

Check out what's happening around Okaloosa County, Florida
Where you can find superior lifestyle, leading technology and boundless opportunity!

September 2021

From the Director's Desk

By Nathan Sparks, CEcD

Looking back on a very successful summer for our friends in the hospitality and tourism sector, it is safe to say that Okaloosa County would not be the wonderful community we all know it to be today without the significant economic impact generated by visitors. It is already well documented that tourism directly supports countless jobs and numerous small businesses in our area – not to mention the fact that the sales tax activity generated by visitors provides much needed funding for our schools and roads. Speaking of tourism, I would like to focus this month's column on a subject that is currently topping the list of public discourse in our fair corner of the world – the proposed Tourist Development Taxing District expansion. One Okaloosa's Business Leadership Council was recently treated to an insightful presentation on this topic, and I wanted to pass along some of the "nuggets" for your consideration as you contemplate your vote in Okaloosa County's first ever mail-in ballot referendum.



Here are some items worth considering:

- The Tourism Development Tax – also known as the “Bed Tax” – is the tax that locals don't pay. Only those staying in short-term lodging and rentals pay tourist development taxes, and the tax is paid in addition to sales tax. Chances are, if you have taken a vacation recently and stayed in a hotel or condo, you contributed to another community by paying their version of the tourist development tax.
- At present, Okaloosa's tourist development taxing district *only* includes Destin, Okaloosa Island, Fort Walton Beach, Mary Esther and Cinco Bayou.
- If countywide expansion of the tourism taxing district is approved by voters, nearly 3,000 existing lodging units in places like Niceville and Crestview would be added to the district.
- Tourism Tax dollars collected from visitors to these properties could then be utilized to benefit areas of our County that currently rely solely on sales tax and property tax as a funding source for important community amenities like parks and boat ramps.
- The current amount of tourism development tax assessed in Okaloosa County is five pennies on the dollar. Visit Destin-Fort Walton Beach has identified a very specific purpose for each of these pennies, ranging from improving parks, beaches and waterways, to tourism promotion, to beach safety – benefiting locals and tourists alike.
- Remarkably, Okaloosa is one of only four of Florida's 67 counties that don't currently have a countywide tourist development taxing district.

Pretty compelling information in my book, and yet another opportunity to

capitalize on the tourist activity that is already occurring by collecting revenues for projects that benefit EVERYONE. Please keep an eye out for your mail-in ballots and remember, all ballots must be returned by 7pm on October 5!

Defense Support Initiatives

By Bob Marinan, Chairman



As we close out another fiscal year for the DSI, there remains a lot of activity ongoing. First and foremost, the House Armed Services Committee released their NDAA marks for the FY2022 budget and our installations are currently on the list for \$600M in support of various range and construction projects. Although a promising start to our budget requests, we remain cautious as now the Senate Armed Services Committee has their turn to make adjustments to the proposed budget. Bottom line, we have a long road to go to get to the finish line. Kudos to Jim Heald and Kay Rasmussen for their yeoman's work on submitting the proper budget paperwork, authorization forms and appropriation request forms to numerous Congressional offices.

The Okaloosa Gas District is moving forward with building a new administration complex in Valparaiso with the availability of up to 5-6 stories to accommodate defense industry companies; if there is sufficient interest. This would be new office space with the opportunity for a secure classified facility. The DSI along with One Okaloosa EDC and Okaloosa Gas District will be hosting an industry day in the near future to introduce this potential to our Eglin/Hurlburt industry partners.

In other tidbits of information:

- The DSI has updated our Military Mission Line (MML) position paper to reflect our current 2021 concerns since 2017.
- The proposed KinderCare facility in Crestview continues to move forward with the anticipation of acquiring land in December.
- Sufficient available and affordable housing in the area remains a priority of our military community.
- Our area MAC's were engaged in military appreciation events until the COVID Delta increased putting a hold on some of those events.
- Okaloosa County will unveil the new women veteran's memorial at the Veterans Park on 11 November, Veterans Day.
- Eglin AFB officials continue their efforts of upgrading installation infrastructure.

Technology Coast Manufacturing & Engineering Network

By Jason Monroe, Chairman



2021 for the TeCMEN group has been a fantastic year, and I know you're all thinking it was because they had an excellent chair. It's only part of the reason and a small one at that. The fact is that the TeCMEN members and the staff of One Okaloosa EDC make the group awesome, and that's the truth. Sure, I could take credit for all of the great meetings we have had, entertaining speakers, high attendance, and even the successful TeCMEN Industry Day; but that wouldn't be true.

With 2021 being a rollercoaster of wearing a mask, don't wear a mask, stay 6-feet apart, well maybe 10-feet apart, don't be in groups with more than 8 people, or if you're vaccinated, then you can be in larger groups as long as at least 50% of the people within 5.3 meters of the person with the lowest last digit of the year they were born is

vaccinated with at least 1 dose of Pfizer.... Confused yet?? (and for all you Grammar Police, I know it's a run-on sentence). TeCMEN members made it work, and we prospered. We accomplished many things over the past year, such as:

- An in-person TeCMEN Industry Day. (yeah, I said in-person)
- We grew in membership.
- We formed a committee to conduct a study to keep more contract money here, locally, in Okaloosa County.
- We had speakers from the University of Florida (go Gators!), University of West Florida, FBI, Okaloosa Schools, state politicians, and much more.
- We exchanged business, leads, employees, and ideas.
- We helped place NW Florida ahead of the rest of the state with compliance requirements (CMMC).
- We even won and lost business together (but mostly won).

It has been an honor to lead this group in 2021. To see your resilience, perseverance, and adaptability; it's inspired me. I might have led TeCMEN in 2021, but I also followed the TeCMEN members' lead. Thank you, TeCMEN members. A special thank you to Linda, Nathan, and the rest of the One Okaloosa EDC staff; you kept me in line and made this year go as smooth as I could have imagined. I am happy to leave TeCMEN in the capable hands of Nic Dezinski; he'll do great things.

Business Expansion and Support Team

By Kevin Lovelace, Director of Business Success

Destin Charter Fishing Fleet Business Education Program

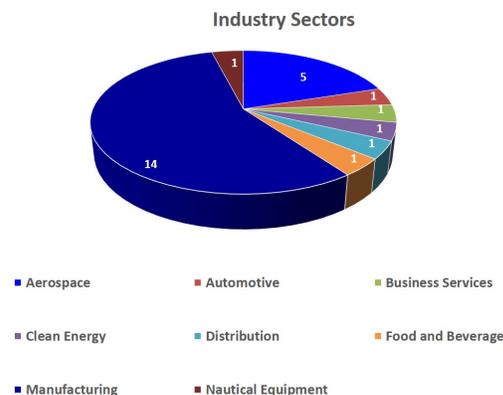
This month, One Okaloosa EDC, in partnership with the Destin Area Chamber of Commerce, and the Destin Charter Boat Association, kicked off the inaugural Destin Charter Fishing Fleet Business Education Program. Inspired by Captain Gary Jarvis (and Mayor of Destin), this innovative program is designed to educate the captains on various aspects of improving their business operations. Topics covered in September included business plan development, determining the right legal structure for the business, business continuity planning, human resources, finance, and banking. The program will take a pause during the month of October while the Destin Fishing Rodeo takes place and will resume sessions in November. Special thanks to the companies presenting in September, including the Florida SBDC, Community Bank, Hand Arendall Harrison Sale, Saltmarsh, Cleveland and Gund, SimpleHR, Trustmark National Bank, and Warren Averett.



November subjects will include: Marketing Your Business, Website Development, Social Media Strategies, Technology in the Fleet, Resiliency Planning, Mentorship, and Paying it Forward.

Project Activity

Project activity continues to remain strong in Okaloosa County, from existing business expansions to new businesses seeking build-to-suit opportunities or existing buildings. Also exciting is the trend of very diverse industries such as manufacturing, aerospace, automotive, food & beverage, distribution, and business services.



2020 US Census Data – What Does it Tell Us?

With the decennial United States Census data now officially released, there is much we can learn about our fair corner of the world. Here are a few highlights that grabbed our attention, as well as a link to a resource where you can learn more!

- Between 2010 and 2020, Okaloosa County's population increased by 30,846 – from 180,822 to 211,668 – a 17.1% overall increase.
- Drilling down from the County level to Okaloosa County's 47 specific Census tracts, the tract that includes portions of north Crestview grew by a staggering 116.6% over the past 10 years.
- Census tract 232 – including portions of southern Fort Walton Beach, Mary Esther and Okaloosa Island grew by 46% during the same timeframe.
- Census Tract 214, which houses the central portion of Eglin AFB including lin Village experienced 10 year population growth of 100.1%.
- Of all 47 Okaloosa Census tracts, only three lost population over the past decade.
- Okaloosa is becoming more racially diverse – 81% of our county's population in 2010 identified as white, while 71.7% identified as white in 2020. As such, our "diversity index" has increased from 39 to 54 over the past 10 years.
- According to 2020 Census data, Okaloosa has 101,197 housing units at present – a 9.5% increase from 2010 when we were reported to have 92,407.

Interested in digging deeper? https://data.tuscaloosaneews.com/census/total-population/total-population-change/okaloosa_county_florida/050-12091/

Members in the News

MEI Technologies, Inc. has merged with Alpha Space Test and Research Alliance to form Aegis Aerospace, Inc. Standing on 30 years of success and innovation, Aegis offers an innovative, broad range of cutting-edge commercial space services, technology and engineering, space system development services, and related products in the space and defense industries.

Welcome New Members



SmartBank.



CLEAR HARBOR
WEALTH MANAGEMENT



HEARTLAND BANK



