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Florida Library History Project

St. Lucie County Library System

As early as 1903, a small group of citizens in Fort Pierce decided to create a reading room to be set up in the Community Hall, a building located on the site of the present electric power plant (South Indian River Drive).

Having no money, they approached churches, civic organizations (of which there were very few) and individuals to loan books for the enterprise which was manned by volunteer workers.

The second home of the "reading room" was in the Cobb Building at the foot of Avenue A (in Fort Pierce).

In 1913 the Women's Club residence was built and that organization volunteered to house and manage the "reading room". The Women's Club was the home of the "reading room" until 1950, when it was moved to an old house in the 7th Street Park owned by the City of Fort Pierce.

The St. Lucie County Library Association was founded in 1946 - the principal factor being a bequest by the late P. P. Cobb to the Women's Club for library purposes.

This organization started with \$1,000 in the treasury. The first president was E. C. Collins and the head of the Finance Committee was Dan McCarty, under whose leadership a group of dedicated citizens raised \$15,000 by door-to-door solicitation. The City of Fort Pierce donated two lots located on 2nd Street and Atlantic Avenue which were sold to the News Tribune for \$8,250, making a grand total of \$23,000 in the treasury.

Ground was broken in 1952 for the new building on the land given by the City of Fort Pierce to the Library Association. This land is the site where the Main Library currently resides. In 1954, the library was opened to the public with a professional librarian; but, no books and furniture.

The City of Fort Pierce and the Women's Club moved 1,000 books from the 7th Street Park building and a hard core of library friends went to work supplying enough furniture and material to permit operation of this institution. The Florida State Library loaned St. Lucie County 2,000 books to help open the library and donations of books and furniture were accumulating from church groups, civic organizations and individuals.

In 1958 a Stack Room was added to the building and the library started their Bookmobile Service (through Federal grant funding). Also, in 1958, the St. Lucie County Library Association entered into a contract with the Okeechobee County Commission to form a regional library system. There was one (1) library in each County, with the Fort Pierce facility being designated as the headquarters. The St. Lucie-Okeechobee Regional Library System, as it was called, was governed by a Board of Directors consisting of five (5) members from the Library Association and five (5) members appointed by the Okeechobee County Board of Commissioners.

In 1967 a "Big Addition" to the library was completed at a cost of \$111,000: two-thirds of the funding came from Federal funds and City and County Commission each contributed \$25,000. A dance was held to raise funding for furniture and equipment. The results, after expenses, was \$5,5000 (quite a bit of money for that time period).

On December 7, 1970 the Lincoln Park Branch Library was opened in a building provided by the Fort Pierce Housing Authority. A federal grant was received which helped provide equipment and materials. When the site opened it had 2,000 catalogued books on the shelves ready for circulation. This facility lasted a very short time.

On December 1, 1971 the Port St. Lucie Branch Library was opened in a new building constructed and donated by General Development Corporation to St. Lucie County and the Regional Library Board. Funding for furniture and equipment was obtained through door-to-door solicitation as well as contributions from the City of Port St. Lucie, St. Lucie County Board of County Commissioners and the Library Association, as well as some State-Aid funds set aside by the Regional Board.

In 1972 the Regional Board approved the purchase of a new bookmobile and the

sale of the old vehicle. In May 1973 the new bookmobile went into service and a gala Open House was held to celebrate the library's 20th anniversary.

In 1977 several things happened. The St. Lucie-Okeechobee Regional Library System ceased to exist, with St. Lucie and Okeechobee County each assuming the responsibility for providing library service. The St. Lucie County Library System became a part of County government with all funding provided by that agency of local government. The County Commission authorized the establishment of a Library Advisory Board, the board consists of nine (9) members, six (6) appointed by the Board of County Commissioners and three (3) appointed by the Friends of the St. Lucie County Library.

In 1981 the Port St. Lucie Branch Library was expanded from 1500 square feet to 4500 square feet. Funding for this expansion came from the Board of County Commission, the Friends of the St. Lucie County Library and local fund-raisers in Port St. Lucie. Several mobile units were established in the 1980's to determine the need for additional library services. One unit was placed at 7508 Jennings Way (Lakewood Park) and another unit was placed at 606 North 29th Street (Fort Pierce). Both of these mobile units showed the need for additional library services and two new branch facilities were built.

In 1987 construction began on a 10,000 square foot building in Lakewood Park. The land was donated to the County by the Lakewood Park Homeowner's with a \$1.00 lease. Library Services and Construction Act funding was obtained for the new library. The first new facility built in 18 years. The Friends of the Library donated \$60,000 towards furniture and equipment for this facility which opened in late 1989.

Also in 1987 the Friends of the St. Lucie County Library purchased a piece of property on North 29th Street and Avenue D for the construction of a new library. The Friends donated this land to St. Lucie County with the stipulation that a new building would be built within five (5) years or the land would be returned to the Friends of the Library. In 1991 ground was broken for the new Zora Neale Hurston Branch Library and it was opened in December 1991. This 5,200 square foot facility was designed to eventually become a 10,000 square foot facility. LSCA funds were also obtained for construction of this facility.

St. Lucie County took their first step in joint funding of a library facility with the construction of the Morningside Branch Library in Port St. Lucie. A grant was written by the St. Lucie County and the St. Lucie County School Board to obtain funding through a Community Education Facility grant to build a facility which would serve the public and the Middle School slated for construction on Morningside Boulevard. A grant of \$792,892 was received for partial construction of this facility with the remaining funds coming from the Board of County Commissioners. The Friends of the St. Lucie County Library also contributed \$40,000 towards equipment and furniture. This 20,000 square foot facility opened on January 2, 1993 with much support of local residents and kudos for such a wonderful facility.

In 1995 an unique facility was opened in St. Lucie West. Indian River Community College built a library, which was being used temporarily as classrooms. An interlocal agreement was signed between IRCC and the Board of County Commissioners and IRCC also signed an interlocal agreement with Florida Atlantic University for library services. This is the first cooperative library of its kind in the State of Florida. St. Lucie County Library (through State Aid funding) pays for contracted services for staff and provides a popular reading collection and periodicals for the general public. The public now has the ability to access electronic databases, search the World Wide Web and have internet email accounts at this facility. We are on our way to the virtual "library without walls" with this facility.

1995 was the beginning of still another cooperative venture between the City of Fort Pierce, the St. Lucie County Board of County Commissioners and the Friends of the St. Lucie County Library. Through a charrette held in January 1995 and the redevelopment plans for Downtown Fort Pierce, a new Branch Library concept began to take place. A grant was submitted in May 1995 with St. Lucie County being ranked number 2 in the State for their proposal with the outcome being a grant of \$400,000. The new Branch facility should break ground during the summer of 1998 with the new site opening in the fall of 1999.

Written and compiled by: Susan B. Kilmer/Library Manager April 1998