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Dancing Rabbits in Mississippi Libraries: A New Multitype Consortium

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Library service in northwest Mississippi has multiplied thanks to a bunch of... *dancing rabbits?*

Libraries have rabbits now? Well, yes, sort of. Fourteen libraries in the hills and delta of northwest Mississippi are announcing the formation of the Dancing Rabbit Library Consortium.

"The grant we got to plan a multi-type consortium called the group 'the Delta area libraries'", say participants, "but not all the libraries were in the Delta. And 'Northwest Mississippi' didn't have any pizzazz, so when someone suggested 'Dancing Rabbit' we all jumped on it and began designing a logo in our heads!" Some of the area served by the consortium was also included in the 1830 Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek.

Joining together to provide better service to area library users are Blackmur Memorial Library in Water Valley, Bolivar County Library System, Carnegie Public Library of Clarksdale and Coahoma County, Coahoma Community College, Delta State University, First Regional Library System (Desoto, Lafayette, Panola, Tate, and Tunica counties), Humphreys County Library System, Marks-Quitman County Public Library, Mississippi Delta Community College, Mississippi Valley State University, Sunflower County Library, Tallahatchie County Library, Washington County Library System, and Yalobusha County Public Library System.

The idea for a cooperative effort began about three years ago when Kathy Buntin, then head of grant services for the Mississippi Library Commission, suggested the non-automated libraries might "piggyback" on a library that was automated. At a grant-writing workshop in Cleveland, Terry Latour, director of the W. B. Roberts Library at Delta State University, heard several librarians discussing the project and proposed expanding into other areas as well. Carnegie Public Library agreed to be the lead library in asking for an LSTA grant to plan a multi-type consortium in the northwest part of the state.

The grant was funded and, in February 2002, the group started meeting with Sara Laughlin of Sara Laughlin and Associates. Over the course of three two-day meetings, the group explored areas of cooperation, read articles about what other consortia were doing, interviewed leaders in those consortia via telephone, developed mission, vision, and values statements, and set priorities. They met with three Mississippi librarians with experience in consortial development: Sara Swinney of South Mississippi Regional

Library, Tom Henderson for Central Mississippi Library Consortium, and Stephen Cunetto for Golden Triangle Library Consortium. They conducted phone interviews with many ICAN members.

At the last meeting with the facilitator, the group voted to form the Dancing Rabbit Library Consortium to "develop and improve library service in northwest Mississippi through the collaborative efforts of all types of libraries" and elected a Board of Directors. They adopted Bylaws and made the decision to incorporate and file for 501(c)3 status.

Guidelines for an area-wide library card have been ironed out and plans are to have the cards printed and ready to go by October 1. "Several states, including Colorado and Georgia, have state-wide library cards. If those states can make them work, there's no reason Mississippi can't do the same," said Craig.

Members of the consortium have already received a second grant for shared technology support. They are working on ways to get every library automated and are developing a website and a logo. Other areas in which the group is interested are: shared resources including staff expertise, continuing education, and 24/7 reference service.

The Dancing Rabbit Library Consortium libraries are quick to make it clear they are not interested in a building or a staff. Except for participation in the area library card, all members can choose to participate or not in cooperative endeavors. Dues for the first year are \$25.

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