

County Connection

September 2024

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



Continued success

I want to congratulate everyone on the near completion of another successful fiscal year. With staff support and Board leadership we have been able to assemble a budget for the next year that positions us to follow through on our promise to the residents of the County to provide sound infrastructure and services while remaining fiscally responsible.

We recognize that we cannot provide quality service to our citizens without the the staff of more than 1,000 County employees.

Your efforts and commitment to service is the reason that Okaloosa County stands out as an example of excellence for other counties in the state to emulate.

With the Board's leadership, the FY 2025 budget includes a 4% Cost of Living Adjustment for employee salaries to help defray living expenses and bolster employee retention for the future.

I look forward to working with you in the coming fiscal year and am excited to continue this trend of achievement and progress for the County.



John Hofstad
County Administrator

'Saving futures': Drug overdose support program expanded across Okaloosa County



Capt. Greg Cain of Okaloosa EMS reinforced the gravity of the situation that led to the program's creation. "It's a sobering moment when you realize you [Okaloosa County] have one of the highest overdose rates in the state of Florida," Cain said. [READ MORE>>](#)

Okaloosa County looks at hospital-supported plan to boost Medicaid funding



It will impose special assessments on private hospitals to help fund health care for low-income and uninsured residents. [READ MORE>>](#)

Officials, residents discuss future Patriots' Park



Commissioner Paul Mixon led the discussion for the new park, welcoming resident input. [READ MORE>>](#)

7 business organizations endorse Okaloosa tax exemption renewal ahead of November vote



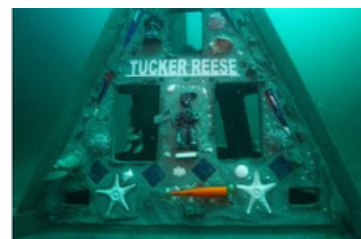
The Economic Development Ad Valorem Tax Exemption (EDATE) program, which provides temporary property tax exemptions to eligible businesses, will be up for reauthorization by county voters. [READ MORE>>](#)

Okaloosa County proclaims September as Childhood Cancer Awareness Month



Jessie Huisken (mother of Phinley) and Haley Brown, program and Rally Kid coordinator with Rally Foundation, were present to receive the proclamation. [READ MORE>>](#)

Destin High School expands artificial reef project, honoring community members



The site, now known as Destin High School Reef 2024, sits in about 65 feet of water, making it accessible for smaller boats and the students themselves. [READ MORE>>](#)



Getting their Chamber On!

The Visit Destin-Fort Walton Beach team in the County's Tourist Development Department recently sponsored the Crestview and Greater Fort Walton Beach chamber breakfasts to spread the word of all of the adventures both residents and visitors can have countywide.



Power of Partnerships

Director of Public Safety Patrick Maddox recently appeared in a video by the Okaloosa County School District to discuss how the School District makes decisions about school closures in the event of inclement weather. View the video at <https://www.facebook.com/OkaloosaCountySchoolDistrict/videos/1257606218561146>

Look who we spotted with Superintendent Chambers. It's Director of Public Safety Patrick Maddox delivering this important message to students and parents in Okaloosa County 🙌



Okaloosa County School District
August 30 at 6:00 PM
Weather Safety Decisions Explained
Thank you to Okaloosa County Emergency Management Director Patrick Maddox for collaborating with Superintendent Chambers to es... See more

Out of Gas

Okaloosa Beach Safety lifeguards are ready for anything. A boater required assistance recently after the vessel became disabled and began floating toward the Okaloosa Pier. The Beach Safety team worked quickly to ensure the boat was safe until it was able to move again. Beach Safety lifeguard Aiden Schoettler helped keep the boat in place until the necessary steps were taken so the boaters could regain control of their vessel and be on their way.



40 under 40

Congratulations to Visit Destin-Fort Walton Beach's Katelyn Bray who joined this year's 40 under 40 Class with United Way Emerald Coast. Katelyn works as a Destination Stewardship Coordinator within the Okaloosa County Tourism Development Department. View the full list of United Way Emerald Coast's 40 under 40 [here>>](#)



Fiber Frenzy

Okaloosa County's Information Technology fiber team recently jumped into action to remedy a fiber line that was cut by a contractor east of Crestview. The IT Department has been working diligently to install miles of fiber in north Okaloosa County.





The Destin-Fort Walton Beach Sales Team made their presence known at recent trade shows to promote the destination and our tourism partners.



WELLNESS WORLD

Okaloosa County Wellness Events



Suicide Awareness: Okaloosa County Wellness is holding a 1-hour Suicide Awareness & Prevention Class on Sept. 18 at Water & Sewer (3rd Floor) from 3 – 4 p.m. If you would still like to sign up you can email kburgess@myokaloosa.com

Shot Clinic: We will also be holding the shot clinic in October. We will have shots available for the following: Flu, Pneumonia, RSV, Tetanus, Hep A&B Combo, Gardasil and Shingles. They will be held on October 8th at the OCAB and October 9th at the Brackin Building. We will be sending out a flyer to set up your appointment time and place.

Benefit Deductions: Remember to check your first paycheck in October to ensure your benefit deductions are correct. If there is a mistake it is best to catch it early. County contributions to HSA accounts will be made at that time as well.

Wellness Programs: The 24-25 Wellness Program begins Oct. 1. Make sure you are logging your self-report items such as your annual Wellness check, preventative screenings, vaccinations and more to receive those incentives from the County. The Personal Health Assessment (PHA) will be available to earn your initial \$75!

The staff at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center continues to make improvements, in the facility, food and customer service. The Convention Center is undergoing a refresh of some artwork featuring local artists and the installation of two new LED walls for clients. The work of the Aramark chefs should also be noted as you will see in the mouth-watering photos below.



This year, there was a noticeable and very positive difference in our experience. I believe recognition is well deserved, as we have very little to critique about the entire process—from the initial contract negotiations to the final hour of the event(minus the rental fee increase, lol). The entire team was accomodating, professional, kind, and quick to respond to any issues we encountered.

... You should be proud of the job well done, which made our experience both smooth and enjoyable.

-Convention Center Client: Scott Chase - Holistic Health Fair



September Milestones



Congratulations to these County employees who are celebrating their work anniversaries. Pictured with County Administrator John Hofstad and County Commissioners is Gabriel Arceo (25 years, Water & Sewer), and Billy Martin, right, who is retiring after 16 years working in the Water & Sewer Department.

OTHER MILESTONES



Paul Davies, 2 years, Airports



- Stephanie Berry, 10 years, EMS
- Jeana Bryant, 5 years, Mosquito Control
- Kenyon Miles, 25 years, Water & Sewer

In Case You Missed It

Regular Board Meetings



September 3 - Meeting notes

- Board approved holding public hearing for Local Provider Participation Fund (Hospital Assessments).
- Board discussed request for rezoning of School District Property.
- Board approved the transition plan from the current County leave plan to PTO plan.
- Board reviewed Executive Salary comparison report and approved salary increase for County Administrator.

September 17 - Meeting notes

- Board approved resolution to impose special assessments on private hospitals.
- Board adopted ordinance related to public sleeping/camping on County properties.
- Board approved contract to construct Shoal River Ranch WRF.
- Board approved purchase of 297 acres of property adjacent to Baker Recreation Area.
- Board approved agreement for stormwater management facility necessary for the SR 85 Crestview Evening Relief Project.

TIDBITS

 **Always Recycle**



Plastic Bottles & Containers **Food & Beverage Cans** **Glass Bottles & Containers** **Paper** **Flattened Cardboard & Paperboard**

RECYCLE RIGHT  To learn more, visit wm.com/recycleright
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Pass it On - Lead by example

WM, the County's contracted vendor for recycling services (in unincorporated Okaloosa County) will be utilizing their locally built Materials Recovery Facility (MRF). Reducing contamination in our recycling is vital to keeping costs down. Show your neighbors how to recycle right. Follow the guidelines above and never put your recyclables in a plastic bag, just put them loose in the bin. Spread the word!

DO NOT PUT PLASTIC BAGS IN YOUR CURBSIDE RECYCLING BIN