

Women's Computer Project Off the Ground and Flying

BY ANITRA FREEMAN

Well, I have Gone on the Internet. I have stepped forth, with firm tread and much espresso, and Braved the Web. And I bring News:

I have been SNOWED!

For years I have told computer users, "Don't let 'em snow you; most stereo systems are harder to operate than a desktop computer." And I've quoted my favorite story, about the World War II General who was asked "Can you fly a plane?" and answered, "I don't know - I've never tried."

But there was SO much hype about the Internet. It wasn't that I was intimidated. Never. But learning the Internet would be a sizable task, so I had to schedule it when I had a sizable amount of time for it, and I just hadn't found a good time for it yet, but any day now....

So here I was, our whole computer committee and all the computer students and everyone else I know waiting for me to Go to the Internet, Come Back and Report. I had to take a deep breath, act real casual, and sit down at a Speakeasy terminal.

And it was EASY!

I don't mean just easy for me. My first flight on the Internet was with a squadron of women from WHEEL who were at the Speakeasy to learn how to access the material that the International Women's Conference in Beijing had put out there. As soon as I was finished with the terminal, Monique, who had almost no computer experience, grabbed the mouse - and didn't let go of it until hours after the rest of us had gone.

This was the World Wide Web we were looking at: which, by the way, just means that level of the Internet that is full-screen fancy-graphic.

Then I finally used the library Internet, at one of the text terminals - I could get information on my screen, but no pictures. I could access network levels on the Internet that *only* handle text, no graphics, or I could access the World Wide Web and get its information displayed stripped of graphics.

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The library also has full-color screens that can display Web pages with all the graphics. If you want to use them, however, call up and schedule well ahead of time. There is a very high demand for them. It is fairly easy to find an open text terminal any time you go into the library.

I could read everything: the schedule of community events from Seattle to Washington DC, political comments by members of Seattle Community Network - but I couldn't put anything out there, because I wasn't a registered user, and I didn't have a user ID. I had sent in my paperwork, but it hadn't gone through yet.

To all who are going to register as users on Seattle Community Network: be patient, this is a non-profit organization being run by overworked volunteers on coffee and jellybellies.

When several of us from the

computer committee went to a Web Master's Workshop put on by SCN and had to have ID's we got registered right there, and I decide to pay an extra \$15 to get a designer ID, instead of a random-issue one which is free. And two days later I got my free ID in the mail.

Next day I headed back to the library to explore the text Internet with the ability to send text myself. I sent e-mail and posted an essay on the Writing Forum "Bulletin Board".

I also did some grumbling. I am used to printing whole files - not one screen at a time. I am used to copying files into the computer from a portable disk, or copying them out of the computer onto a portable disk.

The Help screens didn't tell me how to do any of this. But when I went, howling back to my shelter about my frustrations I found there *are* ways to do it.

That will be next month's column.

I talked about WHEEL's Internet

Project last month. WHEEL now has a Web page. The committee formed to create the WHEEL Web page and educate homeless women to use

computers and access the Internet, has grown, and WHEEL has granted us our independence. We are now The Homeless Women's Network, empowering women to overcome the limitations of homelessness and poverty through computer training and paid work on community-service computer projects. One of our ongoing projects will be to keep expanding and updating information on the Internet that is needed by homeless women.

Homeless women's computer classes are enlarging. We are looking for a large space for rent (or donation), within the free ride zone, suitable for classes, office space, and a sizable computer lab. If you have any suggestions, please call 441-8847, or email us at alf1701@scn.org

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