

## Thoughts from the State Librarian

by Christie Brandau, State Librarian



A recent article in *The Kansas City Star* concerned a proposal to create a city-wide wireless Internet network in San Francisco. Although other cities across the nation have established such a network, I would guess that this may be the largest and most comprehensive. The article contained a quote by Mayor Gavin Newsom of San Francisco that really struck me: "Affordable Internet that is accessible to all San Franciscans regardless of geography or income is simply essential...we must recognize that access to information is a fundamental government service akin to libraries or public schools."

That quote had me cheering for two reasons: one, that Mayor Newsom verbalized access to libraries as a fundamental government service, and two, that he has the foresight to realize that accessible Internet is essential. It has been said that soon we will consider Internet to be as vital as lights and electricity. If you think that is an overstatement, consider the fact that the majority of communication, e-mail, voice, video, and audio, is now transmitted via the Internet. However, some still don't have access to this critical tool, or have to pay dearly to have it. And that is where libraries can help.

What can we do? We can strive to offer the highest bandwidth of Internet connection available for our patrons. We can consider providing wireless access in the library. We can make sure we have enough computer terminals. All of these things take money, but our funding agencies need to recognize that lights and electricity take money too, and yet we wouldn't even think of opening our doors without these essential services.

Libraries are a fundamental government service and are founded on the Jeffersonian ideal of an educated citizenry participating in the democracy. And today Internet access through libraries is a vital part of how Americans can participate.

*Christie Brandau*