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Postal Customer Local

Embracing Unique Abilities: You Can Help Through the Westonwood Ranch Rodeo

By Lori Leath Smith

A lot of families with a young child with Autism are thinking, "What if something happens to me? I just want to know that my child is safe, and someone will love them just as much as I do."

More than five years ago, Lindy Wood had a dream – a dream of a program geared toward older youth and young adults with autism and special needs developmental differences. She wanted to be able to offer more for her son, Weston, diagnosed with Autism at age 2, and other teens and young adults affected by Autism. So, with a hope to create opportunities to develop and cultivate independent, life-changing skills, surrounded with love, Lindy and her husband, founders of Westonwood Ranch, purchased a 40-acre tract of land in Freeport to begin a farm and, eventually, birth a new local non-profit.

Westonwood Ranch is designed to fill in the service



gaps where other transitional programs fall short. "But it's also about advocacy for this population and breaking barriers," said Kelly Thompson, Westonwood Ranch Executive Director. "Due to the individual's diagnosis, society already puts labels and barriers to their abilities and Westonwood wants to break down those barriers."

In just a short time, Westonwood Ranch has grown into providing programs focused on teaching life and vocational skills for adolescents and young adults in our area with varying developmental

> **RODEO** continued on page 2

Former Trump Press Secretary Opens NWFSC Speaker Series

By Doug Stauffer

Kayleigh McEnany opened this year's President's Speaker Series at Mattie Kelly Arts Center. While introducing Kayleigh, President Devin Stephenson of Northwest Florida State College invited stated, "Northwest Florida State College is certainly honored to do our part in improving the quality of place in our community by enhancing our regional cultural activities." Last year's speakers were former federal prosecutor and congressman Trey Gowdy and financial journalist Charles Payne with Fox Business Network. February's speaker was Dr. Ben Carson.

My impression of McEnany is: authentic, personable, sacrificial, fearless, patriotic, conservative and Christian. Then I could add: working mom, brave and articulate, and, no, she is not the One that walked on water, but she often speaks of her personal relationship with the Creator. And she was born and raised in the Free State of Florida.

> PRESS SECRETARY continued on page 2





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COMPASS

The Community

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PRESS SECRETARY

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Who is Kayleigh McEnany? She was the former White House Press Secretary and the national spokesperson for the Republican National Committee (RNC). She now co-hosts Outnumbered on the Fox News Channel. Before joining the RNC, she worked as the lone conservative political commentator at CNN and as a producer for the Mike Huckabee Show. She has also authored several outstanding books.

As I read her book, I was overwhelmed to learn about the many sacrifices her family experienced for the American people. Some may recall that her tenure at the White House commenced during the earliest days of the COVID-19 lockdowns. The CDC guidelines curtailed (or discouraged) travel, forcing some difficult choices. It was also during the death of George Floyd. Unfortunately, some people used this tragedy to threaten Kayleigh and her family.

Kayleigh tells of balancing her concern for her family with her job's demands. She strove to be much more than a press secretary. Kayleigh wanted to be a voice for those who do not "qualify" for national attention and are often ignored and certainly overlooked. She strove for substance over sensationalism.



Her motto in the press secretary's office was "Offense!," intending to challenge the media, never allowing others to drive the narrative. She insisted on holding the press accountable.

When President Donald Trump called to ask if Kayleigh was interested in becoming press secretary, she was in the backseat of her car with her baby girl while her mother was behind the wheel. The phone rang with the White House switchboard on the line. "Would you take a call from the president?" A quick answer of "yes" followed an even faster prayer. The president asked if she would consider becoming the White House press secretary. Without hesitation, she responded, "Mr. President, that would be the honor of my lifetime."

She was understandably nervous about taking on this enormous task, especially in

the middle of a novel pathogen just entering the country. However, she also realized the honor it would be to communicate clearly to the American people. She began reading everything, calling everyone for advice, but her dad sent her the best advice. "Kayleigh, maybe you were made for such a time as this," a direct reference to the book of Esther. She knew God wanted her to hear this and believes He wants us all to understand that we are on this earth for a specific purpose and reason.

Her first day at work was April 13, 2020. It had been 400 days since a press secretary, Sarah Sanders Huckabee, had gone to the podium. Her first press briefing was less than three weeks later. On that day, she tweeted out Philippians 4:13 about being able to do all things which strengthen us through Christ. She had prepared herself academically. Still, the spiritual preparation gave her peace - listening to sermons on faith over fear, Christian music, and prayer.

As she sat in the press secretary's office wondering how the first day would go, the Chief of Staff's office called and told her to go to the Oval Office because the President was preparing to do a Coronavirus task force briefing. She was asked for input and then watched as the President used some of her feedback during the briefing.

That week, she fielded texts from Christians who said they were praying for her. One text was from Sarah Sanders Huckabee with advice: "Pray and let God carry you through the tough times and give you strength when you don't have the wisdom."

Sarah sent Kayleigh the day's devotional from when Sarah was press secretary - "You are on the path of my choosing. There is no randomness about your life ... As you give yourself more and more to a life of constant communion with me, you will find that you simply have no time to worry." Her assistant entered her office and got her parents on speaker phone to pray together. As she walked through the president's private dining room, the vice president motioned with praying hands that he would continue praying

eral social enterprises that not

only serve as hands-on, job skill

training and employment op-

portunities, but contribute back

terprises currently," said Kelly.

"There is a 3,500-sq.-ft. com-

"There are two social en-

Continued on next page

into the program.

for her.

Finally, she slipped into the private West Wing bathroom, got on her knees, and prayed yet again. She retells the story of going to the podium and everything changed. Her fears and worries vanished and turned to complete serenity. That divine intervention made her feel like she had been on that podium her whole life. She pointed out that the peace came from the millions of Christians who prayed for the administration. She mentioned being a personal testament to the fact that those prayers made a difference. Her speech contained so much more thought-provoking, uplifting, and inspirational material.

Her family almost moved to this area, but settled in the Tampa Bay area. She agrees with many of us that Northwest Florida has the best beaches and promises to vacation here during the offseason.



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RODEO continued from page 1

disorders differences. The farm offers a comprehensive, holistic learning program for fulltime students, ages 12 through adult, that focuses on providing

functional learning opportunities. Through hands-on ranch operations, students learn skills in aquaponic farming, animal husbandry, kitchen operations, creative art exploration and fitness classes. The overall goal is for these young individuals and adults with developmental differences to learn to transition into the next phase of their lives.

Part of Lindy's dream was for the farm to be self-sustaining with a revenue stream to help support the non-profit. Today, it IS a working farm with sev-



🌸 Community

RODEO

continued from page 2

In the fall of 2020, Westonwood received a grant from Impact 100 of Northwest Florida to start a job training program and launched Program LIFT-OFF in April 2021. It is a job skills training grant with an end goal of gainful paid employment at Westonwood Ranch. Program applicants must be age 18 or over with developmental differences and must want to obtain employment at program completion. "This is a 4-phase program with a focus on soft skill acquisition as well as social skills," she said. There are 15 in the program currently with three additional students joining in the spring. "We just hired the first four participants within our social enterprises who will receive their first paycheck at the end of the month. They've made it through the LIFTOFF phases and have shown progress through onboard training."

"Society is the one that puts limits on them," said Kelly. "We want to teach society that with the right resources and right training, they are capable of so much more and should have the



Ranch's two microbusinesses, the Aquaponics Farm and Brew Chews Dog Biscuit Company. Jake – Grower, Aquaponics; Shelby – Baker, Brew Chews; Trenton - Office Support, Aquaponics; and Blake - Office Support, Brew Chews.

same workforce opportunities as their neurotypical counterparts."

Westonwood Ranch is laying the groundwork to hopefully be a model to other companies and communities about how to hire individuals with developmental differences. "We want our local community and society as a whole to not look past these individuals just because they may be different. Our motto is "Embrace Unique Abilities" and we are here to challenge our community to do just that through our grass roots movement." Kelly noted some big businesses ARE starting to do these things and her hope is that it will trickle down into our communities.

How can you help? One way is to dust off your boots and participate as a sponsor or attend the 4th Annual Westonwood Ranch Professional Rodeo at the Freeport Sports Complex March 24-25 where some of the nation's top cowgirls and cowboys will be competing in bareback riding, calf roping, saddle bronc riding, steer wrestling, breakaway roping, barrel





racing, team roping and bull riding. Westonwood Ranch partners with the PCA and Bo Campbell Rodeo Productions, who help produce and source the entertainment and riders. "Last year was a record-breaking year," said Kelly. "We sold out both nights with more than 2,200 people coming out each night. And we were able to raise \$175,000, which is huge in contrast to the past couple of years." The rodeo is an important fund-raising event that supports Westonwood Ranch's

mission and programs.

This year's rodeo gates open at 6 p.m., with rodeo events starting at 7:30 each night and live pre-rodeo entertainment by David Gautreau, food by Mozey's Mobile Cuisine, children's inflatable play area and more! To become a sponsor, email Kelly@westonwood.org, call (850) 880-2220 or visit www.westonwood.org.

So, what's next for Westonwood Ranch? Kelly said they plan to embark on a capital campaign for the next phase of Westonwood - a residential community where individuals would live and work. "We plan for these 40-acres to be developed into a holistic, supportive residential community where individuals are loved and cared for as long as they are with us," she said. "We hope to continue to grow and be a resource to individual with developmental differences as they age into adulthood and a residential community is the next step to bridging the gap for these individuals.



The community



From left: Tim and Sue McCool, 3rd Planet owners; Karen Fredrickson, CALM treasurer; DeeDee Smith, CALM facilitator; Chelsa Dunaway, volunteer; Heather Julseth, 3rd Planet; LeAnn Shutt, Corina Zalace, Frankie, and Wanda Siefke, volunteers.

mittee (WCREC) will meet

Monday, Feb. 20, and March

20 at the Hammock Bay Club-

house, 1850 Great Hammock

Bend, Freeport. Registration

begins @5:30 p.m.; meeting 6-7

p.m. These meetings are open

to registered Republican voters

in Walton County. WCREC

meets monthly on the third

Monday of each month at the

The Youth Village, Inc.,

celebrated its newly remod-

eled playground recently with

a ribbon cutting. Named "The

Destin Charity Wine Auction

Foundation presents the Youth

Village Outdoor Experience,"

the playground's remodel was

due to a large donation from the

foundation. Opened in 1999,

the Youth Village is a non-profit

after school care program and

same location and time.

3rd Planet hosted a successful chili cook-off to benefit CALM. More than \$4,400 was donated toward providing transitional housing and life skills to moms and their kids in crisis. The Magnolia Group, 3rd Planet, Kevin Cook's bacon-wrapped deliciousness, generous donors, CALM volunteers (some pictured here), and patrons made this event a success.

Join the **Sand Dollar lacers at the Heritage Museum** for a beginner-friendly **Bobbin and Lace class,** Saturday, March 4, 1- 4 p.m. \$25 members; \$30 Non-Members. All supplies included. Five adult students max. Call (850) 678-2615 to register and pay.

The Walton County Republican Executive Com-

Bay Buzz

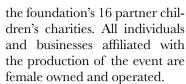
summer camp for preschool children, ages 3-5, and elementary and middle school children from kindergarten through eighth grade. Its goal is to provide a safe, nurturing environment with supportive mentors, teachers and other caring adults to help children, ages 3-16, acquire a love of learning and create a desire to achieve. Located in Fort Walton Beach, connect at (850) 582-0549 or visit www. ouryouthvillage.org.

Be Resilient Clinics, held by SOF Missions are planned

for March 9-13; April 13-17 and May 18-22. Details are available at sofmissions.org/clinic. The free sessions will include people who have served our country, helping them recover from the inward and outward scars of war.

Attending warriors receive the expert psychological, social, spiritual and physical help they need to overcome the challenges they face as a result of their experiences.

Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation's (DCWAF) 2nd Annual Galentine's Day Fundraiser raised a record-breaking \$92,500 for young women in need in Northwest Florida, \$30,000 more than last year's inaugural event. Hosted on Saturday, Feb. 4, by DCWAF trustee Candis Wilson and DCWAF board members Tiffany Edwards, Jeanne Dailey and Lane Redding, the event brought influential women in the community together to support one another while raising money for programs designed to empower young girls through



The funds raised at this year's Galentine's Day Fundraiser will benefit the following charity initiatives.

Boys & Girls Clubs of the Emerald Coast: A 10-week, small group program focused on health, fitness, prevention, education, and self-esteem enhancement through dynamic sessions, activities, field trips, and mentoring opportunities with adult women.

Children in Crisis: A Valentine's Banquet for the women and girls at the Children's Neighborhood for them to receive support through an award ceremony focusing on self-worth and affirmation.

Habitat for Humanity of Walton County: The Women Build Initiatives in Okaloosa and Walton counties will educate, advocate and promote awareness to more than 250 women and girls in our community. They will reach these women and girls through their Hard Hats and High Heels Luncheon, power tool training, construction educational classes and onsite construction skill training throughout the year.

Point Washington Medical Clinic: The Young Women's Health and Hygiene Initiative will provide pathology for PAP smears, additional testing needed for positive results, and feminine hygiene products for girls under the age of 18.

Shelter House of Northwest Florida: A program to address the unique health needs of girls ages 9 to 18 by providing feminine hygiene products and education.

Youth Village: Eight-week performing arts theater workshops during the summer, a Sprint Theatre performance and eightweek tennis lesson workshops for elementary and middle school-aged girls.

FP&L Donates \$5,000 to OCSD Summer Camp Programs

A donation by Florida Power & Light Company will enhance the summer camp experience for rising fifth graders to help spark interest in coding, construction, biomedical, automotive, welding, culinary, entrepreneurship, digital design and cosmetology. Visit www.okaloosaschools.com.

Democratic Women's Club March Events

In March the DWCWC celebrates Women's History Month, Tuesday, March 14, from 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. at Cantina Laredo at Grand Boulevard, Miramar Beach. For \$25 you can have a delicious meal and hear Women's Club member Deborah Rine speak about her family's involvement with Adlai Stevenson, an important figure in Democratic political history. Sign up at waltoncountydwc. org by March 7.

Democratic Women's Club of Walton County donors were able to erase more than \$1 million in medical debt for Walton, Washington and Holmes County residents through the RIP program. For more information on RIP, visit www.ripmedicaldebt.org.

If you have questions, please contact club president Sue Bowden at susanbowden4321@ yahoo.com. Questions? Contact club president Sue Bowden at susanbowden4321@yahoo. com.

New CARES Program Manager ECCAC

Debra "Debi" Riley-Broadnax has joined the Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center (ECCAC) as the non-profit's new CARES Program Manager. Debi will be responsible for creating, managing and sustaining the CARES (Community, Awareness, Resources, and Support) Program. She will also oversee the non-profit's successful Prevention and Safety Matters programs, already in the schools. Debi is a native of Fort Walton Beach and a product of the local public school system. She received her bachelor's degree from Troy University, and her master's degree in social work from the University of West Florida.

Visit www.eccac.org or call (850) 892-0280 for more information. If abuse is suspected, call the anonymous Florida Abuse Hotline at 1-800-96-ABUSE.

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The community

Bay Buzz Events

International Women's Day Celebration

The American Business Women Association - Emerald Coast Chapter presents the International Women's Day Emerald Coast Celebration Saturday, March 4, 10 a.m.--3 p.m., hosted by University of West Florida's Fort Walton Beach Campus. The theme for 2023 is Embracing Innovation and Technology. The event will feature guest speakers, handson activities, workshops and roundtable discussions. A limited number of vendor booths are available for non-profits, women entrepreneurs and corporate sponsors.

ECCAC Gala in the Garden and Golf Weekend

The Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center (EC-CAC) will hold its annual signature Gala in the Garden and Golf Weekend, presented by George and Janice Hendricks. The Gala features a cocktail hour starting at 5:30 p.m., with dinner at 6:30 p.m. Friday, March 10, at the Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa. Guests will enjoy live entertainment by The Will Thompson Band, live auction and a featured guest speaker.

The Golf Tournament, also to benefit ECCAC, will take place Sunday, March 12, at Kelly Plantation Golf Club with registration and a cookout meal 10:30-11:45 a.m. for a tour-



nament shotgun start at noon. Cost is \$400, which includes two tickets to the Gala. Gala tickets only are \$250 per couple.Make reservations online at eccac.org. Sponsorships are still available. Contact Lee Curtis at (850) 684-4422, or email Lee@eccac.org.

2nd Annual Soiree on the Bay

Enjoy a lavish gathering with fine wine, food and spirits at the 2nd Annual Soiree on the Bay, benefiting Children's Volunteer Health Network, Friday, March 10, 6- 9 p.m., and Saturday, March 11, 1:30-7 p.m. This weekend event is presented by the Dugas Family and will take place on their stunning family estate overlooking the Choctawhatchee Bay in Santa Rosa Beach. Guests will indulge in cuisine by Cafe Thirty-A, wine tastings featuring Thompson 31Fifty Wines and Etude Winery, as well as an assortment of beverages provided by Mighty

Swell. The evening will feature a live auction.

Proceeds will go toward CVHN mission to eliminate the barriers to accessible and affordable healthcare for children in need through mobile solutions to provide free restorative dental services to children in need across Okaloosa and Walton counties. Visit www. cvhnkids.org/soiree-on-the-bay for more information or to purchase tickets for the event. The Dugas Family Estate is located at 38 West Hodge Road, Santa Rosa Beach.

Peter Pan at Mattie Kelly Arts Center

The Mattie Kelly Arts Center hosts the Northwest Florida Ballet as they perform Peter Pan, March 11 and 12. Purchase tickets online at nfballet. org or by calling the box office at (850) 729-6000. Showtimes Saturday, March 11, 7:30 p.m., and Sunday, March 12, 2:30



p.m. The Mattie Kelly Fine & Performing Arts Center is located at 100 College Blvd. E., Niceville.

9th Annual Tea Fore Her Fundraiser

The ninth annual Tea Fore Her fundraiser presented by Emerald Coast Hospice is set for Sunday, March 5, noon-2 p.m. at The Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort and Spa. Guests are encouraged to dress up in their "tea party best" including their most fabulous hats to enjoy lunch and tea with great company while raising funds for those battling breast cancer on the Emerald Coast. This year's soiree will feature breast cancer survivor, Jessica Foster from WJHG-TV, as the emcee for the event.

Tickets are \$65 per person,

or \$60 for breast cancer survivors, and includes a plated lunch, live music, photo booth, complimentary glass of champagne, silent auction, and a prize for "Best Hat." Tickets can be purchased online at https:// www.foreher.org/ tea-fore-her

Sponsorship opportunities are still available. Please email ali@weilhousecreative.com or visit www.foreher. org/tea-fore-her for mation.

more information.

Spring Up for CALM 2023

The 7th annual spring fundraiser to benefit CALM is Saturday, April 15th from 5 to 8 p.m. at Christ our Redeemer Catholic Church in Niceville. Tickets are on sale for \$75 per person. The Spring Up for CALM event will feature music by The John Galt Band, food courtesy of local eateries and live and silent auctions. The ticket price reserves your seat and includes food and two beverage tickets. All funds raised benefit CALM, including CALM Village, the exciting new phase of affordable housing. Visit nicevillecalm.com for tickets, donations and more and the Facebook page at (1) CALM | Niceville FL | Facebook.

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COLLEGIATE HIGH SCHOOL

The Community

Every Day is a Chance to Change a Child's Future Mac & Cheese Fest is One Way to Do It

An increasing number of children are at home with no adult care or supervision. Yet, young people need to know that someone cares about them. Boys & Girls Clubs of the Emerald Coast (BGCEC) offer that and more. Club programs and services promote and enhance the development of boys and girls by instilling a sense of competence, usefulness, belonging and influence all in a safe place to learn, grow and have fun.

Our local BGCEC has taken members from the Clubhouse to the White House; from the game room to the corporate boardroom; from the high school football field to the NFL; from a band room to Carnegie Hall. And from the streets to guidance, friendship and a place to belong.

Boys & Girls Clubs Emerald Coast offers programs that are addressing today's most pressing youth issues. "Our programs teach young people the skills they need to succeed in life, while providing a safe place for hundreds of Northwest Florida children to go after school and during the summer," says C.E.O. Shervin Rassa.

Local area programs basically focus on three priorities: Academic Success where members are provided with tools to graduate from high school with a plan for their future; Good Character and Citizenship through a variety of programs such as Keystone Club, Torch Club, Youth of the Year, Youth for Unity and Netsmartz; and Healthy Lifestyles where members learn to adopt and maintain positive behaviors about life, nutrition and self.

In order to support all of its valuable programs, BGCEC hosts several events throughout the year: the widely popular Mac & Cheese Festival, the Epic Bakery Competition in

Defuniak Springs and Brunch-Fest in Pensacola.

The community adds to BGCEC produced foodie festivals by embracing the organization as a charity beneficiary for Shrimp & Grits Festival, Burgers, Bourbon & Beer Festival and Half Shells on the Harbor. The BGCEC is invested in



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these productions as a driven and organized volunteer force, partnering with event coordinators to bolster the ranks of triumphant events. To say the BGCEC is a hardworking nonprofit organization is an understatement.

Led by C.E.O. Shervin Rassa, the BGCEC is responsible for supporting local club members and a large and talented staff. "What better way to celebrate and support our club kids than a series of festivals focusing on family and foodie favorites?

Shervin has dedicated his career to youth development. He joined the Boys & Girls Club Movement roughly 22 years ago as an area director in Tampa, relocating to the Emerald Coast organization in 2012. He now oversees eight clubs throughout three counties, serving 3,200 children from Pensacola to De-Funiak Springs.

The 5th annual Mac & Cheese Festival takes place Sunday, March 5, 2023, from Noon to 3 p.m. at Destin Commons. The family-friendly event will feature gourmet, chef-inspired twists on the South's favorite comfort food. Local restaurants far and wide will bring their best macaroni masterpieces to compete for the best mac and cheese in town. There are three categories each local restaurant can win in total: Judge's Choice Award, People's Choice Award, and Kid's Choice Award. Attendees are invited to taste each delicious sample from the vendors and cast their vote – all the while supporting BGCEC.

To purchase tickets (VIP \$45; General Admission \$25; Children GA \$15), visit Eventbrite. To compete, volunteer or sponsor, contact hello@francesroy. com.

Attendees and sponsors will want to keep a lookout for the "ultimate" ways to enjoy, celebrate and engage, and the best way to stay informed is through the BGCEC Facebook page.

BGCEC was born in 1968 as the Boys Club of the Playground Area with 15 Members. When economic conditions threatened the organization in 1988, local businessmen recognized the club's value and potential and ensured it survived. More than 1,200 kids are registered during the school year, with usually more than 1,300 enjoying the BGCEC over the summer.

BGCEC is a registered IRS 501(c)3 charity and receives funding from contributions, special events, grants, and major donors such as Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation and United Way agencies in Escambia, Okaloosa and Walton Counties.



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Air Force Enlisted Village: A Haven for Heroes!

If you had told Yvette in 4th grade that the boy who surprised her with an oversized Valentine's Day card would one day be her husband, she would have laughed out loud. But sometimes life has a funny way of working out, and that's exactly what happened.

Yvette and Richard (or Butch, as he was known) first met in elementary school. They shared a brief but sweet friendship until Yvette's family moved away. It wasn't until a decade later that they ran into each other again, this time at a bowling alley. They hit it off immediately and started dating shortly afterward. The rest, as they say, is history.

The couple raised two daughters while jumping from base to base during their 22 years of service in the Air Force. Moving so frequently and changing schools so often was a hardship on the girls. But, Yvette always tried to stay positive through it all. "I always tried to make the best for us all wherever we would go," Yvette tells me. This kind of resiliency is typical of many military spouses, who often have to deal with unexpected changes and challenges.

It was four years ago that Yvette and Butch moved into Bob Hope Village. Butch had been ill for most of his time here and sadly passed away last spring. While Yvette misses her husband of 58 years dearly, she finds strength and support from her fellow residents and the Air Force Enlisted Village (AFEV) staff.

Even at 78 years old, she is still enjoying a whole host of activities – from Wii bowling to hula dancing at Air Force Enlisted Village "I walk around and



everything is just so beautiful. I can't tell you how grateful I am to be here. It was the best decision that Butch and I ever made!"

Alice joined the Air Force when she was just age 18 in 1951. She was one of the first women to receive orders to the air station in Iceland. On her second day there, Alice went to the club on base where she met Stanley, a young and handsome staff sergeant who would become her husband. "It really was love at first sight," says Alice. "It also helped that he was a very good dancer!"

The couple enjoyed a wonderful life together in the military while raising three children. Their two daughters would go on to become Air Force servicemembers as well. After retirement, Alice and Stanley purchased an RV and loved to cruise around the country.

While traveling to an air show, the couple first learned about AFEV. Stanley's immediate thought was that it would be an ideal place for Alice to live if anything were to happen to him. Sadly, Stanley died of lung cancer in 2000, and short-



ly after Alice made the move to Bob Hope Village. She is now a 22-year resident here and she couldn't be any happier! "I just love my little apartment. It's homey. The staff does such a fantastic job, and they treat us wonderfully. It's like life in an old town community."

But Bob Hope Village is much more than an apartment complex. It's based on a sense of community where residents have access to scheduled bus transportation, activities, social events, on-site conveniences and a variety of amenities to promote fitness, wellness and independence. Basically, it's a 55+, active, independent living community designed for surviving spouses of retired enlisted U.S. Air Force personnel and is shaped by six villages of oneand two-bedroom apartments, a community center, swimming pools and more. And the best aspect is friends or neighbors are always nearby sharing memories of military life together.

The HOPE (Health Optimization Program for Everyone) Wellness program at Bob Hope Village launched in 2018 and has been well received by residents who wish to improve their level of wellness. The program provides a full calendar of health, wellness, and fitness activities for residents, as well as, challenges and prizes for the winners. Residents can participate in a wide range of classes to promote the benefits of laughter, exercise, healthy eating, good posture, and core strengthening. The program's calendar can include 100 classes and activities ranging from hula dancing, hearing aid checks, and caregiver support.

Located roughly three miles from Eglin Air Force Base and eight miles from Hurlburt Field, DoD cardholders (required for eligibility to live at Bob Hope Village) can take full advantage of base offerings, such as commissaries, exchanges, health care and recreation.

There are apartments avail-

able in Bob Hope Village and Hawthorn House. Visit bobhopevillage.us to learn more or call 850-651-9422. For assisted living with memory support located on the Bob Hope Village campus, visit hawthornhouse.us or call 850-609-2550 to find out about eligibility, availability and pricing.

You can help AFEV by joining Heroes for Hope, a monthly giving club, create a Facebook fundraiser in honor of your birthday or for Giving Tuesday, or choose AFEV as your charity of choice for AmazonSmile. You can also volunteer for AFEV events or leave a legacy by including the AFEV in your estate plans at afev.us/planned-giving. Visit afev.us.

Contributions from Scarlett Bauman, AFEV Fundraising and Marketing Manager



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Community

Happenings Around the Bay

MARCH 2023

02	Puzzle Exchange Club 11 am Niceville Public Library Niceville	11	Women's Climbing Circle 9 am Rock Out Climbing Gym Destin
03	Greater FWB Chamber First Friday Coffee 7 am Christian Life Center at First Baptist Church Fort Walton Beach		Little Chefs in Oil with Jeanette Herron 10:30 am Artful Things Niceville
	British Rock Invasion 3 pm Horse Power Pavillion Freeport		Live Music: Autumn Poultry 6 pm LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant & Oyster Bar Niceville
	Live Music: Autumn Poultry 6 pm 3rd Planet Brewing Niceville		Classical Connections feat. Geneva Lewis, Violin 7:30 pm Destin High School Destin
	Resin Art with Cynthia Roberson 6 pm Estelle Studio & Gallery Freeport		NWF Ballet Presents: Peter Pan 7:30 pm Mattie Kelly Arts Center Niceville
03- 05	Emerald Coast Boat & Lifestyle Show 10 am - sunset Aaron Bessant Park Panama City Beach		Soiree on the Bay 1:30 - 7 pm Dugas Family Estate Santa Rosa Beach
04	Choctawhatchee Audubon Bird Walk 7:30 am Wright Landfill & Okaloosa Holding Ponds Fort Walton Beach		Choctawhatchee Audubon Bird Walk 7:30 am Destin Beaching and Birding Spots
	International Women's Day Emerald Coast Celebration 10 am - 3 pm UWF FWB Campus Fort Walton Beach		2023 Eye Ball 6 pm Hilton Pensacola Beach
	Spring Sock Gnomes with Linda Routson 10:30 am Artful Things Niceville	12	NWF Ballet Presents: Peter Pan 2:30 pm Mattie Kelly Arts Center Niceville
	10:30 am Artful Things Niceville British Rock Invasion 1 pm Horse Power Pavillion Freeport	14	Democratic Women's Club Walton Co. 11:30 am Cantina Laredo Miramar Beach
	Live Music: Saint Social 6 pm 3rd Planet Brewing Niceville		Creative Space: Homeschool Art 2 pm Estelle Studio & Gallery Freeport
	MOMIX 7:30 pm Mattie Kelly Arts Center Niceville	16	Greater FWB Chamber Business After Hours 5:30 pm Beach Weekend - The Marina Fort Walton Beach
05	5th Annual Mac & Cheese Festival 12 pm Destin Commons Destin		Thursday Throw Down 6 pm LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant & Oyster Bar Niceville
	Tea Fore Her Fundraiser 12 - 2 pm The Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort and Spa Miramar Beach	17	Live Music: The O'mericans 6 pm 3rd Planet Brewing Niceville
06	Chess Night 6 pm LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant & Oyster Bar Niceville	18	Choctawhatchee Audubon bird walk 8:30 am Eden Gardens State Park Santa Rosa Beach
80	Niceville-Valparaiso Chamber Second Wednesday Breakfast 7:30 am Niceville Community Center Niceville		Encaustic Scenes with Corina Zalace 10:30 am Artful Things Niceville
09	Bluewater Bay Garden Club: No Mow March 10 am Niceville Crosspoint Community Life Center Niceville		Easter Cookie Decorating with Sundy Keichel 1 pm Estelle Studio & Gallery Freeport
	Greater FWB Chamber Nothing But Networking 11:30 am Clubhouse Grill Fort Walton Beach	21	Free Shredding Event 10 am Niceville Softball Complex Parking Lot Niceville
10	Soiree on the Bay 6 - 9 pm Dugas Family Estate Santa Rosa Beach	25-	Westonwood Ranch Professional Rodeo 7:30 pm each night Freeport Sports Complex
	ECCAC Gala in the Garden 5:30 pm Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa Miramar Beach	26 30	On Your Feet! The Story of Emilio & Gloria Estefan 7:30 pm Mattie Kelly Arts Center Niceville

hool Art ry | Freeport usiness After Hours The Marina | Fort Walton Beach de Restaurant & Oyster Bar | Niceville ns liceville n bird walk te Park | Santa Rosa Beach orina Zalace eville with Sundy Keichel ry | Freeport mplex Parking Lot | Niceville essional Rodeo rt Sports Complex

FARMER'S MARKETS

Niceville Community - Saturdays March 4, 11, 18, 25 9am-1pm | Palm Plaza | Niceville

Hammock Bay - 1st & 3rd Sundays March 5, 19 8am | Victory Blvd | Freeport

Grand Boulevard - Saturdays March 4, 11, 18, 25 9am-1pm | Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach





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Find Your Boat and More! Emerald Coast Boat & Lifestyle Show March 3-5

Dateline, Sunday, March 1st, 2020, Aaron Bessant Park, Panama City Beach, Florida. The annual Emerald Coast Boat and Lifestyle Show had just concluded a weekend with beautiful weather, record-setting attendance, and dealers reporting yet another year of tremendous sales, welcoming new members to their boating families.

Then, less than two weeks later, the world changed, as did boating. Already going through a historic popularity boom on the Emerald Coast, boating saw demand skyrocket as families took to more outdoor activities. This brought additional challenges as manufacturers battled production shutdowns and supply chain issues resulting in an inventory shortage.

But like a fisherman getting back at it after a tough trip, today is like a new day on the water for boating and the Emerald Coast Boat and Lifestyle Show, which returns to its picturesque home venue adjacent to Pier Park March 3-5 in Panama City Beach.

The continued growth of new homes and waterfront developments throughout Bay County and the 30A Corridor continues to drive demand for not only boats but also products and services that encompass the 'Coastal Lifestyle.'

"Even in the past few years when we couldn't have the show because our dealer and lifestyle partners didn't have the necessary inventory, we knew once that challenge was resolved, we'd be able to bring the show back," said Chris Miller of Wheels Up Events which hosts the event.

"This show helped us expand our business from having just one location in Orange Beach to adding a new store in Panama City Beach," said Chris Bazor of Grander Marine, who also recently opened a third store in Port St. Joe. "So having it back in 2023 will be very impactful once again for our business locally."

Chuck O'Neill of Legendary Marine of Panama City Beach knows his dealership has always attracted lots of attention at the show in years past. Their very prominent display is filled with a wide variety of boat models and manufacturers appealing to most anyone in the market for a boat. O'Neill ex-

pects the show in March to be

much like past shows. "The demand is certainly here in this market. The show has always allowed us to showcase our boats, connect with new customers or see old friends. The time is right for this show to return!"

In addition to hundreds of boats, the Emerald Coast Boat



and Lifestyle Show lives up to its billing with an ever-expanding line-up of products for anyone who loves living or visiting the Emerald Coast. Street-legal golf carts, paddle boards, electric bikes, personal watercraft, fishing tackle and seminars, outdoor furniture, along with



service providers for everything from boat maintenance to installing your new dock, will be at Aaron Bessant Park the first weekend in March.

For a complete list of exhibitors, more information and to purchase tickets online, visit EmeraldCoastBoatShow.com.





March 3 - 5, 2023 at Pier Park



EmeraldCoastBoatShow.com

(Community

A Path to Transformation

By LISA WOODRUM

Path of Grace (POG) provides a way out for women caught in the destructive lifestyle of addiction through discovering their identity and purpose in Christ. Eddie Mansfield has been its director for 12 years. He compassionately understands these residents' journey as he too had wandered off the right path, but later found his way back to God's path of grace through Christ from a life of addiction many years ago.

POG has a structured faithbased culture effectively producing transformation, with an 85-90 percent success rate (two-year program)! Aspects of the program include Bible study, prayer, work at their thrift store (in Santa Rosa Beach and Panama City), attending AA, church, parenting classes, individual and group therapy. They also learn various skill sets such as sales, management, truck driving, customer service and construction.

At graduation, each 2-year girl receives a "nest egg" of \$8,100 for her fresh start. (They also have an 18-month program as well.) Eddie explains, "We speak life into these ladies, teach them to be there for each other ...They learn to be loving, caring and a big family for each other."



POG has one house in Miramar Beach, two in Santa Rosa Beach and one in Vernon. Since its inception, it has graduated 160 women. Some remain to become staff.

Upon graduation, Brandy Wilson desired a job in recovery and was offered the position as assistant managing director. She shares, "God totally restored my life. This program is my heart!"

Morgan Jones is a house chaplain. She experienced major losses and spiraled into a life of addiction, ultimately forfeiting custody of her daughter. She came to herself and entered POG. She recalls, "I finally found that missing piece... a relationship with God, his grace... and learned stability in the everyday routines." She has been restored to her whole family, celebrates the opportunity to "speak life into the girls with truth and love. It makes my heart smile knowing I helped someone through a rough time."

To ensure the continued recovery of the graduates and reunite mothers with their children, POG has completed Phase I of Serenity Village,





eight transitional cottages. Because of the financial and emotional challenges to start over, this offers a safe environment and a continued support system to thrive together as a family.

An open house will be held at the beginning of March. Please plan to join the celebration and congratulate the staff and POG family! (Check its facebook site for details TBA: facebook.com/ pathofgrace.

There is no other program like this across the Emerald

Coast, so the need for POG and Serenity Village are paramount. This is a costly venture, in which many have invested. As Morgan testifies, "Path of Grace is an amazing recovery program and ministry to invest into, giving women a second chance at life... to live in freedom and become all that God's called them to be! It is restoration that no price can be put on." Donations can be made at www.pathofgrace.net.





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Community

Fun Facts and the Lighter Side of Insurance

By Joe Capers, Insurance Zone Knowing that insurance can

be boring, and currently very stressful, we are going to have fun with some insurance facts.

Granted, it's not the most exciting subject on earth. However, as we all know, it's necessary in



our lives when we need a safety net underneath to protect the things that matter to us the most.

Let's have a bit of fun and take a look at some interesting and intriguing insurance facts that you might not be aware of:

• Golf insurance protects you when you win! In some cultures, it is required. So, anyone who scores a hole in one can use this policy to help buy drinks for everyone. If you refill a wine glass before it's empty, it still counts as one glass.

• U.S. insurance policies often vary from state to state. Although there are similarities in laws and rules, they may vary a lot in the U.S.

• Fire departments revolve around insurance. The very concept of a fire department has ties to insurance. In the beginning they were established to put out fires for specific households and policyholders.

• Gender gap is tightening in the insurance industry. Current studies still show that the majority of people working in the industry are women, about 60-40 divide.

• 9/11 resulted in huge payouts. The World Trade Center disaster in 2001 resulted in payouts up to \$40 billion from life and property claims.

• The meaning of insurance





has changed enormously. Insurance used to refer to being engaged to wed someone. The term has evolved to now mean 'assurance'.

• GPS once had conflicts with insurance. Those that engineered GPS and satellite navigation thought that insurance would not cover those who drove with navigation systems guiding their way. It was never patented as such.

• Some companies make serious returns on insurance. Some companies like Sony are believed to make more money off its insurance division than from selling its products and services.

• Mental health is not always protected by insurance. Many U.S. health insurance companies do not cover mental health issues for their policyholders. They are required to cover in some states.

• Can you obtain alien abduction coverage? The policy would pay should you be abducted by aliens and the UFO Abduction Insurance Company states that they have paid out!?!

• Life insurance can skyrocket for celebrities. The most influential people have obtained some high limits life insurance policies, and Steven Spielberg is reported to have a policy over \$1 billion. Betty Grable insured her legs for \$1 million and Bruce Springsteen insured his voice for \$5.7 million.

• Starbucks pays substantially for life and health insurance. They pay more to cover their staff than they pay for their actual coffee. It is believed that they pay staff more than \$300 million.

• Insurance has been around for centuries. The first contract was signed back in the 14th Century or earlier. Traders in China insured their boats in case of loss

Aging in Our Community: Options for Residential Care

By Teresa Halverson, Director of Business Development & Community Relations, The Manor at Blue Water Bay

We are all blessed to live on the beautiful Emerald Coast. With more families moving to the area every day, our aging population continues to grow as well. Navigating the senior living and health care options can often be confusing. Our community is fortunate to offer so many different levels of care. Planning ahead, exploring options and taking a facility tour can help avoid crises when you need immediate assistance.

There are many services available to choose from and there is no simple answer to which one would be right for you or your loved one. Knowing what is available will help you understand the difference and enable you to choose a service that best meets your family's needs. The following services in our community provide care levels.

Independent Living Facilities (ILF) for Seniors: Private Pay. Most residents are normally fully independent aside from some minor medical needs. ILF's offer a wide range of social amenities and fine dining. Sometimes we are just ready to downsize without having to care for a larger home.

Assisted Living Facilities (ALF): Private Pay. Need a little more assistance? No longer able to live alone? These facilities allow an individual to live in a private room. Assistance includes Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) and medication management. Communal dining, housekeeping and recreation programs are typically offered. Many facilities offer transportation to appointments, shopping and medical appointments as well. Some ALF's offer a Memory Care Unit (secure unit) dedicated to a family member who might need daily attention for safety and security.

Skilled Nursing and Rehabilitation Facilities are traditionally known as long term care facilities. This service is right for you (or your loved one) if you require 24-hour skilled nursing care and assistance with ADLs. Is your loved one no longer safe to live at home or alone? Does your loved one need assistance with getting out of bed? Transfers? Wound care? Long Term Care in skilled nursing facilities is paid for by Private Pay, Long Term Care Insurance or Medicaid. All skilled nursing facilities also offer short term, post hospital rehabilitation stays. Insurance (Medicare or Private Insurance) covers the costs of the stay for



a limited time. Typical short stay patients (known as Rehab Patients) are admitted directly from the hospital and receive 24 hours nursing care, physical, occupational and speech therapy services. The goal is to assist the patient to reach their highest level of functioning and return home as soon as possible.

Take time to start looking at all resources available, request a tour of potential facilities and develop a plan for the future to help avoid last-minute crises.

FUN FACTS

continued from previous page

at sea or theft.

• Ben Franklin founded the first Insurance Company in the United States in 1751. The Philadelphia Contributorship for the Insurance Houses from Loss by Fire still exist today.

• Body part insurance is a big deal. Famous people, actors and singers often purchase body part or body insurance.

• Your insurance score can significantly influence your insurance costs. All companies today utilize 'credit-based insurance scores' that will influence the premiums quoted.

• Home insurance policies often exclude animal liability and certain dog breeds. Over 4 million people are bitten by dogs each year so if you have a pet this coverage is very important.

• Car insurance for male teen-

agers is surprisingly expensive. Statistics show that 16-year-olds have twice as many accidents as 18-19 year olds.

Which of the facts above did you already know and which ones are new to you? Let us know! We would love to hear of any odd and bizarre insurance facts you might have! Send your comment to info@ins-zone.com or post them on our Facebook wall.

Insurance Zone, founded by Joe and Lea Capers, is now Abora Insurance Group. Voted Top in the Market for 10 years in a row, Abora is a full-service commercial and personal lines insurance agency serving Destin, Miramar Beach, Santa Rosa Beach (30A) and Inlet Beach. Abora can find solutions from a wide variety of the best insurance carriers in the market for Home, Auto and Life insurance on your terms. Call (850) 424.6979 or visit Getabora.com.





The community

Warrick Dunn Delivers Dream Home Surprise for Single Mom of Four

By TRACY LOUTHAIN

In January, Habitat for Humanity of Walton County held its 60th home dedication for a very special mom of four. Unlike other home dedications, this dedication was held in partnership with Warrick Dunn Charities, and included a very special surprise by former FSU running back and NFL star Warrick Dunn.

A dedicated single mom of four. Shakisha McDonald, became a first-time homeowner thanks to Walton County Habitat for Humanity, and thanks to Warrick Dunn Charities (WDC) she received a life-changing surprise. While the new home was earned and financed through Habitat for Humanity, Aaron's provided \$10,000 worth of home furnishings, turning an empty shell into a move-in ready dream home. Additionally, WDC was able to provide a \$5,000 down-payment assistance check and ensure the home was fully stocked, thanks to additional assistance from Stronghold SOF Solutions, and Ryan Jumonville and Raven's Ranch.

This event marked the 210th home celebration nationwide by Warrick Dunn Charities (WDC),





the former NFL star's non-profit organization that identifies single parents across the country and helps them achieve their goal of first-time homeownership as part of its "Homes for





the Holidays" program. "We are extremely grateful







to partner with Warrick Dunn Charities for a second time," said Habitat for Humanity Walton County Executive Director Teresa Jones. "Shakisha is extremely deserving of this incredible gift. Our houses would not be possible without the generous support of our sponsors, volunteers and board members. Through our partnership with WDC, this house became a true home for Shakisha and her family!"

When she isn't caring for her four children at home, Shakisha supports hundreds of kids from the community as a program director at the Boys & Girls Club of the Emerald Coast. She and her children have been living in a dilapidated rental house with rodents, a leaky roof and septic tank issues. Now, she is moving into a brand-new home with everything she and her kids have dreamed about. From children's toys, video games and a new computer to a pantry full of food, laundry room filled with essentials and a house full of

furniture, Shakisha and her kids were wowed by the surprise.

"There are no words to express how it feels to come home to something like this, said new homeowner Shakisha McDonald. "The one thing I want my kids to understand is that nothing is just handed to you. You have to work for it."

Dunn told Shakisha this is her reward for the many hours she and her children invested in building of their home. His goal is to help break the cycle of generational poverty by providing a hand-up, not a handout, to single parents and their children.

Dunn started WDC's Home for the Holidays in honor of his late mother, Betty Smothers, a Baton Rouge police officer who lost her life when Dunn was only 18 years old. She was a single parent who worked tirelessly to achieve the American dream of homeownership. Today, he has helped 210 single parents' dreams come true.

Community



By Greg Durette, Florida Health Connector

The end is near! Not in the mortal sense, but rather the end of the Open Enrollment Period for predominantly Medicare Advantage plan members in 2023. We will leave the mortality proclamation to the crazy guy wearing the sandwich board roaming various city streets around the country.

Keep in mind, if you are "aging-in" this year, you have a whole different set of deadWhat to Check Before the End of Open Enrollment for Medicare

lines and circumstances (see last month's article).

This article will cover what you should be checking up on before the March 31 deadline rolls around and locks you in until the next Annual Enrollment Period (Oct. 15-Dec. 7).

So, what should you do to make sure this year's coverage selection treats you well and is something you will be happy with until next year?

First, you should have had some time to try out your new coverage. Whether that is a visit to the doctor of your choice or a trip to the pharmacy, you likely have had a chance to use your current coverage. If you are one of those folks that needs neither, bully for you! However, you should still take this time to conduct further research into whether the doctors, hospitals and pharmacies you favor are included in your network at a reasonable cost.

If you find some changes would be required of your intended selections, you have until March 31 to do something about that.

One point of note: if you have already made a change during this Open Enrollment Period, you have used your last bite at the apple for the year. Changes made during this period are final and cannot be changed. If you have yet to use this last chance opportunity then, you still have that one chance available.

Second, have you reviewed the functionality of your plan? What I mean is, are you able to easily use your new insurance card and have the providers accept it without a hassle? Do you find it difficult to know why your neighbor with a PPO has a much easier time finding an in-network doctor or facility (especially when traveling) than you have with an HMO? Has your doctor or medical group suddenly stopped accepting your coverage with little to no explanation?

If so, it is time for you to get busy with the business of taking care of you. If you have read my articles for any length of time, you know I am no fan of the grand promises made by the sports figures and celebrities on television about the benefits. They love to use the kicker statement, "you MAY be eligible to receive these benefits". Talk about slick!

The fact of the matter is, the proof is in the pudding. No-

body but you can get you what you need. Do the work. Do the research. Call local, knowledgeable people and get the details that matter to you.

Once you make that final call for the Open Enrollment Period, you can sit back and relax in the comfort of knowing you did the very best for you. Happy 2023!

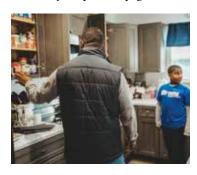
Greg Durette is a qualified, licensed agent with Florida Health Connector providing Medicare throughout the State and is based in Niceville. He has been in the insurance industry for over 39 years and can be reached at his office at 850-842-2400 or his mobile at 978-509-2941.



CRI CRESTVIEW

DREAM HOME

continued from previous page



Affordable housing is vital to local families. Habitat for Humanity Walton County is proud to build homes for partnering families and make a permanent impact. Over a hundred volunteers and sponsors made this home possible. Habitat would like to thank those who assisted in this process and their investment into their community.

One hundred percent of donations made to Habitat for Humanity of Walton County, FL.,



501(c)(3) non-profit are allocated towards the homes built for the local community. To learn more about future volunteer opportunities and other Walton

County Habitat events, please

email volunteer@waltoncoun-

tyhabitat.org.

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The community

Needed Public Beach Access Becoming a Reality

More public beach access in Destin is coming soon. A nearly 340-foot beachfront "Tarpon Beach Park" is now on its way to becoming a reality. The City of Destin, Okaloosa County Board of County Commissioners, Trust for Public Land and Destin-Fort Walton Beach Tourist Development Council have partnered to acquire land in Destin to expand the existing Tarpon Beach access. Three parcels adjacent to the Tarpon Beach Trail will be cleared to make way for the park, which will have new, stunning views of the Gulf of Mexico along Scenic Highway 98.

"Making our beautiful beaches more accessible to our residents and out-of-town guests is a top priority for the County," said Okaloosa County Board of County Commissioners Chairman Trey Goodwin. "This is a major step toward that goal, and we are grateful to have a team of partners that understand that commitment."

Added Destin Mayor Bobby Wagner, "These kinds of partnerships are an effective way to move Destin forward in a posi-



tive direction for both locals and visitors. I applaud the efforts of our partners and the work of former Mayor Gary Jarvis in making this a reality."

Okaloosa County and the City of Destin have pledged a combined \$26.5 million to expand public beach access in Destin. The Tarpon Beach project is Phase II of this endeavor and the cost share is split 50/50 between the city and county. Phase I progress took place with the removal of structures in April 2021 to expand the Crystal Beach Access. The county's portion, as well as much of the city's, will be funded with Tourism Development District revenue.

Trust for Public Land was the lead agency that helped negotiate the purchase of the properties for both Phase I and II.

"Increasing access to the pristine Tarpon Beach is not only a tourism draw for the city but gives residents walkability to the waterfront and all its amenities that have previously been closed





off," said Kate Brown, Senior Project Manager for Trust for Public Land."

The new park at Tarpon Beach will include free parking and restrooms. Parks at both Crystal Beach (Phase I) and Tarpon Beach (Phase II) are expected to be open to the public in May 2024, with construction starting after this tourism season.

The Only Thing Worse than Paying **Taxes is Paying Too Much!**

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Harry Holmes

Niceville Home Office

4485 Parkwood Sq • Niceville, FL 32578 Call: (909) 238-3359 or (877) 465-6378 Email: taxvet@sbcglobal.net Visit: www.holmestaxco.com

John Sims Parkway Project

Remember to be careful as you navigate John Sims Parkway from Edge Ave. to west of Rocky Bayou Bridge. The FDOT \$6.2 million resurfacing project is 2.6 miles and includes the following improvements:

A grassed median west of Palm Boulevard, which is cur-



rently under construction.

Widening the roadway in key locations to extend or widen existing turn lanes to improve traffic flow. The structural layer of asphalt is now in place. More paving and preparation are currently in operation.

A new sidewalk on the north

side of S.R. 20, from the Oak Creek Shopping Center to Rocky Bayou Drive.

During construction, drivers may encounter intermittent and alternating lane closures between 9 p.m. and 6 a.m. Sunday through Thursday nights. There will be no lane closures during Niceville High School special school events. The project is estimated for completion this spring!

All construction activities are weather-dependent and may be delayed or rescheduled in the event of inclement weather.

Eglin Air Force Base Celebrates Black History Month

By KEVIN GADDIE

Eglin Air Force Base celebrated Black History Month with this year's theme "Black Resiliency." Retired Chief years of dialysis and receiving a new kidney, he continued serving the military by founding the society. "There were a lot of people in my life, who bless-



Master Sgt. Jonathan Holmes, e founder of the African American Heritage Military Society, h shared what resiliency means e to him during the kick-off ceremony. Holmes, an Army and Air Force veteran, lost a kidney while serving as an explosive ordnance disposal technician. After persevering through 12

ed me with their strength and helped me become resilient," he said. "I established the society for them. I feel it serves as a symbol to the African American men and women who served in uniform. It is a symbol of their resiliency."

In his opening remarks, Brig. Gen. Jeff Geraghty, 96th Test Wing commander, spoke about African American engineering aviation battalions, who made significant contributions in the base's expansion during World War II. "It was these newly formed battalions, while training for war, that transformed Eglin's landscape," he said.

The battalion personnel dealt with sweltering heat while cutting through dense forests to

construct new roads, buildings and bridges, to pave the way for Eglin's future. Their primary mission was airfield construction and repair. The airfields proved pivotal for Allied aircraft bombers as they returned riddled with bullets, and often broken as they landed. Their contributions and sacrifices played a vital role in shaping our nation's history and securing its freedom. Geraghty asked the attendees to not only celebrate the month's events, but to form a united front in looking to the future with hope and determination. "Together, we must continue to strive for a culture of diversity, inclusion, and equity within our Air Force," he said. "We must recognize our differences are our strengths and together we are an unstoppable force."





DOCUMENTARY OF THE SPRINGS, DAY 2

March 29:

PRESENTER: Oscar Corral

Тіме: 10ам СТ

LOCATION: Morrison Springs

Education

Education News

Okaloosa County

Okaloosa County School District parents can set up their **FOCUS parent accounts** at www.okaloosaschools.com and link their students to it if necessary. The OCSD Focus App can be found in the Apple App and Google Play Stores for download. Find it by searching for OCSD Focus Educational Portal. After download, sign in through the orange log-in button, and you will have access to your student's schedule, grades and attendance. Students can download the same OCSD Focus app to access their grades and attendance without creating an account. They must click on the box marked "Sign in with SSO" and enter their school district email and network password.

In November, the district launched a second app to re-



DID YOU BUILD OR PURCHASE A HOME LAST YEAR?

PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTION FILING DEADLINE MARCH 1, 2023

Gary J. Gregor, Walton County Property Appraiser, reminds property owners who intend to make application for Homestead Exemption, Deployed Military Exemption, Combat Disabled Veteran's Discount, Veteran's Exemption, Disability Exemption, Agricultural Classification, Additional Senior Exemption, or Widow's and Widower's Exemption, the absolute filing deadline is **MARCH 1, 2023.**

If you plan to file your exemption for the first time, please bring with you a copy of your recorded deed or tax receipt, the social security number(s) of all owners of property, Florida driver's license number, Florida auto tag number, and voter's registration number. If you are entitled to disability exemption, please bring proof of disability (two doctors' statements). If you are filing Homestead Exemption on a mobile home, please bring the title or registration certificate. If you are filing for the "Additional Exemption for Persons 65 and Older" your annual household income cannot exceed \$35,167 (adjusted annually) (proof will be required).

If you would like information to determine your eligibility for exemptions, please call **850-892-8123** or **850-267-4500**, Monday thru Friday, 8:00 a.m. until 4:30 p.m.

You may file for exemptions at the following office locations of the Property Appraiser Monday thru Friday, 8 a.m. until 4:30 p.m.

DeFuniak Springs - Courthouse 571 Hwy. 90 East Santa Rosa Beach 31 Coastal Centre Blvd., Suite 600

THE ABSOLUTE FILING DEADLINE FOR 2023 EXEMPTIONS IS MARCH 1, 2023.

Have You Applied For Ag Classification of Newly Acquired Agricultural Lands For 2023?



ceive school and district updates. Download the OCSD Apptegy App through Apple App or Google Play to access documents, events, news updates and emergency notifications.

Okaloosa County School District Teacher of the Year

The Okaloosa County School District Teacher of the Year is Roy-

al Preston, construction teacher at Okaloosa Technical College teaching carpentry and building trades. "I always love celebrating our teachers who spend day in and day out going above and beyond to educate our students. They stay after and arrive early to tutor, sponsor clubs, coach sports, and mentor kids. Each teacher recognized this year represents the best of the best at each of our 38 schools, and I am proud to have Mr. Preston represent us at the state level," said Superintendent Marcus Chambers.

STEMM Academy Nominated for National Blue Ribbon Program

The Okaloosa STEMM Academy has been selected to participate in the 2022-2023 National Blue Ribbon Program, which honors public elementary and secondary schools whose students achieve at very high levels. The Florida Department of Education nominated STEMM Academy to the U.S. Department of Education due to exemplary high performance based on the 2021-2022 performance data.

District Launches Student Anti-Vape Campaign

In a partnership with the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office and Emerald Coast Crime Stoppers, middle and high school students are competing to produce video Public Service Announcements to decrease and end teen vaping. The district is purchasing vape detection devices that will be placed



Teacher of the Year Royal Preston with Superintendent Marcus Chambers.

on campuses to help deter students from bringing vapes to school. A letter will be sent home to all parents explaining what the devices do so they can help our cause at home. "Vaping is something that can really impact our students in a negative way and we want to take a proactive step in having an anti-vape campaign to encourage our students to make healthy choices," said Superintendent Marcus Chambers.

Education Staff Professional Employee of the Year

The Okaloosa County School District's Education Staff Professional of the Year is Shawna Crist, Media Assistant at Plew Elementary School. Crist spent 13 years in the classroom before becoming a mom and choosing to become a full-time volunteer at Plew Elementary, where she received the 2012 Senior Adult Volunteer of the year award. Now, in her 11th year as Media Assistant, she shares ideas with others throughout our District and is known to staff and parents as a "cheerleader for readers who strives to keep students from falling through the cracks." Crist created the school news show, sponsors Violin Club and Shop and is Plew Planters Team lead and Plew Parent Leadership co-president.

Incoming kindergarteners and students new to the Okaloosa County School District for the 2023-2024 School Year can now register.

🐞 Education

Parents must create a Focus Parent Portal Account to start the process.

Parents will use their Focus Parent Portal Account to: View their student(s) class schedule and grades; view attendance and discipline and communicate with teachers.

To register, parents must use their child's legal name and a valid address in Okaloosa County. Parents can also use the registration kiosk in the enrolling school's front office to complete this step. Watch the video below for an overview of the Parent Portal registration process.

CHS Robotics Team Wins Local FIRST Tech Challenge Tournament

The Radical Raiders robotics team at the Collegiate High School (CHS) at Northwest Florida State College (NWFSC) placed first in the FIRST Tech Challenge's FL AeroCoast League Tournament. They competed against eight teams from the panhandle at Northwood Elementary School for a spot in the statewide competition. After spending hundreds of hours on creating and programming its robot, crafting its engineering notebook, and participating in community outreach events, the team's efforts culminated in its successful showing Jan. 28.

The team also earned the Inspire Award for best embodying the challenge of the program.

The Radical Raiders will advance to the Florida Championship March 3 and 4 in Winter Haven, competing against 55 other teams for a chance to compete at the FIRST World Championship in Houston in April.

For more information on the CHS Robotics team, contact Mary Beth Mizell, the CHS faculty sponsor, at mizellm@nwfsc. edu or(850) 729-6429.

Superintendent Marcus Chambers Launches Reelection Campaign

Okaloosa Schools Superintendent Marcus Chambers (R-Niceville) filed for reelection for 2024. During his first term, Chambers led the school district through the COVID-19 pandemic while maintaining the district's top "A" rating.

"Nothing is more important to me than our students' safety and academic success. For nearly 25 years, I have worked every day to provide Okaloosa students with an outstanding education," Chambers said. "My priorities will be maintaining Okaloosa Schools' top "A" rating for academic excellence, providing robust extracurricular opportunities, expanding workforce and technical education offerings, investing in our teachers and staff, completing critical school safety and maintenance improvements, and planning for new school construction. I stand with Governor DeSantis and his efforts to keep inappropriate political agendas out of the classroom."

Walton County

Walton County School District Shows Excellence in Graduation Rate

The Walton County School District's graduation rate is at an all-time high of 96.7 percent – a 5 percent increase over the 2020-2021 school year.

This increase means Walton County has the third-highest number of students walking across the stage to receive their diplomas – 10 percent above the state average.

Green Thumb Garden Club Offers Scholarships to Students in Walton County

For more than four decades, Green Thumb Garden Club has awarded Mercer Scholarships to college students from Walton County. Students must be currently enrolled or must have been accepted by a college, university, or technical school with a major in agriculture, biology, botany, ecology, environmental studies, forestry, horticulture, landscape design or an acceptable related course.

The scholarship is funded through donations from generous GTGC members, fundraising events and the Walton County community. A total of \$3,000. is available for award. The amount of each scholarship will be based upon applicants' qualifications. Detailed application requirements and forms are available on the GTGC website, www.greenthumbgardenclubinc.org.

Club member Debbie Michel is GTGC Scholarship Committee Chair, and her contact information is on the application form which must be submitted no later than April 30. Contact Debbie Michel with any questions or email greenthumbgardenclubinc@gmail.com.

Walton School District celebrated excellent teachers and teacher support personnel at the annual Educational Support Personnel and Teacher of the Year Recognition Event this month. Each school's staff submitted the name of a teacher and support personnel they believed embodied the spirit of E.P.I.C. Shelly Hinojosa was chosen as Teacher of the Year and Roslyn Chatman was chosen as Education Support Personnel of the Year. Both will represent Walton County School District in State Competition later in the year.

New Freeport Middle School

Tuesday, Jan. 24, was an epic day of growth for the Walton County School District. Superintendent Hughes and the Walton County School Board donned hardhats and broke ground for the new **Freeport Middle School.** Later that morning, they attended the ribbon cutting for the new addition to Freeport Elementary School.



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Sports 🔅

Taylor Haugen Trophy Winners: Where Are They Now?

By Lauren Reho

Each year through the All SpEach year at the All Sports Association FCA Breakfast, The Taylor Haugen Foundation presents a trophy to an area athlete who best demonstrates a balance between academics, athleticism, leadership, community service and faith. The winner receives a \$1,000 scholarship, a \$1,000 donation to the athletic department of his or her school and a bronze trophy with an eagle taking flight to symbolize Isaiah 40: 30-32.

The Foundation has awarded trophies since 2009 to well-rounded student athletes in the area. In this series, we're tracking the past winners from 2009 to 2021 to see where they are now in their journeys.

We continue our **Taylor Haugen Trophy Winner series with the 2021 winner Tinsley Abbott.**

Tinsley is studying health science at the College of Public Health and Health Professions at the University of Florida and plans to graduate in 2024. She is excited to begin shadowing a pediatric orthopedic doctor at Shands Hospital and hopes that it will help with her dreams of becoming a pediatric orthopedic surgeon. She loves attending all Gator sporting events and



Tinsley Abbott, 2021 Trophy Winner

being a part of the student section, especially being a member of the Men's Basketball Rowdy Reptiles.

"Winning the Taylor Haugen Trophy is the accomplishment I am most grateful for because it means my Taylor Haugen family saw me exactly for who I was and loved and accepted me for it," Abbott said. "This foundation represents so much more than what the surface shows; it represents hope, light and peace in a world that is lacking all these things."

The quote, "Don't Quit. Never Give Up!" has been a part of her life since birth, but developed with age when becoming a part of the Foundation. In the world we live in today, it is more common to quit than to persevere. She commented, "being associated with T is the greatest honor, and I hope to display even part of his mentality through all the work I put in academically, so that I can change lives in all the ways I can."

Vinner Kinner She went on to say that all of the memories being a part of this family she holds very close to heart, especially the time when Mr. Brian Haugen poked fun at her for toting around the

20-pound trophy at the FCA Breakfast and barely being able to lift it by the end of the day. Abbott continues to share the

light of Christ, just as T did in his everyday life, and lives out her favorite Bible verse Colossians 3:2: "Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are upon the earth.". She remembers every day that Heaven is the ultimate end goal and that her journey in life is not about figuring out her future on her own through daily college obstacles but to follow God's plan for her future instead.

The **2022 Taylor Haugen Trophy winner is Eric Trapp,** a senior at Niceville High School. Eric's primary sport is football — he played all four years of high school and was team captain his senior year. Eric grew up in Niceville. He started playing football at age seven in the Panhandle



Photo: Eric Trapp, 2022 Trophy Winner

Youth Football Association.

Eric serves his community in a variety of ways. He served as a student ministry assistant at Crosspoint Church in Niceville, working primarily with 5th grade boys. In his junior year of high school, he worked with Hope Squad, an organization striving to help those who struggle with anxiety, depression, or suicidal thoughts.

Eric serves this school year as Student Government President at Niceville High School. He works with the Principal and student leaders to provide the best possible learning environment for all students.

Eric says the primary lesson

he learned from Taylor Haugen's inspiring life is to never give up. Eric applied that lesson to his own life in his freshman year when he developed anxiety. He changed from a cheerful, outgoing young man to a quiet and sullen individual. His internal battle with anxiety made academics and sports difficult.

Eric overcame his anxiety through changes to his diet, counseling, and prayer. Today, Eric is fully recovered from the anxiety that made his early years of high school so difficult. Eric wants to use his story to educate others and to inspire hope for those who have lost sight of the future.As for his own future, Eric hopes to attend Vanderbilt University or the University of Florida. He plans to study biology with the goal of becoming a physician. All Sports proudly recognizes Eric Trapp as this year's Taylor Haugen Trophy winner.

This year's All Sports Association Buck Smith FCA Worship Word And Pray 2023 Breakfast at 7:30 a.m. at the Northwest Florida State College Arena, 100 College Blvd. In Niceville.





Local Diving, Drinks and Coffee

JoJo's Coffee and Goodness

Owner and operator Angela "JoJo" Stevenson invites you to enter a cafe and relaxed coffee shop atmosphere for a daily dose of "goodness." Feel free to work on site (free WiFi) or meet up with friends or family. Stop in for cinnamon rolls; scones: cranberry orange, chocolate caramel and cheddar thyme; strawberry coffee cake; cranberry orange muffins; red velvet cookies; brownies with espresso ganache or caramelitas. Try a breakfast special with a piece of quiche or kolache-hashbrown casserole. Breakfast burritos are rolled and ready daily. Choose from andouille, bacon, chorizo or veggie. Or tantalize your taste buds with a made-to-order

breakfast sandwich on croissants or bagel with two eggs and cheese and then choose if you want to add Jojo's homemade smoked jalapeño beef bologna, bacon, house smoked barbecue or ham. Cinnamon rolls and kaloches still hold the top spot for sell outs. Stop in for featured muffins, coffee cake or pound cake-great with maple cinnamon latte or caramel macchiato. Some of Jojo's most popular coffees are COLD. Nitro, Cold Brew, fruit smoothies and frozen affogatos are the way to go. Of course, there's always freshly roasted coffee. Order ahead and pick up some for all your celebrations! Hours 7:30 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Hours 7:50 a.m. – 2 p. Tuesday - Saturday (850) 737-6194 4652 Hwy. 20 East, Niceville bigorangehousedesigns.com

LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant

Welcome to LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant located at the spectacular Bluewater Bay Marina Complex. Named after "LJ Schooner" (the LJ is for Lazy Jack), a cherished four-legged icon on Bluewater Bay Marina docks, the open air Ovster Bar and restaurant offers a magnificent view of the water, marina and unparalleled sunset any time of year. There are, of course, oysters and a delicious varied menu with dinner specials such as Blackened Mahi and grilled shrimp with hollandaise, served over cheese grits.

Monthly: Sundays—Brunch



9 a.m.-1 p.m.; Wednesdays— Bartenders Cocktail Special 3-10 p.m.; Thursdays—Open Mic/Karaoke 6-10 p.m.

March highlighted events include Sunset Shrimp Boil featuring local wild caught shrimp for Willingham Seafood on March 26 with live music from Jared Herzog, Throwdown Paddle Board Race March 16 at 6 p.m. and Chess Night March 6.

Dine-in, pick-up, to-go. Oyster Bar Hours: Monday-Thursday 3 -10 p.m., Friday-Saturday 11 a.m.-midnight, Sunday 9 a.m.-9 p.m.. Happy hour daily 3- 6 p.m. Restaurant hours: Monday-Tuesday, closed. Wednesday.-Saturday, 11 a.m.-9 p.m.. Sunday, 9 a.m.-9 p.m. Sunday brunch: 9 a.m.-1 p.m. (850) 897-6400

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Chef Jim Shirley Receives FRLA Torch Award 2022

Chef Shirley Jim received the 2022 Torch Award presented by the Florida Restaurant & Lodging Association (FRLA) at the organization's Florida Restaurant & Lodging Show in Orlando. The award was presented during the FRLA fall board meeting Nov. 3 at the Caribe Royale Resort.

Shirley owns the Great Southern Café, The Meltdown on 30A, The Bay, Farm & Fire, North Beach Social and The Chicken Shack in South Walton and is co-owner of Great Southern Restaurants, which owns The Fish House, The Atlas Oyster House, The Fish House Deck Bar and others in Pensacola.

A Pensacola native, Shirley uses his knowledge of local waters and family farming histories to promote "New Ruralism," a



movement to champion sustainable agriculture at the urban edge. He is chair of the state board of directors of the Florida Restaurant & Lodging Association and a past president of the association's Northwest Florida Chapter, founder and president of the Society of Great Southern Chefs, and a member of the Southern Foodways Alliance. He is also one of the five distinguished Celebrity Chefs of Pensacola and has cooked at the James Beard House numerous times.

"To join the ranks of previous recipients, including Thomas Keller, Geoffery Zakarian, Curtis Stone, Michelle Bernstein and more, is a great privilege," Shirley said. "I am in good company and can't thank the FRLA enough."

This award comes on the heels of Shirley's Great Southern Café being a recipient of the 2022 Wine Spectator Grand Awards-the iconic Seaside restaurant's 10th year on the list honoring restaurants with extraordinary wine programs. Great Southern Café was also recently named the winner of the Best Mojito in the 2022 Best of the Emerald Coast awards by Emerald Coast Magazine, while Jim Shirley's North Beach Social won the title for Best Outdoor Bar.

🏇 Off the Hook

Destin-Fort Walton Beach Deploys 180-ft Vessel for Artificial Reef Program

The Okaloosa County Tourist Development Department (TDD) Destin-Fort Walton Beach Tourism continues to focus their efforts on ecotourism with the deployment of the research vessel R/V MAN-TA. This expansion supports a long-term vision of continuing to grow as a sought-after destination for those seeking premier fishing and diving opportuni-



ties. The deployment of R/V MANTA took place approximately 16 nautical miles offshore on January 15, 2023. The sister ship, R/V DOLPHIN is set to deploy in the weeks ahead.

This important milestone for the artificial reef expansion project was fully funded by the TDD, inclusive of the purchase of both vessels. Under the direct oversight of the

Coastal Resource team, Tri-Native Contractors performed the extensive cleaning and preparation to eliminate environmental impacts and transported the ships from Lafite, LA to Orange Beach, AL. The vessel was then moved from Orange Beach to the deployment location offshore Destin-Fort Walton Beach by Walter Marine.

"This is an exciting new addition to our growing artificial reef system, and we are extremely proud of the work the



Coastal Resource team has done with this effort," says Okaloosa Board of County CommissionersChairman Trey Goodwin. "Not only will it offer additional fishing and diving opportunities, but it will continue to sustain vital ecosystems in the Gulf of Mexico."

R/V MANTA was deployed in approximately 110 feet of water (N 30° 8.630' W 86° 39.192'). It features a statue of Jesus known as the "Christ of the Gulf," paying homage



to the series of other statues throughout the world. The statue is situated on the top deck at a depth of about 50 feet making it very accessible to even beginner divers. Christ of the Gulf was created by Glenn Camplejohn who is part of the Deepwater Mafia, a Christian based dive club from Mississippi that dives in the area, regularly.

"These deploy-

ments of the R/V MANTA and R/V DOLPHIN in the coming weeks, are not only significant in terms of the recreational opportunities they present, but they also provide habitat for vital species of fish that inhabit our region," commented Alex Fogg, Coastal Resource Manager. "We are now home to more than 400 artificial reefs, and it's been remarkable to see how our efforts are not only contributing to valuable experiences out on the water, but also to the protection of these delicate environments. The addition of both vessels mark the start of what we hope to be a celebratory year of even more impactful costal efforts ahead."

The two sister ships were designed as seismic and bottom cable recording vessels for oil exploration, built by North American Shipbuilding. Standing at over 50 feet tall, R/V MANTA (180') was built in 1976, followed by R/V DOL-PHIN (192') in 1978. Both vessels will join the region's "Wreck Alley" as the second and third largest ships in the artificial reef network. Recently, the Coastal Resource team was able to modify their offshore artificial reef permits, allowing for vessels greater than 60ft in length to be deployed. Since the revision, several unique vessels have been deployed alongside reefs ranging from concrete piles to specifically designed modules.

These unique and innovative deployments now offer an opportunity for first timers to explore closer to shore and experienced divers to take in new sites which are all viewable via an interactive map.

🏇 Off the Hook

Coastal Resource Team Joins Unique Devil Ray Research

Okaloosa County's Coastal Resource Team with Destin-Fort Walton Beach Tourism recently initiated and assisted a team of researchers in identifying and tagging devil rays in the Gulf of Mexico.

While installing three miles of sand fencing on Okaloosa Island in 2021, members of the Coastal Resource team noticed a number of devil rays swimming close to the beach. The Coastal Resource Team's curiosity into the migratory patterns of these rays prompted it to contact researchers from Mote Marine Laboratory & Aquarium in Sarasota.

For 14 years, Mote Researchers have collected data on three pelagic ray species: spotted eagle rays, manta rays and devil rays. All three species are classified as "Endangered." Understanding the migratory patterns of these rays is important for the conservation of the species.

"Anything we can do to as-



sist in the advancement of an endangered species in Northwest Florida is going to be a benefit for all of us," said Okaloosa County Board of County Commissioners Chairman Trey Goodwin. "We are lucky to have a team of marine biologists in Okaloosa County's Tourism Development Department that understands how important these rays are to the collective marine ecosystem."

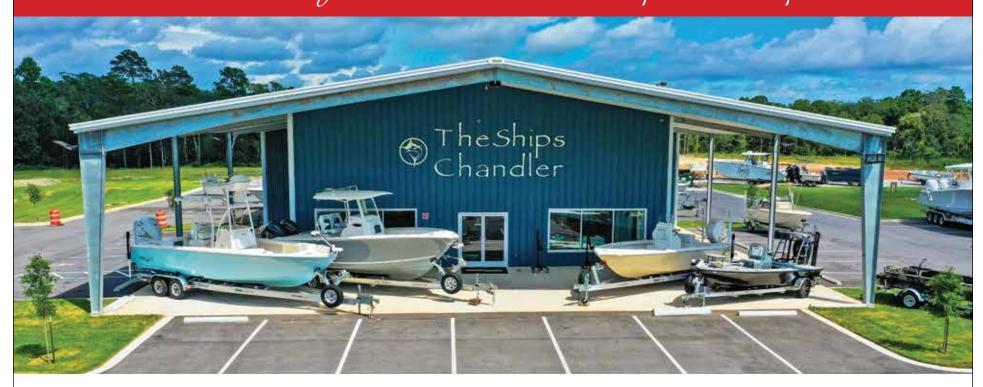
In November, Mote researchers, along with the Okaloosa County Coastal Resource Team, found 17 rays and tagged seven with acoustic tags the size of a small battery. Tracking the movement of the rays will help determine why the rays migrate to the Destin-Fort Walton



Beach area in the fall and winter months.

"It will be great to have some answers for the locals and tourists that constantly stop us on the beach asking questions about this very visible species," said Alex Fogg, Coastal Resource Manager for Destin-Fort Walton Beach. "Hopefully we will see these devil rays returning to our coast year after year and we can determine why they overwinter in our waters." This multi-year collaborative study aims to tag 30-50 devil rays. The data will be analyzed to not only provide some insight into the movement ecology of this endangered species but also guide coastal management throughout their range. This is just one of many cooperative projects the Coastal Resource Team engages in with regional universities and scientific partners.

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Wellness

Self-Care: The Path to Loving Others Well

By Todd Craig, Journey Bravely

join us!

Self-care has become a cultural buzzword over the last decade. Doctors, therapists and social media influencers instruct us to take time for a spa day, a round of golf, a bubble bath, reading a book or a weekend getaway. While all of these are relaxing, the intense demands of life seem to deserve higher priority. Perhaps you find yourself wondering how you're supposed to make time for something so "frivolous and selfish" in the face of serious concerns like the physical/mental health of family members, work demands and the everyday balance of keeping life and family going. Maybe you find yourself asking "What is self-care and what's the point?"

At a surface level, self-care is: a break, a moment for yourself, space to calm, leisure, enjoyable, fun. Self-care, however, goes much deeper than this. When we keep overbusy schedules, attempt to please everyone, expect perfection from ourselves, avoid saying no, and care for others in high gear daily, our human bodies and brains eventually hit a wall. We become resentful, exhausted, short-tempered, depressed, anxious and emotionally/spiritually run down. Often,

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the consequences of not taking care of ourselves result in unintentional destruction to the very relationships we are working hard to manage well.

We accidentally embrace a belief and lifestyle that says we are less important, lovable, and valuable than those we love. We jump from healthy sacrificial love to a place of ignoring our own needs and failing to take care of ourselves. At its heart, self-care is the practice of remembering through action that you are as loved, lovable and valuable as everyone else in your life.

Self-care is about admitting to yourself that you are a more

loving, more present parent, partner and friend when you prioritize your physical, emotional and spiritual needs. When you embrace the deeper meaning of self-care, it moves from frivolous selfishness to the path of loving others well.

5 Ways to Begin a Self-Care Practice

Identify 3-5 activities that feel like a life exhale. Start small. One minute of deep breathing, a 15-minute walk, a five-minute devotional/meditation, a 10-minute cup of coffee are short examples of slowing down to acknowledge your value. You can work toward longer activities like a dance class, a full game of your favorite hobby, a long bath, lunch with a friend.

Do one thing at a time. Set aside time for your self-care activity and do your best not to multitask. Our brains feel more relaxed and satisfied when we do one thing at a time. Be kind to yourself and give yourself this period of time to communicate to yourself that you are loved and worth the time.

Avoid numbing. Taking care of yourself is different than numbing out. Numbing is avoiding and becomes a cycle of not wanting to re-engage. Self-care is an intentional calming time you are taking to fill your cup so you show up in your life as a more full, energized version of yourself. Typical numbing activities include drinking alcohol, spending and scrolling electronics. Try noticing when you're confusing numbing with self-care.

Set boundaries with others. When possible, tell others in your life that you're taking time for yourself and ask them not to interrupt you unless there's an emergency. You may feel guilty at first and that's okay. Stick with self-care and remember you are a better version of you for others when you take care of yourself. People in your life can and will learn to respect your self-care time through time and repetition.

Relax into the moment and enjoy. It may take some practice to let go and enjoy your self-care moments. Take a few deep breaths, release tension where you notice it. Release expectations of yourself for a few minutes. Small pockets of reprieve from life stress are a gift to your body, your soul, and to your loved ones.

As with anything new, starting a self-care practice will likely feel unfamiliar and uncomfortable. Give yourself 30 days to embrace the new habit. Remember not to overcomplicate it. There is no right or perfect way to take a moment to remember you are loved, you matter and you are worth the time. As you extend grace to yourself along your selfcare journey, we are cheering you on and you can find us at journeybravely.com.







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HEALTH ARCHITECT

These two organs are part

of our digestive system and are

often forgotten in our quest for

better gut health. They are re-

sponsible for absorption and

elimination and many diseases

can be traced to the failure of

these functions. We normally

don't even think about them

until symptoms develop. So let's

take a brief look at these two

Caring For Our Liver and Gallbladder



The **liver** consists of 2 lobes. It works with the gallbladder, pancreas and intestines to digest, absorb and process food. It's main jobs are:

• Making bile

Filtering blood coming from the digestive tract before passing it to the rest of the body
Detoxifying chemicals and

metabolizing drugs
Making proteins used for blood clotting and other

functions The **gallbladder** sits under the liver and stores the bile sent

to it by the liver. The gallbladder is triggered when we start to eat releasing the bile into the biliary ducts and ends up in the duodenum, the upper section of our small intestines. (If you've had your gallbladder removed and would like information on what you can take to improve your digestion and nutrient absorption (especially calcium) email me with 'Gallbladder Aids' in the subject line.)

The **bile** is responsible for processing fats and absorbing the fat soluble vitamins A, D, E, K and Beta Carotene. It's also responsible for gallstones which consist of bile material. (This is why, if you've had your gallbladder removed, you can still get 'gallstones'.) These stones can be found in the gallbladder, biliary ducts and liver.

Failure to care for these organs can lead to more serious conditions such as liver cirrhosis, fatty liver, biliary cholangitis (clogged bile ducts which creates scarring in the liver), cholecystitis (inflammation of gallbladder) or chronic acalculous (natural movements of gallbladder are diminished and fails to empty), etc. Besides maintaining a healthy lifestyle including a balanced diet, decreasing your toxic load, regular exercise and stress management we can also go through a natural Liver and Gallbladder Cleanse. Proponents of this cleanse cite that it can improve digestion, boost energy levels and reduce symptoms such as bloating, gas and indigestion.

This cleanse is something a person needs to seriously consider as it is not for everyone. It requires you to follow a specific healthy diet leading up to the actual cleanse. It's also an opportunity to upgrade your understanding of your health and habits.

To learn more about this cleanse and get a better understanding of how you can take control of your health email info@bestbody4life.ca with Article on Cleanse in the subject line. Linda Murphy, RHN, NNCP and Natalie Stratton, Lifestyle and Health Coach will be your expert health and motivational coaches and are offering informational sessions over Zoom in March. They'll be held on Wednesdays (8th, 15th, 22nd, 29th) at 7:30pm. The informational sessions are free and offers you an opportunity to ask questions.

You are also welcome to email me (succeed.hdhl@gmail. com) with your intent to attend and I can send you the registration link. Here's to Health!



Valentines for Veterans Visit Bob Hope Village

With markers, pencils, crayons and glue sticks in hand, second grade students from Longwood Elementary happily created Valentine's Day cards with woodland animals not knowing the impact they would soon have. The students, with pep in their step, proudly walked over to the Bob Hope Village Commons with smiles on their faces and Valentine's Day cards in their hands.

The students were immediately met with applause and cheer from a ballroom filled with Bob Hope Village residents awaiting the young artists.

Happily, the children disbursed their hand-made cards and chimed in with conversations with residents who are retired military surviving spouses or couples. There were 125 beautiful Valentine's Day cards



Longwood Elementary students made Valentine's Day cards for Bob Hope Village residents. They delivered their cards in person on Valentine's Day.

made by the students and twenty-five children delivered them to Bob Hope Village. "The kids had a blast even walking here," said Lisa Jones, assistant principal of Longwood Elementary.

Northwest Florida Military Officers Association (NWF-MOA) coordinated the Valentine's Day event partnering Bob Hope Village with Longwood Elementary for Valentines for Veterans, and annual event first enacted in 1996 by Gen. Ron Fogleman, Air Force Chief of Staff, and was intended to support the Department of Veteran Affairs weeklong National Salute

to Hospitalized Veterans. NWFMOA consists of 230

Continued on next page





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Why Your Thyroid Medication

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May Not Be Working for You By Dr. Richard, MD

Today I'd like to talk about Levothyroxine or Synthroid. This is likely the most commonly prescribed thyroid medication in the world but this is slowly changing. This article may be a bit difficult to follow so don't feel bad if you have to read it several times before it all clicks. I usually spend about an hour educating patients about the thyroid with white board drawings too so 500 words may not be enough to get the full picture.

Thyroxine (T3) is the hormone that drives every metabolic process in our body, so of course, it's extremely important. It turns all the factories in the body on, which then burns more fuel, which means thicker hair, less brain fog, not feeling cold all the time, and maintaining proper weight. We can get T3 two different ways. We can make it in the thyroid or we can convert T4 into T3. The thyroid is told when to make T3 and T4 by the brain. The brain secretes Thyroid Stimulating Hormone (TSH) which tells the thyroid to make T3 and T4. To make sure we don't make too much T4 tells the brain to stop making TSH. This is where Levothyroxine

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can be a problem.

As we get older the body slowly loses its ability to convert T4 into T3. That means the only way we can get T3 is from the T3 produced by the thyroid and not T4 being converted into T3. This is often when we slowly begin to develop symptoms of hypothyroidism such as slow weight gain, brittle hair, fatigue, etc. Unfortunately, since there is enough T4, the TSH many times does not rise to a level where physicians will consider it a problem. Many patients tell us they've been tested for thyroid and it's normal, when in fact they were not completely tested or the values were interpreted incorrectly.

If you do get diagnosed with hypothyroidism then most physicians will prescribe Levothyroxine or Synthroid which is a synthetic T4. You may already be able to see the problem here. If we are adding T4 to the system, two things will happen.

First, the body will try to convert this T4 into T3. If our bodies cannot do this anymore then we will get little to no benefit from this medication. Secondly, T4 will tell the brain to produce less TSH which will reduce the amount of T4 AND T3 produced by the thyroid. In effect, ADDING LEVOTHYROX-INE CAN LOWER YOUR T3 LEVEL! I see patients frequently who are on Levothyroxine who tell me they felt worse when their doctor raised their dosage. This is because each dosage increase can lower your T3 which is the ONLY hormone that drives your metabolism. To me it's obvious. Hopefully it is to you as well now.

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VALENTINES

continued from previous page

members and has been making a difference in the lives of veterans in Okaloosa and Walton counties for sixty years. According to Brig. Gen. Fran Hendricks, USAF, Ret., and president of NWFMOA, the organization is made up of all military branches that never stop serving. "We assist all ranks of those who have served and are currently serving, and we hold a soft spot for surviving spouses," Hendricks said.

Valentine's Day love was felt everywhere in the Bob Hope Village ballroom thanks to NW-FMOA and Longwood Elementary. All residents could talk about were the hugs and cards they received from the students.

"We can't thank MOA enough for choosing us to be part of Valentines for Veterans," said Bobbi Jo Dominguez, Director of Bob Hope Village. "Love is in the air today thanks to MOA and thanks to the Longwood Elementary second graders. We have big love for our friends."



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What Teens Want Us to Know

By Michelle Ruschman

In this ongoing series, What Teens Want Us to Know, Part 2, we asked the question, "What "adulting" skills do you want to be taught before you leave home? (Consider what you might want to know in the areas of physical and emotional health, relationship building, professional success, lifestyle, creativity, practical skills, and education.)" At school, there's a focus on social, academic, and extracurricular activities, but what about what they want to know...need to know... as they prepare to launch into life beyond graduation? In the busyness of working jobs, getting kids from one activity to another, church life, etc it's hard to know what our kids don't know. One mom mentioned, "My college-age son called me the other day and asked me how to make a grilled cheese sandwich! I didn't know he didn't know how to do that until that moment!" It's easy for a modern family to miss the things that we, as parents and grandparents, took for granted growing up. Back then, there was time to learn how to cook together, we assisted our dads in the workshop or garage, and families lived closer together so elders could pass on what they knew to the younger ones. Kids still need this training and mentorship but there don't seem to be the same opportunities.

When our teens answered, there were clear themes they wanted to learn most:

Financial Literacy - How to pay for different expenses, how to do taxes, and how to create a budget. They also want to know what kind of insurance is needed, how to pick the best one, and how to use it.

Lifestyle Skills - Basic car care, how to do a job interview, how to schedule an appointment with a dentist or doctor, how to clean and maintain a bathroom.

Mental Health - How to stay motivated, how to put themselves first but in a healthy way, and learn how to be patient and reasonable.

Relationship-building skills were probably the one area in which the participants reflected their hearts the most. It would be so easy to see a teen on their phone and believe they didn't want to be social. The truth is, there is still a longing to stay connected. It's just now, there are electronic devices our kids are growing up with that make it harder for them to practice. Regardless, they still want relationship advice, to know how

to maintain healthy boundaries, to know how to make the right friends, and how to talk to people confidently. One teen wrote they want to know "how to behave in a likable manner in a social situation." Another participant thought it was important to be able to offer better support. "I'd like to be able to tell when people are having a rough day."

Kids are also longing for clarity in the confusion of our current culture. "Adults could teach us better how to understand the world we live in."

"I just want to be aware of what's out there. My whole childhood was sheltered from what was happening in the world and now I wish I'd gotten to know more so I didn't have to be so confused."

As a parent who works multiple jobs, it feels a little overwhelming to think I'm not teaching my child enough to confidently go into the next chapter after graduation. Anyone else? I think of the single parents, grandparents who are raising grandchildren, foster



families, and families who deal with travel and deployment. There's a real opportunity here for communities to come together, parents to band together, and churches to serve their youth, all for the sake of our kids leaving confidently.

Imagine a program called Launching Well where retirees, parents, and leaders in our community come together to teach their skills, passions, and expertise to our future leaders, consumers, and decision-makers. We'd have an opportunity for generations to reach for one another, for our kids to feel seen and loved, and for these teens to go back to their families with greater knowledge, confidence, and independence. Yes, I've been thinking about this a lot.

Our kids know some of what they will need to be contributing citizens in this world and we've lived it out for decades. Hopefully, with some deliberate action and collaboration, we can pass on what we know so it all becomes a little less daunting.

If you'd like your 13 to 18-year-old to be included in future articles, please have them fill out this anonymous Google form, shorturl.at/npr79.

Michelle Ruschman is a local writer, speaker, and jewelry artisan. To contact her, go to her website, www.michelleruschman.com or email michelleruschman@gmail.com.

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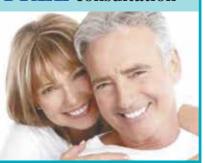
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What Sets Specialty Roofers Apart

At Specialty Roofers, the same person who wrote your contract, whether it be commercial or residential, is the person who will manage every aspect of your job moving forward. Many other companies have a sales team that is followed by a production team, which can make the flow of the project choppy and disconnected.

"My customers are my customers from beginning to end, and it is my responsibility to manage my projects and the production crew so that the process is seamless for all," says Gary Henson, "Customers should be given realistic expectations of the timeline of the job upfront so that communication is clear."

Henson is referring to details such as when the roofing materials and dumpster will be delivered to the job site and exactly how that needs to be done to cause the least inconvenience for the customer. He likes to stop by the home a month after



job completion to do a double check and check for nails again.

That is just one example of his ownership of each project he takes on. Once you are a customer at Specialty Roofers you are a customer for life. The details matter, and attention to detail is a part of the culture of Specialty Roofers in all aspects of the business. Reputation is something the company prides itself in. It has dominated the roofing market in Northwest Florida since 2011 because it is a company you can truly trust.

Aside from the countless certifications and accolades it has received over the years, its team is made up of hardworking, honest people who love what they do. It has office staff and project managers who have been with Specialty Roofers since the day it opened the doors, which speaks to its care for its employees.

customer reviews and 5-star ratings were earned by its hardworking team. It is unmatched by any local roofing company with its community service and involvement in nonprofit work. In 2022, SRI took its philanthropy to the next level by hosting the first Sports Clay Shooting Tournament benefiting Westonwood Ranch. That event, which will become an annual affair, raised more than \$60,000 for Westonwood Ranch. Community service will always be thread through the fabric that makes up Specialty Roofers, and its customers recognize that.



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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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Vertex Solutions and Republic Airways' LIFT Academy Announce Partnership

Vertex Solutions, a leading developer of high-fidelity learning technology, including extended reality (XR) pilot training and Republic Airways' LIFT Academy announced the integration of Vertex Immersive Training Devices (ITDs) into LIFT Academy's cutting-edge training curriculum to increase the throughput, rigor and efficiency of LIFT's already industry-leading pilot training program.

Proven by the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), Vertex ITDs have shown a 40% decrease in training time, a 70% decrease in time to solo, and a 15% increase in performanceresults that directly align with LIFT's vision for increasing the efficiency of their flight training program to meet industry demands. LIFT Academy recognizes that this partnership-a first for pilot schools-will sustain them as a leader in flight training. For Vertex, this partnership opens a new pathway into commercial aviation, proving the dual-use versatility of



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their military offerings in the commercial sector.

For both DoD and commercial aviation, the high cost and limited availability of current Flight Training Devices (FTDs) and Full Flight Simulators (FFSs) have created barriers to achieving the number of pilots' industry demands. The lightweight, small-footprint Vertex ITD improves student access by allowing a more widely spread distribution of devices, and its truly immersive learning environment prepares pilots for safer, more efficient aircraft evaluations. The use of Vertex ITDs in USAF undergraduate pilot training has shown up to a 70% decrease in the time it takes students to get to their first solo flight. Not only that, students retain information at a much higher rate, decreasing error rates during initial check rides, significantly increasing the training value of those flights. The XR ITD developed by Vertex Solutions, combined with LIFT Academy's innovative, cutting- edge flight training program, will become the standard in commercial aviation training.

If you are an aspiring pilot, contact LIFT Academy at www. flywithlift.com. If you are an aviation training academy, contact Vertex Solutions at www. vertexsolutions.com.



By MAURICE STOUSE, FINANCIAL Advisor and Branch Manager

The new year has begun for investors. After watching both the stock and market experience significant drawdowns in 2022 (a rarity for the two to move in tandem), people wondered what the new year might bring. Thus far, we have been showered by the media with talk of recession. stoking fear into the hearts and minds of consumers. Eventually, consumers begin to over worry and they begin to snap their wallets shut. This, however, does not seem to be the case, at least not yet. At this writing, while the economy has most definitely slowed, many companies continue to make money. Seventy-one percent of companies reporting their Q4 earnings have surpassed expectations

We are left to wonder which is the greatest evil: a recession, inflation or deflation. Inflation over time erodes the standard of living and is not sustainable. Deflation, we think, is the worst of outcomes as it is a collapse of demand and it eventually pulls the economy down, perhaps into a depression. We are reminded of a quote Ronald Reagan repeated more than once: A recession is when your neighbor loses his job, and a depression is when you lose yours. A recession is an economic reset and investors are reminded to take note that when the economy is seemingly at its worst, that is the time to invest in stocks if they are long-term, growth-oriented investors and have the tolerance for the risk.

What is driving us here?

The Federal Reserve, whether we like it or not, has significant influence in the economy. The Fed has taken its Federal Funds Rate to 4.5 percent and by the time you read this may very well be at 4.75 or 5 percent. What does that rate do? First of all it is the rate it pays to banks and to money market mutual funds for deposits and investments made overnight.

The Fed has an average of \$3 trillion on deposit each night from banks. It also has about \$2.6 trillion from several money market mutual funds. If banks put that money at the Fed, they are not lending it. If investors and savers are putting money in money market mutual funds, they are not investing it in stocks, bonds, businesses or a host of other things. Since 2008, the Fed has used the federal funds rate to slow an overheated economy, usually one that manifests itself by the inflation read. If less money is available to the economy, that in theory should slow demand, bringing inflation down. It seems to be working. Some worry, however, that it may end up working too much and that the economy will crash land versus soft land. We will have to see.

The impact of this can be seen in the leveling off of interest rates.

Short-term rates are remarkably higher than-long term rates. Investors take note that in times like these, that is by design. That can work to the advantage of savers and those wanting to have lower-risk investments with higher returns than in the past. If the inverted yield curve (where shorter rates are higher than longer term rates) persists, a slower economy will bring down inflation and also long-term rates, including mortgage rates. The implication is that investors should consider investing in longer term bonds be those U.S. Treasuries, municipals or corporate bonds. For retirement accounts, investors also might consider taxable municipal bonds for their quality relative to corporates and their competitive rates. Many investors can diversify their long-term portfolios by incorporating these types of bonds for a portion of their strategy. Investors might also want to consider zero coupon bonds, mainly in retirement accounts as a way of not only diversifying, but knowing what they will have and when they will have it. Zero coupon bonds are bought at a discount from their face value. Bonds have a face value of \$1,000 and a zero coupon bond may sell for \$750 now for example and be worth \$1,000 at maturity. The difference is the rate that the investor earns. Lastly, other fixed rate investments like CDs and fixed annuities offer lower risk and portfolio diversity.

Investment Strategies for 2023

Other considerations for times like these

We continue to think that part of a diversified portfolio should include increased weightings into health care, energy, consumer staples, utilities and financial sector stocks. Increased allocations into fixed income, or bonds could be part of a well-diversified portfolio. Lastly, we think investors should continue to watch the value of the dollar, as its continued slide would mean accelerated growth in international investments (which of course brings on more risk).

Last tidbits

We read that for the first time in decades, China's population has declined (by more than 850,000 people). We also read that in 2022, for the first time in a long time, many index funds underperformed the market. That might be so because index funds are weighted by market capitalization. With approximately 27 percent of the S&P 500 into the technology sector, and that sector had significant drawdown in 2022, that might explain it. Should China continue to decline in population, that has worldwide implications for demands as well as for pricing and inflation. Lastly, if interest rates slow or reverse, investors tend to take more risk in this sector.

Now that we are well into the new year, investors are encouraged to perform portfolio reviews with their advisers or on their own. Working with an advisor might deliver "alpha," that is, increased value for cost paid. Investors should also familiarize themselves with the latest changes in the tax code as well as the updates for retirement savings vehicles. Call or write your adviser or do your own research when you can.

There are special risks associated with investing with bonds, such as interest rate risk, market risk, call risk, prepayment risk, credit risk, reinvestment risk and unique tax consequences. Investments in municipal securities may not be appropriate for all investors, particularly those who do not stand to benefit from the tax status of the investment. Municipal bond interest is not subject to federal income tax but may be subject to AMT, state or local taxes. U.S. government bonds and Treasuries are guaranteed by the U.S. government and, if held to maturity, offer a fixed rate of return and guaranteed principal value. CDs are insured by the FDIC and offer a fixed rate of return, whereas the return and principal value of investment securities fluctuate with changes in market conditions. An investment in a money market fund is neither insured nor guaranteed by the FDIC or any other government agency. Although the fund seeks to preserve the value of your investment at \$1 per share, it is possible to lose money by investing in the fund. A fixed annuity is a long-term, tax-deferred insurance contract designed for retirement. Fixed annuities have limitations. If you decide to take your money out early, you may face fees called surrender charges. Plus, if you're not yet 59-and-a-half, you may also have to pay an additional 10 percent tax penalty on top of ordinary income taxes. You should also know that a fixed annuity contains guarantees and protections that are subject to the issuing insurance company's ability to pay for them. The S&P 500 is an unmanaged index of 500 widely held stocks that is generally considered representative of

the U.S. stock market. Inclusion of this index is for illustrative purposes only. Keep in mind that individuals cannot invest directly in any index, and index performance does not include transaction costs or other fees, which will affect actual investment performance. Investing involves risk and you may incur a profit or loss, regardless of strategy selected. Diversification and asset allocation does not ensure a profit or protect against a loss. Holding investments for the long term does not ensure a profitable outcome.

Maurice Stouse is a Financial Advisor and the branch manager of The First Wealth Management/ Raymond James. Main office located at The First Bank, 2000 98 Palms Blvd, Destin, FL 32451. Phone 850.654.8124. Raymond James advisors do not offer tax advice. Please see your tax professionals. Email: Maurice.stouse@raymondjames.com.

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🔅 Musing



BY SEAN DIETRICH

She was trash. At least that's how she was treated. She was found wandering a rural Mississippi highway. Beneath the stars.

It was a wonder the girl hadn't been hit. This was a busy highway. The kind with transfer trucks.

The dog was walking in the center of the road. On the yellow line. Clearly there was something wrong with her. Animals don't walk open highways. But the black-and-tan dog was

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moving by feel. Because she is blind

All she knew was that she liked open highway because the surface was smooth, and there were no obstructions. And when you're blind, no obstructions is a good thing.

She was a skeleton. Every rib visible. Every spinal disc showed. There were scars all over her, as though she'd been involved in a host of dog fights.

A scar on her face. A scar on her chest. One behind her ear. On her side. Another on her right forelimb.

Probably, she had been caged with other hunting dogs. The dogs were probably mistreated and hungry. Hunger makes dogs mean.

Nobody knows how the blindness happened. But it didn't take a rocket engineer to figure it out.

LESLIE H. DUBUISSON

"Someone hit this animal with a blunt object," the veterinarian later said, choking back tears. "Someone beat this poor

Sean of the South

People say that dogs use smell above all other senses. That's a lie. A dog doesn't use her sense of smell to avoid walking headfirst into walls. A dog doesn't use smell to detect body language in other animals or humans.

dog. Maybe with the butt of a

rifle. Maybe with rebar."

A car stopped on that lonesome highway. A Samaritan picked up the dog. The dog was apprehensive to get into the car, but then, she was so hungry.

The Samaritan placed her into the backseat. The Samar-



itan took photos of the animal and posted them to Facebook. Nobody claimed the animal. Nobody even commented. Nobody wants a blind dog.



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A local hound rescue was called. They bathed her multiple times. The bathwater was almost black each time. They doctored her wounds. They took her to the vet. The vet removed her eye and sewed her eyelids shut.

Not long thereafter a guy heard about this animal through a friend. This guy is a flunky redhead with an overbite and a nose so big he can smell the future. He is not handsome, but he has a weakness for animals. Dogs in particular.

Within hours, the guy and his wife drove to the Mississippi-Alabama state line. They met the dog and her foster mother at a barbecue joint. The dog sat beside the guy while he ate. She pressed her body against his.

He fed most of his pork sandwich to the animal. She ate the meat. He ate the bread.

When it was time to leave, the lady with the animal shelter said, "So do you want to foster her?"

"No," said the guy, "I want her to be my daughter." And we haven't been apart since.

Within the months I've had her, she's gained 14 pounds. She sleeps beside my bed. She travels with me. She has visited 18 U.S. states. Slept in dozens of hotel rooms. She has met a lot of people. And I would even venture to say she's happy.

At least I hope she is.

Also, I hope the man who hurt her reads these words someday. I hope this man recognizes her photo on Facebook. I hope he realizes that he was wrong about her. She isn't trash. No way. No how.

Her name is Marigold. And while I'm sad the last face she ever saw was his. I'm thrilled the first face her little eyes will ever see will be God's.



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By Pastor Doug Stauffer

I have taught Revelation several times and written several books on the subject. Starting in March, we will study the Book of Revelation verse-by-verse at 7 p.m. each Wednesday. Everyone is welcome to attend or watch online.

High-Level Overview of Revelation

Revelation 1:19 Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter;

Verse 19 offers an overview of the book of Revelation from John's first-century perspective. It is a high-level – past, present, and future – viewpoint.

PAST: The things which thou HAST SEEN

PRESENT: The things WHICH ARE

FUTURE: The things which SHALL BE HEREAFTER

The simplified outline: Verse 19 first points to the things which "thou (John) hast seen," with verse 20 pointing to what John already saw. Revelation chapters 2 and 3 chronicle what John saw.

Revelation 1:20 The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.

The Past: John writes in verse 20 that he already saw the seven stars and seven golden candlesticks. He records what he saw in chapters 2 and 3, making these chapters already past. Verse 20 defines the candlesticks as the seven churches. It designates the seven stars. These stars are the seven angels of each of those seven churches. The first verse of each church epistle addresses the angel of each of the seven churches.

"Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus" (Revelation 2:1-2:7) "And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna" (Revelation 2:8-2:11) "And to the angel of the church in

And to the angel of the church in Pergamos" (Revelation 2:12-2:17)

A Pastor's Ponderings: Studying the Book of Revelation

"And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira" (Revelation 2:18-2:28) "And unto the angel of the church in Sardis" (Revelation 3:1-3:6)

"And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia" (Revelation 3:7-3:13)

"And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans" (Revelation 3:14-3:22)

The two words following chapter 3 in Revelation 4:1 reveal the passage of time: "After this." After what John saw (the churches of chapters 2 and 3, the last one mentioned in Revelation 3:22), John is now revealed as being in the present as he is transported to Heaven (Revelation 4:1). It is essential not to miss this point: John moved from speaking of the past to writing concerning the present!

The present: the book of Revelation reveals the present as John appears in heaven. The timing indicates he has been transported thousands of years into the future. A door in heaven opens. God transports (or raptures) John from the earth. John shows up in the present, where God reveals the "hereafter" the future.

Revelation 4:1 After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.

The future: Notice the keyword at the end of Revelation 4:1—"hereafter." This word links the event to the outline delineated in Revelation 1:19—the "hereafter" ending that verse. One might view hereafter as after here since John pictures the Rapture of the New Testament Church after revealing the entire 2,000-year Church Age in chapters 2 and 3.

The "hereafter" divides further into three sections: These divisions run from:

2nd Viewpoint — God transports John to heaven (from Revelation 4:2 to Revelation 17:2)

Revelation 4:2 And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne.

From heaven, John views the 21 judgments on earth during Daniel's 70th week.

3rd Viewpoint — God transports John to the wilderness (from Revelation 17:3 to Revelation 21:9)



Revelation 17:3 So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.

From the wilderness, John views God's destruction of the world powers and the end of all that offends God.

4th Viewpoint – God transports John to a great and high mountain (from Revelation 21:10 to Revelation 22:21)

Revelation 21:10 And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,

From the mountain, John views Eternity.

Note: The 1st Viewpoint was skipped but it was from Patmos (Revelation 1:9), where John views the Church Age. He describes what these seven churches are doing right and wrong and God's expectations of each. The Spirit speaking to the churches happens before God transports John to the other three locations.

All first-time visitors at Faith Independent Baptist Church, 1309 Valparaiso Blvd, Niceville, will receive a free book. If you have any questions: (334) 221-1611. You can also tune in live or archived: Facebook.com/ douglasstauffer1611; youtube. com/@FaithIndependentBaptistChurch/streams; www.Faith-Niceville.com; Sermonaudio. com/docdoug45. Let's study to show ourselves approved unto God!

Dr. Doug Stauffer is pastor of Faith Independent Baptist Church. He was saved July 6, 1980, in Niceville, while stationed at the 33rd Tactical Fighter Wing at Eglin Air Force Base and has now been in the ministry for over 35 years. He has written 20 books including the best selling "One Book" trilogy ("One Book Rightly Divided, One Book Stands Alone, One Book One Authority"); along with several devotionals ("Daily Strength" series); and prophecy books ("Reviving the Blessed Hope, When the End Begins").



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Between Land and Sea A Nonfiction Tom Clancy-type Book

By DOUG STAUFFER

Rear Admiral Philip Dur's rare combination of intellect, military expertise and true patriotism helped shape this country during the Cold War and post-Cold War eras. He has a deep knowledge of naval operations at sea and this nation's national security affairs. His career as a surface warfare officer special-

Destin Resident

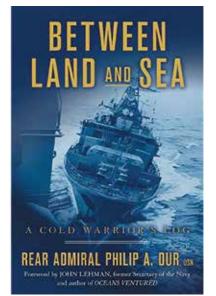
Rear Admiral Philp Dur, USN

izing in national policy helped him funnel his Cold War experiences into the geo-political environment. Imagine rising from the rank of ensign to flag officer to serve at the highest levels in the Navy and the U.S. government's executive branch - that's Phil Dur!

His book, "Between Land and Sea," offers the reader a front-row seat to 30 years of American and world military and diplomatic history. This fact-based analysis and reflection centers around the national security bureaucracy and operating at sea throughout the Cold War.

Read about challenges commanding ships and a Carrier Battle Group and strategy and policy assignments, including leading the Navy's strategy division and serving as Director of Political-Military Affairs on the NSC staff, advising and briefing President Ronald Reagan on critical events in the Middle East. Discover opportunities overseas, such as the admiral's assignment as a U.S. Defense attaché in Paris, working with the highest levels of the French national security establishment as the Cold War ended and as War erupted in the Persian Gulf.

Dur witnessed history and had a hand in shaping its course! From growing up in post-WW2 Europe and Japan, through historical events including the behind-the-scenes views of the attack on USS Liberty, the gun line off Vietnam, the Reagan White House and more, he was on the scene, not as an observer,



but as an engaged and aggressive participant and contributor.

Dur participated in the last great act of the Cold War: a serious and intentional bumping of his command ship, the USS Yorktown, by the Russian Navy during maneuvers in the Black Sea. This confrontation was one of those cat-and-mouse events that could have started World War III.

As a flag officer, he was the chief architect of the Navy's strategy. His story provides a concise description of the Navy's role in the Cold War from the 1960s to its end with the fall

of the Soviet Union. His seat at the table during most of the critical events of that period offers an insightful perspective of policy formation and execution.

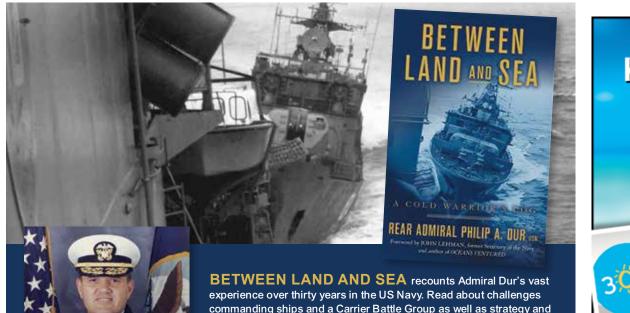
This book is highly relevant and essential reading today for anyone seeking to understand the current European security environment, including the Russian-Ukranian conflict. As someone completely unfamiliar with the workings of the Navy, reading about his command of two great warships - a destroyer and a cruiser - was mind-boggling and fascinat-

ing. "Between Land and Sea" is a must-read for those interested in a better understanding of military, political and national security issues. It's fast-moving, a real page-turner, very well-written and hard to put down.

Vice Admiral Doug Crowder, USN (Ret.), former Commander, U.S. Seventh Fleet, reviewed the book as follows: "If you have loved Tom Clancy's novels of Cold War intrigue, military operations, grand strategy, and political policy making, then you will enjoy Admiral Philip Dur's new book, Between Land & Sea."

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commanding ships and a Carrier Battle Group as well as strategy and policy assignments, including leading the navy's strategy division and serving as Director of Political Military Affairs on the NSC staff, advising and briefing President Ronald Reagan on critical events in the Middle East.

With pointed insights on the complex challenges that lie ahead, Between Land and Sea is a must-read for the next generation of operators and strategists.

Available now on amazon



Alaqua Animal Refuge Opens New Facility with Month-Long Events

Alaqua Animal Refuge has formally opened its new, oneof-a-kind facility, located at 155 Dugas Way, and invites the community to celebrate the momentous occasion with a monthlong celebration of events titled "Celebrate! Alaqua" beginning March 4.

As the Southeast's premier 501(c)3 refuge and sanctuary, Alaqua believes that every abused, neglected, and homeless animal deserves a second chance. Originally located on 10 acres in Freeport, the new 100acre facility will allow Alaqua to continue to do the important work of animal rescue and rehabilitation, 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 society and recreate the model worldwide.

"We are so happy to finally be in our permanent home," said Alaqua Founder Laurie Hood. "We have welcomed the animals to their new sanctuary and now we want to welcome our community to come see what their love, fundraising, and support throughout the years has built. After eight years of creating this space, we invite everyone to come 'Celebrate Alaqua' and honor this momentous move for our organization."

During the month of March, Alaqua will host a featured event every Saturday, kicking off with the highly anticipated Seventh Annual 100 Point and Cult Wine Dinner on Saturday, March 4. The sold-out, exclusive evening will offer guests a one-of-a-kind experience as they will be the first to dine in Alaqua's permanent home. Guests will also enjoy a private concert with musical guest performances as well as a silent and live auction.

On Saturday, March 11, the community is invited to the new facility for the Inaugural Alaqua Wellness Festival from 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. The event will celebrate animals, humans, the earth and how each coexist with one another. The festival, which will



become an annual event at the new facility, will showcase wellness facilitators, art and holistic vendors, nature trail tours, educational seminars, children's activities, live music, vegan food, and local breweries. The day will conclude with a ceremonial bonfire.

Alaqua will officially open its doors to the public once again on Tuesday, March 14 for visits, tours, and adoptions, and will be open daily Tuesday through Sunday of each week from 11 a.m. – 4 p.m.

The following weekend, Alaqua will host their first Adoption Event, Volunteer Drive and Fun Run/Walk at the new facility on Saturday, March 18 from 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. The community is invited to meet, interact, and learn more about adopting one of Alaqua's available animals including cats, dogs, rabbits, birds, and farm animals. The volunteer team will also be available to answer questions and sign up those interested in becoming volunteers themselves. There will be food trucks, education booths, dog training tips, and tours of the grounds and nature trails throughout the afternoon.

The month of celebrations will conclude with a Wild and Free Festival on Saturday, March 25 from 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. This event will highlight Alaqua's Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, a state and federally permitted facility, providing a much-needed resource for rescue, rehabilitation, and release of sick, injured, and orphaned native Florida wildlife across an 11-county area. The festival will kick off with a "baby shower" to raise awareness and gather supplies for the upcoming "baby" season where the Refuge takes in hundreds of orphaned wildlife patients. Following the shower, guests will have access to food trucks, craft beer stations, and live music throughout the day. Alaqua's new wildlife rescue ambulance will be onsite for tours

Continued on page 38



The Hills are Alive with the Sound of Music!

BY ANNA FISHER, ASSOCIATE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, ECTC

Raise your hand if you've ever come upon an open grassy field and spread your arms out while twirling and singing, "The hills are alive, with the sound of music?" No one? Just me? Okay even if you ignored that impulse, I know you wanted to breathe in the fresh spring air and twirl with abandon as you embodied one of your favorite moments from "Sound of Music." We all have our favorite memories

from this beautiful Rodgers and musical to our stage. Hammerstein classic stage play and movie. Everyone learned to sing the notes along to "doe, a deer, a female deer" and find our dreams when we "climb every mountain."

I am so excited to bring this beautiful, based-on-true-events story to life this spring at Emerald Coast Theatre Company. We have a cast of extremely talented adult and child actors who are already working hard in rehearsals to bring this gorgeous

One of the greatest challenges of casting is finding the right actress to play Maria. She has to not only be able to sing like an angel, but to also be angelic in her demeanor. We have to believe that she would come to love a group of children as her own and embrace a life that she did not plan for herself. If you have met Anna Joy Powell, you know that she is the perfect actress to tell this story of love, family and overcoming. She is a

pastor's wife and mother of four with the voice of an angel.

You won't want to miss Anna Joy and the rest of this incredible cast as they create all of those beautiful moments we cherish from this beloved classic. This family-friendly show opens May 5th and runs through the 14th. Green flag beach days, the scent of fresh lemons and The Sound of Music at ECTC-these are a few of my favorite things.



Three of Anna's children from left to right: Selah, Naomi and Vera



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Studio 237 Music Lessons: The Charms of Music

Playing an instrument or listening to music have numerous benefits for our health. Music has the power to influence our mood, reduce stress and anxiety, enhance cognitive function, and even improve physical health.

Music can have a profound impact on our emotions and can have a significant effect on our mental state. Listening to music has a positive impact on cognitive function, such as memory and focus. Studies have shown that playing an instrument, even at a beginner level, can improve memory and executive function, as well as increasing brain plasticity. John Dan PhD, Chair of Neuroscience at Perelman School of Medicine, says, "it engages every major part of the central nervous system. For example, playing the violin uses the peripheral nervous system, which controls movement of your fingers, as well as gross and fine motor skills. The brain's executive function - which plans and makes decisions - comes into play as a musician plays one part but keeps focus on what's coming next. Couple that with the total sensory input all at the same time (visual, auditory, emotional) and playing a song becomes a total "workout" for the brain."

Music Can Reduce Stress

Research has shown that listening to relaxing music before bed or during periods of stress can help to reduce cortisol levels, a hormone associated with stress and weight gain. Additionally, playing an instrument can help to reduce anxiety by bringing our minds into the present moment instead of focusing on our worries.

A 2020 study, found that 57 percent of Americans use music as a form of stress reduction, compared to just 40 percent who find exercise helpful, so the stress-relieving benefits of music are definitely no secret.

Music Can Improve Your Physical Health

Music can have a positive impact on physical health, particularly in the areas of pain management, sleep quality, and cardiovascular health. Listening to relaxing music before bed can help to improve sleep quality, which is important for optimum healing of injuries, and for mus-



cle growth. Listening to up-tempo music (especially while exercising) has been shown to increase heart rate and blood flow, improving cardiovascular health and our motivation levels.

Many of us enjoy dancing to music at clubs or social events, and even more of us enjoy adding music to our jogging, weight training, or Pilates workouts, so it's incredibly easy to reap the physical benefits of music.

Music Can Help someone with Alzheimer's Disease

Individuals living with Alzheimer's or other kinds of memory loss can find a sense of familiarity and comfort in music. The musical part of the brain is barely affected by the disease, so even those who struggle to remember names and faces of their loved ones can still enjoy singing along to their favorite songs.

Music therapy sessions are popular for those living with memory loss. These usually involve a fun and relaxed environment, singing, playing, or clapping along with the therapist either in a personal session or in a group. They provide an opportunity for social interaction and emotional expression, helping to reduce feelings of isolation and depression.

Time to Start Your Benefits

So, playing an instrument and listening to music both have numerous health benefits that range from improving mood, reducing stress, enhancing cognitive function, to promoting physical health. Children are a



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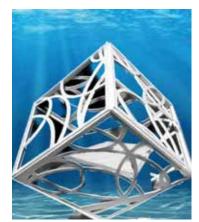


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Seven Designs Selected For Underwater Museum Of Art Installation

The Cultural Arts Alliance of Walton County (CAA) and South Walton Artificial Reef Association (SWARA) will reveal seven new sculpture designs chosen by jury for permanent exhibition in the fifth installation of the Underwater Museum of Art (UMA).

The 2023 installation will include Quantum Reef by Chris Chubb (Tallahassee), Space Nest by Frank Henderson (Evanston, Ill.), Welcome Home by Zachery Long (Oklahoma City), Madam Nature by Andrew Luy (Huntsville, Ala.), Cetacean Remains by Pat Mclain (Stone



Mountain, Ga.), One Tree by Ann Moeller Steverson (Huntsville, Ala.) and Opus by Allison Wickey (Santa Rosa Beach).

Alaqua's new home while si-

multaneously honoring Alaqua's

overall mission and vision for

animals within the community

and across the state of Florida



Named in 2018 by TIME Magazine as one of 100 "World's Greatest Places," the UMA is presented as part of CAA's Art

everything they are doing to

treat, rescue, rehabilitate, and

save the animals who need it

most. There are multiple spon-

sorship opportunities available

In Public Spaces Program and augments SWARA's mission of creating marine habitat and expanding fishery populations while providing enhanced creative, cultural, economic and educational opportunities for the benefit, education and enjoyment of residents, students and visitors in Walton County.

UMA sculptures are deployed with SWARA's existing USACOA and FDEP permitted artificial reef projects that includes nine nearshore reefs located within one nautical mile of the shore in approximately 58 feet of water. The 2023 installation will join the 34 sculptures previously deployed on a one-acre permit patch of seabed off Grayton Beach State Park, further expanding the nation's first permanent underwater museum.

Deployment of the 2023 UMA installation is slated for summer. Visit UMAFL.org for more information on the timeline and events surrounding UMA's launch. Project and sculpture sponsorships are available. Please contact Gabby Callaway at gabby@culturalartsalliance.com for sponsorship details.

ALAQUA

continued from page 35

and will be filled with animal ambassadors. There will also be kid's activities including a wildlife scavenger hunt, face painting, and birdhouse decorating.

Each of these events will highlight a different area of



around me used to be a dream, and now it's a reality," Laurie said. "We couldn't have done this without all the support within our community and across the state. Our volunteers, builders, donors and supporters are the ones who made this happen and are the ones who are going to be making a difference in animals'

lives for years to come."

With the exception of the 100 Point and Cult Wine Dinner, all of the weekend events are open to the public and free to attend. However, donations are appreciated at the entrance to support Alaqua's mission. For more information, call (850) 880-6399 or visit www.Alaqua.org.





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- June 15 | Journeyman: A Tribute to Eric Clapton
 - MKAF.org/events





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Community

BAY BUZZ

continued from page 4

Emerald Coast Autism Center 2023 ONE Campaign

Emerald Coast Autism Center (ECAC) is launching the **11th Annual ONE Campaign** to provide scholarships to students with autism. ECAC's ONE Campaign is an annual effort to raise funds and awareness of autism within Okaloosa and surrounding counties.

ECAC is kicking off the 2023 ONE Campaign with the 11th annual ONE Run 5K Saturday, April 1, 8 a.m., at Emerald Coast Autism Center on the campus of Northwest Florida State College, 80 College Blvd. East, Niceville. An after party with food, music, and raffle drawings will follow. The ONE Campaign will continue with a golf tournament at Blackstone Golf Course in Mossy Head Friday, Sept. 29, with a 9 a.m. shotgun start.

The **Choctawhatchee Audubon Society** invites the public to attend its monthly evening program Thursday, March 2. George Ross will share his experience photographing hundreds of birds in many different ecosystems in Costa Rica. The biodiversity of Costa Rica



makes this one of the top ecotourist destinations. Come learn about the country with an area smaller than West Virginia with the greatest density of bird species of any continental American country with 945 reported bird species, including 50 different hummingbird species. This program will be in Room 800 on the 2nd floor of the Chandler Center (NW door of

519 Helms St.) at the Crosspoint Church in Niceville. Socializing with refreshments begins at 6:30 p.m., and the program be-



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open to the public. Visit Choctawhatcheeaudubon.org for updated information on programs and bird walks. March 4, Wright Landfill and the Okaloosa Holding

gins at 7. Admission is free and

Ponds, 7:30 a.m.; March 11, bird walk to Destin Beaching and Birding Spots, 7:30 a.m.; March 18, Eden Gardens State Park, 8:30 a.m.; March 25, Deer Lake Restoration Area, 9 a.m.



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