

# County Connection

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February 2024

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



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## Staying busy

As you read through this newsletter you will see how busy every department is. Consistent and reliable service to the residents of Okaloosa County is a necessary part of our responsibility as servants to the community. I believe we do it very well.

Additionally, we continue to make improvements and upgrades to our infrastructure and parks, while preparing in the off-season for what may become a very busy summer.

We are proud to announce a Hurricane Preparedness Expo that will take place on May 11 at the Administration Building in Shalimar. More information on this event can be found on page six of this newsletter.

I appreciate all of your hard work and as always, you may reach out to me or your department head if you need anything.

Thanks.



**John Hofstad**  
**County Administrator**

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## Committee approves phased plan to 'transform' aging Fairgrounds in Fort Walton Beach



The County's seven-member Fairgrounds Advisory Committee unanimously approved a conceptual master plan for phased renovations of the property. [READ MORE>>](#)

## Okaloosa to purchase 412 acres in Crestview for new ecotourism destination



The Okaloosa County Board of Commissioners has approved the purchase of approximately 412 acres of undeveloped land along the Shoal River in Crestview. [READ MORE>>](#)

## VIDEO: Military successfully detonates three WWII-era bombs found in Choctawhatchee Bay



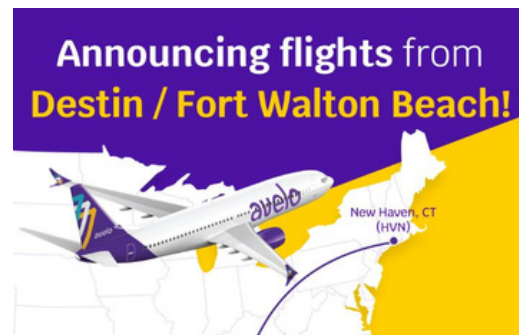
The bomb disposal operation was a collaborative interagency effort to ensure public safety, protection of property and the environment, according to Hogue. [READ MORE>>](#)

## Progress being made on new Cristobal Waterfront Park in Mary Esther



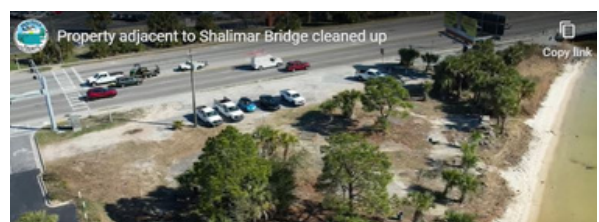
The County is splitting the task order cost with the city of Mary Esther under an interlocal agreement in which the county will lead the development of the park before handing over ownership and operations to the city upon completion. [READ MORE>>](#)

## Destin-Fort Walton Beach Airport welcomes Avelo Airlines, offering nonstop service to Southern Connecticut



This new addition will connect the Destin-Fort Walton Beach destination to New Haven, Connecticut (HVN). [READ MORE>>](#)

## VIDEO: Progress being made on \$3 million waterfront park next to Shalimar Bridge



Following a successful community cleanup, Okaloosa County Facilities and Parks Maintenance crews continued the progress of the future waterfront park. [WATCH THE VIDEO>>](#)

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# Department News

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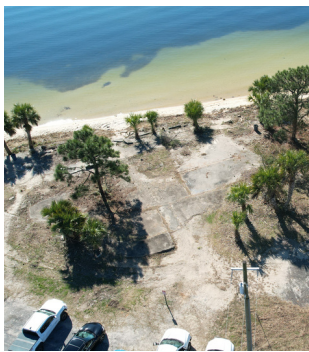
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## W&S Upgrades

Okaloosa County Water and Sewer crews recently finished replacing water lines along U.S. Hwy 90 West near Old Bethel Road in Crestview.

They're tackling a substantial 1.75 miles of a drinking water line, ensuring reliable service for Fairfield Drive and Tanglewood Lane residents.



## You get a park! You get a park!

Considerable progress has been made in clearing the lots for parks at the Cristobal Road location in Mary Esther and the future park site at the base of the Shalimar Bridge.



## Going down

Okaloosa County has taken the plunge yet again with another successful artificial reef deployment. The 239-foot R/V DEEP STIM III joins hundreds of other artificial reefs already deployed off the shores of Northwest Florida.

## Convention Center Happenings

DESTIN  
FORT  
WALTON  
BEACH  
FLORIDA



### Events of note at the DFWBCC:

- TDD Annual Meeting – about 230 industry partners gather together to hear about the Tourism Development's past achievements and all the new happenings in our community.
- 2024 FMO / PIWG (F-35 Air Force event) – Coming back for their second year, this time with more attendees, about 350, bringing a huge economic impact to the area with about 900 room nights.
- 2024 SAWS Special Air Warfare Symposium (military event) – coming back for the 3rd year in a row (also looking to come back next year), this time with about 600 people, with about 400 room nights within our partner hotels.
- All Sports Association Annual Awards Banquet with about 1300 people. This is their 17th year in a row having their banquet with us.
- Force Dance Tour 2024 – back onsite for their 7th consecutive year with us. They have about 700 people in this event.
- 2024 Emerald Coast Gymnastics Vacation Classic – this is their 4th annual event with us, with about 400 people.

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# Department News

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## CORRECTIONS ON THE MOVE



Okaloosa County Corrections has been busy both inside and outside of the jail. Chairman Paul Mixon recently swore in four new officers who graduated from the Northwest Florida State College Correctional Academy. Staff also volunteered their time to help with some playground maintenance at the Emerald Coast Autism Center, while Chief Nolan Weeks spoke recently to a group about the importance of the Good News Jail & Prison Ministry.

## We have your back



Okaloosa County Public Safety's Division of Emergency Management provided support for Eglin Air Force Base's recent operation to detonate three unexploded World War II-era bombs that had been found weeks earlier in the Choctawhatchee Bay.

## The tourism adventure

Hundreds of tourism industry professionals and community leaders joined the staff of Destin-Fort Walton Beach from our tourism development department to listen to the accomplishments from 2023 and a glimpse into the initiatives for 2024.



## WATERWAY SAFETY

Growth Management's Coastal Code Enforcement Officer, Chris Mitchell, organized this year's required Annual Water Safety Meeting (A.W.S.M) for livery vessel owners and operators. Various law enforcement agencies and water safety advocates gathered for updates related to Crab Island and the various permitting rules that are in place.





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# Employee Spotlight

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## February Milestones



Congratulations to these County employees on their work anniversaries and for their years serving Okaloosa County. Pictured with County Administrator John Hofstad and County Commissioners are: Larry Williams, 30 years, Extension Services, and Kit Snyder, 2 years, Water & Sewer.

## OTHER MILESTONES



- Ryan McDonald, Water & Sewer, 2 years
- Christina Rogers, Corrections, 2 years
- Gregory Richards. Water& Sewer, 5 years



Sheila Dunning (right), UF/IFAS Extension Services Agent for Okaloosa County, has been honored with the prestigious Conservation Award by Florida State Regent Cindy Addison (left) and the Choctawhatchee Bay Daughters of the American Revolution on Feb. 1, 2024.

This award recognizes volunteers for their exceptional conservation efforts, showcasing sustained accomplishments that enhance the environment and educate the public on conservation issues, going above and beyond job expectations.

# In Case You Missed It

Regular Board Meetings

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## February 6 - Quick Notes

- Board approved purchase of 412 acres of property on the Shoal River off of Poverty Creek Road for the purpose of recreation.
- Board approved funding for TDD's expansion of Little Adventures and development of Reel Time Charter Fishing pilot.
- Board approved revisions to County MSBU/MSTU Policy.
- Board approved change order for Live Oak Church Road improvements.

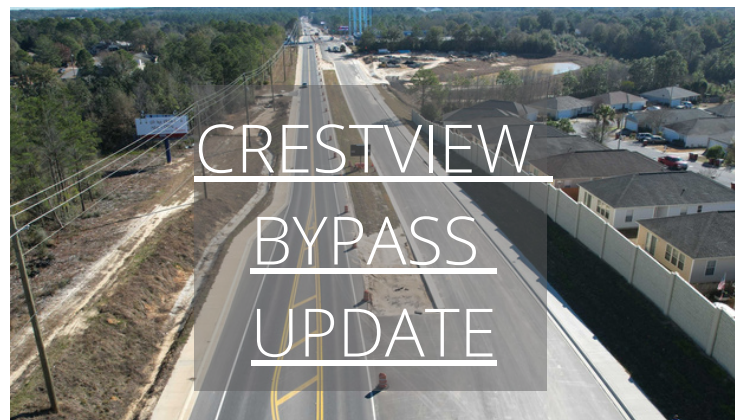
## February 20- Quick Notes

- Board was presented with CSX 'Select Site' distinction for Shoal River Ranch.
- Youth Leadership Council presented to Board.
- Board approved Resolution and Ordinance related to Lake Clyd MSBU assessment and future dredging projects.
- Board recommended Dr. Deanna A. Oleske to appear on reappointment ballot for District One Medical Examiner.
- Board approved new BCC Safety and Health Manual
- Board approved County Attorney and staff to take necessary action related to septage management facility in Holt.

## TIDBITS



The Hurricane Preparedness Expo is coming to the Okaloosa County Administration Building, 1250 N. Eglin Pkwy. in Shalimar on May 11, 2024, from 10 am to 2 pm. If your department would like to participate with a table or booth, please email Nick Tomecek at [ntomecek@myokaloosa.com](mailto:ntomecek@myokaloosa.com). [Click to learn more>>](#)



The Crestview Bypass continues to make progress. [View the latest video update from Public Works Director Jason Autrey >>](#)