



The Sound of Freedom rings out at Destin Fort Walton Beach Airport (VPS)

Many of us patriotic individuals refer to the military aircraft that fly over our area daily as *The Sound of Freedom*. However, there is a new movie called the *Sound of Freedom* in theatres as this goes to press. It is a thought provoking and an emotional journey of human trafficking. I am proud to write that Destin -Fort Walton Beach Airport (VPS), in partnership with the *Okaloosa County Commission on the Status on Women*, was ahead of this movie with a campaign against human trafficking. We have placed decals in every rest room stall at the airport along with an overhead announcement, which plays hourly, directing victims how to seek help. For an informative write up read the article recently published in *Get the Coast*. I have included the link [here](https://www.getthecoast.com/2021/07/20/okaloosa-county-airport-fights-human-trafficking/) or you can copy and paste the URL. bit.ly/FightTraffickingOkaloosa

Destin-Fort Walton Airport (VPS) is a commercial service/military Joint-Use Airport in Okaloosa County along Florida's Gulf Coast, one of only 22 in the nation. Destin-Fort Walton Beach Airport is located on U.S. Department of Defense property and is considered a leading example of a Joint-Use Airport. This designation means VPS is situated on Eglin AFB operating on Eglin's airfield from a leasehold. Established in 1957, the airport provides commercial passenger service for leisure and business travelers. Since 2017 air service has increased over 150 percent making VPS one of the fastest growing airports in the United States. Today **Allegiant Air, Delta Air Lines, American Airlines, Southwest Airlines, and Sun Country Airlines** provide nonstop service to 13 Large Hub airports and 48 U.S. cities. These commercial activities contribute valuable connectivity worldwide and tourism revenue to the region and state. The growth at VPS has been supported by numerous capital improvements, some recently completed and some currently underway, including expansions of the aircraft apron, baggage claim, and parking lots as well as construction of a new concourse for Allegiant Airlines.

Okaloosa County's three-airport system, Bob Sikes Airport (CEW), Destin Executive Airport (DTS) and Destin-Fort Walton Beach Airport (VPS), operate without any debt, and serve as one of our economic drivers along with our Military as number one. To the best of our knowledge, VPS, CEW and DTS is the only debt free - three airport system in the nation. Okaloosa County Airports are responsible for a \$2.9 Billion annual impact to our local economy, which is a 67 percent increase since 2019. Our airport system has an economic impact across industries on 18,500 jobs and \$785 million in payroll annually, largely flowing into the local economy. By supporting jobs both on and off airport property, VPS supports the infrastructure necessary for

important activities such as manufacturing, logistics, tourism, and emergency response. In 2021, Okaloosa County welcomed a record 2,006,297 passengers at VPS.

We continue to have exciting initiatives at Bob Sikes Airport, Destin Executive Airport and Destin-Fort Walton Beach Airport. Our airlines fly non-stop to: Boston, Chicago, Cincinnati, Knoxville, Las Vegas, New York City, Minneapolis, Pittsburg, Washington DC, Baltimore and Dallas to name just a few. Please visit our website at flyvps.com/ to view the 48 cities that can be flown directly from Destin-Fort Walton Beach Airport. Many have recognized our huge growth and have asked about our on-going plans for expansion. I have included the URL and a link to a fantastic overview of what can be expected to take place at VPS as our master plan unfolds. Regardless of how you choose to navigate to the page, scroll down to locate the video, and be sure you have your sound on. The link is [here](#) or copy and paste the URL. flyvps.com/master-plan-vps/

We have a wonderful airport staff, and I would be remiss if I did not give a shout out to Tracy Stage, our Airports Director, for his tireless leadership and vision that, along with our Aviation Board members and county commissioners, have made this a state-of-the-art community asset.

The next time you hear a plane overhead, remember the sacrifices of our men and women who bring us the Sound of Freedom, and say a silent prayer for those little ones who are victims of human slavery.

My Sincere Thanks,



Carolyn N. Ketchel
District 2 County Commissioner
Okaloosa County, Board of County Commissioners
1250 N Eglin Pkwy., Suite 100
Shalimar, FL 32579
850-651-7105
cketchel@myokaloosa.com