



The Pursuit of Happiness for a Greater Good

This year we celebrate the 250th year of the birth of the United States. The Revolutionary War was fought for a number of reasons. Most of those who lived in the colonies wanted to be treated fairly as British citizens but felt unfairly taxed by the crown. Those who gathered in Philadelphia to write the document we now call the Declaration of Independence began to examine what were considered the fundamental rights of man. Those rights were eventually defined as rights to life, to liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

These phrases which role off our tongues as we read or recite the preamble to the Declaration of Independence, were highly debated by the men who sought to take these ancient ideas, debated by Aristotle, Cicero and Locke, and synthesize them into a document for a new nation and government. Most of the colonists had lived in a world that was governed by feudal lords and kings. This idea by our founders to pursue happiness was not so much about the happiness of the individual but to have governance for the good of the whole.

This is a good time in the history of America to discuss the pursuit of happiness, not just for individual reasons, but for the whole of our great nation. When an individual cares more for his duty to his country, public good, than for his own selfish needs, both individual and country win. Sometimes we lose sight of this principle and focus on our own desires. Each generation must learn the meaning of sacrifice and service for the greater good.

In our community so many have done so much for this nation. We are a military community, and this makes us different. We understand that freedom is not taken for granted. We walk among heroes that have made a difference to our nation. We celebrate you, and those who have lived before you, that have given us the freedom to call America home.

There are many activities in our community to celebrate our nation as we approach the 250th anniversary. This newsletter attempts to let you know some of them.

The Okaloosa County Board of County Commissioners passed a resolution on January 20, 2026, creating the Okaloosa County America250! Commission. This group is charged with developing, coordinating and publishing a series of America250! gatherings in conjunction with other governmental, private and non-profit groups to recognize, remember, and celebrate the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States of America. The 18 member Commission consists of representatives from the following groups:

- Emerald Coast Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution
- Choctawhatchee Bay Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution
- West Florida Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution
- State of Florida America250! Commission
- Okaloosa County Tourist Development Department
- Okaloosa County School Superintendent's Office
- Florida State Historical Commission
- Fort Walton Beach Krewe of Billy Bowlegs
- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
- Gulf Coast Council of Scouting America
- A mayor of a local municipality to be chosen by the Okaloosa County League of Cities
- A Chamber of Commerce representative to be selected by the leadership of the Crestview, Fort Walton Beach, Niceville/Valparaiso, and Destin Chambers of Commerce
- An appointee of the United States military community
- One individual appointment by each of the 5 County Commissioners

Many events have already been scheduled and are well under way in organization:

- February 20 The All Sports Association will kick off a new Military Award in honor of Patriots and acknowledge America250!
- February 28 the Fort Walton Beach Chamber will host A HEROES DINNER, honoring our military. For tickets call the chamber at 850-244-8192.
- United for a Good Cause will host an America250! International Festival during the week of March 23.
- June 12 will bring a Patriotic Drone Show at the Rigdon Fairgrounds from 6-10 pm with a community tailgate at Freedom Tech Center/Fairgrounds for the show.
- Also on June 12 a Gala will be held (hosted by the Choctawhatchee Bay DAR) in the evening following the drone show. This event is open to anyone with purchased tickets.
- July 4th America250! Fireworks will be held by our local municipalities
- In October, the Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce plans to organize a “Remember 9/11” event with a Patriots focus.

- November 11 at 9:00 AM a celebration of Veterans Day at the Convention Center on Okaloosa Island, an 11:00 ceremony at Beal Cemetery, and a 1:00 Veteran Day Parade in Mary Esther.

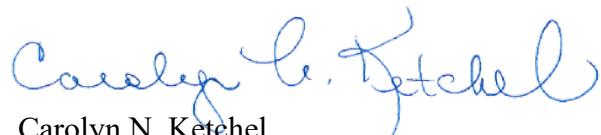
Several other events are in the planning stages:

- The City of Crestview is currently organizing a memorial event for early April based upon “The Shot Heard ‘Round the World”
- The Okaloosa County School District is organizing a Memorial Day flag ceremony at each school in honor of America250!
- A “WE THE PEOPLE” patch to be affixed to all county school sports uniforms is currently in design.
- Local Scout Troops are in discussion about organizing an outdoor America250! hike at Spanish Trail.
- Constitution Week falls annually in September. This year we hope to organize a bell ringing, reminiscent of the ringing of the Liberty Bell, with our local houses of worship.
- NWFSC hosts a rodeo event in November, and planners are considering making this an America250! event.
- The year will close with a celebration of the many Christmas songs from 1776.

There will be many ways to celebrate the Semiquincentennial, America250! Anniversary. Please mark the above events on your calendar. WE THE PEOPLE need to celebrate our citizenship in this great nation.

It is an honor to serve as your County Commissioner.

My Sincere Thanks,



Carolyn N. Ketehel
 District 2
 County Commissioner
 Okaloosa County, Board of County Commissioners
 1250 N Eglin Pkwy., Suite 100
 Shalimar, FL 32579
 850-651-7105