

Introducing your mayor, kids' teachers and garage mechanic to online databases

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Darrel Skidmore is emphatic. "The Knowledge Ontario online databases have the potential to make libraries even more indispensable than they already are." And in a recession? "People need these knowledge bases. We have to encourage libraries to take every opportunity to talk them up, to turn their clients on to the databases. They have to get registered – to get ready."

He looks away and reflects before adding, "They'll have help. There will be training, marketing ideas and more. These databases for 2009-10 have something for every Ontarian whether they're library novices or regulars. We need to take every opportunity."

A former library CEO now heading up the United Way in Burlington and Greater Hamilton, Skidmore was the point negotiator for the licensing of the core set of databases on behalf of Knowledge Ontario's Resource Ontario committee, which represents public, school, college, university and government libraries. Resource Ontario saved Ontario libraries a couple million dollars and expanded the offerings in doing so. It's natural he would be passionate about the results. But his enthusiasm is shared.

Minister of Culture Aileen Carroll announced the Ontario government's \$5 million investment in Knowledge Ontario as a way to "help more people access a wide range of online databases through its Resource Ontario service.

"In difficult economic times," she said, "it is more impor-

tant than ever to invest in libraries to bridge the digital divide." Access to authoritative online content helps all participating libraries but particularly makes a difference to remote, rural, northern, Francophone and Aboriginal communities.

* Conversations about Knowledge Ontario resources and lots of other ideas are happening on the LNG discussion board. Jump in!

* All the Resource Ontario databases are up and running. Get registration and training information from the KO website or the Resources wiki.

For instance, a wonderful addition are well-respected French-language current affairs resources that are updated daily and contain 20 years of archives. The universities and colleges see this as a boon to their many bilingual and French-speaking students. And another 20 daily newspapers have been brought on from Cornwall to Timmins to Welland.

"Without Knowledge Ontario's leadership, most Ontario communities and many smaller school boards would be without these critical learning resources," says Lisa Radha Weaver, who sat on the Resource Ontario committee as president of the Ontario School Library Association.

The new content is certainly helpful in an economic down-

turn. "How can you quickly and anonymously search for and find a new job or get the details to fix your own car without spending money, especially if you have been laid off?" asks Jane Horrocks, CEO of Richmond Hill Public Library.

Job hunters will be particularly interested in Career Cruising. It's already been in the schools and is now available more widely. This is a fully bilingual database which has been designed to help students and other job-seekers explore possibilities and plan their futures. Jobs and careers are detailed including descriptions, requirements, earnings and working conditions. You can build e-resumes, find a national database of the courses offered at Canadian colleges, universities, trade schools and more.

And the Auto Repair Reference Centre is sure to be a hit, for example, when word gets out that it's available without cost. You can almost imagine a laptop propped up inside the garage with a schematic diagram displayed. Car owners will value the resource – but garages and parts suppliers will too. Indeed, the broad online resources available are a tremendous asset to small businesses of all kinds.

Horrocks piqued the interest of her city's mayor who does his own car repairs when she introduced her city council to the databases, describing them as a resource for every

stage of life. She passed out library cards to the councilors and they're using them, she says. In fact, online use at her library has soared. "People are doing research from their business, from home and from schools," she says. "They are finding the information they need and coming back regularly."

Horrocks plans to introduce them to her MPP this year – and suggests it as a strategy for all librarians: "Do what you can to inform the influential people in your community, school, government." And, if possible, consider setting up integrated search results as Richmond Hill has been able to do. "People love seeing all the results in one view," she explains. "And it opens up all of our resources – in library and online."

Knowledge Ontario chair Peter Rogers sees the databases as one part of an emerging strategy to renew Ontario libraries. "With the depth and breadth of resources available, the Knowledge Ontario library partners continue to extend the foundation of knowledge needed to succeed in the knowledge economy," he states. "These databases are available from anywhere in Ontario to anyone with a library or student card and internet access."

For more information and a list of all the new online resources: www.knowledgeontario.ca

Knowledge Ontario Executive Director David Thornley (left) with Resource Ontario Project Manager Gerda Molson and databases negotiator Darrel Skidmore.

