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Postal Customer Local

98-Year-Old Pilot Sees Skyraider Legacy Live on in AFSOC's OA-1K Skyraider II

Editor Note: A testament to our area's commitment to its veterans and their families, Hawthorn House at the Air Force Enlisted Village in Shalimar quietly honors the legacy of service for retired enlisted members and their surviving spouses. This 64-apartment, assisted living home offers care and community helping them live with dignity, purpose and connection. The story that follows highlights one of those remarkable residents-a 98-yearold veteran whose life of service was recently honored in a moving ceremony. His journey is a powerful reminder of why Hawthorn House matters and what a profound impact compassionate care and community support have on the lives of our veterans and their families.

BY STAFF SGT. NATALIE FIORILLI, AIR FORCE SPECIAL **OPERATIONS COMMAND**

At 98 years old, retired U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Bill Buice never imagined he'd see another Skyraider take flight.

Looking ahead, he smiled as the hum of the aircraft's



PHOTO BY STAFE SGT. NATALIE FIORILL

as it drew closer.

Joined by his family and members of Air Force Special **Operations Command, Buice** watched as the first missionized OA-1K Skyraider II arrived at Hurlburt Field, April 3, 2025.

As the OA-1K Skyraider II taxied, Buice said the moment brought back a wave of memories. To him, this was more than a new aircraft-it was a tribute to the original

turboprop engine deepened A-1 Skyraider, the plane he piloted during the Vietnam War until the day he was shot down nearly 60 years ago. ...

> Rolling in for a pass to inspect the area below, Buice heard a sudden explosion.

It was July 9, 1968, and Buice, call sign "Firefly 16," and his wingman, "Firefly 17," were providing cover for a formation of American helicopters flying in northern Laos, near the Vietnam border.

Looking through the canopy of his A-1 Skyraider, he spotted a fire on the left wing of his aircraft.

Buice dumped the hydraulic system pressure to extinguish the flames. It worked, but the wing had a gaping hole, and the magnesium casting continued to burn.

He pulled the aircraft into a climbing turn, looking for a place to land. His teammates warned him over the radio.

"Not in the valley, whatever you do," they urged, warning the enemy could be there.

Knowing he would soon lose complete control of the aircraft, he reversed his rudder controls, forcing the A-1 into a faster roll. Inverting the plane, he pulled the ejection handle as soon as he could see the sky through the canopy.

"The canopy disappeared with a bang," Buice recalled. "Then nothing."

He saw the jungle rushing

98 YEAR OLD continued on page 2

Saddling Up for Success with Westonwood Ranch

By Heather Bennett Eye

Whether you're navigating a new diagnosis or have recently moved to the Emerald Coast, finding the right resources for a child or family member with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) can feel overwhelming. Knowing where to turn for therapy, education, social support and recreational opportunities can make all the difference. Our community offers several resources to help you connect, advocate and thrive.

Lindy Wood, founder of Westonwood Ranch in Freeport, was once in your shoes. Her 15-year-old son Weston was diagnosed with autism when he was two. "It's overwhelming. You do not get a lot of guidance from the diagnostic physician. They tell you that you need to start therapy, but you walk away, and you don't know where to turn to," said Lindy.

In rural Alabama, where they lived, extensive therapy was limited. After visiting several schools, they decided the Emerald Coast Autism

Award Winning Local's Menu

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FREE ADMISSION TO GATOR BEACH - OPENS AT 11AM

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98 YEAR OLD

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up. His airspeed increased and altitude dropped. He pulled the handle again.

The rocket fired, pulling him from the cockpit. His parachute deployed, slowing his descent. He crashed through the jungle, hitting a tree and injuring his shoulder and quickly realized he couldn't move his right arm.

Hearing noise nearby, he used his left hand to reach for his pistol and call for help with his radio.

Moments later, an Air America helicopter arrived. Owned and operated by the CIA, Air America was a cargo and passenger airline that provided air

support for the U.S. and its allies during the Vietnam War. A pilot came down to help

Buice onto the lift, but as they ascended, the weight was too much

"I insisted that he join me for the trip up, but it was too heavy," Buice recalled. "So I gave him my radio and pistol, and he stayed behind, hoping another chopper would get to him before the bad guys did."

Buice was airlifted to Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base, Thailand for urgent medical treatment. Ultimately, his shoulder injury would end his 20-year Air Force career.

For decades, Buice often thought about the man who had rescued him, wondering if he



made it out alive.

Sitting beside Buice at the OA-1K delivery ceremony was Phillip Jennings, a retired Air America helicopter pilot-the very man who had saved him that day. Over the years, the two had reunited only a handful of times, making this moment even more special, Jennings noted.

"I knew from the moment I

watched him get shot down that we would have to go get him," Jennings said. "I'm elated to be able to be here to see him be recognized and honored. He was the real hero that day, saving the Air America helicopters from landing in the deadly gunfire that shot his A-1 down.'

Though the crash ended his flying career, Buice said he has always felt a connection to the A-1 Skyraider.

As a pilot, Buice liked the A-1 for its ability to fly for an extended period while also being able to carry a large payload of ammunition.

The OA-1K Skyraider II now carries on that role, equipped with advanced weapons systems for light attack and reconnaissance missions for AFSOC.

Taking a moment to look at the new aircraft, Buice reflected on what it meant for the next generation of Skyraider pilots.

"I hope they embrace the challenges, the accomplishments-even the fear and the adrenaline," he said. "There will be a day when they can no longer do this. Today is not that day.'

Today, Buice lives at the Hawthorne House, an assisted living neighborhood in the Air Force Enlisted Village in nearby Shalimar. The Air Force Enlisted Village is a community for retired enlisted military members and their surviving spouses.

and the Special Olympics of Walton County.

If you would like to learn more about Westonwood Ranch, visit www.westonwood.org or contact them at info@westonwood.org or (850) 880-2220.



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WESTONWOOD

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Center in Niceville was the best choice for Weston, and they moved to Freeport to give Weston better opportunities. Here, they navigated a new community and new opportunities.

Now Lindy and her family work to help others. "The most important, or critical thing, when they're young, is that you're more aggressive with therapy. It's shown to have the best outcomes as they continue to age," stated Lindy. "Take advantage of that time ahead of the game. Be proactive. You have to advocate for alternate learning opportunities. Because those are critical." Westonwood Ranch started as a vision of a place where individuals with disabilities could learn,

grow and thrive, and since opening in 2019, they've worked hard to help teens and young adults with IDD realize their potential and develop life skills to foster independent and productive lives.

While there are numerous therapy and skill-building opportunities available for young children with autism and other developmental disabilities, resources tend to become more limited as children grow older. For adolescents and young adults, access to developmentally appropriate services, such as life skills training, social development programs, or transition support, can be significantly harder to find. Additionally, insurance coverage for these types of services may be restricted, leaving families to navigate financial barriers during a critical period of growth and in-



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dependence. Westonwood Ranch works

hard to raise money and find community support to help offset costs for participants through financial aid. "We never want finances to be a barrier to obtaining this higher level of programs," said Lindy. They also have an aquaponic farm where they grow and sell produce. They currently have seven local restaurants sourcing lettuce from them regularly. They also have a bakery where they produce their own Brew Chews Gourmet Dog Treats. Proceeds from those businesses are reinvested back into the ranch.

There are several programs to assist children and young adults with IDD offered at Westonwood Ranch. The Transitional Services Day Program is full-time, year-round for those 12 and up, providing opportunities to gain critical skills to be more independent. The LIFT OFF Program for those 18 and older is designed to help those exiting the school system and focuses on developing soft skills with real hands-on learning at the aquaponics farm and pet treat bakery. The program culminates in an internship and an opportunity to be employed. The ranch also provides an Afterschool Equine Therapy on Mondays and Wednesdays for ages four to adult.

"No matter where you are on your walk with autism or other developmental disabilities, don't let their age be a limit on their ability to learn. No matter what age you are, you're still capable of learning whether you have a disability or not," added Lindy. "They are still able and capable



of learning and capable of doing amazing things if given the right

Many cities and counties face the challenge of affordable hous-Emerald Coast is no different. Westonwood Ranch is looking to change that. They are currently working on securing funding for a supportive living community for 44 young adults that will include apartments, townhomes and tiny homes with a pool and a clubhouse. This community will be 180 degrees from the traditional group homes.

In addition to Westonwood Ranch, there are a variety of resources available along the Emerald Coast to support individuals with IDD, as well as their families and caregivers. These resources span early intervention services, educational supports, therapy providers, community programs, and advocacy organizations. Notable organizations include the Emerald Coast Autism Center, Great Gains Behavioral, Project 10, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Florida Center for Students with Unique Abilities, Centers for Autism and Related Disabilities, Autism Society of Florida, Walton County Arc, Grace Rides,

opportunities and pathways."

ing for people with IDD, and the

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The Father of All Holidays: Celebrating Dad

By Christopher Manson

Father's Day is Sunday, June 15, and you are kindly reminded that the celebration happens all day long, regardless of whether the old guy is awake or not.

Warm up-or rather, cool off-Friday, June 6, by treating Dad to a cold one at "Free Beer Friday: Locals on the Harbor" at Destin's Boathouse Oyster Bar "while the keg lasts." The event is a fundraiser for Road Dogg Rescue, a local volunteer-driven foster-based rescue that saves dogs from kill shelters and is responsible for many happy doggie daddies. It's scheduled from 5 to 7 p.m.

On Saturday, June 7, radio station 99 ROCK presents The Word Alive and The Funeral Project live in concert at Club L.A. in Destin. The band Melrose Avenue is also scheduled to perform. Ages 16 and older. More at rockdestin.com.

Kick off Father's Day weekend early with the nostalgic Eighties rock stylings of **Def Leppard** tribute band Adrenalize at the Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation's Dugas Pavilion in

Destin Thursday, June 12, at 7 p.m. (doors open at 6 p.m.). And good news! You and Dad are not required to pose for a photograph or pour sugar on yourselves, but you can rocket on over for tasty bites from choice local restaurants and food trucks. Purchase your tickets at mkaf.org.

Guardians of the Jukebox hit the Club L.A. stage Friday, June 13. The event is presented by Coast 93.3 FM and is an age 16 and up show. On Saturday, June 14, HarborWalk Village hosts the Summer Sun-Sets Concert Series at 6 p.m. (band to be announced; check the HarborWalk Facebook page for updated information).

On Father's Day proper, take the old man to AJ's Seafood & Oyster Bar in Destin for the Sunday Crawfish Boil, starting at 1 p.m. Since 1984, our friends at AJ's have been serving up delicious crawfish with fresh new potatoes, sweet corn and tasty mushrooms. Meanwhile, Jones and Company serve up their award-winning fusion of pop, jazz and rhythm and blues from 4 to 8.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MANSON FAMILY ARCHIVES Christopher Manson (right) with the late great C.E. Manson, Sr., on the Destin Harbor about a hundred years ago.

If fishing is Dad's passion, the Seventh Annual Summer Slam Fishing Tournament is in full swing through the end of July. Daily weigh-ins happen at Destin's Boathouse Oyster Bar from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. And while you're on the Destin Harbor, there are plenty of appealing options for charter fishing adventures (among other things).

For more Harbor fun, treat Dad to a one-of-a-kind adventure on the water with Tailfins Island Adventure! Tailfins offers two unforgettable experiences: climb aboard the Always Workin', a spacious 45-foot cruiser perfect for sightseeing and relaxing, or opt for the Talk of Town Tikis, Tailfins' newest and most unique tiki boats-complete with island vibes and panoramic Gulf views. Whether Dad's in the mood for dolphin watching, a harbor cruise or just some laid-back fun on the water, it's a perfect way to make Father's Day memories.

Looking for a more laid-back way to treat Dad this Father's Day? Head over to Bluewater Bay Marina in Niceville and kick back at LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant & Oyster Bar. On Sunday, June 16, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., enjoy "Brunch on the Bay"-a delicious buffet with waterfront views and salty breezes. As a special toast to all the amazing dads out there, each dad gets a complimentary mimosa or draft beer. Brunch is \$15.99 for

adults, \$5.99 for kids ages 7-12, and free for little ones under 6.

After brunch, spend some quality time together exploring the marina-rent a boat, try paddleboarding, or simply take in the **beauty of the Bay.** It's a great way to slow down, connect and celebrate Dad. For more info, visit bluewaterbaymarina. com.

As far as Dad-friendly movies are concerned, From the World of John Wick: Ballerina hits the big screen June 6. A spin-off of (or shameless attempt to cash in on) Keanu Reeves' action-packed franchise, the events of this film take place between John Wick: Chapter 3 - Parabellum and John Wick: Chapter 4... in case you thought those two movies weren't long enough. There's also a new How to Train Your Dragon movie hitting theaters, in case you or your father happen to be nine years old.

Other ideas include enjoying quality time with Dad by exploring local parks, having a family barbecue or taking a scenic walk along the Bay. And remember to let Pop sleep in.



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A Man for All Seasons: Celebrating Stan Proffitt at 107 years old

By Barbara Palmgren

Every so often you meet an icon. Someone who inspires and leaves lessons for the ages. I had that distinct pleasure when I met with Stan to reminisce about a life well lived.

Stan lives with daughter Nancy Kilgore and husband Ray Kilgore in Shalimar Pointe in my neighborhood. Stan spends most sunny days sitting outside of the garage in his walker, available to greet an talk with anyone who passes by and needs a few words of wisdom, humor, or advice.

My husband, Lornie, had already stopped to present a few balloons in the morning to Stan and returned home with a few tears in his eye. When I visited Stan later in the day, he was busy on the phone. Lots of folks phoning to give birthday wishes.

With a smile on his face and agreeing to share special stories we talked for a long time. A few highlights of that interview are now shared.

Stan was born in a small town of Hulet, Virginia. He tried to find the little town years ago but could only locate a place where there was a cross in the road. Stan remembers growing up on a 150 acre farm near Fred-



ericksburg, Virginia. Stan never left the farm until he was in his 20's. With a large family of six children, Stan was busy working on a farm that raised all sorts of fruits and vegetables. He walked two miles to a one-room school house and his teacher walked even further. She would be seen going by the farm and every so often Stan's father would call out, "Boys aren't going to be in school today. They have work to do here."

At the onset of World War II, Stan and his younger brother went to enlist. The brother was recruited but Stan was rejected. At 24 years of age, Stan was almost blind. He had cataracts and a peripheral vision issue.

Undeterred and patriotic, Stan and several friends, boarded a train from the east and

deral

bers Matter Most

headed to Detroit, Michigan to work in a factory manufacturing aircraft wings to be used on aircraft that would land on a navy carrier. He said the wings use to fold up. It was for him, an amazing adventure. Male workers were appreciated to help alongside women who were now part of the work force. We know about the "Rosie Riveters," needed to build necessary machines and equipment to win the war.

When peace returned, Stan was back in the Washington D.C. area living in a boarding house with his brother, Walt. Both sons went home to Virginia on Sundays to get a good meal from mother and visit mom and dad. One Sunday they met two women who had traveled by bus from the city to visit one of the lady's children. Stan's mother fostered over 65 children in her lifetime and this mother was visiting the farm to see her children. Both women worked at the Pentagon. The mother couldn't afford care for her children so Stan's mother helped her. The ladies were going to take the bus back to the city when Stan's brother offered them a ride back in a 1937 Chevy Coupe. Only problem, one lady would have to sit on his lap. You could seat three people across in the one long seat of the car.

That ride back led to all four of them having dinner and eating chili at a nearby restaurant across from the Capitol. One woman, Virginia, gave Walt her phone number in case they wanted to see the Pentagon. Both ladies roomed at the YMCA. A few days later, Walt enlisted in the US Army and he gave Stan this phone number. Stan phoned and asked Virginia out on a date. This date later turned into a 65-year marriage.

Stan was so proud of Virginia. She had more education than Stan who did not attend high school. He said his father raised the boys to understand that "horses and hands" are what's needed to ensure success on the farm. Virginia, born in Illinois, graduated from high school, taking a Civil Service exam to work for the government. Virginia scored so high she was immediately hired and traveled after graduation for a job at the Pentagon.

Stan had various jobs in the Washington DC area and retired working for RL Polk, a printing plant that produced items such as city directories. He and Virginia traveled everywhere in an RV during retirement, visiting bother Walt in Central Florida and Ray and Nancy near US AirForce bases in California and Arizona.

So now, in 2025, after talking about all the changes in technology he had seen over his lifetime, I asked Stan what he thought the most valuable lesson in life should be shared with the younger generation. Stan answered immediately that "common sense and will power is what will do you the most good." Stan thought that all the education in the world doesn't help if someone has no common sense and will power.

How can you argue with that? I certainly marvel at a lesson learned for all of us.

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Bay Buzz Summer

Get Creative This June at Big Orange House Designs Creates!

Big Orange House Designs Creates in Niceville is the place to be this summer for all things imaginative and hands-on! Whether your child wants to craft, paint, or play, or you're an adult looking to explore new artistic skills, their June lineup is packed with fun for every age. Led by beloved local instructors like Donna, JoJo, Mery, Laurel, and Kathleen Broaderick, each session is a chance to make something special and spark creativity in a welcoming, community-focused environment. Here's what's coming up:

Camp Create (Grades 1 & Up) Held from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m., \$50 per day

• June 3: Paint a camper &





Mattie Kelly Arts Center 100 College Blvd East, Niceville







make a felted camp banner with Donna

• June 5: Foam printing press with JoJo & summertime cookie tray with Mery

• June 10: Skewer sculptures & Weaving 101 with JoJo

• June 11: Olympic Games parachute play, water relays, balloon toss & make a medal with JoJo

• June 12: Balloon cars & Father's Day boxes with JoJo

• June 17: Butterfly/dragonfly wall art & lightning bug bottles with Donna

• June 19: Driftwood & seashell beaded mobile with JoJo & beachy cupcakes with Mery

• June 24: Paint-your-own beach bag with JoJo & pottery fish with Laurel

• June 26: Fish mobile & mixed media canvas with JoJo

Camp Create Preschool (Ages 3–5) Held 9 – 10:30 a.m., \$35 per session

June 4: "Go Camping" –
Brown Bear theme with Donna
June 18: "Critters" – Hun-

gry Caterpillar theme with

Donna Glass Art Open Studio (All Ages Welcome!)

Drop in anytime from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m., \$25+

• June 20, 21, & 28

To register or learn more, visit Big Orange House Designs Creates on Facebook or at bigorangehousedesigns.com. Space is limited, so don't wait to grab your spot!

Valparaiso's Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida Announces July Summer Camp Details By BARBARA PALMGREN

This year, two unique weekly summer camps will be offered at the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida located at 115 Westview Ave. in Valparaiso. Camp hours are from 10 a.m. -1 p.m. with campers arriving at 9:45 a.m. Snacks are provid-

ed but campers should bring a lunch as well. For both weeks, campers age 5-12 will engage with in-

age 5-12 will engage with instructors in hands-on activities, games and crafts that bring history to life.

The first week, July 7-11, 2025 will include activities using candles, rag dolls, natural dyes, weaving and enjoying old fashion games. This step back into the past is truly hands-on with children finding out about how life was like for a child in the 1920's. Lessons, crafts, and activities each day.

The second week, July 14-18, 2025 in addition to a day where history focuses on Native Americans, other days highlight native plants, archeology, "creek critters and boggy buddies", and reptiles and amphibians. An ice cream social is scheduled the last day of camp with campers designing their own masterpieces with various toppings. Don't worry, no critters will be joining in the fun!

Helping camp directors are experts from the Valparaiso Garden Club, Panhandle Archeology, Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance and Jackson Guard.

Contact the museum to register; space is limited to 25 students per week. The cost is \$85 and \$80 for museum members. Contact the museum Tuesday -Saturday, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. (850) 678-2615.

2025 Safety-Focused Youth Summer Camps

Emerald Coast Indoor Shooting & Sport in Valparaiso is offering two hands-on, safety-focused youth summer camps this July for ages 12 and up. Led by NRA-certified instructors, the camps teach firearm safety, marksmanship and responsible handling in a structured, supervised environment.

• NRA Basics of Pistol Shooting: July 14–18, 10 a.m.–12 p.m. Register at https://theshootersrange.com/product/nra-basics-pistol-shooting/

• NRA Basics of Rifle Shooting: July 21–25, 10 a.m.–12 p.m. Register at https://theshootersrange.com/product/nra-basics-rifle-shooting/

• Cost: \$159 per camp (includes firearms, ammo, protective gear, course materials, and NRA certification)

Emerald Coast Indoor Shooting & Sport is a state-ofthe-art facility offering electronic target systems, expert instruction, and a strong emphasis on safety for all skill levels. Learn more at theshootersrange.com. 685 Valparaiso Pkwy, Valparaiso.

Happenings Around the Bay

JUNE

- 01 Live Music: Bluegrass Jam 12 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing Co. | Niceville
- 03 Niceville Young Professionals Lunch Meeting 11:30 am | Niceville Valparaiso Chamber | Niceville Charcuterie Board Workshop 6 pm | Salt & Story | Niceville
- 05 Puzzle Swap 10 am | Niceville Library | Niceville Concerts in the Village: A1A: Jimmy Buffett Tribute 7 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation | Destin



- 06 Greater FWB Chamber First Friday Coffee 7 am | Christian Life Center at FBC | FWB Live Music: AP 6 pm | LJ Schooners Restaurant | Niceville
- 07 NextHome Cornerstone Realty 5K benefiting Road Dogg Rescue 7:30 am | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville

Florida Concealed Carry Weapons Class 10 am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso

Live Music: Duchess 6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing Co. | Niceville

08 Okaloosa Island Beach Cleanup for World Oceans Day 9 am | The Boardwalk | Okaloosa Island Goat Yoga 10:30 am | 3rd Planet Brewing Co. | Niceville Women's Climbing Circle

5 pm | Rock Out Climbing Gym | Destin

- 09 Adult Paint Like an Artist hosted by the Traveling Painter 6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing Co. | Niceville
- 10 Puzzle Making 10 am | Valparaiso Library | Valparaiso Chess Night 6 pm | LJ Schooners Restaurant | Niceville

- 11 Niceville Valparaiso Chamber Second Wednesday Breakfast 7:15 am | Niceville Community Center | Niceville
- 12 Women Veterans Ceremony 8 am | Destin-FWB Convention Ctr | FWB Greater FWB Chamber Nothing But Networking 11:30 am | The Salvation Army | Mary Esther Concerts in the Village: Adrenalize:

Music of Def Leppard 7 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation | Destin

- 13 Live Music: Snake and the Rabbit 6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing Co. | Niceville
- 14 Summer Swing Classic 8 am | Eglin AFB Golf Course | Niceville Live Music: Saltwater Revival 6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing Co. | Niceville
- 15 Father's Day Dinner Cruise 6:30 pm | SunQuest Cruises | Miramar Beach
- 16 FiberArts Circle 10 am | Valparaiso Library | Valparaiso
- 17 The Traveling Painter 5:30 pm | LJ Schooners Restaurant | Niceville
- 19 Puzzle Swap 10 am | Niceville Library | Niceville
- 20 Live Music: Mitch Cantrell 6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing Co. | Niceville Summer Solstice Restorative Yoga 7 pm | Yoga by You Studio | Niceville
- 21 4th Annual FORE! The Love of Animals Golf Tournament benefiting Alaqua Animal Refuge 8:30 am | The Links Golf Club at Sandestin | Miramar Beach



Florida Concealed Carry Weapons Class 10 am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso

- The DeFuniak Springs Woman's Club Fashion Show
- 1 pm | Cafe Nola | DeFuniak Springs Live Music: Cadillac Willy
- 6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing Co. | Niceville







Puzzle Swap 10 am | Niceville Library | Niceville

Greater FWB Chamber Business After Hours 5:30 pm | Run With It | FWB

2025

27 Live Music: Josh Davis 6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing Co. | Niceville

26

- 28 June Jam 11 am | Boys & Girls Club of Pensacola | Pensacola Live Music: Purple Monkey 6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing Co. | Niceville
- 29 Sunset Shrimp Boil 5:30 pm | LJ Schooners Restaurant | Niceville
- 30 Painting and Pastries 5 pm | Valparaiso Library | Valparaiso

ONGOING EVENTS

Summer Lawn Garnes 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 Sounds of the Summer! Live!

7:30 pm | Thurs | Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach 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

Emerald Coast Blue Marlin Classic June 18-22 | Weigh-Ins Each Evening Baytowne Marina | Sandestin

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Honoring Heroes: Women Veterans Ceremony Set for June 12

By Carolyn Newcomer Ketchel

Each year on June 12, Florida honors the service and sacrifice of women in the military with Women Veterans Recognition Day, established by Governor Ron DeSantis. This day commemorates the anniversary of the signing of the 1948 Women's Armed Services Integration Act, which granted women an opportunity for a career in our tion in Okaloosa nation's military. County. This year's

Many of you have attended this ceremony at the Convention Center in years past, and it has become a beloved tradi-

County. This year's speaker is Col. Kristen N. Wood, Commander of the 1st Special Operations Mission Support Group, Hurlburt Field. A dynamic leader, Col. Wood brings inspiring insight into women's contributions to our military.

The event is open to the public—all ages welcome. The Snowden-Horne Chapter of the Children of the American Revolution will lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

After the program, we will process to the Dedication Plaza to lay wreaths in honor of women who have served our nation. This will be an excellent time to tour the beautifully laid-out park and to view the statues of women patriots. The statues are placed on a winding path beginning with the Revolutionary War and continuing to our latest theatres.

As you walk through the Women Veterans Monuments you will notice the work to create a living shoreline being done near the banks of Choc-



tawhatchee Bay. A living shoreline provides vegetation to stabilize the area and prevent erosion from future storms. This living shoreline will be 2000 ft. long. Combination grants from National Fish and Wildlife, Restore Act and Tourism Development Dollars are being used to fund this project to restore damage done during Hurricane Sally in September 2020.

This beautiful 20-acre parcel is home to 248 bird species identified by the Audubon Society. It features a heron rookery where the birds nest each spring, and serves as a vital stopover for monarch butterflies during their fall migration to winter habitats in Mexico. The area also supports a wide variety of other animals and wildlife, making it a rich and diverse ecosystem.

This year, two new statues will be unveiled:

• Capt. Linda Bray, the first woman to lead U.S. troops in combat during Operation Just Cause (Panama, 1989). She took action when a routine operation became a three-hour fire fight with the enemy.

• Florence Finch, WWII Coast Guard veteran and resistance member. Before enlisting in the Coast Guard, Ms. Finch was a part of a network of private citizens smuggling food, medical supplies and clean clothes to POWs in the Philippines during WWII.

Please plan to attend this hour-long ceremony. It will become a treasured tradition to honor our military serve women who have contributed so much the history of our nation.

Carolyn Ketchel is Okaloosa County Commissioner, District 2, Vice-Chairman 2024-2025, CKetchel@myokaloosa.com or 850-651-7105.

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 Student Concert in May at the Mattie Kelly Arts Center

Education News:

Honoring Excellence, Empowering Futures and Supporting Student Well-Being in Okaloosa County

Over 600 Seniors Honored at Anne T. **Mitchell Academic** Awards

The Okaloosa County School District (OCSD) celebrated the academic achievements of 619 seniors during the annual Anne T. Mitchell Academic Senior Honors Assembly, held April 22 at Northwest Florida State College's Raider Arena. Students from Baker, Choctawhatchee, Crestview, Fort Walton Beach, Laurel Hill and Niceville High Schools were recognized for earning a weighted GPA of 3.75 or higher, achieving the honors of Cum Laude, Magna Cum Laude or Summa Cum Laude.

"These seniors have shown outstanding dedication throughout their high school years, and it's an honor to recognize them for their achievements," said Superintendent Marcus Chambers.

A special highlight of the evening was the announcement of the Peggy Gorday Bruner Award recipient, Tina Le of Choctawhatchee High School,

recognized for her excellence both in and out of the classroom

Take Stock in Children Celebrates 29 Years and Over \$700K in **Scholarships**



On May 12, the Okaloosa Public Schools Foundation hosted its annual S.T.A.R.S. Ceremony at the Niceville Community Center, celebrating 29 years of the Take Stock in Children program. Seventeen graduating seniors were honored, receiving more than \$700,000 in scholarships, including two-year Florida Prepaid College Plans. Each graduate also received a new laptop and backpack, courtesy of the Foundation.

In addition to honoring the Class of 2025, the program welcomed 16 new middle school students who will now begin their journey with the support of mentors and academic resources.

"This program is chang-ing lives," said Superintendent Chambers. "We are incredibly proud of our students for their dedication, perseverance and achievements, and we look forward to seeing how these young leaders will shape our future."

To learn more about becoming a mentor, visit: www.okaloosaschools.com/o/ocsd/page/ volunteer.

District Highlights Mental Health Awareness Month

In recognition of Mental Health Awareness Month this May, the Okaloosa County School District is engaging students, staff and families in wellness-focused activities centered on this year's theme, "Turn Awareness into Action." The district's initiatives emphasize resilience, emotional well-being, and creating open dialogue around mental health.

"Our Mental Health Team



plays a vital role in ensuring that our school communities have the support they need to thrive,' said Superintendent Chambers. "Mental health is not just the absence of illness-it's about resilience and well-being... I encourage everyone to reflect on their mental health, engage in open conversations and take steps toward better mental wellness."

To support this mission, OCSD offers a comprehensive online resource hub for students, families and staff. Visit: www.okaloosaschools.com/o/ ocsd/page/mental-health-andwellness.

Cox Inspirational Student Hero Awards Celebrate Resilience

Thirty-seven Okaloosa Coun-

ty students were recognized at the annual Cox Inspirational Student Hero Awards, hosted at Northwest Florida State College. Selected by school leaders, these students were honored for their strength and positivity in overcoming adversity-from personal loss and health challenges to difficult home situations.

Honorees received personalized medallions, certificates from local and state officials, and a proclamation from the Okaloosa County Board of County Commissioners declaring May 2025 as Cox Inspirational Student Hero Month.

Now in its 32nd year, the program has honored more than 5,100 students across the Southeast.



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Community

Forner Vietnam Refugees Celebrate Historic Rescue of 1975

By Barbara Palmgren

On Saturday, May 3, former refugees from across the nation gathered to reunite and share memories at the Vietnam Refugee Camp Exhibit created in their honor and staged in the 1,400 sq. foot new Exhibit Hall of the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida. Eglin AFB was one of three camps set up to house over 10,000 refugees fleeing after the fall of Saigon at the end of the long Vietnam War in 1975.

Museum trustees, management and volunteers spent days preparing for this historical event. Special archival gloves were used to view original documents. Elegantly decorated tables set for lunch invited guests to enjoy a delicious buffet lunch donated by Tom Rice of Magnolia Grill. With retired military personnel and former camp volunteers, everyone viewed oral histories, editions of the Dot Moi newspaper written both in English and Vietnamese, and the expansive photos and newspaper articles enlarged and arranged chronologically on the walls of the room. The three phases were Phase One-The Buildup (April 27-May 23); Phase II-The Pipeline (May 24-June 25); Phase III-The Phasedown (June 29-September 19.)

Images in Phase One were part of a 2010 exhibit, symposium and regional initiative commemorating the 75th anniversary of Eglin AFB and next on display in the library at Northwest Florida State College. The images are part of the Vietnam Center and Archive at Texas Tech Uni-



versity from which the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida received permission to use the images for this current exhibit. The 2010 exhibit was curated by Michelle Jannazo, former Executive Director of the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida. Phase two and three were curated by Dr. Barbara Palmgren, Secretary and Exhibits Chair of the Heritage Museum, with digitized photos and copies of the Dot Moi daily papers from Col. Bill Keeler's private collection. Oral histories were videotaped by Mike Weaver, Trustee for the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida. The large tent exhibit was designed by Frank Berte, Destin Interactive. Trustee Jene McCraken and husband Bill Mc-Cracken digitized photos and articles preserved and now shared on a kiosk in the exhibit.

On Sunday, May 4, the reunion continued with former refugees boarding a bus and visiting the actual camp site itself. Ken Walsh, Marketing Chair for the museum, accompanied the group to this site on Eglin Air Force Base and observed that all visitors were enthusiastic. He noted. "The older ones were excited to show their children and grandchildren this location and pointed out specific details although the original tent city had been removed." Kim Delevett shared, "I couldn't believe I was walking on the same ground as my two-year-old self."

Barbara Palmgren met refugee organizer, Kim Delevett, in 2021 when Kim visited to see photos and articles about the refugee camp. Kim was only two vears old in 1975. Once Barbara knew the museum would build the new Exhibit Hall in 2024 from initial funds received through an Impact 100 grant and further contributions from over 80 people, she began working on the exhibit. Barbara and Kim together prepared for this special reunion corresponding to the 50th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War.

One of the highlights of the event was a Zoom meeting with Col. Ray Beery now residing in Virginia. Col. Bill Keeler, appointed by General Lane to oversee the operation as Refugee Liaison Officer, attended the reunion with his wife and spoke to the group, sharing his congratulations and memories. He wanted to be sure that everyone in the camp received proper care in a stressful situatison. Suddenly leaving their homeland with little or no knowledge of the English language, classes were set up at the camp to begin a journey into citizenship in the United State of America.

One of the translators for the camp, Nghiep Tran Duy Qyoc, shared poignant memories with former refugees now living and speaking perfect English. He was on-site daily to help with cultural adjustments and his wife, Mary, was present at several births. Marriages, schools, recreation, food and helping with outside jobs, especially in the fishing industry, were part of the five-month experience. Former refugees shared their stories as well and several volunteers were videotaped to be part of the oral histories now collected by the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida. These oral histories will also be sent to the Vietnam Center and Archive at Texas Tech University.

Several non-profit and church groups helped find sponsorships throughout the nation for each refugee. Both Col. Keeler and Col. Beery were proud of the job accomplished in a short amount of time. Everyone received a sponsorship before hurricane season in Northwest Florida.

Amid a total disruption of their former lives, these former refugees had only praise and thanks for those who reached out to help them in a strange new environment. Tears flowed, hugs were constant, and grateful joy continued all morning. Jene McCraken, Collections Chair, handed out additional information as well for the former refugees to take with them.

What took years of planning and work between Kim and Barbara would soon be just a memory of a short stay in the tent city. What the former refugees left with was a reminder that friendships happen regardless of a language barrier. Friendships happen at the strangest times and for the best reasons. Friendships last forever.

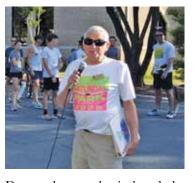


Saturday in the Park Draws Big Crowds

The Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida's annual Saturday in the Park was a lively celebration of community, history, and fun for all ages. Drawing a large crowd, the event kicked off with a scenic 5K run along the bayous, designed by Museum Marketing Chair Ken Walsh. Athletes of all ages laced up for the race, setting the tone for a full day of festivities.

Classic car clubs cruised in and stole the spotlight as a new crowd favorite, while live music filled the air and performers entertained throughout the day. Early risers enjoyed craft demonstrations, local vendors, and a history lecture, followed by a visit from Rosie the Riveter herself. The afternoon featured a crowd-pleasing K-9 demonstration by the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office.

Guests enjoyed free admission to the museum, where the scent of grilled hamburgers and hot dogs tempted appetites, along with sweet treats from Dip n



Dots and a popular indoor bake sale. Children stayed busy with ongoing crafts, and the day ended with a colorful piñata party.

The Valparaiso Garden Club also hosted its spring sale, offering a cheerful array of flowers and vegetables from the pollinator garden behind the museum. With perfect weather and nonstop activity, Saturday in the Park once again proved to be a springtime favorite in Valparaiso.

ECCAC Courtyard Reimagined

The 2025 Leadership Walton Class from the Walton Area Chamber of Commerce partnered with the Emerald Coast

Bay Buzz Children's Advocacy Center to renovate the Pierce Family Center's courtyard in DeFuniak

Springs. The class raised over \$10,000 and completed the work themselves. Updates include new trees, flowers, benches, games and pavers—creating a safe, welcoming space for children and families. Not only did the Leadership Class raise the funds to do this project, they also joined together to physically do the work.

Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation Raises Record \$3.55M for Kids

The 20th Annual Destin Charity Wine Auction raised a record-breaking \$3.55 million to benefit 17 children's charities in Northwest Florida: Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast, Boys & Girls Clubs of the Emerald Coast, Caring & Sharing of South Walton, Children's Home Society of Florida, Children in Crisis, Inc., Children's Volunteer Health Network, Ellison McCraney Ingram Foundation, Emerald Coast Autism Center, Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center, Habitat for Humanity of Walton County, Mental Health Association of Okaloosa & Walton Counties, Opportunity, Inc., Point Washington Medical Clinic, Shelter House Domestic Violence Center, The Arc of the Emerald Coast, Westonwood Ranch and Youth Village. More than 600 guests attended the sold-out event. Funds will be distributed in August during a private check presentation at the Hilton Sandestin.

Since its founding, DCWAF has donated over \$35 million to improve the lives of over 100,000 children. Learn more at DCWAF.org.

ECCAC Named First Charity Recipient by ECRWF

Emerald Coast Republican Women Federated selected the Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center as its first charity recipient. Kate McDougall-Mason presented the Center's work, including advocacy, therapy, medical care and school-based prevention programs. Learn more at ECCAC.org or call 850-420-4639.

Niceville Awards \$15K in Scholarships

The Katie Mathews White Endowment awarded over \$15,000 in scholarships to four 8th-grade students in the Take Stock in Children Program. Funded in part by Florida Prepaid, the program offers mentorship and a two-year college scholarship to selected students.

This program has proven to be transformative, allowing many recipients to become the first in their families to attend college. Contact Kristi Evans at evansk@okaloosaschools.com to learn more.

League of Women Voters Elects New Officers

Beth Madrigal was recently elected President of the League of Women Voters of Okaloosa and Walton Counties. Other officers elected were April Leake – Vice-President, Cathay Lam-

Continued on page 39



(Community

Storm-Ready Starts with Coverage: What You Need to Know Before Hurricane Season



By JULIE A. MARTIN

As we do every year, Bay Life is bringing readers up-to-date guidance on preparing for hurricane season—this time with the help of local expert Abora Insurance. With this year's storms predicted to be more frequent and intense and Hurricane Season beginning June 1, making sure your homeowner's and flood insurance policies are in order is more critical now than ever.

Here are the essential coverages every Florida homeowner should review now:



Hurricane & Wind Coverage

Most Florida policies (HO3, DP3, HO6, HO4) include hurricane, named storm or wind/ hail coverage under a separate deductible. Ideally, your wind coverage should be included in your main home policy to avoid gaps. If your insurer doesn't offer wind in your area, you'll need a stand-alone wind policy—and must ensure coverage details match to avoid surprises.

Tip: "Hurricane" coverage typically offers the best protection, applying your larger deductible only to named hurricanes. Smaller deductibles would apply to other wind-related damage.

Coverage A (Dwelling Limit)

Make sure your home is in-

sured for today's rebuild costs not what it cost years ago. Data shows nearly 2 in 3 homes are underinsured. If disaster strikes, inadequate coverage could leave you paying thousands out of pocket.

Loss of Use (or Loss of Rents)

This coverage pays for temporary housing if your home is unlivable. For landlords, Loss of Rents ensures continued income during repairs. Not all rental policies include this—check with your agent. Remember, there needs to be direct physical damage to trigger this coverage. Some rental policies don't include Loss of Rents so you will want to read your policy or call your insurance agent so you know for sure.

Law or Ordinance Coverage

Florida's building codes change often, especially after major storms. If your home needs to be rebuilt to new code, this coverage helps cover the added cost. Most carriers, if they have it available, offer either 10%, 25% or 50% coverage. This percentage is tied

to your Dwelling Limit. If you have extensive hurricane damage, like we saw with Hurricane Michael, there may be new building codes you must adhere to in order to rebuild. The additional Law or Ordinance coverage is crucial to your protection, since your policy is designed to rebuild your home as it was before the damage, with similar materials and quality, and not with more costly materials that could now be required by more stringent construction codes that may have come into play. After storms like Hurricane Michael, this protection proved essential.

Flood Insurance

Standard homeowners insurance does not cover flood damage—and floodwaters can result from both hurricanes and regular rain events. While some carriers offer limited flood endorsements, most homeowners need a separate flood policy. Although there are a few carriers who will add flood coverage as an endorsement to a home policy, it is infrequent.

You have two main options:

• NFIP (National Flood Insurance Program): For most insureds, your flood policy will be a separate policy written through the NFIP (National Flood Insurance Program), and, unless your lender requires the policy, or you're closing on a new purchase, there is a standard 30day waiting period through the NFIP before your flood policy will become effective.

• Private Flood Insurance: Growing in availability, often with broader coverage and less waiting, Private flood insurance is an alternative. Many of the private markets in in the country, and especially in Florida, offer broader coverages than the NFIP and these should be considered as an alternative to maximize your protection.

Call (850) 424-6979 or visit www.getabora.com to review your policy before the next storm blows in.

Stay ready. Stay protected. We're here each year to help you do just that.

Abora Insurance has served Destin, Niceville, Fort Walton Beach, Miramar Beach, Freeport, Santa Rosa Beach (30A) and Inlet Beach for over a decade. They work with top-rated carriers to tailor coverage for home, auto and life insurance.





Unsinkable Rose: A Titanic-Inspired Adventure

By Tamara L. Young, PhD, Public Information Director for the World's Luckiest Fishing Village

If you've seen the movie Titanic, you'll remember Rose DeWitt Bukater (portrayed by Kate Winslet) who falls in love with Leonardo DiCaprio's character.

But this is Rose Skelton, and she was in love with Glen Richard Skelton. And the ship she was on is bigger than the Titanic; over 100 feet longer, in fact. It's the SSUS and, to this very day, she holds the Blue Riband for the fastest transatlantic crossing by an ocean liner.

Acquired by Okaloosa County with the Tourist Development Department leading the way, the SSUS is prepping her way to becoming the world's largest artificial reef, a habitat for marine life and attracting divers and anglers from all over the world.

But before that, she had a long, storied life. One of those stories includes Destin City Councilmember Terésa Hebert. She was a baby when her mother, Rose Skelton, took her and two of her siblings across the ocean to London.

Coming full circle this month, Terésa met up with her sister Juliana Skelton and their mother, who is now in her 90s and lives with Juliana in Mississippi. The three met in Mobile, Alabama, where crews are working on the ship to get her ready for deployment.

"I was too young to remember any of it, so my mother being one of the travelers on this massive ship was a surprise to me up until a year ago," said Terésa. I sit on the Destin City Council, and my husband heard us talking about the future artificial reef at a meeting that was being livestreamed, and he mentioned he thought that was the ship my mother had taken. So, to go from that to then getting a chance to visit the ship together was incredible. Being able to see her sitting outside the ship and talking about having to deal with the three tiny little people that we were, all by herself, for the five days crossing. It was so amazing!"

It was toward the end of 1961 when Rose's husband Glen requested his next assignment to be at an Air Force base in the United Kingdom. Part of the government budget cuts at the time were that all dependent travel was suspended. "Military members had the option to resubmit requests for orders, but they would be unaccompanied tours," recalled Rose. "He received orders for Weathersfield AFB to arrive by April 1962. I wrote to my mother who was living in London and told her he was coming, but I couldn't afford the plane tickets to England."

The only option was to go a more affordable route – by sea. "As our household goods wouldn't be shipped for free, we figured we could take more needed household items if we went by sea. The car had to be shipped by sea out of New Jersey, and the USS United States was in New York. So, it was easy for us all to take a road trip from Maxwell AFB in Montgomery to New York."

They chose the last cruise in April to book, right before the pricier summer rates kicked in for travelers.

"My husband was able to help bring our bags and steamer trunk onto the ship and get us settled in," said Rose.

Rose elicited laughter from Terésa and Juliana recalling what happened just after she waved goodbye to her husband. "As the ship's horn blasted, my eldest son wet his pants."

Her other memories were equally spirited. "Our room must have been on the upper deck, because I remember going downstairs to the dining room. I also remember the bar was very close to our cabin, probably 30 feet away." One late night Rose slipped away for a drink while the kids (Terésa and her two brothers Dominic and Anthony) were sleeping. Dominic woke up crying, and that woke up Anthony, and soon enough the noise was heard outside the cabin by the steward. He headed to the bar to find Rose.

"She remembered dad giving her permission to leave and have a glass of wine each night," said Terésa. "And then of course the one night she does, Dominic needed her!"

Rose was quick to chime in with what a good baby Terésa was. "She just ate and slept, so when I put her down, it was easy for me and the boys to go to the dining room where we



could eat. I don't remember seeing a lot of people, and for a couple of days the weather was so rough that we preferred to stay in the room. When we did go out on rough days, we had to hold onto the ropes that were strewn from one side of the ship to the other. I had friends who told me that I would have plenty of help with taking care of three little ones. Well, that wasn't the case as most of the passengers were dependent wives in the same boat as I was. No pun intended!"

There was also the added complication that there were not disposable diapers. All of Rose's three kids on board wore cloth diapers at night, so "there was a lot of washing diapers out in the morning and hanging them around the cabin."

Soon enough, they arrived on land and found a place close to base, with the towels, pots, cutlery and other items she'd packed. It also wasn't long before "the budget opened up and dependents were able to travel again on the government dime." But Rose wouldn't have had their experience any other way. She's a part of history, having cruised on the SSUS. Due to a bit of walking instability, she was unable to tour the ship alongside Terésa and Juliana on their recent visit. Instead, Rose stood on the concrete slab next to the ship, looking up and waving enthusiastically as she saw her daughters through an upper deck porthole.

They all wish Glen was here to be part of this (he passed away in 2015 at the age of 81), but Terésa is grateful to have this experience with her mother.

"It was mixed emotions of funny, inspiring, and just happy she's still alive to be able to see the ship up close 63 years later.

Rose plans to travel to our area for the ship's deployment, which is scheduled to take place later in 2025. The exact location in the Gulf has not been set, but it is expected to be about 20 miles south of the Florida Panhandle region in the Destin-Fort Walton Beach area.

Unlike the tragedy of the unexpected sinking of the Titanic, Rose said she is excited for the purposeful sinking of the SSUS and knowing it will continue to serve a valuable purpose.

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Education

Mathnasium of Niceville: Empowering Students Through Personalized Math Learning

By Adana Elder, Mathnasium Niceville, Destin and Pensacola

As a parent, you want your child to enjoy their summer but you also don't want them to fall behind academically.

One of the most common academic setbacks where students lose ground over the summer break is math. Research shows that many children forget important skills, key math skills among them, during the summer months, making the transition back to school more difficult in the fall.

This concern is backed by international ranking data. Assessments like the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) consistently show that U.S. students lag behind their peers in many other developed countries globally when it comes to math proficiency. In 2024, U.S. students ranked 26th out of 81 participating nations. As the world becomes increasingly more math- and technology-driven, this global gap highlights the critical importance of consistent, year-round support to help American students stay competitive.

Nationally, Florida's performance in mathematics, as assessed by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), shows both encouraging and troubling trends. In 2024's rankings for 4th grade math, Florida ranks 2nd in the U.S., but dropped sharply to 41st place by 8th grade!

Grade inflation is another challenge that parents face in understanding how well their children are actually learning. A study was performed between 2010 and 2022 by ACT, the nonprofit organization that administers the college readiness exam. In that 12-year time frame, the average adjusted math GPA increased from 3.02 to 3.32, a 0.30 grade point change — the highest across all school subjects. In 2012, the average Florida ACT math score was 19.9 and had fallen to 18.4 by 2022 (36 is a perfect score). Even though a student may get A's and B's on their report cards



for the year, their performance on standardized assessments is falling, while their average grades rise.

Together, these trends underline the importance of keeping students engaged in math yearround—especially during the summer.

Personalized Learning Plans

At Mathnasium, each student begins with a comprehensive assessment to identify their strengths and areas for improvement. Based on this evaluation, instructors develop a customized learning plan that aligns with your student's academic goals. This individualized approach ensures that children receive the support they need to build confidence and achieve success in math.

Summer Programs to Prevent Learning Loss

Mathnasium's summer programs are specifically designed to combat the "summer slide," a common phenomenon where students lose some of the academic gains made during the school year. These programs incorporate engaging activities, games and problem-solving exercises that make learning math enjoyable. By participating in the summer sessions, your child can reinforce their existing knowledge and maintain important skills during the break, preparing them for a successful transition back to school in the fall.

Flexible Scheduling Options

Understanding the busy schedules of families, Mathna-

sium offers flexible scheduling options. Students can attend sessions in-center or opt for live, face-to-face online instruction through Mathnasium@home. This flexibility allows families to choose the format that best fits their needs.

Community Engagement and Support

Mathnasium center in Niceville is deeply rooted in the community, serving local schools and participating in community events. The dedicated staff is committed to fostering a positive learning environment where students feel supported and motivated to excel in math.

To enroll your student in Mathnasium's programs, scheduling a free assessment is the first step. This evaluation will help determine the appropriate learning plan tailored to your child's needs.

Visit mathnasium.com/ niceville, stop by Mathnasium of Niceville, 1538 E. John Sims Pkwy., Niceville, 32578, or call (850) 987-6284.

BAY BUZZ SUMMER

continued from page 6

Northwest Florida Ballet Academy Registration Now Open!

Register now for the School 2025/26 season. Classes begin Aug. 4 and run through May for

K-12 students, with adult classes offered year-round. Pre-School Ballet is also provided weekly for 45 minutes, Aug.-Dec and Jan.-May. All classes are taught by experienced dancers and teachers who make dance exciting and engaging. A student concert is held each May at the Mattie Kelly Arts Center. Ask about 2025 summer Pre-School Ballet classes, a camp for students K-2, and adult classes. To learn more or register online, visit NFBallet. org/Classes.





Your child can avoid the math learning loss that typically happens over the break by attending summer sessions at Mathnasium. And the benefits don't stop there!

- Faster progress is possible without the distraction of other academic commitments
- We're vacation-friendly, with live face-to-face instruction, both in-center and online
- Kids can start the new school year with confidence

Mathnasium of Niceville (850) 987-MATH (6284) 1538 John Sims Pkwy E, Niceville, FL 32547



HNASIUM



Education

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Congratulations to the Rocky Bayou Christian School Graduating Class of 2025!











Anna Fulton





Austin Sanders

Dominic Sposito



Ava Wilson

Emily Matheny



Bao Tran

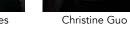


Carson Tingle



Faith Zhang







Cooper Schrier



Daylan Hudson



Jack LaMantia



Ethan Heathershaw



Jadyn Farnsworth



Jesse Nixon

Macy Wanner



Hailey Zhang

Jonas Mosley

Madi McAdams

Olivia Guilmain



Hannah Whaley

Patrick Weisbruch



Joshua Sposito

Isabella Turner











Rylie Mills





Oliver McKinney





Olivia Cline

Timothy Song



Tomas Ganaj Toya Losinger





Reace Early









Skyler Dill-Langley



Tam Lam





Kailey Yang













Laura Cline

















Kristina Parnell

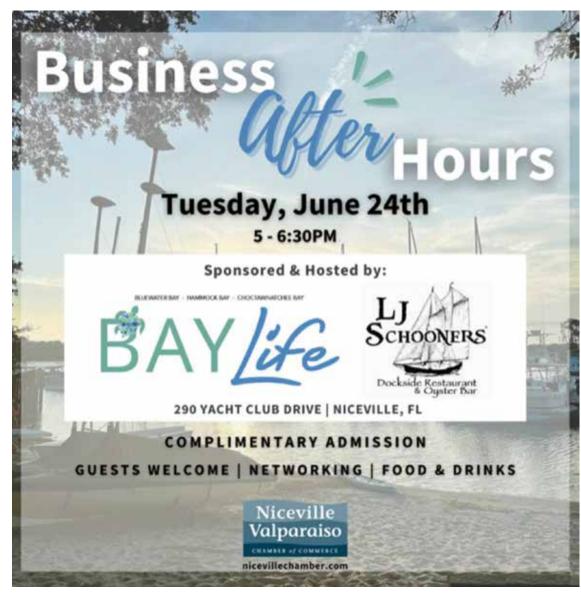
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Local Nining, Nrinks, Coffee & Entertainment

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 144 Palm Blvd N., Niceville brozinnispizza.com

FUBAR Pizza Bar

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

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

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

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

JoJo's Coffee and Goodness

An iconic favorite of locals, owner and operator of Jojo's Coffee and Goodness Angela "JoJo" Stevenson invites you to enter her cafe and relaxed coffee shop atmosphere for a daily dose of "goodness." Stop in for mouth-watering cinnamon rolls; scones: cranberry orange, chocolate caramel and cheddar thyme; strawberry coffee cake; cranberry orange muffins; red velvet cookies; brownies with espresso ganache or caramelitas. Try a breakfast special with a piece of quiche or kolache-hash brown casserole. Breakfast burritos are rolled and ready daily! Choose from andouille, bacon, chorizo or veggie. Or tantalize your taste buds with a 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



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Local Dining, Prinks, Coffee & Entertainment

DINING

continued from page 16

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!

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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.

Mondays: Beach Madness 4-7 p.m.; Hotdog Specials; Extended Happy Hour 3-7 p.m.

Tuesdays: Tacos & \$5 House Margaritas

Wednesdays: Sailboat Races 6 p.m.; Kids Eat Free with Adult Purchase

Thursdays: Open Mic and Karaoke Nights 6-10 p.m.; Throwdown SUP Races: 6 p.m.

Sundays: Brunch 9 a.m.-1 p.m. buffet style, bottomless Mimosas! Sunday, June 29: Sunset Shrimp Boil 4-7 p.m. Live music 4-8 p.m. Shrimp, Sausage, Corn on the Cob, Potatoes, Bread

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. (850) 897-6400

bluewaterbaymarina.com/schooners 290 Yacht Club Dr., Unit 200 Niceville in Bluewater Bay

Landshark's Pizza Bids a Bittersweet Goodbye—for Now

After more than 15 flavorful years of serving up fan-favorite pies, ice-cold beer and a welcoming hangout for locals and tourists alike, Landshark's Pizza officially closed the doors of its current location on May 22, 2025. But loyal fans, don't worry—this is not the end of the road, just a heartfelt pause in the journey.

"Wow. What a ride," say owners Brian, Sue and Heidi Hassmann in a Facebook post. "Running this business was never easy—but it was meaningful. Every early morning, every late night, every problem we solved and every customer we served—it was worth it. We took pride in what we built. We worked hard and we gave people something special."

"To our team: you are the reason this place ever worked. The passion, the hustle, the way you showed up for each other—that's what made this more than a job. You showed heart when it counted. We shared good times, tough lessons, and a whole lot of laughs. That's the stuff we'll remember."

"To our loyal customers: you kept us going. You came back, you spread the word,





you let us be part of your lives. Thank you for supporting us, for rooting for us and for showing up again and again. We noticed. We won't forget."

The Hassmanns say this summer will be dedicated to rest, recovery and a thoughtful reimagining of what's next. "We're not disappearing we're preparing. With fresh energy and a fresh location on the horizon, our hearts are pulling us back to Destin, where the story began — and where the next chapter is already taking shape."

Fans are encouraged to follow along for updates and sneak peeks. "When we're ready to fire up the ovens again, you'll be the first to know."

"There are always things we could have done differently. But we leave this chapter with no regrets—just lessons learned, friends made and pride in what we accomplished."

"With love and gratitude— Brian, Sue and Heidi Hassmann."

As one chapter closes, another one rises—cheesy, saucy and full of promise. Stay tuned. The next slice of Landshark's legacy is just around the corner.



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The Hook

A Legend at 100: The Primrose

By Christopher Manson

In 1925, the Jazz Age was in full swing, The New Yorker magazine published its first issue, and here on the Emerald Coast, a revolutionary fishing boat was about to launch.

On Saturday, May 3, the Destin History & Fishing Museum commemorated the 100th anniversary of the Primrose seine fishing boat. Locals and visitors got a look at the restored Primrose while the kids enjoyed cake, a bounce house and activities with the Emerald Coast Science Center.

The museum offered some historic games from the 1920s and there's now new Primrose merchandise – hats and stickers – in the gift shop. They also raffled off a two-night "staycation" from Ocean Reef Vacation Rentals & Real Estate and a museum merchandise basket that includes the aforementioned Primrose swag.

"She was the last seine boat built in Destin and the first of her kind to have a motor installed," says Destin History & Fishing Museum Executive



Director Vivienne Williams of the Primrose's significance. The Primrose functioned as a fishing boat until 1968, enabling local fishermen to hone their skills and serving as a bridge between traditional and modern methods of fishing.

"We have a volunteer at the museum who used to help tie fishing nets together." The seine nets are five feet tall and 100 feet long.

The previous Primrose restoration happened in 2015, and the museum invited several of the people involved to the anniversary event, along with mem-

bers of the Destin City Council. Over a century ago, the Primrose was the brainchild of Captain John W. Melvin Sr., one of Destin's local fishermen. His experience and know-how planted the idea of a bigger and better fishing boat.

Captain Melvin approached John George Maltezo in 1922. Maltezo knew his way around boats, but was unsure exactly how to build a craft like the Primrose. Melvin and Maltezo worked tirelessly for days designing and planning every de-



tail of the Primrose's length of 56 feet.

The Primrose was completed in 1925 and fitted with a Palmer Marine engine. It was the last seine boat to be built in Destin.

The 2015 restoration involved the participation of at least 10 groups, says Williams. The Primrose was then moved from the Destin Community Center to the museum where a "pole barn" was added to protect the vessel from the elements. Other groups, such as the Destin Chamber of Commerce's Destin Forward classes, have helped with preservation projects over the years.

"I love being part of the community and its very rich history," she says. "I like being able to maintain it and share it with everyone that comes to visit."

In addition to the Primrose centennial, the museum hosted a Night at the Museum event in March to mark its 20th anniversary. "We had

live music, a custom martini bar and raffles, and several area restaurants donated appetizers," says Williams. "Food, drink and fun." The "true" celebration is set for October and is still in the planning stages.

She adds: "We'll be celebrating all year long."

The Destin History & Fishing Museum is located at 108 Stahlman Ave. Learn more at destinhistoryandfishingmuseum.org, and follow the museum's Facebook page.



290 Yacht Club Drive, Niceville, FL 32578—End of Bay Drive in the Community of Bluewater Bay 850-897-6400 Restaurant 850-897-2821 Marina

Governor DeSantis Champions State-Led Conservation Success and Announces Record-Breaking 126-Day Red Snapper Season

By Doug "Doc" Stauffer

In a bold testament to the success of state-led conservation, Governor Ron DeSantis announced Florida's longest-ever Gulf red snapper recreational season—an unprecedented 126 days-during a recent press conference at Legendary Marine in Destin. With the sparkling waters of Choctawhatchee Bay behind him, DeSantis declared, "This is the longest combined season that's been available for anglers in Florida history since state management began."

The record-setting 2025 season surpasses last year's 103-day stretch and is a shining example of what can be achieved when state governments, rather than Washington bureaucrats, manage their natural resources. The extended season includes a summer run from Memorial Day weekend (May 24-26) through July 31, followed by a daily fall window from Sept. 1-14, and three-day weekends through the end of the year, including Veterans Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas.

The announcement drew numerous cheers from business leaders, anglers, and conservationists who gathered to celebrate economic and environmental implications. Todd Royall of Legendary Marine called the move "priceless," and Clint Rogers of Saltwater Restaurant Group praised the governor for boosting tourism and the local dining industries. "This gives our TDC more marketing ammunition to bring families to our area," Rogers said.

By contrast, the federally managed Atlantic red snapper season remains abysmally short, just two days last year, despite a growing population of Red Snapper. DeSantis didn't shy away from highlighting the stark difference in outcomes. "We've asked the President himself. Let us manage the red snapper in the Atlantic," DeSantis said. "We will do a good job. We will have accurate data, and we're going to be able to expand opportunities for a lot of people."

DeSantis has proven himself a trusted leader in ecological



stewardship by blending science common sense. Under his leadwith the somewhat uncommon

ership, Florida has prioritized

angler-reported data through programs like the State Reef Fish Survey, resulting in better-informed policy and more robust fish populations. Florida now leads the nation with over 920,000 boat registrations, 4 million licensed anglers, and an annual \$31 billion boating and fishing economic impact-figures that dwarf federal performance metrics.

While Washington's red tape continues to stifle opportunity on the Atlantic coast, Florida's Gulf coast is flourishing thanks to state control. DeSantis's firm commitment to states' rights starkly contrasts with the onesize-fits-all failures of federal agencies like NOAA and the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council. "We stand ready, willing, and able," DeSantis emphasized. "Florida's proven it knows how to balance access and conservation—let us do the same for the Atlantic."

In an era when federal mismanagement too often limits economic growth and outdoor access, Governor Ron DeSantis offers a successful alternative: empowered local governance that delivers ecological protec-

tion and freedom for Floridians and those who vacation here.

2025 Gulf Red Snapper **Season Schedule: Memorial Day Weekend:** May 24-26

Summer Season: June 1 – July 31 **Fall Daily Season:** September 1–14 Weekend/Holiday Access: Sept. 19-21, 26-28 Oct. 3-5, 10-12, 17-19, 24-26, 31–Nov. 2

Nov. 7-9, 11 (Veterans Day), 14-16, 21-23, 27-30 (Thanksgiving)

Dec. 5-7, 12-14, 19-21, 25-28 (Christmas)

As the Florida Gulf Coast experiences another record year under state stewardship, one thing is clear—when it comes to natural resources, the Sunshine State shines brightest when the federal government steps aside. Those who love fishing and those dependent upon tourism should applaud the Governor's successful leadership.



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(Lifestyle

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Crafting Kitchens, Building Trust: Adam Shepherd Brings Expertise and Heart to Niceville Homes

In the heart of Niceville, Adam Shepherd stands as a beacon of expertise in kitchen design and installation. With over two decades of hands-on experience, Adam has honed his skills, not only as a designer, but also as a project manager and installer. Adam, who is a partner at Apex Design Center, a local hub for innovative home solutions, brings a wealth of knowledge from his family's contracting business, where he grew up completing residential remodels and selling cabinetry. Adam's deep roots in the community and industry make him a trusted name for homeowners looking to transform their kitchens into functional and beautiful spaces.

What sets Adam apart from other kitchen designers is his comprehensive understanding of the entire remodeling process. Holding a Florida state contractor's li-

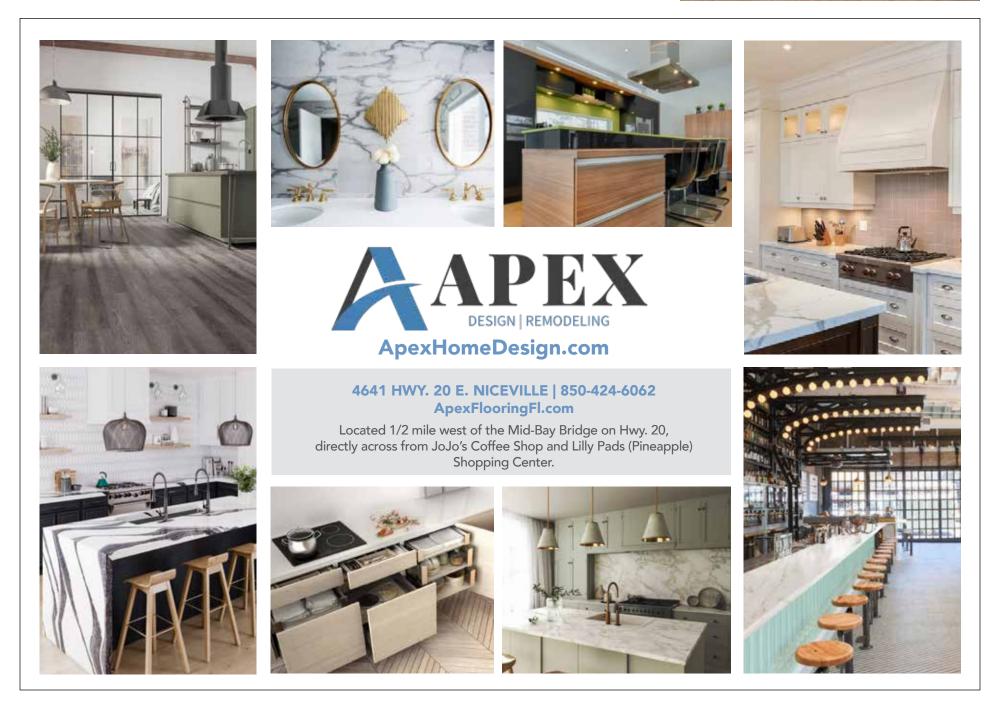
cense, he is well-versed in the technical aspects of construction, including electrical, plumbing and HVAC needs. This unique skill set enables him to address potential issues before they arise, ensuring a smoother renovation journey for his clients. Adam takes pride in his ability to provide detailed estimates and a clear scope of work, which are essential in delivering reliable, high-quality results that meet the specific needs of each project.

Customer service is at the forefront of Adam's approach. He believes that a successful project goes beyond just aesthetics; it involves understanding the client's vision and executing it with precision. Adam's hands-on involvement in project management and installation allows him to maintain a high level of quality throughout the entire process. He is dedicated to building strong relationships with his clients, listening to their needs, and guiding them through the decisions that shape their dream kitchens.

As a resident of Niceville, Adam is passionate about contributing to the local community through his work. He understands the importance of creating spaces that not only enhance the functionality of a home but also reflect the personal style of the homeowner. With a commitment to excellence and a keen eye for design, Adam Shepherd is redefining kitchen renovations in Niceville, one project at a time. Whether you're looking for a complete remodel or a simple update, Adam is ready to bring your vision to life with unparalleled expertise and dedication.









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Lifestyle

Give Your Sunroom a Facelift with These Bright Ideas



By Stacy Sarikanon, Stunning Spaces - Decorating Den Interiors

As we get into the seasons of more hours of sunlight, it might be just the right time to think about brightening up your sunroom. Or creating one.

Here are some tips for putting together a place where you'll spend many hours curled up with a good book and your favorite coffee mug. Or catching up with friends. Or enjoying the family.

Choose Functionality Over Fashion

The first step is to decide how you plan to use the sunroom. Do you want it to be an inviting place where people want to gather, serving as a central spot that connects the backyard and the rest of the house? Or would you rather have this sunny room be an isolated sanctuary where you can escape from reality for a few hours? Or do you have something else in mind for the space, a home office maybe?

Deciding on function will help you determine furniture selections and placement. Regardless of function, there are a few tips that can apply to any sunroom.

Start with the Obvious

You probably already have selected lighter colors. Not only will they make your room look larger, but they will also reflect light and make your space feel bright and open. Wallpaper with images or colors from nature can help bring that outdoorsy feeling inside.

Just because it's a sunroom, doesn't mean you can forego lighting. You'll want to use your sunroom after sunset. Table lamps and floor lamps can create light both for reading or table games and help establish a mood. Twinkle lights or string lights can add some whimsy. For a more rustic look, try placing black or metal lanterns on your tables or sconces on the walls.

Dress those Windows

Yes, you want an open look.



But dressing up those windows can add color, create privacy, and add a homey touch.

If your room is in an overly sunny part of your house, you may want to use window treatments to protect your flooring and furniture from the negative effects of UV rays. Since sunrooms are typically subject to fluctuating temperatures and moisture, you'll want draperies that can remain in good shape throughout the year. Do your research or ask an expert.

Window treatments also can help you regulate light. For in-

stance, solar shades give you a decent amount of privacy while still allowing in quite a bit of sunshine. On the other hand, black-out window treatments can fully block out the sun and wandering eyes when drawn.

Sheer window treatments diffuse harsh sunlight while still allowing in plenty of natural light. They also blend into the background when not being used. This gives a magical look, especially when the windows are open, causing the draperies to flap in the breeze. Pair intricate gold hardware for a whimsical enchanting combination.

Comfort. Comfort. Comfort.

Choose spots you can sink into and stay for hours, making your sunroom act as a second living room. Cushioned sofas, armchairs, ottomans and chaise lounges are cozy options that work for

most spaces.

Let the beauty of nature seep in and embrace you. Let the warmth of the sun engulf you, natural sunlight does the mind and body good. Let a gentle zephyr add to your tranquility.

Keep it fairly simple to not distract from the beauty of the world around you. Enjoy.



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Business

Is Your Business Prepared for Hurricane Season?

BY BIT-WIZARDS

The 2025 Atlantic hurricane season has arrived, with experts anticipating above-average activity and over a dozen named storms this year. Our area is no stranger to the risks posed by hurricanes and how to prepare for them, especially when it comes to keeping people safe. At Bit-Wizards, we unfortunately know that many local businesses fail to prepare and ensure their survival in the event of a hurricane or major storm.

If a hurricane strikes and your business IT isn't prepared, you could lose critical pieces of your company and suffer significant costs. While evacuating your employees and their loved ones can be done, physically taking any IT equipment that powers your business is logistically challenging and impractical. Even if you take the equipment with you, there's no guarantee you can make it work once you've relocated.

If you can't move everything, you'll then need to replace what's damaged. While losing a single piece of hardware can be a more manageable cost, the scale of your business can make that price unaffordable. An even more costly loss than physical equipment is data loss. Everything you've built can disappear in an instant, and it can't always be restored. Even if you start from square one with new hardware, the loss of customer trust can mean the end of your business.

Unfortunately, too many business owners learn this lesson the hard way, with 25% of businesses closing their doors for good after a hurricane or other disaster. Hardware, data, and reputation losses can quickly accumulate and become too much to handle, so it's essential to act now. Even though hurricane season is already here, it's still not too late to do what you can to prevent catastrophic losses.

The best way to prepare your business for a hurricane is by developing a business continuity and disaster recovery (BCDR) plan to keep your operations running, avoid major disruptions, and prioritize the well-being of your employees. Your BCDR plan should outline every aspect of how your team should prepare for an incoming hurricane, from moving essential pieces of hardware to resuming operations after evacuating.

A thorough BCDR plan should prioritize two distinct goals that each focus on keeping your operations running during and after a disaster. The busi-



ness continuity portion involves supporting the people and processes that fuel your company. Plans should be made to ensure your employees can evacuate safely while continuing to support critical customer services and avoid major interruptions.

The disaster recovery component focuses heavily on preparing and recovering any IT systems that fuel your business. All efforts should minimize any potential downtime or impact on your operations from a technological standpoint. Both goals overlap and support each other considerably, ensuring every aspect of your business is ready for worst-case scenarios.

The most helpful thing you can include in your plan is how you'll shift your files and programs to the cloud. Switching to cloud-based operations and storage means you and your employees can access anything you need and stay connected wherever you are. Many cloud storage options also help you create and store backups, adding another layer of data loss prevention in the event a program quits, or a hurricane strikes.

Even if your office is in a hurricane's path, using the cloud and preparing your IT can help you minimize potential losses. If you want help creating a BCDR plan or making your operations more resilient through everyday outages or major disasters, Bit-Wizards can help. With our Managed IT Services (MITS), your business can prepare for the worst while striving for the best. Visit www.bitwizards.com/ services/bcdr to learn more.



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New York Flights Coming to ECP

Delta Air Lines will launch daily nonstop flights between Northwest Florida Beaches International Airport (ECP) and New York-LaGuardia (LGA) starting Nov. 6, 2025. The Embraer 175-operated service adds to Delta's seasonal Saturday flights and offers expanded trav-

Business Buzz

el options. Bookings are available at Delta.com or through ECP's FlyMyAirport tool.

Leadership Northwest Florida Celebrates Graduates

Congratulations to seventeen community leaders who graduated from Florida's Great Northwest Foundation's Leadership Northwest Florida program on May 9. The seven-month initiative covers business, infrastructure, talent and regional collaboration. Applications for Class IV open this summer. Visit FGNW.org or contact Kasey Killebrew at 334-790-4557.



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🌸 Military

Eglin Welcomes New F-35 Test Force, Expanding Role of Reserve Units in Fighter Innovation

A new chapter in fighter jet innovation has officially taken off at Eglin Air Force Base. On May 1, 2025, the first-ever F-35 Lightning II Combined Test Force (CTF) was established as part of Eglin's expanding fighter test community—a signifi-

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cant milestone not just for the base, but for the Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve Command Test Center (AATC) as well.

This groundbreaking unit marks the first time the Air Reserve Component (ARC) has

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stood up a test force dedicated to fifth-generation fighter aircraft, solidifying its place in developmental and operational testing alongside the active-duty force.

AATC pilots have long been integrated into Eglin's test programs, regularly flying Developmental Test (DT) and Operational Test (OT) missions with aircraft from the 96th Test Wing and the 53rd Wing. Now, with the formal activation of the CTF, the ARC is moving from a supporting role to a leading one—shaping the future of air combat capability.

"Coordinating and streamlining across the Total Force by tirelessly testing, evaluating, and extrapolating our capabilities is how we bring

how we bring the future faster," said Maj. Gen. Duke Pirak, Air National Guard's acting director. Traditionally operating legacy aircraft, the ARC's expan-

> vancing U.S. airpower. With the stand-up of this new test force, Eglin continues to cement its status as a national leader in next-generation air dominance—where tradition meets innovation, and the future of flight is being forged today.

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Precision Under Pressure: Behind the Mission with Aircrew Flight Equipment Airmen

sion into F-35 testing reflects a

broader mission evolution. The

CTF now stands at the forefront

technologies into combat-ready

able to the warfighter," said Col.

Daniel J. Wittmer, AATC com-

mander. "Our weapons and tac-

of

strategies.

integrating cutting-edge

"We are primarily account-

The oxygen mask seals tight and night vision goggles click into place. Each component has been tested, maintained and inspected with precision not by those who wear it, but by those responsible for ensuring it works when it matters most.

At Hurlburt Field, Aircrew Flight Equipment technicians make sure aircrew have the gear they need. From flotation devices to communication systems, they help keep missions safe from start to finish.

"My level of trust in the AFE team here is very high, and it has to be," said a 1st Special Operations Wing aircraft loadmaster. "Every single piece of equipment I use, that is pre-flighted and inspected, directly relates to saving my life or protecting the aircraft."

AFE technicians inspect and prepare gear not only before mobilization, but they assess and reset equipment af-



ter each mission to ensure all components are ready for use.

Though aware of the importance of their responsibilities, a 1 SOW AFE technician said the impact of the job became more apparent during training.

"When I was in technical school, learning how to do this job, we had a pilot come in and he expressed how he actually ended up using our gear," said the AFE technician. "He had to eject from a plane and the fact that his parachute worked properly allowed him to safely land and return to his family. That honestly made me proud to even be a part of a career that contributes to that." Airmen take their responsibility seriously and it shows in how they talk about the job, as explained by a 1 SOW AFE noncommissioned officer in charge.

"On somebody's worst day in their life, AFE will be the last to let them down," said the NCOIC. "And we will ensure their safety."

Not every piece of gear is used on every flight, but it's critical when emergencies happen. AFE's work ensures that aircrew have reliable equipment to stay prepared for any situation.

"It honestly saves lives," said the technician. "That is what our job is, to make sure the gear we are inspecting and preparing will be there in case they need it. Hopefully they don't, but when push comes to shove, our gear is what will save their life."

litary

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Nine Local JROTC & ROTC Cadets Earn Scholarships from the NWFMOA

By Dave Parisot, NWFMOA Scholarship Fund

Eight JROTC cadets and one ROTC cadet from seven local schools were honored on May 1 with a total of \$55,000 in prestigious scholarships from the Northwest Florida Military Officers Association (NWFMOA) via their Scholarship Fund.

The scholarships were presented at NWFMOA's annual scholarship luncheon at the Fort Walton Yacht Club, recognizing JROTC cadets from Baker, Choctaw, Crestview, Fort Walton Beach, Navarre and Niceville High Schools, and one local ROTC cadet at the University of West Florida Air Force ROTC unit. Factors in selecting the scholarship awardees were academic excellence, leadership, community service, and service to their schools. Attendees at this recognition luncheon included JROTC instructors form each of the cadets' high schools, business leaders of local businesses who have contributed financially to fund scholarships, the parents of awardees, and members of NWFMOA. The Color Guard for Presentation of the Colors was provided by the Baker School Army JROTC (Cadets Zachary Pena, Bella Gibson, Gunner Walters, and Alex Pena).

The JROTC scholarship recipients are:

Cadet Bella Gibson of Baker School – Florida Power & Light Scholarship of \$6,000.

Cadet Heidi Edwards of Crestview High School – Mrs. Joan Gibson Griffin Bush Scholarship of \$6.000.

Cadet Layth Atrakchi of Choctawhatchee High School – Dr. Fred and Mrs. Janet Westfall Scholarship of \$6,000.

Cadet Chriscelle Pardillo of Fort Walton Beach High School – Mrs. Eileen Arpke Memorial Scholarship of \$6,000.

Cadet Madelyn Burdick of Navarre High School – Dr. Howard and Mrs. Irene Fisher Scholarship of \$6,000.

Cadet Hope Apfelbach of Navarre High School – Mrs.



Chong (Kim) Parisot Memorial Scholarship of \$6,000.

Cadet Caleb McDevitt of Navarre High School – Lt. Col. Jim and Mrs. Una Heavener Memorial Scholarship of \$9,000.

Cadet Penelope Ashby of Niceville High School – Col. Karl and Mrs. Charlotte Eschmann Scholarship of \$6,000. Cadet Lincoln Dooley of

Niceville High School – First Alternate

Cadet Owen Clift of Niceville High School – second Alternate

NWFMOA's ROTC scholarship of \$4,000, the Major General Richard Secord Memorial Scholarship, was awarded to Cadet Mark Almazan of the UWF Air Force ROTC. Mark is a 2023 graduate of the Fort Walton Beach IROTC.

In addition to these scholarships the NW-FMOA also recognized four local graduating high school seniors who have received appointments to our nation's military academies. **Those recognized are:**

Max Diehl of Niceville High School – United States Naval Academy.

Jackson Hamman of Niceville High School – United States Air Force Academy.

JROTC Cadet Jack Mashburn of Navarre High School – United States Merchant Marine Academy.

JROTC Cadet Lauren Mavity of Navarre High School – United States Merchant Marine Academy.

"These cadets are prime examples of leadership, service, academic excellence and community service that define our local JROTC and ROTC programs," said Brig. Gen. Fran Hendricks, USAF Ret., and president of the NWFMOA chapter. "We are incredibly proud of these local students and thankful to be able to invest in their futures, hopefully leading to a commission in one of our armed forces branches. These young men and women represent the very best of Okaloosa and Santa Rosa Counties." The JROTC scholarships will be paid to the respective colleges of attendance over a two-year period. Scholarship recipients are required to participate in their college's ROTC program.

The NWFMOA Scholarship Fund provides scholarship funds annually to local JROTC and ROTC cadets who exhibit superior academic achievement, leadership, and community service performance. For more information and photos, go to https://nwfmoa.org/files/sf25/ album/index.html or http:// nwfmoa.org.

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Okaloosa & Walton Counties Strengthen Hurricane Preparedness Amid Active 2025 Forecast

By LORI LEATH SMITH

In response to forecasts predicting above-average storm activity for 2025, Okaloosa and Walton Counties are intensifying their hurricane preparedness efforts and ensuring we are well-prepared for these potential storms. With the 2025 Atlantic hurricane season beginning June 1, Colorado State University anticipates 17 named storms, including nine hurricanes and four major hurricanes, exceeding the 30-year average of 14 named storms, seven hurricanes and three major hurricanes.

Okaloosa County

Building on the success of previous initiatives. Okaloosa County hosted its second annual "Florida's Greatest Hurricane Preparedness Party" on May 3, 2025, at the Okaloosa County Administration Building in Shalimar. The event featured expert presentations from Patrick Maddox, Okaloosa County Director of Public Safety, and Jason Beaman, Meteorologist-in-Charge at the National Weather Service in Mobile. Attendees received complimentary 2025 Hurricane Guides, engaged with various vendors and participated in public safety discussions with first responders.

In tandem with the expo, the county released its comprehensive 2025 Hurricane Guide, offering detailed information on evacuation zones, emergency contacts, shelter locations and

post-storm recovery resources. You can download it at https:// myokaloosa.com/emergency-management.

You can also sign up for emergency notifications through AlertOkaloosa.com or by texting "OKALOOSAFL" to 888777. Additionally, the county's Emergency Management Division provides resources and updates via their official website, MyOkaloosa.com, and social media platforms.

Walton County

Walton County Emergency Management (WCEM) has launched several initiatives to bolster community readiness. You can review evacuation routes, learn how to assemble emergency supply kits and sign up for local alerts. The county's official website offers resources and updates to assist in these preparations: https://www.mywaltonfl.gov/1063/Emergency-Management.

Additionally, WCEM is hosting the 2025 HERricane Florida | Landfall: Walton County camp from July 29 to August 1. This free program aims to educate 7th to 9th-grade girls about emergency management and public safety careers, fostering the next generation of leaders in disaster response. For more information, visit https://www. mywaltonfl.gov/1348/HERricane-Florida-Landfall-Walton-County.

Understand if/when you would evacuate your home. If your home is a solid structures outside o ure existing supplier is in working condition Generators should be cranked each month the surge zone, staying should be considered. search locations nor st, and west of Walt sunty for potential cations evacuate. ire they are tioning property. ne 2 - 15 is Disa pplies Tax Free liday in Florida

EVACUATE

Know your zone, know

Overall Quick Safety Tips:

• Stay in your safe place Get to high ground if flooding is a risk and shelter during high winds.

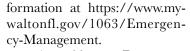
• Check weather updates -Enable Wireless Emergency Alerts and monitor changing conditions.

• Watch for flooding - Never drive through floodwaters. Just 1 foot can sweep a car away!

• Listen to local officials Follow evacuation orders and stick to recommended routes.

Key Hurricane Preparedness Steps:

 Know Your Evacuation Zone: Determine your evacuation zone and route. Okaloosa County provides detailed maps and information at https:// myokaloosa.com/gm/evacuation-zones. Walton County provides detailed maps and in-



PREPARE BEFORE HURRICANE SEASON

SUPPLIES

Assemble disaster upplies, including f vater, batter

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INSURANCE

Document all of your

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possess angles.

• Assemble an Emergency Supply Kit: Include essentials such as non-perishable food, water, medications, flashlights, batteries, chargers and important documents. Crank your generator monthly to keep it in good shape, and don't forget June 2–15 is Florida's Disaster Supplies Tax-Free Holiday! A comprehensive checklist is available at https://www.floridadisaster.org/planprepare/hurricane-supply-checklist/.

• Sign Up for Emergency Alerts: Stay informed by registering for local emergency notifications through AlertOkaloosa or by texting "OKALOOSA-FL" to 888777. Stay informed by registering for local emergency notifications through Alert Walton at https://www. mywaltonfl.gov/1063/Emergency-Management.

• Prepare Your Home: Secure loose outdoor items, install hurricane shutters, trim trees, clear debris, make sure gutters drain properly and ensure your home is in good repair to withstand high winds.

• Plan for Pets: Make arrangements for your pets in case of evacuation, including food, water, and shelter.

• Review Insurance Policies: Ensure your homeowner's insurance covers hurricane-related damages and understand the claims process. Review your policy for gaps, document your belongings, and save important files on a thumb drive or in waterproof/fireproof containers.

For more information and resources, visit:

Okaloosa Coun-Emergency tv Management at https://myokaloosa.com/emergency-management Walton County

Emergency Management at https:// www.mywaltonfl. gov/1063/Emergency-Management.

Evacuation Zones Information

& Routes:

YOUR HOME

ng in hurricane

could impact the main living structure.

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or any yard debris that

nd shutters

https://myokaloosa.com/ gm/evacuation-zones; https:// www.mywaltonfl.gov/DocumentCenter/View/29365/ Flood-Zone-Evacuation-Map?bidId=

• Road Closures and Delays: https://fl511.com (Statewide real-time traffic info)

• Kids Get a Plan and Children's Needs (Family Emergency Planning Tool for Children):

https://kidsgetaplan.com; https://www.mywaltonfl. gov/555/Childrens-Needs

• Pet Shelter Information During an Emergency:

https://myokaloosa.com/ emergency-management/ pets; https://www.mywaltonfl. gov/556/Pet-Needs-and-Safety

• Shelter in Place Guidelines: https://myokaloosa.com/ emergency-management/shelter-place

• Shelter Locations and Updates (Okaloosa County):

https://myokaloosa.com/ emergency-management/shel-

• Special Needs Registration (Okaloosa & Walton Counties Special Needs Registry):

https://snr.flhealthresponse. com; https://www.mywaltonfl. gov/1194/Special-Needs-Shelter-Registration

Disabilities (Walton https://www.my-County): waltonfl.gov/1380/Individuals-with-Disabilities

• Business Planning (Walton County): https://www.mywaltonfl.gov/1449/Make-a-Business-Plan





🐲 Sports

Page 27

Local Nonprofit Celebrates 10 Years With Olympic Gold Medalist

By WENDY RUDMAN

The Emerald Coast Fitness Foundation (ECFF), a nonprofit formed around a kitchen table 10 years ago, is celebrating a key milestone. The foundation operates two facilities in Fort Walton Beach and an aquatic center in Destin - all of which are open to the public.

Over the years, the organization has welcomed more than 5,000 swimmers of all ages to its pools, teaching some to swim and giving others opportunities to train and compete.

To commemorate 10 years of bringing pools back to local communities, ECFF held a Splash of Gold May 17, which featured Olympian swim clinics, a giant pool party and an evening cocktail social. Gold medalist Olympic swimmer, Cody Miller, will be teaching the youth clinics, signing autographs at the pool party and speaking at the evening cocktail social. The event was held at the Taj Renee Community Aquatic Center in Destin.

"I'm excited for our keynote participant, Cody Miller," said ECFF Board President Kevin Leibold. "I'm looking forward to watching him bring his expertise to local swimmers and to hearing how he relates his professional swimming career to them."

Kathi Heapy, one of the founders of the foundation, reached out to Miller early this year after enjoying his swimming YouTube videos for years. Miller is a prolific YouTuber, as well as an Olympic gold medalist at the 2016 Rio Olympics in the 4 X 100 medlev relay.

Both swam for Indiana University, which makes them family, she said.

"I emailed him, mentioned that I was also an Indiana

swimmer, and told him what our foundation is doing here," Heapy said. "Next thing, I got a text. 'Hi, this is Cody Miller. Let's set up a time to talk.""

Heapy said Miller was compelled by the foundation's mission, which is to bring aquatic opportunities to all. Ten middle school teams, six high school teams, two summer leagues and one year-round team practice or compete at ECFF pools. Additionally, more than 1,000 children and adults take lessons in foundation pools each year. In 2024, the foundation added adaptive swim lessons and its second pool in Fort Walton Beach to expand these unique offerings.

"The foundation is growing," Heapy said, adding that when ating local pools. That never erously to a large spring fundsucceed and thrive.

This year for the first time,

they started 10 years ago, they assumed a larger entity would take up their mission of operhappened, but support from businesses like Tim Smith Acura, which has contributed genraiser for the last several years, has helped the foundation to

the spring fundraising event included an online auction with items such as beachfront stays, vacations, charter boat trips, premium bourbon baskets and Are you embarrassed about smiling in front of people? The foundation is a 501(c)3by memberships, business sponsorships and fundraisers such as

Olympic gold medalist memorabilia. organization, which is funded

Splash of Gold.

vou smile?

- Would you like to change the way your teeth or gums are shaped? · Do you have gaps or spaces in between your teeth?
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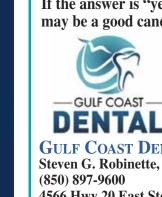
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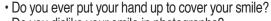
GULF COAST DENTAL Steven G. Robinette, DDS







Gold medal Olympic swimmer Cody Miller visited Destin May 17 to promote the Emerald Coast Fitness Foundation, which provides facilities for public swimming in Okaloosa County.



- Do you dislike your smile in photographs?
- · When you look through magazines, do you envy the models' smiles? · Do you wish your teeth were whiter?

Get the Smile You Deserve

Smile with Confidence Again

· Do you think you show too much or too little of your teeth when

Wellness

Breaking the Cycle: How Strength Training Can Help Overcome Chronic Pain and Fear-Avoidance



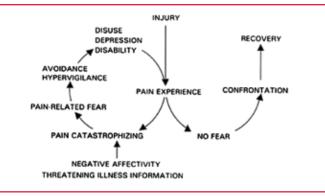
By Kassia Garfield, Owner, MaxStrength Fitness

Chronic pain is more than a lingering ache-it's a complex, frustrating condition that can take a heavy physical and emotional toll. While the pain itself is very real, how we respond to that pain often plays a major role in how much it affects our lives. One of the most common patterns that traps people in long-term pain is the fear-avoidance cycle-a psychological loop where fear of pain leads to less movement, which in turn increases pain and disability. The nervous system also becomes more sensitive, although the pain felt is very real, it is not always truly what the body is feeling. This higher sensitivity took time to develop, and takes time to reverse as well.

The fear-avoidance model explains how chronic pain can persist even when the original injury has healed. It often begins with pain or injury. A person may become afraid that movement will make the pain worse or cause more damage, so they start avoiding activities-especially anything that feels physically demanding. Over time, this avoidance leads to physical deconditioning, muscle weakness, and stiffness. The body becomes less resilient, making everyday tasks harder and sometimes more painful. This confirms the person's fears, reinforcing the belief that movement is dangerous. The result? A vicious cycle of fear, inactivity

and worsening pain. But here's the good news: this cycle can be broken. And one of the most effective ways to do it is through strength training and understanding that pain does not equal damage. Movement is the best way to start reversing the sensitivity to the nervous system.

Strength training helps challenge the fear-avoidance mindset by gradually reintroducing movement in a safe, controlled



way. It provides both physical and psychological benefits. Physically, building muscle improves joint stability, increases mobility and reduces inflammation. It also enhances circulation and can help normalize the nervous system's sensitivity to pain. Simply put, the stronger and more capable your body feels, the less pain tends to dominate your experience. Strength also starts to build muscle lost due to lack of movement, which supports the joints, helping to reduce injury, damage or reduce the advancement of arthritis.

Psychologically, strength training rebuilds confidence. When someone sees that they can lift a weight, perform a squat or walk farther than they could before—without causing IMG CREDIT: PHYSIOPEDIA.COM

harm—it reshapes how they perceive their pain. Each successful workout becomes a small win against fear, proving that movement is not the enemy.

It's important, of course, to approach strength training carefully when dealing with chronic pain. The goal is not to push through pain, but to work around it and gradually expand your limits. Programs focused on low-load, high-repetition movements or bodyweight exercises are often a good place to start. Progress should be slow and steady, and ideally guided by a knowledgeable physical therapist or trainer familiar with chronic pain principles.

In many cases, strength training becomes the foundation of a more active, fulfilling lifestyle. It empowers individuals to take control of their pain rather than being controlled by it. For people stuck in the fear-avoidance cycle, lifting a weight can feel like lifting a burden they've carried for years.

The key is this: movement is medicine—but strength is empowerment. When guided correctly, strength training can offer a powerful path out of chronic pain and back into a life of confidence, resilience, and freedom.

MaxStrength Fitness of Niceville (4576 E Highway 20) is hosting a **free Chronic Pain and Strength seminar on Monday June 2nd at 5:30 p.m.** run by the owner, Kassia Garfield, who is also a physical therapist. This will be capped at 25 people.

Hydrafacial

• Dermaplane



Beyond Routine: Innovative Testing for Proactive Health



By Dr. Karen DeVore

Healthcare should be proactive, not just reactive. You shouldn't have to wait until something is "wrong" to start paying attention to your body. This is the foundation of our integrative approach—focusing on prevention, understanding the root cause of symptoms and delivering care that's personalized to you.

Although often a great first step, conventional lab work often doesn't tell the full story. Maybe you've been told your results are "normal," but you still don't feel like yourself. Fatigue, brain fog, bloating, mood swings or trouble sleeping—these aren't just in your head. They're signals from your body that deserve to be explored, not dismissed.

That's why we offer a deeper level of testing at the Tortoise Clinic. Our specialty diagnostics are designed to find answers, target care more effectively, and give you the insights you need to feel empowered on your wellness journey.

Precision Testing for Personalized Care

Specialty testing goes beyond the basics. It helps us detect hidden imbalances, identify early warning signs, and tailor a treatment plan specifically for you. This isn't about chasing symptoms—it's about uncovering what's really going on beneath the surface so we can support your health in a meaningful, lasting way.

Here are a few of the impactful tests we use to support your whole-body wellness:

• Galleri® Multi-Cancer Early Detection Test This groundbreaking blood

test screens for over 50 types of aggressive cancer—many of which don't have routine screening options. It detects tiny fragments of tumor DNA in your blood before symptoms ever appear. It's a great option for those with a family history of cancer, unexplained symptoms, or anyone who wants to take a proactive approach.

Genova GI Effects® Comprehensive Stool Analysis

Your gut tells a bigger story than you might think. This test looks at digestion, inflammation, your microbiome (the bacteria living in your gut), and even signs of infection. Because your gut health is connected to your immune system, mood, energy levels, and more, this test can be a game-changer if you're struggling with things like bloating, fatigue, skin issues, or autoimmune concerns.

• Hormone Testing (Serum & DUTCH)

We offer both traditional blood work and the more advanced DUTCH test, to give us a fuller picture of your hormone patterns. DUTCH helps us see how your body makes, uses, and clears hormones like cortisol,



estrogen, and testosterone. It's especially useful for symptoms like low energy, irregular cycles, sleep issues, and mood swings.

• Food Sensitivity Testing

Unlike allergy tests, which check for immediate reactions, this test looks at delayed immune responses that can cause chronic inflammation. That includes symptoms like brain fog, joint pain, headaches, or breakouts—often tied to foods you'd never suspect. Knowing your sensitivities helps us craft a dietary strategy that truly supports your body.

• Methylation & Genetic Wellness Testing

This test looks at the genes

that affect detox, hormone balance, mood, and how your body uses nutrients. A common example is the MTHFR gene, which plays a role in how you process folate and B vitamins. With this info, we can finetune your supplements and lifestyle to work with your genetics, not against

• Functional Lab Panels

them.

We also look at standard labs—like vitamins, minerals, cholesterol and inflammatory markers—through a functional lens. That means we're not just checking if you're in a "normal" range; we're asking, is this optimal for you? These panels help us assess your metabolic health, nutrient levels, and inflammation in more meaningful ways.

Empowering Your Wellness Journey

Specialty testing isn't about collecting more data—it's about getting the right insights. By un-

Continued on page 34



🐲 Wellness

Why We Should Care

BY KAY LEAMAN, HEALTHYDAY HEALTHYLIFE

As I write this, summer is starting to sneak its way in. A new morning to start fresh, make a change, do something different and up-level my health journey so I can do more, enjoy more and encourage others to do the same.

Here are some headlines:

Wall Street Journal: Your Healthspan Is as Important as Your Lifespan-and It's Declining The U.S. Diet is Deadly.

Health News: Six in 10 Americans Have Unhealthy Pro-Inflammatory Diets. Less Than 3 Percent of Americans Have a Healthy Lifestyle.

York New **Times:** Three-Quarters of U.S. Americans Are Now Overweight or Obese.

Comment and Health: Why is the U.S. still in such poor health, despite its wealth?

Bluewater PLASTIC SURGERY Steven J. Clark, MD, DMD, FACS

Michelle Sasala MSN, APRN, FNP-BC Nurse Practitioner/Aesthetic Injector

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- Liposuction (Vaser, 360)
- Facelift, Necklift, Eyelid Lift • Gynecomastia (Male Breast
- Reduction)
- Post Weight Loss

Non-Surgical

- Laser Hair Removal
- OBAGI Skin Care
- Laser Pigmentation / Wrinkles UltraClear[®]

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Why Is American Food So Unhealthy?

Health and Medicine: Only 12 percent of American adults are metabolically healthy, Carolina study finds. Many sports supplements have no trace of their key ingredients.

HealthWatch: U.S. spends the most but ranks last in health compared with other high-income nations, new report says.

Forbes: 89% Of Sports Supplements Tested Did Not Accurately Label Their Ingredients. 40% of Sports Supplements Don't Contain Ingredients On The Label, U.S. Study Finds.

CNN: Nearly 800 dietary supplements contained unapproved drug ingredients, study finds

CBS News: Herbal supplements filled with fake ingredients, investigators find.

Dr. Mark Hyman M.D. (Doctors Pharmacy Podcast) states: "Since the nutrient density of our diet has declined over time, we all need supplements. Unless you're hunting and gathering and foraging all your own wild food, unless you're drinking pure clean water, you have no exposure to environmental toxins, you have no chronic stress, you go to bed with the sun and wake up with the sun, you sleep nine hours a night - if that's you, you don't need supplements; but everybody else --- we need supplements.'

When choosing a vitamin, do we know if they have industry leading certifications such as USP, GMP, NSF TGA, ISO, HACCP, etc. Are they manufactured in a FDA registered facility? What rigorous trials have they gone through using 3rd party research?

When we look at all the information above and think about what questions to ask regarding our food supply as well,



it becomes overwhelming. However, there are steps we can take to impact our own health in a positive way. Being proactive in understanding food labels is a good start. We can decrease the number of inner isle products we normally purchase. Many canned vegetables contain sugar and other preservatives. An example of this is canned tomatoes. Pomi's ingredients are tomatoes. Check the other options and you'll notice a trend. I have found more natural (less ingredients) in the international isle. I avoid any item containing sugar or coloring. Why they need to add yellow coloring to pickles is beyond me!

Supplements are a whole other issue. Because they are not regulated by the FDA, there are many both in stores and online that are not what they claim to be or have (They can be added to the sport supplement quotes above.). Several years ago, I attended a training on taking a product to an online platform. The short version; create a label, find a manufacturing company that can produce the product and attach your label to it. The product they were focused on-vitamins. The bottom line of the entire training: the money, not quality, purity, efficacy or safety.

If you are interested in a couple of short videos regarding where my husband and I redirected our supplement spending, send me an email with 'I care' in the subject line. I am also available to discuss labels or other questions you might have via a phone call. Please use the same subject line in your email.

It's about learning and sharing what we learn with others that can impact the health of our communities. Here's to Health.

succeed.hdhl@gmail.com

Botox Bar Facial Fillers Profound (RF Microneedling)



By Dr. Jessica Monteleone, PT PhD

My husband honored the bake sale offered by our church teens this week by purchasing a few brownies. No, they did not look dense, dark or worth the calories. So, I declined even a bite. I had a hankering for chocolate. So, I decided to make my own brownies with avocado and pumpkin that afternoon.

Now, my dad was the kind of guy that was always looking for food. Whenever he saw me, I received a big hug, then, the first words that came out of his mouth were, "What do you have for your father to eat?" Dad lived to eat. My girlfriend Pamela snubbed my fresh baked, healthy brownies asking, "Jessica, why do you put these weird foods in your cooking?" I eat to live. The food that I put in my body is nutrient dense fuel, so that I can do what I've been called to do, and the avocado is one of those foods.

The avocado is a rather unique type of fruit. Most fruit consists primarily of carbohydrate, while avocado is high in healthy fats. Numerous studies show that it has powerful, beneficial effects on health. So, let me convince you to enjoy them as well.

1. Avocados are amazingly nutritious. This fruit is prized for its high nutrient value and is eaten raw or added to dishes for its good flavor and rich texture. Avocados contain a wide variety of nutrients, including 20 different vitamins and minerals. One half of an average avocado offers: Vitamin K: 26%, Folate: 20% Vitamin C: 17%, Potassium: 14%, Vitamin B5 (pantothenic acid): 14%, Vitamin B6 (pyridoxine):13% Vitamin E:10% RDA (Recommended Daily Allowance). Small amounts of Magnesium, Manganese, Copper, Iron, Zinc, Phosphorous, Vitamin A, B1 (Thiamine), B2 (Riboflavin) and B3 (Niacin) are present as well. At 160 calories, avocados have 2 grams of protein and 15 grams of healthy fats. Although it contains 9 grams of carbs, 7 of those are fiber so there are only 2 "net" carbs, entitling this a low-carb friendly plant food.

2. Avocados contain more potassium (14% RDA) than bananas (10% RDA). Potassium helps maintain electrical gradients in the body's cells and serves various important functions. Several studies show that having a high potassium intake is linked to reduced blood pressure, a major risk factor for heart attacks, strokes and kidney failure.

3. Avocados are loaded with Heart-Healthy Monounsaturated Fatty Acids. 77% of the calories in it are from fat, making it one of the fattiest plant foods identified, however, the majority of the fat in avocado is oleic acid; a monounsaturated fatty acid that is also the major component in olive oil. Oleic acid has been linked to reduced inflammation and been shown to have beneficial effects on genes linked to cancer. The fats in avocado are also resistant to heat-induced oxidation, making avocado oil a healthy and safe choice for cooking.

4. Avocados Are Loaded with Fiber. Fiber is indigestible plant matter that can contribute to weight loss, reduce blood sugar spikes and is strongly linked to a lower risk of many diseases. ¹/₂ of avocado contains 7 grams of fiber, 27% RDA.

5. Eating Avocados are heart healthy. Eating good fat can improve blood markers tested for heart disease. Sounds Bizarre doesn't it? However, studies have shown that avocados can reduce total cholesterol levels significantly reduce blood triglycerides by up to 20%, lower LDL cholesterol by up to 22%, and increase HDL (the "good") cholesterol by up to 11%.

6. People Who Eat Avocados Tend to be Healthier. Studies show that Avocado eaters had a much higher nutrient intake and were half as likely to have metabolic syndrome, a cluster of symptoms that are a major risk factor for heart disease and diabetes. People who ate avocados regularly also weighed less, had a lower BMI and significantly less belly fat. They also had more HDL (the "good") cholesterol.

Avocado Pleasure

7. The Fat in avocados helps the gut to absorb nutrients from plant foods. The healthy fat found in avocados allows bioavailability of vitamins A, D, E and K as well as antioxidants such as carotenoids. One study showed that adding avocado or avocado oil to either salad or salsa can increase antioxidant absorption by 2.6 to 15-fold. Thus, it can dramatically increase the nutrient value of other plant foods that you are eating. This is an excellent reason to always include a healthy fat source when you eat veggies. Without it, a lot of the beneficial plant nutrients will go to waste.

8. Avocados Are Loaded with Powerful Antioxidants called Lutein and Zeaxanthin that can protect the eyes. Studies show that these nutrients are linked to a drastically reduced risk of cataracts and macular degeneration, which are common in the aged.

9. Avocado May Help Prevent Cancer. There is limited evidence that avocado may be beneficial in preventing cancer. One study showed that it may help reduce side effects of chemotherapy in human lymphocytes. Avocado extract has also been shown to inhibit the growth of prostate cancer cells.

10. Avocado Extract May Help Relieve Symptoms of Arthritis. Multiple studies have shown that extracts from avocado and soybean oil, called Avocado and Soybean unsaponifiables (ASU), can reduce inflammation which reduces symptoms of osteoarthritis of the bones.

11. Eating Avocado May Help You Lose Weight. These nutrient dense fruits are high in fiber, and very low in carbs. One study revealed that people eating the avocado expressed 23% more satisfied and had a 28% lower desire to eat over the next 5 hours over non-avocado eaters.

12. Avocados are user friendly. Try sliced avocado on a salad, or in a guacamole with salt, garlic, lime. Add it to your sandwich, make a creamy salad dressing or add them to deviled eggs. Replace your mayonnaise or fats with avocados in your recipes. You might want to get real brave and try them in your



brownies. If you like your desserts sweet, add a $\frac{1}{2}$ cup honey and 2 teaspoons of vanilla to the baked portion of this recipe. Enjoy avocados. Eat them for the health of it.

Pumpkin Avocado Brownie

Total Time: 40 minutes Ingredients for brownies:

- •l avocado
- •1 C canned pumpkin
- •1/2 C applesauce
- •1⁄4 C honey
- •1 tsp vanilla extract •4 eggs
- •1/4 C coconut flour
- •2 tbsp corn starch
- $\bullet^{1\!/_{\!2}}$ C cacao powder
- 1/2 tsp sea salt or Himalayan salt1 tsp baking soda

Topping:

1/4 C honey
1/2 C nut butter
1/4 C cacao powder
1/2 C coconut milk
Sea Salt

Directions:

Preheat oven to 375 degrees F. Grease 8x8 pan with coconut oil. In a bowl, combine avocado, pumpkin, applesauce, honey and vanilla. Once creamy, add in cacao powder. Add in eggs one at a time. In a separate bowl, combine coconut flour, corn starch, salt and baking soda. Combine both mixtures until smooth. Transfer to greased pan and bake for 25-35 minutes

While baking, combine the last 5 ingredients listed under topping in a separate bowl and mix until creamy and smooth. Once the brownies are done baking and cooled; frost with this mixture.

Dr. Jess Monteleone resides in Freeport. She is a local physical therapist with a Doctorate in Traditional Naturopathic medicine. Visit wholistictherapyathome.com.

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🐞 Wellness

Important Conversations



By Stephenie Craig

You know that feeling when it's time to have a conversation about something important but you aren't sure how to approach it? You feel the urgency to speak but your hands get sweaty, your chest gets tight, and you tell yourself it's not really a big enough issue to discuss resulting in avoidance. Or, you feel anger bubbling up and you speak up with aggression, anger and intensity that turn the conversation in an unintended direction.

Avoiding important conversations may keep the peace in the short term, however, in the long-term avoidance creates unresolved tension, lack of change, feeling unseen, resentment and bitterness. Approaching important conversations with anger and aggression most often results in defensiveness, not being heard, escalation, alienation and seeing the other person as a villain. What if there was another way to talk about things that are important to you? What if there was a way to be calm, clear, direct, and curious, while also being heard?

7 Healthy Ways to Have Important Conversations

1. Notice your emotional activation. When are you feeling upset, bothered or emotionally reactive? Notice big feelings, body tension, irritability, headaches, stomachaches, exhaustion, anxiety, depression.

2. Regulate yourself. Use intentional calming skills to move your brain from emergency, overwhelmed mode to rational mode. Breathe slowly for 2 minutes, take a brief walk, journal, yell into your pillow, punch a punching bag, etc. Use coping skills that don't hurt yourself, others, or property.

3. Engage internal sorting. Notice if past emotion about previous situations/relationships is intermingled with the present. Determine the real issue in the present moment separate from other emotional situations.

4. Own your part. Remember that while you may feel upset with someone, you are not a victim. You have power and self-control. You have a voice and it is healthy to use it. Notice when you are being defensive or making up negative stories in your head (we all make up negative stories that aren't accurate). Determine and clarify what negative contribution you might be making to the situation at hand. Determine how you can communicate your willingness to take responsibility for your part.

5. Reach for vulnerability instead of blame and finger point-



ing. Notice if you are feeling hurt, misunderstood, invalidated, rejected, afraid, unsupported, insecure, unappreciated, or unseen. Look underneath anger as vulnerable feelings often hide beneath.

6. Outline your approach to the conversation. Start by asking the other person if they would be willing to take a few undistracted minutes to talk about something important to you. Then use "I" statements and feeling words to describe what is feeling difficult for you. Follow up by communicating a clear alternative that would feel better to you. "I feel hurt and dismissed when I tell you I am overwhelmed in parenting and you respond by telling me I just need to get more organized. What I'm really needing in those moments is some validation that parenting can be hard. I'm also needing to know you understand my feelings and

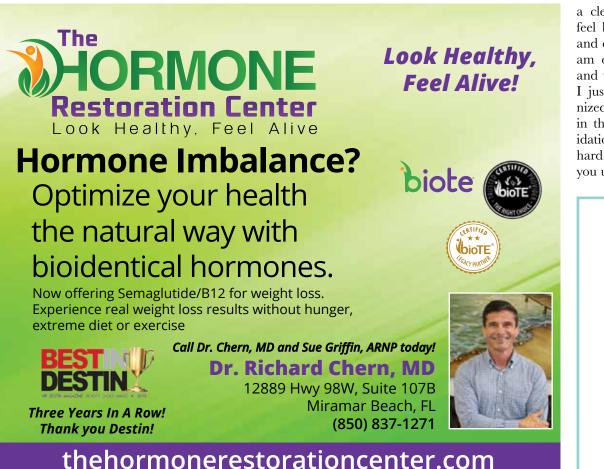
can be curious about support I might be needing."

7. Practice your outline, then gather your courage or calm and initiate the conversation.

Remember to regulate yourself before and during the conversation with calm breathing. Your approach will influence the tone of the discussion. Also, try to listen to the other person with curiosity rather than defensiveness when they respond to your thoughts. The other person may or may not respond the way you are hoping. However, it feels empowering to know you handled your side of the conversation well. Practice is needed much more than perfection when it comes to learning new communication skills. Keep working at it consistently and it will become more natural. Connect with us along your journey for counseling at coaching at Journeybravely.com.







Considering Ketamine After Psilocybin? Here's What to Know



By Melanie Yost

If you've experienced the healing power of psilocybin, you already understand how transformative psychedelic therapies can be - revealing hidden truths, releasing emotional weight and restoring a sense of meaning. If you're exploring what's next in your healing journey, ketamine may be a natural and meaningful next step.

While the experience is different from psilocybin, the intention is the same: to help you heal from the inside out - especially if you're continuing to navigate depression, anxiety, PTSD or trauma.

Different Medicines, Shared Purpose: Both psilocybin and ketamine support the brain's natural ability to heal; they just take different routes to get there.

Psilocybin often brings deeply emotional or spiritual experiences. It opens the door to insight, compassion, and reconnection by activating serotonin receptors and disrupting rigid thinking patterns in the brain's default mode network, the area linked to self-reflection and rumination.

Ketamine works differently. It blocks NMDA receptors and boosts levels of glutamate and BDNF (brain-derived neurotrophic factor), enhancing neuroplasticity allowing your brain to form new connections and healthier patterns. While psilocybin dives deep into the emotional landscape, ketamine often offers a more spacious, observational experience that quiets the inner critic and creates room for relief.

Both are Psychedelic -



But in Different Ways: It's important to know that ketamine is also a psychedelic, though in a different category than psilocybin. Psilocybin often brings intense, symbolic and immersive experiences. Ketamine typically feels more floaty, dissociative and dreamlike.

This "softer" psychedelic state may feel less overwhelming, but still opens a window into subconscious thought. Intensity does not equal therapeutic effectiveness. Ketamine offers a different kind of access to healing.

Why Consider Ketamine?: If you're still experiencing emotional distress, looping thoughts or trauma responses, ketamine can offer support in ways that build upon your previous work with psilocybin:

• It offers relief without requiring emotional breakthroughs. Sometimes healing happens through subtle shifts lighter days, quieter

thoughts, steadier emotions.

• It provides a new perspective. The dissociative quality of ketamine creates space between you and your pain, helping you gain clarity and calm.

• It increases resilience. Many people report better sleep, fewer spirals, and a greater ability to respond, rather than react, to life's stressors.

• It supports long-term integration. If psilocybin opened the door to transformation, ketamine can help you walk through it with steadiness and support.

A Continued Journey, Not a Restart: Choosing ketamine after psilocybin isn't about starting over; it's about continuing your healing with new tools. Psilocybin helps uncover emotional truths. Ketamine helps you integrate and sustain those insights. The self-awareness you've built can deepen your ketamine experience. You're not replacing one medicine with another; you are expanding your capacity to heal.

Trust the Process, Trust Yourself: You've already done courageous work. Choosing to keep going, even in a new way, is a powerful act of self-care.

Ketamine activates healing pathways already within you. The medicine opens the door, but your body and brain do the healing.

Whether you're seeking clarity, relief or stability, ketamine offers a path forward that is gentle, effective and uniquely supportive. If psilocybin helped you see what's possible, ketamine can help you sustain it.

Both are powerful. Both are worthy of your trust. And most importantly, so are you.



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Musing

A Pastor's Ponderings: The God of the Ordinary Days

Many Christians find it eas-

iest to sense God during the

highs and lows-at weddings

and funerals, during revivals and

tragedies. But what about on a

Tuesday morning when the cof-

fee has turned lukewarm and the

to-do list seems never-ending?

What about while folding laun-

dry or sitting in traffic on High-

way 85, trying to get through

Crestview at 5 p.m.? Is He not

there, too? Yes, God is the God

of the ordinary days and the un-

who encountered God in quiet

The Bible is filled with people

remarkable events.

moments:



By Pastor Doug Stauffer

For many people, most days are spent in the familiar routines of life, without extravagance or pageantry. Not every day comes wrapped in the emotion of Easter or the celebration of Christmas. Many days can be relatively predictable and constant, and the month of June displays this characteristic. It doesn't boast the glory of Christ's birth or the deep reflection of His resurrection. Aside from Father's Day, it simply exists-quiet and unremarkably constant. Nevertheless, God is no less present during June's seemingly "humdrum" days.

BEYOND ROUTINE

continued from page 29

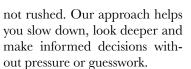
derstanding your body's unique rhythms and needs, we can create a plan that's truly tailored to

Elijah discovered that God shows up in ways that we least expect Him. Following a dramatic showdown on Mount Carmel, he fled in fear and discouragement. While hiding in a cave, he encountered God, not in the extreme, but in the stillness. The Bible tells us in 1 Kings 19:11, "And he said, 'Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord.' And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: 12 And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and

after the fire a still small voice." The Bible says that the Lord was not in the wind, not in the earthquake and not in the fire, but He did show Himself to Elijah in a "still small voice." That whisper was more potent than all the noise and hoopla we expect from God. Elijah's encounter with God was personal, intimate and surely sufficient.

you. Whether you're managing symptoms or staying ahead of potential issues, we're here to guide you with clarity and care.

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Ruth gleaned in a field and eventually met her redeemer (Ruth 2:3-4).

Moses was tending sheep when he saw the burning bush (Exodus 3:1-2).

A boy brought lunch that Jesus used to feed thousands (John 6:9-11).

A woman came to a well for water and met the Living Water (John 4:6-26).

In the Gospels, we read of Jesus during seemingly routine times: walking, talking or dining with His disciples. He wasn't always performing miracles; sometimes, He was simply present—teaching, praying, or resting. Those ordinary moments prepared His followers for their extraordinary missions that would follow.

Perhaps we need that reminder this month. God is not waiting for us solely in a spirit-moving church service or during a life-altering crisis. He meets us in the mundane, speaks to us during our morning routine, and walks with us through every ordinary activity.

fection. It's clarity over confu-

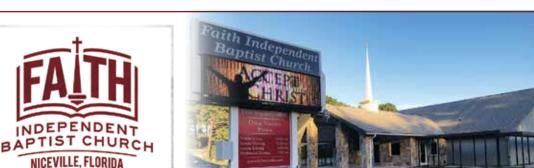
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I have found that my spiritual strength is not built solely on mountaintop experiences. It is formed in the valleys, on the plains and through life's routine activities. When we pray without emergencies, read Scripture because we want to, or serve without applause, growth occurs exponentially.

Lamentations 3:22–23 tells us that God's mercies are "new every morning." Not just on holidays. Not just on Sundays. Every single day! So, this June, let's listen for the "still small voice." Let's choose to focus on God during the ordinary and not just the extraordinary days. We might discover that those are the moments He chooses to shape us the most.

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.

And above all, wellness is a marathon, not a sprint.



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

Service Times

Sunday School: 10:00 AM • Morning Service: 11:00 AM • Evening Service: 6:00 PM Wednesday Service: 7:00 PM

Watch or Listen Live with Pastor Doug Stauffer Services broadcast live on several platforms, including Youtube, Facebook, SermonAudio and our Website.



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Sean of the South



BY SEAN DIETRICH

The radio was on. WSM 650 AM. It was a summer night. The crickets were out. The garage door was open.

Daddy was changing the oil. He was lying beneath the Ford. I was sitting there, watching him work. Because that's what kids did before TikTok.

The garage was peppered with posters of fighter jets, and model airplanes. My father was obsessed with planes. All kinds. He wanted to be a fighter pilot as a boy. But he was deaf in his left ear. So he became an ironworker.

His voice came from beneath the car. "Be a pal and get me another one from the fridge?'

He wasn't talking about Coca-Cola. He wanted another bottle of Weekend Lubricant. I didn't have far to walk. The fridge was beside his workbench. Our family's beer fridge was always kept in the garage because we were Baptist.

I fetched another bottle. I handed it to my old man, who slid from beneath the car on one of those slider things with the wheels.

He was still wearing work clothes. Denim. Boots. He was still covered in soot from a day of welding column splices. It was Saturday. He had worked overtime, but still somehow had energy enough to cut the grass, paint the shed, and change the oil after work. Just how he was.

"Turn up the radio, Opie," he said.

He called me that because I had red hair. Although the truth was, I was pretty chubby and looked nothing like Ron Howard. In fact, I looked more like I had eaten Opie Taylor.

The radio was playing the Grand Ole Opry. The garage swelled with the sounds of steel guitars and twin fiddles.

My father discovered that I was a musical child from a



young age. I was 4 when he marched me into the music minister's office and said, "My boy can sing. I want you to learn him to do it good." Daddy paid \$9 per week for voice lessons. That was a lot back then. The first song I learned was "Swing Low Sweet Chariot."

"Do you have regrets?" I asked my father.

"Huh?" came the voice beneath the four-wheeled piece of Dearborn Steel.

"Where'd you hear that word?"

Shrug.

He slid from beneath the car. He stared at me. "You mean do I wish I'd done anything different? Of course I do. Everyone has regrets."

"Like what?"

He was still lying on his back. Socket wrench resting on his chest. "Why do you ask?"

Another shrug.

"Well," he said, "I wish I'd gone to college. That's Number One. Wish I'd made something of myself. Wish I didn't walk on iron beams all day. Lotta men die doing what I do." "What else?"

He thought. "Oh, I wish I would've taken flying lessons. I always wanted to fly. But when they told me I'd never be a Navy pilot, on account of my dead ear, I cried for a whole year. I hated myself. Hated this gimp body God gave me. But I shouldn't have given up. Shoulda taken flying lessons. But I didn't. I regret that."

"Is it too late?"

"For flying lessons?' Nod.

He sighed and took a sip. He looked into the faroff. "I

don't know. Maybe." The music of Loretta Lynn filled our garage. "But it doesn't matter, because you know what I've learned?"

"What?" "When you were born, I learned that the most important thing I would ever do was be a daddy. I didn't care about me no more. I only cared about you.

Cared about watching you succeed." "Me?"

"Yessir. You shoulda seen

yourself. You were pitiful. You came out of your mama helpless and nekkid. You didn't even have a name. So I gave you mine.

"And when I held you that first time, I promised myself that anything I ever did, from that day on, would all be for you. That was my job. To look after you. Not to be a pilot. Not to be rich. Even after I die, so help me, I'll be looking out for you however I can. Because you're mine. And I'm your'n."

I am a middle-aged man now, older than my father was in my memory. But tomorrow night I will be performing at the Grand Ole Opry. And I wonder if he isn't the reason why.









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Since 2011, Studio 237 Music Lessons has become a beacon of musical growth, creativity and home to a passionate group of instructors with decades of experience and dedication to their craft. Each teacher contributes a unique background and skill set, creating a well-rounded learning environment for students of all ages and levels. Our teachers, from left to right in picture, are: Max McCann, Scott Gilmore, Helmut Dimmel, Ray Cyr, Kimberly Burke, Lisa Cyr, and MaryKate Cary-Dooly. Studio 237 Music provides a place for teachers to teach and for students to learn.

Max McCann is a graduate of the Guitar Institute of Technology (GIT) in California. As an accomplished guitarist with over 30 years of experience, he offers students quality technical instruction and insight for live performance. His teaching style and personality is favored by students of guitar and bass. Max seeks to get one's musical gifting flowing in a simple and fun way via knowledge, technique, and feel. He believes all students have potential.

Scott Gilmore has been with Studio 237 since 2016, and has



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Nov. 28 - Dec. 31





over 16 years of teaching students of all ages and levels on guitar (acoustic and classical), ukulele, songwriting, and theory. Known for his patient, kind, and detailed instruction, Scott emphasizes technique, music theory, and developing sight-reading skills. He teaches a variety of styles such as classical, Latin, jazz, and pop, each lesson is personally designed.

Helmut Dimmel is an accomplished pianist, keyboardist, and church worship leader for 29+ years. He earned his bachelor's degree of education in Germany, which brings his European classical training and appreciation for musical expression to the student. Along with reading music, Helmut teaches playing piano by ear, identifying chords, and tabs. Keyboard improvisation encourages learning, flexibility, and musicianship.

Ray Cyr is the co-owner, administrator, and teacher of drums/percussion. Ray has 60+ years of experience in the music industry, in live concerts, recording, and owning a talent agency. Ray is known for his technical precision, fun, and supportive teaching style. He has trained over 100 drummers to play marching band, rock, blues, boogie, gospel, swing and big band music.

Kimberly Burke, with 30+ years of experience as a singer/ songwriter and Nashville recording artist, is a classically trained musician with a degree in voice performance. Kimberly performs as a solo artist and with bands covering country, classic rock, beach town favorites and old R&B. Her original music is published online, including her new single titled "The Girl I Was Before." Kimberly emphasizes technique, breath support, developing skills, range, and confidence.

Lisa Cyr, the co-owner, administrator, and teacher, brings a wealth of 35 years of teaching experience in piano, music theory, chord method, and general music education. Her gentle demeanor and creative teaching methods make her an excellent fit for beginners through advanced learners of all ages 6 and up. Lisa uses fun, time-proven techniques to keep students motivated and progressing. As a member of the National Federation of Music Clubs, she encourages and prepares her students to perform at music events, auditions, and competitions.

MaryKate Cary-Dooly is a classically trained vocalist with studies in gospel, jazz, and pop who teaches voice and piano. She earned her Bachelor of Arts Music and Entrepreneurship degree from Florida State University. With her experience and vocal performance, she helps students unlock their potential and develop stage presence using classical and contemporary techniques. As a versatile and dynamic teacher, MaryKate is thrilled to share the joyful experience of music with others.

Together, the teachers at Studio 237 form a passionate and supportive music community. Whether a student dreams of performing on stage, composing original music, or music appreciation, our talented group of instructors can help make one's dreams a reality. To find out more about Studio 237 Music, visit our website at www.Studio-237Music.com. Or call (850) 231-3199.

Sinfonia Gulf Coast's Demetrius Fuller Accepted into Florida Chapter of the Recording Academy; Takes Leadership Role in Music Education



Demetrius Fuller, Founder and Music & Artistic Director of Sinfonia Gulf Coast, has been named a Professional

Member of the Florida Chapter of the Recording Academy currently the ONLY professional member from Northwest Florida. He has also been appointed to the chapter's Education Committee, helping guide statewide music education and scholarship initiatives supported by MusiCares.

Fuller founded Sinfonia in 2004 at just 24 and joined the Academy in 2024. His appointment comes as Sinfonia prepares to celebrate its 20th anniversary season in 2025–2026.

"Joining the Florida Chapter of the Recording Academy

is an honor that places Sinfonia Gulf Coast within an influential global network of music industry professionals," said Fuller. "This affiliation aligns perfectly with our mission to redefine the symphony experience while supporting music education and professional growth in our community and beyond."

Demetrius also mentors through GRAMMY U, connecting music professionals with college students pursuing careers in the music industry. He has commissioned and premiered numerous works, helping shape both regional and international music culture.

"We are beyond proud of this stellar accomplishment," added Elizabeth Boswell, board president. "Demetrius is not only a distinguished music professional, but a relevant and engaged industry leader."

The Recording Academy's Florida Chapter, founded in 1995, represents artists and professionals throughout Florida and Puerto Rico and includes icons like Gloria Estefan, DJ Khaled and Bad Bunny, reflecting Florida's rich musical heri-

Art News

tage and dynamic contemporary scene. SinfoniaGulfCoast. org.

Students Shine in 16th Annual OAA Poster Contest

The Okaloosa Arts Alliance (OAA) recently celebrated the winners of its 16th Annual Okaloosa County School Poster Contest, themed "Arts in Outer Space." A total of 138 creative entries from students across the county were showcased at a public reception on Sunday, May 4, at the Emerald Coast Science Center. Attendees enjoyed live music from Grow Your Gift Conservatory of Music and refreshments from Twisted Grape.

Special thanks go to the Science Center for hosting the event and to Melissa Forte Litscher of NextHome Cornerstone Realty for sponsoring. Eglin Federal Credit Union provided gift cards for the winners, while HH Arts, Arts & Design Society, and the Science Center donated art supply bags and tickets for first-place and Viewer's Choice recipients.

Participating schools in-

cluded Rocky Bayou Christian School, Crestview High, Kenwood Elementary, Montessori Learning Center, Village Christian Academy, Risen Star Academy, St. Mary Catholic School, Meigs Middle, and Ruckel Middle School.

Winners:

Elementary (K-4th)

• 1st: Christine Blatz, 1st grade – Montessori Learning Center

• 2nd: Rachel Ard, Kindergarten – Montessori Learning Center

• 3rd: Alexa Gonzalez, 4th grade – Kenwood Elementary

Middle School (5th–8th) • 1st: Aria Berry, 8th grade -Rocky Bayou Christian School

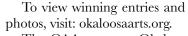
• 2nd: Ahymn Kim, 6th grade – Ruckel Middle School

• 3rd: Trinity Ricciardi, 6th grade – Rocky Bayou Christian School

High School (9th-12th)

1st: Jingxuan Lee Song,
 10th grade – Crestview High
 School

2nd: Ryan Jaime, 11th grade – Crestview High School
3rd: Kennedy Glenn, 12th grade – Crestview High School



The OAA serves as Okaloosa County's official arts agency, promoting the arts through advocacy, education, and community engagement.

Artists Invited to Apply for 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, set for October 25–26, 2025, at the Dugas Pavilion in Destin.

This juried show features over 100 artists and awards more than \$12,000 in prizes! Mediums include painting, sculpture, photography, jewelry, and more. Artists benefit from amenities like free breakfast, booth sitters, and an awards dinner.

Applications, including four images, are due by June 30, 2025. Fees are \$30 to apply and \$350-\$700 for booth space.

Proceeds support MKAF's arts outreach programs. Details at mkaf.org or call (850) 650-2226.



🌸 Arts & Music

2025 ECTC Summer Theatre Camps

Mini Player Camps (Ages 5-7)

For rising kindergarteners, half-day camps run Monday -Friday from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. Each week features a different theme inspired by popular musicals and films. Tuition \$250 which includes a \$30 non-refundable registration fee.

June 2 - 6	Disney Dreams
June 9 - 13	Snow White
June 16 - 20	Seussical
June 23 - 27	Moana
June 30-July 4 Encanto	
July 7-11	Trolls

Camp Broadway: Disney Dreams (Grades 2-5)

9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Focus on acting, singing and dancing to popular Broadway Disney show tunes. Simple choreography, theatre games and screenings of classic musicals. Tuition \$325. June 2-6, 9 a.m. - 3 p.m., ECTC at Grand Boulevard, Miramar Beach

Snow White and the Seven Dwarves - Non-Musical (Grades 2-5)

A one-act straight play where



young performers learn stage directions and theatrical language while bringing a classic story to life. 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., with a final performance on the last Friday. Tuition \$375. June 9-13, 9 a.m. - 3 p.m., ECTC at Grand Boulevard, Miramar Beach

Seussical the Musical (Grades 2-5)

A two-week musical theatre camp featuring characters from Dr. Seuss's beloved stories. Engage in group singing and choreography, culminating in ticketed performances. 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Monday - Friday. Tuition \$375. June 16-27, 9 a.m. - 3 p.m., ECTC at Grand Boulevard, Miramar Beach

Camp Broadway: Rock and Pop! (Grades 2-5)

Act, sing and dance to popu-

 lar rock and pop songs by artists like Taylor Swift and Ariana Grande. The program includes theatre games and improvisation exercises. 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Monday - Friday, \$375. June 30-July 4, 9
 a.m. - 3 p.m., ECTC at Grand Boulevard, Miramar Beach

Acting for Film: Harry Potter Edition (Grades 5-12)

Learn the essentials of acting for the camera using scenes and materials from the Harry Potter series. 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Monday – Friday. Concludes with a final showcase. \$375. July 7-11, 9 a.m. - 3 p.m., ECTC at Grand Boulevard, Miramar Beach

Camp Broadway: The Best of Broadway (Grades 6-12)

Explore songs and scenes from popular Broadway shows like "Hamilton" and "Wicked" with focus on singing, dancing and acting, ending with a showcase performance. 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Monday - Friday,

SINFONIA INITIATIVES

Link Up IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

\$375. June 2-6, 9 a.m. - 3:30 p.m., ECTC at Grand Boulevard, Miramar Beach

Too Many Detectives at the Murder Mansion -Non-Musical (Grades 6-12)

A two-week straight play camp. Develop comedic timing and ensemble work through a murder mystery storyline. 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Monday – Friday. Final performances last Friday & Saturday. \$675. June 16-27, 9 a.m. - 3:30 p.m., ECTC at Grand Boulevard, Miramar Beach

Beetlejuice JR! Musical Theatre Intensive (Grades 6-12)

A three-week intensive camp. Work on acting, voice, and dance through the production of "Beetlejuice JR!" 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Monday – Friday. \$1,125. July 14-August 1, 9 a.m. - 3 p.m., ECTC At Grand Boulevard, Miramar Beach. *Final Performances: Friday, August 1, 7 p.m. and Sat., Aug. 2, 7 p.m.

Satellite Locations:

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (Grades 2-8)

Young actors explore stage directions, theatre language and teamwork.

• June 16–20, 9 a.m.–3 p.m., FL Chautauqua Theatre, De-Funiak Springs

• July 7–11, 9 a.m.–3 p.m., Gulf Coast State College, Panama City

• Performance: Final Friday of camp at 2 p.m.

• Tuition: \$375 (payment plans available)

Camp Broadway: Disney Dreams

Perfect for first-time performers! Campers act, sing, dance and enjoy theatre games and classic movie screenings leading up to a show-stopping final performance.

• Grades K–5: June 23–27, 9 a.m.–3 p.m., FL Chautauqua Theatre, DeFuniak Springs

• Grades 2–5: July 14–18, 9

Continued on next page

ENTERTAIN. EDUCATE. INSPIRE.



Educational outreach remains at the forefront of Sinfonia's mission. Since it was established in 2007, Sinfonia Gulf Coast has introduced music to more than 200,000 children in Okaloosa, Walton, and Bay Counties.

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🐲 Arts & Music

ECTC SUMMER *continued from previous page*

a.m.-3 p.m., Seaside Assembly Hall

• Tuition: \$375 (payment plans available)

•Tuition: Includes a \$30 non-refundable registration fee. Payment plans and scholarships are available.

• What to Bring: Half-day campers should bring a snack and water; full-day campers should bring a snack, water, and lunch.

• Registration: Open now. Early registration is encouraged as spots fill quickly.

For more details and to register, visit emeraldcoast-theatre.org/summer-camps.

BAY BUZZ continued from page 11

berth – Secretary and Danielle Lear – Treasurer. Three Board Members were also elected, including Tarita Byas-Harris, Samantha Herman, and Breanne Howe.

The League promotes voting rights through education and advocacy. A free public seminar on recent voting law changes will be held soon. The next meeting is June 28 at 208 Partin Drive, Niceville City Council chambers, Niceville. Call 850-517-7516 for info.

Women of Honor Recognized

The Okaloosa Commission on the Status of Women honored 26 women during its annual "Women of Honor" ceremony on May 8. The "Women of Honor" was



first established as "Wall of Honor" by the OCCSW in 1997 as an idea of its members who thought it would be a nice way for someone to honor the women in their lives whose works might be unknown to most others. Each honoree's name is added to a plaque at UWF Emerald Coast's library, celebrating local women who made a significant impact in their communities. Visit OCCSW.com or call 850-685-8027.

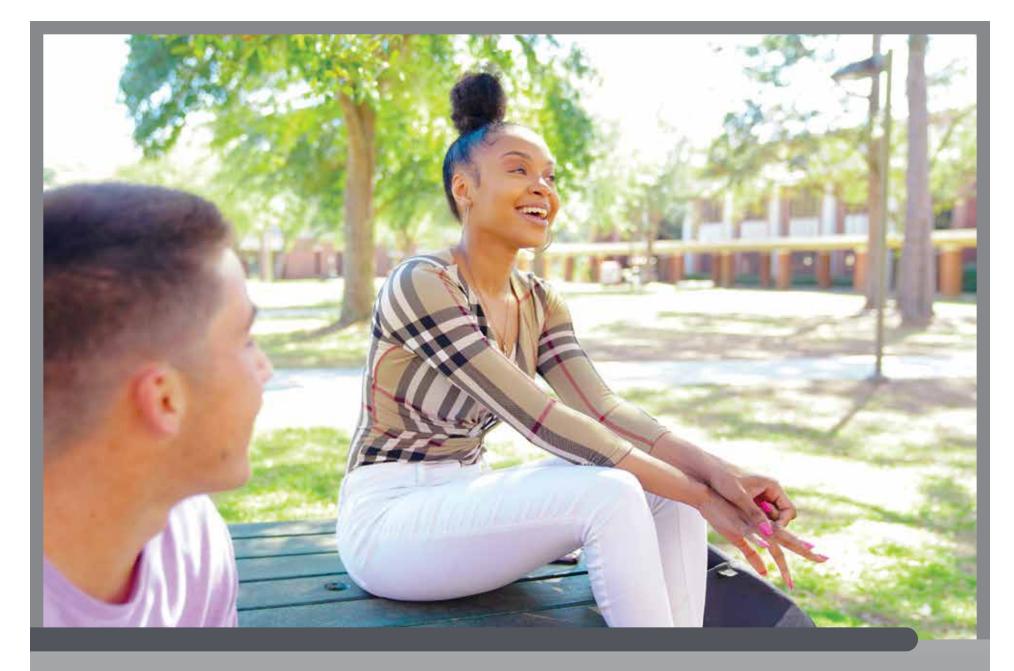
Shaffer Honored with Inaugural Kindred Spirits Award

Aimee Shaffer, local animal advocate and owner of Aimee's Animal Magnetism, has been named the first recipient of the Sara DeMonbrun Kindred Spirits Award. The award honors someone "who embodies the lifelong passion for the care, protection and dignity of animals," said SOCKS Executive Director Nancy Schimmer. Shaffer supports numerous rescues and is the longtime "Voice of SOCKS." "I am truly humbled and honored... I will treasure this honor the rest of my life," she said. A plaque will be displayed in the SOCKS lobby.

One Okaloosa EDC Launches New Website

One Okaloosa EDC has launched a new website, www. oneokaloosa.org, designed to better showcase the region's workforce, demographics and business resources. The update modernizes the site first launched in 2017 and supports the region's economic development efforts.







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be directed in writing to the South 1097, by calling (404) 679-4500, or l

