



THE SOUTH EXTENSION BUILDING IS FINALLY OPEN!



On April 23, 2026, a passionate group of gardeners and community supporters gathered to “cut the ribbon” on the beautiful Sheila Dunning Agricultural Extension Office. The new office is named for employee Sheila Dunning, a much-beloved member of the team, who passed away unexpectedly. The new building is across from the Fort Walton Beach Courthouse Annex Extension. It is visible on the right as you enter the Courthouse parking lot driving towards the Ridgon Center Fairgrounds building. It is directly behind Ruth’s Farmer’s Market. The offices are spacious, and we invite you to stop-in and take a

look. There is plenty of parking.

In 2021, as then Chairman of the County Commissioners, I worked with Rep. Patt Maney and Governor DeSantis’s office to provide additional money to build a new Okaloosa County Extension Office in the South end. Some of you may remember the dilapidated old building on Hollywood Blvd that served as the Extension Office. Hurricane Sally finished off what was already a sad building that flooded on a regular basis.

The University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) is a federal, state, and county partnership dedicated to developing knowledge in agriculture, human and natural resources, and life sciences and to making that knowledge accessible to sustain and enhance the quality of human life.

Many people associate the Extension Office with long-time employee Larry Williams.

For many years, Larry wrote an informative column about lawn and pest control that was published in the NWFL Daily News. His knowledge is extensive and the articles were widely appreciated.



However, the Okaloosa Sheila Dunning Agricultural Extension Office offers so much more than lawn care advice! Extension Services offers educational programming and volunteer opportunities in agriculture, coastal sciences, commercial horticulture, family and consumer sciences, residential horticulture, natural resources, and 4-H youth development.

How can Extension specifically serve you, the Okaloosa County community, at our new facility, The Sheila Dunning Extension Building in Fort Walton Beach, FL?

- Soil analyses and interpretation
 - pH done in-house (free + explanation of results)
 - Landscape and Vegetable Garden (\$10/sample, sent off to UF, + explanation of results)
 - Lawn (\$10-\$20/sample, depending on needs + explanation of results)
 - Producer (\$10 sample + explanation of results)
 - Pasture (Bahia- up to \$20/sample depending on needs + explanation of results)
 - Note- explanation of results is a printed analysis accompanied by an Extension team member verbally explaining results, if desired)
- Basic water quality analyses (e.g., salinity, dissolved oxygen, algae identification, nutrient ranges) and interpretation
- Aquatic management (e.g., pond management)
- Environmental resilience (e.g., flood preparation and residential strategies)
- Living shorelines
- Lawn and garden (e.g., lawn management/maintenance, garden starting to sustaining— includes assistance with planting, pruning, upkeep, insects, diseases, etc.).
- VITA program (tax preparation program—contact office for more information)
- Healthy living (e.g., Cooking Up Health, The Mediterranean Diet Course that has been proven to reduce disease.)
- Food safety
- Volunteer opportunities with the Master Gardener volunteer program, 4-H youth development (specifically, need volunteers to lead clubs at the new building), coastal science programming, and natural resource programming.
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I have been a fan of the Extension Service long before I became a commissioner. My favorite class was on Antique Roses. I love roses, and I learned so much in the class. Did you know that antique roses were what grew before the Hybrid Roses we now see? They are most often found in old cemeteries where they were planted next to loved ones. Some are as old as the Roman Empire!

There is so much to learn about our beautiful community. This is the place to volunteer if you share a passion for gardening, learning and the environment. Please call 850-689-5850 with any questions.

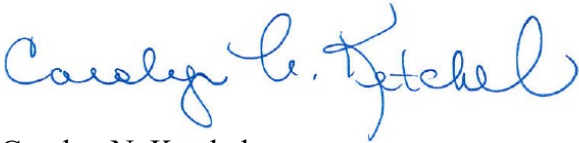
It is an honor to serve as your commissioner.

Carolyn Ketchel is Okaloosa County Commissioner,
District 2

She can be reached at CKetchel@myokaloosa.com or 850-651-7105.

It is an honor and privilege to serve as your commissioner.

My Sincere Thanks,



Carolyn N. Ketchel
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Sheila Dunning