

Some ABCs

By RON INOUE

In education

Editor's Note: The column for this week and the next two weeks will feature information on the use of the state's libraries. As students, educators, parents and private citizens, we are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of information not only in school but also in our day-to-day personal decision-making.

Parents and educators in particular should provide their youngsters and students with the skills necessary to obtain information, a skill which will yield life-long benefits.

Are you a student, teacher, or private citizen living in a rural community who would like to obtain library information? If so, I hope you will review these several pages as they may help you obtain the needed information for you or your students.

There are four publicly funded institutions which can provide you with information depending on the type of information needed. These sources are 1) local community, school, and regional resource center libraries, 2) the law libraries in Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Juneau which are attached to the state court of system, 3) the Alaska Library Network, and 4) academic-libraries of the University of Alaska and its community colleges. These sources are in addition to the privately funded libraries of individuals or companies or highly specialized publicly funded libraries.

LOCAL LIBRARIES. Some community libraries have extensive reference collections, and others have primarily recreational reading. Your local library can help you, based not solely on what it has on its shelves, but because of its inter-library loan services and the craft of local library personnel.

Locally one should also consult the school library. Many school districts have policies opening their library collections to the public. Although some libraries don't have professional librarians to maintain their collections, there generally are knowledgeable people who work with the materials regularly and could assist you. Often townspeople have personal collections which would be available to you; don't neglect to ask them.

Many school districts have consortium (cooperative) agreements with other districts to form Regional Resource Centers (RRC's). The RRCs have specialized materials collections and personnel who may be able to assist you with your information needs if you are a teacher or a student of one of the cooperating school districts. These Regional Resource Centers, which are affiliated with the school districts, are not to be confused with the Regional Resource Libraries, which are affiliated with the Alaska State Library.

LAW LIBRARIES. For issues relating to the law, there are law libraries in Anchorage, Fairbanks and Juneau. The system for organizing legal information is significantly different than that used in public and academic libraries and requires specially trained law librarians and staff. Although these law libraries exist primarily to assist the courts and those involved with legal matters, the law collections can be used if you go there in person.

ALASKA LIBRARY NETWORK. The Alaska Library Network is an interrelated combination of regional resource and research libraries which, with the regional coordinators, lend valuable assistance to rural library users. (These regional resource libraries, remember, are not the same as the Regional Resource Centers formed by school districts.) The resource libraries are public libraries with general collections, while the research libraries are part of academic institutions with collections to support the instructional and research programs of their institutions.

The regional coordinators are State Library staff stationed in the regional libraries in Fairbanks and Anchorage. They offer consultant services and assistance to schools and communities in library-related matters and act as "troubleshooters" for problems with library services. If your school or village council wishes to start a library, have them contact a regional coordinator.

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ACADEMIC LIBRARIES. In addition to the academic libraries serving the Alaska Library Network, most post-secondary institutions have collections for academic support to which the public has access. Your local community college has a library collection and access to the other University libraries.

INTERLIBRARY LOAN. The state's libraries share many of their individual collections with each other through interlibrary loan (ILL) agreements. These libraries are also part of a larger multi-state information- and materials-sharing network. In Alaska's case, we coordinate with the Pacific Northwest through the Pacific Northwest Bibliographic Center and with other national centers. The major Northwest libraries are linked by a computer network and can often identify immediately the location of materials or identify an obscure title whether it is a book, government periodical, or regular periodical.