

## **S-R launches on-line service**

*By Tom Sowa/The Spokesman-Review*

The Spokesman-Review launches its cyber cousin today, a World Wide Web-based information service called Virtually Northwest.

Offering stories from The Spokesman-Review and other sources, Virtually Northwest plans to become the fastest, most complete computerized information source in the region, said project manager Dave Bender.

Today's launch coincides with extensive on-line coverage of Sunday's Bloomsday run.

Along with a package of daily news, Virtually Northwest will offer times and statistics for every finisher. Runners also can compare times between 1995 and 1996 and see photos not published in today's paper.

Reaching Virtually Northwest requires access to the World Wide Web and browser software, such as Netscape.

Its address is <http://www.VirtuallyNW.com>. It has been open to users for the past few weeks during its final tuneup.

Virtually Northwest also can be reached with on-line services such as CompuServe or Prodigy through a World Wide Web connection.

"This is not meant to replace the newspaper," Bender said. "It's a way of giving people another way of getting information quickly and in greater depth."

One advantage is access to stories that have appeared in The Spokesman-Review over the past several months.

Every day, on-line readers also will find nearly every local story that appears in any edition of the newspaper. Search indexes can help locate stories by state, by subject or by writer.

"Spokane readers can find all the stories that appear only in our Idaho edition. And Idaho readers can find those Washington stories they don't see in their paper," Bender said.

More than a dozen news photos will be featured daily. But graphics, maps and cartoons will not.

Other items from the daily paper may be added, said Scott Sines, managing editor/opinion and presentation. Those include such features as stock prices and obituaries.

"We really are waiting to see what response readers give us. Depending on what they tell us, that's what we'll try to add," Sines said.

There will be no cost or time limits. Some income will be raised through advertising, Sines said. In a few months, classified ads will appear on Virtually Northwest, he said.

The service also will allow readers to send responses to articles via e-mail to editors or reporters.

Immediacy will be one asset, as the service will give readers fast updates on breaking news.

The recent Spokane City Hall bombing showed that readers wanted fast updates. "The bombing was easily the most popular area" as people were checking out Virtually Northwest last week, Bender said.

Other features include directories not found anywhere else, said Bender.

Two of those are Golfers' Guide and Popcorn Alley. The first gives overviews of golfing information on more than 60 regional courses. The second offers a guide to movie listings and video rentals.

Readers also can find instant weather data, an on-line Bible and a directory of area churches.