

Ready, Set, Protect: Prepare for Hurricane Season

On September 28, 2022, Hurricane Ian made landfall in southwestern Florida as a Category 4 hurricane. The storm surge reached 10 – 15 feet along the immediate coastline, and a surge of up to 8 feet was pushed 15 miles inland and up to 24 miles along rivers. There were 68 deaths attributed to Ian in Lee County alone.

This year, Pinellas County Emergency Management is trying to convey one simple message: time is the one resource you cannot get more of. Once a storm threatens Pinellas County, there will be limited time to get ready, get set and protect yourself from impact.

Know Your Risk

Storm surge is the water that is pushed onto land as a hurricane makes landfall. Know if you are at risk from storm surge by looking up your evacuation zone at disaster.pinellas.gov, the [Ready Pinellas app](#) (now available in Spanish) or by calling (727) 453-3150 (landline phones only; uses your home location to determine your evacuation zone).

Wind in a hurricane can range from outer bands that could be gusty winds to devastating hurricane-force winds. Know if your home is strong enough to stay in. **All mobile homes must evacuate when an order is given because they are very vulnerable to strong winds.**

Areas prone to **flooding** can be overwhelmed. Localized flooding can last much longer than storm surge flooding. Know if you are at risk for inland flooding. Look up your flood risk at floodrisk.pinellas.gov.

Make a Plan

Prepare for all members of your family.

- Gather your basic emergency supplies.
- If you have a loved one who is electrically dependent or who has medical needs requiring assistance, they can register for the [Special Needs Evacuation Program](#) in advance.
- Make sure to [prepare your pets](#). Check that vaccination

and license information is updated, build an emergency kit for them, and consider a pet-friendly shelter if you need to evacuate.

- Decide if and when you will stay home or evacuate. Make arrangements. If you live in a non-evacuation zone, consider being a [host home](#) (internal link for employees).



Stay Informed

Staying informed is one of the best ways to stay safe during a disaster.

- Visit disaster.pinellas.gov for general information and quick links. During emergencies, find up-to-the-minute information.
- Download the [Ready Pinellas mobile application](#). Be sure to install updates; Spanish is now available.
- Sign up for [Alert Pinellas](#). Receive urgent notifications via text, email, or phone.
- Call the County Information Center (CIC) during emergencies at (727) 464-4333 or start a [live chat](#).
- Follow the County on social media: [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#).
- Have an emergency weather radio on hand. Configure the radio to the Special Area Message Encoding (SAME) for Pinellas County, 012103, or tune to frequency 162.450.

Once Pinellas County enters the 5-day cone, activities on the County level will increase. That will be the time for you to make final preparations and be ready to put your plans into action to ensure your loved ones are safe.

The Employee Voice Survey is Coming in Late Summer



This is your chance to say what you think and how you feel about working for Pinellas County.

Your Voice Matters.

Registration Now Open for Virtual Art Show

The deadline to register and submit your artwork is September 8. See [page 7](#) for more information, including information about the new way you will need to submit your artwork this year.



Emergency Management Prepares for Hurricane Season With ‘Hurricane Asher’ Exercise

For Pinellas County Emergency Management (PCEM), “Always Preparing In Order to Protect” means more than writing plans, sharing communications, and doing outreach. The PCEM team of 16 works year-round with our local, state and federal partners to coordinate and discuss multi-agency responses to all hazards. Exercises are one of the many complex aspects that play a vital role in ensuring the community is ready to respond to and recover from an emergency.

Emergency Management conducted what is known to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as a “Functional Exercise”, meaning the exercise does everything but move actual resources in the field, from June 2, 2023 – June 8, 2023. The exercise, named “Hurricane Asher”, engaged over one hundred partner agencies through each phase of the scenario as the storm gained steam and barreled towards the west-central coast of Florida. On June 7, the Pinellas County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) activated to a Level 1 – Full Activation, requiring the most complex coordination of over 300 personnel broken across two shifts.

Throughout the exercise, agencies tested their plans, communications, systems, technology, and other essential assets to ensure they are ready for the hurricane season and working on fixing anything identified as an area for improvement after Hurricane Ian and Hurricane Nicole last year.

“Exercises are a critical component to the emergency management process, and I am very proud of the team’s efforts and partner response to bring the ‘Hurricane Asher’ exercise to life this year,” said Cathie Perkins, Emergency Management Director.

Emergency Management continues the training and exercise efforts throughout the year to prepare for all types of hazards.

Discovering Pinellas: Hurricane Myths vs. Facts

With several close calls in recent years but no direct hits, many in Pinellas County have embraced an appealing myth: that Tampa Bay has a special protection from hurricanes.

The latest episode of the Discovering Pinellas video series debunks that myth by talking with popular TV meteorologist Denis Phillips along with a local historian and our Emergency Management Director, Cathie Perkins. Check out the [video](#) and consider sharing this important message on your social media with your friends and family.



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Host Homes and R’Club Childcare Programs

Pinellas County offers a [Host Home Program](#) (internal link for employees) to help you and your immediate family, including pets, find a safe place to stay during an evacuation. County employees who live in non-evacuation zones offer to host others. Employees living in an evacuation zone simply contact the Host Home Program to register and receive a suggested match.

Employees who are activated for a declared emergency and need childcare may enroll for childcare services with [R’Club](#) (internal link for employees). Childcare services are only effective during the period of recovery. Once available, R’Club will provide childcare services (ages 2 months through 5th grade or 12 years of age and special needs children through age 22) for all employees.

If you have questions about either of these services, contact Human Resources at AskHR@pinellas.gov or (727) 464-3367, option 2.



Q. Are County offices open or closed on July 3?

A. All County offices except for Clerk of the Circuit Court and Tax Collector offices will be open on Monday, July 3. Tuesday, July 4 is a County holiday and therefore, all County offices will be closed with some exceptions for employees who will need to report to work. Please check with your supervisor.

Q. When is the next retention supplement?

A. On August 11, the second retention supplement of \$600 (\$422.10 after taxes) will be paid to permanent employees who have been employed continuously between January 29 and July 29, 2023. Visit [Retention Supplement](#) for more information.

Q. I have an employment verification form that needs to be completed, who should I contact?

A. If you have an employment verification form to be filled out or you need an official letter of employment, email hr@pinellas.gov and the information will be provided within 48 hours. Visit [Employment Verification](#) for more information.

Q. Is the County required to allow me breaks and can I leave 1.5 hours early if I skip my breaks and lunch?

A. No, the Federal Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) and Florida Statutes do not require breaks or meal periods and the Personnel Rules do not address breaks or meal periods, except that the FLSA does have a provision for breaks for nursing mothers. However, the Rules do provide flexibility to departments to have their own policies regarding meal periods. The FLSA also does not require employers to pay employees during meal periods, but if a meal period is granted, the employer must allow the employee to take the full meal period without doing any work, and the meal period is usually for a minimum of 30 minutes. The only reference to a required meal period in the Florida law pertains to employees under the age of 18.

Meal periods promote good health, encourage social interactions, and boost morale along with helping to increase productivity as they provide an employee a needed break from a long work day. It is encouraged that employees take their meal period away from the immediate work area. Specific questions regarding approved breaks and meal periods should be directed to your supervisor up through to your Appointing Authority.

The Pen

Update Your Contact Information in OPUS

Please take a moment to update your personal cell phone number and home mailing address in OPUS. Your personal cell phone number will be used to receive Florida Retirement System information securely, to receive timely information during emergencies such as hurricanes, and to receive important benefits reminders. It is important that you review your home mailing address listed in OPUS as some Appointing Authorities will be mailing the retention supplement check. To update your information, login to [OPUS](#), select *PIN Employee Self Service*, then *Personal Information*. Click *Update* next to the items you need to update.

HR: Here to Help You

PHONE

Call the HR main line at **(727) 464-3367**:

- **Press 1 for Benefits, Wellness or Retirement**, or
- **Press 2 for all other inquiries** and one of our team of HR Representatives will assist you.

EMAIL

Email us at AskHR@pinellas.gov, and one of our team members will help you. For benefits inquiries, please email at employee.benefits@pinellas.gov.

Food Trucks on Wednesdays

Connect with your co-workers during Food Truck Wednesdays at three County locations.



You can order at the truck, or pre-order up to 3 days ahead, pay and select a pick-up time using each location's unique link. The cuisine rotates each week for variety. You can also sign up for email reminders of which truck is coming each week using the links below.

Clearwater Campus

Wednesdays 11:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
400 South Fort Harrison Avenue

In front of the Annex building. View the [Clearwater Campus Food Truck Schedule](#) and pre-order if desired.

Criminal Justice Center (NEW)

Wednesdays 11:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
14250 49th Street North, Clearwater

Near the main entrance. View the [Criminal Justice Center Food Truck Schedule](#) and pre-order if desired.

STAR Center / Raytheon

Wednesdays 10:30 - 1:30 p.m.
7887 Bryan Dairy Road, Largo

West parking lot near Raytheon main entrance. View the [STAR Center/Raytheon Food Truck Schedule](#) and pre-order if desired.

YOUR TOTAL REWARDS

Health • Wellness • Retirement • Compensation

Donate Your Used Glasses for Good Between July 1-31



In partnership with [EyeMed](#), our vision plan administrator, we will be collecting used glasses at collection sites across the County between **July 1 and 31**.

Glasses accepted are prescription and non-prescription glasses, sunglasses, and reader glasses (no frames only, glasses cases, or safety glasses).

As part of their [Donate for Good Program](#), EyeMed will donate \$5 to the [OneSight EssilorLuxottica Foundation](#) for every pair collected. Glasses still in good condition will be donated to the [Lions Club](#), who cleans them and provides them to communities in need.

Contact your department's [Wellness Champion](#) to see where your department's donation box will be located. If your department does not have a Wellness Champion, you can interoffice your glasses to Human Resources by addressing it to *Wellness, Annex*. Please wrap the glasses in bubble wrap if they are not in a case.

Upcoming OnSpot Dermatology Bus Dates



Skin cancer screenings, diagnosis and treatment for various skin conditions, biopsy and cryotherapy procedures, and Mohs surgery for skin cancer

services, as well as cosmetic services are offered on the bus. OnSpot has a 25-person minimum. If this is not met, the event may be cancelled.

The OnSpot Dermatology Bus will be at the following locations on the following dates:

- **Tax Collector, South County, July 20**
2500 34th Street North, St. Petersburg
- **Airport, July 25**
14700 Terminal Blvd., Clearwater
- **Clerk of the Circuit Court, North County, July 26**
29582 U.S. Highway 19 North, Clearwater
- **Solid Waste, July 27**
3095 114th Avenue North, St. Petersburg

For more information and to register, visit [OnSpot Dermatology Bus](#).

Take Care of Your Family With Voluntary Benefits

Did you know our [Identity Protection Plan](#) benefit through Allstate Identity Protection monitors the apps and social media platforms your kids use and alerts you when they detect bullying, threats, and more?

Our [Legal Plan](#) benefit through ARAG can help you set up important estate planning documents so that your family is taken care of should something happen.

If you haven't enrolled in either benefit, you will have the chance to do so this November during Annual Enrollment.

The Pen

Complete Your Health Assessment Now

Did you know you do not have to wait to get your biometric screening before you complete your health assessment? Don't delay! Complete your health assessment now in the *Wellness* section of www.myCigna.com. Visit [biometric screening and health assessment](#) for more information.



2023 Benefits Partners

DENTAL

[Cigna](#)
(800) 862-3557

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (EAP)

[Cigna](#)
(800) 862-3557

FLEXIBLE SPENDING ACCOUNT (FSA)

[TASC](#)
(800) 422-4661

HEALTH SAVINGS ACCOUNT (HSA)

[HSA Bank](#)
(800) 357-6246

LIFE INSURANCE

[Securian Financial](#)
For questions, call Benefits
(727) 464-3367

MEDICAL/BEHAVIORAL/MENTAL HEALTH

[Cigna](#)
(800) 862-3557

PRESCRIPTION

[Express Scripts](#)
(866) 544-9221

VISION

[EyeMed](#)
(866) 939-3633

VOLUNTARY IDENTITY PROTECTION BENEFIT

[AIP](#)
(800) 789-2720

VOLUNTARY LEGAL ASSISTANCE BENEFIT

[ARAG](#)
(800) 247-4184

VOLUNTARY SUPPLEMENTAL MEDICAL BENEFITS

[Aflac](#)
(800) 433-3036

Take Care of Yourself



In the [June To Your Health newsletter](#), you will find:

- Dispelling Virtual Care Myths
- What You Need to Know About Men's Health
- Alzheimer's and Brain Health Awareness
- "Water" You Having to Drink?
- Get Your Preventive Screenings & Earn Rewards
- Group Fitness Class Schedule

Meet Our Claims/Customer Service Representative



Keith Brown is a Claims/Customer Service Representative employed by our medical administrator, Cigna, to assist Pinellas County employees.

What is your background?

I have experience in the healthcare, insurance, business, and leadership fields. My 10+ years of experience

includes speaking with customers and handling billing inquiries, appeals, grievances, and life-threatening concerns. Along my journey, I have worked for UnitedHealthcare, Florida Blue, Wellcare, and Cigna. Prior to this position, I worked as an onsite representative for Hillsborough County employees. I enjoy helping to make sure that our members get what they need.

How can you help employees?

I assist Pinellas County employees with navigating Cigna benefits by resolving claims issues and providing resources related to medical, dental, and pharmacy coverage. I start by listening closely and then address their questions and concerns about benefits, claims, providers, payment, and billing. I want employees to know they have someone on their side who will pursue every possible avenue to help them.

What do you enjoy doing in your free time?

In my free time, I like to relax and refresh. I enjoy time away with my family, touring different restaurants to try new foods, going to sporting events, working out, coaching my son, and traveling the world. There's so much to see but not enough time to see it all so I try to

explore as much as possible with the ones I love and the time I'm afforded.

What is something you practice daily?

Patience and being a better listener.

Can you tell us a little more about yourself?

I am originally from Jacksonville, Florida, and am currently located in Tampa going on 6 years. I come from a huge family so family values, dynamics and team focus have been instilled in me. I have a 9-year-old son who pays attention to everything I do, so he reminds me that I have a higher purpose. Did I mention that I love to travel? I am the oldest of 3 men, and my parents have been married 33 years and counting. I am also a huge Florida Gator fan and one of 7 family members that have played professionally in the NFL/NBA.

How can employees contact you?

I can be reached by telephone or email, or if preferred, set up a virtual or in-person appointment. For your privacy, please **email only from your personal email address.**

- Email: PinellasClaims@cigna.com
- Phone: (727) 464-4555, option 1
- Address: 400 S. Ft. Harrison Ave., Benefits, Room 126, Clearwater
- Hours: Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., in person, by phone or by email

See our other [Cigna Onsite Representatives](#).

The Pen

BCC Issues Pride Month Proclamation

At the June 13 meeting, the Board of County Commissioners issued a proclamation recognizing the month of June 2023 as Pride Month.



Back row left to right: Commissioner Chris Latvala, BCC Vice Chair Kathleen Peters, Commissioner Charlie Justice, Commissioner Rene Flowers, and Commissioner Brian Scott
 Front row from left to right: Todd Richardson, Pinellas Development Director, Equality Florida; Nicole Berman, Executive Director, St. Pete Pride; Janet C. Long, Chair of the BCC; Mark Esparza, Equal Opportunity Coordinator, Office of Human Rights

Audit Shows Pinellas County is in Strong Financial Shape

Pinellas County Government remains in strong financial shape going into the new budget year, with healthy reserves and minimal debt, according to the results of an independent audit shared at the June 13 Board of County Commissioners meeting.

Continuing a long-term trend, Pinellas' debt per capita remained the lowest by far among a half-dozen comparable county governments across Florida, the audit by Tampa accounting firm Crowe LLP showed.

Pinellas County has no general fund debt, which is rare among Florida counties, said Ken Burke, Pinellas County Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller.

The audit also found no issues or concerns with how the County manages taxpayer funds or grants.

At the meeting, the Clerk of Court also released the [2022 Citizens' Guide to County Finances](#), a citizen-friendly snapshot of the County's finances.

National Waste & Recycling Workers Week 2023



Since 2012, the third week of June has been celebrated as [National Waste & Recycling Workers Week](#). The week is dedicated to recognizing the commitment of waste professionals to keep our communities clean.

We hope you enjoy this Department Spotlight as part of the celebration.

Solid Waste Department Spotlight

What services are offered by the department? Our mission is to manage solid waste as a resource through applied environmental and societal principles.

What projects is the department currently working on? We are working toward our vision of Zero Waste to Landfill by 2050 as laid out by the 30-year [Solid Waste Master Plan](#). In support of that vision, we are in the process of revising Pinellas County Ordinance Chapter 106 Solid Waste to standardize recycling and expand the control of the flow of waste generated in the County.

What are some achievements of the department within the last year? In February, we [received accreditation](#) from the [American Public Works Association](#) for our commitment to continuous improvement of solid waste operations and services to the community.

What do you enjoy about working in the department?

Leslie Caplin (Office Specialist 2): I like feeling connected to our citizens by being their trusted resource for all things regarding garbage, recycling, and household hazardous waste disposal. When they contact us, they are getting the right information which helps dispel any false rumors or incorrect information out there. Serving and educating our citizens is the most rewarding job I've ever had.

Henry Gomez & Thomas Huth-Scruggs (Industrial Water Treatment Facility Operators): We enjoy working at Solid Waste because we are a part of taking trash from the residents of Pinellas County and using that as a fuel source. At an industrial water treatment facility, we treat [leachate](#) from the pond on 118th Ave. that is then used in the waste-to-energy process to produce electricity for the residents of Pinellas County. We are helping Solid Waste have a smaller footprint on the environment.

Lindsey Brown (Solid Waste Program Supervisor, Scalehouse): Working at Solid Waste for many years has given me an appreciation of the continued efforts every individual contributes to the longevity of the health and safety of our environment for future generations to come. We pride ourselves in providing outstanding customer service to the citizens of Pinellas County while contributing an essential asset—power—to our growing community. There is never a dull day on site and the learning opportunities are endless. Garbage tells quite a tale.

Jasmine Scott (Environmental Outreach Technician): My favorite part is giving tours. When I witness the astounded look on people's faces at the sheer amount of garbage on the tipping floor of the Waste-to-Energy Facility, I feel rewarded to see their thought-provoking realizations happen right in front of me.



Department of Solid Waste staff, family, and friends at Gandy Beach for a litter clean-up on Earth Day 2023 in partnership with Keep Pinellas Beautiful.

Anna Jeffers (Solid Waste Program Coordinator): Solid Waste is a unique department with such vastly different sections. I love learning about what other sections within the department do and seeing their passion as they work on projects. As different as our roles are, each section works seamlessly together. People truly make or break a job. Solid Waste and the atmosphere here is exactly what I was looking for when we moved to Florida.

Skip Lang (Craftworker 1): I enjoy everyone's commitment to saving our environment as best we can and providing as much guidance as possible to the residents of Pinellas County when they visit our site to dispose of their refuse. And, I enjoy the comradery of like-minded people to reduce, reuse and recycle.

Judy Kujawa (Solid Waste Program Supervisor): I will be starting my 34th year with Pinellas County soon and 33 years of it has been with Solid Waste. I transferred here from Parks when Solid Waste opened the County's recycling drop-off sites. I enjoyed landscaping, so the sites soon became my mini parks. Since then, I have held many positions with Solid Waste and gained a tremendous amount of knowledge on so many different things. Solid Waste has always been very interesting, challenging, changing and growing. I never really had a desire to leave. The staff here has always been like family and great to work with. On top of all that, we have awesome wildlife out here to see.

What do you want people to know about the department that most people don't know? We offer tours of the Solid Waste Disposal Complex where participants learn about our vision of zero waste to landfill by 2050 and why it's important that we create less waste. Tours are for those at least 8 years old and in third grade or above. Individuals and small groups interested in touring the Solid Waste Disposal Complex can [sign up on Eventbrite](#) for a monthly Citizen Tour. [Email us](#) to book a tour for groups with 8+ participants.

How can employees reach out to the department? Visit us online at www.pinellas.gov/solidwaste, email recycle@pinellas.gov, or call (727) 464-7500.

Automotive Service Professionals Month 2023



The [National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence](#) (ASE) announced June 2023 as Automotive Service Professionals Month. The celebration honors the professionals who keep our vehicles running safely on our roads.

We hope you enjoy these employee spotlights as part of the celebration.

Employee Spotlights



Dan Cronk

Position: Fleet Mechanic

How long with Pinellas County?
9 months.

Describe job in 25 words or fewer:
Ensuring the safety of the people who operate County vehicles by

maintaining Fleet vehicles and repairing them as needed.

Best part of job: The great people I work with!

Most challenging part of the job: Working on things that we may not have the equipment or the resources to do it efficiently.

Most memorable moment? Seeing a mentor and new friend retire.

What do you do in your free time? Go to church and the gym, spend time outdoors, and enjoy life by doing fun stuff and trying new things.



Clint Jones

Position: Fleet Mechanic

How long with Pinellas County?
25 years in November; both with Pinellas County and in this position.

Describe job in 25 words or fewer: To maintain and repair County assets in a timely and professional manner. I work on anything from golf carts up to 1 ton trucks and trailers. I also prep new vehicles for service with County decals and asset numbers and upfit them with accessories that the customer needs.

Best part of job: Meeting our customers and being able to put a face with a vehicle that I'm working on.

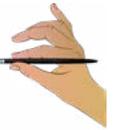
Most challenging part of the job: Ever-changing technology. When I started 25 years ago, motors were carbureted (no fuel injection) and had points instead of electronic ignition. Now, almost every part on the vehicle is connected to a control module.

Most memorable moment? Post Hurricane Irma—moving around equipment and generators and keeping them fueled up.

What do you do in your free time? Fishing, boating, bike riding, and just being outdoors.



Colors of Pinellas



Registration for the 2023 Virtual Art Show is Open

The [2023 Art Show](#) is open to all employees, retirees, volunteers and interns – plus your family members. Register by September 8, 2023. You can enter a photograph, painting, sculpture, drawing, craft, jewelry, woodcarving, mixed media, etc. See the [Art Show Guide](#) for details. The show will be virtual again this year.

Each artist receives a Certificate of Participation in the National Arts Program. Winners are eligible for cash prizes totaling \$3,450 provided by the National Arts Program. Entrants are limited to one cash prize. The Art Show will be judged by art professionals, and prizes awarded by classification as shown:

- Best in Show - \$400 (Adults Only)
- Adult (Amateur, Intermediate, and Professional)
 - 3 – First Place Awards of \$350
 - 3 – Second Place Awards of \$250
 - 3 – Third Place Awards of \$150
- Youth/Teen (Youth 12 & under; Teen 13-18)
 - 2 – First Place Awards of \$150
 - 2 – Second Place Awards of \$100
 - 2 – Third Place Awards of \$50
- Art Education - \$200 (Teens and Youth Only)
- Honorable Mention - Judges' discretion

What's New This Year?

This year, it's a one-step process to register and submit your artwork on the National Arts Program website.

When you register for the Art Show, you will upload a photo of your artwork. Previously you registered on the National Arts Program website and emailed your art to Human Resources later. Now, your artwork must be completed (and photographed) before you can register. It is not possible to go back and edit your registration later to upload your art.

If you submit two items, you will need to complete a separate registration for each item.

See one of last year's winners below. View all [2022 Winners](#) and the full [2022 Art Show](#) with 222 entries. To learn more and to register, visit www.pinellas.gov/artshow.



Dimitrios Gigrutis,
The Desperate Man,
Professional, Painting,
Family Member,
Parks & Conservation
Resources

“Sock It” to Tax Collector’s Offices this Summer

The Tax Collector offices are collecting sock donations for a local non-profit, [Clothes to Kids](#), through a “Sock it to Us!” initiative this summer.

To aid in the effort of building the self-esteem of children in the County, Tax Collector offices have Clothes to Kids Sock it to Us! donation bins available. Based on current needs, Clothes to Kids encourages donations of new girls’ and ladies’ socks. Monetary donations can also be made by scanning the Clothes to Kids QR code, which will be displayed in all Tax Collector offices.

Every year, Tax Collector employees suggest and vote for a non-profit to support with internal fundraising through the Thread of Hope program. The 2023 charity

is Clothes to Kids, and along with the Thread of Hope program, Tax Collector team members wanted to find another way to support this local non-profit and “Sock it to Us!” was the perfect solution.

“Community is one of our values here at the Tax Collector’s Office, and it is upheld daily in each of our offices,” Tax Collector Charles W. Thomas said. “We are always looking for ways to support our community beyond our in-office services and we are very excited to partner with Clothes to Kids this year.”

For updates and important info from the Tax Collector’s Office, find them on social media (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter) @PinellasTC, or visit pinellastaxcollector.gov.

Employee Spotlight



Elyssa Dean

Position: Tax Technician 2

Department: Tax Collector’s Office, Mid County Branch

How long with Pinellas County?
3 years.

How long have you been in this position?
1 year.

Have you had any other positions with Pinellas County?

I was a Communications Coordinator for 2 years.

Describe job in 25 words or fewer: I process title and driver’s license transactions for County citizens. I maintain the office blog posts and communications to ensure we are all celebrated often.

Best part of job: Connecting with like-minded individuals who strive to deliver excellent customer service. Our leadership team truly cares about us and always has our best interests in mind. I am proud to work alongside some of the most intelligent, inspiring, and incredible women I have ever met!

Most challenging part of the job: Helping individuals navigate the most sensitive subjects such as a death or divorce while making sure their work is accurately completed.

Most memorable moment? Being able to announce my own award during PCTC CARES Day. It made the experience magical and memorable.

What do you do in your free time? Spend time with my kids; we love going to the beach and Florida’s springs.

Human Resources Department Celebrates Diversity

Last fall, the Human Resources Department developed a Connections Committee that has been hosting monthly events for the department ever since. A committee member created a tree for the committee’s first event, a gratitude gathering. Since then, each month, the committee decorates the tree, located outside the break room, with a different theme. This month’s theme is celebrating diversity. The tree is covered with rainbow flowers and gnomes and next to the tree is a sign with a quote from Arthur Chan that says, “Diversity is a fact. Equity is a choice. Inclusion is an action. Belonging is an outcome.”



The Pen

Got a Bright Idea?



Pinellas County
BRIGHT IDEA AWARD

- **Earn up to \$2,500 cash** for submitting an idea that improves productivity, efficiency, quality, and/or cost effectiveness.
- All classified (hourly) employees are eligible.
- Submit a suggestion that identifies a problem and recommends a specific improvement.

To learn more or submit your suggestion, visit www.pinellas.gov/suggestion.

Property Appraiser’s Circle of Heroes Dive Trip



On Memorial Day morning, a group led by Property Appraiser Mike Twitty embarked on an underwater journey to honor and remember the brave men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice for our country. The memorable scuba dive trip proved to be a unique and heartfelt tribute that left

participants moved and inspired.

Led by experienced dive instructors, the expedition took the divers to honor our fallen veterans by visiting

the Circle of Heroes Veterans’ Memorial, the world’s only underwater veterans’ memorial. As the group swam among vibrant coral reefs and schools of tropical fish, they paused periodically to hold a solemn moment of silence, reflecting on the courage and sacrifice of those who served our nation.

This dive trip is taken every year and is expected to continue growing, welcoming more divers and spectators who wish to participate in this unique and meaningful tribute.



Property Appraiser’s Office Hosts Conference

The Property Appraiser’s Office hosted the [Property Appraisers’ Association of Florida](#) (PAAF) Conference and it was an incredible success! The PAAF has been in existence for well over 100 years. Originally known as the “Tax Assessors’ Association of Florida” (TAAF), the association was organized in 1903 for the purpose of bringing about fair, equitable and accurate assessments throughout the State of Florida. The purpose of the annual meetings is to provide property appraisers an opportunity to express their views and discuss problems uniform in nature throughout the state with the ultimate goal of obtaining fair, equitable and accurate assessments. Industry experts shared their insights while participants engaged in thought-provoking discussions and strengthened working relationships with their colleagues.



Property Appraiser Mike Twitty speaks at the Property Appraisers’ Association of Florida Conference



Clerk’s Office Receives Best Practices Award

The Clerk’s Office received the Best Practices Award during the [Florida Court Clerks and Comptrollers’ Summer Conference](#).

The conference is an opportunity for clerks to collaborate, learn, and grow together to improve how they serve their communities.



Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller Ken Burke (center) accepts the Best Practices Award at the Florida Court Clerks and Comptrollers’ Summer Conference

Find it Fast: HR from A to Z



Our [A to Z Index](#) was viewed over 29,000 times last year!

- Find what you need on the Human Resources website quickly and easily. Access the A to Z link on the left-hand side of any Human Resources webpage.
- New items are added to the listing frequently. Let us know if you have items to add by emailing AskHR@pinellas.gov.

The Pen

Your Learning Opportunities

Learn Today. Be Ready for Tomorrow.

Pinellas County supports a learning culture for all employees. For more information, visit [Organizational & Talent Development](#) or call the team at 464-3367, option 2.

Learning Heroes Unite!

Organizational & Talent Development (OTD) had the absolute pleasure of bringing together representatives from departments and divisions around the County to come together to celebrate a culture of learning and growth during the first in-person Learning Heroes Event. This event was filled with celebrations of achievement, learning new content and skills, gathering important feedback, and the bringing together of minds to create lasting connections. We thank each of the Learning Heroes even if they could not attend the event. This is the very beginning, and we are excited to see what comes next for this program!

Through Microsoft Teams, the OTD team has been working to engage Learning Heroes through Learning Bursts once a month. Learning Bursts provide an opportunity for short bursts of content (networking, SharePoint, Learning Paths, etc.), updates on offerings from the County, and a chance to ask questions that are relevant for a specific department. Learning Heroes can take this information back to share with others that work in their area.

The in-person event was a chance to connect this group in a new and exciting way. It also served as an important space to share the positive impact of current programming, while also taking time to identify gaps that might exist in current offerings or programs. The space was an opportunity for each Learning Hero to grow their connections in the County in a room with others that are passionate about learning and growing within the organization.

Do you know who your Learning Hero is? If you don't, view our [Learning Heroes List](#) (internal SharePoint link for employees).

Who are the Learning Heroes?

Learning Heroes are department or division representatives that work to help those in their area access information about learning opportunities happening in the County. Learning Heroes also work as the voice of their department to provide OTD with important feedback on needs of their department.

What is the goal of the Learning Heroes program?

The goal is to encourage continuous learning and build a learning culture. There are many benefits of a cultivated learning culture. These include, but are not limited to:

- Increased efficiency and productivity
- Increased employee satisfaction and decreased turnover
- An improved mindset among employees
- A developed sense of ownership and accountability
- Ease in succession/transition
- A culture of knowledge inquiry and sharing

These individuals work to ensure that learning opportunities in the County are accessible and meet the needs of the employees in their areas.

Who is eligible to be a Learning Hero?

Anybody in the organization can be a Learning Hero. They act as catalysts for change and motivate others to learn by providing encouragement and support. They advocate for learning and development; help spread the word; and build, carry, and sustain the learning momentum.

How can I become a Learning Hero?

Contact the OTD team at learning@pinellas.gov. You can also visit our [Learning Heroes SharePoint site](#) (internal link for employees) for additional information.

The Pen



Welcome Aboard

New employees listed are for May 2023.

Board of County Commissioners

Administrative Services

Elizabeth Mauck Administrative Support Specialist

Airport

Kyle Baldwin Craftworker 1

Building & Development Review Services

David Chandler Building Inspector 1

Suzette Covell Plans Examiner 1

Susan Gibb Development Review Specialist

Cesil Schrader Office Specialist 2

Contractor Licensing

Lynette Jutte Office Specialist 2

Convention & Visitors Bureau

Kenneth Chambers Property & Stores Clerk 3

Oliver Kugler CVB Sales Representative

Sophia Sanders Management Intern

Kaylin Strauch Management Intern

County Administration

Justin Graham Executive Assistant 2

Human Services

Heather Williams Office Specialist 1

Housing & Community Development

Shannon Lee Community Development Specialist 2

Parks & Conservation Resources

Patrick Donahue Park Ranger 1

Olivia Donovan Lifeguard

Brian Hickey Craftworker 2

Daniel Isenberg Park/Preserve Maintenance Worker

Renato Izaguirre Park Ranger 1

Estevaun Morales Lifeguard

Jordan Perdek Lifeguard

Breanna Sowinski Park Ranger 1

Anna Williams GIS Analyst

Public Works

Marina Abdel Malek Trainee Under-Fill C

Andree Carr Management Intern

Jacquise Collins Automotive Equipment Operator 1

Erica Connor Worley Management Intern

Sheldon Douglas Management Intern

Charles Gary Management Intern

Lionel Lovett Management Intern

William Mullen Environmental Specialist 1

Robert Rubin Traffic Signal Technician 2

Safety & Emergency Services

Kristie Arriagada Trainee Under-Fill A

Jayson Ashley Trainee Under-Fill A

Whitney Brewster Trainee Under-Fill A

Ashley Lindgren Trainee Under-Fill A

Melanie Mugford Trainee Under-Fill A

Solid Waste

Kristen O'Bryant Scalehouse Services Specialist 1

Utilities

Nina Cudahy Section Manager 3

Veronica De Bernardo Engineer 1

Callie Herold Executive Assistant 1

Anthony Weaver Management Intern

Carly Zahniser Water Quality Management Specialist 1

Karolina Zakarkaite Water Quality Management Specialist 1

Elisabet Zamora Hernandez Management Intern

Business Technology Services

Abdoulie Bajo Systems Engineer

Clerk of the Circuit Court

Kali Ajaye Records Specialist 1

Forward Pinellas

Valerie Brookens Principal Planner

Emma Wennick Program Planner

Human Resources

Peggy Rowe Interim Human Resources Director

Property Appraiser's Office

Wendy Kitchel GIS Cadastralist 1

David Kjoss PAO Appraiser 1

The Pen



May 8 New Employee Orientation via Zoom

May 22 New Employee Orientation via Zoom



Promotions

Promotions listed are for May 2023.

Board of County Commissioners

Administrative Services

Vinton Gilbert.....Electronics Specialist 1
Erik Sapp.....Electronics Specialist 1

Airport

Joshua Cates..... Spray Technician 1

Public Works

Dale Baldwin.....Craftworker 1
Jullian CobbsCraftworker 1
Javon Harris..... Crew Chief 2
Antonio JamesCraftworker 1
Derrick Jones..... Crew Chief 2
Dearies Pittman.....Craftworker 1
Daryl Russ Crew Chief 2
Seth Schafer..... Crew Chief 2

Safety & Emergency Services

Lynn Abbott.....Administrative Support Specialist 2

Solid Waste

Michael Alberg.....Solid Waste Program Coordinator

Utilities

Janis Blackklidge..... Engineering Technician 2
Darrell Ford Customer Services Specialist
Debra Gerdes Project Management Specialist 1
Dean Lyons.....Wastewater Treatment Manager

Business Technology Services

Tricia Cartier Endpoint Analyst, Sr
Joseph Gauthier..... Program Manager, BTS-OTI

Clerk of the Circuit Court

Edward Metz.....Fiscal Records Specialist
Jennifer Trusivich.....Finance Operations Specialist

Supervisor of Elections

Sarah Rathke..... Elections Administrator

The Pen

Don't Let Free Cost You



Many subscription offers are tempting, from beauty products that promise to make you look years younger to weight loss supplements that guarantee to melt away the pounds. Companies selling such products often lure consumers in with false promises of “free trials”, “only pay shipping and handling”, “risk free—no obligation”, or “100% satisfaction guarantee”. As

the saying goes, “If it’s too good to be true, it probably is.” Free trials can be tricky and there’s often a catch. Here are some things you should know about free trials.

Free Trial: It’s often unclear when the trial period starts. Does it start when the order is placed, the product is shipped, or when the product is received? Don’t guess because not knowing will cost you money. Usually, you’re required to provide a credit or debit card number, so if you don’t cancel before the trial period ends, the company will charge you. Fraudulent companies make it difficult to cancel and will continue to charge you monthly.

Auto-Renewals: If you continue to receive products or services after the trial is over, it may be what’s referred to as “negative option marketing”. A negative option is when you’re automatically charged for future purchases unless you actively cancel it by a certain date or at the time of purchase. With online purchases, the consumer usually must uncheck a pre-checked box. It’s a common practice that businesses use, and it often happens with free trial offers and subscriptions.

Unordered Merchandise: By law, companies can’t send you merchandise you didn’t order and then demand payment. If a seller sends you merchandise marked as a gift, free sample, or merchandise from a charitable organization as a request for a contribution, it’s your right to keep the merchandise as a gift.

Tips to help you when considering a free trial offer:

- Make sure you understand the terms of a trial period, as well as the return and cancellation policies before agreeing to the offer.
- It’s not truly free if you are required to pay for shipping and fees.
- Be sure to research the company and product, so you know exactly who you’re dealing with and what you’re agreeing to.
- Watch out for pre-checked boxes, which may give the company permission to continue charging you past the trial period.
- Monitor your accounts for erroneous charges.
- Beware of misleading advertisements using celebrity endorsements or false testimonials.
- To stop a subscription, first contact the company for instructions on how to cancel. If the company ignores your cancellation request, then contact your debit or credit card company to dispute the charges or stop payment.

For more information on free trials, to file a complaint, or check the complaint history of a business, call Pinellas County Consumer Protection at (727) 464-6200 or visit [Consumer Protection](#).

Service Anniversaries

Service anniversaries listed are for May 2023.

20 YEARS



Kathy Shakespeare
Public Works



Ann Tsoukalas
Tax Collector's Office

Unavailable for Photo

35 Years

Michael Hornak
Public Works

Linda Umberger
Utilities

30 Years

Curtis Goss
Public Works

25 Years

Janeth Colon
Human Services

Ljilja Cvijic
Supervisor of Elections

Christine Frangipane
Tax Collector's Office

Willie Marshall
Utilities

Jerry Whobrey
Parks & Conservation
Resources

3 TO 15 YEARS

15 Years

Kimberly Alli..... Clerk of the Circuit Court

10 Years

Andrew Brown.....Office of Management & Budget
Jennifer Castagner..... Administrative Services
Glen Darfler.....Utilities
David Hudak..... Safety & Emergency Services
Kevin Jackson..... Public Works
Glenn Smith..... Tax Collector's Office
Carlee Ward.....Solid Waste

5 Years

Christine Brill..... Clerk of the Circuit Court
Scarlett Calderon..... Tax Collector's Office
Larry Dickie..... Administrative Services
Dhaneshia Gordon..... Property Appraiser's Office
Gregory Grabowski.....Airport
Dustin Guinta..... Administrative Services
Tyler Jones..... Utilities
Kelly Navarro..... Clerk of the Circuit Court
Alex Richtman..... Business Technology Services
Julia Sales..... Emergency Management
Michael Schoppe..... Public Works
Jared Welhouse..... Public Works

3 Years

Emilly Baechle.....Parks & Conservation Resources
Kevin Karr..... Business Technology Services
Maxwel Lense.....Solid Waste
Stephanie Lovel..... Clerk of the Circuit Court
Sean Mitchell..... Public Works
Ian Murray.....Utilities
Lori Patrick..... Building & Development Review Services
Yoshio Renteria.....Utilities
Jacob Stephen.....Supervisor of Elections
Javier Zuniga Trejo..... Utilities

The Pen

THE RECORD KEEPER

Preparing Records for Storage

As you begin gathering your records and boxing them for storage, each box should meet the following criteria:

- Organized – Content is easy to find in the box
- Easy to lift – It weighs 25 lbs. or less
- Safe-hanging files have been removed and the box itself is not damaged
- Correct box type – If you need empty boxes, please order them through Gimmel
- Create a new box in the Gimmel information management system
- Have a system-generated box number written on the outside short end of the box

If you need assistance or have any questions, please contact Records Management at (727) 464-5555.



Upcoming Blood Drives



Did you know that one blood donation can save up to three lives? You can donate whole blood, red blood cells, platelets or plasma. Please consider donating! Walk-ins are welcome or [schedule an appointment](#).

South County Tax Collector

2500 34th Street N., St. Petersburg
July 19, 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

STAR Center

7887 Bryan Dairy Road, Largo
July 27, 9:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Retirements

Retirements listed are for May 2023.

35 Years



Odessa Green
Accounting & Finance
Technician,
Business Technology Services

Retirees Unavailable for Photo

Over 25 Years

Dorothy Simpkins,
Crew Chief 2, Public Works

21 Years

Michele McQuiston,
Spray Technician 2, Public Works

Over 15 Years

Beth Yeatman,
Clerk's Reporting Support Specialist 2,
Clerk of the Circuit Court

REPCO News

The next REPCO lunch meeting will be on July 10, 2023 at Quaker Steak & Lube located at 10400 49th Street North in Clearwater. The meeting begins at noon; please arrive early to order your meal prior to the start of the meeting. Elder law attorney Sean Scott, Esq. will be providing information and answering questions on wills, trusts, and nursing home care. If you have any questions, contact Rudy Garcia at rdgarcia@verizon.net or (813) 855-3466.

Florida Retirement System (FRS) Changes

Effective July 1, 2023, there are changes to the Florida Retirement System (FRS) benefits for Pinellas County employees and retirees due to new state laws. The changes are positive and elevate our current retirement plans. Upcoming changes include an expansion of DROP, increase in the Health Insurance Subsidy, and an increase in the County's contribution rate to Investment Plan accounts:

- The maximum time for eligible members to participate in DROP (Deferred Retirement Option Program) is expanded from 5 years to 8 years. This includes those currently participating in DROP. If you would like to enroll or extend your time period, see [DROP](#).
- The DROP annual interest rate has tripled

from 1.3% to 4%, compounded monthly, for your accrued monthly DROP benefit.



- The restricted 12-month election window has been removed; you may enter DROP any time after becoming fully vested and reaching your normal retirement date.
- The monthly retiree Health Insurance Subsidy is increased by 50% from \$5 to \$7.50 for each year of creditable service. This includes current retirees.
- Pinellas County will increase the contribution rate paid into FRS Investment Plan accounts by 2% in all membership classes.

To learn more, visit [2023 FRS Changes](#).



Your Source for Employee Info

The Pen Extra

Employee and family news including kudos, weddings, births, graduations, memorials, and classified ads. Send your news to employee.communications@pinellas.gov or call (727) 464-3367.

Gone but not Forgotten

The Pen is saddened to report the passing of the following retirees:



Lael Challen, 91, of South Pasadena, passed away on April 19, 2023. Challen retired in 2008 as a Personal/Real Property Specialist with the Property Appraiser's Office after 10 years of service with Pinellas County Government. No obituary was found.



Paula Preston, 76, of Clearwater, passed away on May 19, 2023. Preston retired in 2014 as a Court Records Specialist, Senior with the Clerk of the Circuit Court after over 29 years of service with Pinellas County Government. [View her obituary.](#)



Dorothy Theus, 89, of Kenneth City, passed away on April 1, 2023. Theus retired from Pinellas County Government in 1999. No obituary was found.



William White, 60, of Seminole, passed away on May 3, 2023. White retired in 2013 as a Tax Collector Training Specialist with the Tax Collector's Office after over 8 years of service with Pinellas County Government. A celebration of life will be held on June 24 at 1 p.m. at Friendship Community Church, 4321 Duhme Road in Madeira Beach. [View his obituary.](#)



Kim Yuna, 68, of Palm Harbor, passed away on May 4, 2023. Yuna retired in 2012 as a Court Clerk Supervisor with the Clerk of the Circuit Court after over 35 years of service with Pinellas County Government. [View her obituary.](#)

Congratulations



The St. Pete Branch Office of the Clerk of the Circuit Court would like to congratulate Dionne Taylor for receiving her U.S. citizenship. Dionne was born in Kingston, Jamaica, and migrated to the U.S. in 2018. In November of 2021 Dionne was hired by the Clerk's Office as a Records Specialist in the Criminal Court Records Department. She was then promoted in August of 2022 to Fiscal Records Specialist in the Civil section at the St. Pete Branch Office.

Kudos

Kudos to **Caitlin, Julianna, and Kaia Walker**, triplet daughters of Karen Walker (Clerk of the Circuit Court) and her husband Jason (retired Pinellas County Sheriff) for graduating from Osceola Fundamental High School. Caitlin will be going to the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, NY to pursue a degree in baking and pastry arts, Julianna will be going to Valencia College to pursue a degree in digital art media/animation, and Kaia will be going to Valencia College to pursue a degree in early childhood education.



Caitlin Walker



Julianna Walker



Kaia Walker