



County Connection

Decemberrrrr 2025

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



Holiday wishes

We have accomplished a lot this past year. The residents of Okaloosa County are the biggest benefactors of your hard work and our accomplishments are clearly a reflection of the work you carry out each day with a steady consistency.

We are fortunate to have elected officials who help guide us through our challenges with passion and thoughtfulness to ensure we remain a responsible government agency.

We all share this responsibility.

I am thankful to you for how you continue to perform at a high level and for how we collaborate to reach our goals.

My appreciation is shared by our Commissioners as well. They expressed their appreciation for the Okaloosa County staff at the December Board meeting.

Our outgoing Chairman, Paul Mixon, shared his thoughts and support. You can view his remarks by [clicking this video link](#).

Have a safe and enjoyable holiday.



John Hofstad
County Administrator

In the News

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Goodwin, Palmer selected to lead Okaloosa County Commission in 2026



The Okaloosa Board of County Commissioners selected its 2026 leadership during the December meeting, voting to appoint District 4 Commissioner Trey Goodwin as chairman and District 5 Commissioner Drew Palmer as vice chairman.

[READ MORE>>](#)

Okaloosa approves funding to complete SS United States artificial reef project, addresses concerns



Commissioner Sherri Cox emphasized during the discussion that the funds raised for the project, to date, exceed the amendment request by more than \$1 million, meaning there would be no impact on citizens except for the benefit of the project moving forward.

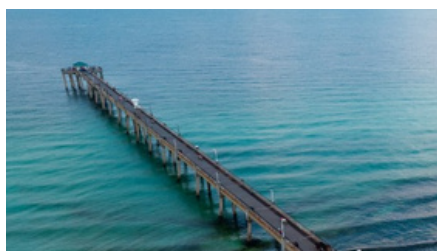
[READ MORE>>](#)

Crestview teen Asher Guillory named Keep Florida Beautiful 'Youth Champion of the Year'



A Crestview High School student who founded a statewide anti-litter initiative was recognized Tuesday by Okaloosa County commissioners after being named Keep Florida Beautiful Youth Champion of the Year for 2025. [READ MORE>>](#)

Destin joins Okaloosa in opposing Eastern Gulf oil drilling near military training range



The Destin City Council voted to send a letter opposing oil drilling and energy exploration in the eastern Gulf, joining Okaloosa County and members of Florida's congressional delegation in calling for protections for a critical military training area. [READ MORE>>](#)

Okaloosa business organizations make case for renewal of half-cent infrastructure surtax



King asked commissioners to consider a 10-year renewal term that would begin in January 2029 and run through December 2038. Voters originally approved the surtax in 2018. [READ MORE>>](#)

Okaloosa approves restroom facility for Cinco Bayou boat launch



The bathroom will be installed near the former three-story former bank building at 198 Eglin Parkway NE that the county purchased in March for \$2.95 million, which will serve as the new Tourism Development Department headquarters. [READ MORE>>](#)

Department News

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Making a difference together



The 2025-26 Paramedic students at Northwest Florida State College EMS Programs proudly partnered with Okaloosa Community Paramedics and community outreach to help bring comfort and joy to families in need this holiday season by collecting toys, clothing and jackets.

Staying "on" in the off-season



Okaloosa Beach Safety lifeguards remain committed to their work even in the off-season by continuing their training as well as reaching out to the community with their recent appearance in the Fort Walton Beach Christmas parade.

Giving Thanks



Okaloosa County Department of Corrections would like to show appreciation to the dedicated volunteers of Operation Holiday Cheer.

The organization served hot meals to on duty military, and first responder personnel throughout Okaloosa county on Thanksgiving day.

Naturally Outstanding



The Destin-Fort Walton Beach Natural Resources Team has been selected and was honored at the Okaloosa Board of County Commissioners meeting on Tuesday as the recipient of the 2025 Maritime Landscape Preservation (MLAP) Outstanding Preservation Award.

The 2025 MLAP Outstanding Preservation Award recognizes the team's science-driven approach, innovative technologies, and dedication to partnerships across the Gulf Coast region.

Keeping Okaloosa Beautiful



The Okaloosa Board of County Commissioners recognized Crestview resident Asher Guillory during the December Board meeting for being named the Keep Florida Beautiful (KFB) Youth Champion of the Year.

Crestview resident Asher Guillory, 17, was named the Keep Florida Beautiful Youth Champion recently at this year's annual KFB conference. This award is given to only one person in the state out of 47 affiliates. She was nominated by Molly McDaniel, Okaloosa County's Keep Okaloosa Beautiful Director and Environmental Resource Coordinator.

Pouring Progress



Immense progress continues to be made at the Shoal River Water Reclamation Facility in Crestview. Crews have been pouring concrete recently for the necessary infrastructure at the facility.

Big league improvements for little league



Great work is being accomplished by Facility and Parks crews at the Shalimar Port Dixie Little League Park with the installation of two new synthetic ball fields and batting cages. More improvements are on the way and include the addition of more fields, bringing the total to six softball/baseball fields.

PLEDGE FORM

[Download, print and fill out your pledge form here>>>](#)

or online at <https://united-way.goodworldnow.com/p/okaloosacounty>



Dear Okaloosa County Team,

We have an incredible opportunity to support the very community we serve every day. We have launched the workplace campaign for United Way Emerald Coast—a local nonprofit that connects individuals and families in Okaloosa and Walton counties with the resources they need to thrive.

How You Can Get Involved

Give Back: Every gift has an enormous impact—no matter the size. Just \$5 per month can help provide a family with three nights of shelter.

Get Involved: Your time matters, too. Just five hours of volunteering can help a child learn to read or ensure a family receives a nutritious meal. United Way Emerald Coast offers opportunities for every interest—sign up here.

Take Action: Stay informed through the employee newsletter, follow @uwemeraldcoast on social media, or check out the Change Starts With U podcast on YouTube (or wherever you get your podcasts). You can also explore special interest groups like Women United, ReadingPals, or NextGen United.

Not sure where to begin? Start by reviewing the brochure you received, visiting united-way.org, or exploring UWEC's online resources. However you get involved, your support truly makes a difference.

PLEDGE FORM

[Download, print and fill out your pledge form here>>>](#)

All pledge forms are due by January 7th—but giving is always welcome beyond that date!

Thank you for being part of something bigger and for helping create a stronger, more connected community.

Best regards,
Okaloosa County HR & Risk Management Team

TOGETHER, WE OPEN DOORS.

A local woman spent more than three years living in her car, with only her emotional support animal beside her. Every day was a struggle to stay safe and survive. That all changed when a dedicated outreach team, funded by United Way Emerald Coast, connected with her. Through their support, she received housing assistance, mental health care, and access to essential resources. Now she has a safe, affordable place to call home—and for the first time in years, she can rest and begin building a more stable future, with her loyal companion at her side.

Her story is just one of many. The need is real, and it is growing. We are working hard to meet it, but we cannot do it alone. Together, we can answer every call for help by providing food, shelter, mental health care, safe spaces, and more. It does not take much to make a difference.

FOR JUST \$5...



ONE TIME

YOU create academic success for a local student.



A MONTH

YOU provide 3 nights of safe shelter for those in need.



TWICE A MONTH

YOU feed 13 local families in our community.

JOIN US BY FILLING OUT THE PLEDGE FORM
OR GIVE ONLINE AT
WWW.UNITED-WAY.ORG/OKALOOSACOUNTY



A message from your County
Information Technology Experts

Tech Talk

The Holidays (And the Criminals) Are Just Around the Corner

It's that time of year again — a time of celebrations and festivities! You might be buying gifts and vouchers, organizing family reunions and trips, or maybe even donating money to charity. Unfortunately, there are also plenty of opportunities for dishonest criminals to take advantage of your generosity and joyful mood. To stay safe over the next few weeks, you should follow a few simple instructions.

Donations

Cybercriminals often make fake fundraising appeals around the holidays to exploit people's goodwill. They use deceptively real emails or websites to steal money or data. To be on the safe side, verify that the organization is authentic and never click on links or attachments in unsolicited emails.



Gift Cards

During holidays, fraudsters often spread fake gift cards, vouchers, or discount codes via emails or social media. These offers can lead to identity theft or the spread of malware. **You should only buy gift cards and vouchers from official websites.**

Offers

Unrealistically cheap offers, often for coveted products or trips, are a popular scam. If an offer seems too good to be true, it's likely to be a scam. **Only buy from trusted retailers and always be suspicious of offers that are well below the market price.**



Deliveries

With many people ordering gifts online, fake delivery notifications are particularly common. To protect yourself, **always check shipment tracking via the official website of the delivery company, and don't click on links in unexpected delivery notifications.**



UF IFAS Extension
UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

Extension Services Awarded the Florida Master Gardener Volunteer Legacy Award!

The UF/IFAS Okaloosa County Master Gardener Volunteer (MGV) Program received a Florida Master Gardener Volunteer Legacy Award.

Through a statewide competitive process, the Okaloosa County MGV project received \$1,100 to achieve the proposed project focused on having a positive impact in the Okaloosa County community. Specifically, the MGV will partner with Okaloosa Technical College's to expand the Unique Professionals (UP) Culinary Garden Program. The Okaloosa UP program is the first in Okaloosa County to offer an inclusive college experience for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Through gardening, culinary arts, and building trades, UP students develop practical skills preparing them for success as active participants in their communities.

The UP program creates an innovative model of experiential learning where students follow the complete cycle of food production from planting and nurturing seeds to harvesting herbs and vegetables to incorporating them into meals. MGVS support the UP program in a multitude of ways such as classroom instruction, individualized mentoring, hands-on gardening and maintenance, and leadership building. Extension Services is excited for this continued partnership and benefit to UP students supporting our community.



DO YOU KNOW YOUR NUMBERS?

Receive **\$75** in your paycheck for participating in the biometric screening. With the potential to earn an additional **\$50**.

Receive immediate results for cholesterol, diabetes, blood pressure and more.

Fasting 2 hours before your screening is recommended, but NOT required.

To ensure everyone who wants to be seen is seen, **appointments are required.**

Register today to get your preferred time slot!

<https://schedule.pickatime.com/OkaloosaBOCCHealthScreeningSched>

January

2026

Health Fair & Biometrics

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
5	6	7	8
		County Extension Office 3098 Airport Rd. Crestview 7:00 am – 11:00 am	Water & Sewer 1804 Lewis Turner Blvd Fort Walton Beach 6:30 am – 10:30 am
12	13	14	15
		Corrections Muster Room 4 pm – 7 pm	
19	20	21	22
		Corrections Muster Room 4 pm – 7 pm	OCAB Training Room 1250 Eglin Pkwy Shalimar, FL. 32579 7 am – 11 am 12 pm – 1:00 pm (FM only)
26	27	28	29
	Public Works – North 1759 S. Ferdon Blvd, Crestview 6:30 am – 10:00 am		



Wellness incentive payouts: Wellness Incentive payouts will be made in the 12.25.2025 paycheck for activities completed through 10.31.2025, fitness incentives and those that walked in the Parade.

Recent Milestones



Congratulations to these County employees who are celebrating their work anniversaries. Pictured with County Administrator John Hofstad and County Commissioners are Jared Porter (2 years, Certified Equipment Technician), Kristy Kratz (5 years, Human Resources), Brad Callaway (5 years, Electronics Supervisor) and Pamela McCelvy (25 years, Supervisor of Elections).



Other notable milestones

- Matt Hall, 10 years, Information Technology

In Case You Missed It

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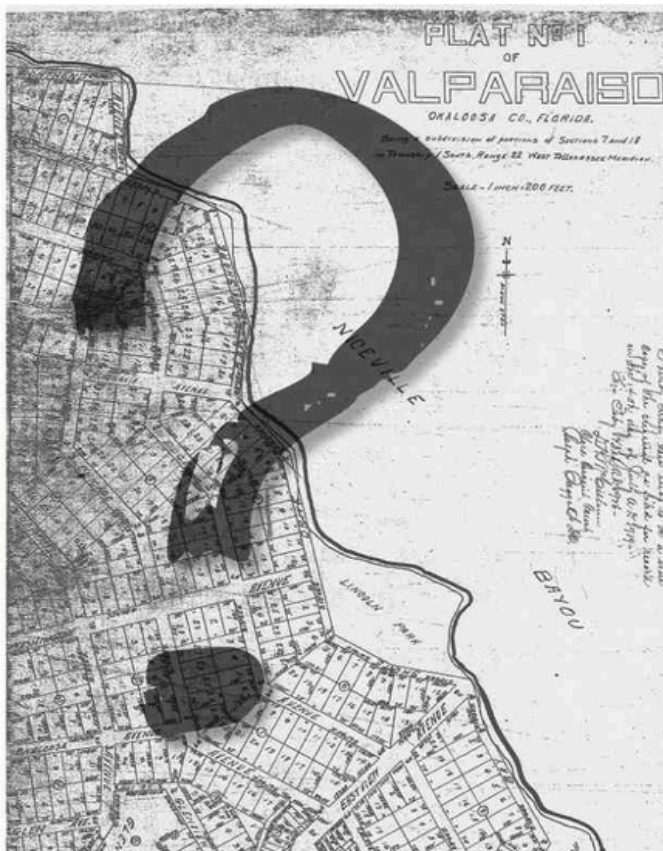
Regular Board Meetings



December 9

- Greater FWB Chamber of Commerce gave a presentation supporting renewal of infrastructure surtax.
- Board approved proceeding with prescribed burn at Shoal River Preserve.
- Board voted to take strong stance against the construction of a carbon storage facility in southern Alabama, citing possible environmental impacts to Okaloosa residents.
- Board delayed approval of transit contract renewal with MV Transportation.
- Board approved contract amendments to collective bargaining agreement for EMS staff.
- Board approved contract funding adjustment for SS United States artificial reef project.
- Board approved surtax funding to complete dirt road stabilization efforts.

TIDBITS



Rumors, stories, and speculation have existed for decades about whether the notorious criminal Alphonse Capone ever visited or did business in Okaloosa County, Florida. Listen as FLASHBACK explores this question. -

CLICK>>

<https://www.podbean.com/ew/pb-fvba6-19e93d2>