



Leon County

Board of County Commissioners

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YOUR TURN

2023 Leon County in Review: Advancing Our Strategy, Shaping Our Community

Vincent S. Long, Leon County Administrator

In 2023, Leon County continued to make great progress and serve our citizens while striving to set the highest standard for performance, fiscal stewardship, and best practices for local governments everywhere.

Leon County remains committed to advancing our strategic priorities and achieving tangible results for our community from the opening of Amazon, the largest injection of private sector jobs in the County's history, to transforming a historic rail station into a central hub for visitors and so much more. Each year, I present an annual report to the Board of County Commissioners and our community that highlights Leon County's ongoing commitment to investing in infrastructure, creating places for people and businesses to thrive, and building a culture of innovation and co-creation—all of which make our County one of the South's Best places to live, work, and play.

We did this and so much more in 2023, never losing focus on our ambitious targets and bold goals for the organization and the community, including growing our local tourism economy, addressing pressing issues like homelessness and hunger, protecting our precious environment, and so much more.

While addressing the critical needs of this time, we remained focused on executing our long-term strategy of building and diversifying our local economy which resulted in the opening of Amazon. Leon County is now home to a \$200 million, 630,000-square-foot Amazon Fulfillment Center, the largest facility in the region with a footprint of 170 acres. This one game-changing project alone brings more than 1,300 full-time jobs and \$33 million in annual wages to our community, with a \$114 million economic impact each year.

With that same dedication to ensuring our community's brightest future, Leon County continued enhancing our quality of life and protecting our precious water bodies, like Lake Munson, through the removal of hundreds of septic tanks in the southside and more. And because building community is all about building connections, we opened new green spaces and playgrounds in 2023. We also revitalized a neighborhood through our annual 9/11 Day of Service project, held our award-winning Created Equal with a frank conversation on race and equality, and continued building disaster preparedness and resilience at every level.

With live music and events roaring back in 2023, we had another record year for local tourism, with \$1.23 billion in economic impact and nearly 2.35 million visitors. To keep this historic momentum going, we opened the County's one-of-a-kind Visitor Information Center downtown in the renovated rail station. Strategically positioned between

businesses, hotels, campuses, and venues, this hub for visitor services will grow tourism and support the County's leading efforts in celebrating our community's bicentennial in 2024.

Due to the County's sound fiscal policies and long-range planning, the County once again balanced the budget without raising the millage rate for the 12th year in a row and received Moody's highest-grade, lowest-risk credit rating. This commitment to fiscal stewardship has been key to keeping Leon County among the most efficient and affordable counties anywhere.

Because of results like this and so much more, in 2023, our dedicated County employees received dozens of state and national awards for exceptional public service. Such awards recognized the County's Emergency Medical Services as the best in the state, our communication strategy as best in the nation, and our Public Works projects as best among their peers. These efforts not only continue to make our community better, but they have also been key to keeping Leon County among the most efficient and affordable counties anywhere.

In 2023, Leon County Emergency Medical Services celebrated 20 years of dedicated service to our community. For two decades, our exceptional EMS team has continued to create a vibrant, resilient, and healthy community. This year alone, Leon County EMS responded to more than 50,000 calls for service, up from 10,000 calls in 2004. For these contributions and so many more, Leon County was recognized as the 2023 EMS Provider of the Year by the Florida Department of Health.

Though Leon County will continue to face the same challenges of communities and governments everywhere, as we reflect on the progress made over the last year and look to the future, we remain committed to listening to the people we serve, addressing the challenges we face together, and striving to be a place like nowhere else.

Take a look back at Leon County's progress in 2023 by viewing the annual report and video at LeonCountyFL.gov/AnnualReport.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Vince Long, county administrator, has worked for Leon County since 1995, and in 2022, earned the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) Award for Career Excellence. Reach him at 850-606-5300 or LongV@LeonCountyFL.gov.

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