

CONTACT: Lori Bell, Alliance Library System, lbell@alliancelibrarysystem.com

John Walber, LearningTimes, john@learningtimes.net

Alliance Library System and LearningTimes Announce ATLAS

Alliance Library System (ALS) and LearningTimes are pleased to announce the debut of ATLAS (Alliance Trail to Learning and Syndicated Sites) at <http://www.atlaspodcasts.org>. ATLAS is a new set of social media tools ALS is using to promote information and historical photos about Illinois history. ALS and LearningTimes partnered to create this innovative and exciting new model of collaborative digital imaging collections using multimedia and social networking tools to bring historical times to life, and involving a community at large in its creation. The project debuted June 29th with an online conference. A recording of the event is available at <http://www.atlaspodcasts.org/webcast-2009-06/>. The Cullom-Davis Library at Bradley University will serve as the first partner library to produce additional podcasts on Illinois history to be added to the site. They were involved in the first set of ten podcasts, providing the material for the five from Peoria.

At the heart of the ATLAS project are digital images of historic people, places, documents and objects. The images are combined with audio descriptions and placed on a map of Illinois to produce an engaging new interactive learning model for libraries and their customers.

The project began with ten short high-quality podcasts about nineteenth century Illinois and famous women from the first hundred years of statehood. Produced in association with LearningTimes, each podcast spotlights a specific person or topic area. ATLAS visitors are able to mouse over a city in Illinois and select a story of interest, featuring engaging commentary and information. A searchable database allows users to search sound files, narratives and photographs. The programs may be enjoyed right from the ATLAS site, or downloaded to a portable audio player.

The ATLAS site will support dozens of additional podcasts. To encourage continued growth and wide participation, LearningTimes trained over 50 librarians from all over the state to produce their own podcasts. Based on the popular LearningTimes program "Producing Great Audio and Video Podcasts," these online workshops offered concrete approaches for bringing each of the elements of a great podcast together. Participants learned the practical skills and techniques they need to produce high-quality, highly engaging audio and video podcasts. Participants are expected to share two images relating to Illinois history and additional podcast modules which will become part of the project website.

"We are thrilled to introduce this exciting new tool to the library community" said Kitty Pope, ALS Executive Director. "As we dig our way out of this recession, Central Illinois libraries are embracing their new role as the one community organization that crosses all boundaries and creates a forum to work together. I believe ATLAS will highlight this emerging role and build a bridge for inter-agency cooperation. I can see libraries working with a whole new group of folks on this project, from the small business to

historic sites and recreational facilities, the opportunities for creating podcasts to add to the map are endless. This is a great project, for these challenging times.”

“We are delighted to be the first library partner in this exciting historical project and have a lot of wonderful material to contribute,” stated Barbara Galik, Director of the Cullom-Davis Library at Bradley University. “Our Access Services Librarian, Skip Burhans, will work with students to research selected topics, choose images, and write and produce podcasts for the site.”

LearningTimes CEO John Walber added: “We are honored to participate in this unique program. ATLAS enabled us to combine our skills in online community development, podcast production and training, and map-based podcasting, with the great stories of Illinois heroes. We hope this is just the beginning of a great and expanding future for the ATLAS collection.”

To participate in upcoming ATLAS events, join the ATLAS google group at <http://groups.google.com/group/AllianceATLAS?lnk=gcimv>

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