

ANNOUNCER: You've tuned in to 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. This week, we're going to head back over to the County

and talk with Anastasia Mosquito Control District

Commissioner Trish the Commish

Becker. It's that time of year

again to be thinking about

mosquitoes as we get back

outside enjoying sunny St

Augustine. But first, Trish has

an announcement to make about

the new education center open

house and the new facilities.

Welcome back. TRISH: Hi. Well, thanks

for having me back here in this

beautiful station, and thanks

for Flagler College for keeping

it up. I love it. I'm also

now a Flagler student. I'm in the

pad program. Forgot to tell you

that. MELISSA: Nice. TRISH: But yeah, we

have a great open house coming

up on June 22nd from 3 PM to 7

PM. MELISSA: Finally. Finally, I'm

going to say. TRISH: Well, we do the
open house every year but...

education center. MELISSA: The education
center we've been talking

about. I was looking back from
our notes from previous

interviews when you've been
with us and we've been looking

forward to this. TRISH: Yes, it's it's
and it's still not done.

I mean, I guess, you know, in
in that aspect with the, you

know, the education center and
science museum. It's, no one's

done it, so things that, you know
contractors would say... yeah,

it'll be done in a month. And
it's been taken six months

because it's just, it's
hard to find a format. But it is

absolutely incredible, and so we
certainly want to welcome

everyone in the community to
come out there. It's at 120 EOC

Drive. And when you go, it's kind
of off of 95 and 16, when you go

near the Outlet Center Area. And
then if, you know where the

Center is. You just keep going
and you turn right and it's

next to the emergency center.

MELISSA: So where it says EOC employees

only. There's a, there is a sign
out there, because I was out

there for a meeting. And it can
be a little daunting. If you're

going to the mosquito, the
education center, go on back.

Go check it out.

Don't be afraid to drive down

there. TRISH: Yeah, just keep going,

and we're going to have signs

out too to help people, because

that, you're right. That can be

daunting, where it's like... MELISSA: Is

that, is that out, the new

Sheriff's Facility's there, as well. And that's where

the gun range used to be. TRISH: Yes.

Okay. It's well, it still is.

So you may hear some

some guns going off. But it's

completely safe. MELISSA: Tell me

about the education center, like

I said when we were doing our

intro. We have been talking

about this for a long time and

it's something that we got

funding for it or...? TRISH: Yeah, we saved for it through grants and

different kind of things. And now with, you know, us being as

vector disease education center where we can hold conferences,

we can hold events for people, and also teach people, which is

the most important part of this. It'll open us up to

getting a lot more grants, you know, and especially from

different museum spectrums, so since this is a first of its

kind. MELISSA: And that's something we talked about, this isn't just,

you know, a museum come and see a placard on a wall with

mosquitoes flying. TRISH: Yeah, it's

not the mosquito shrine that

people think it is, and

all. MELISSA: Right. And you all have a

reputation and are recognized.

Tell me a little bit about

that gravitas that you

have. In terms of the, what you guys do there. I

don't think people really

realize. TRISH: Yeah. The kind of

stuff that we do, you know... Last

year we got \$1. 4 million

dollars in grant funding to do

different research. So the work

that's done at our district, we

not only are, you know, we use

taxpayers money to treat and to

prevent and to pay our

employees. The kind of research

stuff that we do is all based

on funding, on grant funding. We

work with the Department of

Defense very closely. We're

writing a big manual over the

last few years with that, and

we're actually applying for a

new one, which will bring in

almost \$5 million dollars. MELISSA: \$5

million dollars. TRISH: Yeah and

there's only... MELISSA: That's a lot of money. TRISH: Yeah, we're

going to be a Southeastern

Center of Excellence. So, we're

really pushing it hard.

We're worldwide recognized and

awarded. And we actually just

had one of the, he's not the

president, but he's like a top

person of the Italian mosquito

control come out. And they

filmed an entire documentary

with us and are hoping to share

that with other places in
Europe to show what, you know,

can be done with good funding
and with accurate data. You know.

Like I've told you before, you

know, we have our traps we

put out on Monday, we pick them
up on Tuesday, and you know hand

count everything, we can look at
weather patterns, and know

in pre-treat areas, so we don't
have to use those, you know,

higher up chemicals. MELISSA: Yeah and I
think the point of that with

this whole center. The open
house of course is to get folks

to come in. It it is in
conjunction with the National

Mosquito Control Awareness

Week. So we're timing having

you here to to celebrate an
occasion for you all.

But you really do, that's the
one thing that's impressed me,

or been impressed upon me, is
what you do is more than just...

Hey I've got a mosquito
infestation in my backyard. Can

you come treat it? And we're
going to talk about that. But

it's really about the science
and education and making a

difference really in the world.

TRISH: Yeah I mean, yesterday I went

and met our new interns. We've
got four interns from the Nease

High School Science Academy and
they're interning there. We've

got interns from University of
North Florida. We had some from

Cambridge not long ago. So,
we're really bringing a lot of

people in to learn and then to
take that knowledge back to

their perspectives. You know.
When I was talking to some of

the high school students, they
all mentioned like, you know, I

want to be a doctor. I want to
look at these diseases that are

happening, because we have so
many diseases that aren't just

mosquitoes, and that's one of
the topics we talk about in the

in the education center is... You
know this isn't just

mosquitoes. This is all kinds

of different vector diseases

that come from ticks, that from
lice and bed bugs and all kinds

of things. And we need more
people working on those. So,

we're hoping that, I personally,
you know, I'm hoping that this

is going to inspire the next
group of people to enter this

field into public health and
protect people. MELISSA: Wow. It's a lot

more than mosquitoes. If you're
just now tuning in, you're

listening to The Break Room. I'm
Melissa Whistle, Communications

Director for the City of St.
Augustine and this week, I have

Trish the Commish Becker. Is one
of five Anastasia Mosquito

Control District Commissioners.

We've been talking about the

Education Center open house

that is on June 22nd from 3

to 7 PM. And I want to switch

gears though before we run out

of time. Let's talk a little

bit about the mosquitoes and

mosquito control, because that's

also part of the message, too, is

helping our residents know.

Particularly because we have a

lot of new residents.

What's in, what's in St

Augustine, what's in Florida, the

mosquitoes... What do we need to

do to help keep those numbers

down of mosquitoes? TRISH: Yeah and

that's something that's pretty

surprising to people. You know,

worldwide over a million people
die every year from a mosquito

born disease or illness. Every
two minutes a child under five

years old dies from malaria. And
as a mom, it's absolutely

heartbreaking, and you know
that's one of the reasons I do

what I do, and try to educate
our residents. And so in Florida...

You know, worldwide we have 3,500 different species. In

Florida, we have about 85. We
just got a new one that just

came in. So that's exciting.

Welcome to Florida. In South

Florida and in St Augustine,
in St Johns County, we've got

about 43 species. So out of
those species, we're just really

looking at a handful of those
species. You know, none in this

industry is trying to play God
and Jurassic Park and all that.

You know, we just want to
prevent people from dying.

And anyone that's not
familiar, please take a a trip

down to the Huguenot Cemetery
across the street from the Fort

and and look at all the people
that died there from Yellow

Fever in 1819 and 1821. So
that is something we've dealt

with several times actually
that I think that was the fifth

time we had a mosquito pandemic
here. MELISSA: Okay. And we had Zika not too too long

ago. TRISH: Yeah and that still is

something. Yeah. You know,

that hasn't gone away. We
actually have mosquitoes here

that naturally carry it, but
they don't feed off of humans.

So, we're very happy
about that. And you know,

just as a reminder to any of
the listeners, only the female

mosquitoes bite. They bite
to take that protein that's in

human's blood back to their
babies, so their babies can

fully become an adult. They're
not actually eating it. And

so male mosquitoes are 100% of
the time pollinators, and female

mosquitoes are most of the time
pollinators, also. So, you know,

we do understand the role that
pollinators play, and that's a

huge thing we have in the
education center. We have live

beehives that go from the
inside to the outside. We work

very closely with the beekeeper
association and they actually

have their bees here. MELISSA: Oh wow.
So that's a really cool

thing to see. But you know,
locally all it takes is one

bottle cap of water for the
the mosquitoes that are

dangerous to us, like the 80s
Egypti, to grow their their

babies in that in one week.

MELISSA: Let's talk about that. You

mentioned the the a little
bottle cap of water. So, if you

think about a bottle of water

that you buy, you take that

little bottle top off. That

little bit of water. That's all

it is. That's all it needs to.... TRISH:

And these mosquitoes are so

smart that they actually make a

glue-like substance and they

can glue the eggs to the side

of this bottle cap and it can

get thrown in a ditch and maybe

it doesn't rain for two years

and all of a sudden, it rains.

Those eggs in one week will

become an adult. So, it's

crazy. MELISSA: Now, a couple of things,

where we got just a minute and

a half, 2 minutes left here. I

do want to make sure a couple

of things to talk about. The

plants, the purple, the.... TRISH: The
bromeliads. MELISSA: Everybody loves a bromeliad.

TRISH: Check those out, spray em some soap and water.

MELISSA; Those little, those little cups.

TRISH: Yeah. Each cups. Can hold
yeah over an ounce of water. So

your bromeliads will always be
something to grow. So keep an

eye on those. Spritz a
little water and dish soap on

them if you have to have them.

That layer of film will prevent

a female from wanting to lay
her eggs there. Anytime you

have a mosquito problem, you
know, you pay for our services

in your property taxes. So it
is free for us to come. You can

visit WWW.AMCDSJC. org

Anastasia Mosquito Control

District SJC. MELISSA: Google my website

TrishTheCommish.com I've

gotta put in a service request,

we have a app that we've won

awards for. So we are always out

there you, can call us. But come

to the open house, and you

cannot only see the education

center, but you can see our new

sit lab, our aerial program, all

the biologic tools that we use.

Because we really, we know

mosquitoes are so resistant to

pesticides. So, we really are

on the leading edge to

pushing more and more natural

resources. Because that's the

one thing that they're not

resistive to. MELISSA: And if you have any questions about what's in

your yard, what plants are good or not good? Watch out for any

kind of standing water. The little bases of plant

pots. Or plant pots, bird..

tires, bird baths. MELISSA: As much as

we love our bird baths, I'll tell you, I got a gift of a

little hanging bird bath for my, house warming gift, and I thought

to myself... I don't think Trish would really want me to hang

that in my back yard. TRISH: Just keep an eye on it. Anytime you see

movement, dump it out, clean it out with dish soap, and then

refill it. That's all you gotta do, just keep an eye on it. MELISSA: Very

good. So I can still put that in
my yard, yes. But just trying to

be smart. You have educated
me over the years and I really

do pay attention, too. So I hope
our listeners are listening.

Take a look around your yard
when you get home tonight, look

for any little sitting water
and.. TRISH: Gutters especially. MELISSA: In those

little plant crevices of the
plants and things like that. And

look up Trish the Commish. Is it
TrishTheCommish.com? TRISH: Yeah.

MELISSA: And the St Johns County
Anastasia Mosquito Control

District website, like Trish
said, you can get on there.

Register to get someone to come

out to your house. It's free.

Put your tax dollars at work

and let's keep safe, St Johns

County. I'd say mosquito free,

but maybe just mosquito

minimized. TRISH: Yeah. I mean, we

haven't had a mosquito disease

since 2004. So, that's

very exciting. None of our

neighbors can say the same

thing. So, your your tax

dollars are definitely being

used correctly. And we've been

lowering the tax rate each

year. So, I hope to do that

again this year. And you know,

any questions, always reach out

to us. We we want you to know

as much as you can about this.

Because that's that's the whole
point of our district is to

educate our residents and
prevent any kind of illness. We

actually had a travel-related
case of malaria come in and

luckily, we worked with
Homeland Security and the

Department of Health and we're
able to fix that. That could

have been a very, very bad
problem, so. I just came back

from Washington DC. I told
everyone how amazing everyone

is here and. MELISSA: Well, we
appreciate the work you do. TRISH: Our

quality living is good. I can
see why everyone wants to move

here. MELISSA: So. Well, as always, it's
great to have you. Great

information and you really make
the bugs sound cool and fun.

TRISH: They are, just when they're not
killing us. MELISSA: Well, Trish

the Commish, thanks again for
coming by, and we'll have you

back soon. And good
luck. TRISH: Thanks, I'll see everyone at the

open house. And good luck with the open house.

TRISH: Thank you. MELISSA: Alright. If you
missed part of this broadcast

and want to go back and listen
from the beginning, or if you'd

like to hear our past
interviews, you can find all

that information at CityStAugRadio.com. We're also on

podcast and we have a complete
listing of the podcast

platforms at CityStAugRadio.com. We want to keep you

informed about what's happening

in and around the City, and of

course, out into the county. Most

importantly that you hear it

from the people who are doing

the work and making it happen

every day. Stay connected with

the City, Like us, and follow

us on our social media. You'll

find us on Facebook, Twitter,

and Instagram @CityStAug. Until next time, thanks

for tuning in. 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.