

Area library system among first in U.S. to have 'dial-in data'

By VIKI VOLK
Special to the Independent

Joyce Latham grins when asked how the Southern Maryland Regional Library Association became the first in the country to have a "dial-in data base."

"They couldn't figure out the program," she said of other libraries and commercial indexing programmers.

Latham, who heads up the technology end of the Southern Maryland regional extension of the state's integrated library system, has reason to be proud. The computer programs and data-entry personnel who brought Southern Maryland's system into being also are employees of the regional library association.

"We've done quite a bit of work," Latham said about the regional research and coordinating function of the Maryland library system.

It didn't look like much work.

The regional library's research collection rests in a few handfuls of volumes leaning at the ends of a few bookshelves. A smaller, narrower shelving unit held small labeled boxes of microfiche. A couple of banks of tables held a few computer terminals. Telephones and facsimile machines were stashed in there, too.

A research library just doesn't

look like it used to.

Christine Tucker — one of the voices on SMRLA's data-access line — explained the difference in terms of the U.S. Census data which has been "collapsed down to one disc. Remember when the census covered shelves and shelves and shelves of space?" she asked Latham. The shelves held only Maryland data, Tucker said. Now the single disc holds more up-to-date census data for the entire nation.

The switch from paper to computer discs are a much cheaper and faster way to disperse the information, the librarians explained.

The savings have translated into the ability for SMRLA to offer limited amounts of copying and facsimile services to library card holders via the 10 branch libraries they serve.

"Access is free," Latham said, raising her low, librarian voice to the pitch of a soapbox speech.

"The bottom line is, it's for the citizen out in the street ... It's the most equitable institution in the country. They just don't know it," she lamented.

However, card holders will know about computers soon. They have replaced — and expanded — the card catalogues in the branch libraries. The catalogues now list the titles owned by all 10 branches.

It will take a day, but if your

branch doesn't own the title you want, the branch librarian can have it sent over from a branch that does.

If none of the branches have the book, the SMRLA steps in with the ability to "leap out" of the regional system, Latham said, and seek a copy at the state level. If the state-level search at the Enoch Pratt library fails, Enoch Pratt belongs to a national consortium and can take the search one step farther.

While SMRLA's integrated system represents what all of the state's libraries must begin to do, Latham said there are still additional goals of integrated systems. For example, she said, the computerized card catalogue system might one day include a nationwide indexed system. And SMRLA will nearly certainly come to include personal computer access to the integrated card catalogue.

In addition to responding to requests by title, author or subject, the computerized catalogue also cross-references books, audio equipment, video equipment and serial publications. Next, community information will be entered.

That would allow someone interested in diabetes, for example, to browse through the titles of books, and audio and visual information sources. It would also tell of a community support group, if one was available.

Yet Latham said regional library systems have not been spared the budget problems of

Maryland's current financial crisis. While many elements of the data system have come to SMRLA as grants — such as the medical index via a health information project — other things are costly. The subscription to the magazine data base — of which 90 percent of

the articles are on microfiche — costs \$15,000. "Ten times \$15,000..."

Still, considering the use, Latham said it's a deal. "If SMRLA disappeared, so would that. Branches would have to buy it themselves or give it up."

"There are 10 branches," La-

tham calculated. "Now it's free," she said.

Library 'Learn to Earn' program gears students toward future jobs

By VIKI VOLK
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Libraries are expanding. But that doesn't necessarily mean adding bookshelves anymore.

In Southern Maryland, it means teaching computer literacy via the regional library's new computerized data program.

"That's our big grant," said Joyce Latham of the Southern Maryland Regional Library Association.

The grant program is called Learn to Earn. SMRLA will use the money to promote computer literacy as well as teaching students how to write a resume and through the use of video equipment, how to conduct a successful interview.

Those are the three most important things to getting a job today, Latham said: "A resume, interview skills and some basic computer skills."

"We're moving out of this insulated approach," she said.

The training is free and open to the public, said Latham, who rears at the notion that such a project might fall outside of a library's calling.

"We (are in the business) of getting people what they need to know to live the lives they want to live," she said.

She cites Benjamin Franklin's early insistence that books be made available freely to every citizen.

"No one should be denied access (to books) just because they were poor," she said of Franklin's vision. "The new book is the computer and nobody (should be denied access) because they're as accessible as a (videotape machine)."

While the training will take place at the Charlotte Hall regional library building, students may practice their assignments on the computers at the 10 branch libraries in Calvert, Charles and St. Mary's counties.

The teachers will be SMRLA staff.

With Latham at the helm and a number of various computer grants underwriting its budget, SMRLA's new, integrated computer system has made virtual computer experts of SMRLA employees.

The expertise helped win the state grant geared toward helping underemployed and untrained workers get better jobs.

Since SMRLA employees had to learn their new system for themselves, create some of the programs it uses and input the data, they "have experience in setting up and making the lab work," Latham said.

They plan to share this information with the public over the course of the three-year grant.

NARFE Chapter 126 receives state award for volunteer works

At a recent state federation board meeting, the Maryland Federation of Chapter 126 National Association of Retired Federal Employees, Chapter 126 Charles County was awarded a plaque for outstanding volunteerism as the Maryland Federation Chapter of the Year.

The chapter was awarded for, among other accomplishments, more than 11,000 volunteers hours in 1991; tutoring adults to read and write; tutoring adults and children in mathematics; and tutoring foreign-born adults and children in English.

Members of the chapter also served as

officers and committee chairs for various organizations, including the Department of Social Services and the Alliance for Seniors; coordinated activities and drove cancer patients to medical appointments; delivered Meals on Wheels, operated the snack bar at Physicians Memorial Hospital; worked in records and pharmacy de-

partments at Malcolm Grow Medical Center, and in customer service at the commissary at Andrews Air Force Base; gave out food packages for the Share Food Program; and repaired homes as well as prepared and delivered meals for Christians in April.

Members also were part of state, na-

tional and international conventions and lobbied in Washington D.C. for extension service programs, and through NARFE, for better living conditions for seniors.

For more information about the chapter, call Jeanette Green at 645-3319.

Bel Alton graduates