



PANAMA CANAL SOCIETY  
GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING MINUTES  
UF SMATHERS LIBRARIES/FRIENDS OF PCMC MUSEUM  
April 22, 2023

At 12:02 p.m., Judy Russell, the Dean of the University of Florida's (UF) Libraries, welcomed all the attendees and invited everyone to visit the new Museum exhibit across the hall. UF is looking forward to more exciting exhibits and recognizing the names of the donors. Judy thanked the Panama Canal Society (PCS) and the Friends of the Museum then she introduced the PCS President, Bill McLaughlin.

The meeting was called to order by Bill and he welcomed the 63 attendees and was excited to see the Museum Collection. He reminded everyone that the Museum is preserving our Zonian heritage. Bill gave the invocation, followed by a moment of silence for our departed family, friends, and the military. After the invocation, he led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Bill introduced the Past Presidents and Board Members present: Tom Wilder, P.P; Laura Kosik, 2<sup>nd</sup> VP; Penny Canamas, Director; Mike Young, Director; Margaret McLaughlin, Director-at-Large; Jacque Vowell, *Canal Record* Editor; Kathy Malin, Office Manager; and John Husum, FaceBook Administrator. Bill thanked Kathy for her hard work at the office and this event along with Penny Canamas.

The meeting recessed for lunch.

The meeting was called back to order at 1:05 p.m.

Bill spoke about the 2023 Annual Reunion that will take place from July 5<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> at the Rosen Shingle Creek Resort in Orlando. All Reunion information is in your December and March *Canal Records* and online. Updates will be printed in the June *Canal Record*. This year we are having a musical themed reunion with live bands on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday evenings plus a DJ dance late on Friday night. Besides these four dances, there will be a Musical luncheon on Saturday and the Panama dancers on Sunday morning. This is a grand highlight and for the first time in 20 years when Bruce Quinn directed a musical at the reunion in 2003. The 2023 musical is being organized by Melanie and Fred Bales along with many other Zonian Thespians as they walk down memory lane from the musical years of 1979-1999 at Balboa High School, The Ancon Theatre Guild, and The Pacific Theatre Arts Centre. The theme of the musical is, "A Retrospective of American Musical Theatre at the Panama Canal: 1979-1999".

Last year, we had a super Murga and this year, the Murga is scaled down but will still consist of lots of great music on Saturday. The Despedida on Sunday morning is always well attended with the performers as well as the lottery drawing.

At the Cultural Seminar, our UF curators, John Nemmers and Betsy Bemis are presenting "Hometown Memories". It will be a special trip back in time through personal memories from a group of Zonian panelists. It starts at 2pm on Friday.

The Friends of the Museum are hosting the silent auction as well as the University of Florida having a museum display.

Bill announced that we have about 975 people registered; 382 for the luncheon, which is low, because we had to raise the price due to food costs from the hotel and the musical production logistics; 522 Ball tickets sold; golf is limited to 72 because of another tournament following ours; and only 17 vendors have registered but we are reaching out to past vendors to sign up. The deadline to register for the Reunion is June 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Volunteers are needed for many parts of the Reunion. Anna Hertrich, our Office Assistant, is our Volunteer Chairperson, so contact her at the office if interested.

Bill announced we were drawing for the early bird hotel certificates. Your name is in the box if you registered for the Reunion by February 8<sup>th</sup>, Kathy and Penny drew names for these three gifts next, and you did not have to be present. The gifts were donated by the Rosen Shingle Creek Resort and are (1) Complimentary three-night stay (king or double queen room); (2) An upgrade from a regular room to a suite; and (3) A dinner certificate for \$200 to *Calla Bella* or *A Land Remembered* fine dining restaurants. Winners were drawn and they are: (1) Terri Flynn; (2) Shane Walker; and (3) Ray Dittmar.

Bill asked for any questions from the members.



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Bill then introduced Joe Wood, President of the Friends of the Panama Canal Museum Collection (PCMC). Joe excitedly explained how excited they were when the museum found out that the University of Florida (UF) had agreed to be the curators of the PCMC over ten years ago. When several Zonians started the museum in Seminole back in 1998, they had 2 goals: 1) preserve the history of the U.S. in Panama and 2) preserve our heritage and experiences in the Canal Zone. The Friends have transferred all items over to UF and now advise and assist the library in research; answer questions about the CZ, Panama Canal Company, and Panama; provide background information on photos, documents, and objects; and to raise funds for various UF PCMC research projects. Last year, an Oral World History fund raiser was held and raised \$160K was raised to date for the Oral History project with 184 oral histories completed to date.

Joe reported that there are 184 members, which is a reduction from last year. The Friends' Silent Auction at last year's Reunion raised over \$10,000 and he thanked Mickey Fitzgerald, Kathy Egolf and Carole Miller as well as all the volunteers. Since the Silent Auction began, they have raised over \$100K. In the Fall of 2022, the PCMC Friends had a challenge to match the Reunion's Silent Action in which they raised \$11K. The 2023 Silent Auction needs volunteers, and they should contact Mickey or Carole. Joe encouraged people to donate their "junk" and treasures to the Silent Auction and to pledge at least the \$26 membership a year to join the Friends of the PCMC.

The Executive Council of the Friends of the PCMC in attendance were Kathy Egolf, VP, Mikey Fitzgerald, John Husum, Carol Meyer, Carole Miller, Joan Ohman, Janice Scott, Frank Townsend and representing the PCS was Bill McLaughlin.

There are membership forms on each table along with information on a fundraising cruise to Hawaii in 2024. Janice Scott spoke about the *Panama American* newspaper project moving along well.

Joe introduced John Nemmers, Curator of the PCMC. As the curator, John talked about the treasures that are donated along with needing the Friends' expertise in identifying objects and documents. There was an Oral History challenge to raise funds and \$19,900 was raised from October to December 2022. Besides joining the Friends, you can also donate in honor or In Memoriam of family or friends. Since the last meeting, PCMC have had 74 researchers' queries, digitalized 16K items for online; and had many visitors to the PC Gallery with Wednesday being the largest turnout of visitors. John introduced Betsy Bemis as the Associate Curator for PCMC and is also in charge of the Oral History program. As Joe stated, there are 184 oral histories completed to date with 20 just in this past year. If anyone is interested, contact Betsy, who has 7 interviews currently scheduled. She can conduct the interviews at the reunion, visit your home, via Zoom or telephone.

John spoke about the PCMC Gallery presenting "The Cutting Edge" which is about the Panama Canal engineering achievement. There is a QR code on the pamphlet on the tables where you can hover over then open the UF exhibits on your phone. Next year the gallery will present the PC Railroad. UF PCMC has a wish list of a variety of historical materials to expand and strengthen the PCMC. A few from the list are diaries, home movies, letters, post cards, audio or video recordings, photos, etc. They do not want scrapbooks and they have plenty of pamphlets, brochures, menus, and travel guides. UF also accepts digital reproductions if donors are not willing to donate the original objects.

Janice Scott gave her personal appreciation to Judy, John, Betsy, Lourdes, and Chandler, and the UF staff in attendance. PCS has done a lot towards helping the Museum. A few attendees mentioned we need to see more young people especially from Panama attending. They really don't know much about the Americans in Panama because they were not alive then. Another person commented that last year, she enjoyed speaking to the 3 young men from the BioMuseo Museum in Amador where they have now erected historical panels along the causeway. John will work on contacting any Panamanian students attending UF. UF Libraries has just hired a new communications manager who will work on social media, as well.

Bill returned to the podium to mention that the Society is seeking members to volunteer at the Reunion. Contact the Society's office for the email link if interested.



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Door prizes were drawn.

Tom Wilder made a motion to end the meeting, Joan Ohman seconded, and the meeting was adjourned at 2:02 p.m.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bill McLaughlin".

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Bill McLaughlin, President

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kathy Malin".

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Kathy Malin, Office Manager