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Grace Rides: A Story of Compassion, Community and Equine Healing

BY DOUG STAUFFER

In the heart of Niceville, a remarkable story unfolded at Grace Rides, a sanctuary where humans share a journey of healing and growth with horses. Founded in 2008 by Sherry Hall and her husband, Steve, Grace Rides has transformed from a modest pilot program at the Oak Heaven Stables equestrian facility in Niceville into a beacon of hope for many, embodying a God-sized vision of love and service.

A Vision Born from Compassion

Grace Rides originated from a desire to intertwine the daily presence of horses with the mission to serve people of all abilities. Inspired by the foundational efforts of the local RACE program ("Riding for Adults and Children with Exceptionalities") and supported by entities like Storybrook Farms and Shangri-La Therapeutic Academy of Riding, Grace Rides took



its first steps toward making a significant impact in the community.

Since 2008, Grace Rides has grown from a pilot program of four riders per week. Last year, devoted volunteers invested almost 6,000 hours into the program and provided nearly 900 rides for program participants. The exponential growth will only continue with community involvement.

The Spiritual Journey

At the core of Grace Rides is a profound spiritual philosophy guided by scriptures like Matthew 25:40 (caring for the least in society) and Philippians 4:13 (Christ making all things possible). These scriptures are not just verses displayed on their website; they are truths that fuel the mission to serve through the healing power of equine-as-

GRACE RIDES
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Lights Out. Stash the Trash. It's Sea Turtle Nesting Season!

BY LORI SMITH
AND RITA L. SHERWOOD


Each year, thousands of sea turtles nest on our beaches. Florida beaches are the No. 1 place for sea turtle nests in North America from May to October. Northwest Florida beaches attract many endangered species including Green, Loggerhead, Leatherback and Kemps Ridley.

Life Media's own "Theo," the Gulfarium C.A.R.E. Center, Destin-Fort Walton Beach Sea Turtle Patrol and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC) remind locals and visitors to help protect nesting sea turtles by practicing some simple tips.

Clean: We can all do our part to protect the sea turtles by keeping the beach clean. Remove all belongings, including trash, when you leave the beach. Leave no trace! Stash the trash! Obstacles on the beach can prevent sea turtles from nesting as they crawl from the water, across the sand, to lay their eggs. They can also prevent sea turtle hatchlings

SEA TURTLES
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 Community
GRACE RIDES*continued from page 1*

sisted activities. Sherry Hall, the executive director, asked God to “break my heart to what breaks yours.”

Programs That Transform Lives

Grace Rides offers a variety of programs designed to cater to individuals with special needs, including physical, cognitive and emotional challenges. These programs range from Therapeutic Riding, which teaches riding skills tailored to the needs of the participants, to Horses for Heroes, a dedicated initiative for veterans that focuses on ground handling and relational skills with horses.

The Stable Friends and Equine-Assisted Learning and Enrichment programs provide unmounted experiences promoting emotional, social and cognitive growth through horse interaction.

Abi Copeland is a true example of success. She started as a participant in 2016 (left picture) and transitioned into a volunteer with a special needs child last summer (right picture). She also helps clean out the stalls, and when asked about that, she said, “Someone has to do it—they don’t clean themselves.” Abi wants to continue pursuing

volunteer work, because she loves animals and finds so much joy in giving back.

The People Behind the Mission

The dedication of individuals like Sherry Hall, a PATH Certified Instructor, and Anne Jennete, a Therapeutic Riding Instructor and veteran, highlights the commitment and passion that drive Grace Rides. Their stories of personal growth and the joy of seeing others transform are testimonials of the power and success of this program.

Involvement and Support

Grace Rides thrives because of the community’s support and sponsors’ generosity. Opportunities to get involved include volunteering in various capacities around the farm, sponsoring a horse, or contributing to the operational needs through donations. Each role is crucial in sustaining and expanding the impact of Grace Rides. Would you believe that the program participants span ages 4 to 84 years old?

The Future Vision

With steadfast community support and the dedication of volunteers and donors, Grace Rides is poised for significant expansion. The construction of



a 9,000 sq/ft barn in Defuniak Springs serves as a vivid testament to what collective faith and support can accomplish. Sherry Hall proudly declares, “This is the barn that God built.”

Looking ahead, Grace Rides has outlined a 10-year strategic plan to broaden its scope of services. “Currently, we operate without a required fee structure, relying entirely on donations and volunteer support,” explains Sherry. The future roadmap includes introducing full-service overnight stays to complement existing day camps, enhancing the breadth of therapeutic engagement available to participants.

Moreover, Sherry shares an ambitious vision to construct a large event center featuring a gymnasium and a fully catered kitchen. This facility would host community events such as weddings and family reunions and offer employment oppor-

tunities to program participants and volunteers. “We envision a space that serves our mission and becomes a hub for community gatherings and celebrations,” she adds.

Grace Rides is seeking substantial funding opportunities to realize these goals, including an Impact 100 grant. The organization is also calling for donors to provide matching funds, a critical step towards leveraging larger grants and ensuring the financial sustainability of these expansive projects.

By engaging with Grace Rides, community members, and supporters can play a pivotal role in transforming these aspirations into reality, paving the way for a future where the organization can touch even more lives through its equine-assisted programs.

A Call to Action

Grace Rides invites everyone

to join their journey by volunteering, sponsoring, or simply sharing their story. The experience at Grace Rides isn’t just about riding; it’s about building confidence, fostering relationships, and creating a community where everyone is valued and empowered.

Conclusion

Grace Rides is more than an equestrian program; it is a spiritual journey that intertwines faith, compassion, and the therapeutic power of horses to create profound changes in the lives of participants and volunteers alike. It stands as a testament to what can be achieved when a community comes together to support “the least of these,” embodying the very essence of grace and service.

As Grace Rides continues to write its story, it calls on us to be a part of something bigger than ourselves, to contribute to a legacy of love, healing, and empowerment that will resonate for generations to come. Check them out at www.gracerides.net.

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Meet our Hometown Heroes: Leslie and Tyler Fuller – The Pearl Project

BY MICHELLE RUSCHMAN

Anyone who knows local resident Leslie Fuller knows she was purposed by God to be a mother to children, whether they came into the family by birth or by providence. She and her husband Tyler, a missions pastor, met when they were 15, and after doing several mission trips together, knew that adoption would be part of their story, even when they didn't know what that would look like. "We got married and had two biological children. When our youngest daughter was age 2, we started to ask God to show us what He wanted us to do. During a church service, a story was shared about Jesus calling Peter to walk on the water. Peter was afraid because the waves and the wind were scary. But, God called him to get out of the boat. Our pastor challenged us to get out of the boat, even if we felt nervous about it. If God was calling us, we could trust Him to take care of us. And I knew at that moment that God was



calling us to foster care. Within a month, Tyler felt that call as well. We were scared and it felt big, but we were excited to begin!"

Becoming a foster parent would be one of the hardest things the Fullers would ever do and it was one of the best decisions they would make in their marriage. "When you are a foster parent, the goal is always to care for these children until they can safely reunify with their biological parent. Sometimes it is a matter of days or years and sometimes it turns into a lifetime. There are so many unknowns and that can be hard. Our story turned into one that



will last a lifetime. Our family is blessed to have grown by adoption!"

As a mother who had now experienced all the different ways a family can grow, Leslie wanted to be able to share her heart and knowledge with other families who were working on navigating the foster care system, especially with children who had experienced trauma.

She is doing that through The Pearl Project as their current Director of Northwest Florida. As the Director, her job is to network and build relationships in the community, fundraise and guide programs in our area. To the organization, the work is critical.

"The Pearl Project's mission is to help vulnerable children discover their value. Children

who have experienced trauma have changes in their brains, bodies, biology, and belief systems that can ultimately lead to confusing behaviors. Because of their early life circumstances, it can be hard for them to learn how to trust the adults in their lives. Caregivers often come to us overwhelmed and at a loss for how to help their children heal. We offer practical tools to empower caregivers to help their children. We also believe these children need to be surrounded by a community that is trauma informed. We are committed to bringing Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI) to teachers, case workers, church volunteers, and anyone who works with children. We desire that through healthy connections, vulnerable children will feel safe, know they have a voice, and ultimately, discover that they are precious."

The Pearl Project was founded by Joy and Stephen Zedler. When Leslie met Joy at a camp

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 Community

SEA TURTLES

continued from page 1

from reaching the water once they emerge from their nests. Dispose of all trash, fill in holes in the sand and put away boats, beach toys and furniture. This also applies to trash in the water, such as abandoned fishing gear, extremely harmful to sea

turtles. They can get stuck in deserted traps or wrapped up in a net or fishing line, causing physical injuries to their flippers and softer parts of their body. Sea turtles are air breathers, so getting caught in an old trap will prevent them from making it up to the surface. Never cut your fishing line if you hook a sea turtle and do not target sea turtles

while fishing. Leave no trace on the beach or in the water!

Dark: Lights out! Since most of Florida's sea turtles nest at night, it is important to keep our beaches dark. Bright lights can disorient nesting turtles and their hatchlings, leading them away from the ocean and toward potential danger, such as a parking lot. So, avoid using a flashlight or cellphone on the beach at night. If you live along the beach or are visiting, turn out lights or close curtains after dark to ensure nesting turtles' safety as they come ashore, keeping hatchlings oriented when they emerge from their nests. Use turtle safe flashlights or flashlight covers when on the beach at night. You can get one FREE at the Visit Destin-Fort Walton Beach Welcome Center, 1540 Miracle Strip Pkwy SE, Fort Walton Beach.

Flat: We share the beach with sea turtles. A female will return to her beach where she was born to lay her eggs. So, when you leave the beach each day, knock down any sandcastles and fill in any holes. It's incredible to watch a 300-400 lb. Loggerhead sea turtle crawl up the beach which is no easy task, dig an 18-20-inch hole with only her back flippers, deposit her eggs and then cover them back up with sand and pat it all down (all with only her back flippers). The whole process takes 30 to 60 minutes.

Sometimes they are seen during the day where they encounter many additional hazards and complications. For example, a sea gull's favorite snack is a baby sea turtle. The nest, also, is at risk of predation by animals as well as of high tides during storms, which can wash out and drown nests. Once hatched, they must make it to the water without becoming disoriented by artificial light or killed by predators. Finally, they arrive to their home in the Gulf where they are at risk of sharks, fish, fishing lines, ingesting debris and trash, boats and pollution. For the females who survive and return to shore to nest, it's a great victory. Once she lays her eggs on the beach, the sea turtle mama never returns.

The most important thing to remember if you see a mama sea turtle on the beach is to be respectful, stay quiet and stay back at least 50 feet. Don't get excited or be loud or take pictures with the flash on your cell



phone which can disorient the turtle and stress her out. She is likely to return to the water unable to lay her eggs.

We're so passionate about the sea turtles that we even have a local celebrity named Theo, a lovable, plush turtle with a mission—to help protect and sustain the threatened sea turtle population along our Gulf Coast. "I'm a little turtle on a big mission. I'm here to save my fellow threatened sea turtles," says Theo.

One of Theo's favorite places is our very own Gulfarium on Okaloosa Island known as the Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park, a beacon for coastal conservation where it been active in marine animal rescue and rehabilitation for many years through the C.A.R.E. Center, the non-profit arm of Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park. Developed in 2015 to facilitate and further its continued coastal conservation efforts, the program has helped to rehabilitate and release hundreds of various species of sea turtles found on the Gulf Coast, from the Loggerhead, Green, Kemp's Ridley, to the Leatherback, back into the wild.

Rehabilitation starts when a sea turtle patient arrives; it is evaluated by animal care and veterinary staff using guidelines from the FWC. These guidelines give staff the necessary information needed to evaluate a method for rehabilitation, recovery and release.

Although every effort is made to release the turtle back to the ocean, occasionally a sea turtle is deemed non-releasable due to medical or physical limitations, and Gulfarium C.A.R.E. Center becomes the turtle's permanent home with full-time care.

The Center leads the charge in the rescue and rehabilitation of sea turtles along the Emerald Coast, successfully treating over 130 sea turtles in 2023 alone, with the average rehabilitation of each turtle costing over \$20,000.

The C.A.R.E. Center also encourages awareness through public education as well as opportunities for locals to actively participate, such as becoming a volunteer, donating or attending a fund-raising event. You can support by donating at <https://bit.ly/3SOuEwQ>, or through the C.A.R.E. Center's Amazon Wishlist! <https://amzn.to/3WhZZHP?>


Other ways to help sea turtles include reporting those that are sick, injured, entangled or dead to FWC's Wildlife Alert Hotline at 888-404-FWCC (3922). Do not touch the sea turtle, remove it from the beach or attempt to push it back into the water as this can cause the animal to re-strand and die. Instead, monitor from a safe distance. While waiting for authorities to arrive, note its position and monitor its breathing.

Visit Gulfarium.com/volunteer and the C.A.R.E. Center at Facebook.com/gulfariumcare-center. You can also help support the cause at theotheturtle.com. A portion of every Theo purchase, from ball caps and pillows to Christmas ornaments and key chains, goes directly to help support the conservation and rehabilitation of sea turtles. We can all do our part to protect these amazing marine animals; after all, it was certainly their beach first!




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Bay Buzz



2024 Women of Honor

Congratulations to the 2024 Women of Honor, recently recognized at the Women of Honor event held at the University of West Florida (UWF) Emerald Coast Campus. The "Women of Honor" was first established as "Wall of Honor" by the The Okaloosa County Commission on the Status of Women (OC-CSW) in 1997 as an idea of its members who thought it would be a nice way for someone to honor the women in their lives whose works might be unknown to most others. Details about who they are and the impact they had are shared and each woman's name is added to a plaque that hangs on the Wall of Honor at the UWF Emerald Coast campus library along

with a letter placed in the Book of Honor near the plaque.

The 2024 Women of Honor are as follows:

Audrey Adams – Assistant Director for the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Communications Division

Megan Blancho - President of Okaloosa Chapter of Florida Association of Women Lawyers, dedicated to the development of professional relationships among women lawyers

Daquiri Champion – Retired Registered Dietician in Nephrology, Pediatric Nutrition, Counseling and Geriatric Nutrition

Sherry Cronley – Active volunteer with Fort Walton Beach Elk's 1795, formerly a school teacher and now homes-

chooling her 14 year old grandson

Sheryl "Sherry" Jones - Community & Public Relations Director for One Hopeful Place, Sheryl is responsible for securing funds

Pam Lee - Volunteer with Elks Lodge 1795, Mardi Gras Club, River Rats, Destin Elementary, Corvette Club, Arc of the Emerald Coast and American Business Women's Association

Kathy Miller - volunteer, teacher and leader for 59 years at First Baptist Church's International English School, longest running in the State of Florida

Amanda Negron – CEO of Hsu Foundation and serves on the Senior Board of the Snowden-Horne Society, Children of the American Revolution

Elizabeth "Liz" Qualiana - Residential Stability Coordinator Supervisor who works with people to find housing at One Hopeful Place

June Scroggin - an activist volunteering with Republican Women of Okaloosa Federated (RWOFF), Fresh Start, 100+ Women Who Care, Sleep in Heavenly Peace (building beds) and more

Melinda Sousa - Founded Visiting You Senior Home Care

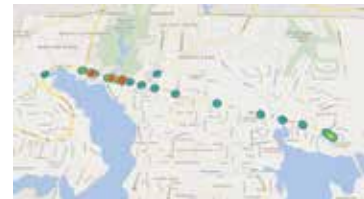
dedicated to helping seniors find companionship.

Neko Stubblefield – Vice President of Membership & Community Development for Eglin Federal Credit Union, fostering valuable partnerships

Debbie Tate – Community Affairs Office Manager for Okaloosa County Public Schools Foundation

Sabina Zunguze - A certified suicide prevention speaker and CEO of the Tatissa Foundation for Suicide Prevention and Social Justice Inc.

Niceville Police Department's "Operation Save the Day"



The City of Niceville's Police Department concluded its speed enforcement initiative 'Operation Save the Day' on Friday, April 26. The three-day initiative aimed to combat speeding and reinforce safe driving on State Road 20 between Rocky Bayou Dr. and Government Ave.

Over the course of the operation, the department issued a total of 77 citations, 67 of which were for speeding. Each speeding violation issued was for exceeding the posted speed limit by 9 MPH or more. From the start of the initiative on Wednesday, April 24, until the end on Friday, April 26, there was a 40% decrease in the number of citations issued. Chief Lovering stated, "We're trying to change people's habits. The initiative would have been a success if no tickets were written at all."

Destin Charity Wine Auction Raises \$3.3 million for Children in Need

The Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation (DCWAF) is pleased to announce that the 19th Annual Destin Charity Wine Auction presented by the Jumonville Family raised \$3.3 million for children in need in Northwest Florida. Hosted April 26 and 27 to a sold-out crowd of more than 600 guests, proceeds from the auction

benefit DCWAF's 17 partner children's charities in Northwest Florida. The funds raised will be distributed to 17 local non-profit organizations for specific projects and programs that benefit children. DCWAF's charity partners for 2024 are AMIkids Emerald Coast, Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast, Boys and Girls Clubs of the Emerald Coast, Caring & Sharing of South Walton, Children in Crisis, Children's Volunteer Health Network, Ellison McCraney Ingram Foundation, Emerald Coast Autism Center, Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center, Habitat for Humanity of Walton County, Mental Health Association of Okaloosa and Walton Counties, Opportunity Inc., Point Washington Medical Clinic, Shelter House of Northwest Florida, The Arc of the Emerald Coast, Westonwood Ranch and Youth Village.

Interested in Volunteering to Help Children?

ECCAC Hosting A Volunteer Orientation June 18

The Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center (ECCAC) will be hosting an informative Volunteer Orientation on Tuesday evening, June 18, 6-7 pm. in its Niceville Center, 401 McEwen Drive. Volunteers are needed to help at its center in Niceville, or volunteers can help in other ways such as community events and more.

ECCAC's mission is to heal and prevent the trauma of childhood abuse and neglect by providing advocacy, child-friendly therapies and a safe environment for kids to feel seen, heard and understood. In 2023 alone, ECCAC assisted 1,585 kids and 17,480 students received Safety Matters prevention education in area schools. Though ECCAC doesn't house children, it provides services to children and their families at no cost in its Okaloosa and Walton County centers.

Call or email ECCAC Client Care Manager Hailey White to attend: 334-343-4541, Hailey@eccac.org. Visit www.eccac.org.

If abuse is suspected, report it by calling the anonymous Florida Abuse Hotline at 1-800-96-ABUSE.

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Saving the Green Space at Bluewater Bay Update

BY BARBARA PALMGREN

It's exciting to report that Preserve Bluewater Bay (PBWB) is edging even closer to its goal of saving 150 acres of green space at Bluewater Bay. Owning the land ensures that Bluewater Bay remains the unique and beautiful community that is celebrated throughout the area.

David Rauch from PBWB updated that the agreed price of \$2.3 million still could use donations to make up a small difference. The officers are in the process of completing surveys for the sliver buyers and collecting pledges.

Within the last several months, the organization received 501C3 eligibility required by the federal government. Organizations that qualify under

the Internal Revenue Code are eligible for federal exemption from payment of corporate income tax. This should encourage a few more appreciated donations, so please visit the website at preservebwb.com to make a pledge.

Yes, you are almost there. Since Preserve Bluewater Bay, Inc., has been granted the non-profit 501C3 status, more residents are making the important decision to help Bluewater Bay. The "Hi Ho Sliver" campaign to extend property lines on the golf course for those who live on the golf course is also still available as a way to become a serious and needed donor.

As a reminder, Preserve Bluewater Bay (PBWB) is a not-for-profit organization created by



community members who want to save 150 acres of green space in Bluewater Bay from developers—a special spot of paradise. The green space will be saved from further housing development and preserved for future generations, because our com-

munity is coming together with donations to sustain the area. To those who have already pledged their commitment, thank you for your proactive support. To the rest of our community, we encourage you take advantage of this collective opportunity

for preservation—we are almost there!

Contact David Rauch at 850-865-0897 or visit "Welcome to Preserve Bluewater Bay | A Community Effort" at preservebwb.com to learn more and make your pledge.

Learn how to Keep Our Green Spaces *Green* Today!

Which Describes You?



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

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

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

Consider donating to save the green space today.

www.preservebwb.com

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 Community

Preparing for a Safe Summer at the Beach

By MACKENZIE McCLINTOCK,
SWFD PUBLIC INFORMATION
OFFICER

As the weather warms up and many individuals head to the beach, South Walton Fire District (SWFD) wants to remind our communities about the proper precautions to take to make summer safer.

SWFD's firefighters and lifeguards experience a significant uptick in preventable medical incidents during the summer months. Many times, these events happen without warning and do not discriminate between individuals who are long-time Florida locals, or first-time visitors to the area.

"Anyone can fall victim to impacts of the Florida heat," said SWFD Beach Safety Director David Vaughan. "When you combine that hot weather with dangerous surf, we start to experience incredibly busy and difficult days. Unfortunately, it doesn't take long for a nice day at the beach to end in tragedy, and that's what we're trying to prevent."

The Gulf of Mexico does have smaller surf compared to other beaches across the country, however, the waves are not the primary danger to swimmers. Instead, rip currents pose the most significant threat.

"Each year, it's estimated rip

currents are responsible for approximately 100 deaths in the United States," Vaughan said. "These deaths are preventable. It starts with an understanding that any open body of water poses a threat to swimmers and demands your respect."

Often incorrectly referred to as "riptides" or "undertow," rip currents typically form due to a break in the sandbar, as well as near structures such as jetties and piers.

A rip current's size and speed can vary depending on the day's conditions, but one thing remains the same: even elite swimmers can't outlast the grip of the rip.

"It's the panic that kills people," Vaughan said. "A swimmer realizes they aren't making any progress toward shore and suddenly, they start to swim straight toward shore not realizing they are swimming against the current. This is a race that no one can win."

Instead, SWFD lifeguards recommend a swimmer remains calm, relaxes their body, and allows themselves to float to conserve their energy. Then, they can wave back to shore or yell for help. Strong swimmers also can consider swimming parallel to shore to break out of the rip current.

"Rip currents often have a natural dispersion point where the current comes to an end and will essentially spit you out back into a section of breaking waves," Vaughan said. "At this point, you may find yourself close to the sandbar on our beaches, where the water is shallow, and you are able to stand or rest."

Some clues that rip currents might be present include:

- 1. The color of the beach warning flags.** Rip currents are more likely to be present on days of single red or double red flag conditions. However, they can also be present on a yellow flag day.
- 2. Differences in water color.** Rip currents are often darker in color than the water immediately surrounding them.
- 3. Irregular water texture.** Areas where waves are not breaking or appear disorganized can indicate the presence of a rip current.
- 4. Debris and foam.** A trail of marine debris or sea foam being pulled in a line out to sea can show the rip current's



pattern or trail.

"The best defense to prevent a rip current-related drowning is to swim near a lifeguard," Vaughan explained. "When an emergency happens, you must account for the time it will take for someone to call 911 and send help to your location. Our sole purpose is to keep people safe at the beach and the closer you can get to us, the quicker we can be there to help."

SWFD staffs 15 lifeguard towers across the 26 miles of South Walton's coastline. For a better understanding of lifeguard tower locations, rip current safety, and daily beach condition updates, follow the South Walton Fire District on Facebook or Instagram, or visit www.swfd.org.

Anyone interested in joining SWFD's team and serving the community as a beach lifeguard can email career@swfd.org to learn more about career opportunities.





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thank you



The **Niceville High School Theatre Department** wishes to thank our community for the tremendous outpouring of support you showed for our recent production of Disney's 'Newsies.'

Because of you, we managed to break all attendance and box office records, making **"Newsies" the most successful high school musical ever performed in any Okaloosa County high school.**

We sincerely thank you for supporting the arts at NHS, and hope to see you at next year's shows!

*Follow us on Instagram @ theatre_nhs
or on Facebook @ NicevilleHSTheatre.*



 Community

Bay Buzz Events



Music, Comedy and Fun at Mattie Kelly Arts Center this Summer!

This summer, the Mattie Kelly Arts Center (MKAC) presents a concert and comedian series you will not want to miss. Start off with an evening of Southern Rock when Atlanta Rhythm Section and Orleans take the stage on June 29 at 7 p.m. Purchase tickets at Mattiekellytickets.com or by calling 850-706-5206.



In July, continue the concert Series with Great American SoulBook, July 11, 7 p.m., which features more than 12 performers on stage performing Motown, R&B and other iconic Soulful favorites that inspired generations.

And finish the series with Tom Papa comedian, Friday, July 19, 7 p.m., who will have you laughing in the aisles. With more than 20 years as a stand-

up comedian, Tom Papa is one of the top comedic voices in the country, finding success as an actor, host, and author, in film, TV, radio and podcasts as well as on the live stage. Purchase July event tickets at mattiekellyartscenter.org or call the box office at 850-729-6000.

Life Media looks forward to seeing you over the summer.

Memorial Day Remembrance

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints is hosting a Memorial Day Remembrance, May 25, the Saturday before Memorial Day, at their chapel located at 1100 Palm Blvd. S., in Niceville. The community is

invited to attend. Beginning at 8:15 a.m., there will be a flag raising; at 8:30 a.m., everyone is invited to enjoy a pancake breakfast. Retired Colonel Stephen Snow will be the keynote speaker sharing stories about his time flying multiple presidents on Air Force One. After breakfast, stick around and play Pickle Ball, Corn Hole or let the kids explore the Niceville Fire Engine that will be on site for the young ones to enjoy.

3rd Annual Sip & Splash

Saturday, June 1 | 6-9 p.m.



Join friends and Life Media on Saturday, June 1, from 6-9 p.m. for the third annual Sip & Splash: An Aquatic Affair, presented by Tim Smith Acura, at The Taj Renee Community Aquatic Center, benefitting the Emerald Coast Fitness Foundation (ECFF), a public charity formed to develop physical fitness and water safety among the youth and adults of Okaloosa

County. Tickets include unlimited craft cocktails, wine, beer and a multicourse dinner served by your favorite local restaurants including Camille's at Crystal Beach, Carrabba's Italian Grill, Mozey's Mobile Catering and Cuisine, SunQuest Catering, Sura Korean Steakhouse, and The Beachy Asian, along with live music, a silent auction, photo booth and more!

Tickets and tables are available for \$125 per individual or \$1,000 for a table of 10. Purchase at ecffitnessfoundation.org.

Freeport Veterans Memorial Golf Tournament

June 1 | 8 a.m. | Eagle Springs Golf Course ~ Defuniak Springs

The city of Freeport volunteers invite you to play in the Freeport Veterans Memorial Golf Tournament, June 1st at Eagle Springs Golf Club in Defuniak Springs, to raise funds for the Veterans Memorial Walk. The Golf Tournament raises monies for the continued maintenance and additions to the Veterans Memorial at Casey Park. Angels Among us is the

Continued on page 12



ATLANTA RHYTHM SECTION

& Orleans

MATTIE KELLY ARTS CENTER
June 29th 7:00pm

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.

Happenings Around the Bay



2024 EVENTS

JUNE

- 01** | **Spring Soiree benefiting the Freedom House**
5:30 pm | Niceville Senior Center | Niceville
Emerald Coast Chamber Music Festival Showcase Concert
7 pm | Tyler Recital Hall at NWF State College | Niceville
Billy Bowlegs 5K Run
7:30 am | Fort Walton Beach HS | FWB
Freeport Veterans Memorial Golf Tournament
8 am | Eagle Springs Golf Course | Defuniak Springs
Emerald Coast Pride
9 am | Niceville Community Center | Niceville
- 02** | **Young Artists of the Emerald Coast Chamber Music Festival**
1:30 pm | Tyler Recital Hall at NWF State College | Niceville
Women's Climbing Circle
5 pm | Rock Out Climbing Gym | Destin
- 03** | **Chess Night**
6 pm | LJ Schooners Restaurant | Niceville
- 03-07** | **Pistol Youth Camp**
10 am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso

- 04** | **Niceville Young Professionals Lunch Meeting**
11:30 am | Niceville-Valparaiso Chamber | Niceville
Live Music: Charlie Seagar
4 pm | Al's Beach Club and Burger Bar | FWB
Movies on the Beach: "Luca"
8 pm | Al's Beach Club and Burger Bar | FWB
- 05** | **Growing Green Families Knit/Crochet Night**
6 pm | Growing Green Families | Niceville
- 06** | **A Bed 4 Me Greens & Dreams Golf Tournament**
12:30 pm | Rocky Bayou Country Club | Niceville
Concerts in the Village: Adam Ezra Group
7 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation | Destin

- 07** | **Greater FWB Chamber First Friday Coffee**
7 am | Christian Life Center at First Baptist Church | FWB

- 07 CONT.** | **Live Music: Chris Curles + Saltwater Revival Band**
5 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville
- 8** | **Alaqua Animal Refuge's 3rd Annual FORE! The Love of Animals Golf Tournament**
8:30 am | Links Golf Club at Sandestin | Miramar Beach

- 10-14** | **Rifle Youth Camp**
10 am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso

- 11** | **Movies on the Beach: "Migration"**
8 pm | Al's Beach Club and Burger Bar | FWB
- 12** | **Niceville-Valparaiso Chamber Second Wednesday Breakfast**
7:15 am | Niceville Community Center | Niceville
The Pittman's Magical Variety Show
6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville
- 13** | **Greater FWB Chamber Nothing But Networking**
11:30 am | Sura Korean Steakhouse | FWB
- 14** | **Live Music: Purple Monkey**
7 pm | Al's Beach Club and Burger Bar | FWB
- 15** | **Stained Glass Part 2 with Dulvie Scaff**
11 am | Artful Things Niceville | Niceville
- 18** | **Movies on the Beach: "Wonka"**
8 pm | Al's Beach Club and Burger Bar | FWB
- 20** | **Greater FWB Chamber Business After Hours**
5:30 pm | Beachworx FWB | FWB

- 22** | **American Legion 221 Poker Run benefiting A Bed 4 Me Foundation**
9 am | American Legion Post 221 | Niceville
- 29** | **June Jam!**
11 am | Boys & Girls Club of Pensacola | Pensacola
GUP 5K Run!
8 am | Christ our Redeemer Catholic | Niceville
Atlanta Rhythm Section and Orleans
7 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville
- 30** | **Sunset Shrimp Boil**
4 pm | LJ Schooners Restaurant | Niceville

ONGOING EVENTS

- Oils and Acrylics with Rosalyn O'Grady**
10 am | Tues | Artful Things | Niceville
- Watercolor Techniques with Theresia McInnis**
1 pm | Tues | Artful Things | Niceville
- Bingo Night**
6 pm | Tues | Bayou Brewing Company | 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



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 Community

High Speed Internet Comes to the Panhandle

BY KENNETH BOOKS

Tired of slow Internet? Tired of being bounced in the middle of your session? Live Oak Fiber is laying the lines to overcome those problems.

Halfway complete, some 200,000 customers are expected to sign on to the fiber optic Internet plan, from Valparaiso to Santa Rosa County.

Why here?

“What’s not to like?” said Steve Smith, Live Oak’s chief revenue officer and founder. “The world’s best beaches. A growing population. And we also found the existing providers were absentee landlords. They were not doing a good job maintaining.”

Live Oak is the largest green-field fiber project in the world,

with its local headquarters in the former Coldwell Banker building behind Bluewater Bay’s Winn Dixie. So far, the company has investing \$145 million to build the network. The company has made a commitment to hire locally to ensure the benefits of a local company working for the community it serves, according to a Live Oak press release. So far, it’s hired about 100 locals, primarily in Niceville. These include hires in technical, sales, marketing, customer service, engineering and operations. “That’s a lot, I think, in two years,” Smith said.

Part of its financing comes from a grant from the Florida Broadband Opportunity program. It earned “Best in Destin” honors through VIP Destin



Magazine and was named Business of the Year by the Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce. One Okaloosa Business Leadership Council recognized the Milken Institute Best Performing Cities report, which cited the company as being the key reason of moving to the area forward from a broadband ranking of number 182 to number 23.

It all started in July 2022.

“We had to identify the markets, find office space, renovate when we could and find the cof-

fee cups,” Smith said. Already, between 6,000 and 7,000 customers are on board.

The company started out working with infrared capital partners and created a solar farm and toll road around the Denver airport. Originally, it received \$150 million from the airport hierarchy “and we’re close to spending that,” Smith said. “We’re in the process of raising \$200-250 million. We’re a platform they like.”

“One out of every three houses in Bluewater Bay and Shalimar are among our customers,” he said.

The service will include 500-megabyte, 2-gigabyte and 5-gigabyte options, with packages ranging from \$55 to \$135 per month. There are no data caps.

“Incumbent providers like to charge for that,” he said.

“This might be one of the largest private infrastructure projects the county has ever seen,” Smith said. “Our goal is to get fiber-reliable activity for every American.”

It’s a big job, but one that seems to resonate with customers.

“We’re trying to offer Internet the way it should be,” Smith said. Feedback is important. We believe our reliable Internet is better and having people who can solve your problems is better. We have a much more resilient structure and unlimited connectivity.”

To learn more about Live Oak Fiber, go to liveoakfiber.com.

EVENTS

continued from page 10

most recent monument to be dedicated Veteran’s Day 2024 and will feature a final statue of an angel, welcoming and embracing a service member titled

“Angels Among Us,” as well as a ground memorial and Space Force marker, to round out the military services. To participate, visit facebook.com/FreeportVeterans to download a registration form, then email rbarley@freeportflorida.gov, mail a check to

Mayor Barley, 112 Highway 20, Freeport FL 32439, or turn in to City Hall receptionist. Please make checks payable to TPS/FVM (Town Planter’s Society Freeport Veterans Memorial).



Alaqua Animal Refuge 3rd Annual FORE! The Love of Animals Golf Tournament

June 8 | Miramar Beach | Deadline to Register: May 24
Join the 3rd Annual FORE!

Continued on page 16



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Building Resilience with the Walton County CERT Program

BY HEATHER BENNETT EYE

The Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program was started in the '80s by the Los Angeles Fire Department when they realized the need for support in the event of a large-scale disaster. They wanted to give people the proper training to help others without putting themselves in harms way. FEMA formalized the training program in 1993, which is now available across the United States. The CERT training program prepares everyday people like you and me to help families and neighbors in the event of a disaster so we're able to provide support and immediate assistance before first responders arrive.

Our Walton County CERT program is under the umbrella of Walton County Emergency Management, the entity responsible for all aspects of disaster including mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery for all types of natural, technological or man-made hazards. It operates out of an old Cold War bunker in DeFuniak Springs. The program is a 501(c)(3) all-hazards department consisting of volunteers who assist where there's a need. It began in 2017 and has grown to over 200 trained individuals, with 150 volunteers who are active for large-scale events and about 60 volunteers who are more active and readily available for non-disaster events as well. "The reason why CERT exists, is so our community is more resilient and more prepared," said Catie Feeney, Operations Coordinator for Walton County.

Non-Disaster events are what they call "Blue Sky" activities. These can be anything from assisting community events with traffic control or first aid stations to attending outreach events, helping around the bunker, organizing disaster supplies, and assisting with office functions such as filing. "Gray Sky" activities are more disaster response events such as human needs assessments after house fires alongside the American Red Cross, assisting in the Emergency Operations Center, answering phones in the Community Information Center, and distributing supplies such as food, water, and ice. "We are the pieces behind the scenes that make sure that when big does get



big, and it's beyond the capacity of the first responders, we can be there to support them so they get what they need," stated Catie.

The CERT team also focuses on helping people post-disaster, thinking about what people need in the weeks and months ahead, and making sure they are able to transition back to normalcy as soon as possible. "We're the little worker bees behind the scenes," said Catie. Volunteers will help EOC staff keep track of resources, recovering resources that are no longer needed and moving them around to where there's still a need.

Volunteers come from all types of backgrounds. Some people are professional volunteers, who volunteer more hours than their regular work hours, and there are also retirees, lawyers, and doctors. "We have some folks who are in their 70s. It doesn't matter your age or ability, there's a spot for everybody," said Catie. "The CERT program is an incredible opportunity not only to give back to your community but also to make lifelong friends. There are people from all walks of life, all different professions. You can find your friends here."

If you're interested in learning more about CERT, you can take an online class IS-317: Introduction to Community Emergency Response Teams, offered through FEMA. The Walton County CERT program offers in-person volunteer training 3 times a year. The next session will be offered this summer. The classes teach basic skills for fire operations, fire safety, light search and rescue, team organization, disaster medical operations and terrorism. It's offered on Tuesday and Thursday evenings over two weeks with a Saturday practicum where you can put your skills to the test.

Other ways the CERT pro-

gram is helping Walton County stay prepared is through HERICane Florida | Landfall: Walton County, Walton County Emergency Management's free, week-long girl's day camp where girls (7th - 9th grade) will train in disaster preparedness, leadership, career exploration and professional development. They will be mentored by female leaders

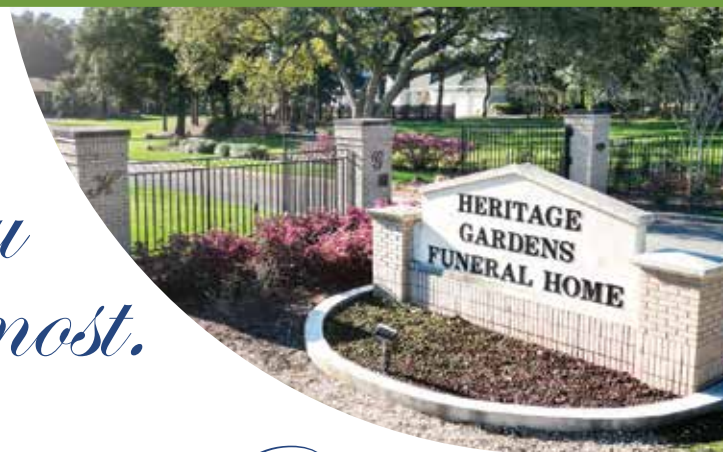


from local, state, national and private sector response agencies. There will also be a county-wide Preparedness Town Hall hosted on June 6 from 6-8 p.m. at the South Walton Annex at 31 Coastal Centre Blvd in Santa Rosa Beach.

"We just want to make Walton County better. We want to make Walton County more resilient, to be able to help our neighbors do it safely, and build a community that can rely on each other," said Catie. "We have no control over Mother Nature, and she is way more powerful than we are. What we have control over is being able to make sure both our visitors and our residents are prepared."

If you'd like to learn more about the CERT program, please visit <https://www.co.walton.fl.us/1208/Community-Emergency-Response-Teams-CERT>. If you'd like to make a donation, you can make a donation through the Walton County Board of County Commissioners.

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 Community

Is Your Insurance Ready for Hurricane Season?

June 1st marks the beginning of the 2024 hurricane season, which could be one of the most active on record. Colorado State University's tropical meteorology project team is forecasting 23 storms, 11 of which will become hurricanes and five of which will reach Category 3 status or stronger, in their first outlook for 2024 recently released. That's because of two main factors: El Niño is expected to become La Niña, which usually enhances storms; and the Atlantic Ocean water is record warm in most areas, which also could enhance storms.

So, it is time to make sure you're ready for the next round of tropical depressions, storms and hurricanes that have potential to affect the Gulf Coast every year.

Do you have what you need when it comes to homeowner's and flood insurance and hurricanes? There are a few things that should be on your radar. If you have these coverages in place, you'll be better equipped to ride out whatever storm blows through.

First on the list is hurricane/wind coverage. Most home pol-

icies (HO3, DP3, HO6, HO4) in Florida include either hurricane, named storm, or wind/hail under a separate deductible. This is preferred since coordination and consistency of coverages is important. Some carriers don't write wind coverage close to the water. So, a stand-alone wind-only policy would be needed. If this is the case, extra care must be taken to avoid any coverage inconsistencies. In previous articles, we've addressed the differences in hurricane, named storm and wind/hail coverage. But suffice



it to say, when it comes to wind coverage, the best option is hurricane. Under this coverage scenario, the larger deductible in the policy, usually a percentage of the Dwelling Limit, applies to declared hurricane activity, while the smaller deductible in the policy would apply to other wind losses and all other perils in the policy. There are several deductible options available that can have a large impact on what would be your out-of-pocket responsibility if you file a claim.

Make sure you know you have sufficient Dwelling Limit (Coverage A) coverage to rebuild your home in the event of a loss. Local and national data indicates that nearly two out of three homes and structures are underinsured.

Another important coverage is Loss of Use that pays for you to live somewhere else while repairs are being done to your temporarily unlivable home. This goes for rental properties

with Loss of Rents coverage as well. Remember, there needs to be direct physical damage to trigger this coverage. Some rental policies don't include Loss of Rents so you will want to read your policy or call your insurance agent so you know for sure.

Another often misunderstood coverage not offered with each carrier, but always recommended, is Law or Ordinance coverage. Most carriers, if they have it available, offer either 10%, 25% or 50% coverage. This percentage is tied to your Dwelling Limit. If you have extensive hurricane damage, like we saw with Hurricane Michael, there may be new building codes you must adhere to in order to rebuild. The additional Law or Ordinance coverage is crucial to your protection, since your

policy is designed to rebuild your home as it was before the damage, with similar materials and quality, and not with more costly materials that could now be required by more stringent construction codes that may have come into play.

Another vital policy to have, especially during hurricane season, is flood insurance. Flood and water damage from a wind event are not necessarily the same thing. This coverage is so vital that we will again devote our next month's article to this topic. Although there are a few carriers who will add flood coverage as an endorsement to a home policy, it is infrequent. For most insureds, your flood policy will be a separate policy written through the NFIP (National Flood Insurance Program), and, unless your lender requires the policy, or you're closing on a new purchase, there is a standard 30-day waiting period through the NFIP before your flood policy will become effective. Private flood insurance is an alternative. Many of the private markets in the country, and especially in Florida, offer broader coverages than the NFIP and these should be considered as an alternative to maximize your protection.

We hope this helps ease your concerns this hurricane season, in terms of coverage.

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Community

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.

“Walton County is a unique place, with world-famous beaches and resort towns, charming historic sites, large areas of conservation, and beautiful rural farmland,” says Plan for Walton 2040 Project Lead Marina Khoury. “Those areas all have their own character and a sense of community. Future growth in these communities, and the intensity of that growth, should reflect those values. Walton County also is a special place for DPZ as we have been helping to guide development there for the past 40 years.”

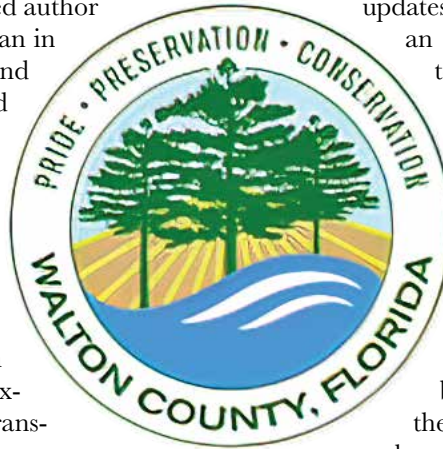
Plan for Walton 2040 is part

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. The planning effort 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. Plan for Walton 2040 also has a Facebook page of the same name where residents can ask questions and engage in the process.

“For this plan to be successful, we need to hear from the wide array of people who work, live or recreate in Walton County. So we invite everyone to visit the website, take our survey,

sign up for email updates, and plan to attend all or part of the charrette meetings in May,” said Khoury.

In addition to the website, social media, and email outreach, the planning team hosted a week-long workshop in Walton County from May 1-8, 2024. That workshop, a “charrette,” included public presentations, workshops on specific topics such as environment and transportation, an open-studio time where stakeholders interacted with members of the planning team, and “pop-up” outreach efforts in different areas of the County.

For more information, visit www.PlanForWalton2040.com or email info@PlanForWalton2040.com.

EVENTS

continued from page 12

The Love of Animals Golf Tournament. Set against the stunning backdrop of The Links

Golf Club at Sandestin on Saturday, June 8, it’s a perfect blend of competitive golfing and heartfelt support for our furry friends, benefiting the refuge and its mission.

Begin at 8:30 a.m. with check-in, accompanied by a breakfast and a Bloody Mary and Mimosa bar. The golf tournament, starting at 10 a.m., will feature a shotgun start and scramble format, offering a fun challenge for

golfers of all levels.

Registration Information:

Teams of 4 (individual players will be paired)

Includes 18 holes with a cart,

boxed lunch, and 2 drink tickets

Fee: \$250 per individual, \$850 per team of four



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MKAF's Warrior Arts Brings Hope and Resilience to Veterans Throughout Northwest Florida

By WILL ESTELL

If you live among the coastal communities of Northwest Florida, you have likely become aware of the Destin-based Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation (MKAF) and the outreach this wonderful organization does to promote the arts within the growing communities it serves. One such initiative by which the MKAF staff, board and members bring such support and healing is the charitable organization's Warrior Arts Program.

Warrior Arts partners with local, state and national veteran service organizations and military partners to offer creative opportunities that promote mindfulness and resilience for our nation's heroes and their visible and invisible injuries. It is widely recognized that artistic activities can prove to be a great tool for individuals undergoing both mental and physical rehabilitation, those with PTSD and a wide array of other conditions that often affect our veteran community. Everything from improved cognitive function and memory, to increased at-



tention span and even eye/hand coordination has been shown to improve through the performance of visual arts.

Many physicians, scientists and mental health professionals agree that the arts can provide opportunities to process, express and reframe negative past experiences and assist in staying in the present moment. MKAF's Warrior Arts Programs offer the opportunity for individuals in need to experience many aspects

of these empowering processes, through simply making art, doing something new and gaining artistic skills. While relaxing and therapeutic, it's also fun.

Mattie Kelly's Warrior Arts Program sets out to accomplish all the above through its curation of multiple specific programs, including everything from the Zentangle drawing method to painting to jewelry making to improv comedy workshops. Additionally, the Warrior Arts

Program is actively partnered with veterans centers in the immediate and surrounding counties that MKAF serves, as well as working alongside the EOD Warrior Foundation, AFSOC Warrior C.A.R.E. Summit, AFSOC Preservation of the Force and Family, AFSOC Peer Supporters, AFSOC Commando Caregivers, Air Force Wounded Warriors and Special Operations Wounded Warriors, and other such organiza-

tions that are working toward the common goal of bettering the lives and conditions of our Northwest Florida veterans.

As a MKAF board member, I've had the pleasure of attending some of the outreach events the nonprofit orchestrates, as well as getting to hear about the real change and positive impact that the Warrior Arts Program helps bring to fruition. I asked MKAF's Director of Education and Community Engagement, Melanie Moore, to tell me in her own words what the Warrior Arts Program means to MKAF and to her as the staff member responsible for creating Warrior Arts and bringing it to life in our coastal communities. "It is our great honor to give back to our heroes by offering meaningful art experiences that promote resiliency and holistic healing. While it is easy to say 'thank you for your service,' we have taken that a step further to invest in over 100 art programs per year for our area's active duty and veteran military personnel,

Continued on page 37

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NWFMOA Awards \$39,500 in Scholarships to Local JROTC and ROTC Cadets

BY DAVE PARISOT, PRESIDENT OF NWFMOA SCHOLARSHIP FUND, INC.

The Northwest Florida Military Officers Association (NWFMOA) held its 10th annual Scholarship & Awards Luncheon on May 2nd at the Fort Walton Yacht Club. Primary 'guests of honor' were 10 Junior ROTC cadets of six local high schools who were awarded college scholarships and two local ROTC cadets entering their junior and senior years of college. Also honored were seven local JROTC cadets in their junior year of high school who received the MOAA Medal (Military Officers Association of America), and three cadets of the Navarre H.S. Navy JROTC who received appointments to the U. S. Military Academy at West Point.

Ten MOAA Medal scholarships totaling \$31,500 were awarded to local high school JROTC cadets—nine at \$3,000 each and one at \$4,500. Awardees must be a local JROTC cadet, have high academic scores, have demonstrated leadership skills in their high school JROTC and school activities, and show potential for a future commission in our armed

forces, along with community service activities. Scholarship awardees must attend college full-time and enroll in their college ROTC program:

Cadet Angelina Romano of Fort Walton Beach H.S. received the "Lt. Col., USAF, Ret., James 'Jim' and Mrs. Una Heavener Memorial Scholarship" of \$4,500.

Cadet Victoria Beckworth of Baker School received the "Dr. (Lt. Col., USAFR, Ret.), Howard and Mrs. Irene Fisher Scholarship."

Cadet Griffin Woodley of Niceville H.S. received the "Dr. (Lt. Col., USAF, Ret.) Frederick and Mrs. Janet Westfall Scholarship."

Cadet Jason Bollenbach of Choctawhatchee H.S. was awarded the "Colonel Karl, USAF, Ret., and Mrs. Charlotte Eschmann Scholarship."

Cadet Reese Sayer of Navarre H.S. received the "Mrs. Chong (Kim) Parisot Memorial Scholarship."

Cadet Jade Bradley of Fort Walton Beach H.S. was awarded the "Colonel William 'Bill' Byerley, USAF, Ret., Memorial Scholarship."

Cadet Alexander Bollenbach of Choctawhatchee H.S. was



awarded the "Colonel Hampton, USAF, Ret., and Mrs. Nancy Kenaston Memorial Scholarship."

Cadet Akadian Campbell of Baker School received the "Major William 'Bill' Van Hoesen, USA, Ret., Memorial Scholarship."

Cadet Francesca Howard of Choctawhatchee H.S. was awarded the "Colonel Troy

Dent, USAF, Ret., Memorial Scholarship."

Cadet Lauren Bage of Choctawhatchee H.S. was awarded the "Colonel Melvin Bryant, USAF, Ret. Memorial Scholarship."

Two scholarships of \$4,000 each were awarded to two local ROTC cadets: Air Force ROTC Cadet Jeffrey Tavarez, a 2021 graduate of Choctawhatchee H.S. and JROTC, who will be a senior at Embry Riddle University with a major in aerospace and occupational safety; and Air Force ROTC Cadet Logan Herron, a 2022 graduate of Navarre H.S. and JROTC and a junior at the University of Florida with a major in astrophysics.

Five previous scholarship awardees were also recognized who are being commissioned as second lieutenants in the U.S. Army and U.S. Air Force this year. Having our previous scholarship awardees receive a military commission is the primary way we measure the success of our scholarship programs. Of the 18 scholarships we paid out since 2015 who have been in college long enough to complete ROTC, 12 awardees (65%) will have been commissioned by the end of 2024. This follows the motto of the NWFMOA Scholarship Fund: "Helping to Build Future Military Officers and Leaders."

Kayla McCarthy, a 2020 graduate of Navarre H.S. and Navy JROTC, was commissioned a 2Lt in the U.S. Air Force on May 8th. She is a 2024 graduate of the University of South Florida and Air Force ROTC and will report to Columbus Air Force Base, Miss., for pilot training.

Anthony Rodas, a 2020 graduate of Crestview H.S. and Army JROTC, was commissioned a 2LT in the U.S. Army on May 3rd. 2LT Rodas is a 2024 graduate of the University of West Florida and its Army ROTC, going into Air Defense Artillery.

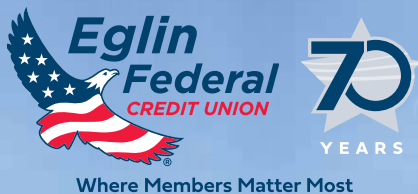
Kathrynn Dunn, a 2021 graduate of Crestview H.S. and Army JROTC, was also commissioned a 2LT in the U.S. Army Reserves on May 3rd. 2LT Dunn is a 2024 graduate of the University of West Florida and its Army ROTC, and will attend the Army Military Intelligence training at Fort Huachuca, Ariz., this summer.

Two additional previous JROTC scholarship awardees will be commissioned in the U.S. Army this year. Army ROTC Cadet Sean Ripley of Blinn University, Tex., will be commissioned a second lieutenant via ROTC at Texas A&M University. Ripley is a 2020 graduate of Niceville H.S. and Air Force JROTC. Army ROTC Cadet Naomi Barr Whitlock is a 2022 graduate of Crestview H.S. and Army JROTC. She attends Army ROTC at Marion Military Institute, Ala. She is participating in the Army's early commissioning program and will be commissioned a second lieutenant this summer prior to finishing her final two years of college to get her Bachelor's degree.

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Military News



Hurlburt Field Reopens Memorial Air Park to the Public

For the first time in more than 20 years, Hurlburt Field has opened its air park to the general public, allowing visitors to come face-to-face with the aircraft and history of Air Force Special Op-

erations Command.

The Hurlburt Field Memorial Air Park stands as a living testament to the dedication, sacrifice and valor of the men and women who have called Hurlburt Field their home. As visitors wander among the stoic aircraft, they are reminded of the en-

during spirit of aviation and the profound impact it has had on AFSOC as a whole. Informational plaques provide insights into the technological advancements and historic achievements of each aircraft, fostering an appreciation for the contributions of military aviation.

The air park serves as a destination for veterans, aviation enthusiasts and families seeking to honor the legacies of those that came before. Visit: Hurlburt Field > Air Park (af.mil).



Celebrate Women's Veterans Day at Veterans Park

BY CAROLYN NEWCOMER
KETCHEL, OKALOOSA COUNTY COMMISSIONER, DISTRICT 2

You are invited to a celebration of Women's Veterans Day on June 12th at 8 a.m. We will gather at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center for a ceremony honoring our women



who have served in the United States Military. Retired Col. Allison Black, USAF (Hurlburt) will be our keynote speaker this year. The ceremony will include a presentation of the Medal of Honor by the Choctawhatchee Bay DAR to be announced at the event. We will then gather at the base of the Margaret Corbin statue at Women Veterans Monuments at Veterans' Park for a wreath-laying ceremony.

The beautiful 20 1/2-acre park features eight life size statues of women who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces from the Revolutionary War to current theatres. These statues have been purchased using the Tourism Development Tax known as the "Bed Tax." This is a one of kind park in the U.S. with the beauty of the land and the history of women who served our great nation. We expect and hope for an additional eight statues to complete the park.

This park is for patriots and conservationists and reflects people's values on our Emerald Coast. Learn of the heroic deeds of our women veterans as you enjoy a beautiful walk in nature.



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Family Room Fun

BY STACY SARIKANON,
STUNNING SPACES—DECORATING
DEN INTERIORS

Family rooms, by their very name are for the family! And when most of us think of family, we think of relaxation and fun, as well as informal settings

for carefree entertaining. This is a room in which we can truly “let our hair down.” It demands space for our hobbies, be they reading, watching TV or needlework. It also calls for some imaginative planning, so all members of the family feel that

this is truly “their” room. Believe it or not, the concept of family rooms has been around for centuries. Many years ago, they were called second parlors, and allowed families to informally entertain while the front parlors were re-

served for special guests.

Here are some tips you might consider in furnishing your family room:

1. Look for large or small tables, perhaps folded or stacked to allow you the opportunity to increase table space.

2. Ping Pong, pool, and air hockey games are a welcomed addition to this room. Of course, having the proper space is a requirement based on the type of game you select.

3. An entertainment center/media closet to house your TV, DVD, gaming consoles and music system is a must. Entertainment centers offer you a place for everything.

4. Comfort is KEY in the selection of your upholstered furniture pieces – weather shallow depth or cushy deep seats – it should fit your family’s lifestyle and be a welcome retreat.

5. A game table may also be an important addition to this room – be sure to allow for adequate lighting when you select it’s place in your room.

Since many great rooms center around a fireplace, be sure to arrange your furniture to “take in the view” and the warmth of this wonderful architectural feature. And how about changing your mantle accessories with the seasons? A grapevine wreath for



the fall, Christmas candles and greenery for the holidays and a beautiful spring bouquet for the summer—which is upon us.

Careful planning of your family room is a must. Be sure to make a list of all the activities and functions that the room will encompass. Stunning Spaces - Decorating Den Interiors can help design your stunning new family room. We make the whole process of interior design/decorating easy for our clients by providing a wide variety of products to fit any budget. From order to installation, we do it all—making your dreams become reality.



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 fudpucker.com

JoJo's Coffee and Goodness

An iconic favorite of locals, owner and operator of Jojo's Coffee and Goodness Angela "JoJo" Stevenson invites you to enter her cafe and relaxed coffee shop atmosphere for a daily dose of "goodness." Stop in for mouth-watering cinnamon rolls; scones: cranberry orange, chocolate caramel and cheddar thyme; strawberry coffee cake; cranberry orange muffins; red velvet cookies; brownies with espresso ganache or caramelitas. Try a breakfast special with a piece of quiche or kolache-hashbrown 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!
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LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant

Suds, Songs and Sunsets! Welcome to LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant at the Bluewater Bay Marina Complex. Named after "LJ Schooner" (the LJ is for Lazy Jack), a cherished four-legged icon on Bluewater Bay Marina docks, the open-air oyster bar and restaurant offers a magnificent view of the water, marina and unparalleled sunset any time of year. There are, of course, oysters and a delicious varied menu with dinner specials such as blackened mahi and grilled shrimp with hollandaise, served over cheese grits.
Sundays: Brunch 9 a.m. - 1 p.m. buffet style, bottomless Mimosas!
Wednesdays: Bluewater Bay Sailing Club Sailboat Fun Races 6 p.m.
 Kids Eat Free 5-9 p.m. Kids 10 and under eat free!
Thursdays: Throwdown SUP Race 6 p.m.; Karaoke/Open Mic 6-10 p.m.
Fridays: Steak Night 5-9 p.m.
 Live entertainment each weekend. See ad for lineup.
 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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Restaurant Hours: Mon.-Tues. Closed, Weds.-Sat. 11am to 9pm, Sun. 9am to 9pm, Sunday Brunch 9am to 1pm

 **Outdoors**

The "Bear" Necessities of Conservation

BY HEATHER BENNETT EYE

Walton County has a few local celebrities that are familiar with the spotlight, but our woodland neighbors, the Florida Black Bear, are getting their time to shine. The Paper Bear, a nonprofit, is creating a soon-to-be-released feature film to bring awareness of the importance of biodiversity through the lives of the Florida Black Bears and a better understanding of how we can live in harmony with our environment. The film itself is a conservation movement.

"It's a love letter to the state of Florida, and specifically the panhandle of Florida," stated Co-Producer Arix Zalace on The Paper Bear Instagram. "It's one of the most important regions in North America." Besides the obvious, what makes the panhandle and Florida Black Bears so special that there's an entire film being made? Let's set the scene.

We know by the millions of people that flock to our sugar sand beaches and turquoise waters, that The Emerald Coast is a tourist hotspot, but did you know that we're also a biodiversity

hotspot? That's right! We're actually the epicenter of the North American Coastal Plain (NACP), which is 36th in the world, with The Florida Panhandle, home to rare coastal dune lakes and the Longleaf Pine ecosystem, being the 5th richest biodiverse spot in all of North America.

But what makes it a hotspot? The NACP has more than 1500 plant species not found anywhere else in the world and has lost more than 70% of its original surface area. In the Florida Panhandle, there are over 100 threatened or endangered species that live within the 57 different ecosystems in our area.

The key to conservation is the Florida Black Bear, known as an umbrella species. By focusing on the conservation of black bears and their habitats, we can also protect larger groups of species that share their home. "If you could pinpoint one animal specifically that essentially helps protect everything underneath it, the black bear is the largest most iconic species that we have here in the Florida Panhandle," said Co-Producer Sean Couch in an



interview with The 30A Company.

Many of you know someone who's encountered a black bear or has encountered one themselves. There's a lot of conversation around population control, food sources and why they're knocking down your trash can. However, most of it's not true. "There's so much misinformation about the black bear. The sooner we get rid of the misinformation, the better we can have an educated discussion about this," stated Arix in an interview with The 30A Company.

Black bears are actually self-regulating when it comes to their population. The gestation period for a female black bear is around seven months. However, there is a delayed implantation for the first five. The amount of food the female can find, or the amount of weight she can gain, will determine how many fertilized eggs will drop and develop into cubs.

Food sources are quite abundant within our forests. They eat



around 73% plants, 22% insects and 5% meat. They'll feed on nuts, seeds, berries, beetles, grubs and saw palmetto. They don't like to chase their food if they don't have to, so sometimes road kill is on the menu. "Just because you see bears coming into your trash means nothing about their population," said Arix in the same interview. "Doesn't mean they can't find food. They're opportunistic and you've got good food."

So what should you do if you come face to face with a Florida Black Bear? Stay calm, and don't go towards it. Remember

it's probably just as scared of you and you are scared of it. Most of the noises they make, we mistake for aggression. They may huff, click their teeth, stomp their feet or even false charge. However, they are just anxious and trying to let us know not to come closer because they are uncomfortable, too.

The Paper Bear Film switches from live action to animation as it hopes to shed more light on this species that is key to the survival of so many others. The premise is a coming-of-age story about a young boy and his father, who are working to track and research black bears in the Florida Panhandle, aiming to gain deeper insights into their behavior. Initially hesitant about the trip, the son undergoes a transformative journey as he develops his own understanding and appreciation for nature along the way. On a post from The Paper Bear's Instagram, Arix Zalace says, "It's a story you'll love, you'll laugh, you'll cry, and hopefully you'll want to protect when it's all said and done."

I'm proud to have our beautiful region highlighted on such a big stage for such an important reason. As The Paper Bear team works on finishing up the film, let's take a moment to consider our impact on the environment and the critical importance of our actions today, and how they shape our home for generations to come.

If you'd like to learn more or get involved, please visit www.thepaperbear.org. You can donate or sign up to join their ambassador program. There are also links to other local nonprofits that benefit conservation.

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More than 275 Artificial Reefs Recently Deployed off Destin-Fort Walton Beach

Marine life in the Gulf of Mexico now has hundreds of additional underwater habitats thanks to a \$1.26 million artificial reef project funded by the Natural Resource Damage Assessment Fund.

The project included 133 different reef sites and the deployment of 279 total reef structures ranging from 6-25 feet. The project was managed by the Coastal Resources team of Destin-Fort Walton Beach in Okaloosa County's Tourism Development Department. The reefs include some of the deepest modules ever deployed by Destin-Fort Walton Beach with depths ranging from 65-292 feet.

"This is an impressive effort to enhance the habitats for marine life in the Gulf of Mexico

waters," said Okaloosa County Board Chairman Paul Mixon. "This is a great example of how we continue to work to be good stewards of the environment that we depend on for our fishing and tourism industries."

This project also included 3D-printed modules that were deployed in late February and are the first of its kind in the Gulf of Mexico. Overall, the project involved six total deployment days spanning from February to early May and involved contractors Walter Marine and IPrint who performed the construction and deployment work.

The project was 100% grant-funded from the Natural Resource Damage Assessment Fund which is administered by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.



"I am extremely proud of the work that was done to complete this extensive project," said Destin-Fort Walton Beach Coastal Resources Manager Alex Fogg. "Our area of the Gulf of Mexico is lacking in natural reef structures for marine life to thrive which is something we

are working to change. Not only do artificial reefs create essential habitat for native species here in the Gulf, but they also provide ideal

locations for fishermen and divers to visit."

Coordinates for these and other reefs off of Destin-Fort Walton Beach can be found at <https://www.destinfbw.com/explore/eco-tourism/artificial-reefs/maps/>

103-Day Gulf Red Snapper Recreational Season for 2024!

Governor Ron DeSantis recently announced the record 103-day 2024 Gulf Red Snapper recreational season, the longest season since the state was delegated management of Gulf red snapper. This season will include both a summer and fall season which includes major holiday weekends such as Father's Day, July 4th and the Thanksgiving holiday. "Under Gov. DeSantis' bold leadership, we are maintaining Florida as the Fishing and Boating Capital of the World with another record-breaking Gulf recreational red snapper season," said Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Chairman Rodney Barreto. "We are proud to continue providing Floridians and visitors the world-class fishing opportunities we are known for."

"Anglers from all over the country look forward to Gulf recreational red snapper season and the iconic fishing opportunities Florida provides yearly," said Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Executive Director Roger Young. "We want to thank Governor DeSantis, the Legislature, and our recreational anglers for their continued investment in the

State Reef Fish Survey, which gives us the data to allow these additional days for snapper fishing in Gulf state and federal waters this season.

Those fishing from private recreational vessels or charter vessels will be able to participate in the 2024 Gulf red snapper season. The 61-day summer season will begin on June 1 and continue through July 31. The 42-day fall season is the longest fall season since the beginning of state management. Find the dates at <https://myfwc.com/news/all-news/snapper-424/>.

Florida is able to offer this long season due to data driven management of the Red Snapper fishery on the Gulf Coast (not allowed by the Federal Government on the East Coast.)

Florida will evaluate additional dates to add later in the season if rainy days impact. If you plan to fish for red snapper in state or federal waters from a private recreational vessel, even if you are exempt from fishing license requirements, you must sign up as a State Reef Fish Angler (annual renewal required) at GoOutdoorsFlorida.com. Find more on recreational snapper regulations at MyFWC.com/Marine.



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Seacoast Collegiate High School Expands Athletics

Seacoast Collegiate High School, The Seaside School, Inc.'s high school, has announced the expansion of its athletic program with the addition of boys and girls weightlifting and boys and girls swim teams. These exciting new opportunities will provide students with avenues to excel in both individual and team-based sports, fostering camaraderie, discipline and physical fitness.

The boys and girls weight-

lifting teams will offer students the chance to develop strength, technique, and mental resilience under the guidance of Coach Evan Chelini. Meanwhile, the boys and girls swim teams, led by Coach Jack O'Connor, will provide an outlet for students to showcase their aquatic skills and compete at a high level.

Furthermore, Seacoast Collegiate High School is proud to extend an invitation to all public high school students in Walton

County to join the newly formed boys and girls swim teams. This inclusive initiative aims to promote community engagement and collaboration among local schools while providing students with access to high-quality athletic programs.

Randy Moore, Athletic Director for THE SEASIDE SCHOOL™, expressed enthusiasm for the new additions to Seacoast Collegiate High School's athletic lineup, stating,

"We are excited to see Seacoast Collegiate High School continue to prioritize the holistic development of its students through the addition of these new athletic teams. These opportunities not only promote physical fitness but also instill valuable life skills such as teamwork, perseverance, and sportsmanship while also enriching the student experience and vibrant athletic community in Walton County."

For more information and

registration details, please contact Randy Moore, at moorer@seasideschools.net. Applications for Seacoast Collegiate High School for the 2024-2025 school year are still being accepted online for incoming 11th and 12 graders. Incoming 9th and 10th graders may still apply to be placed on the waitlist for enrollment.



Billy Bowlegs 5K Run

The Northwest Florida Track Club, Inc. (NWFTC) is hosting its 50th anniversary of the Billy Bowlegs 5K run to be held on Saturday June 1, 2024. This is our banner event, and we are striving to make this big-

ger and better than ever before and would like to elicit your help in doing so. Let me first tell you a little about the NWFTC and why we feel it's important to gain community support.

The Northwest Florida Track

is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization that endeavors to support our local schools with funds that we raise throughout the year. Our primary revenue raisers are through local racing events that we organize, facilitate, and sponsor. These competitive and noncompetitive running/walking events encourage a healthy lifestyle while promoting athletics and physical fitness for our local youth and adults.

For the last several years we

have donated money to each Okaloosa County and Navarre High School Cross Country/Track program. To date, we have donated more than \$300,000 to the schools. In the days of dwindling school budgets, these programs are usually the first to feel the cut and we are very proud that as a small group, we have been able to make such a difference. The money that we have donated has been used for such things as new uniforms, running

shoes for children who could not afford to buy their own, and to cover expenses for buses and entry fees for out of town meets that would otherwise have to come from the students and parents. In turn, the kids and parents come out to volunteer and support our events as a way of saying thank you. We cannot tell you how much this makes all the hard work worth it.

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100% of proceeds will go to The Ground Up Project
"Supporting a community for unique adults with special needs" <https://www.thegroundupproject.org/>

Growing the Game:

Okaloosa County Middle Schools Conference Spring Tournament

BY BARBARA PALMGREN

This mid-April, conditions were perfect at Shalimar Pointe Golf Club where nine middle schools entered boys and girls golf teams to compete for the prized county trophy—Ruckel, Saint Mary Catholic, Destin, Liza Jackson, Meigs, Davidson, Shoal River, Pryor and Bruner.

Both the Boys and the Girls overall Conference Team Trophy were won by Ruckel Middle School. In addition to the team trophies, awards were given to the top five finishers.

Congratulations to the following:

Girls top five finishers: First



ond place - K. Jeffrey (Ruckel); Third place - H. Hocke (Destin); Fourth place - M. Cooper (Ruckel); and Fifth place - N. Fosdyk (Destin).

I congratulate all the schools who support middle school athletics. As a former middle school and high school educator, I know the value of extra-curricular activities for our youth. Many will continue to compete at both the high school and college levels, and we might see a few on the pro golf tours. Anything is possible when given the opportunity to begin learning and applying necessary skills at an early age.

place - T. Sharron (Ruckel); Second place - C. Bridgford (Saint Mary Catholic); Third place - S. Kirland (Ruckel); Fourth place - A. Williams (Pryor) and Fifth place - R. Watkins (Ruckel)

Boys top five finishers: First place - A. Yang (Ruckel); Sec-

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You may recognize Dr. Jess' face as the previous Health Awareness Committee Chairman of the Walton Area Chamber of Commerce or from her previous position at her business as the owner and operator of South Walton Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation that was located in Santa Rosa Beach. You might have recognized her as the Master of Ceremony for Christian International Business Network, or the owner of Quick and Fit circuit training gyms in Walton County. That was a while back. In 2009, circumstances tore the Monteleones away from this area. But, now they have been called back to fulfill a need in our communities.

Dr. Jess found out early in her career as physical therapist and owner of South Walton PT, that therapeutic exercise alone did not fix the health of an individual. She then pursued and received a Master's Degree in Holistic Nutrition. Furthering her education even more, she earned a Doctorate Degree in Natural Health.

Now operating Wholistic Therapy at Home, Dr. Jess offers an integrative approach to health. Her greatest love is working with individuals where they live, tweaking their everyday living experience to reduce pain, increase strength and to ultimately improve their quality of life while on this journey at home or on vacation.

She will come to you! Dr. Jess utilizes tools of the trade including a comprehensive evaluation which encompasses treatment during the first visit. This may include muscle work, massage,



red light therapy or incorporate therapeutic ultrasound, electrical stimulation, ergonomics, personal education, home safety assessment or possibly exercise.

Why so many tools of trade? "We have found that inflammation is the cause for most disease," said Dr. Jess. "These high-tech, quality modalities and interventions will treat at the cellular level. One approach is helpful. Many wellness modalities may bring a synergistic approach to improve an overall health."



Lifestyle management is an important aspect of overall healthy living. If requested, Dr. Jess will help incorporate an eating plan that will support your health challenges that work for you. We all know that diets don't work for the long haul, however healthy lifestyle choices certainly do.

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pyathome.com. You can also e-mail Wholistictherapy@yahoo.com or text Dr. Jess at 850-974-0970 to schedule your free 15-minute consultation to initiate your transition to better health.



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 Wellness

Check Your Alignment



BY STEPHENIE CRAIG

Do you ever notice you aren't behaving consistently with the

person you want to be? Maybe you want to be honest, but you find yourself lying. Maybe you want to be patient, but you find yourself being irritable with those around you. Maybe you want to be trustworthy, but you find yourself continuing to let yourself and others down.

Day to day life can be overwhelming and distracting from the bigger picture of who you want to be. Often, you might find yourself doing the next

thing without creating space to be intentional about your values. When you don't know what you value, you don't know who you want to be. And when you aren't clear about who you want to be, your choices and behavior are likely to take you down destructive paths you did not intend to travel. When your lifestyle is out of alignment with your values and who you want to be, life becomes less fulfilling, less hopeful, less focused and

less purposeful. Life lived out of alignment can also bring destructive patterns like addiction, failure to tend to relationships and lack of self-awareness about how your behavior is impacting yourself and others.

So, how do you know if you are out of alignment and what can you do about it?

6 Ways to Check Your Alignment

Refine. Refine what character traits and values are most important to you. Use character guides like the Biblical fruit of the spirit to clarify who you want to be. "I want to be kind, patient, loving, responsible, thoughtful, adventurous, creative." Use value lists to determine what is most important to you. "I value integrity, faith, family, loyalty, travel, generosity, commitment." Try creating a list of 10 positive character traits and 10 values to provide structure. You can find a printable Strengths List and Values List at journeybravely.com to help you get started.

Remember. Take time weekly to remember your values. Revisit character and values lists. Notice when your behavior is in conflict with who you want to be. "I want to be reliable but I am not following through on commitments leaving others experiencing me as flaky."

Reflect. Notice what is contributing to your alignment struggle. Are you under stress? Do you have unhealthy coping skills that need replacement? Are you surrounding yourself with negative influences and information? Are you engaging in positive things that help you stay grounded such as spiritual prac-

tices, self-care, personal growth? Are there boundaries you need to set? "I have trouble saying no to people so I say yes when I know I'm not actually going to follow through. I need to learn how to say no."

Repent. Repent means to turn in the opposite direction once you realize you are off your desired path. Acknowledge to yourself, God, and others you have made mistakes and engaged in behavior that is inconsistent with who you want to be. "Failing to follow through is not how I want to live. It's distancing me from people I care about. I'm sorry I've been making that choice and I want to learn to live differently."

Repair. Take ownership of your unaligned behavior's negative impact on yourself and others. Make amends. Apologize directly. Receive forgiveness. Communicate adjustments you will make. "I'm sorry I told you I would help you and then I backed out at the last minute. I'm realizing I have a tendency to say yes, because I don't want to hurt people's feelings and then I don't follow through. It will be better for me to say no up front and I'm going to work on improving in this area."

Realign. Determine meaningful action steps to bring your behavior and choices back in line with your values. Seek spiritual, social, and professional support as needed in your process. Begin taking action in the direction of your values and remember your brain naturally rewires through consistent repetition over time. Move forward in grace and growth. "In the

Continued on next page





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Continuing A Legacy of Listening and Empathy

BY DOUG STAUFFER

Grant Williams, owner of the Niceville Hearing Center, is a testament to the perseverance, commitment and compassion for those he serves. This establishment is more than just a hearing aid practice—it's a beacon of hope and transformation, symbolizing Grant's unwavering dedication to bettering the lives of those grappling with hearing challenges.

From humble beginnings in the mining town of Matewan, W.Va., to championing gymnastics for the state of Kentucky, every step of Grant's journey has been characterized by overcoming adversity. His formative years, marked by economic hardships, became the very foundation of his tenacity and resilience. As the only one from his family of seven to attend college, Williams remains an inspiration to many, showcasing the limitless potential of human spirit.

His foray into gymnastics paved the way for an unexpected but life-changing encounter with Patrick Yeager, a men-



tor who guided him towards the path of higher education. Grant's journey is a testament to the serendipity of life and how one meeting can alter the trajectory of one's future.

However, life had its set of twists and turns. After his gymnastics program and his scholarship were defunded, he pivoted his attention to a field that

would ultimately become his life's work—hearing healthcare. Grant's realization that he excelled in patient counseling was transformative. He understood that the cornerstone of effective hearing care was not just technical proficiency but also the art of listening.

Grant's empathy stems from his roots. Growing up in a mod-

est environment, he was instilled with values that emphasized the importance of taking care of oneself and others. This philosophy became the cornerstone of his practice. His innate knack for fitting hearing aids, combined with his genuine concern for his patients, made him a sought-after specialist in the region.

Despite a successful business in Louisiana, life brought Grant to Florida to enjoy a brief stint at retirement. His desire to make a difference was evident as he set up his practice in Niceville. What initially began as a part-time venture quickly transformed into a sanctuary for many, especially veterans and military service members. Grant's commendable initiative of offering follow-up services to returning vets, at no charge, showcases his unwavering commitment to the community.

In essence, Grant and the Niceville Hearing Center epitomize the confluence of technical expertise and human touch. "It's not just about the hearing aids," says Grant. "It's about

the people wearing them." With several decades in the hearing healthcare domain, Grant has perfected the art of 'straight talk,' ensuring that every patient feels valued, heard and understood.

For those seeking to transform their hearing journey, the Niceville Hearing Center stands as a testament to Grant's legacy—one that underscores the significance of perseverance, empathy and, most importantly, listening. Full disclosure—Grant is my hearing healthcare provider—and why I offer him my personal recommendation.

Publisher's Note: The May 2024 article written by author Douglas L. Beck, AuD, Tinnitus: An Interview with David Baguley, PhD, was originally published as "Clinical Aspects of Tinnitus: An Interview with David Baguley, PhD," in the January 2016 issue of The Hearing Review and can be found at: <https://hearingreview.com/inside-hearing/research/clinical-aspects-tinnitus-interview-david-baguley-phd>.

ALIGNMENT

continued from previous page

spirit of learning to say no and keeping my word, I'm going to listen to a boundaries podcast and I'm going to ask a friend to check in with me each week on what I'm learning and how I'm applying it."

We all get out of alignment at times. Maturity is developed through the gracious process of noticing when it happens and walking through your realignment practices. As you walk along your growth journey, connect with us at journeybravely.com for counseling and coaching support.

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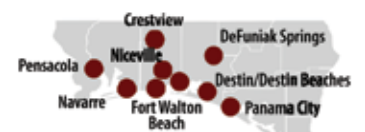
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Your Skin



By KAY LEAMAN, HEALTH ARCHITECT, HEALTHYDAY HEALTHYLIFE

Skin reflects what we eat, if we're hydrated, if we've received some vitamin D from the sun, if we're not feeling well, etc. Even though this article talks about what we use on the skin, what we eat and drink plays a big role on our skin. Just ask me what changes I see after eating some dark chocolate ice cream!

Skin should be nourished (This includes the men out there!) and cared for. It starts with using more natural soaps such as pure-castile soap, which comes in many different natural scents. Body washes also offer more natural options. The more natural ingredients, the less chance there is of reactions. This goes for shampoo, deodorant, makeup, lotions and potions as well. Remember, whatever you put

on your skin is absorbed into the body. These products are more than skin deep. Healthy on the inside shows up as healthy on the outside.

There is no doubt that some people are more sensitive to ingredients and that includes natural. Unscented is a good choice and, of course, knowing what ingredients to watch out for. Take time to read ingredients. You can also take a picture of the ingredients and look them up online. This will give you a list of what to avoid. Focus on three or four ingredients that you want to avoid. Your list will grow as your knowledge grows.

NOTE: Glycerin is a humectant, a type of moisturizing agent that pulls water into the outer layer of your skin from deeper levels of your skin and the air. There are several benefits with the use of products with glycerin, but if it is not diluted enough, it can actually dry out the skin. Ingredients are listed in order of percentage, highest to lowest.

EWG.org is a site that offers

great information on the use of chemicals in food, household products, skincare, makeup, etc. The upgrades on this site have made it a bit more difficult to dig into. So, if you search for a specific ingredient, look for the EWG link that can get you directly there. The U.S. allows dangerous chemicals to be used in the products we use and the food we eat, whereas many, many other countries have outlawed them.

This company also has EWG approved products so if you are easily overwhelmed this can be a great way to start; it's how I found the makeup I use.

This topic is much deeper than my brief thoughts in this article. Sometimes starting simply gives us the success and confidence we need to continue to take control of our health. We don't need to replace everything at once. Doing the work when it's time to replenish gives us space to find our new favorites.

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Don't Let Mobility Issues Slow You Down



By KELLY STALNAKER

We are fortunate to live on the Emerald Coast, surrounded by so much beauty. From Turkey Creek to 30A, there are so many local places to enjoy the outdoors. Unfortunately, many older adults face hurdles getting outside. But, a little fresh air and a change of view can offer many benefits. Aside from diminishing boredom and complacency, people that get outside regularly are less likely to suffer from health issues including chronic pain, insomnia, depression and much more. If decreased mobility is keeping you inside, there is a wide variety of mobility aids to help get you moving.

A standard wheelchair has large wheels on each side for the user to be able to move themselves independent of a companion. These chairs are available in a variety of sizes

for additional accommodation. Transport wheelchairs, also called “companion chairs” are more lightweight and portable than a standard wheelchair as it does not have the large wheels so the patient cannot move themselves (they must always have a companion). It is a great alternative to a heavier wheelchair, especially if the caregiver has any lifting restrictions. Power wheelchairs and scooters are motorized solutions for independent individuals that lack the upper body strength required to move a standard wheelchair. They can go much longer distances with ease, and offer a variety of features.

A standard walker (with or without wheels) is the most common type of mobility aid. It offers the most stability and is great for individuals that are mobile enough to not need a wheelchair. These walkers are especially useful for patients who are recovering from a hip or leg injury or surgery. Lots of great accessories are available including: baskets, bags, ski glides, tennis balls, and trays to promote independence for the user. Rollators, also known as four wheel walkers with a seat, have become increasingly popular with older adults. They can be used indoors or out for shop-

ping trips, appointments, social events, and much more. Rollators allow seniors to walk for longer distances but there is always the option of taking a rest on the attached seat if fatigued. Rollators are affordable, convenient, and customizable as they come in a wide variety of styles, colors, and sizes; with tons of accessories.

If you're experiencing only minor issues with balance and stability, a cane might be right for you. Available in single and quad tip, a cane acts as a third leg, keeping you upright and steady. Canes are offered in wood or aluminum in several bright and colorful options. If

you're recovering from a lower leg/foot injury or surgery, consider a knee walker. Also called a knee walkabout, it is a comfortable and easy-to-manuever alternative to crutches. Knee walkers are covered by Tricare (with a prescription).

Issues with mobility have become the most common disability older adults face in America. When you or a loved one has lower body weakness, vertigo



or instability, it might be time to consider a mobility aid. Stop by and see us at 540 E. John Sims Pkwy. in Niceville for more information.



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 Business


BY MAURICE STOUSE, FINANCIAL ADVISOR AND BRANCH MANAGER

Economic growth can be measured by corporate revenues and profits, GDP growth, productivity growth (latest report is a strong 3.7% for the last three quarters), market performance, low unemployment and the rate of inflation over time.

What is driving all of this, particularly when we look at the growth of the public debt (now at approximately \$28 trillion), historically large deficits and recent market volatility?

We can start with the monetary (money supply) stimulus from the Federal Reserve's balance sheet. That is the assets it owns because it bought bonds on the open market with the newly produced money supply. By buying the bonds it injects money into the economy. Would you believe that at the start of the Great Recession/financial

Insights for Investors: The Debt, the Economy and the Markets

crisis of 2008 that it stood at \$900 billion? It grew to \$3.8 trillion (2019) pre-pandemic and then peaked at \$8.9 trillion in March of 2022.

That is a significant amount of new money that has made its way into the American economy. They call that quantitative easing or QE. It is now coming down steadily as the Federal Reserve is letting things mature and decreasing the money supply. They call that quantitative tightening or QT. The latest read from The Federal Reserve is \$7.4 trillion. Inflation grew steadily with the move in the money supply and peaked at 9.1% in mid-2022 and it is now at approximately 3.5%. So, the stimulus is down %17 and inflation is down about 60% even though much of the money that was created in the last 16 years is still out there and that has helped drive consumption, construction, innovation, the economy, and GDP.

Of course, federal spending has an impact as well albeit a two-sided effect: 1) It provides economic stimulus but 2) it also drives up deficits, the debt and borrowing costs for the US gov-



ernment. The US Treasury has had the luxury of paying less the 3% on all of debt held by the public (about 30% of that is held by overseas buyers). We take note that this year the Treasury has to refinance almost a quarter of that, about \$7 trillion. There are a lot of new Treasuries hitting the market and the Treasury will have to pay higher rates than it was paying. One recent impact has been the steady rise in yield of the bellwether US Treasury 10-year note. Why are yields going up? When there is a lot of new supply and not a commensurate growth in demand, the price goes down and the yield goes up. At this writing it is at 4.66% and at the start of the year it was closer to 4%. Most of this move was recent and stocks correspondingly sold off. One mitigating factor is the strength of the US dollar. Its year-to-date increase in value is 4.5% (after an increase of 2% for all of 2023). That can have a positive impact for demand for dollar denominated securities like U.S. Treasuries and even though rates are up, can keep borrowing cost lower in the long run.

We are well into earnings season for America's corporations and thus far about 20% of the S&P 500 (which makes up about 80% of the value of the US stock market) have reported and about 68% are beating estimates. Growth rates (for earnings) for the year are projected to be 11% for 2024. Stock prices typically follow earnings (or sometimes get ahead of them).

That is strong growth and typically that is reflected in stock prices unless there are competing priorities (like the 10-year US Treasury), and or an increase in costs of goods and or labor (hurting productivity and profitability).

So, we come down to a few questions: 1) Will the continued drawdown in monetary stimulus eventually lead to lower growth overall because the excess money is drying up? 2) Can the U.S. address its deficit growth? We think yes and the answer lies in healthy and fair, entitlement reform. We believe Social Security and Medicare/Medicaid (the biggest drivers of government spending) can and will be fixed because they can be fixed. 3) Can the U.S. put a lid on public debt and outgrow it with GDP?

This brings us to innovation. The U.S. leads the world in the flow of capital and the incentive to innovate and create. The results are being seen with artificial intelligence, or AI. We are beginning to see the increased impact that is having on productivity and economic growth as mitigating factors. The USA leads the world in innovation but also consumption. We consume a lot of what we build or serve. If we look at the threat many see coming from China, we take note that China is more of producer and less a consumer of what it builds or serves. It depends on the rest of the world, the US in particular and that is yet another factor to consider for the long run.

Long-term investing and saving, to us, means that those who save out of fear but invest out of optimism best position themselves to obtain their goals and their dreams.

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 considered representative of the U.S. stock market. US government bonds and treasury bills are guaranteed by the US 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. Main office located at The First Bank, 2000 98 Palms Blvd, Destin, FL 32451. Phone 850.654.8124. Raymond James advisors do not offer -tax advice. Please see your tax professionals. Email: Maurice.stouse@raymondjames.com.

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Education News

NWFSC Student Government Shines for Florida

The Northwest Florida State College (NWFSC) Student Advisory Board made a significant impact at the annual End-Year Conference of the Florida College System Student Government Association (FCSSGA), hosted by Seminole State College in Sanford, Florida, in April. Among the accolades, NWFSC student Abdiel Alvarado-Pabon secured the Region Rookie Student Award, Lillian Roller received the Region Student Leadership Award and Connor Kilroy was honored with the State President's Award. Additionally, the NWFSC chapter was recognized for its commitment to service, earning the State Volunteer Award for accumulating over 100 hours of volunteer work. The FCSSGA represents the nearly one million students enrolled in the Florida College System's 28 colleges.



Mid-Bay Rotarian Wayne Cheatum presents ECSC Director Diane Fraser a check for the outdoor classroom's canopy.

Mid-Bay Rotary Completes an Emerald Coast Science Center (ECSC) Outdoor Classroom

The ECSC mission is to inspire and grow a scientifically engaged community. The Mid-Bay Rotary's project was the construction of an outdoor classroom located in an area that will be used for environmental learning. The outdoor classroom consists of a concrete

base, a carport cover, and tables and benches. Mid-Bay helped finance the carport cover and Mid-Bay Rotary Club members and the 96th Logistics Readiness Squadron (LRS) volunteers moved nine concrete tables and 27 concrete benches to the new outdoor classroom. They also helped string lights for an ECSC fund raiser. The classroom was part of Mid-Bay's and District 6940's Rotary Year 2023-2024 Grants. Mid-Bay Rotarian Wayne Cheatum was Mid-Bay's

Above: Mid-Bay Rotarians and 96th LRS Volunteers. Rotarians include Wayne Cheatum, John Sallman and his Rotary Partner Ashley, Harold Peek, Art Jean, Dave Swanick and Tom Johnson

Lead. The ECSC Center's focal point was the ECSC Director Diane Fraser.

NHS Web Programming Student 1st in Congressional App Challenge

U.S. Congressman Matt Gaetz announced Niceville High School Junior Andrew Putman as the 2023 Congressional App Challenge winner in Florida's First District at Northwest Florida State College this past November. Andrew's app, Assets4Kids, won first place in the competition, which aims to alleviate child poverty. He was inspired to develop the app after witnessing child poverty during a mission trip to the Dominican Republic.

Congressman Gaetz invited Andrew and his teacher, Carrie Foxhall, to the Capital Building in Washington, D.C. Accom-



panied by his parents and Ms. Foxhall, Andrew showcased Assets4Kids at the House of Code Reception in April. The Congressional App Challenge aims to inspire, include and innovate efforts around STEM, CODING and Computer Science Education. It is noteworthy that this is the fourth time a Niceville High School student has won the Congressional App Challenge in their district.

RBCS Has National Winners

Rocky Bayou Christian School's Sydney Athearn won 1st place from the Joshua Expeditions Outstanding NACS Musician Award. High school

seniors from the Class of 2024, 198 of them, enrolled in 19 member schools of the National Alliance of Christian Schools (NACS), were nominated to compete in a national awards program for their outstanding scholarship and/or musical achievements. Out of the 68 semifinalists selected from the field, 11 share the spotlight as 1st, 2nd, 3rd or Finalist award winners, dividing \$10,250 in college grants: \$2,500 to each 1st place winner, \$1,250 to each 2nd place winner, \$750 to each 3rd place winner and \$250 to each finalist. The Outstanding NACS Scholars and Musician Awards Program is funded by a generous grant from Joshua Expedition, a non-profit Christian Student Travel company that offers global education and mission trips for high school students throughout the nation.

RBCS Results for National Latin Exams

Rocky Bayou Christian Academy's Latin students placed well on the National Latin Exam taken on March 13, 2024. Individual winners were Magna Cum Laude Gaige Adkins; Cum Laude Ayden Mosley, Brianna Nutt, Colt Stevens, and Nolan Weisbruch; and Maxima Cum Laude (with ensuing Silver Medal) Lela Cawood, Janessa Laemmel, and Camden Miller. Their Latin teacher, Juliana Mosley, is very proud of their accomplishment.

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Musing

Road to Redemption: Jose Aguilar

BY VICTORIA OSTROSKY

Our father Adam was placed in the Garden of Eden way back in the beginning to be its keeper. His job was to tend and protect the Garden, to ensure that everything was as it should be. He was the caretaker and guardian. Things have certainly changed over the last 6000 years since he took the fruit Eve offered him, plunging mankind into death and separation from God. But men, for the most part, retained that position of protector and provider throughout the ages.

However, over the past several decades in particular, masculinity has been attacked, and men have been made to feel that their God-given role is a thing of the distant past. Chivalry is not only dead, but women today act as if they don't want to have anything to do with it. This direct lie of Satan has done irreparable damage to countless relationships, destroying families where trust has been eroded.

Jose Aguilar was born in Texas and in 2005, he and his family relocated to the Destin area. He didn't know Jesus at the time, al-

though his mom always encouraged him to attend church. His mom would admonish him and say that he needed to get his life aligned with Christ. But he dismissed her words. Never underestimate the power of a praying mother.

Fast forward to 2019, and Jose had married the love of his life. He always wanted a daughter, so when his wife became pregnant, they were very happy. Jose's precious wife lost the baby and ended up suffering four miscarriages. And instead of grieving with her and encouraging her, something snapped in him. "I didn't understand, and became really sour, and I stepped outside of my marriage." He abandoned his role of protector and guardian when he allowed his own grief to take center stage. Two weeks later, a still, small voice told him to go back home. The voice said - "you're going to find what you need if you go back home." That's when he and his wife discovered they were pregnant again. Even after Jose's wife was six months along, he still couldn't believe



husband really was. God was doing work in his heart and changing him into the Godly husband and father his family so desperately needed. "Sometimes men don't know how much damage they're doing to their wives. Only God can heal what was damaged. We must accept

As God knows, when men accept the place of leadership in the home, watching over and protecting those under his care, relationships flourish, children are calmer and wives are content. When a wife knows her husband, though certainly not perfect, is dedicated to providing for and guarding her and her children, it changes people at their core level.

Jose now is privileged to be the father of not one daughter, but two. And God has blessed his business so that he is able to spend more time speaking to his customers about the wonderful things God has done for him.

"When God cleaned up my life, it made my children's lives better. Now blessings are being passed down through the generations." What God is doing in Jose's life, He can do in yours.

You can hear Jose Aguilar's entire interview and listen to many other incredible stories on the weekly Road to Redemption radio show and podcast at www.rtrdestiny.com

he would actually, finally, be a dad.

Jose finally reached a point where he said to God - "I give up." And that's when his life changed because that's what God was waiting for Jose to say.

He and his wife began attending Destiny church, and after joining a small group, his wife finally discovered who her

what we did wrong and choose to change our behavior."

Now, Jose says, "I have no shame or guilt. I've been set free. There's redemption and His name is Jesus."



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A Pastor's Ponderings

Happy Father's Day: Standing Firm in Faith as Anchors in the Storm



ADAPTED BY PASTOR DOUG STAUFFER

In the beginning, God established the home with a simple design, as stated in Genesis 2:24: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh." However, the world, the flesh, and the Devil tirelessly work to undermine this divine blueprint, causing some parents to raise their children without a spouse. The deck is stacked against these homes, no matter the fortitude and bravery of the one-parent household.

Today, nearly one in four children live in father-absent homes. The absence of fathers from children's lives can lead to significant challenges, impacting their emo-

tional, academic, and behavioral well-being. These factors underscore the indispensable role of fathers in child development and family dynamics. Many resources reflect the impact of a Father's absence from the home.

Fatherless households experience lower self-worth and have more difficulties regulating their emotions.

Fatherless households are more likely to struggle with educational achievement.

Fatherless households experience a higher risk of children engaging in harmful behaviors like substance abuse.

Fatherless households experience a greater risk of poverty, affecting children's quality of life and future financial stability.

Fatherless households are prone to a greater susceptibility to mental health issues and emotional challenges, including stress and anxiety.

Girls in father-absent homes are at a higher risk of teen pregnancy, highlighting the protective role a father can play.

Boys growing up without fathers are more prone to criminal behavior.



There is an observed increase in infant mortality rates in households without father involvement.

In this challenging context, fathers have historically been at the forefront of ensuring the welfare of their families. I want to encourage fathers to engage in their children's lives. Unfortunately, current government funding structures often discourage the traditional family unit by promoting policies that provide increased financial support to single-parent households. This trend undermines the father's vital role and directly impacts the families' spiritual and emotional

fabric. It is quite a dilemma.

In these times of unprecedented challenges, the words of Psalm 34:17-18 resonate deeply, reminding us that "The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit." As we navigate the complexities of modern

societal structures, it is crucial to reaffirm the importance of a father's presence, which is divinely ordained to nurture and protect. Through the reassurance of scripture, we find the strength to confront these systemic challenges and the guidance to restore the father's rightful place in the home.

Jesus Himself extends a comforting invitation in Matthew 11:28: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." This call reaches out to all, but in our context, it includes every father burdened by the weight of economic, social, and spiritual

responsibilities. In these trying times, it is vital to remember that we are never alone. Our Heavenly Father offers not only solace but also strength.

As fathers and leaders, you are uniquely positioned to be instruments of God's comfort, reflecting His profound love and mercy within your families and communities. By embracing this divine support, fathers can rise above the pressures imposed by worldly systems, continuing to be the steadfast protectors and nurturers they are called to be.

Let us also thank the mothers whose enduring love and resilience bolster our homes. Fathers and mothers form a partnership essential to God's perfect plan for family and community. We set aside a day for mothers and one for fathers—to honor and reflect on both parents' pivotal roles in nurturing the next generation.

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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Musing

Sean of the South



BY SEAN DIETRICH

The boy holds his fish as high as he can. His father hugs him and kisses his hair. They make a fine picture together.

I'm watching a father and son fish in a state park. They stand

shoulder-to-shoulder.

After a few minutes, the boy's rod starts to bend.

He screams, "I GOT ONE DAD!" His voice carries on the water all the way to Birmingham.

And I am a nine-year-old again.

In fact, if I were to shut my eyes right now, I would see my father, shirtless, standing on a sandy teshore, smiling. A beer can by his feet.

"Quit messing with your reel so much," he'd say. "You'll scare fish away if you don't relax."

On one particular day, my father caught three bass and a shellcracker. Mister Unrelaxed had not been so fortunate—I'd



caught one Penzoil can and a medium-sized turtle.

But my luck changed. My rod nearly jerked out of my hands. I tugged and cranked.

And it happened. I caught a bass bigger than most residential water heaters. Daddy whooped

and hollered.

He let me take a sip of his lukewarm beer. He discussed how to clean a fish.

He handed me a Buck knife to cut off the head. He made me swear to keep both hands on the handle.

The next thing I remember is a puddle of my own blood. I nearly fainted.

Daddy wasted no time. He tossed my flopping fish into the truck bed. He pressed a wadded T-shirt against my cut hand. We sped to the Emergency room.

I glanced through the back window and saw my fish flopping in the pickup bed.

"Your mama's gonna kill me," said Daddy.

The doctor was an old man. He looked at my hand and said, "What kinda fish you catch, old timer?"

Old timer.

I told him. He smiled, then removed a needle as big as a turkey baster. He jammed it into my palm and said, "I hope it was worth it."

I screamed. Daddy held me against himself and kissed my hair while the doc stitched me. And for as long my mind stays sharp, I'll never forget the way Daddy smelled.

It's funny, the things you remember about dead people.

For instance, I remember the way Daddy ate his eggs. I remember his long-legged walk—like a heron. I remember how he used to sit in a chair after work, crying for no apparent reason.

And the night before he took his own life, I remember a blank look on his face.

"Remember that time we went fishing and you cut your hand?" he said.

Do I ever.

The kid and his father want their photo taken. The man asks if I'll do the honors.

He hands me his phone. I tell them both to say, "cheese." They do.

The boy holds his fish as high as he can. His father hugs him and kisses his hair. They make a fine picture together.

I'm not sad about the way my life turned out. God help me, I'm not. I don't wish for different circumstances. I don't want anything more than what I have.

But if God were taking requests...

I wouldn't mind fishing with Daddy again.

Or a kiss on the hair.

Sean Dietrich is a writer, humorist, novelist, and biscuit connoisseur, known for his commentary and stories on life in the American South.

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A New Season Begins with Jersey Boys

Emerald Coast Theatre Company (ECTC) has unveiled the Season 12 lineup of Professional Shows and Theatre for Young Audiences. Kicking off the season in spectacular fashion is the electrifying production of *Jersey Boys*, Sept. 20 to Oct. 13, 2024. This iconic show promises to captivate audiences with its timeless music and compelling storytelling.

Baskerville: A Sherlock Holmes Mystery, Oct. 24 – Nov. 3

The play's afoot in Ken Ludwig's murderously funny twist on Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. The male Baskerville heirs are being dispatched one by one. To find their ingenious killer, Holmes and Watson must brave the desolate moors before a family

"Stille Nacht." Thus begins an extraordinary night of camaraderie, music, and peace. *All Is Calm: The Christmas Truce of 1914* tells the true story of the first Christmas Eve of World War I, when soldiers across the Western Front laid down their weapons to celebrate Christmas together. Based on the first-hand accounts of soldiers who lived it, this beautifully staged

Nathanael Fisher, Producing Artistic Director and co-founder of ECTC says, "This year we go from Frankie Valli to Elle Woods in a matter of months. Bringing high quality entertainment of many genres to the area is what we love to do! We believe the community will be very pleased with this year's lineup! There really is something for every audience and we hope to see YOU at the theatre."

ECTC, including details about upcoming shows and other programs, opportunity for VIP membership, ECTC educational programs and local school field trip opportunities, visit emeraldcoasttheatre.org or call (850) 684-0323. You can also make a tax-deductible donation, volunteer and engage with ECTC on Facebook, Instagram, X (Twitter) and YouTube. See you at the theatre!

For information about



PHOTO BY NIKKI HEADRICK

2024 Shows:

Jersey Boys, Sept. 20 – Oct. 13

Jersey Boys takes you behind the music of Frankie Valli and The Four Seasons to discover the secret of a 40-year friendship as the foursome work their way from the streets of New Jersey to the heights of stardom. Enjoy chart-topping hits like "Sherry," "Big Girls Don't Cry," and "Can't Take My Eyes Off You." This Tony Award-winning true-life musical phenomenon takes you from the streets of New Jersey to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, a musical that's just too good to be true.

curse dooms the next heir. Our intrepid investigators try to escape a dizzying web of clues, silly accents, and disguises, as five actors deftly portray more than forty characters. Can our heroes discover the truth in time? Join the fun and see how far from elementary the truth can be.

*Field Trip Thursday, Oct 24, 10am

All Is Calm: the Christmas Truce of 1914, Dec. 6 – 22

The Western Front: Christmas 1914. Out of the violence of World War I, a silence, then a song. A German soldier steps into No Man's Land singing

play with music brings these stories to life with traditional carols and patriotic songs, sung a cappella by a cast of 12, celebrating the unique way that the holiday season can bring us all together.

Stay tuned for 2025 offerings which include **Every Brilliant Thing** Jan. 9-17, **Little Shop Of Horrors** Jan. 24-Feb. 9, **Always A Bridesmaid** Feb. 20-March 2, **Go, Dog. Go!** March 11-March 16, **The Tortoise and the Hare: Fast Friends, Slow Foes** March 27-29 and **Legally Blonde The Musical** May 2-18.

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Arts & Music

Gulf Coast Jam 'Kicks Off' Brand New Music Festival with Garth Brooks, Carrie Underwood and Alabama

By PAUL BONNETTE

For over a decade, Gulf Coast Jam, one of the southeast's largest country music festivals has been bringing "Country to the Coast" to Panama City Beach showcasing some of country music's biggest stars. Every year, thousands of visitors and locals alike pack into Frank Brown Park for great vendors, delicious food, and of course, country music. For many years, Gulf Coast Jam was a staple event on Labor Day Weekend with the festival becoming synonymous with college football and the last days of summer. The festival was then moved up earlier in the summer, leaving a gap in Labor Day tourism. In order to bridge the gap, Gulf Coast Jam organizers announced a brand-new country music festival in addition to the current Gulf Coast Jam.

Kick Off Jam will be a 3-day star-studded festival featuring 18 musical acts, running August 30–September 1 at Frank Brown Park. The lineup includes Garth

Brooks, Carrie Underwood, the band Alabama with special guest star Randy Travis, as well as numerous other country music artists such as Pam Tillis, Jamey Johnson, Tyler Farr, Oak Ridge Boys, Lauren Alaina, Randy Houser, and more.

Garth Brooks took to social media to help announce the festival declaring that with availability to only do one outdoor gig per year, he was excited for it to be Panama City Beach. Kick Off Jam will be a country music celebration that celebrates five decades of country music on Panama City Beach.

For Executive Producer Rendy Lovelady, securing Garth Brooks fulfills a mission, years in the making.

"I've been trying to get Garth Brooks for my festivals for years and it's always been 'no.' He's excited. Panama City Beach is where Garth came for summer vacation when he was a kid. That's why he's doing this, he is doing this to celebrate where he



came from and to be a part of it."

For Lovelady, Kick Off Jam promises to be bigger than any-

thing before it.

"I've been doing this for 40 years, and without question, this is the biggest show we've ever put on. We're excited to celebrate five decades of Country music in Panama City Beach!"

Alabama will headline on Friday, August 30 with Carrie Underwood performing on Saturday, August 31. Garth Brooks will take the stage on Sunday, September 1. For more information and tickets visit www.kickoffjampcb.com.

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WARRIOR ARTS

continued from page 17

with an all professional teaching staff, free of charge to MKAF's Warrior Arts participants. This segment of our Northwest Florida population has sacrificed so much to secure our freedom, so I feel the least we can do, individually and collectively, is to embrace our military community in the best way we know how, through creative opportunities curated especially for them."

I couldn't agree more, but what proves the benefits of Warrior Arts, more than anything, are the words from those who've seen its remarkable impact first hand. As you can see from this small sample of the testimonials MKAF's Warrior Arts Program receives, this is the real catalyst for continuing to offer this help, hope and change.

Testimonials:

In 2004, while piloting a helicopter for the Army, I suffered a devastating crash. After awakening from a coma four days later, I discovered that I had a Traumatic Brain Injury and extensive nerve damage. The majority of my fine motor skills



on my right side were limited. I struggled with simple tasks like writing my own name. So, as expected, flying a helicopter would be virtually impossible. Fearing I may not regain full use of my dominant hand, I began to teach myself how to write with my left hand. Learning how to hold a pencil was the first step. Eventually I realized if I could teach my left hand how to master those skills, I could re-learn the same skills on my dominant hand. Initially I began learning how to make the letters of the alphabet. Eventually I was able to create letters and form words that I could actually read. From there, I began to draw creative patterns and straight lines, then connect those lines and create images.

Soon I developed smoother and neater pencil strokes. Within a few months I had regained about 80% of my fine motor skills. By the end of the year I had regained full control of my right arm, hand and fingers. Years later I was introduced to Zentangle by a close friend. It was simply a stress-free, no-fault method of creating beautiful patterns. It became clear to me that I wanted to share this helpful healing art with everyone. I decided to become a Certified Zentangle Teacher, and the rest is history.

—CW3 Charles Burkett, *Certified Zentangle Instructor*

I write to you in great appreciation for the support you showed in the recent PTSD retreat I attended in Destin, Fla. As a 23-year veteran, with 14 combat deployments, adapting back into the civilian world can be difficult and stressful for both the member and family. The art technique that Miss Melanie Moore introduced has helped me both focus and obtain the inner calmness I need. I brought the art set home your foundation provided and enjoy sharing

the meditative process with my 10-year-old daughter. Again, I thank your foundation and especially Miss Melanie for the time and support you showed. We do what we do for great people like you.

—Rob, *Special Operations*

Your programs come at a great time...saving lives...and protecting the livelihood of thousands is just as important as squeezing triggers. If showing a veteran the technique of drawing on a small [paper] tile to relieve their stress and anxiety can prevent a veteran suicide, then that is the most important thing in their life!

—Charles, *Special Operations*

I want to say thank you for your time, in Destin while I was at the Elk Foundation PTSD retreat. I really appreciate you supporting our veteran community and introducing something a little different into our lives. I want you to know that I have continued with the Zentangles and truly enjoy the process. I have attached a photo of my latest drawing. I hope you like it and I plan to continue.

—Rico, *Special Operations*

This program continues to have a huge positive impact on our veterans and military members. Your passion, vision, artistic talent and resources are the reasons for this. Thanks for continuing to expand the program, adding Charles Burkett for more Zentangle groups and partnering with Estelle Grengs Art for painting classes. I'm a true believer that the creative process enhances our lives and helps one heal.

—Janet Paulus, *Veteran Therapist and Air Force Veterans*

To learn more about Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation, along with this and other outreach programs this organization makes possible, visit MKAF.org

Will Estell is a writer, media entrepreneur, and real estate professional with over 600 published features in an array of publications. As chief creative officer of Estell Hussey Media, LLC, and the Editor-In-Chief of Navarre Beach Magazine, during the past 26 years, Will has been instrumental in founding 12 new magazine titles from concept to fruition, as well as serving as editor for others.




Concerts
 in the Village
 mattie kelly arts foundation

June 6 | Adam Ezra Group

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.



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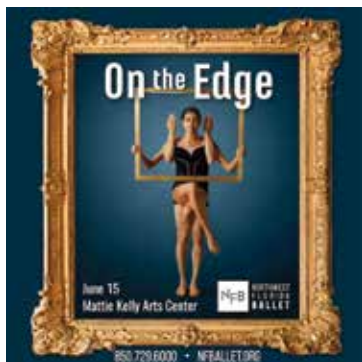
 Arts & Music

NFB Will Have You "On the Edge" in June!

Join the Northwest Florida Ballet (NFB) for On the Edge at 7:30 p.m. on Jun. 15 at the Mattie Kelly Arts Center. This unique final production of the season features NFB and international guest artists performing a mix of cutting-edge contemporary, neoclassical and classical pieces from guest choreographers and the NFB repertoire.

Box office prices for NFB's On the Edge are \$35 for adults and \$15 for children 12 and under. Visit NFBallet.org/On-The-Edge to learn more or purchase your tickets.

On the Edge is brought to you by Season Signature Sponsors Life Media and NFB's Official



Sports Medicine & Orthopaedic Provider, NFBJS Foot & Ankle Surgeon Dr. Sonya Ahmed. NFB is sponsored in part by the State of Florida through the Division of Arts and Culture and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Okaloosa Arts Alliance 15th Annual School Poster Contest Winners

The Okaloosa Arts Alliance (OAA) would like to thank all the Okaloosa County School students who participated in the 15th annual OAA Okaloosa County School Poster Contest.

Participating schools include Rocky Bayou Christian School, Crestview High School, Fort Walton Beach High School, Silver Sands School, Edge Elementary, Kenwood Elementary, Plew Elementary, Montessori Learning Center, Liza Jackson Preparatory School, Okaloosa STEMM Academy and Homeschool students. The winners are as follows:

Elementary (K5-4)

First Place: Ruth Nicolas, 2nd Grade, Silver Sands School

Second Place: Dayliana Stifter, 3rd Grade, Edge Elementary School

Third Place: Julie McMorow-2nd Grade, Edge Elementary School

Viewer's Choice: Emmanuel Vasquez, 1st grade, Home-school

Middle (5-8)

First Place, Emily Lowe-8th grade-Okaloosa STEMM Academy

Second Place, Olyvia Stephens-7th grade- Rocky Bayou Christian School

Third Place, River Autumn Jean Grimes-8th Grade- Rocky Bayou Christian School

Viewer's Choice: Hannah Leitheiser, 5th Grade, Liza Jackson Preparatory School

High (9-12)

First Place, Rosemary Clifton-10th grade- Rocky Bayou Christian School

Second Place, Link Kendrick-12th grade-Crestview High School

Third Place, Lillian Leitheiser-9th grade- Fort Walton Beach High School



THE PEARL PROJECT

continued from page 3

in Orlando in 2019, they knew their relationship would grow into a beautiful friendship and partnership. "We have experienced many of the same struggles and share a passion for helping children and families. We honestly feel like God brought

us together for this mission. Once the pandemic hit a year later, Joy was living in Ocala, but we were able to connect and share more resources because we had to rely on the internet. In 2023, we officially launched the Northwest Chapter of the Pearl Project! It has been so fun to look back and see how much we have grown."

Since becoming a foster-turned-adoptive-mom, Leslie has certainly traveled a difficult road. But, she sees the blessings have far outweighed the challenges she faced along the way. "When I look back at our foster care journey, I realize that I am not the same person that I was 10 years ago. I love to think about our foster care journey like

the refiner's fire. I have learned that sometimes life is hard and things don't end up looking the way I thought they would, but that's ok. I have learned to have more grace for those around me and myself. I know the depth of God's love and that God is with me even when things are hard. I look at all six of my children and I can't help but think about

what an honor it is to be a part of their story."

For those who are wanting to help through fostering, Leslie has this piece of advice: "I would encourage people to learn about trauma-informed care. Early childhood trauma is something that can affect people throughout their lifetime. Learning about it can help caregivers parent from a place of compassion and understanding. There are so many strategies we can use to help children feel safe and learn to trust. Ultimately, helping them connect with loving and caring adults is going to help the healing begin. I would also encourage them to build community. When you bring children into your home, it can be isolating. It's so important to find people around you who can help.

If you aren't ready to foster, The Pearl Project is also a great organization in which to partner for events, clothing donations and more. Supporting a foster family is also a good place to start. This can mean making a freezer meal, helping with babysitting, meeting physical needs or just listening and praying," said Leslie.

If you are interested in getting involved with The Pearl Project, visit www.thepearlproject.org.

On the Edge



June 15 | Mattie Kelly Arts Center

\$35 Adults • \$15 Children 12 & Under

Season Signature Sponsors:



NFB is Sponsored in Part by:



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Summer Music Lessons at Studio 237

Summer is a great time to keep your playing skills sharp, try a new instrument, or begin your music-learning journey. This summer beginning on June 3, Studio 237 Music Lessons is offering lessons on piano, keyboards, guitar (acoustic, electric, and bass), ukulele, voice, and violin. During the summer, there is more room for flexibility for the student to choose days and weeks that fit best with their needs. Teachers have provided the studio with their available times and are excited to help people of all ages develop their unique musical passion and skills. We are also open in the summer Monday through Friday.

Unlike our spring and winter semesters, the summer semester is a more relaxed and carefree time of learning without the added stress of daily school and sports activities. As a result, we have created some idea packages below for you to consider:

The Basics package is for those who desire to attend their lesson once a week (for the weeks of your availability) as a continuation of lessons, an opportunity to try a new instrument, a refresher of previous skills, or even a sort of advanced class such as learning riffs, scales, and new performance techniques for

already accomplished performers. Those who might have an audition coming up for this fall would benefit greatly from a basics or the next package which is a master class.

Master Class is for those early intermediate to advanced players who desire to go to take their performances to the next level. This level may dive a little deeper into topics such as proper technique, theory as it applies to your instrument, practice, stage performance, songwriting, how to sing and play at the same time, balance, interpretation, understanding and feeling rhythm, developing your voice and/or style, focus, and memorization techniques. Master Class can be taken several times a week or as a weekly lesson concept.

A Taste of Music package is for those who would like to take a month's worth of lessons in one week! No instrument, no worries, we have instruments here during the lesson for you to use. Some of our students started this way. Beginners will begin learning how to play an instrument or instruments for several days in an entire week (two or as many as five days). This is a great way to discover your interest and reveal what you may be in for if you desire to continue lessons in

the fall semester.

Let us help you shape your package to fit your summertime schedule. There are a multitude of options to meet your needs such as taking a 30, 45, or 60-minute lesson as many times a week as you desire beginning when you are ready in June and/or July. You may take lessons on one, two, or more different instruments. There are instruments that tend to complement

each other such as voice lessons along with piano or guitar/ukulele.

Here is our listing of available teachers this summer: (Lessons are paused during the week of July 4.)

Mary Kate Cary: voice and beginner piano lessons.

Don Dirkin Jr.: electric lead guitar and acoustic guitar,

Helmut Dimmel: piano

Linda Chung: violin, viola

Scott Gilmore: (June only) classical or acoustic guitar and ukulele, songwriting for kids.

Gregg Shapiro: bass guitar and beginner guitar.

We are ready today, for you to call us to reserve your special time. Our teachers bio's are located on our website at Studio237Music.com/all-teachers-listing. Call (850) 231-3199 or (850) 797-3546 or email Studio237Music@gmail.com.



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