



PANAMA CANAL SOCIETY
GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING MINUTES
UF SMATHERS LIBRARIES/FRIENDS OF PCMC MUSEUM
March 28, 2026

The meeting was called to order by Carl Orvis at 12:35 pm and he welcomed the 89 attendees and determined a quorum was present. He thanked everyone for attending and introduced Bill Lane, Chaplain, 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 who led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance. He asked the group to review the February minutes during lunch. The meeting paused for lunch.

Carl called the meeting back to order at 1:40 pm. He then introduced the Past Presidents present: Bob Russell, Tom Wilder, and Shirley Avery-Bentley. The Board members present are Mike Young, 1st VP; Penny Canamas, 2nd VP; Dixie Barons and Cheryl Williams, Directors; Noreen Hanson, Treasurer; Shirley Avery-Bentley, Past President; Bill Lane, Chaplain; Ted Kaufer, Sergeant-at-Arms; and Office Staffers, Susan Burk and Kathy Malin.

Carl asked everyone if they read the February meeting minutes. Shirley Avery-Bentley motioned to approve the minutes, Bob Russell seconded the motion and the minutes were approved.

Carl explained to the group that we could not switch to a 501.3.c (non-profit) because if we did, the Society would have to go public and let anyone join the Society. The Preamble and ByLaws must be rewritten. He then spoke about the last ByLaws amendment where the term limits of Board members are changing. The Bylaw did pass but out of 1600 members, only 83 ballots were received.

The Reunion is July 8 -12. There is an elegant evening planned for Saturday prior to the Ball. It is a sit-down *Soirée* dinner. There is a 3-course meal plus one can purchase wine bottles and high-end liquor. After dinner, a group will perform Panamanian Folklore dancing and music. There will be Tivoli photo ops and the Murga will begin at the Soiree. We are encouraging members to wear black & white to make it an elegant dinner. There are 170 registered to date. Children are allowed at dinner and the ball. At 10:30 pm, children under 12 need to depart.

There are 2 other new events: Paul Shemella, a retired Navy SEAL, will speak about his fictional books about the Caribbean and Central America. One book is called *Dictator's Revenge* about a fictional account on General Noreiga trying to blow up the Canal. At the same time, we are hosting a Children's Magic Show. The Reunion will also be hosting the annual Golf Tournament, Bingo, UF's Trivia Game, Pool Party, Yoga, Cornhole Tournament, Mass, Dances, Vendors, Raffles and the Annual Meeting has moved to Saturday morning at 10:30 am with the Lottery drawing at the end. Deadline to register is May 29th.

Other upcoming events are *Paella in Palmetto* on Saturday, May 16. It is only \$20. On Saturday, October 17th, we are returning to the Safety Harbor Resort and Spa for a luncheon. Then our Christmas luncheon is Saturday, December 5th at the St Petersburg Yacht Club. Carl thanked Ted & Mel Henter for sponsoring us at the Yacht Club.

Carl introduced John Nemmers, the curator of Panama Canal Museum Collection (PCMC). John welcomed all to Smathers Libraries. There are 144 members of the Friends of the PCMC. He thanked the Friends' Executive Council and introduced the new members. Last year the Silent Auction raised over \$11K and in the fall, they raised \$12K. From July 2024 to March 2026, they raised over \$118k for a new digitization program. The new Imaging Assistant, Isabella Lola, has uploaded 12K more items than last year.

This year, there have been 78 research queries and the views on the Museum are amazing. From 2021 – 2025, the monthly average was 37K views and just in 2026, the monthly average is 224K. John gave a Blog update where UF students are creating interesting Blogs.

John introduced Carole Miller, one of the organizers of the annual Silent Auction. She said they are excited about raising over \$10K every year. The Silent Auction team are always looking for items and volunteers. For volunteering at the Reunion, one needs to contact Laura Kosik. Lori Snow talked about the Fall Cruise from September 4 – 7, a short cruise to the Caribbean. Janice Scott spoke about continuing the Zonian legacy. John stated the Oral History is still ongoing.



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Carl spoke about the Canal Zone Reunion in January, and their organizers desire a joint effort with the PC Society.

Door prizes were drawn. Then the 3 early bird drawings were drawn. The 3-night stay at the Reunion was won by Patricia (Sanchez) Boniewicz; the upgrade to a suite was won by Lynn Harp; and the \$200 gift card was won by Tamara Gramlich.

Bob Russell made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Penny Canamas seconded, and the meeting was adjourned at 2:05 p.m.



Carl Orvis, President

Kathy Malin, Office Manager