**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

*Board of County Commissioners*

November 4, 2026

**Okaloosa County to Observe Veterans Day with Unveiling of 2nd Charters of Freedom Monument and Recognition Ceremony for Placement of New Women Veteran Statues**

**Okaloosa County, Florida** – Okaloosa County will pay tribute to our service members this Veterans Day with a veteran appreciation event and unveiling of the newly constructed Charters of Freedom. The event will take place on Nov. 11, 2025, at 8:30 a.m. at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center on Okaloosa Island, followed by the unveiling at the nearby Women Veterans Monuments at Veterans Park. Participants are also encouraged to view the four newly placed women veteran statues at the park via a self-guided tour.

The keynote speaker for the event will be Col. Patrick Dierig, a retired Air Force veteran and former commander of the 1st Special Operations Wing (SOW) at Hurlburt Field.

"This is a special year with the Nation's Semiquincentennial to honor Veterans Day because we have the opportunity to recognize our veterans with a new monument that displays our nation's founding values and we will now be able to view the newly placed women veteran statues at the park," said Okaloosa County Commissioner Carolyn Ketchel.

**Charters of Freedom**

The Charters of Freedom is a display that contains a donated set of stainless-steel replicas of the Declaration of Independence, U.S. Constitution, Bill of Rights and Civil Rights Amendments. They were donated by Foundation Forward Inc., a North Carolina-based nonprofit that has gifted similar sets to communities in 17 states. This is one of two Charters of Freedom monuments in Okaloosa County. The other monument is located adjacent to the Crestview Courthouse and was unveiled on November 3, 2026.

**Women Veterans Monuments at Veterans Park**

This is a one-of-a-kind park that features 12 statues in honor of women who have served our country as true patriots. They were sculpted by renowned artist Jon Hair.

Home to native wildlife and vegetation, the park is situated on the Choctawhatchee Bay coastline and pays homage to the military, which has played an integral role in shaping our community. Second only to Washington, D.C., Florida is home to one of the largest populations of women veterans in the nation. This park pays tribute to women who have served throughout history.

Four new statues were unveiled last year and have recently been installed in their permanent locations at the park. View their bios below.

For more information on the monuments at Veterans Park go to https://myokaloosa.com/bcc/women-veterans-memorial

*Bios:*

**Florence Ebersole Finch:** Loring May Ebersole, later known as Florence, was born in 1915 to a Filipino mother and an American father. After High School, she took a job as a stenographer with U.S. Army Intelligence Headquarters in Manilla, where she met and married Charles Smith. Six months later, she was widowed.

Being half Filipino, she was able to hide her American sympathies from her new employer, the Japanese-controlled Philippine Liquid Fuel Distributing Union. Working with the Philippine underground, she diverted fuel and other critical items to the resistance. Soon she became part of a network of private citizens smuggling food, medical supplies and clean clothes to POWs. After her activities were discovered, she was imprisoned and tortured until her release in February 1945, having never betrayed the resistance. When her U.S.C.G. superiors learned of her work in the Philippines, she was awarded the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Ribbon and later the Medal of Freedom.

**Linda Bray:** Linda L. Bray was born in Sanford, North Carolina, in 1960. She joined the Reserve Officers' Training Corps in 1981 while enrolled at Western Carolina University. She holds degrees in criminal justice and military science and was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant in June 1983. By December 1989, Ms. Bray had been promoted to the rank of Captain and was assigned as Commanding Officer of the 988th Military Police Company at Fort Benning. That year, she and her company were deployed to Panama as support for Operation Just Cause. The initial mission was a routine operation to secure an attack-dog kennel on the periphery of Panama City, but the kennel was heavily defended. Though her team used bullhorns and warning shots to attempt to clear the area, the defenders refused to surrender. The subsequent engagement became a 3-hour firefight involving grenades as well as machine gun and rifle fire. The interaction resulted in the death of three and the capture of one of General Manuel Noriega's troops. Ms. Bray continued on active duty in the U.S. Army until 1991

**Sgt. Nicole L. Gee:** Sgt. Nicole L. Gee, 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit, a maintenance technician by specialty, also served a vital role in the evacuation of Kabul by communicating with and facilitating support for Afghan women and children. On August 27, 2021, Sgt. Gee was assisting with the evacuation of Kabul when a suicide bomber killed 18 U.S. service members, including Sgt. Gee.

**Iroquois Warrior – War of 1812:** At least five native women received military pensions for officially serving as "cooks": Polly Cooper, Susan Jacob, Dinah John, Julia John and Dolly Schenandoah. These women enlisted in regiments of Indian volunteers and served honorably. Though officially labeled as "cooks" in pension records, many served in combat alongside their husbands as a matter of necessity. The sculpted image of the Iroquois Warrior is representative rather than individually specific, as there are no paintings or photographs of these women during their time of service.