words) believe that no self-respecting solver of such enigmas would cheat by using such a dictionary.

Although some of our nursing or physician assistant students or faculty may be interested in the history of medicine (along with resident hypochondriacs), we decided that the Libraries’ patrons would have to struggle without the 1933 edition of Practical Hematological Diagnosis. For a similar reason, perhaps, we did not add the 1948 edition of Common Gastrointestinal Diseases.

Perhaps because it is not yet, to my knowledge, possible to major in the instrument, or that research grants are not frequently given to support scholarly investigations in its history, we reluctantly did not add to the Music and Dance Library a copy of How to Play the Harmonica for Fun and Profit. Because we already owned a copy, we offered for sale a delightful collection of New Yorker cartoons published between 1950-1955.

Similarly, we already owned a number of copies of one of the old Roman classic love poets, Catullus, but I can recommend that this old Roman could teach quite a few things to contemporary practitioners.

We have no conscious bias against Tarheels—or educators—but decided to do without a copy of the 1991-92 North Carolina Education Directory. Some lucky person content to own a 1966 edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica (minus volume 13) could buy the whole set for $10! While the article on Bill Clinton in that edition is not accurate—in fact, I couldn’t even find it—one assumes that the article on Catullus would be just as accurate today as it was in 1966.

Some among my readers may be old enough to remember the nationally syndicated columns by Sidney J. Harris that commented, usually wryly, on all sorts of esoteric and surprising facts. These usually began with Harris admitting, almost as if he were a rather scatter-brained reference librarian, that he discovered a very odd fact while looking up something else. Well, we offered, in the final addition to our gallimaufry, a 1976 edition of 30 years of The Best of Sydney J. Harris.

If you were lucky enough to purchase one of these choice books, or something equally delectable from our servings at the book sale, you’ve done both yourself and the Friends of the Libraries a favor—and perhaps added a new flavor to your life. As the poet and lexicographer John Ciardi used to say, at the end of his NPR program on etymologies, “Here’s good words to you.”

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**Library Friends: Annual Meeting**

April 14, 1999, was the occasion for the annual meeting and election of the officers and Board of the Friends of the University Libraries. Marilyn Gosling, Vice President, presided over the Business Meeting and Election that was held in the Meader Rare Book Room on the 3rd floor of Waldo Library. The following slate of officers was elected or confirmed as continuing:

- Bettina Meyer, President, 1999-2000
- Marilyn Gosling, Vice President, 1999-2000
- Mary Ann Bowman, Secretary, 1998-2000
- David McKee, Treasurer, 1998-2000

Board of Directors
- Richard Brewer, 1999-2002
- Robert Hahn, 1998-2000
- Jan Dommer, 1998-2001
- William Combs, 1998-2002

Following the business meeting, the Friends and visitors heard Sharon Carlson, Director, Archives & Regional History Collections at WMU, speak on the topic of “Cooperative Men and Library Ladies: Michigan’s Ladies’ Library Associations.”

Director Carlson, who is writing a Ph.D. dissertation on this subject for the Department of History at WMU, delighted and amused the audience with tales of these unique associations and the individuals associated with them. Formed originally in the early to mid-19th century, the associations are credited as the founding forces for “75% of all public libraries in the United States.” The associations in Michigan were especially active during the last half of the 19th century, and were key to the development of a culture that fostered public library development across the state. In many communities, the “women acted directly as instruments of change.”

The Friends were also introduced to WMU President Elson S. Floyd, who spoke briefly to the group. President Floyd noted his strong support of the University Libraries at Western Michigan University, and his appreciation of the Friends’ organization and efforts on behalf of the Libraries.

The Friends of the University Libraries sponsors this newsletter, Gatherings, along with a variety of fund-raising and cultural activities that support the mission of the University Libraries through the acquisition of books and other needed resources. The first of two annual book sales was held March 30 and 31, 1999. The Friends invite personal memberships that include Associate ($10), Contributing ($25-99), Donor ($100 to 499), Patron ($500 to 999), and Benefactor ($1,000 or more). There are also student memberships for $5 and Donor, Patron, and Benefactor Corporate memberships. Interested individuals should contact Bettina Meyer at Waldo Library, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI 49008, or call 616-387-5143.

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**On the Road Again!**

By Elaine Jayne and Mae O’Neal

It’s a late winter afternoon and already nearly dark; there are classes to teach tonight in Grand Rapids—over an hour’s drive away. Loaded into the state car is a large box containing hands-on exercises, Library Guides, and a miscellany of handouts for students. Now the only worry is the weather. Just past the overpass at Plainwell, the car seems to enter the Twilight Zone! First comes rain, then sleet and ice, finally snow. Farther north, near the Wayland exit, the car emerges once more into a cold, but tranquil night. Everything is calm again.

Once at the Grand Rapids Regional Center, there’s a rush to get to the computer classroom, lay out the handouts, and turn on all the computer terminals before the class arrives. Students drift in, and soon the class begins. An explanation of the off-campus and online services available to them goes well; the students have lots of good questions. WestCat, the online catalog of the WMU University Libraries is demonstrated, to be followed by the steps of searching PsycINFO 1967, an online index to psychological journals and books found in FirstSearch, an OCLC online service provider. Oh no! The entire FirstSearch system is down; we can’t gain access and search any of its 60 plus indexes and databases. Back to the schoolroom and blackboard drawings where we talk the students through the steps that they “will” follow when the system is “up” again. Finally, we help students work through hands-on exercises at the computers—for WestCat, and, if it comes back online in time, FirstSearch.

Though we’ve combined a couple of our mishaps, these are problems that really do happen whenever we travel away from the Kalamazoo campus. As continuing education librarians who serve Western Michigan University students at five regional centers, we often have to deal with similar and worse weather conditions, and a multitude of technical glitches that comes with the territory of computerized services. We won’t even mention other possibilities that inevitably can occur when two dozen students travel to meet with faculty who have “promises to keep” and “miles to go.” As a result, above all, we have to be adaptable, and roll with the punches. Our reward? These are students who come to learn how to learn, who are attentive, and actively engaged in the process, and who truly appreciate our being there for them.

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Who Is Remote?

There are over 3,000 continuing education students who take classes at WMU’s regional centers in Muskegon, Grand Rapids, St. Joseph, Battle Creek, and Lansing. Most of them are in their 30s or 40s, and almost all of them work full-time and take classes at night. They are also more likely to be enrolled in graduate programs. In fact, continuing education students represent a growing segment of our total graduate head count enrollment, approximately 43%. The fact that a graduate degree, specialization, or licensing requirement is of singular importance to employment and professional advancement explains the attention and involvement of these students.

WMU and the University Libraries are committed to providing distance learners with an educational experience that is comparable to that of students on the main campus. This includes providing remote access to the Libraries’ collections and research resources. Students can identify books, government documents, audiovisual resources, periodical holdings, etc., by searching WestCat, the online catalog, either from their home computer or at one of the regional centers’ computer labs. They can also use one or more of the Libraries’ electronic indexes (there are now over 130 available through the Libraries’ home page: http://www.wmich.edu/library) to locate titles of specific articles and selected data for their research. After students identify what they would like from the University Libraries, they may fax their requests for books or articles directly to the Libraries’ Resource Sharing office, or drop off requests at their regional center, where the requests are faxed for them to Kalamazoo. The Resource Sharing Office sends the requested materials (books and photocopies of the articles) directly to students’ home addresses. The service is remarkably efficient and reliable even in the face of a steadily growing demands, and will be described in a future issue of Gatherings.

As “circuit rider librarians,” we provide distant learners with information on library services and databases through a variety of means. These include an “open lab” program, in-class presentations, class-related instruction sessions, and a printed Library Guide, available free to all off-campus students and faculty.

What We Do

Open Lab Program Every semester we schedule drop-in, hands-on labs for students at each regional center’s computer laboratory. The open lab hours are posted at the centers and note when one of us will be there to offer individualized help. Students are encouraged to sign up in advance for these sessions.

In-Class Presentations In-class visitation is another method of “getting the message out.” Although there is no hands-on time with computers, the presentations provide an opportunity to inform students of the services available to them, provide an overview of WestCat and the FirstSearch system, announce open lab hours, and pass out copies of the Library Guide. The advantage of these visits is that we are able to reach many students by visiting several classes in one evening. And as always, we urge students to contact us by phone or e-mail if they need help.

Class-Related Instruction The best method for teaching distance learners, built on the Libraries’ information literacy guidelines, is to provide students with a class-related instructional session in a computer lab. When this occurs, the students receive an explanation of the several services available to them as distance learners (e.g., the Libraries’ excellent document delivery service mentioned earlier); a demonstration of how to use and search effectively the online catalog, WestCat; a demonstration of how to select and use one or two of the several dozen indexes available through our home page; and actual hands-on experience with a computer research exercise that we will relate to a specific assignment of that particular class. These sessions, which last at least an hour and take place at the request of the faculty member teaching the class, have been well received since they are of immediate and requisite use to the students.

The Library Guide Several times, mention has been made of the WMU Library Guide for Continuing Education Students that was developed especially for distance learners. The guide is free, and is widely distributed at the in-class visits, open labs, instructional sessions, and at every regional center. Gathering together in one place all the information that students might need, the Guide is 60 pages long, and serves as a handy reference for any first-time or on-going user of the University Libraries. It contains contact and help referral information, a schema of the research process, and an explanation and examples—both simple and advanced—of how to search the Libraries’ databases. All of WMU’s electronic resources are listed with a brief description along with instructions for accessing them. In addition, the Library Guide includes sample forms for requesting services and maps to the main campus.

Reference Search Assistance If students have difficulty finding material for a research paper on a specific topic, they can request personal assistance by contacting either Mae O’Neal or Elaine Jayne by phone or e-mail. Alternatively, they can send us a search assistance form, on which they enter their topic, search terms used, and databases tried. We review their work, identify the most appropriate databases, and search for the topic. Then we provide the student with a list of useful search terms, a search strategy, and some sample citations.

Not Remote at All

The foundation for all of our efforts as “distance librarians” is simple: We try to provide a friendly face to the WMU Libraries, its many research databases and services, and let “distance learners” know that someone can be called upon to help. There are wonderful remote resources available for their research that can be brought right to their homes and offices. Our goal is to make sure students know how to take full advantage of all that is available to them.