

# County Connection

March 2025

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



## The grass is greener in Okaloosa County

Spring weather has welcomed us with vibrant colors in our landscape and the sounds of birds remaking their nested homes for the season.

Along with the warmer weather, comes the chance of severe storms as we have seen so far this month.

Severe weather season leads us right into hurricane season and our public safety staff carefully monitors all weather threats to the County, its residents and our employees.

Continue to be weather aware while you are on the job and in your homes and have multiple ways to receive weather alerts.

We echo the message of preparedness every year and I want to encourage you to remain ready and prepared for future weather impacts.

Staff leadership and your County Commissioners continue to observe the energy as you work to advance the County in a positive direction. Thank you for your continued efforts.



**John Hofstad**  
County Administrator

## Okaloosa County to unveil new \$1.3 million playground at Marler Park



The coastal-themed playground features interactive elements to educate children about marine life while providing a safe, engaging outdoor space for locals and visitors alike. [READ MORE>>](#)

## Smalls Sliders eyes former Hardee's location on Beal Parkway in Fort Walton Beach



The burger slider chain has submitted a development order for the long-vacant Beal Parkway property, which could transform the site that has remained empty for years following a fire. [READ MORE>>](#)

## Commissioner: Eglin waterway restrictions “not nearly as impactful” as initially feared



Okaloosa County Commissioner Trey Goodwin reports that recently implemented waterway restrictions around Eglin Air Force Base will have less impact on boaters than originally anticipated. [READ MORE>>](#)

## The road ahead: Inside the year-long transformation of SS United States into world's largest artificial reef



The iconic ocean liner will undergo a year of remediation in Mobile, AL before being deployed offshore Destin-Fort Walton Beach, FL, creating new marine habitat and boosting tourism. [READ MORE>>](#)

## Okaloosa to purchase former bank building in Cinco Bayou for tourism offices, public boat ramp upgrades



The project will more than double the capacity of the popular Cinco Bayou Boat Ramp while addressing overcrowding issues for the county's growing tourism department, officials said. [READ MORE>>](#)

## Destin, county discuss parking designs for 'Shore at Crystal Beach' project



City officials and county representatives collaborate on parking designs for beachfront access, balancing safety concerns with maximizing spaces for visitors. [READ MORE>>](#)

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## Working behind the scenes, making Okaloosa more efficient



Okaloosa County has PRIDE yes we do. Okaloosa County has PRIDE how about you?

Okaloosa County would like to recognize Leslie McGhee with the Public Recognition Involving Dedicated Employees (PRIDE) Award. As Okaloosa County's Senior Financial Analyst within the Tourism Department, Leslie recently saved the County nearly \$130,000 in fees proposed by our event management system vendor to add new event venues to the system.

It would have been easy to sit back, let the team find a new vendor and still spend unnecessary time and money. Instead, in addition to her usual duties for the County, her dedication, hard work and will to serve allowed for the implementation of a streamlined integration using existing processes.

The spirit of problem-solving and the desire to maximize the functionality of existing software is an employee character trait that we are celebrating. The PRIDE award not only recognizes Leslie but demonstrates the County's appreciation for exemplary work to other employees.

## Infrastructure, Infrastructure, Infrastructure



The Infrastructure Surtax Advisory Committee met recently for their regular meeting to move forward on projects that benefit aging and new infrastructure throughout the County in both the South and North ends. Learn about the voter-approved infrastructure surtax projects at <https://myokaloosa.com/bcc/infrastructureprojects>

## From 4-H to the stage, Extension agent wins Miss West Florida



When she isn't running the UF IFAS Extension Okaloosa County 4-H, she is winning pageants! Congratulations to Hartley Spaulding, Extension Agent I, M.S. with the Extension Office's 4-H Youth Development on being crowned Miss West Florida. She will move on to compete in the Miss Florida Competition Learn more about the work Hartley does at <https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/okaloosa/4-h/> Photo by: R J Myrick Photograph

## The science of recycling



Okaloosa County's Waste Resources Division of Public Works is proud to sponsor the Regional Special Award for the East Panhandle Science and Engineering Fair. This year's winners of the award are:

- Junior Division – Emmalyn Otzenberger (right)
- Senior Division – Elisabeth Wallace (left)

A project in each division was recognized that focuses on recycling, composting, alternative energy, conservation, and related topics. Winners received an engraved award plaque presented by Okaloosa County's Recycling Coordinator Jim Reece.

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## Facility & Parks: Teamwork, progress and new leadership



On February 13, members of the county's Grounds Beach Crew found a tree that had been washed up on the beach between Beach Accesses 6 and 7. The tree measured more than 60 feet in length, had a trunk base of 9.5 feet in diameter and weighed 5,000 lbs. This type of work speaks to the dedication of the talented grounds beach crew and what they do to keep the beaches pristine and safe for all of Okaloosa County and our visitors.



Our new Facility and Parks Director Jeff Peters, along with leadership, gathered the staff for a recent employee appreciation lunch. Keep up the great work!

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## Florida's Greatest Hurricane Preparedness Party



Please email Nick at [ntomecek@myokaloosa.com](mailto:ntomecek@myokaloosa.com) if you or your department would like to participate in this year's Expo or just come on out with your family. The first 100 people will receive a tote bag with a first aid kit. Food trucks, vendors, presentations and complimentary Hurricane Guides will be available for participants.

## Saving lives one overdose at a time



Okaloosa County EMS in partnership with the Florida Department of Health's Okaloosa County Health Improvement Partnership stakeholders gathered at Niceville High School recently to have a community conversation about drug abuse, overdoses and the impact on our community. Okaloosa County and its partners have quickly helped in saving lives, reducing the number of overdose deaths in the past year.

## Permitting lessons



Okaloosa County License Specialist Renee Lucas was recently invited to give a presentation on the county's permitting and licensing requirements to the Construction/Carpentry and Electrical classes at Okaloosa Technical College.

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**Join us for a fun filled day on the farm!**  
**April 12, 2025**  
**9am to 1pm**  
486 Martin Mill Rd, Baker, FL

ANTIQUE TRACTORS  
AERIAL DISPLAYS  
FOOD TRUCKS  
EGG HUNT  
\$1K IN PRIZE EGGS

UF IFAS Extension UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA  
United Bank

The University of Florida IFAS Okaloosa County Extension Office is partnering with the Okaloosa County Farm Bureau again to bring you A Day on the Farm. We invite you to bring your families and enjoy a beautiful and fun day on the farm. Gates open at 9 a.m. and we will have an Easter Egg Hunt at 9:30. There are over \$1000 in prize eggs in the hunt! We will have educational booths and demonstrations from 10 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. There will be several great food trucks set up serving up great meals, desserts, and coffee! There will be antique tractors and new equipment on display. We also have gate prizes to include \$250 in cash, a weed eater, and a hedge trimmer. Come ready to learn and spend the day with us on the farm.

**DATE:** April 12, 2025

**TIME:** 9 a.m. - 1 p.m.

**WHERE:** 486 Martin Mill Road, Baker, FL

For more information, go to our Facebook event page:  
<https://www.facebook.com/share/16NyFa8bFt/>

# Support



## UNITED WAY EMERALD COAST



### GIVE BACK

Your gift strengthens essential programs that support our community today and builds long-term solutions for tomorrow.

United, we prepare children for kindergarten, ensure seniors have healthy foods, support our military, and empower families. And best of all?! It stays in Okaloosa & Walton counties!



### TAKE ACTION

Join the cause and make your voice heard! Whether you're championing education, or raising awareness about critical issues, your voice matters.

Get involved, follow us on social media (@uwemeraldcoast), and help us build a brighter tomorrow.



### GET INVOLVED

Volunteering is at the heart of United Way. With our partnerships with 50+ non-profits, we offer opportunities that match your interests and needs. Let us find the perfect volunteer opportunity for you, your family, or your group.

Join us for **Day of Caring** on **April 24!** Join hundreds of volunteers on this annual day of volunteerism and make a meaningful difference.

Learn more at [www.united-way.org](http://www.united-way.org). To make a gift, please visit [www.united-way.org/donate](http://www.united-way.org/donate) or scan the QR code.



## Recent Milestones



**Congratulations to these County employees who are celebrating their work anniversaries.**

Pictured with County Administrator John Hofstad and County Commissioners is Wendy Cain, Airport Financial Services Supervisor, 15 years service, Andrew Kindle, Paramedic, 5 years service, Brenda Hibbs, Emergency Medical Technician, 5 years service, Carol Eaton Arietta, Systems Application Specialist, 5 years of service, and Stephen Bonham, Carpenter 2 years service.



### OTHER MILESTONES

- Raymond Tedder, Water & Sewer, 30 years
- Lisa Payton, Growth Management, 25 years
- Brenda Ball, Supervisor of Elections, 22 years (RETIREMENT)

# In Case You Missed It

Regular Board Meetings



## March 4 - Meeting Notes

- Board approved purchase of old bank building , two parcels and interlocal agreement with the Town of Cinco Bayou for area near boat ramp.
- Board approved property insurance renewal with direction.
- Board approved scheduling public hearing for revisions to Waterway Rental Vendor Safety Ordinance.
- Board approved resolution in support of road closures for FDOT SR 85 road construction.

## March 18 - Meeting Notes

- Board discussed and proposed revisions to Waterway Rental Vendor Safety Ordinance
- Board approved John Moring as the new Corrections Director.
- Board approved purchase of multiple parcels near Shoal River to fill property gaps for Patriots Ridge Park.
- Board approved contract to demolish old Fort Walton hospital.

# TIDBITS

Eglin Air Force Base has shared with Okaloosa County the waterway areas with restricted access. Our amazing GIS team has created this interactive map where you can click on your current location and it will bring up the map to see if you are in the incorrect area. Click the link and save if you are going to be on the water.

<https://bit.ly/EglinRestrictedWaterwaysMAP>  
Save/print the QR code and place it in your boat for future use. Questions? Reach out to Eglin Public Affairs at [96TW.PA.OfficeMailAccount@us.af.mil](mailto:96TW.PA.OfficeMailAccount@us.af.mil)

