

PALM HARBOR LIBRARY'S HISTORY

EARLY HISTORY

The Palm Harbor Library exists today due to the vision of Mrs. Jeannette Malouf. Ms. Malouf, who was the Vice President of the Palm Harbor Civic Club, suggested to its members in February of 1978 that a library was needed in Palm Harbor. She was a kindergarten teacher at the Ozona Elementary School and was deeply concerned that the children had no library close to their homes. *"The kids I taught were a big reason why I wanted the library. I'd work with them, helping them learn to read, and then it'd be the first of June. School was out and there was nothing for them in the community to help them stay interested in reading."* The Dunedin Library and Tarpon Springs Library were the closest libraries to Palm Harbor, but they were about a twenty minute drive. In addition to the distance, there was a fee that the Palm Harbor residents had to pay because they were not residents of these cities.

The Civic Club's members voted to donate a "start-up" fund of \$400 for a library. Ms. Malouf led the drive to acquire donated books from residents, other libraries, book stores, publishers' overruns, and outdated books and magazines from publishers and distributors. Within two weeks, the book collection had grown to over 500 books. Mr. Bill Honey donated the first floor of a small house at 1205 Omaha Ave to house the library. Mr. John Hutcheons, President of the Civic Club, organized the building of book shelves with lumber donated by "Jim" Yakle of Yakle Lumber. Carpeting for the facility was donated by Mr. "Don" Valk, and Mr. Pert donated lighting improvements.

The Palm Harbor Library first opened its doors to the citizens of Palm Harbor, Ozona and Crystal Beach on April 1, 1978 and the volunteer force had grown to 24. On December 18, 1979 the volunteers formed the Palm Harbor Friends of the Library, Inc.

1980 was a busy year for the library. The library volunteers held a meeting in January to elect officers for the newly formed Friends of the Library and Ms. Malouf was made the first Director of the library. She, along with John Hutcheons, received awards from the Palm Harbor Chamber of Commerce for their outstanding work in the community. By now the library had outgrown its quarters on Omaha Circle and moved into the historic Palm Harbor Methodist Church (currently the Palm Harbor White Chapel) on 12th St. in downtown Palm Harbor in December. The library boasted 10,000 volumes and served about 1,600 families.

The Palm Harbor Friends of the Library held its first annual volunteer appreciation banquet on January 11, 1981 honoring its 49 volunteers. The library hours fluctuated quarterly due to the availability of volunteers. The library operated from the semi-annual book sales and monetary donations. Also, since the number of children that participated was more than the small former church could accommodate, these programs were held in the Palm Harbor Senior Center located nearby.

By the end of 1982 the library served 2,000 families, had around 20,000 volumes and was staffed by 50 volunteers. A new dimension in library service was added when a large print book collection was donated to the library in memory of Lea Gibbons. The library also received \$500 from the county to buy lumber for additional shelving for the library since it was already running out of room for all of its books.

STATE FUNDING EFFORTS

In 1983, the Florida State Library announced that public libraries could apply for as much as \$200,000 for construction grant money under a program administered by the State Division of Library Services. The grant would be included in the 1984-85 state budget. Palm Harbor wanted to apply for a \$200,000 grant but the following two problems had to be addressed in order to meet the grant qualifications:

1. The grant could be made only to a governmental agency. Palm Harbor was an unincorporated area of about 30,000 and had no local government other than the Pinellas County Board of Commissions. This hurdle was overcome when the Pinellas County Administrator said that the county would support Palm Harbor's grant application and act as a facilitator for them.
2. The grant would have to be matched by the community. Again the Pinellas County government provided assistance by agreeing to let the Palm Harbor community use an 8 acre site in the 1500 block of 1 6th St. that would count toward \$100,000 of the matching funds needed from the community. Donations and fund raisers would have to account for the rest.

In late May, the Senate Appropriations Committee, aided by Senator Gerald Rehm, approved the \$200,000 grant and sent it to the House Appropriations Committee. Rep. Peter Dunbar had the grant included in the House of Representatives version of its Appropriations Bill. The bills were sent to a Conference Committee which would settle the differences between the House and Senate versions of the bill. The grant survived the Conference Committee and was sent to Governor Bob Graham for approval. On June 30, 1983, Governor Graham vetoed it. The reason he gave was that the legislature had not given him his tax increase, so he had to cut spending by reducing some unnecessary costs. Rep. Peter Dunbar tried to override the veto in a special session of the Legislature, but failed.

The library would reapply to the legislature for the grant in the following session. Businesses and civic organizations were requested to adopt the library as their cause for 1984. The Republic Bank was the first business to enrich the library's building fund by \$2,000. Other groups such as Inner Wheel, the Junior Women's Club, the Palm Harbor Civic Club, and the Palm Harbor Newcomer's Club held fund-raising drives for the library.

By January of 1984, the Friends had collected \$13,000 towards the building goal. In March, the Palm Harbor Civic Club offered to sell the Palm Harbor Friends of the Library lots 1, 2, 3, and 4 of Block 128 in the town of Sutherland for "\$10 and other good and valuable considerations" for the site of the new library building. This land was located at 1123 Illinois Ave. The Palm Harbor Civic Club would retain the right of first refusal to purchase the property and building with credit given to them for the fair market value of the land if it was sought by either the Civic Club or by another purchaser. The library had \$30,000 by the end of March. It was decided in July that this lot offered by the Civic Club was too small for the proposed library. In August, the residents of Palm Harbor asked the Pinellas County to consider funding a building that would house a county library for residents outside the incorporated area. The Commission said that the people would have to make a formal proposal to them. Later in August, Florida Secretary of State George Firestone pledged to request \$200,000 in matching funds for Palm Harbor to build a library in the next Florida State Budget. Firestone visited the library in September and renewed his support for the library. Fund raising activities for the rest of the year included James Shawweker's pen-and-ink drawing of the Palm Harbor Library/United Methodist Church that was reproduced into posters and note cards, a Literary Ball, and an anonymous gift of \$25,000.

CREATION OF PALM HARBOR SPECIAL FIRE CONTROL DISTRICT

In February, 1985, State Senator Curt Kiser proposed a bill to the State Legislature to create a Special Status District for the area within the boundaries delineated by the Palm Harbor and East Lake Fire Districts. By creating this special district, without becoming a city, Palm Harbor residents would gain the power to tax themselves for various services, including a library and keep their boundaries free from the threat of annexation. That meant Palm Harbor would become eligible for a library construction grant without having to wait for a county-wide system to be established. In April, 1985, an Advisory Committee was formed to assist the Friends of the Library's Board of Directors with building plans and financial help. The Palm Harbor Library' building fund topped \$100,000 in May. The library then re-submitted its

application for the \$200,000 state grant. Senator Kiser proposed that his bill for the Palm Harbor Special Fire Control District (PHSFCD) be decided by July. This later version excluded the East Lake Fire District from the Special Taxing District area because of opposition expressed by some East Lake residents. The bill retained the five-member Pinellas Board of County Commissioners as the area's governing body, but prohibited the Commissioners from levying unwanted taxes on the area. It also contained a provision allowing Palm Harbor residents to override the County Commission if the Commission did not agree to its petition requests. Early in June, Senator Kiser's bill was approved by the Legislature and the Governor signed it.

CREATION OF THE MSTU

The Library had to submit the wording for the proposed November referendum to tax the residents of the newly created Special Status District for the construction of a library by July 15. The county set aside about two to three acres of land for the library board to lease located near the old Palm Harbor Senior Citizens Center on Omaha Circle. The library would need about \$300,000 to build the new building and about \$1,000 per month to pay for utilities and books. One full-time staff member and a volunteer staff could operate the new building. In July, the referendum proposition that would create the library district and set the tax rate to support it was drawn up. It went to the County Commissioners for approval so that they could coordinate it with the County Supervisor of Elections for the Special Referendum election and then be put to the voters. In August, the Pinellas County Election officials discovered that the referendum needed an enabling county ordinance to establish a Municipal Service Taxing Unit (MSTU) for the Palm Harbor Special Fire Control District. This ordinance needed to be voted upon by the County Commission before the Palm Harbor residents could vote on the referendum for the .25-mil ad valorem tax for the library and a companion referendum on local recreation facilities. The Commission had to approve the ordinance by early September in order to advertise the Oct. 15th referendum on Sept. 9th and Sept. 24th. The ordinance would terminate automatically if neither referendum question was approved. The County Commissioners would govern the MSTU by contracting with a non-profit corporation called the Palm Harbor Community Services Agency (PHCSA) to administer the business operation of the district. The PHCSA would consist of 2 officers of the Palm Harbor Friends of the Library, Inc., 2 officers from the Palm Harbor Youth Recreation League, Inc., 2 Board Members from the Greater Palm Harbor Area Chamber of Commerce and one at-large member that would be appointed by the County Commissioners. The MSTU for Palm Harbor had 20,472 registered voters. The cost of the election (\$10,000) was paid for by the library and the Recreation League. On October 15, 1985, both of the referendums passed by wide margins!

PREPARATION FOR BUILDING THE NEW LIBRARY

In November, 1985 the inaugural members of the Palm Harbor Community Services Agency (PHCSA) were Jeannette Malouf and Betty Stegman who represented the Friends of the Library, Jim Sunderman and John Gibbelino who represented the Palm Harbor Recreation League, Dale Belcher and Robert Sippel who represented the Palm Harbor Chamber of Commerce and Jack Latvala was appointed by the Pinellas County Commission.

In February 1986, the library learned that the American Library Association recommended that the new building needed to be at least 15,000 sq. ft. in order to serve a population of 35,000 to 50,000. The only site available from the County to accommodate a building that large was a two-acre plot south of the Palm Harbor Day Care Center at Pennsylvania Ave. The library called for people to write to their legislators and ask for state appropriations for the construction of the library. The building fund stood at \$115,000. The Friends of the Library were asking for donations of money, materials, and services to keep down the cost of the construction. The preliminary plans for a 15,000 sq. ft. building would cost \$750,000.

The Pinellas County Board of Commissioners agreed to lend \$180,000 to PHCSA to help pay some of its start-up costs. In September, PHCSA signed a contract to purchase 3.3 acres on County Road 94 and Nebraska Ave. for \$250,000 or nearly \$75,800 an acre. The Library Board issued a resolution stating that since it wanted the library built as soon as possible, it would approve the Nebraska Avenue site, provided that the appraisal of the land showed that it was worth the \$250,000 asking price. The Library Board hired a librarian to write a report as to the suitability of the Nebraska property versus two other sites that the library had considered. County Administrator Fred Marquis said that the resolution and the report were necessary before the contract for the Nebraska site could be presented to the County Commissioners for approval.

A \$1,620,000 bond issue proposal from the C&S Bank was also accepted by PHCSA in September. This proposal allowed 324 tax-free bonds in \$5,000 increments to be sold to investors to finance the library and recreation facilities. If the bond proposal was accepted by the county, the proposal would provide PHCSA \$1,550,000 by November 20. The bond issue was chosen over conventional financing because of the lower interest rates. In December, the County Commissioners approved the purchase of the property on Nebraska Avenue for the site of the new Palm Harbor Library. The county also approved to loan the money to PHCSA. Architects Ted Prindle and Don Davidson were selected to design the new library building and by March 1987, the preliminary site and floor plans were completed and submitted to Tallahassee to satisfy the requirements of the \$200,000 construction grant

During the same month, Debra Rhodes was hired to be the Library Director. She had a Masters of Library Science from Western Michigan University and came from Portsmouth, VA where she had served as a Library Branch Manager.

The fund raisers for the library continued with donations from the Junior Women's Club, and Antique Doll Show and a raffle of a quilt donated by the Quilter's club. By mid-summer, the final site plan was approved. The Notice of Bid to construct the Palm Harbor Library, issued by the architect Prindle Associates, Inc. of Clearwater, FL was published on July 19, July 26, and August 2, 1987. Lincoln Construction won the bid with \$643,884. The groundbreaking ceremony for the Palm Harbor Library was conducted on August 14, 1987. In recognition of her efforts, PHCSA voted to name the youth room in Jeannette Malouf's honor and so to this very day, it is known as the "Jeannette Malouf Youth Room". Construction started two weeks later. The library was on its way to being completed.

The new library building slowly emerged on the Nebraska site in early 1988. The certificate of occupancy was received in June. Book shelving was delivered in June and the books transferred to the new building. On July 5, 1988, the Palm Harbor Library officially opened its doors for business. Dedication of the building was on Sunday, September 17, 1988.