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## Pinellas Public Library Cooperative

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# **Florida Library History Project**

## **Pinellas Public Library Cooperative.**

The Pinellas Public Library Cooperative, Inc. was established based upon the passage of a referendum in March 1989. This referendum offered residents in the unincorporated areas of Pinellas County the opportunity to vote to tax themselves up to .5 mills for library service. The referendum passed by a 75% majority and thus began the legal work to set the Cooperative in motion.

Prior to that time the librarians throughout Pinellas County sought ways by which they could open their doors to people outside their legal boundaries. The directors presented their ideas to the Council of Mayors and to the Pinellas County Commission which authorized the County Administrator to further explore the possibilities. Administrator Fred Marquis appointed his Chief Deputy Dora Harrison to work with the Library Directors and other interested parties to develop a plan. A broad public relations effort was begun led by the Library Directors and several Friends of the various libraries.

The public relations effort culminated in the success of the referendum.

Then the variety of paperwork and structural design began.

The Interlocal Agreement was the first of several documents created to describe the Cooperative, its legal basis, leadership and operations. This lengthy document included funding as a major component. A formula was developed whereby the County would allocate monies collected in the unincorporated areas to be used to operate the administrative unit and to support member libraries. These funds are allocated to the libraries to be used for operations -- staff, materials purchases, supplies and services. Another portion of these funds has been used to support buildings - new or renovations.

The Interlocal Agreement was signed by sixteen cities (five for the Gulf Beaches Library), the Palm Harbor taxing district and the County in 1989. Clearwater held out but finally joined in 1994.

In 1995 the document was revised to increase the Board to nine (9) members and to correct language pertaining to State and Federal funds. The revised document was signed by all members.

A supporting document is the Agreement between the County and the Cooperative Board which gives the Board greater authority for budgeting and funding allocations.

It was determined early on that a not-for-profit corporation should be established to administer the Cooperative. Under Florida law such an entity can be empowered to receive State and Federal funds for library services. It was further decided that a Board of Directors would be set up for the Corporation whose members would be residents of various areas of the county that belonged to the Cooperative, that these Board members would not be employees of any library in the county or elected officials of any Cooperative member city, town or district.

The County solicited nominations for this seven-member Board with the understanding it would appoint the first three who would serve as interim officers, It then fell to those three to review and appoint the remaining four members. This first Board of Directors was composed of

- Elizabeth B. Mann, Ph.D. - Tarpon Springs - Retired University Professor
- Lawrence Lyons - Seminole - Banker
- Patricia Bauer - Dunedin - School Media Specialist
- Joan Friedman - Pinellas Park - Co-owner, Air Conditioning Company
- Orchid Rogers - Oldsmar - Real Estate Agent
- Homer Still - St. Pete Beach - Retired State Veterans Affairs Official

The first duty of this Board, in addition to developing its Bylaws for approval by all member entities, was to hire an Administrator. An advertisement for the position was placed in national as well as state professional media. Responses were received and the list of candidates was eventually narrowed to three. Bernadette Storck, career employee of the Tampa-Hillsborough County Library System, was offered the position and began work on May 14, 1990.

As stated earlier in this narration, Clearwater Library System did not sign the original Interlocal Agreement. In 1994 Clearwater applied for membership and

became a member effective October 1, 1994. Thus all of the existing public libraries are participants in Florida's first countywide public library cooperative.

Among the early goals of the Cooperative were the establishment of an Answer Center, the Talking Book Library and interlibrary courier service. A team of library directors proposed the Answer Center and wrote a grant which was funded by LSCA monies. The Answer Center was designed to provide back-up reference service for member libraries utilizing a variety of more costly, in-depth reference tools. The Center has operated from the Largo Library and is presently housed in Clearwater's Main Library.

The Talking Book Library was established in 1992 and opened to the eligible public in May 1993. It is housed with the Cooperative offices and provides services to all Pinellas County residents who are eligible regardless of whether they live in the Cooperative service areas or not. This subregional library works with the Regional Library in Daytona. The Pinellas Talking Book Library is staffed by two professional librarians, three full-time readers advisors/clerks and a part-time receptionist. It is also staffed by a devoted cadre of volunteers.

Courier service began in January 1991 with one volunteer who used his own truck, two days a week. His duty expanded to three days almost immediately. It soon became apparent a pick-up truck would not do the job so the Cooperative leased a cargo van. In 1996 the budget was expanded to allow for two couriers and two vans. Service is daily with the couriers each serving half the county with stops at the Supervisor of Election office twice a week, the School Board once a week and Hillsborough and Pasco Counties once a week.

In 1996 libraries in Hillsborough, Pasco and Pinellas Counties with the cooperation of the Tampa Bay Library Consortium decided to take interlibrary cooperation to a new plateau. The various libraries agreed to honor the library cards issued to residents with cards in their home counties. This means a resident of one county working in another has access to the collection in the neighboring library at the moment, not by waiting for interlibrary loan. Several residents are taking advantage of this system.

With the success of tri-county interlibrary cooperation another program was initiated in 1997. St. Petersburg Junior College and Pinellas Public Library Cooperative libraries have agreed to accept adult learners wherever they may be.

This is another step toward cooperation in which Pinellas County has taken a lead.

The member libraries share resources, programs and talents. By purchasing some costly materials and databases through or by the Cooperative even smaller libraries are able to offer their readers access to more in-depth information sources. The library directors meet monthly and share committee work, planning and concerns. This networking has resulted in policies and procedures which are accepted countywide to the benefit of all clientele.

Brief histories of Pinellas county's public libraries offer an interesting review of some of the oldest of Florida's libraries and some of the newest. Small or temporary facilities have been replaced with new or newly renovated ones in the several years since the Cooperative began. Library staff numbers have increased and more professional librarians are available to serve the public. Friends and volunteers have increased in number and enthusiasm. The libraries and their readers all benefit.

Plans for the future include new main libraries for Clearwater and St. Petersburg, enlargement and renovation of Pinellas Park and a new headquarters for the Cooperative and the Talking Book Library. These projects should be on the way by the year 2000. Member libraries and their current addresses (as of May 1998) are as follows:

Clearwater Library System  
Main Library and Offices  
100 N. Osceola Avenue  
Clearwater, FL 33755

Beach Branch  
40 Causeway Blvd.  
Clearwater, FL 33767

Countryside Branch  
2741 S.R. 580  
Clearwater, FL 33761

East Branch

2251 Drew Street  
Clearwater, FL 33765

North Greenwood Branch  
1250 Palmetto Street  
Clearwater, FL 33755

Dunedin Library  
223 Douglas Avenue  
Dunedin, FL 34698

Gulf Beaches Library  
200 Municipal Drive  
Madeira Beach, FL 33708

Gulfport Library  
5501 28th Avenue South  
Gulfport, FL 33707

Largo Library  
351 East Bay Drive  
Largo, FL 33770

Oldsmar Library  
101 State Street West  
Oldsmar, FL 34677

Palm Harbor Library  
2330 Nebraska Avenue  
Palm Harbor, FL 34683

Pinellas Park Library  
7770 52nd Street North  
Pinellas Park, FL 33781

Safety Harbor Library  
101 2nd Street North

Safety Harbor, FL 34695

St. Petersburg Library System  
Administrative Offices  
280 5th Street North  
St. Petersburg, FL 33701

Main Library  
3745 Ninth Avenue North  
St. Petersburg, FL 33713

Azalea Branch  
7801 22nd Avenue North  
St. Petersburg, FL 33710

James Weldon Johnson Branch  
1111 18th Avenue South  
St. Petersburg, FL 33705

Mirror Lake Branch  
280 5th Street North  
St. Petersburg, FL 33701

North Branch  
861 70th Avenue North  
St. Petersburg, FL 33702

South Branch  
1201 Country Club Way South  
St. Petersburg, FL 33705

St. Pete Beach Library  
365 73rd Avenue  
St. Pete Beach, FL 33706

Seminole Library  
9199 113th Street North

Seminole, FL 33772

Tarpon Springs Library  
138 E. Lemon Street  
Tarpon Springs, FL 34689

Pinellas Talking Book Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped 12345  
Starkey Road, Suite L  
Largo, FL 33773-2629