

Got a question?

Local libraries

have the answers

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One person wanted to know if Korean electric eel wallets demagnetize credit cards.

Someone else wanted the names and addresses of all the isolation and flotation tanks in the country. They were referred to the Flotation Tank Association.

Another patron needed details on the Odwira festival, a West African New Year's celebration. It's a yam festival put on by the Ashanti people of Ghana.

Those questions were among the queries handled recently by the Monterey Bay Cooperative Library System (MOBAC), a network of 18 members comprised of public and private libraries in Monterey and Santa Cruz counties.

"We answer about a 100 questions a month and they are all difficult," said Ken Sertic, coordinator of MOBAC. "Sometimes, it'll take a lot of phone calls all over the country to find answers."

But coming up with responses to exotic questions is but one function of the system which mostly tracks down books for people via its inter-library loan project.

In operation in the Monterey Bay area since 1969, MOBAC works through its members to provide patrons with books and answers to questions.

If a book is not found within the network, MOBAC staff, which works out of the basement of the Monterey Peninsula College Library, gets in touch with the 14 other cooperative library systems in the state.

"Or we have the means to find it across the country," Sertic said.

"We open up the information universe for the library patron."

There is no cost for the service. Member libraries put their requests in to MOBAC on

behalf of the patron.

The system's delivery system is made up of a van and driver whose 83 stops a week total 65,000 stops annually.

Later this spring, MOBAC is anticipating delivery of a computerized catalog system. Currently MOBAC relies on a manual system.

Going from an antiquated locator to a modern tool will allow quick "turnaround," Sertic said.

However, MOBAC doesn't have a shabby delivery record, he pointed out.

"We pride ourselves that 90 percent of what is requested through the system is delivered within 24 hours," he said.

Law firms, city officials, military brass and students are the primary users of MOBAC.

"The average person probably doesn't know we exist," Sertic acknowledged.

In recognition of that, the state and federally funded system takes on an underserved segment of the population as a target group every year.

This year, it is focusing its attentions on physically disabled children.

Next year, it hopes to implement an ethnic services project.

"We want to determine what the information needs will be of Hispanic Spanish-speakers," said Anne Turner, chairwoman of MOBAC. "There's no question Hispanics are underserved by the library system."

Since many of the member libraries already provide services for Hispanic children, the proposed ethnic project will concentrate on the needs of adults, Turner said.

MOBAC also puts out a brochure listing the level of access services available to disabled people at all Monterey and Santa Cruz county libraries.