

RURAL LIBRARY SERVICE NEWSLETTER

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The Kansas City Initiative

The Kansas City Initiative or as it officially known "The National Invitational Meeting on Rural Postsecondary Education" was sponsored by the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FISPE) and organized by the University for MAN, a center for community learning at Kansas State University. The conference held in Kansas City on June 29th-July 1, 1981 drew twenty-eight rural educators from seventeen states. Delegates included a Regional Librarian; an aide for Senator Kassebaum of Kansas; a representative of the National Public Radio and a large contingency representing state and community colleges; and private citizens.

Because many of the views, opinions, and feelings described by the conference participants reflect those often expressed by rural librarians, and because library use and education are so closely related the following are excerpts from the conference proceedings. RLS Newsletter thanks Mr. Richard (Dick) Margolis, the author of the proceedings for his permission to run these excerpts. RLS also appreciates the cooperation of Sue Mars and the University FOR MAN.

STRUGGLING TOWARDS ALLIANCE

The virtual rural quarantine that delegates sensed and hoped to dispel had, in their opinion, reduced their effectiveness in dealing with several important groups and institutions: with professional and scholarly colleagues, for lack of an association tailored to their needs; with other rural advocates, for lack of a broad rural network; with state legislatures and the U. S. Congress, for lack of a lobby; with the press, for the lack of an organized information program; and with the general public, for the lack of

a means to challenge the widely believed myth of inevitable rural decline.

In the end they (the delegates) opted for some kind of alliance, searching for a common label, a "hook" on which to drape their mutual aspirations. Some called for "an action network," others for "an information clearinghouse," still others for "a professional institute."

THE PAST: PLAYING "CATCH-UP" IN RURAL AMERICA

THE PEOPLE LEFT BEHIND a report by President Johnson's Commission on rural life, proclaimed what rural Americans already knew:

"Rural adults and youth are the product of an educational system that has historically short-changed rural people."

Although rural residents make up less than one-third of the total U. S. population, they accounted for 42 percent of the functionally illiterate and for 53 percent of the "educationally deprived" (as defined by the U. S. Department of Education). In addition, nearly half of all rural citizens over 24 years of age had not graduated from high school--a figure that prompted several conference participants to question whether they were, in fact, engaged in "postsecondary education"/ "Maybe," said one delegate, "we should call ourselves something else. How about "The Committee for a Second Chance in Rural Education?"

PRACTICAL QUESTIONS & ANSWERS: FACING UP TO RURAL WEATHER

The barriers that stood between rural citizens and their "second chance" were per-

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ceived by conference delegates to be mainly geopolitical, a familiar rural amalgam of too much distance and not enough power. A delegate from Colorado noted that his college's target territory encompassed 12,000 square miles of "some of the most inaccessible and weather-buffed high country in the world." Most described similar natural constraints on their "delivery" efforts, but they pointed as well to another kind of "weather": poverty, unemployment, despair--the social winds that buffeted so many small communities.

To meet the challenge of geography, some pinned their hopes on telecommunications, which, as one participant commented, "can turn a vast region into a small classroom." "With Television or radio," said another delegate, "a teacher can cross deserts and skip over mountains without even leaving his chair."

Others placed their faith less in technology than in social organizing. They relied on outreach and extension programs, on regional learning centers, on schools-without-walls. Several explicitly rejected electronic communications on the grounds that the technique seemed "un-rural". As one critic explained, "Television does away with social intimacy. Face-to Face-relationships are still an important part of rural life."

AND MORE QUOTES. . .

Margery Walker, University of Alaska, "Rural students are extremely diverse in their interests, heritages, educational levels, life styles and economic situations, but they share a common difficulty in securing access to college and university programs suited to their current needs."

"Rural people tend to think locally and to act socially. Therefore the best way

to reach them is through local programs that the whole community has a stake in."

Ed Note: The full proceedings of the National Initiative meeting on Rural Post Secondary Education prepared by Dick Margolis can be acquired by sending \$2.00 to cover the cost of handling to:

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Rural Education: Actions and Rights

The delegates to the Kansas City Initiative developed an agenda for action and discussed basic principles which have been labeled a bill of rights. They are reprinted below:

BILL OF RIGHT

1. People have a right to the benefits of lifelong learning regardless of age, race, income or place of residence.
2. Rural students are entitled to equity, both in the quality of education offered and in the variety of choices available.
3. Rural education has been short-changed for many generations. Therefore, the time to improve learning opportunities for rural Americans is now.
4. If the development of rural adult education is a national necessity, it is also a national responsibility.
5. The financing of rural lifelong learning cannot be borne exclusively by rural citizens; that obligation must be equitably distributed.
6. Rural people's educational needs, no less than those of their metropolitan brethren, are multiple and diverse. No single program, philosophy or technique

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can possibly satisfy their manifold requirements.

7. The best kind of education is one that the learners have helped to plan, execute and evaluate. Rural people want "a sense of ownership" in their educational programs.

8. Lifelong learning programs can strengthen rural communities, help dispel rural isolation, reduce rural poverty and sustain rural democracy.

RURAL POSTSECONDARY ACTION AGENDA

1. Establish a permanent professional alliance that would serve as a Clearing-house for Adult Rural Education.
2. Advocate an institute for small, rural educational institutions.
3. Undertake a comprehensive national study of rural adults and their educational needs.
4. Design strategies to focus national media on rural concerns in local regions.
5. Undertake "consciousness raising" about rural concerns in local regions.
6. Develop a means of linking with educational telecommunication projects around the country.
7. Establish a steering group to plan for professional development activities among rural postsecondary educators.
8. Stimulate rural postsecondary education publications through professional organizations.
9. Develop rural concerns advocacy in professional organizations.

10. Develop contact sources for funding rural programming.

11. Develop ways to disseminate on-going progress.

ALA MIDWINTER RLS COMMITTEE

Over 3,800 librarians, exhibitors, and ALA staff attended the American Library Association Midwinter conference in Denver. Of the thousands who attended only twenty persons went to either of the two PLA/SMLS Rural Library Service Committee's programs. However small in attendance, the audience was a diverse group of library professionals which included the State Librarian of South Dakota, the Director of the Office of Library Service of the Marianna Islands, Montana's ALA Chapter Counselor, a Library School Professor and a number of librarians from communities under 10,000 population. Glaringly missing were representatives from school, academic and special libraries.

One of the committee's first chores was to determine its charge and audience. Its audience was determined to be service people (regional or state library personnel), local practitioners, and the rural patron. Responsibilities the committee should assume were identified as: Research; Training and Continuing Education for the rural library practitioner; serve as a rural voice within the library profession; and Legislation, Policies, and Standards for rural libraries. The committee's activities therefore would evolve around Legislation, statistics gathering, publications and programs.

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A draft of the Rural Library Service Committee's mission statement, goals, and objectives will be presented at its business meeting during the Philadelphia Conference. Also featured at Philadelphia will be the committee-sponsored program, "Research and Realities in the Rural Library." Presentations will be given by Lisa DeGruyter on her study of Adult users in rural libraries, John Head on information studies conducted by the Center for the Study of Rural Librarianship, and Terry Weech on the state of the art in rural library research. The reality portion of the program will feature panel discussion and audience participation. Panel members will represent different types of rural libraries.

Also being planned is a program to be held at the 1983 Los Angeles Convention and at the Public Library Association 1983 conference in Baltimore. This program entitled, "A Variety of Alternative Delivery Systems", will include discussions on bookmobile service, mail-a-book program and the use of electronic and satellite communication.

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"GETTING TO KNOW YOU"

National library publications have begun to cover and recognize library service. Bernard Vavrek of the Center for the Study of Rural Librarianship was mentioned in the February 1st LJ/SLJ HOTLINE about the Center's survey of library service in communities under 25,000. Dr. Vavrek also has an article, "The Future of Rural Libraries" in the October/November 1981 issue of Show Me Libraries, a publication of the State Library of Missouri. The

February issue of Wilson Library Bulletin mentions that Janice Allen of Willsboro, New York received the 1981 L. Marion Mosher/ASA Wynkoop Award. This award is given by the New York Library Association in recognition of distinguished librarianship in a community of 7,500 or less. In its February issue, Administrative Digest reports on a newspaper article on the rural Huron County Public Library in Ontario, Canada.

Information for Small Business and Agricultural Enterprises...a workshop to demonstrate how libraries and information agencies can serve as an information bridge to small business and agricultural enterprises is being sponsored by the Department of Library Science, College of St. Catherine and the Minnesota State Library. The workshop will be held March 18 and 19 in Willmar, Minnesota. Registration deadline is March 10, 1982. Subjects treated will be small business and agricultural enterprises' and their information needs and problems, their information sources and resources, and the online and marketing services available to them. For more information on the workshop contact: Mary Martin, OPLIC, 301 Hanover Building, 480 Cedar Street, St. Paul, Minnesota 55101.

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