

2024 Community Guide

OKEECHOBEE

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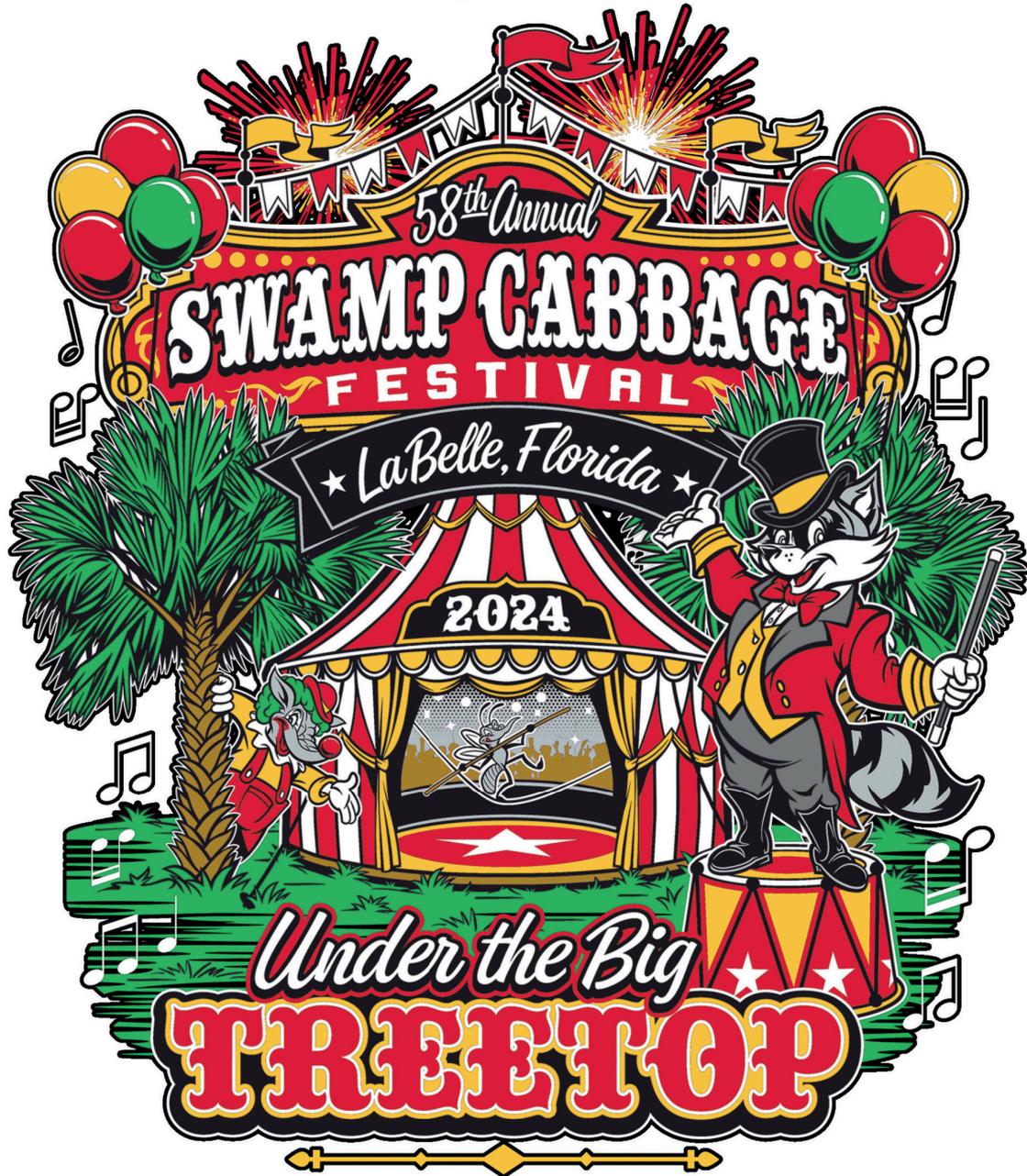
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Okeechobee Community Guide *Contents*

- 06 Introduction**
Okeechobee County has a lot to offer
- 08 Festivals**
celebrate local community
- 12 History**
of Okeechobee 1949–1958
- 13 2024 is an**
election year
- 14 Welcome**
from Mayor Dowling Watford
- 16 City and County Police**
Police Chief and Sheriff say a few words
- 18 Welcome**
from County Commission Chairman
David Hazellief
- 20 Okeechobee Main Street**
enriches
- 20 Chamber of Commerce**
strives to improve local economy
- 22 Okeechobee County Schools**
put students first
- 24 Indian River State College**
Low-cost, high-quality education
- 26 County Map**
Government and Public Buildings
- 28 Catch some big fish**
on the big lake
- 32 Youth Sports**
and athletics in Okeechobee
- 36 Recreation**
fun opportunities in Okeechobee
- 40 Shooting Sports**
Okeechobee's premier options
- 46 Bike Riding and Hiking**
Lake O area's greatest hits
- 50 Clubs and Organizations**
There's something for everyone
- 54 Dining Guide**
Okeechobee's unique restaurants
- 58 Raulerson Hospital**
takes care of community
- 60 Health Services**
Department of Health, Pregnancy
Center, Open Hand
- 62 Okeechobee County
Fire Rescue**
keeps community safe
- 62 Important Numbers**
In Case of Emergency
- 64 Cattle Country**
Okeechobee County has lots of 'em
- 67 View art and history**
in murals
- 68 Things to Do**
Have fun in the Lake O area!
- 72 Okeechobee Census**
Data from the most recent census
- 74 Church Directory**
A list for the spiritual
- 78 Okeechobee City Council**
Members and Administrator
- 79 County Commissioners**
and Administrator
- 80 Constitutional Officers**
Sheriff, Tax Collector and more
- 81 School Board**
Members
- 82 Directory**
of Advertisers

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2024 Community Guide **OKEECHOBEE**

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Okeechobee County has a lot to offer

To the fisherman, Okeechobee County is the home of the “Big O” – 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.

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 want to start a business, it’s a place welcoming to those who want to grow with the community.

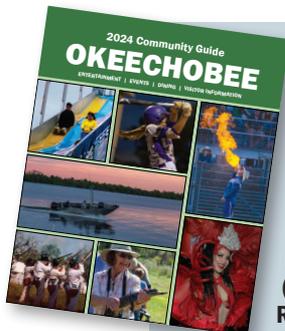
For those who love the outdoors, Okeechobee County has plenty to see and do: Boating on Lake Okeechobee or the Kissimmee River, hiking the Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail, enjoying the beauty all around in Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park, horseback riding and more. Shooting enthusiasts can choose from world-class outdoor

shooting facilities. The area also has plenty of hunting opportunities.

To the rancher, Okeechobee is 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 133,975 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.

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

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



On the cover ...

Photos on the cover of this edition of the Okeechobee Community Guide include:

(Top left) Children enjoy the big slide at the Okeechobee County Fair. [Photo by Richard Marion]

(Top center) Kamryn Hackett up at bat for Okeechobee High School softball. [Photo by Richard Marion]

(Top right) A rodeo clown breathes fire at the Pete Clemons Memorial Rodeo. [Photo by Richard Marion]

(Middle left) Fishing boat at sunset near C. Scott Driver Boat Ramps. [Photo by Richard Marion]

(Bottom left) Reenactors at the Battle of Okeechobee. [Photo by Richard Marion]

(Bottom center) Alligator demonstration at Okeechobee Battlefield State Park. [Photo by Richard Marion]

(Bottom right) A showgirl helps celebrate the addition of craps and roulette at the Brighton Seminole Reservation Casino. [Photo by Katrina Elsen]

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FESTIVALS

Festivals celebrate local community

Okeechobee County festivals celebrate the community’s pioneer heritage and 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. 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.



BATTLE OF OKEECHOBEE

The Battle of Okeechobee reenactment is held the last weekend in February each year at the Okeechobee Battlefield State Park, 3500 SE 38th Ave. (off U.S. 441 S.E.) in Okeechobee County. The 2024 event is planned for Feb. 24-25. Gates open at 10 a.m. and the battle re-enactment starts at 2 p.m. each day. Entry fee is \$10 per car. The Battle of Okeechobee, fought on Christmas Day 1837, involved more than 1,000 U.S. military and volunteer soldiers fighting against several hundred Seminole and Miccosukee warriors along the northern edge of Lake Okeechobee. The battle is considered a turning point in the war with full-scale attacks ceasing and the number of smaller skirmishes diminishing after the event.

OKEECHOBEE MUSIC

FESTIVAL

The Okeechobee Music Festival, held in March at Sunshine Grove in northeastern Okeechobee County, is a camping festival that attracts as many as 40,000 fans. The festival will not be held in 2024, but plans to return in 2025. For ticket information, go online to okeechobeefest.com.

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 2024 Speckled Perch Festival, sponsored by Okeechobee Main Street, will be held in Flagler Park in downtown Okeechobee on March 9 and 10. The festival starts around 10 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 info, go online to okeechobeemainstreet.org.



OKEECHOBEE COUNTY FAIR

The Okeechobee Fair will take place March 12 - 17, 2024 at the Okeechobee County Fairgrounds, ■ See **Festivals** on page 10

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Viren Desai (GM)

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Festivals

▪ From page 8

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Experience six days of fun including a full carnival midway, delicious fair food, and exciting entertainment. The competitive events tent will showcase local talent with displays of artwork, photography, cooking, horticulture, Lego building, Duct Tape creations, educational displays and more.

Gate admission is \$5. Children under age 5 will be admitted free. Opening day, March 12, is \$2 Tuesday. Thursday is Moms Free Day. Moms will be admitted free with paid child admission.

Fair entertainment – free with gate admission – will feature:

- Gator Boys Road Show: Tails, Scales and Teeth,
- Magic of Lance Gilford and Company,
- Lew-E's Comedy Circus:
- Rosarie's Royal Racers (racing pigs!),
- Max Power & Nitro,
- Pirate Man Dan,
- Foam Zone, and,
- Turn Around Livestock & Exotics Petting Zoo.

Modern Midways will return with all new rides and attractions for the Okeechobee County Fair. Ride the all new Hyper Loop or take a relaxing spin on the Century Wheel! Unlimited ride wristbands will be available for \$25 Tuesday-Sunday from open to close.

On Saturday, the Demolition Derby will take place in the grandstand for an additional \$10.

Advance tickets for the fair and for the midway rides are available at okeechobeeountyfair.com.

INDEPENDENCE DAY CELEBRATION

Celebrate our country's independence with your friends and neighbors at the annual Independence Day Celebration at the Okeechobee Agri-Civic. For more information, as it becomes available, see southcentralfloridalife.com.



LABOR DAY FESTIVAL

Labor Day Weekend, Aug. 31 - Sept. 2, 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.

FESTIVAL OF TREES

Annual Festival of Trees is usually held in November. This annual event features a silent auction of donated Christmas trees and holiday décor, with a portion of the proceeds donated to Hospice of Okeechobee, Inc. For additional information, go to okeechobeemainstreet.org.

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 goes 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.

SOUR ORANGE FESTIVAL

The Lakeport Sour Orange Festival is held each year in January 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 chance to sample sour orange pie. For information closer to the date, see Lake Okeechobee News or go online to southcentralfloridalife.com.

TOP OF THE LAKE ART FESTIVAL

The Top of the Lake Art Festival is presented by Okeechobee Main Street and is usually held in February. (The event skipped 2024 but will be back in 2025.) For two days visitors get to see and experience the beautiful art that local artists have submitted. The Top of the Lake Art Fest is the biggest celebration of the arts in Okeechobee and provides opportunity for people of all ages, cultures and backgrounds to discover and embrace the arts! For more information on the Top of the Lake Art Festival, please visit okeechobeearts.org.

NOTE: Some events may be changed or postponed. For updates, check the southcentralfloridalife.com website or the Lake Okeechobee News.

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1949-1959 was a busy time in Okeechobee County



In 1951, the weather news was “A freeze encases cattle in fields and hundreds of them die.” [Photo courtesy Magi Cable/Okeechobee Historical Society]

By Magi Cable

OKEECHOBEE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

When preparing to write this article about the history of Okeechobee between 1949 and 1959, it was interesting to see how many “new” things still have a great impact on our community and the state.

In the history article in the 2023 Okeechobee Community Guide, it was noted that hurricanes and flooding started a series of events that resulted in the formation of the Central and Southern Flood Control which has evolved into the State’s Water Management Districts. This governmental agency forming was also responsible for a major event during this time. A “Governor’s Day” celebration was held in Okeechobee on April 15-16, 1950. The crowd at the celebration was so large that it reportedly rivaled only the vast turnout present in 1924 for the opening of the Conner’s Highway. Ammon McClellan was chairman of the event and was assisted by R. B. Meserve, Mayor



Mrs. Fuller Warren, the govern’s wife, unveils a plaque in 1947. [Photo courtesy Magi Cable/Okeechobee Historical Society]

Hiram H. Raulerson, and S. H. McDougald. A large parade, headed by J. O. Pearce, Sr., marched through the downtown section. Gov. Warren gave a speech and a fish fry and rodeo were held. Mrs. Fuller Warren, the governor’s wife, unveiled a plaque which said: The original meeting of 300 citizens of Central and Southern Florida who authorized the formation of the “Flood Control Committee of Florida” was held on this spot Oct. 6, 1947.

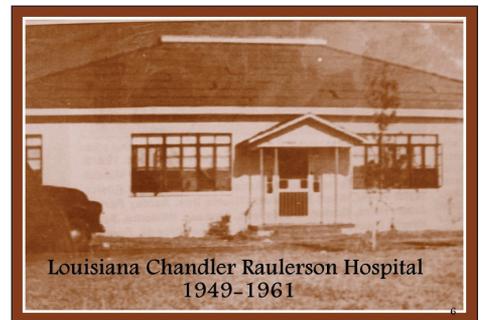
Weather occupied a large part of the news headlines starting with this event in August 1949, “Worst Storm in Okeechobee History” when a hurricane that had winds of 165 miles per hour struck Okeechobee. It was deemed worse than the 1928 storm. In this storm the cover blew off the City Water Tank, 18 homes were destroyed, 250 homes damaged and more than 600 families affected. It was noted that the dike stood firm. In 1951, the weather news was “A freeze encases cattle in fields and hundreds of them die.” This event made it to Life magazine.

World events would also affect our community. Sgt. James C Bass would receive a Silver Star for his

heroic action in the Korean War while Bruce Smith died in action and Earl Hansel became a POW and died in captivity. Recently, the Okeechobee Board of County Commissioners honored Earl Hansel by naming a street after him.



The Ford F-6 fire truck arrived on March 3, 1950. [Photo courtesy Magi Cable/Okeechobee Historical Society]



Louisiana Chandler Raulerson Hospital
1949-1961

The Louisiana Raulerson Hospital opened in 1949, our first hospital that was named for our first white female settler of Okeechobee. Dr. Bruce Mills and Nurse B.J. Davis operated it in 1956. This served as the hospital until 1961 when Okeechobee General Hospital opened on 5th Avenue. When the county opened the “new” hospital, the old building became the Dunklin Rest Home.

The City of Okeechobee began its volunteer fire department with a purchase ■ See **History** on page 13

History

▪ From page 12 of a fire truck and installation of a siren at City Hall. The Ford F-6 fire truck arrived on March 3, 1950 and went on its first call March 14.

Things were also happening within the school system. In 1951, Seminole Tribe students from Brighton began attending Okeechobee schools, the high school football team changed from being the Catfish to the Brahmans and went on to win the Tamiami Conference Championship in 1953. The Basinger School closed and students were bussed into town and the Beta Club was formed at OHS. In 1958, the Okeechobee Primary School (now Central Elementary) first opened its doors and Coleman Josh became the second Seminole Tribe student to graduate high school in Florida.



Members of the Seminole Tribe attend a 1949 rodeo. [Photo courtesy Magi Cable/Okeechobee Historical Society]

Economically some events occurred that have remained a force in our community with the four-laning of Parrott Avenue beginning, the opening of Flying G Dairy in 1957, the first large scale producing dairy in Okeechobee which was soon followed by MacArthur Dairy relocating from Hollywood, Florida in 1959.

Some other interesting news that happened during this decade was the opening of Gladys Restaurant, the Florida School for Boys, the Public Library and Community pool.

Finally, another community



Earl Hansel became a POW and died in captivity. Recently, the Okeechobee Board of County Commissioners honored Earl Hansel by naming a street after him. [Photo courtesy Magi Cable/Okeechobee Historical Society]



The community pool. [Photo courtesy Magi Cable/Okeechobee Historical Society]

event that is very near and dear to many of our citizens, was the first Labor Day Rodeo being held on the historic rodeo grounds on N 441 in September of 1949 — A tradition that continues some 75 years later.

ELECTION

2024 is an election year

By Melissa Arnold
OKEECHOBEE COUNTY
SUPERVISOR OF ELECTIONS

This year we have elections in March, August, and November!

The first election, the Presidential Preference Primary, is on March 19th and will only include Republican voters.

The Democratic Party of Florida submitted only one name, President Joseph Biden and therefore there will be no ballot for

Democrat voters in the Presidential Preference Election.

The next election, the Primary Election, is on Aug. 20 and all parties will be voting. Please remember that oftentimes local races are determined in the Primary Election so please make sure you mark your calendars and plan to vote on Election Day or during Early Vote.

The General Election on Nov. 5 allows for final

voting for the United States President, Senators, and House of Representatives as well as other statewide and county races.

Due to legislative changes, you **MUST** request a new Vote-By-Mail (VBM) ballot for every election cycle to have a ballot mailed to you. To request a VBM Ballot please call our office at 863-763-4014, go to our website@VOTEOKEECHOBEE.

GOV, or stop by the office located in the Historic Court House.

Additionally, please make sure your current address and signature are on file so you can be processed quickly on Election Day.

We look forward to accurate, secure elections in 2024 and, as a reminder, are always looking for poll workers to help make that happen! Blessings for a spectacular year!

Welcome



Mayor Dowling Watford: “Welcome to Okeechobee!”

The City Council and staff hope you enjoy your time in our City whether you are here for a few weeks, months, or a lifetime. Okeechobee is a very unique town with a family atmosphere and rural lifestyle. The cattle industry has been our main industry for over one hundred years. The wonderful cattle drive sculpture project in Flagler Park celebrates this heritage, as well as several rodeos each year. In addition to wonderful restaurants and coffee shops, small boutiques offer shopping opportunities in our downtown area.

Okeechobee MainStreet sponsors many events in Flagler Park including: Labor Day Festival; Christmas Festival; and Speckled Perch Festival. Each of the events also includes a parade, with the Christmas parade a lighted parade at night. Our Chamber of Commerce is very active, and supports the businesses of our community. Their office is located at the main intersection of Hwy 441 and Hwy 70, and they can provide you with a wealth of information on the area. With the great fishing on Lake Okeechobee, the Tourist Development Corporation facilitates several major fishing tournaments as well as other events. The Okeechobee Music Festival attracts thousands of people each year with major musical artists. Other popular events include the Battle of Okeechobee reenactment the last weekend in February, and many horse shows and other events at the Ag Center. The Okeechobee Historical Society has a local history museum, the 1909 schoolhouse, and the original log cabin built by the Peter Raulerson family, the first settlers in Okeechobee. Just a few miles away the Seminole Tribe Brighton Reservation has a beautiful casino and several important cultural sites.

So welcome to our wonderful City and enjoy the “real Florida!”





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Sheriff's deputies patrol 773 square miles



Noel Stephen

Sheriff Noel E. Stephen is responsible for law enforcement on the county level. The 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. The 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 has 219 employees as well as dozens of volunteer personnel who serve on our auxiliary, search and rescue, and Citizens on

Patrol. Sheriff Stephen's command staff consists of one Chief Deputy, three captains, and eight lieutenants. Specialized teams include our K-9, Crisis Negotiations, SWAT, Dive, Motorcycle unit, Drone unit, Honor guard and Cell extraction teams.

The Sheriff's office also performs other functions such as animal control and enforcement, all traffic investigations and enforcement, homicide investigations, narcotics investigations, transportation of prisoners, school resource Deputies, civil process, and courthouse security to name a few.

The Sheriff's Office Law Enforcement budget for the fiscal year 2023-2024 is \$16,794,869 which includes:

- \$1.2M contract with the Okeechobee County

School Board

- 621,210 contract to manage Animal Control services for the Okeechobee Board of County Commissioners (BOCC).

Sheriff Stephen has also been asked by the Okeechobee BOCC to manage:

- The County jail which has a budget of \$7,865,445 with an average daily jail population of 291 inmates

- Okeechobee County Courthouse security operations with a budget of \$1,443,403.

All total, Sheriff Stephen is fiscally responsible for over \$26.1M of Okeechobee County Taxpayer dollars.

The deputies are responsible for patrolling over 773 square miles in Okeechobee County with

an average population, as of 2021, of 43,196 residents. In the fiscal year, 2022-2023 we answered 30,936 calls for service through our agency. 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 and increase officer efficiency while keeping costs at a minimum. A few examples are Body-Worn Cameras, P25 Radios, and cutting edge technology utilized for investigations which have been purchased with grants and criminal justice fees.

In January 2021, Sheriff Stephen was sworn in for his second term as Okeechobee County Sheriff.

A message from the Okeechobee City Police Chief



Donald Hagan

As we start the new year, I am excited to share some ways we are improving your Okeechobee City Police Department.

We continue to prioritize transparency and safety in our community, and I am delighted to announce that our police officers will soon be equipped with body-worn cameras. These cameras will help us ensure accountability and improve

the trust between our officers and the community. We are committed to making Okeechobee City a safer place for all its residents, and these cameras will play a critical role in achieving that goal.

I am also pleased to share that former Okeechobee City Fire Department Lieutenant Adam Crumb will join our police force soon. After 20+ years of service with our Fire Department, Adams is now in the police academy and is ready to serve our community in a new capacity. We are

thrilled to hire a local hero and look forward to seeing all the great work he will do to help keep our community safe.

Be sure to tune into our monthly radio show on WOKC on the first Thursday of every month, where we discuss various topics related to community safety and policing. This is an excellent opportunity to see what's happening in law enforcement, in your community.

Our quarterly newsletter, "Okeechobee City Police Post," will be coming out soon, and we

encourage you to read it to stay informed about what's happening in our community. We will share updates on community outreach programs, crime prevention tips, and other important news. You can pick up a copy at downtown businesses, City Hall, or the Police Station.

As always, we are committed to serving and protecting our great city. We appreciate your support and look forward to continuing to work with you to keep Okeechobee City a safe and vibrant place to live.

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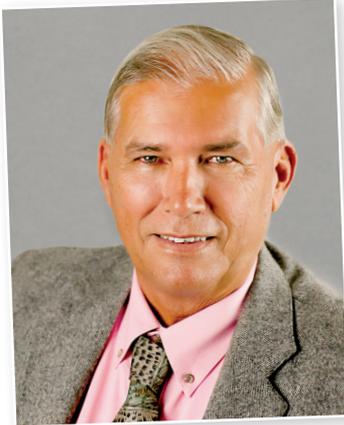
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County Commission Chairman David Hazellief: “Okeechobee County continues to make improvements”

**By David Hazellief,
Chairman**

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COMMISSIONERS

As Chairman of the Okeechobee County Board of County Commissioners and on behalf of our Board, we want to say “Thank You” to our citizens, businesses, and other community partners, for your enthusiastic support of our county during this past year.

It has been another exciting and busy year for our county! Okeechobee County was successful in receiving several grants awarded this past year totaling \$49,980,201. A few of the grant projects consist of:

- Okeechobee County Vulnerability Assessment;
- Four Seasons and Spot in the Sun Stormwater improvements;
- Berman Road Drainage improvements;
- Hardening of two Fire Station Buildings; Lofton Road and Dark Hammock improvements,
- Douglas Brown Park improvements, and a second FDLE Grant for our

Jail Renovation – Phase 2.

With the leadership of County Administrator Deborah Manzo, Deputy Administrator Richard J. Reade, and our departments, we continue to stand ready to provide exceptional services during a time when demand is high as we continue to experience unique opportunities and challenges that come with navigating future growth. Each year brings new opportunities to our County as we are centrally located within 30–45 minutes to larger community areas.

Our County continues to see a greater demand in the services we offer as citizens are building homes, opening new businesses, developing subdivisions, and more events are booking and coming to our area.

We are thrilled to see our Tourist Development Council making great strides in marketing Okeechobee County. Our TDC Director and Coordinator recently attended the Chicago Trade Show to draw attention to our beautiful lake and tourism

in our area. They continue to host annual fishing tournaments at our Scott Driver facility and partner with the community for event sponsorships.

In other areas, the county is closing in on the completion of the Splash Pad project at the Darrell Enfinger Sports Complex with a tentative completion in March 2024.

FDOT and the County are working together for installation of a traffic signal light at Hwy 441 North and Cemetery Road (NE 39th Blvd). This has been an ongoing process with material demand, and we look forward to completion of this project within the next few months.

Phase 1A Jail Renovation and Expansion project has been completed with the new cell pod/housing pod and the County is now in Phase 1B which will consist of the kitchen and laundry areas. The County completed paving of 12 roadway lane miles. The airport continues with the County resuming its “fixed based operations”

at our local airport in 2021. It has proven to provide reasonable fuel sales/ground services, tie-down leasing, and has enhanced customer service to the aviation community. This milestone was important for our economic growth in our community.

The county continues working with Bass Pro as they move forward with all of the due diligence requirements and permitting.

In closing, I would like to say that our County’s mission is “Okeechobee County will provide responsive government services to its citizens in a well-managed, cost-effective, fiscally sound, policy-driven manner. All services provided shall benefit the health, safety, and welfare of the community.” We continue to strive in adhering to our mission with the community’s support.

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Okeechobee Main Street enriches



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 vibrant destination to visit are critical to Okeechobee's future. Building on downtown's inherent assets - rich architecture, personal service and traditional values and most of all, a sense of place.

Okeechobee Main Street, Inc. is a 501(C) 3 non-profit member-based organization with roots dating back to 1980 when the National Trust for Historic Preservation formed the Main Street program. The Okeechobee Main Street approach rekindles entrepreneurship, downtown cooperation and civic concern. Because it is a locally driven program, all initiatives stem from local issues and concerns. The Okeechobee Main Street program's success is based on a comprehensive strategy of work, tailored to local needs in four distinctive areas, often referred to as the Four-Point Approach.

Okeechobee Main Street has been the driving force behind the Arts & Culture programs in Okeechobee for 18 years. In 2018, OKMS became a Local Arts Agency for Okeechobee County and opened their art and education center in 2021. The Arts & Culture Alliance mission is to connect people to the arts and to each other, working to facilitate and nurture the creation, development, promotion and education of arts and culture in Okeechobee County.

An award-winning organization, Okeechobee Main Street's vision is to help create a successful downtown and enrich our community through celebrating the arts, supporting local businesses, embracing our heritage, preserving our natural environment and promoting quality events which make Okeechobee an inviting hometown destination.

Chamber strives to improve local economy

The Chamber of Commerce of Okeechobee County, Inc., stands as a beacon of collaboration and progress, embodying the spirit of a not-for-profit 501(c)(6) voluntary organization. Comprising dedicated business professionals, the Chamber is driven by a singular purpose — the promotion of civic and economic advancement within the community. At its core, the Chamber acts as a dynamic spokesperson, translating collaborative ideas into impactful actions. The focus is on connecting businesses with the community, fostering an environment where success and prosperity flourish.

A key player in the community's growth, the Chamber is dedicated to fortifying businesses and cultivating a robust economic climate. The Chamber's commitment extends beyond traditional roles, offering an array of classes, business networking programs, and personalized marketing spaces on its website. The educational spectrum spans diverse topics, ranging from marketing strategies and accounting principles, catering to the multifaceted needs of its members. However, the Chamber's purpose transcends information dissemination; it is a driving force behind holistic business community growth.

The Leadership Okeechobee Program exemplifies this commitment, consisting of nine monthly, day-long sessions designed to expose participants to critical local issues, major industries, and personal skill assessments. Through initiatives like this, the Chamber actively contributes to cultivating strong business leaders and diversifying the local business landscape. The Chamber is not merely an informational hub; it is a catalyst for change. Its passionate collaboration with business owners contributes to creating a diverse and robust business community. With strength drawn from the diversity and number of its members, representing businesses of all sizes and professions, the Chamber influences investments and collectively achieves what no single business could accomplish alone. In essence, the Chamber of Commerce of Okeechobee County, Inc., is more than an organization; it is a dynamic force shaping the economic destiny of the community, fostering growth, and empowering businesses to thrive in tandem with community prosperity.

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Okeechobee County Schools put students first



By Ken Kenworthy
OKEECHOBEE COUNTY
SUPERINTENDENT OF
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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 fundrais-

ers, 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 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 for a place to enroll your student, look no further. We currently enroll about 6,000 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.

This next year will be a particularly exciting one for us as we are looking forward to construction of a new Okeechobee High School. The state of the art school will house nearly 1,700 students and be built on the existing campus. Credit for funding goes to our community. We pulled together, wrote grant applications, made countless presentations and lobbied the legislature and because of this work were granted \$66.8 million to begin construction. This further exemplifies why Okeechobee is a great place to live. Without this community-wide effort, the new building would not have been possible. Pulling together to support one another is the hallmark of our community. Our school district is the beneficiary of this engagement and support. Thank you for helping us Put Students First!"

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Discover Indian River State College

Indian River State College provides residents of Okeechobee with low-cost, high-quality educational opportunities and resources that build a pathway to great jobs and higher education. In a typical semester, some 700 Okeechobee residents take advantage of IRSC programs and services at the Dixon Hendry Campus of Indian River State College in Okeechobee—including the IRSC Promise Program.

In 2023 more than 1 in 3 public and public charter high school graduates residing in the IRSC service district enrolled with the College via the IRSC Promise—which offers tuition-free college to eligible high-school graduates. The College's service district includes Indian River, Martin, Okeechobee, and St. Lucie counties. Affirming its commitment to enhanced access to quality higher education, Indian River State College Foundation, Inc. will continue the enormously popular program in 2024. To learn more about the IRSC Promise, visit promise.irsc.edu.

"IRSC has helped thousands of Okeechobee residents continue their education to increase their earning power and reach their full potential," says Campus President Russ Brown. "We invite anyone interested in starting a new chapter for themselves to continue their education by enrolling in programs at our campus."

The 40-acre Dixon Hendry Campus is a hub of activity found at 2229 N.W. Ninth Ave. in Okeechobee. Students can complete the 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.

Offering both day and evening options for class, many Okeechobee residents come to IRSC to gain hands-on skills through job training programs. These include diesel mechanics and welding programs and paramedic/EMT courses. Additionally, the Dixon Hendry Campus now offers a Law Enforcement Corrections Academy Class starting each June. All these programs provide the opportunity to earn skill-based licenses and Associate in Science degrees. Additionally, students interested in early childhood education can earn associate degrees and related certificates, with many local job opportunities.

Nursing is among the most rapidly growing and well-paying careers in our region. 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 healthcare facilities throughout the community.

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.

For those who have not yet earned their high school diploma, GED preparation is available at the campus. Additionally, English as a Second Language instruction is on tap.

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, hosting cookouts and games that provide opportunities to meet college and community representatives.

Business and community groups benefit from the Williamson Center, a state-of-the-art conference center on the cam-

pus available for meetings, workshops, and events.

IRSC recently opened the Perch Café at the Dixon Hendry Campus. Proudly serving Starbucks—the Café offers a comprehensive menu of delectable hot and cold beverages, including coffee, Frappuccino® blended beverages and Refreshers® Monday through Friday from 6:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. The Café features drive-up and walk-up windows, so students and community members can find their morning—or early afternoon—pick-me-up at the Perch Café.

Indian River State College has also announced its intent to establish a dedicated, fully operational data campus in Okeechobee County, positioning the County at the epicenter of the State's data center capacity. The data campus will serve as a learning lab for IRSC students and a stable employment base for its graduates and other residents from Okeechobee and surrounding communities.

IRSC invites you to learn more by visiting www.irsc.edu or calling the Dixon Hendry Campus at 863-824-6000.



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9 Judicial Center
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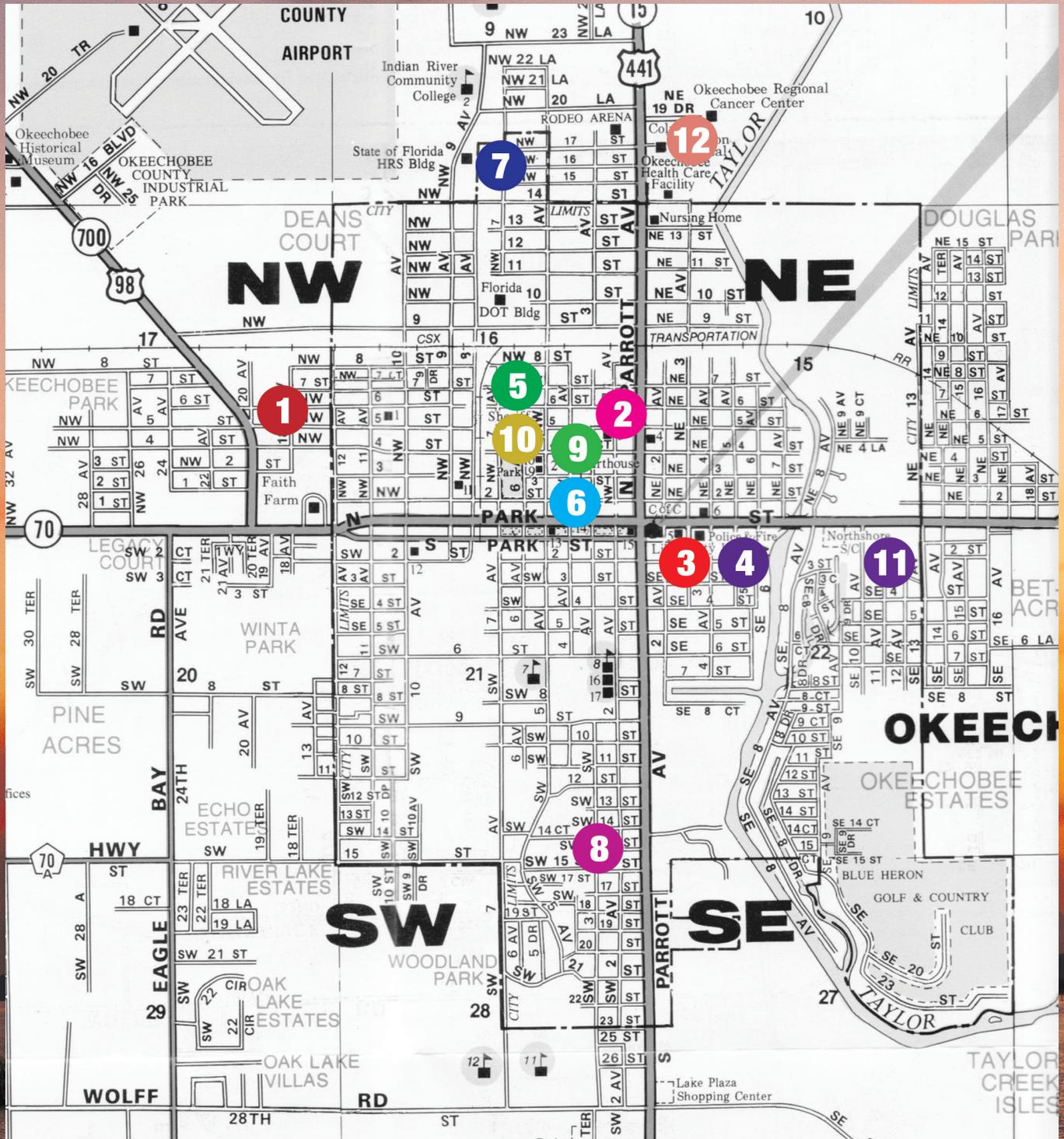


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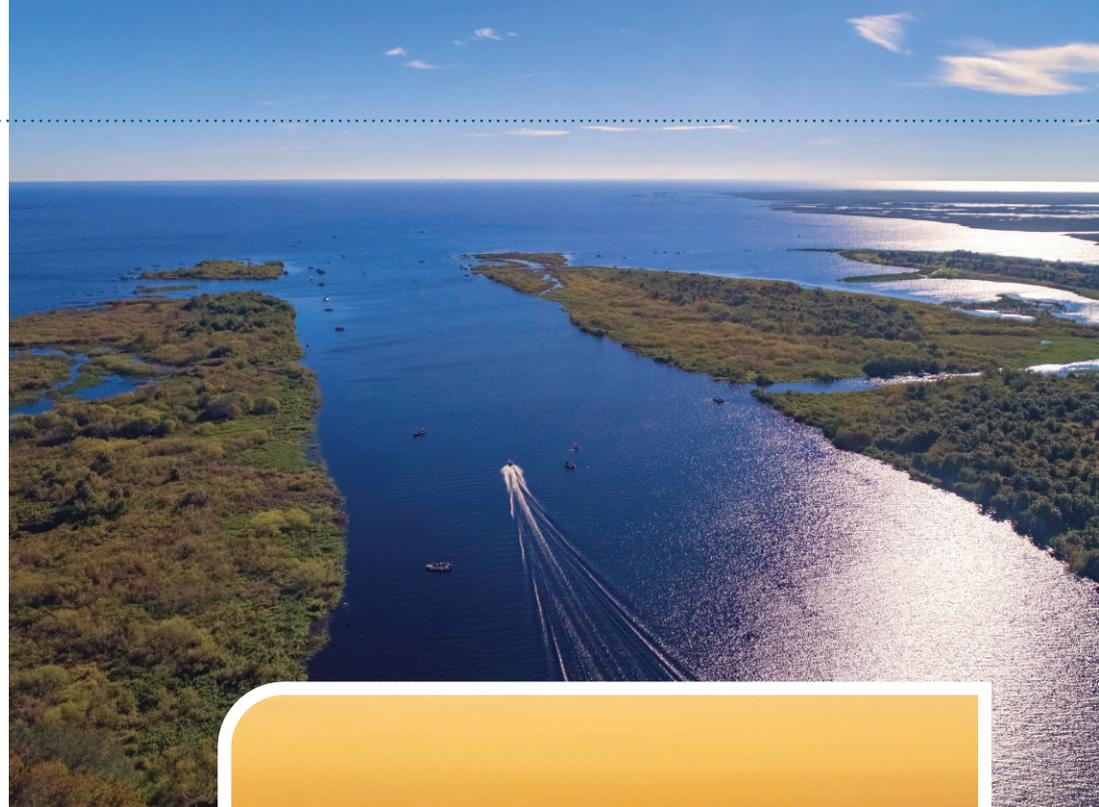
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Map and Legend of Okeechobee County Government and Public Buildings



Background photo of Lake Okeechobee by Richard Marion/Okeechobee Community Guide

Catch some big fish on the big lake



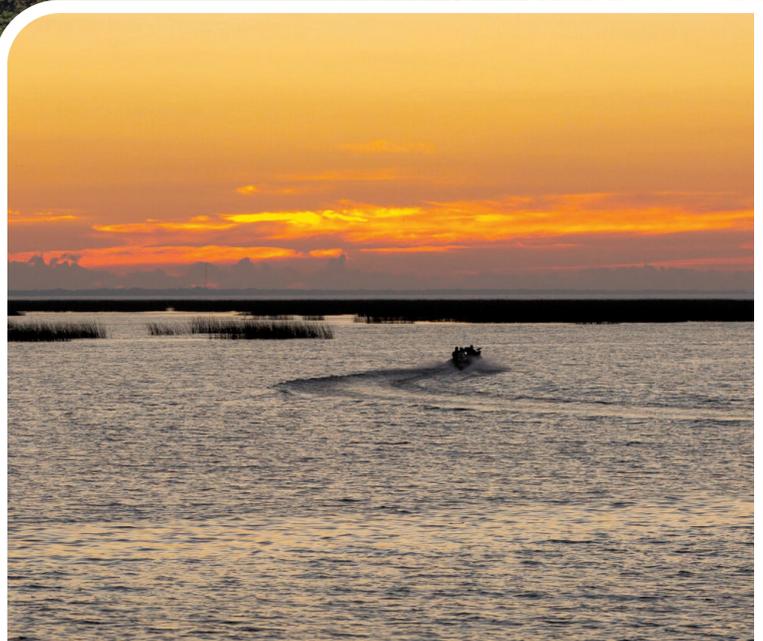
Lake Okeechobee, the second-largest freshwater lake within the continental United States, is a vast shallow lake with a surface area covering 730 square miles. “Okeechobee” comes from the Seminole words meaning “big and water.”

Lake Okeechobee has been a premier fishing destination for decades, and multiple fishing tournaments are held on the lake every year. Major League Fishing hosted its Toyota Series tournament on Lake O in January of 2024, which saw Florida native Jessie Mizell claim the top prize. Mizell won \$44,000 with a three day total of 79 lbs. Mizell said he fished mainly the north part of the lake for the tournament. He said he used prop bait and frog for the most part to catch fish but also mixed things up with a vibrating jig and a worm.

A rainy dry season had the lake

higher than normal to start the year. Lake Okeechobee’s water level reached 16.28 feet in January of 2024. The lake’s ecological envelope – the most beneficial range for the lake’s ecology – ranges from 12 to 12.5 feet at the start of the wet season to 15.5 feet at the start of the dry season.

“The water is extremely high,” says Power-Pole pro Darrell Davis of Dover, Florida, who has three top-10 finishes in FLW tournaments on Lake Okeechobee. “The fish are pretty scattered, and the



high water has definitely opened up quite a few new areas.”

In contrast to the current high level, Lake O went through a dryer period in late 2018 and early 2019.

The lower water levels in the lake affected navigation throughout 2019, but proved to be good for the lake overall. Florida Audubon Society’s Okeechobee science coordinator, Dr. Paul Gray, explained that the lower water level allows sunlight to reach the lake bed and

▪ See **Fishing** on page 30

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Fishing

▪ From page 28

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 the upcoming year.

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

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Youth sports and athletics in Okeechobee

There are plenty of athletic opportunities in Okeechobee, no matter what sport your child is interested in.

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 rec leagues here in Okeechobee. More information can be obtained on the group's official Facebook page at www.facebook.com/chobeevolleyballacademy.

The Okeechobee Bulls Youth Athletic League is part of the National Pop Warner Football Program. They play teams from the surrounding areas during fall. Home games are held at the Okeechobee Sports Complex. Divisions are 6 years and up, 8 years and up, 10 years and up, 12 years and up, and 14 years and up. The Bulls Youth Athletic League can be contacted by email at obyal.pw@gmail.com.

Okeechobee County Parks and Recreation provides leagues for youth soccer and basketball. Youth basketball for ages 6-14 takes place from January through March. Youth soccer for ages 5-13 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) offers boys baseball and T-Ball, as well as, girls fast pitch softball at the Okeechobee County Sports Complex for participants 5-14 years of age. This program begins in March and ends in June. OCRA also offers boys tackle and flag football as well girls cheerleading at the Okeechobee County Sports Complex for participants 5-14 years of age. This program begins in October and runs through December. For more information contact OCRA by email at ocra2022@yahoo.com.

Boxfit Okeechobee offers training and sparring for both boys and girls. In 2019 one of the gym's students, Karina Maldonado, was named the Junior Olympic Regional boxing champ after winning a tournament in South Carolina. More information can be found at their official Facebook page at www.facebook.com/boxfitokeechobee, or by reaching out by email at boxfitokeechobee@gmail.com

Lake O Elite Athletics provides opportunities for youth to participate in football, cheer, and track,

as well as a digital media program. Cheer and football sign-ups end July 1. For more information visit www.lakeosports.com.

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 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, 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.

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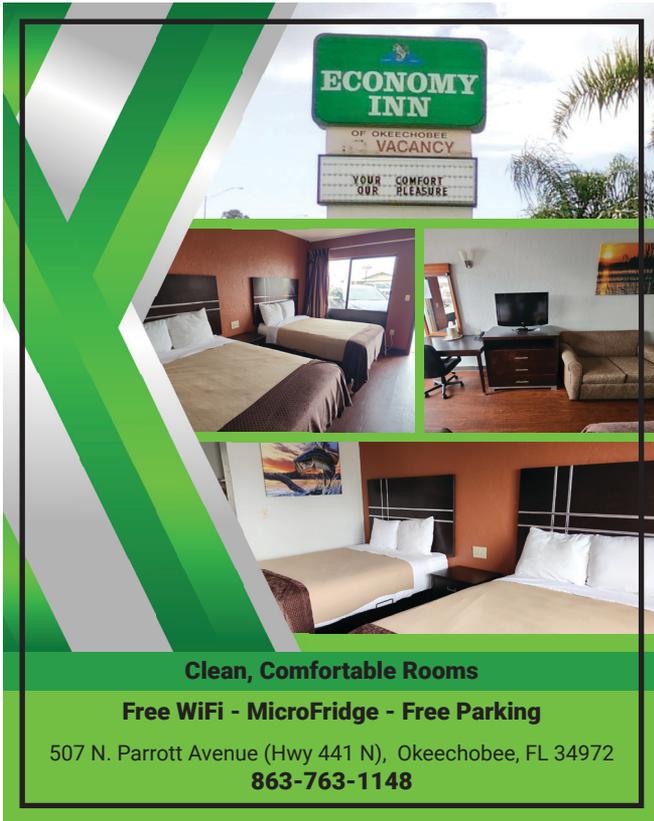
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2024 Election Schedule

Presidential Preference Primary Election

Registration Deadline: February 20, 2024

Early Vote: March 9-16, 2024

8:30am-6:00pm

Election Day: March 19, 2024

Polls open: 7:00am-7:00pm

Republican Ballot Only

Primary Election:

Registration Deadline: July 22, 2024

Early Vote: August 10-17, 2024

8:30am-6:00pm

Election Day: August 20, 2024

Polls Open: 7:00am-7:00pm

General Election:

Registration Deadline: October 7, 2024

Early Vote: October 26 – November 2, 2024

8:30am-6:00pm

Election Day: November 5, 2024

Polls Open: 7:00am-7:00pm

Lots of fun recreation opportunities in Okeechobee

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 rec-

reational 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, eight tennis courts, a picnic pavilion and the Wooden Jungle playground. The county recently started construction on a splash pad at the Sports Complex, which will be completed soon.

♦ Kiwanis 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

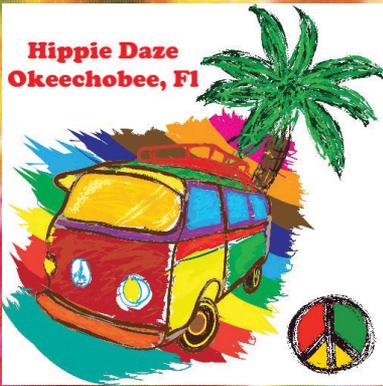
fields at 3001 N.W. 10th Terrace. It includes baseball, softball, football and soccer fields.

♦ 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 Cliff Betts Jr. Lakeside Recreation Area (once called Lock 7) at 200 SR 78 W. includes boat ramps, a fishing pier, parking areas, and

♦ See **Recreation** access to on page **40**



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Recreation

Recreation

• From page 36 the scenic trail.

• Okee-Tantie at 10430 SR 78 W. includes a parking area and boat ramps.

• The Scott Driver Recreation Area at 10101 S.R. 78 W. includes an enclosed area for meetings, parking area and boat ramps.

• 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.

Shooting Sports

The 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. Quail Creek

hosts multiple shooting competitions throughout the year, most recently playing host for the 2024 Jack Links Cup.

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 offers night time shooting events throughout the year and recently added pickleball courts for members.

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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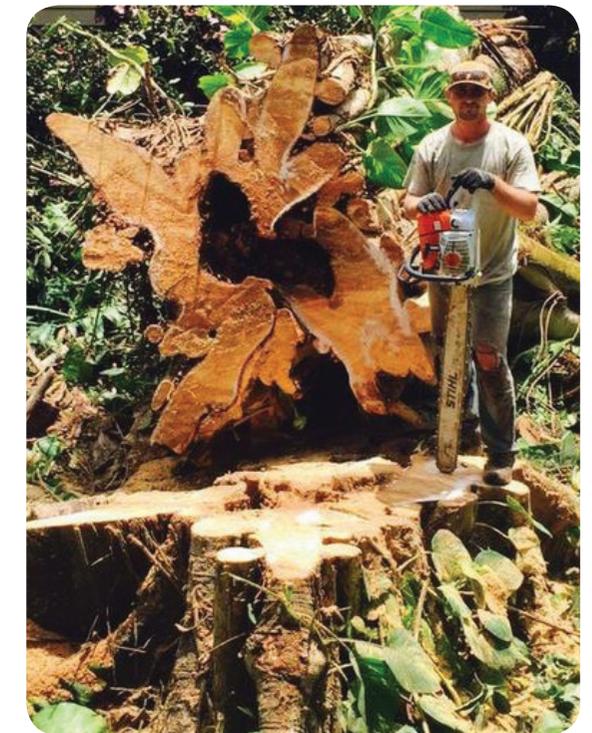


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Lake O area offers great bike riding and hiking

The Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail (LOST) continues to be an important resource when it comes to hiking and cycling in the Okeechobee area.

Designated as part of the Florida National Scenic Trail in 1993, LOST is an approximately 110-mile trail encircling the lake.

More than half of the trail is paved, and the remainder consists of a two-track gravel roadway on top of the 35-foot high Herbert Hoover Dike.

The height above the surrounding area provides hikers, bikers, and wildlife watchers with scenic vistas of the lake. The trail is open year round and can be utilized for short day hikes or loop hikes

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: www.saj.usace.army.mil/Portals/44/docs/Recreation/LOST%20map%20508.pdf

The LOST trail is 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. In the summer, people tend to run or walk the trail either early in the

morning or around sunset, to avoid the Florida heat. A bonus of hitting the LOST trail at those times are the great sunrises and sunsets you'll get to see while getting exercise.

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. 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.

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'll 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.

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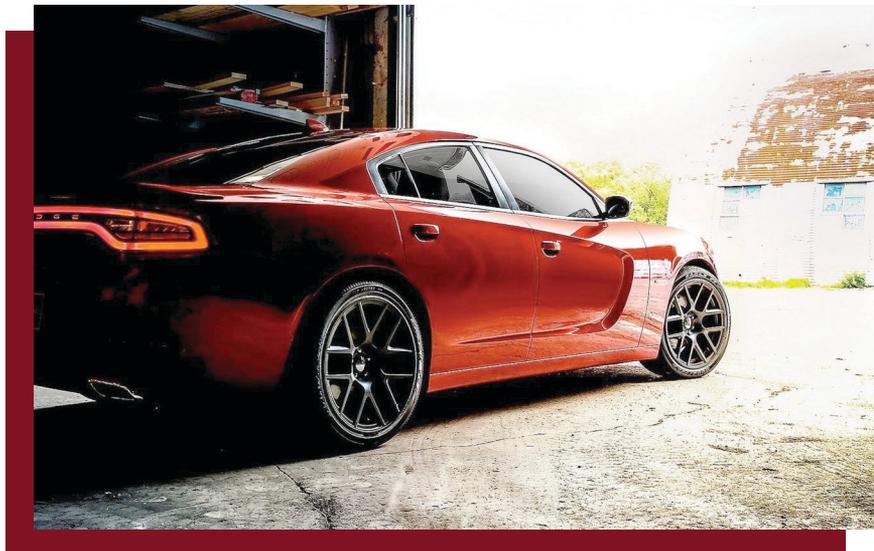


Mitchell Vitella, owner of M & M Auto Brokers Inc., has called Okeechobee home since 2002. Originally from South Florida, Mitchell and his family owned and operated GCR Transport there for over 19 years. With their passion for the outdoors, horses, air boating and quick trips to the beach, the Vitella family settled into the Okeechobee way of life with ease.

Mitchell has owned and operated M & M Auto Brokers since 2007 and has sold thousands of vehicles in and around Okeechobee County. He said, "How fortunate I am to be able to help folks from all walks of life."

M & M Auto is more than a local car dealership. The office is very welcoming and often you can find locals just hanging out, chatting it up, drinking coffee, and eating lunch with Mitchell (or eating Mitchell's lunch!).

If you haven't been to M&M Auto Brokers, come on by and meet Mitchell. He is happy to work with you because he really is "A Sweetheart of a Guy!"



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Clubs & Organizations

Okeechobee clubs and organizations welcome new members and visitors.

- **Alcoholics Anonymous**

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

- **American Legion #64**

863-763-2950. Meetings are the second Tuesday of every month at 6 p.m., located at the American Legion, 501 S.E. Second St., POST64@centurylink.net, visit Okeechobee American Legion Post #64 on Facebook.

- **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.

- **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 762 N.E. 16th Ave., Okeechobee, ecmhsp.org.

- **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.

- **Friends of the Okeechobee Library**

863-763-3536. Meetings are held the third Wednesday of every month at 4 p.m., at the Okeechobee Library, 206 S.W. 16th St.

- **Garden & Orchid Club**

863-763-7800, Meetings are held the third Monday of every month at 6 p.m., at the UF/IFAS Extension office, 458 U.S. 98, Okeechobee.

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• 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.

• Loyal Order of the Moose #2417 (South)

863-763-2250. first and third Thursdays of every month with the officers meetings at 10 a.m. and general memberships at 11 a.m. located on 1016 Linda Road, Buckhead Ridge.

• Moose Lodge #1753 (North)

863-763-4954. All meetings are held the second and fourth Tuesday of every month. Men's Officer meeting is at 6 p.m. Womens meeting at 6:30 p.m. and the general meeting is at 7 p.m. All meetings are held at 159 N.W. 36th Street.

• Okeechobee Amateur Radio Club

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dowlingwatford@okeechobeefford.com.

• Okeechobee Battlefield Friends

863-610-2333. Meetings are held as needed. For information, email dowlingwatford@okeechobeefford.com.

• Okeechobee County Board of Realtors

863-467-0004. Call for meetings and information.

• Okeechobee County Community Emergency Response Team

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

• Okeechobee County 4-H

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

• Okeechobee Democratic Party

863-532-6781. Okeechobee Democratic Party meets the third Wednesday of the month, beginning at 7 pm at 3169 US Hwy 441 SE.

• Okeechobee Republican Party

207-713-3720. Republican Party meets the second Tuesday of the month at Lakeside Grill, 1111 S Parrott Ave., at 11 a.m.



• Okeechobee Historical Society

863-763-4344. The Historical Society meets the third Monday of the month from September until June, at noon, with a pot luck luncheon at the Okeechobee Historical Museum, 1850 U.S. 98. Annual 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).

• O.C.R.A. (Okeechobee Citizens Recreational Assoc.)

Monthly meetings open to the public, held the second Thursday of every month at 6 p.m., at the Civic Center on U.S. 98 North unless otherwise posted. For information, visit their Facebook page or email ocra2022@yahoo.com.

• Rotary Club

Meetings are held every Tuesday at noon

at Golden Corral, 700 S. Parrott Ave. For information email mjahner09@gmail.com or call 863-634-8844.

• Tantie Quilters

863-763-4344. Meetings are held on Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

• Treasure Coast Builders Association

Okeechobee branch, 863-467-2007; treasurecoastba.com.

• 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.

• Vietnam Veterans Of America #1086

574-249-9495. Meetings are held the first Thursday of every month at Beef O' Brady's at 7 p.m. Veteran breakfast is held every Wednesday at Gladys's Restaurant at 7:30 a.m. For info, email Jimcraig47@yahoo.com.



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**Dining
Guide**

Okeechobee 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 fast 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!

American Legion Post #64

501 SE 2nd St

Antojitos Mexicano's
3600 U.S. 441 S.

Applebee's Neighborhood Grill & Bar
1210 State Road 70

Arby's
417 S. Parrott Ave.

Beef 'O' Brady's
608 S. Parrott Ave.

Big Tasty's
309 S.W. Park Street

Big O Flea Market
3600 U.S. 441 S.

Bill's Mini Mart
3007 SR-70E

Blitzkrieg BBQ & Grill
3101 U.S. 441 S.

Blue Moon BBQ
1600 State Rd. 70 E.

BoxerBros
Locations vary

Bucio Chinese Restaurant
104 S.E. Sixth St.

Brahma Bull Restaurant & Lounge
2405 U.S. 441 S.E.

Bravo
802 N.E. Park St.

Brown Cow Sweetery
103 S.W. Park St.

Burger King
604 N.E. Park St.

Crossroads Restaurant
5050 N.E. 128th Ave

Dairy Queen
1212 S. Parrot Ave.

Ding A Ling Deli
2107 U.S. 441 S.E.

Domino's
1700 S. Parrott Ave.,

Duck Pub (Lakeport)
1031 Lakeport Plz

Dunkin' Donuts
205 N.E. Park St.
4993 U.S. 441 S.



Big Tasty's

309 SW Park Street
863-623-5470
Facebook.com/
bigtastys2018

Hours: Mon. - Fri.
11:00 a.m. - 7:00 p.m.

Big Tasty's is a family owned and operated '50s style diner offering lunch and dinner with a retro vibe. Their menu features classic diner foods such as burgers, chili cheese fries and hot dogs. Among their specialty burgers is the Brahman Burger, topped with chipotle mayo, BBQ sauce, pepperjack cheese and onion rings. Don't forget dessert! Big Tasty's offers the best hand spun milkshakes, sundaes, malts and even a banana split.

2800 NW 20th Trail | Okeechobee, FL 34974
863.467.6828 | CafetheLandingStrip.com

121 SW Park Street ♦ 863-532-9096

Dining Guide



La Cabana Taqueria y Tortilleria

1100 S. Parrott Ave.
863-623-4188

LaCabanaTaqueria.com

Hours: Open Every Day
10:00 a.m. – 9:00 p.m.

Offering fresh and delicious Mexican food, La Cabana Taqueria is a family owned quick service restaurant located in downtown Okeechobee. Their menu consists of classic Mexican favorites such as taco salads, fajitas, street tacos, gorditas, and quesadillas, as well as authentic dishes like birria tacos and tripe soup. They also offer a convenient drive thru window. Order online through their website, call in your order for take out, or eat inside the establishment.



Landing Strip Cafe

2800 N.W. 20th Trail
863-467-6828
CafeTheLandingStrip.com

Hours: Open Every Day
from 7:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Located at the Okeechobee County Airport terminal building, Landing Strip Cafe invites you to enjoy your favorite breakfast or lunch items while watching a variety of aviation aircrafts taking off or landing at the runway. Breakfast is served all day long, and lunch begins at 10:00 a.m. From their fluffy buttermilk pancakes to their signature pan fried omelettes, Landing Strip Cafe has a wide variety of specialties that will satisfy any breakfast craving. For lunch, try their Tuscany Pesto sandwich.



Los Cocos Mexican Restaurant

107 N.W. Sixth Ave.
863-467-0922
EatLosCocos.com

Hours: Tues. - Thurs. 10:30 a.m. – 8:00 p.m., Fri. 10:30 a.m. – 9 p.m., Sat. 10:30 a.m. – 6:30 p.m. Closed Sun & Mon.

Delicious homemade cuisine in a family atmosphere! We offer a large variety of excellent Mexican entrees including tacos (crunchy or soft), tostadas, enchiladas, burritos (wet or dry), quesadillas, nachos, fajitas (steak, chicken, shrimp or mixed), taco salads and more! High quality ingredients and our authentic flour tortillas are a specialty you won't find anywhere else. Catering and party trays available.

El Rancho Market
3901 U.S. 441 N.

El Rico Tacos
3600 U.S. 441 S.

El Rincon Boriqua
711 N. Parrott Ave.

Fiesta Supermarket
3691 U.S. 441

Fine Swine Nutrition
108 S.E. Park St.

Gladys' Restaurant
511 S.W. Park St.

Golden Corral
700 S. Parrott Ave.

Good Spirits
245 U.S. 441

**High Noon Café,
OK Corral Gun Club**
9449 N.E. 48th St.

Jersey Mike's Subs
611 S.W. Park St.

Joey's Supreme Pizza
107 S.W. Park St.

Kahootz Draft House
702 N.W. Park St.

KFC
3387 U.S. 441 S.

King House Chinese Restaurant
3399 U.S. 441 S.

La Cabaña Taqueria
110 S. Parrott Ave



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Okeechobee, FL 34974
(863) 623-4188

Open Every Day 10am 'til 9pm
Drive thru window available

Dining Guide

La Mariposa
202 NE 2nd St. Suite 10

La Queretana Supermarket
625 N.E. Park St.

Lakeside Grill
1111 S. Parrott Ave.

Landing Strip Café
2800 N.W. 20th Trail

Lightsey's Seafood Restaurant
1506 S. Parrott Ave.

Little Caesars Pizza
2105 S. Parrott Ave.

Lunch Box Grille Okeechobee KOA
4276 U.S. 441 S.

Lunkers Sports Bar & Grill
4825 U.S. 441 S.

Mable's Place
204 N.E. Seventh Ave.

McDonald's
4151 U.S. 441 S.
401 E. North, S.W. Park St

Mom's Kitchen
909 S. Parrott Ave.

Niki's Dixie Donuts
121 SW Park St.

Nutmeg's Cafe
515 S.W. Park St.

Okeechobee Fish Co.
7841 Hwy 78 West

Okeechobee Livestock Market Restaurant
1055 U.S. 98 N.

Okee Poké
122 SE Park Street

Paco's Kitchen
3100 U.S. 441 S.

Papa John's Pizza
414 N.E. Park St.

Park 112
112 S.E. Park St.

Park-it Market
1600 State Road 70 E.

Parrott Island Grill
1001 S. Parrott Ave.

Pizza Heaven
208 S. Parrott Ave.

Pizza Hut
2795 U.S. 441 S.

Pogey's Family Restaurant
1759 S. Parrott Ave.

Popeye's Louisiana Kitchen
822 N.W. Park St.

Publix
3551 U.S. 441 S.

Pueblo Viejo
3415 U.S. 441 S.

Quail Creek Plantation
12399 NE 224th Street

RaceTrac
975 NE Park St.



Mom's Kitchen

909 S. Parrott Ave
863-763-7553

Hours: Open Every Day
6:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Mom's Kitchen is a family restaurant offering homestyle cooked meals ranging from hamburgers and cheeseburgers, sandwiches, and salads to country fried steak, fried chicken, and steaks. They serve breakfast all day and offer daily specials. Their prices are reasonable, and their staff is courteous and friendly. Mom's Kitchen also features a mix of Italian and Mexican dishes. If you're looking for a good burger at a bargain price, be sure to try their Daniel burger!



Okeechobee Fish Company

7841 Hwy 78 W.
863-357-7500
Facebook.com/p/
Okeechobee-Fish-
Company-
100029115146564/

Hours: Tues. - Fri. 9:00 a.m. - 7:00 p.m., Sat. 10:00 a.m. - 7:00 p.m. Closed Sunday & Monday

Okeechobee Fish Company offers fresh fish daily, and they also offer seafood and oysters at their seafood market, which is open 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. They also offer fish dinners, shrimp cooked four ways, locally caught gator, tacos, and sandwiches. Their food is available to go or they have a pavilion for outdoor dining.

Los Cocos

Mexican Restaurant

Fajitas Steak Chicken & Shrimp
Tacos - Tostadas - Enchiladas
Burritos - Quesadillas - Nachos

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7841 Hwy 78 West, Okeechobee, FL 34974

Dining Guide



Niki's Dixie Donuts

121 SW Park St.
863-532-9096
NikisDixieDonuts.com

Hours: Mon - Fri 6:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m., Sat. 8:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m, Closed Sun.

Opening their doors in May 2023, Niki's Dixie Donuts has added some sweetness to home sweet Okeechobee with their delightful, mouthwatering desserts. Their donuts, fritters and more are hand made daily in house, and they offer an assortment of flavors and fillings. Their donuts range from glazed, topped, and dipped, to frosted and sprinkled. Call ahead for to go orders! If the lights are on, come on in and grab a donut or two. Now offering breakfast sandwiches!



Tin Fish Restaurant

301 N. Parrott Ave.
863-357-0722
Facebook.com/
TinFishOkeechobee

Hours: Mon. - Sat. 11:00 a.m. - 12:00 a.m., Sun. 11:00 a.m. - 11:00 p.m.

Tin Fish offers fresh seafood dishes to delight any appetite. Their 100% Angus Big Fat Burgers and taco selection will knock your socks off! If you're searching for an inviting atmosphere and delicious food, think of Tin Fish! Come grab a seat at their outdoor patio or let their welcoming staff seat you inside at a table. They're also a partner of DoorDash, so if you can't make it into the restaurant, order online!

Regal Pizza & Restaurant
301 SW Park St.

Ridge Market
7 State Rd 78,
Buckhead Ridge

Rio Bravo Mexican Restaurant
151 N.W. 36th St.

Sante Fe Mexican Restaurant
207 S.W. Fifth Ave.

Seminole Casino Brighton Josiah Restaurant
17735 Reservation Road N.E.

Serenity Coffee Shop
601 S.W. Park St.

Shenanigans
2237 U.S. 98 N

Speckled Perch
105 U.S. 98 N.

Sublime Juice Garden
101 SW 2nd Ave.

Subway
2101 S. Parrott Ave
2398 SR 70
422 N.E. Park St.
1865 SR 70 W.
12800 SR 70 E.
8605 U.S. 441 S.E.

Taco Bell
501 N.E. Park St.

Tacos y Amigos
1661 State Road 70

Taqueria Yanez
310 U.S. 98 N.

Taqueria Victoria
2054 State Road 70

Tasty Cuban Café
3600 U.S. 441 S.

Tin Fish
301 N. Parrott Ave

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

Ursy's Corner Café
3100 U.S. 441

Wawa
200 NW Park St.

Wendy's
502 N.E. Park St.

Winn-Dixie
3246 U.S. 441 S

Yanely's Tacos
3100 U.S. 441 S.

Zaxby's Chicken
912 N.E. Park St.

Mom's KITCHEN
Home Style Cooking

909 S Parrot Ave
Okeechobee
863-763-7553

Hours: Monday-Sunday
6:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

OKEECHOBEE FL
Tin Fish
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Restaurant & Bar

301 N. Parrott Ave. | 863-357-0722
Mon - Sat: 11:00 am - Midnight | Sun: 11:00 am - 10:00 pm

HCA Florida Raulerson Hospital puts the care and improvement of human life above all else.

HCA Florida Raulerson Hospital puts the care and improvement of human life above all else.

Raulerson Hospital accomplishes this mission through the Healthcare Corporation of America enterprise's approximately 37 million patient encounters each year, and with continued investment in equipment and technology. Through our connection to the nation's largest, most advanced healthcare system we are able to provide Okeechobee the highest quality care.

The state-of-the-art robotic surgical system is capable of performing minimally invasive robotic-assisted surgical cases which leads to faster recovery times and virtually scar-free procedures. Most recently, the MRI technology has been upgraded to shorten the time patients need to spend within the machine, as well as produce higher-quality images for physicians to evaluate.



HCA Florida Raulerson Hospital takes care of the community

Founded by HCA Healthcare in 1979, and named after one of the county's pioneer families, Raulerson Hospital treats over 30,000 ER patients annually in its 24-hour emergency room, including children. As a valued member of the HCA Florida Healthcare family, Raulerson Hospital is part of a 14-hospital network that employs 17,000 in HCA Healthcare's East Florida Division.

HCA Florida Raulerson Hospital raises the bar in healthcare with:

- ♦ Accreditation by The Joint Commission,
- ♦ Primary Stroke Center Licensure by The Joint Commission,
- ♦ Accredited by the American College of Radiology in MRI, CT, Mammography, Ultrasound, Nuclear Medicine and Cardiac CT,

- ♦ Accredited Laboratory by the College of American Pathologists,
- ♦ 5-star Healthgrades Recipient for Patient Safety 2018-2023,
- ♦ 5-star Healthgrades Recipient for Treatment of Diabetic Emergencies 2023,
- ♦ 5-star Healthgrades Recipient for Hip-Fracture Treatment 2018-2023,
- ♦ 5-star Healthgrades Recipient for Treatment of Gallbladder Removal Surgery 2021-2023.

At Raulerson Hospital, we put our patients first and affirm the unique worth of each individual. We believe that exceptional healthcare is built upon a foundation of inclusion, compassion, and respect for our patients and one another.

In pursuit of an Excellence ALWAYS culture,

we collectively share the following standards:

Our Mission: Above all else, we are committed to the care and improvement of human life.

Our Vision: To be your partner in healthcare excellence.

Our Values: The foundation of our culture is reflected in the outline of the ALWAYS pillars: Accountability, Leadership, Willingness, Attitude, You First, and Safety.

Our Patient Promise: We are committed to excellence always: every action, every patient, every time.

To learn more about the services and mission of HCA Florida Raulerson Hospital, visit HCA-FloridaHealthcare.com, or 'Like' HCA Florida Raulerson Hospital on Facebook.



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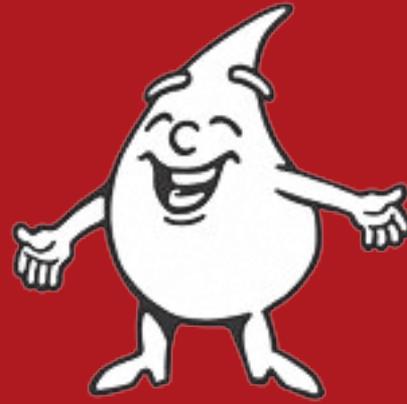
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Kari Berger
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863-634-1574



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863-824-3431

Florida Department of Health offers variety of services

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. (863) 462-5800.

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

Epidemiology and Disease Control.

Environmental Health issues permits for public wells, private wells, and septic systems; inspects cafeterias in schools and jails, public swimming pool, mobile home parks, RV parks, assisted living facilities, tanning salons, body piercing and tattoo parlors.

Vital Statistics provides certified copies of birth and death certificates.

Public Health Preparedness partners with public and private agencies to ensure essential services are available during

disasters and provides outreaches to vulnerable populations and the community to promote disaster preparedness.

School Health Registered Nurses conduct annual health screenings for vision, hearing, scoliosis, and body mass index (BMI) in Okeechobee schools, provides clinical oversight to school clinics, reviews immunization records to ensure state requirements are met and provides a dental hygienist for the Dental Sealant Program.

WIC is a free program for eligible women,

infants, and children (under the age of 5) that provides healthy foods, nutrition education, breastfeeding counseling and breastfeeding support, the WIC Dental Health Program for children, and refers participants for health care and community support.

Health Education engages community partners to address issues related to chronic disease, injury and violence prevention, maternal & child health, provides community outreaches to promote safety,

▪ See **Health Dept** on page 62

Pregnancy center serves the community

The Pregnancy Center of Okeechobee was founded in 2008 and exists to serve anyone involved in a difficult pregnancy situation. The staff and volunteers at our center genuinely care about the women and men who walk through our doors and are eager to assist you with all of your concerns.

The goal of the Pregnancy Center of Okeechobee is to:

- Provide education and support to people in our community as they make important decisions about pregnancy.

- Create a safe, confidential and caring haven in which options can be

provided for women experiencing an unexpected pregnancy.

- Provide practical services related to pregnancy, childrearing and relationships.

All services provided at the Pregnancy Center of Okeechobee are confidential and FREE. The Pregnancy Center of Okeechobee desires to serve the whole community, regardless of race, creed, age, economic status or marital status.

We now offer Women's Wellness services to all uninsured women 18 and older with a valid Florida drivers license. For information about services and more, call 863-467-8748.

Open Hands offers free health care

Open Hands Health Center is a free Christ focused health center that was founded on Deuteronomy 15:11 "For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, 'You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.'"

Currently, Open Hands offers free Women's wellness exams including referrals for free mammograms for those without health insurance that financially qualify. Our newest program Biblical Whole Health Coaching is free and open to anyone interested in growing in 10 different areas of their

lives including health, thoughts & emotions, relationships, rest and renewal, physical activity, finances, walk with God, work and self improvement, surroundings and nourishment of the body and soul. Participants will complete a personal health inventory and meet weekly, bi-weekly or monthly with a coach team and together come up with growth changes they would like to pursue annually. We have been able to bring the Florida Baptist Association free dental van, which will return again 5/27-5/31/2024. Local

▪ See **Open Hands** on page 62



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- ❖ **Rewards To Go Clubs**
- ❖ **Double Points every Wednesday**
- ❖ **Bonus Points on Select Items**
- ❖ **Monthly Swipe to Win Giveaways**

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Handy #82 ▲●
200 Old CR 78

Handy #85 *▲
1400 CR 78

ALVA

Handy #86 ■*▲●
21321 Palm Beach Blvd

LEHIGH ACRES

Handy #86 ■*▲●
3205 Lee Blvd

OKEECHOBEE

Handy #93 ■*▲●
2790 Hwy 441 South

IMMOKALEE

Handy #50 *▲●
417 New Market Rd W

IMMOKALEE

Handy #65 *●
501 15th St North

Handy #75 *▲●
2902 Lake Trafford Road

Handy #77 *▲●
1812 Lake Trafford Road

Handy #91 *▲●
820 West Main Street

Handy #92 ■*▲●
120 West Delaware Ave

■ Diesel Available ▲ Propane Available ● ATM Available * Hot Deli

Fire

Fire Rescue keeps community safe

Okeechobee County Fire Rescue (OCFR) is a combination department that uses both career and volunteer members to serve the community needs for emergency services. The department operates out of three fire stations that are strategically located throughout the county. These stations are staffed 24 hours, seven days a week, 365 days a year. OCFR is staffed with 59 full time employees who are all trained as firefighters, paramedics, and emergency medical technicians (EMTs). The full time employees are supplemented by volunteers. OCFR provides fire protection, emergency medical service (EMS) with advanced life support (ALS) capabilities, fire inspections, fire and EMS public education, and special event coverage to all of Okeechobee County. The department accomplishes these responsibilities using four paramedic engines and four paramedic

rescues that transport patients to the hospital. Various mutual aid agreements are in place with the counties of Highlands, Glades, Indian River, Martin, Osceola and Saint Lucie to provide or receive assistance if needed of each county. Daily fire rescue operations are under the supervision of the Deputy Fire Chief. The responsibility of coordinating and conducting all department fire and EMS training is the responsibility of the Bureau Chief of Training. Community Risk Reductions activities such as fire inspections, site plan review, and public education programs are the responsibility of the Bureau Chief of Risk Reduction/Fire Marshal who also supervises the Deputy Fire Marshal. The Fire Chief has supervision of the Deputy Fire Chief, both Bureau Chiefs, E911, as well as the budgetary and administrative functions of the department.

Health

Health Dept

▪ From page 60
healthy lifestyle choices, wellness, and health equity.

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.

Epidemiology and Disease Control monitors contagious and all reportable infectious diseases, provides guidance in control for future outbreaks, conducts follow-up investigations for diseases that spread through human to human contact, in water, or food, and by animal bites.

For more information, call 863-462-5800 or go to okeechobee.floridahealth.gov

Open Hands

▪ From page 60
dentists volunteer their time to do both fillings and extractions for those without dental insurance that financially qualify. We 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 free women's wellness, participate in free biblical whole health coaching or

be placed on the dental van waiting list (beginning in March) or would like to volunteer your time or help support our cause,

call 863-357-1257.

Open Hands is located at 309 N.W. Fifth St. in Okeechobee.

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

863-763-3134

Okeechobee Utility Authority

863-763-9460

Poison Control Center

1-800-222-1222

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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Okeechobee County is cattle country

Cattle 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, much as the pioneers did in the days of the Florida Cracker Trail cattle drives.

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. These days, 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.

RANCH RODEO

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, See **Cattle Country** on page 66



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Cattle Country

Cattle Country

• From page 66

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 and ultimately the national competition. The 2023 Florida Ranch Rodeo State Finals will be held Sept. 27 at the Silver Spurs Arena in Kissimmee.

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 Cowtown 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 Cowtown Rodeo will be March 9 and 10 at the Okeechobee Cattlemen's open-aired, historical grand stand arena on U.S. 441 North. For ticket information, see their website at okeecheebecattlemens.com.

The best-of-the best on the PRCA 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.

PETE CLEMONS LABOR DAY RODEO

The Pete Clemons Labor Day Rodeo will be held Aug. 31 and Sept. 1, at 6:30 p.m., at the Okeechobee Cattlemen's Arena. Held annually over the Labor Day weekend, this rodeo extravaganza promises non-stop action, heart-pounding competitions, and a celebration of the cattlemen's way of life like no other. Whether you're a seasoned rodeo enthusiast or a first-time visitor looking for some adrenaline-pumping fun, the Pete Clemons Labor Day Weekend Rodeo guarantees an unforgettable experience for the whole family! For ticket information, see their website at okeecheebecattlemens.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 Okeechobee Agri-Civic Center Arena, 4200 State Road 710, will host Florida High School Rodeo April 1 and 2. The Florida High School Rodeo State Finals will be at the Okeechobee Agr-Civic Center June 6-9. For more on high school rodeo, go online to www.fhsra.com.

The Florida Junior High School Rodeo Association is a division of the National High School Rodeo Association (NHS-RA) 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. The Okeechobee Agri-Civic Center will host Junior High School Rodeo Feb. 17-18, with competition starting at 11 a.m. on Saturday and 9 a.m. on Sunday. The Florida High School Rodeo State Finals will be May 17-19 at the Okeechobee Agri-Civic Center. For more info, go online to www.afjra.org.

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.

For updates on rodeos in the Okeechobee area, check the southcentral-floridalife.com website or the weekly Lake Okeechobee News.

View art and history in murals

Check out Okeechobee murals to see some of the local history.



A mural on the Okeechobee Freshman Campus Gymnasium depicts settlers Peter and Louisanna Raulerson arriving in Okeechobee, the Raulerson log cabin and a Seminole village.
Okeechobee Main

Street has sponsored a series of murals including:
 • Williams Family Cattle Drive - 1937, 206 North Parrott Avenue;
 • Railroad Arriving 1915, 100 Block of North Parrott Avenue;
 • Okeechobee Tele-

phone Company, Century Link Building, North Parrott Avenue;
 • Looking Back Through The Windows Of Time, Osceola Avenue and State Road 70;
 • Okeechobee Hardware Store, 300 NW Park

Street;
 • Murals Honoring Seminole Chief Osceola and the Battle of Okeechobee, 114 SW 5th Avenue;
 • Markham Canning Co. Mural, 601 S.W. Park Street.

Area Things to Do

The South Central Florida area offers a variety of things to do throughout the year. For more, go online to SouthCentralFloridaLife.com.

FEBRUARY

Doo-Wop meets Motown

FORT PIERCE — Doo-Wop meets Mowtown at the Summer Crush Vineyard & Winery, 4200 Johnston Road, on Friday, Feb. 16, from 1 to 4 p.m. For tickets and more info, go online to summercrushwine.com.

Brighton Field Day Festival

OKEECHOBEE — The festival grounds are next to the Fred Smith Rodeo Arena, 17400 Sport Complex Road NE, Okeechobee, off State Road 721 in Glades County. This event, to be held Feb. 16-18, 2024, showcases Seminole

and other Native American arts, crafts, food, dances and traditions. Call 863-467-6039 or visit their website at rezeroed.com.

Swamp Cabbage Festival

LABELLE — This festival celebrates local heroes with fun activities beginning with the Old Timers Dance and continuing with the Swamp Stomp, the Adult Country Western Dance, the Ranch Rodeo, the Legends of the Road Show, and more. The festival will be held Saturday, Feb. 24 and Sunday, Feb. 25, 2024, at 8 Park Avenue in LaBelle. You can visit their website at swampcabbagefestival.org

John Denver Tribute

LABELLE — LaBelle Entertainment presents Ted Vigil as John Denver on Sunday, Feb. 25, at The Venue at Mud Ranch, 1323 Loblolly Bay Road. Dinner is at 4 p.m. and the show starts at 5 p.m. For information or to purchase tickets, please visit www.labelleentertainment.com/

Bee Gees Tribute at

▪ See **Things to Do** on page 70



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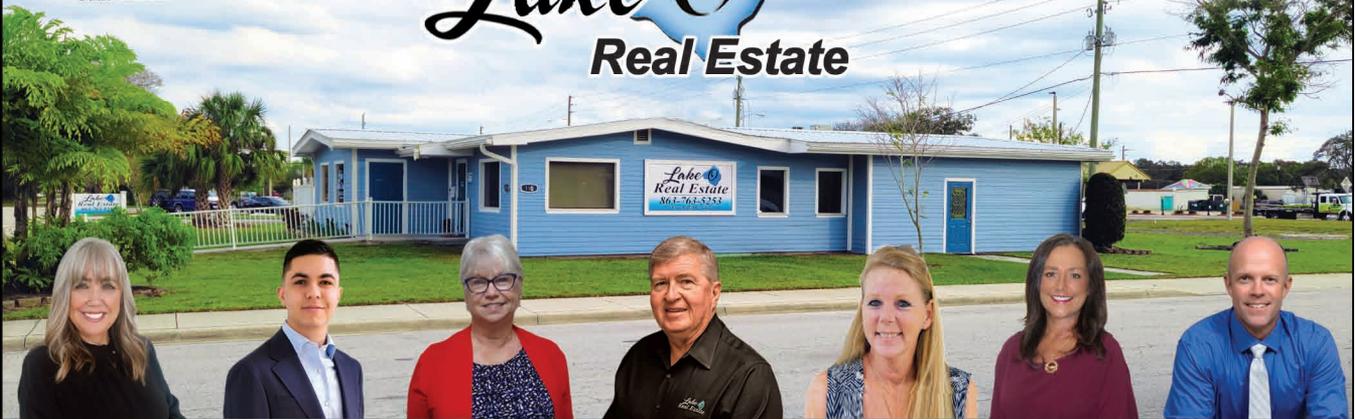
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**Commercial
Properties**



Jody Carter
863-634-1285
Lic. Realtor

JodyCarter.Okeechobee@gmail.com

Rick Gonzalez
863-801-7674
Lic. Realtor

Rg.FloridaRealtor@gmail.com

Vivia Ware
772-284-0929
Lic. Realtor

Vivia.Ware@yahoo.com

Jim Jones
863-634-9706

Owner/ Lic. R.E. Broker
Jrj1009@aol.com

Eileen Long
772-240-2716

Lic. Realtor
ELong@gmail.com

Rhonda Patrick
304-787-4429

Lic. Realtor
Rhonda92970@icloud.com

Gordon Skellett
561-335-0260

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Things to Do

Things to Do

• From page 68

Dolly Hand

BELLE GLADE — Stayin' Alive: One Night of the Bee Gees will be on Tuesday, Feb. 27, at 7 p.m. at the Dolly Hand Cultural Arts Center, 1977 SW College Drive, Belle Glade. For tickets, visit www.palmbeachstate.edu/theatre/dollyhand

A Johnny Cash Experience

AVON PARK — Johnny Cash: The Official Concert Experience is at 7 p.m. on Feb. 29. at the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for Performing Arts, 600 W. College Drive, Avon Park. For tickets and information, call 863-784-7178 or E-mail: culturalperformances@southflorida.edu.

MARCH

Springfest Craft Show is March 1

LABELLE — Whisper Creek RV Resort Springfest Craft Show and Bake Sale is being held on Friday, **March 1** from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. in the recreation hall located at 1887 N. State Road 29 SW. There will be door prizes. Lunch will be available to purchase from 11:30 to 12:30 for \$6. There will be a large bake sale and pie auction with all proceeds going to LaBelle Salvation Army.



For information, email Creeker2014@gmail.com.

An evening with the Bellamy Brothers

FORT PIERCE — Experience a rare and intimate evening with the Bellamy Brothers at the Summer Crush Vineyard & Winery, 4200 Johnston Road, on Friday, March 1, from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. For tickets and more information, go online to summercrushwine.com.

Chalo Nitka Festival

MOORE HAVEN — Chalo Nitka will be held on March 1 & 2, 2024 (usually held the first weekend in March) in Moore Haven in nearby Glades County. Chalo Nitka is one of the state's oldest continuing festivals. The festival grounds are located in Chalo Nitka Park off U.S. Highway 27. There are midway games, rides, a pancake breakfast and vendor booths selling

food, crafts and jewelry. Events also include the Big Bass Tournament, the Frontier Days Rodeo, the Kid's Day and Small Fry Fishing Contest, the Chalo Nitka Parade and the Chalo Nitka Queen Pageant. For more info, visit chalonitka.com or call 863-946-0300.

An Eagles Tribute

LABELLE — LaBelle Entertainment presents 7 Bridges: An Eagles Tribute Band on Sunday, March 3, at The Venue at Mud Ranch, 1323 Loblolly Bay Road. Dinner is at 4 p.m. and the show starts at 5 p.m. For information or to purchase tickets, please visit www.labelleentertainment.com/

Little Women the Musical

AVON PARK — Little Women the musical is at 7 p.m. on March 6. at the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for Performing Arts,

600 W. College Drive, Avon Park. For tickets and information, call 863-784-7178 or E-mail: culturalperformances@southflorida.edu.

FCT presents comedy

LABELLE — Firehouse Community Theatre Inc., present "Cahoots", a comedy, on March 8-10, & 15-17. Friday and Saturday shows are at 7 p.m. and Sunday shows are at 2 p.m. To get more information on how to get your tickets, please visit the website at www.firehousecommunitytheatre.com, call the Ticket Hotline at 863-675-3066, email Info@firehousecommunitytheatre.com, or find FCT on Facebook.

Beach Boys Tribute

LABELLE — LaBelle Entertainment presents a Beach Boys Tribute band on Tuesday, March 12, at The Venue at Mud

■ See **Things to Do** on page 71

Things to Do

Things to Do

▪ From page 70
Ranch, 1323 Loblolly Bay Road. Dinner is at 6 p.m. and the show starts at 7 p.m. For information or to purchase tickets, please visit www.labelleentertainment.com.

Vocal group performs at Dolly Hand

BELLE GLADE — The Fifth Dimension will perform on Wednesday, March 13, at 7 p.m. at the Dolly Hand Cultural Arts Center, 1977 SW College Drive, Belle Glade. For tickets, visit www.palmbeachstate.edu/theatre/dollyhand

Clewiston Sugar Festival

CLEWISTON — The Clewiston Sugar Festival will be held on Saturday, March 16, at Civic Park, 162 Royal Palm Avenue in Clewiston. There will be live music, food, games, sporting events, and much more! As well as the Sweet Taste of Baking Competition. To see what all the festival will offer, visit www.clewistonsugarfestival.com/

Elvis' Hawaiian Show

LABELLE — LaBelle Entertainment presents Elvis' Hawaiian Show on Sunday, March 17, at The Venue at Mud Ranch, 1323 Loblolly Bay Road. Dinner is at 4 p.m. and the show starts at 5 p.m. For information or to purchase tickets, please visit www.labelleentertainment.com/

labelleentertainment.com/

Aerosmith and The Cars Tribute

FORT PIERCE — Summer Crush Vineyard & Winery, 4200 Johnston Road, will present two tributes - Aerosmith and The Cars - on Saturday, Feb. 10, from 1 to 4 p.m. For tickets and more information, go online to summercrushwine.com.

APRIL

USF Gospel Choir to perform

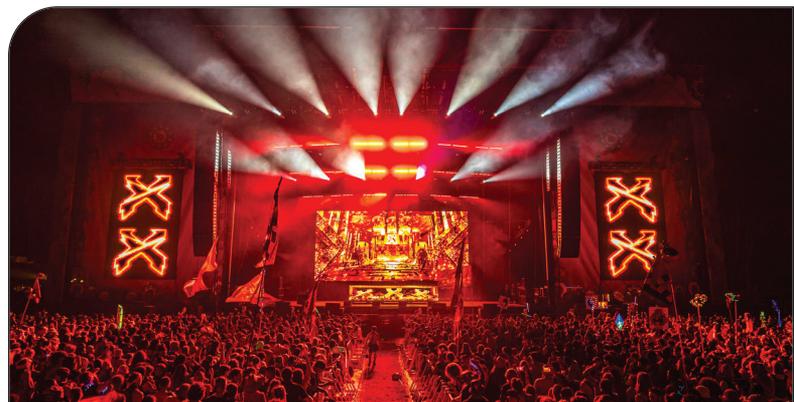
AVON PARK — The University of Florida Gospel Choir will perform at 7 p.m. on April 6. at the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for Performing Arts, 600 W. College Drive, Avon Park. For tickets and information, call 863-784-7178 or E-mail: culturalperformances@southflorida.edu.

Tributes to David Bowie & Duran Duran

FORT PIERCE — Summer Crush Vineyard & Winery, 4200 Johnston Road, will present two tributes - David Bowie and Duran Duran - on Saturday, April 6, from 1 to 4 p.m. For tickets and more information, go online to summercrushwine.com.

Black Gold Jubilee

BELLE GLADE — Celebrating the end of harvest season, this unique festival will be held April 13, 2024, shows off Belle Glade's agricultural



roots and organic “black gold” soil. Food, entertainment, fireworks, a car show, a volleyball tournament, rides and more. To be held at Torry Island Campground, 5000 W Canal St. N. in Belle Glade. For more information, visit blackgoldjubilee.org/

A Bee Gees Tribute Band

FORT PIERCE — Summer Crush Vineyard & Winery, 4200 Johnston Road, will present a Bee Gees tribute band on Sunday, April 14, from 1 to 4 p.m. For tickets and more information, go online to summercrushwine.com.

FCT presents comedy

LABELLE — Firehouse Community Theatre Inc., present “The Book Club Play”, a comedy, on April. 19-21, & 26-28. Friday and Saturday shows are at 7 p.m. and Sunday shows are at 2 p.m. To get more information on how to get your tickets, please visit the website at www.firehousecommunitytheatre.com, call the Ticket

Hotline at 863-675-3066, email Info@firehousecommunitytheatre.com, or find FCT on Facebook.

60 Years of Mustang & music

FORT PIERCE — Summer Crush Vineyard & Winery, 4200 Johnston Road, presents 60 Years of Mustang with a Mustang and Ford Car Show and a tribute to the music of Phil Collins and Genesis on Sunday, April 21, from noon to 3 p.m. For tickets and more information, go online to summercrushwine.com.

JULY

Caldium Festival

LAKE PLACID – The Lake Placid Caladium Festival, is set for July 26-28, in Devane Park on Interlake Boulevard in Lake Placid, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Friday and Saturday and 10 a.m to 3 p.m. on Sunday. The festival includes tours of the caladium fields, a car show, music, food, arts and crafts and more. For more information, go online to www.caladiumfestival.org.

Census Information for Okeechobee County

Population estimate as of July 1, 2022 40,412

Age range:

- ♦ Age 5 and under: 6.3%
- ♦ Age 18 and under: 21.8%
- ♦ Age 65 and older: 20.6%

Sex:

- ♦ Females: 46.3%
- ♦ Males: 53.7%

Race and Origin:

- ♦ White, non-Hispanic: 50.7%
- ♦ Black or African-American, non-Hispanic: 8.4%
- ♦ American Indian: 1.6%
- ♦ Asian: 1.0%
- ♦ Hispanic or Latino: 27.5%

Population Characteristics:

- ♦ Veterans: 2,729
- ♦ Foreign born persons: 12.4%

Housing:

- ♦ Housing Units (as of July 1, 2019): 18,570
- ♦ Owner-occupied housing: 74.4%
- ♦ Median value of owner-occupied housing units (2018-2022): \$158,500
- ♦ Median rent (2018-2022): 963

Living arrangements:

- ♦ Living in the same house 1 year ago: 86.7%
- ♦ Language other than English spoken at home: 26%
- ♦ Person per household (2015-2019): 2.49
- ♦ Households with a computer: 91.9%
- ♦ Households with internet: 80.5%

Education:

- ♦ High school graduate or higher (percentage of persons age 25+): 79.9%
- ♦ Bachelor's degree or higher (percentage of persons age 25+): 16.8%

Health:

- ♦ Persons with a disability, under age 65: 12.8%
- ♦ Persons without health insurance, under age 65: 20.5%

Transportation:

- ♦ Mean travel time to work: 26.7 minutes

Land area in square miles: 768.91

Population per square mile: 52.0

SOURCE: U.S. Census



Church Directory

Churches are located in Okeechobee unless otherwise noted

Abiding Hope Worship Center Assembly of God
4550 U.S. 441 N.
Phone: 863-763-3736

Alpha Ministries at Freedom Ranch
11655 U.S. Hwy. 441 S.E.
Email: alphaministries1@gmail.com
Facebook: Facebook.com/Alphaministries-Church-in-the-Woods-101888191473486

Basinger Christian Brethren Church
16090 N.W. 176th Ave.
Phone: 863-467-2635

Believers Fellowship Church
300 S.W. Sixth Ave.

Bible Church of God
3666 E. Hwy. 70 (old Elks Lodge)
Phone: 863-357-2264
Email: bcog_indokee@yahoo.com
Facebook: facebook.com/bcogindokee34972

Big Lake Church of Christ
1115 S.W. Third Ave.
Phone: 863-467-6758

Big Lake Missions Outreach
605 N.W. 16th St.
Phone: 863-763-5725
Cell: 863-697-6433
Facebook: facebook.com/BigLakeMission-

sOutreach
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)
Facebook: facebook.com/Brighton-BaptistOkeechobee/?rf=111560848883388

Buckhead Ridge Baptist Church
1731 Hunter Road., Buckhead Ridge
Phone: 863-763-7165
Email: Nason.philip@yahoo.com

Calvary Chapel of Okeechobee
212 S. Parrott Ave.
Phone: 863-623-5283
Email: pastorcarlos_calvary@aol.com
or info@calvaryokeechobee.org
Facebook: facebook.com/Calvary-ChapelOkeechobee
Website: calvaryokeechobee.org

Christ Fellowship Church
Non-denominational
701 S. Parrott Ave.
Phone: 561-799-7600
Office
Email: hello@christfel-



lowship.church
Website: cf.church

Church of God of Okeechobee
301 N.E. Fourth Ave.
Phone: 863-763-4127
Email: chadkeathley@att.net
Website: okeechobeecog.com (streaming service available)

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints
310 S.W. Sixth St.
Phone: 863-467-2425

Church of Our Saviour Episcopal
200 N.W. Third St.
Phone: 863-763-4843
Email: churchofoursaviour1@gmail.com,

info@ChurchOfOur-SaviourOkeechobee.org
Website: churchofoursaviourokeechobee.org

Community Church of Basinger
Non-denominational
19836 U.S. 98 N.
Facebook: facebook.com/Community-Church-of-Basinger-153185001390240/

Embassy Church at Basinger
Corner of Hwy. 98 & 68
863-467-2635

Everglades Baptist Church
Currently holding services outdoors across from Everglades Elementary
▪ See **Churches** on page 75

Churchs

▪ From page 74

(3725 S.E. Eighth Street)

Phone:

Doug 863-261-2499

Eric 863-261-2198

Jim 863-801-5311

Email: eb-

cokeechobee@gmail.com

Facebook: facebook.com/groups/everglades-baptistchurch

Website: everglades-baptist.com/main

Faith Alive Family Church

Non-denominational
3075 S.W. Third

Terrace

Phone: 863-623-4233

Facebook: facebook.com/FaithAliveFamily

Church (live on Sunday mornings)

Faith Farm Ministries

7595 N.E. 128th Ave.

Phone: 863-763-4224

Website: faithfarm.org

First Baptist Church of Okeechobee (ROC)

401 S.W. Fourth St.

Phone: 863-763-2171

Email: mail@fbcokee.org

Website: fbcokee.org

Facebook: facebook.com/firstbaptistokee

First Indian Baptist Church of Brighton

20060 Reservation Road

Phone: 863-357-0013

Facebook: facebook.com/profile.php?id=100064582605688

First United Methodist Church

200 N.W. Second St.

Phone: 863-763-4021

Facebook: facebook.com/1UMCOKEE1



com/1UMCOKEE1

Fountain of Life Church

1302 S.W. 32nd St.

Phone: 863-763-8945

Facebook: facebook.com/FountainofLifeChurchOkeechobee

Ft. Drum Community Church

Nondenominational

32415 U.S. 441 N.

Phone: 863-467-1733

Facebook: facebook.com/fortdrummcc

Freedom Baptist Church

1902 S. Parrott Ave.

Phone: 863-447-1805

Haven of Rest Pentecostal Church

912 N.W. Second St.

Phone: 863-357-3053

Website: havenofrest-church.com

His Church – It's Jesus' Church

Non-denominational

1167 Linda Road,

Buckhead Ridge

Phone: 863-357-6500

Email: office@his-churchfl.com

Website: his-church-itsjesuschurch.org

Facebook: facebook.com/HisChurchFL/

Iglesia Jesus Es Mi Redentor

Christian Evangelical

1803 S.W. Third Ave.

(Wednesdays)

551 N.E. 39th Blvd.

(Sundays)

863-447-8571

Facebook: facebook.com/JMREDENTOR

Lakeport Christian Church

10947 East S.R. 78 •

Glades County

Phone: 863-946-1747

Email: klziegler@gmail.com

Website: lakeportcc.com

Facebook: facebook.com/LakeportChristianChurch

More 2 Life Ministries

605 S.W. Park Street

Suite 214

Phone: 863-467-0796

Email: Hello@

M2LMinistries.com

Website: m2lministries.com/

Facebook: facebook.com/M2LMinistries

New Testament Baptist Church

Independent Baptist

535 N.E. 28th Ave.

(just west of the overpass, off of SR 70)

Phone: 863-763-6682

Email: ntb-

cokeechobee@gmail.com

Website: newtestamentokeechobee.com

Facebook: facebook.com/NTBCOkeechobee

North Okeechobee Church of God

15949 N.W. 30th

Terrace

Phone: 863-467-1066

Phone: 863-634-0344

Facebook: facebook.com/northokeechobeeocg

Northside Baptist Church

51 N.W. 98 St.

Phone: 863-763-3584

Website: nbc-okeechobee.org

Oakview Baptist Church

677 S.W. 32nd Street

863-763-1699

Website: oakviewbaptist.com

Facebook: facebook.com/Oakview.life

Okeechobee Christian Church

3055 S.E. 18th Terr.

Phone: 863-467-7858

Website: okeechobeechristian-church.com

Facebook: facebook.com/occokeechobee

▪ See **Churches** on page 76

Church Directory

Churches

• From page 74

Okeechobee Church of Christ

1401 S. Parrott Ave.
Phone: 863-763-4477
Email: okeecofc@gmail.com
Facebook: facebook.com/okeechobeeoc

Okeechobee Church of the Nazarene

425 S.W. 28th St.
(Wolff Rd.)
Phone: 863-763-3519
Email: Okeenaz425@gmail.com
Website: okeenaz.org
Facebook: facebook.com/OkeeNaz

Okeechobee Church of the Trinity

Interdenominational
2939 S.W. Third Terrace
Phone: 863-484-8055

Okeechobee Missionary Baptist Church

4212 U.S. 441 N.
Phone: 863-763-3681
or 863-763-7743
Email: OkeechobeeMBC@yahoo.com
Facebook: facebook.com/Okeechobee-Missionary-Baptist-Church-336936679770150

Okeechobee Presbyterian Church

312 N. Parrott Ave.
Phone: 863-824-0013
Email: office@okeepresby.com
Website: okeechobeepresby.com/wp_blogsite
Facebook: www.facebook.com/OkeePresby

Okeechobee Seventh Day Adventist Church

412 N.W. 6th St.
Phone: 863-763-0655
School: 863-763-0763
Email: OkeechobeeS-DACHurch@gmail.com
Facebook: facebook.com/profile.php?id=100080279233857

Peace Lutheran Church

750 N.W. 23rd Lane
Phone: 863-763-5042
Website: plcokee.com
Email: KOlckers@PSTGlobal.com

Pentecostals of Okeechobee

405 S.W. 10th Ave.
Phone: 863-623-4278
Cell: 606-202-3580
Email:

Okeechobeeupc@gmail.com

Facebook: facebook.com/pentecostalsofokeechobee

Point of Light Fellowship Church

15399 East S.R. 78,
Lakeport, Okeechobee mailing, 34974
Phone: 863-946-0228
Email: teresa-woodham@yahoo.com
Facebook: facebook.com/PointOfLightFellowship/

Resurrection Life Church

Phone: 863-763-7770
1803 S.W. Third Avenue

Sacred Heart Catholic Church

901 S.W. Sixth St.
Phone: 863-763-3727
Email: sacred-heart901@outlook.com
Facebook: facebook.com/SacredHeartChurchOkeechobee



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
Email: newststephenamechurch@gmail.com
Facebook: facebook.com/NewStStephenAME/

St. Teresa of the Child Jesus Catholic Church

1027 Chobee Loop,
BHR on SR78
Phone: 863-946-0696
or 863-824-8701
Email: office@stjosephtheworkerfl.org

The Gathering

1735 S.W. 24th Avenue
Phone: 863-357-4418
Email: TheGatheringOkeechobee@gmail.com
Website: thegathering1.org
Facebook: facebook.com/thegatheringchurchokeechobee

Treasure Island Baptist

Church

4209 U.S. 441 S.E.
Phone: 561-541-7087
Website: treasureisland-baptistchurch.com
Facebook: facebook.com/TIBChurch

Trinity Free Will Baptist Church

1840 N.E. 39th Blvd.
(Cemetery Rd.)
Phone: 863-763-4962

Victory Baptist Church

Independent, King James Bible
500 S.W. Ninth St.
Phone: 863-763-0669
or 863-697-6598
Facebook: facebook.com/victorybaptistokee

Westside Christian Church of Okeechobee

8082 SR 70 West
Phone: 863-467-2278
Email: barker73@embarqmail.com
Facebook: facebook.com/Westside-Christian-Church-of-Okeechobee-111813058882730



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Okeechobee City Council



The Okeechobee City Council is made up of five representatives who reside within the city limits. Representatives are elected from the community large, rather than by districts and serve four-year terms. Each even-numbered year on general election day in November, the city's registered voters elect or re-elect two or three city council members, depending on the year, to represent them in their city government.

Bob Jarriel
(far right in group photo)
is serving his second term as city councilman. He was elected in 2018.

David McAuley
(far left in group photo)
is serving his first term as city councilman. He was elected in 2022.

Monica Clark
(left in group photo)
is serving her second term as city council member. She was first elected in 2016.

Dowling Watford
(center in group photo)
is serving his third term as mayor and has been a member of the council since 1987.

Noel Chandler
(right in group photo)
Noel Chandler was elected to the city council during a special election held in May 2021 after a councilman elect resigned prior to taking office. Chandler previously served on the council for 16 years.

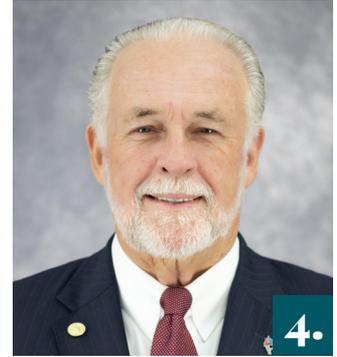
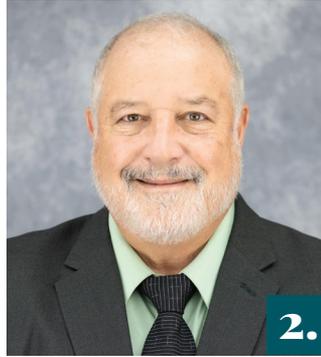
1. Gary Ritter
was hired as city administrator in May 2021. Ritter served on the city council for the term ending in 2018.

2. Lane Gamiotea
has served the city of Okeechobee as city clerk for more than 20 years and was assistant to the clerk for 14 years prior to being elected. She was elected

again in 2022, and said it was bittersweet as that election was the last time a city clerk position would be on the ballot. When her term is up, the position will be appointed rather than elected.

The City Council meets on the first and third Tuesday of each month at 6 p.m. in their chambers, located on the second floor of City Hall.

County Commissioners and Administrator



1. David Hazellief

District 1
Chair
Elected 2016, re-elected 2020, up for re-election in 2024.
Previously served 1996-2004.
863-610-1553
dhazellief@co.okeechobee.fl.us

2. Frank DeCarlo

District 2
Elected 2022. Up for re-election 2026.
863-763-6441 ext. 1
fdecarlo@co.okeechobee.fl.us

3. Bradley G. Goodbread

Second Vice Chair
District 3
Elected 2016, re-elected 2020, up for re-election in 2024
863-634-2121
bgoodbread@co.okeechobee.fl.us

4. Terry Burroughs

First Vice Chair
Elected 2014, re-elected 2018, 2022.
Up for re-election in 2026
863-532-6036
tburroughs@co.okeechobee.fl.us

5. Kelly Owens

Elected 2016, re-elected 2020
Up for re-election 2024
863-532-9006
kowens@co.okeechobee.fl.us

6. Debra Manzo

County Administrator
863-763-6441 Ext. 1
Email: dmanzo@co.okeechobee.fl.us

7. Richard J. Reade

Deputy Administrator
863-763-6441 Ext. 2
Email: rreade@co.okeechobee.fl.us

Constitutional Officers



1.

1. Jerald D. Bryant

Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller

The Okeechobee County 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.

Jerald Bryant was elected to the position in 2020. He will be up for re-election in 2024.

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

2. Noel Stephen

County Sheriff



2.

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 and re-elected in 2020. He will be up for re-election in 2024.

863-763-3117
504 N.W. Fourth St.
sheriff.co.okeechobee.
fl.us



3.

3. 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 and re-elected in 2020. He will be up for re-election in 2024.

863-763-4422
409 NW Second Ave. Ste B
okeechobee.com

4. Melissa Arnold

Supervisor of Elections

The Okeechobee County 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.

Melissa Arnold was elected in 2020. She will be up for re-election in 2024.

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

5. 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 re-elected in 2020. She will be up for re-election in 2024.

863-763-3421 • 409 N.W. Second Ave.
okeechobeeountytaxcollector.com



Left to right:
Melisa Jahner,
Malissa Morgan,
Amanda Riedel,
Christine Bishop,
and Jill Holcomb

Christine Bishop

District 1
Elected 2022.
Term expires November 2026.
863-697-0330

Malissa Morgan

District 2
Vice Chairwoman
Elected 2012.
Reelected 2016, 2020.
Term expires November 2024.
863-634-5852

Melisa Jahner

District 3
School Board Chairwoman
Elected 2018. Reelected 2022.
Term expires November 2026.
863-634-8844

Amanda Riedel

District 4
Elected 2016. Reelected 2020.
Term expires 2024.
863-261-6764

Jill Holcomb

District 5
Elected 2014. Reelected 2018,
2022.
Term expires November 2026.
863-484-0908

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Vice President,
Okeechobee Board of Realtors**

Vicki Anderson 863.634.4106

863.634.4107 Eric Anderson

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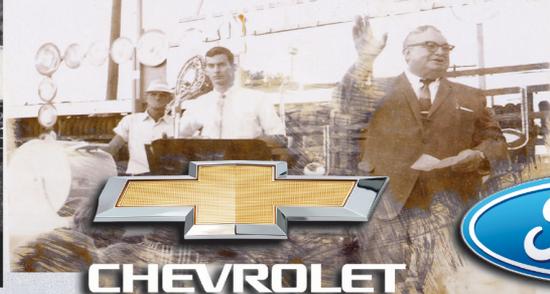
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Personal Assistant
863.801.8463
shellydoyle@ymail.com

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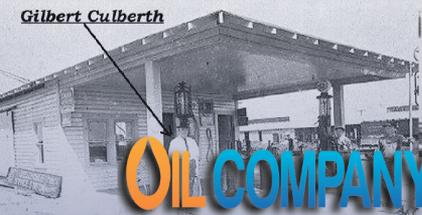
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Visit one of our friendly Gilbert locations today and see why people say, "Gilbert Has It."

Proudly Serving the Lake Okeechobee Area Since 1924