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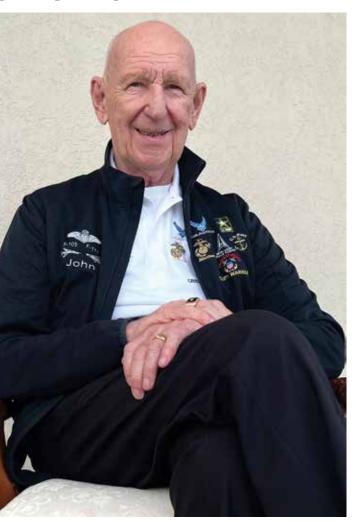
Postal Customer Local

Meet Hometown Hero John Wambough: Flying Against the Odds

By Kelly-Murphy Redd

John Wambough says courage and love of country was the glue and inspiration that kept the F-105 fighter jet pilots climbing high in the sky at record speeds over North Vietnam. Retired Colonel John H. Wambough, remembers the heroic past of his pilot friends who daily went into battle facing being shot down, perhaps rescued, killed or falling into the hands of the North Vietnamese. John says he never thought of himself as a hero, though his F-105 took on enemy fire. He says, "The real heroes were those who fought bravely and didn't make it back safely. Many were unmercifully tortured for years in the infamous "Hanoi Hilton" and many never returned."

Born in 1939, John grew up in Glen Cove, Long Island, N.Y. He attended New York University (NYU) and joined the Cadet Corps, became Captain of the Pershing Rifle Trick Drill Team, and



Cadet Corps Commander his senior year. Graduating NYU in 1962, he attended Flight School at Vance Air Force Base during the Cuban Missile Crisis. He flew the B52G Bomber during the Cold War against the Soviet Union. He volunteered to fly F-105 Fighters in 1967.

During the Vietnam War, John volunteered to fly the F-105 Thunderchief (THUD) and trained at Nellis AFB in Las Vegas, Nev.

• 1967 was the peak year for pilot losses. F-105 pilots averaged getting shot down every 33 missions.

The rescue rate was 50%.
180 F-105 pilots were killed in action during the Vietnam War.

• 107 pilots became prisoners of war (POW's).

• 145 F-105 pilots were shot down and rescued.

Of the pilots who became POWs, most were tortured

JOHN WAMBOUGH continued on page 2

No Child Should Carry Their Life in a Trash Bag: Kay's Carry-On Gives Foster Kids Hope on Wheels

By Michelle Ruschman

When children in foster care are forced to leave their homes because of dire circumstances or because they've aged out, they are provided with garbage bags to transport their personal items. What's also used to hold food scraps, used tissue and discarded mail will now carry the clothes, toiletries and personal treasures of children who have already endured so much. No person should feel their things are being treated like trash, especially a child who has already experienced the unpredictability of fear, trauma and displacement. Area local, Dr. Kay Kizer, veteran, author and founder of Kay's Carry-On, has made it her

> KAY'S CARRY-ON continued on page 2



The Community

JOHN WAMBOUGH

continued from page 1

during captivity via beatings, stress positions and prolonged isolation to extract information and propaganda confessions. At least 7 F-105 pilots died in captivity. The extreme loss rate of F-105 pilots was due to highly sophisticated air defenses in North Vietnam, second to only Moscow, to include 10,000 anti-aircraft artillery guns (AAA), Soviet supplied surface to air missiles (SAMs) and MIG fighters. F-105 missions were so dangerous, by the late 1960s, the odds of an F-105 pilot completing a 100-mission tour were less than 50%.

Micromanagement of the Vietnam War by the sitting President of the United States, Lyndon B. Johnson and Secretary of Defense Robert Mc-Namara also contributed to high loss rates. President Johnson bragged, "They (pilots) cannot hit an outhouse without my

approval." Predictable routes of attack and hideous Rules of Engagement prevented hitting targets necessary to win the War. The first year and a half into the War, 97% of the Joint Chiefs of Staff's recommended targets in North Vietnam were off limits to air strikes. The N. Vietnamese were able to build up defenses to attack our aircraft when we were finally permitted to attack targets previously off-limits.

Pilots noticed the uncanny ability of the N. Vietnamese to move AAA and SAMs into position before we could hit assigned targets in N. Vietnam. The reason was revealed many years after the war during a TV interview with President Johnson's Secretary of State Dean Rusk. He admitted the following, "We didn't want to harm the N. Vietnamese people, so we passed the targets to the Swiss Embassy in Washington with instructions to pass them to the N. Vietnamese government."

of Operation Rolling Thunder. The F-105 accounted for approximately 75% of the sustained bombing campaign against N. Vietnam during Rolling Thunder. Targets included heavily defended rail lines, bridges, supply depots and missile sites to stop the movement of war materials going to South Vietnam to be used against our troops and S. Vietnam troops. Civilian populations were not targeted. John's combat tour included strikes into N. Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, with only a single mission into South Vietnam in support of our troops in contact with enemy forces (Viet Cong).

John loved flying the F-105. He describes it as "fantastic." The F-105 was the biggest and fastest fighter-bomber ever produced. It could go up to 1,000 mph off the deck. MIGs (fighter aircraft supplied by Russia to the North Vietnamese) couldn't match its speed. In September of 1968, John

began a tour of duty in the 34th Tactical Fighter Squadron (TFS) at KORAT, Thailand expecting to fly 100 combat missions in 6 months. But due to the high losses of F-105 aircraft during the Vietnam War, in 1969, the F-105s were withdrawn from combat in the 34th TFS and replaced with F-4 fighter aircraft. John went on to an assignment as an Air Operations Officer at 7th Air Force, Saigon, followed by assignment to the 12th TFS at Kadena AB, Okinawa. He retired in 1990 at Hurlburt Field after $27\frac{1}{2}$ years in the Air Force. Celebration to Honor Vietnam Veterans

John is looking forward to the Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber's Honoring Our Heroes celebration marking the 50th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War.

The tribute to honor our Vietnam veterans begins April 28-29 with free events at the Air Force Armament Museum in Fort Walton Beach, 5-8 p.m.

The Heroes' Tribute Banquet follows on April 30, 5-9 p.m., at the Destin/Fort Walton Beach Fairgrounds & Event Center.

Keynote speaker is Rocky Bleier, four-time Super Bowl champion and Vietnam veteran. Other featured speakers include decorated Marine and Warriors, Inc. founder Dale Dye, and Col. Ed Hubbard, a former POW who spent over six years in captivity in North Vietnam.

Register for the banquet at: https://www.fwbchamber. org/events/details/heroes-tribute-banquet-honoring-our-vietnam-veterans-20292.

Publisher's Note

This month marks the 50th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War. In recognition of this milestone, we are honored to share stories that pay tribute to the courage, sacrifice, and resilience of those who served. We thank our Vietnam veterans and their families for their service and invite our readers to join us in remembering their legacy.

John flew missions as a part

KAY'S CARRY-ON

continued from page 1

mission to help children in foster care have more dignity, hope and respect. "When a child is removed from a home, they are provided with two black trash bags to transport their belongings. To me, that's just so demeaning, and I know that from personal experience. I grew up in the foster care system and I have been a foster mom."

Dr. Kizer believes it was divine inspiration that Kay's

Carry-On became Dr. Kizer's mission. "The Lord was specific about it being rolling luggage. It means even a five-year-old can handle their luggage, because the wheels help them pull easily. Whether they have to get into a case worker's car or arrive at a bus terminal, train station or airport, they're ready with luggage and not just trash bags. It's making sure that they have some sense of comfort that their belongings are secure and don't look like something that is being thrown away.



Dr. Kizer's goal is to have a carry-on program in every state, so that others will grow this idea wherever they live. "All they have to do is have someone be in charge of collecting. It's a wonderful thing to help children this way and it can get a community excited to do this together."

Not only does Dr. Kizer encourage the collection of carry-ons, but she also hopes these children can get some essentials, especially those who age out of the system at age 18. "For the young ones, stuffed animals are always a source of comfort. But, at any age, blankets, toothbrushes and toothpaste, towels and face cloths, and Bibles are also needed. I've even given a child their favorite cereal with their name on it so they had some sense of ownership and familiarity."

Dr. Kizer also hopes that having a rolling carry-on will provide more security. "Foster children can go through multiple moves, and each time there is the possibility of theft or loss in the displacement. If a child has to move in the middle of the night, they know that luggage is theirs and their belongings can be secured with a simple lock. A trash bag can't provide that."

Donated luggage is given to foster homes, shelters and foster parent agencies. With this in mind, Dr. Kizer is grateful for every donation, but encourages people who are thinking of donating luggage, to bring "like new," if not brand new. "Of course, each donation that is given is wonderful. But, we want to make sure that each piece of luggage that is presented to a child reflects that they are valuable, not just something second-hand. In a moment of upheaval, the hope is that it will be seen as a gift that reflects that they're cherished."

To partner with her organization or donate to Kay's Carry-On, visit www.kayscarryon. org. If you have any questions, or you're an author who would like to contribute to her anthology series, The Faces of Foster Care (found on Amazon), contact Dr. Kizer by emailing kaykizer3@gmail.com or calling 936-240-8762.



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> P.O. Box 1424 Santa Rosa Beach, FL 32459

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

Director, Advertising Sales Scott Miller Scott@LifeMediaGrp.com

Production & Layout Kim Harper

Writers William Blanken Corey Dobridnia Sherry Jones Christopher Manson Barbara Palmgren Kelly Murphy-Redd Michelle Ruschman "Doc" Doug Stauffer

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More Than Commerce: Freeport Merchants Association Powers Community Growth

By WILLIAM BLANKEN, PRESIDENT

The Freeport Merchants Association (FMA) is a driving force behind the success of local businesses in Freeport, working to create a supportive environment where all enterprises can grow and thrive. Now with almost 200 members, FMA is designed to promote economic development, host community events and provide a unified voice for local merchants.

At its core, the FMA is about connecting businesses to customers, merchants to one another and the entire business community to the larger goals of Freeport. The association regularly organizes events that draw both locals and visitors, increasing foot traffic and exposure for member businesses. Seasonal festivals and themed weekends not only boost sales, but also reinforce Freeport's identity as a vibrant, welcoming place to shop, dine and explore.

At the FMA, we equip our members with information and resources designed to enhance



their businesses and drive success.

The FMA has two ongoing events per month. One of the highlights of our calendar is the morning meeting held on the third Thursday of every month at 8 a.m. This gathering takes place at an esteemed FMA members' establishment, where we come together to connect, share and grow. At each morning meeting, we have the privilege of featuring a breakfast sponsor who will share valuable insights about their business as well as a distinguished speaker who brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise tailored specifically for the business community.

An evening social takes place on the second Thursday of every month at 6 p.m., hosted at one of our valued FMA members' establishments. This event is designed to create a relaxed and inviting atmosphere where community members can come together to network, share experiences and build lasting professional relationships. Food and beverages are provided by a FMA Member.



Beyond events, the FMA supports business development through resources, networking opportunities and advocacy. New businesses can lean on the experience of long-established members, while all benefit from being part of a recognized, respected organization that works to amplify their voices. Membership in the Freeport Merchants Association is available for an annual fee of \$125. This investment provides access to valuable networking opportunities, local business advocacy, promotional support and community events designed to support and grow your business.

Importantly, the FMA's ef-

Continued on page 33

Jude Frances



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(Community

Vietnam Vets Ed Hubbard and Tom Moody: Heroes Among Us

By Kelly Murphy-Redd

Local resident Ed Hubbard joined the United States Air Force in 1955. He flew the RB66 Destroyer while stationed in England and spent nine months in France. One Saturday afternoon, he received orders to deploy to Thailand. Ed dropped off his family in the U.S. and went to the Philippines for three weeks of survival school. He was stationed at Takhli Air Base in Thailand flying into Vietnam. Thirty days later, he was shot down by a surface to air missile. Ed spent eight hours in the jungle before he was captured. He spent six years, seven months and 12 days in prison.

In prison, two Cuban interrogators controlled 10 Americans in one building. One day, guards threw a new American prisoner on the floor. He was comatose, couldn't speak or eat, and was beaten badly. After three days, they had to do something.

The group decided to forcefeed him twice a day. They did this for a year. At this time Ed had a broken jaw, lost 75 pounds, and boils all over his body. He was supposed to die. Feeding this comatose American taught him something. He cites a quote from the book, Man's Search for Meaning: "Life without a purpose is no life at all." Keeping this man alive kept Ed alive.

Feeding took one-and-a-half hours. Four people held him down. They held his nose shut and put a stick in his mouth. He had to swallow to breath. He regained consciousness one time and was almost normal, but in 1970, he died.

Ed was put in solitary confinement twice for 30 days each and once for 91 days. He wasn't cooperating with the indoctrination and wrote something the guards didn't like. He was beaten every day for 28 days.

In solitary, Ed paced the floor all day talking to himself, convincing himself he would be O.K. He decided if he changed the way he viewed the situation, he could change how he dealt with it. He tried to think of who had it worse than he did. His answer was orphans, because they don't know who their parents are. He decided 90% of people in the world had it worse than he did.

He promised himself he would survive no matter what. Ed says a pity trap is where you go to die. He vowed he would never feel sorry for himself again and would never have an-



Ed Hubbard

other bad day as long as he lived.

In January of 1973 the peace treaty ended his tour and he was released. He flew for 12 more years.

Ed had no problem adjusting to coming home. In fact, he went back to Hanoi on the 30th and 50th anniversaries of Vietnam. Walking out of the prison door, he looked around, and thought he would never have done all he has done in the last 50 years had he not been a POW.

He has been to 84 countries and spoken to four million people as a motivational speaker. He has no animosity towards the North Vietnamese. He saw many POWs who were filled with hate and they suffered. Ed says it up to us to decide how we want to live. He says you can't make him have a bad day and he hasn't had one since.





Tom Moody

Tom Moody joined the United States Army out of high school. His dad wanted him to go to college and become a civil engineer. Tom decided college was not for him and went to the Navy recruiting office downtown. He wanted to be a pilot and the Navy told him he had to have a four-year degree. So, Tom went to the Army recruiter. They had an opening for military police. After some time, Tom decided he didn't want to be a security guard and heard the 82nd Airborne needed paratroopers. He worked his way up and joined the 1st Army Aviation Battalion, was a part of the Rangers, went to jump school, and OCS school. He went through flight school and became a helicopter pilot. He was the only Sergeant who was Airborne Ranger qualified.

He was part of the Aviation Battalion at Ft. Bragg, renamed the 118th Air Assault Unit. This unit was first into Vietnam. Tom received the Soldiers Medal for Heroism in 1970 for the following incident.

Tom was flying the command and control helicopter above the landing zone on a mission to transport troops to a particular opening with jungle on both sides. One helicopter was there to disperse smoke to protect the troops from being seen and shot at. This helicopter ran into a tree, tipped over and caught fire. Tom landed his helicopter close to the wreckage. He ran into the fire, grabbed the pilot, and carried him 50 yards to his helicopter. He went back for the crew chief and carried him over his shoulder. He transported the pilot and crew chief to medivac and they survived.

Tom spent 39 months in Vietnam! After his first tour, the Army sent him back to the U.S. and told him he was going to Germany. Tom said he wanted to go back to Vietnam. After the second year, the Army sent him back to the U.S. and again told him he was going to Germany. Tom said he still didn't want to go to Germany and wanted to go back to Vietnam. That third tour was extended three months.

During his first tour, the helicopter door gunners, from the 25th Infantry out of Hawaii, only had M14 rifles. The next tour, the door gunners had machine guns. They often coordinated with the Air Force F100s for support. One time Tom was sent up north at Thanksgiving to rescue POWs but they had been moved.

He says they did what they were told to do, didn't ask questions, and didn't know the big picture. They were there to support their brothers. In retrospect, Tom thinks the U.S. government got us into a war we shouldn't have gotten into. We lost over 50 thousand men. Their hands were tied, because they couldn't shoot unless shot at.

Out of 7000 helicopters in Vietnam, 3000 were destroyed. Eleven hundred helicopter pilots lost their lives and 1,200 crew were killed. From start to end, 100,000 pilots and crew served in Vietnam.

After Tom retired, he owned a well-known boating business in Destin. He is a humble and generous man who enthusiastically acknowledges the contribution and bravery of others. He has been named Crestview's Citizen of the Year.

This year the Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce will be hosting "Honoring Our Heroes," a tribute to our Vietnam veterans on the 50th anniversary of the end of the war. The April 28-30th event will be filled with historical presentations, panel discussions, and a banquet featuring distinguished speakers. The event is open to the public, with free admission to the educational programs on April 28-29. Ticket information for the Heroes' Tribute Banquet on April 30 is available online at FWBchamber.org.

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Community

Bay Buzz Events

Honoring Our Heroes April 28-30

The Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce will host the "Honoring Our Heroes: Welcome Home" tribute from April 28-30, 2025, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War's conclusion. The event culminates with the Heroes' Tribute Banquet on Wednesday, April 30, from 5-9 p.m. at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Fairgrounds + Event Center (1958 Lewis Turner Blvd). The evening features keynote speaker Rocky Bleier, a decorated Vietnam veteran and four-time Super Bowl champion, along with special guests Dale Dye and Col. Ed Hubbard. Tickets are \$40 for general admission and \$19.75 for military members who served before 1975, with

reserved tables for 10 available at \$600. For more information or to purchase tickets, visit fwbchamber.org.

Burning Up the Beaches May 1-3

The 14th Annual Burning Up the Beaches classic car weekend returns to Destin Commons from May 1-3, 2025, offering a high-octane celebration for car enthusiasts and families alike. The event kicks off Thursday with early registration, followed by Friday's coastal cruise and an '80s-themed dinner party at The Island Resort. The main event-the car show-takes place Saturday, May 3, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., featuring classic cars, live music by DJ Salty, a valve cover race, vendors, and awards. Proceeds benefit The Arc of the Emerald Coast, supporting individuals with developmental disabilities. For registration and details, visit burningupthebeaches.com.

Let's Taco 'Bout It! 12th Annual Tequila & Taco Fest May 8-11

So. Many. Tacos! Chicken, Pork, Beef, Steak, Shrimp, Barba-

coa – you name it; we have it at the wildly popular Tequila & Taco Festival – the 2nd longest-running Tequila and Taco Fest in the U.S. Enjoy Tequila and Margarita tastings, live music, DJ and face painting. and recently honored with the Gold Award for Best Event in the 2025 Perfect in Walton County Awards! Sample many types of Tequilas and Margaritas from



Blancos, Reposados, Anejos and even Mezcals. So, get ready for Tacos, Tequila and fun and find your favorite at the 12th Annual Tequila & Taco Festival, happening May 8-11, 2025, at The Village of Baytowne Wharf at Sandestin! Local restaurants and food trucks will compete for the Best Taco on the Emerald Coast with a \$2,500 grand prize.

Enjoy Tequila and Margarita tastings, live music, DJ and face painting.

Event Highlights:

Tequila Dinner – May 8, 6:30-9 p.m. at Cantina Laredo (\$79.99). Call 850-654-5649 for reservations.

Kickoff Party – May 9, 6-9 p.m. at Baytowne Wharf. Live music, unlimited appetizers, tequila & margarita samplings (\$75).

Festival Main Event – May 10, 1-4 p.m. (VIP noon-4 p.m.) Unlimited taco tastings & tequila samplings (\$40-\$175). VIP at Jimmy Buffett's 5 O'Clock Somewhere.

BYE BYE Brunch – May 11, 11 a.m.-2 p.m. at Sunset Bay Cafe at Sandestin. \$50 includes two Margaritas or Bloody Marys (limited seating).

New Yacht Charters – that include Tequila, Latin Small Plates, Boating and one VIP Ticket per person.

Get your tickets NOW at EfestEvents.com. Part of the proceeds benefit Fisher House and A Bed For Me Foundation. Don't miss this Emerald Coast favorite!

Swing into Action FORE the Love of Animals May 3

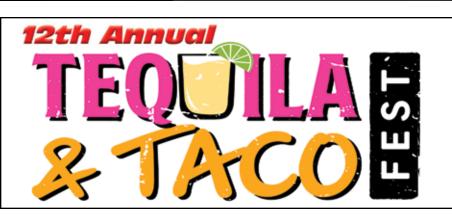
Get ready to hit the greens for a great cause May 3 at the Links Golf Club at Sandestion! Registration is now open for the FORE! the Love of Animals Golf Tournament, presented by Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort and benefiting Alaqua Animal Refuge. This premier event combines friendly competition, camaraderie and a shared commitment to helping animals in need. Foursomes are \$850 and individuals are \$250 with proceeds directly supporting Alaqua's mission of providing shelter, safety, and second chances to animals in need.

REGISTER NOW at https://app.eventcaddy.com/ events/fore-the-love-of-animals-2025.

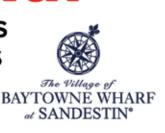
Get Your Pirate on at the Billy Bowlegs Festival May 15-19

The 69th Annual Billy Bowlegs Pirate Festival will take place in Fort Walton Beach from May 15 to May 19, 2025. Festivities begin Thursday evening with a Pre-Invasion meet-andgreet downtown. On Friday, May 16, the Landing hosts a Pirate Skirmish starting at 5 p.m., featuring live music and fireworks. Saturday, May 17, brings the main event at Fort Walton Beach Landing (131 Brooks St. SE), running from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., with vendor booths, food trucks, live music, and the Pirate Landing at 3 p.m. The celebration concludes Monday, May 19, with the Torchlight Parade along Eglin Parkway beginning at 7 p.m. For more details, visit billybowlegsfestival.com.

Continued on page 11



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2025

EVENTS

Happenings Around the Bay

MAY

01 | Justice on the Block 10 am | Valparaiso Community Library | Valparaiso

> Concerts in the Village: Black Jacket Symphony: Music of Journey 7 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville



- Greater FWB Chamber First Friday Coffee 02 7 am | Christian Life Center at FBC | FWB Science Labs for High School Homeschoolers 9 am | NERD Lab | Niceville Bugs on the Bayou 10 Pre-Show Cruise 5:30 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville
- "Hello, Dolly!" presented by the NHS Theatre 02-Various Showtimes | Niceville High School | Niceville 03
- The Ground Up Project's 2nd Annual 03 5K Run/Walk 8 am | Christ Our Redeemer Catholic Church | Niceville 4th Annual FORE! The Love of Animals Golf Tournament benefiting Alaqua Animal Refuge



Florida Concealed Carry Weapons Class 10 am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso Burning Up the Beaches Car Show 9 am-3 pm | Destin Commons Live Music: Autumn Poultry

6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville

- ArtsQuest Fine Arts Festival 03-| 10 am | Grand Boulevard at Sandestin | Miramar Beach 04
- Women's Climbing Circle 04 5 pm | Rock Out Climbing Gym | Destin
- Niceville Young Professionals Lunch Meeting 06 11:30 am | Niceville Valparaiso Chamber | Niceville

- Concerts in the Village: Dear Amy: Amy Winehouse Tribute 08 7 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation | Destin
- Tequila & Taco Festival Kickoff Party 09 6 pm | Baytowne Wharf | Sandestin
- "Hello, Dolly!" presented by the NHS Theatre 09-Various Showtimes | Niceville High School | Niceville 10
- **Tequila & Taco Festival** 10 Main Event 1-4 pm | Village of Baytowne Wharf | Sandestin Substantial Music Presents: The Piano Man 7 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville
- **Chess Night** 13 6 pm | LJ Schooners Restaurant | Niceville
- Niceville Valparaiso Chamber Second 14 Wednesday Breakfast 7:15 am | Niceville Community Center | Niceville
- **Billy Bowlegs Pirate Skirmish** 15 5 pm | Fort Walton Beach Landing | FWB Concerts in the Village: Kickstand Jenny 7 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation | Destin
- Florida Concealed Carry Weapons Class 17 10 am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso Northwest Florida Ballet Student Concert 12 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville **Billy Bowlegs Festival** 10 am-6 pm | Fort Walton Beach Landing | FWB Spring Home & Boat Show 10 am-5 pm | Northwest Florida Fairgrounds | FWB Tchaikovsky x Drake 7:30 pm | Destin-FWB Convention Center | Okaloosa Island



- The Pittman's Magical Variety Show 18 6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville
- **GSSF Indoor League** 19 10 am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso 69th Annual Billy Bowlegs Torchlight Parade 7 pm | FWB
- Paint the Bay with The Traveling Painter 20 5:30 pm | LJ Schooners Restaurant | Niceville

	EVENTS
	5
21	Mom and Tot Group
	10 am Growing Green Families Valparaiso
22	Concerts in the Village: Molly Ringwalds
	7 pm Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation Destin
24	Yoga for Grief
	7 pm Yoga By You Studio Niceville
25	Sinfonia Goes Pops!
	7:30 pm Alys Beach
29	Concerts in the Village: Petty Hearts
	7 pm Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation Destin
	68th Annual Blessing of the Fleet
	4 pm Behind Brotula's on the Destin Harbor
31	Gretsch and The Modern Eldorados
	6 pm 3rd Planet Brewing Niceville
	ONGOING EVENTS
	Summer Lawn Games in Grand Park
	5 pm Daily Grand Boulevard Miramar Beach
	Free Pirate Show
	5 pm Mon Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar FWB
	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 Movies on the Beach

7:30 pm | Tues | Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar | FWB One Stroke Painting (LvI 2) with Sheila Mahony 10:30am | Fri | Artful Things | Niceville

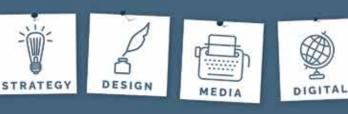
Yoga at Turkey Creek 9 am | Sat | Turkey Creek Nature Trail | Niceville Brunch on the Bayou 9 am | Sun | LJ Schooners Restaurant | Niceville

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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5a

Buzz

The community



Retired Officers Wives Club Hosts Annual Spring Fashion Show

The Retired Officers Wives Club welcomed spring with its annual fashion show at their monthly luncheon, held at the Clubhouse Grill at the Fort Walton Beach Golf Course. Members modeled the latest styles from the Eglin BX store.

Mid Bay Rotary Donates \$500 to Heritage Museum

In April, the Mid Bay Rotary Club presented a \$500 donation to the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida trustees Dr. Marie Hallion and Dr. Barbara Palmgren. During the Rotary breakfast, guest speaker Dr.



Palmgren shared details about the museum's new room addition and its upcoming 2025 exhibit on the 50th Anniversary of the Eglin Vietnamese Refugee Camp.

Photo L-R: Rotary President Harry Holmes, Dr. Marie Hallion, Dr. Barbara Palmgren, Rotary Officer Dave Swanick.



Niceville High Principal Named Regional Director of FASSP

Niceville High School Principal Charlie Marello has been appointed Northwest Florida Regional Director for the Florida Association of Secondary School Principals (FASSP), a division of the Florida Association of School Administrators (FASA). Marello brings 15 years of leadership experience to the role, currently in his ninth year at NHS following previous posts at Destin Middle and Emerald Coast Middle Schools.

Builders FirstSource Opens New Truss Plant in DeFuniak Springs

Builders FirstSource (BFS) is celebrating the grand opening of its new 50,000-square-foot truss plant in DeFuniak Springs on Thursday, May 8, from 4 to 7 p.m. at 205 Progress Lane. Hosted by Contractors Con-



nect, the event includes tours, food, drinks, live music by Sean Williams, and a ribbon cutting with the Walton Area Chamber of Commerce. The state-ofthe-art facility employs 50 staff members and serves the Central Gulf Coast from Walton to Franklin counties, producing up to 14 sets of roof and floor trusses daily. BFS is the nation's largest supplier of structural building products and services for residential construction and remodeling.



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NHS Theatre Brings Hello, Dolly! to the Stage

The Niceville High School (NHS) Theatre Department will present the Broadway musical comedy classic Hello, Dolly! in May at the NHS Auditorium. With a score by Jerry Herman and book by Michael Stewart, the show tells the story of turn-of-the-century widow matchmaker Dolly Levi and her pursuit to win over and marry Horace Vandergelder, Yonkers' "well known, unmarried half a millionaire" all the while meddling in the love lives of those around her. "Musical comedy is my favorite genre of theatre, and I have been a huge fan of Hello, Dolly! ever since I was in high school and saw the movie on TV, says NHS Theatre Director Ritchie Jackson. "It's always a joy to direct a show that you have loved for years, and it's an even sweeter joy to introduce my cast and crew to this delightful show - many of whom were not familiar with the show going into it. I love opening their eyes to great Broadway classics and watching them fall in love with them too."

A 1982 NHS graduate, Jackson is in his 9th year and directing his 15th production as Theatre Director at Niceville High School. Under his leadership, the department has seen record-breaking success, with A Chorus Line, Chicago, and Newsies setting new box office records for Okaloosa County high schools. "We continue to set the bar high at NHS Theatre," says Jackson. "And I take great pride in that. I know better than anyone that some high school theatre shows can be painful to watch. Some school programs give a part to anyone who wants one or do shows just for the fun of it without much care about production values or doing truly good work. But, at NHS we mean business. Our department's motto is 'Bringing theatrical excellence to the stage,' and we won't settle for anything less."

Jackson says nearly 100 students audition for each show, and those cast undergo in-depth character and scene study to bring high-caliber performances to life. "Our actors then do character analysis and scene study work to help them truly grasp their character and motivations, and the result is top notch entertainment that features the tremendous talent pool we have at Niceville High. Together with a recent massive lighting and sound upgrade, a new stage floor and curtains, amazing set designs, and gorgeous costumes, NHS' shows truly stand out and keep bringing our crowds back for more," says Jackson. "Audiences routinely leave our shows marveling at the fact that what they just saw was a high school

HELLO, DOLLY!

production, and that gives us a great source of pride."

Director Jackson is joined by Choreographer Nicci Fahle and Vocal Director Michael Walker, both returning collaborators known for their work on past NHS productions like A Chorus Line, Chicago and Newsies. "We simply could not do this without Nicci's talents," says Jackson. "She has an absolute gift of taking amateur dancers and making them look as though they have been in dance classes for years. She has the Midas touch for sure when it comes to leg and foot work." Walker, also returning from Newsies, brings rich harmonies and professional vocal finesse to the production. "Michael coaxes really great harmonies and vocal work out of our actors, and his talents give the show's score a beautifully polished panache. We have a really stellar team, and when the three of us

Continued on page 37



Miss West Florida Scholarship Competition Crowns First Titleholders and Inspires a New Generation

By Sherry Jones

The energy was electric inside the University of West Florida's Fine and Performing Arts Center in Pensacola on Sunday, March 9, 2025. Families, friends, and supporters from across the region gathered to witness a moment in history the inaugural Miss West Florida Scholarship Competition.

Two remarkable young women emerged victorious: Hartley Spaulding of Crestview was crowned Miss West Florida, and Chloe Reese O'Donoghue of Santa Rosa Beach earned the title of Miss West Florida's Teen. Both winners were awarded scholarships and prizes to support their future educational goals and now advance to the Miss Florida Scholarship Competition in June, the next step on the prestigious path to Miss America.

The competition was emceed by none other than Casana Fink, Miss Florida 2024 and third runner-up to Miss America, who brought elegance, charm, and enthusiasm to the stage. Her presence was a meaningful reminder of the powerful journey that begins at the local level.

But this competition is about far more than crowns and titles.

Rooted in the evolving mission of the Miss America Organization, the Miss West Florida Scholarship Competition promotes education, leadership, and community service. It's a platform where young women showcase their intellect, express their values, and build confidence that carries through college, careers, and civic life.

In its first year, the competition not only set the stage for talent and achievement—it also redefined what it means to be a titleholder in a modern scholarship competition.

The Power of Scholarship Competitions

Despite outdated misconceptions, today's scholarship competitions are dynamic programs where purpose-driven young women thrive. These events are designed to empower not judge. Competing isn't just about winning; it's about discovering your voice and using it to make a difference.

The Miss West Florida Scholarship Competition, directed by Sherry Jones and Jula Ruhland, was built with that vision at its core. Together, they've created a competition that celebrates not just appearance or performance, but character, preparation, and purpose.

Contestants were evaluated in five key categories:

Private Interview

• On-Stage Introduction, Community Service Initiative & Question

• Fitness Wear (featuring Rebel Wear)

Talent Competition Evening Gown

Each area challenged participants to think critically, communicate clearly, and present themselves with confidence and integrity.

Judges and Mentors

The judging panel included an esteemed group of leaders from across the community:

• Dr. Martha Saunders, President, University of West Florida

• Lori Leath Smith, Executive Editor and Publisher, Life Media Group

• Ted Corcoran, President and CEO, Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce

• Theresa LePore, Executive Director, Miss South Florida Fair & Miss Palm Beach County

• Karen Parham, Certified Miss America Judge

• Lacy DeMartin, Investor and Entrepreneur

Their task was to identify young women who embody the values of today's Miss America-affiliated scholarship competitions: academic achievement, service, stage presence, and advocacy.

Also in attendance were Keith Williams, Executive Director of Miss Florida, and Dr. Gregg Mays, Miss Florida Field Director, reinforcing the event's importance as a stepping stone to state and national recognition.

Community Service with Purpose

Both titleholders have strong platforms that reflect their passions and personal missions.

Miss West Florida's Teen, Chloe O'Donoghue, leads a heart-centered initiative called "Sew Loved," which donates handmade tote bags to foster children in the Northwest Florida region. Her project provides both comfort and dignity to children in transition, and her commitment to giving back has already made a meaningful impact.

Miss West Florida, Hartley Spaulding, promotes a platform rooted in agricultural education and sustainability, aiming to bring awareness to the importance of farming and food systems in our everyday lives. As a 4-H member and advocate, she is passionate about empowering young people to understand where their food comes from and how agriculture sustains our communities.

Since being crowned, both titleholders have been actively representing the organization. Their recent appearances include visits to One Hopeful Place, participation in the Strength & Unity Conference, a featured performance of the National Anthem, and interviews with local media outlets and community organizations.



More Than a Crown

For Hartley and Chloe, the titles come with responsibility and opportunity. Over the next year, they will serve as ambassadors for West Florida, engage in community outreach, and continue preparing for state competition.

At its core, the Miss West Florida Scholarship Competition is a vehicle for change. Through generous scholarship funding, young women are given real tools to pursue their dreams—whether that's through higher education, entrepreneurship, advocacy, or professional development.

Continued on next page

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Community

MISS WEST FLORIDA

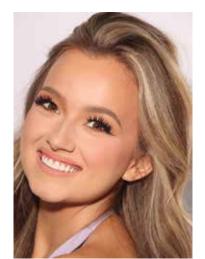
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This isn't just about being in the spotlight; it's about using that spotlight to illuminate issues, inspire others, and ignite careers.

Elevating Ambitions

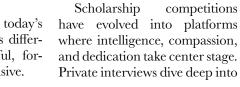
The Miss America Organization remains the largest provider of scholarships to young women in the United States. And programs like Miss West Florida are key contributors to that impact.

Former titleholders have gone on to pursue careers in law, education, medicine, nonprofit leadership, and public service. The communication, confidence, and leadership skills they



gain on stage translate directly into real-world success.

This is what makes today's scholarship competitions different—they are purposeful, forward-thinking, and inclusive.



a contestant's values and experiences. Talent performances reveal creativity and discipline. Community service initiatives provide a glimpse into their personal missions and causes they care deeply about.

Gone are the days of one-dimensional contests. In their place: multi-faceted, empowering events that prepare young women to take on the world.

Looking to the Future

As Miss West Florida and Miss West Florida's Teen, Hartley and Chloe will now represent their region at the Miss Florida Scholarship Competition. Should they advance, they'll join women from across the country on the national stage for Miss America and Miss America's Teen.

But win or lose, they've already demonstrated what success looks like. They've shown that scholarship competitions can be life-changing opportunities—ones that build skills, open doors, and uplift communities.

For young women considering whether to step into this world, Miss West Florida serves as a clear example of what's possible. It's not just about competition, it's about connection, confidence, and creating a brighter future.

And for a community looking to invest in the next generation of women leaders, there is no better place to start.

EVENTS

continued from page 6

Spring into Savings at the Northwest Florida Spring Home & Boat Show!

Saturday, May 17, 2025 | Northwest Florida Fairgrounds | FREE Admission!

Get ready, Northwest Florida! One of the most anticipated events of the season is sailing your way-the Northwest Florida Spring Home & Boat Show is coming to the Northwest Florida Fairgrounds for one exciting day only on Saturday, May 17, 2025-and admission is completely FREE! Presented by Paradise Promotions and powered by sponsors Life Media (Destin Life, Bay Life, FWB Life), Ecoview Windows, Defined Interiors, JVC Broadcasting, Fast Signs, Peaden AC, Zoo Graphics, and The Honey Do Service, this dynamic event will feature 50+ vendors showcasing everything you need to upgrade your home and lifestyle-with exclusive show-only discounts and giveaways. Expect to find the best deals on everything from roofing.

remodeling, and restoration services to flooring, furniture, pools, spas, windows and doors.

Plus, explore innovations in solar energy, tech gadgets, closets, kitchens, bathrooms, and more—all under one roof! And that's not all—Emerald Coast Marine will be on-site hosting a Super Spring Boat Show & Sale, offering fantastic boat deals you won't want to miss. Whether you're dreaming of hitting the water or refreshing your home, this show has it all.

On top of that, there will be over \$10,000 in swag and door prizes up for grabs! And with vendors from health and wellness to tech and travel—including Scentsy, chiropractic care,

massage therapy, and more there's something here for everyone.

Don't miss this chance to connect with local experts, score unbeatable deals, and get inspired for your next home or boating adventure. Want to be a vendor? Visit www.Paradise-Promotions-FL.com to register your booth space today!

It's all happening Saturday, May 17—one big day, one fantastic event. See you at the fairgrounds!

Destin's 68th Annual Blessing of the Fleet: Honoring a Seafaring Legacy May 29



Destin's 68th Annual Blessing of the Fleet will take place on Thursday, May 29, 2025, behind Brotula's Seafood House & Steamer (210 Harbor Blvd.). The event begins at 4 p.m. with a Captain's Testimony and Worship Service, followed by the Blessing of the Vessels at 5:15 p.m. A community fish fry will

Reframing the Experience

follow, with free parking available nearby. The event is part of Destin's Week of Blessings and includes a Watch Party at Sky-Bar at Edge Seafood with live music at 6 p.m. and fireworks at 9 p.m. Captains may register their vessels for a blessing by emailing immanuel@iacdestin. org.



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The community

Strong Will-ed: Honoring the Life and Legacy of Deputy William 'Will' May

By Ms. Corey Dobridnia, WCSO Public Information Officer

We want to tell you about our friend Will.

Deputy William "Will" May began his career with the Walton County Sheriff's Office in 2014.

He started as a Communication Officer and was later sworn in as a Deputy Sheriff in 2019. Since that time, Will was promoted to Field Training Officer.

He was a beloved zone partner who was easily spotted by his bright orange sunglasses. He often worked overtime to help his fellow deputies on patrol, and even when he was in communications, he was reliable and always cutting up to keep folks smiling. He worked hard. He loved what he did. That was Will.

Deputy May leaves behind a legacy of dedication and service to our community. His father, Bill May, served as Assistant Fire Chief with Walton County Fire Rescue before retiring. Will carried on that commitment to public service. Now, we will carry on that commitment for Will.

Will leaves behind a wife and four children. He is also sur-



vived by his mother and stepfather, loving sisters, cousins who

- were more like brothers, aunts and uncles, and a large extended family.

But that doesn't even scratch the surface of who Will was. What he accomplished and the relationships he built during his years of serving the community could never be able to be summarized in something as simple as a single piece of writing. After all, how do you ever really summarize a man's legacy?

While we mourn, our community mourns with us. The ripple effect is so widely felt.

He has made us comfort each other a little softer, say "I love you" more often, and embrace each other a little longer.

Deep in our souls, we feel a void. One that we can only be filled with knowing Will died with honor, doing what he was meant to do. He's inspired us to be "Strong Will-ed." That, after all, was Will.

Where there's a Will, there's a way.

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Northwest Florida Commemorates the End of the Vietnam War 50 Years Ago

By Barbara Palmgren

Beginning this April, the 50th anniversary of Vietnam's conclusion will be commemorated with tributes to the men and women who served and the military operation that preserved the lives of over 10,000 Vietnam refugees fleeing from oppression under the new regime.

The first event, Honoring Our Heroes, is presented by the Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce. This three-day event begins with stories of service, book signings, discussions and historical presentations. The first two days is a free event held at the Air Force Armament Museum from 5-8 p.m. on Monday, April 28 and Tuesday, April 29.

On Wednesday, April 30, the Heroes' Tribute Banquet is scheduled at the Destin-FWB Fairgrounds from 5-9 p.m. with speakers and a buffet dinner. Tickets can be purchased for this banquet. Ted Corcoran, President and Chief Executive officer of the Greater Fort Walton Chamber of Commerce, encourages the community to help celebrate this historic 50-year anniversary and participate in all scheduled events. the camp. She especially thanks trustee Frank Berte for creating the flyer and the tent replica in the exhibit. Barbara also thanks Col. (Ret) Bill Keeler for loaning his photos that are

The second tribute, the Vietnam Former Refugee Reunion, organized by Kim Delevett from California, takes place over two days May 3 and 4. Former refugees from Massachusetts, North Carolina, Texas and California, will return to the site where they lived in a tent city at Eglin Air Force Base for several months before finding sponsorships to begin a new life in the U.S.

On Saturday, May 3, they will gather in the new room addition to the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida to see the exhibit created in their honor. The exhibit occupies the entire space. Dr. Barbara Palmgren, museum Exhibits Chair and trustee, worked with trustees and staff to design an exhibit with photos and memorabilia for the three-phase operation of the camp. She especially thanks trustee Frank Berte for creating the flyer and the tent replica in the exhibit. Barbara also thanks Col. (Ret) Bill Keeler for loaning his photos that are now digitized for our local history. Trustee Jene McCracken and husband Bill McCracken organized materials for preservation of this exhibit with Bill completing digitization of all printed material.

On the morning of Saturday, May 3, Barbara will introduce Kim Delevett who is the guest speaker. Kim will conduct the reunion proceedings. Generous Tom Rice and Magnolia Grill is contributing a free lunch at the museum. Barbara and Mike Weaver, videographer and trustee for the museum, will record oral histories in the afternoon for guests who wish to be part of this project. On Sunday, May 4, reunion guests will visit the site of the camp itself on Eglin Air Force Base.

What You Should Do Right After An Auto Accident



By JULIE A. MARTIN Publisher's Note:

Recently, my daughter was involved in a rear-end collision, and the experience opened my eyes to just how overwhelming and confusing the aftermath of an auto accident can be. The article that follows offers essential steps to take after an accident — information that proved incredibly helpful to my family during a stressful time. I felt it was important to share it again, in hopes that it may serve you as well, should you ever find yourself in a similar situation.



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 drivable 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.



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 intersection, 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

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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n Community

Summer Camps 2025: A Local Guide for Families

Bay Life has curated a recommended list of a variety of summer camps to keep your kids engaged this summer! From STEM and environmental education to creative arts, leadership, theater and dance to basketball and classic outdoor adventures, there is a variety of options from which to choose.

General Enrichment & Academic Camps

• Kids on Campus – Northwest Florida State College (Niceville): Open to students entering grades 3–7, with classes in science, music, art, athletics and more. Sessions run June 23–27 and July 7–11, full- or half-day options available. Register: nwfsc.edu/kidson-campus-2

• Youth Village Summer Program (FWB): For ages 2–14, this full-day camp includes STEM activities, field trips, arts and crafts and more. Weekly rates range from \$140 to \$190.

Register: ouryouthvillage.org

• La Petite Academy Wonder Camp (Niceville): Runs May 19–August 29 and ideal for children ages 5–12. Weekly themes, hands-on activities and creativity-focused learning experiences are included. Register: (850) 897-1152 or visit lapetite.com.



• Rocky Bayou Christian School Summer Programs (Niceville): Offers a faith-based summer day camp for children ages 3–12. Programs include field trips, educational activities and themed weeks. Open June 9–August 1. Register: rbcs.org/summer-programs.

Arts & Performing Arts Camps

•Emerald Coast Theatre Company's 2025 Summer **Camps** offer a dynamic lineup of theater experiences for children ages 5-18, with locations in Miramar Beach, Freeport, DeFuniak Springs, and beyond. Campers can explore acting, singing, dancing, and stagecraft through themed programs like Disney Dreams, Beetlejuice JR!, and Camp Broadway, including mini-camps for young performers and intensives for teens. Sessions run from June through August, with half-day and fullday options. Registration is now open and can be completed online at emeraldcoasttheatre. org/summer-camps.

• Drama Kids of Northwest Florida: Designed for children aged 6–12, this camp focuses on building confidence through theater activities. Camp Hollywood runs June 2–6, Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Cost is \$250 per week. Register: dramakids. com/destin-fort-walton-beachniceville-fl

• NFB Summer Dance Camp (FWB): Designed for children entering Kindergarten through 2nd grade, this camp introduces young dancers to the fundamentals of ballet in a fun and engaging setting. Sessions run Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. Tuition is \$150 per week. Register: nfballet. org/community-classes

• NFB Pre-Ballet Classes (FWB): Classes (once a week) are tailored for preschool-aged children, focusing on basic ballet movements and coordination. Various time slots available. Tuition \$75 for 4-week session. Register: nfballet.org/ community-classes.

• NFB Summer Workshop Intensive (FWB): Aimed at dancers entering 3rd grade and up, this intensive workshop focuses on advanced ballet techniques, including pointe work and variations. Sessions run Monday - Friday, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tuition is \$300 per week. Register: nfballet.org/ community-classes.

• Compass Rose Academy Summer Enrichment (Santa Rosa Beach): Offering programs for ages 3–12, this camp includes activities in art, music and dance. Half-day and full-day options are available from June 2 to August 1, with weekly rates ranging from \$180 to \$440. Register: compassroseacademy.org or call (850) 660-1110

Sports & Recreation Camps

• Emerald Coast Rush Youth Development Program (Niceville, Valparaiso, Destin, FWB): For ages 6–12, this soccer camp develops skills in a fun, structured environment led by licensed coaches. Register: emeraldcoastrush. com

• **Raider Basketball Camp (Niceville):** Held at the NWFSC Raider Arena, this coed camp is open to students entering grades 2–8. Week 1 runs June 2–5; Week 2 is July 28–31. Includes instruction, T-shirt and lunch. Register: nwfsc.edu/ k12/sports-camp.

• Challenger International Soccer Camp (Freeport): A soccer camp for boys and girls, offering skill development and fun games. Dates and specific details for 2025 are to be announced. Visit challengersports.com for updates.

PIANÓ MAN

A Tribute to **Billy Joel** Featuring **Mark Kovaly**

Mattie Kelly Arts Center Saturday, May 10th at 7 p.m.



Piano Man: a Tribute to Billy Joel featuring Mark Kovaly has become one of the most highly respected and sought after tribute shows in the country. Unique attributes include Mark's ability to play additional instruments like the harmonica and accordion. This is truly a one-of-a-kind tribute to the iconic Piano Man himself.

Mark your calendars and grab your tickets now for a night filled with nostalgia, energy and pure musical bliss. Piano Man live in concert for one night only to ignite the stage with an electrifying performances and iconic songs.

Tickets: www.mattiekellytickets.com or call 850-706-5206 reserved tickets \$19.50-\$44

Community

SUMMER CAMPS

continued from previous page

STEM, Science & Innovation Camps

• Camp Invention (Niceville): A nationally recognized, STEM-based camp for kids entering grades K-6, focusing on hands-on STEM activities. Sessions are scheduled for June 2-5 in Santa Rosa Beach and June 9-13 in Niceville, with fees between \$275 and \$295. Register: invent.org.

• Summer STEAM Work**shops (FWB):** For ages 5–12, these themed hands-on science workshops include engineering, physics and biology. Emerald Coast Science Center Fort Walton Beach. Sessions are limited to 20 students. Register: ecscience.org

• Barrett School Robo-**Quest STEM Workshops** (Destin): Targeting ages 10-15, this program offers robotics and coding workshops from June 10 to July 26. Weekly fee is \$350. Register: barrettschool. com

• HSU Foundation STEM **Program via Youth Village** (FWB): Selects 12 girls aged 8-12 for a two-week STEM experience with Lego Robotics, Coding and Drones. Register: ouryouthvillage.org

Outdoors, Wildlife and Environment Camps

• E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center - Wednesday Summer Day Camps (Free**port**): Designed for children aged 5-12, these camps focus on nature exploration, animal encounters and environmental education. Sessions are held on Wednesdays from June 4 to July 30, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. \$55 per camper. Register: (850) 835-1824.

• Camp Longleaf at E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center (Freeport): Camp Longleaf provides week-long overnight camps for children aged 9-14. Campers engage in traditional outdoor activities combined with hands-on nature education, including animal encounters, exercises. Cabins are air-conditioned. Dates TBD. Visit eowil-



• Creature Features & Special Programs (FWB): Interactive wildlife programs and science demos are held throughout summer and included with general admission. Emerald Coast Science Center. More info: ecscience.org

• 4-H Camp Timpoochee (Niceville): This beloved overnight and day camp experience offers marine science, outdoor adventure and environmental

ter: florida4h.ifas.ufl. edu.

Childcare **Network Wonder-**Quest Summer Camp: Held at multiple locations, this themed adventure camp is open to children ages 5-12. Register: childcarenetwork.com

Variety & **Specialty Camps** Boys & Girls

of the Emerald Clubs

Coast: From June 2 to August 6, the program serves children K-12 with educational, recreational and leadership-building activities. Register: emeraldcoastbgc.org

• Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida (Valparaiso): Children aged 5-12 can embark on a week-long journey through time at the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida's summer camp.

Friday, 9 a.m. to 12 p.m., with sessions available in July. \$75 for non-members; \$70 for museum members. Register: (850) 678-2615 or visit heritage-museum. org.

• HERricane Florida: Landfall - Walton County (Freeport)

A free leadership camp for girls focusing on emergency management and community leadership. Open to girls entering grades 8–12. The camp runs from June 11 to 14, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Walton County Emergency Operations Center. Register: mywaltonfl.gov/1348/HERricane-Florida-Landfall-Walton-County

• Uniquely Clever Mobile Art & The Yoga Garden - Art & Yoga Camp (Freeport)

This camp offers a blend of art and yoga activities for children aged 5 and up. Sessions are on Tuesdays: June 3, 10, 17, 24 and July 8, 15, 22, 29, from 10:15 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. The cost is \$50 per day or \$160 for the month. 48 Commerce Lane #6, Freeport. Register: (850)



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Page 16

Local Diving, Drinks, Coffee & Entertainment

Brozinni Pizzeria

Brozinni Pizzeria's family-friendly pizza place offers you a taste of New York right here in Niceville. Featuring the Big Apple's signature crust, its famous buttery garlic knuckles will leave you wanting more, including appetizers such as bread sticks, homemade stuffed pepperoni or sausage sticks, cheese bread, meatball sticks, pizza, Cocoons Famous smoked tuna dip, and crackers/pita chips. There are also salads, build your own pizza, specialty pizzas, pasta/spaghetti, calzones, drinks and desserts. Every ingredient used has been hand-selected. Call to Order or Order Online at bronzinnis.revelup.online and have your mouth-watering fare delivered! (850) 678-7778

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An iconic favorite of locals, owner and operator of Jojo's Coffee and Goodness Angela



"JoJo" Stevenson invites you to enter her cafe and relaxed coffee shop atmosphere for a daily dose of "goodness." Stop in for mouth-watering cinnamon rolls; scones: cranberry orange, chocolate caramel and cheddar thyme; strawberry coffee cake; cranberry orange muffins; red velvet cookies; brownies with espresso ganache or caramelitas. Try a breakfast special with a piece of quiche or kolache-hash brown casserole. Breakfast burritos are rolled and ready daily! Choose from andouille, bacon, chorizo or veggie. Or tantalize your taste buds with a madeto-order breakfast sandwich on croissants or bagel with two eggs and cheese and then choose if you want to add Jojo's homemade smoked jalapeño beef bologna, bacon, house smoked barbecue or ham. Cinnamon rolls and kolaches still hold the top spot for sell outs. Stop in for featured muffins, coffee cake or pound cake, which go great with maple cinnamon latte or caramel macchiato. And, oh, the freshly roasted coffee-just what

you're craving for Spring! Hours 7:30 a.m.-2 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday.

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LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant

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

Monday, May 5: Cinco de Mayo 5:30 p.m.

Friday, May 16: Life Jacket to Work Day

Sunday, May 25: Sunset Shrimp Boil 4-7 p.m. Live music 4-8 p.m. Shrimp, Sausage, Corn on the Cob, Potatoes, Bread

Tuesdays: Tacos & Margaritas

Wednesdays: Sailboat Races 6 p.m.

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

Thursday Throwdown SUP Races: 6 p.m.

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

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

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

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Local Nining, Nrinks, Coffee & Entertainment



Local Nining, Nrinks, Coffee & Entertainment

Celebrating Mom

By Christopher Manson

It was the day before my birthday, and I was talking to my mother (Pauline Manson, nee Weekley) about the legendary movie star Charles Bronson. Mom expressed her dismay at the lack of Bronson movies being shown on broadcast television these days.

Good son that I am, I introduced her to Tubi, the greatest free streaming service in the world. We spent the afternoon watching Death Wish 4: The Crackdown, which she had somehow missed during its brief theatrical run in 1987. It was all I could do not to recite the dialogue out loud, as I'd seen this Cannon Films classic dozens of times

Thanks, Mom, for letting me share one of my favorite movies with you. And for not complaining about all the commercial breaks.

In celebration of Mother's

Day (Sunday, May 11), Life-Media reached out to friends, family, and complete strangers to share how their lives have been—and continue to be blessed by their mothers.



My stay-at-home mom demonstrated sacrifice by taking on work to send us to Germany after college, giving us the priceless gift of heritage, family connection, and a remarkable cultural experience.

- Dr. Doug Stauffer, bibledoug.com



My mother-in-law, Carol Palmgren, died over 13 years ago. I had lost my mother to cancer in the 1980s, and when I married Lornie Palmgren, who was an only child, Carol shared with me that because of health complications she had been unable to bring more children into the world. She had always wished for another child, especially a daughter. Upon hearing that, I made it my mission to spoil her on a consistent basis. We had one "Mother-Daughter Day" each Sunday and made a bucket list of things she had never done— Broadway shows, a cruise, trips to different cities. So much fun together. I treasure these moments and am grateful I had two moms in my life.

- Barbara Palmgren, Life Media contributor



My mother has created a strong, independent, opinionated young lady. I always know she is available for support and to listen and to give me the artificial inflation for my personal hype team I need at this point in my life!

- Kassia Garfield, MaxStrength Fitness



My mother taught us by example the importance of being gracious and kind. Always full of Southern colloquialisms, she was quick to remind us "You catch more flies with honey than with vinegar" and "If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all." I've never heard her disparage anyone or pass judgment on poor choices.

When my mother says "Bless her heart," she actually means it. "It's not my favorite" is the most she will ever say to show distaste. Her voice stays in my head as I navigate relationships, children, and my career, and I strive to stay gracious and kind. If I can be half the woman she is, I am truly blessed. Happy Mother's Day, Callie!

-Amy Milligan, CRY0850

My mother, Artie, passed away when I was 36. My father had already been gone 18 years. She met my husband and my firstborn, which I count among my greatest blessings. One of the most profound gifts she gave me was permission-permission to protect my peace, even if that meant distancing myself from negative people, including family if necessary. She gave me the freedom to be present on my own terms. She never expected attendance at holidays or gatherings out of obligation; she wanted you there because you wanted to be.

And, perhaps most meaningfully, she gave me permission to choose my family. If I felt deeply connected to friends, she believed they could be considered family, too. Having left my hometown in my twenties and living away from relatives ever since, this perspective was a powerful and lasting blessing.

- Zandra Wolfgram, Director of Marketing and Communications, Sinfonia Gulf Coast/MKAF





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Off the Hook

Get Geared Up for the 2025 Lionfish Festival: A Celebration with a Purpose

Our area is once again diving into conservation and coastal celebration with the highly anticipated 2025 Lionfish Festival, returning this spring with a splash. Set to take place May 17–18, 2025, along the Destin Harbor Boardwalk, this vibrant, family-friendly event merges environmental awareness with fun, food, music, and marine education.

The festival will run from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on both Saturday and Sunday, transforming the Destin Harbor into a bustling celebration of local culture and ecological stewardship. The event is free and open to the public, making it the perfect weekend destination for families, divers and seafood lovers alike.

At the heart of the festival is the mission to combat the invasive lionfish, a striking but destructive species threatening native marine life in the Gulf. The Lionfish Festival not only raises awareness about this growing issue, but also encourages action through organized lionfish removal tournaments and educational outreach.

Activities & Entertainment

Visitors can enjoy a variety of engaging attractions, including:

Lionfish Filleting and Cooking Demonstrations – Learn how to safely handle and prepare lionfish with guidance from local chefs and marine experts.

Live Music – Enjoy performances from regional bands and artists throughout the day.

Educational Exhibits – Dive into marine conservation with booths hosted by local environmental organizations, universities, and state agencies.

Interactive Kids Zone – Hands-on activities, games, and art projects for the younger festivalgoers.

Local Artisans and Vendors – Browse ocean-themed crafts, artwork and sustainable products from local makers.

Tastings and Food Trucks – Sample lionfish-inspired dishes and classic coastal cuisine from a diverse selection of food vendors.

Lionfish Tournament Details

A centerpiece of the event is the Emerald Coast Open, where licensed divers compete to remove as many lionfish as possible from local waters. Registration is now open (through May 15 at emeraldcoastopen. com) and participants must pre-register and possess a valid saltwater fishing license. The LARGEST Lionfish Tournament in the world, there are monthly prizes for pre-tournament participants and huge cash prizes for the main tournament. In 2024, there were 147 participants, 11,844 Lionfish removed! Emerald Coast Open gave away \$65,000 in cash prizes and over \$60,000 in gear prizes.

Pre-Tournament February 1-May 15, 2025

Participating in the ECO pre-tournament is easy for everyone! Simply go out and hunt lionfish. Drop them off at designated drop off locations (emeraldcoastopen.com) and you will receive two raffle entries for each fish you turn in. That's it! Hunt lionfish and win prizes!

Main Tournament May 16-17, 2025

Win big money and big prizes! Each team of up to four can go out for two days and harvest lionfish. Tournament fish must be turned in at the official weigh station before 3 p.m. on Sunday, May 18, to be eligible for prizes. Awards will be given for categories such as Most Lionfish, Largest Lionfish and Smallest Lionfish. This friendly competition not only supports reef conservation, but also provides data for ongoing scientific research. You don't have to be a professional, but you do have to sign up and get out on the water. You can't win if you don't compete!

While no special permit is required to harvest lionfish in Florida waters, divers must follow all standard safety and boating regulations. For rules and more information, visit emeraldcoastopen.com.

Emerald Coast Open Restaurant Week May 9-17, 2025

Concurrent to the Festival



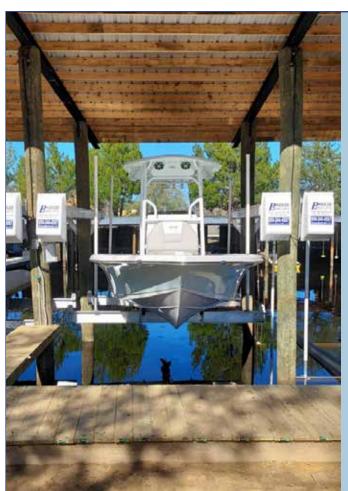
and Tournament is Restaurant Week, an event hosted by Destin-Fort Walton Beach during the week leading up to the Emerald Coast Open Lionfish Tournament. This event provides an opportunity for local restaurants to put their spin on a lionfish special while educating their customers about the impact of this invasive species.

Taste delicious lionfish at one of Destin-Fort Walton Beach's featured restaurants during the Emerald Coast Open Lionfish Restaurant Week! Local chefs will highlight lionfish in unique dishes to help bring awareness to the invasive species in our waters. May 9 • Crab Trap Destin May 10 • Bitterroot May 11 • Jasmine Thai May 12 • Beach Walk Cafe May 13 • La Paz May 14 • Brotula's Seafood House & Steamer May 15 • Harbor Docks May 16 • Sura Korean Steakhouse May 17 • AJ's Seafood and Oyster Bar (All-day special)

Why Lionfish Matter

Originally from the Indo-Pacific, lionfish have become a significant problem in the Gulf due to their rapid reproduction and voracious appetite. With no natural predators in local waters, they threaten to disrupt native fish populations and coral reef ecosystems. Events like the Destin Lionfish Festival are vital in promoting removal efforts and educating the public about how they can help.

Whether you're a diver looking to make a difference, a foodie curious about lionfish cuisine, or a family seeking a fun-filled day by the water, the 2025 Lionfish Festival offers something for everyone. Mark your calendar for May 17–18 and join Destin in the fight to protect our Gulf waters, one fish at a time.



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() Lifestyle

Apex Design Center Celebrates Its Feature Remodel of 2024 in Swift Creek

Apex Design Center is thrilled to celebrate its feature remodel for 2024, showcasing a stunning transformation that has set a new benchmark for excellence in home design in Niceville. This ambitious project involved a full kitchen remodel, alongside the creation of three elegant vanities, a custom shower, laundry room built-ins and new tile flooring that flows seamlessly throughout the main areas of the house. Our dedicated team collaborated closely with the client to ensure that every detail was meticulously crafted to perfection, resulting in a space that radiates both beauty and functionality.

At the heart of this remodel are our exquisite Bishop brand cabinetry, which played a pivotal role in defining the kitchen's aesthetic. The design features a painted shaker style cabinet, accentuated by stacked wall cabinets that provide ample storage while adding visual interest. The project showcases thoughtful additions such as cabinet lighting, which highlights the craftsmanship and enhances the overall ambiance of the kitchen. Complementing the cabinetry are quartzite countertops, known for their durability and elegance, paired with a tasteful tile backsplash that ties the entire design together. Throughout the project, our team prioritized a collaborative approach, working hand-in-hand with the client to fine-tune product selections, cabinet designs, and color palettes. This attention to detail extended to verifying new appliance compatibility, ensuring seamless integration with existing plumbing and electrical systems. Our expertise in guiding installation details as the project progressed allowed us to address any challenges relentlessly until each phase met client expectations.

The culmination of this extensive remodel not only elevates the aesthetic appeal of the home but also enhances its functionality, making it a perfect fit for the client's lifestyle. Apex Design Center is proud to celebrate this remarkable achievement, demonstrating our commitment to quality, innovation, and customer satisfaction. As we look forward to future projects, we remain dedicated to transforming spaces and turning dreams into reality, one remodel at a time delivering Expert Solutions for our Client's Design Inspiration.







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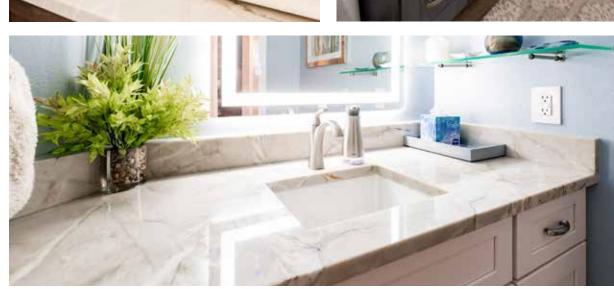














Lifestyle Nicovi

Niceville Slabs and Cookies: Our Roots Run Deep—and Wide

Tucked just behind a gate off Kelly Road—marked by a bold blue "B" and the faint scent of sawdust in the air—you'll find one of the best-kept secrets on the Emerald Coast: Niceville Slabs and Cookies, also known as "Your Emerald Coast Wood Source." But if you're imagining an old-school lumber yard? Think again.

What started as a garage passion project has grown into a dynamic, community-driven woodworking hub with a mission: connect people to truly remarkable wood and help them bring their creative visions to life.

From the very beginning, NSC wasn't built on big-box ideas—it was built on relationships, craftsmanship, and a deep respect for the story each tree tells. Whether you're a first-time DIYer, a professional maker, or someone who just fell in love with the perfect slab for a dining table, you'll find more than just wood here. You'll find people who get it.

And now, NSC is leveling up. The business is in the midst of restructuring into three distinct branches designed to serve the growing community of makers, artists, and legacy builders across the Gulf Coast:

The Wood Shed at NSC – The heart of the operation. Stocked with over 50 domestic and exotic hardwood species many milled and kiln-dried on site—The Wood Shed offers raw slabs, cookies, dimensional lumber, and milling services for everyone from hobbyists to highend builders.



The Legacy Line at NSC – Where heirloom meets heart. Specializing in handcrafted custom work, this division brings meaningful builds to life—whether you're dreaming of a show-stopping dining table, a statement mantel, or floating shelves that feel like they were always meant to be there.

NSC serves both residential and commercial clients, with standout projects including a stunning full interior build at



Eagle Eye Vision in Niceville, and a cozy custom library featuring a built-in daybed for a local homeowner. The team works regularly with trusted names like Randy Wise Homes, Rominger Construction, and other respected contractors throughout the Panhandle.

Each project under The Legacy Line is grounded in craftsmanship, intention, and a deep respect for the material—turning slabs with character into pieces with soul.

The Shop Shelf at NSC – Home to all things finished, polished, and wildly giftable. From epoxy charcuterie boards and stabilized pen blanks to hand-finished home goods, this retail space celebrates the creative talent that flows through NSC—and makes it accessible to anyone walking through the door.

And behind all of it? A crew of hardworking, hands-on, sawdust-covered humans who proudly refer to themselves as Wood Dealers.

There's Mike—owner, sawmill master, and the quiet force behind the big machines. Kathleen—the in-house accountant with a woodworking obsession and a love for clean cuts and clean ledgers. Aaron—yard expert and lumber wrangler, likely to be your first point of contact when you pull through the gate. And Genevieve—creative director, chaos coordinator, class instructor, and one of NSC's founding voices, often found giving shop tours or promoting epoxy classes to the next wave of makers.

Together, they're not just selling wood—they're building a movement.

NSC regularly hosts woodworking and epoxy classes, live demos, and collaborative workshops with local artists, florists, and small businesses. They also lend their talents and time to causes that matter, donating builds and support to nonprofits like Emerald Coast Autism Center, PAWS, Freedom House, and CALM.

"Our goal has always been to make quality wood more accessible—and to show people what's possible once they get their hands on the right piece," Genevieve says. "We're here to help people create. Whether it's a massive dining table or a simple epoxy cheese board, it all starts with the right piece of wood—and the right people to help."

So the next time you're nearby, stop in. Browse the slab wall. Ask questions. Get inspired.

Because at NSC, we don't just sell wood—we deal in possibility.

Visit us at 207 B Kelly Rd., Niceville. Phone 850.897.0038. On the web: NicevilleSlabsAnd-Cookies.com.



207 B Kelly Rd., Niceville, FL | 850-897-0038 www.nicevilleslabsandcookies.com

Page 23

Spring Into Style: Create Your Perfect Outdoor Oasis at The Shop at Baldwin Turf

By Jenny Herndon, Owner

Spring has officially arrived, and there's no better time to refresh your outdoor spaces! At The Shop at Baldwin Turf, we've been proudly serving the community for over a year with a carefully curated selection of quality outdoor furniture, vibrant plants, thoughtful gift items and premium fertilizers. We've got everything you need to create the perfect backyard escape.

May is one of the best times to shop for outdoor furniture not only is the weather perfect for planning and setting up your space, but shopping early in the season means the best selection of styles, colors, and sets before summer is in full swing. Whether you're prepping for backyard BBQs, casual evenings by the fire pit, or peaceful mornings on the porch, now's the time to create the outdoor retreat you've been dreaming about.



But before you dive into decorating, here are a few quick tips on choosing outdoor furniture that fits your space—and your lifestyle:

1. Consider Your Space and Purpose - Are you furnishing a spacious deck or a small balcony? Think about how you'll use the area—dining, lounging, entertaining, or all of the above. Sectionals and dining sets work great for larger areas, while bistro tables and compact chairs are ideal for cozier spots.

2. Pick Durable, Weather-Friendly Materials - Our Florida weather can be tough on furniture, so look for pieces made with weather-resistant materials like recycled plastic, teak, aluminum, or all-weather wicker. We carry plenty of stylish options built to last.

3. Comfort is Key - A great-looking chair isn't much good if it's not comfortable. Be

sure to try out seating before you buy, and go for cushions made with fade-resistant, quickdry fabrics to keep things fresh season after season.

4. Match Your Style -Whether your vibe is coastal, rustic, or modern, your outdoor space should feel like an extension of your home. Add personal touches with planters, throw pillows, and outdoor lighting.

5. Visit Us in Person -Come see what's new at The Shop at Baldwin Turf, where you can browse our curated collection in person, get inspired, and let our team help you bring your vision to life. Follow along on social media @baldwinturf for updates on new items and events!

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Monday-Friday 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Saturday 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

Protect the Basin: A Call to Action for Our Waterway

By Alison McDowell, Executive Director, Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance

The Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance (CBA) is proud to launch the Protect the Basin campaign—an initiative designed to empower residents, businesses, and visitors to become everyday stewards of the Choctawhatchee Bay and its surrounding waterways.

At its heart, Protect the Basin is about transformation: turning awareness into action and concern into commitment. The campaign outlines four key steps that anyone can take to make a meaningful impact on the health of our waterways:

1. Prevent Pollution - Our watershed starts in our backyards. We can stop pollution before it begins by reducing consumption, reusing and recycling, properly disposing of waste, and keeping harmful chemicals out of storm drains.

2. Safeguard Habitat & Wildlife - Healthy ecosystems depend on mindful behavior.



Good boating behavior includes respecting slow-speed zones, steering clear of sensitive seagrass beds, and using designated fishing line bins to help protect the diverse species that call our waterways home.

3. Plant for Resilience - Nature knows best. Planting native vegetation along shorelines supports erosion control, filters runoff, and enhances water quality, creating a stronger, more resilient environment.

4. Be Water-Wise - Small habits add up. Conserving water, minimizing fertilizer use,

and capturing rainwater can dramatically reduce our impact on the basin's delicate ecosystems.

"Protecting our waterways is a shared responsibility," said Alison McDowell, Executive Director of CBA. "This campaign is about turning awareness into action because every small choice we make impacts the health of the Choctawhatchee Bay."

The Choctawhatchee Basin is vital to our local environment, economy, recreation, and overall quality of life. Whether you're a lifelong resident or a first-time visitor, you have a role in preserving this natural treasure.

We invite you to join the movement. Visit basinalliance. org/protect-the-basin to explore resources, find volunteer opportunities, and learn simple, practical steps to make a lasting difference.

Together, we can protect the basin—one action at a time.



Sports

Golf Series: Shalimar Pointe Golf Club Hosts **First Prestigious AJGA Preview Presented by Destin-Fort Walton Beach**



By Barbara Palmgren

The American Junior Golf Association (AJGA) Preview was brought to this area by Destin-Fort Walton Beach. They sponsored this outstanding preview of male and female golfers of the future. This 36-hole stroke play event was challenging and exciting.

The 78 young golfers, age 12-19, began competition on Friday, April 11, in the Qualifying Round at beautiful and challenging Shalimar Pointe Golf Course. Yardage for boys was 6.620 yards and for girls was

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5634 yards for 18 holes of golf. In the field itself, 19 states were represented including 36 young players from Florida. Seven countries were represented with three players already receiving college letters of intent. After the Qualifier Round on Friday, tournament rounds began Saturday with the majority of golfers continuing. Maximum score to continue for the weekend was 77 for the boys and 76 for the girls.

The American Junior Golf Association national headquarters is located in Braselton, Ga., close to Atlanta. Past winners that became pro golfers included memorable names of Phil Mickelson, Scottie Scheffler, Jordan Spieth and Tiger Woods.

The Tournament Director, Harlie Valinho, worked with a staff of eight interns and one assistant. She coordinated a flawless registration and organization of the day requirements. Regional Director Matt Emmi shared more information with me about the organization itself, the point system players collect

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ECOVIEW

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AND THE FOLLOWING AWESOME BUSINESS OWNERS

and the trophies that are awarded. Matt grew up in a golfing family, inspired by his father who was a head golf professional. Matt is now the Regional Director of Florida for the AJGA working in the Tourist Bureau of Affairs Department at the national headquarters.

Impressed with Shalimar Pointe Golf Course and the warm welcome of staff and golf members who opened their homes to house 10 staff members, Matt also thanked Destin-Fort Walton Beach for the sponsorship of this event. Ron Schumard of the Okaloosa County Tourist Development Department worked with Matt to bring this tournament, one of a few nationwide, to the Florida Panhandle. Shalimar Pointe Golf Course Manager John Jenkins and course employees and staff created perfect course conditions and excellent restaurant service throughout the threeday tournament.

On Sunday, April 13, trophies were presented to the top







men and women golfers. In first place, from Jacksonville, Fla., was Ethan Gossman with a twoday score of 149. Ethan won in a playoff with Charlie Hipp of St. Johns, Fla. Tied for 3rd place was Hugh Michael Hollingsworth from Milton, Ga., Henry Hurley from Atlanta, Ga., and Nathan Peji from Dunwoody, Ga., with a score of 153.

Winners for the Girls divi-



sion included Emily Storm from Lakewood Ranch, Fla., with a score of 151. Tied for second place was Meredith Finger from Wilmington, Del., Payton Haugen from Brookfield, Wis., and Olivia Hodges, from Duluth, Ga., with a score of 152.

The weather was perfect for the game of golf and these young players are ones to watch in the future. This golf reporter with newspaper publisher, Scott Miller, enjoyed helping with the trophy presentation on Sunday afternoon. Just another golf day in paradise in Northwest Florida!



FASTSIGNS.

Diving the Expanded Underwater Museum

The Cultural Arts Alliance (CAA) of Walton County was recently approved by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) for a Grants for Arts Projects award of \$20,000! This grant will support the 2025 installation of sculptures to expand the nation's first Underwater Museum of Art (UMA). The NEA awarded 1,127 Grants for Arts Projects awards nationwide totaling more than \$31.8 million as part of the recent announcement of fiscal year 2025 grants.

"The CAA's very first NEA grant was received in 2018, making it possible for us to collaborate with the South Walton Artificial Reef Association to create the nation's first Underwater Museum of Art. So, it is incredibly rewarding to be recognized again by the NEA now that the UMA is approaching its seventh anniversary," said CAA President & CEO Jennifer Steele.

In addition to this exciting news, J & The Causeways will return to headline Dine + Dive, CAA's upcoming fundraising event benefiting the Underwa-



ter Museum of Art, Wednesday, April 30, 6-9 p.m. at Grand Boulevard's Town Center. Dine + Dive serves as the official kickoff for Art Month Walton County, a month-long celebration of the arts featuring a diverse lineup of cultural events throughout May.

This year, the CAA and South Walton Artificial Reef Association (SWARA) are ele-

vating the former Under the Sea event into an immersive celebration of fine art, exquisite cuisine, exceptional wines and marine conservation. This multi-sensory experience will feature an extensive selection of incredible wines to sample, more than a dozen tasting showcasstations ing exclusive dishes from the area's most renowned restaurants and celebrated chefs, and a cash bar serving signature cocktails and craft beer.

In addition to continuous live music, Dine + Dive party-goers will have an opportunity to meet UMA artists from current and previous installations as well as receive an exclusive preview of several of the original works created for the 2025 installation before the sculptures are deployed to the UMA site over the summer. Tickets fare \$100 per person in advance and \$125 per person day of the event, if available. Purchase at CulturalArtsAlliance.com/upcoming-events.

Funds raised will directly support the 7th deployment of sculptures into the UMA. A collaborative initiative with SWARA, the UMA is the nation's first permanent underwater sculpture museum. Recognized as one of TIME magazine's 100 World's Greatest Places (2018), National Geographic's Best Trips (2019), and a 2023 CODA Award winner, the UMA continues to gain international acclaim for its unique fusion of art, marine conservation, and eco-tourism.

The UMA is a signature initiative of the Cultural Arts Alliance's Art in Public Spaces program, developed in partnership with SWARA. Designed to serve both ecological and artistic purposes, the UMA enhances marine habitats and supports the growth of fish populations while also enriching South Walton's cultural landscape.

The 2025 UMA installation will include the following piec-

es of sculpture: Concretion by William Braithwaite (United Kingdom), Seahorse by Jessica Bradsher (Greenville, NC), The Neptunian Oak by Nathan Hoffman (Highlandville, MO), Happy Hour by Sarah Wilkinson (United Kingdom), and Hometown by Mandy Yourk (Panama City, FL), and The Menina of the Reef: An Infinite Message by Antonio Azzato (Spain).

Select sculptures, including The Menina of the Reef: An Infinite Message, which is a special collaboration between the Florida Cancer Specialists Foundation and CAA, will be on display at Dine + Dive and during the 37th annual ArtsQuest Fine Arts Festival in Grand Boulevard's Town Center May 3 and 4 and will then be transferred to Orange Beach, Ala., to be prepared for their deployment into the Gulf this summer. The UMA site is located less than one mile off the coast of Grayton Beach State Park in a one-acre permit patch of seabed.

For more information, visit UMAFL.org.





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Wellness



Understanding Your GLP-1 Journey

Kay Leaman, HealthyDay HealthyLife

Whether you've taken, are currently taking or are thinking about taking GLP-1, understanding what it is, how it works and the side effects will help you support your body for the best possible results. GLP-1 is a glucagon-like peptide and comes in three forms; natural, injection and oral.

Natural GLP-1 is a hormone naturally produced in the gastrointestinal tract. The lifestyle factors that enhance your natural GLP-1 production are certain foods, physical activity and maintaining a healthy gut.

Injection and oral applications are manufactured substances called agonists (a manufactured substance that causes an action similar to a naturally occurring substance.) and mimic the effects of naturally produced GLP-1, but in a more potent and longer-lasting form. The injections last up to seven days in the blood (Ozempic, Wegovy), whereas the oral tablets last for 24 hours and need to be taken daily.

These drugs are used for diabetes and obesity. Worldwide, 1.9 billion adults are overweight and, of these, 650 million are children. There is not much difference between men and women as obesity is the #1 killer in both sexes.

How it works: In the pancreas it increases the release of insulin and decreases glucagon (A hormone that raises blood sugar.) secretion. The stomach is also affected as it slows the emptying of food from the stomach which helps you feel fuller longer and aids in extracting nutrients into the bloodstream. It also acts on the brain to suppress appetite ('food noise').

The side effects consist of:

• Gastrointestinal issues such as bloating, nausea, diarrhea, constipation, heartburn and nutrient deficiency.

• Muscles are an organ and muscle loss can negatively impact our metabolic rate making long term weightmanagement more difficult. It can also affect mobility and bone density. One can expect their muscle loss to be 24-40%. Muscle loss slows the metabolism, reduces strength, lowers BP related to fatigue, weakens bones and increases risk of fractures.

• Overdosing can cause hypoglycemia, gastrointestinal distress, loss of consciousness, etc. Because of the reduced caloric intake, nutrient deficiency is also an issue and reduced fertility and hair loss has also been experienced.

Drawbacks consist of heart issues as the heart is also a muscle. Sagging skin can be seen depending on how much weight one is losing vs. it being a symptom of the drug. GLP-1 also starves your body due to the decrease in caloric intake. This is why long-term use is NOT



recommended. The sad news is that at this time there are no safe alternatives. There has been some talk coming out about berberine. It's found in plants and may have an effect on sugar levels, but has not been researched beyond the Petri dish.

As with any weight loss program, if our lifestyle doesn't change, the pounds will return. We usually find what we lose. However, this is not true for the lost muscle. It must be exercised and cared for to get it back.

Adopting a healthy diet to enhance the effectiveness of GLP-1 can ensure sufficient intake of essential nutrients (protein, fats, fiber, vitamins and minerals) can minimize muscle loss during weight loss.

A healthy lifestyle consists of eating well, exercising, lowering stress and getting quality sleep.

Regarding foods, here are some suggestions:

Fats - Avocado and avocado oil, olives (especially black), flax-seed and flaxseed oil

Lean Protein - Fish, chicken, turkey, eggs, lean beef, cottage cheese, tofu, soybeans

Fibers - Fruit, veggies, whole grains, legumes, flaxseed, chia seeds

Probiotics / Prebiotics - Yogurt, kombucha, kefir, sauerkraut, supplements. There are quality supplements that can help the body respond well. Contact me if you're interested in more information.

I have seen excellent effects from taking GLP-1. My biggest caution is that overuse can suppress the body's ability to make its own. Supporting our body's naturally created functions will ensure a healthier life as we age. GLP-1 is a tool not a replacement for the responsibility we have to care for our bodies well.

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Wellness Is a Marathon, Not a Sprint: Why Integrative Care Matters



By Dr. Karen DeVore

If you know the story of the tortoise and the hare, you already understand one of the most important lessons we can apply to health: slow and steady wins the race.

In a world where we're constantly bombarded with quickfix solutions—miracle diets, instant detoxes, and one-pill answers—it's easy to lose sight of the long game. But with integrative healthcare practitioners, that's exactly what we focus on: your long-term, sustainable wellness. Not the shortcut, not the sprint—but the journey that leads to resilience, balance, and vitality for years to come.

What Is Integrative Health?

Integrative health is an approach to care that puts you, the whole person, at the center. It draws from both conventional Western medicine and evidence-based Eastern traditions to treat not just symptoms, but root causes.

This model acknowledges the value of modern diagnostic tools, lab testing, and pharmacology, while also embracing the centuries-old wisdom of acupuncture, herbal medicine, nutrition, and lifestyle medicine. At its core, integrative health is collaborative, personalized, and preventative.

Instead of asking, "What drug treats this disease?" we ask, "Why is this symptom happening—and what's the best way to restore balance?" That



might include medication, but it may also include herbs, dietary changes, movement, sleep support, or acupuncture. The goal is not to replace one system with another, but to combine the best of both to offer more comprehensive, compassionate care.

How The Tortoise Clinic Blends East and West

At the Tortoise Clinic, we

live and breathe this philosophy. We've served the communities of North Florida for over 30 years, building a practice that reflects the needs of our patients and the realities of modern life.

A typical visit here might include lab testing to evaluate hormones, inflammation, or nutrient deficiencies, followed by acupuncture to support nervous system regulation and pain relief. A patient might receive customized herbal formulations from our Chinese herb dispensary - the largest in Northwest Florida, paired with guidance on nutrition and daily habits to support their health goals.

Because we're not bound by one medical model, we have more flexibility—and more tools—to help you feel your best.

How Is This Different From Traditional Medicine?

Traditional, Western medicine has done incredible things. It excels in acute care, emergency response, and surgical interventions. But when it comes to chronic illness, long-term prevention, and quality of life, many patients are left wanting more.

I hear it often:

"My labs are normal, but I still don't feel well."

"My doctor told me it's just

Continued on page 33



Page 28

Wellness



By Kassia Garfield, Owner, MaxStrength Fitness

Back pain is one of the most common ailments affecting millions of people worldwide, and it can range from mild discomfort to debilitating pain. Whether it's due to poor posture, muscle imbalances or injury, many individuals struggle with chronic back pain. While medications, physical therapy and other treatments are often used to manage pain, strength training has emerged as an effective approach to both alleviate and prevent back pain. Here's how strength training can be beneficial for those experiencing back discomfort. The scary thing is, as we have improved health care and science, the incidence of back pain is increasing! With changes to the work force, and less and less physical jobs, people overall are less active.

1. Strengthens Core Muscles

The core, consisting of the

Four Ways Strength Training Can Help Relieve Back Pain

muscles in the abdomen, lower back and pelvis, plays a crucial role in stabilizing the spine. When the core muscles are weak, the spine lacks the support it needs, which can lead to poor posture and increased stress on the back. Strength training exercises like planks, deadlifts and squats can specifically target and strengthen these muscles, improving stability and reducing strain on the spine. A strong core ensures that the body can move efficiently and with less risk of injury, which is particularly important for those with chronic back pain. Just like any joint, the stronger the muscles, the less stress on the joints. A sedentary lifestyle decreases core strength and only leads to an increase in back pain as you age if activity is not a priority.

2. Increases Flexibility and Mobility

Strength training isn't just about building muscle—it can also enhance flexibility and mobility. Exercises that focus on movement through a full range of motion can improve flexibility in the muscles surrounding the spine. For instance, performing squats or lunges can improve hip

New Clients Only

flexibility, which in turn helps alleviate tension in the lower back. Increasing mobility in the hips, hamstrings, and spine reduces stiffness, which is often a contributing factor to back pain. Regular strength training helps maintain healthy movement patterns, which can prevent discomfort and stiffness from developing over time.

3. Reduces the Risk of Injury

Strengthening the muscles surrounding the spine and improving overall body mechanics can significantly reduce the risk of back injuries. A well-balanced strength training program that targets all major muscle groups helps prevent muscle imbalances, which are often the root cause of back pain. Strength training can also help individuals recover more quickly from an injury by improving muscle strength and endurance, allowing the body to better handle physical stress without overloading any one area, particularly the back. If you are dealing with back pain, hiring a professional to help guide you is important, but starting to move and not be afraid is the first steps.

4. Fear-Avoidance Behaviors Can Limit Success

For many people with chronic back pain, the fear of worsening their condition leads to avoidance behaviors. This fear movement-often called of "fear-avoidance behavior"-can become a major obstacle to recovery. When individuals stop moving or avoid certain activities due to fear of pain, it can contribute to the pain getting worse over time. Muscles become weaker, joints become stiffer, and mobility declines. In turn, this can lead to a cycle of increased pain and decreased activity, reinforcing the idea that movement is dangerous. As a health care professional, I often ask people who have had back pain for years, "Wells has rest and a lack of activity helped your back pain?" and the answer is usually, No. If your back hurts if you move or if you don't move, might as well be active and start the process of getting better through strength. Not moving has clearly not worked for many people with back pain-it's time to try something different. Strength training is an excellent way to re-engage with movement. Starting with low-impact exercises and gradually increasing intensity helps build confidence in one's ability to move without pain. When done correctly, strength training can help reduce pain by addressing the underlying causes, such as muscle weakness and imbalances, rather than avoiding movement altogether.

Rather than fearing exercise, individuals with back pain should focus on movement as a tool for healing. Starting slow, with guidance from a fitness professional or physical therapist, can help individuals safely build strength and regain mobility. Over time, this can lead to not only pain relief but also increased function. reduced fear of movement, and a better quality of life. If this sounds like you, please reach out to MaxStrength Fitness of Niceville to hire a professional to help guide you through this journey of recovery. 850-373-4450.

Conclusion: Strength training offers a comprehensive approach to managing and preventing back pain. By strengthening the muscles that support the spine, increasing flexibility and mobility, and reducing the risk of injury, strength training can significantly alleviate discomfort. For those struggling with back pain, incorporating a well-rounded strength training routine into their fitness regimen, alongside advice from a healthcare professional, can lead to long-term relief and improved quality of life.

Interested in a different topic? Please email kgarfield@maxstrengthfitness.com!

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Mellness

Struggling with Sleep? Hormone Therapy Can Help You Rest and Restore Your Health



By Dr. Richard Chern

If you're tossing and turning at night, waking up drenched in sweat, or simply unable to sleep through the night, you're not alone. Poor sleep is one of

the most common complaints among women approaching menopause or who are postmenopausal. And the most common cause of this frustrating issue is estrogen deficiency.

As estrogen levels decline, the body experiences disruptions in temperature regulation, melatonin production and serotonin levels-all critical factors for a deep, restful restorative sleep. This leads to insomnia, frequent waking, night sweats and poor sleep quality, leaving you feeling drained, irritable and unable to function at your best.



Poor Sleep Affects Every Part of Your Life

Many women don't realize that sleep isn't just about feeling rested. Lack of sleep can have serious effects on physical and mental health. Without proper rest, emotions become harder to regulate, leading to increased irritability, anxiety and even depression. The immune system weakens, making you more susceptible to illness and slowing down your body's ability to heal.

Poor sleep also interferes with metabolism and weight management. When you're not sleeping well, your body produces more cortisol, the stress hormone that encourages fat storage, particularly in the midsection. Over time, sleep deprivation can also increase the risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and even dementia. In fact, research indicates that consistently poor sleep can reduce life expectancy due to its widespread impact on overall health.

If you feel like you're aging overnight, struggling with low energy or battling daily exhaustion, it's time to address the root cause. Hormone therapy can help.

The Hormone Restoration Center Can Give You Back Your Sleep!

At the Hormone Restoration Center, we specialize in helping both women and men achieve hormonal balance, restoring energy, vitality and overall well-being. For women struggling with sleep due to declining estrogen, hormone therapy can be a life-changing solution.

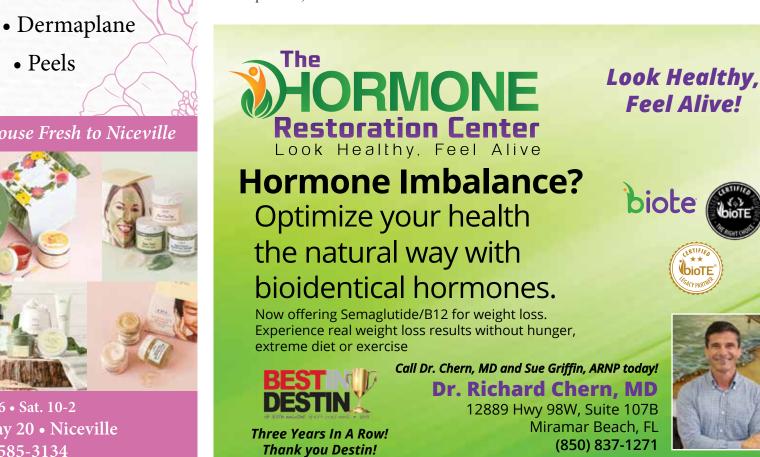
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placement Therapy (BHRT) is a safe and effective treatment that replenishes the hormones your body is missing. By restoring optimal estrogen levels, you can experience deep, uninterrupted sleep, relief from night sweats and hot flashes, improved mood and reduced anxiety. Energy levels will increase throughout the day, mental clarity will sharpen and your metabolism will function more efficiently, making weight management easier.

Imagine waking up refreshed, energized, and ready to take on the day without feeling groggy, moody or exhausted. That's what hormone therapy can do for you.

You don't have to suffer through sleepless nights or accept exhaustion as your new normal. Your body is telling you something and we can help. If poor sleep is affecting your quality of life, it's time to take action.

Call the Hormone Restoration Center at 850-837-1271 today to schedule your consultation. Let us help you reclaim your nights, restore your energy and feel better than you have in years!





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Living with High-Functioning Depression and Anxiety: The Hidden Struggle



By Melanie Yost

High-functioning depression and anxiety are often invisible to the outside world. People who live with these conditions may appear successful, organized, and sociable - yet internally, they struggle with persistent sadness, chronic worry, and emotional exhaustion. Because they continue to perform at work, maintain relationships, and meet responsibilities, their suffering is often overlooked by others and sometimes even by themselves.

High-functioning

sion often mirrors symptoms of Persistent Depressive Disorder (PDD) — a long-lasting, low-grade form of depression. Those affected may experience a constant sense of emptiness, low self-esteem, fatigue, and difficulty enjoying life. However, they continue to "push through" daily tasks, sometimes excelling in them, which masks the emotional toll beneath the surface.

Similarly, high-functioning anxiety often resembles Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD). People may appear competent, driven, and reliable, but internally they battle racing thoughts, fear of failure, perfectionism, and an inability to relax. Their productivity may be fueled more by anxiety than genuine motivation, leading to chronic stress and feelings of burn out.

These conditions are frequently missed for several reasons. First, mental health symptoms are often judged based on external behavior. If someone is working, socializing, and main-



taining responsibilities, others may assume they're fine. Second, many high-functioning individuals downplay or hide their struggles out of fear of stigma or judgment. Lastly, the individuals themselves may have difficulty recognizing or validating their symptoms, believing they are simply "not trying hard enough," "just tired," or "in need of a vacation."

The impact of high-functioning depression and anxiety on health and daily life is profound. Physically, chronic stress can lead to headaches, digestive problems, sleep disturbances, muscle tension, and weakened immune function. Emotionally,

these individuals may feel numb, disconnected, or overwhelmed. Over time, unaddressed symptoms can contribute to burnout, relationship problems, and even increased risk of substance use or suicidal ideation.

Work and productivity are often affected in sub-

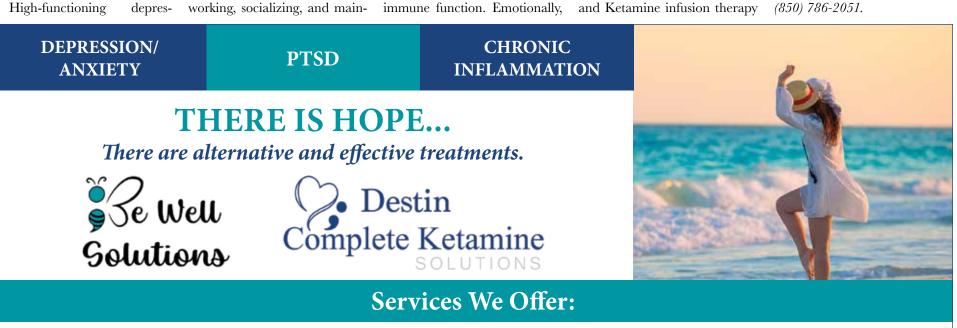
tle but damaging ways. People may overwork to avoid anxiety, struggle with imposter syndrome, or fear delegating tasks. Despite outward success, they may feel unfulfilled or constantly on edge. In daily life, maintaining a façade of normalcy can be exhausting, leaving little energy for genuine connection or self-care.

Fortunately, treatment is available and effective. Therapy can help individuals understand and manage and change their thought, emotion, and behavioral patterns. Wholistic therapies such as body/energy work, Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy, and Ketamine infusion therapy

can be very helpful in calming down the nervous system and creating neuroplasticity. Lifestyle changes — including a healthy whole food diet, regular exercise, adequate sleep, mindfulness, meditation, and setting appropriate boundaries will also make a meaningful difference. And lastly Medication, such as antidepressants or anti-anxiety prescriptions, may support symptom regulation when appropriate.

It's important to remember that you don't need to "hit rock bottom" to seek help. Functioning doesn't mean flourishing. If you're living with persistent inner struggles despite outward success, reaching out for support is a strong, valid step toward healing.

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 more than 35 years and can be reached at (850) 786-2051.



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🐞 Wellness



By Stephenie Craig

Have you ever found yourself in a relationship that is feeling unhealthy? Do you notice a pattern of unhealthy relationships in your life over time and wonder why you keep attracting people who don't treat you well? Maybe a relationship

Choosing Healthy vs. Toxic Relationships

seems great at first. The other person seems fun, friendly, and interested in a relationship with you. You share significant information about yourself pretty quickly and develop a connection. Then, perhaps, you start to notice your new friend ignores you when you say no, or is only interested in talking about themself, or punishes you emotionally when you don't give them what they want, or yells and calls you names when they are frustrated. Maybe they express jealousy when you spend time with another friend, belittle your values, or refuse to take responsibility for their behavior and blame

you when they behave badly. And, when these things occur, perhaps you make excuses for them telling yourself they are just upset and won't do it again or focus on the good moments while ignoring the disrespectful ways they are treating you.

Over time, when you stay in unhealthy relationships, your brain becomes trained to believe this is how you deserve to be treated. As you tolerate being treated poorly, you are unintentionally setting yourself up to choose other unhealthy relationships in the future. It's also possible you grew up in an unhealthy environment that set a pattern of being treated poorly by parent figures. This scenario also creates patterns and beliefs that how you were treated as a child is what you deserve in your adult relationships. Repetitive unhealthy relationships can leave you wondering what is wrong with you and why you can't seem to find healthy people in your life. No one wants to be surrounded by toxic relationships, but, how are you supposed to stop the cycle? How do you start choosing healthy relationships and distance from toxic relationships?



7 Ways to Choose **Healthy Relationships** and Distance from Toxic **Relationships**

• Define and notice deal breakers. Try making a list of qualities/behaviors that are relationship enders for you. Examples include: abuse of any kind (verbal, physical, sexual, emotional, financial), name calling, cursing at you, demeaning/ belittling, disrespecting your consent, drug/alcohol abuse, infidelity, pushing, hitting, etc.

• Define and notice red flags. Try making a list of qualities/behaviors that signal unhealthy patterns. Examples include: offloading anger on you, blaming you for their behavior, shaming, jealous/controlling patterns, isolating you from other relationships, passive



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aggressive punishment of you instead of direct, respectful conversations, hateful words, talking behind your back, insecurity, holding you responsible for their mood/mental health, refusal to have conversations about your experience in the relationship, disrespect of your values.

• Define and notice green flags. Try making a list of qualities/behaviors you believe are important to have in a healthy relationship. Examples include: honesty, loyalty, respect, kindness, directness, caring, reciprocity, respect for your boundaries, calm conversations, taking responsibility, willing to apologize, listens, manages anger in healthy ways, communicates needs.

• Approach relationships slowly and intentionally. Sharing too much too fast and getting close without having time to observe long-term behavioral patterns can result in missing red flags.

• Clarify your values. When you know what is most important to you in life and relationship, it will be easier for you to notice if someone is a healthy fit for your values. Values fit does not require the other person to agree with you about everything. Values fit requires that your most important values are not in conflict with the character and lifestyle of the other person.

• Be the friend you want to have. If you want a new friend to be kind, compassionate, and respectful of your boundaries. Engage in personal growth and become kind, compassionate and respectfu of boundaries. You are more likely to pursue and attract health when you are healthy.

• Be honest and let go. Be honest with yourself when someone is treating you poorly. Remember that while it is hard and sometimes complicated, you have the choice and power to step away from or end a relationship when needed. Grieving the end of a relationship is hard, however, staying in toxic relationships leads to more future toxic relationships.

Choosing more healthy relationships produces a life of positive community and support. Be patient with yourself as you navigate learning new relationship skills. Connect with us for counseling and coaching along your journey at Journeybravely.com.



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- When you look through magazines, do you envy the models' smiles?
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Contractors Connect Invites Building Industry to May Networking Event

Contractors, subcontractors, and building industry specialists are invited to Contractors Connect, a premier networking event happening on Thursday, May 1, from 5 to to 7 p.m. at AJ's in Grayton Beach. The event offers professionals in the construction and trades industries a valuable opportunity to build relationships, exchange business insights, and connect with potential partners—all in a relaxed, welcoming atmosphere.

Attendees will enjoy one free draft beer or house wine, light appetizers, multiple door prizes, and exclusive networking opportunities with local industry leaders. "Networking is crucial in the construction industry, and Contractors Connect is designed to bring professionals together to strengthen the local building community," said Erin Bakker, event organizer for Contractors Connect. "We encourage all industry professionals—whether you're a contractor, subcontractor, supplier, or specialist—to come out and expand your network."

The event is presented by Builders FirstSource along with Industry Partners, Savi Flooring & Tile, Precision Stoneworks and Ply Gem – highlighting the commitment of industry leaders to fostering connections among construction professionals in the region.

"Contractors Connect is a fantastic event, and we're proud to be the presenting sponsor for the May meetup in Walton County," John Pugh, Builders FirstSource area sales manager, said. "It's a great opportunity to connect with others in the construction industry, build relationships, and support the local building community. We truly appreciate being part of such a valuable networking experience."

Tickets are \$20 per person and can be purchased in advance at www.contractors-connect.com, or at the door. For

In short, the Freeport Mer-

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FREEPORT

continued from page 3

forts extend beyond dollars and cents. The organization understands that strong businesses build strong communities. That's why it collaborates with nonprofits, schools and local leaders to support initiatives that improve quality of life in Freeport. Whether it's through beautification projects, sponsorships or educational partnerships, the FMA aims to create a town where businesses and resi-

life in prough sponartnerreate a ad resi-

chants Association is more than a business group, it's a catalyst for growth and a pillar of community life. Its mission is to promote local commerce, foster

dents thrive together.

promote local commerce, foster development and advocate for a thriving Freeport is evident in every initiative it leads. As Freeport continues to grow and evolve, the FMA will remain a steady advocate for the people and businesses that make Freeport unique. To become a member, visit ttps://thefma.online/

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WELLNESS

continued from page 27

part of getting older."

"I was given medication, but no one asked about my diet or stress levels."

Integrative medicine fills those gaps.

We take time to listen. We look at patterns, history, and lifestyle. We ask about your sleep, digestion, energy, and emotional well-being—not because it's "extra," but because it all matters. Our goal isn't just to mask symptoms, but to understand the story behind them and to create a care plan that's tailored to your unique biology, goals, and life circumstances.

The Power of Personalized Wellness

No two bodies are the same. You are not your neighbor, your parent, or your coworker. What

works for one person may not work for another—and that's why personalized care matters.

When you work with an integrative provider, you're not handed a one-size-fits-all solution. You're invited into a partnership, where we co-create a wellness plan that evolves with you. Whether you're working on hormone balance, fertility, digestion, chronic stress, weight loss, or simply optimizing your energy, our role is to guide and support your process with the right blend of tools.

Sometimes, that's acupuncture. Sometimes, it's a dietary shift, a carefully selected supplement, or lab-guided medical intervention. Often, it's all of the above.

The Tortoise Mentality

Health is not a destination. It's not a number on a scale or a perfect lab result. It's a relationship with your body, and like any relationship, it requires time, trust, and patience.

True wellness isn't about "fixing" what's wrong—it's about learning what your body needs to thrive and honoring that through intentional, steady steps. That's what we mean when we say, "Wellness is a marathon, not a sprint."

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Musing

Pastor's Ponderings – "May Day: A Cry for Help and a Call to Hope"



By Pastor Doug Stauffer

May Day. For some, the term evokes images of children dancing around a pole adorned with flowers to celebrate spring. For others, it conjures images of international labor protests or even Cold War military parades in distant lands. And then there's the urgent distress call: "Mayday! Mayday!"—a plea for rescue when things go wrong. In many ways, all these meanings can resonate powerfully within our current cultural and spiritual climate.

Historically, May Day originated as a spring festival, marking the upcoming harvest's renewal, growth and promise. As the Earth warmed and flowers bloomed, communities gathered to celebrate life and beauty. It was a time of hope—a season of sowing, both literally and symbolically. Over time, especially in the 20th century, May Day became associated with labor movements and political ideologies, particularly in communist and socialist nations, where it was used to exalt the state over the individual and government over God. America seemed poised to repeat these same mistakes.

Here in America, we often shy away from the May Day connotations, choosing instead to honor our workers on Labor Day in September. Nevertheless, May remains a time of transition—from spring to summer, from planting to preparing for harvest.

As Christians, May Day presents an opportunity to pause and reflect on what we're sowing in our lives, homes, and country. The Bible states, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7). May is an ideal time for self-examination. Are we sowing righteousness, kindness, truth, and grace? Are we planting seeds of faith in the hearts of our children and the communi-



ty around us?

And then there's that haunting cry: "Mayday! Mayday!" Our nation, our churches, and many of our families are in distress. We have strayed from our biblical foundation, exchanging truth for tolerance and conviction for convenience. Perhaps this May Day, we should heed the spiritual distress signal echoing across the land—not with despair, but as a call to action.

The good news is that when we cry out, God listens. Psalm 34:17 reminds us, "The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles." Our national restoration will not come through politics alone, programs, or protests. It begins when God's people humble themselves, pray, seek His face, and turn from their wicked ways (2 Chronicles 7:14); Israel's promise can also be ours.

This May, let us reclaim May Day—not as a political statement or a pagan ritual, but as a personal and collective turning point. Let it remind us that now is the time to plant seeds of revival, to call out in faith, and to renew our commitment to the Lord.

May our cry be not just "Mayday! Mayday!" in desperation, but "Lord, have Your way! Have it today" in devotion to the Almighty.

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

Service Times

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Sean of the South



BY SEAN DIETRICH

Memorial Day is the unofficial start to summer, and summer was in full bloom in America. The nation experienced mostly beautiful weather.

The Midwest had highs in the 80s, The Southeast experienced temps even higher. Temperatures in the Florida panhandle exceeded approximately 173 degrees.

But it's important to remember that it wasn't a great Memorial Day weekend for everyone.

Yesterday in Saint Louis, for example, a man named Phillip was playing baseball with his kids while his wife, Lindsey, was making potato salad inside. The day was going swimmingly.

"Guys in my family have always played baseball on Memorial Day weekend," Philip wrote to me this morning in an email. "It's a longstanding tradition for us."

Phillip was pitching. His 11-year-old son, Austin, was at the plate. Phillip delivered an easy pitch underhand. His son swung the bat like the baseball had personally insulted his mother. The bat connected.

PING!

The good news is that Phillip's son hit a line drive. The bad news is: it was a line drive which struck a part of Phillip's anatomy most often associated with procreation.

The ball nailed Phillip. He howled in pain. He went down under the power. His kids all gathered around him and asked if he was okay. All Phillip could utter was, "Go get your mom, please."

It bears mentioning, Phillip's son was using an aluminum bat not a wooden bat. Which might not sound like an important detail to this story except that the exit velocity of a ball hit by an aluminum bat is a LOT higher

than that of one hit by a wooden bat.

A ball hit by a wooden bat has an average velocity of 60 to 80 mph. Whereas a ball hit by an aluminum bat is capable of breaking the sonic barrier.

Phillip's wife approached her what had happened.

Twinkie."

self for a moment. When she returned, her face was red and she looked like she'd been laughing. "I wasn't laughing," said

Phillip's wife. "It's allergies."

Then, his wife single-handedly loaded Phillip into their SUV. She placed him in the cargo hold because Phillip was incapable of sitting. Phillip laid on on his side throughout the long ride to the hospital and tried to remind himself to breathe.

Occasionally, he heard a cackling sound coming from the front seat, but his wife swears that her allergies get so bad this time of year.

allergies," Phillip writes.

checked him out. The nurse removed Phillip's trousers and the medical professionals inspected the bruising. The doctor asked how it happened.

again. "My brother hit my daddy in the Twinkie."

The doctor nodded, covered his mouth, then excused himself

husband and asked her children

Her 4-year-old son remarked, "Austin hit daddy in the

His wife had to excuse her-

"My wife doesn't even have

At the hospital, a doctor

Phillip's 4-year-old spoke



briefly. The medical man left the exam room and Phillip swears he heard the sound of the doctor's allergies acting up.

When the doctor returned, he was out of breath and he had four other male medical colleagues with him who were available to offer their expertise. Also, the janitor said he wanted to see, too.

One of the veteran ER doctors, male, inspected the bruising and wore a grave face. Whereupon he looked Phillip square in the eye and said, "Son, I'm afraid we're going to have to remove it."

At which point, all medical staffers excused themselves again and Phillip heard more allergies in the hallway.

"What kind of world is this we live in," Phillip wrote to me, "when doctors and nurses can't

even act professionally?"

Thankfully, as it turns out, Phillip will make a full recovery. The main advice the doctor gave Phillip was to use frozen vegetables-either corn or peas

work best-to de-inflame the affected netherregions. Once the bruising goes away, the doctor recommends that Phillip retire his jersey and quit baseball altogether.

Phillip spent most of today in the supine position, lying on his sofa. All day, Philip's friends have been stopping by to wish him well.

"They've been bringing me a lot of Hostess products," said Phillip.

He hopes that by sharing his story he can warn fathers out there to take the proper protective measures when playing backyard sports.

"I just don't wanna see this happen to someone else," he added. "I think it's time we talked openly about this painfully sensitive subject."

Now if you'll excuse me, my allergies are acting up.







Email msvenghaus@gmail.com

Arts & Music

The Benefits of Music Students Performing in Recital

Recitals are an important part of any music student's education. These performances offer significant opportunities for growth and development. For students, the chance to perform in front of an audience can be both exhilarating and challenging. Yet, the benefits extend beyond stepping on stage. From technical skills to fostering emotional resilience, recitals provide valuable experiences that shape a music student's journey.

Recitals are an important **1. Building Confidence/** rt of any music student's edu- **Overcoming Stage Fright**

One of the benefits of performing in a recital is the opportunity to build self-confidence. The idea of playing in front of others can be daunting. However, with practice and repeated exposure, the fear of performing gradually diminishes. Over time, students become more comfortable with public performance, gaining self-assurance to play before others. It is an excellent way to conquer stage fright and gain personal confidence.

2. Refining Technical Skills

A recital performance offers students a chance to put their technical skills to the test. Rehearsing for a recital encourages musicians to fine-tune their playing, ensuring they achieve the highest level of precision in their technique. In preparing for recitals, students focus on details and often improve their over-



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all musicianship as they perfect their instrument handling, rhythm, and phrasing.

3. Developing Discipline and Time Management

Preparing for a recital requires a level of discipline and time management that is crucial to a student's musical development. Students must organize their schedules to allow ample time for rehearsals, adjustments, and refinement of their songs. This process teaches valuable lessons in discipline as they balance their musical goals with other academic or personal commitments. The experience of preparing for a recital, then, is not only about musical growth but also about developing the habits of consistency and perseverance that will serve them in all areas of life.

4. Enhancing Emotional Expression

One of the most rewarding aspects of performing in a recital is the ability to communicate emotion through music. Music is a powerful tool for expression, and recitals provide the opportunity to convey emotions to an audience. Whether playing a piece filled with joy, sorrow, or contemplation, students learn to use their instruments to evoke a particular mood or atmosphere. This emotional connection with the music develops one's appreciation for their craft while honing their ability to connect with listeners on a deeper level.

5. Receiving Constructive Feedback

Performing in front of an

audience, including instructors and peers, provides students with the opportunity to receive constructive feedback. Teachers and fellow musicians might offer suggestions to help refine the performance. This feedback, while sometimes challenging, is crucial for a student's growth. By learning how to welcome and implement constructive critique, students develop a sense of humility and strength to continue learning and improving.

6. Cultivating a Sense of Community

Finally, recitals foster a sense of community among music students. These performances create a shared experience between the performer and the audience. The support from peers, family, and friends who attend the recital creates an encouraging atmosphere that nurtures the student's growth. Also, they often provide students with the opportunity to connect with other musicians, exchange experiences, and learn from one another. The skills and experiences gained will influence their musical journey for years to come.

Studio 237 Music Lessons' student recital is scheduled for May 10, Saturday, at Seagrove Baptist Church, 4915 E County Hwy 30A, Santa Rosa Beach, FL. The community Is invited to attend. Performance groups will begin at 10 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. Students of all ages and levels will be playing on piano, voice, guitar, drums, and ukulele. To find out more about Studio 237 visit our website at www. Studio237Music.com, and/or call (850) 231-3199.

Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation Calls for Artists for the 30th Annual Festival of the Arts

The Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation (MKAF) is now accepting artist applications for the 30th Annual Festival of the Arts, one of the most anticipated art festivals in the Southeast. This juried fine arts show will take place October 25-26, 2025, on the Dugas Pavilion green in Destin.

Celebrating three decades of artistic excellence, the Festival of the Arts features more than 100 premier artists from across the country, offering attendees an immersive experience of fine art, live music, and interactive activities for all ages. The event includes a beer and wine garden, a live entertainment lineup, "street" performers, and engaging art activities for childrenall narrated by a professional emcee.

Artists are invited to apply for this juried show, which awards more than \$12,000 in cash prizes, including Best in Show, People's Choice, Awards of Excellence, Awards of Merit, and Judge's Recognition Awards. A variety of mediums will be showcased, including painting, drawing, printmaking, photography, digital art, sculpture, ceramics, fiber, glass, wood, jewelry, mixed media, and more.

The Festival of the Arts provides a prime opportunity for artists to showcase and sell their work to an audience of more than 6.000 art enthusiasts and



collectors. Participants benefit from inclusion in the official festival guide, both in print and digital formats, with artist contact details featured in the Artist Preview. MKAF offers exceptional artist hospitality, including free admission to the kickoff party Friday (optional), complimentary breakfast each morning and a special artist award dinner on Saturday evening. Artists also enjoy easy, drive-up access for booth setup and teardown, free on-site park-

ing, booth sitters, and overnight security.

Artists must submit four high-resolution images, including three of their work and one of their booth setup, for jury consideration. The application

fee is \$30 per category. Booth fees are \$350 for a single space, \$400 for a corner space (limited availability), and \$700 for a double space (limited availability). The deadline to apply is June 30, 2025, with jury results announced in mid-July.

Proceeds fund the MKAF's community outreach mission to provide cultural outreach programs serving K-12 students, individuals with special needs, and active-duty military and veterans in our community.

For full details on artist participation, rules, and applications, visit www.MKAF.org or contact (850) 650-2226 or info@ mkaf.org.

HELLO DOLLY continued from page 9

join forces, the results are really nothing less than amazing."

Leading the cast of Hello, Dolly! is Jaiden Rae Strange as Dolly Levi, with Jaron Music

as Horace Vandergelder. Eli Pancoast and Drew Cookplay Cornelius Hackl and Barnaby Tucker, while Lyla-Christine Payne and Caylee Konradt portray Irene Molloy and Minnie Fay. Nicholas Venture and Sara Marello round out the cast as Ambrose Kemper and Ermengarde.

VIP tickets for Hello, Dolly! are \$20 and include early entry 30 minutes before the show, plus a free bag of popcorn and bottled water. General Admission is \$15, with seating beginning 20 minutes prior. "People are surprised by our ticket prices until they realize a single show can cost \$10,000-\$15,000 to produce," says director Jackson. "The rights for Dolly alone were \$7,500—before sets, costumes, props and staff." Performances

are May 2, 3, 9 and 10 at 7 p.m., with matinees May 3 and 10 at 2 p.m. Concessions (cash only) will be available before the show and at intermission. Tickets are on sale at GoFan.co. Hello, Dolly! is presented through Concord Theatricals, New York.



Arts & Music

Spring is Blonde this Year!

By Anna Fisher, Associate Artistic Director, Emerald Coast Theatre Company

Spring is always my favorite time of year. I love it for all the usual reasons—cool breezes, beautiful flowers, and Easter celebrations with family. I also love it because we have our K-12 student performances in April when we get to watch our ECTC kids shine on stagemost recently in "The Wizard of Oz." Last but not least, we end our season in the spring with a show- stopping musical, which is none other than Legally Blonde this May!

One of the things I absolutely love about this show is the humor that is woven through every part of the show. The song lyrics, the writing, and the scenes always bring a laugh or a smile and yet manage to show depth and character development at the same time. Elle Woods, the lead character, is a great example of this balance of humor and depth.



Everyone around Elle- including the audience- expects her to be a shallow sorority girl who only cares about getting her MRS. degree. This might be true in the beginning, but one of the joys of the show is watching her grow and overcome every obstacle thrown in her path. She proves us wrong time and time again and defies all odds by being kind, persistent, and not quite as "blonde" as we think she is. If you're somehow not familiar with the story, I won't spoil it for you, but I will say it's gonna surprise you how much you end up rooting for this pink loving blonde. We always deliberate at length about what shows to put in our season at Emerald Coast Theatre Company, and we always look for stories with heart. This show is no exception. I think you'll find that like a cool refreshing breeze, Elle is the hero we all need this spring. Don't miss the laughs and the joy! Come join us May 2nd-18th in real time for a live show experience that will never happen the same way twice. That's why the heart of ECTC is you!

ArtsQuest Returns May 3 & 4

Every May, for more than 35 years, the CAA's ArtsQuest Fine Arts Festival showcases more than 125 local, regional and national fine artists for residents and visitors. This year's event planned for Saturday, May 3 from 10 a.m. - 7 p.m. and Sunday, May 4 from 10 a.m. - 5 $\,$ p.m., transforms North Park in Grand Boulevard Town Center into a vibrant hub of artistic expression offering a dynamic showcase of talent. Artists compete for prestigious awards and cash prizes totaling \$10,000, with winners selected by a panel of distinguished judges.

Beyond the stunning art-

work, ArtsQuest offers an immersive experience for all ages. Attendees can enjoy live demonstrations, an exclusive CAA member exhibit, and a Walton County student exhibit highlighting the next generation of creative talent. This year also includes a special showcase from the CAA's transformative Prison Art program, an interactive public art installation, and a silent auction featuring unique pieces and experiences.

Live entertainment will fill the air throughout the weekend, creating a festive atmosphere, while families can explore "ImagiNation: Where Kids Rule," a hands-on creative space designed just for young artists.

NEW this year is an exclusive VIP Package offering festival goers an elevated way to enjoy the event. The package includes a Sip & Shop experience on Saturday, May 3 from 5-7 p.m. with special offers from participating artists as well as a meet and greet with featured Artist Gerard Frank. VIP package holders will enjoy access to a private shaded lounge featuring snacks, drinks and interactive activities throughout the event weekend. For VIP tickets, visit culturalartsalliance.com.







Okaloosa Arts Alliance Announces 16th Annual Okaloosa County School Poster Contest: "Art in Outer Space"

The Okaloosa Arts Alliance (OAA) is excited to invite all K-12 students in Okaloosa County to showcase their creativity under the theme "Art in Outer Space" for the 16th Annual Okaloosa County School Poster Contest.

Students may submit their entries individually or through their schools, with only one submission per student. Each artwork must include the artist's name, grade and school on the front of the artwork.

Submissions can be mailed to: Okaloosa Arts Alliance -Poster Contest P.O. Box 4426 Fort Walton Beach, FL 32549. Alternatively, entries can be dropped off in person at the Emerald Coast Science Center during regular business hours. The deadline for submissions is May 2, 2025, before the close of business.

Prizes will be awarded to First, Second and Third place winners in three categories: Elementary

School (K-4th), Middle School (5th-8th), and High School



(9th-12th). First-place winners' artwork will be showcased on

the OAA website and newsletter. Prizes are generously provided by Eglin Federal Credit Union, HH Arts, ADSO, and the Emerald Coast Science Center.

All the poster entries will be on display and the winners will be announced on Sunday, May 4th, from 2–4 p.m. at the Emerald Coast Science Center. The

event will feature a Viewers' Choice Award, where attend-

ees can vote for their favorite artwork. Live music will be performed by Grow Your Gift Conservatory of Music. "We are excited to be opening our new planetarium building and are looking forward to partnering with OAA on the space art contest to showcase the planetarium," said Diane Fraser, Executive Director of the Emerald Coast Science Center.

For more information, visit https://www.okaloosaarts. org/2025-school-poster-contest. html or email Amy at amybaty1@gmail.com







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