

# Little Enterprise on the Prairie



Laserfiche forms the foundation of an enterprise system that unites Marshall, MN, with Lyon County

Win-win situations are not good enough for information technology staff in Marshall, part of Minnesota's Lyon County. They've got to have win-win, win-win.

That's because the Marshall school district, its city hall, municipal utility department and the Lyon County government all have built their IT infrastructures around Laserfiche. So when one part of the quartet undertakes improvements to Laserfiche, everybody benefits—and it seems that the improvements aren't stopping any time soon.

"That's the thing about Laserfiche," says Todd Pickthorn, an IT expert with the Marshall School District. "Once you've completed one project with Laserfiche, your eyes open up to the new projects that are possible. That's been the case with all the agencies we're working with. When one makes an improvement, everybody reaps the rewards."

In a world where government bureaucracy is the norm, the Marshall collaboration's streamlined operations are a remarkable accomplishment which is earning national acclaim—and in an arguably unexpected part of the world.

Marshall, a quiet prairie town, is 40 miles from the nearest interstate and 200 miles from Minneapolis. Yet in the late 1990s, a forward thinking group of residents and elected officials calling themselves "Prairie Net" vowed the information superhighway was going pass a lot closer than Interstate 29 in South Dakota. Monthly meetings were held, resolutions were passed, grants were received and bonds were issued. And with official commitment clear and money in hand, Marshall soon had ISP providers waiting to wire up the community. It took a few years but eventually a brand new fiber optic cable stretched some 75 miles from Sioux Falls, SD, down every street in Marshall.

Next step was deciding what to do with that cable. Prairie Net knew it was crucial to provide Web access to serve the whole community, including residents, government and businesses alike. And they knew Laserfiche was going to play a large part in it, they just weren't sure how to go about it. That's where planning came in.

"It's all about planning and having the group meetings where we all talk about our road map for this system and how to plan on using Laserfiche down the road," Pickthorn says. "We knew that having that new fiber optic cable in place opened a lot of opportunities to us."

It was in those meetings that the idea surfaced to have a shared document management system connected by the new cable. Prairie Net recognized that different government agencies were responsible for similar tasks in their respective offices—and that duplication of effort would be eliminated by having all their records maintained in a single location.

Bringing four distinct government operations together under one IT roof was no small task. City Hall and the city's utilities already shared a Laserfiche system, while the school district and county had their own systems. The district decided to merge their system with

## Organization Profile

Marshall, MN, a quiet prairie town and home to 12,500 residents, is 200 miles from Minneapolis.

## Situation

Prairie Net, a group of the town's residents and elected officials, was searching for a way to manage information – and share it with residents.

## Solution

A Laserfiche system connects the town with its county, Lyon County, and provides Web access to information for residents.

## Benefits

- With four agencies sharing an enterprise system, costs are managed more easily.
- One IT staff member is able to serve three of the four agencies.
- The Marshall Portal will offer one-stop Web access to information for local government, school district or county government records.

## Laserfiche Components

Laserfiche Server  
Audit Trail™  
E-mail Plug In™  
Quick Fields™ – Barcode Plug-In  
Quick Fields – Real Time Lookup  
Snapshot™  
WebLink™

the city's, and the county followed suit soon after. With an enterprise Laserfiche system encompassing the four different agencies, staff were able to share ideas on its construction, upkeep and expansion.

"Each entity had its own unique challenges on how they wanted to organize and store their data," Pickthorn says. "We were able to take the efficiencies we learned through working with multiple schools and apply them to city government and municipal utility operations. We've been able to take things we've learned through experience, such as file naming conventions and standardization, and apply them throughout the system."

"In a big city it would be very difficult to get something like this done, simply due to the politics involved," says Clayton Baer, software designer for Marshall's Laserfiche reseller Crabtree Companies.

Not to say that there hasn't been opposition, including intervention by the courts when one judge questioned the legality of the collaboration, says Marshall's City Director Harry Weilage. However, the system's success has won over most of the skeptics.

"The last departments in the various agencies that wanted to get into this technology were the financial departments," Pickthorn says. "Now, it's staff in those departments who use Laserfiche the most."

For the four agencies, sharing a single enterprise system means that costs are managed more easily. According to Pickthorn, a single IT staff member is able to serve three of the four different agencies. And with one large system instead of four smaller ones, there is also considerable savings on costs.

"The initial investment is one-quarter of the price," says Baer. "That was probably the biggest selling point when it came to getting grants. Why would we build four separate infrastructures when we could just build one? They all serve the same taxpayers."

There has also been plenty of local attention, particularly through a program that recruited developmentally disabled

residents to undertake some of the scanning needed to get the original paper documents into digital format.

All the attention has helped spread similar collaborations among government agencies in other parts of the state, Weilage adds. In Anoka County, 11 different police departments all use a county-wide enterprise Laserfiche system. Ditto for the 10 school districts in Northeast Metro 916 Intermediate School District.

"Where this might be too expensive in another rural school district, Northwest was able to manage it because they all worked together to create a system that serves the entire school district," Baer says.

Right now, Marshall is in the most ambitious phase of its IT infrastructure project. The Marshall Portal, as it's being called, is a multi-media interactive website with links to every organization and agency in town. Prairie Net now wants to upload the various Laserfiche repositories onto that portal, so town employees will be able to access their work documents from home and students and taxpayers alike will be able to research public records.

"We want to offer one-stop access to information, whether it's local government, school district or county government records," Weilage says. "The Marshall portal will offer quick and easy access to all the information we have in Laserfiche. Whether a resident is looking for sports schedules, meeting minutes or to sign up for Little League, it will all be there."

Marshall has more than its residents in mind with its portal plans. This community of 12,500 hosts three billion-dollar industries—Archer Daniels Midland, Schwan Foods and US Bank—and having all this information on-line is going to be helpful for them as well, according to Weilage.

But ultimately, the benefit of Laserfiche is in how the community—of residents and staff alike—has embraced it.

"You can spend as much as you want on new technology, but the key is getting the most out of it," Weilage says. "That takes getting the community to take advantage of it, and here, they are."

## About Laserfiche

A resource for more than 25,000 public- and private-sector organizations around the world since 1987, Laserfiche creates simple, elegant document management solutions that help organizations run smarter. From streamlining digital records management to automating the agenda process, Laserfiche helps improve efficiency while integrating easily within any environment.

## Your Next Step

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