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# BAY Life

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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 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 con-

**SINFONIA**  
*continued on page 2*



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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](mailto: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 Memori-

al 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 solemn act makes it a moment of remembrance and a family tra-



dition 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](http://wreathsacrossamerica.org). Find your location and ceremony and click the red sponsor button.

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**SINFONIA**

*continued from page 1*

certs 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 replacement 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. Sin-

*Continued on page 29*

# 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](mailto:diane@abed4me.org) or send a message at [abed4me.org](http://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](mailto: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](http://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](http://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](http://nicevillecalm.com).



**Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center's** ([eccac.org](http://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 at [ECCAC.org](http://ECCAC.org). Every contribution makes a difference in ending abuse and restoring childhood one child at a time. Contact Hailey ([Hailey@eccac.org](mailto:Hailey@eccac.org)) to schedule your drop-off.

**Food for Thought** ([fftfl.org](http://fftfl.org)) is gearing up for the holidays and its annual food services. The nonprofit's Holiday Food List includes instant po-

tatoes, 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 Santa Rosa Beach pantries. Email [support@fftfl.org](mailto:support@fftfl.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 in-

vestments generated by EDATE bring additional tax revenue to the county through sales taxes 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 Nixon, 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 pro-

*Continued on page 6*



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Community

# The Vietnam Refugee Camp at Eglin: New Historical Exhibit at the Heritage Museum of NW Florida

By BARBARA PALMGREN

As a trustee for the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida, it is an honor to announce an exhibit being planned at the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida in 2025: the Vietnam Refugee Camp at Eglin AFB.

When the museum received the Impact 100 grant last November for a 1,400 sq. ft. Exhibit Hall addition to the museum, we knew we could honor a historical event that happened 50 years ago in our community. Several years ago, a young woman, Kim Delevett, from San Diego, Calif., traveled to our area and spent time in the

museum's research library looking at articles and photos about the camp. She was a small child in the camp and wanted to remember this time when her older brother and she were saved by the U.S. military.

Working with Kim and several others, we are moving forward now that we have available space, to share memories of this historical event. Kim and former Vietnam refugees living in California and Texas currently, have bonded over the years and will return as a group to visit our area the first weekend in May 2025. We anticipate having former refugees visiting the exhibit



Minh Nguyen holding a copy of the book authored by the man who rescued his family in 1978.

during the 2025 landmark 50th anniversary.

The new exhibit hall will house photos, newspaper reproductions, artifacts and oral histories to highlight the three phases of this project that resettled over 10,000 Vietnamese in the months of May through September, 1975. Eglin Air Force Base was one of three camps in the nation that housed refugees.

As the museum develops this project to have it ready for 2025, we are asking former refugees from this camp to contact us so we can interview them about their experience at the camp for

our oral histories. We also want to interview personnel at Eglin or community volunteers who helped with the project.

If you were a part of this historical event, please phone the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida at 850-678-2615, and provide your contact information. Help us celebrate a memorable time for you and this nation!

The museum is open Tuesday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and located at 115 Westview Ave. in Valparaiso.

## WHY VOTE YES

continued from page 4

gram, Okaloosa County would lose a valuable tool for attracting and retaining businesses. 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](http://www.JobsForOkaloosa.com)

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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 Firefighter tours were great as well as informative. Served were Brats (over 1,900) and Sauerkraut (100 pounds), ¼ 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 Squad-

ron; 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).

### 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 at-

tendees gathered to celebrate the beauty and ecological significance of the Choctawhatchee Bay.

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' photographs 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

### 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 initiative 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

*Continued on page 24*



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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 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

*Continued on page 16*



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 Community

# '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. 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, Des-**

**tin, 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.

## 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



ly 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](https://airtable.com))) and we will get that scheduled!

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 general-

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 Registration required upon drop-off so we can notify the winners

**\$1 per vote; most votes in each category wins!**  
**Voting Open: December 7th**  
**9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. during the Niceville Christmas Parade**

Categories:  
**Ages 10 and under**  
**Ages 11-17**  
**Ages 18+**  
 One winner from each age group will receive a gift card.

Bring your entry to St. Jude's Episcopal Church on Thursday 5 December between 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.  
 Pick up: All gingerbread houses must be picked up by 1 p.m. on Sunday December 8th, or leave the gingerbread house for disposal.

200 N Partin Dr., Niceville, FL 32578  
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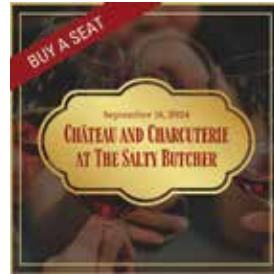
# Happenings Around the Bay

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

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[WaltonAreaChamber.com/the-next-big-thing/](http://WaltonAreaChamber.com/the-next-big-thing/)

 Community

# What Are You Thankful For?

BY LORI LEATH SMITH,  
PUBLISHER

*“Reflect upon your present blessings—of which every man has many—not on your past misfortunes, of which all men have some.”*

— Charles Dickens

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 their blessings — a new beginning, a bountiful harvest, new friendships, a bright future, family and a faithful God.

In the spirit of thankfulness, I encourage you to buy someone a cup of coffee, listen to a struggling friend or leave a larger tip at a restaurant. You can also serve at a homeless shelter or donate for a Thanksgiving meal (See this month’s article on ways to be a Holiday Hero, page 3.) There are endless ways to express thankfulness to others verbally and physically. Even small, positive, every-day words and benevolent actions can mean a world of difference to those around you. You never know—it could be a lifeline for them, and it just might mean even more to you!



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 com-

passion 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 Wolfram, *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 Stalnaker, *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 im-

portant 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 community 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’m thankful for living in a community with philanthropic hearts. I’m thankful to be the mom of a Walton County High School honor roll student/football player, and an FSU graduate! I’m thankful for my career and AMAZING mentors in my life! I’m thankful for my supportive boyfriend. I’m thankful for living at the beach, owning my home, and most of all, I’m thankful for my FREEDOM! Thank you, Life Publications, for reminding me that I’m a lucky girl!”

— Tracy Louthain, *Newman Daily Resort Properties and Local Resident*

“I am grateful for so many things—friends, colleagues and the endlessly amazing experience of living in this paradise we call home. But most of all, family. We are so blessed to be surrounded by it all.”

— Gregory Durette, *Florida Health Connector*

“I am thankful for being a part of a school district who has skilled and passionate teachers, staff and administrators who wake each morning with a heart for students and a willingness to be difference makers in the lives of kids.”

— Marcus D. Chambers, *Superintendent, Okaloosa County School District*



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*the Nutcracker*

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# How to Make Enrollment in Medicare Smooth and Easy



BY GREG DURETTE, FLORIDA HEALTH CONNECTOR

As with most election years, normalcy tends to be replaced by a great deal of turmoil in processes and routines. Medicare enrollment, however, remains relatively simple—once you know how!

In the not-so-long-ago days, a person looking to learn more about Medicare and their enrollment options could visit a local office, attend a seminar or sit down in the comfort of their home with a qualified, licensed

agent. This process could take several visits to become comfortable with the available choices. Even Joe Namath (not a qualified, licensed agent!) would be hard pressed to get a person comfortable in just one phone call, despite claims to the contrary.

Well, even with those in-person options still available, most folks like to do a little research on their own in advance of taking any additional steps. So, what are your options to gather the information you need to make sure you are making the right choices for you and make your enrollment happen as smoothly as possible?

The first step is getting in touch with someone qualified to provide you with information for your specific needs. I know you get bombarded with email, regular mail, TV ads and phone calls as you approach age 65 and then every Annual Election Period (October 15 – December 7) thereafter. That type of infor-

mation overload typically helps no one figure things out and, as I have been told on many occasions, tends to make things even more confusing. When it comes to Medicare, quality, individualized information trumps volume of information every time.

The first thing you will need to do is apply for your Medicare Parts A & B. There are a number of issues surrounding this first step so again, it would be wise to seek out a qualified, licensed person to guide you. Also, it is best to begin this process right when you are first eligible which is three months prior to the month in which you will turn age 65.

While waiting for your Medicare card to be issued (sometimes up to six-eight weeks), you will have the perfect opportunity to explore your other options. Those options range from simply sticking with Original Medicare (Parts A & B only) plus getting a Stand-Alone Prescription Plan to avoid unintended,

lifelong penalties or, choosing between an Advantage Plan or a Supplement Plan. Each comes with its own benefits and potential issues.

I know it seems like a lot to consider and it is. However, if you take the time and are able to ignore the constant din of your telephone ringing and mailbox being stuffed, you will eventually come to understand the best choice for you and your specific set of needs.

Fast forward and here you are with your Medicare card in hand and, have decided on the best plan choice for you. Congratulations! There is only one last step to take...actually getting enrolled. With all those multiple enrollment options available, what is a person to do?

You can relax in knowing many insurance companies have implemented multiple options to help get you enrolled in a timely manner. The two most popular being an in-person sit


down with a licensed, trained professional or telephone call. You can meet at an office or sit back in the comfort of your own home and rest assured all will be taken care of quickly and professionally.

Following these tips will help to alleviate much of the hectic stress this major transition/continuation often causes.

As a side note, you can use this process to help eliminate the stress of comparing your existing plan to another as well as oftentimes, many plans change their benefits and/or costs every year.

Boom! Welcome to stress-free Medicare enrollment.

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



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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 necessary 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 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

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.

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.

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

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.

You may also add other items 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 sometimes up to 36 months, depending on the carrier.

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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 corner! 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 excit-

ing 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...

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116 Harbor Blvd.  
ajstestin.com

**Landshark's Pizza**

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

and wine from 3-6 p.m. Tuesday - Friday. Having teamed up with Props 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.

(850) 424-6743  
1128 E. John Sims Pkwy.  
Niceville  
Landsharkspizza.com

**FUBAR Pizza Bar**

Looking for a sports bar to call home? Welcome to FUBAR pizza bar nestled on Okaloosa Island. Locally owned and family friendly, Fubar is known for its almost-famous pizza and wings and carries all sports games and live entertainment, along with impeccable service. You can en-

joy all that while enjoying the waterfront view.

FUBAR has plenty of games for the kids along with pool tables, corn hole, dart boards and more. When out on the water all day, come dock your boat on one of FUBAR'S boat slips and enjoy the incredible view. Feel free to bring along your furry friends to join you on the patio.

Need the perfect space to host your holiday party or event? FUBAR is equipped with numerous private sections with the option of having a private bar as well. The outside deck can hold up to 300 people comfortably and can be sectioned off to fit your needs. In addition to the pizza and wings, FUBAR can customize a menu for you from Italian food to Prime Rib and everything in between. Open 7 days from 11 a.m.-2 a.m.

850-226-7084  
114 Amberjack Dr.,  
Okaloosa Island  
fubarfiob.com

**November 2024 NFL Schedule**

Dates, Times, Where to Watch

**Week 9**

**Thursday, Oct. 31**  
Houston Texans at New York Jets — 7:15 p.m., Prime Video

**Sunday, Nov. 3**  
Dallas Cowboys at Atlanta Falcons — Noon, Fox  
Denver Broncos at Baltimore Ravens — Noon, CBS

Miami Dolphins at Buffalo Bills — Noon, CBS  
New Orleans Saints at Carolina Panthers — Noon, CBS

Las Vegas Raiders at Cincinnati Bengals — Noon, Fox  
Los Angeles Chargers at Cleveland Browns — Noon, CBS

Indianapolis Colts at Minnesota Vikings — Noon, CBS  
Washington Commanders at New York Giants — Noon, Fox

New England Patriots at Tennessee Titans — Noon, Fox  
Chicago Bears at Arizona Cardinals — 3:05 p.m., CBS

Detroit Lions at Green Bay Packers — 3:25 p.m., Fox  
Los Angeles Rams at Seattle Seahawks — 3:25 p.m., Fox

Jacksonville Jaguars at Philadelphia Eagles — 7:20 p.m., NBC\*

**Monday, Nov. 4**

Tampa Bay Buccaneers at Kansas City Chiefs — 7:15 p.m., ESPN

**Week 10**

**Thursday, Nov. 7**  
Cincinnati Bengals at Baltimore Ravens — 7:15 p.m., Prime Video

**Sunday, Nov. 10**  
New York Giants vs Carolina Panthers (Munich) — 8:30 a.m., NFL Network  
New England Patriots at Chicago Bears — Noon, Fox

Buffalo Bills at Indianapolis Colts — Noon, CBS  
Minnesota Vikings at Jacksonville Jaguars — Noon, Fox

Denver Broncos at Kansas City Chiefs — Noon, CBS  
Atlanta Falcons at New Orleans Saints — Noon, Fox

San Francisco 49ers at Tampa Bay Buccaneers — Noon, Fox  
Pittsburgh Steelers at Washington Commanders — Noon, CBS

Tennessee Titans at Los Angeles Chargers — 3:05 p.m., Fox  
New York Jets at Arizona Cardinals — 3:25 p.m., CBS

Philadelphia Eagles at Dallas Cowboys — 3:25 p.m., CBS

*Continued on next page*

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**2024 College Football Game Day Highlights**

**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 11: November 9**

Georgia @ Mississippi TBA  
Florida ST. @ ND TBA  
LSU vs Alabama TBA  
Oklahoma @ Missouri TBA  
Miami @ Ga Tech TBA  
Florida @ Texas 11am ESPN

Miss St. @ Tennessee 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 13: November 23**

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

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

**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

**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

**NFL SCHEDULE**

*continued from previous page*

Detroit Lions at Houston Texans — 7:20 p.m., NBC\*

**Monday, Nov. 11**

Miami Dolphins at Los Angeles Rams — 7:15 p.m., ESPN

**Week 11**

**Thursday, Nov. 14**

Washington Commanders at Philadelphia Eagles — 7:15 p.m., Prime Video  
Sunday, Nov. 17  
Green Bay Packers at Chicago Bears — Noon, Fox  
Jacksonville Jaguars at Detroit Lions — Noon, CBS  
Las Vegas Raiders at Miami Dolphins — Noon, CBS  
Los Angeles Rams at New England Patriots — Noon, Fox  
Cleveland Browns at New Orleans Saints — Noon, Fox  
Baltimore Ravens at Pittsburgh Steelers — Noon, CBS  
Minnesota Vikings at Tennessee Titans — Noon, CBS  
Atlanta Falcons at Denver Broncos — 3:05 p.m., Fox  
Seattle Seahawks at San Francisco 49ers — 3:05 p.m., Fox  
Kansas City Chiefs at Buffalo Bills — 3:25 p.m., CBS  
Cincinnati Bengals at Los Angeles Chargers — 3:25 p.m., CBS  
Indianapolis Colts at New York Jets — 7:20 p.m., NBC\*

**Monday, Nov. 18**  
Houston Texans at Dallas Cowboys — 7:15 p.m., ESPN

**Week 12**

**Thursday, Nov. 14**

Pittsburgh Steelers at Cleveland Browns — 7:15 p.m., Prime Video



**Sunday, Nov. 24**

Kansas City Chiefs at Carolina Panthers — Noon, CBS  
Minnesota Vikings at Chicago Bears — Noon, Fox  
Tennessee Titans at Houston Texans — Noon, CBS  
Detroit Lions at Indianapolis Colts — Noon, Fox  
New England Patriots at Miami Dolphins — Noon, CBS  
Tampa Bay Buccaneers at New York Giants — Noon, CBS  
Dallas Cowboys at Washington Commanders — Noon, Fox  
Denver Broncos at Las Vegas Raiders — 3:05 p.m., CBS  
San Francisco 49ers at Green Bay Packers — 3:25 p.m., Fox  
Arizona Cardinals at Seattle Seahawks — 3:25 p.m., Fox  
Philadelphia Eagles at Los Angeles Rams — 7:20 p.m., NBC\*

**Monday, Nov. 25**

Baltimore Ravens at Los Angeles Chargers — 7:15 p.m., ESPN\*

**Week 13**

**Thursday, Nov. 28 (Thanksgiving)**

Chicago Bears at Detroit Lions — 11:30 a.m., CBS  
New York Giants at Dallas Cowboys — 3:30 p.m., Fox  
Miami Dolphins at Green Bay Packers — 7:20 p.m., NBC

**Friday, Nov. 29 (Black Friday)**

Las Vegas Raiders at Kansas City Chiefs — 2 p.m., Prime Video

**Sunday, Dec. 1**

Los Angeles Chargers at Atlanta Falcons — Noon, CBS  
Pittsburgh Steelers at Cincinnati Bengals — Noon, CBS  
Houston Texans at Jacksonville Jaguars — Noon, Fox

Arizona Cardinals at Minnesota Vikings — Noon, Fox  
Indianapolis Colts at New England Patriots — Noon, Fox  
Seattle Seahawks at New York Jets — Noon, Fox  
Tennessee Titans at Washington Commanders — Noon, CBS  
Tampa Bay Buccaneers at Carolina Panthers — 3:05 p.m., Fox  
Los Angeles Rams at New Orleans Saints — 3:05 p.m., Fox  
Philadelphia Eagles at Baltimore Ravens — 3:25 p.m., CBS  
San Francisco 49ers at Buffalo Bills — 7:20 p.m., NBC\*

**Monday, Dec. 2**

Cleveland Browns at Denver Broncos — 7:15 p.m., ESPN\*

**Week 14**

**Thursday, Dec. 5**

Green Bay Packers at Detroit Lions — 7:15 p.m., Prime Video

**Sunday, Dec. 8**

New York Jets at Miami Dolphins — Noon, CBS  
Atlanta Falcons at Minnesota Vikings — Noon, Fox  
New Orleans Saints at New York Giants — Noon, Fox  
Carolina Panthers at Philadelphia Eagles — Noon, Fox  
Cleveland Browns at Pittsburgh Steelers — Noon, CBS  
Las Vegas Raiders at Tampa Bay Buccaneers — Noon, CBS  
Jacksonville Jaguars at Tennessee Titans — Noon, CBS  
Seattle Seahawks at Arizona Cardinals — 3:05 p.m., CBS  
Buffalo Bills at Los Angeles Rams — 3:25 p.m., Fox  
Chicago Bears at San Francisco 49ers — 3:25 p.m., Fox  
Los Angeles Chargers at Kansas City Chiefs — 7:20 p.m., NBC\*

**Monday, Dec. 9**

Cincinnati Bengals at Dallas Cowboys — 7:15 p.m., ESPN/ABC\*

**SOTF**

*continued from page 9*

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](http://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 af-

ter 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 Sergeant (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:**

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*Continued on page 18*

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Coffee and Goodness Angela "JoJo" Stevenson invites you to enter her cafe and relaxed coffee shop atmosphere for a daily



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

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

Hours 7:30 a.m.-2 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday.  
(850) 737-6194  
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## LJ Schooners Docksider Restaurant

Suds, Songs, Sunsets and Sports! Welcome to LJ Schooners Docksider 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.*

Oct. 12: Nautical Flea Market and Flea Market 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.; Oct 20: Mullet Toss 4 p.m.; Mullet Hair Contest 6 p.m.; Oct. 27: Sunset Shrimp Boil 4-7 p.m. Oct. 31: Halloween Karaoke and Open Mic 6-10 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.-midnight; Sun 9 a.m.-9 p.m.

Restaurant hours: Mon-Tues closed. Wed-Sat, 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Sun, 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

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## SOTF

continued from page 16

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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](http://www.sotf.org).

# 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 Eisen-

hower, 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 Mixon. "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

*Continued on page 22*



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

Urban Meyer will be the guest speaker for the 56th Annual All Sports Awards Banquet, February 21st, 2025, a key event for the All Sports 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 involvement. "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.

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 association'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](http://allsportsassociation.com) or [Facebook.com/AllSportsAssociation](https://www.facebook.com/AllSportsAssociation).

## 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.

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.

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

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.



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# Matthew Perry's Death and the Spotlight on Ketamine Therapy for Brain Health

By MELANIE YOST, LCSW

Matthew Perry's untimely death brought the therapeutic use of ketamine for brain health issues into the public spotlight. Let's take a closer look at ketamine—what it is, its history and methods of administration.

Ketamine has proven to be highly effective in helping people struggling with treatment-resistant depression, anxiety, PTSD and chronic inflammatory pain. By providing relief, ketamine enables people to lead happier, healthier lives. Initially developed as an anesthesia more than 60 years ago, ketamine was used in the 1970s to successfully treat PTSD in Vietnam War soldiers. Unfortunately, its use was abandoned due to the stigma surrounding other psychedelics like LSD and PCP. Instead, selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) emerged as the preferred treatment, as they were believed to lack the addictive qualities of psychedelics.

After 50 years of SSRI usage, however, researchers are now



finding little evidence to support the theory that depression is caused by a lack of serotonin, dopamine or norepinephrine. In fact, SSRIs are effective in only about 40% of the people who take them. In contrast, ketamine

shows an 80–85% efficacy rate in treating mood disorders and chronic pain.

Over the past 10–15 years, more than 2,000 papers have been published on ketamine's potential to help with treatment-resistant mood disorders. Researchers have found that ketamine can begin to relieve symptoms of depression immediately after the first treatment. Long-term relief, however, stems from neuroplasticity. When patients complete six ketamine treatments over a two – three-week period, the drug helps rewire neural circuits, leading to sustained positive mood changes. Additionally, ketamine binds to receptors in the opioid pathway, providing relief from chronic inflammatory pain.

### Methods of Ketamine Administration and Side Effects

Ketamine can be administered in four ways: sublingually, via nasal spray, intramuscular injection or IV infusion. All

methods come with three possible side effects: nausea, elevated blood pressure and the potential for a negative psychedelic experience.

At clinics such as Be Well Solutions and Complete Ketamine Solutions, medically supervised IV infusions are the preferred method. IV administration makes ketamine 100% bioavailable, meaning patients receive the exact dose they are given. Other methods require the body to metabolize the drug, which varies from person to person, making the actual dose received uncertain. Furthermore, IV infusions allow for immediate management of any side effects, ensuring a safer and more positive experience. At Be Well Solutions and Complete Ketamine Solutions, all infusions are administered in a comfortable, spa-like setting by compassionate Nurse Practitioners, ensuring client safety and well-being throughout the treatment.

### How Was Ketamine Involved in Matthew Perry's Death?

According to reports, Matthew Perry was receiving ketamine infusions from a reputable clinic, and they were helping with his depression. His last infusion occurred two weeks before his death, and was not found to be a contributing factor. Perry, however, had a lifelong struggle with substance abuse. Like many individuals with addiction, he believed that “if a little is good, more is better.” With his financial means, Perry was able to find people who took advantage of his addiction by selling him injectable ketamine to use at home without medical supervision. Tragically, he died from an overdose.

Perry's story underscores the importance of choosing a reputable clinic with established protocols and experienced medical professionals who prioritize client safety and well-being.

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 Wellness

# 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 deliv-



ery 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!

## FIRST STEP

*continued from page 19*

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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# 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 cogni-

tive 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 processing 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!

~ Kassia Garfield, Ed.D, PT, DPT, ATC, COMT, OCS, Cert. DN  
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# You're Invited to the 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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## BAY BUZZ

*continued from page 8*

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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 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 metal 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




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Shield. This program protects homeowners and detects any problems early, saving customers thousands of dollars. "We inspect customer roofs annually 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 "exceptional 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](http://specialtyroofers.com), email [info@specialtyroofers.com](mailto: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**



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 biggest, 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.

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.

## Sporting Clay Tournament to Benefit Westonwood Ranch

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-

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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 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.

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. 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...

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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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**SINFONIA**

*continued from page 2*

fonia's Film in Concert series is a great way for families and everyone really, to enjoy live music paired with iconic films. Nostalgia, 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 curat-

ed 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 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 offerings 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*

*Continued on page 31*



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Arts & Music

# 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 Vallie 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



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## SINFONIA

continued from page 29

*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 collaborated 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](http://SinfoniaGulfCoast.org)) and follow us on Facebook and Instagram to get to know us and learn more.

## ECTC

continued from page 30

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

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