



AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE IN OKALOOSA COUNTY

The approaching season of Thanksgiving is a good time to examine our blessings and focus on gratitude for what Okaloosa County has to offer.

We are truly fortunate to call such a beautiful place home. Our southern beaches are among the most breathtaking in the world, offering pristine white sands and crystal-clear waters that invite both relaxation and adventure. Along the Okaloosa County coastline, residents and visitors alike can enjoy stunning vistas, peaceful walks, and countless opportunities for exercise and leisure. In the northern part of our county, the meandering Shoal and Yellow Rivers provide a haven for boating, fishing, kayaking, hiking, and hunting. It's no wonder so many people choose to live here — drawn by the natural beauty and outdoor lifestyle that make this area so special.

Between these divergent landscapes lies the economic drivers of our community — Eglin Air Force Base, Hurlburt Field, Duke Field, 7th Special Forces Group, and Camp Rudder. We appreciate our active-duty and retired military personnel who bring a wealth of experience, leadership, and dedication that strengthen every aspect of our region.

Our beautiful panhandle, in addition to the great outdoors, offers cultural events at The Mattie Kelly Arts Center, home to the Northwest Florida State College Department of Humanities, Fine, and Performing Arts. This wonderful venue hosts a wide array of events and productions throughout the year. From student-led performances to professional Broadway tours, there's always something inspiring to experience at Mattie Kelly. The Center is also home to the Northwest Florida Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, under the direction of the talented Todd Craven.

Northwest Florida State College began as a small community college, and has grown into a true powerhouse within the Florida College System. Today, the College offers an impressive range of programs — from the arts to welding — including a Bachelor of Science in Nursing. Students

enjoy a vibrant campus experience, complete with newly constructed on-campus housing and award-winning baseball and basketball teams that bring excitement and pride to the community.

Okaloosa County is home to four active and engaged Chambers of Commerce — Fort Walton Beach, Destin, Crestview, and Niceville-Valparaiso. Each of these Chambers plays a vital role in strengthening our community, supporting local businesses, and fostering economic growth. Our nine municipalities also collaborate closely with their local and neighboring Chambers, building partnerships that benefit the entire region. Through shared advocacy, coordinated initiatives, and community events, they bring our communities closer together and enhance the quality of life for residents and visitors alike.

Regardless of faith background, everyone can find a beautiful and dedicated house of worship here in Okaloosa County. These diverse faith communities work hand in hand on many projects that strengthen our love for one another and deepen our shared devotion to our community. One such effort is the Lazarus Memorial Event, an annual service organized by an ecumenical group of pastors to honor those in our community who have passed away during the year without family or friends to attend to their final needs. Traditionally held on November 2 at Beal Memorial Cemetery at 10:00 A.M., this year's ceremony will take place on November 3, since November 2 falls on a Sunday this year.

Finally, let's talk about County services. We are fortunate to have a strong and well-run Sheriff's Office, led by Sheriff Eric Aden. His department — and the dedicated men and women who serve and protect our citizens — deserve our deepest gratitude.

Working alongside the Sheriff's Office is the Okaloosa County Public Safety Department, directed by Patrick Maddox. This department includes Emergency Medical Services (EMS) and Beach Safety Lifeguards, all of whom are always ready and prepared to respond. Whether handling a medical emergency or managing a weather-related event, Chief Maddox and his team remain vigilant and proactive in keeping Okaloosa County safe. And behind the scenes, our dispatchers, who remain calm under any circumstance, ensure that help is always on the way. Together, they truly have our backs.

Across Okaloosa County, our many fire districts are highly focused and well-trained, working tirelessly to ensure the safety of our nearly 200,000 residents. From Almarante in the north to Okaloosa Island in the south, we can always count on our dedicated firefighters to respond swiftly and professionally whenever they're needed.

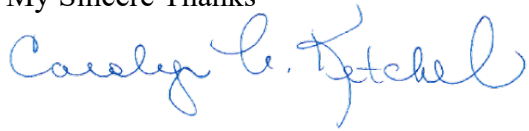
Our multi-airport system includes Destin–Fort Walton Beach Airport (VPS), Destin Executive Airport, and Bob Sikes Airport. It is the fastest-growing airport systems in the United States — and may be the only debt-free airport system. The leadership provided by Airports Director

Tracy Stage is truly unparalleled in Florida, guiding a system that continues to expand while maintaining exceptional financial stewardship and service.

At times, life can be challenging. Far too many people in our community experience food insecurity, and your generosity can make a real difference in their lives. When our citizens face a crisis, the philanthropic organizations in Okaloosa County — including the Jaycees, Lions Club, Rotary Clubs, Kiwanis Club, The United Way and numerous food pantries — are there to provide much-needed support. If you have been blessed with abundance, especially during this holiday season, please remember our local food pantries.

It is an honor to serve as your County Commissioner, and I wish everyone a blessed Thanksgiving.

My Sincere Thanks



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