# Monticello's Web Site Gets a Facelift

Even a well-liked, well-known face needs a makeover now and then. The Web site www.monticello.org – the Thomas Jefferson Foundation's visage on the Internet – is no exception.

On Feb. 25, a redesigned Monticello Web site made its debut, the result of more than a year and a half of planning led by Chief Technology Officer Kate Bakich and Webmaster Chad Wollerton.

"From the beginning, we looked at more than cosmetic changes," Bakich said. "Appearance was an important consideration, but the main goal was to make the site easier to use, to make the content more accessible."

The project managers began the task by conducting user testing, enlisting visitors to the house as subjects. Bakich and Wollerton also consulted with Foundation staff members, researchers, and local teachers, and employed pop-up surveys on the site to collect opinions and suggestions. All in all, more than 1,700 people were surveyed.

With research in hand, Bakich and Wollerton contracted technology consultants Dominion Digital to deliver the design. The firm, chosen from a group of six applicants, produced two versions, one of which ultimately got the nod.

The end product has a more streamlined, less cluttered appearance than its predecessor. Dark red banners at the top and bottom of the page border a neat presentation of links, news, and a calendar of events. The image of Monticello near the top of the screen can be switched by refreshing the page.

There was some trepidation about altering a site that had garnered much attention and praise since its launch in January 1996. At first the

MONTICELLO

# Web Site

**The redesigned Web site debuted Feb. 25.**

site was essentially "a detailed brochure," Bakich said, but its scope broadened over the years to keep pace with the Foundation's research initiatives and other programs. Expanding to more than 900 pages of content, the site became a favorite tool for researchers, teachers, students, prospective visitors, and others curious about Jefferson and Monticello. In 2002, the site recorded more than 34 million hits and had 488,599 individual visitors from the United States and 47 other countries, with an average stay of 9 minutes, 37 seconds.

But the site also experienced growing pains. The proliferation of material frequently led to numerous navigational twists and turns in searches for information.

"You had to understand the organizational structure at Monticello to navigate portions of the old site," Bakich said. "The primary goal of the redesign was to make the site more intuitive to the user."

The number of main subject tabs has been reduced, replaced by a more consolidated set near the top of the home page. The buttons more clearly delineate the paths toward information about Jefferson, the house and plantation, research and collections, planning a visit, education, and the Foundation.

The directional cues for all users – including shoppers, gardeners, journalists, and donors – also have improved. And for those who prefer to search rather than browse, the site's sophisticated search function is now easily visible at the top right of each page.

Questions and comments about Monticello's Web site can be sent via e-mail to webmaster@monticello.org.

**COMMENTS? newsletter@monticello.org**