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2026

COUNTY COMMUNITY GUIDE



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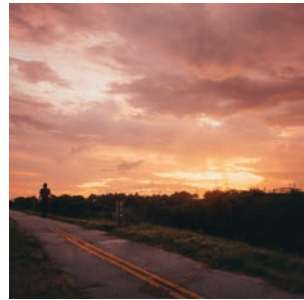


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2026 Community Guide OKEECHOBEE

A special publication of Independent Newsmedia Inc., publisher of Lake Okeechobee News and Hendry County News, serving Okeechobee County since 1915.

Our Staff

News:

Debbie Akins
Richard Marion
Annie Wills
Cathy Womble

Advertising:

Kay Sheedy
Advertising Manager
Angie Bridges
Rick Lewis
Corri Harden

Graphics:

Erik Maurer
Debbie Myers
Mona Lisa Navarrette
Chris Pitts
Kris Schwartz
Creative Services Team Leader
Chris Williams

Circulation:

Terri Rodgers
Circulation Manager

Editor-in-Chief:

Katrina Elsken
President & CEO:
Charlene Bisson

CONTACT US

313 NW 4th Avenue,
Okeechobee, FL 34972
LakeONews.com
863.763.3134

News:
okeenews@iniusa.org
Advertising:
okeeadsales@iniusa.org

Mayor's Note



Cattlemen's Square [Photo by April Martin]

"Welcome to Okeechobee"

By Mayor Dowling Watford
CITY OF OKEECHOBEE



Mayor Dowling Watford

The City of Okeechobee would like to welcome you to Okeechobee. You will find our community very friendly with a variety of activities to enjoy. From fishing on world famous lake Okeechobee, birding or star gazing at Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park (a certified Dark Sky Park), hiking the Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail, shopping at our unique boutiques and shops downtown, or enjoying a meal at one of our many restaurants and coffee shops, you will have plenty of things to do and see. Our Flagler Park features a Veterans Park with a display of military equipment and memorial stones, a butterfly garden, and Cattlemen's Square with wonderful bronze sculptures.

Okeechobee MainStreet sponsors several special events and festivals including a Labor Day festival, Speckled Perch festival, Christmas parade and festival, and a farmers market. The Okeechobee Cattlemen's Association holds two rodeos each year to celebrate our ranching heritage. The Okeechobee Historical Society has three historic sites/museums, the Battle of Okeechobee Reenactment represents the largest battle of the Second Seminole War, and the Okeechobee Music Festival attracts thousands of music lovers. The Chamber of Commerce and the Tourist Development Council are wonderful sources of information on all the happenings in Okeechobee.

Whether you are visiting us for a few weeks, months, or relocating here, welcome and enjoy your stay!



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Okeechobee County's future is bright



David Hazellief
Chairman
Okeechobee County Board of Commissioners

On behalf of the Okeechobee County Board of County Commissioners and staff, we are pleased to present a 2025 update on actions taken in Okeechobee County! We are excited about the future of Okeechobee County, and with our community's support and our future initiatives, we will continue to move forward.

We had a successful year in 2025 as the County was awarded 26 Grants, totaling \$5.3M for several initiatives and projects. This year, the County implemented a new grant software system designed to streamline research, improve application tracking, and enhance overall grant management. With this added capability, the County and our Grants department are positioned to increase application submissions and seek additional funding to advance County priorities.

Below are just a few of those grants listed (in order from largest amount to smallest):

- ♦ FOOT Grant for 120th Street Improvements (aka Dark Hammock Road) \$2,260,764
- ♦ Several Senior Service support services combined grants which totaled: \$1,065,587;
- ♦ FAA Airport Apron Rehabilitation/Reconstruction \$202,825;
- ♦ FOOT NE 56th Ave Improvements (Dark Hammock) \$200,000;
- ♦ USDOT Airport Wildlife Hazard Assessment Project \$128,250;
- ♦ FDMS Spring 2025 Rural County Grant Program - Maintenance of PSAP \$122,997;
- ♦ FDEM FY2025 Emergency Management Preparedness and Assistance (EMPA) \$105,806
- ♦ FDEP FY2025 Small County Consolidated Solid Waste Management \$95,666;
- ♦ U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Fuel Farm Expansion - Design \$94,285;
- ♦ FDACS) FY2025 Mosquito Control Program \$67,479.

Okeechobee County is planning for a busy and productive 2026 with new projects and initiatives.

Below is a list of some of those expected initiatives:

- ♦ \$1 M Legislative Appropriation request related to a new Fire Station/Sports Complex facility;

- ♦ \$500,000 request for design services related to a Special Needs Shelter.

- ♦ The Broadband Project (awarded to Comcast) to provide access to fiber in FY25 funded by the American Rescue Plan Act, for the County Airport and Commerce Park;.

- ♦ The Medical Examiner Building is expected to begin the construction phase in 2026;.

- ♦ Lofton Road Improvements, Engineering and Construction phase;.

- ♦ FDOT realignment of Martin County Grade to County Road 15B;

- ♦ Stormwater Master Plan for Spot in the Sun and Four Seasons to enhance drainage.

- ♦ Bassmaster Elite Nationally Televised Bass Tournament hosted by the Tourist Development Council at C. Scott Driver Park.

- ♦ The County continues to work with Bass Pro as they move forward with the final required due diligence requirements and permitting at the Okee-Tantie Facility.

- ♦ New Permitting Software is expected to be completed to improve public interactions with the Community Development Department.

- ♦ Implementation of Impact Fees for new development.

Our Tourist Development Council (TDC) continues to make great strides in marketing Okeechobee County. This year, "Christmas in Okeechobee" came to life with Light Up Flagler Park, and more than 250,000 LED lights sparkling through our downtown parks and public spaces. We can't wait to see what Christmas 2026 will hold! In the meantime, our TDC is proud to continue partnering with the community for event sponsorships.

At our County Airport, we continue to maintain our "fixed-based operations" which have proven to provide reasonable fuel sales/ground services, tie-down leasing, and enhanced customer service to the aviation community.

The most significant capital improvement in Okeechobee County this year is the \$60 million Jail & Expansion Project, representing a major commitment to public safety. Construction began in December 2023 and was completed in February 2025. Phase 1 B resulted in the completion of Unit D, a new kitchen and laundry facility, for \$7.5M. The next phases, 2A and 2B, began in April 2024 and are currently in progress.

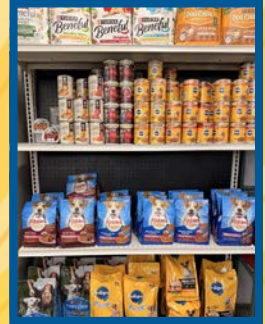
In closing, I would like to emphasize our county's mission is "Okeechobee County will provide responsive government services to its citizens in a well-managed, cost-effective, fiscally sound, policy-driven manner. All services provided shall benefit the health, safety, and welfare of the community."

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Festivals celebrate Florida heritage

Festivals in and around Okeechobee County celebrate the community's pioneer heritage and embrace new traditions. Festivals are a chance to gather with new friends, enjoy performances by local entertainers and try samples of local delicacies. Bring your own folding chair – it comes in handy when you are waiting for a parade or just want to sit back and enjoy the show.

Brighton Field Day Festival

Brighton Seminole Reservation hosts an annual festival that includes Native Americans from all over the country. The festival grounds are next to the Fred Smith Rodeo Arena, 17410 Sport Complex Road NE, off State Road 721 in Glades County. This event, to be held Feb. 19-22, 2026, showcases Seminole and other Native American arts, crafts, food, dances and traditions. It also includes a rodeo. Call 863-467-6039 or visit their website at brightonfieldday.com.



• See **Festivals** on page 9



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Festivals

• From page 8

Battle of Okeechobee

The Battle of Okeechobee re-enactment 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 2026 event is planned for Feb. 28 and March 1, 2026. 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 2026 festival is planned for March 19-22.



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 2026 Speckled Perch Festival, sponsored by Okeechobee Main Street, will be held in Flagler Park in downtown Okeechobee on March 14 & 15. The festival starts around 10 a.m. with arts and crafts, food booths, food trucks 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.

• See **Festivals** on page 10

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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.



Festivals

• From page 9

Okeechobee County Fair

The Okeechobee Fair will take place March 13 - 21, 2026 at the Okeechobee County Fairgrounds, 4601 State Road 710, Okeechobee.

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 is March 13. Tuesday is \$2 admission, Wednesday is buy one - get one free ride wristbands with coupon available at participating Okeechobee stores, Thursday is Moms Free Day, moms will be admitted free with paid child admission.

Fair hours:

- ♦ Friday, March 13: 5 p.m. to midnight,
- ♦ Saturday, March 14: noon to midnight,
- ♦ Sunday, March 15: noon to 11 p.m.;
- ♦ Monday - Thursday, March 16-19; 5 to 11 p.m.,
- ♦ Friday, March 20: 5 p.m. to midnight;
- ♦ Saturday, March 21: noon to midnight.

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

Fourth of July

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

Labor Day Festival

Labor Day Weekend, Sept. 5 - 7, brings Okeechobee's Annual Labor Day Festival, with an arts and crafts festival in downtown Okeechobee, games for the whole family and a parade. This weekend also brings a rodeo at the Okeechobee Cattle-men'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.

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 the Lake Okeechobee News or go online to LakeONews.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. 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, please visit tokeechobeearts.org.

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



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Looking back 100 years: OKEECHOBEE in 1926

Contributed by
Magi Cable
Okeechobee Historical Society

When researching for this article, it is quite a coincidence that many of the activities happening in 1926 are happening now.

Okeechobee High School (currently the Freshman Campus) was being built and in 2026, Okeechobee High School is being built.

The high school also had an undefeated baseball team. Maybe this will be the same for the OHS Brahman Baseball team?

Highway 70 was opening in March 1926 to great fanfare as I am sure most residents will react when the repaving of Highway 70 is completed in 2026.

In 1926, Okeechobee was having a building boom with the City Hall, County Courthouse, High School, and Southland Hotel were all under construction. In 2026, we have a boom in businesses and homes being constructed.

Hopefully, some of the negative news from 1926 won't be repeated in 2026. The September "Great Miami Hurricane" of 1926 caused the lake to break its' earthen dike and resulting in major damage and death in Moore



Domer's Machine Shop



Okeechobee City Hall



Okeechobee High School under construction in 1926



Pogy Bill Collins



This photo from the 1920s shows the Bank of Okeechobee. [Photo courtesy Florida Memory Project]



This photo from the 1920s shows the County Courthouse.



The Southland Hotel was built in 1926. [Courtesy photo]

**Okeechobee
History in
photos**



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MONDAY: 9AM - 4PM

TUES - FRI: 8AM - 5PM

SATURDAY: 8AM - 1PM

SUNDAY: CLOSED

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1815 S Parrott Avenue, Okeechobee FL, 34974



LOOKING BACK 100 YEARS CONT'D

Haven. It is believed that this storm resulted in the Florida real estate boom, which had been characterized by the frenzied speculation in the buying and selling of land, to end.

The Bank of Okeechobee, which was now housed in a yellow-brick building on North Park, failed in 1926.

Domer's Machine Shop was opened by Victor Domer and still is in business near original location.

William "Pogy Bill" Collins served as Sheriff of Okeechobee County from 1925-1931. Among his deputies were Curtis Wright, Hendrix Alderman, James Daughtry, and John Barber. Sheriff Collins helped to establish a baseball team and was instrumental in the organization of the local Boy Scout troop. He helped unfortunate families, both white and black, throughout the county, by leaving clothes, shoes, or groceries on their porches. Our current Sheriff does a lot of charity work also, but doesn't participate in another of Pogy Bill's activities which got him into severe trouble. The national prohibition law proved to be Pogy's downfall. He controlled bootlegging in the county by supervising the rumrunners' activities, but in 1929 he was charged with violating the liquor law.

In conclusion, "The more things change, the more they stay the same" is a proverb meaning that despite change, fundamental aspects of life, human nature, and situations often remain the same. Coined by French writer Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr in 1849 as "plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose," it suggests that new technologies or governments might alter appearances, but underlying realities, human motivations, and problems persist.



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Chamber focuses on economic development

The Chamber of Commerce of Okeechobee County, Inc., 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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Main Street improving downtown



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 is the driving force behind the Arts & Culture programs in Okeechobee.

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.

The Main Street office is at 107 S.W. Fifth Avenue.



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OKEECHOBEE COUNTY is cattle country



The 2026 Great Florida Cattle Drive was held Jan. 26-31 in Osceola and Okeechobee Counties. [Photo by Katrina Elsen/Lake Okeechobee News]

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.



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*Rainclouds form behind a herd of cattle near Basinger.
[Photo by Richard Marion/Lake Okeechobee News]*

Modern Okeechobee County is still cattle country. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture census in 2024, Okeechobee County had the most cattle of any county in Florida with about 155,000 head. Okeechobee County leads the state in both beef and dairy cattle.

Nationwide, Florida ranks ninth in beef cattle with 862,000 head. The state ranks 20th in the nation in dairy cattle with 98,000 head. In 2024, Florida dairy cattle average 20,313 pounds of milk per cow each year. That's an average 2,361 gallons of milk per year or about 6.5 gallons a day!

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 with the help of dog, much as the pioneers did in the days of the Florida Cracker Trail cattle drives.

Cracker Trail

The Florida Cracker Trail is a 120-mile long cattle path that passes through Okeechobee County. The trail is now designated by brown state signs, to remind locals and visitors alike that historical state-wide cattle drives once took place along the route. 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, 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 2026 Florida Ranch Rodeo State Finals will be held Sept. 23 and 24, 2026 at the Silver Spurs Arena in Kissimmee.

PRCA 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.

Okeechobee Cowtown Rodeo

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 held March 14-15 at the Okeechobee Cattlemen's open-aired, historical grand stand arena on U.S. 441 North. For ticket information, see their website at okeechobee-cattlemens.com.

The best-of-the best on the PRCA (Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association) circuit will be in Okeechobee, for one weekend only, scoring points and money in hopes of advancing their careers on to the year-end National Finals Rodeo in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Pete Clemons Labor Day Rodeo

The Pete Clemons Labor Day Rodeo is also held each year 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 okeechobee-cattlemens.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 Feb. 7 and 8. The Florida High School Rodeo State Finals will be at the Okeechobee Agri-Civic Center May 7, 8 and 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 (NHSRA) for sixth, seventh and eighth graders. The top 20 kids in each event at the end of the season move on to compete at the Florida State Finals.

The top four in each event after state finals then have the option of moving on to compete at the national finals. The Okeechobee Agri-Civic Center will host Junior Rodeo April 18 and 19. The Florida Junior Rodeo State Finals will be May 15, 16 and 17 at the Okeechobee Agri-Civic Center. For more information, 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 lakeone-ews.com website or the weekly Lake Okeechobee News.

Great Florida Cattle Drive

In 2026 Okeechobee County was part of the Great Florida Cattle Drive, a historical re-enactment of cattle drives of the 1890s. About 500 Cracker Cattle were driven over a six-day period from YeeHaw Junc-

tion to the Okeechobee Cattlemen's Rodeo Arena. The cover photos on this guide are from that event.

Florida Wildlife Corridor

Florida ranches are important to sustaining the natural environment. Research at the Archbold Biological Station found cattle are critical to maintaining the natural balance of the Florida ecology. The cattle -- which have been here 500 years -- have taken the place in the food chain once held by bison.

The Florida Wildlife Corridor Act, signed into Florida law with unanimous bipartisan support in 2021, defined the corridor and a plan to protect and connect nearly 18 million acres of wildlife habitat. The goal of the corridor is to connect wildlife habitats. In the past, fragmentation of habitat has led to declines of native plants and animal populations due to human activity.

The corridor is home to 60 species as risk of extinction. The land also provides open green space which allows rainfall to percolate into the earth, recharging the aquifer.

State investment in the corridor helps purchase priority conservation lands to expand existing state parks, state forests and wildlife management areas. It also funds conservation easements, which buy the development rights from working farms, ranches and forests to ensure that working lands are conserved.

Through Conservation Easements, property owners sell the development rights in perpetuity to the state. The land stays on the tax rolls and the current use -- such as cattle ranching -- may continue. The land can be sold -- but it can never be developed. The property owners are responsible for maintenance of the land, which includes control of invasive plants.

Recent Florida Wildlife Corridor additions include 2,800 acres of the One Nine Cattle Company ranch and 2,996 acres of the Williamson Cattle Company ranch.

CLUBS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Okeechobee clubs and organizations welcome new members and visitors.

- **Alcoholics Anonymous**

772-873-9299. For meetings, please see aastlucieintergroup.com/ meetings or download the "Meeting Guide" App.

- **American Legion #64**

863-763-2950. Call for meeting dates and times. Located at 501 S.E. Second Street.

- **American Legion Auxiliary**

863-763-2950. Call for meeting dates and times. 501 S.E. Second Street.

- **American Red Cross**

863-763-2488. Located at 208 N. Parrott Ave.

- **Business Women's Referral Network**

772-213-1436. Meet at Lakeside Restaurant, 1111 S. Parrott Ave., the third Friday of every month. Call or email christine@hmainwindowanddoor.com

- **Fraternal Order of Eagles #4509**

863-467-1154. Call for meeting dates and times. Located at 4701 U.S. 441 S.E.

- **Friends of the Okeechobee Library**

863-763-3536. Call for meetings and information.

- **Guardians ad Litem**

Guardian ad Litem always needs more

volunteers to advocate for Children in Foster Care. For more information. Visit guardianadlitem.org or call 772-785-5804.

- **Kiwanis Club**

863-610-2333. Meetings are held every Thursday at Lakeside Restaurant, 1111 S. Parrott Ave. t at noon. For information, visit www.facebook.com/OkeechobeeKiwanis or email dowlingwatford@okeechobeeford.com.

- **Loyal Order of the Moose #2417 (South)**

863-763-2250. Call for meeting dates and times. Located at 1016 Linda Road, Buckhead Ridge.

- **Amateur Radio Club**

147.195 MHZ with 100 Khz tone. For more information, call Mark Brandel, KF4EA, at 863-634-7021 or email markwbrandel@gmail.com or Mike Thomas 904-616-1243.

- **Okeechobee Battlefield Friends**

863-610-2333. For information, email dowlingwatford@okeechobeeford.com.

- **Okeechobee Community Theatre**

OCT is volunteer-based organization of local people who present live, Broadway-style musicals, comedies and dramas. Go online



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David May
Supervisor of Elections

2026 Election Schedule

Primary Election

Registration Deadline: July 20, 2026

Early Vote: August 8-15, 2026

8:30am-6:00pm

Election Day: August 18, 2026

Poll Hours: 7:00am-7:00pm

General Election:

Registration Deadline: October 5, 2026

Early Vote: October 24-31, 2026

8:30am-6:00pm

Election Day: November 3, 2026

Poll Hours: 7:00am-7:00pm

New Location: 307 NW 5th Ave, Okeechobee FL 34972



to www.okeechobeecommunitytheatre.com.

• **Community Emergency Response Team**

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

• **Okeechobee County 4-H**

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

• **Democratic Party**

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

• **Okeechobee Garden Club**

Meetings are held the

second Tuesday of every month at 11 a.m., at the UF/IFAS Extension office, 458 U.S. 98, Okeechobee.

• **Okeechobee Orioles #336**

863-777-2442. Call for dates and times of meetings. Located at 1855 SW 53rd St.

• **Republican Party**

207-713-3720. Republican Party meets the second Tuesday of the month at 11 a.m. 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.

The museum is open on Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. (except holidays).

• **OCRA (Okeechobee Citizens Recreational Assoc.)**

863-763-6950. For information, visit their Facebook page or email ocra2022@yahoo.com.

• **Rotary Club**

Meetings are held every Tuesday at noon at Beef O'Brady's, 608 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. at the Okeechobee Historical Museum, 1850 U.S. 98.

• **VFW Post #10539**

863-763-2308. Call for meeting dates and times. Meetings are held at the VFW Post, 3912 U.S. 441 S.E.

• **VFW Post #9528**

863-467-2882. Call for meeting dates and times. Meetings are held at the VFW Post, 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 with dinner and fellowship at 5 p.m. and the meeting starts at 7 p.m. Veteran breakfast is held every Wednesday at Ding-A-Ling Deli, 2107 SE US-441, at 7 a.m. For information, email Jimcraig47@yahoo.com.



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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 February of 2025,

In 2025, the lake’s level has come down from highs in recent years. A lower water level could be beneficial for vegetation to grow on the lake, which fish rely on for food and safety.

Derrick Moore, tournament director of the Lake Okeechobee Crappie Series, says managing vegetation on the lake is an important part of

maintaining the quality of fishing.

“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.”

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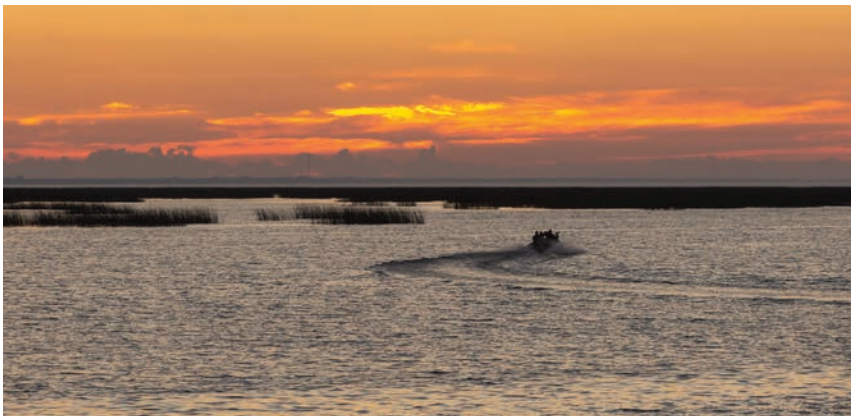
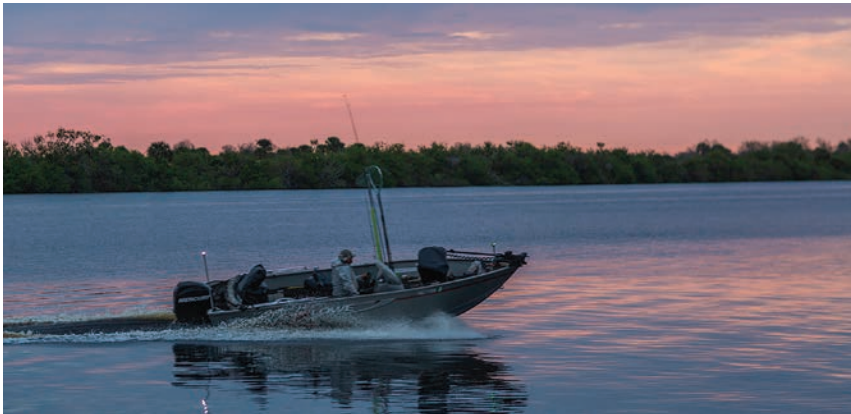
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Moore had a few tried and true tips for anglers looking to get in some fishing on the lake in the upcoming year.

“Lake Okeechobee is one of the best fisheries in the world,” said 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 method is used by majority of the anglers who compete in our Lake Okeechobee Crappie Series.”

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



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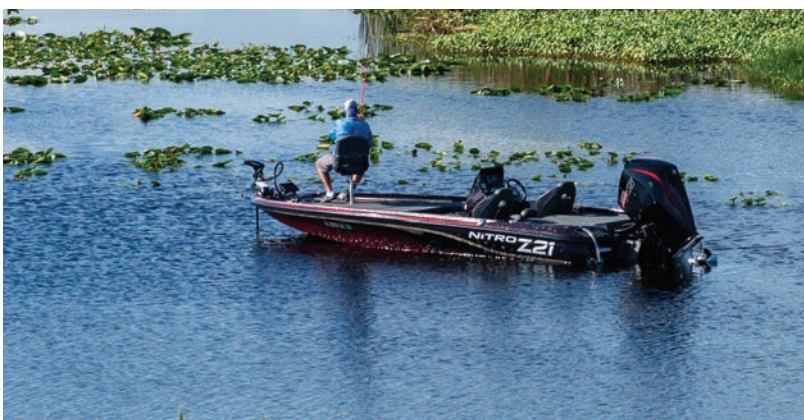



While the South Florida Water Management District's 2025 spraying efforts have broken up the massive hydrilla fields into a complex maze of vegetation and channels, successful pros are shifting their tactics to match this "patchwork" environment.

Because the spraying has thinned out the lake, finding the remaining "thick stuff" is key. Early season spawners are already nesting, particularly in sheltered areas like Horse Island and the Moore Haven Canal.

While everyone is focused on the hydrilla drama, the real "wildcard" is the Kissimmee grass flats. Look toward Eagle Bay and Pelican Bay for these grass flats. Use moving baits like vibrating jigs or speed worms to secure heavy limits away from the crowds.

"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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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 three scenic, fully automatic clay shooting courses. At Quail Creek you're able to rent guns to shoot and golf carts to get around the plantation. Quail Creek hosts multiple shooting competitions throughout the year.

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. Okeechobee Shooting Sports also offers memberships that gives discounts and the option of weekday usage which helps avoid the crowds.

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.



Lake O area offers

GREAT HIKING AND BIKE RIDING

There are plenty of options around Okeechobee for people looking to get out in the Florida sun and hike or ride their bike.

The newest edition to the area is a fitness trail added to the Okeechobee County Sports Complex. Added in 2025, the new paved trail is three-quarters of a mile and includes six fitness stations along the path. The trail alternates from shaded portions through the trees to sections with more direct sunlight. With the six fitness stations spaced evenly through the walk.

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, the Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail 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

The Lake O Scenic 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.

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.

The Rafael Sanchez Trail at Port Mayaca follows the old shoreline of Lake Okeechobee before the Herbert Hoover dike was constructed. The trail is about 6 miles long and offers plenty of shade as it passes through stands of bald cypress and live oak.



1

Administrative Annex

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2

**Property Appraiser,
Tax Collector &
Driver's License
Office**

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3

**City Police
Department**

50 SE 2nd Ave



4

**Okeechobee
City Hall**

55 SE 3rd Ave



5

**Emergency
Operations Center**

707 NW 6th St



6

**County
Courthouse**

304 NW 2nd St



7

**DCF & Health
Department**

1690 NW 9th Ave



8

Public Library

206 SW 16th St



9

Judicial Center

304 NW 2nd St



10

**Okeechobee
County Sheriff's
Department**

504 NW 4th St



11

**United States
Post Office**

1000 SR 70 E



12

**HCA Florida
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13

**Okeechobee
County Supervisor
of Elections Office**

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Okeechobee, FL 34972

**COUNTY
LEGEND**



COUNTY MAP



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 from the civic center provides a historical museum and the old school house.

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

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

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

- ♦ 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/pickleball court, skate park and a pump track.

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

- ♦ Willie Alderman Field at 424 N.E. 15th Ave. provides a field for adult softball and youth baseball with fence and dugouts.

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

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

- ♦ 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.

♦ 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.



In 2024, artist Fanny C. was busy painting murals at the Wooden Jungle playground at the Darrell Enfinger Sports Complex in Okeechobee. [Photo by Katrina Elsken/Lake Okeechobee News]

Indian River State College has Okeechobee campus

Indian River State College's Dixon Hendry Campus serves approximately 700 local residents each semester through its comprehensive academic and vocational programs.

The 40-acre campus, located at 2229 N.W. Ninth Ave., offers both traditional academic pathways and specialized vocational training. Students can complete an Associate in Arts degree with guaranteed transfer options to bachelor's programs, or pursue career-focused training in high-demand fields such as diesel mechanics, welding, law enforcement, and nursing.

The Indian River State College Promise Program, launched in 2023, has seen remarkable success with more than one-third of public and

charter high school graduates from the college's four-county service district enrolling through this tuition-free initiative.

Indian River State College has plans to establish Okee-One, a dedicated data campus on the 205-acre former "School for Boys" site. This initiative, supported by Florida Governor Ron DeSantis through HB1603 in June 2023, aims to position Okeechobee County as a key player in Florida's data center industry while providing learning and employment opportunities for local residents.

The college's comprehensive support services include financial aid advising, career guidance, and structured academic pathways. Additional

programs such as GED preparation and English as a Second Language instruction ensure educational accessibility for all community members.

The nursing program remains a cornerstone of vocational training, offering three levels of certification - Certified Nursing Assistant (C.N.A.), Licensed Practical Nurse (L.P.N.), and Registered Nurse (R.N.). Students gain practical experience through clinical internships at local healthcare facilities.

Campus life is enriched through regular student activities, including the Week of Welcome at the start of each semester, featuring club rush events, cookouts, and networking opportunities with college and community representatives.

For more information about Indian River State College's programs and opportunities, visit www.irsc.edu or contact the Dixon Hendry Campus at 863-824-6000



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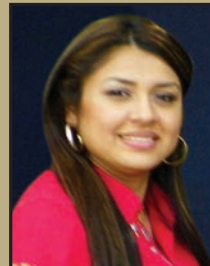
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(863) 801-4516



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Medicine and Cardiac CT
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by the College of American
Pathologists

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- Treatment of Diabetic

Emergencies (2023–2025)

- Hip-Fracture Treatment (2018–2025)
 - Gallbladder Removal Surgery (2021–2025)
 - Heart Attack Treatment (2024–2025)
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Open Hands Health Center

Over the 11 years we have been open; we have learned that health is so much more than physical. It includes mental, emotional and spiritual health. When any of those areas are impacted, it can lead to physical problems. That is why we continue to offer year round programs to support women's wellness.

Mondays 1:30-2:45 we are reading together and discussing "Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World." Wednesday 12-1:30 we are working through "Safe

in the Storm" Biblical Strategies for Overcoming Anxiety. We will begin in February "Forgiveness: Breaking the power of the past. We offer free biblical counseling and biblical whole Health coaching. Through cooperation with EBC counseling we offer on Monday evenings Biblical Seminars of various topics for the family ages 12 & up. Topics include parenting adult children, Honoring God in the workplace, using time wisely, Developing Godly

Habits. These are shown on Facebook live. May will bring the Florida Baptist free dental bus back to Okeechobee to offer free extractions & fillings for those without insurance that financially qualify. We currently offer several free women's conferences on topics of Our Body His Temple; Anxiety; pursuing peace and are working on one for forgiveness. These conferences range from 1-3 sessions which can be tailored to fit the needs of your ladies group. We

continue to offer women's wellness exams with free mammograms, ultrasounds, and biopsies when indicated to women without insurance that financially qualify. All services are always free. Call 863-357-1257 for more information. Check out our Facebook page or visit us online at openhandshealthcenter.com.

Open Hands is located at 309 N.W. 5th St. in Okeechobee.

Florida Department of Health

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, Florida Department of Health offers variety of services 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 infants, and children 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, (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 and child health, provides community outreaches to promote safety, 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 863462-5800 or go to okeechobee.floridahealth.gov.

Okeechobee County CENSUS DATA

Population

Population estimates, July 1, 2024: 42,369
Population, Census, April 1, 2020: 39,644
Population, Census, April 1, 2010: 39,996

Age and Sex

Persons under 5 years: 6.3%
Persons under 18 years: 21.5%
Persons 65 years and over: 21.0%
Female persons: 46.7%

Race and Hispanic Origin

White alone, not Hispanic or Latino: 61.6%
Black, not Hispanic: 8.4%
American Indian and Alaska Native: 1.6%
Asian: 1.0%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander: 0.2%
Two or More Races: 2.0%
Hispanic or Latino, percent: 27.4%

Population Characteristics

Veterans, 2019-2023: 2,842
Foreign-born persons, 2019-2023: 12.4%

Housing

Housing Units, July 1, 2024: 18,653
Owner-occupied housing unit rate, 2019-2023: 74.6%
Median value of owner-occupied housing units, 2019-2023: \$179,000
Median selected monthly owner costs - with a mortgage, 2019-2023: \$1,347
Median selected monthly owner costs -without a mortgage, 2019-2023: \$426
Median gross rent, 2019-2023: \$974
Households, 2019-2023: 15,187
Persons per household, 2019-2023: 2.47
Living in the same house 1 year ago, percent of persons age 1 year+ , 2019-2023: 86.5%
Language other than English spoken at home, percent of persons age 5 years+, 2019-2023: 21.7%

Computer and Internet Use

Households with a computer, percent, 2019-2023: 92.0%
Households with a broadband Internet subscription, percent, 2019-2023: 83.0%

Education

High school graduate or higher, percent of persons age 25 years+, 2019-2023: 80.0%
Bachelor's degree or higher, percent of persons age 25 years+, 2019-2023: 16.1%

Health

With a disability, under age 65 years, percent, 2019-2023 13.4%
Persons without health insurance, under age 65 years, percent 17.3%

Economy

In civilian labor force, total, percent of population age 16 years+, 2019-2023: 49.2%
In civilian labor force, female, percent of population age 16 years+, 2019-2023: 45.8%
Total accommodation and food services sales, 2022 (\$1,000)(c) 71,397

Transportation

Mean travel time to work (minutes), workers age 16 years+, 2019-202: 26.0

Income & Poverty

Median households income, 2019-2023: \$52,288
Per capita income in past 12 months, 2019-2023: \$27,836
Persons in poverty: 17.0%

Businesses

Total employer establishments, 2023: 922
Total employment, 2023: 7,980
Total employment, percent change, 2022-2023: 1.6%
Total nonemployer establishments, 2023: 3,055
Men-owned employer firms, Reference year 2022: 416
Women-owned employer firms, Reference year 2022: 164

Geography

Population per square mile, 2020: 51.5
Land area in square miles, 2020: 769.16

Okeechobee County Fire Rescue (OCFR)

Okeechobee County Fire Rescue (OCFR) is a vital emergency service provider serving the residents and visitors of Okeechobee County through a combination of career and volunteer personnel. The department employs 59 full-time staff members and operates from three strategically located fire stations, ensuring fire protection and emergency medical services are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. OCFR provides a comprehensive range of services, including fire suppression, advanced life support (ALS) emergency medical services, training, fire inspections, public education, and special event coverage.

Daily fire rescue operations are overseen by the Deputy Fire Chief. The coordination and delivery of all fire and EMS training programs are managed by the Bureau Chief of Training. Community Risk Reduction efforts—such as fire inspections, site plan reviews, and public education initiatives—are the responsibility of the Bureau Chief of Risk Reduction/Fire Marshal, who also supervises the Deputy Fire Marshal. Overall leadership of the department rests with the Fire Chief, who oversees the Deputy Fire Chief, both Bureau Chiefs, E911 operations, and all administrative and budgetary functions.

In addition to its core responsibilities, OCFR maintains mutual aid agreements with surrounding counties, including Highlands, Glades, Indian River, Martin, Osceola, and St. Lucie. These partnerships enhance the department's ability to respond effectively to large-scale or complex incidents and ensure a coordinated regional approach to emergency response and public safety.

Earl Wooten, EFO serves as Okeechobee County Fire Rescue Chief as well as Public Safety Director.



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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.

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Neighborhood Favorites

Okeechobee County Dining Guide

**American Legion
Post #64**
501 SE 2nd St

Applebee's Grill & Bar
1210 State Road 70

Arby's
417 S. Parrott Ave.

Baylin's Bakery
121 SW Park St.

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

Big Tasty's
309 S.W. Park Street

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.
2550 U.S. 441 S.

Eggshells Kitchen
204 N.E. 7th Ave.

El Rancho Market
3901 U.S. 441 N.

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.



Lakeside Grill

**1111 S Parrott Ave,
Okeechobee
863-357-4745
LakesideGrill
Okeechobee.com**
*Hours: Open Mon – Sun
6:30 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.*

Lakeside Grill is a delightful restaurant which offers a tantalizing selection of well-prepared American dishes like prime meats, seafood, pasta, and burgers. Not to mention Lakeside Grill serves up an incredible breakfast. What makes Lakeside your best choice among Okeechobee restaurants is that you'll find all your American favorites with some extra culinary zeal, and topped off with perfectly cooked entrees. Your "Home away from Home" is the way Okeechobee residents describe Lakeside Grill.



Los Cocos Mexican Restaurant

**107 N.W. Sixth Ave,
Okeechobee
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 Sunday & Monday*

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 & more! High quality ingredients and our authentic flour tortillas are a specialty you won't find anywhere else. Join us for lunch or dinner. Catering and party trays available.



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ingredients**

**107 SW Park St,
Okeechobee, FL 34972
863-763-8383**



Restaurant & Bar

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

Mon - Sat: 11:00 am - Midnight | Sun: 11:00 am - 10:00 pm



Joey's Pizzeria

**107 SW Park St,
Okeechobee
863-763-8383**

**OrderJoey's
PizzeriaMenu.com**

*Hours: Mon, Wed – Sat:
11:00 a.m. – 8:30 p.m.
Sun: 12:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.
Tues: Closed*

Joey's Pizzeria offers truly authentic New York-style pizzas made solely with high-quality ingredients. At Joey's, you can order a pizza or even pizza by the slice. They also serve different daily specials, appetizers, garlic knots, salads, chicken wings, calzones, subs, desserts and more. In addition, they also provide a special kid's menu suitable for their youngest customers. Stop in for lunch or dinner, or easily order for takeout or delivery by calling or going online!



Tin Fish Restaurant

**301 N. Parrott Ave.,
Okeechobee
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!

Good Spirits
245 U.S. 441

High Noon Café
9449 N.E. 48th St.

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

Josiah Steakhouse
*(inside Seminole
Brighton Bay Hotel
& Casino)*

15005 Reservation
Road

**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

La Esperanza Tacos
1416 State Road 70 E.

**La Queretana
Supermarket**
625 N.E. Park St.

Lake O Nutrition
3553 U.S. 441 S.

Landing Strip Café
2800 N.W. 20th Trail

**Lightsey's Seafood
Restaurant**
1506 S. Parrott Ave.

Little Caesars Pizza
2105 S. Parrott Ave.

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

McDonald's
4151 U.S. 441 S.
401 N.E. Park St

Mimi's Meals
1416 State Road 70 E.

Mom's Kitchen
909 S. Parrott Ave.

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

Okeechobee Fish Co.
7841 Hwy 78 West

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

Okeechobee Orioles 336
1855 S.W. 53rd St.

Okee Poké
122 SE Park Street

**Omino Japanese
Restaurant**
307 N. Parrott Ave.

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.

RaceTrac
975 NE Park St.

Wawa
200 NW Park St.



Lakeside

Lakeside Grill

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Okeechobee

863.357.4745

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Okeechobee County

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.
Phone: 863-763-9800
Email: alphaministries1@gmail.com
Website: alphaministries.co
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/bcogin-
dokee34972

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
Facebook: facebook.com/
BigLakeMissionsOutreach
Food pantry — call for appoint-
ment: 863-763-5725

Brighton Baptist Church
24050 Highway 70 West
Phone: 863-763-3063 (Office)
863-763-6626 (Church office)
Facebook: facebook.com/Brigh-
tonBaptistOkeechobee

Buckhead Ridge Baptist Church
1731 Hunter Rd., Buckhead
Ridge
Phone: 863-763-7532
Email: rankbest55@yahoo.com

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

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

Church of God of Okeechobee
301 N.E. Fourth Ave.
Phone: 863-763-4127
Email: Okeechobeechurchofgod@
gmail.com
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@ChurchOfOurSav-
iourOkeechobee.org

Community Church of Basinger
Non-denominational
19836 U.S. 98 N.
Phone: 863-467-2635
Email: ccobasinger@gmail.com
Facebook: facebook.com/
Community-Church-of-Basing-
er-153185001390240/

Everglades Baptist Church
Currently holding services out-
doors across from Everglades Ele-
mentary (3725 S.E. Eighth Street)
863-261-2198 (Everglades
Elementary School)
Phone: 863-261-2499
Email: ebcokeechobee@gmail.com
Facebook: facebook.com/groups/
evergladesbaptistchurch

Faith Alive Family Church
Non-denominational
3075 S.W. Third Terrace
Phone: 863-623-4233
Facebook: facebook.com/
FaithAliveFamily

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
Email: emmaurbina863@gmail.com
Facebook: facebook.com/profile.php?id=100064582605688

First United Methodist Church

200 N.W. Second St.
Phone: 863-763-4021
Facebook: facebook.com/OkeechobeeFirstMethodist/

Fountain of Life Church

1302 S.W. 32nd St.
Phone: 863-763-8945
Website: floc-okeechobee.com
Facebook: facebook.com/FountainofLifeChurchOkeechobee

Ft. Drum Community Church

Nondenominational
32415 U.S. 441 N.

Phone: 863-467-1733
Email: fortdrummcc@gmail.com
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
Email: hwoods8891@gmail.com
Website: facebook.com/Pentecostalhome

Iglesia Jesus Es Mi Redentor

Christian Evangelical
1803 S.W. Third Ave. (Wednesdays)
551 N.E. 39th Blvd. (Sundays)
Phone: 772-828-6226
Facebook: facebook.com/JMRE-DENTOR

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

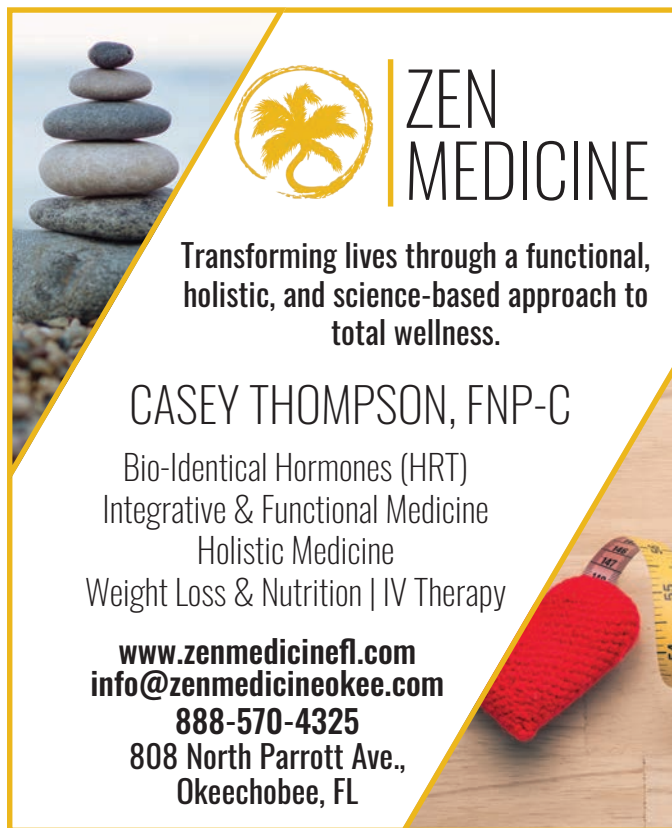
551 NE 39th Blvd.
Phone: 863-467-0796
Email: hello@m2lministries.co
Website: m2lministries.com/
Facebook: facebook.com/M2LMinistries

New Testament Baptist Church

Independent Baptist
535 N.E. 28th Ave.
Phone: 863-763-6682
Email: ntbcokeechobee@gmail.com
Website: newtestamentokeechobee.com
Facebook: facebook.com/NTB-COkeechobee

North Okeechobee Church of God

15949 N.W. 30th Terrace
Phone: 863-467-1066



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 Phone: 863-763-3584
 Email: northsidebaptist-church@gmail.com
 Website: nbc-okeechobee.org
 Facebook: facebook.com/profile.php?id=100066989918925&ref_type=bookmark

Oakview Baptist Church
 677 S.W. 32nd Street
 Phone: 863-763-1699
 Email: office@oakbc.org
 Website: oakview.life
 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

Okeechobee Church of Christ
 1401 S. Parrott Ave.
 Phone: 863-477-9563
 Email: okeecofc@gmail.com
 Facebook: facebook.com/okeechobeecoc

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

com/OkeeNaz

Okeechobee Church of the Trinity
Interdenominational
 1857 Hwy 441 SE
 Phone: 863-623-6500

Okeechobee Missionary Baptist Church
 4212 U.S. 441 N.
 Phone: 863-763-7743
 Email: OkeechobeeM-BC@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/
 Facebook: www.face-

book.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
 Email: KOLckers@PST-Global.com
 Website: plcokee.com
 Facebook: facebook.com/plcokee

Pentecostals of Okeechobee
 405 S.W. 10th Ave.
 Phone: 863-623-4278
 Cell: 606-202-3580
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Okeechobeeupc@gmail.com
Facebook: facebook.com/pentecostalso-fokeechobee

Point of Light Fellowship Church

15399 East S.R. 78, Lakeport, Okeechobee mailing, 34974

Phone: 863-946-0228
Email: teresawoodham@yahoo.com

Facebook: facebook.com/PointOfLightFellowship/

Resurrection Life Church

1803 S.W. Third Avenue

Phone: 863-763-7770

Sacred Heart Catholic Church

901 S.W. Sixth St.

Phone: 863-763-3727

Email: sacredheart901@

outlook.com
Facebook: facebook.com/SacredHeartChurchOkeechobee

Seventh Day Christian Church

312 N. Parrott Ave. (services held in the Presbyterian Church)
Phone: 863-763-2285

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

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 863-249-9701

Email: vbcokeechobee@gmail.com

Facebook: facebook.com/victorybaptistokee

Westside Christian Church of Okeechobee

8082 SR 70 West
Phone: 863-441-2001

Email: barker73@embarqmail.com

Facebook: facebook.com/Westside-Christian-Church-of-Okeechobee-111813058882730

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Okeechobee County Sheriff's Office



Sheriff Noel E. Stephen

The Okeechobee County Sheriff's Office is responsible for countywide law enforcement, including patrol operations, emergency response, criminal investigations, traffic enforcement, civil process, courthouse security and specialized public safety services. The agency also operates specialized teams including K-9, crisis negotiations, SWAT, dive, motorcycle, drone, honor guard and cell extraction units.

The Sheriff's Office employs 239 sworn and civilian personnel supported by volunteers who serve on auxiliary, search and rescue and Citizens on Patrol teams. Command staff consists of a chief deputy, four captains and eleven lieutenants.

For fiscal year 2025-26, the agency's law enforcement budget is about \$33 million. In addition to law enforcement operations, the sheriff manages the county jail, with a budget of about \$8.9 million and an average daily population of 231 inmates; courthouse security at about \$1.8 million; a School Board contract of about \$876,000; and animal control services at about \$692,000.

Deputies patrol 769 square miles in Okeechobee County. According to the 2020 census, the county had a population of 39,644 residents. During fiscal year 2024-25, the Sheriff's Office handled 36,948 calls for service.

Sheriff Noel E. Stephen entered his 39th year of service in law enforcement in 2025, all with the Okeechobee County Sheriff's Office. He was sworn in for his third term as sheriff in January 2025.

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City of Okeechobee is growing

In 2026 the Okeechobee Police Department remains dedicated to providing a professional but home-town approach to policing our community. This year is my 30th year with the agency and third year as your chief of police. Since my start in 1996, I've seen our city grow exponentially as two lane roads became four lane highways. Traffic congestion and issues happen when a small town that was designed in 1915 tries to adapt.

As we move forward, be patient while our county and city planners work to plan and put solutions into action.

As the police department, our number

one complaint is traffic. Whether it's the railroad crossing malfunctioning or back street speeders in residential neighborhoods. Last year CSX moved replacing the control box on 441 to top priority thanks to constant emails from the police department. These emails were sent to the Department of Transportation (DOT) in Tallahassee and CSX railroad. CSX is now working to resolve the issues in the underground wiring between U.S. 441 and N.W. Ninth Street, which continue to cause traffic problems.

In 2025, many of the control boxes at city traffic lights were replaced. In 2026 this will continue

and should be finished by the end of the year. Currently, work is ongoing to repair and replace the boxes and wiring that continue to cause problems at SE 21st Street (Walmart), every time it rains.

DOT paving and construction of U.S. 441 in the city should be completed. State Road 70W is ongoing and will continue through 2026.

These projects have created many traffic issues through 2025 that the police department had to contend with. The officers stepped up and handled these issues professionally and consistently. Traffic enforcement has been stepped up to reduce traffic crashes and complaints.



**Police Chief
Donald
Hagan**

And, last and most of all, our downtown parks looked incredible throughout the holiday season. This is a two-year contract, so it will be lit up again in 2026. This was absolutely the most beautiful and amazing thing I've ever seen done in Okeechobee. It looked like something you would see in Disney.

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OKEECHOBEE SCHOOLS ARE THE heart of the community



By Dylan Tedders
*Superintendent of
Okeechobee Schools*

To the Community of Okeechobee, on behalf of the Okeechobee County School Board, I want to extend a warm welcome to any new students and families joining us this year. Whether you are a community member, beginning your educational journey with us, or returning for another year we are thrilled to have you as part of our school district family.

To our 6,500+ students: You are the heart of our schools, and your potential knows no bounds. Embrace every opportunity to learn, grow, and discover your unique talents. I encourage you to take advantage of the opportunities our schools and community have to offer. Get involved in clubs, activities, and sports that interest you. Build positive relationships with your peers, mentors, and teachers.

Your curiosity and determination will pave the way for extraordinary achievements. We are proud of you!

To our families: Thank you for entrusting us with the education and well-being of your children. Your support and partnership are invaluable. Your voice matters, and I encourage you stay engaged through our district website, social media channels, and community events. And remember, a child's education is a partnership between home and school, so please don't hesitate to reach out to us if you have any questions, concerns, or ideas. Together, we can continue to ensure that our schools reflect the values and aspirations of the families we serve.

To our 900+ educators and staff: Your dedication and passion are the driving

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force behind our mission. Your commitment to excellence and innovation ensures that our students receive the best possible education. Thank you for educating and keeping our students safe each day. Your hard work does not go unnoticed.

To our future employees: If you have a heart for children, then we have an opportunity for you to join us on the mission. This work will never be easy, but you will directly impact the future of our students. Check in with our HR Department and see how you can change lives (maybe even your own).

Our 10 schools are more than just places of learning; they are the heart of our community. From our classrooms to our athletic fields, from our fine arts programs

to our career and technical education programs, the goal is to provide opportunities for each and every student to thrive. Together, let us build upon the rich traditions of our district while embracing new opportunities for growth and collaboration. Let us foster a culture of perseverance, respect, integrity, dependability, and ethics where every individual feels valued and supported.

I am honored to serve as your Superintendent of Schools. Our district's commitment to excellence is a testament to the dedication of our students, families, staff, and community partners. The community support for our schools is unmatched.

Together, we are building a brighter future for every learner.

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SCHOOL BOARD

**Melisa
Jahner**

District 3
Board Member
Term expires
November 2026.
863-634-8844

**Christine
Bishop**

District 1
Vice Chair
Term expires
November 2026.
863-697-0330

**Jill
Holcomb**

District 5
Board Chair
Term expires
November 2026.
863-484-0908

**Amanda
Riedel**

District 4
Board Member
Term expires
2028.
863-261-6764

**Malissa
Morgan**

District 2
Board Member
Term expires
November 2028.
863-634-5852

2026 is an ELECTION YEAR

By David May
OKEECHOBEE COUNTY SUPERVISOR OF
ELECTIONS

The 2026 elections are quickly approaching. The Primary Election will be held on Aug. 18, 2026, and the General Election will take place on Nov. 3, 2026. Mark your calendars and be on the lookout for additional information as the elections approach.

There are three ways to vote: Election Day, Early Voting, and Vote-by-Mail. If you plan to vote by mail, you must submit your request at www.voteokeechobee.gov or by calling 863-763-4014. Once you receive your mail ballot, carefully follow the instructions to ensure your vote is counted. Be sure to mail your completed ballot well before Election

Day to avoid any delays in processing.

Before voting begins, make sure your information on file is accurate and up to date. You can review or update your voter information, such as your address or party affiliation, at www.voteokeechobee.gov. Keeping your information current helps ensure a smooth voting experience.

We are always looking for dedicated election workers to serve our community. If you want to get involved and gain hands-on experience in the election process, contact our office to complete an application. We look forward to serving you in 2026 and keeping Okeechobee County's elections accurate and secure!

Okeechobee Voters

Registered voters in

Okeechobee County as of Feb. 9, 2026

Republicans: 12,122

Democrats: 4,256

Other: 810

No Party Affiliation: 3,080

Election dates and deadlines

♦ July 20 - Deadline to register to vote or change party affiliation for the Primary Election

♦ Aug. 6 – Deadline to request a ballot by mail for the Primary Election

♦ Aug. 18 – Primary Election Day

♦ Oct. 5 – Deadline to register for vote in the General Election

♦ Oct. 22 – Deadline to request a ballot by mail for the General Election

♦ Nov. 3 – General Election Day



Janetta Thibault
Real Estate Professional

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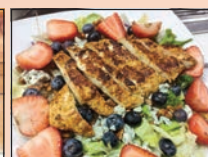
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Okeechobee Soil & Water Conservation District



Nano Corona

First elected in 1994. Seat 1,
Term: 2023-2026



Jared Figley

Seat 2, Term:
2025-2028



Don Sellers, Jr.

First elected in 2015. Seat 3,
Term: 2023-2026



Doug Burnham

First elected in 2005. Seat 4,
Term: 2025-2028



Glynn Rutledge

First elected in 1997. Seat 5,
Term: 2023-2026

The Okeechobee Soil and Water Conservation District collaborates with a range of partners—including Okeechobee County, the U.S. and Florida Departments of Agriculture and other dedicated organizations—to promote and implement impactful conservation initiatives within our community.

Our efforts include:

- ♦ State and Federal Program Implementation: Connecting landowners with sustainable agriculture and land stewardship programs.
- ♦ Monofilament Recovery and Recycling Program: In collaboration with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC), helping to protect aquatic ecosystems by reducing fishing line pollution. Check out our recycling bins at lake access points.
- ♦ Youth Poster Contests: Inspiring the next generation to engage with environmental conservation through creative expression at the local, state, and national levels.

The District is governed by a five-member, non-partisan Board of Supervisors who are passionate individuals committed to our mission:

- ♦ Nano Corona: First elected in 1994. Seat 1, Term: 2023-2026
- ♦ Jared Figley: Seat 2 Term: 2025-2028
- ♦ Don Sellers, Jr.: First elected in 2015. Seat 3, Term: 2023-2026
- ♦ Doug Burnham: First elected in 2005. Seat 4, Term: 2025-2028
- ♦ Glynn Rutledge: First elected in 1997. Seat 5, Term: 2023-2026

Together, we're working to preserve Okeechobee's natural resources for future generations. Visit www.okeechobeeswcd.org for more information.



Audrey Kuipers
District Administrator



Carlos Torres
USDA-NRCS District
Conservationist

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.

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 also field cheer and track teams. Chobee Bulls can be contacted by email at chobee-bullssports@gmail.com.

Okeechobee County Parks and Recreation provides leagues for youth soccer and basketball. Youth basket-

ball 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.

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.

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. For more information contact OCRA by email at ocra2022@yahoo.com.

Boxfit Okeechobee offers training

and sparring both boys and girls. In 2019 one of the gym's students, 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 signups end July 1. For more info 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. More information can be found on Facebook at facebook.com/chobenationbasketball.

The Shockwaves Summer Swim Team program is for swimmers ages 5-18. For more information, call 863-467-7667.



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Jerald D. Bryant

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Jerald Bryant was first elected to the position in 2020. He will be up for re-election in 2028.

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312 N.W. Third St.

clerk.co@okeechobee.fl.us



Noel Stephen, County Sheriff

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

Sheriff Stephen started in the Okeechobee County Jail as a Corrections Deputy in 1987 and was elected as sheriff in 2016 and re-elected in 2020 and 2024. He will be up for re-election in 2028.

863-763-3117

504 N.W. Fourth St.

sheriff.co.okeechobee.fl.us



Mickey Bandi, Property Appraiser

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



Mickey Bandi was elected in 2016 and re-elected in 2020 and 2024. He will be up for re-election in 2028.

863-763-4422

409 NW Second Ave Suite B

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David May, 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.

David May was elected in 2024. He will be up for re-election in 2028.

863-763-4014 • 304 N.W. Second St., Suite 144

voteokeechobee.com • elections@voteokeechobee.com

Celeste Watford, Tax Collector

The Tax Collector serves as an agent for various state and local government agencies and taxing authorities for collection of revenue, and is also responsible for distributing this revenue to these agencies. Although most of the revenue collected are taxes, the Tax Collector's office isn't funded with tax dollars but with fees collected for services provided. These fees are established by the Florida Legislature and outlined in the Florida Statutes. The amount of work done in the Tax Collector's office creates fee revenues in excess of the Tax Collector's budget. All excess fees are returned to the local government agencies at the end of each fiscal year.

Celeste Watford was re-elected in 2020 and 2024. She will be up for re-election in 2028.

863-763-3421 • 409 NW Second Ave.
okeechobee-county-tax-collector.com



OKEECHOBEE CITY COUNCIL



Bob Jarriel
First elected in 2018



Monica Clark
First elected in 2016



Noel Chandler
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.



Gary Ritter

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



David McAuley
Elected in 2022



Dowling Watford
First elected in 1986. He has served as mayor since 2017.



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 Okeechobee City Council is made up of five representatives who reside within the city limits. Representatives are elected from the community at 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. The city council chooses the mayor from among their members. City officials are chosen during the general election in November and take office in January.

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.

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Okeechobee County COMMISSIONERS

The County Commission is comprised of five members, elected to a four-year term by voters. Exercising their legislative powers, the County Commission adopts ordinances (local laws) and resolutions to establish policies and programs to protect the health, safety, and general welfare of Okeechobee County residents.

David Hazellief • District 1 • *Chairman*

Elected in 2016; re-elected in 2020 and 2024. Up for re-election in 2028.
Previously served 1996-2004.
863-610-1553 • Email: dhazellief@okeechobeecountyfl.gov

Frank DeCarlo • District 2

Elected 2022. Up for re-election 2026
863-532-9374 • Email: fdecarlo@okeechobeecountyfl.gov

Bradley G. Goodbread • District 3 • *Second Vice Chair*

Elected 2016; re-elected 2020 and 2024. Up for re-election in 2028.
863-763-6441 • Email: bgoodbread@okeechobeecountyfl.gov

Terry Burroughs • District 4 • *First Vice Chair*

Elected 2014. Re-elected 2018, 2022. Up for re-election in 2026.
863-532-6036 • Email: tburrough@okeechobeecountyfl.gov

Michael Sumner • District 5

Elected 2024. Up for re-election in 2028.
863-532-9006 • Email: msumner@okeechobeecountyfl.gov



David Hazellief



Frank DeCarlo



Bradley G. Goodbread



Michael Sumner



Terry Burroughs



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