



AUGUST 2024  
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# BAY Life

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## Heroes Among Us Meet Hometown Hero Chris Lambert

By MICHELLE RUSCHMAN

**Resilience. Community. Forgiveness.** These are three words that would describe what three-time Purple Heart recipient, Chris Lambert, wants for fellow veterans. His Purple Hearts were received during the Vietnam War when he began serving at 18 years old during the Tet Offensive in 1968. His experiences have given him compassion for those going through PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder), even as he continues to move through his healing, and he's also helped veterans who have gone through MST (Military Sexual Trauma).

People join the military for different reasons. Among them, for the love of their country, to have a chance to serve alongside friends, some are looking to find direction in a season where there is none, or they want to follow in the footsteps of a family member who served in the military. For Chris, it was his father who



was the greatest influence to volunteer.

"My dad was playing football for Oklahoma University when the war broke out in 1941 and he went and joined up like everyone else did. He came home with really bad

PTSD but back then it was called battle fatigue. He ended up being an alcoholic and I joined because I just wanted to know he was proud of me."

Just as Chris' dad managed his PTSD from World War II with alcohol, so would Chris

as he came back home from Vietnam and suffered the abuse of a veteran whose efforts were overlooked by the country he fought for. He

**CHRIS LAMBERT**  
*continued on page 3*

## A Message from the Supervisor of Elections

The election season is upon us; are you registered to vote? Primary Elections are coming up August 20.

### Political Party Affiliation

When completing the Florida Voter Registration Application Form, one of the fields is Party Affiliation. In this field, you have several options. You can choose from one of the major political parties (Florida Democratic Party or Republican Party of Florida), one of the minor political parties, you can select no party affiliation (NPA), or you can leave the field blank. If you leave this field blank on the application form, our office will register you with no party affiliation (NPA) by default.

### Registration & Party Change Deadline

You can update your voter registration record at any time. However, the registration deadline for new

**ELECTIONS**  
*continued on page 20*



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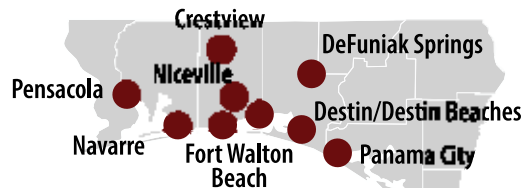
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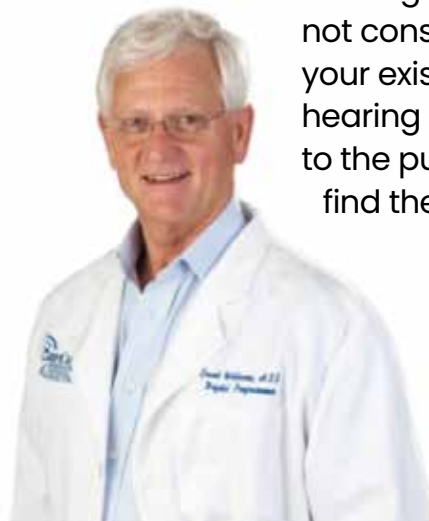
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**CHRIS LAMBERT**

*continued from page 1*

would battle alcoholism till December 1980, when he joined Alcoholics Anonymous. As

do their best to support the military after coming home from deployment, there isn't enough being done to prepare them for the realities of combat: Injuries and death, the sounds



PHOTOS COURTESY JOJO STEVENSON, JOJO'S COFFEE & GOODNESS

Chris lives sober today, he wants people to know an important fact about his fellow veterans and the way coping in post-war may present itself in each person.

“Veterans who have been through combat aren't broken. We're just not trained. We're not trained to have the life skills that are needed after seeing the horrors of battle.”

Even as the VA, churches, and community organizations

and smells, the guilt over killing and surviving, and having to integrate back into their family home with their injuries and fractured mental health. How do you settle back into domestic life when you can't unsee the experiences of deployment? According to Chris, you do it by getting in front of other veterans, finding a way to express what you want to hide the most, and you learn to forgive.

“I think something that's

missing from many current modalities of treatment is the ability for military members to be angry, cry, and express all the fear, sadness, and guilt that we carry around. We think there's a way we're 'supposed' to respond to war and the reality is, every response is valid. For example, when you come close to getting killed, you will pee in your pants. It's things like that that we need to talk about together

so you figure out that what you think is private shame is normal in abnormal circumstances.”

One place where Chris has experienced profound healing is at JoJo's Coffee and Goodness in Niceville. It's there that owner, Angela “JoJo” Stevenson, who comes from a military family herself, hosts a monthly meeting called Come to the Table. At this event, veterans gather to enjoy a meal, pray together, share

experiences with those who speak the same language, and together, find their way home.

If you know a vet who is looking for support, or you are one, reach out to Chris at 209-985-7075 or email [Chris4vetsnolb@aol.com](mailto:Chris4vetsnolb@aol.com). (NOLB - No one left behind.). For meeting times for Come to the Table, call JoJo's Coffee and Goodness at 850-737-6193.



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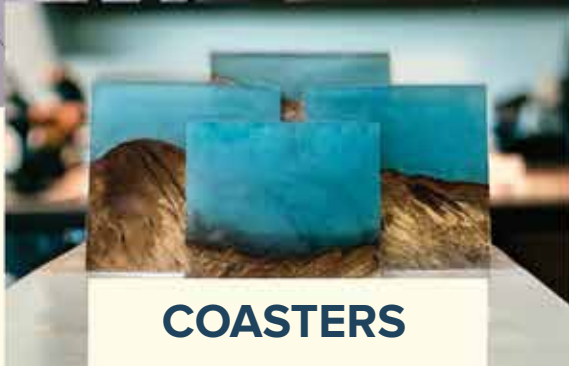
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# Mary Anne Windes for County Commissioner, District 5: Knowledge • Experience • Trust

BY MICHELLE RUSCHMAN

You don't live in Okaloosa County as a life-long resident and entrepreneur without gaining the perspective of a student, parent, business person, consumer and citizen. This is the experience Mary Anne Windes will be bringing to our community as she puts in her bid to be voted for County Commissioner, District 5, in the August elections.

Mary Anne grew up in Fort Walton Beach, graduating from

you need as a real estate agent, it's the ability to help people. You have to dig to find out what the real motivation is behind why they are doing what they are doing, and if there's a better way, you bring that to their attention."

It's this practice of finding a better way that Mary Anne wants to bring Okaloosa County as the District 5 Commissioner. "Okaloosa County has been good to my family and me, and I've always wanted to give back.

Realtors, she successfully advocated for real estate agents to receive compensation for losses incurred during the BP oil spill. This was done after it had been decided that real estate agents were not to be compensated.

In addition, she has proven her leadership capabilities by serving as Chairman of the Mid-Bay Bridge twice, as Chairman of the Destin Fishing Rodeo as well as Chairman of the Destin Chamber of Commerce Board

of Directors.

These are the kinds of results Mary Anne wants to bring to Okaloosa County! She's asking for our vote so she can get to work.



Mary Anne wants to be someone her grandchildren can look up to.

Fort Walton Beach High School, and getting her Associate of Arts degree in Business when North West Florida State College was still Okaloosa County Community College. She went on to get her Bachelor of Arts degree in Accounting from the University of West Florida and has since lived in Destin for 40 years.

Over the years, Mary Anne has demonstrated a knowledge and love for both the opportunities on land and in the water. As a student she was riding, training, showing horses and teaching riding lessons. Mary Anne is also married to Commissioner Kelly Windes, a third generation Destin fisherman for 40 years. With Captain Kelly fishing seven days a week from March to October for 12 hours a day, Mary Anne became a real estate agent for the flexibility in raising their two children, owning her own brokerage firm for 30 years. It was during that time she learned critical lessons about how she wanted to serve the people who relied on her expertise. "I would talk as many people out of selling real estate as I would take the listing. The ability to sell is not something

I've reached the top in real estate, and I feel like everything in my life has led me to this decision. My auditing background (where I audited condominiums and counties that gave me a well-rounded understanding of the county operations), real estate background, my ability to get things done, work ethic and my integrity puts me in a unique position to be an asset to our Board of County Commissioners."

If elected, Mary Anne's goals include keeping taxes low, keeping the public safe in the wake of open borders, working on attainable housing for all citizens and partnering with the Early Learning Coalition to address the child care crisis. Mary Anne also plans to put her accounting background to good use with her understanding of how spending and inflation impacts both the public and government. Infrastructure will also be a point of focus as well as roads, county services and maintaining county assets.

Mary Anne demonstrated her tenacity in taking care of those she served when, in 2010 as the President of the Emerald Coast Association of

- Knowledge
- Experience
- Trust



Let Mary Anne put her unique set of skills to work for Okaloosa County!




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DISTRICT 5

Political advertisement paid for and approved by Mary Anne Windes, Republican, for Okaloosa County Commissioner, District 5.

# Empower Academy: Teaching Skills, Providing Confidence, Saving Lives

BY MICHELLE RUSCHMAN

One of the most powerful forces on the planet is a parent who is ready to protect their child. When that parent is re-

tired Green Beret, Matthew Docchio, President and Founder of Empower Academy out of Valparaiso, you begin to create a generation of young men and

women who have the confidence and skills to take care of themselves. With thousands of families getting ready to launch their young adults into the next chapters of their lives in August, the skills that are taught through Matthew's courses will provide much-needed peace of mind, especially for families with daughters.

"When I was looking at colleges with my daughter, I became aware of the fact that one out of three female undergrads were experiencing rape or sexual assault. That was a deafening statistic to me, especially when you hear this has been going on for decades. When I started looking at the evidence of incidents that have been happening recently at college campuses around the country, I began thinking that if these kids had had even a fraction of the training I've had in Special Forces, we could have increased the odds that the outcome could have been prevented."

As Matthew has expanded the reach of Empower Academy, he sees that there are potentially two lives that he's saving through these classes, the student that is being taught and the retired Green Beret he hires to be an instructor.

The motto of the Green Berets is De Oppresso Liber - Free the Oppressed. When these veterans retire, they still have the desire to serve, but in many cases, have nowhere else to put the skills they still carry. Empower Academy gives them an opportunity to protect the next generation and the communities they represent. "These guys can struggle with suicide after they retire, because they can lose a sense of purpose. We are built in such a way that a lot of us need to be fighting the battle for someone who can't do it for themselves. What better purpose for these guys than to protect our daughters?"

Matthew's classes don't teach hand-to-hand combat, but offer the skills to have situational awareness based on an analytical mindset. Ideally, the course runs for two days, eight hours each day, starting at 8 a.m., for no more than 25 participants. For this size, five Green Berets



are assigned to teach. So, there is a 5-to-1 student-to-instructor ratio. By the end of those 16 hours, students have learned valuable skills such as knowing how to check if they are being followed by car or by foot, immediately establishing a baseline of normalcy and identifying potential threat by analyzing non-verbal cues, and getting out of a variety of restraints. Students who can visualize themselves reacting appropriately to a variety of scenarios greatly reduce the chance of freezing if the threat becomes real.

If a two-day course isn't feasible, Empower also offers workshops that are two, four, or seven hours. These classes aren't just for local female students. These classes can also accommodate community, school and corporate functions throughout the nation. Once you become a student with the Academy, you're also able to join a network of students who can share information. For example, college students can connect with oth-



ers who attend the same campus to discuss the safest routes as they navigate their way through campus. It's not pleasant to think about the different scenarios that can occur, but when you diminish the possibility of individuals becoming a target, confidence begins to replace worry.

If you would like to schedule a class for friends and family or have any additional questions, you can contact Matthew Docchio at 850-573-9110 or email [empower.academy.us@gmail.com](mailto:empower.academy.us@gmail.com). You can also go to [www.empower-academy.online](http://www.empower-academy.online) to support Matthew's efforts by becoming an Angel to sponsor future students.

Instagram: [empower.academy.2023](https://www.instagram.com/empower.academy.2023)

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# Sunbright Inn Receives Scenic Walton Design Excellence Award

By KERRI PARKER

Scenic Walton recently announced Sunbright Inn as the winner of its Design Excellence Award for the renovation of the oldest house in Walton County. The organization presented the award to owners, Patrick and Heather O’Neill, among their family and friends, including dignitaries involved with the project in DeFuniak Springs in June.

Among a couple dozen guests, the ceremony opened with Leigh Moore, executive director of Scenic Walton, explaining the purpose of the organization and the award. “We created this award for businesses and local governmental entities that excel in the areas of architecture, landscaping, signage and other categories related to scenic beauty in the built environment,” says Moore. Scenic Walton recently revived the Design Excellence Award in 2024, originally debuting in 2017. The award helps to promote beauty

and safety throughout Walton County by recognizing indisputable development and design excellence. “The efforts of the O’Neill family and Paul Rushing Construction have delivered astonishing renovations that not only restored a significant historical building in DeFuniak Springs, but also enhanced the beauty of Highway 331,” says Moore.

Patrick O’Neill accepted the award with a heartfelt speech placing significant emphasis on the team behind the scenes who tirelessly pursued excellence in the renovation process, including his children. “There is no better way to spend time with your kids than laying pavers in the extreme Florida summer heat,” laughs O’Neill. The renovation was a family affair, with all hands on deck throughout the 27-month renovation. Not only the O’Neill family, but also their operation partners, Inn Keepers David and Heather Campbell. The Campbell’s



young adult children are also involved in daily operations of the Inn. Staying on course, in thanking Paul Rushing of Rushing Construction for invaluable expertise in Victorian home renovation, O’Neill also highlighted Paul’s son “Bubba” Paul Wayne Rushing II, as having “the most blood, sweat and tears” in the project. In closing of the presentation, all attendees were invited on a tour of the home turned Inn, with eight rooms that embrace the past but with modern amenities – “like plumbing,” laughs O’Neill.

“This award presentation was the first-ever to bring me to tears. It was heartwarming and embodied the importance of family and community. We are delighted to recognize Sunbright Inn and all the people who made this renovation possible,” says Moore.

Scenic Walton, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that promotes increased property values, a robust business environment and safe and beautiful surroundings for all, works to preserve, protect and enhance the beauty and safety of Walton County.

Since its inception in 2008, Scenic Walton has been dedicated to preserving the natural beauty of Walton County while enhancing safety for pedestrians and cyclists. By collaborating with community members and elected officials, Scenic Walton ensures that the region’s charm remains intact for future generations.

Leigh Moore, the dynamic Scenic Walton executive director and vice chair of Scenic America’s Board of Directors, embodies a deep passion for scenic conservation. Initially joining as a part-time executive director for the Scenic Corridor Foundation, Leigh has seen the organization evolve into Scenic Walton, where she now leads full-time. “I’m really passionate about what we do,” Leigh shares. “We’re the only ones who do it. There’s not a lot of advocacy being done for scenic beauty.”

*Continued on page 10*



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# David Schmidt for Okaloosa County School Board

## A Passion for Students, Education and Local Workforce

By MICHELLE RUSCHMAN

Two characteristics of an invested candidate for the Okaloosa County School Board include someone who has gone through the system he wants to lead, and another is that the candidate has children who will be affected by the decisions he will make. David Schmidt, candidate for District 2, fits both criteria. He and his wife, Shannon, are not only esteemed graduates of Okaloosa County, but David has the future vision that his five children, Neyland, Bennett, Malachi, Ramsey and Sawyer will also have the opportunity to thrive in their education.



“My five children will be among 35,000 students in the Okaloosa County School District,” says David. “If elected, I’ll be the only candidate to serve my term while still having children enrolled in the district. I think it’s important to have a boots-on-the-ground mentality in this area of service because not only will I get to apply my professional expertise as an educator, but I’ll also come with my experiences gained from being a parent. This should give voting parents the confidence that I will be acting in their best interest, as well as their children’s.”

There are two areas that David is especially passionate about when it comes to a plan that will positively impact the education of our children. The first one has to do with financial management and accountability. With so many new buildings needed, and so many needing repair, David supports the millions of tax dollars that will create more space and make it safer for our kids to go to school. However, what is needed is a master plan to be approved by the school board and there currently isn’t one, short-term or long-term. Why is that important?

“Master plans help to identify important ‘needs’ in the district and help eliminate simple ‘wants.’ This ensures your tax dollars are being spent wisely with the highest level of Return on Investment (ROI) in mind,” David says.

If elected, David’s goal is to have plans in place, not only for current projects but also to pro-

vide a template to ensure that future projects will keep up with the predicted growth for the district, especially in the north end of the county.

The second area that David is impassioned by is the vision of ALL Okaloosa students graduating with a marketable skill set. “We want our Okaloosa graduates to have the option of living and staying in our community, but we have to equip them with the necessary skills,” he says. “Approximately half of our students will enter college after graduation, where roughly half those will actually finish college. That means one out of four of our high school students will get a college diploma. The research and data also show that only 4% of students will graduate from Okaloosa Schools and enroll into a Technical College. There is a significant number of Okaloosa County students who are going straight into the workforce, many without the necessary skill sets needed to be able to stay and live in our community. We need to make sure they’re ready.”

If elected, David will begin work immediately on a plan to audit all current programs to ensure the tax dollars are being spent on courses that give students the best chance to be marketable to local employers. David’s goal is to increase the long-term professional benefits to the students without having to request new sources of funding. For example, “Eliminating courses with low overall value and diverting the dollars from these courses over to courses with a higher marketability standard is a way to increase student marketability without requesting new sources of funding.”

In 2013, David and Shan-

non established a non-profit organization called “Financial Storehouse.” Through Financial Storehouse they’re able to mentor individuals, groups and students on financial literacy. As

a result, these transformative experiences are not only an investment in the individual, but they are looking at the positive long-term impact on our community. David is looking forward to

servicing the Okaloosa County School Board in the same way: For each student to know their purpose and as a result, for their families to thrive and move forward together.

**Vote**

# DAVID SCHMIDT

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Community

# Walton County Tourism Department Launches Keep Walton County Beautiful

The Walton County Tourism Department proudly announces the launch of Keep Walton County Beautiful (KWCB), a local affiliate of Keep America Beautiful dedicated to preserving the county's natural environment.

"Joining forces with Keep America Beautiful is a landmark moment," says Matt Algarin, Director. "Walton County is a special place. Through Keep Walton County Beautiful, locals and visitors will help protect our natural resources so everyone can enjoy them for generations to come."

Keep Walton County Beautiful



### About Keep Walton County Beautiful:

Keep Walton County Beautiful, an affiliate of Keep America Beautiful, helps preserve the natural resources that make Walton County special through education, beautification, litter prevention, waste reduction and recycling programs. Keep Walton County Beautiful is funded by the Walton County Tourism Department. Please visit [keepwaltoncountybeautiful.org/about-us/](http://keepwaltoncountybeautiful.org/about-us/) and follow us on Instagram, Twitter/X and Facebook to learn more.

ful will partner with individuals and businesses on beautification and protection efforts including:

- Tree planting and enhancement of green spaces
- Beach and roadway clean-ups
- Litter prevention campaigns

Resources for green businesses

In addition to resources for locals, KWCB will spearhead educational campaigns targeting visitors, encouraging them to act as good environmental stewards and participate in clean-up

and beautification events.

KWCB is led by Ashlyn Temples, marketing specialist for the Walton County Tourism Department. Please visit [keepwaltoncountybeautiful.org](http://keepwaltoncountybeautiful.org) to learn more and get involved today.

## SCENIC WALTON

continued from page 8

Scenic Walton's primary focus is on impactful project work. "In the beginning, we concen-

trated on Hwy. 98 and Hwy. 331 south of the Bay. By 2018 and 2019, we started achieving

more significant milestones and received requests to extend our projects beyond that corridor. That's when we expanded our reach to cover the entire county and rebranded ourselves as Scenic Walton. It was a substantial expansion for us."

Following this expansion, Leigh and her team integrated board members from Central and North Walton and began identifying project opportunities north of the bay. "Our mission is to maintain and enhance the visual aesthetic and natural beauty of Walton, as well as ensure the county's safety. We achieve this through several initiatives, such as undergrounding utilities, creating cyclist and pedestrian paths and landscaping public areas."

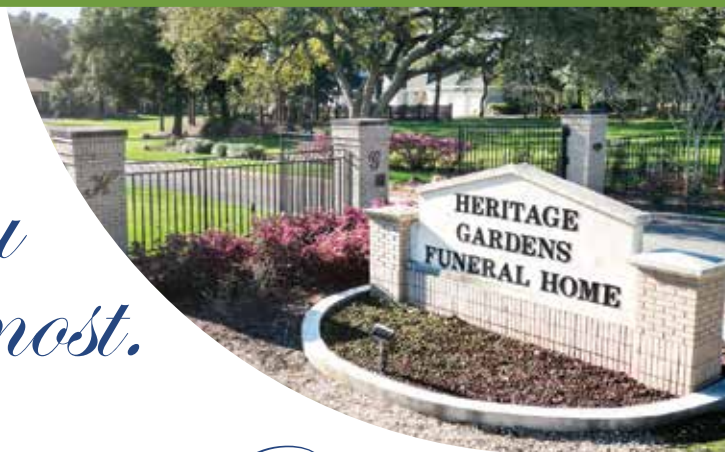
Currently, Scenic Walton is focusing on landscaping along primary roadways in Walton County. Additionally, they actively promote and educate the community about the advan-

tages of implementing good development standards and are planning a partnership with the Walton County Tourist Development Council to support their Keep Walton County Beautiful initiative.

One way you can support is through Scenic Walton charity license plates. \$25 from each initial sale and ongoing renewal fee goes directly to Scenic Walton and can be purchased at any tax collector office or online. "It's an easy way to support our county-wide mission," says Moore. The Walton County Tax Collector's offices have the plates in stock. Citizens with a car, RV, trailer, or golf cart/LSV registered in Florida can pick up their plate there or order online at [scenic.org/walton-plate](http://scenic.org/walton-plate).

To learn more about Scenic Walton or sign up for the newsletter, visit [scenicwalton.org](http://scenicwalton.org). Visit Sunbright Inn at <https://sunbrightinn.com/>.

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# Re-Elect Eric Aden for Okaloosa County Sheriff

## Transparency • Accountability • Tough on Crime!

By MICHELLE RUSCHMAN

When someone deliberately puts themselves at risk for the sake of others, that career goes beyond a job—it's a calling. Sheriff Eric Aden not only answered that call to law enforcement 29 years ago, but his experience reflects his dedication to reducing crime in Okaloosa County. In 2019, Sheriff Aden attended the prestigious FBI National Academy and ran unopposed in the 2020 election where he has served honorably since January 1, 2021. Through this calling, he has stepped into a role that makes him responsible for the safety and well-being of nearly 220,000 residents in addition to 7.8 million annual visitors (2023), and he does so while overseeing nearly 500 employees. His experience in private-sector finance also allows him to manage a budget of over \$60,000,000 while being fiscally conservative to safeguard tax dollars, manage resources and acquire new technology. On Au-

gust 20, 2024, Sheriff Aden is asking for our vote to make him Sheriff again.

Eric Aden was born on Eglin Air Force Base in 1971. Mainly residing in Shalimar, he has been a lifelong resident of Okaloosa County, fostering respect not only for the military community, but also for the citizens who grow up in our area. His father started as a young Air Force pilot and later became an aerospace engineer. His mother spent 25 years as a teacher. Eric grew up playing football, basketball and baseball during his school years, graduated from Choctaw High School and attended Florida State University where he studied Criminology. While at FSU, he interned with the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office (OCSO) in 1993 and upon graduation in 1994, returned home to complete the law enforcement acad-



emy in Niceville. His career began in January 1995. Eric is now married with four daughters, one son and one granddaughter.

In the years leading up to serving as Sheriff, Aden has regularly been recognized as a leader in law enforcement. In 2008 he was recruited for a leadership position with the Walton County Sheriff's Office where he was quickly promoted to Lieutenant over Judicial Services, Civil Process, Warrants, Court Security and Team Leader for the U.S. Marshal Fugitive Task Force.

In 2010, he was again hand-selected for leadership in Okaloosa County to oversee Judicial Services/Court Security, Booking and Detention. Since then, he has also led Criminal Investigations, Evidence, Crime Scene and Criminal Analysts as well as Watch Commanders, part-time/Reserve Deputies, Airport Security Units and Posse Liaisons. Sheriff Aden's experience truly encompasses all facets of law enforcement.

During his recent first term as Sheriff, Aden's leadership was proven through programs such as Real-Time Crime Center and License Plate Readers. These initiatives, along with intensive, deputy training and other measures, reduced violent crime by an astonishing 26% and overall reported crimes by 8%.

The new Real-Time Crime Center monitors License Plate

Readers as well as video surveillance of schools and many local businesses. This has allowed information to be disseminated to patrols and investigations when minutes are critical in the success of open cases. It has led, also, to the arrest of suspects in critical areas such as homicide, robbery, shooting, carjacking and kidnapping.

Sheriff Eric Aden has a proven track record of being committed to full transparency, accountability and a force for good in our community. With our vote, he will continue the work he has created for.


*Sheriff Aden's numerous endorsements include Rick Scott U.S. Senator FL, Matt Gaetz U.S. Congressman FL District 1, Patt Maney FL State Representative District 4, Marcus Chambers Superintendent Okaloosa School District and many, many more. For a full list and additional information, visit [VoteAden.com](http://VoteAden.com).*

**RE-ELECT**  
**ADEN**  
**SHERIFF**

**Beating Down Crime, Making Okaloosa Safer.**  
*Violent Crime Rate Down 26%*

Sheriff Eric Aden is a proven crimefighter with over 25 years of experience and a distinguished record serving Okaloosa County.

**VoteAden.com**  
**ELECTION DAY IS AUGUST 20**




## Bay Buzz

### Eglin Federal Credit Union Opens New Freeport Branch

Eglin Federal Credit Union (EFCU) celebrated the grand opening of its new Freeport Branch today with a ribbon cutting ceremony. Located at 16970 U.S. Hwy 331 S., this is EFCU's first full-service branch and second location in Walton County. The Freeport Branch will provide convenient account access for more than 30,000 members living in Walton County. The DeFuniak Springs ATM/Video Teller Drive-thru located at 677 Highway 90 opened July 18, 2023.

Eglin Federal Credit Union expanded membership opportunities to persons who live, work (or regularly conduct business in), worship, or attend school in, and employees of businesses located within the approved seven census tracts in Walton County. Visit the new Freeport Branch to learn more about membership, or go to [eglinfcu.org/join](http://eglinfcu.org/join).

Eglin Federal Credit Union President/CEO Jerry Williams said, "This year marks our 70th Anniversary, and we recognize we wouldn't be here today without the loyal support of our members and community partners. We thank you for the trust that you have placed in our care.



Eglin Federal Credit Union celebrated the grand opening of its new Freeport Branch with a ribbon cutting ceremony July 11, 2024.

It is a responsibility that we do not take for granted. We embrace the credit union philosophy of people helping people, and we believe that when you lead with values and do the right things, that good things happen. We are proud Eglin Federal Credit Union was named the 2023 Large Business of the Year by the Walton Area Chamber of Commerce. Thank you for celebrating our first Walton County Branch. We look forward to serving this community and growing the Credit Union family."

The Freeport Branch is approximately 4,400 square feet, showcasing a new open branch design that features a member engagement area with interactive touch screen monitors. This is a full-service branch with safe deposit boxes, a Coinstar® machine, night drop, touch screen video tellers and drive-thru

ATMs. La Macchia Group is the design/build firm for the new Freeport Branch.

Follow on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and LinkedIn or visit [www.eglinfcu.org](http://www.eglinfcu.org).

### Okaloosa County EMS Achieves Gold Status Recognition for 10th Consecutive Year

Okaloosa County Department of Public Safety - Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Division recently received the Mission: Lifeline® EMS Gold achievement by the American Heart Association for excellence in delivering rapid care for heart attack and stroke victims. This is the 10th consecutive year Okaloosa County has achieved Gold status.

"This achievement reaffirms the County's commitment to delivering quality, timely care for stroke and heart attack patients," said Okaloosa County Board Chairman Paul Mixon. "I am proud of our EMS professionals who continue to perform every day at the highest level, selflessly delivering care to those in need. We are honored to receive this recognition from the American Heart Association for the dedication of these individuals."

Emergency medical services

staff can begin treatment when they arrive — up to an hour sooner than if someone goes to the hospital by car. EMS staff are also trained to provide resuscitation efforts to someone whose heart has stopped. People who arrive by ambulance may also receive faster treatment at the hospital.

Mission: Lifeline EMS® is the American Heart Association's national initiative to advance the system of care for patients with high-risk, time-sensitive disease states, such as severe heart attacks and strokes. The program helps reduce barriers to prompt treatment — starting from when 911 is called, to EMS transport and continuing through hospital treatment and discharge. Optimal care for heart attack and stroke patients takes coordination between the individual prehospital providers and healthcare systems.

For more information, visit [heart.org](http://heart.org).

### Quilts of Valor Recognizes Mid-Bay Rotarian Bert Melnick



Rotarian Bert Melnick and His Rotary Partner Mary Jo



During a ceremony held at the Air Force Armament Museum on July 13, Mid-Bay Rotarian Bert Melnick was presented a Quilt of Valor. The presentation was hosted by the Flying Needles Quilt Guild – Niceville/Valparaiso. The quilts are a reminder of America's appreciation and gratitude. Quilts are stitched with love, prayers and healing thoughts; they are a tangible token of admiration that says, "Thank you for your

service and sacrifice." Bert served over 37 years with tours in the U.S. Marines and the U.S. Navy. As a Navy aviator, one of his tours was in support of the U.S. in its intelligence gathering during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Mid-Bay Rotarians along with Bert's Rotary Partner Mary Jo, were in the audience in support of Bert. After the ceremony, Mid-Bay Rotarians were treated with a tour of the Museum by Rotarian Tom Johnson. Visit [www.QOVF.org](http://www.QOVF.org).

### Grand Knights from Knights of Columbus Councils 13527 and 7667

in Niceville recently presented a check for \$3113.80 to the CEO of Children in Crisis, Inc. The councils combined efforts to conduct a Luau in Niceville with all proceeds going to the local charity that provides homes for children and has been able to keep 300 siblings together.

### Niceville Republican Women Federated Presented Two 2024 Scholarships:



Sydney Athearn, a 2024 Rocky Bayou Christian School graduate, received a scholarship from Niceville Republican Women Federated. Sydney read her essay on "Why I Am a Republican" at the June 3 meeting and met members and guests at NRWF. Sydney will be attending Wheaton College. L-R: NRWF President Libby Hill, Diana Gilbert, Sydney Athearn, Lana Wood and Jane Stevens



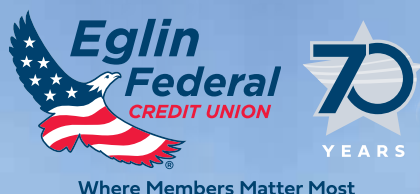
Rylee Daniels, a 2024 Niceville High School graduate, received a scholarship from Niceville Republican Women

*Continued on page 16*

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# Happenings Around the Bay

## 2024 EVENTS

### AUGUST

- 01** **Puzzle Exchange Club**  
10 am | Niceville Library | Niceville  
**Luau Beach Party**  
5 pm | The Boardwalk | Okaloosa Island  
**Broadway on the Boulevard**  
7:30 pm | Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach
- 02** **Greater FWB Chamber First Friday Coffee**  
7 am | Christian Life Center at FBC | FWB  
**Live Music: Kyle Lamonica**  
6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville
- 03** **Live Music: Radio Star**  
6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville  
**Concealed Carry Weapons Class**  
10 am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso
- 04** **Women's Climbing Circle**  
5 pm | Rock Out Climbing Gym | Destin  
**Magical Variety Show**  
6 & 7:30 pm | Al's Beach Club | Okaloosa Island
- 05** **Beach Madness Monday**  
3 pm | LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant | Niceville  
**Pirate Show**  
5 pm | The Boardwalk | Okaloosa Island
- 06** **Niceville Young Professionals Lunch Meeting**  
11:30 am | Niceville-Valparaiso Chamber | Niceville  
**Lunch N Learn: Be the Office Rockstar with AI**  
11:30 am | Greater FWB Chamber | FWB  
**Movies on the Beach: "The Little Mermaid"**  
5 pm | The Boardwalk | Okaloosa Island
- 07** **The Pittman's Magical Variety Show**  
6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville  
**Fireworks Show**  
9 pm | The Boardwalk | Okaloosa Island
- 08** **Greater FWB Chamber Nothing But Networking**  
11:30 am | Pedro's Tacos & Tequila Bar | Mary Esther  
**Luau Beach Party**  
5 pm | The Boardwalk | Okaloosa Island  
**Broadway on the Boulevard**  
7:30 pm | Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach
- 09** **Live Music: The Remedy**  
6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville
- 10** **Early Voting Begins – Aug. 17th**  
Okaloosa and Walton Counties

- 10** **Live Music: Boukou Groove**  
6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville  
**Fluorescent Space Acrylic Pour with Debi Profeta**  
5 pm | Artful Things Niceville | Niceville
- 11** **Live Music: Meg Phillips**  
6 pm | Al's Beach Club | Okaloosa Island
- 13** **Book Club for Adults**  
11 am | Niceville Library | Niceville  
**Live Music: Carlie Seagar**  
4 pm | Al's Beach Club | Okaloosa Island
- 14** **Niceville-Valparaiso Chamber Second Wednesday Breakfast**  
7:15 am | Niceville Community Center | Niceville  
**Center for lifelong learning (FWB) Meet & Greet / Welcome Back Social**  
6 pm | UWF - FWB Campus, Rm 126 | FWB
- 15** **Free Family History Help**  
1 pm | Niceville Library | Niceville  
**Greater FWB Chamber Business After Hours**  
5:30 pm | The Island Resort | Okaloosa Island  
**Home Defense Fundamentals**  
5:30 pm | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso
- 16-31** **Fall Lawn Games**  
5 pm | Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach
- 16** **NHS Football Game vs. Bay HS**  
7 pm | Niceville High School | Niceville
- 17** **Concealed Carry Weapons Class**  
10 am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso  
**Stained Glass Part 2 with Dulcie Scaff**  
11 am | Artful Things Niceville | Niceville  
**Casino Night benefiting CALM**  
6 pm | LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant | Niceville
- 18** **Live Music: Robbie Paynter**  
6 pm | Al's Beach Club | Okaloosa Island
- 19** **Center for lifelong learning (FWB) Fall Online Registration Opens**  
9 am | cl-fwb.org | UWF - FWB Campus, Rm 461 | FWB
- 20** **Election Day!**  
7 am - 7 pm | Okaloosa and Walton Counties
- 23** **Live Music: Rockers 4 Life**  
6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville

- 23** **NHS Football Game vs. South Sumter HS**  
7 pm | Niceville High School | Niceville
- 24** **Live Music: Purple Monkey**  
6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville
- 25** **Sunset Shrimp Boil**  
4 pm | LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant | Niceville
- 28** **Live Music: Michael Howard**  
6 pm | Al's Beach Club | Okaloosa Island
- 30** **NHS Football Game vs. Escambia HS**  
7 pm | Niceville High School | 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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<b>FARMERS MARKETS</b>	<b>Niceville Community</b>	<b>Hammock Bay</b>	<b>Grand Boulevard</b>
	Saturdays   9 am - 1 pm	1st & 3rd Sundays   8 am	Saturdays   9 am - 1 pm
	Palm Plaza   Niceville	Victory Blvd   Freeport	Grand Boulevard   Miramar Beach

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# Five Things to Do Before a Storm



By JULIE A. MARTIN,  
LICENSED AGENT FL

It's the middle of summer, and you just heard on the radio that a Category 4 storm is about to hit in your area. What should you do to prepare? Stocking up on non-perishable food and bottled water is a given and also batteries. Those are both good preventative measures. But, what will you do if the storm hits your house? How can you minimize damage to your home and to your other possessions?

The first thing you should do is call your insurance agent

and ask for a copy of both your declarations page and your policy jacket. You should do this both for your home and for your vehicles. If you have boats, motorcycles, an RV or any other contrivance or dwellings, get all of your policy documents together in one place. Familiarize yourself with your deductibles, coverages and any exclusions or limitations. You should do this regularly anyway, because once a storm is in the box, no coverage can be changed, altered or reinstated. If there is a payment due, pay it. You might be unable



board up your house against the possibility of storm damage.

The last thing to do is make sure you have a battery-operated charger for your phone, so that in the event you do get hit, you can communicate with your family, and call the agent and insurance company for help in putting in your

claim. Get gas before the storm. Don't just top it off. If you have three vehicles, take them to the station one by one and fill them all up. The first thing that happens after a hurricane is a localized shortage of goods, and you don't want to have to scramble around at the last minute and go without. If you prepare yourself, your home and your vehicles well in advance of the upcoming storm, you can breathe a sigh of relief that even if the storm hits, you have done everything you can to prevent against further loss.

to do so later, if the timing of the storm coincides with a cancellation or the expiration of your policy.

The second thing you should do is take pictures and videos of the inside and outside of your home and email them to yourself. This is to show what your house looked like BEFORE anything happened. If you recently purchased big ticket items like new furniture or an entertainment center, email yourself any receipts you might have for the more expensive items in your home. In the event of a loss, receipts, photos and videos will aid the adjusters in processing your claim in a fair and timely manner.

The third thing to do is go out into your yard, front and back, and think about anything that can become a projectile. Winds upwards of 120 miles per hour can turn even a 6 oz. can of soup into a weapon. The more things that you can bring into the garage or a shed, the less they will be likely to fly into one of your windows or the side of your house. The things that you are unable to bring into your garage, lay them on their side as close to the back of the house as possible, or the shed. Try to tie them down with rope so it is less likely to fly away and either damage your home or hurt someone. Anything on your patio? Bring it into the house or into your garage, if you have one.

If you have hurricane shutters or windows, you are already ahead of the game. But, if you do not, boarding up your windows is a good close second. You might need to go to Home Depot or Lowe's where they have both the lumber and the clips/screws to board up the windows tightly. Do some research before you do this, because there is a right and wrong way to

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# Barbara Morano: Champion for Change

Barbara Morano, Republican, is running for Walton County Commissioner for District 5, bringing a wealth of experience and a proven track record of community service. Her extensive involvement in county activities, organizations, and tireless volunteer work showcases her commitment to the com-

Additionally, she contributed to the Draper Lake Architectural Control Committee from 2018 to 2020 and currently presides over the Hidden Lake Condominiums as President since 2019.

As a board member of the South Walton Community Council Contributions, Barbara



munity and readiness to take on this vital role. In a public statement, Mrs. Morano stated, "I have participated in many county meetings during the past five years, speaking at the podium on the county budget, the land development code, planned unit developments and ordinances that affect our quality of life and the natural environment and the need for enhanced infrastructure throughout Walton County. I do my homework and I research. I have no special interests except for the citizens of Walton County."

### Leadership in Community Organizations

As a former school counselor, supervisor and principal, Barbara's advocacy for children, parents and teachers was always at the forefront. Her dedication to helping others ignited her passion for advocacy, problem-solving and leadership in retirement.

Barbara is a Board member of South Walton Community Council, a 501c3 non-profit volunteer organization with a focus on sustainable growth. She is a member of Coastal Seniors. Barbara led the Draper Lake Coastal Village HOA as president from 2014 to 2017.

has actively opposed detrimental developments, such as defeating the rezoning of property on Moll Drive for an RV park and reducing the density of a DR Horton project on 30A. She has alerted neighbors to potential developments, worked to

eliminate "ghost chairs" at public regional beach accesses, and advised communities both north and south of the bay on navigating county processes and procedures. "I have walked neighborhoods and knocked on doors to inform citizens of projects that are being proposed and would negatively affect them."

### Endorsement

The Walton County Citizens for Smart Growth has endorsed Barbara Morano for the Board of County Commissioners, District 5. A portion of the endorsement:

"Mrs. Morano has demonstrated a remarkable commitment to the community and promotes fiscal responsibility when taxpayers' funds are spent.... watchful that it will be managed prudently and effectively.

Her extensive experience and active participation in crucial county meetings highlight her understanding of county governance. Barbara's unwavering dedication to smart growth is evident in her advocacy for green space conservation and her significant contributions to the Tree Ordinance committee.

Barbara's tenacity, knowledge, and proven perseverance make her the best overall

candidate to fill the Board of County Commissioner Seat in District 5. Walton County Citizens for Smart Growth believes that Walton County will thrive and grow responsibly under her leadership. We urge our fellow citizens to support Barbara Morano's candidacy for the Board

of County Commissioners, District 5."

Barbara has been married to James Morano for over 50 years and they have a married daughter who is an infectious disease physician working at the Veterans Hospital in Tampa and one grandson. "I have enjoyed the

beauty of Walton County, the diversity of the various communities and cities, but most of all, I desire to serve as your Commissioner and I promise to serve with integrity, transparency and caring for all FIVE districts."

**Voting for Morano is a vote for change.**

**BARBARA MORANO**  
Republican for County Commissioner



*Giving a Voice to the People*

Barbara is driven by a desire to maintain the character and quality of life in Walton County. She is an articulate advocate who is actively involved in managing responsible growth, and promoting accountability and transparency.

### POSITIONS:

- ✓ Supports opening South Walton beaches to public access, restricting signs on beaches and banning ghost chairs
- ✓ Opposes rezoning to allow expanded and higher density development
- ✓ Supports preserving the character and natural resources of Walton County
- ✓ Supports responsible spending of taxpayer dollars that are fairly distributed throughout the county.

### Contact Barbara:

[Barbara.Morano@proton.me](mailto:Barbara.Morano@proton.me) • 850-585-4935  
[www.BarbaraMorano2024.com](http://www.BarbaraMorano2024.com)

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 Community

**BAY BUZZ**

*continued from page 12*

Federated. Rylee met members and guests and read her essay on “Why I Am a Republican” at the July 1 meeting. Rylee will be attending Auburn University.

L-R: NRWF President Libby Hill, Lourdes Adams, Diana Gilbert, Rylee Daniels, Jane Stevens and Lana Wood

NRWF meets the first Monday of the month at Eglin Golf Clubhouse in Niceville at 5:15 p.m. (Social) and 6 p.m. (Dinner). For more information, contact President Libby Hill: ehilly@cox.net or 850 855-6193.

Members of **P.E.O. Chapter DH, Florida**, gathered in early June to celebrate Meya

Martin and Sophie Palm, two local young women who have won scholarships sponsored by their organization, P.E.O. They and their mothers were honored at a luncheon held by Chapter DH members on Monday, June 3, at the home of Janice Lacefield in Bluewater Bay.

(Philanthropic Educational Organization) has been supporting women’s education for



(L to R) Hostess Janice Lacefield; Meya Martin, STAR scholarship winner; Marianne Habermusch; Yavontka Boose Martin, mother of the recipient; Marcia Wolff; Sophie Palm, Chapter DH, Florida Memorial Scholarship winner; Laura Palm, mother of the recipient; Jeannie Farmer, Melissa Pearce, Elizabeth Adkinson, Linda Testa, Sharon Brockenbrough, Anna Skelton, Candice Foster, Karen Krause, Dona Charlton, Jill Höglund, Joyce Brand and Karla Kelly.



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more than 155 years. Since its inception in 1869, the nonprofit organization has helped more than 125,000 women pursue educational goals by providing nearly \$432 million in grants, scholarships, awards and loans. Through membership, the P.E.O. Sisterhood has brought together more than half a million women in the U.S. and Canada who are passionate about helping women advance through education while supporting and motivating them.

Niceville High School graduate Meya Martin won a \$2,500 P.E.O. STAR Scholarship for 2024. She was sponsored by Chapter DH and chosen from among thousands of applicants nationwide based on excellence in leadership, activities, community service, academics and her potential for future success. Meya will begin her studies at Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida, this fall on a pre-med track.

Baker School graduate Sophie Palm was awarded the \$1,000 Chapter DH, Florida Memorial Scholarship for 2024. Chapter members from Okaloosa County raised the money for this annual scholarship, which is competed locally and awarded to a young woman from Okaloosa or Walton County based on excellence in leadership, activities, community service, and academics. Sophie will attend Florida State University in the fall to begin her studies toward an eventual law degree.

*Continued on page 47*



# Tony Anderson:

To make Walton stronger for everybody, we must say “yes” to big ideas.

Expanding public beach accesses, reducing traffic, and building parks and ballfields have been key priorities for Tony Anderson throughout his service as Walton County Commissioner for District 5.

In announcing his campaign for reelection, Anderson, a Republican, said that county government must continue to take aggressive action on these important “quality of life” issues.

“Like all of America, Walton County faces challenges,” Anderson said. “Young people want better job opportunities with higher wages. Families want better parks and sports facilities for their kids. Most residents want our beaches open to all. And everyone wants relief from traffic.”

Anderson said he’s well-positioned to address these challenges because he’s built coalitions of residents to tackle tough challenges before. He pointed to Walton County’s fight for Customary Use, which he strongly supported, and the county’s his-



toric investments in South Walton projects during his tenure as commissioner.

“We put aside negativity and worked together to build or break ground on three new beach accesses, three new parking facilities, and new feeder roads in South Walton,” he said. “We also purchased 220 acres

of land to manage stormwater, resurfaced major roadways, and expanded Helen McCall Park and the South Walton Sports Complex—all while cutting property tax rates.”

Now, Anderson wants the county to accelerate efforts to secure state and federal grants to expedite infrastructure proj-



ects, improve cell phone service countywide, and protect the Choctawhatchee Bay. He also supports securing the Boys & Girls Club property in South Walton to create more youth sports options, and he backs building a new sports complex for children in North Walton.

On economic development, Anderson says he will work to attract new aviation, avionics, technology and logistics businesses to Walton County’s busi-

ness parks in DeFuniak Springs, Freeport and Mossy Head to create higher-paying private sector jobs. He also indicated that he will propose another reduction in property tax rates next year to offset the burden of inflation.

“The vast majority of Walton County residents are hardworking people who just want their tax dollars used productively, and many of those folks don’t have time to show up at meetings. I’m in this job for them,” Anderson said. “You simply cannot get things done for people if you only listen to the folks who shout, ‘no’.”

Anderson was raised in Walton County, worked in the county his entire life and raised his three children — Colby, Logan, and Keagan — here. Now, his three grandchildren call Walton County home, too. He faces two opponents in the August 20, 2024, Republican primary.

Learn more about Tony Anderson at [VoteTony24.com](http://VoteTony24.com).

## REPUBLICAN TONY ANDERSON:

Bringing neighbors together. Delivering results for all of Walton County.

**Tony Anderson is a father, grandfather, retired small business owner, and conservative Republican.**

As our Walton County Commissioner for District 5, Tony works to deliver results for all residents, not just the elite few. With your support in the August 20 Republican Primary, Tony will continue the fight to:

- Support local businesses and create new jobs
- Improve infrastructure and roads
- Protect and expand public beaches
- Invest in parks and recreation facilities
- Cut property tax rates

Learn more at [VoteTony24.com](http://VoteTony24.com).



Community

ELECTIONS

continued from page 1

registrations in Florida and party changes is typically 29 days before an election. Any new registrations or party changes received during the registration book closing period will not take effect until after the election.

Primary Elections

Florida is a closed primary state, which means that in most cases only voters who are affiliated with or registered members of political parties may vote for their respective party's candidates for an office in a Primary Election

(For example: only registered Republicans can vote in a Republican Primary contest and

only Democrats can vote in a Democratic Primary contest.)

However, there are times when all registered voters can vote in a Primary Election contest, regardless of party affiliation:

If all the candidates for an office have the same party affiliation and there is no opposition in the general election (no write-in or no party affiliation



candidates have qualified), then all registered voters can vote for any of the candidates for that office in the primary election, and the winner is decided in the primary election. This is called a Universal Primary Contest.

If contests for nonpartisan offices (such as judicial and school board seats), nonpartisan special districts, or ballot issue questions (amendments/referendums) are on the primary election ballot, then all registered voters are entitled to vote in those races on the ballot.

There are certain contests that will be decided in the primary election and will never make it to the general election ballot. Therefore, missing a primary election could mean missing out on voting in some contests altogether.

same ballot with the same contests and may vote for any candidate or question on the ballot. Winners from the closed primary contests will move on and will be on the general election ballot. In addition, minor party candidates, candidates with no party affiliation, and qualified write-in candidates will proceed to the general election. In a general election, a write-in line will be on the ballot ONLY if there is a qualified write-in candidate for a contest. Write-in candidate names do NOT appear on the ballot. Only votes for qualified write-in candidates are valid.

Let your voice be heard; The deadline to register or change party affiliation for the 2024 Primary Election is July 22, 2024. The deadline to register for the 2024 General Election: October 7, 2024.

To register to vote or for more information, visit www.votewalton.gov.

General Elections

At a General Election, all registered voters within the same precinct area receive the

**MAKE A PLAN TO VOTE**

Return Vote by Mail Ballot  
**Early Voting: Aug. 10 - 17**  
**Election Day: Aug. 20**

Vote **TREY NICK**

**Republican for Walton County Commissioner District 1**

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Protecting the Choctawhatchee Bay and it's natural resources for the economic value and the prosperity of Walton County

Infrastructure Enhancement:

Improving transportation, utilities, and public facilities to enhance connectivity and services.

Promoting Economic Sustainability:

Supporting local businesses and industries in Walton County for economic growth.

Public Beach Access:

Advocating for policies that preserve and expand public access to Walton County's beaches.



Paid by Trey Nick, Republican, for Walton County Commissioner District 1. P.O. Box 606, Freeport, FL 32439

To learn more, visit: [www.TreyNick2024.com](http://www.TreyNick2024.com)

Citizens Beware: Deceptive Advertising in Political Campaigns

You may be receiving emails or seeing Facebook posts that appear as "WalCo," or "Walton County Breaking News." These emails and posts bear the Walton County seal and can be quite deceptive.

They appear to be politically motivated and often include untrue and offensive statements about various Walton County residents, elected officials and candidates. These statements are false, misleading and outrageous. It appears to be a smear campaign designed to benefit certain political candidates.

Please be aware of any correspondence that comes from WalCo, AKA John Walton, etc.

They have illegally obtained email addresses from the county database. If you "click" on any prompts, such as LEARN MORE or SIGN

UP, you enable them to access the personal information contained within your phone or PC.

Please advise your family and friends of the dangers of this deceptive tactic. Do not join or click on any links contained in these emails or you risk compromising your own personal security.

Remember to rely on reputable news sources and consider that misinformation campaigns are rampant during election cycles.

Don't become a victim - learn about each candidate at [Votewalton.gov](http://Votewalton.gov) or attend the upcoming candidate forums to hear from each candidate personally and choose the candidates you feel are best suited to lead our county.

This is a public service announcement sponsored by: Vote Smart & Fair Committee.

# Tackling the Affordable Housing Crisis with Habitat for Humanity: A Conversation with Teresa Jones

By SHANTELLE DEDICKE

As host of the “Hello Frances” podcast, I recently spoke with Teresa Jones, the Executive Director of Habitat for Humanity of Walton County. Our conversation delved into the critical issue of affordable housing in our community, a challenge affecting not only individuals and families but also local businesses striving to retain and attract top talent.

From the outset, it was clear that Habitat for Humanity plays an essential role in addressing this crisis. Teresa began by sharing the organization’s mission: “Habitat for Humanity brings people together to build homes, community, and hope. We’re not just building homes; we’re building lives.” This statement encapsulates the transformative impact of stable, affordable housing on families, offering them hope and a foundation for a better future.

One of the most eye-opening aspects of our discussion was the severity of Walton County’s

affordability crisis. The numbers are staggering: as of March 2024, the average sales price for a home in Walton County was \$945,000, with a median sales price of \$551,000, for many workers in our community, including those in essential roles like school district employees, owning a home at these prices is simply out of reach.

Teresa explained that Habitat for Humanity’s model is designed to bridge this gap without being a handout. “Our homeowners pay for their homes at a 0% interest rate and must also contribute 250 hours of ‘sweat equity’ per adult in their household,” she said. This approach makes homes more affordable by eliminating interest costs and instills a sense of ownership and pride among homeowners.

Listening to Teresa’s stories about the homeowners they’ve helped was incredibly inspiring. She shared the success of various families, including school district employees and single mothers, who have improved



their lives dramatically thanks to Habitat for Humanity. These families, who once faced insurmountable obstacles, now have safe, affordable homes and brighter futures.

As a business owner, I found our conversation particularly relevant to the challenges we face in retaining and attracting talent. The lack of affordable housing limits our ability to keep young, creative professionals in the area. This issue is not unique to Walton County but is a growing concern nationwide.

Teresa emphasized the importance of community support and engagement in tackling the housing crisis. Habitat for Humanity relies heavily on volun-

teers and donations to reduce construction costs and make homes affordable. She encouraged businesses to participate in team-building activities by volunteering at Habitat builds and urged individuals to support the Habitat ReStore, which sells lightly used and new housing goods to fund their mission.

The Habitat ReStore in Santa Rosa Beach has been a game-changer for the organization. In the last year, it has served 18,000 families and kept 80 truckloads of materials out of landfills. Teresa proudly stated, “Our ReStore pays for all of our operations costs, so 100% of donations go directly to building homes.”

Looking ahead, Teresa shared plans for a block party at Hope Village in Defuniak Springs. This event will celebrate the completion of their eighth home and the construction of five more. It aims to educate the community about Habitat for Humanity’s work and the families they serve.

In conclusion, supporting Habitat for Humanity is crucial for addressing our community’s housing needs. I urge everyone to get involved, volunteer, and support their mission. At Frances Roy, we’re committed to joining the next build and supporting Habitat for Humanity in any way possible.

For more information on how to support Habitat for Humanity of Walton County, follow them on social media, visit the Habitat ReStore, or attend their upcoming events. As Teresa aptly put it, “We need workforce housing in our community, or we won’t be a community anymore.”

This episode of “Hello Frances” has been an enlightening experience. It highlights the challenges we face and the incredible work being done to create a sustainable and thriving community. Let’s all do our part to support this vital cause. Listen to this episode and more at [francesroy.com/hello-frances-podcast](http://francesroy.com/hello-frances-podcast).

# SHERIFF MIKE ADKINSON HAS UNIFIED THIS AGENCY.



LAW ENFORCEMENT



FIRE RESCUE



ANIMAL SERVICES



COUNTY JAIL

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POLITICAL ADVERTISEMENT APPROVED AND PAID FOR BY MICHAEL ADKINSON JR., REPUBLICAN, FOR SHERIFF.

 Education

# Education News

## NWFSC Bestows President Emeritus Title on Dr. Devin Stephenson



The Northwest Florida State College (NWFSC) Board of Trustees has conferred the prestigious title of President Emeritus on Dr. Devin Stephenson, recognizing his exemplary service and leadership over the past 7.5 years as president. This honor was presented during the Board of Trustees meeting on June 18, 2024.

Board Chair Lori Kelley praised Dr. Stephenson's significant contributions, stating on behalf of the Board of Trustees, "Dr. Devin Stephenson has provided transformative leadership for college educational initiatives and enhanced the reputation of the college as an educational institution and as an active participant in both the Okaloosa and Walton County communities, enthusiastically supporting the work of faculty, staff and the college's commu-

nity partners. We are forever grateful for his service."

In accepting the honor, Dr. Stephenson expressed his gratitude and reflected on his tenure, "Over the past 7.5 years, we have embarked on a remarkable journey together, filled with achievements, challenges and transformative growth. Together, we have built something exceptional. Northwest Florida State College will always hold a special place in my heart, and I will forever cherish the memories we have created together. Go Raiders!"

Dr. Stephenson's leadership at Northwest Florida State College has been marked by a steadfast commitment to academic excellence, community engagement and student success. Under his guidance, the Collegiate High School is on a path to enroll over 500 students. The college has secured more than \$73 million in grant awards, and Raider Athletics has won three additional national championships. Dr. Stephenson also oversaw the opening of the Aviation Center of Excellence and the completion of the Raider Village student housing initiative. Additionally, the NWFSC Foundation's net assets increased by 40%, reaching over \$65 million. These achievements are a testa-

ment to his visionary leadership and dedication to the college's mission.

Dr. Stephenson has been selected as the next president of Florida Polytechnic University in Lakeland, Fla., and begins July 7, 2024. His tenure as president of NWFSC will come to an end at the close of business on July 5, 2024.

## Marcus Chambers Appointed to FHSAA Board



Recently, Governor Ron DeSantis announced the appointment of Marcus Chambers, Superintendent of Schools for Okaloosa County, to the Florida High School Athletic Association Board of Directors. With more than 26 years of experience in education, Chambers received the First Year Teacher of the Year Award for Ruckel Middle School in 1999, the Okaloosa County Reading Leader of the Year Award in 2010 and the Martin Luther

King Jr. Academic Achievement Award in 2013. Chambers also currently serves as Chairman of the Florida School Labor Relations Service Board of Directors and is a member of the Florida Association of District School Superintendents, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development and the Okaloosa County Association of School Administrators. This appointment is subject to confirmation by the Florida Senate.

## Okaloosa Continues Top 10 Tradition!

The Florida Department of Education has released this year's results for the Florida Assessment of Student Thinking (FAST) and End of Course Exams. Each year, students are required to take statewide assessments in ELA grades 3-10, Mathematics grades 3-8, Algebra, Geometry, Science grades 5 and 8, Biology, Civics, and U.S. History. A combined analysis of all test results show Okaloosa Schools continue to rank in the top 10 school districts out of 67 in the state of Florida for the 2023-24 school year. Specifically, Okaloosa ranked 10th overall, while excelling in areas such as 5th, 7th, and 8th grade Reading, as well as 7th and 8th grade Mathematics, and 8th grade Science, which all ranked in the top six in the state. Additionally, the overall middle school test results shined as some of the best in the state with our students ranking 3rd in Math, 4th in Science, and 6th in ELA.

The results of these assessments, along with other academic indicators, are used to produce school grades, which are anticipated to be released in August. For more information on assessment results, visit <https://www.fldoe.org/accountability/assessments/k-12-student-assessment/results/2024.stml>.

## NWFSC Students Selected to FCSAA All-Academic Team

Ten Northwest Florida State College (NWFSC) students have been selected to join the prestigious Florida College System Student Activities Association (FCSAA) All-Academic Team. This recognition highlights the exceptional academic achievements of these students, reflect-

ing their dedication, hard work, and commitment to excellence.

The students selected for this honor are Abdiel Alvarado-Pabon, Joselin Cardenas, Emery DeVane, Joshua Fillion, Karissa Grant, Gabriela Kelly, Connor Kilroy, Anh Nguyen, Nyeli Reyes and Kristina Tolkacheva.

The Florida College System Student Government Association (FCSSGA) represents nearly one million students enrolled across the 28 colleges in the Florida College System. The organization is dedicated to promoting legislative advocacy, leadership development, service-learning, campus activities, and strong citizenship. FCSSGA works to unify member colleges to address student concerns effectively and communicate these concerns to the Florida Legislature.

## OCSD to Host Annual Stuff the Bus School Supply Drive, August 3

Stuff the Bus helps local students get the tools they need for the upcoming school year! In 2023, our collective efforts led to the collection of over \$12,000 worth of supplies, impacting over 10,000 students in 53 schools across Okaloosa and Walton counties. This is a testament to the power of our community's generosity. Without your support, students would lack the supplies they need to be successful during the school year.

District staff will be on-site for the Stuff the Bus School Supply Drive, which will take place on Saturday, August 3, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the following locations:

Walmart - Crestview (3351 S Ferdon Blvd)

Walmart - Fort Walton Beach (748 Beal Pkwy NW)

Walmart - Niceville (1300 E John Sims Pkwy E)

## Back to School Sales Tax Holiday

The state of Florida's back-to-school sales tax holiday will be held from July 29 to August 11, 2024. During this period, qualifying items will be exempt from tax, including:

- Certain school supplies selling for \$50 or less per item
- Specific clothing, footwear,

*Continued on page 21*




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1440 Live Oak Street, Niceville

Open Monday-Friday 7:30-4

850-897-9060

[office@baldwinturfniceville.com](mailto:office@baldwinturfniceville.com)

# Outdoor Spaces



viting outdoor space. Whether it comes from landscape lighting, overhead lighting, ceiling fans or decorative side lighting, be sure you are incorporating various types of lighting in your outdoor space

just as you would in your indoor spaces. Developing a creative lighting plan can help you create a space with increased ambiance and functionality.

Remember to create a space that is “perfect” for you and your needs and then sit back and enjoy it!



BY STACY SARIKANON,  
STUNNING SPACES—DECORATING DEN INTERIORS

The line between indoors and outdoors continues to blur as many of us want to take our indoor comforts and solitude outdoors. This process is becoming more realistic as many manufacturers of home products develop more and more appliances, furniture, lighting and accessories that can be used indoors or out.

People are driven to find peaceful sanctuaries as a prescription for our stressful lives. Outdoor patios and porches are becoming more sophisticated

and refined and are becoming a living extension of the indoor spaces.

Outdoor furniture has evolved a long way from the folding, vinyl strap versions we grew up with, to beautiful pieces made of teak, steel, rattan, and wicker. Many pieces look just like indoor furniture, but are constructed and designed to take the outdoor elements. Fabrics such as Sunbrella are making a name for themselves in the outdoor furniture industry.

Lighting is also a very important aspect to creating an in-

Brett Hinely! Friday, July 19, Gov. Ron DeSantis announced his appointment to the Okaloosa County School Board, effective August 2, 2024, to replace Dr. Diane Kelley, new principle of Destin High School.

An Auburn University graduate and U.S.A.F. veteran, Hinely is the President of Cove Marine, Inc., and Bluewater High & Dry. He is also the Director of Marina Cove Realty, LLC, and Freedom Distributions, LLC. He is the former president of the Marine Industries Association of Northwest Florida and is a member of the Eglin Air Force Armament Museum Foundation Board of Directors.

## EDUCATION NEWS

*continued from page 20*

and accessories selling for \$100 or less per item

- Personal computers and related accessories purchased for noncommercial home or personal use selling for \$1,500 or less

Visit <https://www2.okaloosaschools.com/page/stuff-the-bus> for information on Okaloosa schools’ supply wish lists and donation drop-off locations.

## Gov. DeSantis Appoints Hinely to Okaloosa County School Board

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## Fudpucker's Beachside Bar & Grill

Locally owned and operated since inception in 1982, Fudpucker's restaurant stands out by being dedicated to its owners' three favorite "F" words: Food,

Fun and Family. Featuring live alligators, family entertainment and teen nights, Fudpucker's is the only place in Destin where you can see, feed and even get your picture taken with a live alligator, shop for "World Fa-

mous" t-shirts, write your names on the walls, play arcade games and enjoy quality casual food in an upbeat and family friendly atmosphere. There's even a special kids' menu and a playground with lots of space to play. Stop by Fudpucker's Destin for a relaxing meal, a cold drink and a friendly locals' smile. Fudpucker's is not just a restaurant, it's not just a bar, and it's certainly not just a "tourist" place - it's a one-of-a-kind entertainment experience, and one that can be enjoyed by kids and families of all ages. Special: World Famous Fudpucker Punch - \$8 'til 4 p.m. every day: Father Fud's special cure-all elixer and legendary medicinal concoction made with a combination of orange and pineapple juices, four types of rum and a splash of Grenadine - \$8 'til 4 p.m. every day.

(850) 654-4200  
20001 Emerald Coast Pkwy.  
Destin  
fudpucker.com

velvet cookies; brownies with espresso ganache or caramelitas. Try a breakfast special with a piece of quiche or kolache-hash-brown casserole. Breakfast burritos are rolled and ready daily! Choose from andouille, bacon, chorizo or veggie. Or tantalize your taste buds with a made-to-order breakfast sandwich on croissants or bagel with two eggs and cheese and then choose if you want to add Jojo's homemade smoked jalapeño beef bologna, bacon, house smoked barbecue or ham. Cinnamon rolls and kolaches still hold the top spot for sell outs. Stop in for featured muffins, coffee cake or pound cake, which go great with maple cinnamon latte or caramel macchiato. And, oh, the freshly roasted coffee. Get what you're craving! Order ahead and pick up some for the office or breakfast to start your day off right!

Hours 7:30 a.m.-2 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday.  
(850) 737-6194  
4652 Hwy. 20 East, Niceville  
bigorangehousedesigns.com

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.

**August 3-13:** Join in on the fun at the Annual Pinfish Tournament!

**August 25:** Shrimp Boil 4-7 p.m., Parker & Ivoree Willingham 4-8 p.m.

**Sundays:** Brunch 9 a.m. - 1 p.m. buffet style, bottomless Mimosas!

**Tuesdays:** Taco Tuesday 4-8 p.m. buffet style, bottomless Mimosas!

**Wednesdays:** Kids Eat Free 5-9 p.m. Kids 10 and under eat free!

**Thursdays:** Karaoke/Open Mic 6-10 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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## 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

## LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant

SUMMER, 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,



## Taco Tuesday 4-8pm

Chicken Carnitas Tacos \$10 • Asada Tacos \$10  
Chorizo Tacos \$10 • California Burrito \$16  
\$2 Chips and Salsa with purchase of Taco  
\$5 Margarita with purchase of Taco Tuesday Special

## Wednesday Kids Eat Free 5-9pm

Kids eat free from Kid's Menu.  
10 and under with purchase of adult entree. One child per adult.

## Thursday Karaoke/Open Mic 6-10pm

All Welcome



## Events & Live Entertainment

**August 3:** Michael and Terry 6-10pm

**August 10:** Jody Lucas 6-9pm

**August 17:** Call the Law 6-10pm

**August 24:** Duchess 6-10pm

**August 25:** Shrimp Boil 4-7pm, Parker & Ivoree Willingham 4-8pm

**August 30:** Jimmy Buffet Day, Ken Baker 6-10pm

**August 31:** Dismystic 6-10pm

**August 3:**

**Annual Pinfish Tournament**

**September 8:**

**Card Board Boat Race 4pm**

**Oyster Bar Hours:** Monday-Thursday 3pm-10pm • Friday-Saturday 11am to midnight • Sunday 9am to 9pm

**Restaurant Hours:** Monday-Tuesday Closed • Wednesday-Saturday 11am to 9pm • Sunday 9am to 9pm • Sunday Brunch 9am to 1pm

# Gulfarium C.A.R.E. Center Celebrates Historic Release of Adult Male Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle!

A jubilant gathering of locals, tourists, and sea turtle advocates witnessed a landmark moment in marine conservation as the Gulfarium C.A.R.E. Center released seven rehabilitated sea turtles back into the Gulf of Mexico at Topsail Hill State Preserve. Organized by the Gulfarium C.A.R.E. Center Foundation, the event showcased the successful rehabilitation efforts and ongoing commitment to protecting marine wildlife.



sea turtles hooked and entangled in fishing gear.

The Gulfarium C.A.R.E. Center Foundation extends its appreciation to the community, volunteers, and partner organizations whose support makes these releases possible.

If you see a sea turtle in distress, injured, or deceased please report it to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission immediately at 1-888-404-FWCC (1-888-404-3922).

Follow the C.A.R.E. Center on Facebook to learn more about sea turtles and the center's rehabilitation efforts. The C.A.R.E. Center and its patients can be visited as part of a general admission ticket to Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park.

The Gulfarium CARE Foundation, a 501(c)(3) non-profit, is proud to act as a beacon for

coastal conservation through marine animal rescue and rehabilitation.

Donations are tax-deductible

and can be made online on the C.A.R.E. Center's webpage or through their Amazon Wishlist.

The highlight of the release was the introduction of Landon, an adult male Kemp's Ridley sea turtle weighing 62 lbs. Landon's journey to recovery began after he was hooked at Pensacola Beach Fishing Pier on June 30, 2024. Kemp's Ridley sea turtles are critically endangered, with only an estimated 22,000 individuals remaining in the wild. The significance of Landon's release cannot be overstated, as it marks the first time the C.A.R.E. Center has rehabilitated and released an

adult male of this species. In a monumental step for conservation, the United States Geological Survey (USGS) representatives applied a satellite tag to Landon to provide valuable data on long-distance movements and behaviors. Acoustic tags were also applied to the remaining turtles released today, allowing researchers to assess fine-scale movements and habitat use around fishing piers. The USGS hopes to compare the movement patterns of rehabilitated turtles to wild caught sea turtles aiding in conservation efforts to reduce the number of

## Trump "Too Big to Rig" Boat Parade, Aug. 3

A Trump "Too Big to Rig" Boat Parade will be held Saturday, August 3, 2024, with Matt Gaetz as the Grand Marshall! Lineup starts at 8:30 a.m. by Sunset Isle Resort and Yacht Club on Okaloosa Island next to the Elk's Lodge. Boat parade kick-off begins at 9 a.m. with the American Spirit in the lead and will travel through Fort Walton Beach and end on the west side of Navarre Bridge.

attending for the Coast Guard and local boaters' safety.

Afterward, join the FREE After Party hosted by Sunset Isle Resort and Yacht Club with entertainment, food and spirits. All who are registered are welcome.

For updates and the latest information, as well as to keep up with events sponsored by the Fort Walton Beach Trump Flag-Waving Team, scan the QR code:

To sign up and join the parade, email Trump2024BoatParade@yahoo.com. There is no registration fee. Signing up will simply allow for a general idea of the number of boats



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# Fishing News

## New Name, Same Fish: Largemouth Bass Are Now Florida Bass

Genetics studies confirmed what many anglers and biologists have believed for a long time – Florida bass are special! Florida's most popular freshwater game fish has a new name. The American Fisheries Society established the Florida bass as a separate species from the largemouth bass. This means that in most of Florida (except the western Panhandle) what was known as a largemouth bass is now called a Florida bass.

This name change will affect how the fish is referred to in regulations and other communications. However, it will not affect anglers fishing for this iconic freshwater sport fish.

According to the recent research publication by Yale University, the study used advanced genetic analysis and determined Florida bass to be its own species. The research also identified the range of Florida bass to be larger than once believed, including not only Florida, but also parts of Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina.

The scientific names of these two bass also changed. Largemouth bass, previously *Micropterus salmoides*, is now the scientific name for Florida bass.



Largemouth bass are now *Micropterus nigricans*.

Understanding and conserving fish species is crucial for sustainable recreational fishing and biodiversity preservation. The classification of species plays a key role in these efforts. Black basses (*Micropterus* spp.) are well-known freshwater fish and highly popular for recreational fishing. This new understanding of black bass diversity, distribution and classification provides a critical foundation for better managing and conserving these important and iconic fish. It will aid in ensuring their continued conservation and sustainable use for future generations.

To learn more about the Florida bass name change, visit [MyFWC.com](http://MyFWC.com), click on "Freshwater Fishing," select "Black Bass Management" and click on "Florida Bass."

## Be On The Lookout For Divers-Down Flags

Boaters and divers: practice safe boating and diving habits by maintaining 360-degree awareness and adhering to all divers-down flag regulations.

Divers-down flags and buoys are crucial warning devices used by divers and dive vessels to signal the presence of divers in the water. These devices must feature a divers-down symbol — a red rectangle or square with a white diagonal stripe — and must be prominently displayed whenever divers are wholly or partially submerged and using a face mask, snorkel or underwater breathing apparatus.

"When navigating near a divers-down flag, boaters must operate at idle speed within 300 feet in open water or within 100 feet on rivers, inlets or navigational channels," said Maj. Bill Holcomb, FWC Boating and



Waterways Section Leader. "And divers need to stay within 300 feet of their properly displayed flags on open water and 100 feet on rivers, inlets or navigational channels."

The divers-down symbol must measure at least 12 x 12 inches when displayed from the water, and at least 20 x 24 inches when displayed from a vessel, positioned at the highest point to maximize visibility. Flags must be constructed to remain fully unfurled, even in calm conditions, while buoys must display the symbol on each of their flat sides.

"In the summertime there is a lot going on out there and these regulations are important for divers to remember whether they are diving for scallops in north Florida, lobster in south Florida or recreationally throughout the state," said Col. Brian Smith, Director of the FWC Division of Law Enforcement. "Vessel operators should be aware of what is going on around them at all times and be on the lookout for divers-down flags nearby. It's also good to remember to take the dive flag down and wear a life jacket while underway. This is not just responsible boating and ensuring the safety of divers and the boating public - it's also the law."

Every year, the FWC responds to incidents where a diver was struck, injured or killed by a vessel. Working together, vessel operators and divers can each play a part in preventing tragedy on the water this summer.

For more information, visit [MyFWC.com/boating](http://MyFWC.com/boating), click on "Boating Regulations," and select "Divers-down Warning Devices."

Boating violations may be reported anonymously to the Wildlife Alert Hotline at 888-404-FWCC (888-404-3922) or text 847411 (Tip411) with keyword "FWC" and information about the location and violation.

## The Emerald Coast Poker Run, August 9-10

Get ready to make waves for a great cause at the Emerald Coast Poker Run! Whether you're cruising in a powerboat or soaking in the excitement from shore, this event is your chance to be part of something truly impactful.

For over 25 years, the Emerald Coast Poker Run has been a beacon of hope for children in our community, raising over \$2.5 million to support local youth charities. This volunteer-driven initiative ensures that every dollar raised goes directly to those who need it most - our kids.

By participating, you're not only enjoying an exhilarating weekend filled with poker, parties, and prizes, but you're also contributing to a brighter future for Northwest Florida's youth.

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## Catch the Next State Record Bass In Florida, Follow These Steps

Be prepared if you catch a bass large enough to be the new state record.

This is what a lucky angler needs to do when they reel in a

*Continued on page 32*



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# AFEV Purchases U.S. Air Force Land for Victory Village!

The Air Force Enlisted Village (AFEV) has purchased 80 acres of land from the U.S. Air Force with a Deed Signing Ceremony on July 12, 2024. The former Eglin AFB land in Shalimar will be used to build Victory Village, a nonprofit retirement community with a specialized lifestyle for aging wounded warriors and their caregivers. Victory Village will be a continuum of care retirement community for wounded warriors, their caregivers and enlisted surviving spouses and married couples of all military branches.

Over 200 people attended the event which featured special guest speakers Gen. James C. Slife, Vice Chief of Staff of the U.S. Air Force, and the Honorable Dr. Ravi Chaudhary, Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Air Force for Energy, Installations, and Environment.

AFEV President and CEO Brooke McLean described meeting with board members, community leaders, and elected officials seven years ago with the idea of how to create this joint base community for enlisted military members.

"In the 50-plus years that this organization has been in existence, we have seen thousands of Air Force widows and retired couples. And today, Air Force Enlisted Village has about 600 residents here," McLean said. "I started thinking about the opportunity to help wounded warriors and the caregivers as they go through the aging process. And they're going to go through an aging process that's not going to be like any of the rest of us."

Victory Village will be located adjacent to the Air Force Enlisted Village (AFEV). Plans for the community include multiple neighborhoods for 800 people to reside, a community center, a



multi-denominational chapel, a fitness center, a swimming pool, walking paths, retail services, and an EMS substation to serve the Poquito Bayou neighborhood.

"Words can't describe what our wounded warriors and the families have meant to our nation. But to do something this tangible, this impactful for them cannot be understated," Chaudhary, said.

Slife mentioned most people in the serving and veteran community miss the camaraderie. "When you think about what Victory Village will be for the

communities that it serves, it provides that sense of purpose and a community of shared values," Slife said.

Victory Village will also be home to surviving spouses of retired enlisted service members and retired enlisted couples of all military branches of service with plans to offer a continuum of care complete with on-site skilled nursing. The community will be constructed in increments and will take ten to fifteen years to complete.

Also participating in the event: Eglin AFB Honor Guard presented the colors, AFEV

COO Cory Olson served as MC, Bob Hope Village resident Ernest Tucker sang the National Anthem, and Dolores Hope All-Faiths Chapel Chaplain Bethel

Bateson provided the invocation.

A video of the ceremony is available on YouTube.

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 **Military**

# Brig. Gen. Mark A. Massaro Takes Command of the 96th Test Wing at Eglin Air Force Base

By DOUG STAUFFER

In a ceremony rich with tradition, Brig. Gen. Mark A. Massaro assumed command of the 96th Test Wing from Brig. Gen. Jeffrey T. Geraghty on July 3,

2024. Despite the rainy weather outside, the McKinley Climatic Laboratory provided a perfectly climate-controlled environment for the event, which was presided over by Maj. Gen. Evan C. Dertien, Air Force Test Center commander. "I'm so happy to return to Eglin," Massaro expressed in his remarks. "While it's fantastic to return as a previous member of the test wing, and it's com-

forting to be back as a Florida native, even in July, what causes me to smile the most is getting to contribute to this mission again."



Left to right: Okaloosa County Commissioner Mel Ponder, Becky Massaro and Brig. Gen. Mark A. Massaro

mander, Massaro emphasized his excitement about returning to Eglin after 15 years. "I'm humbled to be here today as the commander of the 96th Test Wing," he said. Massaro outlined his priorities: executing the mission, caring for people, and partnering for success. He emphasized the wing's role in advancing the Air Force's operational imperatives, including strengthening the nation's air-delivered arsenal, enhancing navigation and guidance systems, and developing joint all-domain command and control systems.

Massaro also stressed the importance of partnerships within Team Eglin and with the local community. "I am committed to continuing the strong relationships that have been built up over these past years as we partner for success," he said. The ceremony included several traditional elements, such as the passing of the unit guidon to symbolize the transfer of command. The 96th Test Wing Honor Guard presented the colors, and General Geraghty's daughter sang the national anthem. An F-16 aircraft bearing Massaro's name was unveiled as part of the welcome for the new commander. As Brig. Gen. Massaro takes the helm, he brings a wealth of experience and a deep commitment to the mission and people of the 96th Test Wing. The change of command ceremony underscored the critical role of the wing in supporting national defense objectives. As the largest installation in the U.S. Air Force, Eglin Air Force Base hosts a complex mission set that includes testing and evaluation of conventional munitions, command and control systems, aircraft avionics and guidance systems, and radar cross-section measurements. Additionally, Massaro will oversee a 120,000 square mile over-water test range and facilities in six states and all base operating support, infrastructure and services support for Eglin.

Maj. Gen. Dertien highlighted the significance of Eglin Air Force Base and its role in developing joint capabilities to support national objectives. "Eglin is on the leading edge of forging new technologies into fielded capabilities and supporting a diverse array of joint activities," Dertien said.

Brig. Gen. Massaro's extensive background includes commanding the 412 Operations Support Squadron and the 495th Fighter Group. He has flown over 100 combat hours in the F-16, commanded a classified assignment and served as the 495th Operations Group commander at Shaw Air Force Base, South Carolina.

In his first address as com-

mander, Massaro emphasized his excitement about returning to Eglin after 15 years. "I'm humbled to be here today as the commander of the 96th Test Wing," he said. Massaro outlined his priorities: executing the mission, caring for people, and partnering for success. He emphasized the wing's role in advancing the Air Force's operational imperatives, including strengthening the nation's air-delivered arsenal, enhancing navigation and guidance systems, and developing joint all-domain command and control systems.

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*Continued on next page*

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# Lt. Gen. Michael Conley Takes the Helm at Hurlburt Field

By DOUG STAUFFER

In a significant ceremony at Hurlburt Field Air Force Base, Lt. Gen. Tony Bauernfeind passed the special operations wings flag to the incoming commander, Lt. Gen. Michael Conley, marking a pivotal moment for the Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC). The event, attended by Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. David W. Allvin, underscores the importance of this transition for the more than 24,000 people living and working at the base in Okaloosa County.

Lt. Gen. Michael E. Conley now leads AFSOC, the Air Force component of U.S. Special Operations Command. This command comprises approximately 20,800 active-duty, Reserve, Air National Guard and civilian professionals, providing specialized operations forces for global deployment and assignment to unified combatant commanders. Lt. Gen. Conley brings extensive experience and a decorated career to his new role.

Having received his commission through the United States Air Force Academy in 1996, Lt. Gen. Conley completed pilot training in 1998. His operational experience spans flying the UH-1N, MH-53, and CV-22, with most of his assignments in special operations aviation. Conley's career includes multiple staff assignments, such as serving on the Joint Staff as Spe-

cial Assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and at Headquarters Air Force. He has commanded a squadron, wing, and multiple deployed special operations air components. Most recently, Conley served as the Director of Operations at AFSOC headquarters.

At the ceremony held on July 2 inside Freedom Hangar, Gen. Allvin emphasized the evolving nature of global threats and the critical role of AFSOC in national security. "There are aspiring great powers developing capabilities and demonstrating the will to use them in ways that threaten our national security. The character of war is changing," Allvin remarked, highlighting the importance of readiness and adaptability in current and future conflicts.

Lt. Gen. Bauernfeind, reflecting on his tenure, commended his command for navigating the changing landscape of the Air Force. "You've brought forward capabilities like the Theater Air Operations Squadrons, focusing on our regional adversaries with exceptional intel teams, mission planners, and air advisors. Building relationships with our allies and partners is crucial for our collective security," Bauernfeind said.

Taking command, Lt. Gen. Conley outlined his vision for AFSOC's future, emphasizing innovation and resilience. "It will take all of us rowing together to ensure we're ready.

Air Force song, marking the official transfer of leadership. Brig. Gen. Massaro now leads the wing's efforts in testing and evaluating systems critical to U.S. military capabilities in an era of great power competition.

## MASSARO

*continued from previous page*

cludes weapons development, advanced spectrum warfare, and training for special operations forces and other specialized units.

The event concluded with the



'Any place, anytime, anywhere' isn't just our motto. It's our way of life," Conley stated. He ex-

pressed his readiness to lead and work alongside the elite combat force at Hurlburt Field, assuring that all current policies and directives remain in effect.

Lt. Gen. Conley has a distinguished record, with over 2,400 flight hours across several special operations aircraft. His leadership roles at Hurlburt Field include serving as the 1st Special Operations Wing commander from June 2018 to 2020. Addressing the air commandos in formation, Conley reinforced the command's mission. "We exist to do what oth-

ers are unable to do or unwilling to attempt. We must remain ready to fight tonight, just like our teammates currently in the fight downrange," he said.

The ceremony, attended by base officials, airmen, and elected leaders, including U.S. Rep. Matt Gaetz, marked the beginning of a new chapter for AFSOC under Lt. Gen. Conley's leadership. His experience, dedication, and vision set a promising course for the future of the command and its critical role in national defense.

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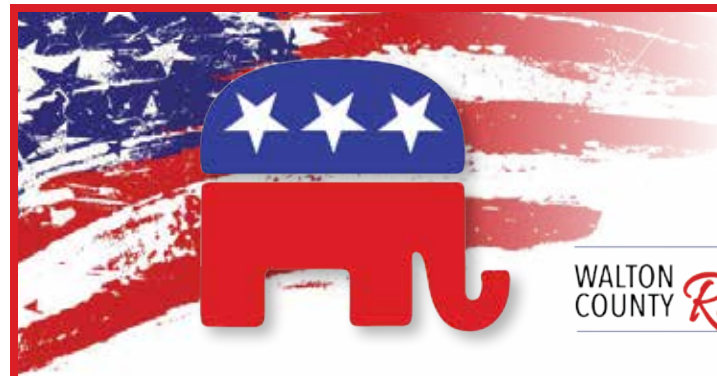
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# SOF Missions Hosts 8th Annual GALA to Empower and Heal Our Nation's Heroes

Shield of Faith (SOF) Missions proudly presents the 8th Annual Emerald Coast Gala, scheduled for Sept. 13, 2024, at

the prestigious Destin-Ft. Walton Beach Convention Center. This gala serves as a beacon of hope, dedicated to empowering

and fostering resilience among our Nation's warriors.

With an unwavering commitment to combatting the tragic epidemic of suicide among our Nation's warriors, the nonprofit team at SOF Missions has tirelessly worked to provide essential care. To date, SOF Missions has allocated over \$8.1 million in support to more than 3,000 warriors, ensuring they receive the care they deserve.

One hundred percent of the proceeds from the gala will go directly to aiding active-duty personnel, Veterans, and first responders nationwide who face mental and physical injuries. These funds enable Be Resilient Clinics to offer free, comprehensive care plans, ensuring our Nation's warriors receive the support they need, regardless of their financial situation.

The evening will be filled with celebration and inspiration from our incredible warrior guest speaker, John Arroyo, a retired Special Forces Green Beret with an incredible story you won't want to miss.



Our theme this year is swing! Get creative with your 40s swing attire and have fun! You can look forward to live entertainment from the HashTag Swing Band and audience instruction from the Luna Ballroom team! You will also enjoy an exquisite

meal based on the swing era, as well as the excitement of both silent and live auctions.

Additionally, the gala will provide invaluable networking opportunities, enabling guests to connect with fellow supporters who share a deep passion for aiding our warriors.

We invite you to join us in this noble cause, standing united with the SOF Missions team and our community at one of the most impactful fundraising events of the year. With your generous support, together, we can provide the crucial aid needed to foster hope and facilitate healing for our Nation's heroes.

For more information about the gala or to purchase tickets, please visit [www.sofmissions.org/gala](http://www.sofmissions.org/gala). Sponsorship opportunities are also available for businesses and individuals looking to make a lasting impact.

Tickets: \$100 per person  
<https://sofmissions.org/gala/>

Attire: 40s Swing Theme (have fun and get creative)

Ticket price includes dinner, dessert, and one free drink. Guest speaker, silent auction, swing dancing.

For more information about the gala or for any media outlets to cover the event, please contact Kristi Beckman at 850-503-5201 or email at [kristi@sofmissions.org](mailto:kristi@sofmissions.org).

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# Growing the Game: The Annual Emerald Coast Junior Golf Tour



BY BARBARA PALMGREN

Every year, junior golfers look forward to this prestigious event. This year, on July 10 and 11, the 45th Marvin DeBolt Daily News Junior Challenge was held at Fort Walton Beach Golf Club. This was a special occasion as Marvin's sons, Doug and

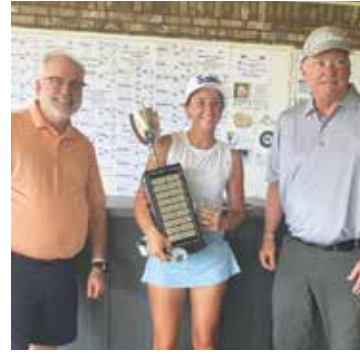
Jeff Debolt, presented the Girls and Boys overall winners with individual trophies and having their names listed with other winners on a large trophy. This impressive trophy had names inscribed from past winners who have gone on to win on the PGA Tour, such as Bubba Watson and Heath Slocum.

The tournament format was stroke play. Boys and girls 8-9 and 10-11 played two days of nine holes each. Older divisions played 18 holes for two days. There were first and second place winners in each division: Boys and Girls 8-9; Boys and Girls 10-11; Girls 12-14; Girls 15-18; Boys 12-13; Boys 14-15; Boys 16-18. In stroke play, shoot-



ing a low score wins after two days of 36 holes of golf.

Tournament director, Dennis Attaway (ECJGY) showed me the huge trophy filled with names of the women and men overall winners over the years. Each golfer this year received a tee shirt with all of those names



listed on the back of the shirt. Impressive, to say the least!

The tournament began in 1980, started by the Daily News publisher, Marvin DeBolt and sponsored by the newspaper and the City of Fort Walton Beach. This tournament is also part of a golf course summer series

where courses in several counties host these young golfers. The next leg of the series in Okaloosa County will be held at Rocky Bayou County Club, July 24 and 25. The title of the series is the "Gulf Coast Summer Slam."

The overall Girls Champion with a two-day score of 154 was Mckazlyn Payne. The overall Boys Champion was Baylor Touchstone with a two-day score of 144.

Congratulations to all these young golfers as they enjoy the game and continue participating in golf tournaments in our area. Who knows? The next names on the trophy will be winners on the pro tour!

# Inaugural Emerald Coast Classic Women's Tournament

NCAA Tournament second-round participants Alabama, Creighton and Syracuse headline an eight-team field in the inaugural Emerald Coast

Classic Women's Basketball Tournament, presented by Global Sports. Alabama State, UAB, Clemson, Missouri and Wichita State also are competing in the

tournament. Championships will be determined in two brackets. Alabama, Alabama State, Clemson and UAB will play in the Bay Brack-

et. Creighton, Missouri, Syracuse and Wichita State comprise the Beach Bracket.

Games will be played Nov. 25 and 26 at Raider Arena on

the campus of Northwest Florida State College. Syracuse and Creighton were ranked Nos. 20

*Continued on page 35*

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# Finding Balance



By DR. JESSICA MONTELEONE  
PT MS PhD

As I was shoreline strolling the beach last week, an elderly woman was being escorted into the water by someone quite younger than herself. The elder appeared fearful and hesitant. Of course, I asked her if she would like my help, and both parties welcomed me in.

The waves pushed us one way as the sand pulled in the opposite direction. Yes, she was wobbly, but had a successful “let’s get wet at the beach “adventure. They were grateful for my assistance.

Why is it so difficult to stay



upright at the beach? It’s most probably because we don’t have sufficient balance. Balance is described as the even distribution

of weight enabling someone or something to remain upright and steady.

Although standing at the

shoreline in a safe place with your feet submerged in the water is an excellent balance exercise for older adults, know that you need it on land before you can be successful in the water. Injuries can occur.

If you don’t use it, you lose it. Isn’t that the truth! As a veteran physical therapist, I see the results of falls. Many happen, because when someone retires from work, they may retire from life, leading a sedentary lifestyle. They get weak.

Need better balance? An evaluation from a trained physical therapist is a great start to establish what is causing your balance problems. A home visit is my favorite place to evaluate you. Where do you sit? How do you get in and out of bed? How are your glasses? Are your shoes supportive or do they have wear? Do you have the muscular strength to perform your daily tasks? Can you feel your feet on the floor? Can you stand on one leg for a good 3-5 seconds without loss of balance? Do you use walking sticks? A walker or a cane?

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If your balance problem is due to weakness, it’s time for an exercise program. You don’t want to fall. Two areas that I specifically look at to improve balance is the core and ankle strength. Learn to use hip and ankle strategies to keep balance when you start to lose it. A therapeutic ball and the kitchen sink can be two great tools to challenge balance and improve it in the comfort of your own home. We just need to implement the correct exercises from a qualified exercise expert.

Ready to get wet at the beach? Make sure that you have your balance or take that dip with someone else that does.

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# HCA Florida Fort Walton-Destin Hospital Celebrates 50 Years!

HCA Florida Fort Walton-Destin Hospital recently commemorated a half-century of service to our community with a grand celebration marking its 50th anniversary! Since its founding in 1974, the hospital has provided optimal healthcare services while evolving alongside the vibrant community it serves.

Zach McCluskey, chief executive officer at HCA Florida Fort Walton-Destin Hospital, welcomed hospital and community leaders, care team members and other guests to the milestone event. McCluskey expressed gratitude to colleagues, physicians, volunteers, community members and partners for their unwavering support throughout the hospital's five journey. "In 1974, a group of visionary physicians joined forc-



es to establish what was then the General Hospital of Fort Walton Beach," McCluskey said. "Their pioneering spirit laid the foundation for our enduring commitment to the care and improvement of human life."

From its early days with 42 physicians and 172 employees, the hospital has grown exponentially. Today, it employs over 1,200 dedicated care and support team members, including more than 400 skilled physicians, and a comprehensive

range of services including two free-standing emergency rooms, an inpatient rehabilitation facility.

During the celebration, Chaplain Ray Sansom led a prayer and blessing, reflecting on the hos-

pital's journey and its future.

Mayor Dick Rynearson of Fort Walton Beach presented a proclamation highlighting the hospital's contributions to the community. "HCA Florida Fort Walton-Destin Hospital has been a cornerstone of our city, providing exceptional care and service for 50 years," Mayor Rynearson remarked.

In recognition of the hospital's 50th anniversary, and in support of education and future healthcare professionals, the

hospital has pledged \$50,000 to Northwest Florida State College (NWFS) for health sciences scholarships over the next five years. The hospital recently made the first installment of this pledge, donating \$10,000 to the radiology program and \$10,000 to nursing program scholarships.

"Northwest Florida State College is dedicated to equipping our students for essential roles in local healthcare," said Dr. Cristie Kedroski, Interim President of NWFS. "We couldn't achieve this without the generous support of HCA Florida Fort Walton-Destin Hospital, which has provided scholarships and program assistance for many years. This partnership helps remove financial barriers for our nursing and radiography students, ensuring we can serve

our community's needs effectively."

The State of Florida has established a grant program entitled Linking Industry to Nursing Education, or L.I.N.E. Grant. This grant provides matching funds to NWFS for gifts from healthcare providers to their nursing program which means that the \$10,000 gift will become \$20,000 worth of scholarships for nursing students.

McCluskey concluded the event, stating, "From all of us at HCA Florida Fort Walton-Destin Hospital, thank you for contributing to this extraordinary journey. Here's to the next 50 years of excellence, compassion, and quality care."

For more information about HCA Florida Fort Walton-Destin Hospital and its services, visit [HCAFloridaHealthcare.com](http://HCAFloridaHealthcare.com).

## FISHING NEWS

*continued from page 24*

potential catch of a lifetime:

Contact the FWC: To properly certify a new Florida state record freshwater fish, the angler must contact the FWC via an online form or by calling an FWC regional office listed on the FWC website (Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.). An FWC biologist must confirm the fish species and potential record weight.

Obtain certified weight: To establish a new record, an FWC employee must witness the fish being weighed on a certified scale. Staff will provide directions on how to best accomplish this.

Once an angler contacts the FWC, a biologist will coordinate to provide direction on how to best work through the certification process. False alarms are common! Be prepared to provide a photo of the entire fish on a scale with the weight legible when possible.

The current state record bass weighed 17.27 pounds and was caught by Billy O'Berry in Polk County in 1986. Although that record has stood over 30 years, anglers and biologists alike are asking when the next state record will show up based on recent submissions of giant 15- and 16-pound bass to FWC's TrophyCatch citizen-science program.

You do not need to reel in a state record to earn recognition for your trophy-sized bass

catches! Participate in FWC's TrophyCatch program and win prizes for catching and releasing bass 8 pounds or larger. Learn how to participate at [TrophyCatch.com](http://TrophyCatch.com).

Anglers can check the current state records at [BigCatch-Florida.com](http://BigCatch-Florida.com) by clicking on "State Record." Good luck Florida anglers!



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# The Importance of Strength Training

Did you know that grip strength is one of the biggest indicators of longevity in life? Grip strength can show a few important health factors in an individual, such as the ability to fight infection, can be an indicator of chronic disease and is directly correlated to a healthier aging process. What this means is that the stronger you are, the healthier you are. And grip strength is only the beginning.

Starting in your 40s, everyone experiences, a natural process called sarcopenia, which is the degenerative loss of skeletal muscle mass, at the rate of about 3 to 5% every decade. That is why, Kassia Garfield, a physical therapist and owner of MaxStrength fitness of Niceville, says strength training has a profound effect on a person's physical and mental abilities. "When we lose our muscle mass, it affects all of our other sub systems," Garfield says. "It can affect balance, joint health, posture, weight management, endurance, mental health, functional independence, and overall longevity. Strength training has a pivotal role in maintaining muscle mass and improving overall health." Without actively counteracting sarcopenia, the body loses muscle mass. Many active older adults still like to walk, bike, golf, etc., but this is not the same as strength training. Strength training is very specific and takes intentional action to counteract the natural loss of muscle mass. "As a



ting weaker year to year."

Starting something new can be hard without the knowledge, experience or motivation. Finding a buddy system, hiring a professional or watching some videos can be a great place to start for anyone. In the world of the internet, resources are available everywhere. Habits take time to create, however, so the sooner you take steps to making the change, the better!

PT, I am an advocate for fitness, whatever that looks like for an individual," Garfield says. "But after the age of 40, if you are not strengthening, you are get-



Kassia is a physical therapist, veteran, educator and life transformer at MaxStrength Fitness of Niceville. The fitness studio targets the busy professional and active aging adult. "Although that is our target audience, we are here to help anyone who wants to make the commitment to a better life," she says. "At MSF we utilize a

slow, steady, continuous motion style of fitness training, which is very safe on joints, and allows for maximum effort for an effective workout in just 20 minutes, twice a week."

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Wellness

# Growing Through Disruption



BY STEPHENIE CRAIG

After three years of talking about moving to Florida, we listed our house thinking it might sell in six months to a year. Twelve days later we were thrust into disruption when the house sold and the reality of a cross country move set in. In some ways, talking about the possibility of a move for three years instead of taking meaningful action was a way of avoiding the inevitable disruption of a location change.

On some level, humans are

designed to avoid change, discomfort and emotional turmoil. Disruption presents itself with feeling emotionally and physically stirred up. You might experience symptoms of anxiety or depression. You might feel angry, sad, stressed and overwhelmed.

Disruption comes in many forms including moves, relationship conflict, mistakes, failures, endings, beginnings, births, death, diagnosis, job transitions, developmental transitions and environmental stress. You might avoid disruption because it forces you out of your comfort zone, it necessitates you facing personal challenges, it reminds you of all you can't control, it invites you to admit you are wrong, it creates fear of the unknown and it invites you to feel like the discomfort associated with disruption will be never ending.

However, if you look back in



your life, you will likely see that times of disruption and struggle have often been openings for tremendous growth, change and maturing in wisdom. When things get shaken up, you can often find an opportunity to examine and adjust your approach to life. The growth does not change the discomfort of disruption. But, the invitation to grow is present if you know to seek it. So, how do we shift from viewing disruption as something to be avoided to seeing disruption as an invitation to grow?

### Seven Ways to Grow Through Disruption

**Notice your personal signs of disruption.** Notice

irritability, tightness in your chest, low energy, controlling behavior, changes in sleep, busy thoughts, physical ailments and notice if these discomforts are related to a disruptive circumstance, thought or feeling.

**Identify the origin of disruption.** When did the disrupted feelings begin? Can you connect the disrupted feeling to an event, circumstance or relationship?

**Validate your experience.** "What I'm dealing with is stressful and it makes sense I am emotionally and physically disrupted."

**Identify growth opportunities.** "How can I understand something new about myself?" "How can I take responsibility for myself instead of blaming others?" "How can I increase my life skills and understanding of others?" "How can I cope in healthy ways in the midst of disruption?" Consistently be on the lookout for ways to grow through your struggle.

**Engage intentionally in growth activities.** See that therapist, find a mentor, devel-

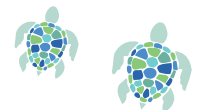
op spiritual disciplines, read an instructive book about relationships, listen to a podcast related to your struggle, spend time with healthy people, deepen healthy relationships.

**Apply and sustain learning.** Try new, healthier coping strategies, new ways of communicating, new ways of problem solving, new ways of relating to others. Keep the new ways of doing things in front of mind for six weeks with post it notes and phone reminders until they have become healthier habits.

**Notice change and celebrate.** Look back over a six month to one-year arc of time to notice how you have grown and changed. Express gratitude for the changes and sustained growth in your life.

After about six months of significant disruption and discomfort around our move, we settled into Santa Rosa Beach and have built a life we love. On the other side of disruption has been learning to take healthy risks, learning to chase a dream, learning to plant ourselves in a new community and learning to face fears. The result has been something new and beautiful and gratitude-worthy. Disruption can be very uncomfortable and avoidance is tempting. But, when you engage disruption as a tool of growth, beautiful and life changing things can happen.

Connect with us along your journey of growth at Journeybravely.com for counseling and coaching.



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# Navigating a Trip With Your CPAP Machine

By KELLY STALNAKER

Are you a CPAP user that's planning an upcoming trip? Perhaps there's a late summer getaway in your near future; or a visit to family/friends out of town for a wedding or other special occasion? Traveling with

they need. Save yourself the hassle of trying to contact your doctor while you're on vacation, and bring your prescription with you. Just keep it in your bag!

Another often overlooked component is the power supply. It is either left behind (still

plugged into the wall) or not compatible with electrical outlets (if traveling outside of the U.S.). Creating a thorough checklist prior to starting the packing process can help alleviate some of these travel woes.

Depending on the specifics of your trip, you might want to consider packing a battery backup. Suppose you're going camping and will be away from a source of electricity for an extended amount of time. Or maybe you'll be traveling to a location that is forecasted to have severe weather with possible power outages. In these situations, a battery backup would be the only option for securing a good night's sleep. At J&B Medical we carry the popular Portable Outlet for these types of situations. But even if you're not traveling under these con-

ditions, the Portable Outlet is handy to have around anytime as you never know when you'll lose electricity, especially during hurricane season! If just the thought of lugging around your bulky CPAP machine through airports and hotels feels like too much, then consider downsizing to a travel CPAP machine! Lightweight and portable, these machines offer the same features but in a more compact size. We carry one about the size of a baseball! But whether you are traveling with a portable or standard machine, the protocol at security in most airports remains the same; prior to entering the security line, remove your device from its bag and send it through the x-ray machine like any other electronic item. Labeling the bag with a "medical equipment luggage tag" is also advised for

more efficiency at the airport. At J&B Medical, we have a variety of travel machines and accessories to help make your CPAP journey more comfortable and convenient. Stop by and see us anytime Monday through Friday from 9 until 5 at 540 E John Sims Pkwy. in Niceville. Or call 850-729-2559 and see how we can help you with your CPAP needs!



your CPAP machine and supplies may seem daunting, but there are things you can do to make it easier!

Packing for your trip is obviously of the utmost importance; you need to remember everything from medications to personal hygiene items to extra underwear. But, when you have a CPAP, you also have to remember your machine, masks, cushions, tubing and more. And since you're already gathering all of the necessities, experts recommend including a few extra essentials. Our favorite tip is to pack a paper copy of your prescription with you. Nearly every single day we have patients visiting our area that have forgotten (or broken) pertinent CPAP pieces. Fortunately, we can help. But, often we do need a prescription to get them what

plugged into the wall) or not compatible with electrical outlets (if traveling outside of the U.S.). Creating a thorough checklist prior to starting the packing process can help alleviate some of these travel woes.

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## NCAA WOMEN'S

*continued from page 30*

and 23, respectively, in the final Associated Press women's basketball poll.

"We have assembled a great field in this inaugural year of the event and we hope to make this one of the top preseason women's college basketball events annually," said tournament director Maury Hanks, who is also chief executive officer for Global Sports. Syracuse, under the direc-

tion of ACC Coach of the Year Felisha Legette-Jack, posted a 24-8 record while advancing to the second round of the NCAA Tournament. Creighton, which finished second in the Big East Conference, went 26-6 and also advanced to the second round of the NCAA Tournament. Alabama had a 24-10 record.

Global Sports has produced 55 multi-team college basketball tournaments since 2007, with three more coming during the 2024-25 season.

## Okaloosa County Hurricane Guide Available

Be prepared! Okaloosa County has 2024 Hurricane Guides available. You can read or download a pdf version at [myokaloosa.com/sites/default/files/HurricaneGuide2024-v2.pdf](http://myokaloosa.com/sites/default/files/HurricaneGuide2024-v2.pdf).



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 Business


BY KAY LEAMAN, HEALTH ARCHITECT, HEALTHYDAY HEALTHYLIFE

LAUGH: To express cer-

## Laughter Improves Our Health

tain emotions, especially mirth or delight, by a series of spontaneous, usually unarticulated sounds often accompanied by corresponding facial and bodily movements.

People bring laughter into their lives in various ways. From watching comedy, to animal videos, telling jokes, listening to songs, reading, etc. The newest trend is laughing yoga. If you haven't tried it, I recommend

you consider it. You can grab a Youtube video or find a class.

My mom had a large and wicked sense of humor. Our home experienced a plethora of jokes and comedy television shows. If we fell, mom would say 'Are you ok?' and then proceed with laughter. It helped and hurt all at the same time. As I've gotten older, I've learned to appreciate good humor. It lessens the load and reminds me that life is better and a bit easier when laughter is taken regularly.

What happens during a laughing spell? Your brain releases endorphins (feel good chemicals), reducing stress and bringing on feelings of happiness and well-being. It causes us to take deeper breaths, bringing increased oxygen to the brain, heart, lungs and muscles.

A good laugh offers the short-term effects of lightening our mental load (stress) and abating anger. (It's hard to be angry when you're laughing.) It also stimulates many organs by enhancing our intake of oxygen-rich air.

Hearty laughter fires up and cools down the stress response, raising and lowering our heart rate and blood pressure. It brings on a good relaxing feeling, soothes tension and stimulates circulations and muscle relaxation.

Long term benefits include:



An improved immune system due to the increase of immune cells and antibodies. Negative thoughts manifest chemical reactions that can affect body by raising stress & lowering immunity. Positive thoughts release neuropeptides that help to fight stress & potentially more serious illnesses.

Relieves pain - Laughter can produce its own pain killers.

Improved mood - We experience less stress, depression and

anxiety and our self-esteem improves.

Greater personal satisfaction makes it easier to cope with difficult situations and connect with other people.

Protects the heart by improving function of blood vessels and increases flow.

If you can laugh 10-15 minutes per day, you can burn up to 40 calories, equaling a loss of 3-4 lbs./year. Maybe I should create a laughter diet. hehehe:-)

Research shows that children laugh about 400 times a day, whereas adults, on average, laugh only about 15 times. I wonder what our yearly check-ups would look like if we worked on maintaining our childlike laughter. We can start by learning to laugh at ourselves again. A study in Norway found people with a strong sense of humor outlived those who didn't laugh as much. The difference was particularly notable for those battling cancer.

Are you someone who doesn't laugh very often? Did you know that humor can be learned? Attend laughing yoga regularly or get around jovial people, read a funny book, etc. and discover the benefits of laughter.

It's never too late to start a new habit. Make laughter a habit worth laughing over. Here's to Health!

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*April Pretz, APRN, FNP-C, Member*

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## Walk to End Alzheimer's Scheduled for Oct 27 Planning Committee Formed

Are you passionate about the fight against Alzheimer's? Do you want to get more involved with the Alzheimer's Association and Walk to End Alzheimer's - Air Force Armament Museum? Join the Air Force Armament Museum Walk Planning Committee and help shape the movement to end this disease.

Committee members are the heart of the event, planning everything from the kick-off to the wrap-up. Some members focus on growing the event by recruiting teams and sponsors, others coordinate logistics and some work on promoting the event in the



community. There's a role for everyone!

To learn more about joining our volunteer Walk Planning Committee, contact:

Tina Henson, (850) 502-5947 or email [thenson@alz.org](mailto:thenson@alz.org) or visit [www.act.alz.org/goto/panhandleassistantcarefl](http://www.act.alz.org/goto/panhandleassistantcarefl)

New members are welcome to join any time throughout the year. Subcommittees may meet separately as needed.



# From Rescue to Rehab: One Dog's Mission to Bring Harmony to Healthcare

An exuberant, reddish-brown puppy found herself living on the street in northwest Florida. Originally thought to be male, she was called Cleo by Animal Control. She was taken to two different animal rescue agencies before finding her place, the second of which determined she was, in fact, a girl, and changed her name to Chloe. When she was ready to be adopted into a "forever" home, Chloe was dressed up in cute costumes to disguise her large size, strength, and likely pit bull heritage, and she even appeared on the local news.

After more than six months at the shelter, a new volunteer who did not intend to adopt a dog appeared. It was love at first sight and the would-be volunteer immediately dropped to the ground to greet Chloe, who excitedly kissed her face. The volunteer took Chloe home on a trial basis and the pair began working diligently on training with Nancy Bown, CPDT-KA of Dog-Harmony.

Chloe gradually gained confidence and overcame her fear of garbage trucks and plastic bags. Bown, an evaluator for Intermountain Therapy Animals, recognized that Chloe had the right personality to become a therapy dog and encouraged the pair to become evaluated. In 2023 at age six, Chloe and her mom became a certified therapy dog team with Dog-Harmony.

They now volunteer at HCA Florida Healthcare's Northwest Florida Rehabilitation Center in Destin.

Each week, Chloe brings 65 pounds of love and joy to staff and patients - and the occasional tears to patients who miss their dogs. Her favorite place to visit at the rehab center is the physical therapy (PT) gym, where she can interact with the PT patients. She is a great aid, assisting with repetitive arm movements as a command to sit, stay, or play fetch.

One day, Chloe almost fell asleep standing up as she received an excellent massage from a patient, who she distracted from blood pressure measurements before the patient began her work in the gym. The patient's blood pressure visually dropped on the device's screen as she patted Chloe.

A fellow volunteer at the rehab center, Sue Marks, said of Chloe: "The staff have to give Chloe a hug, pet, or scratch and they tell us which patients in specific rooms would love a visit from Chloe each week. We have learned so many pet names and breeds belonging to the staff and patients. A smile after a visit from Chloe goes a long way. She is so well-behaved. She takes treats nicely. She makes my day on Fridays, too."

The staff at the rehab center awarded Chloe the prestigious honor of Employee of the



Month in February 2024 in appreciation of her visits.

Today, roughly 50% of American households (approximately 65 million) have a dog at home. Nearly all pet owners in the U.S. (97%) consider their companion animals family members. Living with dogs at home reduces stress and anxiety, lowers blood pressure, and improves the mood of humans.

Medical studies have shown that patients interacting with qualified therapy dog teams have been able to heal and recover faster. After only a few minutes of interaction, it is evident how profoundly therapy dog teams affect patients and staff as they benefit from a "bit of home" in a difficult clinical setting.

In an inpatient rehabilitation unit of John Hopkins University's School of Medicine, doctors realized "patients who participated in animal therapy were able to meet goals faster by in-

volving the animals - standing for longer periods while patting a dog, for instance."

Dog-Harmony is experiencing an overwhelming demand for qualified therapy dog teams in healthcare and a significant shortage of qualified therapy dog teams in northwest Florida. The 501(c)3 non-profit provides complimentary, ongoing training for therapy dog teams, coordinates their placement in healthcare facilities, accompanies team visits, and provides management and oversight for its healthcare partners. Dog-Harmony spends an average of 10 hours of training, which is provided at no cost to the teams, and is required for each team after the evaluation resulting in certification.

Because of Dog-Harmony's significant experience and multiple relationships with national pet therapy organizations (i.e., Intermountain Therapy Animals, Therapy Pet Connections, Pet Partners, etc.), the non-profit can manage and assign qualified dog therapy teams based on abilities, temperaments, and clinical requirements. The non-profit also spends a significant number of hours on continued monitoring of team performance and ongoing therapy dog team train-

ing specific to animal-assisted therapy in healthcare.

According to Dog-Harmony's regionally-focused survey of 895 respondents in 2023, 31% of people think animal-assisted therapy is "very important" and most responded with interest in helping to support by volunteering their time, skills, and knowledge. Dog-Harmony also needs financial support to sustain the hospital therapy dog program, which is provided at no cost; and for interested therapy dog partners to start the certification program required to volunteer at regional healthcare facilities.

To support Dog-Harmony's therapy dog program, currently managed for HCA Florida Destin-Fort Walton Beach and Twin Cities hospitals, and expand its reach to additional healthcare institutions in the area, visit [www.dog-harmony.org/donate](http://www.dog-harmony.org/donate) or vote for Chloe in the 'Bark in Style' photo contest running through August 1, 2024.

To learn more about becoming a team with Dog-Harmony's therapy dog program, visit [www.dog-harmony.org/therapy](http://www.dog-harmony.org/therapy) or follow Dog-Harmony on Facebook to keep abreast of the next therapy dog team evaluation at the end of October.

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 Business



BY MAURICE STOUSE, FINANCIAL ADVISOR AND BRANCH MANAGER

We are into an election year, the markets have made some extraordinary moves and we thought it was a good time to catch our breath and reflect on a few things. Davis Parrish, one of our advisors (in the Atlanta area)

# Insights for Investors: Where Do We Stand at Mid-year?

compiled some research (from Raymond James) for us and we wanted to share it with you here for your mid-year reading.

### The Stock Markets:

As of June 21, the S&P 500 had surpassed its own record 31 times since the beginning of January. That equates to an all-time high every four trading days. This year marks the first election year since 1892 when both major party nominees have occupied the White House. Gains for the market have historically been higher when an incumbent president is running



for reelection. The volatility index or "VIX," as of June 28 was 12.36, which was down

almost 8% for the year. The worker participation rate is now at 62.4%. That is the percentage of people 16 years old and older that are working or seeking work. That puts it just about at its average for the past 75 years. Unemployment approximates 4% of the workforce. Its highest rate was almost 11% back in 1982 and its lowest rate approximated 2.5% in 1953.

### We have a few observations for our readers.

First is U.S. debt. Higher debt leads to higher debt service which could mean either higher taxes or less capital available for investment and growth and ultimately lowering living standards for Americans. Raymond James published an article in the first quarter of this year addressing U.S. debt. Let us know if you would like a copy.

Second, we encourage readers to research what the U.S. net worth is as well as the U.S. household net worth. That makes things a bit more encouraging since you might find that as debt has risen, so has wealth. And wealth is several times greater than the debt. There are a variety of sources online that address that. We are encouraged when we see U.S. worth at several times GDP and several times debt. The same for U.S. household net worth. Again, we remind readers that higher debt always leads to higher debt service and that is important to economic growth.

Third would be potential solutions for entitlements – mainly Social Security and Medicare. The last time that Congress took substantial action was in 1983 when Congress

increased the full retirement age from 65 to 67 (for those born after 1960). That is being looked at again as the last time the FRA was extended, it also provided long-term solvency for several decades after. Other measures being considered are raising the cap of income where the Social Security tax is applied (there is no earnings cap for Medicare taxes). Regardless of how someone sees it, we remained encouraged that the U.S. has found the answer before and will find it again.

*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@raymond-james.com.*

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# Walton County Property Appraiser Gary Gregor Announces Reelection Bid

Gary Gregor, a long-time resident of Walton County, is running for reelection to the office of Walton County Property Appraiser. In a public statement he says, "Walton County is one of the most unique and diverse counties in Florida. With 29 years of experience in the appraisal field, and now a strong four-year record as your Walton County Property Appraiser, I believe I'm the most qualified to best serve our county during this time of growth and diversity. Most importantly, I will continue to prioritize serving the public and assisting property owners

implemented online services for the ability to file homestead exemption and tangible personal property returns.

We continue to restructure the office to improve workflow and timelines. We have created a system that consistently stays ahead of schedule and allows for a better appraisal process and additional time for field inspections to meet required mandates by Florida law. In addition, we've increased the outreach efforts and services of the office through the website, social media, and online services.

*In a statement to South Walton Life, Gary stated:*

"I believe I am the **best qualified** candidate for this position, having 29 years of experience, approximately 10 of those in a management / supervisory role and the past four years as your Property Appraiser. In this time, the office complied with Florida Statutes, made technology and workflow process improvements while experiencing unprecedented growth in Walton County. I have the most appraisal experience having done



to address any questions or concerns they may have."

As noted, Gary now has a four-year record to run on.

### Goals achieved since being elected:

"First, we brought advanced appraisal technology to Walton County which enabled us to be more efficient and effective than ever before, also equipping us with the tools to provide the best possible customer service and the most advanced services available to Walton County. These improvements have also enabled us to be more effective in achieving our goal to be in compliance with Florida Statutes and Florida Department of Revenue Guidelines, as required by the Florida Constitution. With the emphasis on providing outstanding customer service for the citizens and property owners of Walton County, we have also

hundreds of USPAP (industry standard) compliant appraisals. I have the most appraisal education having completed over 300 credit hours and 15+ classes related to the appraisal practice. I am the only candidate that is a Certified Florida Appraiser. I am the only candidate that holds a professional appraisal designation in mass appraisal. I look forward to continuing to bring advanced technology and professional appraisal knowledge and practices, along with an emphasis on outstanding customer service to the citizens of Walton County. It would be a tremendous honor to serve another term as your Walton County Property Appraiser. My promise is to continue to comply with all Florida Statutes, produce **honest, fair and equitable assessments** and exceptional customer service for all Walton County property owners.

Gregor has been married to Brianne Gregor for 20 years and together they share two children. His family is actively involved at New Harmony Baptist Church and they enjoy

spending their free time outdoors, at the beach, playing softball, hunting, fishing and going on new adventures. They are so happy to call Walton County home and he hopes to continue

to share his knowledge and passion by serving as the Walton County Property Appraiser for the next four years.



## Re-elect Gary Gregor for Walton County Property Appraiser

*Please allow me the privilege to continue to use my experience, knowledge, education and leadership for you.*

### The Candidate with:

- ✓ the MOST appraisal experience
- ✓ the MOST appraisal knowledge
- ✓ the MOST appraisal education
- ✓ and proven leadership qualities



**Christian, Conservative, Republican**

### Goals for keeping up with the growth and diversity in Walton County.

- Provide outstanding customer service
- Update and advanced appraisal analysis and technology
- Improve integrity and knowledge through staff education and employment of appraisal practice professionals
- Improve outflow of services that office provides and online filing capabilities
- Improve work flow

**Experience, Knowledge, Education & Integrity Matter!**



# Jay Odom and the Freedom Tech Center: A Celebration of Patriotism and Progress

BY "DOC DOUG" STAUFFER

In a grand display of patriotism and community spirit, Jay Odom, a true local success story, presided over the flag-raising ceremony at the Freedom Tech Center. This momentous event marked a significant milestone for Okaloosa County and Fort Walton Beach, bringing together community members, local officials, and military personnel to celebrate the realization of a transformative vision.

## "We Fly as One"

The ceremony featured raising one of Florida's largest American flags, measuring an impressive 105 feet by 70 feet, on a towering 200-foot pole. The flag, visible from as far away as the Shalimar Bridge, symbolizes the unity and strength of the community under the motto, "We Fly as One."

Jay Odom, known for his remarkable contributions to the area, including the development of Raider Village at Northwest Florida State College, expressed his deep love for his community, the Free State of Florida, and the nation. His heartfelt speech resonated with the crowd, showcasing his unwavering patriotism and commitment to his hometown.

## A Vision for the Future

The Freedom Tech Center, master-planned by The Jay Odom Group under a long-term land lease with the U.S. Air Force, spans 50 acres and promises to transform the north side of Fort Walton Beach into a bustling commerce center. This mixed-use development will bring jobs, housing, hotels,



meeting spaces, restaurants, Class A office space, and a 4-acre recreational park to the local community.

The project includes 312 luxury apartment homes, a leasing office, a pool, seven 6-bay parking garages, and a carwash/maintenance building. With 180,000+ square feet of Class A office space, single-tenant build-to-suit opportunities, and multi-tenant options, the Freedom Tech Center will redefine the work-live-play concept in the region.

## Community and Military Connection

The Eglin Air Force Base Color Guard graced the event, which raised the massive American flag, and a flyover added to the patriotic atmosphere. Florida Department of Commerce Secretary Alex Kelly and Jay Odom delivered inspiring remarks, highlighting the project's significance for the local community and its strong ties to the military.

Secretary Kelly, speaking on behalf of Governor Ron DeSantis, emphasized the importance of military-based communities to Florida's economy and identity. He noted that the military and defense sector has be-

come the state's second-largest industry, surpassing agriculture and creating almost a million jobs.

## A True American Patriot

Jay Odom, a lifelong resident of the area, reflected on his childhood experiences near Eglin Air Force Base and how they shaped his understanding of freedom and the military's role in preserving it. He described the Freedom Tech Center as a "centerpiece of the community" and envisioned it becoming the "epicenter of the region for living, working, playing and eating." The flag, he said, is a beacon of freedom.

Odom's journey from a young boy in Shalimar to a successful developer is a testament to the power of community-focused development. He praised the collaborative effort required to bring the project to life, recognizing the support from various stakeholders, including the Air Force, Fort Walton Beach, Okaloosa County and the state of Florida.

## A Bright Future Ahead

The Freedom Tech Center's grand opening marks a new chapter for Fort Walton Beach and the surrounding area. With its mix of residential, commer-



Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce, Ted Corcoran, lauded the project, saying, "Jay Odom does everything top-of-the-line. The Freedom Tech Center is an amazing addition to our community. This development expands our business base from downtown to midtown to upper Fort Walton Beach, creating another vibrant city quadrant."

Corcoran added, "Jay has structured the property to allow people to stay, work, and play here, creating a community that feels like a downtown WITHOUT THE TRAFFIC. It's a great walkable area with lodging and dining options, making it a fantastic place for locals and visitors."

Jay Odom's dedication to his hometown and his visionary leadership have paved the way for a brighter future for Okaloosa County. The massive American flag waves proudly over the Freedom Tech Center, symbolizing this remarkable community's unity, strength and patriotism.

cial, and recreational spaces, the project aims to create a vibrant community hub that honors the region's strong military ties while fostering economic growth and enhancing the quality of life for residents and visitors alike.

## Praise from the Community

President and CEO of the

Savvy Leigh

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BY PASTOR DOUG STAUFFER

# A Pastor's Ponderings: The Duty and Moral Obligation of Voting

abysmal at best. Remember, your vote is a powerful tool that shapes the future of our nation, state, counties, and cities. Your vote is not just a mere checkmark; it is a voice that influences the future course of societies.

The scriptures remind us of the importance of active community participation. **Proverbs 29:2** states, "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn." This verse highlights the significance of righteous leadership and the voters' collective responsibility in choosing those who govern. Too many people do not realize that elected representatives holding office at a local level affect them daily more than those holding office at the federal level. We must ensure we choose leaders who align with the principles of the Declaration of Independence: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

In a democratic republic (the founders' original design), voting was the primary means of influencing the direction of our

country—nationally and locally. **Romans 13:1a** says, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers." While this verse refers to subjection to authority, the context mentioned in the first paragraph above stresses the type of rulers God intended the electoral process to produce. It also vindicates those who choose not to subject themselves to usurped authority that is not God-ordained (whether in 1776 or today).

By voting scripturally, we are establishing leaders who align with biblical values because the right "rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil." Romans also describes the actions of the God-ordained rulers: "do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same." (**Romans 13:3**) Unfortunately, too many elected representatives focus more on personal agendas than servant leadership. Voting is the primary means of aligning leadership with the Bible when an informed electorate votes.

As American citizens, we are blessed with the freedom to



vote—a right many worldwide still struggle to attain. A right neglected in this country by far too many, far too often! Voting is a crucial way to serve and protect the values we cherish. Let's not take this privilege for granted but use it wisely. Remember that you are not electing a saint or a savior but a servant you desire for God to influence and direct. Choose candidates whose policies align with biblical values.

As we prepare for the upcoming elections, let us remember that our vote is more than a mark

on the ballot—it is an expression of our faith, our values, and our commitment to the well-being of our fellow compatriots. Let us pray for wisdom and discernment and exercise our right to vote with a heart dedicated to God's will and the common good. **PRAY AND VOTE! MAKE A DIFFERENCE!**

May God bless America and guide us in this important civic duty and responsibility. The primary election is on August 20th, with early voting the week before (August 10th to the 17th). You can view a list of candidates at [www.govote-okaloosa.com](http://www.govote-okaloosa.com). Look closely; you might find my name—"DocDoug"—on the ballot for State Committeeman!

*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.*



## Douglas "Doc Doug" Stauffer for State Committeeman



Judy and "Doc Doug" Stauffer



**Primary Election August 20, 2024 | Early Voting August 10-17, 2024**

PD. POL. ADV. Doug "Doc Doug" Stauffer, 1512 John Sims Parkway, Suite 346, Niceville, FL 32578.



Musing

# Sean of the South



Namely, because yesterday the whole world underwent a historic global internet outage, which delayed and canceled nearly 3,000 American flights. And on this particular historic day in human civilization, I happened to be flying.

You could see boiling anger and frustration on every face in the airport.

The young man in line ahead of me was with his mother. He was maybe 15. He had Down syndrome. He was shouting hellos to people in line. He was a natural comedian. He was Mister Personality.

And you couldn't help but smile when the kid landed his



surviving on vending machine food, actually began chuckling.

The businessman was laughing too, when he said, "Okay, then I am doing WELL, and how are you today?"

"I'm good," the boy said.

More laughter.

Then the boy addressed another woman in line. She was playing on her phone. She was mid-forties. She looked like she'd just sucked a lemon.

"Hi," the kid said.

She looked up from her phone.

"Um. Hi?" she replied.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Laura."

"Can I give you a hug, Laura?"

Laura looked around. "Um. I don't think so."

He hugged her anyway. He even closed his eyes. Laura was taken off guard. She put her phone away and committed to the hug.

"You smell good," the kid said.

"Thanks," she said.

"What about me?" he said.

miracle gaze on you.

"Hello!" the boy shouted to a businessman in line. "How are you today?!"

The business guy was on the phone, having a heated conversation at the time.

"Uh, I don't know," the guy says.

Then the boy hugged the man. "Does this help!?" he said.

The businessman tentatively hugged back. Until, finally, he broke a smile, ended up terminating the phone call, and he said to the boy, midhug, "I guess I'm good, how are you?"

"It's not 'good,'" the boy said. "You never say 'I'm good,' it's bad grammar. It's WELL. You should have told me, you're doing WELL!"

Everyone laughed at that. All the people in line, in foul moods, some of whom had been living in KCI for the past 20 hours,

"Do I smell good too?"

Laura looked around again. "Sure."

This made her laugh. Which was exactly what the boy was aiming for, of course.

The kid approached several others in line. I watched people's rancid attitudes fade, one by one. And I watched a few hundred delayed airline passengers start to smile.

When it was time to board the plane, the kid stepped back in line. His comedy routine was over. He was with his mom once again. He was quiet.

"That's one remarkable boy," I whispered to his mother.

She smiled.

"He has a gift," she said. "He can make anyone smile. And I mean ANYONE."

"He must inherit that gift from you?" I said.

She laughed. "Lord, no. His biological parents left him in a dumpster as a baby, behind a restaurant." She used a pinky to dab away a tear. "I was just the one who was lucky enough to find him."

Some folks get all the luck.

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

BY SEAN DIETRICH

Kansas City International Airport. I was standing in a long, LONG line, waiting to board my plane. We were like cattle, clogging up the chute. Nobody was happy.

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

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# ECTC Opens Registration for 2024 Fall Educational Theatre Programs

Programs Available in Freeport, DeFuniak Springs and Miramar Beach

Emerald Coast Theatre Company's (ECTC) 2024 Fall Educational Theatre programs are bigger and better than ever. These programs provide creative and engaging classes designed especially for young thespians from elementary to high school, as well as adult classes. ECTC offers classes for Mini Players (5yrs.-1st), Little Players (2nd-3rd grade), Big Players (4th-5th grade), teens, and adults. This year, ECTC is offering Shrek the Musical, Show Choir (4th - 12th), Acting for Musical Theatre, Movie Magic Mondays, Tap for Teens and Adults, Jazz and Dance for teens and adults, Homeschool Classes, Beginner and Intermediate Ballet, ECTC Thespian Troupe, ECTC Teen Company (9th-12th), and Individual Coaching Sessions for Jr Thespians/Jr Company, and a Senior Drama Club. The full schedule of class dates and times along with tuition and registration rates can be found at [www.emeraldcoasttheatre.org/youthclasses](http://www.emeraldcoasttheatre.org/youthclasses).



the evil Lord Farquard to regain their homes. Students will work as a cast to act, dance, and sing throughout this high-energy, fast paced production. There's a reason Shrek has become a cultural phenomenon. Join us and be a part of the action!

Fall Youth and Adult Education Classes are held from August 10 - November 16, 2024. Payment plans and Scholarships are available. \*Tuition price includes a \$30 non-refundable registration fee. Class locations include ECTC's main space at 560 Grand BLVD, Suite 200 in Miramar Beach, FL as well as Florida Chautauqua Theatre (FCT) at 848 Baldwin Avenue in Defuniak Springs, FL and at the Freeport Elementary School in Freeport, FL.

"Theatre arts allow children to express themselves in a comfortable environment with other children, without judgement. We are overjoyed to be able to continue these programs here at ECTC and surrounding communities," says ECTC co-founder and producing artistic director Nathanael Fisher.

ECTC's 2024-2025 season is made possible with support from Grand Boulevard at Sandestin, St. Joe Community Foundation, Howard Group, and the South

Walton Tourist Development Council. Thank you to our Education Program Sponsors - Shoreline Title, Barker Williams, PLLC, Jennifer Crawford's Own At The Beach Team with Keller Williams, Heritage Oak Wealth Advisors

To register for ECTC 2024 Fall Theatre Education classes, visit <https://www.emeraldcoasttheatre.org/youthclasses>.

To make a tax-deductible donation, volunteer or learn more about Emerald Coast Theatre Company, find them on Facebook, follow the ECTC YouTube channel, call (850) 684-0323 and visit [www.emeraldcoasttheatre.org](http://www.emeraldcoasttheatre.org).

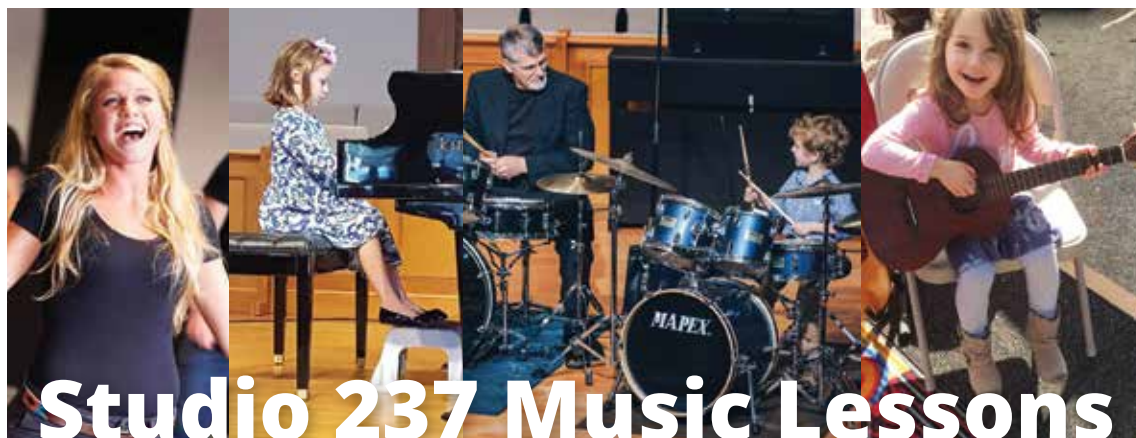
## Art For All Funding Awards

The Cultural Arts Alliance (CAA) recently announced Art for All grants totaling \$32,000 were awarded to 13 Walton County teachers, students, artists and organizations to support arts education, creative projects and further their artistic endeavors. In its decades of fostering creativity, the CAA has awarded grants totaling more than \$845,000.

Thirteen Teacher Grants benefiting seven area schools, including Bay School, Freeport Elementary, Magnet Innovation Center, Seaside Neighborhood School, South Walton Academy, The Nature School Cooperative and The WISE Magnet School were awarded.

In addition to the Teacher

Grants, two college scholarships were awarded to Avery Joyner of DeFuniak Springs and Ferrell Crawley of Santa Rosa Beach, two Walton County college-bound students who have declared a major in the visual, literary or performing arts. Local artist Merry Beth Myrick was awarded a grant for professional development to take advantage of specific skill-building educational opportunities to advance her work, and three grants were awarded to local non-profit organizations, including Emerald Coast Theatre Company, Longleaf Writers Conference, and Bay School serving Walton County in the area of Arts Education.

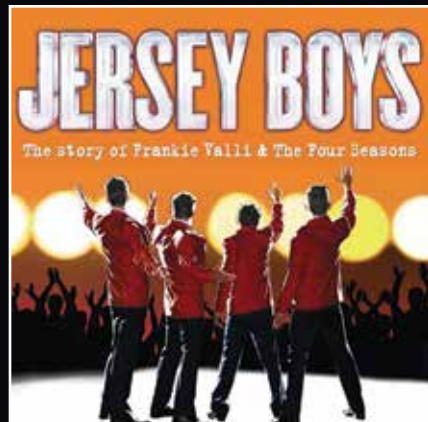


## Studio 237 Music Lessons

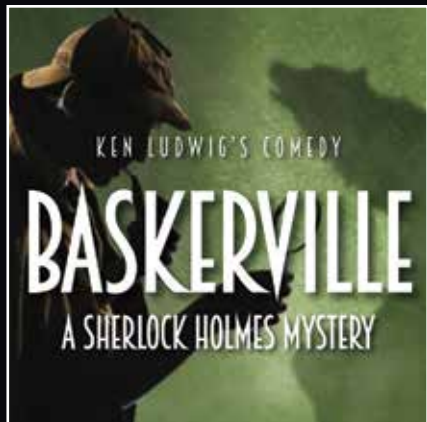
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 Arts & Music

# The Benefits of Music Lessons at Studio 237 Music

Music, an ageless companion to the human experience, has a profound impact on our thinking abilities, emotional well-being, and social development. Engaging in music lessons, whether in childhood or adulthood, offers a variety of benefits that extend far beyond the ability to play an instrument well. Let's explore how the pursuit of musical education shapes our lives in many ways.

## 1. Mind Strengthening

Learning music involves a variety of abilities including hearing, seeing, and coordination skills. Research has consistently shown that children who receive music lessons tend to perform better in school subjects such as math and language. This is attributed to the increase of memory, attention span, and abstract reasoning skills that are sharpened when learning to read musical notation, understand rhythm, and identify melodies.

## 2. Emotional Well-being

Music is a powerful emotional outlet. It allows individuals to



express feelings that may be difficult to articulate in words alone. Learning to play an instrument or sing fosters a sense of accomplishment and self-confidence as students master new skills and conquer challenges. Furthermore, music has therapeutic benefits, reducing stress, anxiety, and even alleviating symptoms of depression by triggering the release of natural mood elevators in the brain.

## 3. Self-Regulation and Patience

Learning to play a musical instrument requires some

dedication, practice, and perseverance. Students learn the value of achievement as they commit to regular practice schedules and strive to improve their ability over time. This cultivated patience and resilience extend beyond the realm of music into other areas of life, contributing to personal growth and resilience in the face of challenges.

## 4. Social Skills and Collaboration

Music education often involves group activities such as bands, orchestras, or choirs. Working collaboratively with peers toward a common musical goal fosters important social skills such as teamwork, communication, and empathy. These experiences teach students how to listen actively, compromise, and appreciate the contributions of others—a valuable lesson in building harmonious relationships both within and outside the musical sphere.

## 5. Cultural Awareness and Appreciation

Studying music exposes individuals to a rich tapestry of cultural traditions and history. Whether exploring classical compositions, folk songs, or contemporary genres, students gain a deeper understanding of diverse musical styles and the community in which they originated. This fosters an appreciation for other cultures and their style of music.


## 6. Lifelong Enjoyment and Fulfillment

Beyond the educational and developmental benefits, music lessons provide a lifelong source of enjoyment and fulfillment. The ability to create music, whether for personal pleasure or shared with others, brings a sense of joy and accomplishment that endures throughout one's life. Whether playing for relaxation, performing on stage, or simply appreciating music as a listener, the skills and appreciation gained through music education enrich every stage of life.

In conclusion, the decision to

begin music lessons is not merely about learning to play an instrument or sing proficiently. It is an investment in learning development, emotional well-being, and personal growth. From enhancing academic performance to improving social skills and cultural appreciation, music education offers a wealth of benefits that resonate far beyond the practice room. Whether for children starting their musical journey or adults rediscovering a passion, the rewards of music lessons reverberate through every facet of life, creating harmony for the mind and soul alike.

*Studio 237 Music Lessons has music teachers ready to help you begin your musical learning experience. Contact the studio to register online at [www.Studio237Music.com/registration](http://www.Studio237Music.com/registration) or call the studio at (850) 231-3199 leave a message or text/call (850) 797-3546. We provide a place for teachers to teach and students to learn. For more info visit our website at [www.Studio237Music.com](http://www.Studio237Music.com).*



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Proceeds benefit Sinfonia Gulf Coast and its music education and community engagement initiatives throughout Northwest Florida.

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# MKAF Awarded \$30,000 National Grant by Emeril Lagasse Foundation

Northwest Florida's champion of the arts for all abilities was awarded \$30,000 (one of four national grants totaling \$127,000) recently from the Emeril Lagasse Foundation.

Founded in 2002 by Chef Emeril Lagasse and his wife Alden, Emeril Lagasse Foundation is a 501(c)(3) public charity headquartered in New Orleans. The Foundation's mission is to create opportunities to inspire, mentor, and enable youth to reach their full potential. Since its inception, Emeril Lagasse Foundation has granted more than \$20 million to children's charities to support culinary, nutrition, and arts programs with a focus on life skills development.

"Alden and I started this foundation to support youth and provide them with opportunities they would not otherwise have," said Chef Emeril Lagasse. "While we continue to nurture our roots here at home in New Orleans, we are excited that the reach of the foundation is growing across the country."

Other recipients of a Spring 2024 grant include: Second Harvest Food Bank's Summer Feeding and Kids Café Program (New Orleans), The Ingram Lee Foundation (Houston, Texas), Orange County School of the Arts Foundation's Culinary Arts & Hospitality Conservatory (Orange County, Calif.).

"We're honored Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation's ArtsReach efforts in Northwest Florida have been recognized by such a respected organization as the Emeril Lagasse Foundation in such a profound way," said MKAF CEO Demetrius Fuller. "We are approaching our 30th year and this is a great way to start the celebration ... by making the arts accessible to even more youth in our community."

In 2024, MKAF presented around 140 ArtsReach programs — a record and 71 percent increase over the previous year. Since it was established in 1995, MKAF estimates its outreach has impacted more than 400,000 in the local Northwest



Florida community.

Arts for All Abilities initiative is unique in the area. MKAF is the only arts organization that has a specific program initiative to deliver arts to people of all abilities. Arts Empower is MKAF's effort to reach K-12 students through dynamic creative learning opportunities presented by professional art partners such as live theater performances, music sessions, hands-on art workshops and more.

MKAF's community outreach initiatives provide cultural outreach programs through ArtsReach serving K-12 students, adults and children with special needs, at-risk youth, and through MKAF's Warrior Arts program serving active/veteran military.

For more information about becoming an MKAF member, sponsoring, volunteering to attending MKAF events, visit MKAF.org or call (850) 650-2226.



## Celebrate the Arts with *Festive Fall Events*

**Best of the Emerald Coast** \*MKAF is the 2024 Charity Beneficiary

OCT 10 | 6 PM | Grand Boulevard at Sandestin

**An Evening with Wendy Rodrigue**

OCT 11 | 6 PM | The Dugas Estate | Santa Rosa Beach

**Arty Kick Off Party & 29th Annual Festival of the Arts**

OCT 25 | 6 PM | Henderson Beach Resort | Destin

OCT 26 | 9 AM - 5 PM & OCT 27 | 10 AM - 4 PM | Dugas Pavilion Green in Destin

**mkaf**  
mattie kelly  
arts foundation

**Purchase Tickets at [MKAF.org/Events](https://www.mkaf.org/Events)**

Proceeds from all events benefit MKAF and its ArtsReach education and community engagement initiatives.



 Arts & Music

# The Northwest Florida Ballet Announces Season 55

## A celebration of 55 years of performing arts excellence on the Emerald Coast

The Northwest Florida Ballet (NFB) announces Season 55, a celebration of five and a half decades of excellence in performing arts, which includes Lightwire Theater's *Dino Light* at Grand Boulevard and *The Nutcracker* and *Cinderella* at the Mattie Kelly Arts Center featuring live music by the Northwest Florida Symphony Orchestra (NFSO).

The 2024-2025 season begins with Lightwire Theater's *Dino Light*, sponsored by Grand Boulevard's Coastal Culture Art, Entertainment and Events on Sat., Oct. 5 at 7:30 p.m. at Grand Boulevard in North Park. Free and open to the public, this original story features a famous scientist with magic powers who brings a friendly dinosaur to

life. Internationally recognized for their signature brand of electroluminescent artistry and poignant storytelling, Lightwire Theater has been featured as the winner of Tru TV's *Fake Off* first season and semi-finalists on America's Got Talent and ABC's *Game of Talents*.

Next, NFB makes its way to the Mattie Kelly Arts Center for the 45th annual productions of *The Nutcracker* on Fri. and Sat., Nov. 22 and 23 at 7:30 p.m. and Sun., Nov. 24 at 2:30 p.m. As the only full-length version of this delightful holiday fairytale in the area, NFB's *The Nutcracker* features a cast of more than 140 performers, including international guest artists and over 100 local children. The NFSO, led by NFB music

director and conductor David Ott, will provide live musical accompaniment for all public performances.

In the Spring, NFB returns to the Mattie Kelly Arts Center to conclude the season on Sat., March 8, at 7:30 p.m. and Sun., March 9, at 2:30 p.m. with *Cinderella*. With live music by the NFSO led by Ott, this beloved classic features the acclaimed choreography of NFB Artistic Director Todd Eric Allen and the beautiful music of Serge Prokofiev. NFB's *Cinderella* is presented in three acts and brings to life a cavalcade of enchanting characters, brilliant dancing, vibrant costumes and magical scenery sure to hold you under its spell.

"With the support of our



### CREATE with Big Orange House Designs Calendar

- |  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <b>Aug 1</b> - Glass Window Camp: 8 years and up \$74.90                                     | <b>Aug 6</b> - Dog Days Camp w/ JoJo & Donna. \$53.50       | sedesigns.com.<br>Want to book a private table in a class or host a party? Contact JoJo at 334-320-6658 or bigorangehousesedesigns@gmail.com.<br>bigorangehousesedesigns.com (850) 737-6193.<br>4652 Hwy. 20E, Pineapple Plaza, Bluewater Bay in Niceville |
| <b>Aug 2</b> - OPEN STUDIO GLASS ART 10-2: A fun OPEN STUDIO DAY CREATING Glass Art! \$26.75 | <b>Aug 7</b> - A Day at the Zoo w/ JoJo & Donna. \$53.50    |  |
| <b>Aug 3</b> - OPEN STUDIO GLASS ART 10-1: A fun OPEN STUDIO DAY CREATING Glass Art! \$26.75 | <b>Aug 8</b> - Back to School Camp w/ JoJo & Donna. \$53.50 |  |
|  | <b>Aug 14</b> - Sept 18: Daytime Pottery Series. \$267.50   |  |
- View remaining schedule and Book Classes at [bigorangehousesedesigns.com](http://bigorangehousesedesigns.com).

board of directors, staff, patrons and community partners, NFB is committed to our legacy of outstanding programming despite the significant budget cuts announced by our Governor last month. It is my sincere hope that the residents of our community and visitors to the

Emerald Coast join us as we celebrate our 55th season," said NFB Artistic Director and CEO Todd Eric Allen.

Season subscriptions will be available beginning Thurs., Aug. 1, and include tickets to *The Nutcracker* and *Cinderella* for \$80 per adult and \$37 per child (12 and under), a savings of more than 15% compared to box office prices. Season subscribers can also purchase VIP party tickets held after the opening night of *The Nutcracker* and *Cinderella* for \$25 each and receive a 10% discount for additional performance tickets. Individuals and families may also support NFB by purchasing memberships, which start at \$250 and include benefits ranging from dress rehearsal invitations to season subscriptions.

Visit [www.NFBallet.org](http://www.NFBallet.org) and NFB's Facebook page for subscription packages, individual ticket sales announcements and membership purchases. NFB is supported by Season Production Sponsor, the Mattie Kelly Arts Center; Season Signature Sponsors NFBJS Foot & Ankle Surgeon Dr. Sonya Ahmed, Bay Life (Life Media), Emerald Coast Magazine and *Scarlett Magazine* as well as Performance Co-Sponsor HCA Twin Cities Hospital.



**NORTHWEST FLORIDA BALLET**

*Celebrating 55 Years of Excellence*

**Lightwire Theater's Dino Light**  
October 5  
Grand Boulevard North Park

**The Nutcracker**  
November 22-24  
Mattie Kelly Arts Center

**Cinderella**  
March 8-9  
Mattie Kelly Arts Center

**24/25 Season Subscriptions On Sale Now!**

Season Sponsors:








[NFBallet.org](http://NFBallet.org)

**BAY BUZZ**

continued from page 16

Chapter DH, Fort Walton Beach, is one of more than 200 P.E.O. chapters in Florida, with members from Niceville, Bluewater Bay, Baker, Crestview, and South Walton County. For more information on the P.E.O. Sisterhood, visit [www.peointernational.org](http://www.peointernational.org).

**Baggage Claim Expansion at Destin-FWB Airport**

The Okaloosa Board of County Commissioners approved a \$16.6 million expansion of the Destin-FWB Airport baggage claim area. The project will add approximately 14,724 sq. ft. to the east end of the existing terminal and renovate another 12,732 sq. ft. of existing space. Not only will it improve passenger circulation, but it will also double rental car operations space and relocate airline baggage storage offices to make way for expanding the Emerald Coast Bar & Grill. “We’re excited to get this project going,” Airports Director Tracy Stage said. “With the latest bid coming in very favorable with a qualified contractor, the time is now to begin expanding the east side of the terminal to better facilitate rental car and baggage claim operations.”



**It's Official!**

Congratulations to this year’s new Captain Billy Bowlegs LXIX Michael Castleberry and his Queen Zabrina Horne! Each year a new Captain Billy Bowlegs and his queen are selected to sail the Blackhawk and the Krewe into uncharted seas. The new Billy is selected by the current year’s Captain after receiving the secret nominations from

a committee of the last seven Billys. The new Billy remains a secret for several months as he prepares for his year and his many decisions; he will choose the colors, and create a logo and theme to represent his vision for the new year.

**Teaching Children to Save in Our Community**

Eglin Federal Credit Union



(EFCU) partnered with Okaloosa Saves and The First Bank for the annual Teach Children to Save campaign April 1 – June 30. Youth were encouraged to set a savings goal and make a deposit into their savings account. Their names were entered into a random drawing for six children to win a \$50 deposit into their savings account from Okaloosa Saves. Winners were invited to the Okaloosa Board of County Commissioners board meeting on Tuesday, July 16 to receive their certificates and recognition.

This year, there were 106 youth from EFCU and six youth from The First Bank under the age of 18 who participated in the Okaloosa Saves Teach Children to Save campaign with deposits totaling \$20,169.64. Since the program began in 2004, 2,398 children made deposits totaling \$393,610.

The six winners were Calvin Hopper, Crestview; Keegan Hughes, Miramar Beach (The First Bank), not pictured; Emily Pear Kirkpatrick, Crestview, not pictured; Norrace Lampert, Niceville, Santana Stewart, Freeport and Anakin Tedder, Niceville.

Eglin Federal Credit Union President/CEO Jerry Williams said, “We look forward to offering this youth savings program every year because it is so important to teach children about the importance of saving. Eglin FCU has proudly partnered with Okaloosa Saves for 20 years to help provide financial education to our community, and we plan to continue this effort for years to come.”

Visit Okaloosa Saves on Facebook or <https://okaloosa-saves.wildapricot.org>.

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Northwest Florida State College is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) to award associate and baccalaureate degrees. Degree-granting institutions also may offer credentials such as certificates and diplomas at approved degree levels. Questions about the accreditation of Northwest Florida State College may be directed in writing to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges at 1866 Southern Lane, Decatur, GA 30033-4097, by calling (404) 679-4500, or by using information available on SACSCOC's website ([www.sacscoc.org](http://www.sacscoc.org)).