



PANAMA CANAL SOCIETY
GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING MINUTES
UF SMATHERS LIBRARIES/FRIENDS OF PCMC MUSEUM
March 29, 2025

At noon, Judy Russell, Dean of the University of Florida George A. Smathers Libraries, welcomed all the attendees and invited everyone to visit the new Museum exhibit across the hall. The University of Florida (UF) is looking forward to more exciting exhibits and recognizing the names of the donors.

The meeting was called to order by Carl Orvis at 12:05 pm and he welcomed the 86 attendees and determined a quorum was present. He thanked everyone for attending and introduced Mike Young, 1st VP, who gave the invocation, followed by a moment of silence for our departed family, friends, members and the military. After the invocation, he introduced Ted Kaufer, our Sergeant of Arms that led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Carl introduced the Past Presidents and Board Members present: Bob Russell, P.P; Bill McLaughlin, P.P. and Reunion Coordinator; Mike Young, 1st VP; Penny Canamas, 2nd VP; Kelly Fenton, Director-at-Large; Jacque Vowell, Editor; Ted Kaufer, Sergeant of Arms; and Kathy Malin, Office Manager. He asked everyone to please read the Christmas and Space Coast meeting minutes that are on everyone's table so we can vote to approve after lunch.

The meeting paused for lunch.

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

Carl asked if everyone read the Christmas and Space Coast minutes. Jacque Vowell motioned to approve the minutes, Bill McLaughlin seconded, and the motion carried. Carl stated that the Panama Canal (PC) is a construction and historical piece of modern-day marvel. He stated he researched different types of museums and found other interesting museums: Museum of Bad Art, Museum of Broken Relationships; Dog Collar Museum and All Hair Museum.

Carl thanked the Smathers Libraries at University of Florida – Dean Judy Russell and Curator John Nemmers as well as the other staff. He also thanked the Friends of the PC Museum Collection (PCMC) on their dedicated hard work in identifying and preserving our heritage.

Carl explained how the Society is finally "in the black" with our 2024 financials. Carl thanked all the members who donated to the Society and encouraged future donations. Other ways the Society saved money was by inserting the Directory into the December *Canal Record*; members are now paying the small credit card processing fees which saved over \$6K since 2023; and the Society made about \$9K in interest with investing our money in CDs and money market.

The Board decided not to host a luncheon in Sarasota in September but moved the meeting to October 18th at the Safety Harbor Resort and Spa. The Christmas luncheon will again be held at the Columbia Restaurant in Ybor City on December 6th.

Carl introduced Bill McLaughlin, Reunion Coordinator. Bill stated the Reunion will be held from July 2nd – 6th at the Rosen Shingle Creek Resort in Orlando with the final updates being printed in the June *Canal Record*. The reunion will be back in the Gatlin side of the convention center – escalator to the left.

The reunion will be kicked off by the 45th Annual Chagres Invitational Golf Tournament on Thursday morning followed with Bingo in the afternoon. There will be dances on Thursday and Friday nights sponsored by BHS 75 and 80, respectively. When Frankie Pretto attended the Canal Zone reunion in January, he caught a respiratory bug, and his doctors advised him no performing until his lungs healed. At the Saturday Annual Ball, we hired a local Latin band called *Salsumba Orchestra*. They will be learning a few Lucho songs.

On Friday, our annual meeting will start at 9:30 am followed by cornhole tournament and then the cultural seminar which was a big 'hit' at last year's reunion. The annual luncheon is back on Saturday with Wendy Tribaldos presenting the Panamanian and United States perspectives of the 1964 riots. Saturday afternoon, there is a pool party and bingo.

Bill thanked our biggest donator, Al Nahmad, and other donors. He advised all to register by May 23rd. For our members who registered early by February 6th, we will draw for 3 prizes: (1) a complimentary 3-night stay in a 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. The winners were drawn by Kathy Malin and Carl Orvis.



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Carl thanked Bill and introduced John Nemmers, the curator of PCMC. John said 'our heritage is going strong' with 136 members of the Friends of the PCMC. He thanked the Executive Council. Last year the Silent Auction raised over \$11K and in the fall, there was another fundraiser which raised over \$60k for a new digitization program. Since July, there has been over \$82K raised. The museum reached its goal and hired an Imaging Assistant, Sophia DeLoran.

This year, there has been 67 research quires, 22K items have been digitized, 563K titles are now on line and now seven UF courses on Latin American studies vice four from last year.

John talked about the oral histories and then the new exhibit on "An Ensemble Performance at the Panama Canal". He mentioned that Penny Canamas dad and uncle are the twins pictured in one of the exhibits. In 2024, 53 people visited the museum.

Last year at the Reunion, the trivia game was hugely successful so John and Betsy will host a 2nd annual trivia game on Friday afternoon starting at 2:00pm. The PCMC will also bring some unique exhibits to the reunion. The Silent Auction needs donations and/or volunteering, please contact Kathy Egolf and Carole Miller.

John announced the Dean Judy Russell will be retired this summer after 18 years of dedication and support to the Smathers Libraries. He invited all to visit the exhibits and ask questions.

Carl thanked John and read a Zonian Toast by Ernest E. Price:

All those who are Zonians carry a solemn responsibility. As our parents before, and we ourselves, have lived, benefited and accepted the administrations of the government of Panama Canal Zone, we became "de facto" citizens of that government – we have become "Zonians." That government is no longer viable and the Canal Zone no longer exists. Yet our earned birthright As Zonians, we carry forever. We carry the responsibility to perpetuate this birthright so all men will know of the achievements of the "Ditchdiggers" and the successes of the government and its society. We Zonians, and others like us, carry the responsibility to be the Guardians of this piece of history.

Door prizes were drawn by Carl and Penny Canamas. Carl asked all the Friends of the Museum to stand and thanked them for their hard work. He also thanked Kathy & Penny for hosting and all for attending.

Bob Russell made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Joan Ohman seconded, and the meeting was adjourned at 1:44 p.m.

Kelly Fenton reported that the Gulf Coast Spring Fling is Saturday, May 3rd in Palmetto. It will be inside with air conditioning and a pool is available. Janice Scott talked about the Social Security Fairness Act and thanked Bob Russell for all his support to this cause.

A blue ink signature of Carl Orris, consisting of a stylized 'C' and 'O' followed by a horizontal line.

Carl Orris, President

A blue ink signature of Kathy Malin, featuring a large, flowing 'K' and 'M' followed by a horizontal line.

Kathy Malin, Office Manager