

Calendar

Web-Savvy Travelers

Library Offers Pointers

Having an older sibling can be handy in many ways. Listen to this one, speaking to her younger sister on the phone addressing the subject of their planned Easter vacation together in Florida. Apparently, she has spent a solid morning finding travel resources for them on the Internet.

"I'm such a stud. I got the rental car down to \$209 for the week. Dollar had a special on convertibles. I'll give you this really good site that has everything. It's www.bnm.com [BreezeNet's Guide to Airport Rental Cars]. They list all the companies and

give you a snapshot of all the rates. I got it using my 'direct-hit' thing [the search engine www.directhit.com], which is fabulous."

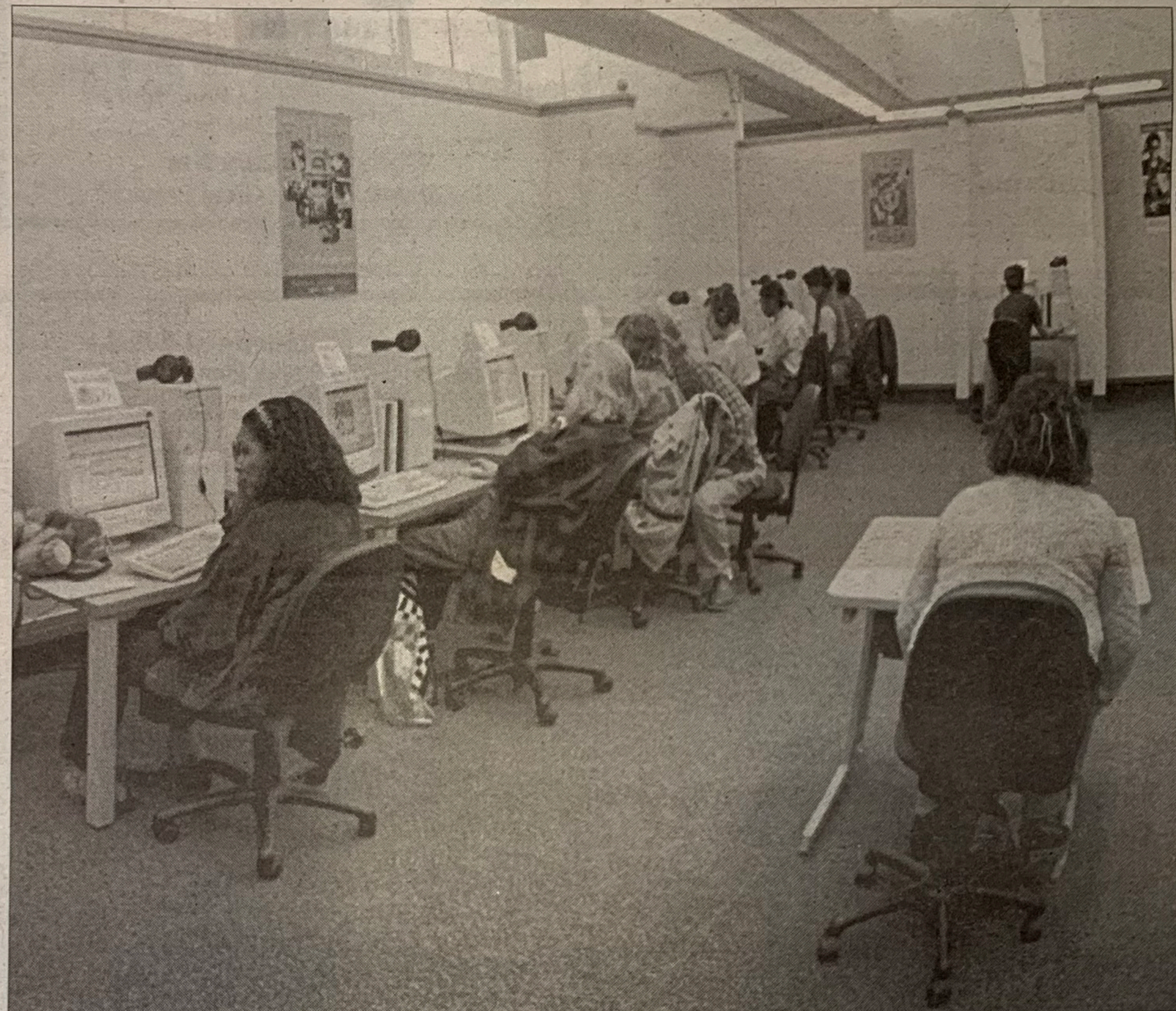
"What about the hotel?"

"Well, if you go to www.clayhotel.com, it's got the hotel's history, it's got all this stuff. It's very cool. It says 'very Mediterranean, blah, blah, blah, corner of narrow Spanish village.' It's partly a youth hostel..."

"What?"
These sisters are aged 49 and 51. "... except there are two buildings, and I got us into the more expensive one, with 120 period private rooms. 'Generous amenities for the money.' It says it's where Desi Arnaz created the rumba craze. Al Capone's gambling den was there. It looks very cool. You can see pictures and such on the site. So that's, like, 70 bucks a night. The car's a hundred each. I'm mean, we're getting this down to zilch. So this is all good."

Questioning further, younger sister discovered that the hotel, in Miami's South Beach, was mentioned in a *New York Times* article. Older sister hadn't found the place on the Internet until she already had the name of it and been assured of its acceptability by the *Times's* imprimatur.

It's also true that younger sister tried BreezeNet herself, and did not find the convertible special. When she clicked on the spot where she was directed, the screen that came up said, "Sorry, this promotion has expired." It seems that older sister, being given the same message, called Dollar and was insistent about getting the cheaper rate. Younger sister is not adept at that kind of maneuvering; she would have paid the nonspecial \$48 a day, along with all the other,



San Diego Central Library computer room

less assertive types, whether she had Internet prowess or not.

Younger sister has, however, been successful in the past at finding other Internet travel resources, including www.travelocity.com. Since she has booked flights with it between Boston and San Diego several times, it periodically sends her e-mail, giving her the latest cheap fare on that route. Right now it's \$188 round trip. Very tempting. She got her Florida tickets through travelocity, too.

Still, she could use some more pointers for planning future trips, as well as a little more moxie, it appears from her BreezeNet experience.

The pointers, at least, are being offered this week at the downtown branch of the library. Library assistants in the brand-new computer lab will present a free one-hour class on how to find the best travel resources on the Internet. Basic computer experience — using the mouse, etc. — is required,

says library assistant Albert Elguira. So are reservations for one of the 19 spots in the class.

"There are so many sites out there that pertain to travel," Elguira says. "It can be difficult to sort through it all for the first time. People can bypass the travel agent and do it themselves, but they have to be able to figure out what is legitimate and what is not, and what is up to par with current standards."

Some of the information in the training manual that the library assistants will use is the result of the experiences of the librarians, says Elguira. "We have library people who have used those sites themselves." The rest was derived from books (after all, it is a library) and from what Elguira calls "on-site directories."

Among the Internet sites the library has chosen to highlight is www.expedia.com. "This is a very comprehensive site, all-in-one package

deal," says Elguira, sounding like a travel agent himself. "You can book your flights through them, your cruises, car rentals, accommodations, everything. We'll also be telling people about www.priceline.com," which is similar to travelocity.

One reason the sisters are going to Florida is to visit their father, who lives in Boca Raton. They decide that they'll take him out for Easter dinner after their time in South Beach. Before they hang up, they agree to find a good restaurant — where else? — on the Internet.

— Jeanne Schinto

Finding Travel Resources on the Internet
Tuesday, January 30,
2:30-3:30 p.m.
Computer Lab Central Library
820 E Street Downtown
Free
Reservations: 619-238-6621

Local Events
page 59

Classical Music
page 70

Art Museums & Galleries
page 72

Theater
page 75

Pop Music
page 79

Movies
page 105

Restaurants
page 114