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Postal Customer Local

# Go Red for Women!

By Melissa Fertitta

February marks the 20th anniversary of the American Heart Association's Go Red for Women initiative.

Started in 2004, Go Red for Women prioritizes educating women about their risk for cardiovascular disease. Cardiovascular disease is the number one killer of women, taking a life every 80 seconds, according to the AHA.

Each February, more than 50 countries participate with speaker series, luncheons, fashion shows and workplace events. Attendees wear red to show their solidarity in support of this mission.

Beachworx, Destin's premiere coworking community, is hosting a Go Red for Women event on Wednesday, February 14 at 9 a.m. The breakfast will be informative for men and women. A local heart attack survivor will share her harrowing journey to a successful heart transplant. Inger Berg, Senior Director of Development and Community Health for the American Heart Association in the Florida Panhandle, will be on hand to discuss



Life's Essential 8, the AHA's science-based recipe for improving cardiovascular health in all people. There will also be free blood pressure screenings.

Often called the "silent killer," the AHA estimates that 45% of women over the age of 20 are living with some form of cardiovascular disease. This number can be influenced by the unique life stages women may experience, like pregnancy and menopause.

Pregnancy causes additional strain on a woman's heart and blood vessels, which can uncover existing, unknown cardiovascular issues or create new ones that may last past pregnancy, especially if other risk factors exist, like obesity or gestational diabetes.

While menopause does not

raise a woman's risk for cardiovascular disease, some of the changes that may happen during this life stage can.

According to the AHA, many studies indicate estrogen reduces atherosclerosis by reducing low-density lipoproteins (LDL or "bad" cholesterol) and

> **GO RED** continued on page 4

# Eagle Pride Returns!



By MICHELLE RUSCHMAN

On January 1st, the Niceville High School Eagle Pride Marching Band kicked off 2024 by performing in the 135th Tournament of Roses Parade, an event that has gained an international audience. How was this achieved? Matthew Tenore, Associate Director of Bands, explains. "We're blessed with wonderful band students here in Niceville. When we see these kids achieve in the way they have, we want to reward their efforts with some sort of magnanimous trip. Their work ethic is unlike any other band. These kids have never relented in trying to strive for the highest possible level, and it showed by being invited to the Rose Bowl Parade."

While the 2023/24 band had the privilege of marching for the

**EAGLE PRIDE** continued on page 2







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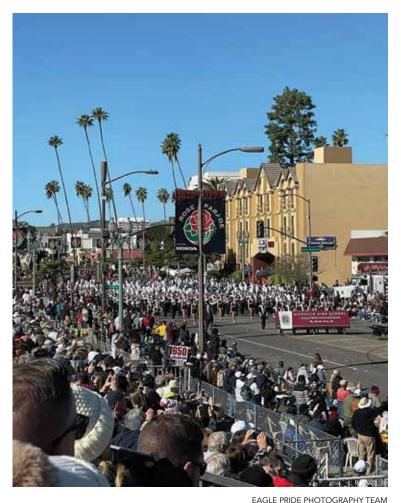
### The community

### **EAGLE PRIDE**

continued from page 1

event, Mr. Tenore wants to acknowledge it was the 2022/23 members who helped them get there. "We had to apply in 2022 to march in the 2024 parade, and we were competing with countless bands from around the world, not just the United States. The band of the 2022/23 school year had a great showing, and it gave us the invitation. We will forever be thankful to everyone who participated during that time."

This year's theme was Celebrating a World of Music: The Universal Language. Because it was so broad, it provided an opportunity to truly showcase what makes Niceville such a special place. "When we heard what the theme was going to be, we had to ask ourselves, 'What would resonate with our town the most?' Being in a military community as strong as this one, we wanted to highlight patriotic songs like American Salute, America the Beautiful, and The Stars and Stripes Forever. We also added a jazz tune, Hey Pachuco, as jazz is a style of music that is uniquely American. We knew the Rose Bowl Parade and Bandfest (an event where the parade's marching bands from around the world, along with their auxiliary members and dancers, get to perform and showcase their musicianship and distinct talents) were going to be international events. So, we wanted the kids to experience sharing their American music."



To be ready for this trip, Eagle Pride members, the directors and families had to have a rigorous practice and preparation schedule, from rehearsal to fundraising. This particular parade posed unique challenges the band had to be ready for. "There were two main thingsthe performance aspect and the trip aspect. As far as the performance, this parade is infamous for having a 105-degree turn right at the beginning where all the major networks are broadcasting. With the width of the turn, we had to plan how to put 11 kids across, and how to do that turn to where each row looks like a straight line all the way through the turn. It took many rehearsals and hours, and the kids executed it well.

The other side, planning and fundraising for the trip, was accomplished primarily by our incredible parent volunteers. We could not have done this trip without their support. Moving 250 kids across the country is no small feat! We can't thank the kids enough for hanging on from early in the semester to now, and the parents for really making sure that they had the best experience possible."

From the moment they arrived in California, Eagle Pride began an incredible itinerary that took over a year to plan. In addition to the parade, highlights of the trip included seeing Hollywood's Walk of Fame, visiting the California Science Center, float building for the parade in Pasadena, eating In-N-Out Burger, performing at Bandfest, watching an L.A. Kings Hockey Game (where Dan Wooten, the Director of Bands, was invited to ride the Zamboni!), going to Knott's Berry Farm amusement park, and capping off the trip with a celebration dinner and dance on the Queen Mary.

On behalf of Mr. Wooten and Morgan Molina, the As-







sistant Director of Bands, Mr. Tenore wishes to send a message to everyone who supports this band: "Thank you so much. When we do trips like this, one of the biggest goals we have is to represent our small-town community at a high level. Performances like this allow us to highlight the talent of our students, their wonderful parents, and not only Niceville and Eglin Air Force Base, but the surrounding areas as well. We could not have done that without all the sponsorship, contributions and encouragement. We hope that we honored you in response."

As Mr. Tenore thinks about the future of Eagle Pride, he wants families who might be considering the marching band as part of their child's high school experience to know this: "Some middle school students may look at this trip and think, 'I don't know if I could do that.' What we want them to be aware of, though, is that we design our band program to be as welcoming, supportive, inclusive and accessible as possible. If you've had a middle school band experience, we take you where you are, and will get you to where you can be as successful as you can be. Being a part of the largest organization on campus will also help you feel involved in the high school and safe around all of the new friends in your section," he said.

"From the band to the color guard to the majorettes, the coaches and my mentors, Dan Wooten, Jeff Adams and Eddie Steadman, have provided the leadership that continues to permeate our entire program," Mr. Tenore continued. "I could not be prouder of seeing the students we teach achieve so much and get the reception and recognition they have earned through their hard work. Dan, Morgan and I are truly grateful to be part of this wonderful organization and look forward to meeting incoming students."

To help the marching band with their ongoing efforts, use the concession stands and purchase 50/50 raffle tickets during football games or support local restaurants' Eagle Pride Spirit Nights. If you're interested in donating or becoming a sponsor, email Eagle-PrideFinance@gmail.com



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Publisher/Executive Editor Lori Leath Smith Lori@LifeMediaGrp.com Director, Advertising Sales Scott Miller Scott@LifeMediaGrp.com Production & Layout Kim Harper

> Advertising Sales Ray Cyr

Writers Susan Benton Stephenie Craig Heather Bennet Eye Wes Fell Melissa Fertitta Ron Kelly Samuel King Margaret Zonia Morrison Barbara Palmgren Bobby Parker Michelle Ruschman Doug Stauffer Scott Thomas

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### 🏇 Community

# A Rare Gem: McCaskill & Company Celebrates 30 Years

By Lori Leath Smith

What was once a childhood dream for a young boy, William "Bill" Campbell, has grown into three decades of one of the most successful jewelry design businesses in the Southeast. McCaskill & Company owners, Bill & Elizabeth Campbell, have established an exciting jewelry business foundation and impeccable customer service philosophy that continue to propel McCaskill & Company to the forefront of the jewelry industry.

Bill's passion and love of jewelry stem from he and his grandmother, Gussie McCaskill Campbell, spending hours together marveling over the jewels and gems that his great-grandfather brought home from his travels around the world. Here the seeds of his appreciation for fine jewelry were sown from the McCaskills and Campbells, some of the earliest settlers in Walton county. Never did he imagine that the precious time spent with his grandmother would one day culminate into a coveted business where he

could fulfill his dream of one that is loved by McCaskill's many devoted customers.

Like many jewelers, owners Bill and Elizabeth Campbell started with humble beginnings—first a

small kiosk in Seaside (1994) and later a storefront at the Market Shops at Sandestin (1995).

As the business grew exponentially, it was a sign for Elizabeth to join full time after her 25-year-career as a licensed therapist. In 1999, with determination and passion, the Campbell's opened their current free-standing location.

McCaskill & Company became a true, next-generation family business in 2008, which also included their next milestone, an accessory boutique, Sarah Carolyn, adjacent to Mc-Caskill & Company, opened by their daughter, Carolyn Camp-



bell Brigman. It later became a luxurious bridal design gallery (2015). Now serving as vice president, Carolyn grew up learning the jewelry business, while managing the former boutique served as the perfect training ground for running all aspects of the business.

Carolyn feels the brand's success through three decades hinges on its unique ability not only to adapt to some trends, but also to maintain the classic, memorable and timeless jewelry designs coveted by customers. "It could largely be attributed to our vigilance in anticipating, recognizing and choosing jewelry that moves us in hopes of moving our customers as well," Elizabeth continues. "We cherry pick our pieces, favoring one-ofa-kind designs," she says.

Never stuffy or pretentious, Bill, Elizabeth, Carolyn and the entire McCaskill staff strive to offer the most memorable experience possible, from the time you enter the store. "We realize for some it can be intimidating," says Elizabeth. "But we are actually very down to earth. It's important for us to help people feel warm and invited." For example, each morning, the staff offers chocolate chip cookies and coffee. "We want people to feel at home, welcome and enjoy their time here," says CarMCCASKILL & COMPANY - Finest Jewelry & Watches -

olyn. "They can even shop in their beach attire!" Bill delights in sharing his knowledge and intricacies of jewelry pieces, often relating interesting tidbits about the designers, all of whom he knows personally. Elizabeth considers herself a detail-oriented influence where customers receive the special "touches" she invokes on a day-to-day basis.

At the core of the Campbells' successful venture is relationship. "This is a relationship business," says Carolyn. "You

Continued on page 13

# IT ALL STARTS WITH A GEMSTONE

# MCCASKILL & COMPANY

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### The Community

### **GO RED**

continued from page 1

inflammatory processes in the vascular system. Estrogen may also act as an antioxidant.

After menopause, a woman's body naturally makes very little estrogen and a decrease in this hormone during menopause may cause cholesterol to buildup in arteries, leading to increased heart attack and stroke risk.

Risk for metabolic syndrome also increases during menopause. Metabolic syndrome is a condition that usually includes three or more of the following risks: abdominal obesity, high triglycerides, low HDL cholesterol, high blood pressure and high blood sugar.

Go Red for Women is de-

signed to educate women about their unique risks and symptoms and empower them to take control of their cardiovascular

• Systolic pressure (the top

number in a blood pressure

reading) measures the pressure

in your arteries when your

heart beats. A "normal" num-

ber, according to the CDC, is

less than 120 mm Hg (millime-

ters of mercury). You might

have high blood pressure if

your systolic pressure is 130

bottom number in a reading)

measures the pressure in your

arteries when your heart rests

between beats. If diastolic

pressure is 80 mm Hg or high-

er, and stays high over time, it

can put you at risk for cardio-

vascular disease, heart attack

• Diastolic pressure (the

mm Hg or higher.

mean?

arteries.

health through education and self advocacy. The initiative also raises funds for women-focused research.

### By the Numbers

### and stroke.

Blood pressure is an indicator of cardiovascular health, • Blood pressure is affected but what do the numbers by physical activity, diet, cholesterol and alcohol consump-• High blood pressure tion and tobacco use. Some makes your heart work hardinfluences we cannot control include genetics, heredity, age, er, which strains the heart and

> race and ethnicity. • A single high reading is not an immediate cause for alarm. Having blood pressure measures consistently above normal may result in a diagnosis of high blood pressure (or hypertension).

• If your blood pressure is normal (120/80 mm Hg or below these numbers), have it checked at least every two years. If it is high, follow your health care professional's advice to control it and consider monitoring it more frequently. Find the AHA's guidance on monitoring your blood pressure at home at this URL: https://bit.ly/home\_BP

Next to the U.S. Government, the American Heart Association is the largest funder of heart disease and stroke research. But according to the AHA, only 38% of 2020 clinical trial participants were women. Go Red for Women events support the AHA's commitment to funding research focused on women.

Events like the one being held at Beachworx on Valentine's Day help educate men and women about risk mitigation and raise money to further the AHA's mission of education, outreach and research.

Scan the QR code to register for the event or donate to the American Heart Association.



Link to Beachworx Valentine's Day event or visit Eventbrite and search 'Go Red for Women Emerald Coast':

https://bit.ly/GoRedDestin

### Women's heart attack symptoms can be different from men's.

Both men and women generally experience chest pain or discomfort, but women more often experience shortness of breath, nausea or vomiting and back or jaw pain.

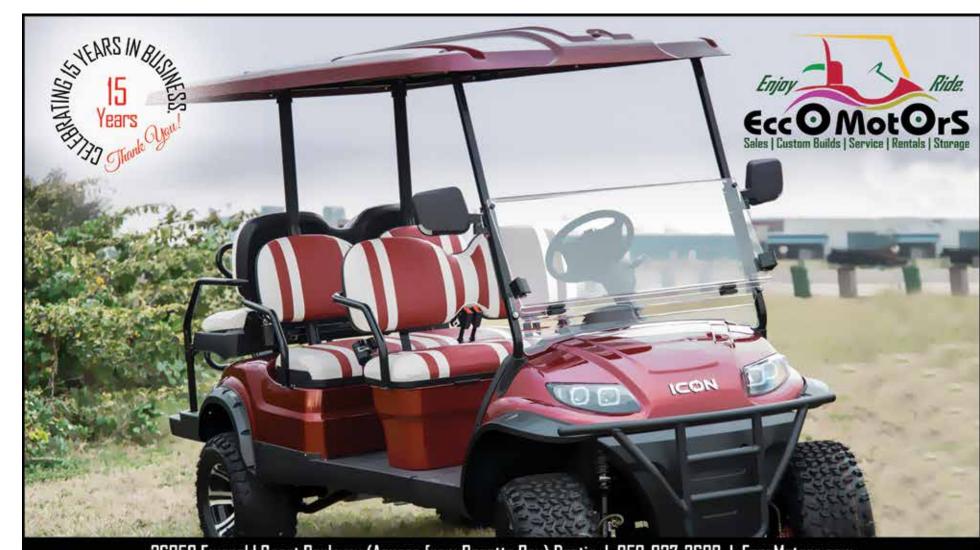
Stroke symptoms are the same for men and women and present suddenly. Stroke symptoms can include numbress in the face or on one side of the body, confusion and trouble speaking or understanding, vision trouble in one or both eyes and severe headache. The acronym F.A.S.T. is an easy way to respond to warning signs of stroke.

F - Face drooping. Ask the person to smile. Is there drooping on one side or numbness?

A-Arm weakness. Is one arm weak or numb or drifting downward when asked to raise both arms.

**S** - Speech difficulties. Is it difficult for the person to correctly say a simple sentence? Are they difficult to understand?

T - Time to call for an emergency response if any of these symptoms present, even if they go away. Get the person to a hospital immediately.



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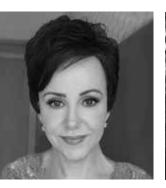


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### n Community

# Off the Couch and Into Creation Real Faith, Real Adventure Await Viewers

By Michelle Ruschman

When missionaries, Mike and Libby Wild, began making videos with their four sons in 2011, no one in the family dreamed it would one day become Wild Brothers Productions. In less than 10 years, what started as a video series for friends and family in the Niceville area, has now become a multimedia business with brothers Morgan (25), Hudson (23), Kian (21) and Asher (19) at the helm. It is through their company they are bringing their adventures from around the world right to your home. They still make videos to entertain and educate our locals, but their efforts are now inspiring people around the world.

Morgan shares that growing up as missionaries positioned the Wilds to share experiences that no one else was having back home. "In 2003, my family moved to the country of Indonesia as Christian missionaries to serve the Wano, a community of approximately 1500 indigenous semi-nomadic people living in the Highland jungles. They were a beautiful people, but they were burdened by sickness and tribal warfare that led to a lot of hardship in the village.



We lived among them as students of their culture, spending the first five years just learning their language, worldview and culture. As we were building relationships, we served them through my parents' medical clinic, even before we could speak fluently."

Back in the United States, friends and family asked questions about their day-to-day life. In response, with their parents' encouragement, the boys began to film their many adventures. "In 2011, on a short furlough here in America, we came back for a few months, and our parents produced a series of 15 videos for our church called Growing Up Wild. That was developed as an elective for a homeschool curriculum. This show was the starting point of our filming career."

Over the next several years, the brothers continued to document their lives overseas, collab-









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**Lawn & Landscape Location 1440 Live Oak Street, Niceville** Open Monday-Friday 7:30-4 850-897-9060 office@baldwinturfniceville.com orating in their distinct talents and learning how to get better. Their goal was to be authentic and unscripted so their audience could truly be with them in the moment. Over those 10 years, they would grow up with scientists from around the world who provided an amazing education, footage and distinct opportunities. They were able to produce reality show content and documentaries, even partnering with Answers in Genesis. Without Wi-Fi, however, they were unable to take full advantage of the internet to reach an international audience. That would change in 2020 when COVID brought the family back to the United States. "We were in different stages of education, most of us in college. We had always imagined that we were going to go our separate ways. But, when COVID shut everything down, we were doing a lot of online

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Page 7

# Saving the Green Space Update

By Barbara Palmgren

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

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

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

Fortunately, at that time,

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

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

Witnessing the loss of the former Magnolia Golf Course, now abandoned and soon to be developed, the lesson was painfully in front of Bluewater Bay homeowners. Witnessing the closure of the Lakes Course to development was another wakeup call. Last month, while attending a meeting of PBWB, I personally witnessed the loss of



other golf holes and the driving range across from the clubhouse. When I entered the meeting, I felt the resolve and dedication to see that the carnage cease.

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

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

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

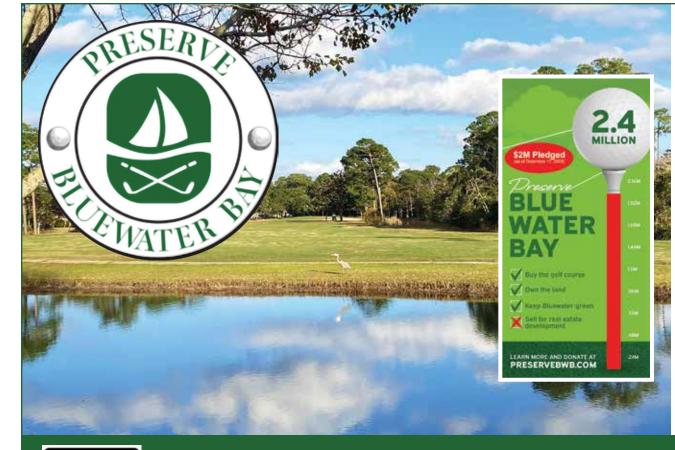
With your help, we can cross the finish line! Contact David Rauch at 850-865-0897 or visit preservebwb.com to learn more and make a pledge. Property owners living on the course can also purchase up to 20 feet of property behind their home extending into the golf course for \$8 a sq. ft. with certain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

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

Working together, a community can do anything. Let's win this race!

### Upcoming Community PBWB Meetings

6 p.m. | BWB Golf Clubhouse Tuesday, February 6 Tuesday, February 20



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

We need to raise \$2.4M through the Capital Campaign to purchase the 150 acres that is available. As of 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:

February 6 & 20 @ 6 PM



Scan the QR code to learn more. Support our efforts by: Donating or Volunteering • Attending Events • Playing Golf Visit preservebwb.com golf@preservebwb.com | 850-865-0897

### n Community

# Bay Buzz Events



### The SeaLight Festival Debuts at Seascape Resort

A dazzling world of light featuring more than 1,000 handmade Chinese lanterns comes to the Panhandle following roaring success in New York City, Atlanta and Washington D.C. The SeaLight Festival is making its Florida debut following three consecutive years of sell-out runs in New York City, Atlanta and Washington D.C., where it welcomed more than 500,000 guests. On Thursdays

- Sundays from 5-9 p.m., Feb. 1 to March 31, 2024, Seascape Resort will undergo a breathtaking transformation into an extraordinary world of illumination. This captivating spectacle will feature over 1,000 handcrafted Chinese lanterns and lights, guaranteeing an unforgettable experience. Tickets, all ages, start from \$17.99 children and \$25.99 adults. Purchase at sealightfestival.com.

### Wear Your Favorite Heels at Habitat Walton County's Hard Hats & High Heels Feb. 2

Make plans for the annual women's empowerment luncheon, Hard Hats & High Heels, bringing together a cross-section of the Emerald Coast's professional, social, and philanthropic leaders, Fri., Feb. 2, Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa, 11 a.m.- 2 p.m. Tickets are \$60 at eventbrite.com/e/2024hardhats-and-high-heels-luncheontickets-739785005867. This year's event showcases a keynote speaker, a silent auction, games, prizes, an awards presentation, seated lunch, complimentary cocktail (21+),



Wine & Spirits Pull and more. Visit WaltonCountyHabitat.org.

### Seaside Prize Weekend Feb. 2-4

The highly anticipated 2024 Seaside Prize weekend takes place Feb. 2-4, with a variety of events and symposia themed, "New Urbanism: Frontiers Remain." For the 30th anniversary of the Seaside Prize, the SEA-SIDE Institute will recognize Victor Dover and Joe Kohl, founders since 1987 of the Miami-based town planning firm, Dover, Kohl and Partners at the awards ceremony on Feb. 3 by Seaside Founder Robert Davis at The Chapel at Seaside. The Seaside Prize is an annual award presented by the Seaside Institute to individuals who have made significant contributions to the fields of architecture, ur-

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ban planning and community development. Recipients are selected based on their exceptional achievements, commitment to design excellence, and their positive impact on communities around the world. Register at seasideinstitute.org.

### Camellia Festival Feb. 10

The majestic grounds of Eden Gardens State Park in Point Washington have more than 370 camellias and many will be in bloom for the annual Camellia Festival on Feb 10, 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. Every February, The Friends of Eden Gardens State Park and guests pay tribute to the Camellias, provide an array of educational displays and presentations, and invite visitors to stroll through the Camellia gardens and grounds. There will also be Camellias for sale as a fundraiser for the park! Between the months of November and April, the Camellia bushes bloom. The camellias at the park were strategically selected and planted to provide blooms throughout the cooler months. The event is free with paid park admission (\$4 per car). Additional parking is at Bay School with tram service. There will be educational stations throughout the park and camellias available to purchase. Summer Kitchen will be selling delicious food and drinks near the pavilion and Bo Adams will be playing music from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. on the Bayou stage.

### Laissez Les Bon Temps Rouler Feb. 11

It's the Annual Mardi Gras Parade on Sun., Feb. 11, 2 p.m. at the Village of Baytowne Wharf at Sandestion. No cost to attend, the Village streets will be filled with costumed dogs and their humans along with unique and colorful floats, golf

carts, vehicles, pick-up trucks and Mardi Gras cheer. Let the good times roll with dressed-up marchers in their Mardi Gras best and Mardi Gras music filling the air as four-pawed friends and parade participants shower parade-goers with a barrage of beads, moon pies and other trinkets. Baytowne is looking for Krewes to join in the Mardi Gras festivities. To participate, register by Friday, Feb. 9, at 5 p.m. at baytownewharf.com. Participants who register by Feb. 5 will receive five points added to their score.

### Register for the Seaside Race Feb. 16-18

Benefiting the Seaside School, Inc., public charter school, the Seaside School Half Marathon & 5K, presented by SEASIDE®, launches its 22nd Race Weekend, Feb. 16-18. Registration for the 5K is \$95 and the half marathon is \$130. 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 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 outand-back run along the coastal dune lakes of Scenic Hwy. 30A. To register, visit runseasidefl. com.

### Tropical Reunion Wedding Vow Renewal at LuLu's Feb. 17

Looking for the perfect romantic Valentine's Day present for your spouse? Celebrate your love and commitment by officially renewing your wedding vows at LuLu's Tropical Re-Union on Sat., Feb. 17, 1 to 3 p.m. at Lulu's at the foot of the Mid Bay Bridge. Couples should pre-register at the restaurant or

Н	appenings Arc	ound	d	the Bay FEBRUARY
01	Gopher Tortoises: A Keystone Species 6:30 pm   Crosspoint Church   Niceville		12	Charlotte's Web 9:45 am   Mattie Kelly Arts Center   Niceville
02	Greater FWB Chamber First Friday Coffee 7 am   Christian Life Center at First Baptist Church   Fort Walton Beach			Downbeat Jazz Concert 7 pm   Fudpucker's   Destin
	Coffee and Conversations 7:30 am   Niceville Council Chambers   Niceville		13	Watercolor Techniques with Theresia McInnis 12:45 pm   Artful Things   Niceville
03	Pop-up Shop: Head & Heart 10 am   Artful Things   Niceville New Heights Wrestling presents "Bulldog Bash"		14	Second Wednesday Breakfast 7:15 am   Niceville Community Center   Niceville Wine Tasting and Prime Rib Night
	7 pm   Freeport High School   Freeport <b>Niceville Monthly Cruise In</b> 8 pm   Landshark Pizza Company   Niceville		15	5 pm   LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant & Oyster Bar   Niceville Greater FWB Chamber Business After Hours 5:30 pm   El Paso de Mary Esther   Mary Esther
04	Bluegrass Jam 12 pm   3rd Planet Brewing   Niceville			Niceville-Valparaiso Chamber Annual Awards Celebration 6:30 pm   Mattie Kelly Arts Center   Niceville
	Women's Climbing Circle 5 pm   Rock Out Climbing Gym   Destin		17	Pickleball Tournament 8 am   Niceville Senior Center   Niceville
06	Watercolor Techniques with Theresia McInnis 12:45 pm   Artful Things   Niceville			2nd Annual Gumbo Cookoff 5 pm   3rd Planet Brewing   Niceville
	Preserve Bluewater Bay Community Briefings 6 pm   Bluewater Bay Clubhouse   Niceville		20	Preserve Bluewater Bay Community Briefings 6 pm   Bluewater Bay Clubhouse   Niceville
07	Anime & Drawing Basics with Chris McLoone 3:30 pm   Artful Things   Niceville		22	The Cher Show 7 pm   Mattie Kelly Arts Center   Niceville
	Chess Night 6 pm   LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant & Oyster Bar   Niceville		23	One-Stroke Basics (Level 2) with Sheila Mahony 10 am   Artful Things   Niceville
08	Greater FWB Chamber Nothing But Networking 3:30 pm   Artful Things   Niceville		24	Birding Little Creek Woods 7:30 am   visit choctawhatcheeaudubon.org for more information   Niceville
09	One-Stroke Basics (Level 2) with Sheila Mahony 10 am   Artful Things   Niceville			5th Annual Shrimp and Grits Festival         12 pm   Brotula's Seafood House and Steamer   Destin
10	Birding North Okaloosa and Walton Counties 7:30 am   visit choctawhatcheeaudubon.org for more information   Niceville Mardi Gras 5k Race	e		2nd Annual Plew PLA Purse Bingo 6 pm   Eglin Golf Course   Niceville
	9 am   Christ Our Redeemer BWB   Niceville Mardi Gras Golf Scramble benefiting Heritage Museum		27	Watercolor Techniques with Theresia McInnis 12:45 pm   Artful Things   Niceville
	8 am   Regatta Bay Golf Course   Destin Pop-up Shop: Jardin du Chat		28	Prime Rib Night         5 pm   LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant & Oyster Bar   Niceville
	11 am   Artful Things   Niceville Daddy Daughter Date Night		29	Unlikely Pairings: A Wine and Culinary Sensory Seminar 3:30 pm   Cuvee 30a   Inlet Beach
	4:30 pm   Timpochee 4-H Youth Camp   Niceville Wes Herndon Live 6 pm   Horse Power Pavilion   Freeport			ONGOING EVENTS
	Northwest Florida Symphony Orchestra - Stars of Tomorrow	TQAST 'N JAM bat Alders Protein Carner Results in 1994		Oils and Acrylics with Rosalyn O'Grady 10 am   Tuesdays   Artful Things   Niceville
	7 pm   Mattie Kelly Arts Center   Niceville	13 1		Trivia Night 6 pm   Thursdays   Strange Colt Brewery   Niceville
11	Toast 'n Jam feat. Brubeck Brothers Quartet         10:30 am   Henderson Beach Resort   Destin	× • _		
FARMER'S MARKETS		ammock Bay - <sup>-</sup> ebruary 4, 18	1st & 3	Brd Sundays Grand Boulevard - Saturdays February 3, 10, 17, 24
9 am - 1 pm   Palm Plaza   Niceville     8 am   Victory Blvd   Freeport     9 am - 1 pm   Grand Boulevard   Mi				9 am - 1 pm   Grand Boulevard   Miramar Beach





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### The Community

### **BAY BUZZ EVENTS** continued from page 8

LuLu's website, so LuLu's can have special Certificates of Reunion ready. There will be complimentary champagne toasts, wedding cake, flowers for the "brides" and photos for the couples. Prizes will be awarded to the couples who were married ter festival favorite is back for

the longest, shortest and dressed the most festively. To register or for more information, visit www. LulusFunFoodMusic.com/destin or call (850) 710-5858.

### Pursue the Roux at the **35th Annual Sandestin** Gumbo Fest Feb. 24

Gumbo Anyone? This win-



its 35th year at The Village of Baytowne Wharf on Feb. 24, 12-4 p.m.! Gulf Coast restau-



### **DID YOU BUILD OR PURCHASE A HOME** LAST YEAR?

### **PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTION** FILING DEADLINE MARCH 1, 2024

Gary J. Gregor, Walton County Property Appraiser, reminds property owners who intend to make application for Homestead Exemption, Deployed Military Exemption, Combat Disabled Veteran's Discount, Veteran's Exemption, Disability Exemption, Agricultural Classification, Additional Senior Exemption, or Widow's and Widower's Exemption, the absolute filing deadline is MARCH 1, 2024.

If you plan to file your exemption for the first time, please bring with you a copy of your recorded deed or tax receipt, the social security number(s) of all owners of property, Florida driver's license number, Florida auto tag number, and voter's registration number. If you are entitled to disability exemption, please bring proof of disability (two doctors' statements). If you are filing Homestead Exemption on a mobile home, please bring the title or registration certificate.

If you are filing for the "Additional Exemption for Persons 65 and Older" there is a total household income limitation (adjusted annually for cost of living; proof will be required).

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

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

**DeFuniak Springs - Courthouse** 571 Hwy. 90 East

Santa Rosa Beach 31 Coastal Centre Blvd., Suite 600

### **THE ABSOLUTE FILING DEADLINE FOR 2024** EXEMPTIONS IS MARCH 1, 2024.

**Have You Applied For Ag Classification of Newly Acquired Agricultural** Lands For 2024?





rants will compete for the title of 'Best Gumbo on the Emerald Coast." Vote for your favorite as the "People's Choice" winner as celebrity judges deliberate over who will take home the top prize. The afternoon will also feature live music and children's activities.

### **ECCAC** Presents its Signature Gala & Golf **Events March 8 and 10**

The Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center (EC-CAC) is putting on its annual

signature Gala & Golf events this year March 8 and 10. The Gala features a cocktail hour starting at 5:30 p.m., with dinner at 6:30 p.m. on Friday, March 8, at the Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa. Guests will enjoy dinner and live entertainment by the popular Will Thompson Band and DJ Chris Henson; exciting live auction by famed auctioneer Dawn Marie Kotsonis, also known as The Gavel Girl; as well as a featured guest speaker. The Gala proceeds benefit children by providing services at no cost to help identify, treat and support child victims in abusive situations.

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

ready for a tournament shot gun start at noon. An Awards Ceremony will follow the tournament. Tournament cost is \$400, which includes two tickets to the Gala. Gala tickets only are \$250 per couple. Please make reservations on-line at eccac.org. Sponsorships are still available. Contact Lee Curtis at 850-400-3488 or email Lee@ eccac.org

### Wear Shades of Pink! **Women United Brunch & Bubbly March 9**

Join the ladies of Women United for Brunch and Bubbly presented by Florida Power & Light. Sat., March 9, at 10:30 am located at The Venue at Beach Weekend 109 Brooks St. SE, Fort Walton Beach. Contributions support the work of United Way Emerald Coast and Women United to provide mental health resources, access, and education to local women and girls. Tickets available for purchase at united-way.org/womenunited.

### **Dust Off Your Boots and Get Ready to Rodeo!** March 22-23

The 5th Annual Westonwood Ranch Pro Rodeo returns March 22-23 to the City of Freeport Sports Complex. The professionally sanctioned rodeo benefits Westonwood Ranch, an organization whose mission and programs serve teens and young adults with Autism and related developmental disorders.

Come watch some of the nation's top cowgirls and cowboys compete. Contestants will compete in events including bareback riding, calf roping, saddle bronc riding, steer wrestling, breakaway roping, barrel racing, team roping and bull riding. Rodeo gates open at 6 p.m. with a 7:30 p.m. each night. Come early to enjoy live pre-rodeo entertainment at 6:30 by David Gautreau, food vendors, children's inflatable play area and more! Tickets for the Westonwood Ranch PCA Rodeo are sold at the gate: \$20 adults; \$15 children 12 years and younger. Free admission for children ages 2 and under. No ticket presales. Want to become a business sponsor? Email admin@westonwood.org or visit westonwood.org.

The Community

# Walton County to Celebrate Bicentennial in 2024

By Ron Kelly, Walton County Information Officer

Walton County was created in 1824, making this year the 200th anniversary of its founding. Walton County's present total land area is 1,028 square miles, but it was once much larger. Portions of Walton County's original territory were given in 1846 to help form Washington County. In 1848, a northeastern portion was given to Holmes County and in 1915, a western portion of Walton and an eastern portion of Santa Rosa counties were untitled and released to form Okaloosa County.

Thus, Walton County once encompassed much of what is now Washington, Holmes and Okaloosa Counties.

Walton County has a rich history as large as its former borders. Throughout this year, there will be numerous projects and events celebrating its history and heritage. Among those projects is a new website, currently under construction, that focuses solely on Walton County history, through the written word, photographs and videos.

Walton County is also



launching a weekly video series titled Reflections of Walton h County, featuring interviews with Walton County residents who either helped create some of that history or had relatives and ancestors who did. The purpose of the video series is to inform, educate and entertain the residents of Walton County with a slice of historical life each week throughout 2024.

We hope you will enjoy these weekly installments as we look back through the pages of time at this won-

derful and unique place we call home.

Reflections of Walton County - Episode 1 features Chris Mitchell, a former television news reporter, historian and past director of the Florida Chautauqua Association, who gives us a walking tour of the final resting place of some of the most influential people in Walton County's history.

Please visit at the link to view on YouTube,

https://www.youtube.com/ watch?v=fnHIXvjeif4



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



# **New Year, New You?**

By Stephenie Craig The holidays are over and Change yourself. Change your

New Year messages are here. life. Lose weight. Earn more money. Look younger. Do more.

Take better trips. Buy better stuff. Eat differently. You and your life aren't enough. Spend money to be a better, more acceptable version of yourself.

While a life-long journey of growth is a healthy pursuit, common New Year messages miss the mark for changing your life. Most messages focus on external adjustments to create a better life. In reality, internal character patterns drive your external behavior. You can drink less, however, if you don't understand the emotional connection between coping and drinking, you are unlikely to sustain change. You can work out and eat differently, but if you don't address how stress or historical beliefs impact your food/ fitness habits, you are unlikely to sustain change.

What if you shifted from setting external behavior goals to setting internal character goals? What if instead of focusing on working out, weight loss, or drinking less, you focused on strengthening determination, self-control, kindness, or curiosity? It's likely that internal character growth will result in greater success in adjusting external habits. If you grow in self-control, you will set different boundaries with alcohol or money. If you grow in kindness, you will respond more kindly in relationships. So, how do you shift from external behavior goals to internal character growth?

### 7 Ways to Focus on **Internal Character Growth**

Identify your character growth area. Ask yourself: What do I really want to be true in my life and relationships? Then, notice a character trait you need to shift in order for your desired reality to become true. An example for a parent: When my kids are adults, I want to have a supportive, patient, curious relationship with them



that motivates them to want to spend time with me. Character traits to consider addressing to help this desire become a reality: Are you currently patient? Are you currently asking curious questions and listening? Are you currently communicating support? Choose the area where you need the most growth.

Notice patterns and situations related to your growth area. If your growth area is patience, notice when you tend to rush others. Notice when you are short with others. Notice the frequency of the character struggle and the situations in which it occurs.

Identify and increase understanding regarding the origin of the character pattern and how it is impacting your current life. Did your family of origin value being kind? When did being kind feel like a problem for you when you were younger? Counseling may be a helpful tool if you struggle to understand the origins of your character pattern.

Determine what you need to know inside to be

Continued on next page



ATTENTION

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still start each morning with the sound of "Reveille" and end your day with the sound of "Retreat."

From independent living to assisted living and memory care, our community will have you confidently thriving at every age. Call us today to schedule a tour and learn why our residents chose us as their next home base.

### SCHEDULE A TOUR TODAY!

**BOB HOPE VILLAGE** 850-612-8684

bobhopevillage.us



**HAWTHORN HOUSE** 850-517-4323 hawthornhouse.us

### The Community

HERITAGE

GARDENS

UNERAL HOME

### **NEW YEAR**

continued from previous page

able to let go of the current character pattern in favor of the character you are trying to grow. To embrace more determination, you may need to know that you can do hard things. To embrace more curiosity, you may need to know you don't have to know everything.

Try a new way. Notice when you want to judge others rather than extending kindness. Stop. Breathe. Remember what you are growing toward. Try suspending judgment, then asking a curious question truly seeking to understand. See how it feels. Notice the result.

**Embrace the discomfort** 

that comes with releasing the way you are used to doing things. Remind yourself that it is okay to feel uncomfortable releasing the past way to create space for more helpful character growth.

Repeat sustain to growth. Keep slowing down and trying the new way of being. You are rewiring your brain through repetition and over time, it will become more natural.

As you develop an internal character trait, remember to notice how that change supports other external changes you are hoping to see in your life. Be patient with yourself. Change takes time. Connect with us at Journeybravely.com for support along your journey.

### MCCASKILL continued from page 3

don't stay in business 30 years without building trust and customers knowing you care. We care so much about the craftsmanship and, so we work to give customers the best-in style, color and customer service. And they trust us to do it."

Having started with only a small case of pearls and other gems, today McCaskill receives recognition from the world's finest designers. McCaskill & Company is host to some of the world's most exclusive jewelry designers and watches such as Rolex, David Yurman, Erica Courtney, Kwiat, Oscar Heyman and many others. It's been recognized by Harper's Bazaar as one of the "Best Jewelry and Watch Retailers in America" and repeatedly honored as "the Best of the Emerald Coast," "Best in Destin" and "Finest of the Emerald Coast." Locals and out-of-towners attend McCaskill & Company events such as trunk shows. "We're in a unique position because of location to choose designers that appeal to the customers in this area all under one roof-a very broad, distinguished collection," says Elizabeth. "We have people that come in from all over the world, and say they've never seen a better selection of colors or variety of designers across the United States," says Carolyn.

In its 30 years, McCaskill & Company has had a valuable impact in our communities, donating to more than 50 charities. For example, this past December, McCaskill invited customers to vote for their favorite charity, then donated to the winners.

Moving forward, the Campbells have no plans to just sit back. "You could say part of our 30th Anniversary on April 1 will be an expansion," says Elizabeth. "Even after 30 years, it's amazing how many things we keep coming up with to grow and evolve." Having already expanded to a staff of 18, Mc-Caskill & Company has purchased two lots next door and will be expanding its building by doubling its showroom size. "We plan to create an atmosphere of relaxation and spa-like experience with details such as music, scent and touch," says Carolyn. There will also be an enlarged Rolex environment where you'll be able to view watch makers on site. "We just started with wanting more parking," laughs Elizabeth.

When you walk into Mc-Caskill & Company, you'll find an array of delightful jewelry pieces from exquisite diamonds, varying colors of pearls and gemstones, gold and silver pieces artistically formed into bracelets, earrings, watches, necklaces, rings and more. And, you'll make new friends!

McCaskill & Company is located at 13390 Highway 98 W., between Destin and Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort, just two miles east of the Mid-Bay Bridge. Hours: 10 a.m.- 5:30 p.m., Monday–Saturday. (850) 650-2262.

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Page 14

### The community

# The Seaside School<sup>™</sup>: A Legacy of Excellence and Innovation in Education

In the picturesque coastal town of Seaside, a pioneering institution has been shaping the future of education since 1996. The Seaside School, comprising Seaside Neighborhood School and Seacoast Collegiate High School, stands as a testament to the power of community collaboration, forward-thinking and the relentless pursuit of academic excellence.

#### Historical Roots in the Charming Town of SEASIDE<sup>®</sup>

The Seaside School's history is intertwined with the story of Seaside, Florida—a town conceived in 1979 by Robert and Daryl Davis, that became a symbol of community planning and design innovation. Designed on a neighborhood scale with interconnected streets, Seaside aimed to foster a sense of community. The town became famous for its design, and its idyllic setting was immortalized in the hit 1998 movie The Truman Show.



Remarkably, the movie played a pivotal role in Seaside School's history. Robert Davis donated the land for the school, and the fees from The Truman Show funded its first building. Thus, Seaside School was born, taking the path of becoming one of Florida's first public charter schools.

Dr. Rosemary Williams spearheaded the movement to create a tuition-free neighborhood school in Seaside to address the need for middle school education in the southern end of Walton County - emphasizing that success is achievable both academically and socially during the often-challenging middle school years. The journey began with 36 students, two faculty members, and one administrator housed in two portables on Seaside's Lyceum Lawn. Over the years, the school has expanded its offerings, eventually establishing Seacoast Collegiate High School to expand the charter's scope. Today, The Seaside School proudly holds the distinction of being the oldest public charter school in Florida.

### A Holistic Approach to Education

The school prides itself on being a flexible and personalized learning community, providing a tuition-free experience with small class sizes and top-ranked educators - a learning experience usually associated with private education. Learning extends beyond the classroom, encompassing gardening, culinary, art, and music programs, as well as mentorship from local business leaders. The comprehensive athletics program adds another dimension to the students' holistic development.

Additionally, Seacoast Collegiate High School has become the premiere dual enrollment program, empowering students to graduate debt-free or enter the workforce as skilled employees. This unique high school offers a collegiate model where students can earn college credits in 11th and 12th grades to ultimately earn their A.A. degree alongside their high school diploma at no cost. With a 100% graduation rate, over 6,300 college credits earned, and more than \$8 million in academic and athletic scholarships, Seacoast Collegiate High School stands as a beacon of success.

The school's strong collaboration with Northwest Florida State College is set to reach new heights with the expansion of its campus in Fall 2025. This expansion, the first of its kind in the area, will include 80,000 square feet of new educational space, dedicated buildings for classrooms and labs, and "The Accelerator" - a facility housing a workforce/business incubation center. This initiative demonstrates Seacoast's commitment to preparing students for high-demand careers and fostering economic development in the region as well as becoming a national model for education.

### Achievements Beyond the Classroom

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The Seaside School stands

as a beacon of academic excellence, recognized nationally and within the state of Florida for its outstanding achievements. Seaside Neighborhood School, the cornerstone of this institution, earned the prestigious National 2007 No Child Left Behind Blue Ribbon Schools award, solidifying its position among the highest-performing middle schools. The commitment to academic prowess is further exemplified by the school's attainment of high-performing charter school status in 2011 and the esteemed title of a "pioneer charter school" in 2016, bestowed by the Florida Department of Education.

The accolades for The Seaside School paint a stunning picture of a top-rated combination charter school in Florida. Consistently ranking in the top 1% statewide for math and science, the institution proudly holds the #1 position in Walton County. Notably, it has maintained an "A" grade for over 20 consecutive years, reflecting a sustained commitment to excellence that resonates through every aspect of its educational journey.

### Open Enrollment: Shaping Futures, One Student at a Time

As The Seaside School continues to make strides in education, it opens its doors for enrollment from January 5th to February 15th. Prospective students and their families are invited to join a community where innovation, excellence, and a commitment to the whole child have been the driving forces for over two decades.

Seaside School, Inc. stands not only as an educational institution but as a beacon of inspiration, illustrating what can be achieved when a community comes together to invest in the future. With eyes set on continued growth and innovation, The Seaside School, Inc. remains dedicated to nurturing minds and shaping futures for generations to come.

For more information about The Seaside School, Inc. and the enrollment process, please visit SeasideSchools.net.

# BLUEWATER BAY GOLF CLUB



# The following rates will be active this winter season:

**\$50** Snowbird/Public Rate Feb 1 - April 30

- \$30 9 Hole Rate/Twilight
- \$39 Military Rate (Active Or Retired Only)
- **\$25** Junior Rate

**Snowbird card rewards** 10 play card \$400 tax included.

For every \$1 spent after **250 points** will receive 1 free round.



# **Two GREAT stories. One EXTRAORDINARY school.**

LOTTERY ENROLLMENT • January 5 - February 15

Seaside Neighborhood School • Grades 5-8 | Seacoast Collegiate High School • Grades 9-12



Scan the QR code or visit SeasideSchools.net to learn more and apply.

# **Top 5 Reasons to Enroll**



Highest Performing Public Charter School in Florida



### National Model for Education

Seacoast Collegiate High School in partnership with Northwest Florida State College and the Walton County School District, is quickly becaming a national model for education through its multi-million dollar expansion that includes a dual enrollment and workforce development center. This innovative and collaborative model, set to open in Fall 2025, aims to boost economic development and provide access to college-level classes for in-dempnd careers.



Learning goes beyond the classroom for our students, including gardening, culinary, art, and music programs as well as mentoring from local business leaders. We also offer a complete athletics program for our middle and high school students.

### Collegiate High School

Through our partnership with Northwest Florida State College, students who attend Seacoast Collegiate High School have the apportunity to earn college credit hours and an AA degree completely free. Our 2023 graduates earned more than 3,300 college credits, saving them and their families over \$760K in college tuition. The 2023 graduates also earned more than \$3,6MM in academic and athletic scholarships

### **Tuition Free**

We offer our students a tuition-free personalized learning experience typically found In private education including small class sizes and top-ranked educators. We are also a certified STEM School with a strong emphasis on character, communication and critical life skills.



23





### The second secon

# Paradise Music Festival Brings Tributes to Elton John, the Eagles, Journey, Jimmy Buffet and the Beach Boys

By Wes Fell

The only three-day, indoor music festival ever held in this area is coming to the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center Friday- Sunday, March 8-10. Event Promoter Wes Fell with Paradise Promotions of the Emerald Coast has contracted with seven awesome classic bands to perform, featuring four national, touring tribute bands and three Northwest Florida local bands to appear on the Florida Power and Light Stage.

The Friday lineup opens with Jessie Ritter and Jessica Heit, a country duo with Nashville roots and amazing talent. Jessie Ritter is a rising country singer who will someday win a CMT award. And Jessica Heit is a violin/fiddle player extraordinaire who has worked with many bands locally and in Nashville. Following Jessie and Jessica on Friday night will be one of the best local bands in Northwest Florida – the awesome Paradise Bayou Band who plays Classic Rock, Country, Motown and lively dance tunes.

Friday night's headline band - back for a repeat performance from 2023 - is the 7 Bridges Eagles tribute band that will make sure you "TAKE IT EASY." Rolling Stone magazine proclaimed 7 Bridges the Greatest Eagles tribute on Earth. The

The 2024 Paradise Music Festival

March 8, 9, 10, 2024

Saturday lineup features two great national touring tribute bands beginning with Departure from Atlanta, Ga., advising you to "DON'T STOP BELIEV-IN"" with an incredible tribute to a favorite-Journey. Headlining the Saturday lineup will be "STILL STANDING" with a tribute to Elton John. They'll have you chanting, "SATUR-DAY, SATURDAY' over and over again. On Sunday, we open with a fantastic tribute to the Man, the Myth, The Legend - Mr. Jimmy Buffett. Nashville recording artist and Destin resident Chuck Lawson, along with his awesome partner, Cheri Salvetti - the duo SHACK N











UP, will take you down memory lane as you are "WAISTING AWAY AGAIN IN MARGAR-ITAVILLE" dressed in your favorite Parrot Head attire. And to keep the beach theme going, the show will close with the best Beach Boys tribute band on the planet known simply as END-LESS SUMMER. You will be feeling many "GOOD VI-BRATIONS" as you are dreaming of "SURFIN' USA."

As mentioned, this one-of-a-kind event will take place in air-conditioned comfort at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center, with 1000 seats each night, including 700 reserved table seats and 300 general admission seats. There will also be a spectacular light show, food and beverages, as well as vendor booths with band merchandise.

Ticket start at only \$35 each night and can be purchased online from Eventbrite by visiting ParadisePromotions-FL.com. This event

is sponsored in part by Life Media, Cox Media, Florida Power and Light, Omni Broadcasting, Fast Signs, T-Mobile and Zoo-Graphix Online—another great Paradise Promotion!



This Is Another Great Paradise Promotion



Page 16

For some of us, it is inevitable. It happens every year around this time. It's a cumulative effect. The sun sets later. Temperatures creeping up to feeling very Spring-like. And even though we don't want to let our thoughts wander from our current task, we can't help ourselves. We cannot ignore the symptoms of our ailment. We think about being on the water. We think about being on a boat. We think about being on our boat. We think, "I should just go ahead and buy that new boat!"

We have a full-blown case of Boat Fever! And no amount of online browsing, video watching or magazine reading can alleviate our pain. We need to see boats in person. We need to climb up on them. We need to open hatches. We need to compare them side-by-side. We need to be around shiny new boats, and we need to be around a lot of them!

Luckily for us, the Emerald Coast Boat and Lifestyle Show will soon be here, and it's just what the doctor ordered!

The annual show, which has become one of the can't-miss events of the early Spring, returns to its' picturesque home venue at Aaron Bessant Park, adjacent to Pier Park in Panama City Beach, March 1-3.

Each year, the show features the top dealers representing the best brands of boats and personal watercraft, and this year is no different. There will be more marine dealers than ever at the show, drawing from all across the region. Boats will be on display from dealers in Dothan, Panama City Beach, Destin, Fort Walton Beach, Niceville, Shalimar, Eastpoint, Bonifay and Orange Beach.

With more than \$40 million of marine inventory in the park, dealers will be featuring 'A Boat for Everyone.'

From entry-level boats to quad-powered, 45' center console fishing rigs that always draw big crowds, fishing boats, wake boats, cruising boats, personal watercraft and outboard manu-





facturers are on site offering best-of-year financial incentives and unbeatable 'Boat Show Pricing,' which is indeed a real thing!

In addition to hundreds of boats, the Emerald Coast Boat and Lifestyle Show lives up to its billing with an ever-expanding line-up of products for anyone who loves living or visiting the Emerald Coast. Street-legal golf carts, paddle boards, electric bikes, personal watercraft, fishing tackle and seminars, outdoor furniture and service providers for everything from boat maintenance to installing your new dock will be at Aaron Bessant Park the first weekend in March.

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





March 1 – 3 at Aaron Bessant Park



 ${\bf EmeraldCoastBoatShow.com}$ 

### Community



# What Does it Mean to "Age-In" to Medicare?

By Greg Durette, Florida Health Connector

As many times as I have said the term "age-in" to folks when discussing Medicare, it has never failed to elicit a visceral response such as, "What do you mean with this age-in thing?!" or "I don't feel aged-in!"

The fact of the matter is, "ag-



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MEDICARE

ing-in" means you are turning 65 soon, and it is a good thing. There are many we all know that didn't make it to that milestone. Bravo for making it and cheers for many more.

Yes, we are in the middle of the Open Enrollment Period which runs from January 1 -March 31 of every year pre-dominantly for Advantage Plan members (you can re-read my article from last month for more information about the ins and outs of that). But, that does not change the fact many people have birthdays all year long and are actually aging-in during this time as well.

What generally happens is, folks get confused between what they see on TV with all the pitches about "time running out," and what they can actually do during the aging-in period. Let me attempt to de-mystify it a little bit here.

There is a period of time when a person ages-in and becomes eligible for Medicare. Typically, this period of time is three months before the month in which they turn 65 and three months after the month in which they turn 65. Do the math and you will see this is a seven-month period of time around your birthday. There are a few other exceptions to this eligibility period, but those will have to be saved for another article or very long-winded phone call for the braver among us!

The first order of business is to obtain your Part A and B (if desired or needed) through Social Security. Without adding a litany of boring details as to qualifications for each, suffice it to say Part A is typically \$0 premium for most folks and Part B for 2024 will typically cost \$174.70 per month. The Part B premium is means tested and can get a little complicated-certainly more complicated than can be described in this article. Again, suffice it to say, some could pay much more or much less, depending on your Modified Adjusted Gross Income from two years prior unless you apply for a break based on current income. We have a form for that.

If you wish to avoid the LIFE-LONG penalties, you will have to have Part B and Part D (prescription coverage) in place at the time of first becoming eligible. As a reminder, eligibilities are one of those things unique to each person's circumstances. So, it is important to know how these things apply to you.

If you choose to obtain a Supplement, commonly called a "Medi-Gap" policy, you will need to also obtain a separate Part D prescription plan as Supplement plans DO NOT INCLUDE such. If you choose to obtain an Advantage plan, the Part D prescription coverage is typically IN-CLUDED.

As you can see, this can, and usually is, a very confusing time for most folks used to having traditional insurance their entire lives. Suddenly, you are thrust into this new system where everybody and their cousin is calling and/or mailing you every single day with their "better option."

Your best option is the one that best suits you. Maybe it is a great price. Maybe it is a great network of providers. Maybe it is just the peace of mind knowing you have someone you can rely on for information when you need it.

If there is only one take away you receive from this article, it would be to work with someone, like me, that can help you navigate the local landscape and help you completely understand this otherwise very confusing time in life.

Happy New Year!

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



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MEDICARE

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# **Okaloosa County Continues to Prosper**

By Carolyn Newcomer Ketchel, Okaloosa County Commissioner, District 2

Okaloosa County continues to lead with conservative fiscal leadership. Blessedly, we did not have a hurricane in 2023. Okaloosa residents are seeing the work of the surtax funds thanks to the citizens who voted for the 1/2 penny tax and the committee that selects the projects, with final approval by the Commission.

### **Budget**

In 2014, when I first became a commissioner, Okaloosa County had a reserve rate of 6.5 million dollars. This fiscal year we have a reserve of 36 million dollars. This has been an intentional effort by a fiscally conservative Board of County Commissioners. We watched our neighboring County need a tremendous reserve to address the devastation of Hurricane Michael, and are doing everything in our power to be prepared if such a storm would hit Okaloosa County.

### **Budgetary highlights:**

• Property Values are estimated to see a 10%+ increase in FY 2023

• Millage Rate has been 3.8308 flat for 7 years

• MSTU rate of .2990 has been flat for 10 years

### Airports

### Thanks to outstanding financial management this past year by our Airports Department, Okaloosa County retired the last remaining long-term debt for all three County owned Airports, the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Airport (VPS), Destin Executive Airport (DTS) and the Bob Sikes Airport (CEW). This accomplishment is unprecedented in the commercial airport industry and will position our system of airports for sustained growth and financial success well into the future. VPS offers direct connections to 50 cities on Allegiant Air, American Airlines, Delta Air-

Country Airlines. 1,200 additional parking spaces were constructed to meet the increased demand, and another 600-space lot is in design now to be completed before next Thanksgiving. A 30,000 sq. ft. expansion to baggage claim has been designed and will be competitively bid in January, adding two additional baggage carrousels. Covered walkways are under construction now to cover connecting sidewalks and the entire secondary curb, to be completed by late summer. Visit FlyVPS.

lines, Southwest Airlines and Sun

com for more information.

#### Roads

The single largest project in Okaloosa County history, the Southwest Bypass around Crestview, is well underway. This project would not have been possible without the County's <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> cent surtax, the City of Crestview and partnerships with the Florida Department of Transportation and Triumph Gulf Coast.

We are seeing the work of the surtax thanks to the citizens who voted for the  $\frac{1}{2}$  penny sales tax. This includes the Crestview bypass, PJ Adams, Beachview Drive drainage improvements, widening of John King Road, Carmel Drive and Beal Parkway intersection improvements, Overbrook area and Lloyd Street area storm water improvements and many smaller projects for road improvements. We have also had a tremendous effort for dirt road stabilization in the north end. We anticipate we will have sealed 200 miles of previously dirt roads during the next two years. An extensive storm water pipe replacement project on 6th Street and in Lake Lorraine Estates was completed in 2023.

#### **Economic Development**

This past year, Okaloosa County Commissioners approved the acquisition of 588 acres within the Shoal River Ranch property east of Crestview and south of U.S. Hwy. 90. The Shoal River Ranch offers unlimited potential for targeted economic development. With proximity access to rail, Interstate 10, U.S. Hwy. 90, and Bob Sikes Airport, this property is an ideal location for businesses in the light industrial, manufacturing and defense support sectors. Work is nearing completion for the expansion of water and sewer lines east of Crestview along U.S. Hwy. 90 to Shoal River Ranch.

### Human Services Initiatives

Okaloosa has one of three statewide pilot projects for Mental Health Pre-trial Diversion which allows for treatment of the non-violent mentally ill rather than expensive incarceration. This is a win-win for everyone, reducing tax rates, recidivism and jail and court costs. There have been 130 participants and many graduations. The state of Florida allocated an additional \$350,000 in fiscal year 2024 for this remarkable program.

### Parks

A highlight of the year has been the continued development of Veterans' Park on Okaloosa Island accessed by the parking lot of the Convention Center. This park features monuments honor-

**CROSSPOINT.CHURCH** 

ing women veterans who served in conflicts throughout our country's history. The County established an advisory group of women, each of whom served in the military, to identify and craft these monuments. The county plans to continue this project with shoreline and upland improvements on the pristine  $20^{1/2}$ acres of coastal dunes, as well as installation of four more statues honoring women for outstanding service which will be unveiled in the Women Monuments at Veterans' Park. Women Veterans Recognition Day is June 12, and there will be a ceremony at 8 a.m. at the Convention Center. Please plan to attend.

### **Multi Modal Bike Path**

Construction of the bike path from Brooks Bridge to Marler Bridge will begin on the South side of Hwy. 98 later this year. Construction costs will be paid with bed tax dollars, money from our State Legislature and a donor gift. This has been a much-anticipated project.

### The Lazarus Field program

The Lazarus Program gives

Continued on next page



Page 20

# **Protecting Your Treasures**



### BY JULIE A. MARTIN

During the holiday season, many beautiful baubles are bought, beautifully wrapped

insurance z⊚ne

and gifted to loved ones to smile, ooh and ah over. Rings, and earrings, and bracelets and necklaces, Oh My! Now that you have these beautiful gems, gold and silver, too, how do you insure these beautiful treasures?

There are two ways to insure your new valuables. One is to schedule your new jewelry onto your existing home insurance policy for its specifically appraised value. It will be necessary for you to have the item or set appraised by a licensed or certified jewelry appraiser prior to insuring them. Many insurance companies allow appraisals up to 36 months old, while some require new appraisals every 12 months. Please review the terms of your policy to find out what the rules require.

The other way to insure your valuables is on an Inland Marine Floater policy. These policies typically cover for the perils of theft, breakage or mysterious disappearance, but are not tied to your home insurance.

One advantage of having an Inland Marine Floater policy over scheduling on your home insurance is that, if there is a claim, it won't count against your home insurance policy itself. It will still count as a claim, but not the same way.

There are 12 categories of personal property that are typically classified as Scheduled Items:

• Jewelry, goldware, silverware, pewterware

- Furs
- Sports equipment
- Firearms
- Artwork
- Antiques/collectibles
- Stamps
- Coins

• Rare books and Manuscripts

The rating basis of the item or items in question has to do with the current value of the item or set, where it is kept, either in the home or in a safe, as well as the condition of the item.

In the event of loss by theft or mysterious disappearance, there would need to be a police report filed as well as the claim itself.

Many carriers offer discounts for the scheduling multiple items on one policy. For example, if you have a 10K ring and your husband has a Rolex, scheduling them together under one policy would reduce the premiums for both, as it would make more sense than to have a separate policy for each item.

For any older yet still valuable items that fall into this category, please make sure to keep appraisals current to get full value in the event of a claim. If your last appraisal showed a value of 15K, but the current value is 20K, you will not be able to collect on the difference, if you have an old appraisal that is outside the bounds of the underwriting guidelines.

You may also add other items to the same policy such as rare books, antique firearms or other valuable items from the list, provided they have been appraised within the timeframe of the carrier's rules, usually either 12 months, or sometimes up to 36 months, depending on the carrier.

Your treasures carry more than monetary value; to you they would mean the world. So, protecting them to the fullest extent possible is a logical next step, and will be much less expensive than you think.

It's a good idea to sit down with your Independent Insurance Agent to talk about your options, and outline a good plan to protect your treasures in a way that makes you feel comfortable.

### OKALOOSA

continued from previous page

a dignified burial to those who die without means for a service. Truly these individuals are the most forgotten who walk among us. This year the age range was from a newborn baby boy to a 104-year woman who died in a nursing home and had outlived her family. This event has been identified as a model for others to follow throughout the state. Together with members of the local clergy, each November 2 at 10 a.m., the county hosts a burial service at Beal Memorial cemetery to provide a dignified burial for those in our community largely forgotten and without the financial means to afford a proper burial. Please plan to attend this special service each year on the same date.

### Meigs Park for Special Needs

Okaloosa County Commissioners are working with Nicev-

ille to bring an upgrade of \$2 Million to Meigs Park which lies along Park Avenue. The project would utilized \$1.25 million in state dollars and \$750,000 in matching funds from Okaloosa County to assist with Special Olympics. It would feature an 8-ft.-wide quarter mile walking track, a ballfield, basketball and volleyball court, a large Americans with Disabilities Act compliant playground, a large pavilion with a quiet room, new bathrooms and additional parking. Those who participate in Special Olympics will find this ideal for training purposes.

It is an honor and privilege to serve as your commissioner. Some of our best ideas come from the citizens to improve our community. Please let me hear from you if you have an idea to enhance our community.

Carolyn Ketchel is Okaloosa County Commissioner, District 2. She can be reached at CKetchel@myokaloosa.com or 850-651-7105.



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# Have a Safety Plan Before a Storm Learn How to Prevent Unwanted Wildlife Encounters

Move your vessel if you can and protect it if you can't.

• If your boat can be trailered, haul it out of the water and move it to a safe location as far from tidal waters as possible. This includes kayaks and other recreational watercraft.

• Report storm-damaged boats that might be lost or abandoned to your local law enforcement agency or the FWC at 888-404-3922.

Monitor weather broadcasts frequently and be prepared with an emergency kit.

• Stay up to date with storm tracking through FloridaDisas-

ter.org/storminfo.

• Learn how to prepare your home and build an emergency kit at Ready.gov/kit.

Know what to do if you encounter wildlife.

• Alligators and snakes might be observed more frequently after a major storm event, especially in areas with flooding. Keep them at a distance and give them space.

• After a storm, you might encounter a small animal that seems orphaned or abandoned. Rarely are animals actually orphaned; a parent could be searching for food or observing its young from a distance. When encountering injured wildlife,



contact the appropriate FWC-licensed wildlife rehabilitator in your area. A list of wildlife rehabilitators by county can be found at MyFWC.com/Conservation, clicking on "How You Can Conserve," then "Living with Wildlife" clicking on the "Injured and Orphaned Wildlife" slider and "Licensed Wildlife Rehabilitator." ditions, manatees can become stranded. If you encounter a stranded, injured or dead manatee, do not attempt to handle it on your own but call the Wildlife Alert Hotline at 888-404-3922.

Learn more about attending or becoming a vendor on our website!

freshieandcraftexpo.com

During rough weather con-

# Craft, Learn, Beach, Repeat!

### By Scott Thomas

As we cozy up indoors during this chilly weather, thoughts of sunny spring days filled with gardening and crafting activities dance in our minds.

Drawing from over 50 years of gardening and crafting expertise, Scott Thomas shares a few gardening tips.

**Tip #1:** When acquiring seeds for your vegetable garden, carefully explore seed catalogs. Opt for cost-effective options by choosing seeds labeled "OP" (open-pollinated) or "Heirloom." These varieties allow you to save seeds for the next season, offering both savings and the promise of better germination and tastier vegetables compared to the basic hybrid seeds.

**Tip #2:** Trim expenses on plant purchases by directly sowing seeds for crops like sweet corn, beans, cilantro, and peas. Many garden centers offer seedling plants that become more budget-friendly and easier to cultivate when planted directly in your garden.

**Tip #3:** In Florida, where the soil resembles beach sand, ensuring good drainage, incorporate compost into the sandy soil during garden bed preparation. This addition is crucial for retaining moisture, fostering healthier plants in Florida's distinctive gardening environment.

Don't miss the opportunity to learn from Scott! He'll be leading the Gardening 101 class at the upcoming **Freshie & Craft Expo taking place March 7-10**, 2024, at The Island Resort. Register to attend on their website: freshieandcraftexpo.com.

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### Community

# **Bay Buzz**

### FGNW's Conoley Selected for SelectFlorida Board

Local Jennifer Conoley, President & CEO of Florida's Great Northwest, the regional economic development organization in our area serving 13 counties, was appointed by Florida's Secretary of Commerce to serve on the inaugural board for SelectFlorida, a newly formed organization focused on the state's international commerce functions under FloridaCommerce. She is one of only seven members of this important statewide board.

Jennifer is a Certified Economic Developer (CEcD) with the International Economic Development Council and a Master Economic Development



Practitioner with the Advanced Economic Development Leadership program. She has been promoting Northwest Florida for growth and diversification, attracting quality companies and fostering new job creation since 2009. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Communication from Florida

### State University.

"To be chosen as an inaugural board member of this important organization is an honor," said Jennifer. "Promoting Florida as a business destination is crucial in creating more highskill, high-wage job opportunities in the private sector, and I'm excited to join my other colleagues on the SelectFlorida board and contribute to this goal."

Florida Secretary of Commerce J. Alex Kelly announced the first SelectFlorida Board of Directors, appointing Greg Britton as chair and Jennifer Conoley, Beth Kigel, Nick Primrose, Michael Simas, Kelly Smallridge and Mark Wilson to the board. SelectFlorida was formed and founded in 2023 to lead the state's international commerce functions under FloridaCommerce following the signing of House Bill 5 and serves as a catalyst for economic development by promoting Florida as a premier business destination and expanding the state's economic power through private-sector job creation.

FloridaCommerce combines the state's economic, workforce and community development efforts, expediting economic development projects to fuel job creation in competitive communities and promote economic resiliency. For more information, including valuable resources for employers and job seekers, please visitwww.FloridaJobs.org.

### BCC Recognizes Superintendent Hughes



The Walton County Board of County Commissioners (BCC) recognized Walton County School Superintendent Russell Hughes at a meeting in December. Superintendent Hughes was just named Superintendent of the Year by the Florida Department of Education.

Board Chairman William 'Boots' McCormick introduced Superintendent Hughes, saying "It's the recognition of a good friend and a public servant of the county. Some of you may not know it, but Mr. Hughes was recently designated as the 2024 Florida Superintendent of the Year. Out of 67 counties, we have the best superintendent – I have said that all along, but finally, the state recognized it. So, as a token of our appreciation from the BCC, we'd like to present this (plaque) to you in recognition of that honor... Thank you for what you do for our children."

Superintendent Hughes said, "We're glad to bring this kind of result to Walton County. When I became superintendent, we were ranked No. 36 and are ranked now No. 3. We have no 'C' schools in Walton County. There are only four other districts in the state of Florida that can say that. So, we thank you for your support, we thank the citizens for allowing us to educate

their children" he said. "We love children. That's why we're here." Hughes also recognized his wife, Lori Hughes, and Curriculum Instruction Director Crystal Appel.

### Walton County Hosts Job Fair Feb. 9

The Walton County Tourism Department is pleased to help support local businesses and the

community by hosting the third Hospitality & Service Industry Job Fair on Friday, Feb. 9, 2024,

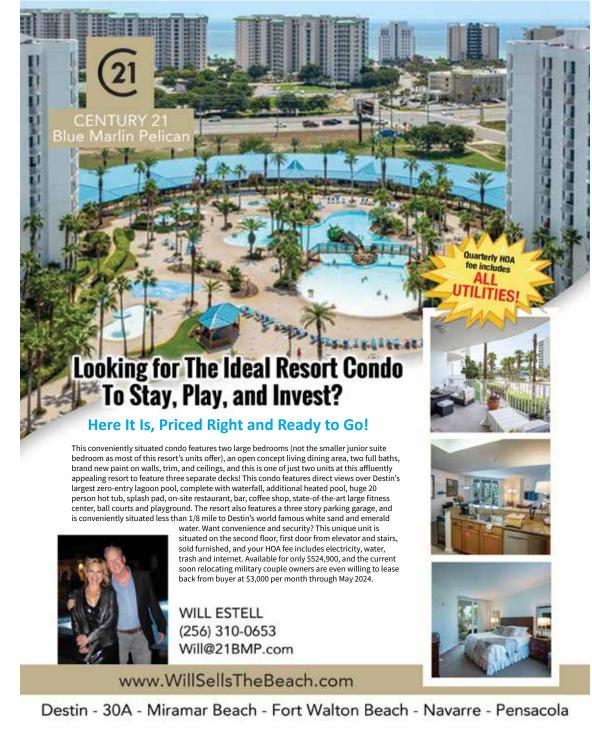
from 9 a.m. - 1 p.m. at the Boys & Girls Club, located at 427 Greenway Trail in Santa Rosa

Beach. Representatives from more than 30 local companies will be present. Each business will be actively recruiting to fill positions. Job seekers are encouraged to attend this free event and network with business professionals who represent some of Walton County's largest employers. Attendees should bring copies of their resume. Walton County businesses interested in participating can register at WaltonFL.com.

For more information, contact Dana McDowell at Dana@ WCFLTourism.com at the Walton County Tourism Department at (850) 267-1216. Walton County businesses interested in participating can register at WaltonFL.com.



Dr. Marie Hallion presented Dr. Barbara Palmgren the museum's annual award for outstanding service to the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida.



### **Environment**

# Sustaining an Ecosystem Through Stewardship

By Heather Bennett Eye

The ecosystem provided by the Choctawhatchee Bay and surrounding areas is vital for environmental balance and biodiversity, with its waterways and estuaries serving as crucial components. These aquatic habitats not only support diverse life forms but also play a key role in regulating temperature, nutrient cycles, and serve as breeding grounds. Additionally, these waterways are integral to the local economy, contributing to fishing, recreation, and tourism. Preserving their health is essential for clean water sources, flood mitigation, and regional resilience. Sustainable practices and conservation efforts are crucial for ensuring the ongoing well-being of this important ecosystem.

The Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance (CBA) is a nonprofit organization formed in 1996 dedicated to promoting swimmable, fishable waterways in Northwest Florida through monitoring, education, restoration and research. In order to inspire water stewardship, they are working to grow a network of supporters to protect these precious natural



resources. Here are some of the recent ways they've been able to drive that mission forward.

Through their education efforts, the CBA was recently able to bring hands-on science learning to over 3,600 students in our community through their Grasses in Classes program. Students grow shoreline grasses at their school, tend to salt marsh nurseries throughout the year, and receive monthly education on local estuarine topics. At the end of the school year, students will then plant their shoreline grasses at a designated salt marsh restoration site along Choctawhatchee Bay. This helps support the CBA's living shoreline initiative.

In October, CBA's Executive Director Alison McDowell & Senior Restoration Program Manager Rachel Gwin, attended the 2023 Living Shorelines Tech Transfer Workshop, an event hosted by Restore America's Estuaries and Galveston Bay Foundation. Alison presented on how CBA sources plants for restoration, and they were able to see Galveston Bay Foundation sites to learn about oyster recycling, conservation lands and education programs.

The CBA relies on sponsors to enable their initiatives. One admirable supporter is Islander Coastal Outfitter, situated at the Boardwalk on Okaloosa Island. As a proud member of 1% For the Planet, they dedicate 1% of their annual sales to the CBA. Beyond financial support, they actively volunteer and have made a substantial impact by assisting with Grasses in Classes this year.

Another outstanding supporter is the beach and fishing apparel company, FL BABE. They endorse four nonprofits, including the CBA. In addition to shopping on their website, you can also explore information about conservation efforts across Florida on their blog. They've even featured our CBA in a November article.

If you're interested in supporting the CBA by volunteering, there are openings currently available with the Water Quality Monitoring and Monofilament Recycling initiatives. The CBA collaborates with the UF Florida LAKEWATCH program to conduct monthly water quality tests at 130 stations spanning Choctawhatchee Bay, the Choctawhatchee River, and the coastal dune lakes of Walton County. The CBA is actively seeking dedicated citizen scientists to contribute their valuable efforts and help ensure the program's effectiveness.

The Monofilament Recycling bins are located at various locations along Destin Harbor, Bluewater Bay Marina Complex, Veterans Park and Ross Marler Park on Okaloosa Island, as well as Nick's Seafood Restaurant, Cessna Park and Thomas Pilcher Park. These bins play a crucial role in preventing fishing line from finding its way into the water where it poses a threat to wildlife causing entanglement, starvation, loss of flipper, tail, or wings, and can even cause death. Volunteers are needed to maintain the bins. aid in outreach efforts and occasionally help with beach cleanups.

For additional details on ongoing and upcoming initiatives and projects undertaken by the CBA, as well as opportunities for volunteering, please explore basinalliance.org. Remember that we coexist with a diverse range of wildlife that depends on the same water sources. Our actions can make a positive impact on their habitats. By being more mindful, we can contribute to the well-being of the creatures that share our environment.





### Page 24

8th Annual

HERITAGE

MUSEUM

# Local Nining, Nrinks, Coffee & Entertainment

### Fudpucker's Beachside Bar & Grill

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Shotgun Start At 8:30am

DEADLINE: Tuesday, FEBRUARY 6, 2024

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

(850) 654-4200 20001 Emerald Coast Pkwy.

Destin fudpucker.com

### JoJo's Coffee and Goodness

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



fee 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 breakfast to start your day off right!

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

(850) 737-6194 4652 Hwy. 20 East, Niceville bigorangehousedesigns.com

### LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant

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

This month:

Feb. 14: Special Valentine's Day Dinner!

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Everyday: 10% military discount to all active and retired military

4506 E Hwy 20 #150 • Niceville | 850-353-2643 | tisanosgrill@gmail.com Order Online: Tisanos.com **Appetizers:** Honey Baked Brie with Crostinis & Fresh Fruit

**Entree:** Surf'n Turf with Wild Mushroom Demi Glace; Shrimp & Grits with New Orleans BBQ • Crawfish Etouffee with Blackened Redfish

**Sides:** Garlic Mash Potatoes • Herb Roasted Potatoes • Veg Medley • Haricot Verts

**Dessert:** Chocolate Ganache Brownie & Cheesecake with Fresh Fruit

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

**Wednesdays:** Kids Eat Free 5-9 p.m.

**Thursdays:** Open Mic/Ka-raoke 6-10 p.m.

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

Oyster bar hours: Wed-Thurs 3-10 p.m.; Fri-Sat 11 a.m.-midnight; Sun 12-9 p.m.

Restaurantt hours: Mon-Tues closed. Wed-Sat, 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Sun, 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Sunday brunch, 9 a.m.-1 p.m. (850) 897-6400

(350) 897-0400 bluewaterbaymarina.com/schooners 290 Yacht Club Dr., Unit 200, Niceville in Bluewater Bay

### **Ovide at Hotel Effie**

Enjoy an unforgettable Valentine's Dinner Experience crafted for you and your special someone at Ovide, the signature restaurant at Hotel Effie Sandestin. Voted 2023's Best Romantic/Special Occasion Restaurant of the Emerald Coast, Ovide embraces the local food and cherished flavors of the Gulf Coast and presents them with a sophisticated and refreshing style. From February 8 to 19, couples can celebrate at a specially prepared table with Valentine's Day-inspired specialty linens and a spread of rose petals. The elevated dinner includes an exclusive Valentine's Day Menu featuring sharable appetizers such as Yellow Fin Tuna Tartare; Tomato Tart; and Octopus Carpaccio. Mains include Duck Confit Ravioli; Beef Tenderloin; Halibut; and Scallops. Finish the intimate evening with desserts like Berry Cheesecake and Chocolate Coulant & Dulce de Leche, and toast to love with a complimentary glass of sparkling wine. Reservations are available at \$120 per person and can be

# Local Nining, Nrinks, Coffee & Entertainment

# **Embarking on a Culinary Adventure:** City Food Hall Redefines the Food Court Experience

By Bobby Parker

In the heart of Destin where the emerald beaches meet the vibrant coastal energy, a culinary revolution is underway at City Food Hall in Destin Commons. This innovative food hall is rewriting the script on traditional food courts, transforming them from ordinary to extraordinary. With a fusion of culinary creativity and communal dining, City Food Hall has become a premier destination that transcends the conventional dining experience.

### A Glimpse into Food Court History: From Humble Beginnings to Suburban Staples

The concept of the food court emerged in the post-World War II era, born out of the practical need to provide convenient and affordable dining options for the growing suburban communities and shopping malls. These early food courts, characterized by fluorescent lighting and a limited selection of



chain restaurants, served their purpose but lacked the culinary diversity and ambiance desired by modern diners. However, fast forward to the present, and a renaissance is taking place, redefining food courts into vibrant hubs of culinary creativity and social engagement. This evolution reflects a shift from utilitarian spaces to dynamic culinary destinations that cater to the diverse tastes and desires of today's discerning patrons.

### The Rise of Elevated Food Halls: A Culinary Revolution

In recent years, a culinary revolution has swept through the world of food courts, and elevated food halls, exemplified by City Food Hall in Destin, have taken center stage in this renaissance. Going beyond the ordinary, these spaces curate a diverse selection of local chefs and artisans, offering a wide range of cuisines from around the world. City Food Hall, at the forefront of this movement, embraces culinary diversity to create an atmosphere catering to everyone, from the pickiest eaters to the most adventurous foodies. No longer confined to sterile, utilitarian spaces, elevated food halls prioritize ambiance and design, providing inviting and engaging environments. At City Food Hall, this experience is elevated even further with a central bar serving one-of-a-kind craft cocktails, making it a true gathering place for the community and setting new standards for casual dining in Destin.

### **City Food Hall: A Premier Destination for Elevated Dining**

City Food Hall stands as the epitome of the elevated food hall concept, offering a culinary adventure that tantalizes the taste buds and sparks social connections. Step inside, and you're greeted with a tantalizing array of flavors curated by over 10 local chefs showcasing their culinary prowess. From authentic ethnic dishes to innovative fusions, the food hall becomes a global journey for your taste buds, ensuring there's something to satisfy every palate. The ambiance and design transcend the traditional with comfortable seating, vibrant décor, and a lively atmosphere. The central bar, serving one-of-a-kind craft cocktails, anchors the space, creating a true gathering place for the community.

Continued on next page

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### Weekly Events

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WEDNESDAYS Whiskey Wednesday \$3 Off Whiskey & Bourbon Pours + \$8 Whiskey & Bourbon Cocktails

**THURSDAYS** Ladies Night \$5 Tito's Martinis [Lemon Drop, Cosmo, Espresso, & French] Karaoke | 6 PM – 8:30 PM

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# Local Nining, Prinks, Coffee & Entertainment

### DINING

continued from page 24

made via OpenTable. View the full menu at hoteleffie.com.

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

Tisano's owner Trinity Coleman grew up in a restaurant family. Her brother, mother and grandfather all owned restaurants in their hometown of Stroud, Okla., 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. Under her leadership, the restaurant has flourished. Today, Tisano's is 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.

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### **CITY FOOD HALL** *continued from previous page*

City Food Hall goes beyond being a dining destination; it's a place for people to come together, connect, and share a culinary experience, fostering a sense of community and making it more than just a place to eat but a space to create memories. With the added allure of TopGolf Swing Suites, City Food Hall provides not only a unique dining experience but also a space for entertainment and play, solidifying its position as a premier destination for elevated dining in the heart of Destin.

### Top 5 Reasons to Visit City Food Hall:

**Culinary Diversity:** Indulge in a culinary journey around the world, savoring flavors from Asia to the Mediterranean, all within one vibrant space.

**Local Flavor:** Support local culinary talent and experience the authentic flavors of Destin, crafted by passionate chefs who bring their unique culinary perspectives to the table.

**Craft Bar Delights:** Quench your thirst with an ex-



tensive selection of craft cocktails, local brews, and an array of non-alcoholic beverages. Plus, you never know what new creations their skilled bartenders will have up their sleeves.

**Entertainment and Play:** Unwind and engage in friendly competition at the TopGolf Swing Suites, where you can test your golf skills while enjoying delicious food and drinks.

**Community and Social Gathering:** Connect with friends, family, or fellow diners in a vibrant and inviting atmosphere, fostering a sense of community and shared culinary experiences.

City Food Hall at Destin Commons transcends the ordinary notion of a mere dining destination; it's an immersive experience that elevates the food court concept to unparalleled heights. This culinary haven seamlessly brings together diverse flavors, fosters community connections, and becomes the backdrop for creating lasting memories. Embark on a culinary adventure and explore the extraordinary dining experience that awaits at City Food Hall, where the convergence of food, community, and entertainment creates an unforgettable fusion. Whether you're a local resident or a visitor to Destin, City Food Hall stands as a destination that invites you to savor the remarkable and redefine your culinary expectations. To learn more about City Food Hall, visit City-FoodHall.com.



# Local Nining, Nrinks, Coffee & Entertainment

# The Origins of Gumbo + Seafood Gumbo Recipe

By Susan Benton, 30AEats.com

New Orleans, a.k.a. the Crescent City, is a fascinating place known for diversity, culture, and its rich heritage. Put it all in a bowl to eat and enjoy, and you would have what is known as gumbo.

Gumbo originated in Louisiana in the 18th century, but there is no evidence to pinpoint the exact origin of the food. Many believe as do I, that the name "gumbo" is derived from the word kingombo, which is Bantu for okra, a popular ingredient in West African cooking. The Choctaw Indians were found to have developed the spicy file' powder, a key additive made from sassafras leaves; but the French lay claim to the thickening agent known as the roux.

Gumbo is a full meal, a melting pot of rich flavors steeped in tradition, a comforting stew-like dish. Though I learned to make gumbo in high school, most locals to the state learn at the hand of their mothers and grandmothers at a young age. Gumbo can't be rushed. So, if you don't have the time or quality ingredients, don't bother.

It is crucial to use the freshest and best seasonal ingredients when cooking gumbo. So, selecting meat and/or shellfish, vegetables, including the thickener (usually in the form of okra or file powder) must be done carefully. There are many variations of gumbo, and everyone thinks theirs is the best. But, I tend to stick to Chicken & Sausage or Seafood Gumbo, but I do use turkey after Thanksgiving. If lucky enough to have a hunter in the family, game is a wonderful ingredient to use as well.

Having had the opportunity to live in New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Houma, and to have toured the state of Louisiana, I have tasted many different, yet exceptional gumbo dishes. Creole gumbo typically contains seafood and often stewed tomatoes, and Cajun gumbo is seafood and fowl based (though typically not together). But, one thing is for certain, it all comes down to the roux.

The key to the best gumbo is a milk chocolate colored roux, which can be tricky, as it is at its peak just before being burned. A roux is equal parts flour and fat (I tend to use a little more flour), and is cooked gently on the stove for about 20-30 minutes depending on your altitude. I also prefer vegetable oil over butter that tends to burn, or olive oil that tends top separate.

**Note:** You must not leave your pot during the roux process; not for anything. If burned it must be thrown out, and a new roux started. I stand at my stove and stir, using a slotted roux spoon with an angled bottom in my heavy bottom pot, for at least 20 minutes.

Every gumbo has to include the holy trinity of vegetables: the onion, celery, and green bell peppers. I always introduce quite a bit of fresh garlic, and of course the okra. I have heard many talk of leaving the okra out, but then you will just have a great stew. It's not gumbo without the okra!

Gumbo is cooked an hour or more to let the flavors marry. In my opinion it is even better the following day. I tend to make gumbo in a large batch to feed a crowd or to have leftovers, and it does freeze well.

Serve your gumbo around a mound of fluffy Louisiana or Anson Mills rice with a dash of Tabasco or your favorite hot sauce, and enjoy this soulful dish, perfect for the Mardi Gras season.

**Note:** Use a heavy bottom pot to keep the roux from scorching. Get ready for the cajun facial when you add the holy trinity. During Lent, try Gumbo Z' Herbs.

### Louisiana Seafood Gumbo

The premier stew of Cajun country, seafood gumbo, is known worldwide as the dish to seek out when visiting South Louisiana. There are as many recipes for gumbo as there are people who cook it. This, however, is my favorite.

#### **Ingredients:**

- 1.5 pound (35-count) shrimp, peeled and de-veined (save heads for stock)
- 1.5-2 pounds lump crabmeat1 dozen shucked oysters, reserve
- liquid (optional) 2 quarts shellfish stock (strain heads before using)
- l cup vegetable oil
- 1.5 cup flour
- 2 cups chopped onions
- 1 cup chopped celery
- 1 cup chopped bell pepper
- 1/4 cup diced garlic



15 oz bag frozen cut okra1 cup stewed tomatoes1/2 cup tomato sauce1/2 pound sliced andouille sausage

- 1 pound counecuh smoked sausage
- 1 cups sliced green onions
- 1/2 cup chopped parsley

3 sprigs chopped fresh thyme 1/4 cup chopped fresh basil leaves

salt and cayenne pepper Crystal or Tabasco Hot Sauce File powder 2 Bay leaves

#### Method:

In a 7-quart cast iron dutch oven, heat oil over medium-high heat. Sprinkle in flour and, using a wire whisk or roux spoon, stir constantly until brown roux is achieved. Do not allow roux

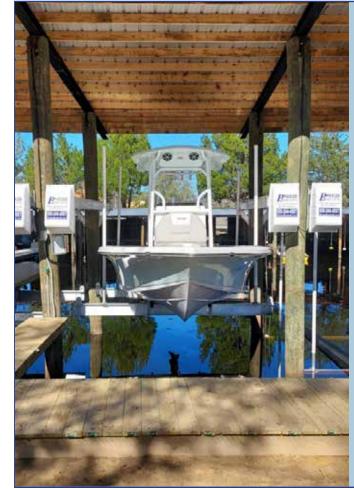
to scorch. Should black specks appear in roux, discard and begin again. Once roux is golden brown, add onions, celery, bell pepper and garlic, thyme and basil. Sauté approximately 3-5 minutes or until vegetables are wilted. Add andouille, smoked sausage, blend well into vegetable mixture and sauté an additional 2-3 minutes. Slowly add hot shellfish stock, one ladle at a time, stirring constantly until all is incorporated. Slowly add stewed tomatoes, tomato sauce, and bay leaves. Stir. Bring to a low boil, reduce to simmer and cook approximately 20 minutes. Stirring often so not to stick. During this time, in a separate pan, saute the okra for 10 minutes, then rinse in a colander, and add to the mixture already cooking. Add additional stock if

necessary to retain volume. After the 20 minutes, add green onions and parsley. Add 1/2 pound of crabmeat. Season to taste using salt, pepper, cayenne pepper, and hot sauce. Cook on low 10 more minutes. Fold shrimp, rest of lump crabmeat, oysters and reserved oyster liquid into soup. Return to a low boil and cook approximately 5 minutes until oyster edges curl and shrimp turn pink. Adjust seasonings and serve over cooked rice.

**Personal Tips:** I like to saute my vegetables (onion, celery, garlic, bell pepper, thyme, basil) in a separate pan and add after the stock. I also pre saute my smoked sausage and andouille in a separate pan, drain on paper towels, and add after the stock. To make the shellfish stock I simmer heads and bodies of shrimp in chicken broth, strain and then use in the gumbo.

**To serve:** Ladle the gumbo into shallow bowls and pile some rice in the center. Sprinkle the parsley and green onions over the top. Pass the warm French bread, gumbo file powder, and Crystal hot sauce at the table.

Gumbo bowls from the former D.H. Holmes in New Orleans, passed on to me from my mother-in-law, a native New Orleanian.



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### Off the Hook

# No Boat? No Problem?



BY CALI HLAVAC

Nestled along the picturesque shores of the Gulf of Mexico and Choctawhatchee Bay, our region boasts a reputation as one of the best fishing areas anywhere. While many locals and visitors envision deep-sea excursions when thinking about fishing on the Emerald Coast, there are plenty of other opportunities for anglers who prefer to keep their feet on solid ground. From the sandy beaches to the tranquil waters around the Bay, Okaloosa Island or Navarre Beach, fishing without a boat on the Emerald Coast offers a unique and rewarding experience. Here are four ways to savor the thrill of fishing without ever setting foot on a boat.

Surf Fishing: Our beaches of sugar-white sands provide an idyllic backdrop for surf fishing. The fall and winter months, particularly from November through March, offer the perfect conditions for catching a variety of species. Anglers can cast their lines into the gentle waves, targeting redfish, pompano and bluefish. Set up your beach chair, let the soothing sound of the waves serenade you and wait for the tug on your line.

Paddleboard/Kayak Fishing: For those seeking a more adventurous angling experience, paddleboard or kayak fishing is an excellent choice. Launch your vessel from any of the county or city public boat launches, where the absence of a boat motor allows you to sneak quietly into calmer, shallower areas. The Choctawhatchee Bay and the calm waters around Crab Island are particularly



popular spots for kayak and paddleboard anglers. Grab the necessary fishing gear and head out in search of speckled trout, flounder and sheepshead.

Pier Fishing: For those who prefer solid ground be-

neath their feet but want an elevated fishing experience, the piers at Okaloosa Island and Navarre Beach are prime locations. These piers provide easy access to deeper waters, attracting a diverse range of fish species. Whether you're an experienced angler or a novice, the friendly atmosphere on the piers creates a welcoming environment. Drop your line into the depths and try your luck at

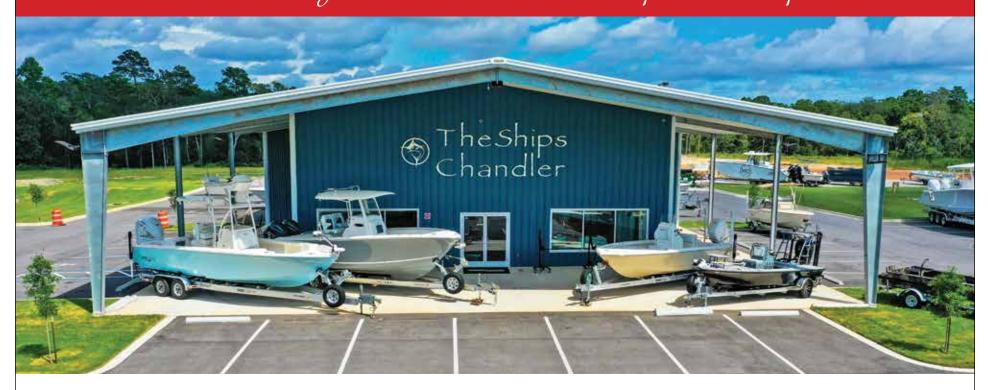
reeling in king mackerel, Spanish mackerel, and even the occasional cobia. The piers are ideal year-round, but the winter months offer a quieter experience with fewer crowds.

Park Fishing: Our area

and surrounding areas are full of beautiful county parks that offer excellent fishing opportunities. Thomas Pilcher park, under the 331 bridge, is one example of an area where anglers can cast their lines from the shore or elevated platforms, along with plenty of parking and bathrooms. The parks provide not only great fishing, but also a chance to appreciate the unspoiled beauty of the Emerald Coast. The cooler months are particularly inviting, with comfortable temperatures and a higher likelihood of reeling in a variety of species.

And don't forget - If you are looking for a little more guidance while fishing, there are a variety of private charters or party boat options available to book in our area. Private charters are a flat rate small group fishing, where as a party boat is more affordable and priced per person. There are so many affordable ways to enjoy fishing in our lucky fishing village!

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# Walton County Master Gardeners Receive Coveted Legacy Award

By MARGARET ZONIA MORRISON

On November 21st, it was announced that Walton Countv Master Gardeners have been awarded \$1,000.00 as a Legacy Award for the Landscaping Project at the Coastal Branch Office, located at 70 Logan Lane, in Grayton Beach. The Master Gardener Program operates under the auspices of the University of Florida as this state's land grant university. Volunteers must commit to 8 weeks of intensive training in all horticulture, emphasizing the bio-diversity of Florida. There are many services available at no cost to the general public for assistance in landscaping, plant questions, and plant identification available through this organization at its offices in both DeFuniak Springs and at the Logan Lane facility. Plant Help Desks are open to the public from Monday through Friday at DeFuniak Springs Extension Office from 9 a.m. to noon, and every Monday at the Logan Lane Facility from 9 a.m. to noon.

The announcement granting this award to Walton County Master Gardeners is a major accomplishment. Walton County has not received such an award in the past, and was one of only two counties in the entire State so awarded this year. The project removed all previously overgrown and unkempt vegetation, consisting largely of palmettos, with the help of many volunteers, including assistance and equipment offered by Regional Utilities and the County Department of Public Works. The Master Gardeners who worked closely on both design and execution of this project were Andrea Schnapp as Chair, Carol Tyler, Margaret Zonia Morrison, and Bill Kuenstler as committee members.

The Legacy Fund has been part of the University of Florida's program for Master Gardeners for over 40 years. It recognizes outstanding efforts to share the mission of education within the communities where they work. The Coastal Branch Landscaping Project, using only

Florida Friendly Landscaping plants and methods, will continue to inspire those curious about this type of gardening. This project will also be featured in the Spring issue of the State Master Gardener Volunteer Newsletter, distributed through the University of Florida to all Master Gardener groups in Florida. Walton County has every reason to be proud of this award. The public is invited to view the landscaping at 70 Logan Lane and to be on notice that future opportunities for lectures on Florida Friendly Landscaping will be offered. An open house at 70 Logan Lane is set for Monday, February 12, 2024, from 9:00 a.m. to noon.



and the public is invited. For more information, please check the Walton County Master Gardener website, at waltonmg@ ifas.ufl.edu

### **OFF THE COUCH**

continued from page 6

school together and learned very quickly that America is expensive. We decided that instead of branching off and doing our own thing, we could take this love for filmmaking and turn it into something that would be more sustainable for us.

We already had 10 years of footage. So, that's when we began wildbrothers.tv It's where people can see all our shows for a small subscription fee, and we have new content dropping every Saturday. We're excited about the community we're building there. Our members can engage with our content and other members, they can post their pictures and videos, and we do live stream each month. That's the shift in our business and where we see the future."

As a team, everyone takes turns holding the camera. But, each brother has also taken on specific roles to advance the company. Morgan and Kian are the main producers and directors, Hudson is in charge of the business and its correspondence, and Asher handles customer service while being their licensed drone pilot.

The Wild brothers' newest show, Off the Couch Into Creation, began when they

BOXING

wondered if their days of adventure could ever be captured again. "When we moved back to America, we found ourselves on the couch a lot and we began to doubt that we could replicate the exploration of our childhood. About a year ago, we set the challenge to experience Niceville and our state of Florida. It set us on an amazing journey where we are learning that you don't have to be on the far side of the world to have adventure. Locals will be excited to see how the show highlights the natural beauty and iconic atmosphere of Niceville, Bluewater Bay and Destin."

What makes Wild Brothers Productions unique is the message that faith, scientific discovery and adventure go hand-inhand. "Our brand, in a nutshell, is Real Faith, Real Adventure. On the screen, we want to show what a holistic Christian life looks like. That life has adventure and excitement. Too many people use faith to disrupt communities. We want to bring back unity through what we do."

Have ideas or access to new adventures? Connect to the Wild Brothers community, starting with a free trial, at wildbrothers. tv, subscribe to their YouTube channel (The Wild Brothers), find them on Instagram and Facebook (@thewildbrothers) or download their app (Wild Brothers TV).

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Military

# **Military News**

BY SAMUEL KING JR.

# Eagles have landed: New F-15EXs arrive at Eglin

The Air Force's two newest fighters, F-15EX Eagle IIs, known as EX3 and EX4, touched down at Eglin Dec. 20, 2023, just minutes from each other.

The new arrivals bring the Air Force's total F-15EXs to four, all located at Eglin. The two aircraft belong to the 96th Test Wing (EX3) and 53rd Wing (EX4), who also own the initial two fighters. "The F-15EX has met every challenge we've thrown at it to date and the platform is on the cusp of being ready for the warfighter," said Lt. Col. Christopher Wee, Operational Flight Program Combined Test Force commander. "The delivery of the new aircraft paves the way for not only the delivery of combat coded aircraft to the U.S. Air Force, but also the continued development of this incredible addition to the USAF inventory."

The new Eagles bring features and capabilities to be



tested that the original two jets didn't have. The cockpit pressure monitor and warning system is a new addition to EX3 and EX4, as well as an ultra-high frequency antenna for satellite communications. The new Eagles also feature a forward fuselage redesigned specifically for the U.S. Air Force.

The F-15EX test platforms at Eglin will accelerate development of capabilities both for the platform itself, and other combat aircraft. "Our integrated test approach, which combines developmental and operational test, brings the future faster to the warfighter," said Brig. Gen. Jeffrey Geraghty, 96th Test Wing commander. "This ensures the U.S. Air Force continues to provide deterrence and readiness for the high-end fight."

The F-15EX program at Eglin ends this year with two new aircraft, but the combined test wings kept the two available jets in the air for a very busy 2023. In May, those two aircraft flew to Alaska and participated in and supported Northern Edge 2023. In June, the F-15EX executed advanced weapons integration missions to ensure the aircraft and various munitions flew and communicated with each other properly.

After the integration successes, the F-15EXs flew to Hill AFB, Utah, for Combat Hammer, where the aircraft success-

fully employed advanced airto-ground weapons for the first time. These and the efforts over the last two years earned the combined test and evaluation team a glowing report from the Operational Test and Evaluation director.

The director's report stated the F-15EX is operationally effective, suitable and survivable against threats likely to be encountered while performing its missions in threat environments. This report allows the program to move into a new testing phase. "I am tremendously proud of the team and their efforts to foster the F-15EX program," said Wee. "The F-15EX is the most capable Eagle on the planet, and we are just getting started." The test wings are scheduled

to receive two more F-15EX aircraft in the future.

### Over \$1.8 Million to Strengthen Military Communities

Governor Ron DeSantis announced more than \$1.8 million

Continued on page 35

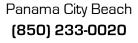


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# **Point Washington Medical Clinic Opens New Facility**

The Point Washington Medical Clinic (PWMC) is pleased to announce the official Ribbon Cutting and Reception of its new stand alone 4,750 sq. ft. facility located at 1321 N. County Hwy 395 in Santa Rosa Beach. The press and public are invited to attend the event beginning at 4 p.m. with a ribbon cutting on Thursday, January 25, 2024. Following the ribbon cutting there will be a reception with live music and tours of the building.

Founded by Drs. Hillary Glenn, DNP, APRN and Patsy Vargo, MD, Point Washington Medical Clinic provides free medical care to those who need it thanks to their dedicated team of volunteers, from doctors and nurses to various community members who assist with health education, translation, and administrative tasks.

Their new facility, beautifully situated on the Point Washington United Methodist Church campus in Point Washington, was designed by architect Zack Quinn with interior design by Suzanne Rester Watson. Wood-



ruff Construction handled the construction and Bradford Davis Landscape Architect the environs.

Co-Founder and Executive Director Dr. Hillary Glenn, DNP shares, "This building is by the community, for the community. We wouldn't be here without the many contributions of our generous supporters, and we're incredibly excited to expand our services and hours to serve our neighbors even more. Designed with the patient in mind, the building's intentional details are all planned to ensure privacy and provide a calming



well as being organized so the volunteers and team are able to easily access the tools they need." Dr. Glenn continues, "Unique attributes of the facility include a children's educational play area, a state of the art classroom with a teaching kitchen, and a meditation prayer garden. To support the calming environment, we leaned into the natural landscape. This is seen with the oversized windows in the lobby looking out over the beautiful native forest, the dental operatories line up with large windows so patients will be looking out at trees while being treated and our partnership with the CAA and their Arts in Public Spaces program will enhance the interior beauty by bringing in works

from local artists of our local environment inside."

The new clinic will provide more space for volunteers who serve the clinic in various administrative, clinical and hospitality roles. It will also include six exam rooms including a pediatric exam room, an increase

from two in the current pop up clinic. This means the team will be able to serve 850+ patients a month in the future, an increase of 300%. The clinic will expand its preventive and primary care services with the addition of dentistry, mental health services and expanded onsite lab testing. Wellness, nutrition and educational classes will now be possible because of the new teaching kitchen and meeting space. This will enable the PWMC to further its mission of building a stronger and healthier community by providing high-quality primary health care regardless of the patient's means or access.

The PWMC staff, Board of Directors and volunteer team are all excited for what the new facility means for the growing roster of patients as well as the greater Northwest Florida region. For the past six years, operating only two days a week, they have provided over \$3.5 million in healthcare services on site and have had over 15,000 patient visits.

Once the volunteer-driven clinic is able to expand their service hours, they expect to be able to see close to 10,000 patients annually providing over 1 million dollars in healthcare services per year.

A fundraising campaign continues to support construction. Those interested in volunteering or contributing to the building campaign can visit thepwmc. org/donate to learn more and make a donation.





### Mellness

# **Tinnitus: An Interview with David Baguley, PhD**

BY DOUGLAS L. BECK, AUD

Editor's note: Below is an interview with David M. Baguley, PhD, MBA, the Head of Audiology/Hearing Implants at Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Trust in Cambridge, England, focusing on clinical aspects of tinnitus and how hearing healthcare professionals participate daily in taking care of the tinnitus patient, as part of a multi-disciplinary approach.

Beck: In my research and practice, it seems obvious to me that the number-one treatment of all time to help the tinnitus patient manage their tinnitus is hearing aids. Is that correct?

**Baguley:** Yes, I would agree. No doubt at all. Hearing aids are an enormous help for most tinnitus patients, most of the time, even when their hearing loss is mild. And although there are no shortages of success stories for the tinnitus patient using hearing aid amplification, as a profession we haven't been very good at documenting the specific details as to how to select the best candidates, which approaches work best, which tools



Dr. David M. Baguley, Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Trust, Cambridge, England

are best for which patient, and so on. We need to document specific diagnostic and treatment protocols for these patients, and I'd like to see us have better protocols addressing how to assess and treat patients suffering with tinnitus.

Beck: Fair enough. I agree. We have lots of case reports and anecdotal successes, but we need more science. Specifically, we need longitudinal outcomes-based studies comparing experimental group and control groups, or randomized controlled trials (RCTs) to better capture facts and data, rather than trends and implications.

In fact, as we don't have hard and fast numbers, let me ask you about the "80/80 Rule." When I was reviewing the literature in 2012 for the British Academy of Audiology (BAA), it seemed apparent that 80% of all tinnitus patients have sensorineural hearing loss (SNHL) and 80% of all patients with SNHL have tinnitus. Do those numbers sound right to you?

Baguley: Absolutely. The 80/80 Rule seems correct to me. Further, in the UK right now, there is work going on with regard to mild-moderate SNHL to determine how many of those patients have troublesome tinnitus, which is perhaps a different question, but it might be very important to see if there are clear differences in tinnitus based on degree of hearing loss. It's a relatively simple question, but we really don't have answers on this, as of yet.

**Beck:** One specific question

which comes up a lot in the dayto- day management of tinnitus patients is the treatment of unilateral tinnitus after medical clearance. Given that scenario, do you fit amplification on one or two ears?

Baguley: I think you have to go bilateral on these fittings wherever there is some hearing loss. If you fit one ear only, you're very likely to replace their tinnitus with an even more annoying sense of imbalance, everything being louder on the one ear, and of course the asymmetry is likely to not be very pleasant.

Beck: In your book, Tinnitus: Clinical and Research Perspectives, available from Plural Publishing co-edited by Prof Marc Fagelson, Grant Searchfield authored a brilliant chapter titled "Hearing Aids for Tinnitus." Grant seems to agree with Henry, Frederick and colleagues who stated hearing aids with and without sound generators provided significant benefit with regard to reducing the effects of tinnitus, but importantly, there were no statistical differences in the outcomes based on the instrument selected (with or without a masker). That is, 87% reported meaningful reductions in their tinnitus using either device-which is clearly a remarkable outcome!

Baguley: This is a really important area for us. I'm happy to tell you we're exploring this area currently, too, and are involved in an RCT [randomized

controlled trial] to try to pin this issue down. We have wonderful and vast opportunities with combination devices for tinnitus, but we don't know how much the patients embrace them; we are unsure if the sound source itself matters, and there's a lot to learn here about which patient to select for traditional amplification versus which patient to select for hearing aids with a masker-and how to set these things maximally after we've selected the best alternative!

**Beck:** Seems to me the best masking noises would be relatively meaningless, pleasant sounds like the ocean, a shower sound, rain on the roof, fractal tones, and so on. But I have no data to support those presumptions. However, if I were suffering from tinnitus and you gave me white noise or pink noise, which are not very pleasant to listen to, I cannot imagine adhering to that protocol.

**Baguley:** Intuitively, T agree...but that's why we need scientific studies to better select the best sounds. And, of course, we need to be ready for the fact that the sound the patient prefers this week may be very different from the sound they prefer in a few weeks or months. As Grant mentions in his chapter, there are many potential reasons why hearing aids are beneficial for the tinnitus patient, such as providing an alternative sound to listen to. Simply by masking

Continued on next page



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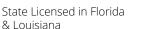
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To book any of these amazing experiences, call 850.351.3020 or visit https://www.hoteleffie. com/spa-lilliana.



### TINNITUS

continued from previous page

the tinnitus percept—and if we presume 80% of tinnitus patients have hearing loss—with hearing aids is likely to help destress these patients and allow them to communicate more easily and engage in pleasant social situations, which their untreated hearing loss may prevent them from enjoying.

**Beck:** David, I'm very glad you mentioned that, and I want to dig a little deeper on stress. One of my key lecture points about tinnitus is that "tinnitus is very often a manifestation of stress." That is, hearing, the auditory system, the brain, and the general health of the patient all are important factors—but the thing which seems to separate the tinnitus patient from the non-patient is their level of stress.

**Baguley:** This is an important area. Whilst I see few cases in which stress has been directly

causal of tinnitus, I see many where stress and anxiety can exacerbate tinnitus. Given that tinnitus can also increase stress and anxiety, this is a two-way street. Chapters in the book on models of tinnitus look at these ideas in detail, with practical and clinical insights.

**Beck:** Additionally, I know you advocate a multi-disciplinary approach to tinnitus. Would you elaborate on that?

Baguley: Yes, of course. Tinnitus patients sometimes require more specialized care than that which the audiologists provide. That is, the ENT, the family practitioner, psychologists, and other counselors often contribute quite a bit to the care of the tinnitus patient. In fact, that was the focus of our 2nd edition of The Multi-Disciplinary Approach to Tinnitus in 2013. Of the patients who come to see the audiologist or ENT for tinnitus, I would expect we can likely help about two-thirds of them using audiologic solutions...but many tinnitus patients never see anyone in hearing healthcare. That is, their point of entry may be a psychologist, psychiatrist, neurologist, a GP—and perhaps if it appears the patient has no hearing loss, no audiologist ever sees them. Again, there's still quite a lot to learn!

**Beck:** And, of note, you advocate Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) to help people with tinnitus? [CBT for tinnitus is a psychological treatment to identify and modify unhelpful thoughts and behaviors. CBT involves identifying and modifying maladaptive behaviors, thoughts, and feelings.]

**Baguley:** Absolutely. CBT tactics have a real role to play here. As you recall, Doug, in 2012, I was involved in a group that published in The Lancet "Specialized treatment based on cognitive behavior therapy versus usual care for tinnitus: a randomized controlled trial."2 In that publication we presented the results of some 490 patients

treated with CBT, as compared to 247 patients with "usual care" between 2007 and 2011. We looked at many things, but the primary thing was health-related quality of life (QOL). Those treated with CBT experienced less tinnitus severity and they experienced statistically significant improvements in their QOL.

**Beck:** David, you've been very generous with your time today, and I thank you for that. I suspect you and I can talk about tinnitus for hours.

Douglas L. Beck, AuD, is among the most prolific authors in audiology with 148 published articles, more than 1250 abstracts, interviews and op-eds written for the AAA (2008-2015) and AudiologyOnline (1999-2005) websites, addressing a wide variety of audiology and professional topics. In addition to his new role as Senior Editor for Clinical Research at The Hearing Review, Dr. Beck is an Associate Professor of Audiology at the University of Hawaii and Director of Professional Relations at Oticon Inc, Somerset, NJ.

Dr. Baguley has published more than 150 peer-reviewed publications, and is the co-author of Tinnitus: A Multidisciplinary Approach, Second Edition (Wiley-Blackwell, 2013) and Hyperacusis: Mechanisms, Diagnosis, and Therapies (Plural Publishing, 2007). He is also the former audiology section editor of the UK's ENT & Audiology News, and has co-edited the latest edition of Ballantyne's Deafness (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), as well as a self-help book on tinnitus and hyperacusis, Living with Tinnitus and Hyperacusis, with Lawrence McKenna and Don McFerran (Sheldon Press, 2010).

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# Meet The Therapist Kathlyn White Integrating Faith and Therapy for Positive Counseling

By Michelle Ruschman

During a time when people are struggling with mental health, it's good to know that support is so readily available. One hometown hero who is invested in seeing our community live fully is counselor and author of "The Therapist: Stories about Parenting, Narcissists, Combat, Abuse, and Marriage," Kathlyn C. White, who is with Carpenter House in Niceville.

Carpenter House is a faithbased counseling center and Kathlyn remembers how it came to be named. "I was sitting in traffic one day in Niceville and the car in front of me had a bumper sticker that said, 'My boss is a Jewish carpenter.' Wow. Right in that moment I thought, 'If I ever have a business, I will call it Carpenter House,' because my boss is a Jewish carpenter too."

Kathlyn has always had a passion for mental health. But, it wasn't until she was in her 30s and working on her Master's, that she was saved and decided to integrate her new faith into her work. Since then, she has

By local resident

marriage and

family therapist

of experience

Kathlyn C. White,

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been helping people by weaving Christianity, faith and the Bible into counseling.

"When you become a Christian, you have this hunger for knowledge. I always say that cognitive behavioral therapy started in the Bible. The Bible tells us to think on positive things, and that's cognitive behavioral therapy." So, what is the differ-

ence between Christian and secular counseling? One example she cites is in marriage counseling. "I do my best to keep the family together. It's

to keep the family together. It's not possible 100% of the time, but I am not leaning toward divorce, like some counselors are, especially if the counselor has been divorced. You really never want to see a marriage counselor who does not have a successful marriage, because they don't know how to stay married. I've been married for 43 years. I know how to stay married and include a chapter in my book about how to have a healthy marriage."

Kathlyn suggests additional qualifications to look for when seeking out mental health professionals. "I think you need a counselor with some experience. I've had experiences in all kinds of places because we were a military family. I started out in an inpatient treatment facility with patients who had what's now called dissociative identity disorder. I've helped people recovering from satanic cults and have worked in domestic violence shelters. I've worked with people who are low income and with children who were navigating the foster system. You want to look for someone with a wide base of experience, who thoroughly understands the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders), and can speak to all these situations, because all these things are very complicated."

Psychology Today is a source that can offer a list of local counselors, but once you're ready to meet, Kathlyn suggests there are aspects to the counseling you should look for that will



help your success.

• Trust your intuition that it will, or won't, be a good fit.

• Ask how many patients a counselor is seeing a week. The more they talk to people, the more experience they have to offer your session.

• Look for a counselor who is willing to set goals with you so you can see how much progress is being made.

• You might not know what to say to a counselor, especially in the beginning. But, a counselor who is able to ask open-ended questions will be able to help you open up.

After a patient suggested that Kathlyn write down her own experiences, "The Therapist" was born. One of the most rewarding experiences from her book was with a young woman called "B," who was only 14 when they met. "When I met her, she didn't know she was psychotic. She thought she had a friend, Max. But, he was a hallucination that began when she was sexually abused. Max helped get her through her troubles. I had to break it to her that her best friend wasn't real."

In the course of their therapy over the next year and a half, Kathlyn was able to help "B" feel what had been suppressed in her childhood, so she could live out a healthier adult life something we all want to experience.

For more information, visit carpenterhouse.net or go to Amazon for your copy of "The Therapist: Stories about Parenting, Narcissists, Combat, Abuse, and Marriage."



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Page 35

# J&B Medical Can Give You A Lift!



By Kelly Stalnaker

Falls within the home are the leading cause of hospital visits for older adults. But, there are tools and products available to help prevent falls and fall related injuries.

For example, Golden lift chairs help individuals with mobility issues to safely sit down or rise from a seated position. They look like a regular recliner, but have a motorized feature



that lifts the chair up and tilts it forward for assistance into a standing position. Some models of the chairs are offered with the capability for micro-adjustments in the reclined and seated positions. This feature can help improve posture and allows for optimal comfort for the user. And with the elevated leg rest, it can improve circulation and reduce swelling. They even offer the ability to recline into the Trendelenburg position (elevating the feet and legs of the patient above the level of the heart).

Golden lift chairs are luxu-

rious, very practical and made by Americans in Philadelphia, Pa. If you or your loved one has a difficult time sitting down or rising to a standing position, a Golden lift chair could be a game changer for them to allow for more independence. They are super comfortable to sleep in, too, especially for an individual that might need elevation while sleeping.

At J&B Medical, we have Golden lift chairs available for sale and rent. A rental chair is perfect for someone just needing a little extra assistance during recovery from a surgery or injury. Stop by and check out all of the chairs we have in stock. We also carry Golden scooters that you can take with you anywhere you go! Currently, we have several in stock and on sale and we offer FREE local delivery!

### **MILITARY NEWS**

continued from page 30

in awards to military communities through the Defense Infrastructure Grant Program and the Defense Reinvestment Grant Program. These programs provide grants to military communities to support infrastructure projects and economic growth to strengthen the resiliency of Florida's military communities.

This round of funding is in addition to \$6.1 million in Defense Infrastructure and Defense Reinvestment grants announced in 2023. Since 2019, Gov. DeSantis has awarded nearly \$13.6 million in grants to military communities through these programs.

The Defense Infrastructure

Grant Program supports local infrastructure projects deemed to have an impact on the military value of installations within the state. Projects funded under this program include transportation, utilities, housing, security, and projects that protect military installations from encroachment. Awards through the Defense Infrastructure Grant Program include locally:

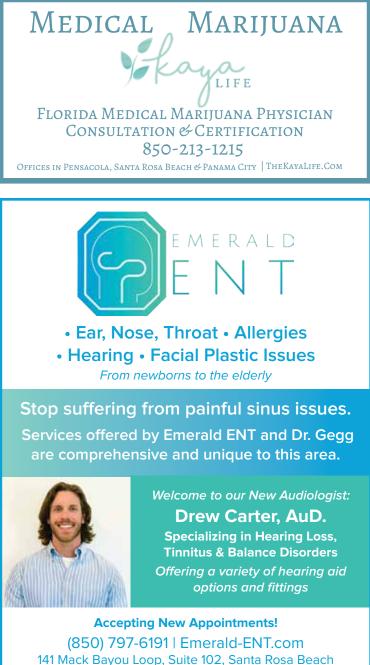
• Walton County Economic Development Alliance (\$830,961) – to improve the intersection at SR 20 and CR 83A West, which will vastly improve the safety, access and operational efficiency for employee access to Eglin Air Force Base.

• Bay County Board of County Commissioners (\$371,350) – to begin construction on Phase II for a multi-use path on Magnolia Beach Road to allow for safer access between the new VA clinic, Naval Support Activity (NSA) Panama City, NSA Panama City RV Park and Naval Branch Health Clinic Panama City.

The Defense Reinvestment Grant Program supports community-based activities that protect existing military installations. These grants are awarded to economic development organizations that represent a local government with a military installation that could be adversely affected by federal actions. Awards through the Defense Reinvestment Grant Program include:

Visit the Office of Military and Defense at floridajobs.org.





### Wellness



### By LISA LEATH TURPIN

Here we are starting a new year and making new resolutions to encourage ourselves to strive to be the best version of ourselves. We've been through a lot the past four years, but I am

# Soar in 2024! ACSM Names "Wearable Tech" as the Top Fitness Trend for 2024

ready more than ever to pump up my health and STRENGTH! It's time to SOAR in 2024!

My recommendation to get started? Set short-term goals and make them specific. Write them out and put them in sight so you see them A LOT, like on the refrigerator, bathroom mirror or dash of your car. Perhaps, sign up for a Run/Walk as a motivator.

As you age, you might notice that it can be more challenging to keep your strength up. That's the natural progression of our bodies; the only way to combat

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the decline is to do some type of strength training—use it or lose it! We have to use our muscles or they will get weak. Join a fitness class, hire a qualified personal trainer or grab a partner and hit the gym—anything to develop a consistent schedule. There will be days you don't want to work out. But, the less you give in and carve time for it, the more you mentally train yourself to overcome. When you do, you learn how good you feel after, both mentally (proud) and physically.

So, what does 2024 look like for the fitness industry? The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM), which sets the standards for the industry as a whole, conducts a study each year where they survey 3000 +health and fitness pros from every continent worldwide. Now

in its 18th year, the "Worldwide Survey of Fitness Trends" has named wearable tech to be the number 1 trend for 2024, the same as in 2020. So, if you use your smartwatch or fitness tracker

to track your exercise, heart rate, step count, calorie consumption or sleep quality, you are already hitting the top fitness trend. Personally, I love this trend, because it allows me to further customize performance and tracking for day-to-day physical activity for my clients and track progress over time.

This year's survey provided 45 potential trends to choose from, including a new 2024 potential trend that acknowledges the bold return to in-person fitness, such as boutique fitness studios and subscription-based

memberships.

Some of the top 5 trends for 2023 included fitness programs for older adults, functional fitness training and strength training. Notably, recent top previous trends as a result of quarantine mandates, such as online live exercise classes, fell out of the top 10 trends list in 2023. In spots 6-10 are employing certified exercise professionals, mobile exercise apps, exercise for mental health, youth athletic development and personal training. My favorite, personal training, seems to always remain a staple in the top 10 fitness trends and has since the survey's beginning in 2007. The benefits include one-on-one training with fitness testing, goal setting and getting you on a customized program for your ongoing lifestyle.

To view the full list with the descriptions, visit journals.lww. com/acsm-healthfitness.

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# **ECCAC** Announces 2023/2024 Board of Directors

At a recent board meeting, the Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center (EC-CAC) officially announced its 2023/2024 line-up of board members and officers: Renee Pellegrino, President; Khaliqa Wheatley, Vice President; and Alan Wood, Treasurer; immediate past President, Janet Parker; Audie Rowell, Blake Morar, Candance Vlahos, Cindy Cole, Dr. Dennis Lichorwic, Heather Parrish, Michael Thompson, Neslihan Suhi-Moore, Shannon Amos, Shan Eubanks, Stephanie Brannon, Tammy Pierce, Tom Saffel, Tracy McLean; and Velia Lala.

"It is our mission to build a better, healthier future by ending child abuse, one child at a time. Our board members will all work diligently to help achieve this," said Renee Pellegrino.

ECCAC provides services

in a child-friendly environment to help identify, treat and support children in abusive situations, as well as helping to prevent child abuse through education and prevention programs. With the Julie Sacco Porterfield Family Center in Okaloosa County and the Pierce Family Center in Walton County, they house representatives from the Florida Department of Children and Families, Child Protection Team, State Attorney's Office, local law enforcement, licensed mental health counselors, and ECCAC's staff and volunteers. In ECCAC's 24-year history, more than 15,000 children have received more than 170,000 services at no cost. Visit eccac.org or call 850-400-3488. If abuse is suspected, call the anonymous Florida Abuse Hotline at 1-800-96-ABUSE.

## Forbes Advisor Names NWFSC Nursing Program one of Nation's Best Affordable Institutions

Northwest Florida State College (NWFSC) was named by Forbes Advisor as one of the nation's best affordable institutions in 2024 for RN to BSN Programs. Forbes Advisor evaluated 58 colleges, with NWFSC emerging as one of the top ten schools providing an opportunity for students to earn the degree in as little as three semesters and at a very affordable cost.

"Under the dedicated guidance of our exceptional faculty and staff, we have witnessed extraordinary growth and success, shaping a new generation of healthcare professionals," Dr. Devin Stephenson, President of Northwest Florida State College, stated. "Our program stands as a beacon of excellence, not just in Florida but nationally, reflecting our unwavering commitment to providing top-tier education and training."

According to Forbes Advisor, the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) is quickly becoming the industry standard for entry-level nursing practice, especially in hospitals. BSN graduates earn approximately \$92,000 annually. Additionally, a BSN degree can equip nurses for graduate school and job advancement.

"The healthcare industry is evolving rapidly, and with it, the role of training qualified nurses becomes increasingly critical," said Dr. Henry Mack, Vice President of Academic Affairs at Northwest Florida State College. "Thanks to our faculty and staff, our program is uniquely



in nursing education."

The NWFSC Nursing RN

positioned to meet the demand while helping set new standards to BSN degree program (Bachelor of Science in Nursing) is designed for licensed registered nurses. This program provides nurses with the knowledge and skills to advance their careers to become nurse managers, case managers, hospital-based educators, and more. The program content addresses high-demand nursing specialties. Clinical instruction targets the specific needs of special populations, including community and family healthcare.

For more information about the NWFSC Nursing RN to BSN Programs, please visit NWFSC Nursing RN to BSN or contact Dr. Tanya Beauregard, RN, CNE, Director of Nursing, at beauregt@nwfsc.edu and 850-729-6400.



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#### Business

## **Insights for Investors:** Deciding on Where and How to Invest in the New Year



By MAURICE STOUSE, FINANCIAL Advisor and Branch Manager

f we reflect on almost four decades in the investment world, we cannot find, with any consistency, anyone who can tell you when and how to invest in the next year. For sure, there are market predictions, economic predictions and forecasts and opinions. The question we keep coming back to is: Does anyone really KNOW where the markets, the economy and the world are headed? Sometimes a prognosticator will get it right, but he or she is rarely right on a consistent basis. Why might that be?

Morgan Housel is an author who has written two books on investing and behavior. One is title "Same as Ever" and the oth-

er is "The Psychology of Money." The main theme drawn from these two writings is that the future cannot be predicted, because people and events cannot be predicted. Would anyone have known for sure that Russia would have invaded Ukraine two years ago (and the economic fallout that followed)? Or, as was pointed out, the effects or significance of the coronavirus pandemic? Housel points out that The Economist magazine, well revered in the investing and professional world, predicted neither in its annual forecasts for 2020 and 2022 respectively.

Some call unusual or unpredictable events "Black Swan" events. No one knows when they will appear. It's impossible to predict things, so we encourage investors to plan and invest according to their time frame, their risk tolerance and their investment objective. These are the big three for most investors.

Charlie Munger, Warren Buffet's partner, has had many books written about him, as has Buffet. A current read is "The Tao of Charlie Munger" by David Clark. It is replete with lessons from the investing great

0784 98

who passed away in December of 2023. One consistent lesson was for investors to not be in a hurry. We suggest that investors identify companies, or funds, or bonds or instruments that fit your investment objective, their time frame and their comfort level, and then be patient.

2023 tested the patience of many investors as they saw the markets gain substantially for most of the year while perhaps their investments did not. Had they held the so called magnificent seven (META, Google, Apple, Microsoft, Tesla, Nvidia and Amazon) only, they would have seen those returns. Most stocks (the remainder of approximately 500 stocks in the S&P 500) had lesser returns, no returns or perhaps lost up until about October of 2023. Then, in November, interest rates (based upon the 10-year U.S. Treasury note) began to decline (from approximately a high of 5% to 3.9%). The market's performance for the S&P in November was almost nine percent and many long-term bonds appreciated as much as 6%. December numbers, while not final at this writing were equally compelling. So, what might be learned, or gained, from all of this?

Peter Lynch, the well know fund manager from Fidelity, said many years ago in one of his three books to not give up hope at the worst possible time and sellout. We have seen this repeated by many investment managers for years, to not sell at the bottom (as if you would know the bottom). Did that happen in 2023? Many investors were convinced that cash or CDs was the best place to be and as a result either sold out and moved to cash or CDs or remained in cash or CDs. To be clear, these low to no risk investments play a part in most investors' portfolios. However, we would suggest that if someone has a long term time frame, to not use a short term lens, so to speak, when making an allocation decision or a change.

The U.S. economy continues to lead the world in innovation, cost of doing business and opportunity. We look back over the last almost 100 years and see that investors saw the highest returns in large cap stocks followed by bonds then by cash (Ibbotson Charts). Research, know what you own or what you want to own and why you own it. Know how long you want to own something. Appropriate risk mitigation along with patience might serve investors well in 2024 and beyond.

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

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# Chamber Gala & Awards **Ceremony Feb. 9**

The Walton Area Chamber of Commerce Annual Gala and Awards Celebration will be held Friday, February 9 at the Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa. The blacktie optional "80's Prom" Gala will kick off at 5:30 p.m. with a cocktail reception where guests will have the opportunity to socialize with other ber Gala https://business. attendees including elected officials, dignitaries, business owners, Chamber members, and guests. Following the reception, guests will enjoy a seated dinner and awards ceremony.

Purchase your tickets TO-DAY: 2024 Walton Area Cham- chamber.com.

waltonareachamber.com/ events/details/2024-walton-area-chamber-annual-awards-gala-35223

The Walton Area Chamber of Commerce provides leadership for a healthy business community.www.waltonarea-

## **Meet Our Local Pro Corey Booth** Saving Money on Your Energy Bill

Growing up in Pensacola, Corey Booth didn't need to look far to learn the meaning of generosity.

"As a child, I watched my father work at the local utility and live his faith by helping others, and I knew I wanted to follow in his footsteps," said Booth.

The now always-busy father of four works at Florida Power & Light Company (FPL) leading a team of energy efficiency experts who help customers save energy and money.

"If you were to ask my kids about what I do for work, they would say 'Daddy helps people," he said with a smile.

Despite his hectic schedule at work and home, Booth always manages to find the time to give back to the community that raised him. For the last decade, Booth has represented FPL as a volunteer for the United Way of West Florida.

"I'm blessed to work for a company that encourages us to volunteer where we live," said Booth

Year-round, he helps plan the organization's biggest community-wide initiative, "Day of Caring," taking place in October. From painting murals on elementary school walls to cooking meals for the homeless, countless lives have been touched through volunteer events, financial resources, and essential aid offered by the United Way and partnering companies.

"People can be emotional, thanking us for our work in the community," said United Way's Community Impact Coordinator, Julia Helton. "Last year,



[Booth] brought together more than 40 FPL volunteers.'

As the chill of winter descends upon Northwest Florida, the need for resources and energy-saving guidance intensifies.

This time of year, we put the focus on being a light and helping others in need," said Booth. "We all know the saying 'It's better to give than to receive... and I believe that to be true.""

Whether he's volunteering through United Way, his church or helping FPL customers save



money on their electricity bills, Booth has a genuine heart for serving others no matter the season. From his early days as an energy solutions specialist to now spearheading a team of energy experts as the northwest regional manager, Booth has built trust in his hometown.

As cold weather sets in, Booth offers practical advice on ways to stay warm while keeping your bill low when the thermometer dips in the winter:

Additional Services:

#### 1. Adjust thermostat settings:

For every degree you lower your thermostat during colder weather, you'll save about 3-5 percent on your monthly heating costs. Heat your home at 68° or cooler with the thermostat fan switch on "auto." To save even more, lower your thermostat to 65° or cooler when you're away from home for more than a few hours.

#### 2. Safely use space heaters rather than heating your entire home

The cost to run a central heating system with only electric heat (not a heat pump) can add up to \$1.50 or more per hour to heat your home. Rather than heating the entire house, use an electric blanket or a single space heater. Keep in mind the average space heater costs about  $25\,$ cents per hour to heat the space, so turn it off and unplug when not in the room.

#### **3. Get personalized** tips from FPL's Energy Manager

FPL's Energy Manager automatically breaks down and itemizes the actual cost and use of energy throughout your home, with personalized tips on how to save on your bill.

For more information on ways to save visit https://www. fpl.com/save/lower-my-bill. html.







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#### Musing



By Pastor Doug Stauffer

Like so many other churches, we establish a new theme every year. Interestingly, our

# A Pastor's Ponderings: Manifesting More Mercy in 2024

theme for 2020 was pretty predictable—"20/20 vision" (ugh, right before COVID-19 reared its ugly head). The vision that year seemed blurry at best. Last year, it was from James 4:8: "Draw nigh to God," because God promises to "draw nigh to you." Think about that one if you ever sense that God is distant. I incorporated that thought as a sidenote in many of my sermons throughout the year.

As our church embarks on the theme "Manifesting More Mercy in 2024," we are reminded to live more like Christ, displaying mercy in every aspect of our lives. This journey of manifesting more mercy is about tempering justice with compas-

sion, forgiving those who do us wrong and embodying the tenderness of heart that Christ Himself demonstrated. An impossible feat without God's help every day!

In Matthew 5:7, Jesus declared, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." This profound statement underscores mercy's reciprocal nature. It reminds us that showing mercy is not just an act of kindness towards others, but a pathway to receiving mercy. Words and actions tend to reflect our spirit. So, do a self-checkup. Do you nurture a spirit of complaint and judgment or mercy and understanding?

The parable of the Prodigal Son serves as a great example. A young man demands his inheritance, squanders it and returns home in shame. His father sees him and doesn't greet him with scorn or 'I told you so' remarks. Instead, he welcomes his son with open arms, symbolizing God's unconditional forgiveness and MERCY. In this story, Jesus teaches us about the heart of God—a heart ready to forgive, restore and project mercy.

Consider a similar story that of the Good Samaritan. In him, we see a man who embodies mercy. He doesn't walk by the injured man like others; he stops, cares for him and ensures his recovery. Here, mercy is an action—it goes beyond mere feelings or words. It is about doing what is right and kind, even when it is less convenient or costly.

Our pride and self-righteous attitude often prevent us from showing mercy toward others. Jacob reminds us of God's mercy while recognizing his unworthiness. Jacob told God: "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant" (Genesis 32:10a). As we manifest more mercy this year, this humble acknowledgment is essential.

In our daily lives, we need to clothe ourselves with garments of a Christ-like character. They are not just for Sundays or church gatherings; they are for every interaction, conflict and challenge.

Our commitment to mercy

must also extend beyond our sphere. Micah 6:8 reveals what God requires of us: "to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." This direction is not a passive requirement, but an active engagement in showing mercy in our communities and outreach programs. Being merciful often means going against our natural inclinations to judge or retaliate.

Prayer plays a crucial role in cultivating mercy. Hebrews 4:16 encourages us to boldly approach God's throne of grace, "that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." When we return from God's throneroom, our hearts will be transformed and realigned. We will truly have a heart of mercy after being in God's presence.

As we embrace the journey of "Manifesting More Mercy in 2024," let us recognize this not as a mere annual theme, but as a transformative call to action. Imagine the ripple effect if we commit to living out mercy in our daily interactions. This philosophy is not just about acts of kindness within our church walls; it's about extending God's grace into the hearts of our communities, one merciful act at a time.

Mercy, after all, is more than a concept-it's a way of life that echoes the very nature of Christ. By adopting this Christlike attribute, we don't just change ourselves; we can bring about a wave of compassion and understanding in a world that deeply needs it. So, as we step into this year, let's do so with a resolve to embody mercy to let it shape our actions, words and thoughts. Together, we can turn "Manifesting More Mercy in 2024" from a theme into a tangible, living reality, making a lasting impact in our lives and the lives of those around us.

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.



Located 1/2 mile west of the Mid-Bay Bridge on Hwy. 20, directly across from JoJo's Coffee Shop and Lilly Pads (Pineapple) Shopping Center

Sean of the South



By Sean Dietrich

The plane landed in Tuscaloosa at 8:37 p.m. Central Time. Coach Kalen DeBoer deboarded.

He was met with an entourage of photographers and reporters with iPhones. DeBoer's press conference was scheduled for 1 p.m.

It was a blustery, rainy day in the Yellowhammer State.

Nick Saban retired on Wednesday. DeBoer was announced as his replacement on Friday evening. The former head coach of the University of Washington is about to be applying for Alabama auto insurance.

Kalen is a young name. I went to school with guys named Kalen. I played baseball with Kalens, Justins, Corys, and Brandons.

There was a Kalen in my seventh-grade drama class. He had epilepsy. We weren't allowed to use strobe lights in our performance of "Cats."

Kalen DeBoer isn't much older than me. And so this marks the first time someone from my generation will be coaching Alabama football. And I don't know what to think about it. Or how to feel. Nobody in my father's gener-

ation was named Kalen. A guy named Kalen grew up playing Atari, watching Nolan Ryan, listening to Michael Jackson. Or worse: The Osmonds. team. I was born during the third quarter of Bear Bryant's Liberty Bowl, in Memphis, Tennessee. I was born directly after a critical touchdown. Peter Kim made the kick. The kick was good.

And I made my earthly pre-

When did this man's hairline start retreating toward the nape of his neck.

When did this man's middle become soft? When did they start playing his favorite songs in elevators?

When did I start eating supper at 5 p.m.? When did I discover that the volume knobs also turn left? When did flowers start scaring me?

So anyway, don't get me wrong, I'm glad Alabama has a new, accomplished, head coach. I'm glad he's here. I'm glad he has lots of enthusiasm.

But I miss the old guys. I miss the trilby fedora hats, the pressed khaki pants, and the sport coats worn on the sidelines. I miss Howard Cosell, Don Meredith, and (dare I say it?) Frank Gifford. I guess I miss my dad's generation.

And I guess my old man was right when he said "The older you get, the earlier it gets late."

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A guy named Kalen owned a Walkman, rode BMXs, saw the final episode of "M\*A\*S\*H," and learned to "Just Say No" from Nancy Reagan.

All my life, Alabama's head coach has been either someone from my grandfather's generation, or my dad's generation.

Someone old enough to remember Iwo Jima. Or Hamburger Hill. Or the Tet Offensive. Someone with enough gray in his hair to recall Benny Goodman, Nat Cole, or at the very least James Brown.

A guy named Kalen remembers Styx, the Gulf War, 9/11, the OJ Simpson trial, and he probably watched the Smurfs. Alabama is my childhood sentation. Seven pounds eight ounces of red hair. The doctor was shocked when he saw my unusually large hallux.

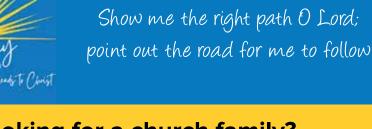
A hallux is your big toe. Get your mind out of the gutter.

So I don't know how to feel about all this. What does it mean? Alabama's head coach is from my generation. Can we be trusted?

Consequently, who is this idiot in the mirror? The man with white in his beard? The guy with crappy health insurance.



Psalm 25:4



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#### Arts & Music

## **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 Pep-

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.

# Valentine Tour of Homes Feb. 10-11

Valentine's weekend typically means romantic dinners and flowers for most, but for South Walton residents and visitors alike, it also signals the highly anticipated annual Valentine Tour of Homes. The two-day event offers a self-guided tour through some of South Walton's most unique homes representing diverse architectural styles, beautiful interior design, historic significance and fine art collections.

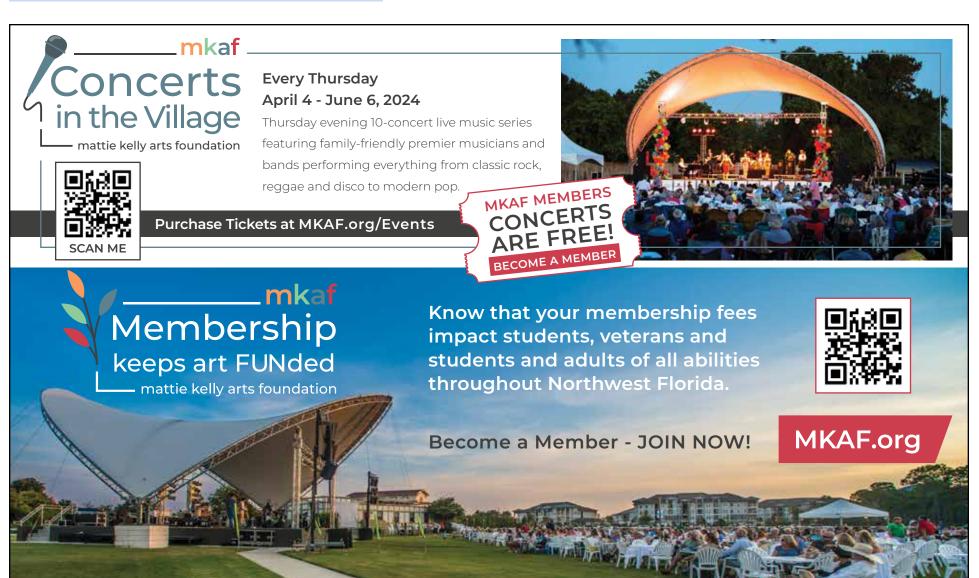
Tickets: culturalartsalliance. com/valentine-tour-of-homes.

Tickets are \$40 in advance through Sunday, February 4 and increase to \$50 beginning Monday, February 5 through the event weekend. To volunteer, visit culturalartsalliance.com/ volunteer. Volunteers receive a complimentary event ticket.

All tickets are valid for the entire weekend with one entry per house. Please note that as most of these homes are privates residencies, they cannot be guaranteed as ADA compliant. The CAA is committed to ensuring



access for all to its programs, including for people with disabilities or limited mobility. Please notify the CAA office in advance for questions regarding access, and best efforts will be made for accommodations. For more information about the Valentine Tour of Homes and the Cultural Arts Alliance of Walton County, call 850-622-5970 or visit culturalartsalliance. com.



## **Sinfonia Presents Crescendo!**

Crescendo! is an exciting cultural extravaganza to benefit Sinfonia Gulf Coast and its music education and community engagement initiatives. This energy-infused experience will celebrate the cultural and culinary arts by showcasing world-class vintners, expert spirit purveyors, amazing auction items, and an award-winning musical guest. Taking place Friday, March 1 & Sunday, March 3, 2024. This year's theme is, Great Gatsby, channel your favorite variation of 1920s decadence.

#### Vintner Dinners Friday, March 1

Crescendo! weekend will begin with a series of carefully curated vintner dinners hosted in elegant homes and venues throughout the Emerald Coast. Go to sinfoniagulfcoast.org for a list of the Vintner Dinner venues.

#### Crescendo! Main Event Sunday, March 3

This year's theme is, Great Gatsby, channel your favorite variation of 1920s decadence. Set



for Sunday, March 3 at 11:30 a.m. at the Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa in Miramar Beach, this energy-infused experience will celebrate the cultural and culinary arts by showcasing world-class vintners, expert spirit purveyors, amazing auction items, and an electrifying musical performance. Enjoy reserved table seating, hors d'oeuvres, full, seated lunch, and an all inclusive afternoon of incredible fun!

Tickets to Crescendo! 2024 are \$195 per person and include all food, wine, reserved table seating, performance and valet parking. Purchase Tickets: https:// app.arts-people.com/index. php?ticketing=sgc

Proceeds from Crescendo! benefit Sinfonia Gulf Coast and its music education and community engagement initiatives. For more information or to purchase tickets, go to SinfoniaGulfCoast.org and call (850) 460-8800. Email questions to info@sinfoniagulfcoast.org.

## Sinfonia Gulf Coast: Toast 'n Jam Concert Series Feb. 11

Join Sinfonia Gulf Coast for Toast 'n Jam, a concert series held at the Henderson Beach Resort in Destin on Sunday, February 11. 2024 at 10:30 a.m. This fun new series includes valet, elegant brunch fare with a Bloody Mary & Mimosa bar.

Tickets: https://app. arts-people.com/index. php?ticketing=sgc

-- \$95 per person (includes valet, live performance, brunch, all gratuities) -- \$125 per person (front row seating, limited)

The groundbreaking, category-shattering trio Time for Three (Tf3) transcends traditional classification, forming a blend all its own with elements of classical, country western, gypsy and jazz idioms

Visit Sinfonia Gulf Coast online to read about Season 2023-2024 and purchase tickets. Sign up for Sinfonia news. SinfoniaGulfCoast.org



**Crimes of The Heart** 

By Anna Fisher, Associate Artistic Director, ECTC

Back when I was a little baby acting student in grad school, I had the pleasure of playing the character of Meg in "Crimes of the Heart." She's the sister who has returned home after an unsuccessful attempt to make it big in Hollywood. Her favorite pastimes are drinking, dating and telling half-truths, which makes her a really fun character to portray—think of that wacky cousin who is always making bad decisions, but never really learning from their mistakes. I remember being fascinated by these three sisters who make odd and unexplainable choices while trying to navigate such unusual circumstances.

Playwright Beth Henley masterfully writes each character with such depth and dimension that one might suspect they are drawn from real life inspiration. Exploring the motivations of such a richly written character is the kind of role that actors live for, and the character of Meg was no exception. Henley creates the perfect storm of disappointed Meg, withdrawn and bitter Lenny, and Babe, who has seemingly had a mental break from reality. Although I don't have sisters, it wasn't too much of a stretch to understand the multi-layered relationships of three sisters in this broken family. We all have that weird neighbor, crazy sister-in-law or eccentric aunt who continually surprises us with their zany antics.

This darkly comic, 1981 Pulitzer-prize-winning play has everything you want in a good





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"IC theatre company FEDRUART TO

story: dysfunctional family relationships, scandalous affairs and a shooting.

In 1986, it was made into an Oscar nominated film with a heavy hitting cast of actors including Diane Keaton, Jessica Lange, Tess Harper and Sissy Spacek. Harper and Spacek both garnered Oscar nominations for their exceptional performances in this southern, gothic story about the ties of sisterhood and family.

The humor, quirky characters and twisty plot all translate into one very fun night out with your crew. Just like "Steel Magnolias" last season, this show pairs well with a

bubbly glass of champagne and your favorite people. We hope you'll join us at Emerald Coast Theatre Company this winter for "Crimes of the Heart." Because, the heart of ECTC is you—and that's no crime!

ECTC's Nathanael & Anna Fisher Win Florida Theatre Conference 2023 Distinguished Career Award



Marci Duncan presenting the Distinguishing Career Award to Nathanael Fisher at the Florida Theatre Conference in Winter Haven in November with ECTC's Jr Company High School Troupe.

Emerald Coast Theatre Company's (ECTC) founders, Nathanael and Anna Fisher, have been awarded The Florida Theatre Conference 2023 Distinguished Career Award in the professional category.

In 1986, the Florida Theatre Conference began recognizing individuals in the state of Florida that had made a contributing effort in the area of Community Theatre, Professional Theatre, University/ College Theatre, University/ College Theatre, Theatre for Youth, and High School Theatre. Each year the Board solicits names from the general membership for these awards. Over the years, these awards have been given to persons in the state of Florida that have made a difference in their area.

"We are so honored to receive this recognition from the Florida Theatre Conference! We have always seen ECTC as a land of opportunity...opportunity for creative people and for the children, families, and adults of our community," said Nathanael and Anna.

For more information: (850) 684-0323 or www.emeraldcoasttheatre.org. Engage with ECTC as well on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube.

Arts & Music

## You're Invited to Virtuoso Voices 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 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

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850.855.0068. Tickets may also be purchased online at Event Brite. For more information,

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#### Arts & Music

# **Local Resident Nominated For Grammy Award**

The nominations have been announced for the 66th Grammy Awards. Donnie Sundal. a Walton County resident who contributed to Sam Bush's album, Radio John: Songs of John Hartford, nominated for Best Bluegrass Album - is recognized for dual roles; Recording Engineer and Tenor Back-

ground Vocals on the song "In recording studio. "Once I start-Tall Buildings."

Donnie is the owner of Neptone Recording Studio in Miramar Beach and a seasoned professional musician. On a whim to help a friend on vacation, Donnie brought enough recording gear to turn a vacation rental of Sam Bush's into a mobile

ed cutting the songs with Donnie digitally it was like, 'Oh, now this is recording studio quality here.' I was originally only meaning to make tapes of these John Hartford songs to show the guys in the Sam Bush Band and then maybe we'd record them," says Sam Bush in an interview

with thebluegrasssituation.com.

Radio John is a tribute to Sam's great friend and mentor, John Hartford. Sam plays every instrument on the album except the full band finale and sole original tune, "Radio John."

Donnie, his family and his band Boukou will Groove be cheering Sam Bush on in hopes he will win his

fourth Grammy Award with more than a dozen lifetime nominations. "We love Sam Bush and are inspired by his career and commitment to his craft. It's an honor to be a part of the album and his friend," says Donnie.

The Grammy Awards will return to Los Angeles' Crypto.



Sam Bush with Donnie Sundal

com Arena on Sunday, Feb. 4, 2024, with the show airing live on the CBS Television Network and streaming on Paramount+ at 8 p.m. ET / 5 p.m. PT.

You can learn more about Donnie Sundal on his websites at www.neptonerecording. com and https://www.boukougroove.com.

# Showcase Your Talent in "Okaloosa County's Got Talent"

Okaloosa Arts Alliance and DJ Zoran, in collaboration with the Hope & Restoration Tour, are thrilled to announce "Okaloosa County's Got Talent" (OGT), an exciting opportunity for artists across Okaloosa County to showcase their talents. This dynamic event, featuring two more open mic night qualifiers hosted by DJ Zoran, will take place on February 4, and March 3, 2024, from 5 to 9 p.m. at The Sound Cafe + Enlightened Studios.

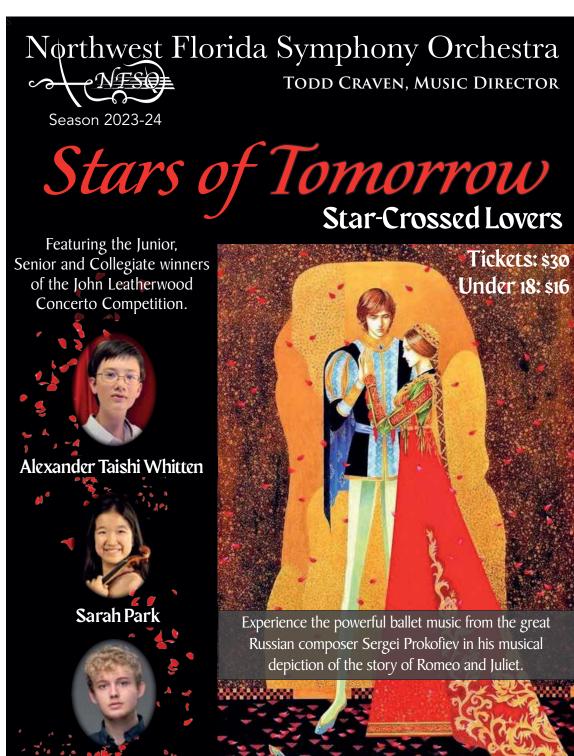
Artists interested in participating can pre-register by emailing zoranzakary@gmail.com with the name of the band/artist, cell phone number and email. This inclusive event is free and open to the public, fostering a vibrant celebration of artistic expression. Enlightened Studios, the venue for the qualifiers, is located at 142 Miracle Strip Parkway SE, Fort Walton Beach, 32548.

The qualifying rounds will feature performances from K-12 artists from 5:00 pm to 7:00 pm, followed by 18+ performances from 7 to 9 p.m. All types of performing artists are welcome, including solo acts, duos, trios, bands, dance troupes, theater groups, vocalists, and poets. The event is plug-and-play, allowing artists to bring their instruments and recorded music if applicable. Art supporters are encouraged to attend and revel in the diverse artistic talents on display.

The panel of judges will determine the qualifiers who will advance to the final "Okaloosa's Got Talent" event on Sunday, April 7, 2024, hosted by the Okaloosa Arts Alliance. Winners will not only gain recognition for their talent, but will also receive cash and prizes.

For those with questions or seeking more information, vishttps://www.okaloosaarts. it org/2024-okaloosa-s-got-talent. html or email Zoran at zoranzakary@gmail.com or Amy at amybaty1@gmail.com.

Don't miss this chance to be part of the artistic showcase that is Okaloosa County's Got Talent!



Noah Keyes



Scan or call for tickets (850) 729-6000 or visit MattieKellyArtsCenter.org

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MATTIE KELLY

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# Choctawhatchee Audubon Society's February Programs

The Choctawhatchee Audubon Society's February 1st presentation delves into the world of Gopher Tortoises. It seeks to educate the public on their significance, the hurdles they encounter and the methods utilized for habitat preservation and relocation to ensure their survival, presenting a chance for all to discover, comprehend and contribute to safeguarding these essential reptiles within Florida's ecosystem.

Room 800, 2nd floor of the Chandler Center (NW door of 519 Helms St.), Crosspoint Church in Niceville. Socializing begins at 6:30 p.m.; program begins at 7 p.m.. Admission is free and open to the interested public.

**February 10, SATUR-DAY FIELD TRIP** to Into the countryside of North Okaloosa and Walton Counties. Leader Malcolm Swan 210:452:4899 (texting encouraged). Meet at 7:30 a.m. in the Niceville CVS, Oak Creek Shopping Center parking lot, Niceville. Goals are



winter visitors including Sandhill Cranes south of Florala and Lake Jackson. Wear sturdy, closed-toe shoes and long pants. Bring a sack lunch and binoculars.

**February 24, SATURDAY BIRD FIELD TRIP** to Little Creek Woods, a private preserve in North Walton County. Leader: Bob Reid, 850:678:1926. Meet at 7:30 a.m. in the Niceville CVS, Oak Creek Shopping Center parking lot, Niceville. We will look for Brown-headed Nuthatches among other species. Wear sturdy closed-toe shoes and a hat. Bring a sack lunch, a camera and binoculars. Harch 22-23, 2024 Westonwood Ranch PEA Rodeo



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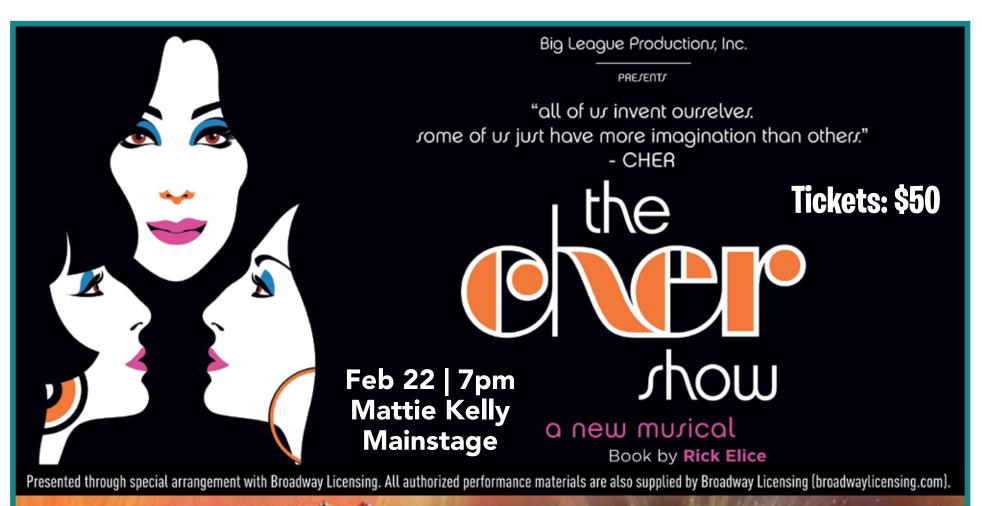
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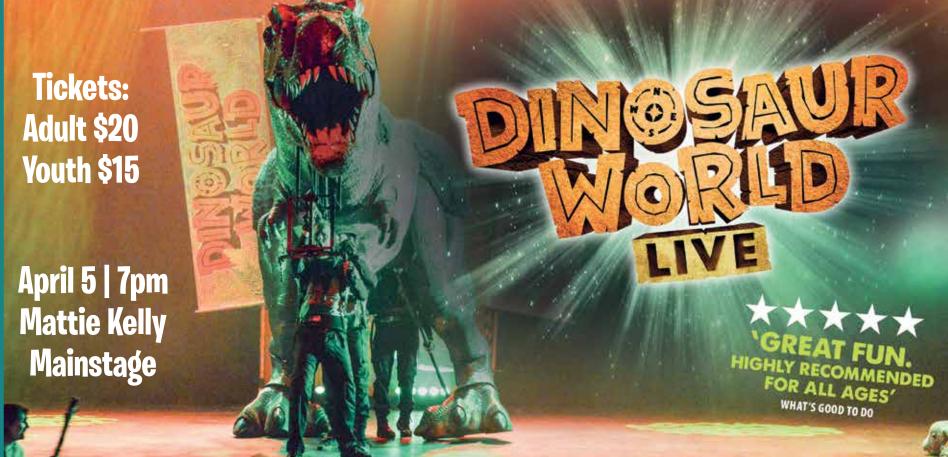
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