



Courtesy of the New Jersey State Library



## New Jersey Knowledge Initiative Provides Needed Information

By Mary Branham Dusenberry

As New Jersey officials were discussing ways to bring high tech, small startup businesses to the state, talk eventually turned to infrastructure.

“I realized what was missing was an information infrastructure,” said Norma E. Blake, the state librarian. “Owners of small businesses, some researchers and students had to go to either one of our major universities or drive to universities out of state in order to access this timely data (and) very expensive information materials.

“These articles on data clinical trials that are very expensive, and large companies have the money to purchase them, as do large universities,” Blake said. “For smaller entities, it is just out of the price range.”

Some information databases cost as much as \$17,000 or more for a subscription.

Enter the **New Jersey Knowledge Initiative**, in which the state library bought access to databases and provided access at every county college as well as all the four-year colleges and universities. Desktop access was given to 350 businesses working with the Economic Development Authority.

The program is one of eight to be recognized with a CSG Innovations Award.

Blake said university librarians surveyed researchers as well as faculty members in science, medicine, technology and business fields to determine what databases they needed access to. The state library worked with the major business organizations in the state and surveyed their business members to find out what information they needed to run their businesses and get grants successfully.

The state library developed a list of the most highly sought databases.

The state library was able to get \$6 million over a two-year period from state government to develop the program. With that

funding, the state library purchased \$74.5 million worth of access.

“It was a significant savings for everyone, and also gave access to people who never would have had access,” said Blake.

Getting such a discounted rate took some effort.

“We were able to do it because we were able to convince the vendors we were giving them a market they never had before and could never get on their own,” said Blake. “They were never going to get the county colleges to have their products.

“By adding on to the rest of their market and offering this low cost deal, they were able to get additional customers.”

All the businesses with desktop access have 50 or fewer employees, and in many cases are just two people sitting in an office, according to Blake. “This is a market they never would have had,” she said.

Some of those people came from larger corporations and were familiar with the information available on the databases, but couldn’t afford the access.

The investment has paid off, according to Blake.

“It does make a difference to a businessperson where they locate if they can get information,” she said. “It really spurs economic development in the state. It makes New Jersey just a business friendly environment because it pulls together all the business organizations and statewide organizations.

“It’s a way of bringing partners together to benefit business.”

Blake points to a resident of central Jersey who had a small business and wanted to invent an insulin pump.

“In order to do his business, he was having to travel to Rutgers or the University of Delaware,” said Blake. “Some of that information doesn’t appear for free in print

yet. It’s so brand new and you have to pay bucks to get access. He was able to use the New Jersey Knowledge Initiative from his desktop and was able to get a major research grant.”

New Jersey is interested in shared services and the cost-effectiveness of a statewide buy, because the state is home to many scientists and engineers, and considered a leader in scientific innovation, according to Blake.

“It made sense for libraries to do that. Our job as librarians is to guide people to the best sources and to guide them to use them most effectively,” she said.

“We have a new system in our state whereby any student who goes to one of our two-year county colleges will have all their credits accepted when they go to a four-year college,” she said. “It’s very important they know how to use database and resources when they get to the four-year colleges.”

Blake said four other states have expressed interest in replicating the New Jersey Knowledge Initiative. She said it’s important to have the funding and commitment for the program.

### Fast Facts

- More than 8 million articles and records were used during the first 18 months of the New Jersey Knowledge Initiative.
- The \$3 million annual operational costs are funded 100 percent by state legislature appropriations.
- The initiative is the only statewide library database access program focused on business and economic development.