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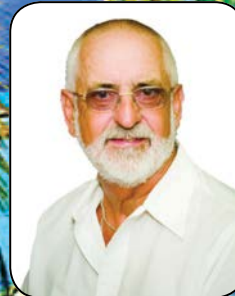
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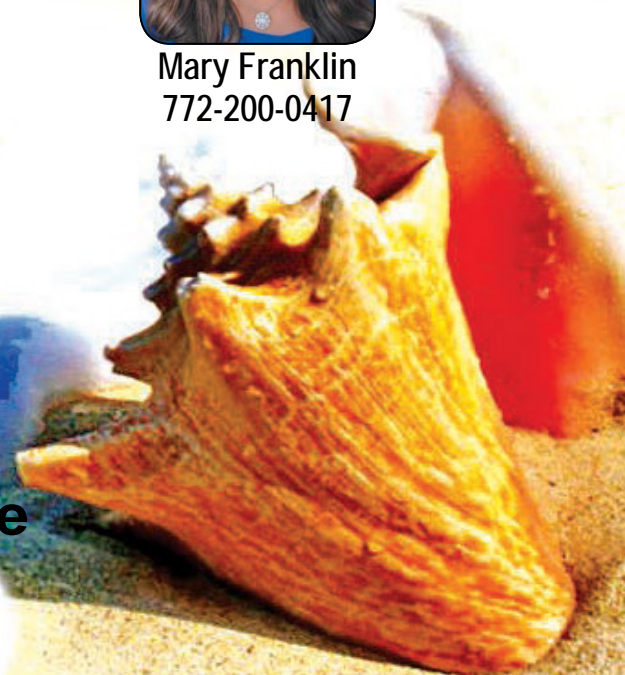
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## 2023 Community Guide **OKEECHOBEE**

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

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# Okeechobee County has a lot to offer

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

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

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

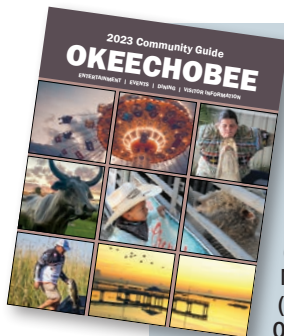
For those who love the outdoors, Okeechobee County has plenty to see and do: Boating on Lake Okeechobee or the Kissimmee River, hiking the Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail, enjoying the beauty all around in Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park, horseback riding and more. Shooting enthusiasts can choose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

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

To the rancher, Okeechobee is wide open spaces. According to the United States Department of Agriculture Census, Okeechobee County is home to 599 farms and ranches for a total of 297,439 acres in agriculture. Okeechobee has earned the nickname “Florida’s Cowtown,” as the county is No. 1 in the state in the most beef cattle and the most milk produced. According to the most recent USDA Census of Agriculture, Okeechobee County ranches and dairies are home to a total of 133,975 head of cattle, including calves. Okeechobee County dairies account for about 20 percent of the milk produced in Florida. The county has also 3,268 acres in citrus trees.

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

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



### *On the cover ...*

- (Top left) The American Legion Fair is held in downtown Okeechobee in January. [Photo by Richard Marion]
- (Top right) Brighton Seminole Reservation, just 30 miles from downtown Okeechobee, hosts festivals and rodeos, and has a casino. (Photo courtesy Tanner Huysman)
- (Middle left) Visit Flagler Park in downtown Okeechobee to see the Cattle Drive Sculptures. (Photo by Richard Marion)
- (Middle right) Youngsters often try their luck in the Mutton’ Bustin’ competition at the Okeechobee Cattlemen’s Association Cowtown Rodeo. (Photo by Katrina Elsen)
- (Bottom left) Lake Okeechobee is know for bass fishing and is the location for major bass tournaments. [Photo courtesy Major League Fishing]
- (Bottom right) The pier at the Clif Betts Memorial Lakeside Recreation Area – aka Lock 7 – is a scenic spot on Lake Okeechobee. (Photo by Richard Marion)



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# Festivals celebrate local community

Okeechobee County festivals celebrate the community's pioneer heritage and embrace new traditions.

March is the busiest festival month in Okeechobee, bringing the Speckled Perch Festival, the Okeechobee County Fair and Florida's Cowtown Rodeo.

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

## TOP OF THE LAKE ART FESTIVAL

The Top of the Lake Art Festival is presented by Okeechobee Main Street and is held in February. For two days visitors get to see and experience the beautiful art that local artists have submitted. A variety of different artistic styles will be on display including street art, sand sculpture, local adult and student artists as well as food, entertainment, art demonstrations and children's art programs. 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 [okeechobeearts.org](http://okeechobeearts.org).

## BATTLE OF OKEECHOBEE

The Battle of Okeechobee reenactment is held the last weekend in February each year at the Okeechobee Battlefield State Park, 3500 SE 38th Ave. (off U.S. 441 S.E.) in Okeechobee County. The 2023 event is planned for Feb. 25-26. Gates open at 10 a.m. and the battle re-enactment starts at 2 p.m. each day. Entry fee is \$15 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.

## 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 2023 Speckled Perch Festival, sponsored by Okeechobee Main Street, will be held in Flagler Park in downtown Okeechobee on March 11 and 12. The festival starts around 10 a.m. with arts and crafts, food booths and entertainment in Flagler Park. The Speckled Perch Festival Parade will be on Saturday at 10 a.m. For additional info, go online to [okeechobeemainstreet.org](http://okeechobeemainstreet.org).

## OKEECHOBEE COUNTY FAIR

The Okeechobee County Fair will be held March 14-19, at the Agri-Civic Center Fairgrounds, with entry at State Road 710.





The Okeechobee 4-H and FFA Livestock Show will be the week of March 10-17. Poultry show is March 11 at 9 a.m. Rabbit show is March 12 at 9 a.m. Dairy show is March 13 at 5 p.m. Swine showmanship is March 14 at 5 p.m. Swine show is March 15 at 5 p.m. Boer goat show is March 16 at 2 p.m. Steer show is March 16, at 5 p.m. Beef breeding show is March 17, at 2 p.m. The Livestock Sale is March 18, starting at 2 p.m.

March 14 is Dollar Day with \$1 entry. March 15 is canned food drive day; bring three cans of food and your fair entry is \$3 off admission. March 19 is \$2 entry.

Entertainment will include the Johnny Rocket's Cycle Circus Live, The Petting Zoo with Parakeet Encounter, Fables of the West - Strolling Country Comedy, Hollywood Racing Pigs, helicopter rides, and Pony Rides.

The Demolition Derby will be on Saturday, March 19 at 6 p.m.

For more information online, go to [okeechobeeountyfair.com](http://okeechobeeountyfair.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 information, as it becomes available, see [southcentralfloridalife.com](http://southcentralfloridalife.com).



## Labor Day Festival

Labor Day Weekend, Sept. 2 - Sept. 4, brings Okeechobee's Annual Labor Day Festival, with an arts and crafts festival in downtown Okeechobee, games for the whole family and a parade. This weekend also brings a rodeo at the Okeechobee Cattlemen's Rodeo Arena on U.S. 441 N. For more information on the parade and festival, go to [okeechobeemainstreet.org](http://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](http://okeechobeemainstreet.org).

## Christmas Festival

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

in Flagler Park downtown Okeechobee.

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

## American Legion Carnival

The Okeechobee American Legion hosts a fair in January with carnival rides for the kids.

## 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](http://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.

*NOTE: Some events may be subject to change or postponed. For updates, check the [southcentralfloridalife.com](http://southcentralfloridalife.com) website or the Lake Okeechobee News.*



# History of Okeechobee 1938-1948



Front Row: M.O. Kent, J.O. Wolf, Haynes Williams, Hancock, Carter Howell, Bucky Burgstiner, Snook Watford, Carol Hancock, Paula Burdeshaw, Alberta Louthan  
 Back Row: Russell Collins, Bill Hendry, Charles Hargraves, ??, Donald Mack, ??, ??, ??, ??  
 Down Front Middle: Babs Hayes, Sunny Row, Mike Barber.

**By Magi Cable**

Okeechobee Historical Society

After reviewing the historical events that occurred in Okeechobee during this decade, a few commonalities really stood out.

It appeared that during this time, the citizenry of Okeechobee had become established and wanted to be a part of bigger things. Many civic organizations, that are still active in the community, came to be. The Kiwanis organized in 1940, as did the Knights of Columbus, Shriners, and Girl Scouts. The Lions Club formed in 1943.

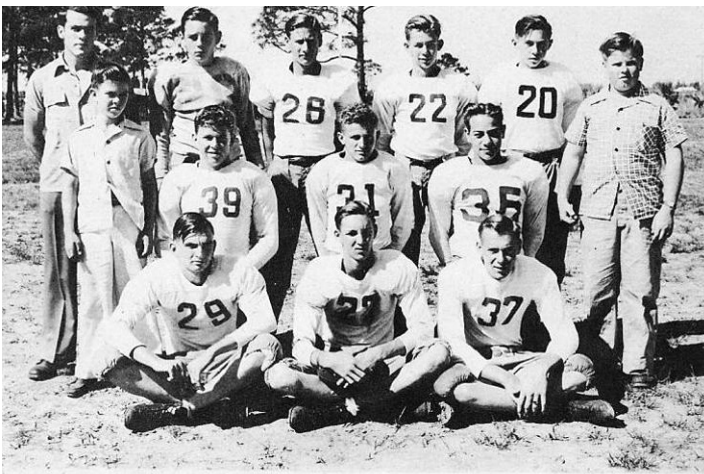
During this decade the schools that had operated in Fort Drum and Basinger were closed and those students were bused into Okeechobee. The football team was called "The Fighting Catfish." In 1945, several groups organized at the high school which have had lasting impact on our community, the first OHS Marching Band was formed and three years later, the Okeechobee Band Parents organization came into being. Future Farmers of America formed at the high school and one year later, 4H clubs started.

Markham Brothers opened their cannery plant in 1939 on Park Street which proved to be very successful and a huge boost to Okeechobee economics. It soon became the largest employer in the county and provided a patriotic service, when during the war, it operated 24 hours a day in order to provide canned foods for the U.S. Military. The plant, which canned green beans, tomatoes, and swamp cabbage, operated until the doors closed in 1970.

Another influential business opened in 1939 which was the livestock market. It originally was a project of the Okeechobee Cattleman's Association but then went into private ownership and is still operating today.

In 1945 it was reported that there was only one dairy farm in Okeechobee with some 109 cows.

Obviously, World War II had a major impact on the county. 347 men registered for the armed services out of a total county population of 3,000. The airport was approved by the Civil Aeronautical



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## History

• From page 10



Authority and would soon be used in training of pilots. The Home Defense Council and Red Cross were established in order to help with the war effort. From the Okeechobee News, which was the oldest business institution in Okeechobee, the following story appeared: Okeechobee's first World War II blackout occurred in January, 1942. About 9 p.m. airplanes roared over the town and the whistle at the canning plant sounded, signaling all lights out. Okeechobee Countians purchased \$110,550 worth of War Bonds from the time the program began on May 1, 1941 until December 31, 1942. Starting on May 1, 1942 each county in the nation was given a monthly quota of bond and stamp sales. The first quota set for Okeechobee County was \$1500, in May 1942, but residents surpassed the quota by purchasing \$3,150 worth of bonds. Okeechobee women prepared surgical dressings to aid the war effort. Under the supervision of Mrs. E. M. Meserve, volunteers met at the Woman's Club starting in September 1942. Local men and boys were organized into Civilian Defense Units which included rifle and

signal squads and a Citizens Defense Corps. Okeechobee is the first county in the United States to reach bond quota.

In the Okeechobee News on May 11, 1945, it was reported that WWII had ended. Okeechobee had 10 citizens who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country: Donald Gary Barber, Henry Thomas Bass, Jr, Albert Berka, Jr., William Joseph Goodwin, Vernon King, Pete Leitner, Robert Lightsey, Leonard Perry Mercer, Jr., James Henry Thomas, and Herman Watford. Their names are memorialized on the markers in Veteran's Park.

With the ending of the war, the American Legion Post 64 and the American Legion Auxiliary formed.

Economically, the county had some good and bad times. Both the City of Okeechobee and Okeechobee County were in severe financial trouble during the 1930s and early 1940s due to bond issues that had been floated during the boom days of the 1920s. The county obtained relief when a Federal Judge "entered a final decree confirming the debt settlement proposed by Okeechobee County in 1940, and which has been in litigation for the past two years," according to the Okeechobee News of August 28, 1942. The Okeechobee Land Company was dissolved by proclamation. A year later, the Okeechobee County Bank opened. There had been no banks in Okeechobee since the '30s when the Citizen's Bank closed. This bank was located on the west corner of West South Park and 5th Avenue.

The City of Okeechobee's volunteer fire department was organized in 1948.

Finally, and probably the most impactful occurrence in Okeechobee was the following series of events. After



the devastating hurricane of 1928, the Army Corps of Engineers constructed the Herbert Hoover Dike in 1938. A hurricane swept through South Florida in September 1947 and was followed by two lesser storms and heavy rain. Lake Okeechobee's levee held firm and no water leaked through, but a great deal of land on the northern shore of the lake was inundated by the heavy rains, causing most of the Kissimmee River valley to be flooded. Many cattle were lost during the flood and thousands of head sought refuge on the high ground of the Okeechobee dike so as a solution, one month later, 300 persons assembled at the county courthouse and authorized Irl Bronson, president of the Florida Cattlemen's Association, who presided over the meeting, to name a committee that would help push a flood control program through Congress. Sen. Claude Pepper flew in for the meeting and announced that he would be meeting with President Truman within a week and would urge him to move ahead with emergency fund allotments for the construction of the water control program. Thus, the precursor to the State of Florida Water Management Districts was created!





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## Historic buildings offer a link to the past

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

- **The Okeechobee County Courthouse**, 304 Northwest Second St., Okeechobee, was constructed in 1926. This Mediterranean-Revival style Courthouse now holds county offices. It was designed by architect George Gaynor Hyde of Miami. Due to the collapse of the Florida Land Boom during its construction, a central dome that was originally planned was never built. After the 1928 Okeechobee hurricane, its hallways were used as a temporary morgue. The courthouse originally had an open breezeway through the center front of the first floor. It was later enclosed to add a county commission meeting room. After the new Okeechobee County Judicial Center was built in 2005, the old courthouse was renovated. County commission now meets in the upstairs room that was originally the courtroom. The downstairs breezeway area was cleared of the old commission meeting room, but glassed in for security and weather protection. In 1989, the Okeechobee County Courthouse was listed in "A Guide to Florida's Historic Architecture," published by the University of Florida Press.

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



- **The Okeechobee Historic Schoolhouse Museum**, 1850 U.S. 98 N., was built in 1909. It was used as a school until 1916 when a new two-story red brick school was built. The original school was used as a private home off and on until the 1970s. In 1976, it was moved to its current location to be used as a museum.



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

• See **Historical Buildings** on page 16





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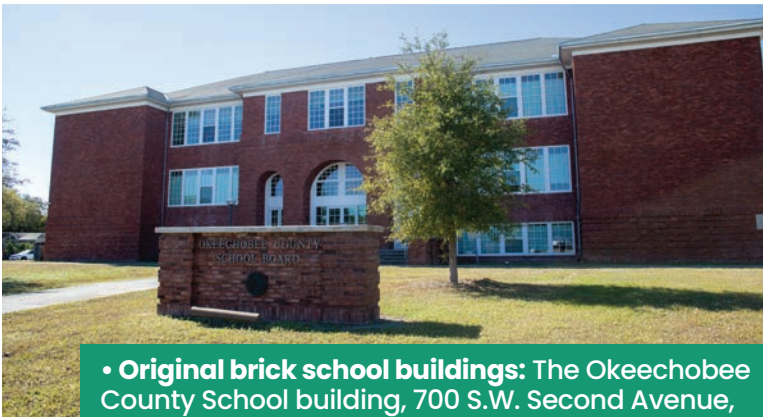




## Historical Buildings



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



- **Original brick school buildings:** The Okeechobee County School building, 700 S.W. Second Avenue, was built in 1916. It now houses the Okeechobee County School Board offices. The original Okeechobee High School building, 610 S.W. Second Avenue, was built in 1926. It currently houses the Okeechobee Freshman Campus.



- **Primitive Baptist Church**, 1003 S.W. Third Avenue, was built in May 1923. In 2022, the building was purchased by the City of Okeechobee. The Okeechobee Historical Society has an agreement with the city to develop the building as a museum.

**The Battle of Okeechobee Battlefield site**, four miles southwest of Okeechobee on U.S. 441 is being developed as part of the Florida Parks System. The battlefield was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1966.

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

- **The Bank of Okeechobee**, on State Road 70 and Osceola Avenue, was built in 1926, but was only a bank for a short time. In

2012, Okeechobee Main Street sponsored the mural project “Looking Back Through The Windows Of Time” which illustrates some of the building’s uses over the years.

- **The Raulerson Log Cabin**, 811 S.W. Second Avenue, is the homesite of the first Euro-American settlers to the area, Peter and Louisiana Raulerson. The couple moved southeast from Basinger to “The Bend,” a region along On-shohatchee River (Taylor Creek) and a few miles north of Lake Okeechobee, in October 1896.

They first constructed a barn to house both their family and livestock. In 1899, a group of friends arrived and, in three days, helped the couple construct a two-room log cabin. Elements of the original log cabin are preserved within the structure of a new home, built for the family in the 1920s. In 2016, the Okeechobee Historical Society purchased the building to preserve this historical site. Inside the house, the newer walls have been removed to expose the original logs.





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## Welcome



# *Mayor Dowling Watford: “Welcome to Okeechobee!”*

Welcome to Okeechobee! The City Council and staff hope you enjoy your time in our city whether you are here for a few weeks, months, or a lifetime. Okeechobee is a very unique town with a family atmosphere and rural lifestyle. The cattle industry has been our main industry for over one hundred years. The wonderful cattle drive sculpture project in Flagler Park celebrates this heritage, as well as several rodeos each year. In addition to wonderful restaurants and coffee shops, small boutiques offer shopping opportunities in our downtown area. Okeechobee MainStreet sponsors many events in Flagler Park including: Labor Day Festival; Christmas Festival; and Speckled Perch Festival. Each of the events also includes a parade, with the Christmas parade a lighted parade at night. Our Chamber of Commerce is very active, and supports the businesses of our community. Their office is located at the main intersection of Hwy 441 and Hwy 70, and they can provide you with a wealth of information on the area. With the great fishing on Lake Okeechobee, the Tourist Development Corporation facilitates, several major fishing tournaments as well as other events. The Okeechobee Music Festival attracts thousands of people each year with major musical artists. Other popular events include the Battle of Okeechobee reenactment the last weekend in February, and many horse shows and other events at the Ag Center. The Okeechobee Historical Society has a local history museum, the 1909 schoolhouse, and the original log cabin built by the Peter Raulerson family, the first settlers in Okeechobee. Just a few miles away the Seminole Tribe Brighton Reservation has a beautiful casino and several important cultural sites. So welcome to our wonderful city and enjoy the “real Florida!”





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***County Commission Chairman  
David Hazellief:  
“Each year brings new  
opportunities!”***

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

Reflecting on this past year, it is truly remarkable how much we have accomplished. Our community is emerging from the pandemic stronger and the services we offer are in greater demand as citizens are building homes, opening new businesses, and we are seeing more events coming to our area.

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

We are thrilled to see that the Bass Pro project continues to move forward with Bass Pro working diligently on its permitting process with the U.S. Army Corp as well as completing the preapplication process with South Florida Water Management. In addition, our Tourist Development Council will be hosting the first stop of the Annual Bass Master Elite Series Feb. 16-19, 2023 at our Scott Driver facility. This event is the opening series event and is nationally televised. The public is encouraged to come out and feel the camaraderie of Bass Pro and experience this event in person!

In other areas, the county continues its work on the Splash Pad project at the Darrell Enfinger Sports Complex and is hopeful we can be in the permitting phase by the end of February 2023.

At our Scott Driver Boat Ramp, the County’s dock and gangway improvement project continues to move forward with all required permits being approved and we are hopeful for a project completion by April 2023.

Within the Taylor Creek area and Rim Canal area, the county completed renovation of 14 water markers with 2 additional “no wake” markers. FDOT and the county are working together for installation of a traffic signal light at Hwy 441 North and Cemetery Road (NE 39th Blvd). Phase 1A Jail Renovation and Expansion project should be completed by April 2023 with a \$1.2M in savings from the original \$24.8M price; Phase 1B is now underway and will consist of the kitchen and laundry areas. The County completed paving of 12 roadway lane miles. Finally, in 2021 the county resumed its “fixed based operations” at our local airport which enabled the county to provide fuel sales/ground services, tie-down leasing, and enhanced customer service to the aviation community. This milestone was important for our economic growth in our community.

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



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# Okeechobee Main Street enriches

The Okeechobee Main Street program is designed to improve all aspects of the Okeechobee



downtown district, producing both tangible and intangible benefits. Improving economic management, strengthening public participation and making downtown a vibrant destination to visit are critical to Okeechobee's future. Building on downtown's inherent assets - rich architecture, personal service and traditional values and most of all, a sense of place.

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

Okeechobee Main Street has been the driving force behind the Arts & Culture programs in Okeechobee for 16 years. In 2018, OKMS became a Local Arts Agency for Okeechobee County and opened their art and education center in 2021. The Arts & Culture Alliance mission is to connect people to the arts and to each other, working to facilitate and nurture the creation, development, promotion and education of arts and culture in Okeechobee County.

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

# Chamber strives to improve local economy

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

The Chamber of Commerce of Okeechobee County strives to make businesses stronger, as well as to make a stronger economic climate for those businesses to thrive. Classes, business networking programs and a website that allows each member to have its own marketing space are all part of that focus.

Educational programs provided by the Chamber allowing for businesses to explore new ways to market, sell and engage with clients. In recent years, the Chamber has become a Grow With Google Partner and has assisted more than 250 individual clients both in person and via digital conference with marketing, digital and cloud-based business software, and client relations





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# HCA Florida Raulerson Hospital takes care of community

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

HCA Florida Raulerson Hospital accomplishes this mission through the Healthcare Corporation of America enterprise's approximately 35 million patient encounters each year, and with continued investment in equipment and technology. Through our connection to the nation's largest, most advanced healthcare system we are able to provide Okeechobee the highest quality care. Our state-of-the-art robotic surgical system is capable of performing minimally invasive robotic-assisted surgical cases which leads to faster recovery times and virtually scar-free procedures. Most recently, our MRI technology has been upgraded to shorten the time our patients need to spend within the machine, as well as produce higher-quality images for our physicians to evaluate.

Founded by HCA Healthcare in 1979, and named after one of the county's pioneer families, HCA Florida Raulerson Hospital treats nearly 30,000 ER patients annually in its 24-hour emergency room, including children. As a valued member of the HCA Florida Healthcare family, Raulerson is part of a 15-hospital network that employs 17,000 in East Florida.

HCA Florida Raulerson Hospital raises the bar in healthcare with:

- Accreditation by The Joint Commission,
- Primary Stroke Center Licensure by The Joint Commission,
- Accredited by the American College of Radiology in MRI, CT, Mammography, Ultra Sound and Nuclear Medicine,
- Accredited Laboratory by the College of American Pathologists,
- Leapfrog Hospital Safety Grade "A" in Spring 2020, Fall 2020, Spring 2021, Fall 2021, Fall 2022
- 5-star Healthgrades Recipient for Patient Safety 2018-2022,
- 5-star Healthgrades Recipient for Hip-Fracture Treatment 2018-2022,
- 5-star Healthgrades Recipient for Treatment of Gallbladder Removal Surgery 2021-2022

In 2022, HCA Florida Raulerson Hospital's new 52,000 square foot, four-story medical office



building (MOB) opened its doors to the community. The MOB features a new entrance to the hospital, patient registration, and administration offices on the first floor. The other floors house multi-specialty physician offices. These enhancements have allowed us to further provide the community with high quality, highly-reliable care every day close to home.

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

In pursuit of an Excellence ALWAYS culture, we collectively share the following standards:

- Our Mission: Above all else, we are committed to the care and improvement of human life.
- Our Vision: To be your partner in healthcare excellence.
- Our Values: The foundation of our culture is reflected in the outline of the ALWAYS pillars: Accountability, Leadership, Willingness, Attitude, You First, and Safety.
- Our Patient Promise: We are committed to excellence always: every action, every patient, every time.

To learn more about the services and mission of HCA Florida Raulerson Hospital, visit [HCAFloridaHealthcare.com](http://HCAFloridaHealthcare.com), or like HCA Florida Raulerson Hospital on Facebook.





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## Youth Sports and athletics in Okeechobee



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

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

Volleyball enthusiasts can join the Chobee Volleyball Academy. The group is a nonprofit organization designed to expose young girls to the game of volleyball. The league serves a variety of ages. They compete in tournaments around the state, and in 2018, the group competed in the AAU Girls Junior National Volleyball Championship. More information can be obtained on the group's official Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/chobeevolleyballacademy](http://www.facebook.com/chobeevolleyballacademy).

The Okeechobee Bulls Youth Athletic League is part of the National Pop Warner Football Program. They play teams from the surrounding areas during fall. Home games are held at the Okeechobee Sports Complex. Divisions are 6 years and up, 8

years and up, 10 years and up, 12 years and up, and 14 years and up. The Bulls Youth Athletic League can be contacted by email at [obyal.pw@gmail.com](mailto:obyal.pw@gmail.com).

Okeechobee County Parks and Recreation provides leagues for youth soccer

and basketball. Youth basketball for ages 6-14 takes place from January through March. Youth soccer for ages 5-13 lasts for up to 12 weeks between October and December.

Okeechobee County also provides a summer play camp and a summer swim league from June to August. Adults can also join softball leagues that run twice per year, between April and June, and again between October and December. Adults also can join a flag football league that plays games in January and February. The Okeechobee Citizens Recreational Association (OCRA) offers boys baseball and T-Ball, as well as, girls fast pitch softball at the Okeechobee County Sports Complex for participants 5-14 years of age. This program begins in March and ends in June. OCRA also offers boys tackle and flag football as well girls cheerleading at the Okeechobee County Sports Complex for participants 5-14 years of age. This program begins in October and runs through December. For more information

contact OCRA at (863) 801-7505.

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

Chobee Nation basketball provides travel ball experience for aspiring basketball players. There are teams for boys in the fifth grade to eighth grade and girls 12 and under. There are other teams for high school age children. The Chobee Nation high school boys' basketball team won back-to-back United States Specialty Sports Association national championships in 2016 and 2017. More information can be found on Facebook at [facebook.com/chobenationbasketball/](http://facebook.com/chobenationbasketball/).

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

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



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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 held its opening stop of the Tackle Warehouse Invationals Power-Pole at Lake Okeechobee in February this year. The tournament launched out of Roland & Mary Ann Martin’s Marina & Resort in Clewiston.

Lake Okeechobee topped out at 16.51 feet in December of 2022. The lake’s ecological envelope – the most beneficial range for the lake’s ecology – ranges from 12 to 12.5 feet at the start of the wet season to 15.5 feet at the start of the dry season. • See **Fishing** on page 32







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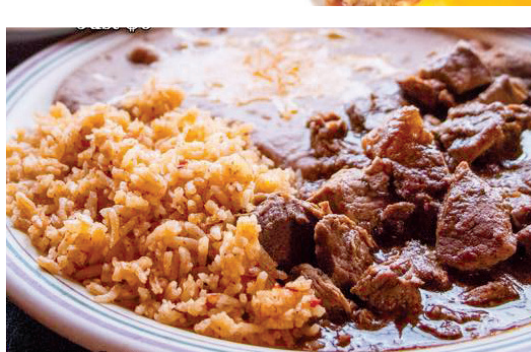
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## Dining Guide

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



**441 BBQ Grill**  
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**Alice's Restaurant**  
17410 Reservation Rd. N.E.

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501 SE 2nd St

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

**Apolonia's Prime Steakhouse**  
202 NE 7th Avenue

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**Crossroads Restaurant**  
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**Crum's Windmill Café**  
480 Windmill Road,  
Brighton Reservation

**Dairy Queen Grill & Chill**  
1212 S. Parrott Ave.

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

**Domino's**  
1700 S. Parrott Ave.,  
Suite B

**Duck Pub (Lakeport)**  
1031 Lakeport Plz,  
Okeechobee

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

**El Rancho Market**  
3901 U.S. 441 N.

**El Rico Tacos**  
3600 U.S. 441 S.

**Gladys' Restaurant**  
511 S.W. Park St.

**Golden Corral**  
700 S. Parrott Ave.

**Good Spirits**  
245 U.S. 441

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

**Jersey Mike's Subs**  
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**Joey's Supreme Pizza**  
107 S.W. Park St.

**Kahootz Draft House**  
702 N.W. Park St.

**KFC**  
3387 U.S. 441 S.

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

**La Cabaña Taqueria Restaurant**  
110 S. Parrott Ave

**La Mariposa Mexican Restaurant**  
202 NE 2nd St. Suite 10

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

**La Taqueria Las Palmitas**  
Near Southwest 21st Avenue & State Road 70

**Lakeside Grill**  
1111 S. Parrott Ave.

**Landing Strip Café**  
2800 N.W. 20th Trail

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

**Little Caesars Pizza**  
2105 S. Parrott Ave.

**Lunch Box, Okeechobee KOA**  
4276 U.S. 441 S.

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

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

**Maria's Cuban Cafe**  
301 S.W. Park St.

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

**Mom's Kitchen**  
909 S. Parrott Ave.

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

**Okeechobee Fish Company**  
7841 Hwy 78 West

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

**Okee Poké**  
122 SE Park Street

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

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

**Park 112**  
112 S.E. Park St.

**Park-it Market**  
1600 State Road 70 E.

**Parrott Island**  
1001 S. Parrott Ave.

**Pizza Heaven**  
208 S. Parrott Ave.

**Pizza Hut**  
2795 U.S. 441 S.

**Pogey's Family Restaurant**  
1759 S. Parrott Ave.

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

**Publix**  
3551 U.S. 441 S.

**Pueblo Viejo**  
3415 U.S. 441 S.

**Quail Creek Plantation (Pavilion)**  
12399 NE 224th Street

**R Cafe**  
22302 NW 176th Ave.

**Ridge Market**  
7 State Rd 78, Buckhead Ridge

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

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

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

**Serenity Coffee Shop**  
601 S.W. Park St.

**Shenanigans**  
2237 U.S. 98 N

**Speckled Perch**  
105 U.S. 98 N.

**Sublime**  
101 SW 2nd Ave.

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

**Taco Bell**  
501 N.E. Park St.

**Taqueria Serrano**  
5602 State Road 70

**Taqueria y Fruteria**  
1002 N.W. Park St.

**Taqueria Yanez**  
310 U.S. 98 N.

**Tasty Cuban Café**  
3600 U.S. 441 S.

**Tin Fish**  
301 N. Parrott Ave

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

**Twisted Sisterz Mobile Kitchen & Bakery**  
(various locations)

**VFW Post #4423**  
300 NW 34th St.

**Ursy's Corner Café**  
3100 U.S. 441

**Wendy's**  
502 N.E. Park St.

**Winn-Dixie**  
3246 U.S. 441 S

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

**Yeli's Sweets**  
3600 U.S. 441 S.

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

The Okeechobee area dining guide will publish inside of several annual Lake Okeechobee News publications. To submit additions, corrections or to upgrade your listing, please contact Angie Bridges at 863-824-5942

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The lake started the 2022–23 dry season a foot higher than the top of the ecological envelope.

“The water is extremely high,” said Power-Pole pro Darrell Davis of Dover, Florida, who has three top-10 finishes in FLW tournaments on Lake Okeechobee. “The fish are pretty scattered, and the high water has definitely opened up quite a few new areas.”

In contrast to the current high level, Lake O went through a dryer period in late 2018 and early 2019. The lake level dropped to around 12 feet in February 2019.

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

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

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

“I feel like the future of the fishing on our lake is depending upon the management and treating of the lake and vegetation,” explained Mr. Moore. “A healthy balance of mechanical harvesting and spraying areas that can’t be reached by mechanical harvesting is essential to the overall future of

fishing on the lake. The lake needs vegetation to act as natural filters for harmful substances that enters the lake from the Kissimmee River. Likewise these fish need vegetation for a number of reasons; shelter, food and more so for crappie-spawning areas.”

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

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

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

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



# Dolly Hand Cultural Arts Center

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2022-2023 Season



**The Latin Divos**  
January 10



**The World of Musicals**  
January 23



**Harlem Gospel Travelers**  
February 9

**Branden & James**  
February 23



**The Kingdom Choir**  
March 21



**The Sounds of Soul**  
March 16

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# Map and Legend of Okeechobee County Government and Public Buildings



**1** Administrative Annex  
450 US Hwy 98 N



**2** Property Appraiser, Tax Collector & Driver's License Office  
409 NW 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue



**3** City Police Department  
50 SE 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue



**4** City Hall  
55 SE 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue



**5** Emergency Operations Center  
707 NW 6<sup>th</sup> Street



**6** County Courthouse  
304 NW 2<sup>nd</sup> Street



**7** DCF & Health Department  
1690 NW 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue



**8** Public Library  
206 SW 16<sup>th</sup> Street



**9** Judicial Center  
304 NW 2<sup>nd</sup> Street



**10** Sheriff's Department  
504 NW 4<sup>th</sup> Street



**11** US Post Office  
1000 SR 70 East



**12** HCA Raulerson Hospital  
1796 Hwy 441 N



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



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# *Okeechobee County Schools put students first*



By Ken Kenworthy  
Superintendent of Schools

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

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

best sponsors, supporters and lifeblood to many activities, sports, and clubs.

As a full time resident, you know us. You know, with your help, we have increased our graduation rate, the number of industry certifications, and the number of college credits/Associates Degree recipients. You know we are fully accredited, certified as a healthy district, and take not only our academic performance seriously, but also devote a serious amount of the time to school safety and the social and emotional learning of our students. We appreciate your continued support to help make our school district grow and thrive.

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

If you are looking a place to enroll your student, look no further. We currently enroll about 6,000 students throughout our 10 schools in PreK-12th grades. We offer programs for students who need advanced coursework through honors, dual enrollment and advanced placement

courses. We are involved in the AVID program that pushes middle level students into more rigorous coursework. Need accommodations? We can work with an IEP team to get your child the services he or she needs. Our band is one of the best, our drama program is out of this world, our sports programs continue to excel and our CTE programs reach industry standards. Our schools are welcoming, diverse and set high standards for teaching and learning. We think you will find what you are looking for in us.

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



# Lots of fun recreation opportunities in Okeechobee

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

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

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

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

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

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

- Various Okeechobee school facilities are also available for rent for recreational purposes.

They include gymnasiums at Okeechobee High School, 2800 U.S. 441 N., Osceola Middle School at 825 S.W. 28th St., and Yearling Middle School at 925 N.W. 23rd Lane.

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

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

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

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

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

- The Okee-Tantie Campground and Marina at 10430 SR 78



- 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.

W. includes a parking area, open fields, marina and boat ramps. It also has an amphitheater.

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

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

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

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

- Also available is the

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

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

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

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

## *Okeechobee features premier shooting sport options*



The wide open spaces of Okeechobee County are home to some of the best shooting sports facilities in South Florida.

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

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

14-station fully automatic clay shooting courses.

**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.

**Center Mass Gun Range**, 1934 Center St., is Okeechobee's only indoor gun range and features many climate-controlled shooting lanes. The range also features seven simulation rooms where shooters can take turns playing through several

computer-generated scenarios such as a zombie apocalypse and an Old West shoot-out.

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

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



## Lake O area offers great bike riding and hiking

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

Designated as part of the Florida National Scenic Trail in 1993, 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

There is a map available from the Army Corps of Engineers that identifies where the closures are, and it can be found online at the following site: [www.saj.usace.army.mil/Portals/44/docs/Recreation/LOST%20map%20508.pdf](http://www.saj.usace.army.mil/Portals/44/docs/Recreation/LOST%20map%20508.pdf)

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

There are several good sections of the Florida Scenic Trail in the area to sample as a section hiker on a cool winter morning, if you desire. The Florida Trail follows the dike around Lake Okeechobee both to the east and the west sides. 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.

# *Okeechobee County is cattle country*



Cattle have been an important part of Okeechobee's economy since the first settlers arrived in the Big Lake area more than 100 years ago. Modern Okeechobee County is still cattle country. It is listed as one of the top three counties in Florida with the most cattle, and among the Top 10 in the country.

While today's cowboys take advantage of modern agribusiness technology, it's not unusual to see a cowboy on horseback separating cattle from the herd, much as the pioneers did in the days of the Florida Cracker Trail cattle drives.

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

cattle drives once took place along the route. These days, the Florida Cracker Trail Association hosts an annual cross-state ride along the "Cracker Trail" to showcase, educate, and help preserve the importance of Florida's role cattle and agriculture. For information on how to join the ride, go online to [www.crackertrail.org](http://www.crackertrail.org).

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

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

## **RANCH RODEO**

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





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## Cattle Country

compete at area rodeos to earn points to qualify for the state competition and ultimately the national competition. The 2023 Florida Ranch Rodeo State Finals will be held Sept. 27 at the Silver Spurs Arena in Kissimmee.

### OKEECHOBEE COWTOWN RODEO

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

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

The Okeechobee Cattlemen's Association produces the Okeechobee Cowtown Rodeo every March as their annual fundraiser. Professional cowboys and cowgirls from all corners of the nation make Okeechobee their home for the weekend and compete for prizes and money. This year's Cowtown Rodeo will be March 11 and 12 at the Okeechobee Cattlemen's open-ai red, historical grand stand arena on U.S. 441 North.

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



for one weekend only, scoring points and money in hopes of advancing their careers on to the year-end National Finals Rodeo in Las Vegas, Nevada.

### FLORIDA HIGH SCHOOL RODEO & JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL RODEO

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

The Florida Junior High School Rodeo Association is a division of the National High School Rodeo Association (NHSRA) for sixth, seventh and eighth graders. The top 20 kids in each event at the end of the season move on to compete at the Florida State Finals. The top four in each event after state finals then have the option of moving

on to compete at the national finals.

The Fred Smith Arena, 171410 Sports Complex Road, on Brighton Seminole Reservation in Glades County will host a Florida High School Rodeo March 11-12. Okeechobee Agri-Civic Center, 4601 SR 710, will host a Florida High School Rodeo on April 22-23.

May 11-14 are the dates for the Florida High School Rodeo finals, which will be held at the Okeechobee Agri-Civic Center, 4601 SR 710. Spectators are admitted free. For more information on high school rodeo, go online to [www.fhsra.com](http://www.fhsra.com)

### EXTREME BULL RIDING

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

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

For updates on rodeos in the Okeechobee area, check the [southcentralfloridalife.com](http://southcentralfloridalife.com) website or the weekly Lake Okeechobee News.



## Florida Department of Health offers variety of services



Photo courtesy 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, 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

• See **Health Department** on page 44

## Pregnancy center serves the community

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

The Goal of the Pregnancy Center of Okeechobee is to:

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

Create a safe, confidential and caring

haven in which options can be provided for women experiencing an unexpected pregnancy.

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

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

For more information, call 863-467-8748

Center Director is Lisa Lumpkin.

## Open Hands provides free health care to uninsured

Open Hands Health Center is a nonprofit that has been serving Okeechobee since 2015. It was founded on the scripture verse Deuteronomy 15:11 "For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, 'You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.'" The mission of Open Hands Health Center, Inc. is to deliver free professional, Christ-centered healthcare to people, who for whatever reason, find themselves without health insurance. Open Hands offers free office visits and we are able to arrange low cost labs and medications. We prefer to spend quality time with the patient so we can best address their health needs. Annually, we have been able to bring the Florida Baptist Association free

• See **Open Hands** on page 44

## Health Department

• From page 43

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

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

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

Health Education engages community partners to address issues related to chronic disease, injury and

violence prevention, maternal & child health, provides community outreaches to promote safety, healthy lifestyle choices, wellness, and health equity.

Clinical Services of public health significance include family planning, immunizations/vaccines, sexually transmitted infections testing and treatment, hepatitis program and HIV/Aids services. The Health Department accepts the following payment methods: cash and credit card. For clinical services only, Medicaid and self-pay sliding fee based on eligibility are accepted.

Epidemiology and Disease Control monitors contagious and all reportable infectious diseases, provides guidance in control for future outbreaks, conducts follow-up investigations for diseases that spread through human to human contact, in water, or food, and by animal bites. For more information, call 863-462-5800 or go to [okeechobee.floridahealth.gov](http://okeechobee.floridahealth.gov)

## Open Hands

• From page 43

dental van, which will return again 6/5-6/9/2023. Local dentists volunteer their time to do both fillings and extractions. We also have been able to help facilitate free biblical counseling for those who are interested.

If you would like to see if you are eligible for free health care, be placed on the dental van waiting list (beginning in March) or would like to volunteer your time or help support our cause, please call us at 863-357-1257.

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

## Important Numbers

**In an emergency, call 9-1-1**

**Animal Control**

863-357-3225

**City Code Enforcement office**

863-357-1971

**City Fire Department, non-emergency**

863-763-9796

**City Police, non-emergency**

863-763-5521

**County Code Enforcement office**

863-763-5548

**County Fire/Rescue, non-emergency**

863-763-5544

**Emergency Operations Center**

863-763-3212

**Glades Electric Cooperative**

863-946-6200

**FDACS Consumer Help Line**

1-800-HELP-FLA  
(1-800-435-7352)

**Florida Power and Light**

1-800-226-3545

**FPL power outages**

1-800-468-8243

**Lake Okeechobee News**

863-763-3134

**Okeechobee Utility Authority**

863-763-9460

**Poison Control Center**

1-800-222-1222

**Raulerson Hospital**

863-763-2151

**Red Cross**

863-763-2488

**Sheriff's Office, non-emergency**

863-763-3117

**School Board Office**

863-462-5000





# Things to Do

## FEBRUARY

### Harlem Gospel Travelers

BELLE GLADE — Dolly Hand Cultural Arts Center, 1977 SW College Drive, will present Harlem Gospel Travelers on Thursday, **Feb. 9** at 7 p.m. For information or tickets, visit [www.Dollyhand.org](http://www.Dollyhand.org).

### Hit Men of Country

AVON PARK — On Feb. 9, The Hit Men of Country, will perform at the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts in Avon Park, 600 W. College Drive, Avon Park at 7 p.m. For tickets and information, call 863-784-7178 or E-mail: [culturalperformances@southflorida.edu](mailto:culturalperformances@southflorida.edu).

### Doo Wop & 60s Motown Thursday

FORT PIERCE — Summer Crush Vineyard & Winery, 4200 Johnston Road, will present Doo Wop & 60s Motown Thursday **Feb. 9** from 1 to 4 p.m. For tickets and more information, go online to [summercrushwine.com](http://summercrushwine.com).

### CCC Festival

SEBRING — Highlands Hammock State Park, 5931 Hammock Road, Sebring, will host the 36th Annual Civilian Conservation Corps Festival on Saturday, **Feb. 11**, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

### Premier National Eagles Tribute Band: The Long Run!

FORT PIERCE — Summer Crush Vineyard & Winery, 4200 Johnston Road, will present "Premier National Eagles Tribute Band: The Long Run!" on Saturday, **Feb. 11** from 1 to 4 p.m. For tickets and more information, go online to [summercrushwine.com](http://summercrushwine.com).

### Art in the Park

MOORE HAVEN — Art in the Park will be held on Saturday, **Feb. 11**, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., at the Tom Perry Memorial Park and Glades County Library, 201 Riverside Drive S.W. For information, visit Art in the Park - Moore Haven on Facebook.

### Absolute Queen!

FORT PIERCE — Summer Crush Vineyard & Winery, 4200 Johnston Road, will present Absolute Queen! A royal pre-super bowl party! Plus a Chevy SSR Show on Sunday, **Feb. 12** from 1 to 4 p.m. For tickets and more information, go online to [summercrushwine.com](http://summercrushwine.com).

### The Lovettes in Concert

AVON PARK — The Lovettes will perform at 1:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Feb. 14, at the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for Performing Arts, 600 W. College Drive, Avon Park at 7 p.m. For tickets and information, call 863-784-7178.

### Doo Wop & 60s Motown Thursday

FORT PIERCE — Summer Crush Vineyard & Winery, 4200 Johnston Road, will present Doo Wop & 60s Motown Thursday **Feb. 16** from 1 to 4 p.m. For tickets and more information, go online to [summercrushwine.com](http://summercrushwine.com).

### Let's Dance

FORT PIERCE — The Indian River State College McAlpin Fine Arts Center, 3209 Virginia Ave, Fort Pierce, will present, "Let's Dance" on Feb. 16, & 17 at 7 p.m. and on Feb. 18 at 2 p.m. For more information and tickets, go online to <https://irsc.edu/student-life/arts-and-culture.html>.

### Shirley Bradner Gospel concert

CLEWISTON — Shirley Bradner will perform in a gospel concert at the Red Barn, located on the left after S.R. 80 overhead pass between Moore Haven and Clewiston, on Friday, **Feb. 17** at 7 p.m. For information, call Judy Swindle at 863-228-0090.

### Bob Marley Rockin' Reggae

FORT PIERCE — Summer Crush Vineyard & Winery, 4200 Johnston Road, will present Bob Marley Rockin' Reggae & Tropical Soul Party on Friday, **Feb. 17** from 1 to 4 p.m. For tickets and more information, go online to [summercrushwine.com](http://summercrushwine.com).



# Elections office preparing for 2024



By Melissa Arnold  
Supervisor of Election  
We are happy to  
report a 100% accurate  
audit for the 2022

Election Cycle! We are  
already preparing for  
2024 and will have  
three federal elections  
next year. Some items

to note as a voter:  
Confirmation notices  
will continue to be  
mailed from our office  
throughout the first  
quarter of 2023. If you  
receive a notification  
from our office, you  
must return the notice  
or call and update  
your information to  
remain on the voter  
roll. The legislative  
changes in 2022 have  
made tighter regulations  
regarding our list  
maintenance activities  
and voter responsibility.  
One more BIG legislative  
change is that all  
VOTE-BY-MAIL requests  
are canceled.

You MUST request a  
new VBM ballot for  
every election cycle to  
have a ballot mailed  
to you. To request a  
Vote-By-Mail Ballot  
please call our office  
at 863-763-4014 or  
go to our website@  
VOTEKEECHOBEE.GOV  
or stop by the office  
located in the Historic  
Court House.

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

## Veteran Service Office offers services to veterans

The mission of the Okeechobee County Veteran Service Office (CVSO), is to assist veterans, spouses and their dependents in matters pertaining to their rights and benefits for claim submission to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. We appreciate our Veterans for their service and sacrifice and are happy to assist. There is absolutely no fee or cost for our services or for submission of a claim for VA benefits.

### Who can use our services?

- Veterans
- Veteran's dependent
- Surviving spouse or child of a Veteran
- Reservist or National Guard member
- Active duty service member

Available services include:

- DD214 or Report of Separation replacement
- Service Disability and Pension

Ex: Agent Orange exposure, Camp Lejeune Water Contamination or PACT

Act 2022 presumptive list

- Education Benefits
- Burial Benefits
- Health Care
- Home Loans
- Life Insurance
- Property Tax Exemption
- Survivor Benefits
- Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Services
- Free VA Van service to VAMC West Palm Beach! Pick up at WaWa gas station located at 200 NW Park Street, leaving promptly at 6:30 a.m. All appointments must be before noon and

seating is limited. To reserve a seat, call the Veteran Service Office with the date/time of your appointment.

The CVSO is available by appointment only. Monday – Friday 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. For more information or to make an appointment, call or email your County Veteran Service Officer, Sarah Carter at 863-763-6950 Ext 5, or [veteran@co.okeechobee.fl.us](mailto:veteran@co.okeechobee.fl.us).

Our address has changed! Now located at 1700 NW 9th Ave, Ste C., Okeechobee, FL 34972.



## City Police Department has been serving Okeechobee for over 100 years



**Okeechobee City Police Chief Donald Hagan**

The Okeechobee Police Department was established in 1915. It has evolved and now consists of 38 employees with Chief Donald Hagan in command. Of the sworn law enforce-

ment employees, there are two lieutenants, one detective sergeant, two detectives, one narcotics detective, four road patrol sergeants, eight road patrol officers — including a K-9 unit, two part-time officers, one motor officer and three school resource officers assigned to schools located within the city limits and working jointly with the Sheriff's Office SRO Program.

Three of the officers work jointly with the sheriff's office SWAT team. The narcotics detective is assigned to

the narcotics task force with sheriff's detectives.

Working jointly with other law enforcement agencies provides strength in numbers, and the open line of communication makes us all more effective.

Civilian employees consist of one administrative secretary, one records clerk, one code enforcement officer, one assistant code enforcement officer, five dispatchers, three part-time dispatchers and one school crossing guard. The road patrol is supported by a small group of non-sworn

volunteers on the police department auxiliary and assistance with special events and natural disasters is their main priority.

The department is responsible for providing law enforcement duties within the city of Okeechobee which is roughly 4 square miles with a population of 5,918 as of 2021. The Police Department shuts down local streets and highways four times a year for the community to enjoy small town parades. The biggest and most attractive

• See **City Police** on page 48

## Sheriff's deputies patrol 773 square miles



**Sheriff Noel E. Stephen**

Sheriff Noel E. Stephen is responsible for law enforcement on the county level. The sheriff's deputies carry out most of the law enforcement duties, while the sheriff, an elected

official, manages their activities. Deputies serve under the sheriff. The duties of a deputy sheriff include investigating complaints, emergency response, patrolling, resolving disputes, arresting suspects, criminal investigations, and executing warrants.

The Okeechobee County Sheriff's Office has 207 employees as well as dozens of volunteer personnel who serve on our auxiliary, search and rescue, and Citizens on Patrol. Sheriff Stephen's command staff consists of

one Chief Deputy, three captains, and eight lieutenants. Specialized teams include our K-9 teams, hostage negotiations, SWAT, dive team, motorcycle unit, drone unit, honor guard, and the cell extraction team. The Sheriff's office also performs other functions such as traffic control, animal enforcement, accident investigations, homicide investigations, narcotics investigations, transportation of prisoners, school resource officers, and courthouse security.

The Sheriff's Office

budget for the fiscal year 2021-2022 is \$20,456,376. Within that budget, Sheriff Stephen is also responsible for the county jail with an average daily jail population of 285 inmates, Okeechobee County Courthouse security operations, animal control, communications center, and provides school resource deputies to all county schools.

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

• See **Sheriff** on page 48

**City Police**

• From page 47

being the Christmas Parade held the second Saturday in December at 6 p.m.

The main event in the city of Okeechobee is the yearly Speckled Perch Festival. It takes place the second weekend in March every year and is kicked off with the Speckled Perch Parade. Small vendors set up in the city's Flagler Park District and provide homemade things like quilts, jams and jellies that are some of the favorites.

People live in and move to Okeechobee for the small-town atmosphere and to escape the issues that often come with larger cities. We strive to keep it that way while attempting to provide all the modern amenities.

The police department stays active in providing safety and constant security for our residents. Code enforcement is always in pursuit to keep our city safe and clean in order to improve the look of our community.

The city police invite and encourage people to visit our little slice of Heaven located in the country, away from the traffic jams and hustle and bustle of larger cities.

# Okeechobee County Fire Rescue keeps community safe

By Ralph Franklin, EFO  
Public Safety Director/Fire Chief

Okeechobee County Fire Rescue is a combination department that uses both career and volunteer members to serve the emergency service needs of the community. The department operates out of three career stations that are strategically located throughout the county. Stations are staffed on a 24 hour, 7 days a week, 365 days a year system.

The department is staffed with 58 career employees who are all trained as Firefighters and Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT), with most of the staff certified as paramedics. The career employees are supplemented by volunteers.

Okeechobee County Fire Rescue provides Advanced Life Support (ALS) Emergency Medical Service (EMS), Fire Protection, Fire Inspec-



tions, and Fire and EMS public education to all of Okeechobee County. The department accomplishes these responsibilities using four paramedic staffed and transport capable ambulances and four paramedic engines. Various mutual aid agreements are in place with the counties of Highlands, Glades,

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

The field staff and daily operations are under the direct supervision of the Deputy Fire Chief. The responsibility of coordination and conducting all department fire and EMS training is the responsibility of the Bureau Chief of Training. All Community Risk Reductions activities including, fire inspections, site plan review, and public education programs are the responsibility of the Bureau Chief of Risk Reduction/Fire Marshal. The Fire Chief has direct supervision of the Deputy Fire Chief, the Bureau Chiefs, E911, as well as the budgetary and administrative functions of the department, with indirect supervision of the field staff.

In 2022, Okeechobee County Fire Rescue responded to 7,539 calls for service.

## Sheriff

• From page 47

with an average population, as of 2021, of 43,196 residents. In fiscal year, 2021-2022 we answered 27,235 calls for service through our agency.

Since taking the oath

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

within the sheriff's office.

In January 2021, Sheriff Stephen was sworn in for his second term as Okeechobee County Sheriff. Sheriff Stephen is the first ever, unopposed sheriff to win an election since the inception of Okeechobee County in 1917.



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# Clubs & Organizations



Okeechobee clubs and organizations welcome new members and visitors. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, some meeting times and places are subject to change

## **Alcoholics Anonymous**

772-873-9299. For meetings, please see [aastlucieintergroup.com/meetings/](http://aastlucieintergroup.com/meetings/).

## **American Legion #64**

863-763-2950. Meetings are the second Tuesday of every month at 6 p.m., located at the American Legion, 501 S.E. Second St., [POST64@centurylink.com](mailto:POST64@centurylink.com).

net, visit Okeechobee American Legion Post #64 on Facebook.

## **American Legion Auxiliary**

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

## **American Red Cross**

863-763-2488. Located at 208 N. Parrott Ave., Okeechobee, FL 34972, [redcross-pbc.org](http://redcross-pbc.org).

## **Business Women's Referral Network**

863-467-2557, [rayedeusinger@gmail.com](mailto:rayedeusinger@gmail.com).

com. Call for meetings and information.

## **Chamber of Commerce (Okeechobee)**

55 S. Parrott Ave. Visit their website at [okeechobeebusiness.com](http://okeechobeebusiness.com), email [info@okeechobeebusiness.com](mailto:info@okeechobeebusiness.com), visit their Facebook page or call 863-467-6246.

## **East Coast Migrant Head Start**

863-467-6930. Located at 762 N.E. 16th Ave., Okeechobee, [ecmhsp.org](http://ecmhsp.org).

## **Fraternal Order of**

## **Eagles #4137**

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

## **Fraternal Order of Eagles #4509**

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

## **Friends of the Okeechobee Library**

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

## **Garden & Orchid Club**

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

## **Guardians ad Litem**

Guardian ad Litem

• See **Clubs** on page 52





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**Lucy Olivarez**, Office Manager  
**Carmen Guerrero**, Customer Service

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admin@c21okee.com

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## Clubs & Organizations

always needs more volunteers to advocate for Children in Foster Care. For more information on meetings and location, visit [guardianadlitem.org](http://guardianadlitem.org) or call 772-785-5804.

### Kiwanis Club

Meetings are held every Thursday at Lakeside Restaurant, 1111 S. Parrott Ave. Meetings start at noon. For information, visit [www.facebook.com/OkeechobeeKiwanis](http://www.facebook.com/OkeechobeeKiwanis).

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

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

### Masonic Lodge #237

863-763-1610. Meetings are held for the ladies (The Order of the Eastern Star), the first and third Tuesday at 7:30 p.m. Meetings for the gentlemen are the first and third Monday of every month at 7:30 p.m. All meetings are held at 107 N.W. Fifth Ave.

### Ministerial Association

Meetings are held the second Wednesday of the month at noon at Golden Corral, 700 S. Parrott Ave. For more information, call Pastor Jim Dawson of the First United Methodist Church at 863-763-4021.

### Moose Lodge #1753 (North)

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

### Okeechobee Amateur Radio Club

147.195 MHZ with 100 Khz tone. Anyone who is licensed is welcome to check-in for information. For more info, call Mark Brandel, KF4EA, at 863-634-7021 or email [markwbrandel@gmail.com](mailto:markwbrandel@gmail.com).

### Okeechobee Battlefield Friends

863-610-2333. Meetings are held as needed. [facebook.com/Battle-of-Okeechobee](http://facebook.com/Battle-of-Okeechobee).

### Okeechobee County Board of Realtors

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

### Okeechobee County 4-H

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

### Okeechobee Historical Society

863-763-4344. The Historical Society meets the third Monday of the month from September until June, at noon, with a pot luck luncheon at the Okeechobee Historical Museum, 1850 U.S. 98. Annual dues are \$10. The museum is open on Thursdays from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. (except holidays.)

### Okeechobee Main Street

[okeechebeemainstreet.org](http://okeechebeemainstreet.org), email [info@okeechebeemainstreet.org](mailto:info@okeechebeemainstreet.org), visit their Facebook page or call 863-357-MAIN (6246).

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

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

### Okeechobee Emergency Response Team

If you are interested in joining the Okeechobee Emergency Response Team, email [okeechobeecert@gmail.com](mailto:okeechobeecert@gmail.com).

### Rotary Club

Meetings are held every Tuesday at noon at Golden Corral, 700 S. Parrott Ave.; [rotary6930.org](http://rotary6930.org).

### Treasure Coast Builders Association

Okeechobee branch, 863-467-2007; [treasurecoastba.com](http://treasurecoastba.com).

### VFW Post #4423

863-763-0818. House Committee meetings are held the third Thursday of every month at 5:30 p.m. The Post meeting is held at 6:30 p.m. Auxiliary meetings are held the second Thursday of the month at 6:30. Meetings are located at the VFW Post, 300 N.W. 34th.

### VFW Post #10539

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

### VFW Post #9528

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



# Discover Indian River State College

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

In 2022 more than 1 in 3 public and public charter high school graduates residing in the IRSC service district—Indian River, Martin, Okeechobee, and St. Lucie counties—enrolled at IRSC via the Promise program that offers tuition-free college to eligible high-school graduates. Affirming its commitment to enhancing access to quality higher education, Indian River State College Foundation, Inc. will continue and expand access to the enormously popular program in 2023. To learn more about the IRSC Promise program, visit [promise.irsc.edu](http://promise.irsc.edu).

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

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

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

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

Students concerned about the cost of a college education are happy to discover that 91 percent of IRSC students graduate without debt (U.S. News and World Report) and that IRSC is the second-most-affordable college in the country (U.S. Department of Education). Advisors work closely with prospective students to help them obtain financial aid they don’t have to pay back. Advisors also help



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

“Don’t let financial concerns or worry stop you from pursuing your dreams,” adds Campus President Brown. “We are eager to help you apply for financial aid and will help you stay on track.”

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

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

Business and community groups benefit from the Williamson Center, a state-of-the-art conference center on the campus available for meetings, workshops, and events.

IRSC invites you to learn more by visiting [www.irsc.edu](http://www.irsc.edu) or calling the Dixon Hendry Campus at 863-824-6000.

# 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  
Pastor: John Glenn  
Website: alphaministries.  
org  
or churchinthewood-  
sokeechobee.org  
Email: office@alphaminis-  
tries.org  
Facebook: Facebook.  
com/Alphaminis-  
tries-Church-in-the-  
Woods-101888191473486

**Basinger Christian  
Brethren Church**

16090 N.W. 176th Ave.

Phone: 863-467-2635  
Pastor: Reverend Monroe  
Arnold

**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/  
pages/category/  
Religious-Center/BCOG\_  
IndOkee-1454811934780798

**Big Lake Church of  
Christ**

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

**Big Lake Missions  
Outreach**

P.O. Box 1663,  
Okeechobee, 34973  
Phone: 863-763-5725  
Cell: 863-697-6433

Facebook: facebook.com/  
BigLakeMissionsOutreach  
Bruce and Mary Anne  
Swinford, directors  
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the Methodist Church four  
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meal on Wednesday.  
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pointment: 863-763-5725

**Brighton Baptist Church**

24050 Highway 70 West  
Phone: 863-763-3063  
(Office)  
863-763-6626 (Church  
office)  
Pastor: Bill Allen  
Facebook: facebook.com/  
BrightonBaptistOkeechob  
ee/?rf=111560848883388

**Buckhead Ridge Baptist  
Church**

1731 Hunter Rd., Buckhead  
Ridge  
Pastor: Phillip Nason, 863-  
763-7165  
Email: Nason.philip@  
yahoo.com

**Calvary Chapel of  
Okeechobee**

212 S. Parrott Ave.  
Phone: 863 623-5283  
Pastor: Carlos Amador  
Email: pastorcarlos\_cal-  
vary@aol.com or infor@  
calvaryokeechobee.org  
Website: calva-  
ryokeechobee.org

**Christ Fellowship Church  
Non-denominational**

701 S. Parrott Ave.  
Phone: 561-799-7600  
Office  
Pastor: Matt & Tracy  
Bowen  
Email: hello@christfellow-  
ship.church  
Website: cf.church

**Church of God of  
Okeechobee**

301 N.E. Fourth Ave.  
Phone: 863-763-4127  
Pastor: Chad Keathley  
Website: okeechobeeog.  
com (streaming service  
available)  
chadkeathley@att.net

**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  
Rev. Kay Muller  
Website: churchofoursav-  
iourokeechobee.org  
Email: churchofoursav-  
iour1@gmail.com,

• See **Church Directory** on  
page **56**





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## Church Directory

info@ChurchOfOurSaviorOkeechobee.org

### Community Church of Basinger

**Non-denominational**

19836 U.S. 98 N.

Phone: 863-467-2635

Pastor: Rev. Michael W. Peppers

Facebook: facebook.com/Community-Church-of-Basinger-153185001390240/

Phone: 863-467-2635

### Embassy Church at Basinger

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

### Everglades Baptist Church

Currently holding services outdoors across from Everglades Elementary (3725 S.E. Eighth Street)

863-261-2198

Phone: 863-261-2499

Pastor: Doug Nickalson, Jim Womble, Eric Phillips

Website: evergladesbaptist.com/main

Email: ebcokeechobee@gmail.com

### Faith Alive Family Church Non-denominational

3075 S.W. Third Terrace

Phone: 863-623-4233

Facebook: facebook.com/FaithAliveFamily

Church (live on Sunday mornings)

### Faith Farm Ministries

7595 N.E. 128th Ave.

Phone: 863-763-4224

Pastor: Rick Aspen and Lee Joliceur

Website: faithfarm.org

### First Baptist Church of Okeechobee (ROC)

401 S.W. Fourth St.

Phone: 863-763-2171

Senior pastor: Mark McCarter

Website: fbcokee.org

Facebook: facebook.com/firstbaptistokee

Email: mail@fbcokee.org

### First Indian Baptist Church of Brighton

20060 Reservation Road

Pastor: Bill Allen

Phone: 863-357-0013

Website: firstindianbaptistchurchofbrighton.org

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

Phone: 863-357-0013

### First United Methodist Church

200 N.W. Second St.

Phone: 863-763-4021

Sr. Pastor: Don Hanna

Associate Pastor: Jim Dawson

Website: fumcokee.com

Facebook: facebook.com/1UMCOKEE1

Phone: 863-763-4021

### Fountain of Life Church

1302 S.W. 32nd St.

Phone: 863-763-8945

Pastor: Dave Robertson

Facebook: facebook.com/FountainofLifeChurchOkeechobee

Phone: 863-763-8945

### Ft. Drum Community Church Nondenominational

32415 U.S. 441 N.

Phone: 863-467-1733

Facebook: facebook.com/fortdrummcc

Phone: 863-467-1733

Facebook: facebook.com/fortdrummcc

### Freedom Baptist Church

1902 S. Parrott Ave.

Phone: 863-447-1805

Pastor: Mike Worf

### Haven of Rest Pentecostal Church

912 N.W. Second St.

Phone: 863-357-3053



Pastor: Tom Velie

Website: havenofrest-church.com

Facebook: facebook.com/HavenOfRestChurch/

### His Church – It's Jesus' Church

**Non-denominational**

1167 Linda Road, Buckhead Ridge

Phone: 863-357-6500

Pastor: David & Christine Ferguson

Email: office@hischurchfl.com

Website: hischurch-itsjesuschurch.org

Facebook: facebook.com/HisChurchFL/

### Iglesia Jesus Es Mi Redentor

**Christian Evangelical**

1803 S.W. Third Ave.

863-447-8571

Facebook: facebook.com/clorenz00531-

### Lakeport Christian Church

10947 East S.R. 78

Lakeport

Phone: 863-946-1747

Pastor: Kevin Ziegler

Email: klziegler@gmail.com

Website: lakeportcc.com

Facebook: facebook.com/LakeportChristianChurch

Phone: 863-946-1747

Facebook: facebook.com/LakeportChristianChurch

Phone: 863-946-1747

Facebook: facebook.com/LakeportChristianChurch

605 S.W. Park Street Suite 214

Phone: 863-467-0796

Preacher: Cary McKee, James Garner, Danny

Enfinger, Paul Crews &

Morgan Lumpkin

Email: Hello@M2LMinistries.com

Website: m2lministries.com/

Facebook: facebook.com/M2LMinistries

Phone: 863-467-0796

Facebook: facebook.com/M2LMinistries

Phone: 863-467-0796

Facebook: facebook.com/M2LMinistries

### New Testament Baptist Church Independent Baptist

535 N.E. 28th Ave. (just west of the

overpass, off of SR 70)

Pastor: Adam Sumner

Phone: 863-763-6682

Website: newtestamentokeechobee.com

Email: ntbcokeechee@gmail.com

Facebook: facebook.com/NTBCOkeechobee

Phone: 863-763-6682

Facebook: facebook.com/NTBCOkeechobee

Phone: 863-763-6682

Facebook: facebook.com/NTBCOkeechobee

Phone: 863-763-6682

Facebook: facebook.com/NTBCOkeechobee

### North Okeechobee Church of God

15949 N.W. 30th Terrace

Phone: 863-467-1066

Pastor: Daniel Jones

Phone: 863-634-0344

Facebook: facebook.com/northokeechobeeocg

Phone: 863-634-0344

Facebook: facebook.com/northokeechobeeocg

Phone: 863-634-0344

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Phone: 863-634-0344

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• See **Church Directory** on page **58**





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## Church Directory

Phone: 863-763-3584  
Pastor: Del Suggs  
nbc-okeechobee.org

**Oakview Baptist Church**  
677 S.W. 32nd Street  
863-763-1699  
Pastor: Rev. Robby Lewis  
oakviewbaptist.com  
Facebook: facebook.com/  
Oakview.life

**Okeechobee Christian Church**  
3055 S.E. 18th Terr.  
Phone: 863-467-7858  
Minister: Tim Ramsey  
okeechobeechristian-  
church.com  
Facebook: facebook.com/  
occokeechobee

**Okeechobee Church of Christ**  
1401 S. Parrott Ave.  
Phone: 863-763-4477  
Minister: Mike Hanlon  
Facebook: facebook.com/  
okeechobeeoc  
okeecofc@gmail.com

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

**Okeechobee Church of the Trinity Interdenominational**  
2939 S.W. Third Terrace  
Phone: 863-484-8055

**Okeechobee Missionary Baptist Church**  
4212 U.S. 441 N.  
Phone: 863-763-3681  
or 863-763-7743  
Pastor: Donny Raney  
pastorraney@gmail.com  
Facebook: facebook.com/

Okeechobee-Missionary-Baptist-Church-336936679770150

**Okeechobee Presbyterian Church**  
312 N. Parrott Ave.  
Phone: 863-824-0013  
Pastor: Loy Mersheimer  
Website: okeechobeepres-  
by.com/wp\_blogsite  
Email: office@okeepresby.  
com  
Facebook: www.facebook.  
com/OkeePresby

**Okeechobee Seventh Day Adventist Church**  
412 N.W. 6th St.  
Phone: 863-763-0655  
School: 863-763-0763  
Pastor: Rafael Fernandez  
Facebook: face-  
book.com/profile.  
php?id=100080279233857

**Peace Lutheran Church**  
750 N.W. 23rd Lane  
Phone: 863-763-5042  
Interim Pastor: James  
Olckers  
Website: plcokee.com  
KOlckers@PSTGlobal.com

**Pentecostals of Okeechobee**  
405 S.W. 10th Ave.  
Pastor: Mark Sanders  
Phone: 863-623-4278  
Cell: 606-202-3580  
Facebook: facebook.com/  
pentecostalsofokeechobee

**Point of Light Fellowship Church**  
15399 East S.R. 78, Lake-  
port, Okeechobee mailing,  
34974  
Phone: 863-946-0228  
Pastor: Eddie and Teresa  
Woodham  
Email: teresawoodham@  
yahoo.com  
facebook.com/PointOfLi-  
ghtFellowship/

**Resurrection Life Church**  
Phone: 863-763-7770  
1803 S.W. Third  
Avenue  
Pastor: David San  
Martin

**Sacred Heart Catho-  
lic Church**  
901 S.W. Sixth St.  
Phone: 863-763-3727  
Pastor: Father Yves  
Francois  
Email: sacred-  
heart901@outlook.com  
Facebook: facebook.  
com/SacredHeartChur-  
chOkeechobee

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

**St. Stephens AME Church**  
1050 N.E. 16th Ave.  
Phone: 863-484-8449  
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@stjo-  
sephtheworkerfl.org

**The Gathering**  
1735 S.W. 24th Avenue  
Pastors: Mike & Theresa  
Brown  
Phone: 863-357-4418  
Email: TheGatherin-  
gOkeechobee@gmail.com  
Website: thegathering1.  
org or thegatheringc-  
hurch.us  
Facebook: facebook.  
com/thegatheringchur-  
chokeechobee



**Treasure Island Baptist Church**  
4209 U.S. 441 S.E.  
Phone: 561-541-7087  
Pastor: Douglas T. Ryan  
Website: treasureisland-  
baptistchurch.com  
Facebook: facebook.com/  
TIBChurch

**Trinity Free Will Baptist Church**  
1840 N.E. 39th Blvd. (Cem-  
etery Rd.)  
Phone: 863-763-4962  
Pastor: Thomas Dees

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

**Westside Christian Church of Okeechobee**  
8082 SR 70 West  
Phone: 863-467-2278  
Minister: Richard Barker  
Facebook: facebook.com/  
Westside-Christian-  
Church-of-Okeechobee  
-111813058882730  
Email: barker73@embarq-  
mail.com



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BRIGHTONFIELDDAY.COM | FOR MORE INFO: FSRA - (863) 467-6039

### **Brit Invasion Band**

FORT PIERCE — Summer Crush Vineyard & Winery, 4200 Johnston Road, will present Brit Invasion Band for a day of British Invasion tunes and a special set saluting the music of The Rolling Stones on Saturday, **Feb. 18** from noon to 4 p.m. For tickets and more information, go online to [summercrushwine.com](http://summercrushwine.com).

### **Brighton Seminole Field Day**

BRIGHTON — The Brighton Seminole Field Day Festival will be held on Friday, **Feb. 17** and Saturday, **Feb. 18**, at the festival grounds next to Fred Smith Rodeo Arena, 17400 Sports Complex Road NE off County Road 721 (Reservation Road) in Glades County. The festival will include native dancing, rodeo shows, alligator wrestling, vendor booths, food and more. Gary Allan will be in concert on Feb. 18 at 6 p.m. For tickets and more information, call 863-467-6039 or go online to [brightonfieldday.com](http://brightonfieldday.com).

### **Thunder on the Beach Pow Wow**

FORT PIERCE – The Indian River County Fairgrounds will host the Thunder on the Beach Pow Wow, **Feb. 17-19**. Come experience native culture – dancing, drumming, flute music, fative good and more! There will be craft vendors, demonstrations, hoop dancing and seminars! All ages welcome. Hours are Friday, 4 to 9 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. and Sunday, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

### **Electric Light Orchestra Experience**

AVON PARK – The Electric Light Orchestra Experience will be at the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for Performing Arts, 600 W. College Drive, Avon Park at 7 p.m. on **Feb. 18**. For tickets and information, call 863-784-7178 or E-mail: [culturalperformances@southflorida.edu](mailto:culturalperformances@southflorida.edu).

### **Credence Tribute Show**

LABELLE — The Venue at Mudge Ranch, 1323 LobLolly Bay Road SW, will present Hey Tonight - Credence Tribute Show on Sunday, **Feb. 19** at 6 p.m. Dinner at 5 p.m. from Mission BBQ. For information and tickets, visit [www.labelleentertainment.com](http://www.labelleentertainment.com).

### **Johnny Cash, George Jones & Friends**

FORT PIERCE — Summer Crush

Vineyard & Winery, 4200 Johnston Road, Johnny Cash, George Jones & Friends with Nashville's Ralph Curtis Trio on Sunday, **Feb. 19** from 1 to 4 p.m. For tickets and more information, go online to [summercrushwine.com](http://summercrushwine.com).

### **Eddie Metz Trio**

AVON PARK – On **Feb. 19**, the Eddie Metz Trio will perform at the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for Performing Arts, 600 W. College Drive, Avon Park at 3 p.m. For tickets and information, call 863-784-7178 or E-mail: [culturalperformances@southflorida.edu](mailto:culturalperformances@southflorida.edu).

### **Branden & James**

BELLE GLADE — Dolly Hand Cultural Arts Center, 1977 SW College Drive, will present Branden & James on Thursday, **Feb. 23** at 7 p.m. For information or tickets, visit [www.dollyhand.org](http://www.dollyhand.org).

### **The Isaacs**

AVON PARK – The Isaacs will be in concert at the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for Performing Arts, 600 W. College Drive, Avon Park on **Feb. 21** at 1:30 p.m. For tickets and information, call 863-784-7178 or E-mail: [culturalperformances@southflorida.edu](mailto:culturalperformances@southflorida.edu).

### **U.S. Army Concert Band**

AVON PARK – The U.S. Army Concert Band and Solidier's Chorus will perform at the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for Performing Arts, 600 W. College Drive, Avon Park on **Feb. 25** at 3 p.m. For tickets and information, call 863-784-7178 or E-mail: [culturalperformances@southflorida.edu](mailto:culturalperformances@southflorida.edu).

### **Swamp Cabbage Festival**

LABELLE – The 2023 Swamp Cabbage Festival will be held **Feb. 25 and 26** in Barron Park. The parade will begin on Park Avenue and end on Bridge Street in front of the Catholic Church on Saturday, Feb. 25. The parade starts at 10 a.m. A ranch rodeo will be held at the LaBelle Rodeo Grounds on SR 29 on Feb. 25 at 7 p.m. and Feb. 26 at 6 p.m.

### **Battle of Okeechobee Re-enactment**

OKEECHOBEE – The Battle of Okeechobee commemoration, set for **Feb. 25 and 26**, honors the largest and fiercest battle of the Seminole Wars. Gates open at 10 a.m. and a re-enactment starts at 2 p.m. both days.

Admission is \$15 per car. Okeechobee Battlefield State Park, 3500 S.E. 38th Ave., is off U.S. Highway 441 S.E.

### **Johnny Rogers**

FORT PIERCE — Summer Crush Vineyard & Winery, 4200 Johnston Road, will present Tribute to Buddy Holly, Roy Orbison & Legends of Rock, with entertainer extraordinaire Mr. Johnny Rogers on Saturday, **Feb. 25** from 1 to 4 p.m. For tickets and more information, go online to [summercrushwine.com](http://summercrushwine.com).

### **Vero Beach Blues Festival**

VERO BEACH – The Indian River County Fairgrounds in Vero Beach will host the Vero Beach Blues Festival Feb. 25 and 26. Over two days, 10 blues bands will take the stage. There will be 180 market vendors, festival foods and more. For information go to [VeroBluesFest.com](http://VeroBluesFest.com) or call 772-492-6105.

### **Tribute to ABBA**

LABELLE — The Venue at Mudge Ranch, 1323 LobLolly Bay Road SW, will present ABBA Revisited - A Tribute to ABBA on Tuesday, **Feb. 28** at 7 p.m. Dinner at 6 p.m. from Sassy Basskets. For information and tickets, visit [www.labelleentertainment.com](http://www.labelleentertainment.com).

### **Neil Diamond Tribute**

AVON PARK – SO GOOD: Neil Diamond Tribute will be at the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for Performing Arts, 600 W. College Drive, Avon Park on **Feb. 28** at 1:30 p.m. For tickets and information, call 863-784-7178 or E-mail: [culturalperformances@southflorida.edu](mailto:culturalperformances@southflorida.edu).

### **MARCH**

#### **Okeechobee Music Festival**

OKEECHOBEE – The Okeechobee Music Festival will be held in Sunshine Grove, 12517 N.E. 91st Ave., in north-eastern Okeechobee County **March 2-5**. For tickets and information, go online to [okeechobeefest.com](http://okeechobeefest.com).

#### **Chalo Nitka Festival & Rodeo**

MOORE HAVEN — The 75th Annual Chalo Nitka Festival & Rodeo will be held on Friday, **March 3** and Saturday, **March 4**, at the Chalo Nitka Park, 301 10th St. For information, visit [www.facebook.com/ChaloNitka/](http://www.facebook.com/ChaloNitka/) or email [chalonitkasecretary@gmail.com](mailto:chalonitkasecretary@gmail.com).



## Ferguson Family Gospel Concert

CLEWISTON — The Ferguson Family will perform in a gospel concert at the Red Barn, located on the left after S.R. 80 overhead pass between Moore Haven and Clewiston, on Friday, March 3 at 7 p.m. A love offering will be collected. Light refreshments. For information, call Judy Swindle at 863-228-0090.

## Beach Boys Tribute

LABELLE — The Venue at Mudge Ranch, 1323 LobLolly Bay Road SW, will present the Beach Boys Tribute Band/Rudy Cox as Jimmy Buffett show on Sunday, **March 5** at 6 p.m. Dinner at 5 p.m. with Chef Brian Michael. For information and tickets, visit [www.labelleentertainment.com](http://www.labelleentertainment.com).

## UF Jazz Band

AVON PARK — The University of Florida Jazz Band will perform at South Florida State College University Center Auditorium, 600 W. College Drive, Avon Park on **March 5** at 3 p.m. For tickets and information, call 863-784-7178 or E-mail: [culturalperformances@southflorida.edu](mailto:culturalperformances@southflorida.edu).

## Company Musical

FORT PIERCE — The Indian River State College McAlpin Fine Arts Center, 3209 Virginia Ave, Fort Pierce, will present, "Company Musical" on **March 10 & 11** at 7 p.m. and March 12 at 2 p.m. For more information and tickets, go online to <https://irsc.edu/student-life/arts-and-culture.html>.

## Speckled Perch Festival

OKEECHOBEE — The Speckled Perch Festival will be held **March 11 and 12** in Flagler Park in downtown Okeechobee. The parade is Saturday at 10 a.m.

## Okeechobee County Fair

OKEECHOBEE — The Okeechobee County Fair will be held **March 14-19**, at the Agri-Civic Center Fairgrounds, with entry at State Road 710. For more information online, go to [okeechobeeountyfair.com](http://okeechobeeountyfair.com).

## Orange Blossom Opry Band

LABELLE — The Venue at Mudge Ranch, 1323 LobLolly Bay Road SW, will present the Orange Blossom Opry Band on Wednesday, **March 15** at 7 p.m. Dinner at 6 p.m. by Mission BBQ. For information and tickets, visit

[www.labelleentertainment.com](http://www.labelleentertainment.com).

## Sounds of Soul

BELLE GLADE — Dolly Hand Cultural Arts Center, 1977 SW College Drive, will present 'Sounds of Soul' on Thursday, **March 16** at 7 p.m. For information or tickets, visit [www.Dollyhand.org](http://www.Dollyhand.org).

## Play On!

OKEECHOBEE — "Play On!" a comedy by Rick Abbot, will be presented Fridays at 8 p.m. and on Saturdays, at 2 p.m., **March 17** through **April 1**, in the historic Okeechobee Auditorium, 610 S.W. Second Avenue, Okeechobee. For tickets or more information, call 863-532-1107 or 863-332-2053 or e-mail [okeecommunitytheatre@gmail.com](mailto:okeecommunitytheatre@gmail.com) or go online to <http://www.okeechobeecommunitytheatre.com/tickets.html>.

## Peace River and Simple Faith Concert

CLEWISTON — Peace River and Simple Faith will perform in a gospel concert at the Red Barn, located on the left after S.R. 80 overhead pass between Moore Haven and Clewiston, on Friday, **March 17** at 7 p.m. A love offering will be collected. Light refreshments. For information, call Judy Swindle at 863-228-0090.

## Sugar Festival

CLEWISTON — The Clewiston Sugar Festival will be held in Civic Park, 162 Royal Palm Avenue in Clewiston, On **March 19**, the Sugar Festival 5K starts at 8 a.m. with registration at 7 a.m. The cornhole tournament starts at 10 a.m. The horseshoe tournament starts at 10 a.m. The festival will feature an antique tractor display, kids park, gator show, car show and more. There will be free concerts by Lee Brice, Ian Munsick, Ashland Craft and Grand Funk Railroad. For more information online, go to [Clewistonsguarfestival.com](http://Clewistonsguarfestival.com)

## A Celebration of Fleetwood Mac

LABELLE — The Venue at Mudge Ranch, 1323 LobLolly Bay Road SW, will present Forever Fleetwood: A Celebration of Fleetwood Mac, on Monday, **March 20** at 7 p.m. Dinner at 6 p.m. For information and tickets, visit [www.labelleentertainment.com](http://www.labelleentertainment.com).

## The Kingdom Choir

BELLE GLADE — Dolly Hand Cultural Arts Center, 1977 SW Col-

lege Drive, will present The Kingdom Choir on Tuesday, **March 21** at 7 p.m. For information or tickets, visit [www.Dollyhand.org](http://www.Dollyhand.org).

## The Guess Who

AVON PARK — The Guess Who will perform at the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for Performing Arts, 600 W. College Drive, Avon Park on **March 24** at 7 p.m. For tickets and information, call 863-784-7178 or E-mail: [culturalperformances@southflorida.edu](mailto:culturalperformances@southflorida.edu). **APRIL**

## Muse Honey Festival

MUSE — The Muse Honey Festival will be held on Saturday, **April 1**, from 10 to 3 p.m., at 3897 Loblolly Bay Road in LaBelle. Bring a chair. For information, email [mavishoneygirl@aol.com](mailto:mavishoneygirl@aol.com) or call 239-246-1149.

## Kenny Rogers Tribute

LABELLE — The Venue at Mudge Ranch, 1323 LobLolly Bay Road SW, will present The Gambler Returns: The Ultimate Kenny Rogers Tribute on Sunday, **April 2** at 6:30 p.m. Reserve seating only. For information and tickets, visit [www.labelleentertainment.com](http://www.labelleentertainment.com).

## Black Gold Jubilee

BELLE GLADE — The Black Gold Jubilee will be held on Saturday, **April 15** from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m., at Torry Island Recreation Center, 5000 W. Canal St. N. For information, visit Black Gold Jubilee Facebook page.

## Heritage Festival

BASINGER — The Highlands County Heritage Festival is set for April 15 and 16, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Edna Pearce Lockett Estate, 70 Boondock Road in Fort Basinger (off U.S. 98 on the Kissimmee River) just past the Okeechobee County line. The festival will include musical entertainment, historical house tours, Cowboy Church on Sunday, food vendors, artisans and craft vendors, pirate history, spinning & quilting display, a cow camp, Florida Cracker Trail Riders, Colonial period to 1950s Fashion Show, cemetery tours and much more. Bring the family and enjoy the event for just \$10 per carload.

For updates and more things to do, see the Lake Okeechobee News or go online to [Southcentralfloridalife.com](http://Southcentralfloridalife.com).



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

**Christine Bishop**

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

**Malissa Morgan**

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

**Melisa Jahner**

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

**Amanda Riedel**

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

**Jill Holcomb**

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



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## Okeechobee City Council



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

### **Bob Jarriel**

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

### **David McAuley**

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

### **Monica Clark**

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

### **Dowling Watford**

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

### **1. Gary Ritter**

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

### **Noel Chandler**

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

### **2. Lane Gamiotea**

has served the city of Okeechobee as city clerk for more than 20 years and was assistant to the clerk

for 14 years prior to being elected. She was elected again in 2022, and said it was bittersweet as that election was the last time a city clerk position would be on the ballot. When her term is up, the position will be appointed rather than elected.

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



County Commissioners and Administrator



**1. David Hazellief**

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

Up for re-election in 2026  
863-532-6036  
tburroughs@co.okeechobee.fl.us

**2. Frank DeCarlo**

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

**5. Kelly Owens**

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

**3. Bradley G. Goodbread**

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

**6. Debra Manzo**

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

**4. Terry Burroughs**

First Vice Chair  
Elected 2014, re-elected 2018, 2022.

**7. Richard J. Reade**

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

## Constitutional Officers



1.

### 1. Jerald D. Bryant

Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller

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

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

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

### 2. Noel Stephen

County Sheriff



2.

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

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

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



3.

### 3. Mickey Bandi

Property Appraiser

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

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

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

### 4. Melissa Arnold

Supervisor of Elections

The Okeechobee County Supervisor of Elections will administer all federal, state and county elections in Okeechobee County. As a gatekeeper of the democratic process, and an elected Constitutional Officer, the Supervisor of Elections will uphold

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

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

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

### 5. Celeste Watford

Tax Collector

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

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

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





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