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Niceville High School's Eagle Pride Marching Band Performs at Rose Bowl!

By MICHELLE RUSCHMAN

On September 9th, 2022, Niceville High School's marching band, Eagle Pride, cheered as Director of Bands, Dan Wooten, announced they were invited to perform in Pasadena's 2024 Rose Bowl Parade. Now, over a year later, all their hard work will finally culminate in a trip to California from December 28, 2023 to January 2, 2024. With nearly 1 million in attendance and 30 million watching the parade from throughout the world, the prestige of being chosen reflects the dedication and excellence that Eagle Pride is known for. This current group of more than 250 high school students is only one of 20 marching bands that have been selected and is the only band representing the state of Florida. For the class of 2024, participating in this 135-year-old parade will be an incredible way of commemorating years of dedication as they head to graduation.



The last time Niceville High School appeared in the Rose Bowl Parade was in 2017, and 2024 will mark the third time Niceville is represented in this iconic event. Their premier performance was in 2008. Bands of any size are welcome to apply, but the criteria with which a band is selected includes "musicianship, marching ability, uniqueness and entertainment value or special interest." (tourna-

mentofroses.com) If you have ever gotten to experience the excitement of a Niceville football game and the hype of the band's halftime show, you

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> > MattieKellyArtsCenter.org

Active Compassion for the **Homeless**

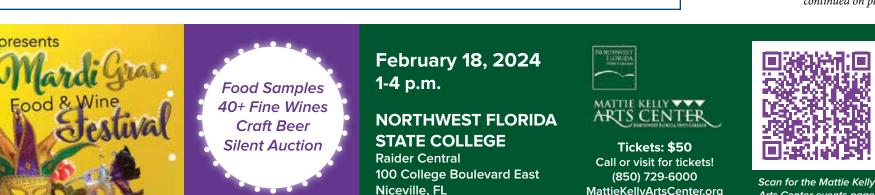
By DOUG STAUFFER

Imagine a world where every night brings the uncertainty of finding a safe place to sleep, where danger can be right around any corner, and feelings of fear, demoralization and alienation are constant companions. This isn't a hypothetical scenario for many; it's the everyday reality for those living without the basic security of a home. Addressing this need doesn't always require grand gestures; sometimes, the smallest acts of kindness can make the biggest difference.

At the forefront of this compassionate response is One Hopeful Place, a beacon of hope in Okaloosa County dedicated to breaking the cycle of homelessness for people living in our communities. My journey in understanding this crisis began three decades ago, as the President of a city rescue mission. A heart-rending moment happened when a homeless couple, struggling with addiction and caring for two small children, stayed

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(h) Community

HOMELESS *continued from page 1*

at our shelter. Months after they left, they contacted my wife and me with a life-changing request: would we adopt their young son and daughter? They were aware of our loss and wished for their children to have the stability they couldn't provide. This poignant episode not only highlighted the multifaceted challenges faced by the homeless, but also the critical need for community support and intervention. We said "yes."

The Growing Need

In today's world, the challenges faced by the homeless have intensified, with fewer resources and increasing societal apathy. In this bleak landscape, One Hopeful Place emerges as a sanctuary, providing critical services such as a day program, cold night shelter, health screenings and transportation for medical needs. These services, as simple as a hot meal or a safe place to sleep, are often lifesaving, offering a glimmer of hope in the lives of many.

The Day Program: A Lifeline

The Day Program at One Hopeful Place transcends the definition of service; it is, indeed, a lifeline. For those on the streets, basic necessities like nutritious food, clean water and access to hygiene and laundry facilities are luxuries. Here, the program bridges this gap, often marking the thin line between survival and despair. The stories of those who have found solace

LISA Y. SHORTS PITELL

ATTORNEY AT LAW





and support here are a testament to its impact.

How Can YOU Help?

Your support can create a significant ripple effect on the lives of the homeless. Donations to One Hopeful Place do more than provide shelter and meals; they instill hope and open doors to new beginnings. As a 501(C)(3) organization, One Hopeful Place relies entirely on grants, donations, and community support.

Even a small monthly pledge can significantly impact, helping to keep the lights on and doors open. Every church could budget funds to contribute their part. Reflecting on our Christian duty, as outlined in Matthew 25:35-40, we are reminded that serving the needy is akin to serving Christ Himself.

This scripture is not just a call to action; it's a moral imperative, urging us, especially religious and community leaders, to heed the words of Jesus and actively engage in caring for the hungry and homeless. Jesus concluded with these words: "And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40). Jesus was directly referring to our responsibility to care for the hungry and the homeless! No one, especially religious and community leaders, should turn a blind eye to such an appeal from the Son of God Himself.

Our Mission and Goals

One Hopeful Place's mission is to provide shelter and support for single men, women, with priority given the veterans experiencing homelessness. Our goal is not just to offer a handout but a hand-up, helping individuals rebuild their lives. The shelter, which opened in 2016, has expanded to accommodate more individuals, including a separate shelter for homeless women.

The Community's Role

Community engagement is crucial. The story of One Hopeful Place is one of collective effort and shared responsibility. It began with community leaders recognizing a need and taking decisive action. Today, it continues to grow with the support of local businesses, nonprofits, churches, and volunteers.

Making a Difference

Small acts by individuals can transform many lives. Whether it's volunteering, donating supplies, or simply spreading awareness, every contribution counts. One Hopeful Place exemplifies how community-driven initiatives can create significant change, providing a haven for those in need.

Conclusion

Reflecting on my experience from three decades ago, the plight of the homeless remains a pressing issue. However, with organizations like One Hopeful Place and the collective effort of our community, there is hope. Together, we can make a difference, offering not just shelter, but dignity, support, and a path to a better future. Let us unite in this call to action with active compassion for the homeless.

Check out the website: www. onehopefulplace.org or call 850-586-7879. Please help as the need is real and the time is now.



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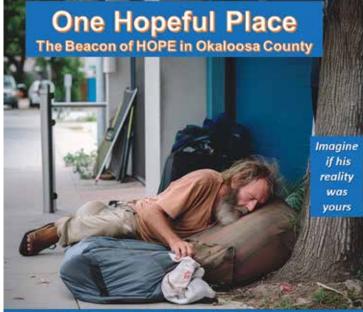
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The hiring of a lawyer is an important decision that should not be based solely upon advertisements. Before you decide, ask us to send you free written information about our qualifications and experience.



Visit www.onehopefulplace.org or call 850-586-7879 with your active compassion for the homeless in need.

Trusts, Estate

NHS BAND

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know exactly why this organization was selected to appear on an international stage.

Going on this trip are the directors, the marching band, color guard, twirlers, coaches, chaperones, support teams and, for security, two Niceville police officers. They are also packing hundreds of uniforms, instruments and pieces of equipment. It has truly taken a Herculean effort in meticulous planning and ongoing fundraising.

Families of the band and auxiliary teams have been working on fundraisers tirelessly since the announcement was made in 2022 and the band is so grateful for everyone who has supported its needs. These events included 50/50 raffles at football games, the Super 50/50 raffles, sales for citrus, chocolate and popcorn, a vendor event at the high school, haunted house tickets, jewelry and ornament sales, and a cruise raffle. Local businesses such as Walmart, Panera Bread, Panda Express, Domino's and McAllister's hosted fundraisers as well. It's been a community effort to get



Left to right: Dan Wooten, Director of Bands, Matthew Tenore, Associate Director of Bands, and Ms. Morgan Molina, Assistant Director of Bands

Eagle Pride to California.

Still, there is more to be done. Leading up to December 28th, everything the students need is turned in, cataloged and packed. The band continues to condition in preparation for the $5^{1}/_{2}$ mile parade route. At practice, they hone their performance and learn to march the turn at the corner where they will stop for the cameras and perform for an international audience of millions.

Tune in on January 1st, 2024, at 10:30 a.m. central time to watch the Rose Bowl Parade live on NBC, ABC and



Dan Wooten and Niceville High School hosts Alex Aghajanian, President and Chairman of the Board for the 2024 Pasadena Tournament of Roses Association



Head Chaperones, Debbie Pong Tuper and Kim Van Horn Hodges

Univision, as well as streaming networks such as Peacock, FuboTV and Hulu Plus. You're invited to welcome the new year by cheering on your Niceville Eagle Pride!

If you would like to donate to future performances and trips, please email EaglePride-Finance@gmail.com.





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 Dec. 15, \$2,000,000 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: January 10 & 23 @ 6 PM February 6 & 20 @ 6 PM



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Begin the New Year with Stories in Song!

Top Performances from the Largest Gathering of Nationally Recognized Songwriters on The Florida Coast Perform Jan. 12-15

By Lori Leath Smith

What makes your favorite song your favorite? I've always said it's likely the story it tells.

And that's what is so special about the 30A Songwriters Festival. On Jan. 12-15, 2024, South Walton will be transformed into a story-in-song paradise and the "hottest" mid-January mecca for music fans. And the best part? It's right in our back yard!

For the past 15 years, fans

locally and from throughout the world converge at the 30A Songwriters Festival, which attracts thousands of dedicated live music fans to hear original songwriters spanning multiple genres perform their songs—the largest gathering of nationally recognized songwriters performing right here locally!

Scenic Highway 30A is home to 30 venues presenting more than 180 songwriters and 280+ solo, band and in-the-round performances throughout the weekend. These featured songwriters come from varied careers including local performers, aspiring Nashville artists and ones who've performed at sold-out arenas.

This year, the Festival turns 15 with performances on the main stage at presenting partner Grand Boulevard's Town Center with headline performances

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code to learn more.



by renowned artists Jeff Tweedy, Elvis Costello and The Imposters, Grace Potter, Rosanne Cash and KT Tunstall. Twenty-one newly confirmed artists to add to the 2024 line up include John Driskell Hopkins (Zac Brown Band), John Paul White, Kevn Kinney, Chris Stills, Wyatt Durrette, Ethan Hulse, Duncan Phillips, Boukou Groove, Donnie Sundal, Katie Martin, Larry Mitchell, Ken Johnson, Andi Zack-Johnson, Alex Rogers, The Rough & Tumble, Amanda Donald, The Krickets, The Late Night Losers, Gileah Taylor, Kyle Lamonica and The Mosleys.

Local amphitheaters, town halls, restaurants, theaters, bars and covered patios will be converted into unique music venues with state-of-the-art sound systems and capacities ranging from 100 to 1000 seats indoors and 6,000 outdoors.

Co-produced by Russell Car-

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

"We are thrilled to host Elvis Costello in January 2024," comments Russell Carter, President of Russell Carter Artist Management and Festival Co-Producer. "Most Artists who break commercially do so after many years of hard development work. Elvis Costello flat out burst on the international scene with his debut album My Aim is True. Seemingly out of nowhere he appeared on Saturday Night Live with a name borrowed from Presley and looks apprehended from Buddy Holly. He proceeded to rage like the British punk and pub rocker that he was. His debut record demonstrated a melodic sense on par with Lennon &

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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.

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

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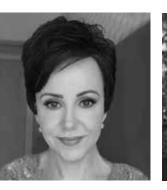


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Join the Wall of Champions:

ECCAC calls on community to pave the way to ending child abuse and neglect

The Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center (EC-CAC) invites the community to become champions in the fight against child abuse and neglect by contributing to the creation of a new symbolic tile Wall of Champions in the Julie Sacco Porterfield Children's Advocacy Center in Niceville. This 14,000-square-foot building, with its new addition, is dedicated to bringing dreams back to life for children affected by abuse and neglect.

Embrace the opportunity to be part of the Wall of Champions at the Julie Sacco Porterfield Center by having a name, logo, or artwork engraved on an 8" x 8" tile. This will not only secure



one's place in the legacy of this vital center but also signify the commitment to being a champion for the cause. Contributions will help build and sustain this Center for children and families facing the challenges of abuse.

Be part of this extraordinary initiative by getting a tile, or making a year-end donation to support the Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center and its unwavering mission to restore childhoods for these courageous children. Engraved tiles can bear any name, whether it is a family name, a company logo, or a tribute to a special person in their honor.

To join the Wall of Champions, simply order a tile. EC-CAC's goal is to have 100 tiles at \$250 each for an 8" x 8" tile, or buy more, earning multiple tiles permanently placed in the Wall of Champions in the Julie Sacco Porterfield Center's main conference room.

For more information or to contribute, please visit https:// eccac.org/about/end-of-yeargiving/ or email Lee Curtis: Lee@ECCAC.org. If abuse is suspected, call the anonymous Florida Abuse Hotline at 1-800-96-ABUSE.



This Is Another Great Paradise Promotion

Rocky Bayou Christian School Senior Brings Her Game

The national Heisman Trophy Trust recently announced the 2023 School Winners for the Heisman High School Scholarship. Congratulations to Rocky Bayou Christian School Senior Sydney Athearn for being named a school winner in the 2023 Heisman High School Scholarship!

Thousands of high school senior scholar-athletes graduating with the class of 2024 from 4,129 different schools across the country applied for the scholarship earlier this fall. From this talented group of accomplished, community-minded young men and women, more than 4,878 have earned the honor of becoming School Winners in the Heisman High School Scholarship competition awarded by The Heisman Trophy Trust.

One hundred of the school winners will become state winners with the opportunity to become part of an esteemed group of 12 National Final-



ists and ultimately be named one of two national winners. State winners receive a \$1,000 college scholarship, national finalists receive a \$2,000 college scholarship and the male and female national winners will each receive a \$10,000 college scholarship.

A complete list of School Winners can be found at https://www.heismanscholarship.com/results.

Winner names will be released at https://www. heismanscholarship.com.

For more information about Rocky Bayou Christian School, please visit our website at www. rbcs.org.

Meet Our Hometown Hero: **Children in Crisis' Ken Hair** A Legacy of Compassion and Leadership

BY DOUG STAUFFER

Ken Hair, a name synonymous with compassion and dedication, has been the face, heart and soul of Children in Crisis (CIC) for 18 years, leaving an indelible mark on the community and the lives of children. After nearly two decades as president and CEO, Ken Hair has retired from the organization, renowned for providing homes and keeping brothers and sisters together, many of whom have been abused, neglected and abandoned.

I recall my first Chamber Breakfast where Ken's influence was evident. During the 50/50 drawing, the winner donated her winnings to Ken and CIC, a gesture embodying the spirit of generosity that Ken himself championed. Who was this Ken Hair and why did so many Chamber members wish to donate their winnings to him and this organization? I would soon learn.

Under Ken's leadership, Children in Crisis, established in 2002, has flourished. The organization has provided homes for more than 1,000 young children, offering them refuge and stability. Ken;s journey, filled with challenges always stayed the course seen in the tangible impact of CIC's work. Upon retirement, his leadership earned him the Golden Deeds Award from the Exchange Clubs. The **Emerald Coast Public Relations** Organization (ECPRO) also presented Ken with the inaugural "Ken Hair Non-Profit of the Year Award at the FWB Chamber's First Friday Breakfast on December 1st. This award will be given each year and carries Ken's name and spirit of excellence.

Ken's heartfelt interactions often moved people to tears, reflecting the depths of his love and life. Recognition of his commitment was exemplified at his retirement ceremony when Ft. Walton Beach Mayor Dick Rynearson dubbed him the honorary mayor of "The Children's Neighborhood" the residential-style foster care neighborhood conceived and managed by CIC. The mayor also presented Ken with a key to the City of Ft. Walton Beach.



CIC expanded under Ken's guidance to include an Emergency Shelter, family foster homes and the Opportunity Home for young adults aging out of foster care. CIC's influence extends beyond its immediate community highlighted by initiatives like the Pensacola Bay Area Impact 100 and a significant land donation/lease valued at \$3 million from Northwest Florida State College,

Ken's personal and military background is a testament to his life of service. A retired Chief Master Sergeant in the United States Air Force, his military career laid the foundation for his work in child wellbeing. The discipline, integrity and leadership skills honed in the Air Force were instrumental in his successful management of CIC. Even the Air Force recognized his excellence with the coveted titles of NCO and Senior NCO of the year.

Ken's humility and empathy have endeared him to colleagues and community members alike. His ability to connect with diverse groups has been crucial in building partnerships and gar-



nering support for CIC. Reflecting on his journey, Hair credits his military experience for preparing him for the challenges of leading this non-profit: Ken has said, "The skills and values I learned in the Air Force have been integral to my work with Children in Crisis...It's about serving a cause greater than oneself, whether in uniform or in our community."

As Ken navigates through his second retirement, his legacy stands as a powerful testament to the extraordinary impact one individual can have in shaping a better future for others. Ken's life and work evoke some parallels to the classic film "It's a Wonderful Life." This movie portrayed a man who did not realize the profound impact one person can have on his community. Just as the film highlights this reality, Ken's contributions make us ponder the different landscape of many on the Emerald Coast without his influence. His journey and achievements underscore the immeasurable value of selfless dedication and the ripple effect of kindness and commitment in a community.

As we honor his contributions, it's clear that Ken's service and leadership have left an indelible mark, both to the nation and in the hearts and lives of countless children and families. For more information or to support Children in Crisis, please visit www.childrenincrisisfl.org. Let Ken know you want his legacy to live on.



Community

A First Step to Recovery: Freedom Life Compass

By Kenneth Books

Sometimes, putting one foot in front of the other is the best way to move forward. For those trying to recover from addiction, mental preparation can also be key. Because resources are limited and the lure of drugs and alcohol can be so overwhelming, it can be challenging at best. But there is a resource in our area that helps women break the cycle of addiction, get and stay sober and create a normal, fulfilling life for those who wish to be free.

Freedom Life Compass is the brainchild of president and founder Stephanie Wedel, our hometown hero, whose early life was far from a Leave It to Beaver episode. "I grew up in a drug house," Stephanie says. "I fell into the lifestyle and started using at age 11. Eventually, I became a high school dropout. I did a lot of things I'm not proud of." Her father was a drug dealer who later served time in prison for selling methamphetamine. Her brother, Rex, was a drug addict.

At age 23, Stephanie found herself homeless. So, she joined

the Army, the only service that would accept her without a high school diploma. "The Army was great," she says. "It taught me discipline." She spent 15 months in Iraq and when she came home, she learned her mother had become a bornagain Christian. "I started attending church with my mom," Stephanie said. It was then that "Jesus transformed my life."

Today, the entire family is sober. Rex is the Executive Director of Project Hope Recovery Center Florida and Stephanie is the recovery minister at Crosspoint, Niceville.

To help her brother in his struggle to remain free of drugs, Stephanie started Freedom Life Compass. The organization, which started in 2018, opened the doors to the Freedom House in April, a ministry to help women caught in the same trap of addiction that Stephanie once was. "Over the last five years, one of the biggest needs was transitional housing for women," Stephanie says. "We saw a need for this place."

She expressed that need at a meeting of Parakaleo (Greek for



"Come alongside.) Among the listeners was Chris Shinnick, the pastor of Manna Church, which meets at Niceville High School. He gave Stephanie the use of a property on County Line Road in 2022, with a five-year lease. A large building contains a dormitory for women in need, not just recovering addicts, a kitchen, showers and a garden, prayer path and chicken coop.

Behind the building is the Freedom Life Center office. Currently, two residents are staying there, both single women. "It's transitional housing for women," Stephanie says. "We're helping anyone to take their next right step." One of the residents has been incarcerated in the past, but now has a length of sobriety under her belt and is looking for an apartment. The other has mental issues. "We got her off the streets," Stephanie said.

Part of the difficulty in setting up such an organization is the need for money. Because part of the requirements for help includes church attendance, no

state or federal money is provided. Crosspoint church had hosted a bazaar for 39 years. "They gave it over to us," Stephanie says. This year's Niceville Bazaar, supporting Freedom Life Compass, took place in October at the Niceville Mullet Fairgrounds. Last year, the first that Freedom Life Compass sponsored the bazaar, more than 5,000 people attended the free event. Because of the City of Niceville's grant of the grounds, Freedom Life Compass donates five percent of the proceeds to the city Fireworks Fund. It also donates 10 percent to another non-profit.

Recently, Freedom Life Compass hired Dave Glinka as Program Director to assist with re-entry programs, specifically the Freedom House. David, who spent 22 years in the Air Force in Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD), has brought with him his more recent experience working in a non-profit for homeless women and children, and also provides his personal relations and networking assets,

Continued on next page



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BrainHearing[™]

Maximizing Hearing, Listening and Understanding

By Douglas L. Beck, Au.D. Doctor of Audiology

As we move beyond our current approach that centers on correcting for hearing loss to an approach that emphasizes feeding the brain optimal information about incoming sound, we can do a better job of allowing the hearing aid user to get the most out of their hearing. BrainHearing endeavors to help the brain orient, separate, focus, and recognize sounds in order to apply meaning through the use of modern and highly sophisticated technologies and improved hearing aid fitting protocols (i.e. Personalization) to maximize hearing and listening and understanding of what people are talking about.

Hearing and listening are often used as synonyms, yet they are each unique cognitive processes. Hearing can be defined as simply "perceiving sound" whereas listening is a far more sophisticated task; listening is defined as "attributing meaning to sound."(1)

Arguably, for the first 100 years, our profession focused on "hearing." Since 2015, we have the ability to go further than simply making sounds perceptible. We can deliver additional acoustic information to better preserve the natural acoustic environment through improved delivery of soft speech sounds

and better preservation of speech details, improved delivery of interaural loudness and timing differences, a more realistic extended bandwidth, better signal-to-noise ratios, improved noise reduction systems, improved feedback management systems and adaptive compression systems —many of which are "smarter" than previous generations and all of which are designed to maximize hearing and listening.

BrainHearingTM—which is a proprietary and trademarked term by Oticon, but will be used more generally as a broader industry concept in this articleemphasizes the importance and inclusion of the world's most sophisticated processor (ie, the human brain) and the individual's personal listening preferences to facilitate and maximize hearing and listening. Technologies and aural rehabilitation programs designed to support BrainHearing strive to maximize the ability of the ears and brain to work together through the preservation and delivery of natural acoustic information.

As all hearing care professionals (HCPs) know, hearing is a relatively basic, automatic function for those with normal hearing, as well as people with lesser degrees of hearing loss. Listening is a far more sophisticated process and listening

FREEDOM LIFE

continued from previous page

having lived in Niceville since 2000. On July 31, he began his most recent non-profit work at Freedom Life Compass as the Program Director. "I take care of day-to-day operations, resources and case management, Dave says. "I bring a lot of networking; I know a lot of people in Niceville. However, I can't do this job without the support of the amazing volunteers who are needed to provide transportation, lead devotions and help with events."

Now with expanded services, "Our vision is to help individuals coming out of life-controlling situations, such as trafficking, incarceration, homelessness and addiction, and find Christ-centered recovery and resources,"

states Freedom Life Compass material. "We can help begin to break the cycle of addiction and dysfunction in their lives and, in turn, change the course of their families' lives. Our Life Skills Center provides job training, computer skills, administration training and basic skills. Partnering with organizations in our community we will offer classes for financial management, business etiquette, dressing for success, and other essential skills needed to become a productive member of society.

To learn more, visit FreedomLifeCompass.org.

Publisher Note: A similar Freedom Life Compass article was published in the November 2023 edition of Bay Life. This article has been revised and updated. can be defined as attributing meaning to sound.1 Listening involves multiple unique and sophisticated cognitive abilities, such as working memory, processing speed, and attention, and importantly the ability to compare and contrast auditory information from the left and right ears is essential to making sense of sound (i.e., to attribute meaning to sound) in difficult listening environments.(2) That is, binaural summation and binaural squelch are of significant importance with regard to listening in challenging acoustic environments. The brain's ability to use interaural loudness differences (ILDs) and interaural timing differences (ITDs) to determine the origin of sound (i.e., "knowing where to listen") significantly contributes to the sophisticated acoustic and spatial analysis the human brain completes in milliseconds.

BrainHearing helps facilitate improved hearing and listening with less effort by supporting how the brain makes sense of sound, through the provision of key acoustic information as sound travels from the two hearing aids to the brain.

Conclusion

BrainHearing is more than a buzzword. BrainHearing, in some respects, represents a philosophical change from hearing to maximal hearing and listening. In this way, our field moves from simply making sounds louder (amplification) to recognizing that the brain processes many psychoacoustic cuesand the more reliably these cues can be delivered to the brain, the better! BrainHearing endeavors to help the brain orient, separate, focus, and recognize sounds in order to apply meaning to sound through the use of modern and highly sophisticated technologies and improved hearing aid fitting protocols (i.e. Personalization) to maximize hearing and listening. The cognitive system integrates information from all of the senses to create a total impression of the world around the listener. Sounds must make sense when combined with all of the other information the system has garnered about the ongoing world around the listener. As we move beyond a focus solely on correcting for hearing loss to an approach that emphasizes feeding the brain the fullest amount of information about incoming sound, we can do a better job of allowing the hearing aid user to get the most out of their hearing.

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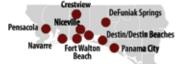
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Community

Know Your Neighbor: Vet Rides Voice to Second Career

By Kenneth Books

When local resident Kevin Gaddie retired from the Navy after 20 years, he realized he had a lot of life ahead of him. He needed something to do.

"I said to myself, I'm too young to sit on the porch," remembers Kevin, now 63. Possessed of a rich baritone voice, he decided to try his hand at voice-over work. "I ended up going to the University of West Florida and taking a class called 'Getting Paid to Talk," he says. "There were maybe 20 people in the class. They gave us scripts to read and we played them. When I played mine, I heard some ohs and ahs from the crowd." Kevin was no stranger to using his voice. His two decades in the Navy were spent as a broadcast journalist, a job that won him several awards. The first thing to do was to get an agent. So, he sent his demo tape out. "I got signed around Christmas," Kevin says. "It was the best present I got."

The ball was rolling. Voice Coaches, out of Albany, N.Y., called and gave him a voice test, which went well, so they decided to train Kevin. He participated in four Saturday sessions over the phone on script reading and interpreting copy. "I pretty much breezed through it," he says. He also got 50 CDs with his demo on them. Next, Kevin attended an acting academy run by Ann Marie Crouch, a model and actress who lives in Fort Walton Beach by way of Enid, Okla., and Los Angeles. She runs AMC Talent and is best known for her role as Princess Shayla in Power Rangers: Wild Force. "When I moved from LA, I wondered, what do I do now?" says Ann Marie. "All I'd ever done through life is act. So I started teaching. I like to help the next generation of actors along this great path." Ann Marie liked Kevin's voice, but saw greater things for him. "I said, why don't we put him on camera?"

Six weeks later, Kevin was cast in the movie "Atlantic Rim" as an extra. Ann Marie was the casting director and fellow actor Steve Marlow said he liked Kevin's voice, which earned Kevin an invitation to her open call designed to meet new talent. Local voice actor Johnny Alexander brought his boom box and they played Kevin's demo. She signed him on the spot. So far, Kevin has had roles in about 30 movies, including seven as the lead actor. He has completed more than 150 voice-over projects as well.

One of his proudest voiceover gigs was as a volunteer for WUWF 88.1's Sightline program



"We read stories - cold, no rehearsal - from the Pensacola News Journal to our blind and visually impaired audience," he says. "I also narrated 55 children's books for WUWF's 'The Children's Hour.' In nine years, I logged a total of 770 volunteer hours with WUWF. I admit to being proud of that. Volunteering at WUWF was a way I found to give back to the community for all the good fortune I've had in my life.'

Later, he saw an ad on Facebook for automated recording - dubbing - working with award-winning director Benh Zeiten, who won an Oscar for "Beasts of the Southern Wild." "He was the nicest, sweetest guy," Kevin remembers. One of Kevin's favorite roles was that of Mr. X in a short indie film titled "X's and O's." An actress played Mrs. O in the film. which won the audience award at the 2015 Kite Film Festival in Destin. "It was very good exposure," he says.

While acting looks easy, sometimes it's difficult. Kevin's toughest role was in a series out of Milton called "Kookville." "I got two days' notice," Kevin said. "An actor had dropped out and I got his role."

On top of that, he says, "The

script was so wordy, there was so much to say. It was hard for me to retain all the lines.'

What does the future look like for Kevin?

"I hope to keep working," he says. "As you get older, parts are few and far between on camera, but voice is alive and well." To that end, he has acted in several audio drama series, the newest of which is "The East Haven Eight." "All I have to do is get the scripts, do my lines and send it in," Kevin says. The series is about eight teens who, caught in an exploding building, develop superpowers. He plays the hard-boiled news reporter constantly grilling the kids about their powers.

He's also signed for an upcoming local documentary about a man who helps people. He's not well-to-do, but has made helping others his life work.

It's been an interesting trip for Kevin Gaddie, from two decades as a Navy journalist to voice-over actor to the silver screen. But it's not over yet. "I'd like to say I'm thankful and humble for all the good fortune I've had in film and voice-over in these last 10 years," he says. "I wish I had found this years ago, but it's not too late."

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Happenings Around the Bay

- 03 | Kids' Watercolor with Corina Zalace 10:30 am | Artful Things | Niceville
- **Greater FWB Chamber** 05 Installation and Awards Breakfast 7 am | Christian Life Center at First Baptist Church | FWB
- Niceville Monthly Cruise In 06 3 pm | Landshark Pizza Company | Niceville
- Live Music: Bluegrass Jam 07 12 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville
- Anime & Drawing Basic with Chris McLoone 10 3:30 pm | Artful Things | Niceville Prime Rib Night & Wine Tasting 5 pm | LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant | Niceville Preserve Bluewater Bay Community Briefings 6 pm | Bluewater Bay Clubhouse | Niceville
- **30A Songwriters Festival** 12-15 4 pm | Grand Boulevard at Sandestin | Miramar Beach
- Women's Climbing Circle 13 9 am | Rock Out Climbing Gym | Destin Illuminated Letter with Elia Saxer 10:30 am | Artful Things | Niceville **Classic Car Club** 11 am | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville
- Anime & Drawing Basics with Chris McLoone 17 3:30 pm | Artful Things | Niceville
- 19 HYPROV: Improv Under Hypnosis 7 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville
- Music of the Knights 20 7:30 pm | Destin-FWB Convention Center | FWB



- Stinky Cheese Man! 22 9:45 am & 11:30 am | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville
- Preserve Bluewater Bay Community Briefings 23 6 pm | Bluewater Bay Clubhouse | Niceville
- Anime & Drawing Basics with Chris McLoone 24 3:30 pm | Artful Things | Niceville

FARMER'S MARKETS Niceville Community - Saturdays January 6, 13, 20, 27 9 am - 1 pm | Palm Plaza | Niceville

- **Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation's** 24 **Riedel Seminar** CONT 4:30 pm | Camp Creek Inn | Inlet Beach **Prime Rib Night**
 - 5 pm | LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant | Niceville
- Crescendo! Kick Off Lunch 25 11 am | Bijoux Restaurant + Spirits | Miramar Beach **Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation's Riedel Seminar** 4:30 pm | Wine World | Pensacola Free Concert: Taylor Hicks 7 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville
- Kids' Art Workshop with Marla Armstrong 27 10 am | Artful Things | Niceville
- Anime & Drawing Basics with Chris McLoone 31 3:30 pm | Artful Things | Niceville

ONGOING EVENTS

Oils and Acrylics with Rosalyn O'Grady 10 am | Tuesdays | Artful Things | Niceville Watercolor Techniques with Theresia McInnis

2024

JANUARY

12:45 pm | Tuesdays | Artful Things | Niceville Trivia Night

6 pm | Thursdays | Strange Colt Brewery | Niceville





Hello Frances.

Hello Frances is a podcast for curious creatives and nano entrepreneurs who seek knowledge, purpose, and community produced by the creative team at Frances Roy Agency. A lineup of guests, friends, and mentors candidly share their diverse wisdom and experience. This refreshing podcast is an easy addition to your playlist of favorites.

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Hammock Bay - 1st & 3rd Sundays January 7, 21 8 am | Victory Blvd | Freeport

Grand Boulevard - Saturdays January 6, 13, 20, 27 9 am - 1 pm | Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach



CONNECT.

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🏇 Community

Buzz Bav

February is Black History Month and Bishop Roy Edward Campbell, Jr., Homilist, invites all to the 43rd annual liturgical celebration commemorating Black History Month.

Presented by the Catholic African American Cultural Awareness Group of Okaloosa County, listen to the word of Jesus with an open heart on Sunday, Jan. 28, 2024, at 2 p.m. at Christ Our Redeemer Catholic Church, 1028 White Point Rd. in Niceville. There will also be a musical concert by the Eglin Brotherhood Gospel Choir.

ECCAC Announces New Board Member

The Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center (EC-CAC) recently announced the newest member of its Board of Directors, Shannon Amos.

Originally from Tennessee, Amos moved to the Florida Panhandle in 2005, where she has been a Destin resident with her husband and their age 10 daughter. They also have three adult children. Amos is current-



ly a real estate agent with World Impact Real Estate. As well, she and her husband, Dr. Warren Amos, a radiation oncologist with Genesiscare, are in the real estate investment and rental arena with their two companies, Lullaby Properties and Lullaby Rentals, with Amos serving as the Managing Partner.

Prior to her real estate career, with her Master's Degree from the University of Tennessee in speech-language pathology, Amos was the owner of Speech & Swallowing Services, LLC. Amos has been very involved in the community. She served on the Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation (DCWAF) Board until 2021 and still serves as a DCWAF Trustee. Currently, she is an Impact 100 member, a 7F Foundation member and now a member of the ECCAC Board.



Emerald Coast Music Alliance is celebrating its 8th Annual Music Festival this January 2024. From January 8th - 19th, the ECMA will bring "Carnegie Hall" concert musicians to perform in schools, senior centers, not-for profit agencies, organizations that serve the disabled and more - at no charge! Artistic director and concert pianist Alon Goldstein is returning to perform along with Neo-Art Piano Duo; Regina Tanujaya and Matteo Genera-



ni, brass musicians Alan Morell and Claire Worsey, and special first-time guest musicians The Guy Mintus Jazz Trio - and more!

it org/2024-festival.html.

Two Free Community Concerts:

January 11, 6 p.m., Fort Walton Beach Community Center January 12, 6:30 p.m., Cros-

spoint Church in Niceville Seating is limited; Reserve at

one of the following: https://www.emeraldcoast-

music.com (Festival 2024 page) https://www.Eventbrite.com

(Search for live events by city or

by name.)

https://www.facebook.com/

emeraldcoastmusicalliance For more information, viswww.emeraldcoastmusic.

Several area parades were cancelled on Saturday, Dec 9, due to weather. But, the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida gambled on the weather and were rewarded, holding its Yule of Yesteryear event. Pictured are the Bob Hope Village Chimers with trustees Steve Czonstka, Marie Hallion, Barbara Palmgren and Ken Walsh. Photo by museum trustee Mike Weaver.



MUSIC OF THE KNIGHTS

Saturday, Jan. 20, 2024 | 7:30 PM **Destin-FWB Convention Center**

From Broadway to the top of the pop charts, these musical geniuses each created an incredible individual musical legacy. Music of the Knights honors their lasting musical influence with hits like Memory, Yesterday, Don't Cry for Me, Argentina, Can You Feel the Love Tonight, Circle of Life, Hey Jude, The Phantom of the Opera and more.

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Homeowners' Association and Property Insurance



BY JULIE A. MARTIN

When you live in a community governed by a Homeowners Association (HOA), you might feel like your options for homeowner's insurance are limited. However, working with an independent insurance agent can help you find the right coverage that meets both your needs and the requirements of your HOA.

For instance, some townhomes are covered by a COA,



Condo Association, and the Association assumes responsibility for the exterior walls and the roof of the buildings, so that the unit owners only require coverage for the inside of the dwellings, from the drywall in, as well as their personal property, liability, mold coverage, etc.

Homeowners Associations generally require their unit-owners to purchase insurance coverage that includes coverage for the exterior walls and the roof, in addition to coverage for liability and even flood insurance on that townhome.

An independent insurance agent is not tied to any specific insurance company. So, they can provide you with a range of options and help you choose the one that best suits your situation. They have the knowledge and experience to navigate the complex world of insurance policies and can help you understand the various types of coverage available. This is especially important when dealing with an HOA, which may have specific requirements for the insurance coverage you need.

An independent insurance agent can help you find the right policy that meets these requirements, while also ensuring that you have the appropriate level of coverage for your individual needs.

Furthermore, an independent insurance agent can help you identify potential gaps in your coverage that you may not have considered. For instance, if you have valuable jewelry or art, you may need additional coverage beyond the standard policy. An independent insurance agent can help you identify these gaps and recommend coverage options that meet your needs.

In the case of Jewelry or fine arts and other related types of valuable personal property, the property itself is more likely to be lost through theft or mysterious disappearance than any other type of peril. There are 12 categories of personal property that require appraisals for full coverage in the event of theft, breakage, or mysterious disappearance.

Carriers require a current appraisal, usually within the last 36 months,

along with a picture of the item or set, and a full description. Additionally, they may require the type of location of the item such as in your home or in a bank vault, and rate at least partially based on the location given.

Working with an independent insurance agent also provides the added benefit of having a personal relationship with your agent. You can build a relationship of trust and confidence with your agent, who can provide ongoing support and guidance throughout the life of your policy. They can help you navigate the claims process and make sure that you receive the coverage you need when you need it most.

Finally, working with an independent insurance agent can save you time and money. They can help you compare policies from different insurance companies and find the best coverage at the most competitive price. They can also help you identify discounts and other cost-saving opportunities that you may not be aware of.

In conclusion, when you live in an HOA-governed community, it is important to work with an independent insurance agent to find the right homeowner's insurance policy that meets both your needs and the requirements of your HOA.

An independent insurance agent can provide you with a range of options, help you identify potential gaps in your coverage, build a personal relationship with you, and save you time and money. Don't leave the protection of your home and personal belongings to chance — work with an independent insurance agent to ensure that you have the right coverage for your needs.

At Abora Insurance, we know that life is complicated, but insurance doesn't have to be.



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The Community

Why is the Medicare Open Enrollment Period Important?



By Greg Durette

Now that the Medicare Annual Election Period (AEP) is over (ended December 7th), you can finally take a breather from all those ads, phone calls and mailers. Come January 1st, you will have a chance to try out your new Medicare Advantage, Supplement and/or Prescription plan.

If you suddenly discover the plan you selected during the AEP is not right for you, all is not lost. You will get one more bite at the apple to make changes to your plan.

As with many situations, in order to get a good outcome, you first have to ask the right questions. In this case, the questions you should ask first are:

• Did you sign up for a new Advantage Plan or a stand-

alone Part D prescription drug plan during the last Annual Enrollment Period (AEP)?

• Do you have an existing Advantage Plan or a stand-alone Part D prescription drug plan that renewed with a January 1st effective date?

If the answer to either of these questions is yes, then the Medicare Open Enrollment Period (OEP) is very important to you.

The OEP runs annually from January 1st to March 31st.

During this time, Advantage plan holders are given the option to make certain changes to the plan they selected in the AEP.

These allowed changes are: • Cancel your stand-alone Part D prescription drug plan

• Drop your Medicare Advantage Plan and return to

Original Medicare (A & B only) • Enroll in a stand-alone Medicare Part D prescription drug plan

• Elect to change from one Medicare Advantage Plan to another

Let's a look at each option a bit deeper. First, why would someone elect to cancel their stand-alone Part D prescription plan? The only reason one could have would be it was being replaced by other qualifying coverage. If you cancel without replacing, penalties will accrue and be waiting for you when you do put this coverage back in place at a later date. Plus, those penalties will be with you for life!

Second, there are a few rare circumstances when it makes sense for someone to cancel an Advantage plan and return to Original Medicare known as Part A and Part B. Usually this would have something to do with provider networks which are insufficient for the beneficiary. Again, this rare circumstance would require you to also remain in or enroll in a standalone Part D prescription drug plan in order to avoid accruing the future penalties I just mentioned.

Again, enrolling in a standalone Part D prescription drug plan is a requirement if you do not have qualifying coverage elsewhere and want to avoid those penalties. If you neglected to get that done during the AEP, now is the time to take care of this.

Last, some folks have a change of heart once they see the detailed materials of the



Advantage plan they enrolled in during the AEP. Perhaps you find your HMO plan does not have the providers you need but, a PPO plan does. Or, perhaps the terms of coverage are better in a plan different from your current plan. Maybe, another plan costs less (or even \$0!).

You don't need any reason to switch plans provided you do so before the OEP expires on March 31st. Just remember, you only get one chance to make this change. Once you do, you will have to keep that plan until the next AEP, which begins on October 15th of every year. The best options for your particular situation should be thoroughly discussed with your insurance agent/broker to make sure you have all the facts about the choices you may be thinking about and, get all your questions answered.

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



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NWFSC Welcomes Dr. Henry Mack as Vice President for Academic Affairs

Northwest Florida State College (NWFSC) has appointed Dr. Henry Mack as Vice President for Academic Affairs. Dr. Mack brings a wealth of experience to the role, having served as the higher education and workforce system head for the State of Florida for four years.

As chancellor, Dr. Mack was responsible for Florida's public and nonpublic institutions of higher education—overseeing a \$3 billion dollar budget with a combined K-20 student enrollment of 1.5 million, annually. He led the Divisions of Florida Colleges, Career and Adult Education, Vocational Rehabilitation, Blind Services, the Florida Department of Education's Office of Workforce Education and Educational Alignment and the Commission for Independent Education.

"I am both grateful for and excited by the opportunity to serve the students, faculty, and staff of Northwest Florida State College," said Dr. Mack. "As a first-generation college student and native Floridian, I look forward to helping NWFSC achieve continued excellence



and impact."

Dr. Mack was directly responsible for the State of Florida's workforce education strategy, budget, operations, policy and finance, grants and administration, and, together with the Governor's Office, responsible for all higher education and workforce education legislative and policy priorities.

NWFSC President Dr. Devin Stephenson expressed his enthusiasm for the new hire. "We are thrilled to welcome Dr. Mack to the NWFSC family. His experience and expertise will be invaluable as we continue to strive for excellence in our academic programs." Dr. Mack earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in theology and philosophy from the Catholic University of America and a doctorate in education administration and philosophy of education from the University of Miami.

NWFSC looks forward to the contributions Dr. Mack will make to the College and the community. For more information, please contact the Office of Strategic Communications at stratcomm@nwfsc.edu.

Rocky Bayou Christian School Celebrates a New Chapter

By Doug Stauffer

In a remarkable celebration of growth and legacy, Rocky Bayou Christian School (RBCS) marked a significant milestone with the ribbon-cutting ceremony of Grete Hall. This event not only signifies the expansion of the school's facilities, but also honors its rich history and commitment to academic excellence since its establishment in 1973 by Dr. and Mrs. Robert Grete, and Pastor and Mrs. Harold Thomas.

Niko Stubblefield, a board member and master of ceremonies, who is also a parent of two Rocky-lifers, led the event. Her connection to the school added a personal touch to the ceremony, echoing the sentiments of many families involved with RBCS.

Dr. and Mrs. Grete's vision, which started with just 22 students, has now flourished into an institution already maxed to capacity with 1,050 students. Grete Hall stands as a testament to this growth, being the first new building in over two decades. The 20,000 square foot facility boasts eight classrooms, two science labs, a STEM lab and an innovative outdoor classroom.

During the ceremony, Pastor James Ross emphasized the school's mission, praying for the building to be a tool in "training past and present leaders." He asked that "the Lord be glorified by all that happens" in this building.

Dr. Michael Mosley, the esteemed Superintendent of RBCS, reflected on the journey, saying, "The founders kept their hands to the plow and didn't give up. We are standing here today because they didn't give up. They heard God's call; they answered it; they devoted their lives to the mission and vision of the school." His words resonated with the audience, reminding them of the dedication and perseverance that has shaped the school.

Highlighting the advancements, Dr. Mosley added, "We have done school under oak trees on concrete tables, and we know you can do school anyplace. But having a state-of-theart facility is obviously a huge blessing for us, and we are anxious to take advantage of that." This statement underscores the progress RBCS has made over the years, transitioning from humble beginnings to a modern educational establishment.

Classes in Grete Hall are set to commence in January, marking the beginning of a new era for RBCS. The event concluded with tours of Grete Hall, leaving attendees in awe of the new facility and excited for the future it represents.

Rocky Bayou Christian School, with a legacy spanning over 50 years, continues to uphold its commitment to providing quality education with a spiritual worldview. Under the leadership of Dr. Mosley, who has a distinguished career in education and administration, RBCS is poised to nurture future generations, staying true to its founding vision while embracing new opportunities for growth and learning.





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Education

Okaloosa County Receives A-Rating from the Florida Department of Education

2023 Baseline School Grades were released by the Florida Department of Education (FL-DOE) and the results are highly encouraging in the first year of a new statewide assessment. As a District, OCSD earned an A-rating from the Florida Department of Education once again. The District's percentage of points jumped from 63% last year to 68% this year. Okaloosa is one of three districts in Florida to earn an A each year since 2014.

Superintendent Chambers notified Principals yesterday, stating, "I want to let you know how proud I am of the performance of your students and teachers! Recognizing that the school grades process has been adjusted for this year due to a new assessment and the lack of



a learning gains component, I am thrilled that every single one of our schools either maintained their prior-year school grade or improved! We had no school grade lower than the previous year. I hope that each of you takes great pride in your school's improved performance, indicated by these grades, and I know that you have been hard at work this fall, doing even better."

Ten schools increased their grade from C to B or B to A. Specifically, Laurel Hill, Edge Elementary and Florosa Elementary each earned an A this year after having a B in 2022-2023. Bob Sikes, Riverside, Wright, Shalimar, Elliott Point, Mary Esther and Kenwood, all elementary schools, improved from C to B. Four (4) district-operated schools, Eglin, Choctawhatchee, Crestview and Fort Walton Beach, along with Destin Charter High School, received Incomplete (I) grades. The District has reached out to FLDOE for clarification on the process to be issued a school grade and will provide additional information as soon as possible. In past years, incomplete grades were given if the percent of students tested was below 95%.

According to Superintendent Chambers, the District expects even better results at the conclusion of the current school year. "The 2023 Baseline School

Grades released today could not take into account learning gains made by students because 2023 was the first year of the new FAST assessment. Many of our schools do a tremendous job helping students achieve significant gains each year and ensuring a year's worth of growth in a year's time. This will only help school grades going forward."

For more information, please visit https://www.fldoe.org/accountability/accountability-reporting/school- grades.



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Residential and Commercial



Thank A Teacher!

HCA Florida Fort Walton-Destin Hospital and Okaloosa County School District celebrated the first "Thank A Teacher" recipient, Robert Roeckers, at Okaloosa STEMM Academy. Roeckers joined Okaloosa STEMM Academy for his first year of teaching with an

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apply.) Financing as low as \$79/mo. w.a.c.



undeniable enthusiasm and a commitment to fostering a love for learning among his students. His innovative approach to education, combined with his dedication to student success, has quickly made him a standout educator with his students and amongst peers.

"This year is Mr. Roeckers' first year of teaching, but the way he acts makes his classes fun and enjoyable, you would think that he has been teaching for quite some time," said a student. "He also is very kind to his students and everyone else on campus, and will always greet you with a smile. Thanks, Mr. Roeckers for making my Advisory and Aerospace class fun!"

Visit the www.okaloosaschools.com/page/thank-ateacher to express your gratitude for your favorite teacher!

Local Diving, Drinks and Coffee

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-a-kind entertainment experience, and one that can be enjoyed by kids

and families of all ages. (850) 654-4200 20001 Emerald Coast Pkwy. Destin fudpucker.com

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.

(850) 424-6743 1128 E JohnSims Pkwy., Niceville landsharkspizza.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





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An elegant, culinary adventure, Ovide brings together classic Gulf Coast flavors and Southern culinary traditions.



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Continued on next page

Local Dining, Drinks, Coffee & Entertainment

LOCAL DINING

continued from previous page

taste buds with a made-to-order breakfast sandwich on croissants or bagel with two eggs and cheese and then choose if you want to add Jojo's homemade smoked jalapeño beef bologna, bacon, house smoked barbecue or ham. Cinnamon rolls and kaloches still hold the top spot for sell outs. Stop in for featured muffins, coffee cake or pound cake, 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 or New Year's breakfast to start the year right!

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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 after "LJ Schooner" (the LJ is for Lazy Jack), a cherished four-legged icon on Bluewater Bay Marina docks, the open-air oyster bar and restaurant offers a magnificent view of the water, marina and unparalleled sunset any time of year. There are, of course, oysters and a delicious varied menu with dinner specials such as blackened mahi and grilled shrimp with hollandaise, served

Get a taste of New York right here in Niceville!

Every ingredient we use

has been hand—selected.

over cheese grits.

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!"

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

Thursdays: Open Mic/Karaoke 6-10 p.m.

Jan. 3: Chess Night 6 p.m. Jan. 10: Prime Rib Night:

5-9 p.m., Wine Tasting 5-7 p.m. Jan. 13: 15th Anniversary

Celebration! Food specials ALL DAY! Live music 6-10 p.m. Jan. 17: The Traveling Paint-

er 5:30 p.m. Jan. 24: Prime Rib Night:

5-9 p.m.

Jan. 27: GUMBO TAST-ING! 4-6 p.m. Jody Lucas 6-9 p.m.

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

Oyster bar hours: Wednesday-Thursday, 3-10 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/schooners 290 Yacht Club Dr., Unit 200, Niceville in Bluewater Bay

Ovide at Hotel Effie

Celebrate the New Year in style at a Poppin' New Year's Eve Dinner experience at Ovide at Hotel Effie. Savor a culinary journey with a specially curated 4-course prix fixe

5-9 p.m. on New Year's Eve, feast on a menu featuring New Zealand Lamb Rack, 12-Hour Slow Cooked Short Ribs and Poached Grouper among many more main dishes, appetizers, salads and desserts all along with a complimentary glass of champagne! Reservations are required via OpenTable. Reserve now and receive \$50 off your ticket to Ara Rooftop Pool & Lounge, where there will be a live band and an exclusive rooftop viewing of the fireworks at Sandestin from 7 p.m. - 1 a.m. The luxurious rooftop features a delicious menu of fine wines, hand-crafted cocktails and light bites, and boasts the best seats in the house overlooking both the 8 p.m. and midnight firework displays at The Village of Baytowne Wharf in Sandestin with live music by locally loved musician Jared Herzog from 9 p.m. - 1 a.m. General Admission: \$125. Purchase on Eventbrite. After 9 p.m., Ara Rooftop Pool & Lounge is strictly 21+.

Fuel up with brunch at Ovide on New Year's Day, featuring a handful of Gulf Coast breakfast classics like deviled eggs and shrimp cocktails in addition to specialty brunch dishes like crab cake benedicts and steak & eggs. Keep the festivities going with a flute of bubbly or cure last night's hangover with freshly squeezed juice. Reservations are encouraged via OpenTable.

Hours: Breakfast 7 - 11 a.m.

5 - 9 p.m., Sunday-Thursday; 5 -10 p.m. on Friday and Saturday. Brunch 7 a.m. - 2 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

Tisano's owner Trinity Cole-

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

Tisano's Garlic Grill

man grew up in a restaurant family. Her brother, mother and grandfather all owned restaurants in their hometown of Stroud, Oklahoma, and Trinity remembers working in their restaurants from a very young age. Trinity and her family moved to Niceville when her husband, Trey, was assigned to Hurlburt Field in 2021. Shortly after moving to the area, Trinity purchased Tisano's so she could pursue her dream of owning her own restaurant. Under her leadership, the restaurant has flourished. In 2023, Trey retired from the Air Force so Trinity could continue her passion. Today, Tisano's has become a local favorite and a community staple. Tisano's customers rave over the stuffed mushrooms, the giant portions of homemade lasagna, and the homemade tiramisu. Gluten free options are also available. Trinity's recipe for success is simple. "We just want to provide a clean restaurant with awesome food and friendly staff, at a fair price." All of the pictures on the wall are pictures Trinity and Trey took on different trips to Italy and the wine list features a broad selection of handpicked Italian wines. When you visit Tisano's, Trinity wants you to feel like you're going to a friend's house for a great meal and good company. See the coupon section for 10% off any lunch-time purchase!

Specials include:

Monday: 25% off total bill for active-duty military (with ID) and \$5 margaritas for everyone.

Tuesday: Two can dine for \$49. Includes salad, bread, two glasses of house wine and two entrees (some exceptions).

Wednesday: \$3 per glass of house wine and half off all bottles.

Thursday: 25% off total bill for teachers (with ID) and \$5 martinis for everyone.

Happy Hour 3-6 p.m. Monday-Friday: \$1 off regular priced beer, wine and liquor.

Hours: Mon.-Thurs. 4-9 p.m.; Fri. & Sat. 4-10 p.m.; Sun. 12-8 p.m.

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Tuesdau: Two can dine for \$49 two entrees and two glasses of wine for \$49

Wednesdau: Wine Wednesday -\$3 house wine and half-off all bottles

Thursday: Teachers - 25% OFF Martini Thursday -\$5 martinis all night

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Off the Hook

FWC's New 2024 Saltwater Fishing Record Categories

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC) Division of Marine Fisheries Management and its saltwater angler recognition program, Catch a Florida Memory, is accepting applications for three new record categories starting Jan. 1. In addition to the current All Tackle and Fly-Fishing Weight categories, the FWC will add a Youth Weight category for anglers aged 15 and under and Youth and Adult Length categories to allow for catch-and-release records.

The species eligible for records in the Youth and Adult Length categories include red drum, bonefish, permit and snook. To qualify for a Length Record, the fish must be caught on or after Jan. 1, 2024, measure at least 10 inches and be measured using a flat length measuring device with photographs showing measurement increments clearly visible. Once a record is approved, all subsequent records must be at least 0.5 inches (1.27 cm) greater than the previous record.

The species eligible for records in the Youth Weight category include blackfin tuna, cobia, dolphinfish, flounder, gray (mangrove) snapper, gray triggerfish, hardhead catfish, red grouper, sheepshead, Spanish mackerel, spotted seatrout and yellowtail snapper. The FWC is planning to include more species for records in the Youth Weight category in years to come, providing more opportunities for young saltwater anglers to participate in the records program. To qualify for a Youth Weight Record, the fish must be caught on or after Jan. 1, 2024, weigh a minimum of 1 pound (0.0453



kg) and follow the documentation requirements of the Adult Weight category.

To qualify for a record, a completed application form must be submitted with the angler's signature and a notary stamp. Applications are available at CatchaFloridaMemory. com/Records. Applications must be accompanied by digital or print photographs clearly showing the gear used to make the catch, the angler with their catch, various views of the fish for identification purposes, and required weight or length verification photos. Videos will be accepted for Youth and Adult Length record categories. Both youth and adult applications must be submitted within three months of the catch date. Anglers who obtain a new approved state record after Jan. 1, 2024, receive a certificate, Catch a Florida Memory decal and custom fish metal decor courtesy of The Metal Edge.

The FWC reserves the right to deny any application to the saltwater angler recognition programs for any reason. This includes improper fish handling, which will be especially import-



ant in both the Youth and Adult Length categories. To view best handling practices, visit MyF-WC.com/FishHandling. For a complete list of current categories, rules and eligible species, visit CatchaFloridaMemory. com/Records. This page will be updated with the new categories on Jan. 1, 2024.

Florida Saltwater Fishing Records are part of the FWC's Catch a Florida Memory – Saltwater Angler Recognition program, which rewards anglers for their fishing efforts while encouraging them to target a diversity of species. To learn more and view current records, visit CatchaFloridaMemory.com/ Records or call 850-487-0554.

Check out the latest catches and see your achievements highlighted by following the Catch a Florida Memory Facebook page, Facebook.com/Catcha-FLMemory, and view angler catches and much more on Instagram by following @MyFWC and on FishBrain by following FWC Saltwater Fishing.

If you have questions about the Catch a Florida Memory program, email AnglerRecognition@MyFWC.com or call 850-487-0554.

Your purchase of fishing equipment, motorboat fuel and a fishing license supports these programs along with aquatic education and outreach efforts. Learn more at MyFWC.com/ SFR.



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Sports

Register for the 22nd Annual Seaside Race Weekend!

Feb. 16th - 18th, Benefiting The Seaside School, Inc. Public Charter School

The Seaside School Half Marathon & 5K, presented by SEASIDE®, is back, launching its 22nd year of racing. Registration, presented by Visit South Walton, is now open for Race Weekend February 16-18, 2024, further establishing this event as a signature running event and paramount fundraiser in Northwest Florida. Every year, athletes from around the world converge in Seaside, assisting in funding The Seaside School, Inc.

"We've witnessed tremendous growth and transformation over the years, not just in numbers, but in the quality of the educational experience we provide," commented Teresa Horton, Executive Director of the Seaside School Foundation. "Each year, Race Weekend is a true testament to the collective passion and commitment of our community. 2024 promises an exhilarating experience for everyone!"

This year's race will embrace a dynamic superhero theme.

Participants and spectators alike are encouraged to immerse themselves in the spirit of the event, donning attire inspired by their favorite superheroes, and celebrating the strength and resilience that defines the Seaside community. There will also be first time exclusive VIP experiences for racers and spectators.

"Each registration for the Race Weekend directly fuels our mission-based programming at The Seaside School, Inc. Whether it is enhancing educational experiences for our students through new technology, exploratory programming or gaining access to higher levels of our collegiate curriculum, every race participant plays a pivotal role in our students' success," said Dr. Tom Miller, the new Executive Director of The Seaside School, Inc. "Their financial support resonates throughout every classroom, enriching their lives and inspiring the next generation of leaders to live a life of personal growth and prosperity."



The weekend experience commences with the coastal cuisine extravaganza, Taste of the Race, on Friday, February 16, 2024, promising culinary delights, celebrating local flavors, and culinary maestros. Saturday will be bustling with activity at the Race Expo, where participants can gather their race packets and bask in the pre-race excitement at the Seaside Lyceum. The main event is set for Sunday, February 18, with the out-and-back half marathon starting at 7 a.m. and the 5K at 7:30 a.m. starting and concluding in Seaside.

"Seaside's deep-rooted history with the Seaside School Half Marathon & 5K, now spanning 22 years, embodies our shared ethos of community, vitality, and a commitment to excellence," said Micah Davis, President of Seaside Community Development Council (SCDC). "As Seaside continues to flourish, it's rewarding to see parallel growth and achievement in The Seaside School, Inc., honoring the vision of my parents and our town founders Robert and Daryl Davis."

Registration this year comes with delightful surprises, notably swag from The Seaside Style, this year's swag sponsor. "It's genuinely a mammoth effort, requiring the dedication of over 400 volunteers including students, teachers and parents from Seaside Neighborhood School and Seacoast Collegiate High School, to bring this weekend to life," added Kim Mixson, Principal of the Seaside Neighborhood School at The Seaside School, Inc. "We're immensely grateful for the community's unwavering support."

Registration for the 5K is \$95, and the half marathon is \$130 and 100% of the proceeds

benefit the Seaside School Foundation. Exclusive VIP experiences for both racers and spectators are also available for \$125 with dedicated parking or \$95 without parking. Kids can also take part in the VIP experience for just \$25 [limited to two kids per adult]. Weekend parking passes are also be available for purchase. Military personnel, first responders and teachers are eligible for a \$20 discount upon presentation of valid identification.

The 22nd annual charity Race Weekend will kick-off on Friday, February 16th with an evening under the stars at the official race pre-party, Taste of the Race. Party-goers can attend this delicious Seaside party that features local chefs and restaurateurs competing for the top culinary awards including the coveted Chef's Choice Award, last year won by Wild Bill's Beach Dogs operated by the Dawson Group, and the

Continued on next page





Emerald Coast Classic 2023: Ohio State Triumphs Amid a Sold-Out, Energetic Crowd

BY DOUG STAUFFER

The 2023 Emerald Coast Classic, a prestigious college basketball tournament, was held on Thanksgiving weekend (November 24-25) at Raider Arena, Northwest Florida State College. Headlining teams like Alabama, Ohio State, Oregon and Santa Clara, the tournament drew a sold-out crowd, creating an electrifying atmosphere. Alabama, entering as the top-ranked team and a favorite, along with Ohio State, came up short.

Tournament Overview

In the first round, Alabama overcame Mercer, Oregon defeated Tennessee State, Santa Clara narrowly edged out Southeastern Louisiana, and Ohio State won against Western Michigan. The tournament's second round intensified with the Alabama vs. Ohio State matchup and Santa Clara vs. Oregon.

The Championship Clash Ohio State, led by sophomore guard Bruce Thornton, showcased a dominant performance in the final against Santa Clara. The Buckeyes, with a 5-1 record, defeated Santa Clara (6-1) with an impressive 86-56 victory. Thornton, alongside Jamison Battle and Felix Okpara, played pivotal roles, with Battle scoring

a leading 21 points. Highlights and Key Performances

Thornton's overall impact was noteworthy, setting a career-high with seven assists and scoring in double figures. Ohio State's strategy and teamwork, particularly in the second half, were key to their success. The team's defense and offensive prowess were on full display, with Thornton and Gayle Jr. significantly contributing to the win.



Ohio State's Historical Victory

Ohio State's win marked their first championship in a neutral-site multi-team event since 2012. The Buckeyes' performance throughout the tournament, especially in the championship game, was a testament to their teamwork, strategy, and skill. Their ability to maintain a consistent lead and dominate the second half was crucial in securing the Emerald Coast Classic title.

The Emerald Coast Classic 2023 was more than just a basketball tournament; it celebrated sportsmanship, skill and community impact. Ohio State's victory will be remembered for the triumph on the court and the vibrant atmosphere and economic benefits it brought to the Niceville area.

The Emerald Coast Classic at NWFSC: The Emerald Coast Classic 2023 brought a national spotlight to NWFSC, showcasing its top-notch facilities and vibrant campus life. The tournament highlighted the college's ability to host major sporting events. It underscored its role as a cornerstone of the local community and a beacon of academic and athletic distinction in Florida's Panhandle.

Northwest Florida State College's blend of academic rigor and athletic prowess makes it a unique and vital part of Florida's educational landscape. Its remarkable journey from a community college to a state college, combined with its significant contributions to collegiate sports, particularly basketball, underscores its standing as a center of excellence both in the classroom and on the court.

NWFSC: A Hub of Academic and Athletic Excellence

Nestled in Niceville, Northwest Florida State College (NWFSC) was established in 1963 as Okaloosa-Walton Community College, where it operated on a temporary Eglin Air Force Base campus. By 1969, NWFSC moved to its permanent location, evolving significantly.

Transition to a State College: The college began offering four-year degrees in 2003, marking a significant transition in its academic offerings. In 2008, it was officially designated as a state college, adopting the name Northwest Florida

SEASIDE RACE

continued from previous page

People's Choice Award, won by The Red Bar.

Packet pick-up is Sat., Feb. 17, at the Seaside Neighborhood School and Expo taking place in the Seaside Lyceum. The half marathon (13.1 miles) starts at 7 a.m. and the 5K (3.1 miles) at 7:30 a.m., on Sun., Feb.

18. Both races – the half marathon and 5K – start in the town of Seaside with an out-and-back run along the coastal dune lakes of Scenic Hwy. 30A.

"The race is really important to me because I love Seaside, and without this race, our school might not be here. It's so much fun to participate, cheer for the runners, and hang out with my friends," said Charlotte Stubley, a 7th grade student at Seaside School. "Organizing it takes a lot of effort from our staff, students, and board members. Like my dad always says, 'many hands make light work.' I'm thankful everyone comes together to make this event so special."

For more information and to register, visit runseasidefl.com.

State College. With around 15,000 students, it is the largest educational institution between Pensacola and Tallahassee.

Unique Athletic Positioning: Despite offering four-year degrees, NWFSC competes at the Junior College (JUCO) level as part of the NJCAA Panhandle Conference. This conference includes five schools from the Florida Panhandle - Pensacola State College, Gulf Coast State College, Chipola College, and Tallahassee Community College.

Impressive Athletic Achievements: Since its inception in the 1991-92 season, NWFSC's athletic teams, known as the Raiders, have consistently performed at a high level within the Panhandle Conference. They have secured 9 conference titles and 4 FCSAA Florida state championships. Their presence is strongly felt in the NJCAA Tournament, with 11 appearances and four runs to the national championship game (1995, 2012, 2013, and 2015), triumphing twice (1994-95 and 2014-15).

A Pipeline to Division I: NWFSC's commitment to athletic excellence is further highlighted by its success in nurturing talent. Over the past two seasons, 17 players have transitioned from NWFSC to Division I teams. Remarkably, every sophomore from the 2018-19 team, which held the number 1 national ranking for a significant part of the year, moved on to Division I programs.

The Emerald Coast Classic at NWFSC: The Emerald Coast Classic 2023 brought a national spotlight to NWFSC, showcasing its top-notch facilities and vibrant campus life. The tournament highlighted the college's ability to host major sporting events and underscored its role as a cornerstone of the local community and a beacon of academic and athletic distinction in Florida's Panhandle.

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The following rates will be active this winter season:

- **\$45** Snowbird/Public Rate Nov 1 Jan 31st
- **\$50** Snowbird/Public Rate Feb 1 April 30
- **\$30** 9 Hole Rate/Twilight
- **\$39** Military Rate (Active Or Retired Only)
- \$25 Junior Rate

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Wellness



By Kay Leaman, Health Architect, HealthyDay HealthyLife

The holidays are the time of year we escape from the disciplines we've created. The family recipes, the cookies, pies and beverages flow. And, depending on our emotional state during all the busyness and possible drama is what can move us to over indulge.

Our gut system can take a beating this time of the year. So, read on and I'll offer some thoughts for making this season a bit more digestive (pun intended).

There are two types of constipation: **Periodic**, which is mostly due to dietary or activity fluctuations; and **Chronic**, which can frustrate both doctor and patient.

Let's take a look at each:

Periodic constipation can be resolved with minor changes.



Gut, Constipation and Colon Health





April Pretz, APRN, FNP-C, Member

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Located in the Palm Plaza Shopping Center 850-842-3128 • 1049 John Sims Pkwy., Ste. 2, Niceville WWW.EASYCARECLINICNICEVILLE.COM Causes can be dietary intake, reduced fiber consumption, dehydration, change in schedule or holding or ignoring the urge to go for too long.

14% of people suffer with recurrent episodic or Chronic constipation and there is no known cure. It, many times, also requires medication to help alleviate the symptoms. A medical diagnosis requires two or more of the following symptoms for at least three months:

• Straining 25% of time

Hard stools 25% of time
Incomplete elimination more than 25% of time

• Two or less bowel movements per week

Causes for chronic constipation include pregnancy, hypothyroidism, Diabetes, IBS, depression/anxiety, MS, Parkinson's, stroke, cancer, spinal cord injury and medications. Some of these medications include:

Narcotics

• HBP

Anti-cholinergic for muscle spasms, such as Benadryl, etc.
Anti-Parkinson's and seizure

medications

• Tricyclic antidepressants (adrenal, etc.)

Iron supplements

• Anti-diarrhea and laxatives

Caffeine can cause constipation. But, in general, it helps to alleviate it. Coffee stimulates muscles in the bowel to help evacuate the sigmoid colon. Decaf can do the same, but caffeinated is best. It is also a holistic treatment for constipation.

Substances that can also cause constipation are dairy products which are high in calcium and low in magnesium, calcium intake without magnesium, iron, excess caffeine, alcohol and artificial sweeteners such as aspartame which affect the nerves needed for elimination.

The process of moving food and then stools through the digestive system requires nerve stimulation and these muscles require micronutrients to contract and relax, notably calcium (contract) and magnesium (relax). Diets high in calcium should supplement with a minimum of 250 mg. per day or 400 mg. and should be consumed with fiber. The average fiber intake is 15 grams per day. The optimal amount should be 35 grams per day. We can supplement our fiber intake with 20 grams of a high-quality fiber that contains both soluble and insoluble fiber.

Implementing fiber into our diets should be done gradually,

allowing the bowels to adjust. The ratio is 6 grams of soluble and 4 grams of insoluble 2x daily. Begin with 1/2 serving in the evening. After several days add a second dose in the a.m. Then graduate to the full dose after several more days. Be sure to take a probiotic daily to aid in reducing gas and bloating.

Increasing water consumption is also key. Start here. Track your intake and choose water over sodas or tea.

Now let's get back to the tips for the holidays or anytime:

• Choose a healthy snack before sitting down for the main meal.

• Consider substituting the sugar in your recipes with honey. You can also cut back on the amount needed as honey is sweeter than sugar.

• Drink a glass of water about 20 minutes before eating. Do not drink liquids during the meal as it neutralizes the stomach acids.

• Set out a small plate of cookies and sweets each day. Once the plate is empty, no more sweets until tomorrow.

• When you sit down to eat have everyone take a few deep breaths and offer what they are grateful for.

• Put your fork down between bites.

• Go for a walk after eating.

All of these can help our digestive system "do its thing" without overload.

Remember to take time to de-stress. Several deep breaths can take our body from stressed to calm. The best part is that this can be done anywhere at any time.

Enjoy this very special time of year and have a very blessed and healthy Christmas and New Year.

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



Intimacy Over 50: Embracing a Fulfilling Love Life



By Dr. Richard Chern M.D.

Intimacy over 50 remains a topic shrouded in unnecessary mystery. As age encroaches, couples often retreat from discussing or embracing their changing sexual health needs. Dr. Richard Chern, MD, situated in the heart of Miramar Beach, Florida, is championing a new narrative – that intimacy and fulfillment are not exclusive to youth, but are vibrant at any age.

Understanding the physical shifts that come with age is paramount to sustaining not just sexual health but the deeper emotional bonds that thrive on intimacy. Women may grapple with the repercussions of menopause, while men might con-

front testosterone decline, with both scenarios impacting confidence and the intimate dynamic of a relationship. Recognizing these shifts and addressing them head-on is where Dr. Richard Chern, MD, and his team excel.

Routine lab work is the cornerstone of Dr. Richard Chern's practice, providing crucial insights into hormone levels and overall health, which in turn produces personalized treatment plans. This proactive approach can dispel myths surrounding the inevitability of diminished intimacy with age.

Dr. Richard Chern's clinic offers more than just medical evaluations; it provides a holistic approach to intimacy post-50. With a compassionate, knowledgeable team, inclusive of Sue Griffin, ARNP, the clinic fosters an environment where sensitive discussions are met with expertise and care. Their dedication to health and vitality is reflected in the clinic's platinum status with BioTE, signaling a premier standard in hormone therapy and patient satisfaction.

An invitation is extended to all ages especially those over 50 in the Miramar Beach area and beyond: embrace the possibility



of a rich, fulfilling intimate life with the support of Dr. Richard Chern, MD. It is never too late to address sexual health, to rediscover connection, and to experience the joy and pleasure of closeness. With two decades of military precision and a commitment to education and excellence in hormone therapy, Dr. Richard Chern's clinic stands apart as a sanctuary for those seeking to reclaim or enhance

their intimacy. The clinic's pledge is to guide

each patient through the nuances of aging with grace, care, and the latest in medical advancements. Visiting Dr. Richard Chern, MD, is not just about getting lab work; it's about taking a definitive step towards a rejuvenated intimate life. Here, in the tranquil surrounds of Miramar Beach, the golden years can indeed be golden, filled with health, happiness, and heartfelt connections.

Don't let misconceptions dictate the course of your intimate life. Reach out to Dr. Richard Chern's clinic, where your journey to a vibrant, intimate future is just a phone call away. Schedule your appointment at (850) 837-1271 and open the door to a chapter of life where intimacy continues to flourish, proving that love knows no age.

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- Do you wish your teeth were whiter?
- · Do you think you show too much or too little of your teeth when vou 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.



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Supporting Others' Mental Health

> Wellness



By Stephenie Craig

This time of year can bring uncomfortable feelings and can exacerbate pre-existing mental health struggles. While some people are decorating and celebrating, others are experiencing loss, depression, loneliness, anxiety and even suicidal thoughts. When someone you care about is struggling, it can feel difficult to move toward them in support. At times, we might avoid people, because we aren't sure how to be helpful and have fears we will say or do the wrong thing.

While mental health chal-

lenges aren't new, we are living in a post pandemic, social media driven world that has seen a significant and non-discriminating rise in mental health struggles over the last several years. Now, everyone knows someone coping with emotional discomfort that creates significant life disruption. We can all benefit from basic tools for providing healthy support to those around us.

Things NOT to do when supporting others:

Don't avoid. People who are struggling want to feel seen and understood. When we avoid engaging, we unintentionally send a message that people are only acceptable when they aren't struggling. Those struggling with mental health often feel a sense of shame regarding their struggles and isolation isn't helpful.



Don't try to fix the person or the struggle. Mental health struggles are legitimate and complex. It is not as simple as thinking more positively, worrying less, or getting more exercise. The suffering of others can be uncomfortable and can stir up our problem solving instincts because we want things to be better. However, those struggling need to know you care, you see them, and you value them regardless of their struggles.

Don't take emotional responsibility for the person's struggle. We want to be present and encouraging while also recognizing the person struggling has authority over how they want to manage their struggle. No one can be responsible for changing another's emotional state or keeping another person from harming themself. We can take steps to be caring but if we are beginning to feel like the person's struggle is our struggle, it's time to increase emotional boundaries.

Don't judge. It's easy to assume that we might do something different, however, each person navigates struggles with their available tools and energy. Judgment and shame typically produce more of whatever exists rather than bringing about change.

Things TO do when supporting others:

Reach out consistently. People struggling with mental health often find it difficult to keep up relationships when they are spending significant energy managing their emotional/physical state. Often, this is not about a lack of value for relationships but about a state of overwhelm. Call, text, send a note in the mail, send a care package, bring a meal, invite the person for coffee, ask if you can come by for a visit, offer to do a load of laundry, babysit, sit with the person, ask questions about their experience and be present.

Encourage seeking additional support. A support system needs to have multiple people and components to be effective. It is not healthy to be someone's only support person. Be supportive while encouraging the person to also seek counseling, a support group, faith support or medical support. You can encourage, however, it is the person's choice to follow through on seeking additional support. Use words of affirmation. Try reminding the person what positive traits you see in them. Tell them about ways they have been a good friend, ways you see they make a contribution, ways they matter in the world, ways they matter to you.

Provide empathy and validation. Try reaching for how it might feel to be in their shoes. Communicate with words and actions that you see they are having a hard time, you care about them, and you are seeking to understand their experience. "It makes sense that you're feeling overwhelmed." "It seems like you're working really hard to feel better and not sensing progress and that is really frustrating."

Involve others when needed. When someone is talking about suicide whether directly or indirectly, it is important to help connect the struggling person with helpful resources such as the suicide hotline (dial or text 988) and the ER for additional support for staying physically safe. If the struggling person is a minor, it is important to involve safe adults in the process.

These tips are a beginning. Continuing to educate ourselves about healthy ways to support others makes a difference in the lives of individuals and in communities. As you move through the holidays, intentionally be aware of others who might be struggling and extend some love and support where possible. Connect with us along your journey at journeybravely.com.



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Local owners Jim and Kim Wonsick say coming up with the name of their business was easy, J - Jimmy (31) and B - Brandon (28) are their children who are now grown and actively involved in the daily operations. "In the beginning, we were primarily a respiratory company," says Kim. "However, low insurance reimbursement, coupled with burdensome documentation requirements have pushed us in a different direction."

In 2008, they moved to their current location and added a retail showroom, which was expanded in 2022. "We have grown our retail business into a one stop shop for all your home medical equipment needs," says Kim. "We have daily living aids, bathroom safety items, pain management creams and lotions, gloves, lift chairs, power scooters, walkers, knee walkers, wheelchairs, hospital beds, wound care, catheters and so much more. We are also happy to carry items that our health care providers need such as littmann stethoscopes, manual blood pressure cuffs, colorful and fun compression socks, pen lights, medical scissors and more."

During the Pandemic, Kim says the business was open the entire time. "Our staff was amazing and put themselves at risk daily to help our customers who had continuing need for medical equipment and supplies. We also worked very hard, sometimes around the clock, securing masks, gloves, hand sanitizer $\tilde{\&}$ cleaning products for our community as these items were not easy to find."

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will make sure you are properly fit for compression socks and stockings, braces and CPAP. You will not find a more trained staff, several of them have been with us a very long time, they know insurance billing rules and the products we sell inside and out and most of all they really do care about our customers. If you are new to Medicare we would love the opportunity to transition your CPAP service to our locally owned company.'

Kim says they get asked weekly, why J&B Medical is more expensive than the internet. "The answer is simple," she says. "Sometimes we are not; we try to be competitive with all of our products, but there are differences that you might not realize. We only stock the highest quality equipment and supplies, we assemble the products so you do not have to and we offer free maintenance on the products we sell. Many products require a prescription, but for unclear reasons online providers are not held to the same standards, which is very concerning. Our inventory is on site. So, if you have a problem, we can address it at the store versus you having





to ship a product back and wait for a replacement."

Kim continues, "If your rollator brakes need adjusting or your wheelchair wheel needs tightening you just bring it in. Receiving proper instruction is very important and we do that with all of our products. A good example is wheeled walkers are not safe for everyone and we will identify that and offer alternatives. You will not get that service from an online provider."

J&B Medical is located at 540 E. John Sims Parkway. Call 850-729-2559, like them on Facebook for discounts/giveaways, Google to read about the company and staff or visit www. jbmedical.org. "We are proud to be active members of our community and plan to be here serving you and your family for many years to come," says Kim.

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Talent Has No Color The Story of Ruby Elzy and Our Local Connection to Black Diva of the Thirties Part 3

By Jené McCracken

Success Achieved ... and Then

A high point for Ruby Elzy came in December of 1937. Ruby was invited to sing before a ladies' luncheon. The guests were the wives of the U.S. Supreme Court Justices. Ruby and her white accompanist, good friend and fellow Julliard graduate, Arthur Kaplan, arrived for their performance. Unlike all the other times, she had to enter the houses of white people by way of the back-kitchen door solely because of her race. This time she was welcomed and ushered through the South Portico Doors of The White House to be introduced warmly by the First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt. The White House concert was a success. Mrs. Roosevelt wrote an enthusiastic review in her daily newspaper column which was published throughout the nation.

Years later following an eightmonth, cross country revival tour of Porgy and Bess, Ruby was selected by the Metropolitan Opera to be the first African American to play the title role of Aida, an Ethiopian Princess, in Verdi's sumptuous opera. In her life, Ruby had transitioned from a Mississippi "pauper" with uncertain prospects, to an Ethiopian princess with the world spread out before her! All things seemed possible.

Tragically, before the first performance as Aida, Ruby required surgery. Exhausted from



the Porgy and Bess revival tour and having only five days of rest before the surgery, Ruby died unexpectedly during the operation.

It was 1943. She was only 35. Both Emma Elzy and Jack Carr, Ruby's second and devoted husband, were stunned and grief stricken.

Emma sent a telegram to C. C. and Cleo: "Our beloved Ruby passed during an operation."

"My dad was never the same," Ed told David. Bill, Ed's older brother, later shared with David that "Ruby's death hit them all very hard. It was a waste, her death, a waste."

Bill had visited with Ruby in Chicago when she closed at the Studebaker Theatre that January. Bill said, "We must have walked 16 blocks before we could find a place that would allow us, a black lady and a white man, to sit together." For Emma,

For Emma, Ruby's shortened life was not a waste. She wrote to C. C. that Ruby's work would continue and that C.C.'s own efforts "helped thou-

sands of Negro boys and girls throughout America ... your finding Ruby down in the hills of Mississippi ... and giving her a chance."

C. C. and Cleo McCracken retired and relocated to Tavares, Florida, where they had a few citrus trees and grew gladiolus to sell. C. C. visited Emma Elzy in 1952 and he then commenced writing Ruby's biography. However, he had to abandon the biography due to declining health and died in 1957. Cleo died in 1965.

The manuscript was packed away with other content and found its way to a closet in the Niceville house of Janet Mc-Cracken, educator, and Mary Ruth McCracken, artist and educator. The boxes, uninvestigated since C. C.'s death, were relocated to Ed's house following Mary Ruth's passing in 2000. Bill died later in 2000 and Janet died in 2003.

Since 1957, the manuscript slumbered for nearly 50 years. Ruby, long forgotten by the public, only as a footnote in other books, came back to life for David. David knew, with Bill's, Janet's and Ed's blessing and support, that his biography of Ruby Elzy was now a possibility.

Cleo's Baldwin piano, used by both Cleo and Ruby, was also used by Ed in his childhood. That piano eventually passed to Ed, an accomplished amateur pianist who enjoyed playing for his family, friends, colleagues and himself – with fond memories of Ruby and her uniquely exquisite voice.

Ed, Ruby's favorite, died in 2009.

David Weaver wrote his book,

the acclaimed Black Diva of the Thirties: The Life of Ruby Elzy, compiled and produced a CD on Ruby Elzy's music, and is currently the Executive President of the Ohioana Library Association. He also conducts symposiums, festivals and retrospectives on Ruby Elzy. His book is widely available as a book and as an ebook.

For a quick summary by David Weaver of Ruby's life, samples of her singing, and the story of his writing the book, start with the You Tube video entitled "Columbus Neighborhoods: Ruby Elzy."

Publisher Note: This is Part 3 of a 3-part series—the story of Ruby Elzy and her local connection to founding president of Okaloosa-Walton Junior College (now Northwest Florida State College), Ed McCracken. If you missed Parts 1 and 2, you can read it in Bay Life August and September 2023 at MyBayLifeNWFL.com.



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Sean of the South: **A New Year**



By Sean Dietrich

Long ago, my college professor told us to choose a poem to recite in class. Students chose lofty selections from the greats. Whitman, Dickinson, Frost. I consulted Daddy's Hank Williams songbook.

10:40 P.M.—New Year's Eve. Hank Williams is on my radio. My wife is sleeping in the passenger seat. My coonhound is in the backseat. To bring in the year, we've gone for a drive on county roads that weave along the Choctawhatchee Bay. There are no cars out. The highway is vacant-except for police cruisers. I've never welcomed in a year like this. As a boy, my father and I brought in holidays with shotguns. We'd march to the edge of creation and fire twelve gauges at the moon. Then, I'd sip Coca-Cola; he'd sip something clear. Another year goes



by without him.

11:02 P.M.-my tank is on E. I stop at a gas station. The pump card-reader is broken. My wife is still out cold. I go inside to pay. The clerk is a young girl with purple hair. She wanted to be with her kids tonight, but someone called in with a sinus infection. I buy a Coca-Cola in a plastic bottle. I also buy a scratch-off lotto ticket. The last few minutes of the year, I'm feeling lucky. I use my keys to scratch the ticket. I win five bucks. So, I buy another two. I win another dollar. "Lucky you," the cashier says. "Wish I could buy one, but it's against store policy." To hell with policy. It's New Year's Eve. I buy her one. She swipes a coin from the take-a-penny tray. She scratches. She wins ten bucks. We high-five. It's only ten bucks,

but seeing her win makes my vear.

11:28 P.M.—I'm driving. My wife is still sawing pinelogs. I'm riding through the North Florida woods, sipping Coke. Trees grow so high you can't see the moon. It's almost like poetry. Long ago, my college professor told us to choose a poem to recite in class. Students chose lofty selections from the greats. Whitman, Dickinson, Frost. I consulted Daddy's Hank Williams songbook. He'd given it to me before he died. He'd wanted to be a guitar player once upon a time, but he was god-awful. He gave the instrument to me.I recited, "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry," and made a D. I wasn't doing it for the teacher.

11:40 P.M.—my Coke is almost empty. I'm parked on the edge of the bay to watch fireworks. My coonhound is looking at me with red eyes. And I'm writing you, just like I do every day. Listen, I don't remember how I started writing, or why. I have nothing valuable to say, I don't know any big words, and I'm as plain as they come. But I won't lie to you, it has been precious to me. And so have you. These are my last words of the old year, my first words of the new: I love you. Happy New Year.



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🌸 Musing

A Pastor's Ponderings: Embracing 2024 - A Journey of Growth and Faith



By Pastor Doug Stauffer

As we usher in 2024, it is natural to imagine the prospect of new beginnings. This universal feeling of starting anew echoes

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the teachings of the Bible: each day offers a blank canvas. The Bible, rich in narratives of new beginnings, assures us of God's unending mercies and the potential for renewal regardless of our past. "It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22-23).

I see God's guiding hand through almost every stage in my life—from the spiritual awakening of salvation, through life's joys and trials, to God's

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calling into the ministry. Each of these chapters and many more have been a testament to God's faithfulness and a reminder that with Him, every ending paves the way for a new beginning.

We've all seen or heard of lives dramatically transformed by faith—stories of finding hope in despair, strength in weakness, and purpose amidst uncertainty. These testimonies inspire us as we step into 2024, inviting us to examine our lives, seeking areas for renewal and aligning our paths with renewed vision.

The Bible abounds with stories of new beginnings—Noah's emergence from the ark into a world to be reborn, Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt to a promised future and a promised land, and Paul's transformative encounter on the road to Damascus. Each narrative underscores the central theme of the Christian faith: no matter the past, the future holds endless possibilities for those who trust in God.

Growth often arises from dissatisfaction. Spiritual growth challenges us to leave our comfort zones. The lukewarm faith rebuked in the Laodicean Church reminds us to pursue our spiritual journey with fervor and continuous advancement. We should, like King David, relentlessly seek God despite our imperfections.

In our distraction-filled



times, prioritizing our relationship with God is essential. As we navigate 2024, let's draw inspiration from biblical figures like Joseph and Job, whose unwavering faith and steadfastness in trials remind us of God's sure direction. This new year is more than just setting resolutions; it's about deepening our commitment to God, aligning our goals with His will, and seeking His guidance in all aspects of life. Psalms assures us of God's goodness in the year ahead. "Thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and thy paths drop fatness (Psalm 65:11). Let this year be marked by trust in His faithfulness, reflecting on His presence in our past, and looking forward to His blessings in our future. May we find the courage to embrace change, grow in devotion to God, and step out in faith.

Let's carry hope and determination into 2024, actively participating in life-changing endeavors. In 2024, let's commit to living our faith with purpose, pressing towards the goals God sets for us. May we find joy in small steps, strength in shared faith, and grace to overcome challenges. Remember, our journey in Christ is about who we are becoming in Him. May this year be crowned with His goodness as we walk with God, forging a path of growth, faith and unwavering devotion.

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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What Could Go Wrong?

By Anna Fisher, Associate Artistic Director, Emerald Coast Theatre Company

In 2012, The Mischief Theatre Company dreamed up a worst-case scenario play where absolutely everything that can go wrong, does go wrong. It is the stuff that us theatre-makers have nightmares about, like set malfunctions, missed cues, and actors getting bonked on the head. It first premiered at the Old Red Lion Theatre in London and due to its success eventually moved on to the West End. Coincidentally, film and TV director J.J. Abrams had been filming Star Wars: The Force Awakens in London in 2014 when, on a day off, he popped into a West End theater to see The Play That Goes Wrong and absolutely loved it.

"I just became obsessed with this idea of trying to help in any way that I could if it were ever to move to Broadway," Abrams said, adding that he soon teamed up with veteran theater producer Kevin McCollum (Rent, Avenue Q) to do just that.1

In 2017, The Play That Goes Wrong premiered on Broadway with Abrams making his theatrical debut as director.

From London, to New York, and now Emerald Coast Theatre Company in Miramar Beach, FL, this show is like the



"Little Engine That Could." The humor, the writing, and the over the top scenarios make it such an audience favorite that it has won multiple awards including a Tony and Drama Desk Award. I am thrilled to say that we open what The Times calls a "masterpiece of malfunction" next month in January.

As if that wasn't exciting enough, we are also opening The Marvelous Wonderettes: Caps and Gowns in January. This is the follow up show to ECTC's The Marvelous Wonderettes which you may have had the pleasure of seeing in Season 9. The four friends are now at their 1958 high school graduation and beyond, performing all of the favorites like "Rock Around the Clock" and "At The Hop."

And since it's kind of cold in

January and February, ECTC has a third offering to keep you indoors and entertained. Pulitzer prize winning play Crimes of the Heart opens in February. This darkly comic show is about three eccentric sisters and a murder charge in a small southern town. We are going to make everything go right for The Play That Goes Wrong and these other fabulous winter offerings January through March. I hope you'll join us for some good stories, warm coffee, and a laugh or two, because the heart of ECTC is you!

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CRESCEN Seated lunch, exclusive shopping case and festive raffle An event supporting Sinfonia Gulf Coast \$150/person VINTNER DINNERS Friday, March 1, 2024 Celebrity vintners and chefs SCAN HERE TO BUY TICKETS n stunning homes and venues \$500/persor MAIN EVENT! day, March 3, 2024 Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa World-class vintners, delectable bites, a seated lunch, expert spirit purveyors SINTONIA amazing auction items and award-winnir \$195/person ard-winning entertainment CRESCENDO! 2024 IS PRESENTED BY PANERAI setco Hilton ON STAGE JANUARY 19 - MARCH 3 MARVELOUS ON STAGE JANUARY 26 – FEBRUARY 4 THE PLAY THAT GOES WRONG est plav B Ecc emerald coast theatre company GRAND BOULEVARD Tickets or Info, call 850.684.0323 or visit EMERALDCOASTTHEATRE.ORG

30A SONGWRITERS *continued from page 4*

McCartney and a lyrical and poetic prowess comparable to Dylan. Over several decades of album releases, Elvis has recorded amazing songs encompassing R&B, country, jazz, baroque pop, Tin Pan Alley and classical music. It is with tremendous pride that we introduce Elvis Costello, one of my very favorite artists and one of our generation's greatest songwriters, to the 30A Songwriters Festival.

"As we approach the 15th anniversary of the 30A Songwriters Festival, we want to acknowledge how fortunate we are to have hosted so many world class musicians in our small beach community," says Cultural Arts Alliance of Walton County Executive Director and Co-Producer Jennifer Steele. "We gambled in 2010 that touring musicians would enjoy spending an extended weekend performing along the uniquely beautiful coast on the Gulf of Mexico, and fortunately Jackson Browne, Emmylou Harris, Jason Isbell, Mavis Staples, John Prine, Indigo Girls, Brian Wilson, Brandi Carlile, Grace Potter and hundreds more have proved us right. Our Festival is a partnership with venues, resort communities, rental agencies and hotels along Hwy. 30A and beyond, along with important regional and national business sponsors who all benefit from the exposure to the many thousands of music lovers the Festival attracts. Most importantly, our local community benefits as 100% of the Festival's net proceeds are further invested in our mission to foster creativity and our vision of a thriving Walton County where everyone experiences the power of the Arts."

Adds Carter, "There is a direct correlation between the success of the 30A Songwriters Festival and the richness of cultural arts experiences in our communities, including an Art in Public Spaces program (murals and sculptures), The Foster Gallery that supports local artists, professional theatre, the Underwater Museum of Art, Flutterby Children's Arts Festival and the ArtsQuest Fine Arts Festival."

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.

The 30A Songwriters Festival is presented by Grand Boulevard with additional support from Visit South Walton, the Florida Department of State Division of Arts & Culture, WaterColor Inn and Resort and ASCAP.



Arts & Music

Choctaw Bay Music Club Virtuoso Voices Scholarship Fundraiser

VIRTUOSO VOICES SCHOLARSHIP FUNDRAISER

The Choctaw Bay Music Club of Niceville is excited to invite you to the Virtuoso Voices 20th Annual Scholarship Fundraiser Brunch on Saturday, February 24th, at Crosspoint United Methodist Church, 214 Partin Dr. South, Niceville in the Fellowship Hall beginning at 11:30 AM.

Virtuoso Voices Scholarship Fundraiser along with the Jan Miller Studio Artists of the Pensacola Opera will present an engaging theatrical show by their talented artists in residency with professional singing and acting for most all ages to enjoy. The money raised is for the worthy cause of supporting our upcoming musically talented youth in their endeavors to develop into fine musicians for generations to come.

Some people remember this event as the "Opera Brunch." This year, the club decided to change the fundraisers' name to better reflect the presentation. Virtuoso Voices is fun filled with attention grabbing singing, drama, laughter, live music, comedy, and emotion, to lift your heart and spirit. The artists in residence share the story line behind each song to actively engage the listener before they perform. Last year, \$10,500 was awarded to deserving students for college, high school senior awards, and summer music camp scholarships.

This years' theme centers around the show "Die Fledermaus" by Johann Strauss which combines light-hearted comedy with bright and beautifully precise musical motifs, producing a performance which is a joy to watch. Excerpts from this show and from others will be performed.

A fun raffle will be held during the first part of the event and winners are announced/ presented towards the end. Local businesses and private donors contribute a variety of raffle items such as gift cards, wine, fine chocolates, artwork, interior decor, personal services, and

A Taste of Mardi Gras:

Food, Wine, Craft Beer and More

A Taste of Mardi Gras, this year's Food and Wine Tasting Festival supporting the Northwest Florida Symphony Orchestra's youth programs, will feature a jazz combo, tastes of 40 different wines, local craft beers and samples of cuisine from area restaurants, such as Aegean Greek Restaurant, Cafe Bienville, Carrabba's Italian Grill, Magnolia Grill, Peppers Mexican Cantina, Red Lobster Seafood Restaurant. Brozinni's Pizzeria and several others.

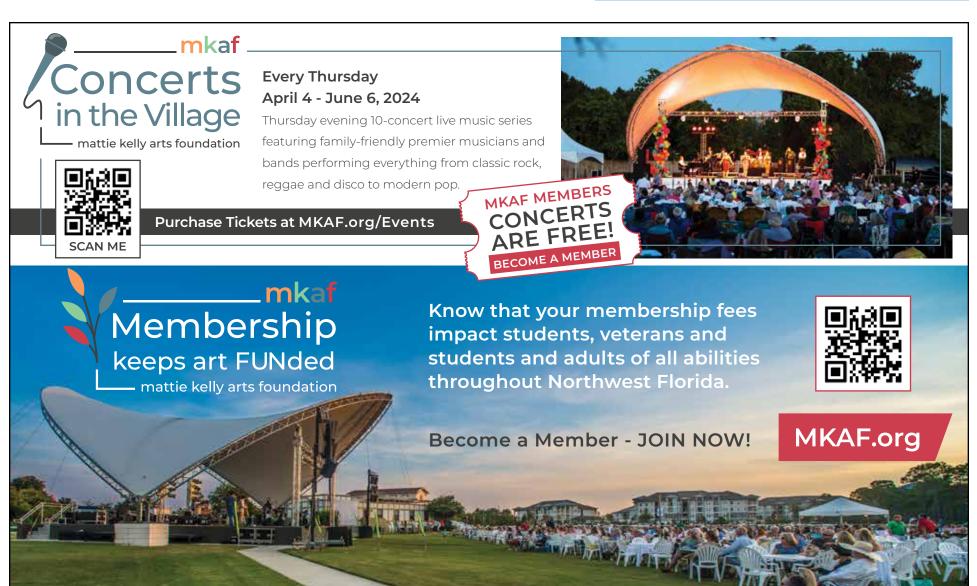
Scheduled for Sunday, Feb. 18, 2024, from 1 to 4 p.m. in the Raider Central of Northwest Florida State College in Niceville, the event will also include a silent auction containing a variety of items such



as gift cards, art, jewelry and gift baskets.

Sponsored by the Northwest Florida Symphony Guild, the event raises funds to support the Symphony's youth programs, such as the fifth-grade concerts and the annual John Leatherwood Concerto Competition.

Tickets are \$50 and can be purchased by calling the Mattie Kelly box office at 850-729-6000 or online at www. MattieKellyArtsCenter.org.



Continued on next page

VIRTUOSO VOICES

continued from previous page

event tickets. Raffle tickets are (1 for \$1, 7 for \$5, 15 for \$10) and will be for sale (cash or personal check) during the luncheon.

Please join us at Virtuoso Voices for an exceptional experience of theatre, singing, food, and fun that's designed for all ages to enjoy as we support our local young aspiring musicians.

Tickets are \$40 for adults and \$25 for students and may be reserved/purchased by calling or texting Karen or Phillip LeGrand at 850.527.4200 or 850.855.0068. Tickets may also be purchased online at Event Brite. For more information, visit the club's website under the events tab at www.choctawbaymusicclub.com.

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NORTHWEST FLORIDA STATE COLLEGE 100 College Boulevard East | Niceville, FL

Tickets: \$50

Food Samples

40+ Fine Wines

Craft Beer

Silent Auction

CALL OR CLICK FOR TICKETS! (850) 729-6000 | MattieKellyArtsCenter.org

To be directed to the Mattie Kelly Arts Center events page, scan the QR code below



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NORTHWEST FLORIDA STATE COLLEGE IS COMMITTED TO EQUAL ACCESS/ EQUAL OPPORTUNITY IN ITS PROGRAMS, ACTIVITIES, AND EMPLOYMENT. FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, VISIT NWFSC.EDU.



