Activist Tools on the Net
The Internet: Not Just for Geeks Anymore

By Anitra Freeman

The Internet is, of course, a key networking tool. One of the most important pages on any site is its list of links to other sites. Once you've found one poet on the Net, for instance, you will sooner or later find them all — each one has links to a lot more, and on it goes.

Several activist sites on the Web focus on networking — connecting activist groups and web pages with each other, making it easy for you to find what interests you, promoting new projects.

WebActive
http://www.webactive.com

WebActive was developed by a Seattle-based company called Progressive Networks, founded by Rob Glaser — member of the board of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, and owner of the Seattle Mariners.

Progressive Networks makes software to help computer users send and receive multimedia presentations in real-time — meaning you can link to the Balkan music page and hear folk music played or watch Balkan dancing, and it plays for you as it comes in over the phone lines. You don't have to wait half an hour for your computer to download a file that takes three minutes to play.

WebActive itself was developed by Andrew Sharpless, VP for WebActive, who has worked for Ralph Nader, People for the American Way, the Dukakis for President campaign, and organized the Wisconsin Citizens Utility Board. Progressive Networks developed WebActive as an electronic guide to the latest in activism and progressive politics on the Internet.

The first feature I grabbed onto was the searchable directory. I entered "poverty" and got a list of six new sites to check out, which I'll review in next issue.

A note about web searches. There are many "search engines" on the Web — AltaVista, WebCrawler, etc., as well as specialized ones, like searchable directories of on-line magazines or activist web sites. When you do a search, the engine is not going out and scanning the live Web — it is scanning a list of entries collected about sites on the Web. This is why you get different results from different search engines — they have each collected a different list of sites, or categorized them differently. It's also why sometimes the link from a search engine gets you the message "file not found". The web page listed has moved or no longer exists, and the directory hasn't been updated.

I got no bad links from the WebActive directory, and no off-base answers — like asking for sites on "poverty" and getting a book review that refers to the poverty of original metaphor in a recent best-selling novel.

I believe the person I have to thank for this is Sam Tucker, the Publisher of WebActive. Prior to joining Progressive Networks and WebActive, he worked for the environmental-foundation community in New York, then relocated to Seattle where he served as a contract writer for environmental groups. The staff info pages also mention Scarlet Tang, a volunteer who works on the directory — and is looking for full-time work. I recommend hiring her.

In addition to the searchable directory, WebActive has headlines of relevant articles published this week on the Web, and writes its own, including interviews with such folks as Ralph Nader, Ricki Seidman (Rock the Vote) and Bill Shore (Share Our Strength), and a feature on Five Job Leads This Week.

HandsNet
http://www.handsnet.org/handsnet

HandsNet is a network environment, on CONNECT, that provides human service organizations with interactive forums to exchange information and resources and collaborate on program and policy issues. Founded in 1987, HandsNet links some 5,000 public interest and human service organizations across the United States.

Linking the Human Services Community Online

HandsNet on CONNECT — a private network — offers public policy alerts and analyses from experts in the field, notices of legal and administrative actions, abstracts of key studies and reports, descriptions of program innovations, Federal Register notices, funding information, daily summaries of human services news from major daily papers and wire services, electronic mail, Special Interest Mail Groups, an Internet mail and fax gateway, binary file transfer and a full-text library of information searchable by keywords and date.

HandsNet on the web offers to the public users of the Web a selection of what is available to members of HandsNet on