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Local Signs of Fall: An Array of Art and Music that Heals

By WILL ESTELL

If you're a fan of the arts whether visually, musically or through their power of healing, and if you live anywhere in Okaloosa, Walton or Bay Counties, then you're likely already familiar with Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation (MKAF)—the outreach and events this organization has been bringing to Northwest Florida's Gulf Coast for almost three decades.

MKAF has grown from its humble beginnings to becoming one of the largest champions of the arts in our beautiful communities that dot this piece of paradise. MKAF is a mission-driven, membership based, not-for-profit organization, with all MKAF event proceeds going to support ArtsReach, the organization's outreach mission.

MKAF events do more than entertain the tens of thousands who attend them each year; they elevate the quality of the people, schools, groups and communities they



impact. MKAF events, such as the annual Festival of the Arts, various concerts, wine tastings and culinary gatherings might be thought of simply as entertainment or something fun to do, but the true mission and impact of the organization is about so much more than providing a good time for attendees and members. It's about making a measurable difference—a real and lasting impact for the betterment of our communities and the people MKAF serves.

Since its inception in 1995, MKAF has enlightened, empowered and educated more than 400,000 children in more than 100 schools and partner agencies throughout Northwest Florida's Gulf Coast. These exciting "Arts Empower" programs provide arts in our children's schools where, as you know if you have a student, much of the arts funding had been stopped. MKAF saw the need and is producing dynamic arts learning opportunities through its ArtsReach education initiative serving local K-12 students, at-risk youth and even those with disabilities through "Arts for All Abilities." A newer program, Paint the Music, is a collaboration between MKAF and

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There is Still Time:

Protecting Green Space at Bluewater Bay



BY BARBARA PALMGREN, BAY LIFE REPORTER AND AUTHOR, "SAVING A GOLF COURSE"

I've come to realize that sometimes in life we are fortunate to have opportunities to step up in times of adversity, to be one more person to say, "Let's roll. Let's do this!"

Yes, it's time for action. Action that will lead to a legacy for future generations to look back and be proud of those who stepped up to do

> BLUEWATER BAY continued on page 7



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Community

MKAF

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Sinfonia Gulf Coast (SGC), and explores the musical classics while channeling students' inner Picasso—students paint to musical selections and are invited to a live SGC concert performance. If you have a child participating in one or more of these school programs, you know how effective they are and crucial the arts are toward molding our upcoming generations.

Through "Warrior Arts," MKAF, too, serves our military population suffering with both physical injuries and invisible traumas and hardships, bringing therapeutic benefits to active duty and veteran military service members. This unique and healing program features Zentangle drawing for mindfulness and there are numerous testimonies to the program's effectiveness.

MKAF's spring and summer Concerts in the Village series showcases some of the most entertaining and talented touring artists in the entire country, bringing thousands of both local and vacationing music and arts lovers to MKAF's Arts Village in the heart of Destin. This fun, musical series raises both awareness and funding, so that MKAF can impact more and more people in our community with each coming year.

As for the upcoming fall



and winter events that you can take part in while also knowing you're making a positive difference just by being there, MKAF has quite a few just around the corner:

Festival Of The Arts

Now in its 28th year, Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation's Annual Festival of the Arts is the place to be Oct. 28-29. The largest and most celebrated art fair in all of Okaloosa and Walton counties, the annual art fair brings in top-tier artists in an array of media from throughout the country. This October, the growing event will feature more than 100 artists, some with multiple display spaces, all ready to show, talk about and sell their pieces, while competing for various accolades in their respective categories as part of this juried festival. "This year, we enjoyed overwhelming interest and after the blind jury scored more than 200 applicants, we are proud to present more than 100 artists hailing from 17 states across the U.S. and Europe," said Festival of the Arts Producer, Deb Nissley. In addition to all the unique

and creative pieces on display, MKAF's Festival of the Arts also features live music, food trucks, beverages, comedian Jason Hedden as emcee for the festivities and even a VIP Lounge Experience. There's also an available cash bar featuring locally sourced craft beer, including Mattie Light from Destin Brewery, and MKAF's famous Bloody Mary bar to accompany your fun in perusing the festival, seeing friends and finding those perfect pieces to call your own...ones you'll treasure for years and perhaps even hand down.

This year's festival will include a new edition, MKAF's Arty Kick Off Party, October 27th at 6 p.m. at Destin's Hen-



with Stage Crafters performing

scenes from the Broadway musi-

cal "Something Rotten," along

with local Gulf Coast artist and

MKAF Board Member, Maxine

Orange and her Splatter Studio,

which allows children to suit up

and exercise their artistic inspi-

ration while creating their own

personal art to take home from

the festival. It's never too ear-

ly to instill a love of the arts in

the future of our communities.

What better place than MKAF's

Festival of the Arts to introduce

the younger members of your

family to a love of arts, music

members and the community

are invited to join in on more

amazing entertainment and fun

from small intimate concerts in

area listening rooms to MKAF's

It doesn't stop there! MKAF

and community?

PHOTOS BY KURT LISCHKA MOON CREEK STUDIO

derson Beach Resort—an exciting way to usher in the festival while also partaking in great food, drinks and entertainment. This year's Festival will also bring additional entertainment

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Salt Water Music Fest

If you're a fan of live music and lots of fun, you will certainly want to grab your three-day tickets or VIP table for the inaugural Salt Water Music Fest, presented by MKAF and Salt Water Vacations.

The spectacular festival takes place at MKAF's Arts Village in the heart of Destin, and brings internationally renowned headliners: Grammy winning R&B sensation Macy Gray and CMA nominated country hitmakers LOCASH, as well as six other hit Nashville songwriters to MKAF's Dugas Pavilion stage for what is sure to be a fun-filled celebration of music across multiple genres.

With hits like "I Try," "Sweet Baby," "Beauty in the World," "Still," and "Why Don't You Call Me," you're sure to enjoy a night of reminiscent musical fun, moving to the tunes of Macy Gray, just as country fans are sure to sing along to LO-CASH staples like "I Love This Life," "I Know Somebody," the band's remarkably popular 2023 patriotic hit, "Three Favorite Colors," and the chart-topping, "You Gonna Fly" written by LOCASH'S Chris Lucas and Preston Brust for Keith Urban.

The festival and ticket proceeds will further support and grow awareness for MKAF's outreach to our communities, schools, veterans and residents of these coastal communities. (Read more about the festival from my one-on-one interview with LOCASH on page 34 in this issue.)

As if that's not enough music, MKAF has also added to its 2023 fall season two, new MKAF Unplugged live concerts! These popular listening-room style concerts will showcase singer-songwriters, solo artists, musicians, duos and small bands performing for limited numbers of attendees in intimate acoustic sets. The two upcoming fall concerts include American country music singer-songwriter Erin Enderlin on Sunday, Oct. 25, and the country rock duo, Capps & Hughes on Sunday, Nov. 1st. Both limited availability events take place on Henderson Beach Resort's Sunset Terrace in Destin. These particular concerts are a remarkable value, as they



Grammy winning R&B sensation Macy Gray

are offered as a bundle for only \$75. Tickets also include complimentary valet service, light bites and a cash bar.

MKAF's CEO, fearless leader, and champion of the arts Demetrius Fuller, had this to say about the addition of the new Unplugged Series: "Our first Unplugged benefit concert last June featuring Adam Ezra and Corrina Smith was so well received that we partnered with our friends at the Henderson to add these acoustic sets. With limited seats on a terrace, overlooking beautiful Henderson Beach State Park and the Gulf

THURSDAY, OCT. 12

FRIDAY, OCT. 13

LOCASH

Ben Burgess

Josh Mirenda

Dugas Pavilion in Destin

Dugas Pavilion in Destin

MACY GRAY & **California Jet Club**



Will Estell, his wife, ABC 3 news anchor, Laura Hussey, and Tommy Shaw of Stvx

at sunset, this is a wonderful way to gather with friends to experience live music, a cocktail and delicious food. It's literally the magic memorable evenings are made from."

Whichever MKAF events you choose to attend and support this fall, one thing is for sure: By being a member of, or simply an attending supporter of Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation's growing number of artful community events, you will be doing so much more than enriching your own life through contact with the organization's art, music, and outreach pro-

grams. You will quite literally be making a lifelong difference in the lives of others. How's that for having your proverbial cake and eating it too?

For more information, including tickets to any of the array of MKAF events, Salt Water Music Fest, and to become a MKAF member and take advantage of their corporate sponsorship opportunities, visit MKAF.org

Will Estell is a writer, media entrepreneur and coastal real estate professional with more than 600 published magazine features in an array of genres, from celebrity interviews to travel and tourism to automobiles and real estate. During the past 25 years, Will has been instrumental in founding and co-founding 12 new magazines from concept to fruition, as well as serving as editor in chief for numerous others. Originally from the backwoods of rural Ripley, Mississippi, Will is a father of three who splits his time between Destin and Navarre, along with his wife, ABC 3 news anchor, Laura Hussey. Will is a regular contributor to Life Media and numerous other publications, as well as a member of the Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation's board of directors.



benefiting mattie kelly

Grammy-award winning pop songstress Macy Gray and country music's "feel-good duo" LOCASH plus 5 top Nashville Singer-Songwriters hit the Dugas Pavilion in Destin. Food Trucks, Beverage Stations and Cash Bars on site.

Proceeds benefit MKAF ArtsReach initiatives including the ground-breaking arts therapy program Warrior Arts, Arts for All Abilities and arts education outreach throughout Okaloosa, Walton and Bay Counties.



Jordan Minton SATURDAY, OCT. 14

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5 Award-winning Singer-Songwriters

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Jordan Reynolds

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OCTOBER 28 & 29

ARTY KICK OFF PARTY

FRIDAY, OCT. 27 | 6 PM HENDERSON BEACH RESORT Tickets at MKAF.org/Events

The 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 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.

MKAF Kicks Off 2023 Fall Season With Salt Water Music Fest

Presented by Salt Water Vacations and MKAF, The first-ever Salt Water Music Fest brings music lovers a sensational threeday music showcase celebration to raise funds and awareness for MKAF — Destin's champion of the cultural arts for all. The twoday 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 Revnolds, 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.

LJ Schooners 30th Annual Single Hand Race

The biggest race on the Bay is fast approaching. The 30th Annual Single Hand Race sponsored by Budweiser, Bluewater Bay Marina Complex and LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant & Oyster Bar will be held October 21. Upwards of 30 boats will participate in this race for everyone. "We encourage participation from as many sailors as possible to mark the 30th Anniversary of this fun and exciting race," said Jimmie Boisjolie of LJ Schooners. This is a single handers race with only one person per boat. A short race for fun, challenge and perhaps bragging rights is planned. Skippers meeting and registration will be held Friday, Oct. 20, at 6 p.m. at LJ Schooners Dockside Ovster Bar. Exact start times for the Bermuda Start Race will be assigned at skippers meeting on Friday night. For more information, call Bluewater Bay Marina at (850) 897-2821 or visit our website bluewaterbaymarina.com.

NWFSC to Host the First Annual Emerald Coast PCA Rodeo

There's a new rodeo in town and it's taking the bull by the horns! Buckle up your boots and grab your cowboy hats, because the Emerald Coast PCA Rodeo is about to stampede into Niceville, Friday, Nov. 10 at 6:30 p.m. Mutton Busting, 7:30 p.m. Rodeo and Saturday, Nov. 11, at 6:30 p.m. Mutton Busting, 7:30 p.m. Rodeo. All events will be held at Northwest Florida State College (NWFSC). This heart-pounding, thrill-seeking event promises to deliver an ultimate rodeo experience for rodeo enthusiasts and newcomers alike. With heart-stopping bull riding, daredevil barrel racing, breathtaking roping, and specialty acts, attendees can expect a showcase of top-notch rodeo talent.

Proceeds will support Raider Athletics at NWFSC. Critical resources are necessary for Raider student-athletes to compete for championships on the field and on the court. Your support will go a long way in ensuring Raider Athletics has the essential tools to maintain the high standards of athletics and academics established at NWFSC.

Saddle up and get ready for a wild ride!

Honorary Judges and Angel's Envy Partnership Announced for Eggs on the Beach

This popular foodie returns to Seascape Resort on Oct. 14, and in addition to rallying for taster votes, cook teams will also compete for recognition by a distinguished panel of honorary judges. This year's culinary experts range from Tony Chachere's Corporate Chef to a Michelin restaurant-trained chef to a local restauranteur and a contributing food writer for national magazines. New this year-Best Angel's Envy Bite, celebrating the event's new partnership with Angel's Envy Bourbon.

With diverse backgrounds, judges will evaluate bites based on taste, creativity and presentation to award the coveted Judge's Trophies: Chef Jude Tauzin, corporate chef for Tony Chachere's, Lafayette, LA; Chef Dan Tederous, corporate chef Hilton Sandestin; Nikki Nickerson, founder Cowgirl Hospitality Group; Carrie Honaker,

by the

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(Community

Meet Madame Director Paula Hilton

20 Years Down the Line, This Mystery Train Shows No Signs of Slowing Down

By Christopher Manson

In the interest of full disclosure, I have been involved as an actor, stage manager and errand boy with the local comedy troupe Act4Mystery since 2005. Paula Hilton founded the troupe in 2003 and, upon my joining two years later, they started to get really good.

Ms. Hilton is the group's writer, director and occasional actress. She is referred to affectionately by her actors as "Madam Director." "When I started this, I didn't know how much work would go into it, even just one production – getting everything organized and agreed upon with the venues, as well as dealing with the actors' schedules and personal problems."

For Ms. Hilton, the last two decades have been a learning experience, "but it hasn't taken away my enjoyment and love of this. If I didn't enjoy it, I wouldn't be doing it, because it's so hard.

"And I couldn't do it without help. In the beginning, my mom did all the sewing, my daughter Rochelle acted in the shows, and my dad built props." Rochelle is also the group's choreographer and ran the group when Ms. Hilton lived in Gainesville to undergo cancer treatment in 2006 and 2007. Ms. Hilton's youngest daughter, Jessika, has acted in a handful of shows, too.

Prior to moving to Fort Walton Beach, Ms. Hilton lived in California and acted in murder mystery productions. "I was performing someone else's shows, and then I decided to write one. I presented it to my director,



Bill Hembree, actor, with Paula Hilton, founder Act4Mystery

and she made some suggestions – trimming dialogue, that was something I had to learn.



Chris Manson performing a private show

"When I moved here, there wasn't a murder mystery company as far as I knew. I felt like it would be something different and that it could benefit the community."

She talked her sister, Dr. Julie McNabb, into letting her put on her first show for the nonprofit Horizons (now the Arc of the Emerald Coast), where Dr. Mc-Nabb served as CEO. That first show, "Peace, Love and Murder," encouraged the audience to dress up in their best hippie duds and sold out two nights in a row.

"I didn't have any actors, but several people on the Horizons board were actors or knew somebody that acted," says Ms. Hilton. "That first show had seven actors, and I used some of them for other fundraisers." Act4Mystery performed its first public show at the now-defunct Summerhouse restaurant.

Cast members have come and gone, but some have stuck around for as long as Kenan Thompson has been on SNL. "Kay Yarbrough, who was on the Horizons board at the time, acted in the first show and is still with us." Joe Chase, a Stage Crafters veteran, and the multitalented Cynthia Bergquist have been an integral part of the troupe for nearly as long.

When Ms. Hilton first held auditions, she put a notice in the local newspaper. One notable, Michelle Dellafave, called and said she was interested. "I asked if she had any experience, and she said, 'Well, I was on the Dean Martin TV show and toured with Bob Hope...' She was great." Ms. Dellafave currently lives in New York and continues to perform.

The Act4Mystery founder has written 38 shows, the most recent being 2022's "Murder on a Ghost Walk." "I try to write one show a year, but I haven't been able to in 2023," she says. "We've been very busy. We did three performances of three different shows in August and I had to bring in new people. So, we had to have about four rehearsals for each of those."

Ms. Hilton does have several "note files" for new shows kicking around, but hasn't been able to write due to her full-time job and some time-consuming family health issues.

The only thing that almost derailed this mystery train in the last 20 years was – you guessed it – COVID. "We didn't perform for 14 months," she says. "My scripts are licensed all over the world, and none of those groups were performing either. I think I only wrote one show and cleaned up some of the older ones."

But, let's focus on the highlights. "The performances are always wonderful," says Ms. Hilton. "There have been a ton of clients I've enjoyed working for, and I just loved our annual awards parties. Recognizing you guys and your hard work, dressing up, handing out trophies... We did the last one right before COVID, and I hate to say no to doing another one."

This fall, Act4Mystery has some private parties lined up which, Ms. Hilton says, are always a blast. The troupe has performed in a variety of venues, including intimate living rooms, a backyard tent, a train in Milton and the Air Force Armament Museum.

This month, you can catch "Killer in the Kitchen" – an elaborate cooking show spoof – at 790 in Destin (Thursday, Oct. 19) and the board game-inspired "Murder Without a Clue" at Samuel's Roadhouse in Crestview (Saturday, Oct. 28).

"I love writing the shows and then watching my characters come to life," she says. "And when the audience laughs at something I've written, that's mind-boggling sometimes."



🀞 Community

BLUEWATER BAY

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what's right—to save the legacy of beauty that is Bluewater Bay. And, right now, we need your help. Make no mistake about it, if 150 acres of green space, paid for by golf memberships and public play goes away, what follows will be similar to the words of a song, "They paved paradise, to put up a parking lot."

Or, in this case, the scenario will be more like, "They paved paradise to put up more houses, destroy green space and lower current property values." If you don't believe it, look at the houses being built across from the clubhouse where the driving range used to be. This is happening folks, right in front of our eyes.

In the days of yore or in the Wild, Wild West, we had heroes. Remember the Lone Ranger that masked man who rode a white horse named Silver? Along with his faithful companion, Tonto, he would show up to save the day!

As many of you already know, Preserve Bluewater Bay has initiated the "Hi Ho Sliv-

er" campaign where "heroes" can purchase "slivers" of land to help preserve the green space we all covet and want to keep for so many reasons. Many golf course property owners have joined the "Hi, Ho Sliver" campaign already to purchase land behind their property, extending it 20 feet into the golf course for \$8 per sq. ft. with certain conditions. A yard sign thanking them will be placed in either their front or back yards so that golfers and the public will know who has helped save the day. But, in order to meet the late October goal, we need more folks to step up. If you'd like to become a hero, please contact Blue Marlin Pelican realtor Debbie Stretch at (850) 218-8312 for more information about this purchase.

Several neighbors, who live on parts of the course that were not saved, regret they did not have the opportunity to do this. One homeowner on hole number 6 of the closed lake course said, "The garbage truck goes past the front of my house five days a week; with the new construction of homes it will go behind my house five days a week." The thought of more



traffic and more infrastructure is no longer a threat for this person. It is reality.

What's exciting is that this opportunity to purchase extra footage on the course will ensure that other homeowner's backyards will continue to have a beautiful golf course view where the course is mowed and maintained at no cost to the homeowner.

What happens if the green space is lost? Looking out at another homeowner's backyard? Hearing another noisy garbage truck? Struggling with more traffic? More noise? Loss of natural beauty? More waiting in line at establishments in the nearby shopping plaza? More worry about losing the resale value of your home that is no longer on a golf course? If enough funds are not raised, the only winners are developers who are waiting currently to see what the outcome will be.

You don't have to live on the golf course to be part of Preserve Bluewater Bay. There are several other community heroes who are pledging thousands of dollars regardless of whether they live on the course or even in Bluewater Bay. They understand the value of saving 150 acres of green space that is maintained and protected by funds raised from golf course operations. The golf course is now succeeding financially and has all the equipment, staff and materials to operate for a profit.

At the forefront of this organization to protect and preserve are people who want no recognition. They know what's right and what must be done. The "Capital Campaign" leadership and the organization Preserve Bluewater Bay are dedicated to preserving this magnificent green space. They are awaiting notification of 501C3 non-profit status that has been applied for and could be used for tax purposes as well.

In last month's article, I reported that \$900,00 had been pledged. That pledge is now \$1.2 million. Close to \$2 million is the goal by late October. The critical timeline is fast approaching. If you have been waiting to make a decision, will you please take a leap of faith and pledge support now?

REMEMBER funds are being pledged only at this time. No checks will be written until a deal has been brokered in late February 2024. To help, contact David Rauch at (850) 865-0907 or visit preservebwb.com. There is still time for every person to be a hero—every person can participate in saving this 150acre green space paradise that will be shared with our future generations.



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 9/16 \$1,200,000 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: Tues. 10/10 @ 6pm Mon. 10/16 @ 6pm

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() Community

Grant Williams: A Legacy of Listening and Empathy

By Doug Stauffer

Tucked away in Niceville sits the Niceville Hearing Center, a testament to the perseverance, commitment and compassion of its owner, Grant Williams. This establishment is more than just a hearing aid practice—it's a beacon of hope and transformation, symbolizing Williams' unwavering dedication to bettering the lives of those grappling with hearing challenges.

From humble beginnings in the mining town of Matewan, W.Va., to championing gymnastics for the state of Kentucky, every step of Grant Williams' journey has been characterized by overcoming adversity. His formative years, marked by economic hardships, became the very foundation of his tenacity and resilience. As the only one from his family of seven to attend college, Williams remains an inspiration to many, showcasing the limitless potential of human spirit.

His foray into gymnastics paved the way for an unexpected but life-changing encounter with Patrick Yeager, a mentor who guided him towards the path of higher education. Williams' journey is a testament to the serendipity of life and how one meeting can alter the trajectory of one's future.

However, life had its set of twists and turns for Williams. After his gymnastics program and his scholar-

ship were defunded, he pivoted his attention to a field that would ultimately become his life's work—hearing healthcare. Williams' realization that he excelled in patient counseling was transformative. He understood that the cornerstone of effective



hearing care was not just technical proficiency but also the art of listening.

Williams' empathy stems from his roots. Growing up in a modest environment, he was instilled with values that emphasized the importance of taking care of oneself and others. This philosophy became the cornerstone of his practice. His innate knack for fitting hearing aids, combined with his genuine concern for his patients, made him a sought-after specialist in the region.

Despite a successful business in Louisiana, life brought Williams to Florida to enjoy a brief stint at retirement. His desire to make a difference was evident as he set up his practice in Niceville. What initially began as a part-time venture

quickly transformed into a sanctuary for many, especially veterans and military service members. Williams' commendable initiative of offering follow-up services to returning vets, at no charge, showcases his unwavering commitment to the commu-

thers. nity.

In essence, Grant Williams and the Niceville Hearing Center epitomize the confluence of technical expertise and human touch. Williams emphasizes, "It's not just about the hearing aids; it's about the people wearing them." With several decades in the hearing healthcare domain, Williams has perfected the art of 'straight talk,' ensuring that every patient feels valued, heard and understood.

For those seeking to transform their hearing journey, the Niceville Hearing Center stands as a testament to Grant Williams' legacy—one that underscores the significance of perseverance, empathy and, most importantly, listening. Full disclosure—Grant Williams is my Hearing Healthcare Provider and why I offer him my personal recommendation.

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The community

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Niceville Hearing Center

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f @EarCareAssociates

Grant Williams, HAS, HIS, ACA, Audioprosthologist, Florida & Louisiana State Licensed in Hearing Instrument Sciences I ANSWER MY PHONE 23/6 🏇 Community

- A Bed 4 Me Dinner of Dreams 01 5 pm | Niceville Senior Center Courtyard | Niceville **Bluegrass Jam** 12 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville Talking Turtles with Tabby Audubon Program 05 6:30 pm | Crosspoint Church | Niceville Greater FWB Chamber First Friday Coffee 06 7 am | Christian Life Center at First Baptist Church | FWB Football Game: Niceville High School vs. Pine Forest High School 7 pm | Niceville High School | Niceville Football Game: Rocky Bayou Christian School vs. Aucilla Christian 7 pm | Rocky Bayou Christian School | Niceville 07 Dog Daze presented by Friendship Veterinary Hospital 9 am | Fort Walton Beach Landing | FWB Community Walk to End Alzheimer's 10 am | Bluewater Bay Golf Club | Niceville Intro to Gothic Hand Calligraphy with Elia Saxer 10:30 am | Artful Things | Niceville Niceville Monthly Cruise In 2 pm | Landsharks Pizza Company | Niceville Saint Social Live 6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville Mutts Gone Nuts! Canine Cabaret 7 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville **3rd Annual BrunchFest** 80 11 am | Seville Quarter | Pensacola The Pittman's Magical Variety Show 6:30 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville 09 Glock Sport Shooting Foundation (GSSF) Indoor League 10 am | EC Indoor Shooting and Sport | Valparaiso 10 Preserve Bluewater Bay Community Briefings 6 pm | Bluewater Bay Clubhouse | Niceville Niceville-Valparaiso Chamber Second 11 Wednesday Breakfast 7:30 am | Niceville Community Center | Niceville
- 12 Bored Teachers Comedy Tour 7 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville Movies on the Beach: Wonder Park 7:30 pm | Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar | FWB

DESIGN

OCTOBER 2023

- 12- Salt Water Music Fest 14 Times Vary | Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation | Destin Macy Gray -Locast OCT. 12-14, 2023 Singer/Sergentings
- 13- | Mosaic Theater presents Matilda Jr. 15 | Times Vary | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville
- 15 13 Dot Dot Dot 9:45 am | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville Blue Jam 5:30 pm | Bluewater Elementary | Niceville Football Game: Rocky Bayou Christian School vs. North Florida Christian 7 pm | Rocky Bayou Christian School | Niceville **Nautical Flea Market** 14 8 am | Bluewater Bay Marina Complex | Niceville Making Strides of Emerald Coast 8 am | Northwest Florida State College | Niceville Women's Climbing Circle 9 am | Rock Out Climbing Gym | Destin Let the Good Times Boil (Shrimp Boil) 2 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville Mad Hatter's Tea Party 1-3 pm | Heritage Museum of NWFL | Valparaiso **Duchess Live** 6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville Greater FWB Chamber Business After Hours 19 5:30 pm | Ashley Homestore | FWB Harvest Wine & Food Festival 19-
- 22 6 pm | Locations Vary | WaterColor



- The Pearl Project Breakfast Benefit
 7:45 am | The Heritage Room | Niceville
 Football Game: Niceville High School
 vs. Leon High School
 7 pm | Niceville High School | Niceville
 Football Game: Rocky Bayou Christian
 School vs. Georgia Christian
 7 pm | Rocky Bayou Christian School | Niceville
 Niceville Bazaar
- 10 am | Mullet Festival Grounds | Niceville 30th Annual Single Hand Race 10 am | Bluewater Bay Marina Complex | Niceville

Niceville Community Sat. October 7, 14, 21, 28 9 am - 1 pm | Palm Plaza | Niceville

FARMER'S MARKETS

STRATEGY

Hammock Bay Sun. October 1, 15 8 am | Victory Blvd | Freeport

MEDIA

Grand Boulevard Sat. October 7, 14, 21, 28 9 am - 1 pm | Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach



21 Honoring Our Heroes: ^{CONT} 9/11 America's Response 5:30 pm | Northwest Florida Fairgrounds | FWB



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SAY HELLO.

n Community

Northwest Florida Symphony Orchestra: A Season to Sing!

The Northwest Florida Symphony Orchestra (NFSO), the region's premier professional orchestra, reveals an exhilarating 2023-24 season entitled **A Season to Sing!** The program highlights a fantastic array of internationally acclaimed guest artists and also feature the Northwest Florida Symphony Chorale, The Unified Gospel Choir, and the Voices of Northwest Florida.



Lawrence Brownlee PHOTO BY ZAKIYAH CALDWELL BURROUGHS



David Spencer



On October 21, the NFSO presents War and Peace, a concert in honor of our military community. Selections include Handel's Music for the Royal Fireworks, the Florida premiere of Purple Mountains by rising star composer Shuying-Li, and Gustav Holst's iconic masterpiece The Planets, accompanied by the incredible NASA imagery of our solar system.

This year is one of unprecedented collaboration. On November 8, you will hear Sounds of the Spectrum, a concert benefitting the Emerald Coast Autism Center. The evening will feature internationally acclaimed artists operatic tenor Lawrence Brownlee and trumpeter David Spencer, as well as artists from the Pensacola Opera in an evening of light opera, musical theater and gospel music. It is an event not-to-be missed and all tickets and donations will go to a great cause!

The first ever co-production with the Northwest Florida Ballet and the New Orleans Ballet Theatre on March 8 and 9, 2024, will feature Carmina Burana. With original choreography by NWF Ballet Artistic Director Todd Eric Allen and Artistic Director of New Orleans Ballet Theatre Gregory Schramel, this epic masterwork of the 20th century for orchestra, chorus, ballet and solo voices will utilize the Mattie Kelly Arts Center stage and pit to full capacity!

As always, the NFSO supports music education through it's bourgeoning youth orchestra program: the NFSYO, and annual education concerts in January and March, as well as the annual John Leatherwood Concerto competition. A portion of every donation and ticket purchase to the Northwest Florida Symphony Orchestra helps benefit students and music education in our community.

The Northwest Florida Symphony Orchestra has something for everyone! Get your season subscription for all five concerts and also purchase your ticket for Sounds of the Spectrum by calling the MKAC box office at 850-729-6000 or purchase online at

VISIT **MYBAYLIFENWFL.COM** TO READ OUR LATEST ISSUE AND SIGN UP TO RECEIVE OUR E-NEWSLETTER! mattiekellyartscenter.org.

All concerts performed are held at the beautiful Mattie Kelly Fine and Performing Arts Center on the campus of the Northwest Florida State College in Niceville. The Messiah performances are at St. Paul Lutheran Church in Niceville and Point Washington United Methodist Church in Pt. Washington.

Schedule:

War and Peace: October 21, 7 p.m.

Sounds of the Spectrum: November 8, 7 p.m. Handel's Messiah: Decem-

- ber 2, 7 p.m.*; December 3, 2:30 p.m**
- *St. Paul Lutheran Church (Niceville)
- **Point Washington United Method-
- ist Church (Pt. Washington)

Holiday Pops: December 8,

7 p.m. Stars of Tomorrow: February 10, 7 p.m.

Carmina Burana: March 9, 7:30 p.m./March 10, 2:30 p.m.





The community

Medicare Open Enrollment is Here! Now What?



By Greg Durette, Florida Health Connector

It's finally here again: Medicare Open Enrollment or more precisely, the Annual Election Period (AEP). Every year, from October 15th to December 7th, Medicare eligible folks are able to do pretty much anything they want with their coverage. Some of my previous columns have addressed many of the details of those options but, simply put, you can add, drop or change virtually any plan and change to or from any insurance company.

Piece of cake right? Wrong! The reason is, many folks do not want to relive the information overload they experienced when first becoming eligible. Remembering the volume of phone calls, emails and mountains of regular mail would understandably send anyone running for cover!

Please know, this time will be different. First of all, you now





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have had some time to experience what the plan you originally selected, can or cannot do for you. Were you happy with the premium? Were all your doctors in the network? Were all your prescriptions covered at a reasonable cost? Did you get any of the extra benefits like Dental, Vision, Hearing, Tele-Health, At Home Care, Caregiver Support or Over-the-Counter cash allowances?

If the answer to any of these is no, then now is the time for you to get answers, so you can make the correct choices for 2024.

The problem for many folks becomes, where can they get this information without re-igniting the aforementioned onslaught? The answer - YOU need to initiate contact. That means calling your current agent or broker and/or finding other sources of information.

Calling Joe Namath will likely cause that onslaught to re-ignite as the company he represents simply gets you to call so they can SELL your information to any and all agents around the country willing to pay to get access to you. In fact, many of these types of advertisements do exactly the same thing. Call them all and get ready to buy the jumbo size mailbox and voicemail box!

Instead, look for advertising from local folks you know will be able to get you what you are looking for. They WON'T SELL your information to strangers. This simple tip will allow you to rest assured that you will not be overwhelmed again.

Once you have decided which person or place to call, do it. But, be ready to answer a few questions about what you currently have, what you are

Florida Health



paying (some plans can be as little as \$0 per month!) and what it is you would like to improve or change with a new plan. Also, make sure you are ready to answer questions about your doctors and prescriptions, so you can make sure what you are considering changing to will provide you with all you expect. You are looking for no surprises; so, also have a few questions of your own!

The bottom-line message is this; be not afraid. This time of year (AEP) is designed to help you make improvements, not make you relive the trials and tribulations of your initial enrollment.

Reach out and look to how you can possibly make things better for you. Your health may change from year to year, but your need for excellent health insurance remains a constant.

Follow these simple steps and make 2023 your best health insurance year yet!

Greg Durette is a qualified, licensed agent with Florida Health Connector, based in Niceville, and providing Medicare throughout the state. He has been in the insurance industry for over 40 years and can be reached at his office at (850) 842-2400 or his mobile at (978) 509-2941.

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Stair Climbers Honor the Fallen of 9/11

By Kenneth Books

About 70 people, ranging from school age to senior citizens, climbed 2071 steps Saturday morning, Sept. 9, at the Niceville football stadium, representing the 110 floors first responders climbed in twin towers after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. At the end of the field was an enormous, 30-by-20-foot American flag. The event was sponsored by Niceville High School and the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office.

Cheering them on was Bronx native Mary Mercado, whose oldest son, Steve, was among the New York City firefighters who entered the stricken buildings in search of people who needed help. Steve Mercado died in that effort. His body was never found.

"Even after 22 years, it's still painful," Mary, whose recent surgery prevented her from actively participating, says.

Steve's brother, Tony, was among those who did make the climb. "I'm doing it to raise awareness for my brother," Tony says. "I'm here in remembrance."



Sept. 11 memorial climbers make their way from one tier to another at Niceville High School football stadium.

That sentiment was echoed over and over among climbers and those who came to support their efforts. "When it happened, I tried to get a flight to New York," Mary, who now lives in Fort Walton Beach, says. None were available. "I went to rent a van, but there weren't any to rent. Finally, a neighbor drove us up there."

Kim Henderson rounded up her friends to participate. "I didn't know they did this," she says. So, I got my friends and we're here. I have friends who lost someone in the attacks."

Ashley Seay said she was participating, because "I heard what a great opportunity it is to honor the first responders who were there."

Her friend, Cara Culpepper, agreed. "I'm here to honor the men and women of 9/11," she says.

The climbers began their trek in the Niceville side of the bleachers, threading their way along each set of stairs, when running to the visitors' side to continue, and back to the Niceville side for another round.

This was to be the third memorial climb, but last year's event was rained out. However, this year's event was "so far, pretty good," said Sheriff's Deputy Chad Smith. "This is a bigger turnout than before."

Smith remembers that day like it was yesterday.

"I was in the Marine Corps," he says. When the attacks took place, "my wife started crying. I told her we had a bumpy road ahead and I was to start training to go over there." Once he arrived in the Middle East, Smith and his fellow Marines opened the U.S. Embassy in Kabul.

Those who wanted a more permanent memory of the event aside from sore hamstrings and fatigue, could buy T-shirts stating "Never again." The proceeds from the shirts went to Tuesday's Children, which supports families and children of the fallen first responders. "More than 50,000 families have been assisted," says Sheriff's Deputy Lisa Worth, who, with her daughter, Laikyn, manned the table. While the attack on the Twin Towers is foremost in the memory of that day, as millions of horrified Americans watched on television as they collapsed into a heap of ash, smoke and rubble, two additional airplanes also targeted important American buildings.

At 9:37 a.m., Flight 77 crashed into the Pentagon. All passengers aboard are instantly killed and so were 125 civilian and military personnel in the building. And at 10:02 a.m., Flight 93 plowed into an empty field in Shanksville, Pa., as heroic passengers foiled what is believed to be an attack on the White House of the Capitol.

The response of the American people was that of immediate and sustained outrage. Military enlistments surged. Flags flew everywhere. On May 2, 2021, terrorist mastermind Osama bin Laden was killed by U.S. Navy Seals, triggering rejoicing throughout the country. Today, the outrage has cooled somewhat by time, but it smolders quietly within many Americans.



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🏇 Community

Buzz Bav



Highway Dedication Ceremony Honoring Mayor Randall Wise, a **48-Year Public Servant**

The City of Niceville will dedicate Partin Drive/State Road 285 from Hwy. 20 to College Blvd. in honor of the late Mayor Randall Wise. This event

will celebrate the legacy of Mayor Wise, who dedicated nearly 49 years of his life to the service of the City of Niceville. Mayor Wise, who served from 1971 to 2020, left an unforgettable mark on the community and its residents. His commitment and love for the City of Niceville have made him a legendary figure in local government, earning him the distinction of being the 15th longest-serving Mayor in recorded American history.

"Mayor Wise's service to our city was nothing short of extraordinary," said City Manager, David Deitch. "His dedication to improving the lives of our residents and his tireless efforts to make Niceville a better place will forever be remembered. Renaming this stretch of highway in his honor is a small token of our gratitude for his contributions." Residents and community members are invited to join with City leaders and Mayor Wise's family to celebrate this local icon October 6, 8 a.m. at the Intersection of State Road 285 and College Blvd. Call (850) 279-6436 ext. 1601 for more in-

Nautical Flea Market /

On Saturday, Oct. 14, The Bluewater Bay Marina Complex will host its Bi-Annual Nautical Flea Market from 8 a.m. – Noon. The public is invited to browse each display in order to buy, sell or trade the vast assortment of boat and maritime equipment, as well as other nautical treasures and household items. The Marina Ship Store will also discount most of its casual clothing for men and women, as well as a conduct a STORE WIDE SALE on most items. You can reserve a table in order to display and sell your own marine gear or flea market items by calling 850-897-2821.

City of Niceville CRA Wins Statewide Accolade

The City of Niceville Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) is the statewide winner of the 2022 Redevelopment Projects in Florida! The prestigious honor was granted to the City of Niceville for the Old Town Landing on Boggy Bayou project, which garnered the coveted Florida Redevelopment Association (FRA) "President's Award" and was presented at the FRA's Annual Conference held in October 2022 in the city of Daytona Beach.

The Old Town Landing on Boggy Bayou project is evidence of the City of Niceville's unwavering commitment to historic preservation, community enhancement and innovative development. Comprising a public landing, a vibrant festival site, and a meticulously planned six-acre commercial village, the project has been recognized as a prime example of redevelopment excellence. This project underscores the revitalized economic contribution of Niceville's historic downtown to the overall City's economy.

The Florida Redevelopment Association's "President's Award" is the most prestigious accolade within the redevelopment community in the state. Selected from a pool of distinguished projects from all corners of Florida, the Old Town Landing on Boggy Bayou project emerged as the winner for its visionary approach and impact on the local community.

The project is poised to embark on its final design phase in 2023, marking a significant milestone in the realization of this transformative endeavor. This next phase is anticipated to

bring the project even closer to its vision of providing the community with a gathering place that captures the city's rich history and fosters economic growth.

The City of Niceville invites community members to explore the project further through the comprehensive map and plan available on the official City website at https://cityofniceville.org/481/Community-Redevelopment-Agency-CRA.



Choctawhatchee Audubon program: Talking Turtles with Tabby Oct. 5

The Gulf of Mexico is home to three sea turtle species: Kemp's ridleys, Greens, and Loggerheads. Join Tabitha Siegfried, Gulfarium C.A.R.E. Center Stranding Coordinator, as she talks about her time researching local sea turtle behavior and habitat use, as well as her experience rehabilitating sick and injured sea turtles, Oct. 5th at Crosspoint Church in Niceville, Room 800, 2nd floor of the Chandler Center (NW door of 519 Helms St.). Socializing begins at 6:30 p.m.; program begins at 7 p.m. Admission is free and open to the interested public. Visit Choctawhatcheeaudubon.org or follow on Facebook. Learn what you can do to help this endangered species!

Additional October events include:

• Oct. 14th, Audubon field trip to Ft. Pickens, choctawhatcheeaudubon.org for details.

• Oct. 21st Audubon Bird Walk at Veterans Park on Okaloosa Island, 7:30 a.m.

• Oct. 28th Audubon field trip to Camp Helen State Park, 8:00 a.m.

formation. Flea Market



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.

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

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The Community

Parrot Heads Flock Together to Remember

By Joshua Cowsert

On September 1st, 2023, the sunshine on the seas got a little bit dimmer as we said Goodbye to a legend, Jimmy Buffett. According to a press release, the beloved singer-songwriter passed away at his home in Sag Harbor, Long Island, surrounded by family and friends. Jimmy, 76, had been fighting Merkel Cell Skin Cancer for four years.

With a recording career that spanned more than 50 years and included hits such as "Margaritaville," "Come Monday" and "It's Five O'Clock Somewhere," Jimmy was one of the most successful performers in popular music. He filled arenas with fans who called themselves "Parrot Heads," and popularized a signature blend of folk, country and Caribbean music with lyrics that often reflected Buffett's world travels.

Having spent part of his childhood in Mobile and nearby Fairhope, Ala., his name, brand and music mean a lot of things to a lot of people, but to me it means friendship and charity. As a late arrival to the "Margaritaville lifestyle" that called so many to associate with his name, I've seen so much more than what it seems from the outside looking in!

As a local and at my first run in with his fan club, the Emerald Coast Parrot Head Club, I was floored at how much more there was to find! Of course, there was fun to be had, but the primary saying of each and every encounter was, "Yes, we like to party, BUT with a purpose." Time and again at each meeting, this concept was reinforced by the charitable donations of



the fan club. Ranging from children's homes, to shelters for pets or people who are otherwise unable to find help, there is never a party without a close-to-home charity in mind!

In September, shortly after his passing, there was an exceptional party. However, as the purpose was a final send off for Jimmy, including the reading of a poem from one of the club members written to commemorate his passing, top rock tunes and memories of treasured times were passed all around among friends! From concerts attended, to tailgate and after parties dearly remembered, each and every Parrot Head had something to share. We had all come together to honor and remember one of our own, and the very reason for our attendance!

According to Jimmy, "I'd rather die living, than live while I'm dead." He certainly lived life to the absolute fullest. Though he travelled all over the world for his music, at its heart, there was always that longing for closeness to the sea and sandy beaches that he came from right here on the Emerald Coast. Come Monday, he could always walk back in those doors to boiling shrimp and a margarita; but come last Friday, he set out with toes in the water for his very own Key West in the sky.

Sail on, Skipper! We'll see you again for our very own 5 o'clock watch!

BAY BUZZ

continued from previous page

E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center Night Hike

The Night Hike has returned! Join the Biophilia Center for an exciting event that's perfect for the whole family. Let your kids take the lead as they navigate a trail from the E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center to Camp Longleaf. To top off the evening, we'll gather around a bonfire, enjoy delicious s'mores, and play games! October 21st, from 6 to 9 p.m. Admission \$8 for adults and \$5 for children aged 4–12. For more details, please visit eowilsoncenter.org.

Do you want to learn how to stop eating compulsively?

Overeaters Anonymous (OA) meets every Thursday 6:30 pm at Crosspoint Church, Chandler building, 214 S Partin Dr., Niceville. OA offers a program of recovery from compulsive eating and eating behaviors utilizing Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. There are no fees for members; it is self supported through member contributions. For more detailed information, please visit oa.org, call 1-850-964-9489 or email oanwfl@gmail.com.

Okaloosa No. 312 F.&A.M. annually adopts first year elementary school teachers in the Niceville area as a part



of the Grand Lodge Adopt-a-Teacher program. Teachers are presented with a check to assist in establishing their first school room as a teacher. The selected first year teacher from Lewis Elementary is Tara Gobbi, 2nd Grade. Pictured from left to right are, Ms. Tara Gobbi, W.M. Timothy Kennedy, Mrs. Norma Kennedy and Principal Lesley Smith.

Cox Employees Award Over \$6,200 to Gulf Coast Schools

Cox Communications employees have awarded a total of \$6,204 in grants to local schools, through Cox Charities Innovation in Education Grants. The program provides employee funded grants of up to \$2,500 for classroom programs and curriculum that encourage and promote students' ingenuity and imagination. Earlier this year, schools were invited to submit applications for funding. This year's recipients of the Cox Charities Innovation in Education grants include several local schools:

Bluewater Elementary



School – Kristen Detweiler received \$654 for Science of Reading Phonics Resources. Through the Science of Reading program, a variety of hands on activities and games are used to enhance reading skills.

Bruner Middle School – Jennifer Badger in Fort Walton Beach was awarded \$1,500 for her Classroom Improvement program that offers silent activities to help students with ADHD and ADD that cannot sit for periods of time. The activities utilize resistance bands, stabilizing balls and noise canceling headphones.

Plew Elementary School – Shawana Crist's GRAND Readers program received a \$1,000 grant. The program

Continued on next page



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Today's Lifestyle Furniture



By Stacy Lingenfelter Sarikanon, Stunning Spaces – Decorating Den Interiors

Stay in your easy chair and join the legions of homeowners who are rediscovering the familiar comforts of home! With the advent of large-screened televisions and in-home movie rooms, home has truly become the "in" place to be after a stressful day at the office.



Today's furniture reflects society's desire to "stay put" with deeper, more comfortable seats, extra-long lengths and lots of pillows. Even those who prefer the traditional styling of a wing chair will find wider, better-shaped chairs with cushioned backs among today's choices. Of course, in these days that spawned the term, "couch potato," it's important to provide the appropriate "couch!" The home furnishings industry is making generously proportioned furniture designed to envelop, comfort and relax weary bodies. Oversized sofas and sectionals with extra cushions that feel like



down – without the hassle – truly fit the bill.

Need a place to put up your feet? A club chair – or chair and a half with ottoman afford just the right comfort to rest those weary bones at the end of the day. And in the bedroom, a chaise lounge, beautifully upholstered in a chenille burn out fabric, will truly provide a pampered feeling for all who recline there.

The comfort and security of today's sumptuous furniture offers an antidote to today's high tech, fast paced society.



BAY BUZZ

continued from previous page

brings older members of the community into the school to work with children who need a little extra help.

"As Cox celebrates our 125th anniversary as a company in 2023, it's important that we remember our roots," said David Deliman, vice president of Cox's Gulf Coast Market. "We were founded in 1898 by a retired schoolteacher who believed it was important to give back to the community, especially in the field of education. Our employees still live those values today, giving their own money to support these

great classroom programs."

In addition to the Innovation in Education grants, Cox Charities offers Community Investment grants to 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations. This grant application will open in August 2021. For more information about Cox Charities, visit www. CoxCharitiesSER.org. The **Niceville-Valparaiso Rotary Club** recently presented a check to Barbara Palmgren and Marie Hallion, trustees of the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida, to be used for exhibits and educational activities at the museum.





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NWFSC Raider Village A New Era for Campus Housing

BY DOUG STAUFFER

Decades ago, Jay Odom started his academic journey at what was then called Okaloosa Walton Junior College in a Volkswagen with no reverse. Fast forward to today, and he is helping to pave the way for a state-of-the-art student housing facility named Raider Village at Northwest Florida State College (NWFSC). This addition will not only change the landscape, but also will impact the student body in unimaginable ways.

In a groundbreaking ceremony teeming with anticipation and enthusiasm, NWFSC commemorated the commencement of construction for Raider Village. This marks a transformative moment in the college's history as it embarks on providing its first-ever on-campus student housing.

Dr. Devin Stephenson, NWFSC President, led the ceremony, echoing gratitude for the collaborations that have made the project possible. "This college has been incredibly blessed with opportunity, funding, great leadership and passionate students," he said. "Today, we're building for the decades to come."

Jay and The Jay Odom Group deserve special mention among the contributors. Not only did they design the buildings, but they will also build, own and manage Raider Village. Dr. Stephenson highlighted Jay's deep roots in the institution and immense contributions to the Niceville community. "It's unbelievable how this [campus] has evolved and grown since I was here," Jay reflected.

The residential facility will be a game-changer for NWFSC. It

bolsters academic performance and retention, infusing an engaging campus life. The college anticipates Raider Village as a significant draw for potential athletes, setting the highest standards for sporting excellence even higher.

The first phase of Raider Village will provide 192 beds equipped with modern amenities to cater to students' needs. Plans reveal that each unit will comprise four bedrooms, each with its own bathroom, complemented by a kitchen, living area and laundry facilities. Common areas designed for community building will be prevalent throughout.

Expected to be operational by Spring 2025, the three-story building will proudly stand at the front of the 264-acre campus, seamlessly aligning with the existing brick architectural theme.

Beyond the brick-and-mortar, the project stands as a testament to the spirit of collaboration. The combined efforts of The Jay Odom Group, the NWFSC Foundation and Community Bank of Mississippi have been instrumental. Dr. Stephenson highlighted the unwavering commitment and financial support of the NWFSC Foundation and recognized Jonathan Ochs, Vice-Chair of the Foundation Board, for his indispensable role as the liaison.

Reflecting on his journey, Jay mused about the past, "From where I sat then in the 1970s to now, I did not have the vision at that time to know that I'd be here today being able to contribute to the community." But he has, and Raider Village stands as a beacon of progress





and promise, ensuring that future generations will benefit from a world-class facility.

In the words of Dr. Stephenson, this groundbreaking event is not just about laying the foundation for a building. It's about laying the foundation for the future of NWFSC and the thousands of students it will nurture.

May I add one last caveat? I am another one of the many proud alumni of Okaloosa Walton Junior College—now, Northwest Florida State College.



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

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



WALK END ALZHEIMER'S

ALZHEIMER'S R ASSOCIATION



Sunday, Oct. 1 Alz.org/PensacolaWalk Niceville





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

Local Diving, Prinks 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 (850) 737-6194

4652 Huy. 20 East, Niceville bigorangehousedesigns.com

LJ Schooners **Dockside Restaurant**

Suds, Songs and Sunsets! Welcome 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.

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 rac-

es 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

bluewaterbaymarina.com/schooners 290 Yacht Club Dr., Unit 200.

Niceville in Bluewater Bay

Ovide at Hotel Effie

An elegant, culinary adventure, Ovide brings together classic Gulf Coast flavors and southern culinary traditions. Every dish is fueled by a passion for sustainability and seasonality that gives each bite incredible flavor unlike anything you've tasted before-you will want to savor every bite, from an intimate meal for two to a get-together for 10 or more. Ovide embraces the local food and cherished flavors of the Gulf Coast and presents

them with a sophisticated, refreshing French influence and southern flair. Have you tried the Seasonal Special at Ovide at Hotel Effie? Mondays, 5 p.m., choose one starter, one entrée and one dessert for \$50. Ask your server about the wine pairing option. Hours: Breakfast 7 - 11 a.m. Mon-Fri. Lunch Closed. Dinner: 5 - 9 p.m., Sunday-Thursday; 5 - 10 p.m. on Friday and Saturday. Brunch: 7 a.m. - 2 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

(833) 873-3343 Hoteleffie.com Grand Sandestin Blvd., Miramar Beach

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 clean restaurant, with awesome food and friendly staff, at a fair price," said Trinity. When you

Get a taste of New York right here in Niceville! Every ingredient we use has been hand-selected. Pizza Calzones Wings Salads Pasta Dine-In – Pickup – Delivery • Call to Order or Order Online Open Mon – Sat 11am – 9pr www.brozinnispizza.com



850-678-7778 • 144 Palm Blvd N., Niceville

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.

8th Annual Bloody Mary Festival Oct 14

The Market Shops 8th Annual Bloody Mary Festival is BACK—Saturday, Oct. 14 from 11 a.m. until 2 p.m. in Sandestin! Join us to benefit Habitat for Humanity – Walton County. The annual event will feature unlimited tastes of South Walton's most creative and innovative Bloody Mary's made with Distillery 98's Dune Laker Vodka and served by the finest restaurants and bars on the Emerald Coast. There will also be live music, football, lawn games, beer, champagne, local food, shopping, and much more!

For a \$60 donation to attend, guests are invited to enjoy 16 of South Walton's most coveted Bloody Mary's. For tickets: https://www.eventbrite. com/e/the-market-shops-8thannual-bloody-mary-festivaltickets-600752164897.

Those already signed up to compete for "Best Bloody Mary in South Walton" include Austons on 98, Camille's at Crystal Beach, Chanticleer, Chef's Bistro 30A, Chringo, Faber, Marina Cafe, Ovide, Signature Catering of 30A, Soleil, The Beach House and The Henderson. A panel of select food critics and local celebrities will judge each Bloody Mary to select the winners for the most delicious and the most creative. There will also be a highly coveted first-, second- and third-place People's Choice Award that is selected by each guest in attendance.

There will also be plenty of food from the various restaurants located directly in The Market Shops, local craft brews, spiked seltzer, champagne from the Bubbly Bar, along with water at the Hydration Station. A lounge area with additional seating and cornhole games will be set up on the main lawn, along with SEC football streaming on the big screen and live music. For more information, email jessica@proffittpr.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

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

Wednesday: \$3 house wine by the glass and 1/2 off all bottles Thursday: \$5 Martini's

Happy hour every day from 3-6.

(850) 353 2643 Tisanos.com 4506 E. Hwy. 20, Suite 150, Niceville



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Everyday: 10% military discount to all active and retired military Open for lunch & dinner 7 days a week • Live piano Wednesday and Saturday nights

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Order Online: Tisanos.com



🏇 Off the Hook

Celebrating 75 Years of the Destin Fishing Rodeo!

2023 will mark the 75th Annual Fishing Rodeo in Destin, and each year it gets better and better. Created back in 1948, the Destin Fishing Rodeo had one simple goal: to extend the tourist season another month. Destin has always been a popular tourist spot for fishing, and keeping those extra vacationers here helped our town thrive.

The Destin Fishing Rodeo has expanded into one of the largest fishing tournaments along the Emerald Coast. The rodeo is a month long, spanning October 1-31st and roughly 30,000 anglers compete each year.

The weigh-ins happen on the docks behind AJ's Seafood and Ovster bar, located on the Destin Harbor. They are free to the public and are open daily from 10 a.m.-7 p.m. For boats to participate, charter and private boats must be registered at least 24 hours prior to weighing in a fish. There is no fee for anglers fishing on a registered vessel (private or charter) and shore fisherman can participate by simply bringing their catch to the scales. Fish by kayak, paddle board, pier, bridge, jetty, shoreline and surf - whichever you prefer.







trip down to the docks, expect to see a broad spectrum of fish being weighed in. From Sharks to Amberjacks, Grouper to King Mackerel, Tunas to Marlin, the rodeo has it all. Anglers are competing for over \$100,000 in cash and prizes, awarded for both daily and overall catches. 2022 was the first year that the



Extended Voyage Division added five extra species of fish for a total of ten eligible fish.

The Destin Fishing Rodeo leaderboard includes grouper, amberjack, scamp, yellowfin and big eye tuna, dolphin, wahoo, Almaco Jack, snowy grouper and yellowedge grouper. There was also a Ladies, Seniors and Junior Divisions added in 2022 for wahoo, alongside king mackerel, grouper, amberjack and blackfin tuna.

Even if you're not a fisherman, the energy level and excitement that comes from being at the docks for weigh ins is like nothing else we've ever experienced. Boats back into the scales, pull the fish from their boat while the announcer hypes up the crowd. Fish are strung up on the scale while the crowds cheer and applaud the boat and their team. For the best seat in the house, get there early, grab a few beers and snag a seat on the bleachers by the leaderboard or above on AJ's upper deck.

Halloween on the Harbor will signify the end of weigh-ins on Wednesday, Oct. 31, when the captains, anglers, volunteers, and even Miss Destin, will be dressed in their favorite costumes. Everyone is invited to partake in the fun!

October kicks off with the Destin Seafood Festival, in conjunction with the Destin Fishing Rodeo! Make your plans to visit the Harbor all month long!





Nautical Flea Market **Oct. 14th - 8AM 30th Annual Single** Handed Race Valage Tel **Oct. 21st**

Skipper's Meeting & Registration Oct. 20 - 6PM

Missing the Mullet Oct. 22nd

Mullet Toss 4PM - Mullet Hair Contest 7PM

Oyster Bar Hours: Mon.-Thurs. 3pm to 10pm, Fri.-Sat. 11am to midnight, Sun. 9am to 9pm Restaurant Hours: Mon.-Tues. Closed, Weds.-Sat. 11am to 9pm, Sun. 9am to 9pm, Sunday Brunch 9am to 1pm Food Truck Hours: Mon.-Tues. 5pm to 9 pm, Fri.-Sat. 5pm to 10pm

More Events and Live Entertainment: Oct. 6 - Fathom 6-9pm Oct. 7 - Rythm Express 6-10pm Oct. 13 - Jody Lucas 6-9pm

- Oct. 14 Jimmy Buffet Tribute Party w/Hi Tide 6-10pm
- Oct. 17 The Traveling Painter 5:30pm
- Oct. 20 David Gautreaux & The Delta Current Band 6-10pm
- Oct. 21 Below Alabama 6-10pm
- Oct. 22 Call The Law 4-8pm Oct. 27 - The Remedy 6-10pm
- Oct. 28 Halloween Party & DJ Diamond Dan 6-10pm
- Oct. 29 Shrimp Boil 4-7pm
- Oct. 29 Alston Weeks 4-8pm

290 Yacht Club Dr., Niceville • Bluewater Bay • (850) 897-6400 • Find us on Facebook for more events!

Sports

Emerald Coast Classic Tickets on Sale

Tickets for the 9th annual Emerald Coast Classic college basketball tournament, presented by Global Sports, are on sale on the official tournament website www.emeraldcoastclassic.com. Tickets start at \$20 per session with each session having two games.

The Emerald Coast Classic will be played Thanksgiving weekend Nov. 24-25 at Raider Arena on the campus of Northwest Florida State College.

Alabama will face Ohio State in a semifinal round game at 6 p.m. central time on Friday, Nov. 24, while Oregon will play Santa Clara at 8:30 p.m. The third-place game will be played at 3 p.m. on Saturday Nov. 25 with the championship game scheduled for a 6 p.m. tip off on that Saturday.

Alabama was ranked No. 1 in the final Associated Press basketball poll, posting a 31-6 record while winning both the SEC regular-season and postseason tournament titles. Under the guidance of coach Nate Oats, Alabama was the top overall seed in the 2023 NCAA Tournament, while advancing to its ninth Sweet 16 Tournament appearance in school history.

Oregon advanced to the quarterfinal round of the 2023 NIT en route to a 21-16 record. The Ducks have won 20 or more games in each of Dana Altman's 13 seasons as head coach, advancing to the 2017

NCAA Final Four.

Ohio State went 16-19 in 2022-23 and was ranked No. 52 in the final NET rankings.

Santa Clara had a 23-10 record last year — the most regular season wins at the school since the 1968-69 season while advancing to the NIT.

Other games at Northwest Florida State College on Friday Nov. 24 have Mercer playing Tennessee State at 11 a.m., while Southeastern Louisiana meets Western Michigan at 1:30 p.m. These teams will play their second game Nov. 25 with tip offs at 10 a.m. and 12:30 p.m.

"We're excited about the rich tradition of this year's tournament field," said tournament director Maury Hanks, chief executive officer of Global Sports. "We continue to strive to bring the best college basketball teams possible to the Emerald Coast

of Florida."

Global Sports has produced 52 multi-team college basketball tournaments since 2007.



Niceville High School Football Schedule

.....Won 61-0Won 42-7Lost 28-14

......Won 19-14

	North Miami Beach Milton	
9/7	Lincoln, Tallahassee	Home
9/15	Chiles	Away
9/22	Choctawhatchee	Home
9/29	Crestview	Home
10/6	Pine Forest, Pensacola	Home
10/20	Leon, Tallahassee	Home
10/26	Mosley, Lynn Haven	Away
	Navarre	•

BAY BUZZ EVENTS

continued from page 4

Florida Food & Travel Writer— Bon Appetit, Food & Wine and Wine Enthusiast, among others; and Michelin restaurant-trained Chef Chad Donelson, executive chef Bitterroot. These culinary experts will mix and mingle with the crowd tasting each team's culinary creations and collaborating to award this year's trophy winners.

The team with the most votes will win a Large Big Green Egg, valued at \$1,449. The runner up with the second most votes will receive a medium Big Green Egg and the third-place team will receive a mini-max Big Green Egg. Cook teams representing a non-profit organization have the opportunity to earn up to \$3,500 toward their cause.

New to this year's event is a Junior Chefs Competition. Open to five youth cook teams, the junior cook team category will allow young chefs, ages 8-14, an opportunity to showcase their talents and compete for bragging rights, medals and cash prizes.

Proceeds benefit two local non-profits—the Fisher House of the Emerald Coast and Food for Thought. The cooking competition will be enhanced with live music by Dan Collins and Becca of Black Eyed Blonde, as well a chance to win a Mini-Max Big Green Egg. Beer, wine, cocktails, water and sodas will also be available for purchase at the Tiki Bar.

Taster tickets are on-sale now for \$45 in advance and include unlimited bites, live music, Angel's Envy samples, chance to win a mini-max Big Green Egg and more. Tickets are \$18 for children (ages 11-17); Kids ages 10 and under are free. To learn more, purchase tickets or register a cook team, visit www.EggsontheBeach.com or call 850-269-4666.

Attention all brunch aficionados! The **3rd Annual Brunch-Fest benefiting the Boys and Girls Clubs of the Emerald Coast** is on October 8th! Meet Bay Life at Seville Quarter for a morning filled with mouth-watering brunch bites and a whole lot of fun! Sunday, Oct. 8 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Seville Quarter in Downtown Pensacola!

Don't miss out on this chance to brunch for a good cause and make a difference in the lives of over 5,000 local club kids.

Tickets are \$45 for adult VIP *(VIP tickets include (1) beverage ticket and a t-shirt); \$30 for adults (General Admission); \$15 for kids (5-16 years old). Interested in Sponsoring or Competing? Send an email to hello@francesroy.com and join the fun!



Sports

Page 22

Golf Series: Mattie's Legacy Lives On at Kelly Plantation



By BARBARA PALMGREN

There's a street in Kelly Plantation called "Mattie's Way." It was named after the late Mattie Kelly, whose Irish and southern roots strongly influenced a scenic subdivision with a championship golf course, equestrian center, nature-centered walkways and jogging trails that included a 225-acre nature preserve. Mattie Kelly owned the land and didn't sell it until she found developers she trusted to plan the community in her name and with her vision.

Unfortunately, within the first few months of beginning

the project, Mattie's life was cut short at only 80 years of age. But her dream continued in 1992 with gracious homes, manicured lawns and community covenants to insure a picture-perfect postcard community. Kelly Plantation Golf Club, the crown jewel in the middle of stunning scenery and designer homes, was fashioned by Fred Couples and Gene Bates. In the early 19th century, the land was part of a large turpentine industry with towering pines along miles of waterfront and intricate bayous. Kelly Plantation Golf Club was built along miles of panoramic views of Choctawhatchee Bay with 7,000 yards of contoured greens, wide manicured fairways, hazards and sand traps.

Beyond the golf course itself, the large clubhouse offers diverse menu options to be enjoyed in the clubhouse or on the covered veranda overlooking a beautiful lake with views of the 9th and 18th greens. I remember attending the Blount-Bowden Scholarship award



event for local college scholarship winners held one evening at Kelly Plantation Golf Club. Our granddaughter was awarded one of the scholarships. The evening was staged beautifully with large tents framing the veranda and a great sound system for Bobby Bowden to speak and present awards after a delicious meal.

But, let's talk golf. This semi-private 18-hole golf course, nestled in the heart of Destin, is one of the area's premium golf experiences. The course stretches 7,099 yards which is a serious driving test for long hitters. Novice golfers enjoy the forward

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tees with easier layout and scenic appeal. Hole number 4 captivates with a panoramic view of Choctawhatchee Bay. Native flora such as magnolias and palmettos add to the beauty. Other lakes and sand traps often await an errant golf shot. So, the golfer should take ample precautions and keep drives safely in the manicured fairways.

Carts are GPS-equipped, so there is no excuse not to know accurate yardage. The challenge is to execute the perfect golf shot to be on a green in regulation. Prior to teeing off on hole number 1, a golfer can practice at the driving range, and chip and putt around practice bunkers and a lush practice green. Large bins of cold apples await golfers, so vitamins as well as liquid refreshment provide extra energy when needed.

In addition to the main clubhouse, there is also an Owners' Club House. It has a large patio deck, grill, pool and kids' playground. The Club House is the heart of Kelly Plantation's annual social events in addition to the Board and Town Hall meetings throughout the year.

Golf course manager John Townsend, who began his career in various golf management positions for courses both in Georgia and in the Jacksonville and Tallahassee areas, considers Kelly Plantation the pinnacle of golf courses. Graduating from Valdosta State in the late 90's with a degree in sports medi-



was what he truly enjoyed. Now, assisted by Robert Whitt, head golf professional, John tells us that the positive post-pandemic numbers for golfers playing 18 holes at Kelly Plantation has continued with tee times costing between \$189 and \$129 for an 18-hole round of golf (depending on time of day.) Hole number 7 is John's favorite, because there are two angles or options from the tee box.

Kelly Plantation gives back to the community with at least several charity tournaments. They take pride in hosting two annual tournaments, one for Children in Crisis and one for the Children's Advocacy Center.

So, would Mattie be pleased if she looked down from the heavens today at her vision for the old turpentine industry? I can imagine her bright, smiling eyes and sense she would be thrilled with the gated community and the clubhouse at the center of her dream. Perhaps she might be singing,

"When Irish eyes are smiling, Sure, 'tis like a morn' in spring In the lilt of golfers' laughter You can hear the songbirds sing. When golf strokes are rewarded With pars and birdies, too. Yes, my course will make you happy, It may steal your heart away."



Detox (Cleanse), 'Internal Shower'



By Kay Leaman, Health Architect, HealthyDay HealthyLife

In gathering information to share I discovered a few rabbit holes which I will attempt to avoid. These words offer opinions that truly oppose each other. The words detox and cleanse are used interchangeably, but they basically have the same definition. They are often used to replace the word 'diet.' It implies a short-term solution with quick results such as weight loss; but quick is not necessarily a good thing. An important point to note is that detoxes and cleanses are meant to deep clean our organs, remove toxic buildup, support them and rejuvenate them, so they continue to serve us well.

Dr. William Stiles, who has practiced traditional medicine and surgery for the last 20 years, is also certified in functional medicine and offers a wide range of virtual services geared toward optimizing health and creating personalized health solutions for clients all over the world, states:

"Our world is wrought with harmful pollutants that can be transferred, stored and cause harm within our bodies. The list



Let's begin with answering these two questions:

Why do I want to detox?

What results are the results I want to see?

Next is the decision of which detox is actually needed. Though not an exhaustive list, below are a few from which to choose:

Fasting Detox (food restriction usually for 2-3 weeks) • Liver Cleanse • Juice Cleanse, Master Cleanse • Supplement and herbal Cleanse • Colon Cleanse • Parasite Cleanse • Foot detox • Nasal Irrigation • Oxygen Detox • Mental • Spiritual.

Many of these cleanses detox various systems of the body. The liver, being the second largest organ in the body (skin is #1) is impacted by all of these due to its major role from filtering the blood to signaling the stomach to stop digesting food to eliminating toxins, in addition to 500+ other functions. If the liver has to divert its major functions to take care of other tasks, it won't have the time or energy to focus on keeping the body clean. Stress, toxins, nutritional deficiencies, too many calories, too little sleep and oth-



er imbalances aid in gumming up the liver. Think of it like an oil filter. What would happen to your vehicle engine if you never changed the oil?

There are also eating programs that can aid in detoxing and/or cleansing. A few of these plans are the Elimination Diet, Low-FODMAP, Core Food, Detox Food, Cardio Metabolic Food, Renew Food and Phytonutrient. These plans were developed to accomplish specific outcomes. They were created by specialists and are safe when followed.

Some pros of these programs: Benefits from an increased intake of vitamins and minerals, identifying food sensitivities, giving the system a period of rest from toxicity, etc.

Many detoxes/cleanses on the market offer products to assist you through the program. This is where research and learning the right questions to ask can ensure safety and increase your understanding of what is happening on the inside of your body.

Detoxes/cleanses can also introduce healthy habits such as:

Drinking pure, clean waterReducing sugar intake, salt, caffeine, alcohol

• Eliminating processed foods, smoking

• Consuming more organic and whole foods that are fiber and anti-oxidant rich, etc.

• Regular exercise

Dr. Stiles also notes that "detoxification is the necessary process by which these harmful products are removed from the body. Prior to a successful and safe detoxification, the liver, kidneys, colon and lymphatic systems must be opened and draining. The patient must also simultaneously be nourished with electrolytes, ionic trace minerals, hydration, enzymes, gut support, amino acids and basic nutrition. We all have different hidden toxicities. If you are seeking real health solutions and want a personalized health

optimization plan, advanced functional testing is a good next step."

Detoxes and cleanses date back thousands of years such as fasting, saunas (I saw the ruins of a public sauna in Israel. It was amazing!), dry brushing, smudging, herbal medicine, water, crystals, meditation and exercise. If it had benefits for them, why not take the next step and reap the benefits yourself? Reach out to Dr. William Stiles at drwilliamstiles.com if you'd like to schedule a complimentary 15-minute consultation.

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As we age hormone levels decrease and this is normal but I see it occurring at different rates for different people. I have patients in their seventies with untreated natural testosterone levels in the 900's. These patients spend most of their time outside the US eating clean foods and staying amazingly active. Unfortunately, that's not how most of us live.

I believe because of our lifestyles, exposures, food, and activity levels, our hormones begin falling much sooner than they should. Many people have the idea that hormones are only for sexual function but our patients will even tell you this is just one of the many positive effects of bio-identical hormones. Mood and outlook improves, relationships with spouses, family members, and coworkers improve, sleep improves, stress reduces and so much more. You are more understanding of others, more forgiving, more loving.

This doesn't even touch on the health benefits. Unfortunately, many doctors will tell you hormone therapy is not safe, not proven, and may cause cancer or some other harm. I was taught the same way. Unfortunately, these doctors are just wrong.



They fail to keep up with the medical literature and are unable to consider the possibility that medicine has evolved over the last fifty years. Even the American Heart Association changes blood pressure treatment guidelines every couple of years. It's unfortunate because when doctors disagree it causes confusion and fear in patients.

We do have patients in their 20s but I always say if you are over forty you should have already seen me. That's when I got treated and it was a life-changing event that has made me happier

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You Didn't Earn My Respect



By Stephenie Craig. JOURNEY BRAVELY

I was talking to a student about a difficult relationship with a teacher. The student didn't like the teacher's communication style and decided the teacher had not earned respect. The student gave less effort and had a negative attitude, because the teacher was "not worthy of respect." The student ended up with a poor grade, being grounded and not being a great version of self all in the name of withdrawing respect from someone who hadn't earned it. Following the interaction, I started wondering about the cost to ourselves and others when we practice withdrawing respect from others when they displease us or behave in ways that don't align with our values.

It's uncomfortable when we discover someone holds a different view or value that is in fundamental opposition to our way of approaching life. We are left to decide how we will engage this person going forward. Current culture encourages us to believe respect is earned and only safely given to people who agree with us. Social media and news give us permission to cut off, cut out, publicly shame and withdraw not only respect, but also kindness from anyone who sees things differently. This begins as a way to "hold people accountable" and ends with us finding ourselves being unkind, rude, judgmental, self-righteous, bitter and a version of self that can become unrecognizable.

What if there are two kinds of respect? The traditional definition of respect is holding someone in high esteem or admiration. This type of admiring respect is what we refer to when talking about earning respect. It is based on character, performance and behavioral choices. We choose to bestow admiring

respect on some and not on others. The second brand of respect is basic human respect. Basic human respect is the fundamental belief that each human has inherent value and worth regardless of what they believe or how they behave. Basic human respect is born out of respecting self and extending to others the same level of common decency you hope others will extend to you. This respect assumes we do not have the right to subtract from the value of another person regardless of their disagreement with us in word or action. Basic human respect is freely assumed and not earned or lost.

Our culture is often confusing withdrawal of admiring respect with withdrawal of basic human respect. When we don't admire someone, there is not a significant social cost. When we don't extend basic human respect, we begin to believe we are better, to verbally assault others, to lose compassion, to dehumanize, to oppress, to reduce our character and to blindly engage in hypocrisy—all in the name of withholding respect others aren't doing their job to earn. When we make withholding basic human respect a habit, we find ourselves going down a dark character hole. So, how can we avoid this pitfall?

5 Ways to Practice Extending Basic Human Respect to Others

Extend grace freely because you're going to need it. No matter how hard you try, you will not be perfect and will make mistakes. Your values will not always align with others. You will need others to extend basic human respect to you.

Use judgment as a mirror. Typically, when we feel judgmental of others, there is an internal issue we need to address. Ask yourself what purpose your judgment is serving both inwardly and outwardly. Try trading judgment for curiosity. Try being curious about others beliefs/behaviors.

Treat others with kindness you would show to your friend or child. You would be kind to your friend or child if they disagreed with you. Treat others in the world with this same level of kindness. Your kindness should be based on who you want to be, not on whether someone else is pleasing you.

Speak to others as equals. You are not better or worse than anyone. Use a tone of voice, words, eye contact and nonverbals that reflect your belief that others are your equal.

Embrace humility. Just because you believe you are right about things doesn't mean you are. Try remembering you are human and you have things to learn from other people. Sometimes we learn the most profound lessons from those who see things differently.

As you pursue a life marked by extending basic human re-



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Tips to Lower Your Insurance Costs in a Rough Market

BY JULIE A. MARTIN

1. Update your home. In this property insurance market, most of the standard carriers are imposing strict age guidelines on Roof, Heating, Wiring, and Plumbing. If your home is 20 years old or older, keep in mind that the older your roof is, the harder it will be to move your insurance to a different carrier. The same holds true for your hot water heater, which most carriers regard as too old once it has been in your home for at least 15 years.

2. Confirm with your agent that your insurance has all applicable discounts. Wind Mitigation discounts weigh heavily on your premium. Roof credits such as FBC, or Florida Building Code Equivalent, Hip roof, for roofs

that slope on all four sides like a pyramid, and single wraps, may vastly decrease your premium from what it is now. If you have recently replaced your roof, it is best to order a new mitigation inspection directly afterwards, and submit it to your agent. Carriers acknowledge new inspections as of the date they are received by the underwriting department, rather than the date they are performed.

3. Check your Total Insurable Replacement Cost. Ask your agent to update your replacement cost estimator. Most standard carriers have some form of inflation guard on their policies, which is designed to keep your dwelling coverage at or above the level required in order to fulfill the Florida Valued Policy Law. Due to the



recent burst of inflation in materials and the costs of hiring a licensed contractor, some policies may experience a bigger jump in dwelling coverage from policy term to policy term. It is best to check with your agent to be sure your home is not over-insured.

4. Smart Water Protection System. Some newer homes have a Smart Water Protection system which automatically shuts off the water in the event of accidental leakage, and many carriers offer a good discount to policyholders for having this device installed in their homes.

5. Increase Deductibles. This is a valid way to reduce your overall property insurance premium. However, there is a downside. For one thing, if raising your deductible significantly increases your potential out of

pocket expenses in the event of a claim, you have to decide if you are prepared for that risk. Secondly, some deductibles can only be changed at renewal. If you change your wind deductible from 2% to 5%, you will have to wait another year before changing it back, so be sure to calculate your potential out of pocket exposure before making this decision.

In this rough market, it is difficult to shop rates between carriers, but the best time to do that is after hurricane season ends, which is in December.

The guidelines are always the toughest in high summer, so that by December, many of the carriers have relaxed their rules enough for people to move from carrier to carrier with much less fuss and expense, and that, dear reader, is what we all wantpeace of mind with less expense.

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🏇 Musing

A Pastor's Ponderings: **Back to School 7 Spiritual Truths to Instill in Your Children**



By Doug Stauffer, Pastor, Faith Independent Baptist Church

With the 2023-2024 school year in full swing, parents and teachers have bought their supplies, arranged schedules and attended orientation sessions. Amidst all the bustle, focusing on some deeper life lessons is crucial as they serve as a moral compass for children. In a recent sermon, I explored seven pivotal spiritual principles rooted in the rich soil of Judeo-Christianity. These principles not only bolster character, but also provide a compass that can guide children in school and throughout their lives.

1. The Importance of Divine Creation: School curriculums may teach theories of evolution and the Big Bang, but it's important to counterbalance this by instilling in your children that they are God's special creation, created with purpose and talents (Daniel 1:17; Genesis 1:27). This foundation not only strengthens self-worth, but also infuses life with a sense of divine purpose that scientific theories such as abiogenesis and survival of the fittest fail to deliver.

2. Understanding God and America's Heritage: Teach your children about the Judeo-Christian heritage that shaped America. In a world that often sees the concept of a Creator as old-fashioned, children must know that they are purposefully made (Daniel 6:10; Psalm 139:14). By grounding their identity in faith, they will be better prepared to defend their beliefs and answer questions about their hope (1 Peter 3:15).

3. Learning to Trust in God: As your children navigate life's challenges, remind them that God is involved in human endeavors (Daniel 2:21; Proverbs 3:5). Several scriptures assure that trusting in God will guide them through all of life's circumstances (Isaiah 41:10, Jeremiah 29:11). Encouraging a balanced spiritual life can impart to them an unshakeable peace, even in the face of adversity.

4. Choosing Friends Wisely: The company your children keep can either uplift or undermine their moral fabric (Proverbs 13:20; 1 Corinthians 15:33). The Psalmist pointed out that he surrounded himself with those who share his faith. "I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts" (Psalm 119:63). The right relationships offer mutual spiritual support and enrichment.

5. The Virtue of Diligence: Encourage your children to give their best in all they do, not for worldly acclaim but to glorify God (Colossians 3:23; Ecclesiastes 9:10). The principle of doing one's best "as unto the Lord" can serve as a guiding framework throughout their lives, in academics, relationships, or career choices.

6. The Courage to Stand Alone: Life will present situations where your children must stand alone in their convictions, like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Daniel 3:14-18). This courage to uphold their beliefs, even under peer pressure or threats, is an invaluable life skill. Scriptures reiterate that God will fight their battles when they



stand alone in their faith (Exodus 14:14). Teach them that standing alone with God is not solitude it's spiritual fortitude.

7. The Path Back from the Pit: Lastly, remind your children that making mistakes is a universal human experience, but the gifts of repentance and forgiveness are ever-present (Luke 15:18-19). The moving narrative of the Prodigal Son illustrates the transformative power of family reunification. This story shows that even when we lose our way, a loving reunion with God and family remains our best option.

Imparting these spiritual principles is more than just instilling a religious edification; they are tools for forging resilient, thoughtful individuals who can gracefully handle the world's complexities. So, as we continue the back-to-school season, let's not overlook these foundational teachings that will fortify your children for a lifetime. Invest now to insure a profitable reaping in the future.

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").



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

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Sean of the South

By Sean Dietrich

I am a dropout.

I grew up pretty hard. I am an educational failure. I had few academic opportunities. As a result, I am a very slow reader, and an even wurse speler.

This is because, after my father died, my family hit rock bottom. My mother cleaned houses for a living, and worked in fast food. I, my ownself, dropped out of school and got my first job at age 14, hanging drywall.

Later, I would install tile and wood floors. I hung commercial roofing and seamless gutter. I had other ignoble occupations, too. I scooped ice cream. I was a telemarketer for exactly 13 hours. In the evenings, for extra cash, I played music at local bars where overserved people two-stepped and showed their appreciation by lobbing bottles at the piano player.

I wasn't particularly talented. I owned a guitar. I had a cheap piano my father bought from the classified section. I had long hair. Nobody wanted their daughter to date me.

But something about the communal glow of a beer joint changed me. I've had some powerfully good memories in dim rooms with clinking glassware.

When I was 16, I spent my birthday playing "Faded Love"

in a joint on the Alabama state line. The bartender, Wanda, asked if I wanted a beer. Wanda was five foot, even, and had a voice like a pack of filtered menthols.

I told Wanda, without hesitation, yes, I did want a beer. So Wanda opened a PBR and poured three fingers of the golden nectar into a tumbler.

"Happy birthday," she said. "You'll have to wait until you're 21 to get the rest."

Whereupon she ceremoniously finished the bottle.

I also played piano in church, and at every Baptist function including fifth-Sunday sings, Decoration Day potlucks, and VBS. Most Baptists turned a blind eye to my nocturnal habits.

I attended community college as a 30-year-old man. I rectified my high-school misgivings. And I learned how to spel prety good.

And somehow, here I am.

I have an overbite, red hair, and a list of bad habits which causes fundamentalists to send me emails with subject lines that read: "Will I spend eternity without you, Sean?"

But there were a few people who have consistently believed in me. Namely, my wife. And my mother. My sister. My friends, who are too numerous to list.

And in a few days, the Grand Ole Opry will be releasing my first album. In a few days, I will



be performing selections from this album on the Opry stage, on the air.

I'm not even sure what this means, since none of this feels real. But I'm telling you about all this because, I suppose, I still can't believe it.

Even so, my first Opry album single "dropped" yesterday, on my father's birthday. I don't know what "dropped" means. But I know that this is something my old man would have loved.

My father was an avid Opry

listener, and often swore that if he ever met Minnie Pearl in person, he would either propose marriage or, at the very least, a scandalous love affair.

I can also tell you that my first album was not recorded in a fancy studio with world-famous sound engineers named "Pootie Tang" running the mixing board. This album was recorded by me, in a rustic cabin, on Lake Martin, with cheap equipment.

There were quilts on the walls, to deaden the sound. The way all the professionals do it. My best good friend, Aaron Peters, played fiddle. We played antique music. There were empty Ovaltine bottles strewn around the cabin.

And a blue heron visited the lakeside dock every night after recording, to flap its wings and say hello.

Sometimes at night, after recording, I would lie in bed and wonder if prayers can travel backward in time. If they can, I continue to pray that a young 14-year-old, redheaded, construction-working musician will just hold on.

Because one day, in the year 2023, even though he is much older than most Opry walk-ons; even though he feels like a consummate failure; even though he can't spell worth a shuck; that little boy will not be able to believe what I just wrote.

I know I can't.

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LOCASH: From the Studio to the MKAF Stage

Interviewed by Will Estell, September, 2023

If you're a fan of high-energy rocking country, combined with catchy songwriting and the remarkable stage presence that goes with great live entertainment, then you're probably already familiar with LOCASH and the success this duo has garnered over the past decade-anda-half in the ever-competitive world of country hitmakers.

LOCASH was originally formed back in 2006 by singer-songwriters Chris Lucas and Preston Brust who had each headed to Nashville to pursue their dreams of making a living writing and performing country music. Jump ahead 17 years and lots of time in the studio, on the road and on the stage, and they're established family men as well. Chris, a native of Baltimore, Md., along with his wife, Kaitlyn, and their three children call Tampa home, while Preston, originally from Kokomo, Ind., and his wife, Kristen, and three children reside in the Nashville area. The duo has had an impres-

sive share of cuts turned hits, both recorded by LOCASH and those performed by other well-known country artists; like the number one, "You Gonna Fly," written by LOCASH and Cadillac Three's Jaren Johnson, and performed by Keith Urban. The duo, along with close musical friends Chris Janson and Danny Myrick, also wrote Tim McGraw's, "Truck Yeah." But they've charted their own country hits, too, like their Platinum breakout "I Love This Life," and their number one Gold hits, "I Know Somebody" and "One Big Country Song."

As a duo they've earned eight charting singles, cut three studio albums and garnered over 820 million global on-demand streams. LOCASH has also received a healthy dose of acknowledgements and accolades, including a recent Vocal Duo of the Year nomination at the 56th Annual CMA Awards.

As a fan of LOCASH's writing and ability to work the crowd, I've seen the duo perform live, and I can tell you that you don't want to miss their upcoming headlining performance as part of Mattie Kelly Art Foundation's inaugural, three-day Salt Water Music Festival, happening October 12-14. It also includes performances by the talented Macy Gray, as well as top Nashville singer-songwriters, Ben Burgess, Josh Mirenda, Jared Mullins, Jordan Minton and Jordan Reynolds.

I sat down with Chris and Preston to find out a little more about their thoughts on everything from the ever-changing music industry, their patriotism, being named honorary guardians of Space Force, and their love of our beautiful beach towns.

Both of you have been very vocal about being strong supporters of our military, showing your patriotism by traveling abroad many times to perform at U.S. bases around the world. What transpired to cause LOCASH to be so passionate about our country and the men and women that defend it?

Chris: Preston has a brother that was in the Air Force, and my dad was in the Army, and my great granddad was in the Army. In fact, he actually rode with Teddy Roosevelt, as one

of the Rough Riders, which was awesome. With that background, when me and Preston got together we just said, "We've got to do something to support our men and women in uniform." They mean the world to us, and we couldn't do what we do without the freedoms we have because of our military.

I'm sure seeing what you two have seen in your travels to perform to our troops in other parts of the world really paints a clearer picture of how good we all have it in this great country.

Preston: Yeah, traveling to some of those bases to perform, and seeing other parts of the world, then comparing the freedoms we have, really puts it in perspective. When you get back in the states and think about how different it is at home, it's just an awesome feeling, you know. That's one of the reasons we wrote, "Three Favorite Colors." We wanted to stand proud and say how we feel about our freedoms and those who make them possible.

Speaking of military, you guys were recently named Honorary Guardians of



PHOTO BY DAVID MCCLISTER

U.S. Space Force. Tell me about that and how that came to be. Were either of you space fanatics?

Chris: Yeah, man, I mean for years, when we were on the road, I used to go on Space.com all the time. I mean, no joke, I was literally into what asteroids were close, what satellites were going up. It just all really intrigued me.

Preston: He was on Space. com, and I was on Playboy.com [laughing, jokingly]. Really, with all the military stuff we were doing, General Whiting just asked us to get involved, after President Trump started Space Force [in 2020], a lot of people joked about it, and no one seemed to know what Space Force was or

Continued on next page

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We Hope You Get Butterflies

By Anna Fisher, Emerald Coast Theatre Co.

My Dad took me to see Camelot when I was around 12 years old. It was my very first experience seeing a live performance, and I remember walking up the steps at the Fort Walton Beach Civic Auditorium with such excitement that I had butterflies. We had the honor of escorting none other than Mrs. Mattie Kelly herself that day, as she was one of my Dad's clients at his brokerage firm.

Oh, the music, the lights, the

voices, the costumes! Guinevere was so beautiful with her long flowing locks and shimmery gowns and I was in awe of the spectacle of everything. My only other experience with a musical was catching a rerun of Grease 2 on TV whenever I got really



lucky. But this live performance feeling was different. It had texture and weight; it was fully immersive and glowing, like an intense sunset that washes over everything in its path.

The power of that live performance never left me. I still feel the magic of it every time I watch a new cast thrill our audience with everything they've got. The most rewarding moments of all happen when I get to watch children experience that magic for the first time at ECTC.

We are bringing Junie B. Jones the Musical to life on stage this October and I am so excited to have multiple schools attending on field trips, as well as our offerings to the general community. Aside from the boost that live theatre gives students in every area of education, it gives space for kids to imagine and dream, just like I did so many years ago.

We have something inspiring for the adults in October as well. Me and My Gal: A Musical Tribute to Judy and Gene is a joyous walk down memory lane with such songs as "Singin'in the Rain" and "Get Happy." Like putting your toes in the sugar white sand, attending a live performance is one of the best reset buttons we can employ in this technology age. I turn off my phone, take a deep breath, and just feel all of the music, dance and life that is being played out before me.

Whether you're attending Junie B. Jones, Me and My Gal, or any of the multiple productions we offer throughout the year, I hope you get those same butterflies of excitement and anticipation as you walk up the steps to ECTC. Come join us in real life and real time to experience the magic of that reset for yourself.

LOCASH

continued from previous page

what they did. So, we got involved and started helping to spread the word, and they made us Honorary Guardians. I mean who else would you want to protect the world, but LOCASH? [laughing]

You guys have had success both as



performers of your own songs, and as songwriters for other hits like Keith Urban's "You Gonna Fly" and Mc-Graw's "Truck Yeah." I've seen you perform live and you really bring it. But, what is your favorite side of it, writing or performing, or do you like both equally?

Preston: I think it's pretty equal for us. Just being on stage and giving those people 45 or 75 or 90 minutes and reaching those people live is just fun. When I see one little kid, just screaming out the song lyrics at the top of his lungs, that's when I know we've done something right.

Chris: Like with the song, "I Love This Life," when we are up there playing that and you see people singing along, and you know they know the words, because that song has impacted them in a positive way, there's no better feeling than that.

What's your favorite LOCASH song you've written?

Chris: It's probably, "I Love This Life," because, you know, it was our first one to go up the charts, and you never forget your first. That song felt like the little train that could. It just kept climbing the charts. It was just cool to watch music do what it's supposed to do. Just for two guys who've worked so hard to get to that moment, and then to watch it happen... I love this life, for sure.

🌸 Arts & Music

LOCASH

continued from previous page

What about a favorite song the two of you have written for another artist?

Preston: You gotta love [Tim] McGraw's "Truck Yeah," and "You Gonna Fly" [performed by Keith Urban]. There's actually some songs we've written that haven't even gotten picked up yet that I probably love even more than either one of those.

I've asked multiple long-time artists I interview—from the iconic Jimmy Buffett to Kenny Chesney to STYX to Alan Jackson and Sara Evans—this same question: In the time you've been in the industry, how have you seen it change, and what do you see coming for the future of music and how you as artists navigate this everchanging landscape?

Preston: I tell you, Will, there's been a ton of changes, and it's easy sometimes to get

the music industry changes so quickly that you have to adjust your next move, whether it's methodically, touring, business wise or even social media. I mean, I remember when MySpace was a thing, then sitting down and starting our first Facebook page, and realizing we could have a music Facebook page, too. And just when you have watched all those things evolve, and start to get used to where it's headed, streaming comes along, and it's like, boom! Now it's not just about country radio, it's about all the streamers you have to reach: Spotify, Pandora, Apple-all of these outlets where people are consuming music. So, now even that is beginning to change. One thing I love about Chris and me, is that we've always kinda been able to adjust, and move with the industry. I see really cool

discouraged. Because sometimes

things coming. I mean, we just did a show in California a couple weeks ago, for a company called HitKor. It was a really cool thing, because we were able to do a live show on stage, while also performing globally, online. Fans just pay one ticket price and they can watch from home anywhere in the world! HitKor is making that record live, and then it can be used on radio, on streamers and other places too. So, it's amazing how people are learning to adapt and share music in the industry. Back when we started in '06, people couldn't wait to get an album out, and now you don't even need an album—a lot of times it's just a song. And now sometimes it's not even a whole song. Trending sounds are becoming wildly popular online.

As for projects beyond the music, tell me a little about the new I Love This Life' podcast you guys have launched. You have mentioned it's going to be noholds-barred conversations, and you promise to keep it raw and real. What does that entail and how did the podcast come to be?

Preston: Man, one of my favorite things about our career is the stories. The places we've been and the things we've done, like "Remember that time we did this or that?" We'll be sitting on the bus and telling stories and we get to laughing and we always say, "Man, no one would ever believe that if we told that story." So, we just decided to start telling those stories, because that's what life is about. It's about looking forward to things, but also reliving some of those fun moments and stories from the past. [Fans can find LO-CASH's I Love This Life podcast on YouTube and Apple.]

I know you guys have played quite often along the beach communities of Northwest Florida's Gulf Coast, including shows in Fort Walton Beach to playing Gulf Coast Jam in PCB. What are your thoughts on the area? Have you also vacationed here over the years?

Chris: We definitely have vacationed there with our families. Even recently when we played in Fort Walton [The Block], we stayed an extra couple of days. We were staying in Destin last time. I love Destin. The Emerald Coast is just beautiful, and this time, the family is going to be there. We love playing there. It's great to look at the water, and jump in before jumping on stage. And especially with the military bases being there, it's a wonderful place for us to play.

For more information, and tickets, to LOCASH's upcoming performance as part of Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation's Salt Water Music Fest, visit MKAF.org.







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