

History of the Panama City Beach Public Library

Library service for Panama City Beach started in the 1960's with weekly bookmobile runs from the Bay County Public Library in Panama City. In the winter time the bookmobile was jammed with snowbirds looking forward to their weekly reads. Sandra Capps, Anita Lucas, Evelyn Lumpkin, J.C. Maender, John Garrett, Cheryl Hodges, Joyce Hix Dannecker, Rocky Harris, and Lois Moland, were some of the PCB bookmobile personnel.

"The People Want a Library" headlined an article in the Beach News on August 18, 1978. In support of that wish, the Northwest Regional Library System parked the Bookmobile - PCB (1981) bookmobile at the Beach and sent a staff member to meet a volunteer each week to provide library service in 1981. The people wanted more.



NWRLS Bookmobile and Future Library Location.

A public library for Panama City Beach was the goal of many civic minded volunteers and hardworking city officials. The first official meeting of the Advisory Board of the Panama City Beach Public Library took place on October 3, 1978. The members Dan Russell, Jane Patton (NWRLS Director), Robert Young, Mildred Russell, Julian Bennett, Jim Johnson, and W.H. Kampbell elected Peggy McCabe chair and Joe Sitton co-chair.

On October 20, 1978, Peggy McCabe announced the City of Panama City Beach had designated a parcel of city land at the corner of Firenzo and Highway 79 as the library site. The City also agreed to pay the library's annual utility bill, estimated at \$3,000-\$5,000. All that was left was to raise the construction money. The building was downsized from 6,000 to 5,000 square feet with an estimated \$200,000 construction cost. Schools, clubs, snowbirds, churches, individuals, and business donated money. The Bay County Commission pledged \$20,000 towards construction. It was truly a community effort. The grassroots fundraising campaign continued until the Panama City Beach Library opened for service in the winter of 1984. Early managers of the Panama City Beach Library were Sharon Jacquay and Gail Vandervest.



Panama City Beach's Robert L. Young Public Library

In September 1994, the library was named for Dr. Robert L. Young in recognition of his contribution to the community.

Disaster struck when Hurricane Opal, a relatively dry storm, tore off the library's metal roof in 1995. A dismayed Frances Williams watched from the Police Department next door. Within a few days Library Director George Vickery, Bay County Public Library Staff, and Van Horn Mayflower Moving Co. were packing up the entire library in anticipation of a new roof. PCB Library staff worked at BCPL until their library was again ready for occupancy.

The library continued to add to its collections and services and by 2008, it was recognized that a new, larger building was needed. Panama City Beach Mayor Gayle Oberst submitted a grant to the state for construction money which was approved. ClairPCB Library Groundbreaking Grantham was Branch Manager at the start of the project. A library committee was formed to help raise money for furnishings and construction. The committee chair, Doug Gilmore, was also part of the effort to build the first library in Panama City Beach. Joanne Wyndham served as interim manager until Frank Walker filled the position in 2009.

The new facility was completed in April 2010 and the old library was closed in May to Panama City Beach's New Library relocate to the new building at 12500 Hutchison Blvd. The move was made by library staff, volunteers, and city Road and Street Department personnel. The new library opened for business on June 1, 2010.



Groundbreaking for the new Panama City Beach Public Library at 12500 Hutchison Blvd.



Panama City Beach Public Library building at 12500 Hutchison Blvd.

On May 20, 2010 a group of interested, dedicated individuals who wished to support the PCB Library met at the new facility to discuss organizing a Friends group. After a few meetings and intense discussion, a goal of creating a Foundation to include a Friends group was enthusiastically approved.

On June 15, 2011 the Panama City Beach Public Library held an open house to celebrate its first anniversary. Mayor Oberst, City Manager Richard Jackson, City Council members, and other city officials attended along with over 400 library patrons.

A comparison of statistics between the last year in the old building and the first year in the new building show significant increases in use. Items borrowed had increased 41%; customer visits had increased 36%; questions answered had increased 112%; computer uses had increased 55%. From June 2010 to May 31, 2011 there were 3,342 new library cards created. The new library has been a huge success.