



NEW AGRICULTURE BUILDING COMING TO OKALOOSA COUNTY

Okaloosa County is fortunate to have a University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Services (UF IFAS) in Crestview. There was an office in the south end of the county on Hollywood Boulevard in Fort Walton Beach, until Hurricane Sally finished an already outdated and dilapidated building. It became a priority to replace it and the legislature and Governor DeSantis allowed the expenditure in 2021. We are looking forward to enhancing the many services offered to our citizens.

The new Okaloosa UF IFAS Extension Office will be located close to the Okaloosa County “Miss Ruth’s” Farmers Market at the Fort Walton Beach Fairground. It is important to point out that this is not part of the newly acquired property of the Fairground, but property that the county owned beforehand. The cost to build is to be \$1.5 million with the county providing the match in real estate.

The wonderful team of the Okaloosa UF IFAS Extension office anticipates offering a variety of courses, programs, workshops, and meetings. These courses will feature agriculture, family and consumer sciences, commercial and residential horticulture, natural resources and 4-H Youth Development program areas. Some of the examples include: Master Gardner programs, food preparation and safety workshops, Master Naturalist program, drone training, 4-H development clubs and after school programs.

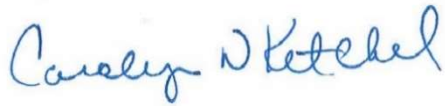
The new building will feature an accommodation for large groups, full teaching kitchen, small laboratory, storage, office space and plenty of room for teaching classes. The surrounding area of the building will be used for gardening both flowers and vegetables by the Extension Office for their students. The building will be one floor with 3,000 sq. feet.

The plans include a greenhouse on the grounds. “Miss Ruth’s” Farmer Market will have additional outdoor bathrooms built to accommodate vendors and customers.

An existing well on the property will allow for irrigations of flower and vegetable gardens. Ground breaking is planned for the spring of 2024.

As one who comes from a long family history of farming and gardening, I am excited to see this state-of-the-art building provided for our community. I have taken numerous classes over the years through our extension office with one of the most memorable being “Antique Roses”. I serve as the Commissioner liaison to the UF ISAS Extension Office. It is one of my favorite parts of being a Commissioner. There is something special about those who want to grow flowers and food and care for the earth. I invite you to consider signing up for the classes as they open this new building. It will make you and your family healthier and it is a great way to make new friends.

My Sincere Thanks,



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