At the Library

By Julie Winkelstein
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"The Infopeople Project improves the quality of information access to the people of California by upgrading the skills, resources, and tools available through libraries."

-From Infopeople website,
 http://infopeople.org

When I first started working at the Albany Library, I came from a job that required few computer skills. I knew how to check out library materials and how to use a word processing program - because I used one at home on my Apple computer. I had an email account, so I was somewhat comfortable with email, although I had never added an attachment or did any other fancy stuff – my skills were basic.

Not long after starting the job, I had the opportunity to attend an Infopeople training workshop. This turned out to be only the first of many, many workshops I have taken through Infopeople. Since then I have not only greatly improved my computer skills, but also have expanded my knowledge of such diverse topics as digital photography, storytelling, teens in the library, online medical sources, helping library users find a job, seniors & computers, and online searching. I have gone from being marginally comfortable using a computer mouse to zipping around from website to website, and link to link.

And so, since I am attending one of these workshops in December – this time, "Rethinking Library Collaboration and Partnerships" – it seemed like a good time to talk a little about the Infopeople Project. Although I have attended these workshops, I knew little about the background of this organization. After some searching, an article called "Profiles in Connectivity: Infopeople" (benton .org) provided some basic information.

According to this piece, the Infopeople Project started within the California State Library as a way to provide Internet access to the public. Libraries across the state applied for grants that provided each site with a computer, a modem, a printer, 100 hours of free access to the Internet and basic training on Internet navigation. There were also certain require-

ments for the participating libraries, such as choosing a community partner, receiving appropriate training and installing public access computer workstations.

Part of the goal was to serve isolated communities, by giving them connections to the rest of California, through library websites. It is amazing when you think about the power of providing such a connection, especially in 1994 when this program first started. The Infopeople Project continues and the grants are awarded through the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA,) and are overseen by the United States Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), which is a federal agency. There is extensive information about these grants available on the California State Library website at library.ca.gov.

But no matter the history, the important part to me is the care and thought that goes into each of the workshops offered by Infopeople. Partly this is due to the energy and oversight of Cheryl Gould, who is the Infopeople Training Consultant. I have taken several classes from Cheryl and she is a warm, responsive and accomplished instructor. Another instructor is Francisca Goldsmith, from Berkeley Public Library – a librarian who knows an incredible amount about books, libraries and teens. The Infopeople website provides a complete list of their excellent instructors.

These trainings are for members of the California library community, including those who are working in any California library or in any California library organization, as well as California library school students, trustees, volunteers, library consultants, self-employed librarians, and information professionals working in California. They are taught all over the state, with sites in a wide range of locations, including Sonora, San Francisco, San Jose, Stockton and San Diego. And if you'd rather do your learning at home, there are even free, live webcasts.

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