

County Connection

August 2025

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



Remain calm and stay prepared

This is the time of year we begin to see increased tropical activity heading into the peak of hurricane season. Hopefully, you have prepared your disaster supply kits and gone over your plans with your family.

As a County, we are fortunate to be well-equipped for any potential impacts. Our Public Safety team remains highly competent in responding to emergency situations, but most importantly, they are actively engaged in planning and preparations throughout the year.

We will keep you and the public informed of any dangers that may threaten our lives

and property and we will continue to remind you to review your family's disaster response plan.

The more preparations that are made now will prevent panic later and position everyone to act more swiftly during recovery.

Informational resources can be found on our website at <https://myokaloosa.com/emergency-management>. It includes information about evacuation zones, a disaster supply kit list, EOC activation information and other relevant information.

Thanks for all you do for the County and stay safe.

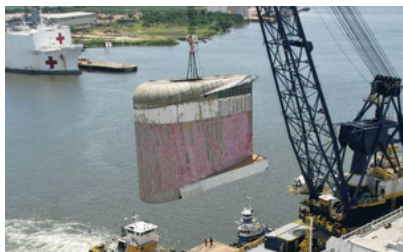


John Hofstad
County Administrator

In the News

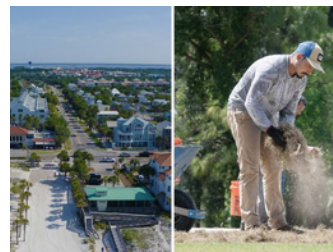
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SS United States aft funnel removed as artificial reef preparations continue



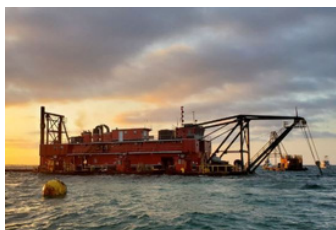
The towering funnels, each standing 65 feet tall and as tall as a six-story building, were removed last week. The remaining propeller was also removed last Friday and loaded on the same barge as the aft funnel. [READ MORE>>](#)

Okaloosa Commissioners approve Destin, Fort Walton Beach tourism funding plans



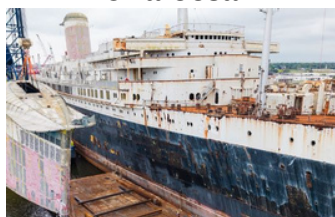
The city will receive \$665,000 for beach and boardwalk operations, covering maintenance and operations of tourist facilities including June White Decker Park, Shores at Crystal Beach Park and the harbor boardwalk. [READ MORE>>](#)

Okaloosa County receives \$320,000 grant for East Pass dredging project



The study examined expanding the federal channel dredging operation from the current 200,000 cubic yards of sand removed every five years to between 600,000 cubic yards and over one million cubic yards. [READ MORE>>](#)

Federal court dismisses lawsuit against Okaloosa



The court noted that when the county took title in August 2024, "the ship's fate as an artificial reef was already sealed." [READ MORE>>](#)

'CARE CREW': New pilot program teaches Okaloosa teens childcare skills and business practices



The program originated from Okaloosa County Commissioner Paul Mixon's vision to support the local childcare workforce by equipping young learners with caregiving tools and introducing the early learning pathway to potential early childhood educators. [READ MORE>>](#)

New TSA PreCheck enrollment center opens in Fort Walton Beach



The new center, operated by Telos, is located at the Office Depot site in Sun Plaza at 419A Mary Esther Cut Off NW in Fort Walton Beach. [READ MORE>>](#)

July 25, 1968: The birth of Silver Beach Wayside Park, now known as James Lee Park in Destin

The park's journey continued when the state transferred it to Okaloosa County in May 1981, and it was eventually renamed James Lee Park – honoring the very same James Lee who had helped dedicate it in 1968. (As I'm sure you are aware, there are also roads named after James Lee in the area). [READ MORE>>](#)



Certainly Certified



Our Public Works staff continues to excel and gain knowledge to better serve the residents of Okaloosa County. Deputy County Administrator of Development Services Jason Autrey, left, was on hand recently to celebrate the graduation of these four Public Works employees who graduated from the Florida Certified Public Manager program at FSU. These Level 8 graduates have completed one of the nation's most respected leadership development programs. Their achievement reflects dedication, innovation, and a deep commitment to public excellence. Graduates (from left to right): Rob VandenBroeck – Road Division Chief, Zan Fedorak – Property & Finance Manager, Matt Card – Supply Supervisor and Michael Anderson, P.E. – Engineer III.

Hot and Ready



Beach Safety lifeguards, Lt. Stacy Karczewski and Payton Watson, along with Okaloosa Pier staff and the Okaloosa Island Fire Department, responded recently to an individual on the pier suffering from a heat-related illness. Their quick action helped prevent the patient from further harm.

Emerging Emergency Medical Services Paramedics



Congratulations to Okaloosa County EMS Paramedics Lisa Goodman and Chase Good for graduating from the Northwest Florida State College paramedic program after a year of education that includes 1,300 hours of classroom instruction, labs and clinical time. Both Lisa and Chase have taken and passed the national registry paramedic exam clearing them to get their Florida paramedic licenses.

Signal Success



Traffic Operations crews recently installed a new loop detection wire at the traffic signal in front of Florosa Elementary in preparation for the new school year. Loop detection systems in traffic signals use inductive loops embedded in the road to detect vehicles. These loops are essentially wires embedded in the pavement that create a magnetic field. When a vehicle passes over the loop, it changes the magnetic field, which is then detected by the system, triggering a signal change.

Life is Sweet at Fleet



Our fleet technicians stay busy maintaining numerous vehicles, including our EMS ambulances. Pictured is Fleet technician Charles, ensuring that Okaloosa County residents and visitors have lifesaving vehicles at the ready.

Tour time



We were honored to give State Representative Patt Maney a recent site tour of the legislative appropriation projects he and our other legislators helped fund and bring home to Okaloosa County from Tallahassee. Pictured with Rep. Maney is Okaloosa County Interim Public Works Director Scott Bitterman.

Partnering for the pantry



Staff members of the Okaloosa County Department of Corrections partnered with Santa Rosa Correctional Institute, successfully collecting food to restock the pantry at the Children in Crisis Center in Okaloosa County.

Undeniable upgrades



Progress continues to be made on much-needed improvements at Col. Bud Day Park (soon to be Brigadier General Bud Day Park). Future upgrades include a pavilion, 2 pickleball courts, a playground, and additional improvements to the basketball court.



Fall lawn care questions

How can I prevent winter annual lawn weeds?

If your lawn has a history of winter annual weeds such as henbit, wild geranium, annual bluegrass, chickweed and lawn burweed, you can apply a preemergence herbicide to prevent these weeds from emerging. Apply it during October when nighttime temperatures drop to 55° to 60°F for several consecutive nights. This will be just before the winter annual weeds emerge.

Should I fertilize my lawn in the fall? The last application should be no later than the end of September. Choose a lawn fertilizer with low nitrogen or controlled-release nitrogen and with sufficient potassium. The fertilizer should have little to no phosphorus unless a soil test indicates a need for it. Avoid “weed and feed” products.

Should I overseed my lawn with annual ryegrass?

Overseeding a lawn with ryegrass to create a green lawn during winter is mostly done for cosmetic reasons. Personally, I don't overseed because I'm ready to take a break from routine lawn care. I take a break, my mower takes a break, and my lawn takes a break. The optimal time to broadcast the ryegrass seed is mid-October through mid-November if you wish to have a winter lawn.

Should I let fall tree leaves stay on the lawn?

You should not allow a thick layer of leaves to accumulate and remain on the lawn for long periods. A layer of leaves left on the lawn through winter can reduce oxygen and sunlight availability to the lawn. This may result in a weak, thin lawn in spring. Also, a layer of leaves may hold too much water and cause rot problems for your lawn. A few leaves (scattering of leaves) should not be a problem, though.

For more info on lawns, landscapes and gardens, contact UF/IFAS Okaloosa County Extension Office or use [this link](#).

Larry Williams, UF/IFAS Extension Agent, Okaloosa County, August 19, 2025



Larry Williams

UNITED *for impact* EARLY BIRD TICKETS ARE OPEN!!!

A Non-Profit Conference

WHAT TO EXPECT:

- Learn from experts in fundraising, strategy, leadership, and more
- Build connections that matter
- Walk away with tools you can use right away

Secure your spot now! Ticket price will increase on September 1st, so don't delay!



Recent Milestones



Congratulations to these Okaloosa County employees who are celebrating their work anniversaries. Pictured with County Administrator John Hofstad and County Commissioners are April McDaniel (20 years, Corrections), James Sutton (2 years, Facilities and Parks), Melissa Thompson (2 years, Airports), Ricardo Thornton (2 years, Facilities and Parks), Terrie Henderson (10 years, Court Services).



Other notable milestones

- Justin Enders (20 years, Water & Sewer)
- Michael Burgess (5 years, Corrections)
- Larissa Singletary (2 years, Public Works)

In Case You Missed It

Regular Board Meetings

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August 5 Meeting

- Board approved the Special Selection Committee for public transportation services.
- Board approved grant award of \$3.5 million for Shoal River Ranch water storage tank.
- Board approved agreement for Airport Road improvements.
- Board approved task order for Overbrook Stormwater improvements for environmental and design modifications.
- Board approved social media policy.

August 19 Meeting

- Board approved new animal control contract with PAWS.
- Board approved contractor funding for vessel cleaning and prep of MV BELLE REYNOLDS and MV HENRY ALEX for artificial reef deployment.
- Board approved allocating surtax reserves for design work for Santa Rosa Blvd. improvements.
- Board approved surtax allocation toward sidewalk projects in Ocean City and Crestview.
- Board approved resolution to authorize issuance of bonds for Air Force Enslited Village.

TIDBITS



**CONTAMINATION
CAUSES PROBLEMS**



Did you know?

Recycling contamination happens when trash ruins otherwise good recyclables. For example, food waste and liquids saturate paper and cardboard. Once contaminated, these materials can no longer be recycled. They become trash that will be separated out and sent to the landfill.

On a recent visit to our local Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) we learned that the greatest contamination threat in Okaloosa County actually comes from plastic bags! You should not bag your recycling. Recyclables stuck inside plastic bags never make it through the recycling process.