

County Connection

July 2024

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



Progress and stability

We are fortunate to continue providing quality resources and services to residents as this County grows.

With Board leadership, we continue to make our way through the Fiscal Year 2025 budget process. Your department heads have provided valuable input to ensure you are equipped in the future to deliver the services the residents of Okaloosa County expect.

I cannot express enough how appreciative I am for your tireless work.

While planning for the future of serving this County, we have also been able to keep the health benefits cost to employees static with minimal changes to the dental plan.

Open enrollment begins July 29 and you will be able to review your health benefits, make changes, and update beneficiaries.

Please review the information related to open enrollment on page 5 of this newsletter.

As always, reach out to me or your department head if you have any concerns.



John Hofstad
County Administrator

Okaloosa County to host flood vulnerability assessment meeting



Okaloosa County officials are inviting residents to attend a public meeting on July 30 to discuss a new flood vulnerability assessment and adaptation planning project. [READ MORE>>](#)

Okaloosa County breaks ground on 4-mile photoluminescent multi-use path, first in Florida



Public Works Director Jason Autrey explained the innovative technology: "It's really a glow-in-the-dark rock. They'll put the asphalt down, throw this rock on top, spread it out, and when they roll it, it embeds in the top." [READ MORE>>](#)

Okaloosa County to take over Baker Recreational Center operations



The lease amendment allows for a smooth transition and includes provisions such as granting the Baker Area Recreation Association their preferred date for their annual rodeo, the Old Spanish Trail Rodeo. [READ MORE>>](#)

73 rare Kemp's ridley sea turtle hatchlings make their way to the Gulf from Destin beach



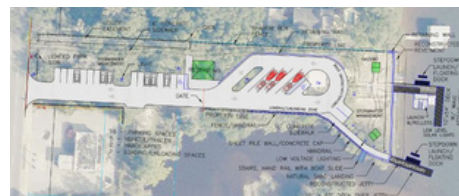
The first sea turtle nest of the season hatched recently in Destin-Fort Walton Beach, marking a successful start to the nesting season for the area's endangered marine species. [READ MORE>>](#)

80ft and 75ft former scuba dive boats to become artificial reefs off Destin-Fort Walton Beach coast



The Okaloosa Board of County Commissioners unanimously approved a \$138,000 contract with Coleen Marine, Inc. on Tuesday for the clean-up, preparation, towing, and deployment of two donated vessels as artificial reefs. [READ MORE>>](#)

Okaloosa Commissioners approve 30% design plans for Cristobal Landing Park in Mary Esther



The \$3 million project, funded equally by the county and city using tourism revenue from the expanded bed-taxing district, will transform waterfront property on Cristobal Road into a new public park. [READ MORE>>](#)



Tribute to lives lost

Okaloosa County EMS staff and Honor Guard were proud to represent Okaloosa County recently in the National EMS Memorial Service (NEMSMS) and Weekend of Honor "Moving Honors" procession in Santa Rosa County. The annual tribute pays respect to our EMS heroes across the nation who were tragically killed in the line of duty, giving their lives while helping others. This year's tribute honors 36 EMS professionals who lost their lives in the line of duty last year. The procession stopped in Navarre Beach for a ceremony on its way to Arlington, Virginia.



'We have a plan'

Emergency Management Planner Destiny Nunez recently held a series of instructional classes for stakeholder agencies that will be involved in opening emergency shelters in the event Okaloosa County faces a hurricane impact.

Convention Center Happenings

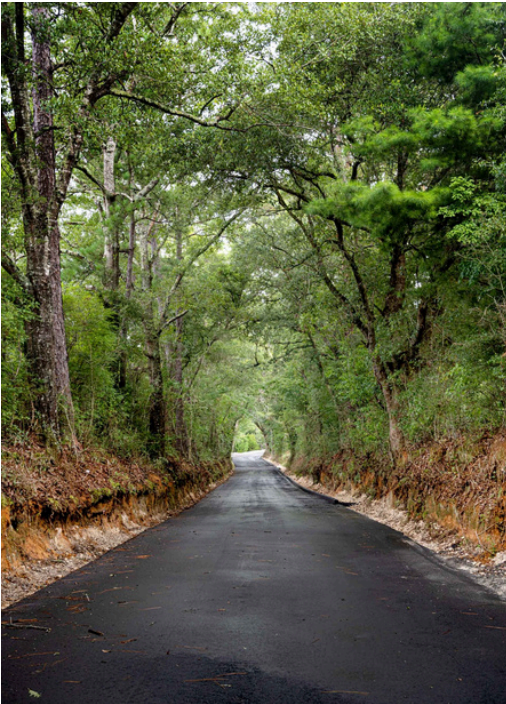
DESTIN
FORT
WALTON
BEACH
FLORIDA



July Events of note at the DFWBCC:

- Celebration Talent Nationals 2024 Dance Competition – This is their second year with us, with about 4,000 people over the course of six days attending. This group brings an economic impact of about 400 room nights within the county's hotels.
- Weapons Program Increment 4 (military event)– This is their 4th event with us this year and they are looking to come back in October, December, and most likely next year.
- Candlelight Concert Series – This is their 9th event with us since last October.

Looking good!



Surtax Success Story:

We have exceeded our goal of paving 50 miles of dirt roads in 5 years thanks to the voter-approved infrastructure surtax. Okaloosa County will have stabilized approximately 150 miles of dirt roads in about 4 years. These improvements could not have happened without the wisdom of the voters of Okaloosa County who recognized the importance of having quality road infrastructure that will improve driving conditions and reduce harmful stormwater runoff. This scene is from Jack Road in north Okaloosa County and is a great example of the dirt road stabilization efforts.

More info can be found on the surtax website:
<https://myokaloosa.com/bcc/infrastructureprojects>

Hatched and happy



The Destin-Fort Walton Beach Sea Turtle Patrol with the County's Tourism Development Department monitored the hatching of the first nest of the season. The nest yielded 73 Kemp's ridley hatchlings that made their way into the Gulf of Mexico to start their new journey.

The nest hatched in the early hours of the morning and surveyors were able to be there while the hatchlings crawled out of the nest and to the water. All of the hatchlings went straight for the water and swam off strongly.

The team evaluated the nest 72 hours later by pulling out all of the eggs and counting the number of hatched eggs. In the nest, 73 out of 77 eggs hatched, resulting in a 95% successful hatch.

2024 OPEN ENROLLMENT 2025



[CLICK TO ACCESS BENEFITS SITE>>>](#)

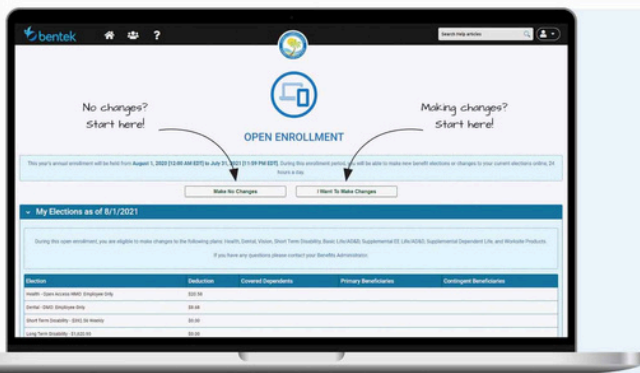
Open Enrollment will begin **July 29th and run through September 1st**. We will have the Blood Bus at each Benefits Fair location. Our benefit vendors will be on-site to assist with any questions or concerns. We will have some Resources and guests in relation to Wellness and as always, there will be an opportunity for employees to win prizes and collect give-away items. More detailed information will be coming throughout the month such as who specifically will be attending, raffle prizes, "Did You Know" informational emails with things you may not have known about the benefits and/or other resources available.

Also, we are currently having a Self-Care vs Medical Care on-site class that 50 employees have signed up for. You can earn \$20 if you attend. Some upcoming classes to keep an eye out for are:

- Financial Wellness – July 23 & 25 - Eglin FCU Financial Advisor will be onsite to discuss ways to Spend Smart, Save for Success, Borrow Wisely & Plan for the Future.
- Suicide Awareness & Prevention – September 17 & 18 – Review warning signs and tools/resources available to help those in need.

ONLINE ENROLLMENT THROUGH BENTEK!

Bentek enrollment system will be open Monday, July 29th through Sunday, September 1st.



EMPLOYEES MAY:

- ✓ View all benefit elections and payroll deductions
- ✓ View plan summaries
- ✓ Designate Life Insurance beneficiaries
- ✓ During open enrollment, employees may make new elections, change, add or remove dependents

To access the site, visit app.mybentek.com/myokaloosa

All employees are encouraged to log on to Bentek during the Open Enrollment period (July 29 - September 1) to verify coverage and update beneficiaries for the 2024-2025 Plan Year. Bentek Online Assistance will also be available during the dates and times listed.

To access Bentek using a mobile device, scan code:



BENEFITS FAIR

We hope you can join! There will be both County and Vendor drawings and giveaways!

DATE	LOCATION	TIME
July 30th	Crestview Community Center 1446 Commerce Drive Crestview, FL 32539	7:00am – 12:00pm
August 7th	OCAB Training Room 1250 Eglin Pkwy. Shalimar, FL 32579	7:00am – 12:00pm
OPEN ENROLLMENT BRIEFING SESSIONS		
August 6th	Waste & Sewer 1804 Lewis Turner Blvd, Fort Walton Beach	6:30am – 9:00am
	Facility Maintenance 5489 Old Bethel Road, Crestview	1:00pm – 3:00pm
August 14th	Corrections - Muster Room	6:00am – 7:00am 6:00pm – 7:00pm
August 15th	Public Works – North – 1759 S. Ferdon Blvd. Crestview	6:00am – 8:30am
August 21st	Corrections - Muster Room	6:00am – 7:00am 6:00pm – 7:00pm
August 27th	Public Works - South 84 Ready Ave NW, Fort Walton Beach	6:00am - 8:30am
August 28th	Airport (VPS) 2nd Floor	10:00am – 11:30am

Employee Spotlight

July Milestones



Congratulations to these County employees who are celebrating their work anniversaries. Pictured with County Administrator John Hofstad and County Commissioners: Deborah Thatcher (Tourist Development, 10 years), Lance Jones (Water & Sewer, 10 years), Stephen Dreading (Corrections, 5 years), and Emily Gorman (Tourist Development, 2 years).



OCWS celebrated Shane Oglesby just days before his retirement. Shane started his career with Okaloosa County in 1993 as a Plant Worker on Essex Rd at what he recalls was \$3.69/hour with the Water & Sewer Department. Shane finished up his career as a Wastewater Operator 'C' in the Plant Maintenance division of Wastewater Operations. The staff will forever remember him on his blue tractor working the 'RIBS' and his infinite collection of "Dad jokes". We wish him the best of luck in his retirement.



Corrections recently celebrated Officer William Purvis and Officer Steve Hoerter, both of whom have dedicated 20 years of outstanding service to the Okaloosa County Department of Corrections. Corrections also recognized Professional Standards Captain, Travis Huisken for his 10 years of exemplary service.

OTHER MILESTONES



- Zackery King, Facility & Parks Maintenance, 5 years
- Bobby Boydston, Information Technology, 5 years

In Case You Missed It

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Regular Board Meetings



July 16 - Meeting notes

- Board approved MOU to support installation of live underwater webcam at the Okaloosa Island Pier.
- Board approved ordinance creating a combined Electrical, Mechanical, and Plumbing Board and providing for initial members.
- Board approved construction contract for the Baggage Claim Expansion project at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Airport.
- Board approved purchase orders for Marler Park playground improvements.
- Board approved road stabilization contract to stabilize remaining County-maintained dirt roads.
- Board approved two new paramedic positions.
- Board approved employee group benefits plan for FY 25.

TIDBITS

OKALOOSARXCARD.COM
PRICE YOUR PRESCRIPTION ONLINE
CAN BE USED FOR PET MEDS, TOO
CAN BE USED AT OVER 75K PHARMACIES
SAVE UP TO 50%

Did you know the County offers a free Prescription savings card through UniversalRx? GET YOUR CARD: At www.okaloosarxcard.com you can print or email your card. WORKS FOR PET MEDS: Ask the vet to write your furry friend's prescription for a pharmacy and save up to 50%



Did you know Okaloosa County auctions off surplus items? Happening Now>> Live Online Auction: This item was previously used for staffing during hurricane/emergency situations. You can bid on this item and other surplus items at <https://www.publicsurplus.com/sms/list/current?orgid=1024171>