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Palm Springs Public Library

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Florida Library History Project

Palm Springs Public Library

1978-1988

The Jeanette J. Guerty Palm Springs Library celebrates its tenth anniversary in a beautiful new building which is the pride of the community. From one small room in Village Hall nearly two decades ago to today's state-of-the-art facility is a long journey, made possible by people who were, and still are, dedicated to the establishment and growth of a Village library.

In the early 1960s, Bobbe Taffel proposed a resolution to the Village Council to start a library. "I pushed it at each meeting," she said in a recent interview. "I'd bring it up and they'd say, well, we're not ready, or whatever, and then, when I was Vice-Mayor ... they said yes, and it knocked me off my feet."

"I didn't think that they would say yes," she continued. "The discussion was that they couldn't start a library, where would they put it? So I said 'You can start it anywhere.' I looked around and I found that little closet, behind the desks where we were meeting, and I said, 'Hey, you know, you could keep it right there.' They said okay ... it was a pretty rotten place, but anything to get it started!"

The Village published a flier, asking residents to donate books. Mrs. Taffel recruited her friend Janet Walker to help with the library project. Both women were classroom teachers, and both were taking graduate library science classes at the time.

"Those donated books came in," said Mrs. Walker, "Every type of book on the market, including comic books which we should have saved--they'd be worth a fortune now!"

Mrs. Walker volunteered to organize and catalog the collection. "I said I'll write Gaylord [library supply company] and order just the minimum amount to get us started. Cards, card pockets, date due slips, a dater, boxes that divide cards alphabetically. And here are all these books totally unclassified ... it was a big

mess! I worked six weeks--I took a lot of that work home--and I put them in some semblance of order. I had the authority to do that because by that time the mayor backed it wholeheartedly and gave me authority to do as I felt professionally best."

Volunteers, including Ban Robinson, Shirley Kohl, Mary Lou Seaman, Mary Schwenk, Norma Lasko, and Charlotte Lynch worked at the new library, making sure to keep regular hours so residents would know when it was open.

The Village Council established a Library Board, with Barbara Jette as Chairman. "She really took a full hand in trying to get the library going," said Mrs. Walker, who applied to serve on the Board. Other early Board members included Thelma Lowenkron, George Silverman, Moses Lennon, Victor Muller, Bobbe Taffel, Frances Mooney, and Janet Walker.

When the library outgrew Village Hall, a double-wide trailer was placed on land across the street, where the library parking lot is now. The library shared this space with the Recreation Department. Charlotte Lynch became a paid staff member.

The trailer provided more space, but not enough. Mrs. Lynch recalled, "There was no air conditioning, so we had the doors open ... it wasn't too bad. But it ,%,as just the size, for a library and all those books, why, it was impossible! I put the best sellers on one shelf so that people could see what we had. Then the children had to sit on the steps outside, when we were supposed to be noted for our children's library. But I did the best I could."

Mrs. Lynch had bookmarks printed at her own expense. She closed the library for two hours in the afternoon so that she could eat dinner. Once a month she made out a request list of bestsellers and handed it in to the Village Manager's office. "I don't know where the list went," she said, "but they gave me the money or the books."

Jeanette J. Guerty was elected to the Village Council in the early 1970s. Her favorite cause was the library. She lobbied for monies to fund the first real library building. Soft-spoken but determined Mrs. Guerty urged that revenue from the 1976 Capital Improvements Bond Issue be used to build the library. To honor her efforts, the Village Council named the library after her. Mrs. Guerty died in

September of 1978, just before the opening of the first library building.

Janeen Campanero was appointed library director in 1978, the first professional librarian to hold that position. Dedication ceremonies for the new building were held on November 11 of that year. The new library offered 6,000 square feet for books and activities. Additional staff members were employed, including Eve Johnson as children's librarian.

In 1979, a group of library supporters organized the Friends of the Library. First officers were Berencie Bluestone, President; Lil Newall, Vice-president; Anne Dee, Secretary; Lee Locatelli, Treasurer; and Harry Schloss, Historian. The Friends began to sponsor many programs, including an annual art show. Sarah Gay was elected President in 1980.

Angelica Carpenter took over as director in 1978. With more than 20,000 items in the collection, additional space was needed. In 1985 voters approved a bond issue to enlarge the library by 50%.

The Palm Springs Library today has 9,000 square feet of space, with over 30,000 items for reference and circulation, a fine new children's department, and a beautiful new Multi-Purpose Room with a projection booth. Besides books, the library lends audio and video cassettes, art prints, and record albums. It offers a full range of programs for patrons of all ages.

With the help of Friends, volunteers, and colleagues from other Florida libraries, and with support from the Village Council, Village Manager, and other Village Departments, the library has earned a statewide reputation for excellence.

Tracy Simkowitz
1988

Update - April 1998

We now have about 40,000 items in our collection. We automated by joining the COALA (Cooperative Authority for Library Automation) consortium, using Sirsi Unicom software. We began circulation on the system in December 1997 and still have about 25% of the retrospective conversion to complete. In 1996 (I think) we

offered Free-Net access to the public, and in January 1998 we began to offer full, unfiltered Internet access.

On October 1, 1997, the library joined The Library Cooperative of the Palm Beaches. Through the Cooperative, the library will receive State Aid for the first time this fiscal year. We have worked hard to win State Aid for municipal libraries in Palm Springs.

As part of that effort, the Palm Springs Library took a leadership role in the Florida Public Library Association. The group's articles of incorporation were signed in this library; I served as president; longtime Friends' President Sarah Gay also served on the founding FPLA board.

Locally, the Palm Springs Library has taken a leadership role in founding and supporting BookFest, an annual, regional literary festival. It started in 1991, when I was president of the Palm Beach County Library Association, and Sarah and Harry Gay from our Friends' Board also served on the founding BookFest board. The Village provides strong support for BookFest, donating money and giving many good people to work on it. BookFest has grown and prospered, outgrowing the volunteer organization of the library association, and now the Palm Beach County Cultural Council has assumed responsibility for the 1998 event.

The Palm Springs Library is now state headquarters for the Florida Chapter of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. My mother Jean Shirley began a local critique group for this organization when she moved to Palm Springs in 1984 and later became the Florida Regional Advisor. After her death in 1995, Barbara Casey became Florida Regional Advisor. The Palm Springs Library hosts a statewide workshop each September, co-sponsored by the SCBWI and the Florida Public Library Association. Speakers have included Avi, Gloria Houston, Loreen Leedy, Matt Novak, and many other well-known writers and illustrators. Starting in 1990, my mother and I published three biographies for young people, all from Lerner Publications: Frances Hodgson Burnett, L. Frank Baum, and Robert Louis Stevenson.

Thalia Becak was elected Friends' President in 1997; Sarah Gay continues as Program Chair. Our Friends are well-known in Florida for their active program of activities and they are consulted often by other groups who are starting or revitalizing. They host an annual Book and Author luncheon. Speakers have

included Elmore Leonard, Robert B. Parker, Olivia Goldsmith, and Tananarive Due. They publish an annual newsletter, host monthly programs, earn money by preparing the Village newsletter for mailing, sponsor a baseball team in the Village league, and donate money to the Village Scholarship and BookFest. This year they have filed for incorporation and 501(c)(3) status. I can barely keep up with them!

Our plans for the future include finishing the conversion project this year so that we can offer new programs like a local history project and computer instruction for staff and patrons.

--Angelica Carpenter
April 1998