

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Board of County Commissioners

April 8, 2025



### Okaloosa County Celebrates Public Grand Opening of New Extension Services Facility

**Okaloosa County, Florida** – Okaloosa Board of County Commissioners is excited to announce a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Sheila Dunning Extension Building on Thursday, April 23, 2026, at 8:30 a.m. at the facility's location at 1954 Lewis Turner Boulevard in front of the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Rigdon Center (formerly the NWF Fairgrounds). The public is welcome to attend and tour the facility following the ceremony.

“We could not have completed this project without the continued support of my fellow Commissioners, the Florida Legislature’s generous appropriation and County staff who made this vision possible,” said Okaloosa County Board Chairman Trey Goodwin (District 4).

The new 3,000-square-foot facility is replacing a storm-damaged building in south Okaloosa County. It will allow Okaloosa County’s University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Services (UF/IFAS) Extension to offer the public educational programming in agriculture, coastal sciences, commercial horticulture, family and consumer sciences, residential horticulture, and 4-H youth development. Extension Services will now have an incredible new space to provide valuable services to community members, including, but not limited to, soil testing, free tax preparation, plant clinics, lawn care, water quality assistance and 4-H clubs.

“Agriculture has always been a passion of mine and I have worked with the team at the Extension service for many years,” said Okaloosa County Commissioner Carolyn Ketchel (District 2). “This will greatly enhance services offered to the south end of the county. I am grateful to be part of the effort to unveil this new facility that will mean so much to our community.”

The facility is named in honor of Sheila Dunning, a respected commercial horticulture Extension agent who passed away in 2025 after 23 years of educating and supporting local projects in Okaloosa County. Sheila was promoted to Extension Agent IV, the highest Extension Agent faculty rank, in 2023.

Born in rural Wisconsin, Dunning moved to Florida in 1976, where she built a successful 22-year career in the nursery industry before joining UF/IFAS Okaloosa County Extension Services. Her contributions to horticulture were widely recognized, and in 2024, she received the Conservation Award from the Choctawhatchee Bay Daughters of the American Revolution. Dunning earned a Bachelor’s in Environmental Horticulture and a Master’s in Agricultural Education and Communication at the University of Florida. She was pursuing a Doctor of Plant Medicine degree at the time of her death.

Learn more about the Extension Office at <https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/okaloosa/>

###

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER NICK TOMECEK AT 850.651.7321

NTOMECEK@MYOKALOOSA.COM