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BAY Life

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Local Wellness Center, CRYO850, Raises the Bar...Again

High Performance Lab Completes a Wellness Trifecta

BY LORI LEATH SMITH,
PUBLISHER

Your local wellness center, CRYO850, recently added a state-of-the-art Performance Lab to its already robust arsenal of offerings for local athletes, fitness professionals, military personnel, coaches, exercise enthusiasts and those, like me, simply wanting to keep their bodies as healthy and in shape as possible, while managing pain without drugs.

CRYO850 Performance and Recovery came to Destin in 2019 offering drug-free technology for healing and recovery. Though the name has a focus on cold, the center started with a line-up of Hyper-Wellness services including Red Light Therapy, Infrared Sauna, Vibration Plates and Compression Therapy. The concept quickly took off and local trainers, coaches, athletes and health care providers began not only using its services, but also rec-



Lexi Roberts, Niceville High School Senior Track Athlete and Troy University Commit trains on the Reflexion Visual Performance Board.

ommending CRYO850 for adjunct therapy to enhance performance and expedite healing. People of all ages in our community found refuge for the management of pain

and disease, post-surgery recovery, anti-aging, weight loss and skin care.

As the center grew, CRYO850 owner, Amy Milligan, saw a need to add new

services to increase the offering. Pagani Muscle Recovery became popular for muscle relief and the Cocoon Sauna Pod for muscle relaxation, lymphatic drainage, circulation and weight loss. Esthetic services were added including a Cryo Facial and Pagani Deto Fat Freezing, an all-natural method of eliminating subcutaneous fat to cleanse the body of toxins and address stubborn areas such as the stomach, love handles, back, arms, neck and thighs.

Fast forward five years and CRYO850 Esthetics has grown into a stand-alone division. Through partnership with Pensacola-based WILD ICE Botanicals, CRYO850 Esthetics now offers a full line of facials using the organic, cold-kept skin care products to further help customers. "It's

PERFORMANCE LAB

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Gulfarium is Making a Splash!



BY MEGAN TRAINER

You won't want to miss all the excitement at Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park this year! Located on Okaloosa Island, the Gulfarium recently unveiled its new Dolphin Oasis, an exciting new addition which sets a new benchmark for marine life experiences. Further, this announcement was accompanied by news of an upcoming renovation to welcome manatee rehabilitation and the launch of "C.A.R.E. on the Coast," an event championing sea turtle conservation. These developments represent significant strides in the park's ongoing commitment to the preser-

GULFARIUM

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 Community

GULFARIUM

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vation and education of marine life, promising enriching encounters for all visitors.

Dolphin Oasis

Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park was excited to inaugurate its highly anticipated Dolphin Oasis during a momentous ribbon-cutting ceremony on March 8, 2024. The event marked a significant milestone for the renowned marine park and the region's attractions, drawing esteemed guests including local dignitaries, politicians and business leaders.

Spanning 2.2 acres of sandy dunes and palms along the picturesque emerald waters of the Florida Gulf Coast, Dolphin



Oasis reflects Gulfarium's commitment to animal welfare, conservation education and visitor experience. With a \$30 million investment, the expansion comprises three large interconnected habitats and three husbandry habitats, totaling over one million gallons of Gulf saltwater. The immersive, natural-themed

experience embodies the beauty of the Emerald Coast.

The grandstand seating for 480 guests and a 27-foot acrylic split-level viewing area in the exhibit habitat offer unparalleled opportunities to witness the beauty of dolphins up close. Moreover, the habitat is designed to serve as a future nursery for



rine Adventure Park is excited to introduce "C.A.R.E. on the Coast," a new event dedicated to supporting sea turtle conservation through the Gulfarium C.A.R.E. Center. Scheduled for May 4, 2024, at 3:30 p.m., the event promises an immersive experience into sea turtle rescue, rehabilitation and release efforts.

Highlights of "C.A.R.E. on the Coast" include a private dolphin presentation at the NEW Dolphin oasis, live music, an in-depth look at the C.A.R.E. Center and its current patients, food and beverage vendors, conservation-based vendors, silent auctions and raffles. Early registration discounts of 25% are available until May 1 with code EARLYTURTLE, ensuring participation in this celebration of marine life conservation.

Tickets for C.A.R.E. on the Coast are on sale now at Gulfarium.com, with limited availability. Join others on the beautiful Emerald Coast for an evening filled with education, entertainment and a shared commitment to safeguarding our marine ecosystems.

For more information and ticket purchases, visit www.gulfarium.com/careonthecoast.

Follow Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park and Gulfarium C.A.R.E. Center on Facebook and Instagram for event updates and marine conservation news.

dolphin calves, enriching the park's offerings. The new habitat also allows guests to get up close and personal with the dolphins during exclusive encounter opportunities.

Manatees, Coming This Fall

Patrick Berry, CEO of Gulfarium, announced during the ceremony a multi-million-dollar renovation of the original 300,000-gallon dolphin habitat to accommodate manatee rehabilitation patients as part of the Manatee Rescue and Rehabilitation Partnership (MRP). This initiative underscores Gulfarium's dedication to marine life conservation, with plans to welcome manatees in need beginning fall of 2024.

C.A.R.E. ON THE COAST: An Event for a Cause

Saturday, May 4 | 3:30 - 7 p.m. | Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park, Okaloosa Island
Additionally, Gulfarium Ma-

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A Legacy of Service, Dedication and a Remarkable Journey: Meet Hometown Hero Patt Maney

BY PASTOR DOUG STAUFFER

In the tapestry of American public servants, few threads are as colorful and resilient as that of General Judge Representative (GJR) Patt Maney. From military battlegrounds to the judicial bench and into the halls of the Florida State House, Patt Maney's life epitomizes leadership, patriotism and an unyielding commitment to minister.

Maney's military tenure as a Brigadier General in the United States Army honed his leadership skills and ingrained a profound sense of duty in him. His service across various global hotspots, including Panama, Haiti, Bosnia, and Afghanistan, equipped him with unique insights and experiences that would later refine his approach to governance and public service.

Blown up by an Improvised Explosive Device

Patt Maney's military legacy took a pivotal turn following a near-fatal encounter with an IED in Afghanistan. The blast left him with a TBI (traumatic

brain injury), testing his resilience and reshaping his future. Fortunately for Patt, he married his college sweetheart, Caroline, almost 50 years ago, and she became his caregiver. "He became a 56-year-old/6-year-old, and I had to learn how to deal with him and help him," Caroline Maney said. "I was his full-time caregiver, and he needed assistance daily to get him from place to place."

Despite the daunting challenges of his recovery (20 months at Walter Reed Medical Hospital), which included over 80 hyperbaric oxygen therapy dives and multiple surgeries, Maney's spirit remained unbroken. His profound personal struggle and subsequent recovery not only restored his capabilities, but also deepened his empathy and commitment to fellow veterans facing physical and invisible life-changing injuries.

Upon returning to his duties as an Okaloosa County judge, Maney initiated the county's



first Mental Health and Veterans Treatment Court, recognizing veterans' unique challenges in the justice system. This court, the first of its kind in the state, has become a transformative platform for rehabilitation and reflects Maney's dedication to serving those who have served, ensuring they receive the support and understanding needed to reintegrate into society successfully. The Florida statute establishing a Veterans Treatment Court system statewide is named after Maney, as is the street around the Okaloosa County courthouse.

Transition to Civilian Impact: The Legal Chapter

After retiring from active military service, Maney's journey did not decelerate. He shifted his battlefield to focus on the courtroom in Okaloosa County. For nearly three decades, he served as a judge, where his decisions were guided by fairness, empathy, and an ever-present commitment to justice. His legal career allowed him to directly impact his community, addressing local issues and making judicial decisions that resonated well beyond the courtroom walls.

A New Arena: Political Aspirations

In 2020, General Maney transitioned to another realm of public service by entering the political arena. His election to the Florida House of Representatives was not just a change of career but a continuation of his lifelong commitment to service. As a representative, Maney brought with him the discipline of a military leader and the judicious calm of a seasoned judge.

Current Contributions and Legislative Focus

Today, Maney serves with distinction, focusing on key policy areas, including education, employment, public safety, veterans' affairs and mental health. Notably, his work on mental health reform—spearheading significant legislation like the transformative Mental Health and Substance Abuse bill—showcases his dedication to improving the lives of Floridians. This legislation modernizes Florida's Baker and Marchman Acts and was PASSED UNANIMOUSLY. Maney introduced this groundbreaking bill every year during his time in office. These changes mark the first updates in 53 and 30 years, respectively!

Collaborative Efforts and Bipartisan Leadership

Maney is known for his ability to collaborate across the aisle. His efforts in co-sponsoring bills and working within com-

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 Community

Hope Medical Clinic Fills the Healthcare Gap

BY MICHELLE RUSCHMAN

There's no doubt that most people would see our area as abundant, and it is. We live where other people work all year to get to and snowbirds spend entire seasons with us. We have a thriving military community as well as many successful small business owners and developers. At a glance, Okaloosa and Walton counties are doing well.

There are locals, however, who are struggling with necessities such as basic healthcare, from the homeless to entrepreneurs. This is the gap that Tim Roberts, the Founder and Executive Director of the Hope Medical Centers in Destin and

Freeport, has been trying to fill since the Destin clinic opened in 2009. Both clinics are designated free and charitable clinics, in Destin and Freeport. "I moved here from Oregon and was introduced to the need that people who were working jobs 'behind the scenes' – restaurant workers, cleaning staff, etc. – weren't able to afford healthcare, including the insurance that was offered by their jobs. It was just too expensive, especially now as food and housing costs are increasing. People shouldn't have to choose healthcare OR basic needs. As I was considering what I could do to help, Brad Bynum, who was the minister



at the Destin Church of Christ at the time, felt like there was a possibility that they had space that could be used, and they had connections to medical personnel. Once I understood the needs of the community, which are similar to much of our nation, just exacerbated. The two counties we serve, Okaloosa and Walton, are classified as medically underserved areas. What makes our area work are the individuals who do foundational work. They're working in construction, they're working on the docks, they're cleaning, they're cooking, they're doing all these things That make our tourist economy work, and a lot of those jobs do not provide health benefits. And so that's where the Hope Medical Centers in Destin and Freeport can offer some relief to the residents of Okaloosa and Walton counties. When we stay healthy as a community, everyone benefits."

The Destin clinic is based in the Destin Church of Christ while Destiny Worship Center hosts the Freeport clinic. The generosity of these church communities in donating space and resources has provided the opportunity for Hope Medical

Center to use their donations and grants directly toward patient care, offering massive relief from rent and utilities, as the number of patients continues to grow.

The staff at both clinics are made up of Nurse Practitioners, Case Managers, Medical Assistants, Front Office Managers, Social Workers and Counselors. Together, with a team of medical volunteers and students, HMC can provide a more holistic model of healthcare. Patients are not only given a physical assessment through consultations, exams, and lab work but there is also an opportunity to assess the mental health of the patient as well. "We all want to be known and for many of our patients, Hope isn't just where they get their physical needs met, it's a place to be supported in many other areas too. We understand that for a person to build emotional resilience and move toward healing, we not only need to take care of the body, but we also need to look at how they're responding to what's going on in their lives. Not everyone wants or needs that kind of support but we do want to make that available."

Hope Medical Center is a 501(c)(3) non-profit primary care facility that serves those who don't have any type of medical insurance, and also meets the salary cap which is based on how many adults and children make up the household. The clinics are primarily funded by private donations, support from local churches and grants. There is no cost to the patient when they are seen at either clinic but donations are gratefully accepted to help with the longevity of their healthcare, no matter how modest. If the patient has to be directed toward specialty care, in most cases, there are available community partners that offer discounted rates, and every effort is made to build a team for the patients who are part of the practice. This includes partnering with other agencies and hospitals, offering discounts on medication, and talking with a social worker to see what other resources are available.

Many of the patients who come to Hope Medical Center are referred by local hospitals or word-of-mouth and Tim appreciates that the growth has been steady throughout the years, with the Freeport clinic opening in 2016. "If we're going to give free healthcare, why wouldn't we do it the best we can and make it what we would want for ourselves and our families? Our staff and volunteers work together

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Bay Buzz

Annual Fire Truck Pull Raises Over \$13,000 for The Twin Cities Pavilion and Crestview Manor

About 200 service minded individuals on 18, 10-person Fire Truck Pull teams from the

community helped raise more than \$13,000 for Twin Cities Pavilion, Niceville, and the Crestview Manor on Saturday, April 6, as part of the Third Annual Fire Truck Pull. The event was hosted by and took place at 3rd



Planet Brewing where multiple service clubs (Rotary Clubs, Knights of Columbus) and the Okaloosa County Fire-Rescue came together to make the pull a huge community service event. Over 500 people attended, including the pull teams themselves, Military organizations and families. On hand was radio station Coast 93.3 which broadcasted the event. Mid-Bay Rotarian Bob Hoffman and East Niceville Fire District Chief Dave Birch were the leads. The service organizations organized and staffed the overall event and Chief Birch and Deputy Chief Jonathan Kramer and fire fighters from the East Niceville Fire House ran the pull itself. The pull consisted of pulling a 38,000-pound fire truck 50 feet in the least amount of time. First through Third Place trophies and medallions (donated by Bay Area Awards) were awarded. Gift certificates donated by 3rd Planet and the Mid-Bay Rotary Club were given to the top three teams. In addition to the dollars raised at the Fire Truck Pull itself, multiple other organizations generously gave, including a \$1,000 donation from the Okaloosa County Fire and Rescue Association. The bottom line: More than \$13,000 was raised for the Twin Cities Pavilion and Crestview Manor Assisted Living Homes.

Walton County Seeks Community Input on Growth and Development

The Residents and businesses in Walton County can help plan the future of their communities through a new initiative, Plan for Walton 2040, part of an Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR) of the county's Comprehensive Plan, a state-mandated long-range plan that must be updated every seven years. It includes a major emphasis on community outreach and engagement to ensure that residents, businesses, and stakeholders have the chance to share their ideas and opinions. This input will be combined with the technical team's assessment to create a long-range vision plan to guide Walton County's future growth and development.

To conduct the review and planning effort, the Walton County Commission has engaged a team of consultants led by DPZ CoDesign. DPZ may be familiar to long-time residents as they helped author the Trust Plan in the 1980s and also planned and designed the town of Seaside, among others. The consulting team includes experts in transportation, green infrastructure, environmental planning, land economics, zoning analysis and legal review.

On the website, www.PlanForWalton2040.com, residents can learn more about the planning process, sign up for email updates and take an initial survey to share their ideas and preferences for Walton County's future. Or visit the Facebook page to ask questions and engage in the process. The planning team will also host a week-long workshop here in Walton County from May 1-8, 2024. Called a "charrette," it will include public presentations, workshops on specific topics such as environment and transportation, open-studio time where stakeholders can interact with members of the planning team and "pop-up" outreach efforts in different areas of the County. Visit www.PlanForWalton2040.com or email info@PlanForWalton2040.com.

100 Men Who Care Exceeds \$50,000 in Local Donations


100 Men Who Care – Emerald Coast recently exceeded \$50,000 in donations supporting the needs of Okaloosa and Walton County nonprofits with its 2024 first quarter donation and its presentation of more than \$7,800 to One Hopeful Place – a nonprofit meeting the needs of homeless people in our community. Since its founding, 100 Men Who Care has additionally contributed to C.A.L.M. House of Niceville, The Crossroads Center, A Bed 4 Me, Defenders of Freedom, Fresh Start for Children and Families, Healing Hoof Steps, Freedom Life Compass and Children in Crisis.

If you're interested in becoming a member, email Scott at 100mwcec@gmail.com, visit the website; 100mwcec.com or message the group's Facebook Page.


100 Men Who Care – Emerald Coast is a member of 100 Who Care Alliance with more than 700 chapters worldwide. Coining the phrase "The Power of 100," each chapter meets quarterly, gathering its members at a local venue. Each member contributes \$100 quarterly to a giving pool. Local charities and non-profits then have an opportunity to describe their mission, needs and plans.




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Bay Buzz

"A Walk Down Magnolia Lane" Golf Soiree Raises \$78,000 For Embrace Florida Kids

Embrace Florida Kids, a nonprofit faith-based organization, recently held its first-ever "A Walk Down Magnolia Lane" event raising more than \$78,000 to provide homes, healing and hope for vulnerable children across the Florida Panhandle. The inaugural golf-themed soiree celebrated the world's greatest golf tournament and featured a tournament-themed menu, golf-related activities with top-tier prizes for the winners, signature cocktails, outstanding company and music. Embrace Florida Kids' mission is to embrace and nurture vulnerable children and families by providing homes, healing and hope through foster care, family

preservation and residential services. The organization meets kids experiencing neglect, abuse and abandonment where they are and provides them with an individualized support system to help them flourish. Visit www.EmbraceFLKids.org or follow @EmbraceFLKids.

Sharing and Caring Celebrates 35 Years!

Sharing and Caring of Niceville is celebrating its 35th Anniversary this year. Its doors opened on May 8, 1989, and they've been serving the community ever since. Sharing and Caring's mission is to coordinate efforts to meet critical and urgent needs of families living in the Niceville, Valparaiso and Choctaw Beach area. "Sharing and Caring has been helping our neighbors for many years

with food, rent, utilities and other essentials as the need in our area is ongoing," says Jim Rollins, president. "We could not provide this assistance without the outstanding support from the community. We are truly grateful that so many organizations and individuals give food and financial aid, which serves as the foundation for our organization."

Sharing and Caring saw a 26% increase of people needing food in 2023. Rent, utilities and other financial aid provided to families increased by 33%. The need for assistance for many in our community continues to grow.

Sharing and Caring follows the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) guidelines for Okaloosa County in determining who receives as-



sistance. It is based on earning more than the Federal Poverty Level, but not enough to afford the basics to live. ALICE households are forced to make tough choices, such as deciding between childcare and rent. These choices can have long-term consequences for their families.

Additional programs at Sharing and Caring include Tools for

School, holiday meals at both Thanksgiving and Christmas, and the Holiday Toy store and Angel Tree. What began as a food bank has evolved into a multi-faceted giving organization to address the needs of families today. The Sharing and Caring staff is 100% volunteers. You can help through regular donations and/or organizing a food drive. Visit <https://sharing-n-caring.org/nicevillehome.html>.

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/SharingNCaring-Niceville> Instagram: [snc_niceville](https://www.instagram.com/snc_niceville)

For additional information, contact Mari Plante, 1st Vice President or Patti Atcheson, Pantry Co-Director at 850-678-8459 or info@sharing-n-caring.org.

HOPE MEDICAL

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er to make our care the highest level it can be. Cost shouldn't be the difference between critically declining health and taking care of treatable diseases, like hypertension and diabetes."

So, how can you partner with Hope Medical Center to ensure

that our local community continues to stay as healthy as possible? There are several ways. "We're always needing more volunteers, especially medically trained volunteers, especially if you are a specialist. The great thing about volunteering with us is we're grateful for any time you can provide and can schedule patients accordingly. No matter

how much time you can offer, it will make an impact.

The other thing we need is advocates in our community. We need people who see the value in what we do and want to support us in whatever capacity their resources or connections can offer. Partnerships in health services and funding are what help our everyday operations.

Even a donation of \$125 helps us to see one patient for an entire year."

If you would like to learn more or would like to support these efforts, go to hopemedclinic.org, or send a check made payable to Hope Medical Center to

Hope Medical Center
150 Beach Dr.

Destin, FL 32541

Interested in volunteering or want to become a new patient? Email Cora Sternberg the LPN Nurse Operations Director at cora@hopemedclinic.org, or call 850-270-7130. You'll need to provide your first and last name, an email and a phone number.



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 Community

2024 Okaloosa County Mosquito Control

Okaloosa County's Mosquito Control technicians will begin night spraying operations Countywide in mid to late April and early May. Broadcast treatment is conducted in the evening and is required by State Law to be justified. Justification is based on mosquito population surveillance data and other methods. Treatments will begin one hour before sunset.

In our areas...

Mondays: Wynnehaven Beach, Florosa and Valparaiso; Destin: County Line to Airport Rd

Tuesdays: Airport Rd to Destin Bridge, Mary Esther/Fort Walton Beach and Bluewater Bay

Wednesdays: Streets off of Lewis Turner Blvd. to Carmel Dr., Rocky Bayou, Fort Walton Beach from Brooks Bridge to Memorial Pkwy.

Thursdays: Shalimar, Ocean City, Mooney Rd area and Niceville

Okaloosa County Mosquito Control and the Florida Department of Health urge the public to remain diligent in their personal mosquito protection efforts. These should include remembering to "SWAT."

Stay inside with screened doors and windows when mosquitoes are biting (dusk and dawn).

When outside, wear cloth-

ing that covers skin.

Apply mosquito repellent that includes DEET [N, N diethyl-m-toluamide] on your skin when you are outside.

Turn over standing water where mosquitoes lay eggs or rid your outdoor area of standing water in which mosquitoes can lay their eggs.

Remember to apply all mosquito repellants in accordance with the recommended frequency and methods suggested by the manufacturer.

Okaloosa County Mosquito Control recommends the following mosquito-borne illness preventative measures:

- Drain standing water to



The County Mosquito Control Program sprays for mosquitoes county-wide excluding federal and state-owned land. Mosquito spray trucks generally operate starting 1 hours before sunset and/or in the 1 hours after sunrise. Surveillance activities may indicate certain

types of mosquitoes known to be disease vectors that are active during time periods other than noted. If this is the case, the County will respond appropriately.

stop mosquitoes from multiplying: Drain water from garbage cans, house gutters, buckets, pool covers, coolers, children's toys, flower pots or any other containers where sprinkler or rain water has collected.

In addition to spraying, the County has an aggressive larviciding program that includes more than 1,500 sites treated and are checked on a regular basis. Additionally, more than 750 ponds and areas with standing water are treated with gambusia fish which eat mosquito larva and are able to reproduce at a high rate.

Residents are also reminded to have outdoor animals vaccinated against mosquito borne disease. Horses should be vaccinated against Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE). Although West Nile and EEE can occur throughout the year, peak season is August, September and October. Horses must receive two vaccine injections three to six weeks apart and then it is recommended every three to six months. Dog owners are also reminded to have pets treated for heartworms since certain mosquitoes present in Okaloosa County carry the disease as well.

The Mosquito Control Division of Public Works is open Monday through Thursday from 8 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. and may be reached at 651-7394 or 689-5772. Mosquito spray schedule, preventative tips and other related information is available on the County's web site at <http://www.myokaloosa.com/pw/environmental/mosquito-control>.

Additional information about Okaloosa County's Mosquito Control Division can be found at <https://myokaloosa.com/pw/environmental/mosquito-control>.

Discard tires*, drums, bottles, cans, pots and pans, broken appliances and other items that aren't being used.

• Empty and clean birdbaths and pets water bowls at least once or twice a week.

• Protect boats and vehicles from rain with tarps that don't accumulate water.

• Maintain swimming pools in good condition and appropriately chlorinated. Empty plastic swimming pools when not in use.

• Waste tires can be disposed of FREE at the South Okaloosa County Transfer Station and the Baker Landfill. This applies only to local households, not businesses. Tire sizes are limited to passenger car and light truck tires. Quantities limited - 5 tires per household per month.

• Cover skin with clothing or repellent.

Clothing: Wear shoes, socks, and long pants and long-sleeves. This type of protection may be necessary for people who must work in areas where mosquitoes are present.

Repellent: Apply mosquito repellent to bare skin and clothing. Always use repellents according to the label. Repellents with DEET, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus, and IR3535 are effective.

Netting: Use mosquito netting to protect children younger than two months old.

• Cover doors and windows with screens to keep mosquitoes out of your house. Repair broken screening on windows, doors, porches and patios.



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Yellow Fly Season! Are You Ready?

By BERNADETTE CANUT, PUBLIC OUTREACH COORDINATOR AND AMY ANGUIANO, FIELD BIOLOGIST

If Florida mosquitoes weren't bad enough, yellow flies are here to steal their thunder. These devilish insects will begin to arrive around mid-April and normally stick around for six weeks. They are quiet flyers and are hard to hear approaching. Once the female yellow fly decides you are the perfect meal, she will gently land on you, and I am sure we are all very aware of what happens next. The female yellow fly is known as a

fierce biter, and she will begin feeding on your blood by using her saw-like mouthparts to cut through the skin. I know it sounds horrible but just wait... there's more! Once the cut is made, she will begin to lacerate the skin with her two pairs of cutting "blades." This will allow the blood to flow out of the painful bite where she will then begin to "drink it up" with her sponge-like mouthparts. When this process is complete, the victim is left with a VERY painful welt which can take days and, worst case, weeks to go away.



You might be asking yourselves at this point, "Where are the male yellow flies?" Great question! The males are non-biters and keep busy as pollinators and nectar feeders. So surpris-

ingly, male yellow flies help us out with their pollinating abilities.

Yellow flies are most active on cloudy days or in wet, shaded areas near the edge of tree lines and avoid bright sunny, open areas unless

they are extremely hungry. If you cannot avoid going outside, the best way to prevent bites is to stay covered. They are attracted to dark materials, so it is best to dress in bright clothing.

Applying insect repellent containing DEET has had the best results.

Unfortunately, there does not seem to be an effective method to control populations, especially the larvae. Yellow fly kits can be used to reduce their presence in small areas or at least distract them from you but will not eliminate them.

Believe it or not, there is some good news when it comes to yellow flies! They do eventually disappear, and we can then turn our attention back to our dislike of mosquitoes!

PATT MANEY

continued from page 3

mittees highlight his pragmatic approach to governance, focusing on shared goals and mutual respect. His legislative success is due mainly to his ability to engage with peers and constituents, ensuring that his policies have broad support and real-world impact.

Looking Ahead: The Path Forward

As Maney continues his work in the Florida House, his future initiatives promise to enhance further the state's infrastructure, healthcare, and environmental policies. His ongoing commitment to veterans' affairs and public safety remains unwavering, driven by personal experience and professional dedication.

GJR Maney's journey from

the military to the judiciary and now to the Legislature is a powerful testament to a life well-lived in service to others. For those who know him and those he serves, Maney is not just a representative but a steadfast guardian of their welfare and a tireless advocate for their rights.

Too Many Awards to List Each One

Representative Maney was honored as the national 2019 DAV Outstanding Disabled

American Veteran and named Military Order of the Purple Heart National Patriot of the Year in 2010. He was also given the United States Army War College Outstanding Alumni Award (2019) for his community service after military retirement. Rep. Maney was inducted into the Florida Veterans Hall of Fame (2018) and appointed to serve on the Florida Veterans Hall of Fame Council (2019) for making significant contributions

to the State of Florida after military service.

In District 4 and beyond, General Judge Representative Patt Maney's legacy is not merely in the laws he has helped pass but in the lives he has touched—a true embodiment of leadership, service, and unwavering commitment. I count him a true friend, an outstanding patriot, and one worth emulating.

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Bay Buzz Events

Lakeside Songwriters Concerts Underway!

Featuring a lineup of top-notch, popular talent, the Lakeside Songwriters Spring Concert Series, Friday nights at Old Florida Fish House on 30A, continues with Bryan White May 5th!



Bryan is a CMA, ACM, and Grammy award-winning country music artist, producer and songwriter. Throughout his prolific recording career, he's charted 21 singles, of which six were number 1. His hits include "So Much for Pretending," "Sittin' On Go," "I'm Not Supposed to Love You Anymore," "Rebecca Lynn," "Someone Else's Star" and "From This Moment On" which he recorded with Sha-

nia Twain for her "Come On Over" album which is the biggest selling female album of all time. Bryan has sold more than 4.5 million albums. His list of honors include a Grammy, The CMA's 1996 Horizon Award, The Academy of Country Music's Top New Male Vocalist, CMT Awards Artist of the Year, multiple CMA and ACM Male vocalist nominations as

well as Canadian Country Music Awards. In 1998, White was voted one of People magazine's *50 Most Beautiful People." He has toured with many of country music's biggest artists including Alan Jackson, Vince Gill, and Bryan teamed up with LeAnn Rimes in 1998 for their co-headline "Something To Talk About Tour," which was the number 12 top grossing tour of that year. As a songwriter Bryan has written songs for a host of artists. Wynona, LeAnn Rimes, Joe Diffie, Diamond Rio, Sawyer Brown and many others. Bryan's song "God. Gave Me You" was an international smash hit in Asia and has taken him there multiple times. The song came to fame when super stars Alden



Richards and Maine Mendoza made it their theme song in the Philippines on the popular variety show Eat Bulaga.

Purchase VIP (with dinner) and general admission tickets at www.oldffishhouse.com/lakesidesongwritersconcert. Old Florida Fish House is located at 33 Heron's Watch Way in Santa Rosa Beach. Call (850) 534-3045 or visit OldFloridaFishHouse.com.

form everyone's rock 'n roll favorites. The diversified song list of this seasoned six-member Emerald Coast-based band founded by Edwin Watts includes The Beatles, Tom Petty, Eric Clapton, Elvis, the Eagles, Bee Gees, the Ventures, Rolling Stones, Buddy Holly, The Monkees, Roy Orbison, Moody Blues, Young Rascals, Billy Joel, The Outsiders and many others.

May 9: Rumours ATL: A Fleetwood Mac Tribute takes the stage. Since 2014, Rumours ATL has set stages ablaze across the U.S. with their scorching Fleetwood Mac renditions. With meticulous attention to detail and infectious energy, Rumours sells out venues and leaves fans dancing, singing, and

MKAF Showcases a Range of Music at 2024 CIV

The area's first live concert series is being held Thursday evenings at the MKAF Dugas Pavilion in Destin. This year's 29th annual family-friendly series began April 4 and continues to June 6.

May 2: The Mulligans per-

Continued on page 12



May 18th 2024
6:30 to 10:00 PM

12870 US-98, Miramar Beach, FL 32550

Live music



Ike Bartley



Clejan

A charity event for

The Jackson Fund, and Bundle of Hope Adoption and Family Services

@thewhitesandsgala
Tickets: Eventbrite.com



whitesandsgala.com

White Sands Gala May 18 | Event Sponsorship

We are honored to celebrate the paradise we call home while giving back to local charities, the Jackson Fund and Bundle of Hope Adoption & Family Services. Through the White Sands Gala, we hope to unite our community in a summer kickoff, while making a meaningful impact. With the support of Carrot Top Designs, who has generously partnered to host the event in its beautiful showroom as well as many generous friends such as you, we feel we can ignite the spirit of summer and spread benevolence far beyond this inaugural event.

We will be celebrating with our friends and neighbors at The White Sands Gala on Saturday, May 18, 2024. Sponsorship packages offer VIP entry, VIP parking, early



access to the Popup Selfie stations, just for fun Poker game and an open bar. Please consider supporting us as one of the Gala Sponsorship Partners, and save the date for this exciting event.

With Gratitude,
Jennifer Board-Board President White Sands Gala, Beverly McManus-Sponsorship Chair and Deb Johnson-Treasurer. For more information, visit whitesandsgala.com, call (615) 293-5812 or email info@whitesandsgala.com.

Happenings Around the Bay

2024 EVENTS

MAY

01 Dine + Dive: A Fine Art, Food & Wine Event benefiting the Underwater Museum of Art
6 pm | Grand Boulevard at Sandestin | Miramar Beach

02 Concerts in the Village: The Mulligans
7 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation | Destin



03 Greater FWB Chamber First Friday Coffee
7 am | Christian Life Center at First Baptist Church | FWB

Mid Bay Rotary Golf Tourney
11:30 am/1 pm Shotgun Tee Off | Bluewater Bay Golf Course

04 Bugs on the Bayou
9 am | 598 SR-85 | Niceville

Emerald Coast Native Plant Fair
9 am | Paradise Plants and Palms | Niceville

Spring Fling Vendor Fair
9 am | Niceville High School | Niceville

GatorFest
11 am - 3 pm | Fudpucker's | Destin

C.A.R.E. On The Coast
3:30-7 pm | Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park | Okaloosa Island

Sarlacc Scramble Junior Golf Tournament
4 pm | Eglin Air Force Base Golf Course | Niceville

Love Peace & Music Senior Center Prom 2024
6:30 pm | Niceville Senior Center | Niceville

04-05 ArtsQuest Fine Arts Festival
10 am | Grand Boulevard at Sandestin | Miramar Beach

05 Women's Climbing Circle
5 pm | Rock Out Climbing Gym | Destin

06 Chess Night
6 pm | LJ Schooners Restaurant | Niceville

08 Niceville-Valparaiso Chamber Second Wednesday Breakfast
7:15 am | Niceville Community Center | Niceville

09 Freeport Merchants Association Evening Social
6-8 pm | North Bay Mercantile Warehouse | Freeport

Concerts in the Village:
Rumours ATL: A Fleetwood Mac Tribute
7 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation | Destin



11 Tequila & Taco Fest
1-4 pm | Sandestin | Miramar Beach

Spring Soiree benefiting Freedom House
5:30 pm | Niceville Senior Center | Niceville

Victorian Mother's Day Tea
1-3 pm | Heritage Museum of NWF | Val'p

14 Young Professionals Leadership Conference of Northwest Florida
10 am | Niceville Community Center | Niceville

16 Freeport Merchants Breakfast Meeting
8 am | Alaqua | Freeport

Concerts in the Village: Gotta Groove Band
7 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation | Destin



17 12th Annual Destin Rotary Cajun Crawfish Bash
5:30 pm | The Towne Centre at Seascapes | Miramar Beach

Family Movie Night
7:30 pm | Freeport Sports Complex | Freeport

18 White Sands Gala
6:30 pm | Carrot Top Designs Showroom | Miramar Beach

Sinfonia Gulf Coast: Jurassic Park in Concert
7:30 pm | Destin-FWB Convention Center | FWB



19 The Pittman's Magical Variety Show
6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville

20 Glock Sport Shooting Foundation (GSSF) Indoor League
10 am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Niceville

68th Annual Billy Bowlegs Torchlight Parade
7 pm | FWB



23 Concerts in the Village: Mitch Malloy
7 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation | Destin



25 Live Music: Luke & Kaylee
6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville

26 Sunset Shrimp Boil
4 pm | LJ Schooners Restaurant | Niceville
Sinfonia Goes Pop! Concert
7:30 pm | Alys Beach Amphitheater | Alys Beach

30 Concerts in the Village: Haley Reinhart
7 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation | Destin



ONGOING EVENTS

Bingo Night
6 pm | Tues | Bayou Brewing Company | Niceville
Anime & Drawing Basics with Chris McLoone
3:30 pm | Wed | Artful Things | Niceville

Trivia Night
6 pm | Thurs | Strange Colt Brewery | Niceville
Yoga at Turkey Creek
9 am | Sat | Turkey Creek Nature Trail | Niceville

Brunch on the Bayou
9 am | Sun | LJ Schooners Restaurant | Niceville
Freeport Republicans
6 pm | 2nd Tuesday monthly | Hammock Bay Clubhouse | Freeport

Niceville High School Theatre Presents Disney's Newsies!
May 3: 7 pm | May 4: 2 pm & 7 pm | May 10: 7 pm
May 11: 2 pm & 7 pm
Niceville HS Auditorium | Niceville

Emerald Coast Chamber Music Festival!
Daily May 19-June 2
Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville

FARMERS MARKETS

Niceville Community
Saturdays | 9 am - 1 pm
Palm Plaza | Niceville

Hammock Bay
1st & 3rd Sundays | 8 am
Victory Blvd | Freeport

Grand Boulevard
Saturdays | 9 am - 1 pm
Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach



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EVENTS

continued from page 10

discovering new facets of Fleetwood Mac's magic at every performance. Believe in miracles and join the unforgettable experience of Rumours.

May 16: Gotta Groove Band will put a fresh spin on popular cover tunes from the '60s to today. With outstanding vocals and top-shelf musicianship, they feature own arrangements and mixing many popular tunes together to create a fun flow of entertaining energy. You will not want to miss the party this Land O Lakes, Florida, band throws down.

May 23: Mitch Malloy will rock Destin. Former front man of Great White, rocker Mitch Malloy is a studio veteran and

award-winning songwriter. With a career spanning decades, he's navigated the music scene since the '80s, achieving chart success and even turning down a role as Van Halen's lead singer in the '90s.

May 30: Haley Reinhart's timeless voice will transport you. With talent that transcends eras, blending pop, rock, and jazz in her 2019 album, *Lo-Fi Soul*. A finalist on *American Idol*, this Chicago-born singer is influenced by '50s music and enjoys playful lyrics. With a decade-long grind, platinum hits, and diverse collaborations, Reinhart's multifaceted artistry shines, promising a lasting connection with her audience.

June 6: Adam Ezra Group closes out the series. Fusing folk intimacy and rock energy with

soul power and pop charm, the band first emerged from Boston in the early 2000s and quickly garnered widespread acclaim for their bold, insightful songwriting and interactive, euphoric performances.

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. A drawing will be held at each concert to award valuable raffle prizes donated by local businesses.

General admission varies per concert. Prices range from \$20 to \$35 for adults. Discounts offered for active-duty military (must show ID). Purchase tickets

prior to day of the concert and save \$5 per ticket. Children (12 and under) are free. Purchase tickets at MKAF.org/events.

Proceeds fund cultural outreach programs through ArtsReach serving K-12 students, adults and children with special needs, at-risk youth, and through MKAF's Warrior Arts program serving active/veteran military. For more information, call (850) 650-2226.

Pairing and Sharing Wine Dinner May 2



Sip, savor and share a glass among friends at the Second Annual Pairing and Sharing Wine Dinner at Churchill Oaks on Thursday, May 2 at 6 p.m. Proceeds from this event will di-

rectly benefit Caring & Sharing of Walton County. Guests will begin the evening with cocktails, conversation, and passed hors d'oeuvres followed by a four-course dinner from Swiftly Catered paired with Dry Farm Wines. A silent auction will be available throughout the evening for guests to bid on exclusive items. Tickets are \$250 per guest and available at carinandsharingsowal.org.

Mid-Bay Bridge Rotary Club 25th Annual Charity Golf Tournament

Friday, May 3; 11:30 - Sign-In; Putting Contest & Lunch - 1 p.m. - Shotgun Tee Off at Bluewater Bay Golf Course (Bay and Marsh Courses)

Charities include Shelter Box, aBed4Me, Sharing and Caring, Take Stock in Children, Interact Clubs, Students Scholarships, Polio Eradication, Salvation Army, Heritage Museum, Emerald Coast Science Center, CALM House.

For more information contact Mid-Bay Rotarian Tom Whittemore at 850-621-4899, or Mid-Bay's Web Site: <https://www.midbayrotaryclub.org>.



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&
Orleans

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WWW.MATTIEKELLYTICKETS.COM

OR CALL 850-706-5206

RESERVED TICKETS \$43 | \$57 | \$68 | \$79



Legendary Hitmakers Atlanta Rhythm Section & Orleans Coming to Mattie Kelley Arts Center

The legendary hit makers Atlanta Rhythm Section and Orleans team up to bring their melodic magic to Mattie Kelly Arts Center June 29th in Niceville.



The two iconic bands dominated the 70's & 80's charts—Atlanta Rhythm Section with top 10 hits "So Into You," "Imaginary Lover," "Doraville," "I'm Not Gonna Let It Bother Me Tonight," "Champagne Jam," "Angel," "Do It Or Die" and "Spooky"—Orleans with the unforgettable radio hits "Still The One," "Dance With Me" and "Love Takes Time."

Their classic songs still resonate with audiences of all

ages thanks to continued airplay on Classic Rock radio, television, film and streaming services. With multiple gold and platinum albums to their credit, both artists continue to be in demand for live shows, as they have been for more than five decades. Purchase tickets (\$43, \$57, \$68 and \$79) at www.mattiekellytickets.com or call 850-706-5206. All tickets are reserved.

EVENTS

continued from page 12

Disney's Newsies Coming to the NHS Stage!



Niceville High School (NHS) Theatre Department will present Disney's Broadway musical Newsies, opening May 3rd at 7 p.m. and playing again May 4th (2 p.m. and 7 p.m.), May 10th (7 p.m.) and 11th (2 p.m. and 7 p.m.) in the Niceville High School auditorium.

With a score by Alan Menken and Jack Feldman and book by Harvey Firestein, the lavish production is directed and produced by Richard Jackson, with choreography by Nicci Fahle and vocal direction by Michael Walker, and is produced with permission by MTL. The musical, based on the 1992 film and real-life events of the 1899 New York city paperboy strike, Newsies tells the story of a band of newspaper boys and girls who rally to strike against Joseph Pulitzer and other publishing titans to protest the unfair conditions that they work under. VIP tickets are available for \$20 which include early seating 10 minutes before the general public, a small bottle of water and a bag of popcorn. General admission tickets are also available for \$15. All tickets are sold exclusively through www.gofan.co (not .com).

ArtsQuest Fine Arts Festival! May 4-5

In its 36th year, ArtsQuest Fine Arts Festival will be held May 4th-5th! Produced by the Cultural Arts Alliance of Walton County and presented by Grand Boulevard Town Center, ArtsQuest provides an opportunity to view and purchase original art from over 100 artists from throughout the country. ArtsQuest is a juried show that awards \$10,000 in cash prizes. The rain or shine event also features live performances, artist demonstrations, hands-on learning opportunities, student



exhibits, ImagiNation: where kids rule, food, beverages and more! Join us in the Town Center of Grand Boulevard, from 10 a.m. - 7 p.m. on Saturday, May 4th and again on Sunday, May 5th, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. A \$5 donation will be accepted at the entrance gate.

11th Annual Tequila & Taco Fest | May 10-12 | Baytowne Wharf at Sandestin

Get ready to indulge in the ultimate fiesta experience as the 11th Annual Tequila & Taco Fest returns for another unforgettable celebration of Tequila Love! Established as the second longest running Tequila & Taco Fest in the U.S., Tequila & Taco Fest promises an unparalleled culinary adventure coupled with live music, family-friendly activities and thrilling competitions.

The festivities commence with the electrifying **Brews, Blues & BBQ Kick-off Party** on Friday, May 10th, hosted by Sandestin® Beer, Buffalo Chip Bourbon and Black Sheep Tequila (voted the best tequila in the world) at the popular Marina Bar in Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort® at the Baytowne Marina overlooking the Choctawhatchee Bay.

The **Main Event, Taco Extravaganza**, unfolds on Saturday, May 11th, at the iconic Village of Baytowne Wharf, transforming the picturesque locale into a taco lover's paradise. With an impressive lineup on Saturday, May 11th from 1 to 4 p.m., the main event takes center stage. There will be 25 plus taco vendors competing for the esteemed title of "Best Taco in Northwest Florida," a grand prize of \$2,500 for first place, the Best Margarita Competition, 25 tequila tents and an assortment of imported beers from South America. Families can enjoy kid-friendly activities including face painting, live music and even a Chihuahua Beauty Pageant. The exclusive



VIP area at Landshark Bar and Grill will feature the finest tequila, courtesy of Black Sheep Tequila, and exotic tacos that are unavailable in the main festival area. Wrap up the festivities on Sunday, May 12th, with the **Bye Bye Brunch** at the Beach House overlooking the Gulf of Mexico from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Purchase tickets online at www.efestevents.com. A portion

of the proceeds will benefit two worthy causes: Fisher House of the Emerald Coast and the Sandestin® Foundation for Kids.

Victorian Mother's Day Tea at Heritage Museum of NWF May 11

The Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida invites you to a Victorian Mother's Day Tea on May 11, from 1-3 p.m. at 115 Westview Ave., Valparaiso. Guests are encouraged to dress in Victorian attire and enjoy teas, treats and engaging conversations. For more information, contact HMNWF at 850-678-2615. We look forward to welcoming you for this special celebration.

Forward DeFuniak, Inc. to Host 4th Annual Sprint Triathlon

The Sprint Triathlon, sponsored by Forward DeFuniak, Inc., will be held on May 4, 2024, from 6:30 to 11:30 a.m. in DeFuniak Springs. If you'd like to race, see dfstriathlon.com or runsignup.com for registration information. The swim and bike courses are the same as in 2023. The route for the 5K has been changed slightly. Registration will be capped at 200 this year.

T Proceeds in 2023 allowed small grants to be made to 10 local nonprofit organizations. Come as a spectator (bring a lawn chair and stay at a local bed and breakfast or hotel) and be amazed, not only with the race but with the surroundings. For more information, call (850) 830-7663. DeFuniak Springs is a small historic town, but great things are accomplished here!

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Condo Insurance and Claims



By JULIE A. MARTIN

When you have a property insurance claim in a single-family home, the claims process can be both frustrating and intimidating, and can be a long involved process. In a condo, it can be even more challenging, because the association is responsible for the exterior walls and the roof. So, what happens when the claim involves damage to the interior premises as a result of property that the association is responsible for?

Hypothetical situation: Due to a roof leak that was not

discovered, the ceiling collapses in a condo unit, with the ceiling dry wall pieces landing on furniture in the living room and dining room. In addition to the dry-wall damage to the ceiling, there is now mold in the unit that spreads on whatever it lands on as well as the other areas of the home.

In this situation, up until several years ago, insureds would put the claim in with their carrier and then wait for the carrier to subrogate against the condo association. Now however, carriers opt to take care of the parts



of the claim that the unit owner is responsible for, i.e. contents, additional living expenses and mold.

For the areas that the association is responsible for, the carrier will deny those parts of the claim that the unit HO6 coverage does not pertain to. In a condo, you own from the drywall in, and anything permanently attached to the inside of the unit are things the association is NOT going to pay for such as the flooring, cabinets, counters, bathroom fixtures and interior doors.

COA-Condo Association is responsible for the exterior walls and the roof. If there is a claim arising from property your COA is responsible for, your best bet is to get a copy of the Master Property policy for your building, along with a copy of their

certificate of insurance, as well as a copy of your declarations page.

If you end up in the situation above, please let your agent know right away, and have your policy jacket and your declarations page handy. Protect against further loss by moving undamaged items away from loss site, and cooperate with the carrier inspection. If a carrier representative asks you questions you do not know the answers to, do NOT guess. Let them know you do not know the answer and will find out and let them know when you can.

Any questions you have about your coverage and how the coverage will respond in the event of a claim, please direct those questions to your insurance agent, and make sure you let them know any definitions you do not understand.

Claim time is the wrong time to not understand your insurance policy or what coverage you have, and whether it meets your needs. Having the conversation now will give you peace of mind that your insurance coverage meets your needs and will respond when you need it.

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Heritage Museum of NWF

Victorian Mother's Day Tea

Saturday, May 11, 2024
1:00 PM- 3:00 PM
\$25 or \$20 for Members
Wear your Finest Victorian outfit.
Call 850-678-2615 to register and pay.
115 Westview Ave. Valparaiso FL.
32580/Heritage-Museum.org



Insights for Investors: Financial News for the First Quarter

BY MAURICE STOUSE, FINANCIAL ADVISOR AND BRANCH MANAGER

The first quarter of 2024 is already behind us, and the markets have had some interesting results. The S&P 500 as of this writing was up over 10%; the Dow is up over 5%. Bonds, based upon the bellwether 10-year U.S. Treasury have declined in price (which means they increased in yield) by about 2.5%. The stock market is made up of 11 sectors and every sector was positive except for real estate (which is mainly real estate investment trusts and real estate firms). Communication Services was the leader, with an almost 16% return (examples of

stocks in that sector are Google, Facebook, Netflix, Disney, the phone companies such as AT&T, Verizon and T Mobile among others). Technology, Industrials, Energy and Financials all had double digit returns for the quarter as well.

Oil prices were up over 13% and gold was up over 5%. The U.S. dollar, to the amazement of many was up over 2% after having a similar return for all of 2023. Japan was the leading international market with a return of over 11% year to date. A stronger dollar tends to work against international equities, but such was not the case for many international markets, Japan in particular.

Mortgage rates averaged close to 7% which is interesting because despite the perception that mortgage rates are quite high, that is less than the average rate for the past 50 years. Rates did reach an all-time low in the early 2020s. So, many homebuyers understandably have that concern. There has been so much liquidity (money available) for the past few years that it increased demand and thus prices substantially. The demand for housing, particularly first-time homebuyers continue to grow, and an outstanding question is if the current rate of construction is meeting the demand.

What about interest rates, particularly where the Federal Reserve is concerned? The Fed has held its short term (overnight rate) to 5.25-5.50% although pointed out in its March meeting that they foresee up to three rate cuts in 2024. Short term rates (one year or less CDs, money market mutual funds) continue to pay approximately 5%. By contrast the 10-year US Treasury pays approximately 4.25%. The longest-term U.S. Treasury pays approximately the same. The question on many minds is how long will the low to no risk rate be in favor? Enter the Federal Reserve dot plot, or where rates are expected to be and by when. Currently the dot plot puts the overnight rate at 4.5 to 4.75% by year end. It is much harder to ascertain what long term rates will do so watching the 10-year US Treasury



(which many banks use to price mortgages and other loans) makes most sense to us. There is a lot in the financial media regarding the longer-term dot plot, perhaps as low as 3.5% by 2025 as noted on Bloomberg Wall Street Week this past week.

When the market has a strong return, particularly over an increasing period, many people begin to think about valuations. In other words, is the market getting more expensive relative to earnings. That seems to be the case as the price of stocks to earnings is near an all-time high. Earnings have been growing year over with the S&P averaging close to 12%. Its 10-year average earnings growth rate has been about 8.4%. Stocks typically follow earnings. What might be fueling that? There are several things: Innovations such as artificial intelligence (AI), the growth in energy demand, productivity gains, efficiency gains, a strong dollar and finally, the rate of inflation continued to decrease.

A few key points for investors bear repeating: Timing the market is next to impossible. They don't ring a bell at the top and they don't ring a bell at the bottom. FOMO, or fear of missing out can consume anyone but it is not an emotion that serves investors. Know what you own, why you own it, where you own it and for how long do you need or want to own it. Asset allocation should be based upon the three keys of investment objection, risk tolerance and time frame.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average (DJIA), commonly known as "The Dow," is an

index representing 30 stocks of companies maintained and reviewed by the editors of the Wall Street Journal. The S&P 500 is an unmanaged index of 500 widely held stocks that is generally considered representative of the U.S. stock market. U.S. government bonds and treasury bills are guaranteed by the U.S. government and, if held to maturity, offer a fixed rate of return and guaranteed principal value. U.S. government bonds are issued and guaranteed as to the timely payment of principal and interest by the federal government. Investing in oil

involves special risks, including the potential adverse effects of state and federal regulation and may not be suitable for all investors. International investing involves special risks, including currency fluctuations, differing financial accounting standards, and possible political and economic volatility.

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

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Phased Improvements Suggested For Fairgrounds

BY CAROLYN NEWCOMER KETCHEL

Background

The Okaloosa County Fairgrounds, located behind the Courthouse on Lewis Turner Boulevard, was originally owned and operated the City of Fort Walton Beach. In 2022, The Fort Walton Beach City Council declared it as surplus. Realizing that the land could be sold for real estate development, the Okaloosa Board of County Commissioners (BCC) entered into negotiations to purchase the valuable parcel of public land. The BCC realized that, in addition to annual events such as gun shows, the Okaloosa Fair, Antique shows and Fish Fries for All Sports, to name a few, the county will have a continuing need for a staging area when natural disasters, such as hurricanes, occur. This space would continue to be available to provide for power trucks and to house the National Guard. As a result of these discussions with the city, Okaloosa County agreed to purchase the Fairgrounds “as is” for \$4.1 million with the understanding that the county would have greater resources to update and modernize the facilities, es-

pecially with access to Tourist Development dollars available through the bed tax on short-term rentals. The idea is to keep as much green space as possible for such a need.

Improvements

After the purchase of the property, there seemed to be broad consensus by the Okaloosa County BCC that the existing dilapidated structures need to be improved. A citizen committee was appointed, with one appointment by each commissioner, with the goal to develop specific recommendations for improvements to the Fairgrounds. Note: All improvements will be paid for from Tourism Development dollars. No money will be used from Ad Valorem tax dollars. The BCC will have the final vote on any improvements.

Committee Report

The Citizen Committee began meeting in September 2023, with an initial tour of the facilities. Deficiencies were noted. Event history was considered as well as possible future events after completion of much-needed improvements. I want to thank the Citizens Committee, who



served without compensation, for their many selfless hours of work on this project.

The suggested plan to improve the current site would be implemented in phases. Detailed below are the specific improvements suggested by the Citizen Committee. Although there is a general consensus as to the vast majority of the suggested improvements, I have outlined below in red several significant additions. Because this is such an important capital project for the county that would affect all residents, I need your input specifically as to the major additions outlined in **bold**.

General Improvements Suggested:

- Demolish the oldest and most dilapidated buildings;
- Remove trash and debris throughout the site and cleanup overgrown vegetation;
- Remove the storage of unused and unnecessary equipment from the site;
- Relocate remaining storage items to outer remote buildings;
- Develop sections of **paved** and grass parking over time; and
- Work to ensure electricity and storm water issues are up to date and working.

Existing Building Space

- Ensure all roofs are weather tight with no leaks;
- Construct a new, attractive,

uniform facade on outer existing buildings;

- Add new entrances at strategic points and demo existing entrances;
- Improve existing bathrooms;
- Add an 8-ft. covered walkway along the front of the existing buildings;
- Address parking needs and improve landscaping;
- Redo the 60-ft. area between Bldg. B and Bldg. C and the space between Bldg. D and Bldg. H by constructing a new addition that will include caterer’s kitchen and bathroom that could serve both buildings;
- Explore improving the internal lighting, wall and floor finishing, painting and similar cosmetic improvements for each space;
- Redevelop the functional event spaces with HVAC, insulation, floors, lighting and wall finishes; and
- Allow for longer corridor space into a more finished homogenous space capable of being used as one space or divided for each of the Building B, C, D and H.

Open Space Area Behind Buildings

- Eliminate safety holes in the open space area and remove antiquated infrastructure;
- Relocate current RV spaces elsewhere on site, perhaps to the periphery, and build new side with correct infrastructure, adjusting any necessary Eglin agreements;
- Build oversized bathroom for the field/outside use events;
- Reconstruct the area with new underground infrastructure that can be utilized when needed and hidden when not needed; and
- Add landscaping and turf to improve the overall appearance.

New Large Multi-Purpose Building

- **Construct a new minimum 30,000-sq.-ft. building on the east side of the existing building with approximately 10,000-sq.-ft of additional support space, e.g. bathrooms, kitchen, storage, mechanical, etc.;**
- **Build other new or replacement sections and**



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Okaloosa Maintains StormReady Designation from National Weather Service

The National Weather Service (NWS) has recently renewed Okaloosa County's StormReady status, a designation that acknowledges the county's emergency preparedness through robust communications infrastructure and an increased level of severe weather awareness. The county has maintained this designation since 2002. "I am extremely proud that Okaloosa County remains at the highest level of storm readiness," said Okaloosa County Board Chairman Paul Mixon. "While we cannot prevent natural disasters, it is important for all of us to be prepared so that we can react

appropriately before, during and after a storm."

StormReady status is effective for four years and is a success that is approved by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), NWS and the local StormReady Advisory Board. Applicants must demonstrate efficiency in Emergency Operations Planning, Coordination and Partnership Development and Community Preparedness.

To be officially StormReady, a community must:

- Establish a 24-hour warning point and emergency operations center.

• Have more than one way to receive severe weather warnings and forecasts and to alert the public.

• Create a system that monitors weather conditions locally.

• Promote the importance of public readiness through community seminars.

• Develop a formal hazardous weather plan, which includes training severe weather spotters and holding emergency exercises.

"Meeting the metrics defined by the National Weather Service for this recognition is a reflection on the hard work of the County's Emergency Management



team," said Okaloosa County Director of Public Safety Patrick Maddox. "The fact that we pay attention and have plans and policies in place, ensures that we are as prepared as possible in the event of a disaster."

Learn more about NWS's StormReady program at <https://www.weather.gov/stormready/>.

Sign up for local weather alerts at <https://alertokaloosa.com/>.

FAIRGROUNDS

continued from previous page

parking over time as demand is determined and funding permits, as shown in the conventional plan;

- Ensure the new building is modern and multi-purpose with technology, high

ceilings, sprinklers, etc. with the ability to function alone or together with the other venue spaces as part of a bigger event;

- Build other wing in Phase V over time.

• Estimates of cost for these improvements are north of \$10 million dollars.

Commission Decision:

The BCC approved Phase I of a comprehensive plan in March to refurbish the existing buildings with a new façade, kitchens and bathrooms. Other phases will be addressed as needed. The Fairgrounds are a wonderful county asset that will serve the community well for

years to come: Emergency staging area when needed by power trucks and National Guard; Nice event venue—an alternative to expensive venues such as the Destin-FWB Conference Center on Okaloosa Island.

It is an honor and privilege to serve as your commissioner.

Carolyn Ketchel is Okaloosa County Commissioner, District 2.

She can be reached at CKetchel@myokaloosa.com or 850-651-7105.



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 Community

Lionfish Festival: A Dive into Conservation Efforts

BY CALI HLAVAC,
TO DO IN DESTIN

The Emerald Coast is not just a picturesque backdrop for tourists; it is also a battleground against an invasive species - the lionfish. On May 18-19, 2024, the Lionfish Festival returns to Fort Walton Beach, rallying the

community in an ongoing effort to combat this threat to the local marine ecosystem.

First, what is a lionfish? Lionfish, with their striking red and white stripes, are not native to the waters of northwest Florida. Originating from the Indo-Pacific region, they were introduced

to the Atlantic Ocean and have since become a formidable invasive species. Their rapid reproduction rate and lack of natural predators have led to a surge in population, wreaking havoc on native fish populations and coral reefs.

The Lionfish Festival is more

than just a celebration; it's a call to action. It aims to raise awareness about the detrimental effects of lionfish on the marine environment and promote sustainable solutions. One such solution is lionfish removal through fishing derbies and dives, which are central to the festival's activities.



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

In 2023, 144 divers in Destin and Fort Walton Beach captured over 24,000 lionfish during the Emerald Coast Open tournament, demonstrating the community's commitment to conservation efforts. This year's pre-tournament is already underway lasting through May 16, and sets the stage for two days of conservation-focused activities—the main tournament May 17-18. Divers have the opportunity to compete for prize money totaling nearly \$100,000 in categories like most lionfish caught and largest and smallest lionfish.

Participants in the Lionfish Festival can expect a diverse range of events, including lionfish hunting tournaments, educational seminars, cooking demonstrations featuring lionfish cuisine, and live music. Local marine biologists and conservationists will lead discussions on the ecological impact of lionfish and strategies for their management. Emerald Coast Open Restaurant Week offers the public unique lionfish dishes prepared by chefs at local restaurants. Each evening, a local restaurant serves a unique lionfish dish on their menu. The fish caught pre-tournament are provided to the participating restaurants to serve. Each dish is also judged and the winning chef crowned at the end of the week.

Moreover, the festival provides an opportunity for the community to come together and

Continued on next page

Peaceful Outdoor Sanctuaries



BY STACY SARIKANON,
STUNNING SPACES—DECORATING
DEN INTERIORS

As our patios and porches are becoming more sophisticated and refined, today's homeowners are driven to find peaceful sanctuaries as a prescription for their stressful lives.

Creating your perfect out-

door space will be the result of the successful combination of many design elements – landscaping, stonework, carpentry, furnishings, lighting and accessories. Careful pre-planning will be the key to the creation of your personal sanctuary, so begin with creating your personal “wish list.” You might be amazed at how long this list might become!

Think about incorporating your year-round needs. Do you frequently entertain outdoors? Do you spend time outdoors in the evenings simply relaxing? Is an outdoor grilling season a year-round requirement for you? Do you enjoy planning simple family meals outdoors?

Once you've accessed your needs, then planning your outdoor space becomes much easier. Think about incorporating these simple ideas:

1. Comfortable Furni-



ture! This should be most important element in your design. Today's outdoor furnishings have been manufactured to withstand all that Mother Nature can bestow. The age of folding, vinyl strapped furniture is definitely now obsolete. Many furniture pieces of today look identical to indoor furniture, but have been constructed and

designed to stand up to all the outdoor elements.

2. Fabulous Fabrics! Outdoor fabrics come in an array of colors, design-oriented prints, and are durable. They feature gorgeous fabrics manufactured to resist fading from ultraviolet rays, mildewing from damp conditions, and odor absorption. It is just the ultimate outdoor up-

holstery or drapery fabric that will be used and enjoyed by your family for years. And of course, these outdoor fabrics are offered at Stunning Spaces - Decorating Den Interiors.

3. Let there be Light!

Be sure to consider incorporating various types of lighting in your outdoor space design, just as you would inside your home. Landscape lighting, overhead lighting, ceiling fans, sconces and decorative side table lighting are all GREAT ideas. Develop a creative lighting plan to help you create a space with increased ambiance and functionality.

Remember to create a space that is perfect for you and your needs. This is a space where memories will be made. So, please consider it an important investment—both financially and emotionally.

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LIONFISH
continued from previous page

support local businesses involved in sustainable fishing practices. By promoting the consumption of lionfish as a delicacy, the festival encourages a market-driven approach to control their population while providing economic

opportunities for fishermen.

As visitors immerse themselves in the festivities, they also contribute to a larger conservation effort. Proceeds from the festival support ongoing research and conservation initiatives aimed at mitigating the impact of lionfish on the delicate balance of marine ecosystems.

The Lionfish Festival is more than just an event; it's a testament to the power of community-driven conservation. By joining forces to combat the invasive lionfish, residents and visitors alike are making a tangible difference in preserving the natural beauty of the Emerald Coast for generations to come.

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Fudpucker's GatorFest 2024

Saturday May 4th | 11 a.m. - 3 p.m.

GatorFest 2024

Fudpucker's Beachside Bar & Grill is set to host GatorFest

2024, a spectacular event promising an exhilarating blend of entertainment, education, and

gastronomic delights. Scheduled for May 4th, 2024, this four-hour extravaganza at Des-

tin's most family-friendly venue aims to bring together individuals of all ages for an unforgettable experience dedicated to one of nature's most awe-inspiring creatures — the alligator. Festivities go from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.



GatorFest Activities

GatorFest 2024 is more than just an event; it's a journey into the heart of Florida's beloved wildlife culture, set against the backdrop of Fudpucker's renowned hospitality. From thrilling Gator Shows that offer an up-close look at these magnificent reptiles to a Gator Tail Cook Off Competition that showcases culinary creativity, the festival is a testament to the diverse attractions that make Fudpucker's a must-visit destination.

The dedicated Kid's Zone is a paradise for young adventurers. Here, children can engage in a variety of activities, from face painting and airbrush art to Gator-themed games, fostering an environment of fun and creativity. Meanwhile, adults can savor Cocktail Tastings, indulge in Hot Sauce Tasting, and enjoy music, ensuring there's something for everyone.

GatorFest Charity Partnership

GatorFest is not just about fun and games. It stands as a beacon of community involvement and environmental conservation. Partnering with Alaqua Animal Refuge, the festival channels its energy into raising awareness and funds for the refuge's mission to rescue and care for animals in need. This collaboration highlights the event's commitment to making a positive impact, offering attendees a chance to contribute to a noble cause while enjoying the festivities.

Fudpucker's Beachside Bar & Grill

Fudpucker's itself is a destination that embodies the spirit of family-friendly fun, with its title of "Best Family-Friendly Restaurant" earned through a commitment to providing memorable dining experiences. Gator Beach, dubbed The World's Greatest Alligator Park, allows

visitors to interact with these fascinating creatures, offering an educational experience that leaves lasting memories.

The anticipation for GatorFest 2024 reflects a broader community excitement, drawing visitors from across the United States. Known for hosting vibrant events like Teen Night, Kid's Day, the Noon Year's Eve Balloon Drop, Kick-Off Parties for Emerald Coast Volleyball, Jeepalooza, and Jazz Dinner Shows, Fudpucker's continues to be a beacon for family entertainment, making it the perfect venue for GatorFest.

Food, Fun & Gators

GatorFest 2024 promises a day of exhilarating entertainment, delicious food, and a shared commitment to wildlife conservation. By integrating fun with educational and charitable endeavors, the festival not only offers a unique experience but also reinforces the importance of community and environmental stewardship. Mark your calendars and join the celebration at Fudpucker's, where the wild is welcomed, and memories are made.

So, stop by and have some fun at Fud's GatorFest – see you later, alligator!

Visit Fudpucker's in Destin at 20001 Emerald Coast Parkway. Visit on the web at www.FudsGatorFest.com or www.Fudpucker.com.



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-a-kind 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 elixir 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.

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JoJo's Coffee and Goodness

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scones: cranberry orange, chocolate caramel and cheddar thyme; strawberry coffee cake; cranberry orange muffins; red velvet cookies; brownies with espresso ganache or caramelitas. Try a breakfast special with a piece of quiche or kolache-hashbrown casserole. Breakfast burritos are rolled and ready daily! Choose from andouille, bacon, chorizo or veggie. Or tantalize your taste buds with a made-to-order breakfast sandwich on croissants or bagel with two eggs and cheese and then choose if you want to add Jojo's homemade smoked jalapeño beef bologna, bacon, house smoked barbecue or ham. Cinnamon rolls and kolaches 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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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 DoorDash.

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.

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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 magnifi-

cent 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:

May 12: Mothers Day Brunch, 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

May 21: The Traveling Painter, 5:30 p.m.

May 26: Sunset Shrimp Boil Sunday 4-7 p.m.; Live Music Jared Herzog

Live entertainment each weekend. See ad for lineup.

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

Wednesdays: Sailboat Race 6 p.m.

Thursdays: Throwdown SUP Race 6 p.m.; Karaoke/Open Mic 6-10 p.m.

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

Oyster bar hours: Mon-Thurs 3-10 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.

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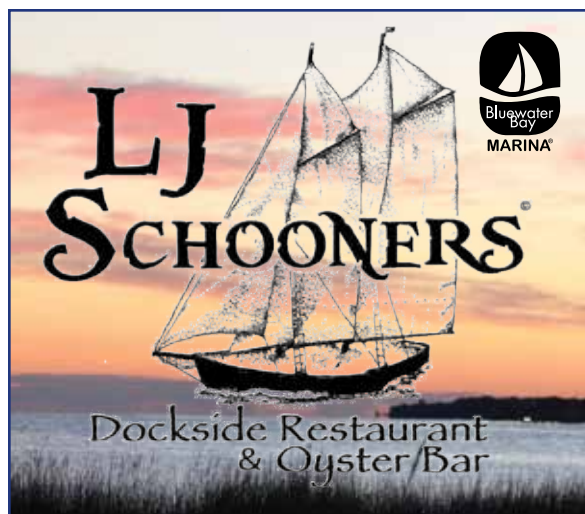
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Sunset Shrimp Boil

4-7PM: May 26, June 30, July 28,
Aug. 25, Sept. 29, Oct. 27

May 26 Live Music: Jared Herzog

Shrimp, Sausage, Corn on the Cob,
Potatoes, Bread (Market price per plate)
Featuring Shrimp from Byrd's Seafood Market,
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Wednesday Sailboat Races 6pm
Thursday Karaoke/Open Mic 6-10pm
Thursday Thrown Down SUP Race 6pm
Sunday Brunch 9am-1pm



More Fun

- May 3: Ronny Dean Garrett 6-10pm
- May 4: The Remedy 6-10pm
- May 6: Chess Night 6pm
- May 10: Radio Star 6-10pm
- May 11: Catalyst 6-10pm
- May 12: Mothers Day Brunch, 9am-1pm
- May 17: David Gautreau, 6-10pm
- May 18: Call the Law, 6-10pm
- May 21: The Traveling Painter, 5:30pm
- May 24: Parker & Ivoree Willingham, 6-10pm
- May 25: Below Alabama, 6-10pm
- May 26: Jared Herzog, 4-8pm
- May 27: Brooke and Nathan Duo 4-8pm
- May 31: Alston Weeks 6-10pm

Oyster Bar Hours: Mon.-Thurs. 3pm-10pm, Fri.-Sat. 11am to midnight, Sun. 9am to 9pm

Restaurant Hours: Mon.-Tues. Closed, Weds.-Sat. 11am to 9pm, Sun. 9am to 9pm, Sunday Brunch 9am to 1pm



Another Year of Favor: Celebrating the 67th Annual Blessing of the Fleet

BY LORI LEATH SMITH

We all have reasons why we live here. But, I believe, many are drawn here, because our city is so blessed...After all, Destin IS known as the “World’s Luckiest Fishing Village.”

Not only a beach destination, our town was founded on fishing! But despite the legendary stories of big catches and heroic fishing, there are also horrendous ones where hope was dim and times were tough. And through it all, we prevail and are still the World’s Luckiest Fishing Village, with the largest fishing fleet in North America.

As I’ve said before, could it be that because we bless our city, its citizens, our Harbor, businesses, residents, youth and many more each year, that it results in favor for our little paradise? You can ask captains in the fishing fleet and many will tell you their success rides on prayer. Fisherman, locals and area professionals alike will tell you they believe their success rides on blessings.

That brings us to Destin’s Week of Blessings held each year and is what makes continuing the yearly “blessing of the fleet” tradition so important. Despite having grown and prospered from a



fleet of four to five boats more than half a century ago into more than 125 charter-fishing boats today, this one event begun by Destin’s Immanuel Anglican Church will always make it feel like Old Destin, and our lucky fishing village it is best known for.

To further expand the “blessings,” over twenty years ago, several pastors got together to form the ‘Church of Destin’ as a symbol of unity, crossing denomina-

tional barriers and also igniting Destin’s Week of Blessings. As the Blessing of the Fleet grew, so did the hundreds of people, families and businesses in the area who also wanted to be blessed. And before you knew it, the vision expanded into a full “Week of Blessings” with faith-focused family-oriented activities to bless and support the Destin community. That’s how the Blessing of the Marketplace was born, en-



abling the “blessing” to impact further to other locals, professionals and visitors, too.

Hundreds of business owners, first responders, industry leaders and representatives gather during the Blessing of the Marketplace at Destin United Methodist Church. Local pastors from various churches representing the collective “Church of Destin” pray over professionals in our community.

Destin’s 67th Annual Blessing of the Fleet will be held on Ascension Day, Thursday, May 9th, at the docks behind Brotula’s Seafood House and Steamer Restaurant on the Destin Harbor. The event begins at 4 p.m. with a Captains’ Worship and Prayer Service. The public is encouraged to attend. Following the service, around 5:15 p.m., local clergy will process to the dock to begin blessing those vessels which have pre-registered followed by Brotula’s Fish Feast for all. (Donations requested.) All commercial fishing, safety and recreational vessels that make their living on the sea are invited to participate. Several local area pastors will gather at the dock and the bless the boats one by one as they proceed in a line down the harbor—praying for safe passage and bountiful catches for the 2024 season.

In 2023, more than 150 fishing boats and vessels were blessed! So, a lot has changed since Destin was a quaint fishing village. And, that’s what makes

continuing this unique tradition so special. It serves to remind us of the significant role that fishermen have played and continue to play in our beloved Destin community. As always, Thursday’s Blessing of the Fleet is hosted by Immanuel Anglican Church. Immanuel is excited to team with other area churches who share the vision of preserving Destin’s character as a faith-and-family-oriented community.

To Pre-Register Your Vessel: If you and your vessel make your living on the sea and would like to receive a blessing, please register your watercraft by emailing immanuel@iacdestin.org, or by calling the church at 850-837-6324 with your vessel’s name, captain’s name, mailing address, email address and phone number.

For more information on the Blessing of the Fleet, visit iacdestin.org/special-events/blessing-of-the-fleet, contact Immanuel Anglican Church at immanuel@iacdestin.org or 850-837-6324. Immanuel Anglican Church is located at 250 Indian Bayou Trail in Destin, just north of the Nancy Weidenhamer Dog Park in Destin.

Never doubt that your prayers on behalf of our coveted city are to no avail. We have and continue to witness the blessing of favor in our small paradise. Could it be that Destin has been dubbed the “World’s Luckiest Fishing Village” because, simply, it is SO “blessed?”



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Will Billy Bowlegs Gain A Foothold Along Our Sands?

68th Annual Billy Bowlegs Festival | May 16-20

BY LORI LEATH SMITH

Ahoy, maties! Avast, ye! It's time to open your treasure chest, get your eyepatch on, take out your sword and get your pirate gear ready for 2024's 68th Annual Billy Bowlegs Pirate Festival—May 16-20. Any landlubber knows Pirate Captain Billy Bowlegs has been setting his sights on our sandy white shores since the 1950s!

This year's new "Captain Billy," Bill Kilpatrick, takes the helm as Captain Billy Bowlegs LXVIII and is joined by the 68th Queen of Bowlegs Sharen Burt, First Mate and Mistress Brad and Krista Bowman along with their lackeys Christina Kilpatrick and John Burt and the Captain's Honor Guard krewe.

The 2024 festival kicks off with a Pre-Invasion on Thursday evening, May 16th, around 4:30 p.m., just off Main St. downtown, where Captain Billy Bowlegs and his Krewe will arrive aboard their pirate ship parade float, the Blackhawk, to greet children, take photos and hand out treasure.

The Skirmish will be held on Friday evening, May 17th, where Captain Billy and his Krewe of Bowlegs will arrive by water at the Fort Walton Beach Landing to scout the city prior to their invasion on Saturday. The mayor of Fort Walton Beach and his forces are prepared and have threatened to arrest Captain Billy if he tries to land, resulting in a skirmish. The city of Fort Walton Beach will also host its Concert in the Park (6 p.m.), Arts & Crafts Fest (3 p.m.) and a Fireworks show (8 p.m.) over Santa Rosa sound.

On Saturday afternoon, May 18th, Captain Billy will return with the entire Krewe of Bowlegs and his allies from visiting Krewes across the country, after his defeat the night prior. The mayor will try everything to stop him from landing. Will he be a match for the overwhelming presence of Captain Billy's pirates? Will the Captain prevail in taking over our city? The pirates and wenches will be full of merriment and mischief as they hand out treasures (3:30- 4 p.m.). Festivities at the Landing throughout the day include live music (noon-6 p.m.), an

arts and crafts festival (10 a.m.), along with food, beverages and other vendor booths.

Finally, on Monday night, May 20th, the Torchlight Parade will start at 7 p.m. on Eglin Pkwy. from First Street to Hughes Avenue to conclude the festival. The parade will be anchored by Captain Billy, the entire Krewe of Bowlegs and more than 100 floats and participants

marching down the street to celebrate Captain Billy Bowlegs' 68th annual capture of Fort Walton Beach. And, they'll be sharing their loot with those cheering them on!

Any local who has been around long enough looks forward to the famed treasure hunt. There are fewer than 100, limited-edition, two-inch treasure coins, each having an individually engraved serial number. Some coins are being hidden with published clues, some are being given away on the radio and on social media, and some by Captain Billy personally at public appearances. The winning coin will be chosen by a live drawing on May 20th at the Fort Walton Landing for a Grand Prize.

In between the Skirmish and Torchlight Parade, there's all



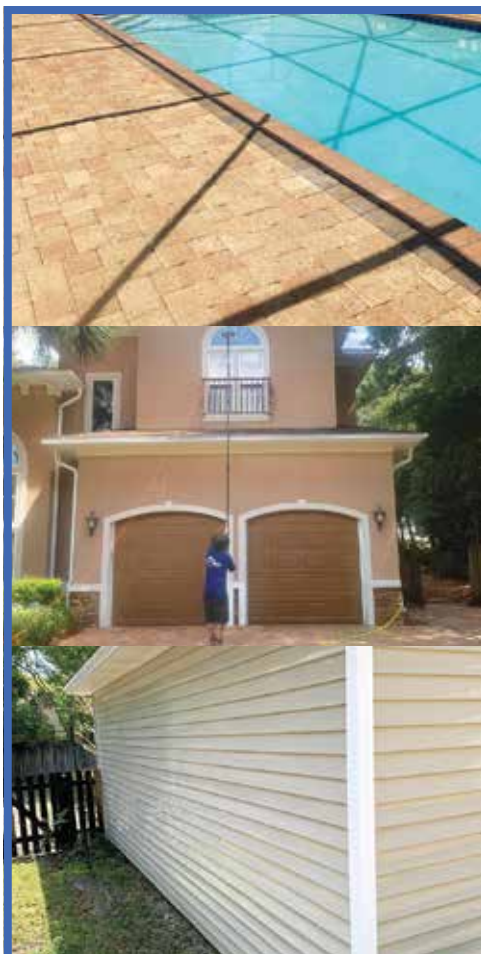
sorts of grub and grog, from ice cream to seafood. There will be live music and entertainment, fireworks a plenty and vendors showcasing lots of pirate booty and the like. For scallywags young and old, there's arts and crafts booths, food, refreshments and bouncy houses. Our high seas are filled with hundreds of boats lining the mile-long sandbar off Fort Walton Beach Landing, where a melting pot of people will make their way to pillage, plunder and drink rum.

Drawing both locals and visitors, the festival is produced in partnership with the William Augustus Bowles Foundation, the Krewe of Bowlegs, the City of Fort Walton Beach, the Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce and local businesses and community organizations.

FWB Life implores you to

boldly stand guard to defend our piece of paradise at this year's festival. Want to play a part? For more information, visit billybowlegsfestival.com. Captain Billy 68 is looking for a

BIG 2024 turnout! So, join him and his Krewe for a swashbuckling good time as they, again, try to take over the city of Fort Walton Beach!



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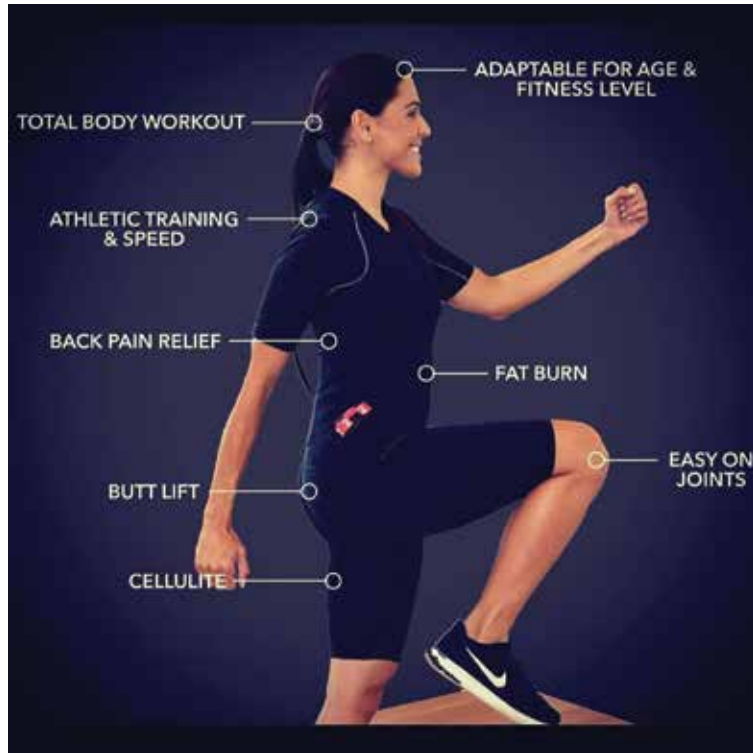
PERFORMANCE LAB

continued from page 1

been such a great partnership," says WILD ICE Owner, Mila Bush. "We've collaborated to develop a full menu of services to serve our customers and grow our respective brands. The Collagen Enhancement Treatment and Collagen Reactivation Programs are local favorites," says CRYO850 Esthetician, Hannah Hunter. "Students love the Teen Facial for acne and inflammation, and the Cinderella Facial is the tourists' choice for beach photos and weddings."

Alongside WILD ICE skin care, additional local brands on the CRYO850 retail shelves include HoneyMed, Earthquake Eddie Bee and Elite Spray Tan. CRYO850 also supports local businesses and organizations via pop ups, sponsorships and fundraisers. "From inception, CRYO850 has tapped into local communities," says Destin Mayor, Bobby Wagner. "Everyone knows the name CRYO850."

March marked the five-year anniversary and the unveiling of yet a third division designed



to meet our community's needs. The long-awaited Performance Lab has now introduced Visionbody Wireless EMS Training and Reflexion Neuroscience Vision Training to Destin, further elevating the health and wellness center's importance. EMS (Electric Muscle Stimulation Training) is an efficient, non-weight bearing muscle de-

velopment program. With adjustable stimulation, EMS works for all ages and levels of fitness with 20-minute sessions. EMS has several benefits for fitness beginners, athletes looking for a competitive edge and those with mobility issues. Strength, Fat Burning and Yoga Programs are available.

The Reflexion Vision Board



is designed for cognitive training in a myriad of areas including hand-eye coordination, response time, peripheral awareness and focus. Users can customize programs and track progress. While vision training gives an athlete a competitive edge, it can also serve as a baseline to offer valuable insight if he or she takes a hard hit. "We are so excited to bring this brain-training technology to the center," says Amy. "It's an

incredible tool for all ages. We are looking forward to working with the Neuro-diverse Community and the military community for cognitive progress and healing," she says.

Through education, community involvement and an unprecedented list of high-tech services, CRYO850 has made an undeniable impact on the health of our local community, growing and expanding to become THE local wellness spot and comprehensive body maintenance center. "On any given day, you'll find community members from ages 12 to 82 sharing experiences and resources and offering advice and support to one another," says Amy. With the traditional Hyper Wellness services combined with CRYO850 Esthetics and the new addition of the much-needed Performance Lab, CRYO850 has created a trifecta for comprehensive body maintenance. As this community of health and healing continues to grow, we can't wait to see what they think of next!

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Meet Our Local Wellness Pro: **Dr. Jake Hawkins!**

By MICHELLE RUSCHMAN

Two criteria that are invaluable in looking for a healthcare provider are their investment in the community and what drives their care. Dr. Jake Hawkins, an orthopaedic surgeon with Orthopaedic Associates, grew up in the Destin area and knows it well. He and his wife, Caroline, were high school sweethearts at South Walton High School. After graduation, Dr. Hawkins pursued his bachelor's degree at Florida State University and received his Doctor of Medicine degree at the Florida State University College of Medicine. He then completed his orthopaedic surgery residency training at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) and rounded out his training with a fellowship in hip and knee replacement and revision surgery at the University of Florida.

Years later, the couple is raising their three children, Noah (5), Asher (2), and Lainey (10 months) among the people they love. "We live in one of the most beautiful areas in the country, surrounded by friends and fami-

ly, and I am proud to call North Florida home. Outside of orthopaedic surgery, my hobbies include playing golf, fishing, exercising, going to the beach, boating, hunting, traveling and spending time with my family."

Dr. Hawkins also feels blessed that his professional life is fulfilling and rewarding. "Orthopaedic Associates is an amazing group. My favorite thing about my work is helping patients with hip and knee pain. Seeing my patients experience pain relief, restoration of function and resumption of their hobbies and activities is very gratifying.

I could not ask for a better group of practice partners and leadership. The entire staff is supportive, friendly, and attentive. We are humbled and honored to have the opportunity to come alongside people in the community to restore their health."

Dr. Hawkins also attributes his calling to the field of orthopaedic surgery to his love for Jesus. "I have a strong faith. The Lord has blessed me with the ability to help people who are



injured, hurting, suffering or in pain. I love praying with my patients and impacting them not just physically, but spiritually as well. It is by His mercy and grace that I have the opportunity to impact people in my work. I strive to do everything unto the Lord in all aspects of my life—marriage, parenting, family, my job, relationships, etc."

Dr. Hawkins specializes in

hip and knee replacement surgery utilizing cutting-edge technology and surgical techniques that allow his patients to recover as quickly as possible. This includes outpatient total hip and knee replacement surgery, anterior approach total hip replacement, minimally invasive surgery, robotic-assisted total knee, and hip replacement surgery, and computer-navigated joint replacement. He also specializes in complex revision total knee and hip replacement.

Dr. Hawkins also cares for patients with fractures (broken bones) utilizing both operative and nonoperative techniques. The course of action is based on the patient's injury and situation.

Dr. Hawkins is a fellowship-trained orthopaedic surgeon which means that he opted for one additional year of training in hip and knee replacement and revision surgery. Becom-

ing an orthopaedic surgeon requires four years of medical school, five years of orthopaedic surgery residency training, and added one year of fellowship training to study hip and knee replacement and revision surgery. His decision to work so hard in his field came from being a patient himself. "My interest in orthopaedic surgery began after I suffered a femur fracture while playing football at Destin Middle School. I was treated by Dr. Thackeray, who is now one of my senior partners. My experience with him and Orthopaedic Associates had a lasting impression on me and motivated me to pursue a career in medicine and, ultimately, orthopaedic surgery."

Not only does Dr. Hawkins have an office in Niceville, but you can also find him in Fort Walton Beach, Destin and Crestview. If you need his help, you can call 850-344-1646 to make an appointment for any of the area offices. He is ready to serve you. To learn more about Orthopaedic Associates, visit www.orthoassociates.net.



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 Wellness

Dealing With Difficult People



BY STEPHENIE CRAIG

When did you last interact with a difficult person? Maybe

the difficult person has anger problems, behaves with superiority, doesn't treat others the way they expect to be treated or is generally unkind, mean or rude. Sometimes you might label people as difficult when they have different values, opinions, religious views, political leanings or personalities than you. When are differences just different rather than difficult? When do you invest energy in making space for different ways

of moving through the world vs. investing energy in addressing boundary crossings by people who seem to disrespect you or others?

While easy to overlook, sometimes you might be the difficult person. Self-awareness is a skill developed through uncomfortable practice. Noticing when you may tend towards being judgmental, short-fused, selfish or unkind can go a long way in helping you sort interac-



tions with others. Noticing your capability of being difficult and your need for grace when you aren't your best self can inspire increased humility when addressing difficulty in others.

A common way to deal with difficult people is to become difficult yourself. When someone is rude, you may feel the invitation to match the rudeness. When someone is mean, you may spend time brainstorming ways to inflict vengeance. While these approaches can bring short term satisfaction and a false sense of justice, you end up giving up healthy emotional control and compromising your character. Over time, matching others' difficult behavior leads to bitterness, resentment, drama, shame and poor character habits. So, how do you address difficult behavior in healthy ways?

7 Ways to Navigate Interactions with Difficult People

1. Evaluate. Determine what is happening in a situation. What is bothering you and why? What is tough or feels like a boundary crossing?

2. Sort past emotion from present. Notice if something about this situation is bringing up feelings from past events/relationships that may be intensifying your emotions in

the present. If so, take time to process past feelings separately to give you an accurate perspective in the current situation.

3. Sort differences from difficulty. Ask yourself if the other person is showing poor character vs. has different opinions, values, perspective than you. Make space for difference. Address poor character.

4. Set boundaries. Use kind, direct words and tone to clearly state how the other party is crossing a boundary, how it impacts the relationship, what you will do differently and what you would like for them to do differently. "When you belittle me in front of others, I feel disrespected and emotionally unsafe in our relationship. I won't participate in conversations where I am belittled and disrespected. When talking to me, please use respect." If the other party respects your boundary and makes a change, that is an indicator of movement toward health. If the other party continues to cross boundaries or responds poorly to your boundary setting, that is information you need to understand the low value the other party places on the relationship.

5. Speak up for those whose voices are hard to hear. Sometimes difficult people cross boundaries resulting in negativity, abuse, or injustice for those who are vulnerable. Try using your voice and boundary setting for the sake of others.

6. Distance. Once a person has established an ongoing pattern of crossing boundaries and poor character they are unwilling to address, it's appro-

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Tinnitus: An Interview with David Baguley, PhD

BY DOUGLAS L. BECK, AuD

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



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

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

Baguley: Yes, I would agree. No doubt at all. Hearing aids are an enormous help for most tinnitus patients, most of the time, even when their hearing loss is mild. And although there are no shortages of success stories for the tinnitus patient using hearing aid amplification, as a profession we haven't been very good at documenting the specific details as to how to select the best candidates, which approaches work best, which tools are best for which patient, and so on. We need to document specific diagnostic and treatment protocols for these patients, and I'd like to see us have better protocols addressing how to assess and treat patients suffering with tinnitus.

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

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

Baguley: Absolutely. The 80/80 Rule seems correct to me. Further, in the UK right now, there is work going on with regard to mild-moderate SNHL to determine how many

of those patients have troublesome tinnitus, which is perhaps a different question, but it might be very important to see if there are clear differences in tinnitus based on degree of hearing loss. It's a relatively simple question, but we really don't have answers on this, as of yet.

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

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

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

Baguley: This is a really im-

portant area for us. I'm happy to tell you we're exploring this area currently, too, and are involved in an RCT [randomized controlled trial] to try to pin this issue down. We have wonderful and vast opportunities with combination devices for tinnitus, but we don't know how much the patients embrace them; we are unsure if the sound source itself matters, and there's a lot to learn here about which patient to select for traditional amplification versus which patient to select for hearing aids with a masker—and how to set these things maximally after we've selected the best alternative!

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

Baguley: Intuitively, I

agree...but that's why we need scientific studies to better select the best sounds. And, of course, we need to be ready for the fact that the sound the patient prefers this week may be very different from the sound they prefer in a few weeks or months. As Grant mentions in his chapter, there are many potential reasons why hearing aids are beneficial for the tinnitus patient, such as providing an alternative sound to listen to. Simply by masking the tinnitus percept—and if we presume 80% of tinnitus patients have hearing loss—with hearing aids is likely to help de-stress these patients and allow them to communicate more easily and engage in pleasant social situations, which their untreated hearing loss may prevent them from enjoying.

Beck: David, I'm very glad you mentioned that, and I want to dig a little deeper on stress. One of my key lecture points about tinnitus is that "tinnitus is very often a manifestation of stress." That is, hearing, the auditory system, the brain, and the general health of the patient

all are important factors—but the thing which seems to separate the tinnitus patient from the non-patient is their level of stress.

Baguley: This is an important area. Whilst I see few cases in which stress has been directly causal of tinnitus, I see many where stress and anxiety can exacerbate tinnitus. Given that tinnitus can also increase stress and anxiety, this is a two-way street. Chapters in the book on models of tinnitus look at these ideas in detail, with practical and clinical insights.

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

Baguley: Yes, of course. Tinnitus patients sometimes require more specialized care than that which the audiologists provide. That is, the ENT, the family practitioner, psychologists, and other counselors often contribute quite a bit to the care of the tinnitus patient. In fact, that was the focus of our 2nd edition

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 Wellness

Back to Basics



By KAY LEAMAN,
HEALTHYDAY HEALTHYLIFE

What sparked this month's topic? I ran a report for our grocery expenditures for February; what a shock!

As we maneuver through the times we're in, creating new habits around how we shop and consume can improve our health and wallets. Below are nine health tips with thoughts to help reduce spending at checkout:

- Focus on eating more fruits and veggies. A salad with every meal will usually create more leftovers which creates another meal at no added cost. Also, buying fresh vegetables offers multiple lunches and side dishes. Non-processed foods will always offer health benefits. Salads don't always have to be served with lettuce. Consider brown

rice, quinoa or gluten free noodles. Change up the veggies for variety. Serve the salad warm vs. cold.

- Who doesn't love a delicious plate of spaghetti or lasagna? Dishes like this are filling and can be stretched. A big pot of sauce can give you several dishes: spaghetti, lasagna, or dinner-in-a-dish (seashell noodles, veggies, sauce and cheese). Be sure to par-boil (not quite done) noodles. Doing this slows down how quickly the sugar in the noodles is absorbed.

- Scratch baking can also save money. Replace white sugar with Turbinado (cane sugar), honey, date sugar or pure maple syrup. Check the prices on these. Raw honey and pure maple syrup can be pricey, but they also require a much smaller amount due to their sweetness which also makes it last longer. On the health side, the body recognizes these natural sweeteners as real food which allows it to be broken down easier.

- Cut your white flour in half with almond flour, oat flour (You can make this by grinding whole rolled oats.) or another less pro-

cessed flour. This cuts down on the sugar impact on the body.

- If you're a yogurt person, switch up to plain low-fat Greek or regular yogurt. It should have only two-three ingredients. Add your own fruit (frozen fruit works well) and add nuts, seeds, and a touch of honey or maple syrup. This is cost effective and makes a great breakfast or lunch.

- Supplement with a high-quality vitamin. The company should be able to guarantee that the ingredients on the label are in each and every tablet. Consumer Lab tested 74 products and found defects in 40% of them. Taking control of our health includes becoming more informed with what we are putting in our bodies.

- Soup! I love soup. It's filled with all kinds of good stuff, from chili to veggie to chicken tortilla soup. I've found with soup that by cutting the chicken up in smaller bites I can stretch my chicken breasts for more meals. And, soup usually always allows for left overs. Tacos are another way to stretch out ingredients.

- Make your own beans. You can make a big pot and freeze



etc. You can also add a few chocolate chips (dark chocolate) for a little treat. The benefits of this one is huge. You're cutting back on starches and a high amount of sugar.

- Lastly, consider a garden. If you're like us, growing a garden has its challenges. To make this less overwhelming, grab some neighbors and friends. One can grow tomatoes, another peppers, another squash, another lettuce and so on. Then you can share with each other. You can use containers, growing bags, etc. If you have a green thumb the ground works too :-). You can even grow flowers for sharing.

Have an amazing spring. I hope the above thoughts spark you to think outside the box. Here's to Health!

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them. Soak them over night. Rinse and fill the pot with fresh water and cook until done. An Insta-Pot cooks them quickly. You can also crockpot them on high for a few hours. This is a great savings and offers us the benefit of less salt in our diet.

- Replace cereal with oatmeal. Soak it in the bowl overnight in milk or water. Serve hot or cold. add nuts, seeds, fruit, nut butters, natural sweeteners,

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Easy Access to Local Home Medical Equipment

By KELLY STALNAKER

Having easy access to home medical equipment should be a priority for everyone. You never know when an accident, injury or emergency medical situation will occur. No one is protected against a stroke of bad luck. There might come a time that an injury or surgery will leave you or a family member needing extra assistance, and recuperating with the proper equipment will promote more ease and comfort. For example, lift chairs and cryo-coolers (Rx only) are game changers for patients in recovery. But even if you're convinced that you'll never need this type of service,

consider how accessibility to a hospital bed, wheelchair or ramp could benefit a loved one.

With the arrival of warmer weather, it's that time of year for weddings, graduations and summer festivities. But maybe there's someone in your life that is hesitant about participating, because they feel unsteady or simply unable to walk safely. Don't let them miss out on important moments because of mobility issues; rent a wheelchair or transport chair! Often called companion chairs (as it requires the patient to have a compan-



ion to push them), a transport chair is smaller and lighter than a standard wheelchair. It weighs about half as much and folds up

into a manageable size that will easily fit in most cars.

Maybe you're preparing to host houseguests over the summer. But, have you considered if you can accommodate everyone's needs? We rent (and sell) hospital beds, lift chairs, patient lifts and so much more to make your guests feel safe and comfortable during their visit. Our rental lift chairs are compact enough to not overcrowd a house full of guests, but can be helpful for someone with muscle weakness that cannot sit or rise unassisted. A lot of users prefer to sleep in them as well!

And consider how helpful it may be to have a portable ramp on hand. Ramps aren't just for wheelchairs; they can be a safer and easier option than stairs for anyone with any type of mobility issue.

So, whether for you or a loved one, long term or temporary, we can help you address all of your home medical needs. Stop by or call anytime Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m. to chat with us about availability of rental items. Or simply peruse our showroom full of medical necessities and useful devices. We are located at 540 John Sims Pkwy. in Niceville, or call 850-729-2559.

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 Education

Education News

OKALOOSA COUNTY

12 Okaloosa County Schools are "Schools of Excellence"

In March, 10 Okaloosa County District Schools, along with two charter schools, were designated by the Florida Department of Education as "Schools of Excellence" for the 2022-2023 academic year. The Schools of Excellence program was established by the Florida Legislature in 2017 under HB 7069 to recognize and reward Florida's highest-performing schools. The program aims to promote continuous improvement and provide administrative flexibility to the state's top schools so they can maintain the highest quality education for students.

Superintendent Marcus Chambers stated, "This prestigious recognition is awarded to schools that have consistently ranked in the 80th percentile or higher for at least two of the last three school years based on their school grade calculation. I want to extend my heartfelt congratulations to the students, teachers, staff, and administrators who have all contributed to this remarkable accomplishment!"

Okaloosa County Schools

of Excellence: Bluewater Elementary; Destin Elementary; Edge Elementary; Eglin Elementary; Florosa Elementary; Plew Elementary; Northwest Florida Ballet Academie; Ruckel Middle School; Okaloosa STEMM Academy; Niceville High School; Liza Jackson Preparatory School—Charter School; Collegiate High School at Northwest Florida State College—Charter School.

First High School Health Academy on HCA Healthcare Campus Opens

HCA Florida Fort Walton-Destin Hospital and the Okaloosa County School District (OCSD) have partnered to open the Health Academy of Northwest Florida on the hospital's campus. The Health Academy of Northwest Florida is the first high school health academy to be housed on an HCA Healthcare hospital campus anywhere in the country! A joint partnership between HCA Florida Fort-Walton Destin Hospital and OCSD, the Health Academy of Northwest Florida provides high school students interested in healthcare careers the opportunity to earn industry certifications, providing

them with the skills they need to directly enter the workforce or continue their post-graduate studies.

Students enrolled in the two-year practical nursing program learn the foundational principles of basic nursing and medical skills needed to provide care to patients.

Students at Niceville High School, Choctawhatchee High School and Fort Walton Beach High School are eligible to participate in the practical nursing program through the Career and Technical Education Department of OCSD. Students receive hands-on clinical training at HCA Florida Fort Walton-Destin Hospital during their senior year. Upon completion of the two-year program, students will be eligible to earn a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA), a Certified Patient Care Technician (CPCT), and/or Electrocardiogram Technician (EKG) certification. Juniors who complete the program will have the opportunity for dual enrollment in the LPN program at Okaloosa Technical College during their senior year, and get a head start on earning their required course hours toward an LPN license.

"We are grateful for this pioneering collaboration, alongside the invaluable support and funding provided by Triumph Gulf Coast for this program," said April Branscome, OCSD Career and Technical Education Program Director. "This marks a historic milestone as the first initiative of its kind nationwide, ushering in a transformative era in healthcare education."

As part of the partnership, HCA Florida Fort Walton-Destin Hospital provided a 6,375-square-foot-space to OCSD for the Health Academy of Northwest Florida, which includes two classrooms and two practical labs. Students who successfully complete the practical nursing program will have job placement opportunities throughout HCA Florida Healthcare. In addition, if employed by an HCA Florida Healthcare facility, tuition reimbursement will be available for students wishing to continue their education.

Annual Space Art Contest at Plew Elementary

Lieutenant Governor Jeanette Nuñez visited Plew Elementary to announce the Third Annual Spring 2024 Florida Space Art Contest for Florida's kindergarten through fifth grade students. Mrs. Leavins and Mrs. Hill's students welcomed Lieutenant Governor Nuñez, Superintendent Marcus Chambers and Space Florida's President and CEO Rob Long to their classrooms. The students showed them some of the STEAM projects they were currently working on.

During the announcement at Plew's media center, Lieutenant Governor Nuñez expressed her excitement about the initiative to promote Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Mathematics (STEAM) education among students. She shared her full support and encouragement for the students' creative artwork for this year's theme, "Suit Up! Florida's Space Suit of the Future." Superintendent Marcus Chambers also added to the excitement by asking the students, "Who would like to go to space one day?" He further stated, "It is amazing to have a Lieutenant Governor with a vision about Space Florida, a vision to get you all to be thinking even more about space, because one of you could be an astronaut one day." Chambers also reaffirmed the importance of STEAM education across Okaloosa Schools.

All entries must be received by 5 p.m., Friday, May 24, 2024. Entries must be mailed to Space Florida, ATTN: Florida Space Art Contest, 505 Odyssey Way, Suite 300, Exploration Park, Florida 32953. For more information about the contest, and official rules and guidelines, please visit www.FloridaSpaceArt.com.

ECFU Partners with OCSD for Financial Literacy

Eglin Federal Credit Union and the Okaloosa County School District teamed up to bring financial literacy to high school students. Approximately 60 high school students from the 9th to 12th grades participated in lessons facilitated by Eglin Federal Credit Union's VP Membership and Community Development, Neko Stubblefield. The personal financial



literacy course covers a wide range of topics, from opening a checking or savings account to planning for retirement.

"By offering this course in local high schools, we aim to empower young people to develop healthy financial habits that will serve them throughout their lives," said Stubblefield.

Governor Ron DeSantis signed Senate Bill 1054, the Dorothy L. Hukill Financial Literacy Act, March 22, 2022. This act makes it mandatory for high school students to complete a financial literacy course to qualify for a standard high school diploma. The requirement applies to students who enrolled in high school in the 2023-2024 school year.

WALTON COUNTY

THE SEASIDE SCHOOL™ Named School of Excellence

THE SEASIDE SCHOOL™, encompassing SEASIDE NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOL™ and Seacoast Collegiate High School, proudly announces its designation as a 2022-2023 School of Excellence by the Florida Department of Education for the sixth consecutive year as a combination public charter school serving grades 5 through 12 in our area.

Out of 783 schools designated as Schools of Excellence for the 2022-2023 academic year, 658 retained their designation from the previous year, 37 renewed their designation and 88 were newly designated in 2022-2023.

Section 1003.631(1)(a), Florida Statutes (F.S.) mandates the designation of a school as a School of Excellence if its percentage of possible points earned in its school grade calculation ranks in the 80th percentile or higher for at least two of the last three school years. The program, established by the Florida Legislature in 2017,

Continued on next page

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EDUCATION NEWS

continued from previous page

continues to recognize and celebrate schools demonstrating exceptional academic performance.

In addition to its designation as a School of Excellence, THE SEASIDE SCHOOL™ was also honored as an “A” school for the 2022-2023 school year, positioning it in the 98.5 percentile among all combination public schools in the state of Florida and securing its ranking as one of the top combination public charter schools in the state. THE SEASIDE SCHOOL™ has been an “A” school for more than 20 consecutive years.

“This achievement underscores our unwavering dedication to providing outstanding education to our students,” said Dr. Tom Miller, Executive Director of THE SEASIDE SCHOOL™, emphasizing the crucial partnership with the Walton County School District, which was recently ranked as the #2 school district in Florida. “Our strong partnership with the Walton County School District has been instrumental in our success, and we look forward to continuing our collaborative efforts to further elevate educational standards in our community.”

“Our partnership with Northwest Florida State College has provided our students with invaluable opportunities to excel academically and prepare for their future endeavors. Being recognized as a School of Excellence affirms the effectiveness of our collaborative efforts in offering rigorous academic programs that empower our students to succeed,” said Drew Ward, Principal of Seacoast Collegiate High School, highlighting the significance of the partnership with Northwest Florida State College for Seacoast’s collegiate dual enrollment program.

For more information on THE SEASIDE SCHOOL™, visit SeasideSchools.net.

Freeport High School Students Explore Aquaponics

Freeport High School boasts an innovative aquaponics program that integrates culturing fish (aquaculture) and various crops (agriculture) using an array of growing systems, including deep-water well, nutrient-film technique (NFT),



Dutch buckets and clay media beds. Spearheaded by the foresight of Walton County School District’s Superintendent A. Russell Hughes and aided by a \$500,000 appropriations funding initiative from the Florida legislature in 2022, this program offers students a hands-on learning experience in sustainable agriculture, environmental stewardship, and equips students with invaluable career skills.

Students engage in the operation and maintenance of these aquaponic systems, learning about the symbiotic relationship between fish, plants, and bacteria as they cultivate crops in water-efficient environments. The nutrient-rich water, which is created by fish, circulates through naturally occurring good bacteria systems that convert the fish waste to high nutrient water that then passes through various growing systems delivering essential nutrients to plants. The plants continue to filter the water so that it can then be returned to the fish. As students manage these systems, they learn to troubleshoot and overcome challenges that may arise in these aquaponic systems, developing critical thinking and problem-solving abilities essential for any profession.

Moreover, Freeport High School’s aquaponics program hopes to extend its reach beyond the classroom by offering students the opportunity to participate in restoration efforts within our local estuary, Choctawhatchee Bay. By partnering with esteemed organizations such as the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Mote Laboratory, and the Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance, students can actively contribute to the preservation and enhancement of the Bay’s ecosystem.

Through these unique partnerships, students gain firsthand experience in environmental conservation and scientific research, fostering a deeper under-

standing of the interconnectedness between human activities and the natural world. As they engage in restoration projects,

students not only apply their knowledge in practical settings, but also develop a sense of responsibility and stewardship towards their local environment, leaving a lasting impact on their community and beyond.

Moreover, the collaborative nature of the program fosters teamwork and communication skills as students work together to design, implement and maintain their aquaponic setups. The program also cultivates leadership skills as students take on various roles and responsibil-

ities within their teams. Whether leading project initiatives or mentoring peers, students learn to inspire and guide others, honing their leadership skills and achieving shared goals. These career-focused skills are integrated into the aquaponics program at Freeport High School not only to prepare students for success in fields related to agriculture, environmental science and conservation, but also to instill in them the confidence and competence to excel in any professional endeavor they pursue.

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Thinking of Selling Your Home?

10 Marketing Strategies the John Martin Group Does to Achieve the Highest Price in the Shortest Time



BY JOHN MARTIN, REALTOR,
BERKSHIRE HATHAWAY PEN FED
REALTY

1. Professional Home Staging: We invest in professional home staging to present

the property in the best possible light. Staged homes tend to sell faster and for higher prices as they help buyers envision themselves living in the space.

2. High-Quality Photography and Virtual Tours: We capture the essence of the home with high-quality, professional photographs and immersive virtual tours. This allows potential buyers to explore the property online and increases interest before they even visit in person.

3. Targeted Online Advertising: Our team utilizes targeted online advertising on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Google Ads to reach potential buyers directly. We tailor your ads based on demographics, interests, and location to maximize exposure to the right audience.

4. Host Exclusive Open Houses and Events: We or-

ganize exclusive open houses and events for potential buyers, real estate agents, and local influencers.

5. Highlight Unique Features: We identify and highlight the unique features of the home, such as architectural details, stunning views, or eco-friendly upgrades. Emphasizing these aspects can set the property apart from others on the market and attract discerning buyers.

6. Utilize Influencer Marketing: Our team partners with local influencers, bloggers and other experts to promote the property through their social media channels or blogs. Their endorsement can add credibility and reach a wider audience.

7. Create Compelling Video Content: We produce engaging video content showcasing the property, neighborhood amenities, and lifestyle. Video tours, testimonials from

happy residents, and neighborhood highlights can help potential buyers connect emotionally with the home.

8. Network with Local Real Estate Agents: We are always building relationships with local real estate agents and are highly resourceful in getting agents to view your property.

9. Utilize Drone Photography for Aerial Views: Our team incorporates drone photography to capture stunning aerial views of the property and surrounding area. This can showcase the home's location, proximity to amenities, and highlight unique selling points.

10. Offer Flexible Viewing Options: We accommodate potential buyers with flexible viewing options such as virtual tours, 3D walkthroughs, and private showings outside of traditional hours. Making it convenient for buyers to view the property can

lead to quicker sales and higher offers.

We are also highly resourceful working with vacation renters and their agencies to get qualified buyers in your property. This is highly important to selling your property in peak rental months.

By implementing these strategies, we can effectively market your home to attract qualified buyers, generate interest, and ultimately sell for the highest price possible in the least amount of time with minimal hassle.

John Martin is a top selling real estate agent and his team covers South Walton, 30A and the Emerald Coast. His mission is to listen to clients and help achieve their goals. Contact John to schedule a home marketing consultation. Reach John on his cell at 850-714-3731 or email: john@johnmartin30a.com. Website: johnmartin30a.com.

TINNITUS

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of The Multi-Disciplinary Approach to Tinnitus in 2013. Of the patients who come to see the audiologist or ENT for tinnitus, I would expect we can likely help about two-thirds of them using audiologic solutions...but many tinnitus patients never see anyone in hearing healthcare.

That is, their point of entry may be a psychologist, psychiatrist, neurologist, a GP—and perhaps if it appears the patient has no hearing loss, no audiologist ever sees them. Again, there's still quite a lot to learn!

Beck: And, of note, you advocate Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) to help people with tinnitus? [CBT for tinnitus is a psychological treatment to

identify and modify unhelpful thoughts and behaviors. CBT involves identifying and modifying maladaptive behaviors, thoughts, and feelings.]

Baguley: Absolutely. CBT tactics have a real role to play here. As you recall, Doug, in 2012, I was involved in a group that published in The Lancet “Specialized treatment based on cognitive behavior therapy

versus usual care for tinnitus: a randomized controlled trial.”² In that publication we presented the results of some 490 patients treated with CBT, as compared to 247 patients with “usual care” between 2007 and 2011. We looked at many things, but the primary thing was health-related quality of life (QOL). Those treated with CBT experienced less tinnitus severity and they experienced statistically significant improvements in their QOL.

Beck: David, you've been

very generous with your time today, and I thank you for that. I suspect you and I can talk about tinnitus for hours.

Douglas L. Beck, AuD, is among the most prolific authors in audiology with 148 published articles, more than 1250 abstracts, interviews and op-eds written for the AAA (2008-2015) and AudiologyOnline (1999-2005) websites, addressing a wide variety

Continued on next page

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A Pastor's Ponderings: A Good Soldier in God's Army



ADAPTED BY PASTOR DOUG STAUFFER

2 Timothy 2:3 Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. 4 No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.

I am a soldier in the army of my God;

The Lord Jesus Christ—my commanding officer.

The Holy Bible—my code of conduct;

Faith, prayer and the word—my weapons of warfare.

The Holy Ghost is my teacher

I have been trained by experience,

Tried by adversity, and Tested by fire.

I volunteered for this sacred army

With a commitment eternal, And a pledge never to waver or swerve.

I will either die on the battlefield or retire at the rapture;

Unyielded in stance, committed never to falter.

I will not get out, sell out,

Be bought out, or pushed out.

Faithful and reliable, in my Lord, I stand capable and

Dependable in His service, my commitment unshakeable.

When my God calls, I am there—steadfast and true,

In Sunday School, teaching or guiding the youth,

Helping adults, and ever willing to embrace new truths,

Available to serve, a soldier prepared

I pledge to be steadfast by His love ensnared.

I am not a baby and require no special care,

No need to be pampered, petted, or primed

To be pumped up, picked up, or artificially spared—

For I stand as a soldier, with a heart prepared.

No one needs to call me, remind me, write me, or visit me,

No one needs to entice me or lure me,

For I am a soldier, in discipline exquisite,

I do not waver, for I am com-

mitted.

I am not a wimp, but a warrior strong,

I am in my place, saluting my King.

Obedying His orders, Praising His name,

Preaching His word, Proud to Whom I belong

No one has to send me flowers, gifts, food,

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TINNITUS

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of audiology and professional topics. In addition to his new role as Senior Editor for Clinical Research at *The Hearing Review*, Dr. Beck is an Associate Professor of Audiology at the University of Hawaii and Director of Professional Relations at Oticon Inc, Somerset, Nj.

Dr. Baguley has published more than 150 peer-reviewed publications, and is the co-author of *Tinnitus: A Multidisciplinary Approach, Second Edition* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2013) and *Hyperacusis: Mechanisms, Di-*

agnosis, and Therapies (Plural Publishing, 2007). He is also the former audiology section editor of the UK's *ENT & Audiology News*, and has co-edited the latest edition of *Ballantyne's Deafness* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), as well as a self-help book on tinnitus and hyperacusis, *Living with Tinnitus and Hyperacusis*, with Lawrence McKenna and Don McFerran (Sheldon Press, 2010).

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

Cards, candy or give me hand-outs.

I do not need to be cuddled, coddled, cradled,

Cared for or catered to for I am committed.

I am a soldier

Devils cannot defeat me. People cannot disillusion me.

Weather cannot weary me. Sickness cannot stop me.

Battles cannot beat me. Money cannot buy me.

Governments cannot silence me, and

Hell does not frighten me. As a soldier of Jesus Christ,

Even death cannot destroy me, One day, my Command-

er-in-Chief

From the battlefield will promote me.

As a soldier in the Army of my God,

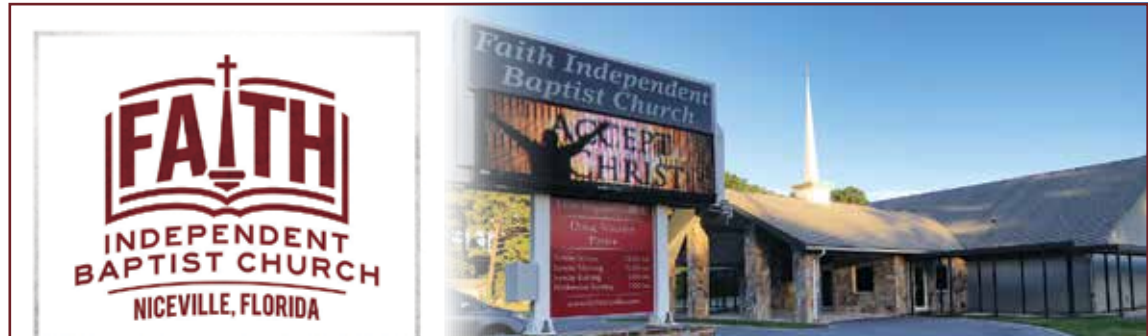
I march, claiming the victory already won,

I am a soldier marching heaven-bound.

Here I stand. WHO WILL STAND WITH ME?

As we observe Memorial Day, a time set aside to honor and remember those fallen in service to our nation, let us also reflect on the spiritual battleground where each Christian stands as a soldier. Just as we remember those who sacrificed themselves for physical freedoms, we should also renew our commitment to the spiritual battle for souls. As good soldiers in God's army, let us stand firm in faith, steadfast in duty, and ever vigilant in service, looking for the return of our King. On this day of remembrance, let the memory of the fallen inspire us to live with courage, dedication and unwavering faith, marching forward to the victory already won.

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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Romans 10:17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

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 Musing

Sean of the South: Memorial Day



BY SEAN DIETRICH

Dear Young Person,
I am an imaginary old man. I am every World War II veteran you never knew. I am each faceless GI from the bygone European War. Or any other war for that matter.
I am in my 90s and 100s now. Lots of young folks probably

don't even know I exist.

In my war, I was one of the hundreds of thousands of infantrymen, airmen, sailors, marines, mess sergeants, seabees, brass hats, engineers, doctors, medics, buck privates, and rear-echelon potato-peelers.

We hopped islands in the Pacific. We served in the African war theater. We beat the devil, then we came home and became the old fart next door.

Wartime was one heck of an era to be young. Let me tell ya. When we went overseas we were still teenagers, smooth skinned, scared spittleless, with government haircuts, wearing brand new wedding rings. We hadn't seen



action yet, so we were jittery and lots of us smoked through a week's rations of Luckies in one day.

Then it happened. It was different for everyone, but it happened. Shells landed everywhere. People screamed. And in a moment our fear melted away and we had war jobs to do. It didn't matter who we were or which posts were ours. Everyone worked in the grand assembly line of battle.

When the smoke cleared and the action was over, we had new confidence in ourselves, and we were no longer boys.

And anyway, we weren't just boys, we were girls, too. There were 350,000 females serving in the U.S. Armed Forces in World War II. People forget that.

Speaking of women. We guys were always talking about our sweethearts, wives, and mothers. If you mentioned someone's girl a man was liable to talk for hours about her. And even if you'd already seen his wallet photos before, you never interrupted a guy talking about his gal. Because eventually you'd be talking about yours.

There were nights overseas when we would stare at the

moon and wonder if our sweethearts were looking at the same moon. There were moments of indescribable loneliness.

Infantrymen had it the hardest. I don't know how our doughboys did it. They lived like pack mules. Their boots got wet, their feet swelled, and their flesh became waterlogged. Chunks of their heels would fall off; the dreaded "trench foot."

The funny thing is, even though their feet were falling off these men still didn't want to leave their posts. Many had to be dragged away cussing. That's how committed these guys were.

Oh, and the food was godawful. You learned to appreciate the rarity of a creative company cook.

In Italy, sometimes we could buy eggs from local merchants for outrageously inflated prices. One time I knew a guy who ate 32 scrambled eggs in his tent one night. I asked him why he did this and he told me he didn't want to die without tasting eggs one last time.

A lot of guys brought banjos, guitars, and fiddles over there. They'd play music at night sometimes in the open Italian air. We'd square dance and laugh. Others would sit on their helmets, smoking, thinking of home, wiping their eyes.

The Germans had a local radio station that broadcasted American stuff like Bing and Frank. Then, between songs, a German gal talked propaganda over the airwaves to us Ameri-

can GIs in a sexy voice, trying to mess with our heads.

She would speak flawless English and say, "Give up, boys, there's no point trying, you can't win. Everyone hates you. Your girls are at home cheating on you, they don't love you anymore. Give up. It's over. You lost."

This was supposed to discourage us, but it usually just made us laugh. Or cry. Sometimes both.

When the war ended, we felt too much joy at once. In fact, most weren't totally sure they could trust good news. A lot of guys got like that.

So when we heard the official papers had been signed and the war was over, it was Christmas morning multiplied times a hundred. No. Times a trillion.

Those of us overseas immediately wrote letters to family and told our wives we were coming home, told our kids to grease up their baseball gloves. Our letters were covered in little wet polka dots, if you get my drift.

Stateside, there were huge celebrations happening. Sailors climbed lampposts to unfurl flags. Infantrymen stood on rooftops, toasting mugs of homebrew. Mothers were frying chickens out the wazoo.

People were partying everywhere from San Bernardino to Flatbush. Big cities, little towns, and the rural parts between. There were ticker tape parades, auto processions, and girls would kiss any guy in government clothes.

But on this important day, you know what I think about? I think about all the guys who never got kissed again. Our men in the soil.

They were those who evaporated like the early morning fog over Anzio, or the thick mists of Normandy. They died young. And they died for a lot more than a three-day weekend of barbecues and Budweiser.

These were men who fell upholding the mantle of our unalienable American spirit, the Blessings of our Liberty, and the pride of their homeland. They were friends. They were the kids next door. They were children of God who once proved, beyond speculation, that even hellfire cannot kill the great idea that is America. I hope we never forget them. I know I never will.

Happy Memorial Day.

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Seasons Change



BY ANNA FISHER, ASSOCIATE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, EMERALD COAST THEATRE COMPANY

I always treasure the micro seasons we experience in this beautiful white sand corner of Florida. We get a little taste of fall, a miniscule winter, a gorgeous capsule of spring and a large slice of summer. I feel the same excitement when our new season is announced at Emerald Coast Theatre Company. Like fall, winter, spring and summer, we always have four different phases culminating in the run of our new season.

We start with one of the most important phases, the reading and research quarter. This is the time when Nathanael and I read a portion of the stacks and stacks of plays we have in our home library. Our desks at work and our counters at home become the staging area for “must reads” and “maybes” along with every color sticky note to mark our thoughts about each one. Then we order more scripts and do the same thing with them too. This leads to the next phase of impassioned debate and deliberation. Did I mention “impassioned debate”? We discuss each story and its nuances, (always calmly and rationally without throwing any scripts across the room) the characters, the writing, the music, and the overall cohesion of each show

choice within the full season. We present our first draft picks and some other top choices to our executive staff for input and collaboration before settling on our new line up.

The next phase is securing production rights and graphic design for all of the show posters and media which leads up to the big announcement of what’s coming in the new season! We aim to get this information out in the spring, well ahead of when we actually launch the new season in the fall. The final large slice kicks off on opening night with a dynamic fall musical and all of the anticipation that a new season brings.

One of the most exciting moments for our patrons is the big spring announcement that happens ahead of the new season—and that day is here! I’m thrilled to present the upcoming 2024-25 Season 12 at Emerald Coast Theatre Company!

We launch in September with Jersey Boys. This toe tapping musical takes you behind the music of Frankie Valli and The Four Seasons as they work their way from the streets of New Jersey to the heights of stardom. You can continue the fun in October with Baskerville: A Sherlock Holmes Mystery as our five talented actors portray more than forty characters complete with silly accents and hilarious disguises.

All Is Calm: The Christmas Truce of 1914, our holiday show, is an a cappella masterpiece. This remarkable true story is told in the words and songs of the men who lived it. Every Brilliant Thing, an interactive show with depth and humor, premieres during January. The story centers around a young boy as he attempts to ease his mother’s depression by creating a list of all the best things in the world worth living for. Everyone’s favorite man-eating



plant, sadistic dentist, and meek yet heroic shopkeeper will also make an appearance next January/February in Little Shop of Horrors.

Always a Bridesmaid, a hilarious “Golden Girls” style romp where four friends have sworn to keep their promise to be in each other’s weddings no mat-

ter what, rounds out our winter offerings in February/March. And finally, the can’t miss transformation of the eternally pink Elle Woods in Legally Blonde: The Musical is the perfect spring show to end our Season 12! We also have two spring shows specifically geared towards our younger audience members.

P.D. Eastman’s classic children’s book Go Dog, Go! comes to life on stage like a pop-up book full of big and little doggy music fun for the whole family. We are also offering The Tortoise and the Hare: Fast Friends, Slow Foes, a madcap re-telling of the classic, complete with all the forest animals and a pesky possum who just wants to join the fun.

It is always a little astonishing to be in production mode for our upcoming spring show- which this year is Mary Poppins- and launching a new season for the next year. Each phase brings its own set of joys and challenges, and I have so much gratitude for what I get to do every day and the people I get to work alongside. The heart of ECTC is each and every one of those talented artists along with each and every one of you. Here’s to Season 12!

Presenting

SEASON 12

<p>JERSEY BOYS <small>The story of Frankie Valli & The Four Seasons</small></p> <p>SEPTEMBER 20 - OCTOBER 13</p>	<p>BASKERVILLE <small>A SHERLOCK HOLMES MYSTERY</small></p> <p>OCTOBER 24 - NOVEMBER 3</p>	<p>ALL IS CALM <small>THE CHRISTMAS TRUCE OF 1914</small></p> <p>DECEMBER 6 - 22</p>	<p>EVERY Brilliant THING</p> <p>JANUARY 9 - 17</p>
<p>LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS</p> <p>JANUARY 24 - FEBRUARY 9</p>	<p>ALWAYS a Bridesmaid</p> <p>FEBRUARY 20 - MARCH 2</p>	<p>Go, Dog, Go!</p> <p>MARCH 11 - 16</p>	<p>LEGALLY BLONDE <small>The Musical</small></p> <p>MAY 2 - 18</p>

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Arts & Music

Cousin Curtiss To Headline "Dine + Dive" Fundraiser For Underwater Museum Of Art

May 1st Event Is Official Kickoff For Art Month Walton County

The Cultural Arts Alliance of Walton County (CAA) is excited to announce 30A Songwriters Festival favorite Cousin Curtiss will headline the "Dine + Dive" fundraiser for the Underwater Museum of Art. The event will take place on Wednesday, May 1, 6-9 p.m., in Grand Boulevard's Town Center and is the official kick-off party for Art Month Walton County, a month-long celebration of the Arts that includes many diverse cultural events throughout the month of May.

The CAA and South Walton Artificial Reef Association (SWARA) are pleased to expand the former "Under the Sea" event to an immersive fusion of fine art, food, wine, and marine conservation igniting all of the senses featuring scores of incredible wines to sample, more than a dozen restaurant tasting stations with special food menu items from some of South Walton's



most popular restaurants and celebrated Chefs, along with a cash bar offering signature cocktails and beer.

Event headliner Cousin Curtiss brings to the stage a fiery dynamic rarely seen by a solo act and now partnered up with the equally enigmatic and soulfully driven electric guitar prowess of Harrison B, these two road warriors are on a mission to electrify audiences everywhere with their two-man full-band sound. Think, "blues at bluegrass speeds." Imagine, "rock americana with a soulful drip." Experience rap-

id-fire acoustic guitar, incendiary harmonica, fiercely energized solos, all driven by a thunderous kick drum.

In addition to continuous live music, "Dine + Dive" party-goers will have an opportunity to meet UMA artists from current and previous installations as well as receive an exclusive preview of several of the original works created for the 2024 installation before the sculptures are deployed to the UMA site over the summer. Tickets for this awe-inspiring experience are on sale now at CulturalArtsAlliance.com/upcoming-events for \$100 per person in advance and \$125 per person day of the event, if available.

The "Dine + Dive" event is produced by the Cultural Arts Alliance of Walton County with support from Visit South Walton, Grand Boulevard Town Center, SWARA, and Word of Mouth Restaurant Group. A few event



and sculpture sponsorships are still available, and those interested can contact Gabby Callaway at Gabby@culturalartsalliance.com for more details.

Funds raised from "Dine + Dive" ticket sales and sponsorships will benefit the sixth deployment of sculptures into the Underwater Museum of Art (UMA), a collaborative project with the South Walton Artificial Reef Association (SWARA) and the nation's first permanent dedicated sculpture museum, recognized as one of TIME magazine's 2018 100 World's Greatest Places as well as one of National Geographic's Best Trips 2019 and a 2023 CODA Award winner.



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Emerald Coast Chamber Music Festival Returns for 2024 Season

The Emerald Coast Chamber Music Festival has announced its lineup of concerts for the 2024 season. Speaking on the 2024 season, ECCMF Co-Artistic Director and international viola soloist Jacob Clewell states, "This year's festival programming is enticing, I think, because we're showing off music from composers we're mostly familiar with, but not necessarily the music we know them for."

The 2024 festival concert series features the ECCMF Artist Faculty in exhilarating performances of music by Brahms, Mendelssohn, and Beethoven, with less familiar composers like Florence Price and Masatora Goya peppered in alongside longtime favorites. In an exciting change for the 2024 season, the second Showcase Concert (to be performed by the Artist Faculty with guest artist Kirsten Yon, violin, on May 25th) has free attendance, offering an excellent way to kick off Memorial Day weekend. As always,



the festival concludes with the Young Artists of the Chamber Music Institute showing off their skills in an afternoon of amazing chamber playing from classical music's next generation of performers.

ECCMF boasts an impressive roster of international-

ly-respected Artist Faculty and masterclass Guest Artists, who pull double duty by performing in concerts and teaching the college-aged students of the Chamber Music Institute. The Institute is a major feature of the festival; participants are chosen by competitive audi-

tion for attendance, and travel to Niceville from top-notch music schools from across North America for the chance to immerse themselves in the intensive environment.

Public events at ECCMF 2024 run from May 19th to June 2nd. Most concerts take place in the intimate and acoustically brilliant Tyler Recital Hall in the Mattie Kelly Arts Center at NWFSC. Tickets are either free or \$10 depending on the event, and

are available through the Mattie Kelly box office and website. More information about ECCMF concerts and festival activities is available at www.emeraldcoastchambermusicfestival.org.


DIFFICULT PEOPLE

continued from page 26

priate to create various forms of distance including limiting conversational topics, time, space, emotional energy/investment, and financial involvement. You have power to give your energy and resources to life-giving relationships and to withhold energy from life-draining relationships.


7. Disengage. Try practicing forgiveness toward difficult people for the sake of your own peace and character. Release your right to vengeance and let the relationship go. You have the power to discern when relationships need to end. Disengaging is not defeat. In fact, you win by sustaining good character and recapturing energy to invest in pursuits that bring positive meaning to your life and those around you.

Navigating relationships with difficult people is challenging but inevitable. Practicing boundaries will grow your confidence. As you seek support along your journey, connect with us at Journeybravely.com for counseling and coaching.



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 Arts & Music

Studio 237 Music Lessons: Meet the Teachers



Piano: Helmut Dimmel has recently moved from Germany to Walton County. At the early age of seven, he learned how to play the organ. Due to his rapid progress, his teacher advanced him to classical training piano lessons. Helmut later developed a love for rock-pop music at the age of 17. He now has 29 years of experience as a piano teacher.

Helmut has the unique ability to teach a worship leader/pianist/organist how to accompany different choirs, to be a soloist, and/or train someone to perform in weddings, concerts, and musicals with a band. Due to his vast experience using the chord method, Helmut can help students develop their ability

to play by ear, and identify and play chords, tabs, and patterns. Keyboard improvisation is a fun method to learn. It develops the freedom to be creative, the ability to play in bands, and the option of playing without sheet music.

After earning his bachelor's degree in social work and education in Germany and many years of teaching private lessons, Helmut has the experience and knowledge needed to effectively educate children, young people, adults, and senior adults to reach their musical goals.

To find out more about Lessons with Helmut, call Ray Cyr at Studio 237 Music Lessons at (850) 231-3199 and visit <https://studio237music.com/helmut-dimmel>.

Violin: Linda Chung: Calling all violin students! We have a violin teacher with 40 years of experience. Linda Chung has joined the 8-member team of music educators at Studio 237 Music. Her formal education is from the University of Southern California where she earned her Bachelor's degree in Violin Performance. Linda also obtained a Master's



degree in Music from the University of Central Florida which has opened doors for her to teach not only private lessons but also classroom music and a Suzuki string program. She enjoys teaching students of all ages and levels.

As a performer, Linda has been a soloist and concertmaster of several chamber ensembles in Florida and Tennessee. Her vast experience as a performer with several orchestras has greatly added to her violin instruction and enabled her to coach ensembles and soloists for state competitions and orchestral auditions. In addition to private lessons, Linda desires to form group a string program providing performance experi-

ence with fellow violinists. She is highly motivated to bring inspiration, excitement, quality, and passion to our students.

To find out more about lessons with Linda, call Ray Cyr at Studio 237 Music Lessons (850) 231-3199 or visit our website for more info at <https://studio237music.com/linda-chung>.

Voice: MaryKate Cary is a classically trained vocalist who enjoys teaching voice lessons using a variety of styles including gospel, jazz, theatre, and current pop. She earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in music along with special studies in music entrepreneurship from Florida State University. MaryKate is excited and passionate about empowering and supporting each of her students as they develop their voices.

She says, "I have always enjoyed the thrill of singing and performing and I find teaching voice lessons just as rewarding." MaryKate loves nurturing, encouraging, and sharing the joyful experience of vocal music with others. Her positive and uplifting personality energizes and refreshes students and those around her!



Since joining our team of teachers at Studio 237 Music Lessons in Santa Rosa Beach, MaryKate has provided voice lessons for students of all ages. Her diverse background and experience provide enough knowledge to enable one to improve their vocal ability and sound after a season of personal instruction. Because of her experience as a gifted performer, she understands the types of training a person will need to develop their voice and stage presence.

To read more about MaryKate go to <https://studio237music.com/marykate-cary>. Call Ray Cyr (850) 231-3199 to schedule your appointment for a voice lesson.

Bradley Copeland is 2024 ArtsQuest Featured Artist!

ArtsQuest, the 36th Annual Fine Arts Festival produced by the Cultural Arts Alliance of Walton County (CAA), has announced the 2024 festival's fea-

tured artist, Bradley Copeland. Her custom artwork titled "Matapalo" will be the featured image on all ArtsQuest marketing materials as well as at ArtsQuest,

a beloved May tradition taking place May 4th & 5th in Grand Boulevard Town Center's North Park.

Bradley Copeland is a prolific

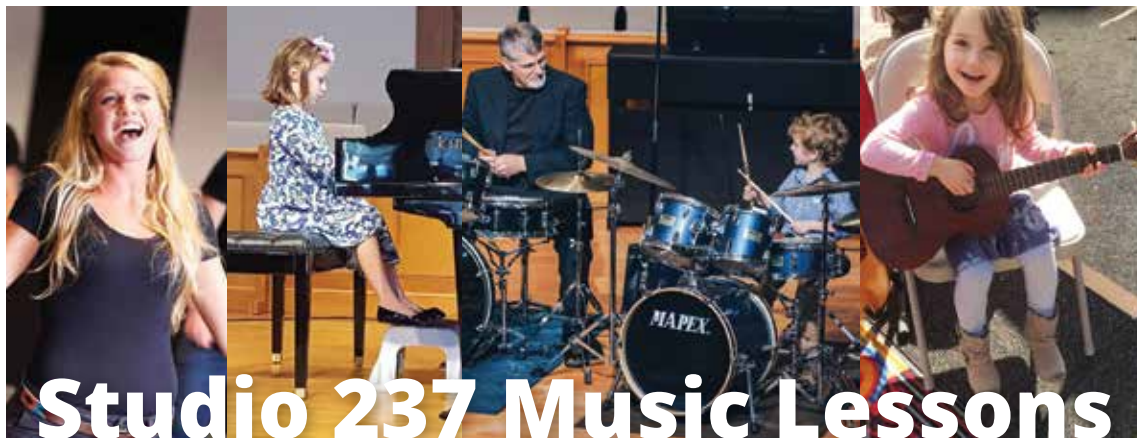


26 year-old artist living in Santa Rosa Beach. Her passion for art has existed for as long as she can remember. After moving to Florida's panhandle in 2020, her passion transformed into her career. She has since participated in numerous solo and group shows as well as other festivals and events. Her story and artwork have been featured in many various publications, including the cover story of Emerald Coast Magazine. And last year, she was awarded South Walton's Artist of the Year Award by Visit South Walton.

Bradley considers art to be her religion, her compass and her greatest love. Her passion for creativity evolved into a need to share its healing abilities with others, and with the help of the CAA, a brand new prison art program was born. Above everything previously described, her most rewarding accomplishment is teaching this type of creativity every week to the residents of Walton Correctional Institution. When asked where she draws her inspiration from Copeland shares, "Really from everything in and around me. I am constantly trying to better understand myself and the universe and my place in it and making art helps me make sense of all of these things."

ArtsQuest will feature over 100 other artists exhibiting and selling their work in Grand Boulevard's North Park. Mediums include Ceramics, Sculpture,

Continued on next page



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ARTSQUEST

continued from previous page

Glass, Oils, Acrylics, Mixed Media, Photography, Sculpture, Metal and Wood, Jewelry, Works on Paper, and more. These exhibiting artists from around the United States will compete for awards and cash prizes totaling \$10,000 that will be decided by distinguished guest judges including Olga Guy, Watercolor Artist; Allison Galloway-Gonzalez, of Galloway-Gonzalez Consulting; and Katie Kehoe Assistant Professor, Sculpture and Expanded Media, Department of Art (FSU).

The Festival will also feature a variety of activities and attractions for art enthusiasts of all ages. Attendees can look forward to art demonstrations, a CAA member gallery featuring many artists from The Foster Gallery, a Walton County student exhibit, a special exhibit from the CAA's Prison Art program, an interactive public art installation, Silent Auction, continuous live music and entertainment, and "ImagiNation: where kids rule." Continuing this year is the popular Art on Demand Live series featuring educational sessions throughout the weekend. Interested participants may register for these sessions on the Cultural Arts Alliance website in advance

of the event. A full cash bar will be available throughout the weekend in Grand Park.

ArtsQuest is part of Art Month Walton County, a collaboration of visual, performing and literary arts events presented in diverse formats and venues throughout Walton County

in May. Art Month Walton also includes "Dine + Dive" - a fundraiser for the Underwater Museum of Art, Digital Graffiti at Alys Beach, the Longleaf Writers Conference, an Open Mic Night with Emerald Coast Storytellers, Sinfonia Goes Pop at Alys Beach, Mary Poppins - a

production from Emerald Coast Theatre Company, Gallery events, concerts, and more.

Volunteers are needed throughout ArtsQuest weekend to work on all aspects of the festival. Those willing to help can sign up at CulturalArtsAlliance.com/volunteer. ArtsQuest is a

rain or shine event. The festival is open to the public, and a \$5 admission donation is requested. Visit CulturalArtsAlliance.com for more information about ArtsQuest as well as other Art Month events, which are supported in part by Visit South Walton.



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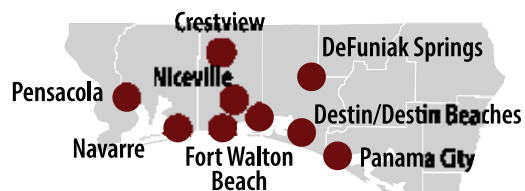


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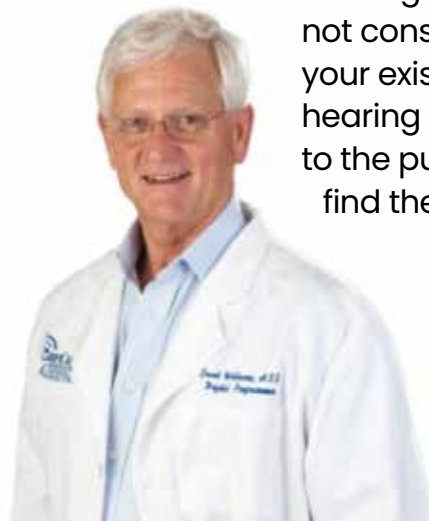
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