E. Florida, Suite 300, Denver, CO 80210: www.carl.org
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