

## Tribute to a Cooperative Pioneer: Bill DeJohn

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Minitex

The New Year brought the end of the influential career of William T. "Bill" DeJohn, whose 50-year career in library collaboration ranged across the United States from Missouri to Illinois to Washington State. He retired at the age of 71 after more than 27 years as director of Minitex, a consortium serving all types of libraries in Minnesota and the Dakotas. Bill died Dec. 31 after a short illness – 11 months after his retirement.

In his time at Minitex, Bill led the organization as it grew from a small staff focused on resource sharing, reference, OCLC support, and a serials union list to a 70-person staff that served 2,200 libraries in Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota. Throughout his career, Bill's primary goal was a simple one -- supporting staff of all types of libraries so they could provide better service to their patrons. He sought to ensure that library users could get the best library and information resources regardless of their location.

Bill's success and the regard felt for him by his colleagues were shown by the number of people who showed up to bid him farewell on Jan. 10, 2012. The retirement party had to be moved to a larger space when replies indicated that more than 250 people were planning to attend an afternoon event in Minneapolis – in the middle of the winter! A man who was not comfortable displaying emotion and reluctant to consider how far his influence had reached, Bill was genuinely touched by the size and enthusiasm of his audience that day.

As he explained, "I just do what I think is the right thing to do. That's what I've been doing since I was a librarian. It's serve the users, help the staff – just what I do."

That simple formula is exemplified by wide-ranging initiatives that have brought all types of libraries throughout the Minitex region together to provide improved services for library users

from Winona, MN, to Williston, ND, and from Duluth, MN, to Hot Springs, SD. These initiatives came to fruition through Bill's dedicated leadership of his staff and his skill in bringing library colleagues together in support of projects that would have been impossible for individual libraries.

The initiatives included:

- Growing a cooperative purchasing program that expanded to include the Electronic Library of Minnesota ([ELM Portal](#)) which provides a collection of research and information databases to be used by Minnesota residents through their school, public, academic, and state government libraries. Some of the resources selected for ELM, which are identified by a task force made up of staff from libraries from Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota, are available through special arrangements for residents of the Dakotas. The ELM collection was one of the first "Big Deal" packages negotiated for a multitype library consortium in the early 1990s. The Minitex Cooperative Purchasing and Electronic Resources Program ([CPERS](#)) provides negotiated discounts for library products and electronic resources that saved Minnesota libraries over \$35.5 million (excluding ELM) in Fiscal Year 2012.
- Participating in the mid-1990s in the Minnesota Library Planning Task Force, a state supported working group of librarians and representatives of business and the public, which provided the genesis for:
  - [MnLINK](#), a two-part initiative that provides a statewide virtual library to link Minnesotans to the state's rich library resources as well as the integrated library system used by Minnesota's publicly supported universities, colleges, and state government units, and
  - [Minnesota Library Access Center](#), which provides storage for 1.48 million im-

portant, but lesser used volumes owned by 21 Minnesota libraries.

- Taking part in the group that founded the Minnesota Digital Library (MDL) with its signature collection, [Minnesota Reflections](#). MDL has been chosen to be one of seven service hubs for the new Digital Public Library of America. Over its more than 10 year history, Minnesota Reflections has grown to be a collection of more than 135,000 images, maps and documents from more than 150 of Minnesota's cultural heritage organizations.
- Joining with Minnesota's state library agency to form the [Minitex/State Library Services Standards Review Task Force](#), which brought together staff from all types of libraries - and experts from outside the library community as needed - to draft standards and best practices documents on topics ranging from minimal bibliographic standards, to bar codes, to indexing standards for bibliographic records, to Z39.50 attribute set recommendations, to data privacy, to digitization, to open linking.

These and other projects grew because of Bill's work with library leaders and libraries throughout the Minitex region. In his early years with Minitex, Bill put uncounted miles on his vehicles, visiting with library staffs from International Falls to Worthington, MN, from Rapid City, SD, to Grand Marais, MN. Bill and his staff worked to bring together librarians who, although they had common interests and common needs, did not come together because of geographic or library type diversity.

Bill's interests also reached beyond the narrowly defined library sphere. He was just as likely to attend a meeting of the Minnesota [P-20](#) Educational Partnership to make sure that "libraries were at the table" as he was to attend meetings of the professional library associations in Minitex's three states. He made sure that members of the Minitex Policy Advisory Council had access to the *Harvard Business School Newsletter* and that Minitex participated in the National Information Standards Organization and the Coalition for Networked Information.

Everyone who knew Bill was devastated to learn of his metastatic cancer diagnosis less than a year after his retirement. Somehow, the idea that Bill would not live to see the full fruits of his long years of work and would not be able to provide guidance for those of us still working to do the "right thing for the library user" seem almost incomprehensible. He will be missed - greatly.

A Facebook tribute from one of his Minnesota library colleagues summed up our wish: "Bill was a wonderful man. Rest in peace. May heaven be filled with books and newbies."



"One of my fondest memories is of Bill and his wife, Kathi, and their pride in their numerous Newfoundlands - Kathi's pictures of the large, calm creatures became a hallmark of Bill's presentations." - Cecelia N. Boone