Bancroft Library updates computer system

By Tony Pearson

Many people in this area get frustrated with their "slow-poke" internet connections. The Bancroft Library felt the frustration as well; it had been getting along with an information system that was over a decade old. As Library head Vanessa Holm put it: "technology can quickly separate the information ?haves' and ?have nots' in a community." Since the library is dedicated to ensuring fair access to information material, they sought and obtained grants from the Southern Ontario library Service and the Ontario Libraries Capacity Fund to "close the divide" by upgrading their access ramp to the information super-highway.

The library now has a new server for its catalog, two new high-speed internet connections, and six new computers which the public can use. For the 100 people or so who sign up to log on every week, this means a lot less waiting for data (and for a computer spot). The increase in speed is noticeable. With a new capacity to balance the load between the two connections, the computers often clock in at 12 megabits per second.

The computers are used by a broad range of patrons ? students, naturally, but also small business managers, seasonal residents, home schoolers, and those in outlying areas whose internet connections are snail-paced (a number remain restricted to dial-up). The uses are diverse; yes, there are games for the kids (little and big), but many use the service for e-mail, finding and downloading government forms, and research at various levels. Librarian Bev Creighton notes that several university professors on holiday pop in to dig into their research interests.

Some patrons even use the machines to do their banking. Asked if the system was secure, Creighton mentioned the recent purchase of the "Deep Freeze" program, which deletes all "cookies" and other identifiers from the system daily; it also protects against viruses, and does a daily re-boot of the system.

In addition to the new hardware, Holm added that the computers carried up-to-date software, such as the latest version of the Microsoft Office package, including Word, Excel, Publisher, and PowerPoint. As well, the library can provide access to a number of popular databases, such as Ancestry. Also, printer connections have been improved. The library was even considering tools like a laminator to be invested in, for those who choose to visit a library for studies and revision. However all the ideas need to come in sections and for now, enough tweaks have been made. Moreover, library members can access e-books (including from their own home), which is enough to keep bookworms and researchers alike as happy as they can be for the time being.

All in all, the upgrades have positioned the library to meet the area's information needs, says Holm.

"Free access to information is essential for a free society, as wellas a creative community."