

NEWS RELEASE
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Pensacola Interstate Fair Sets Course for a New Era
Gilbert E. Clark Jr. Named CEO to Lead Fair's Future Growth and Transformation

PENSACOLA, Fla. (September XX, 2026) — The [Pensacola Interstate Fair](#) has named Retired Navy Capt. Gilbert E. Clark Jr. as its Chief Executive Officer, ushering in a new era for the 91-year-old organization as it looks to build on its agricultural roots and expand its role in the Pensacola community and throughout the region.

For Clark, the opportunity is especially personal. His wife, Heather Lohbeck Clark, grew up in Cantonment and graduated from Tate High School in 1998. With Tate High's close ties to the agricultural community in North Escambia, Heather grew up surrounded by the farming traditions and FFA and 4-H programs that are an important part of the area's heritage.

After nearly three decades of military service that took the family around the country, the Clarks made the decision to return to Northwest Florida when it was time for Gil to retire from the Navy.

"This is my wife's hometown, and I was looking for a way to transition my service into this community once I hung up my military uniform," Clark said.

The Clarks are now raising their three children in the area. Their oldest daughter, Lily, is a senior at Florida State University and plans to become a veterinarian. Their daughter Chloe is in her second year at the University of Georgia, where she is studying biology, while their 6-year-old son, Jax, attends Episcopal Day School.

Clark brings more than 28 years of leadership experience, including senior executive roles with the U.S. Navy and U.S. Naval Academy. His Navy career included leadership of complex organizations, large-scale operations and strategic initiatives involving thousands of personnel, with a focus on organizational transformation, modernization, strategic planning and building partnerships across government and industry.

As Commander of Naval Surface Group Southwest in San Diego, Clark founded the Navy's first integrated surface force enterprise, bringing together fleet, acquisition, shipyard and industry stakeholders under a unified management model. He also served as Commandant of Midshipmen at the U.S. Naval Academy, where he led a 5,000-person institution and oversaw a \$180 million portfolio.

Now, he hopes to bring that experience to the Pensacola Interstate Fair and help unlock the potential of its facilities, workforce and mission.

Clark's appointment comes as the Pensacola Interstate Fair embarks on a long-term effort to strengthen its founding mission of agricultural education while continuing to provide the entertainment, food, rides and experiences that have made the Fair a beloved regional tradition.

“This is about building on the strong foundation that generations of volunteers have created over the past nine decades, and positioning the Fair for an exciting new future,” said Andy Peterson, president of the Pensacola Interstate Fair Board of Directors. “Gilbert brings the leadership experience, strategic vision and organizational expertise we need to take the Fair into its next chapter.”

A Fair for the Future

Under Clark's leadership, the Fair will develop a multi-year strategy focused on creating a year-round agricultural education enterprise supported by successful entertainment events, grants, sponsorships and philanthropic partnerships.

A key component of the vision is expanding the Fair beyond its traditional fall event to include a new annual spring event centered on warm-weather activities. The additional event would create a new revenue stream while increasing opportunities to use the Fairgrounds throughout the year.

Clark also plans to expand the Fair's educational programming, particularly for children and young adults interested in farming, ranching and food production. Proposed initiatives include hands-on agricultural education, live demonstrations and exhibits, as well as partnerships with schools, colleges, universities, agricultural extension services, FFA and 4-H programs and industry organizations.

The long-term vision includes exploring opportunities for university partnerships, including programs connected to agriculture and veterinary studies, as well as on-site training facilities where modern agricultural techniques can be demonstrated, taught and refined.

“I am hoping that, in this role, we can expand on this beautiful piece of property and modernize it,” Clark said. “We would really love to get into university partnerships, agriculture and veterinary studies and make the Fairgrounds more of a year-round learning hub.”

Strengthening the Fair's Foundation

Clark will also focus on strengthening the Fair's business and operational foundation. Priorities include developing new revenue opportunities, expanding grant and philanthropic support, pursuing sponsorships and partnerships, improving financial planning and reporting, and building a professional staff and seasonal workforce.

“My focus is to utilize a great core workforce, build sponsorships and partnerships and capitalize on our already ample space,” Clark said.

The Fair also plans to undertake an effort to clarify and strengthen its brand and public identity, communicating more broadly about its agricultural mission and expanding participation throughout the region.

Clark's experience in organizational transformation and strategic planning will support those efforts. During his military career, he led organizations ranging from 50 to more than 15,000 personnel and was selected to oversee a \$40 billion Navy-wide investment review.

“I am excited about the opportunity to be part of the Pensacola community and to help write the next chapter of the Pensacola Interstate Fair,” Clark said. “We have an opportunity to honor everything that has made the Fair special while building something that serves this region 365 days a year.”

Clark holds a bachelor's degree in history from the U.S. Naval Academy and a master's degree in national security and strategic studies from the U.S. Naval War College.

The Pensacola Interstate Fair is a state-chartered, nonprofit organization whose founding mission is agricultural education. For nine decades, the Fair has brought together agriculture, entertainment, food, education and community traditions for residents and visitors throughout the region. Under Clark's leadership, the organization will work to build upon that history while preparing the Fair for its next 90 years.

The 91st annual Pensacola Interstate Fair runs October 22-November 1, 2026. For more information on the Fair, visit PensacolaFair.com. You can also join us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/PensacolaInterstateFair.

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