

Remarks
Mary Alice Harvey
March 16, 1989

It is an honor to be here today. It is very fitting that this award be named for John R. Finnegan whose life long commitment to providing information and his advocacy of free access to information has so enriched and influenced our state. I am also pleased that the role librarians play in providing access to information is being recognized. Because I am a librarian in a small town I am inclined to see the general issues about information in very personal terms of what they mean to individual people. When I lobby for continued access to the information the federal government has collected, I do it not just because of the principle involved, but because a local school district needs the statistics in order to make a decision or a small businessman needs information for product development or marketing, and his success has an impact on our whole community. In the library where I work we are conscious of the influence of rising postal rates to access. Some of our patrons live 60 miles from the library and may come to town only a few times a year. They are accustomed to asking to have books mailed to them, but with rising postal rates and tight budget we are not as eager to do that as we used to be. Minnesota's wonderful multi-county, multi-type library system, which has been a model for other states, makes almost any library material available to almost anyone, but will the cost of postage limit the willingness of small libraries to make use of it?

Are the slower methods of obtaining information adequate in the electronic information age? A doctor in a small town needs a journal article available at the U of M medical library, it will be photocopied and mailed to him and he will receive it within a couple of weeks, unless his local library can afford a telefax machine and phone line and then he will have it the same day. We must be alert to the danger that the cost of equipment, trained personnel, on line charges, and telephone costs do not cut some individuals, organizations and communities off from the information they need. If we want to maintain Minnesota's leadership in education and quality of life, we need to find solutions that assure access of information to everyone.

I want to thank you for the honor of this award and I accept it as a mandate to continue the ongoing battle for access to information for everyone.