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Florida Library History Project

Polk County Library Cooperative

On October 1, 1997 the new Polk County Library Cooperative came into existence. This marks a revolutionary new chapter in Polk County's history because for the first time ever there are interlocal agreements between all thirteen municipalities and the county to provide library services to all residents of Polk County with no out-of-city membership charges. For many years the city librarians had worked together to try to find a way to equitably provide services to all residents. All the libraries worked well together and informally shared resources and information, and a reciprocal borrowing agreement had been reached between a number of the libraries to allow patrons of one municipal library to get a card at another municipal library without having to pay for an out of city membership. Most of the thirteen municipal public libraries in the county had well established, well run library services in existence for their city residents, but received no funding means from the State or County to enable them to open their doors to all county residents without charging an out of city membership fee. Several attempts over the years had come close to developing a countywide service, but each time the project would fall through before a system was developed.

Then in 1996 the County applied for and received a grant from the State Library to hire a professional consultant to study the issue of countywide library service again. A series of meetings began in 1997 between the city governments, the city libraries, the county, and the state library to work out a plan for developing a library cooperative. After much hard work and plenty of give and take on both sides an Interlocal Agreement was drafted and signed by all municipalities with a library and the county. An additional bonus that has proven to be quite an asset for the Cooperative was the inclusion of the Polk County Historical/Genealogical Library and the Polk County Law Library in the Cooperative membership. These libraries are non-circulating research libraries and are valued and unique members of the Cooperative.

The County allocated funds to be distributed among the 13 libraries based on a formula set forth in the Interlocal agreement. A Governing Board was formed in

October consisting of one representative from each municipality and one from the County government, A December 1st deadline was met for writing, approving and submitting a Long-Range Plan, Annual Plan of Service, Aggregated Budget, and Aggregated Statistical Report to the State Library. The Governing Board approved a job description for a Cooperative Coordinator and entered into a contract with the City of Bartow to have the Assistant Director of the Bartow Public Library be the new Cooperative Coordinator. Committees have been formed and plans are underway for beginning a delivery system, developing outreach services, and studying technology needs. The libraries are all very excited about the possibilities the future holds and proud to be a part of this wonderful new chapter in Polk County's library history!