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MAGGIE'S PLACE: Connecting with the Community at the Pikes Peak Library District

INTRODUCTION

The Pikes Peak Library District (PPLD) has long been known for providing access to community information through online databases. PPLD's patrons, both at terminals in the library's facilities and as remote users via dial-up lines, have had access to community information since 1978.

Today, there are 10 community information databases on the menu at PPLD: Agencies, Arts, Calendar, Child Care, Courses, Clubs, Local Authors, Local Documents, Senior Housing, and Social & Economic Indicators. Collectively, these databases are known as Community Connections. The Community Connections databases total more than 10,000 records and were accessed nearly 50,000 times in 1992 (a 10% increase over 1991 usage). Most of the Community Connections databases are also available for purchase in printed form. In most cases, the entire file may be purchased, or in other files, specific portions are printable.

HOW DID PIKES PEAK LIBRARY DISTRICT GET INTO THE ONLINE COMMUNITY INFORMATION BUSINESS?

PPLD's involvement in providing community information online began in 1976 with joint planning meetings with the Colorado Springs Junior League. Many of the ideas advanced in these meetings were incorporated in an effort put forth by a private, nonprofit, nonpolitical organization known as Citizen's Goals to establish a central, well-publicized, 24-hour information and referral service. The library's computer was a logical home for this much-needed service.

The first database available for online access resulting from this effort was CALL (Citizen's Action Line Limitless), which evolved into the present Agencies database. The information in the database was primarily about social service agencies, and volunteers from the Junior League provided most of the maintenance labor. Much of the information input initially came from an

existing card file of community resources maintained by the library; other data came from United Way member agencies.

Although the Junior League phased out the volunteer program in 1979, PPLD was able to continue and expand the online community information program through the use of CETA-funded employees. In addition, a local events calendar was brought online in 1979, and a database of educational classes (Courses) was added during the same year.

In 1980 CETA funding was drastically cut, and PPLD moved several of the CETA employees into regular library positions. Several years passed before any additional databases were added, but in 1982 the Clubs file was brought online. The process for proposing and bringing up new online community information databases was also formulated during this time. Eventually PPLD's Information and Reference Committee would take the leadership role in evaluating proposed databases.

COMMUNITY INFORMATION DATABASES
AVAILABLE TODAY AT PPLD

Agencies (online since 1978)

The Agencies database (the continuation of the original CALL file) contained 671 records as of mid-March 1993. Information is available about vital community services, such as public and private social service agencies, crisis intervention agencies, and other information and referral services. The Agencies database also includes hot-line and emergency telephone numbers and information about elected and appointed state and local officials. Agencies in the database provide free, low-cost, or unique services, and information in each record indicates whether there is a fee and who qualifies for the services offered.

This database may be searched by using words indicative of the functions, services, or names of the agencies. Contact names, telephone numbers, hours of operation, and addresses are supplied. The Agencies database was accessed more than 7,000 times in 1992, and the first two months of 1993 show a 10% increase in weekly usage.

Arts (online since 1992)

The Arts database contained 1,735 records as of mid-March 1993. This database provides information on people and places involved in the arts, primarily in El Paso County, Colorado. It also includes detailed information about performing artists, performance places, visual artists, display spaces, and arts organizations.

The Arts database may be searched by using the name, functions, or services of an artist, space/place, or organization. This database permits a search by category (visual artists, performing artists, visual spaces, performance places, and arts organizations) as well.

Sources of information for the Arts database included paper files kept by a variety of arts organizations in Colorado Springs and several others with

statewide scope. After the database was introduced to the public, artists and organizations not listed have been reported by artists and other interested people, and thus the Arts database continues to grow.

This database was available to the public online for only eight months of 1992 and was accessed 2,116 times. The first two months of 1993 show an 11% increase in average weekly usage.

Calendar (online since 1979)

The Calendar database contained 467 records as of mid-March 1993. Three main types of records are included in this database: (a) permanent records for annual events, (b) temporary records with more detail about this year's program for an upcoming annual event, and (c) temporary records for events occurring only once.

The information in the Calendar database is gathered in a variety of ways. Staff responsible for maintaining the database are in regular, direct contact with many representatives of venues where events take place. In addition, the local newspapers are a regular source for new events information, as are library patrons connected with the sponsors of events.

The Calendar database is also made available in printed format. Monthly or annual events calendars may be purchased. The Calendar database was accessed more than 6,000 times in 1992, and the first two months of 1993 show a 4% increase in average weekly usage.

Child Care Providers (online since 1984)

The Child Care Providers database contained 453 records as of mid-March 1993. This database was established to assist parents in locating, and making informed decisions about, child-care providers. Presently only providers licensed by the Social Services Department of El Paso County are included in the database.

Each entry in the database included the name of the provider, nearest major street intersection to the provider's location, telephone number, nearest school(s), days and hours of care (including overnights and weekends, if applicable), transportation availability, and a brief description of the provider's services. Such a broad array of information permits a variety of searches: by the name of the provider, by zip code, by school, by street name, and by a variety of words indicative of the services provided and age levels accepted by each provider.

The original entries for the Child Care Providers database came from card files maintained by the local Urban League and several neighborhood mothers' groups. As new providers are licensed, they are offered the opportunity to be listed in the database. Most wish to be listed and provide the information for the file. The Child Care Providers database was accessed more than 6,000 times in 1992, and the first two months of 1993 show no change in this rate of usage.

Clubs (online since 1982)

The Clubs database contained 926 records as of mid-March 1993. Information available in this database concerns civic, social, professional, and

recreational clubs, as well as medical and emotional support groups. The record for each club provides a description of the club's function, meeting days and times, presiding officer, number of members, names of contact persons, and telephone numbers. This database may be searched by keywords describing the functions or interests of the club, the type of club (e.g., support group), acronym (e.g., NAACP), or the specific name of the club (e.g., Pikes Peak Genealogical Society).

The Clubs database began as a card file of local contact names and telephone numbers developed by a library staff member. This file, although valuable, was incomplete and not consistently maintained. Following the precedent of the Agencies and Calendar databases, the Club file was put online, and further sources of information were developed. Possibly the most valuable source of new club listings are the library patrons who use the database and naturally search for any club they belong to. If they don't find their club, these patrons frequently ask a library staff member how PPLD could possibly have overlooked it. The patron is asked to supply information about their club for the database. The technician assigned to the Clubs database also uses information from local newspapers (both daily and weekly), radio, and television.

Club entries are updated annually. The time for updating is built into each record and generally timed to come just after each club's election of officers. The Clubs database was accessed more than 10,000 times in 1992, making this the most frequently accessed of the Community Connections databases. The first two months of 1993 show a 12% increase in average weekly usage.

Courses (online since 1979)

The Courses database contained 1,975 records as of mid-March 1993. There are two primary types of records: (a) individual courses, workshops, seminars, and forums offered in the Pikes Peak region; and (b) profiles of institutions or organizations offering courses.

Each record of an individual course includes the name of the course, the school or organization offering the course, the address and telephone numbers for enrollment information, dates, times and length of the course, cost of the course, and other miscellaneous information. Profile records include the name of the school/organization, addresses and telephone numbers, and keywords for the types of courses offered.

This database began with the information contained in the files of the Consortium for Coordinating Education for Adults, a local community group that ceased to function because of lack of funding. PPLD combined these files with the course listings already known to the library and put the information online.

The information in this file is gathered in a variety of ways. Two of the larger institutions that list courses in the database (University of Colorado at Colorado Springs and Pikes Peak Community College) supply PPLD with computer tapes of all their offerings on a regular basis. Other institutions supply paper copy for each session. More than 50 different sources provide course listings for the database. The technician responsible for maintaining the Courses database has also established contacts at a number of the institutions. In addition,

the local news media occasionally provide information on new course offerings. The Courses database was accessed approximately 4,000 times in 1992; the first two months of 1993 show no change in average weekly usage.

Local Authors (online since 1986)

The Local Authors database contained 164 records as of mid-March 1993. This database provides current information on authors who live and work in the Pikes Peak region. Each record includes the author's name, the genre or subject of work, a list of publications, biographical information, and an indication of availability as a speaker.

This database may be searched by the name of a particular author or by subject words (to find a list of local authors that write on that subject). Searching on the word "yes" will generate a list of all the local authors who are available to speak to seminars, club meetings, etc.

The Local Authors database began with a mass mailing of questionnaires to all the writers that PPLD knew about. The appearance of the database led to library patrons suggesting additional authors missed by the first mailing. The Local Authors database was accessed more than 1,500 times in 1992, and the first two months of 1993 show a 21% increase in average weekly usage.

Local Documents (online since 1986)

The Local Documents database contained 3,674 records as of mid-March 1993. This database provides access to documents written by city and county government departments, citizens groups, and developers. Each record includes the name of the issuing agency, the date the document was issued, the title of the document, an abstract of the document, and keywords for the subject(s) of the document.

This database also resulted from the efforts of Citizen's Goals. Although some city and county agencies were routinely sending documents to the library, many were not. Funding from Citizen's Goals permitted the expansion of the document collection and the addition of computer capacity to handle the increased number of documents. The Pikes Peak Area Council of Governments donated its library of documents to PPLD to enrich the Local Documents collection. Today, PPLD routinely receives copies of new local documents and adds them to this database. The Local Documents database was accessed more than 7,500 time in 1992, and the first two months of 1993 show a 6% increase in average weekly usage.

Senior Housing (online since 1988)

The Senior Housing database contained 84 records as of mid-March 1993. This database provides access to housing facility information for those 55 or older. Each record includes the name of the facility, address, telephone numbers, price range, admission requirements/restrictions, services offered, and amenities provided. The database may be searched by zip code, street, name of the facility, or by keywords describing services or amenities.

The original entries in this database came to PPLD as the result of a joint project of PPLD and the Area Agency on Aging. Cooperation between the two agencies continues. This database was accessed approximately 800 times in 1992, and the first two months of 1993 show no change in this rate of usage.

Social and Economic Indicators (online since 1988)

The Social and Economic Indicators database contained 396 records as of mid-March 1993. This database was established to provide a single source for existing statistics that had previously appeared in a number of formats and in a wide range of sources. This database was constructed from scratch, not from previously existing source files. Each record includes statistical information, keywords for the subject(s) of the record, and the source or sources of the information. Most of these data concern the Pikes Peak region and Colorado, but some statistics include comparisons with other parts of the United States. This database covers such diverse subjects as climate, residential and commercial construction, vital statistics, education, and numerous others.

Social and Economic Indicators may be searched by keyword(s), by source (e.g., 1990 Census or Colorado Springs *Gazette-Telegraph*), or by the words in the title of the record (e.g., Population—Municipalities). The Social and Economic Indicators database was accessed nearly 4,500 times in 1992, and the first two months of 1993 show a 30% increase in average weekly usage.

IMPACT ON STAFFING LEVELS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Maintaining the Community Connections databases at Pikes Peak Library District involves a variety of tasks and staff members to perform them. Presently, each of the databases is assigned an information technician/librarian team responsible for maintenance, development, and promotion. Each information technician assigned to a database devotes approximately 25% of her time to this task. The supervising librarians spend approximately 10% of their time on database-related activities.

The information technician is responsible for adding and deleting records from the database, gathering the information for updating records (some databases are updated annually, others at various intervals), and surveying local sources for leads to additional entries. The supervising librarian is responsible for broader decisions about the content of the database, determining what reports will be generated from the database, speaking to groups involved in the database, making new contacts regarding the database, and a variety of other supervisory tasks. Occasionally, the supervising librarian may also be called upon to input data.

THE FUTURE OF COMMUNITY INFORMATION ONLINE AT PPLD

At the time of this writing, the Pikes Peak Library District is proposing another giant step forward in providing community information. PPLD and the Pikes Peak United Way are considering the joint creation of an Information and Referral Center, housed in the downtown library facility, that would extend

the community information concept further. This Community Intake Center would build on the existing Community Connections databases and add client referral to the appropriate agency. Both walk-in and telephone clients would be welcome. PPLD would provide the facility, the staff, and the expertise in using the Community Connections databases; the United Way would work with PPLD to improve agency listings and insure that services are accurately listed in the database. Application has been made for grant funding to begin the program.

CONCLUSION

The Pikes Peak Library District is well known throughout the world as a leader in providing community information online. Library staff from many countries have visited PPLD to see the Community Connections in action, and PPLD is understandably proud of the success of the program. The high rate of use of the databases (five accesses per record in the databases) indicates that they fill a need in the community, and without a doubt, the future will surely see a continuation of this commitment to Community Connections.