



Editor's Note: NORTH CAROLINA LIBRARIES introduces a new column, "Wired to the World." Edited by Ralph Lee Scott, a documents librarian at East Carolina University, this column will introduce the state's librarians to the wealth and variety of information available through Internet access. We welcome your comments.

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— by Ralph Lee Scott

Community online information systems are described "as a quiet revolution"¹ sweeping the country. These systems are the microcomputer versions of National Public Radio stations. The first of these systems, the Cleveland Free-Net, was started in 1984 by Dr. Thomas Grundner, then a member of the Case Western Reserve Medical School Department of Family Medicine. Dr. Grundner hoped through the system, which was called, incidentally, "St. Silicon's Hospital and Information Dispensary," to provide community health care information via a dial-up online microcomputer system. St. Silicon grew into the Cleveland Free-Net, which since 1988 has been operating out of the Case Western Reserve University Community Telecomputing Laboratory. The Cleveland Free-Net was the first of many community online information systems to spring up throughout the country. In fact, other cities and towns may lease the Cleveland Free-Net software for one dollar per year provided they agree to provide adequate support of the system. Welcome to the electronic city, as it is also called.²

To reach the Cleveland Free-Net you need to connect on the Internet to freenet-in-a.cwru.edu (using the mnemonic) or 129.22.8.38 (using the Internet Protocol address) as appropriate for your data communications system.

The Cleveland Free-Net and other nets based on its software are divided up into rooms or buildings, much like the American Memory Project. Original rooms on the Cleveland Free-Net were: the Administration Building; the Post Office; Public Square; the Courthouse and Government Center; the Arts Building; the Schoolhouse; the Community Center and Recreation Area; the Business and Industrial Park; the Library; University Circle; the Teleport; the Communications Center; and NPTN/USA TODAY HEADLINE NEWS.

"The Administration Building" functions as the control center of the system. Here you can obtain registration information, change your password, send comments to the system administrator, search the user directory and suggest proposals for new "rooms." A visitor, by the way, can use the system as a guest without registering. However, if you wish to post information or questions to a room, or to send or receive mail, you must register. For most systems there is no cost to register. These are free, public-supported systems. In the Administration Building, you can also find out about user services, Free-Net computers, What's New in the Electronic City, a list of Free-Net Sysops, and information on how to submit a proposal for a new room.

"The Government Center" consists of links to other rooms dealing with federal, state, and local government issues. This room has connections to "The Freedom Shrine" (historic documents); "The Congressional Memory Project"; information on how to contact your representatives; government toll-free hotlines;

"U.S. National Weather Service"; "Latest Economic Information: U.S. Dept. of Commerce"; City Government Information; "The County Engineer's Office"; "Safety and the Environment"; "Institute for Democracy in Education"; "OTA Teleforums"; and the 1993 Budget of the United States. System users can read general information articles and post questions and receive answers to specific questions in the individual rooms. For example, if you had a question about the county building code, you could post the question in the room run by the county engineer's office. Each of these rooms are moderated by an operator who agrees to read the messages, post answers to them and in general keep the room clean. These operators are called "Sysops."

Also in "The Government Center" is a room called The Courthouse. This includes a Lawyers Library; a Tax Office; What's New in Ohio Law; and a legal clinic. This room can have some interesting discussions, but all advice is concluded with the same answer you will find in the vet clinic: "Your pet is sick, please take it to see a doctor" (i.e., see a lawyer!).

The "University Circle" contains branches to information systems at Case Western Reserve University, the Cleveland Children's Museum, Ohio Prospect Research Network, the Cleveland State University College of Education, and the Cleveland Museum of Natural History. These rooms contain telephone book information, course listings, library catalogs, and news of campus and museum events that have been scheduled.

"The Medical Arts Building," as one might expect, is divided into clinics, each one dealing with a medical or allied health specialty. Typical clinics include Family Medicine Clinic (the original use of the system, you will recall); Dental Clinic; Handicap Center; Sports Medicine Clinic (great for minor weekend injuries!); Psychology and Mental Health Clinic; Drug and Alcohol Center; Geriatric and Home Care Center; Nursing Office; a Staff Lounge; Alzheimer's Disease Support Center; the Center for International Health; Substance Abuse Education Clinic; Safety and the Environment; the Hospital Library; and the Byte Animal Clinic. By way of example, if you had an animal health care concern, you could post a note to the Byte Animal Clinic and your request would be answered by a doctor (handles dogs, cats, birds, turtles, pigs, etc.).

"The Arts Center" is broken up into Visual, Culinary, Video, Theatre, Photographic, MIDI/Electronic Music, Music, Creative Writing, Audio, It's A Mystery (The Mystery Literature Group), and Literary Arts rooms. Each of these rooms is in turn broken down into sub-interest groups.

"The Science and Technology Center" consists of USA TODAY: Science and Technology News; The Museum of Natural History; NASA Air and Space Special Interest Group(SIG); The Computer Corner; a Skeptics SIG; an IEEE (Institute of Electrical

and Electronic Engineers) room; a Solid Waste SIG; the American Statistical Association SIG; an environmental discussion room; and a Home, Yard, and Garden interest group.

"The Public Square" is a sort of catchall for a group of generalized information rooms. There is a Podium, where you can read posted speeches; an electronic newspaper; an open chat line (where you can interact with others signed on); a Kiosk (where you can post notices); a Speakeasy (open general discussion); a Singles Party line; a special interest group on nonsexist information; and a Mensa forum. There is also a Kiosk (aka The Zone) which is an open board for adults only.

"The Post Office" is, of course, where you send and receive your electronic mail. In the system each user has a mailbox to which she can send or receive mail from other users. Some systems have Internet mail access for users, others allow only local mail drops.

"Academy One" is the building devoted to education. Rooms here are devoted to a list of Academy One Schools; a list of Academy One Projects underway; Academy One Partners Wanted; a Daily Report Card (newsletter); a Teacher/Administrator Lounge; a Student Lounge; the school library; special learning centers; a special education center; the Academy bulletin board; the National Middle School Network; a directory of users; and a Counsellor's Office. Users can post information to each of the rooms and later go back to see if, for example, a counsellor had information to share.

"The Teleport" is a packet switching building that enables users to send mail and to connect to other bulletin board systems. "The Community Center," of course, has rooms about local recreation centers and community services as well as an open discussion forum. The Business and Industrial Park has rooms devoted to USA TODAY: Headline Business News; Latest Economic Information: U.S. Dept of Commerce; the Personnel Office (job line); the Travel Agent; the Computer Room; Integral Users Group; Starting Smart (small business start-up info) and EDPA (Electronic Data Processing Auditors Association Users Group).

The Library contains the Freedom Shrine (Historical Documents); The Electronic Bookshelf (online texts); The CAMLS Library; The CWRU Libraries; The Cleveland Public Library; The Special Libraries Association; Government Documents Roundtable; and open system interconnect to "Libraries around the Nation" and the world.

"The Communications Center" provides the following: ability to chat with other users online; a directory of services; file transfer services (FTP); user services; a shortcut to the Post Office or the Teleport; a Sysop Administration information area; and a WAIS (Wide Area Information Servers) server.

The final choice on the opening Cleveland Free-Net menu provides access to the National Public Telecomputing Network and USA TODAY HEADLINE NEWS. USA TODAY provides access to the current daily USA TODAY issue through a number of subject rooms (for example, USA TODAY WEATHER). The National Public Telecomputing Network (of which Academy One is the K-12 component) is a sort of National Public Radio (NPR) Network for public free-net bulletin board users. This room will provide you with information on NPTN, including its mission, some brief facts about it, its affiliates and organizing committees (Cleveland Free-Net is a member of NPTN), a directory of its "Cybercasting services", data on the Teledemocracy Program, and the NPTN Campaign '92.

This concludes our tour of the "generic" free-net, the Cleveland Free-Net. Hope you have enjoyed the visit and will try out some of the rooms that interest you.

The Cleveland Free-Net is one of many online community

information systems to be found. Other systems are in Buffalo (Buffalo Free-Net); San Diego (Coconet); Berkeley (Community Memory — which, by the way, has coin-operated terminals in public laundromats in Berkeley, California; Santa Monica (PEN); Westchester County, NY (PALS); and Youngstown, Ohio (Youngstown Free-Net). These are just a few examples of Community Online Information Systems that are being accessed by "electronic citizens." Next month we plan to visit a school media network bulletin board. Until then, please try out some of the connects mentioned in "Wired to the World," and "Good Netting."

To enter The Cleveland Free-Net:
connect freenet-in-a.cwru.edu
To exit The Cleveland Free-Net:
x

Editor's Note: Recently The Cleveland Free-Net has been very busy and is limiting logons. The Buffalo Free-Net is another public computer system that you might wish to try if the Cleveland system is busy.

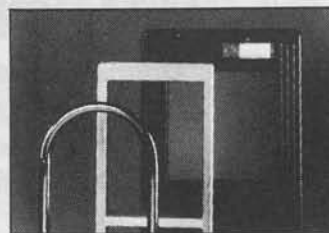
To enter The Buffalo Free-Net:
connect freenet.buffalo.edu
To exit The Buffalo Free-Net:
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References

¹ Kathleen L. Maciuszko, "A Quiet Revolution: Community Online Systems," *Online* (November 1990): 24-32.

² Steve Cisler, "Micro Monitor: The Library as a Metaphor and Cleveland Free-Net," *Database* (April 1988): 97-99.

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