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Linda Jusino (foreground), Lakewood, and her sister Arleen Blanco, Howell Township, use computerized library system in Monmouth County Library, Manalapan Township.

Computerized libraries make finding data easy

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Focus

THE SOPHISTICATION of hi-tech computers is transforming the traditional library — literally putting it at one's fingertips.

County library officials say that by the end of the decade most reference information will be capable of being retrieved from data bases by patrons using personal computers.

"We really have just begun to scratch the surface," said Sharon Kormazin, director of the East Brunswick Township Library. "Some of the advances in technology are so mind-boggling, it is hard to grasp."

A relatively new information format aimed at libraries is the interactive videodisc.

The New Jersey Library Association is sponsoring a morning workshop on this information process with Dr. Ching-chi Chen at 9:30 a.m. March 30 at the Monmouth County Library headquarters, Symmes Drive, Manalapan Township.

Dr. Chen, a professor and associate dean of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at Simmons College, Boston, developed the revolutionary videodisc process that can store as much as 60,000 printed pages on a single disc.

"Dr. Chen ... is on the cutting edge of information technology," said Renee Swartz, chairman of the Monmouth County Library Commission.

Many libraries in central New Jersey have found that placing their card catalogs on a computer data base frees the files for a speedier and easier search for reference information.

But even with all of the rapid advances in computer technology, librarians said, the present-day library will not completely go the way

See **COMPUTERIZED**, page D2

Computerized libraries make finding data easy

From page D1

of the Edsel and the dinosaur. They point out that computers and data bases will not replace the printed word in the foreseeable future.

"For people only used to dealing with the printed word, this could be pretty intimidating stuff," Mrs. Kormazin said.

Elaine A. McConnell, director of the Ocean County Library, said the technological evolution of library science during the last 20 years has prompted many librarians to be retrained to keep abreast of advances.

"There is no profession that can afford to remain constant," Ms. McConnell said, "because without education you can become stagnant."

Only 10 years ago, Ms. McConnell said, there would not have been a need for a computer reference librarian for Ocean County's 14-library system. The Ocean County library system has 600,000 volumes and employed 55 librarians, she said.

"There will be a change in the face of

Focus

the library as we know it, in terms of how we store information," Ms. McConnell said.

By the end of this year, Ms. McConnell said, Ocean County library patrons will be able to dial into the system's data base to search for reference material.

"But you will still have to come to the library to pick up the material," Ms. McConnell said.

The electronic phase that public libraries are experiencing is a natural progression, given the growing computer awareness of the public it serves, said John H. Livingstone Jr., director of the Monmouth County Library.

Livingstone said the 1,050,000-volume Monmouth County library system already has on-line search capabilities and an audio/video center is being planned.

"The library of the '90s certainly will be different, but there will be certain things you will not see on data base," Livingstone said. "People still like to check a book out, take it home or walk

on the beach and read it."

Although many public libraries are firmly entrenched in the use of a computer data base, the advent of the videodisc has new possibilities for information retrieval and research, librarians said.

"That is why this workshop was convened, so we can learn more about the videodisc," Livingstone said. "Because it is so new we don't know too much about it."

Ironically, when the videodisc entered the electronic market in the late 1970s, the process was geared primarily to entertainment. Now, it is proving to be an important research instrument, librarians said.

Dr. Chen developed the groundbreaking "Project Emperor I: China's Treasure Revealed via Videodisc Technology." The project delved into the excavation of the tombs of Xian, the burial place of Shih Huang-ti, first emperor of China, who ruled from 221 to 206 B.C.

With amazing speed, a viewer can skip to any frame on the Project Emperor I's 108,000-frame videodisc in about 1½ seconds, Dr. Chen said.

Project Emperor I was produced on two videodiscs, Dr. Chen said, with the first consisting of videotaped, filmed and still footage of the burial site and its artifacts. The second includes interviews with 10 experts on Chinese history and the recent archeological finds.

There also is a narration in English and Chinese.

"It is truly multimedia because we can deliver any information the people want," Dr. Chen said from her Boston office. "Based on people's interests, they can find the information they want instantly."

Since she completed the nine-month production of Project Emperor I in 1985, Dr. Chen has logged more than 300,000 miles in preaching its virtues.

Dr. Chen said Project Emperor I was created using a \$270,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and \$56,659 in matching funds from Simmons College.

The cost of pressing a master videodisc runs about \$3,600, with copies about \$20 to \$25. However, the real expense is the production costs that can range from \$5,000 to \$2 million, depending on the magnitude of the project, Dr. Chen said.