

# County Connection

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March 2024

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



## Spring is here again

You have hopefully, by now, recovered from the recent time change and are adjusting to the extra daylight. With spring, comes warmer weather and the the bustling of seasonal visitors as they begin to fill our beaches, parks and roadways.

I would like to leave you with a message of safety as we move through the spring break period. Continue your efforts as attentive and patient drivers.

It is important that we model behavior to the public that demonstrates our commitment to serving them while doing so in a safe manner.

Also, be weather aware as we enter into the severe weather season. Awareness and taking steps to ensure you are prepared for these events will create less worry and panic in the future.

Your well-being is a top priority for the County as it ensures that you are healthy for your work day and most importantly, for your families when you return home.

Thank you for your continued hard work.



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

## Okaloosa's Shoal River Ranch Gigasite recognized with prestigious 'Select Site' distinction by CSX Railroad



Shoal River Ranch is one of 19 sites nationwide that received "Select Site" status which positions the County to attract significant economic development. [READ MORE>>](#)

## Okaloosa County Jail celebrates inmate success with 'Anchored' program



Thirty-four men at the Okaloosa County Jail achieved a significant milestone on March 5, 2024, by successfully completing Phase I of the transformative "Anchored" program. [READ MORE>>](#)

## First-ever 3D printed artificial reefs sunk off Destin-Fort Walton Beach coast



The first 3D printed artificial reefs were deployed on Monday off the Destin-Fort Walton Beach coast, sinking 25 concrete modules to the Gulf floor to establish new marine habitat. [READ MORE>>](#)

## Southwest Airlines honors VPS Team with 'Most Reliable Small Station Award'



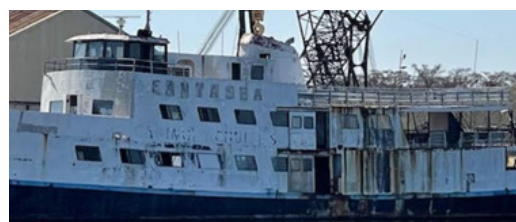
The Southwest Airlines team at Destin-Fort Walton Beach Airport (VPS) was awarded the Most Reliable Small Station award at the company's Annual Station Awards Banquet on February 29, 2024. [READ MORE>>](#)

## Okaloosa to host TSA PreCheck Enrollment 'pop-up' event in Shalimar



IDEMIA is holding a pre-check enrollment event at the Okaloosa County Administration Building at 1250 N Eglin Parkway in Shalimar from March 4th-21st and March 22nd. [READ MORE>>>](#)

## 144-ft 'casino boat' to be sunk as new artificial reef off Destin-Fort Walton Beach coast



"The FANTASEA fits the design we are looking for to create interesting dive sites offshore Destin-Fort Walton Beach," added Fogg. [READ MORE>>](#)



## Small Business and Government



Suzanne Ulloa and DeRita Mason from the Purchasing Department, along with Chairman Paul Mixon, recently attended a meeting held by Florida SBDC at UWF.

### Back on the Beach

Okaloosa Beach Safety seasonal lifeguards are back on the beach full-time from 9a.m.-6p.m. Sign up for daily beach flag text alerts by texting BEACH to 44144.



### Show your support

We dedicate a week in May to honor the entire 160+ staff at the Okaloosa County Department of Corrections for their daily service behind the walls. If you would like to show your appreciation for these correctional professionals, you can sponsor a meal, prize, gift bag, etc., during this appreciation week by contacting Sgt. Nikki Hatten at [nhatten@myokaloosa.com](mailto:nhatten@myokaloosa.com).

## Convention Center Happenings



### Events of note at the DFWBCC:

- Deep South Cheer & Dance Competition – coming back to the facility for the 4th year in a row, with about 10,000 people over a 2-day event.
- Slammedenuff 2024 (car show)– coming back for their 4th year in a row, with about 2,000 attendees.
- Keystone Hardscapes (national pavers company) – first-time event – training for about 100 people for 2 days
- Paradise Music Festival – Back again this year but now for a 3-day event with several bands, including Journey Tribute and Elton John Tribute Bands.



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# Department News

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## Science, Service and Landscaping

Okaloosa County's Solid Waste/Recycling Division sponsors an award every year at the East Panhandle Regional Science and Engineering Fair. Okaloosa County's Environmental Award winners were: Zoe Orange - Paxton School (Senior Award- Επαναφέρω A Natural and Cost-Effective Process of Bioremediation for Contaminated Soils) and Sofia Escobar - Okaloosa STEMM Academy (Junior Award - Are Biodegradable Plastics a Viable Replacement?) Both award winners also won multiple "special awards" as well as 1st place in their respective category awards. Both were selected to participate in the State Science Fair, and Zoe Orange was selected to attend the 2024 International Science Fair in California.



Okaloosa Department of Corrections staff recently volunteered their time to help the Emerald Coast Autism Center with mulching their playground.



Okaloosa Extension Services Commercial Horticulture Agent Sheila Dunning, along with Facility and Parks Maintenance staff, transplanted a winged elm at the Administration Building in an effort to revive the tree's health.

The recent Florida Department of Health in Okaloosa County's OCHIP (Okaloosa County Health Improvement Partnership) recognition ceremony recognized the tireless efforts of local community leaders dedicated to a healthier community. Among the award recipients was Okaloosa County EMS Capt. Greg Cain, recognized as the Healthier Communities Member of the Year. Also mentioned for their efforts in promoting pedestrian safety, were the Public Information Officers, Managers and Specialists for the County and municipalities.

## Creating a Healthier Community





## March Milestones



The Water & Sewer Department recently celebrated the retirement of Wallace Berry. Wallace started his career with Okaloosa County 10 years ago as a Meter Reader, ultimately ending his career as a Senior Meter Reader. The staff will always remember him for his team-oriented work ethic. He was always willing to help his fellow meter techs and assist the maintenance crew check for leaks. He will truly be missed and we wish him the best of luck in his retirement.



## OTHER MILESTONES

- James Billings, Corrections, 2 years

# In Case You Missed It

Regular Board Meetings

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## March 12- Quick Notes

- Representative from the Florida Veterans Hall of Fame Society President Tom Rice presented updated plaques with the latest inductee Dr. Gerald Hollingsworth.
- Board approved funding design and other services for lift station in Poquito Bayou.
- Board approved property insurance renewal
- Board approved terminal building lease with Avelo Airlines at VPS and charging station at Bob Sikes Airport at no cost to the County.
- Board reached consensus for staff to proceed with stop work order related to construction site of FPL solar farm in north Okaloosa County.

## TIDBITS



Patrick Maddox  
Okaloosa County  
Public Safety Director



**May 11**

**10 am - 2 pm**

Okaloosa County  
Administration Building  
Shalimar



Laura Hussey  
Morning Anchor  
WEAR Channel 3



The Hurricane Preparedness Expo is coming to the Okaloosa County Administration Building, 1250 N. Eglin Pkwy. in Shalimar on May 11, 2024, from 10 am to 2 pm. [Click to learn more>>](#)

Okaloosa County routinely holds online auctions for surplus items. The auction is open to the public. Live auctions will be posted at this link:  
<https://www.publicsurplus.com/sms/okaloosaco,fl/list/current?orgid=1024171>