

Fall Federal Depository Library Conference  
Washington, DC

October 24, 2006



## **Starting and Operating a Statewide Virtual Reference Service: Maryland AskUsNow!**



**Joe Thompson**

**Project Coordinator: Maryland AskUsNow!**

**Baltimore County Public Library**

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# Background Basics

## Maryland AskUsNow!

- Grand opening on March 17, 2003
- Currently 34 partner library systems (12 academic, 19 public, Maryland State Law Library, Maryland State Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, and Charles Co. Law Library)
- Participant in OCLC's *QuestionPoint 24/7 Reference* national cooperative (backup staffing and chat / e-mail platforms included)
- Mission:  

AskUsNow! is a 24/7 live online interactive service. It uses the expertise of librarians to provide answers to questions, research guidance, and help navigating the Internet. AskUsNow! serves the information needs of Maryland residents and students of academic institutions through a partnership of Maryland public, academic, and special libraries.



askus  
now!  
info experts 24/7  
[www.askusnow.info](http://www.askusnow.info)

*Award  
Winning!*



Why are we offering this cooperative service?

# None of us could do this alone!



Why are we offering this cooperative service?



## **1. Convenience!**

- **Expanded hours (any time of need)**
- **Where they are looking (point of need)**

## **2. Communication!**

- **To clarify complex questions**
- **Instruction (Show them how to do it!)**
- **Chat and Instant Messaging = communication tool of choice**

Why are we offering this cooperative service?



### **3. Promotion!**

- **Marketing and publicity**
- **Ability to highlight other library services**

### **4. People!**

- **Personalized service**
- **Knowledgeable trained librarians**
- **Opportunity to learn new skills**
- **Efficient use of existing staff (\$)**

## How do people get to it?

### From...

- [www.askusnow.info](http://www.askusnow.info)
- Partner library home pages, and library web site links
- K-12 schools, nonprofits, and other community organizations who have added a link

Get answers from a librarian,  
not a machine



A cooperative service of Maryland libraries

## Welcome to Maryland AskUsNow!

AskUsNow! is a 24/7 live online interactive service. It uses the expertise of librarians to provide answers to questions, research guidance, and help navigating the Internet. Expand your resources, connect with an information expert!

Enter your 5 digit zip code:

CONNECT

AskUsNow! serves the information needs of Maryland residents and students of academic institutions through a partnership of Maryland public, academic, and special libraries.

[Learn about participating libraries](#)

[Find out more about this service](#)

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## AskUsNow! Participating Libraries

AskUsNow! is a 24/7 live online interactive service. It uses the expertise of librarians to provide answers to questions, research guidance, and help navigating the Internet.

Get answers from a librarian,  
not a machine



A cooperative service of Maryland libraries

- [Allegany College of Maryland](#)
- [Allegany County Library System](#)
- [Anne Arundel Community College](#)
- [Anne Arundel County Public Library](#)
- [Baltimore City Community College](#)
- [Baltimore County Public Library](#)
- [Calvert Library](#)
- [Caroline County Public Library](#)
- [Carroll Community College](#) ■
- [Carroll County Public Library](#)
- [Cecil County Public Library](#)
- [Charles County Public Law Library](#) ■
- [Charles County Public Library](#)
- [College of Southern Maryland](#) ■
- [Enoch Pratt Free Library \(Baltimore City\) & State Library Resource Center](#)
- [Frederick County Public Libraries](#)
- [Harford Community College](#) ■
- [Harford County Public Library](#)
- [Howard County Library](#)
- [Maryland State Law Library](#)
- [Maryland State Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped](#)
- [Montgomery College](#) ■
- [Montgomery County Public Libraries](#)
- [Prince George's Community College](#)
- [Prince George's County Memorial Library System](#)
- [Salisbury University](#) ■
- [Somerset County Library](#)
- [St. Mary's County Library](#)
- [University of Maryland College Park](#)
- [Villa Julie College Library](#)
- [Washington County Free Library](#)
- [Wicomico Public Library](#)
- [Worcester County Library](#) ■

■ indicates a new AskUsNow! partner library



# VILLA JULIE COLLEGE Library

Search Print-Friendly

## Menu

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- [SHARC Catalog](#)
- [Course Reserves](#)
- [Databases](#)
- [Faculty Services](#)
- [Full-Text Journal Locator](#)
- [InfoBasics](#)
- [Research Guides](#)
- [Student Services](#)

## LIBRARY RESEARCH

<a href="#">SHARC Catalog</a> Books, media & more	<a href="#">Full-Text Journal Locator</a> Find journals by title
<a href="#">Course Reserves</a> Electronic & print	<a href="#">NoodleBib</a> Citation help
<a href="#">Databases</a> Articles, ebooks & more	<a href="#">Research Guides</a> Style guides & more
<a href="#">Distance Learning</a> Forensic Studies Online	Research Tutorials: <a href="#">InfoBasics</a> <a href="#">Beyond the Basics</a>

**Need Help?**  
Click on Miss Julie for online help and more



## LIBRARY SERVICES

<a href="#">Faculty</a>	<a href="#">Student</a>
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## GENERAL INFORMATION

<a href="#">Highlights &amp; News</a> Have a favorite website for research? Add it to our list	<b>Fall 2006 Library Hours</b> M-Thur      8 - 10	<a href="#">About the Library</a>  <a href="#">Archives</a>  <a href="#">Library Staff</a>
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PRINCE GEORGE'S  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

- [Library Tutorial](#)
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[Library Instruction](#) | [College Homepage](#)

## Library • Accokeek Hall Learning Resources Division

Where would you like to go next?

### [Reference Tools](#)

- Encyclopedias
- Almanacs
- Dictionaries
- Directories
- Handbooks and Manuals
- Government Documents
- Style Guides
- Writer's Reference

### [Online Databases](#)

- Journal and Magazine Articles
- Newspaper Articles
- Reference Books
- Full Text Sources and More
- Remote Access
- Database Guides
- E-books





# PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY MEMORIAL LIBRARY SYSTEM

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October 24, 2006

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## LIBRARY SERVICES

- \* Events & Programs
- \* Catalog
- \* Email Notification
- \* Interlibrary Loan
- \* Meeting Rooms

and more .....

## Program Highlights



Halloween Hoopla  
& Hijinks

## Featured Library Service

*KidsCenter - Homework Resources*



 SEARCH

RESIDENTS

GOVERNMENT

BUSINESSES

CULTURE & LEISURE

How Do I...?

News

County Executive

County Council

Departments

Services (A-Z)

Online Services

County Cable 6

Transportation

Education

Careers

Volunteers

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Montgomery County PUBLIC LIBRARIES

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[Ask-a-Librarian](#) [Biz Info](#) [English Learner](#) [Kidsite](#) [Readers' Café](#) [Seniorsite](#) [Teensite](#) [Home](#)

### What's New @ Your Library

The Rockville library closed on Friday, October 6. [Learn more.](#)

[Celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month.](#)

The [Testing and Education Resource Center](#) is now here.

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## Testing & Education Reference Center

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[See today's events.](#)

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[Have a question? Contact us.](#) We want to hear from you.

### Catalog Quick Search:

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 **Ask us!**

**CHAT ONLINE**  
with Maryland's  
24/7 Virtual  
Reference  
Service

[Ask us now!](#) | [Ask now in Spanish](#)

UM librarians chat 9am-5pm, Monday-Friday. There are some times you may be helped by a non-UM librarian. If you log in with an e-mail address, a UM librarian will be able to follow up on your question.



**E-MAIL**

E-mail your question to [Ask a librarian](#).

**TELEPHONE**

- ▶ Libraries' general information: **301-405-0800**
- ▶ More Libraries' [Phone numbers](#)

**IN PERSON**

- ▶ **Walk-in reference:** Ask for help at any UM Libraries' information & research services desks. Check Libraries' [hours](#).
- ▶ **In-depth consultation:** UM faculty, staff, students, & administrators may schedule an appointment with a [Librarian Subject Specialist](#).

Read the UM Libraries' [privacy policy](#).

# They can find us even at worldcat.org

Find in a Library: This side of paradise - Microsoft Internet Explorer

File Edit View Favorites Tools Help

Address [http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/2369033&referer=brief\\_results](http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/2369033&referer=brief_results)

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Search for items in libraries:  
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**This side of paradise**  
by [F. Scott Fitzgerald](#) [Bookmark](#) | [Permalink](#)

Type: English: Book: Fiction  
Publisher: New York : C. Scribner's Sons, ©1948.  
OCLC: 2369033

Subjects: [World War, 1914-1918 - Veterans - Fiction](#) | [Children of the rich - Fiction](#) | [College students - Fiction](#) | [More...](#)

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Enter Location Information:    
Enter postal code, state, province or country

**Instructions:**  
To find this item in a library, enter a postal code, state, province, or country in the field above. Then click the "Go" button.

**Examples:**  
Postal code: "43017" (U.S.) or "S7K-5X2" (Canada)  
State: "Ohio" or "OH"  
Province: "Ontario" or "ON"  
Country: "United States" or "United Kingdom"

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BALTIMORE COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY  
Services:  
• [OCLC FirstSearch](#)  
• [Connect to the BCPL catalog](#)  
• [Request item](#)  
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• [Ask a librarian](#)

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<http://www.worldcat.org/wcpa/servlet/OUFrame;jsessionid=8CABD2EE76E8EDC05A675714764EFB09.four?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.questionpoin> Internet

Patron - Microsoft Internet Explorer

File Edit View Favorites Tools Help

Address: [http://www.questionpoint.org/crs/servlet/org.oclc.home.TFSRedirect?SS\\_COMMAND=CUST\\_SUP&Category=MD\\_A&VIRTCATEGORY=PGCC](http://www.questionpoint.org/crs/servlet/org.oclc.home.TFSRedirect?SS_COMMAND=CUST_SUP&Category=MD_A&VIRTCATEGORY=PGCC)

askUS now! info experts 24/7 www.askusnow.info

## Welcome to Maryland AskUsNow!

Get answers from a person, not a machine

askUS now! info experts 24/7 www.askusnow.info

A cooperative service of Maryland libraries

**Please note that, in most cases, you will be communicating with a librarian who does not work at your local library and does not have access to your personal library card records.**

[Getting started](#)  
[How it works](#)  
[Software compatibility](#)  
[Tips on chat communication](#)

[Policy of mutual respect](#)  
[Find out more about AskUsNow! page](#)  
[Participating libraries page](#)

While you're waiting, you may wish to look at these links:

- [Librarians' Internet Index](#)
- [Internet Public Library](#)
- [KidsClick!: web search for kids by librarians](#)
- [QuestionPoint 24/7 Reference: Global Knowledge Base](#)

Check this box to make this session anonymous. [Please click here for explanation.](#)

Please fill in as much information as you can below. Then click the "Connect" button.

Please enter your name: *(required)*

To receive a transcript of this session, type your e-mail address below:

Confirm Email Address

Which college or county library system do you use?

Do you have a library card?

Yes  No

How may we help you? Please type your full question: *(required)*

What is your Internet Connection?

Connect

Unknown Zone (Mixed)



# What came before?

## ■ 2001

- ❑ Two of 24 Maryland counties initiated pilot project to provide “homework help” to low income/high risk K-12 students at after-school centers.
- ❑ Due to low usage, target customer group had to be expanded. First to all K-12 students, then everyone in those counties.

## ■ 2002

- ❑ Multiple virtual reference services provided around Maryland - all for limited hours.
- ❑ State Dept. of Ed. promised to provide Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grant funding for larger cooperative.
- ❑ Planning for statewide service began.

## What were the big ISSUES?

### Daylong conference held in summer 2002

- ❑ Representation from libraries around state
- ❑ Karen Hyman from “QandA NJ” talked about their experience in New Jersey
- ❑ Small group discussions in these 7 areas:
  1. Staffing
  2. Training
  3. Marketing/Promotion
  4. Policies
  5. Software features
  6. Outcomes/Evaluation
  7. Resources

# Planning

- Planning team assembled. Top issues from conference used as starting point
- Separate review team assembled to provide helpful criticism and suggestions
- Plan of service made available in October. “Letters of Intent” to partner due in November 2002
- Request for Proposal (RFP) made available to seek vendor and back-up staffing.

The old planning page is still posted:

<http://www.askusnow.info/planning/>

(last updated, December 2002)

# Funding

- **LSTA grant funds for FY 2007: \$175,932**
  - ❑ **One part-time Project Coordinator**
  - ❑ **One full-time Operations Supervisor**
  - ❑ **QuestionPoint contract**
  - ❑ **Mileage**
  - ❑ **Staff Development**
  - ❑ **Printing of training materials**
  - ❑ **Training and meeting supplies**
  - ❑ **Statewide Marketing**
- **Partner libraries contribute:**
  - ❑ **Existing staffing**
  - ❑ **Internet workstations**
  - ❑ **Enthusiasm!**

## How much is it being used?

### A lot!

- **Maryland customers accounted for 26% of all *24/7 Reference* national usage in the first half of 2004!**
- **Over 143,000 chat questions have been submitted to date.**

# Chat usage over time

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	TOTAL
2006	4198	3865	4790	4403	4571	2110	1690	2051	3386				31064
2005	4364	4607	5950	5970	5351	2771	1867	2054	3194	3981	4119	3423	47651
2004	3277	3359	4224	4183	3856	2425	1853	1912	3308	4399	3703	3727	40226
2003			1653	2731	2703	1878	1834	1864	2688	3393	2738	2655	24137

# Chat usage...

...by time of day

Hour	Sep
00:00-00:59	28
01:00-01:59	17
02:00-02:59	10
03:00-03:59	8
04:00-04:59	7
05:00-05:59	10
06:00-06:59	13
07:00-07:59	29
08:00-08:59	71
09:00-09:59	125
10:00-10:59	193
11:00-11:59	165
12:00-12:59	195
13:00-13:59	263
14:00-14:59	264
15:00-15:59	255
16:00-16:59	292
17:00-17:59	286
18:00-18:59	228
19:00-19:59	291
20:00-20:59	263
21:00-21:59	198
22:00-22:59	121
23:00-23:59	54
Total	3386

## Marketing – Develop a Plan

- **Most promotion has targeted K – 12**
- **Business community to some extent, more in future**
- **Local library staff are your link to delivering the message to your communities**
- **Get what you can out of free publicity – Remember, you can only be new and exciting once!**





## Md. launches 24-hour online librarian service

BALTIMORE (AP) — It's the middle of the night and your Internet search for information you need. If you live in Maryland, don't despair — a library is just a click away.

A new service allows Maryland residents to reach a librarian online anytime, providing information ranging from recipes to tax information, or just about any other question you can think of. The service is available through the state's libraries.

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March 2003 – Grand Opening

From Mount Vernon to the Inner Harbor, people were drinking Irish stout and donning

## Md. libraries to connect with patrons via the Internet

### 24-hour service to offer live, interactive help from reference librarians

By ALYSON KLEIN  
SUN STAFF

Libraries across Maryland are scheduled to begin offering a service today that combines the 24-hour convenience of the Internet with the professional expertise of a reference librarian.

Maryland AskUsNow! will be

# Towson institution looks to access the 'invisible Web'

BY HEATHER COPPLEY  
*Daily Record Business Writer*

In the 1957 movie "Desk Set," Katharine Hepburn plays an ace research librarian who handily answers questions that are enough to overload the computer that she fears is meant to replace her.

Nearly 50 years later, "Get answers from a person, not a machine" is the theme of a new initiative at the Towson Library.

The **Baltimore County Public Library** has coordinated AskUsNow! — a statewide program that allows Marylanders to have all-hours access to the human intelligence that often gets lost in dozens of pages of online search engine results. AskUsNow! is a live online information service staffed by librarians 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Joe Thompson has been planning the effort through the county libraries during the last year.

"It's been fun visiting the member libraries and telling librarians that they will be working the 12 a.m. to 2 a.m. shift," he said jokingly.

Librarians from 26 libraries throughout the state will staff the chat-based service only during regular library hours. At other times, questions will be answered by librarians elsewhere in the country.

Participating libraries include 20 county systems, five academic libraries and the Maryland Law Library.

The Maryland state libraries consortium is only the second nationwide to offer this type of 24-hour live information service. New Jersey has a similar program run on different software. Appropriately, the software that Maryland's AskUsNow! runs on is called 24/7 Reference. It is licensed through an agreement with the **Metropolitan Cooperative Library System** in Pasadena, Calif.



ERIC STOCKLIN

The Baltimore County Public Library's Towson branch today will launch a 24-hour information service designed to help people answer questions about everything from business to law and beyond.

Thompson said the service will help people who are unacquainted with libraries and prefer online searches.

"What we're seeing in surveys is that people are often not finding what they need online. There is what is called the Invisible Web — areas that are hidden from search engines. Some of it is on subscription databases that libraries have access to," he said.

It is not only the online query service that the libraries are borrowing and expanding from the corporate sector, but the underlying software as well.

Thompson said that the programming used in 24/7 Reference was originally developed for corporate call centers, such as those for clothing catalogues. In the primitive application, it was used to help shoppers to ask questions while selecting from a catalogue of merchandise.

"They were dealing with a closed library, if you will," he said.

When people are looking for an answer to a question, they will often first ask a friend, Thompson said. Because AskUsNow! operates as a live chat service, it will enable the sort of narrowing of questions that can make online searches difficult to manage, with an immediacy that is lacking in the libraries' current ability to answer questions via e-mail.

While the most obvious use is homework assistance, the librarians online will be able to answer any sort of factual question, including those involving law, medicine and business.

Andrea Lewis directed the modest \$155,602 in seed money for the project through the state from a federal grant for museums and libraries.

"This will take our services beyond the four walls of the library," she said. "We are pulling together a great level of expertise through this service."

# COMMUNITY

## Librarians provide answers 24 hours a day

BY LONI INGRAHAM

At 10:15 on a Friday morning, why is it that a librarian from Broward County, Fla., is providing population figures for Towson?

That's the first question that might be asked of the Maryland AskUsNow! internet program, which was officially launched at the Towson library this week.

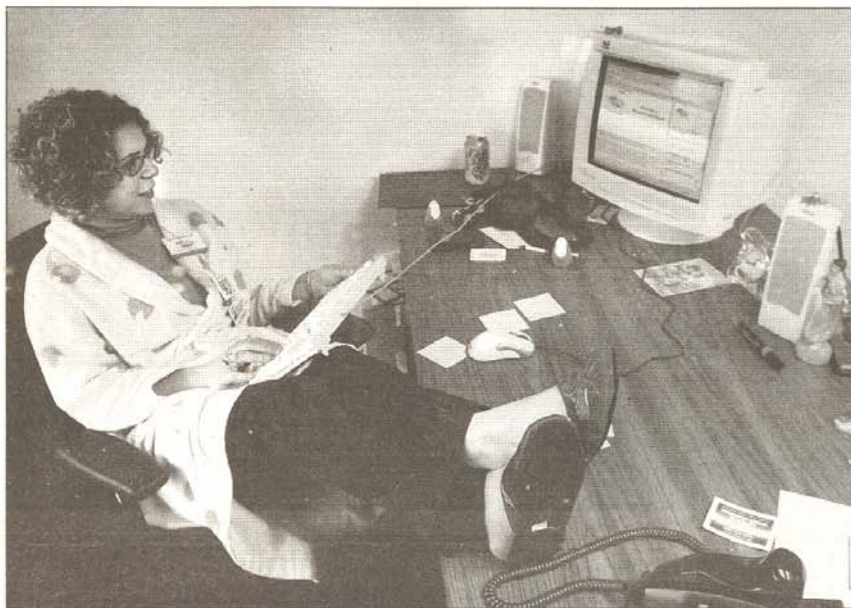
Of course, it just as easily could have been midnight on a Monday and the librarian could have been from Hartford or Terre Haute, because the AskUsNow! program offers the public the services of professional librarians who will answer factual questions and provide information 24 hours a day online.

The Baltimore County Public Library is coordinating the statewide initiative, which involves virtually every public library in the state, the Maryland Law Library and academic libraries for Loyola/Notre Dame, Villa Julie, University of Maryland College Park and Anne Arundel and Baltimore City community colleges.

Users of personal computers can access the service free through BCPL's Web site ([www.bcpl.info](http://www.bcpl.info)) or through [www.askusnow.info](http://www.askusnow.info).

Maryland is now part of a consortium of libraries worldwide using software provided by California-based 24/7 Reference, which offers round-the-clock online service, according to BCPL librarian Joe Thompson, who is coordinating AskUsNow.

After hours, libraries from Massa-



STAFF PHOTO BY GABRIEL HACKER

**Towson librarian Elizabeth Rafferty demonstrates how easy it is for someone to use AskUsNow!, the new, 24-hour-a-day service that uses librarians around the country to answer factual questions.**

should never receive a busy signal since local librarians are backed up by librarians elsewhere in the nation — including librarians from Broward County.

A second question that might be asked of AskUsNow is why was BCPL librarian Liz Rafferty of

called "co-browsing," which allows the librarian and customer to see the same screen at the same time, the librarian can share the information, as well as links to Web sites and databases, or show the customer how to complete a search.

Funded by the Maryland Depart-

It's not just the training on the software that's involved, he says. Absent the visual cues provided by both customer and librarian in a face-to-face interaction, virtual librarians have to keep customers apprised of what is happening while they are waiting.

And they need to get to the ques-

## BULLETIN Board

*Submissions for the Bulletin Board can be sent to Lauren Taylor, Towson Times, 409 Washington Ave., Towson, MD 21204, fax your notices to 410-337-2490 or e-mail them to [ltaylor@patuxent.com](mailto:ltaylor@patuxent.com).*

*Priority will be given to events or groups in the Towson Times readership area. Items must be received no later than noon on Friday for the following week's paper.*

### ART

► **Towson University** will sponsor the following art events.

• **Reclaiming Tradition** Sunday, through Friday, March 21, Asian Arts Gallery. Gallery hours are Mondays-Fridays, 11 a.m.-4 p.m. and Saturdays, 1-4 p.m.

• Abstract expressionist painter **Judith Godwin** exhibit through March 22, Center for the Arts Holtzman Art Gallery. Opening reception Friday, Feb. 21, 7-9 p.m.

### BENEFITS

► **Big Brothers Big Sisters** present the **24-Hour Big Phat Bowl** for teams of five with a minimum of \$50 in pledges Friday, March 21, 6 a.m. to Saturday, March 22, 6 a.m., AMF Towson Lanes, 701 Southwick Drive. Call 410-243-4000, Ext. 230.

► **Harvest for the Hungry** will hold their spring drive through March 22. Leave nonperishable food items at your mailbox or post

# Library reference service never sleeps

BY LONI INGRAHAM

With the launching of the Maryland AskUsNow! Internet program, at the Towson library last month, the reference desk became the source that never sleeps.

The AskUsNow! program offers the public the services of professional librarians who will answer factual questions and provide information 24 hours a day online.

ment of Education's Division of Library Development Services, which gave BCPL \$155,602 in seed money, it is the first statewide project of its type and only the second of its type in the country.

Pooling resources on a regional basis just makes sense, according to BCPL Director Jim Fish.

"I see this as the perfect blend of technology and what libraries do well — that is to organize information and to interpret the needs of customers to get them to the right information," he said. "This takes what's good and updates it for the 21st Century."

About 180 librarians from 26 libraries have received special training for the project, Thompson said.

It's not just the training on the software that's involved, he said. Absent the visual cues provided by both customer and librarian in a face-to-face interaction, virtual librarians have to keep customers apprised of what is happening while they are waiting.

And they need to get to the question as soon as possible. "They get to chat but they shouldn't go off the topic too much," Thompson said. "It's not a service for lonely people. It would be the same type of transaction as if they were talking to a librarian at the desk."

E-mail Loni Ingraham at [lingraham@patuxent.com](mailto:lingraham@patuxent.com).

PAGE 12 • THE AVENUE NEWS • April 9, 2003

## County librarians now online 24 hours to answer questions

By AUDREY CARPENTER

THE AVENUE NEWS STAFF

The Baltimore County Public Library system is offering a new 24-hour program to answer questions from county residents.

Library patrons could always call their local libraries and get questions answered by a librarian. But users were limited to the library's hours of operation.

That has changed. Residents can hop on the internet at any hour, day or night, and go to [www.askusnow.info](http://www.askusnow.info). Librarians are standing by to answer questions.

The Maryland AskUsNow! initiative is being coordinated by the county library system and involves almost every library in the state as well as five academic libraries and the Maryland Law Library, so virtually any question can be answered.

Information such as recipes, corporate officers, articles for homework, consumer facts, sports results, biographical details and quotes are just a few of the areas that

can be tapped, according to the library staff.

AskUsNow! is the first statewide project of its type and the second in the nation. The program in Baltimore County was started when former librarian Diane Tremere requested a grant from the Maryland Department of Education's division of Library Services in 2000. Tremere worked in the Information Services Department in Towson but recently passed away.

The first two years was a pilot program geared to school students, said Joe Thompson, the current coordinator of the program, also based in Towson.

"The program was so successful we decided to take it public," Thompson said.

The Department of Education gave the county library system a total of \$155,602 for the expanded AskUsNow! program. That money is used to cover Thompson's salary as well as special software called "24/7 Reference" that allows librarians to research information. The "24/7



Reference" software was developed by a Southern California company.

The official kickoff and demonstration of the AskUsNow! program was March 17 at the Towson Library, and received 333 questions the first day, Thompson said.

Librarians boast that users never receive a busy signal, as the local librarian an-

backed up by libraries elsewhere if necessary.

Academic libraries participating in the program include Annapolis Community College, Baltimore Community College, Loyola University, and the University of Maryland at College Park.

April 2003

Northeast Booster April 30, 2003

## Library service queried about mice and men

Librarians in Perry Hall helped answer more than 3,000 questions in the first month of the new statewide program that provides 24-hour Internet access for questions and information on all topics.

Maryland AskUsNow!, which is being coordinated by the Baltimore County Public Library, fielded 3,410 inquiries ranging from the age of Mickey Mouse to where to obtain name-change forms.

The service, which always links a customer to a live librarian, can be accessed at [www.askusnow.info](http://www.askusnow.info).

## State's new library Web tool provides answers 24/7

BY LONI INGRAHAM

Villa Julie, University of Maryland College Park and Anne Arundel and Baltimore City community colleges.

asked of AskUsNow is why was BCPL librarian Liz Rafferty of Anneslie wearing a white terry cloth

librarian can share the information, as well as links to Web sites and databases, or show the customer how to

use representative in January.

It's not just the training on the software that's involved, he says. Absent

At 10:15 a.m. on a Friday morn-

# Staffing & Scheduling

- **300+ Maryland librarians actively provide service**
- **Maryland librarians cover 266 hour per week**
- **Standard weekly schedule: Each library was required to offer at least 5 hours a week on the service, but we have made a few exceptions for very small library staffs**
- **Partner libraries are responsible for plugging in a trained librarian during the specific hours they have committed**
- **State Library Resource Center in Baltimore City provides one librarian during regular business hours 8:00 a.m. until 11:00 p.m., Monday – Friday**
- **24/7 Reference and cooperative librarians provide back-up, weekend, and overnight staffing!**

# What are they asking?

## School assignment

- “what historical inaccuracies are found in the movie, Patton (1970)? history vs. hollywood”
- “What is the direction of proton transfer between acids and bases? This is high school chemistry.”
- “For a school project, I need a magazine article dealing with water pollution. I have searched though all of my magazines, and am unable to find one. Do you have any?”
- “I am writing a term paper and i can not find any information on the event of Henri de Navarre seizing the city of Cahors.”
- “what were the slave populations of the countries in 1860?”
- “How did Philantropy have a impact during the Gilded Age?”
- “I need Help With My Exit Project”

# What are they asking?

## Advanced

- **“I am researching family and want access to the New York Times Archives. I understand I can get this through an access site with the Balt. County Library. Is this correct? I want to do this from home on my PC. Thanks”**
- **“I would like to know the ward, section, block and lot information for \*\*\*\* Hillburn Avenue Baltimore, MD 21206. I know this information should be the LUSK Fish”**
- **“This question relates to electric or gas scooters. I need to look up the Maryland law that governs the use of these scooters on public roads in Maryland?”**
- **“Can you help me find a website that tells what a Fathers Rights are concerning paying child Support, also are there any advocacy groups which support fathers”**
- **“What is the minimum and maximum someone can go to jail for kidnapping?”**

# What are they asking?

## Library Policies & Collections

- **“How do I sign up for an account online and a pin to renew materials?”**
- **“how do i renew DVDS?”**
- **“My son took one of his checked out books (Hardy Boys #20) to school and lost it there. Can you please let me know how much money I owe the library to replace the book. I am hoping someone would find it and turn it in but that has not happened yet.”**
- **“how can I get into your databases?”**
- **“I am looking for some sort of video training CD-Rom for english learning or correcting my pronunciation?”**
- **“I was wondering if there is a way to get one Maryland system library card. I thought I had heard something about a statewide system and wanted to know if I can condense my three county cards into one state card.”**



# What are they asking?

## **‘Other?’**

- **“What is the median starting salary of new librarians?”**
- **“i need articles about Benjarong Thai Restaurant in rockville Maryland. how can i get these articles online? or any ways that i can get them?”**
- **“how much money is lil romeo worth?”**
- **“the major conflict in older women dating younger men and how can they be solved?”**
- **“Can I please have info on HP and the Half Blood Prince? (If possible, can I have librarian nws, please?)”**

## Greatest challenges?

- We could have planned better on how to handle all of those follow-up questions
- Keeping up with technology – working with customers who use a wide range of browsers, operating systems, and... firewalls
- Establishing realistic expectations
  - Answers are usually not instantaneous
  - Question negotiation not always expected
- Unexpected class visits
- Rude behavior

**Challenge ahead:  
Keeping up with demand!**

# Survey feedback

## Sample recent comments:

- “Two words can describes your service and that is Fast and efficient.”
- “The service was very knowledgeable and they knew just where to look to find the information that I needed!”
- “My librarian rep. was very nice and helpful she should get a raise!”
- “Fast, helpful, easy to use, friendly and I can always count on!!”

For more info...

**Maryland AskUsNow! Staff Support Page:**  
**[askusnow.info/partners](http://askusnow.info/partners)**

**Recommended Resources for Planning a  
Virtual Reference Service:**  
**[askusnow.info/recommended](http://askusnow.info/recommended)**

**This Presentation and Others:**  
**[askusnow.info/presentations](http://askusnow.info/presentations)**

**Contact Joe:**  
**[jthompso@bcpl.net](mailto:jthompso@bcpl.net)**  
**410-887-8124 (Info. Services Dept., BCPL)**