

County Connection

August 2026

p. 1 of 8



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Hard Work and Success

The miracle of a successful local government does not happen by chance. It happens through hard work every single day. Okaloosa County's success is no different. As we draw closer to the end of the fiscal year, I am reminded each day of the County's most valuable asset, its employees.

We have some uncertainty ahead of us, and I share with you the anxiety that may cause. At the same time, I am inspired to continue the hard work to keep this County running smoothly and continue keeping employees safe and equipped with the necessary tools to get the job done.

It is important to keep the consistency of high-quality service to the residents of Okaloosa County. Coupled with hard work and innovation, our goals will be achieved and with persistence, our challenges will be overcome.

As always, do not hesitate to reach out to me or your department head if you need anything.

Thanks for everything you do for Okaloosa County.



John Hofstad
County Administrator

In the News

p. 2 of 8

Commissioner Ketchel outlines how the proposed homestead tax exemption would affect Okaloosa County



District 2 Commissioner Carolyn Ketchel says the proposed constitutional amendment could strip tens of millions from Okaloosa County's general fund, forcing cuts to public safety, animal services and more. [READ MORE>>](#)

100 divers pull nearly 160 pounds of debris in Okaloosa Island Pier cleanup



The final pier cleanup dive of 2026 drew exactly 100 divers who collectively removed 157.78 pounds of debris from the waters surrounding the pier. [READ MORE>>](#)

Okaloosa approves Millwood Ranch conceptual master plan in Baker after developer agrees to road improvements



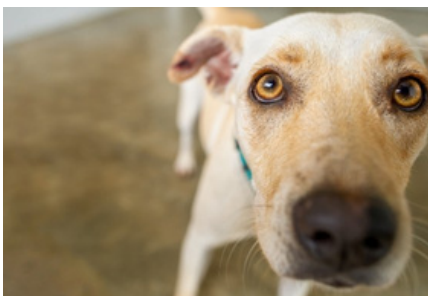
Okaloosa County commissioners on Aug. 4 unanimously approved the conceptual master plan for Millwood Ranch, a 104-lot Baker subdivision, after the developer offered road improvements. [READ MORE>>](#)

Okaloosa County reduces its share of school resource officer funding by \$500,000



Commissioners approved a smaller reduction rather than eliminating the county's \$4.4 million contribution, and directed staff to plan further cuts toward an even split after state Safe Schools funding. [READ MORE>>](#)

Okaloosa Commissioners approve \$600K in surtax funds for animal control startup



Commissioners unanimously approved \$600,000 in surtax funds for startup capital as Okaloosa prepares to launch in-house animal control before its PAWS contract ends Sept. 22. [READ MORE>>](#)

Okaloosa Commissioners set tentative millage rate



Okaloosa County Commissioners voted 4-1 to hold the county's property tax millage rate at 3.8308 mills for the 11th consecutive year. [READ MORE>>](#)

Destination Dealings

The staff at Destin-Fort Walton Beach in our Tourist Development Department recently hosted three local chamber of commerce breakfasts to inform the public about the work they do.



Veteran Services

Did you know that one in seven residents in Okaloosa County is a veteran, making it the #1 county in Florida for the highest percentage of veterans? Eddie Taylor Jr., our Veterans Affairs Manager, recently sat down for an interview about one of the oldest departments in the County. [View the video >>](#)



New Digs for D.O.M.E.S.

Community leaders, Okaloosa County staff and Commissioners gathered recently for a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new District One Medical Examiner (DOME) facility in Milton.



Moving on Up

Three of our EMTs graduated from the Northwest Florida State College paramedic program. They completed the one-year program and are ready to take the National Registry Paramedic Exam to get certified.



Finding Jobs at the Jail

CareerSource Okaloosa/Walton recently assisted soon-to-be-released inmates with job search assistance.



Fiber frenzy continues

Okaloosa County Information Technology professionals are laying fiber optic cables along Highway 90 east of Crestview that will run from Shoal River Ranch before crossing the road and heading north. This will provide the backbone for high-speed internet service going north on 393, turning at Poverty Creek Road all the way to Garden City and beyond.



Jumping Juniors

Okaloosa Beach Safety held its annual two-week summer Junior Lifeguard program in July. These youngsters learned life-saving skills for the according to standards by the Emerald Coast Lifesaving Association (ECLA). Ages ranged from 8 to 16.

The camp ended with the opportunity for the kids to jump off the pier.



A CHANCE MEETING



Our amazing staff members with Okaloosa County EMS rarely learn the outcomes of the patients they treat, nor do they usually get to meet them again. This time was different.

Scouting America Troop leader Bret Moore was preparing to rent a vehicle to travel to the Scouting America National Jamboree last month. He suffered a major heart attack and fell to the floor unconscious. A staff member from the car rental agency immediately began chest compressions to keep the blood flowing through his body until paramedics arrived.

Okaloosa County EMS community paramedics and other EMS leadership arrived on scene, rendering life-saving aid. Bret was transported to the hospital, where he was treated and survived.

Okaloosa County EMS Community Paramedic Erika Henderson was one of the responding paramedics on that day. She recently gave a CPR and Narcan presentation to the Scouts of Troop 529. As she was preparing for the presentation, she spotted Bret in the parking lot walking into the meeting. Not knowing he would be there or that he was a scout leader, she recognized him and they made contact.

Smiles and "Thank You's" ensued and made this chance meeting the highlight of the evening. This encounter impacted the young scouts who heard the story and were able to make the connection between the knowledge they already knew about first aid and a real human experience.

We could not be more proud of our EMS team who respond daily with these types of calls. While they are just doing their job, it does not minimize the very real impact they have on the community and the individual lives they treat.

Photo: Okaloosa County EMS Community Paramedic Erika Henderson, front right, poses with Scouting America Troop 529 leader Bret Moore outside of the Troop's Scout Hut before a recent meeting.

EMS staff that was present on that day to help treat Bret include: Chief Darrel Welborn, Lt. Kenneth Worley, Community Paramedic Andrew Kindle, Community Paramedic Erika Henderson, Paramedic Jonathan Lopez and EMT Hayden Lech



Fueling Success: Healthy and Affordable Back-to-School Eating

Back-to-school shopping means more than buying new clothes and school supplies; it also means planning quick, easy, and healthy breakfasts, snacks, and lunches, sometimes on the go. So, how does a parent or caregiver keep a growing child full and happy without breaking the bank? Here are a few tips to help you manage your time and money while putting a smile on your child's face.

Choose Foods from a Variety of Food Groups. Not all the vitamins, minerals, and other essential nutrients our bodies need are found in any single food. Use many food groups to plan meals or snacks, and include many types of food within each group. For example, plan your weekly meals using foods from the Fruits, Vegetables, Protein, Grains, and Dairy food groups, but choose different vegetables and fruits each night. All fruits and vegetables contain essential nutrients, but they differ in their “good” or “high” sources of nutrients. While carrots are well known for their vitamin A, which is good for eyesight, tomatoes are a good source of vitamin C, which supports the immune system. Remember to choose low-fat versions of protein, dairy, and whole grains. Limit added sugar, salt, and fats.

Choose Fruits and Vegetables that are “In-Season.” Most fruits and vegetables are at a lower price at the grocery store when they are “in-season,” meaning the time of year they become ripe for harvest and sale. The produce is abundant, top-quality, and easy to find during this time. When the product is “out of season,” it is typically higher in price, may be lower in quality, and is hard to find. Plan meals and snacks around the harvest season. If you are wondering when local fruits and vegetables are “in-season,” visit <https://wfrec.ifas.ufl.edu/panhandle-produce-pointers> to see our Harvest Calendar, recipes, and more!

Don't Yuck Their Yum! We know that children (and, let's face it, many adults) can be picky eaters. As their parent or caregiver, supporting them when they want to try something new is key. Children model the behaviors of adults and older siblings around them, which can shape their views of food. Just because you don't like something doesn't mean your children won't; teach them to try new things and keep an open mind. Prepare foods in different ways and try again. Taste buds change over time and can be affected by how a food is prepared or what it is served with.

Plan Ahead and Involve the Kids. Planning grocery shopping for sale items and meal prep can save time and money. Doing this helps answer the dreaded question “What's there to eat?” or respond to “We don't have anything in the house.” Involving the kids in meal planning gives them a sense of control and teaches them to make decisions and become independent. Give them age-appropriate tasks, such as choosing between chicken and turkey, packing containers with portioned fruits and vegetables, or making a sandwich that you cut into pieces.

Here is an easy snack guide to making healthy after-school snacks from our colleagues at Utah State University. <https://extension.usu.edu/createbetterhealth/kids-create-blog/healthyafterschoolsnack>.

For more information about planning healthy meals and snacks, contact Jill Breslawski, UF/IFAS Family and Consumer Sciences Agent, Okaloosa County, at 850-689-5850 or jbreslawski@ufl.edu

Recent Milestones



Congratulations to these County employees who are celebrating these career service milestones. Pictured with County Administrator John Hofstad and the County Commissioners are: Alexander Rider, 2 years with Facility & Parks Maintenance; Rachel Cole, 5 years with Human Resources; Rudy Raymundo, 5 years with Fleet Operations; William Barrow, 10 years with the Roads Division; Patrick Jones, 20 years in the Engineering Division and Chuck Larouche, 20 years with Information Technology.

TOTALLY TRAINED

More Okaloosa County leaders have earned their Training Zone Challenge Coins. There are 11 Training Zone classes in the program but eight core classes focus on policies and procedures. Any foreman, supervisor, manager or director who completes the eight core classes (since 2022) earns the Training Zone Challenge Coin. Pictured with Training Zone training coordinator, Becca Autry (l to r): Mark Wise (Water & Sewer), Mike Hackett (Water & Sewer). Also receiving their coins but not pictured were: Joe Hornsby (Water & Sewer), Romke Mersino (Corrections), Hans Steinke (IT), and Kenneth Worley (EMS).

Any foreman, supervisor or manager or director who wants to sign up for courses, login to Training Zone or to find out what classes you are lacking, contact Becca Autry at 850-689-5873."



In Case You Missed It

Regular Board Meetings

p. 8 of 8



August 4

- Board voted to take steps toward balancing the County's financial contribution to School Resource Officers.
- Board voted to approve the conceptual master plan for Millwood Ranch Subdivision.
- Board approved a contract for a construction manager for the Public Works and Growth Management Facility
- Board approved the implementation plan for the next round of opioid settlement funds.

August 18

- Board approved moving forward with authorizing OCWS to self-perform a lift station replacement on West Sunset and water main upgrades at Mariners Lane and Neptune Drive.
- Board approved the Infrastructure Surtax Renewal Projects list.
- Board approved a contract with Tidewater Transit (VIA) for transportation services.
- Board approved DAG Architects for the planning and design of the Rigdon Center.
- Board approved an interlocal agreement with City of Crestview for north Okaloosa Animal Control services.

TIDBITS

SURPLUS AUCTION UNDERWAY

Okaloosa County assets that have outlived their life with the County are placed on a public auction. To view the recent items in the current auction, go to <https://www.publicsurplus.com/sms/okaloosaco,fl/auction/view?auc=4066369>

