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## From the Depths of Despair to Radiant Hope Resilience and Courage Define OHP's Sherry Jones

#### BY DOUG STAUFFER

This story began four decades ago and details the extraordinary journey of a local girl who, at the tender age of 18 and fresh out of high school, found herself unwittingly intertwined with a drug kingpin. This captivating narrative chronicles a story of redemption and second chances, a tale of reclaiming life from the depth of despair.

In the grand tapestry of human existence, redemption and second chances form the core of our most captivating narratives. They are the vital elements that enable countless individuals to resurrect their lives and produce meaningful change in the world. This account serves as a heartfelt testament that everyone, despite their missteps, deserves a chance at redemption.

Sherry Jones grew up in Fort Walton Beach, graduated from Choctaw High School, and entered such a narrative



in March 1983. This narrative began when she visited her stepfather at the Eglin AFB Federal Prison, unofficially known as "The Country Club." Her stepfather, incarcerated for suspected tax evasion but later cleared, had been befriended by a charismatic prisoner named Jorge Valdes. This magnetic Cuban man would assert, in no uncertain terms, that he was destined to marry Sherry. Jorge, an intelligent, sophisticated and attractive figure, was serving time for conspiracy to import cocaine into the U.S. However, he avowed that he had turned over a new leaf as a born-again Christian and left his criminal past behind. Young and naïve, Sherry was drawn into Jorge's orbit, her parents' approval strengthening the allure. In October 1983, Sherry and Jorge tied the knot, and Jorge regained his freedom on July 25, 1984.

Unbeknownst to Sherry and her family, Jorge had ascended to U.S. chief of operations for the infamous Colombian Medellín Drug Cartel, headed by the notorious Pablo Escobar. Jorge's journey into this world began innocuously with a position as an accountant at the Federal Reserve Bank. Soon after, he

SHERRY JONES

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Estuary Program Brings Bay's Importance to Coastal Residents

By Kenneth Books

The average human body contains about 60 percent water. And we die after about three days without ingesting liquids.

Yet, most of us take water, the most crucial element in the world, for granted.

The Choctawhatchee Bay Estuary Program is designed to create

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### n Community

### **SHERRY JONES**

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established his own business, taking on what appeared to be a simple grocery store as his first client. However, this store operated beneath the surface as a front for illicit drug activities. Jorge's adeptness didn't remain hidden for long, eventually drawing the attention of Pablo Escobar and Manny Graces, resulting in their collaboration in the growing drug trade.

While Sherry joined Jorge's affluent lifestyle, complete with housekeepers and nannies, the origin of his wealth remained obscured. Sherry's life had all the trappings of a fairytale: dinner trips from Miami to Los Angeles on a Lear Jet, an array of

luxury cars, a waterfront home in Coconut Grove, Miami, and a 200-acre horse breeding ranch named Santa Barbara in Clewiston, yachts, along with a beach house in Ft. Myers. Sherry remained blissfully ignorant of the real money-making scheme, assuming it to be quarter horse breeding and horse racing. Sherry did not speak Spanish, so the language barrier cloaked his discussions when people came to their home. Before Pablo Escobar became a visibly recognizable figure, he was already a regular visitor to their home.

In 1986, they welcomed their first child into the world. However, the following year, Sherry's life took an unexpected turn. An accidental discovery of a hidden room filled with money from the floor to the ceiling shattered her illusions about Jorge's wealth and his proclaimed innocence. Upon confronting Jorge, she faced a cold reality: exiting the drug trade could have life-threatening consequences.

Sherry felt trapped with only a high school education, lacking job skills and expecting their second child. When she discovered Jorge's infidelity, she opted to leave him, returning to Fort Walton Beach. Subsequent efforts attempted reconciliation which resulted in the birth of their third child. In 1989, Sherry could not handle the constant fear and insurmountable turmoil, so she filed for divorce. An attorney advised Sherry to copy records for proof of income. Jorge caught her, thinking her intent was dubious, and warned her that she could get everyone killed. She left without the records or proof for future support.

In 1991, prompted by concerns for Sherry's safety and that of their children, Jorge insisted that they leave Florida. This cautionary move was due to his impending role as a federal witness in the high-profile trial of Sal Magluta and Willy Falcon. His testimony was a means to extricate himself from the charges he faced and a protective measure to prevent Sherry's potential indictment due to the federal law's guilt-by-association outcome. It was Jorge who had originally ushered these two infamous figures into the drug trade. Witness assassinations

and alleged juror bribes marred the subsequent trial. Although initially acquitted in 1996, Magluta and Falcon were later convicted of money laundering and bribery charges. The cult film, "Cocaine Cowboys," and Netflix's six-part documentary, "Cocaine Cowboys-The Kings of Miami," portrayed their infamous stories. Jorge chronicled his own experience in a series of books, including his autobiography, "Coming Clean," where he details Sherry's life with him during that time.

Jorge, who had been re-arrested in 1990, faced eight life sentences for conspiracy to import narcotics. Following a 5-year prison stint, he earned

Continued on next page

### **ESTUARY**

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awareness of that body of water and how its values include environmental, economic and social benefits.

"We are a grant-based program funded from the BP oil spill settlement and EPA," says Sabina Pennington, Public Outreach Specialist. The RE-STORE Act, or "Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economies of the Gulf Coast States Act," provides financing in response to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill that took place April 20, 2010.

In 2019, the Choctawhatchee Bay Estuary Coalition was established to provide a regional



The Choctawhatchee Bay and River Watershed.

program for the management, restoration and protection of the Choctawhatchee Bay and watershed. It comprises 10 counties in Alabama and four

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The hiring of a lawyer is an important decision that should not be based solely upon advertisements Before you decide, ask us to send you free written information about our qualifications and experience. in Florida, each of which is a source of water flowing into the Bay.

"It's important for everybody to work to bring awareness of the importance of watersheds and the environmental and economic impact to our communities," Sabina says. "It's wonderful to work collaboratively to benefit the estuary program with a common goal. I think of it as "Connecting our Waters to People."

An estuary, she said, is any body of water that meets the sea.

The watershed has a surface area of 5,400 square miles, with an average daily fresh water inflow of 63,665 gallons.

It's also the home of a diverse group of wildlife, from blue herons to turtles. The Coalition members include Holmes. Walton, Okaloosa and Washington counties in Florida, the Air Force, the Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance and the Choctawhatchee, Pea and Yellow **Rivers Watershed Management** Authority in Alabama.

"The Coalition works with the public to share and educate the importance to our communities, not just environmentally, but economically and socially,' Sabina says. In the future, she says, a comprehensive conservation management plan will be developed to bring together five focus areas. "I kind of call it a to-do list," she says.

The coalition seems to be made to order for Sabina, who emigrated from Czechoslovakia at age 3. She saw her position advertised on the Okaloosa County website and showed it to one of her sons, who told her, "Mom, it's perfect for you." She holds a bachelor of science in environmental science from the University of Massachusetts and a master of science from Johns Hopkins University in environmental management and planning. She moved to the Emerald Coast with her husband, Allen, a retired Air Force major and has three sons: AJ, 22, a recent Florida State University graduate, Alex, 17, a senior at Niceville High School and Adrian, 15, a sophomore at NHS.

"The coolest thing is I engage with the public," Sabina says. "Education and outreach are the most important and pivotal part of any program. It's very important to our community to bring awareness to the local economy to the betterment of the beautiful area we have



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### 🌸 Community

### **SHERRY JONES**

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a Ph.D. at Loyola University in Chicago, authored a biography and established the Tres Hermanos Foundation for criminal reform. The government estimated that the cartel had brought 75 tons of cocaine into the United States; the cartel estimated it to be 175 tons, valued at almost five billion dollars.

Sherry's journey continued as she remarried in 1992, leading a discreet life in Texas. Later, she returned to Fort Walton Beach after another divorce following 26 years in an increasingly turbulent marriage. Meanwhile, Sherry experienced a drastic shift from luxury to poverty. She survived on welfare and worked two jobs to provide for her three children. She sought refuge with her parents, allowing herself some respite and time to heal. Sherry pursued higher education, earning a B.A. in Communication and Behavioral Science.

Sherry is presently the Director of Communications and Public Relations at One Hopeful Place (OHP), the sole low-barrier shelter in Northwest Florida. OHP assists the homeless population in the community through



its inclusive programs, providing temporary housing and resources for reclaiming independence. The shelter accommodates even those with felony convictions, barring those related to sexual abuse. Sherry is grateful to Ted Corcoran, president & CEO of the Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce, for allowing her to make a positive difference in the lives of others.

Veterans are accorded top priority, with the Veterans Affairs Department contacted promptly to activate necessary benefits. Extensive background checks are carried out to validate the narratives of potential residents. OHP also collaborates with the Bridgeway Center in Fort Walton Beach to offer mental health treatment and detox services. Moreover, OHP plans to construct "tiny" homes to provide transitional housing, a venture requiring substantial community support.

OHP also offers a threeday-a-week program (Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m.), allowing the homeless to come and eat a hot meal, shower and do laundry. The homeless living in their cars are provided a safe car park area. When winter temperatures fall below 40 degrees, OHP opens a cold night, 48-bed area to house the homeless overnight.

Beyond her commitments at OHP, Sherry also devotes her time to several philanthropic pursuits. She serves as a Guardian Ad Litem for the First Judicial Circuit Court in Florida. She offers her experience and empathy as an instructor for a church-based Divorce Care program. In a leadership capacity, she is the Vice President of Parkinson's Strong, Inc., a nonprofit organization based in Destin. She has also established World Class Scholarship Pageantry, LLC, which cultivates philanthropic values in young women, with OHP benefiting from their charitable efforts.

Despite the turbulence in her personal life, Sherry has successfully fostered academic and professional growth in her children. Each of the children graduated from highly ranked universities. Their first daughter has a Master's degree and is a dedicated educator. Their second daughter serves as a Florida Barred attorney. She serves as a risk analyst for the Department of Education in Washington, D.C. Their son is a CFO of a publicly listed company on NASDAQ. Sherry's youngest daughter is completing a Master's in the Medical Science field. Against all odds, Sherry has been instrumental in shaping her children's successful career paths.

Sherry Jones' story is a testament to her resilience and the power of second chances. With her experience and understanding, it's fitting that she has been called to One Hopeful Place since there are similar stories of hope from those that One Hopeful Place serves. With plans to share her extraordinary journey in a forthcoming book, she stands as a beacon of hope, reflecting the potential for renewal even in the face of adversity. Meet Sherry and consider supporting One Hopeful Place and its mission.



2201 N. Partin Drive, Niceville, FL 32578

### The community

# Meet our Hometown Hero Judah Claire Pierce Persistence Through the Pain

By Lori Leath Smith

Publisher Note: It is always an honor to write about a Hometown Hero. For many, the word hero brings a particular image or personality to mind. Yet, our heroes vary in age and are as unique and special as the life they have lived and the inspiration they are for each of us. They come from all walks of life, and their occupations, ambitions and accomplishments motivate us to embrace our own life's challenges with determination and hope. As we listen to them share the trials and triumphs of their life journey, our heart is awakened to the reality of exactly how fragile and precious life is. The truths they communicate are a solemn reminder we should strive daily to cherish every moment and celebrate the ones who make our life beautiful in every way. Niceville local Judah Claire Pierce is one such non-assuming hero. Her story is one of resilience, persistence and zeal to maintain a sense of normalcy through soul-crushing pain.

At age 10, Judah Claire Pierce experienced an ordinary day at summer camp nestled in the foothills of Georgia. A spontaneous dash down a hill strewn with large tree roots resulted in a minor fracture in her left foot – an incident now three years past. Reflecting on that moment, Judah remarked, "Little did I know that this seemingly innocent act would lead me down a path I never could have imagined."

Her path is one etched with unrelenting pain. Each morning, Judah awakens to a world filled with stabbing, searing and crushing sensations—a chronic condition she vividly describes as "feeling like I am being



burned alive. No matter what I do, the pain persists relentlessly. It affects even the simplest tasks like going to school, tidying my room, or just trying to live a normal life...making me feel as though I'm wearing a mask of happiness," shared Judah.

Initially deemed a minor injury, her condition baffled doctors as her relentless suffering defied relief. Through an array of medical interventions and rigorous physical therapy, she eventually received a rare but life-altering diagnosis: Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS), a neurological anomaly casting her into a realm of chronic, intense pain to her left leg.

Termed the "Suicide Disease" from the relentless pain it induces, CRPS stems from autonomic nervous system imbalances and dysfunction. As Judah's parents, Blake and Candace Pierce, describe it, "CRPS is one of the most excruciatingly painful diseases known to humankind, surpassing even childbirth and amputation without anesthesia on the McGill





Pain Index." Highlighted as one of the top 20 most agonizing conditions, many instances follow forceful traumas to limbs or ankles, among other triggers. However, the mechanism behind why these injuries provoke CRPS remains elusive.

"Working with the doctors was a challenge, because Judah's pain never matched her injury. She would scream in pain," recounted Candace, Judah's mother. She continued, "As a mom, it's so hard to watch your daughter crying in pain every day, just trying to live her life and you can't fix it. With all







these healthcare degrees, I still can't stop my daughter's suffering."

During the summer of 2022, the Pierces found their way to a distinguished CRPS program at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia where she relearned how to walk and run barefoot, revitalizing mobility in her left leg. "Unfortunately, unlike others who completed the program, my pain did not go into remission and has only intensified since then," said Judah.

While CRPS often leads many affected children to wheelchairs and eventual bed confinement, her father, Blake, proudly stated, "Yet, Judah refuses to let this awful disease steal her childhood." Despite enduring countless hurdles, she persistently greets each new day with a smile, striving to maintain a semblance of normalcy amidst the emotionally draining and physically relentless pain.

"I believe it's Judah's faith that fuels her with such resilience," commented Candace. "She identifies closely with Paul in the Bible who was given a thorn. 'Therefore, so that I would not become arrogant, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to trouble me—so that I would not become arrogant. I asked the Lord three times about this, that it would depart from me. But he said to me. My grace is enough for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. So then, I will boast most gladly about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may reside in me.' ~ 2 Corinthians 12: 7-9, New English Translation." "It's that we all want it to go away; and even though it sucks, it's not the end," said Candace.

Now approaching age 13, Judah embraces her challenges.

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### The community

### Bay Buzz

**Okaloosa No. 312 F. & A.M.** annually adopts first year elementary school teachers in the Niceville area. They are presented with a check to assist in establishing their first school room as a teacher. The selected first year teacher from Edge Elementary is Cecelia Roff. Pictured left to right: Robert Anderson, Melissa Kearley, Cecelia Roff, Timothey Kennedy and Norma Kennedy.

You're invited to the **Oka**loosa County 2023 Women's Hall of Fame induction ceremony August 28, 6 p.m., at the Emerald Coast Convention Center to honor the following recipients:

Ms. Bonnie Barlow, Carolyn Spencer Humanitarian Inductee; Ms. Lucinda "Cindy"

SINFONIA GULF COAST

Frakes, Community Service Inductee; Lt. Betty Jo Hunter, ret., Pioneer Inductee; Hon. Patricia Grinsted, Professional Leader Inductee and Col. Teresa Ryan, ret., Military Inductee.

The keynote speaker is Judy Byrne Riley, local activities, past Hall of Fame Inductee and Past Chair, Florida Commission of the Status of Women. RSVP to theocsw@gmail.com.

Join others for the **Importance of a Community-Based Estuary Program**, Sept. 7 at 6:30 p.m. at Crosspoint Church Niceville, Room 800 on the 2nd floor of the Chandler Center (NW door of 519 Helms St.). Attendees will discuss the importance of estuaries, and how connecting the birds and the bees, the water and the trees can help overcome challenges that local communities face. Admission is free and open to the interested public.

You don't want to miss "**Tacos Under the Trees**" Saturday, September 16th at the E. O. Wilson Biophilia Center. It's an all-you-can-eat taco bar, bottomless margaritas, live music, tequila tasting, a ride on the new Turtle Train and much more! Space is limited! Register online today and visit eowilsoncenter.org.

Join the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida in celebrating National Con**stitution week** by hearing the story of "The longest siege of the American Revolution; the Battle of Pensacola" presented by author Wesley S. Odom, Saturday, Sept. 23, 10:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m., 115 Westview Ave., Valparaiso. Lasting nine weeks in 1781, this little-known battle impacted the Revolution in a decisive way and, in this lesson, you will hear the surprising end of the siege. \$10 per attendee and \$6 for museum members. Special group price \$20 for a group of 4 or \$15 for members. CALL 850-678-2615 Visit heritage-museum.org.

Make plans now for the annual **"Fallapalooza" at the**  **E. O. Wilson Biophilia Center** Saturday, September 23rd, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. There will be food trucks, yard games, bounce houses, animal encounters and much more! Admission is \$8 for adults and \$5 for ages 4–12.

Walk to conquer Chiari Saturday, September 23, at the Horse Power Pavilion, 4497 St. Hwy. 20W, Freeport, to raise awareness of Chiari Malformation and to raise money for valuable research. Registration begins at 8 a.m.; Walk starts at 9:30 a.m. There will be live music from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. by the Backsliders, face painting, guest speakers, and more! For more information, contact Marion Gipson at 334-313-0875 or visit the Conquer Chiari website at Walk.conquerchiari.org Chiari Malformation is a neurological disorder where the brain descends out of the skull and puts pressure on the spine. This affects over 300,000 people in the U.S. and affects people of all ages and races. Help us gain funds and awareness for important research and WALK for a cause!

Enjoy food, music, dance, a live DJ and contemporary art at the **31st Annual Emerald Coast National Juried Art** Exhibition, McIlroy Gallery, Thursday, August 31, 6–8 p.m., Mattie Kelly Arts Center Galleries at Northwest Florida State College-Awards Best in Show: 6:15 p.m.; Artist Talk: 6:30 p.m. See contemporary art made by 20 different artists from across the U.S. guest juried by Dr. Maria Elena Buszek, Professor of Art History, University of Colorado. There will be a debut solo exhibition by ECN 30's Best-in-Show artist, Ainaz Alipour, MA in film ('21) and MFA fine art ('24). See a blend of high & low-tech materials and processes, including virtual reality, projection, 3D Printing and hand sewing. Free and open to the public.

Exhibition Dates: August 31-December 15, 2023. MKAC

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CABARET at seagar's

### An Evening with Laura Benanti

Don't miss this extraordinary enchantment of Tony Award-winning Broadway star Laura Benanti in a one-night-only solo concert. Known for her brilliant performances in iconic musicals like *The Sound of Music* (Maria), *Into the Woods* (Cinderella) and *Gypsy* (Louise), as well as TV and film's (*The Sound of Music Live!*, *Tick Tick ... Boom*, *Life & Beth*, *Worth*, *The Gilded Age* and more) her brilliant vocals and diverse repertoire will captivate you. Experience a mesmerizing musical journey as she performs your favorites from the American Songbook to Broadway's best.

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# **Preserving Healthy Green Space for Bluewater Bay's Future Generations**

By Barbara Palmgren

There is an old saying, "It takes a village to raise a child." Neighbors and friends of Bluewater Bay are working hard to save their village. In the next few months, they will make a decision to either preserve the precious green space that has defined Bluewater Bay for decades, or to hand that green space over to developers, increasing the already heavy burden on local infrastructure, school systems and the environment.

Leaders of the effort to preserve Bluewater Bay want to keep the Bluewater Bay Golf Course operational, because it is the most cost-effective way to maintain their 150 acres of green space. They are rallying the community to buy the course when its lease ends in February, 2024. The course was once magnificent, but like many other courses, it struggled after the 2008 recession. However, thanks to new leadership, the golf course is coming back to life, and importantly, it is now

realizing a profit and has the staff, equipment and materials to continue operating for a profit. The golf course helps pay for maintenance of these green spaces.

I once wrote a book titled, Saving A Golf Course. This book told the story of our efforts over a decade ago to save the Shalimar Point Golf Club. There are many similarities between our fight to save Shalimar Pointe and the fight to save Bluewater Bay. Ultimately, Shalimar Pointe was saved by the generosity of residents and non-residents as far as Destin who pledged support and purchased shares of an LLC to buy the course from the Meadowbrook Corporation.

David Rauch is one of the founding members of the Preserve Bluewater Bay (PBWB) organization and has read my book. Looking to the 2012 Shalimar Pointe Golf Club situation, Dave and I recently had a conversation about the challenges Bluewater Bay is facing.



Dave told me they began their Capital Campaign earlier this year to raise a total of \$2.4 million to purchase the course. They are now approaching a critical point in their timeline. By October, they will need to have received \$2 million in pledges to move forward. As of August 16, they have received \$920,000 in pledges.

I hope our community can come together to save Bluewater Bay the same way it came together to save Shalimar Pointe. Support can come throughout the county and region. Communication about the timelines and necessary funds through news and social media has begun. Please, neighbors and friends inside and outside Bluewater Bay, help save this green space.

#### How can you help?

The easiest way to help is to pledge financial support. You will not be asked to honor the pledge until the PBWB organization knows it has raised enough funds to purchase the course. PBWB has applied for non-profit 501C3 status with the State of Florida. This means that your individual or business contribution could potentially be counted as a tax deduction.

Next, if you are a resident of Bluewater Bay and live on the course, you can join what I call the "Hi ho Sliver" campaign. This campaign allows homeowners that live on the course to extend their property line 20 feet into the golf course for \$8.00 a sq ft. Slivers will be thanked with a lawn sign at the edge of their property to let the community know their part in this preservation effort. Century 21 Blue Marlin Pelican realtors Bob and Debbie Stretch can be reached at (850) 218-8312 for more information about this purchase.

I truly hope our community both residents and nonresidents of Bluewater Bay - can come together to save this village. You don't have to own golf course property to make a difference. You don't need to be a golfer. You don't even need to live in Bluewater Bay. Anyone can contribute, and every contribution helps. With your contribution, you can be part of a community-owned and community-operated group with voting rights about land decisions. You will own an iconic course and make this green space available for future generations. You will make a difference. You will save a village.

Contact the leadership of "The Capital Campaign" to save 150 acres of green space that defines the area. Visit online at preservebwb.com or call David Rauch at (850) 865-0897.



The Preserve Bluewater Bay seeks to save the green space in Bluewater Bay that has always made Bluewater Bay unique and magnificent.

We need to raise \$2.4M through the Capital Campaign to purchase the 150 acres that is available. As of 8/16 \$920,000 has been raised so far. Please let's keep the momentum going.

Today, the green space is primarily used as a golf course, which helps pay for its maintenance. By owning the land, we can ensure that it remains green, open and ours!

Please attend a meeting at the clubhouse to learn more: Thur. 8/24 @ 6pm Wed. 9/6 @ 6pm Thur. 9/21 @ 6pm Tues. 10/10 @ 6pm Mon. 10/16 @ 6pm

Support our efforts by: Donating or Volunteering • Attending Events • Playing Golf Visit preservebwb.com golf@preservebwb.com | 850-865-0897

### ( Community

### **BAY BUZZ EVENTS**

#### The 3rd Annual Wentz Brothers' Festival of Fears Continues to Become Bigger & Better

The Wentz Brothers invite one and all to their third annual Festival of Fears haunted attraction in Fort Walton Beach. This year's event promises to be bigger and better than the last, opening in a new facility at the Santa Rosa Mall. The new location boasts over 80,000 square feet, leaving the Wentz Brothers, Alex and Andrew, with plenty of room to continue growing the Festival of Fears into "the Gulf Coast's premier haunted attraction."

The 2023 haunt season will introduce guests to a number of new characters, offerings and attractions you won't want to miss. The Festival of Fears will host three all-new, original haunted houses alongside new and improved horror-themed midway games, two haunted,

15-minute escape rooms, a spooky gift shop, food trucks and an expanded bar serving a variety of drinks from alcohol to event-exclusive Fear Potions. The Wentz Brothers also plan to host a number of new events held throughout the season such as the inaugural Drop Dead Disco costume party, two Family Day events, and a special sur-

#### prise for Friday the 13th. Keeping with the Festival

of Fears' tradition of changing haunted house themes each season, 2023 will boast three unique, haunted house concepts and styles. The first, Beasts of the Bayou, will transport guests into a backwoods marsh never explored by man, but home to a bevy of hideous and hungry monsters. Next, Nightmare Menagerie will have guests venture into an abandoned, roadside zoo that has now become home to a new breed of evil. And finally, guests will step under the big top to see the newest additions to the Collector's horrifying horde in Into The Festival Of Fears: The Secret Show. Additionally, guests can test their nerves and their wits in two new, haunted, 15-minute escape rooms Lazarus Toys: No Escape and

Lazarus Toys: No Escape and Experiments In Evil: Razorback's Revenge.

The Festival of Fears is located in the old JC Penney's building at Santa Rosa Mall and is open select nights from September 15th to November 4th. Haunting hours start at 6 p.m. sharp with a special pre-show to kick things off — so don't be late. Guests who book their tickets for any night in September will receive \$5 off general admission or \$10 off express entry or VIP passes using the promo code: SEPTEMBER at checkout. Tickets can be purchased at the door or online at www.wbfestivaloffears.com.

#### Join the 6th Annual Niceville Strong October 1

Niceville Strong, an annual prayer rally designed to unite the local community in the fight against addiction, mental health issues and violence, is scheduled for Sunday, October 1 at 6 p.m. in the Niceville High School Auditorium. Now in its sixth year, the event has become a Niceville staple for successfully bringing together community leaders, faith-based organizations, residents, and businesses to address growing pressures on today's students and communities.

In 2022, drug overdose deaths rose to nearly 110,000 a staggering statistic that represents the third year in a row where overdose deaths exceeded 100,000 across the U.S. In Florida alone, overdose deaths account for more than 5,200 lives per year, and the suicide rate is currently greater than the national average.

Featuring an evening of music, prayer, testimonies and speakers, Niceville Strong is free and open to the public and typically draws approximately 500 people. The agenda will feature pastors from local churches, school officials and community leaders, as well as families and students who will share their experiences and offer inspiration to others.

In addition, representatives from local resource groups will be on hand beginning at 5:30 p.m. to provide information to families and students in need of help. These groups include faith-based support and recovery groups, student advocacy groups and other organizations focused on breaking the cycle of negative influences.

A united community front that is grounded in faith is the best offense in defeating the negative dynamics impacting our youth and families," said Perian Herring, cofounder of the event with her husband Eddie Herring. "Prayer is our most powerful weapon."

For more information about Niceville Strong, visit www. nicevillestrong.com.

### It's Almost Time for Mid-Bay Rotary's 29th Annual Oktoberfest

Friday, Sept 29 | Saturday, Sept 30 | Merchants Walk - Bluewater Bay

The Mid-Bay Rotary Club will hold its 29th Annual Okto-





berfest Friday (5 to 10 p.m.) and Saturday (11 a.m. to 10 p.m.) September 29 & 30. The Octoberfest will be held again at Merchants Walk in Bluewater Bay. The festivities will include the Joe Occhipinti German Band. Accordionist Walter Kasprzyk, Face Painter Maria, The Emerald Coast Community Band and Folk Musician Gary Schmitz. There will be over 30 vendor booths. There will also be a children's giant slide, rock climb and bouncy house. Brats and Kraut, German Pretzels, Chicken, Hot Dogs will be served. German beer, soda and water will also be served. Free admission!





# Talent Has No Color Part 2:Embracing Opportunity

By Jené McCracken

Professor McCracken was a nationally known educator whose specialty was education management and organization. He was half of a U.S. Bureau of Education team visiting black colleges to assess results of a survey. While in the Rust College President's office, they heard the strains of a spiritual wafting through the open windows. Eager to learn more, an impromptu recital was arranged. Ruby sang nine songs including the stirring, vocally rigorous "Inflammatus et accensus." C. C. was awestruck. The young singer, not knowing how to read music, had memorized the music by listening to records. Rust college had no music department and not even one class provided musical training.

Ohio State did.

Within 24 hours, C. C., not having wealth of his own, relying solely upon his contacts and the promise of Ruby's talent, offered the penniless Ruby the possibility to attend Ohio State. A month later, fellow students and friends at Rust College cobbled together enough money for Ruby's traveling outfit and a train ticket. In 1927 Ruby Elzy traveled with a white, Rust College teacher, Ella Becker, who was going home for the summer holidays. To travel on the Pullman train together under the laws at the time, Ruby had to pose as the teacher's maid. When boarding the train, Miss Becker said, "Now, Ruby, you give our luggage to the porter." Ruby replied, "Yes, Miss Ella."

While attending Ohio State, Ruby lived with C. C. McCracken's family, which consisted of his wife, Cleo, and their four young children. Ruby quickly became especially attached to the youngest, Ed, who she called "my little Eddie." Cleo was a classically trained pi-

anist. Her Uncle worked at the Baldwin piano company where he built an upright grand piano for her in 1906. Cleo cherished and played the piano for her entire life. Cleo often accompanied Ruby as she practiced singing.

C. C. arranged for auditions, arranged introductions, opened a bank account for Ruby, mentored her and became the fa-



ther-figure that Ruby lacked. He maintained regular correspondence with Ruby's mother. While at Ohio State University, Ruby wrote a play, "Stumbling Upward," which was publicly performed. She had it copyrighted at C. C.'s suggestion. Ruby was considered "a member of the family" and participated in Sunday night Bible readings, served with Cleo's hot chocolate and cookies.

Having arrived at OSU with just raw determination and trusting her mentor, Ruby graduated with honors. At her senior graduation recital, she was the only performer before a packed auditorium. She was respected by her peers and by the community. Emma Elzy was in attendance. Ruby was wearing a new pink gown sewn by Cleo. Ruby was welcomed back to Rust College to teach, but her mother knew her talent was so great that she "belonged to the world." C. C. knew that, too.

Within one week of

Ruby's graduation, C.C. attended a luncheon with the endowment officer of the Rosenwald Foundation, established by the Jewish Chairman of the Board of Sears and Roebuck. C. C. wanted a scholarship for Ruby. The officer gave C. C. three minutes to make his pitch. In those three minutes, he convinced the officer. Ruby got her scholarship - to Juilliard.

Ruby moved into the YMCA near Julliard. C. C. concurrently accepted a job at Storrs, CT, to become the President of The Connecticut Agricultural College (now the University of Connecticut). Ruby took frequent train trips to her "beloved McCrackens" to spend her holidays with the family.

At Julliard, Ruby flourished as she had at OSU. She won two annual Rosenwald scholarships (normally only one is allowed) and won the prestigious Faculty Scholarship. She completed the course of study in two years instead of the expected three years. She became a part of the thriving, exciting, Harlem Renaissance community - artists who valued and honored their culture and sought unfettered expression. When her marriage failed after five years, Ruby visited the McCrackens' home, asked if she could sit down and play Cleo's piano. As she played, she sang, with heartbreaking feeling, "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen."

This is Part 2 of a 3-part series. If you missed Part 1, you can read it in Bay Life August 2023 at MyBay-LifeNWFL.com.



🏇 Community

tappenings Around the Bay

SEPTEMBER 2023

16th Annual Cardboard Boat Race

Greater FWB Chamber First Friday Coffee 01 7 am | Christian Life Center at First Baptist Church | FWB Live Music: Zaq Stiles 6 pm | Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar | FWB **RBCS Football vs. Joshua Christian Academy** 7 pm | Rocky Bayou Christian School | Niceville NHS Football vs. Milton 7 pm | Niceville High School | Niceville 02 | All Shooters Callout Competition 10 am | EC Indoor Shooting and Sport | Valparaiso Illuminated Letter Calligraphy with Elia Saxer 10:30 am | Artful Things | Niceville Live Music: Duchess 6 pm | LJ Schooners Restaurant | Niceville Niceville Monthly Cruise In 7 pm | Landsharks Pizza Company | Niceville Live Music: Hitide Band 03 6 pm | Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar | FWB **Chess Night** 04 6 pm | LJ Schooners Restaurant | Niceville 05 | Live Music: The Friskeys 6 pm | Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar | FWB Preserve Bluewater Bay Community Briefings 06 6 - 7 pm | Bluewater Bay Clubhouse | Niceville Wake Up w/Walton Area Chamber Breakfast 7:30 - 9 am | Sunset Bay Cafe | Miramar Beach Live Music: Joey Collins 07 6 pm | Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar | FWB Choctawhatchee Bay Estuary Program 6:30 pm | Crosspoint Church | Niceville NHS Football vs. Lincoln 7 pm | Niceville High School | Niceville Live Music: Purple Monkey 80 6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville Women's Climbing Circle 09 9 am | Rock Out Climbing Gym | Destin Field of Valor 10 am | Mullet Festival Grounds | Niceville Kids Book Reading with Robin Wiesneth

### 4 pm | LJ Schooners & Bluewater Bay Marina Live Music: The Friskeys 6 pm | Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar | FWB

10

- Niceville-Valparaiso Chamber Second 13 Wednesday Breakfast 7:30 am | Niceville Community Center | Niceville International Grenache Day Tasting 4:30 pm | Toast Wine Bar | Niceville Greater FWB Chamber Nothing But Networking 14 11:30 am | Pedro's Tacos and Tequila Bar | FWB Sparks in the Park 15-12 pm | Mullet Festival Grounds | Niceville 17 Poker Run 16 9 am | American Legion Post 221 | Niceville Sea Shul Rosh Hashanah New Year Celebration New Year New Tide 6 pm | Watersound Beach Club | Santa Rosa Beach Tacos Under the Trees 10 am | E. O. Wilson Biophilia Center | Freeport Free Shredding Event 19 10 am Niceville Recreation Center Niceville
- 10 am | Niceville Recreation Center | Niceville Live Music: The Friskeys 6 pm | Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar | FWB 21 | Greater FWB Chamber Business After Hours
- 5:30 pm | The Meridian at Westwood | FWB
   Preserve Bluewater Bay Community Briefings
   6 7 pm | Bluewater Bay Clubhouse | Niceville
   United Way EC 40 Under 40 Awards
  - 5:30pm | Shoreline Church | Destin
     Wine & Fries
     Ronald McDonald House Charities of NWFL | Hotel Effie
     NHS Football vs. Choctawhatchee
     7 pm | Niceville High School | Niceville
- Heritage Museum History Class

   10:30 am 1:30 pm | 115 Westview Ave. | Valparaiso
   Veterans Helping Veterans
   11 am-4 pm | Twin Cities Pavilion | Valparaiso
   Fallapalooza
   9 am-2 pm | E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center | Freeport
   3rd Annual Burgers, Bourbon, and Beer Festival
   12 pm | Destin Boardwalk behind Brotula's Seafood | Destin

8 am reg/Walk 9:30 am | Horse Power Pavilion | Freeport

FRANCES R

Hammock Bay - 1st & 3rd Sundays September 3, 17 8 am | Victory Blvd | Freeport

#### 24 Adoption Event 12 pm | PetSense | Niceville Sunday Sunset Shrimp Boil 6 pm | LJ Schooners Restaurant | Niceville

27 Sinfonia Cabaret feat. Laura Benanti 5:30 pm | Seagar's | Miramar Beach



The Hole in ONE Golf Tournament 29 benefiting Emerald Coast Autism Center 9 am | Blackstone Golf Course | DeFuniak Springs NHS Football vs. Crestview 7 pm | Niceville High School | Niceville Mid-Bay Rotary Annual Oktoberfest 5-10 pm | Merchants Walk Bluewater Bay Houndfest9 for Westonwood Ranch 30 Times vary | Idyll Hounds Brewery | Santa Rosa Beach Smoke on the Coast 3 pm | Destin Commons | Destin Zach Williams A Hundred Highways Tour 7 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville Mid-Bay Rotary Annual Oktoberfest 11 am -10 pm | Merchants Walk Bluewater Bay **ONGOING EVENTS** Trivia

6 pm | Tuesdays | Bayou Brewing | Niceville Rock'n Bingo 6 pm | Tuesdays | Bayou Brewing | Niceville Anime & Drawing Basics with Chris McLoone 6 pm | Tuesdays | Bayou Brewing | Niceville Open Mic & Karaoke Night 6 - 10 pm | Thursdays | LJ Schooners Restaurant | Niceville

Grand Boulevard - Saturdays September 2, 9, 16, 23, 30 9 am - 1 pm | Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach

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1 pm | Artful Things | Niceville Live Music: The Friskeys 6 pm | Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar | FWB Live Music: Duchess 6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville



Niceville Community - Saturdays September 2, 9, 16, 23, 30 9 am - 1 pm | Palm Plaza | Niceville

am - 1 pm | Palm Plaza | Niceville







Beer

Community

# **Caregiving for a Loved One With Alzheimer's:** Tips for a Compassionate Journey

By MATTHEW EATON

For Lisa LeClere of Fort Walton Beach, caring for her mother living with Alzheimer's was a journey in patience and grace. "I remember my mom would ask where my friends were who came home with me from work," said LeClere. "The first couple of times, I was tired after a long day. I snapped at her and told her it was just me. But I learned quickly it didn't help to lose my patience, to just go with it and look at things from her perspective." lence of Alzheimer's in the U.S, with more than 580,000 Floridians living with the disease supported by 827,000 unpaid caregivers.

LeClere was a caregiver for her mother, along with her father who was facing his own cancer diagnosis. Self-care, she says, was vital. "I learned to take two hours to myself," said LeClere. "You must do that in order to keep going."

Caregiving for family members can be overwhelming and many report experiencing highcare, and support groups can ease the challenges of caregiving. Many of these are available at low or no cost to Floridians through state and local programs. For more information, call the Alzheimer's Association 24/7 Helpline at 800.272.3900.

LeClere says it's important to ask for help in the caregiving journey. "Alzheimer's is such a taboo subject. I wish I had known what I know now," said LeClere. "We can't be afraid to talk about this.. awareness is helpful."

Join others impacted by Alzheimer's for Walk to End Alzheimer's happening in two locations on the Emerald Coast. The Niceville Walk will take place on Saturday, October 7 at Bluewater Bay Golf Club at 10 a.m. Register at act.alz.org/ NicevilleWalk. The Panama City Walk is on Sunday, October 15 at Florida State University Panama City. The event begins at 2 p.m. with the ceremony and Walk starting at 3 p.m. Register your team at alz.org/EmeraldCoastWalk.



LeClere's mother passed from Alzheimer's last April after a 10-year battle with the disease. Unfortunately, her experience is repeated thousands of times across Emerald Coast and beyond.

According to new research from the Alzheimer's Association International Conference, more than 10.6% of Okaloosa County residents age 65 and up are living with the disease. Florida has the second highest prevaer rates of stress. According to the Alzheimer's Association 2023 Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures report, 66% of Florida caregivers reported at least one chronic health condition, 29% reported having depression and 14% reported being in poor physical health.

Practicing self-care is vital to ensure both the caregiver and the person being cared for can have the best quality of life. Services like respite care, adult day



Save the Date THINK PINK & FIGHT CANCER AWARENESS CONFERENCE Saturday, September 30, 2023 Doors open at 8:15 a.m. for Exhibits 9-11 a.m. Program

The 1st 100 attendees will receive goody bags!

To engage our community to fight before, during, and after cancer and to give survivors and caregivers hope and encouragement

> I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 2 Timothy 4:7



### www.RBCNiceville.com

THIS IS WHY WE WALK.

At the Alzheimer's Association Walk to End Alzheimer's<sup>®</sup>, we're fighting for a different future. For families facing the disease today. For more time. For treatments.

We're closer than ever to stopping Alzheimer's. But to get there, we need you. Join us for the world's largest fundraiser to fight the disease.

Join us at Walks across the Florida Panhandle. Register your team today!



WALK = END ALZHEIMER'S ALZHEIMER'S

Pensacola Sunday, Oct. 1 Alz.org/PensacolaWalk



Niceville Saturday, Oct. 7 Act.alz.org/NicevilleWalk



Panama City Sunday, Oct. 15 Alz.org/EmeraldCoastWalk\_

### The community

## Niceville's Boggy Bayou Headwaters Restoration to Improve Water Quality & Habitat

Through the support of a BP oil spill-related grant issued by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the City of Niceville initiated the Boggy Bayou Headwaters Restoration project to address water quality concerns and habitat conditions near the Turkey Creek outfall. The project is permitted through the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Construction began in February and is substantially complete.

The improvements included the formation of a new western marsh peninsula and the installation of an eastern oyster shell eastern breakwaters near the neighboring marina to protect the vegetative communities in the headwaters and to direct any creek sediments into the middle of the bayou. The accretion of sediment has historically shallowed the waterfront, making the Valparaiso boat ramp unusable.



Although upstream sediment controls have significantly reduced this accretion over the past two decades, accumulated sediment, debris, and vegetation was removed near the S.R. 20 bridge to divert flows and slow the water discharging into the bayou. Additional flow paths have been opened to the east and west to diversify and slow the flows, allowing sediment and nutrients adversely affecting water quality to be absorbed by the marsh vegetation within the headwaters. These flow diversion efforts will also improve dissolved oxygen levels throughout the headwaters, enhancing natural habitat that will substantially improve water quality in previously stagnant areas. A two-year

program to eradicate exotic and nuisance species removal throughout this region continues and will be significantly enhanced through "living shorelines." These include the planting of native species along the shorelines and newly constructed marsh areas to suppress the re-emergence of exotic vegetation and to improve the public viewshed of this scenic landscape.

Following native plantings on the newly formed western peninsula and along the Kiwanis Park shoreline, construction will be complete. Coconut-fiber coir logs have been installed to protect the plantings and these coir logs will naturally dissolve over time. Public awareness is vital to ensuring the preservation of these improvements until the system has a chance to stabilize. A subsequent monitoring program is scheduled for a five-year period to monitor the conditions and to ensure the ecological systems can stabilize and perform as designed.

Two osprey platforms were also installed at the terminus of each peninsula extending into Boggy Bayou. Since the completion of the improvements, residents, commercial operators, kayakers, and others based or visiting the area have shared observations of teeming wildlife. Local resident Debra Wolfenden frequently kayaks in the headwaters and offered, "I have never seen so many ospreys, bald eagles, terns, blue herons and seagulls all in one place." An increase in redfish and smaller juvenile fish has been observed by neighboring businesses and residents. Wolfenden added, "I love that grasses were planted to attract the fingerlings, this will be an awesome estuary for them. I am so excited that some positive work is being done to save our beautiful Boggy Bayou and its health. This is why we live in and love this area so much-we have a City that cares about the future of our environment for generations to come."

The headwaters area of Boggy Bayou is a unique ecological system and, once established, the improved wildlife habitat and water quality along with enhanced scenery will serve as a long-term environmental jewel for all residents and visitors of Niceville to enjoy.

### VISIT MYBAYLIFENWFL.COM TO READ OUR LATEST ISSUE



Page 13

### Five Things to do Before a Storm

BY JULIE A. MARTIN, LICENSED AGENT FL

It's the middle of summer, and you just heard on the radio that a Category 4 storm is about to hit in your area. What should you do to prepare? Stocking up on non-perishable food and bottled water is a given and also batteries. Those are both good preventative measures. But, what will you do if the storm hits your house? How can you minimize damage to your home and to your other possessions?

The first thing you should do is call your insurance agent and ask for a copy of both your declarations page and your policy jacket. You should do this both for your home and for your vehicles. If you have boats, motorcycles, an RV or any other contrivance or dwellings, get all of your policy documents together in one place. Familiarize yourself with your deductibles, coverages and any exclusions or limitations. You should do this regularly anyway, because once a storm is in the box, no coverage can be changed, altered or reinstated. If there is a payment due, pay it. You might be unable to do so later, if the timing of the storm coincides with a cancellation or the expiration of your policy.

The second thing you should do is take pictures and videos of the inside and outside of your home and email them to yourself. This is to show what your house looked like BEFORE anything happened. If you recently purchased big ticket items like new furniture or an entertainment center, email yourself any receipts you might have for the more expensive items in your home. In the event of a loss, receipts, photos and videos will aid the adjusters in processing your claim in a fair and timely manner.

The third thing to do is go out into your yard, front and back, and think about anything that can become a projectile. Winds upwards of 120 miles per hour can turn even a 6 oz. can of soup into a weapon. The more things that you can bring into the garage or a shed, the less they will be likely to fly into one of your windows or the side of your house. The

things that you are unable to bring into your garage, lay them on their side as close to the back of the house as possible, or the shed. Try to tie them down with rope so it is less likely to fly away and either damage your home or hurt someone. Anything on your patio? Bring it into the house or into your garage, if you have one.

If you have hurricane shutters or windows, you are already ahead of the game. But, if you do not, boarding up your windows is a good close second. You might need to go to Home Depot or Lowe's where they have both the lumber and the clips/ screws to board up the windows tightly. Do some research before you do this, because there is a right and wrong way to board up your house against the possibility of storm damage.

The last thing to do is make sure you have a battery-operated charger for your phone, so that in the event you do get hit,



you can communicate with your family, and call the agent and insurance company for help in putting in your claim. Get gas before the storm. Don't just top it off. If you have three vehicles, take them to the station one by one and fill them all up. The first thing that happens after a hurricane is a localized shortage of goods, and you don't want to have to scramble around at the last minute and go without. If you prepare yourself, your home and your vehicles well in advance of the upcoming storm, you can breathe a sigh of relief that even if the storm hits, you have done everything you can to prevent against further loss.







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### Page 14

What's your Living Room's Style?

### Lifestyle



By Stacy Lingenfelter Sarikanon, Stunning Spaces – Decorating Den Interiors

Your living room, like your lifestyle is uniquely personal! And, because this room is often the room you share with others,

it is very important that it reflect your own likes and dislikes!

It's true that every room in your home is unique to you and your family, and each of these rooms have their own starting point for decorating ideas. For instance, the living room is often the room where you're able to showcase special pieces that reflect important times in your life. Perhaps an heirloom armoire, or handmade artwork. Pieces such as this will help set this room apart and give it a special distinctive character.

And even on a limited budget, you can use ingenuity and imagination to create a room



that reflects your own style – especially when you avail yourself



of the talent of a professional decorator to make your living

room design ideas become reality.



Welcome to Niceville!

Jim & Jane Rainwater welcome you to our real estate office. We have over 20 years experience selling real estate, residential and commercial, working with buyers and sellers in Bluewater Bay, Niceville, Valparaiso, Destin, Crestview and surrounding areas.

Property Management

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

4400 Hwy. 20 E., Suite 314, Bluewater Bay, Niceville (The old Bluewater Bay Post Office) Stop by our office today or call Jane at (850) 830-1976 or Jim at (850) 830-9636

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#### **HOMETOWN HERO** *continued from page 4*

Her recent academic feats are noteworthy, encompassing top grades at Okaloosa STEMM Academy, securing 1st Place in the Regional Science Fair, participating in the State Science Fair, being a Thermo Fisher Jr. Nominee, winning the NASA Earth Systems Science Project Award, achieving recognition as a regional History Project winner and participating in the state National History Day. Judah excels in math, enjoys Cotillion, passed the Python certification exam, and is active in piano, violin, tennis, and as VP of the Hope Squad. She's also into acting, singing and leads worship for her church youth group.

Home for the Pierces is Niceville, where Blake is stationed at Hurlburt AFB. Candace revealed Judah's goal is to graduate at age 15 and explore aviation, possibly joining the military to fly or pursuing engineering.

However, her pain has escalated, prompting the Pierces to urgently seek relief for their daughter. "We recently discovered the Spero Clinic, a unique medical center in Arkansas offering a 12-week Neurologic Rehabilitation program that approaches CRPS treatment differently," said Candace. "This clinic has achieved remarkable success in achieving remission for CRPS patients worldwide. Our aim is to have her begin treatment after Christmas. Unfortunately, due to the limited understanding and rarity of



CRPS, insurance doesn't cover her 3- to 4-month stay or treatment plan."

Judah and her family have partnered with the Burning Limb Foundation, a 501c3 non-profit, to raise funds for her Spero Clinic treatment. You can help by contributing a tax-deductible donation to the 501c3 fundraising account for Judah. Visit https://burninglimb.networkforgood.com/ projects/198056-help-judahpierce-on-her-journey-to-thespero-clinic.

You can also support by purchasing a t-shirt designed by Judah at https://www.bonfire. com/crps-treatment-for-judahat-spero-clinic/.

For additional details about the Spero Clinic, visit https:// www.thesperoclinic.com/ conditions/complex-regional-pain-syndrome/.

"...the reality is that CRPS has consumed my life for the past three years," said Judah. "It has forced me to grow up faster than my peers, confronting challenges that no child should have to face. Yet, in the midst of it all, I remain resilient and hopeful, believing that with your support, I can conquer this pain and reclaim my childhood."

Education

### **Letter from Superintendent Marcus Chambers**

Welcome to a brand-new year in the Okaloosa County School District! I cannot begin my thoughts and hopes for this year without thanking our students, parents and staff for an outstanding 2022-2023 school year. In a year that brought new, more rigorous statewide assessments in English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics to Florida, Okaloosa students once again outperformed almost every other school district in the state in their proficiency rankings. A combined analysis of all test results recently released by the Florida Department of Education shows Okaloosa ranks 5th among 67 Florida school districts. These results continue the improvement in recent years from 8th and 7th in 2021 and 2022, respectively, proving yet again the OCSD family can pull together to increase academic excellence.

Safety has been a top priority



of mine since becoming Superintendent. One of the most critical layers of school safety is our partnership with our School Resource Officer program, which the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office provides in collaboration with district personnel. All procedures and protocols are continuously reviewed to ensure students are safe. I'm always mindful of and thankful for your support of the half-cent sales tax that provided much-needed support for safety projects and continues to fund building improvements and projects in each of our schools.

While students were out for the summer, our administrators and staff were busy 'huddling' in preparation for the new school year. We spent much of our time planning and working to im-

prove in areas where we are not as strong as we can be while also fine-tuning the practices that have allowed us to become one of the highest-performing districts in Florida! We've updated our 'playbook' that outlines a student-centered approach to academic excellence and continuous learning for students using researched-based best practices. I'm thankful for everyone who spent the summer diving into data, reviewing policies and procedures, and planning for a great start to what I know will be a fantastic year for our students!

Former record-setting Duke University basketball coach Mike Krzyzewski (Coach K) says, "Effective teamwork begins and ends with communication." We will continue to utilize multiple means of communication to keep all stakeholders upto-date on what's happening in Okaloosa. It's a winning strategy. Expect great things because we're planning and preparing for great things, and communication with all stakeholders is a big part of the game plan.

We are all excited to kick off the new year, and I have high expectations for what we can accomplish together. Being your Superintendent is more than a job for me; it's a calling. I'm thankful for your trust and support in educating those you hold near and dear, and I approach this position with all the enthusiasm and attention to detail such an important task demands. Our teachers, ED support professionals, school administrators, and district staff are excited to have our students return to the classrooms, and I encourage all parents to be involved in supporting their child's school in whatever way they can.

The future is bright for the Next Generation of Okaloosa County students!! See you soon, and Welcome Back!!

### VISIT MYBAYLIFENWFL.COM TO READ OUR LATEST ISSUE



Sat. October 7 | 7 p.m. | Mattie Kelly Main Stage \$20 Adults | \$15 Youth 18 and Under

### Food Trucks and Local Pet Shelters On Site

Imagine five of the world's most talented 4-legged performers in an uproariously funny, comedy dog spectacular that is leaving audiences everywhere howling for more! The all-star lineup includes the highest jumping dog in the universe, a hilarious six pound Pomeranian Pikachu mix, and a host of previously discarded dogs that will dance, prance, flip, and skip their way right into your heart.

For more information and ticket sales Visit **MattieKellyArtsCenter.org** Call the Box Office at **850.729.6000** or Scan Here



Northwest Florida State College is committed to equal access/equal opportunity in its programs, activities, and employment. For additional information, visit www.nwfsc.edu.

# Local Nining, Nrinks and Coffee

#### **Brozinni Pizzeria**

Owner Nicole McKee and GM Seth Perry have produced a gem for our community-Brozinni Pizzeria located at 144 N. Palm Blvd. in Niceville (next to Pounders). Since opening their doors just over one year ago on March 14, 2022, Brozinni's has specialized in 20" pizzas so large a family of four to five can enjoy! Gluten free pizza available, too, in 10" size. They also serve delicious wings, calzones and pastas. Portions are BIG! Salads are refreshing, especially the Caprese with fresh mozzarella. This pizza shop even has the best burgers. The desserts are homemade. They offer key lime pie, cheesecake, banana pudding, cannolis and tiramisu to name a few. Lunch is served by the slice form 11 a.m. - 4 p.m. daily. You can get a slice of NY Style pizza, salad, drink and a breadstick for \$9.50—a great deal Slices during the day include Park Avenue (meat lovers), Canal (supreme), Italian Beef, Parmesan Chicken, Spinach Artichoke, Deep Dish Meatball, Deep Dish Buffalo Chicken, and Margarita, 34th White pizza with ricotta cheese,



basil and garlic to name a few!

Brozinni's offers dine in, online ordering, delivery and takeout, Monday – Saturday 11 a.m. - 9 p.m.

(850) 678-7778

144 N Palm Blvd. Niceville

#### Fudpucker's Beachside Bar & Grill

Fudpucker's Beachside Bar & Grill in Destin has been locally owned and operated since inception in 1982. Fudpucker's restaurant stands out by being dedicated to its owners' three favorite "F" words: Food, Fun and Family. And, you can be assured that there's plenty of each when you visit Fudpucker's restaurant in Destin. Fudpucker's is not just a restaurant, it's not just a bar, and it's certainly not just a "tourist" place – it's a one-of-a-kind entertainment experience, and one that can be enjoyed by kids and families of all ages. (850) 654-4200

20001 Emerald Coast Pkwy. Destin fudpucker.com

### 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 muffin, 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 sellouts. Stop in for featured muffins, coffee cake or pound cake-great with maple cinnamon latte or caramel macchiato. In summer, 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 every morning, even all day. Order ahead and pick up some for all your celebrations.

Hours 7:30 a.m.-2 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday

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#### LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant

Suds, Songs and Sunsets! Wel-



come to LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant at the 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 oyster 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.

Special September Event September 10—16th Annual Cardboard Boat Race! 4 p.m. September: Live music every Friday and Saturday.

**Sundays** – Brunch 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

**Beach Madness Mondays** 4-7 p.m.; extended Happy Hour

4-7 p.m. **Tuesdays** – Kids Eat Free (with adult purchase)

Wednesdays – Sailboat races 6 p.m.

**Thursdays** – Throwdown Paddle Board Races 6 p.m.; Open Mic/Karaoke 6-10 p.m.

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.

Food Truck: 5-9 p.m. Monday & Tuesday | Friday & Saturday. (850) 897-6400

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#### **Tisano's Garlic Grill**

Tisano's owner Trinity Coleman grew up in a restaurant family. Her mother and grandfather both owned restaurants in their hometown of Stroud, Oklahoma, and Trinity grew up working in their restaurants. After graduating college and marrying an Air Force man, Trinity left the restaurant business, but she's always missed it. In 2021, the Coleman family was assigned to Hurlburt Field, and they moved to Niceville. Trinity fell in love with the community and decided it was time to get back into the restaurant business, so she and her husband bought Tisano's, and she has poured her heart into it ever since. Her husband Trey recently retired from the Air Force. They have three children at Niceville High School and Florida State University.

Today, Tisano's has become a local favorite! Tisano's makes almost all of their dishes from scratch. They focus on Italian food, but also bring in some country favorites and some international cuisine that they've learned to love from living around the world. They also offer several Gluten free options. Their recipe for success is simple. "We just want to provide a



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# Local Nining, Nrinks, Coffee & Entertainment

#### **Discover Unique Suds** and Ales at the Baytowne Wharf Beer Fest Friday, Oct. 6 - Saturday, **Oct. 7**

Tickets on sale now at BaytowneBeerFestival.com. The Village of Baytowne Wharf at Sandestin presents the 14th Annual Baytowne Wharf Beer Fest where American specialty beers from around the nation will be available for participants to sample and savor. The main event on Saturday, Oct. 8, will feature more than 200 domestic and international craft beers available for sampling and live music.

Friday, Oct. 6, is Beer From Around Here from 6-8 p.m. where local breweries feature their products for a more intimate night of learning about craft beer culture. Restaurants in The Village showcase their best dishes - combining unique lite bites with the many complimentary flavors of a good brew. Live music by Duchess from 6-8 p.m.

Tickets (Friday event only) \$65 general admission and \$75 the day of the event if not sold out.

Saturday, Oct. 7, is the Grand Craft Beer Tasting, general Admission from 2-5 p.m. at the Baytowne Wharf Events Plaza. \$50 general admission and \$60

the day of the event. Live music by Six Piece Suits. For tickets, a lineup of beers and additional information, visit baytownebeerfestival.com.

**Destin Seafood Festival:** Oct. 6-8 | Friday 4-10 p.m., Saturday 10 a.m.-10 p.m., Sunday 10 a.m.-6 p.m.



One of the locals' favorite times of year is the Destin Seafood Festival, back for its 45th year! Happening Friday through Sunday, Oct. 6-8, the festival kicks off October's month-long Destin Fishing Rodeo. Local Destin restaurants and eateries will serve up scrumptious seafood specialties. Cold drinks, including beer and wine, are available and you can stroll along the Destin Harbor enjoying the arts and crafts where artists and vendors display their jewelry, clothing, sculpture, glass, watercolors, oil paintings, designs and more. And don't forget your seafood festival T-shirt! For more information, visit www.destinseafoodfestival.com or email info@

destinseafoodfest.com.

#### **7th Annual Harvest Wine** & Food Festival

The 2023 Harvest Wine & Food Festival in WaterColor will be held October 19-22 and feature wine dinners, famous Grand Tasting, a cocktail brunch and much more. Rated as one of the premier wine and food festivals in the Southeast, Harvest provides the opportunity to sip and savor some of the world's finest wine and culinary selections.

Ranked as one of Southern Living's "15 Southern Festival's Worth Planning Your Trip Around," this year's festival will feature an expanded schedule of events including a cocktail seminar and elevated culinary and wine pairing event on Friday evening. Currently ranked number five "Top Charity Wine Auction in the US" by Wine Spectator Magazine, Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation (DCWAF) is one of the nation's premier fundraising organizations, raising money for 16 Northwest Florida children's charities that assist at-risk youth in the local community by tackling a variety of issues including homelessness, food insecurity, mental health, education, medical care, and much more. In ning \$3.5 million for its benefit-

April, DCWAF raised a stun- ing charities. Purchase tickets at bigtickets.com.



Breakfast: Bakery - Quiche - Breakfast Sandwiches Lunch: Chicken Salad - BLTs - Paninis - And MORE Inside & Outside Seating Available 7:30 a.m. - 2 p.m. Tues. - Sat. Worried about getting out? NO CONTACT pick up still available. Looking for event space? Give us a call!



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### LOCAL DINING

continued from previous page

clean restaurant, with awesome food and friendly staff, at a fair price," said Trinity. When you visit Tisano's, Trinity and Trey want you to feel like you're going to a friend's house for a great meal and good company. We highly recommend you give the house-stuffed mushrooms and the homemade lasagna a try.

Monday: 25% off for active duty military

Tuesday: Two can dine for \$39! Two entrees with salad and bread with two glasses of wine for just \$39

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### The Hook 🐞

# Q & A: Alex Fogg of Destin-Fort Walton Beach's Artificial Reef Program

#### BY WILL ESTELL

If you are a full-time or parttime resident of any of the beach towns and coastal communities that dot Northwest Florida's Gulf Coast you've likely heard a thing or two about the Artificial Reef Program initiated and managed by Destin-Fort Walton Beach Tourism.

As much as the program has been praised as a haven for the 150-plus species of fish and invertebrates that inhabit the purposely and strategically sunken vessels, the artificial reef program is part of a much larger and more complex fiveyear objective plan designed to both enhance the area's marine ecosystems and spark additional interest in NW Florida Gulf Coast water adventures.

Since 2019, the project has deployed about 1,500 structures and 10 vessels. Those include limestone reefs that were deployed in partnership with Starborough Wines, Destin High School, Emerald Coast Reef Association and Saltwater Restaurant Group. These vessels include R/V Manta (180-by-38-foot steel hulled research vessel); R/V Dolphin (192-by-39.9 foot steel hulled, bottom cable research vessel); and the RMS Cyclops (105-by-24 foot steel hulled, offshore supply vessel). The RMS Atlantis (a decommissioned offshore supply vessel) and The Deep Stim are also new, soon to be deployed vessels.

The various concrete structures and medium-to-large shipwrecks used to create the artificial reefs provide remarkable opportunities for diving, fishing and snorkeling. In addition, they reduce the environmental impact to naturally occurring reefs, by spreading out fishing and diving across a larger and more controlled area. The new reefs do a significant part in helping to sustain and control the fishing industry and prevent overfishing along our Gulf Coast.

I sat down with Alex Fogg, Okaloosa County's Coastal Resource Manager, to talk about Destin-Fort Walton Beach Tourism's Artificial Reef Project. We explored the benefits and merits of this remarkable program, as well as his love of the project, and the future of artificial reefs in our area.

#### How did you get involved in this field, and where does your passion for the Artificial Reef Projects come from?

Growing up, my dad was in the Navy, which resulted in a lot of moving around, but it was always to coastal locations. We fished and snorkeled every opportunity we had. We vacationed in Florida often and would fish the reefs in the destinations we traveled.

I realized I needed to pick a career path that kept me near the water and marine science was the obvious choice. I can remember my dad talking about spearfishing and scuba diving. That was what drove me to become scuba certified and really catapulted my desire to continue with my career. I graduated from the University of South Carolina right as the BP oil spill was occurring, which resulted in a number of positions opening up around the Gulf Coast. I made my way to Mississip-



PHOTO COURTESY DESTIN-FWB FL

pi, where I began working on oil spill response projects with NOAA. I then moved on to the University of Southern Mississippi and completed my masters, looking at lionfish life history. As I was wrapping that up, I knew I wanted to be in Florida and a position opened managing the largest artificial reef project in Northwest Florida. This was an easy decision but after a few years with Florida Fish and Wildlife I knew I needed to find something on a more local level, and that's when I made it to Destin-Fort Walton Beach and began working with Marine and Coastal Resources and getting the artificial reef program up and running again.

#### What do you consider the most personally rewarding aspect of your job?

The most rewarding part of my job is being able to work on projects that directly benefit the community that I live in. My previous jobs were over a much larger geographic area and I didn't have the same satisfaction. Working with Destin-Fort Walton Beach Tourism, and this project, is just a dream come true for me.

What do you consider to be the biggest challenge to the Gulf waters we, and our tourism community, love?

I think everyone who knows me has heard

me say "weather dependent." What I mean is that a number of the projects we work on are so dependent on the weather, which makes scheduling a real pain sometimes.

If budget were not a constraint, and you, in your position and with your passion could do any single or multiple layered project within the scope of these efforts what would it be and why? What's your, "We have to do this one?"

Oh, Will, that's a tough one. I Think on the tourism side, I want to deploy the largest artificial reef in the world! Something like a 1000-foot-plus vessel. This is something that I hope to achieve during my career, but cost is always a big consideration.

Outside of tourism, and thinking more along the lines of conservation, we have made great strides to develop our coastal resource programs, but like anything else, projects that benefit and enhance our environment are quite expensive. So, having funds to complete all of our dream projects would be ideal. That's something we are shooting for, and with the help of the businesses and individuals who continue to donate vessels and essential elements of operation, we'll hopefully get to do lots more

We've touched on some of the previous artificial reef projects of Destin-Fort Walton Beach Tourism involvement, but can you shed some light on future projects we can be looking for? You can tell us... We won't tell anyone and ruin the surprise [laughing]?

(Alex provided this list of upcoming deployments):

**AJ's Blackbeard/Flying Eagle:** A 72-foot sailboat has been donated by AJ's. Deployment location will be near the Cordonazo sailboat that was deployed last year to form the "Yacht Club" reef site

**MV Deep Stim III:** A 270foot offshore supply vessel. This is a joint project between Okaloosa, Walton and Bay counties.

**Crimson White:** A 125foot tugboat that caught fire in dry dock and is currently being cleaned for deployment in state waters less than nine miles from shore. Expected deployment will be this month (August) and will be part of a TV special highlighting artificial reefs.

**Module Deployment:** A \$1.26 million project to deploy more than 400 modules throughout our coast's permitted areas from three to 30 miles offshore.



### Off the Hook

### **ESTUARY**

continued from page 2

here. We are so blessed. It's important to the life we enjoy here. It's about empowering each citizen to know and understand that they make a difference."

A Citizens Advisory Committee meets every other month. "The CAC is pivotal to help us better understand the needs of our communities and to provide input on the best ways to manage and preserve our estuary," Sabina says. "It's so important to have people in our communities share in the decision-making processes related to the estuary program. The CAC is the bridge between the estuary program managers and the public, ensuring that community concerns and priorities are taken into account. The CAC members include residents, business owners, environmental advocates, scientists, educators, recreational users and other people who have a vested interest in the health and well-being of the estuary. The next CAC meeting is Oct. 26. If anyone wants to participate they can email me for the zoom link at spennington@ myokaloosa.com.

Sabina said she is also looking for kids in middle and high school ages who are interested in being future stewards. The group is called TEACH (Teen Environmental Advisors for a Cleaner Habitat). Anyone who



Sabina Pennington releases a small frog near the estuary.



Sabina Pennington points out the extent of the watersheds that reach Choctawhatchee Bay.

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call Destin his home, with his wife Candice and four children: Matthew,

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is interested can email her.

In celebration of National Estuaries Week, which takes place Sept. 16-23, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Office for Coastal Management is holding a photo contest. To enter, go to coast. noaa.gov/nerrs/about/photo-contest. The deadline is Tuesday, Aug. 31.

On Sept. 16, the organization will hold an Emerald Coast Native Plant Fair from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Paradise Plants & Palms, 695 Valparaiso Pkwy. in Valparaiso. Area schools are also holding campus clean-ups. Interested parties can email Sabina.

On Sept. 23 a Family-Fun-Fest event, "Come get your Passport to the Bay," is scheduled. Participants can enjoy fun activities, prizes and vendors and learn about the critters and creatures of the Choctawhatchee Bay. More information can be found at the program's website.





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Page 20

By Christopher Manson

"I played tennis up until college and started playing pickleball, because I had some time on my hands during COVID. I loved it. It's a fun game." ~ Jeff Harris, Owner of Run With It and Pickleball at the Palms

Back in 2016, I was editing the late, great Beachcomber magazine, and my boss suggested that we run some articles on pickleball. I had no idea what a pickleball was, but thankfully, a man named Phil Gardner explained it to me and my readers.

"Pickleball is a cross between tennis, ping-pong and badminton," he wrote. "It's most often played in two teams of doubles, but can be played as singles. The game is played on a badminton-sized court over a net similar to those in tennis. A whiffle ball is propelled by solid paddles over the net."

He added: "Pickleball is an action game that teaches coordination and exercises reaction and mobility. Players learn quickly that positioning on the small court is paramount to mastering the game...and that mastery of the game is an evolving journey."

In 2018, Mike Minich, president of Southern Events Management, Inc., took up the game. "I was originally part of putting on volleyball tournaments," he



says. "Karen Parrish was one of the people who started running pickleball tournaments and had people playing at Destin Methodist Church. The recreation center in Fort Walton Beach had two courts also."

In 2020, the Fort Walton Beach Recreation and Cultural Services director converted two unusable tennis courts into six pickleball courts at the recreation center on Jet Drive. "They filled up right away," says Mr. Minich. "Pickleball is a sport that can be played by anyone, any age. You see people in their 50s and 60s playing every morning on Jet."

Ms. Parrish left the area to take a job in Arizona with USA Pickleball, the national governing body for the sport, and left the Emerald Coast Pickleball Facebook group in his hands. "I'm still doing it," he says. "We share interesting things, and there is no advertising for products or services. We want to let people know about tournaments."

I've never picked up the paddle. So, Mr. Minich recommended that I check out Joe Baker's YouTube videos. "He's the driest human I've ever seen, but his videos are the best to learn from. He teaches paddle control, strategy... that's how I learned."

Jeff Harris, owner of Run With It since 2008, jumped on the pickleball train in October 2020 and immediately loved the sport. "I realized how popular it was," he says. "There would be six courts and 50 to 60 people waiting to play."

"I also saw that nobody was selling pickleball accessories locally," says Mr. Harris. "Walmart had some cheap stuff, but they were always out of stock."

With the new demand for pickleball equipment, Mr. Har-

ris, his wife Donna and his team brought in paddles, balls and many other accessories. Within a few months, it exploded. "We brought in more brands, as well as court shoes, which are different from running shoes. It opened up a whole new world for us. The cool thing is that we already carried running skirts, which can also be used for pickleball."

Due to its popularity and the need for an indoor court, he and his wife Donna launched Pickleball at the Palms in Feb. 2023, a designated indoor pickleball court, one of the very few places to play indoors in our region slated only for Pickleball, as opposed to a regular gym. Mr. Harris says the cool, indoor court is extremely popular and stays booked 70-85% of the time.

Mr. Harris says he also has a competitive streak. "I go to tournaments and I've even qualified to play in some," he says. "But I just turned 60 and can play in the 60-plus division. I'm not competing with teenagers anymore, which makes life a lot easier for me."

Pickleball at the Palms is located at 21 Racetrack Road NE in Fort Walton Beach. Hours of operation are 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Saturday and noon to 4 p.m. on Sundays. "We use an app called CourtReserve," says Mr. Harris. "Just sign up there for clinics or to rent the court." Open play is Fridays from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. (beginner level) and 4 to 6 p.m. (intermediate level). Cost is \$5 for two hours of play, and if you want to rent the court for an hour, it's only \$24.

He and Donna were in the restaurant business for 21 years in Birmingham, Ala. Things came full circle when Mr. Harris stumbled upon a pickleball/restaurant franchise called Chicken N Pickle, which is sort of the Top Golf of pickleball. "I was interested in opening one, and Donna said, 'You can do that with your next wife, because you're not doing it with me!""

Mr. Harris is one of over 4.8 million pickleball players, or "picklers," in the U.S., according to a 2022 report from the Sports & Fitness Industry Association. Pickleball grew nearly 40 percent between 2019 and 2021, making it America's fastest-growing sport.

According to USApickleball. org, Pickleball is celebrating its 58th anniversary. Interestingly, the game was actually invented in 1965 on Bainbridge Island. Three enterprising dads – Joel Pritchard, Bill Bell and Barney McCallum – created the game when their children were bored with their usual summertime activities. They started with original handmade equipment and simple rules.

Although accounts of how the name originated differ (especially since no pickles are used), according to Joel's wife, she started calling the game pickleball, because "the combination of different sports reminded me of the pickle boat in crew where oarsmen were chosen from the leftovers of other boats." However, according to Barney, the game was officially named after the Pritchards' dog Pickles, who would chase and run off with the ball. With really no official name in its first couple of years, as the game progressed over time, an official name was needed and "pickleball" was it!



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### Golf Series: The Regatta Bay Golf Experience



By Barbara Palmgren

Some people have a vision of success that turns their dream into a legend for the ages. Did Peter Bos envision that his dream of a community built with one of the finest golf courses in the country would become just that...legendary? His company, Legendary, Inc, began in 1996 when the Coleman L. Kelly Testamentary Trust, entrusted Peter as broker, developer and planner for Regatta Bay. With 800 acres, the homes on the first lots were built in 1996. The golf course was developed at the same time and opened in 1998. Now, Regatta Bay attracts visitors from all over the world.

Yes, Peter Bos, to borrow and change a few lines from Tina Turner, Regatta Bay is:

Simply the best. Better than all the rest. Better than any course, Golf at its very best. I'm stuck on your landmark greens, Fairways and bunkers, too. I'll come here again, For there's no better place, You're simply the best.

In 2009, Mike GiammaresI, a graduate of the University of North Florida, visited the Destin area with his girlfriend. She was employed in the area and Mike, a member of the college golf team, saw an ad for a job at Regatta Bay. Starting out with golf cart and pro shop experiences, his employment ended when he moved to Germany for three years to support his wife's merchandising career. In 2013, back in the area, Mike returned to Regatta Bay as head golf professional. Then in 2014, Mike was trusted with running the club.

Mike Giammaresi, at the helm of this excellent course, devotes his time, intelligence and hard work to elevate Regatta Bay to the prestigious position it now holds in the golf world. Both Golf Digest and Golf World rank Regatta Bay as one of the top 200 golf courses in the nation. The club lists 344 members composed of full-time golfers, non-resident golfers and social members. Members and the public enjoy as beautiful an indoor space as the gorgeous golf course surrounding it. The clubhouse welcomes one into an elegant restaurant with a wellstocked bar and an inviting pro shop. There is even a members' lounge, that special place where golf mistakes can be reviewed.

Regatta Bay Golf Club hosts at least 25 events each year for members and charitable organizations. Tee times can be booked at www.regattabay.com and vary in price depending on time of day. The Par 72 course has championship black tees as well as several other tee options for average to beginning golfers. The owners and staff want to be sure they implement their mission statement, "To provide an experience that exceeds expectations of visitors and residents in Destin and beyond: constantly enhancing the beauty, planning, quality and up-scale style of the Destin area by developing the Legendary brand as the standard for quality and service."

Why do golfers play this special course? It appears to be a must-play for visiting golfers who come to the Emerald Coast. The meticulous layout, crafted by architect Robert C. Walk-







er, blends lush fairways, pristine greens and stunning water features, all set against a backdrop of landscapes unique to the Florida Panhandle. Golfers warm up on a putting green and driving range before stepping up to the first tee box. Regatta Bay's professional staff load and unload bags and welcome you immediately to the beginning of a unique golf challenge.

I have personally played golf at Regatta Bay and can attest to strategically placed bunkers that lure my golf ball like a magnet. I wish I could say my game involved skill and strategy, but that wouldn't be true. Regardless of the loss of balls and the two-foot missed putt, I leave the course with a smile and a thank you for that perfect blend of natural beauty, superb design and the welcoming atmosphere that elevates the entire golf experience. Regatta Bay Golf and Yacht Club is the benchmark for others to achieve because it is, "Simply the Best."



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### Mellness

### **Intermittent Fasting For Better Health**



BY KAY LEAMAN, HEALTH ARCHITECT, HEALTHYDAY HEALTHYLIFE

Intermittent: Coming and going at intervals, not continuous; occasional, limiting food consumption to certain hours each day.

Intermittent fasting (I.F.) is currently one of the world's most popular health and fitness trends. Reasons behind this trend is weight loss, improved health, simplified lifestyle and positive effects on the body and brain.

I.F. focuses on when you eat what you eat. That being VS. said, eating high-calorie junk food, super-sized meals or desserts/treats during eating hours will not produce the benefits most are looking for. Following a mediterranean diet is recommended for best results. If you would like a Mediterranean diet foods list you can email succeed. hdhl@gmail.com with MED-ITERRANEAN DIET in the subject line.

There are several types of I.F.:

Sixteen hours fasting/ eight hours eating (You can also choose 14/10 or 12/12). If starting with 16/8 is too difficult you can choose the lighter one and work up to the max.

• Fast for two consecutive days each week.

• Limit food intake to 500-600 calories on two non-consecutive days each week.

· Eating one meal per day for two days each week (consecutive or nonconsecutive)

The most popular type of I.F. is the 16/8 (I am currently on a 12/12 schedule with my target being 14/10. We eat dinner no later than 6:30 pm (when life runs as planned) and breakfast just after 7 a.m.). It normally takes two to four weeks for the body to become accustomed to the new routine. Those who make it through the transition period tend to stick with it mostly because they notice they feel better.

During the fasting period limit your liquids to water and caffeine free herbal teas. If you're just starting out and struggling, chicken, beef or bone broth can be consumed. Things to consider are staying hydrated, avoiding thinking about food (remember, the digestion begins in the brain followed by saliva secretion) and rest and relaxation.

One recommendation I found was to eat high-volume, low-calorie foods, which can include popcorn (plain or added spices), raw veggies and fruits

with high water content such as grapes and melons. You can also improve taste without the added calories using garlic, herbs, spices or vinegar. Flavor can also reduce the feeling of hunger. Focus on nutrient dense foods after fasting that are high in fiber and nutrients.

Studies have shown the main benefits as being weight loss, a reduction in insulin resistance and inflammation, heart health. brain health and anti-aging. Indepth studies are in their early stages. Many were short-term, small or conducted on animals. Even though higher quality human studies are still needed, Mark M., who has studied I.F. for 25 years, said that when the body goes without food, it exhausts the body's sugar stores and starts burning fat (referred to as metabolic switching). One research study that was not designed to look specifically at I.F. found that limiting the daily window of eating does not prevent weight gain over time

or yield significant weight loss. Reducing the number of large meals or eating smaller meals may be associated with minimizing weight gain and maintaining weight. What I didn't find in my research were any negative effects of fasting, unless of course it's abused.

It is recommended for people under 18 years of age, women who are pregnant or breastfeeding, Type 1 diabetics or those with a history of eating disorders not fast. You should check with your primary care physician if you need clarification in regards to your current health status.

Fasting has been a part of life for thousands of years for various cultures. It offers the body time to rest and repair and aids in cellular elimination of waste products. A healthy lifestyle is about balance. It's about the choices we make and being honest with ourselves.

Here's to health!

Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center (ECCAC) has launched a new brand to continue growth and heighten its impact in the fight to end child

abuse and neglect in Walton and Okaloosa Counties.

The organization has revealed glimpses of some very exciting changes via social media over the recent weeks, culminating with the launch of its new website on August 4, 2023. Humbled by consistent growth over the past 23 years, it has

**ECCAC** Rebrands



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taken the next step to update the logo, visual identity, brand messaging, and website to better represent where the organization is today-and the vision going forward.

"This is a monumental milestone for ECCAC. We are truly grateful for the support and contributions of the many donors, agency and community partners, volunteers and team members who have supported our mission and helped us serve our communities over the past two decades. We would not be where we are today without each and every contribution to our cause, and we're so excited about the next chapter," said Julie Porterfield, Chief Executive Officer of ECCAC.

With the new branding in place, ECCAC will continue to rise to the challenge of ending child abuse and neglect, providing child-friendly environments and therapies, and educating children and families on critical prevention issues so that not one more child becomes a victim. Its goal is to continue making a lasting and positive impact in the lives of those served and ECCAC will not waiver until

that vision is realized.

Visit ECCAC.org and follow along on social media to see the full transformation and vision as ECCAC enters its next chapter. And, if you feel called to do so, you can Become a Champion of Hope and join the fight to end child abuse and neglect.

ECCAC brings together the resources needed to advocate, care for and support children of abuse and neglect in Walton and Okaloosa Counties. Through a multidisciplinary team of child protection personnel, prosecutors, law enforcement, DCF, therapists, ECCAC staff and volunteers, children are given the support they need to heal today so they can thrive tomorrow. ECCAC is a 501-C-3 non-profit organization that has provided more than 170,000 services at no cost to over 15,000 children for 23+ years.

For further information about the Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center, visit www.eccac.org or call 850-833-9237. If abuse is suspected, call the anonymous Florida Abuse Hotline at 1-800-96-ABUSE.

### Don't Let Stress Get The Upper Hand



By Stephenie Craig, Journey Bravely

When did you last experience tense shoulders, sighing breaths, irritability, exhaustion, trying to keep it positive, being overscheduled and overwhelmed? It's back to school transition time and August tends to sneak up each year with an unending list of buying things and attending events for the new school year. Back to school is only one of many transitional times. Sometimes you experience major transitions such as moving homes, starting college, adding children to the family, changing jobs, divorce or loss. Other times, you experience regular life transitions like starting middle school, changing schedules, school breaks or daylight savings time. Regardless of the brand, transition tends to disrupt physical and emotional routines, leaving you confused, less productive, and stressed. Transition is an inevitable certainty of life, but, what can you do to manage stress effectively in the process?

8 Ways to Manage Transitional Stress

Notice and acknowledge the presence of stress. Listen to your body. Pay attention to bodily sensations, thoughts, and behavior you connect with stress such as tension, headaches, stomachaches, energy level, obsessive worry, irritability, heart rate, sweating, sighing, grumping, sleep problems or pessimism.

Look for life transitions to connect with stress. Notice your recent life circumstances that could be contributing to stress. Are you walking through a major or regular life change? Is someone you love going through a life change? Do the changes feel out of your control? Name the transition and remind your-

self stress in transition is normal. You may not have control over the circumstances but you do have control over how you care for yourself.

Acknowledge mixed feelings that accompany life transitions. Some transitions feel primarily sad. Most transitions create both excitement for the new future reality and grief to leave the previous way behind. Give yourself space to hold conflicting emotions and remind yourself it's normal and okay to feel confused.

**Engage in intentional, more frequent self care.** Talk to a trusted person about your feelings, go for a walk, take a nap, create art, go for a run. Engage in activities that feel caring and calming as regularly as possible during transitional times.

Set boundaries where possible. Reduce unnecessary commitments. Say no to new commitments. Lower any excessively high or perfectionistic expectations you have for yourself. Prioritize rest. Less is more during times of stress.

Plan ahead for repetitive



**transitions.** Make lists and use calendars for transitions like school starting to remind yourself not to procrastinate needed tasks

**Mindfully do one thing at a time.** As you walk through the necessary tasks during life stress, try not to overthink or get ahead of yourself. Plan far enough to be responsible then focus on what you are doing right now, today. Be present in the moment knowing each moment builds into a history of you moving through and out of your current transitional stress. Accept and don't judge. Transition is inevitable. Stress happens. Notice the transition and the stress without judging yourself or the circumstance. Engage in healthy self-control and do what you can to practice health. Remember where you have power to act rather than viewing yourself as a victim which creates more stress. Your body and brain will adjust to the new normal over time.

Transitions are as common as steady, calm moments in life. Be intentional and kind to yourself in your process. As you navigate life transitions, connect with us at journeybravely.com for counseling and coaching support along your journey.



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### Military

# In Memory of Those Who Have Fallen: Locals Serve and Heal at Field of Valor

By Angie Toole, Niceville Exchange Club President

Starting on September 9, close to 400 flags will be on display at the Mullet Festival Fairgrounds for the 10th year, honoring those who gave their lives in the service of their country.

The Field of Valor, set up by the Niceville Exchange Club, recognizes those service members from the state of Florida who have fallen in combat since September 11, 2001. Posted on the Niceville field, each flag will bear a tag with the name, photo and information about a Floridian who served in Iraq or Afghanistan who lost his or her life in action.

Tammy Summers is a Gold Star wife who joined the Niceville Exchange Club after attending the Field of Valor in 2022. She took photos for her Facebook page of her husband, Sgt. First Class Severin W. Summers III, who died August 2, 2009, in Operation Enduring Freedom.

On the memorial page she has created to honor his memory, she posted: "I am honored and humbled to participate in putting out flags for our fallen military in my hometown of Niceville. I placed Sev's flag out and attached his biography. Remembering him today and always!"

Karla Lacey also volunteers at the field to honor her son, Sgt. First Class William Lacey of Laurel Hill. She works at Fort Walton Machining, which was one of the event sponsors this year, as it has in years past.

Visiting the Field of Valor hasn't always been easy for the Lacey family. Karla has been attending for several years, because it has been a healing experience for her. She also volunteered to spend time as a docent at the field this year, as she has in previous years.

Don "Pockets" Pardue is the chairman for this year's event. The former Marine admitted that honoring the military is a particular passion of his, especially honoring those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

This year's event will feature guest speakers including United States Air Force Retired Captain Nathan Nelson, who suffered a spinal cord injury from a rocket blast in Afghanistan. Capt. Nelson has served as a military affairs advisor for Congressman Matt Gaetz; director of the Northwest Florida Supercomputer Research Group; and currently works as project control lead and strategic growth lead for Integrated Solutions for Systems, a Department of Defense contractor and sponsor of the event.

For his service to the country, Captain Nelson received the Purple Heart, Air Force Commendation Medal, Army Commendation Medal, Army Achievement Medal, Air Force Excellence Organizational Award, Air Force Good Conduct Medal, Air Force Recognition Ribbon, National Defense Service Medal, Afghanistan Campaign Medal, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, Air Force Legacy Service Award, Air Force Basic Military Training Honor Graduate Ribbon, Air Force Training Ribbon and the NATO Medal.

Eglin's Brig. Gen. Jeffrey T. Geraghty, Commander of the 96th Test Wing, Air Force Materiel Command also has committed to speak again this year at the event. He leads more than 10,000 military, civilian, and



contractor personnel, in accomplishing the 96th Test Wing's missions of developmental testing and evaluation of conventional munitions, command and control systems, aircraft avionics and guidance systems, and radar cross section measurement.

Niceville High School JR-TOC, Niceville firefighters, the local Patriot Guard Riders also are on the schedule to participate in the event.

The Rocky Bayou Christian School Chamber Choir singers are slated to perform a medley of patriotic and military branch songs.

The Exchange Club of Niceville is part of the National Exchange Club and has been active for 30 years. The National Exchange Club is the only service organization exclusively serving communities in the United States. More than 630 local clubs throughout the U.S. and Puerto Rico provide individuals with opportunities to use their time and talents to benefit their local communities and the country as a whole. Exchange's Core Values are family, community and country.

Through the Programs of Service – Americanism, Community Service, and Youth Programs – members support activities that benefit youth, promote pride in our country, and honor military and public service providers, to name a few. Exchange's National Project is the prevention of child abuse.

To find out more about you can be a part of making the Niceville/Valparaiso/Bluewater Bay area a better place to live by joining the Niceville Exchange Club, come to our next meeting (held on the second and fourth Thursday at Café Bienville), visit our website at http://nicevilleexchange.club/ and Facebook at https://www.facebook.com/ Niceville-Exchange-Club-603451859685687.



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🀞 Business



By Dr. Jeff and Robin Cerny

Because of technology change and the associated worker turbulence, greater attention is being placed on workforce development. Workforce Development refers to policies and initiatives aimed at improving the skills, education, and overall employment prospects of workers in the labor force.

The rapid pace of technological change is disrupting work and workplaces. Policy makers have been slow or unable to predict what skills will be needed in our future businesses. As a result, more and more workers are finding that their acquired skills are quickly becoming obsolete.

A workforce that seeks wisdom will develop 'higher level skills' needed for change.

The Bible teaches that while human beings can make plans and decisions, it is God who

# Wisdom Workforces for the Emerald Coast and Beyond

orders our steps and guides our paths (Proverbs 16:9). This scripture encourages the development of a Wisdom Workforce in three ways. 1) Wise workers approach their tasks with humility and a willingness to learn. Instead of assuming that they have all the answers, wise workers seek God's guidance and wisdom in their work. 2) Understanding that God may guide our paths in unexpected ways helps wise workers to be flexible and adaptable. Instead of being stuck in rigid plans or expectations, wise workers are open to change or even better yet will generate divine ideas and open doors. 3) Wise workers trust that God will guide them in the right direction, even when things seem uncertain or difficult. Instead of being uncertain and anxious, this trust provides a sense of peace and confidence that will be beneficial in any workplace. Wisdom Workers which include the Leaders are willing to learn, to adapt, and are confident in their ordained steps.

C12EmeraldCoast.Com is a Wisdom Investment Group. It operates in Cohorts of 12 committed Business Leaders that share Godly Wisdom and Best Practices together for a Greater Purpose.

### Rod D. Martin: A Visionary Leader's Path to Prominence

By Doug Stauffer

The Okaloosa County Republican Club hosted distinguished guest speaker Rod D. Martin recently. More than 90 attendees eagerly embraced the wisdom and insights from this celebrated entrepreneur, futurist, hedge fund manager and author. Martin's life and career are a testament to the power of commitment to freedom, faith and capitalism.

Hailing from Arkadelphia, Ark., Martin's journey is nothing short of remarkable. His academic achievements include earning a Juris Doctor degree from Baylor University, after which he promptly demonstrated a keen interest in public service. Notably, he served as a policy director for former Gov. Mike Huckabee.

The business world has felt the potent influence of Martin's innovative thinking. His stewardship at The Martin Organization, a technology-centric conglomerate, has seen it flourish in fields as diverse as software development, biotech, venture capital and entertainment. His writings, covering a wide range of topics, from technology to economics, politics and faith, have been featured in prestigious publications such as the Wall Street Journal and National Review.

PayPal, the global payments giant, benefited from Martin's expertise as part of the pre-IPO startup team, where he served as



special counsel to founder and CEO Peter Thiel. The company swiftly amassed over 25 million customers and conducted the first successful post-bust tech IPO.

Martin's influence extends far beyond business. He has made significant contributions to the pharmaceutical world with his role in Galectin Therapeutics' turnaround, now conducting a Phase III clinical trial of a drug that reverses liver and kidney fibrosis and cirrhosis.

His commitment to public service, business and philanthropy is remarkable, demonstrated by his establishment of The Martin Foundation. This institution underscores his dedication to community development, supporting initiatives centered on faith, educationz and aid to the needy.

Over the years, Martin's contributions to technology, economy and society have garnered him titles such as "tech guru" by Fox Business News, "philosopher capitalist" by Britain's Guardian, and "one of America's leading public intellectuals" by BlazeTV.

Continued on page 27



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### 🌸 Musing



By Doug Stauffer, Pastor, Faith Independent Baptist Church

Labor Day, for many, signifies the end of summer, the beginning of a new school year, and a day off work and school. But when viewed spiritually, Labor

## A Pastor's Ponderings: Labor Day A Spiritual Reflection on Work and Rest

Day takes on a far greater significance. Labor Day becomes a celebration of our labor, the spiritual essence of work and the sanctity of rest.

The Bible repeatedly emphasizes the significance of work in human life. Whether it's the biblical notion of Adam tilling the Garden of Eden, David tending the sheep or Jesus working as a carpenter, work is an integral component of the human experience. Work is how we find purpose, how we serve our communities and how we align ourselves with God's divine order. The Bible says, "... let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth." (Ephesians 4:28b) I learned early in my Christian walk that we work not to GET, but to enable us to GIVE to others. Hard workers are the best givers!

This biblical emphasis and these examples remind us that no job is insignificant in the eyes of the Almighty. God honors every noble profession with inherent dignity when approached with dedication and sincerity. Yet, most people do not realize how much God values work.

The Bible says, "For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat." (2 Thessalonians 3:10) The emphasis here is on those who choose not to work, rather than those incapable of doing so. It's a potent reminder of God's expectations for each of us. Teach your children to work, and they will have a greater appreciation of the character of God. If you nurture laziness in your children, they will haunt you for the rest of their days.  $\Box$ 

Work, in its spiritual essence, isn't merely about the tasks we complete or the wages we earn. It embodies the inner transformation that unfolds when we dedicate ourselves to any job. When approached with passion, love and integrity, work isn't just



a means to earn a living, but a vessel for personal growth. It cultivates virtue and contributes to the greater good of society. Is there any wonder why unrelenting forces are busy undermining the work ethic? Young people are being convinced that work is a punishment rather than a blessing!

My journey of understanding the value of hard work started young. By age 12, my "free time" was occupied with three jobs: mowing lawns, delivering newspapers and bagging groceries. Today, this would be considered child abuse of me and my two older brothers. By age 17, I managed a local mom-andpop convenience store during the summer, after school and on weekends. My upbringing was more than just labor; it was a foundation for character-building that has aided me all my life. By 21, I was promoted to Assistant Chief of Administration on a Wing level command with 2,000 people in the command.

As much as the Bible and life teach us the essence of work, they also stress the sanctity of rest. Just as God crafted the world in six days and rested on the seventh, humans are wired for a rhythm of work and rest. This pattern isn't a mere luxury, but a necessity, a divinely ordained time to

rejuvenate the soul, ponder upon our deeds and foster a deeper connection with the Almighty essentially, the essence of Sunday worship.

This Labor Day, let's find the balance between the sacred nature of work and that of rest. The Bible cautions against laziness with terms like "sluggard" and "slothful." As Proverbs states, "The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat." (Proverbs 13:4) If every generation could internalize this wisdom and be taught the work ethic of previous generations, imagine the progress, harmony and shared prosperity we could achieve in this, the most blessed nation on earth.

Indeed, we work hard not just because it is expected, but because it's a testament to character, faith and our bond with the Almighty. As we enjoy our barbecues, parades and family gatherings this Labor Day, take a moment to honor the spiritual essence of work and rest. And be sure to thank God if you learned these vital lessons while praying for those who have been duped into believing that work is a curse.

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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Sean of the South



#### BY SEAN DIETRICH

Recently, it came to my attention that I was one of the remaining four Americans who had not seen "Barbie." In case you're one of the other three, "Barbie" is a wildly popular movie that is making waves in all the headlines.

The New York Times recently said that "Barbie" is "...about becoming your own hero." CNN stated that "Barbie" is "...Important for normalizing women's health." Toisto Magazine called "Barbie" the "most important film of the year."

"Barbie" has reportedly impressed the Hollywood establishment because it proved that, to produce a hit movie you don't need computer graphics, elaborate CGI effects, and a huge production budget to create hype. All you need is a huge promotional budget to create hype.

So I decided to see "Barbie" with my friend Dan, a former law-enforcement officer, who asked me to accompany him and his two daughters.

I haven't been to the theater in a long time. I think the last movie I saw was "Steel Magnolias." Mostly, because my people weren't big movie goers. We were sanctified Baptists who did not believe in going to the movies for fear that it could lead to mixed bathing.

When we got there, the first thing I noticed was that lots of young women were there to see "Barbie." I could tell this because they were all dressed in neon pink.

"I've seen 'Barbie' four times," one 22-year-old woman told me. "It's just a great movie, with an important message."

I asked the young woman what this message was, exactly.

"Um," she went on, "like, it's about, like... Like. I don't know. You just have to see it."

Another group of teenage women stood in line with their

boyfriends. The young women had already seen "Barbie" twice. This was their boyfriends' first time.

"We made our boyfriends come with us this time," said one the girls. "Because it's a super good movie."

"Oh my God," said another young lady. "So good."

Most of the boyfriends were clad in Barbie-themed, festive clothes. I asked one of the boys whether he was excited to see the movie and I asked whether I could quote him in a column I would be writing.

He gave me a sincere but thoughtful answer by saying, "My girlfriend made me wear these pink pants."

So we waited in a long line because it was a weekend, and everyone was at the theater. Some were there to see the new Indiana Jones movie, which features an 81-year-old Harrison Ford starring in "Indiana Jones Takes a Nap."

Other movie goers were there to see "Oppenheimer" a film about J. Robert Oppenheimer, who invented the atomic bomb. The film is directed by Christopher Nolan, a director who critics hail for blending "thrill rides with thoughtful narratives which pose complex and pressing ethical questions" such as, "When will this movie be over so I can go pee?"

We purchased our tickets for "Barbie," and went into the dark theater. Once we nestled into our seats, the movie began,



and I can honestly tell you I did not move a muscle for the duration of the film.

Namely, because my feet were glued to the floor because of movie-theater-floor gunk, which is an adhesive consisting of decade-old soft drink spills and petrified candy.

The movie began. The screen featured stunning set design, elaborate dance sequences, and wild costumes. The first thought I was struck with was, "Man, I'm really old."

Because most of the starring cast was comfortably in their early 20s, with fit bodies that did not contain a thimble-full of adipose tissue. And every other word in their scripted sentences was "like."

Admittedly, I am also out of touch with popular culture, so I, like, didn't get most of the, like, jokes.

Dan's daughters, however, were laughing with everyone

else. Meantime, I was looking around wondering when, exactly, did movie theaters quit using ushers with flashlights. And what happened to the Wurlitzer organ?

The apex of the movie was a stirring scene which featured the movie's title song, "What Was I Made For," recorded by Billie Ellish, which had many in the theater sobbing. Admittedly, I was weeping too. Although, to be fair, I was crying because my ticket cost more than a three-bedroom beach condo.

When the film ended, we exited and passed the gaggle of teenage boyfriends, lingering in the lobby.

"Please don't write about me wearing pink pants," one boyfriend said.

Which I would never do.

### **ROD D. MARTIN**

continued from page 25

His influence reaches the four corners of the globe and left his audience at the Okaloosa County Republican Club with a fresh outlook and a renewed sense of purpose.

As a policy leader for conservative institutions, Martin's relentless dedication to faith, freedom and prosperity embodies the American Dream, encouraging us all to strive for more to envision the potential in ourselves and communities. Indeed, the Okaloosa County Republican Club, and the broader community, benefited greatly from this unique opportunity to learn from one of the most influential figures of our time, igniting a generation of conservative thinkers and leaders.

Beyond the enlightening discourse from Rod D. Martin, the Club proudly presented a \$1,000 scholarship (one of its three scholarships) to a deserving recipient, Saskia Copeman, from Crestview High School.







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🏇 Arts & Music

# Local Resident's Thrill of a Lifetime: Background Extra for The Chosen

By Victoria Ostrosky

Take yourself back in time. It's sweltering and dusty. The sun beats down and your sandals kick up dirt. The Temple looms large, its massive stone columns and steps filled with people going about their business. The smell of penned sheep and goats mingle with the scent of spices and fruit. And the heat is suffocating.

Being a background extra on the set of the globally popular TV series The Chosen for four days filming Season 4's finale was, in a word, memorable. The Jerusalem set in Goshen, Utah, is spectacular. The stone walls are imposing. And when the sun kisses them late in the day, they turn pink.

There were 600 of us dressed as first century Jews, Greeks and Nabateans sweating in the sun, drinking tons of water and smiling in between takes, just because.

We arrived at 6:15 a.m. The crew checked us in. and we were given lanyards dividing us up

into five teams. Oh, and to make a note, we were strictly forbidden to divulge any specifics on the actual scenes being filmed. While we waited for our turn on set, we sat in a spacious air-conditioned holding tent, stocked with water, juices, sodas, snacks and electrolytes, not to mention breakfast, lunch and a box dinner handed out at the end of a 12-hour day. We were well taken care of as we sat around getting to know each other.

I mentioned the heat. It was in the upper 90s each day, and although the humidity is lower there than here, when that sun is beating down on you, it feels like a laser boring into your brain. So, we used umbrellas and sunglasses in-between takes. There was a lot of waiting and when it was the most uncomfortable, a wonderful young man, dressed as a Jewish peasant, walked around spritzing us in the face with water. He was quite popular, being the one who made everyone feel better even if only for a minute or two.



When our color group was called and we arrived on set, Mitch, the 2nd Assistant Director, gave us instructions and taught us some new ABCs - Always Be Crossing. That means, when "Background!" is called out, you never stop moving until you hear "Cut!" Seeing the actors up close was amazing, although we weren't allowed to make eye contact or approach them since they were in character. I did, however, make sure I walked near Jesus (Jonathan Roumie) for a few of the takes, so I could hear him deliver his lines (which were awesome, by the way). Everyone was sweating and uncomfortable, and gracious. The actors would joke a little with each other as we all waited.

"Pictures up!" Time to put everything that wasn't first century approved away in our bags.

"Rolling, rolling!" Get ready. "Background!" Our cue to

start walking or shoving or milling around.

"Action!" Now the actors begin delivering their lines while background continues backgrounding without looking at the actors.

"Cut!" Everyone stops in their tracks.

"Reset!" Everyone goes back to where they started. And we do it again. And again. And again. Until Dallas Jenkins is happy with the shot.

By the end of day 4, my feet were blistered and my toes were rubbed raw. My nose and shoulders were sunburned, and I was exhausted. But it was worth every uncomfortable moment.

Ben Burgess

Jordan Minton

**Brunch @Soleil** 

When you think about it, a film set is a microcosm of the body of Christ. Each person has their part. Some parts are bigger or more visible than others. But the scene wouldn't be complete without everyone's participation. The actors need background extras to make the scenes realistic. The camera operators need not just the actors and background extras, but the props to make the picture authentic. Everyone needs the staff and crew to set up the props and clean up the set and provide the food and the water and the umbrellas and so much more. The Director is needed to oversee and direct, instruct and troubleshoot the entire production.

We are all necessary, no matter what part we have been assigned to play.

There are three more seasons to film, and, if I could, I would be a permanent "Background" extra and move to Texas, where most of the filming is done. We'll have to wait and see what happens.

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### **Mitch Malloy:** Destin's Rock Star Resident Drops Newest Album, "The Last Song"

#### BY WILL ESTELL

If you reside in, or have spent much time along, any of the beach communities that make up what I coined "America's Favorite Coastal Playground" some years ago, then it's certainly no secret that not only do celebrities from the film, ty, music and entertainment world vacation in our area, many of them also decide to move here.

Rock musician, vocalist, and record producer Mitch Malloy is one of these, having moved to Destin almost five years ago. Malloy, 61 (Yes, we all know he doesn't look it. It must be the Viking DNA), originally from Dickinson, North Dakota, first made his mark on the international rock scene back in 1992 when he was signed to RCA, releasing his debut album, "Mitch Malloy," which garnered international attention as it climbed the USA Billboard charts, as well as building a musical following with hard rock fans around the world.

Mitch's voice has been highly sought after as a front man for legendary acts, as well as a guest vocalist on other artists' projects. In the mid-90s Mitch was asked to replace Sammy Hagar as lead singer for Van Halen. However, due to some of the typical things that happen within the day-today dynamics of rock bands of that caliber he declined. At that time Mitch turned his focus more to the songwriting and producing side of the industry, making a move to Nashville where he has worked for over two decades writing, producing, and consulting with some of the biggest names in the business from Kenny Loggins, Craig Morgan, and Victoria Shaw to Boys Like Girls and Taylor Swift, to name a few.

When I first met Mitch, for a feature magazine interview back in 2019, he was engulfed in a four year stint as lead singer for 80's hard rock band, Great White; touring regularly, and having just made a move to our beautiful beaches. Malloy has since left Great White, deciding instead to get back to his roots, resuming his solo career with his first album since "Making Noise" was released almost eight years ago. piece, entitled "The Last Song," is like its predecessor, a solo effort in every sense of the term. Malloy plays every instrument, as well as writing every song on the album, and producing and engineering the entirety of "The Last Song."

I recently sat down with Mitch at his Destin home to find out a little more about his newest album, as well as his musical journey, and living his ideal life along the beaches we all love.

#### You know, I know, but for our readers, tell me a little about your musical journey and how it began.

I was born in Dickinson, North Dakota, where I began singing in school plays and church, at about six years old. I was the youngest of six children, and just immediately had a passion for music. I began playing guitar at about twelve, went to music school in Seattle, and then hit the road to Los Angeles and Nashville to chase the dream. I guess I'm still doing it... just in a much prettier place, and on my own terms.

You've had quite the diverse musical career, having done everything from your early solo albums



that charted Top 20 Hits, to having the iconic Eddie Van Halen personally offer you the frontman gig with Van Halen when Sammy left. All while building a name in Nashville as a talented writer and producer. What's your favorite part of the business and why?

I really like most aspects equally. I love to perform live.

I love to write, and I really like that magic of taking something from raw vocals and music to a completed song and album. That's what producing is really about, and what drew me to working alongside so many talented artists when I was in Nashville at my studio. I get chills just thinking about that part, the magic, that moment when it all comes together.

#### I know you've lived in Destin full time for just over a year now. How did that come to be, and what led you to these beautiful beaches?

It's a funny story. Some years ago I was on a tour with Eddie Money, and the guys in management told me I had a weekend off, and asked if I wanted to stay in Alabama with them after the last concert that week. I was like, "no way, why would I want to stay in Alabama for the weekend? I want to fly home." I'm really a homebody. So, I get off the plane the night before the show, I took a shuttle to the hotel and didn't really know where I was. The next morning I wake in the room, pull back the curtains and see this beautiful white sand and emerald water. I didn't even know sand looked like that anywhere. I told them I'd changed my mind and wanted to stay the weekend [laughing]. Then I met my wife, Faith, and she had been coming to the Florida Gulf for years, since she was a kid. We just started coming often, and one day about two years ago, we just decided it was time to get out of Nashville

Continued on next page



Mitch Malloy's new master-

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### 🐞 Arts & Music

### The Million Dollar Quartet

By Anna Fisher, Associate Artistic Director, ECTC

Picture it; America-1956. A gallon of gas is 29 cents and a glass bottle of Coca Cola costs you a nickel. Grace Kelly becomes Princess Grace of Monaco and new products on the market include Play Doh, Comet Cleanser and a funny little dice game called Yahtzee. It is also the year a relatively unknown Elvis Presley explodes onto the scene at the tender age of 21. The term "catapults" might even be more apt. 1956 is a rockn-roll pot of water that is just beginning to boil, and then Elvis comes along and cranks up the heat.

He released five songs to top the Billboard pop charts that year including "Heartbreak Hotel," "I Want You, I Need You, I Love You," "Don't Be Cruel," "Hound Dog" and "Love Me Tender."

On Nov. 15, 1956, the movie "Love Me Tender" was released, and not long after that on Dec.



4, 1956, Elvis stopped by Memphis-based Sun Records Studios to have a chat with owner Sam Phillips, also known as the man who invented rock-n-roll. It just so happened that Rockabilly artist Carl Perkins, who originally wrote and performed "Blue Suede Shoes," was there to lay down some tracks. Wild piano man Jerry Lee Lewis was brought in to help fill out those tracks with his distinctive sound. Oh, and there was someone else there, too—a popular country singer named Johnny Cash.

These four legendary musicians proceeded to have an impromptu jam session that included gospel, hymns, rockabilly, country and a little rock-n-roll thrown in for good measure. Sam Phillips had the presence of mind to leave the tapes running, and managed to get a recording of this epic jam session that made the Memphis newspapers the next day with the headline "Million Dollar Quartet."

The actual recording wasn't released until 1981 and, even then, only in Europe. It wasn't until 1990 that the complete recordings were released in America. The musical, which is based on this once-in-a-lifetime convergence of some of the greatest musical talent in American history, premiered in Chicago in 2008 to rave reviews and eventually went to Broadway.

I am absolutely thrilled that

this incredible, based-on-a-truestory musical is the opening show for Emerald Coast Theatre Company's 11th Season! The music makes this show great, but the story behind the music is what gives this show a magical texture. We, as the audience, have the privilege of knowing that this event was an ephemeral, once-in-a-lifetime happening. For those guys, it was just another Tuesday. What a stroke of genius for Sam Phillips to have the gift of foresight and capture the moment for all of us to savor years later. And just as brilliant that Colin Escott and Floyd Mutrux saw the magic in the story and wrote a show about it. Get your tickets soon because Elvis will be in the building on September 15th through October 1st.

The great thing about ECTC's premiere of this toe-tapping musical is that you have more than one random Tuesday afternoon to catch it. As the King would say, "It's now or never."

### MITCH MALLOY

continued from previous page

and live in a place we really love. We couldn't be happier; I don't ever want to leave.

What's your favorite as-

pect about living here in Destin and being part of our beach culture?

It's beautiful and the area's great, but it's also like you and I have talked about. The people are just so friendly, and real, and accommodating. Everyone is so nice here. It's like a melting pot of happy people.

I love the tracks on the new album, man, but with a title like, "The Last Song" I have to ask... is it?



You know, people have been asking me that in a lot of the rock mag interviews, and I tell them, I don't know. Maybe. It depends on how the streaming numbers come in. [laughing]

You've mentioned to me before that you've consistently had a recording studio in your home(s) for like 45 years now. How different is it to be able to record the entire album at home, and do it all yourself, compared to having a label or their cronies putting their two cents worth in and dictating the music?

It's been 47 years now, of having my own studio. I joke with people in the business that I may have logged more studio time than any single artist in the business, by now. It was a great feeling to get to do the new album, all my way. From writing every song to playing every instrument to producing all the tracks. I felt that freedom allowed me to be my best, and put out what I really wanted people to hear. On the flip side, it's also a little scary to have that much control. I mean, without anyone to bounce it off of and get feedback from, you just don't know how well it's going to be accepted until it comes out and fans start buying it, and the magazines and rock stations start commenting on it. Luckily, so far, the reception of "The Last Song" has been great though.

Mitch Malloy's newest album, "The Last Song" is available by download, CD, and vinyl. Check it out yourself. If you're a fan of hard rock melodies, just the right amount of screaming guitar, and the great vocal ability that has enabled Malloy to belt out clean tunes for over four decades, I think you'll be a fan of this.

Will Estell is a writer, media entrepreneur, and real estate professional with over 600 published magazine features in an array of genres, from travel and tourism to automobiles, real estate and celebrity interview features. Over the past 26 years Will has been instrumental in founding twelve new magazines from concept to fruition, as well as serving as editor in chief for numerous others. Originally from the backwoods of rural Mississippi, Will and his wife, ABC 3 news anchor, Laura Hussey, call Destin and Navarre home. Will is a regular contributor to Life Media, as well as other magazines, papers, and websites regionally and nationally.



### **BAY BUZZ**

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Galleries Hours: Monday – Thursday: 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Okaloosa County is seeking public input via a community survey to assist in the development of an Attainable Workforce Housing Strategy. The questions in this survey will help local leaders to better understand public opinions about housing affordability, needs and types of development. Okaloosa County is utilizing consulting firm TPMA for survey development and analysis. No personal or other identifying information will be provided to city or county departments, staff or elected officials. All information collected in this survey will be reported only in the aggregate and will be fully anonymized. The Community Survey is available now through September 4. 2023 at https://www.surveylegend. com/s/52wj.

### **Crisis Aid for Littles and**

Moms (CALM) Organization, Inc. has a new interim Calm House Director, Krystal Boelk. Krystal has served the organization as a volunteer babysitter, a class Facilitator, then as Secretary of the Executive Board until just recently. She found it natural to serve at CALM, a 501c3 non-profit, to offer transitional housing and life skills training to single moms and their children who are in crisis situations to prepare them for successful independent living. Krystal would love to share more of her passion and ideas for future growth and can be reached at director@nicevilleCALM.com www. NicevilleCALM.com.

### MKAF Kicks Off 2023 Fall Season With First Ever Salt Water Music Fest, Oct. 12-14

Presented by Salt Water Vacations and MKAF, The first-ever Salt Water Music Fest brings music lovers a sensational three-day music showcase celebration to raise funds and awareness for MKAF — Destin's champion of the cultural arts for all. The two-day music festival is Thursday, Oct. 12, and Friday, Oct. 13 at MKAF's Cultural Arts Village in Destin with a singer/songwriter brunch to follow on Sunday, Oct. 14 at Soleil in Destin.

Grammy-winning pop songstress Macy Gray, best known for her international hit single I Try, headlines the Festival on Thursday,



Oct. 12. Joining this captivating, eclectic R&B talent on stage is her band, The California Jet Club, performing hot tracks from her newest album, The Reset.

The event will also feature an evening of five of Nashville's hottest singer/songwriters including Ben Burgess, Jared Mullins, Jordan Minton, Jordan Reynolds, the Josh Mirenda Band along with headliner country music duo LOCASH. Music lovers can meet and greet many of the singer/songwriters during Brunch at Soleil on Saturday, Oct. 14. The event will include multiple food trucks, beverage bars, merchandise retail sales as well as artist meet & greets (for some ticket levels).

Advance tickets are priced from \$50 per person. General admission lawn seating and table seating will be available for individuals. Full tables (seating eight) are available starting from \$750. VIP Tables are from \$1,500 and include prime seating, VIP tent access, drink coupons, a cash bar, onsite VIP parking passes, and more. Purchase tickets online at mkaf.org.







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