

Editor's Note: North Carolina Libraries presents this feature in recognition of the increase in excellent unsolicited manuscripts that merit publication, but are not necessarily related to each issue's specific theme.

NC LIVE @ home: Throwing Open the Doors to Information

by Greg Rideout

Editor's note: Users of public and academic libraries in North Carolina have benefited greatly from the addition of NC LIVE (North Carolina Libraries for Virtual Education). North Carolina library patrons will soon gain greater accessibility to these resources through the creation of NC LIVE @ home. Using a library-supplied password, patrons will be able to dial into NC LIVE from a home computer via the Internet. Here one library user ponders the possibilities.

I can't believe what's waiting around the electronic corner for me. North Carolina's libraries are about to open a major branch library on my desk at home. NC LIVE and its myriad resources will soon travel over the phone lines and into my computer. I can't wait to have remote access and here's why.

I always wished I had a bigger library. As a kid, I remember going to the library in Havelock and wanting more — more books, more newspapers, and, in my case, more atlases.

It wasn't until I went to college in Greenville that I found a library big enough. There were times I'd stay in Joyner Library all day, ignoring my classwork and wandering through the stacks, amazed at the unbelievable variety of books. Other times, I'd sit for hours in the periodicals room, reading whatever seemed interesting.

With the *Readers Guide to Periodical Literature*, I could find anything I wanted. And with a little help from a reference librarian, I could find things I didn't even know I wanted.

Now, I like my county library. I know it has one of the larger collections in the state, but it can't have everything.

Or can it? With NC LIVE @ home, it comes awfully close. My Wake County Library card (member since 1993) powers up more plastic magic than ever before. Now I've got more — more than the tens of thousands of books and more than the racks of magazines and newspapers waiting for me to drop in and peruse.

My sneak preview of remote access to NC LIVE revealed to me what other library users will soon realize: North Carolina has thrown open the doors to information in an invigorating fashion. Remote access to NC LIVE allows libraries to do what libraries do best: order and organize information and make it available to the public.

I like the Internet, but finding anything of value on it can be frustrating. The Internet may have the same information as NC LIVE, but it doesn't even attempt to organize it. It's like shoving the holdings of the Library of Congress into a giant Yatzhee shaker, scrambling them up and dropping them out on the floor. Try finding the book you want in that mess. Soon, all of us can click through all the clutter and on to the NC LIVE Web site, type in a password and go exploring.

Librarians know what's on the site. But, perhaps what you don't know is how easy it is to use for an average library patron like me. Facts, financial records, and soon-to-be-published books

are only a quick search away. Indexed journals, health information, and archived newspaper stories can be found fast and efficiently.

I did a search on global trade issues using a variety of the tools available through NC LIVE. I did the same search on the Internet. The difference may not amaze a trained librarian, but it certainly startled me. The junk that came up with my Internet search included personal websites and other global garbage that hurt more than it helped. The remote access search on NC LIVE netted usable research nuggets I could use.

Some of those nuggets mean more research at the library. But that's exactly the point. Remote access isn't a destination; it's a midpoint. If I'm in Chocowinity or Cherokee, I can go on-line, do preliminary research, and then decide if this is all I need. Do I need to go to the next level? Do I need help from a librarian to sort it all out? Do I need help from a librarian to find and read indexed articles I've found through my search? Sometimes the answer will be yes; sometimes it will be no.

Remote access also will have what I believe will be an energizing effect on libraries. Like a trout fisherman with the right fly, remote access to NC LIVE will lure new users into the library and re-establish ties with lapsed patrons. I don't believe remote access users will just return to the library every six months, sneak in, grab a password, and sneak out. That's illogical.

My guess is they'll stay awhile, check out the latest bestseller, or read an out-of-town paper. Remote access will bring them in, not keep them out.

Libraries, like schools, fuel democracies. They are egalitarian. They bring resources that only the wealthy can dream of and place them at the feet of each and every citizen. Benjamin Franklin understood that information was the milk of our Republic, helping us grow and making us strong. To him, too much information was an oxymoron. It just couldn't be.

Were the penny-saving kite-flyer matching wits with us today, I'm sure he'd immediately grasp the revolutionary nature of remote access to the state and nation's information resources. He'd say more is always better.

Library patrons like me will agree. I can't wait to have more than the sneak preview. I can't wait for the feature-length cut. Remote access to NC LIVE puts North Carolina on the leading edge of tomorrow's library. Just where we should be.