



LHS-5

Cooperating for library reference service

The libraries of Irving (191,600), Carrollton (109,600), North Richland Hills (55,600), and Plano (222,000), Texas, have teamed up to offer the Answer Zone, an online, interactive reference service. Residents of the four cities can enter their library card numbers to use the service. They then “chat” online with reference librarians, who can send them Web pages, articles, and other electronic reference materials instantly. The service is primarily used to obtain information on library policies and procedures, resources for homework, and answers to miscellaneous queries, including job-related resources. Each of the participating libraries staffs the Answer Zone for a number of hours on the basis of its population, between 10 A.M. and 6 P.M. every day. The libraries have received state and federal grants for the program, and pay about \$15,000 a year to a service that answers questions in the early morning and evening hours, and \$12,000 a year to license the software. The service receives approximately 125 queries a week.

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