

# County Connection

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January 2024

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## Plenty more in 2024

The County is moving steadily forward as we cultivate our resources for 2024. I want to thank 2023 Board Chairman Trey Goodwin for his leadership and look forward to guidance from the 2024 Chairman of the Board, Commissioner Paul Nixon, and the rest of the Commissioners.

With their leadership, in conjunction with staff and employees, we have seen prosperity in recent years. I expect this trend to continue as we envision new goals and complete previous ones.

We have recently published the County's Annual Report for the 2023 fiscal year. The hard copy of the report will be delivered to Department Heads and a link to a digital flipbook is provided on page 4 of this newsletter.

The report highlights each department's purpose and numerous successes.

Moving forward, I encourage you to work towards achieving the smaller goals each day that will inevitably lead to overall success.

Thanks for your hard work.



**John Hofstad**  
**County Administrator**

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## 12-foot wide 'bridge-to-bridge' path across Okaloosa Island inches closer to reality



After years of negotiations, Okaloosa County officials unanimously ratified the signature on an easement from Eglin Air Force Base to allow construction of a new multi-use pathway parallel to U.S. 98 along Okaloosa Island. [READ MORE >>](#)

## Christmas comes early for Eglin Airman with free flight home from Destin-Fort Walton Beach Airport



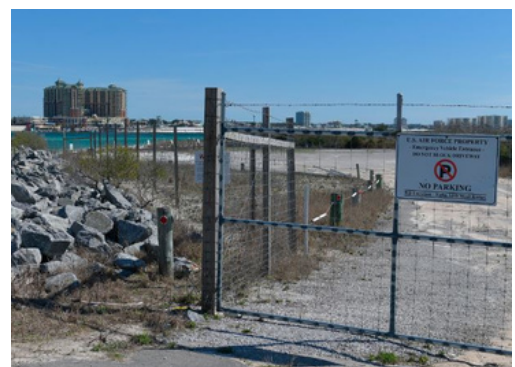
Nichols, 21, 96th Security Forces Squadron, stationed at Eglin Air Force Base, won a free roundtrip flight home to Sacramento, California, to visit her family over the holidays. [READ MORE >>](#)

## Fort Walton Beach to explore ferry system from The Landing Park to Okaloosa Island Boat Basin



The FWB Council agreed not to spend any taxpayer funds on exploring ferries. But several members supported designating potential landing zones to gauge private sector interest. [READ MORE >>](#)

## Okaloosa seeks to reopen 'Redneck Beach' in partnership with Eglin AFB after 2020 closure



The county proposes hiring lifeguards, park rangers and providing other services to maintain the area for public recreation. [READ MORE >>](#)

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# Department News

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Austin Folkerts, left, and Austin Hickey from the Traffic Signal Operations Division showed off their cornhole skills at the recent Public Works Christmas appreciation luncheon. Folkerts and Hickey went undefeated against their fellow Public Works members from Road, Mosquito Control and Fleet divisions.



Okaloosa County's Public Works Director Jason Autrey was recently recognized by the Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce with a "Teddy" award for exemplary work by the Public Works Department related to Santa Rosa Boulevard improvements and the bridge-to-bridge path on Okaloosa Island.



Destin - Fort Walton Beach Airport's Deputy Airport Director Chad Rogers and Airport Director Tracy Stage pose with State Rep. T. Patt Maney at a recent Chamber of Commerce breakfast. Rogers will be serving as a new member of the Chamber's Board.

## Convention Center Happenings



### Events of note at the DFWBCC:

- Okaloosa County Schools Professional Development 2024 event – 2,500 teachers attended their annual professional development meeting.
- Okaloosa County Schools will also be holding their Teacher of the Year event. They have been having this event with us for over a decade.
- Candlelight continues its series of events with us this month and is very well attended. They are looking to come back in the coming months.
- ECAR held a very successful Installation Gala event for the first time at the convention center.
- USAF is holding its inaugural event called AFMC A3V Flight Operations Summit.



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# Department News

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The Okaloosa Board of County Commissioners recently approved using tourism bed tax revenue to begin project planning, permitting, and design work for a pedestrian footbridge on the Florida National Scenic Trail in Okaloosa County that will cross the Yellow River. The effort will be in partnership with the USDA Forest Service and Florida Trail Association. The footbridge will "bridge" the 20-mile gap between sections of the Florida Trail that currently force hikers to hike on busy State Road 85 and U.S. Highway 90. In this video, Commissioner Boyles discusses the future of this footbridge on a recent hike and boat ride along the trail and Yellow River.

[>> WATCH THE VIDEO<<<](#)

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The new and highly anticipated playground at Baker Park is now open to the public. Visit this unique playground at 1450 Charlie Day Road, Baker, Florida. Kudos to the Facility and Parks Maintenance Department for a job well done! [Take a video tour of the playground >>](#)



Hard copies of the Annual Report for the 2023 Fiscal Year have been distributed to Department Heads. For a digital flipbook of the report [CLICK HERE>>](#)





## January Milestones

Congratulations to these County employees on their work anniversaries and for their years serving Okaloosa County.



- Darron Adams, Information Technology, 2 years of service
- Joy Barnes, Growth Management, 2 years of service
- Isaac Davis, Water & Sewer, 2 years
- Robert Halsell, Engineering, 10 years of service
- Lee Holland, Tourist Development, 2 years
- Anthony Peterson, Airport Operations Manager, 5 years of service
- Christine Smith, Waste Resource Management, 2 years





# In Case You Missed It

Regular Board Meetings

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## January 2 - Quick Notes

- Board approved amendment of Patriot Ridge Donation Agreement.
- Board approved quotes in lieu of formal bids for materials related to Okaloosa Island Water Main Replacement Project.
- Board approved the reduction of Code Enforcement lien on property at 100 Dolphin Road in Mary Esther.
- Board approved ratification of Air Force signature on Okaloosa Island easement for bridge-to-bridge path.
- Board approved tourism funding for planning, permitting and design for Yellow River footpath for Florida National Scenic Trail.
- Board approved contract amendment for MV Transportation for County public transit operations.

## January 16 - Quick Notes

- Board approved sending Letter of Intent to Eglin AFB for potential to reopen beach area adjacent to Marler Bridge.
- Board approved Interlocal Agreement with City of Niceville for a special needs park at Meigs Park in Niceville.
- Board approved Jail Site Investigating Gathering team to assist in selecting potential site for a new jail.
- Board approved voter-approved surtax funding for Public Safety Driving Pad at OCSO Training Facility.
- Board approved the County to move forward with FDOT grant application to improve traffic conditions on SR 85.

## TIDBITS

## 2023 HIGHLIGHTS

Okaloosa County has accomplished so many things in 2023 and we understand that there is plenty more hard work to do in 2024. This video looks back on a handful of those accomplishments in 2023. [View the video HERE>>](#)



## FREE 2024 Calendars

For a free calendar, email County Public Information Officer

Nick Tomecek at  
[ntomecek@myokaloosa.com](mailto:ntomecek@myokaloosa.com)