July 2014

Multnomah county library's world wide web kidspage

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Unless you're a total technophobe, you have probably heard of the World Wide Web, but if you don't have a Web-capable computer and software, you may not have had a chance to explore it. If you work with children or young adults, it's time to start.

The Web is the hottest thing in technology, so if you have access to the Internet, ask your Internet service provider how you can gain access to the Web. To get on, you'll need a powerful personal computer with a graphics-capable monitor, Web browser software like Mosaic or Netscape, and a fast modem (2400 baud is too slow to handle most graphics-oriented Web pages).

Look closely at print ads in trendy magazines and you'll notice strange goobledygook like this:

http://www.hip.stuff.com/wow.html.

This is a uniform resource locator (URL)—a Web address. Businesses use the Web to advertise their products and services. Schools and public agencies, including public libraries, use the Web as a public relations vehicle: They use it to bring information into homes, schools, and other public agencies. It is possible even for private individuals to have a "home page," the basic unit of a Web document. Subscribers to Teleport, an Oregon Internet provider, are entitled to their own Web pages, and if you access Teleport's Web server at *http://www.teleport.com*, you can see many homepages. Some belong to agencies and others to businesses, but many belong to regular (and some not-so-regular) folks, displaying their artwork and ideas for the world to see and read.

The various Web books and articles I've read emphasize how suddenly the Web has appeared: to most of us, it seems as if the Web sprang virtually out of nowhere. I've read that traffic on the Web is currently doubling every four months, three times the growth rate of the Internet itself. I've also read that the Web is now being used more than the ubiquitous Gophers on the Net, and that since 1991, the Web has increased tenfold in size each year. There are lots of people out there logging onto the Web, and many are library users.

Multnomah County Library on the Web

Many public libraries in the United States now have Web pages. Web pages make wonderful online newsletters, but some work better than others. To see lots of them, check out *http://sjcpl.lib.in.us/homepage/PublicLibraries/PublicLibraryServers.html*. This page is posted by the St. Joseph County (Indiana) Public Library. I also recommend Berkeley (California) Public Library's page at *http://www.ci.berkeley.ca.us/bpl/*. In Oregon, Eugene Public Library has a page at *http://www.ci.eugene.or.us/Library/default.htm*. Perhaps the most interesting development is a library that doesn't exist in a physical form—the Internet Public Library (IPL) at *http://ipl.sils.umich.edu*. The IPL has a Youth Section that's worth checking out. The best site for children's librarians, though, is the Children's Literature Web Site at *http://www.ucalgary.ca/~dkbrown/*.
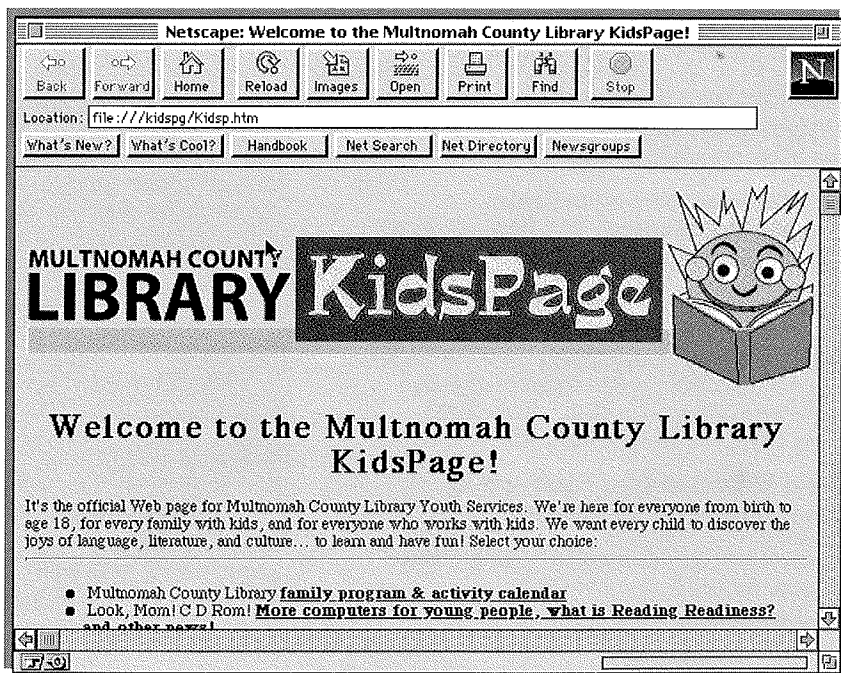
Multnomah County Library has been on the Web for less than a year at *http://www.multnomah.lib.or.us/lib*. During that time, the page has been "under construction"—a phrase you'll see on many Web pages. The page was designed and created by graphic artist Katherine Davenport under the web-mastership of Brian Williams, the library's systems manager. Although Davenport resigned from the library this summer, she continues to work on the page as a volunteer.

As soon as I learned about the library's plan to go on the Web, I wanted to ensure there'd be a youth services presence. I proposed that we create a page for kids, with interactivity, whimsy, and information aimed directly at our three primary youth services' client groups: kids, parents, and teachers. After I received preliminary approval from Multnomah County Library deputy Director Jeanne Goodrich, who oversees the Web project, I went to work.

Becoming Web-savvy

I looked at many Web pages designed for kids, parents, and teachers after a Web-capable workstation was installed at the Gresham Regional Library. I learned several things:

* There are few Web pages easily usable by children under ten years old. Most Web pages labeled for kids are actually heavily school-oriented, like the NASA and Volcano World Museum pages. There are a few pages labeled for young children, like the Public Broadcast-

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Netscape: Welcome to the Multnomah County Library KidsPage!

Location: file:///kidspg/Kidsp.htm

Welcome to the Multnomah County Library KidsPage!

It's the official Web page for Multnomah County Library Youth Services. We're here for everyone from birth to age 18, for every family with kids, and for everyone who works with kids. We want every child to discover the joys of language, literature, and culture... to learn and have fun! Select your choice:

* Multnomah County Library **family program & activity calendar**
* Look, Mom! C D Rom! **More computers for young people, what is Reading Readiness?**

ing Services pages, including the Sesame Street and Mister Rogers pages, but they always seemed to be busy and I was never able to access them.

- The slow speed and unpredictable behavior of Web pages accessed over a phone link argue against their regular use by young children. Large graphics (over 25 kilobytes in size) can take as much as a minute to download. If there are several graphics on a page, one needs to do something else while they download.

- On the other hand, schools are doing great stuff on the Web. If you view Portland's Buckman Elementary School pages *http://buckman.pps.k12.or.us/buckman.html*, you'll see what first- and second-graders can do—working with a Web-savvy teacher, of course.

Next I had to learn HTML, or Hypertext Markup Language, which I did by reading the three books I list at the end of this article and testing the results. Working on my Mac Quadra 605, I would write the copy and prepare the HTML in SimpleText (the equivalent of Write or Notepad in Windows), then open the finished document in the Mac version of Netscape 1.1N (the same thing works in Windows).

By this time, Ellen Fader, Multnomah County Library's new youth services coordinator, had joined our staff, and I wasted no time in asking her to take a look at my draft of "KidsPage." After showing Ellen and Jeanne Goodrich the draft and after incorporating their suggestions into the new version, I demonstrated the page to the rest of the youth services staff and asked for contributions. If all goes well, the page should be available at *http://www.multnomah.lib.or.us/lib/kids* by the time you read this.

KidsPage

KidsPage is actually misnamed: It's not just for children. There are segments for kids, parents, and teachers. Each group can access our calendar of family events *and* information about the October 13 dedication of the Beverly Cleary Sculpture Garden for Children in Portland's Grant Park. The dedication material includes a large photo of the Ramona Quimby statue that you can bring on screen with a mouse click. For kids, there are links to interesting Web pages, titles of new and recommended books in the library collection, and the Joke of the Month: *What does a librarian use to hold his pants up?* (For the answer, see KidsPage.) For parents, there's a page of recommended parenting books and a reminder of why it's important to read, talk, and sing to your child. For teachers, there are recommended books as well as links to send each of our branch youth librarians an e-mail message. Each page (see illustrations) contains a copyright-free graphic that I hope livens up the presentation.

Problems exist and questions remain to be answered:

KidsPage

- Will overworked youth services staff be able to contribute regularly to a Web page that most cannot access at their branches?
- We don't know whether we can keep up the pages of book annotations for kids, parents and teachers.
- Because parents express anxiety about young people stumbling upon inappropriate materials while exploring the Web, we plan to create a link to the full text of *Child Safety on the Information Highway*, published by the Center for Missing Children.
- Since the primary Web users are young male university students and computerphiles (this is changing rapidly, though), how many of Multnomah County Library's youth services' clients will be able to access our Web pages? Once they access the pages, will they tell others about them? Will they return?

A Web page is like a litter box—it must be changed regularly to be revisited—So I plan to keep KidsPage updated. We'll see, and in the meantime, I hope you'll pay a visit to our library page and KidsPage! **Q**

Recommended books

I highly recommend the following books if you're interested in learning HTML and Web page design. Although all are helpful, the first is easiest for absolute beginners in computer languages and HTML. If you don't have at least one of these titles in your library's collection, you should (but don't expect to see it on the shelves during the next two years):

Lemay, Laura. Teach Yourself Web Publishing with HTML in a Week. Sams, 1995; 403 pp.

Taylor, Dave. Creating Cool Web Pages with HTML. IDG, 1995; 244 pp.
Includes utilities disk for Windows computers.

Tittel, Ed and Steve James. HTML for Dummies. IDG, 1995; 449 pp.
Includes utilities disk for Windows computers.

Collaboration

teachers directly through our Assignment Alert program (teachers may place library materials on reserve for a class), we let them know that we were willing and able to assist them and that we supported their efforts to educate our children. They were introduced to our professional staff, and became more knowledgeable about the services the public library had to offer. When Homework Alert Centers were established in the public libraries throughout Benton County, the school district placed computers at the public library for students to use for word processing. This partnership inspired the Hewlett-Packard Company to make a considerable donation of computer equipment to enhance the centers. The centers also attracted a large pool of highly educated and experienced volunteers to serve as mentors for the students working on school assignments at the library.

Constant communication, accomplished by e-mail, school district courier, phone calls, press releases, and on-site visits to schools, increased the visibility of the public library and convinced the school district employees of our sincere desire to assist them. Teachers were invited to tour the public library and to bring students for tours. Public library staff continued to provide excellent traditional services such as booktalks and reference assistance.

The expanded dialogue led to the formation of a joint committee of public library and school district staff to discuss further opportunities for partnership. The group wrote a new LSCA grant which will begin in January 1996. It is entitled, *Kids Need Libraries: Inventing a New Model of School/Public Library Collaboration.* This grant will refocus the community on the importance of the school library, especially inthis time of exploding information technology. The need for students to have the skills to access, search, and evaluate the overwhelming amount of data available will be emphasized.

Writing the grant collaboratively required the library and the school district trust in each other. Both institutions showed their commitment to the project by pledging dollars and staff. (And the terrific school district cookies for meetings!) A joint statement of understanding was signed by the City of Corvallis, of which the library is a part, and the school district. Both institutions agreed to fund the school-library liaison position from September 1, 1995, even though the grant does not begin until January 1996.

Our advice: Begin! Start talking. Get librarians from both institutions together to discuss ways to help each other. Send school district staff a directory of key players in your library. Invite teachers for tours of reference areas and highlight new resources. Visit schools, especially school libraries. Co-sponsor parent education seminars. Establish Homework Alert Centers. Offer Assignment Alert.

Bake some cookies. You will be amazed at the results! **Q**