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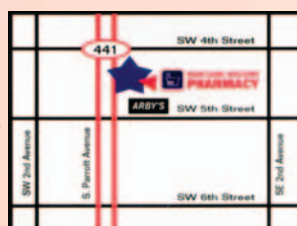
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On the Cover...

The playground at Kiwanis Park in Okeechobee can be enjoyed by kids of all ages. Located next to the park is Okeechobee's only skate park as well as a baseball field. *(Photo by Richard Marion)*

Take the time to explore!



Okeechobee County, a rural community rich in pioneer history, is a place of discovery and opportunity.

To the fisherman, Okeechobee County, the home of the "Big O," is one of the top lakes in the country for catching bass and speckled perch. Professional bass anglers fish Lake Okeechobee for thousands of dollars in tournament prizes.

To the rancher, it's wide open spaces. According to the United States Department of Agriculture Census, Okeechobee County is home to 599 farms and ranches for a total of 297,439 acres in agriculture. Okeechobee has earned the nickname "Florida's Cowtown," as the county is No. 1 in the state in the most beef cattle and the most milk produced.

According to the most recent USDA Census of Agriculture, Okeechobee County ranches and dairies are home to a total of 184,462 head of cattle, including calves. Okeechobee County dairies account for about 20 percent of the milk produced in Florida. The county has also 3,268 acres in citrus trees.

For young families, Okeechobee is a place where kids can be active in school, church and club activities. And, it's a place where the community supports its youth with thousands of dollars donated each year to give local scholarships to high school graduates headed for college.

For those who love the outdoors, Okeechobee County has plenty to see and do, boating on Lake Okeechobee or the Kissimmee River, hiking the Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail, enjoying the beauty all around in Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park, horseback riding and more.

Shooting enthusiasts can choose from world-class outdoor shooting facilities. The area also has plenty of hunting opportunities.

The people of Okeechobee love to show their community spirit, with festivals, parades and special community events throughout the year.

Explore Okeechobee: Even longtime residents can be surprised at the opportunities all around them.



To Reach Us

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To Submit Events

Explore Okeechobee welcomes submissions from its readers. Calendar items, story ideas, and photographs are welcome. Call (863) 763-3134 to reach our newsroom. Items may be mailed or emailed.
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Area festivals celebrate county's pioneer spirit



Okeechobee County festivals are a way not only to celebrate the community's pioneer heritage but also to embrace new traditions.

March is the busiest festival month in

Okeechobee, bringing the Speckled Perch Festival, the Okeechobee County Fair and Florida's Cowtown Rodeo.

Festivals are a great chance to gather with friends, enjoy performances by local entertainers, and try samples of local delicacies such as Seminole pumpkin fry bread (hint, to find the fry bread booth, just look for the longest line.) Bring your own folding chair — it comes in handy while you're waiting for a parade, or if you just want to sit back and enjoy the show.

Speckled Perch Festival

Most central Florida towns have a festival connected with something important to the area's history. For Okeechobee, it's the Speckled Perch Festival, which honors the great fishing on Lake Okeechobee, and Okeechobee's title as Speckled Perch Capital of the World. When the festival first started more than 50 years ago, it featured a fish fry that served up plenty of the tasty local favorite "Specks," also known as black crappie. However, in the 1980s, changes in health department rules banned the public sale of any fish not commercially harvested. So, instead of speckled perch, festival goers enjoy a variety of other great food choices.

The 2020 Speckled Perch Festival, sponsored by Okeechobee Main Street, will be held in Flagler Park in downtown Okeechobee on March 14 and 15. The festival starts around 9 a.m. with arts and crafts, food booths and entertainment in Flagler Park. The Speckled Perch Festival Parade will be on Saturday at 10 a.m. For additional information, go online to okeechebeemainstreet.org.



Okeechobee County Fair

The Okeechobee County Fair will be held March 17-22, at the Agri-Civic Center Fairgrounds, with entry at State Road 710. The fair includes a carnival midway, livestock shows, cooking competitions, fruit and vegetable competitions; sewing, arts and crafts competitions. There is even a Lego building competition.

The Okeechobee 4-H and FFA Livestock Show will be the week of March 13-20. Poultry show is March 9 at 9 a.m. Rabbit show is March 16 at 2 p.m. Swine showmanship is March 17 at 5 p.m. Swine show is March 18 at 5 p.m. Lamb show is March 1 at 1 p.m. Goat show is March 19 after the lamb show. Steer show is March 19, 5 p.m. Beef breeding show is March 20 at 11 a.m. Dairy show is March 20 at 6 p.m.

Fairgrounds opens at 5 p.m. Monday - Friday and at noon on Saturday and Sunday.

March 17 is Dollar Night with \$1 entry. March 18 is food drive night.

Entertainment will include the popular Eudora Farms petting zoo, The Swamp Cowboys Alligator Show, Freestyle Motorcycle and MX Madness, Tunica Helicopter Rides and more!

The Demolition Derby will be on Saturday, March 21.

For more information online, go to okeechebecountyfair.com.

Minimal Regatta

The annual Adam Bryant Memorial Minimal Regatta and Festival is a special hometown event. This is Okeechobee's own homemade boat race. The race contestants make their own boats from one sheet of plywood, a pound of screws, 24 feet of 2" by 4"s and a roll of duct tape. The race honors the memory of Adam





Bryant, a young man who did not live long enough to fulfill his dream of becoming a fire fighter/EMT. The regatta keeps Adam's dream alive by raising money for scholarships for others to go to school to become a firefighter/EMTs. The race has moved around the calendar over the years, and has been held in October, April and July. A 2020 date has not yet been announced. For more information, go to minimalregatta.com.

4th of July

Celebrate our country's independence with your friends and neighbors at the annual Independence Day Celebration at the Okeechobee Agri-Civic Center hosted by the Okeechobee Fraternal Order of Police. There will be fun, games, food, and amazing fireworks! For more information, as it becomes available, see lakeokeechobeenews.com.

Labor Day Festival

Labor Day Weekend, Sept. 5 - Sept. 7, brings Okeechobee's Annual Labor Day Festival, with an arts and crafts festival in downtown Okeechobee, games for the whole family and a parade. This weekend also brings a rodeo at the Okeechobee Cattlemen's Rodeo Arena on U.S. 441 N. For more information on the parade and festival, go to okeechobeemainstreet.org.

Oktoberfest

Okeechobee KOA hosts Oktoberfest in October with a beer tent, German food and live music. The KOA Oktoberfest also features Daschund racing.

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For details, see future editions of "101+ Things to do in the Lake Okeechobee Area" or go online to koa.com/campgrounds/okeechobee/.

Christmas Festival

Okeechobee's annual Top of the Lake Christmas Festival and Lighted Parade is usually held on the second Saturday of December in Flagler Park downtown Okeechobee.

The highlight of the festival is the lighted Christmas parade, which is held on Saturday evening at dark (around 6 p.m.) Festival rules require all entries be lighted — included the horses, which are festooned with colorful holiday lights and decorations. For additional information, go online to okeechobeemainstreet.org.

YeeHaw Music Festival

The YeeHaw Music Festival is held in January in Okeechobee County. This unique bluegrass festival is held at the Agri-Civic Center in Okeechobee. Bluegrass music is held under the big top tent and will go on rain or shine. Spectator entrance is 4601 State Road 710 in Okeechobee County. For more information, go to okeechobee-tdc.com/okeechobee-agri-civic-center.

BHR Catfish Festival

Buckhead Ridge (BHR) is on the Glades County side of the Kissimmee River, but most residents consider themselves part of the Okeechobee community. The annual Buckhead Ridge Catfish Festival is held in January at the Buckhead Ridge Volunteer Fire Department on State Road 78. The festival features fried catfish dinners, using Fire Chief John Wilkinson's recipe. Visitors are entertained by local bands. Arts and crafts will be for sale at the vendor booths. The annual event raises money for equipment and training for the BHR Volunteer Fire Department.

Top of the Lake Art Festival

The Top of the Lake Art Festival is held in February in Flagler Park in downtown Okeechobee. The main event is a juried fine art show with a competition for student

artists. Artists from throughout the state are welcome to participate. A chalk art competition has become a popular part of this festival. Visitors can watch as colorful chalk art is created onsite. This festival is paired with the Taste of Okeechobee which features cuisine from local restaurants. Armed with a "passport," participants walk up and down Park Street sampling delicious fare, then vote on their favorites.

Sour Orange Festival

The Lakeport Sour Orange Festival is held each year at the Lakeport Community Center, 1239 Red Barn Road, State Road 78 between Moore Haven and Okeechobee. The festival features the traditional sour orange bake off and a rib cook off. The festival also features entertainment, a quilt show, a historical display, children's games, a small carnival for the kids, a display by the Lakeport Fire Department and sour orange pies. The highlight of the event is the pie contest.

Brighton Field Day

Brighton Seminole Field Day and Rodeo, held each year in February, on the Brighton Seminole Reservation about 30 miles from Okeechobee, originated in 1938 as a day of sporting events and arts and crafts competitions for members of the Seminole Tribe. William P. Boehmer and his wife Edith — teachers at the original Brighton Day School — originated the festival as a way to bring Seminoles from other reservations together for some friendly competition. Over the years, the event evolved into a festival that is open to the public and showcases Seminole and other Native American arts, crafts, dances and traditions. On Friday, the festival hosts "Kids Day" which is open to area school children. School buses from all over South Florida transport elementary school children to Brighton Reservation, where they learn how Seminoles once lived in chickees, cooked food over open fires, made their own canoes, weapons and crafts such as sweetgrass baskets and clothing made from tiny pieces of cloth sewn



into intricate patterns. The festival also includes wild animal exhibitions, alligator wrestling and native dances. In more recent years, the event expanded to invite Native Americans from all over the country to participate.

This year it will be held on Friday, Feb. 14, through Sunday, Feb. 16.

Battle of Okeechobee Re-Enactment

The Battle of Okeechobee Re-Enactment and Festival, also held in February, commemorates the largest and fiercest battle of the Second Seminole War. The original

battle was fought Christmas Day, 1837. Part of the original battleground has been preserved as a state park on 3500 S.E. 38th Ave. (off U.S. 441 S.E.) in Okeechobee. In addition to re-enactments of the battle, the two-day festival often includes animal shows, a living history camp, artisans, Seminole arts, horse rides for the kids and folk music.

This year's Battle of Okeechobee will be held on Feb. 22 and 23. Gates will be open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and the re-enactment will be at 2 p.m. each day.



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Historic buildings offer a link to the past

For those interested in local history, Okeechobee's historic buildings offer a link to the past.

- **The Okeechobee County Courthouse**, 304 Northwest Second St., Okeechobee, was constructed in 1926. This Mediterranean-Revival style Courthouse now holds county offices. It was designed by architect George



Gaynor Hyde of Miami. Due to the collapse of the Florida Land Boom during its construction, a central dome that was originally planned was never built. After the 1928 Okeechobee hurricane, its hallways were used as a temporary morgue. The courthouse originally had an open breezeway through the center front of the first floor. It was later enclosed to add a county commission meeting room. After the new Okeechobee County Judicial Center was built in 2005, the old courthouse was renovated. County commission now meets in the upstairs room that was originally the courtroom.

The downstairs breezeway area was cleared of the old commission meeting room, but glassed in for security and weather protection. In 1989, the Okeechobee County Courthouse was listed in "A Guide to Florida's Historic Architecture," published by the University of Florida Press.

- The **Freedman-Raulerson House**, 600 South Parrott Avenue, a two-story, eight room house was built in 1923 as a home by Abraham and Maud Freedman. It was later owned by the Raulerson family. This mission/Spanish revival building was added to the National Historic Register in 1985.



- **Okeechobee City Hall**, 55 S.E. Third Street, was built in 1922. The Spanish-style building was designed by architect William Hatcher.

- **The Okeechobee Historic Schoolhouse Museum**, 1850 U.S. 98 N., was built in 1909. It was used as a school until 1916 when a new two-story red brick school was built. The original school was used as a private home off and on until



the 1970s. In 1976, it was moved to its current location to be used as a museum.

- **The Battle of Okeechobee Battlefield site**, four miles southwest of Okeechobee on U.S. 441 is being developed as part of the Florida Parks System.

The battlefield was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1966.



- **Okeechobee Livestock Market**, 1055 U.S. 98 N., was built in 1937. As Florida's largest livestock market, it reflects the importance of the cattle industry to the region.

- **The First Methodist Episcopal Church**, 200 N.W. Second St., a red brick Gothic Revival structure, was built in 1924.

- **The Okeechobee Historical Society** is restoring the interior of original cabin built by Peter Raulerson. Over the years, the cabin, on the corner of Southwest Ninth Street and



Southwest Second Avenue, was completely enclosed by new construction which was built around the original log walls.

- **The Bank of Okeechobee**, on State Road 70 and Osceola Avenue, was built in 1926, but was only a bank for a short time. In 2012, Okeechobee Main Street sponsored the mural project "Looking Back Through The Windows Of Time" which illustrates some of the building's uses over the years.



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Okeechobee County is cattle country

attle have been an important part of Okeechobee's economy since the first settlers arrived in the Big Lake area more than 100 years ago.

Modern Okeechobee County is still cattle country. It is listed as one of the top three counties in Florida with the most cattle, and among the Top 10 in the country!

While today's cowboys take advantage of modern agribusiness technology, it's not unusual to see a cowboy on horseback separating cattle from the herd and driving through the ranchland, much like the pioneers did years ago along "The Florida Cracker Trail."

The Florida Cracker Trail is a 120-mile long cattle path that passes through Okeechobee County. The trail is now designated by brown state signs, to remind locals and visitors alike that historical state-wide cattle drives once took place along the route.

Today, the Florida Cracker Trail Association hosts an annual cross-state ride along the "Cracker Trail" to showcase, educate, and help preserve the importance of Florida's role cattle and agriculture. For information on how to join the ride, go online to www.crackertrail.org.

The Florida Cracker Trail Association is a non-profit organization of volunteers dedicated to the mission of "Keeping History Alive," by educating through demonstration, the Old Florida Cracker Pioneer ways of agriculture, animal husbandry, and respect for the land as well as the hardships and joys of life on the original frontier.

Cowboy heritage is also evidenced in the popular local rodeos, which are ample in Okeechobee.

RANCH RODEO

The Pete Clemons Memorial Ranch Rodeo is held in July at the Okeechobee Cattlemen's Arena in celebration of the "National Day of the American Cowboy."

Ranch rodeos attract working cowboys who currently work on South Florida ranches. The events in a ranch rodeo are based on actual skills the cowboy uses to work the herd, such as: calf roping, team "doctoring," team sorting, wild cow milking, relay race, double mugging and bronc riding. In these events, the team works together to perform a task similar to those done on the ranch, just like cowboys work together on ranches.

Those competing in ranch rodeos use the same equipment and tack that cowboys use in everyday work.

If these rules seem confusing, not to worry, for those at a ranch rodeo who are new to the sport, the announcer explains the rules as the rodeo unfolds.

Okeechobee County ranches compete at area rodeos to earn points to qualify for the state competition in Kissimmee and ultimately the national competition.

This year, the Okeechobee County Cattlemen's Ranch



Lake Okeechobee News/Richard Marion

The Okeechobee Cowntown Rodeo is held in March in the Okeechobee Cattlemen's Arena.

Rodeo is scheduled for July 25, at the open-aired, historical grand-stand Cattlemen's Arena.

The Okeechobee Cattlemen's Association also hosts Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association rodeos.

OKEECHOBEE COWTOWN RODEO

According to the Professional Rodeo Cowboy's Association (PRCA), legend has it that American rodeo was born on July 4, 1869 when two groups of cowboys from neighboring ranches met in Deer Trail, Colo., to settle an argument over who was the best at performing everyday ranching tasks. That competition is considered to be the first rodeo, which evolved into rodeo as we know it today.

PRCA cowboys compete in rodeos all over the country, earning points and money that qualifies them for the national championship event in Las Vegas, NV.

The Okeechobee Cattlemen's Association produces the Okeechobee Cowntown Rodeo every March as their annual fundraiser. Professional cowboys and cowgirls from all corners of the nation make Okeechobee their home for the weekend and compete for prizes and money. This year's Cowntown Rodeo will be March 14 and 15 at the Okeechobee Cattlemen's open-aired, historical grand stand arena on U.S. 441 North.

On Saturday and Sunday, gates open at 1 p.m. and the rodeo starts at 2 p.m. with Mutton Bustin', followed by the grand entry at 2:30 p.m. then rough stock. Rodeo contestants will show-off their athleticism, bravery and skill at an annual event that provides wholesome fun and entertainment for the entire family. The best-of-the best on the PRCA (Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association) circuit will



be in Okeechobee, for one weekend only, scoring points and money in hopes of advancing their careers on to the year-end National Finals Rodeo in Las Vegas, Nevada. For more information online, go to TheOkeechobeeRodeo.com.

FLORIDA HIGH SCHOOL RODEO & JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL RODEO

Okeechobee County also has active youth in high school rodeo and junior rodeo events. The Florida High School Rodeo Association hosts competitions for rodeo teams from Florida High Schools. Rodeo contestants travel around the state competing in a series at high schools to earn points toward their state rankings. The top 15 contestants in each event will compete in the state finals, and the top four to finish in each event at the state level go on to compete in the National High School Rodeo Finals.

The Florida Junior High School Rodeo Association is a division of the National High School Rodeo Association (NHSRA) for sixth, seventh and eighth graders. The top 20 kids in each event at the end of the season move on to compete at the Florida State Finals. The top four in each event after state finals then have the option of moving on to compete at the national finals. June 4-7 are the dates for the Florida High School Rodeo finals, which will be held at the Okeechobee Agri-Civic Center, 4200 SR 70 East. Spectators are admitted free. Spectator entrance is off SR 710. For more information on high school rodeo, go online to flsra.homestead.com.

EXTREME BULL RIDING

Another type of rodeo found in Okeechobee County is known as X-treme bull riding.

The rules are simple: Place a wiry cowboy on the back of a hulking, snorting temperamental 2,000-pound bull and see if he can stay on for an eternal eight seconds ... with only one hand strapped to the bull.

The Okeechobee Labor Day Bull Bash is held at the open-air, historical grand-stand Cattlemen's Arena over Labor Day weekend. The event is a sanctioned Southern State Bull Riding event, where contestants aim to win points and money to advance them along in the SSBR circuit.

For more on events produced by the Okeechobee County Cattlemen's Association, go online to OkeechobeeRodeo.com and OkeechobeeCattlemen.com.

RIDE FOR THE FIGHT

Ride for the Fight, held each year at the Okeechobee Cattlemen's Rodeo arena, features a mix of bull riding and bronc riding. This event gives some the area's up and coming bronc and bull riders a chance to hone their skills while raising money for a good cause. The annual event raises money for local cancer victims and their families. At presstime for this publication, the date 2020 Ride for the Fight rodeo had not been released. For updates, see the lakeokeechobeenews.com website.



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The Second Ten Years

(1906-1916)

By Magi Cable

President, Okeechobee Historical Society

Last year's historical article for the guide focused on the first decade of "The Bend/Tantie." This installment will explore the second ten years — 1906 through 1916.

In 1906, the biggest industry was Captain Tom Bass's commercial fishery, along the shores of Onoshohatchee (Taylor Creek), but changes were on the horizon.

In 1910, the big news came! J.R. Parrott, president of Henry Flagler's Florida East Coast Railroad, announced that a spur line would come from New Smyrna Beach to Okeechobee, then reconnecting in Fort Pierce for the purpose "to develop farmlands, haul timber and turpentine, aid the cattle industry and provide rapid transportation for the catfish industry." This announcement ushered in a new era. This also explains why U.S. Highway 441 through town is called "Parrott" Avenue.

During this year, the Tantie School was built for some 36 students. Surnames included the Raulerson, Davis, Hancock, Wright, Sloan, Jones and Strickland families. The first teacher was Dr. George Hubbard. This school is now part of the Okeechobee Historical Society museum.

Our medical community consisted of Merida Drawdy Raulerson, who was a midwife. Over her long career, she delivered over 500 of our citizens. Drs. Anna and Roy Darrow came in 1911. "Doc Anner" was only the second female in Florida to be licensed as a physician. She handled house calls, traveling by horse and buggy throughout the area. Doctor Roy served as a pharmacist and surgeon for both humans and animals, working out of their offices on Park Street.

First major change from the announcement was the name of the community. Tantie was deemed inappropriate for a town name, so in 1911 the name became Okeechobee. The population of the area was around 150 people.



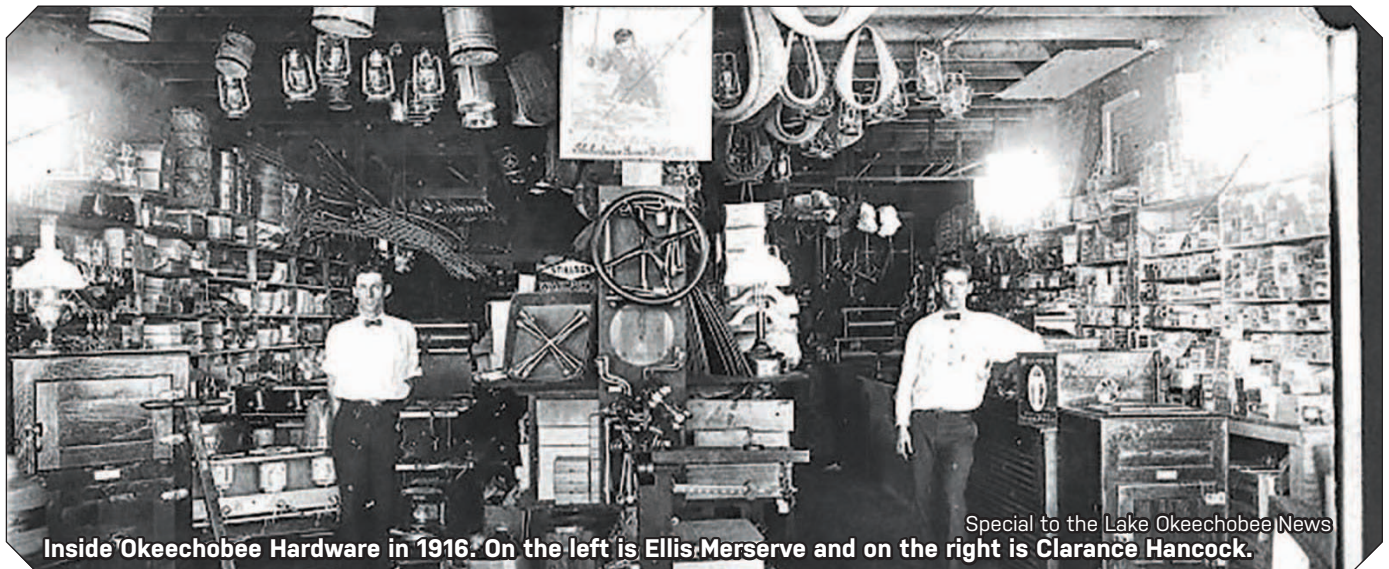
Special to the Lake Okeechobee News

This brick school was reported to be the first building in town with indoor plumbing. The school still serves this community, as it currently houses all of the administrative offices of the Okeechobee County School District.

Next came the land companies that purchased the land and laid out the plats, which became the skeleton for the newly emerging town. Lumber mills were expanded to meet the demand of wood to construct homes and business that were suddenly appearing. The first bank, The Bank of Okeechobee, was organized in 1914.

The first train arrived Jan. 4, 1915, and the sentiment at that time was that Okeechobee might become "the Chicago of the South" due to its central location, wide streets and train service. The first paying passenger was a young man, Ellis Meserve, who would open the first commercial building in the town, Okeechobee Hardware. He also hired the first black citizen, Will Harp, to help him build the store.

Some of those early businesses were Southern Fisheries; Okeechobee Call, which became the Lake



Special to the Lake Okeechobee News

Inside Okeechobee Hardware in 1916. On the left is Ellis Meserve and on the right is Clarence Hancock.



Okeechobee News; McCarthy Grocery, Feed and Hardware; Winkler's Barber Shop; Dr. Bibb, dentist; Raulerson's Department Store; Okeechobee Hotel; Park Drugs; Scharfschwerdt Brothers hardware, garage and movie theater; and Okeechobee Telephone Company.

Lacking was a local governmental structure until June 4, 1915, when the Florida Legislature, in a special act, incorporated the City of Okeechobee. In July, the first city council meeting was held where Peter Raulerson, the original settler of Okeechobee was selected as mayor;



The McCarthy Store.

Special to the Lake Okeechobee News

Henry Chandler, a dairyman, was chosen to be the clerk and assessor; and councilmen being Lewis Raulerson, William Coats, Dr. Roy Darrow, Smith J. Drawdy and C.L. Hatch. At that meeting, the City Seal was designed, which is still used till this day. A mural of the seal appears on City Hall facing State Road 70. The first combination police and fire chief was hired, Benjamin Hall.

The city grew rapidly to a population of 1,800 by November 1915.

The foresight of the land companies and newly



Fish houses on a canal.

Special to the Lake Okeechobee News

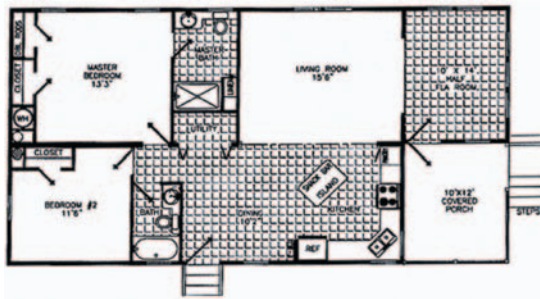
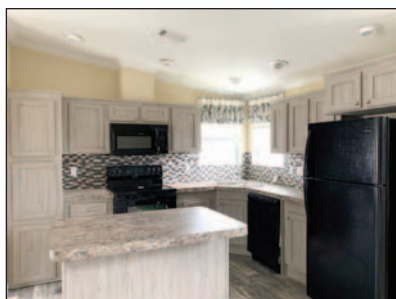
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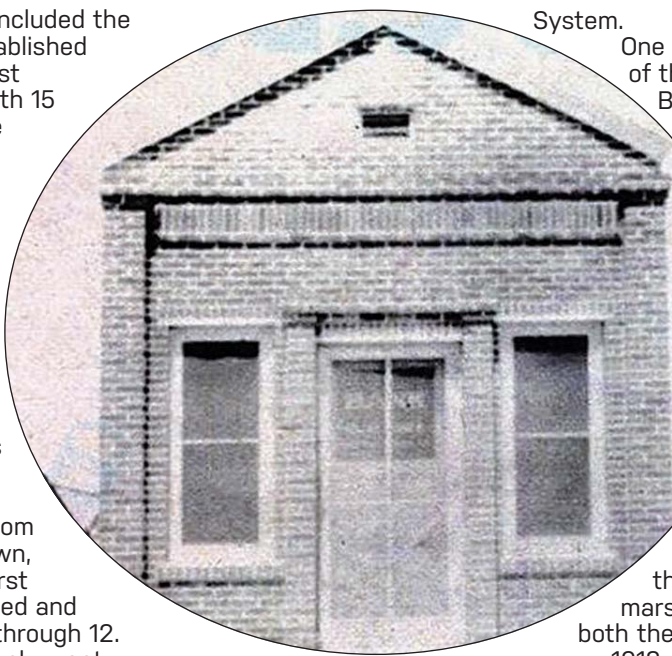
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established city fathers included the deeding of land to all established churches. The First Baptist Church was organized with 15 charter members and the Methodists held services with the Reverend W.O. Troutman in 1915. Land was also secured for the establishment of the Catholic, Church of God and Episcopal churches with the city proper. The First Baptist Missionary Negro Church began meeting with S. Jones as their minister in 1916.

Due to the rapid growth, the Tantie one-room schoolhouse was outgrown, so in October 1916, the first brick school was completed and now housed grades one through 12. Prior to that, the school only went to the eighth grade, so it would be four years until Okeechobee had its first graduating class. This year's graduating class from Okeechobee High School will be the 100th! This brick school was also reported to be the first building in town with indoor plumbing. The 1916 school still serves this community as it currently houses all of the administrative offices of the Okeechobee County School



Special to the Lake Okeechobee News
Okeechobee's First Bank in 1915.

System.

One of the more interesting characters of the community was William E. "Pogy Bill" Collins. He had arrived in the area around 1910 and was quite a "colorful" character. He and his fellow fishermen liked to come to town on the weekends, have some liquid libations and get into brawls with the cowboys, who were doing the same thing. The townspeople pleaded with Justice of the Peace Henry Hancock to establish some law and order. Mainly, they were tired of their stores being torn up. After many confrontations, Judge Hancock appealed to Pogy Bill to mend his ways. This was so successful that Pogy Bill was appointed the city marshal in March 1916! He served as both the city marshal and fire chief until 1918 when he became sheriff, but more on that later!

At the end of 1916, the City of Okeechobee was established, the community was thriving and Okeechobee was destined for bigger challenges. The next decade was on the horizon.



Special to the Lake Okeechobee News
First Baptist Church, established in 1916.



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Welcome to the City of Okeechobee

By Dowling Watford
Mayor of Okeechobee

 n behalf of the city council and city staff, I would like to welcome you to Okeechobee and encourage you to "explore" all our friendly community has to offer. Our most famous asset to "explore" is Lake Okeechobee and all the wonderful water activities it affords, from boating, bass and speckled perch fishing and jet skiing to just enjoying the view at the pier. There is something for everyone to enjoy. You can also "explore" our wonderful shops, boutiques and restaurants in our historic downtown. Okeechobee Main Street hosts several special events during the year including: Speckled Perch Festival; Top of the Lake Art Fest & Taste of Okeechobee; Labor Day Festival; and the Christmas Festival and Parade. These are held in the beautiful Flagler Park area of the city, which also includes Veterans' Park with a display of military equipment with an M-60 tank and a Huey helicopter.

To celebrate our ranching culture, the Okeechobee Cattlemen host two pro rodeo events and a ranch rodeo.

The Battle of Okeechobee reenactment commemorates the largest battle of the Second Seminole War, and is held the last weekend in February. For those interested in history, the Okeechobee Historical Society conducts tours at the Historical Society Museum and old school complex. There



**Mayor
Dowling
Watford**

are also several historic buildings to see in town, including the historic courthouse, city hall, brick school buildings, the downtown business district and the original log cabin of the Raulerson family. The Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park offers a wonderful view of natural Florida with wildlife and bird viewing, hiking and camping. Recreational activities are readily available with golf, tennis, racketball and several wonderful community parks with large playgrounds. Walking trails at the Lake Okeechobee dike and Taylor Creek stormwater treatment area provide wonderful views and wildlife viewing. A variety of accommodations are available with RV parks, local and chain motels and rentals.

Relocating to Okeechobee is easy with many housing options, from mobile home parks, apartments and housing developments, or your own mini ranch. Businesses will find a welcoming business climate with space available in both county (rental) and city (purchase) business parks. City and county staff are always "business friendly" and can help guide you through the permitting process. Our Chamber of Commerce is a great resource, and actively supports our business community. We are served by CSX rail, have a wonderful general aviation airport and are easily accessible to Interstate 95 and the Florida Turnpike. If you are just visiting, a current resident or looking to relocate, Okeechobee is the ideal place for you or your business to "explore."

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BOCC working to improve community

By Terry Burroughs

Chairman, Okeechobee County BOCC



he beginning of the year is often the time for new goals including self-improvement and living a healthier lifestyle.

Our community is no different as it comes into a new year. While there may not be much harm in not reading as much as you intended or failing to prepare to run a marathon, the stakes are much higher for our community as we go about developing our strategic focus. Fortunately, by focusing on the right areas and putting in the foundational work, we have implemented a successful planning strategy that will last not just throughout the year but into the foreseeable future.

So why have I started this editorial off in this manner? Simple. The county, city, Indian River State College and number of private investors instituted a new economic development corporation last year. We hired an outstanding individual to manage the company and in just over six months, our community is beginning to reap the benefits. New companies will be emerging, offering better jobs for our community.

Although many challenges still exist, the fact that we are now beginning work together speaks volumes that



Terry Burroughs

hope does in fact exist for new jobs and a better quality of life to be attainable. I have a strong feeling of optimism and enthusiasm for the potential growth of our community in the coming years.

I am encouraged by the willingness of our local leaders to address difficult issues and their commitment to work together to improve our community. Additionally, I feel a great sense of accomplishment given the opportunities I personally have had to make a difference in my county.

With the conclusion of 2019, it is time for each one of us to take a moment and quietly reflect on last year. Remember the fun times and remind yourself of the missed opportunities. 2020 is the time to ensure that we bring balance to our life with positive influences overriding the negative ones as we continue our journey in making our community a place we all cherish.



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Main Street devoted to enhancing downtown Okeechobee

(T)he Okeechobee Main Street program is a non profit organization devoted to enhancing downtown Okeechobee as the heart beat of the community.

The Okeechobee Main Street program is designed to improve all aspects of the Okeechobee downtown district, producing both tangible and intangible benefits.

Improving economic management, strengthening public participation, and making downtown a fun place to visit are as critical to Okeechobee's future as recruiting new businesses, rehabilitating buildings, and expanding parking.

Okeechobee Main Street is dedicated to building on downtown's inherent assets - rich architecture, personal service, arts and culture, traditional values and most of all, a sense of place.

OKMS hosts monthly mixers, as well as annual events such as the Top of the Lake Art festival, Taste of Okeechobee, the Speckled Perch Festival, the Art and Wine Walk, the Labor Day Festival and the Christmas Festival.

Okeechobee Main Street, Inc. is a 501(C) 3 not for profit organization.



Okeechobee Main Street hosts the annual Top of the Lake Art Festival in February, with contests for professional, amateur and student artists.

Chamber strives to improve local economy

The Chamber of Commerce of Okeechobee County Inc. is a not-for-profit 501(c)(6), voluntary organization of business professionals joined together for the purpose of promoting the civic and economic progress of our community. Its primary function is to act as a spokesperson and translate into action the group thinking of its members, by connecting business and community for success and prosperity.

The Chamber of Commerce of Okeechobee County strives to make businesses stronger, as well as to make a stronger economic climate for

those businesses to thrive. Classes, business networking programs and a website that allows each member to have its own marketing space are all part of that focus. Classes cover a variety of topics — everything from marketing to Concealed Carry laws and accounting.

The chamber's main focus is to create growth for the entire business community. Chamber members and staff work diligently alongside business owners to help make that happen. One way the chamber is helping create strong business leaders within

the community is through its Leadership Okeechobee Program. Leadership Okeechobee is comprised of nine monthly daylong sessions that expose participants to critical issues facing the Okeechobee, major industries operating within the community and structured personal/skill assessment.

The chamber works passionately to help diversify the base of businesses in the community, while encouraging the creation of additional high-wage job opportunities.

Economic Council links business and government

The Economic Council of Okeechobee County serves as a unified, influential voice for the business community to policy makers at the local and state level. The council works to advance policies and initiatives that promote quality economic growth and improve the quality of life in Okeechobee County.

For over 30 years, the Economic Council of Okeechobee County has served as a catalyst between the public and private sectors to foster

dialogue, planning and action.

The Economic Council is a non-profit, non-governmental, non-partisan organization which strives to:

- Act as a catalyst between the public and private sectors to foster dialogue, planning, and action;
- Involve the economic, political, and social processes of the county;
- Comprise the top industry, business, and professional leaders of the community;
- Promote principles of good

government and good citizenship;

- Provide a forum for open discussion of matters of public interest; and,
- Encourage service-minded individuals to serve their community.

For more information, contact Executive Director Jennifer M. Tewksbury at 863-467-0200 or email at jennifer@economiccouncilofokeechobee.org.





Voters must be registered

(H)ave you registered to vote? This year brings important elections for local, state and national offices.

Important dates to note:

- Feb. 18 – Deadline for new voter registrations and party changes for those who wish to vote in the Presidential Preference Primary.
- March 17 – Presidential Preference Primary, polls open 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.
- July 20 – Deadline for new voter registrations and party changes for those who wish to vote in the primary election.
- Aug. 18 – Primary election day, polls open 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.
- Oct. 5 – Deadline for new voter registrations and party changes for those who wish to vote in the general election.
- Nov. 3 – General election, polls open 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Local elections listed on 2020 ballot

(O)keechobee County races on the 2020 ballot will include:

- Okeechobee County Clerk of Court;
- Okeechobee County Property Appraiser;
- Okeechobee County Sheriff;
- Okeechobee County Supervisor of Elections;
- Okeechobee County Tax Collector;
- County Commission District 1;

- County Commission District 3;
- County Commission District 5;
- School Board District 2;
- School Board District 4.

Okeechobee City elections on the 2020 ballot will include City Council members Monica Clark and Wes Abney. All city council seats are elected at-large.

Okeechobee County Supervisor of Elections has a wide range of duties

(T)he Supervisor of Elections, a constitutional officer, has a wide range of duties involving voter registration, maintaining voter registration records and administering all elections as mandated by Florida statute and federal law.

In addition to actual Election Day logistics and management, there are many other functions of the office including records management, voter education, candidate assistance, campaign report management and review, providing current and historical voter registration statistics, maintaining an archive of election results going back to 1954 and election security procedures.

The supervisor of elections is also responsible for the layout and programming of paper and electronic ballots, securing and maintaining voting equipment, recruiting and training poll workers for early vote and Election Day, securing and equipping polling places, providing information and statistics on voting and elections, and maintaining precinct and district boundaries, including a precinct-specific street index.

Diane Hagan, elected in 2012, is currently the Supervisor

of Elections. The office also has two full-time employees. Temporary workers are employed during election time.

Voter registration is a continual process that is always taking place. Florida Statute requires that a citizen register at least 29 days before an election in order to be eligible to vote in that election. However, a citizen can always register so he/she may vote in subsequent elections. Registering to vote can be done in person, by mail and at the drivers' license office. Voters are asked to update their voter registration information to save them time when going to vote. A political party or name change must be done in writing. An address change or to request an information card may be done by phone.

The Supervisor of Elections office is located on the first floor in the Historic Courthouse at 304 N.W. Second St, Rm. 144; 863-763-4014; Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. until 5 p.m.

As of Jan. 17, there were 20,937 registered voters in Okeechobee County including 6,940 Democrats, 9,519 Republicans and 4,478 other party voters.



Okeechobee County Census Data

	County	City	More Okeechobee County Census Facts	
Population	41,605	5,621	Veterans	3,040
Population age:			Foreign born persons	12.5%
Persons under 5 years	5.9%	7%	Language other than English spoken at home	23.5%
Persons under 18 years	21.2%	27.9%	Median gross rent	\$726
Persons age 65 and older	20.5%	16.7%	Households with a computer	77.1%
Female	46.2%	49.8%	Households with broadband internet	58.1%
Okeechobee County population by race:				
White, non-Hispanic	62.1%	54%	Education:	
Hispanic	25.3%	25.2%	Persons age 25 up who are high school graduates: 73.9%	
Black	8.9 %	8.8 %	Persons age 25 up who have bachelor's degree or higher: 11%	
Native American	1.5 %	2.0%		
Asian	1.0 %	1.1 %		
Two or more races	1.2 %	2.3 %	Total employment	7,042
Households	13,333	1,953	Population per square mile	52
Average persons/household	2.79	2.65	<i>Source: U.S. Census</i>	
Housing, owner-occupied	72.2%	61.3%	NOTE: In 2020 the Census Bureau will gather the data for the new census. It is important for everyone to be counted. Please respond to the census request for information to make sure Okeechobee County has an accurate census count!	
Median value owner-occupied housing units	\$89,900	\$121,962		
Median household income	\$39,059	\$39,587		



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Veteran Service Office offers advice, counsel and more

(T)he mission of the Okeechobee County Veteran Services Office, is to advise, counsel and assist veterans, spouses and their dependents in matters pertaining to their rights and benefits for claim submission to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. This include securing any other benefits veterans and their family members may be entitled to under County, State or Federal laws/statutes. There is never a charge for this service.

Available services include claim filing for: Compensation, Veteran/Spouse Pension, Aid and Attendance, Education (Post 9/11 GI Bill), Burials, Healthcare and Military Retiree services. Additional services include claims for VA Life Insurance, VA Vocational Rehabilitation, Employment Benefits, VA Home Loan Guaranty, Income Verification Letters, Discharge Paperwork and TRICARE/CHAMPVA Insurances.

Okeechobee County, in coordination with VAMC West Palm Beach and Disabled American Veterans, provides a FREE van service for eligible veterans and/or an aid to VAMC West Palm Beach. The van departs from Burger King on S.R. 70 East at 6:30 a.m. To reserve a seat, call the Veteran Service Office with the date/time of your appointment. All appointments must be before noon.

Did you know that the Department of Veteran Affairs will provide a free headstone, foot marker or medallion to a Veteran's grave site? There is no time limit to apply and there are a few documents needed. Ensure your beloved veteran is recognized on special days around the year such as



Okeechobee High School ROTC provides the Color Guard at Veterans Day services in Flagler Park.

Memorial Day, Veterans Day and when the Wreaths Across America lays wreaths at all veteran grave sites nationally in December!

For more info, as office hours vary, call or email County Veteran Service Officer, Sarah Carter at 863-763-6441 Ext 5, or scarter@co.okeechobee.fl.us.

The Veterans Service Office is in the Historic Okeechobee Courthouse, 304 NW 2nd Street, Room 106, Okeechobee, FL 34972.



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Okeechobee County Schools put students first

By Ken Kenworthy
Superintendent of Schools

 Okeechobee County Schools take great pride in putting students first! As you get to know us, you will find opportunities abound. Whether you are a visitor, permanent resident or are looking for a new place to call your home, we encourage you to consider Okeechobee County Schools as a partner.

We recognize that many of you visit our great community for various reasons. Some come for the winter, some come in for the music festival, and some come to the rodeo, some come to dine, shop or just enjoy nature. That stay varies from the day to months at a time. Whatever your reasons for visiting, we thank you for supporting our schools. We depend on your generosity. Many of you support our fundraisers, temporarily volunteer in our schools and help drive our local economy. Your patronage of local businesses in turn helps us as they are the school district's best sponsors, supporters and lifeblood to many activities, sports, and clubs.

As a full time resident, you know us. You know, with your help, we have increased our graduation rate, the number of industry certifications, and the number of college credits/ Associates Degree recipients. You know, through the hard work of all of our employees and students, we increased our letter grade to a "B" under the state's accountability system. You know we are fully accredited, certified as a healthy district, and take not only our academic performance

seriously, but also devote a serious amount of the time to school safety and the social and emotional learning of our students. We appreciate your continued support to help make our school district grow and thrive.

For those looking for a new home, we promise to meet your educational needs. We are the largest employer with nearly 900 employees ranging from certified teachers and administrators to support staff including paraprofessionals, secretaries, bus drivers, food service assistants and custodial and maintenance staff. If you are looking for employment here, be sure to check us out.

If you are looking a place to enroll your student, look no further. We currently enroll about 6,600 students throughout our 10 schools in PreK-12th grades. We offer programs for students who need advanced coursework through honors, dual enrollment and advanced placement courses. We are involved in the AVID program that pushes middle level students into more rigorous coursework. Need accommodations? We can work with an IEP team to get your child the services he or she needs. Our band is one of the best, our drama program is out of this world, our sports programs continue to excel and our CTE programs reach industry standards. Our schools are welcoming, diverse and set high standards for teaching and learning. We think you will find what you are looking for in us.

Whatever group you belong to, we hope your "Explorations" lead you to us. Thank you for helping us Put Students First!

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Indian River State College celebrates 60 years of student success

indian River State College (IRSC) is celebrating a milestone — 60 years of service to the Treasure Coast and Okeechobee County communities! The past six decades, marked by exceptional growth and significant progress, include the evolution of Indian River State College from a small junior college into a comprehensive community college, to one of Florida's first four-year state colleges, to the Top College in the Nation!

Each semester more than 900 Okeechobee residents take advantage of IRSC programs and services at the Dixon Hendry Campus of Indian River State College in Okeechobee. IRSC first offered classes in Okeechobee in the 1970s. Dixon Hendry Campus opened in 1986, with significant campus expansion and student growth since that time.

"IRSC has helped thousands of Okeechobee residents continue their education to increase their earning power and reach their full potential," said Provost Russ Brown. "We invite anyone interested in continuing their education to our campus."

The 40-acre Dixon Hendry Campus, located at 2229 N.W. Ninth Ave. in Okeechobee, is a hub of activity. Students can complete all of their first two years of college at the campus to earn an Associate in Arts Degree. Graduates are well prepared to continue their education toward a Bachelor's Degree at IRSC or another college or university, with seamless transfer of credits.

Many Okeechobee residents come to IRSC to gain hands-on skills through job training programs. These include programs in automotive,

diesel mechanics and welding, offered in labs during the evening at Okeechobee High School. Courses in air conditioning are held in the state-of-the-art, multi-purpose laboratory at the Dixon Hendry Campus.

All these programs provide the opportunity to earn skill-based licenses as well as an Associate in Science degree.

Additionally, the college offers in-demand career training programs such as office skills, early childhood education and nursing. The office skills program is one of the most popular, enabling students to develop the expertise they need for the modern computer-based office. Participants can proceed at their own pace and attend in the daytime or evening. Students interested in early childhood education can earn an Associate Degree and related certificates, with many local job opportunities.

Nursing is one of the most rapidly growing and well-paying careers. Okeechobee residents can train at IRSC for any of three levels of nursing instruction — Certified Nursing Assistant (C.N.A.), Licensed Practical Nurse (L.P.N.) and Registered Nurse (R.N.). All IRSC nursing students gain experience through clinical internships at health care facilities throughout the community.

Many students who are concerned about the cost of a college education, are happy to discover that 91% of IRSC students graduate without debt (2019, U.S. News and World Report) and that IRSC is the third most affordable college in the country (U.S. Department of Education). Advisors work closely with prospective students to help them obtain financial

aid they don't have to pay back.

Advisors also help students decide which career paths are best for them, and collaborate with students to pick majors and set up guided pathways that outline the courses they should take each semester.

"Don't let financial concerns or worry stop you from pursuing your dreams," adds Provost Brown. "We are eager to help you apply for financial aid and will help you stay on track."

For those who have not yet earned their high school diploma, GED preparation is available at the campus. English as a Second Language instruction is also offered. Interested people can enroll for a \$30 fee each semester.

The Dixon Hendry Campus continues to expand its student activities to provide an enriched and fun learning experience. At the start of each semester, a Week of Welcome engages students in club rush, opportunities to meet college and community representatives, as well as cook-outs and games.

In November, International Education Week is commemorated with a Parade of Nations and delicious food from different countries. Another special event is the First Responders Celebration, honoring the first responders in the community.

Business and community groups benefit from the Williamson Center, a state-of-the-art conference center on the campus available for meetings, workshops, and events. More than 160 events were held during 2019 at the center, named after Sonny and Betty Williamson.

For more info, visit irsc.edu or call the Dixon Hendry Campus at 863-824-6000.



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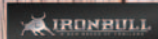
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Community Theatre entertains

By Kara DePasquale, Business Manager
Okeechobee Community Theatre

The Okeechobee Community Theatre (OCT) is proud to be in its 41st year of entertaining our local community. Known as "Florida's most reasonably priced live stage theatre," OCT is an all-volunteer organization made up of local business/professional people, retirees, and young people who enjoy using their talents to act, sing and dance, or to build sets, sew costumes, usher, etc. While prior experience is not necessary, a number of the participants do have a background in the performing arts. Open auditions for acting roles in upcoming productions are held several times a year and are a fun, laid-back experience for all involved. Participants of all ages are welcome for both backstage and onstage roles. OCT also hosts its very own internship program for those that wish to gain experience in the theatre and is a great opportunity for students to gain community service hours. Okeechobee Community Theatre generally produces three fantastic shows a year — typically held in November, March, and July; although, special features are sometimes added to the schedule.

Coming up in this season's schedule is the production of "Death and Taxes." A hilarious murder/mystery that relies on audience participation to help solve the crime! Audience members will be encouraged to look through the crime



scene themselves and interact with the cast to deduce who may be the killer. Death and Taxes will run on Feb. 28, 29, and March 6 and 7. Showtimes are 8 p.m. every Friday and 2 p.m. matinées every Saturday with a special 8 p.m. showing on Feb. 29. Tickets are just \$12 and are available online or at the box office an hour prior to showtime. The theatre is located at 610 S.W. Second Ave., one block west of Golden Corral restaurant.

For info, visit okeechobeecommunitytheatre.com or call Kara DePasquale at 954-815-5272.



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Youth athletics alive and well in Okeechobee

{ N }o matter what sport your child is interested in, chances are you will find a league in Okeechobee.

The **Okeechobee County School District** offers a number of opportunities to participate in team and individual sports. In addition to school sports, there are community and travel teams.

Volleyball enthusiasts can join the **Chobee Volleyball Academy**. The group is a nonprofit organization designed to expose young girls to the game of volleyball. The league serves a variety of ages. They compete in tournaments around the state, and in 2018, the group competed in the AAU Girls Junior National Volleyball Championship. More information can be obtained on Facebook. @chobeevolleyballacademy.

The **Okeechobee Youth Football League (OFYL)**

provides a flag football team and tackle football for a variety of ages for boys and girls. They are a travel league and a member of the Mid Florida Youth Football Conference. They play games from August through October. Home games are held at the Okeechobee Sports Complex. Flag team members begin at 4 years old. Tackle is available for ages 7 and up. Girls can also join cheerleading squads for each team. The OFYL can be contacted on their official Facebook account atfacebook.com/OYFL-Football-and-Cheerleading-470207729804263/.

Okeechobee County Parks and Recreation provides leagues for youth soccer and basketball. Youth basketball for ages 9-14 takes place from January through March. Youth soccer for ages 5-14 lasts for up to 12 weeks between October and December.

Okeechobee County also provides a **summer play camp** and a **summer swim league** from June to August. Adults can also join **softball leagues** that run twice per year, between April and June, and again between October and December. Adults also can join a **flag football league** that plays games in January and February. The **Okeechobee Citizens Recreational Association (OCRA)** provides softball and baseball youth leagues with games from March to May. The costs this year are \$65 for T-ball and \$90 for baseball and softball. There is a \$5 sibling discount for each sibling after the first child at full price. For more information, OCRA has a Facebook page @OCRA-Okeechobee-Citizens-Recreation-Association, or call 863-801-7505.



Chobee Nation basketball provides travel ball experience for aspiring basketball players. There are teams for boys in the fifth grade to eighth grade and girls 12 and under. There are other teams for high school age children. The Chobee Nation high school boys' basketball team won back-to-

back United States Specialty Sports Association national championships in 2016 and 2017. More information can be found on Facebook at facebook.com/chobeenationbasketball/.

The **Shockwaves Summer Swim Team** program is for swimmers ages 5-18 and is held at the Okeechobee County Sports Complex Swimming Pool. For more information on this program along with start times, please contact the swimming pool at (863) 467-7667.

The Treasure Coast offers numerous travel ball opportunities in sports that include softball, soccer, baseball and volleyball that many of our local athletes take part in. There is normally a league charge. These teams travel across the state, which challenges the athlete with more practice time, more instruction and better competition.



Hiking and biking around Lake Okeechobee

The Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail (LOST) continues to be an important resource when it comes to hiking and cycling in the Okeechobee area. However, much of the LOST continues to be a construction zone, so opportunities are limited.

There is a map available from the Army Corps of Engineers that identifies where the closures are, and it can be found online at the following site: saj.usace.army.mil/Missions/Civil-Works/Recreation/Lake-Okeechobee-Scenic-Trail.

What you will see when you access the map is that there has been only one real change in the closures since this time last year. You can also see that in the whole south half of the lake, there is a total of 11 miles of path open, between Port Mayaca and Lakeport. Three small sections of path are all that are currently available to hike or bike on the south side. We are lucky here in Okeechobee, as there still are plenty of miles of the trail available to ride or walk or hike. Starting at the Kissimmee River, there is open trail from there to Taylor Creek, a distance of about 6 miles. This trail is in good condition and enjoys an improved parking lot with restrooms and drinking water available at about the midpoint where the path continues past the Lock Seven park. This is a popular section of the path, nearest to Okeechobee.

The section of the path from Taylor Creek to Nubbin Slough is currently closed due to construction and will be for several years, to replace a culvert there, but access on the east side of Taylor Creek has been restricted for the last several years anyway, due to a landowner gate. The Army Corps of Engineers website states that the current closures will continue through 2020.

Further to the east is Nubbin Slough, and the LOST here is one good continuous path all the way to the Port Mayaca bridge over the Okeechobee Waterway. This is a 17.3-mile-long section of the LOST that is not heavily used and includes some really excellent areas to view the lake and the associated wildlife that live along its shores. In the past, I have observed all manner of birds, including turkeys, wading birds and, of course, gulls and pelicans. I have also had the good luck to spot fox, bobcats, raccoons and, one time, what I'm sure was a panther, while riding here. I also had the good luck to film a dragonfly hatch taking place, and for several miles rode through a vast cloud of new dragonflies, though not a single one ever touched me, as they soared and swooped around my head as I pedaled up the path toward Okeechobee.

In Glades County, there continues to be a very nice portion of path to ride near the town of Lakeport. Though not reflected accurately on the Corps of Engineers' map, there is a paved path that parallels State Road 78 for several miles, and then joins a newly paved section that follows the top of the dike along the lake side of the town of Lakeport and terminates at the park along the Harney Pond Canal. Not to be missed along this stretch of the LOST and adjacent to the Lakeport Navigational Lock is an

area long referred to as the "Hiker Graveyard," a section of the dike with stone columns sticking up out of a graveled swale, that really resembles a rough cemetery.

Construction projects that close the path are primarily to replace old culverts that were put in place when the dike was constructed in the 1930s, and it seems that to replace a culvert is about a two- or three-year project. The Army Corps of Engineers expects these projects to continue until at least 2020, so the closures that I have noted will continue until at least then.

Still, the LOST trail continues to be a great place to get out and see the lake and enjoy the cooler temperatures that we enjoy in the winter time here in Okeechobee.

There are several good sections of the Florida Scenic Trail in the area to sample as a section hiker on a cool winter morning, if you desire. The Florida Trail follows the dike around Lake Okeechobee both to the east and the west sides, and with the dike closures, the hikers will find themselves on the side of the highway most of the distance these days.

Good news here is that the trail has been expanded recently in northern Okeechobee County, to eliminate a 15-mile road walk up Micco Bluff Road.

The Florida Trail, in that part of the county, is in several defined sections. The section of the trail just south of the new expansion is named the Chandler Slough North section, and roughly parallels U.S. 98, with a fence crossing just a bit north of Northwest 144th Trail. This portion of trail is 3.56 miles long and ends when it reaches U.S. 98, just east of the river. Before the expansion, to stay on the trail, a 15-mile road walk, along U.S. 98 and Micco Bluff Road, all the way to the entrance to Starvation Slough was required.

In 2018, a new section called the Micco Trail Section was developed and allows the hiker to skip most of the road walk with a new 12.12-mile-long section. The Micco section begins right across U.S. 98 from the gate at the north end of the Chandler Slough North section, and passes an improved camping area near its beginning. The trail then stays in the forest and wildland for the entire distance. The Florida Trail Association and its volunteers are responsible for trail expansion through there and work with landowners and, in this case, South Florida Water Management District to establish the new trail section. The local Trail Association also maintains the trail by marking the trail with paint blazes on trees and with mowing to keep the trail clear. They do an amazing job and are to be commended for their efforts.

This is the time of the year we see a number of hikers in the area. Each year, 20 to 40 people strike out to hike the length of the Florida Scenic Trail in a single outing. At times they have to take to the road, due to construction on the dike, or due to sections of the trail that are currently a road walk. You will recognize them by their substantial backpacks and twin walking sticks, as they move along the shoulder of the road. If you should see one of these folks, a gift of cold water or soda is usually happily accepted. And please, give them plenty of room as you pass.



Okeechobee features premier shooting sport options

{T}he wide open spaces of Okeechobee County are home to some of the best shooting sports facilities in South Florida.

Okeechobee County has a variety of options for those who enjoy shooting sports with clay shoots, target competitions, cowboy action and hunting.

Quail Creek Plantation, 12399 N.E. 224th Street, is a pristine wilderness where sportsmen revel at the sight of pointing dogs racing back and forth across expansive fields, and the suspense of walking into the feathered whirlwind of a rising covey. The plantation also offers sport shooting on two scenic, 14-station fully automatic clay shooting courses.

O.K. Corral Gun Club, 9449 N.E. 48th St., has 29 shooting stations with sporting clay courses, covered 5-stand, wobble deck, covered pistol/rifle ranges, competition shooting park and even an old west street with Cowboy Action shooting. The club also hosts a steak dinner every Friday from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. which features live music. Throughout the year O.K. Corral will host multiple National Sporting Clays Association registered shoots.

Center Mass Gun Range, 1934 Center St., is



Okeechobee's only indoor gun range and features many climate-controlled shooting lanes. The range also features seven simulation rooms where shooters can take turns playing through several computer-generated scenarios such as a zombie apocalypse and an Old West shoot-out.

Okeechobee Shooting Sports, 7055 N.E. 48th St., has rifle and pistol ranges, with five 5-stand sporting clays fields, trap and skeet fields and shooting galleries.

Duck hunting, hog hunting and alligator hunting are also popular in Okeechobee, with some hunting allowed on public land as well as hunting with permission on private property. For more on Florida hunting seasons, licenses and permits, go online to myfwc.com.

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Recreational choices plentiful



Okeechobee is host to a number of recreational facilities that are suited for a wide variety of different interests.

- For families looking for a quiet place to relax and hold a family event or picnic, consider the Alton Chandler Civic Center at 20350 U.S. 98 N. in Basinger. They provide an enclosed building available for rent, a picnic area with pavilion and a playground.

- The Douglas Brown Community Center at 826 N.E. 16th Ave. includes an enclosed building, a picnic area with pavilion, a playground and multiple basketball courts.

- The Okeechobee Civic Center at 1750 U.S. 98 N. includes fields for sports activities and an enclosed building for weddings and other events.

- The Okeechobee Historical Park across the street provides a historical museum and the old school house.

- Team sports are played at the OK Softball Field complex at 950 N.W. 23rd Lane. This facility includes two lighted softball fields, a sand volleyball court, restrooms and a fenced playground.

- Various Okeechobee school facilities are also available for rent for recreational purposes. They include gymnasiums at Okeechobee High School, 2800 U.S. 441 N., Osceola Middle School at 825 S.W. 28th St., and Yearling Middle School at 925 N.W. 23rd Lane.

- The Okeechobee County Sports Complex is the centerpiece of Okeechobee's recreational facilities. The facility at 640 N.W. 27th Lane includes a swimming pool and bathhouse, four baseball and softball fields for youth, a football and soccer multi-purpose field, two basketball courts, four racquetball courts, eight tennis courts, a picnic pavilion and the Wooden Jungle playground.

- The Okeechobee Recreational Park and Skate Park at 350 N.W. Sixth Ave. is located in the City of Okeechobee. It includes a picnic pavilion, playground area, open space, a tennis court, skate park and a baseball field.

- The Practice Field complex is a large area of fields at 3001 N.W. 10th Terrace. It includes baseball, softball, football and soccer fields.

- Willie Alderman Field at 424 N.E. 15th Ave. provides a

field for adult softball and youth baseball with fence and dugouts.

- Okeechobee's Agri-Civic Center at 4601 State Road 710 also includes fields for soccer and places to jog and walk.

- Boating, fishing and other activities are welcomed at several facilities in Okeechobee. The Clif Betts Jr. Lakeside Recreation Area (once called Lock 7) at 200 SR 78 W. includes boat ramps, a fishing pier, parking areas, access to the scenic trail and restrooms.

- The Okee-Tantie Campground and Marina at 10430 SR 78 W. includes a parking area, open fields, marina and boat ramps. It also has an amphitheater.

- The Scott Driver Recreation Area at 10101 S.R. 78 W. includes an enclosed area for meetings, parking area and boat ramps. It is the Okeechobee Fishing Tournament Headquarters.

- Other locations for boaters include the Kissimmee River C-38 complex at 8400 S.W. 99th Drive.

- Platts Bluff Park at 15925 N.W. 56th St. also includes a boat ramp.

- The Nubbin Slough, Rim Canal facility at 6206 U.S. 441 S.E. includes a parking area, boat ramp, fishing area and access to the Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail.

- Also available is the Henry Creek Boat Ramp at 10654 U.S. 98 S., which provides access to the rim canal and fishing opportunities.

- The Taylor Creek boat ramp at 700 S.E. Fourth St. is a popular area for boaters.

- The Taylor Creek Stormwater Treatment Area is a popular spot for hikers, walkers and bicyclists. It is located at 7201 U.S. 441 N. It has three miles of hiking and bicycling trails.

- The Kissimmee River public use area includes 30,000 acres of public recreation in Highlands, Okeechobee and Glades counties, with a trailhead on U.S. 98 in Basinger. Camping, hiking and hunting opportunities are available at various times of the year.

County Sheriff serves community

Sheriff Noel E. Stephen is responsible for law enforcement on the county level. Sheriff's deputies carry out most of the law enforcement duties, while the sheriff, an elected official, manages their activities. Deputies serve under the sheriff. Duties of a deputy sheriff include: investigating complaints, emergency response, patrolling, resolving disputes, arresting suspects, criminal investigations and executing warrants.

The Okeechobee County Sheriff's Office is small, with 201 employees, Auxiliary, Search and Rescue and Citizens on Patrol. Sheriff Stephen's command staff consists of one colonel, three captains and eight lieutenants. Specialized teams include K-9 Units, Hostage Negotiations, SWAT, Dive Team, Motorcycle Unit, Honor Guard and the Cell Extraction Team. The sheriff's office also performs other functions such as traffic control, animal enforcement, accident investigations, homicide investigations, narcotics investigations, transportation of prisoners, school resource officers and

courthouse security.

The sheriff's office has an annual budget for fiscal year 2020 of \$19,250,000. Of that budget, Sheriff Stephen is also responsible for the county jail with an average daily jail population of 250 inmates.

The deputies are responsible for patrolling over 773 square miles in Okeechobee County with an average population, as of 2018, of 41,120 residents.

Since taking the oath of sheriff in January 2017, Sheriff Stephen has brought new and innovative tools to the sheriff's office to better serve the community. He also acknowledges and treats each employee with respect, which is one of the most meaningful things a leader can do to boost engagement within the sheriff's office.

(For more about the sheriff, see Constitutional Officers, page 56.)



City police put safety first

By Chief Robert Peterson
Okeechobee Police Department

(T)he Okeechobee Police Department was established in 1915 when Okeechobee was still an outlying part of St. Lucie County. Comprised of a single town marshal, it served as the only source of law enforcement for the entire area that would later become the city of Okeechobee and Okeechobee County.

The police department is currently staffed by approximately 35 members of various ranks and units, including command staff, uniformed road patrol, criminal investigations, school resource officers, a traffic unit, a K-9 officer, records, police services, dispatch/911 telecommunications, code enforcement and a special response unit.

Our most visible unit, uniformed road patrol, is responsible for responding to emergency and non-emergency calls for service, traffic enforcement and patrol.



**Police Chief
Robert Peterson**

The Okeechobee Police Department is also responsible for all code enforcement issues within the city limits.

We foster a commitment to not only serve the community but also to be an integral part of it. The residents of the city of Okeechobee enjoy a low crime rate and unmatched response times due to the hard work and dedication of its dedicated personnel.

Whether you're a new resident, have lived here all your life or are somewhere in between, we welcome you to stop by and introduce yourself. This is and always has been your police department.

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City has own fire department

By H. Smith

Fire chief/marshal

 I take immense pride and honor in introducing you to the City of Okeechobee Fire Department. The Okeechobee Fire Department (OFD) is a combination department comprised of 12 career firefighters and 12 volunteer firefighters.

We no doubt have some of the most dedicated and talented firefighters in the region. The reason I believe this is that our financial resources are very limited, therefore we rely on the adage, "Our employees are the most important asset." The firefighters of our department accept additional responsibilities that their positions in larger departments would not.

Now, for a little history: The City Fire Department was formed in 1916 and its volunteers have been chartered since 1915. Some department members have been volunteers since they were 16 and still in high school, some 40 years ago. Until 1978, the city fire department was the sole fire protection agency for all of Okeechobee County.

The City of Okeechobee is the central hub of the entire county with two major roadways crossing in the center of the town and county. The department responds within a four and one-half mile area. The department's average response time is four minutes from the time of notification. Our department responded to 1,500+ incidents in 2019.

OFD renders structural, vehicle and wildland fire suppression, all forms of rescue coverage and gives mutual aid to our county fire department as well as the surrounding counties.

I have been privileged to serve as fire chief since 2005 and honored to serve with the dedicated men and women

that we have in Okeechobee. OFD members have numerous certifications, including Firefighter I & II, Instructors, EMT/Paramedic, Technical Rescue, Fire/Arson Investigation and Hazardous Materials Operations, to name a few.

We currently offer services such as educational classes, training for businesses and industries and tours of the fire station. Our department also manages all fire inspections and plan reviews within the city of Okeechobee. We participate in the Okeechobee County/City Technical Rescue Team (certified/authorized by the state). We have a city council with mayor that heads an administrator form of government.

The City of Okeechobee has the only ladder truck in the entire county or city. OFD responds to incidents with: a 2017 engine/pumper, 1997 engine for backup, 2010 brush/medical truck, and one reserve pumper. We also use one of the first engines utilized by the department as our parade vehicle for our council members.

One of the things I am most proud of is the rating issued to our department by the Insurance Service Organization (ISO) (used by insurance companies to issue rates to commercial and residential structures). We have improved our rating over the last 10 years through challenging work, dedication from employees and support from our council. The rating of "3" was issued several years ago which is near the top ten percentile for the nation for a department of our size.

Welcome to Okeechobee, and I hope you always feel welcome to come by and say hello or ask for assistance.

Okeechobee County Fire Rescue offers many services

Okeechobee County Fire Rescue is a combination department that uses both career and volunteer members to serve the emergency service needs of the community. The department operates out of three stations that are strategically located throughout the county. Stations are staffed on a 24-hour, seven days a week, 365 days a year system.

The department is staffed with 52 career employees who are all trained as firefighters, with 38 of them certified as paramedics. The career employees are supplemented by approximately 10 volunteers.

Okeechobee County Fire Rescue provides Advanced Life Support (ALS) emergency medical service to all of Okeechobee County through the use of four paramedic staffed ambulances. Additionally, the department operates three paramedic engines that provide fire suppression to the unincorporated areas of the county. Various aid agreements are in place with the City of Okeechobee and the counties of Highlands,

Glades, Indian River, Martin, Osceola and St. Lucie.

The field staff is under the direct supervision of the deputy fire chief. The captain of training is responsible for coordination of all department fire and EMS training. The captain of risk reduction is responsible for overseeing fire inspections, department safety initiatives and public education events. The public safety director has direct supervision of the deputy fire chief and the captains, Fleet Services, E911, Emergency Management as well as the budgetary and administrative functions of the department, with indirect supervision of the field staff.

In 2019, Okeechobee County Fire Rescue responded to 9,237 calls for service, of which 5,894 were EMS calls, and transported 4,261 patients to the hospital. Additionally, the department completed 11,000 hours of training.

Ralph Franklin

Public safety director/fire chief



Fishing on Lake Okeechobee in 2020 off to great start

Photo by Richard Marion

Lake Okeechobee, the second-largest freshwater lake within the continental United States, is a vast shallow lake with a surface area covering 730 square miles. "Okeechobee" comes from the Seminole words meaning "big and water."

Lake Okeechobee has been a premier fishing destination for decades, and multiple fishing tournaments

are held on the lake every year. In March 2020 Fishing League Worldwide (FLW) will hold the second tournament in its Costa FLW Series Southeastern Division on Lake Okeechobee. The tournament will launch out of Roland & Mary Ann Martin's Marina & Resort in Clewiston.

In 2017, Hurricane Irma swept across South Florida and Lake Okeechobee, ripping out a lot of vegetation and

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raising the lake level to around 17 feet. After a much-needed dry spell in late 2018 and early 2019 the lake level dropped to around 12 feet by February 2019.

The lower water levels in the lake affected navigation throughout 2019, but could ultimately prove to be good for the lake overall. Florida Audubon Society's Okeechobee science coordinator, Dr. Paul Gray, explained that the lower water level could allow sunlight to reach the lake bed and help regrow vegetation. New vegetation would provide a spawning ground for fish species during the wet season and cover for those same fish as they grow and increase in size.

"I was in a meeting with scientists from the district and the Florida Wildlife Commission, and it was unanimous in the room that everybody wanted the lake to get to 11 feet because that's what it is going to take to get those plants back," said Dr. Gray. "I know lower levels make navigation inconvenient and that's unfortunate, but we gotta take our medicine to get well."

Derrick Moore, tournament director of the Lake Okeechobee Crappie Series, echoed those thoughts by Dr. Gray.

"I feel like the future of the fishing on our lake is depending upon the management and treating of the lake and vegetation," explained Mr. Moore. "A healthy balance of mechanical harvesting and spraying areas that can't be reached by mechanical harvesting is essential to the overall future of fishing on the lake. The lake needs vegetation to act as natural filters for harmful substances that enters the lake from the Kissimmee River. Likewise these fish need vegetation for a number of reasons; shelter, food and more so for crappie- spawning areas."

Mr. Moore had a few tried and true tips for anglers looking to get in some fishing on the lake in 2020.

"Lake Okeechobee is one of the best fisheries in the world," said Mr. Moore. "Early in the year the crappie move



Special to the Lake Okeechobee News/RLE Big Fish Adventures
Angela Jenkins of West Virginia caught a big bass that weighed in at 11.04 pounds while fishing Lake Okeechobee on Jan. 21, 2020. The fish was weighed then released back into the lake.

into the shallow parts of the lake in vegetation, this hold true for the entire lake, whether you are fishing the south end near Pahokee, the west side near Lakeport, north side in Okeechobee, and the east side near Port Mayaca. You can find some nice quality and quantity when jigging in the vegetation and using minnows around the outside edges. A nice long light rod and small reel is ideal catching crappie on Okeechobee and some jigs that can be purchased from any bait and tackle store around the lake. These method is used by majority of the anglers who compete in our Lake Okeechobee Crappie Series."

One of the things that makes fishing on Okeechobee so special is just its sheer size. With the lake being nearly half the size of the state of Rhode Island, the ecosystem of the lake can be wide-ranging.

"This lake has the most diverse ecosystem of any I have ever seen," said Okeechobee Fishing Headquarters owner Mike Krause. "And I've fished in Florida all my life. You have 730 square miles of water and you can go from one side of the lake where it's solid rock to another side where it's nothing but muck, then you will find another corner that's sand. So many species and different types of wildlife. It's special."





(R)aulerson Hospital accomplishes this mission through the enterprise's approximately 30 million patient encounters each year, and with continued investment in equipment and technology, like the new 64-slice CT Scanner and 3D Mammography technology, which includes 3D stereotactic breast biopsy and contrast capability.

Raulerson Hospital raises the bar in healthcare with:

- Accreditation by The Joint Commission
- Primary Stroke Center Licensure by the Agency for Health Care Administration
- Accredited by the American College of Radiology in MRI, CT, Mammography, Ultra Sound and Nuclear Medicine
- Accredited Laboratory by the College of American Pathologists
- 5-star Healthgrades Recipient for Treatment of Heart Attack 2019- 2020
- 5-star Healthgrades Recipient for Patient Safety 2018-2019
- 5-star Healthgrades Recipient for Treatment of Respiratory Failure 2016-2019
- 5-star Healthgrades Recipient for Hip-Fracture Treatment 2018-2019

Raulerson Hospital 's Surgical Services Department is also raising the bar in healthcare by proactively earning the CNOR Strong status from the Competency & Credentialing Institute (CCI), the leader in perioperative certification. Hospitals and surgical centers can achieve the CNOR Strong status when more than half of the perioperative (or surgical) nursing staff have earned their individual CNOR certification. In fact, at Raulerson Hospital more than seventy percent of the surgical nurses have achieved their CNOR certification. CNOR certification is a voluntary 200 question exam, which demonstrates knowledge and skills competency in 9 areas of the specialized field of perioperative nursing. Additional education provides nurses advanced skills to ensure surgical patients receive high-quality care.

Raulerson Hospital is proud to have two nursing units recognized for their efforts to create healthier tomorrows. The Critical Care Unit and Outpatient Surgery Departments have been named honorees in HCA Healthcare's Unit of Distinction Awards in 2019. The Unit of Distinction designation is achieved through measurable, exemplary performance in the strategic areas of advocacy and leadership, consistency in nursing practice and operations, and leveraging scale to drive performance. Nursing units are evaluated and scored based on performance using specific criteria determined by service line advisory boards that include representatives from across the organization. Honorees, like Raulerson Hospital's Intensive Care Unit and Outpatient Surgery Department achieved scores ranking them within the top 20 percent of all HCA Healthcare Nursing Units. Approximately 1200 HCA Healthcare nursing units participated in the data collection necessary to be considered for the Unit of Distinction Awards.



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Wildlife is abundant in Okeechobee County



Okeechobee County is home to abundant wildlife, including some endangered species. It's a great place for bird watching and wildlife photography. In the rural areas of the county, it's not unusual to see wading birds, eagles, alligators, raccoons, foxes, opossums, armadillos and more.

Manatees visit Lake Okeechobee so frequently that the gates on the locks used by boats to enter and leave the lake are equipped with manatee protection devices to prevent a closing gate from injuring an underwater manatee.

One popular place to view wildlife is the Taylor Creek Stormwater Treatment Area (STA) off U.S. 441 N., about 4.2 miles north of the intersection of State Road 70 and U.S. 441. The 170-acre STA attracts a variety of migratory and resident birds. Commonly observed birds include sandhill cranes, crested caracara, wood storks, great blue herons, roseate spoonbills, black-necked stilts, white and glossy ibises, a variety of egrets, wild turkeys and many songbirds. Deer and alligators are also commonly seen at the STA. The STA is open to the public from sunrise to sunset.

The Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail, which has a trailhead at the Lock 7 recreation area off State Road 78, also provides a chance to see local wildlife.

Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park, 33104 NW 192nd Ave., a 54,000 acre preserve, protects the largest remaining stretch of Florida dry prairie, home to an array of endangered plants and animals. The preserve offers excellent

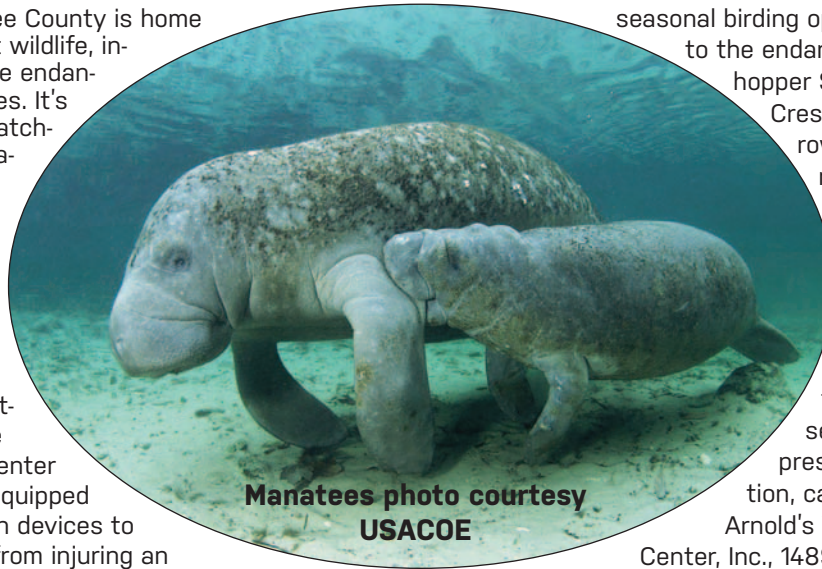
seasonal birding opportunities and is home to the endangered Florida Grasshopper Sparrow, as well as the Crested Caracara and Burrowing Owl. More than 100 miles of dirt roads allow hikers, bicyclists and equestrians to explore prairies, wetlands and shady hammocks. November through March, ranger-led prairie buggy tours allow visitors to see remote areas of the preserve. For more information, call 863-462-5360.

Arnold's Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, Inc., 14895 N.W. 30th Terrace

in Okeechobee, is a non-profit 501(c) educational-based wildlife care facility, dedicated to bringing people and wildlife together to develop a community awareness of the value of our Florida wildlife. Their ultimate goal is to rescue, rehabilitate, and return recovered animals to their natural habitat.

The wildlife center cares for about 1,000 wild animals a year. If possible, native animals are rehabilitated and returned to the wild. Some animals are too badly injured to survive in the wild. These animals become permanent residents at the wildlife center, where they live in specially-built habitats and are used to educate the public about Florida wildlife.

The center is also home to some non-native animals which were found injured, brought to the center by Florida Wildlife Commission officers or surrendered by their owners. For more information, call 863-763-4630.



Manatees photo courtesy
USACOE



Alligator photo courtesy FWC





Wading birds
photo courtesy SFWMD



Nesting Wood Storks
photo courtesy SFWMD

Muck City TATTOOS & PIERCING

TEAM #116



Tattoos • Piercings
Microblading

863.623.5319

909 PARROTT AVENUE
SUITE 8-F • OKEECHOBEE

★★★ Your Supervisor of Elections wants to know: ★★★

Are You Election Ready?

- Are You Registered to Vote?
 - Has Your Name or Address Changed?
 - Would You Like to Receive a Ballot by Mail?
 - Do You Need to Update Your Signature?
 - Would You Like to Update Your Party Affiliation?
- ★ If you answered yes to any of these questions, please contact the **Elections office at 863.763.4014** or visit our website at **www.voteokeechobee.com** and click the 'Voter Information/Update Voter Registration' link.
- ★ By updating your voter record now, you will be 'Election Ready' when it's time to vote.

IMPORTANT: Florida is a Closed Primary State.
A voter must be registered with the same party affiliation of the candidate(s) they wish to vote for in a primary election.

2020 Election Schedule

Presidential Preference Primary: March 17

Primary Election: August 18

General Election: November 3

★★★ Thank you, Diane Hagan, Supervisor of Elections ★★★

Health Department works to protect public

Florida Department of Health works to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts. Florida Department of Health in Okeechobee County is located at 1728 N.W. Ninth Ave., Okeechobee, FL 34972.

Departments include Environmental Health, Vital Statistics, Public Health Preparedness, School Health, Dental Sealants, (WIC) Women Infants and Children, Health Education, Clinical Services of Public Health Significance, and Ep-

idemiology and Disease Control. Clinical Services of public health significance include: family planning, immunizations/vaccines, sexually transmitted infections testing and treatment, hepatitis program and HIV/Aids services. The Health Department accepts the following payment methods: cash and credit card. For clinical services only, Medicaid and self-pay sliding fee based on eligibility are accepted. For more information, call 863-462-5800 or go to okeechobee.floridahealth.gov.

Open Hands provides health care to uninsured

Open Hands Health Center is a nonprofit that has been serving Okeechobee since 2015. It provides health care to those in the community without insurance who financially qualify. Patients consist of those who, for whatever reason, find themselves unemployed, as well as hard working families who just cannot afford the high cost of health care. Open Hands offers some of the same things you would get at a regular doctors office but hope to help even more. A current focuses has been on wellness, and they offer a wellness group that helps educate people on healthy living which includes good nutrition, increased physical activity, as well as a healthy emotional thought life.

They hope to be starting classes open to the public

soon. As a result of this type of care, many of the patients have been able to get off or reduce their medications and are experiencing a better quality of life. Annually we have been able to bring the Florida Baptist Association free dental van, which will return again this June. Local dentists volunteer their time to do both fillings and extractions. They also have been able to help facilitate free biblical counseling for those who are interested. If you would like to see if you are eligible for health care, learn about upcoming wellness classes, be placed on the dental van waiting list or would like to volunteer your time or help support our cause, please call at 863-357-1257. Open Hands is located at 309 N.W. Fifth St. in Okeechobee.

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Kelly Staples
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Lic. Real Estate Agent

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Group Meetings

* Ongoing caregiver support groups, we meet the 2nd and 4th Thursday of each month.

Powerful Tools Class

*A 6 week course for anyone caring for a loved one.

Grief and Loss Support Group

Group Meetings

*Ongoing support group meeting twice per week.

*Tuesdays and Thursdays 10am – 11am.

*Facilitated by a Master's Prepared Counselor

**Individual Grief
Counseling**

Call for more information.

863-467-2321

These groups are open to all Okeechobee county residents regardless of Hospice eligibility.

411 SE 4th Street, Okeechobee, FL 34974

Your Hometown Hospice.

A Chapters Health Affiliate



Okeechobee Dining Guide

(I) keechobee is home to many unique restaurants! From an eatery where people fly in to dine, to a cattle market known for its burgers to a spot that will cook your catch fresh from Lake Okeechobee all the way to key lime pie known to be the best north of the Florida Keys, the sit-down dining options in and around Okeechobee, Florida will not disappoint! If you are looking for something quick to take home from a local grocery-store deli or a quick bite from a drive-thru, Okeechobee offers convenience as well as quality! At night, many food trucks and stands come alive. If a visit to Okeechobee is in your future, bring your appetite!

- 2 441 BBQ Grill – (mobile - locations vary)
- 79 Alice's Restaurant – 17410 Reservation Rd. N.E.
- 3 Applebee's Neighborhood Grill & Bar – 1210 State Road 70
- 4 Arby's – 417 S. Parrott Ave.
- 5 Beef 'O' Brady's – 608 S. Parrott Ave.
- 6 Bill Coyle Hot Dog Wagon – Corner of State Road 78 & U.S. 441 S.

7 Big Tasty's

309 S.W. Park Street
863-623-5470
facebook.com/bigtastys2018/
Hours: Mon.-Sat. 8:00AM-8:00PM, Closed Sunday

Big Tasty's is a family owned and operated 50's diner. We offer breakfast, lunch, and dinner. All of our food is freshly made by us. We offer a wide variety of hamburgers, hot dogs, sandwiches, malts, milkshakes, and we have a special dinner menu!

- 8 Big O Flea Market – 3600 U.S. 441 S.
- 9 Blimpie Subs & Salads – 3609 U.S. 441 S.E.
- 81 Blitzkrieg BBQ & Grill – 3101 U.S. 441 S.
- 39 Blue Moon BBQ – 1600 State Rd. 70 E.
- 10 Brahma Bull Restaurant & Lounge – 2405 U.S. 441 S.E.
- 11 Bravo – 802 N.E. Park St.
- 12 Brown Cow Sweetery – 103 S.W. Park St.
- 13 Burger King – 604 N.E. Park St.
- 14 Chen Chinese Restaurant – 104 S.E. Sixth St.
- 15 Cowboys BBQ & Steak Company – 202 N.E. Seventh Ave.
- 17 Crossroads Restaurant – 5050 N.E. 128th Ave.
- 18 Crum's Windmill Café – 480 Windmill Road, Brighton Reservation
- 19 Dairy Queen Grill & Chill – 1212 S. Parrott Ave.
- 20 Ding A Ling Deli – 2107 U.S. 441 S.E.
- 21 Domino's – 1700 S. Parrott Ave., Suite B
- 22 Duck Pub – 1037 Lakeport Plaza
- 23 Dunkin' Donuts – 205 N.E. Park St., 4993 U.S. 441 S.
- 24 El Rancho Market – 3901 U.S. 441 N.
- 25 Gladys' Restaurant – 511 S.W. Park St.
- 27 Golden Corral – 700 S. Parrott Ave.
- 28 High Noon Café, OK Corral Gun Club – 9449 N.E. 48th St.



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DAILY LUNCH & DINNER SPECIALS
(863) 623-5470
309 S.W. Park St, Okeechobee, FL 34972
Monday - Saturday 8am-8pm Closed Sun



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Burritos - Quesadillas - Nachos
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Dine In or To Go:
(863) 467-0922
107 NW 6th Ave
Okeechobee, FL 34972

29 Jersey Mike's Subs – 611 S.W. Park St.
 30 Joey's Supreme Pizza – 107 S.W. Park St.
 31 Kahootz Draft House – 702 N.W. Park St.
 32 KFC – 3387 U.S. 441 S.
 33 King House Chinese Restaurant – 3399 U.S. 441 S.
 35 La Queretana Supermarket – 625 N.E. Park St.
 36 La Taqueria Las Palmitas – Near Southwest 21st Avenue & State Road 70
 37 Lakeside Grill – 1111 S. Parrott Ave.
 1 La Mariposa – 202 N.E. Second St.
 38 Landing Strip Café – 2800 N.W. 20th Trail
 40 Lightsey's Seafood Restaurant – 1506 S. Parrott Ave.
 41 Little Caesars Pizza – 2105 S. Parrott Ave.

42 Los Cocos Mexican Restaurant

107 N.W. Sixth Ave., Okeechobee
 863-467-0922

facebook.com/eatloscocos/

Hours: Tues. - Thurs. 10:30 a.m. – 8:30 p.m., Fri. 10:30 a.m. – 9 p.m., Sat. 10:30 a.m. – 6:30 p.m.

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43 Lunch Box, Okeechobee KOA – 4276 U.S. 441 S.
 44 Lunkers Sports Bar & Grill – 4825 U.S. 441 S.
 80 Mable's Place – 204 N.E. Seventh Ave.
 45 McDonald's – 4151 U.S. 441 S., 401 E. North, S.W. Park St

47 Mi Familia – 219 S.W. Park St.

219 S.W. Park Street
 863-484-8277

Hours: Mon - Closed; Tue. - Thur. 9AM – 9PM; Fri. - Sun. 9AM – 10PM

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- STEAK, CHICKEN, OR SHRIMP FAJITA
- BURRITO BOWL
- FRIED QUESADILLAS

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 Friday & Saturday: 9am-10pm
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46 Mom's Kitchen – 909 S. Parrott Ave.

16 Nature's Pantry

417 S.W. Park Street
 863-447-7835

facebook.com/naturespantryokeechobee/

Hours: Mon.-Fri. 9:30AM-5:00PM, Sat. 9:30AM-2:00PM, Closed Sunday

Since 1982, Nature's Pantry has been your local source for clean, healthy products. SMOOTHIES, supplements, edible seeds, oils, medicinal herbs, essential oils, CBD oil, teas, grains and flours, raw vinegar, local raw honey, ear candles

48 Nutmeg's Cafe– 515 S.W. Park St.
 49 Okeechobee Livestock Market Restaurant – 1055 U.S. 98 N.
 51 Papa John's Pizza – 414 N.E. Park St.
 61 Park 112 – 112 S.E. Park St.
 39 Park-it Market – 1600 State Road 70 E.
 52 Parrott Island – 1001 S. Parrott Ave.
 8 Peppered Pig BBQ Company – 3600 U.S. 441 South, Okeechobee
 53 Pizza Heaven – 208 S. Parrott Ave.
 54 Pizza Hut – 2795 U.S. 441 S.
 55 Poge's Family Restaurant – 1759 S. Parrott Ave.
 56 Popeye's Louisiana Kitchen – 822 N.W. Park St.
 57 Publix – 3551 U.S. 441 S.
 58 Pueblo Viejo – 3415 U.S. 441 S.
 59 Quail Creek Plantation – 12399 N.E. 224th St.

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301 N. Parrott Ave. - 863-357-0722

60 Rio Bravo Mexican Restaurant – 151 N.W. 36th St.
 82 Sante Fe 2 – 207 S.W. Fifth Ave.
 62 Seminole Casino Brighton Josiah Restaurant– 17735
 Reservation Road N.E.
 63 Serenity Coffee Shop – 601 S.W. Park St.
 64 Shenanigans – 2237 U.S. 98 N
 65 Speckled Perch – 105 U.S. 98 N.
 66 Subway – 2101 S. Parrott Ave., 2398 State Road 70,
 422 N.E. Park St., 1865 State Road 70 W., 12800 State
 Road 70 E., 8605 U.S. 441 S.E.
 68 Taco Bell – 501 N.E. Park St.
 69 Taqueria Serrano – 5602 State Road 70
 70 Taqueria y Fruteria – 1002 N.W. Park St.
 71 Taqueria Yanez-310 U.S. 98 N.

72 Tin Fish

301 N. Parrott Ave, Okeechobee
 863-357-0722

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facebook.com/tinfishokeechobee/

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Tin Fish offers fresh seafood dishes to delight any appetite. Our 100% Angus Big Fat Burgers and our taco selection will knock your socks off. Happy hour is 4:30-6:30 daily. We have a full bar with Diamond pool tables. Parties can be booked on-site. Check out our Facebook page for upcoming events.

73 Trading Post Flea & Farmers Market – 3100 U.S. 441 S.

74 Twisted Sisterz Mobile Kitchen & Bakery – (various locations)

73 Ursy's Corner Café – 3100 U.S. 441

75 Wendy's – 502 N.E. Park St.

76 Winn-Dixie – 3246 U.S. 441 S

77 Zaxby's Chicken Fingers & Buffalo Wings –
 912 N.E. Park St.

78 Zippy's – 301 S.W. Park St.

The Okeechobee area dining guide will publish inside of several annual Lake Okeechobee News publications. To submit additions, corrections or to upgrade your listing, please contact Jaime Limoges, advertising manager at Lake Okeechobee News, at 863-824-5934.

Lake Okeechobee News is part of Independent Newsmedia, Inc. and made up of people who share a set of deeply-set values. We care deeply about journalistic service and the community. Our company is owned by a unique non-profit trust that is designed to preserve INI's independence and journalist mission forever.

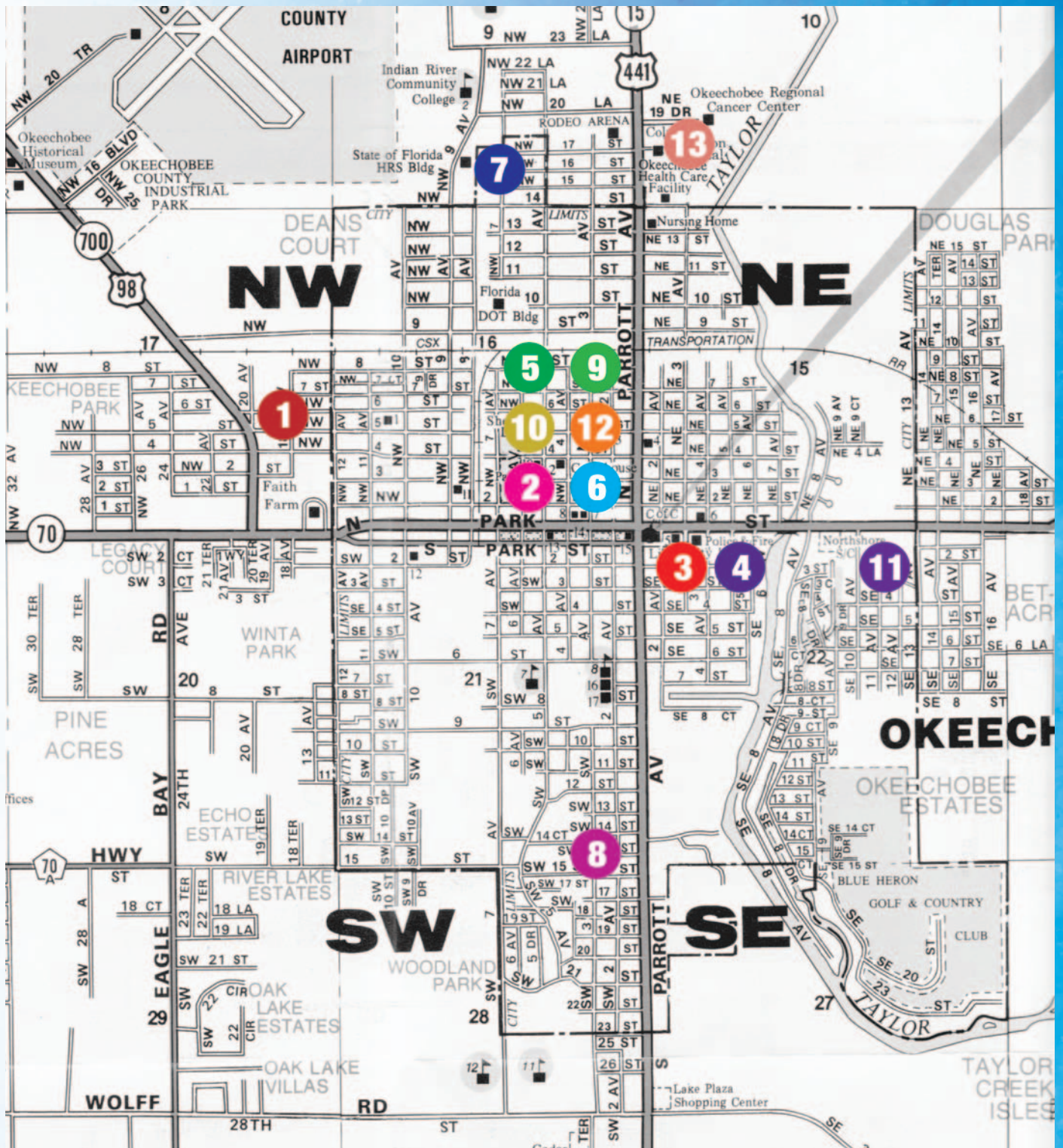
We are proud to serve Okeechobee!



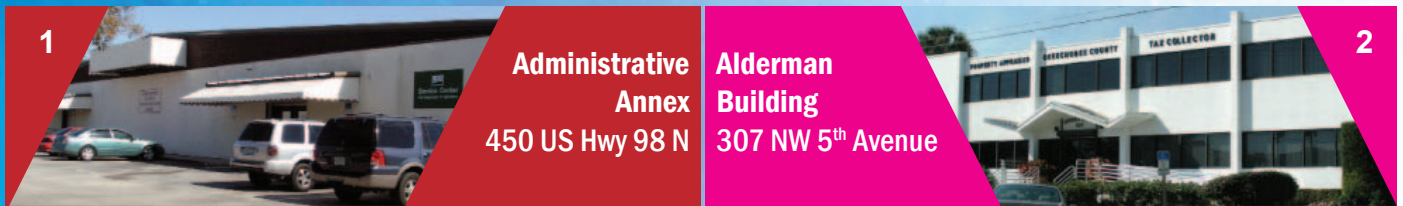
101+ Things to Do • Explore Okeechobee
Hendry County Guide 8th Edition
Caloosa Belle • Immokalee Bulletin
Lake Okeechobee News featuring Life in
the Sun & Sweet Life in Hendry County
Okeechobee County School Information
Guide • Medical Information Guide
Lake Okeechobee Real Estate Magazine

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County Map



1

Administrative Annex
450 US Hwy 98 N

Alderman Building
307 NW 5th Avenue

2



3

City Police Department
50 SE 2nd Avenue

City Hall
55 SE 3rd Avenue

4



5

Emergency Operations Center
707 NW 6th Street

County Courthouse
304 NW 2nd Street

6



7

DCF & Health Department
1690 NW 9th Avenue

Public Library
206 SW 16th Street

8



9

Judicial Center
304 NW 2nd Street

Sheriff's Department
504 NW 4th Street

10



11

US Post Office
1000 SR 70 East

DMV (Driver's License Office)
210 NW 5th Ave.

12



HCA Raulerson Hospital
1796 Hwy 441 N

County Map



Clubs and Organizations

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

772-873-9299
For meetings, please see
aastlucieintergroup.com.

AMERICAN LEGION #64

863-763-2950
POST64@centurylink.net
Meetings are the second Tuesday
of every month at 7 p.m., located
at the American Legion, 501 S.E.
Second St.

AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY

863-763-2950
Meetings are held the second
Tuesday of every month at 6 p.m.,
located at the American Legion.

AMERICAN RED CROSS

863-763-2488
Located at 208 N. Parrott Ave.,
Okeechobee, FL 34972
redcross-pbc.org.

B.R.A.T. CLUB INC.

hosts teen dances and youth
activities in Okeechobee. For more
information, visit their website at
okeebratclub.weebly.com or email
bishopt.okee@gmail.com

BUSINESS WOMEN'S REFERRAL NETWORK

863-467-2557
rayedeusinger@gmail.com
Call for meetings and information.

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE (Okeechobee)

55 S. Parrott Ave
Visit their website at
okeechobeebusiness.com, email
info@okeechobeebusiness.com,
visit their Facebook page or call
863-467-6246.

EAST COAST MIGRANT HEAD START

863-467-6930
Located at 726 N.E. 16th Ave.,
Okeechobee, FL 34972; ecmhsp.org

ELKS LODGE

131 N.W. 36th St., 863-623-5738.
Meetings are the second and fourth
Thursday of every month at 7 p.m.

FRATERNAL ORDER OF EAGLES #4137

863-763-2552
Meetings are held the first and third
Tuesday of every month at 7 p.m. All
meetings are located at 9985 U.S.
441 N.

FRATERNAL ORDER OF EAGLES #4509

863-467-1154
Meetings are members only. Aeries
meet the first and third Wednesdays
of the month at 6:30 p.m. Ladies
meet on the second and fourth
Wednesday of every month at
6:30 p.m. Eagle Riders meet on the
second Thursday of every month at
7 p.m. of each month and trustees
meet every Monday at 4:30 p.m.
Meeting is at 4701 U.S. 441 S.E.



VOTE

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instagram.com/okeechobeoutdoors






FRIENDS OF THE OKEECHOBEE LIBRARY

863-763-3536

Meetings are held the second Tuesday of every month at 4:30 p.m., at the Okeechobee Library, 206 S.W. 16th St.

GUARDIANS AD LITEM

always needs more volunteers to advocate for Children in Foster Care. Meetings are held the fourth Friday of every month at 10 a.m. For more information on location, visit guardianadlitem.org or call 772-497-6302.

KIWANIS CLUB

Meetings are held every Thursday at Lakeside Restaurant, 1111 S. Parrott Ave. Meetings start at noon. For information, visit www.facebook.com/OkeechobeeKiwanis or email ken@gladesmedia.com.

LOYAL ORDER OF THE MOOSE #2417 (SOUTH)

863-763-2250

Meetings are held for ladies on the first and third Monday of every

month and gentlemen are the first and third Tuesday of every month, located on 1016 Linda Road, Buckhead Ridge.

MASONIC LODGE #237

863-763-1610

Meeting are held for the ladies (The Order of the Eastern Star), the first and third Tuesday at 7:30 p.m. Meetings for the gentlemen are the second and forth Monday of every month at 7:30 p.m. All meetings are held at 107 N.W. Fifth Ave.

MINISTERIAL ASSOCIATION

Meetings are held the second Wednesday of the month at noon at Golden Corral, 700 S. Parrott Ave.

MOOSE LODGE #1753 (NORTH)

863-763-4954

All meetings are held the first and third Tuesday of every month at 6:30 p.m. All meetings are held at 159 N.W. 36th Street.

OKEECHOBEE AMATEUR RADIO CLUB

holds a weekly Monday evening net on 147.195 MHZ with 100 Hz tone

at 8 p.m. Anyone who is licensed is welcome to check-in for information. For more information, call Mark Brandel, KF4EA, at 863-634-7021.

OKEECHOBEE BATTLEFIELD FRIENDS

863-610-2333

Meetings are held as needed. okeechobeebattlefield.com, facebook.com/Battle-of-Okeechobee.

OKEECHOBEE COUNTY BOARD OF REALTORS

863-467-0004

Call for meetings and information.

OKEECHOBEE COUNTY 4-H

numerous clubs including livestock, cooking, photography, small animals, equestrian and more. For information, call 863-763-6469.

OKEECHOBEE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

863-763-4344

The Historical Society meets on the third Monday of each month at noon at the Okeechobee Historical Museum, 1850 U.S. 98. Participants are asked to bring a covered dish to pass for a pot luck lunch. Annual



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dues are \$10. The museum is open on Thursdays from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. (except holidays.)

OKEECHOBEE MAIN STREET

okeechobeemainstreet.org, email info@okeechobeemainstreet.org, visit their Facebook page or call 863-357-MAIN (6246).

OKEECHOBEE CITIZENS RECREATIONAL ASSOC.

863-801-7505
Meetings are held the first Thursday of every month at 6:30 p.m. at the OCRA office, 640 N.W. 27th Lane. facebook.com/pages/OCRA-Okeechobee-Citizens-Recreational-Association/358355094346714.

OKEECHOBEE COMMUNITY EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM

If you are interested in joining the Okeechobee Community Emergency Response Team, email okeechobeecert@gmail.com.

RETIRED EDUCATORS ASSOCIATION

863-763-5755; Meetings are held every second Monday at Beef O'Brady's at 11:15 a.m.; okeechobeerea.org.

ROTARY CLUB

Meetings are held every Tuesday at noon at Golden Corral, 700 S. Parrott Ave.; rotary6930.org.

SHRINE CLUB

863-763-3378
Meetings are the second Thursday of every month at 6:30 p.m., at 1855 S.W. 53rd St. The email address for the Shrine Club is okeechobeeshrine@yahoo.com.

SONS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

863-763-7130 or 863-634-6134
Meetings are held the second Saturday of each month at 10 a.m., at the Okeechobee Historical Society. Times change during June, July, August and September.

TANTIE QUILTERS

863-763-4344
Meetings are held at the Okeechobee Historical Society, 1850 U.S. 98, on Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. (except holidays). The club makes quilts which are often used to raise money for local charitable causes.

TREASURE COAST BUILDERS ASSOCIATION, Okeechobee branch

863-467-2007; treasurecoastba.com.

VFW POST #4423

863-763-0818
House Committee meetings are held the first Thursday of every month. Auxiliary meetings are held the second Thursday of the month. Post meetings are held the third Thursday of the month. Meetings are located at the VFW Post, 300 N.W. 34th St. at 6:30 p.m.

VFW POST #10539

863-763-2308; Meetings are held the first Sunday of every month at noon. Meetings are held at the VFW Post, 3912 U.S. 441 S.E.

VFW POST #9528

863-467-2882; Meetings are held the second Saturday of every month at 10 a.m. at 29012 E. S.R. 78.

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March 26





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Church Directory

Churches are located in Okeechobee unless otherwise noted

Abiding Hope Worship Center Assembly of God

4550 U.S. 441 N. • 863-763-3736
Pastor: Mark & Kathy Witt
abidinghopewc.com
abidinghope.office@gmail.com

Alpha Ministries at Freedom Ranch

11655 U.S. Hwy. 441 S.E.
Phone: 863-763-9800
Pastor: John Glenn
alphaministries.org
churchinthewoodsokeechobee.org
office@alphaministries.org

Basinger Christian Brethren Church

16090 N.W. 176th Ave.
Phone: 863-763-7798
Cell: 863-634-0781
Pastor: Reverend Monroe Arnold

Believers Fellowship Church

300 S.W. Sixth Ave.
Phone: 863-763-6848
Pastor: Nick Hopkins

Bible Church of God

3666 E. Hwy. 70 (old Elks Lodge)
Phone: 863-357-2264
Pastor: Bishop Robert L. Banks, Jr.
facebook.com/pages/category/
Religious-Center/BCOG_
IndOkee-1454811934780798

Big Lake Church of Christ

1115 S.W. Third Ave.
Phone: 863-467-6758

Big Lake Missions Outreach

P.O. Box 1663, Okeechobee, 34973
Phone: 863-763-5725
cell: 863-697-6433
Bruce and Mary Anne Swinford,
Directors
Feeding the needy behind the
Methodist Church four days a week
at noon. No meal on Wednesday.
Food pantry — call for appointment:
863-763-5725

Brighton Baptist Church

24050 Highway 70 West
Phone: 863-763-3063 (Office)
863-763-6626 (Church office)
Pastor: Calvin Fryar
facebook.com/BrightonBaptist
Okeechobee/?f=111560848883388



First Baptist Church of
Okeechobee

Buckhead Ridge Baptist Church

1731 Hunter Rd., Buckhead Ridge
Pastor: Arlen Cook, 863-763-7165
arlenandloretta@gmail.com

Calvary Chapel of Okeechobee

212 S. Parrott Ave.
Phone: 863 623-5283
Pastor: Carlos Amador
pastorcarlos_calvary@aol.com
calvaryokeechobee.org

Christ Fellowship Church

Non-denominational
701 S. Parrott Ave.
Phone: 561-799-7600 Office
Pastor: Brandon Catoe
oke@cftoday.org
gochristfellowship.com/church_
locations/okeechobee/

Church of God of Okeechobee

301 N.E. 4th Ave. Phone: 863-763-4127
Pastor: Chad Keathley
okeechobeecog.com for streaming
service
chadkeathley@att.net

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints

310 S.W. Sixth St. • 863-467-2425
Branch President David Allen
(cell) 561-420-2053

Church of Our Saviour Episcopal

200 N.W. Third St.
Phone: 863-763-4843
Father Jim Shevlin
info@
ChurchOfOurSaviourOkeechobee.org
churchofoursaviourokeechobee.org
churchofoursaviour1@gmail.com

Community Church of Basinger

Non-denominational
19836 U.S. 98 N. • 863-467-2635
Pastor: Rev. Michael W. Peppers
facebook.com/Community-Church-of-
Basinger-153185001390240/
ccobasinger@gmail.com

Embassy Church at Basinger

Corner of Hwy. 98 & 68
863-467-2635

Everglades Baptist Church

3725 S.E. Eighth Street
863-261-2198 (Everglades
Elementary School)
Phone: 863-261-2499
Pastor: Doug Nickalson, Jim Womble,
Eric Phillips
evergladesbaptist.com/main
ebcokeechobee@gmail.com

Faith Alive Family Church

Non-denominational
3075 S.W. Third Terrace
Phone: 863-623-4233
Pastors Paul & Jen Smith
Facebook.com: Faith Alive Family
Church (live on Sunday mornings)
jenlsmith66@gmail.com

Faith Farm Ministries

7595 N.E. 128th Ave.
Phone: 863-763-4224
Pastor: Rick Aspen and Lee Joliceur
faithfarm.org

First Baptist Church of Okeechobee (ROC)

401 S.W. Fourth St.
Phone: 863-763-2171
Senior pastor: Mark McCarter
fbcokee.org
mail@fbcokee.org

First Indian Baptist Church of Brighton
20060 Reservation Road
Rev. Matthew Johnson Tiger, Pastor
Cell phone: 863-261-6429
firstindianbaptistchurchofbrighton.org

First United Methodist Church
200 N.W. Second St. • 863-763-4021
Sr. Pastor: Don Hanna
Associate Pastor: Jim Dawson
fumcokee.com

Fountain of Life Church
1302 S.W. 32nd St.
Ph: 863-763-8945; or, 863-801-1297
Pastor: Dave Robertson
folifechurch.net
fountainoflifechurchokeechobee@gmail.com

Ft. Drum Community Church
32415 U.S. 441 N. • 863-467-1733
Pastor: Fred Hodges

Freedom Baptist Church
1902 S. Parrott Ave.
Phone: 863-447-1805
Pastor: Mike Worf

Haven of Rest Pentecostal Church
912 N.W. Second St.
Phone: 863-357-3053
Pastor: Tom Velie
havenofrestchurch.com

His Church – It's Jesus' Church
Non-denominational
1167 Linda Road, Buckhead Ridge
Phone: 863-357-6500
Pastor: Tim Welburn
office@hischurch-itsjesuschurch.org
hischurch-itsjesuschurch.org

Iglesia Jesus Es Mi Redentor
Christian Evangelical
1302 S.W. 32nd Street
Phone: 772-828-6226; 863-447-8571
Pastor: Ignacio Lorenzo
Facebook: JesusESMiRedentor-Okeechobee

Jesus Holy Ghost Crusade Church
1401 N.E. 14th Ave.
Contact: Crystal Harris
Food pantry: 863-634-9194

Lakeport Christian Church
10947 East S.R. 78 • Glades County
Phone: 863-946-1747
Pastor: Frank Moore
lakeportcc.com
mooreorless5@gmail.com

More 2 Life Ministries
All weekend services meet at
Osceola Middle School Gym
605 S.W. Park Street
Phone: 863-467-0796
Pastor: Cary McKee
Wednesday meetings at Serenity
Coffee Shop

New Testament Baptist Church
Independent Baptist
535 N.E. 28th Ave. (just west of the
overpass, off of SR 70)
Phone: 863-763-6682
newtestamentokeechobee.com
ntbcokeechobee@gmail.com

North Okeechobee Church of God
15949 N.W. 30th Terrace
Phone: 863-467-6066
Pastor: Don Leon
Cell: 863-634-0344

Northside Baptist Church
51 N.W. 98 St. • 863-763-3584
Pastor: Rick Giles
nbc-okeechobee.org
Email: northsidebaptistchurch@live.com

Oakview Baptist Church
677 S.W. 32nd Street
863-763-1699
Pastor: Rev. John T. Garner
oakviewbaptist.com
church@oakbc.org

Okeechobee Christian Church
3055 S.E. 18th Terr. • 863-467-7858
Minister: Jonathan Thomas
okeechobeechristianchurch.com

Okeechobee Church of Christ
1401 S. Parrott Ave. • 863-763-4477
Minister: Mike Hanlon
facebook.com/okeechobeecoc
okeecofof@gmail.com

Okeechobee Church of the Nazarene
425 S.W. 28th St. (Wolff Rd.)
Phone: 863-763-3519
Pastor: Joshua Petty
biglakenazarene.com
facebook.com/OkeeNaz
tech@biglakenazarene.com

Okeechobee Church of the Trinity
Interdenominational
2939 S.W. Third Terrace
Phone: 863-484-8055
Pastor: Reverend Kathy Everett

Okeechobee Missionary Baptist Church
4212 U.S. 441 N.
Phone: 863-763-3681
Pastor: Donny Raney
pastorraney@gmail.com

Okeechobee Presbyterian Church
312 N. Parrott Ave. • 863-824-0013
Pastor: Loy Mersheimer
okeechobepresby.com/wp_blogsite
office@okeepresby.com

Okeechobee Seventh Day Adventist Church
412 N.W. 6th St.
Phone: 863-763-0655
School: 863-763-0763
Pastor: Rafael Fernandez

Peace Lutheran Church
750 N.W. 23rd Lane
Phone: 863-763-5042
Pastor: John C. Hirst
plcokee.com
pastorjohn@plcokee.com

Pentecostals of Okeechobee
405 S.W. 10th Ave.
Phone: 863-634-4567
Pastor: Raymond Warren
okeepentecostals.com
penteofokee@yahoo.com

Sacred Heart Catholic Church



Point of Light Fellowship Church
15399 East S.R. 78, Lakeport,
Okeechobee mailing, 34974
Phone: 863-946-0228
Pastor: Eddie and Teresa Woodham
teresawoodham@yahoo.com

Resurrection Life Church
1803 S.W. Third Avenue
Pastor(s): David and
Deborah San Martin

Sacred Heart Catholic Church
901 S.W. Sixth St.
Phone: 863-763-3727
Pastor: Father Yves Francois
sacredheart901@outlook.com

Seventh Day Christian Church
912 N.W. Park St.
Phone: 863-763-2285
Pastor: Doyle McDuffie

St. Stephens AME Church
1050 N.E. 16th Ave.
Phone: 863-484-8449
Pastor: Rev. Jack Washington
Pastor's cell: 863-214-6568
facebook.com/NewStStephenAME/
newststephenamechurch@gmail.com

**St. Teresa of the Child Jesus
Catholic Church**
1027 Chobee Loop, BHR on SR78
Phone: 863-946-0696
Pastor: Father Marcial I. Garcia
office@stjosephtheworkerfl.org

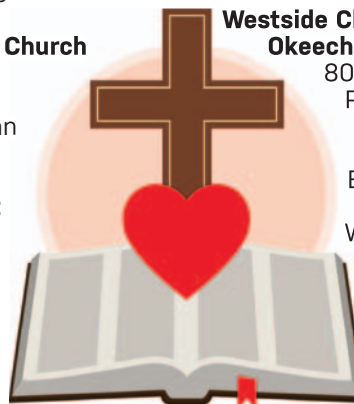
The Gathering
1735 S.W. 24th Avenue
Pastors: Mike & Theresa Brown
Phone: 863-357-4418
TheGatheringOkeechobee
@gmail.com
thegathering1.org
thegatheringchurch.us

Treasure Island Baptist Church
4209 U.S. 441 S.E.
Phone: 561-541-7087
Pastor: Douglas T. Ryan
treasureislandbaptist-
church.com
**Trinity Free Will Baptist
Church**
1840 N.E. 39th Blvd.
(Cemetery Rd.)
Phone: 863-763-4962
Pastor: Thomas Dees

**Trinity Temple Seventh-Day Adventist
Church**
1208 Avenue D, Belle Glade FL
Phone: 561-708-8939
Pastor: Dwight A. Gayle

Victory Baptist Church
Independent, King James Bible
500 S.W. Ninth St.
Phone: 863-763-0669;
863-697-6598
Pastor: Dr. Johnny Jarriel
facebook.com/victorybaptistokee
pastorjybc@gmail.com

**Westside Christian Church of
Okeechobee**
8082 SR 70 West
Phone: 863-467-2278 or
740-361-2722
Minister: Richard
Barker
facebook.com/
Westside-
Christian-Church-of-
Okeechobee-
111813058882730
willarddelaney@
peoplepc.com



Tonya Tyson,

Lic. Real Estate Broker

863.634.0571

lakeridgerealty@gmail.com
lakeridgerealty.com



549 SW 86th Ave.
Okeechobee, FL 34974



491 SW 86th Ave.
Okeechobee, FL 34974



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City of Okeechobee

Council Members and Employees



**MARCOS
MONTES DE OCA**
City Administrator
863.763.3372 ext. 9812
mmontesdeoca
@cityofokeechobee.com



**LANE
EARNEST-GAMIOTEA**
City Clerk
Serving her fifth consecutive term as
City Clerk, 2019-2021
863.763.3372
lgamiotea@cityofokeechobee.com



**DOWLING R.
WATFORD, JR**
Mayor of Okeechobee
Served on city council 1981-1984; has
been re-elected since 1987
Serving second term as mayor:
2019-2021
Serving 10th city council term:
2019-2023
dwatford@cityofokeechobee.com

City Council Members



WES ABNEY
Appointed to finish a term: 2018-2021
wabney@cityofokeechobee.com



MONICA M. CLARK
Serving 1st city council term: 2017-2021
mclark@cityofokeechobee.com



BOB JARRIEL
Serving 1st city council term: 2019-2023
bjarriel@cityofokeechobee.com



BOBBY KEEFE
Serving 1st city council term: 2019-2023
bkeefe@cityofokeechobee.com



Okeechobee County

Board of County Commissioners



DAVID HAZELLIEFF

District 1

1st Vice Chairman

Elected 2016 • Up for re-election 2020

Previously served 1996-2004

863-610-1553

dhazellief@co.okeechobee.fl.us



BRYANT CULPEPPER

District 2

Elected 2010, re-elected 2014, 2018

Up for re-election 2022

863-801-4097

bculpepper@co.okeechobee.fl.us



BRADLEY G. GOODBREAD

District 3

Elected 2016

Up for re-election 2020

863-634-2121

bgoodbread@co.okeechobee.fl.us



TERRY W. BURROUGHS

District 4

Commission Chairman

Elected 2014, 2018 • Up for re-election 2022

863-532-6036

tburroughs@co.okeechobee.fl.us



KELLY OWENS

District 5

2nd Vice Chairman

Elected 2016 • Up for re-election 2020

863-532-9006

kowens@co.okeechobee.fl.us



ROBBIE CHARTIER

County Administrator

Appointed 2011

863-763-6441

rchartier@co.okeechobee.fl.us



LOUIS JOHNSON

Deputy Administrator

Appointed 2019

863-763-6441



Okeechobee County

Constitutional Officers



SHARON ROBERTSON
Clerk of the Circuit Court

The Clerk of the Circuit Court, established by the Constitution of 1838, is the public trustee for the County. The Clerk provides the checks and balances in county government by acting in their capacity as Clerk to the Board, Clerk to the Court, Keeper of the Public Records, Comptroller and Internal Auditor of county funds.

Upon the retirement of Gloria Ford, on July 1, 1995, Sharon Robertson was appointed by the governor to fulfill Ms. Ford's unexpired term. She was first elected to the position in 1996. She will be up for re-election in 2020.

863-763-2131
312 N.W. Third St.
clerk.co@okeechobee.fl.us



NOEL STEPHEN
County Sheriff

The Sheriff of Okeechobee County has his duties and regulations established through Florida Statutes, just as other constitutional officers. At the present time, Noel Stephen is the Sheriff and Chief Law Enforcement Officer of Okeechobee County, and is the Chief Corrections Officer of the county jail. The sheriff supervises over 200 full time employees, over 100 part time/volunteers and manages a current budget of over 20 million dollars.

Sheriff Stephen started in the Okeechobee County Jail as a Corrections Deputy in 1987 and was elected as sheriff in 2016.

He is up for re-election in 2020.

863-763-3134
504 N.W. Fourth St.
sheriff.co.okeechobee.fl.us



MICKEY BANDI
Property Appraiser

The Okeechobee County Property Appraiser is the Constitutional officer charged with making the annual determination of the just or fair market value of all property within the county for taxing purposes, and maintaining certain records connected therewith. These records include a comprehensive GIS (Geographic Information System). This office accepts and reviews all applications, granting those that qualify for exemptions and classifications available to Florida property owners. Mickey Bandi was elected in 2016.

He is up for re-election in 2020.

863-763-4422
307 N.W. Fifth Ave., Suite A
okeechobeepta.com



DIANE HAGAN
Supervisor of Elections

The supervisor of elections will administer all federal, state and county elections in Okeechobee County.

As a gatekeeper of the democratic process, and an elected Constitutional Officer, the Supervisor of Elections will uphold the

election laws of the State of Florida and the Constitution of the United States. The mission of the supervisor of elections is to enhance public confidence; encourage citizen participation; and increase voter awareness and education for citizens of all ages.

Diane Hagan was first elected in 2012. She has announced that she will not seek re-election in 2020.

863-763-4014 • 304 N.W. Second St., Room 144
voteokeechobee.com • Diane@voteokeechobee.com



CELESTE WATFORD
Tax Collector

The Tax Collector serves as an agent for various state and local government agencies and taxing authorities for collection of revenue, and is also responsible for distributing this revenue to these agencies.

Although most of the revenue collected are taxes, the Tax Collector's office isn't funded with tax dollars but with fees collected for services provided. These fees are established by the Florida Legislature and outlined in the Florida Statutes. The amount of work done in the Tax Collector's office creates fee revenues in excess of the Tax Collector's budget. All excess fees are returned to the local government agencies at the end of each fiscal year. Celeste Watford was first elected in 2000. She will be up for re-election in 2020.

863-763-3421 • 307 N.W. Fifth Ave., Suite B
okeechobeeountytaxcollector.com



Okeechobee County

School Board Members



JOE ARNOLD

District 1

Elected 2002,
Re-elected 2006, 2010, 2014, 2018
Term expires: November 2022
863-610-1639



MALISSA MORGAN

District 2

Elected 2012,
Re-elected 2016
Term expires: November 2020
863-634-5852



MELISA JAHNER

District 3

School Board Vice Chairwoman
Elected: 2018
Term expires: November 2022
863-634-8844



AMANDA RIEDEL

District 4

School Board Chairman
Elected: 2016
Term expires: November 2020
863-261-6764



JILL HOLCOMB

District 5

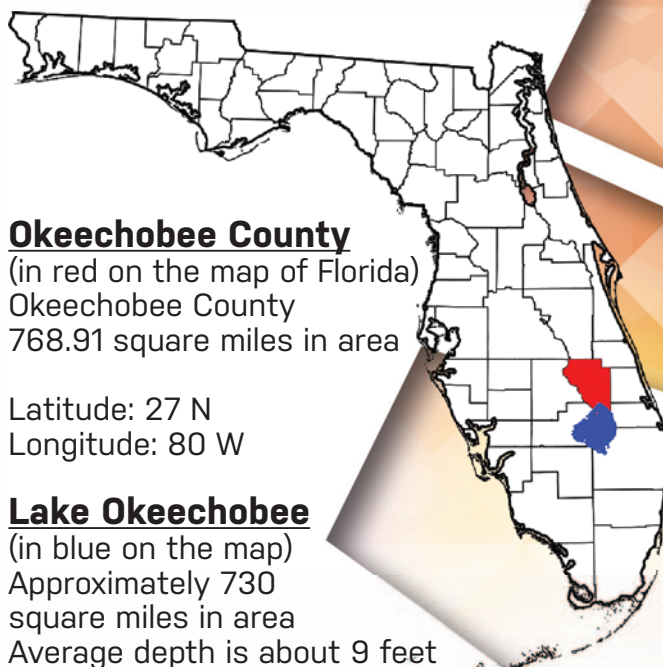
Elected: 2014
Re-elected 2018
Term expires: November 2022
863-484-0908



**KEN
KENWORTHY**
Superintendent of Schools

863.462.5000





Important Numbers

IN AN EMERGENCY, CALL 9-1-1

Animal Control.....	863-357-3225
City Code Enforcement office....	863-357-1971
City Fire Department, non-emergency	
.....	863-763-9796
City Police, non-emergency	
.....	863-763-5521
County Code Enforcement office	
.....	863-763-5548
County Fire/Rescue, non-emergency	
.....	863-763-5544
Emergency Operations Center....	863-763-3212
Glades Electric Cooperative.....	863-946-6200
FDACS Consumer Help Line	
.....	1-800-HELP-FLA (1-800-435-7352)
Florida Power and Light.....	1-800-226-3545
FPL power outages.....	1-800-468-8243
Lake Okeechobee News.....	862-763-3134
Okeechobee Utility Authority....	863-763-9460
Poison Control Center.....	904-244-4465
Raulerson Hospital.....	863-763-2151
Red Cross.....	863-763-2488
Sheriff's Office, non-emergency..	863-763-3117
School Board Office.....	863-462-5000

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*Vicki S. Anderson,
Licensed Real Estate Broker
President,
Okeechobee Board of Realtors*



Vicki Anderson 863.634.4106

863.634.4107 Eric Anderson

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Shelly Doyle
Personal Assistant
863.801.8463
shellydoyle@ymail.com

Vicki S. Anderson
Licensed Real Estate Broker
863.634.4106 | vic_anderson@earthlink.net

Eric W. Anderson
Licensed Real Estate Broker
863.634.4107

Shelly D. Doyle
Licensed Real Estate Agent
863.801.8463 | shellydoyle@ymail.com

30034 E. SR 78, Okeechobee, FL 34974

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863-763-3154

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863-763-2121
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 Chevrolet Autom
 Madrid, Alabama



OIL COMPANY

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 Oke
Established 1924
863-763-0666

"password" is Chevrolet!

OUTDOORS

Established 1950
863-763-6434

COLLISION CENTER
Established 1933
863-824-3553



Established 2011
863-763-6434

Realty

Established 1971
863-763-1155

FLEET
 & COMMERCIAL

Established 2017
863-824-3518

Experience
 PRODUCTIONS

Established 2016
863-824-3636

*The Gilbert name is consistent with value and community service.
 Our family roots are here in Okeechobee, and we take pride in
 offering services the community needs just as we have since 1924.
 We will continue to be here as a neighbor and friend
 for generations to come.*

*Visit one of our friendly Gilbert locations today and
 see why people say, "Gilbert Has It."*

Proudly Serving the Lake Okeechobee Area Since 1924