

# County Connection

September 2025

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## A New Fiscal Year

We have completed the budget process for fiscal year 2026 with the recent approval of a budget resolution by the Board of County Commissioners. The budget represents a County that continues to grow, and with it, the needs of our residents. The budget also addresses your department's growing needs to ensure we operate with a high level of service. With Board leadership, the FY26 budget contains a 3% cost of living adjustment for County employees as well as health insurance costs remaining static for staff due to the utilization of Pro Share Reserves.

We continue to perform in a fiscally responsible manner, while also enhancing the County's infrastructure and providing necessary government services. We are positioned for another successful year and a better future due to your commitment .

I look forward to what we can achieve together in the coming year.

Thank you and keep up the great work.



**John Hofstad**  
County Administrator

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# In the News

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## VIDEO: Underwater camera at Okaloosa Island Pier goes live



The \$25,000 Fathom Ocean camera system, approved by Okaloosa County Commissioners in July 2024, features 1080p, 360-degree pan-tilt-zoom capabilities. [READ MORE>>](#)

## Okaloosa approves \$400,000 to complete Santa Rosa Boulevard design work on Okaloosa Island



The funding will finish the design plans for Phase I of the project, which runs from the first Beach Access east to the Brooks Bridge project limits. The state has already committed \$1 million for construction of this phase. [READ MORE>>](#)

## EMS Paramedic named in 40 under 40 list



The awards program, hosted by United Way Emerald Coast NextGen United and presented by Florida Power & Light, honors individuals ages 21-40 who excel in leadership, community involvement and professional achievement. [READ MORE>>](#)

## New 24/7 library lending machine available in Crestview, expanding book access



The lending machine allows patrons to browse available books by scanning their library card from any participating library in the cooperative. Additionally, users can place holds online through their library accounts and select "lockers at the Welcome Center" as their pickup location. [READ MORE>>](#)

## More than 800 sea turtle hatchlings emerge from nests on Destin-Fort Walton beaches



"We've had some live hatchlings still in the nest and we've been able to release all of them," Valek said. "We find them during the nest evaluation, and we make sure that they make their way safely out into the Gulf." [READ MORE>>](#)

## 75ft former scuba dive boat finds new life as artificial reef off Destin-Fort Walton Beach



The unique catamaran design of the vessel is expected to provide habitat for marine life while offering accessible diving opportunities. [READ MORE>>](#)

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# Department News

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## #EndOverdose



We are very proud of our EMS team and Community Paramedics that are part of a community effort working to end overdose deaths and help people suffering from addiction to get into recovery. Community partners, agencies and supporters gathered for a recent event for International Overdose Awareness Day organized by Okaloosa County Health Improvement Partnership. Learn more about Okaloosa Community Paramedicine at <https://myokaloosa.com/ps/community-paramedicine>

## Supporting Suicide Awareness



Okaloosa County Water and Sewer Customer Service (OCWSCS) observes National Suicide Awareness Day by wearing green. Although the official colors of the day are teal and purple, OCWSCS chose to wear green, the favorite color of Payton Emily Raulerson, 13-year-old girl who passed away on December 2, 2024 as a result of constant bullying from classmates. J. Matthew Heaney (center), a close friend of the Raulerson family, sits on the board of the Payton Emily Foundation, which was started in memory of this precious young lady. Back row left to right: Yvette Franklin, Lee Bandy, Adriane Rivera, Robyn Kavalesky, J. Matthew Heaney, Chiquetta McCorvey, Jean Steele, Trina Bradley. Front Row: Shannon Harms

## Skill and Innovation



Members of the Tourism Development Department team recently attended the annual Governor's Conference and came home with two top Flagler awards and a second place plaque. The Flagler Awards is an annual statewide competition recognizing outstanding Florida tourism marketing. The program was created by VISIT FLORIDA to honor the countless individuals and organizations that help position Florida as the No. 1 travel destination in the world. Destin-Fort Walton Beach received the Henry Award (top award) for excellence in Social Media Marketing, the Henry Award for best in Website, and the Silver award for Resources/Promotional Material-Consumer for the DFWB 2025 Visitor guide.



## Partnering for Blood Donations

Okaloosa County Corrections staff were proud to be a part of a blood drive that involved Okaloosa Correctional Institution (Sergeant Amanda Hall), Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office (Deputy Sean Murphy), and Crestview Police Department (Officer Sam Minnifield) for the North County First Responder Community Connect & Blood Drive. Our agencies came together to support One Blood, and the Big Red Bus in the parking lot of Central Baptist Church.



## Keeping Okaloosa Beautiful

Molly McDaniel, Environmental Resources Coordinator and Director of Keep Okaloosa Beautiful, recently presented to the Youth Leadership Council and held a cleanup at Oak Tree Nature Park.



## "I will tell you when its time to freak out"

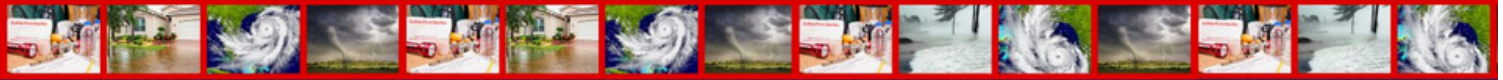
Public Safety Director Patrick Maddox recently spoke at a Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce breakfast to remind people to remain prepared during Hurricane Season and to resist social media hyperbole regarding storms.



## Youth in Leadership

We are proud to once again partner with the Okaloosa County School District to launch this year's class of the Youth Leadership Council. Guided by County Commissioner Drew Palmer and Assistant Superintendent John Spolski, these juniors and seniors will be learning leadership skills while serving their community and providing input to County leadership.

## FLORIDA PREPAREDNESS MONTH 2025



### CUSTOMIZE YOUR DISASTER SUPPLY KIT

#### KIDS

- clothes
- water bottle
- toys
- comfort items
- flashlight
- portable chargers



#### PETS

- medications
- collars/ID tags
- leashes/carriers
- vet paperwork
- favorite toys
- pet food



#### SENIORS

- eyeglasses
- medications
- medical ID
- medical equipment
- official medical documents



[FloridaDisaster.org/PlanPrepare](https://FloridaDisaster.org/PlanPrepare)



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A Non-Profit Conference

KEYNOTES SPEAKERS ANNOUNCED

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UNITED WAY  
Emerald Coast



**Tim Bolduc**

Chief Executive Officer, Adams Sanitation  
& Founder of TBSpeaks



**Johnny Crowder**

Founder & CEO of Cope Notes



**Carly Barnes**

Executive Director, Caring & Sharing of  
South Walton

## Recent Milestones



Congratulations to these Okaloosa County employees who are celebrating their work anniversaries. Pictured with Deputy County Administrator Craig Coffey and County Commissioners are Scott Bitterman (10 years, County Engineer), Mellony Kuester, (2 years, Corrections Re-entry and Programs Coordinator) and Travis Fassnacht (2 years, Building Superintendent).



## Other notable milestones

- Moses Macaulay, 2 years, Facilities & Parks
- Christopher Napoleon, 2 years, Water & Sewer
- Anthony Sayers, 10 years, Fleet Operations
- Dana Long, 20 years, Water & Sewer

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# In Case You Missed It

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## Regular Board Meetings

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### September 2 Meeting

- Destin Rotary Club presented rescue tube project.
- Board approved reimbursement from Surtax Reserves for hourly labor of in-house staff performing work on Surtax projects.
- Board approved Dorcas Fire District budget and creation of 2 full-time positions for district staffing.
- Board approved application for grants related to East Pass dredging.

### September 16 Meeting

- Board was presented with 2026 Legislative Priorities
- Board approved contract with Coca-Cola for vending machine services at County buildings.
- Board approved interlocal agreement with Escambia County for court technology personnel.
- Board approved Scott Bitterman as new Public Works director.
- Board approved fuel farm expansion at VPS
- Board approved contract to begin construction on College Blvd. multi-use path.

## TIDBITS

[Click to view the LIVE fish cam at the Okaloosa Pier>>](#)

