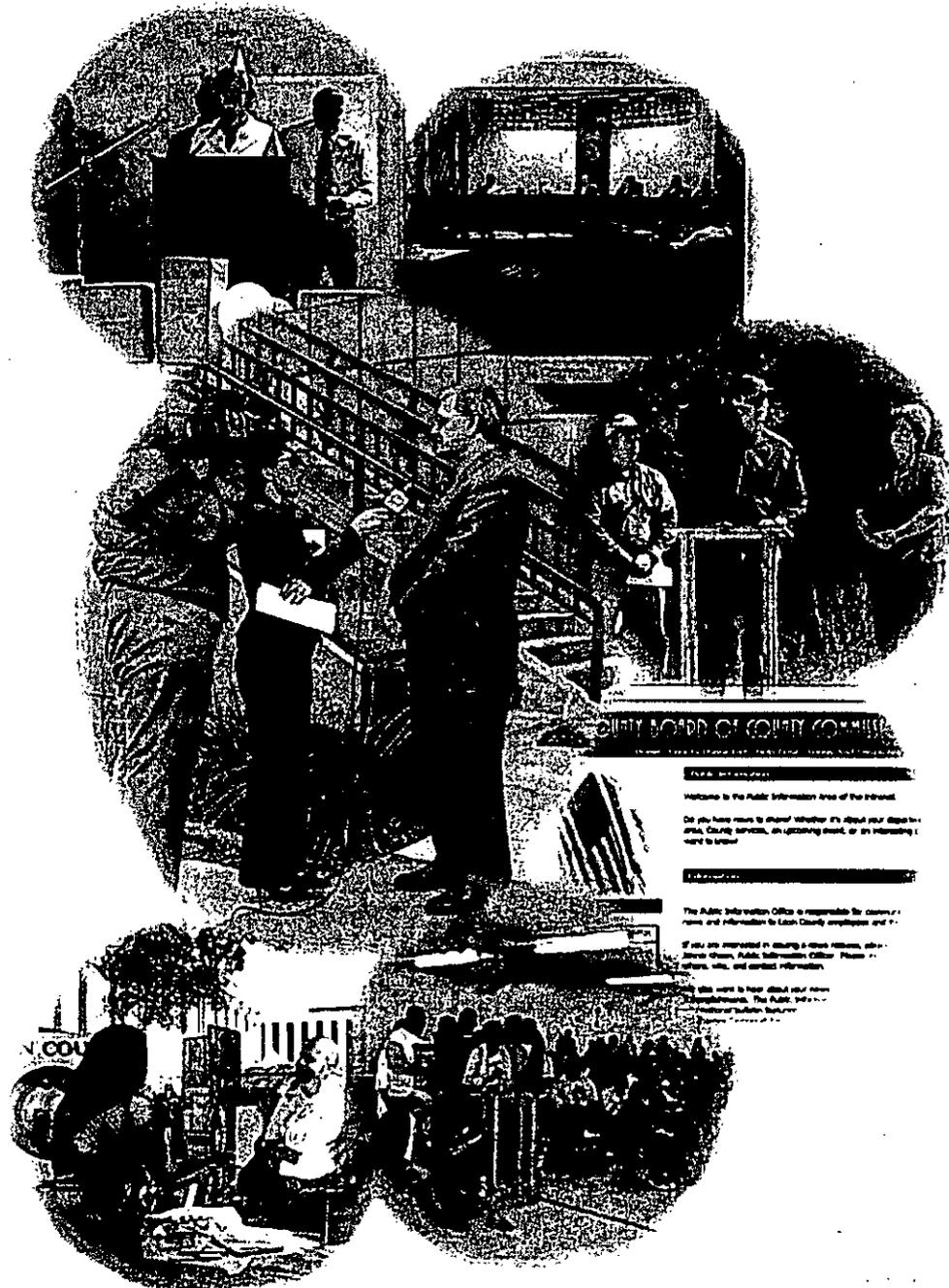




**Leon County**  
Board of County Commissioners

# Strategic Communications Plan

## *Leon County Public Information*



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## **Leon County Mission**



Leon County Government is dedicated to preserving and enhancing the outstanding quality of life which has made our community a desirable place to live, work and raise our children. Through the provisions of cost effective superior services, County Government will ensure orderly and sustainable growth, promote economic health and vitality, and provide for the welfare and safety of its citizens.

## **Public Information Office**

### **Public Information Office Mission**

The core mission of the Public Information Office (PIO) is to promote a positive public image for Leon County. This is accomplished by fostering proactive and responsive communication with the public and Leon County employees through public awareness, community outreach, and other communications initiatives.

### **Role of Public Information Office**

The PIO is responsible for communications strategy and message development, media and public relations, and the marketing of County programs and services. The PIO uses communications tools to educate the public including: the official County website, distribution of news releases, news advisories and public notices to the media; press conferences, The County Link (monthly newspaper advertisement), the county government TV channel, speaking engagements, neighborhood and community meetings, and numerous publications to the public and regular reports to the Board. Internal communications tools include: the distribution of a quarterly employee newsletter, Intra (internal) Website, and other forms of communication. The Public Information Office has a three person staff, including the Public Information Officer, a Public Information Specialist, and the Information Desk Coordinator. The PIO is a division that reports to the Assistant County Administrator. PIO staff work closely with County Administration and the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) on a daily



basis to ensure that the most timely and accurate information reaches our external and internal customers, via the most effective medium(s).

### **Goal of Strategic Communications Plan**

The Strategic Communications Plan aims to:



1. Enhance overall communications effectiveness in Leon County government.
2. Guide in the efforts of the Public Information Office in the short-term and serve as a critical planning tool for the future.
3. Develop a communications system in which the County's message is conveyed using a consistent, cohesive, honest, and proactive approach.
4. Improve public awareness and public perception of Leon County government and its services through the implementation of enhanced communication as outlined in this plan.
5. Encourage citizens to become more educated, engaged and involved in county government.
6. Improve internal communications in Leon County government recognizing employees as valuable promoters of the County's image.
7. Cultivate an inclusive and open environment for communication that encourages mutual communication between citizens and government, as well as between and among employees and Administration/Management.
8. Address real and perceived deficiencies and to build upon strengths, utilizing this plan as a living document to continuously improve Leon County's communications strategy.

### **External Communication Methods**

*Target audience: Citizens*

There are approximately 250,000 residents including citizens, students, businesses, neighborhood groups, civic groups, and more who all call Leon County home. The

following methods are recommended to improve public awareness and public perception of Leon County government. Because Leon County is home to Florida's capitol, three institutions of higher learning, and is known for its history and natural beauty, tourists are attracted to the area. The PIO will continue to work with the Tourist Development Council (TDC) and the Chamber of Commerce to promote economic development initiatives in Florida's Capital County.

## **External Communications Tools**

**I. Media Relations** – Television, radio and print news media are extremely important to the successful implementation of the County's communication plan because of the large quantity of people they reach. The PIO maintains contact with the news media on a daily basis. It is the responsibility of the PIO to communicate the policies and programs of Leon County and to ensure reporters receive timely and accurate information. To ensure that reporters understand County issues comprehensively, the PIO will review the County Commission agenda, identify the topics that will likely generate media interest, and will follow up with the reporter to clarify any questions the reporter may have regarding the issue. For detailed responses, the PIO will put the reporter in touch with the best county staff person, county commission chairman, or appropriate county commissioner to address those questions.

A. News Releases – The PIO works closely with the Board of County Commissioners and Aides, Administration, and the Departments and Divisions to share Leon County news and information, and promote County services and programs through news releases and press conferences. News Releases prepared and distributed by the PIO must focus on a Leon County service or program or a Board approved policy or issue. (The PIO has shared a media contact list with County Commissioner Aides and assisted with making news release templates, if a commissioner is interested in distributing their own news release.)



B. Press Conferences – The County Administrator and/or Assistant County Administrator must approve press conferences coordinated by the PIO and press conferences must promote a Leon County program or service.

**II. County Link** – The Leon County Link is a full page advertisement published in the Tallahassee Democrat the first Tuesday of each month. It is also posted on the Leon County Website. The Link highlights Leon County programs, services, upcoming events, and other information important to citizens. This is an effective communications tool to promote Leon County because weekday readership is 128,800 people.

### **III. Publications/Reports**

A. Citizens Guide to the Budget & County Services – The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) in coordination with the PIO develops and publishes the annual Citizens Guide. This guide is released at the start of the fiscal year and serves as an educational tool and reference guide for citizens.

B. Highlights & Accomplishments Report –The PIO, with assistance from Administration and the departments and divisions, produces a Highlights and Accomplishments Report every two years to educate the public on the County's most recent successes.

C. County Administrator's Annual Report – In accordance with the County



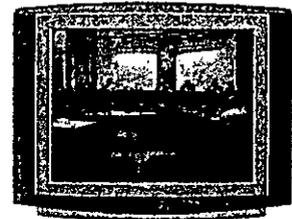
Charter, the County Administrator must publish an annual report on County services. Beginning in fall 2005, the Citizens Guide to the Budget & County Services and the Highlights & Accomplishments Report will no longer be produced and both will be replaced with ***The County Administrator's Annual Report***. The PIO will

assume responsibility of producing this report with coordination from Administration and OMB on budget information.

**IV. Leon County Channel 16** – Leon County Channel 16 serves as a valuable, effective, but under-utilized communications tool to educate the public on important information about county government. The Communication Plan puts strong emphasis on the increased utilization of Channel 16.

A. Programming

- *Character Generator Message Board* – Leon County purchased the software to provide a message board on Channel 16 in 2002. The PIO will begin enhancing message board pages to include useful information for the public and add photos and graphics to attract more attention. (*Implementation: February 2005*).
- *Broadcasting of meetings* - Through a franchise agreement with Comcast, Leon County broadcasts live Board of County Commissioner workshops and meetings. Per the agreement, Comcast provides a Comcast employee to assist with the production of the live broadcast. MIS has maintained responsibility of producing the live broadcasts and maintaining the audio system for the meetings. In January 2005, PIO staff will assume this responsibility. Per the Comcast agreement, Leon County can only access Channel 16 from 9 a.m. until 12 a.m. on Tuesdays (end time subject to change to coincide with the conclusion of the meeting).
- *EMS Video* - In spring 2004, the PIO office contracted with a video production vendor to produce a 30 minute educational video on Leon County's new Emergency Medical Services Department. The PIO wrote and produced the script, and served as the talent, significantly reducing the cost of the videographer/editor that otherwise would perform these functions. The video airs on Channel 16 on Tuesdays, when a Board meeting is not airing. County commissioners, the administrator, and EMS staff received positive feedback from the public on the video. The



tool proved valuable and the County should consider approving the production of additional videos to promote County services.

- *Televised News Conferences* –Comcast provides the service of taping events, such as news conferences that have a county-wide impact, like a library branch opening. Per the County’s franchise agreement with Comcast, the cable company charges \$65.00 per hour with a four hour minimum for videography services. Editing work would be additional \$25.00 per hour.
- *Special Video Projects* –Special video productions for Channel 16 can be enhanced. For example, a “Year in Review” video featuring the highlights of the year would help increase public awareness on County services. To keep operating costs and staff to a minimum, it is envisioned that the County would contract with a vendor to produce these videos in the foreseeable future.
- *PSA’s* – The PIO will acquire all PSA’s promoting County services from the divisions to broadcast on Channel 16 (ie: mosquito control, recycling, solid waste).
- *Cross-Promotion on Comcast* – The PIO will work with Comcast to cross-promote Leon County programs on Channel 16 on some of the other Comcast cable channels.

B. TV Control Room Upgrades - In order to enhance programming on Channel 16, TV control room equipment upgrades are needed. In summer 2004, the PIO met with MIS and the video equipment vendor to discuss the capability of recording and re-playing Board meetings, in addition to broadcasting special videos. The vendor provided the County with the cost to purchase additional equipment (a video server) which will be paid out of the MIS Chamber improvement budget allocation. *Expected Implementation: February 2005.*

The Channel 16 enhancements will greatly improve the County’s ability to increase awareness of Leon County services and important issues before the Leon

County Commission, well into the future. However, this will require a commitment from staff, and adequate funding to purchase equipment and build on our technology.

#### V. Leon County Website

# www.leoncountyfl.gov

A. New Website name – In spring 2004, Leon County launched the County’s new website address: [www.leoncountyfl.gov](http://www.leoncountyfl.gov). The new URL is easier for the public to remember. The new URL should be used on all County documents to promote visibility and enhance use of the County website

B. Report Problems On-Line – This feature allows the public to report problems on the County’s website. The information is automatically transferred to the appropriate department or division and responded to in a timely manner. To increase use of this feature, the PIO will develop a more prominent button from the front page to attract attention and begin cross-promoting this feature through the County Link, flyers, and other informational tools. (Attachment 1 provides list of recent reports).

C. Provide Comments/How are we doing? –The “Send Comments” feature to the Leon County website homepage shall be enhanced with the addition of a more prominent button on the homepage to attract attention to this feature. The input received can be used as an effective measurement tool on how well we are serving our customers.

D. Web Stewards – Each County program, department, and division has an appointed Web Steward to maintain their respective web index



pages. The PIO is responsible for maintaining the overall content on the website while the MIS division is responsible for the technical maintenance. The PIO also coordinates the web stewards' duties and holds quarterly meetings with the web stewards. In spring 2004, the PIO developed standards for the index pages to promote consistency across the website. Every page on the website must use the County template (from the front page of the website). Each index page must also have contact information displayed. Web stewards are responsible for maintaining accurate and up-to-date information on their index pages. Department and divisions are encouraged to post brochures and other informational documents to the index pages. Information promoting County services on the Website will help build "buy-in" from employees and the public.

**VI. Education/Informational Campaigns** – The PIO will provide assistance in the development of marketing campaigns including writing scripts, designing ads, and marketing as issues arise.

**VII. Branding** - The Leon County Board of County Commissioners uses the Leon County seal as its official image on letterhead and other materials. This seal currently has the image of the State of Florida. It is important for the public to identify Leon County government with a consistent image. To avoid confusion in the eyes of the public and to provide a more targeted and cohesive message, all external publications should clearly identify the source of the document with the County's official seal.

In addition to the County seal, a County Logo will be developed, incorporating the seal and the words *Leon County Board of County Commissioners*, to be used on County Letterhead and formats where the seal alone is not sufficient. Please note the following example:



**Leon County**  
**Board of County Commissioners**

This logo can be used when Leon County participates in programs or events in conjunction with other government entities, such as the City of Tallahassee or the Health Department, who have logos incorporating the names of their organizations. Simply, the logo would be a chosen font for the words *Leon County Board of County Commissioners* that would be used consistently for County publications. The font used in the example is *Futura Md BT*. Citizens would come to recognize the font and identify it with Leon County government.



#### **VIII. Public Meetings/Public Events –**

In recent years, the Board has held 5 district-wide community meetings in the fall to educate the public on county-wide and district specific issues of importance. Overall, attendance at these meetings has been relatively low, except for District 4 in 2003, due to an overwhelming concern over flooding in Killlearn Lakes, and District 1 in 2004, which generated a very large turnout. Instead of holding several community meetings, the plan recommends holding one town hall or community meeting when an issue arises that would require significant public education, as in the case of the CRA. A fun, family event like a “Leon County Citizens Appreciation Day,” at a location like the Miccosukee Greenway, would likely generate more turnout than the district meetings. The event could provide food, family activities, children’s games, and displays of Leon County department and division services, increasing awareness and allowing commissioners and staff an opportunity to personally meet and greet with citizens. The PIO would coordinate the “Citizens Appreciation Day” in the fall or spring and implement a marketing campaign to increase awareness. The cost to provide hot dogs, chips, and a refreshment is approximately \$2.50 per person. If 1,000 people attended, the cost would be \$2500. A budget allocation would be needed to fund the event.

## **IX. Other: Economic Development, Tourist Development, Community Issues**

The PIO will increase communication with staff at the Tourist Development Council, Economic Development Council, and the local Chamber of Commerce(s) to improve the awareness of Leon county government with visitors and out of town businesses. The Public Information Officer is a member of two professional organizations including the Florida Association of Public Relations, Capital Chapter, where she serves as the Student Liaison on the Board of Directors. The Public Information Officer is also a member of the National City-County Communications Association (3CMA). The PIO can work closely with the communications professionals from these groups to continue to enhance the image of Leon County government.

### **Measuring Communications Effectiveness**

#### **Survey Results**

The PIO conducted a survey in July 2004 to receive input from employees in order to evaluate the county's current internal communications practices and to make meaningful improvements to when, how and in what ways we communicate as an organization. A total of 123 people responded to the anonymous survey. The entire survey and results are included as Attachment 2.

Overall, participants rated the PIO's efforts at keeping employees informed on County issues as good to very good. However, the survey findings indicate that the majority of participants agree that better communication is needed from Administration and Senior Management to employees and from the PIO to employees. Messages from Administration and the PIO are not always carried through from Executive and Senior Management to their respective staff.

Employees expressed a desire for more access to up-to-date County information before seeing County-related stories on the TV and/or reading it in the newspaper. In addition, the majority of employees read the Courier newsletter, but would like to receive

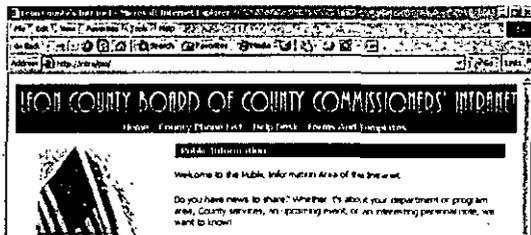
additional information, specifically on policy changes and county events and activities. Employees also appreciate visits from Administration to discuss important Leon County issues.

### **Internal Communication Methods**

*Target audience: employees*

Leon County has approximately 800 employees who are a direct reflection of the County government itself. An employee who knows that he or she is valued as such and is well informed is our most important and effective connection to our internal and external audiences. As such, any effective communication strategy must recognize County employees as valuable resources in promoting Leon County's image in the community. To that end, the following methods are recommended:

#### **Internal Communications Tools**



**I. Intranet** – Leon County's internal Website, <http://intra>, serves as a useful tool to provide information to employees, including a phone directory, policies, manuals, forms and templates, and more. MIS is currently

upgrading the site to include a new "look and feel" with the goal of attracting more attention and more users. In July 2004, the PIO added its own page that includes templates for news releases and news advisories, information about the monthly employee newsletter, media guidelines, and more. Other departments and divisions are encouraged to take advantage of this site to share information about their own areas with the rest of the organization.



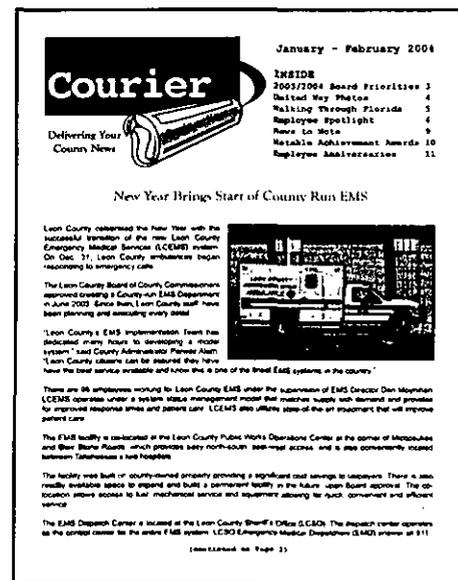
**II. Frequently Asked Questions On-Line** – In the survey, employees recommended receiving additional information that directly impacts them, from policies and procedures to employee benefits. One way to accomplish this is by creating a FAQ section on the intranet that could

answer many common employee questions. The PIO will work with Human Resources to create this document.

**III. Email Newsletter/Bulletin** – The survey revealed that employees want more up-to-date Leon County information more frequently. Many of the survey participants said they often learn about Leon County information on the TV instead of from Administration or Management. To improve this level of communication, the PIO recommends developing an e-mail bulletin to be posted on the intranet with an e-mail link provided to employees on a weekly to bi-weekly basis. Potential titles for the document include: Leon County E-News, In the Loop, or News to Note. It will also include a link to all news releases for additional information. This information will help employees be armed with Leon County news and serve as positive advocates for Leon County government. The bulletin would be brief (limited to one-page) and include timely information and news on upcoming events. *Recommended Implementation: February 2005*

**IV. Courier** – The Courier employee newsletter is a 10-15 page publication that is produced by the PIO and published quarterly. It is distributed to every Leon County employee and it is also posted on the Intranet site. The Courier includes a letter from the County Administrator, information on new services, interesting stories about employees and programs, employee accomplishments, upcoming events, new hires, personal notes, and more.

The survey of employees ranked the kinds of information they would like to read in the Courier. The results were (from most important to least important): policies, events/activities, new hires, personal stories, weddings and births. The PIO will work to include more stories based on these recommendations. Employees also recommended that the Courier be



published more frequently, bi-monthly rather than quarterly. The PIO will work toward publishing six Couriers a year, rather than four.

However, for the Courier to be successful, it is essential for all employees to share news and information with the PIO to be placed in the Courier. The PIO looks to Executive and Senior Management to provide information from their respective areas for use in the Courier and other communications tools. The PIO also has commissioned the Web Stewards –assigned staff who maintain their divisions' websites -- to also serve as PIO Stewards. These PIO Stewards are the eyes and ears of the PIO office throughout the organization and will help foster improved communications between the PIO and the divisions/programs, help generate story ideas for the Courier, and share information from their areas. In order for PIO stewards to be effective, the concept must be reinforced by their managers and Administration.

**V. Paycheck stuffer** – Another tool to improve communication among employees, as recommended in the survey, is to develop a type of newsletter to be delivered along with BCC employees' paychecks bi-weekly. This would help get the message to all employees, especially those who don't have e-mail access. This would be similar to the e-mail bulletin. This is an under-utilized method for internal communication and will be considered more thoroughly as a means to disseminate the most critical information to employees.

## **VI. Media/Marketing Training –**

### **A. Media Guidelines – (Attachment 3)**

- *News Releases* - The PIO office is responsible for distributing news advisories and releases. Department and division directors or their designees can use the news release templates found on the intranet to draft news releases but must send them to the PIO for review and distribution. The PIO will alert the County Administrator and/or

Assistant County Administrator about a news release prior to distribution.

- **Media Contact - All employees who are contacted by the media for questions should inform their supervisor and PIO by phone or e-mail.** If the reporter is asking general County information about a County service (not controversial), employees may answer the question(s), and should follow-up with an e-mail or phone call to the PIO. For example, a reporter may ask Mosquito Control staff when spraying is occurring, or a reporter may ask Growth Management staff when a particular permit is up for consideration, or ask Public Works staff what roads will soon be under construction. **If the topic is potentially controversial, employees should contact the PIO before responding.** For example, questions related to personnel issues, projects that have received negative press previously, and issues that involve lawsuits. The PIO will coordinate with County Administration on the appropriate message.
- **County Spokesperson** - The PIO will issue statements to the media at the request of the County Administrator and/or Assistant County Administrator. When the press calls the PIO directly on a particular subject, the PIO will recommend the County staff person who is most familiar and knowledgeable on the issue to talk to the media and direct the reporter to that person. In some cases, the PIO will ask for the information from staff and provide the statement to the press.

B. Marketing Training -- The PIO will develop and implement a media training that will include tips for dealing with the media, how to give an effective interview, how to write a news release, and more.

(*Recommended Implementation: Spring 2005*) The PIO is also available to assist divisions and departments with marketing their services,

including assisting with the development of power point presentations and talking points to be used to promote a County service at a neighborhood meeting.

**VII. Staff Meetings** – Survey respondents reported that they appreciate when the County Administrator met with them to discuss important issues (ie: Article V, the Charter, CRA). Continuation of these personal meetings would also boost employee morale and improve the goal of employees serving as positive advocates of Leon County government. The PIO could help coordinate monthly meetings with employees.

### **VIII. Internal Events/Activities**

The Public Information Office coordinates or assists with several internal events during the course of the year, such as EMS Appreciation Day, and the Public



Works Rodeo.

A. Winter Festival – The PIO takes a lead role in coordinating the Leon County float for the Winter Festival parade in mid-December. The PIO coordinates a committee that decides on the theme, and drafts a float design. Facilities and Public Works dedicate several staff

people to help build the float two to three days before the event. The cost for materials for the float is approximately \$750 which is allocated from the Public Services Promotions Activities budget.

B. United Way – The PIO office coordinates the United Way fundraising campaign for the entire County government, coordinates the captains in each of the program areas, and organizes the joint city/county kickoff event.



## **Public Information Office Contact Information**

The Public Information Office will continue to evaluate communications effectiveness in an effort to improve ways we communicate as an organization. The following PIO staff is available to assist in any way we are needed:

### **Jennie Khoen**

Public Information Officer  
488-9962  
Cell 294-2274  
khoenj@leoncountyfl.gov

### **Rebeka Gipson King**

Public Information Specialist  
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### **Attachments:**

1. On-line Problem Reporting summary
2. Internal Communication Survey Results
3. Media Guidelines

January 14, 2005