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A cooperative service of Maryland libraries

Maryland Celebrates First Anniversary of State's 24 Hour Live Information Service

Maryland AskUsNow! Receives Over 30,000 Questions in First Year

(Baltimore, MD – 3/14/04) During the week of March 14th to 20th, Maryland libraries will be celebrating the first full year of Maryland AskUsNow! This online service provides residents and students of the state with answers to questions, research guidance, and help navigating the Internet - 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. By using Internet chat, a person with a question can communicate with a professional librarian to receive authoritative information when and where they need it. This free service is available from links on the Maryland partner library web pages or by logging in at www.askusnow.info.

A unique aspect of this service is that it not only brings together the experience and resources of the state's public, academic, and special libraries, but it is also staffed in an extremely cost-effective manner. By sharing the responsibility of covering a common schedule, the libraries are able to provide a service cooperatively that none could do alone. After hours, librarians nationwide are available through the "24/7 Reference" collaborative.

Considering the substantial increase in the use of Instant Messaging (IM) among many people in the way that they communicate, libraries are bringing the same trusted information services that they have been providing for generations to people in a new format that they like. Although used by a wide spectrum of people, one of the largest groups to ask questions has been college and high school students working on school projects.

The following quotes are representative of the comments that Maryland AskUsNow! has received in its first year:

- "I was surprised how quickly I got an answer to my question and how helpful it proved to be. Definitely a service to the public."
- "Thank you for using my tax dollars for such a worthwhile service."
- "Slick service. I LIKE IT!"

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