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Legislative funds to assist all Ulster Libraries

Tax dollars apportioned to Ulster County libraries in 2007 by the county legislature will be used to purchase premier knowledge resources according to Ulster County Library Association president, Lynn Ridgeway. In past years, funds have been distributed to individual libraries to defray the cost of programs and various expenses. This year the funding will be spent to benefit all libraries and their cardholders in the same way.

“This represents a change in method by which member libraries are usually supported,” said Ms. Ridgeway, who is also a Library Trustee with the Plattekill Library. “In the past, libraries received a check, now they will be receiving services equal to, or greater than, the amount of money they would have received,” she continued. “Based on funding reductions from the legislature in the past two years, we had to provide county residents with value for their tax dollars, treat member libraries fairly, and get more bang for our buck in the products available,” said association vice-president, James Cosgrove, who is also director of the Marlboro Library. “I think the legislature, member libraries, and county residents will be pleased with the solution we have chosen,” said Cosgrove. The products were chosen for the extent of their reach - which is into every home and business in the county with Internet access. A library card issued by any Ulster library is all that is needed for access. People without home computers can go to any library.

The Association has purchased annual subscriptions including the Historical New York Times, HertiageQuestOnline, and NetLibrary downloadable audiobooks with the \$57,500 received in July. The association looked at a number of knowledge products before making their decision. Many, but not all of the county libraries offered downloadable audiobooks from NetLibrary. Now all of the county libraries, regardless of size can offer this service to their patrons. “County funding helps us to even the playing field, so we aren’t a mix of “have” and “have not” libraries, added Jody Ford, director of the Stone Ridge Library and secretary for the association. Stone Ridge Library had to drop downloadable audiobooks last year for budgetary reasons. “With county funds, we can buy in bulk which makes it affordable for everyone,” said Ford. Along with Stone Ridge, libraries in Rosendale, Town of Ulster, Phoenicia, Pine Hill, and others did not offer this product which allows cardholders to download audiobooks to a computer for listening on a computer or MP3 player.

Perhaps, the most popular item in Hudson Valley libraries is the genealogy product, HeritiageQuestOnline. This item contains digitized records for viewing U.S. federal census records from 1790 to 1930. Digitized versions of books are also available for view or printing. A search on “Ulster County” brings up full-text copies of Old Gravestones of Ulster County, Baptismal and marriage registers of the Old Dutch Church of Kingston: Ulster County, New York, 1660-1809, and many more.

The jewel of the fleet is without doubt the Historical New York Times which displays actual copies of the paper from 1851 to 1999. School children, and adults alike will find

this resource invaluable as a research tool for any number of fields. Ulster public libraries were offered a major discount for the group buy. It is estimated that the 21 Ulster libraries attempting to buy this product on their own would have faced a cost of over \$100,000.

The knowledge products will be unveiled at the Association's dinner meeting. "The Arts, Education and Cultural Affairs legislative committee (that oversees county libraries) challenged us to do the most we could with the limited funds granted," said Amy Raff, association treasurer and Woodstock Library assistant director. After the databases are purchased, all funds remaining will be shared among the 21 libraries for the purchase of children's books. "In future years, we would like to build up the book fund. These databases have fantastic value, but nothing will ever replace the value of children discovering their first book," said Raff.

The Ulster County Library Association will be holding it's meeting at The Gilded Otter from 6 to 9 p.m. on Monday, October 15, 2007. The evening will feature a full buffet dinner, guest speaker, and a brief presentation on the new knowledge products. The guest speaker will be Lisa Phillips, New York Times contributor, former radio reporter, and author of *Public Radio: Behind the Voices*. Phillips, an Ulster County resident, profiled 39 public radio personalities including Garrison Keillor, Ira Glass, and Terry Gross for her 2006 book. She will share stories about her experience and will autograph copies of her book which will be available for purchase.

Members of the county legislature as well as state senators and assemblymen for the county have been invited to attend.

The public is invited to attend. Tickets are \$27 and do not include alcoholic beverages. Contact Jessica Serrano, Director of the Saugerties Public Library at (845) 246-4317 to reserve tickets.

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