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# **More Than Medals:** Beyond the Finish Line with the Special Olympics

By Heather Bennett Eye

As our regional athletes of Special Olympics Florida gear up for the Summer Games, I want to share with you how the organization is more than just a place for those with intellectual disabilities to train and compete in Olympic-style sports. It's also an organization that fosters leadership growth and provides access to free health care. I'll also share ways you can get involved.

Our Northwest Region consists of Area 1 (Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, Walton, Bay, Washington, and Jackson counties) and Area 2 (Gadsden, Leon, Wakulla, Taylor and Hamilton counties). They'll each have their own Area competitions (Area 2 on March 2nd and Area 1 on March 16) before competing against each other at the Northwest Region Summer Games on April 6 in Defuniak Springs. Prior to that, two athletes from our region, Sara Dunbar and Ashley Harrell, are preparing for a very special trip to Washington,



D.C. On February 5-7, athletes, program leaders, unified partners and family members will gather on Capitol Hill to address members of the House of Representatives and the Senate. This is an annual, national event known as Capitol Hill Day. Athletes will advocate the importance of continued funding for the program, and ending health care disparities and discrimination against people with intellectual disabilities.

Athlete Stacy Barns of Pensacola attended Capitol Hill Day in 2015 and 2016 and recently assisted in prepping the national athletes who will make their way to Washington, D.C. this month. Along with the Chief Health Officer of the Special Olympics, she co-presented via Zoom the health initiatives in Florida and across the globe. "It's something that's really inspiring, not just about Stacey, but many athletes, where they gain these leadership roles and they assume these positions within Special Olympics and their communities and they use it to leverage their voice to become advocates," stated Damien McNeil, Regional Director of the Northwest. "That's one of my favorite things to witness."

Advocacy is important for various reasons. Not only does the Special Olympics

SPECIAL OLYMPICS continued on page 4

# CALM Village Nears Completion!

By MICHELLE RUSCHMAN

In 2013, Terri Steadman and Grace Nuffer were working with a group of young single mothers when they saw a need: To have a safe place these moms could go with their children during a time of crisis. As a result, CALM (Crisis Aid for Littles and Moms) House was born. Eleven years later, not only has CALM House helped 50 mothers and 70 children, the organization now includes the CALM Furniture Resale Store (in the former Ven-You201 building) and they are now answering a new need with CALM Village: Where do single mothers go to find affordable transitional housing? Leanne Schutt, Secretary, and Niceville Public Relations Representative for the Executive Board of Directors, shares what started CALM Village and what is included in these new homes: "The shortage of reasonably priced housing is a significant issue, and (CALM House) residents often struggle to obtain affordable housing through the Department of Housing and

> **CALM VILLAGE** continued on page 2



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### n Community

### **CALM VILLAGE**

continued from page 1

Urban Development (HUD) or they are unable to find suitable accommodations in their budget

Each cottage will be a brandnew house approximately 600 square feet, with two bedrooms, one bathroom, a kitchen/dining room/living room combo, a stackable washer/dryer, and a private front porch. They will also be fully furnished."

For many families, these homes will be a game changer. But, the application process and screening will be rigorous, even more so than CALM House. "To qualify for CALM House and CALM Village, applicants are required to complete an application form. They must also have at least one child under their custody and pass a phone screening and interview process to evaluate their suitability for our programs. Furthermore, prospective applicants must be free from drugs and alcohol."

In addition, applicants must meet these qualifications:

• Be a family (one adult with custody of children no older than 12 and no more than three children)

• Pass a background check completed by CALM

• Must be employed full-time (32 hours/week or more) with at least 60 days of pay stubs as proof

Must have children in school or childcare

• Must have a driver's license and an insured vehicle

• Electronic Benefit Transfer



(EBT) is already established

· Must have medical insurance for them and their children • Must have birth certificates and Social Security cards for all

members of the household. • Must be drug and alcohol-free including medical mar-

ijuana and medication-assisted treatment (MAT) • Must provide a copy of

credit report with debts • Must have the deposit and the first month's fee before moving in

Bay Life www.mybaylifenwfl.com

• Must read and accept all CALM Village Rules. (The guidelines and application will be shared on the website soon.)

These homes will be where CALM House graduates can look to as "next steps," but it is not mandatory to be a graduate to apply. If you fit the criteria listed above, you're a potential candidate to become a resident in CALM Village. The rules are no-nonsense and faith-centered. But, for those who qualify and are willing to live out the values that have made the CALM program so successful, those approved will gain a beautiful and safe place to live with their child(ren) for up to a year.

CALM Village, like CALM House, is not meant to be a permanent solution, but a point of transition where single mothers have an opportunity to gather resources until they can launch on their own. With many properties, rent is reaching well over a thousand, even for an apartment. CALM Village is truly a gift in our community with the fee being just \$850 a month. In addition, \$100 of that fee will be set aside in a savings account for the family. The goal is, at the



end of their year-long stay in the CALM Village, mom will have at least \$1200 to begin her next chapter.

As of now, four cottages are nearing completion, but the CALM House Executive Board isn't done dreaming big for the families they serve. "Our immediate goal is to establish the 4 cottages that constitute CALM Village. We will assess their effectiveness before proceeding with the construction of the next three cottages. As an additional consideration, we are working on a playground and exploring the possibility of constructing an educational building."

The CALM group knows their dreams have become tangible as a direct result of the amazing support from the people of Okaloosa County and beyond. Because CALM is an overtly Christian-based organization, it doesn't qualify for government aid. These safe places have only become possible through private donations and sponsorship and the expenses are significant. The biggest need for CALM House to run, and for CALM Village to expand, is to have a budgetable, reliable, monthly income, whatever the amount. Every dollar helps and will be used to maximize every contribution. If you'd like to be part of these life-changing efforts, there are several ways you can contribute time and/or resources.

•. Send donations to: CALM Organization Inc., 201 Redwood Ave., Niceville, FL 32578. Checks can be made payable to CALM Organization Inc. Venmo @CALM-organization (the last four digits of the phone number are 6419).

•. Attend their annual fundraiser, Spring Up For CALM, on March 9th from 5-8 p.m. at 1028 White Point Rd. Tickets are \$75 each or \$550 for a table of 8. Purchase tickets through Venmo (Make note that the funds are for this event and include your email address.) or

email Terri Steadman at President@nicevillecalm.com.

•. Visit https://nicevillecalm. com/donate to see the many ways you can contribute to these efforts.

To volunteer as an advocate or with childcare, contact CALM House Director and graduate of CALM House, Carri Jackson, at director@ nicevillecalm.com.

Together, we are making a positive impact for generations to come.



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# **Dust Off Your Boots! It's Almost Time to Rodeo!**

5th Annual Westonwood Ranch Pro Rodeo | March 22-23 | Freeport Regional Sports Complex

Dust off your boots and get ready to rodeo again this year! The 5th Annual Westonwood Ranch PCA Rodeo returns to the City of Freeport Sports Complex March 22nd –23rd. You don't want to miss some of the nation's top cowgirls and cowboys compete. So, bring the family and friends for a funpacked weekend!

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!

"We are so thankful for the partnership with Walton County Sheriff's Office, the City of Freeport, our 2024 Presenting Sponsor New Life Church and other community sponsors that make it possible to raise funds that help support our programs," said Lindy Wood, Founder of Westonwood Ranch. "So many youth with developmental disabilities miss irreplaceable opportunities to gain critical life skills and job skills needed to lead an independent life. These special individuals want the same thing as we do — to be fully participating members of society",.

The professionally sanctioned rodeo benefits Westonwood Ranch, an organization whose mission and programs serve teens and young adults with Autism and related developmental disorders. Located in Freeport, it provides therapeutic programs designed to fill the transition gap from high school into adulthood by incorporating functional learning opportunities in a therapeutic farm environment. All net proceeds from the event go to support Westonwood Ranch programs.

More than five years ago, Lindy Wood had a dream—a dream of a program geared



towards older youth and young adults with autism and special needs. She wanted to be able to offer more for her son, Weston, diagnosed with autism at age 2, and other teens and young adults affected by Autism. So,

with a hope to create opportunities to develop and cultivate independent, life-changing skills, Lindy and her husband, founders of Westonwood Ranch, purchased a 40acre tract of land in Freeport to begin a farm and, eventually, birth a new local non-profit. In just a

short period of time, Westonwood Ranch has grown into a sustainable,

working farm providing life and vocational skills for adolescents and young adults in our area with varying developmental disorders. The farm offers a comprehensive, holistic learning program for fulltime students, ages 12 through adult, that focuses on providing functional learning opportunities. Through hands-on ranch operations, students learn skills in aquaponic farming, animal feeding and care, kitchen operations, creative art exploration and fitness classes. Young individuals and adults with developmental differences learn to transition into independent living by receiving hands-on, job skill training leading to employment opportunities.

Tickets for the Rodeo are \$20 for adults and \$15.00 for children 12 years and younger at the gate. Children ages 2 and under are free. There will be no presale of tickets, so spectators are encouraged to arrive early. Westonwood Ranch is seeking additional local business sponsors. For more information about how to support the rodeo and Westonwood Ranch, email admin@westonwood.orgor visit our website at www.westonwood.org.



### **Community**

### SPECIAL OLYMPICS

continued from page 1

provide opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities to demonstrate their skills and talents through sports and leadership, but it's also internationally the number one provider for free health screenings for people with intellectual disabilities. "People are going without things that they need. They need those resources," said Damien. This also rings true for those who live along the Emerald Coast. The disparity that affects those with intellectual disabilities happens right there as well.

The Special Olympics provides free optometry, audiolo-

gy, dental, podiatry and mental health screenings, along with referrals for those who need medical care. They also provide free hearing aides. "It gives life to the mission at work," stated Damien. The free screenings take place at events like the Summer Games, in which Doctors volunteer their time and resources for these screenings. Screenings are available to athletes and non-athletes with intellectual disabilities. At this year's Northwest Region Summer

Games, around 600 athletes are expected. With as many athletes,



and additional non-athletes, that will be in attendance, healthcare

workers are encouraged to reach out if they are interested in volunteering to assist with screenings.

How can you help the Special Olympics? Dayof or long-term volunteers are always needed. You can also sign up to coach or play. Those without intellectual disabilities who have a passion for sports can participate as a Unified Partner. This offers the opportunity to contribute and foster connections between communities. "We want to make sure we are advocates for

people with disabilities in any way that might look like," said Damien. Volunteering is a great opportunity to demonstrate that.

If you are a physician or health organization looking to volunteer for health screenings, you can contact Blair Mackie, Health Manager for Areas 1 and 2 at blairmackie@sofl.org or (850) 778-7573. For anything else, please reach out to Damien McNeil at damienmcneil@sofl. org or (407) 402-8604. To learn more about volunteering opportunities, please visit www.specialolympicsflorida.org/northwest and click on Get Involved. If you are interested in attending an event to cheer on our athletes, the summer games are free and open to the public.

# Free Federal Income Tax Preparation Available

Free Federal income tax preparation is being offered in South Walton County for low to middle-income families and individuals, with special attention to senior citizens. Tax Preparation service will be available from Feb. 6 to April 11, 2024, at A Simple Faith Church in Santa Rosa Beach (new location this year). The church is at 360 WRM Circle Blvd in the Blue Mountain Beach Industrial Park, north of Hwy 98.

Taxpayers must make appointments online at tinyurl. com/yryzb5mt or by calling

(850) 275-9104. The site will be open Tuesdays and Thursdays from 12 - 5 p.m.

Tax-Aide is also available in

DeFuniak Springs. Call (850) 892-8746 for an appointment.

AARP Tax-Aide is a nationwide service, with information available at other nearby locations at https://www.aarp.org/ money/taxes/aarp\_taxaide/ locations.html.

This service is sponsored by the AARP Foundation and the IRS. There are no age restrictions and AARP membership is not required.

Taxpayers must bring their 2022 tax return, Social Security cards for taxpayer(s) and all dependents, picture IDs, and all tax documents received. Bring checking or savings account information if direct deposit of refunds or direct debit of amounts due is desired. If applicable, bring Identity Protection PIN (IP PIN) for each individual. Taxpayers who wish to itemize deductions must bring appropriate information. Note that complicated tax returns involving rental properties, inventories, depreciation, etc. cannot be prepared.



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# Meet Our Hometown Hero Mike Sanders, Junto Tribe Founder

By MICHELLE RUSCHMAN

In a culture that often calls masculinity toxic, Mike Sanders, author of Seek. Adapt. Endure: Following the Way of the Authentic Man, has found

a way for men to reclaim and discover the best parts of what they were created to be. He is doing that with a growing group called Junto Tribe. Although Junto Tribe is described as "a

non-profit ministry dedicated to helping men realize their full potential in Christ," Mike is quick to point out that this group is not just for Christian men. "Ben Franklin's one of my heroes and



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





he created a club when he was 19 years old called Junto. The goal was for men of action to gather, share their knowledge and experience and, in doing so, elevate the community. In Junto, there was an expectation that members be involved in the process, and we want thinking men. This isn't just a group for you to come and listen to somebody else speak and talk about Jesus. I want to challenge men who will be part of the conversation whether they're men who want clarification about their identity in Christ, or who have questions about what Christianity is all about.

We call ourselves a tribe. because we're all one tribe. We have one creator. We have one God, and he's our head. The idea of the Junto Tribe is we're all included in that tribe, and everybody's welcome."

What makes Mike's background so perfectly suited to this ministry is his exposure to many areas of what would be considered traditional masculinity. When he was getting ready to go to college, he thought he'd go into pre-med or sports medicine. But, his love for exercise would take him in a different direction. "I heard about becoming a strength and conditioning







coach, where I could become an expert in kinesiology, physiology and anatomy in the preparation of athletes, where they could train to become stronger, bigger and faster. This gives them more endurance so they can go on the football field, the hockey rink, whatever it is, and win championships. That's what I wanted to do, straight through to my master's degree. I am ridiculously curious and fascinated about what we are capable of doing as humans."

It was this curiosity that led to working with college athletics and helping the University of Denver's hockey team win backto-back championships in 2004 and 2005. But just as Mike was being considered as a strength coach for the National Hockey League, he didn't feel the Lord calling him in that direction, so he declined. It was shortly after Mike learned the military wanted to take the concept of training athletes and apply it to the Special Operations community. In that moment, he knew this was his next chapter, and became one of the first civilians hired to train our military elite.

Even with his extensive track record of success, however, Mike's start didn't reflect the feeling of being worthy of that success. "I grew up believing I wasn't smart enough or athletic enough and I had a lot of health



### MIKE SANDERS

continued from previous page

problems. It kept me from being active so I wasn't supposed to make it in life. I was going to be a statistic that was pushed off in the corner."

What Mike knew, though, was that he wanted to help people. Junto Tribe was born when Mike was at his lowest point and sought answers for himself. is even a group just for juniors and seniors where the young men are mentored through the same curriculum. Members also participate in activities that help them live out examples of what these aspects entail. During the Servant chapter, for example, the Junto Tribe comes together to work on projects for the community. The Explorer training has included a camping trip and the Warrior spirit was explored You can also join Junto Tribe at their first Men's Encounter on March 8-10th at Real Life in Marianna, FL. Additional information about this event and registration can be found at jun-

readers may know, Pecan Jacks'

owners, Tim and Veronica Wy-

att, jumped into the Theo spirit

by decorating their stores with

Theo in mind! In addition, the

couple created a unique "Theo of South Walton" flavored Ice

cream, which, 6 years later, is

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exclusive stockist for the latest

Theo product - a children's

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In all that Junto Tribe does, it is executed with the spirit of collaboration, fun, camaraderie, faith, unity, elevation and freedom. As a result, these men are

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better equipped for their families, work and areas of service. If you are a man who has been looking for a tribe, Junto is ready to receive you.

In 2011, Mike experienced a devastating loss when many of the special ops men he had worked with, lost their lives during an historical mission. "I started thinking about the kids that would grow up without dads. At that moment, I just hit the ground. I remember asking myself, 'Did you do everything you could for them?' I remember thinking yes, I did. I prepared them the best I possibly could to help them go in and physically outwork and outlast the enemy. I remember then asking, 'Did you do everything you could for them mentally and spiritually?' I didn't think I had."

It was at that moment, when Mike was trying to understand himself and what more he could do, the roots of Seek. Adapt. Endure. began to take shape. The book would eventually become the curriculum for Junto Tribe.

Many original members have now become leaders of their own groups, meeting at their individually designated times during the school year. Using Mike's book, they discuss what it means to be the men God created them to be—Disciple, Servant, Warrior, Scholar, Explorer, Craftsman and Leader. There on the shooting range and through a game of paintball.

Current lessons finish in May, but Mike says it's never too late to discover what Junto Tribe is about. To find a group, you can email juntotribe@gmail.com.



plushie is sure to be a big hit this summer but locals will get the first chance to purchase the backpack at Pecan Jacks beginning now - and at a special "locals only" price!

FOSWST is dedicated to educating the public - visitors and locals alike, about sea turtle vulnerability and has initiated a #CleanDarkFlat campaign to remind people of the dangers of leaving trash and unfilled holes on the beach, or using bright lights that can frighten Sea Turtles coming to nest on South Walton's Beaches. May 1st through October 31st is nesting season and FOSWST deploys up to 200 Volunteer Beach Ambassadors throughout the 26 miles of South Walton Beaches, teaching children about sea turtle vulnerability, marine ecosystems and conservation through efforts like the "plastic to paper" campaign begun in South Walton. "The amount of trash - especially plastic - that makes its way into the Gulf and is then ingested by our sea turtles is staggering," says FOSWST President, Beth Coppedge. "We hope, through our educational efforts, "Theo" will continue to be a fun way to remind everyone about our mission. We consider Theo the "Conscience of South Walton," she says. Theo is a great way to bless your child and help the FOSWST fulfill their educational mission!



### ( Community

# **Exciting News! Saving the Green Space Update**

By Barbara Palmgren

Preserve Bluewater Bay, Inc., is making remarkable progress towards finalizing the acquisition of 150 acres of green space in Bluewater Bay that defines this special spot of paradise.

Preserve Bluewater Bay (PBWB), 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, has set a goal of raising \$2.3 million by April 30, 2024, in order to purchase the land and save it from developers. So far, they've raised just over \$2 million in pledges, and have been granted 501(c)(3) status, meaning that donations can be tax deductible.

I've been asked why I'm pas-



sionate 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.

Witnessing the loss of the former Magnolia Golf Course, now abandoned and soon to be developed, the lesson has been painfully in front of Bluewater Bay homeowners. Witnessing the closure of the Lakes Course to development was another wake-up call. 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 of green space occupied by the remaining golf course, officers and members of PBWB have worked tirelessly over the past months to raise funds.

Less than \$300,000 is needed to make this happen. 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.

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!

# Learn how to Keep Our Green Spaces *Green* Today! Which Describes You?



We live here for the **wide-open places**, the water, green, and gathering spaces that make Bluewater Bay a sanctuary for all who reside, visit, pass through, and enjoy. This is our community, and this is our opportunity to preserve the magic for ourselves, the wildlife, and the recreational use of the greens for everyone.

We are working together to preserve the openness and nature the 150 acres of green space provides us all. Whether you live next to the green space, drive by it, walk throughout, enjoy fishing inside, pick blackberries along the water, or listen to birds who live here because of thm, our green spaces are an indelible part of Bluewater Bay. You may protect the bears, the bobcats, and the alligators who sometimes travel through as well.

**Preserve and protect the green space today.** Bluewater Bay green spaces are what make Bluewater Bay magical. We **resort** here. We **live** here. We **thrive** here.

**Consider donating to save the green space today.** The deadline of **April 30th** for contributing and securing the space for future recreation is almost here.

www.preservebwb.com (850) 865-0897 Pledge your support today Everyone of you Matters



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**EVENTS** 

Greater FWB Chamber Business After Hours

5:30 pm | Beach Weekend - The Marina | FWB

21

# Happenings Around the Bay

### MARCH

- 01 | Greater FWB Chamber First Friday Coffee 7 am | Christian Life Center at First Baptist Church | FWB United Way Emerald Coast's Emerging Leaders Field Day 4 pm | Mullet Field | Niceville Night at the Park 5 pm | Freeport Sports Complex | Freeport Sinfonia Gulf Coast's Crescendo! Vintner Dinners 6 pm | Various Venues VINTNER DINNERS CRESCENDO. The Ultimate Elvis 7 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville Kiwanis of Niceville-Valparaiso Annual 02 Pancake Breakfast & Silent Auction 8 am | Niceville Community Center | Niceville Niceville Monthly Cruise In 3 pm | Landshark Pizza Company | Niceville The Pearl Project's 2nd Annual Family Sock Hop 4 pm | Community Life Center at Crosspoint | Niceville Live Music: Purple Monkey 6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville Sinfonia Gulf Coast's Crescendo! Main Event 03 11:30 am Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa CRESCENDO! A CULINARY & CULTURAL EVENT EXTRAVACANTA ARCH 3 | 11:30 A aGulfCoast.org Women's Climbing Circle 5 pm | Rock Out Climbing Gym | Destin Impact100 Northwest Florida 04 Membership Event
- 5:30 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville 07 Birds of New Zealand 6:30 pm | Crosspoint Church | Niceville
- 08 ECCAC Gala 6:30 pm | Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa | Miramar Beach

 S SLEW
 Niceville Community

 Saturdays | 9 am - 1 pm

 Palm Plaza | Niceville

DESIGN

09 United Way Brunch & Bubbly 10:30 am | The Venue at Beach Weekend | FWB Soiree on the Bay Act III for CVHN 10:30 am | Dugas Family Estate | Santa Rosa Beach Carmina Burana

7:30 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville

10 6th Annual Mac & Cheese Festival 12 pm | Destin Commons | Destin



ECCAC Golf Tournament 12 pm | Kelly Plantation Golf Club | Destin Carmina Burana 2:30 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville

- 12 Oils and Acrylics with Rosalyn O'Grady 10 am | Artful Things | Niceville
- 13 Niceville-Valparaiso Chamber Second Wednesday Breakfast 7:15 am | Niceville Community Center | Niceville Anime & Drawing Basics with Chris McLoone 3:15 pm | Artful Things | Niceville An Evening with Casting Crowns 7 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville
- 14 Greater FWB Chamber Nothing But Networking 11:30 am | The Place on Beal | FWB
- 15 Niceville-Valparaiso Rotary Club Annual Golf Tournament 11 am | Bluewater Bay Golf Club | Niceville Live Music: LA Strangers 6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville
- 16 Shamrock Stroll Adventure Hike 10 am | Alaqua Animal Refuge | Freeport Birding the Wright Landfill and Okaloosa Holding Ponds 7:30 am | 1826 Lewis Turner Blvd | FWB
- 20 Kids' Painting with Sheila Mahony 10:30 am | Artful Things | Niceville Crochet Part 1 with Eliza Scalia 2 pm | Artful Things | Niceville
- 21 Origami with Laura Duerrwaechter 2 pm | Artful Things | Niceville

Hammock Bay 1st & 3rd Sundays | 8 am Victory Blvd | Freeport Grand Boulevard Saturdays | 9 am - 1 pm Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach



8:30 am | Church on Bayshore | Niceville Eggstravaganza Spring Festival 9 am | Freeport Sports Complex | Freeport Valparaiso Spring Plant Festival 9 am | Paradise Plants and Palms | Valparaiso Fisher House Poker Run 9 am | American Legion Post 221 Niceville Encaustic Wax with Corina Zalace 10:30 am | Artful Things | Niceville

Valparaiso Spring Plant Festival 9 am-1 pm | 695 Valparaiso Pkwy | Valparaiso

### ONGOING EVENTS

Oils and Acrylics with Rosalyn O'Grady 10 am | Tuesdays | Artful Things | Niceville Watercolor Techniques with Theresia McInnis 1 pm | Tuesdays | Artful Things | Niceville Trivia Night 6 pm | Thursdays | Strange Colt Brewery | Niceville Brunch on the Bayou 9 am | Sundays | LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant & Oyster Bar | Niceville

MARCH 8-10, FRIDAY•SATURDAY•SUNDAY 3-Day Paradise Music Festival! Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center









Bay

Buzz

### The community



Cindy Addison and Sheila Dunning

The Choctawhatchee **Bay Chapter, Daughters of** the American Revolution, has honored Okaloosa County UF/IFAS Extension Services Agent Sheila Dunning with the prestigious DAR Conservation Award. The award recognizes volunteers with distinguished conservation efforts which include sustained accomplishments that improve the environment and educate the public on conservation issues while exceeding job expectations. The award was presented by Florida's State Regent, Mrs. Cindy Addison, at the Chapter's February meeting.

#### Rocky Bayou Christian School Rocks Brain Bowl

Mr. James Wagenschutz, Principal of Rocky Bayou Christian Academy, is pleased



to announce that two seniors have been selected as finalists for the 2024 National Merit Scholarship Program. Christopher Seeling and Scarlett Stevens are among 15,000 Finalists in the nation and as such will continue in the competition for some 7,500 national Merit Scholarships, worth more than \$35 million, that will be offered this spring.

RBCS is very proud of Scarlett and Christopher for their high academic achievements.

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

#### Roller Selected to Serve on the FCSSGA State Executive Board

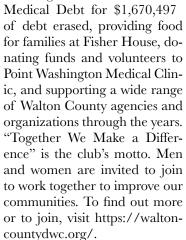
Northwest Florida State College (NWFSC) student Lillian Roller has been selected to serve on the Florida College System Student Government Association (FCSSGA) State Executive Board as the Chair



of the Temporary Committee. As the Chair, Roller will lead the planning efforts for the Student Leadership conferences in February and April. These two Florida Conferences host representatives from all 28 Florida College Student Government Associations. In her role, she will report directly to the FCSSGA President and will lead weekly meetings to plan and implement successful conferences.

#### Democratic Women's Club of Walton County Celebrates 100th Member

The Democratic Women's Club of Walton County was founded with only 12 members and now celebrates its 100th member joining the Club. We congratulate founder and current member Grace Marse for bringing this club to Walton County Democrats and Vice President in charge of membership Lesa Klein for her efforts that have increased membership. Recent public service projects include providing sheets and pillows for local Walton project, A Bed 4 Me; assisting Panhandle families to get out of medical debt by donating to RIP



#### RBCS Junior Classical League Regional Forum Wins

Bayou Christian Rocky Academy's Latin students recently earned both the Ordo Tertius (3rd place) overall trophy and individual ribbons at the Junior Classical League Regional Forum in January at Gulf Breeze High School. Five local high schools from four counties were in attendance. Individual RBCS winners for the academic testing were Seniors- Michael Mosley, 2nd Adv History of Empire and 3rd Adv Mytholog; Gideon Rossell, 1st Adv. Derivatives; Christopher Seeling 3rd in both Adv Greek Derivatives and Adv Latin Derivatives; Scarlett Stevens 3rd Adv Latin Literature and 2nd in Adv Grammar: Juniors- Oliver McKinney, 2 in the Heptathlon and 3rd in Adv Hellenic History; Jonas Mosley, 3rd Latin Reading Comprehension and 4th in Adv Greek Literature; and Austin Sanders, 3rd in Adv Greek Derivatives and 5th in Adv Latin Derivatives; Sophomores- Lela Cawood, 1st in Latin Grammar 2 and 3rd in the Heptathlon; Mckenzie Newsom, 2nd in Latin Grammar 2 and 4th in Heptathlon; Justus Rossell, 4th in Latin Derivatives 2; Colt Stevens, 1st in Latin Grammar 2 and 3rd in Ancient Geography 2; and Elijah Waller, 2nd in the History of



the Republic 2 and Everly Willis, 3rd in Latin Derivatives 1; Freshman- Gaige Adkins, 3rd in History of Republic 1; Janessa Laemmel, 2nd in Greek Derivatives 1; Camden Miller 3rd in Latin Grammar 1 and 5th in the Pentathlon; Brianna Nutt, 3rd in the Pentathlon and 5th in Mythology 1; and Nolan Weisbruch 2nd in Latin Grammar 1. JCL Sponsor Julie Mosley is very proud of this small-school group for earning wins amongst much larger high schools in this "total points" competition. Pictured are left to right, back to front: Nolan Weisbruch, Colton Wilson, Gaige Adkins, Elijah Waller, Colt Stevens, Camden Miller, Lela Cawood, Everly Willis; Janessa Laemmel, Scarlett Stevens, Mckenzie Newsom, Justus Rossell; Brianna Nutt and Michael Mosley. Not in photo are Oliver Mckinney, Jonas Mosley, Gideon Rossell, Austin Sanders and Christopher Seeling. www.rbcs.org.

#### OCSD Kindergarten & New Student Registration Now Open

It is that time of year! Incoming kindergarteners and students new to the Okaloosa County School District for the 2024-2025 School Year can begin registering for school now. Parents must create a Focus Parent Portal Account to start the process.

The Focus Parent Portal Account will allow parents to: View their student (s) class schedule and grades; View attendance; View discipline; and Communicate with teachers. Create a parent portal account at https:// okaloosa.focusschoolsoftware. com/focus/auth/

To enroll, families must use their child's legal name and a valid address in Okaloosa County to begin. A registration



## Become a member of the family



To find out if you're eligible, visit eglinfcu.org/join Must be 18 or older to apply online. Insured by NCUA

### BAY BUZZ

continued from previous page

kiosk at the student's enrolling school's front office is available to complete this process. For an overview of the Parent Portal registration process, watch the video at https://www.youtube. com/watch?v=-dTnw4yrsHU.

The online enrollment request will serve as a valid enrollment pending receipt of other documents requiring a parent/ legal guardian signature and proof of residence that must be brought to the school. The child will be linked to the parent's portal account upon completion.

#### Green Thumb Garden Club Offers Scholarships to Walton Co. Students

For over four decades, Green Thumb Garden Club has awarded Mercer Scholarships to college students from Walton County. Students must be currently enrolled or must have been accepted by a college, university or technical school with a major in agriculture, biology, botany, ecology, environmental studies, forestry, horticulture, landscape design or an acceptable related course.

The scholarship amount has been increased for 2024 through generous donations from GTGC members, fundraising events and the Walton County community. A total of \$4,000 is available for award. The amount of each scholarship will be based upon applicants' qualifications. Detailed application requirements and forms are available on the GTGC website, www.green thumbgardenclubinc.org. Submit to club member, Debbie Michel, GTGC Scholarship Committee Chair, by April 30. Contact Debbie Michel with questions or email greenthumbgardenclubinc@ gmail.com. The scholarship covers tuition only paid directly to the college, university or technical school. The winner will be requested to make a presentation at the award ceremony for the scholarship in May 2024.

#### **COME GROW WITH US!**

The Walton County Master Gardeners will be hosting an Open House, March 2, 9 a.m. – 3 p.m. at its Coastal Branch Office on 70 Logan Ln. in Grayton Beach. The event will offer information on a wide range of topics at tables attended by Master Gardeners available to answer your questions. The topics covered are as follows:

• "Plants that Work, Even if you Don't" or Florida Friendly Landscape

• "The Fungus Among Us"

• Master Gardeners Training Program – YES, YOU CAN!

• Beneficial and not so Beneficial Insects

• "Warning: Trespassers will be Composted"

• Plant-Scaping a/k/a Pruning: Sometimes, less is more

• Zen and the Art of Hydrangea Maintenance

• Soil Blocking and Seed Starting

Herbs: The Useful Plants
Recycled Planters: Creative Containers

In addition, there will be two lectures offered. At 10 a.m. Evan Anderson, the Horticulture Agent for Walton County, will present "What's Bugging You? Evan knows..." And, at 1 p.m., Andrea Schnapp will present "No Yard, No Problem – Container Gardening."

There will be light refreshments. Due to limited parking on site, guests are encouraged to park at the Public Parking lot located on the east side of CR 283 directly across from Logan Lane and walk to the building. Door prize for the first 50 to attend. (Surprise: it is plant related!) For questions, call the Extension Office at 850-892-8172. Reservations are not required.

#### DCWAF's 3rd Annual Galentine's Day Fundraiser Raises \$113,000

Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation's (DCWAF) 3rd Annual Galentine's Day Fundraiser raised a record-breaking \$113,000 for young women in need in Northwest Florida-\$20,500 increase over the previous year's event. Hosted on February 3 by DCWAF trustee Candis Wilson and DCWAF board members Tiffany Edwards, Jeanne Dailey and Lane Redding, the event brought influential women in the community together to support one another while raising money for programs designed to empower young girls through the Foundation's 17 partner children's charities. Led by dynamic keynote speaker and founder of Good Grit, Laura Quick, all individuals and businesses affiliated with the production of the event are female owned and operated.

#### 2024 Perfect in Walton County Award Winners Announced

The Walton County Tourism Department recently announced the winners of the 2024 Perfect Awards. Now in its 10th year, the annual awards are nominated and voted upon by residents and visitors alike who choose their favorites in tourism-related businesses, services and organizations. More than 5,000 votes were cast across 30 categories to determine the best dining, entertainment, shopping and more in Walton County; the 91 winners, first through third place, are featured in our Perfect in Walton County 2024 guide, and may be viewed, along with listing by category, on perfectinwaltoncounty. com. Additionally, Stacey Brady, director of marketing and communications with Grand Boulevard at Sandestin, was this year's winner of the tourism department's annual Van Ness Butler Jr. Hospitality Award.

Congratulations to the **Niceville Cheerleaders** who won their fifth state title in the Florida High School Athletic Association Large Varsity State Championship. The Florida High School Athletic As-

sociation (FHSAA) State Championship was held in Lakeland, Florida at the Jenkins Arena. The Eagles Cheerleaders are once again the 5X FHSAA Large Varsity State Champions!

### **New Airline at VPS**

Avelo Airlines recently announced exclusive nonstop service between the Florida Panhandle's Destin-Fort Walton Beach Airport (VPS) and Southern Connecticut's most convenient airport – Tweed-New Haven Airport (HVN the first and only airline offering



nonstop service between Florida's Emerald Coast and Southern Connecticut. Avelo will operate this route twice weekly on Thursdays and Sundays, with a special Friday inaugural flight on May 1. Avelo will operate Boeing Next-Generation 737 aircraft on this route. Introductory low one-way fares between VPS and HVN start at \$79\*. Customers can make reservations at AveloAir.com.





### ( Community

# **OCSO Prepares for 2024 Spring Break**

By Michelle Nicholson

There's typically a range of emotions when you start talking about Spring Break rolling back around in Okaloosa County; those who welcome the influx and those who don't. It's important to remember our county caters primarily to families who travel here to enjoy the warmer temperatures, crystal clear temperatures and the slew of family friendly activities available.

The majority of high school and college students also show up to have a good time at some of the world's most beautiful beaches while behaving in a safe, respectful and lawful manner.

And then, of course, there are the ones who see Spring Break as an opportunity to binge drink and get rowdy. Each year the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office (OCSO) reminds our Spring Break visitors with that type of partying on their mind



Okaloosa County Sheriff Eric Aden

that we have a zero tolerance for underage drinking. That's because the goal is to promote safety for citizens and visitors using our public roadways, beaches, parks, neighborhoods and recreation areas. "We have special staffing with extra units assigned to Spring Break patrol seven days a week while it runs, essentially from March



2nd to April 6th" said Sheriff Eric Aden. "The priority for our deputies is public safety, which means making sure everyone follows the rules. We also want to emphasize that beachgoers who swim in the Gulf should always pay attention to our beach flag safety system."

The 2023 Spring Break operation started the last week of February 2023 and ended at the end of April 2023. When OCSO enacted the operation and daily patrols, they addressed underage possession of alcohol, narcotics and miscellaneous calls for service. Over the course of the 52 days of the Spring Break operation, the members of the Beach Unit initiated 233 of the 409 total arrests. There were

the usual issues with large house parties, trespassing and fake I.D.s, but tragically a 17-yearold visitor from Kentucky lost his life in an alcohol-related fall from the balcony of a Destin condominium April 4th. "Our deputies are trained to recognize the indicators most common with impaired individuals," said Sheriff Aden. "If we encounter an underage individual with alcohol, he or she will be issued a notice to appear with a court date before a judge. Repeat violations by an underage person

would result in an individual's physical arrest."

OCSO deputies will be monitoring beach and vacation rentals for criminal activity, using proactive patrol methods to detect and apprehend anyone involved in criminal activity, and assisting Okaloosa County and Destin lifeguard with the prevention of drowning incidents.

The objectives behind the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office Spring Break zero tolerance mission is to deter underage possession, thereby reducing the potential for property damage, injuries or deaths by impaired individuals. "We plan to conduct patrols with a minimum amount of intrusion and inconvenience to citizens and visitors," added Sheriff Aden. "But we will be vigilant in our efforts to keep everyone safe because ultimately we want everyone to go home with only positive memories from their stay."

# **Representative Patt Maney RCOC MVP**

Representative (GJR)\* Patt Maney, a distinguished Okaloosa County political landscape member, recently achieved a notable accolade. He was honored with the Mike Mitchell MVP Award

for "Most Valuable Politician" by the Republican Club of Okaloosa County. The award was presented by Marvin Brigman, President Emeritus, and Doug Stauffer, President, recognizing Representative Maney's significant contributions and leadership within the county. (\*GJR stands for General-Judge-Representative.)

The MVP award pays trib-

ute to Mike Mitchell, fondly remembered as "Mr. Republican." Mitchell played a pivotal role in transforming Okaloosa County from a primarily Democratic stronghold to a deeply Republican area. He served as the county's longest-standing commissioner, beginning his political journey as an aide to Jerry

Continued on next page



Page 13

# Spring Break: Walton County Sheriff's Office

where, during Spring Break, there can be as many as 300,000 visitors on any given week through Labor Day, said Walton County Sheriff Michael Adkinson last year. In 2022, Walton County made more than 1,100 Spring Break arrests.

Chief of Operations Audie Rowell, Walton County Sheriff's Office (WCSO), recently updated the Walton County Board of County Commissioners (BCC) regarding this year's spring break activities.

He opened his remarks with a quote from former FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, who said 'The most effective weapon against crime is cooperation.'

"I want to say thank you," said Chief Rowell, "thank you to the Commission, thank you to the BCC staff and the citizens of Walton County for your support and understanding - not

Walton County is an area just for law enforcement, but for public safety. Law enforcement, fire, our EMS folks – I truly believe this is why we are safe, is because we cooperate." Chief Rowell said he believes Walton County is one of the safest counties in the nation.

"Spring Break is coming up, March 1 through about April 14," said Chief Rowell. He said the WCSO has been diligently preparing for this through the development of an operation plan to mitigate possible issues and problems.

One of the important components in their preparations is increased staffing. "Literally, about 110% from our normal staffing every day," he said. During what it commonly called 'Houston Week' and the 'Atlanta Week' when visitor numbers are heaviest, Chief Rowell said their plan calls for having roughly 54 deputies out at any given time.



"We cancel all days off that's including myself. I won't be taking off during Spring Break and we have overtime positions that deputies sign up for," he said. "But this year, just to kind of give you an overview of what we're looking at overtime-wise, for about 44 days of Spring Break, we're

going to have just over a

thousand individual overtime positions. So, we're going to be busy. We're going to have people out and we're going to deal with the things we come across."

Targeting specific areas and quality of life issues is another part of their operational plan. This will include the Dogwood Beach Access near Seaside where

the Sheriff's Office will have additional staffing in addition to Rosemary Beach.

Rowell addressed the agency's policy on underage drinking and large, unruly crowds. "Another thing we do is - we have a zero tolerance. Most people know about our zero tolerance for underage drinking. We also have a zero tolerance for large, unruly crowds. We will not put up with it. Those things will be dispersed and, if arrests need to be made, arrests will be made," he said.

Rowell also mentioned having problems with large numbers of bicycles in the rightof-way in Seaside. "We had about 100-150 bikes pile up in the right-of-way out onto the street," he said. "I want to get with (County Administrator) Mr. Sunday to see if we can do some temporary stuff with the right-of-way down there so we can clear those bikes out-even if we have to get down there with a trailer and haul those bikes away, that's what we'll do-but we're going to try to keep the area free of those kind of things and keep the area looking nice.'

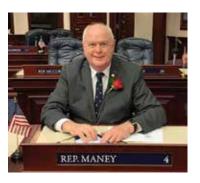
He also said the WCSO does retain the authority to enact a short-term curfew should it become necessary.

### **PATT MANEY**

continued from previous page

Melvin, a then-Democratic State Representative. Like many others, Melvin later transitioned to the Republican Party, and the annual RCOC scholarship is named the Jerry Melvin scholarship in his honor.

A series of challenges and triumphs marked Mitchell's political career. When he first ran for office in 1976, he faced skepticism due to his Republican affiliation and non-Southern



roots. However, he overcame these obstacles, winning his initial election to the commission by a narrow margin of 26 votes and maintaining his position until 1994. Mitchell and Melvin passed away in 2020, leaving behind a legacy of dedication and transformation in Okaloosa County politics.

In a heartfelt commendation, Dr. Doug Stauffer, President of the Republican Club of Okaloosa County, extolled the virtues of Representative Patt Maney upon presenting him with the esteemed Mike Mitchell MVP Award for "Most Valuable Politician." Stauffer emphasized the exclusivity and prestige of this award, noting that Representa-

tive Maney is only the second State Representative to be honored with it. The award, reflecting high achievement and commitment, has previously been given to a select group of local officials, including three School Superintendents, three County Commissioners, and five Constitutional Officers.

Stauffer's words highlighted the exceptional nature of Representative Maney's service to the community, underscoring how this honor is a recognition of political stature, personal integrity, and character. He remarked on his deep respect and friendship for Maney, describing him as a "remarkable man of character." This statement underscores Maney's significant impact and influence in Okaloosa County, celebrating his dedication and contributions as a leader and a community member. Stauffer's tribute paints a picture of a politician who is successful in his endeavors and deeply respected and admired for his character and commitment to serving his community.

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# simple human sense

### Page 14

What to Check Before the End of

**Open Enrollment for Medicare** 



### By Greg Durette, Florida Health Connector

The end is near! Hopefully, not in the mortal sense, but rather the end of the Open Enrollment Period for predominantly Medicare Advantage plan



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850-974-ROOF | SPECIALTYROOFERS.COM 124 TROUT BRANCH DR. FREEPORT, FL 32439 members in 2024. We will leave the mortality prognostications to the crazy guy wearing a sandwich board roaming various city streets around the country.

Keep in mind, if you are "aging-in" this year, you have a whole different set of deadlines and circumstances. (See last month's article.)

This article will cover what you should be checking up on before the March 31st deadline rolls around and locks you in until the next Annual Enrollment Period (October 15 – December 7).

So, what should you do to make sure this year's coverage selection treats you well and is something you will be happy **with until next year?** 

**First,** you will have hopefully had some time to try out your new coverage. Whether that is a visit to the doctor of your choice or a trip to the pharmacy, you likely have had a chance to use your current coverage. If you are one of those folks that needs neither, bully for you! However, you should still take this time to conduct further research into whether the doctors, hospitals and pharmacies you favor are included in your network at a reasonable cost.

If you find some changes would be required of your intended selections, you have until March 31st to do something about that.

*Note:* If you have already made a change during this Open Enrollment Period, you have used your last bite at the apple for the year. Changes made during this Period are final and cannot be changed unless there is a government declared Special Enrollment Period. (This would take another whole article to get your head around!) If you have yet to use this last chance opportunity, then you still have that one chance available.

Second, have you reviewed the functionality of your plan? What I mean is, are you able to easily use your new insurance card and have the providers accept it without a hassle? Do you find it difficult to know why your neighbor with a PPO has a much easier time finding an in-network doctor or facility (especially when travelling) than you have with an HMO? Has your doctor or medical group suddenly stopped accepting your coverage with little to no explanation?

If so, it is time for you to get busy with the business of taking care of you. If you have read my articles for any length of time, you know I am no fan of the grand promises made by the sports figures and celebrities on television about "potentially available" benefits. They love to use the kicker statement, "You MAY be eligible to receive these benefits." Talk about slick!

The fact of the matter is, the proof is in the pudding. Nobody but you can get you what you need. Do the work. Do the research. Call local, knowledgeable people and get the details that matter to you and ignore those with opinions that might be in their best interests and not your own.

Once you make that final call for the Open Enrollment Period, you can sit back and relax in the comfort of knowing you did the very best for you. Happy 2024!

Greg Durette is an agent with Florida Health Connector based in Niceville providing Medicare throughout the state. He has been licensed in the insurance industry for more than 40 years and can be reached at his office at 850-842-2400, mobile at 978-509-2941 or dedicated and recorded Medicare Line at 850-462-7807.



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# Insights for Investors: Health and Wealth – What are the Key Drivers?



By Maurice Stouse, Financial Advisor and Branch Manager

Keith Knight spent over 50 years in the investment and financial services business before retiring to the Emerald Coast of Florida. During his years advising clients and consistently across the beach towns, you could hear his often-repeated refrain: "Money never sleeps."

Following on to this, we are pondering what drives building and maintaining wealth in this life as well as building and maintaining health in this life. The Declaration of Independence speaks to the rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. To that end, what or how does someone make that happen? Morgan Housel in his book "The Psychology of Money" wrote that a key driver to wealth in this world is not necessarily knowledge or education. It is trumped by behavior. Yes, behavior.

Identifying objectives, risk tolerances and time frame help form the plan for building wealth. The same can be said for health (which makes up about 18% of the U.S. economy or gross domestic product). Health care spending topped \$4.2 trillion in 2022, according to data from Statista. While knowing the answers to the big three are important, the results to our health and wealth are driven by our behaviors. Housel writes that people should save out of pessimism, but invest out of optimism. He notes that optimism must be realistic. In other words, the eternal optimist is probably more complacent than optimistic. The compound effect, per Housel and countless others, is a result of behaviors of consistency, patience and determination. It takes time and

consistency to build assets, and the compound effect can illustrate that.

Behaviors can also work against us. Sometimes in investing, people are driven to chase returns of a stock or a fund or some other asset. And many times, we might hear what has worked so well for someone (think a particular stock), the resulting behavior is motivated by FOMO: Fear of Missing Out. The problem with chasing returns and acting on limited input (a friend's experience or something overhead at a cocktail party) is that we always hear about the incredible successes but how often do we hear about the incredible failures? We have all heard it before: Past performance is no indication or guarantee of future performance. No one can time the market, or can they? Many will say that they have and that they can. Sooner or later, what goes around comes around. Someone who might have been correct before might not repeat again for a while. We believe that behavior trails persistence, patience and, ultimately, the compound effect.

What about living off our investments (now or in retirement)? We believe that investors should focus on maintaining principal and living off income produced (stocks, bonds, real estate, CDs or money markets) vs. the gradual selling of principal to maintain income. That might mean sacrificing some appreciation in up markets, but it also means not selling principal in down markets. It is a concept known as the sequence of returns. Put another way, don't cut the branches of the trees that are producing the fruits or vegetables. That is behavior driven.

Think about the compound effect in weight loss, weight gain, muscle loss or muscle gain. Nothing happens quickly and there is no proven way or shortcuts to success. We think investors can and should contemplate that behavior can drive desired outcomes in life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

What about saving and investing behaviors? Housel also speaks to the 50/30/20 rule: Spend 50% of income on what



it takes to run your life and household. 30% on what you enjoy and 20% on saving. That saving we think includes your retirement savings. And take a cue from what behaviors it takes to get out of debt, should you find yourself in debt: You need to drive income up and or expenses down. A key behavior is to work toward growing your income faster than your outgo. That takes behavior vs. education, knowledge or skill.

What about time? Warren Buffet has been quoted repeatedly about how time is something that cannot be created or gotten back. Time (unlike energy), once used, is gone. The behavior of how we spend our time will (via the compound effect) produce a given result. If we spend our time studying nutrition, exercising and eating right, that, over time, could lead to a healthy state. Same for wealth. Energy is interesting in that we hear that energy cannot be created or destroyed, only transformed from one form to another. So, if we put our energy into reading, researching, saving, exercising, eating right, getting enough sleep, drinking enough water, investing, applying and investing our time, what might the results be for health and wealth?

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

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### ( Community

# Bay Buzz Events

#### Enjoy the SeaLight Festival 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, now through March 31, Seascape Resort will undergo a breathtaking transformation into an extraordinary world of illumination. This captivating spectacle features 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.

### Sinfonia Crescendo! March 1 & 3

CRESCENDO! Main Event | Sunday, March 3rd at 11 a.m.

Crescendol: A Cultural & Culinary Extravaganza benefits Sinfonia Gulf Coast and its music education and community engagement initiatives. Taking place March 3, this energy-infused experience will showcase world-class vintners, expert spirit purveyors, amazing auction items, and a special appearance by fashion icon Isaac



Mizrahi who will perform his entertaining New York-style cabaret show. This year's theme is Crescendo!: the New Noir. Channel your individual take on black, be it classic, vintage, edgy or embellished with a wisp of white or a pop of color."

Vintner Dinners | Friday, March 1 at 6 p.m.

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## The 2024 Paradise Music Festival March 8, 9, 10, 2024

At The Beautiful Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center Featuring Seven Incredible Bands with Tributes to the



**This Is Another Great Paradise Promotion** 

dinners hosted in elegant homes and venues throughout the Emerald Coast. Go to sinfoniagulfcoast.org for a list of the Vintner Dinner venues.

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

#### 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 a.m. 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.

#### Soiree on the Bay: Act III for CVHN March 8 & 9

The good times will roll with fine wine, food and spirits at the Soiree on the Bay: Act III, benefiting Children's Volunteer Health Network (CVHN). In its third year, presented by the Dugas Family, the Soiree will take place on their stunning estate overlooking the Choctawhatchee Bay in Santa Rosa Beach, Friday, March 8th from 5-9 p.m. and Saturday, March 9th from 2-7 p.m., Friday and Saturday's events will feature indulgent cuisine by Cafe Thirty-A, and exclusive wine tastings by 20+ notable vintners from throughout the nation. Festivities begin Friday with an intimate evening under the stars where guests can walk the beautiful grounds while enjoying wine tastings, incredible cuisine, a live DJ, and an exciting live auction where attendees can bid on incredible prize packages like

over-the-top wine experiences and unique travel. Saturday is a spirited daytime affair, kicking off at 2 p.m. with bocce ball, bubbly, wine samples and light bites. Back for the third year in a row, musical guest, The Tip Tops, will have guests on their feet, dancing to their favorite Motown hits.

Tickets, \$1,000 per person, include Friday and Saturday's festivities and can be purchased at cvhnkids.org/soiree-on-thebay. Proceeds benefit CVHN's mission to offer accessible and affordable healthcare and free dental services for children in need in Okaloosa and Walton counties. To purchase tickets, visit www.cvhnkids.org.

#### It's Almost Here! 3-Day Paradise Music Festival March 8-10!



Paradise Promotions presents a three-day, indoor music festival at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center Friday-Sunday, March 8-10. Seven classic bands will perform, featuring four national, touring tribute bands and three Northwest Florida local bands 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. Following is the Paradise Bayou Band playing 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

Continued on page 38



# **Decorating Your Nursery**



By Stacy Sarikanon, Stunning Spaces–Decorating Den Interiors

#### **Have Fun with Colors!**

While the most popular colors for nurseries are gentle pas-



tels like mint green, sky blue, pinks and creamy yellows, psychologists say children like -and thrive- around primary colors.

#### First Things First!

Make it easy for you! Consider selecting a room in your home that's close to your master bedroom.

Pay attention to the direction your nursery faces. Sunlight streaming into your child's room during most of the day -or even streetlights beaming into your nursery during the evening- might make sleeping a bit difficult.

#### Safety is a Must!

• Be sure to child proof all locks and outlets.

• Anchor furniture, so you're sure it won't accidentally tip over.

Avoid using space heaters.
Check on "hand me down" products to be sure they haven't been recalled and are in good, safe working order.

Create a Room Your Child Can "Grow Into"!

Select furniture that will

grow with your child. For instance, a baby armoire is a great idea for storing those precious little clothing items. And once your child ages, this same piece of furniture could easily be converted to a computer desk.

#### Furniture Arranging Is As Easy As 1 - 2 - 3!

• Don't place your crib close to a window, try an inside wall or angle instead.

• In the beginning, it's wise to keep your room arrangements simple and functional for YOU!

Select furnishings that are as maintenance free as possible.Remember, your baby

will be growing by leaps and bounds! Don't forget to look for furniture that will grow as your child grows.

• As in all decorating, start with the largest areas first – your walls and floor.

> • A rocking chair is a great addition to any nursery's floor plan.

• Allow for plenty of light in the room. A ceiling light is not enough. So, consider adding lamps at the bedside or on the walls.

Windows, Walls, And Floors - Oh My! **Wonderful Windows!** Consider cordless shades or blinds to keep kids safe. Room darkening treatments topped with a fun, light hearted, thematic top treatment might just help insure a good night's sleep for your newborn. Whimsical Walls! Have fun with wallcovering - give your nursery its own personality. When painting your walls be sure to use washable paint. Try adding a few cheerful pictures to continue your room's theme.

Fabulous Flooring! From

braided area rugs to rugs featuring light hearted colorful patterns, this great and practical accent will not only help warm your nursery area, but will also add that whimsical touch.



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### Page 18

# Local Nining, Nrinks, Coffee & Entertainment

#### Fudpucker's Beachside Bar & Grill

Locally owned and operated since inception in 1982, Fudpucker's restaurant stands out by being dedicated to its owners' three favorite "F" words: Food, Fun and Family. Featuring live alligators, family entertainment and teen nights, Fudpucker's is the only place in Destin where you can see, feed and even get your picture taken with a live alligator, shop for "World Famous" t-shirts, write your names on the walls, play arcade games and enjoy quality casual food in an upbeat and family friendly atmosphere. There's even a special kids' menu and a playground with lots of space to play. Stop by Fudpucker's Destin for a relaxing meal, a cold drink and a friendly locals' smile. Fudpucker's is not



just a restaurant, it's not just a bar, and it's certainly not just a "tourist" place – it's a one-of-akind entertainment experience, and one that can be enjoyed by kids and families of all ages. Special: World Famous Fudpucker Punch – \$8 'til 4 p.m. every day: Father Fud's special cure-all elixer and legendary medicinal concoction made with a combination of orange and pineapple juices, four types of rum and a splash of Grenadine—\$8 'til 4 p.m. every day. (850) 654-4200

You're invited to the Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center's

presented by Janice & George Hendricks

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eccac.org/gala-golf

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#### JoJo's Coffee and Goodness

An iconic favorite of locals, owner and operator of Jojo's Coffee and Goodness Angela "JoJo" Stevenson invites you to enter her cafe and relaxed coffee shop atmosphere for a daily dose of "goodness." Stop in for mouth-watering 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

Continued on next page

# There's A New Chef In Town!



Juan Bochenski is the new executive chef at Hotel Effie. Bochenski helms the kitchen at the hotel's signature restaurant, Ovide, and oversees all aspects of food and beverage operations across the hotel's four restaurant outlets and inroom dining. An elegant, culinary adventure, Ovide brings together classic Gulf Coast flavors and southern culinary traditions fueled by a passion for sustainability and seasonality that gives each bite incredible flavor. To do that, Bochenski works closely with local farmers and vendors to serve farm-fresh and sustainable ingredients whenever possible. Born in Buenos Aires,

Argentina, Bochenski has worked at luxury resorts across the globe, including Arcis Golf in Dallas; Baker's Bay Golf & Ocean Club on Great Guana Cay, Abaco, Bahamas; Resorts & Residences by Cuisinart on Anguilla; Jade Mountain and Anse Chastanet resorts on St. Lucia; and Rosewood Hotels & Resorts' Inn of the Anasazi in Santa Fe, New Mexico; among others.

Ovide's new dinner menu is available Friday through Saturday, from 5 - 10 p.m., and Sunday through Thursday, from 5- 9 p.m. including choices from the raw oyster bar and delicious desserts.





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



Located at Hotel Effie Sandestin. Open to the Public.

# Local Nining, Prinks, Coffee & Entertainment

### DINING

#### continued from previous page

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. Get what you're craving! Order ahead and pick up some for the office or breakfast to start your day off right!

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

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### Landshark's Pizza

Hungry? Thirsty? Maybe a little of both? Come in and visit Landshark's Pizza. Owners Brian and Sue Hassmann have created a Niceville locals' favorite pizza, buffalo wings and sports pub and bar that serves can'tbeat, handmade-dough pizza and wings with the craziest selection of wing sauces and rubs you'll find-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 your favorite teams on countless regional and national sports networks. Now it pays to show up a little early to get your favorite seat and to save a buck on all beer and wine from 3-6 p.m. Tuesday - Friday. Having teamed



up with Props Brewery to serve the coldest brews this side of the Bay along with the vast selection of bourbon and craft beer, it's no secret why the locals love Landshark's Pizza Company. Cheers! Order online, too, or Door Dash.

Hours: Sunday 11 a.m. – 7 p.m.; Monday Closed; Tuesday - Thursday 11 a.m. – 9 p.m.; Friday - Saturday 11 a.m. – 10 p.m.

(850) 424-6743 1128 E. John Sims Pkæy. Niceville Landsharkspizza.com

#### LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant

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

#### This month:

**March 9:** Bluewater Bay Marina's Nautical Flea Market 8 a.m. - Noon! **March 17:** St. Patrick's Day Free the Piggies! Bluewater Bay Marina's 9th Annual Sock Burning! 5:30 p.m. with live music from Ronny Dean Garrett 4-8 p.m. Come with your socks and shoes on; burn your socks during the fire and leave in flip flops! New socks will be accepted to donate to a local homeless shelter. **March 30:** Shrimp Boil Sun-

day 4-7 p.m.

Live entertainment each weekend. See ad for lineup. **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: Mon-Thurs 11 a.m.-10 p.m.; Fri-Sat 11 a.m.-midnight; Sun 9 a.m.-9 p.m.

Restaurant hours: Mon-Tues closed. Wed-Sat, 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Sun, 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Sunday brunch, 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

(850) 897-6400 bluewaterbaymarina.com/schooners 290 Yacht Club Dr., Unit 200, Niceville in Bluewater Bay

#### **Ovide at Hotel Effie**

March brings St. Patrick's Day at Hotel Effie and Ovide! Get your green on for a lucky St. Patrick's Day bash at Ara Rooftop Pool & Lounge, perched atop the luxurious Hotel Effie Sandestin. The shenanigans begin at 6 p.m. on Saturday, March 16 with live DJ beats, drink specials and charming vistas of the Emerald Coast. Guests can enjoy half-off Irish Whiskey drinks when they wear green, and the most festive has the chance to score a \$100 bar credit!

**Brunch with an Irish Twist at Ovide:** Add a touch of Irish flair to your weekend brunch plans with enticing St. Patrick's Day specials at Ovide, the signature restaurant at Hotel Effie Sandestin offering a refined approach to coastal flavors and upscale design. Toast to good fortune and good company with Green Boody Marys and exclusive Shepherd's Pie offerings created by Executive Chef Juan Bochenski and his team.

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

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### **Sports**

# Golf Series: What Golfers Deserve Close to Home In Crestview!

By Barbara Palmgren

Okaloosa County is a diverse place, indeed. I have taught a class for several years for seniors at the Center for Life Long Learning called "The Museum Trail." We explore each of the nine museums beginning with the Destin Fishing Museum and ending with one farthest north, the Baker Block Museum. I'm amazed that folks living near the coast have never stopped to visit shops and venues in the Crestview and Baker area. When they do, they learn, for the first time, that cotton is grown and agricultural products are part of a sustainable industry for this area.

As I began writing my golf series for our local paper, I followed the same format. I started with the golf courses along the Emerald Coast and now move to a special place at the north end of the county, Blackwater Golf Club.

A short history lesson first. In 1915 the Florida House of Representatives approved the creation of a new county from the existing counties of Santa Rosa and Walton. The county was named after a steamboat called "The Okaloosa," a Choctaw word meaning black water. The diverse ecosystem of darker river waters in the north end of the county contrast with the emerald green waters and sugar white sands of Destin and Fort Walton Beach. It reminds me of the song, "Black Water" by the Dobbie Brothers. I'll change a few of the lyrics:

Well, if it rains, I don't care Don't make no difference to me. Just take my old 9 iron out Par the hole and get on down. Gonna make everything all right Gonna make everything all right Old black water, keep on rollin' Crestview moon, won't you keep on shinin' on me?

Keep on shinin' on me.

I interviewed an old friend, Mykal Bailey, a former assistant pro at Shalimar Pointe Golf Course. Now, assistant general manager and head golf professional at Blackwater Golf Club, Mykal graciously shared information about the course that's been renovated to become the family friendly destination in the Crestview area. Mykal has local roots, playing baseball at Choctawhatchee High School and then at LBW college in Andalusia. Always a fan of golf, a



physical injury ended hope of pursuing baseball after college, but led him to another sport and work in the golf industry.

Always impressed with Mykal at Shalimar Pointe, I can attest that Blackwater Golf Club, formerly Foxwood Country Club, is in good hands. Again, back to a little history. Foxwood Country Club in Crestview was built in 1961 with a golf course, pool and tennis courts. Whatever economic circumstances led to it being closed in 2017, the City of Crestview purchased the property in 2019 and began renovating with plans to reopen in 2021.

Working with Kansas-based Mammoth Sports Construction, repairs included replacing irrigation lines, improving drainage



and reshaping and re-sodding the course's greens. Having visited and played the course when it was Foxwood, I was delighted to view the changes that were made, not only to the course, but also to the clubhouse area as well.

Now partnering with Great Life Golf, a management company, Blackwater Golf Club is a new and exciting venue. If you are not a golfer, there are other opportunities for enjoying sports. A tennis and pickleball court are located next to a large outdoor eating space with welcoming fireplace and a full bar. Inside, the Eagle's Nest restaurant advertises itself as a "gastro pub like no other." This warm embrace of the local community is felt by members as well as the public who visit, especially at Sunday Brunch. How do you choose between a classic breakfast and shrimp & grits? Or do I just enjoy delicious eggs benedict?

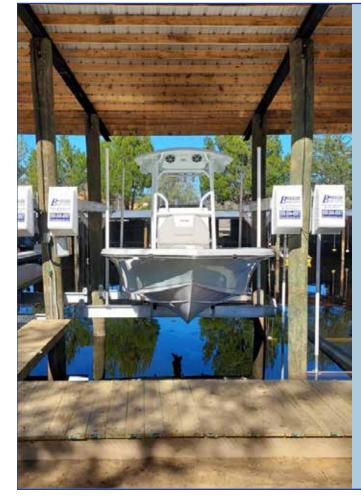
Focusing on the golf course itself, Blackwater is a Par 72,

18-hole course, with tee box markers denoting the most challenging distances as well as user friendly markers for high handicap players. Ideal for every skill level, public play is welcome along as reasonable membership fees for those who support the game of golf. Mykal's favorite hole is number 3. A Par 5, with a creek that surrounds it. The club is doing well again, in part due to its unique offeringthe "sports bragging rights" of the virtual golf experience, the Blackwater Driving Range.

The Blackwater Driving Range combines golf with a video-game experience that's fun for all ages. With 14 individual hitting bay stalls with Top Tracer technology, get ready to experience golf in an exciting way. Imagine teeing up, hitting your drive and tracking the golf shot as it travels down the third fairway at Pebble Beach. Yes, your shot is correlated with a famous course you are playing, like Pebble Beach. It's fantasy golf, of course, but who doesn't like a little fantasy in their life?

A virtual golf experience like no other for every member of the family, sounds like a great family outing, doesn't it? And after achieving par on Pebble Beach, one can always be awarded with a signature libation at the clubhouse.

Life is good at the north end of the county.



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# **Football Great Warrick Dunn Speaks at All-Sports**

By Lori Leath Smith

Each year at this time, some of the area's top high school, collegiate, amateur, professional, Special Olympics athletes and individuals who have fostered youth activities are honored during the annual All Sports Association's (ASA) Awards Banquet. The ASA is a Northwest Florida non-profit organization whose primary mission is to help raise money for local youth-oriented non-profit organizations with an emphasis on sports programs. The All Sports Association and its volunteers have raised more than \$2 million in the last 10 years for our local youth and the promotion of youth athletics.

The annual awards banquet is used to identify, then recognize and honor some of the finest athletes from Northwest Florida who are contributing to their sports and their community. The recognized individuals not only excel in their sports, but also are at the top in academics and community involvement. Since 1970, the ASA has brought together the finest athletes in Northwest Florida.



This year's speaker, Warrick Dunn, joined a growing list of impactful past speakers—Herschel Walker, Tom Glavine, Bo Jackson, Nick Saban, Bobby Bowden, Paul "Bear" Bryant, Tim Tebow and Herm Edwards.

Dunn, a prominent figure in both college and professional football, was elected to the prestigious College Football Hall of Fame's Class of 2024 in January! His road forged by this amazing accomplishment was inspired by his commitment to making a positive impact beyond the field. He began leaving his mark in college football history at Florida State University as a running back from 1993 to 1996. Dunn's speed, agility and versatile playing style helped secure Florida State's first nachampitional onship in 1993. became Dunn the first player in program history to rush for 1,000 yards in three different seasons

and left FSU as the program's career rushing yards record holder, finishing his college career with more than 3,000 rushing yards. Dunn becomes the 11th FSU representative in the College Football Hall of Fame, including Dunn's teammates Charlie Ward (2006) and Derrick Brooks (2016) as well as head coach Bobby Bowden (2006).

Having displayed his dynamic and multi-dimensional athletic ability, Dunn was picked as 12th overall by the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in the 1997 NFL Draft. Throughout the 12 seasons of his NFL career, Dunn played for both the Buccaneers and the Atlanta Falcons. Dunn earned three Pro Bowl selections and surpassed the 10,000 rushing yards milestone during his tenure.

However, Dunn's contributions extended far beyond his accomplishments on the football field. He established the Homes for The Holidays program and the Warrick Dunn Charities, aiming to provide affordable housing to single-parent families. This initiative was deeply personal to Dunn, as he lost his mother, a police officer, during his college years, leaving him to take care of his siblings.

In 2007, he and other greats— Andre Agassi, Muhammad Ali, Jeff Gordon, Mia Hamm, Tony Hawk, Andrea Jaeger, Jackie Joyner-Kersee, Mario Lemieux, Alonzo Mourning and Cal Ripken, Jr.—founded Athletes for Hope. Dunn's charity work reflected his empathy and desire to make a tangible difference in the lives of others.

In recognition of his contributions, Dunn received numerous accolades, including the Walter Payton Man of the Year Award in 2004, highlighting his excellence on and off the field.

Celebrating 55 years this year, the weekend included the awards banquet held at the Emerald Coast Convention Center, and the 2024 Buck Smith FCA Breakfast with this year's guest speaker Isaiah Sanders. Isaiah is the winner of the 2021 Wuerffel Trophy and a United States Air Force Academy and Stanford University graduate.

All-sports weekend activities also included a golf outing and fish fry with guest speaker Colonel (retired) Kurt Buller. Through the efforts of the annual All-Sports banquet and summer golf tournament, and in addition to supporting local high school athletic programs, the association helps fund numerous worthwhile sports organizations and charitable causes. The primary beneficiaries are the Boys & Girls Club of the Emerald Coast, Special Olympics Florida-Okaloosa, Eleanor J. Johnson Youth Center and Okaloosa Walton FCA.

For more information, visit allsportsassociation.org.



### Mo Off the Hook

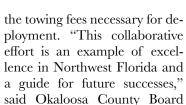
# Large Research Vessel Deployed for Artificial Reef

By Nick Tomecek, OKALOOSA COUNTY PIO

The northern Gulf of Mexico has a new addition to its extensive artificial reef system with the deployment of the 239-foot R/V DEEP STIM III. The vessel, deployed on Jan. 30, 2024, joins hundreds of other artificial reefs already deployed off the shores of Northwest Florida and will serve as a haven to support various marine species while simultaneously providing the fishing and diving industry with an additional resource.

The successful deployment of R/V DEEP STIM III was accomplished through a Tri-County partnership between Tourist Development Councils in Destin-Fort Walton Beach, Panama City Beach and Walton County. Emerald Coast Reef Association and South Walton Artificial Reef Association provided funding for additional reef modules that were placed on the deck of the vessel adding to the complexity of the new site. Coastal Conservation Association provided funds for





Chairman Paul Mixon. "We look forward to many more opportunities that will allow our tourism industry to thrive, while also creating sustainable а aquatic ecosystem benefitting marine life, tourists and locals."

The majority of the vessel deck sits at about 100 feet, ideal for an advanced dive experience. In addition to diving, the 65foot high-relief site will provide an outstanding fishing location

and habitat for popular species like amberjack. The added reef modules enhance the overall habitat and will attract fishing favorites such as grouper and snapper. "While fishing has always been at the heart of our region's history, creating sites that increase scuba diving opportunities is something we look forward to continue to develop. Collaborating with neighboring counties and communities on a large artificial reef project like this not only creates essential habitat off our coast but certainly moves the needle on establishing our area as a leader in adventure tourism," said Alex Fogg, Coastal Resource Manager for Destin-Fort Walton Beach.

The deployed vessel will benefit a wide range of coastal communities. It is located about 22 NM from the Destin East Pass, 29 NM from St. Andrews Pass and 16.5 NM south of Walton County. "This collaborative effort with Okaloosa and Bay counties to provide a new artificial reef serves to illustrate what great things can be accomplished when we work together for the benefit of our residents and visitors alike," said Walton County Commission Chairman William McCormick.

While the Tri-County partnership involves three counties, large reef deployments like the DEEP STIM III have the potential to draw in adventure seekers from beyond the borders of our counties and the state of Florida. "The Gulf of Mexico serves as a shared resource among our destinations, and we are thrilled to collaborate with our partners on this artificial reef project, said Visit Panama City Beach President and CEO Dan Rowe. "In addition to benefitting our region's diverse marine life, this joint effort will enhance the spectacular diving opportunities for all residents and visitors in Panama City Beach."

Coordinates: DEEP STIM III artificial reef is located at: 30° 03.035' N, 86° 17.758' W

Destin-Fort Walton Beach Panama City Beach, and Walton County Tourism are destinations that foster ecological stewardship and embrace the fishing and diving opportunities provided in the Gulf of Mexico.

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### **Exercise With Your Child**



By LISA LEATH TURPIN, HEALTH AND WELLNESS COACH

Good health should be a family affair. Children learn and develop from what they see their parents do. When parents practice a healthy lifestyle, the children are more likely to follow. The key to developing lifelong healthy fitness habits is to start young. Your children can also get a head start on sports and Physical Education if they already understand and have good exercise habits. Being active is important for proper bone growth, muscle development and brain function. Exercise strengthens the heart, keeps arteries and veins clear,

strengthens the lungs, reduces blood sugar levels, controls weight, and helps give a better outlook on life. Exercising together is the ultimate bonding activity for families especially in a world where electronics and technology cause disconnect and isolation.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and prevention, about one-third of American children ages 10-17 are overweight or obese, and fewer than 25% of children get the recommended 60 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity per day recommended by the American Medical Association.

The American Council on Exercise (ACE) beautifully names the top 10 reasons why children should exercise (acefitness.org/education-and-resources). I have combined into five reasons:

• Children who are active 60 minutes per day demonstrate lower rates of obesity.

• Greater rates of activity in children have been associated with higher test scores in reading and math. Frequent physical



activity is also associated with improved behavior in the classroom and beyond.

• Physical (body) and cognitive (brain) development go hand-in-hand. While this continues for life, this relationship is most critical at a young age. When kids are active, their brains develop, allowing for new types of activity. Aerobic activity is shown to increase the size of essential brain structures and number of neural connections.

• Frequent activities requiring a high degree of balance

and coordination have been associated with improved emotional response.

• Frequent exercise decreases symptoms of depression and anxiety in children. Regular exercise with children promotes self-efficacy with regard to health and self-image.

• A family that exercises together stays together! This spring, put down the iPad and iPhone, hop on a bike or put on your hiking boots and get going. If your kid is old enough, go to the gym together. Here in our area, join beach boot camps or utilize our pristine Bay and Gulf to go paddle-boarding or surfing. The benefits are priceless!

Be Active 850! Have a fitness question for Lisa? Email BeActive850@gmail.com.

Lisa Leath Turpin is a degreed and certified health and fitness lifestyle coach and consultant who has devoted her life to motivating and strengthening the body and mind of others. With almost 30 years' experience, Lisa has a B.S. degree in Sports & Fitness Management from the University of Alabama, developed and managed the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Health & Wellness Facility and programs in Huntsville, Ala., is board certified by the National Board of Fitness Examiners and possesses certifications from AFAA, Polestar/Balanced Body, Reebok U, SCW Fitness and American Heart Association. She is currently a group exercise leader at Destin Health & Fitness and an independent personal trainer in the Destin area, diversely and extensively trained in classical and modern Pilates, lifestyle management, personal training, group exercise and post-rehabilitation.

# Morrison Springs Re-Opens



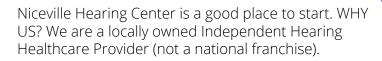
Morrison Springs Park is now open again. The park has been closed for repairs and renovations since Oct. 25. Now those improvements are complete, and the park is again open to the public.

During the interim, county crews rebuilt the entire boardwalk and added new steps for divers. The beach area was filled with fresh white sand and crews rebuilt the fence around the pavilion area. They also installed a new septic system with fencing and re-

built the fence near the public parking lot. Those working on the project included the Parks Maintenance Crew - consisting of Parks Foreman David Brown, Kenneth Cox, Dennis Bryan's inmate crew and Greg Martin's inmate crew as well as the Building and Construction Crew - consisting of Construction Foreman James R Nance, Donald Varnum, Jason Davis, Anthony Anderson, Ryder Brown, Cody Willingham, Max Ealum and their inmate crew.

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🀞 Wellness

# The Value of Bouncing Back



By Stephenie Craig

Have you ever found yourself wanting to rescue someone you love from hard things? Maybe you keep taking your child the homework they left at home, paying their speeding tickets or paying their rent into adulthood. Maybe you feel like being a good friend or family member means swooping in and preventing people from struggling. Do you ever find yourself avoiding facing your own struggles and feeling someone should rescue you from difficulty if they really love you?

Struggle, disappointment and suffering are hard to walk through no matter your age and stage of life. It's common to feel life should be fair when reality uncomfortably reveals life is often not fair. You can do the "right" things and still aren't guaranteed the outcome you want. When things go sideways in life, it's easy to begin to view yourself or others as victims who need to be rescued. It can feel mean to not soften struggle when you know you have the power to do so.

However, often, struggle, failure and suffering are where life's deepest growth and lessons reside.

The resilience you and others develop when working through

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and bouncing back from struggle is an essential life skill. When you move through hard things seeking the lessons, you become wiser, more confident and more competent at navigating life's frequent complications. When you let those you love move through hard things with support, but without rescuing them, you are supporting their growth and maturity. Supporting is showing empathy, compassion and validating the person's hardship without trying to fix the situation or alleviate the discomfort. It's being present and encouraging the person in the midst of pain without believing it is your job to make the pain stop. Rescuing is taking ownership of the per-

of a growth process.

So, how do we help ourselves and those around us build resilience rather than engaging rescuing behavior?

### 7 Ways to Encourage and **Support Bouncing Back**

Notice and acknowledge when life gets difficult. Notice when you or others experience stress. Watch for stressed behavior, overwhelm, anxiety and depression. Notice behaviors such as isolating, mood changes, physical tension and irritability. Say to yourself or another, "You seem stressed. What might be causing stress? How can you take care of yourself right now?"

Validate the struggle. Say to yourself or another, "That situation is stressful. I can really see why you would be struggling and feeling overwhelmed."

victim/rescuer Notice stories you are believing. Notice where you might be see-

ing yourself or another as helpless, needing rescue, lacking ability to take action, or victimized by some outside villain (a person, a circumstance, or a condition). Notice thoughts of wanting to be rescued or thoughts of feeling it is your job to rescue another from a natural consequence or struggle that is likely to produce personal growth.

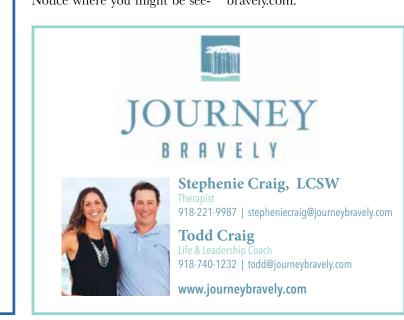
**Embrace empowerment.** Ask yourself what power you or another has to take action in the midst of the difficult situation. Release trying to control people and situations you can't control. Identify and encourage steps of self-control.

**Encourage internalizing** lessons. Notice the lessons emerging from the struggle. Encourage yourself and another to see the lessons, to internalize them, and to incorporate them into future decision making.

Engage support through the process. Spend time with people, call, text, listen to give and receive encouragement when things are hard. Avoid advice giving, problem solving for others, or taking responsibility for others' pain. Be present and kind rather than trying to fix.

Celebrate learning. Notice and talk about when you or another have moved through difficulty, learned new things, and has developed resilience. Be proud of the work.

Be encouraging and kind as you and others press into building resilience knowing it becomes the reservoir of confidence, competence, problem solving and grit for life's inevitable challenges. Connect with us for coaching and counseling along your journey at Journeybravely.com.



son's pain and falsely believing it is your job to stop natural pain and consequences that are part BLUEWATER DIAGNOSTIC IMAGING Your low cost diagnostic imaging provider offering quality MRI, CT, XRAY AND **ULTRASOUND SERVICES** 

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## **J&B Medical Offers Accuracy and Ease**

BY KELLY STALNAKER

Are you a Type 1 or Type 2 diabetic patient that is tired of constant finger sticks? Then it might be time to consider a continuous glucose monitor. A continuous glucose monitor (or CGM, for short) is a device that automatically tracks your blood sugar level 24/7, with fewer finger sticks. Instead of lancets, a tiny sensor is inserted under the skin with a sticky patch to help keep it in place. There might be some discomfort during insertion, but once in place, the testing is completely painless. And the monitor delivers readings instantly.

With this wearable sensor, you'll have quick and convenient access to real time blood sugar data to help you make better food, activity and medication decisions in the moment. You can also review how your blood sugar level changes over a few hours or days, or after certain meals, to spot trends. And many

sensors now offer the ability to stant and accurate monitoring sound an alarm when levels are dangerously high or low. Con-

can help you keep your blood sugar level in target range to re-

### White-Wilson Call for Grant Apps

The White-Wilson Community Foundation is currently accepting applications for its Grant Program. Since 2014, the foundation has awarded 39

grants totaling over \$300,000 to nonprofit organizations seeking to make unique and powerful health and wellness programs possible throughout Okaloosa,

Santa Rosa and Walton Counties. To learn more or to apply, visit whitewilsoncommunityfoundation.org/giving/.





duce the chances of developing other health problems caused by diabetes. CGM's are so easy to use that they're perfect for patients of all ages. A quick glance at your smartphone or CGM receiver will provide accurate blood sugar readings day or night. Also, the sensor is waterproof and will hold up to swim-

ming, sweating and all of your active lifestyle demands.

J&B Medical is proud to announce that we now provide CGM's to qualifying Medicare and Tricare patients! There are many benefits to having a local supplier; you have direct access to a customer care representative in person or over the phone

five days a week. But, more importantly, we are a family owned business in your neighborhood that cares about the community and all of our neighbors! Call us at 850-729-2559 or stop by 540 E. John Sims Pkwy. in Niceville to find out how to get started!



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### 🎪 Wellness

BY RICHARD CHERN, M.D.

Hormone therapy can be

traced back over 2000 years

when the Chinese isolated pitu-

itary and sex hormones for me-

dicinal purposes. The hormones

had not been identified, but the

benefits were already known. Of

course, many discoveries have

occurred since then and today

we are not only treating symp-

toms but also using hormones to

Health problems associated

improve our overall health.

# The Origins of Hormone Restoration

with hormonal imbalances can go on for years, often undetected by both patients and their physicians. Increased risk of cardiovascular disease, Alzheimer's, metabolic syndrome, diabetes, and osteoporosis are only some of the problems associated with hormonal imbalances. And, like high cholesterol, you can't "feel" any of these to know you have a problem. Instead, you must get tested.

To make things more difficult, the symptoms of andropause, menopause, and hypothyroidism are often so slow to occur that we discard them as part of the aging process. Fortunately, at The Hormone Restoration Center, we know what most of these symptoms are and can screen for them to see if there is a potential hormonal imbalance.

There are a number of symp-

toms associated with hormone

HORMONE THERAPY

imbalances to help identify those at higher risk. Symptoms can include fatigue, depression, weight gain, decreased libido, joint pain, poor memory, mood swings, low stamina, and sexual dysfunction are just a few.

If you have ANY of the above symptoms, you should complete a symptom checklist and get tested. These symptoms are an indication that you may need treatment.

After identifying an imbalance, physicians and non-physicians may use pills, creams, supplements, tonics, and much more.

At The Hormone Restoration Center we use what we consider to be the best of the best. We use bioidentical BioTE hormones which means the hormones are identical to what our body produces. That way the key fits the lock exactly as it should

The BioTE method uses hormone optimization created from hundreds of studies using hun-

dreds of thousands of patients worldwide to successfully optimize the hormone levels of women and men once their body's production is no longer sufficient. Surprisingly, our bodies can stop producing sufficient hormones in our early thirties or before.

As shown in different studies, Hormone replacement therapy has been shown to reduce fatigue, improve sleep, improve libido in women and sexual performance in men, decrease muscle loss, reduce body fat, and reduce irritability, anxiety and depression. Also, the symptoms of osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis are significantly reduced.

Long term, men and women will have a reduced incidence of Alzheimer's disease, heart disease, and osteoporosis. Also, multiple studies show a long term reduction in breast cancer. Testosterone and estradiol also improve lipid profiles, reduce triglycerides, and increase HDL

cholesterol which can have positive benefits on the cardiovascular system. Therapeutic testosterone levels can also protect the body from diabetes, prostate cancer, and all-cause mortality.

Hormone replacement therapy by pellet implantation has been used with success in the United States, Europe and Australia since 1938, and has been found to be superior to other methods of hormone delivery.

All the practitioners at The Hormone Restoration Center are BioTE certified and have had extensive clinical and didactic training specific to the treatment of hormonal imbalances. This is to ensure the highest safety, efficacy, and results for our patients. More than 96% of patients are satisfied with treatment when using BioTE.

Dr Richard Chern, MD is a Certified BioTE provider in Miramar Beach at The Hormone Restoration Center. He has been seeing patients for over 25 years and treating patients using hormones for nearly as long. Dr Chern is currently accepting new patients and you can call for an appointment at 850-837-1271. For more info on BioTE and The Hormone Restoration Center please contact visit www.The-HormoneRestorationCenter.com



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- Do you wish your teeth were whiter?
- · Do you think you show too much or too little of your teeth when vou smile?
- Would you like to change the way your teeth or gums are shaped? · Do you have gaps or spaces in between your teeth?

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





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# **There Are Surprises Behind Oral Health**



By Kay Leaman, HealthyDay HealthyLife

Did you know that there is a consensus emerging that maintaining good oral health can be the underappreciated practice to a longer, healthier life?

Even though having healthy gum tissue and removing the plaque buildup on a daily basis is important, it's the microbiome that needs our attention. Our oral cavity is home to viruses, fungi and 700+ bacteria species. If we let our oral hygiene slip, this bacteria can travel throughout the body causing or exacerbating problems, from cardiovascular disease and cancer to Alzheimer's and arthritis. On the flip side, keeping this environment in check staves off decline.

Recent studies, DNA sequencing along with more attention being given to a person's oral health when they are dealing with other diseases has led to several connections:

• People with gum disease are as much as 20% more likely to be diagnosed with cancer compared to those with healthy

FASYCARE

gums. Another recent study revealed oral bacteria in the brain of those with Alzheimer's. In very basic terms our oral bacteria could be hitching a lift inside specific immune cells (white blood cells) and traveling to other parts of the body (brain) and released when the white blood cell breaks apart. These processes cause inflammation and can create a snowball effect as the body can't keep up with the invaders.

• 39 People with IBD (irritable bowel disease) had elective colon surgery and the affected biopsy samples were found to contain much higher levels of oral bacteria compared with nearby healthy colon tissue.

• One study tracked 10,000 healthy volunteers over 15 years and showed that participants with gum disease were more than twice as likely to go on to have a stroke as people without this condition. They have studied plaque that has been scraped from carotid arteries and the bacterial DNA revealed bacteria from gum disease. These bacteria are migrating to the arteries and building a home by forming a protective layer preventing antibiotics and the body's natural defenses from attacking them. Once they are established, these bacteria cause atherosclerosis by provoking immune cells to release a chemical that turns LDL cholesterol into a special oxidized form that builds up on artery walls.

Flossing and brushing before

bed and brushing in the morning should become a ritual. Don't be in a hurry. Take time to curve the floss around each side of the tooth, bringing the floss below the gum line and back up. Also, remember to brush your gums. It increases circulation and stimulates the tissue. Do not add pressure when brushing; be gentle. Begin using a tongue scrapper after brushing. I am amazed what actually remains on the tongue between all those little fungiform papilla. GUM brushes can be used after every meal or snack which cleans debris between the teeth. You might also consider an oral probiotic (Contact me for details). And since fluoride is added to water and toothpaste as well as the dentist's office list of therapies ('for our benefit'), let's take a quick look.

Fluoride is a byproduct of the element fluorine. There are three types of fluoride produced (Fluorosilicate, Sodium Fluoride) and Hexafluorisilicic Fluoride). Of these, Fluorosilicic acid is the most regularly used additive for our water and it is not pharmaceutically graded. It's a byproduct of the phosphate fertilizer, aluminum, steel and cement industries. The warning labels on these products are marked with hazard signs



(corrosive, toxic, health hazard, harmful) and must be handled using great caution. Fluoride is a cumulative toxin and increases with the amount and length of exposure. It also has an insatiable appetite for calcium which can deplete the natural calcium hydroxyapatite that contributes to bone density, thus making our bones more brittle.

As of December 2019, 72 studies have investigated the relationship between fluoride and human intelligence. Over 60 animal studies concluded exposure impairs learning and memory capacity of animals. 62 studies have found that elevated fluoride exposure is associated with reduced IQ and IQ examinations were of 23,773 children (62 studies) and 245 adults (two studies).

In October 2022 The National Toxicology Program (NTP) published a review draft of fluoride neurotoxicity conclusion: "...Fluoride is presumed to be a cognitive neurodevelopment hazard to humans. This conclusion is based on a consistent pattern of findings in human studies across several different populations showing that higher fluoride exposure is associated with decreased IQ or other cognitive impairment in children."

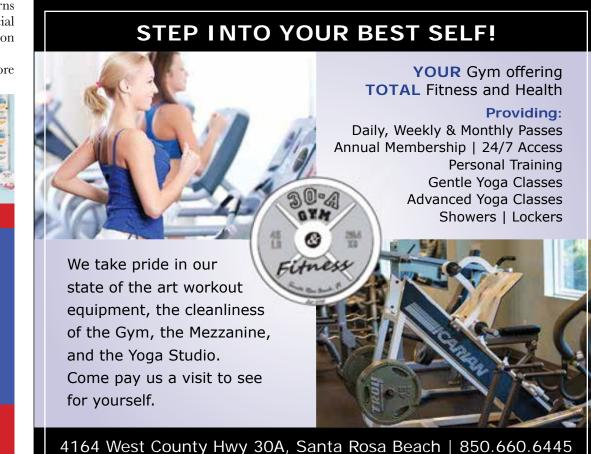
You can repair a cavity, but you can't repair a child's brain.

A few other known health effects are cardio toxicity, neurotoxicity, endocrine dysfunction and hepatotoxicity and nephrotoxicity. Anyone drinking this water is prone to toxic cumulative and highly reactive substance. The younger you are, the worse are its effects.

Consider these questions: Can you guarantee that no toothpaste is swallowed while brushing? What about fluoride treatments? Please take some time and learn more about this in-depth topic which I have only skimmed. It can help you make an informed decision with your next purchase and dental visit.

If you would like a list of the top sources of fluoride in daily life, email succeed.hdhl@gmail. com with Fluoride in the subject line.

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



April Pretz, APRN, FNP-C, Member

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### **Description**

# **Okaloosa County Schools First Semester Highlights**



Superintendent Marcus Chambers

As Superintendent, it fills my heart to see the successes of our students excelling in academics, the arts and athletics. I also see our teachers and administrative staff giving their all to build a positive school culture and prepare our students for college, military and workforce.

Okaloosa County Receives A-Rating from The Florida Department of Education: As you may know, the Okaloosa County School District (OCSD) earned an A-rating for the 2023 school year by the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE)! Okaloosa is one of three districts in Florida

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to earn an A each year the state has assigned grades since 2014. I could not be more proud of our students, teachers, staff, and administrators for this recognition! In December, FLDOE released the 2023 Baseline School Grades, and the results are highly encouraging in the first year of a more rigorous statewide assessment. The district's percentage of points earned increased from 63% last year to 68% this year.

Student Accomplishments in The Arts and Athletics: Arts and Athletics are the fabric of school districts. Students learn perseverance, teamwork, dedication, grit, success, hard work and even failure. These characteristics culminate a student's journey by giving them the confidence to accomplish their dreams, helping them academically, and developing their mental mindset. Our students have achieved district and state championships on the football field, the volleyball court, cross country, swimming and golf. We have talented student artists who participated in a statewide visual arts competition called "Art in the Capital," and several students were recognized for their impressive work.

Our middle and high school choral programs showcase the exceptional vocal talent of our students who have received straight superiors and participated in Okaloosa's All-County Honor Choir. We have fantastic band programs where our students are earning straight superior ratings at District Music Performance Assessments (MPA) and have opportunities, like the 2024 Rose Bowl Parade, to represent Okaloosa County and show our nation and the world how awesome our music programs are. These programs, teachers and students make us all very proud!

Capital Projects: Due to the Half-Cent Sales Tax Program that Okaloosa County Voters approved in 2020 for our schools, we are making many critical updates to our buildings throughout the entire District. Although not all these completed projects are visible, such as new roofs and heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) replacements, they are all critically important. Last fall, we began highlighting the success of the Half-Cent Sales Tax projects by hosting ribbon cuttings at several Okaloosa County schools.

We've also been working to reduce the number of portables. Classroom addition projects do just that. When we build a much needed Cafetorium (enlarged cafeteria along with other additional space) such as what is under construction at Bob Sikes Elementary School, Edwins Elementary, Plew Elementary, Shalimar Elementary, Wright Elementary and Ruckel Middle School, we are able to convert the old cafeterias into new classrooms, thus eliminating portables on campus. For information on the Sales Tax program, visit the District's Half-Cent Sales Tax Capital Program website.

New School Construction: We have also put the wheels in motion for the first new school construction since 2007- a new K-8 school in Crestview to serve 1,200 children in the Fall of 2026. A 32-classroom addition is in the plan-and-design phase to open in 2026 and serve grades 3 through 5 at Destin Elementary School. Additionally, the District is considering expansion possibilities and/or new school construction in the Niceville area.

School Buses: Okaloosa County is refreshing its school bus fleet at the rate of 15 buses per year. In 2021, the District started our Bus Replacement Program with the arrival of 40 new school buses. We now have 76 new buses and 15 more on the way in 2024, totaling 91 new buses with today's latest safety features in three years' time.

Career Technical Education: The OCSD Career and Technical Education (CTE) program offers 19 courses at the middle and high school level with rigorous career pathways for all facets of the workforce: **Building Trades & Construction** Design Technology, Digital Design, Digital Video Technology, Engineering Pathways, Applied Robotics, Biomedical Sciences, Emergency Medical Responder, Practical Nursing, Culinary Arts, Cosmetology, Applied Cybersecurity, Data Science and Machine Learning, Web Application Development and Programming, Criminal Justice Operations, Dispatcher: Police, Fire,

Ambulance, Welding Technology Fundamentals, Advanced Manufacturing Technology, Entrepreneurship, and Automotive Maintenance and Light Repair.

From 2007 through 2022, the District has received over 10 million dollars for CTE education funding. During this timeframe, Okaloosa students have earned 20,426 certifications. Recently, CTE received a grant for \$307, 200 for our Building Trades program. We are grateful to Senator Jay Trumbull and Representative Patt Maney for their support on the legislative funding. Funding is necessary to ensure the longevity of CTE programs to provide hands-on, work-based learning that is relevant to student interests and responsive to the needs of employers and the economy. To learn more about OCSD's CTE program, visit https:// www.mycteworks.com.

**Okaloosa Technical Col**lege - Triumph Grant: We are very excited about the \$7.85 million in funding through a grant by Triumph Gulf Coast to purchase and renovate seven acres in the Okaloosa Industrial Air Park near Bob Sikes Airport in Crestview. The funding will allow the District to establish a north campus of Okaloosa Technical College (OTC) to serve residents and allow access to our programs, such as automotive, manufacturing, cyber security, electronics, and plumbing, in rapidly growing northern Okaloosa County. Currently, Okaloosa Technical College offers dual enrollment programs for high school students. Upon project completion, the north campus will provide dual en-

Continued on next page



### Welcome to Niceville!

Jim & Jane Rainwater welcome you to our real estate office. We have over 20 years experience selling real estate, residential and commercial, working with buyers and sellers in Bluewater Bay, Niceville, Valparaiso, Destin, Crestview and surrounding areas.

#### **Property Management**

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

4400 Hwy. 20 E., Suite 314, Bluewater Bay, Niceville (The old Bluewater Bay Post Office) Stop by our office today or call Jane at (850) 830-1976 or Jim at (850) 830-9636

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# WCSD Keeps Winter Chill at Bay with Epic Work



Superintendent A. Russell Hughes

The winter weather chills did not deter the epic work produced by students and staff! We are proud to report our district ranked number two in the state, having moved from a ranking of 37th in seven short years. Because of the hard work of teachers and students, we can also report that our district schools were graded either an A or B school. There are no schools in the Walton County School District ranked any lower!

Our extracurricular programs continue to seek excellence in the arts. Our Walton County Schools music students and teachers attended the Florida Music Conference in January in Tampa. 14 of our WCSD students represented us at this event. In addition to the more than 250 sessions and concerts, FMEA hosts 23 All-State music ensembles under the direction of industry-leading clinicians and conductors.

The All-County Band presented a phenomenal show in January at Freeport High School. Student musicians from across the county came together to showcase their talents and provide an evening of music for the audience. Put this event on your calendar for next year if you missed it and look out for the event announcement to attend and support these wonderfully musically inclined students.

While the students were in rehearsal, music educators from across the District participated in professional development sessions to hone their skills and bring back cutting-edge skills and concepts in arts education. Congratulations to these EPIC students and their directors for their commitment to the development of the Whole Child.

Our wrestling, soccer, weightlifting and basketball programs are in season and are a part of rounding out our student participants. In addition to maintaining academic excellence and meeting practice engagements, varsity students must contribute time to a community project with their team and coaches to give back to the community that supports them. Take time to attend our sporting games and help support our student-athletes.

Superintendent Hughes met with senior high school students from across the county in a Senior Roundtable to hear from students what is working well and what might need improving or adding to our district opportunities. Those participating received a certificate and letter of recommendation, which students can add to their resumes. The round table is hosted yearly to give students a voice in their educational journey.

Our students are EPIC, because we have EPIC teachers and staff. In January at Walton High School, the annual Teacher of the Year and ESP (Educational Support Personnel) award ceremony was held to announce the winners in each category. Teacher and ESP nominees selected from each campus are chosen by district staff to represent Walton County in the state competition. We look forward to naming the district winners in our next update!

Walton County School District wants to hear from you! You can always reach out and ask questions through the Let's Talk platform. This community digital tool automatically delivers your text questions to the appropriate personnel for a speedy reply. Text (850) 204- 9667 or click "contact us" on the WCSD webpage.

### OKALOOSA

continued from previous page

rollment opportunities, and our students will have access to new technical college programs. The location of this campus is near the epicenter of future economic growth for the Shoal River Ranch mega site and proximity to Bob Sikes Airport and the Okaloosa Industrial Air Park.

**Community Engagement:** Last semester, the District staff successfully kicked off two initiatives to provide Thanksgiving meals to families and launch our very first Angel Tree. It was heartwarming to see members of our community, such as Jacob's Titan, Florida Power and Light and Publix, who partnered with us to provide Thanksgiving meals to 119 families. In addition, our District staff and local families sponsored 73 students for our Angel Tree. We look forward to continuing these programs and supporting even more of our families.

Together, we will finish this school year strong!

### Upcoming Choctawhatchee Audubon Events

March 7th: Local wildlife photographer George Ross will discuss the birds of New Zealand. New Zealand is best known for its endemic, flightless Kiwi bird species. Kiwi plus other unique birds including the world's heaviest parrot the Kākāpō will be shown and discussed during his talk on this fascinating island nation in the South Pacific. Room 800 on the 2nd floor of the Chandler Center (NW door of 519 Helms St.) at the Crosspoint Church in Niceville. Socializing begins at 6:30 p.m.; program begins at 7 p.m. Admission is free and open to the interested public. Visit choctwhatcheeaudubon.org.

March 16, Birding to the Wright Landfill and the Okaloosa Holding Ponds. Leader Malcolm Swan 210.452.4899 (texting encouraged). Meet at 7:30 a.m. at the left side of Roberts Road, 200 feet N. of Helen Back Pizza, 1826 Lewis Turner Blvd. Looking for late ducks, early waders, quick hawks and songbirds. Wear long pants, sturdy closed-toe shoes and hat. Bring a camera and/or binoculars.

March 23, Field Trip to Conservation Park with Bay County Audubon, near Panama City Beach. Leader Ron Houser 850:774:9733. Meet at 7:30 a.m. in the Park's Parking lot 1/3 mile beyond the north end of Griffin Blvd., the south end, one mile NW from the intersection of US 98 and Hwy 79. This is an open area so be prepared for little shade and cool, windy conditions. Bring your binoculars and/or camera.



Page 30

# **Business, College and Career**

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

Northwest Florida State College (NWFSC) was named by Forbes Advisor as one of the nation's best affordable institutions in 2024 for RN to BSN Programs. Forbes Advisor evaluated 58 colleges, with NWFSC emerging as one of the top 10 schools providing an opportunity for students to earn the degree in as little as three semesters at a very affordable cost. According to Forbes Advisor, the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) is quickly becoming the industry standard for entry-level nursing practice, especially in hospitals. BSN graduates earn approximately \$92,000 annually. Additionally, a BSN degree can equip nurses for graduate school and job advancement.

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

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

#### Okaloosa Public Schools Foundation to Host the 4th Annual College and Career Fair

The Okaloosa Public Schools

• Roller Replacement

Foundation is thrilled to share news of the upcoming 4th Annual College and Career Fair, scheduled for Tuesday, March 12, at Beachside Community Church, at 200 Racetrack Rd NW, Fort Walton Beach. This year, we're switching things up with a new format designed to provide attending students with abundant information on post-graduation employment opportunities, higher education, and military service. Juniors and Seniors from Choctawhatchee, Fort Walton Beach, and Niceville High Schools can register through the links below!

#### Sessions:

8 a.m. - 10 a.m.: Fort Walton Beach and Niceville Students (Breakfast Provided)

11 a.m. - 1 p.m.: Choctawhatchee Students (Lunch Provided)

The OPSF College and Career Fair is not designed to be Drop-In Style this year. Please plan to stay for the entire Session. Attendees will have the chance to win prizes and gift cards! The event is free. Students are responsible for their own transportation. Registration is required.

Niceville's Registration Form: https://docs.google. com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQL-SevwL7CeZUqJ-9aF914F9p-J6kj2WaIUd4CuQ4bTYtzt-GAjabg/viewform.

Specific event information is available on the Registration forms linked above. Please see your school's point of contact for event permission forms. School Point of Contact:

Choctawhatchee: Front Office

Fort Walton Beach: Guidance Office Niceville: Front Office

For those who wish to participate as a vendor, visit https://www.eventbrite. com/e/4th-annual-college-and-career-fair-vendor-registration-tickets-819021664847?aff=oddtdtcreator. For questions, contact Debbie Tate, tated@okaloosaschools.com or (850) 974-0742.

#### Florida SBDC at UWF Presents "When Banks Say No"

It's tough for small businesses to get funding. In fact, 75-80% of small business loan requests are denied by banks. So, what's a small business owner to do when the bank says no? Find alternative funding sources! "When Banks Say No," presented on March 12 from 9 - 10:15 a.m., provides an overview of alternative funding options for small business owners who need money to start, support or grow their businesses. Takeaways from and Benefits of Attending this webinar include:

1. Hope! A "no" from the bank is not the end of the road. There are many options available for nearly any business situation.

2. Understanding! We'll explain many funding options that banks just don't offer. One might be just what you need!

3. Direction! When you identify one or two loan options that work for you, you can take the steps towards acquiring that money to start or support or grow your business.

Presenter: S. Boyd Karren, Managing Partner, Otro Financial. Fee: \$15. To register, visit sbdc.uwf.edu and open "Training & Events." Sponsored by



Cadence Bank and Wells Fargo.

#### Florida SBDC at UWF Presents "Connect to Capital"

This panel discussion is a must-attend for small business owners, aspiring entrepreneurs, and anyone seeking a deeper understanding of the funding options available to drive business growth. Don't miss the opportunity to connect with industry experts, ask questions, and gain the knowledge needed to secure the financial support your business deserves. Join us online for "Connect to Capital" on March 13 from 9:00 - 10:00 a.m. for an engaging conversation on building bridges to opportunities in the world of small business financing. Presenters: Joel Ross, Business Development Officer, Florida First Capital Finance Corporation; Stacey McGilvray, Senior Vice President of Commercial Lending, Hancock Whitney; Cristian Carlee, Assistant Vice President & Commercial Relationship Manager, Trustmark. Fee: \$15. To register, visit sbdc.uwf.edu and open "Training & Events". Sponsored by Cadence Bank and Wells Fargo.

#### FP&L Awards \$200K in Grants to Help 28 Nonprofits

Florida Power & Light (FPL) recently announced it helped support a variety of needs in the community through 28 nonprofits in Walton, Okaloosa, Santa Rosa and Escambia counties with grants totaling \$210,435. NextEra Energy Foundation, a charitable arm of FPL's parent company, awarded the grants to the Northwest Florida nonprofits each quarter through 2023, with the last ones announced in December. The money will support their programs well into 2024. Foundation grants are focused on education, food insecurity, senior citizen support and child advocacy, as well as grants focused on environmental conservation and protection.

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Page 31

# The Urgent Need for Cybersecurity in Small to Medium Businesses: Protecting Your Assets in an Evolving Threat Landscape

In today's digital age, the significance of cybersecurity cannot be emphasized enough. The alarming surge in cyber insurance costs, coupled with the prevalence of ransomware attacks targeting small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs), underscores the critical need for prioritizing cybersecurity measures.

Consider the latest insights from The 13th edition of the NetDiligence® Cyber Claims Study, which revealed that the cost of cyber insurance in the U.S. spiked by a staggering 79% in the second quarter of 2022 alone. Shockingly, ransomware attacks accounted for a whopping 88% of cyber insurance claims among SMBs during the period of 2022-2033. Moreover, the average financial toll of a cyber incident borne by an insurance carrier stood at a staggering \$865,000 for SMBs, highlighting the substantial financial risks at stake

Despite these alarming statistics, only a mere 14% of SMBs are adequately prepared to confront such cyber threats. While larger corporations typically allocate significant resources to cybersecurity, SMBs often lag behind in implementing robust cybersecurity measures. Many SMBs have yet to develop comprehensive cybersecurity solutions to safeguard their operations, particularly in regions with stringent data privacy laws and regulations governing the collection and storage of personal



#### Several factors contribute to SMBs neglecting cybersecurity:

Lack of Awareness: Many SMB owners and managers underestimate the importance of cybersecurity or the potential risks they face, erroneously assuming that cybercriminals target only larger enterprises. However, studies reveal that 63% of SMBs have experienced cyberattacks in the past two years, with data breaches costing an average of \$3.31 million per incident.

**Overreliance on Managed Service Providers** (MSPs): While MSPs play a crucial role in supporting software and applications, they often lack the expertise required to navigate the complexities of cybersecurity response and insurance coverage. Additionally, they may overlook the diverse legal and regulatory frameworks governing cybersecurity across different states and industries.

Dependence Third-Paron ty Applications: **SMBs** frequently rely on third-party cloud applications, assuming that these vendors bear sole responsibility for cybersecurity. However, cybersecurity is a shared responsibility, necessitating proactive measures from both the business and its vendors.

**Cost Concerns:** SMBs often view investing in cybersecurity solutions as financially burdensome. However, the costs associated with recovering from a cyberattack far outweigh the initial investment in preventive measures.

**Perceived Complexity:** The intricacies of cybersecurity can appear daunting to SMBs, who may lack the necessary expertise to implement comprehensive cybersecurity solutions effectively.

**Misconceptions about Cyber Insurance Coverage:** SMBs may erroneously believe that their cyber insurance policy provides blanket coverage, failing to grasp the nuances of regulatory compliance and the

insurance z⊚ne

importance of tailored policies and procedures.

# Addressing these challenges requires proactive measures:

**Education and Awareness:** SMBs must prioritize cybersecurity education and awareness programs to understand the evolving threat landscape and their vulnerabilities.

**Strategic Partnerships:** Collaborating with a company that has expertise in cybersecurity solutions and insurers can help SMBs develop tailored solutions that align with their budget and requirements.

**Compliance and Risk Management:** SMBs must stay abreast of regulatory requirements and implement robust policies and procedures to mitigate risks effectively.

**Integration of Cybersecurity and Insurance:** Integrating cybersecurity solutions with insurance expertise can provide SMBs with comprehensive coverage and peace of mind.

In conclusion, the imperative for small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) to prioritize cybersecurity measures has never been clearer. With cyber insurance costs surging and ransomware attacks on the rise, SMBs face significant financial risks and operational disruptions. Despite the alarming statistics revealing the prevalence of cyber threats, many SMBs remain ill-prepared due to factors such as lack of awareness, reliance on third-party providers, cost concerns, and misconceptions about insurance coverage.

However, by taking proactive steps to educate themselves, forge strategic partnerships, adhere to compliance requirements and integrate cybersecurity with insurance solutions, SMBs can effectively mitigate risks and safeguard their assets in an ever-evolving threat landscape. It is imperative for SMBs to recognize the importance of cybersecurity as a fundamental aspect of their business operations and take decisive action to protect themselves against cyber threats.

At Abora Insurance Group, we specialize in bridging the gap between cybersecurity solutions and insurance policies, offering affordable comprehensive solutions tailored to SMBs' needs. By fostering transparent communication and leveraging our network of insurers and cybersecurity solution providers, we empower SMBs to navigate the complexities of cybersecurity and secure their digital assets effectively. Protect your business today to safeguard against the growing threats of tomorrow.



### 🌸 Musing

# Sean of the South

By Sean Dietrich

"Dear Sean, how can we save

this country?" the email began. The writer lives in Hartford, Connecticut. His name is Michael. I have no idea why Michael thinks a hayseed like me is qualified to answer this loaded question. I'm not a smart guy. Blondes tell jokes about me.

Still, I have an idea.

The way to save this country is to eat together. We don't eat together anymore. We don't eat

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supper at the same table. When did that stop?

A recent study found that only 29 percent of Americans sit to eat supper with family each day. Fifty years ago, the statistic was nearly 99 percent.

On average about 50 percent of millennials admit to cooking their own suppers. Whereas the number was around 80 percent with baby boomers.

Something else. We need to put the Wurlitzer organ back in Major League Baseball.

I don't know if you're aware, but baseball has undergone many changes since we were kids. Even the rules have changed. There is a pitch clock. No more cigar smoke.

But the biggest disappointment was losing the organ. I attended a game recently and all I heard was Lady Gaga blasting overhead.

This is an affront.

In 1941, organist Ray Nelson debuted at Wrigley Field. It was the first time organ music was heard in baseball. He played before 18,678 Cubs fans. He played "When the Midnight Choo-Choo Leaves for T-U-L-S-A."

A half century ago, each American ballpark had an organist. Today, there are only seven.

Another way to save this country is to bring back piano lessons. Five decades ago, 81 percent of American kids took piano lessons. Do you know what the percentage is now? Eight percent.

That's not enough Americans to form a Rotary Club.

I took piano lessons. My teacher was Miss Betty, who smelled like bath powder and Icy Hot. She said if I played "Savior Like a Shepherd Lead Thee" without mistakes, she would give me fudge. I gained nine pounds.

We need dinner on the grounds. Once upon a time, rural churches had outdoor dinners on the lawn. Often around Decoration Day. We did.

Our whole congregation would gather on the grass, eat copious amounts of sugar and cholesterol. Whereupon we would all sing "Bringing in the Sheaves" while receiving insulin injections from our neighbors.

This country needs Lawrence Welk, Roy Clark, and Buck Owens. We need Thomas and Richard Smothers. Bing Crosby. Nat Cole. Satchmo.

Our music sucks. We once had hit tunes like "Georgia," "String of Pearls," and "Hey Good Lookin'." Now we have—these are actual song hit titles—"Me & Ur Ghost," "Knockin' the Boots," and "AB-CDEFU."

More Andy Taylor; less Taylor Swift bashing. More Ray Charles, less Justin Bieber. More Clark Kent, less Beavis and Butthead.

More rope swings on muddy creeks. More young men opening doors for females. More Norman Rockwell. More John Wayne. More Fred McFeely Rogers.

No, I don't know how to save this country. I don't know much about anything

But I know family dinners ain't a bad place to start.

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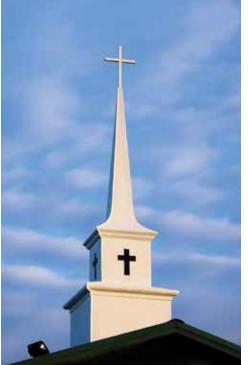


# A Pastor's Ponderings: The Power of Decision **Courage, Conviction and Consequences**



By PASTOR DOUG STAUFFER

Life's journey is guided by the decisions we make, shaping our path and defining our future. The Bible offers invaluable advice on making wise choices. James 1:5-8 stresses the importance of seeking God's wisdom before making a decision. The book of James also says that God promises to give wisdom generously to those who ask. In the same context, James 4:2 says, "Ye have not, because ye ask not." We have all the tools at our immediate disposal.



The book of James also warns against the peril of wavering indecision, likening it to a ship tossed upon the stormy seas. Double-minded people are unstable in all their ways, highlighting the importance of making decisions with faith and conviction. We need to learn to be decisive and avoid being wishy-washy.

Every decision we make has consequences. The story of Christ's crucifixion illustrates the weight of choices. Pilate, swayed by the clamoring crowd, opted to release Barabbas, a guilty man,

instead of Jesus, the innocent Son of God. This decision, driven by fear of others, led to the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. Herod's choice had profound consequences. Our decisions impact us and those around us. We must heed the warnings of scripture and choose wisely, mindful of the unexpected consequences.

Anne Frank's decision to document her experiences while hiding from the Nazis during the Holocaust has provided a powerful testament to the human spirit and resilience in the face of adversity. Her diary has become one of the most widely read books in the world, inspiring generations to stand against injustices. Because of her wise decision, Anne Frank continues to speak through the written page.

Proverbs provides crucial insights into decision-makstressing the significance ing,

of knowledge, wisdom, and correction. Knowledge lights our path, wisdom guides our steps, and correction fosters our growth. These ele-

Despite facing mained steadfast in

Ruth's journey, marked by unwavering trust and obedience, bears witness to the boundless blessings awaiting those who walk in righteousness. Ruth followed Naomi and embraced her God. Her faithfulness was rewarded with blessings beyond measure as she became part of the lineage of Christ. We must emulate Ruth's unwavering faith, trusting that God will always lead us on the path of righteousness.

The political landscape, too, offers glimpses of decisive leadership that leave indelible marks upon society. Margaret Thatcher, the "Iron Lady," reshaped the fabric of Britain with her unwavering commitment to conservative principles, leaving a legacy in the annals of history. Her conservative policies, including privatization, deregulation and free-market reforms, reshaped the British economy and society during her tenure from 1979 to 1990

As we journey through life, let's seek God's wisdom and trust in His guidance. Let our decisions be anchored in faith, knowing God will grant us the necessary wisdom if we only ask. May we draw lessons from scripture and the lives of faithful individuals, making wise choices and walking in the light of God's truth. I pray we will all consider Him as we make our decisions.

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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ments serve as pillars supporting us through both successes and setbacks from every decision we make. opposition from his family, Moses re-

his commitment to God. Similarly, we may encounter difficult choices that test our allegiance to the Almighty. Like Moses, we must trust in God's guidance, even when doing so re-

quires us to stand alone.

Page 34

# It's Almost Time for the Wildly Popular Concerts In The Village!

The 10-concert live music series on Thursdays, April 4 to June 6, will feature premier musicians and bands performing everything from classic rock, disco and modern pop to fulllength Grammy Award-winning iconic albums.

Hear the entire Grammy Award-winning Purple Rain album performed live, reminisce with Fleetwood Mac classics, dance to funky disco beats and discover new pop vocalists from The Voice — all in the diverse lineup of the 2024 Concerts presented by Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation, offering something for every music lover.

The area's first live concert series is held each spring on Thursday evenings at the MKAF Dugas Pavilion in Destin. This year's 29th annual family-friendly series will run from April 4 to June 6. The 10-concert live music series will feature premier regional and national musicians and bands performing everything from classic rock, rhythm & blues, and disco to

modern pop.

The series kicks off on Thursday, April 4, 2024, with must-not-miss entertainers Post Modern Jukebox promising an unforgettable trip back in time to celebrate vintage music and pop culture.

The highly anticipated season features a range of local, regional and national musicians and bands including rhythm & blues sensation Wendy Moten from The Voice, full-length rendition of Prince's iconic album Purple Rain by Black Jacket Symphony and the chill sounds of Yacht Rock Revue. Kicking off May are local fan favorites The Mulligans, the Fleetwood Mac tribute band Rumours ATL, party starters Gotta Groove Band, rock god Mitch Malloy and gifted pop/jazz/blues and soul songstress Haley Reinhart. The series caps on Thursday, June 6 with crowd pleasing Adam Ezra Group, sure to fuse rock energy and soul power.

"This is a great lineup of live music performed in a beautiful



venue at an affordable price for a great cause" says MKAF CEO Demetrius Fuller. "When you purchase a concert ticket, you are enabling us to provide the highest quality of arts education and community engagement throughout Okaloosa, Walton and Bay Counties. If you are a MKAF regular, welcome back, if you're not yet a MKAF member, please consider joining. We have a great time and as we like to say, your support keeps the arts FUN-ded."

Gates open at 6 p.m. with concerts beginning at 7 p.m. for this come-as-you-are family-friendly outdoor concert series. Bring a lawn chair, picnic, wine, or purchase food and beverages on-site prepared by featured restaurants and food trucks.

# The 2024 Concerts in the Village schedule is as follows:

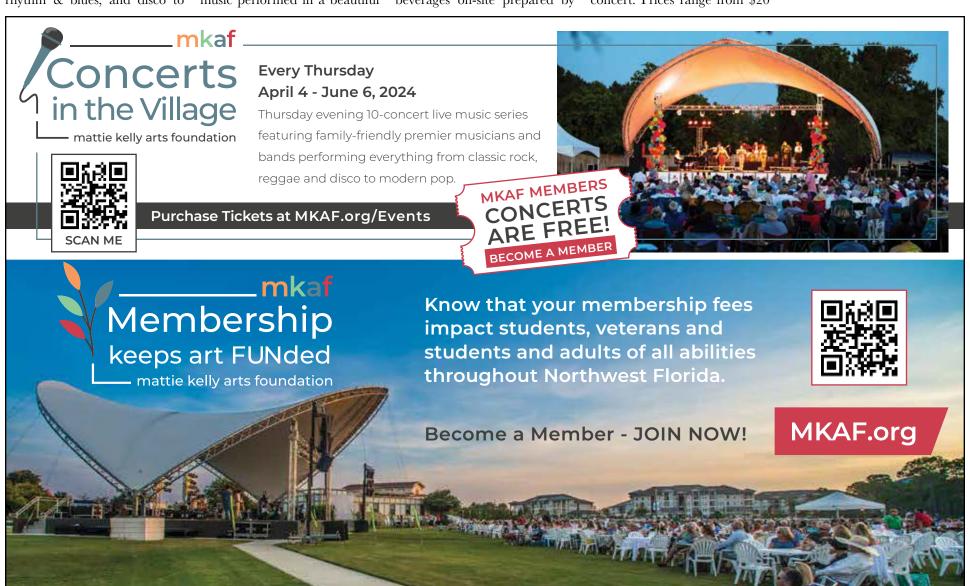
Thursday, April 4 | Post Modern Jukebox

- Thursday, April 11 | Wendy Moten
- Thursday, April 18 | Black Jacket Symphony presents
- Prince's Purple Rain Thursday, April 25 | Yacht
- Rock Revue Thursday, May 2 | The Mul-
- ligans Thursday, May 9| Rumours
- ATL: A Tribute to Fleetwood Mac
- Thursday, May 16 | Gotta
- Groove Band Thursday, May 23 | Mitch
- Malloy Thursday, May 30 | Haley Reinhart
- Thursday, June 6 | Adam Ezra Group

General admission varies per concert. Prices range from \$20 to \$35 for adults. Discounts offered for active-duty military (must show ID). Purchase tickets in advance of concert day and save \$5 per ticket at the door. Children (12 and under) are free. A limited number of VIP tables (reserved table for eight guests for the entire season) are available for \$2,250. Purchase tickets online at MKAF.org/ events.

MKAF members enjoy early entry and free admission to every concert as well as discounted pricing to other MKAF events. For more information on MKAF membership, visit MKAF.org.

Concert lineup is subject to change. All sales are final; sorry, no refunds. Pets, tables larger than two feet, and drones are not permitted. Children 17 and under must be accompanied by a parent or guardian. To learn more about sponsoring the 2024 MKAF season, call (850) 650-2226. For the latest news and information, visit www.MKAF.org, and follow the Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation Facebook and Instagram pages for dates, information, and inspiring arts and culture-related posts.



# ECMAF Music Fest Delights Listeners During 10-Day Festival

By Deborah Carboni

2024, January 10 - 19. marked the 8th year that Emerald Coast Music Alliance Foundation (ECMAF) has invited "Carnegie Hall" musicians to perform throughout Okaloosa and Walton counties for its 10day festival-in schools, senior centers, assisted living facilities and organizations that serve the challenged or disabled populations. And every performance is free! "We do it because we love it," exclaimed our Artistic Director Alon Goldstein.

This year's festival has been an amazing success! ECMAF musicians traveled to 13 elementary through high schools; the Northwest Florida Ballet Academy, The Emerald Coast Autism Center, Bob Hope Village, The Mid-Bay Rotary Club, American House at Bluewater Bay, Twelve Oaks, Bee Hive Homes, Fresh Start, Nellies Youth Village and more—over 50 performances in 25 venues.

ECMAF Artistic Director and concert pianist Alon Gold-



stein invited three incredibly talented musical groups to perform with him. Neo-Art Piano duo wowed audiences as two pianists perform intricately and simultaneously on one piano. The Brass Trio featured a trombonist, a French horn and a U.S. Navy Band trumpeter on leave to us just for this event! Exceptional jazz artists, The Guy Mintus Jazz Trio came all the



way from New York to blow us away with their incredible talents on piano, bass guitar and drums.

In addition to all these performances, two free evening community concerts were offered to the public, one at the Fort Walton Beach Civic Auditorium and one at Crosspoint Church, Niceville. All the musicians performed at these con-



certs and the audiences gave them standing ovations!

When you give, you often find that you receive more than you gave – and that's the sentiment we keep hearing from our musicians. Children engage with the performers, clapping in time with the rhythm of the music, swaying to the beat, some getting up to spontaneously interpret the music through dance. The artists spend time with the children, showing how their instruments work, letting them touch keys, valves and strings. It's inspiring to see the curiosity and interest, hearing the children and youth express a desire to pursue learning to play an instrument.

"I feel alive again," is the one statement that brought tears to our eyes, spoken by an elderly woman in one of the senior living facilities after a performance. These moments and feedback inspire us to expand our vision for 2025 and beyond, returning year after year with new musical talents, more performances and more engagement with the public.

Interested in supporting us as a business or individual? The ECMAF is a 501c-3 organization, funded solely by donations. Please visit www.emeraldcoastmusic.org for more information or to make a donation of any amount through PayPal, or email at info@emeraldcoastmusic.org.



### Arts & Music

# Emerald Coast Theatre Company Presents Comedy at the Boulevard!

Emerald Coast Theatre Company (ECTC) and Panama City Comedy are proud to present Comedy at the Boulevard, Saturday, March 9 at 7:30 p.m. Come for an uproarious night of laughs! ECTC presents some of the Southeast's most hilarious comedians! This hysterical event will be hosted by resident funny guy Jason Hedden and features Lace Larrabee and

Cyrus Steele.

Lace Larrabee, Co-headliner, is a nationally touring comedian, actress and host whose debut comedy album, White Trash Cinderella, produced by 800 Pound Gorilla Records, sealed the number one spot on the comedy charts. The accompanying YouTube special amassed over 1 million views and counting. A former southern beauty queen, Lace ditched the pageants, but kept her dominant stage presence, unrivaled timing and trademark sass. As a season 17 semifinalist on America's Got Talent, America loved her charming wit so much, NBC brought her back to roast Simon Cowell alongside Roastmaster General himself, Jeff Ross. Lace turned her appearance on AGT



into a Vegas residency as host of America's Got Talent Superstars Live.

For over a decade, Lace has been honing her self-deprecating humor and hilarious personal anecdotes into a style that is fiercely her own. Lace can captivate a room and garner laughs as big as her personality. From tales of growing up in a trailer to relatable observations on friends, family, and aging, Lace turns life's humiliating moments into an indomitable act of comedy. Lace's candor, perspicacity, and refreshingly real takes on life make comedians want to be her, audiences want to be best friends with her. Offstage, Lace and fellow comedian Katherine Blanford (The Tonight Show) co-host a juicy podcast called Cheaties that delights in the raw messiness of love, life, and mistakes we all make. Each week, this snarky duo interviews guests who divulge their own stories of cheating or being cheated on and how they overcome.

Lace is a regular favorite on Sirius XM and has two upcoming specials dropping in 2024 through OFTV and Rhizome Comedy. Lace's charisma radiates and her writing and delivery are undeniable. Lace has found her voice and is passionate about empowering others to find and use theirs too.

As a dynamic performer, Co-headliner and comedian Cyrus Steele is quickly establishing himself to be a comedic force through his wit and hilarious celebrity impersonations. He covers everyone from Barack Obama to impressions of Kevin Hart and Donald Trump! Steele appeals to all audiences young and old, with clean comedy and mining humor from his Southern roots, growing up in Savan-

nah, Ga. He has performed at many of the nation's best comedy venues, including the famous Apollo Theater. In 2017, he was a top 5 finalist for HBO's American Black Film Festival and most recently a finalist for Jeanne Robertson's Comedy with Class. In 2019, he was a finalist for Steve Harvey's 2019 'Standup Spotlight'. And more recently made an appearance on FOX's 'TMZ' and won their 'Wacky Talent Competition'. In November 2021, he dropped his first DryBar comedy special!

Local Jason Hedden is an actor and director that took to stand-up comedy when his wife stopped laughing at his jokes at home. He lives in Panama City where he produces monthly shows with Panama City Comedy. He has been seen at Star-Dome, The Comedy Catch, Stand Up Live, Comedy Bar, Laughing Skull Lounge, Dothan Opera House and dozens of other venues throughout the southeast. Jason has performed at the Pensacola Indie Fringe and Comedy Festival, West End Comedy Festival, Gulf Coast Comedy Festival, Blue Ridge Comedy Festival and P3 Comedy Fest. He is a frequent opener for Grand Ole Opry member, Henry Cho. Follow him at @ jasonheddencomedy or jasonhedden.com.

Comedy at the Boulevard will be staged on the Cabaret Stage in ECTC's main space located on the second floor of 560 Grand Boulevard in Grand Boulevard Town Center in Miramar Beach. Tickets range from \$27 - \$40. There is an additional processing fee for ticket purchases. Purchase tickets online at www.emeraldcoasttheatre.org.





# The Love Language of Music

Music is a universal language that transcends borders and cultures. It has the power to evoke a myriad of emotions and connect people on a profound level. Beyond its rhythmic notes and melodic tunes, music serves as a unique love language, allowing individuals to express and communicate their deepest feelings.

#### **The Emotional Symphony:**

Music has an innate ability to convey emotions that words often fail to express. Each note, chord, and rhythm create a symphony of feelings that can range from joy and excitement to sadness and introspection. The love language of music provides a platform for individuals to communicate their emotional states, connecting with others who share similar sentiments. Whether it's the upbeat tempo of a celebratory song or the soothing melody of a ballad, music becomes a vessel for emotional expression. Musicians take their audience along on a magic carpet ride of emotions and feelings as they watch and listen to the musician perform.

### **Cultural Resonance:**

Different cultures around the world have their unique musical traditions, reflecting the diversity of human experiences. The love language of music extends beyond individual expression to encompass collective cultural identity. From the rhythmic beats of African drums to the intricate melodies of Indian ragas, music becomes a cultural love language, preserving and transmitting the stories, traditions, and values of a community. It helps us to appreciate, embrace and learn about other cultures.

### **Personal Connection:**

Music often serves as a soundtrack to significant moments in people's lives. A particular song can evoke memories of love, heartbreak, joy, or sorrow. The love language of music allows individuals to forge a personal connection with certain songs or genres, creating a story that encapsulates their life experiences. It becomes a means of self-expression, enabling individuals to share their stories through the melodies that touch and inspire their hearts. Often certain songs (from any time period) bring back fond memories



of loved ones and moments together.

### Communication Without Words:

In the realm of interpersonal relationships, music becomes a powerful tool for communication without the need for verbal expression. Couples, friends, and family members often develop their own musical language, where certain songs or genres hold shared meanings and emotions. A love song can convey sentiments that words might struggle to articulate, fostering a deeper understanding and connection between individuals.

#### Healing Harmonies:

Beyond its role in emotional expression, music possesses ther-

apeutic qualities that contribute to mental and emotional well-being. The love language of music extends to the realm of healing, offering solace, comfort, and a sense of catharsis. Whether through the soothing sounds of classical music or the energizing beats of upbeat tunes, music has the power to uplift spirits and provide a sanctuary for the soul. A fun experiment to try is noticing the atmosphere changes that occur between a silent room versus turning on music. It's like a fresh coat of paint in a room. Try out different colors such as classical, baroque, contemporary, cello, guitar, violin, opera, rock, jazz, blues, folk, etc., and compare the variety of moods each genre creates in the room.

In the grand symphony of life, music emerges as a univer-

sal love language that speaks to the core of human existence. It serves as a conduit for emotional expression, cultural identity, personal connection, and non-verbal communication. As individuals navigate the complexities of their emotions and relationships, the love language of music stands as a timeless and harmonious companion, weaving a melodic thread that connects hearts across time and space.



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Incoming 4th Grade Student Auditions: April 20 - 2:30 pm to 4:00pm

> **NFBallet.org/Auditions** *All auditions are by appointment only.*

### () Community

#### **BAY BUZZ EVENTS** *continued from page 16*

J I 8

sure you "TAKE IT EASY." Rolling Stone magazine proclaimed 7 Bridges the Greatest Eagles tribute on Earth.

The Saturday lineup features two 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 is"STILL STANDING" with a tribute to Elton John. They'll have you chanting, "SATUR-DAY, SATURDAY" over and over again.

Sunday, brings a tribute to the Man, the Myth, The Legend – Mr. Jimmy Buffett. Nashville with recording artist and Destin resident Chuck Lawson and Cheri Salvetti – the duo SHACK 'N UP, will take you down memory lane as you are "WAISTING AWAY AGAIN IN MARGARI-TAVILLE" 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

Psalm 25:4 Show me the right path O Lord; point out the road for me to follow

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planet known simply as END-LESS SUMMER. You will be feeling many "GOOD VIBRA-TIONS" as you are dreaming of "SURFIN' USA."

Ticket start at \$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.

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

The Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center (EC-CAC) presents 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.



#### Mac & Cheese Festival at Destin Commons March 10

Join Bay Life at the Mac & Cheese Festival on Sunday, March 10 from noon - 3 p.m. benefiting the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Emerald Coast. This family-friendly event will feature gourmet, chef-inspired twists on the South's favorite comfort food. For more information and to purchase tickets, visit https://www.eventbrite.com/ e/6th-annual-mac-and-cheese festivaltickets-769177820567. All proceeds from this event will go to the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Emerald Coast, which works in our community to promote and enhance the development of boys and girls by instilling a sense of competence, usefulness, belonging and influence through its programs focused on academic success, good character, citizenship and healthy lifestyles.

#### Florida Power and Light Economic Symposium March 5-6

The annual FPL Northwest Florida Economic Symposium will take place on March 5-6 at Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort. An annual signature event, the Symposium focuses on strengthening collaboration throughout Northwest Florida communities and fostering discussions and engagement in

### Community

### BAY BUZZ EVENTS

continued from page 38

community and economic opportunities with challenging, thought-provoking speakers. Register at fplsymposium.com.

### Annual Tea Fore Her March 10th

The 10th Annual "Tea Fore Her" fundraiser, hosted by Fore Her organization, will occur Sunday, March 10, at noon, at The Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort and Spa. This lively springtime event offers an opportunity to gather with friends and enjoy an afternoon of tea while raising funds to support breast cancer patients along the Emerald Coast. Fore Her is a nonprofit organization offering financial assistance, resources, hope, compassion, and education for all who are affected by breast cancer. Tickets are \$65 per person; tables for eight guests are also available for purchase at www.foreher.org. A discounted ticket of \$60 per person will be available for breast cancer survivors.

Forever Warriors, in collaboration with Step One Automotive Group, announces its involvement in a series of events designed to engage and support military per-

**S** sonnel, their families and the broader community.

Upcoming March events include the following:

• United Way Field Day, March 1, Niceville

An opportunity for Forever Warriors volunteers to demonstrate dominance in camaraderie and sportsmanship, fostering a competitive yet friendly environment.

• Lightning CrossFit on Eglin: The Open 2024 Cross-Fit Games Season Launch March 1, 8 & 15, Eglin AFB, FL

Partnering with the Panhandle's oldest CrossFit gym, this event welcomes 50 to 100 participants each Friday to kick off the CrossFit season, emphasizing the connection with the military community.

• Eggstravaganza, March 30, Hurlburt Field, FL

Aiming to support military and military family retention efforts, this family-friendly event is expected to welcome 1,500 attendees.

Come join the fun at the **St. Puptricks Adoption** event to be held at HorsePower Pavilion, March 16th, 11-3 p.m.

Rescue shelters, vendors and sponsors are participating. Rescue organizations and rescue shelters throughout the Panhandle will be showcasing their adoptable animals and, hopefully, many animals will find their forever homes. There will also be games, jumpy houses, inflatable axe throwing and vendors with merchandise.

#### Emerald Ball

Tickets are now on sale for the Sacred Heart Foundation's 2024 Emerald Ball benefiting Sacred Heart Emerald Coast, April 6 at 6 p.m. at the Hilton Sandestin Beach Resort Golf and Spa. Presented by Howard Group, Grand Boulevard, and Silver Sands Premium Outlets, proceeds from this year's event will benefit the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at Sacred Heart Emerald Coast. With more than 1,200 babies born prematurely in Walton and Okaloosa counties in the past three years, Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast continues to make significant investments by adding five new neonatal specialists to provide 24/7 coverage for sick and well newborns. Guests will enjoy live musical entertainment provided by the band Mr. Big and the Rhythm Sisters and a Lumi Pod photo booth sponsored by Emerald Coast Hospice Care. Guests can purchase tickets, \$150, which includes reserved seating, a curated dinner and two drink tickets. For more information, tickets or sponsorship, contact Lisa Wainwright at lisa.wainwright@ascension.org or call (850) 278-3702. sacredheartemeraldball.com. Guests are encouraged to wear emerald shades for this elegant evening.

#### The Annual Destin Charity Wine Auction Returns April 26-28

Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation (DCWAF) will present the 19th Annual Destin Charity Wine Auction April 26-28. All funds raised at the annual auction benefit children in need in Northwest Florida through the Foundation's 17 partner children's charities. In 2023, DCWAF donated \$3.4 million to charity following one of its most successful auctions to date.

This year's auction will feature an impressive line-up of celebrity chefs and vintners from throughout the world, hosted by philanthropic couples within the local community.

Patrons attending the Destin Charity Wine Auction presented by the Jumonville Family can expect a weekend filled with exclusive wines and excellent food from a variety of celebrity chefs beginning Friday, April 26 with the patron dinner experience. Each dinner features a nationally recognized chef paired with world-class vintners. Confirmed vintners and chefs are listed online at dcwaf.org/auction. More will be announced in the coming months as the auction approaches.

The Destin Charity Wine Auction is the main event of the weekend at 1 p.m. on Saturday, April 27. The Reserve Tasting and Live Auction will be held under an air-conditioned tent at Grand Boulevard Sandestin Town Center and will feature distinctive wines from internationally acclaimed vintners poured and paired with cuisine curated by a selection of the area's top restaurants. The event culminates with a high-energy, live auction boasting rare and distinctive wines, spectacular trips and other incredible oneof-a-kind items.

Hosted in conjunction with the South Walton Beaches Wine and Food Festival in Grand Boulevard Sandestin Town Center the same weekend, the Festival will showcase hundreds of premium wines along with a diverse selection of spirits and culinary creations. Auction attendees also have access to South Walton Beaches Wine & Food Festival's Grand Tasting on Sunday, April 30 at 1 p.m. For sponsorship: info@dcwaf. org. Patron packages: dcwaf. org/tickets.

#### **Local Coupons J & B MEDICAL, INC BC MUSIC** LJ SCHOONERS **DOCKSIDE RESTAURANT AND OYSTER BAR MILITARY DISCOUNT** FREE APPETIZER \$100 OFF OR DESSERT 15% OFF **ANY LIFT CHAIR PURCHASE** WITH AN ENTREE PURCHASE VALUE UP TO \$11.95. LIMIT ONE COUPON PER WITH COUPON VISIT, PER CUSTOMER. RESTRICTIONS APPLY. Offer expires 3/31/24 Offer expires 3/31/24 Offer expires 3/31/24 Niceville and Ft. Walton Beach Locations 540 E John Sims Parkway., Niceville • 850-729-2559 290 Yacht Club Dr., Niceville • 850-897-6400 850-376-8380 | bcmusic.cloud jbmedical.org www.bluewaterbaymarina.com ×-----**AIRESERV OVERHEAD DOOR BEACHSIDE SLIDING GLASS DOOR MAINTENANCE, LLC \$100 OFF A NEW WI-FI DOOR** \$50 OFF **OPERATOR AND FREE DECORATIVE \$25 OFF SLIDING DOOR TRACK REPAIR DOOR HARDWARE** WITH ROLLER REPLACEMENT **DUCT CLEANING** WITH EACH DOOR PURCHASE. (NO OTHER DISCOUNTS FREE ESTIMATES APPLY.) FINANCING AS LOW AS \$79/MO. W.A.C. Offer expires 3/31/24 Offer expires 3/31/24 Offer expires 3/31/24 850-678-9522 850-269-3246 BeachsideSlide.com destinoverheaddoor.com 850-98-SLIDE (850-987-5433) www.aireservec.com

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