

County Connection

November 2024

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Giving thanks

We have many things to be thankful for in Okaloosa County. I am especially thankful for the dedicated County staff across all departments. This County could not function without your tireless efforts and team-focused strategies.

We are also fortunate to welcome two new Commissioners to the County who were sworn into office at the last Board meeting. Commissioners Sherri Cox and Drew Palmer were chosen by Okaloosa County voters to serve a four-year term. I look forward to their leadership and guidance to continue moving the County in a positive direction.

Also selected by voters this election cycle, is Chairman Paul Mixon, who will serve a second term to continue working toward the County's successes. You can learn more about each Commissioner on our [website](#).

I wish you all a safe and restful Thanksgiving holiday. Please reach out to me or your Department head if you need anything.



John Hofstad
County Administrator

Northwest Florida State College selects Mel Ponder as next president



Ponder, who currently serves as Association Executive for the Emerald Coast Association of Realtors and Okaloosa County Commissioner for District 5, was chosen following candidate forums and interviews held November 4 and 5. [READ MORE >>](#)

Okaloosa County ensures proper burial for 31 individuals without family or means at memorial service



Annual interfaith ceremony at Beal Memorial Cemetery provides dignified burial for those who died without means or family to claim them, bringing total to nearly 800 since program's inception. [READ MORE >>](#)

Nathan Boyles concludes 12-year chapter as Okaloosa Commissioner after transformative tenure



During his prepared farewell address, Boyles emphasized the challenging nature of public service. "The easy parts of these jobs, they're easy and they're fun. The hard parts, when they're done well, they're hard. They're really hard," Boyles said. [READ MORE >>](#)

Navy divers complete disposal of World War II-era bombs in Choctawhatchee Bay



Six World War II-era unexploded ordnance were safely disposed of through controlled detonations in Choctawhatchee Bay, with final operation canceled. [READ MORE >>](#)

Commissioners delay action, seek more time to review North Okaloosa Planning Study

The study, initiated in March 2024, examined growth management in the 245,000-acre area north of Eglin Air Force Base, encompassing the city of Crestview and rural communities of Holt and Baker. [READ MORE >>](#)



On your head

Some members of the Public Works team participated in "Wear Your Costume on Your Head" costume contest for Halloween. Judges included Kelly Bird, Amanda Maxwell and Sheila Fitzgerald. Winners (pictured right): 1st place-Jennifer Black, 2nd place-Rob Vandenbroeck, and 3rd-Tina Moore.



Time to play...almost

The playground at Ross Marler Park on Okaloosa Island is getting a much-needed makeover. This artist rendering shows what the new playground will look like. The rest of the park will be open for the duration of the playground work. The new playground is expected to be complete by March 1, 2025 (weather dependent).



Okaloosa becomes a little more beautiful

Keep Okaloosa Beautiful hosted this year's statewide Keep Florida Beautiful Conference on Okaloosa Island. The three-day event gathered affiliates from as far as Key West to discuss ways to improve recycling contamination, litter reduction and beautification.



The 'Best Airport'

Okaloosa County and Destin-Fort Walton Beach Airport (VPS) recently recognized Dan Holmes and his therapy dog Elsa. Since 2016, Dan and Elsa have graced the terminal halls of VPS to bring a dose of joy to passengers waiting to take their flights. [View a video here>>](#)



Time for a tour

We love it when students learn about the county where they live. Darren Alford, our Wastewater Operations Manager recently guided students from Farling School of Excellence through the Arbennie Pritchett Water Reclamation Facility. Learn how this facility works [here >>](#).



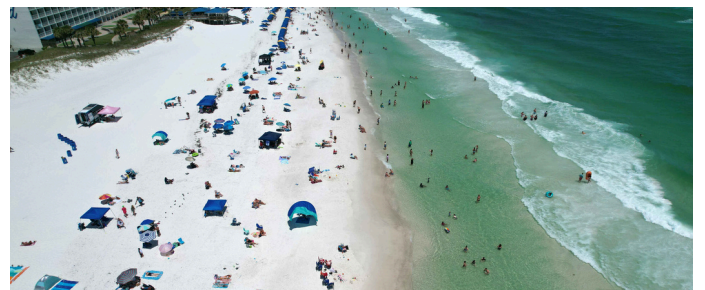
2024 Beach Safety Stats

Our Okaloosa Beach Safety Team went above and beyond this year, interacting with over 850,000 beachgoers!

2024 Lifeguard Stats

Responded to or provided educational/preventive support for:

- 39 rescues
- 73 lost child incidents
- 273 medically-related calls
- 487 beach wheelchair deliveries
- 0 drownings (guarded and unguarded)
- Over 850,000 educational/preventive contacts about high surf, rip currents, heat indices, hazardous marine life, and double red flags .



WELLNESS CORNER



NOVEMBER – Make Time for Self-Care

Register for [Florida Blue's wellness live webinars>>](#)
Access the [Better You Monthly Newsletter>>](#)

- [Prediabetes – 4 things you need to know](#) (2:12)
- [4 happiness hacks – Give your mood a nudge](#) (2:22)
- [Mental Well-Being: Online tools for support](#) (3:52)

[MyOkaloosa.com/Wellness](https://www.okaloosa.com/Wellness)

Upcoming Events:

- We will have a round of Wellness payouts for incentives earned in the first paycheck in December to give you a little bit of extra Holiday Cash!
- Remember your Personal Health Assessment in the Better You Strides Portal. It takes about 8 minutes and it can earn you \$75 in a future paycheck.
- Fighting Inflammation – 1-hour on-site Presentation (North & South County) December 10th & 11th. Learn more about inflammation in your body – what triggers it, how it helps you heal when too much can damage your health and how to defend against it if needed. [Sign Up here](#)
- Biometrics will be coming up in January! Remember this is a wonderful opportunity to check your personal biometrics (blood pressure, cholesterol, glucose levels) and speak with a Healthcare Specialist. Last year we had 349 participants – each of these employees earned \$75 - \$150 extra in their paycheck!

November Milestones



Congratulations to these County employees who are celebrating their work anniversaries. Pictured with County Administrator John Hofstad and County Commissioners is Robert Vandebroek, Public Works (25 years), Billy Pounders, Information Technology (5 years), and Tucker Cantler, Corrections (20 years).

OTHER MILESTONES

- Kali Hiemier, Keep Okaloosa Beautiful (2 years)
- Shelane Bell, Growth Management (2 years)
- Barbara McKinney, Public Works, (2 years)
- Bruce Brooks, Growth Management, (25 years)



In Case You Missed It

Regular Board Meetings

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Nov. 4 - Meeting notes

- Board adopted Comprehensive Plan Amendment to Mobility Plan for future developments.
- Board approved contract for planning and design for a new County jail.
- Board approved purchase of three type I ambulances

Nov. 19 - Meeting Notes

- Board gave input on State Legislative priorities and funding requests.
- Board approved updates to Human Resources manual related to drug testing and CBD warnings.
- Board approved contract amendment between County at MV Transportation, Inc. for continued public bus service.

TIDBITS



2024 Annual Report

Okaloosa County's Annual Report has been published for the 2024 Fiscal Year. [Check it out>>](#)