"Physician, Heal Thyself"
By Lance Query

[Readers of Gatherings are familiar with Lance Query's analysis of information and library issues affecting the University Libraries. However, coming to the Michigan over five years ago, Dean Query has taken a leadership role in state-wide library access issues serving as Chair of the Executive Committee of the Michigan Library Consortium, as a charter member of the Steering Committee of AccessMichigan, and on the Public Policy Committee of the Michigan Library Association. Each of these active roles has deepened his concern about the future of citizen access to the expanding world of electronic resources. This column addresses the future of such access.]

During the past two years, Michigan libraries have come a long way toward realizing the benefits of cooperation. The primary vehicle for this cooperation has been AccessMichigan (AM). AM is a statewide, collaborative project of Michigan libraries of all types—from school media centers to public libraries to hospital/medical libraries to academic research libraries. The ultimate goal of AccessMichigan is to create a digital information environment that will offer every resident of the State equitable and easy-to-use access to a core set of information sources. For the first time, as it is implemented across the State, the AM project bridges the gaps among different types of libraries, collections, and users. In addition, several independent, but similar, information access efforts already developed or under development are being drawn together to provide a Michigan-wide library of information. The objectives of AccessMichigan include the provision of a rich assortment of online databases, a common user interface, and training for Michigan librarians and the general public in effective use of the almost unlimited number of electronic resources now available.

Despite the establishment of a solid base and a growing momentum among the State's libraries in support of Michigan's shared database acquisitions project, there are clouds on the horizon, an impending sickness of the body. Foremost among concerns is the fact that funding is precarious since there are no base monies. Until now, the federal Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) has been the source of financial support along with the Library of Michigan. One or both of these funding sources could easily dry up due to Congressional [in]action or other priorities. As a result, there is a major need to develop a stable funding base that will ensure continuation of the foundation already firmly in place. As one who has been involved in the leadership and planning for AccessMichigan since it was initiated, I have developed a proposal that could address the issue of future funding—and cooperation. Currently under discussion by the Michigan Library Consortium's Executive Board and the AccessMichigan's Steering Committee as well as the library deans and directors of Michigan's fifteen public universities, and other public, school, and special library directors, the proposal builds on the fact that Michigan is composed of a decentralized library community, i.e., no legal, political, or social regulations tie the multiple entities together. Given that fact, a decentralized solution to funding seems not only obvious, but, more important, something that could be done without state-wide legislative, educational, institutional compacts. The proposal depends on each Michigan library, operating on its own, to make a commitment.

Proposal: Each Michigan not-for-profit library, regardless of type or size, will contribute one percent of its acquisitions budget to a state-wide pool that would then be used to acquire electronic resources that would be accessible to all users of those same libraries.

The purpose of such a funding proposal would be four-fold: (1) To increase the amount of funds available collectively, and thereby leverage our acquisition dollars so that the best (and, ipso facto, most expensive) resources would be available state-wide; (2) To supplement current funding from federal and State sources, and to ensure that funding is there, regardless; (3) To create a means by which the momentum to develop a shared, statewide "library" offering quality resources involves every individual library; and (4) To drive Michigan's libraries to devise a state-wide "plan" for the development of all Michigan libraries.

Having set such a basic standard by which the Michigan library community could "heal itself" and offer accessible information to all citizens, the next set of questions quickly emerges. Some of the questions have no ready answers, but they need to be noted.

1) How about the libraries that will not agree to the one percent donation? Answer: Let us begin on a voluntary basis. As resources are made available, peer pressure, maybe even legislative pressure, and patron demand will undoubt-edly show the wisdom of the effort.

2) Why should the large institutions—both academic and public—disproportionately bear the cost? A: One per cent is one per-cent, and although the dollars add up faster when based on a multi-million dollar budget, the effect on acquisitions is the same, and the end result is value across the board—even the largest institutions benefit from leveraged dollars.

3) Who would be the "man-ager" of the pool of resources. A: AccessMichigan is already up and running; this proposal is a means by which to motivate each

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participant as well as to provide stable funding.

4) Will such a pooling of resources let Congress, the governor, and the state legislature ignore a key problem that they should handle? A: Perhaps, but it might also motivate federal and state funding since an institutional investment/commitment from each library is involved.

5) Doesn’t this plan put the cart before the horse? Should there not be a statewide plan for libraries before dollars are earmarked to purchase resources? A: Sure, plans are key, but Michigan shores are littered with plans that fell for want of funding.

When push comes to shove, and the problem must be solved, then a seemingly simple answer often turns out to be the best way to proceed. The extraordinary need to make the magnificent world of electronic resources available to all users, regardless of their location, the size of their library, and their personal computer ownership is so compelling that we could move forward quickly and effectively. The “plan” will be crafted, refined, and implemented because the right environment will exist in Michigan. This proposal provides a solution to a problem, a healing, because it adds an individual library commitment to an idea already well-founded: AccessMichigan works. AccessMichigan can work even better. The more funds we have, the more vendors are willing to provide a solution, and examine its illustrations, you will discover, if not already obvious from the first examples, that some of the terms of venery are well-known, for example, “A Host of Angels,” “A Swarm of Bees,” “A Litter of Pups.” But Lipton’s compilation of collective nouns includes many more that are completely new and unexpected, and you begin to wonder why some of them had never occurred to you.

At one point, Lipton notes, “These terms are authentic and authoritative. They were used, they were correct, and they are useful, correct—and available—today” (p. 30). To try and select a few from the many, is difficult, but, among those that caught my fancy in Lipton’s first set of examples are:

- “A Murder of Crows”
- “A Skulk of Foxes”
- “A Parliament of Owls”
- “An Ostentation of Peacocks”

In a section called “The Unexpected” are found:

- “A Converting of Preachers”
- “An Obeisance of Servants”
- “A Skulk of Thieves”
- “A Melody of Harpists”

Finally, Lipton concludes with some contemporary “collectives” that he thought to be “shards of poetry and truth.” Among them,

- “A Sample of Salesmen”
- “A Nerve of Neighbors”
- “An Aroma of Bakers”
- “A Shush of Librarians.”

And, so, we are back, full circle to the question. And, let it be known, only one person referred to a group of librarians in a similar manner—and then only historically—since, in today’s electronic environment, libraries are seldom quiet or “shushful.” In fact, one respondent even suggested that “A Cacophony of Librarians” was not unlikely! Several of the suggestions were of the kind that only someone who knew library history and language might understand as, for example.

- “A Dewey of Librarians”
- “A Quire of Librarians”
- “A Classification of Librarians”
- “A Tracing of Librarians”
- “A Stack (or Shelf) of Librarians”
- “An Archive of Librarians”

Others, however, seemed to have a sense of the purpose of a term of venery—or a librarian. But let the respondents speak for themselves:

- “A Book of Librarians”
- “A Collection of Librarians”
- “A Catalog of Librarians”
- “A Circle of Librarians”
- “A Knowledge of Librarians”
- “A Resource of Librarians”
- “An Authority of Librarians”
- “A Library of Librarians”

Rather surprisingly, in today’s world of computers and online information that dominates the contemporary library, not one person suggested

- “A Network of Librarians”
- “A Database of Librarians”
- “A Web of Librarians”
- “A Screen of Librarians”

Is there a message in this omission? Perhaps, but in the spirit of Gatherings, which is both a reflection of the Friends of the University Libraries as well as the “leaves of a book that are folded and stitched into one signature,” possibly the real name for a group of information professionals is “A Gathering of Librarians.”

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a long and exciting search that began when I realized with a sudden exhilarating shiver that GAGGLE OF EESE and PRIDE OF LIONS might not be just isolated pools of amusing poetic idiosyncrasy but estuaries leading to a virtually uncharted sea, sparkling with found poetry—and intriguing poetic possibilities. ... It isn’t just that we will be able to turn to someone and cooly and correctly say, “Look—a charm of finches.” What is more important is that a charm of poetry will have quietly slipped into our lives (p. 19).

As you turn the pages of the book, and examine its illustrations, you will discover, if not already obvious from the first examples, that some of the terms of venery are well-known, for example, “A Host of Angels,” “A Swarm of Bees,” “A Litter of Pups.” But Lipton’s compilation of collective nouns includes many more that are completely new and unexpected, and you begin to wonder why some of them had never occurred to you.

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"Interconnected globally, they [computers] will form a network, which is being called the information highway."

—William H. Gates III

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James Lipton’s centerfold from An Exaltation of Larks.