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Florida Library History Project

Lighthouse Point Library

1965-1987

CICERO wrote "to add a library to a house is to give that house a soul."

And now in 1987, the soul that existed since July 1965, has finally found its own home, the Lighthouse Point Library.

In the very beginning, the co-founders William and Elayne Solien said, "lots of philosophy existed, but very little money. We rounded up a group of interested, civic-minded people who wanted a library with rules to accommodate our own community."

The first part-time library was a small room in the Beacon Light Shopping Center. The owner of the Center gave this area rent free for three months as a gesture of good will to the community

Some shelves, copies of duplicate books from Pompano and Deerfield Beach Libraries were donated, as well as armfuls of books from helpful Volunteers. Two tables and chairs were the less than ornate furnishings. But the spirit was there and the small community responded with great enthusiasm to the friendly, little library in Beacon Light Shopping Center.

A very glamorous Library Ball was given on March 30, 1965. The Lighthouse Point Bank underwrote the cost and co-sponsored the affair. Five hundred people attended, many donors contributed \$50.00, and the dance was a social and financial success. Over \$5,000.00 was raised and this was just the beginning.

At this point it was necessary to legally establish the Library with a Charter and a Board of Directors. This was drawn up by December 8, 1965 and the first Board of Directors were: William Solien, Bertha Chomont, Betty Dygon, Fay M. Mayes, A. Evelyn Schlapkohl, and Phyllis R. Smith.

The Philosophy read as follows:

"The purpose of the Lighthouse Point Library is to supply, organize and circulate such books, periodicals, newspapers, etc. which will help members of the community satisfy their need to be well informed, answer important questions, discipline their emotions, cultivate their imagination, refine their tastes and enjoy their leisure by means of recreational reading.

"In order to relate meaningfully to this purpose, the library and its staff strive to aid and encourage the young in their pursuit of knowledge and in finding rewarding experiences through literature. Since adult use of the library is mainly recreational, emphasis is placed on novels, mysteries, science fiction, biographies and the like. In conclusion, the Lighthouse Point Library aids younger members of a community to grow into adulthood and then seeks to meet the needs of that maturity."

By 1966, the library contained 3,000 volumes, books of references and entertainment for the entire family. Under the continuing leadership of William Solien, the Board of Directors continued to work diligently to raise more money. Every year, from 1966 to 1971, the Library Balls continued, and the latter ones were held at the new Lighthouse Point Yacht Club. Each one became more lucrative and more enjoyable.

Now the move for larger quarters was on. In January 1968, a lease was signed for the rental of two empty stores, 1800 sq. ft. at the Venetian Isles Shopping Center, 3770 N. Federal Highway, Lighthouse Point. The Library had 921 members, one fifth of which were non-residents (total number of residents in Lighthouse Point about 8,000).

A part-time library consultant was hired, and the staff of ten hardworking volunteers continued to develop the new location known as "the friendly meeting place." There was a special children's reading area which encouraged young parents to join the library.

The Library Balls and many other donations supported this growth from 1965 to 1971. Over \$20,000.00 was contributed, which was a goodly sum from a fairly small group of people.

Circulation grew from the 314 books in 1965 to over 10,000 books in 1968.

The Board of Directors held monthly meetings, set policy and continued to hope and work for a permanent, larger library-complex with room for cultural and theater activities for all. Architectural plans were drawn-up by a well known Ft. Lauderdale firm to present at the 1971 Library Ball. This beautifully depicted building remained a cherished dream for the visionaries who started it all. One day it may be realized.

In the meantime, the facilities at the Venetian Shopping Center served the community well. One thousand families had membership cards for the 5,002 books. Quality of the reading material made up for the quantity. Unlike most libraries then, Lighthouse Point Library allowed its reference books to be signed out. The fee to join was \$1.00, non-residents \$2.00.

The volunteers gave great sustenance to this community endeavor from the very beginning, never wavering in their devotion and willingness to work. This lifeline continued through all the changes and discomforts of moving even to present day. There are not enough words available to convey the tremendous gratitude to tile beloved and helpful volunteers from a very grateful community.

Inevitably the City Fathers realized the merits and needs of tile Library that was so special to the Lighthouse Point Community and surrounding areas. In October, 1972, the Library began to function under the jurisdiction of the City of Lighthouse Point. The Mayor was Frank McDonough. The first Advisory Board was; Mrs. William Solien, Mrs. Dan Witt, Mrs. James Stangle, Mrs. Seward Smith and Mrs. Jacob Chomlont.

The services of a full time Librarian, Mrs. Evelyn Scofield, and two part-time staff members, Mrs. Shirle Wyatt, and Mrs. Fran Festa were engaged later. The City Code was established and the Advisory Board of Directors continued to advise policy, approve budget, book orders and purchases related to the Library, and the hiring of additional personnel. A plan for a Summer Children's Program as well as a weekly reading program was put in the works for younger children and their parents.

During the next five years, there was constant growth in membership, increased

circulation and there was always the valuable assistance from more volunteers. Donations continued, books, magazines, and contributions helped purchase large print books, encyclopedias, other books for research and some necessary equipment.

In 1977, a petition was signed by hundreds of members, expressing their desire for the development of a plan to build a New Library and Cultural Center for Lighthouse Point. This encouraged the Advisory Board to present such a statement to the Commissioners and Mayor. Sometime later, meetings were held and research into this matter continued. Properties and areas available were presented, however, no feasible plan or resolve emerged at this time.

Later in 1977, Evelyn Scofield retired and Elizabeth Croke was hired as a full-time Librarian and another part-time member was added to the staff. The membership at this time was well over 3,000, the Library was crowded with books and some 2,000 volumes were stored in city buildings due to lack of space in the library.

In 1979 Elizabeth Croke moved away and the present Librarian, Doreen Wildman was hired. The volunteers increased in numbers and remained the backbone and constant help to the staff, the Librarian and community.

During this period of growth in 1979, the "Friends of the Library" was organized. The Board, a nucleus of seven enthusiastic citizens were: Ralph Gates, Pamela Buzbee, R. Blair Smith, Constance Melanson, Hermina Faherty, Gene Paullette, and Cornell Rowe. Under their aegis, 150 families joined and immediately started fund raising activities. Their participation in the development of the Library increased yearly and now in 1987, there are 900 families who are Friends of the Library. During the years of 1984-85, 86, over \$207,000 was raised through an organized drive under the leadership of Ted McLaughlin and others too numerous to mention. The money was raised specifically for a new Lighthouse Point Library.

Previous to this however, in 1980, additional space was so desperately needed that another storefront was added to the Venetian Library. Architect Thomas DiGiorgio voluntarily gave freely of his time and talent to plan and arrange the area.

Growth continued, under the able direction of Doreen Wildman, and assistance from the staff and volunteers. Tapes, film, other informative material, exhibits, every avenue of reading and research material was available, however crowded together on non-stretchable shelves. The Summer Programs for children were increasingly inventive and have become more popular every year.

During the years, the Advisory Board met monthly, helping to guide the destiny of the Library through trying times. Never daunted, the Board with Elayne Solien at its helm, continued to work toward the goal - a new Library. During this period of growth, the Mayor was Al Fletcher.

In early 1984, Publix in Venetian Shopping Center, announced it was taking over the entire area including the library space, to build a new supermarket. The inopportune news at the time meant one major thing. What was going to happen to the Library?

Soon to be evicted, a temporary move was necessary, and it was a horrendous feat. The contents of the Library were moved to a huge trailer unit in November 1985. The trailer was placed in the grounds so generously loaned by the Trinity United Methodist Church, 3901 N.E. 22nd Ave., Lighthouse Point.

After many meetings, research and discussions, Mayor Fletcher and Commissioners came up with the present plan of building a City Complex with the Library as the permanent focal point. The money raised by the Friends of the Library made this possible.

Until the complex was even started, more meetings were held, various ideas discussed, different architects were consulted, and locations were considered. Finally the firm of architects chosen was Miller, Meier, Kenyon, Cooper Architects and Engineers, Inc. from Ft. Lauderdale.

Meanwhile back at the trailer unit, the business of the Library continued. A few storms and heavy rains caused havoc, but the staunch staff, the Librarian and volunteers stretched their energies and came through with smiling faces, hoping the rainbow was just around the corner! Circulation continued, the atmosphere was friendly as always and the make-do library worked.

However difficult the change, the on and off air-conditioning, the tired workers continued to serve the community. In May 1987, the final move to the permanent Library began. Though far from finished, with furniture, and fixtures in the way, shelves were arranged and everyone pitched in to make the transition.

The volume count in 1987 is over 20,000 and the membership exceeds 7,000 children and adults. At present there are 11,500 residents. The newly elected Mayor is Leo Bentz.

The permanent home for the Lighthouse Point Library, is indeed an achievement. Few small cities can boast of such facilities that belong to their own community.

As part of the Municipal City Complex, the contemporary Library, 2200 NE 38th Street, Lighthouse Point, Florida 33064, is an interesting architectural encounter. The well-planned offices, a notable conference room , and a pleasant meeting-room large enough to accommodate 50 people has state of the art equipment throughout. Its spacious, well-lighted interior with a comfortable, secluded, reading area has a special charm and friendly ambiance.

And this is just the beginning. Plans for the future include a Monthly Cultural Series starting in January, 1988. This co-operative endeavor of the Advisory Board and Friends of the Library will bring renowned and outstanding guest speakers in the field of Art, Music and Theater. Other events will be forthcoming as the year progresses.

Without the dreams and help of so many people from the very beginning the Lighthouse Point Library would not be a reality. Fortunately it does exist, and a bright new star shines in Lighthouse Point ...

Jeanne F. Cavallaro
April 1998