

County Connection

February, 2023

p. 1 of 5



Stay Engaged.



A new and prosperous year in Okaloosa County

The holidays have come and gone and we are already running at full speed into 2023. We are extremely proud of the work that each employee achieved in 2022 to keep this County operating smoothly. Despite numerous challenges, you have persevered with your determination and positive attitude to bring the citizens of Okaloosa County the quality of life we all deserve.

Looking ahead, we already see our construction and road projects making progress. We also saw success earlier this month in our efforts to bring more beach access in Destin to the public with the expansion of the Tarpon Beach area. We will continue to promote the County's goals of improved infrastructure, health and safety for every citizen, and responsible economic development as we move forward. We are thankful for the leadership in every department and stand ready to support you and the efforts of every staff member in 2023.



John Hofstad
County Administrator

Gulfarium C.A.R.E. Center and Coastal Resource Team Partner for Turtle Talks

The Gulfarium C.A.R.E. Center is partnering again with Destin-Fort Walton Beach to bring awareness to sea turtles and our nesting beaches. With this monthly event, attendees will be able to visit the C.A.R.E. Center after-hours and get a behind-the-scenes look into the operations of the rehabilitation center, meet their current patients, and learn how to perform a mock in-take of an injured turtle. [View the full article](#)



Tarpon Beach expansion and demolition

Leadership from the City of Destin and Okaloosa County gathered for a public beach expansion celebration at the Tarpon Beach Access in Destin. The new park will provide an additional three acres of beachfront for public use. [READ MORE](#)



Hérons on display at OCAB



Okaloosa Public Arts recently housed 20 herons at the Okaloosa County Administration Building for public display. Each heron was painted by a local artist and was taken to a different location around the County as part of the "Heron Hunt." [READ MORE](#)

Researchers study Devil Rays in Northwest Florida to understand winter migration patterns

Okaloosa County's Coastal Resource Team with Destin-Fort Walton Beach Tourism recently initiated and assisted a team of researchers in identifying and tagging devil rays in the Gulf of Mexico. In November 2022, Mote Researchers along with the Okaloosa County Coastal Resource Team, found 17 rays and tagged seven of them with acoustic tags the size of a small battery. Tracking the movement of the rays will help determine why the rays migrate to the Destin-Fort Walton Beach area in the fall and winter months. [Read the full story.](#)



Department News

p. 3 of 5

Severe Weather Awareness is everyone's responsibility



Director of Public Safety Patrick Maddox recently engaged the public with a Q&A about severe weather with information about the dangers of lightning, weather terminology and how to stay safe and prepared for extreme weather events. [WATCH THE Q&A](#)

Sun Country Airlines lands at VPS >> This new carrier is running non-stop service between Destin-Fort Walton Beach Airport and Minneapolis twice a week. The airline made its first trip to VPS earlier this month. [WATCH A VIDEO of its arrival.](#)



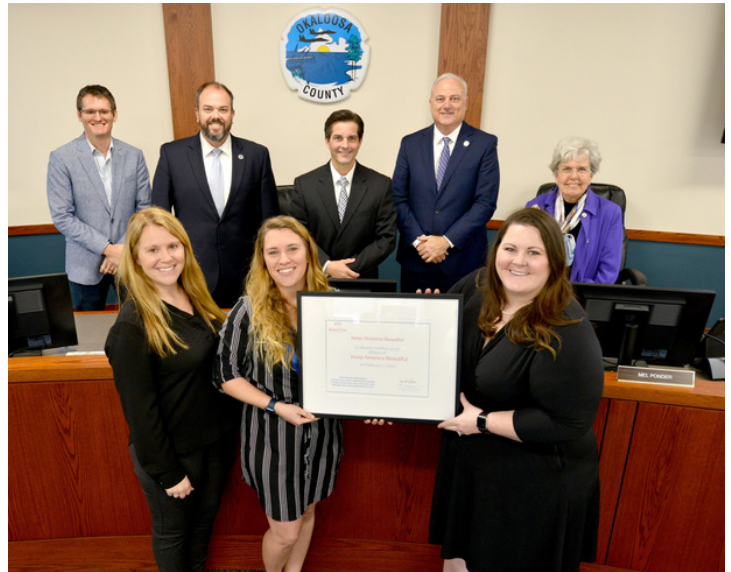
TDD wows audience at annual meeting >> The Tourism Development Department recently held its annual meeting at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center. The Department highlighted some of their achievements and the goals for 2023.



Public Works Road Division uses new tool>> Roads crews recently trained to use a new paver that is being used to stabilize roads with hot-mix paving material in north Okaloosa County. [WATCH A VIDEO of the paver in action](#)



Okaloosa County earns affiliation with Keep America Beautiful>> It's official! Okaloosa County is now an affiliate of Keep America Beautiful. Led by the County's Environmental Resource Coordinator, Kali Hiemier, Keep Okaloosa Beautiful will be working to beautify Okaloosa County, specifically to control litter in our County with regular cleanups. Additionally, Keep Okaloosa Beautiful will focus on recycling, composting, household hazardous waste education and general beautification.



In Case You Missed It

p. 4 of 5

Pre-season Waterway Safety Meeting>> Hundreds of waterway safety stakeholders attended the first County-run boater meeting to discuss new rules and water safety for pontoon boat and personal watercraft businesses.



Did you know Okaloosa County has a local history podcast? The podcast has 18 episodes that take a deep dive into local history. The latest episode explores the history of the community of Dorcas. [CLICK TO LISTEN](#)



February 7 Board Meeting Quick Notes

- The Board listened to a presentation from representatives of Keep America Beautiful who certified Okaloosa County as an affiliate. They also listened to a presentation from the Youth Leadership Council Chairperson Angelique Patterson.



- Board approved submitting an application to the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) for the Transportation Regional Incentive Program (TRIP) grant program in the amount of \$1,900,000 for the Wynnehaven Beach Road Stormwater Control and Road Improvements project.
- Board approved funding for the installation of 35 additional cameras at the jail
- Board appointed two new members to the Affordable Housing Advisory Committee - Grady Carpenter and Brooke McLean
- Board approved FY 2023 Board Meeting Schedule



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County. Send them to

<https://www.governmentjobs.com/careers/okaloosa>

Employee Spotlight

p. 5 of 5

JANUARY EMPLOYEE MILESTONES



Pictured with County Administrator and Commissioners:
Mariena Kohlhaas, 25 years (Water & Sewer), right,
and Robert Bolby, 25 years (Water & Sewer)

Other January Milestones

- Richea Driskell, 34 Years (EMS)
- Michael Jackson, 15 years, (Water & Sewer)
- Kevin Schoeneman, 5 years, (Facility & Parks)

FEBRUARY EMPLOYEE MILESTONES



Pictured with County Administrator and Commissioners:
Marie Kimberly, 5 years (Water & Sewer)

CATCHING UP



Okaloosa County employees represented well in November at the American Heart Association Heart Walk at Northwest Florida State College, finishing as one of the top 5 teams, and raising \$1,817.01. Kudos!



Okaloosa County employees made their presence known at area Christmas parades in late 2022
