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BAY Life

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Postal Customer Local

'Tis the Season on the Bay Santa's Back in Town and Much More

By CHRISTOPHER MANSON

Northwest Florida's Bay area brings joy and goodwill year-round. So, visitors and newcomers can only imagine how things kick in once the holiday lights are strung up and Christmas carols merrily shake the walls of local businesses and residences.

This December offers a number of unforgettable seasonal events for the entire family in Niceville, Valparaiso, Freeport and surrounding areas. Whether it's concerts, parades or some light bites with Santa Claus himself, this is guaranteed to be a very Merry Christmas indeed.

Saturday, Dec. 2-Monday, Jan. 6, 2025
17th Annual Geek Lights on the Corner Christmas Light Show
At the corner of Bluewater Blvd. & Antiqua Way, Bluewater Bay

Free performances feature thousands of Christmas lights



and other themed display elements, all under computer control and synchronized to music and stories. Shows every 30 minutes starting at 6 p.m., with the last show at 9:30 p.m. Sunday-Thursday, and 10:30 p.m. on Fridays, Saturdays and holiday eves.

Donations benefit Caring & Sharing of Niceville.

The show is the technical and creative wizardry of Jeff Werner, the "Northwest Florida Geek" and Wendy Werner, his "Spouse Peripheral". Jeff is author of the weekly computers and technology Q&A

feature "It's Geek to Me," (ItsGeekToMe.co). Facebook.com/GeekLightsOn-TheCorner

Tuesday, Dec. 3
Kick-Off for Festival of Trees Benefiting Local Charities
Grand Park, Grand Boulevard at Sandestin, Miramar Beach, 4-6:30 p.m.

Eighteen nonprofits compete to win cash prizes totaling \$8,500 in a tree-decorating spectacular. The People's Choice winner will be voted on and announced along with Best of Show. Trees remain on display through Christmas Day. grandboulevard.com

Wednesday, Dec. 4
Holiday Concert Series & Visits with Santa
The Village of Baytowne Wharf, Miramar Beach, 6-8 p.m.

Holiday classics and qual-

'TIS THE SEASON
continued on page 4

The Perfect Christmas

By GUEARY CLENDENNING

What was your perfect gift you received as a child during Christmas? You know, the one gift that stands out in your memory even after all these years?

I remember my perfect gift was a fully loaded red, chrome Schwinn bicycle! How many of you from my generation got that bike for Christmas? But of the gifts we all received, I would think being with family and friends is what we cherished the most.

Living in Illinois for many years, driving home in the snow, and listening to carols being played on the radio was a lot of fun. At Grandfather's house, some of us would sleep on the floor, so all the family could stay together. On Christmas morning, we would be awakened by the shouting of the Children, "Wake up it's Christmas!" Reading the Christmas story from St. Luke's gospel was first on the agenda. Then we would pray, giving thanks to God for sending His Son. Afterwards, some would share what they were most thankful for. Next was the madhouse, as everyone started opening their gifts. Joy and laughter filled the room as we modeled our new clothes and opened sometimes

PERFECT
continued on page 2



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Community

PERFECT

continued from page 1

unexpected gifts. And soon the living room floor was littered with Christmas wrappings and ribbons.

Breakfast was always special on Christmas day, which always included sausage gravy and biscuits with various egg casseroles. Can you tell there's a little southern blood in us? And Christmas dinner, what a feast! A huge bowl of chicken and dumplings, garden salad, and freshly baked dinner rolls was the tradition at our house; followed by desserts we couldn't resist! The memories have lasted a lifetime.

I realize for some, Christmas is a difficult time. Many have experienced heartaches, broken relationships, disappointments and the passing of family members. Such is the case with me.


Is that why God sent his Son? Into an imperfect world Jesus came, showing God's love for us



by dying on the cross. He paid the penalty for our sins, and through putting our faith in Him we will become children of God.

(Read St. John 1:12 and 3:16 and Romans 10:13). The perfect gift is to spend Christmas

Okaloosa County School District & Sheriff's Office Angel Tree



Superintendent Marcus Chambers and Sheriff Eric Aden have announced the collaboration between the Okaloosa County School District (OCSD) and Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office (OCSO) for this year's Angel Tree Program which will assist students from families who require support this holiday season. Through school guidance counselors and school resource officers (SROs), students in need are identified. Last year, more than 300 Okaloosa students received gifts from the two organizations, thanks to the generosity of staff and community members.

You can help this year by contributing monetary funds or sponsoring a student and purchasing gifts from their wish list. "This program has grown with the needs of our community thanks to the heartfelt generosity and commitment of our employees along with many local businesses and citizens," stated Sheriff Aden. "Partnering with OCSD will help take the initiative to a higher level and that is something everyone touched by this Christmas program can truly celebrate."

To sponsor a child or make a monetary donation, visit <https://ocsostarcharity.com/angel-tree>. For more details about the program, contact Catherine Card at catherine.card@okaloosaschools.com or Katie Tingle at ktingle@sheriff-okaloosa.org.

with God and His family forever. That's God's ultimate purpose for you!

May you receive God's perfect gift this Christmas!

Merry Christmas to all!



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The hiring of a lawyer is an important decision that should not be based solely upon advertisements. Before you decide, ask us to send you free written information about our qualifications and experience.

Safe Connections Curbs Domestic Violence

BY KENNETH BOOKS

Divorce can be vicious. Sometimes marriage can, too. Until 1997, there were few local places families could turn to in order to exorcise the hatred, violence and mistrust that are often the aftermaths of a failed marriage.

But since 1997, an organization has existed to serve children and families dealing with domestic violence and other, related, issues.

Safe Connections, with offices in Okaloosa and Walton counties, “specializes in supervised visitation and court-ordered custody exchanges,” according to executive director Carole Antoon. “Our staff is very well trained and training is quite extensive. Our manual on sex abuse is almost 200 pages. The supervised visitation training manual is about 400 pages.” In addition, there is roughly 24 hours of further training annually.

Helping that goal is the passage of Florida House Bill 385, “The Safe Exchange of Minors” law, which came into effect in

July and which allows families experiencing domestic violence to use Safe Connections for their court-ordered custody exchanges. When there is a domestic violence injunction, the court can order monitored exchanges, or supervised visitation, to take place at Safe Connections’ facility. “This ensures that parents do not have any contact during the exchange, and the process is documented and conducted smoothly,” Antoon said.

One of the founders, Sharon Rogers, who recently retired as executive director, said the organization’s birth was a joint venture between volunteers and Shalimar United Methodist Church. “It was brought to the church that we needed a safe place for kids,” Rogers said. “The church formed a committee, which offered the old church building for the organization.

“We had no money, but we had space and interested people,” Rogers, who was serving as a Guardian ad Litem, providing a legal advocate for the child in difficult circumstances, at the time, said.



“Everything was free,” Rogers said. “We had donated furniture, toys. We used a model that had been started in Jacksonville and just went from there. Eventually, we got some money and decided we should hire somebody. I applied. It was just a very small amount, just a part-time job.”

Donated space was the early prerequisite for Safe Connections.

“The only way we could have done it was with that donated space,” she said. It allowed us to expand into other areas, such as Walton County, in 2001.

Then, in 2012, Safe Con-

nections got a substantial grant from Impact 100, its first. “We bought a building in Crestview and we’ve been there since,” Rogers said.

Recently, the organization bought a building on Beal Parkway, just past Hollywood, for \$86,000. “It needs a ton of work,” Rogers said. “We have to put in the safety parameters, flooring and bathrooms need to be done and it needs an entirely new air conditioning system.”

“We’re in the process of getting handicapped accessible ADA compliance bathrooms done,” Antoon said. “We need money for a security system. We

do have parents who get really angry and threaten us. Those systems cost a lot but we’re trying to get to the point where we’re self-sustainable.

“We want this to be a place where parents and children can rebuild those bonds from prior to whatever family event happened.”

“Child sex abuse, neglect, domestic violence – We have parents who have tried to kidnap their kids,” Antoon said. “We have so many different categories. It’s so hard to understand others’ experiences so we try to put ourselves in their situations.”

Safe Connections had a “giant field grant that carried us for years,” she said. “We were competing with major entities (for grants).” But that grant expired. “We’re in a major funding crisis right now,” she said.

Those wanting to help can do so on the Safe Connections Website, safe-connections.org/donate.

A fundraiser, “Cruisin’ Into

Continued on page 12



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Community

'TIS THE SEASON

continued from page 1

ity time with Mr. Claus. bay-townnewharf.com

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

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

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

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

The popular symphony event features Broadway actress-singer Grace Morgan, with favorites from the Great White Way and Disney, along with holiday classics. Also - the Northwest Florida Symphony Orchestra Chorus, Unified Gospel Choir and Voices of Northwest Florida.

Cost is \$45 for adults and \$16

for youth ages 18 and under and military. Call 850.729.6000 for tickets. mattiekellyartscenter.org

Saturday, Dec. 7
Alaqua Holiday Bazaar
Alaqua Animal Refuge, Freeport, 11 a.m.-4 p.m.

The spirit of the season comes alive with rows of unique vendors and their one-of-a-kind gifts, delectable treats, and the Winter Wonderland of your holiday dreams.

Tickets are \$10 for adults and \$5 for children. Ages 2 and under receive free admission. alaqua.org

Christmas Performance By Paradise City Core Dance
Freeport High School, 4 p.m.

Dance meets faith. Art becomes worship. A memorable afternoon of joy, praise and fellowship through dance. www.paradisecitydwc.com/recital

2024 Niceville-Valparaiso Community Christmas Parade
City of Niceville, 10 a.m.

This year's theme is "The Magic of Christmas." Visit the event page on Facebook

for rules and registration info. nicevillevalparaisorotary.org

Saturday, Dec. 7-Monday, Jan. 6, 2025
Eighth Annual Troon Goon Christmas Light Show
1074 Troon Drive E., Niceville, 6-9:30 p.m.

FREE residential graphic light show combining classic and modern Christmas songs for a fun and energetic jolt of entertainment. High tech animated dancing and limitless pixel combinations. The 30-minute show starts every hour and half-hour. Watch from your vehicle while listening to holiday music on 101.3 FM. www.troon-goonchristmas.com

Sunday, Dec. 8
Sinfonia Gulf Coast's Big Band Holiday Toast 'N Jam with Vocalist Morgan James

The Crystal Ballroom, Henderson Beach Resort, Destin, 10:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.

Broadway star James makes her triumphant return, performing holiday favorites, Broadway classics, American Songbook standards, and selections from her album A Very Magnetic



Christmas. Enjoy an elegant brunch complete with Bloody Mary and mimosa cash bar.

Tickets start at \$125 per person, which includes the live performance, brunch, valet service and gratuities. Limited front-row seating available; early purchase recommended.

chase recommended. Ticket sales support Sinfonia Gulf Coast's music education and community outreach initiatives throughout Northwest Florida. sinfoniagulfcoast.org

Continued on page 6

Advertisement for Patios Plus featuring the logo, address (202 Jonquil Ave., Ft. Walton Beach), phone (850) 837-1400, and images of patio furniture and the store exterior.

Advertisement for Chaise Lounge Sale featuring two lounge chairs, the text 'Chaise Lounge Sale!', 'Reg \$459 ea. Now \$399 each', and the Patios Plus logo.

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Community

'TIS THE SEASON

continued from page 4



December
St. Jude's Episcopal Church
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Special Events Free & Open to the Public
Gingerbread House Competition

Early Entries December 1st 9 a.m.-12 p.m.
 Final Entries December 5th 10 a.m.-2 p.m.
 Early Voting December 7th 9 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
 Final Voting December 8th 9 a.m.-10 a.m.

Children & Youth Advent Musical December 15th 10:30 a.m.

Lessons & Carols December 22nd 8 a.m. & 10:30 a.m.

Christmas Eve Service December 24th 5:30 p.m. & 11 p.m.
 Music presented by the Choir & Special Guest Soloist
 11 p.m. "Midnight" Service will be by Candlelight



Sunday, Dec. 8-Sunday, Dec. 22
Emerald Coast Theatre Company Presents "All Is Calm: The Christmas Truce Of 1914"

560 Grand Boulevard, Miramar Beach, 7 p.m.
 Thursday-Saturday, 2 p.m.
 Sundays and 6 p.m.
Sunday, Dec. 22
Field Trips Friday, Dec. 6, at 6 p.m.

Christmas 1914. All quiet on the Western Front, then a song, kicking off an extraordinary night of camaraderie, music and peace. This is the true story of soldiers laying down their weapons to celebrate Christmas together, based on firsthand accounts from the soldiers who lived through it. Tickets are available for purchase online. emeraldcoasttheatre.org

Monday, Dec. 9
Niceville High School Chorus Holiday Concert
Mattie Kelly Arts Center, Niceville, 7 p.m.

All seven (!) NHS choruses – teachers, local elementary and middle school talents and more – are joined by professional instrumentalists. Plus, spe-

cial guests The Ruckel Middle School Envoys Chorus. Tickets are \$10 through Dec. 1, and \$15 after. gofan.co

Wednesday, Dec. 11
Holiday Concert Series And Visits With Santa
The Village of Baytowne Wharf, Miramar Beach, 6-8 p.m.

Holiday classics and quality time with Mr. Claus. baytowne-wharf.com

Thursday, Dec. 12
Holiday After Hours
Tru by Hilton, 4382 Ansley Drive, Niceville, 5-6:30 p.m.

Members and guests are invited. Email events@nicevillechamber.com to learn more. nicevillechamber.com

Friday, Dec. 13
Meet Santa!
Lou Lou Beans, 130 Marquis Way East, Unit 102, Freeport

Photo opportunities for the good boys and girls on your list. 850.682.5353



Saturday, Dec. 14
Breakfast With Santa
Props Brewery Hammock Bay, Freeport, 10 a.m.-1 p.m.

Brunch and photos with Santa Claus. propsbrewery.com

The Grinch In Concert
Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center, Fort Walton Beach, 7:30 p.m.

Dr. Seuss' immortal classic comes to life, with the Sinfonia Gulf Coast orchestra performing James Horner's musical score from the Ron Howard movie. Enjoy scenes from the film as your heart grows exponentially.

Tickets start at \$40 and can be purchased online. sinfiogulfcoast.org

Continued on page 13

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The Addams Family FEBRUARY 1, 2025 7 P.M.

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

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



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Community

Representative Patt Maney Receives Boy Scouts' Highest Award

By "DOC" DOUG STAUFFER

On October 24, surrounded by family, friends, colleagues and community leaders, State Representative Patt Maney received the prestigious Distinguished Eagle Scout Award (DESA), joining an elite group of fewer than 2,500 recipients, including Neil Armstrong and Gerald Ford. The ceremony, held at the Hilton Garden Inn and emceed by Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber President Ted Corcoran, celebrated a lifetime of service and commitment. Every tribute spoke to the extraordinary achievements and unwavering dedication that have marked Maney's career, reaching far beyond Okaloosa County to make a global impact. Even Maney's home state of Kentucky recognized his achievements when the University of Kentucky bestowed upon him an Honorary Doctor of Laws.

He is only the second Eagle Scout recipient from the Gulf Coast Council, encompassing Northwest Florida and South

Alabama. William James, a local Eagle Scout from Holt who worked alongside Maney, spearheaded the nomination. James, a retired Sergeant First Class with the National Guard, took the initiative to acknowledge Maney's outstanding career and service.

"Patt became a Scout in February of 1964," remarked Vince Mayfield, CEO of Bit-Wizards and an Eagle Scout himself. "Since then, he's made an impact not only on our county, not only on our state, not only on the United States of America, but he's made an impact in the entire world." These words resonated deeply in a room filled with individuals whose lives have been touched by Maney's service and mentorship. His wife, Caroline, stood proudly by his side, representing the personal support central to his journey.

Maney's history of service is a narrative of resilience, courage, and a commitment to bettering the lives of others. After earning the rank of Eagle Scout in 1965, he dedicated himself to a



life of public service. His career as a Brigadier General in the U.S. Army led him to Afghanistan, where he served as a senior political sector advisor, helping coordinate the country's first free presidential election. Tragically, he was severely wounded by an IED in 2005, and his 20-month recovery at Walter Reed Army

Medical Center became a testament to his tenacity.

The night's tributes highlighted Maney's influence in military and public service and his role as a Florida State Representative, County Judge, and advocate for veterans. Maney's contributions have paved the way for veterans' treatment programs, mental

health initiatives, and judiciary reform. The "T. Patt Maney Veterans' Treatment Intervention Act" is a legacy of his dedication to helping veterans reintegrate into civilian life, a cause deeply meaningful to him as a Purple Heart recipient. "My parents

Continued on page 12



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Mel Ponder Named President of NWFSC

BY "DOC" DOUG STAUFFER

Northwest Florida State College (NWFSC) has appointed County Commissioner Mel Ponder as its next president. Known for his unwavering dedication to Okaloosa County and his tireless commitment to public service, Ponder's selection promises a new chapter for the college and for the students it serves.

Ponder's appointment marks the culmination of a storied career in leadership, community involvement and faith-based advocacy. He brings to the role a rich background, having served in several influential positions, from mayor of Destin to Florida State Representative and, most recently, as Okaloosa County Commissioner. His wide-ranging experience has endowed him with a profound understanding of the needs of Northwest Florida and its people. Mel Ponder is no stranger to championing causes that matter to residents. His contributions to the area's growth and development have solidified his reputation as a beloved leader.

A third-generation Floridian and a graduate of Florida State University, Ponder has devoted his life to serving others. His impressive career trajectory has also included roles in the private sector, where he has demonstrated his passion for community and business development. Through his company, Business Empowered, a ministry focused on equipping individuals to make a positive impact in the marketplace, Ponder has demonstrated his dedication to empowering others to lead lives of service grounded in faith. As Association Director for the Emerald Coast Association of Realtors, he has been instrumental in fostering collaboration and advocacy across the region's eco-



nomie landscape. Ponder's leadership style reveals a deep commitment to conservative values, family, and faith. For him, leadership is about more than holding titles; it is about living a life of purpose and making a meaningful difference in the lives of others. His roots in Ocala, coupled with his faith and his enduring love for his family—his wife Mona and their three children, Preston, Casey and Grace—serve as the foundation of his character and vision.

The NWFSC Board of Trustees' chair, Lori Kelley, expressed optimism for the college's future under Ponder's stewardship. "Commissioner Ponder brings deep experience and passion for our community to this critical role," she said, noting that his record demonstrates a readiness to lead the college into its next phase of growth and innovation. Ponder was selected from a pool of esteemed candidates, each of whom brought their unique perspectives and experiences. It was Ponder's demonstrated commitment to the community and his dedication to fostering educational and economic opportunities in Northwest Florida that set him apart.

As president, Ponder will oversee the college's growth, spearheading initiatives to enhance the educational experi-

ence and promote a welcoming environment for students, staff, and the larger community. He steps into the role at a transformative time, with the support of a NWFSC community that eagerly anticipates his vision.

With his extensive background in leadership, finance

and legislative accomplishments, Ponder is well-equipped to guide Northwest Florida State College toward a bright and prosperous future. The community, the board, and his colleagues are confident in his ability to create positive change and to inspire the next generation of learners

and leaders. With Ponder at the helm, the horizon for Northwest Florida State College is boundless, and together, they are poised to reach new heights, ensuring a future where opportunity and growth seem limitless. Congratulations Mel!



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Community

The Gift That Gives More

Support The Communities You Love by Shopping Local for the Holidays

By WILL ESTELL

We've all heard the benefits over-and-over, from social memes to chamber advertising to local news outlets. But do we really shop local as much as we could and should?

It's no secret that many of our friends and family may be smackdab in the middle of the holiday buying spree; some of them a little extra stressed this season due to somewhat treacherous financial times. Don't fret though. Shopping local doesn't really cost more as many incorrectly assume. It can also be faster, as well as sending a positive message to those you're gifting: Locally sourced presents do more than simply gifting the receiver — they actually gift a local business, and our entire community's economy. Our local businesses are the backbone of our economy, providing employment opportunities and retaining wealth within our community. How can you not love that extra special "keep Christ in Christmas" touch?

Another plus of keeping more of your holiday shopping local is



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that it creates the opportunity to gift the ones you love with unique

items that can potentially mean so much more to them, especially

ly in the long run than another run-of-the-mill item from some big box online retailer.

Do you remember what the hottest new toy, or must-have fashion accessory was the Christmas before last? How about last year? See what I mean? Me either. But, I do still recall and relish that personalized and signed, cool, one-off Cowboy painting by local South Walton artist and musician extraordinaire, Chris Coleman, that someone gave me in 2020 that still hangs in our living room today. And the local branded apparel by coastal brands like Tribe Kelley Surf Post, NAVBCH, Jewell & Earl, or even a cool hat from 30A or a local restaurant. Somehow, we just tend to remember the locally sourced unique gifts better—and so will those we give them to.

For beach to coastal, outdoor to edible, dazzling to functional themed gifts right now, some favorites are Lily Pads Interior Market, The Shop at Baldwin Turf, Simpler Carpet & Tile, JoJo's Coffee and Goodness,

St. Jude's Episcopal Church

3rd Annual GINGERBREAD HOUSE Competition

A Fundraiser for Emerald Coast Children Advocacy Center

Free to Enter • Open to the Public
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

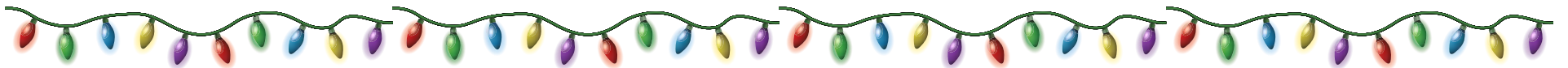
Categories:
Ages 10 and under
Ages 11-17
Ages 18+

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.

One winner from each age group will receive a gift card.

200 N Partin Dr., Niceville, FL 32578
www.stjudes.us

Continued on page 12



Happenings Around the Bay

2024 EVENTS

DECEMBER

- 01** | Bluegrass Jam
12 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville

Women's Climbing Circle
5 pm | Rock Out Climbing Gym | Destin
- 03** | Niceville Young Professionals Lunch Meeting
11:30 am | Niceville Valparaiso Chamber Office | Niceville

Festival of the Trees
4 pm | Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach

Giving Tuesday
Support your local nonprofits online
- 04** | Homeschool Art
10 am | Estelle Studio & Gallery | Freeport

Growing Green Families Knit/Crochet Night
6 pm | Growing Green Families | Valparaiso

Chess Night
6 pm | LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant | Niceville
- 06** | Greater FWB Chamber First Friday Coffee
7 am | Christian Life Center at FBC | FWB

Coastal White Christmas
5 pm | Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach

Holiday Pops: Christmas on Broadway
7 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville
- 07** | Niceville Valparaiso Christmas Parade
10 am | John Sims Parkway and Partin Drive | Niceville

Holiday Bazaar
11 am | Alaqua Animal Refuge | Freeport



Christmas Candlelight Open House
5pm | Eden Gardens & Wesley House | Santa Rosa Beach

Holiday Open House & Shop-About
12 pm | Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach

Coastal White Christmas
5 pm | Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach

Christmas Parade
5:15 pm | Freeport


Tree Lighting and Christmas Program
6:30 pm | Freeport

- 08** | Big Band Holiday Toast 'n Jam
feat. Morgan James
10:30 am | Henderson Beach Resort | Destin
- 09** | Niceville HS Chorus Holiday Concert
7 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center
- 11** | Niceville Valparaiso Chamber Second
Wednesday Breakfast
7:15 am | First Baptist Church on Bayshore | Niceville

Greater FWB Chamber Holiday Party
5 pm | Harvey F. Eckhoff VFW Post 7674 | FWB

Holiday Concert Series & Visits with Santa
6 pm | Village of Baytowne Wharf
- 12** | Pop-Up Movie Night: National Lampoon's
Christmas Vacation
5:30 pm | Yoga By You Studio Niceville | Niceville

Elvis Tribute Concert benefiting Alaqua
Animal Refuge
6 pm | Jake and Henry's | FWB



13 | Coastal White Christmas
5 pm | Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach
- 14** | Winter Open House!
All Day | Artful Things Niceville | Niceville

Ugly Sweater 5K and Kids Fun Run
8 am | Hurricane Grill and Wings | Niceville

Winter Extravaganza
9 am | E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center | Freeport

NERD Lab STEM Saturday
10 am | NERD Lab (119 Partin Drive) | Niceville


Breakfast with Santa
10 am | Props Brewery | Hammock Bay Freeport

Yule of Yesteryear
10a m - 4 pm | Heritage Museum of Northwest FL

Billy Claus & the Lulu Belles
1 pm | Lulu's | Destin

Coastal White Christmas
5 pm | Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach

- 14** CONT | The Grinch in Concert
7:30 pm | Destin-FWB Convention Center | FWB


- 18** | Santa Paddle Parade for Caring & Sharing
12 pm | LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant | Niceville

Holiday Concert Series & Visits with Santa
6 pm | Village of Baytowne Wharf
- 19** | Pop-Up Movie Night: Home Alone
5:30 pm | Yoga By You Studio Niceville | Niceville
- 21** | Santa Paddle Parade
12 pm | Bluewater Bay Marina

13th Annual Boat Parade & Decorating Contest
5:30 pm | Bluewater Bay Marina
- 28** | Walton County Bicentennial Bash
1 pm | Baldwin Ave. | DeFuniak Springs
- 31** | New Year's Eve Fireworks
8 pm | The Boardwalk | Okaloosa Island

ONGOING HOLIDAY EVENTS

- A Victorian Christmas at the Wesley House
Now - Jan. 6 | Tours 10am - 3pm
Thurs. - Mon. weekly | Eden State Gardens
- City of Freeport Festival of Trees
Dec. 1 - Dec. 8 | Freeport City Hall Council Chambers
- All is Calm: Christmas Truce of 1914
Dec. 6 - Dec. 22 | Emerald Coast Theatre Co. | Miramar Beach
- 8th Annual Troon Goon Christmas Light Show
Dec. 7 - Jan. 6 | 1074 Troon Dr. E. | Niceville
- Geek Lights on the Corner Christmas Lights & Music Show
Dec. 2 - Jan. 6 | 30-min shows nightly beginning 6pm | Final shows:
nightly 9:30pm Sun. - Thurs. | 10:30pm Fri., Sat. & Holiday Eves
- Live Nativity
Dec. 13 - Dec. 20 | 6-8:30pm nightly | 2nd St. & Church Ave. |
First Baptist Church of Fort Walton Beach
- The Nutcracker by studio6twenty5
Dec. 20 - Dec. 22 | Fri. Dec. 20 - Sat. Dec. 21 6pm | Sun. Dec.
22 2pm | FWB Civic Auditorium | Fort Walton Beach
- Coastal White Christmas
Dec. 20 - Dec. 21 & Dec. 27 - Dec. 28 | 5 pm | Grand Boulevard
| Miramar Beach

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



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 Community
THE GIFT*continued from page 10*

North Bay Mercantile, Old Florida Outfitters and even a photo session with Savvy Leigh Photo. There's something on that list for a wide array of needs and desires, all while contributing to the prosperity and success of the beach localities we call home.

Even if someone's gift list includes a national brand, you can still keep the holiday spirit local. With shopping centers like Destin Commons, Grand Boulevard, Silver Sands Premium Outlets and PCB's Pier Park, you quite literally have access to over 500 major brand national and international retailers within our local Northwest Florida coastal communities. Keep in mind that buying items directly from these local shopping centers and outdoor malls isn't like buying from



Amazon, eBay, Poshmark, or the endless slew of online retailers that do nothing to support your friends and neighbors in business, or working for, the businesses that make up our local coastal community.

The truth is that between the local brands and all of the retailers in our area, there is practically nothing that anyone can ask for that you can't find here locally.

Even the major purchase, big ticket items are often available

right here in our area, where they can also help local people when you purchase them. Looking for a new Rolex Submariner or Porsche 911 Targa for your husband? Need a Diamond ring or Mercedes G-Class SUV for your wife? How about a new swimming pool for the entire family? Thinking about a kitchen remodel or a new media room? Been wanting a new golf cart, low speed vehicle, board or electric bike? From McCaskill & Company to Porsche of Des-

tin to Mercedes of Fort Walton to Step One Automotive to the local boutique near the beach, there are endless possibilities. And don't forget YOLO Board & Bike, ECCO Motors or Electric Cart Company. Or an experience-oriented gift like a membership to Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation, or tickets to Mattie Kelly Arts Center and Sinfonia Gulf Coast performances, 30A Songwriters Festival or Gulf Coast Jam. Give a gift of beauty from Bluewater Plastic Surgery. And who doesn't love to be pampered at the spa? Gift cards are always in fashion!

No matter how small or elaborate your gifting need is, it is likely available right here within our area. We just have to remember to source it locally and to be aware of the beneficial economic and social impact we are making by doing so. From employment

opportunities to neighborhood vitality projects to better roadways, parks and beaches, buying local this holiday season makes a difference, and it really does make sense.

Will Estell is a writer, media entrepreneur and real estate professional with over 700 published articles. Will is currently the chief creative officer of Estell Hussey Media, and the co-founder of the nationally sold Navarre Beach Magazine. He has been instrumental in founding 12 new magazines from concept to fruition, as well as serving as editor in chief for numerous others. Originally from the backwoods of rural Mississippi, Will is a father of three who, along with his wife, ABC 3 news anchor, Laura Hussey-Estell, now calls Destin and Navarre Beach home. He is a regular contributor to Life Media's family of publications.

SAFE*continued from page 3*

Christmas," hosted by Emerald Coast Harley Davidson, is scheduled for Thursday, Dec. 5, 6:30 to 9 p.m., with a catered dinner, adult beverages, live en-

tertainment and live and silent auctions. Tables of eight are available. For more information, go to safe-connections.org.

Some of Safe Connections' encounters are less than cordial. For example, said Antoon, "We had military father. We could

tell from a domestic violence injunction that he had lot of anger and he was horrible to our staff. Finally, we let him know his actions were unacceptable.

"He came in one day after that and apologized to the staff. He's now a much more engaged

parent. He asked questions like 'What should I do here?' We got his daughter to write him a letter and tell him what her concerns were. He got angry and said he was never coming back. We asked him, 'What if this was you talking to your father and you

just wanted him to know what was going on and how you felt?' We talked to him about canceling his visits. Every so often we get a text that things are going good. He got his children back. He's been doing unsupervised visitation for about a year now."

PATT MANEY*continued from page 8*

had seven children," Maney said, turning emotional as he acknowledged his older brother,

Edward, a Vietnam veteran he described as his hero.

The Distinguished Eagle

Scout Award, presented by the National Eagle Scout Association and the Gulf Coast Council, honored Maney's lifetime achievements, drawing community leaders from across the state. District Attorney Ginger Madden's words echoed the sentiment of the evening, describing him as a man of wisdom, integrity, and unwavering moral strength.

Maney's career is marked by a collection of honors and recognitions that underscore his profound influence, including the Secretary of Defense Outstanding Public Service Award, the Purple Heart, and the Afghan Ghazi Mir Batcha Kahn Superior Medal. In addition, he was recognized by former Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani, who praised his contributions to rebuilding Afghanistan and championing justice.

In his acceptance speech, Maney emphasized the role of family, mentors, and community in shaping his life. His deep gratitude was evident as he reflected on the importance of Scouting and its lasting impact on his character and values. "Boys need

activity, and boys need male leaders," he said, adding that Scouting is possible only through the dedication of volunteers and generous supporters.

On a personal note, Representative Maney has been a mentor and close friend to me ever since my return to Okaloosa County. His guidance and wisdom have been invaluable, and I was honored to be invited to witness this special event. I treasure our friendship and the continued impact his leadership has had on my life and many others in our community.

Pastor Scottie Thigpen offered a benediction, marking another chapter in a lifetime of service for Rep. Patt Maney—a man whose influence, by the testimonies of many, spans continents yet remains deeply rooted in our communities. As those gathered celebrated his remarkable journey, there was no doubt that Rep. Maney's legacy of service would continue to inspire and shape lives for years to come.



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'TIS THE SEASON

continued from page 6

Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida's Yule of Yesteryear

114 Westview Ave., Valparaiso, 10 am.-4 p.m.

A FREE event at Perrine Park, with a Valparaiso Garden Club sale, craft vendors, music, children's crafts and more.

Call 850.678.2615 for more information. heritage-museum.org

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

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

Holiday classics and quality time with Mr. Claus. baytowne-wharf.com

Friday, December 20th at 6 p.m.

Saturday, December 21st at 6 p.m.

Sunday, December 22nd at 2 p.m.

The Nutcracker presented by studio6twenty5

Experience Clara's magical journey to the Kingdom of Sweets as studio6twenty5 presents The Nutcracker featuring the talented dancers from the children's program and adult/open program. Doors open one hour before each performance. Tickets range from \$15-\$30 available now at studio6twenty5.com.

December 20-22 Free Photos with Santa at Fudpucker's, 2 - 6 p.m.

Each family receives a FREE digital photo with Santa—and he'll be holding an alligator! Fudpucker.com

Saturday, Dec. 21 Christmas Boat Parade & Decorating Contest Bluewater Bay Marina, Niceville



Captains meeting at 4 p.m., staging at 5. The parade begins at 5:30. Registration is \$30

for Sharing and Caring or 15 canned goods. 850.897.2821

Victorian Christmas Tea Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida, 1-3 p.m.

Mrs. Connie Wolff will transform the Veterans Common Meeting room into an enchanting tea room that would meet with the approval of Queen Victoria.



Mrs. Debbie Edgar's Tea menu includes traditional sweets and savories—fruit cup, finger sandwiches, scones, desserts including petite fours and mince pies as well as teas and hot chocolate.

Highlighted: History of Tea by Dr. Marie Hallion, Chair of the Museum Trustees. RSVP by Dec. 19. 850-678-2617

December 31 Fudpucker's Noon Year's Eve Celebration, 10 a.m. - 1 p.m.

FREE family friendly event with face painting, entertainment, a Live DJ, food, alligators and a prize filled balloon drop at Noon!



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Bay Buzz



Left: Niceville High School—Lily Suttlemyre and William Cupp.
Right: Choctawhatchee High School - Jonathan Curtis and Tina Le)

2025 National Merit Scholarship Semifinalists Announced

The Okaloosa County School District (OCSD) announced two students from Niceville High School—Lily Suttlemyre and William Cupp—along with Jonathan Curtis and Tina Le from Choctawhatchee High School have become the 2025 National Merit Scholarship Semifinalists

and Commended Students

To qualify for the National Merit Scholarship Program, students must take the Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT) in the fall of their junior year. Semifinalists represent less than one percent of U.S. high school seniors and are the highest-scoring entrants. To advance to Finalist status and



compete for one of the 6,870 National Merit Scholarships, valued at nearly \$26 million, students must submit a comprehensive scholarship application, maintain an exceptional academic record, receive a school official's endorsement, write an essay, and achieve SAT or ACT scores that validate their earlier performance.

Republican Women of Okaloosa Federated Honor Veterans at Annual Luncheon

By "DOC" DOUG STAUFFER

On November 6, 2024, the Republican Women of Okaloosa Federated (RWOFF) proudly hosted their annual Veterans Appreciation Luncheon, with this year's theme honoring "Our Women in Service." The event, organized by RWOFF's Immediate Past President Maddie McNeal, brought together veterans, community leaders, and supporters to celebrate the invaluable contributions of women in the military.

The luncheon, a cherished RWOFF tradition, is held each year on the first Wednesday of November to honor veterans across all service branches. This year's special tribute highlighted the courageous women who have served, highlighting their unique contributions and the obstacles they overcame to pave the way for future generations.

Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Carmen Reynolds of the United States Air Force served as the keynote speaker. Lt. Col. Reynolds, who broke new ground as one of the first female officers in the Air Force's Security Police, shared insights from her 22-year military career, which spanned various roles from base administration to computer systems management, as well as her continued dedication to veterans' welfare in retirement. Her address emphasized the resilience and adaptability of women in service and underscored the importance of community support for veterans.

The Emerald Coast Chorus and the Gloryland Choral Group closed the celebration with a patriotic medley of military songs and Christmas music, honoring the spirit of veterans and bringing a festive note to

the event. Attendees, including many veterans from the RWOFF membership, gathered to share stories, enjoy camaraderie, and honor the legacy of service members.

In a heartfelt message, Maddie McNeal, who has coordinated this event for several years, expressed her gratitude to all veterans and attendees. "It's an honor to recognize our veterans' sacrifices," McNeal said. "Our country is forever indebted to these brave men and women who served selflessly to protect our freedoms."

Dr. Elvira Chiccarelli, a trailblazer for women in dentistry, made an impression with her storyboards at the annual veterans' luncheon. She is a pioneer and believed to be the first female dentist at Eglin Air Force Base. Despite many challenges, she persevered, rising through the ranks and eventually earning the 1989 Air Force Reserve Dentist Award. In recognition of her professional accomplishments and dedication to public health, she was inducted into the Okaloosa County Women's Hall of Fame in 2022.

A longstanding contributor to the local community, she co-founded a county dental clinic, offering free care to residents and refugees, and spent 32 years serving patients in private practice. Dr. Chiccarelli's legacy of service extends to her family; her daughter, Maj. Dr. Elvira N. Chiccarelli (same name), now serves as an Air Force dentist in San Antonio, continuing her mother's commitment to service.

The RWOFF Veterans Luncheon continues to grow each year, reflecting the community's deep-seated patriotism and commitment to honoring those who have served. This year's luncheon reminded us of veterans' vital role in American life and the importance of recognizing their contributions daily.

10th Annual Eggs on the Beach Cooking Competition a Huge Success!

By BARBARA PALMGREN

What a beautiful day for teams competing for bragging rights as well as raising money for non-profits! This was

Continued on next page

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Neko Stubblefield
Linda Sumblin
April Sutton
Guido Tremolini
UWF Haas Center
Nate Vannatter
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Sandra Wilson
Matt Zimmermann

Bay Buzz

my first experience attending and, yes, participating with our non-profit, The Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida and our partner The Pallet Bar and Grill, located in Fort Walton Beach.

Hosted by Bay Breeze patio at Seascape Town Center, 25 cook teams brought their "A" game from desserts to shrimp, ribs, venison, pork belly, brisket, sausage, chicken, beef and seafood to raise an impressive \$52,500 for local non-profits, including Fisher House of the Emerald Coast and Food for Thought through ticket sales along with the three non-profit cook teams.

This year, eight winning teams took home cash, prizes and bragging rights from the commemorative competition.

Proceeds from the event are presented to the non-profit cook teams and the remainder is divided between the two benefiting charities, Food for Thought and Fisher House of the Emerald Coast. This year, both received a \$22,000 donation to

support their mission. In addition, non-profit teams competed for Taster's Choice Awards and were awarded cash prizes totaling \$8,500.

The three non-profit winners selected by the people who attended and voted for the People's choice included:

- 1st Place: Food for Thought
- 2nd Place: **Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida by Pallet Bar & Grill**
- 3rd Place: **Healing Paws for Warriors by Swiftly Catered**

The main bite selected for the Judge's Awards included:

- 1st Place: **Sea Market**
- 2nd Place: **Healing Paws for Warriors**
- 3rd Place: **Saltwater Restaurants**

Two sponsors, Tony Chachere and Angles Envy, supported awards using their product.

For those who don't know Angels Envy, it's a delicious American bourbon whiskey distilled in Louisville, Ky. I fondly



- 1st Place: **Keggs Over Easy**
- 2nd Place: **Captain's Choice**
- 3rd Place: **Saltwater Restaurants**

Everyone who purchased a ticket and sampled entrees, sides, desserts and even drinks, were winners at Seascape Town Center.

remember sipping mint juleps at the Kentucky Derby years ago never thinking how bourbon could be used for cooking! But used for cooking, it was, and here are the winners:

- 1st Place: **Healing Paws for Warriors**
- 2nd Place: **It's a Write Off**
- 3rd Place: **Food for Thought**

Tony Chachere's Bite Award Winners were:

- 1st Place: **Saltwater Restaurants**
- 2nd Place: **Sea Market**
- 3rd Place: **Food for Thought**

Taster's Choice Awards included:

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 Community

5 Tips to Lower Your Insurance Costs in a Rough Market



By JULIE A. MARTIN

1. Update your home. In this property insurance market, most of the standard carriers are imposing strict age guidelines on Roof, Heating, Wiring, and Plumbing. If your home is 20 years old or older, keep in mind that the older your roof is, the harder it will be to move your insurance to a different carrier. The same holds true for your hot water heater, which most carriers regard as too old



once it has been in your home for at least 15 years.

2. Confirm with your agent that your insurance has all applicable discounts. Wind Mitigation discounts weigh heavily on your premium. Roof credits such as FBC, or Florida Building Code Equivalent, Hip roof, for roofs that slope on all four sides like a pyramid, and single wraps, may vastly decrease your premium from what it is now. If you have recently replaced your roof, it is best to order a new mitigation inspection directly afterwards, and submit it to your agent. Carriers acknowledge new inspections as of the date they are received by the underwriting department, rather than the date they are performed.

3. Check your Total Insurable Replacement Cost.

Ask your agent to update your replacement cost estimator. Most standard carriers have some form of inflation guard on their policies, which is designed to keep your dwelling coverage at or above the level required in order to fulfill the Florida Valued Policy Law. Due to the recent burst of inflation in materials and the costs of

hiring a licensed contractor, some policies may experience a bigger jump in dwelling coverage from policy term to policy term. It is best to check with your agent to be sure your home is not over-insured.

4. Smart Water Protection System. Some newer homes have a Smart Water Protection system which automatically shuts off the water in the event of accidental leakage, and many carriers offer a good discount to policyholders for having this device installed in their homes.

5. Increase Deductibles. This is a valid way to reduce your overall property insurance premium. However, there is a downside. For one thing, if raising your deductible significantly increases your potential out of pocket expenses in the event of a claim, you have to decide if you are prepared for that risk. Secondly, some deductibles can only be changed at renewal. If you change your wind deductible from 2% to 5%, you will have to wait another year before changing it back, so be sure to calculate your potential out of pocket exposure before making this decision.

In this rough market, it is dif-

icult to shop rates between carriers, but the best time to do that is after hurricane season ends, which is in December.

The guidelines are always the toughest in high summer, so that by December, many of the carriers have relaxed their rules enough for people to move from carrier to carrier with much less fuss and expense, and that, dear reader, is what we all want—peace of mind with less expense.

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Simplifying Medicare Advantage vs. Supplement Choices



BY GREG DURETTE, FLORIDA HEALTH CONNECTOR

This is the time of year when you should review your Medicare options and make important decisions about your coverage for 2025.

Right now, we are in the Annual Election Period (AEP) for all Medicare beneficiaries. It is often referred to as the Annual Open Enrollment Period. This annual event runs from October 15th through December 7th.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Since Medicare Advantage

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

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

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



ing choice that works for you.

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

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



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2024 Football Guide

Football. Food. Fun. Fans.
Let the Games Begin...



By SCOTT MILLER

All I want for Christmas is... well, I already have my two front teeth, as the song goes. I credit my mom for that. Why, you ask? Because, as a child, she would never let me or my bro-

thers play hockey.

You see, growing up in Philadelphia in the early 70s, the Philadelphia Flyers were a dominant force in NHL winning several Stanley Cup Championships and the captain of the team was Bobby Clarke.

You couldn't go a day without seeing his smiling face on TV and no front teeth to be seen. It seems that was a common theme among pro hockey players back in those days. And, so, my mom stood firm and said no playing hockey! And she meant it. To her, football, believe it or not, seemed like a much safer way to go. Maybe that's why I became such an avid football fan. Oh, yes, back to football—I



got a little off track for a moment.

December football is here and oh, what fun it is to cheer. We've got the Army Navy game set for December 14 and away we go. Seems like every year there's a new bowl game added to the mix and, why not? These kids deserve it and football fans love it. It will be interesting to



watch how the new playoff system shakes out and see who gets crowned National Champion this year! Where will you be watching?

Here are a few of my favorite places to go on game day. I hope to see you there, too!

AJ's Seafood & Oyster Bar

Since 1984, AJ's Seafood and Oyster Bar has been serving cold Gulf Coast oysters and cool libations. What began as a popular local hang out known for fresh oysters and cold beer has grown into one of the most iconic "hot spots" on the Destin Harbor. From its humble beginning shucking oysters off the deck behind a small trailer on the Destin Harbor, it has grown to four locations along our Emerald Coast, serving fresh seafood, live music and exciting water activities in the Destin area. Attention all die hard football fans, AJ's boasts the one and only Jumbotron on the Destin Harbor. AJ's serves up delicious daily specials, mouth-watering drinks plus entertaining live music all month. Don't miss any of the action just come on down to AJ's Seafood and Oyster Bar all season long...

(850)837-1913
 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-

Continued on page 22

Niceville's Favorite Pizza, Wings & Beer

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• 290 NE Eglin Pkwy.

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NFL Football Schedule

Week 13
Thursday, Nov. 28 (Thanksgiving)
 Chicago Bears at Detroit Lions — 11:30 p.m., CBS
 New York Giants at Dallas Cowboys — 3:30 p.m., Fox
 Miami Dolphins at Green Bay Packers — 6:20 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 — 6:20 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*

Week 15
Thursday, Dec. 12
 Los Angeles Rams at San Francisco 49ers — 7:15 p.m., Prime Video
Sunday, Dec. 15
 Dallas Cowboys at Carolina Panthers — Noon, Fox
 Kansas City Chiefs at Cleveland Browns — Noon, CBS
 Miami Dolphins at Houston Texans — Noon, CBS
 New York Jets at Jacksonville Jaguars — Noon, Fox
 Washington Commanders at New Orleans Saints — Noon, Fox
 Baltimore Ravens at New York Giants — Noon, CBS
 Cincinnati Bengals at Tennessee Titans — Noon, Fox
 New England Patriots at Arizona Cardinals — 3:25 p.m., CBS
 Indianapolis Colts at Denver Broncos — 3:25 p.m., CBS
 Buffalo Bills at Detroit Lions — 3:25 p.m., CBS
 Tampa Bay Buccaneers at Los Angeles Chargers — 3:25 p.m., Fox
 Pittsburgh Steelers at Philadelphia Eagles — 3:25 p.m., Fox
 Green Bay Packers at Seattle Seahawks — 7:20 p.m., NBC*

Monday, Dec. 16
 Chicago Bears at Minnesota Vikings — 7 p.m., ABC*
 Atlanta Falcons at Las Vegas Raiders — 7:30 p.m., ESPN*

Week 16
Thursday, Dec. 19
 Cleveland Browns at Cincinnati Bengals — 7:15 p.m., Prime Video
Saturday, Dec. 21
 Houston Texans at Kansas City Chiefs — Noon, NBC
 Pittsburgh Steelers at Baltimore Ravens — 3:30 p.m., Fox

Monday, Dec. 22
 New York Giants at Atlanta Falcons — Noon, Fox
 New England Patriots at Buffalo Bills — Noon, CBS
 Arizona Cardinals at Carolina Panthers — Noon, Fox
 Detroit Lions at Chicago Bears — Noon, Fox
 Tennessee Titans at Indianapolis Colts — Noon, CBS
 Los Angeles Rams at New York Jets — Noon, CBS
 Philadelphia Eagles at Washington Commanders — Noon, Fox
 Denver Broncos at Los Angeles Chargers — 3:05 p.m., Fox
 Minnesota Vikings at Seattle Seahawks — 3:05 p.m., Fox
 Jacksonville Jaguars at Las Vegas Raiders — 3:25 p.m., CBS
 San Francisco 49ers at Miami Dolphins — 3:25 p.m., CBS
 Tampa Bay Buccaneers at Dallas Cowboys — 7:20 p.m., NBC*

Monday, Dec. 23
 New Orleans Saints at Green Bay Packers — 7:15 p.m., ESPN*

Week 17
Wednesday, Dec. 25 (Christmas)
 Kansas City Chiefs at Pittsburgh Steelers — Noon, Netflix
 Baltimore Ravens at Houston Texans — 3:30 p.m., Netflix
Thursday, Dec. 26
 Seattle Seahawks at Chicago Bears — 7:15 p.m., Prime Video — 7:15 p.m., Prime Video*
Saturday, Dec. 28
 Denver Broncos at Cincinnati Bengals — TBD
 Arizona Cardinals at Los Angeles Rams — TBD
 Los Angeles Chargers at New England Patriots — TBD
 Indianapolis Colts at New York Giants — TBD
 Atlanta Falcons at Washington Commanders — TBD
Sunday, Dec. 29
 New York Jets at Buffalo Bills — Noon, CBS
 Tennessee Titans at Jacksonville Jaguars — Noon, CBS
 Green Bay Packers at Minnesota Vikings — Noon, Fox
 Las Vegas Raiders at New Orleans Saints — Noon, Fox
 Carolina Panthers at Tampa Bay Buccaneers — Noon, CBS
 Dallas Cowboys at Philadelphia Eagles — 3:25 p.m., Fox
 Miami Dolphins at Cleveland Browns — 7:20 p.m., NBC*

Monday, Dec. 30
 Detroit Lions at San Francisco 49ers — 7:15 p.m., ESPN/ABC* (edited)

Monday, Dec. 31
 New York Jets at Buffalo Bills — Noon, CBS
 Tennessee Titans at Jacksonville Jaguars — Noon, CBS
 Green Bay Packers at Minnesota Vikings — Noon, Fox
 Las Vegas Raiders at New Orleans Saints — Noon, Fox
 Carolina Panthers at Tampa Bay Buccaneers — Noon, CBS
 Dallas Cowboys at Philadelphia Eagles — 3:25 p.m., Fox
 Miami Dolphins at Cleveland Browns — 7:20 p.m., NBC*

Monday, Dec. 31
 Detroit Lions at San Francisco 49ers — 7:15 p.m., ESPN/ABC* (edited)

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2024/25 College Football Bowl Games

Saturday 12/14
 Navy vs Army CBS 2 p.m.
 Celebration Bowl ABC 11 a.m.
 Veterans Bowl ESPN 8 p.m.
Tuesday 12/17
 Frisco Bowl ESPN 8 p.m.
Wednesday 12/18
 Boca Raton Bowl ESPN 4:30 p.m.
 LA Bowl ESPN 8 p.m.
Thursday 12/19
 New Orleans Bowl ESPN2 6 p.m.
Friday 12/20
 Cure Bowl ESPN 11 a.m.
 Gasparilla Bowl ESPN 2:30 p.m.
 Playoff Game 1st Round ABC/ESPN 7 p.m.
Saturday 12/21
 Playoff Game 1st Round TNT 11 a.m.
 Playoff Game 1st Round TNT 3 p.m.
 Playoff Game 1st Round ABC/ESPN 7 p.m.
Monday 12/23
 Myrtle Beach Bowl ESPN 10 a.m.
 Idaho Potato Bowl ESPN 1:30 p.m.
Tuesday 12/24
 Hawaii Bowl ESPN 7 p.m.
Thursday 12/26
 Game Above Sports Bowl ESPN 1 p.m.
 Rate Bowl ESPN 4:30 p.m.
 68 Ventures Bowl ESPN 8 p.m.
Friday 12/27
 Armed Forces Bowl ESPN TBD
 Birmingham a.m. Bowl ESPN TBD
 Liberty Bowl ESPN 6 p.m.
 Holiday Bowl FOX 7 p.m.
 Las Vegas Bowl ESPN 9:30 p.m.
Saturday 12/28
 Fenway Bowl ESPN 10 a.m.
 Pinstripe Bowl ABC 11 a.m.

New Mexico Bowl ESPN 1:15 p.m.
 Pop-Tarts Bowl ABC 2:30 p.m.
 Arizona Bowl CW 3:30 p.m.
 Military Bowl ESPN 4:45 p.m.
 AI a.m.o Bowl ABC 6:30 p.m.
 Independence Bowl ESPN 8:15 p.m.
Monday 12/30
 Music City Bowl ESPN 1:30 p.m.
Tuesday 12/31
 ReliaQuest Bowl ESPN 11 a.m.
 Sun Bowl CBS 1 p.m.
 Citrus Bowl ABC 2 p.m.
 Texas Bowl ESPN 2:30 p.m.
 Fiesta Bowl/Playoff Game Quarterfinal ESPN 6:30 p.m.
Wednesday 1/1
 Peach Bowl / Playoff Game Quarterfinal ESPN 12 p.m.
 Rose Bowl / Playoff Game Quarterfinal ESPN 4 p.m.
 Sugar Bowl / Playoff Game Quarterfinal ESPN 7:45 p.m.
Thursday 1/2
 Gator Bowl ESPN 6:30 p.m.
Friday 1/3
 First Responder Bowl ESPN 3 p.m.
 Duke's Mayo Bowl ESPN 6:30 p.m.
Saturday 1/4
 Bah a.m.as Bowl ESPN/ESPN2 10 a.m.
Thursday 1/9
 Orange Bowl / Playoff Game Semifinal ESPN 6:30 p.m.
Friday 1/10
 Cotton Bowl / Playoff Game Semifinal ESPN 6:30 p.m.
Monday 1/20
 National Championship Game ESPN 6:30 p.m.

JoJo's Coffee and Goodness

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



brown casserole. Breakfast burritos are rolled and ready daily!



Choose from andouille, bacon, chorizo or veggie. Or tantalize your taste buds with a made-to-order breakfast sandwich on croissants or bagel with two eggs and cheese and then choose if you want to add JoJo's homemade smoked jalapeño beef bologna, bacon, house smoked barbecue or ham. Cinnamon rolls and kolaches still hold the top spot for sell outs. Stop in for featured muffins, coffee cake or pound cake, which go great with maple cinnamon latte or caramel macchiato. And, oh, the freshly roasted coffee. Get what you're craving! Order ahead and pick up some for your holiday parties!

(850) 737-6194
4652 Hwy. 20 East, Niceville
bigorangehousedesigns.com

LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant

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

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

Wednesday, Dec. 4: Prime Rib Dinner Special!

Dec. 17: Santa Paddle Parade — 12 p.m.

Dec. 18: Christmas Party with Chris Saylor 6-10 p.m.

Dec. 19: Brunch with Santa

Dec. 20: Christmas Boat Parade 5:30 p.m.

Dec. 31: New Year's Eve Par-

ty with Diamond Dan DJ

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

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

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

(850) 897-6400
bluwaterbaymarina.com/schooners
290 Yacht Club Dr., Unit 200
Niceville in Bluewater Bay



Our beans are roasted in house!

Breakfast: Bakery • Breakfast Sandwiches • Burritos

Lunch: Chicken Salad • BLTs • Paninis • And MORE

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Christmas Sausage Balls

FROM SUSAN BENTON,
30AEATS.COM

My father has made sausage balls for Christmas morning as long as I can remember. I often wonder why he did not get recipe credit for this amazing comfort food as he has been making them for 50 + years! Sausage balls are wonderful for tailgating and a delicious cocktail appetizer, but most of all as a breakfast snack on Christmas morning. The ingredients are simple and the prep and cleanup are easy. If selecting regular sausage, then add about 1/4 tsp of cayenne pepper. I prefer to grate my own cheese rather than buying pre-shredded, as I do not like the caking ingredients used in packaging. I also prefer not to use low-fat cheddar as it does not melt well and the sausage balls will be dry. You will be surprised at how quickly they disappear!



3 tablespoons water

Preparation:

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F.

In a large bowl, combine sausage, cheese, and baking mix using hands to mix well.

Only add water if portions of the mix are too dry, and just drops until it gets to the consistency where you can roll into 1 to 1.5-inch balls.

Place on an ungreased baking sheet.

Bake 18-22 minutes (depending on your oven) until golden brown.

Remove and cool on rack or parchment paper.

Quickly move to sealed container or Ziploc storage bags.

These keep for up to two weeks in the refrigerator and freeze very well.

Ingredients:

- 1 lb. ground hot breakfast sausage
- 3 cups cheddar cheese, shredded
- 2 cups Bisquick baking mix



Santa Paddle Parade Dec. 21

Let's fill Rocky Bayou with Santas!

Registration \$10 or \$10 worth of canned goods.
Must paddle in Santa suit (Provide your own Santa suit)
12 PM Group Photo | 12:10 Start
Benefits Caring & Sharing

Bluewater Bay Marina Christmas Boat Parade Dec. 21

Join the 13th Annual Bluewater Bay Christmas Boat Parade!

Call 850-897-2821 to register or visit bluwaterbaymarina.com

Skipper's Meeting 4pm / Staging 5pm
Parade 5:30pm / DJ 6-10pm

More Upcoming Fun!

Wednesday, Dec. 4 – Chess Night 6pm
Wednesday, Dec. 4 – Prime Rib Night 5-9pm, Wine Tasting 5-7pm
Saturday, December 14 – Christmas Party & DJ Chris Saylor 6-10pm, Ugly Sweater 9pm
Wednesday, December 18 – The Traveling Painter 5:30pm
Wednesday, December 18 – Prime Rib Night 5-9pm, Signature Cocktail Tasting 5-7pm
Sunday, December 22, Brunch 9am-1pm, Santa 10am-1pm
December 31 – Oyster Bar Open 11am-1am
New Years Eve Dinner Specials 5pm – 10pm – Reservations Suggested 850-897-6400
Party with DJ Diamond Dan 9pm-1am

Oyster Bar Hours: Mon.-Tues. Closed, Wed.-Thurs. 3pm-10pm, Fri.-Sat. 11am to midnight, Sun. 12pm to 9pm
Restaurant Hours: Mon.-Tues. Closed, Weds.-Sat. 11am to 9pm, Sun. 9am to 1pm, Sunday Brunch 9am to 1pm

BEST PLACES

continued from page 18

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

fubarfwb.com

Tailfins Waterfront Grill

Hey football fans, Tailfins Waterfront Grill is calling YOU!



That's right y'all, Destin's favorite season is here and there's not a better place in Destin to come and watch your team play.

Looking for a locals' favorite breakfast before the game? Start your day off right with Tailfins breakfast from 8-11 a.m., seven days a week. Enjoy a classic breakfast with bacon and eggs, a seafood or Cajun omelet and even a kid's smiley pancake. Be sure to order up a round of mimosas and bloody marys. Watch Tailfins' sushi chef create right in front of your eyes. Enjoy some of your favorite food and drinks,

scrumptious early bird dinner specials Monday to Friday, 4-6 p.m. Happy hour from 4-6 p.m. Monday through Friday, featuring \$24 domestic bottle buckets, \$7 house wines and well drinks and \$5 Long Island iced teas. Live music on the docks. Tailfins is a go-to destination for sports watching featuring more than 70 big screen TVs showing all college football games and Sunday Ticket.

(850) 650-1200

On the Harbor in Destin,

172 Harbor Blvd.

tailfinsdestin.com



Austons on 98

Offering an amazing raw oyster bar and the best happy hour in town, Austons is the place to be and home of the 102-foot bar, including 32 beers on draft! Some of the specialties include little neck clams, freshly shucked raw oysters, New England-style clam chowder and jumbo shrimp cocktail. With big screen TVs all around and football season upon us, there's no bad seat in the house. So, come by and watch the games all season long. Happy Hour Specials from Monday-Friday,

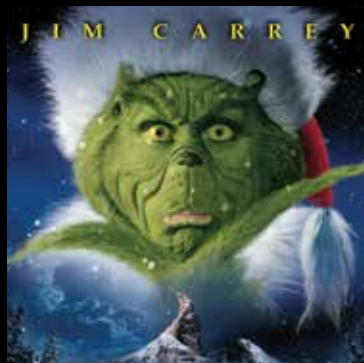
2-5 p.m., \$2 off all bar drinks and Monday-Friday from 3 p.m. - 5 p.m. \$3 off a dozen raw oysters. Bucket Specials all day every day. Austons on 98 is open daily from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. and features its own "Real Deal Nashville Hot Sauce." View full menu at austons98.com.

(850) 842-3200

125 Poinciana Blvd.,

Miramar Beach

Austons98.com



FILM IN CONCERT

The Grinch in Concert

Saturday, Dec. 14 | 7:30 PM

Destin-FWB Convention Center

TICKETS: FROM \$40 PER PERSON

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



BIG BAND HOLIDAY Toast 'n JAM SESSION

feat. Morgan James

Sunday, Dec. 8 | 10:30 AM

Henderson Beach Resort

TICKETS: FROM \$125 PER PERSON

Celebrate the season with Morgan James' soulful holiday concert featuring Broadway hits, timeless classics, and original music. Don't miss this magical performance with her stunning vocals, guaranteed to brighten your holidays. This event includes an elegant holiday brunch and Bloody Mary & Mimosa cash bar.

24
25
SEASON



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850.460.8800

Destin-FWB and CCA Florida Release 30,000 Redfish into the Choctawhatchee Bay

Destin-Fort Walton Beach, in collaboration with the Coastal Conservation Association Florida (CCA), released 30,000 juvenile redfish into the Choctawhatchee Bay on Nov. 12 at Lion's Park in Niceville.

This multi-year collaborative effort seeks to address the issue of declining redfish populations across Northwest Florida fisheries and enhance the population with stocking initiatives for one of Florida's most popular in-shore fish species.

"This species is very important to the health of the Choctawhatchee Bay, benefitting the overall quality of the estuary and providing additional fishing opportunities for the future," said Okaloosa County Board Chairman Paul Mixon. "We

look forward to future partnerships with CCA Florida and to see how this work will contribute to the abundance of the redfish population."

The redfish were about three to four inches in length and can take about three years to reach 26-inches in length. Redfish, also known as red drum, spot-tail, red bass, and channel bass can live up to 40 years.

"We are thrilled to return to Choctawhatchee Bay for our second redfish release in collaboration with Okaloosa County," CCA Florida Executive Director Brian Gorski said. "This event is a great example of what can be achieved when partners share the same goal – to support the health and sustainability of Florida's iconic fisheries for gen-



erations to come."

Panhandle fishing regulations for redfish include:

Season: Open year-round
Slot Limit: Not less than 18" and no more than 27" total length

Daily Bag Limit: 1 fish per person per day; 4 fish vessel limit

Source: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)

The CCA was founded in 1977 after drastic commercial

overfishing along the Texas coast decimated redfish and speckled trout populations. One of 19 state chapters, CCA Florida became the fifth state chapter in 1985. A 501(c)3 non-profit, the purpose of CCA is to advise and educate the public on the conservation of marine resources. Through habitat restoration projects, water quality initiatives and fisheries advocacy, CCA Florida works with its over 18,000 members including recreational anglers and outdoor enthusiasts to conserve and enhance marine resources and coastal environments. Join the conversation on Facebook or learn more at ccaflorida.org.

View a video of the release at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lpLvGUinfa4>.

Gulfarium CARE Center Receives Large Grant to Enhance Sea Turtle Rescue Operations

The Gulfarium CARE Center has been awarded a grant of \$13,391.40 from the Florida Sea Turtle Grants Program. This generous funding allowed for the purchase of a new utility task vehicle (UTV), a critical addition that significantly enhances our sea turtle rescue efforts along the Emerald Coast.



The UTV, fully funded by the Sea Turtle License Plate Grant, will be instrumental in responding to turtles in distress, particularly those affected by accidental hook-and-line interactions. Equipped with a specialized hoist, this vehicle is designed to safely and efficiently retrieve sea turtles impacted by fishing gear, enabling our team to respond more effectively and securely to these urgent situations. The need for such resources has never been more pressing, as the CARE Center has seen a marked increase in sea turtle rescues. In 2023, we responded to nearly 100 calls, and this year alone, we have already attended to 168 distress calls—all originating from the Okaloosa Island Fishing Pier.

With the addition of this UTV, the CARE Center is better equipped than ever to meet

the needs of sea turtles in our region. Our commitment to protecting these magnificent animals and ensuring their safe return to their ocean home remains unwavering.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to volunteers Bob and Ralph, whose assistance was vital in assembling the hoist for the UTV. Their dedication, combined with the support from the Sea Turtle Grants Program, ensured that this new vehicle will serve as an essential tool for safe and efficient rescues.

The Florida Sea Turtle Grants Program is funded by the proceeds of the Florida Sea Turtle License Plate, which plays a crucial role in protecting Florida's sea turtles and their habitats. To support sea turtle conservation and learn more about how you can contribute,

please visit helpingseaturtles.org.

If you see a sea turtle in distress, injured, or deceased, please report it to the Florida

Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission at 1-888-404-FWCC (1-888-404-3922).

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Growing the Game: High School Male Golfers Tee Up Their Best Game!

By BARBARA PALMGREN

The 40th year for the Miracle Strip High Golf Tournament was held this year at Fort Walton Municipal Golf Course. This sporting tradition was organized for both high school teams and to crown an individual golfer with the lowest score for 18 holes. USGA rules governed play and spectators had

to stay on cart paths or on the tree line/rough.

On a beautiful October day, the following schools sent their best male golfers to vie for honors: Choctawhatchee, Pensacola, Baker, Niceville, Crestview, Mosley (Lynn Haven), Northview (Century), Fort Walton Beach, Destin, Walton and South Walton. There were 64

girls who entered the competition.

Teams were composed of five players, using the top 4 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 four hours of play, two schools emerged victorious. Destin High's team was



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runner-up with a score of 319. South Walton was the winner with a score of 318. This was quite a close battle with only one point separating the second and first place winner.

But, more excitement in store! Two boys were tied for individual winner with a score of 76. So began a play-off that lasted over an hour. In most tournaments after three or four holes, one player emerges victorious. This was not to be the case today. Hole after hole,

spectators watched in awe as two young men concentrated and performed as never seen in high school golf in this county. Finally, the coaches made the decision to award both players the top individual award. Another first place trophy will soon be mailed to one of the two winners; Ebner Ingram of Destin or JP Sullivan of South Walton. Their photo will show both of them with the trophy. Congratulations, boys. Well deserved!

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 Wellness

Beware of Elder Fraud

By KELLY STALNAKER

According to a 2023 FBI report, Americans aged 60 and older lost an estimated \$3 billion to scammers. The report adds that this figure could be low due to various factors such as only about half of the reports

included information about the victim's age, meaning that elder fraud is likely underrepresented. Additionally, there is a level of shame or embarrassment about being the victim of a scam. So, it's possible that many incidents go unreported. But these crimes

have become so sophisticated that even the savviest of consumers can fall victim. Scammers try to take advantage of those most vulnerable in society. That's why it is important to educate all consumers to know what to look for.

Artificial Intelligence scams are highly technical and involve replicating the voice of a loved one. A phone call will sound like a family member is in trouble and needs money urgently. To avoid falling prey to this scam, establish a code word with your loved ones to verify their identity. Romance scams are most often the result of internet dating; be wary of any romantic interests or new friends asking you to send them money, especially if you've never met in person. Tech support scams can generate from fake pop-up messages on your computer or emails stating that there is something wrong with your device. Once you click into the message, you are asked to give remote access to your computer, at which point the scammer can pilfer your sensitive data.

Bank or company impersonation scams are some of the most successful and sneaky to uncover. Scammers will pretend to be from a reputable, familiar company to warn you about problems with your account or order. They'll try to trick the consumer into sharing personal or financial information. Don't pick up phone calls from numbers you don't recognize or answer unsolicited texts or emails. Law enforcement impersonation scams can be the most unnerving as a scammer will pose as a representative from the IRS, Social Security or law enforcement, demanding immediate payments or threatening criminal action. Be advised that in most cases, government agencies will contact you by mail and not by phone or email.

The prevalence of scams does increase during the holiday season. With so much online shopping, it can be easy to fall for a company impersonation. Fake websites for stores are done so well that it can be difficult to determine what is real and what is a scam. This applies to charity websites, too. Charitable donations increase around the holidays and scammers are ready to take your money.

A lesser-known scam affecting seniors is medical fraud, and it takes shape in many different ways. It can look like a reputable company consistently sending



you medical devices or supplies that you did not request and/or do not need. Your insurance is then billed for exorbitant costs. Medical scams can also be the promise of a miracle cure for sale. To protect yourself, be wary of offers that seem too good to be true; don't give out your Medicare number or other personal information to people you don't know; talk to your doctor before buying medical products; and avoid odd payment types such as gift cards, money orders or wire transfers.

Stay safe online, remain vigilant, and don't let scammers be a grinch in your holiday season! If you believe you may have been the victim of a scam, report it to the FTC online or call 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357).



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Wellness

Blue Hearts of Hope

In the wake of an unimaginable loss, local resident Diane Cooke channeled her grief into creating hope and support for others. When her son, Drew, age 20, died by suicide on December 23, 2018, she initially lost herself in unfathomable pain. But, through Ketamine Infusion therapy, Diane found a path forward, with a renewed sense of purpose. This transformative experience inspired her to create Blue Hearts of Hope, a non-profit in Drew's memory, followed by the opening of Be Well Solutions, a wellness clinic she co-founded with her childhood best friend, Melanie Yost, LCSW and life/brain health coach.

Blue Hearts of Hope reflects Drew's generous spirit and his love for helping others. "When Drew passed, friends and family wanted to send flowers. But, I asked them to donate money instead so we could make a difference for others in some way," Diane recalls. "Drew's favorite color was blue, and he was all about hope for others, helping everyone around him. That's where the name Blue Hearts of Hope came from."

Blue Hearts of Hope's mission is straightforward yet profound: to assist people at their breaking points. "We want to



provide the kind of hope for others that Drew couldn't find for himself —whether it's support for someone with depression, PTSD, trauma or any mental health struggle that has made daily life feel impossible," Diane explains. "Sometimes, hope comes in the form of practical support, like covering a car repair so someone can commute to a new job. Or maybe it's hiring a cleaning service for someone who feels overwhelmed by their living environment, giving them a fresh start."

In just a few years, Blue Hearts of Hope has already made an extraordinary impact—helping a young woman become a therapist to pay it forward, supporting individuals who couldn't afford therapies,

and providing essentials to help people regain their independence and dignity.

The Be Well Solutions clinic, provides advanced, innovative whole body wellness therapies. They offer affordable solutions like ketamine infusion therapy for conditions often resistant to traditional treatments like medication and talk therapy. Clients find relief from depression, anxiety, PTSD, chronic pain, migraines, restless leg syndrome, neuropathic pain, fibromyalgia and suicidal ideation. The clinic also provides supportive therapies like hyperbaric oxygen (HBOT), Bio-Electromagnetic Energy Regulation (BEMER), vitamin and nano particle infusions, weight loss programs, and more, to boost mental and



physical wellness. Together, Diane and Melanie are creating a sanctuary for individuals in need of comprehensive care, kindness and hope, rooted in Diane's own healing journey.

One powerful example involves a disabled 20-year, Navy SEAL veteran who, after experiencing severe PTSD and traumatic brain injury, found new purpose through the clinic's therapies. With support from Blue Hearts of Hope, he was able to reclaim his role as a husband, father and productive member of society. Stories like his, and many others shared on the clinic's social media Facebook page, highlight how crucial these therapies can be in transforming lives.


To join Diane in her mission, consider donating to Blue Hearts of Hope. Your contribution goes directly to helping individuals reclaim their lives and take meaningful steps forward. Diane and her husband, Greg, are matching all donations until December 23, 2024. In addition to individuals donating, Blue Hearts of Hope is looking for businesses in the community who would like a tax-deductible donation that would specifically sponsor our local veterans to receive the life changing help Ketamine, BEMER and Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy can provide.

If you or someone you know could benefit from a grant from Blue Hearts of Hope, please visit the Facebook page for updates. Donations can be made via Venmo or PayPal at blueheartsofhope@aol.com (last 4 of phone number 0446) For those who prefer, checks can also be mailed to:

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Shattered by Suicide: A Mother's Mission to Save Lives

BY DIANE COOKE AND
MELANIE YOST

In the early hours of December 23, 2018, Diane Cooke's life was forever changed by a heartbreaking phone call. Her 20-year-old son, Drew, had taken his own life. As a mother, Diane was devastated and confused. She had known that Drew was struggling emotionally in the months leading up to his death, but she had believed that this difficult period was just a passing chapter in his life. Drew was under the care of a counselor and a psychiatrist, and Diane felt confident that, with the support of professionals, medication and the love of their family, he would be able to navigate through the storm. Tragically, this was not the case. Now, Diane is sharing her story in the hope of saving others.

According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (afsp.org), 49,476 Americans died by suicide in 2022, making it the 11th leading cause of death in the U.S. An estimated



1.6 million people attempted suicide that year. Reflecting on Drew's experiences, Diane suspects that the actual number might be even higher. During the last five years of his life, Drew had several incidents that, in hindsight, appear to have been suicide attempts, although they were not recognized as such at the time.

What Diane Has Learned About Suicide:

Not Everyone Talks About Their Struggles: In the days before his death, Drew did not speak about ending his life. On the contrary, he spent time with his mother, helping her bake cookies just the day before. While Diane was aware that Drew was dealing with the



challenges many young adults face—such as the end of a serious relationship and hurtful rumors—she did not realize these issues felt life and death for him. She wishes she had asked him directly about his feelings. Though she can't be certain he would have opened up, the conversation might have provided an opportunity to offer him life saving support. It's a common fear that asking someone if they are having suicidal thoughts might introduce the idea, but this fear is unfounded. If a loved one seems to be struggling, asking if they feel safe can be crucial, especially if they have had past incidents

like single-car accidents, overdoses or risky behavior.

Take Every Statement Seriously: When someone expresses thoughts of suicide, it's vital to take them seriously. Sometimes, these expressions are mistaken for attention-seeking behavior, but suicidal thoughts often manifest as casual comments like, "It would be easier for everyone if I were gone," "I don't know if I can do this anymore," or "If I died tomorrow, life would go on." Drew was a vibrant and joyful young man who loved to make others laugh. He had many friends and was known for his kindness and sense of humor. However, he also struggled with significant mental health issues that affected his mood, perceptions, impulsivity and judgment. If a loved one makes comments that hint at giving up or dying, it's important to ask questions, listen carefully and help them access resources that can keep them safe.

Continued on page 34

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Wellness

Here's to Staying Healthy During the Holidays!



two months, it only makes getting started harder! It can be difficult to find a balance, but here are some healthy tips to help make this time of year easier on the body!

By KASSIA GARFIELD, OWNER, MAXSTRENGTH FITNESS

Happy Holidays from MaxStrength Fitness of Niceville! This time of year is a great time for family gatherings, celebrating friendship and community! It is very easy to make excuses to wait until the New Year to start healthy habits. However, if we make unhealthy decisions for

With so many delicious home-made goodies, people showing off their culinary skills, it can be hard to say no to temptation! This is also the time of year people often put their diet and health on the back burner; and, funny, there is a correlation in illness, sickness and the flu starting right around now. What people don't realize is how much healthy habits affect

our immune system. Spikes to our insulin levels decrease our immune responses. People often assume the colder weather causes illness. But, really, the start of cold and flu season is the holidays. Not only are there are more gatherings and opportunities for disease to spread, but also our eating habits change with a large increase in high

sugar items, compromising our immune system.

The more our insulin system spikes (when eating high sugar foods), the less our immune system can fight off disease. The more sugar, pumpkin spiced lattes and grandma's chocolate cream pies we eat this season, the more likely we are to get sick. Sugar in the blood stream specifically decreases white blood

cell's response to destroying foreign invaders, hence leaving our immune system compromised. Too much sugar can also lead to inflammatory responses in the body, which can lead to not feeling great, stiffness and the beginning of other disease processes.

can decrease the insulin response. So, focusing on the timing or order of what we eat can help, too. Most people stay away from starting **new routines** this time of year. But, why wait till January! Getting into a healthier exercise routine now will only counteract the changes to diet that everyone seems to have this time of year (starting with Halloween). There is always an excuse during the holidays that "we will start exercising later." But everyone should start to find time now. With more days off, there is actually more time, even though it feels like a busy season.

Set realistic goals about diet and exercise. Get into the gym now while it is not crowded to find your balance and routine. Be kind to yourself with overindulgences, but know that to maintain fitness and health goals, there needs to be some self-discipline. Also, if you feel you are eating more, just increase your activity during the day, such as adding an extra walk, yoga class or strength-training session.

Here at MaxStrength Fitness, we are always around to help you start an appointment based, high intensity workout-style routine that can fit into anyone's day, with just 20 minutes, twice a week. Let us know if we can jump start your fitness goals during this holiday season. Be Strong!

So, How Do We Stay Healthy?

The key is not seeing the whole holiday season as a "cheat" time of year. Maintain moderation and set some small rules for yourself. Only one cookie, eating only dessert once a day, or eating only homemade items—nothing store bought.

Exercise is an easy way to help decrease blood sugar levels. So, add a walk after overindulgences—your muscles can absorb sugar in the blood stream when there are glucose spikes, which can decrease the insulin response. Also, eating protein before eating high sugar items

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A Race for Wellness: Slow, Steady and Intentional Healing



BY DR. KAREN DEVORE

At the Tortoise Clinic, we embrace the philosophy of the tortoise: steady, intentional and focused on the journey. I often reflect on the story of the tortoise and the hare, where the tortoise wins not by speed, but by staying the course with quiet determination. It's a lesson that I've seen echoed time and time again in my patients' wellness journeys. Health isn't something that can be rushed. True, lasting wellness is a marathon, not a sprint.

When I first began practicing medicine, I saw a gap in how

we approached health—one that overlooked the wisdom of ancient healing methods in favor of fast, superficial treatments. But, I also saw the potential in blending the best of both worlds: the deep, holistic roots of Eastern medicine with the advancements of modern Western science. That's how the Tortoise Clinic came to be, an integrative health center where the patient's entire well-being is considered—not just the symptoms they present with, but the root causes beneath.

We offer a wide range of services, from acupuncture to massage therapy and holistic health consultations, each tailored to the individual's unique needs. Our Chinese Herb dispensary, the largest in Northwest Florida, is one of the cornerstones of our practice. We create customized raw herbal prescriptions, combining the wisdom of ancient medicine with medical-grade supplements and formulas designed to support the body's natural healing process.

One of the things I'm most passionate about is empower-



ing our patients to take charge of their own health journeys. I love helping people connect the dots between their lifestyle, environment and diet, and how these factors play into their overall wellness. At the Tortoise

Clinic, it's not about treating a headache or a sore back in isolation. It's about understanding why that pain exists in the first place and working together to create sustainable solutions. That's where the beauty of integration—Eastern and Western medicine—comes into play.

We are also incredibly fortunate to have Dr. Lisa Forsythe on our team, offering Neuro-Acupuncture, a cutting-edge technique that combines traditional Chinese needling with the latest in neurological science. As

the only Neuro-Acupuncture specialist within 300 miles, Lisa provides life-changing care for patients recovering from strokes, managing nerve pain or dealing with other central nervous system disorders. Her work is a powerful reminder of why combining these two worlds of medicine is so essential for holistic healing.

At the Tortoise Clinic, we don't believe in rushing toward a finish line. We believe in walking alongside our patients, step by step, on a path toward lasting vitality. Like the tortoise, we know that the journey to wellness is slow and steady, but ultimately, it's the most rewarding one you can take.

If you're ready to take that journey with us, I invite you to visit our clinic. Whether you're seeking relief from chronic pain, support with your overall health or just a deeper connection to your body's natural healing abilities, we're here to guide you. Because in the race for health, it's not about how fast you go—it's about how well you get there.



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 Business

Meet Photographer Jim Clark

BY MICHELLE RUSCHMAN

You may not know Jim Clark personally, but it is likely that you, or someone you know, has appeared in his work. Since 1992, Jim has been in the advertising business. But, he went to school to be a fine artist. It was there that he took a course in photography and got hooked. Although Jim can be hired as a professional photographer, he is known for just showing up at a variety of events such as fundraisers, concerts, art festivals and more. Where people gather to enjoy our community, Jim is likely there to capture special moments.

“People like to have their functions covered and, for me, it’s like being a fly on the wall. I have more of a documentary style in my work. So, I get to see people being themselves. I want to look at the activities going on and try to capture a little bit of the whole experience. I want

you to see the entryway, and the people who worked at the event, and show the people who were there. As it goes on, I might hear someone laugh out of nowhere, and as I look over, I’ve already got my camera up. I like it when people feel like they still get to experience the event even if they didn’t go.”

Jim doesn’t see himself as outgoing, but his camera allows him to connect with new people at every event. He loves it when people find themselves in his pictures on Facebook and reach out with their unique stories.

“I’m a shy person, but once I get out there with my camera, I can interact with other people through my camera. It’s not talking to folks, but you get to experience their reactions. People will approach me after seeing their pictures on Facebook, or they may message me, to say things like, ‘Oh, I love the picture. You got me and my best



PHOTO BY NATHAN SACZYNSKI

friend and we hadn’t seen each other in so long.’ I didn’t know the story, but I captured the image and that is so cool to me. I love it when people tell me what was going on in that moment and I get as much out of it as they do.”

Jim is not only generous with

his pictures, but also his time and advice. One day he may remind an aspiring model that it’s not her look that will sell and have longevity, but her personality and kindness that will extend beyond a pretty face. On another day, an aspiring photographer may receive advice from Jim’s vast education in the arts and real-world experience. He just

wants to share what he’s been so freely given and for that, he credits his mother.

“My mom passed away on April Fool’s Day and I say that Mom did that because she didn’t want to pass on Easter Sunday. She was the historian of her family, and she would take pic-

tures because her dad knew she would take care of the camera. Growing up, she made me and my two sisters’ scrapbooks and she passed on to us that desire to archive.”

Jim knows he’s been blessed to have access to many people and settings that most people will never get so he sees every event as valuable as the next. In 2016, a year before he passed away, Jim had the privilege of taking pictures of one of his favorite artists, Grammy award winner, Al Jarreau. A few years later, with the shadow of COVID-19, a family wanted to take pictures of each generation of their family on the beach one last time. Thanks to Jim, the family has precious memories of laughter and joy.

If you are interested in getting in touch with Jim, go to iamjimclark.com, or look up Jim Clark on Facebook. You just might be in one of his pictures.

Now We Have Party by Joce!

Have you ever had the experience of walking through the doors of an event and just having your mind blown away by the extraordinary decorations laying before your eyes? Like an actual, “WOW” involuntarily

crosses your lips as you enter the room?! No? How sad. What if it actually did happen?

Joce of Party by Joce produces that “WOW” factor for her clients throughout the Emerald Coast.

Whether it’s a birthday, holiday, corporate event or whatever else your mind can conjure up, Party by Joce can make it exceptional.

“When I tell people I am an event decorator, not an event



planner (event planners call ME for decorating), the usual response is, “Oh, that’s nice,” said Jockey Durette, owner. But once they have a chance to see what I actually do, the response is always, “Wow, this is unbelievable—now I get it! It’s not like anything I’ve ever seen before!”

Arriving in America over 20 years ago from Brazil where her passion and flair for event decoration began, she has embraced the gift of growing a wonderful family and the beauty of what the Emerald Coast community represents. “It truly is a blessing to be here in what is accurately dubbed, paradise.”

When asked what she would say to anyone considering enlisting her services: “Just let your mind run free with ideas and possibilities. That will be the spark to ignite the creativity needed to make your event something people will remember for years to come—maybe for a lifetime. Imagine what you can’t yet imagine, and then, watch your impossible become reality!”

Joce (pronounced Josie) can be reached at, www.PartybyJoce.com, Joce@PartybyJoce.com or (850) 353-5500.



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Sean of the South: Waffle House



BY SEAN DIETRICH

The Third Day of Christmas. My three French hens must have gotten lost in the mail. The weather was a stolid 34 degrees. The water in the dog bowls was stone. The sun was out.

Waffle House was warm and inviting. The parking lot was mostly empty except for a few muddy trucks. My wife and I had an 11-year-old with us. She is blind. This is her first time attending a Waffle House.

“Have a seat wherever,” said the server.

We found a table in the corner. A booth. Red vinyl. Faux wood table. Laminated menus. Napkin dispenser.

Going to Waffle House is one of my most cherished habits. I go a few times every week. Sometimes more often, if I’m on the road. I give the Waffle House corporation half my annual in-

come. And I do it gladly.

But going to a Waffle House with a blind child is another matter entirely. The whole ordeal is different. For starters, the multi-sensory experience begins with the nose.

“That smell,” the child said, as we walked into the door.

She used her white cane to trace the perimeter of the aisle, navigating between booth and bar and jukebox.

“What is that smell?” she said. Nose to the ceiling.

“It’s bacon,” said my wife.

When you walk into a Waffle House, it’s the smell that gets you first. The smell of cured pork and frying tuber vegetables. It hits you in the back of the throat. If you’re lucky, the scent works its way into the fibers of your clothes. And it stays with you all day.

The child was smiling. “This place smells delicious.”

“Welcome to Waffle House,” said the server.

We told the waitress it was the kid’s first time visiting.

The employees made a big deal about it. You would have thought Young Harry and Meghan Markle were entering the premises.

We sat. We talked. The waitress gave the kid a complimentary paper hat.

I’ve known people who



worked at Waffle House. The industry term for this hat is the Confidence Killer. But it looked good on the girl.

The waitress gave me a paper hat too. She put it on my head. I looked like an unhappy mess-hall sergeant.

The child is thrilled to be here and she doesn’t care who knows. She is dancing in her seat. Bouncing in rhythm to the jukebox music. Which is Taylor Swift.

“Are you having a good day?” says our waitress.

“Yes, we are!!” says the kid, using not one but two exclamation points.

She ordered eggs, scrambled. Bacon, crispy. White toast, buttered within an inch of its grain. Strawberry jam. An Irish pint of chocolate milk. A giant waffle—blueberry.

The waitress drew a whipped-cream smiley face on the waffle. Nobody asked her to do that.

When the meal was finished, the waitresses asked, “Has it

been a good first visit to Waffle House?”

But the kid can’t answer. Her mouth is still full.

So the waitresses offered to pose for a picture with us, to commemorate the monumental occasion. One that will not soon be forgotten.

We all pose. The photographer holds the camera and tells us all to smile. “Say cheese,” says the photographer.

“No,” says one waitress, kissing the blind girl’s head. “Don’t say cheese. On the count of three, let’s everyone say, ‘Love!’”

Whereupon every customer joined in unison, counting down with the photographer. We all counted.

“ONE...! TWO...!”

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A Pastor's Ponderings:

The Wise Men Never Met Jesus as a Baby in a Manger



Herod's Decree: The Killing of Children Under Two Years Old

Another critical detail is Herod's decree to kill all male children "from two years old and under." After the wise men did not return, Herod, fearing this "King of the Jews," ordered the massacre. **Matthew 2:16** explains Herod's order was based on the timing he had "diligently enquired of the wise men." This reveals that Jesus could have been as old as two years, further confirming He was no longer an infant at the time of the wise men's visit.

and underscores the importance of studying Scripture carefully.

Jesus Was a "Young Child" - Not a Baby

Matthew gives us a clear sense of Jesus' age when the wise men arrived. **Matthew 2:11** reads, "And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother." Jesus is consistently referred to as a "young child" in Matthew's account (e.g., **Matthew 2:8**), not as a baby, and the wise men find Him in a "house," not a stable, indicating time had passed since His birth.

The Star: A Sign After Jesus' Birth

The timing of the star also matters. In **Matthew 2:2**, the wise men say, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him." The star appeared after Jesus' birth, leading

the wise men on a long journey, likely from Persia or Babylon, taking several months or more. By the time they arrived, Jesus was a young child in a house.

Why This Matters: The Importance of Correcting Misconceptions

Some may ask if it's harmless to believe that the wise men visited Jesus as a baby in the manger. However, the Bible calls us to seek truth diligently (**Acts 17:11**). Holding to tradition over Scripture can obscure the depth and historical context of God's word. Every detail in Jesus' life, even His age when visited by the wise men, emphasizes His identity as Messiah.

guide us. Jesus warned against "the tradition of men" that can obscure truth (**Mark 7:13**). In understanding the wise men's visit accurately, we honor Scripture's integrity and deepen our faith in the God who came to save us. Including the wise men in a manger scene isn't the end of the world, and it's a cherished part of many holiday traditions. However, in our family, we set the wise men further away to reflect on their journey and later arrival, reminding us of the story's true timeline and the importance of grounding our faith in Scripture.

Dr. Doug Stauffer is pastor of Faith Independent Baptist Church. He was saved July 6, 1980, in Niceville, while stationed at the 33rd Tactical Fighter Wing at Eglin Air Force Base and has now been in the ministry for over 35 years.

A Call to Seek the Truth in Scripture

As Christians, we are called to be "children of light" (**Ephesians 5:8**), letting God's word

SHATTERED

continued from page 29

Explore All Treatment Options: Diane believed that the love and support Drew received would be enough to carry him through his difficult

time. Since his passing, she has learned much more about mental health and the various ways it can be treated. There are now many innovative treatments available that are highly effective for those struggling with mood disorders that don't respond well

to traditional therapies. To help others, Diane partnered with her childhood friend, Melanie Yost, to open Be Well Solutions and Complete Ketamine Solutions in Destin. Their mission is to provide affordable and effective brain health therapies, such as

Ketamine Infusion Therapy and Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy, to help people heal and reclaim their lives. Diane hopes that by offering these treatments, others won't have to suffer as Drew did.

If you or a loved one are struggling with thoughts of suicide, please reach out to the National Suicide Prevention Hotline at 988. If current treatments aren't providing the help needed, consider a free consultation with Be Well Solutions to see if their ser-

vices might be the right fit.

These treatments have brought hope and healing to Diane in her darkest moments, and she firmly believes that if Drew had access to these therapies alongside his counseling, he might still be here today. Diane and Melanie have witnessed many clients begin to truly live again, and they are dedicated to helping others find the same hope and healing.



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Romans 10:17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

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Thankful for Change: Honoring Legacy Through Life's Unfamiliar Moments

INSPIRED BY ROY WARNER;
WRITTEN BY SHANTELE
DEDICKE

This past August, my life shifted irreversibly with the passing of my grandfather, Roy Warner. To my family, he was Papaw—a steady presence and a man with the world's best smile. He was also the Roy in Frances Roy, the namesake of our agency and the bedrock of the values that guide our work. As I recorded the latest episode of Hello Frances, I confronted a truth that had quietly taken hold in my heart: there is no going back. Life, as it once was, had changed.

In the episode, "Let it Change You: The Fight Against Normal," I discuss the resistance we often feel toward change, our instinct to cling to the familiar, and the discomfort accompanying transformation. But what I was truly grappling with was the profound personal change that loss brings. My Papaw's passing made me realize that change is not merely something to be managed—it shapes us, often in ways we cannot anticipate.

Papaw's legacy, however, has always been about more than just family memories. His values live on in the very core of Frances Roy, embedded in every decision we make, every story we tell, and every relationship we cultivate. He taught me that doing what is right, even when difficult, is non-negotiable. Authenticity is not just a value but a way of life. And that there is no shortcut to true success—only hard work, honesty, and integrity. These are the principles that Frances Roy stands on, and they are the principles that will continue to guide us, now more than ever.

The episode became a space for me to explore the necessity of embracing change and the personal reckoning that comes when life pulls you in a direction you didn't choose. In business, as in life, we tend to resist anything that disrupts our rhythm. We seek normalcy as a form of stability, something to hold onto in uncertain times. But I have come to realize that normal is not the goal. Change, and how we navigate it, is where growth happens. In the unfamiliar—



where we are tested—we discover new strengths, new capacities for resilience, and new ways of being.

Papaw understood this intuitively. He lived a life built on the courage to embrace the unknown, to work through the challenges, and to let change guide him to something greater. His hands, which once built homes and created beautiful things, also built a life founded on anything but ordinary values. His legacy is woven into every fiber of Frances Roy, into how we serve our clients, honor our commitments, and continuously strive to do the right thing, even when it is the hardest thing.

Reflecting on his life and recording this episode, I realized that the fight against average is not a struggle against change but a call to embrace it. The notion of "normal" is often a construct of comfort, something we hold onto when the future seems uncertain. But Papaw's passing reminded me that there is strength in stepping away from what is familiar, in allowing ourselves to be reshaped by the moments that challenge us the most. In business and in life, it is this openness to change that leads to real transformation.

I hope listeners will take away the same lessons that Papaw imparted to me: that there is no shortcut to authenticity, that change is not to be feared but embraced, and that we hon-

or those we've lost by carrying forward the values they instilled in us. This is how we keep their legacies alive—by living and working with the same principles, continuing to strive for

something better, and never settling for what is simply "normal."

You can listen to the full episode on our website or through your favorite podcast platform. I

hope it offers you the same clarity and strength it brought me and that you, too, will find the courage to embrace change and let it transform you.

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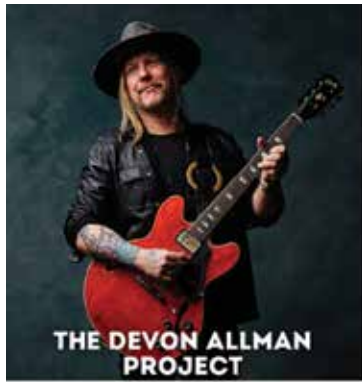
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2025 30A Songwriter's Festival Initial Lineup Announced

30A Songwriters Festival will celebrate its 16th year with performances on the main stage at Grand Boulevard's Town Center in Miramar Beach with headline performances by renowned artists Melissa Etheridge, Amos Lee, The Jayhawks, The Devon Allman Project, Maggie Rose and Secret Sisters.

The festival welcomes for the first time to 30A: Charlie Starr & Benji Shanks (Blackberry Smoke), Natalie Hemby, Brandy Clark, Chuck Prophet & His Cumbia Shoes, Lindsay Lou (Band), Brett Dennen, The Stews, Langhorne Slim, Chris Knight, Josh Joplin Group, Willi Carlisle, Bee Taylor (Band), Jon-tavious Willis, Josh Rouse, Paul McDonald & The Mourning Doves, Tyler Ramsey, Andrea Von Kampen, Jill Sobule, Burris, Kyle Davis, Jada Cato, Beth Bombara, Mallory Johnson, Jessica Sharman, David Borné and Anna Grace.

Returning to perform two shows each throughout the weekend are songwriting leg-



ends Darrell Scott, Livingston Taylor, Will Kimbrough, Ellis Paul, Shawn Mullins, Vicki Peterson & John Cowsill, John Paul White, Tommy Prine,

Ruthie Foster, Hayes Carll, Holly Williams, John Fullbright, Black Opry Revue, Lilly Hiatt, Susan Werner, Chuck Cannon, Jeff Black, Dan Bern, Griffin

House, Charlie Mars, Randall Bramblett, Jeffrey Steele, Steve Poltz, Kelly Willis, Bob Schneider, Mary Gauthier, Certainly So, David Ryan Harris, Chris

Stills, Emerson Hart, John Driskell Hopkins, Adam Hood, Abe Partridge, Chastity Brown, Cousin Curtis, Will Hoge, Ryanhood, with more to come.

The following additional artists are also confirmed: Sarah Clanton, Jack Barksdale, Eliot Bronson, Mike Kinnebrew, Liz Longley, Grayson Capps, Cat Ridgeway, Lilly Winwood, Caitlin Cannon, Bradley Cole Smith & Nelson Nolan, Jennifer Lynn Simpson, Sara Hells, The Sand Ole Opry With Mike Whitty and many more.

Many more artists will be announced over the next few weeks—Stay Tuned! Visit www.30asongwritersfestival.com to stay up to date and to purchase tickets.

The 30A Songwriters Festival is presented by Grand Boulevard with additional support from Visit South Walton, the Florida Department of State Division of Arts & Culture, WaterColor Inn and Resort and ASCAP.



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Cultural Arts Alliance Advocacy Alert—You Can Help!

BY JENNIFER STEELE,
CAA PRESIDENT & CEO

In the past, the Florida Division of Arts & Culture (DAC) grants received regular funding through state budget approvals. For the FY25 budget, the state legislature recommended \$32 million for two of the DAC's four grant programs. However,

ommendation, and the governor's budget has not been published yet. But this is a recommendation for the governor to consider.

In Walton County, the arts & culture sector generated \$57.3 million in economic activity during 2022—\$8.6 million in spending by arts and culture organizations and an additional \$48.6 million in event-related expenditures by their audiences. That economic activity supported 652 jobs, provided \$23.9 million in personal income to residents, and generated \$8.1 million in tax revenue to local, state, and federal governments. To learn more about these important findings, visit our website.

We are at the beginning of the budgeting process, where advocacy can make a big difference. For now, I ask that you write our state representative and senator. Make them aware of this situation and ask them to reinstate the arts & culture recommendation to include funding for the FY26 Division of Arts & Culture grants (DAC). A letter template from the Florida Cultural Alliance is at <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1eNUhh4mQH-f5Eaxl9aR3usS-D3seu9iAeh-GcdAbihagY>, ready for you to insert your programming and

share your impact. For individuals, please remove any section which may not be applicable.

Contacts for Walton County legislators are below.

Representative Shane Abbott: Shane.Abbott@myflorida-house.gov

Samantha Sullivan, Aide:

Samantha.Sullivan@myflorida-house.gov

Senator Jay Trumbull: Trumbull.Jay@flsenate.gov

Andrea Gainey, Aide: Gainey.Andrea@flsenate.gov

We remain in close communication with The Florida Cultural Alliance and other local

arts agencies throughout the state working towards and hoping for a positive outcome. The legislative session in March 2025 offers time for advocates to meet with lawmakers and highlight the arts' value in the state and we plan to attend once again.



the governor vetoed this funding, leaving hundreds of arts and cultural organizations like ours that provide education, enrichment, and economic impact in our communities without state support for the year—a first in state history.

For FY26, arts advocates are closely watching the budget process. The Department of State submitted a legislative budget recommending zero funding for DAC grants, although this isn't yet the governor's final decision. This is all especially disappointing because the state's investment has shown a 9:1 return year after year.

Importantly, this isn't the governor's official budget rec-



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- Dec 13:** Santa Workshop craft stations & photos 4:30-6 \$25
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- Dec 14:** Santa Workshop craft stations & photos 12:30-2 \$25
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Arts & Music

Miracles Small and Grand

BY ANNA FISHER, ASSOCIATE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, ECTC

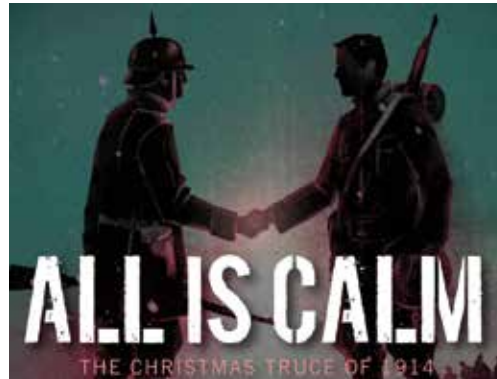
Recently I traveled with our Emerald Coast Theatre Company (ECTC) Junior Thespian Troupe to the state district competition in Tallahassee. This is the qualifying event for the Florida State Thespian Festival, which is essentially like the Florida theatre Olympics. Each of our 18 students participated in solo, duet and group pieces as well as everyone performing in the one act play entitled "Box." We were a giant roving group of students and parent supporters, cheering each other on with silent jazz hands as we also cheered on our fellow thespians who were competing alongside us. It was a day of tiny miracles, watching young middle schoolers sing their hearts out, act with conviction, and dance like everyone was watching. The highest rating one can receive is a "Superior." This rating allows the monologue, duet or acting scene to advance to the State competition. Our students racked up 15 superiors and won Critic's choice in the pantomime category. They also won the honor of performing their One Act at the state festival. The aforemen-

tioned miracles lie not in the fact of winning, for they worked tirelessly to achieve these rankings. The miracle lies in the motivation and determination of each student to bring their very best, the willingness to sacrifice their weekends and after school time to work on a scene, and in their understanding that this is more than just a hobby; it's a passion.

I've always loved the general feeling that Christmas is a time when miracles are more prevalent and anything is possible. Just like these students experienced the miracle of working hard, believing and achieving, we continue to believe with them that "Anything Can Happen." In keeping with ECTC's Season 12 theme for the holidays, we chose the beautiful a cappella musical All is Calm; The Christmas Truce of 1914 to keep that spirit alive. This story is based on true events that transpired on Christmas Eve, 1914 in the Belgian territory of Ypres between the English and French soldiers, and German soldiers.

British Soldier Albert Moren of the 2nd Queen's Regiment wrote of that night:

"There was a lot of commotion in the German trenches and



then there were those lights — I don't know what they were. And then they sang 'Stille Nacht.' I shall never forget it. It was one of the highlights of my life."

In a miraculous and risky show of peace, a German soldier reached out through the darkness of the trenches and sang "Silent Night." What followed was an incredible truce, lasting hours, and, in some places, days.

Within moments, soldiers from both sides found themselves standing in the middle of "no man's land," unarmed, shaking hands, laughing and doing their best to communicate in a foreign tongue. During the next several hours, they would exchange gifts, share a little rum, pause to bury fallen comrades, play a game of soccer and sing Christmas carols.

The Christmas Truce is a story that is almost too far-fetched to believe. But, the overwhelming evidence based on letters from soldiers and diaries of those who lived through it has corroborated this miraculous event. To experience the beauty of this story, as told through those words and the music that weaves seamlessly throughout the performance, is a miracle, too. This show will also feature a return to the stage of some of your favorite ECTC performers.

Bruce Collier, local actor and playwright best known for his one-man Winston Churchill show, will be joining the illustrious cast alongside many of your favorites that you know and love. Vincent Pelligrino, last seen as Bert in Mary Poppins, brings his musical direction and vivid stage presence once again. Chris Saltalamacchio, who last took a

turn on our stage as buttoned up Mr. Banks with a change of heart in Mary Poppins, will once again share his velvety tenor voice with us this season. Also gracing the stage is the dynamic Logan Polson of Jersey Boys and Baskerville; A Sherlock Holmes Mystery and the multi-talented Gavin Parmley, also of Jersey Boys and The Play That Goes Wrong.

On Christmas Eve in 1914, Allied and German troops shared a "Stille Nacht" and laid down their arms to shake hands across a muddy trench. It was the smallest of gestures that resulted in a grand miracle that made history. Miracles small and grand are happening all around us in the everyday normalness of life, even the tiny miracles of confidence and achievement our students experienced at competition. I hope that during this holiday season, you experience a few miracles of your own. In fact, come join us at ECTC for All is Calm and walk away believing in your heart that "Anything Can Happen."

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Alaqua Animal Refuge Seeks Support for Animals Displaced by Hurricane

Alaqua Animal Refuge is urgently seeking public support to continue providing life-saving care for animals displaced by Hurricane Milton. While national animal welfare organizations have stepped in with emergency grants, food and bedding, Alaqua remains in critical need of monetary donations, volunteers, fosters and adopters to sustain the ongoing care for these animals.

As the designated emergency shelter for Hurricane Milton, Alaqua quickly mobilized to meet the needs of displaced animals, even before state supplies could arrive. The refuge sourced kennels, food and medical supplies from a three-hour radius, ensuring every incoming animal had the shelter and care they needed.

Thanks to the generosity of national and local organizations, Alaqua received emergen-

cy grants and supplies. However, the sheer volume of animals—many of them in dire condition—has placed an enormous strain on the refuge’s resources. The animals are currently housed in two large emergency arenas, and many are suffering from severe health conditions, including heartworm disease, malnutrition, untreated injuries, broken bones and behavioral trauma from the storm.

You can help with monetary donations by visiting www.alaqua.org; volunteer with animal care, feeding and support; foster or adopt to relieve the overcrowding and give animals a loving environment to recover; and share Alaqua’s story on social media encouraging others to get involved. For more information, donate or volunteer, visit www.alaqua.org or call 850-880-6399.

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