

Okaloosa, Santa Rosa awarded \$405,000 in grants to support military

[MLADEN RUDMAN](#) Tuesday September 4th, 2007

Okaloosa and Santa Rosa counties will receive \$405,000 in state grants to help support local military bases and surrounding communities. Gov. Charlie Crist's office announced the awards last week. They are part of nearly \$3.5 million in defense grants awarded statewide to communities that host military bases

"Defense grants enable communities near military installations to better support the men and women who serve in our military and their families," Crist said in a prepared statement. The grant program "recognizes just how important the defense sector is to Florida's economy," he said.

The Economic Development Council of Okaloosa County received two grants. The largest, \$200,000, will be used to help develop the Emerald Coast Technology and Research Campus on property adjoining the University of Florida's Research and Engineering Education Facility on Lewis Turner Boulevard.

"We're going to be focusing a lot on marketing (the campus)," said Kay Rasmussen, the EDC's director of defense and economic initiatives. Okaloosa's defense reinvestment grant is \$135,000. The EDC plans to use the money to help Eglin Air Force Base with growth planning.

At the top of the list is helping prepare the area for some 5,000 troops coming to Eglin as a result of the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure process. Rasmussen said the reinvestment grant money also could be used for efforts such as keeping the 46th Test Wing at Eglin if the threat to move it resurfaces.

Santa Rosa County was awarded a \$70,000 defense infrastructure grant. County Commissioner Don Salter said the money would be used to help cover the cost of a prescribed-burning smoke forecast model for Naval Air Station Whiting Field.

"We've been trying to get that funded for the last three years, even though it's a smaller (grant)," he said. The grant request was one of three Santa Rosa submitted for fiscal 2008. In the past, the county has received heftier grants to help buy land or conservation easements to buffer Whiting Field and its outlying fields from encroachment.

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