



## MARLER PARK RESTORED

Each month I highlight a project within Okaloosa County. Many of you have visited Marler Park over the decades. It is a popular park on Choctawhatchee Bay, next to the Destin-Ft. Walton Beach Convention Center. (See map below.) It is situated next to a public boat ramp and features picnic table pavilions, restrooms and a worn-out playground.

As you have read recently, a bike path will be constructed on the south side of Hwy 98, we have interconnecting trails throughout Veteran's Park, a living shoreline will shortly be added and the entire area is becoming user friendly for pedestrians, especially as we watch the new Brooks Bridge come into focus.

Along with the other changes and improvements to Okaloosa Island, the county has been working to design and develop a new Playground at Marler Park. Many locals and tourists visit the park each year. This heavily used park has old playground equipment, much of which has been removed, piece by piece, over the years as it was deemed unsafe. The rubber flooring needs to be replaced.

The Board of County Commission has voted to make Marler Park a one-of-a-kind destination in South Okaloosa that is inviting for children of all ages. The updated and brand new playground equipment will be a joy to use. Safe, up-to-date playground equipment featuring sea creatures such as Red Snapper, Turtles, Grouper and other nicely designed play equipment, will be installed, and the entire park will receive a general overhaul. Work will begin later this summer and should be completed prior to spring break 2025. Children love splash pads on a hot summer day, and we hope to eventually install one in Marler Park.

The county will use \$1,237, 213.08 from Tourism Development dollars (also known as Bed Tax money) for playground structures, safety surfacing, sail shades, installation, benches and coastal coating. Though many other projects, such as road repair, need funding, Tourism Development funds can only be used for parks and marketing in the county.

It is nice to see the changes that are coming to this area, beginning in Ft. Walton Beach, traveling over Brooks Bridge to the Destin Bridge. Locals and visitor alike will enjoy the amenities found on Okaloosa Island, such as kayak boat launches and the access ways to our public beaches. Tourism Development dollars continue to make a difference in these and other projects, like the new photo-

luminescent Bridge to Bridge Bike Path being built along the dune line, the lovely trails in Veterans Park with views of statues of heroic women who have served the USA since our beginning, and the planned living shoreline that will revitalize and protect the bay-side beach. We continue to preserve our area with amenities that are military and family friendly.

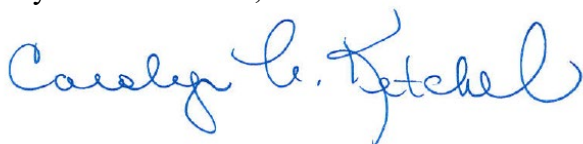
Take a look at the video below and enjoy the beautiful plans to restore Marler Park. (note: Given the sensitivity towards sharks in the Gulf of Mexico the shark featured in the video has been removed in favor of a friendly, large fish.

<https://bit.ly/NewMarlerPlayground>

One final note: We are working to reopen East Pass Park (on the south side of Destin Bridge) with the cooperation of our military partners at Eglin AFB. It will be much improved, but that will be the subject of another column.

It is an honor and privilege to serve as your commissioner.

My Sincere Thanks,



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