

Library eyes new electronic law library

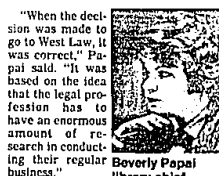
By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

By the first week in January, the Farmington Community Library will replace its existing electronic law library with a system providing more for less money.

Library officials have canceled the West Law computerized legal information services and replaced it with Lexis — a similar system offering more information services for a 20-percent reduction in cost.

"We are going to realize some savings from this," said Library Director Beverly Papal.

In use in the library system since 1983, West Law charges a monthly subscription fee of approximately \$520. Lexis, which comes with an additional service called Nexis — offering computerized full-text publications, such as newspapers and wire services — will charge approximately \$100 a month, Papal said.



Beverly Papal
Library chief

"When the decision was made to go to West Law, it was correct," Papal said. "It was based on the idea that the legal profession has to have an enormous amount of research in conducting their regular business."

BUT AS it turned out, usage wasn't as high as expected. "I am not implying that it was never used. There were just months when we just made our minimum usage," Lexis/Nexis requires no minimum usage," Papal said.

Unlike the library's other computerized search systems, the legal data base system has to be subsidized, Papal said. "Every other data base we offer is self-supporting," she said.

Although library officials do not set their sights on making a profit from the computerized information services.

The idea is to simply recover the cost of paying for the services. "We are on cost-recovery basis," said Gerald Furi, assistant library director.

When the library first began using West Law, the idea was to teach attorneys how to use the computerized search system themselves. The electronic system allows attorneys to quickly search the computer's data base for legal information, including decisions, laws and even judges' and attorneys' names. Library staff has trained 92 attorneys to be "end users."

"They search for themselves rather than have library staff search for them," Papal said.

BUT WHAT happened is that unless the attorneys used the system consistently and maintained their training, they became less adept at using it. The longer it took an attorney to use, the higher the cost for the attorney to retrieve needed information, Furi said.

About twice as much, he said. "They search for themselves rather than have library staff search for them," Papal said.

\$9-\$18 for a basic information search. If the first information search needs modifying, the attorney will have to pay an additional \$3, Papal said.

"It is expensive. There is no two ways about it. But people who use it, find it a godsend," Furi said, about the electronic information systems.

Although the cost-effectiveness of the Lexis/Nexis system is attractive to library officials, the new system also is larger than West Law. Lexis offers a federal law library, tax and securities information, patents, trade regulations, all state and federal case law, as well as international trade law and European law. Lexis can also assist attorneys in finding expert witnesses, as well as how certain judges have ruled on cases and attorneys' track records.

Traditionally, attorneys or their law clerks spend hours sifting through case law for legal decisions and issues pertaining to their current cases. The electronic information systems do the same thing but much quicker. After plugging in associated elements — key words that jolt the computer's legal

memory to find similar cases — a search can be completed within minutes.

"A MANUAL search (for research information) can take 10 times as long," Furi said. "And time is money. It (information service) is a tool. It cuts out unnecessary work. Once a successful date base search is run and a person sees the capability of the services, they're sold on it."

Nexis offers full texts of more than 100 journals and newspapers, including wire services, mining and petroleum, and advertising and marketing publications. "What's important is that this information is extremely viable because businesses in this area are getting into the import/export business," Furi said.

While the effort with West Law was

to train attorneys to use the system themselves, library officials are taking a different tack with Lexis/Nexis, Papal said.

Library staff will do the information searches on Lexis/Nexis. Not only will it be less time consuming, but a lot of the "mind-set" problems people have in using computers will be reduced if they don't have to sit and figure out the process, Furi said.

"A SPINOFF of offering these data bases is that it adds to the competency and experience of the librarians," Papal said.

Because many people still think of a library in the traditional sense — books and other print materials — library officials have been marketing computerized services, particularly to the local business and professional community.

Spicer study group nears

Farmington City Manager Robert Deadman will serve on a review committee for a tri-governmental foundation for the 212-acre Spicer property in Farmington Hills.

City council unanimously appointed Deadman Dec. 16 to the exploratory committee consisting of representatives from Farmington, Farmington Hills and the Farmington Schools. Farmington Public Schools proposed the foundation.

Farmington Hills approved the foundation concept with a 3-2 split vote in November. The measure is opposed by Hills' council members Joan Dudley and Terry Seaver.

A foundation would act as an agency to receive financial gifts and donations — a function city government does not perform — for the proposed park west of Farmington Road, between 10 and 11 Mile.

Concerns with the project include receiving financial contributions for a project still without concrete plans, and that the influx of private money could foster rapid development of the acreage. There is also a concern that Spicer property contributions could decrease money given to the adjacent Farmington Community Center.

Farmington Hills bought the Spicer property — the largest tract of publicly held land in the city — in April with the help of a \$1.2 million grant from the Michigan Land Trust Fund. A total of \$800,000 in city money was spent.

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