

## **CHAIRMAN SEAN PARKS' INTRODUCTION**

The Lake County Board of County Commissioners has spent the year dedicated to diligently planning a prosperous future - with proven results - from building partnerships toward a stronger economy to promoting and protecting the county's ecotourism treasures.

The commission has again lowered taxes, rolling back the millage rate, while supporting the passage of the Penny Sales Tax. We focused on improving infrastructure, welcomed new and growing private sector businesses, enhanced public safety and elevated our unique quality of life.

On behalf of the board, it is now my honor as chairman to share with you Lake County's most exciting and notable accomplishments of fiscal year 2016.

### **A Legacy of Accomplishments**

Lake County is the picture of the true Florida lifestyle, complete with charm, hospitality and a pro-business environment. From regional parks to major roadway connectors, we work to build a community that appeals to families, visitors and entrepreneurs. Lake County's leadership, under the direction of County Manager David Heath, is enthusiastic about leaving a legacy of stability and prosperity for future generations.

All signs point to a growing, healthy economy. This year, the county's unemployment rate reached a 10-year low. Jobs are up 4.6 percent - the highest year over year gain in a decade- and the average Lake County worker's salary is at a record high.

To further promote this upward trend, the county launched the Made in Lake website to market local manufacturing businesses, foster pride

and create new connections. The site was unveiled during the Manufacturing Summit, hosted with the goal of giving manufacturers a greater understanding of the resources available to help them prosper.

With manufacturing as one of Lake's top niche markets, county leaders were thrilled when the state's budget included \$2.8 million for the completion of the Center for Advanced Manufacturing at Lake Technical College. The center will provide workforce training in computerized machining, welding and fabrication, and will be one of the premiere facilities in Central Florida.

Providing a major transportation corridor connecting to the new Minneola Interchange on Florida Turnpike's, the North Hancock Road extension is a vital economic development project for Central Florida. Future development adjacent to the interchange has the potential to create 7,400 direct and indirect jobs and over \$1 billion of economic impact for the region.

To continue building economic development partnerships in the region, Lake County Chairman Sean Parks hosted Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer for a Lake County tour showing city leaders why Lake County is "the other half or Orlando" and ripe for future business expansion in the region.

Lake County's tourism industry celebrated a record-breaking year, with total revenues for 2016 projected to surpass \$2.7 million for the first time ever.

The hit show "how to Do florida," which highlights outdoor activities across the state, returned to Lake County for a third visit, this time focusing on South Lake-area adventures and attractions.

Featuring 1,400 named lakes and seven of the top 11 lakes for number and size of bass fish in Florida, Lake County is the place to catch trophy

fish. To help anglers do just that, Lake County launched lakebigbass.com, a one-stop-shop for fishing enthusiasts visiting the area.

Two major fishing tournaments descended on the county's plentiful lakes this year: the third annual Harris Chain Big Bass Tour brought in over 600 participants. Jack Link's Major League Fishing, the most-watched fishing show on TV, filmed seven episodes on the Harris Chain of Lakes for the Outdoor Channel.

The Wings & Wildflowers Festival continues to highlight Lake County as Florida's premier birding destination. Last year's festival offered more than 100 trips and educational programs, attracting a record 5,000 visitors to all corners of Lake County.

The festival took home two first-place SUNsational awards during the Florida Festivals & Events Association Convention & Tradeshow in Orlando earlier this year.

It's easy to show off Lake County - nature's paradise - with over 3,800 acres of active and passive parkland. Walkers, joggers and cyclists are treated to 45 miles of recreational trails while paddlers and kayakers meander down our nine Blueway trails.

This year, Lake County partnered with the St. Johns River Water Management District to construct a trail joining the Green Mountain Scenic Overlook and Trailhead with the Lake Apopka Loop Trail. With this completion, the loop trail encompasses 18 miles of pristine, natural terrain and offers expanded ecotourism opportunities.

One of the best places to take in the sights and sounds of nature is at the county's new Wildlife Watch Post at PEAR Park, a camouflaged steel structure ideal for bird and butterfly watching.

At East Lake Community Park, the sounds of children's laughter permeates the air as more than 500 local children take to the fields each week to learn sportsmanship and form friendships. Commissioners fast-tracked lighting the park's multi-purpose fields, just in time for the Lake County Soccer Club's 2016 season.

Many years in the making, the Miracle League of South Lake County kicked off its spring season at their new home base - the Miracle Field of Lake County at Lake Idamere Park. The field features a cushioned synthetic surface that accommodates wheelchairs, walkers and crutches, and allows people with disabilities to play baseball and traverse the track.

The board understands the important role of parks, trails and libraries within our tightknit communities and is proud to continually support these investments.

As part of the 2016 inaugural graduating class, seven Lake County students earned accredited high school diplomas through the Lake County Library System's new Career Online High School program. The county awarded 78 total scholarships this year, funded by the Florida Department of State, allowing students to earn a high school diploma as opposed to a GED.

Lake County is on the path of establishing a more accessible community, with a reinforced commitment to the Safe Access to Schools initiative and the Countywide Sidewalk Program. This year's projects, funded by the penny sales tax, included County Road 468 near Rimes Early Learning Center in Leesburg, County Road 466A near Fruitland Park Elementary School and Grassy Lake Road near Minneola Charter School.

The board also worked with the Lake County Water Authority on the Wolf Branch Drainage project, providing for the capture and treatment

of water runoff in the Wekiva Springs Protection Area. The environmental project seeks to improve water quality before it discharges into the Wolf Branch Creek.

Due to the onset of Zika, Lake County has taken an aggressive approach to Mosquito Control, including purchasing a thermal fogger, backpack sprayers and a “chill table,” which allows staff to collect adult mosquitos and send them to the lab for testing while keeping them cold.

This year, Lake County also became a model for other counties for its innovative bear-resistant trash cart program, approving an ordinance for bear-resistant carts and requiring they be properly secured. Bear-resistant dumpsters were also installed at two convenience centers, available to citizens 24 hours a day.

Lake County continues to make the safety of its citizens and first responders a priority. To meet the increased needs of a growing population, Lake County Fire Rescue is enhancing its operations to ensure the highest level of performance and safety precautions are in place.

The division’s successes were recognized this year when Lake County received an improved Insurance Services Office rating due to a decade of improvements, including opening new fire stations, adding personnel, integrating a new radio system and launching the county’s interlocal service boundary agreements with automatic aid for fire.

To further this momentum, Fire Rescue was awarded the Department of Homeland Security’s SAFER grant. The \$1.7 million grant will go toward hiring 15 new firefighters to help increase staffing at existing stations and open a new one. These changes are expected to improve response times.

Lake County and the City of Clermont made history when opening the first jointly operated fire station in the county in September. Station 90104 is strategically located near State Road 50 and Florida's Turnpike. Built with land donated by Senninger Irrigation, and shared resources between the county and city, both agencies are able to save taxpayer dollars while offering a higher level of service to citizens.

Additionally, six Lake County Fire Rescue stations were outfitted with brand new LIFEPAK 15 monitor/defibrillator units, considered the top-of-the-line in care for advanced life support services.

Lake County Fire Rescue showcased their bravery on a world stage, when their efforts went viral during the Royal Trails Fire. Firefighters saved not only seven homes, but also a baby bear nicknamed Smokey Junior.

In response to Hurricane Matthew, Lake County activated its Emergency Communications and Operations Center to a Level 1 and opened emergency shelters for the first time in 12 years. Nearly 100 stakeholders gathered in the EOC, using new workstation consoles with integrated power, data and telecom, to quickly and efficiently respond to the needs of the community during the storm.

Lake County was also able to put its new emergency notification system into play just weeks after it went online, using AlertLake to get emergency weather notifications about Hurricane Matthew to residents. The system lets the county contact residents on their cell phone or by email or text message - within seconds of an emergency.

Lake County Public Safety was awarded the E911 State Grant to help upgrade its emergency recording equipment. The new system operates under technology that in the future, will include text, image, and video capabilities, and support for American Sign Language users.

LakeXpress, Lake County's fixed route public transit service, created two new routes along State Route 50 in South Lake and split Route 1 to help provide a more timely service for patrons. Lake County Transit also installed an additional 10 shelters and 20 bus stops with benches throughout the county.

The Lake County Water Safety Team received the National Water Safety Congress Award of Merit, presented at the International Boating & Water Safety Summit in San Diego. The award recognizes outstanding teamwork by agencies facilitating water safety and drowning prevention.

Lake County was honored with five National Association of Counties' Annual Achievement Awards for its implementation of innovative programs that modernize county government and increase service to residents. The programs include the Automatic Aid Agreements for Fire Rescue; customer-friendly web enhancements for the Property Appraiser's website; Keep Lake Beautiful; the board's new agenda process; and the Parks & Trails mobile data collector.

Lake County also again accepted the Government Finance Officers Association's Distinguished Budget Presentation Award for its 2016 Annual Budget and proudly hosted 20 budget workshops this year.

With a focus on the wellbeing of county employees, commissioners opened the Primary Care Connection – Employee Health & Wellness Center. Using the center for primary care service is expected to result in both savings for the county and its employees under the self-funded medical plan.

To meet the needs of an increasing number of Lake County veterans, the county published the free "Lake County Veterans Handbook," a survivor assistance guide to local and federal resources for veterans and their families.

In partnership with the 5<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit, Lake County helped establish the Veterans Treatment Court this year. The program is designed to assist defendants with the complex treatment needs tied to their military service. The court offers links to services using a team approach to help the participant remain in treatment and improve their chances of success and sobriety.

Lake County also implemented the Homeless Rehousing Program to serve homeless youth, elderly and families with children. The grant program, funded by the State Housing Initiatives Partnership, is designed to assist people to transition from homelessness to permanent housing.

The board honored 50 volunteers who offered their time and talents to Lake County, contributing over 19,000 hours of service, or the equivalent of nine full-time employee positions with a value of over \$152,000.

Keep Lake Beautiful, Lake County's volunteer organization seeking to beautify the community, organized more than one dozen events during its first year. 500 volunteers planted nearly 1,000 trees and shrubs, collected 27,000 pounds of litter, and painted 14 school buildings.

The Lake County Board of County Commissioners is investing today to ensure a prosperous future for its residents, visitors and business owners. From affirming a commitment to public safety, to providing an unsurpassed quality of life for residents and its growing commercial industries; Lake County leaders will leave a legacy that will endure for generations.