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October 2023

## **From the Director's Desk**

By Nathan Sparks, CEcD

Welcome to Fall! After the scorching hot summer that we experienced, the (slightly) cooler temperatures are, quite literally, a breath of fresh air. Fall not only brings cooler weather, lighter traffic, fewer crowds and, my personal favorite, FOOTBALL – it also brings a change of leadership at One Okaloosa as our new fiscal year begins October 1.



We cannot say enough about what a pleasure it has been to serve under Jillian McQueen, Hilton Garden Inn, as our FY 2023 Chair. Likely our youngest chairman in the 34 year history of One Okaloosa EDC, she has proven to be a seasoned pro in every sense of the word. And while we will miss having Jillian as our chair, we're delighted that she will remain on our Executive Committee for another year as our Immediate Past Chair. We're also equally excited to welcome Dr. Mike Mosley as our FY 2024 Chairman. As the Superintendent of Rocky Bayou Christian School, Mike is well-known throughout Okaloosa County, having previously chaired the Niceville-Valparaiso Chamber of Commerce. Bottom line, One Okaloosa EDC will once again be in excellent hands.

Speaking of leadership transitions, many of you will recall that during the month of July we solicited nominations for two seats that would soon be opening on One Okaloosa's Executive Committee. In the end, 17 highly-qualified individuals were nominated for these two slots – a record! While our Nominating Committee certainly had a difficult task, in the end, two outstanding leaders were put forward for consideration and voted on by our full membership (our sincere thanks to those of you who participated in this process).

So, in case you haven't yet heard the news, Bonnie Barlow, CEO, Bridgeway Center was selected as One Okaloosa's Board Secretary - which will also place her in the role of chairing our Investor Value & Growth Committee. Bonnie is an outstanding leader who currently serves on Okaloosa County's Affordable Housing Advisory Committee and was recently honored as an inductee into the Okaloosa Women's Hall of Fame. In addition, Jason Monroe, Director of Solution Consulting, Bit-Wizards, was selected as One Okaloosa's Member-at-Large. Another fantastic partner and community champion, many of you will recall that Jason served as Chairman of One Okaloosa's Technology Coast Manufacturing & Engineering Network

(TeCMEN) committee in 2021. Please join me in congratulating Bonnie and Jason, along with all of our FY 2024 Executive Committee members!

## Defense Support Initiatives

By Bob Marinan, Chairman

A great time of year with fall approaching and football has begun, here we go now!!



So much for the good news, in the last newsletter I reported that Higher Ground Education (HGE) facility in Crestview was on track to open in the summer of 2024. Well, you can slam the brakes on that statement as the new developer bailed on the effort late in the fourth quarter due in part to the rising construction costs. HGE is now in discussions with a third developer who they have partnered with before.

In a separate effort and at the request of the Department of the Army and the Department of the Air Force, and to satisfy the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirement, a Child Development Center (CDC) review is being conducted in Okaloosa County. They are looking at 6 alternatives for a development location. They are, 1) no action at all, 2) a CDC on Camp Bull Simons inside the active bombing range, 3) on the North end of the range new Hwy 85, 4) a City of Crestview West, 5) a City of Crestview Central, and 6) a City of Crestview East. The DSI supports the three City of Crestview alternatives.

At our August meeting, we received a briefing from the Transportation Planning Organization (TPO), managed by the Emerald Coast Planning Council who oversees the five panhandle counties, on their future five-year planning efforts. SR 85 resurfacing and intersection improvements are to begin this year and the expansion to six lanes is considered a high priority. The expansion of SR 285 to four lanes is rated a low priority, and with that news, the 96 TW has requested to meet with the TPO leadership to discuss this rating and to hopefully raise the priority score. The 96 TW also requires a mission impact analysis to be conducted for a SR 20 expansion.

Finally, after four mostly fun-filled years albeit with some frustrations, this will be my last newsletter input. My time as the DSI Chairman will come to end the last day of September. But fear not, the DSI will remain in more than capable hands as the new incoming Chairman will be MGen (Ret) Jeff Reimer, former Eglin AFB Commander, who begins on 1 Oct.

I would be remiss if I didn't take a moment to give special thanks to Kay Rasmussen for her enduring help and support during my tenure. Her efforts in support of the DSI are instrumental in the DSI successes!

## Technology Coast Manufacturing & Engineering Network

By Holly Karr, Chair

Before I get misty-eyed about this being my last newsletter article as the TeCMEN Chair, let me give you some great news. Pens ready? **SAVE THIS DATE – Wednesday, May 15<sup>th</sup>** – The Annual TeCMEN Industry Day is on the books. And as usual, set up for exhibitors is always the day before, Tuesday May 14<sup>th</sup>.

Go to [TecmenIndustryday.com](https://www.tecmenindustryday.com) to sign up for special reminders about TeCMEN Industry Day's beloved, and often missed, EARLY-BIRD Exhibitor Registration pricing. Also on the Home page there's a link to the photo gallery of candid shots taken at this year's event. If you've never been to our event, you don't know what you're missing. Look through the photos for ideas on how to set up your booth in 2024 or search for embarrassing pics of your friends/colleagues. Sigh, I looked. Nathan doesn't have a bad one in there at all.



Why am I telling you this now, yet so early, it seems? Because we SOLD OUT last year! And with interest indicated from the post event survey we will SELL OUT again in 2024!

*Past TeCMEN meetings recap:* August: Crickets chirped. We didn't have a meeting due to community conflicts and frankly, the weather was just too dang hot. But we made up for it the next month. September: Wowza! What a meeting! We had several new companies joining us and first time representatives from long-time member companies. Our special guest, Okaloosa County Administrator, John Hofstad, gave updates about:

- Okaloosa County's 2024 Budget that will be announced in October
- New roadway projects that will help us spend less time in our cars
- New housing development plans that will help meet the growing demand

We also announced the new TeCMEN chair for the 2023-2024 year, Andrew Rencich of AA Tactical/Aerohead Inc. With that I say goodbye as the TeCMEN Chair. It has been one of the best volunteer positions I have ever held. I believe I was mentored by one of the finest (Nathan), spoiled by one of the best (Linda), and encouraged by all. Thank you for this life-changing opportunity.

If your company is in the Technology, Manufacturing, Engineering, and Education sectors, consider joining us.

## Welcome New Members



**NERD Lab**

## **Members in the News**

The **Okaloosa School District's STEMM Academy** has been recognized as a 2023 National Blue Ribbon School, one of only 353 schools in the nation and 13 in Florida to receive the honor. The recognition is based on the STEMM Academy's overall academic performance and progress in closing achievement gaps among student subgroups. The National Blue Ribbon Schools Program recognizes public and private elementary, middle and high schools in one of two performance categories: exemplary high-performing schools and exemplary achievement gap-closing schools. STEMM Academy earned recognition in the exemplary high-performing category.

Steve Riggs, **Carr Riggs & Ingram** and Alexis Tibbetts to be inducted into FWBHS Hall of Fame. Two Fort Walton Beach High School (FWBHS) legends will be inducted into the school's Hall of Fame during halftime at the Vikings' home game on October 13th. Tibbetts dedicated over 45 years to the Okaloosa County School District as a teacher, counselor, administrator and superintendent. As principal of FWBHS, she led the school to become one of the top schools in the country. Because of her tireless effort and vision, the Steve Riggs Stadium became the 'Home of the Vikings' in 2006. Riggs graduated in the inaugural FWBHS class of 1972. He went on to become a successful businessman, having co-founded one of the top CPA firms in the country.

The Department of the Air Force recently named **WaveLink, Inc.** as one of the companies to be awarded the Eglin Wide Agile Acquisition Contract. EWAAC is a shared-ceiling, multiple-award, indefinite-delivery/indefinite-quantity contract in the amount of \$40B. Through this contract, WaveLink, Inc. will provide rapid response applicable to all areas and lifecycle phases of weapons development to include weapons concepts, concept development, concept demonstrations, weapons system procurement, production, fielding, operations, and sustainment to quickly meet current and future weapons system requirements to the Air Force Armament Directorate at Eglin Air Force Base, FL.

**On-Point Defense Technologies** announced it has been awarded a long-term contract with the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) for support of consumables and Depot Level Repairables to support weapon system components manufacturing and repair. The Umbrella-type contract has an 8-year duration with the DLA Contracting Office in Huntsville administering the basic contract. On-Point provides product manufacturing and full life-cycle support to weapon system users from over sixteen countries. Chief Executive Officer and President Keith Driver announced, "this latest award will allow the US Army, and other ordering activities, to expeditiously and economically acquire critical capabilities provided by On-Point." It is anticipated these potential orders will drive additional infrastructure and hiring needs by 25%.

## **Attainable Housing Strategic Plan**

Okaloosa County is developing an **Attainable Workforce Housing Strategic Plan**. The plan development process to this point has included data collection, interviews with key leaders and experts, two stakeholder workshops, and a public opinion survey on housing issues. The next step in this process is to conduct a business survey, created exclusively for local businesses.

The questions in this survey will help us to better understand the impact that housing is having on the local business community and the ways our businesses can support efforts to address this important issue. This is a very short survey

that will likely take **less than 5 minutes** to complete; and it will only be open for a short time, so please respond at your earliest convenience.

Take the survey here: <https://www.surveylegend.com/s/56vj>

## **Executive Committee Members and Staff**

### **Officers**

Dr. Mike Mosley, Chairman; Neko Stubblefield, Vice-Chair; Nic Dezinski, Treasurer; Bonnie Barlow, Secretary; Jason Monroe, Member-at-Large; Jillian McQueen, Past Chairman

### **Ex Officios**

CareerSource: Michele Burns

County Commissioner: Nathan Boyles

Educational Partners: Dr. Devin Stephenson, Dr. Melinda Bowers, Mr. Marcus Chambers

Utility Partners: Steve Rhodes, Gordon King, Bernard Johnson

### **Employees / Contractors**

Nathan Sparks CEcD, Executive Director

Kay Rasmussen CEcD, Associate Director / DSI Manager

Cole Randall, Project Manager

John Ferrandini, Administrative Assistant

Linda Sumblin, TeCMEN Manager

Penny Mercer/Kory Carter, Accounting Department

Monica Earley, Event Coordinator



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