

Prepared by:

Maurice J. Freedman,
Director
Westchester Library System
December 3, 1984

A Draft for Discussion:

**Library Service in Westchester County
in the Year 2000**

The fundamental business of libraries, despite the technological, demographic and societal shifts which undoubtedly will occur by the year 2000, will continue to be the satisfaction of the information, education and recreation needs of the citizens of Westchester County. There are many tiers of library and information service in Westchester County. Each will play its vital role to its constituents. The public libraries, the only group chartered to meet the needs of all of the community; the academic libraries, whose responsibility is to meet the needs of their students and faculty; the school libraries, whose responsibility is to support and supplement the curricular needs of their students and teachers; and the corporate, medical and other special libraries which support the research and information needs of their specialized users, all work to provide a comprehensive, thorough and successful level of library and information service which meets the diverse needs of the citizens of Westchester County.

The means by which these various library groups will deliver their service will be substantively altered by technological change, and the specific services to be offered always will be subject to the shifting needs of their constituencies. It is in these areas that defining library service in the year 2000 will be problematic and conjectural. People will continue to depend upon libraries for meeting their information, education and recreation needs, but what the specific needs will be and how they will be met will vary at least somewhat from the kinds of library service offered in 1984.

An examination of library service in Westchester County will show that the Westchester Library System, which consists of the County's thirty-eight independent and autonomous public libraries and the Headquarters service center, is the hub. The Headquarters operation is funded primarily by the State of New York's Education Department, with an assist from Westchester County to defray the costs of cooperative services enjoyed by the local public libraries, as well as categorical funding from foundation and institutional grants and contracts. The immediate focus will be upon the current role played by the Headquarters, and how that role might evolve by the year 2000. And then a more specific

view of the kinds of service which might be offered by the County's public libraries in 2000 will be developed separately.

The Westchester Library System Headquarters, hereafter WLS, because it is chartered by the state to serve its member public libraries provides them with a number of services. The principal services are centralized book purchasing cataloging, processing and automation; interlibrary loan for books unavailable at a given library; consulting, selection lists, specialized newsletters,, etc. for service to library users at different age-levels; a strong film collection and lending film service; and outreach and other special services which are supported by various categorical funds.

Automation is at the heart of improving and expanding these services. Assuming adequate funding, and the assumption is that the private and public sector will fund WLS and the public libraries to accomplish these ends, all of the public libraries of the County will be linked via sophisticated communications devices to each other under a system managed by WLS. Such a system will allow any user at any public library to know what books or other library information is available: a. at the library from which they are making the query; b. any other public library in the County; c. any participating academic library in the County; or, d. any library in the region, the state, the continent. The request will go as far as is necessary to ensure that the person gets the information sought. This is precisely the information path currently taken for Westchester residents using their public libraries at present but unfortunately, the machine support of their needs only occurs at the regional and continental levels, not locally.

It is absolutely critical that all public library holdings be converted to machine readable form and reside in an automated system which permits, promotes and controls access to the materials in all of the libraries. Simply anyone at any library will be able to use a terminal to know what is available on some or all of the levels indicated, request an item if it is needed, and have it sent to them promptly (within 24 - 48 hours if it is on the shelf at one of the public libraries) or they can pick it up directly if there is an immediate need for it. From the libraries' perspective, each library will be able to more efficiently deliver vital services to the public. The endless manual paper work, the 3 x 5 files which have demoralized librarians for decades and degraded service because of the inert and intractable nature inherent in such a paper medium, finally will be eliminated.

That WLS is at the hub of library service in Westchester County is demonstrable through the cooperative interlibrary loan service provided by WLS to the academic libraries of the County, almost from the inception of the Headquarters operation in 1959. By the year 2000, assuming again adequate funding and the continued cooperative spirit which has characterized library service

to date in this County, WLS and the County's academic holdings will be available to all citizens and students and faculty through linked databases. Currently a card catalog at WLS shows what the pre-1977 college and public library holdings are, but it is out of date and most difficult to manage and use. With a comprehensive automated system linking the public and academic libraries the respective constituencies of each will enjoy a greatly improved service over the manual, again the 3 x 5 card and paper slip based system that is so labor intensive today.

The school corporate, medical and other libraries in the County have availed themselves of the WLS services, especially the interlibrary loan book location service, that is, telling them where a given sought item is located in the County. The County's major corporations and others will find that in the year 2000 there will be a machine based service that will promptly meet their needs. The problems toward this occurring will be political and financial not technical.

As regards the other services provided by WLS in the year 2000, children, young adults and adults will find that the broadest range of materials and information needed by them will be available in hard copy and in a variety of machine readable forms, such as laser disks, videocassettes, computer-based memory media (which undoubtedly will include laser written media) and a wide variety of display and "reading" devices will render the information accessible. The consultant expertise at WLS will be there to continue to offer the guidance and leadership to assist the County's public libraries in evaluating and selecting these different kinds of materials.

There are many ways that WLS meets the special needs of Westchester's citizens. Having dedicated staff working to improve library service and information access for those with learning and other disabilities, those with vocational and guidance needs, those with need for information about the broad panoply of educational opportunities available in Westchester County, those who are incarcerated, and a variety of other special publics, has permitted WLS and its members to succeed in the delivery of non-traditional services, as well as the more traditional ones discussed. Again, assuming continued support from the various public and private sectors, we can assume the development of even more improved information services. Such services will exploit the broad array of technology as it develops and funding permits, so that WLS and its members will continue to serve as a model for libraries around the state and the country in providing innovative and special services.

The year 2000 will find the Westchester Library System at the center of library and information activity in the County. The citizens will get their individual and special information needs satisfied through the use of the most advanced technology serviced by the dedicated and highly qualified staffs of the County's public and other libraries. WLS will be there to

coordinate, support, and back-up this activity by providing the staff, technological resources and central leadership needed to make it happen.

Submitted as a draft discussion document to the Westchester 2000 Committee, December 3, 1984.