



Happy birthday DLI!

by Robin Redmond, Writer-Editor

It had all the trappings of a birthday party—cake, balloons, excited visitors, special guests and good wishes for future successes. On May 10, 2006 in the Jean Talon Conference Room, former employees, current team members and friends of the [Data Liberation Initiative](#) (DLI) program gathered together to celebrate the DLI's 10th anniversary. Master of Ceremonies, former Director of the Library and 'Father of the DLI' **Ernie Boyko** was on hand to lead the festivities.

The DLI program provides Canadian post-secondary institutions with affordable and equitable access to the most current statistics and data Statistics Canada has to offer. Member institutions pay an annual subscription fee that allows their faculty and students unlimited access to over 20,000 public-use microdata files, databases and census and geographic files in the DLI collection.

Celebrating a decade of growth

When the DLI was first launched in 1996, the total number of members numbered 59 and there were fewer than 10 data centres in Canada's post-secondary schools. Today, there are 69 Canadian colleges and universities on board with the potential for admitting additional smaller institutions to the program, as well as nearly 70 data centres across the country.

Chief Statistician **Dr. Ivan P. Fellegi** was present to help kick-off the celebration. And, in his congratulations to the team for their hard work and tremendous successes, he likened the DLI program on its 10th birthday to a "precocious child" and one that will certainly continue to get his support.

Dr. Fellegi also noted that one of the most revolutionary aspects of the DLI was its use of the Internet at a time when the cyber world was still in its infancy. "In 1996, the Internet was relatively new and the DLI was a perfect opportunity to implement this new resource," he said, adding that, "Even today, the DLI continues to push the envelope in terms of electronic innovation."

Co-chair of the External Advisory Committee, **Chuck Humphrey** of the University of Alberta's Data Library, also took a few moments to thank everyone for their extensive contributions to this project and to stress the importance of successful partnerships among the academic community and Statistics Canada. He said that, "The commitment on behalf of both parties has demonstrated that they are public champions of the program."

Mike Sivyver, Chief of the Data Liberation Initiative Section since 2001, acknowledged several milestones in the course of DLI's existence, including the creation of an FTP infrastructure, which did not exist at that time; implementation of multiple security measures to prevent data leakages; and being the first project at STC to have an open listserv for communications among partners. On top of all of this, the DLI unit has established and maintained a comprehensive data library collection.

"The DLI continues to be an innovative and forward-thinking project," he said, listing a number of other pioneering components put together by the team, including a DLI member newsletter that highlights training



Dr. Fellegi receives a plaque in recognition of DLI's 10th anniversary from Wendy Watkins and Ernie Boyko.

Photo: Robin Redmond.



Mike Sivyver, Chief of the DLI Section, makes a speech.

Photo: Robin Redmond.

information, additions to the data collection, announcements of events and workshops and general news; and, most recently, an official STC guide on how to cite Statistics Canada products, which will be released shortly.

Mike also made the announcement that with his upcoming retirement, he will be leaving the project behind but entrusts it in Health Statistics Division's **Michel Séguin**'s capable hands. After thanking his team, the university representatives and the former DLI members for their support and guidance—and for making his work with the DLI program enjoyable, he wished Michel and the rest of the DLI team continued success with the program.

The birth of DLI

As Ernie Boyko and the 'Mother of the DLI' **Wendy Watkins** from the Data Centre of the Carleton University Library, pointed out, "the DLI had a rather long pregnancy—49 months before it was launched." They presented the story of the birth of the DLI to the guests via a PowerPoint presentation containing historical ephemera such as Committee meeting photos, briefing notes, old e-mails, letters and documentation. It was quite a suitable presentation for a room full of academics and librarians!

The Data Liberation Initiative came about as a way of making public-data files more affordable and accessible for Canadian post-secondary institutions to purchase. "Pre-DLI, a lot of public-use microdata files were available, but schools couldn't afford them. Canadian researchers were actually reduced to buying cheaper U.S. data and dividing everything by 10." Mr. Boyko explained. As a result, the data did not always reflect Canadian trends and left gaps in the results.



**Wendy Watkins and Ernie Boyko tell the story of the conception of the DLI.
Photo: Robin Redmond.**

The situation provoked data librarian Wendy Watkins to write a paper in 1992 entitled: "Liberating the Data: A Proposal for a Proposal," which drew the interest of Ernie Boyko. When this paper reached the attention of the Social Science Federation of Canada, they decided to host a meeting with members of the academic community to discuss strategies to make Canadian data more readily available to educators and researchers.

Statistics Canada and the Depository Services Program played key roles in devising a plan that was acceptable to both STC and the academic community. The long-awaited official approval from the Treasury Board came in February 1996 and the DLI was included as part of the federal government's Science and Technology Strategy.

The program was officially launched by **Dr. Jon Gerrard**, Minister of State for Science and Technology, at a press conference in October 1996.

At the conclusion of its five-year pilot phase in April 2001, the project proved to be an outstanding success, so the Data Liberation Initiative was made into a permanent program situated in the Library and Information Centre at STC. It has been a valuable addition to Statistics Canada and will continue to be an important program in the years to come.