

# County Connection

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June 2025

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



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## New (ish) leader, new department

In the past few months, there have been some exciting new developments within your County leadership. The Board recently voted to approve Jason Autrey as Deputy County Administrator of Development Services. He will oversee the Public Works, Water & Sewer and Growth Management departments. This move will streamline operations with the ultimate goal of providing better service to our residents. Jason has served us well in his previous position as the Public Works Director and I expect his experience to continue to guide us in a positive direction.

We have also taken the lead to improve workforce/affordable housing in the County by creating a Housing Department, focused on identifying and implementing solutions in Okaloosa County to address this nationwide issue. This Department is led by our Housing Program Manager, Brittnee Orr. Her expertise in this field is welcomed as we move toward a better housing situation in the County. Information about the Housing Department is available on our website at [OkaloosaHousing.com](https://OkaloosaHousing.com).

As always, thank you for your continued hard work.



**John Hofstad**  
County Administrator

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# In the News

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## Okaloosa County votes to remove Crab Island safety corridor citing maintenance costs and inefficiency



After decade of maintenance issues and \$100,000 in costs, commissioners unanimously approve repeal following confirmation emergency services no longer use the designated vessel path. [READ MORE>>](#)

## Okaloosa County approves \$1M for Liza Jackson Park boat ramp renovation in Fort Walton Beach



The project will expand trailer parking, extend launch lanes, and add new amenities to improve waterfront access at the Fort Walton Beach park. [READ MORE>>](#)

## Fort Walton Beach renames Kenwood Park to honor Peters family legacy following 50 years of service



The Peters family dedicated over 50 years to Fort Walton Beach parks and recreation, with Gene serving 31 years and son Jeff continuing for 20 more years of leadership. [READ MORE>>](#)

## Fort Walton Beach Scout Troop honored for finding missing child in April



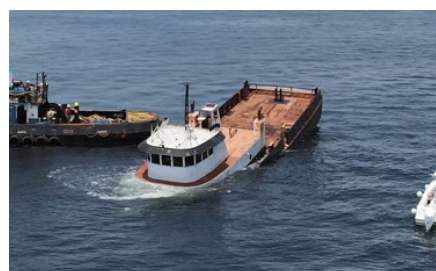
Okaloosa County Board Chairman Paul Mixon presented a proclamation to the scouts, praising their quick response to the potentially dangerous situation. [READ MORE>>](#)

## Williams International brings billion-dollar aerospace investment to Okaloosa County



Aerospace manufacturer will build one million square foot gas turbine engine facility at Shoal River Industrial Park in Crestview. [READ MORE>>](#)

## Okaloosa deploys 118-foot tugboat as artificial reef offshore Destin-Fort Walton Beach coast



Okaloosa's Natural Resources Team deployed the MV SKIPPIN SUE tugboat 8 nautical miles offshore on Monday to create underwater habitat for marine life. [READ MORE>>](#)

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# Department News

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## Storm Ready



Okaloosa County's Emergency Management Division recently held the annual hurricane simulation. Multiple stakeholders from across the County attended to hone communication skills and address strategies related to recovery operations following a hurricane.

## Team building and a caring community at Corrections

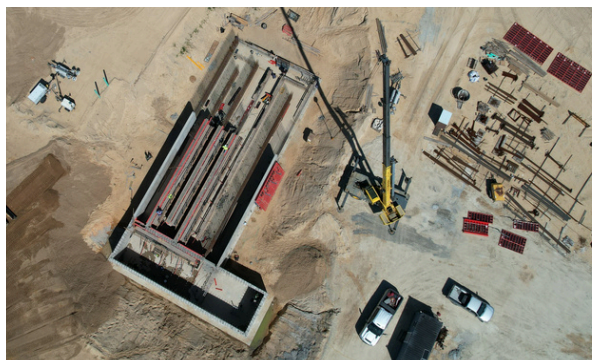
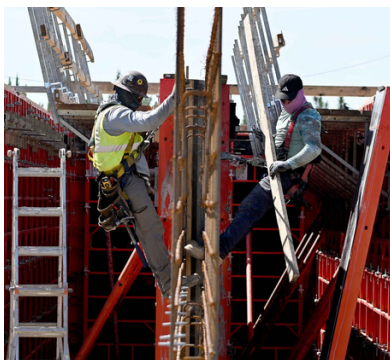


Okaloosa County Department of Corrections hosted a fundraiser to purchase fans for Okaloosa Elder Services. The fans will be distributed to seniors in need in the local community.



Okaloosa County Department of Corrections had eight cadets, now officially certified officers who graduated from George Stone Academy on May 2. Graduates include: Douglas Black, Mason Deida, Curtis Barry, Seth Patterson, Patrick Caldwell, Derek Mitchem, Ryan Phillips and Kurt Lowrey.

## Making progress at Water & Sewer



The Shoal River Ranch Water Reclamation Facility construction project is making progress. The new facility is a major step forward in expanding wastewater treatment capacity for future needs in north Okaloosa County. The SRRWRF will include all the components of a state-of-the-art, modern plant, other related infrastructure needs, on-site effluent disposal, and future public access reclaimed water for irrigation and industrial use. The plant is expected to be completed in late 2026.



## Earned Achievement

Congratulations to Robert "Chad" Rogers, A.A.E., P.E., Airports Deputy Director at Okaloosa County Airports, on a major career milestone. On Friday, May 16, in Atlanta, GA, Chad successfully completed the Final Interview process and earned the coveted Accredited Airport Executive (A.A.E.) designation. This achievement reflects his dedication, leadership, and deep commitment to excellence in the aviation industry.

A promotional poster for the Okaloosa County BCC Summer Safety event. The background is a blue-tinted image of a person's hands on a steering wheel, viewed from the driver's perspective. In the top right corner is the Okaloosa County seal. The text "Okaloosa County BCC" is in a script font, followed by "SUMMER SAFETY" in large, bold, yellow and white block letters. Below this, the event details are listed: "SOUTH: June 17, 2025 7am-9am Fairgrounds Conference Room" and "NORTH: June 25, 2025 7am-9am BARA Conference Center". Further down, it says "Defensive Driving Presentation, Trivia, &amp; More!". At the bottom left, contact information is provided: "For More Information: Delkins@myokaloosa.com Or Call: 850 758 2778". At the bottom right is the "THINK SAFETY Okaloosa County" logo, which consists of three interlocking diamond shapes in yellow and blue.

## June is National Homeownership Month



This month we are raising awareness, along with the National Association of Realtors, about the benefits of homeownership and why every family deserves to benefit from owning their own home to build generational wealth. Awareness, education and advocating for change are steps that are being taken to make this achievable. Learn more about what is being done to reach this goal at <https://www.nar.realtor/june-is-national-homeownership-month>

- Learn more about housing in Okaloosa County at [OkaloosaHousing.com](https://www.okaloosahousing.com)





## Okaloosa 4-H Youth Triumph in State Forest Ecology Contest — A Victory Rooted in Passion, Perseverance, and Tribute

By Dana Stephens and Margaret Stewart, UF/IFAS Okaloosa County Extension Services

With compasses in hand and determination in their hearts, four dedicated Okaloosa County youth took home top honors at the 2025 Florida 4-H Forest Ecology Contest — a testament to months of tireless preparation, deep curiosity, and unwavering teamwork. Philip Thames, Kayleigh Thames, Kaden Wise, and Izzy Wise didn't just show up to compete — they showed up ready. Armed with an impressive knowledge of Florida's forests, these young naturalists spent countless hours mastering everything from bird calls to tree identification, map reading, and the ecological impact of pests and diseases. Their hard work paid off in the forested grounds of Austin Cary Forest near Gainesville on May 29, where they competed with youth from across the state. In a field where every detail matters and every skill tested, the Okaloosa team rose to the challenge — and then some.

- Philip Thames, one of the youngest contestants, stood out in the junior division for his poise, knowledge, and attitude.
- Kayleigh Thames captured third place overall in the individual, intermediate division.
- Izzy Wise earned an impressive second place overall in the same division.
- Together with Kaden Wise, the trio won third place in the intermediate team competition.

This year's victory was deeply personal. The team competed in memory of Sheila Dunning, beloved UF/IFAS Okaloosa County Extension Agent and their devoted coach, who passed away earlier this year. Her legacy of mentorship and passion for forestry education continues to inspire each of them



## HELP CHANGES LIVES

A local woman spent more than three years living in her car, with only her emotional support animal beside her. Every day was a struggle to stay safe and survive.

That all changed when a dedicated outreach team, funded by United Way Emerald Coast, connected with her. Through their support, she received housing assistance, mental health care, and access to essential resources. Now she has a safe, affordable place to call home—and for the first time in years, she can rest and begin building a more stable future, with her loyal companion at her side.

Her story is just one of many.

Our non-profit partners across the community are working hard to meet growing needs. When we work together, we can keep saying “yes” to programs that provide food, shelter, mental health care, and safe spaces for all.

**GIVE TODAY AT [UNITED-WAY.ORG/DONATE](https://united-way.org/donate)**



**UNITED**  
*is the way*



**\$5 ONE TIME**

creates academic success for a local student.



**\$5 A MONTH**

provides 3 nights of safe shelter for those in need.



**\$5 TWICE A MONTH**

feeds 13 local families in our community.



**5 HOURS**

of your time helps over 40+ local non-profits create positive change in our community.

## Recent Milestones



Congratulations to these County employees who are celebrating their work anniversaries. Pictured with County Administrator John Hofstad and County Commissioners are Heather Rumbough (5 years service, IT-Senior Systems Administrator), Devon Stalls (5 years service, Public Safety-EMT Services), Becky Tully, (2 years, TDD-Service Sales Specialist) and Aline Ibanes (2 years service, TDD-Sales Manager)



## Other notable milestones

- Michon Jackson, Water & Sewer, 2 years
- Jeremy Williams, Water & Sewer, 25 years
- Tina Ward, Growth Management, 30 years
- Tanya Fedorak, Public Works, 30 years



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# In Case You Missed It

## Regular Board Meetings

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### June 10 -Meeting notes

- Board approved small-scale plan amendment and rezoning for single-family development east of Crestview.
- Board approved ordinance amending age restrictions for using golf carts on county-maintained roads.
- Board approved grant agreement, 30-year lease agreement and property growth agreement with Williams International for large commercial development at Shoal River Industrial Park.
- Board approved the conceptual site plan for Shalimar Bridge Park.
- Board approved interlocal agreement with City of Destin for pedestrian underpass at U.S. 98 and Stahlman.

## TIDBITS



Okaloosa County is working to reduce the amount of contamination in the recycling loads that are sent to WM's new recycling facility in Fort Walton Beach. Education and progress begins by showing a good example to the residents of Okaloosa County. Do you know what is allowed in your curbside recycling bin? Learn here >>

<https://www.wm.com/us/en/recycle-right/recycling-101>