



From left to right: Silas Walsh, Lydia Rocheleau, Genna Black, Leah Watson, and James Knight, volunteers from the Game Loft in Belfast, served as runners at the Strand Theatre in Rockland for Saturday's Camden Conference. They conveyed questions written by members of the audience to be transmitted to the Camden Opera House for discussion by the conference speakers. Said Silas Walsh, "It's wonderful to get involved in the conference because these topics aren't covered in school as well as they are here."

Real-Time Web-Based Conference Feed to Strand

by Melissa Waterman

Camden Conference participants enjoying the presentations from the comfort of the Strand Theatre in Rockland gave high praise to the technology that allowed them to listen to and query the Camden speakers in real time. The Web-based system was devised by Abacus Technology Creations of Camden and was first tested at the Pop Tech! conference last October.

Lorenzo Vincente, from Abacus, managed the interactive system at the Strand Theatre. "At the Camden Opera House there are several cameras, filming the event from different angles," he explained. The images from the cameras go into a switchboard, then they are fed into a video encoder where the images are turned into a digital format. The digital information is sent to a computer server that streams the data to the Strand Theatre via the Web. "Streaming video is like watching TV," Vincente said, "but instead of sending the image through the air, we send it through the Web."

Once the digital information is received by the computers at the Strand Theatre, it is sent to a computer running

Windows Video Player hooked up to the theater's movie projector and projected directly on the theater's screen. There is no lag time between the Camden Opera House and the Strand Theatre.

Participants at the Strand wrote questions for the speakers at the Opera House which were typed into another Web-linked computer in the theater. Those questions, said Vincente, were then downloaded at the Opera House, edited if necessary, and projected onto the Opera House screen behind the speakers for the audience in Camden to read.

"This isn't new technology," Vincente explained. "It's been used around the country before. Ben Cameron [owner of Abacus] brought it to the attention of the Camden Conference board."

Matt Ward, president of the World Affairs Council in Portland, told conference participants after lunch on Saturday that, as part of that council's 30-year anniversary next year, they plan to host the Camden Conference at a site in Portland using this Web-based technology. Conference board members have suggested that in future years the conference could be sent, real-time, to sites throughout the country or the world.