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Honoring Our Heroes: Okaloosa County Wreaths Across America

By "DOC" DOUG STAUFFER

On Saturday, December 14, 2024, the Beal Cemetery, Gulf Cemetery, Heritage Gardens, Destin Memorial Cemetery and Sunset Cemetery will join more than 3,000 cemeteries nationwide for the annual Wreaths Across America Ceremony. These local events are more than just part of a national program; for many in Okaloosa County, they are deeply personal and significant. The ceremonies include nationally coordinated moments of silence, followed by laying wreaths on veterans' graves as a simple gesture of gratitude.

While many are familiar with the wreaths program at Arlington National Cemetery, communities throughout America also participate in this solemn tradition. Here in Okaloosa County, Wreaths Across America is a community effort that honors our local veterans and ensures their sacrifices are remembered and never forgotten.



Local volunteers play a crucial role in making this event possible. In **Fort Walton Beach**, Tom Rice, owner of Magnolia Grill, is a key figure in the Wreaths Across America event. Rice has been instrumental in bringing this event to Beal Memorial Cemetery. He shares that their target goal for wreaths increases annually, with just over 2,000 wreaths expected to be laid at Beal this December. "This

year marks the sixth year that veterans buried at Beal Memorial Cemetery will receive wreaths," Rice explains. "There's never a day that goes by without a blue tent being raised for a veteran laid to rest at Beal Cemetery. No matter when or where they served, they need to be honored, and that's the goal."

The Beal Memorial Cemetery ceremony is a meaningful event showcasing the

collaboration between the community and local businesses. Tom Rice highlights the importance of this collective effort: "It takes a community effort." For instance, the City Produce Company helps by keeping the wreaths in cold storage, and Step One Automotive staff delivers them to the cemetery the day before placement. Last year, nearly 300 volunteers participated, and Rice notes that support continues to grow, with more people stepping up each year. The logistics coordinator, Retired CMSgt Dennis Krebs, expertly manages the staging of volunteers, serves as the NCOIC for Placement Day, and oversees the post-Christmas cleanup of the wreaths at the cemetery.

The 30-minute ceremony will feature remarks by Brigadier General Mark A. Massaro, 96th Test Wing Commander, and the unveil-

WREATHS
continued on page 2

A Conversation with The Conductor

Discover how Sinfonia Gulf Coast is redefining the symphony experience in its 2024-2025 season — with powerhouse performances, innovative concerts and can't-miss events — in this exclusive Q&A.

By ZANDRA WOLFGRAM

For the 19th season you are once again "redefining the symphony experience" with fresh offerings. Tell us about the first concert of the season, Luminescence: Catalyst by Candlelight on November 7.

Sinfonia is no stranger to unique performance offerings and, in fact, staged "candlelight" concerts over 10 seasons ago when we were performing in Rosemary Beach Town Hall. We had the opportunity to perform in the charming Seaside Chapel and the only thing that could illuminate the musicianship and pedigree of Grammy Award-winning Catalyst Quartet is candles. It is the perfect back drop to do this

SINFONIA
continued on page 36



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Community

WREATHS

continued from page 1

ing of wreaths for each military branch, including a new wreath for the Space Force. Wreaths will also be placed in honor of POW/MIA veterans and Gold Star families. Among the attendees will be State Representative Patt Maney, a retired judge and Army Brigadier General, who will raise the Gold Star wreath. Tom Rice, who served as Maney's First Sergeant in the Army, reflects on the deep meaning of these ceremonies, adding that "honoring all military services is essential."

"When the wreath is placed," Rice explains, "the individual performing the placement either gives a hand salute if they served in the military or places their hand over their heart if they did not. It's a powerful moment of respect." With each veteran's wreath placed by a volunteer, he or she is asked to "say

their name" to ensure that the legacy of duty, service, and sacrifice is never forgotten.

This year also marks the 10th anniversary of the casting of the Veterans Tribute Bell, which will be rung as part of the ceremony. The bell, housed in the Veterans Tribute Tower, further symbolizes the community's dedication to honoring veterans.

Dora Carrano, who helps coordinate the local Wreaths Across America efforts in **Niceville** and **Valparaiso**, brings a unique, personal perspective. She comes from a multi-generational military family. "This has given me a deep appreciation for the military, our service members and the sacrifices they make. Bringing Wreaths Across America to our area gives me and others within the community the opportunity to honor our local veterans, their service and their sacrifice."

Therese Baker and her son Gaige are dedicated volunteers

at the Heritage Gardens and Sunset Cemetery in Niceville. Their participation is not just about the wreaths; it's about honoring the memory of loved ones like Dave, Therese's late husband, and others throughout America who have served. "People often hear about the large ceremonies at national cemeteries, but aren't aware that communities do this locally as well," Therese shared. "Gaige and I do it to honor Dave and those like him who served for us." Wreaths are \$17 and 1,500 graves need sponsorship. You can join the ceremony on Dec. 14 at 11 a.m. at Heritage Gardens Funeral Home-Cemetery. Wreath placement immediately follows. Contact Dora at wreathsacrossamerica850@gmail.com for more information.

In **Destin**, the American Legion Auxiliary Unit 296 and community volunteers will place wreaths at every veteran's grave in both the Destin Memorial



and Marler cemeteries. "We remember the fallen, honor those who serve and teach about freedom," says Corlene Ziegler, president, American Legion Auxiliary Unit 296. "No matter the weather, they come—all ages, from all walks of life to honor the lives of the veterans who served. Parents bring their children so they can learn about service and sacrifice."

Wreaths Across America is not merely a one-day event; it is a powerful mission woven into the fabric of our community—a mission to remember the fallen, honor those who serve and impart the profound value of freedom to the next generation. As we gather this year at local cemeteries, we are reminded that each wreath laid represents more than a gesture; it is a living tribute to our veterans' courage, sacrifice and legacy. Each live, balsam remembrance wreath is a gift of respect and appreciation, donated by a private citizen or organization and placed on the graves by volunteers as a small gesture of gratitude for the freedoms Americans enjoy. Including children in this sol-

emn act makes it a moment of remembrance and a family tradition that instills reverence for those who have safeguarded our freedoms.

Supporting Wreaths Across America in Okaloosa County offers more than just an opportunity to give back; it provides a chance to ensure that the legacies of our local heroes live on. Whether you sponsor a wreath, volunteer or attend the ceremonies to pay your respects, you contribute to a cause that transcends generations. Through this shared commitment, we ensure that the stories of our veterans are not forgotten but carried forward—reminding us all that freedom is both a gift and a responsibility we must pass down with honor.

For those interested in supporting the local Wreaths Across America efforts, you can sponsor a wreath, volunteer or attend the local ceremony to pay your respects. To sponsor a wreath, visit wreathsacrossamerica.org. Find your location and ceremony and click the red sponsor button.

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Be a Hometown Hero This Holiday Season

By CHRISTOPHER MANSON

Good news! There are plenty of opportunities to be a Hometown Hero this holiday season by donating, volunteering or simply spreading the good word about our local nonprofits making a huge impact in our community. Here are just a few ways you can make the holidays a lot brighter for those in need:

On Sunday, Nov. 17, join the **45th Annual Toys 4 Tots Ride** on the Emerald Coast taking place at Niceville's Mullet Festival Grounds and benefiting ECCAC and Children in Crisis. Volunteers are needed to host "mini games" and assist with the raffle drawing. Kick off



at Emerald Coast Harley-Davidson at 8:30 a.m. Bring \$10 per person and a new toy or gift card to donate. End at the Mullet Festival grounds for bike games, a best-decorated bike contest, a car and truck show, a 50/50 drawing, DJ Anthony, delicious food trucks, and over 100 prizes! Jeeps and Corvettes, join the fun too!

A Bed 4 Me provides a full bedding kit at no cost to local children and families in Okaloosa and Walton Counties. You can volunteer to help with bed delivery assistance, fundraising event support or to host bedding drives. To volunteer, email diane@abed4me.org or send a message at abed4me.org. A Bed 4 Me also accepts in-kind donations; a wish list is posted on the website and you can always donate new, standard size sleeping pillows, Amazon and Walmart gift cards.

Freeport Christmas Angels is accepting applicants from families living in the Freeport area. The organization's annual Christmas store will be open for business at Heritage Church of Freeport Dec. 21 and 22. Families can apply by emailing name, address, email, phone number, and first names and

ages of children to Freeport-ChristmasAngels@gmail.com.

Town Planters help less fortunate families in Freeport with Christmas gifts and food. The organization asks that families apply by mid-November. Learn more at townplanterssociety.com. The Town Planters and Freeport residents ensure that wish list items are gathered and gifted to families along with a memorable holiday dinner. Pick up your "angel" at the Angel Tree on display at Freeport City Hall.

You can help **Sharing & Caring of Niceville** by volunteering; making a financial donation directly; organizing a

food drive at your church, place of business, recreational club or group of friends; or by making a pledge through the United Way or Combined Federal Campaign. Learn more at sharing-n-caring.org.

CALM (Crisis Aid for Littles and Moms) depends on the Niceville community to maintain a safe place for mothers and children in crisis situations. Donations provide shelter, provisions and guidance for women seeking a better way of life for themselves and their kids. Holiday donations (make checks payable to CALM Organization Inc.) can be mailed to CALM Organization Inc., 201 Redwood Avenue, Niceville, FL 32578. nicevillecalm.com.

Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center's (eccac.org) Christmas Toy Drive has begun! Bring joy to area kiddos and help ECCAC stock its toy room for its families and agency partners to "shop"! Choose from ECCAC's wish list (https://www.amazon.com/hz/wishlist/ls/2XKK-TQUNU5BED?ref_=list_d_wl_lfu_nav_5) or (<https://files.constantcontact.com/30ac9a4b301/1cbdb057-f224-46bb-9cfc-3a7b414433a7.pdf>).

Every contribution makes a difference in ending abuse and restoring childhood one child at a time. Contact Hailey (Hailey@eccac.org) to schedule your drop-off.

Food for Thought (fftl.org) is gearing up for the holidays and its annual food services. The nonprofit's Holiday

Food List includes instant potatoes, stuffing, cornbread mix, canned vegetables, dry beans, rice, macaroni and cheese, pasta and sauce, cereal, pancake mix, boxed milk and juice. Individuals and local businesses are encouraged to drop off food items for holiday meals at Food for Thought's Destin or San-

ta Rosa Beach pantries. Email support@fftl.org to learn more.

This is just a small sample of the worthy charities in the BAY LIFE readership area. We encourage you to search online for additional opportunities to help others this holiday season! They need you and you'll be glad you did!



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Community

Why Vote "Yes" on the Okaloosa County Referendum

BY "DOC" DOUG STAUFFER

As the November 5 general election approaches, voters in Okaloosa County are presented with a unique opportunity to strengthen the local economy through the renewal of the Economic Development Ad Valorem Tax Exemption (EDATE) program. This initiative, initially adopted in 1981 and requiring reauthorization every 10 years, plays a pivotal role in attracting new businesses to the area and supporting the expansion of existing ones. By offering temporary property tax exemptions, EDATE incentivizes companies to create higher-paying jobs, invest in facility improvements, and contribute to the overall growth of our community.

A "Yes" vote on the referendum is not just a vote for jobs; it's a vote for a more prosperous future for Okaloosa County. Renewing the EDATE program is essential for our county's economic health.

The Proven Success of EDATE

Since its inception, the EDATE program has delivered

significant returns to Okaloosa County. Between 2014 and 2024 alone, the program facilitated the creation of 317 jobs and contributed \$19.1 million in local payroll. The University of West Florida Haas Center's report on the program revealed that EDATE produced a remarkable 663% return on investment for the county. This means that for every dollar exempted in taxes, the county gained over SIX dollars in economic benefit through increased business investment, job creation and tax revenue.

In addition to these impressive economic returns, the program helped bring vital businesses to the area. These businesses not only created jobs but also contributed to the diversification and resilience of Okaloosa County's economy.

Supporting High-Wage Job Creation

One of the most compelling aspects of EDATE is its focus on high-quality, high-wage job creation. The program requires that businesses benefiting from the tax exemption create jobs

that pay at least 110% of the county's average wage. This ensures that the jobs generated through EDATE are numerous and offer competitive salaries that contribute to the financial well-being of local workers.

Strengthening Okaloosa County's Competitive Position

In today's globalized economy, businesses have many options when choosing where to invest and expand. Neighboring counties such as Escambia, Santa Rosa, Walton, and Covington County in Alabama offer similar tax incentives to attract businesses. If Okaloosa County were to forgo EDATE, it would be at a significant disadvantage compared to these neighboring regions.

Nathan Sparks, Executive Director of One Okaloosa Economic Development Council, highlights this competitive dynamic, noting that "businesses have a choice as to where they invest." By renewing EDATE, Okaloosa County can remain competitive in attracting new businesses and retaining existing ones, ensuring that high-paying



jobs continue to flow into the area rather than to other counties or states.

A Smart Investment for the Future

Critics of the EDATE program may argue that it represents a loss of tax revenue, but this view overlooks the program's long-term economic benefits. The county does not lose existing tax revenue when businesses qualify for EDATE. Instead, it forgoes a portion of future property tax revenue that would NOT have existed without the business's investment in new facilities or equipment.

Moreover, the jobs and investments generated by EDATE bring additional tax revenue to the county through sales tax-

es and other local assessments. This new economic activity supports local infrastructure, education, and public services, making EDATE a wise investment for the future of Okaloosa County.

Commissioner Paul Mixon, a referendum supporter, emphasizes that EDATE is "important in keeping Okaloosa County competitive with neighboring areas," noting that without the program, the county risks losing out on vital business investment and job creation opportunities. While some, like Commissioner Nathan Boyles, have expressed concerns about the program's effectiveness, the data clearly shows that EDATE has delivered substantial returns on investment and has been a critical tool in fostering local economic growth.

What Happens If EDATE Is Not Renewed?

Without the EDATE program, Okaloosa County would lose a valuable tool for attracting and retaining businesses.

Continued on page 26

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Menopause The Musical 2
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FEBRUARY 1, 2025
The Addams Family
7 P.M.

FEBRUARY 22, 2025
Boating 20s
7 P.M.

APRIL 12, 2025
ODE TO JOY
7 P.M.

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'Tis the Season... Santa's Back in Town and More!

BY CHRISTOPHER MANSON

Thursday, Nov. 7
Sinfonia Gulf Coast
Presents Catalyst Quartet
Seaside Chapel, Santa Rosa Beach, 7:30 p.m.
SinfoniaGulfCoast.org

The 2024-25 season lights up 30A with "Luminescence: Catalyst by Candlelight," an intimate performance by the Grammy Award-winning Catalyst Quartet. The program – set against the beautifully candlelit Seaside Chapel – includes three pieces by Paquito D'Rivera, Astor Piazzolla's "Suite del Angel," George Gershwin's "Lullaby," and Maurice Ravel's "String Quartet in F Major."

Tickets are \$65 per person. Purchase online or call 850.460.8800. Seating is limited.

Friday, Nov. 22
Santa's Arrival and Tree Lighting
Destin Commons, 6-8 p.m.
destincommons.com

A magical holiday celebration for all ages, with face painting, complimentary photo booth, balloon sculpting, Santa's sleigh, and a fireworks finale.

Friday, Nov. 22
 Saturday, Nov. 23
 Sunday, Nov. 24
Northwest Florida Ballet's "The Nutcracker"
Mattie Kelly Arts Center, Niceville, 7:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday; 2:30 p.m. Sunday
nfballet.org

The 45th annual production of the classic seasonal fairytale, and the only full-length version presented on the Emerald Coast. Features a cast of more than 140 performers, including international guest artists and over 100 local children. Music performed by the Northwest Florida Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Dr. David Ott.

Tickets are \$48 for adults and \$22 for children ages 12 and under. Purchase tickets online.



Saturday, Nov. 23
Christmas Festival of Lights
The Windmills at Hammock Bay, Freeport, 3-6 p.m.
hammockbayfl.com

Celebrate the holiday season with a FREE family-friendly spectacular.

Saturday, Nov. 30
Here Comes Santa Claus
The Village of Baytowne Wharf, Sandestin, 6-9 p.m.

Cheer Santa on as he makes his way to Baytowne and watch

as he lights the Village tree! Enjoy face-painting, kids crafts and a beautiful fireworks display!

Santa's Arrival
HarborWalk Village, Destin, 12:30-4 p.m.
emeraldgrande.com

Mr. Ho-ho-ho hits the Destin Harbor, with a parade at 12:30, followed by visits with the kiddos and a special holiday performance from 1 to 4 p.m.

Holiday Craft Fair
The Preserve: A Bluewater Tap Room, Niceville, 11 a.m.-3 p.m.
thepreserve850@gmail.com

Email Heather at the address above for more info. Eats to be provided Cousins Maine Lobster food truck.

Wednesday, Dec. 4
Holiday Concert Series and Visits With Santa
The Village of Baytowne Wharf, Miramar Beach, 6-8 p.m.
baytownewharf.com

Holiday classics and quality time with Mr. Claus.

Thursday, Dec. 5
Free Pop-Up Movie Night: "Tim Burton's The Nightmare Before Christmas"

Yoga by You Studio, Niceville, 5:30 p.m.
yogabyyouniceville.com

Director Henry Selick's beloved stop-motion animated movie, with complimentary popcorn and ciders. FREE yoga class passes for newcomers attending the screening.

Friday, Dec. 6
Holiday Pops: Christmas On Broadway
Mattie Kelly Arts Center, Niceville, 7-9 p.m.
mattiekellyartscenter.org

The popular symphony event features Broadway actress-singer Grace Morgan, with favorites from the Great White Way and Disney, along with holiday classics. Also – the Northwest Flor-

Continued on page 8



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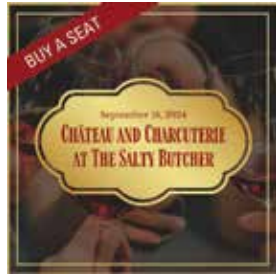
Happenings Around the Bay

2024
EVENTS

NOVEMBER

- 01** Greater FWB Chamber First Friday Coffee
7 am | Christian Life Center at First Baptist Church | FWB
Live Music: Martin Lane
6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville
- 02** Dinner in the Courtyard
5:30 pm | Niceville Senior Center Courtyard | Niceville
- 03** Niceville Young Professionals Lunch Meeting
11:30 am | Niceville Valparaiso Chamber Office | Niceville
- 06** The Real Truth about Pocahontas
9:30 am | NWFL Heritage Museum | Valparaiso
Growing Green Families Knit/Crochet Night
6 pm | Growing Green Families | Valparaiso
Chess Night
6 pm | LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant | Niceville
- 07** Luminescence: Catalyst by Candlelight
7:30 pm | Seaside Chapel | Seaside
- 07-09** Emerald Coast PCA Rodeo
6:30 pm | Northwest Florida State College | Niceville
- 08** 30A BBQ Festival
5 pm | Grand Boulevard at Sandestin | Miramar Beach
- 09** City of Niceville's Veterans Day Parade
10 am | John Sims Parkway & Partin Drive | Niceville
Farling Fall Festival
4-8 pm | Perrine Park | Valparaiso
7th Annual Golf Benefit/Veterans Foreign Wars
8 am | Blackstone Golf Course | Defuniak Springs
- 10** CAA's Flutterby Arts Festival
10 am-4 pm | Watersound Town Center | SRB
Women's Climbing Circle
5 pm | Rock Out Climbing Gym | Destin
- 13** Niceville Valparaiso Chamber Second Wednesday Breakfast
7:15 am | Niceville Community Center | Niceville
Humanities, Fine & Performing Arts: Recital
6 pm | Tyler Recital Hall - Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville
- 14** Niceville Valparaiso Chamber Business After Hours
5 pm | BayArea Awards and Engraving | Niceville
United We Worship Tour
7 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville
- 16** Freeport Night Out
4-8 pm | Props Brewery | Freeport
North Bay Mercantile Holiday Fun
10 am - 6 pm | North Bay Mercantile | Freeport

- 18** Glock Sport Shooting Foundation (GSSF) Indoor League
10 am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso
Chateau and Charcuterie with Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation
5 pm | The Salty Butcher 30A | Santa Rosa Beach



- 21** Greater FWB Chamber Business After Hours
5:30 pm | Home2 Suites by Hilton FWB | FWB
- 22** Hometown Holiday Parade & Celebration
5 pm | Grand Boulevard at Sandestin | Miramar Beach
- 22-23** The Nutcracker presented by Northwest Florida Ballet
7:30 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville
- 24** Thanksgiving Boulderling Competition
10 am | Rock Out Climbing Gym | Destin



The Nutcracker presented by Northwest Florida Ballet
2:30 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville

Emerald Coast Auburn Club Game Watching Party | Times Vary
Saturdays at Gulf Coast Burger Co. | Destin Commons

'Tis the Season for Santa!
Friday, Nov. 22
SANTA'S ARRIVAL AND TREE LIGHTING
Destin Commons, 6-8 p.m.
Saturday, Nov. 30
HERE COMES SANTA CLAUS
The Village of Baytowne Wharf, Sandestin, 6-9 p.m.
Saturday, Nov. 30
SANTA'S ARRIVAL
HarborWalk Village, Destin, 12:30-4 p.m.

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
Yoga at Turkey Creek
9 am | Sat | Turkey Creek Nature Trail | Niceville
Brunch on the Bayou
9 am | Sun | LJ Schooners Restaurant | Niceville

FARMERS MARKETS
Niceville Community
Saturdays | 9 am - 1 pm
Palm Plaza | Niceville
Hammock Bay
1st & 3rd Sundays | 8 am
Victory Blvd | Freeport
Grand Boulevard
Saturdays | 9 am - 1 pm
Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach

Frances
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Don't Miss!
The Next BiG Thing Conference | Nov 4-5
2:30 pm | Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa
WaltonAreaChamber.com/the-next-big-thing/

 **Community**

HOLIDAY HAPPENINGS

continued from page 6

ida Symphony Orchestra Chorale, Unified Gospel Choir and Voices of Northwest Florida.

Cost is \$45 for adults and \$16 for youth ages 18 and under and military.

Call 850.729.6000 for tickets.

Saturday, Dec. 7
2024 Niceville-Valparaiso Community Christmas Parade

City of Niceville, 10 a.m.
nicevillevalparaisorotary.org

This year's theme is "The Magic of Christmas." Visit the event page on Facebook for rules and registration info.

Monday, Dec. 9
Niceville High School Chorus Holiday Concert

Mattie Kelly Arts Center, Niceville, 7 p.m.
gofan.co

All seven (!) NHS choruses – teachers, local elementary and middle school talents, and more – are joined by professional instrumentalists. Plus, special guests The Ruckel Middle



School Envoys Chorus. Tickets are \$10 through Dec. 1 and \$15 after.

Bay, Freeport, 10 a.m.-1 p.m.

propsbrewery.com

Brunch and photos with Santa Claus.

Wednesday, Dec. 11
Holiday Concert Series and Visits With Santa

The Village of Baytowne Wharf, Miramar Beach, 6-8 p.m.

baytownewharf.com

Holiday classics and quality time with Mr. Claus.

Wednesday, Dec. 18
Holiday Concert Series and Visits With Santa

The Village of Baytowne Wharf, Miramar Beach, 6-8 p.m.

baytownewharf.com

Holiday classics and quality time with Mr. Claus.

Saturday, Dec. 14
Breakfast With Santa

Props Brewery Hammock



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Price is per person, based on double occupancy. Single room supplement \$645.

Air departure tax, fuel & surcharges if applicable, are subject to change until entire group is confirmed and ticketed. — Optional Travel Protection Insurance is available and payment is due at time of deposit. —

NOTE: Depart North America for Dublin overnight the day before the tour start date.

Discover the romance of Connemara, castles, and monastic ruins as you take in some of Ireland's most stunning countryside and culture.

Day 1: Dublin City Tour | EPIC The Irish Emigration Museum

Day 2: Glendalough | Johnstown Castle

Day 3: House of Waterford Crystal | Jameson Distillery

Day 4: Jaunting Car Ride | Ring of Kerry Highlights | Kenmare

Day 5: Cliffs of Moher | Galway

Day 6: Connemara | Kylemore Abbey | Sheepdog Demonstration

Day 7: Clonmacnoise | Irish Night

Day 8: Independent Touring in Dublin

Day 9: Tour ends in Dublin



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Don't miss "The Next BIG Thing," Walton Area Chamber's two-day annual conference Nov. 4-5th at the Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort and Spa. Tickets are \$200 for chamber members and \$250 for the public, with two-day passes also available for \$225 (member) and \$275 (public) available at <https://www.waltonareachamber.com/the-next-big-thing/>.

Attendees will choose from a diverse lineup of breakout sessions throughout the day in Leadership Development, Entrepreneurship and Women in Business.

The conference will commence with special experiences like complimentary headshots by Epic Photo Co., Mingle & Mimosas, and a coffee bar during check-in at 8 a.m., followed by a light breakfast and networking opportunities in the Vendor Hall. The first day will conclude with a cocktail reception offering light bites, cocktails,

and exciting raffle prizes. The conference will continue on the second day with additional elevated breakout sessions, a workshop, brunch and more enriching activities.

Keynote Speakers include Juanita McDowell (Mastering Achievement in Business & Life and Using AI in Business) and Dr. Rick Goodman (Living a Championship Life: A Game Plan for Success, and Transforming Challenges into Opportunities with his trademarked program The Adaptability Zone.)

The Women in Business track includes sessions such as Speaker Aerial Payne's on Using Canva Pro to Elevate Your Social Media and Brand and Capturing & Scheduling Video Content.

For a complete speaker schedule or more information, visit www.waltonareachamber.com or Facebook. www.facebook.com/WaltonAreaChamber-OfCommerce.

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Bay Buzz



Mid-Bay Rotary's 30th Annual Oktoberfest: Service to the Community

The Mid-Bay Rotary Club held its 30th Annual Oktoberfest in September at Merchants Walk in Bluewater Bay. The festivities included the Edelweiss German Band, Accordionist Walter Kasprzyk, Balloons by Mickey Cameron, The Emerald Coast Community Band, Folk Musicians Gary Schmitz and Ken Tate and Folk Musician Jody Lucas. There were over 25 vendor booths. The children's multiple bouncy houses were again hits. The North Bay Fire

District Fire Truck and Fire-fighter tours were great as well as informative. Served were Brats (over 1,900) and Sauerkraut (100 pounds), 1/4 pound chicken (300 pounds), Hot Dogs (over 500) and German Pretzels were (600) cooked/sold (along with 240 cups of cheese). Beer sales (27 kegs) and wine sales (75 bottles) were noteworthy. Tips were split between Rotary International's Polio Plus Program (Polio eradication) and ShelterBox. Mid-Bay Rotary specifically thanks Winn-Dixie, CHELCO, Rotary Spouses, Sibling, Kids and Friends, the

96th Logistics Readiness Squadron; and its many sponsors who helped donate to the success of the Oktoberfest. Students from the Collegiate High School Interact Club and other student volunteers helped with the children's rides, serving food and selling pretzels, sodas, iced tea and water. Net profits will go to the community (e.g., student scholarships and the Rotary Youth Camp) and to international projects (e.g., ShelterBox and Polio Eradication).

The Walton County Fair Celebrates 100th Anniversary

The Walton County Fair Grounds recently opened the gates on its 100th anniversary!

The fair has been a cornerstone of the community since 1924, with a mission to promote Agriculture & Home Arts, providing opportunities for youth and adults to showcase their talents in artwork, handicrafts, crops, and livestock. The fair also celebrates the heritage and heart of Walton County, reflecting the

hard work and dedication of its ancestors. Each year, the food, the carnival rides, livestock shows and local entertainment have delighted residents with good, old-fashioned fun. This year's centennial event honored those who, in the early days, helped make the fair what it is today.

Family Bay Day 2024 Brings Community Together to Celebrate Choctawhatchee Bay's Natural Beauty

The Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance (CBA), in partnership with the Choctawhatchee Bay Estuary Program and with financial support from the Mattie Kelly Environmental Initiative through the Northwest Florida State College Foundation, successfully hosted Family Bay Day at Fred Gannon Rocky Bayou State Park in September. A resounding success, over 450 attendees gathered to celebrate the beauty and ecological significance of the Choctawhatchee Bay.

It offered activities and ed-

ucational Exploration Stations that provided participants with hands-on learning opportunities about the bay's unique ecosystem. One of the most popular activities was fish printing, where families created fish prints, combining art with a lesson about local marine life.

"We are thrilled to have had such a wonderful turnout for Family Bay Day 2024. It's inspiring to see families coming together to learn about and appreciate the incredible natural resources in the Choctawhatchee Bay. Events like this are crucial in building a stronger, more environmentally conscious community," said Alison McDowell, Executive Director of the Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance.

As part of the Family Bay Day celebration, the CBA also held the 2024 Amateur Photo Contest, inviting participants to capture the natural beauty and heritage of Northwest Florida. This year's winners' photo-

Continued on page 12

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 Community

What Are You Thankful For?

BY LORI LEATH SMITH,
PUBLISHER

A sunset over the Bay; schools where parents are involved and teachers are impeccable; community parks with so much to offer; a business community based on relationships and trust—these are just a few of the positive highlights in our community!

Each year, Bay Life asks, “What are you thankful for?” and offers readers the opportunity to express appreciation for the people and things in their lives. Indeed, there is so much to be grateful for!

As you gather to celebrate this Thanksgiving, resolve to make it more than a reason to take a day off, eat some great food or watch a football game. Make it a time of counting your blessings. After all, the Pilgrims founded our nation on thankfulness and, instead of focusing on their losses, they chose to offer thanks for all the blessings that made it possible for them to come together in that place — a new beginning, a bountiful harvest, new friendships, a bright future, family and a faithful God.



As your publisher, I’m thankful for so many reasons. But one thing is certain—I’m grateful for this community of friends and colleagues who, with compassion and caring, support and patience, have come alongside me and my family as we continue to navigate through the tragic passing of my nephew—our beloved Wesley Turpin. It is truly comforting and blessed, and we cherish all of you.

—Lori Leath Smith, *Life Media Group*

“I am thankful for my incredible family, whose unwavering support means everything to me, and for the opportunity to work in a school district that is dedicated to inspiring and uplifting the next generation. I’m also

deeply grateful to live in a community like Okaloosa County, where everyone works together to ensure the well-being of those who live, work, and visit here.”

—Catherine Card, *Public Information Officer, Okaloosa County School District*

“I’m thankful to be able to work in the arts. I believe a vibrant arts scene is key to a destination’s Quality of Place and it’s rewarding to me to play a small part.”

—Zandra Wolfgram, *Director of Marketing & Communications, Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation & Sinfonia Gulf Coast*



“J&B Medical is thankful for the continued support from the community of our family owned and operated business for the past 20+ years and for the opportunity to continue to help people with their healthcare needs in and around Okaloosa County.”

—Kelly Stalaker, *J&B Medical*

“I’m so thankful that members of my family in St. Petersburg, Fla., escaped with minor damages during the vicious hurricanes that hit that portion of the state this fall. Everyone is safe and sound and rebuilding again.”

—Barbara Palmgren, *Heritage Museum of NWFL*

“Dear Donors, Your generosity has made an incredible impact on Crisis Aid for Littles and Moms (CALM). Thanks to your support, we’re able to continue our mission of providing essential aid and comfort to those in need. We couldn’t do this important work without you. From the bottom of our hearts, thank you for standing with us and making a difference.”

—CALM Organization

“I am thankful for the incredible blessings in my life: my family, who bring a special joy to my days; my role as a pastor, where I have the privilege of uniquely sharing my faith; and my com-

munity involvement, where I can influence others positively. Above all, I am thankful for God’s unwavering grace, which guides me through my every endeavor.”

—Pastor “Doc” Doug Stauffer

I am extremely thankful for the roof over my head, and for living in a community that is so generous when they witness others in desperate need! Grateful to our customers and all in the area who came to donate Hurricane Relief for both NC and S FL when we collected goods

with our “Come to the Table” team of volunteers working with Veterans Serving Veterans and Bigun’s Hope Disaster Response. 33K pounds of goods were received, sorted and transported.

—Angela “JoJo” Stevenson

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Bay Buzz (cont. from page 10)

graphs truly embodied the spirit of the Choctawhatchee Bay:

1st Place (\$250 prize):
Avery Hale – Pelican at Maritime Park

2nd Place (\$150 prize):
Emily Ellis – Springs Serenity at Cypress Springs

3rd Place (\$100 prize):
Margot V. Penner – Sunset cast net at Basin Bayou

Honorable mentions will also be featured in the 2025 Mattie Kelly Environmental Initiative Calendar, which will showcase the breathtaking landscapes and

moments captured around the bay.

Military Family Makes Stops in Niceville on Inspiring Journey to Run a 5K in All 50 States

Jeremy and Kelly Hough,

along with their teen daughters, Campbell and Caroline, and their beloved pets Kona and Zulu, made a special stop in Niceville on October 17th. The family is running a 5K in each of the 50 states and the nation's capital in a heartwarming ini-



tiative called “Miles for Smiles: Run 50 Strong.” This adventure aims to raise awareness for the cleft community, connect with other cleft-affected families, and support Smile Train, the world’s largest cleft-focused nonprofit. “My daughter, Campbell, was born with a cleft. She was fortunate enough to receive some of the best care in the United States,” said Jeremy Hough, a career Air Force officer. “We know that too many children around the world don’t have access to proper high-quality cleft care. We’re running to help make a difference.”

Clefts are the most common facial difference worldwide, affecting approximately 1 in 700 babies. The condition can make it difficult for a person to speak, eat, hear and breathe.

Campbell is the inspiration behind the family’s partnership with Smile Train, which has supported two million free cleft surgeries globally. “I’m proud to partner with Smile Train, because I know the work they do is lifesaving. As a cleft-affected person, I want to help ensure the global cleft community is seen, heard and supported,” said Campbell.

To date, the Houghs have raised nearly \$100,000 for Smile Train, funding vital cleft treatments for thousands of children across more than 75 countries.

“Miles for Smiles: Run 50 Strong” started on September 11 in Anchorage, Alaska, and will conclude on October 31 in Maui, Hawaii. To support the Hough family and find out more about their stop in Niceville, as well as a full list of locations, visit <https://www.smiletrain.org/miles-for-smiles/locations>.



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Florida GOP and the Walton County Republican Party Issue a Critical Call-to-Action: Get Out to VOTE!

On election day, November 5, 2024, more than 13.5 million Floridians will cast their votes, in addition to electing a U.S. President, 29 members of Congress, 120 members of the State House and 20 of the 40-member Florida Senate. The ballot tasks Floridians with voting on six proposed constitutional amendments also, two of which, according to Walton Co. Republicans, are critical—Amendments 3 and 4.

At a recent meeting of the Walton County Republican Executive Committee, Chairman Tim Norris gave a presentation on overall turnout percentages for the state and Walton County. Overall, there was some encouraging news. Walton County turnout was about 30% of registered voters, 83% were Republicans. The State of Florida's average voter turnout was about 22.5%. Walton County turnout was one of the highest of all counties in the state.

Committee member Lisa Robertson announced an initiative to register and turn out the votes of church-going Christians in Walton County whose surveys have shown overwhelming support for the Republican Party. Lisa encourages anyone who wants to volunteer for this effort to give her a call at 850-737-0226.

Constitutional Amendments

Constitutional initiatives play a pivotal role in the governance of the state, and thus warrant careful consideration. For this election, the six proposed constitutional amendments on the November ballot originate from two sources: the Florida Legislature and citizen initiatives. Regardless of how a measure makes it to the ballot, all amendments require a 60% voting majority to pass.

AMENDMENT 1

Establishing School Board Elections as Partisan. Ballot Language: "Proposing amendments to the State Constitution to require members of a district school board to be elected in a partisan election rather than a nonpartisan election and to specify that the amendment only applies to elections held on or

after the November 2026 general election. However, partisan primary elections may occur before the 2026 general election for purposes of nominating political party candidates to that office for placement on the 2026 general election ballot."

The Florida GOP and Walton County Republican Party urges a YES vote.

AMENDMENT 2

Establishing a State Constitutional Right to Hunt and Fish Ballot Language: "Proposing an amendment to the State Constitution to preserve forever fishing and hunting, including by the use of traditional methods, as a public right and preferred means of responsibly managing and controlling fish and wildlife. Specifies that the amendment does not limit the authority granted to the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission under Section 9 of Article IV of the State Constitution."

The Florida GOP and Walton County Republican Party urges a YES vote.

AMENDMENT 3

Recreational Marijuana Legalization Ballot Language: "Allows adults 21 years or older to possess, purchase, or use marijuana products and marijuana accessories for non-medical personal consumption by smoking, ingestion, or otherwise; allows Medical Marijuana Treatment Centers, and other state licensed entities, to acquire, cultivate, process, manufacture, sell, and distribute such products and accessories."

The Florida GOP and Walton County Republican Party urges a NO vote.

AMENDMENT 4

Right to Abortion Ballot Language: "No law shall prohibit, penalize, delay, or restrict abortion before viability or when necessary to protect the patient's health, as determined by the patient's healthcare provider. This amendment does not change the Legislature's constitutional authority to require notification to a parent or guardian before a minor has an abortion."

The Florida GOP and Walton County Republican

Party strongly urge a NO vote.

State Rep. Shane Abbott noted the extreme nature and deceptive language surrounding Amendment 4, stating "this

amendment allows for abortion past 23 weeks, allowing for fully formed babies to be terminated. In addition, Abbott said "If a licensed medical practitioner determines a mother's emotional

state will suffer from having the child, the baby can be terminated at almost any time before birth. Parental consent is not

Continued on page 17

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Simplifying Medicare Advantage vs. Supplement Choices

By GREG DURETTE, FLORIDA HEALTH CONNECTOR

This is the time of year when you should review your Medicare options and make important decisions about your cover-

age for 2025.

Right now, we are in the Annual Election Period (AEP) for all Medicare beneficiaries. It is often referred to as the Annual Open Enrollment Period. This

annual event runs from October 15th through December 7th.

Because this period allows ALL Medicare eligible folks to make switches and changes to their plans, it is the most heavily

advertised time of the year—not like I have to tell you that! Folks on Original Medicare (Parts A&B), Supplements (MediGap), Stand Alone Prescription Plans (Part D) and Advantage Plans have a chance to pretty much do anything they want with their coverage mix. The hard part comes with sorting it all out.

One of the things I often talk about with Medicare beneficiaries around this time of year is to make sure you don't get so overwhelmed by all the information out there that you run out of time to take action. It can sometimes become "paralysis by analysis" syndrome. Remember, the AEP ends on December 7th!

Figuring out which coverage options are best for you can be confusing at any age, but understanding healthcare options for those 65 and older can be even more difficult.

I suggest considering these three things when shopping for Medicare Advantage/Supplement plans:

Choice: When it comes to Medicare, one size does not fit all - what works for your neighbor (or doctor/provider!) may not work best for you. Take the time to learn and understand the benefits and costs of each plan so you can feel confident in your decision and your health care coverage. Remember, you are getting the best for you, not your doctor or other provider.

Care: Care starts with a strong relationship with your primary care provider. If your plan has a network, make sure you're comfortable with the doctors and hospitals in that network. Check to see if your plan will coordinate your care with the rest of your providers...in and out of State.

Experience: Medicare can be complex and confusing. It's important to find a seasoned agent that works for you and supports you throughout your health care journey with plan benefits and resources that can help you live more and worry less about out of pocket costs.

Since Medicare Advantage Plans are offered by private



companies, one excellent feature is they have more freedom and motivation to include extra benefits such as vision, hearing, gym memberships, dental, over-the-counter pharmacy items and more.

However, it is important to note that, not only do Medicare Advantage plans vary by state, but are different right down to each individual county in each state. Supplements are universal regardless of state/county, but often times cost more premium per month and do not cover prescriptions, requiring additional premium costs to pick up that coverage.

Your sibling in North Dakota is not going to have the same insurance company/coverage options you would in your Florida county. Try not to get trapped into believing the terms Supplement and Advantage are the same. It is critical to know your specific differences before making choice that works for you.

This is why it is vitally important to work with a local agent that knows the area and understands the benefits landscape as it applies to you. A famous actor or retired athlete on TV touting a toll-free number from who knows where will likely not.

Greg Durette is a qualified, licensed agent with Florida Health Connector providing Medicare throughout the State of Florida and is based in Niceville. He has been in the insurance industry for over 41 years and can be reached at his office number of 850-842-2400 or mobile at 978-509-2941.

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Lazarus Memorial Service

BY CAROLYN NEWCOMER KETCHEL

On Nov. 2, 2024 at 1 p.m. at the Beal Memorial Cemetery (316 Beal Pkwy. NW, FWB), over 35 clergy and members from various faith communities will gather to remember and say goodbye to the invisible members of our local community. The Lazarus Memorial Service is an ecumenical ceremony to bury individuals in our community who have died without means to provide for their own burial. The ceremony provides a dignified manner to memorialize the remains of those who otherwise would not have funeral services—our community's outpouring of respect and community spirit to provide the unclaimed deceased a dignified resting place.

A much-celebrated event within the faith community and in the life of our county, it is a dignified way to memorialize those we have lost, many of whom are senior citizens who have outlived their relatives as well as infants/children whose parents and families are without financial means. Some are members of our community who have become estranged from their families due to mental illness. This year, we have 31 individuals from ages 29 to 88.

Florida Statute 497.005(43) requires that each of the 67 counties ensure the proper final disposition of indigent and unclaimed deceased persons in the respective counties. Each year, Okaloosa County receives an average of 30-40 individuals who die without family support or financial means to cover the cost of interment. Other counties have begun to follow Okaloosa's leadership and have their own ecumenical services. Okaloosa County was recognized by the Florida Association of Counties for Best Practices.

Over the past 17 years, Okaloosa County has contracted with various private funeral homes to provide these cremation services. When I first became a commissioner, I found out no one knew what happens to individuals once cremated. A quick search of various, local funeral homes that had contracted with Okaloosa County over the years, yielded approximately 450 sets of cremains in storage.

In 2016, local pastors were invited to plan a service like no other to bury these forgotten individuals in a dignified, but joyful ecumenical service. That same year, a coordinated effort was developed to purchase seven burial plots at Beal Memorial Cemetery in the heart of Okaloosa County.

The county initially agreed to pay \$7,530. Area churches took up a collection to defray the cost, which resulted in a contribution of \$5,000 to the cost of the plots. Further, the clergy were able to contribute \$1,481.00 to purchase and place two benches, one at either end of the burial plots.

The Okaloosa County Lazarus Memorial Service has become a cherished ceremony. The name is taken from the recorded words of Jesus about the poor man named Lazarus who went to Paradise after death, after struggling on earth (Luke 16:19-21.) Roughly 800 individuals have been buried to date.

Mr. Bass, director, and the wonderful staff at Emerald Coast Funeral Home have graciously hosted this ceremony each year. Each set of cremains is held in a box bearing the individual's name. Prior to the ceremony, the boxes are placed inside green velvet bags for display. Those attending the outdoor ceremony can pay their final respects before the ceremony begins. A program provides a list of the individuals to be interred. The service includes ringing the cemetery bells, offering prayers, reading scripture, singing hymns and music, a message of faith and

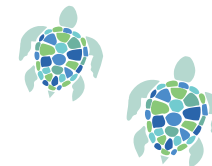
hope, and the recitation of each person's name. The name and date of death of each interred individual is entered in The Book of Remembrance stored at Beal Cemetery for relatives and friends of the deceased.

Okaloosa County has found a compassionate and dignified way to bury these invisible members of our society. Many faith communities mark November 2 as All Souls Day, also the date chosen by the group for the Lazarus Memorial Burial.

You will leave the ceremony with a quiet feeling of having done something "right" that cannot be repaid in this world. Bring a lawn chair to sit (rain

or shine) and join us as we say goodbye to individuals who may have died alone, but are remembered by our community.

Carolyn Ketchel is Okaloosa County Commissioner, District 2. She can be reached at CKetchel@myokaloosa.com or 850-651-7105.



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 Community

Tis' the Season to Protect Your Treasures



By JULIE A. MARTIN

In the upcoming holiday season, many beautiful baubles will be bought, beautifully wrapped and gifted to loved ones to smile, ooh and ah over. Rings and earrings, bracelets and necklaces, Oh My! So, once you have these beautiful gems, gold and silver, too, how do you insure these beautiful treasures?

There are two ways to insure your new valuables. One is to schedule your new jewelry onto your existing home insurance policy for its specifically appraised value. It will be nec-

essary for you to have the item or set appraised by a licensed or certified jewelry appraiser prior to insuring them. Many insurance companies allow appraisals up to 36 months old, while some require new appraisals every 12 months. Please review the terms of your policy to find out what the rules require.

The other way to insure your valuables is on an Inland Marine Floater policy. These policies typically cover for the perils of theft, breakage or mysterious disappearance, but are not tied to your home insurance.



to the same policy such as rare books, antique firearms or other valuable items from the list, provided they have been appraised within the timeframe of the carrier's rules, usually either 12 months, or some-

times up to 36 months, depending on the carrier.

Your treasures carry more than monetary value; to you they would mean the world. So, protecting them to the fullest extent possible is a logical next step, and will be much less expensive than you think.

It's a good idea to sit down with your Independent Insurance Agent to talk about your options, and outline a good plan to protect your treasures in a way that makes you feel comfortable.

One advantage of having an Inland Marine Floater policy over scheduling on your home insurance is that, if there is a claim, it won't count against your home insurance policy itself. It will still count as a claim, but not the same way.

There are 12 categories of personal property that are typically classified as Scheduled Items:

- Jewelry, goldware, silverware, pewterware
- Furs
- Sports equipment
- Firearms
- Artwork
- Antiques/collectibles
- Stamps
- Coins
- Rare books and Manuscripts

The rating basis of the item or items in question has to do with the current value of the item or set, where it is kept, either in the home or in a safe, as well as the condition of the item.

In the event of loss by theft or mysterious disappearance, there would need to be a police report filed as well as the claim itself.

Many carriers offer discounts for the scheduling multiple items on one policy. For example, if you have a 10K ring and your husband has a Rolex, scheduling them together under one policy would reduce the premiums for both, as it would make more sense than to have a separate policy for each item.

For any older yet still valuable items that fall into this category, please make sure to keep appraisals current to get full value in the event of a claim. If your last appraisal showed a value of 15K, but the current value is 20K, you will not be able to collect on the difference, if you have an old appraisal that is outside the bounds of the underwriting guidelines.

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Publisher/Executive Editor
Lori Leath Smith
Lori@LifeMediaGrp.com

Director, Advertising Sales
Scott Miller
Scott@LifeMediaGrp.com

Production & Layout
Kim Harper

Advertising Sales
Ray Cyr

Writers
Teresa Halverson
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Coffee Tables: Styles and Styling

BY STACY SARIKANON,
STUNNING SPACES—DECORATING
DEN INTERIORS

We heard someone recently say that coffee tables are passé. That’s not the case; interior design journalists clearly indicate that coffee tables are certainly in vogue. There are a wide range of styles and styling. A good lesson for styling: Use varied heights, varied materials, layer items and don’t forget nature.

There are tables that are themselves pieces of art where too much styling on the surface would take away from the artistry of the furnishing itself. Other tables have a contemporary style, but the surface is kept open for function.

Traditional rectangular ta-

bles are still popular, but we find a greater variety of construction using metals and glass. Books, open or closed, singular or stacked, are still a staple for dressing up the surface. A second surface below can be used for seasonal decoration or left plain to put the spotlight on the upper surface items.

Depending on your furniture placement, circular tables can add an aesthetic interest by varying the lines to provide more visual interest to rectangular furniture. Of course, a circular table also can complement a curved sofa, which is becoming more popular.

Upholstered pieces can double for ottoman-type use and table-type use. It takes only a tray to display an accessory or two or serve up some drinks.

This cool coffee table in the first photo is truly multifunctional for a client’s casual living space. It is part lift-top, part bench and part storage while coated in a beautiful ash taupe finish.

As for multifunction, some



tables include four nesting tables for use as side tables. Or, the touch of elegance offered by modern glass and metal nesting table(s).



In the second photo, three pieces converge into a multi-piece coffee table for a statement furnishing in this odd-shaped room which dictated the design

in this particularly challenging space.

Stunning Spaces - Decorating Den Interiors can help you consider all the factors in selecting the style of coffee table and the styling for the surface, all to top off your room design in a way that makes your room more beautiful and reflective of your personality and lifestyle.

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GOP

continued from page 13

necessary- only notification.

“What we as a God-fearing community really need to guard against is complacency on this issue. Many folks have the attitude that a measure this extreme could never pass. That is simply not true,” said Abbott. “Recent polls show Amendment 4 is poised to pass. This is an opportunity for deep red Northwest Florida—the Bible Belt of the state—to be the difference makers and defeat this awful amendment,” says Abbott.

AMENDMENT 5

Homestead Exemption Inflation Adjustment Ballot Language:

“Proposing an amendment to the State Constitution to require an annual adjustment for inflation to the value of current or future homestead exemptions that apply solely to levies other than school district levies and for which every person who has legal or equitable title to real estate and maintains thereon the permanent residence of the owner, or another person legally or naturally dependent upon the owner is eligible. This amendment takes

effect January 1, 2025.”

The Florida GOP and Walton County Republican Party urge a YES vote.

AMENDMENT 6

Repeal of Public Campaign Financing Ballot Language: “Proposing the repeal of the provision in the State Constitution which requires public financing for campaigns of candidates for elective statewide office who agree to campaign spending limits.”

The Florida GOP and Walton County Republican Party urges a YES vote.

The Walton Republican Headquarters is now open, Tuesday Through Saturday, and is currently looking for volunteers to help keep the doors open. Everyone is encouraged to stop by and pick up their Trump hats, tee shirts and more.

Republican Headquarters is located in the Great Florida Smiles building, 2nd floor, 6757 U.S. Hwy. 98 in Santa Rosa Beach. To volunteer this election cycle and for any questions, please call the office, 850-533-1237.

For faith-minded members, visit MyFaithVotes.com.

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 Community

Remember Our Seniors During this Holiday Season

Caring for Those that Cared for Us

By TERESA HALVERSON,
DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT & COMMUNITY RELATIONS, THE MANOR AT BLUE WATER BAY

As the holiday season approaches, it is a time for reflection, connection and joy. At the Manor at Blue Water Bay, we understand that this time of year can be particularly meaningful for seniors and their families. We believe in the power of connection, and we strive to create an environment where every resident feels valued and cherished.

It is also time to remember to spend time with those that have cared for us. The holidays can be a depressing time for a lot of people, especially seniors. It tends to serve as a reminder about who is not there to celebrate anymore and how they cannot often go to where everyone else is gathering. Long-Term Care/Skilled Nursing facilities often have seniors without any extended family in the area. Lit-

tle to no visitors, birthdays and holidays often leave an empty feeling for our aging population. While caregivers do their best to make every occasion special, having a visitor, friend and/or family member visit makes all the difference in the world to each individual. It is human nature to want to feel loved, appreciated and cared for.

One reason why the holidays are so important to seniors is that it gives them time to reflect on their lives. Looking through photo albums is a great way to reminisce about the past. Taking time to look at photos and ask questions creates an opportunity for one to “tell a story.” Becoming a “senior” is an achievement in life. We need to remind them how blessed they are and how much richer our lives are for spending time with them.

Perhaps it is time to start a new tradition this holiday season and carry it through 2025. All facilities have a volunteer



program. Have you considered including in your holiday plans to adopt a “grandmother or grandfather” in a facility? Maybe your church or civic group would be interested in volunteering and spending time with seniors. Spare a little time to help bring joy to others during

this joyous time of the year.

Our dedicated team provides specialized care tailored to the unique needs of everyone, enhancing their quality of life during this festive season. With personalized support, we ensure that our seniors not only receive the care they need, but also en-

joy the warmth and companionship that the holidays bring.

We encourage families to remember and engage with their loved ones during this time. A simple phone call, a visit or even sharing memories can make a world of difference. Our compassionate staff is here to foster these connections, helping to create joyful moments for both residents and their families.

If you are seeking support or would like to learn more about how the Manor at Blue Water Bay can assist your loved ones during this holiday season, we invite you to reach out to us. We offer short term post-hospital care, long-term residential care and respite services. Together, let's make this holiday season a memorable one.

Perhaps this holiday season is your year to “make a difference” in the lives of others. Happy Holidays!

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If you or a loved one is seeking a compassionate and dedicated post-acute or long-term care solution, we invite you to reach out for a consultation or assessment. Together, we can navigate your recovery journey and ensure you receive the exceptional care you deserve.



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The SOTF Transitions Elite Veterans to Civilian Success

By “DOC” DOUG STAUFFER

The Special Operators Transition Foundation (SOTF) is a one-of-a-kind organization that provides unparalleled support to elite Special Operations Forces (SOF) veterans transitioning from military service to successful civilian careers. Since its establishment in 2013, the foundation has significantly assisted over 500 SOF veterans in finding meaningful employment with more than 150 leading companies throughout the United States. These success stories underscore the unique value of the SOTF’s mission and its potential for further growth.

The Challenge of Transition for SOF Veterans

The transition from a military career, particularly from within Special Operations, presents a unique set of challenges. The SOF veterans, renowned for their exceptional leadership, strategic thinking and ability to operate in high-pressure environments, often require assistance in finding roles that recognize and understand these attributes in the corporate world. The SOTF not only recognizes, but also deeply understands these unique qualifications, and is committed to facilitating a successful transition.

Furthermore, the military culture and the close-knit community within Special Operations can lead to a sense of isolation when veterans leave the service. However, the SOTF steps in to provide a robust and supportive network that helps veterans navigate this transition, significantly reducing the stress and uncertainty of entering an unfamiliar job market. The SOTF’s unwavering presence in this journey reassures the SOF veterans that they are not alone, instilling confidence and reassurance.

The SOTF’s Comprehensive Approach

The SOTF’s program is strategically designed to address these challenges. It begins with psychometric and behavioral assessments, a crucial step that helps identify the strengths, skills and potential career paths that align with each veteran’s unique profile. This initial step is instrumental in ensuring a smooth transition.

Following the assessments, the SOTF provides executive coach-

ing tailored to each individual. This coaching is designed to enhance veterans’ leadership skills and adapt them to the corporate environment. It also helps prepare veterans for the cultural shift they will encounter in the civilian workplace.

Resume tailoring is another critical component of the SOTF program. Many SOF veterans have resumes that reflect their extensive military experience, but civilian employers sometimes do not immediately grasp the unique qualifications. The SOTF assists in translating military achievements into language that resonates with corporate recruiters, ensuring that veterans can effectively communicate their value.

Networking and Post-Placement Support

One of the SOTF program’s most significant advantages is its extensive network of corporate partners. The SOTF leverages this network to connect veterans with potential employers actively seeking the leadership and problem-solving skills that the SOF veterans bring. These partnerships have led to placements in various industries, from technology and finance to consulting and manufacturing.

However, the SOTF’s support does not end once a veteran has secured a job. Recognizing that the first few months in a new role are critical, the SOTF provides ongoing post-placement support. This ensures veterans have the resources and guidance they need to thrive in their new careers.

A Proven Track Record

The SOTF’s success is evident in the stories of the veterans it has helped. Many have held senior positions in Fortune 500 companies, leveraging the skills and experiences gained in Special Operations to drive success in their new roles. The foundation’s ability to match veterans with the right opportunities has transformed individual lives and enriched the companies that have welcomed these leaders into their ranks.

The SOTF CEO, Austin Moore, shared these details, “The SOTF transitioned 155 Operators in 2023, at an average starting annual salary of \$140,000. Our differentiator is our commitment to the Operator following the education,



training, and business connectivity they receive. We gauge our success based on the quality of the careers our Operators transition into as opposed to the number of Operators that receive our training.”

The Importance of Support

The SOTF’s work highlights the importance of providing specialized support to the SOF veterans during their transition to civilian life. These individuals have made extraordinary contributions to national security and must be given the tools and opportunities to continue impacting the civilian sector. The SOTF’s comprehensive approach serves as a model for successfully bridging the gap between military service and civilian employment, ensuring that veterans can continue to lead and excel long after their military careers have ended.

You can visit the SOTF’s website (www.sotf.org) for more information or to support the foundation. Let us honor our Special Operators for their bravery on the battlefield and resilience in every chapter of life. As they transition from warfighters to leaders in our communities, we owe them more than our gratitude—we owe them the opportunity to continue making a difference. Their legacy should reflect their military service and the impact of their post-service vocations long after the uniform is retired.

You Can Help!

Friday, Nov. 8 | 2:30-6 p.m. | Stronghold Solutions | 150 Warfighter Way, DeFuniak Springs

You’re invited to the Emerald Coast is Grateful 2024.

This 6th annual event features guest speaker Master Ser-

geant (ret.) Earl Plumlee, Medal of Honor Recipient, honored for his heroic actions in Afghanistan on August 28, 2013.

There will also be live music from Ron Adams, food and beverages from local chefs and breweries, military static displays and demos, and a silent auction.

Exclusive Opportunity for the Ladies:

From Noon-2 p.m., there will be a special private shooting experience – “GET YOUR LEAD OUT” – with our nation’s most elite Green Berets, Navy SEALs and Marine Raiders. This unique experience includes your own custom-made, limited-edition purse-size pistol. (Guns will be transferred through a licensed gun shop (FFL) in the ticketholder’s state of residence. Background checks will be conducted prior to the release of all firearms, and SOTF is not liable for any transfer fees.)

For General Admission or VIP tickets: <https://e.givesmart.com/events/Dw1/>. For questions, contact Bobby Payne, Director of Development & Corporate Engagement, Special Operators Transition Foundation (formerly operating as Your Grateful Nation) at 404.967.2067 or robert@sotf.org. For more information about the SOTF, visit www.sotf.org.

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Education News

Okaloosa County Public Library Cooperative Helps Over 50 Adults Earn High School Diplomas

The Okaloosa County Public Library Cooperative (OCPLC) announced the successful graduation of 52 students from the Career Online High School program over a five-year period. The program seeks to help adults achieve their high school diploma despite many obstacles they have encountered in their lives.

Individuals who participate in Career Online High School are stay-at-home moms, working parents and business owners with dreams of bettering their



life through education. Their high school education was interrupted by a variety of reasons, such as the need to financially support their families, homelessness, pregnancy, the COVID-19

pandemic or challenging home environments.

The Class of 2024 includes nine students ranging in age from their 20s to 50's. They were recognized at a graduation ceremony on October 5.

Those who attend Career Online High School return to finish their high school diploma for job readiness, career advancement and college admission. Students take classes online with the flexibility of 24/7 access and get support from certified instructors and academic coaches leading to an accredited high school diploma or career certificate.

Those interested in learning more about Career Online High School or to apply can visit <https://readokaloosa.org/cohs.ocplc>.

Collegiate High School Students Honored for Accomplishments

Collegiate High School (CHS) at Northwest Florida State College (NWFS) recently

announced several significant achievements.

Two of its students, Camille Peck and Roy Thomas, have been named Semi-Finalists for the National Merit Scholarship Program. These exceptional students now have the opportunity to advance to the final stage of the competition, where nearly \$28 million in scholarships will be awarded.

The National Merit® Scholarship Program honors students who demonstrate outstanding academic performance, participate in school and community activities, show leadership qualities, receive endorsements from high school officials, write a qualifying essay and achieve SAT® or ACT® scores that reflect their earlier performance on the qualifying exam. Of the 1.6 million students who entered the competition, the Semi-Finalists represent less than one percent of U.S. high school seniors.

Additionally, two CHS students have been named Commended Students in the 2024 National Merit Scholarship Program. Congratulations to Brynne Massey and Carli Emerzian for their impressive performance on the PSAT, ranking them among the top 50,000 high school students in the nation!

Fifteen CHS students have earned National Recognition from the College Board. To receive this competitive honor, students must have a GPA of

3.5 or higher and exceptional performance on the PSAT/NMSQT, PSAT 10 and/or AP Exams. These students have earned the following awards issued by the College Board:

National Rural and Small Town Award

- Josephine Humphrey
- Henry Klene
- Benjamin Maconi
- Aiturgan McKinney
- Trevor Moeller
- Jackson Sparks
- Nathan Van
- Emma Lee Verworn
- Evan Yurack

National First-Generation Recognition Award

- Mallory Brown

National Rural and Small-Town Award and National Indigenous Recognition Award

- Benjamin Bears

National Rural and Small-Town Award and National Hispanic Recognition Award

- Sebastian Delamata
- Sophie Torres
- Jaydon Funetes

National Rural and Small-Town Award, National Hispanic Recognition Award, and National First-Generation Recognition Award

- Ana Reed

Visit www.nwfsc.edu or contact Travis Henson, Interim Executive Director, Strategic Communications, at hensont2@nwfsc.edu.

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Fudpucker's Beachside Bar & Grill

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

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

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

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-hash brown casserole. Breakfast burritos are rolled and ready daily! Choose from andouille, bacon, chorizo or veggie. Or tantalize your taste buds with a made-to-order breakfast sandwich on croissants or bagel with two eggs and cheese and then choose if you want to add Jojo's homemade smoked jalapeño beef bologna, bacon, house smoked barbecue or ham. Cinnamon

rolls and kolaches still hold the top spot for sell outs. Stop in for featured muffins, coffee cake or pound cake, which go great with maple cinnamon latte or caramel macchiato. And, oh, the freshly roasted coffee. Get what you're craving! Order ahead and pick up some for tailgating!

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

LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant

Suds, Songs, Sunsets and Sports! Welcome to LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant at the Bluewater Bay Marina Complex. Named after "LJ Schooner" (the LJ is for Lazy Jack), a cherished four-legged icon on Bluewater Bay Marina docks, the open-air oyster bar and restaurant offers a magnificent view of the water, marina and unparalleled sunset any time of year. There are, of course,

oysters and a delicious varied menu with dinner specials such as blackened mahi and grilled shrimp with hollandaise, served over cheese grits.

Nov. 16: 6th Annual Chili Cook-Off to benefit A Bed 4 Me — 4-6 p.m.

Oct. 31: Halloween Karaoke and Open Mic 6-10 p.m.

Wednesdays: Nov. 6 and Nov. 20: Prime Rib Dinner Special!

Thursdays: Open Mic and Karaoke Nights at 6 p.m.

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

Oyster bar hours: Mon-Thurs 3-10 p.m.; Fri-Sat 11 a.m.-mid-night; Sun 9 a.m.-9 p.m.

Restaurant hours: Mon-Tues closed. Wed-Sat, 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Sun, 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

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BY SCOTT MILLER

Where does the time go? As we head into November, it's always a bittersweet feeling for me when it comes to college football. On one hand, we're coming down the home stretch and the season will soon be over. On the other hand, the BIG games, the rivalry matchups we love to watch are just around the cor-

ner! What an incredible month November is for college football fans. The hard work and dedication put in year-round by these players and coaches will be put to the test once again as we see how things sort out. One thing is for sure, it's going to be an exciting finish to the season. Where will you be watching? Here are a few of my favorite places to go on game day...I hope to see you there, too!

AJ's Seafood & Oyster Bar

Since 1984, AJ's Seafood and Oyster Bar has been serving cold Gulf Coast oysters and cool libations. What began as a popular local hang out known for fresh oysters and cold beer has grown into one of the most iconic "hot spots" on the Destin

Harbor. From its humble beginning shucking oysters off the deck behind a small trailer on the Destin Harbor, it has grown to four locations along our Emerald Coast, serving fresh seafood, live music and exciting water activities in the Destin area. Attention all die hard football fans, AJ's boasts the one and only Jumbotron on the Destin Harbor. AJ's serves up delicious daily specials, mouth-watering drinks plus entertaining live music all month. Don't miss any of the action just come on down to AJ's Seafood and Oyster Bar all season long...

(850)837-1913
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ajdestin.com

Gulf Coast Burger

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Destin Commons
www.gulfcoastburgercompany.com



lection of wing sauces and rubs you'll find—plus many other scrumptious eats for folks of all ages. There's plenty of seating for everyone and TVs galore, plus fun and games all week long. Sports fans from all over come and watch all your favorite teams on countless regional and national sports networks. Now it pays to show up a little early to get your favorite seat and to save a buck on all beer and wine from 3-6 p.m. Tuesday - Friday. Having teamed up with Props Brewery to serve the coldest brews this side of the Bay along with the vast selection of bourbon and craft beer, it's no secret why the locals love Landshark's Pizza Company. Cheers! Order online, too, or 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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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 se-

The Preserve in Bluewater Bay

Football is back and so is The Preserve clubhouse—a

Continued on next page

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All are welcome!

Special Dates:

Every Friday: Steak Night

Nov. 1: Dismystic 6-10pm

Nov. 6: Chess Night 6pm • Prime Rib Night 5pm • Wine Tasting 5-7pm

Nov. 8: DUCHESS 6-10pm

Nov. 16: 6th Annual Chili Cook-Off 4-6pm to benefit A Bed 4 Me • Parker & Ivoree Willingham 6-10pm

Nov. 20: Prime Rib Night 5-9pm • Signature Cocktail Tasting 5-7pm • The Traveling Painter 5:30pm

Nov. 23: Jody Lucas 6-9pm

Nov. 29: Ed Wrann 6-10pm

Dec. 21: Santa Paddle Parade 12pm • Boat Parade 5:30pm

Oyster Bar Hours: Monday-Tuesday Closed • Wednesday-Thursday 3pm-10pm • Friday-Saturday 11am to midnight • Sunday 9am to 9pm
Restaurant Hours: Monday-Tuesday Closed • Wednesday-Saturday 11am to 9pm • Sunday 9am to 4pm • Sunday Brunch 9am to 1pm

SEC Football Schedule

SEC	Nov 2	Nov 9	Nov 16	Nov 23	Nov 30
Alabama	OPEN	@LSU	MERCER	@OU	AUB
Arkansas	OLE MISS	OPEN	TEXAS	LA TECH	@MIZZ
Auburn	VANDY	OPEN	UL MONROE	TEX A&M	@BAMA
Florida	UGA	@TEXAS	LSU	OLE MISS	@FL ST
Georgia	FLA	@OLE MISS	TENN	U MASS	GA TECH
Kentucky	@TENN	OPEN	MURRAY ST	@TEXAS	LOUISVILLE
LSU	OPEN	BAMA	@FLA	VANDY	OU
MSU	U MASS	@TENN	OPEN	MIZZOU	@OLE MISS
Missouri	OPEN	OU	@S. CAR	@MISS ST	ARK
Oklahoma	MAINE	@MIZZOU	OPEN	BAMA	@LSU
Ole Miss	@ARK	UGA	OPEN	@FLA	MISS ST
SC	A&M	@VANDY	MIZZOU	WOFFORD	@CLEMSON
Tenn	UK	MISS ST	@UGA	UTEP	@VANDY
Tex A&M	@S. CAR	OPEN	N MEX ST	@AUB	TEXAS
Texas	OPEN	FLA	@ARK	UK	@A&M
VANDY	@AUB	S. CAR	OPEN	@LSU	TENN

2024 College Football Game Day Highlights

Week 9: October 26

Auburn @ Kentucky TBA
 Penn State @ Wisconsin TBA
 Texas @ Vanderbilt TBA
 Missouri @ Alabama TBA
 Oklahoma @ Mississippi TBA
 Florida St @ Miami TBA
 LSU @ Texas A&M TBA

Florida ST. @ ND TBA
 LSU vs Alabama TBA
 Oklahoma @ Missouri TBA
 Miami @ Ga Tech TBA
 Florida @ Texas 11am ESPN
 Miss St. @ Tennessee TBA

Vanderbilt @ LSU TBD
 Mississippi @ Florida 11am ESPN
 Penn St. @ Minnesota TBD
 Army @ Notre Dame 6pm NBC

Week 10: November 2

Penn State vs Ohio State TBA
 Auburn vs Vanderbilt TBA
 Mississippi @ Arkansas TBA
 Kentucky @ Tennessee TBA
 Florida @ Georgia TBA
 Duke @ Miami TBA
 USC @ Washington TBA

Week 12: November 16

Tennessee @ Georgia TBD
 LSU @ Florida TBD
 Missouri @ S. Carolina TBD
 Texas @ Arkansas 11am ESPN
 Penn State @ Purdue TBD
 Oregon @ Wisconsin TBD
 Ohio St. @ Northwestern TBD

Week 14: November 30

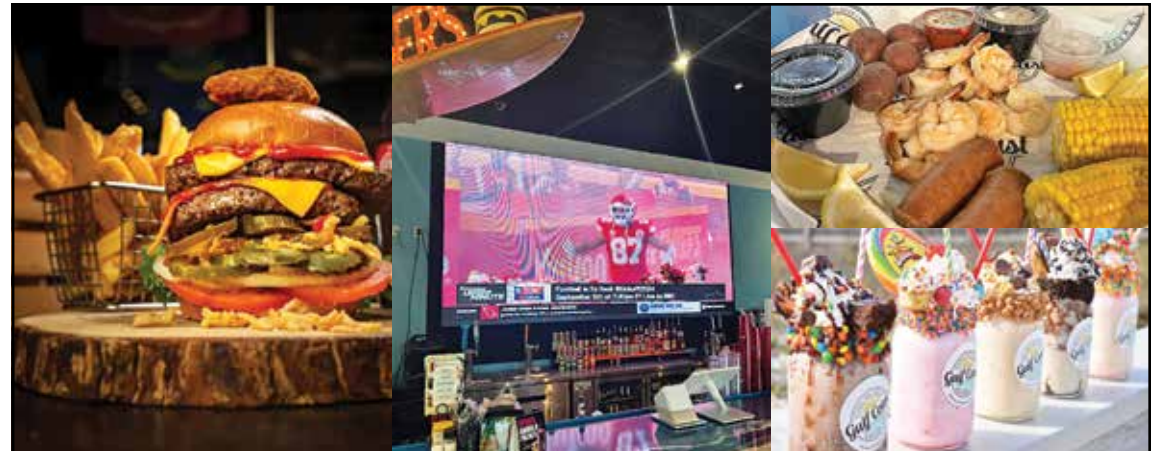
Auburn @ Alabama
 Michigan @ Ohio St. 11am FOX
 Notre Dame @ USC TBD
 Texas @ Texas A&M TBD
 Florida @ Florida ST. TBD
 Oklahoma @ LSU TBD
 Ga Tech @ Georgia 6:30pm ABC
 Tennessee @ Vanderbilt TBD
 Maryland @ Penn State TBD

Week 11: November 9

Georgia @ Mississippi TBA

Week 13: November 23

Texas A&M @ Auburn
 Kentucky @ Texas TBD
 Alabama @ Oklahoma TBD



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High School Football Schedules

All upcoming games at 7 p.m. except where designated.

Niceville (District 1-5A)

Head coach: Grant Thompson
 8/23 – South Sumter (Bushnell)
 8/30 – Escambia (Pensacola)
 9/6 – Pine Forest (Pensacola)
 9/13 – at Crestview
 9/20 – at Choctawhatchee (Fort Walton Beach)
 9/27 – Gulf Breeze*
 10/4 – BYE WEEK
 10/11 – at Mosley (Lynn Haven)* at Tommy Oliver
 10/18 – Lincoln (Tallahassee)
 10/25 – at Milton,* 7:30 CT
 11/1 – at Navarre, 7:30 CT
 *District games

Freeport (District 1-2A)

Head coach: Shaun Arntz
 8/23 – at North Bay Haven
 8/30 – at Jay
 9/6 – Northview
 9/13 – at Cottondale
 9/20 – Vernon
 9/27 – at Pensacola Catholic*, 7:30 p.m.
 10/11 – South Walton*
 10/18 – Baker
 10/25 – at Walton*
 11/1 – Liberty County
 *District games

Rocky Bayou Christian School

North Florida District
 Head coach: KC Woods
 8/23 – at Snook Christian Academy
 9/7 – Jefferson County, 6 p.m.
 9/20 – Franklin County
 9/28 – Central 6 p.m.
 10/11 – SCCA
 10/18 – at Joshua Christian Academy

BEST PLACES TO WATCH FOOTBALL

continued from previous page

great local place in Bluewater Bay to hang out and watch sports. That's right, your favorite neighborhood hangout is ready for fun, food and football. As one patron put it, "Such a fun local's hangout! The atmosphere is fun, warm and inviting and the bartenders are literally the sweetest. I love that I can get good craft beer and watch my favorite teams on one of their many TVs. They've also got a lot of awesome, rotating food trucks to choose from too! Extremely relaxing and always an enjoyable time." Located in the beautiful neighborhood of Bluewater Bay in Niceville, The Preserve offers good drinks, a rotating array of local food trucks each night they're open or feel free to bring your own food as well! Open Thursday-Friday: 3 - 10 p.m.; Saturday: 11 a.m. - 10 p.m.; Sunday: 11 - 6 p.m.; Closed Tuesday and Wednesday.

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Off the Hook

First Step Toward World's Largest Artificial Reef?

The Okaloosa County Board of County Commissioners recently approved a contingent contract to acquire the SS United States that could see the historic ocean liner converted into the world's largest artificial reef, in an announcement from Destin-Fort Walton Beach and the SS United States Conservancy. Part of the deal would also include funding from the county to support the Conservancy's establishment of an innovative

land-based museum that will provide divers, local residents and visitors an opportunity to learn about the legacy of America's Flagship.

Launched in 1951, the SS United States still holds the transatlantic speed record, achieved on her maiden voyage using only two-thirds of her power. She transported presidents, stars of stage and screen, heads of state, tourists, members of the armed forces and



immigrants until the advent of the jet age forced her retirement in 1969. Notable passengers included four U.S. Presidents (Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower, John Kennedy, and a young Bill Clinton), plus Marlon Brando, Coco Chanel, Sean Connery, Duke Ellington, Salvador Dali, Walt Disney, Judy Garland, Cary Grant, Bob Hope, Marilyn Monroe and John Wayne. (To learn more about the ship's historical importance, visit <https://www.ssusc.org/history-the-glory-years>.)

Designed as a top-secret, convertible troop carrier and Cold War weapon, she could transport 14,000 troops 10,000 miles without refueling. The vessel is widely considered the pinnacle of American post-war maritime engineering and a soaring symbol of her namesake nation. The SS United States Conservancy has kept the famous ocean liner safely afloat since acquiring her in 2011.

Once deployed off Destin-Fort Walton Beach, at nearly 1,000-feet long, the SS United States will be a home for a diverse range of marine life and attract divers and anglers from around the world and will continue the growth of Destin-Fort Walton Beach's robust artificial reef program, the most active, and one of the largest vessel artificial reef collections in the U.S.

The deal to acquire the vessel from the Conservancy could close in the coming weeks, contingent upon the conclusion of the current U.S. District Court-imposed mediation. The vessel would then be moved from Philadelphia after initial preparations and a towing plan are completed. A conservative allocation of up to \$10.1 million is estimated for the acquisition, remediation, transport and deployment of the historic ocean liner, as well as partial funding to help establish the Conservancy's land-based museum and immersive experience.

"I am extremely proud of our team and the effort required to achieve this tremendous next step in bringing such a breathtaking vessel to the waters of Destin-Fort Walton Beach," said Okaloosa County Board Chairman Paul Nixon. "Our artificial reef system has shown impressive growth through the years and this accomplishment confirms our commitment to remain good stewards of the environment, while also enhancing our community's status as a premier diving and fishing destination."

"Having the title of the World's Largest Artificial Reef continues to elevate Destin-Fort Walton Beach as a premier destination to visit for scuba diving and fishing. The SS United States will be an exciting addition to the many artificial reefs and wrecks available in Destin-Fort Walton Beach for divers to explore while providing essential habitat for the fishery that our fleet is so dependent on," said Jennifer Adams, Tourism Director.

According to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, for every dollar spent on artificial reefs in the

Florida Panhandle, the conservative overall economic benefit of the artificial reef system over its life span is \$138, a 13,800% return on investment. This includes job creation in the construction and maintenance of reefs and increased economic activity in related sectors such as retail.

"The SS United States has inspired millions the world over as a symbol of American pride and excellence. Should the ship be converted into an artificial reef, she will become a unique historic attraction above and below the waterline. A land-based museum and immersive experience utilizing the latest technology will showcase her unique story and proud history. Converting the world's fastest ship into the world's largest artificial reef will write a new chapter for the SS United States as a world class destination," stated Conservancy President Susan Gibbs.

The SS United States Conservancy's future museum is expected to feature a one-of-a-kind experience for visitors who will be able to explore the ship's extraordinary history. It will encompass iconic components from the ship, including the vessel's radar mast and at least one of her signature funnels, and highlights from the Conservancy's extensive curatorial collections.

This agreement, once closed, would mark the start of a lengthy process that will include the cleaning and preparation of the ship. It is expected to take more than a year to complete the necessary environmental remediation of the historic ocean liner and an additional six months to a year to arrange the vessel's deployment. The exact deployment location offshore Destin-Fort Walton Beach has not been determined, but it is projected to be deployed at a depth that will be widely accessible, providing ample opportunities for novice, intermediate and advanced technical divers.

For more information on Destin-Fort Walton Beach's extensive artificial reef program, including coordinates and 3-D mapping, please visit <https://www.destinfwb.com/explore/eco-tourism/artificial-reefs/>. To learn more about the history of America's Flagship, visit <https://www.ssusc.org/>.

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Growing the Game: High School Fall Tournaments

Girls Just Want to Have Golf!

BY BARBARA PALMGREN

The Miracle Strip High Golf Tournament continued to celebrate golf for teens this year at Fort Walton Municipal Golf Course. The tournament began 40 years ago, hosting male and female golfers to compete as individuals and as a team. Then, 24 years ago, this same tournament split into two tournaments to host boys and girls teams separately.



Individual players were scored as well, using the lowest score for the winner. In golf, low scores win! After almost six hours of play, two schools emerged victorious. Niceville High's team was runner-up

On a beautiful October day, October 9, the following schools sent their best female golfers to vie for honors. These schools included Navarre, Choctawhatchee, West Florida, Pensacola High, Pensacola Catholic, Baker, Gulf Breeze, Niceville, Crestview, Pine Forest and South Walton. There were 64 girls who entered the competition.



with a score of 335. South Walton was the winner with a score of 306.

Individual winners are congratulated with impressive scores. Runner-up, Elizabeth Palmer, from Niceville High School, scored 76 or 4 over Par. Winner, Neely Kight from South Walton, scored 72 or Even Par. Congratulations, ladies! We know all of you had fun and enjoyed the day.

Teams were composed of five players, using the top four scores for the total team score.

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All Sports Association Announces Urban Meyer as Guest Speaker for Annual Banquet

All Sports Association has announced that Urban Meyer will be the guest speaker for its 56th Annual All Sports Awards Banquet, February 21st, 2025. This banquet is a key event for the association, honoring outstanding athletes and people who have significantly contributed to youth sports in the area.

Urban Meyer, who has won three national championships at the University of Florida and Ohio State University, brings extensive knowledge and dedication to athletics. His participation is expected to enhance the event, giving attendees valuable insights into sports leadership and dedication.

Kevin Bowyer, the association's president, shared his excitement about Meyer's in-

volvement. "We are thrilled to have Urban Meyer as our guest speaker this year. His contributions to college football and his commitment to nurturing young talent make him a perfect fit for our event. Our goal is to inspire and celebrate those who excel in athletics, and having a figure like Coach Meyer aligns perfectly with that mission," Bowyer said.

Held every February, the Annual Awards Banquet celebrates top athletes from high school, college, amateur, professional and Special Olympic levels. It also acknowledges individuals who have made notable efforts in promoting youth activities. Several prestigious awards are given out, including the Wuerffel Trophy, the Colonel

Al Byrne Award and the Taylor Haugen Trophy.

The Wuerffel Trophy is awarded to a college football player who shines not only on the field but also in community service and academics. The Colonel Al Byrne Award goes to a local individual who has shown exceptional support for youth sports. The Taylor Haugen Trophy, established in memory of Taylor Reid Haugen, a Niceville High School wide receiver who tragically passed away from football injuries in 2009, is awarded to an area athlete who best demonstrates a balance between academics, athleticism, leadership, community service and faith.

Based in Fort Walton Beach, the All Sports Association is a



sociation's dedication to youth sports and community development is also seen in its Hall of Fame, which honors individuals who've made significant contributions to sports in Northwest Florida.

To attend or support the event, visit allsportsassociation.com or [Facebook.com/AllSportsAssociation](https://www.facebook.com/AllSportsAssociation).

All Sports Association continues to celebrate and support youth athletics. The 56th Annual Awards Banquet promises to be another memorable event that aligns with their mission of fostering community spirit through sports. "This event is more than just a celebration; it's a testament to the hard work and dedication of our young athletes and the community that supports them. Having Urban Meyer speak adds an extra layer of inspiration that we hope will resonate with everyone involved," Bowyer said.

non-profit organization focused on supporting local youth sports programs. Founded in 1970, the association has raised over \$2 million in the last 10 years, thanks to its volunteers and supporters. These funds help various youth sports organizations and charitable causes, fostering the development of young athletes.

Key beneficiaries include the Boys & Girls Club of the Emerald Coast, Special Olympics Florida-Okaloosa, Eleanor J. Johnson Youth Center, and Okaloosa Walton FCA. The as-



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VOTE YES

continued from page 4

Neighboring counties with similar incentives would gain a competitive edge, making it more difficult for our community to attract high-paying jobs and business investments.

The expiration of EDATE would signal to potential investors that Okaloosa County is not fully committed to supporting business growth, potentially deterring future investments that could bring jobs and economic prosperity to the region.

Conclusion: Vote Yes for Jobs, Vote Yes for EDATE

The renewal of the EDATE program is a critical step in securing a prosperous future for Okaloosa County. EDATE has

proven to be an effective tool for fostering economic growth and ensuring that Okaloosa County remains competitive in the global marketplace by providing temporary tax exemptions to businesses that invest in our community and create high-wage jobs.

A "Yes" vote on the EDATE referendum is a vote for jobs, economic stability, and the continued growth and success of our county. Let's ensure that Okaloosa County remains a place where businesses want to invest, grow, and create the kind of high-paying jobs that benefit all of us. Vote yes for EDATE on November 5, and help secure a brighter future for our community. More information available at www.JobsForOkaloosa.com

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Making Preparations for the Storms in Life

BY DR. JESSICA MONTELEONE, PT PhD

We were married 36 years ago. He worked as a third generation, shoe repairman owning two shops in Fort Walton Beach. I was employed as a physical therapist at our local hospital. We were both in good physical shape enjoying our active lives here on the Emerald Coast.

It was six weeks following our wedding that David leaned over to pick up a hose and couldn't straighten back up to an upright position. Unfortunately, physical therapy could not fix his physical challenges that became progressively worse over the years.

When we bought our previous country home many years ago, it had a certain charm. A

two-story, old farm house built in 1943 on an acre and a half, fenced-in lot was delightful. The 20x40' built-in pool was a great place to unwind after a long day. The home was surrounded with mature Magnolia, Sycamore, Oak and Crepe Myrtle trees to shade our expansive property. I thought that it was perfect. However, we found that the pool and yard became too much of a workload on my husband's unresolved back issues. Our upstairs bedroom flight of stairs troublesome. The narrow doorways to the bathroom did not allow a walker to safely enter it. Our tub-shower combo was too high for him to climb over. Needless to say, I wasn't thinking like a therapist when we bought the house. I thought that the challenges presented to him would keep him active and strong. Instead, he felt defeated and worthless to provide upkeep in that house.

When moving back to Freeport last year, I house shopped with new vision. I needed a home that would be handicap able to my husband and the



guests who would frequent our home. When I leave the house, I need to be assured that he is safe and mobile.

It's important to plan ahead. Whether you are renting a home or condo, having aging or debilitated guests in your home or planning for your storms in the future, modifications are so important to meet the needs of others. It can be a selling point in a market like today.

- Have clear pathways that can accommodate a walker or wheelchair, removing scatter rugs and electric cords from walking paths.
- A heavy chair with 19-21" seat height and adequate chair

arms to assist them from sitting to standing is important. I like a Queen Anne style chair. (My post-cardiac patient had no seating in her condo that she could transfer from. Her husband was forced to rent a chair for their continued vacation.)

- Walk-in showers with a sturdy seat and at least two attached hand rails are a must. Install anti-slip shower flooring.
- Install at least one tall bathroom toilet with rails on one or both sides. (My 6'2" patient recently rented a condo on the beach. The toilet was so low, he could not get off of the seat—not good.)
- Night lights in the bathroom and hallways are a must for evening use.
- If you have a sunken living room or steps leading to another room, announce it to your guests before they get to that area.
- Stairs leading to the home

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need to be accessible with a sturdy handrail.

• Beds need to be a height that allows easy access for transferability.

There may be other modifications that are important for your home to ensure the safety of those with mobility deficits. A physical therapist has been trained to evaluate accommodations and make safety recommendations for those people.

Is there an elective orthopedic surgery scheduled in your home this fall? Most of those post-op patients are discharged the same day. Are you prepared for the upcoming possible storms at your home or rental? I hope so. If not, we can help. Please call 850-974-0970 or visit WholisticTherapyatHome.com.

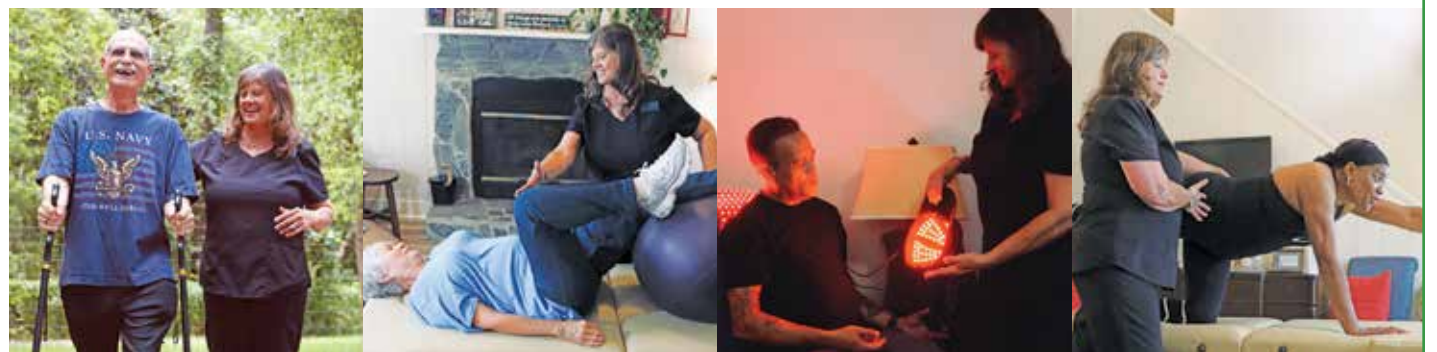


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Instead of Leaning Out, Lean In



BY STEPHENIE CRAIG, JOURNEY BRAVELY

Do you ever find yourself leaning out of something you fear? Maybe you fear conflict so you avoid a hard conversation. Or, maybe you fear rejection so you present a false version of yourself to escape feeling judged by others. Or, maybe you fear abandonment so you close your-

self off from others to avoid feeling unimportant. At the time, leaning out seems like a helpful strategy, because it alleviates the immediate discomfort of your fear. But, upon closer examination, what is the larger result of leaning out?

Not having hard conversations often results in lack of resolution, lack of understanding and long-term resentment. Instead of creating less conflict, avoidance creates larger future conflict. Running from fear of rejection by presenting an inauthentic self ultimately creates a situation where you don't know if people truly accept you for you. Instead of creating acceptance, a false version of self ends up creating more feelings of rejection. Closing yourself off from others to avoid abandonment actually creates more internal loneliness and abandon-

ment. Ironically, leaning out of the thing you fear often creates more of the thing you fear.

So, if leaning out doesn't work, then what?

As it turns out, the way to get what you really want is to lean into your fear instead of leaning out. Have the difficult conversation and prove to yourself you can make it through conflict and survive, often with a helpful outcome. Show up as an authentic version of yourself and learn that those who judge you aren't your people and those who want to be close to the real you truly appreciate you for you. Allow yourself to be close to others even when it feels like they might leave you as a pathway to vulnerable connection. Getting what you really want happens through the risk of leaning into your fear.

So, how are you supposed to lean into fear when the instinct to lean out is so strong?

Eight Ways to Lean Into Fear to Get What You Really Want:

Notice what you fear and instinctively want to avoid. Notice fearful, repetitive thoughts. Notice people or situations you are avoiding. Notice signs of anxiety in your body. Name the fear and the avoid-



ance. "I'm afraid I'll upset my partner if I'm honest and I'm avoiding having the conversation."

Identify what you really want. "What I really want is closeness and open connection with my partner."

Identify how to align your behavior with what you want. "If I want to be close, open and connected with my partner, I need to communicate honestly even if it scares me."

Notice unhealthy coping patterns of leaning out. Notice when you are avoiding. Notice when you are striving in unhealthy ways. Notice when you are engaged in self-protective defensiveness. Notice your per-

sonal brand of leaning out behavior around fear.

Lean into the thing you fear. Remind yourself you will survive the fear. Remember avoiding your fear will create more of what you fear. Do the uncomfortable thing. Remember anticipatory anxiety is usually worse than doing the thing you fear.

Sustain leaning in. Lean in long enough to get to the other side of your fear.

Repeat leaning into your fear until your brain remembers it's a useful strategy.

Evaluate the results of leaning in. Leaning in won't always get your desired results, however, leaning out will always lead to more problems eventually. Notice how you feel about yourself when you lean into fear. Notice when leaning into fear produces helpful results.

Practice. Keep practicing until leaning into fear is a way of life. Celebrate and be proud of yourself as you are progressing.

Be brave and patient as you learn to lean into fear and walk in the confidence that follows. Connect with us along your journey at Journeybravely.com.

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Road Dogg Rescue Pet of the Month

Red was rescued along with 52 other dogs from a neglect situation with patches of hair missing and nervous about everything! She has now been in rescue with Road Dogg Rescue for more than eight months. In fact, Red is the LAST ONE of the 52 rescued that is still looking for her forever family. Estimated to be a one-year-old, medium sized Vizsla mix and she has blossomed over the last few months. She is super sweet, loves dogs and everyone she



meets. She is generally quiet and only barks when she is alerting. She would do best in an active family or one that has another pup looking for a playmate. Red is crate trained and potty trained. She has been in foster in a home with other large dogs and fits in well with the pack!

If you are ready to schedule a Meet & Greet with this amazing pup, fill out the adoption application (Adoption Form (airtable.com)) and we will get that scheduled!

Pickleball: Is It Worth A Paddle?



By KASSIA GARFIELD, OWNER, MAXSTRENGTH FITNESS

As most people have seen, pickleball is the fastest growing sport in America, and has been for the last three years! It was invented on Bainbridge Island, Wash., in 1965. According to the National Pickleball Association, there are over 36.5 million people in America that have played pickleball at least once. During the past three years, there has been a 223.5% growth in the sport. Believe it or not, the largest demographic, coming in at 28.8% are 18-34 year olds



with males comprising 60.5% of the players. Our state of Florida has the second most locations to play pickleball, beaten only by California.

Racket sports overall increase a person's longevity. Tennis has the best return on investment, prolonging life by 9.7 years, more than any other sport. (But, pickleball stats are yet to come out!) To give some context, badminton extends life 6.2 years, soccer 4.7 years, cycling 3.7 years, swimming 3.4 and jogging 3.2 years.

This happens for multiple reasons:

1) Individuals are active, staying healthier, performing cardiovascular activities and, generally, living healthier lifestyles. Tennis also challenges balance, forcing movements in a lateral plane and keeping the body's balance system working well.



2) There is a social piece to racket sports. Tennis requires play with other people. This social community is very beneficial, especially, for older adults, creating meaningful friendships and emotional support, which is vital to a healthier, longer, more-fulfilled life.

3) Racket sports utilize cognitive processing and eye hand coordination, forcing the brain to react and plan in short amounts of time. There is a lot more motor planning, coordination and strategy. Think of a ball coming across the net—to see the ball, hit the ball—during that time of physically reacting. A tennis player is visualizing the court, the placement of other players and choosing the best location for the next shot. This happens in seconds or less. The mental processing for racket sports is just as vital for longevity and healthier longer lives as the physical and emotional components are. Because Pickleball utilizes a smaller court, this pro-

cessing of shot placement and strategy is happening in even shorter amounts of time—only adding the benefit to the sport.

This sounds all well and good, but is there a downside? As a physical therapist, I've noticed an increase in older adult pickleball related injuries. Over-use injuries account for 50% of injuries, such as tennis elbow, knee tendonitis or plantar fasciitis. But, a close second on the list are injuries from falls, usually in people over 50. Players ages 50 and over make up the largest demographic for Pickleball-related injuries, especially related to falls or trips; 32% are in the lower extremity, and 25% are in the upper extremity. I think a lot of these injuries happen, because people think Pickleball is an easy sport to get into; but you still need to ease into it. Aging adults who are just learning to play, may not have been very active before. This means their balance system and coordination are not primed for the pace of the game or lateral movements necessary to be successful, increasing the risk of injury.

My advice? Start with people on your same level. Practice and do drills while not in a game-like environment. This will allow your body to adjust, learn the game and keep a controlled

environment during the motor learning stage.

Strength training (which is also recommended for any adult over 60), also improves balance, endurance and will reduce the risk of injury. When strength increases, it allows the nervous system to better respond to times when the center of gravity is outside the body's base of support. An increase in strength also allows the body to pull the body back into a more grounded state when your body weight shifts too far.

In addition to the long-term benefits of a healthier longer life, racket sports and strength training also help manage weight, reduce the risk of chronic diseases, reduce some cancer risks, lower cholesterol and blood pressure, and help with flexibility and feeling more energized!

But, if you're thinking about picking up the craze that's taking over the country, please stay safe, have some level of fitness before starting, have fun and be strong. I can help you get your game on!

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Wellness



By KAY LEAMAN, HEALTH ARCHITECT, HEALTHYDAY HEALTHYLIFE
Fall is here and although we

have had some amazing mornings, summer is still showing up in force by 9:30 a.m. Whether or not the weather is cooperating with the official start of the season, our minds are beginning to think about the coming holidays. And along with the seasons and holidays comes the cold and flu season.

It's time to boost our immune system. That being said, let's first look at what can weaken our immune system.

Boosting Your Immunity



- Sugar
- Lack of Sleep
- Stress
- Alcohol

When looking at sugar, consider using honey or pure maple syrup in place of processed sugar. You can also decrease the amount of sugar in the recipe. Put out an array of goodies using smaller plates to decrease how much is being eaten each day.

Lack of sleep coincides with stress. So, taking time to schedule your to do list each day and tossing procrastination out the window can help. When it comes to family get togethers, take time to meditate or do some deep breathing to calm the nerves. You can do this each morning when you first awake and before you go to sleep; deep breathing can be done at any time during your day and can quickly take your body from stress to calm.

When it comes to alcohol, be aware of how much or how quickly you are consuming it.

The following list of foods have immune boosting properties due to the vitamins and minerals they contain. Vitamins A, C, E and D all play a part

- Citrus fruit (lemons, limes, oranges, clementines, tangerines, grapefruit). Add as a side to every meal.
- Poultry - Chicken soup can ease congestion, supply protein, increase fluids and offer electrolytes, which are important for hydration and recovery. Making your own stock or using bone broth will offer the best benefits.
- Yogurt (plain with good bacteria) Add fruit, nuts and seeds.
- Almonds (1/2 cup per day) These also contain healthy fats.
- Broccoli (top of the vegetable list for its nutritional impact) Steamed, microwaved or raw are the best methods to retain the most nutrient value. It also contains a good amount of fiber.
- Garlic (medicinal) Add it to whatever you're cooking; soups, stews, sauces, casseroles, etc.
- Ginger (can decrease inflammation, help with sore

throats and aids with nausea) I love the crystalized ginger as I enjoy sweet and spicy flavors. Ginger tea is a great alternative.

• Green tea (contains epigallocatechin 3 gallate or EGCG for short) It enhances the immune system. This can be consumed hot or cold.

Take a high-quality vitamin that has been researched, tested and verified for potency, purity, dissolution and void of coloring and preservatives. No matter how much we eat, our foods no longer contain the nutrients they used to. Extra vitamin D (take this daily) is also important.

Grounding can boost your body's ability to fight off invaders, calm the nerves and give you that little boost of energy you need to finish your day. Whether it's cleaning up the yard, getting your hands in the dirt or walking the beach, spending 10-20 minutes outside daily makes a difference.

Finally, maintain an exercise routine. If a 30-minute routine doesn't work for you, consider breaking it up into 10 minute intervals.

Remember to think outside the box and have fun. After all, our holidays are just around the corner. Here's to Health! succeed.hhdl@gmail.com

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What to Expect from Oxygen Therapy

By KELLY STALNAKER

As most of us likely learned in grade school, oxygen is vital for the survival of most living organisms. Oxygen is essential as cells cannot produce the energy needed to perform basic functions such as movement, thinking and digestion without it. But what happens when the simple act of breathing becomes too difficult? Unfortunately, this is a reality for an estimated 1.5 million people in the United States. The cause of breathlessness varies from person to person, but can be contributed to a variety of disorders including asthma, COPD, emphysema, lung disease and more. In many of these cases, the patient's doctor will prescribe oxygen therapy.

According to the American Lung Association, oxygen therapy can help decrease shortness of breath. And though it may not take away the breathlessness completely, it can help patients resume daily living activities more safely and comfortably. It can also help patients feel less fatigued, sleep better, and be more independent and active in general. But what does oxygen therapy look like?

Medical grade oxygen is considered a controlled substance in



the U.S., meaning that it requires a prescription from a healthcare professional before it can be dispensed. To determine which type and how much oxygen is right for you, your doctor will perform a variety of tests. Your provider will then issue the certificate of medical necessity which will be sent to an oxygen supplier. The type of home oxygen delivery system that is right for you is based on how much oxygen you need, your lifestyle and insurance coverage.

Each type of oxygen delivery device has a setting or an "oxygen flow rate," which is the number of liters of oxygen flowing per minute (this is set by your doctor and should not be changed without the consent of a healthcare professional). Home oxygen concentrators are large units that are kept relatively stationary in your home. These devices convert room air into pure

oxygen by removing nitrogen and other gasses. A portable oxygen concentrator works similarly, but is much smaller and more portable. It is ideal for a traveler or for a patient with an active lifestyle. Compressed oxygen in a metal tank is a common oxygen delivery device. The tanks come in different sizes, but the smaller the tank, the less oxygen is in it. Gauges on the tank are used to control the flow rate. Face masks and nasal cannulas are most commonly used to deliver the oxygen to the patient through their nose or mouth.

There are some considerations to take into account when using oxygen therapy. For example, special care must be exercised storing oxygen as it must be away from heat, and tanks must be stored upright. Additionally, access to electricity will be imperative for an oxygen user. So, power outages need to be carefully addressed in areas that experience severe weather. Using petroleum-based products can also pose a danger to an oxygen patient as the interaction can cause skin irritation or burns.

Being prescribed oxygen can be overwhelming, but finding an oxygen supplier that is committed to your success will help! J&B Medical is a local, family-owned business that has been providing oxygen to our community for over two decades. We are here

to answer any questions you may have about oxygen therapy for yourself or a loved one. Stop by for more information at 540 E. John Sims Pkwy. in Niceville, Monday - Friday from 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. Or call 850-729-2559. We are here to help you!



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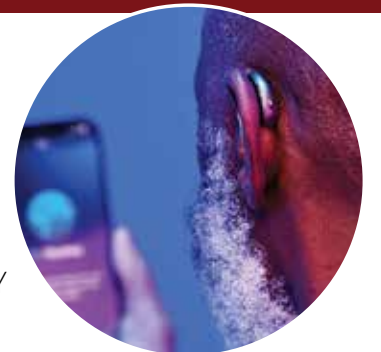
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Business

Up on the Roof: Northwest Florida's Specialty Roofers

BY CHRISTOPHER MANSON

Specialty Roofers, Inc. (SRI), established in 2011, proudly offers the most trusted residential and commercial roofing brands and products available, as well as comprehensive installation and repair services. The company – licensed, insured and bonded in Florida and Alabama – serves local and regional customers throughout the southeast and employs a dedicated staff of trained professionals and certified technicians.

As roofing trends go, president and general manager Mike Miller says he's seeing more and more people make the switch to metal roofing because of energy savings and wind resistance. "We're one of the only roofing companies in the immediate area with our own separate met-



al shop for fabricating." And SRI offers its own mobile panel machine, which allows the crews to fabricate roof panels on site.

With hurricane season in full swing, Miller swears by Roof Shield. This program protects homeowners and detects any problems early, saving customers thousands of dollars. "We inspect customer roofs annual-



ly to make sure they're in good shape and 'hurricane ready,'" says Miller. "Anyone that signs up for this moves to the top of the priority list for repairs and getting new roofs installed."

Roof Shield costs \$450 annually, which Miller calls "very reasonable. A lot of people don't realize squirrels have chewed on something or they've had



their gutters clogged. This is the fifth year we've offered this, and we've had lots of success with the program. It's gained a lot of momentum."

SRI currently employs over 50 people. "We've been blessed with very little turnover," Miller says of his crew. "Several have been with us since we first opened, including a few crews and about a dozen installers."

SRI stands apart from other roofing contractors in the areas of knowledge (skills are constantly learned and honed), customer service (realistic expectations and clear communications) and reputation (SRI has been a dominant force in the local roofing market since 2011).

In 2023, GAF – North America's largest roofing manufacturer – presented SRI with its President's Club 3-Star Award for outstanding achievement in the roofing industry, citing "excep-

tional workmanship and customer service, and commitment to excellence." Only six Florida companies have received this honor.

Miller serves on the GAF advisory board. "It's been interesting working with them on things that will improve the industry," he says.

The SRI website includes testimonials from very satisfied customers and a user-friendly free quote form. There is also a blog featuring topics like the importance of leaf removal, roofing trends for the coming year, and detecting signs of poor ventilation in houses.

As for the company's philanthropical endeavors, SRI raised over \$60,000 for Westonwood Ranch with the inaugural Sports Clay Shooting Tournament in 2022. The 10-acre ranch in Freeport offers life skills and job skill training to teenagers and young adults with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities (IDD).

Specialty Roofers is located at 124 Trout Branch Drive (9600 SR-20 on GPS) in Freeport. For more information, visit specialtyroofers.com, email info@specialtyroofers.com or call 850.974.ROOF. Office and showroom hours are Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

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Sean of the South: Loved Ones

gest, best, most vivid rainbow ever.

So help me, the colors were touching the ground. The rainbow's tail was diving into the dirt like a spotlight.

thinking of my father, and all my late loved ones. I was crying because even though I can't see them, up close, their colors are still here. In everything I do. In all parts of my life.

Pull over in cattle pastures to chase his memory. Let his memory paint your birthday, and allow yourself to grieve.

And for God's sake, whatever you do...

Don't let this world make you normal.

BY SEAN DIETRICH

The letter came via email. "My dad died last year and I don't really know what to do with myself anymore. My mom is trying to give me space, my friends ask when I'll be normal again. I turn fifteen tomorrow and my dad is not here to see it."

I'm the wrong guy to ask about normalcy. I haven't been normal since third grade when I peed my pants at a school assembly. Even our school nurse remarked, "That child's not normal."

No matter. "Normal" is a made-up word. Normal doesn't exist. Nothing in this world is normal. Not you, not me, or anything in nature.

Years ago, for example, while driving through rural Alabama, I saw something quite abnormal. I'll never forget it.

It was an overcast day. My wife and I had just left a funeral. There was a lingering sadness over our vehicle. The kind that only the death of a loved one can bring.

We were riding through miles of farmland, grain silos, barns, and cows staring at us as we sped by. That's when my wife said, "Look!" She was pointing out the window.

I glanced out the window and saw it, too. It was a spectacular rainbow. I pulled into a random cow pasture.

We ran through acres of green grass, alfalfa, and fresh cow pies. And we saw the big-



I'd never seen anything like it. I didn't know rainbows actually touched the earth. This was highly unusual to me.

The cows watched us with big eyes while we behaved like six-year-olds. My wife ran forward to get a better glimpse. I almost peed my pants again.

But here's where things get somewhat magical.

Have you ever tried to look at a rainbow up close? You can't do it. The colors disappear whenever you get too close. Then, the colors will reappear whenever you take several steps back.

It doesn't mean the rainbow isn't there. It's there the whole time, but you can only see it from certain angles.

We hiked back to the truck and I started crying. It wasn't a sad cry. It was the kind of happy cry you do when a baby is born, or at weddings, or when your team wins the SEC Championship—not that I would know what this is like.

I was crying because I was

Life evaporates. It rises toward heaven at the speed of light. It reaches the top of the world, then disappears, and we're left with gray clouds. But the colors of someone's life remain.

Remember their colors, even though you can't always see their rainbow. Watch for the colors to reappear, because sometimes they frequently show up in the most random places. Even in cow pastures.

Do not forget your father. Talk about him. Tell his stories.

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Westonwood Ranch with the support of Specialty Roofers will hold its third annual Sporting Clay Tournament on Friday, Nov. 8, at the Bay County Shooting Range. Featuring over 140 sports shooters, this year's event aims to raise much-needed funds for therapeutic program schol-

arships for teens and young adults affected with Autism, Down Syndrome and other related developmental disabilities in Walton, Okaloosa and Bay Counties. \$500 per 4-man team; Sponsorships Available. Email Erin@SpecialtyRoofers.com



Psalm 25:4

Show me the right path O Lord;
point out the road for me to follow

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Musing

A Pastor's Ponderings: Our Hope Beyond Elections



BY "DOC" DOUG STAUFFER
As this reaches you, we stand

on the eve of another highly contentious election. The results have not yet been wholly tabulated, and many people are filled with anticipation, some hopeful and others anxious about the outcome. As believers, it is essential to remember that our true hope should never be focused on the results of any election or candidate, no matter how pivotal the outcome may seem. Instead, our steadfast trust must be in the Lord above all earthly powers.

Psalm 118:8-9 reminds us, "It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes." Political leaders may guide policies and decisions, but they cannot provide salvation or touch the most profound matters of the heart. While many may eagerly await the election's outcome, we must focus our ultimate trust in God's plan, not in human leadership.

Our True Hope is in Christ

Regardless of who comes to power after this election, we are reminded that human leaders are fallible, no matter how competent or well-intentioned. They may succeed or fail, but God alone is infallible. **Revelation 11:15** declares, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever." This eternal nature of God's plan should fill us with a sense of security and hope, knowing that our future is not shaped by any single election but by God's eternal purpose and plan.

As Christians, we must stay grounded in this reality. The political sphere is important, but it pales compared to our heavenly calling. Our responsibilities as citizens are real, and we must view them through the lens of

eternity, understanding that our role in society pales in comparison.

Looking for His Return

No matter how the election turns out, our primary mission as believers remains unchanged. We are called to engage in our communities and contribute to the good of society. Yet, at the same time, we must never lose sight of our ultimate hope: the return of Christ. The urgency of this hope remains, uniting us in our shared beliefs, regardless of who holds political office.

Hebrews 10:37 reminds us, "For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry." Christ's return is the final curtain call upon which all history moves, not the outcome of any election. Our focus must stay on this blessed hope.

Hope and Action

While waiting for the election results, we are reminded that the Gospel's message remains the same: Christ died for sinners, rose again, and offers salvation to all who call upon His name. This truth transcends any political divide or election cycle. It goes way beyond clocks and calendars into timeless eternity.

As followers of Christ, we are called to love our neighbors, serve with humility, and reflect Christ's love in an often-divided world. Our faith should be evident in our actions, especially during uncertainty and tension. Whether in victory or defeat, we are to live as Christ's ambassadors, offering a message of hope,

peace, and salvation.

A Hopeful Reminder

As the election looms on the horizon, let us not be shaken by the uncertainty of earthly politics. Our foundation is in God's unchanging nature. He is our Rock and Redeemer, whose plan is perfect even in these tumultuous times. **Titus 2:13** encourages us to be "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."

No matter the outcome of the election, Christ is still coming again. He is the King eternal, and His reign is eternal (**1 Timothy 1:17**). Let us live in readiness, faithfully serving Him until that day.

In these final days before the election, whether you are experiencing a sense of hope or anxiety, find peace in this unshakable truth. While elections may shape the future of nations, they do not alter the eternal kingdom of God. As His people, we are called to pray fervently, not just for a particular outcome, but for the wisdom and hearts of our leaders. We must labor for the good of our communities and let Christ's light shine brightly in uncertainty. This world needs His hope more than ever, and we are His ambassadors, sent to share that hope with a world longing for peace. Let us rise to this calling with faith, knowing that God's perfect plan is unfolding and His ultimate victory is assured.

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Co-Creating with ECTC: From Casting to Curtain Call

BY NATHANAEL AND ANNA FISHER

After shows like *Jersey Boys*, *Million Dollar Quartet* and *Wonderettes*, we often receive questions such as, “How long has this cast toured together?” and “Where are they going next?” Anna and I always smile when we get these questions, because it speaks to the quality of the show. But, the reality is that all the mainstage shows at Emerald Coast Theatre Company (ECTC) are auditioned, produced and directed by ECTC staff. It’s a year-long process that begins right after we settle on a season.

After a season is chosen and we procure the production rights from the publishing companies, the work begins. Take *Season 12 Shows: Jersey Boys*, *Baskerville: A Sherlock Holmes Mystery*, *All is Calm*, *Every Brilliant Thing*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Always a Bridesmaid* and *Legally Blonde the Musical*—to produce all of those shows plus our Family Theatre production of *Go Dog Go*, we have to find and hire more than 60 actors to fill those character roles.

Our first step as a casting team (Anna, Emily, Trenton and Nathanael) is to consider our local actors and what parts we feel are right for those who live in the region between Panama City and Pensacola. We then start compiling a list of roles for actors that we know we will have to audition and cast from out of town. Take *Jersey Boys* for example: We were pretty sure we didn’t have any local young men who could sing falsetto like Keenan Lyons, the actor who plays Frankie Valli. Once we have a clear idea of what roles we need to cast for, we begin the auditioning process.

Each February, the Unified Professional Theatre Auditions, otherwise known as “UPTAs,” takes place in Memphis, Tenn. This is where over 100 theatre representatives and more than 800 actors come together for four days of auditions. In sports terms, this is where we “scout” for talent. Trenton and I head to Memphis with our list of needed roles and look specifically for the talent that we might need to bring in. We’ll keep our list of prospects until we are ready to start casting later in the year. For *Jersey Boys*, we brought in six

guys from all over the country. Each actor was hired for his specific look and skill set, including vocal range, dance experience, character choice and believability.

Over the summer, the incredible production team begins working on the first few shows of the season. This includes production design meetings with the director to discuss the overall vision of the show and how each designer will execute their part of it. Beca drafts the set design; Taylor begins researching and building costumes; Emily starts choreographing the dances; and Ora engineers props. This all takes place simultaneously while our summer EDU programs are in full swing, during which they are also designing, building, choreographing and executing those summer shows as well.

In July, we will hold our first round of local auditions for the season. We would love to cast every role locally and do everything we can to work with local actors and their schedules. The casting team then gets to work finalizing and contracting a combination of local and out of town talent to make our shows shine! We start by prioritizing the first several shows of the season (*Jersey Boys*, *Baskerville*, and *All is Calm*). Then, later in the year, start focusing on casting the other shows. Our focus in casting *Jersey Boys*, for example, was to find a group of four young men that looked the part, could sing the part and could act well—four guys that looked like best friends and would cohesively tell the story of Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons.

A huge thanks is due to partners like the Howard Group (with the Grand Boulevard Hotels), Ocean Reef Resorts, and a few generous patrons, who assist in providing accommodations for our out of town actors during rehearsals and performances. This is a partnership that allows us to specifically cast each role with the right actor, no matter where they are from.

Now comes the work! We have 15 rehearsal days to bring our entire cast of *Jersey Boys* together to create a cohesive, well-executed show. Keep in mind that many of the cast members have never met each other before. The six actors brought in from out of town

are not a traveling troupe like many assume. They meet on the first day of rehearsal along with the rest of the cast. The next 15 days are packed! Prior to rehearsals, the cast receives the script and music, so they can essentially have lines and music memorized at the beginning of the rehearsal process—what we call “off book.” On the first day of rehearsals Tom Baroco, our Music Director extraordinaire, starts working with the cast on all of the music, including those beautiful harmonies. Emily Bainbridge, our top-notch choreographer, starts teaching the choreography that she has created and worked on for hours ahead of time in preparation for rehearsals. The first two or three rehearsals are totally focused on the music and choreography - they are such important parts of a musical like *Jersey Boys*. At the second rehearsal, Trenton (Assistant Director) and I give our pep talks. Trenton shares with the cast how they can expect to collaborate with us and our expectations of them, then I share my vision of the show from a storytelling perspective.

Anna and I have recently been discussing the idea of “Co-Creation.” It is amazing that we can take a formless idea of a show that has no set, no props, no costumes, no actors,



and no choreography, to a collaboration with our production team and cast that creates an unforgettable live experience. Along the way, the director and the production team are answering questions like: How is the cast interacting with the set and props? Are the costumes cohesive to the storytelling of the show? Where does the cast need more work in learning music or choreography? Are we remaining authentic in our storytelling throughout the show? The last four or five days before opening are simply called “tech week.” This is where we are focused on technical elements like lights, sound, costumes, and scene transitions. Finally, the last element is executed, where either the director or choreographer stages curtains call- that wonderful moment where the audience shows their appreciation

to the performers. For *Jersey Boys*, Emily choreographed the curtain call and that spectacular finale to *Jersey Boys*. These final touches are put on the show during tech week and the actors magically pull everything together in a seamless, beautiful final product- a “co-creation” that every cast member along with the production and tech crew has contributed to and brought to life.

All of this work culminates in *OPENING NIGHT!* We had a stellar, sold out opening night performance of *Jersey Boys*. The cast was professional, collaborative, and incredibly prepared for opening night. The audience was buzzing with excitement for the show. It was a live phenomenon that happened in real time and will never happen the same

Continued on page 37



November 7TH - 23rd

Come watch our stellar students perform this Tony Award-winning musical about your favorite Ogre and all of his fairytale friends as they fight the evil Lord Farquad to regain their homes. Featuring songs you know and love like "Freak Flag" and "I'm a Believer," this show is a feel good hit for all ages!



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December 6TH - 22ND

Christmas 1914. Out of the violence of World War I, a silence, then a song. A German soldier steps into No Man's Land singing "Stille Nacht." Thus begins an extraordinary night of camaraderie, music, and peace. An a cappella chorale, All Is Calm is a remarkable true story in the words and songs of the men who lived it.






Tickets or info, call 850.684.0323 or visit EmeraldCoastTheatre.org
560 Grand Boulevard, Suite 200 | Miramar Beach, FL 32550

Arts & Music

SINFONIA

continued from page 1

type of presentation in a proper space. It is always important to present this type of concert with the highest caliber of musicians and venue. This sets Sinfonia apart from more recent concerts of others touting the same experience.

Often musicians and vocalists taking the Sinfonia stage are not just performers, they are longtime friends of yours. Singer/songwriter Morgan James returns for Big Band Holiday Toast 'n Jam on December 8. Tell us why she's so special to you and why this concert will get us in the spirit.

Isn't that great? I have been so fortunate to meet and forge friendships with so many incredible people over the last 25 years! It makes it more fun when you have that connection and almost always, even if I am working with an artist for the first time, we leave the concert experience as friends. Morgan, I can write a novel on Morgan James. A really good one. We met by mistake. She was a last-minute re-

placement for a vocalist for our holiday pops in 2012. She blew the roof off that evening, and we never looked back. She has become one of my best friends, sounding board and collaborator. There is not another voice on this planet that can match Morgan James. It is a very special instrument that is so versatile from coloratura opera to Broadway to pop to soul to jazz to R&B and I can go on. She is presenting her holiday themed big band concert that she debuted at Joe's Pub in NYC last year. It is FUN!

Two words. The Grinch. Your innovative Film in Concert series has become one of the most popular offerings with families. Why should we not miss this December 14 concert?

Two Words: The Grinch. Three words: Sinfonia Gulf Coast. Three more words: Live in Concert. Aside from being a classic holiday movie, and with all due respect to Jim Carrey, Sinfonia's orchestra steals the show in these films in concert, but I may be slightly biased. Sinfonia's Film in Concert series is a great way for families and everyone really, to enjoy live music paired with iconic films. Nostal-



gia, excitement, joy—all of the emotions can be described as part of the experience.

Bette, Babs & Beyond sounds like a siren call for everyone who loves the music of legends like Bette Midler, Barbra Streisand, Dolly Parton, Adele and Cher. Sounds like January 17 is a party in the making. Tell us more.

We honored Music of the Knights last year with the tribute to Sirs Paul McCartney, Elton John and Andrew Lloyd Webber. So, it was appropriate to flip the switch and pay tribute to the amazing female voices of our time and this set list is non-stop hit after hit that will feature amazing vocalists, including the return of Jessica Hendy from Music of the Knights and the full orchestra.

February is the season of love and with Crescendo! 2025 Vintner Dinners kicking off February 28 and the Main Event on March 2, we

understand Sinfonia will be Painting the Town Red starting with the January 30 Kick Off event. What can we expect this year?

Crescendo! is Sinfonia's most important event each season because it raises the funds to keep all of our educational outreach and community engagement initiatives free to the school districts that we serve. This includes our Link Up partnership with Carnegie Hall, guest artists in schools, ensembles in residence that provide services throughout our community and our annual Paint the Music program in partnership with Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation. That aside, it is a blast and sets the social scene for the spring and summer. What not to like about incredible vintners paired with celebrity chefs and a big blowout main event all to raise funds for these important initiatives?

Sinfonia's commitment to music is seen in its support of new works. You have commissioned Howard Levy to create a new concerto for harmonica and piano, which will be a U.S. Southeast premier. Why is it important to support new

music and what can you tell us about your Classical Connections collaboration set for April 4?

Talk about friends in the biz. I first worked with Howard in 2003 in Cincinnati where he and pianist Anthony Molinaro were guests on a series that I curated for the Cincinnati Contemporary Art Museum. Sinfonia performed the Southeast U.S. premiere of his first concerto for harmonica and when he asked if I was interested in being involved with his newest offering, I could not refuse. Howard is one of those rare musicians that come along too infrequently, whose skills on harmonica are unparalleled in this universe, but to add piano, for which he is also scarily gifted on, it was a no brainer. Sinfonia will perform the world premiere of this new work for harmonica and piano with Howard performing.

New music and commissions and orchestrations of other existing works is critical to the survival of the orchestra art form. Sinfonia has always been on the forefront of this. While I would love to participate more in this

Continued on next page



FILM IN CONCERT
The Grinch in Concert
Saturday, Dec. 14 | 7:30 PM
Destin-FWB Convention Center
TICKETS: FROM \$40 PER PERSON

Bring the whole family to experience *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* live with Sinfonia Gulf Coast performing the film score as the movie unfolds on screen. Relive this beloved holiday classic about The Mean One and rediscover the true spirit of the season.

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SINFONIA

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realm, we are limited to the number of concerts we do each season; however, it is always important to support new artists, new works and collaboration is key!

Sinfonia has a history of surprising and delighting its audience with bold, innovative offerings. Composer Steve Hackman is known for his unexpected music pairings. Tell us how you plan to cap the Main Event season on May 18?

Relevance. That is a big word being tossed around these days. Why do orchestras who only offer classical music suffer from declining ticket sales ... they are not relevant. Sinfonia has always been one-stop shopping for the entire genre of orchestral of-

ferings to include masterworks, pops, chamber orchestra, chamber music and unique events incorporating other musical and art forms.

Sinfonia's season concludes with Tchaikovsky X Drake. Whether you are familiar with either name, it is a concert that you can attend and thoroughly enjoy from the sheer vantage point that it is an incredible concert experience. Steve Hackman is an impresario of the mash up. Like his presentation of Beethoven X Coldplay that Sinfonia performed several seasons back, this takes Tchaikovsky's epic 5th symphony and weaves elements of Drake's music and lyrics in an ingenious manner. You have to experience it to understand how brilliant it is from the pure orchestral joy that radiates from Tchaikovsky to the vocalists and rap artist that correspond to

Drake's offerings, it is like nothing else you have witnessed.

You have expanded Sinfonia's Music Education program this year by offering even more string programs, which are not offered in schools. As a musician, why should parents consider Sinfonia's programs for their kids?

Sinfonia continues to fill a void by providing incredible and much-needed education offerings to our community, primarily in our Okaloosa and Walton County school districts. Our expanded beginning strings programs and youth orchestra programs have hit record enrollment numbers this school year and it is a program that is not offered by either district. In some cases, our Link Up curriculum is the only arts education several schools have. It is important to continue

to develop these programs and the support of our patrons enables this. In fact, we have hired two additional instructors for the strings and youth orchestra programs and will need several more if the trajectory of expansion continues. It is very rewarding to know that your organization is making an important difference in the community and enlightening young minds.

This year, the state of Florida cut \$32 million from the cultural arts budget impacting organizations statewide. What can music lovers do to support Sinfonia Gulf Coast?

To be clear: the state of Florida did not cut these funds, Gov. Ron DeSantis singlehandedly vetoed this line item from the state budget, directly going against the work of his state colleagues who, for months, diligently collaborat-

ed to approve funding for all of the arts organizations in Florida. Politics aside, this was a very short-sighted endeavor that has impacted 600 organizations and Florida's economy considering cultural tourism provides nearly \$6 billion to the economy each year.

There are many ways to play your part. Beyond donating funds, you can show support by attending our concerts and events, or by sponsoring a single event or the entire season, whether as an individual or business owner. We also welcome volunteers and inquiries about joining our music education social group, the Treble Makers, or exploring leadership opportunities on our Board of Directors. Visit our website (SinfoniaGulfCoast.org) and follow us on Facebook and Instagram to get to know us and learn more.

ECTC

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way again- truly unique and truly epic!

Recently, a gentleman came up to me after the show and started to speak, but couldn't

get the words out as he became emotional. I could see in his eyes the memories, the joy, the special experience he had watching our show. He wanted to say more, but all he could manage as he grabbed my hand with his two hands and held it securely

was, "Thank you, just thank you!" I've been really digging into Hebrew text recently and recently discovered the word "Tohu wa-bohu," meaning "without form and void." It's very gratifying to think about how Jersey Boys was "without



form and void." It was a piece of paper, a thought, a dream. Over the course of the months of preparation and planning, the weeks of rehearsals with our staff, creative team and many incredible performers, we co-created a work of art that left

a man speechless. I would be remiss if I didn't mention the most important part of that co-creation—you. We don't exist without you, without our audience. That's truly why we always say "The heart of ECTC is you."




mattie kelly
arts foundation

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 Arts & Music

Successful Practice Habits

Developing effective practice habits is crucial for music students to make steady progress and achieve their musical goals. Here are some key strategies to help music students establish a productive practice routine:

Set a Regular Schedule

Consistency is key when it comes to practicing music. Establish a daily practice schedule and stick to it as much as possible. Even short, regular practice sessions are more beneficial than

sporadic longer ones. Choose a time when you're typically alert and free from distractions.

Create an Optimal Practice Environment

Choose a specific area in your home for practice. Keep your instrument, music stand, and other necessary materials readily accessible. Eliminate potential distractions by turning off electronic devices or finding a quiet space.

Warm Up Properly

Always start your practice session with a proper warm-up. This could include long tones, scales, or simple exercises to loosen up your muscles and prepare your mind for focused practice.

Set Specific Goals

Before each practice session, define clear, achievable goals. These could be mastering a particular section of a piece, improving a specific technique, or memorizing scales. Having

concrete objectives gives your practice purpose and direction. Review your teacher's personalized lesson plan weekly.

Break Down Challenging Sections

When faced with difficult passages, break them down into smaller, manageable parts. Practice these sections slowly and gradually increase the tempo as you gain proficiency. This approach allows for more focused and effective practice.

Use a Metronome

A metronome is an invaluable tool for developing a strong sense of rhythm and timing. Incorporate it into your practice routine, especially when working on challenging rhythmic passages or trying to increase your playing speed. A variety of metronome phone or iPad apps are available for download. I like to use Pro Metronome.

Practice Mindfully

Avoid mindless repetition. Instead, focus intently on each note, rhythm, and expression as you practice. Mindful practice fosters better musical understanding and helps develop a deeper connection with your instrument.



Vary Your Practice Routine

To keep your practice sessions engaging and effective, incorporate variety. Alternate between technical exercises, sight-reading, repertoire work, and creative activities like improvisation or composition.

Record and Listen to Yourself

Regularly record your practice sessions using your cell phone or other device. Listening back to these recordings can help you identify areas that need improvement.

Seek Feedback

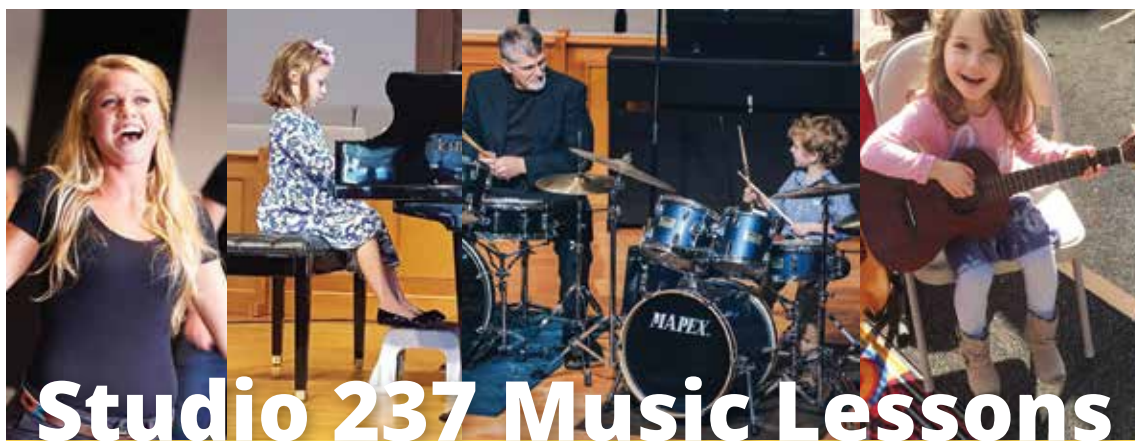
If you're taking lessons, communicate with your teacher about your practice routine and any challenges you're facing. They can provide ideas and advice to improve your practice habits.

Practice Slowly

When learning a new song or working on difficult parts, practice at a slow tempo, and try to focus on accuracy and proper technique before gradually increasing the speed.

Conclude your practice session by playing something you enjoy or have already mastered. This leaves you with a positive feeling and motivates you to return to practice the next day. By incorporating these strategies into their practice routine, music students can develop good habits that lead to consistent improvement and musical growth. Remember, effective practice is about quality, not just quantity. With dedication and smart practice techniques, students can make significant strides in their musical journey.

Located in Santa Rosa Beach, Florida, Studio 237 Music offers private lessons on piano, drums, ukulele, classical, acoustic or electric guitar, bass guitar and voice lessons. For more information and/or schedule lessons, call Ray or Lisa Cyr at (850) 231-3199 or text at (850) 797-3546. Check out our Website at www.Studio237Music.com. Email us at studio237music@gmail.com.



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Grace and Gumbo

By HEATHER BENNETT EYE

Our community was able to fill their bellies and their souls at the Path of Grace Gumbo, Chili and Give Cook-off held on October 5, 2024, at New Life Church in Santa Rosa Beach. There was live music, ministry, testimonies and more. Guests were also able to vote on the best gumbo and chili along the Emerald Coast.

The Gumbo, Chili and Give Cook-off is one of several events they've hosted this year for their Path of Grace - Rebuilding Lives Campaign to raise money for the construction of a 28,000 square foot dormitory that will allow Path of Grace to add an additional 50 beds.

So far, they've raised \$2.5

million of their \$8 million goal. We anticipate the cook-off contributed significantly towards that goal. "These events that we're holding opens the door to double the number of women we'll be able to help," said Path of Grace Administrative Manager Marissa Martin. "We get phone calls daily, but we're maxed out so we're having to turn people away just because we don't have the room."

Since 2009, Path of Grace has help women transform their lives. They are a nonprofit organization that provides a faith-based, long-term sober living environment with Christ-centered teachings, along with Alcoholics Anonymous, addiction counseling and celebrating re-

covery. Their 16- to 24-month residential program helps women regain their self-confidence and self-worth by leading them to have a relationship with God and teaching them important life skills and work ethic for a successful future.

"This program really works," said Marissa, who also graduated from Path of Grace. "If you stay the full two years, and you work your program, this place works."

Our community consistently shows up to support those in recovery and we hope you will consider donating. You can view more about the Path of Grace - Rebuilding Lives Campaign to raise funds for expansion here, [https://youtu.be/_uhym-](https://youtu.be/_uhym-MV2IEo?si=wXjoojcJaAN-q42L-)



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To learn more, visit www.pathofgrace.net. Be on the look-

out for more information on the Path of Grace Gala being held in December.

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