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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

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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

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The community

EAGLE PRIDE

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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

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EAGLE PRIDE PHOTOGRAPHY TEAM

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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The community

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 numbness 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.

GO RED

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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 designed to educate women about their unique risks and symptoms and empower them to take control of their cardiovascular health through education and self advocacy. The initiative also raises funds for women-focused research.

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

By the Numbers

Blood pressure is an indicator of cardiovascular health, but what do the numbers mean?

• High blood pressure makes your heart work harder, which strains the heart and arteries.

• Systolic pressure (the top number in a blood pressure reading) measures the pressure in your arteries when your heart beats. A "normal" number, according to the CDC, is less than 120 mm Hg (millimeters of mercury). You might have high blood pressure if your systolic pressure is 130 mm Hg or higher.

• Diastolic pressure (the 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 higher, and stays high over time, it can put you at risk for cardiovascular disease, heart attack and stroke.

• Blood pressure is affected

by physical activity, diet, cholesterol and alcohol consumption and tobacco use. Some influences we cannot control include genetics, heredity, age, 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



YOUR SUPPORT SAVES LIVES

The Mayor Randall Wise First Responders Foundation Inc. has been established to continue his legacy of public service and community dedication. This charitable 501C3, organization serving Niceville, Florida seeks to assist first responders by providing education, training, counseling, and non-budgeted equipment to help keep them safe as they serve and protect. When you need a first responder, you dial 911. Please consider setting up a recurring donation of \$9.11 to support Niceville's first responders. Scan the code to learn more.

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



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The Community

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



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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, collaborating 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 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 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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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:

 \bullet 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

n 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 Airlines, Southwest Airlines and Sun 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.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 ¹/₂ 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 ¹/₂ penny sales tax. This includes the Crestview bypass, PJ Adams, Beachview Drive drainage improvements, widening of John King Road,

Continued on next page



For information contact tammy@tammysjourneys.com or 850-243-3809

🏇 Community

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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 sew-



er 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 honoring 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 201/2 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 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 Niceville 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.

Nørthwest Florida Symphony Orchestra TODD CRAVEN, MUSIC DIRECTOR Season 2023-24 Stars of Tomorrow Star-Crossed Lovers Featuring the Junior, Tickets: \$30 of the John Leatherwood Under 18: \$16 Concerto Competition. **Alexander Taishi Whitten** Sarah Park Experience the powerful ballet music from the great Russian composer Sergei Prokofiev in his musical depiction of the story of Romeo and Juliet. Noah Keyes Feb. 10 | 7 pm | Mattie Kelly Main Stage Scan or call for tickets MATTIE KELLY (850) 729-6000 or visit MattieKellyArtsCenter.org

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Senior and Collegiate winners



Boats, Fun and More Await You at the Emerald Coast Boat & Lifestyle Show March 1-3

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 EmeraldCoastBoatShow.com

The 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.

City of Niceville Coffee & Conversation

Join Mayor Dan Henkel and City Manager David Deitch for a warm cup of coffee and engaging conversation on City of Niceville Programs and Services, Friday, Feb. 2, 7:30 – 9:30 a.m. All residents, business owners and stakeholders welcome to participate.

Grand Canine Carnaval Feb. 8!

A Brazilian Carnaval Doggie Social, Dog Harmony's inaugural Grand Canine Carnaval, will be held Feb. 8, 3:30-5:30 p.m. at Grand Boulevard at Sand-



estin and will feature a carnaval-themed doggie dance party and contest, photos of your pups , music, treats for both dogs and owners and a chance to win fabulous prizes. To inquire about sponsorship opportunities or for information, contact fundraising@dog-harmony.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 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 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 the longest, shortest and dressed the most festively. To register or for more information, visit www. LulusFunFoodMusic.com/destin or call (850) 710-5858.

Η	appenings Arc	ound	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	14	Second Wednesday Breakfast 7:15 am Niceville Community Center Niceville
	New Heights Wrestling presents "Bulldog Bash" 7 pm Freeport High School Freeport		Wine Tasting and Prime Rib Night 5 pm LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant & Oyster Bar Niceville
	Niceville Monthly Cruise In 8 pm Landshark Pizza Company Niceville	15	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 Nicevi	lle	2nd Annual Plew PLA Purse Bingo 6 pm Eglin Golf Course Niceville
	Mardi Gras 5k Race 9 am Christ Our Redeemer BWB Niceville	27	Watercolor Techniques with Theresia McInnis 12:45 pm Artful Things Niceville
	Mardi Gras Golf Scramble benefiting Heritage Museum 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		ONGOING EVENTS
	6 pm Horse Power Pavilion Freeport Northwest Florida Symphony Orchestra	TQAST 'N JAM	Oils and Acrylics with Rosalyn O'Grady
	- Stars of Tomorrow 7 pm Mattie Kelly Arts Center Niceville	18 1	10 am Tuesdays Artful Things Niceville Trivia Night
11	Toast 'n Jam feat. Brubeck Brothers Quartet 10:30 am Henderson Beach Resort Destin	*	6 pm Thursdays Strange Colt Brewery Niceville
FARMER'S MARKETS		lammock Bay - 1st & ebruary 4, 18	3rd Sundays Grand Boulevard - Saturdays February 3, 10, 17, 24
FARN MARI		am Victory Blvd Freepor	-





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Community

BAY BUZZ EVENTS

continued from page 10

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

Gumbo Anyone? This winter festival favorite is back for its 35th year at The Village of Baytowne Wharf on Feb. 24, 12-4 p.m.! Gulf Coast restaurants 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.

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Contact Niceville Insurance to determine eligibility for property insurance in the state of Florida from a member of the Auto-Owners Insurance Group SM .

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 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. Nash-

ville 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 ÁWAY 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 VIBRA-TIONS" as you are dreaming of "SURFIN' USA."

As mentioned, this one-ofa-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 ParadisePromotionsFL. com. This event is sponsored in part by Life Media, Cox Media, Florida Power and Light, Omni Broadcasting, Fast Signs, T-Mobile and ZooGraphix Online another great Paradise Promotion!





The community

Protecting Your Treasures

BY JULIE A. MARTIN

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

insurance zone

sure 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

There are two ways to in-

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
- FirearmsArtwork
- 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.



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ATTENTION

KEENAN'S KIDS FOUNDATION ANNOUNCES THE CREATION OF KEENAN'S CANINE COMPANIONS THE KKF BOARD HAS APPROVED THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A CANINE COMPANION PROGRAM

THE DOGS COME FROM A DISTINGUISHED BREEDER IN WEST TENNESSEE THE PUPS COME TO US TRAINED AS BASIC COMPANION DOGS AND WILL RECEIVE ADVANCED TRAINING FOR 8 WEEKS WHEN THEY ARRIVE AT OUR OFFICES.

WE WANT TO START THE PLACEMENT PROCEDURES TO ENSURE ADEQUATE TIME TO PICK THE PROPER PLACEMENT. SO IF YOU ARE INTERESTED, PLEASE COMPLETE THE SURVEY.

THERE IS NO COST TO GET PLACED WITH ONE OF THESE COMPANION DOGS.

WWW.KEENANSKIDSFOUNDATION.COM/K9

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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, "aging-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 LIFELONG 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 IN-CLUDE such. If you choose to obtain an Advantage plan, the Part D prescription coverage is typically INCLUDED.

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.



\$5.00pp Pancakes, Sausage, Juice, Coffee, Milk Silent Auction items & certificates from local businesses! Bids close at 11:00am

All proceeds benefit local charities such as: Children in Crisis • Sharing and Caring Holiday Food Baskets • Children's Miracle Network College Scholarships for local youth • Community Youth Organizations

In collaboration with Niceville High School Key Club



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MEDICARE



The 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 high-skill, highwage 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.



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



PHOTO BY MIKE WEAVER. A red maple tree was planted close to Glenview Ave. near the Rail Gun exhibit, courtesy of the Valparaiso Garden Club, at the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida on Arbor Day, January 19. Garden Club Officers, James Connolly and Museum Manager Arthur Edgar helped in the planting. Museum trustees, Marie Hallion and Mike Weaver also attended.

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.

Learn more about attending or becoming a vendor <u>on our website!</u>

freshieandcraftexpo.com

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Craft, Learn, Beach, Repe

March 7-10, 2024 at The Island Resort

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decorating job.

Lifestyle

arranging ideas! I'd be happy



By STACY SARIKANON, STUNNING SPACES DECORATING DEN INTERIORS

Why do so many people constantly rearrange their furniture and still remain dissatisfied with the results? In some cases, after living with pieces in the same are at odds with each other. For instance, a piece may look best in one particular location, but might be totally impractical for use there. For example, a chair which looks just perfect in a corner behind the door does no good if it is never used by the family. I have always found that the BEST USE factor always "wins!"

Another belief that I hold ents is that an under-furnished room is far preferable to an over-furnished room. And by under-furnished, I mean the actual number of furnishings used in a room - not an incomplete



home for many years, I find that many of my clients still push sofas and chairs here and there in search of the best arrangement.

Naturally, I feel that everyone would benefit from the services of a professional decorator to help them solve this universal dilemma. Successful furniture arrangement is not a hit-andmiss matter. It results when professional skill is applied to the job of furniture arranging.

There are two major factors that must be taken into consideration before beginning a furniture arrangement plan. First, you must consider the BEST USE of the piece or pieces and, second, the BEST APPEAR-ANCE of said pieces.

Things that fall into the BEST USE group are factors relating to your physical needs. And the items that fall into the BEST APPEARANCE group relate to creating a pleasing aesthetic in the room.

Often times these two factors

Searching for "The Perfect Spot" to Place Your Furniture?

dear when working with my cli-



side table and a lamp and per-



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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 ul-



tra-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 successfully 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.

Letters to Heroes Delivers More Than 31,000 to Deployed Service Members

As a result of Lieutenant

Governor Jeanette Nuñez' Holiday Letters to Heroes Initiative, more than 31,000 letters written by Florida students from 56 school districts were delivered to service men and women deployed through the Florida National Guard. The letters written by Florida's students were collected by the Department of Education and delivered during the holiday season to bring hope and encouragement to those deployed who were unable to see their own families or on active state duty for Christmas time.

"Florida's National Guardsmen sacrifice so much to serve

Continued on page 20



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

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Military News

Local Nining, Prinks and Coffee

Absolute Thai Cafe (Valparaiso)

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

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

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

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

139 N John Sims Pkwy. Valparaiso, FL 32580 (850) 389-4813

Brozinni Pizzeria

Owner Nicole McKee and GM Seth Perry have produced a gem for our community-Brozinni Pizzeria located at 144 N. Palm Blvd. in Niceville (next to Pounders). Since opening their doors just over one year ago on March 14, 2022, Brozinni's has specialized in 20" pizzas so large a family of four to five can enjoy! Gluten free pizza available, too, in 10" size. They also serve delicious wings, calzones and pastas. Portions are BIG! Salads are refreshing, especially the Caprese with fresh mozzarella. This pizza shop even has the best burgers. The desserts are homemade. They offer key lime pie, cheesecake, banana pudding, cannolis and tiramisu to name a few. Lunch is served by the slice

form 11 a.m. - 4 p.m. daily. You can get a slice of NY Style pizza, salad, drink and a breadstick for \$9.50—a great deal Slices during the day include Park Avenue (meat lovers), Canal (supreme), Italian Beef, Parmesan Chicken, Spinach Artichoke, Deep Dish Meatball, Deep Dish Buffalo Chicken, and Margarita, 34th White pizza with ricotta cheese, basil and garlic to name a few!

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

(850) 678-7778

144 N Palm Blvd. Niceville

Landshark's Pizza

Hungry? Thirsty? Maybe a little of both? Come in and visit Landshark's Pizza. Owners Brian and Sue Hassmann have created the locals' favorite pizza, buffalo wings and sports pub and bar that serves great pizza and awesome wings, plus many other scrumptious eats for folks of all ages. There's plenty of seating for everyone and TVs galore, plus fun and games all week long. Sports fans from all over come and watch all their favorite teams on countless regional and national sports networks. With a fully stocked bar serving up dozens of different bourbons and many different cold beers on draft, it's no secret why the locals love Land-

"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, coffee cake or pound cake, which go great with maple cinnamon latte or caramel macchiato. And, oh, the freshly roasted coffee. Order ahead and pick up some for the office or breakfast to start your day off right!

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

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LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant

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



tine's Day Dinner!

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.-mid-

night; Sun 12-9 p.m.



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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

Continued on next page



We are open and happy to see you!

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Local Diving, Drinks, Coffee & Entertainment

LOCAL DINING

continued from previous page

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 Ten-

A Taste of Mardi Gras: Food, Wine, Craft Beer and More

A Taste of Mardi Gras, this year's Food and Wine Tasting Festival supporting the Northwest Florida Symphony Orchestra's youth programs, will feature a jazz combo, tastes of 40 different wines, local craft beers and samples of cuisine from area

restaurants, such as Aegean Greek Restaurant, Cafe Bienville, Carrabba's Italian Grill, Magnolia Grill, Peppers Mexican Cantina, Red Lobster Seafood Restaurant. Brozinni's Pizzeria and several others.

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



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.

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

Hours: Breakfast 7-11 a.m. Mon-Fri. Lunch Closed. Dinner 5-9 p.m., Sunday-Thursday; 5-10 p.m. on Friday and Saturday. Brunch 7 a.m. - 2 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

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

Tisano's Garlic Grill

Tisano's owner Trinity Coleman grew up in a restaurant family. Her 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 ti-



ramisu. Gluten free options are also available. Trinity's recipe for success is simple. "We just want to provide a clean restaurant with awesome food and friendly staff, at a fair price." All of the pictures on the wall are pictures Trinity and Trey took on different trips to Italy and the wine list features a broad selection of handpicked Italian wines. When you visit Tisano's, Trinity wants you to feel like you're going to a friend's house for a great meal and good company. See the coupon section for 10% off any lunch-time purchase!

Specials include:

Monday: 25% off total bill for active-duty military (with ID) and \$5 margaritas for everyone. Tuesday: Two can dine for \$49. Includes salad, bread, two glasses of house wine and two entrees (some exceptions).

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

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

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

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

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MILITARY

continued from page 18

our state and to protect our country, especially during the holiday season. Through this initiative, we were able to show our deployed guardsmen a small token our of appreciation for their service," said Lt. Gov. Nuñez.

"The response we saw from more than 30,000 students honoring our brave men and women serving in the Florida National Guard was remarkable," said Commissioner of Education Manny Diaz, Jr. "It is clear that Florida students respect and appreciate the sacrifices our service members make for us ---especially during the holidays. I am so proud that our students showed up in full force to participate and encourage the Florida National Guard."

For more information about the initiative, visit flgov.com.



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

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Off the Hook



By CALL 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 deepsea 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 ex-

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perience. 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

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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 beneath 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!



Pizza - Wings - Subs - Calzones - Salads Check out The Speakeasy: Niceville's only high-end cocktail lounge. Open the green door, lift your pinky and grab a drinky in our prohibition-style digs. WATCH YOUR FAVORITE SPORTS HERE

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By LISA LEATH TURPIN

Here we are starting a new year and making new resolu-

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

tions 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 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 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



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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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Tinnitus: An Interview with David Baguley, PhD Part 1

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. We include part 1 in this issue; stay tuned for part 2 next month.

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 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



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

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 trouble-some 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!

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, N7.

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).

Reprinted Courtesy of Grant Williams, Niceville Hearing Center, Inc., Valparaiso Medical Office Park, 141-B South John Sims Pkwy., Valparaiso, 850-830-0376, Niceville-HearingCenterInc.com.

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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

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 com-

fort 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

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Golden lift chairs are luxurious, 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!

Wait to Prune Cold Injured Landscape Plants

By LARRY WILLIAMS, UF/ IFAS EXTENSION AGENT, OKALOOSA COUNTY

Recent freezes have resulted in many people questioning whether to prune or not to prune cold damaged plants. The short answer is - wait.

We've just had a run of freezing temperatures. But winter's not over. Our winter temperatures go back and forth all season - one week it's winter, the next week we think spring has sprung and then winter decides to pay us a visit again. This is typical here in North Florida.

As a result of the freezing periods, the less cold hardy tropical and subtropical landscape plants can be injured. For example, it's normal for popular landscape plants such as oleander, hibiscus, bottlebrush and philodendron to suffer some cold damage. Then, the first impulse for many gardeners is to cut away the dead and dying leaves and branches. But this is not the best idea.

During winter it's difficult to tell how much damage has been done to these plants. Pruning immediately after a freeze will cut away live wood that does not have to be lost. Also, leaves and branches, which have been killed, can help protect the rest of the plant when the next freeze strikes.

Some of the more tender landscape plants such as bananas, cassia, gingers, tropical hibiscus and many of the tropical perennials may have been

killed back to the ground. Don't give up on them too soon. These plants may surprise you by sending up new shoots come spring. Some of these plants require warm soil temperatures before they'll produce new growth. Many of the gingers, for example, may not show any signs of life until April or May.

Some winter and spring flowering plants such as camellias and azaleas may experience flower bud damage. This will be evident at blooming time with few to no flowers. Cold damaged camellia flower buds will either drop off the plant or only partially open showing brown centers. Stem damage will show up in spring and early summer when some of the branches die. Cold inured leaves will fall as new spring growth occurs.

Individual woody stems on some azalea and bottlebrush plants are likely to split or crack during a freeze. These injured stems/branches are subject to dieback the following spring or summer. It's best to wait until these branches begin to die before removing them, during spring or summer. When pruning, make sure to cut below the split or injured area into healthy wood.

Winter is not over. February and early March can bring occasional frosts and freezes. When spring really has sprung, you'll know what survived and what didn't. That's the time to prune.



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New Year, New You?



By Stephenie Craig

The holidays are over and New Year messages are here. Change yourself. Change your 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 set-

ting 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 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 to sustain 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.



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Business

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 en-

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ergy-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:

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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Residential and Commercial



Page 26



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 generation was named Kalen. A guy named Kalen grew up playing Atari, watching Nolan Ryan, listening to Michael Jackson. Or worse: The Osmonds.

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.



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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 team. I was born during the third quarter of Bear Bryant's Liberty Bowl, in Memphis, Tennessee. I was born directly after

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a critical touchdown. Peter Kim made the kick. The kick was good.

And I made my earthly presentation. Seven pounds eight ounces of red hair. The doctor was shocked when he saw my unusually large hallux.

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Sean of the South

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. 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 dis-

cover 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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Musing

A Pastor's Ponderings: Manifesting More Mercy in 2024



By Pastor Doug Stauffer

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



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🌸 Arts & Music

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 dis-



appointed 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 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!



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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, Febru-

ary 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, interi-

ine 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 850.855.0068. Tickets may also be purchased online at Event Brite. For more information, visit the club's website under the events tab at www.choctawbaymusicclub.com.

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

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, 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



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.

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

Showcase Your 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.

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The panel of judges will determine the qualifiers who will advance to the final "Okaloosa's Got Talent" event on Sunday, April 7.

For more information, visit https://www.okaloosaarts. org/2024-okaloosa-s-got-talent. html or email Zoran at zoranzakary@gmail.com or Amy at amybatyl@gmail.com.

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