

[Narrator] You've tuned in to another
edition of The Breakroom, a

weekly conversation about how
the City of Saint Augustine

works from those who do the
work every day. Hosted by the

City of Saint Augustine's
communications director,

Melissa Wissel. The Breakroom
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
Breakroom. Thanks for tuning

in. We're going to catch up on
what's happening in and around

the city and this week, we're
going to head out to the county

talking with Anastasia Mosquito

Controlled District

Commissioner Trish the Commiss

Becker. She's back in the break

room to talk about mosquitoes,
mosquito control, and what you

need to know to keep those
pesky little pests from

multiplying but we're also
going to give you a sneak peek

into the grand opening ribbon
cutting of the Disease Vector

Educational Center and Science

Museum. Trish, welcome back.

[Trish] That's a mouthful, I know.

Thanks for having me. [Melissa] So, I

have to just share this. Um
your first visit was shortly

after I come on board as the

communications manager after

Paul retired. You were my

66th interview. [Trish] Really?

[Melissa] And today, drum roll. Uh you
are my 200th episode. [Trish] Whoo. [Melissa] So,

little bit. [Trish] Confetti. [Melissa] Yup. Yup.
Yup. Roll the confetti. So, but

where do you want to start? So,
we're going to talk about what

we usually talk about which is
reminding folks what not to do

and how to help minimize the
the reproduction of mosquitoes.

[Trish] Yeah. [Melissa] But we have been talking
about the museum literally for

years. [Trish] For years. Yeah. [Melissa] So you
pick which one you want to

start with. [Trish] Well let's start
out with what residents can do.

[Melissa] Yeah. [Trish] At their homes. [Melissa] Yeah. [Trish] And then we'll work into that.

[Melissa] Okay. [Trish] Cuz you know I can talk for years about it. [Melissa] Yeah. So.

So let's remind folks so mosquitoes you can actually

make a difference. I think people figure there's too many

of them. What can I really do?

[Trish] Yeah. Well everyone is going to

be their own best resource at first. And so that's you know

that's part of our statute that we we operate under at the

state level and that's to inform ourselves and residents

about what they can do to protect themselves against

mosquito viruses and like I've always told you there's 3, 500

different species in the world

in the state of Florida. Uh

there's about eighty-three and

then locally in Saint Johns

County, we're now up to 46

different species. [Melissa] Wow. [Trish] And not

all those species bother us.

We're not interested in killing

the they're happy feeding on

alligators and turtles and

birds and other things but the

mosquitoes that are more urban

area like in Saint Augustine

those come from standing water

so it's really important to

check your yards and make sure

you don't have tires,

wheelbarrows, you know plant

saucers bird feeders I mean you

can have that stuff that's not

fine I mean [Melissa] the little thing
that collects the water they're

pretty but [Trish] yeah the bird baths.

[Melissa] Yeah. [Trish] Or bee baths. Yeah.

People are really into the bee
baths too now. Putting a little

plate with some rocks and some
water. That's great. You can

continue to do that. Just make
sure that you're checking it

weekly for any little eggs or
anything wiggling around. If

so, dump it out, clean it out
with soap and water and then

fill it back up. So, just check
it once once a week to make

sure nothing is trying to grow
around you. [Melissa] When I see mine,

I'm like, oh I forgot and I go
over really quick and I check

it and I dump it. There's
usually like dirt and leaves in

it. [Trish] Yeah. And that's good. [Melissa] But
but yeah you don't think about

and you've told me in the past
told our listeners in the past

about the cap of water. [Trish] Yeah so
one bottle cap of water is

about all the mosquitoes around
here that we are you know

nervous about need to grow
almost 200 babies. So like I've

told the listeners before only
female mosquitoes bite. And

when they do that's to take
their babies into the next life

cycle so they need the protein
from our blood. [Melissa] Okay. [Trish] Uh when

they're not doing that, they're
busy being pollinators. They're

out, you know, they feed on
sugar. So, they're just like

butterflies and bees with the
pollinating but they are so

small and don't make a big
enough contribution to our

agriculture where they need to
be like part of the economy in

that way. [Melissa] And also looking out
for some of the plants. That's

the other thing I want to make
sure to remind listeners is be

careful of the plant that
you're planting. [Trish] Yeah. I mean,

just like the stuff we talk
about in your yard, plants are

the same way. So, bramiliads or

as we refer to mosquito hotels,

bromeliad can hold more than an
ounce water in each leaf and

they'll have like 50 or
depending how big they are. You

can have 20 or 50 leaves. So,
that's 20 to 50 different homes

for different mosquitoes. I
mean, that's a lot of

mosquitoes and that's kind of
one of the big reasons I found

out about our mosquito control
here because when we bought our

first house it was surrounded
in bromeliads and we were just

always being attacked and
they're like it's that you know

[Melissa] it's the plant that you love [Trish] you're doing and I
was like ah so if you don't

want to get rid of that plant
just make sure to keep an eye

on it just like everything else
in your yard you know spray

them out with a hose once a
week. You could also spray a

little bit of Windex. You could
spray a little bit of just put

dish soap. So and the dish soap
will act like a oil on the

water and a mosquito will not
want to lay her eggs there.

[Melissa] Okay. So it doesn't damage the
plant. [Trish] It doesn't damage the

plant. You can also use olive
oil. I think I've told you this

before but since I'm Greek
that's like a cardinal sin. I

can't do that. So no olive oil.
Don't waste it. [Melissa] Um don't put it

on your plants. [Trish] Um and then you
know there's no real deterrent

for mosquitoes but they're less
likely to come near you if you

grow things that smell really
well to us. So, things like

lavender, rosemary, basil,
those kind of good-smelling

plants, they just don't like em
but doesn't mean they won't

bite you but they'll bite
somebody else that's not near

that. [Melissa] So, the big message for
what we can do is watch out for

the standing water. Tell us
real quick about calling to get

sprayed or to have your yard
checked out by our

professionals because I want to

make sure we move on to our

other topic. [Trish] Okay. [Melissa] But the one
thing I do want to remind folks

is that you can call the
mosquito board and get somebody

to come out and inspect your
yard. [Trish] Yeah. So, we have a great

team of staff that really work
very vigilant to make sure that

if you have a problem, you can
call us. You can go on our

website which is AMCDSJC. org.
You could put in a request that

way. You can also download our
app and we'll have somebody

come out within a day or two
and inspect your yard since we

are a government agency. We're
not just pest control. So we

have to find a case to spray.

We can't just spray whatever we

want whenever we want. Um and

we also don't want to make we

want to make sure that we don't

kind of help out the pesticide

resistance that's happening

with with bugs. So we try to do

the most biological ways that

we can and that's something

that you'll find out about at

our education center. [Melissa] But okay

so if you're just now tuning in. You're

listening to the break room and

we have Trish the Commish

Becker. She is one of five

Anastasia mosquito control

district commissioners and

we're going to switch gears and

talk about this fabulous

education center. I mean I I if

I could just sit here and tell

people you need to go. You need

to go. You need to go. That's.

[Trish] Well I gave you the sneak peek.

[Melissa] You gave us. [Trish] You have been

getting sneak peeks for years.

[Melissa] I'm so excited. It's I mean I'm

going to just say it is Smithsonian level. [Trish] Well thank you. [Melissa] I

I mean it's beyond this is not

this is not a I was going to

say a Mickey Mouse operation

but Disney's pretty impressive

too but this is not something

that you guys just threw

together so please do tell us

about it in all seriousness you

are having a a ribbon cutting

or an opening grand opening

about all of it [Trish] so when I got
elected when I started in 2019

it was one of the first things
that was brought up and we had

had some of our doctors and
scientists go to other parts of

the world and see kind of they
had small versions of and we

thought wouldn't it be great
because that is part of our

charter to make sure that we
are educating the public

because we are our own best
advocates for that. [Melissa] And you

guys do a lot of research here.
I mean you've told us in the

past that this is like a hub of
education and learning and

training and research. [Trish] Yeah we

are the the highest cited

agency in the world for
mosquito control. Um and what's

also fantastic is that we have
just been a now as a CDC Center

of Excellence and that is in
part due to the education

center. So the training that
we're going to be doing and the

training's not just for
residents and visitors. It's

for our employees. It's for
people all over the world. Um

so we've worked for five years
on this. We have gone to all

the local museums, different
museums throughout the state,

looking at stuff, what works,
what doesn't. We had a great

team of stakeholders that are
the STEM teachers in town you

know in the county from the
STEM programs you know what

things are you looking for for
students. We're working with

the Navy and the Army and I
mean so many different people.

The Department of Agriculture
and Plants and Sciences

Division has a whole wall. The
University of Florida has a

wall. Uh there's so many people
that have just been really

eager to work with us in this
realm and to help out. So we

wanted to make it the best that
we could that would enjoyable,

you know, a name like disease
vector doesn't really grow

butterflies in your stomach,
right? You're like, [Melissa] no disease

vector. Let me jump right on
that. [Trish] So, we wanted it to be a

little bit more playful, you
know, like I've told you every

time, mosquitoes are the number
one killer of humans. So,

that's a really scary concept
to think of but if we can try

to help, you know, make it not
happen by inspiring other

people. Maybe people looking
for a new career. Maybe our our

students, our teenagers, you
know, we've got interns from

the high schools, from
different colleges. You know,

we want to inspire people to

get into science. Maybe it's

not mosquitoes but maybe it's

a. A tick. [Melissa] I was saying. [Trish] Maybe

it's a different plant. [Melissa] Your

that center is so much more and

even saying the word museum

isn't doesn't do its service.

Um it's interactive is the one

thing that I would want to tell

our listeners. If you've got

kids, high school-aged young

kids, anything. There's how

many bugs were behind those

glass display cases. [Trish] Tons. [Melissa] I'm I

could I probably would say over

200. [Trish] Oh easily, thousands. [Melissa] Oh you're talking that.

We're going to have mosquitoes,

bugs, butterflies. [Trish] Yeah so when

you walk in it's like the swamp

and and a house and what how
you can grow mosquitoes around

your house and what you can do.

It talks about the history of

mosquito control and then it
opens up to ways that what kind

of treatment do we use? How do
we spray? You can take a ride

on our helicopter. Um and and
do a mission and see how that

works. See how the trucks work.

What are the traps we use and

then it opens up because we
don't want to focus just on

mosquitoes because that could
be boring. So we talk about all

other plants. I mean bugs and
plants. We have a live honey

bee wall that. [Melissa] That was
incredible. [Trish] Yeah. [Melissa] I will admit

when I saw that I thought to
myself I can't believe they've

got bees like trapped like in
this wall and then you're like

no no no. It it's a tube that
goes to the outside. [Trish] Yeah. So

we believe the bees come in and
out. [Trish] They come in and out as

they please. Uh they're very
happy. They do very specific

dances and moves if they're
happy. If they're not happy. So

and we've worked with that with
the president of Saint Johns

County Beekeepers Association.
Those are her bees. [Melissa] That's

right. [Trish] And so we are you know
we love our bees. We want to

make sure everyone knows why

they're so important and why

it's very important that we
don't disturb them. [Melissa] So one

other thing before we have to
wrap because you're right. We

could sit here and keep
talking. Um I want to let folks

know about that little theater
if you will. Um so if you have

a small group that's looking
for a cool place to go to do a

talk. Tell me a little bit
about that space. [Trish] Yeah. [Melissa] How can

we use that space? How can the
public get in and enjoy the

space? [Trish] So we have kind of we're
just calling it like our movie

theater but it's also where we
can do live science

presentations. We can do talks.

I'm planning on in the future

to have like monthly night at

the museum chats and where

we'll focus on different

topics. [Melissa] Oh I like that. Night at the museum.

[Trish] Yeah and it doesn't even have

to be about mosquitoes but you

know what's going on in the

world. There's a lot of things

happening and so you could have

your group come we it seats 50

people. We can have your group

come and you know have that

space and and do like you know

maybe private events or maybe

some sort of fun for your club,

maybe your garden club wants to

come, maybe the beekeepers, you

know, whatever it is, we're

very open. We we want people to

come. It is going to be free

for everybody until July 10th.

[Melissa] Okay. [Trish] Uh and then we're

going to go from there and see.

I mean, we're talking it's not

a final approval or anything

but we're talking about maybe

\$10 for adults with 50% off for

residents. [Melissa] But that's not set.

[Trish] That's not set yet. So, you

know, we do have to cover the

cost of operating it but we've

tried to do such a good job in

making sure the are low. [Melisa] Right.

So. So real quick. Last thing

we can say because we're

running we are literally

running out of time. Okay.

When's the ribbon cutting?

[Trish] March 26th. [Melissa] Okay. It's
Tuesday. [Melissa] Tuesday. [Trish] Tuesday.

[Melissa] March 26th 8 AM at the Vector
Center at the Science Museum.

Uh we'll post it on our post
about this episode and we're

out of time. [Trish] Keep up with me
and Trish the Commission. [Melissa] There

you go. Thanks so much. [Trish] Thanks
for having me. [Melissa] Thanks Trish. If

you missed part of this
broadcast and want to go back

and listen from the beginning
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tuning in. Until next time.

[Narrator] You've been listening to The

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addressing projects and

programs offered by the City of

Saint Augustine. Join us each

week as the city's

communications director Melissa

Whistle has in-depth

conversations with the people

who make our town work to meet

the needs of our community. See

you at this time next week for

another edition of The Break

Room.