

## Constance Edwards

### Third Annual LITA Forum

It is now the twenty-first century. Information technology is transforming the world, our offices, our homes, our very way of communicating. How can we, as librarians and managers of knowledge, integrate these changes in our libraries? How can we keep abreast of the latest updates, the newest gadgets and the most relevant sources of information? In North America, the third annual LITA Forum addressed these issues from 11-14 October, 2001, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA. Its theme was „Integrating Innovation: IT in the Transformation of the Library“. LITA is the acronym for the Library and Information Technology Association, a division of the American Library Association (ALA). Approximately 450 librarians from around North America attended. The LITA National Forum is an exciting, three-day educational event that provides guidance and continuing education on current and future technologies for decision-makers and practitioners in libraries and information organizations. It is the meeting place for professionals who need to keep up on the latest technological developments of interest to them. „First held in 1998, the LITA National Forum has become a highly regarded annual event for those whose work involves new and cutting edge technologies in the library and information technology field.“ An excellent opportunity for networking was provided by the reception at the Milwaukee Public Library Friday evening as well as during the informal networking dinners on Thursday and Saturday. There were many interesting and enlightening general sessions as well as pre-conferences and concurrent sessions. One could not attend enough of them.

„Adaptive Technology for the Internet“ was presented by Barbara Mates and Will Reed of the Cleveland Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. Dr. Mates, Director of the Cleveland Public Library, reminded us how important a tool the Internet is for the library user with visual, hearing, physical or cognitive impairments or with learning differences, such as dyslexia. This was not new; however the updates given on the importance of web design for handicapped information users were eye-opening. Knowledge of these design developments in regards to handicapped users is imperative for our libraries' web masters. The new developments in so-called adaptive or assistive technology for the handicapped has been tremendous over the past decade. The Cleveland Public Library provides a tip page <[www.cpl.org](http://www.cpl.org)>. Barbara Mates is also the author of a Library Technology Report, entitled „Accessibility Guidelines for Electronic Resources, July/Aug 2001“ <[www.techsource.ala.org](http://www.techsource.ala.org)>. Integrating of innovations for the handicapped user is something about which all of us need to be informed.

Another innovation in the everchanging world of libraries is the onslaught of digital libraries. It seems everyone wants one. Dr. Edwards Fox says there are many definitions for digital libraries. This is why he attempted in his four-hour session, „Practical Digital Libraries, an Overview“, to deal with a variety of scenarios with which he has been involved. The National Science Digital Library



<[www.nsdsl.nsf.gov](http://www.nsdsl.nsf.gov)>, the Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations <[www.ndltd.org](http://www.ndltd.org)>, similar to Dissertations Online from Germany, and Open Archives Initiative are several of the enterprises he mentioned. Dr. Fox presented much in the way of new, long-term projects that are sure to affect the way we do business in the new

century. Digital libraries are „a domain for international collaboration, wherein all can contribute and benefit, all can gain from investment in networking, and which will tie nations and peoples together more strongly“.

One of the most interesting and, for me, new topics dealt with cultural and literary technologies: „The Electronic Book: One Future for Art/Reading/Writing/Scholarship.“ It was surprising to hear that the electronic book is not just a hand-held device for downloading a book to read. The presenters, William Harroff and Charlotte Johnson, feel strongly that culture is becoming more and more tied to the Internet. Their definition of a book is wide-reaching. In their conception, a book is any vessel that holds words or images. Therefore, for them, the Dead Sea scrolls, the Rosetta Stone, and Simon Biggs' babel, the Internet à la Dewey Decimal System <[www.babel.uk.net](http://www.babel.uk.net)> and their own (r)Evolutionary (e)Books <[http://faculty.mckendree.edu/william\\_harroff/ebe/](http://faculty.mckendree.edu/william_harroff/ebe/)> are all forms and forums which librarians must get used to hearing about. It is a brave new world out there and I urge any and all of you to look at some of these unusual e-products. The world over, creative people are writing literature and winning prizes too, on the Internet. The book is not on its way out but its perimeters are bulging; the envelope is being pushed and stretched. How do we integrate these new technologies into our lives? How do we present them to the seekers of information? Librarians need to be proactive in preserving and disseminating knowledge, and in understanding legal issues, especially as they relate to the Internet.

Of interest as well to information managers was Karen Schneider's presentation, „The Librarian's Index to the Internet“. The Librarian's index to the Internet (LII) is a searchable, annotated subject directory of more than 8 600 Internet resources *selected and evaluated by librarians* for their usefulness to users of public libraries. LII is used by both librarians and the general public as a reliable and efficient guide to Internet resources <[www.lii.org](http://www.lii.org)>. Although it began in California and is funded now by the Library of California, it is an interesting and valuable source for public librarians around the world.

„Integrating Innovation“ was not only about new developments in the area of modern technology. It was also about people. Having an opportunity to meet the people who are at the forefront of these developments is exciting and important. The LITA Forum is networking and technology combined in a fascinating forum of ideas, gadgets and people.

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