

# ired to the orld

— by Ralph Lee Scott

Providing universal access to the Internet for all citizens is an idea that most librarians would subscribe to. We are far from that goal today. A number of attempts at providing universal access to the Internet are being made. Coin-operated terminals in laundromats, local area Free-nets, UNC's laUNCHpad, Congressperson Rose's (D-NC) project to provide local access in his district, and various commercial services are examples of recent attempts at so called "universal access." Vice President Gore recently proposed the deregulation of the communications industry as a way of providing universal access to the Internet. Under this plan, cable and telephone companies would compete over providing this "universal access" to the information highway on a local level. With a growing trend in the federal, state, and local governments toward the distribution of information via the Internet, equal access for all citizens becomes not just a goal, but a mandate for good government. With all the political rhetoric about the "National Information Infrastructure," the most commonly asked question is still, "How can I get on the Internet?"

If you live in a city or town that provides Internet access via a local computer site, then all you have to do is call the modem number of the local site and log on to the system using a software package (like ProComm). These local sites often are available at high schools, regional medical centers, community colleges, and universities. Recently, on page one of the January 25, 1994 issue of the *News and Observer*, the 106 sites for the initial installation of the North Carolina Information Highway were announced. If you live near one of these sites, you might contact them to see if you can obtain local dial-up access to their Internet connection. The majority of these sites are located in rural areas and should help provide access to the Internet for an area of North Carolina long denied access to the latest in communications technology. Jane Patterson, Governor Hunt's advisor on high speed communications, is quoted as saying that "this highway (North Carolina Information Highway) signals a rural sunrise for North Carolina ... it's the bookmobile of the 21st century." Additional sites on the North Carolina Information Highway are planned for selection in January of 1995. Perhaps you could be one of them. Ask your legislator!

If there is no local North Carolina Information Highway Internet site at your location, then you will have to contract with a national provider of Internet services. The five major information superhighway providers are: America Online, CompuServe, Delphi, GENie, and Prodigy. All the providers offer a variety of Internet services for a fee. These services include: e-mail via the Internet, financial information, bulletin boards, stock quotes, airline ticket information, sports and lottery information, games, shareware, movie reviews, health information, and reference book information. Most can be reached by either a dial-in 800 number or a local packet switching service (such as Tymnet or Telenet).

**America Online** (800-922-0808) currently has almost a million subscribers. A recent cost estimate was \$9.95 per month for five hours of online time. America Online also features a number of local city information features that highlight local activities (such as Chicago Online and Los Angeles Online).

**CompuServe** (800-848-8199) has about one-and-a-half mil-

lion members. Recent cost estimates are \$8.95 for a basic connection (initial registration is \$39.95) with Internet services priced at about \$4.80 per hour. CompuServe features a number of internationally known discussion rooms (such as the Rush Limbaugh Forum).

**Delphi** (800-695-4005) is a relative newcomer specializing in Internet access at low cost. Estimates are \$10 for four hours per month or \$20 for 20 hours per month, with an extra \$3 per month for the Internet. Current subscriber base is 100,000 and growing.

**GENie** (800-638-9636) has been around for awhile (and I would bet money has something to do with General Electric!). Estimated rates are \$8.95 per month for basic connections in the evenings (5-9 P.M.) upward to \$18.00 per hour for expanded services during prime time (9 A.M. to 5 P.M.). GENie has a large number of downloadable game and music files, as well as graphics and photographs for a variety of microcomputer platforms. GENie has about 500,000 subscribers.

**Prodigy** (800-776-3449) currently has over two million members. Rate estimates are \$7.95 for two hours per month with \$3.60 per hour additional, and 25 cents per e-mail message or \$14.95 for five hours per month with 30 "free" e-mail messages. Prodigy is alleged by some to be easier to use than the other services, but I suspect one would quickly get used to whatever service one selected.

A word of warning: all estimates are subject to change. Call the 800 toll free numbers to get the current price structure before signing on. Prices are somewhat competitive at this point and the deals may vary from service to service; but the above estimates can be used as a rough guide for comparison.

Now a word about **Telnet** and **Telenet**, which seem to be causing some confusion. **Telnet** is an Internet protocol that allows you to log on to a remote host computer using the Internet. For example, you can Telnet to 152.2.22.80 and connect to the UNC's laUNCHpad via the Internet. When you type Telnet, you are telling your Internet host computer that you wish to connect with another computer located at the specified address via the Internet.

**Telenet** is a packet-switching service that provides dial-up telephone modem services in most United States cities. Telenet is a commercial telephone time-sharing service that is not connected with the Internet. With Telenet, you can talk to other computers over regular telephone long-distance lines, provided the other computer is also connected up to the Telenet packet-switching system. Packet-switching systems were set up to allow small users to rent telephone lines to other computers for brief periods of time. These small periods of time are called "packets," hence the name "packet-switching networks." Telnet, on the other hand, is an Internet connection through a computer connected up on the Internet. Please determine whether you want Telenet or Telnet before you try to log on. The two are not interchangeable services.

The writer hopes that you will all soon be enjoying the world of the Internet, either through Governor Hunt's North Carolina Information Highway or one of the commercial information superhighway providers described above.