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Postal Customer Local

You Are a Holiday Hero When You Help Those In Need

By Lori Leath Smith

Anyone can be a Holiday Hero when they help those in need in our community. As always during the holiday season, there is an ongoing need for giving or volunteering. Many children don't have enough food to eat over a weekend, much less over Thanksgiving or Christmas. Some just want Santa to visit them. Some have no beds or gifts. Many homeless veterans go without a warm meal all year long.

Okaloosa County has a food insecurity rate of 12.3 percent among children younger than 18 and Walton County is at 12.6 percent (source: Feeding America), slightly lower than last year, but still too high. Though many families in our area are struggling to get by, we can bless them with an extra boost this holiday season. Fortunately, we are a generous and compassionate community that pulls together for its own. Below are ways you, too, can



be a Holiday Hero this sea-

It's that time of year for **The Salvation Army.** Ready to help you help others with its popular Angel Trees, Angels (children 0-12 years old) are available for adoption beginning November 18th at all the Walmart Stores in Okaloosa and Walton Coun-

ties as well as Bass Pro Shop Destin, Ashley Home Furniture Crestview and Ft. Walton, AJ's on the Bayou in Fort Walton Beach and Chick-fil-a Niceville. Simply pick a tag off a tree and return your Angel's gifts to any of the above locations or drop off at the Thrift Store, 425 Mary Esther Cutoff, Fort Walton Beach, by December 9th. If your business would like to adopt some Angels, please call Laura Beeman, (850) 243-4531 x20.

Have you ever had to sleep without a bed? Some in our community do. Why not put some sparkle into a child's holiday this year? **A Bed 4**

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Just One More Child

By Ellen Fannon

Her motto is, "Just one more child." This is what the shoebox lady, Elaine Lauderdale, has on her mind when she encourages everyone to participate in Operation Christmas Child at Rosemont Baptist Church in Niceville.

Rosemont, a small church with an average attendance of approximately 50 people, has sent out several hundred Christmas shoeboxes a year for the last several years. This past year, Rosemont sent out approximately 1,300 boxes. Elaine, who has been involved in the shoebox ministry for 25 years, spearheads this effort through her unique concept of mass production of shoeboxes. All year long, she hunts for bargains and buys items in bulk to go in shoeboxes. This system makes it more affordable to produce more boxes. Because items are purchased throughout the year, Rosemont realized several years ago that Elaine needed her own place where she could organize and store things until time to pack boxes—hence the "Elaine Lauderdale Shoebox Room" was born. Elaine, along with her team of several other women, spends

ONE MORE CHILD

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HOLIDAY HERO

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Me invites you to help provide beds for children in Okaloosa and Walton counties this season. \$10-\$25 Walmart gift cards can purchase pillows, bedding go towards the purchase of a bed. \$300 sponsors a full bed kit and helps with operational expenses. A Bed 4 Me has provided beds to thousands of children in our community since 2016. To help, visit abed4me.org where you can donate in any amount.

Food For Thought (FFT) provides year-round programs to bridge the meal gap in the lives of the food-insecure children they serve, but it's especially needed during the holidays. You can help by sponsoring a family for the holidays. Food for Thought will provide holiday services during Christmas school holiday breaks, feeding over 700 families during each holiday, distributing 30,000 pantry staples and more than 11,000 lbs. of produce. Families supported by Food for Thought programs throughout Okaloosa and Walton Counties will be provided food to prepare meals to support their students' needs while they are out of school for

a week, which is about 10 meals they will miss. To enroll, email support@fftfl.org. To volunteer or donate, please visit www.fftfl. org.

At Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center (ECCAC), 1,585 kids were assisted in 2022. This giving season, you can make a child's Christmas by helping to stock ECCAC's toy room for families and agency partners to "shop!" Purchase items from ECCAC "wish lists" or shop for items yourself. Contact Hailey@eccac.org to schedule your drop-off and drop off at one of ECCAC's locations: Niceville Chamber Office, 1055 John Sims Pkwy E, Niceville or Pierce Family ECCAC, 336 College Ave, DeFuniak Springs. eccac.

Children in Crisis, our community non-profit charity committed to providing homes and keeping brothers and sisters together, is asking all of the wonderful local Christmas elves to help with their kiddo's Christmas lists. Simply visit https://a. co/0UDgndl to shop from the Amazon Wish List! Please deliver your gifts by noon on Dec. 22 to 1000 Luke's Way, Fort Walton

Beach. Call 850-864-4242 or email Info@childrenincrisisFL. org for more information. childrenincrisisfl.org

The Angel Tree Program, a collaborative effort of the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office School Resource Officers (SROs) and the OCSO Sheriff's Star Charity, is in full gear! SROs provide a list of names of children within their schools whose families may be experiencing financial hardship and could benefit from the program. Children fill out a wish list with their SRO and guidance counselor asking for things sucha as bikes, video games, new pajamas or socks. OCSO employees purchase gifts, but you can help by making a monetary donation to help fulfill the wish lists. Since the program began in 2010, more than 1,000 Okaloosa County children have received special deliveries from their SRO before Christmas. To donate, contact Brian Muhlbach, PIO for the Sheriff's Star Charity, at charity@sheriff-okaloosa.org or visit ocsostarcharity.

Help support the **Walton County Sheriff's Office**(WCSO) in its annual Santa

Patrol Mission, helping the less fortunate families in our area this Holiday Season. Santa Patrol's goal is to seek out those in the community with a need and lighten the burden of providing Christmas to their Children. Santa Patrol accepts NEW and UNWRAPPED toys, games, crafts and art supplies for all ages. Gift cards to clothing stores, hygiene items and hoodies or jackets in all sizes for ages newborn to 18 years. Please contact event director Cblackerby@absolutecamservices.com to schedule a drop off through Dec. 15. You can also make a monetary donation at WCSO on PavPal.

Fatboy's and Holi Indian Restaurant has launched a month-long non-perishable food drive spanning all of its locations, benefitting different local hunger relief organizations throughout the area. The campaign runs now through December 23, 2023. Fatboy's Miramar Beach and Destin locations as well as Holi's Miramar Beach location will support Destin Harvest. Patrons are invited to participate in Fatboy's efforts this holiday season by bringing nonperishable and canned food items to receive

countries and territories. It is not

the goal of Operation Christmas

Child to supply children with a

lifetime of soap, toys or school

items. In fact, a child can only

receive one shoebox in his/her

life. Rather, it is an opportunity

to share about the love of Jesus.

Since 2010, more than 24.9 mil-

lion children who have received a shoebox gift have participated in

The Greatest Journey—a 12-les-

son discipleship program. Children learn from trained, local

volunteers what it means to follow

Jesus and share their faith with

friends and family. In 2023, over

17.4 children made decisions for

Christ. It is estimated that for ev-

ery three shoeboxes sent out, one

child comes to know Jesus as their

Lord and Savior. That estimate

doesn't include their family mem-

bers or others in their towns and

villages who may also come to a

saving knowledge of Jesus Christ

as the result of their child receiv-

ing a simple gift of love. The tes-

timonies of children whose lives

have been forever changed by

that one simple act of love are

20% off their meal. To make the donation process as convenient as possible, labeled boxes will be placed in each Fatboy's location for the collection of donated items.

The 3rd Planet Brewing Bike Club in Niceville is fulfilling Christmas wish lists of the residents of Twin Cities Pavilion this year. After personally obtaining their Christmas wishes, they've displayed those wishes on a special Christmas tree in the brewery's taproom. You can choose a resident and fulfill their gift requests or choose items from a list of essentials the pavilion needs. To keep track, patrons are asked to leave their contact information with the bartender to match the gifts with the residents.



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ONE MORE CHILD

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countless hours sorting, counting and organizing items so that by the time the packing takes place, everything is ready to go. This year, the shoebox ladies started packing in March.

This year marked the 31st anniversary of Operation Christmas Child, a project of Samaritan's Purse, which uses gift-filled shoeboxes to demonstrate God's love in a tangible way to children in need around the world. The



Elaine Lauderdale has devoted 25 years to Operation Christmas Child's shoebox ministry at Rosemont Baptist Church. Elaine is currently under hospice care, but continued to work packing boxes this year for the November 12th deadline.

boxes are filled with small toys, personal hygiene items, school supplies, clothing and other goodies, and delivered to impoverished children around the world. For many of these children, it is the first gift they have ever received. Since 1993, Operation Christmas Child has collected and delivered more than 209 million shoebox gifts to children in more than 170

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Get into the Spirit of Giving with Toys for Tots

By Heather Bennett Eye

Charity and compassion, central to the holiday spirit, run deep in our community, and our Emerald Coast Toys for Tots is gearing up to spread the message of giving and sharing this holiday season. Each year they bring countless smiles to children's faces with their toy drive. As we start our holiday shopping, we can see the familiar logo of the Toys for Tots red train appearing in our favorite stores. It's time to ask ourselves, how can we help?

Toys for Tots began as a charitable effort by the Marines in 1947, and their foundation was authorized as a nonprofit organization in 1991. Emerald Coast Toys for Tots Coordinator, Nicole Armantrout, works with Fort Walton Beach Marine Corps League Detachment 915, Marine Fighter Attack Training Squadron 501, Marine Detachment EOD Students and many valuable volunteers every hol-

iday season. They collect and distribute toys to local charities, such as United for a Good Cause, Catholic Charities, and Guardian ad Litem, to benefit less fortunate children in our community.

Nicole started in 2009 as a volunteer when she worked with a former coordinator. "I wound up just loving it to pieces and wanted to be involved, to be at every event," she explained. "You're in over your head, you love it, you can't imagine how you ever had life without this in it." Nicole stays busy year-round to bring joy to children along the coast. In addition to the Toys for Tots holiday campaigns, they also assist families during natural disasters. "We don't just use toys for Christmas," Nicole explained. "They're also there for emergency situations. If we hear of a family that's fallen on hard times, like a house fire or natural disaster, like a flood, we respond to that as well."



If you are interested in getting involved with Toys for Tots, there are many opportunities to donate, volunteer, or attend an event. For more information on how to get involved by becoming a donation center, volunteering, or becoming a sponsor, please visit their website at http://fort-walton-beach-fl.toysfortots.org. If you would like more information on how to sign up with a local charity to register for assistance, please email fort.walton. beach.fl@toysfortots.org.

Donation locations across the Emerald Coast include Barnes and Noble, Eglin Federal Credit Union locations, Better Homes and Gardens Real Estate Emerald Coast in Destin, and Disney Store Outlet at Silver Sands, and many others.

Please continue to check our website for upcoming Toys for Tots events where you can donate, meet our Marines and volunteers, and take home Toys for Tots promotional items.

Drop Point Details:

December 2: Walmart, Destin - 12 p.m. to 4 p.m.

December 9: Build a Bear, Destin Commons - 12 p.m. to 4 p.m.; Walmart, Destin - 12 p.m. to 4 p.m.; the Disney Store, Destin - 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Upcoming Events:

December 1 - December

5: Highway 98 Country, The Emerald Coast's Country Station, will be hosting its annual Bikes or Bust at Uptown Station Friday starting December 1 at 10 a.m. through Tuesday, December 5 at 12 p.m. Radio host Scott Mallory will be camping out on a scissor lift for 98 hours to help raise awareness for Toys for Tots. During the event, they will be collecting bikes and helmets for kids of all ages. Monetary donations are also welcome. Sponsors of the event include Eglin Federal Credit Union, Florida Power and Light, Skippers Seafood, Hampton Hyundai and Live Oak Fiber, and Shoreline Church.





ONE MORE CHILD

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moving—from a child receiving exactly what she needed to carefully counted shoeboxes being multiplied when more children were present than boxes.

This is what drives Elaine to pack just one more box for one more child. Right after the shoebox dedication day, the second Sunday in November, the shelves in the shoebox room are bare. Elaine starts again, after Christmas, looking for bargains. People all over town know her and her

shoebox ladies, and they have recruited many other people to help.

This year, Elaine's grand-daughter, Ceylona Chapman, a teacher at Rocky Bayou Christian School, got her students involved by giving a 100 on a quiz in return for a packed shoebox. The students at Rocky Bayou responded with 250 boxes! Although Elaine's family attends a different church, she got her whole family involved this year in purchasing and sorting items, packing, assembling shoeboxes, and moving the boxes to storage until time

to load them and ship them out. Every month she asks the church members to supply somethingsoap month, yoyo month, pencil month, etc. The expense, spread over the entire year among several people, is minimal. Many people, both inside and outside of the church, also bring things to put in the boxes. In addition, Rosemont set up a shoebox fund for people who want to contribute money in addition to, or instead of buying items. This money is used to purchase extra things needed to fill the boxes. And Elaine makes sure they are full! She has taught all the packers to utilize every square inch of those boxes. But the most important thing packed is prayer. During every packing session, Elaine stops, gives a "mini-sermon," as she is never at a loss for words, and takes time to pray over the boxes and the children who will be receiving them.

Other churches, many much larger than Rosemont, have sent their shoebox coordinators to learn from Elaine. Most churches that participate in Operation Christmas Child do so by encouraging their members to take home and pack a box or two. Elaine does this, as well. Although massive numbers of boxes emerge from the shoebox room, members of the congregation are highly encouraged to take home and pack their own personal boxes and include photographs and letters. Several people have re-



ceived thank you notes or emails from the child who received their box

Elaine's name is well known in the southeastern region with Atlanta as the Operation Christmas Child processing center. This year, not only was the shoebox room dedicated to Elaine, but she was also honored by a visit and a certificate of appreciation from the district shoebox coordinator who was overwhelmed by what Rosemont has been able to accomplish. Elaine and some of the other shoebox ladies have also traveled to Atlanta many times to volunteer for several days working in the processing center. Elaine

would be the first to tell people that she doesn't accomplish putting together the massive number of shoeboxes all by herself or even with the help of her team. She gives all the credit to God. But it is her infectious passion and enthusiasm for shoeboxes that excite everyone around her and make them want to get in on the action. Her vision and leadership have enabled a small church to do the impossible—sending out over 1,300 boxes this year! That's why she's called the shoebox lady and that's why her vision has become Rosemont's vision of "just one more child."





YOUR SUPPORT SAVES LIVES

The Mayor Randall Wise First Responders Foundation Inc. has been established to continue his legacy of public service and community dedication. This charitable 501C3, organization serving Niceville, Florida seeks to assist first responders by providing education, training, counseling, and non-budgeted equipment to help keep them safe as they serve and protect.

850-678-9473 / info@mrwfrf.com / mrwfrf.com

When you need a first responder, you dial 911. Please consider setting up a recurring donation of \$9.11 to support Niceville's first responders. Scan the code to learn more.





 $The \ Mayor \ Randall \ Wise \ First \ Responder \ Foundation \ is \ a \ 501-c-3 \ non-profit \ organization, \ EIN \ 87-4702964$



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New Center of Excellence Provides Needed Automotive Industry Training

By Lori Leath Smith

The doors have opened at a new Training Center for students pursuing careers in the automotive industry. The Center of Excellence, a state-of-the-art facility, is a milestone achievement made possible through the unique and valuable partnership of Step One Automotive Group and Northwest Florida State College (NWFSC).

Located in Fort Walton Beach's Commerce and Technology Park, the Center of Excellence not only offers the best in innovative automotive training and services, but is also a hub for automotive education. From a dedicated used car reconditioning center, excelling



in oil changes and brake work, the 39,722 sq. ft. center is fully equipped to cater to the diverse needs of the automotive world, including a heavy-duty commercial truck bay, advanced window tinting facilities and a specialized spray-in bed liner bay.

The comprehensive Center includes a fully renovated 30,000-sq.-ft main building, equipped with 17 lifts capable of servicing vehicles up to class 2,500, a 7,000-sq.-ft. detail shop and a 2,200-sq.-ft. paint and dent repair center, built from the ground up. It's also equipped with the latest eco-friendly technology for fluid and tire disposal and features the most advanced equipment and safety standards available.

In addition to automotive services, at the heart of the initiative is the launch of the Automotive Technology Apprenticeship Program, a groundbreaking collaboration between Step One and NWFSC. This unique program offers students invaluable on-the-job training (OJT)—a real shop environment with master certified technicians which aligns education and industry practices seamlessly. Enrolled students stand to benefit from a comprehensive 720 clock, hour-free tuition, complimentary books and essential tools of the trade. On successful completion of the apprenticeship, graduates will be awarded a certified portable credential, gaining recognition and acceptance from industries and employers nationwide.

At the recent grand opening and ribbon-cutting ceremony at the new center, Maureen Bierman, Step One Automo-

tive Group Marketing Director said the idea emerged a year ago when Dr. Devin Stephenson, the president of Northwest Florida State College, reached out to her. "I have an idea and Step One Automotive Group is the only organization that can help us make that a reality," he said.

"When we met, he shared with me his desire to stand up an automotive technology training program at the college and was looking for a partner where the students could do handson apprentice training in a real shop with master certified technicians," said Maureen.

A year later, after extensive renovations to an old factory and with the help of a \$2.8 million grant from the governor's job growth fund, the Center of Excellence is in operation. "When Dr. Stephenson approached us over a year ago, we knew we had the opportunity to turn his vision into reality," said Maureen. "Today, we stand together, proud to be a part of a program that will shape the next generation of automotive professionals."

"By partnering with industry leaders and introducing the Automotive Technology Apprenticeship Program, we provide students with a unique opportunity to gain practical skills and knowledge while working alongside experienced professionals," remarked Dr. Stephenson. "At NWFSC, our goal is to produce graduates who are job-ready and equipped to drive innovation and shape the future of the automotive industry."

"We are deeply committed



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Saving the Green Space: Preserve Bluewater Bay Now a 501c3!

By Barbara Palmgren

The community of Bluewater Bay is one step closer to saving their green space, and I couldn't be more excited for them!

Preserve Bluewater (PBWB) is a not-for-profit organization created by community members who want to save 150 acres of green space in Bluewater Bay that defines this special spot of paradise. They've set a goal of raising \$2.4 million by March 4, 2024, in order to purchase the land and save it from developers. So far, they've raised \$1.9 million in pledges, and just this month have been granted 501(c)(3) status, meaning that donations can be tax deductible.

I've been asked why I'm passionate about saving green space from future development, even though I don't live in the community. Ironically, that was a question I was asked more than 11 years ago as a resident of Shalimar Pointe when the course was about to be purchased and turned into 160 homes.

Fortunately, at that time,

my husband was an officer for Shalimar Pointe Homeowners Association. When he heard that this was a "done deal" at an executive board meeting, he immediately reached out to key people in the community to begin a journey like the one Bluewater Bay is embarking upon right now. A journey to remove the threat of additional homes, infrastructure, traffic problems and the loss of property values and green space. They say it takes a whole village to raise a child. It took 115 investors to save our green space and protect the entire community.

Working together, a community can do anything. Working together, a community can do

Witnessing the loss of the former Magnolia Golf Course, now abandoned and soon to be developed, the lesson was painfully in front of Bluewater Bay homeowners. Witnessing the closure of the Lakes Course to development was another wakeup call. Last month, while attending a meeting of PBWB, I Inc. revenues will go directly to personally witnessed the loss of other golf holes and the driving range across from the clubhouse. When I entered the meeting, I felt the resolve and dedication to see that the carnage cease.

To stop future development on green space occupied by the remaining golf course, officers and members of PBWB have worked tirelessly over the past months to raise funds.

Their efforts have just received another "Hail Mary" before the deadline early next year to purchase the 150 acres. It comes with the granting of 501(c)(3) status by the federal government. Organizations that qualify under this Internal Revenue Code are eligible for federal exemption from payment of corporate income tax. Once exempt, the nonprofit will be exempt from similar state and local taxes. As a 501(c)(3) Charitable Organization, donors can now give, knowing that their pledge will be tax deductible and Preserve Bluewater Bay

preserving the land.

Only \$500,000 is now needed to reach the \$2.4 million to purchase the green space, sustained by the golf course and other recreational use. All investors and future investors can now receive the long "Hail Mary" pass of the 501(c)(3) that will ensure that 150 acres of land is not developed.

Contact David Rauch at 850-865-0897 or visit preservebwb. com to learn more and make a pledge. Property owners living on the course can also purchase up to 20 feet of property behind their home extending into the golf course for \$8 a sq. ft. with certain conditions. Call Debbie Stretch from Blue Marlin Pelican Realty at 850-218-8312 for information to purchase these "slivers" as part of the "Hi Ho Sliver" campaign. Future informational meetings this year will be held at the golf clubhouse at 6 p.m. (in December on Wed., Dec. 6 and Thurs., Dec 19).

So, when I'm asked about

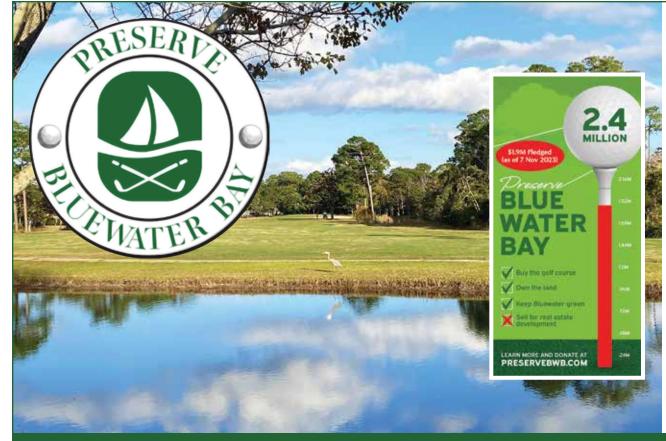
why I'm passionate about helping Bluewater Bay save its green space from development, I can answer that I know it can be done. We did it in Shalimar. You can do it in Bluewater Bay. Why? Because stopping further housing development and saving green space will preserve the legacy that is Bluewater Bay for future generations.

Working together, a community can do anything. Working together, a community can do

Upcoming Community PBWB Meetings

6 p.m. | BWB Golf Clubhouse

Monday, November 27 Wednesday, December 6 Thursday, December 19 Wednesday, January 10 Tuesday, January 23 Tuesday, February 6 Tuesday, February 20



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 Nov. 7, \$1,900,000 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: November 27; December 6 & 19; January 10 & 23; February 6 & 20 @ 6 PM



Scan the QR code to learn more.

Support our efforts by:

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Visit preservebwb.com golf@preservebwb.com | 850-865-0897



Bay Buzz

A Niceville 5th-grade student from James E. Plew Elementary School was invited to the Governor's Mansion recently and recognized for her Hispanic Heritage Month (celebrated Sept. 15 to Oct. 15) essay about her Hispanic grandfather's journey to America. Norah Hall, age 10, is the only student from Okaloosa County. The Panhandle, Okaloosa County Superintendent Marcus Chambers and the Okaloosa County School Board also recognized her in November. Gov. Ron DeSantis and First Lady Casey DeSantis recognized this year's Hispanic Heritage Month student and educator contest winners who were invited to the Florida Governor's Mansion. They received prizes for their art, essays and educational contributions. This year's students were invited to submit an essay on "Celebrating Florida's Hispanic Heroes and Their Contributions to Freedom." Norah wrote about her Hispanic grandfather, Oscar Valenzuela Sr., his journey, overcoming obstacles and



PHOTO CREDIT JULIET HALL Norah Hall with her family and Gov. DeSantis

impacting her own life. At age 12, Oscar moved from Juarez, Mex., to Laredo, Tex., speaking only Spanish, and became an American citizen in 1977 at age 20, Norah wrote in her essay. Six winners were selected including two elementary students (grades 4–5), two middle school students (grades 6–8) and two high school students (grades 9–12).

Gov. Ron DeSantis recently made five key appointments to the Board of Trustees at Northwest Florida State College

(NWFSC). Cory Fosdyck, Senior Vice President and Senior Resident Director for Merrill Lynch, is dedicated to community service. He's spearheaded initiatives at the Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center, offered his expertise to Ascension Sacred Heart Hospital, and once led the Walton County Chamber of Commerce. He is a Senior Vice President and Senior Resident Director for Merrill Lynch. Kristen "Rhea" Goff is the Chief Administrative Officer and a Senior Vice President of the St. Joe Company. Her influence extends to the Great Northwest Foundation in Florida, and she actively contributes to the South Walton High School's advisory board for business and culinary arts. Megan **Harrison** serves as President and Chief Executive Officer of the Walton County Chamber of Commerce. She's known for her work with the Walton County Economic Development Alliance and has strong ties to the Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association in the Northwest Florida Region. Returning to the board are **Donald Litke** and **Thomas "Rudy" Wright.** Litke, an esteemed Major General retiree of the U.S. Air Force, founded the Joyful Place Memory Care Ministry. Wright, another celebrated U.S. Air Force Major General retiree, made notable contributions at the NATO Headquarters in Belgium, earning him the Bronze Star. Note: These selections await the Florida Senate's nod.

Congratulations to the following schools in our area that completed all requirements to earn the Purple Star School of Distinction Designation from the 2023-24 school year through the 2025-26 school year: Okaloosa County-Liza Jackson Preparatory School and Rocky Bayou Christian School; Walton County— Van R. Butler Elementary School and Walton Initiative for Success in Education. To earn the Florida Purple Star School of Distinction Designation, schools are required to fulfill a list of several criteria that extensively support military

families which includes, but is not limited to, a school military webpage, transition program, staff professional development that meets the needs of military families and five percent open enrollment seats for military students and families.



Chief David Birch of East Bay, Chief Tommy Mayville of Niceville/ ValP fire district and Chief Byron Bennett of North Bay

On 9/11, **Niceville Republican Women** honored their 2023 Hometown Heroes: our area's three fire chiefs. President Jan Howard presented checks for \$650, a fireman trophy and cookies donated from Crumbl Cookies to each chief for their daily heroic service to our area.





Niceville Hearing Center

EXPERIENCE YOU CAN TRUST SINCE 1978



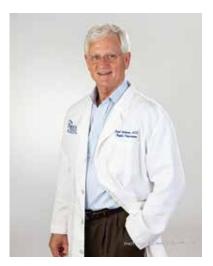
As a nation, we pause in November/December to honor our veterans, the courageous individuals who have dedicated their lives to serving this country. Niceville Hearing Center started on Eglin Air Force Base in 1978. We purchase our hearing supplies from the largest **American-owned manufacturer of hearing technologies**. Niceville Hearing Center is honored to support our nation's heroes. We thank those who have served and for their sacrifices they made to safeguard our freedom, and we remain steadfast in our commitment to honoring them to the best of our ability. Niceville Hearing Center looks forward to continuing to partner with **ALL VETERANS** to spread the gift of better hearing across our surrounding counties.

Niceville Hearing Center, Inc.

Valparaiso Medical Office Park 141-B South John Sims Parkway, Valparaiso, Florida 32580

850-830-0376

GrantEarCare@gmail.com Website: NicevilleHearingCenterInc.com



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Holiday Happenings Around the Bay

Visit Santa at **The Village** of **Baytowne Wharf** at his sleigh Dec. 6, 13 and 20 during the holiday concerts from 6-8 p.m. and during the Tuba Christmas event from 5-7 p.m. Dec. 9. www.baytownewharf. com.

Visit Santa at **Bass Pro Shop** at Destin Commons now through Dec. 24 (book at basspro.com) and at **HarborWalk Village** weekends until Dec. 17 from 1-4 p.m.

Baytowne on Ice | Now-Feb. 4 | Village of Baytowne Wharf

Dust off those skates and get ready for the holidays at The Village of Baytowne Wharf's Baytowne on Ice. Ice rink is open Now – Sunday, Feb. 4. Hours vary daily. Visit BaytowneWharf.com.

Festival of Trees | Now-Dec. 25 | Grand Boulevard

The Festival of Trees at Grand Boulevard at Sandestin runs Nov. 21 through Christmas Day 2023. Participating non-profit organizations compete to win cash prizes totaling \$7,000. Cast your vote for the People's Choice award. Festival of Trees is an annual event in the park at Grand Boulevard shopping center showcasing uniquely decorated Christmas trees from 12 local non-profit organizations.

Christmas Reflection Displays | Nov. 25-Dec. 31 | Defuniak Springs

The City of Defuniak Springs lights up Chipley Park lights with its annual Christmas Reflection Displays, a light display like no other in our area with more than 10 million lights reflecting on the lake and throughout the park. You can view the lights by walking, driving or even taking a horse-drawn carriage ride. A variety of Victorian, animal and toy soldier cutouts, Santa's workshop, and the grandfather clock ticking away are among the thousands of decorations that adorn these historic grounds. Admission is \$5 per person and children 5 and under are free. (850) 978-2999.

Merry Main Street | Nov. 25-Dec. 23 | Defuniak Springs

Free to attend, Merry Main Street boasts live music and theatrical performances, an outdoor market, food trucks, rides on the Choctaw Express Train, visits with Santa and Mrs. Claus, kids character appearances by The Character Clubhouse and more. Baldwin Ave. in downtown DeFuniak Springs. 5 p.m. Fridays and 3 p.m. Saturdays until Christmas. MainStreetDFS.org. (850) 296-9051.

Wesley House Holiday Guided Tours | Now-Jan. 9 | Eden State Gardens | Santa Rosa Beach

The Wesley House at Eden State Gardens will be open for holiday guided tours Thursday—Monday, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on an hourly basis. This year's theme is "A Victorian Christmas and all are invited to attend.

Nights of Lights | Dec. 1-31 | 6, 7 & 8 p.m. | Events Plaza Lawn

Enjoy a free, festive light show every night of December in The Village of Baytowne Wharf at Sandestin and featured during the special holiday edition of the Wednesday Night Concert Series. The tree lights in the events plaza will dance and blink to music at 6, 7 and 8 p.m. Visit BaytowneWharf.com.

Blue Christmas | Dec. 1 | 6 p.m. | Alaqua Animal Refuge

Swing to "The King's" Hits. Join Alaqua for a Las Vegas-style evening with the sensational Ron Adams Entertainment, also known as "the shadow of the king." Purchase tickets at: https://secure.givelively.org/event/alaqua-animal-refuge-inc/blue-christmas-a-night-with-ron-adams. Proceeds go directly towards the care and protection of animals. Visit https://www.facebook.com/AlaquaAnimalRefuge.

2023 Niceville Valparaiso Community Christmas Parade | Sat., Dec. 2 | 10 a.m.

The 2023 theme is "Create Hope in the World." Sponsored each year by the Niceville Valparaiso Rotary Club, the annual Christmas parade is made up of civic and youth groups, organizations, churches, businesses and individuals take part in the festive procession. Watch the parade on John Sims Pkwy. and Partin Dr. along the route. The Eagle Pride Marching Band is usually in the lead. Visit Niceville Valparaiso Rotary.org or its

Facebook page to participate or for more info.

Santa in the Park | Sat., Dec. 2 | 5-8 p.m. | Niceville Children's Park

Join Santa in the Park and meet the Jolly Old Elf himself. Enjoy a craft, face painting, refreshments and a whole lot of fun! Be sure to stop by the Police Department between 5 and 7 p.m. for Cocoa with a Cop!

Wonderland Luncheon | Dec. 2 | 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. | E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center

There will be a mimosa mixer, gourmet lunch, cookie swap, gingerbread house decorating and vendors to shop from. Purchase tickets at eowilsoncenter.

City of Freeport Christmas Parade & Tree Lighting | Sat., Dec. 2 | 5:15 p.m. | Freeport Elementary School

The 2023 themed "Many Faces of Christmas" annual parade assembly is between 2 and 4:45 p.m. Parade route is approx. 1.0 mile beginning at the school and ending at S.R. 20 and Blueberry Rd. The tree lighting will take place after the parade at Freeport City Hall. Live music, food and craft vendors and photos with Santa. To participate, submit an application and liability form at freeportflorida.gov. For questions: 850-333-7423.

7th Annual Troon Goon Christmas Lightshow | Dec. 2 - Jan. 5 | 6-9:30 p.m. | Bluewater Bay area



A free, residential graphic light show that combines classic Christmas songs with modern versions for a fun and energetic twist of entertainment. The hi-tech light animations dance to the music and feature the house, mega tree, arches and other standalone features for an unlimited amount of pixel com-

www.heritagegardensfuneralhome.com
2201 N. Partin Drive, Niceville, FL 32578

Restive procession. Watch the parade on John Sims Pkwy. and Partin Dr. along the route. The Eagle Pride Marching Band is usually in the lead. Visit Niceville Valparaiso Rotary organity.

Continued on page 12

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Community



DECEMBER 2023

Greater FWB Chamber First Friday Coffee 017 am | Christian Life Center at First Baptist Church | FWB Blue Christmas: A Night with Ron Adams 6 pm | Alaqua Animal Refuge | Freeport

Christmas at the Henry's 7 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville

Niceville-Valparaiso Community 02 Christmas Parade

10 am | Niceville

Xmas Ornaments and Acrylic Pour with Debi Profeta

10:30 am | Artful Things | Niceville

Wonderland Luncheon

11 am | E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center | Freeport

Live Music: Bluegrass 12 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville

Christmas Charity Ball Benefiting Caring & Sharing 6 pm | Cafe Thirty-A | Santa Rosa Beach

Freeport Christmas Parade & Tree Lighting 5:15 pm | Freeport

Beachy Little Christmas: A Sandcastle Spectacular

12 pm | The Island Resort | FWB

Niceville Monthly Cruise In

8 pm | Landsharks Pizza Company | Niceville

7th annual Troon Goon Christmas Lightshow 02-06 | 10 am | Niceville

Toast 'n Jam feat. Time for Three (Tf3) 03 | 10:30 am | Henderson Beach Resort | Destin

NWF Chapter of FRLA Golf Classic 04 7:30 am | Blackstone Golf Club | DeFuniak Springs

Niceville Young Professionals Lunch Meeting 05 11:30 am | Niceville-Valparaiso Chamber of Commerce

Anime and Drawing Basics with Chris McLoone 06 3:30 pm | Artful Things | Niceville

> Niceville-Valparaiso Chamber **Holiday After Hours**

5 pm | Tru by Hilton Niceville Eglin Air Force Base | Niceville Preserve Bluewater Bay Community Briefings

6 pm | Bluewater Bay Clubhouse | Niceville

Christmas Bird Count by Malcolm Swan from Choctawhatchee Audubon Society 6:30 pm | Crosspoint Church | Niceville

Holiday Pops feat. Brian Stokes Mitchell 80 7:30 pm | Destin-FWB Convention Center | FWB **Pottery Ornaments Class** 4 pm & 6 pm | Big Orange House Designs | Niceville

Lights & Latkes 09 5 pm | Seaside Assembly Hall

FWB Community Chorus Christmas Memories 17 08-7 pm | FWB Civic Auditorium 09

-80 A Christmas Carol

Times Vary | Emerald Coast Theatre Co. 22

8th Annual Niceville Ugly Sweater Run/Walk 09 8 am | Hurricane Grill and Wings | Niceville

Pottery Ornaments Class

9 am & 11 am | Big Orange House Designs | Niceville

Women's Climbing Circle

9 am | E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center | Freeport

Winter Extravaganza

9 am | Rock Out Climbing Gym | Destin

Christmas Craft and "Elf" Movie Screening 10 am | The Island Resort | FWB

Yule of Yestervear

10 am | Heritage Museum of NWF | Valparaiso

Holiday Wine Tasting Gala 5 pm | MJ's Place | Niceville

Holiday Bazaar 10

11 am | Alaqua Animal Refuge | Freeport

FWB Community Chorus Christmas Memories 3 pm | FWB Civic Auditorium

ASMC Holiday 5K Fun Run/Walk 3 pm | LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant | Niceville

Niceville-Valparaiso Chamber 13 Second Wednesday Breakfast 7:30 am | Niceville Community Center | Niceville

> Anime and Drawing Basics with Chris McLoone

3:30 pm | Artful Things | Niceville

Wheel of Fortune Live!

7 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville

Greater FWB Chamber Nothing But Networking 11:30 am | The Bavarian's Wirtshaus | FWB

1 year Anniversary SALE 9 am | CALM Furniture Resale | Niceville

Cookies and Crafts with the Grump 16

12 pm | The Island Resort | FWB

Victorian Christmas Tea

1 pm | Heritage Museum of NWF | Valparaiso

A Jingle Jangle Christmas Musical Revue 2:30 pm | Emerald Coast Theatre Co.

Cookies and Crafts with the Grump 12 pm | The Island Resort | FWB

Preserve Bluewater Bay Community Briefings 19 6 pm | Bluewater Bay Clubhouse | Niceville

> A Jingle Jangle Christmas Musical Revue 7:30 pm | Emerald Coast Theatre Co.

Anime and Drawing Basics with Chris McLoone 20 3:30 pm | Artful Things | Niceville

Greater FWB Chamber's Holiday Party 5:30 pm | The Harvey F. Eckhoff VFW Post 7674 | FWB

A Jingle Jangle Christmas Musical Revue 7:30 pm | Emerald Coast Theatre Co.

Comedy Open Mic 27 7 pm | Strange Colt Brewery | Niceville

DEC. 01 - JAN. 09

A Victorian Christmas

Tours Daily | Wesley House at Eden State Gardens

ONGOING EVENTS

Oils and Acrylics with Rosalyn O'Grady 10 am | Tuesdays | Artful Things | Niceville

Watercolor Techniques with Theresia McInnis 12:45 pm | Tuesdays | Artful Things | Niceville

One-Stroke Basics (Level 2) with Shelia Mahony

10 am | Fridays | Artful Things | Niceville

Open Mic & Karaoke Night

6 - 10 pm | Thursdays | LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant & Oyster Bar | Niceville

Photos with Santa & Horse-Drawn Carriage Rides

5 - 9 pm | Fridays & Saturdays | Grand Boulevard at Sandestin | Miramar Beach

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

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

Grand Boulevard - Saturdays December 2, 9, 16, 23, 30

9 am - 1 pm | Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach











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HOLIDAYS

continued from page 10

binations. The 30-minute show starts every hour and half-hour. It's a different show every year and you can vote online for your favorite song versions while you watch. View from your vehicle while listening on your car stereo at 101.3 FM. The light-show will run nightly from Visit http://www.troongoonchristmas.com or Facebook for the latest news.

"Geek Lights on the Corner" | 6-9:30 p.m.-Sun.-Thurs. | 10:30 p.m. Fri., Sat. & holiday eves

Located at the corner of Bluewater Blvd. and Antiqua Way in Bluewater Bay, the shows loop every 30 minutes starting at 6 p.m., with the last show starting at 9:30 p.m. Sun.-Thurs., and 10:30 p.m. Fri., Sat. and holiday eves. Now in its 16th year, the free show consists of Christmas lights and other themed display elements, all under computer control and synchronized to music and usually is lighted and available to the public through the first week of January. All donations this



year will support Healing Paws for Warriors. The show is the technical and creative wizardry of Jeff Werner, the "Northwest Florida Geek" and Wendy Werner, his "spouse peripheral." FaceBook.com/GeekLightsOn-TheCorner. geeklights@gmail.com

Toast 'n Jam | Sun., Dec. 3 | 10:30 a.m. | Henderson Beach Resort, Crystal Ballroom Destin

The first "jam" session features the Grammy Award-winning string trio, Time For Three (TF3). Tickets are \$95 per person and includes valet service, an elegant brunch, Bloody Mary and Mimosa full cash bar.

Holiday Concert Series + Visits with Santa | Dec. 6, 13 & 20 | 6-8 p.m.

Tap your feet to some of your favorite sing-a-long classics every Wednesday in December at the Holiday edition of The Village of Baytowne Wharf's Wednesday Night Concert Series. Each concert features visits with Santa.

December 6 | Fort Walton Beach High School Choir

December 13 | Alissa Steffens Vocal Studios

December 20 | Matt McCarty Band



A Christmas Carol | Dec. 8 - Dec. 22

From the first "Bah humbug" to the final "Wassail," this timeless classic is sure to rekindle your holiday spirit. Join all your favorite Dickens characters—Tiny Tim and the Cratchit family, the Fezziwigs, the Ghosts of Christmas past, present and yet-to-come, and of course, everyone's favorite curmudgeon, Ebenezer Scrooge.

560 Grand Boulevard, 2nd Floor, Miramar Beach. Purchase tickets: emeraldcoasttheatre.org.

Holiday Pops | Fri., Dec. 8 | 7:30 p.m. | Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center

Features Brian Stokes Mitchell, dubbed "the last leading man" by The New York Times, Sinfonia's main event of the season featuring this A-list star will perform holiday classics, Broadway tunes and classic favorites with the Sinfonia Gulf Coast orchestra.

Stokes is a two-time Tony Award winner with a versatile career spanning Broadway, television, film and concerts. Receiving critical acclaim and awards for his performances in Kiss Me, Kate, Man of La Mancha, and Ragtime, Stokes has collaborated with renowned conductors like John Williams and Gustavo Dudamel performing at Carnegie Hall and the White House. Some of you might remember him as Trevor in The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air. Tickets range from \$30-\$75 for adults. Seats at tables of 10 are from \$55 per person.

Seaside Pops | Sat., Dec. 9 | 5 p.m. | Seaside Amphitheatre

Sinfonia Gulf Coast presents a concert featuring seasonal and pop favorites in the Town of Seaside. Bring a low-back chair or blanket. Seaside Pops is free and open to the public.

Winter Extravaganza | Dec. 9 | 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. | E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center

Join the Center for games, food trucks, animal encounters and even a visit from Santa Claus himself! Don't forget to bring a coat for the coat drive this year! Tickets: \$10 for adults,

 $Continued\ on\ next page$



Community

HOLIDAYS

continued from previous page

\$7 for ages 4–12. eowilsoncenter.org. 4956 State Hwy. 20 E. Freeport, FL

Yule of Yesteryear | Sat., Dec. 9 | 10 a.m.-4 p.m. | Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida

Enjoy carols, food vendors, craft vendors, Walton guard reenactors, school choir groups, bake sale, raffle ticket prizes, letters to Santa and more! 115 Westview Ave., Perrine Park, Valparaiso.

Christmas Concert | Dec. 10 | 4-5:30 p.m. | Crosspoint Church Niceville

Enjoy a free evening of festive, holiday music featuring the Crosspoint Chancel Choir, Orchestra, Chamber Ensemble, Flute Choir and Hand bell Choir and includes a wide variety of musical styles entertaining to all ages. Everyone is welcome!

Niceville High School Chorus Holiday Concert | Mon., Dec. 11 | 7 p.m. | Mattie Kelly Arts Center

This concert features holiday favorites from all seven Niceville choirs, plus special guest singers from Bluewater Elementary, Edge Elementary, Lewis School and Plew Elementary. Tickets available at gofan.co. www. nicevillechorus.com.

Live Nativity | Thurs., Dec. 14 – Wed., Dec. 20 | 6-8:30 p.m. each night |corner of 2nd St., and Church Ave.

First Baptist Church of Fort Walton Beach will present the FREE, 35th Live Nativity cele-



bration next to the First Baptist Church sanctuary. Parking is available in the church parking lot. When you walk through, you can have a photo taken with Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus, as well as the three wise men. Your photo will be waiting for you as you depart. In the Shepherd's Field, the visitors can pet and feed the miniature donkeys, sheep and Naomi the Camel!

A Jingle Jangle Christmas Musical Revue | Sat., Dec. 16-2.30 p.m. | Tues., Dec. 19-7.30 p.m. | Thurs., Dec. 21 -7.30 p.m.

Enjoy classic holiday songs from some of your favorite Christmas musicals like "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas," "Snow" and, of course, "White Christmas." The cast will invite you to join in some beloved Christmas carols as well.

560 Grand Boulevard, Grand Boulevard Town Center, 2nd Floor, Miramar Beach. Purchase tickets: emeraldcoasttheatre.org.

LuLu's Annual Billy Claus and The LuLuBelles | Sat., Dec. 16 | 3 to 5 p.m.

Free photos with Billy Claus

and the LuLuBelles as well as crafts and treats. Billy Claus is Santa's warm weather-loving brother who lives in the Caribbean, but comes this way every vear to help Santa during the holiday season. The LuLuBelles are Billy's version of Santa's elves. The children's book written by LuLu's owner, Lucy Buffett, "Billy Claus and the Spirit of Christmas Island" is available in the gift shop or on-line. From 5 to 7 p.m., enjoy the movie, Dr. Suess' The Grinch. Come back on Dec. 20 for the Christmas movie, The Polar Express at 6 p.m. with free crafts and treats. 850-710-5858.

A Victorian Christmas Tea | Sat., Dec. 16 | 1-3 p.m. | The Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida

Members \$20; Non-members \$25. 115 Westview Ave., Valparaiso.

LJ Schooners' 7th Annual Santa Paddle Parade | Sat., Dec. 16, | Noon | Bluewater Bay Marina

All paddlers welcome; if you can paddle it, bring it! Paddle on

a stand-up paddle board, canoe, kayak, paddle boat or surf skis. Group photo is at noon with paddle starting at 12:10 p.m. Santa Clauses leave BlueWater Bay Marina and paddle east to Rocky Bayou Bridge, north to North Shore of Rocky Bayou and back to the marina. Registration \$10 or 15 canned goods. Must paddle in Santa suit and provide your own suit. Proceeds benefit Sharing and Caring of Niceville. To register, call Bluewater Bay Marina Ship Store at (850) 897-2821 or visit bluewaterbaymarina.com.

Annual Christmas Boat Parade | Sat., Dec. 16 | 5:30 p.m. | Bluewater Bay Marina

Skippers meeting at 4 p.m.; parade staging at 5 p.m. The parade course exits Bluewater Bay Marina north to Nelson's Cove, around Rocky Bayou, south to the Rocky One marker and then returns to Bluewater Bay Marina. Boats must pre-register. After the Boat Parade, LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant will host a Christmas party with DJ Christ Saylor, 6-10 p.m.; ugly sweater contest at 9 p.m. Call 850-897-2821 or visit bluewaterbaymarina.com to register.

2023 Niceville Val'p Rotary Christmas Boat Parade | Sun., Dec. 17 | 5:30 p.m. | Emerald Coast Marine

The boat parade will feature a traditional display of fun onboard holiday-themed lights and decorations. Festivities include complimentary hot cocoa, a visit from Santa Claus and Mrs. Claus and the elves, provided by the Rotary. The parade route travels southwest from Emerald Coast Marine to Tom's Bayou, past Lincoln Park, then east toward Lions Park, returning back to Emerald Coast Marine. All proceeds raised benefit Sharing and Caring Niceville. For more information, visit nicevillevalparaisorotary.org.

Noon Year's Eve | Dec. 31 | 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. | LuLu's Restaurant

Noon Year's Eve is just for kids at LuLu's Destin. It's the 8th annual Noon Year's Eve celebration Tues., Dec. 31, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. with non-stop, free kid-friendly fun. There will be arts and crafts, inflatables, face painting, live music and more. Kids can have their fun by counting down to Noon with kid-safe "fireworks" and a huge Beach Ball Drop. Visit LulusFunFoodMusic.com/destin or call (850) 710-5858.

Rockin' New Year's Eve Party | Sun., Dec. 31 | 9 p.m.-1 a.m. | LJ Schooners

Ring in 2024! Dance the night away with DJ Diamond Dan, Roaring 20s! Dinner specials will run from 5–10 p.m.

Baytowne Countdown | Sun., Dec. 31 | The Village of Baytowne Wharf

Two breathtaking fireworks displays at 8 p.m. and midnight. Enjoy a family-friendly evening from 6-8 p.m. with face painting, kids' activities and LIVE music on the Baytowne LIVE stage. Dance the night away with LIVE music from DJ Q\$, 7 p.m. until 1 a.m. at the Events Plaza Stage! End the night with spectacular fireworks. *21 & over after 10 p.m. 20 & under must be accompanied by a legal guardian after 10 p.m.







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Which Medicare Enrollment Period is Right for You?



By Greg Durette

Eventually, if you are lucky, you will find yourself needing to make the transition from traditional insurance to Medicare. Knowing when you qualify to first enroll and when to make changes later on can prove a bit confusing. But, it is critical to make sure you make the right moves at the right time. Missed opportunities, and sometimes even monetary penalties which could last a lifetime, might otherwise result.



So, let's get right after it, shall we?

There are four types of enrollment periods for Medicare. For the purposes of this article, I will use the term "Medicare" to apply to Advantage Plans, Supplement Plans and Stand-Alone Prescription Plans, unless otherwise noted. Those Enrollment Periods are:

- Initial Enrollment Period
- Special Election Period
- Annual Election Period
- Open Enrollment Period

The first Enrollment Period you will encounter is called the Initial Enrollment Period, or IEP for short. As the name indicates, this is when you are aging into eligibility for Medicare. The IEP is different for everyone as it starts three months before the month in which you turn age 65 and runs until three months after the month in which you turn age 65.

The IEP does expose you to a potential lifelong penalty if you fail to enroll in Part B and a Prescription Plan. Those penalties would apply after you eventually did enroll late and accrue every month after your IEP ended. The penalties will stop accumulating after you get the proper coverage arrangement. Important note: These penalties will not apply to you if you have other Qualifying coverage through work or a spouse.

The second Enrollment Period you may encounter is a Special Election Period, or SEP for short. This Enrollment Period is for certain types of special events such as moving to a different coverage area or losing your employer or union coverage. The SEP timing is, again, unique to everyone as every situation is unique to the person. This Enrollment Period lasts for three months after the month in which the qualifying special event occurred.

The third Enrollment Period you will encounter is the An-

nual Election Period, or AEP. Every year, from October 15th through December 7th, you can switch plans, drop coverage or change companies for your Medicare coverage. You can also join a Medicare plan if you missed the window for the IEP or SEP described earlier.

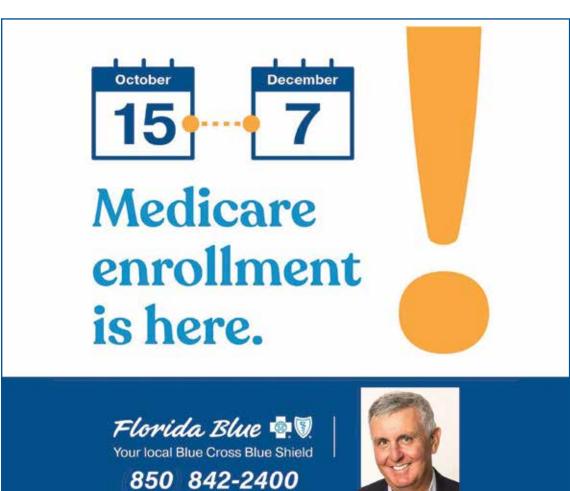
It is important to note, any Medicare plan elections you make during the AEP will become effective on January 1st of the following year.

The fourth and final Enrollment Period you will encounter is the Open Enrollment Period, or OEP. Depending on the type of Medicare plan you have (or don't have), you may be allowed to make a one-time election to switch a plan (Advantage Plan) or purchase a plan (Supplement Plan and/or Stand-Alone Prescription Plan. The OEP runs from January 1st through March 31st every year.

Deciphering all this can be somewhat confusing. Using a broker with experience in such matters will be your best bet. If you have been using a broker that worked with you on your under-age-65 plan, that person would be your best first telephone call, provided they also work in the Medicare field as I do. Often times, folks will look to move that under age 65 policy to a broker that works with Medicare at least three to four years prior to becoming eligible for Medicare just to help make the transition as smooth as pos-

Know your Enrollment Periods or get someone that does and your transition will be as easy as Key Lime pie!

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





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Area Local Awarded Quilt of Valor

By Barbara Palmgren

There are times when I am humbled. There are times when I am awe struck. October 30, 2023, was one of those times. I watched Constance Newhouse being awarded a special honor that comes once in a lifetime: The Quilt of Valor. This event was held at the Fort Walton Beach Library to a round of applause by her community and especially members of the Flying Needles Quilt Guild.

Barbara Ouellette, Guild Coordinator and presenter for the Northwest Florida area, representing the Quilt of Valor Foundation, submitted the application for this honor after receiving a nomination for Constance from her friend, Sandy Stinson. The award can only be given to someone who is living and is a veteran or active-duty personnel with certain requisite criteria. The application



is submitted and reviewed at a state level. When approved, the award must be given at an award presentation ceremony. The Florida State Coordinator appoints a representative from the nominees' area of residence which in this case was the Flying Needles Quilt Guild. The nominee is contacted by the Quilt of Valor representative and arrangements are made to include a date, time and location of where the nominee would



like to be awarded the Quilt of Valor.

The recipient is awarded a special quilt that is hand or machine stitched. Sandy saw a Quilt of Valor on exhibit at the library a few months ago and contacted members of the Flying Needles Quilt Guild and asked that this quilt be the one awarded to Constance. This quilt was pieced by two members of the guild, Peggy Murrel and Shirley Carter and quilted

by Rainbow Quilting of Niceville. Constance is a veteran of the United States Air Force and served during the Korean Conflict from 1952-1954. She proudly comes from a strong military background with generations of over 145 years combined family members who served in various branches of the service. Constance shared photos of several of her relatives at the awards ceremony.

The Flying Needles Quilt Guild is non-profit organization. Its mission statement is as follows: The purpose of this organization is to preserve and continue the traditions, culture and history of quilting. The organization serves the general public by donations to other community service organizations. The organization will serve as a source of information and inspiration in quilting and related arts through the edu-

cation of its members and the public in general by means of exhibitions, lectures, demonstrations, and workshops. The organization will encourage the heritage of quilt making and quilt collecting. The organization will be a gathering for people with this shared interest.

The guild's focus on charity work is evident in the handiwork available for purchase: quilts, stockings, bags and pillowcases. They also donate items to various charities.

The Flying Needles Quilting Guild was personally thanked on the presentation plaque given to Constance in addition to the lovely Quilt of Valor itself.

It's all about giving and caring for the community through a labor of love and talent by this special non-profit. Congratulations Constance Newhouse for your work for our military.

Heritage Museum of NW Florida Receives Impact 100 Grant

After seven years of applying for this grant, on Sunday, November 5, 2023, the Heritage Museum of NW Florida was one of four non-profits to receive the Impact 100 grant of \$100,000. For seven years the museum applied for a room addition to the overcrowded museum that houses historical artifacts from the entire Northwest Florida region. This seventh year was the charm!

The museum has collected and will continue to collect contributions to help fund the remaining costs of \$75,000 for the construction of the building. Businesses and individuals who would like to be part of this lifelong dream can phone the museum and make a contribution between \$200 to \$5,000. The phone number for the museum is 850-678-2615. Contributions are tax deductible because the museum is a 501C3 non-profit. All contributors will be recognized in a permanent placard or art work. Once ground breaks for the project, it should take less than 12 months to complete.

The museum has a warehouse full of artifacts dating back to early Native Indian



Susan Page and Barbara Palmgren

tribes. The museum plans to organize the Vietnam Refugee Camp Exhibit as the first exhibit in the Impact 100 Exhibit Hall. This area was one of four in the nation to house refugees after the end of the Vietnam War in the mid-1970's.

Museum trustee, Dr. Barbara Palmgren, has been involved over seven years with the application process for this grant. In particular, she credits this year's trustee Susan Page and volunteer Jean Schlitt for their work with writing and collecting data for the 2023 application. She also thanks all the trustees and museum management who continue to work tirelessly on behalf of presenting local history

to the public

They say "all good things come to those who wait." The Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida has certainly waited patiently, spending hours each year writing a grant to expand the museum and share its treasures.

This effort will now benefit the community of Northwest Florida as well as the museum itself.





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Rudolph is Missing

By Kenneth Books

A Shocking Discovery

It was a perfect day at the North Pole the day before Christmas. Snow blew nearly sideways across the windows of Santa's house. The panes were frosted like so many cakes. The thermometer hadn't gone as high as zero in two weeks.

Santa rose from his bed early that day, as had been his habit for thousands of years. The only day of the year that was busier than the day before Christmas was Christmas itself.

Before the day was done, Santa knew he would have to inspect tens of thousands of toys and gifts, taste hundreds of goodies, check a pile of lists that nearly reached to the ceiling of his workshop and spend hours helping his army of elves to load his sleigh.

Besides all that, there were the usual chores to take care of. He pulled on his long johns and covered them with his heavy, fur-lined red suit. He topped his flowing white hair with his pointed cap, donned his thick leather boots, combed out his white beard and strode through the waist-deep snow to the heated stable, a bag of reindeer feed on his shoulder.

It was Santa's habit to feed his eight tiny reindeer and Rudolph before he had his own morning meal. He could wait, but he knew a bowl of reindeer feed was one of the high points of their day. "Here you go, Dasher," Santa cooed, rubbing a gloved hand over the bridge of the nose of the first magical reindeer and pouring a generous portion of deluxe food into his bowl. "Now, Dancer," he

said, as the next deer poked his nose into Santa's pocket to see if there were any extra goodies today.

Santa moved briskly down the line of spotless stalls, pouring large amounts of reindeer feed, which included such delicacies as pineapple, figs, candied cherries and apples. Comet, then Cupid, then Donner and Blitzen got their breakfasts and dug in gratefully. Prancer, who always ate too fast, and Vixen, who ate slowly and almost delicately, happily began their meal.

As he came to the southern end of the stable, Santa stopped, looked and stood dumbfounded. There he saw a spacious stall, filled with warm, comfortable hay that no one had slept on. Hanging on a hook in the corner was a large bottle of glass polish.

Santa turned and dashed at top speed from the stable. He fairly glided over the deep snow as he zoomed toward the house with its gingerbread decorations. Santa was running so fast he couldn't stop in time. He crashed into the door, bounced off and landed in a snow bank. He shook his head once to clear it, flung the door open and shouted: "Mother! Call the Royal North Pole Mounted Police! Rudolph has been kidnapped!

The Investigation

The mood was somber in the Clause household. With Rudolph missing, Santa dreaded his annual trip around the world. If he should run into fog or a storm, he would have to fly his sleigh on experience and instinct, just as he did in the old days before Rudolph came to him



But Santa, the elves and the other eight reindeer were depressed for reasons besides the difficulty of the trip ahead. Rudolph had become a family favorite, always ready with a prank and also always reader to lend a hoof and get whatever needed doing done. After the annual Christmas Eve delivery around the world, some of the other reindeer would sometimes be dog-tired and cranky (we won't say which ones). But Rudolph was always cheerful, even when he had bags under his eyes from lack of sleep. That was because Rudolph remembered the days when his bright, glowing nose made him the butt of jokes. All that had changed the night Santa took him onto the team, and Rudolph never forgot.

But now Rudolph was missing. And standing in the Claus living room was Inspector Holly Carroll, one of the finest detectives in the Royal North Pole Mounted Police.

Santa, Mrs. Claus, the elves and even the reindeer tried hard to answer all of Holly's questions. But there weren't many answers they could give. Rudolph seemed fine the night before when he and the other reindeer went into the heated stable after a day of frolicking. He gave Santa his usual good night lick on the nose. None of the other reindeer had heard or seen anything out of the ordinary. Of course, the night before Christmas Eve, the reindeer routinely slept well as something inside them told them they had better stock up on rest for the night ahead.

The snow had blown hard all night. So, if there had been footprints outside the stable, they were long covered over. And the sound of the wind would have drowned out almost any other noise.

In short, Rudolph was missing and there was not a clue to his whereabouts. "What makes you think Rudolph has been kidnapped?" Holly asked. "He's always been so reliable," Santa said. "It's not like Rudolph just to take off like this. And last night, of all nights!" He dropped his bearded chin into his hand with a moan.

Holly asked the last of her questions, then put her hand on Santa's shoulder. "I'm sorry, Santa," she said. "There's nothing for me to go on. That doesn't mean I'll give up — I'll never give up until we find Rudolph. But there's not much chance you'll have him back in time for tonight's ride." Santa nodded sadly and patted Holly's hand. He understood she was doing all she could. Unfortunately, given the lack of clues, that wasn't much!

Santa moved slowly, as if he were carrying a heavy load on his back, as he stood up and went to the workshop. Rudolph or no Rudolph, he had a job to do, a job he hadn't neglected in more than 2,000 years. And Rudolph or no Rudolph, this was not the year he was going to start neglecting it.

Despair

The afternoon before Christmas, the workshop was a quiet as a workshop can be. The labor of building toys, assembling packages, filling sacks and loading the sleigh went on in as sprightly a manner as ever, but there was a dark cloud over the proceedings.

Continued on page 26





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It's the time of year when our families all come together to share our wonderful holidays. What better time to transform your home into its best celebration mode!

Here are but a few suggestions to give your home a cozy and festive glow:

Dress up the front door with a floral wreath or colorful holiday arrangement and light

the walkway with luminaries or plenty of outdoor lighting.

The foyer deserves special attention since this is where the first impressions are made. The front hall must be welcoming with good lighting and perhaps a holiday arrangement on the hall table. Mirrors and candlelight will brighten a foyer nicely, and the perfect area rug can add a luxurious touch. Perhaps this is the year to consider an elegant wall covering in your entryway. Holidays are the time of year to display your most elaborate accessories in all their glitzy glory.

Since family and friends usually settle into the **living or family room, careful attention should be paid** to the arrangement of your furniture. Is the furniture grouped for the best conversational arrangement? Is there plenty of room to traverse the area? Are there easily accessible places for elderly guests to sit?

In the dining room, your goal should be a stimulat-



ing ambiance for dining, conversation and fun. Drape the table with festive holiday linens. For an enchanting combination, cover your table with two table cloths—a richly colored solid base cloth topped with a beautiful sheer cloth sprinkled with "sparkly things" appropriate for the holiday. The centerpiece should be special, but low-profiled since you don't want it to be a detriment to conversation. Candlesticks are perfect. Mixing and matching your china and silver pieces can be a charming

Niceville, FL

and eclectic way to enjoy those special heirlooms.

If your family likes to gather in the kitchen (and whose doesn't?), make sure there are attractive accessories such as bowls of fruits, candies, pastries or flowers in view. Keep a kettle of Aroma Punch on your range top to provide that special holiday aroma throughout your home.

If you will have overnight guests, make them feel welcome by **enhancing the guest room** with fresh flowers. Hol-

iday-themed throw pillows on the bed add a cozy dimension. A good reading light and water carafe by the bed are thoughtful touches. Remember to put out plush towels and extra toiletries for your guests.

There are dozens more ways to make your guests and family feel at home for the holidays. Put your own family's customs into everything you do. Preparing to welcome friends to your home is a lot of fun, and ensures a memorable visit for you and your special guests.

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Absolute Thai Cafe (Valparaiso)

Spice things up at Absolute Thai Restaurant, serving up an authentic taste of Thailand. Under new ownership since June 2023, owner Dao welcomes you to a mix of Thai elegance and simplicity, first rate and creative food, with experienced and skilled chefs in the kitchen straight from Thailand. The menu features classic Thai dishes, but also some creative specialties that are well worth trying. Blending exotic condiments and diverse spices that will whet any appetite, try the garlic fish, Thai Sweet & Sour or one of the popular Curries. House specialties include Crying Tiger: Thai style grilled steak with chili powder dipping sauce served with vegetables; Teriyaki Salmon: Grilled salmon topped with teriyaki sauce served with steam vegetables; and Sizzling Chiangmai: Mushroom, onion, raisins, pineapple, bell pepper and cashew nut with your choice of meat served in hot pan.

"We are pleased to invite all customers to come and try our food which are all special menu," said Dao. "We flew over 10,000 miles from our country and we are now ready to serve you here!"

Dine in, Pick up or Delivery. Lunch Specials Mon-Fri 11 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Order all menu items online from Absolute Thai Cafe (Valparaiso) for takeout. Hours: Mon. – Fri. 11 a.m. - 2:30 p.m., 4 p.m. - 8.30 p.m.; Closed Sat.-Sun.

139 N John Sims Pkwy.



Valparaiso, FL 32580 (850) 389-4813

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-akind entertainment experience, and one that can be enjoyed by kids and families of all ages.

(850) 654-4200
20001 Emerald Coast Pkwy.
Destin
fulpucker.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" this holiday season. Stop in for cinnamon rolls; scones: cranberry orange, chocolate caramel and cheddar thyme; strawberry coffee cake; cranberry orange muffins; red velvet cookies; brownies with espresso ganache or caramelitas. Try a breakfast special with a piece of quiche or kolache-hashbrown casserole. Breakfast burritos are rolled and ready daily. Choose from andouille, bacon, chorizo or veggie. Or tantalize your taste buds with a madeto-order breakfast sandwich on croissants or bagel with two eggs and cheese and then choose if you want to add Jojo's homemade smoked jalapeño beef bologna, bacon, house smoked barbecue or ham. Cinnamon rolls and kaloches still hold the top spot for sell outs. Stop in for featured muffins, coffee cake or pound cake, which go great with maple cinnamon latte or caramel macchiato. And, oh, the freshly roasted coffee. Order ahead and pick up some for the office, Christmas or New Year's breakfast to accompany your holiday offerings!

Hours 7:30 a.m.-2 p.m. Tues-day-Saturday

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LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant

Suds, Songs and Sunsets! Welcome to LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant at the Bluewater Bay Marina Complex. Named

Continued on next page





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LOCAL DINING

continued from previous page

after "LJ Schooner" (the LJ is for Lazy Jack), a cherished fourlegged 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.

Sunday Brunch: 9 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Dec. 6: Chess Night 6 p.m. Dec. 13: Prime Rib Night: 5-9 p.m., Wine Tasting 5-7 p.m.

Dec. 17: Brunch with Santa 10 a.m. -1 p.m. **Dec. 20:** The Traveling

Painter 5:30 p.m.

Dec. 31: New Year's Eve

Dec. 31: New Year's Eve Dinner Specials 5-10 p.m., Party with DJ Diamond Dan, 9 p.m.-1 a.m. "Roaring 20s!"

Dine-in, pick-up, to-go. Oys-

ter bar hours: Monday-Tuesday closed. Wednesday-Thursday, 3-10 p.m.; Friday-Saturday, 11 a.m.-midnight; Sunday, Noon-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.-1 p.m. Sunday brunch, 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

(850) 897-6400 bluewaterbaymarina.com/schoo-

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. Embrace the Autumn season with the "Apples to Apples" cocktail. The craft drink is made with apple brandy (our mixologists prefer Conquerel Fine Calvados), Massenez Green Apple Liqueur honey syrup, lemon juice, apple bitters and cardamom bitters, garnished with a cinnamon stick and lemon wheel to top it all off.

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.

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Landshark's Pizza

Hungry? Thirsty? Maybe a little of both? Come in and visit Landshark's Pizza. Owners Brian and Sue Hassmann have created the locals' favorite pizza, buffalo wings and sports pub and bar that serves great pizza and awesome wings, plus many other scrumptious eats for folks

of all ages. There's plenty of seating for everyone and TVs galore, plus fun and games all week long. Sports fans from all over come and watch all their favorite teams on countless regional and national sports networks. With a fully stocked bar serving up dozens of different bourbons and many different cold beers on draft, it's no secret why the locals love Landshark's Pizza Company.

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Nana's Black Chocolate Coffee Cake for Christmas!

From Venice Irene Cleckler Leath

By Lori Leath Smith

For many, this time of year evokes childhood memories of holiday smells, tastes and favorite "eats." So, I want to offer one of my own—Nana's Chocolate Coffee Cake. Whenever I think of this cake, it reminds me of exciting holiday vacations with my Nana and Papa John in Rome, Ga. Nana always prepared this cake, a tradition at Thanksgiving and Christmas and it is, seemingly, very different from any cake

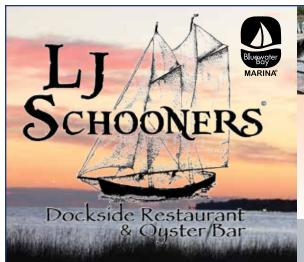
I've ever had

One of the fondest memories surrounding this cake is my cousin, Leta (a year younger than me), and I sneaking down the stairs and into the kitchen during the night to snatch another piece! We gave Nana fits over this (and other things, too!). After many, many years, I decided to make it this Thanksgiving. Many of the smells and sweet memories rolled back into my being and it was delightful. I want to pass this along

to my children and grandchildren as well.

Keep in mind, this is an antique recipe with real old-fashioned ingredients—amateur cook tested with success; but, to my knowledge, not Southern Living tested. I use the exact amounts below. But, for example, you can add more confectioner's sugar for the icing, my favorite part, if desired. It might be fun to double

Continued on next page



Santa Paddle Parade Dec. 16

Let's fill Rocky Bayou with Santas!

Registration \$10 or 15 canned goods.

Must paddle in Santa suit
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12 PM Group Photo | 12:10 Start

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Call (850) 897-2821 to register or visit www.bluewaterbaymarina.com

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Parade 5:30 PM | DJ Christ Saylor 6-10 PM
Ugly Sweater Contest 9 PM

More Upcoming Fun!

December 6: Chess Night 6pm

December 13: Prime Rib Night 5-9pm, Wine Tasting 5-7pm

December 17: Brunch with Santa - Brunch 9am-1pm, Santa 10am-1pm

December 20: The Traveling Painter 5:30pm

December 31: New Years Eve Dinner Specials 5-10pm, Party with DJ Diamond Dan, 9pm-1am – Roaring 20s

Oyster Bar Hours: Mon.-Tues. Closed, Wed.-Thurs. 3pm-10pm, Fri.-Sat. 11am to midnight, Sun. 12pm to 9pm **Restaurant Hours:** Mon.-Tues. Closed, Weds.-Sat. 11am to 9pm, Sun. 9am to 1pm, Sunday Brunch 9am to 1pm



Winter Fishing

By Cali Hlavac, To Do In Destin

As colder temps roll in, we start to target more inshore species – specifically Flounder, Redfish and Trout. The cooler weather means the fish will school up in one area, making them easier to catch once you track them down.

Flounder will be in the Bay and Gulf this month, as November and December feature some of the best flounder action of the year. The move here allows them to settle on natural and artificial reefs to spawn at this time.

Because of their shape, flounder are typically always found on the bottom, where they can burrow into sand to await prey. They hang within 200 yards off the beach, typically at depths of 20 to 60 feet. Common flounder species in the Gulf of Mexico



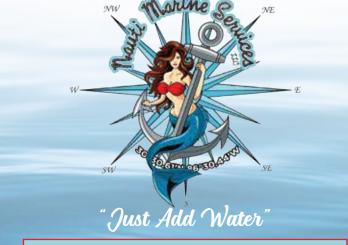
are the Gulf Flounder and the Southern Flounder, and odds are the latter will be a much larger fish – with the female Southern Flounder maxing out around 28 inches. One of the best things about targeting flounder is that they like to come back for your bait if they miss it the first time. So, just hold out and wait on them!

As for Trout, find them deeper water this time of year, specifically around deep water boat docks, bridges, deep holes in the bayous and channels. Fish for these using live shrimp, pinfish, and croakers on a Carolina rig or under a popping cork. Try

a slow troll to find the fish, with a shrimp soft tail plastic jig, and then once you get a hit, switch to live bait to maximize your chances at a bite.

Another favorite to catch are Bull Redfish, which show up in droves during winter months. Find them in the passes, deep channels, deep-water bridges and schooled up on the beaches. These bull reds are fun to catch and release as the bigger size means they put up a bigger fight. Use lures or live bait, as what they prefer will vary day to day. The larger size also means they're spawning. So, handle these fish with care. Use circle hooks and a net to control the fish and release them safely.

Winter fishing rivals warm weather fishing here. So, if you can handle the cooler weather, you're sure to have a great time on the water!



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CAKE

continued from previous page

the icing recipe for more!)

I hope you enjoy this delight as much as we did and still do. Merry Christmas!

Cake:

8 tablespoons Cocoa ½ cup Butter unsalted 2 cups Granulated Sugar 2 cups All-Purpose Flour 1 ½ teaspoon Baking Soda 1 cup Buttermilk 1 cup Boiling Water ½ teaspoon Salt 2 Eggs

Melt chocolate in boiling water. Add ½ cup of butter. Mix 2 cups of sugar, ½ teaspoon salt,



2 cups of flour and baking soda, and sift together. Beat chocolate mixture and flour mixture together. Add milk and beat. Lastly, add the eggs, beating without separating.

Bake for 25 minutes at 375°. (I use two round cake pans, but you could make a sheet cake, too.)

Icing:

3 cups Confectioner's Sugar $^{1}/_{2}$ cup Unsalted Softened Butter

2 teaspoons Vanilla 2 tablespoons strong brewed or instant Hot Coffee

Cream butter and sugar together. Add vanilla and coffee.

Note: Your icing can cover the entire cake solidly or you can be creative (as shown in the photo). I've even added toppings such as edible coffee beans or chocolate sprinkles for a festive flair!

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Golf Series: Indian Bayou Golf & Country Club, A Historic Treasure



By Barbara Palmgren

Before there was Regatta Bay, before there was Kelly Plantation, before there was Emerald Bay, there was iconic Indian Bayou.

As one of four Destin courses in Okaloosa County, Indian Bayou Golf & Country Club is recognized as the first course to invite tourists to play golf as well as enjoy the pristine waters and sugar sand beaches of Destin.

The beautiful Indian Bayou Golf & Country Club course, located in the heart of Destin, is an 18-hole semi-private challenge suited for all skill levels. This 72 Par challenge is visited by tourists and enjoyed by over 150 members as their home course. Members include faithful snowbirds who appreciate the comradery that membership brings. Several golf tournaments are also offered throughout the year for special groups and charities.

Indian Bayou was built in 1978 by local families. They recognized the need for a golf course in the upscale community of Indian Bayou. In 199,2 another nine holes were added to the original 18 holes. Each nine holes is named for an historic Indian nation: Seminole, Choctaw and Creek. In 2018, however, the nine holes of Creek were closed and sold for other development.

Golf manager and Director of Golf, Jim Carpenter, has served Indian Bayou Golf Club since 1984. Like the course itself, Jim follows the present golf course Indian heritage lineage. Graduating from Choctawhatchee High School (Choctaw) and attending Florida State University (Seminole) Jim is definitely "Mr. Indian Bayou." Jim's pride in the course is evi-



dent as he shares credit for the course success with a talented golf course superintendent and devoted staff. Jim talked about the well-conditioned course and the signature putting greens that are among the reasons visitors return to play golf along the Destin corridor.

Morning rates with carts included are \$159 with the lowest afternoon rates of \$105. With 7,038 yards of challenging holes, Jim chooses hole number

15 as his favorite. It is a short dog leg left. For those who know how to make a golf drive obey, they can draw the ball slightly left in order to place a second shot on the green. The striking landscape throughout 18 golf holes contains water, sand traps and bunkers ready for errant golf shots that miss the perfectly manicured fairways.

Prior to a round, golfers can practice at the driving range or practice putting green. There are also golf items for purchase from the well-stocked pro shop. Shoes, shirts, golf clubs and hats, no problem! Golf memorabilia for home or for gifts is available as well. Lunch is served seven days a week beginning from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. and a lounge invites golfers to relax and enjoy a variety of drinks. Indian Bayou provides all amenities to go with a daily round of golf.

So, as the sun sets on the Florida Panhandle and golfers

head home after a round of golf, you can almost hear the approval of those who once shared this special space:

On this Indian Bayou
Once lived tribes who knew it well.
Apalachee and Miccosukee,
Seminole, Creek and Choctaw, too.

A way of life with food and water River trade routes to connect. For years we lived together, For years we worked and shared.

Today, golfers tee up golf shots, See green fairways, waters blue, View wildlife, spans of marshland, Know what our forefather always knew.

That this paradise is precious and eternal.

A place for all who stay and play, A place to honor for the future, Indian Bayou on Choctawhatchee Bay.

To read about other area golf courses in our series, visit MyBay-LifeNWFL.com and search golf.









Gratitude and Your Health



By Kay Leaman, Health Architect, HealthyDay HealthyLife

There's been a lot of talk of late about gratitude. A "gratitude" is being grateful for something or someone: a positive comment from a friend or stranger, the sun on your face, the project that finally got completed, a wagging tail or leg rub from your favorite pet after 'one of those days.'

Since ancient times, religious scholars and philosophers have been interested in the effects of gratitude, but it wasn't until the 1950's that psychologists and sociologists began studying the impact this emotion has on one's health and well-being.

The practice of acknowledging our gratitude can have a significant impact on our physical and psychological health including:



- Improved sleep
- A stronger immune system
- Decreased stress and lower blood pressure
 - Less anxiety and depression
 - Improved self-esteem
 - Higher levels of optimism.

It can also improve our desire to engage in healthier lifestyle practices. Gratitude helps us to focus on the present and magnify positive emotions.

"Gratitudes" come from an emotion, a mood or a disposition. Sometimes it's a choice.

I've been encouraged to start a grateful journal, and although I practice gratefulness, I haven't been very consistent in the journaling. Some days have proven to be a struggle to find something to be grateful for, but then I remember the song by Blue Sky Riders "The sun comes up, it's another day and your heart still beats and you say Hey, I'm still breathing. Take it from me, these little victories are all the heart needs." So, gratefulness doesn't need to be great; it just needs to be real and from the heart.

Consider adding a grateful journal and a pen by the bedside and begin writing at least 1-2 "gratitudes" you experience each day (stocking stuffer!). We have so much to be grateful for. I challenge each of you to engage in this practice and share the changes that take place. I can tell you it's both fun, amazing and strengthening. It can make family and friends laugh and cry. It renews hope and inspires us for tomorrow.

Currently, I am grateful for my five senses, the food on my table and the bed I sleep in. I am also very grateful for where I live and the freedoms I still have.

As Thanksgiving approaches

and we share our "gratitudes," be mindful that what we are grateful for can come from pain or joy and everything in between. That spoken gratitude is important and meaningful. And, if you're in a place where

"gratitudes" are too difficult, borrow someone else's.

Have a surprising and meaningful Thanksgiving holiday.

Here's to Health! succeed.hdhl@gmail.com





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Just One Good Night of Sleep



By Dr. Richard Chern M.D.

Sleeping through the night seems like an impossible task for many of us. Waking up at three or four in the morning can be an everyday ordeal for many as we age. You should already know sleep is one of the most important tools to heal our bodies, maintain the immune system, keep our mind invigorated and our memory healthy. So, you would think we would sleep better as we age.

The effects of sleep depri-

vation are more than just a day of feeling tired and fighting to make it through. Sleep deprivation has been well studied and has catastrophic long-term results. Besides daytime sleepiness, irritability and a shortened attention span, sleep deprivation causes obesity, hypertension, diabetes, anxiety, heart attacks, reduced sex drive, impaired memory, and depression. That's not, might cause, that's does cause.

Did you know that the rate of heart attacks increases with daylight savings? A New England Journal of Medicine study showed a 24% increased risk of heart attack on the Monday morning after daylight savings. Waking up just one hour earlier can put at risk people over the

A lack of sleep decreases your ability to make new memories by up to 40%. Sleep impairs the hippocampus which is the key player in memory formation. This can only be reversed by getting adequate sleep.



Sleep is also a primary way to reduce cortisol levels. Cortisol is responsible for increasing blood pressure, stress, and anxiety.

Hormones are a primary driver in our body's ability to stay asleep. When was the last time you woke up feeling refreshed in the morning? If you can't remember a time you slept well. If you drink more than one serving of caffeine daily. If you have hypertension, diabetes, irritability, or other symptoms described above then you need to call us at (850) 837-1271 for an appointment. You should probably call right now because if you are not sleeping well you

might not remember reading this article when you wake up sleepy tomorrow.

Dr Richard Chern MD and Sue Griffin ARNP specialize in hormone therapy and have

the largest and longest-running bioidentical hormone therapy practice in the Southeast. Dr Richard Chern is also part of the teaching staff for Biote and has taught new providers in our area and across the country how to properly treat patients. There is a lifetime of learning in the treatment of hormones and treatments, and results are not the same everywhere. Don't make the mistake of seeing a provider who dabbles in everything and think you are getting the best treatment. At a minimum, make sure you are seeing a Platinum Provider. Getting your labs and having a consultation is easy and affordable.

Dr. Richard Chern M.D. and Sue Griffin ARNP are currently accepting new patients so don't miss out on this opportunity. Call (850) 837-1271 today and make an appointment.

Tips to Stay Fit and Fine During the Holidays

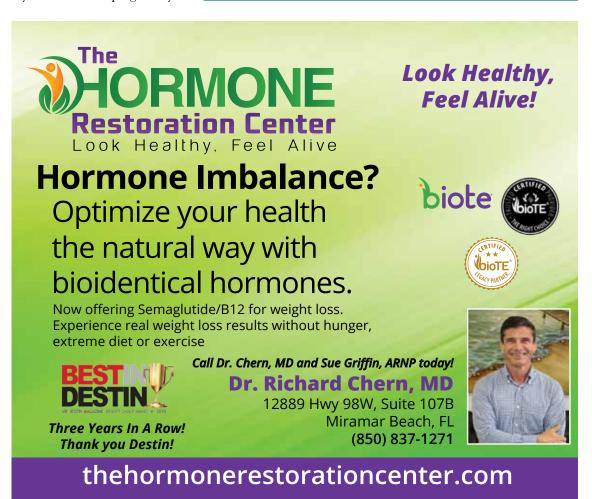
tion overindulging can do to our bodies, both visibly and silently. However, the holidays can be challenging. Bay Life's Fitness and Wellness Coach, Lisa Leath Turpin, offers tips on how to not over-indulge too much, but instead being able to enjoy the fun, holiday season. It doesn't have to be all or nothing—there are ways to boost your ability to become a more efficient calorie burning machine:

• Keep portions smaller. Spread them out throughout the day so that your body has enough time to "catch up" with the amounts you put in. The higher the calories, the smaller the portion should be. Your body can only process only so much at a time. If it can't process the amount of calories you consume, it will have no choice but to store them. Sugars process fast, while fats and protein process slowly. You will absorb and burn sugars almost immediately, which will raise your blood sugar, and leave your fat cells vulnerable to suck up the excess calories—predominant-

We all know the destruc- ly from fats. Therefore, if you eat sugary, fatty foods, you're most likely going to max out how much you can burn at that one meal-and the rest will be stored! If this cycle happens over and over again for several meals, you will gain weight like lightning.

- Move! Exercise requires your body to use energy. Anything you can do to get yourself moving will help use those extra calories your body can't burn on its own. Walk after a meal to keep blood sugar balanced and utilize some calories before they get stored. Do intense workouts, such as interval training, before a meal, as you'll continue to burn calories for hours after you stop exer-
- Keep your muscle tone. Use it or lose it! Having and keeping muscle will raise your resting metabolism which will burn more calories at rest. Even daily activities such as shopping, cooking, playing with the kids are beneficial anytime—just move. The more muscle you have the more calories you burn.







Happiness: Pursuit or Practice?



By Stephenie Craig

When did you last feel genuinely happy? Was it an ideal vacation, a family event where everyone behaved, the day your team won the big rivalry, a day at the beach when conditions were just right? The bar for happiness can feel high and difficult to obtain as you move through a world where so much is out of your control. Flights are delayed, family members aren't behaving, injuries happen, and the weath-

er does what it wants. You hear the consistent cultural message, "Pursue happiness," but what does that even mean and how do you arrive at happiness when it feels so elusive?

It's common to hear happiness discussed as a destination. When you can get into this house, this job, this car, this college, this group...then you will be happy. Happiness is often discussed as an absence of stress, sadness, pain or grief. When you can get past this work season, this move, this parenting season, this test, this break up, this illness... then you will be happy. People talk about happiness as though it's dependent on someone or something external. I'll be happy when I get the recognition I deserve, when my kids start listening, when my partner does the work to understand me, when others agree with me. With all of



these happiness narratives swirling, you can feel discouraged and hopeless that happiness will ever be more than brief moments of relief from stress that exists beyond your control.

What if you could shift the happiness narrative? What if happiness is not something to chase or pursue? What if happiness is something to practice? What if happiness can have internal origin instead of you waiting for all of the circumstances to line up perfectly? What if happiness does not only exist externally where comparison to others creates jealousy, scarcity and insecurity? What would that be like?

While different definitions of happiness exist, many suggesting circumstantial satisfaction, I prefer defining happiness as the practice of finding gratitude, joy and contentment while placing focus in the present moment. So, what does the practice of happiness look like practically?

5 Ways to Begin Practicing Happiness

1-Acknowledge your current reality honestly. Not everything feels good, light and happy. Acknowledge what feels good right now. Acknowledge what feels hard right now. Acknowledge feeling hurt, excited, jealous, sad, inspired, fearful, etc. Give space to all of your feelings and remind yourself feelings are normal and they guide your attention to important insight even when they are hard.

2-Step outside black and white thinking. Everything is not either wonderful or terrible. You are capable of holding the tension of some things in your life feeling hard while some things are going well. You don't have to pretend the hard things aren't hard. You also don't have to exclusively focus on the negative. You can give meaningful attention to what is good even in the face of the hard.

3-Reserve space for daily gratitude. Try setting reminders in your phone throughout the day to focus on 3-5 things you appreciate. Anything counts including spiritual things, relationships, material things, weather, feelings,

books, shows, positive test results, a laugh, etc. Try inverting your frustrations with gratitude. Stuck in traffic can become gratitude for a car, gas, a/c, music, a moment to breathe.

4-Focus on the present moment. You don't have to be anywhere other than where you are right now. Try doing one thing at a time and noticing what you see, hear, feel, taste, observe happening around you right now. Remember you are in this moment for a reason. Use it with intention. The next moment will wait and you can be in that moment when it arrives. Download a mindfulness app and try beginning a practice.

5-Define happiness internally. Notice where you are making happiness contingent on others and circumstances. Remind yourself gently that your happiness does not have to wait for everyone and everything to go your way. Remind yourself of what is good, what has been given to you already, and what can be enjoyed now even when life is complicated and messy.

Be kind to yourself and others as you practice shifting happiness from an external pursuit to an internal practice. Your internal work around happiness has the potential to change your daily mood and approach to life in meaningful ways. As you walk along your journey, connect with us for coaching and counseling at Journeybravely.com.







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Taking Stock of Changes in Insurance



By Julie A. Martin

2023 has been a strange year for insurance in the state of Florida. We have seen some massive increases in premiums across the board. Home, Auto and Flood insurance premiums have risen above levels seen last in 2005. Between 2022 and 2023, nearly 20 carriers either went into receivership or left the Sunshine State entirely due to the high incidence of claims and litigation.

Now that it has been nearly a year since litigation passed, changing the way property damage attorneys are paid in the event of a disagreement, from carrier-paid to contingency paid, what does this mean for insureds whose claims were either denied or underpaid? Does the litigation help? Will there be relief?

These are all good questions. When an attorney takes a case on a contingency basis, it generally means that in return for their help in resolving a case, they will take a percentage of the case value. If you had a \$100,000 property damage claim that should have been covered, and the attorney recovered the entire \$100,000, whatever set percentage you agreed to at the outset of the lawsuit will belong to the law firm. Generally, the percentage is 33% or roughly 1/3 of the total claim payment.

Some of the rates are starting to decrease. Citizens Property Corp. Depopulation program has two types, voluntary and forced, in which it contracts other private market insurance companies to take on Citizens' policies at rates that are within 20% of the Citizens premium. Many of the premiums in those assumption notices are lower than Citizens premiums. Many. Not all, and not enough.

Flood insurance as well has seen historic highs in premiums this year in the wake of last year's shocking storm surge during Hurricane Ian, and it may be another year until flood premiums go down. Many of those affected by the worst of the storm surge waters either did not have any flood insurance, or they didn't have enough.

Many of those who did not have any flood insurance said they didn't think they needed to have flood insurance. Flooding in their area caused genuine shock and awe, and ruined their homes. Many of them are still trying to recoup their losses, even after help from FEMA.

Florida is a flood zone, all of it. What we need to recognize moving forward is that the best thing we can do for ourselves and our wallets is to do everything we can to document what we have through taking photos of the inside and outside of our homes and emailing our receipts for big ticket items to ourselves to date and time stamp them. In addition, purchase flood insurance for your home, knowing you might never need it, or you might need it, but you can't get it once you need it.

Speak with a local independent Insurance agent about making sure you have the right kind of coverage, neither too high or too low, which may involve your agent performing a new Replacement Cost estimator for your home, with you on the phone, to make sure it's correct. The only person who knows what you have in your home is you. The property appraiser network for your county may or may not keep updated records, so that you, dear reader, are the best source of information about any changes you have made to your home, to update your coverage accordingly.

There are three basic home incidents that are some of the most frequent causes of water damage claims in Florida:

1-Rubber supply/drain lines that either leaked or burst. Steel braided supply and drain lines are much more durable, and go a long way towards prevention of these types of leaks.

2-Air Conditioning leaks that happened because the AC lines have not been flushed and no anti-algae treatments were deposited into the AC line. Having



your AC line flushed every three months and putting anti-algae tablets into the AC line, as well as changing out your air filter every couple of months will help to reduce the chances of loss.

3-Old hot water heaters that have rust and/or corrosion are much more likely to burst or even to explode. If a hot water

tank has orange and or green corrosion on it and/or has a manufacture date older than 15 years, replacing the hot water tank with a properly fitted TPR or pressure release valve, is a less expensive option than dealing with a large-scale water claim.

Preventative maintenance is much less expensive and stressful than the kind of insurance atmosphere in which we find ourselves currently. Insurance is there in case something happens, yes, but there are two caveats to this. 1) Not everything is covered and 2) the claims process can take several months to complete.

In short, relief is coming slowly, but we need to do all we can to protect ourselves and our homes and vehicles now, before we have an issue.







RUDOLPH MISSING

continued from page 3

The elves read plans, conferred over toys and talked about the situation. "I don't think we should even try to make the trip with Rudolph gone," said an elf named Skank, whispering, as was everyone, in his worry about Rudolph. "Santa's not getting any younger and he needs Rudolph. The kids will understand. They'll wait."

"Not go?" said an elf named Trok. "Not go? After more than 2,000 years? How will anyone ever trust Santa again? He has to go!" Similar conversations took place all over the workshop. No one was sure what to do with Rudolph missing.

Out in the stable, the reindeer were worried, too. "I haven't led the team in nearly 60 years," Dasher fretted in Reindeer Lingo. "I've come to depend on Rudolph."

"If you stop suddenly, I'll smash right into you," Dancer said, his brow furrowing. "And Comet will crash into me and Cupid into him and... We could actually wreck the sleigh!"

The thought of such a catastrophe was too much to bear. The reindeer went nervously back to their regular activities, but their thoughts were centered on Rudolph and only on Rudolph.

Meanwhile, Santa, who could read the thoughts of the elves and reindeer, knew how much dread was spreading through his home. He knew he should do something to calm everyone down, but erase their fears, to make them think everything was all right. But who would make Santa think everything was all right?

Mrs. Claus seemed to be the only one who wasn't affected by Rudolph's disappearance. She bustled about through the house, taking inventory, polishing the sleigh, offering a word of encouragement here, a motherly hug there, always in control and always smiling. "There, there, it will work out dear," she told Santa, who was sitting in a big easy chair, lost in worry. "I know, Mother," he said, patting her hand. "I know." But Santa didn't believe himself.

A Rudolph-free ride?

As the sun began to set at the North Pole, Santa and his elves began loading the last of the presents onto his sleigh. Usually, this was a time of excited chattering, laughing and good-natured jokes and teasing. Today, for the first time in many years, Santa would make the trip without Rudolph's nose blazing a trail through the dark night. Santa wasn't looking forward to this trip, the first time he could



ever remember not looking forward to his annual Christmas Eve journey.

Dasher, Dancer, Donner, Blitzen, Comet, Cupid, Prancer and Vixen were equally hesitant. A reindeer doesn't remember as well as a human being and some of them had forgotten completely how it used to be before Rudolph showed up for the first time. They felt as if their trip would be made blindfolded.

"That's the last of it, Santa," said an elf named Humna-Humna as he put a bag chock full of toys and goodies onto the sleigh. "I guess it's all up to you and the reindeer now." Humna-Humna frowned with the thought of Santa ven-

turing out into the night without the little deer who had served as his beacon for so long.

Santa sighed, already weary even before he started his trip. The elves, usually so jubilant at the beginning of a Christmas Eve voyage, were quiet. Most of them looked at the ground or the sky. Few looked right at Santa. "On Dasher," Santa said, a little more subdued than usual. "On Dancer! On Prancer and Vixen! On Comet! On Cu..."

"Wait!" came a voice from the house. All eyes turned toward the shout. There, running across the snow, was Mrs. Claus. She carried a bag, presumably filled with sandwiches for Santa and the reindeer, and a leather strap. On the other end of the leather strap was Rudolph! His nose beamed brightly across the North Pole, casting a glow on the snow, the sleigh, Santa, the reindeer and the elves. "I'm sorry, Santa," Rudolph said in Reindeer Lingo. "Where have you been, Rudolph?" Santa asked his voice somewhere between anger and joy. "We've been looking all over for you!" "I'm sorry, Santa," Rudolph repeated. "I guess I should have told you. You see, ever since I came here, I've visited my mother two nights before Christmas. I never wanted anyone to worry. So, I'd visit during the night and get back before daylight.'

"What kept you this year?" Santa asked. "Your mother – she's all right, I hope." "Mom's

fine," Rudolph said. "But this year, she knitted me a sweater for Christmas. Usually, the beaming of my nose keeps me from oversleeping and lets me get to the North Pole on time. But look!" Rudolph slipped on the sweater. And a fine sweater it was. It was a bright red turtleneck, heavy and warm. It was also four sizes too big. The collar covered Rudolph's nose and no light could escape! "I had to wear Mom's sweater," Rudolph apologized. "I never realized I could sleep so well with it on."

"Of course, you did," Santa said. "We're just thrilled to have you back. And from now on, you'll wear that sweater every night – as long as you're in the stable! Now, though, we have a full night of work ahead of us."

He hitched Rudolph to his customary place at the head of the team and climbed back into the sleigh, putting the sack of sandwiches and goodies under the seat. Santa pulled back on the reins and called out, this time with gusto, "On Dasher! On Dancer! On Prancer and Vixen! On Comet! On Cupid! On Donner and Blitzen!" Then with a grin as wide as the Arctic, "On Rudolph!"

As the sleigh rose from the snow-covered ground of the North Pole and arced south, the elves below let out a cheer that rattled the shutters. But, Santa couldn't hear it. He was too busy cheering himself. And so were the reindeer!

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- Are you embarrassed about smiling in front of people?
- Do you ever put your hand up to cover your smile?
- Do you dislike your smile in photographs?
- When you look through magazines, do you envy the models' smiles?
- Do you wish your teeth were whiter?
- Do you think you show too much or too little of your teeth when you smile?
- Would you like to change the way your teeth or gums are shaped?
- Do you have gaps or spaces in between your teeth?

If the answer is "yes" to any of these questions, you may be a good candidate for A Smile Makeover.



CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

continued from page 6

to empowering the next generation of automotive professionals. The opening of the Step One Automotive Group Center of Excellence is not just a milestone for us, but a testament to our vision of shaping a future where passion meets technology," said Juan Carlos Correa, Chairman of the Board, Step One Automotive Group. "Together with NWFSC, we are ensuring that students have unparalleled access to hands-on experience and the best of automotive education. It's about driving dreams into reality and propelling the industry forward.

Excited about what the program offers to Okaloosa County was Okaloosa County Commissioner Trey Goodwin. "Okaloosa County has an excellent





work ethic; just what we want to foster in the automotive industry without accruing extra debt. Skilled technical training is a big deal and there are a lot of holes, currently. We're excited to see we have leadership to fill those holes and help more households in Okaloosa County—those eager to pursue their careers," he said. "It's a perfect example of how a local business and a local institution can come together to achieve these goals."

To find out more about the NWFSC Automotive Technology Apprenticeship Program, visit https://www.nwfsc.edu/academics/non-degree-programs/registered-apprenticeships/ or call 850-533-1521.



Sean of the South: Small Gifts



By Sean Dietrich

Birmingham, Alabama—the 1970's. The hairstyles are ridiculous. Fashions are even worse. It's Christmastime in the Magic City.

Early evening. A young couple arrives in town to visit family. They are working-class poor. He is overworked and underpaid. She is too.

Still, things are looking up. Even though it's hard making make ends meet, they have each other.

It hasn't been a great day. But it's going to be. They just coasted into a Magic City on magic gasoline fumes. They have enough magic cash for the return-trip home, but that's about all the magic they have left.

They wander into Bruno's supermarket. They are shopping on a shoestring budget.

The music overhead is Bing Crosby. "Silver Bells" is the tune.

She pushes a cart. He follows. They are only buying necessities. No fancy stuff.

He listens to the music on the intercom. He lets his mind wan-

der while Bing sings:

"Strings of street lights,

"Even stop lights,

"Blinkin' red and bright green,

"As the shoppers rush home with their treasures..."

He sees something that interrupts his daydream. It's a five-dollar bill, lying in the aisle. Crumpled. Nobody is around. He looks both ways.

He bends to pick it up. This is the '70's, five bucks can do a lot. It can buy six gallons of gas, or canned goods for a few suppers.

"Honey look!" he says.

And just like that, a bad day has become a good day. He unfolds the bill. He looks at Abe Lincoln's stoic face. Even old Abe seems happy about this particular holiday blessing.

"Wow," she says. "Aren't you lucky?"

Luck isn't the word. It's a blessing from On High. Magic, even. It's a sign that things are going to get better. That's what it is.

But it's short lived. Something's wrong. There's a pang in his stomach. He can't keep this five dollars. He doesn't know why. It just doesn't feel right. So he takes the money to the store manager, even though he'd rather not.

"I found this on aisle twelve," he says. "Maybe someone lost it." The manager thanks him.

The couple checks out. Their cashier is wearing a Santa hat, punching buttons on the register. She's about as cheery as a bucket



of room-temperature coleslaw.

Bing sings: City sidewalks, busy sidewalks, Dressed in holiday style, In the air there's a feeling of Christmas..."

The cashier places the items into paper bags. The young couple nearly empties their wallets to pay the bill. "Merry Christmas," the man says to the cashier.

"If you say so," the cashier says.

His wife rolls the cart toward the door. He is noticing how lovely she looks tonight. If it weren't for the low balance in their bank account, nobody would know the difference between this woman and royalty.

They are about to exit when

they hear hurried footsteps behind them.

"Sir!" a voice yells. "Wait!"

It is the manager. He is accompanied by a young black boy. They are jogging after the couple.

"This kid wants to thank you," the manager explains.

"Thank me?"

Then boy starts to cry. "My mama sent me to the store for bread and milk, and I lost the money she give me.

"I thought we was gonna hafta skip dinner again, and I was gonna be in trouble. I looked everywhere for that five bucks."

The boy wipes his eyes with his sleeve, then shoots his hand

outward. "Thank you, sir," the boy tells the man. "And merry Christmas."

They embrace. They part ways. The couple leaves the supermarket. Before they crawl into their car, the man looks into the night sky.

He could've kept that money. But he didn't. He wonders why this is. What made him do it?

Maybe there is something up there in that sky. Something big, just beyond the stars. Maybe it's in the trees, the ground, the air, and on aisle twelve.

Maybe it's in everything. Inside young couples, little boys, grumpy clerks in Santa hats, and store managers. Perhaps it's bigger than the Milky Way, but so small you might miss it.

A handshake, a hug, or five bucks. Something found in department stores, beer joints, sanctuaries, beneath bridges, on city busses, or baseball games. In the YWCA Family Violence Center, the nursing homes, the prisons, or Children's hospital.

I don't know what you call it. I don't care what you call it. It's magnificent. It's real. It's what the twenty-fifth of December is all about.

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Musing



In this world of uncertainty and instability, hope can seem fleeting. Yet, the spirit-led visionary greets each new day, month and year with unwavering hope and resolute purpose. As Christmas approaches and a New Year beckons, God expects pastors to inspire awe concerning the birth of the Saviour and anticipated New year, New beginnings. New Year's resolutions are steeped in tradition with a universal desire for self-improvement and optimistic fresh starts. Too often, they contain unrealistic expectations with fleeting commitments,

A Pastor's Ponderings:

My Prayer for You—True Transformation

resulting in disappointment and a sense of failure. Been there; done that?

Pastors have a unique role during this time of celebration and resolution-making. God tasks pastors with shepherding their congregations through the sacred remembrance of Christ's birth and His death, burial and resurrection. Most of all, we must offer light to those seeking direction for the coming year. The past helps develop our fu-

Fortunately, my path to ministry did not begin inside the church walls, but beyond themserving those in nursing homes and rescue missions, broadcasting over the radio and reaching into the confines of juvenile detention centers, jails and prisons. After a decade of this expansive

outreach, my calling blossomed into pulpits, where I ultimately found myself amidst congregations nationwide and worldwide. This sacred space, teeming with diverse souls, has been a profound challenge, necessitating a careful balance between uplifting words and words that might unintentionally alienate or cause

In our world of endless information, the timeless wisdom of the Bible offers true clarity. Isaiah understood the power of words to provide rest for the weary, "The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary" (Isaiah 50:4a). This is what every pastor strives to do: to speak the right words at the right time. A supernatural feat indeed, "but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26b).

As we prepare for holiday festivities and the prospect of a new start with the new year, the pastor must diligently uphold the Bible's authority and expressed guidance. We need to tell the story of Jesus and call for Christians to take this opportunity to renew their faith, first and foremost.

Being a preacher and pastor is about sharing God's wisdom, not just with words, but with understanding and action. Delivering "a word in season" is inherently sensitive, infused with the capacity to revive spirits or, if ill-timed, to deepen wounds. Preaching is all about knowing when to speak to lift spirits or convict hearts, always conscious of the impact our words can have. Proverbs tells us, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue" (Proverbs 18:21a). Pastors must be ever mindful of the grave responsibility accompanying our words.

Following Christ's example of kindness, pastors aim to provide comfort and hope, much like Jesus did (Matthew 11:28-30). We must strive to speak with the love and kindness that come from God, knowing that our words can profoundly impact others, for better or worse. When a preacher speaks, the words can

stir an array of reactions, from igniting a transformative faith to provoking, as in the case of Judas, a betrayal veiled in a gesture of affection.

The joy of a pastor comes from speaking the truth and offering encouragement at just the right moment. "A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth: and a word spoken in due season, how good is it!" (Proverbs 15:23). The work of a pastor is to find these moments and to speak with a balance of wisdom and care, blending timeless truths with timely guidance. I pray that this celebratory season for you is marked by less tradition and an abundance of true, Christ-induced transformation.

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.

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30a Songwriters Fest Celebrates 15-Year Anniversary in 2024

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30A Songwriters Festival will celebrate its 15th year with performances on the main stage at presenting partner Grand Boulevard's Town Center in Miramar Beach with headline performances by renowned artists Jeff Tweedy, Elvis Costello and The Imposters, Rosanne Cash and KT Tunstall.

Co-produced by Russell Carter Artist Management and the

Continued on page 31



Top 10 Quotes from A Christmas Carol



By Anna and Nathanael Fisher, Emerald Coast Theatre Company

As the holiday season approaches we are getting ready for three heartwarming experiences for our community to come enjoy, connect and feel the magic of the season. A Jingle Jangle Christmas Music Revue, Yes Virginia there is a Santa Claus and the beautiful Charles Dickens classic, A Christmas Carol.

Multiple adaptations of A Christmas Carol have been a part of ECTC history since the very beginning. Our first professional production was a three-person adaptation written by Nathanael called A Dickens Christmas. We can still hear the incomparable Darla Briganti bellowing the lines as Marley's Ghost, vibrating the verbiage in an eerie, ghostly cadence. Some years later that same adaptation was done with four actors

including an accomplished violinist. Fast forward to Christmas 2020 and ECTC presents Barlow's version of the classic with the inimitable Bruce Collier at the helm as Scrooge. Some of the things we love about this version is that 5 actors play all the characters in the story. Barlow does a beautiful job of highlighting the personal trauma that Scrooge experienced as a child which explains his hardened heart. There is also an incredibly touching scene where he faces his past and his hard heart melts, as does ours as we experience it anew alongside him. It's the turning point, the character arc, the part of the story we long for in all human-

Marci Duncan is our guest director for this production so although the story may be familiar,

there are new actors and a new director telling it from a different perspective. It's going to be everything we need and want out of a traditional holiday offering. So, don't "Bah, Humbug" this opportunity to experience live theatre, even if you have seen the production before!

In celebration of this show, we thought we'd share with you our top 10 most recognizable and descriptive quotes from the



story to get you in the spirit before coming to the show.

10. "You may be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of an underdone potato. There's more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are!"

9."If they would rather die," said Scrooge, "they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population."

8. "Oh! But he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner!"

7."Reflect upon your present blessings—of which every man

has many—not on your past misfortunes, of which all men have some."

6."But I am sure I have always thought of Christmas time...as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time; the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shutup hearts freely"

5."I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year..."

4. "While there is infection in disease and sorrow, there is nothing in the world so irresistibly contagious as laughter and good-humour."

3."No space of regret can

make amends for one life's opportunity misused!"

2."For it is good to be children sometimes, and never better than at Christmas, when its mighty Founder was a child himself."

So much of the Christmas spirit is captured in some of these lines and reflected in this redemptive story come to life on stage. We hope you will join us this season as we "honour Christmas" in our hearts and in our community. With all the joy we have this season we wish you the happiest of holidays and leave you with our number one, and what we know is Tiny Tim's number one quote:

1."God bless us every one!"

CREATE with Big Orange House Designs

Dec 2: Holiday cookie decorating with Baker Mery 9-11 a.m.

Dec 5: Homeschool Kids Club "Experiments with Sound" 9:30-11

Dec 6: Family Paint Night w/ Donna 5:30-8 p.m.

Dec 8: Pottery Ornaments w/ Laurel 4-6, 6-8 p.m.

Dec 9: Pottery Ornaments w/ Laurel 11 a.m.-1 p.m.

Dec 9: Leather and Pearl Open Studio w/ Sherrie Noon-2 p.m.

Dec 12: Homeschool Kids Club "Ornament Extravaganza" 9:30-11

Dec 14: Evening Open Studio Leather and Pearls 5-8 p.m.

Dec 15: Santa's Workshop 4:30-6 p.m. and 6:30-9 p.m.

Dec 16: Santa's Workshop 10:30 a.m.-Noon and 12:30-2 p.m.

Dec 19: Homeschool Kids Club "Propulsion Engineering" 9:30-11 a.m.

Dec 19-21: Open Studio Glass Art and Ornament Making 11 a.m.-2 p.m.

Dec 19-21: Permanent Jewelry w/ Sherrie 5-8 p.m.

Dec 20: Angel Painting w/ Donna 5:30-8 p.m.

Dec 21: Evening Open Studio Glass Art 5-8 p.m.

Need a place for your party or event? Check out the newly expanded and remodeled space!

Visit bigorangedesigns.com for class updates or more information.

CLOSED between CHRISTMAS and NEW YEAR to celebrate with our families!





MKAF Awards \$12,100 in Festival of the Arts

The 28th Annual Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation (MKAF) Festival of the Arts held October 28-29 in Destin, Florida, featured exhibits of more than 100 artists from across the United States showcasing a diverse palette of artistic styles in 16 different art mediums.

Highlights of the cultural weekend celebrating art, music, food, and family fun featured seven live music appearances, a kid's creative station, pop-up photo booths, street performers plus six local favorite food trucks and beverage bars.

"Marking 28 years is a testament to how important the arts are to our community and a direct reflection of the talented participating artists, musicians, vendors, board members, and volunteers — all beautifully managed by our incredible festival producer Deb Nissley," said MKAF CEO & Artistic Officer Demetrius Fuller.

Guest judges Carrie Ann Baade an award-winning artist and art professor at Florida State University and Dale Castellucci, a mixed media artist and adjunct instructor at the University of West Florida, awarded 29 ribbons and cash prizes. Recognizing artists whose work reflected exceptional talent and craftsmanship, the judges awarded "Best in Show," three Awards of Excellence, five Awards of Merit, 10 Judges' Recognition Awards, and eight Collaborative Exhibit awards.

Of the honor bestowed on him, Best in Show glass artist Tony Cray of New Melle, Missouri, said, "It's always nice to be recognized. I'm amongst a pool of really talented people. I'm very appreciative." Cray, who has been creating art for 40 years, said of his glass art, "It is all handmade start to finish. I'm responsible for every aspect of it. I'm a designer and maker. I like things that are well-made and finely crafted. I appreciate work that's very organic in nature, but my aesthetic is in the vein of Italian and Scandinavian designs — it's about craftsmanship.'

The Best in Show adult winner of the Collaborative Art Exhibit was awarded to Ian Fagan of Pensacola, Florida, for his photography. The Best in Show student winner was Eliana Batarao from Fort Walton Beach High School for her oil entitled "Sick." The Collaborative Art Exhibit features adults and students competing for the Special McIlroy Awards in honor of the late Patricia McIlroy, Destin's First Lady, and an MKAF advocate and patron.

Freeport artist Estelle Grengs won the "People's Choice" Award. This is her third win in this award category. "It's amazing. I was not expecting it," Grengs said. "For me, it means a lot, because it means that I'm touching people with my art and so if there's any award, this is probably my favorite thing to win."

Best in Show Winner (\$2,000)

Tony Cray, New Melle, Mo.

– Glass

People's Choice Award (\$1,000)

Estelle Grengs, Freeport, Fla.

– Acrylic



Poster Art Contest Winner (\$750)

Roger van Lieshout, Cape Coral, Fla. – Oil

Award of Excellence Winners (\$850)

Katherine Meade, Brookhaven, Ga. – Oil

John Townsend, Sanford, Fla. – Sculpture

Robin Renee Hix, Wimberley, TX – Mixed Media

Collaborative Exhibit Winners (\$850)

Best in Show (Adult) – Ian Fagan, Pensacola, Fla. – Photography

First Place (Adult) – Karen Stein, Niceville, Fla. – Watercolor/Batik

Second Place (Adult) – Bojana Grujovska, Destin, Fla. – Acrylic/Mixed Media

Third Place (Adult) – Don David, Destin, Fla.– Pen & Ink/ Watercolor

Best in Show (Student) -

Eliana Batarao — Fort Walton Beach High School — Oil

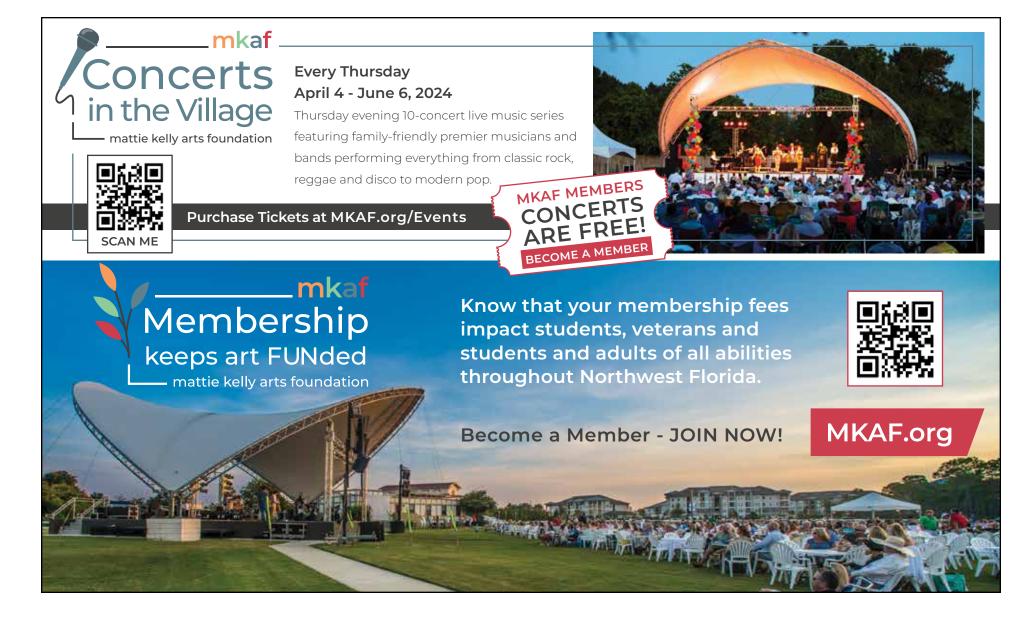
First Place (Student) – Aileen Lu – Crestview High School – Acrylic

Second Place (Student) – Chloe Aldrich – Niceville High School – Mixed Media

Third Place (Student)– Lily King – Crestview High School – Collage

"After unprecedented interest, this year's festival included a wide array of amazing artists from all over the United States (and even Estonia!) including many new artists. We were truly honored to be able to present them and they were absolutely thrilled at the incredible support from our community," said MKAF director of operations and Festival producer Deb Nissley.

Proceeds fund the MKAF's community outreach mission to provide cultural outreach programs serving K-12 students, adults and children with special needs, at-risk youth, and active/veteran military recovering from visible and invisible injuries in our community.



Arts & Music

30A SONGWRITERS

continued from page 28



Cultural Arts Alliance (CAA) of Walton, net proceeds support the CAA's mission to advance the Arts in our area.

Festival Weekend Passes are currently available at www.30asongwritersfestival.com. VIP tickets that include premium seating and complementary gourmet food and drinks in the VIP tent on Saturday and Sunday afternoons are also available. For a full description of each ticket package including VIP mainstage and full weekend transportation packages for groups of 2 up to 12, visitwww.30asongwritersfestival.com.



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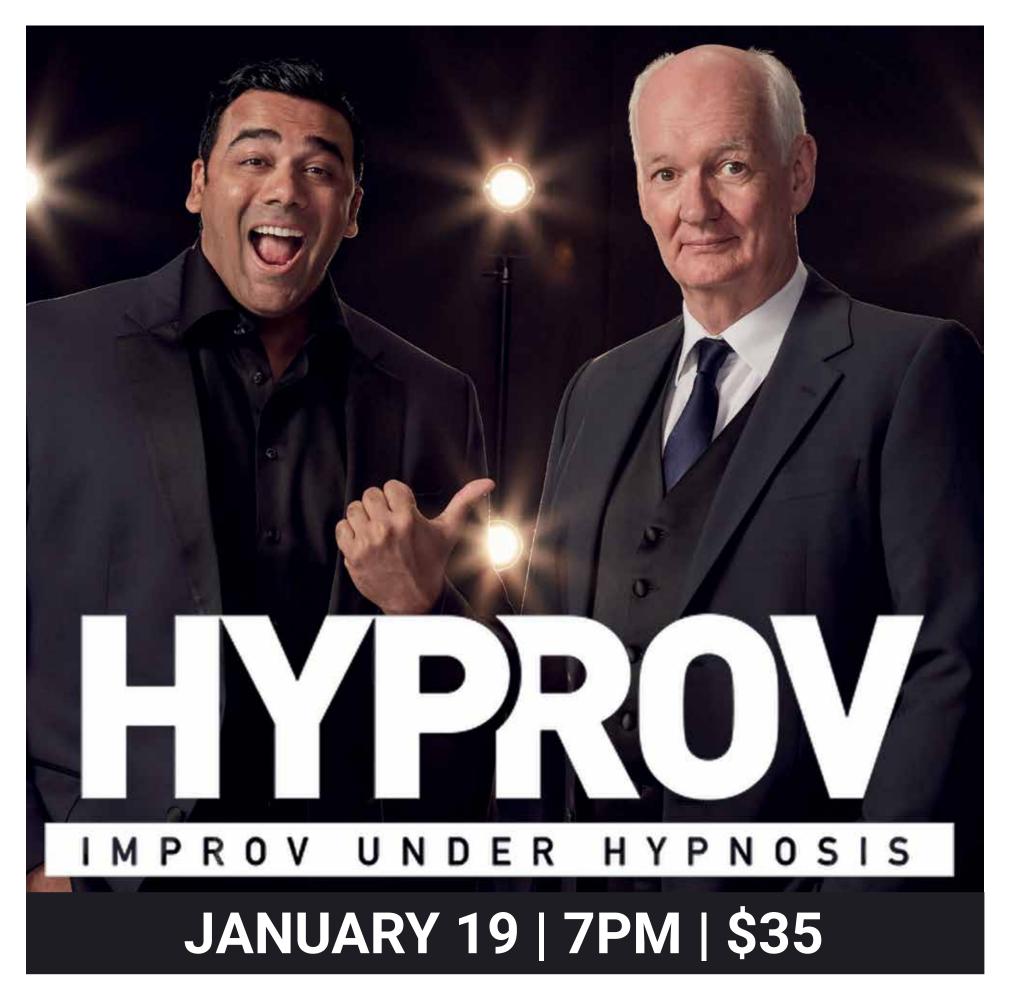
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