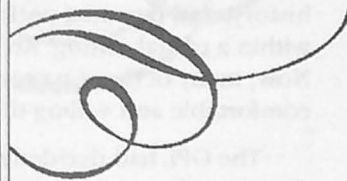


**VIDEO CONFERENCE TECHNOLOGY  
PROGRAMMING: GREENWOOD PUBLIC  
LIBRARY'S ADVENTURE INTO THE UNKNOWN**

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In 1997 the Greenwood Public Library (GPL) received a grant from Ameritech and the Center for Interactive Learning and Collaboration/CILC, formerly CEC. Public libraries had for years throughout the United States offered university courses through a variety of distance learning technologies, including the Internet, cable TV and video conference technology. Ameritech and CILC were curious about the possibilities of using program content providers in Indiana to present non-classroom programs to libraries. The GPL Board of Trustees asked me if I would take on the task of developing video conference programming. Working with CILC, I soon saw the potential for life-long learning programs for all age groups. The first task was to find an easy target audience, one that would be receptive to the technology and the two-way interactive capabilities. Children, ages 7-12 are continuously attuned to all kinds of video and audio input, so they were the obvious first audience. The Indianapolis Zoo was quick to work with me in setting up a Summer Series for 10 weeks in 1997. Schools, home school associations and ads in local newspapers attracted a small group that first year. Even the children were not totally aware of the interactive properties of video conferencing. During a program with the seals, one of the seals apparently heard the voices of the children, turned and walked directly over to the camera and monitor and started watching us. That episode got the message across and word of mouth soon spread throughout Greenwood. Video Conference technology had arrived at the GPL.

The next major issue was getting other content providers on the Vision Athena network to "tweak" their programs for adults, families and home school students. The Indianapolis Museum of Art's Wendy Wilkerson worked out a series of programs: Medieval, Chinese, Contemporary art and the art of Paul Gauguin. Each program was targeted at a specific group. The medieval art program, for senior citizens, centered on the interpretation of medieval triptychs. The program on Contemporary art included a section of the program for children. Using the document camera, children in the audience created their own artwork for Wendy to

interpret. Parents were especially appreciative of having their children's art showcased. The Chinese art program attracted teenagers, since it include the terracotta statues of the ancient tombs of Chinese emperors and various tomb artifacts. The program was followed by a 50 minute video of the Emperor Qin's tomb. The teens were intrigued and checked out many of the books and videos displayed in the studio. Video conference programs aimed specifically for teens is difficult. How to attract, how to interest, how to bring teens into the library, is an ongoing issue with libraries.

Home school students and parents were particularly pleased that Vision Athena and most out-of-state providers conformed to state department of education standards. All programs addressed science, literature, sociology, history, etc...within education standards. Most of the programs targeted for children and home school students include either a pre or post activity. Activities include crossword puzzles, puppet making, history quizzes and fact sheets. Content providers often have activities during the program, such as walking like a penguin, or using an elephant trunk to pick up objects. The purpose of the programs is education, but in an entertaining fashion. The programs offer an alternative mode of education suitable to both schools and libraries. Libraries can now enrich life-long learning missions with a technology that provides on-site visits and learning with museums, zoos, science centers and other cultural institutions. The value of interaction with other cultures, including other states in the US has provided an informal setting for the exchange of ideas. In August 2002 the Greenwood Public Library presented a program from the Melbourne (Australia) Zoo. For most of the audience it was the first time they had interacted with anyone from Australia. And, for the Zoo, it was an exciting chance to interact with people of all ages from the community, not just school children. The education factor works both ways. When the museum programs were announced, several library patrons asked about the format of the presentation. The patrons had wanted to go to the museum, but did not feel comfortable at the museum. They felt their educational experiences and maybe even their "social" experiences did not prepare them for this kind of cultural environ-

ment. By attending the video conference program hosted by Wendy Wilkerson of the Indianapolis Museum of Art, the patrons who originally had been uncomfortable with museums, realized the fun, beauty, history, and personal enrichment available to them within a casual setting. An experience for everyone. Now, many of those patrons go to the museum feeling comfortable and willing to ask questions.

The GPL had decided not to present university or distance education outreach programs. The first consideration was staff that would have to devote time to the various procedures of proctoring, registration, Q&A, and managing the technology. The Board, Administration and I felt that programs for community enrichment was the way we wanted to go. The technology offered a way to interact with other communities. One example will be in October 2002, when Robin Run Community will share a book discussion group with GPL library patrons. There will be three sessions whereby patrons from the community will share their ideas with other seniors at Robin Run about the book *October Sky*. Seniors at Robin Run had expressed the need to talk to other people, not necessarily other seniors, about current issues, books, or any topic. By 2003 we hope to have a network of libraries with video conference capabilities sharing book discussion groups for all age groups.

In 2003, I will be producing a three-day workshop with Ben Mikaelson, the author, for elementary, middle school and home school students. The programs will originate at the University of Minnesota, hosted by the GPL and available for interactive viewing-by-pay for schools and libraries. Our goal is to produce a variety of book discussion groups for various age groups and interests, children's programming, local author and speaker presentations, and craft projects/adult & children. Included in our goal is to present programs from across the US and other countries, not just Indiana. But, we will include as many of the Indiana providers as is possible, because we have a wealth of talent in our own state.

Video conference programs for libraries provides alternative life-long learning opportunities, a melding of technology and print materials, use of local and staff talent, and a technology that can be expanded and integrated with other technologies. Uses for in-house or shared in-house trainings with other libraries offers a cooperative professional development opportunity. The possibilities are endless for libraries that want to take 'up' the challenge.

Issues that affect the libraries going with video conference services and programs are: staffing, training, equipment costs and contracts, line fees/annual fees, program fees, PR, room allocation, and general budget items. All of this from the library's already straining

budget. Some solutions include applying for the E-rate for line fees, LSTA for reimbursement of service/maintenance contracts, grants from local and national foundations and program sponsorship from local businesses and industry. Pet stores and veterinarians could sponsor zoo programs, while local framing and art supply stores, and galleries could sponsor the Indiana Museum of Art programs. Craft and hobby stores could provide sponsorship with a small grant or supplies. Local physicians and/or medical centers could provide funding or speakers in conjunction with the program. Creative grant writing and professional presentation brochures to prospective sponsors would create a competitive and business-like approach in seeking funds. The challenges are many, but so are the rewards.