

Public Access to the Internet in Virginia Beach
submitted by Carolyn Caywood, Virginia Beach Public Library
July 21, 2000

Located in the southeastern corner of Virginia between North Carolina, Norfolk, Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic, Virginia Beach is part of the Hampton Roads Metropolitan Statistical Area. It's the largest city in the state and the 34th largest city in the United States. Also the fastest growing city on the East Coast, it is expected to surpass 500,000 by the year 2010. The city covers 310 square miles, including 156 farms and has approximately 32,700 acres of land under cultivation. Virginia Beach is home to four military bases employing 32,000 armed services and civilian workers. The city's popularity as a tourism destination brought 2.5 million visitors in 1997. For more background, see <http://www.virginia-beach.va.us/dept/econdev/background.html>.

That page adds, "As the first recipient of the American Society of Public Administration (ASPA) National Innovation Recognition Award, Virginia Beach government was cited for excellence and innovation in organizational development, strategic planning, quality initiatives and process improvements. The award recognized Virginia Beach for successfully changing its organization to improve local government, be more competitive and more citizen and customer focused."

One expression of this focus is Virginia Beach, Virginia, Community for a Lifetime: A Strategy to Achieve City Council's Vision for the Future which guides the development of government policies and services. On page 17, City government expresses the belief that, "Individuals form the foundation of any society. If individuals are competent and confident and have support and resources, they can take responsibility for their own lives and reach their full potential. Families form the first level of support for individuals. Therefore, families are the primary force in shaping lives and developing positive experiences and healthy relationships."

In the early 1990s before most people were aware of the Internet, Virginia Beach, like many other cities, had the problem of city government facilities being used as day care substitutes. The affected government departments worked together to create both a policy and a public education initiative. Their objectives were:

- To assure the safety and welfare of unattended children.

- To develop communication among staff, parents, and children.

- To facilitate cooperation and communication among City agencies, including the Police

 - Department and Social Services, having responsibilities concerning unattended, neglected or potentially (or seemingly) abandoned children.

- To conserve staff personal resources.

- To deter the use of public libraries and recreation centers as ad hoc child care facilities.

Since the policy, Unattended Children in Libraries and Recreation Centers, was adopted Jan. 31, 1996, its enforcement provisions have never been exercised in the libraries. Educating families on the legal and safety issues has proven fully effective and

government confidence in informed parents has not been misplaced.

This philosophy has guided the Virginia Beach Public Library as it provides services through a Central Library, six branches, a bookmobile, and three specialized libraries. In addition to a staff of 202 FTE, volunteers contribute 25,794 hours to library operations. The collection contains over 800,000 individual items which were checked out 2,777,075 times during 1,585,513 visits last year. The website <http://www.virginia-beach.va.us/dept/library/> gets over 400 different visitors per day from users outside the libraries. With the help of a Gates Grant, there are now 94 public computers with Internet access.

The library approached the Internet through dialog with the community. A first step was to sponsor a public user group, the Hampton Roads Internet Association, <http://www.hria.org/> in late 1993. Library staff presentations to the group included a discussion on filtering and blocking software in 1996. <http://www.pilot.infi.net/~carolyn/guide.html>. Less technically minded citizens were also consulted --187 participated in a series of public dialogs in 1997 on the future of the library. Book displays, classes and interactive programs have allowed staff and public to exchange views on Internet issues ranging from safety tips to evaluating information quality. All of these contributions have helped shape how we offer the Internet.

As the library developed its plan for public access to the Internet, other city departments were consulted. We worked particularly closely with law enforcement, including the Police, the Sheriff's office, the City Attorney, and the Commonwealth's Attorney. The Library Board reviewed the plan as it developed. Central to our planning was the City government strategy, "We treat people primarily as individuals with capacity rather than individuals with needs, in our relationships with the citizens of our Community and the members of our organization." p.19. We have assumed that the library's role is to teach, assist, and facilitate the development of information literacy skills and that the people of Virginia Beach have the capacity to employ those skills to make their own decisions in using the Internet. We believe the best guide for children in using the library, the Internet, or indeed any source of communication and information, is their own parents. This has led us to focus on offering informed choices. For the youngest users, we have Kidsnet which is a small collection of websites selected by library staff for their developmental appropriateness for children through age eight. Older users can choose between Internet workstations filtered by I-Gear and Internet workstations that are recessed to prevent casual invasion of privacy. Each workstation presents the library policy with an I AGREE button for further access. Chat is not supported on any library workstations. Signs explain the different workstations and handouts address frequent questions. E-volunteers supplement staff in teaching new users and maintaining order.

Virginia Beach, Virginia, Community for a Lifetime: A Strategy to Achieve City Council's Vision for the Future summarizes on page 3, the Roles of Government. "In the past, we focused on providing services as the main way to carry out our mission. Today, as a result of our planning, we realize that we must emphasize three dimensions of service in order to succeed. They are:

- To provide municipal services which are valued by citizens,
- To provide information and knowledge to enable Community success,
- To ensure that things happen, by being a catalyst, mobilizer or facilitator."

We believe that public access to the Internet as provided in the Virginia Beach Public Library exemplifies the kind of municipal government service our citizens want for the future.

Appendices:

**VIRGINIA BEACH PUBLIC LIBRARY
INTERNET USE POLICY
June 29, 2000**

Acceptance Statement:

The Virginia Beach Public Library considers use of any public access computer in its facilities to constitute an acceptance of its Internet Use Policy. Customers will reaffirm the agreement each time they use the public access computer.

Background:

The Virginia Beach Public Library mission states:

A literate populace and the freedom to read are essential to our democracy. The Virginia Beach Public Library system provides free access to accurate and current information and materials to all individuals and promotes reading as a critical life skill.

Free access only has meaning in a society that preserves freedom of expression. This freedom is protected in America by the First Amendment of the *U. S. Constitution*. The intentions of the First Amendment are at the heart of the Library's mission statement.

Court decisions over the years have interpreted the public library to be a "limited public forum." In such a forum, the government may not discriminate among constitutionally protected content or viewpoints. It may only regulate the time, place and manner of their use.

The information to which the Library provides access is increasingly available only in electronic form and over the Internet. The courts have found in recent cases that the Internet deserves the highest protection, because it broadens the opportunities for free speech. This decision puts the Internet at the center of the Library's mission.

The Virginia Beach Public Library endorses the principles of the American Library Association's *Library Bill of Rights* (<http://www.ala.org/work/freedom/lbr.html>), and its interpretation entitled "Access to Electronic Information, Services, and Networks." The

Library endorses the Virginia Library Association's "Intellectual Freedom Vision Statement" and "Open Access to the Internet" (<http://www.vla.org/IFC/ifstatements.htm>).

Responsibilities of the Library and its Customers

Librarians use criteria to select the materials acquired for the Library's collection. The Internet poses a different challenge. Its ever-changing resources are only partially reviewed and recommended. Users of the Internet must be aware that the content they access has not necessarily been verified for accuracy, currency or appropriateness. Library staff can recommend specific resources that have been found to be reliable and can offer advice on how to evaluate content.

The Library has designed and arranged its workstation furniture to assure customer privacy while using the Internet.

The nature of a public forum requires participants in that forum to exercise critical thinking skills to determine the truthfulness and relevance of the content they consult. In the case of minors, parents may need to supplement the inexperience of youth with guidance for their own children.

Service Plan

Internet Protocols

The Virginia Beach Public Library supports as many Internet protocols as it can, balancing security with access. The Library does not support the Internet Relay Chat protocol or provide assistance in using it, though we recognize that some websites will offer chatrooms anyway. IRC is the Internet protocol for synchronous, "real time" conversations on the Internet. This protocol is excluded as having little relevance to the Library's mission because:

The value of information communicated on IRC is diminished by uncertain authorship and lack of archival retrieval,

Other libraries report it is time- and resource-consumptive,

The pace of real-time conversation encourages ill-considered and unsafe behavior
And, for that reason, it is the protocol most likely to be implicated in harm to young people.

Filters

At least one workstation, clearly marked, in each library agency offers filtering software for those who prefer to use it.

Library staff does not make any judgment about which workstation a customer should use. That decision is left to the individual user, or if the user is a minor, to his or her parents.

Children's Workstation

At least one workstation in each library agency is clearly marked for use by young children and their parents. This workstation enables them to experience selected Internet sites without providing access to the entire world wide web. The workstation is intended for children and their families to gain experience with computers and hypermedia in a limited and structured environment.

Time Limits

Each workstation has a set time limit for use, some short for quick lookups and immediate availability, and some longer for study. The workstations are clearly marked to indicate their time limits. Time limits are administered on an "honor system" among customers. They may be extended when there is no one waiting to use a particular computer.

Internet and Information Skills

The Virginia Beach Public Library provides a list of recommended links to help users develop safe and wise Internet skills. These links are reviewed regularly. They are available on the Library's website and in a printed form in each library.

Public Computer Lab

The Library provides training in Internet use and World Wide Web search skills in its Public Computer Room located in the Central Library. The Room also enables customers to use selected software products, and when classes are not in session, its workstations will be available as library workstations with Internet access. The use of the room is open to all library customers, regardless of age. A staff member is assigned to the room to guide the instruction in software use.

Law and Policy Restraints on Behaviors and Content

Some behaviors are not permitted in the Library's limited public forum. The Library has a set of behavior guidelines that apply to users of the Internet as well as to all other library services. In addition, customers are not permitted to:

change the settings and configurations of public access computers,
use non-library software or drives on library computers,
behave in a way that intrudes upon the rights of others. Customers are not permitted to
invade the privacy of other library customers, harass library staff or customers,
damage or disrupt library computer resources, or spam in violation of federal, state, or
local laws or ordinances, including, but not limited to, *Code of Virginia* § 18.2-152 et
seq.

Some content is not protected by the First Amendment to the *U. S. Constitution*. No

library customer is permitted to use a library computer to view obscenity, child pornography, or to display this illegal content, or if a minor to view materials harmful to juveniles in violation of federal, state, or local laws or ordinances including, but not limited to, *Code of Virginia* §§ 18.2-372, 18.2-374.1.1, 18.2-390, 18.2-391, and 18.2-377. Nevertheless, the legal status of any particular content can only be determined by a court of law.

Library customers may not use library computers to violate copyright protection or licensing agreements in violation of applicable federal, state or local laws or ordinances, including, but not limited to, Title 17 of the *United States Code*.

Response to Prohibited Behaviors and Content

Library customers who encounter behavior that violates library policy should report it to library staff immediately. An individual who violates library policy shall be warned about the specific behavior that is prohibited. If the violation continues after warning, he or she may be banned from the facility for a specific period of time. If a user encounters behavior that may be illegal, either the customer or the staff can report it to law enforcement. Neither the staff nor the user can determine the legality of content -- only a court of law has that authority.

Adopted:

Date

**Pat Deans
Chair
Public Library Board**

Virginia Beach, Virginia Community for a Lifetime
A Strategy to Achieve City Council's Vision for the Future

p.17

Our Goal: Community: Building Relationships and Capacities

Individuals form the foundation of any society. If individuals are competent and confident and have support and resources, they can take responsibility for their own lives and reach their full potential.

Families form the first level of support for individuals. Therefore, families are the primary force in shaping lives and developing positive experiences and healthy relationships.

Virginia Beach is composed of many diverse communities - groups of people

who share interests and beliefs (like religious communities), culture and heritage (like ethnic communities), a sense of place (like neighborhoods), or a common purpose (such as military, media, businesses, organizations, special interest groups and our own government community). For these communities to come together and be the Virginia Beach Community, caring and engaged relationships must exist among its individuals, families and communities. The Virginia Beach Community can accomplish things that individuals, families and communities can not do on their own.

We, the leaders and members of the government community, communicate and work collaboratively among ourselves and with the leaders and members of the other communities by:

- listening to understand our collective needs and values;
- adopting and realizing a common vision of Community that gives each of us a sense of belonging and caring;
- acknowledging and appreciating our considerable diversity and demonstrating and encouraging tolerance;
- building and modeling Community leadership;
- identifying and actively addressing the root causes of our individual and collective problems;
- creating and applying collaborative approaches and solutions;
- recognizing and growing individual and collective capacities to create and sustain our Community.

Unattended Children in Libraries and Recreation Centers

Index Number: AD3.10

Date of Adoption: 01/31/96

1.0 Purpose and Need

City staff at community recreation centers and public libraries regularly encounter situations in which children are left by their parents unattended for extended periods of time, both during and after the hours of normal operation. This Directive sets forth procedures to guide staff members when responding to situations involving such unattended children.

Implementation of this Directive shall be guided by the following objectives:

To assure the safety and welfare of unattended children.

To develop communication among staff, parents, and children.

To facilitate cooperation and communication among City agencies, including the Police

Department and Social Services, having responsibilities concerning unattended, neglected or potentially (or seemingly) abandoned children.

To conserve staff personal resources.

To deter the use of public libraries and recreation centers and ad hoc child care facilities

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3.0 Procedure to Accomplish Directive

III. Public Information and Training

The Department of Public Libraries and Department of Parks and Recreation will conduct an ongoing public education program to inform parents of the need for appropriate preparation and/or supervision of children who utilize the libraries and recreation facilities. The public information program will include:

Coordination with the Public Information Office to promulgate Directive and its need through video announcements and press releases.

Placement of signs near each facility entrance, worded as follows:

PARENTS AND GUARDIANS ARE ADVISED THAT (LIBRARY) (RECREATION FACILITY) STAFF MEMBERS CANNOT CONTROL OR BE ACCOUNTABLE FOR INDIVIDUAL CHILDREN WHO ARE LEFT UNATTENDED ON THE PREMISES. IT IS THEREFORE THE PARENT'S OR GUARDIAN'S RESPONSIBILITY TO ENSURE EITHER THAT EACH CHILD IS ACCOMPANIED BY AT LEAST ONE PERSON OF APPROPRIATE AGE AND MATURITY LEVEL TO PROVIDE FOR THE CHILD'S SAFETY, OR THAT EACH CHILD IS ABLE AND PREPARED TO BE IN THE LIBRARY ALONE.

Distribution of informative "checklists" and brochures regarding the unattended children Directive.

Alerting parents about this Directive on application forms when children are enrolled for library cards or for recreation programs.

Displaying posters with public safety messages related to unattended children and child safety in general.

From our class in cyberparenting

<http://vbpl101.homestead.com/files/parentbeyond.htm>

Questions to consider to decide how much guidance an individual child currently needs:

Time -- does your child keep computer use in reasonable balance with other activities?

Privacy -- does your child know what information should not be given out?

Netiquette -- does your child know what behaviors are rude on the Internet?

Advertising -- does your child apply logic to temptation?

Misinformation -- can your child tell when content is biased or a hoax?

Skills -- can your child avoid undesirable content by using well-thought-out searches?

Values -- does your child know what you would want him or her to do in an unfamiliar situation?

Safety -- can your child recognize situations that might be risky?

Maturity -- will your child apply all this, in spite of peer pressure or curiosity?

Thoughts to keep in mind for both home and library use of the Internet:

Be involved. Surf online together -- parents and children can learn from each other. Understanding computers may seem easier for children, but you are better at knowing when to be cautious. Children need assurance that they will not be blamed if they tell a parent about an unpleasant encounter or ask for advice. If your child locates an objectionable website despite your precautions, sit down with him or her and talk about why you, as a parent, find it objectionable. Explain your values and what you expect of your child. *Library staff will not second-guess your decisions.*

Protect your privacy. Discuss what information is private in your family and how to handle situations where that privacy could be compromised. As a general rule, information that could allow someone to locate you should not be shared online. *The library does not keep any record of individual Internet use.*

Be skeptical. There are lots of rumors, mistakes, and outright lies on the Internet, so double check before you trust. Consider the other person's motives and credentials. The Internet is a great place to develop and practice critical thinking skills. *If you have concerns, library staff are experts in evaluating information.*

Be careful. When you know people online only, you don't really know them. Mistakes in Internet addresses can lead to unpleasant results, so don't guess. Make searches as specific as possible and add more words if the search results aren't what you expect. *Library staff can show you how to get the results you want.*

If you encounter something that makes you uncomfortable, delete it or back out of it. If a message doesn't feel right, don't respond. You can report child abusive material online to The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, (1-800-843-5678 or <http://www.missingkids.org/>).

Be courteous and ethical. Don't copy someone else's work, and don't trust those who do. Don't insult people you disagree with. Don't forward rumors or send messages where they're not wanted. *Library staff can explain copyright, plagiarism, and netiquette.*

Interactive websites you and your child can use to reinforce these safe Internet practices:

For the youngest <http://www.familyguidebook.com/safesurfclub.html>

Animated multiple choice <http://www.kidscom.com/orakc/Mousers/Internet/index.html>

Animated characters illustrate lessons <http://disney.go.com/cybersafety/>

Doug's Internet Safety Quiz <http://apps.disney.go.com/global/quiz/quiz.cgi?def=doug1>

Get an Internet Driver's License http://www.safesurfin.com/drive_ed.htm

Another multiple choice quiz <http://www.missingkids.com/quiz/internetquiz.html>

Get a PBS web license http://www.pbs.org/kids/did_you_know/did_techknow.html

Rocko's Safe Surfin' Trivia Challenge <http://www.nick.com/inits/safety/index.html>

Ithaca College's Interactive Guide

<http://www.ithaca.edu/library/Training/ICYouSee.html>

Is it a hoax? <http://www.library.ucla.edu/libraries/college/instruct/hoax/evlinfo.htm>

Evaluate web information http://www.lib.calpoly.edu/infocomp/modules/05_evaluate/