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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 4*



## 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

**GULFARIUM**  
*continued on page 20*



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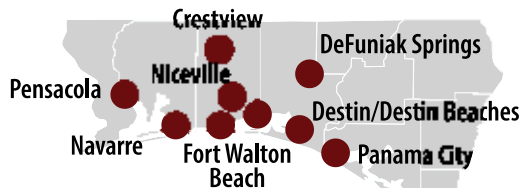
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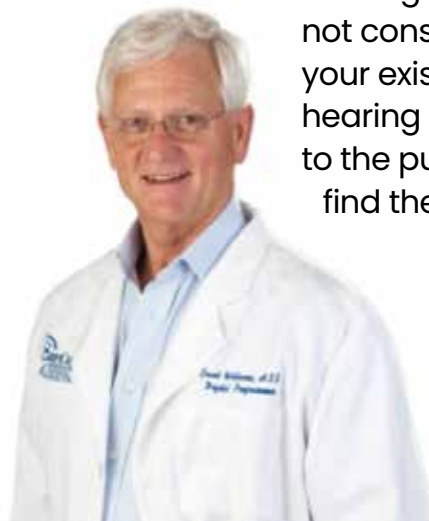
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# Mary Anne Windes for County Commissioner, District 5: Knowledge • Experience • Trust

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!




VOTE FOR MARY ANNE

WINDES

REPUBLICAN

---

FOR OKALOOSA COUNTY COMMISSIONER  
DISTRICT 5

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

Community

CHRIS LAMBERT

continued from page 1

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



erans, 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 abil-

ity 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



PHOTOS COURTESY JOJO STEVENSON, JOJO’S COFFEE & GOODNESS

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. (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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# 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**  
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 Community

# 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 forces 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 freestanding emergency rooms, an inpatient rehabilitation facility.

During the celebration, Chaplain Ray Sansom led a prayer and blessing, reflecting on the hospital'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

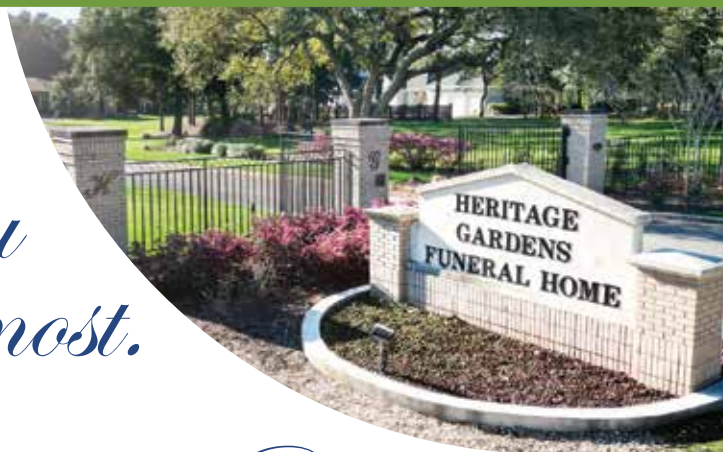
helps remove financial barriers for our nursing and radiography students, ensuring we can serve our community's needs effectively."

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).

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**Publisher/Executive Editor**  
Lori Leath Smith  
[Lori@LifeMediaGrp.com](mailto:Lori@LifeMediaGrp.com)

**Director, Advertising Sales**  
Scott Miller  
[Scott@LifeMediaGrp.com](mailto:Scott@LifeMediaGrp.com)

**Production & Layout**  
Kim Harper

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**Writers**  
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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.

port 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).*

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 Community

# Bay Buzz

## 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 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](mailto:ehilly@cox.net) or 850 855-6193.

Members of **P.E.O. Chapter DH, Florida**, gathered in early June to celebrate Meya Martin, Niceville High School graduate, and Sophie Palm, Baker School graduate, 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 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



P.E.O. Chapter DH, Florida. (L to R) Hostess Janice Lacefield; Meya Martin, STAR scholarship winner; Marianne Habersbusch; 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.

together more than half a million women in the U.S. and

*Continued on page 19*



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<b>Elevate Rate 2</b>	0.75%	0.75%	1.24%	1.25%
<b>Elevate Rate 1</b>	0.50%	0.50%	1.24%	1.25%

\*When Elevate Checking eligibility requirement and additional options are met, the interest rate on account and corresponding annual percentage yield (APY) will vary based on the current applicable rates and tiers. When the Elevate Checking eligibility requirement is not met, the account will not earn interest. Must meet certain criteria to qualify. 3.50% APY will not be paid if all criteria are not met. Must complete a minimum of 15 posted and cleared debit card Point-of-Sale (POS) purchases per statement cycle to be eligible to receive Elevate Rate 1. Options to increase your rate include access online or mobile banking at least once per statement cycle, enroll and receive eStatements, ACH Direct Deposit(s) of at least \$500.00 per statement cycle, maintain minimum daily balance of \$1,000.00 in United Fidelity Bank personal savings or money market account. Meet any 1 additional Elevate Checking option to receive Elevate Rate 2. Meet any 2 additional Elevate Checking options to receive Elevate Rate 3. Meet any 3 additional Elevate Checking options to receive Elevate Rate 4. Meet any 4 additional Elevate Checking options to receive Elevate Rate 5. Eligibility requirements of Elevate Rate 1 must be met in addition to requirements for each additional Elevate Rate option. Rates and APY for each tier may change at any time without notice after the account is opened. APY is accurate as of 06/01/2024. \$25 minimum deposit required to open. Fees or other conditions could reduce earnings on account. Monthly service fee of \$5 if balance drops below \$500 any day during the statement cycle. Program rates, terms, and conditions are subject to change without notice. Paper statement fee of \$5 if eStatements not utilized. **Member FDIC**

Community

# 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.



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.

"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.

### "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."

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

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 become 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

### 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, commercial, 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

*Continued on page 12*

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 Community

# 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 retired 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 others 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)

## FREEDOM TECH CENTER

*continued from page 10*

enhancing the quality of life for residents and visitors alike.

### Praise from the Community

President and CEO of the 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.



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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 Aug. 10 – Aug. 17th**  
Okaloosa County

- 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 County
- 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>
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# Education News

## 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 Mid-



dle 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 appoint-

ment 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. For more information on assessment results, visit <https://www.fldoe.org/accountability/assessments/k-12-student-assessment/results/2024.stml>.

## 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 Saturday, August 3, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Walmart - Niceville (1300 E. John Sims Pkwy E)

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, 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.

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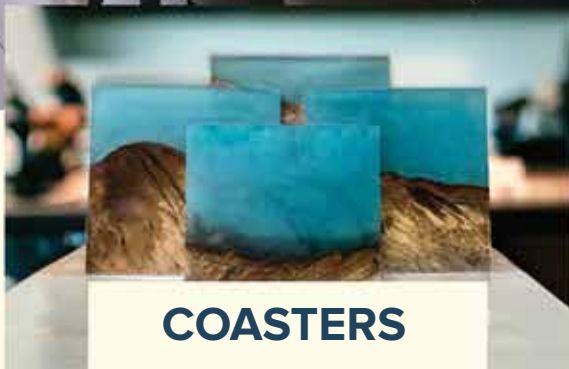
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 **Military**

# 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 comforting 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.”

Brig. Gen. Massaro, a seasoned command pilot with over 2,200 combat hours, began his test pilot career in 2007 with Eglin’s 40th Flight Test Squadron. His extensive experience includes deployments supporting Allied Force, Southern Watch, Iraqi Freedom, and Enduring Freedom operations. As the new commander, he leads over 10,000

military personnel, civilians, and contractors. The wing is responsible for the developmental 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 commander, 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



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

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

The event concluded with the 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.

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

guished 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 others are unable to do or unwilling to attempt. We must remain ready to fight tonight, just like our teammates currently in the fight down-range," 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.

## SOF MISSIONS

*continued from previous page*

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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Locally owned and operated since inception in 1982, Fudpucker's restaurant stands out by being dedicated to its owners' three favorite "F" words: Food, Fun and Family. Featuring live alligators, family entertainment and teen nights, Fudpucker's is the only place in Destin where you can see, feed and even get your picture taken with a live alligator, shop for "World

Famous" t-shirts, write your names on the walls, play arcade games and enjoy quality casual food in an upbeat and family friendly atmosphere. There's even a special kids' menu and a playground with lots of space to play. Stop by Fudpucker's Destin for a relaxing meal, a cold drink and a friendly locals' smile. Fudpucker's is not just a restaurant, it's not just a bar, and it's certainly not just a "tourist" place – it's a one-of-a-kind en-

tertainment 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.

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fudpucker.com

made smoked jalapeño beef bologna, bacon, house smoked barbecue or ham. Cinnamon rolls and kolaches still hold the top spot for sell outs. Stop in for featured muffins, coffee cake or pound cake, which go great with maple cinnamon latte or caramel macchiato. And, oh, the freshly roasted coffee. Get what you're craving! Order ahead and pick up some for the office or breakfast to start your day off right!

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

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

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Landsharkspizza.com

## LJ Schooners Docksideside Restaurant

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

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

*Continued on next page*



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## JoJo's Coffee and Goodness

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

## Landshark's Pizza

Hungry? Thirsty? Maybe a little of both? Come in and visit Landshark's Pizza. Owners Brian and Sue Hassmann have created a Niceville locals' favorite pizza, buffalo wings and sports pub and bar that serves can't-beat, handmade-dough pizza and wings with the craziest selection of wing sauces and rubs you'll find—plus many other scrumptious eats for folks of all ages. There's plenty of seating for everyone and TVs galore, plus fun and games all week long. Sports fans from all over come and watch all your favorite teams on countless regional and national sports networks. Now it pays to show up a little early to get your favorite seat and to save a buck on all beer and wine from 3-6 p.m. Tuesday - Friday. Having teamed up with Props



**LJ SCHOONERS**  
Docksideside Restaurant & Oyster/Bar

Bluewater Bay MARINA

## 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  
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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.

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

Sun, 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

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## BAY BUZZ

continued from page 8

Canada who are passionate about helping women advance through education while supporting and motivating them.

Meya 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.

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).

## 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.

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).

## 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 cur-

rent 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 Chil-

dren 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.

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



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**Off the Hook**

**GULFARIUM**

*continued from page 1*

ium C.A.R.E. Center Foundation, the event showcased the successful rehabilitation efforts and ongoing commitment to protecting marine wildlife.

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 State 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



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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 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.

**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.

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

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:



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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, shooting 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!

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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 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 getting 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!

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."

For a no cost, low risk, free consultation, please call at 850-373-4450.

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Wellness

# 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 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 impor-

tance; 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 pa-

tients 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 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



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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 conditions, 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.

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# 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, relation-

ship 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, develop 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](http://Journeybravely.com) for counseling and coaching.

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- Would you like to change the way your teeth or gums are shaped?
- Do you have gaps or spaces in between your teeth?

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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 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 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.

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## 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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# Sean of the 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.

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 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 termi-

nating 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, surviving on vending machine food, actually began chuckling.

The businessman was laughing too, when he said, "Okay, then I am doing WELL, and

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.*

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Musing



BY PASTOR DOUG STAUFFER

Did you know that the Bible says that God intended elected representatives to be “God’s ministers” (**Romans 13:6**)? It even explicitly states HOW they are to provide for the welfare of others: Each politician is to be “a minister of God to thee for good” (**Romans 13:4**). As we approach the upcoming primary election, Christians should reflect on their per-

sonal responsibility of electing God-fearing American patriots. Okaloosa County’s PRIMARY ELECTION will determine the Sheriff, three County Commissioners, the school board race, and the State Committeewoman and Committeeman.

Voting is not merely a civic duty but a moral obligation that aligns with the teachings of the Bible. Yet, the turnout in non-presidential elections is 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 Pastor’s Ponderings: The Duty and Moral Obligation of Voting

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!**

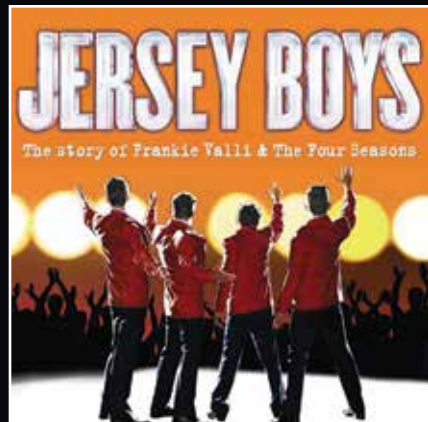
May God bless America and guide us in this important civic duty and responsibility. The primary election is on August 20th, with early voting the week before (August 10th to the 17th). You can view a list of candidates at [www.govote-okaloosa.com](http://www.govote-okaloosa.com). Look closely; you might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

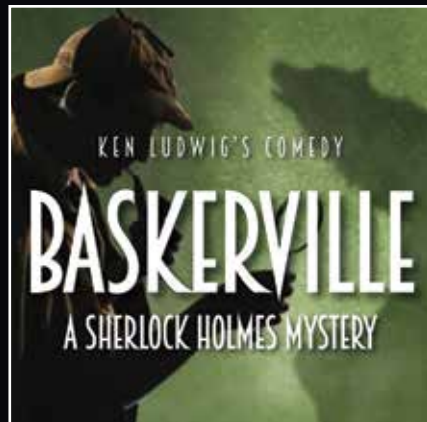
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# MKAF Awarded \$30,000 National Grant by Emeril Lagasse Foundation

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.



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Join us for a spectacular evening with award-winning Broadway star and television actress Alysha Umphress. With impeccable vocals, magnetic storytelling, and contagious charisma, Umphress captivates. Her undeniable talent has been showcased in *On the Town* (Tony nomination), *American Idiot* (Grammy Award), *Smokey Joe's Café* (Chita Rivera Award), and the world premiere of *Beaches* (Helen Hayes nomination). Come and experience the magic of Alysha Umphress live on stage!

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

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Arts & Music

# ECTC Opens Registration for Fall 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).

"ECTC is elevating the game this fall. We have new classes, old favorites, and a show our students have been begging for - *Shrek the Musical*! This semes-



ter is going to be magic! We hope to see everyone on stage with us!" - Heath Carroll, Director of Education

*Shrek the Musical*, the Tony Award-winning musical features your favorite Ogre and all of his fairytale friends as they fight 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 phenom-

non. 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).

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**Aug 6** - Dog Days Camp w/ JoJo & Donna. \$53.50

**Aug 7** - A Day at the Zoo w/ JoJo & Donna. \$53.50

**Aug 8** - Back to School Camp w/ JoJo & Donna. \$53.50

**Aug 14** - Sept 18: Daytime Pottery Series. \$267.50

View remaining schedule and Book Classes at [bigorangehousesdesigns.com](http://bigorangehousesdesigns.com).

Want to book a private table in a class or host a party? Contact JoJo at 334-320-6658 or [bigorangehousesdesigns@gmail.com](mailto:bigorangehousesdesigns@gmail.com). [bigorangehousesdesigns.com](http://bigorangehousesdesigns.com) (850) 737-6193. 4652 Hwy. 20E, Pineapple Plaza, Bluewater Bay in Niceville



## 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

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mattie kelly  
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Purchase Tickets at [MKAF.org/Events](http://MKAF.org/Events)

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

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SCAN ME

# 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 board of directors, staff, pa-

trons 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 & An-

kle Surgeon Dr. Sonya Ahmed, Bay Life (Life Media), Emerald Coast Magazine and Scarlett Magazine as well as Performance Co-Sponsor HCA Twin Cities Hospital.

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