

**HEARTLAND LIBRARY COOPERATIVE
GOVERNING BOARD**

Lake Placid Public Library – Meeting Room
1069 US Hwy. 27 N., Lake Placid, FL

Minutes to the February 18, 2026 Meeting

CALL TO ORDER:

The Meeting was called to order at 10:32 a.m. Invocation and pledge was led by Jeannie Palacios.

ROLL CALL:

Jeannie Palacios Chair Hardee County; Commissioner Judy Schaefer Vice-Chair DeSoto County; Commissioner Brad Goodbread Treasurer Okeechobee County; Lauri Benson Desoto County; Commissioner Hattie Taylor Glades County; Garnett Ahern Glades County; Sue Rood Highlands County; Denise Whitehead Okeechobee County; Nancy Griest Okeechobee County; Vikki Brown Coordinator Heartland; Sonya Chapa Assistant Coordinator Heartland

Also Present: Linda Waters Librarian DeSoto County; Regina Ussery Librarian Hardee County; Kresta King Librarian Okeechobee County; Ann Burford Okeechobee County.

Absent: Ann Ryals Desoto County; Terri Moorehouse Glades County; Nicole Drake Hardee County; Commissioner Kenny Miller Hardee County; Commissioner Arlene Tuck Highlands County.

ROUTINE BUSINESS:

Notice of Public Meeting: Notice was properly given.

Additions to Agenda: Vikki Brown informed the Board that the financial statement has been added to the informational section.

Approval of the Agenda: Lauri Benson moved to accept the agenda with changes, seconded by Judy Schaefer; unanimously passed.

Approval of Minutes of Previous Meeting: Judy Schaefer moved to accept the minutes of the previous meeting, seconded by Lauri Benson; unanimously passed.

NEW BUSINESS:

PRESENTATION:

i. CliftonLarsonAllen Audit Presentation

Julie Fowler presented the Governing Board with the draft of Heartland Library Cooperatives annual audit results conducted by CliftonLarsonAllen. Julie informed the board that the draft was being presented as it was not able to be printed in time for the meetings agenda, however the results would be the same as the final audit. Julie presented the independent auditors' report which states that the financial statements

are in accordance with general accounting principles and were found to present fairly in all materials respects in the year ending 2025, resulting in a clean audit result for the Heartland Library Cooperative. Julie also presented the Cooperative's balance sheet, informed the Board that the Cooperative currently holds \$997,000 in total assets, most of which is in cash, and with a little bit of liabilities, the overall ending fund balance is \$958,000 for the year, meaning the Cooperative is in a strong financial position. Julie also informed the Board that should the Cooperative not receive its usual funding, the Cooperative would still be able to operate for two years with the current fund balance. Julie also presented the statement of revenue expenditures, stating that the Cooperative was right on budget, with revenue at \$454,000 and expenditures at \$433,000, and so the Cooperative is in compliance, breaking even with a \$20,000 increase added to the fund balance. Julie also presented the Government auditing standards report, showing no findings or deficiencies in internal control, and everything is being reported appropriately. Julie presented the management letter to the Board, reporting no findings or noncompliance with State statutes. Julie informed the Board that overall, the audit is good news for Heartland, with the Cooperative system working well. Lauri Benson asked if the Board was able to approve this report as the final audit; Julie stated that yes as long as there were no changes, the draft would be approved as the final audit. Brad Goodbread approved the final audit as presented with the draft, seconded by Denise Whitehead; unanimously passed.

CONSENT AGENDA:

Brad Goodbread moved to accept the consent agenda, seconded by Judy Schaefer; unanimously passed.

- I. Budget Amendment 26-01**
- II. Purchase of 2026 Nissan Rogue SUC (replacing the 2016 Dodge Caravan)**
 - A. All Cooperative vehicles will now be 2023 or newer.**

INFORMATIONAL:

- I. Cooperative updates**
 - A. We are working towards transitioning all public computers to be managed by the cloud-based version of our current software. Two libraires have already been moved over, and they are working well. We have better customized and can change settings immediately, when necessary.**

Vikki Brown reminded the Board of the approval to purchase and move the Cooperative's to a cloud-based software to make them more efficient to manage and easier to personalize per branch. Vikki informed the Board that two Libraries have been moved over to the new software, with the third and fourth currently being updated to transition soon. Vikki reported that there were still a few kinks to work out, but so far everything is working great; Vikki is pleased with the software's capabilities, stating that as we move forward, the software can continue to be customized for each branch to promote specific events, closings, etc. Vikki also reported that the new software does not use much

memory so computers are running faster. Vikki informed the Board that prior to the transition, only one staff computer could manage the computers per branch, and if this computer had issues or was needed for other use it would cause issues for the public computers, but with the new software management can be done from any computer with a staff login leading to more efficiency.

B. The text message service we transitioned to late last year is working well, also.

Vikki Brown informed the Board that the new text messaging service previously approved by the Board is working great and there have been no complaints from the public.

II. Library Statistics

Vikki Brown informed the Board that the statistics were updated with feedback from the Board. Vikki stated that there are some instances where the statistics seem to be down; after talking with the Libraries this appears to be based on the state of the world right now with people staying home more often. Vikki informed the Board that website statistics are up, with services like Mometrix being the highest they have ever been. Linda Waters asked if the Libby statistics were based on both TBLC and SWFLN; Vikki stated that they are based on only TBLC usage in Heartland right now but do include student usage of Libby as well. Linda informed the Board that it was interesting to see that Heartland is one of the few Library systems that allow reciprocal borrowers to use electronic items, as most systems have moved away from this service, and is very thankful we have not decided to go this route as well. Linda provided the example of Charlotte County residents who come to the DeSoto Library to get reciprocal borrowing cards so that they can access Heartland's ebooks, as the other surrounding counties choose not to share their digital assets among reciprocal borrowers. Linda stated that it was interesting to be a smaller county that is being called on to fill a need.

III. Member Updates

Brad Goodbread informed the Board of the Okeechobee Music Fest which will take place from March 19th- 22nd, along with the Special Perch Festival and Rodeo taking place March 14th – 15th.

Judy Schaefer stated she was proud of the report provided by Julie Fowler and is happy the Cooperative is in a good position. Judy stated that she tries to say at all her meetings how thankful she is for the Library and is especially proud of the DeSoto Library and how far it has come. Judy is always amazed by kids telling her what they can do at the Library; Judy thanked Linda for all of her work and the DeSoto staff for making the Library fun. Judy also agreed with Linda informing the Board that many Charlotte County residents go to DeSoto for services; Jeannie Palacios echoed this stating that she knew kids that go to the DeSoto Library County and how they have stated how they always feel welcome and want to go to the Library. Jeannie complimented the DeSoto Library for the great culture that has been created for the public.

Lauri Benson agreed with the importance of a welcoming atmosphere and informed the Board that even the DeSoto County Veterans' service office is used by other Counties. Denise Whitehead stated it is the same in Okeechobee with seasonal residents preferring to wait so that they can go to the Veterans' office in Okeechobee.

Linda Waters stated that she was looking forward to the CloudNine service to be transitioned to DeSoto. Linda also informed the Board that as of right now in the current fiscal year, DeSoto will have more than 2,000 hours of volunteers hours done. Linda stated the importance of this as DeSoto doesn't have the strongest budget but the volunteers are a wonderful community and the DeSoto Library couldn't accomplish everything it does without the volunteers. Linda stated that the volunteers have formed a strong community that enjoys each others' company and have come together to accomplish so much, providing the example that today the volunteers were unloading a truck of 6,000 lbs. of food for the pantry. Linda also informed the Board that after three years of work, the DeSoto Library was working with a program based in Sarasota called 40 Carrots, a literacy based program for babies/toddlers and parents to promote early development. Linda also admitted she had been resistant to doing sharing Libraries but is happy to report that 1,500 books have been provided to the community and has been a positive impact.

Kresta King informed the Board of the Friends of the Okeechobee Library that were volunteers for the Okeechobee Library's Mardi Gras Family Carnival; it was a fantastic event which the community enjoyed, and she was even surprised at the number of adults that stayed far longer to continue the activities. Kresta also informed the Board of a potential playground project for Okeechobee, stating that which an increased in children visitors, for example the 80 first graders that were planned to attend a Library tour on the upcoming Friday, a playground would be a great use for these events to help split groups and provide more resources for the community. Kresta stated that she presented at the Rotary Club of Okeechobee's recent meeting and they may be open to funding a portion of the project. Kresta also informed the Board of the Library's Yoga program which has been a great success and has even reached up to 80 attendees at it's highest.

Denise Whitehead informed the Board that this tourism season has been very busy in Okeechobee with the population doubling with so many events including the Great Florida Cattle drive, the Heritage festival, the Yeehaw musical festival, the Bassmaster elite and college teams competition which will be two-three weeks of fishing, the Jack Links shooting tournament, the County Fair and Livestock shows, the Brighton Fields Days event, and the Florida High School rodeos. Denise also informed the Board that both the Rotary Club and the Girl Scout Troops have adopted more Little Free Libraries in Okeechobee County.

Denise gave a kudos to Kresta King and the Okeechobee staff for their outreach efforts, the success is shown in the increased attendance at the Okeechobee Library; Denise also gave a huge kudos as other departments are getting used to partner on these events. Denise informed the Board that the National Government Communicators recognition was presented by the Okeechobee County Board of County Commissioners and Kresta and her team were recognized for the work they do along with other departments. Garnett Ahern asked about A Land Remembered being filmed; Denise informed the Board that the cattle drive had a film crew and that it was being broadcasted to schools along with a National Geographic photographer being present to document the event.

Regina Ussery informed the Board that new circulation desks were ordered and are on their way to the Hardee Library. Regina said this was in thanks to funding granted to update the adult and teen areas. Regina also informed the Board that Hardee was also granted funding through a cultural trust to do a mural in the teen space which will be a retro game style mural. Regina stated that the recent Stranger Things teen event was a success and had over 50 teens in attendance. Regina informed the Board that between October and December there were over 2,000 people attending in-person programs at the Hardee Library. Regina also stated that the Library would be doing offsite storytime programs at the tortoise enclosure at the Hardee Animal Refuge which children getting to pet the tortoises.

Nancy Griest informed the Board that Okeechobee Library has had an increase in people attending the Crochet and Craft clubs. Nancy also stated that the Okeechobee Library received a request by the prison to donation books and was able to provide boxes of book to the prison's Library as the Library has also had an increase in book donations from the public. Nancy stated that all areas of the Library are being used by the public and the Okeechobee Library is doing well.

Garnett Ahern informed the Board that Iris Perkins was unable to attend the meeting due to a staff shortage, but was happy to report on her behalf that the Art in the Park event was a great success. Garnett stated that the Library's attendance at the festival resulted in a lot of residents signing up for new Library cards so the Glades Library hopes to attend all of the upcoming area festivals in the future to continue this success. Garnett also informed the Board that a new Little Library has been added in Washington Park and the Little Library system is doing great in Glades County.

Hattie Taylor gave a pat on the back for the Glades Library for doing great things and offering lots of programs for the community. Hattie informed the Board that the Art in the Park event was a great day and a very successful event. Hattie is very excited for the things the Library is doing and for the many events coming up in Glades County including the Catfish Festival, the Sour Orange Festival,

Chalo Nitka, and the Brighton Field Days event. Hattie thanked everyone for all they do for our communities and Libraries.

Sue Rood informed the Board that the Sebring Library is very busy and has a lot on the shelves.

Sonya Chapa informed the Board that the Okeechobee Library is busier than ever. Sonya stated that the Mardi Gras event was a great success and very well attended with giveaways, activities, face painting, and fairy hair available for the public along with local organizations partnering on providing more giveaways and information and volunteers from the Friends of the Library and Okeechobee High School Beta Club assisting. Sonya stated that there were many new attendees who were happy to learn about the Library and all of its programs and services. Sonya also informed the Board of more community events coming up including an Easter event and Summer Block Party; Sonya stated that these events have been successful at bringing people to the Library and strengthening community partnerships to inform the public about resources and services available in Okeechobee County. Sonya also informed the Board that free summer meals will be available again this summer, with seven days work of lunches and snacks available for pick up on Saturdays provided by the Boys & Girls Club of Martin County; Sonya also stated the Library is working on providing a second day for meal distribution during the week at the Library this summer as well.

Vikki Brown informed the Board that a Women in Leadership forum would be held at the Sebring Library after hours, from 4:00 – 6:00 p.m., inviting local women leaders to share their leadership journeys and will be a panel session open to anyone. Vikki also informed the Board that the Lake Placid Library will be holding its Easter event on Saturday, March 28th with an easter egg hunt, face painting, and raffle. Vikki informed the Board that April is Child Abuse Awareness Month and the Highlands County Children's Advocacy Centers and Sheriff Department will have guest readers to show children the leaders in the community and familiarize them with safe people and organizations. Vikki also informed the Board that during hurricanes, Highlands Library staff work at the shelters with Vikki serving as the shelter manager and so the staff will be receiving more training on the process along with call center trainings. Vikki also stated that the Highlands County Board of County Commissioners has approved an American Library Association membership for Vikki and she is excited to be able to attend the ALA Annual Conference in June. Denise Whitehad asked if there were other opportunities for the Heartland Governing Board to support trainings and conferences; Vikki informed the Board that due to restrictions the Cooperative is usually unable to fund these efforts but she will do more research.

Jeannie Palacios stated that the Hardee Library is doing great and the Friends of the Library bookstore is still going well. The bookstore has sold a lot of books and had a successful Trade A Book event. Jeannie also informed the Board that the Hardee Library has a lot of events coming up. Jeannie stated that the Little Library system is doing great in Hardee County as well as has utilized the Libraries to reach areas where access to the Hardee Library is more limited making sure to include children and adult books as well to serve all of the community; there is a new Library as the Hardee health center.

Next Meeting is **Wednesday, May 20, 2026**, at 10:30 a.m.

ADJOURNMENT:

Jeannie Palacios adjourned the meeting at 11:32 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Sonya Chapa