



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“Our goal is to create a comprehensive electronic card catalog of all the world’s books. We must collaborate with libraries to accomplish this goal, since the majority of books can be found only there.”

-From “The Facts About Google Book Search,” an information sheet from Google

Last week I attended two technology related presentations in the same day. The first was about a new service available from the Alameda County Library. Live Homework Help (from tutor.com) gives students in grades 4 through 12 the chance to chat online with a free tutor. The hours for this are 1 to 10 p.m. every day and it can be used from home or the library. There are also Spanish speaking tutors for math and science who are available Sunday through Thursday, 1 to 7 p.m. A link for Live Homework Help can be found on the home page of participating libraries.

There are currently 41 California libraries offering Live Homework Help, 1500 total. The funding for Alameda County comes from the California State Library, and a Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grant. In three states, this service is available statewide. This means that anyone who has a public library card in Alaska, Alabama and Kansas

can go to their local library’s website and have access to a highly trained tutor. I’d like to see California join this trio, so every California student in every school district could have the same opportunity.

The talk included a demonstration of a tutoring session. As we watched, Susan Hamilton from tutor.com went to the Alameda County library website and clicked on the Live Homework Help icon. She entered a library card number, and then chose a grade level and subject. Within a minute, a tutor came online and asked how she could help. The problem Susan posed was how to find the area of a rectangle. To demonstrate the online whiteboard, she drew the rectangle and then gave the dimensions for each side.

In keeping with the training for Live Homework Help, the tutor didn’t give an answer, but instead asked leading questions, such as “Do you remember what you do with

these numbers?” The tutor was patient and helpful and despite my initial resistance to online tutoring help, I came away impressed and glad my library is participating in this program.

The San Francisco Bay Region Chapter of the Special Libraries Association and BayNet sponsored the other presentation. Jodi Healy from Google gave a PowerPoint talk primarily about Google Book Search (books.google.com), a program introduced by Google in 2004.

The idea behind Google Book Search is that Internet users can use search terms to search not only websites, but also the content of many, many books. According to the fact sheet we were given, the books come from two main sources: most major United States and United Kingdom publishers, and five major libraries. These include the University of Michigan, Stanford University,

Harvard University, Oxford University, and the New York Public Library. The results of a search depend on the copyrights of the books that are displayed. For some, there is the full text of the book. For others, there are a limited number of sample pages shown. And for the rest, there is simply what is called the bibliographic record, meaning the basic information about the book, such as the title, author, publisher, date, and number of pages.

Both of these online services are impressive and easy to use. And I invite anyone who has now read two columns from me about online services and wonders how to use any of them, to come to the Albany Library and ask for real live in-person help. I’d be glad to show you.