

Area receives \$300,000 in grants

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SHALIMAR - John Adams came to Okaloosa County on Monday to spread positive energy, and the CEO of Enterprise Florida backed that up with almost \$300,000 in state grant money.

"We clearly are in the optimism business," said Adams, who in other states would be known as the state Secretary of Commerce.

"We are a target rich environment in Florida," he said to almost three dozen business and community leaders who came to see him present the grants at University of Florida's Research and Engineering Education Facility.

"We are trying to brand Florida so people elsewhere will know we are open for business."

Enterprise Florida presented Okaloosa County with a Defense Infrastructure Grant worth \$200,000. Okaloosa County's Economic Development Committee will manage that grant.

In the past, this type of grant money has been used to relocate Hurlburt Field's West Gate, as well as put a perimeter fence around what has become Northwest Regional Airport. In this case, some of the money is targeted to supply the new LambdaRail Internet service to the 120,000-square-foot Community Services Complex under construction on the main campus of Northwest Florida State College.

There was also a \$99,000 Defense Reinvestment Grant made to the EDC. It can be used for anything that supports the mission of the military here, said the EDC's Kay Rasmussen.

Any money spent from this grant requires a one-third match from a private source, she added. That could come in the form of money or manpower.

Since 1998, Enterprise Florida has provided about \$9 million worth of grants here, Rasmussen said, with about \$6.6 million of that going to the county.

"Huge," was how she summarized the overall impact. "Not to overuse the word 'regional,' but this benefits all the communities of Okaloosa County."

Okaloosa County Administrator James Curry called the grants "vitaly important to this community."