

VOLUSIA

Pictona gets \$2.5M from Volusia County to double the size of pickleball facility

Mary Helen Moore The Daytona Beach News-Journal

Published 5:30 a.m. ET Jan. 19, 2022

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Pictona at Holly Hill looks to double number of pickleball courts after a year in business

Rainer and Julie Martens founded Pictona at Holly Hill, which is aiming to break ground in 2021 on construction of 25 additional pickleball courts.

DELAND — The Volusia County Council gave out more than \$3.8 million in Volusia ECHO grants on Tuesday, most going to double the size of Pictona at Holly Hill's pickleball facilities.

Once completed, Pictona will be the largest pickleball facility on the east coast of Florida.

"I like what it's doing for Holly Hill," Vice-Chair Barb Girtman said. "Those types of investments are what we need in our communities."

Councilwoman Heather Post said the Pictona is already generating regional, national and even international interest making it a perfect candidate for the Volusia ECHO program.

"This is definitely one that really fits the bill," Councilwoman Heather Post agreed.



Pictona in Holly Hill will double in size after just two years in business. Pictona.org

Pictona is the recipient of the largest single grant in Volusia ECHO history: a whopping \$2.5 million, driving the public investment in the 2-year-old facility over \$5 million.

The expansion will double the number of courts to 48 and add a championship stadium that seats 1,200 and converts to a stage for performances. A third of the courts will be shaded from the sun, rain and wind.

"It's already shown to be a success," Holly Hill Mayor Chris Via said. "Doubling this facility will only make it greater, into a world-class facility... This is an opportunity to put Volusia County on the map, Holly Hill on the map."

The city contributed \$1.2 million toward construction of the first phase and promised \$1 million this time around. Pictona received a Volusia ECHO grant worth \$400,000 in 2020.

Total construction of both phases will add up to more than \$12 million and the remainder of the bill is being footed by Ormond Beach couple Rainer and Julie Martens, who attended Tuesday's meeting in DeLand.

Construction is already underway and the Martens hope the second phase will open this fall.



Holly Hill City Manager Joe Forte, Mayor Chris Via and U.S. Rep. Michael Waltz, from left to right, listen to Pictona founder Rainer Martens as he leads the group on a tour of the recreational complex on Tuesday, Aug. 10, 2021. *Mark Harper/News-*

From YMCA playgrounds to Marine Science Center to Veterans Memorial Plaza

The popular Volusia ECHO program, approved in 20-year increments by voter referendum in both 2000 and 2020, takes property tax dollars and funnels them into protecting the county's environmental, cultural, historical and outdoors resources.

Eight other Volusia ECHO grants were unanimously awarded grants on Tuesday:

- **Veterans Memorial Plaza:** \$600,000 for the county to construct an amphitheater seating, a water feature and military monuments beneath Daytona Beach's newest bridge.
- **Marine Science Center:** \$208,298 toward a new raptor exhibit, including new habitats for six birds of prey.
- **Volusia-Flagler YMCA:** \$112,500 for a playground and pool shade project at the Ormond Beach YMCA.
- **Riverside Conservancy:** \$107,000 to build a kayak launch and craft a living shoreline with an outdoor classroom on their property on the Indian River Lagoon in Edgewater.
- **Rob Sullivan Park:** \$150,000 for the city of DeBary to build a shade structure and building to use for concessions, restrooms and storage.
- **Mary DeWees Park:** \$140,892 for the city of Oak Hill to redo the baseball field.
- **Volusia-Flagler YMCA:** \$29,900 to construct a playground at the YMCA in DeLand. *(Note: This project was the only one not to receive the recommendation of the Volusia ECHO Advisory Board.)*
- **Enterprise Preservation Society:** \$15,750 to replace the roof.

Two additional funding cycles will take place this year, the first kicking off next month and the next in August.

For the first, a mandatory workshop has been scheduled for Feb. 24 from 9 to 11 a.m.

County chair pushed back

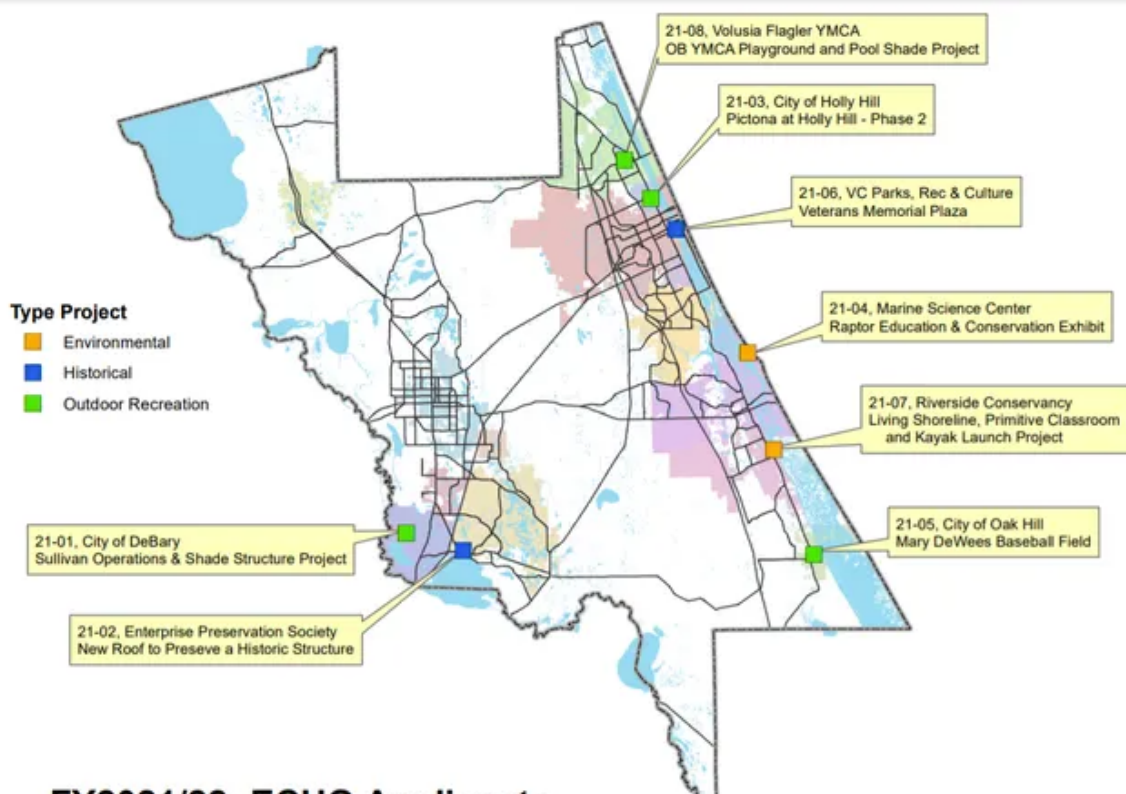
Tuesday's vote on Pictona was the sole 6-1 vote of the day, with County Chair Jeff Brower voting "no."

"Honestly, I don't think you need the exceptional grant. I think this is such a wildly popular, growing sport," Brower said. "I don't think you need taxpayer money."

Pictona qualified for such a large award because two-thirds of the ECHO Advisory Board agreed it qualified for an exceptional grant, one "of paramount and crucial countywide importance which provides for receipt of services by significantly large numbers of people in all areas of the county," according to the guidebook.

Exceptional grants were upped to a \$2.5 million maximum for the first time last year when the [ECHO guidebook was updated](#). At the same time, the required match was reduced from four times the amount of the award (would be \$10 million in Pictona's case) to only 1:1.

Only two other ECHO projects have received more in the 22-year history of the program: \$3 million toward the county's construction of a cultural center at the Ocean Center in 2008 and \$2.9 million for the city of Ormond Beach to build Andy Romano Park in 2012.



FY2021/22: ECHO Applicants

Produced by Volusia County IT/GIS
December 15, 2021

Eight projects were recommended for \$3.8 million in Volusia ECHO funding by an advisory board. *Provided Photo*

Brower said he thought the perception was that Holly Hill had been given special treatment.

"We need to talk about that," Brower said before quizzing staff on a number of matters, including asking why Pictona was allowed to use other local property taxes to serve as their match when it had been prohibited for others in the past.

Community Services Director Dona Butler said the guidebook says larger projects can do so. County Manager George Recktenwald later said the rule is basically, "You can't use (Community Redevelopment Agency) money unless you ask."

Brower also questioned whether Pictona, with about 700 members and 50,000 annual visitors, truly qualified for an exceptional grant.

Councilman Danny Robins stepped in to highlight that more than 70% of voters supported ECHO in the 2020 election.

"We're not talking about a 50-50 split in the community," Robins said. "There is an extreme vetting process for this. It's expensive, but the public voted for it."