

All Share Interest in Lack of Broadband Access

by Marc Galbraith, Deputy State Librarian

We are all impacted when there are parts of the state that do not have access to the highest quality information resources. Given that, there should be incentives for all of us to make sure that every Kansan has equal access to the rich resources available with high-speed Internet access. It is in our own self interest, as a state, to broaden the discussion about the availability of broadband technology. These were thoughts expressed by speakers at “A Whole New Mind: Providing Accessible Broadband Internet for Kansas,” a summit held September 18, 2007, and co-sponsored by the State Library of Kansas, the American Library Association’s Office of Information Technology Policy, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Another thought, if not a theme running through A Whole New Mind, was that Kansas may once again have to look

toward its own resources and leadership to meet the challenges of what has become both a national and a state issue. Depending on the source consulted, the United States ranks between 15th and 24th among modern nations in the delivery of high-speed Internet access. We fall behind Japan, South Korea, Finland, Sweden, France and Canada, to name just a few. In Japan the median download speed is 61 megabits per second, or thirty times faster than the U.S., where the median download speed is 1.9 mbps. The implications in this lag for education, medicine, e-government and the economy have been cited in numerous sources. The implications for libraries, and library users, are equally dramatic. Libraries deliver a wide variety of interactive resources that are dependent upon high-speed transmission, both up-stream and down, for success. And new resources, such as wireless and video conferencing technology, necessitate the availability for even more bandwidth. Yet less than a third of Kansas public libraries have access to the Internet at broadband speeds. When a wide majority of residents believe and expect libraries to be providers of Internet-based services and 30% of the population relies on the public library for Internet access, the ramifications of these ill-fitting facts are both real and serious.



State Librarian Christie Brandau Welcomes Participants

With thoughts such as these in mind, fifty interested individuals, including former Governor John Carlin, nationally recognized broadband consultant John Windhausen, Kansas legislators, local government experts, E-rate specialists, telecommunication network directors and library representatives gathered to spend the day focusing on broadband connectivity. Specifically, summit participants were charged with examining Kansas broadband challenges and success, assessing the possibilities for connecting Kansas, and taking under consideration how high-speed connectivity happens and who can help bring it about.

Summit participants gathered at the International Grains Executive Conference Center on the Kansas State University Campus. State Librarian Christie Brandau opened the summit by introducing John Carlin who provided welcoming remarks. Carlin made it clear that Kansas needs a game plan for availing every Kansas community of this important resource.

Ms. Brandau then introduced John Windhausen, keynote speaker for the summit. Mr. Windhausen has worked in the telecommunications policy arena for over 20 years. He served as an attorney in the office of the Federal Communications Commission and the U.S. Senate Commerce Committee. Mr. Windhausen is now CEO of Telepoly.com. Mr. Windhausen noted that the U.S. does not have a national broadband policy. Instead, Windhausen said, we have a set of tactics. That the success of these tactics is debatable was highlighted when Mr. Windhausen quoted from a government study suggesting the current state of broadband technologies in the U.S. may be the source of future traffic jams on the information highway. Mr. Windhausen noted that states have served as laboratories, but they are more than that. States are where the action is in broadband deployment. Windhausen also noted that libraries can be forces for such action and recommended libraries organize and aggregate to leverage for the needs of their users.



***Former Governor John Carlin
Addresses the Broadband Summit***

The morning portion of the summit included two panels of speakers who addressed questions on the successes and challenges of broadband connections in Kansas. Panel



***Keynote Speaker John Windhausen
Discusses Key Broadband Issues at
A Whole New Mind***

members included Representative Tom Sloan; Don Moler, Executive Director of the Kansas League of Municipalities; Doug Heacock, Director of KanREN; Denise Moore, Director of DISC and KanWIN; Charmine Chambers of Kan-ed; Nancy Bolt, former Colorado State Librarian and co-author of recent research on libraries and broadband access; Linda Schatz, E-rate specialist. Also serving as panel members were Ruby Martin, Director, Dighton Public Library; Marianne Eichelberger, Director, Newton Public Library; and Charlene McGuire, Technology Consultant, SWKLS. Among those firing questions at panel members were Senator Karin Brownlee, Justin McClung of Nex-Tech, and Kansas regional library system technology consultants.

The afternoon portion of the summit was reserved for brainstorming the key issues related to the technology of access and strategies for success.

Input from the summit was creative and significant and is still being synthesized, but it is clear that action was needed and expected.

The State Library is looking forward to working with the Kansas library community, and others, to realize that expectation. To learn more about the summit, including John Windhausen's presentation, a list of summit participants, a linked list of broadband resources and pictures from the summit, go to: http://skyways.lib.ks.us/KSL/ce/broadband_summit/.



Representative Tom Sloan Talks With Participants