

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Board of County Commissioners

May 28, 2025



### Two New Statues to be Unveiled at Annual Women Veterans Day Event

**Okaloosa Island** – Okaloosa County will hold the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Women Veterans' Day ceremony on June 12, 2025 at 8 a.m. at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center. A wreath-laying ceremony will follow at Women Veterans Monuments at Veterans Park. Col. Kristen Wood, Commander 1<sup>st</sup> Special Operations Mission Support Group will be this year's keynote speaker.

This observance recognizes President Truman's signing of the Women's Armed Service Integration Act establishing the Women's Army Corps in the Regular Army and authorizing the enlistment and appointment of women in the Regular Air Force, Regular Navy and Marine Corps. Women Veterans Day was recognized by the State of Florida by proclamation from Gov. Ron DeSantis in 2021.

"This event has become a beloved tradition for everyone in our community to recognize and appreciate the women who have served in our military since the Revolutionary War," said Okaloosa County Vice Chairman Carolyn Ketchel. "We are fortunate to have a place that honors the tradition of women's service with the Women Veterans Monuments on this special day but also throughout the year. This year, two new statues of women veterans will be unveiled, with placement into the existing park to take place at a later date. The new statues recognize the following women veterans:

- **Captain Linda Bray**

Linda Bray, a Captain in the U.S. Army, led her company during a firefight in Panama in 1989 and was recently awarded the Bronze Star with V Device for her actions. At the time, it was illegal for women to engage in combat, but Bray acted when the situation deteriorated.

- **Florence Ebersole Smith Finch**

Florence Ebersole Smith Finch, who was half Filipino, worked with the Philippine underground to smuggle supplies to POWs during World War II. After being imprisoned and tortured by the Japanese, she joined the Coast Guard in 1945 and was awarded the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Ribbon and the Medal of Freedom.

In 2021 Okaloosa County unveiled the Women Veterans Monuments at Veterans Park where this year's wreath laying will take place. A total of eight women who served in combat, during various U.S. military conflicts, are honored at Veterans Park with life-sized bronze statues strategically placed along a quarter-mile path. It is surrounded by native wildlife that includes a nearby great blue heron rookery.

Learn more about the women honored at the park at <https://myokaloosa.com/bcc/women-veterans-memorial>.

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