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BAY Life

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Local Divers Making a Difference

BY RITA L. SHERWOOD

According to National Geographic, up to 8 million tons of plastic and waste enter our ocean and Bay waters every single year. More than 250 million tons of plastic are estimated to make its way into our oceans by 2025, according to projectaware.org.

Everyday trash is entering the sea at an alarming rate, growing rapidly due to our consumer lifestyle.

Marine debris is, simply, the waste that ends up on the bottom of our beautiful Gulf of Mexico and Bay. Nearly 80% of it comes from land-based sources and as much as 70% sinks to the ocean and Bay floor, according to the Plastic Pollution Coalition.

Marine debris is not only unsightly, it's very dangerous to sea life and could be costly for our economy. Marine animals become entangled in debris, and even mistake it for food, many times with fatal results. According to the plastic pollution coalition, plastic bags can look remarkably like jellyfish to turtles, which are a viable food source. Sadly,



turtles consume the plastic, which can cause blockages within their digestive tracts, causing a slow and very painful end. Divers, swimmers and beach goers can also be directly impacted by encounters with marine debris.

But we have a local community of divers fighting back! The Diver's Down Pollution Project (DDPP) is a

fast-growing group of locals concerned with the increasing amounts of pollution on our area beaches and waterways. In July of 2020, DDPP started with only three members, Marine Scientist Brennan Wehrhahn, President Thomas Larrison and Communications Director Bobby Wagner. Now, DDPP boasts more than 250 active, local volunteer

members. To date, DDPP has picked up over 5,000 pounds of trash from our local beaches and waterways here in Northwest Florida. They not only organize monthly beach cleanups, but also are comprised of volunteer expert pro-divers who sweep 50-100 feet of the Harbor and Bay floor, resulting in picking up 300-500 pounds of trash each time, most recently in the area between AJ's and Tailfins.

The majority of this trash on the Harbor and Bay floors is comprised of plastic, not only bottles, but cups and straws as well. "To see the entire floor of the Destin Harbor completely covered with plastic as far as the eye can see is completely disheartening, says Bobby. "The sandy bottom with no reefs is just a complete plastic wasteland of a decade of debris."

Bobby says it's just not sustainable to continue to only pick up trash. There has to be an agreement made among the locals, visitors and restaura-

DIVERS

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BBB: Way More Than You Think!

BY HEATHER BENNETT

The Better Business Bureau (BBB) is one of the nation's oldest non-profit organizations. It provides consumers with business profiles, consumer reviews, consumer information, scam alerts and reviews on charities. It's here to make sure, as consumers, we make wiser decisions about where we spend our money.

I spoke with Tammy Ward, the Communications Director of our local BBB serving Northwest Florida. It covers local businesses and consumer information across 14 counties in the Panhandle. I want to relay how the BBB can help us make wiser consumer decisions here at home.

If you are looking for a service or product and not sure what company to turn to, you can find a list of BBB accredited businesses on their website. You can look through the list of categories for services, or you can use the search bar to look up a specific business you have in mind, and narrow it down by location.

BBB accredited businesses have gone through a vetting process, which includes making sure their li-

BBB

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Community

DIVERS

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rants alike, to come up with a solution to be more eco-friendly. Whether that involves switching from plastic to paper straws, or to even lobby against all things plastic, something needs to be done.

He goes on to say that our area has become well known for the beauty of its beaches and the amazing emerald green color of its water, and gains a lot of attention as well as tourism from it. But, we're not taking the right steps to protect it. He says our area is home to some of the most unique and dynamic ecosystems in the world. People

come here for the beaches, dune lakes, fishing, and breath-taking scenery—all of which are based on natural resources. It is our responsibility to protect those natural resources by keeping these areas clean while inspiring others to do the same.

While the DDPP is recruiting expert divers to join their organization, as well as organizing various beach and Bay cleanups the first Sunday of every month, an hour before sunset, the change really begins with all of us.

Here's some things you can do to help reduce waste and pollution:

- Refuse single-use plastics whenever possible. Bring your

own water bottle and shopping bag with you, and for a day on the water or the beach, use your own reusable containers.

- Become a Gulf and Bay advocate. Tell your friends and family about the epidemic that is underwater pollution. Once people are informed, they'll start to make changes to their lifestyles.

- Recycle everything you cannot refuse, reduce or reuse.

- Divers are ocean heroes. If you love to dive, DDPP invites you to get involved.

- Visit the DDPP Facebook page and ask to join this private organization, and upon approval, they will ask you to pledge to pick up a bag of trash on your



own or with your friends and post a picture on their Facebook page. Their message is clear: Go

on your own to pick up trash to make a difference in our community, as every little bit helps. Be mindful when you're at the beach, and leave only your footprints behind.

Recently, there was a beach cleanup held at Gulf National Seashore Drive in Fort Walton Beach. There will be others scheduled. So, come on and join this great group of volunteers and protect the natural beauty of our stunning beaches and waterways! Find Divers Down Pollution Project on Facebook and Join the Group.

And, if you find yourself walking down the beach and see plastic, make sure to pick it up and bin it appropriately.

BBB

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censes are up to date. They provide information on the business, a list of customer reviews and customer complaints, so you can make an educated guess on which business is best to use. If you are a business owner and you are looking to get your BBB accreditation, you can apply after your business has been open and operating for six months.

"I try to make myself available to those outlying counties, because our office is in Pensacola," Tammy said. "For our accredited businesses, or businesses that wish to be accredited, they want to know that somebody is local to help them. We try to be as flexible as possible."

The BBB also accredits charities. Along the Emerald Coast we are people who like to



give back, and there are a lot of great charities looking for help throughout the year. To make sure you are making a wise investment with your donation dollars, you can check out the list of BBB accredited charities. They look closely at a chari-

ty's board activity and effectiveness, whether or not the charity has avoided accumulating funds, their annual reports, and their donor privacy. A charity has to spend at least 65% of funds on program activities and no more than 35% on fundraising. Charities that are BBB accredited have seen an average of 13.5% growth in public support.

"Some BBBs have a local review process. So, if you have a local nonprofit charity in the area, we can do that locally if it is not on a national level," said Tammy. They can also review local chapters of national organizations to provide local information on the charity.

The BBB is also a useful resource to find out what scams are active in our area. Since 2015, their Scam Tracker (www.bbb.org/ScamTracker) has been a place for consumers to research scams and report them. The website allows you to search by scam type, money lost, and geographically. If you've been a victim of a scam, visit the site and report

everything you can remember. Although they are not able to retrieve any money lost to you, they use the information to warn others and have helped law enforcement with investigations.

Some of the more active scams going on right now are employment scams, fake check scams, IRS scams, mover scams, social media and trial offers, grandparent scams, online purchases, and Covid-19 related scams.

One of the Covid-19 scams we need to be aware of is a fake vaccine appointment. Vaccines are free. If someone is asking you to pay or providing you with a "free gift with postage and handling" type of offer, it is fake. "A lot of times they are looking for personal information," stated Tammy. "If you get a call that you can set up an appointment, they'll ask for your Medicare number or ask you to verify everything with your social security number."

Scammers are also using your information when you post a picture of your vaccine card on social media. "We're cautioning people not to do that," said Tammy. "If you post the card, you're posting personal information." She also said that scammers are using the pictures of the cards to recreate and sell them.

Tammy shares local and urgent scam alerts on the Facebook Page for the Better Business Bureau serving Northwest Florida. Follow them for the latest information on scams and updated information on accredited businesses.

In a time when most of us

are trying to save money, we also need to be aware of where we are putting it. The Better Business Bureau serving Northwest Florida can help us be educated consumers who make wiser decisions on who gets it. For more information, please check out their website at www.bbb.org/local-bbb/bbb-of-northwest-florida.



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How Can You Help Prevent Child Abuse?

Are you aware that approximately 1,100 cases of child sexual and physical abuse are reported annually in Okaloosa and Walton Counties, an average of three a day? Despite those big numbers, nearly 2/3 of the actual needs to help child victims go unmet due to lack of reporting to authorities.

The Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center (ECCAC) is recognizing National Child Abuse Prevention Month in April, and a time to acknowledge the importance of families and communities working together to prevent child abuse and neglect. That is the 24/7 job of the multi-disciplinary team of staff and volunteers at ECCAC centers in Okaloosa and Walton Counties. ECCAC is a part of the National Children's Advocacy Center non-profit organization. There are 950 Centers across the country, with 27 of them located in Florida. Now in its 21st year with centers in Niceville and DeFuniak Springs, ECCAC has provided more than 150,000 services at no cost to more than

15,000 children experiencing abuse, abandonment or neglect to include mental health therapy, crisis intervention, referrals to other community providers, interviews and medicals. But despite these amazing efforts, it is estimated that for every one child ECCAC helps, there are two children out there who are not helped.

That's why ECCAC likes to partner with people and organizations in our communities to help. Combining efforts can help further reach and resources.

For example, ECCAC and Gracie's Good Deeds developed an alliance. For the past few years, Gracie's Good Deeds has donated wipes, cleaning supplies, clothes, snacks, drinks, Pack 'n Plays, therapy graduation decorations, gift cards, toiletry items and diapers to ECCAC in honor of their daughter. Unfortunately, Niceville residents David and Courtney Konradt lost their almost 3-year old daughter unexpectedly in her sleep five years ago. In memory of their daugh-



ter, the Konradts established Gracie's Good Deeds and are helping others through random

acts of kindness with donations made to a number of charities in Northwest Florida.

"It's our family's way of honoring Gracie's memory and spirit," says Courtney Konradt. "We also would like to inspire and help those around us. We personally know how much a kind word or gesture can help a person through the toughest

of times, and we would like to share that feeling with others."

How can you help? Volunteer, donate, attend an ECCAC event, spread the word, or tour either of their Centers. For more information, visit www.eccac.org. If you suspect abuse, report it by calling the anonymous Florida Abuse Hotline at 1-800-96-ABUSE.

Vaccination Age Group Expands to 60+ Years

In accordance with Executive Order 21-62 issued on March 8, 2021, the Florida Department of Health in Okaloosa County and its partners can now vaccinate the following groups of individuals:

- Persons 60 years of age and older with a birthdate of March 1961 or earlier (expanded age group)
- Persons 16 and older deemed extremely vulnerable to covid-19 by a physician with the either the DOH covid-19 determination of eligibility form or form with equivalent information (expanded vaccinators authorized in new executive order allowing improved access to appointment times for this group)
- Health care workers with direct patient contact, including long-term care, home health and hospice workers (For the definition of what classifies as a health care worker with direct patient contact, visit our COVID-19 vaccine page.)
- K-12 school employees 50 and older
- Sworn law enforcement officers 50 and older
- Firefighters 50 and older

For more information or to make an appointment, visit okaloosa.floridahealth.gov.

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There are a handful of homes left to be built in Phases 1/1A. Phase 2 roads are under construction and will include 150 homesites. The community center and pool to be built in Phase 2 will be shared with Phases 1/1A.

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Happenings Around the Bay

MARCH

- 23** | Business After Hours
5pm | Bluewater Bay Boats and Yachts | Niceville
- 27** | 2nd Annual EOD Warrior Foundation Poker Run
8am | American Legion Post 221 | Niceville
- Drive-Thru Egg Dash
9am | Softball Complex on Campbell Drive | Niceville
- Spring Illuminotes - Calligraphy - with Elia Saxer
Artful Things | Niceville

FARMER'S MARKETS

- Niceville Community - Saturdays
March 20, 27 & April 3, 10, 17, 24
9am | Palm Plaza | Niceville
- Hammock Bay - 1st & 3rd Sundays
April 4 & 18
8am | Victory Blvd | Freeport

APRIL

- 02** | Sip N' Stroll
5pm | J. Leon Gallery + Studio | Destin
- Spearman Brewers
6pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville
- Dance Facets
7:30pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville
- 03** | Women's Climbing Circle
9am | Rock Out Climbing Gym | Destin
- Open Air Art Day - Family Fun
12pm | Artful Things | Niceville
- Dance Facets
7:30pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville
- 07** | Storytime in the Park
10:30am | Niceville Children's Park | Niceville
- 10** | Hunger Run 5k 10k and Kids Fun Run in Bluewater Bay
7:30am | Bluewater Fitness | Niceville
- Emerald Coast Autism Center ONE Run 5K
1pm | Northwest Florida State College | Niceville
- Northwest Florida Symphony Orchestra: Just Another Variation
7:30pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville
- 11** | Spring Fundraiser Art Bus Event
11am | Horse Power Pavilion | Freeport
- 13** | FPRA Image Award Ceremony
5pm | Beachworx | Destin
- 14** | Second Wednesday Breakfast
7:30am | Niceville Community Center | Niceville



- 14** | Storytime in the Park
10:30am | Niceville Children's Park | Niceville
- 15** | Encaustic Wax Cards
Artful Things | Niceville
- 21** | Storytime in the Park
10:30am | Niceville Children's Park | Niceville
- 22** | Concerts in the Village: The Music of Queen
7pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation | Destin



- 23** | Date Night Pour with Debi Profeta
Artful Things | Niceville
- 24** | Swipe and Shoe String Pour with Debi Profeta
Artful Things | Niceville
- Tutu Trot 5K Run/Walk
9am | Peabody Baby - 16735 US-331 | Freeport
- 28** | Storytime in the Park
10:30am | Niceville Children's Park | Niceville
- 29** | Concerts in the Village: The Duchess
Artful Things | Niceville



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 Community

What's in Store for Spring Break 2021?

From the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office



BY SHERIFF ERIC ADEN

Spring break 2020 was anything but normal, as the covid-19 pandemic sparked a ban on short-term rentals and limits on bars and restaurants.

This year's spring break runs from March 6th through April 25th, and although Okaloosa County doesn't market itself as a college spring break destination, it's typically a hot spot for

students from southern colleges and universities.

So, what does spring break 2021 have in store? Covid could again make things interesting.

"We're hearing that some colleges are cancelling spring break, but then what we're hearing from the students, because they're doing on-line classes, they're going to come anyway during that time," said Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office (OCSO) Lt. Jason Fulghum.

The OCSO is staffing spring break at the same levels as it traditionally does, with extra beach patrols on tap as well as a boost in the number of deputies on the roads. In addition, many area hotels and condos hire off-duty deputies for added spring break security at their properties.

Of course, Okaloosa County's marketing focuses on families with kids, but the OCSO is ready for whatever comes its way.

"The vast majority of our



visitors come and have a wonderful time, then leave with great memories, and that's what we want for everyone," said Sheriff Eric Aden. "However, there will be consequences for that small percentage who don't act responsibly, endangering themselves or others."

Locals typically also know what to expect. Patience is always recommended.

"Most of our locals have

been here long enough they know what spring break is like. And we'll be out there doing our best to keep the peace and doing our best to keep everybody safe because ultimately that's our biggest concern, is making sure people enjoy their spring break but they do it lawfully and safely."

Lt. Fulghum says college students need to be smart in how they conduct themselves so they

can have a good time without crossing the line.

For those who don't, the OCSO has a zero-tolerance policy, especially when it comes to underage possession of alcohol.

As far as covid-19 precautions, deputies will continue to wear masks and follow all CDC (Centers for Disease Control) protocols when interacting with the public.







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Dotty Blacker Contributes \$40,000 to Support NWFSC's Aviation Center of Excellence

A champion for Northwest Florida State College, Dotty Blacker's first gift nearly 21 years ago was a \$100,000 "challenge" to encourage raising funds to build a visual arts center. Since that time, Dotty has provided nearly \$800,000 in support for various programs at the College. From visual arts, to science development, to first responder training, circling back to the performing arts, Dotty's generosity is evident, and visible in many cases, throughout NWFSC's Niceville campus.

The impetus for her most recent gift of \$40,000 to the Aviation Center of Excellence, located in Crestview, stems back to a passion she had in early adulthood. Having completed two-and-a-half years of college in Enid, Oklahoma, she excelled as a legal secretary but was tired of working hard to pay expenses on a seventy-five cent hourly wage. She discovered that American Airlines was hiring stewardess applicants and sought out an in-

terview. She was hired at 20 years-old on the spot, just barely meeting the height requirement of 5'2".

Stationed in Tulsa, she flew in DC-6s and DC-7s (pre-jet) round trip to New York and Los Angeles. There were usually 50 passengers on board who enjoyed big seats, plenty of legroom and ample space for luggage. Two stewardesses served free cocktails and full meals, complete with a pack of cigarettes.

During her downtime, she spent as much time as possible observing the inner workings of the cockpit.

Her husband enlisted in the Air Force his final year of medical school and that, as she puts it, was the start of their great and unusual adventures. They both joined the Lackland AFB Aero Club and signed up



for flying lessons. Dotty passed the written and flying FAA exams on her first try, earning her ticket (license) in record time. When the Aero Club celebrated its first female pilot, a San Antonio news affiliate sent a photographer to film her taking her husband for a ride. She and her husband enjoyed many more hours of flying together.

The Aviation Center of Excellence will serve as an incubator for aerospace and high-tech industry careers, where students have the opportunity to earn degrees in Professional Pilot Technology and Unmanned Vehicle Systems Operations (drones) along with industry-recognized credentials in Aviation Airframe and Powerplant Mechanics.



Dotty's generous gift of \$40,000 to the Aviation Center of Excellence is a way of celebrating her treasured memories and impacting the aerospace industry at the same time.

lence is a public-private venture providing industrial lab space, hangars and classrooms to meet area training needs. Collaboratively with the Hsu Educational Foundation, the College is committed to inspiring and preparing a strong pipeline of students to seek and take advantage of these high-demand aviation training opportunities that lead to promising careers, a strong source of local workforce talent and a bright economic future for the region.

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 Community

Feeding the Gulf Coast Continues Serving Free Meals for Children 18 and Younger

Feeding the Gulf Coast is partnering with local community organizations to offer free meals to children, ages 18 and younger, through a nutrition program supported by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

“We know that parents do not always have the resources to provide healthy meals for

their kids,” said Eugenie Sellier, Child Nutrition Programs Director at Feeding the Gulf Coast. “We are partnering with sites locally to provide meals for kids on a daily basis. Our goal is to ensure that all children have access to nutritious food.”

Over 55,880 children are food-insecure in our panhandle service area. The far-reaching

impacts of COVID-19 have created an increased struggle for families who are trying to balance a new normal while children deal with the complexities of school, some virtually, others in person or a mixture of the two.

COVID-19 presented a crisis of increased demand, declines in donations of food, and dis-

ruptions to the charitable food assistance system’s operating model, creating an economic crisis unlike anything since the Great Depression. We continue to see elevated need now, and for some, the recovery will take years. 1 In 5 of our neighbors here along the Gulf Coast may struggle with hunger this year, which includes 1 in 3 children.

The food bank’s child nutrition programs have a significant impact on children and families across the Central Gulf Coast. Last year, Feeding the Gulf Coast served over 1,330,500 meals and snacks to over 17,000 children across the Central Gulf Coast at area churches, schools, parks and community centers. Additionally, Feeding the Gulf Coast was able to address the increased need by distributing over 31.6 million meals in 2020. The food bank continues to work hard to address food insecurity in our community.

“We know that the hardships faced by many in the area have



only grown as COVID-19 continues to present problems in 2021,” says Michael Ledger, President & CEO of Feeding the Gulf Coast. “The food bank is thankful for our many pantry partners and Child Nutrition site partners who have linked arms with us as we work to meet the needs of communities. We are truly grateful for many volunteers and supporters who have helped us remain dedicated to our mission.”

The “Find Help” feature available at www.feedingthegulfcoast.org is the best source of information for families and individuals seeking assistance. Individuals can also call (888) 704-FOOD. Parents can also text ‘FOOD’ to 877-877 for child meal sites near them.

“Savor the Sound”

Mattie Kelly Arts Center, May 1, 2021, 2 – 6 p.m.

Introducing “Savor The Sound” a family friendly Saturday afternoon event at the Niceville NWFSC outdoor amphitheater supporting the Taylor Haugen Foundation. For this first annual fundraiser, they will be showcasing several home-grown, well known musicians headlining with the Allman Brothers tribute band, A Brothers Revival, featuring former



Allman Brothers Band bassist David Goldflies. The venue will also host local food trucks, local breweries and exciting raffle items. Tickets: \$10 per person,

\$30 for a family (up to 5 family members).

Visit taylorhaugen.org for sponsor opportunities and mpv.tickets.com to purchase tickets.

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Meet our Hometown Hero: **Laurie Hood**

BY MARY CHRIS MURRAY

Her belief that “every abused, neglected and homeless animal deserves a second chance” is what makes Laurie Hood, Freeport resident and founder and president of Alaqua Animal Refuge, a Hometown Hero.

A true visionary and passionate animal lover since childhood, Laurie founded Alaqua in Freeport, the Southeast’s premier, no-kill animal refuge and sanctuary for both domestic and farm animals located in Northwest Florida, more than 14 years ago. “I discovered that untold numbers of animals, at a rate of nearly 100%, were being euthanized in a five-county area due to the lack of a no-kill shelter or adoption center of any kind in the region,” says Laurie.

Initially providing shelter to only 38 animals, Alaqua has since placed tens of thousands of animals into loving homes and environments and helped countless others through partnerships and community outreach.

With Laurie at the helm, Alaqua is currently undertaking a bold endeavor to build a one-of-kind facility and sanctuary on 100 acres of land. The new Alaqua home will be the first of its kind in the U.S., with an expanded footprint to continue to do the important work of animal rescue and rehab, as well as be an educational and training center for animal welfare advocates as a place that will inspire, empower and educate others to make change in our society.

And Alaqua’s new home isn’t just for animals. It will also be a place to help heal people through the powerful effects that interactions with animals have on the human spirit and body.



Alaqua’s mission is to provide protection, shelter and care to animals in need; a full-service adoption center; and numerous educational outreach and community programs including Equine Interactions, an equine assisted therapy program for children and individuals with special needs, and for veterans and military service members who may be battling a variety of physical or emotional issues, such as PTSD.

A recognized leader in animal care, protection and advocacy, Laurie has authored a curriculum to assist law enforcement across the State of Florida for investigating and prosecuting animal abuse cases. And she has starred in “Animal PD,” a television series on Nat Geo WILD showcasing stories of Alaqua’s

animal rescue efforts in conjunction with law enforcement.

In addition, she serves on many non-profit boards and community organizations including State Director for Florida for Animal Wellness Action; Founding Board Member of The E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center and Nokuse Education, Inc.; District Leader for Northwest Florida for The Humane Society of the U.S.; and Board of Directors for the Florida Wildlife Federation. She has served as the Vice Chair for the Committee to Protect Greyhounds in Florida and the Advisory Board for The Restore Act for Walton County.

Laurie has received numerous awards, including “Daily Point of Light Award” from President George H. W. Bush; the Pinnacle Award from 850 Magazine for her communi-

ty service and leadership; and Communicator of the Year for Non-Profit from the Florida Public Relations Association, Northwest Florida Coast Chapter. Laurie is currently featured in the “Female Disrupters” series in Authority Magazine and Thrive Global. Under her leadership, Alaqua has also been recognized as “one of the best overall organizations in the U.S.” by The Humane Society of the U. S., and as a “prime example of what a sanctuary should be” from the Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries.

Laurie says, “I’ve made a lifelong commitment to improve animals’ lives as we continue to journey into bold, uncharted territory in an effort to educate others about the importance of animals in our lives and their overall welfare.”

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Are Electric Vehicles in Your Investing Future?



BY MAURICE STOUSE, FINANCIAL ADVISOR AND BRANCH MANAGER

So much is being written and said about electric vehicles. The new administration, investors, environmentalists, car enthusiasts and just about anyone has heard about them of has an opinion on them. What then is the current and future state of electric vehicles from cars to buses, to tractor trailers and even school buses? And what will be the impact on the various forms of energy consumption?

Electric vehicles (EVs) are not new. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, the first electric cars were introduced well over 100 years ago. Early

on the likes of Thomas Edison and Henry Ford collaborated on ideas for electric cars as far back as 1914. Ironically, it was Henry Ford's mass production of gasoline powered vehicles that lead to the decline of EVs at the time. Gas powered vehicles proved to be less costly to produce, less costly to run and were more powerful and would go greater distances than EVs. The Energy Department went on to say that the early attraction of EVs was due to their being quieter, cleaner—however they were best suited for short distances. They were also two and half times more costly. It was not until Americans became more mobile that the demand for gas powered vehicles took on added growth. What then are the considerations for investors?

First, break down the components of EVs: There are electric passenger cars, light duty vehicles, and growing development of public transportation buses, school buses and freight vehicles like 18 wheelers. Investors see opportunities in the design, manufacture of all of these through the various companies in America and abroad.



There is growing interest in public transportation buses and school buses, since they travel shorter distances on a given day and require less recharging of their batteries. This would also include the suppliers to these firms which include engines, batteries and drive trains. Interested investors can invest directly through these companies in the form of common stock or through several funds (mainly exchange traded funds).

Raymond James recently released its annual report on electric vehicle adoption. It includes a review of the EV industry as well as the potential impact it will have on the fossil fuel industry. That impact remains to be seen and, as of this writing energy stocks have rallied significantly from their 2020 lows. Reasons for this have been pointed out: 1) the economy is seen emerging from the effects of the pandemic, 2) inflation and the history of outperformance that energy stocks have typically enjoyed in times of price inflation 3) energy companies are investing at a rapid pace in to green or renewable energy.

The growth of EVs is going to have an impact on world oil consumption according to the Raymond James report. Today, electric vehicles sales make up 1% in the USA but are substantially higher in China (7%) and Europe (3%). In fact, the USA is a distant third to China and Europe in EV sales EVs on the roads. How significant might that impact be? According to Raymond James, it is having an impact today of approximately

.6% of the world's daily oil demand, expressed in millions of barrels per day (BPD).

The world currently consumes about 100 million BPD which is up from about 90 million BPD ten years ago. Expressed in numbers, about 576,000 barrels per day less are being used by autos since those are electric. By 2025 that is expected to have an impact of 1.95 million BPD or about 2% of today's consumption. Where might this be in 2030? The EV leaders profess that it will be substantial. It really depends upon the growth of the EV market. Market share of sales ended 2020 at 6.9% of vehicle sales in December and 4% for the year worldwide. That is a year over year increase of 41%. It also depends upon recharging infrastructure and battery life as well.

What are considerations for investors who have an interest in investing in EVs? First, do your research or work with an advisor to learn about and discover potential opportunities. When analyzing and looking at investment, consider both value and growth. A value investor might look at legacy bus or semi manufacturers and determine if they hold value because of potential users within their current markets. Also, what about batteries? There are a host of equities and ETFs that offer opportunities. As always this involves risk and a personal analysis of the amount of risk and the amount of money you might want to risk.

Maurice Stouse is a Financial Advisor and the branch manager

of The First Wealth Management and Raymond James and resides in Grayton Beach. He has been in financial services for over 33 years. His main office is located at First Florida Bank, a division of the First, A National Banking Association, 2000 98 Palms Blvd, Destin, FL 32541, with branch offices in Niceville, Mary Esther, Miramar Beach, Freeport and Panama City, Pensacola, Tallahassee and Moultrie, GA. Phone 850.654.8124. Raymond James advisors do not offer tax advice. Please see your tax professionals. Email: Maurice.stouse@raymondjames.com. Securities offered through Raymond James Financial Services, Inc. Member FINRA/SIPC, and are not insured by bank insurance, the FDIC or any other government agency, are not deposits or obligations of the bank, are not guaranteed by the bank, and are subject to risks, including the possible loss of principal. Investment Advisory Services are offered through Raymond James Financial Services Advisors, Inc. The First Wealth Management First Florida Bank, and The First, A National Banking Association are not registered broker/dealers and are independent of Raymond James Financial Services. Views expressed are the current opinion of the author, not necessarily those of RJFS or Raymond James, and are subject to change without notice. Information provided is general in nature and is not a complete statement of all information necessary for making an investment decision and is not a recommendation or a solicitation to buy or sell any security. Past performance is not indicative of future results.

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Your Roof Age and Insurance Challenges!



By VICTORIA OSTROSKY

“This can’t be right!” Mark exclaimed. “Please tell me this is a joke.”

“I wish I had better news for you,” replied Anne. “The insurance market has gone through some significant changes over the past 12 months.”

“But I don’t understand. This house isn’t that old and it’s in great condition. Why would the premium be this high? Isn’t there another carrier you can try?”

Anne sighed. She had been doing that a lot lately. She didn’t like giving unpleasant news to her customers. Finding the best rates and coverages was her thing.

“Maybe I can shed light on why rates have gone up so much,” Anne said.

Anne put on her instructor hat and shared with Mark the factors driving premiums up and what he could do about it. People all across the country dream of living in Florida, the Sunshine State. But as those who actually live here know, hurricanes are a bit of a pain. Hurricanes Irma and Michael in particular, then Sally last year, caused severe and catastrophic damage to large swaths of the state, which translated to many millions paid out in claims.

Whenever large disasters occur, carriers compile new data and make decisions on changes to underwriting guidelines going forward so they can remain solvent and profitable. The reinsurance companies do the same. Even the estimated \$50 billion in storm damage across Texas will impact insurance rates in our state.

One thing carriers discovered was that roofs, shingle, tile, and metal, didn’t hold up as well as was calculated and anticipated. Based on the new data, almost every carrier revised their un-

derwriting guidelines regarding roof age. Shingle roofs older than 10 years, and tile roofs and metal roofs older than 15 years are now ineligible for coverage on new business for the majority of admitted carriers.

Wind mitigation inspection report findings can often help offset some of the hikes by getting credits for recognized characteristics when they’re available. For homes built in March 2002 and later, admitted carriers automatically apply several credits, but for older homes, or homes with newer roofs, a wind mitigation inspection report can often make a premium more affordable.

Wind mits (as they’re referred to in the industry), look at six separate items regarding your roof.

- Roof covering and age with roof permit for verification
- Roof deck attachment – how close is the nail spacing and length of nails
- Roof to wall attachment – hurricane clips, toenails, straps or bolts
- Roof geometry – is the shape hip, gable, flat or combination
- Secondary water resistance – yes or no to barrier installed before the roof material
- Hurricane opening protection – does it have shutters, impact glass or coverings and if so, what kind

Ideally, you would have all six credits. That would mean your roof is 2002 or newer (FBC credit), the closest nail spacing/length of nails, hurricane clips, hip roof style, secondary water resistance, and hurricane opening protection.

The house Mark had gotten a quote for was built in 1999 and still had the original tile roof. The inspector sent Anne a copy of the wind mit, and once she was able to apply two credits, the premium dropped down considerably, although it was still high compared to what it would have been a year ago.

Realtors’ offices ask Anne to speak to their agents on occasion about the insurance industry, so she took notes for her upcoming talk to mention these same scenarios. She hoped to encourage her Realtor friends to educate their sellers and buyers so that the selling and buying process would go more smoothly. Mak-



ing a new roof part of a purchase agreement negotiation could help seal the deal from an insurance standpoint.

If your home’s roof is older and you’re thinking of selling, you may want to get some estimates for roof replacement. If you’re a buyer, keep in mind that

the roof age will be a large factor in calculating your insurance premium.

Insurance Zone, founded by Joe and Lea Capers, is a full service commercial and personal lines insurance agency serving Destin, Miramar Beach, Niceville, Valparaiso, Free-

port, Santa Rosa Beach (30A) and Inlet Beach. Visit their Video Library on www.ins-zone.com and watch several informative videos, including Annual Insurance Review, or call 850.424.6979. Victoria Ostrosky, author of this article, is a Personal Lines and Life Agent/CSR with IZ.

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Why Should I Go Solar?

BY ERIN BAKKER

Q: What are the financial benefits of solar energy?

A: When you install a solar energy system on your property, you save money on your electricity bills and protect yourself against rising electricity rates in the future. How much you can save depends on the utility rates and solar policies in your area.

Q: What are the environmental benefits of solar energy?

A: Solar power, like other renewable energy resources, has many environmental and health benefits. Going solar reduces greenhouse gas emissions, which contribute to climate change, and also results in fewer air pollutants like sulfur dioxide and particulate matter, which can cause health problems.

Q: What is net metering?

A: Net metering is the system that utilities use to credit solar energy system owners for the electricity produced by their solar panels. With net metering, you only pay for the electricity that you use beyond what your solar panels can generate.

Q: How does solar im-

pact my property values?

A: Studies have shown that homes with solar energy systems sell for more than homes without them. However, your property value will only increase if you own, rather than lease, your solar panel system. In most parts of the country, going solar will actually increase your property value more than a kitchen renovation. (Zillow Tool)

Q: What solar energy rebates and incentives are available?

A: Solar rebates and incentives vary depending on where you live. The most significant is the 22 percent federal investment tax credit (ITC), which allows you to deduct 22 percent of the cost of your solar energy system from your taxes.

Solar Panels and My Home

Q: How do solar panels work?

A: Solar panels absorb the sun's energy throughout the day and convert it into direct current (DC) electricity. Most homes run on alternating current (AC) electricity, so the DC electricity is then passed through an inverter



to convert it to usable AC electricity. At that point, you either use the electricity in your house or send it back to the electric grid.

Q: Do my solar panels produce power when the sun isn't shining?

A: The amount of power your solar energy system can generate is dependent on sunlight. As a result, your solar panels will produce slightly less energy when the weather is cloudy, and no energy at night.

Q: Can I go off grid with solar panels?

A: When you install solar panels on your property, you will still be connected to the grid. This allows you to draw from the grid when your system is not producing all of the power that you need, and send power back to the grid when you produce more than you use. It is possible to go off the grid with a solar en-

ergy system that includes battery storage, but it will cost significantly more and is unnecessary for the majority of homeowners.

Q: Will I still receive an electric bill if I have solar panels?

A: Unless your solar energy system includes battery storage and you are fully off the grid, you will still receive a bill from your utility. However, you can dramatically reduce your bill, or even cut the amount you owe to \$0, with a solar panel system that matches your energy use.

Q: Do solar panels work in a blackout?

A: If your solar panel system is connected to the grid, it will shut off in the event of a blackout. This is to prevent emergency responders and electricity utility repair-people from being injured by your panels sending power back to the grid. However, there are certain inverters

you can buy that provide back-up power in a blackout when paired with a battery.

Q: Can I afford to go solar?

A: If you can afford to pay your electricity bill you can afford to go solar. Our Solar Experts can go over a customized proposal that will show you expected savings from going solar.

Q: Is my roof suitable for solar panels?

A: Southerly-facing roofs with little to no shade and enough space to fit a solar panel system are ideal for installing solar.

Q: What size solar system should I get?

A: That will depend on how much electricity you use on a monthly basis, as well as the amount of optimized roof space you have to install panels.

Q: Do I need to replace my roof before installing solar?

A: It is highly advised that the roof and solar installation occur at the same time. The Deco Tech system is integrated with your roof, meaning that the shingles and the solar panels install directly to the deck of your roof. These two systems working together provide both aesthetic and functional benefits to the homeowner.

Q: How long will my solar power system last?

A: Solar panels have no moving parts and are very durable. They are designed to withstand snow, wind and hail. Your system will continue to generate electricity for 25 years or longer and is guaranteed when installed by a GAF certified contractor.

Q: Do I need to install solar batteries with my solar power system?

A: Solar power systems that include solar batteries can be very expensive. Luckily, batteries are not necessary for most solar homeowners. As long as you are connected to the grid, your system does not need a battery: excess power goes back into the grid, and you can draw from the grid if you need more electricity than your panels can generate.

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Air Force's First F-15EX Arrives at Eglin!

BY ILKA COLE & SAMUEL KING JR., EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE PUBLIC AFFAIRS

The F-15EX, the Air Force's newest fighter, touched down at Eglin Air Force Base March 11.

The aircraft will be the first Air Force aircraft to be tested and fielded from beginning to end, through combined developmental and operational tests.

"It's a special day for the base and our mission," said Brig. Gen. Scott Cain, 96th Test Wing commander. "We're very proud to be part of the next evolution of this historic aircraft. I look forward to seeing this unique test collaboration prepare the F-15EX for the warfighter."

The aircraft bears its unit insignia EX1 marked with "ET"



U.S. AIR FORCE PHOTO BY ILKA COLE

from the 96th TW's, 40th Flight Test Squadron. The EX2, arriving in April, will display the "OT" tail flash to represent the 53rd Wing's 85th Test and Evaluation Squadron.

To support the combined test

effort, both test-squadron commanders ferried in the EX-1 together.

"Choosing to have the two commanders ferry the jet down was a concerted effort to reinforce the cooperation between

DT and OT organizations and integration efforts," said Lt. Col. Jacob Lindaman, 85th TES commander.

The aim of integrated testing is to ensure the EX is delivered to the warfighter as soon as possible, while ensuring the aircraft meets test objectives. This combination of Eglin AFB's testers allows the teams to identify any system issues early on, so they can be addressed before the F-15EX's increased production and delivery to the squadrons.

The Operational Flight Program Combined Test Force, or OFP CTF, at Eglin AFB will manage test planning and oversee all the groundwork for the EX's test program.

"Combining these test capa-

bilities on day one of flight test helps ensure F-15EX is ready to execute on air tasking order day one. We're confident that along with our OFP CTF partners running test management, we will provide that capability faster to the warfighter than ever before," said Lt. Col. Richard Turner, 40th FLTS commander, who flew the new EX to Eglin AFB.

While the new fighter can be operated by a single pilot, it is a two-seat aircraft with an increased payload capacity, electronic flight controls, advanced cockpit and mission systems and software capabilities.

Before testing and evaluation begins, aircrews will familiarize themselves with the aircraft through local airspace flights.

The Great Insurance Equalizer



BY MATTHEW VANDERFORD, CLAIMOLOGY

There's a lot going on in the world of insurance these days. And I mean a lot. Over the last few years, Florida has been hit several times with severe hurricanes. And Floridians have been boots on the ground rebuilding their lives; living out brotherly and sister love; extending good will towards neighbors long forgot and strangers even longer so.

As a licensed Insurance public adjuster, I see first-hand, day after day, the insurance process of how claims are settled. I witness the stress of business owners trying to make repairs to keep their livelihoods afloat. I deal with the stress of parents who come home to houses torn apart due to broken dishwashers or faulty toilets, left either washing dishes in the tub or using one bathroom to accommodate six people. I LOVE what I do.

I LOVE to help people. As a



public adjuster I feel like I really get to help and contribute to the welfare of the community. I get to be a part of helping people obtain the monies they need to rebuild their homes, their businesses, their lives, their dreams. Another part of what I love is learning about what goes on in the insurance world and how to use that information to help other Floridians when they need it most.

Most people aren't aware of the great advantages they have here in Florida. Other states aren't like this. For example, if you have to hire an attorney in another state, they can take 40% or more of the recovery. Not here in Florida. If you win a case here, then the insurance companies are required to pay the bills! That's called leveling the playing field—the Great Equalizer. I wanted to take the time to make sure this information gets out there. This is just one piece of information that people need to be made aware of. If you would like more information on this and other ways

our staff at Claimology can help you with your insurance claims, appraisal and umpire services, or estimating, please contact us at 850.684.4794, visit insuranceadjusterschoolhouse.com, or email claims@insuranceadjusterschoolhouse.com. We're here for you and to help keep Florida Amazing!

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For over a decade, Matthew Vanderford has worked in the Construction, Restoration and Insurance Industries as an Insurance Company Preferred Vendor, Insurance Industry Continuing Education Instructor, Public Adjuster/ Policy Holder Advocate and Licensed Contractor. He's proud to call Destin his home, with his wife Candice and four children: Matthew, Blake, Jordan and Scarlett.

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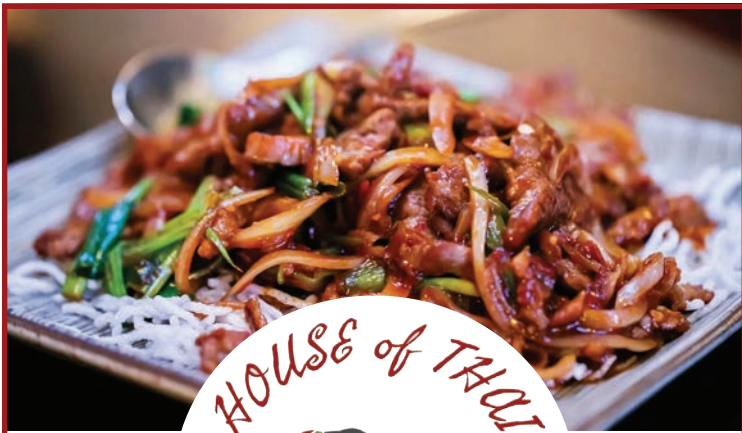
Jim Rainwater offers full-time property management services as well. If you are a homeowner with a rental property, Jim can assist you in finding tenants, qualifying tenants and lease preparation.

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handed down from generations of Thai family chefs date back 400 years. Ingredients from local farmers markets are used to ensure freshness. The menu has just the right amount of offerings, and food is fresh and seasoned to your preference, served in just the right portion sizes to share with another or to enjoy at home later. It's also allergy friendly with no added MSG and non-dairy. Garlic lovers will love the Garlic Pork on the Specials menu. And there's fun, tasty features such as Ginger Shrimp Glass Noodles (Goong Ob Won Sen), Pineapple Fried Rice or Stir-Fried Glass Noodles (Pad Woon Sen) all \$15.95. Perfect for a special meal with variety! House of Thai is also available for private events: weddings, business lunches, dinners, cocktail receptions and more.

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with, of course, oysters and a delicious varied menu with dinner specials such as Blackened Mahi and grilled shrimp with hollandaise, served over cheese grits! Join L.J. Schooners for Sunday Brunch, 9 a.m. – 1 p.m. and drink your bottomless Mimosas for \$10! Adults \$13.95; Children 7-12 \$4.50; Children under age 6 free. Call to order take-out and pick-up in the L.J. Schooners Oyster Bar or call when you arrive for curbside pick-up. And don't forget, now through Oct. 28, 2021, it's the Thursday Throwdown Fun Paddle Board Race series! Bring your own or rent for \$10. All ages welcome. Every Thursday at 6 p.m. Call 850.699.0045 for more information.

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Off the Hook: Spring Fishing



BY CALI HLAVAC,
TO DO IN DESTIN

Spring has officially arrived and so has Spring fishing season! While many fish bite year-round in our lucky fishing village, three of the most prominent this time of year are Triggerfish, Sheepshead and Bull Redfish.

March 1st kicked off Triggerfish season, which many offshore anglers were excited for. In our area, Triggerfish are normally found nearshore and offshore, hanging around artificial reefs and natural bottoms, in depths between 50 to 300 feet. They share the same habitat as Red Snapper and Gag Grouper. So, catching a Triggerfish is usually a sign that additional species are below as well.

Triggerfish are pretty aggressive feeders; a positive if you've set out to catch them specifically, but a con if you were trying to reach the Red Snapper or Grouper they hang around with. Shrimp and any sort of cut bait will do the trick as they typically chase anything they perceive as being food, and a small hook is necessary due to the size of their mouth.

Next up are Sheepshead, which some fisherman refer to as convict fish for their striped pattern. They've also been referred to as 'the fish with the human teeth' as if you've ever opened the mouth of a Sheepshead, they look like they stole a pair of sailor's dentures. They move nearshore during late winter/early Spring to spawn, and you can find them near structure like bridges, wrecks or rocks.

The other fish we like to chase in the Spring are the bull Redfish. Sight fishing these monsters is what most anglers prefer as you can find them schooled up nearshore on our beaches or inshore in our Bay, looking for food. Bull Reds can range from 25-40 lbs. and will put up a fight once you get them hooked.



Redfish are a beautiful fish, known for the spots on their tails. Their scales color with their surroundings, ranging from white to golden brown here on our coast. While schooled up, they're known to eat just about anything you put in front of them. Once hooked, they will run, and



run, and then run some more, in the other direction. Let them run and tire out, before starting

the pull back to your boat. Too much pressure could cause your line to break. So, remember: patience is key.

It's a heart racing, adrenaline pumping experience to feel a Bull Redfish on the end of your line, and one that is easy to get addicted to. If you've never caught one, Destin is the perfect place to start. A flat day on the water and the right gear will get you all hooked up and there is no better time than Spring.

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 Off the Hook

Gone Coastal: How to Start Your Fishing Adventure

By JASMIN GRAHAM AND MELISSA CROUCH

Fishing is an enjoyable pastime, especially here in our area. In fact, there are approximately 4 million saltwater and freshwater anglers in the state of Florida.

I love saltwater fishing for several reasons:

- 1) You get to be outside enjoying nature.
- 2) Crisp sea breezes and the smell of sea salt.
- 3) Every catch is a surprise, with so many fish in the ocean, you never really know what you are going to get.
- 4) The opportunity to unplug; fishing is an activity where you can often just relax.
- 5) I love to eat fish and there is something particularly satisfying about catching your own dinner.

Have I persuaded you to try your hand at fishing? If so, I'd

like to help you get started on your fishing journey with this quick guide for new anglers.

Step 1: Obtain a Fishing License

In Florida, you need a saltwater fishing license if you are over 16 unless you are a Florida resident age 65 and older or are otherwise exempt. You can purchase your license online at GoOutdoorsFlorida.com, through the Fish|Hunt FL mobile app (which conveniently stores your licenses for you) or by phone at 888-FISH-FLORIDA (888-347-4356). Licenses can also be purchased in person at your local tax collector's office or a license agent such as a tackle store. If you are a Florida resident and plan on only fishing from the shore, you can get a one-year shoreline fishing license at no cost. And don't forget about our saltwater fish-



gear by watching our how-to videos on our YouTube channel at [YouTube.com/FWCSaltwaterFishing](https://www.youtube.com/FWCSaltwaterFishing) and checking out our How to Fish page at MyFWC.com/Marine by clicking on "How to Saltwater Fish."

Lastly, you'll want to think about what kind of bait you'll use, which will vary based on which species you want to target. Shrimp and small fish are good live bait to start out with. Now that you've got what gear you need, it's time to pick a fishing spot.

Step 3: Decide Where to Fish

Where you fish can have a big impact on what you catch. Of course, it's impossible to know where the fish are at all times and fish aren't always hanging out in the same places but there are some ways you can make informed decisions about where to fish. FWC's Boating and Angling Guide maps are a great resource to learn about fishing locations. These guides are available without cost at many marinas, tackle shops, boating supply stores and other marine businesses; or by visiting ocean.floridamarine.org/boating_guides.

If you plan on fishing from shore, try fishing places with structure. Maybe there are a few piers where fish seem to be biting more than others, try checking out those. If you plan on fishing from a boat, you can find boat launches and learn where artificial reefs have been deployed on our website, MyFWC.com. You can also check with local tackle shops for tips on the best places to fish. For

ing license add-ons; if you are fishing for snook, spiny lobster, several reef fish species, sharks from shore or using traps to catch blue crab or stone crab, you'll need to have these add-ons on your license.

By purchasing a fishing license, you also are supporting the Sport Fish Restoration Program, which funds fishing outreach and education, boat ramp construction and maintenance, artificial reef construction, fisheries research, stock enhancement, and fisheries habitat management. Any fishing gear and boat fuel you purchase will also support this program, so your investment in your hobby will come back around to make fishing even more accessible. Learn more at MyFWC.com/SFR.

Now the question is, what gear do you need?

Step 2: Become Familiar with Your Gear

There are a few must haves for fishing gear. First and fore-

most, you are going to need a fishing rod and reel. There are many options to choose from but, for beginners, I recommend a spin-cast rod and reel or a spinning rod and reel. The spin-cast reel offers a push-button control to release the line, which makes casting a breeze. For a spinning reel, instead of pushing a button to control the release of fishing line, you must manually manipulate the bail, which is a piece on the reel that guides the line back onto a spool. Choose the rod and reel you think will work best for you.

Next, you'll need fishing line, non-stainless-steel circle hooks (which are more likely to hook the fish in the corner of the mouth) and a dehooking tool. If you want to fish the bottom, you might also want to pick up some small weights and, if you want to fish the surface or middle of the water column, you may want to pick up some floats or bobbers.

Learn how to rig up your

Continued on next page

6th Annual SOCK BURNING
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GONE COASTAL

continued from previous page

more on fishing locations, visit our Where to Saltwater Fish page at MyFWC.com/Marine. For safety's sake, remember to tell someone where you are headed before you leave.

Once you have your spot, it is very important to understand the rules and regulations before you go fishing.

Step 4: Understand the Rules and Regulations

Fishing regulations are available in paper booklets and can

also be found online at MyFWC.com/Marine by clicking on "Recreational Regulations." You can also find them in the Fish Rules app that can be downloaded onto your smart device. Read through the regulations before you go. Do you understand the terms (bag limit, size limit, closed season, etc.)? Do you understand how to measure your fish? Do you feel comfortable identifying common fish you might encounter? (Fishing Lines field guide, also found on our website, is a great resource for this.) What fish may you harvest and at what size?

How many of each fish may you harvest? These are important things to understand before you go fishing.

Step 5: Go Fishing


Finally, the time has come! You have your license, you have your gear, you've read the rules and you've arrived at your fishing spot. Now it's time to cast out and catch yourself a fishing memory. One of the most exciting things about fishing is feeling that sudden tug on your line as a fish grabs your bait. Reel it in and reel it in fast. Safely remove hooks using a dehooking

tool, wet your hands before handling fish and support the fish horizontally. Don't handle the fish too long and safely release any fish you aren't keeping. Remember, to be a conservation minded angler don't leave trash behind and be sure to recycle your monofilament line in an appropriate receptacle.

I hope you grow to love saltwater fishing as much as I do. It's relaxing and it's a great way to enjoy the outdoors. FWC also offers saltwater angler recognition programs through Catch a Florida Memory. Learn more at CatchaFloridaMemory.com or

like and follow Catch a Florida Memory on Facebook. There are nine Saltwater Grand Slams that reward you with prizes for catching various fish in a 24-hour period, Saltwater Reel Big Fish rewards you for catching fish exceeding a certain length, and there are 70 fish you can try adding to your Saltwater Fish Life List. These are fun programs for both kids and adults to participate in. So, dive into these fishing resources, get out there and let's go fishing!





SUP Board Races

Thursday Throw Downs through Oct. 28!

LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant & Oyster Bar & Bluewater Bay Marina began its Thursday Night Throw Downs on Thursday, March 12. These races continue until October 28, every Thursday evening! This is a fun Stand-Up Paddle Board race with a unique race format.

All Stand-Up Paddlers are welcome, all ages and all levels of expertise. Points are awarded throughout the season and overall winner will be recognized on October 28 at an awards ceremony. For more information visit bluewaterbaymarina.com or call 850-897-2821.



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All Sports Association Award Winners

“One thing I’ve always learned is that I’m gonna get up!” — Herschel Walker

By M. SHAYE SMITH

On Saturday, February 20th, athletes, fans and supporters of the All Sports Association gathered at the Mattie Kelly Arts Center located at Northwest Florida State College for the 52nd annual awards ceremony featuring the athlete award recipients, a live auction which brought in \$64,700 for the Association, and keynote speaker, Herschel Walker. Athletes in various categories were recognized for their hard work and dedication - not only on the field, but also in other areas.

Closing the ceremony, attend-

ees got the opportunity to hear from former professional and collegiate football player, bobsledder, and mixed martial artist, Herschel Walker. He entertained the attendees with stories of his experiences, and didn't shy away from what it took to get him where he wanted to go in life and reach the achievements he did. A few attendees even managed to snag a few selfies with him as he mingled and greeted attendees seated close to him.

“I remember my mama told me, ‘Man can’t stop what God’s got in store for you,’” Herschel



said as he encouraged the athletes and attendees to push into



Scott Miller, Herschel Walker, M. Shaye Smith.

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their faith and hard work to achieve the goals they set out for.

Six of the eight athlete award recipients were in attendance and were honored with trophies and recognition during the ceremony. “The All Sports Association does so much in our area for youth sports and supporting our community, and it’s a huge honor to be recognized because there are so many amazing female scholar athletes in our area,” said Fort Walton Beach High School Student, Colby Orcutt, who received the Female Scholastic Award and shared that she has her sights set on Michigan State University following high school where she has received a rowing scholarship.

2020 All Sports Association Award Recipients:

Teton Saltes: Wuerffel Trophy Winner, University of New Mexico

Drew Frederic: Male Collegiate Winner, Troy University

Amber Leggett: Female Collegiate Winner, Sam Houston State University

Joe Brunson: Male Scholastic Winner, Baker High School

Caroline (Colby) Orcutt: Female Scholastic Winner, Fort Walton Beach High School

Tinsely Abbott: Taylor Haugen Award Winner, Walton High School

Brandon Lockridge: Professional Award Winner, Charleston Riverdogs

Regan Rountree: Special Olympics Award Winner, pickleball

Kennedy Hansen: Amateur Award Winner, Water Skier

ASA has donated roughly \$1.1 million to local youth sports over the last seven years, and “it will be at 1.3 million by the end of this year,” says Don Collins, ASA president. “\$145,000 was given Saturday evening!”

Congrats to all of the award winners and thank you to the All Sports Association for everything it does for our communities. To view the photo album of photos from the event and award recipients, visit [facebook.com/MyDestinLife](#).

Considerations for Those Already Using Hormones



BY DR. RICHARD CHERN, M.D.

Women often ask us to optimize their creams or sublingual hormones another physician put them on. Men ask us to get their testosterone shots dosed correctly. Unfortunately, it's not possible to get consistent therapeutic levels of hormones using these methods. Secondly, most research indicates these methods are the most dangerous and raise your risk of strokes, heart attacks, blood clots and possibly even your cancer risk. Lastly, they provide little to no health benefits.

When we discuss hormone

pellet therapy a few concerns usually arise. What if the dose is wrong? BioTE has dosed well over a million patients and we are the oldest and largest hormone clinic in the region. Secondly, we don't dabble in hormones, this is our specialty. We do hormones and do them well. Because this is our area of expertise we keep up with the latest research. We have knowledge of the latest studies many times before they are even published.

Because of our extensive knowledge and experience we are able to use your labs, symptoms, and many other factors to find a dosage that is personalized to you. We look at your levels both before and after treatment and adjust as necessary based on which symptoms have resolved and which remain.

There are two goals when optimizing hormones. The first goal is to resolve symptoms caused by low hormone levels due to natural aging. The second goal is to reduce cancer risk, pro-

mote heart health, increase bone density, reduce pain, protect the brain and overall just decrease disease and increase health. I think many patients do not consider this second goal because I will hear, well I don't have hot flashes.

So, what's so bad about creams, sublinguals and shots?

First, creams & sublinguals last about four to six hours. And as for shots you may get two or three days of feeling good before things deteriorate. That's like

slamming on the breaks each time you get your car to highway speeds or stopping your exercise routine right after the warm up. Pellets have consistent therapeutic levels for as long as six months. That means your body can actually use these hormones to really start repairing your mind and body.

Research shows any oral estrogen increases inflammatory markers, increases risk of stroke and clots. Creams are unable to get high enough levels in the blood-

stream to even get into the uterus to help protect you from cancer. And synthetic testosterone shots are well known to increase clotting factors and increase risk for stroke and heart attacks.

Dr. Richard Chern, MD and his providers typically spend 30 to 60 minutes with new patients educating them on the benefits of hormone therapy and reviewing each lab to make patients feel 100% comfortable. They are accepting new patients. Change your life and call 850-837-1271 for an appointment and turn your life around.

A Better Mammography Experience

Twin Cities Hospital has announced the addition of a new option for 3D mammography designed to elevate the patient experience through a platform built to increase comfort and deliver superior accuracy of screenings. Senographe Pristina from GE Healthcare features adaptable paddles and added cushioning to create a more customized, relaxing experience for women undergoing this important routine screening.

"Twin Cities Hospital invested in this new system because we are committed to improving the health and wellbeing of our community, as well as the overall patient experience. Studies have shown one of the primary reasons women feel anxious or even skip their screening mammogram is the uncomfortable experience," stated Dave Whalen, CEO of Twin Cities Hospital. "But if women skip their screening mammogram, they could literally be putting their lives at risk. Investing in this new platform was a priority for us to ensure we could address this concern and we're glad to bring this option to the Niceville area."

A common issue with screening mammograms is that poor positioning can increase the risk of image problems, which often requires a repeat scan and can also reduce the sensitivity of the mammogram, possibly leading to missed cancers. The new platform at Twin Cities Hospital was engineered to allow women to lean comfortably on the armrests to relax their muscles which simplifies positioning, compression, and improving image quality. The design also improves the technician's workflow, which improves patient positioning that could lead to faster, more precise exams.

To schedule an exam at our Women's Health & Imaging Center, please call our scheduling office at (888) 894-2115.



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 Wellness

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with healthy alternatives. Whether you are cooking, drinking or eating these plant-based options on cereal or in smoothies or puddings, you have choices.

Listed below are some alternatives that are easily found in the grocery store. They are in order from my most favorite to lesser favorites, taking into consideration taste, tolerability and calcium/protein content. Brands differ, but values are based on popular brands of each example.

Almond milk has two grams of protein and provides 30% of the recommended amount of calcium in an adult's diet (about the same as 1% milk). Yogurt, powders, creamers and canned evaporated or condensed versions are also available.

Coconut milk has 0 grams of protein and provides 10% of the recommended amount of calcium in an adult's diet.

Rice milk has 1 gram of protein and provides 30% of the recommended amount of calcium in an adult's diet.

Hazelnut milk has 1 gram of protein and provides 0% of the recommended amount of



calcium in an adult's diet.

Oat milk has 1 gram of protein and provides 0% of the recommended amount of calcium in an adult's diet.

Macadamia milk has 1 gram of protein and provides 45% of the recommended amount of calcium in an adult's diet (50% more than milk).

Cashew milk has 1 gram of protein and provides 4% of the recommended amount of calcium in an adult's diet.

Hemp milk has 2 grams of

protein and provides 30% of the recommended amount of calcium in an adult's diet.

Soy milk has 7 grams of protein and provides 30% of the recommended amount of calcium in an adult's diet. It is last on the list because I don't recommend soy for children and some adults since soy contains compounds that are easily converted to estrogen in the body.

Look for unsweetened milks so that you can add your own healthy sweeteners if you like

and organic, non-GMO options. Many are flavored with vanilla. You can even find many brands of a combination of almond and coconut milk. Use milk alternatives for guilt-free ingredients in creamy soups and sauces. Most options are stored in the pantry for up to a year. Once they are opened, they must be refrigerated and thrown out after 7 – 10 days. Chill before serving and shake well.

Hot Tip: Many individuals who phase out dairy from their diet find that they no longer have muscle and joint aches.

Stay well.

Marty Kernion, Ph.D. is not a medical doctor. She has a doctorate in naturopathy. Naturopathy uses natural, gentle ways to bring our bodies back into balance so that they have the God-given ability to heal themselves. She is a retired professor of herbal medicine and nutrition and has written 39 college level courses in natural approaches to health. She has published two books on natural health. She can be reached on askdoctormarty@cox.net for scheduling a class or consultation, or for sending in your questions for this column.

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Springtime



BY SEAN DIETRICH

Major League Baseball spring training started today. I sat on my porch, listening to a radio. And I was cheering. I mean genuinely cheering.

The Atlanta Braves play the Tampa Bay Rays. The national anthem was played. The umpire used his time-ravaged voice to shout, “Play ball!” I couldn’t help but get excited because it’s been a long year. Too long.

I closed my eyes and visualized the players trotting onto the grass of LECOM Park, greeted by their fans. I could almost see the Dads drinking beer, kids eating nachos, and teenagers taking selfies.

In the theater of my mind the game played beautifully. I could even visualize the occasional kid leaning over the bal-

cony to catch a foul ball—which is one of the great moments of boyhood.

I almost caught a foul-tip once in Fulton County Stadium as a boy. I’ll never forget it. The ball came soaring into the stands and I knew this was my moment. Time slowed down. The eyes of 52,000 were upon me. I stood beneath the ball. I waved everyone else away.

“I got it!” I shouted. “Gimme room! I got it!”

This was going to be the biggest day of my life. I extended my Mickey Mantle model glove into the air—a mitt my father bought from a yard sale for \$1. The ball came down, down, down... “Hey!” I thought, “I’m actually going to catch it!”

But it was not to be.

The ball bounced off the webbing of my glove and landed in the lap of a kid behind me. I heard the lucky bum scream with delight. “I caught it!”

I saw the kid leap. I heard people cheer. The crowd hoisted the kid onto their shoulders for a spontaneous ticker tape parade and the mayor gave him the key to the city.

I still have nightmares about that kid.

Baseball’s spell over me is something I can’t explain. After all, baseball is not real life. The

game doesn’t have anything to do with my mortgage, my work, or my family. And yet I treat baseball like it ranks somewhere just beneath national security.

Why do I care so much about the statistics of clean-up hitters whose performances have no bearing on my immediate future unless, of course, it’s a pennant race?

The answer is: I don’t know. Believe me, if I knew how to free myself from loving this game, I would. Lord knows the game brings nothing but misery and heartburn to those who love it.

There is no pain like watching your team lose to the Cardinals 13-1 in the National League Championship. It feels like a funeral, but with cheaper beer.

I ought to be more concerned about important things during a trying era like ours. Instead I spend time and money keeping up with multimillion-dollar team franchises. Yes! Baseball costs actual money to follow!

It’s not cheap to be a fan these days. Used to, in olden times all you needed was a radio and a cooler. But today to watch a game you need a digital subscription, a smart TV, 12,981 account usernames and passwords, a streaming service, two major credit cards, liquid

fast internet, three forms of legal identification, the blood of a wild boar, etc.

Even so, I don’t care. The game is still being played. And in the midst of a pandemic that has destroyed normal life for everyone, the game inflames me with joy.

Baseball is a link to our heritage. People have been playing baseball on U.S. soil since colonist farmers in knee breeches still spoke with British accents. Early Americans used sacks of wheat for bases and iron skillet lids for home plate. In all likelihood, George Washington probably had a batting average.

My best baseball memory, however, happened last year.

Every afternoon last summer, during the throes of a pandemic, four or five neighbor children would play ball in our dirt road, pausing every inning to allow oncoming cars to pass. They used old pillows for bases and a cooler lid for home plate.

Most often the kids would have a meager audience consisting of middle-aged parents and neighbors who all cradled koozies. We in the crowd would shout phrases like, “Good hustle!” and we’d slow-clap between each batter to prove that we were male.

Sometimes the kids even allowed a few of us neighborhood guys to play with them. Doctors say the cartilage of my knee will never grow back.

Anyway, one night someone hit a foul ball and someone’s



4-year-old brother was nearby shouting, “I got it!” The little white dot sailed above the child who held his hands out and positioned himself beneath the ball.

The baseball came straight down and plunked the boy on the face. The kid fell lifeless to the ground. He was limp. A crowd of panicked adults rushed around him, whereupon the kid leapt to his feet, teeth missing, blood leaking from his chin, smiling and shouting, “I CAUGHT IT, MOM!”

And I’ll never forget when the kid’s mother looked at me, expressionless, and said, “This is why women live longer than men.”

So, I realize there are more important things going on in the world right now. And I know there are bigger issues than baseball to worry about. But it’s been a grueling year filled with squabbling, screaming, rioting, grumbling, coughing, cussing, and crying.

Gosh, it feels nice to cheer for a change.

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A Pastor's Ponderings: Shared Dreams



BY RICK MOORE

My wife says she saw it in a dream. We had only been married a few months. It was the first, and one of the few times she has ever shared one of her dreams with me. She was in a pet shop the day before looking at several dogs, but could not decide which one was the right one. The next night she had a vivid dream of one of those puppies jumping into her arms and licking her face. That morning, she woke me up with great excitement in her voice. "It's him! It's him! I just had a dream about one of the puppies I saw in the pet store." She went back to the

pet shop and there he was...Alex the English Cocker Spaniel. Alex became part of our family.

Having grown up around some people who were a bit mystical, I am skeptical when hearing others talk about their visions. But my wife convinced me this was the dog she saw in her dream, and I had the privilege of sharing in that dream. Alex was the best dog anyone could ever have, except for when it thundered and he tore up our kitchen floor. Even our dreams that come true can come with challenges.

While some people will share in your dreams and celebrate them with you, other people may actually oppose your dreams. We can not control external challenges, but we can control the struggle within.

Every garden begins with a dream. Dorothy Day once said, "We plant seeds that will flower as results in our lives, so best to remove the weeds of anger, avarice, envy and doubt, that peace and abundance may manifest for all."

We dream of what our careers can become. We dream of what our family can be. We dream of achieving great things.



But is it possible to find just as much fulfillment by sharing in someone else's dreams? My mother used to have a recurring dream that she was a swimmer in the Olympics. The only problem is, my mom never learned to swim. Yet, mom taught all four

of her children how to swim. It isn't always healthy for parents to live vicariously through their children. But when mom would watch her children swim, she had a feeling that part of her dream had come true.

Years ago, my pastor started a program called Backpack 2 School. Each year we have the opportunity to bless children and families in our region to start the school year with a backpack, school supplies, a new pair of shoes, and a haircut. This was not my dream. It was my pastor's dream. But every time I participate by sponsoring a student, it feels great sharing in his dream.

My father-in-law loved sponsoring children at St. Jude Children's Hospital. You would think the children whose pictures were stuck by magnets on his refrigerator door were relatives. As his son-in-law, I certainly never had my picture on his refrigerator. It was the founder Danny Thomas who dreamed of creating a great medical facility like St. Judes. But my father-in-law shared in

that dream by sponsoring children.

There is another, very humbling way to share in someone's dream. That is by being a recipient of someone else's help. My son was born with a club foot and had already experienced several surgeries before going to Shriners Hospital for Children. Thinking back to all of the love and care shown to my son still brings tears to my eyes. Thanks to the countless people who gave selflessly, the doctors and the nurses, many prayers, and everyone who shared in the vision of Shriners, today my son can walk!

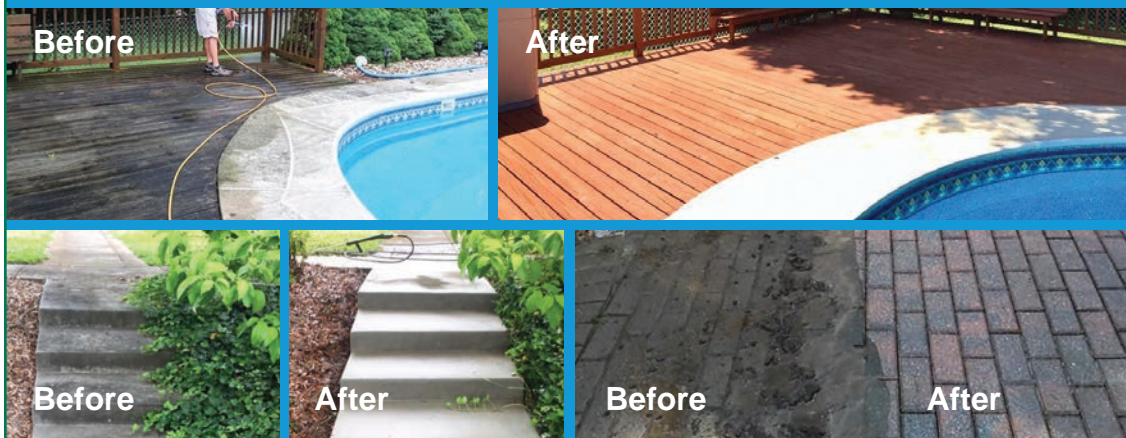
Growing older, I try to think less of my dreams in life and more on what can be done to help others fulfill their dreams. Just because we can't help everybody, doesn't mean we can't help somebody. What can you do today to help make someone else's dream come true?

Rick Moore is Communications Pastor at Destiny Worship Center.

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Pros and Cons of Working Remotely



BY RICKY HARPER, C12

Working from home, remote work, teleworkers or virtual teams; call it what you will, it is fast becoming the nature of today's workplace dynamics. But working from home is nothing new. I have been doing it since 1995 when the company I was working for at that time, GE Healthcare, closed all its satellite offices. Computers and the internet were getting sophisticated enough that GE saw an opportunity to save millions on facilities, and, thus, I started working from a small area I cobbled together in my garage.

Last year, the trend of remote workers shot through the roof due to Covid. And now that the country is beginning to open back up and the economy is rebounding, many business leaders are trying to decide if allowing their workers to stay at home permanently is a good idea, especially given that many of them did not see a drop in productivity.

So, what is a business owner to do?

There are many distinct advantages to a remote workforce. Cost is an obvious and not inconsequential one. Here is a list of why work from home makes sense...

- Reduces the need for space, whether rented or owned, space is expensive.
- Reduces utility costs and overhead.
- Less interruptions working remotely compared to the collaborative workplace.

- Flexibility in schedules.
- Increases work-life balance.
- Some people are more creative working remotely.
- Remote teams enjoy greater innovation.
- Less stress due to lack of office drama, commutes, etc.

In fact, research by a collaborative group including Harvard University, Gallup, Stanford University, and Global Workplace Analytics found the following five benefits of having a work from home workforce:

- Teleworkers were on average 35-40% more productive than their office counterparts.
- They had 40% less quality defects.
- They enjoyed 41% less absenteeism due to stronger engagement.
- Turnover went down 12%.
- Profits were up 21% due to less cost, on average, reported at \$11,000 per employee per year.

Given these advantages and this evidence, what is not to like about having a remote workforce? Well, the answer might be, plenty.

- Some workers simply need direct supervision, a lot of it.
- Working from home can dangerously feel like living at work.
- Remote workers can lose sight of the corporate vision and purpose.
- Research found that 65% of remote workers feel lonely and depressed and 78% become anxious about keeping their jobs when they do not get regular feedback.

- Decreased work-life balance.
- Remote workers are less likely to be promoted.
- Much more difficult for leaders to develop talent.
- Remote workers feel less appreciated, less engaged.

So, what is a leader to do? Based on the available evidence, and my own experience with working remotely, it seems the advantages outweigh the disadvantages.

But how do you make it work?

First, your management style and process might have to change. Leading a workforce that is partially or entirely remote will require intentional effort to stay connected with your employees. Talk to them, call them regularly, plan occasional meet ups over coffee or lunch.

And when you do talk to them, spend time with the 'person' before the 'employee.' Don't jump right into business, ask about them, their family and life. You are the steward of these human beings. Pay attention to their mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. Doing so is essential to prevent burnout and protect mental health.

Second, keep them engaged by giving them a sense of belonging. Working remote can disconnect your people from your purpose. So, be intentional at casting the mission, vision and purpose of the project and business.

Third, equip them with good technology and tools, and invest some time in training them how to look and act professionally in a virtual environment. There are many resources on this subject; use them. Mix up the use



of your technology, too. Do a Zoom or team call and then do an audio only conference call. This prevents the routine from becoming mundane. And studies have linked innovative ideas and insights to team members that can 'walk and talk' when on a call.

Finally, trust them. Some leaders fall prey to the notion that if they cannot see their employees, they cannot trust them. People who are treated as trustworthy usually act in a trustworthy manner. Your employees can sense when you do not trust them, which leads to your sensing their concern followed by a

downward spiral of mistrust between everyone. Prudent leaders ask themselves, "To what extent are my concerns rooted in an unhealthy lack of trust?" Do not let your natural tendency to mistrust others doom the remote workforce before it has a chance to prove its worth.

Working from home can and does work. But, its success is more on the shoulders of leadership than the workforce. What will you do to foster a great remote work environment for your team? For more information on C12 or for questions, email me: ricky.harper@c12group.com.

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 Arts & Music

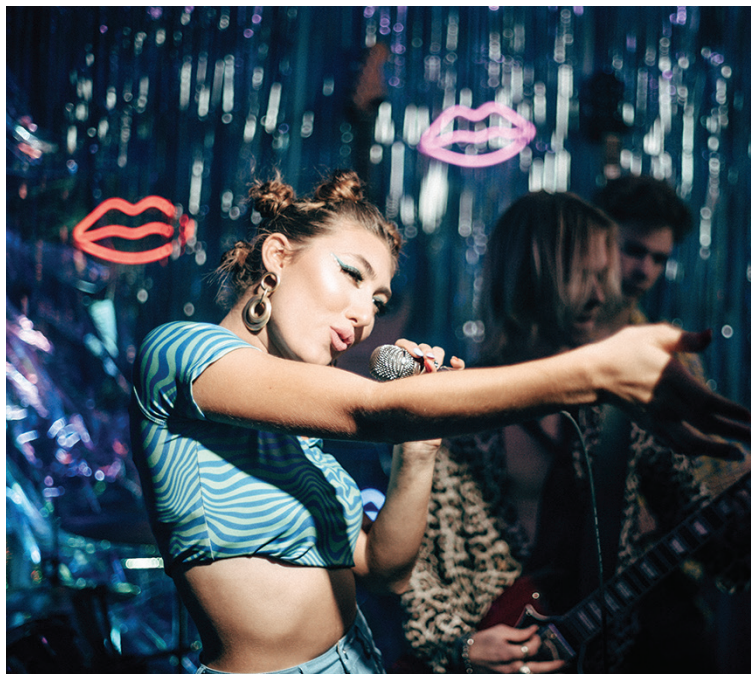
Skylar Capri:

Area Local Takes Her Talent and Tunes to Nashville and Well Beyond

BY WILL ESTELL

It's often said that our current members of Generation Z, colloquially known as "zoomers," tend to be more indecisive, less driven and lack the focus that generations preceding them exhibited. While I'm one to really steer away from the use of such broad generalizations, I do understand the perceptions leading to some of those conclusions. That said, I relish in the opportunity to help prove that stereotype wrong—in writing, when the opportunity avails to talk with an up-and-coming talent like Skylar Capri, who just happens to be an age 21 Gen Z'er herself.

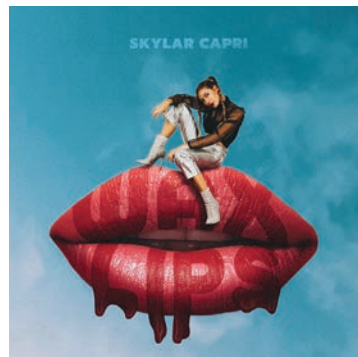
Though I'd previously seen her perform at one of our Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation concerts and in Destiny Worship Center's praise band, I wanted to know a little more about the person behind the voice and that incredible stage presence. I recently sat down with Skylar to talk about just what makes her tick and how she channels that creativity into so many facets of her work, from songwriting to performing to creating her recent music videos.



Skylar (who using her middle name, goes by the professional name of Skylar Capri) has been performing since she was just 13, when she formed her first band, RandomZ (there's that generational reference) with her brother and three other boys. Skylar went on to say that the band had no original music and no guitar player. It was at that moment she began to cultivate

her passion for songwriting and performing her own original music.

She taught herself guitar, and began writing daily, honing her skills, and developing an in-depth love, and understanding of the entire creative process surrounding the music, remember, at age 13. I'd say that's pretty decisive determination for someone who's supposedly



they definitively decided at that age they absolutely knew what they wanted to do, and took it upon themselves to go through the motions, taking the steps to make it happen. Skylar Capri did just that, and continues to.

When I asked Skylar where she wants to be and just what she expects to get out of this musical journey, she seems to have that pretty well laid out, too. Having made several trips to Nashville, and now writing and recording regularly in Music City, she is planning a full time move to Nash this summer, so that she can better collaborate with other creatives and further hone her craft as both a writer and performer. Though I'd say Skylar's music is best described as indie-pop meets creative rock (think lots of unique sounds and experimentation, from the guitars to keys and synthesizers), Nashville is such a hub for all things music, nowadays, that even though she doesn't consider herself country, or have a real desire to get into country, she will gain a lot by living and

in a generation lacking drive and direction. Having spent time interviewing and getting to know major artists from various generations and genres – from Jimmy Buffett and Darius Rucker to Kenny Chesney and Amy Grant, along with many others—I haven't met many performers who've told me

Continued on next page

Upcoming Art Classes at Artful Things Niceville

Upcoming workshops at the gallery:

3/18/21 & 3/19/21 Acrylic Pours with Marcy Breault

3/20/21 Writing Workshop and Book Signing with Eliza Scalia

3/27/21 "Scribe" Calligraphy- Black Letter/Gothic workshop with Elia Saxer

4/03/21 Open Air Art Day 12- 2PM Family Fun

4/15/21 Encaustic Wax Cards

4/23/21 Date Night Pour- with Debi Profeta

4/24/21 Swipe and Shoe String Pour with Debi Profeta



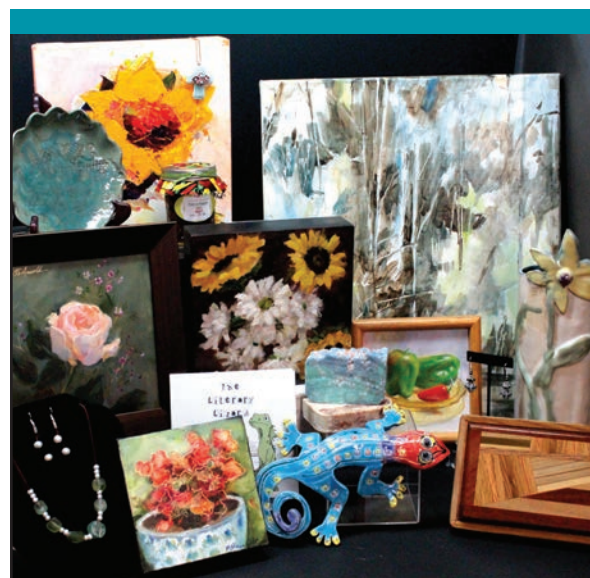
Ongoing Classes:

Tuesdays: 10 a.m. – noon or 1:30 – 3:30 p.m. Acrylics and Oils. \$20 per session plus supplies - Rosalyn O'Grady-gradytr@cox.net

Wednesdays: 3:30 – 4:30 pm. Drawing Basics and Anime. Sug-

gested ages, 10 - and up. \$10. MJ Montgomery - text 505-690-3945

Fridays: 10 a.m. - noon. Basic and Essentials in Oil Painting, \$25 per session plus supplies- Ed Nickerson- text 850-420-9609



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SKYLAR CAPRI

continued from previous page

breathing the booming creative scene that Nashville has become across all genres.

Beyond the music itself, when talking to Skylar one immediately gets a sense of who this young woman is and how her upbeat and vibrant attitude and outlook has, and will continue to propel her not only musically, but in all facets of life. During our interview, it became very evident that Skylar is passionate in building people and community through music. In fact, that desire has already enabled her to bring others along on her intriguing journey. One such example is her friend, Keno Manwell, who



she became friends with in high-school, and now does her music videos, co-creating alongside her vision, and providing his attention to detail filming and editing skills for Skylar's music video productions. There are others she talks about too, excitedly, in a way that you can just



feel how much pleasure she gets out of helping other people get where they want to be, while also getting there herself.

In August of 2020, Skylar released her debut single, "Sway," that has now amassed more than 250,000 streams on Spotify alone, and recently was

added to an internally created Spotify playlist with hundreds of thousands of subscribers. The video for the song is also moving toward 25,000 views on YouTube. Unfortunately, there's only so much room to talk about the music within the confines of my word limit given here, but

I could go on and on about how impressive Skylar Capri is as a person, a creative force and a performer. I encourage you to dive into her work yourself, especially watching the videos for "Sway," and her breakup anthem, "Wax Lips." Skylar went on to talk about her new work releasing this spring, including the singles "Road Trip" and "Right About Us." So, be on the look for both of those, too.

You can find out more about the talented Skylar Capri at SkylarCapri.com, as well as following her on Facebook and Instagram, and of course hitting up Spotify to help make them hits.



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and your partner can choose from a variety of paintings and will create a complementary set of masterpieces—together—from seasonally-inspired landscapes to decorative DIY wood board signs, funny self-portraits and more! Find a paint night theme that makes your heart skip a beat, then sign up.

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Your Girls' Night Out Awaits!

Right when you thought you were out of girls' night out ideas — you found the most creative one yet! Save the date for a BYOW (bring your own wine)* paint party that's a toast to your girl gang. Check out the April calendar and then request an event:

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Check out the Calendar online at paintingwithatwist.com/studio/fort-walton-beach/calendar.

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Pets

MKAF Presents 2021 Spring Concerts!

On Thursday, April 22, 2021, the Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation (MKAF) kicks-off the 2021 Spring Concerts in the Village series with a collaborative and creative event. Presented by MKAF and performed by Sinfonia Gulf Coast, the non-profit duo brings “The Music of Queen” with Conductor Brent Havens and Vocalist Brody Dolyniuk to the Dugas Stage. The concert serves as a celebration of the new partnership between MKAF and Sinfonia Gulf Coast.

“This year’s lineup has something for everyone and I can’t think of a better way to celebrate the arts than with great music and friends,” says MKAF CEO Demetrius Fuller. “Revenue generated from these events enables us to provide the highest quality of arts education and outreach to Okaloosa and Walton Counties.”

Gates open at 6 p.m. and concerts begin at 7 p.m. for this come-as-you-are family-friendly outdoor concert series. Bring a

lawn chair, picnic, and wine, or purchase food and beverages on-site prepared by featured restaurants and food trucks.

Admission for “The Music of Queen” is \$25 for adults; children (12 and under) and MKAF members are FREE. Purchase tickets online at Eventbrite. Admission for the remaining concerts is \$15 for adults; children (12 and under) and MKAF members are free.

Those interested in becoming an MKAF member can learn more at MKAF.org. Children 17 and under must be accompanied by a parent or guardian. All sales are final, sorry, no refunds. Pets, tables larger than two feet, and drones are not permitted.

A limited number of VIP tables (provides a reserved table and seating with admission for up to 8 guests) are available. Please contact MKAF at 850-650-2226 for details.

Benefits of Having a Service Dog

BY ELENA BEPLAY AND RESCUE 22 FOUNDATION

Service dogs can augment many different aspects of daily life for people struggling from a physical or mental disability. Here at the Rescue 22 Foundation, we provide task trained service dogs to veterans with service-connected injuries that have resulted in a diagnosis of PTS or other medical and mobility challenges free of charge. We also partner with the USF School of Public Health in order to continue research towards the efficacy of service dogs as a medical tool.

Before we dive into the story of one of our recipients, maybe you have thought about what services a dog can provide and why someone might need a service dog.

Service dogs can provide a variety of task trained jobs specific to help those with physical and emotional disabilities. Specifically, the dogs can be trained to perform tasks related to ambulatory problems, visual impairments and mental disabilities. Trained tasks could include: picking up objects for the owner, retrieving water or medications, turning on and off lights, calling a medical alert system, alerting family members, guiding the owner through daily obstacles, providing brace support for standing or sitting, providing wheelchair pulling, interrupting panic attacks or PTSD episodes, or providing consolation from chronic depression and emotional distress. Dogs can also be trained to provide different types of therapy such as deep pressure therapy and positional therapy. For centuries, man’s best friend has been up for the job!

In order to perform a service, the dog must be highly trained by a reputable trainer. The dog should meet specific criteria in the area of breed, age, health and behavior. The trainer should have significant experience training reputable service dogs, and knowledgeable in dog behavior. Choosing the perfect helpful companion is not an easy task, but we strive to make it a seamless process for the veteran.



She senses when he is having an episode and will rush to him providing tactile stimulation by jumping on him, licking or nudging. She wakes James up when he is having nightmares and provides a companion for his daily life. After receiving Zara, James was able to ditch his sleep medication and get back to a social life.

“Zara gives me a purpose again. I can leave the house, be social, and get back to a normal life. She goes everywhere with me.” James says.

Zara wears a service dog vest and collar that is prop-

erly marked with “service dog” patches and “do not pet” patches visible to the public. James is an information technologist specialist at a local hospital in St. Petersburg, Fla., and he takes Zara to work with him every day. She is trained to be neutral in public settings and pay attention to James’s needs. Outside of work, both James and Zara enjoy competing in numerous “GORUCK” events and kayaking. When asked about some of the difficulties of taking Zara everywhere James said, “I have flown on a plane with Zara three times with no issues from Airline staff about having a service dog. When we go to restaurants, I choose to respect others around me by sitting a good distance from other customers, but I have never had an issue taking her to restaurants.”

“I recommend getting a service dog; it really makes a difference in daily life and gives me purpose. Just make sure you are getting the dog for the right reasons and continue follow up training.” James’s story provides an opportunity to share insight into the daily life of living with PTSD and having a service dog. He is a testament to what our Foundation strives to provide and the strength of others experiencing similar situations. For more information, visit Rescue-22Foundation.org or email Byron.Beplay@gmail.com.

Zara is a Belgian Malinois task trained by Coastline K9 and customized to James. She responds to panic attacks and anxiety by disrupting his dis-

mkaf mattie kelly arts foundation 2021 Spring Concerts in the Village

	APR 22	Sinfonia Gulf Coast performing The Music of Queen with Conductor Brent Havens and Vocalist Brody Dolyniuk
	APR 29	Duchess
	MAY 6	Shania Twin Shania Twain Tribute
	MAY 13	M80s
	MAY 20	A Brother's Revival an Allman Brothers Tribute
	MAY 27	Deana Carter
	JUN 3	The Tams
	JUN 10	Kara Grainger
	JUN 17	Petty Hearts Tom Petty Tribute
	JUN 24	Air National Guard Band of the South

Bay Buzz

6th Annual Sock Burning - LJ Schooners



Bluewater Bay Marina invites you to join in ushering out winter and welcoming spring at its 6th Annual Sock Burning Party/Ceremony on Sunday, March 21 at 5:30 p.m. This is an annual event on the beach of LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant & Oyster Bar to celebrate the start of Spring. This coastal tradition, dating back to the early 1980s, started in Annapolis with Bob Turner burning his winter work socks. It is a great, fun way to get rid of the winter blahs, burn your socks and put on the flip-flops. The event features live music with Alyssa Sease. For more information, contact Bluewater Bay Marina at (850) 897-2821.

Big Brothers Big Sisters Needs Bigs



Big Brothers Big Sisters of Northwest Florida (BBBSNWFL) has launched its March MATCHness recruitment campaign, aiming to recruit 30 Bigs in 30 days to help fill their bracket and match new mentors with local youth. To play off the National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA)

March Madness basketball tournament, BBBSNWFL has created this fun campaign to recruit mentors for its life-changing mentoring programs. There are almost 100 children who are currently waiting for their Big Brother or Big Sister. Throughout the past year, children have been challenged in many ways, which is why BBBSNWFL needs mentors to provide consistency and stability for Northwest

Florida children. BBBSNWFL requires in-person contact with your Little 2-4 times a month and a weekly touchpoint via call, text, email, etc. Virtual contact is also acceptable. A Little can be easily incorporated into the Bigs' everyday life! Now is the time to be the game-changer in a child's life. Anyone interested in becoming a Big can visit the BBBSNWFL website at bbbsnwfl.org/get-involved, or call (850) 433-5437 for Escambia/Santa Rosa/Okaloosa/Walton Counties or (850) 763-5437 for Bay County.

Congratulations to Okaloosa County's Art in the Capitol Winner



Ruckel Middle School 7th-grade student Brodie Lacanilao is the school district's winner in the state's Art in the Capitol

competition. Lacanilao's winning entry, a portrait entitled ZHC, is now on display in the Florida Capitol. Gina Piccorosi is Lacanilao's art teacher at RMS. The Art in the Capitol Competition is a statewide visual arts competition for Florida students in grades 6 through 8. Each school district holds an annual art competition with artwork judged by a selection committee consisting of art teachers. The winning art from each district is displayed in the Capitol during the legislative session.

Congratulations to Okaloosa County's Teacher of the Year



Now in her ninth year of teaching and loving it just as much, Jessica Landry of Plew Elementary School has been named the Okaloosa County

School District's Teacher of the Year. Jessica along with the other finalists, Joy Robertson, Bluewater Elementary School, Megan Mueller, Fort Walton Beach High School, and the School Teachers of the Year, recently were honored and celebrated for their accomplishments in and out of the classroom.

Billy Bowlegs is On!



The 2021 Billy Bowlegs Pirate Festival and Torchlight Parade in downtown Fort Walton Beach will be held Friday, April 30, and Saturday, May 1, with the Torchlight Parade set for Monday, May 3. It's the 65th annual festival. In recent years, the pirate festival was held the first weekend in June. For more info, visit fwbchamber.org/events.

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