

Illinois library officials are miffed by loss of free phone directories

By Jessica Seigel

Faced with having to pay for telephone directories they previously got for free, Illinois library officials say the public interest has suffered a major blow.

Five months of negotiations that began when librarians threatened to picket Ameritech over the company's unwillingness to continue giving directories to libraries ended Monday after library negotiators rejected the phone company's final offer of a \$50,000 credit to buy phone books.

More than 600 libraries statewide would have had to share the \$50,000 credit.

One complete set of U.S. telephone directories costs about \$30,000, and a set covering the nation's top 60 markets costs about \$1,200, according to Ameritech.

In the past, Ameritech has supplied more than \$400,000 in free phone books to Illinois libraries each year, but the company rejected the librarians' request for \$250,000 in free directories this year.

"That \$250,000 works out to 2 cents per Illinois resident," said Robert Remer, deputy commissioner of the Chicago Public Library, who participated in the negotiations.

"Given people's phone bills went up \$2 last month, it's a small price for an important public interest," he said.

"The issue isn't over."

Remer and other library negotiators

said they will decide how to respond before the free book service ends in August.

Ameritech also is cutting back on providing free Illinois phone books to libraries. Twenty full Illinois sets will be supplied to be shared among the state's 18 regional library systems. But individual libraries will get free books only within their own area codes.

Illinois has six area codes, though the Chicago metropolitan area, recently split into two area codes, will still be considered one region.

Ameritech officials say they could not offer more than a \$50,000 credit because of rising costs.

After American Telephone & Telegraph Co. divestiture created many smaller phone companies, each one had to pay for directories outside its region, said Chuck Yoakum, director of public relations for Ameritech Publishing. The company is a subsidiary of Ameritech, which includes the Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio and Wisconsin telephone companies.

"We had to make a business decision, and we tried to be as equitable as we could," he said. Illinois libraries are among the last in the nation still to receive free phone books, according to Yoakum.

Library negotiators say they rejected the \$50,000 credit because that sum would purchase so few phone books that the small number of libraries to get them would be overburdened with

requests for information.

"For what we can get for \$50,000, we can't afford to offer the service," said Mary Goulding, director of reference service for the Suburban Library System, which participated in the negotiations. The south and west suburban system serves 79 public libraries in parts of Du Page, Cook and Will Counties.

Out-of-state phone directories are widely used by business people, people planning a move, would-be vacationers and people wanting to purchase gifts at stores in other areas.

Last year, for example, the Schaumburg Township Public Library received 84,000 requests for information from its complete directories for New York, Illinois and major metropolitan areas nationwide, according to Claire Obrecht, head of serials services there.

The high cost of the phone books means libraries will have to decide which out-of-state directories to stock, if any. Some of the larger libraries keep microfiche copies of some out-of-state phone books, according to librarians.

Phone books are like a public utility that should be made easily available, said Bleue Benton, director of the Hillside Public Library and a member of the negotiating team that met with Ameritech.

"This is a tragedy for the public," Benton said. "We will take some action."