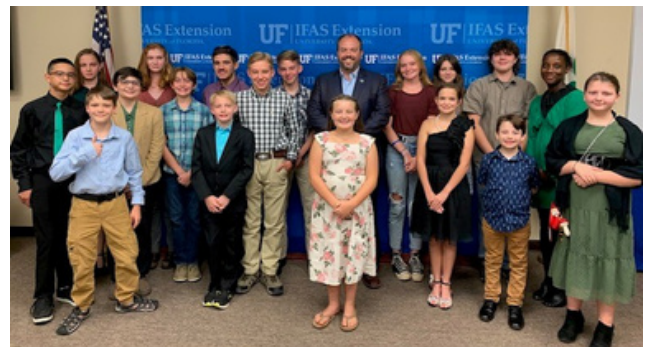


County Connection

August 2023

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



Safety during an Endless Summer

The summer is over for students in Okaloosa County, but the persistent hot weather is an indication that we will be feeling the summer heat for the foreseeable future. I would like to encourage all of you to approach these hot days with safety in mind, especially those of you who work outside.

We have seen another strong tourism season in Okaloosa County and as we transition into the shoulder season, it is important that we remain patient and safe on our roadways, despite the heat.

As the County continues to grow economically and in population, we are making efforts to address the housing challenges that accompany this growth.

The County is developing a strategy to enhance the opportunity for additional housing. Part of this strategy includes an attainable housing survey recently released to the public.

I urge you to take the survey as well. A link is provided at the end of this newsletter.

Thank you all for your continued hard work.



John Hofstad
County Administrator

Destin-Fort Walton Beach receives prestigious designation from Destinations International



This award was in recognition of the organization's commitment to industry excellence and meeting the industry standard for performance and accountability of destination organizations around the world. [READ MORE>>](#)

Okaloosa County seeks public input on workforce housing issues



The county says the questions in this survey will help local leaders to better understand public opinions about housing affordability, needs, and types of development. [READ MORE >>](#)

Okaloosa approves local municipal projects funded by tourist tax dollars



The Okaloosa Board of County Commissioners has approved the expenditure plans submitted by local municipalities for their allocation of 12.5% of collected tourist development taxes for fiscal year 2024. [READ MORE>>](#)

Scuba divers remove nearly 170lbs of debris from the Okaloosa Island Pier



On Saturday, August 5, over 90 scuba divers took part in a cleanup event at the Okaloosa Island Pier, making it the second largest turnout since the event to the public. The event, organized by Visit Destin-Fort Walton Beach, The Gulfarium, and the Okaloosa Island Pier, aimed to remove debris from the pier pilings and seafloor. [READ MORE >>](#)

"Beaming" with excitement



Beams continue to be installed on the bridge at the Phase V (north-south) section of the Crestview Bypass. County engineers were on site recently to observe the installation of the first set of beams.

Beam Facts:

- Length: 131-132 feet long
- Weight: About 150,000 pounds (75 tons)
- How many: 121 beams will be installed
- Bridge completion: Approximately 2025

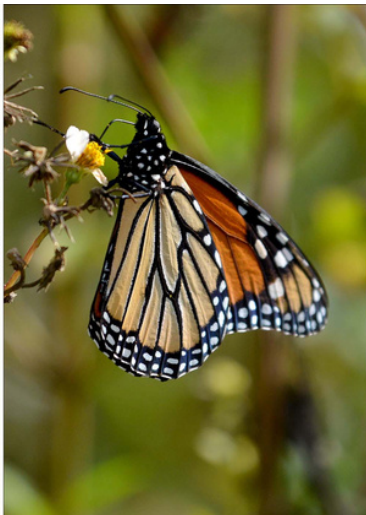
[Watch a time-lapse video>>](#)

Whale shark research



Earlier this month, 10 whale sharks were tagged off of the Destin-Fort Walton Beach shore. Marine biologists from Okaloosa County's Coastal Resource team, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the University of Southern Mississippi, and the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) made up the tagging operations team.

Marvelous monarchs



Okaloosa County groundskeepers work every day to keep parks clean and well-manicured, but sometimes they have the opportunity to beautify parks in other ways. Pictured from left: Joseph Pauley, Anthony Banks, Teresa Williams, Mike Clarke and Randall Dixon recently helped plant milkweed seeds at Women Veterans Park on Okaloosa Island. Milkweed is an essential food source for migrating monarch butterflies.

Spoil island cleanup



Earlier this month, Keep Okaloosa Beautiful led a group of about 20 people to clean up areas of the spoil islands in the Santa Rosa Sound. The group was made up of members of the Coastal Resource Team with Destin-Fort Walton Beach as well as members of their Little Adventures Beach Scouts and volunteers who arrived on kayaks and paddleboards. Special thanks to biologists from Eglin's Natural Resources branch, who were also present and to Island Watersports Company for their help with a pontoon boat. Want to join the next cleanup? Go to keepokaloosabeautiful.com

Junior Lifeguard success



About 60 children participated in this year's two-week Junior Lifeguard program. Our program teaches Juniors water rescues, self-rescues, rip current anatomy, and hands-only CPR. Junior Lifeguards also take trips to Okaloosa Island Fire Department, EMS as well as Gulf Flight Helicopter tours. The program is open to youth ages 10-17 years old.

Convention Center Happenings



Events of note recently at the DFWBCC:

- Celebration Talent – new week-long dance competition
 - Hope for the Hungry – local church/community coming together to pack food. This was their third year and they reached a million meals packed.
-

Employee Spotlight

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EMPLOYEE MILESTONES



Pictured with Commissioners and Okaloosa County Administrator John Hofstad are: Renee Lucas, 20 years with Growth Management, Jokiah Lofton, 5 years with Tourist Development, Jon Kanak, 5 years with Water & Sewer, Rudy Raymundo, 2 years with Fleet Operations and Ryan Evans, 5 years with Tourist Development.



Other August Milestones

- Martina Barrow, 2 years, Growth Management
 - Abra McGilll, 20 years, Growth Management
 - Danielle Thomas, 2 years, Tourist Development
-

In Case You Missed It

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August 1 - Quick Notes

- Board approved municipal expenditure plans for the 12.5% allocation of tourist development taxes for FY 2024.
- Board recognized Lannie Corbin for 52 years of service to the City of Niceville as their City Manager.

August 15 - Quick Notes

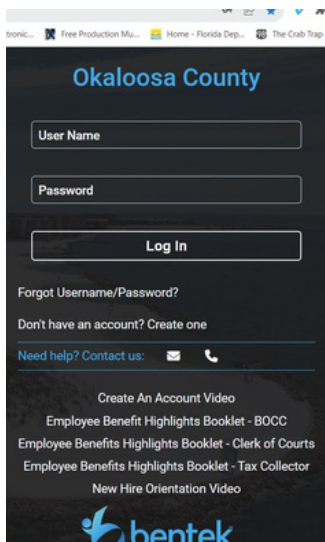
- Board approved contract to replace three passenger boarding bridges at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Airport.
- Bruce Woody, Executive Director of the ECUA Recycling Facility, briefed Board on changes proposed by ECUA.
- Board approved a purchase agreement and interlocal agreement for land in Mary Esther for a future park on Santa Rosa Sound.

TIDBITS

OPEN ENROLLMENT

Open Enrollment ends August 31. Be sure you are signed up for benefits. Logon :

<https://www.mybentek.com/myokaloosa/>



ATTAINABLE HOUSING SURVEY

Your opinion matters! Share your voice and help us envision the future of attainable housing in Okaloosa County for those who live and work here. Please take a few minutes to complete this survey. [SURVEY HERE>>](#)



EMPLOYEE DISCOUNTS

Did you know that as a County employee, you can get discounts from businesses like T-Mobile, Verizon, Riviera Family Fitness and AAA? [View a full list of Employee Discounts](#)

