Organization History

Pre-PrairieCat

Prairie Area Library System (PALS) was formed in 2004 by the merger of the Heritage Trail Library System (HTLS), the Northern Illinois Library System (NILS) and the River Bend Library System (RBLS). Originally, PALS staff served four library shared catalogs, Heritage Automated Libraries (HAL), Northern Illinois Catalog (NIC), NILSCatT (a CD-Rom union list catalog for non-circulating members), and Quad-Cities Libraries in Cooperation (Quad-LINC).

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PrairieCat was formed in 2006 by the merger of HAL, NILSCatT and Quad-LINC. Some of the former NIC libraries also migrated to PrairieCat at that time, along with a group of previously standalone libraries. PrairieCat was originally on a SirsiDynix Symphony system using IBistro for the public catalog. PrairieCat also briefly used AquaBrowser as a catalog overlay.

In December 2010, PrairieCat became an Illinois Intergovernmental Instrumentality, a separate legal entity from the library system, to protect assets and ensure sustainability.

In July 2011, Reaching Across Illinois Library System (RAILS) formed by merger of the Alliance Library System, the DuPage Library System, the Metropolitan Library System, the North Suburban Library System and the Prairie Area Library System.

In December 2011, nineteen libraries in the Quad-Cities area pulled out of PrairieCat to form RiverShare. In June 2012, six libraries in the Joliet area pulled out of PrairieCat to form Pinnacle Library Cooperative.

In July 2012, PrairieCat migrated to Innovative's Sierra platform. PrairieCat added the Basic Online level of membership in 2013 which has encouraged a number of Union List members to move up to fully circulating on the system. FY15 was the first year where the fully circulating members of PrairieCat outnumbered the Union List members.

In May 2016, the eight Illinois public libraries previously in RiverShare rejoined PrairieCat. In May 2019, the eight former NIC libraries rejoined PrairieCat.

In July 2018, as part of planned independence and sustainability project, support staff resigned from RAILS and were directly hired by PrairieCat. In July 2021, PrairieCat joined IMRF as an organization.