

# LISP NEWSLETTER

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*Volume 1999, No. 1*

WELCOME TO THE NEW **LISP NEWSLETTER!**

This is the first issue of the web-format LISP SIS Newsletter. We hope you like it and find it useful and accessible. Please send your submissions, comments and suggestions directly to me, John Adkins, LISP Newsletter Editor, USD Legal Research Center, 5998 Alcalá Park, San Diego, CA 92110 ([adkins@acusd.edu](mailto:adkins@acusd.edu)). I really welcome and appreciate your input!

FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome to the newsletter of the Legal Information Services to the Public Special Interest Section of AALL! We are proud to announce that we are the first SIS to produce and distribute a newsletter that is totally electronic. As an e-journal, the information is written and designed for electronic dissemination. While a few readers may receive a paper copy, that would be understood to be a printout of the actual electronic newsletter.

Newsletter Editor John Adkins at University of San Diego Legal Research Center has created a highly anticipated resource that is such an important part of this SIS. Librarians will receive an e-mail message announcing the availability of the latest issue, with a link directly to the web page where the newsletter can be found. This allows us to get the information to you quickly, with savings on printing and postage, in a format the great majority of our members look forward to. Please give your feedback to John. I want to give my special thanks to Sharon Blackburn at Texas Tech University Law Library for all her hard work in sorting through and shepherding the numerous ideas for LISP-sponsored programs for AALL. Six excellent proposals were sent forward, including programs on Genetic Discrimination and on the Public Library/Law Library Interface. Our top two ranked programs were accepted, so we look forward to Washington, D.C. and LISP programs on Internet Reference and the Non-Lawyer. As members of LISP, you are undoubtedly interested in Quality Customer Service, so I hope you will make it a point to participate in AALL's satellite video conference on that topic, to be held Thursday, April 15, 12-1:30 pm ET. For a downlink site near you, check [http://www.aallnet.org/prodev/event\\_satellite.asp](http://www.aallnet.org/prodev/event_satellite.asp) The video conference, the AALL annual meeting, and this newsletter are vital ways for all of us to continue to strengthen our Legal Information Services to the Public.

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## LISP CLEARINGHOUSE COLLECTION DONATION DRIVE

Approximately two years ago, LISP approved the project of expanding the Clearinghouse Collection to include library guides, pathfinders, and other materials prepared to help the pro se law library patron use our collections. I am somewhat embarrassed that it has taken so long to actively pursue collecting materials. In early January, letters will go out to selected law libraries specifically asking if they have prepared users guides and if they have, will they please consider donating copies to the Clearinghouse. In case your library isn't one of those contacted, and you have prepared a library guide, pathfinder, or any other material that assist patrons in using our collections, please send me a copy. Betsy McKenzie sent me a wonderful assortment of pathfinders, but more are needed. If in doubt as to whether the material is suitable, please error on the side of inclusion. My goal is to have all materials received, organized and added to the Bibliography by the Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C.

Materials may be sent to my attention at Texas Tech School of Law Library, 1802 Hartford, Lubbock, Texas 79409-004. Thank you for your help with this project. If you have any questions, please call 806-742-3964 or e-mail me at [xpeks@ttacs.ttu.edu](mailto:xpeks@ttacs.ttu.edu).

Submitted by Elizabeth Schneider.

## BOOK REVIEW -- THE LIBRARIAN'S GUIDE TO PUBLIC RECORDS

BRB Publications of Tempe, Arizona publishes several works on locating various types of records. Law libraries which serve the general public may find one or more of these titles helpful. These titles assist libraries in fulfilling LISP's mission of assisting the public in locating legal information. In the next few issues of the newsletter, I will be reviewing three of the titles, beginning with the new edition of THE LIBRARIAN'S GUIDE TO PUBLIC RECORDS.

The general public frequently approaches the reference desk wanting to know how to locate information collected by one or more governmental bodies. Usually patrons recognize that the library does not have the records but they are seeking guidance as to where to go to obtain them.. THE LIBRARIAN'S GUIDE TO PUBLIC RECORDS is a helpful tool to direct them to the proper source. The guide begins with an introduction which discusses what constitutes a public record and why people need to locate them. It also explains the difference between public records and public information and then describes over twenty categories of public records.

The majority of the book lists where to locate public records in each state. The states are arranged alphabetically. For each state there is general information on pertinent state agencies, a listing of important state Internet sites, and where to go to obtain birth certificates, accident reports, tax liens, etc. Following a brief description of the state court system and recorders office, there is a county by county listing of which agency to contact to obtain information about real estate recordings and felony, misdemeanor, civil, eviction, small claims, and probate court proceedings.

The last section of the book is titled the "Professional Reference Section." It discusses the issue of privacy and the privacy legislation that impacts the researcher's ability to access records. It also includes tables showing the location of appeals and regional records services, restrictions on state agency public records, and recent telephone area code changes.

For libraries that receive questions about how to find public records, the GUIDE will be most helpful. It is easy to use because of the table of contents and logical arrangement, and priced at \$39.00, it is affordable.

Submitted by: Elizabeth Schneider, Texas Tech University School of Law Library

## SAN DIEGO PUBLIC HAS NEW WEB PRESENCE

The San Diego County Public Law Library is pleased to announce the unveiling of it's new Internet web page located at <http://www.sdcll.org>

The Library's goal is to provide San Diego citizens, the legal and library communities with information about what services are offered. The web site was designed by a committee of dedicated Library staff from various departments, some of whom devoted their own time to creating the content and format. Most of the over thirty-two full-time staff members have contributed to the development of the page with helpful feedback and suggestions for improvements. The library staff plans to continue improving the page and add new features and functions over time. If you have any questions or comments regarding the San Diego County Public Law Library web site or any of our services, please email us at [kkane@sdcll.org](mailto:kkane@sdcll.org).

Thank you.

Charles R. Dyer  
Director of Libraries  
San Diego County Public Law Library

LEGAL INFORMATION vs. LEGAL ADVICE

More and more the non-lawyer is attempting to "do-it-himself." All libraries are aware of the increasing demand by the public for legal information. The librarian is faced with the challenge of determining which legal questions can be answered by the collection and the staff on hand. It is often difficult in the reference interview to get all the necessary information from the patron so that the librarian can make a wise decision about the actual needs of the user. The patron often does not give all the facts involved and, what appears to be a fairly simple request, may actually involve many more complex issues. The reference interview with a do-it-yourself lay patron must be a continuous process and probably should lead to a referral to a local law library with the suggestion that the patron seek the advice of an attorney. (Of course, the librarian should never recommend a specific attorney--no matter how well-known he/she might be!) The local bar association should have lists of attorneys; Martindale-Hubbell Law Directory will list the law firms in your area with notations on their areas of specialization; the local telephone directory may list attorneys by areas of specialization. The librarian should also be aware of the addresses and phone numbers of the local legal aid offices and lawyers' referral services.

Often the most difficult aspect of legal reference is to determine the difference between legal information and legal advice.

There are some general "rules" which can help the librarian draw the line. Do NOT tell a patron that something is legal or illegal. (What if you are wrong?) One should NOT interpret or help to interpret the law for a lay patron or advise them what legal steps to take. Do NOT select the form you think the patron needs. A librarian can be prosecuted for the unauthorized practice of law as well as sued by the patron for negligence.

It is never wrong nor improper to suggest that the patron consult with an attorney!

From: LISP NEWS (Legal Information Service to the Public)

American Association of Law Libraries

Frank Weston, editor

[faw@acusd.edu](mailto:faw@acusd.edu)

## PRO SE LITIGANTS INTERNET SUMMARY

[from Gene Preudhomme, New York Supreme Court Appellate Division Library]

I posted a request for newsgroups and/or listservs for pro se litigants. I did not receive any citations to newsgroups/listservs.

However, I did receive several suggestions for finding newsgroups and listservs. Those suggestions led me to the following:

Web based discussion forums:

Numerous divorce related interactive bulletin boards are found at:

<http://www.divorcenet.com/index.html>

I would like to thank Andrea Battel and Eric Kaufman for pointing me to several Web sites for locating newsgroups and listservs. I found several to be very useful. They are:

<http://www.dejanews.com> - To search for newsgroups.

<http://www.forumone.com> - To search for web based discussion forums.

<http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/~llou/lawlists/lawlibs.txt> - This is a list of law-related lists.

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#### SPEAKING OF WEBSITES....

The ABA Division of Legal Services has a nice newsletter that provides an overview of current cases and organizations that concern providing legal services to the public. The most recent issue has blurbs on legal services organizations in Pennsylvania, Texas, New York, and elsewhere. Check it out at

[http://www.abanet.org/legalserv/news\\_lsn.html](http://www.abanet.org/legalserv/news_lsn.html)

The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) is a national public interest law and policy organization and is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt, non membership organization. CLASP was founded in 1968 by Charles Halpern and three other young lawyers, with the assistance of Justice Arthur Goldberg. For over 28 years, CLASP has consistently been among the most effective and highly-regarded public interest law and policy organizations in the country. Since 1982, CLASP has focused on the economic problems of low-income families with children and securing access to civil legal assistance for low-income persons. For more information, contact CLASP at the following address: <http://www.clasp.org>

#### FIRST ANNUAL AALL PUBLIC ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT INFORMATION AWARD

The Government Relations Committee of the American Association of Law Libraries is now soliciting nominees for the first annual AALL Public Access to Government Information Award. This new award will be presented at the 1999 Annual Meeting in Washington, DC.

A principal tenet of AALL is the right of equal access to information for all to ensure an informed citizenry and to promote a just and democratic society. The Public Access to Government Information Award is given to recognize persons or organizations that have made significant contributions to protect and promote greater public access to government information. Recipients of the award may be any individual or organization. Recipients need not be law librarians or members of AALL. Members of the Washi Judging criteria for the AALL Public Access to Government Information Award are:

\* A contribution that significantly improves public access to government information, thereby increasing the public's knowledge about the workings of government. The award is given in accordance with AALL's mission to provide leadership in the field of legal information and to promote equal access to federal, state or local government information. The award will honor the achievements of those who have championed public access.

\* The extent to which the individual or organization has had a positive impact on protecting and promoting public access to federal, state or local governmental information.

\* The extent to which the effort advances the AALL mission and Government Relations Policy.

To send a letter of nomination:

The GRC welcomes nominations for the recipient of the 1999 AALL Public Access to Government Information Award by Monday, February 1, 1999. To nominate an individual or organization for this award, please send a letter of nomination describing the nominee and including a justification for the award to the Chair of the Government Relations Committee:

Darcy Kirk  
Law Librarian & Associate Professor of Law  
University of Connecticut School of Law Library  
39 Elizabeth Street  
Hartford, Connecticut 06105-2213  
[dkirk@law.uconn.edu](mailto:dkirk@law.uconn.edu)

JOIN THE AALL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT LISTSERV!

"Why can't I find my case on the web?"

"Isn't everything online now?"

"I've tried a lot of different searches and I keep getting too many hits"

"Nothing seems on point"

"I'm overwhelmed by the choices..."

Are you concerned about how competent and confident your patrons are with electronic research? Four of our colleagues have drafted a discussion document that addresses "End-User Electronic Information Competencies."

Bobbie Studwell, Jill Porter, Leigh Semples, and Faye Jones believe that it's time for law librarians to step forward and define basic legal research competencies. The draft document, published in the October 1998 AALL Spectrum, outlines the skill sets that students and attorneys should master to be considered competent in obtaining electronic information.

The AALL Professional Development Listserv is designed to promote information exchange on current issues in law librarianship. Each discussion will be limited to a set period and the listserv will be purged at the end of this period. Bobbie Studwell has graciously agreed to moderate the first discussion (on these proposed end-user electronic information competencies) from November 9-20, 1998.

To subscribe, go to <http://www.aallnet.org/prodev/listserv.asp>

Take a critical look at the list of skills (page 5, AALL Spectrum - Oct 1998.) Do you have suggestions for additions, corrections or modifications? What should our role be in setting these competencies? Voice your opinion!

Thank you,

AALL Professional Development

#### ARE YOUR SERVICES ACCESSIBLE?

I received a letter from the Illinois' Attorney General asking that I let our members know about a brochure that his office is making available. Entitled "Are your Services Accessible", it is targeted at attorneys to encourage them to be more available to people with disabilities. It's pretty specific to Illinois, but I thought your SIS might want to put a notice in your newsletter about it. [For more details, contact: Judy Meadows [jmeadows@mt.gov](mailto:jmeadows@mt.gov)]

#### APPLY FOR AN AALL GRANT

Happy New Year to all! Grants covering registration costs are available to enable newer members to attend the AALL Annual Meeting. The purpose of the grants is to assist librarians who hold promise of future involvement in the law library profession. Applications can be obtained from AALLNET ([www.aallnet.org](http://www.aallnet.org)), as a return fax from AALL's fax-on-demand service (908-544-5901, or by contacting AALL headquarters (312-939-4764 or e-mail: [aallhq@aall.org](mailto:aallhq@aall.org)).

The application deadline is April 1. Contact Grants Committee Chair Carol Watson at the University of Georgia School of Law (706-542-7365 or e-mail [cwatson@uga.edu](mailto:cwatson@uga.edu) if you need additional information.

Sue Welsh 916/739-7014

Reader Services Librarian 916.739.7273

Gordon D. Schaber Law Library

[swelsh@uop.edu](mailto:swelsh@uop.edu)

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