

County Connection

February 2026

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Stay Engaged. Click the logos to join us on social media



Okaloosa County America 250

While Okaloosa County was formed in 1915, the people and history of this area existed well before that time.

The Board of County Commissioners recently approved the formation of an Okaloosa County America 250 Commission to celebrate this nation's birthday with a variety of events throughout the year.

The purpose of the Commission is to gather local community leaders and organizations around a cohesive effort to promote and celebrate the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence and unite Okaloosa citizens around this common theme.

I encourage you to participate and attend the events as they are planned to not only celebrate this country's rich history, but Okaloosa County's as well. Events can be tracked on the official [website here](#).



John Hofstad
County Administrator

Okaloosa County celebrates 2,000 feet of living shoreline on Choctawhatchee Bay



The \$4.6 million project was funded through tourism bed tax revenue, a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and money from the RESTORE Council through the Gulf Consortium. [READ MORE>>](#)

Okaloosa County, NAACP meet on Gap Creek flooding in Fort Walton Beach



Okaloosa County officials and NAACP leaders met recently to discuss a path forward on persistent flooding issues affecting the Sylvania Heights neighborhood, following the civil rights organization's call last month for urgent intervention. [READ MORE>>](#)

Okaloosa, NWFSU collaborate to produce commemorative SS United States coins from ship's salvaged aluminum



Commemorative coins made from aluminum salvaged from the SS United States are being produced at Northwest Florida State College through a collaboration with Okaloosa County's Natural Resources team ahead of the ship's artificial reef deployment. [READ MORE>>](#)

The best sunset spots along Destin-Fort Walton Beach



Sunsets along the Emerald Coast never get old and there are plenty of places to soak in the stunning sky. Jamie Kamber, editor of [Destin Snapshots](#) and local photographer, is sharing her favorite sunset spots in Destin and Fort Walton Beach. [READ MORE>>](#)

Okaloosa Island Pier's underwater camera back online after months-long upgrade



The underwater camera at Okaloosa Island Pier is streaming again after the Natural Resources team from Visit Destin-Fort Walton Beach redeployed it Saturday with a dedicated fiber network. [READ MORE>>](#)

Sickle cell nonprofit plans all-day Valentine's Day fundraiser in Fort Walton Beach



"Melodies of Love is about more than entertainment," Morris said. "It's about creating space for community, celebrating love in all its forms, and supporting a cause that impacts families right here in our region." [READ MORE>>](#)



Primed Paramedic

The Omega Lodge 380 in Fort Walton Beach recently recognized Okaloosa County EMS Paramedic Cassie Freitas as their Paramedic of the Year. She was also recognized by the FWB Exchange Club as the EMS Employee of the Year



Back in Business

On Saturday, February 7th, 2026, the Natural Resources team from Visit Destin-Fort Walton Beach, with the assistance of the fiber IT team, re-deployed the underwater camera at the end of the pier. [View the live feed here>>](#)



Recycled and Reclaimed

Our Water & Sewer crews were hard at work this month installing reclaimed water lines at the intersection of Forest Road and College Boulevard in Niceville. Reclaimed water relieves the demand and impact on the drinking water supply. Reclaimed water uses the purplish colored pipes and is commonly used for irrigation.



Making progress

Construction is well underway at the Shoal River Industrial Park at the Williams International site. Williams International, a high-volume aviation gas turbine engine company, will construct a manufacturing facility in three phases within the Shoal River Industrial Park. This \$1 billion investment in Okaloosa County will not only benefit the local economy but will also create over 300 high-paying jobs in our backyard.



Meet the Team

Tourism partners and community leaders attended the Meet the Team Day recently at the Crestview Welcome + Adventure Center. From tourism partners to local businesses and community members, it was awesome to connect, swap ideas and put faces to the marketing team behind Destin-Fort Walton Beach. The Crestview Welcome + Adventure Center is open to everyone, not just tourists.



Making the Best Use of Time

Congratulations to Stephen Coplen and four other inmates at the Okaloosa County Jail who recently completed the Safeserv food safety course. This four-week course allowed inmates to learn the necessary steps to ensure food safety, sanitation and kitchen management. This certification is recognized by the National Restaurant Association and positions them to exit our jail with the necessary skills to begin a career in our vibrant food industry. Pictured with Coplen is Officer Charles Wallace who assisted the inmates during their time with this program.



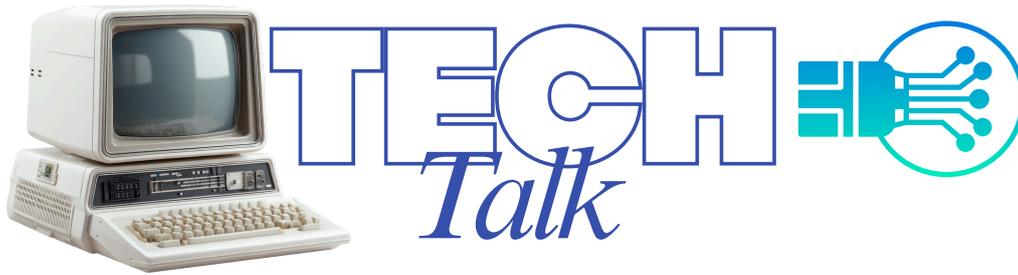
Tree Time

The UF IFAS Extension Okaloosa County staff helped pass out free trees at the City of Niceville's Arbor Day celebration. The trees were provided by the Florida Forest Service .



Waterway Safety

Coastal Code Enforcement Officer Chris Mitchell recently facilitated the Annual Waterway Safety Meeting at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center. Livery vessel owners received important boating safety information for the upcoming spring and summer seasons.



Sharing Links to Collaborate

As our productivity tools evolve, we are moving away from traditional email attachments toward more secure, link-based collaboration. Sharing via Microsoft 365 ensures your team always works from a "Single Source of Truth."

- Real-Time Co-Authoring: Multiple members can edit or comment simultaneously, reducing project timelines and "version bloat."
- Enhanced Security & Control: Permissions can be revoked or updated at any time, ensuring sensitive data stays within the intended group.
- Reduced Data Footprint: Minimizing file copies reduces storage costs and ensures our backups remain efficient and defensible.

To begin:

- Upload your files to OneDrive or SharePoint
- Generate the link by clicking "Share" or "Copy Link"
- Set permissions to access the link and edit if needed
- For Windows devices, use Ctrl + K to embed a clean link in your email text



UF IFAS Extension
UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA



Pictured, are participants in the Okaloosa County 4-H holiday party in December. They had a phenomenal time. From building gingerbread houses to playing with markers, smiles were all around! Congratulations to the winners of our bake-off.

First place was awarded to Emily Patterson for her delicious Conundrum Cookies. Second place was awarded to Nicholas Johnson for his delightful Eggnog Poke Cake. Third place was awarded to John Bearden for his delectable Peanut Butter Brownies!

We are so thankful to everyone who came out and celebrated with us. Parents and other special guests made the party an absolute hit!

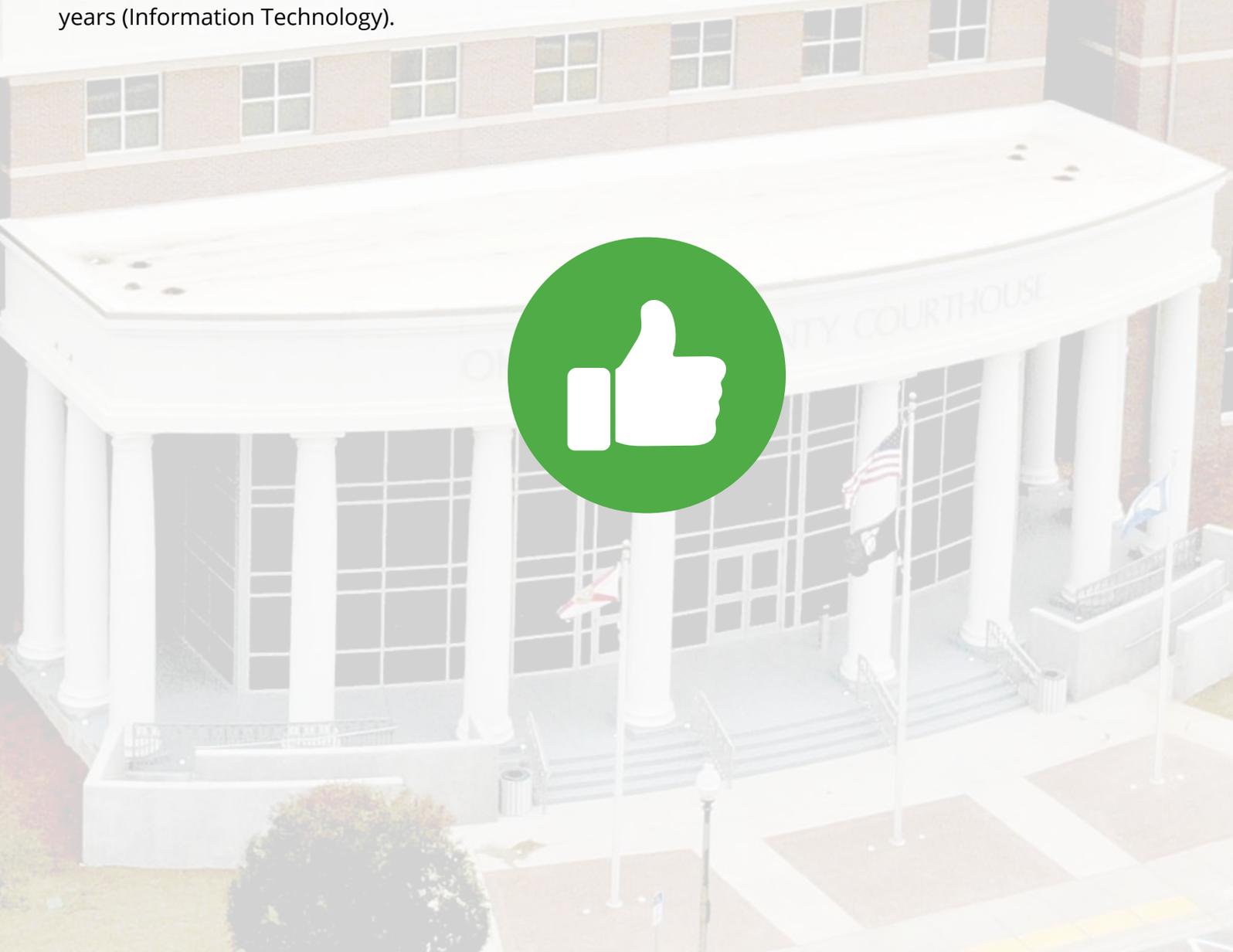
We are looking forward to more exciting events starting this spring! We have our Embryology Program going on over the course of the next few months, the EGGstravaganza at Nixon Farms on March 28th, our County Events Competition coming up on April 11, all followed by our phenomenal summer camps!

Reach out to our 4-H Extension Agent at hartleyspaulling@ufl.edu to get more information or to find out how to get involved!

Recent Milestones



Pictured with County Administrator John Hofstad and County Commissioners are David Figueroa, 20 years (Stormwater Road Construction Supervisor), Tyree Alston, 2 years (Airports Operations Coordinator), Kevin Levine, 2 years (Public Works - Road), Nicholas Wisnoski, 2 years (General Aviation Airports Manager), James Thompson, 2 years (Facility & Parks), Robert Witt, (Facility & Parks), Lane Davis, 2 years (Water & Sewer), William James, Jr, 20 years (Facility & Parks Maintenance) and Robert Card, 20 years (Information Technology).



In Case You Missed It

Regular Board Meetings

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February 3

- Board approved amending bond documents for Destin High School.
- Board approved Destination Stewardship Plan for 2026.
- Board approved new Destination Stewardship Coordinator position within TDD
- Board approved adjusting County organization chart to place Transit under the Airports Department.

February 17

- Board acknowledged partnership between NWFSC and the County for commemorative SS United States coin production.
- Board recognized outgoing members of the Okaloosa County Commission on the Status of Women.
- Board approved requesting Public Hearing to consider adoption of Local Option Sales Tax.
- Board declined to approve zoning request for property in the Green Acres area.
- Board approved lease with JetBlue for operation at VPS.
- Board approved moving forward with design phase of Rigdon Center improvements.

TIDBITS

VOTER-APPROVED INFRASTRUCTURE SURTAX

FREQUENTLY
ASKED
QUESTIONS



WHAT WOULD HAPPEN
IF WE DID **NOT** HAVE
INFRASTRUCTURE SURTAX?

MYOKALOOSA.COM

FAQ: What would happen if we did NOT have the infrastructure surtax?

ANSWER: Property taxes would have to increase by 19% to generate the same revenue as the infrastructure surtax.

Infrastructure would be at risk of failing without a long-term improvement solution, placing a greater burden upon the County's general fund and therefore placing a burden on other County services.

The voter-approved infrastructure surtax has been used to address the ever-present traffic issue in north Okaloosa County. Without this resource, traffic complications would persist beyond the current roadway demands and lead to greater motorist frustrations.

Learn more about the voter-approved infrastructure surtax with the answer to this and other FAQs at <https://myokaloosa.com/bcc/infrastructureprojects/faqs>

