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# BAY Life

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Postal Customer Local

## Special Event to Help Finance Facility for Adults with Autism

By KENNETH BOOKS

The Ground Up Project, an organization designed to find homes for adults who have autism, plans a unique event to raise funds to further that goal. And it promises to be a “wacky” and “crazy” time.

“This is our inaugural marquee event,” said spokesperson Lisa Pitell. “We’re throwing a ball and we’ll judge the wackiest, craziest outfit to christen the wacky, tacky king and queen.”

The Ground Up Project has operated for a little more than two years. Its founders describe it as a “think tank” project.

“What about when the kids with autism are adults?” asked project board member Kendra Brownlee. She said Project members examined facilities for grownups with autism and “what we saw, we didn’t like. There was nothing to hope for.”

According to thegroundup-project.org, only 7% of adults with autism have access to liv-



ing outside their family home, 48 percent of them report feeling lonely and no living situations are available in our area for individuals with special needs to live independent, fulfilled and happy lives.

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental dis-

ability caused by differences in the brain.

People with ASD often have problems with social communication and interaction, and restricted or repetitive behaviors or interests.

Common signs of autism in adults include finding it hard

to understand what others are thinking or feeling, getting very anxious about social situations, finding it hard to make friends or preferring to be on one’s own, seeming blunt, rude or not interested in others without meaning to, finding it hard to express feelings, taking things very literally – for example, not understanding sarcasm or phrases like “break a leg” and having the same routine every day and getting very anxious if it changes.

“Even when a child accomplishes something he didn’t do in the past, it opens up new challenges,” Project board member Eric Hambright told Life Media in 2023. If Ground Up Project is successful in creating this facility, he said, “there will be plenty of demand.”

The group’s concept includes not only a standard facility with plenty of amenities and first-class care, but

**AUTISM**  
continued on page 2

## Athletes Shine at Annual All-Sports Banquet

Championship Football Coach, Urban Meyer, To Inspire All

The All Sports Association will host its 56th Annual Awards Banquet on Friday, Feb. 21, 2025, from 5:30 - 10 p.m. at Northwest Florida State College. A key event for the association, the event honors outstanding athletes and people who have significantly contributed to youth sports in the area and nationally, recognizing excellence and character of worthy athletes in the categories of Professional, Amateur, Collegiate, Scholastic and Special Olympian.

Guest speaker, Urban Meyer, is one of the most successful and celebrated college football head coaches in recent history. Having coached 17 seasons as a head coach, Meyer

**ATHLETES**  
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Award Winning Local's Menu



 Community

**AUTISM**

*continued from page 1*

a community of group homes and apartments, each suited to individual residents' needs and desires. According to the group's presentation to the commissioners, the facility will have a support staff onsite 24/7, along with security measures on multiple levels. Each residence will be centered around an activities center, furthering residents' bonds with the

community, sense of belonging and opportunity to be socially active.

"To my knowledge, between Pensacola and Panama City, there's nothing like we're contemplating," says Lisa Pitell. "We're trying to establish a real community."

The goal is to establish a facility that will enable adults to live a little more freely," says Project board member Kendra Brownlee.

"We want to ensure people like us don't have to worry about people not doing what we planned to do," Hambright says.

The gala event is scheduled for Feb. 22 at 6 p.m. at the Hilton Sandestin Beach Resort. Ground Up hopes to see 150 individuals attending. Tickets for the event, which has been in the planning stages for about six months, Pitell said, are \$150 per person. All proceeds will go toward a residential facility for adults with autism.

A disc jockey will be on hand, as will a photo booth, entertainment and a silent auction. Also provided will be heavy hors d'oeuvres.

"We're hoping to sell out," said Pitell. "This is our first year, so we don't have any kind of expectations."

The organizers hope to see outfits that are "the most outrageous or the silliest that we've ever seen," Pitell said. "Of course, it's not required that people dress

up, but the goal is to get as many people participating as possible. Dress can be casual or formal. People can come with whatever level of dress they want."

Some VIP judges have already been set: The event's platinum sponsor, Life Media and another event sponsor.

For more information on the Ground Up Project, visit [TheGroundUpProject.org](http://TheGroundUpProject.org).

**ATHLETES**

*continued from page 1*

is most well-known for his tenures at both the University of Florida and Ohio State University, where he earned three national championships (2008 and 2009–University of Florida; 2014 Ohio State University (OSU).

Though well-known for his

football success, Meyer has been a key figure in community initiatives through his involvement in charitable organizations. He and his wife, Shelley Meyer, co-founded the Urban and Shelley Meyer Fund for Cancer Research, which focuses on raising money to support cancer research at Ohio State University's Wexner Medical Center. Meyer also helped shape a culture of re-



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

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sponsibility and personal growth for student-athletes by developing the "Real Life Wednesdays" program during his tenure at Ohio State University.

Through this initiative, student-athletes were given opportunities to intern, network and gain real-life experience in various industries, preparing them for life after football. Currently, Urban Meyer works as a college football studio analyst on the Big Noon Kickoff show on Fox Sports, and serves as a co-host The Triple Option podcast.

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

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

The Wuerffel Trophy is

THE GROUND UP PROJECT'S

# WACKY TACKY BALL & SILENT AUCTION



FEBRUARY 22, 2025

06:00 - 10:00 | HILTON SANDESTIN BEACH RESORT  
MIRAMAR BEACH

Because Autism doesn't end at 18, join us for an evening of outrageous and silly fun at our inaugural marquee fundraising event. All proceeds raised will support construction of a residential community for adults with Autism.

\$150.00 PER PERSON INCLUDES

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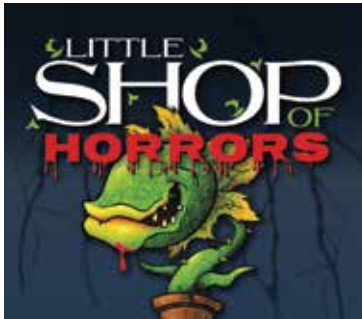
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# Bay Buzz Events



### ECTC: Little Shop of Horrors Jan. 24 - Feb. 9

Emerald Coast Theatre Company (ECTC) presents Little Shop of Horrors January 24 - February 9: showtimes Thursday - Saturday at 7 p.m., Sundays and Wednesdays at 2 p.m. at Grand Boulevard Town Center. Little Shop of Horrors follows meek plant store attendant Seymour, his co-worker crush Audrey, her sadistic dentist boyfriend and the man-eating plant that threatens them and the world as we know it. This horror comedy rock musical is in the style of early 1960s rock and roll, doo-wop and early Motown, and includes several well-known tunes, including the title song, "Skid Row (Downtown),"

"Somewhere That's Green," and "Suddenly, Seymour." Tickets and information: [www.emeraldcoasttheatre.org](http://www.emeraldcoasttheatre.org).



### Crescendo! Kick Off Lunch Jan. 30

Kick off Crescendo! A Cultural & Culinary Extravaganza 2025 in style at Bijoux, located at The Market Shops, on Thursday, January 30 at 11 a.m. Enjoy a delicious lunch prepared by award-winning chef/co-owner Jack McGuckin, sip elegant wines, indulge in delectable

desserts, shop for the must-have accessories of the season from The Jewel, door prizes and raffle items and more.

Crescendo! benefits Sinfonia Gulf Coast and its music education and community engagement programs throughout Okaloosa and Walton Counties. This energy-infused experience showcases world-class vintners, expert spirit purveyors, amazing auction items, and an award-winning musical guest. Taking place Sunday, March 2, this year's theme is, Paint The Town Red!

For tickets, visit [SinfoniaGulfCoast.org](http://SinfoniaGulfCoast.org) or call (850) 460-8800.

### Foodees Food and Culture Festival Jan. 31-Feb. 2

Friday: 1-7 p.m. | Saturday: 11 a.m. - 7 p.m. | Sunday: 11 a.m. - 7 p.m.

The free Foodees Food and Culture Festival offers a weekend of culinary delights, unique crafts and family-friendly entertainment at the Destin Fort Walton Fairgrounds and Event Cen-

ter and celebrates the diverse flavors and creative talents of our community. Tons of Gourmet Food Trucks and Vendors: Indulge in an array of delicious dishes, from savory BBQ and spicy tacos to sweet treats and refreshing beverages. Handmade Crafts and Art: Explore dozens of artisans and crafters showcasing their unique, handmade jewelry, art, crafts, and more. Support local artists and find one-of-a-kind treasures. Family Fun and Entertainment: Featuring the BRAND

NEW Foodees Fun Park with 10 massive inflatables, games, karaoke, and more!

Register for free tickets now, and help food trucks better prepare for you! \$20 weekend passes available. <https://www.foodeesfest.com/events>.

### Pink Run 5K and Walk Benefiting Fore Her Feb. 8

The annual Pink Run 5K and Walk benefiting Fore Her returns to The Village of Baytowne Wharf on Saturday, February 8 beginning at 8:30 a.m. This lively and memorable event includes a timed-5k Race, Walk, Survivor Stroll and After Party, complete with DJ, photo booth, a sampling of delectable bites, prizes and more! All participants are encouraged to "pink out" while racing or walking with family and friends for this tremendous cause. Register and find more information at [www.foreher.org/pinkrun.Pro](http://www.foreher.org/pinkrun.Pro)

ceeds benefit Fore Her, which provides financial assistance to local breast cancer patients. [www.foreher.org](http://www.foreher.org).

### Camellia Festival at Eden Gardens State Park Feb. 8

The Friends of Eden Gardens invite the community to the annual Camellia Festival at Eden Gardens State Park on Saturday, Feb. 8, 10 a.m.-2 p.m. With over 370 camellias that begin to bloom in late November, Eden Gardens State Park brings beautiful blooms through the winter months. Visitors are invited to stroll through unique Camellia gardens, see displays and demonstrations, historic re-enactments, and learn about Camellia propagating and growing. Camellias are also for sale as a park fundraiser.

### Shelter House Palate & Palette Wine Dinner Feb. 8

Shelter House's Annual Palate & Palette Dinner will be held Saturday, Feb. 8. This pop-up style wine dinner is a unique experience, as Legendary Marine's show room is transformed into a chic, intimate venue with a metropolitan feel. The evening will begin with a cocktail hour and hors d'oeuvres at 6:00 p.m. with the program and dinner beginning at 7 p.m. Attendees will indulge in a five-course seated dinner featuring five of the area's most respected chefs. Each

*Continued on page 6*

**SEASIDE SCHOOL™ 2025 race weekend**

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**Community**

**EVENTS**

*continued from page 4*

chef will create a dish for their course, complete with signature craft cocktails. Guests will have the opportunity to bid on an expansive selection of silent auction items, raise their paddle high to support Shelter House, and the painting created at the event will be auctioned off to the highest bidder in an exciting and competitive live auction. All proceeds benefit Shelter House, the state-certified domestic and sexual violence center serving both Walton and Okaloosa counties. Visit [shelterhousenwfl.org](http://shelterhousenwfl.org).

**Biophilia Center Birds & Brews Feb. 8**

Call the sitter and fly on over to the Biophilia Center

for some local craft beers at its annual Birds & Brews event on Saturday, February 8th from 11 a.m. - 3 p.m. Enjoy local craft beers, yard games, meet some feathered friends, and snag some lunch from Copper Grille and Scoops, Sweets, and Treats. Purchase tickets today! For the sober driver, there's the 16+ Sober Driver ticket with a souvenir cup and refreshing mocktails. ID's will be verified upon arrival at check-in. Learn more about the E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center and become a member: [eowilsoncenter.org](http://eowilsoncenter.org).

**Tropical Re-Union Wedding Vow Renewals Feb. 15**

Love is in the air, and couples can celebrate their love and commitment by officially renewing their wedding vows



at LuLu's Annual Tropical Re-Union on Saturday, Feb. 15. The complimentary wedding vow renewal ceremony will be performed by a wedding officiant and begins at 2 p.m. out on LuLu's sandy beach overlooking the scenic Choctawhatchee Bay. Pre-register at the restaurant or on-line at [www.LulusFunFoodMusic.com](http://www.LulusFunFoodMusic.com) until Feb. 14. Registration sign-in begins at 11 a.m. Feb. 15. There will be complimentary champagne toasts, a wedding cake and flowers for the "brides," and Certificates of

Reunion for each couple. Prizes will be awarded to the couples married the longest, shortest and the most festively dressed. Visit [www.LulusFunFoodMusic.com](http://www.LulusFunFoodMusic.com) or call (850) 710-5858.

**Dog-Harmony Hops for Hounds February 23**

Dog Harmony's 5th Annual "Hops for Hounds" dog walk and after party, will be held Feb.

23rd, 1-3 p.m. at Props Brewery in Hammock Bay, Freeport. This tail-wagging event promises fur-raising fun for pups and their humans alike! The day will start with a picturesque, short stroll followed by a lively after-party at Props Brewery, complete with craft beer (for thirsty humans 21 and older), live music, vendors, food trucks and more. Rescue Animal Photography will also be on hand to capture the magical moments.

Tickets are \$35 per entry (includes one human and one fur friend), an adult-sized t-shirt, and a digital photo of participants with their pets. Each human walker will also receive a complimentary craft beer from Props Brewery – Must be age 21 or over to partake.

To register, visit <https://dog-harmony.org/hops-for-hounds-2025/>. (All dogs must be current on rabies vaccinations and at least six-months old. No prong, shock or choke collars will be permitted.) To sponsor: [hello@dog-harmony.org](mailto:hello@dog-harmony.org). All

proceeds benefit Dog-Harmony.

**Kiwanis Pancake Breakfast and Silent Auction!**

The Kiwanis Club of Niceville-Valparaiso (in collaboration with Niceville High School Key Club and Builders Club) will host its annual Pancake Breakfast and Silent Auction, Saturday, March 1, 2025, from 8-11 a.m. at the Niceville Community Center. Enjoy pancakes, sausage, juice, coffee and milk and live music by Island Brothers (Hawaiian, Spanish, Latin Rhythms and 50s-70s tunes! Bid on silent auction items from local businesses, too! All proceeds benefit local charities such as Children in Crisis, Sharing and Caring, Holiday Food Baskets, Children's Miracle Network, College Scholarships for local youth and Community Youth Organizations.

**Emerald Coast Quilt Show March 7-8**

Flying Needles Quilt Guild of Niceville presents Emerald Coast Quilt Show 2025, Friday, March 7 from 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. and Saturday, March 8 from 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. at the Northwest Florida Fairgrounds, 1958 Lewis Turner Blvd. in Fort Walton Beach.

Quilt Entry Categories include: Large Pierced, Medium

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## A Taste of Mardi Gras: Food, Wine, Craft Beer and More!

A Taste of Mardi Gras, this year's Food and Wine Tasting Festival supporting the Northwest Florida Symphony Orchestra's youth programs, will feature a jazz combo, tastes of 40 different wines, local craft beers and samples of cuisine from area restaurants, such as Aegean Greek Restaurant, Cafe Bienville, Magnolia Grill, Peppers Mexican Cantina, Papa's Smokehouse, PB&J Bistro & Cafe and several others.

Niceville, the event will also include a silent auction containing a variety of items such as gift cards, art, jewelry and gift baskets.

Sponsored by the Northwest Florida Symphony Guild, the event raises funds to support the Symphony's youth programs, such as the Fifth-Grade concerts and the annual John Leatherwood Concerto Competition.

Tickets are \$65 and can be purchased by calling the Mattie Kelly box office at 850-729-6000 or online at [www.MattieKellyArtsCenter.org](http://www.MattieKellyArtsCenter.org).

Scheduled for Sunday, Feb. 16, 2025, from 1-4 p.m. in the Raider Central of Northwest Florida State College in



# Happenings Around the Bay

2025  
EVENTS

## FEBRUARY

- 01 | Live Music: Bluegrass Jam  
12 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville  
The Adams Family: A New Musical Comedy  
7 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville
- 02 | Women's Climbing Circle  
5 pm | Rock Out Climbing Gym | Destin
- 03 | Pete the Cat  
9:45 am | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville
- 04 | Lunch N Learn: How to Buy Real Estate with Little to No Money Out of Pocket  
11:30 am | Greater FWB Chamber | FWB  
Niceville Young Professionals Lunch Meeting  
11:30 am | Niceville Valparaiso Chamber | Niceville
- 05 | Prime Rib Night  
5 pm | LJ Schooners Restaurant | Niceville  
Chess Night  
6 pm | LJ Schooners Restaurant | Niceville
- 06 | Valentine's Day Design Class  
6 pm | Katie's House of Flowers & Gifts | Niceville  
Niceville Valparaiso Chamber Annual Awards Celebration  
6:30 pm | NWF State College - Raider Cafe | Niceville
- 07 | Greater FWB Chamber First Friday Coffee  
7 am | Christian Life Center at FBC | FWB  
Niceville's Back Yard Bonfire  
5 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville  
Live Music: Duchess  
6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville  
Full Moon Restorative Experience  
7 pm | Yoga By You Studio | Niceville
- 08 | Two-Person Valentines Scramble  
9 am | Eglin Golf Course | Niceville  
Chili Plunge  
11 am | Turkey Creek | Niceville  
2nd Annual Galentine's Day  
12 pm | Wildflower Boho Boutique | Niceville  
Shop About: Spring Fling!  
12 pm | Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach  
Birds & Brews  
11-3 pm | Biophilia Center | Freeport
- 11 | City Council Meeting  
6 pm | Niceville Council Chambers | Niceville  
Senior Single Mingle  
4:30 pm | Niceville Senior Center | Niceville

- 12 | Niceville Valparaiso Chamber Second Wednesday Breakfast  
7:15 am | Niceville Community Center | Niceville
- 13 | Greater FWB Chamber Nothing But Networking  
11:30 am | Holiday Inn Resort FWB | FWB  
The Not So Newlywed Game  
2:30 pm | Niceville Senior Center | Niceville
- 15 | Ultimate Elvis in Vegas  
7 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville
- 19 | Prime Rib Night  
5 pm | LJ Schooners Restaurant | Niceville  
Paint the Bay with The Traveling Painter  
5:30 pm | LJ Schooners Restaurant | Niceville
- 22 | 6th Annual Shrimp & Grits Festival  
12 pm | Behind Brotula's Seafood House | Destin  
  
Roaring 20s featuring The Stars of Tomorrow  
7 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville
- 23 | Hops For Hounds  
1 pm | Props Brewery - Hammock Bay | Freeport
- 24 | Facebook Class  
1 pm | Niceville Senior Center | Niceville
- 25-26 | Northwest Florida Economic Symposium  
Various Times | Sandestin Resort | Miramar Beach
- 28 | CRESCENDO! Vintner Dinners  
6 pm | Various Venues  
  
Direct from NY: The NY Rockets presents "Good Rockin Tonight"  
7 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville

## MARCH

- 01 | Kiwanis Annual Pancake Breakfast & Silent Auction  
8 am | Niceville Community Center | Niceville
- 07-08 | Emerald Coast Quilt Show 2025  
9 am | Northwest Florida Fairgrounds | FWB

**ONGOING EVENTS**

Oils and Acrylics with Rosalyn O'Grady  
10 am | Tues | Artful Things | Niceville

Watercolor Techniques with Theresia McInnis  
1 pm | Tues | Artful Things | Niceville

Bingo Night  
6 pm | Tues | Bayou Brewing Company | Niceville

One Stroke Painting (Lvl 2) with Sheila Mahony  
10:30am | Fri | Artful Things | Niceville

Yoga at Turkey Creek  
9 am | Sat | Turkey Creek Nature Trail | Niceville

Brunch on the Bayou  
9 am | Sun | LJ Schooners Restaurant | Niceville

**FARMERS MARKETS**

Niceville Community  
Saturdays | 9 am - 1 pm  
Palm Plaza | Niceville

Hammock Bay  
1st & 3rd Sundays | 8 am  
Victory Blvd | Freeport

Grand Boulevard  
Saturdays | 9 am - 1 pm  
Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach



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 Community

**EVENTS**

*continued from page 6*

Pierced, Small Pierced, Applique, Modern and Mixed Techniques. The show's theme is Gulf of Dreams. Attendees will also experience mini-demonstrations, vendors, boutique, quilter's Walk and Quilt of Valor Block Party. For more information, visit [flyingneedlesquiltguild.org](http://flyingneedlesquiltguild.org).



**La Vie En Rouge Friday, March 7th, 6 pm - 9 pm.**

Immerse yourself in the glamour of 19th-century Parisian cabaret at La Vie En Rouge, presented by Emerald

Coast Theatre Company on Friday, March 7th. This exclusive signature event will feature exhilarating live performances, dazzling costumes, and a vibrant atmosphere for guests 21+. Get ready to indulge yourself in an evening of elegance, as we transport you to the iconic Moulin Rouge for a night of dinner, dancing, entertainment, silent auction, and many more unforgettable moments. Tickets: Table up to 4 seats – \$600; One seat at a table – \$150; General Admission – \$125. Purchase tickets at [emeraldcoasttheatre.org/special-events](http://emeraldcoasttheatre.org/special-events).

**SeaLight Festival! Thursdays to Sundays, January 30 - April 13, 2025**

Kaleido Entertainment presents a dazzling wonderland of light and Chinese culture, running January 30 through April 13, 5:30 p.m. - 9:30 p.m., with last entrance at 8:30 p.m. at Seascape Golf, Beach & Tennis Resort in Miramar Beach. Ticket prices start at \$24.99 for adults and \$17.99 for children ages 12 and under. Visit [www.sealightfestival.com/destin](http://www.sealightfestival.com/destin).

**NFB's Cinderella March 8-9!**

Northwest Florida Ballet returns to perform Cinderella at the Mattie Kelly Arts Center to conclude Season 55, Sat., March 8, at 7:30 p.m. and Sun., March 9, at 2:30 p.m. With live music by the Northwest Florida Symphony Orchestra led by NFB Music Director and Conductor David Ott, this beloved classic features the choreography of NFB Artistic Director Todd Eric Allen and the music of Serge Prokofiev. Tickets \$48 for adults; \$22 for children 12 and under. Visit <https://www.nfballet.org/cinderella> or call 850-729-6000 to learn more or purchase your tickets.

**DCWAF Celebrates 20 years Benefitting Area Children April 25-26**

Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation (DCWAF) will celebrate the 20th Anniversary Destin Charity Wine Auction presented by the Jumonville Family April 25-26, 2025! All funds raised at the annual auction benefit children in need in Northwest Florida through the Foundation's 17 partner children's charities. Patron packages are on sale now at [dcwaf.org/tickets](http://dcwaf.org/tickets). In 2024, DCWAF donated \$3 million to charity following one of its most successful



auctions to date.

A limited number of patron packages are on sale now at [dcwaf.org/tickets](http://dcwaf.org/tickets). Sponsorships for the event are also available by contacting the DCWAF staff at [info@dcwaf.org](mailto:info@dcwaf.org).

This year's auction will feature an impressive line-up of celebrity chefs and vintners from around the world, hosted by philanthropic couples within the local community. This year's vintner line-up includes owners and winemakers from AXR Napa Valley, Domaine Serene, Verité, Jarvis Estate, Memento Mori, Pahlmeyer, Lando Wines, Roy Estate, Seven Apart, Thompson 31Fifty, Dakota Shy, Perchance Estates, Innumero Wines, William Cole Winery, Chateau Montelena,

Fisher Vineyards, Nysa, and many more.

Patrons can expect a weekend filled with exclusive wines and excellent food from a variety of celebrity chefs beginning Friday, April 25 with the patron dinner experience. Each dinner features a nationally recognized chef paired with world-class vintners. Each dinner benefits one of DCWAF's 17 partner children's charities. All confirmed vintners and chefs are listed online at [dcwaf.org/auction](http://dcwaf.org/auction).

The Destin Charity Wine Auction is the main event of the weekend, beginning at 1 p.m. on Saturday, April 26. The Reserve Tasting and Live Auction will be held under an air-conditioned tent at Grand Boulevard Sandestin Town Center. The event will feature distinctive wines from internationally acclaimed vintners poured and paired with cuisine curated by a selection of the area's top restaurants. The event culminates with a high-energy, live auction boasting rare and distinctive wines, spectacular trips and other incredible one-of-a-kind items.

The Destin Charity Wine Auction presented by the Jumonville Family is hosted each year in conjunction with the South Walton Beaches Wine and Food Festival, which also takes place in Grand Boulevard Sandestin Town Center the same weekend. South Walton Beaches Wine and Food Festival will showcase hundreds of premium wines along with a diverse selection of spirits and culinary creations that deliver a world class experience to each guest throughout the weekend. Auction attendees also have access to South Walton Beaches Wine & Food Festival's Grand Tasting on Sunday, April 27 beginning at 1 p.m.

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# From Hardship to Hope: Resilience and Renewal

BY SHERRY JONES

Homelessness. It's a word we often hear, a situation we see, but one that too many of us avoid truly talking about. For some, it feels distant—an issue for “other people.” But what happens when homelessness isn't just a statistic, but a reality that hits someone you know, someone you love?

For me, it was personal.

I grew up in Fort Walton Beach, a place filled with fond memories and a deep sense of community. It's the same community where someone near and dear to my heart also grew up. He was someone who gave his life to caring for others—particularly his mother, whom he loved dearly and supported for as long as he could remember. But when she passed away, everything changed.

Grief is a difficult road to walk, and, for him, it brought more than just emotional struggles. A tragedy occurred—a life-altering event that became the start of a downward spiral. When life hits you with an unexpected boulder, sometimes

you don't see it coming. Sometimes, it rolls downhill, taking everything with it—mental and emotional well-being, finances, and stability. And despite his best efforts, he found himself in a place no one ever imagines: homeless.

I wish I could say this story is uncommon. But the truth is, it's not. For so many of us, there's someone—a family member, a friend, a neighbor—who has struggled with homelessness. It's not just a distant issue. It's real, it's painful, and it's closer than we like to admit.

Last year, during the holiday season, my loved one's story became a testament to the power of hope and perseverance. At his lowest point, he was referred to One Hopeful Place (OHP) by a family member: me.

At OHP, he found more than just shelter. He found a team of compassionate, dedicated individuals who gave him the support he needed to start over. Among them was Mike, whose kindness and encouragement made an immediate and lasting impact.

“I'll never forget the day I arrived at OHP,” he shared with me. “It was cold and rainy, and Mike welcomed me with warmth and kindness. He talked with me about housing resources and what OHP could offer to help me rebuild my life. Over the next eight months, Mike continued to be a positive force—not just for me, but for so many others who entered OHP. That support meant everything.”

This guidance, combined with the extraordinary leadership of Donna and Liz—who many refer to as the “Mother Teresas” of OHP—gave him the foundation he needed to rebuild his life. He committed to saving money, accessing critical resources and working through the struggles he faced.

OHP, under the umbrella of Community Solutions of the Emerald Coast, helps participants who are committed to changing their lives and becoming self-sufficient. With the help of grant money, OHP assists participants and veterans in obtaining permanent housing by



covering deposits and providing essential items they need to rebuild their lives.

The holidays were a time of reflection and motivation for him. Surrounded by the generosity of the OHP community and their holiday efforts, he found a renewed sense of purpose. By the end of the year, his hard work paid off—he was approved for his own apartment, a place to finally call home.

Now, as the new year begins, his success story is a reminder of what's possible when compassion meets action. Homelessness doesn't discriminate. It can happen to anyone—regardless of their background or circumstances. But with support, hope and determination, a brighter future is always within reach.

To OHP, thank you for be-

ing the light in so many people's darkest days. Your unwavering commitment to those in need continues to change lives every day.

To my loved one, I am so proud of your courage, your resilience and your determination to create a better future for yourself. Your story inspires us all to never give up, no matter how difficult the journey might seem.

As we move forward into this new year, let us carry the lessons of the holiday season with us. Compassion, kindness and belief in others have the power to change lives. Together, we can build a community that lifts each other up and provides the tools for success.

Hope changes lives. I know this firsthand.

## ATHLETES

continued from page 2

tween academics, athleticism, leadership, community service and faith.

Based in Fort Walton Beach, the All Sports Association is a non-profit organization focused on supporting local youth sports programs. Founded in 1970, the association has raised over \$2 million in the last 10 years, due to the support of its volunteers and supporters. These funds help various youth sports organizations and charitable causes, fostering the development of young athletes.

Key beneficiaries include the Boys & Girls Club of the Emerald Coast, Special Olympics Florida-Okaloosa, Eleanor J. Johnson Youth Center, and Okaloosa Walton FCA. The association's dedication to youth sports and community development is also seen in its Hall of Fame, which honors individuals who've made significant contributions to sports in Northwest Florida.

Please join All Sports Association for a fun evening supporting this year's award winners! Great food, auctions and more!

- Doors open for guests at 5:30 p.m.

- Banquet VIP starts at 4 p.m. (for corporate sponsors only)

- Seating starts at 6 p.m.

- Program starts at 6:45 p.m.

- Silent auction will take place from 5:30-6:30 p.m.

- Live auction will take place during the event

Single Ticket Purchases:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/all-sports-association-annual-awards-tickets-1146081453479>

(Food is included with Single Ticket Purchases and the chance to be upgraded to VIP!)

\*\*Please note that due to the nature of the event, all ticket sales for the All Sports Association Annual Awards Banquet are final, and no refunds will be issued. Thank you for your understanding.

For Banquet Table Sponsorship or donation options, please reach out to [ASATickets850@gmail.com](mailto:ASATickets850@gmail.com).

All Sports Association continues to celebrate and support youth athletics and the 56th Annual Awards Banquet promises to be another memorable event that aligns with its mission

of fostering community spirit through sports. “This event is more than just a celebration; it's a testament to the hard work and dedication of our young athletes

and the community that supports them,” said Bowyer. “Having Urban Meyer speak adds an extra layer of inspiration that we hope will resonate with everyone

involved!”

For more information, visit [allsportsassociation.com](http://allsportsassociation.com) or [Facebook.com/AllSportsAssociation](https://www.facebook.com/AllSportsAssociation).



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# Bay Buzz

## EFCU Honors Jerry Williams with President Emeritus Title

Eglin Federal Credit Union (EFCU) board of directors has honored Jerry Williams with the prestigious title of President Emeritus, recognizing his exemplary service and leadership over the past decade as President/CEO. Jerry officially retired on Jan. 3, 2025. Jerry's new title as President Emeritus was effective Jan. 6, 2025.

Under Williams' leadership, assets grew by over \$1 billion to nearly \$2.9 billion with 124,000 members worldwide. He is well known for his involvement in several area chambers of commerce, economic development councils and nonprofit organizations. He served as an Honorary Commander, 24SOW, Hurlburt Field and as a Civic Leader, 33FW, Air Education and Training Command. In recognition of his extensive support of local military installations, he was presented with the General Lewis H. Brereton Award by the Air Force Association Hurlburt Chapter.

### For the Love of Shorebirds!

Join Choctawhatchee Audu-



BY ROBERT BLANCHARD/AUDUBON PHOTOGRAPHY AWARDS  
Least Tern Courtship Feed

bon for a shorebird talk by Brian Cammarano, Audubon Florida's Shorebird Stewardship Coordinator of the panhandle, Thursday, February 6. Brian will be discussing the importance of bird stewardship at active shorebird nesting sites throughout the summer and how you can get involved locally! Program

begins at 7 p.m. and is open to the public. Room 800, 2nd floor Chandler Center (NW door of 519 Helms St.), Crosspoint Church, Niceville.

The **Daughters of the American Colonists (DAC)**, a civic organization dedicated to historic preservation, will hold



its quarterly meeting at The Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida located at 115 Westview, Wednesday, February 5.

The program will feature Ellen Lea of Pensacola who will discuss early 1800 antique French porcelain. Delicate, ornate and colorfully hand-painted pieces from a collection of family heirlooms will be showcased on site.

Meeting begins at 9:30 with a social followed by the general meeting and the Featured Speaker at 10 a.m. The public is cordially invited to attend.

the Salvation Army. Mid-Bay hosted Okaloosa and Walton Salvation Army's Lt. James Milner (Fort Walton Beach Rotarian) at one of its meetings, donated \$500, and rang the Salvation Army Bell Fridays and Saturdays throughout December 2024. Fifty-Six volunteer one-hour shifts made up of Mid-Bay Rotarians, Rotary Partners and Rotary Children). Mid-Bay collected just over \$3,826 for the Army. Mid-Bay thanks Winn-Dixie in Bluewater Bay for "use" of their grocery market entry for the bell ringing.

### Mid-Bay Rotary Supports the Salvation Army

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# Three Ways We Failed You and How We Will Make It Right: A Developer's Perspective



BY BEKAH MANLEY

In the wake of increasingly devastating storms and a housing market that feels more broken than ever, it's time for an honest conversation about how traditional development practices have failed you. My business partner, Joseph Beeman, and I want to address three critical areas where the industry has let you down – and how we plan to make it right.

## 1. Cost: Homes That Break the Bank...and Then Some

**The Failure:** For too long, housing has been a race to the bottom – developers cutting corners to maximize profits while homeowners bare the financial burden of subpar construction. Rising costs for materials and labor have only worsened the problem. The result? Houses that are increasingly unaffordable, expensive to maintain and costly to insure.

**The Solution:** In Florida,

skyrocketing insurance premiums have become an unbearable burden for many homeowners. By utilizing advanced materials and resilient designs, we can build homes that lower risks, leading to more manageable insurance costs for families. Imagine homes that are not only affordable to build, but also provide financial peace of mind year after year. This shift doesn't just reduce costs, it creates lasting value for homeowners.

## 2. Time: The Endless Waiting Game

**The Failure:** The traditional building process is notoriously slow, often plagued by inefficiencies and delays. In disaster-stricken areas, this lag can leave families displaced for months, if not years. The time it takes to rebuild communities is unacceptable, especially when people's lives are hanging in the balance.

**The Solution:** Innovations like 3D printing are revolutionizing the timeline of construction. With this technology, homes can be built in a fraction of the time it takes using traditional methods. Combined with prefabricated components and modular designs, 3D printing allows for rapid recovery in storm-hit regions and quicker access to housing in high-demand markets. These innovations are the key to delivering homes when they're needed most.



## 3. Safety: Built to Fail

**The Failure:** The harsh reality is that many homes today are not built to withstand the challenges of tomorrow. Whether it's hurricanes, flooding, or other extreme weather events, current building standards have proven inadequate. The result is not only financial loss but emotional devastation for families who thought their homes were safe havens.

**The Solution:** Nature provides inspiration for resilience. Hurricane-resistant designs and energy-efficient components are practical solutions that can be implemented today. By rethink-

ing how and where we build, we can create homes that protect and nurture, even in the face of extreme conditions. This is about more than just safety – it's about ensuring peace of mind for the people who call these houses home.

## Why You Should Care

If you live in the local area, you've seen firsthand the devastation that hurricanes and rising insurance costs can bring. The current approach to building isn't just failing – it's actively putting our families, our finances and our community at risk. We can't afford to keep doing

things the way they've always been done.

The solutions we've shared here are just a glimpse of what's possible. If you feel we, as developers, have failed you, we invite you to connect with us so we can show you how we will make it right. If interested, please email me at [Bekah.Manley@The-iaDevelopment.com](mailto:Bekah.Manley@The-iaDevelopment.com).

It's time for the industry – and all of us – to rethink what's possible. Together, we can rewrite the narrative and build homes that learn from the past, address the needs of the present and shape the future.

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 Community

# Meet Our Hometown Hero Destin Native James Uthmeier – Florida’s New Attorney General

BY DOUG STAUFFER

The Florida panhandle has a new reason to celebrate as one of its own, James Uthmeier, has assumed a very influential role in the state. Governor Ron DeSantis appointed Uthmeier as Chief of Staff in 2021 and has now tapped Uthmeier to succeed Ashley Moody as Florida’s Attorney General following Moody’s appointment to the U.S. Senate. This exciting development highlights Uthmeier’s impressive career and deep Florida roots, promising a bright future for the state under his leadership.

A proud native of Destin, Uthmeier’s journey began at Fort Walton Beach High

School, where he cultivated the discipline and determination that have defined his career. As a University of Florida graduate, he earned academic accolades. He competed as part of the Florida Gators track and field team, helping to bring home a Southeastern Conference championship in 2010. His athletic and academic achievements earned him recognition as one of the University of Florida Alumni Association’s “40 Gators Under 40.”

Uthmeier’s rise to prominence in the Florida political arena has been swift and impactful. After earning his law degree from Georgetown University Law Center and serving as



managing editor of the Georgetown Journal of Law and Public Policy, he began his legal career as an associate at the prestigious law firm Jones Day. Uthmeier then moved into public service, working as senior advisor and counsel to U.S. Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross during the

Trump administration.

In 2019, Uthmeier returned to his home state to join Governor DeSantis’ legal team as Deputy General Counsel. His leadership skills quickly earned him a promotion to General Counsel in 2020 and Chief of Staff in 2021. In these roles, Uthmeier played a central part in shaping and implementing the governor’s agenda, including leading the state’s judicial nominations process and taking on some of Florida’s most significant legal battles.

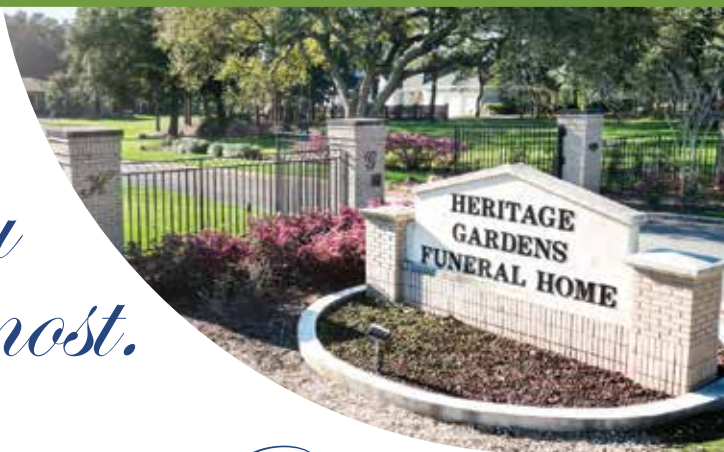
Governor DeSantis praised Uthmeier as a “proven leader” who has been at the forefront of Florida’s fights for conservative values and constitutional principles. “James is someone who has consistently demonstrated his commitment to serving the people of Florida. He has big shoes to fill, but I am confident he is more than up to the task,” DeSantis said.

Uthmeier’s appointment as Attorney General comes at a

pivotal time for Florida. His legal acumen and experience in both the state and federal government position him as a formidable advocate for Floridians. Whether tackling critical issues such as public safety, constitutional rights, or judicial integrity, Uthmeier is expected to bring the same passion and dedication that have defined his career.

He and his wife, Jean, have made Tallahassee their home, where they co-teach religious education classes and actively participate in their community. As James Uthmeier takes the helm as Florida’s Attorney General, Destin, and the entire Emerald Coast can take pride in the accomplishments of a hometown hero. His journey from the Panhandle to one of Florida’s highest offices serves as an inspiring reminder that with hard work and dedication, the sky is the limit. Uthmeier’s future—and Florida’s—is undeniably bright.

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# Doug Stauffer Elected as Chairman of Okaloosa County Republican Party

The Okaloosa County Republican Executive Committee (OCREC) has ushered in a new era of leadership by electing Doug Stauffer as its Chairman alongside a slate of other new officers. This marks a significant transition for the organization, with all four Executive Board positions replaced in the recent election.



Doug Stauffer, a pastor, author, Life Media writer and Niceville City Councilman, was overwhelmingly chosen to lead the party, garnering more than 75% of the vote. Stauffer made headlines early in 2024 when he won a Niceville City Council seat through a historic coin flip to break a tie vote. He has been a member of OCREC since 2019 and has served as Treasurer for the last two terms.

“I am deeply humbled and honored to be elected Chairman of the Republican Party of Okaloosa County,” stated Stauffer. “With President Trump’s election as our 47th President, the Panhandle counties must remain a bedrock of conservative values in Florida. As the world watches our nation over the next four years, we are poised to lead with strength, unity, and a commitment to our shared principles.”

Stauffer also addressed the role of faith in public service: “Christians have been told they should stay out of politics, but the opposite is true. While government needs to stay out of the church, Christians must greatly influence the government. The Founding Fathers designed our Republic to be guided by biblical principles, ensuring that faith and values form the bedrock of a just and moral society. Republicans must insist on ‘following the science’ rather than ideologies driven by agenda-based narratives that undermine truth, freedom and morality.”

Stauffer succeeds Sandra Atkinson, who dedicated over 12 years to the OCREC and served as Chair for the past four years, a period marked by significant challenges within the Okaloosa Republican Party. She withdrew her name from the ballot during the Republican primary in June. Her departure comes as the OCREC undergoes a transfor-

mative renewal, welcoming over 50 new members and embracing a fresh start.

OCREC members elected Chris McKay, the former Secretary, as Vice Chair and Diana Graham, who succeeded McKay as Secretary. Neither had a challenger and were elected by unanimous consent. Stauffer appointed Ed Gilbert as interim Treasurer until a formal election for that position is held on January 27, 2025.

Okaloosa County remains a Republican stronghold, with registered Republicans far outnumbering Democrats. President Trump, Senator Rick Scott, State Senator Don Gaetz, and State Representative Patt Maney secured over 70% of the county’s vote in the November general election. Representative Maney emphasized, “To maintain our momentum, we must boost turnout to counter heavily Democratic counties. With key races ahead, including Congressional and State House elections, robust education and get-out-the-vote efforts will be critical.”

The OCREC is a critical resource for Republican candidates, designed to provide support, training, and grassroots organization. “We are not campaign managers,” emphasized Stauffer. “Our role is to serve as a resource pool for Republican candidates at every level, from city and county positions to congressional and other national offices.” Voter turnout in Okaloosa County dropped by 2% from the 2020 presidential election.

Stauffer brings a wealth of experience to his role, balancing his duties as pastor of Faith Independent Baptist Church, Niceville City Councilman, and a commissioner for the Niceville CRA, the Okaloosa County Transit Cooperative, and the

Okaloosa County Library Governing Board.

Stauffer’s leadership seeks to rebrand the county Republican party as a unified, cohesive organization dedicated to consti-

tutional principles. Okaloosa County should serve as a model county for others to follow. Success will be measured not by maintaining the status quo, but by principled individuals achiev-

ing truly conservative outcomes that align with the founding of this great Republic. For more information or to get involved, please visit [www.OkaloosaGOP.com](http://www.OkaloosaGOP.com).



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# What You Should Do Right After An Accident



By JULIE A. MARTIN

It can be scary to be driving along one minute, and the next, either you've been run off the road, or spun out into the in-

tersection, or even into a ditch. You or your passenger might even be injured, and need medical attention. Here is the short version of how to handle auto accidents so that you know you handled everything correctly and your stress level can come down.

Pull over safely to the side of the road and call 911. Calling for help is the first essential step in making sure that any injuries are treated in a timely fashion, as well as making sure the police arrive to do a full accident report.

Take photos of the other

vehicle(s) involved including the drivers, as the position of the vehicles, for your insurance company, so that there is photo evidence of all damage as well as an accurate representation of who was in which car, as well who was driving.

Make sure you have your license, registration and insurance information on hand. I recommend keeping a copy of your declarations page, your auto id cards and your registration in your glove box.

If your vehicle is not drive able after the accident, you have two choices. If you have AAA, you can have them pick up your vehicle and drop it off at your preferred auto repair shop. If you have towing on your auto policy, and the site of your accident is less than five miles away from your repair shop, you can potentially use the towing coverage on your policy for this accident.

If you are injured, go to the hospital to get checked out or your primary care physician, if your injuries are not serious. Personal Injury Protection in the state of Florida pays 80% of your \$10,000 coverage, minus the deductible. This includes



hospital bills, medical bills relating to your accident injuries, physical therapy, casts, crutches, etc. If you have medical payments on your policy as well, they will start where the Personal Injury Protection ends. If the at fault driver is not you, and they either have no bodily injury liability coverage, or not enough to cover your injuries, this is where uninsured/underinsured motorist coverage comes in. You insure for those times that you get hit, you're hurt, but the person who causes the accident does not have enough coverage to cover your medical expenses.

If you have not already called your insurance company

to put in the claim, do so now, calling your agent and explaining to them what happened. Answer their questions and do not guess if you do not know the answer. Let them know that the police have been on the scene. Give them the case number the police give you and they will get the accident report when it becomes available. Write down the claim number and any other instructions the claims representative, and your agent give you for the accident.

Dear reader, we all get into a scrape from time to time, and hopefully this list is helpful when you need to know what to do. Call 850-424-6979.

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BY GREG DURETTE, FLORIDA HEALTH CONNECTOR

# Why is the Medicare Open Enrollment Period Important to You?

Let's take a look at each option a bit deeper. First, why would someone elect to cancel their stand-alone Part D prescription plan? The only reason one could have would be it was being replaced by other qualifying coverage. If you cancel without replacing, penalties will accrue and be waiting for you when you do put this coverage back in place at a later date. Plus, those penalties will be with you for life!

Second, there are a few rare circumstances when it makes sense for someone to cancel an Advantage plan and return to Original Medicare known as Part A and Part B. Usually, this may have something to do with provider networks which are insufficient for the beneficiary or some other unusual event. Again, this rare circumstance would require you to also remain in or enroll in a stand-alone Part D prescription drug plan in order to avoid accruing the future penalties I just mentioned.

Again, enrolling in a stand-alone Part D prescription drug plan is a requirement if you do

not have qualifying coverage elsewhere and want to avoid those penalties. If you neglected to get that done during the AEP, now is the time to look at this.

Last, some folks have a change of heart once they see the detailed materials of the Advantage plan they enrolled in during the AEP. Perhaps you find your HMO plan does not have the providers you need, but a PPO plan does. Or, perhaps the terms of coverage are better in a plan different from your current plan. Maybe another plan costs less (or even \$0!).

You don't need any reason to switch plans provided you do so before the OEP expires on March 31st. Just remember, you only get one chance to make this change. Once you do, you will have to keep that plan until the next AEP, which begins on October 15th of every year.

The best options for your particular situation should be thoroughly discussed with your insurance agent/broker to make sure you have all the facts about the choices you might be think-

ing about, and get all your questions answered.

*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 nearly 42 years and can be reached at his office at 850-842-2400 or his mobile at 978-509-2941.*

Now that the Medicare Annual Election Period (AEP) is over (ended December 7th), you can finally take a breather from all those ads, phone calls and mailers. As of January 1st, you are now able to try out your new Medicare Advantage, Supplement and/or Prescription plan.

If you suddenly discover the plan you selected during the AEP is not right for you, all is not lost. You will get one more bite at the apple to make changes to your plan.

As with many situations, in order to have a good outcome, you first have to ask the right questions. In this case, the questions you should ask first are:

Did you sign up for a new Advantage Plan or a stand-alone Part D prescription drug plan during the last Annual Enrollment Period (AEP)?

Do you have an existing Advantage Plan or a stand-alone Part D prescription drug plan that renewed with a January 1st effective date?

If the answer to either of these questions is yes, then the Medicare Open Enrollment Period (OEP) is very important to you.

The OEP runs annually from January 1st to March 31st.

During this time, Advantage plan holders are given the option to make certain changes to the plan they selected in the AEP.

**These allowed changes are:**

- Cancel your stand-alone Part D prescription drug plan
- Drop your Medicare Advantage Plan and return to Original Medicare (A & B only)
- Enroll in a stand-alone Medicare Part D prescription drug plan
- Elect to change from one Medicare Advantage Plan to another

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# Education News

## OCSD Recognizes Recipient of the Presidential Award for Excellence

Jacqueline Sheffield, a dedicated mathematics educator with 27 years of teaching experience, has been named a recipient of the prestigious Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching (PAEMST). Established in 1983, this award is the highest recognition K-12 math



and science teachers can receive from the U.S. government.

Ms. Sheffield has been a mathematics teacher at Fort Walton Beach High School for 23 years, where she has inspired students across all grade levels through her engaging instruction in Algebra 2 Honors and Advanced Placement Statistics. Before her tenure at Fort Walton Beach High School, Ms. Sheffield taught mathematics at Davidson Middle School, further exemplifying her commitment to academic excellence and student success. Visit [www.paemst.org](http://www.paemst.org).



## Niceville High School has a New Multi-Purpose Building!

Niceville High School's new multipurpose building, weight

room, and baseball locker room are now in use and are part of a series of improvements funded by the voter-approved Half-Cent Sales Tax.

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## Okaloosa County School District Kindergarten and New Student Registration Now Open

Incoming kindergarteners and students new to the Okaloosa County School District for the 2025-2026 School Year can begin registering for school now. Parents need to create a Focus Parent Portal Account to start the process and will use it to view their student (s) class schedule and grades, attendance, discipline and communicate with teachers.

Visit <https://okaloosa.focusschoolsoftware.com/focus/auth/> to create a Parent Portal Account.

## Stay Connected with the Okaloosa County School District

Are you staying informed about the latest news from the Okaloosa County School District? Parents and guardians can easily access their student's schedule, grades, and attendance by downloading the FOCUS App. Additionally, stay updated with school and district news, events, documents, and emergency notifications through the OCSD Apptegy App. Both apps are available for download on the Apple App Store and Google Play. Visit [www.okaloosaschools.com](http://www.okaloosaschools.com).



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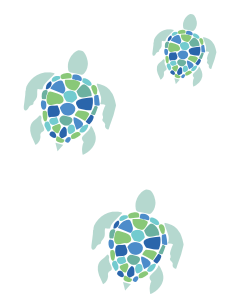
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# ECSC's Diane Fraser: Discovering the Chemistry between Science and Community

BY KELLYMURPHY-REDD

Diane was born in Mobile, Ala., graduated from Niceville High School, earned her undergraduate degree from Huntington College, and her master's degree from University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB).

Armed with her chemistry and forensic science degrees, she moved to Salt Lake City. In her 20's she was looking forward to seeing something different and broadening her horizons. She enjoyed working in a forensic toxicology lab doing cutting edge research. Diane will tell you television shows about crime scene investigation are not true to life. The script will combine six jobs into one character. Diane met her husband in Salt Lake City.

Diane and her husband moved to Cincinnati after they were married, where she worked for five years as a research chemist at the Food and Drug Administration. The Forensic Chemistry Center participated in a lot of criminal investigations. If someone had an adverse effect from some food or chemical, etc., her team would try to find out what was in there that made the person sick.

While in Cincinnati, her husband traveled a lot and was gone all week. They decided to move back to Fort Walton Beach in 1999. His family was there and her family was in Niceville. Diane quit work and became a full-time mom. She has taught as an adjunct professor at UWF since 2003 and joined the Emerald Coast Science Center (ECSC) board in the spring of 2014.

A couple of weeks into November, the ECSC director left to become a full-time teacher. The board asked Diane to be the interim director while they looked for a replacement. In 2015, Diane became the permanent director. It was a leap of faith. There was no money to invest in new exhibits and programs; there hadn't been investments in a while, and the science center didn't have the strongest reputation. It took a couple of years to change the perception. The experience of attending the science center needed to change between visits or why would anyone come back?

With no business experience,

but plenty of ignorance and enthusiasm, Diane didn't know how scared she should be. She started writing grants and, with board guidance, began to make friends in the community, improved the science center's reputation, obtained some investments, generated more revenue and began to build small successes.

The ECSC generates revenue by charging admission. The staff hosts field trips from Okaloosa County, Walton County and Alabama. The center also provides home school programs. Fundraising programs along with personal and corporate donations help the science center keep moving forward.

When asked to share the greatest lesson she's learned, Diane says it's collaboration with our communities. The first two years were focused on investing and income generation to become stable. Then Covid happened. There were big concerns.

The science center board met weekly and the community stepped up. Diane gets emotional when she talks about the community support. The Fort Walton Chamber and Ted Corcoran were also there with support. Facebook generated donations of \$5, \$10 or \$100. The science center was reinvigorated. Many people helped.

To say thank you, the ECSC offered free passes to the United Way, foster programs, guardian ad litem programs and Big Brothers. Anyone with EDT or SNAP can show their card and four people get in for \$12. Normally the fee is \$12 per person. Diane says the science center is not serving the mission if a lot of the population don't have access. "Many families can't afford admission and still pay bills. One of these kids could be the scientist that solves the next big problem."

The ECSC houses 60 animals. There are birds, reptiles, tortoises, chinchillas, geckos, tarantulas, turtles, parrots, hedgehogs and hermit crabs to name a few. They name their animals after scientists. There are 14 employees including two animal care specialists who work 365 days a year, along with seven educators, three of whom work



full-time and front desk personnel.

Among the many science center offerings, there are summer camps, a presence at festivals, libraries, day care centers, hosting birthday parties and even Girl Scout badge workshops.

Diane says no one can do this by themselves. Celebrating 10 years in the community, ECSC has exceeded its pre-pandemic

numbers. But, there is still room to grow. As the only science museum in Okaloosa County, your gift helps close the STEAM education learning gap by providing successful, transformative educational opportunities for children. To support, visit <https://www.ecscience.org/support>. For more information, visit [www.ecscience.org](http://www.ecscience.org).

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Lifestyle

# Mirror Mirror on the Wall!



BY STACY SARIKANON,  
STUNNING SPACES—DECORATING  
DEN INTERIORS

One of the best kept decorating secrets – guaranteed to brighten up any space – is the unique and clever use of mirrors. Here are some great ways you can think about incorporating mirrors in your next design project. And above all, the key to using mirrors effectively is their placement. Just take a look at some of these great tips and room photographs that illustrate each tip.

- Place your mirror(s) on a wall that will help you bounce colors and design schemes around the room.
- A mirror can become a room's focal point.
- Mirrors will brighten up any



space by adding light, depth and interest to a room.

- The bigger the mirror the more light it will reflect.
- Mirrors/mirrored furniture can help a small room appear larger and more interesting.
- Mirrors – as well as wall art –

can help define and bring personality to create a stunning and cohesive space!



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## Exercise Reaper Castillo Pathfinds MQ-9 Capabilities in Austere Environments

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An MQ-9 Reaper circles above the Melrose Air Force Range in New Mexico, surveying the area below as it prepares to land on a dirt strip. On the ground, the 1st Special Operations Mission Sustainment Team (SOMST) secures the landing zone, ready to refuel and rearm the aircraft.

More than 1,100 miles away at Hurlburt Field, an MQ-9 pilot and sensor operator control the remotely piloted aircraft from a ground control station.

The 65th Special Operations Squadron hosted Exercise Reaper Castillo Nov. 4 to Dec. 18, 2024, to sharpen mission-essential tasks and develop MQ-9 Agile Combat Employment (ACE) capabilities. The goal: create a lighter, leaner and more agile force.

The exercise validated the MQ-9's ability to conduct key operations in austere environ-

ments, including dirt-strip landings, refueling, rearming and rapid relaunch.

"In the future fight, we assess we will no longer be able to rely exclusively on the main operating bases that have persisted," said the 1st SOMST flight commander. "Operating in austere environments anytime, anyplace and anywhere is critical. It enables commanders to have options - something critically needed in special operations forces."

Typically, the MQ-9 requires a paved runway with a group of maintainers and extensive support functions. However, during the exercise a light SOMST footprint on an austere dirt airfield provided all necessary functions to support mission execution.

"If special operations MSTs can enable mission generation at the forward edge of the battlefield, it can increase the lethality, range, and overall capa-

bility of the aircraft for strategic and tactical national interests," the flight commander said.

The MQ-9 Reaper is a versatile and precise intelligence, surveillance and strike platform and its adaptability and range of capabilities make it an asset for modern military operations.

These capabilities align with ACE, a strategy focused on enhancing flexibility and resilience by dispersing forces across multiple, often austere, locations. With its ability to operate in remote environments and adapt to rapidly changing mission requirements, the MQ-9 plays a role in supporting ACE's emphasis on decentralized operations and rapid deployment.

"The MQ-9 is extremely relevant in today's fight and will be in the future as well," said a 65th SOS MQ-9 evaluator pilot and exercise mission commander. "It allows us to go places and do things that we cannot risk sending manned aircraft - such as



means," Paul added. "It brought together many members from multiple AFSOC wings and it's humbling to have the Lucky Dicers' stamp on this iteration - this was truly a win for all of AFSOC remotely piloted aircraft and where we're headed in the future."

high-threat environments."

The exercise builds on the hard work of the 65th SOS's sister squadrons over the past few years and will provide important data and lessons learned for the next squadron to push the concepts even further, said Lt. Col. Kurtis Paul, 65th SOS commander.

"On its surface, Reaper Castillo 24 is an exercise created and executed by the 65th SOS. But in reality, it's another step in Air Force Special Operations Command's efforts to push MQ-9 operations beyond conventional

As the future of Air Force operations adapt to emerging technologies and evolving threats, the forward-thinking approach of these teams is crucial to unlocking the full potential of the MQ-9.

"We have to break out of the mindset that we need a huge, paved runway with co-located launch and recovery aircrews," the mission commander added. "If we can free ourselves from the traditional mindset, it makes MQ-9 combat reach nearly limitless."

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*Continued on page 22*

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**DINING**

continued from page 20

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Feb. 14: Valentine's Day Special Dinner Menu 5-9 p.m. Live Music with Nathan Foster 6-10 p.m.

Wednesdays: Kids Eat Free 5-9 p.m.

Thursdays: Open Mic and Karaoke Nights 6-10 p.m.

Fridays: Steak Night 5-9 p.m.  
Sundays: Brunch 9 a.m.-1 p.m. buffet style, bottomless Mimosas!

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

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

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# Better Than Panera Bread Broccoli Cheese Soup

BY SUSAN BENTON,  
30AEATS.COM

With all of the crazy temps and runny noses, nothing beats the warming comfort of a big bowl of soul-satisfying soup, and this wonderful homemade Broccoli Cheese Soup (a favorite of my UA daughter who adores Panera Bread) is always a hit, and easy to make!

The family opted out of following out a boule creating a bread bowl, and served it on the side instead.

**Ingredients:**

- 6 tablespoons butter or extra virgin olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1 stalk celery, chopped
- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 2 cups half-and-half
- 3 cups chicken broth
- 2 bay leaves
- 1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
- Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper
- 4 cups broccoli florets (about 1 head)
- 1 large carrot, diced
- 2 1/2 cups (about 8 ounces) grated sharp cheddar cheese

**Preparation:**

Melt the butter in a large Dutch oven or pot over medium heat. Add the onion, celery and garlic, and cook until tender, about 5 minutes. Whisk in the flour and cook until golden, 3 to 4 minutes, then gradually whisk in the half-and-half until smooth. Add the chicken broth, bay leaves and nutmeg, then season with salt and pepper and bring to a simmer. Reduce the heat to medium-low and cook, uncovered, until thickened, about 20 minutes.




blender until smooth; you'll still have flecks of carrot and broccoli. Return to the pot.

Add the cheese to the soup and whisk over medium heat until melted. Add up to 3/4 cup water a little at a time if the soup is too thick.

Note: Garnish with grated cheese and broccoli floret. I also like fresh ground pepper.

Add the broccoli and carrot to the broth mixture and simmer until tender, about 20 minutes. Discard the bay leaves. Puree the soup in batches in a





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**Special Dinner Menu Available 5-9pm**

Spinach Salad with Warm Bacon Dressing • Tuna/Avocado Tartare  
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**Choice of Two Sides:** Grilled Asparagus • Thyme Roasted Carrots • Herbed Risotto • Roasted Garlic Mashed Yukon Gold Potatoes

**Oyster Bar Hours:** Mon.-Tues. Closed, Wed.-Thurs. 3-10pm, 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

**Sundays:** Brunch 9am-1pm  
**Wednesdays:** Kids Eat Free 5-9pm  
**Thursdays:** Open Mic/Karaoke 6-10pm  
**Feb. 1:** Jody Lucas 6-9pm  
**Feb. 5:** Chess Night 6pm, Prime Rib Night 5-9pm, Wine Tasting 5-7pm  
**Feb. 8:** Neal Dalton Kelly 6-9pm  
**Feb. 14:** Valentines Dinner Specials - Reservations 850-897-6400  
**Feb. 14:** Nathan Foster 6-10pm  
**Feb. 15:** Ed Wrann 6-10pm  
**Feb. 19:** Traveling Painter 5-10pm  
**Feb. 19:** Prime Rib Night 5-9pm, Cocktail Tasting 5-7pm  
**Feb. 22:** Mitch Cantrell 6-10pm



Off the Hook

# How the 2024 Hurricane Season Impacted Recreational Fishing in the Gulf

BY NOAA FISHERIES, SOUTH-EAST REGIONAL OFFICE

The 2024 Atlantic hurricane season, which officially ended on November 30, showcased above-average activity. It had a profound impact on recreational fishing in the Gulf of Mexico, causing recreational fishers to face challenges and interim closures. Hurricanes Beryl, Helene, and Milton caused devastating effects in many Gulf Coast fishing communities—many of which are still working to recover.

The aftermath of this hurricane season is still being felt by many key industries that contribute to the coastal economy—including the recreational fishing community. NOAA Fisheries' Southeast Recreational Fishing

Coordinator, Sean Meehan has spoken with key members in the industry to learn the full scale of this hurricane season's impacts.

"Hurricanes can upset coastal marine ecosystems, but they also have the ability to negatively impact the economy in the Gulf," Sean Meehan says, "Many business owners rely on tourism to keep their tackle shops and charter operations running smoothly. I've met with several members of the recreational fishing community here in Florida who have shared the challenges they're facing in the wake of the 2024 Atlantic hurricane season. Rebuilding efforts are underway and it's only up from here."

## How the Fishing Industry is Recovering

Hubbard's Marina has been operating in the Tampa Bay area since 1928. They offer deep sea fishing trips, dolphin-watching excursions, sunset cruises, island visits, and private fishing charters to both visitors and locals alike. After four generations of family ownership and operations on the Gulf Coast, one could say the Hubbard family is experienced in Atlantic hurricane seasons.

"This hurricane season has had a horrendous impact," says Captain Dylan Hubbard, owner of Hubbard's Marina, "But while we got knocked down, it's all about how we get back up. We were back running strong just days after the storm but



On Oct. 8, 2024, at 6:30 p.m. EDT, NOAA's GOES East satellite captured this imagery of Hurricane Milton approaching the Gulf Coast of Florida. At its most powerful, Milton's maximum sustained winds reached 180 mph making the storm an extremely dangerous Category 5 hurricane.

fish. Hurricanes can destroy or damage shoreline structures, docks, and piers commonly used by this group of anglers.

## Environmental Damage

Hurricanes can disturb marine ecosystems and agitate longstanding habits held by certain fish populations and species. For exam-

ple, increased sand, sediment, and nutrient runoff into the Gulf can impact the health of crucial habitats for spawning and feeding fish.

In severe cases, entire waterways can become closed off, causing some species to temporarily move away from damaged areas. Often they return once waterways are able to stabilize again, but this has impacts on the frequency and amount of fish caught in certain areas.

admit that we need help from our inland neighbors to come out and shop local, shop small to help our coastal communities and fishing communities to rebound more quickly."

Hubbard's is just one of many fishing businesses in the Southeast that were impacted by these storms. While others are on their way to recovery like Hubbard's, many others are still struggling.

## Key Impacts on Recreational Fishing in the Gulf

### Safety Concerns and Storm Damage

Part of the widespread damage is moderate to severe damage to popular marinas, piers, and docks. Recreational fishermen use these to access waterways in the Gulf. Periods of intense weather also raise safety concerns with rough seas, heavy rainfall, and strong winds, making it dangerous for anglers and those with smaller vessels.

Shore-based anglers are finding that many key water access points have been damaged or temporarily closed. Many private recreational fishermen who don't have access to boats/vessels rely on these access points to

### Economic Impacts

Some recreational fishing charter companies have had to suspend operations or temporarily close due to storm damage. Tackle shops, boat rental companies, and bait suppliers can suffer financially due to a reduced amount of tourism to hurricane impacted areas. Many local economies in the Gulf rely on out-of-town visitors to stay open year-round.

Although the 2024 hurricane season has presented many challenges, there have also been notable moments where communities have united to support each other and assist in recovery efforts. The best way to help recovering businesses and communities is by continuing to fish.

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# Local Students Win Prestigious 2025 ASA Scholastic Awards

Maxwell Diehl and Sophie Broutin, seniors at Niceville High School, have been named the 2025 All Sports Association Scholastic Award winners. This prestigious honor recognizes student-athletes in Okaloosa, Walton and Santa Rosa counties who excel in academics and athletics. Surrounded by peers, family members, school staff and representatives from the All Sports Association, Diehl and Broutin received the exciting news in Niceville High School's media center in January. "This is a huge honor for you both. From the school, we're certainly very proud of you," said Principal Charlie Marello. "When I got the call that we won both, that's unprecedented at Niceville High School."

Diehl, who ranks first in his class of 475 students with a 4.77 weighted GPA, serves as captain of the boys' lacrosse team and has led the team to consecutive state playoff appearances. In addition to his athletic and ac-

ademic achievements, Diehl has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to service, raising \$5,000 for Bed 4 Me, a nonprofit providing beds and bedding to children in need. He is pursuing a congressional nomination to one of the United States service academies.

Broutin, a standout athlete and scholar, has achieved remarkable success in Volleyball. She has earned All-State honors and holds multiple school records while also excelling academically with a 4.77 weighted GPA. Her leadership and dedication inspire her teammates, and she plans to continue her academic and athletic pursuits at the collegiate level.

Superintendent Marcus Chambers lauded the students' accomplishments: "Max and Sophie embody the excellence we strive for in Okaloosa County schools. Their dedication to academics, athletics, and community service is extraordinary, and they inspire their peers. We



L to R: Superintendent Marcus Chambers, Principal Charlie Marello, Sophie Broutin, Maxwell Diehl, and All Sports Association President Kevin Bowyer

are so proud of their achievements and look forward to seeing what they will accomplish in the future."

In addition, Senior Emery Hagan of Paxton High School has been named the 2024 re-

recipient of the Taylor Haugen Trophy, an award honoring student-athletes who embody leadership, compassion and perseverance. As the first-ever winner from her school, Hagan, a golfer and cheerleader, attributes

her accomplishments to values instilled by her late mother and hopes her story inspires others in small schools to pursue similar opportunities.

Congratulations to Max, Sophie and Emery on their outstanding achievements and thanks to the All Sports Association for recognizing and supporting exceptional student-athletes.

Additional All-Sports Association award winners include: Nick Dawkins-Wuerffel Trophy Winner, Pennsylvania State University; Jaden Voisin-Male Collegiate Winner, South Alabama Jaguars, Football; Lilly Chouinard-Female Collegiate Winner, Kennesaw State University, Pole Vault; Rece Hinds-Professional Award Winner, Cincinnati Reds, Baseball; Michael Embry-Special Olympics Award Winner; Cam Farrah-Amateur Award Winner, Sailing; and Tony Anderson-Assistant Coach of the Year, Fort Walton Beach High School.



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 Wellness



By **STEPHENIE CRAIG,**  
**JOURNEY BRAVELY**

You're back to a new year with resolutions to overhaul areas of life. Maybe you're back to the gym or back to morning practices or back to church, crossing your fingers you can keep it going longer than last year.

While the idea of positive life change is helpful, resolutions are often missing a key ingredient to make them truly life impacting. Why does the resolution matter? Why are you trying to change? Are you changing because someone judged you, you don't feel enough, you're jealous of someone else? Are you changing because you have something to prove, you want better photos to post, you're seeking approval? Judgement, shame, and approv-

al seeking will only drive change for short periods of time. If you want long-term life change, it's time to ask a different question.

What do you want, really?

When you get to the end of life and reflect back on how you lived, what you made important, how you invested your energy, what do you want to be true about the person you've been and the way you lived your life? What do you want, really?

**Eight Steps to Figure Out What You Want, Really**

**Ask yourself what you want, really.** Brainstorm what you want. "I want to double my current income."

**Ask yourself, "What will that get you?"** What will doubling your income get you? It will give me more freedom for family vacations. What will more family vacations get you? More vacations will give me more time with my family. What will more time with your family get you? More time with family will help me know what's going on with my kids beyond grades and activities. And what will

# What Do You Want, Really?



sign up for family activities? How am I putting boundaries around my phone time to prioritize family connection? How am I showing up in conversations with my family this week? What will I choose to say no to so I can say yes to what I really want?

**Determine how you will measure your progress at the end of 2025.** How will you know if you have engaged in more authentic, connected relationships with your kids and shown that you really want to know them? I will know based on how much they share about their lives outside of grades/sport. I will know based on average face to face time spent talking or having fun together each week. I will know based on how affectionate we are or how much we laugh together.

**Celebrate progress or evaluate lack of progress.** If you

made progress in living toward what you want, enjoy and continue to lean into change. If you don't see the progress you were hoping for, identify the one thing that prevented progress the most. Distraction with work on my phone during family time was the one thing that prevented progress the most.

**Determine the one thing you can commit to that will most likely move you toward what you really want.** I will create a phone/email boundary from 5-9 so I can be more present with family in the evenings.

Approaching personal growth from your deeper values drives long-term change much more effectively than trying to live up to an external standard. Remember that orienting your life habits to your values takes time and commitment and is very worth the work. Connect with us along your journey for counseling and coaching at [Journeybravely.com](http://Journeybravely.com).

I want to double my income (while that would be nice), what I really want is deeper, more connected relationships in my family.

**Orient your priorities and choices toward what you really want.** Try using reminders in your phone and post it notes for several weeks to remember your value/desire. How am I scheduling my time this week to prioritize more meaningful connection with my family? How are we considering family connection when we

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 Wellness

# Caring for the Caregiver

By KELLY STALNAKER

Johns Hopkins Medicine defines “caregiver” as someone who provides assistance in meeting the daily needs of another person. Responsibilities can include bathing, dressing, feeding, housework, shopping, assisting with incontinence needs, dispensing medication, managing medical care and so much more. Caregivers can be paid professionals who have had training or specialized education. But in

nearly 90% of cases, the caregiver is a loved one of the patient, often living in the same home. Because the demands on a caregiver can be far-reaching, it can be a challenge to balance all of the responsibilities.

Providing care for an ill or disabled person can be hugely rewarding, especially if they are a family member. But depending on the level of care needed, it can quickly become an overwhelming experience. A care-

giver may struggle to meet his or her own needs as there is a tendency to be laser-focused on the needs of the patient. The risk of burnout is very high, and can affect the caregiver both physically and mentally. Symptoms such as exhaustion, depression, gastrointestinal distress, insomnia, headaches, weight fluctuations, etc. can develop over time. Fortunately, the risk of caregiver burnout can be decreased in a variety of ways.

Self-care is a necessity, not a luxury. But many caregivers may struggle to find time or energy to tend to their own needs. Asking for help is an important first step on the self-care journey. Making arrangements with a trusted family friend or loved one to step into the caregiver role for a few hours can make a huge difference. Some communities also have resources to schedule respite care for the patient while the caregiver takes a break. Taking time for yourself can look different for everyone; engaging in a favorite hobby, or spending time with friends, or just enjoying time outdoors can all promote relaxation. Eating healthy, exercising, and getting restful sleep on a daily basis are also very important but can feel difficult to work into the already extensive list of responsibilities.



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- Do you think you show too much or too little of your teeth when you smile?
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# Mild Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy: Non-Invasive Support for Health and Well-being



BY MELANIE YOST

Mild Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy (mHBOT) is a revolutionary approach to improving overall health, well-being, and longevity. Traditionally Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy (HBOT) has only been associated with treating conditions like decompression sickness, carbon monoxide poisoning, and wound healing, but the growing body of research shows that it offers a broader range of benefits. With new research highlighting its effectiveness, HBOT is quickly becoming a popular, safe and non-invasive way to enhance physical and mental health.

## What is HBOT and mHBOT?

Hyperbaric oxygen chambers increase atmospheric pressure to elevate oxygen levels in the body. High-pressure chambers provide between 1.5 and 3 ATA (16–66 feet below sea level), whereas mild hyperbaric chambers (mHBOT) operate at 1.3 ATA (10 feet below sea level). This mild increase is exceptionally safe and effective for boosting oxygen levels in the blood plasma.

For years, experts believed that only high-pressure HBOT had therapeutic benefits. However, recent studies demonstrate that mHBOT can be just as effective in promoting healing and, in some cases, even more beneficial, with no risk of oxygen toxicity.

## What Conditions Can mHBOT Help?

Although the FDA has approved HBOT for 14 specific indications, mHBOT is increasingly used off-label to address a wide range of health concerns.

Benefits include:

- **Anti-aging:** Slows the aging process and reverses biological age by lengthening telomeres.
- **Neurological Conditions:** Supports recovery from concussions, traumatic brain injuries, and neurodegenerative diseases.
- **Chronic Health Issues:** Reduces symptoms of autoimmune disorders, diabetes, and inflammatory bowel disease.
- **Brain Health and Mood Disorders:** Helps with PTSD, depression, and anxiety.
- **Physical Performance and Recovery:** Enhances athletic performance, speeds up recovery, and reduces inflammation.
- **General Health and Wellness:** Improves energy, sleep quality, mental clarity, and overall well-being.

Many users report a higher quality of life and symptom relief, making mHBOT a valuable tool for long-term health maintenance.

## How Does mHBOT Work?

The mild pressure in the chamber pushes oxygen into the blood plasma, increasing oxygen delivery to tissues of the body and the brain. This process:

- Reduces chronic inflammation and oxidative stress
  - Boosts the immune system
  - Stimulates stem cell mobilization and proliferation
  - Enhances neuroplasticity (the brain's ability to adapt and heal)
  - Promotes cell regeneration
- These effects collectively contribute to improved physical and mental health, helping the body repair itself from the inside out.

## What to Expect During a Session

A typical mHBOT session is simple, relaxing, and comfortable. Clients lie down on a soft mattress inside the chamber, wearing a nasal cannula to enhance oxygen intake. The atmospheric pressure increases gradually, causing a slight sensation in the ears (similar to airplane

takeoff). Once at pressure, most clients feel relaxed, with many choosing to nap or meditate.

After the session, users often report immediate benefits such as reduced aches and pains, increased energy, and a sense of calm. Over time, cumulative sessions lead to enhanced mental clarity, better sleep, improved mood, and reduced symptoms of chronic conditions.

## Next Steps

If you feel you or a loved one would benefit from Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy, give us a call. We want to help you! Come in for a FREE consultation, so that we can meet your individual needs.

*Melanie Yost is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and owner of Be Well Solutions and Complete Ketamine Solutions in Destin. She has been in the healthcare field for over 35 years and can be reached at 850-786-2051.*

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# A Hidden Effect of Strength Training: **Improved Balance**



BY KASSIA GARFIELD, OWNER,  
MAXSTRENGTH FITNESS,  
NICEVILLE

As we age, most people start to feel less stable and feel that balance starts to be more of a problem. Balance is a crucial component of physical health, contributing not only to everyday tasks like walking and standing, but also to athletic performance and injury prevention. As we age, our balance tends to decline due to a loss of muscle mass, a lack of strength to be specific, as well as decreased coordination and stability. Combined with sarcopenia, that natural loss of muscle mass as we age, this can lead to an increase in fall risk. The risk of hip fractures only increased



with age due to a lack of muscle, decreased balance and osteoporosis. Hip fractures in the elderly are one of the largest risks, with one in four people dying within a year of a hip fracture. One effective way to combat this is through strength training, which builds muscle, improves joint stability and enhances neuromuscular control.

## 1. Strengthening Muscles and Stabilizing Joints

At the core of balance lies the body's ability to stabilize itself against forces like gravity and external disruptions. This requires strength in the muscles surrounding key joints, especially the ankles, knees, hips and core. Weak muscles in these areas can lead to poor posture, misalignment and difficulty in maintaining stability during movement. The stronger we are, the easier it is to pull our

body's weight back into its center of gravity.

When the core and leg muscles are strong, they provide the foundation needed to maintain balance, reducing the risk of falls and improving control during dynamic activities. In the beginning of strength training, there is not always an increase in muscle mass, even though muscles might be able to lift more weight. This is from a principle called "neural adaptation" which means our body is just better at using and coordinating the muscle we already have. This allows our nervous system to respond quicker and also have the strength to correct a loss of balance.

## 2. Enhancing Proprioception

Proprioception is the body's ability to sense its position in space. Good proprioception is



plays a key role in balance because when the body is aligned correctly, it is easier to maintain a stable center of gravity and distribute weight evenly across the body.

Strengthening the upper back, for example, through rows or reverse fly exercises can improve posture by preventing rounded shoulders. A strong core, targeted through exercises like crunches and back extensions helps support the spine and encourages an upright, balanced posture, further improving overall stability.

## Conclusion

Strength training is a powerful tool for improving balance. By strengthening key muscles, enhancing proprioception and promoting better posture, regular strength training can significantly reduce the risk of falls, enhance physical performance, and support overall mobility. Whether you're looking to improve athletic performance or maintain independence as you age, strength training should be a cornerstone of your fitness routine for balance and stability.

Here at MaxStrength Fitness we offer full body, comprehensive workouts targeting the busy professional and active aging adult. If you feel balance is turning into a struggle, please give us a call at 850-373-4450 to learn more and schedule a free consultation.

~ Kassia Garfield, Ed.D, DPT, PT, ATC, COMT, OCS, Cert. DN.

essential for balance, because it helps us adjust our posture and movements without consciously thinking about it. Strength training improves proprioception by engaging and training the neuromuscular system, which includes receptors in the muscles and tendons that communicate with the brain. Any strength training can help jump start the nervous system. Creating challenges of muscle contractions and maintaining equilibrium, forces the brain to refine its ability to sense and respond to the body's position in space. Over time, these exercises improve proprioception, making it easier to maintain balance in various situations, from walking on uneven terrain to performing complex athletic movements.

## 3. Improving Postural Alignment

Balance is heavily influenced by good posture. Strength training strengthens the muscles of the back, shoulders and core, which are vital for maintaining proper posture throughout daily activities. Postural alignment

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BY DR. KAREN DEVORE

As the calendar turns and the holiday festivities wind down, many of us feel the pull to reset, refresh and refocus on our health. Detox and weight loss are two of the most common New Year's resolutions, sparking motivation to shed holiday indulgences and kickstart healthier habits. A quick Google search for "weight loss programs" yields an overwhelming number of results, from juice cleanses to fad diets promising dramatic results in just a few weeks.

But here's the truth—quick fixes often lead to quick rebounds. At the Tortoise Clinic, we see this pattern far too often. Our patients come to us frustrated by the rollercoaster of unsustainable programs that offer little personalization and even less

clarity on how to maintain long-term results. It's disheartening to watch weight that took months or years to accumulate return just as quickly after extreme dieting efforts.

**Slow and Steady Wins the Race**

Just as it didn't take two weeks to gain the weight, it shouldn't take two weeks to lose it. True, lasting weight loss is a marathon, not a sprint. Sustainable health isn't about cutting corners or following one-size-fits-all plans—it's about creating a tailored, thoughtful approach to your body's unique needs.

We take a comprehensive, whole-body approach to weight management with our patients. This means digging deeper than calorie counting and cardio sessions. We look at the full picture—your diet, lifestyle, hormones, metabolic health, behavior patterns, cellular health, and relationship with food.

For some, a personalized

cleanse or detox may serve as a helpful reset, allowing the body to release toxins and reduce inflammation. For others, the path to sustainable weight loss requires a closer look at hormone levels, sleep patterns, nutrient deficiencies, and even genetic predispositions. Weight management is never linear, and the best results come from individualized strategies that consider both short-term goals and long-term health.

**The Building Blocks of Personalized Weight Loss**

Weight loss is more than cutting carbs or ramping up workouts—it's about addressing the root causes from the inside out. Our approach begins with a comprehensive health review to analyze your health history, lab work, and metabolic markers, uncovering the reasons behind weight gain or plateaus.

In addition, we focus on balancing hormones that may be slowing your metabolism, while using herbs and nutrition to

regulate blood sugar, stimulate ketogenesis, and restore essential nutrients for cellular health. Personalized dietary strategies are also implemented to help you develop sustainable habits with whole foods and proper macronutrient balance, while muscle mass preservation ensures you build or maintain strength as fat is lost.

For those needing additional support, we offer GLP-1 therapies, which help control appetite, improve blood sugar levels, and boost weight loss by enhancing metabolic function. By fine-tuning your metabolism and creating individualized plans, we guide you toward long-term, sustainable results that fit your lifestyle.

**Why Personalization Matters**

I often remind patients that weight loss is not just about the number on the scale. It's about optimizing overall health—feeling energized, confident, and

in balance. When you focus on whole-body wellness, weight loss becomes a natural byproduct of a healthier lifestyle.

That's why working with a practitioner who understands the full spectrum of health is crucial. We draw on both Eastern and Western practices at the Tortoise Clinic to create personalized weight management programs. Whether we're using acupuncture to support digestion and hormone balance, or addressing metabolic health with herbs and nutritional support, our goal is to empower you with tools for lasting change.

If you're tired of the cycle of quick fixes and frustration, I invite you to consider a different approach. Let this year be the one where slow, steady, and sustainable wins the race, just like in the story of the tortoise and the hare.

Schedule your consultation today and take the first step toward the healthiest version of yourself at [TortoiseClinic.com](http://TortoiseClinic.com).

# New Year, New You: A Sustainable Approach to Weight Loss



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# Roofing Questions - Part 1

BY BYRON TOUPS

Florida's picturesque landscape and sunny weather make it a dream destination for many, but its vulnerability to hurricanes and tropical storms requires homeowners to carefully consider their roofing options. In this two-part comprehen-

sive guide, we'll delve into key questions about Florida roofs, providing insights into their lifespan, insurance coverage, repair options, installation process and more. Let's navigate the intricate world of Florida roofing together.

## How Long Should My

### Roof Last in Florida?

Florida's climate, characterized by hurricanes and high humidity, significantly impacts the lifespan of roofs. Various factors such as materials, building codes, and climate considerations come into play. Traditional asphalt shingle roofs typically last between 12 and 20 years, while more durable options like metal or tile roofs can endure for 40 to 60 years. The question is, will your insurance carrier insure the roof for that long? Today's Florida homeowners are getting letters or notices of cancellation daily from insurance carriers. Insurance companies are threatening to drop a roof's coverage if it's not replaced.

### Do Florida Homeowner's Insurance Policies Cover Roofs?

Given the frequent hurricanes and storms in Florida, understanding your homeowner's insurance policy regarding roof coverage is essential. Most policies cover structural damage caused by perils such as hail, wind, fire, and falling trees, including damage to your roof. However, the coverage may vary, requiring you to pay a deductible and possibly excluding certain conditions. Please be aware if your policy has special clauses which can change the payment a carrier makes on your claim. You may think you have a Replacement Cost Policy but there may be a clause basically reducing coverage by depreciating the roof's value.



### Does a Leaky Roof in Florida Necessitate a Complete Replacement?

Addressing leaks promptly is crucial to prevent further damage, but not every leak warrants a complete roof replacement. Factors such as the age of the roof, extent of damage, and type of materials used play a role in determining whether repairs suffice or if a full replacement is necessary.

### What Is the Cost of a New Roof in Florida?

The cost of a new roof in Florida depends on various factors, including its size, shape, materials, and additional features like chimneys and skylights.

### What Are the Signs of a Failing Roof in Florida?

Identifying visible signs of a failing roof is crucial, especially in Florida's climate. Look out for loose or missing shingles, sagging areas, exposed nail heads, and granules or debris in gutters. Regular inspections, particularly for older asphalt shingle roofs, can help detect is-

sues early on. And damage may not be visible from the ground.

### Why Is My Florida Roof Stained?

Stains on Florida roofs, particularly black and green stains from algae, moss, or lichens, are common due to the state's humid climate. Regular cleaning is essential to prevent structural damage and preserve the roof's integrity.

### What Reroofing Options Are Available in Florida?

For homeowners considering reroofing in Florida, options include installing a new roof directly over existing materials. Factors such as aesthetics, climate conditions, and budget should be considered when making choices. We do not recommend installing a new roof over an existing roof.

### How Long Does Roof Installation Take in Florida?

The duration of roof installation in Florida varies depending on factors such as roof size, materials, and potential weather delays. While the process can range from a day to a few days, obtaining a comprehensive timeline from roofing contractors is advisable for proper planning.

### How Can I Find a Reliable Roofing Professional in Florida?

Selecting a trustworthy roofing professional is paramount for ensuring the integrity and safety of your home. Look for licensed and insured contractors who are responsive to your questions and concerns. Seeking professional insights from reputable companies like RoofPro Roofing can provide in-depth answers to all your roofing concerns. Check their ratings and reviews and consult your local Chamber of Commerce and BBB. For a free RoofPro Roofing consultation, call 850-332-3330 or email info@RoofPro-Roofing.com.



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## Sean of the South: Love



BY SEAN DIETRICH

We were newlyweds, living in a grungy apartment.

Each morning, I would wake before her. I would pass my morning hours writing poetry on a yellow legal pad, sipping coffee.

Mostly, I'd write the kinds of god-awful things you'd expect newlyweds to write. I'm talking painfully corny stuff. I'd leave these poems on slips of paper scattered throughout our apartment for her to find.

One such poem read:

"Together, the two of us,

"In thought, and deed, and breath, and heart,

"Shall never be lacerated apart."

Gag me with number-two pencil. "Lacerated?" What kind of a dork uses that word? In fact, I'm not certain this verb works in this particular case.

LACERATE [verb: las-uh-reyt] lac'er'at'ed, lac'er'at'ing

l. to tear; mangle; rip. Example: "Hey dude, that poem you wrote really freakin' lacerated."

My wife saved all my crum-

my poems in a shoebox, and today they reside in a storage closet.

Anyway, when we first married, we lived in an apartment that smelled like dead squirrels. I am not being figurative. I mean our apartment actually had a nest of decomposing squirrels in the attic above our master bedroom.

The place was tiny, and about as ugly as homemade soap. The tenant before us had painted the walls black and greenish-gray. Sherwin Williams officially titled this color "Seasick Granite®."

When we moved in, we made the place our own. We painted the walls brown and khaki. We bought a used coffee table and some scented candles.

My friend, Chubbs, found an old console television on the side of the road. I was lucky enough to claim the TV before the garbage man came.

The thing was heavier than a dead preacher, but we got it up the stairs. Chubbs, however, would suffer from severe disc degenerative problems for the rest of his life.

Our building sat across the street from a Waffle House, a Chick-fil-A, and an ice cream shop. And this is why we gained nearly fifty pounds within our first year of marriage.

We never went to the movies because we didn't have the money. We ate Hamburger Helper without hamburger sometimes.

We saved our cash for a new window unit AC—our air con-

ditioner was on the fritz. The thing would only work on days of the week beginning with "R."

On weekends, every weekend, we ate donuts. It was our simple ritual, and I loved it. Krispy Kreme was only a stone's throw from us, and when the hot-and-ready light would glow, by God, we were there.

Over donuts, we would talk for hours about nothing. Heavy doses of sugar can do things to the human mind. It can make a person honest.

She told me all her stories. I told her mine. You can do a lot of soul-searching over crullers.

My professional life was non-existent, I took whatever jobs I could get. I spent days crawling rooflines, swinging a hammer, or operating a commercial lawn mower. She worked as a preschool teacher at church, or in a kitchen.

For extra income, I played piano at a Baptist church on Sundays, Sunday nights, Wednesday nights, Thursday night choir practices, and Saturday night prayer meetings.

We learned things about each other. We learned important things.

We learned how to argue in the middle of a Winn-Dixie, and how to attend two Thanksgivings in one day. How to share a sunset, seated on the hood of a truck. How to read in bed with a flimsy battery-powered book light.

We learned how to travel together with paper maps. And af-



ter years of practice, we finally learned how to make a bed together without me getting murdered.

We learned how to hold each other when loved ones die. We learned how to sit together—me reading a magazine, her playing a crossword puzzle.

We learned how to wring our hands in hospital waiting rooms. We learned how bury dogs with a shovel and a burial sheet.

We learned how to make a life together.

A lot has changed since those days, but I still wake early in the mornings to write. I don't use a legal pad anymore, I use a laptop.

This morning, however, I did not write. Instead, I sifted through our storage closet. I found things. An old coffee-tin sewing kit, some scented candles, love poems, and the picture of a young man and his new

wife in their first apartment.

In the picture, the place had ugly gray walls, but that's the only ugly thing about this photo.

He's holding her. She's holding him. They are young. Their skin is smooth. I wish I could tell you how much I love these two people in the picture.

I wish you could see their faces, and their punch-drunk smiles. You can tell they belong together by looking at them. You simply know that their names should never be said apart.

It's as though nothing bad in this life can ever touch them. As though the two of them, in thought, and deed, and breath, and heart, shall never be lacerated apart.

I suppose that word is growing on me.

Happy Valentine's Day, Jamie.




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 Musing

# A Pastor's Ponderings: "What is Love?"



BY PASTOR DOUG STAUFFER

Many people naturally turn their attention toward love and relationships every February. Many couples celebrate Valentine's Day with cards, chocolates, flowers, and other romantic gestures. What does the Bible say about love? More importantly, how does God define love?

### Love Is Giving

The most well-known verse in Scripture, John 3:16, provides a foundational definition of love: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Love, as demonstrated by God, is selfless and sacrificial. It is giving, not for personal gain, but for the good of others. God's ultimate

gift of His Son is the highest expression of love—a love that seeks the salvation of souls.

Love is giving without expecting anything in return. Consider Jesus' words in Acts 20:35: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." True love seeks the welfare of others, as exemplified by God's ultimate gift to mankind.

### Love Is Sacrificial

The story of Ruth is a beautiful picture of sacrificial love. Ruth's decision to stay with her mother-in-law, Naomi, even after the death of her husband, shows a love that goes beyond mere obligation. Ruth declared: "Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God" (Ruth 1:16). Her selfless devotion not only provided Naomi with companionship but also led to her inclusion in the lineage of Jesus Christ.

### Love Is Forgiving

The parable of the prodigal son, found in Luke chapter 15, illustrates another vital aspect of love: forgiveness. When the wayward son returns home, his father runs to meet him, embraces him, and restores him to his place in the family. Despite the son's failures, the father's love



never wavered. His response to the prodigal reflects God's boundless mercy and grace.

"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). This verse, along with many others, underscores the forgiving nature of God's love. Just as the father in the parable forgave his son, God stands ready to forgive all who repent and trust wholly in His Son for the forgiveness of sins. "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise" (Ephesians 1:13).

### Love Is Enduring

The King James Bible uses

the word "charity" in First Corinthians chapter 13 to describe the enduring nature of love: "Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up" (1 Corinthians 13:4). While the modern concept of charity often refers to acts of kindness, the biblical term encompasses a deeper, enduring love that reflects God's nature.

The Bible continues by describing charity even further. This magnitude of love does not give up but "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, and endureth all things" (1 Corinthians 13:7). It is not based on fleeting emotions but a commitment to act in the best interest of others—regardless of the cost. Love is a choice, not a mere emotion.

### Love Is Eternal

God's love is not confined to time. Jeremiah 31:3 declares: "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore, with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." God's love is eternal and unchanging, providing a firm foundation for our lives. As we reflect on love this Valentine's season, let us remember that God's love is the standard by which all love should be measured.

May we strive to reflect God's giving, sacrificial, forgiving, enduring, and eternal love in our interactions with others. Let us not be content with superficial expressions of affection but seek to embody the kind of love that transforms lives and glorifies our Creator. This February 2025 (Valentine's month), remember that true love is found in the example of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Be a loving example to a world where love grows ever colder. Choose to make a difference!

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




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# An Interview with Lyle Lovett

BY WILL ESTELL

If you know much about music, then you likely know at least something about the talented Texan turned singer, songwriter, actor and producer, Lyle Lovett.

As if 14 albums, 25 singles to date, four Grammy Awards (including wins for Best Male Country Vocal Performance, and Best Country Album) were not enough to prove his creative genius, Lovett has also managed to snag over 40 acting credits in film and television, in addition to more than 30 vocal and scoring credits.

In addition to all of his entertainment accolades, however, the multi-talented Lovett, who celebrated his 67th birthday in November while performing at the recent Moon Crush Cowboy Moon event, can also add to that impressive resume: Dad to seven-year-old twins.

In advance of his Moon Crush performances, I sat down to talk with Lyle about everything from fatherhood, music, acting and his time playing along our beautiful beach communities:

**Man, You're quite the work horse. You're playing two of three nights at Moon Crush in Miramar Beach, and then you head out for a UK tour where you are literally playing five nights in a row, from Glasgow to Dublin to Belfast then two dates in London. That has to be incredibly exhausting to play so many days in a row. Most artists I talk with just don't do that—or can't. How do you handle that with such a small amount of vocal rest?**

You know, I don't really worry about doing shows multiple nights. My voice is not such an instrument that I have to take that kind of care of it. I mean, I sort of sound the way I sound no matter what [laughing].

**Have you always done numerous back-to-back dates like that, across most of your touring career?**

We have to, you know, just because of the size of our group. I mean, with the full band we had 32 people on the road this summer, so we really do have to work in five or six nights a week. And you know, I would rather be productive when I'm away

from home than have a night off somewhere and do nothing. So that then when I am home, I get to really be home and spend time with my family.

**There are plenty of artists that don't choose to do it that way, but one thing that I've found over the years, to quote one of my mom's training axioms, when she was a training specialist at Exxon, "There are many, many correct ways to do something." I'm guessing having twins in first grade also makes being home as often as possible very important, right?**

Absolutely it does. And I'm home far more than I'm gone. In fact, I've kind of kept track, and since they were born in 2017, I've only missed 12 days [at once] away from home, and that was just for logistical reasons. Many times, I even fly back home when I have one day off between shows. It's hard for me to go for more than a week without seeing them. So, most of the time, I'm able to get on an early flight out and be home even if it's just for the day, you know. But when I'm home, I'm really home and I get to take them to school in the morning.

**You've stayed close to**

**your roots having grown up just outside of Houston, and still calling that general area home. What made you stay there?**

Yeah, I grew up in Klein [a rural Texas town near Houston]. My mom was a Klein and my great, great grandpa was the first Klein there. So, that's our place. We've got a real family connection to the area. And that's just one reason it's important to me. Ours is one of the last rural properties in the area and we're surrounded by subdivisions at this point.

In many ways that place has been my life's work. To hang on to my grandpa's farm place, you know. Buying it back over the years after being sold out of the family back in the early 80's. And, you know, reassembling it.

**I think it's safe to say that your music is most typically associated with the country genre. But, the truth is, your compositions are really amalgamations of everything from blues and jazz to folk and gospel. What does Lyle Lovett consider his music to be, and where did that influence come from?**

I grew up in Houston, which was, as you know, one of the big media markets in the country.



PHOTO BY WILL ESTELL, ESTELL HUSSEY MEDIA, LLC

And I listened to pop music. I listened to country music. I listened to my parents' record collection, which had Glenn Miller records, Ray Price records, Ray Charles records and Nat King Cole records. So, to me, that was all just great music. My writing just reflects my taste, really.

**What about the gospel element to some of your songs. What brought that into the writing room?**

I grew up in church, but I grew up in the Lutheran church. So, singing that kind of gospel music didn't really happen. But, I always liked that kind of gospel music. My dad was raised Baptist, and when we'd go visit his

home church, I could hear the difference. They'd have a gospel quartet for music. I love church music and I've always been intrigued by different styles of music.

**I've asked artists from the late great Jimmy Buffett to Kenny Chesney to Darius Rucker. What the biggest changes have been over their musical career, that actually made a specific impact on how they do things. You've come up in some of that same time frame. What industry changes have impacted you the most?**

Well, the changes I've seen are more from just observing and listening, but I don't feel like they do impact me, as much as they have some. But, you know, there's certainly more pop influence in country than ever before. I mean, the style of country—what's considered country—has changed dramatically even since the 80's when my first record came out.

I've kind of always been into doing my own thing. I started out playing solo, or with one other person, doing my own songs. I mean, I've always played singer songwriter rooms and folk clubs.

*Continued on page 39*

## 5

### Reasons to Choose

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Will Estell, Realtor\*

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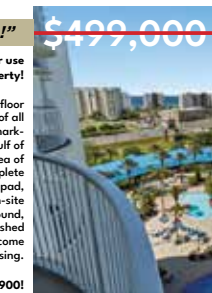
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Arts & Music

# MKAF Announces 2025 Concerts in the Village!

The stellar, 10-concert, live-music series, Thursdays, April 10 – June 12, will feature premier musicians and bands performing everything from classic rock and yacht rock to soulful tributes and high-energy hits. From iconic blues rock to soulful Amy Winehouse tributes, danceable yacht rock and Def Leppard classics—plus a special performance of Journey’s album *Escape* from start to finish by Black Jacket Symphony—the 2025 Concerts in the Village presented by the Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation offers a dynamic lineup for every music lover.

The area’s longest-running live concert series is held each spring on Thursday evenings at the MKAF Dugas Pavilion in Destin. This year’s family-friendly series will run from April 10 to June 12, featuring premier regional and national musicians and bands performing everything from classic rock and rhythm & blues to modern pop and nostalgic tributes.

The series kicks off on Thursday, April 10, 2025, with an electrifying performance by

The Fabulous Thunderbirds, setting the stage for an unforgettable season.

“This is an exceptional lineup of live music in a beautiful outdoor venue at an affordable price for a great cause,” says MKAF CEO Demetrius Fuller. “When you purchase a concert ticket, you’re helping us provide high-quality arts education and community engagement across Northwest Florida. Whether you’re a regular or joining us for the first time, we promise an unforgettable experience.”

Gates open at 6 p.m., and concerts begin at 7 p.m. This come-as-you-are outdoor concert series encourages attendees to bring a lawn chair, picnic, or wine. Food and beverages also will be available for purchase from local food trucks on-site.

## 2025 Concerts in the Village Schedule:

**April 10** – The Fabulous Thunderbirds Kick off the season with blues rock legends known for hits like *Tuff Enuff* and *Wrap It Up*.

**April 17** – Journeyman: An Eric Clapton Tribute Celebrate



Clapton’s timeless hits like *Layla* and *Wonderful Tonight* with stunning authenticity.

**April 24** – Yacht Rock Revue Dance to soft rock classics from the ‘70s and ‘80s by artists like Christopher Cross and Hall & Oates.

**May 1** – Black Jacket Symphony: Journey’s *Escape* Relive Journey’s iconic album *Escape*, featuring *Don’t Stop Believin’* and *Open Arms*.

**May 8** – Dear Amy: Amy Winehouse Tribute The official

estate-approved band, pays tribute to Winehouse’s soulful legacy with hits like *Rehab* and *Back to Black*.

**May 15** – Kickstand Jenny Experience a high-energy night with this dynamic rock ‘n’ roll band.

**May 22** – The Molly Ringwalds Journey through the ‘80s with this ultimate tribute to the decade’s greatest hits.

**May 29** – Petty Hearts Celebrate Tom Petty classics like *Free Fallin’* and *American Girl*.

**June 5** – A1A: Jimmy Buffett Tribute Escape to Margaritaville with the original, Jimmy Buffett estate-approved tribute band.

**June 12** – Adrenalize: Music of Def Leppard Rock out to Def Leppard’s biggest hits like *Pour Some Sugar on Me* and *Love Bites*.

General admission tickets are \$35 per person, plus a ticketing fee. Save \$5 by purchasing tickets in advance online at [MKAF.org](http://MKAF.org). Children under 12 attend for free. MKAF members enjoy early entry and free admission to every concert as well as discounted pricing for other MKAF events. A limited number of VIP tables (reserved for eight guests for the entire season) are available for \$3,000. To reserve a VIP table, call Deb Nissley at (850) 650-2226.

To purchase tickets, become an MKAF member, make a tax-deductible donation or provide a corporate sponsorship, visit [www.MKAF.org](http://www.MKAF.org) or call (850) 650-2226. Follow MKAF on Facebook and Instagram for the latest updates.



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APRIL 10 - JUNE 12  
Annual Thursday evening concert live music series featuring family-friendly premier musicians and bands performing everything from classic rock, reggae and disco to modern pop.

- April 10 | The Fabulous Thunderbirds
- April 17 | Journeyman: An Eric Clapton Tribute
- April 24 | Yacht Rock Revue
- May 1 | Black Jacket Symphony: Journey’s *Escape*
- May 8 | Dear Amy: Amy Winehouse Tribute
- May 15 | Kickstand Jenny
- May 22 | Molly Ringwalds
- May 29 | Petty Hearts
- June 5 | A1A: Jimmy Buffet Tribute
- June 12 | Adrenalize: Music of Def Leppard

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



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



# Sinfonia Gulf Coast Presents Crescendo! 2025:

## A Cultural & Culinary Extravaganza, Feb. 28 & March 2

Sinfonia Gulf Coast's Crescendo! 2025, its highly anticipated annual fundraiser will be held February 28 to March 2, 2025. This multi-day cultural and culinary extravaganza will bring together world-class entertainment, exceptional cuisine and fine wine in support of Sinfonia's music education and community outreach programs.

### Crescendo! 2025 Lineup

**Crescendo! Kick-Off Lunch:** Thursday, Jan. 30 at Bijoux Restaurant + Spirits in Miramar Beach. This chic luncheon will feature award-winning cuisine, elegant wines, and exclusive shopping opportunities. Tickets are \$175 per person.

**Vintner Dinners:** Friday, Feb. 28 at 6 p.m. Carefully curated dinners hosted in elegant homes and venues across the Emerald Coast, featuring "celebrity" chefs paired with renowned vintners. Tickets are \$500 per person.

**Crescendo! Main Event:** Sunday, March 2 at 11:30 a.m. at the Hilton Sandestin Beach

Golf Resort & Spa. Enjoy an all-inclusive afternoon of culinary delights, live and silent auctions, and exceptional entertainment. This year's theme is "Paint the Town Red." Tickets are \$225 per person.

### Featured Entertainment for the Main Event

Crescendo! 2025 will highlight extraordinary talent, including the acclaimed string rock band Violectric. Proclaimed "House Band for the City of Orlando" by Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer, Violectric captivates audiences with cutting-edge technology and live performances that span rock history, from The Beatles to The Weeknd. Led by artist and producer Michelle Jones, known for Grammy-nominated projects, Violectric's interactive performances promise an unforgettable experience.

Also featured is Bradley Copeland, a rising 25-year-old visual artist based in Santa Rosa Beach. Copeland, named Walton County Artist of the Year



(2023), will be showcasing her award-winning talent with a live painting demonstration and a pop-up art gallery. With over 600 pieces in her collection, Copeland's work reflects her passion and creativity, shaped by her experiences and surroundings. Her vibrant career includes solo exhibitions, public art projects, and a mural at Linda Miller Real Estate on 30A. Copeland's dedication to art as a transformative medium extends to her teaching at the Walton Correctional Institution,

where she leads an art program aimed at inspiring creativity and healing.

### Supporting Music Education

Proceeds from Crescendo! 2025 benefit Sinfonia Gulf Coast's mission to redefine the symphony experience and provide exceptional music education. Programs

supported include support of Sinfonia's signature music education program, musicians in schools, free orchestra concerts, transportation for students, and partnerships with Carnegie Hall's Link Up initiative and Ascension Sacred Heart's Arts in Medicine program and more.

Sinfonia Music & Artistic Director Demetrius Fuller states, "Crescendo! is more than a fundraiser; it's a celebration of our community's commitment to the arts. The funds raised allow us to continue bringing mu-

sic and education to thousands across Northwest Florida."

Are you a "treble" maker? If so, Sinfonia Gulf Coast invites you to join this honorary committee. For a \$650 contribution, Treble Makers will receive one ticket to the Crescendo! Kick Off Lunch and Main Event, recognition in the event program, a reserved seat at the closed-to-the-public student Link Up performances on March 12, 2025, at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center, a special Treble Maker gift, and more.

### Tickets, Sponsorship & Volunteering

Tickets are available at [www.SinfoniaGulfCoast.org](http://www.SinfoniaGulfCoast.org) or by calling (850) 460-8800. Sponsorship opportunities are also available. For inquiries, contact Daniel Milana at [dmilana@sinfoniagulfcoast.org](mailto:dmilana@sinfoniagulfcoast.org). For more information on how you can join Sinfonia's team of volunteers, contact Beth Clavier at (850) 460-8800 and [bclavier@sinfoniagulfcoast.org](mailto:bclavier@sinfoniagulfcoast.org).

# CRESCENDO!

An event supporting Sinfonia Gulf Coast

## VINTNER DINNERS

Friday, February 28, 2025

Intimate dinners in stunning homes and venues with a private chef & world class wines.






## MAIN EVENT!


Sunday, March 2, 2025

Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa  
Join us for world-class vintners, delectable bites, a seated lunch, expert spirit purveyors, amazing auction items and live music.

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

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850.460.8800



 Arts & Music

# ECTC Presents Timeless Love: Songs through the Ages Valentine's Day Musical Revue

Emerald Coast Theatre Company (ECTC) is proud to present Timeless Love: Songs through the Ages Valentine's Day Musical Revue on Friday, February 14th at 2pm and 6pm. Share this evening or afternoon event with the ones you love. Enjoy beautiful love songs from yesteryear performed by our top vocalists. This very special evening can be complemented with a bottle of wine and a sweet or

savory charcuterie box. This is a fun way to celebrate with your Valentine or Galentine and avoid the packed restaurants. We have everything you need right here at ECTC to spend a memorable afternoon or evening with your favorite people! Each couple will enjoy their own private table for the evening. If you would like to join another couple please leave their last name in the checkout questions.



Nathanael Fisher, co-founder and producing artistic director of ECTC says, "Grab your Valentine or Galentine and enjoy some beautiful music with delicious charcuterie and a bottle of wine. This intimate performance is the perfect way to show that special someone how much you care about them!"

Timeless Love will be staged on the Main Stage at ECTC located on the second floor of

560 Grand Boulevard in Grand Boulevard Town Center in Miramar Beach. Tickets are \$75 per person (\$150 per couple) and must be bought in pairs. If you need three tickets, call the box office at 850-684-0323. Purchase tickets online at [emeraldcoasttheatre.org/special-events](http://emeraldcoasttheatre.org/special-events).

Visit [www.emeraldcoasttheatre.org](http://www.emeraldcoasttheatre.org). Engage with ECTC on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube.

## Gulf Coast Jam Tops List of Most Popular Festivals in the World

Music Festival Wizard has named Gulf Coast Jam Presented by Jim Beam the number one festival in its Top 50 Most Popular Fests In The World 2024 – Voter's Choice poll. The respected coalition of writers, photographers, artists and musicians road trip around the world annually searching for the "perfect" music festival. For the first time this year, they let fans weigh in on their top 50 favorites in the U.S. and Europe.

"This is absolutely amazing," said Gulf Coast Jam Execu-

tive Producer Rendy Lovelady. "Year after year, we put blood, sweat and tears into booking the best talent line up and presenting the best experience possible for our Jammers. This is such an honor to get recognized in this way!"

Music Festival Wizard staff listed Gulf Coast Jam Presented by Jim Beam #24 in their Top 50 Most Popular Fests in the USA for 2024 early last month, which was culled from a list of 1,800 events between June 1, 2023, and October 31, 2024.

Billboard Magazine also listed Gulf Coast Jam one of "The 10 Best Country Music Festivals."

"To kick off the year with this kind of recognition is truly astounding," added Gulf Coast Jam Presented by Jim Beam COO Mark Sheldon. "We have the best staff putting on an amazing event in one of the most beautiful locations in the world, we're proud the music and touring industry and fans see that!"

Gulf Coast Jam was launched in Panama City Beach in 2013



Blake Shelton, Tyler Childers, Lainie Wilson and Sam Hunt are set to headline the 13th annual festival May 29-June 1, 2024 at Frank Brown Park in beautiful Panama City Beach. Twenty additional artists round out the four days of beachin'

and has hosted virtually every top name in country music. The four-day event has become an annual destination for fans from all 50 states and 14 foreign countries. It was the first large-scale music event in the world to return after the Covid shutdown and recorded sellouts of 30,000 the last two years.

country music. Available passes are on sale at [www.GulfCoastJam.com](http://www.GulfCoastJam.com), and payment plans are available for all pass levels.

Follow Gulf Coast Jam Presented by Jim Beam at [www.GulfCoastJam.com](http://www.GulfCoastJam.com) and on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.



**February 14<sup>th</sup> 2PM & 6PM**

Share this evening or afternoon event with the ones you love. Enjoy beautiful love songs from yesteryear performed by our top vocalists. This special evening can be complemented with a bottle of wine and a sweet or savory charcuterie box. This is a fun way to celebrate and avoid the packed restaurants. We have everything you need right here at ECTC.



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Presents



**February 20<sup>th</sup> - March 2<sup>nd</sup>**

In this hilarious comedic romp a la "Golden Girls," four friends have sworn to keep the promise they made on the night of their Senior Prom: to be in each other's weddings...no matter what. More than thirty years later, these Southern friends-for-life are still making "the long walk" for each other, determined to honor that vow.

## CREATE with Big Orange House Designs Calendar

**Feb 1** - Kids HEART Art: Sat. morning creative class w/ JoJo! \$26.75

**Feb 1** - OPEN Studio Leather & Pearls: Saturday 12-2 p.m. Make what you want. Sherrie will guide you! \$26.75

**Feb 4** - Join us for Laurel's POTTERY Series! 4-week journey of creativity! Starts Feb 4. \$214

**Feb 4** - Bicycle Painting with Donna: Unleash your creativity painting with artist Donna Ammons! \$58.85

**Feb 5** - Valentine's Cards with Donna! \$37.45

**Feb 8** - Valentine's Cookie Tray: Join us for a fun morning decorating Sugar Cookies for Valentine's Day! \$26.75

**Feb 11** - Long Beachy Key Necklace Evening: Leather & Pearls - add

sea glass if you choose. YOU are the DESIGNER! \$74.90

**Feb 12** - Valentines Cards with Donna. \$37.45

**Feb 13** - Mini Heart Cake w/ Baker Mery. Decorate a 6-inch heart cake and enjoy some wine & snacks! \$37.45

**Feb 27** - Come to the TABLE. Active Duty Military, Veterans and Families—Dinner at JoJo's. 2 hrs. 30 min. \$5

To sign up: [bigorangehousedesigns.com](http://bigorangehousedesigns.com)

Want to reserve a table or host your own party? We would love to talk to you! Whether you want a private event or a table reserved inside a class. Corporate event with food? Contact JoJo at (334) 320-6658.



**LYLE LOVETT**

*continued from page 35*

So, my approach to performing has always been more from that point of view. I really never was thinking about how I can write a hit like one that's on the radio right now, or what sort of styles I need to write. I was able to make up songs that appeal to me for personal reasons, rather than, you know, sort of trying to guess what the market might want at any given time.

**What keeps you going? What is the driving force behind Lyle Lovett all these years later?**

I just love being able to do what I get to do. It was very important to my parents that I went to college and got a degree, so I did. My parents both worked really hard and made decisions based on what they had to do. And, by doing that, they were able to afford me the ability to instead do something I wanted

to do. I never ever want to take that for granted, and, I believe I owe it to them and me to be the best I can at this. No matter how long I do it.

**What would you be doing if you weren't writing and performing music or acting?**

I have no idea, Will. [laughing].

**Then I guess it's a damn good thing that you're so good at what you do. [both laughing]**

**I saw you perform at 30A Songwriter's Festival and you've mentioned to me that was your first time along our Northwest Florida beach communities. What do you think of our area? Have you been able to hit the beaches and spend any time out taking in scenery that has drawn so many of your fellow artists, and Texans, to spend their vacations along our shores?**

When I was there for the 30A Songwriter's Festival [2023], that was really the first time that I'd spent any time there, besides just driving through.

April, my wife, used to go to Destin every summer with her parents and she's really fond of the area. I mean it's beautiful, as you know. I'm excited that we get to be there for a few days this weekend. I grew up going to Galveston and Surfside [Texas beaches] where the beaches are quite different. Where the sand is kind of brown. So, it's a whole different deal. And I know it is quite the destination for lots of folks.

**Any parting thoughts or perils of Texan wisdom you'd like to leave for our readers?**

Get out and see the shows! Our shows with The Large Band [the actual name of Lovett's full band] are just incredible. I absolutely love what the people in my band bring to my songs and how

they make my songs better and more musical. You know, I get to play music with some of my heroes. Legends in the business. I mean, we have Russ Kunkel playing drums. Leland Skylar playing bass and Jim Cox playing piano. James Herr along with

Jeff White on guitar. That's quite the lineup, right? You know, to step on stage with them when those guys are trying their best to help me, that's a great feeling.



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