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ATG Interviews Lana Porter

PRESIDENT AND CEO AMERITECH LIBRARY SERVICES <CRA@AMLIBS.COM>

by Katina Strauch (Editor, *Against the Grain*) <strauchk@cofc.edu>

ATG: Please bring us up-to-date on Ameritech Library Services. Let's look back at what's been happening and forward at the future.

LP: 1997 was a very good year for Ameritech because we made real progress in a number of important areas. I think it would be safe to say 1997 was a turnaround year for the company because of several key events. They included: Putting into place a new management team comprised of some really talented people. In fact we just finished this in December when we added industry veteran and librarian, **Carl Grant** as our new Vice President of Marketing. We released some exciting new products and services, including UNIPAC, JAVA based WebPAC, **Dynix** under Windows NT, our Resource Sharing System, **NETCONNECT** and Media Booking for Horizon. New products are, to my mind, an important indicator of the vitality of a business and so this was a very important step forward. We also achieved a significant number of new sales worldwide which is a wonderful reaffirmation that the marketplace believes in the company, its products, services and people. Service procedures were better defined and included the establishment of standards by which to measure the results. By all measures, our customer service has improved dramatically. Company revenues showed growth and the company is profitable again as a result of a lot of very hard work on the part of the entire Ameritech team.

The future looks very good for us. Like many companies, we still have a great deal more to do but all the foundations are in place and we're poised to achieve some really significant progress in the year(s) ahead.

ATG: Tell us about Ameritech's vision for the future of libraries?

LP: Libraries are facing a very important time in their existence, a time when they can redefine and reaffirm their importance in society. This is occurring because of the opportunities created by the Web. At **Ameritech Corporate** and **Ameritech Library Services**, it is well understood that in order to seize this opportunity, we must closely couple libraries with networks and enhance that package. Our vision is to connect libraries in a variety of ways and manners. Clearly, the basic is to connect the library with their us-

ers by providing good, solid systems. We are connecting libraries with system extensions via partnerships with other technology and service vendors like **Ingram, Baker and Taylor, RoweCom** and others. We need to connect libraries to each other, the Web and digital resources via our extensive network offerings. We also need to connect libraries to the future by giving them means to easily maintain and refresh their technology. Backed by the resources and commitment of Ameritech, this vision is becoming a reality for our customers.

ATG: Your background is in telecommunications. Are you working to bring libraries and the telecommunications industry closer together?

LP: Ameritech sees an opportunity to leverage, in two directions, the expertise of networking and information management as is done by libraries. Clearly, libraries need networking. On the other hand, networks sell well when there is something to be accessed on the other end, such as the information found in libraries today and will be found in the future. Remember that Ameritech manages over two million communication ports across the United States. That is the kind of infrastructure that is needed by libraries — big, big networks. It represents a major new outsourcing opportunity in the years ahead.

ATG: Come again? Can you elaborate more on what you just said?

LP: We believe that the need to

outsource the purchase and/or lease of equipment for library networks will become even larger than it is today. We intend to offer as many types of services as are needed by libraries in order for them to be able to leverage our expertise in communications and libraries to improve their ability to better manage all areas of their operations. One example of this would be our offering **ISP (Internet Service Provider)** services as part of a package in order to make things even simpler for the library. We will also help the libraries update their hardware and software on a fixed cost basis. We will be providing libraries with good safe access to the Internet. We'll also provide firewalls, management and monitoring of network links, Internet integration, and the production of MARC records with Internet resource links included.

ATG: We are all working on expanding patron access to digital information. Ameritech has been doing some work with the Library of Congress in these areas. Can you tell us about that?

LP: Yes. Libraries from across the U.S. have been given awards totaling \$600,000 through a partnership between the **Library of Congress** and **Ameritech** in order to digitize historically significant American collections and to then make them available for the first time via the Internet. This is a first step in trying to expand patron access to this information. Ultimately, creating these resources and using our networking capabilities we will be able to provide libraries with easy, fast access to digital information.

ATG: What role do Consortia efforts have in this process?

LP: I think it is very important to realize that consortia efforts have a huge role to play in this process. Creating digital information and libraries, particularly when imaging is involved, is still a costly process. One way we can better bear those costs is by coordinating our efforts at all levels, between all libraries and sharing the work and results. To help libraries take advantage of this approach Ameritech Library Services has undertaken several important steps. For instance, **Horizon** has a number of new enhancements to support consortia. In partnership with our parent company, Ameritech, we are in the unique position of being able to facilitate network-

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ing involving multiple locations across wide geographic areas. This has implications for how "consortia" are defined, because it is no longer necessary to define them strictly by geographic territories. Now we can begin to define them by type, no matter where they are located! Again, because of our extensive expertise in networking, we can assure the libraries of adequate bandwidth to support whatever level of activity they desire and because we understand libraries, we are uniquely positioned to be proactive in planning network needs and capacities. When coupled with our other products and services this ultimately means that Consortia can come together from many diverse geographical locations; that Ameritech can run the central system from one of our data automation centers on an outsourcing arrangement; that we can provide centralized access to databases, fulltext and other digital information, such as images; we can

also manage the entire network, the PCs and software on the desktop, and we can provide a technology refresh program so that the consortia members don't even have to worry about updating those PCs! There is no other company that can help consortia achieve all of this with one-stop shopping. So, clearly consortia are a critical piece of the future of digital information

"Creating digital information and libraries, particularly when imaging is involved, is still a costly process."

from our point of view!

ATG: Tell us a bit about yourself? How long have you been with Ameritech?

LP: I was born and reared in Salem, Illinois. I received my undergraduate degree and Masters Degree in English from **Murray State University** (Kentucky) and my MBA from **OSU** (Columbus, Ohio). I taught for six years at the high school and college levels and did educational research and consulting for six years thereafter. I then started with Ohio Bell telephone in

Columbus, Ohio. Now I have over 21 years of experience in Ameritech, working in cellular and wireless communications as well as in international activities. I ran the first library group that Ameritech bought from **OCLC** in July 1990 and integrated it into **NOTIS** after that purchase was made in 1992. I also spent six months working with the **Dynix** operation in the Paris Office integrating it into the Dynix system since it had just been purchased from a distributor. I have strong operations and marketing background. My Rolodex is one of our most valuable resources and I share it freely within the company. We are strongly supported by Ameritech corporate and I personally hear from the Chairman of Ameritech at least monthly.

ATG: What do you like to do in your spare time?

LP: Reading fiction (mysteries) is pure entertainment. I also enjoy spending time with my family. Our daughter **Cathy** is a veterinarian and lives nearby us here in Chicago. She wanted to be a veterinarian ever since the second grade and she would let nothing get in her way. She has three dogs, four cats and three turtles. 🐢

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