

County Connection

May 2026

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



Taking time to remember

The unofficial start to summer begins this weekend, and by now, you have likely seen increased traffic, crowds, and warming temperatures as we head into the Memorial Day weekend.

We live in an amazing community and many people wish to experience what we live every day.

I encourage you to remain safe, thoughtful and patient as you enjoy your extended weekend.

Please take a moment between your gatherings this weekend to remember our service members who sacrificed their lives defending our freedoms.

While we remember those individuals, we can be comforted that their sacrifice allows us to have the freedom to celebrate the warmer months ahead and many meals with our friends and family.

Thanks for all you do.



John Hofstad
County Administrator

North Okaloosa CERT seeks more volunteers as hurricane season nears



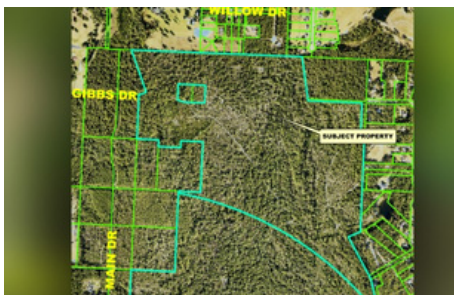
"It's just inherent to human nature," Prince said. "This is one of those great ways that you can help and serve others, especially when they're down at their lowest moments during a disaster and maybe overwhelmed." [READ MORE>>](#)

HOW I WORK: An inside look at how Nick Tomecek blends storytelling, public service, and local connection in Okaloosa County



Nick Tomecek came to Okaloosa County in 2005 from Kentucky with what he describes as "a buzz cut and a dream" to work as a photojournalist in Florida. [READ MORE>>](#)

Okaloosa Commissioners approve master plan for 392-lot River Park subdivision in Crestview



The vote authorizes the developer, River Park Landing, LLC, to phase the project into three parts. [READ MORE>>](#)

Guy Harvey Foundation partners with Destin-Fort Walton Beach to send thousands of invasive lionfish to classrooms nationwide



Thousands of lionfish harvested from local waters during the Emerald Coast Open pre-tournament are being shipped to more than 200 teachers across the country for classroom dissections. [READ MORE>>](#)

Okaloosa to display 'Charters of Freedom' at Crestview courthouse, seeks second set for Women's Veterans Park



Commissioners unanimously accepted the donated replicas of the nation's founding documents and directed staff to pursue a second set so both ends of the county can host a display. [READ MORE>>](#)

'Welcome to your new road': Okaloosa County opens \$212M Southwest Crestview Bypass



Officials and community members gathered in the rain Friday morning to celebrate the opening of the Southwest Crestview Bypass, a \$212 million project two decades in the making. [READ MORE>>](#)



Take a Deep Breath Okaloosa County!

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), recently announced that Florida leads the nation in clean air, according to a report from the American Lung Association. Florida communities receiving national recognition for low ozone pollution levels include Crestview – Fort Walton Beach – Destin, Gainesville – Lake City, Palm Bay – Melbourne – Titusville and Tallahassee – Bainbridge. [Read the full press release](#)



Thank you, tourism professionals

What a fantastic way to celebrate National Travel + Tourism Week! Our tourism industry plays a huge role in keeping our businesses and jobs thriving. Thanks to our Destin-Fort Walton Beach team, partners and community leaders for their work. They celebrated our beautiful area with a recent cruise through our waterways aboard the Southern Star.



Hey Buddy!

Buddy from Okaloosa Beach Safety and Lt. Kalee Pirtle made a recent appearance at Old Navy in Fort Walton Beach to spread the word about beaching safely and other first aid information. You can sign up for daily Beach Flag text alerts by texting BEACH to 44144.



Keeping it Clean

A group of local Publix employees volunteered recently with Keep Okaloosa Beautiful and the City of Fort Walton Beach. Volunteers put a fresh coat of paint on the graffiti-covered skateboard bowl at the city's Recreation Center. Others helped tidy up Chester Pruitt Park by trimming overgrown trees and limbs, picking up litter, and pulling roots and weeds from the playground area.



Corrections in the Community

Team Okaloosa County Department of Corrections joined United Way for their annual Volunteer Week. Corrections sent out 37 volunteers to cover three community service projects in Okaloosa and Walton Counties. They were able to serve at Bob Hope Village, Freedom Farms, and Weston Wood Ranch.



Growing Beach

The dredging and beach restoration on Holiday Isle was recently completed. This public beach sand added about 60-80 feet to the beach to help protect the upland area. The \$10 million project is largely funded through federal disaster recovery assistance, with \$9 million coming from FEMA and \$1 million from Okaloosa County tourism beach restoration reserve funds.

Arbor Day Celebration



Water & Sewer, Solid Waste and Destin-Fort Walton Beach staff recently attended the Arbor Day celebration at the Fort Walton Beach Public Library. Pictured are Lacie Owens (W&S) and Jim Reece (Solid Waste).



SECURITY ALERT
The Golden Rule of Cyber Security

I.T. WILL NEVER NEED YOUR PASSWORD TO:

-  • Fix an issue
-  • Grant access
-  • Perform maintenance

Contact ITSecurity@myokaloosa.com or 850-689-5099 if you are asked for your password.



UF IFAS Extension
UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA



Learn What We Can Do for You at Explore Extension

Did you know there is a new building in Fort Walton Beach connected to the largest informal education provider in the U.S. and the world? Visit our new building on June 27 and learn what we can do for you. We will share many of our helpful services, including:


- Help with your lawn, garden and landscaping efforts in Florida.
- Classes on making cheese, food safety and canning, and saving money at home
- Help for local farmers, golf courses, parks, and plant nurseries to protect the environment while growing healthy plants and food.
- Research and classes to help protect our coast and support businesses that depend on the water.
- A large youth program called 4-H that helps millions of young people around the world learn and grow.

We invite you to visit our new building and meet the UF/IFAS Extension staff during Explore Extension. This event will take place from **8 a.m. to noon on Saturday, June 27**, at the Sheila Dunning Extension Building, 1954 Lewis Turner Boulevard in Fort Walton Beach.

Presentation Schedule

- 9 a.m.** – H2w0es
Learn how to water your lawn, garden and landscape the right way.
Presented by Larry Williams
- 9:30 a.m.** – H2w0ws
Learn about water quality and why it matters.
Presented by Dana Stephens
- 10 a.m.** – Discover 4-H
Find out everything you need to know about 4-H programs.
Presented by Hartly Spaulding
- 10:30 a.m.** – Yes, You Can!
Learn safe ways to preserve food and can fruits and vegetables.
Presented by Jill Breslawski
- 11 a.m.** – Dirt on Dirt
Learn how to collect and understand a soil sample.
Presented by Jennifer Bearden

Come join us on June 27! Tour our new building, meet Extension Agents and Master Gardener Volunteers, see helpful displays, enjoy refreshments, and enter drawings to win plants and gift baskets. You will leave with new ideas and a better understanding of what the UF/IFAS Extension Okaloosa Office can offer.





UF/IFAS OKALOOSA COUNTY

Explore Extension

SATURDAY
June 27

8 am - 12 pm CDT
Sheila Dunning Extension Building
1954 Lewis Turner Blvd., Fort Walton Beach, FL 32547

Meet and Learn from:
Okaloosa County Extension Agents,
Master Gardener Volunteers and
Tri-County Beekeepers!

Refreshments will be served.
Enter the Raffle!

Meet & Learn from Extension Agents at these Scheduled Presentations:

9:00am - Larry: H2 w0es (irrigation through a drought)
9:30am - Dana: H2w0ws (Water Quality)
10:00 am - Hartley: Discover 4-H (Everything you need to know)
10:30 am - Jill: Yes, You Can! (Food Preservation)
11:00 am - Jennifer: Dirt on Dirt (Soil)

<https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/okaloosa/>

Check out the calendar at the link for more events and sign up for our newsletter!

An Equal Opportunity Institution.

Recent Milestones



Congratulations to these County employees who are celebrating their work anniversaries. Pictured with County Administrator John Hofstad and County Commissioners are Nick Tomecek, 5 years (Public Information Officer), Daniel Richardson, 2 years (Airport Operations Coordinator), Zack Livingston, 2 years (Corrections Technician), Liliana Gasca, 2 years (Customer Service Representative) and Callie Lewis, 2 years, (Custodial Supervisor).



In Case You Missed It

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Regular Board Meetings



May 5

- Board approved proclamation declaring May 9, 2026, as "Mia Manganello Day" in Okaloosa County.
- Board approved accepting donation of "Charters of Freedom" with the first monument location to be in Crestview.
- Board approved master plan for 392-lot River Park subdivision in Crestview.

May 19

- Board approved resolution supporting Florida Forever's acquisition of land adjacent to the Blackwater River State Forest.
- Board denied a vacation request of greenspace in Poquito Bayou neighborhood.
- New transit manager, William Higdon, was introduced to Board.
- Board voted to allow staff to restructure transit fixed routes.

TIDBITS



Okaloosa County Mosquito Control technicians will begin the evening spray season on Tuesday, May 26, 2026. Treatments are set to start at sunset. View a map of the spray areas and schedule at

<https://myokaloosa.com/pw/environmental/mosquito-control>

What's Your Mosquito IQ?

How fast can mosquitoes fly?

Depending upon the species, mosquitoes can fly at about 1 to 1.5 miles per hour.