

ANNOUNCER: You've tuned into another
edition of The Break Room. A

weekly conversation about how
the City of St Augustine

works from those who do the
work everyday. Hosted by the

City of St Augustine's
Communications Director, Melissa

Wissel. The Break Room offers a
closer look at the different

City departments and provides
updates on current and upcoming

projects and events. And now
your host, Melissa Wissel.

MELISSA: Welcome to The Break Room.
Thanks for tuning in. I'm

Melissa Wissel, Communications
Director for the City of St

Augustine. This week, we're
going to head over to the

County and talk with Anastasia

Mosquito Control District

Commissioner Trish the Commish

Becker. She is back in the

studio to tell us all about

mosquitoes, mosquito control,

and what you need to know about

keeping those pesky little

pests from multiplying. Trish,

welcome back. TRISH: Thanks for having

me again. This is like, you

know, you you've done this

before. This is not a new rodeo

for you. TRISH: And no, I'm filling up

my punch card. MELISSA: I'm really

excited to have you back, as

silly as it sounds, to talk

about mosquitoes. It's it is

that time of year, but before we

talk about of the local issues.

I want you to tell our
listeners about why a Mosquito

Control Board District
Commissioner goes to Washington

DC. TRISH: Alright. Well, thank you.
So, I'm glad to be back in

Florida. But recently in May, I
went with the Florida Mosquito

Control Association, and I'm
also a part of the American

Mosquito Control Association.
And so, we are a group of

mosquito districts and mosquito
scientists and entomologists

that advocate for different
issues on a nationwide level.

And so every year, we have an
event in Washington DC. Last

year was virtual and we did it
on Zoom and the years before

that were cancelled and then in
person. So this year was my

first year in person. So it was
very exciting. I went up there,

spent the week, and we met with
the head of the... Deputy Director

of the EPA, the USDA, and tons
of other high-up level

administrators, and Congress
Members and Senators. MELISSA: What do

you, I mean, you clearly you go
to talk about mosquitoes, but

it's really science that we
have behind mosquito control?

It's I mean, is it like poison?
I don't know what the right

word is, poison alternatives?
But you know, we talk about the

toxins and technology and what
do you talk about? TRISH: Pesticides. Yeah. So, we

talk about treatments. As we
know, the climate is changing a

little bit, and so one of the
main issues that we have is

that those mosquitoes I've told
you about before, the 80s Egypti,

they're migrating more inland.
And so that means areas that

don't typically have a Mosquito
Control District or treatment

company, those mosquitoes are
going there. And so we don't

want them to spread diseases
more inland, especially when, you

know, the states don't something
to help protect them from. MELISSA: So

if they're not, if they don't

have a controlled a Mosquito

Controlled District like we
have, they don't necessarily,

other than calling some local
pest control, they don't have a

program in place that's.... TRISH: Right. MELISSA:
Governmentally supported, funded

to help mitigate that problem,
if you will. TRISH: Yeah exactly.

MELISSA: Okay. TRISH: And so, in the budget a
few years ago, they put in

something called the Smash Act
and that's to provide the EPA

and the USDA with millions of
dollars of funding to give out

to organizations that can do
some research to try to help

find new ways. And so, since
we're an independent taxing

district, we don't get any of
those funds. But it's very

important because like I always
say that, you know, mosquitoes

don't know what county lines
are. They don't know what state

lines are. They're just
going to going to fly where

they can. They're going to lay
their eggs where they can and

those eggs can stay on
somebody's suitcase that comes

to visit St Augustine and
they take it back home to

Minnesota and, all of a sudden,
there's a 80s Gyptti outbreak.

And they won't know what to do.
You know so. MELISSA: So I I'll can be

waiting to pack my suitcase
into my car and something could

land on my suitcase literally
and I could take it with me.

TRISH: Yes. MELISSA: Never would have thought
that in a million years. TRISH: Well

and that's the big, that's one
of the huge ways that invasive

mosquitoes get to the United
States is through the shipping

routes. Because for example the
tire fees that you pay when you

buy a tire that goes to help
Mosquito Control Districts. And

so they're eggs, they could be
in China sitting, you know, the

tires get made. They're sitting
on a cargo ship, ready to go.

The mosquito lays her eggs there,
those eggs can stay, it's like

a super glue. And they'll stay

there for a year or so. And

then, when that tire gets water
in it, boom. There's

your mosquitoes and it's could
be 2 years later. MELISSA: So, so let's

talk a little bit about that.
You're talking about tires

and water gets in it. You
know, we've talked about what

can we do to make a difference.
Set the scenario for our

listeners. Let's get everybody
on the same page about why we

need mosquito control. What
does it look like in my

backyard? What am I looking
for? TRISH: So mosquitoes kill over

one million people a year
worldwide. They're a very

dangerous little silent killer,
as we say. And so, we want to

make sure that our residents
are watching their yards and, no

matter where you live across
the world, you can do this. You

can look in your yard for any
toys that are filling up with

water, your bird baths, your
water planters, anything outside,

gutters. Anything that can hold
more than like an ounce of

standing water is a great place
for a mosquito to lay her eggs

in, unless it's moving. So things
like holes in trees and

bromeliads are the one of the
biggest causes here locally. MELISSA: That's those

pretty little purple flowers,
flowering looking plants that... TRISH:

Yeah and they have these leaves
that come out and each leaf

holds like almost two ounces of
water. And I first learned about

that from my technician, because
I said, I had a really bad

mosquito problem. And I had a
bunch of bromeliads and that's

what it was. So, you can do
natural things and you can put

a little bit of olive oil. But
I'm Greek, so I don't want to

waste olive oil. So you
could put a spray bottle of

some dish soap and some water
and spray it out. And so it

leaves a little bit of a film
on the water and the mosquito

won't lay her egg there. MELISSA: Wow.

Okay and we've talked about, it

takes I think you said a bottle

cap. TRISH: Yeah. MELISSA: Is all it takes full

of water. TRISH: Exactly. So one water

bottle capful and she could lay

her eggs there and within a

week, 200 babies could fly out

as adults. MELISSA: And you just

mentioned, your technician came

out. So what do I do if I am in

my yard and I maybe see

something or I want to get my

yard inspected? I can do that

right? For free? TRISH: Yeah. So any

St Johns County resident,

whether you own a rent, you

somewhere, that person pays

property taxes, and that's part

of the property tax role. And so,

anytime you have mosquito
problems, you can go to our

website which is www.amcdsjc.com or .org. I'm sorry. MELISSA:

Which is Anastasia Mosquito
Control District St Johns

County. TRISH: That's right. And put
in the service request button

and somebody will be out right
away. MELISSA: And do they spray

automatically? Do they give me
tips on what to do? We haven't

heard much about the the
foggers that the trucks

fogging. TRISH: So, the first thing
that an inspector will do is

come to the house, introduce
themselves, and then look

around the property, try to
find mosquitoes biting. So,

we're not just going to be out
there spraying for no reason,

because that's a way, a waste
of taxpayers money, because you

know, chemicals are expensive.

And we also don't want to just

pretreat and put out chemicals.

Pesticide resistance is

really like the number one
problem that we have in

mosquito control. That's also
one of the things I lobbied

about in Washington DC. And so
we have to be really careful

about over spraying and
using the correct stuff. So

the technician will look
around. If they find something,

they'll let you know. If you're
home, they'll show you what

they found. And they'll say, oh,
here's these little babies

swimming around, because you can
see 'em swimming around. And so,

we'll tell you to dump it out,
wash out the container, if it's

like a a flower pot or
something, wash it out, and tip

and toss it. MELISSA: I was going to say,
that's your kind of your slogan,

is to tip and toss. TRISH: Tip and
toss. Tip out any water and

then toss. Toss those babies
away. MELISSA: Well and you know, you

mentioned bird baths and bird
feeders and toys and, you know,

either random tire or maybe
your wheelbarrow, where you

leave a bucket out in the yard

because you are cleaning your

car and you forget about it and
you know, week later, you go back

and like, oh it rained this
week. Look that ugly pool of

water in the bottom of that
bucket. And you wouldn't even

think about mosquitoes being in
there. TRISH: Yeah and if they're in

there, you'll see em swimming
around there. MELISSA: If you are just

now tuning in, you're listening
to The Break Room. I'm Melissa

Wissel, Communications
Director for the City of St

Augustine. I'm sharing The
Break Room today with Trish

Becker. She is our Mosquito
Control District Commissioner

in St Johns County. Two
things before we go. We have

an education center coming up,
open? We saw it during COVID

because you guys were handing
out masks. TRISH: Yes. MELISSA: That's the... TRISH: We

had just, I think we had just
voted to do it. MELISSA: Okay. You

had your center with all your
stations set up and... TRISH: Yes, that's

for our open house. And
we just recently had a open

house June 30th. That was a big,
you know, big event. With

good turnout. And we did a live
aerial demonstration with our

helicopters, with water. And
so, our education center is

still being finished, and we're
hoping that's going to be open

in August. We were looking at a
May date originally, but COVID

kind of since, you know
steel and getting supplies and

stuff back. But we're really
looking forward to it. It is

really coming along nicely. MELISSA:
We'll be sure to have you back

to share that when it's
officially opened. Cuz what is

there now is very impressive.
The stations and seeing

all the the little egg samples
and all the stuff that you guys

have. I do want to ask you this,
too. How in the world did you

get intrigued and interested in
mosquitoes? Because I've never

met anybody who is so

passionate about mosquitoes! I

love it. I love having you
come on The Break Room. TRISH: Well, I

mean, it's kind of funny. Because
if you would've talked to me

seven or eight years ago, I
would have been like, I don't

know. I hate them and I
would run away from any bug I

see, or snake. And now I'm like
trying to catch everything and

look at it. And so, we had bought
our house and we were renting

prior to, and I had no idea we
had mosquito control. So that's

why I really try to get out to
the renters because, so they

know that there is a mosquito
control. And my technician would

come and every time he would
come over, he would show me

something new. It almost got to
like, my son was four at the

time, if he got a mosquito bite
it like welts super huge, so he

couldn't play outside, and he
loves like being in the dirt. So

every time he would come over,
it was just like, what what are

we going to learn this time mom?!

And it's like, I don't know! And

you know, he would have
flashcards. And oh, it's this

mosquito, and it likes this and
this and and it was just so

interesting. And his passion and
just kind of love for the job

really inspired me to look at
mosquitoes a little bit

differently. And I said, man you
do such a good job. How can I

tell your boss you're awesome?
You know, he said well, you can go

to the board meeting. So I had
no idea there was a board. I

went to the board meeting. I was
so impressed by the

presentation that I heard from
a doctor there and I was like I

want to help out anyway I can.
And a little bit later, I

decided, you know what, I'm
going to run for office. MELISSA: Well,

and it's something that truly
affects every resident. And

mosquitoes aren't really
political either. TRISH: No. They're not. It's like such a awesome
job because I don't really have

to worry about any kind of that
red tape where you gotta say

this and do this. MELISSA: It's science.

TRISH: We live in science in a

science-based world. It's only
based on facts. It's not based

on what people like or what
companies want to come to our

thing. It's purely factual and
it does affect really every

human in the world because what
we do here at Anastasia

Mosquito is known about
worldwide, like people come from

all over the world to train at
our facility. And that's

one of the reasons we built
that education center. And it's

not only going to talk about
mosquitoes, it's going to talk

about different vectors, like
bedbugs, cockroaches, you know.

We'll have a live ant wall, live
honey bees, bats. Like we really

want to inspire the next
generation to really get into

science. And and that there's a
place for them to go. We've

had a great year with interns
and volunteers from the high

schools. And last year, our
research department received

over a million dollars in
grants. MELISSA: Wow. TRISH: So, we've done a

lot of research. And that's how
we're able to pay for things

like the education center is
because of millions of dollars

that we bring in from grants on

the research that we do. MELISSA: Well,

I hate to say it, but we are out
of time. But, that means we're

going to have you back because
we do have a lot to talk about. There

is a huge science side of what
you guys do. It's really

fascinating and I love, like I
said, I really do love having

you come on, because you're so
enthusiastic, energetic, you

make it kind of fun, if I
could say that. TRISH: It is. I'm

always bugging. MELISSA: So so thanks
for bugging on over here and

now we have to bug out. TRISH: I've
got a buzz. MELISSA: Thank you for

coming back to The Break Room,
Trish. TRISH: Thanks. MELISSA: As we wrap up

another edition of The
Break Room, did you know we are

now a podcast? If you've missed
part of this broadcast and

want to listen from the
beginning or share it with your

friends, you can subscribe to
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Twitter, and Instagram @CityStAug. Thanks for tuning in
until next time. ANNOUNCER: You've been

listening to The Break Room. A

weekly program addressing

projects and programs offered
by the City of St Augustine.

Join us each week as the City's
Communications Director Melissa

Wissel has in-depth
conversations with the people

who make our town work to meet
the needs of our community. The

Break Room is produced by
Communication Specialist for

the City of St. Augustine Cindy
Walker. See you at this time

next week for another edition
of The Break Room.