

CONNECTION

NEW ENGLAND'S JOURNAL

OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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The **New England Board of Higher Education** is a nonprofit, congressionally authorized, interstate agency whose mission is to foster cooperation and the efficient use of resources among New England's approximately 260 colleges and universities. NEBHE was established by the New England Higher Education Compact, a 1955 agreement among the states of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont.

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EDITOR'S MEMO

You've heard the conventional wisdom about the Information Revolution's world-shrinking power. Your next email might just as easily go to Bangalore as Bangor. Your new colleague might just as well be in Sydney as Stamford. Your old regional affinities seem parochial in a world measured in mouseclicks.

Not so fast. If you're a New Englander, chances are the Internet and other information technologies are most notable for how they bring you closer to people whose *physical* existence already intersects with yours—people with whom you share common problems and opportunities, people you can visit in the flesh when the convening power of technology won't do.

Which is to say that the highly digitized ether may prove to be a more fertile place for regionalism than *terra firma*, carved up as it is in New England by good fences, Colonial political boundaries, turf animosities and indifference.

Sensing that cyber-regionalism is not the oxymoron some would suggest, the New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE) recently unveiled a comprehensive gateway to New England on the Internet, aptly named *New England Online* and accessible on the World Wide Web at www.newenglandonline.org.

The new one-stop Web resource provides information and links in six different areas: *About New England* features general information on the six-state region. *Education* contains links to New England's 260-plus colleges and universities as well as sources of student financial aid and K-12 resources. *Government* provides vital information on New England state governments and links to key agencies and legislative resources. *Business and Economy* features access to updated workforce data and links to trade groups and economic development organizations. *Civil Society* includes links to the region's rich array of community service organizations. And the ambitiously titled *Life* section offers a range of information on New England media, arts, communities, recreation, tourism, weather and more.

New England Online was launched with financial support from AT&T and the cooperation of the New England Governors' Conference and the New England Council, the region's oldest business organization. It is the technical product of NEBHE intern Jonathan Bertsch and Director of Publications and Information Systems Charlotte Stratton.

The site was conceived by NEBHE's New England Public Policy Collaborative in response to repeated calls from New England leaders and commentators for more regional cooperation, especially a more visible and centralized regional Web presence.

For example, last year when NEBHE invited six forward-looking New England political figures to take part in a mock *Race for Governor of the State of New England*, two "candidates," Connecticut state Senate President Kevin Sullivan and former New Hampshire state Rep. Deborah "Arnie" Amesen, quipped that the capital of New England should not be, say, Boston or Hartford, but instead something along the lines of "www.ne.gov."

"That suggests that we have a technological and symbolic context in which to think differently about what it means to be a region," noted Sullivan.

A year earlier, regionalism expert Neal Peirce told a NEBHE conference: "We must use the Internet to create the virtual region (metropolitan or multistate) that politics denies us—a home for all the reports, analyses, updates, benchmarks, citizen goals, commentaries, debates that a healthy and competitive society should have. Yet New England, known as a high-tech region, presents a pitiful image on this, the high-tech medium of our time."

Added Peirce: "Any region that could give us such economists as Michael Porter and Lester Thurow ought to have basic economic material available quickly and easily."

Peirce suggested further that a strong New England Internet presence would allow businesses, organizations and potential customers from around the globe "to see an aware, customer-oriented, self-critical, mature, adaptive, promising region," while helping New England media outlets offer better news coverage and bringing together the region's college students, high school students and civic organizations.

New England Online may do all that and more. But only if it is a truly regional effort with plenty of input from people like you.

John O. Harney is executive editor of CONNECTION.