

County Connection

December 2023

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Merry Christmas and happy New Year!

As the year comes to a close, I reflect back on a year of progress within Okaloosa County. From the day-to-day work that it takes to keep a County operating, to the larger, long-term projects, we are positioned to continue our success of providing the quality of life that every Okaloosa resident expects from their County government.

It is important that we remain dedicated to our work in the coming year and lean on each other for help when needed.

This County benefits the most when we coordinate our efforts as a team.

Thank you for your continued commitment and hard work. As always, your department head and I are available if you need anything.

Have a restful, safe Christmas and I will see you in the New Year.



John Hofstad
County Administrator

Okaloosa County proposes all-inclusive upgrades for Niceville's Meigs Park



Okaloosa Commissioner Mel Ponder outlined \$2 million in proposed contributions to overhaul the 4-acre city-owned park during a presentation to the council. [READ MORE>>](#)

Okaloosa approves \$1.93 million Bob Sikes Airport South Apron rehab



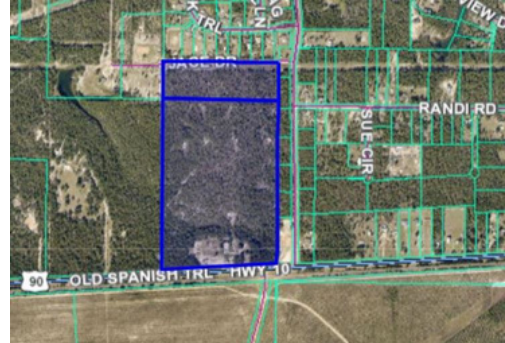
The board voted unanimously Tuesday to approve the bid from Gum Creek Farms Inc. to rebuild the south ramp area used by general aviation aircraft at the Crestview airport. [READ MORE >>](#)

Destin-Fort Walton Beach Tourism Department wins prestigious Travel Marketing awards



"We are truly honored to be recognized with Adrian Award wins across multiple categories this year," said Jennifer Adams, Destin-Fort Walton Beach's tourism director. [READ MORE>>](#)

Okaloosa scraps plans for new jail on Highway 90 site in Crestview



The property consists of two parcels totaling about 68 acres, with 50 net usable acres, according to county analysis. It has water, sewer and fiber accessibility. There is also future potential to utilize nearby planned infrastructure at the Shoal River Ranch county development across Highway 90. [READ MORE>>](#)

Okaloosa County EMS launches new Lifesaving Portable Blood Delivery Program



"This program gives our EMTs and paramedics a significant tool to save lives." [READ MORE>>](#)

Devil rays satellite tagged for the first time ever in Destin-Fort Walton Beach



The collaborative research project builds on similar tagging work conducted last November when the team first began studying devil rays in Northwest Florida. [READ MORE>>](#)

Life blood



Okaloosa County EMS implemented a new blood administration program that will allow Emergency Medical Services (EMS) staff to treat patients on emergency scenes with a portable supply of blood. The first unit of blood was recently deployed on a patient and it ultimately saved his life, according to hospital staff.

These programs have their roots in military battlefield medical operations dating back to World War I and can lead to a dramatic increase in the survivability of patients with serious, uncontrolled bleeding. Okaloosa County EMS is the first ground ambulance transport agency in the Florida Panhandle to carry and provide whole blood.



Convention Center Happenings

DESTIN
FORT
WALTON
BEACH
FLORIDA



Events of note at the DFWBCC:

- Annual Emerald Cost Gala for Autism (first time held at Convention Center)
- Candlelight Concerts – continued with 5 nights of 2 performances each through December and added another one in January. All have been very well attended.
- Sinfonia Holiday Pops
- American Grappling event attended by over 1000 people



Generosity at the jail



The Okaloosa County Department of Corrections adopted six children from The Families First Network's "Operation Santa". Each shift, as well as the Medical Division and Administration, volunteered to support a child for Christmas. Operation Santa supports 1,000 local children who have experienced trauma, abuse or neglect.



The holiday spirit has motivated a handful of local businesses and organizations to deliver food and other treats to Okaloosa County Correctional officers in recent weeks. Tim Shaw and Mike Flowers from Anchors, Smith and Grimsley, the Women's Ministry Group from Emmanuel Baptist Church, Sealand Restaurant and the Crane Center made contributions to Okaloosa officers.

Celebrating service at VPS



Airports Director Tracy Stage and other staffers gathered recently to bid farewell to Major Mike Howell and Captain Chad Rewis and to thank them for their years of dedication protecting Destin - Fort Walton Beach Airport and the millions of travelers who've passed through the doors during their tenures there. Major Howell is retiring - and Captain Rewis is going to head up Central District.



Airport staff gathered to award Airman 1st Class Sagelee Nichols as this year's winner of Operation Home for the Holidays, a service provided to a military service member each year by the Okaloosa County Airports Department at VPS. In its 8th year, Operation Home for the Holidays provides a roundtrip flight for the selected service member to fly home for the holiday. We wish a Merry Christmas to A1C Nichols and all of our area military service members.



Perfecting Parks



Facility Maintenance and Parks continues to improve County-maintained parks including refreshing beach accesses and installing new playground equipment at various parks.

Employee Spotlight

EMPLOYEE MILESTONES



Congratulations to these County employees and their workiversaries! Pictured with County Administrator John Hofstad and County Commissioners are: Susan Lewis, 15 Years, Water & Sewer Department, Jeffrey Schnitzer, 15 Years Water & Sewer, Matthew Hawley, 10 Years EMS, and Jamie Banks, 2 Years, Facility & Parks Maintenance.



Congratulations to Sgt. Ryan McCurley on achieving 10 years of outstanding service to the Okaloosa County Department of Corrections.



Congratulations to Edwin Sanguyo with the Public Works Department who is retiring after 27 years of service with Okaloosa County.



Other December Milestones

- Robert Halsell, Engineering, 10 years
 - Matthew Harms, Water & Sewer, 15 years
 - Gayle Edge, Waste Resource Management, 15 years
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In Case You Missed It

Regular Board Meetings

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December 5 - Quick Notes

- Board approved construction contract for rehabilitation project on the south apron at Bob Sikes Airport.
- Board approved additional staff position for Public Works Engineering division.
- Board approved interlocal agreement for new District One Medical Examiner's office.
- Board discussed and directed staff to explore a jail site location committee.
- Board approved MSBU with residents for future dredging of lake at Meigs Beach Park.
- Board selected Commissioner Paul Mixon as 2024 Chairman and Commissioner Nathan Boyles as Vice Chairman.

TIDBITS



County calendars have been distributed to your department heads. If you would like an additional calendar, please email County Public Information Officer Nick Tomecek at ntomecek@myokaloosa.com

PARKS GUIDE

You can now pick up a hard copy of the County's Parks guide which features more than three dozen County-maintained parks. A limited number of copies are located at:

- Okaloosa County Administration Building (Board of County Commissioners) – 1250 N. Eglin Parkway, Shalimar
- Brackin Building - 302 N. Wilson St (Board of County Commissioners Office third floor) - Crestview

