



Panama Canal Society Annual General Membership Meeting
Rosen Shingle Creek Resort, Orlando Florida
Reunion 2024 – July 5, 2024

The meeting was called to order by President Bill McLaughlin at 9:30 a.m. Carl Orvis asked all to turn off cell phones or put on vibrate. Bill welcomed everyone to the 2024 Annual meeting of the Panama Canal Society and announced that, "Reunion time is the best time of the year! It is always nice to see so many familiar faces in one place. The Canal Zone is still alive and well right here in Orlando this week." Bill thanked all the vendors that donated door prizes and those sponsors that donated money. The 2% quorum for this meeting was reached with approximately 164 members in attendance.

Bill then introduced Society Chaplain, Bill Lane who gave the Invocation. Then Bill McLaughlin asked for a moment of silence for our departed members and friends. Next, Bill introduced the Society Sergeant-at-Arms, Ted Kaufer who led the membership in the Pledge of Allegiance:

Bill introduced the 2022-2024 Executive Board Members who were present on the dais. Carl Orvis (1st Vice President); Laura Kosik (2nd Vice President), Penny Canamas (Director), Bosco Hoyte (Director), Mike Young (Director), Margaret McLaughlin (Director-at-Large and Decoration Chairperson), Raymond Husum (By-Laws Chairperson), Bill Lane (Chaplin), Ted Kaufer (Sergeant-at-Arms), Jacque Vowell (Editor), and Kathy Malin (Office Manager). Absent were Elaine Lewis (Past President) and newly installed Legislature Representative, David Dahlstrom.

Then Bill introduced the Past Presidents who were in attendance: Betty LeDoux (1989-1991 & 2000-2002), Bill McLaughlin (2002-2004 & 2020-2024), Bob Russell (2006-2008), Tom Wilder (2008-2014), and Shirley Avery-Bentley (2018- 2020).

Old Business:

Minutes Approval: Bill asked for an approval for the April 6, 2024, General Membership minutes held at University of Florida, Smathers Libraries, home of the Panama Canal Museum, which were distributed for everyone to read. Tom Wilder made a motion to approve the minutes, seconded by Terry Fuqua. Motion carried.

Bill introduced Kathy Malin, Office Manager and Temporary Treasurer to give the 2023 Financial Report. Kathy showed the 2023 Financial Reports to the members and stated it will be published in the October 2024 *Canal Record*. Kathy explained how the Society had a loss in operating expenses in 2022 by \$42K but only \$33K in 2023. With all the donations and interest in our CDs, she believes that 2024 we will be close to breaking even. Kathy explained that in late 2022, the members voted to invest \$300K in CDs and Money Market. When the 2 CDs matured, the Board decided to reinvest its interest in the next CDs. Membership is still declining. Bill thanked Kathy and encouraged members to recruit new or inactive members.

Door prizes donated by our Vendors then were drawn.

President's Report:

Bill gave his President's Report where he announced we are still looking for a Treasurer to serve on the board. The Board needs dedicated volunteers to serve on the board to keep the Society running. Bill stated he is finishing up his 4th consecutive year as president because no one else was interested. He is grateful for this board which is a good team and we will be swearing in a new Board today. Carl Orvis is running for President and will do a good job. The members and board are the future to carry on our legacy and ensure this organization continues for years to come.

As Kathy reported earlier, it is expensive to perform our normal business running this organization these days. The cost of paper to print the *Canal Record* is ridiculously high, up 2.9% annually, and thanks to John Cooke and Janice Scott for suggesting a better quality of paper.

The Board has discussed everyone's suggestions on the pros and cons of printing the book or having it digitized. If we digitized it, how do we control the sharing of passwords to access the cloud, other members requesting a hard copy because of members not having a computer to read the Record, etc. This is a dilemma we are looking for a solution.



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A committee was formed, and a study implemented in January to see what could be done to possibly combine issues and thus eliminating some issue or issues of the *Canal Record*. The solution was that the annual Directory be modified and reduced to just the membership and information then be included in the December book. This will take effect this upcoming December. The other documents in the annual Directory are published on our website, including our ByLaws. This modification will save us +/- \$10K a year on printing and postage.

There have been some great membership meetings this past year keeping our Zonian fellowships alive. Our Christmas luncheon has been the biggest general membership meeting attraction for years and it moved to the Columbia Restaurant in Ybor City this past December. We are planning to return this December to enjoy its great food and to see our Zonian friends.

At this Christmas luncheon, Louis DeArmas spoke to the members present and asked if all members could donate \$100 to raise funds to keep the Society running. Many donations have come in and another large amount from Albert Nahmad, BHS 58, who donated \$10,000, after reading Bill's plea in his President's Report, in the *Canal Record*. Mr. Nahmad also generously donated the funds for the creation of the Panama Canal Museum Collection at the University of Florida. We thank all members for their donations. As I always, I say, "Facing Future Challenges Together; Zonians Strong and United".

Another way the Board decided to save money is to start charging credit card fees for membership dues and reunion registration. Back in 2021, Bill discovered that the Society was charged a little over \$10K for credit card processing fees. After discussing these issues with our processor, the Society now passes these fees on to the members, as is common business these days.

Bill stated, "after looking over our insurance policy", the PCS only had insurance for the office and contents. He was always told the board was bonded. After researching policies, the Board now has insurance for the Board and Special Events, such as the reunion does too.

Please continue to support the Panama Canal Society, as our Zonian family needs to pull together to keep our future intact.

Door prizes donated by our Vendors then were drawn.

Reunion Reports:

Bill called Dave Bishop to the microphone to give the 44th Chagres Invitational Golf Tournament report. Dave reported there was a new format, consisting of a 2-person scramble with 76 players. The 1st place team with the lowest net score was Louis Vogel Jr. and Dennis Shaw with 62.05 strokes. 2nd place with a score of 62.55 strokes was Ralph Furlong and Adam Beach. The golf tournament gave out 13 prizes. Dave thanked Steve Gilbert for his donation in memory of his parents. Dave also thanked Jean Medinger and Betty LeDoux for their donations and support.

Bill then thanked all our Reunion sponsors who included Albert Nahmad, Condor Tours and Travel, Tom Ellis with B&C Financials, Howler Monkey Sauce, the Bentley family, Ron Abuelo, University of Florida, Baru Highlands Coffee, TraderBrock Rainforest, Kelly Fenton, Mike Coffey, CHS 63, BHS 73 in memory of Josh Duffus, BHS 78 and an Anonymous donor. Every year, we encourage people and companies to become sponsors. Please call the Society office if you are interested.

Bill announced that after the annual meeting today, there will be a Cultural Seminar at 2:00 pm sponsored by the University of Florida. They are planning to have a Trivia game about the Panama Canal. John Nemmers from UF will provide more information later in this meeting.

Bill also announced that later this afternoon, during Happy Hour, Shorty and Slim will be on stage in the Reunion Clubhouse from 4 – 6 pm. The Friday night dance will be hosted by BHS/CHS 79 and CHS 74 and will feature "The band



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Electric Xperience". This dance is free. Frankie Pretto will be on stage on Saturday during noon in the Reunion Clubhouse playing Lucho Azcarraga music.

Saturday afternoon there is the 15th Annual Pool Party with free beer until it runs out. Tom Wilder raised his hand and mentioned that Bob Medinger started the Pool Party, 15 years ago and has been a success every year. Bill continued to announce that Dance and Despedida lottery tickets are on sale during registration hours by the Vendor room. Be sure to purchase a lottery ticket, last year, first prize was over \$1,000 dollars. But you have to be present to win on Sunday morning during the Despedida.

Saturday evening will feature Frankie Pretto and the Paranda Band playing at the Ball. The dance is from 8:00 pm until 1:00 am. The Murga will begin at the bottom of the escalators at 7:30 pm.

Please see the dress code printed on your tickets and the age limitation for attendees. Make sure you pick up a reunion flyer with all the other events and visit the Vendors. Have a great time this weekend.

A few housekeeping items. Parking is complimentary only for hotel guests. Non-resort guests will have a fee. Don't forget to ask for your 25% discount when purchasing food at most hotel outlets. Your Reunion badge is proof of this entitlement. This discount doesn't pertain to beverages.

Advance registration had 1,458 people down from last year at 1,766. We pre-sold 607 Ball tickets; 159 Friday DJ tickets and there are 37 vendors this year up from last year.,

Door prizes donated by our Vendors then were drawn.

Other Reports:

Bill called the curator of the Panama Canal Museum Collection at the University of Florida (UF), John Nemmers, to the podium. John thanked Dean Judy Russell and Associate Curator, Betsy Bemis for all their support and dedication to the Panama Canal Museum Collection (PCMC). The PCMC is currently having a display called "Track Changes" about the Panama Railroad at UF and in here at the reunion in Panzacola Ballrooms F2-3.

John stated the Friends of the Museum has 186 members and explained the different levels of membership. In 2023, the Silent Auction raised over \$13,000 for the museum. He encouraged all to visit the Silent Auction in Panzacola Ballrooms F2 & F3. He thanked all the volunteers, especially Carole Miller and Kathy Egolf. John also thanked Lori Snow of Condor Tours and Travel for organizing last year and this year's cruises. Her company donates for each cabin sold.

John announced the Executive Council Members of the Friends and thanked Joe Wood and Kathy Egolf for their support. As of Spring 2024, \$195K has been raised for the Oral History Fundraising Campaign from 2020 - 2024. There are 174 interviews online and if you are interested in being interviewed, please contact Betsy Bemis, the Associate Curator. In 2024, the fundraising campaign is Digitization. There are thousands of documents, photographs, maps and artifacts that need to be digitized. John discussed the many researcher queries, courses at UF, travel grants, and the donors.

If you want to "Test your Knowledge of Canal History", join us at 2:00 pm today for a Pub Trivia game in Panzacola Ballroom H1-3.

Door prizes donated by our Vendors then were drawn.

New Business:

Bill thanked John and then called, Margaret McLaughlin to the podium. Margaret is the Chairperson of the Nominating Committee. Margaret thanked her nomination committee and reported that there were 297 ballots submitted with 4 being invalid. The results are for President, Carl Orvis received 283; for 1st Vice President, Laura Kosik received 92 and Mike



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Young received 199; for 2nd Vice President, Penny Canamas received 273; and for Directors, Dixie Barons received 253, Alejandro "Bosco" Hoyte received 259 and Cheryl Williams received 274.

Margaret asked if there were any questions or concerns. Betty LeDoux made a motion to destroy the ballots, Tom Wilder seconded the motion, and the motion carried. Bill had all the new Board members rise and repeat the Oath of Office. He presented Carl with a new gavel. Bill thanked Margaret for all her time serving as Nomination Committee Chair.

Carl then approached the podium and announced that Bill McLaughlin was nominated by the Executive Board for the Distinguished Service Award, which was advertised in the June *Canal Record* and asked the members present for a motion to approve. Terry Fuqua motioned to approve this award, Bob Medinger seconded the motion, and the motion was carried.

Carl read and presented the Distinguished Service Award to Bill. Some of the highlights were that Bill has been a dedicated since 1999 Board member, and for the past 20 years as the Reunion Coordinator. He has been the Society's Historian and Liaison to the UF Panama Canal Museum Collection. Betty LeDoux came up to the podium and spoke of Bill's take charge personality, changing the Society's name from "of Florida" to just PCS, creating a PCS website, and all his hours of love planning the Reunion. Margaret McLaughlin then approached Bill and presented Bill with a beautiful gold Society logo pendant as a token of appreciation for all he has done as the President the past four years. Bill thanked the members and Board.

Questions and Comments from the Members:

Jim Copeskey announced the Balboa Rams are having a Rams reunion at 4:30 pm today. Check the bulletin board for the location.

Janice Scott talked about putting a digitized copy of the *Canal Record* on our website with passwords. Another member spoke up saying she will send a link regarding password program.

Len Brockman spoke about his new adventure and retiring in Panama. Bill Riley Jr will be taking over TraderBrock.

Ricky Royo reported that he and Will Benninghoff have a weekly Canal Zone podcast. It is called SCN CZ and you can find it on FaceBook and YouTube.

Door prizes donated by our Vendors then were drawn.

The next-door prize was the Grand Prize with hotel stays and excursions in Panama donated by Lori Snow, Condor Tours and Travels, a long time Reunion sponsor. Steve McCauley won this prize.

Bill thanked Lori Snow and Condor Tours and Travel. He introduced another past president, Mike Coffey that was not present when Bill acknowledged the Past Presidents at the beginning of the meeting. Bill then asked the past Presidents to stay behind for the Past President's picture.

Betty LeDoux motioned for the meeting to be adjourned, Paul Ebdon seconded, and the meeting was adjourned at 11:30 am.



Bill McLaughlin
President



Kathy Malin
Office Manager