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## 100 Men Who Care -**A Driving Force in Our Community**

Milestone quarter pushes local giving past \$100,000 in donations

By Lori Leath Smith

In a world that often moves too fast to notice those in need, a local group of men is pausing—once a quarter—to make a lasting difference. And that pause is powerful!

This past quarter, 100 Men Who Care - Emerald Coast awarded \$9.300 to the Northwest Florida Guardian ad **Litem Foundation** (NWF-GAL), a nonprofit that stands in the gap for some of our community's most vulnerable

At a recent check presentation, members of the group met with Roslyn Snyder and Donna Franke of NWFGAL at their Fort Walton Beach offices to learn firsthand how their collective donation will directly impact children who are navigating the court system due to abuse, neglect, or abandonment.

"These are young people seeking stability in heartbreaking situations," said Don Rob-



erts, a 100 Men Who Care member and GAL volunteer. "Many come from homes affected by drug or alcohol addiction, incarceration, or other traumatic disruptions. Guard- for their best interests. It's a ian ad Litem steps in so that role that can truly change the every child has someone to stand beside them-someone whose only goal is to advocate

**100 MEN** continued on page 2

## Walking to Conquer Chiari **Malformation**



By Christopher Manson

Eleven years ago, Marion Gipson was diagnosed with Chiari malformation type 1. "I had it all my life, but didn't know," she says. "It started with headaches every day. No matter what I took, they wouldn't go away. The doctors told me I had migraines, but I forced the issue and got an MRI which led to my diag-

Chiari malformation is a condition in which brain tissue extends into the spinal canal. According to mayoclinic.org, this occurs when "part of the skull is misshapen or

> WALKING continued on page 4



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## **Community**

#### **100 MEN**

continued from page 1

course of a child's life."

The Florida Guardian ad Litem Office pairs trained volunteer advocates with children involved in the dependency court system. Here in Okaloosa and Walton Counties, NWFGAL goes beyond the courtroom—raising funds to meet the daily needs of these children: things such as clothing, school supplies, tutoring, therapy, summer camps, and even birthday gifts—simple things that remind a child they matter.

"Our mission is about more than just showing up in court," said Roslyn Snyder. "It's about helping children cope and showing them someone cares. Whether it's ensuring they have shoes that fit, a backpack to carry to school, or a counselor to help them work through trauma—we want them to feel seen, safe, and supported. This gift helps make that possible."

For the men of 100 Men Who Care, the act of giving is rooted in purpose. Since the chapter's founding, their "quiet, but aimful pauses" have contributed more than \$100,000 to 15 nonprofits throughout Okaloosa and Walton Counties—supporting organizations that serve children, single mothers, veterans, the homeless and those with unmet medical needs.





The model behind 100 Men Who Care is refreshingly simple—each member commits to donating \$100 quarterly, creating a powerful giving pool. I first spoke with Scott Rude, founding member of the Emerald Coast chapter, when the group launched in 2021. Scott networked, met with Rotaries, local chambers, and wherever his message was welcomed, finding an exceptional number of community minded men to help shape a vision rooted in efficiency and generosity. These men bring experience from fields such as business, education and nonprofit leadership, and are united by one common goal: to make a tangible difference in their community without the barriers of red tape or complex fundraising.

"We didn't want another complicated nonprofit—we wanted something lean, fast and impactful. Just real guys doing good things for our community," said Ed Lagrou, steering committee member.

100(+)gathering like-minded men and pooling contributions, membership provides local nonprofits with significant, immediate support-without asking for more than a few hours each year. That concept quickly resonated, and the impact has grown steadily. At each quarterly meeting, members hear from three nominated nonprofits, then vote on which one will receive the full donationnow nearing \$10,000. In just one evening, lives are changed.

"What amazes me most is the unbelievable people and organizations we're called on to support. Our members nominate





these area nonprofits. Then, we come together to hear their needs and make a contribution to help meet needs in our community," said Scott. "We're all busy, but this simple format gives us a way to make real, local impact in just one hour every few months. In an hour, we've changed a life. It's fast, it's efficient—and it's powerful."

The next quarterly meeting will be held at The Craft Bar – Harbor in Destin at 6 p.m. on Tuesday, September 16. All men who care about the community are welcome to attend, meet the members, and learn how they can be part of something bigger.

"This community is full of people with good hearts. Sometimes they just need an easy and enjoyable way to give back. We may each give \$100, but collectively, the ripple effect is far greater. That's the beauty of this model—it turns simple generosity into powerful change. That's what we built," said Scott.

And, as their donations continue to grow, so does their impact—one quarter, one check, one deserving local charity at a time.

To learn more or get involved, visit 100mwcec.com, email 100mwcec@gmail.com, or connect with the group on Facebook.

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### Publisher/Executive Editor

Lori Leath Smith Lori@LifeMediaGrp.com

#### **Director, Advertising Sales**

Scott Miller Scott@LifeMediaGrp.com

> **Art Director** Kim Harper

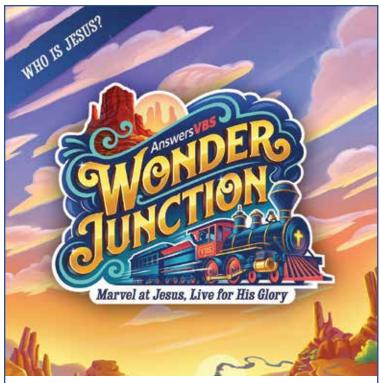
#### Writers

Paul Bonnette
Peggy Brockman
Laura Kester Duerrwaechter
Sherry Jones
Christopher Manson
Barbara Palmgren
Rich Sanders
"Doc" Doug Stauffer

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## **Niceville Christian Church**

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## Founding and Steering Committee Members of 100 Men Who Care – Emerald Coast

Established in 2021

**Scott Rude** – Retired business executive and community volunteer (Santa Rosa Beach)

**Drew McDowell** – Financial Advisor, Mariner Wealth Advisors (Destin)

**Ed LaGrou** – Retired Colonel, USAF (Niceville) **David Glinka** – Retired Master Sargeant, USAF and community volunteer (Niceville)

The membership has created a giving circle built on simplicity, local impact, and personal connection. The model has inspired nearly 100 new members and thousands in charitable giving.



## **Bring Hope Now:** Local Nonprofit Aims to Solve Youth Mental Health Crisis

By Peggy Brockman

Imagine receiving a call from your child's school: your middle-schooler, diagnosed with ADD, lost his temper and screamed, "I wish I were dead." Because the staff knows you, they give you the option to take him to the emergency room yourself, instead of calling law enforcement.

You arrive at the ER, but there's no child psychologist. The ER doctor decides to send your child—seven hours away—to a facility in Orlando for evaluation. You object. Emotions rise. The doctor blames you and asks you to leave. Your child is transported anyway, placed in a holding area with wooden slab beds and other children in crisis, screaming. He's terrified.

Three days later, a tele-psychiatrist finds your child isn't a threat and should be released. But when you return from a brief trip home, you discover your child was already transferred to an inpatient facility in Pensacola—without your con-

sent. He must now remain for another three days, all while you watch helplessly.

This is the true story a mother shared with me after a recent Bring Hope Now presentation. Though a few years have passed and improvements have been made—such as the addition of Mobile Response Teams that now evaluate students on campus—children in crisis in our area still face long waits in local ERs and may be transported hours away due to a lack of local facilities.

This is exactly why we founded Bring Hope Now.

### **A Growing Crisis**

In 2019, two community leaders—David Triana, founder of United for a Good Cause, and myself, Peggy Brockman—joined forces to address a terrifying trend: Northwest Florida, particularly Okaloosa County, had one of the fastest-growing youth suicide rates in the state.

We set out to bring hope through a national peer-to-peer



suicide prevention program in local schools. Eglin Federal Credit Union kickstarted our mission with a \$50,000 donation. With support from Superintendent Marcus Chambers and the Okaloosa County School Board, the program launched in 2020. By the end of 2022, every school in the district had the program in place. It became a model of success.

In 2024, Bring Hope Now officially separated from United for a Good Cause to pursue broader goals. We expanded into

the military community with "Hope on the Line," a peer-led suicide prevention initiative for active-duty personnel. But another pressing need was calling us: a lack of local youth mental health facilities.

## By the Numbers: Why Local Help Matters

The data is staggering. In the 2022–2023 school year, 376 children under 18 in Okaloosa and Walton Counties were involuntarily Baker Acted. Of those, 76% were first-time cases, and 92 were repeat cases.

Statewide, 87% of youth Baker Acts are due to suicidality: 46% had suicidal thoughts, 28% had a plan, and 10% had made an attempt.

Children are typically taken to a local ER, where they wait for an inpatient bed to open in Pensacola or Panama City. Some wait days. If extended treatment is needed, they're sent even farther—to Jacksonville or Orlando—hours from family and support systems. Many families can't even afford to retrieve their children afterward.

## What if that child were yours?

According to Florida Health Charts, 168 people in Okaloosa and Walton Counties went to an emergency room for self-harm injuries in 2023. Shockingly, 121 of them—72%—were children ages 5 to 19. Yes, even as young as five.

Continued on page 16



## **Community**

#### **WALKING**

continued from page 1

smaller than is typical. The skull presses on the brain and forces it downward." It is not a common condition, and increased use of imaging tests has led to more diagnoses in recent years.

This year, Gipson is organizing her third Conquer Chiari

Walk. (She also serves on a special advisory board.) The event is set for Saturday, Sept. 20, at PROPS in Freeport's Hammock Bay. Registration is from 8 to 9 a.m., and the walk starts at 9:30. The walk will feature vendors, food trucks, a silent auction and more. Additional performers and speakers will volunteer their

"Alaqua Animal Refuge is bringing some of their puppies out for the kids to enjoy," says Gipson. "The dogs are very therapeutic for us, and I'm really looking forward to it." The Hammock Bay Line Dancers are slated to appear as well. "It's a big deal!"

Gipson's goal is to bring awareness to Chiari malfor-







She meets people with Chiari

For years, Gipson says she

"My issues are mild," says

long periods of time, because of mation. She says the medical community "has got kind of a the pressure of the brain tissue grasp on it now. Once I put it on the spine. I have to be very out there, a lot of people let me cautious." know that they or their kids have it." She formed a support group

She and her husband live in Freeport and work as commercial loan brokers. Gipson is the chairperson for the Freeport Merchants Association, and she's a substitute teacher. The couple have lived here for over a decade. "My husband was working at Hurlburt Field. I came down to visit and wanted to retire here."

Last year's Conquer Chiari Walk drew 50 participants, some with painted faces and purple tutus. "It's really growing, and people come together." All proceeds from the event go to the Conquer Chiari Foundation for research and education. "There is no cure for this condition, and funding is really needed for research," says Gipson.

"I want to continue to bring awareness. If people are having headaches and their doctors are calling it migraines, they need to be advocates for their own bodies and make sure it's not Chiari malformation or something related."

Discover more at walk.conquerchiari.org







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## Buzz

#### **Impact 100 Sees Their Impact for the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida**

By Barbara Palmgren In November, 2023, the Her-

itage Museum of Northwest Florida received the Impact 100 grant of \$100,000 to build a 1400 sq. foot addition to the museum. The room cost was an additional \$80,000 raised from

## 26th Annual Emerald Coast Home & Boat Show Coming to Destin-FWB Convention Center

Wes Fell, a longtime resident of Destin/Fort Walton Beach and the promoter of the Emerald Coast Home & Boat Show, invites the community to the 26th Annual event on Saturday and Sunday, September 20-21, 2025, at the Destin-FWB Convention Center, 1250 Miracle Strip Parkway, FWB.

This exciting two-day event-now in its 26th consecutive year-will feature over 100 Home Show and general business vendors. Attendees can explore information and discounts on:

- Insurance, Roofing, A/C, Plumbing, Mortgages, Homes
- Interior Design, Flooring, Pools, Spas, Shutters, Leaf Guards
  - Furniture, Generators,

Siding, Heating & AC, Solar, Painting, and Remodeling

- · Closets, Bath & Kitchen Remodeling, Windows, Doors, and more
- Electronics, Computers, Cell Phones, Vacations
- Plus, health and wellness vendors including Chiropractic, Hearing, Massage Therapy, and Skin Care

Emerald Coast Marine will also host a Super Boat Show and Sale with discounted boat show specials.

To register for booth space or for more info, contact Wes Fell at 850-353-2832 or email wesfell@cox.net.

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room to the museum itself.

pete for the title of "Mrs. Asia USA' later this year.

#### **Mid-Bay Rotary Supports Tools for Schools Drive**

Mid-Bay Rotary recently joined forces with Sharing and Caring to support the annual Tools for Schools drive, helping ensure local children start the school year prepared with essential supplies such as paper, pencils, pens and more. The goal of the initiative is to equip every student with the tools they need to succeed from day one. To support the effort, Mid-Bay Rotary presented two \$500 checks—one to Sharing and Caring and one directly to the Tools for Schools program. Pictured: Mid-Bay Rotary President John Sallman and Rotary Partner Ashley Sallman; Rotarian Art Rosenbaum; Tools for Schools Committee Chair Nancy Nast; Sharing and Caring First Vice President Claire Robbins; and Sharing and Caring volunteers Lynda Miesch, Marilinda Beduhm, and Cheryl McDermott, who help facilitate the Tools for Schools program.

#### **City of Niceville Welcomes New Fire Chief, Alex Kukulus**

The City of Niceville has a



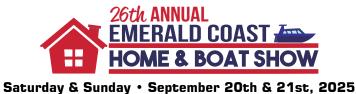
new Fire Chief, Alex Kukulus! Chief Kukulus will be replacing the current fire chief, Tommy Mayville, who is retiring after 43 years of service with the Niceville Fire Department. Chief Kukulus' first day was Friday, July 18th.

Chief Kukulus brings 28 years of experience in the fire service, having worked his way up through every rank in the department until his retirement in 2022 as the Deputy Fire Chief

donations. The room included two handicapped bathrooms and a ramp connecting the

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the museum, gave a moving speech to the members of Impact 100, promising that the first exhibit for the new room would be to honor the upcoming 50th anniversary of Eglin Air Force creating and operating a rescue camp to house over 11,000 refugees fleeing the country after the fall of Saigon. Joni Wallace, President of

The evening of November

2023, Susan Page, trustee for

Impact 100, opened the meeting. Susan Page, Museum Development Chair, welcomed and thanked the group again. Barbara Palmgren, Exhibits Chair, discussed the design of the exhibit and how to view it. Attendees then enjoyed appetizers as they toured the exhibit and the museum itself. The room that was promised was now reality!

Ladies were encouraged to wear hats for this social gathering and museum volunteers, Deborah Edgar, Carol Schneider, and Jene McCraken, created a special "history" hat display in a large display case. If you wanted to know what a lady would wear in the 1930's, look no further than the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida!

Attending also from California was Kim Delevett, a former refugee who helped organize a reunion for former refugees, military personnel and volunteers at the exhibit on May 3. Kim arrived on June 19 to personally thank Impact 100 and share healing stories from the May 3 event. Kim wore a hat as well - her "Mrs. Vietnam USA" pageant crown. Kim will com-

Continued on page 8



## Happenings Around the Bay

2025

**EVENTS** 

#### AUGUST

01 | Greater FWB Chamber First Friday Coffee 7 am | Christian Life Center at FBC | FWB Pom Pom Coaster Class 5 pm | Salt & Story | Niceville

14th Annual Pinfish Grand Nationals 02 | 9 am | LJ Schooners Restaurant| Niceville Florida Concealed Carry Weapons Class

> 10 am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso DAV Indoor Vendor, Craft & Resale Event 8 am - 2 pm | 920 Hospital Dr. | Niceville

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

03 | Live Music: Bluegrass Jam 6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing Co. | Niceville Women's Climbing Circle 5 pm | Rock Out Climbing Gym | Destin

Niceville Young Professionals **Networking Meeting** 12 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing Co. | Niceville

07 Justice on the Block 10 am | Niceville Library | Niceville

Watercolor Basics (Adults) with Elia Saxer 10 am | Artful Things Niceville | Niceville

Watercolor Basics (Youth) with Elia Saxer 3 pm | Artful Things Niceville | Niceville

Book Club: The Gatsby Gambit 6 pm | Salt & Story | Niceville

08 | Live Music: Jody's Lucas 10 am | Valparaiso Library | Valparaiso Full Moon Restorative Experience 7 pm | Yoga By You Studio | Niceville

10 | The Connect, a LiveOak Locale Business Mixer 3-6 pm | The Alice | Destin

Chess Night 6 pm | LJ Schooners Restaurant | Niceville

Niceville Valparaiso Chamber Second Wednesday Breakfast 13 | 7:15 am | Niceville Community Center | Niceville

**Greater FWB Chamber Nothing But Networking** 11:30 am | Knife's Edge Cafe at Bob Hope Village | Shalimar 15 | Live Music: Steven Theriot 6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing Co. | Niceville

Florida Concealed Carry Weapons Class 16 10 am I EC Indoor Shooting & Sport I Valparaiso Live Music: Mechanical Lincoln 6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing Co. | Niceville

18 FiberArts Circle 5 pm | Valparaiso Library | Valparaiso

Greater FWB Chamber Business After Hours 19 5:30 pm | Destin-FWB Convention Center | Okaloosa Island The Traveling Painter 5:30 pm | LJ Schooners Restaurant | Niceville

Puzzle Swap 10 am | Niceville Library | Niceville

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

Niceville High School Football Game vs. Lincoln High School 7 pm | Niceville High School | Niceville

New Moon Aerial Yoga Nidra 7 pm | Yoga by You Studio | Niceville

USCG Boating Safety Class 23 9 am | Emerald Coast Marine | Niceville Live Music: Emily Bass Band

The Resting Tree Open House 11 am - 2 pm | 1177 E. John Simms Pkwy. | Niceville

6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing Co. | Niceville

Niceville High School Football Game 29 vs. Escambia High School 7 pm | Niceville High School | Niceville

Shrimp Boil 31 4 pm | LJ Schooners Restaurant | Niceville The Pittman's Magical Variety Show

> Labor Day Weekend Fireworks 9 pm | The Boardwalk | Oklaoosa Island

> 6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing Co. | Niceville



#### ONGOING EVENTS

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

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

Bayou Pub Trivia Nights 7 pm | Wed | Bayou Pub | Niceville

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

One Stroke Painting (Lvl 1) with Sheila Mahony 2 pm | 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 Twin Cities Pavilion | Niceville

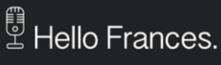
Hammock Bay 1st & 3rd Sundays | 8 am Victory Blvd | Freeport

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

#### SAVE THE DATE

















## Community

### **BAY BUZZ**

continued from page 6

in Reno, NV (Truckee Meadows Fire & Rescue). He also has 25 years of experience as a Paramedic.

Chief Kukulus has been living in Navarre for the past three years with his wife Breanne and their teenage twins, Mason and Madison. He is eager to get involved in the community and work alongside his fellow fire-fighters. "I am excited to begin this new endeavor and become a part of the close-knit community of Niceville," remarks Kukulus.

#### Knights of Columbus Honored for Longstanding Service to Habitat for Humanity

The Knights of Columbus Council 13527 at Christ Our Redeemer Catholic Church in Niceville has been recognized with a statewide award for its outstanding service to Okaloosa County Habitat for Humanity.

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AMERICA'S GOT TALENT Finalists



The honor was presented at the Florida Knights of Columbus Annual Convention in Jacksonville, where representatives from more than 340 councils gathered. The Niceville-based council was selected from among 60,000 members across the state for its 15+ years of

"Naw-dropping magic act"

dedication to Habitat's mission of building affordable housing.

Council 13527 consistently provides 12 to 20 volunteers for each workday, taking on physically demanding tasks including digging foundations, framing walls, installing drywall, flooring, siding, cabinets, and more. Their manpower has made them a go-to group for large-scale jobs like house framing.

At two recent builds in Crestview, the Knights completed full wall framing and installation in under eight hours—work that would typically take several days.

Their continued commitment has made a lasting impact on the local community and helped many families achieve the dream of homeownership.

#### United Fidelity Bank Names Shaun Foster New Business Development Officer



United Fidelity Bank has appointed Shaun Foster as Assistant Vice President and Business Development Officer for the Destin/FWB market. A Choctawhatchee High School graduate and longtime local, Foster brings 18 years of banking experience and a passion for building client relationships.

"We're so excited to have Shaun's experience and dedication here in the Fort Walton Beach area," the bank stated. "If you're looking for someone who is committed to understanding your individual banking needs... Shaun is your guy!"

A Fort Walton Beach native, Foster earned degrees from Northwest State College and Troy University. Currently residing in Niceville with his wife and two children, Shaun actively volunteers with A Bed 4 Me and serves on the boards of ECF and CALM.

United Fidelity Bank operates banking centers in both Fort Walton Beach and Destin.

For more info, visit www.unit-edfidelity.com.

#### Walton Chamber Seeks Speakers for "The Next BIG Thing" Conference

The Walton Area Chamber of Commerce is now accepting speaker applications for its 2025 "The Next BIG Thing" Annual Conference, set for October 6 at the Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort and Spa. Presented by Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast and Eglin Federal Credit Union, the event will feature dynamic sessions focused on Leadership Development, Entrepreneurship and Women in Business. Over 200 professionals are expected to attend the one-day event, which includes TED Talk-style presentations, breakout workshops, networking, complimentary headshots, and more. Speaker applications are due by midnight August 9 at waltonareachamber.com.

To register or sponsor, visit waltonareachamber.com/the-next-big-thing or contact Gabrielle Hamilton at (850) 892-3191 or Gabrielle@WaltonArea-Chamber.com.

### Applications Open for Class IV of Leadership Northwest Florida

Florida's Great Northwest is now accepting applications for Class IV of Leadership Northwest Florida, a regional leadership program designed to cultivate informed, collaborative leaders across all industries. Participants will explore key economic development topics such as business vitality, talent, infrastructure, innovation and quality of life—while building a strong network of regional changemakers. Applications are due by August 21, 2025. For de-

tails, contact Kasey Killebrew at (334) 790-4557, kkillebrew@fgnw.org or visit floridasgreatnorthwest.com/lnwfl.

## CATALYST Program Ignites Tech Innovation at Hurlburt





The 1st Special Operations Wing and HSU Educational Foundation launched CATA-LYST—a hands-on, 7-week training program designed to equip Airmen with tech skills to solve real-world challenges within their units.

Kicking off July 8, 2025, at HSU's campus near Hurlburt Field, the program—Critical Analysis Training Accelerator: Learning to Yield Solutions through Technology—teaches coding, data analysis, and project management using Air Force-approved tools like Python, Envision, and Microsoft Power Platform.

"This empowers Airmen to drive innovation in their own squadrons," said Col. Patrick Dierig, 1 SOW commander. "You're now the pathfinders."

Led by industry experts, the course combines classroom instruction with real-world applications and a capstone project. Graduates return to their units with new tech solutions, dashboards, and certifications that save time, money, and manpower.

"This program adds skills to already talented individuals and gives them the tools to create their own solutions," said Amy Negron, CEO of HSU Educational Foundation.

If successful, CATALYST could expand across Air Force Special Operations Command and beyond.

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Continued on page 16





## Menopause Doesn't Have to Be Miserable

By Dr. Karen DeVore

Let's start with something every woman de-

serves to hear: Menopause is not the end of your vitality.

It's a transition—a powerful, sometimes challenging, often misunderstood chapter in your life. And at the Tortoise Clinic, we believe it can also be one of your most empowered.

#### A New Conversation Around Women's Health

Too many women come to me saying the same things:

"My doctor told me everything's normal, but I still feel off."

"I was offered antidepressants but never asked about my hormones."

"I'm gaining weight, can't sleep, and I don't feel like myself anymore." Sound familiar?

Menopause and the years leading up to it (peri-menopause) can cause a wide range of symptoms—hot flashes, mood swings, insomnia, brain fog, low libido, fatigue, and weight changes. But instead of support, many women are dismissed or handed a pill without a deeper conversation.

That's where integrative care changes the game.

## What Is Integrative Menopause Care?

Integrative medicine blends the best of both Eastern and Western healing traditions. It means we don't just look at your labs—we look at your life. We consider your diet, stress levels, sleep, relationships, work, and everything else that impacts your well-being.

At the Tortoise Clinic, menopause care is never one-size-fits-all. It's personal, proactive, and designed around you.

## Your Hormones Aren't the Whole Story–But They Matter

As your estrogen, progesterone, and testosterone shift, it can affect nearly every system in your body—from mood to metabolism to memory. We use advanced hormone testing (including DUTCH and blood panels) to uncover where imbalances are hiding.

But we also look beyond hormones.

- Is stress overloading your adrenals?
- Is poor sleep undermining your immune system?
- Is your gut health affecting your mood or inflammation?

All of these matter. And all of these can be addressed—often without relying solely on medication.

## **Our Holistic, Patient- Centered Approach**

Every woman's body is different. That's why we offer personalized wellness plans that meet you where you are. Here's what menopause support can look like at the Tortoise Clinic:

Functional Lab Testing: We go beyond standard bloodwork to assess hormone patterns (including DUTCH testing), thyroid function, nutrient status, and inflammatory markers. "Normal" isn't always optimal—we help you find what's right for you.

Herbal Medicine & Supplements: We craft custom herbal formulas and use medical-grade supplements to support sleep, reduce hot flashes, regulate cycles, and improve energy and focus.

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Menopause doesn't mean you have to slow down, suffer through, or give up on feeling great. It's a biological transformation, and it deserves thoughtful care. When supported correctly, women often feel more grounded, intuitive, and powerful than ever.

And the results speak for themselves: Women at the Tortoise Clinic tell us they're sleeping better, thinking clearer, reconnecting with their energyand feeling more like themselves again.

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Menopause isn't the end of anything. It's the beginning of living in deeper alignment with your body—strong, aware, and empowered. Let's walk that path—slow and steady—togeth-

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# Where Freedom Meets Recovery: **Bridgeway Center Lights the Way**

A Star-Spangled Salute to One of Our Region's Brightest Forces for Good

By Sherry Jones

Not all fireworks burst in the

Some ignite in the silence—when a man battling anxiety walks into his first therapy session. Some flicker in the courage of a woman leaving a life of addiction and fear behind. And some burn brightest in the quiet commitment of a team that never stops showing up for others.

In Northwest Florida, that spark has a name: Bridgeway Center, Inc.

As we reflect on what freedom means this month, we celebrate not just our nation's history, but the people and places who are helping others reclaim their personal independence every single day. For over 60 years,

Bridgeway Center has been on the frontlines of healing — providing hope, dignity and direction to individuals facing the hardest battles of their lives.

Nationally accredited by CARF - Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities; Nonprofit Best of the Emerald Coast 2024; 3rd year in a row as a Florida Trend Best Place to Work; In 2025, BCI is set to receive the prestigious National Mental Health Association Gold Bell Seal

Walk into their Fort Walton Beach location on any given day, and you'll see what that looks like. A mother with tear-stained cheeks waits quietly for a family therapist. A young man, barely out of high school, nervously



clutches intake paperwork for outpatient recovery. A veteran sits in the lobby, shoulders square, but eyes weary, waiting to speak to someone who won't judge what he's seen—or what he's lost.

Bridgeway meets them all where they are, and community workers are out in our community.

Serving communities throughout Okaloosa County and beyond, Bridgeway delivers a full spectrum of care: mental health counseling, psychiatric support, substance use treatment, crisis intervention, outpatient recovery, primary care for the uninsured, housing special needs and working with the homeless. They help people weather mental illness, grief, trauma and poverty-sometimes all at once. They serve individuals, couples, families, children, seniors and veterans.

Among their essential services is a Pre-trial Forensic Unit-a 90-day program for people who have been arrested because of their mental illness. At the conclusion, clients gain mental health stability, jobs and hope for their future.

Other services include:

- Primary care
- Anger management
- Case management for children and adults
- Detoxification unit (outpatient)
- Outpatient mental health therapy
- Outpatient substance use counseling
- HUD-permanent supportive housing
- Post-overdose support team And, they do it with grace.

This work isn't glamorous — but it's life-changing. It happens behind closed doors, in counseling offices, homeless camps, people's homes, case management meetings, anywhere in the community and late-night crisis calls. It happens when someone finally says, "I need help," and someone else answers, "We've got you."

At the heart of this mission is Bonnie R. Barlow, SHRM-SCP, SPHR, a woman whose leadership is rooted in both purpose and persistence. With over 40 years of service to Bridgeway, Bonnie has walked the halls, listened to the stories and shaped a culture of integrity, compassion and accountability. From her early days as a probation



officer and DUI administrator to her current role as President and CEO, she has been a driving force behind Bridgeway's growth and transformation.

In 2025, BCI was honored as one of the TOP 100 Women-led Businesses in Florida.

Bonnie holds dual national certifications in human resources, serves as Chair-Elect of the Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce, and serves as treasurer of One Okaloosa EDC, Healthy Start, and the Northwest Florida Health Council. In 2023, she was inducted into the Okaloosa County Women's Hall of Fame, and in 2025, she was appointed to the Florida Rehabilitation Council by Governor Ron De-Santis. "People deserve to be seen, heard, and helped — and we're here to say yes whenever we can."

Bonnie's leadership style is approachable but strategic — she's the kind of executive who knows her staff by name and her clients by heart. She doesn't hide behind a desk. She shows up, advocates fiercely and is never afraid to say the hard things in rooms that need to hear them.

Under her guidance, Bridgeway has continued to evolve — adding more wraparound services, expanding partnerships and responding to emerging issues like the opioid epidemic, youth suicide and the growing need for affordable mental health care in our region.

One of Bridgeway's most impactful collaborations is with One Hopeful Place, the region's only shelter and transitional housing for single homeless adults. While OHP offers immediate shelter and stability,





## Do You Know ADSO?

By Laura Kester Duerrwaechter

I had the privilege to chat with Helen Harris and Wally Ratcliffe recently about the history, contributions and needs of our visual arts community. Both women are strong advocates of an art-centric network, sharing memories and explaining plans to continue the involvement of ADSO through the next decade and beyond.

The Arts and Design Society of Fort Walton Beach has supported our local communities since 1956. Throughout its remarkable history and through the dedication of its Board of Directors and volunteers, residents and visitors have been welcomed through its doors. Housed in the original City Hall Complex, the physical building has endured many temporary fixes and minor renovations.

Artful Things Niceville will host a fundraising event in their own gallery, on Sunday, August 10th from 2-5 p. m., to further support ADSO in its continued stewardship.

"ADSO is a very welcoming community for children, adults and anyone with varied artistic abilities," remarked Wally Ratcliffe (current Membership chair). Helen Harris (President,) added, "It's not just an art gallery it's a home to any and all artists." Their mission statement reads: The mission of the Arts and Design Society of Fort Walton Beach, Inc., is to facilitate fine art exhibitions, conduct art classes to enhance the appreciation of the visual arts, and to further educate fledgling and established artists.

The Society has been a successful grass roots effort in pro-





They are currently applying

for the Impact 100 grant to help with needed repair to the building, located at 17 First St SE, Fort Walton Beach. Last year they tied with Destin History and Fishing Museum. Grant monies would help to cover the cost of renovating the Clay Studio by installing new flooring, replacing street side window, replacing some doors and upgrading the courtyard.



ADSO together with the Okaloosa Arts Alliance and Okaloosa Public Arts strive to support the public schools, charter and home school curriculum with opportunities to explore artistic creativity. Pyramid, Inc has partnered with ADSO for consecutive years as part of their curriculum for people with developmental disabilities. The annual summer Kids Art Camp had expanded to three weeks this year with discounted enrollment for members. Each weekly camp showcases an art show which is open to the public and located in the Art Gallery. Snowbirds from Okaloosa, Walton and Santa Rosa Counties enjoy a continued relationship.

ADSO can boast membership from Escambia and Santa Rosa Counties as well. Membership levels are tiered and anyone can apply. There is no formal membership drive; just call the office to inquire. They are actively recruiting membership and have seen a recent boost in interest.

The gallery space hosts many juried competitions throughout the year. The Members Show, Beaux Art Exhibition, Van Porter Student Art Show, Photography and Digital Arts Exhibition, and ADSO Christmas Arts and Crafts Market are staples. Just this year, special exhibits include: Let's Go Fishing, Americana Gallery Show, ADSO Splash & Drip Gallery Show and a 3-D Show. Monthly gallery shows are free and open to the public during regular business hours.

ADSO was the recipient of The Greater Fort Walton Beach Chambers "Spreading Art Throughout the Community of Fort Walton Beach."

Personally, I am grateful for the dedication, strength and vision of the artists/artisans of The Arts and Design Society. It is truly a creative collective; consistently engaging and promoting visual art along the Emerald Coast. ADSO will continue at their iconic location through 2040 (when their current lease expires). Please support them by attending the fundraising event AND signing up for membership! See you at the gallery!



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## Governor DeSantis Signs New Law Restoring Public Beach Access in Panhandle

By Douglas D. Stauffer

Governor Ron DeSantis signed landmark legislation in Walton County recently that restores public beach access and returns local authority to communities across Florida's Gulf Coast. The bill, Senate Bill 1622, repeals restrictive provisions from a 2018 law that had limited customary use access to dry sand areas of privately owned beaches, creating years of controversy and confusion, especially in Walton County.

Speaking before a crowd of lawmakers, local officials, and beachgoers at Shunk Gulley Oyster Bar in Santa Rosa Beach, DeSantis emphasized that the new law will "put the power back in the hands of local governments and their citizens."

"This bill is about restoring local control, cutting the legal red tape, and putting our residents first," DeSantis said. "The people of this area have fought long and hard to regain the access they've traditionally enjoyed. Today, we're making that a reality."

#### **Reversing a Controversial Law**

of the 2018 law that required local governments to get court approval before enforcing customary use, an unwritten public right to access dry sand areas of beaches that has been traditionally practiced in many parts of Florida. The 2018 change forced counties to initiate costly, parcel-by-parcel legal battles, sparking widespread opposition in coastal communities.

State Senator Jay Trumbull, a sponsor of the bill, remembered how the 2018 legislation caught many residents off guard.

"Overnight, people who had walked the same stretch of beach for generations were being told that they were trespassing," Senator Trumbull said. "This law fixes that."

The new bill allows counties and municipalities to pass local customary use ordinances without first obtaining court judgments, reasserting the right of the public to access Florida's beaches for walking, fishing, swimming, and sunbathing.

### **Accelerating Beach** Restoration

Beyond public access, SB 1622 also simplifies the process The legislation repeals part for beach renourishment proj-



ects in smaller Gulf Coast counties like Walton. Under the law, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) can now establish erosion control boundaries using the state's existing mean high-water line instead of conducting lengthy surveys or requiring separate approvals.

This change is expected to save time and money while enabling faster responses to severe beach erosion, a growing concern in the region. DEP Secretary Alexis Lambert noted nearly 19 of Walton County's 26 miles of coastline are critically eroded.

"Beach nourishment isn't just about tourism," said Representative Shane Abbott, who co-sponsored the bill. "It's about protecting our coastline, preserving property, and ensuring that locals and visitors alike can enjoy these beaches for years to come."

#### **Local Impact and Funding**

Florida has invested over \$550 million in beach restoration efforts since 2019, with an additional \$53 million allo-

cated in this year's state budget. In Walton County, nearly \$60 million in state funds have been committed to local projects, and another \$60 million is expected in federal matching funds.

DEP Secretary Alex Lambert emphasized the significance of the new process: "This legislation simplifies how we set erosion control lines, allowing vital beach nourishment projects to move forward more efficiently."

#### A Victory for **Coastal Communities**

The signing of SB 1622 marks a significant victory for coastal communities and public access advocates across the state. Local leaders praised the decision as a return to common sense and a reaffirmation of Florida's longstanding tradition of beach enjoyment for every-

"This is a great day for Walton County and the entire Panhandle," said Commissioner Danny Glidewell. "Our residents have been waiting for this for years, and I thank Governor DeSantis for listening and taking action." The bill takes effect immediately.







## Scenic Walton Presents Conceptual Design for Linear Park in West DeFuniak Springs

City Council Unanimously Approves Vision for New Green Space Connecting Key Community Assets

Scenic Walton is proud to announce the unanimous approval of a new conceptual design for a linear park in West DeFuniak Springs, presented by Executive Director Leigh Moore at the February 10th DeFuniak Springs City Council meeting.

Commissioned through Scenic Walton's Walton Safe and Beautiful program, the design envisions a multi-functional, aesthetically striking greenway running parallel to Highways 331 and 90—stretching from the future pedestrian bridge at Baldwin Avenue to the public Eagle Springs Recreation Center and Golf Course. This transformational project will provide safe, scenic connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists while offering new recreational opportunities for residents and visitors alike.

The conceptual plan includes:

• A multi-use path from the planned Baldwin Avenue pedes-



trian bridge to the rear entrance of the golf course

- A connection to the bridge to promote walkability and accessibility
- Lush, sustainable landscaping throughout the corridor
- A new playground area to encourage outdoor play and family activity

"This project embodies Scenic Walton's mission to enhance

beauty, connectivity, and quality of life across Walton County," said Moore. "We're grateful to the DeFuniak Springs City Council for their support and excited to move toward the next phase—securing funding for installation."

The City Council's unanimous vote to accept the design is a major step forward in Scenic Walton's ongoing efforts to promote smart, community-focused development. Once implemented, the linear park will serve as both a functional corridor and a visual asset to West DeFuniak Springs.

Scenic Walton would also like to extend special thanks to former City Councilman Anthony Vallee, whose advocacy and vision played a significant role in advancing this project during his time on the Council. His early support helped lay the foundation for the progress now being realized.

Scenic Walton looks forward to working with city leaders, community partners, and potential funders to bring this vision to life.











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# Florida Legislature Awards \$300,000 to The Pearl Project to Expand Trauma-Informed Care

Support will help families in Okaloosa and Walton Counties better understand and respond to childhood trauma

The Florida Legislature has awarded \$300,000 in funding to The Pearl Project, a nonprofit dedicated to helping caregivers better understand and support children who have experienced trauma. The appropriation—sponsored by Senator Stan McClain and Representative Ryan Chamberlin—will enable the organization to expand its reach across the state, including in communities throughout Okaloosa and Walton Counties.

Families and professionals in Niceville, Freeport, Fort Walton Beach, Destin, Valparaiso, and Santa Rosa Beach are expected to benefit directly from the expansion of The Pearl Project's trauma-informed training programs, caregiver support groups, and virtual services. With the increased funding, the organization aims to address the growing need for accessible mental health support, especially in areas where resources are limited.

"This funding represents hope for thousands of Florida families who are struggling to understand and support children who have experienced trauma," said Stephen Zedler, co-founder of The Pearl Project. "When caregivers gain insight into how trauma affects a

child's brain, body, beliefs, and behavior, it transforms relationships—and healing becomes possible. This legislative investment will help us reach more families than ever before and create ripple effects of healing throughout our communities."

The Pearl Project's evidence-based approach helps caregivers move beyond simply managing behaviors to recognizing the deeper trauma responses behind them. Their programs emphasize empathy, healing, and resilience—and are now more accessible to families in Northwest Florida than ever before.





Now accepting applications for The Resting Tree adult day training program for adults with autism and other developmental delays, scheduled to open Fall 2025.

Our program offers opportunities for life skills training, social interaction with peers, and activities designed to enrich the lives of adults with unique abilities.

Visit our website to apply securely online or download a paper application at www.thegroundupproject.org

Paper applications can be submitted in person at our location beginning August 4.

## JOIN US

The Resting Tree Open House

Sunday, August 24 II AM-2 PM

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- Explore our brand-new, fully furnished space
- Meet our staff, board, and program director
- Enjoy light bites + refreshing drinks
- Open Q&Al

Whether you're a family seeking services or a community member curious to learn more - we'd love to see you there!

Learn more at our website: www.thegroundupproject.org





#### Locally, this means:

- Expanded trainings and workshops in Fort Walton Beach, such as the recent trauma-informed care training held at Emerald Coast Church.
- Active involvement with both the Fort Walton Beach and Niceville-Valparaiso Chambers of Commerce, strengthening community connections and awareness.
- The ongoing success of the Niceville Kid-2-Kid Closet, which provides foster and adoptive families with much-needed clothing and supplies in a trauma-informed, dignified setting.
- Increased access to virtual and in-person resources for rural families in communities like Freeport and northern Walton County.
- New family support specialist roles, improving access to trauma-wise support across Okaloosa and Walton Counties.

"Supporting families dealing with childhood trauma is not just a moral imperative—it's an investment in Florida's future," said Senator McClain. "The Pearl Project's work helps break cycles of trauma and creates stronger, more resilient families."

Representative Chamberlin added, "Every child deserves a safe, understanding home environment where they can heal and thrive. This funding will help more Florida families access life-changing services—especially in underserved areas where mental health resources are often scarce."

Zedler emphasized the longterm impact: "When we help one caregiver understand trauma's impact, we're actually helping every child that person will ever encounter. That's the kind of ripple effect we're aiming for—right here in Northwest Florida."

With mental health needs on the rise and qualified professionals in short supply, this funding comes at a critical time. Expanded programming is set to roll out through fiscal year 2026, and hiring is already underway.

Families and professionals in Okaloosa and Walton Counties interested in services or training opportunities can learn more by visiting www.thepearlproject. org. Organizations looking to host workshops or partner with The Pearl Project can contact Stephen Zedler directly at stephen@thepearlproject.org.



# When Can or When Do You Need to Change your Medicare Coverage? Right Now!



By Greg Durette, Florida Health Connector

There are many life events that happen...not the ones that make families happen, but rather, the ones that happen long after you put that train in motion!

I'm talking Medicare issues. If you moved, retired, your current employer plan dropped you or so many other reasons your coverage has left you at this most vulnerable age, now is the time to take action and know your options.

Typically, you only have 30-60 days to make a choice so you are not left without coverage. Knowing your options is critical. Action must be taken.

It can be an overwhelming time, and information is the key to helping understand what choices you have and making the best decisions for you...not what your friends or water cooler talk has led you to believe is best. Everyone is different and personal situations are personal.

So, let's start with the basics. You have likely heard the terms Supplement and Advantage plans. Many people confuse the terms and/or have strong opinions about both. Ignore them until you know the facts about each.

Let's start with Supplements. People that have a Supplement typically say they love it, because it has no network requirements and is simple to operate. Any provider that accepts Medicare in the U.S. has to accept your Supplement. That's nice.

What people don't like is the cost. It is the highest premium per month option and does not cover prescriptions. So, you have to add a Part D plan to avoid future penalties. That plus the Part B you pay to the



government can get expensive, particularly if you are on a fixed income.

Then come Advantage plans. What people love first is the premium. Typically, they start at \$0 per month. Hard to beat that! However, they are a co-pay model meaning many services have a small payment as services as needed. The kicker is,

though, there is a cap on your annual out of pocket that can limit your expenses annually. That could potentially make the personal math on these make a lot of sense.

These plans often IN-CLUDE prescription, dental, vision and hearing. Another big plus.

So, how do you decide which

is right for you? The first step is contacting a professional proficient in both types of plans. Try to resist the urge to figure it out on your own! These people have the training and the resources to make this search and selection process so much less stressful than you can imagine. Plus, the data provided will be accurate and specific to you, not some national marketing advertising which has no relevance to you. Let them know which doctors/ hospitals you use, whether in or out of Florida and, which medications you are currently using.

A good broker will be able to guide you to the plan options based on those factors that match your situation, so you can make a well-informed decision.

Try not to be overwhelmed and relax in knowing a professional is there to guide you through the matrix of options. And, remember, this is not a 30-year mortgage—you can change every year from October 15th through December 7th.

Greg Durette is a qualified, licensed agent with Florida Health Connector providing Medicare throughout the State of Florida and is based in Niceville. He has been in the insurance industry for over 42 years and can be reached at his office at 850-842-2400 or his mobile at 978-509-2941.



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Gregory Durette Florida Health Connector Licensed Blue Cross Blue Shield agent





#### **BRINGING HOPE**

continued from page 3

## From the 2023 Florida Youth Survey:

- 22% of students said they almost always felt symptoms of stress, anxiety, or depression.
- 46% said these emotions stopped them from doing daily activities.
- $\bullet$  19% had seriously considered self-harm.
- $\bullet$  Encouragingly, 31% sought help.

But we need more resources. And we need them here.

#### **The Mission Ahead**

With strong leadership from Board Chair Kathy Houchins and a growing board of community advocates, Bring Hope Now's next mission is clear: establish a youth mental health treatment facility for Okaloosa and Walton Counties.

We're currently seeking a facility or land to build a welcoming, home-like inpatient center. Until that becomes a reality, we continue to train community members through QPR Gate-keeper Training—equipping everyday citizens with the tools to recognize suicide warning signs and how to respond.

We also aim to launch a local loss survivor program to support families who've lost loved ones to suicide.

## A Community That Cares

We believe in this mission because we've lived it. I've personally experienced the pain of a suicide attempt and subsequent residential treatment with a grandson. I know what families are facing.

Bring Hope Now is not just one organization—it's a movement of people, volunteers, educators, parents, and advocates committed to changing the story for our youth.

On September 6, we'll host our 3rd Annual Bring Hope Dragon Boat Race at The Gulf on Okaloosa Island. It's not only a fundraiser—it's a celebration of resilience and community. We're looking for sponsors, racing teams, raffle and auction items, volunteers, and inkind support. Do you know a family who's lost a loved one to suicide? We'd be honored to include a sign in their memory at the event.

To get involved or learn more, visit www.BringHope-Now.com.

It may take a village to raise a child—but it takes a whole community to save one.

#### **BAY BUZZ**

continued from page 8

#### Santa Rosa Golf & Beach Club Hosts First-Ever AJGA Tournament

Santa Rosa Golf & Beach Club successfully hosted its first American Junior Golf Association (AJGA) tournament May 27–30, drawing top junior golfers from across the U.S. and beyond to Santa Rosa Beach.

Local standout Neely Kight, a rising high school sophomore, tied for second place, while Puerto Rico native Krishny Elwin-now living in Orlandowon the girls division, praising the course for its player-friendly design. The tournament featured 54 holes of championship play, a practice round, and strong community and business involvement. Santa Rosa's grounds crew earned high marks for preparing a tournament-ready course, making the event a hit with players and spectators alike. With positive feedback from AJGA officials, the event positions Santa Rosa Beach as a rising destination for junior golf.

For more information, visit santarosaclub.com, call (850) 267-2229, or follow on Instagram and Facebook. Media inquiries: zach@santarosaclub.com.





#### Kids Camp at the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida

Weeks 1 & 2 of Kids Camp at the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida kicked off the summer with hands-on history, creativity and fun! Campers explored the region's rich past through interactive activities, games and crafts that brought local heritage to life. From pioneer living to early tools and traditions, students engaged with museum exhibits in exciting new ways while making new friends and lasting memories. Smiling faces in this week's group photos show just how much fun learning can be!





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# Emerald Coast Excellence: Okaloosa and Walton Earn Top School Grades from Florida DOE

## Both Districts Celebrate "A" Ratings and Significant Academic Gains

The Florida Department of Education has released school grades for the 2024-2025 academic year, and it's great news for Northwest Florida. Both the Okaloosa and Walton County School Districts have earned coveted "A" ratings, underscoring their commitment to academic excellence, student success, and continuous improvement. These ratings reflect strong performance in key indicators such as graduation rates, learning gains, middle and high school acceleration, and college and career readiness.

Okaloosa County School District: Sustained Excellence Across the Board

The Okaloosa County School District (OCSD) once again earned an "A" rating, continuing its tradition of academic achievement. OCSD is one of only three districts in Florida to have earned an "A" every year school grades have been issued since 2014. The district posted a total of 793 points, up from 772 last year, and saw 92% of schools receive an A or B-an increase from 86% in the previous year.

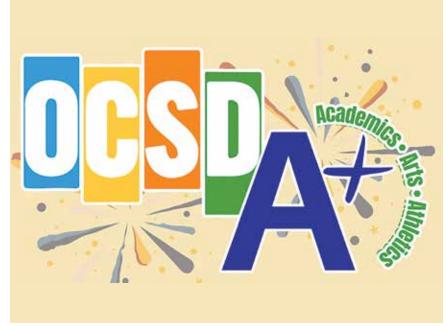
OCSD also maintained an impressive 88% graduation rate and posted academic gains in English Language Arts, Math, Science, and Civics. Notably, there was a 9-point gain in middle school acceleration and a 6-point increase in college and career acceleration.

## **Graduation Rates** by High School:

- Laurel Hill School 100%
- Niceville High School 97%
- Crestview High School 97%
- Baker School 95%
- Choctawhatchee High School 91%
- Fort Walton Beach High School 89%

## School Grade Improvements (2024 - 2025):

- Schools earning an A increased from 15 to 19
- Schools earning a B decreased from 17 to 15
- Schools earning a C decreased from 5 to 3



#### Notable School Improvements:

- B to A: Baker School, Bruner Middle School, Davidson Middle School, Walker Elementary
- C to B: Choctawhatchee High School, Edwins Elementary, Shalimar Elementary

## Schools Just One Point Shy of an "A":

- Fort Walton Beach High School
- Meigs Middle School
- Northwood Elementary School

## Schools with Consistent "A" Ratings (Past 3 Years):

- Elementary: Antioch, Bluewater, Destin, Edge, Florosa, Plew
- Middle: Destin, Ruckel
- Specialized: Okaloosa STEMM Academy, Northwest Florida Ballet Academie
- High School: Niceville High School

Superintendent Marcus Chambers praised the district's accomplishments, saying, "Once again, Okaloosa County has demonstrated what is possible when students, teachers, families, and school leaders work together toward a common goal. Earning an A rating is a reflection of the high standards we hold ourselves to and our belief in continuous improvement."

#### Walton County School District: Among Florida's Top 2

The Walton County School District (WCSD) also received an "A" rating for the 8th consecutive year, tying for the #2 spot among all 67 districts in Florida. Walton County garnered 73% of available points—an increase of 35 points over the previous year—and ranked among the

top 4 districts state-wide. Walton is one of just seven Florida districts to have 100% A or B schools and one of only 28 to earn an "A" grade this year.

Florida The DOE's grading system considers achievement and learning gains, graduation rates, middle school acceleration, and college and readiness. career WCSD showed improvement in 11 of 12 student success metrics.

Superintendent A. Russell Hughes credited the achievement to the district's focus on innovation and student-centered learning: "Congratulations to our teachers, students, school board, staff, and community on putting in the work necessary to realize this exceptional accomplishment. EPIC is The Walton County Way—congratulations to all!"

## 2024-2025 School Grades in Walton County:

- Paxton School A
- Mossy Head School A
- West DeFuniak Elementary A
- ullet Maude Saunders Elementary B
- Walton Middle School A
- Walton High School A
- Freeport High School A
  Freeport Middle School A
- Freeport Elementary B
- South Walton High School
- Dune Lakes Elementary A
- Emerald Coast Middle School – A
- Van R. Butler Elementary A
- Magnet Innovation Center

Walton County's continued academic excellence highlights the district's dedication to ensuring every student has the opportunity to thrive.

For full school performance reports, visit the Florida Department of Education's website: www.fldoe.org/accountability/accountability-reporting/school-grades.



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## **Education News**

#### **Back-to-School Support Grows Across Okaloosa** County

As the first day of school approaches on Monday, August 11, Okaloosa County is rolling out several initiatives to ensure local students are well-equipped and supported for a successful year. Whether it's enrolling a new student, donating supplies, becoming a mentor, or opening a new learning center—there's something for every member of the community to help make a difference.

### **New to Okaloosa County Schools? Register Early!**

The Okaloosa County School District encourages families new to the area to register their children now to ensure a smooth start. Early registration allows time to connect with teachers, understand school procedures, and get students prepared to learn on day one. Visit www. okaloosaschools.com/page/registration to get started.

## "Stuff the Bus" School **Supply Drive Set for Aug.**

The Okaloosa Public Schools Foundation will hold its annual "Stuff the Bus" school supply drive on Saturday, August 2,



from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Walmart locations in Crestview, Destin, Fort Walton Beach, and Niceville. Coinciding with Florida's Tax-Free Weekend, it's a great time to donate while shopping for your own supplies.

Donation boxes will also be available at businesses across the county leading up to the event. For updates or to volunteer as a collection site, visit okaloosaschools.com/page/stuff-the-bus or contact Debbie Tate at (850) 974-0742.

#### **Mentors Needed for Take Stock in Children Program**

The Take Stock in Children program is seeking volunteer mentors to support Okaloosa high school students in grades 9-11. Mentors meet with students 15 times per year at school and receive training and support materials.

To apply, visit takestockinchildren.org/mentors. For more information, contact Lori Lipnicky at LipnickyL@okaloosaschools.com.

### **ECCAC Back-to-School Supply Drive**

The Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Centers (EC-CAC) are collecting school supplies through August 4 for students in Okaloosa and Walton Counties. Donations can be

or dropped off at ECCAC centers, churches and businesses in Destin, Niceville, Fort Walton Beach, Crestview and DeFuniak Springs. "We are asking people to support our communities by helping ECCAC fill the backpacks with donations of school supplies," said CEO Julie Porterfield. "We also need volunteers to help us sort and distribute the supplies to ensure they will reach the students who need it the most to thrive in the classroom."

Visit https://eccac.org/ back-to-school-campaign more information, a link to the Amazon Wishlist page, drop off locations or to donate. All donated items will be distributed to local schools and community centers before the start of the 2025-2026 school year. Visit eccac.org for info or to donate. To volunteer, contact Kate Mc-Dougall-Mason, 530-392-0802, or kate@eccac.org. If abuse is suspected, report it by calling the anonymous Florida Abuse Hotline at 1-800-96-ABUSE.



made via the Amazon Wishlist

### **Ohana Day School Opens Second Location**



Ohana Day School, part of the Ohana Institute, has opened a new preschool location at Grand Boulevard Town Center in Miramar Beach, serving children ages 3-5. A special tuition lottery for the 2025–2026 school year is now open. To apply, visit OhanaDaySchool.org and select the Grand Boulevard location. One student will receive free tuition for a year.



## Freeport's Own Monthly Community Newspaper

All Positive • All the Time! Freeport Life is Direct-Mailed Monthly to 10,000 Area Homes and Businesses

Free of Charge + Digital & Social Media Advertising

Your local community newspaper welcomes businesses, residents and non-profit organizations to share their events, activities and missions with our local readership



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850-974-ROOF | SPECIALTYROOFERS.COM 124 TROUT BRANCH DR. FREEPORT, FL 32439



## Confidence Counts: How Mathnasium Prepares Students for a Successful School Year

As the summer continues to wind down, the back-to-school scaries become more real! President of Mathnasium, Kama Friedman, joined PHL7 with how best to kick off the new school year.

"American Education Journal cites 52% of students lose about 39% of what they learned the previous year. Twenty five percent of that loss is in math. So,

ille, expert tutors use the proven Mathnasium Method<sup>TM</sup> to help students develop a deep understanding of math—building not only skills, but lasting confidence. This proprietary approach combines personalized learning plans with a variety of instructional techniques-mental, verbal, visual, tactile, and written—ensuring each student receives support tailored to their

Learning Plan 3. Start Your Sessions

easy access for busy families.

from Niceville, Bluewater Bay,

Mathnasium of Niceville is conveniently located at 1538 E. John Sims Parkway in the Publix Shopping Center—close to family-friendly shops and restaurants, with ample parking and We proudly serve students



Stay Ahead All Year.

With each math concept depending on the last, today's small co can snowball into tomorrow's poor test scores. Invest now in math skills that will carry your child through the entire year with confidence and comp

#### Experience the Mathnasium difference:

- Expert instructors that teach for comprehension
- Results that stick, not temporary fixes

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





more than half of the loss comes with math," said Kama Fried-

Confidence is key to a successful school year. "Once you can show children not only that they can succeed but how they can succeed, they can take off from there."

Other important factors to help your child thrive this school year include a good night's sleep, a concrete plan and a growth

"Children are like little sponges. They want to absorb all of that knowledge. So, let them do that and come to their own likes and dislikes and struggles and just help them build the confidence."

Mathnasium of Niceville: Where Confidence in Math Grows

At Mathnasium of Nicev-

individual needs and learning style.

#### The Proof Is in the Numbers:

- 94% of parents report improvement in their child's math skills and understanding.
- 93% of parents say their child's attitude toward math has improved.
- 90% of students have seen higher grades in school.

Every student's journey begins with a diagnostic assessment to identify what they already know and where they need support. From there, getting started

#### 3 Easy Steps to Enroll:

- 1. Schedule an Assessment
- 2. Receive a Personalized

Shalimar, Valparaiso, and Fort Walton Beach, including those attending:

- Niceville High School
- Bluewater Bay Elementary School
- Plew Elementary School
- Ruckel Middle School
- Rocky Bayou Christian School Visit us at 1538 E. John Sims Parkway, Niceville.

Call (850) 987-6284 or learn more online at mathnasium. com/niceville.

Source: Jenna Meissner, "Ways to Combat the Back-to-School Scaries," PHL17.com, August 22, 2024, https://phl17.com/phl17-news/ ways-to-combat-the-back-to-school-





### PACKAGES

Engagement / Couples Session

Up to an hour

No limit on edited photos Family Session

\$375 1 hour

No limit on edited photos

Senior Session / Professional headshots

\$175

45 minutes No limit on edited photos

Newborn / Lifestyle

\$300

Up to an hour

No limit on edited photos

WWW SAVVYLEIGHPHOTO COM



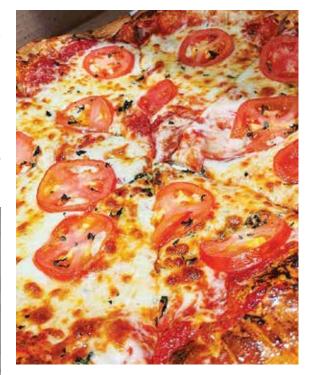
VISIT MYBAYLIFENWFL.COM

## Local Dining, Drinks, Coffee & Entertainment

#### **Brozinni Pizzeria**

Brozinni Pizzeria's family-friendly pizza place offers you a taste of New York right here in Niceville. Featuring the Big Apple's signature crust, its famous buttery garlic knuckles will leave you wanting more, including appetizers such as bread sticks, homemade stuffed pepperoni or sausage sticks, cheese bread,

meatball sticks, pizza, Cocoons Famous smoked tuna dip, and crackers/pita chips. There are also salads, build your own pizza, specialty pizzas, pasta/spaghetti, calzones, drinks and desserts. Every ingredient used has been hand-selected. Call to Order or Order Online at bronzinnis.revelup.online and have your mouth-watering fare delivered!





(850) 678-7778 144 Palm Blvd N., Niceville brozinnispizza.com

Our beans are roasted in house! Breakfast: Bakery - Breakfast Sandwiches - Burritos

Lunch: Chicken Salad - BLTs - Paninis - And MORE

Inside & Outside Seating Available 7:30 a.m. - 2 p.m. Tues. - Sat.

Come for the coffee, stay for the goodness.

Looking for event space? Give us a call!







SUMMER CAMP Schedule

## Come create with us! ART CLASSES FOR ALL AGES!

We do PARTIES! Kid's Birthdays • Girl's Night Out Summer Art Camp Tues. & Thurs. 10-2

FOLLOW US FOR CLASS SCHEDULES: 🛐 🞯 📀

#### 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

your taste buds with a madeto-order breakfast sandwich on croissants or bagel with two eggs and cheese and then choose if you want to add Jojo's homemade smoked jalapeño beef bologna, bacon, house smoked barbecue or ham. Cinnamon rolls and kolaches still hold the top spot for sell outs. Stop in for featured muffins, coffee cake or pound cake, which go great with maple cinnamon latte or caramel macchiato. And, oh, the freshly roasted coffee-just what you're craving for Summer!

Hours 7:30 a.m.-2 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday.

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

Suds, Songs and Romantic

ners Dockside Restaurant at the Bluewater Bay Marina Complex. Named after "LI 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.

August 2: 14th Annual Pinfish Tournament!

Aug. 16: Casino Night Benefiting a Bed 4 Me 6 p.m. and Chrome Reverse 6-10 p.m.

September 7: Card Board Boat Race 4 p.m.

Tuesdays: Tacos & \$5 House Margaritas

Wednesdays: Kids Eat Free with Adult Purchase.

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

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

Sunday, August 31: 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

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



Pizza Calzones Wings Salads Pasta

**Family Priendly** Pizza Place

## **Weekly Specials**

Monday: One 20" Specialty Pizza \$21.99 **Tuesday:** Two Calzones \$20

Wednesday: Family Size Chicken, Alfredo or Spaghetti & Meatballs, Family Salad, 6

Breadsticks, 2l/Gal Tea \$40 Thursday: Buy One Pizza, Get Another 1/2

Price

Friday: Two 16" 1 Topping Pizzas \$29.99 Saturday: Family Night XI 20" Pepperoni, 1/2 Cheese Bread, 6 Wings, Tea/2l \$40

Dine-In - Pickup - Delivery • Call to Order or Order Online

850-678-7778 • 144 Palm Blvd N., Niceville • www.brozinnispizza.com

## **SLICE SPECIALS**

Slice \$5.99 Slice + drink \$8.99 Slice + drink + salad + bread stick \$10.50 Slice + drink + wings + bread stick \$14.99 2 slices + drink \$13.99

Open Monday – Thursday 11am-8pm and Friday -Saturday 11am-9pm



## **BAY BUZZ EVENTS**

#### **10th Annual Bloody Mary** Festival - A Decade of **Delicious!**

Saturday, Oct. 11 | 11 a.m.-2 p.m. | The Market Shops, Miramar Beach



Get ready to Eat, Drink, and B MARY! Celebrate 10 years of bold flavors and brunch vibes at the 10th Annual Bloody Mary Festival, powered by Step One Automotive Group. Sample unlimited creative bloody marys from the area's best restaurants and bars—loaded with over-thetop garnishes from grilled cheese to sushi.

Also enjoy craft brews, bubbly, food vendors, live music, a cigar bar, and SEC football on the big screen. 21+ only. Proceeds benefit Habitat for Humanity - Walton County.

Info and tickets: TheMarket-Shops.com/Bloody-Mary-Festi-

### **Eggs on the Beach -Cook Team Registration** Now Open!

#### Saturday, Nov. 1 | 10 a.m.-1 p.m. | Seascape Resort, Miramar Beach

Get fired up for the 11th Annual Eggs on the Beach, the beloved Big Green Egg cooking competition hosted by Bay Breeze Patio! This family-friendly foodie fest brings together backyard grillers, chefs, and nonprofit teams to serve up creative, bite-sized samples hot off the Egg to a hungry crowd and a panel of honorary judges.

Compete for trophies, cash prizes, a brand new Big Green Egg, and the coveted "People's Choice" title. Registered cook teams receive commemorative t-shirts, rubs, and an Egg to use onsite. Nonprofit teams also compete for donations toward their mission.

benefit Proceeds Fisher House of the Emerald Coast and Food For Thought, two impactful local charities serving military families and food-insecure children.

Taster tickets go on sale soon, and Demo Eggs used at the event are available for pre-sale at a discount! Sign up or sponsor at EggsOnTheBeach.com or call (850) 269-4666.

#### **Built to Lead: Women in Construction Summit**

### Thursday, Aug. 21 | Emerald Grande, HarborWalk Village, Destin

Join ContractHER Connect for a dynamic day of leadership, networking, and industry insight tailored for women in construction, design, and development. Featuring keynote speaker Sarah Stein (Sarah Stein Homes), expert panels, lunch, and a networking mixer at AJ's.

Tickets \$150. Info: contractors-connect.com/contracther-connect or email info@ beespokeconsulting.com

#### **LadyWorld Festival -Pop Culture, Podcasts & Power Vibes**

#### Sept. 26-28 | Seascape Resort, Miramar Beach

The LadyGang is back with LadyWorld 2025, an immersive weekend escape packed with pop culture, comedy, music, and inspiration. This 3-day retreat features powerhouse headliners like Hannah Berner and the Girls Gotta Eat podcast duo, plus Kaitlyn Bristowe, Rachel Lindsay, Stassi Schroeder, and more.

Dive into glam workshops, wellness events, live podcasts, signature cocktails, photo ops, and plenty of Instagrammable moments! Multiple ticket tiers and accommodation options available. VIPs get exclusive merch, private planning access and more.

Grab your girlfriends and get your passes at Ladyworld.co

#### **DAV Indoor Vendor, Craft & Resale Event**

#### Saturday, Aug. 2 | 8 a.m.-2 p.m. | 920 Hospital Dr., **Niceville**

Cool off indoors while supporting local veterans at this new vendor and craft event hosted by DAV Chapter 112. Shoppers can browse handcrafted goods, collectibles, and resale items, while food trucks serve up tasty bites outside. Table rentals are just \$10, and proceeds help fund veteran programs.

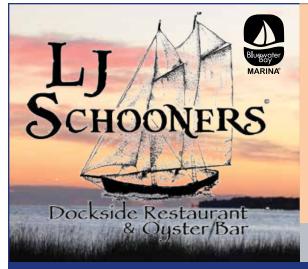
Interested vendors, email DAV112events@gmail.com to reserve your spot.

#### Golf4TheCure -**Gulf Coast Tournament** Friday, Sept. 12 | Raven Golf Club, Sandestin

Swing into action for a great cause at the 2nd Annual Golf4TheCure - Gulf Coast Tournament, benefiting St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. Enjoy 18 holes at the stunning Raven Golf Club, plus player gifts, raffle prizes, hole contests, and a post-play celebration complete with dinner, live music, a Kid's Zone, and the magical Lighting of the Lanterns tribute.

Continued on page 25





## **Taco Tuesdays**

3-9pm • Chef Special • \$5 House Margaritas

## **Kids Eat Free Wednesdays**

5-9pm • Kids eat free from kid's menu • 10 and under with purchase of one adult entree • One child per adult

## **Karaoke/Open Mic Thursdays**

Hosted by Ren & Dan • Signups start at 6pm Every Thursday • All Welcome



#### **More Fun**

Sunday Brunch 9am-1pm

Aug. 1: Beach Dogz 6-10pm

Aug. 2: Dismystic 6-10pm

Aug. 8: Parker & Ivoree Willingham 6-10pm

Aug. 9: Rewind 74 6-10pm

Aug. 16: Casino Night Benefiting a Bed 4 Me 6pm and Chrome Reverse 6-10pm

Aug. 22: Parker & Ivoree Willingham 6-10pm

Aug. 23: South Ciders 6-10pm
Aug. 29: Jimmy Buffet Day and Jody Lucas 6-9pm Aug. 31: Shrimp Boil 4-7pm and Martin Lane 4-8pm

**14th Annual Pinfish Tournament** 

**Card Board Boat Race 4pm** 

Oyster Bar Hours: Mon.-Thurs. 3-10pm • Fri.-Sat. 11am-midnight • Sun. 9am-9pm Restaurant Hours: Mon.-Tues. Closed • Wed.-Sat. 11am-9pm • Sun. 9am-9pm • Sun. Brunch 9am-1pm • Sun. Lunch Menu Served 2-5pm M Off the Hook

# Cast a Line for Fun: 14th Annual Pinfish Grand Nationals Set for August 2

The 14th Annual Bluewater Bay Marina Pinfish Grand Na-

tionals returns Saturday, August 2, 2025, bringing friendly com-



petition and family fun to the Bluewater Bay Marina Complex in Niceville.

This uniquely local tradition runs from 9 to 10 a.m., with an anglers meeting at 8:45 a.m. sharp. Youth and adult fishing duos will compete for 1st–12th place prizes and the coveted Abram Sitcer Big Fish Award. The tournament is open to two-person teams: Angler #1 (age 16+) and Angler #2 (15 or under). With director approval, two junior anglers under 16 may fish as a team with a signed waiver and chaperone.

Fishing is limited to Ward Cove inside the Bluewater Bay Marina, and anglers must bring their own gear—two rods and one bucket per team are required. Winners will be determined by the aggregate weight of 10 pinfish.

Registration is \$30. The first 80 teams to register will receive a goody bag. Each entry also includes a youth tournament t-shirt, angler's bag, a Happy



Meal certificate, and more, including a 10% discount at LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant.

Early package pick-up will be held Friday, August 1, from 5–7 p.m. at LJ Schooners. Tournament-day pick-up begins Saturday at 8 a.m., followed by the awards ceremony immediately after weigh-ins.

This year's event is made possible by the generous support

of sponsors including Noah Detention Construction, Costa Family McDonald's, Gulf Shore Air, People's Community Bank, Ship's Chandler, Maui Jim Sunglasses, West Marine, Costa, L4K Charters, Byrd's Seafood Market, Choc-Basin tawhatchee Alliance, and many others. Special thanks to Bluewater Bay Marina, LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant

& Oyster Bar and Bluewater High & Dry for hosting this beloved event.

Come hungry! LJ Schooners will be serving hamburgers and hotdogs with chips for \$6, ready at 10:45 a.m. at the Dockside Oyster Bar.

For registration and full details, visit bluewaterbaymarina. com or call (850) 897-2821. Let the lines fly, and may the best team reel in victory!



M Off the Hook

## Kayak on a Bay: Be Amazed. Be Free. Be Here.

For Joel and Kristen Lavy, kayaks are not just small boats. Kayaks are vessels that transport people into nature together, creating a shared experience that gives way to treasured lifetime memories. A memory discussed fondly amongst friends or family as the years pass by, as they do all too quickly. Kayak on a Bay's mission is simple: to help people slow down, reconnect, and be outdoors, be together, be present, and to create life long memories for its participantsone paddle at a time.

Joel, who previously served in the U.S. Air Force, fell in love with kayaking years ago while navigating the demands of military life. Paddling became his



where I'm at peace," he says. That feeling stuck with him. Now, as a husband, dad, and local business owner, he's sharing that same peace—and sense of play—with others. Joel's calm energy and love for the outdoors shape every part of the Kayak

escape—his reset button. "It's



on a Bay experience, making it feel more like a neighbor inviting you out for an adventure.

Each rental includes everything you need: high-quality, non-sinkable kayaks, paddles, life vests, biodegradable cooling towels, and foam water shooters for a little splash of fun. It's easy,



safe, and designed for all ages and all adventure levels.

Kayaking isn't just exercise—it's memory-making. It's a chance to be with family, be social, be wild, or simply be still. Whether it's a screen-free afternoon with your kids, a unique date idea, or solo time to recharge, kayaking lets you feel

something real.

Kayak on a Bay operates daily—not just on weekends. Locals enjoy special pricing, and it's the perfect recommendation for visiting friends and family looking to experience the real magic of the bay.

Because the bay is calling.

Be ready. Book your experience at www.kayakonabay.com, or scan the QR code to start your story.



# Epic Catches and Big Payouts: 23rd Annual Emerald Coast Blue Marlin Classic Awards \$1.85M at Sandestin

The 23rd Annual Emerald Coast Blue Marlin Classic (ECBC) returned to Baytowne Marina at Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort from June 18–22, 2025, bringing together 78 elite sportfishing teams for a week of high-stakes competition, camaraderie, and unforgettable moments. With a total payout of \$1,851,937.56, this year's tournament delivered impressive catches and tight races across all categories.

The action-packed week kicked off with the Captain's Meeting on Wednesday night, followed by the thrilling Thursday shotgun start. By Friday and Saturday, Baytowne Marina was the center of attention as teams backed into slips and weighed in some of the Gulf's finest gamefish.

In the Heaviest Blue Marlin category, All-In Southern Charm with angler Ron Davis claimed first place with a



654.60 lb. marlin, earning over \$522,000 in total winnings. DE-VOTION and A Work of Art rounded out the top three with fish weighing 640.40 lbs. and 604.40 lbs. respectively.

## Other top winners included:

- Heaviest Tuna: Knot Done Yet, 181.40 lbs (Blake Garland)
- Heaviest Dolphin: MAE, 50.50 lbs (Drew Marshall)
- Heaviest Wahoo: SQUID ROW, 54.90 lbs (Buck Gosnay)

The Release Division was

Supreme, taking home over \$200,000 with 2175 points. DEVOTION and NIKKI BELLA secured second and third in a close contest.

Top Angler honors went to Ron Davis (All-In Southern Charm), while Team Supreme's Alex Krake was awarded Top

Release Angler. In the Top Lady Angler category, Helen DeLaney aboard Yellow Steel earned her title with 1,000 points.

The tournament also recognized young talent:

- Top Junior Angler Billfish: Leah Pratt on It Just Takes Time, 700 points
- Top Junior Angler Gamefish: Ethan Cruz on NIKKI BELLA, 153.10 lbs

The ECBC team extends a sincere thank you to every angler, crew member, sponsor, volunteer, and vendor who helped

dominated by Team bring the 2025 tournament to Supreme, taking home life. Your passion fuels the heart over \$200,000 with 2175 of this Gulf Coast tradition.

Mark your calendars, the

24th Annual Emerald Coast Blue Marlin Classic will return to Sandestin's Baytowne Marina, June 17–21, 2026.







Basic Monthly Membership \$25.99 • Premium \$35.99 • Premium Add Ons \$15.99

Niceville 850.481.3999

Ft. Walton Beach 850.533.0555 **Destin 850.428.2333** 



## Top College Teams Tip Off in Emerald Coast Classic Men's & Women's Basketball Tournaments

Nov. 24–25 (Women) & Nov. 28–29 (Men) | Raider Arena, Northwest Florida State College, Niceville

is bringing high-level college hoops back to Raider Arena

The Emerald Coast Classic this Thanksgiving week, with both the men's and women's tournaments set to showcase

### 2025 High School Football Schedules

### **Freeport Bulldogs**

Head Coach: Sean Arntz 8/15 - at Rutherford (KO Classic)

8/22 - vs. North Bay Haven

8/29 - vs. Jay

9/5 - at Northview

9/12 - vs. Cottondale

9/19 – at Vernon

9/26 - vs. Catholic

10/3 - Open Week

10/10 – at South Walton

10/17 – at Baker

10/24 - vs. Walton \*

10/31 - at North Florida Christian

### **Niceville Eagles**

Head Coach: Grant Thompson 8/15 – vs. Bay (Preseason) 8/22 - at Tallahassee Lincoln 8/29 - vs. Escambia

9/5 – at Pensacola Pine Forest 9/12 - vs. Crestview

9/19 - vs. Choctawhatchee \*10/3 - Open Week (Freeport

only)

10/10 - vs. Mosley

\*10/24 - vs. Milton

10/31 - vs. Navarre

#### **Rocky Bayou Knights**

8/15 - vs Lighthouse

8/22 - vs Monroe Academy

9/5 – vs Eagles View Academy

9/12 - at Aucilla Christian

9/19 - at Franklin County

9/26 – at Central (Milton)

10/3 – vs Crenshaw Christian

10/17 - at Graceville

\*All games 7 p.m. unless otherwise noted.

\* District Game



top NCAA talent in Niceville. The women's tournament will take place Nov. 24-25, while the men's tournament follows on Nov. 28-29. Hosted by Global Sports, the tournament will feature powerhouse programs, rising stars, and exciting matchups just minutes from the beach. Tickets go on sale later this summer at emeraldcoastclassic.com.

#### **Men's Tournament:** DePaul, Drake, Georgia **Tech & LSU Headline Thanksgiving Showdown**

The 2025 Emerald Coast Classic men's tournament features a star-studded lineup with DePaul, Drake, Georgia Tech, and LSU battling it out Thanksgiving weekend.

GEORGIA TECH



## Semifinals - Friday, Nov.

- 6 p.m. CT: DePaul vs. Georgia Tech
- 8:30 p.m. CT: Drake vs. LSU

#### Finals - Saturday, Nov. 29

- 3 p.m. CT: Third-Place Game
- 6 p.m. CT: Championship Game

All semifinal and championship games will air nationally on CBS Sports Network. LSU returns after winning the

LOUISIANA STATE

UNIVERSITY

NORTHWEST FLORIDA STATE COLLEGE

WWW.EMERALDCOASTCLASSIC.COM

NOVEMBER 28-29, 2025

2021 title, while Drake enters off a record-setting 31-4 season. Georgia Tech and DePaul bring postseason experience and new leadership with high expectations for 2025.

#### **Women's Tournament:** Two Brackets, Eight **Teams, One Incredible** Tip-Off

The second annual women's Emerald Coast Classic features eight teams competing across two brackets—Bay Bracket and Beach Bracket—with games held Monday and Tuesday, Nov.

#### Bay Bracket (Nov. 24-25):

- Providence vs. Middle Tennessee State - Mon. 11 a.m.
- Mississippi State vs. Alcorn State – Mon. 1:30 p.m.
- Third Place Game Tues. 11 a.m. | Championship - Tues. 1:30 p.m.

## Beach Bracket (Nov. 24-

- Nebraska vs. Purdue Fort Wayne – Mon. 5 p.m.
- Virginia vs. Northwestern State – Mon. 7:30 p.m.
- Third Place Game Tues.  $5~\mathrm{p.m.}$  | Championship – Tues.

Last year's inaugural tournament crowned Alabama and Creighton as champions. This year, NCAA tournament teams Mississippi State, Nebraska, and Middle Tennessee State headline an exciting women's field.

All games will be live streamed on FloSports. For schedules, tickets, and more information, visit emeraldcoastclassic.com.



- Lawn Care & Landscaping
- Irrigation & Pest Control
- Outdoor Furniture Patio & Garden Decor
  - Unique Supplies & Gifts

#### THE SHOP

739 John Sims Pkwy, Niceville Open Monday-Friday 10AM-5PM • Saturday 10AM-4PM 850-842-2221 • shop@baldwinturfniceville.com

#### LAWN & LANDSCAPE LOCATION

1440 Live Oak Street, Niceville Open Monday-Friday 7:30-4 850-897-9060 • office@baldwinturfniceville.com

www.baldwinturfniceville.com | [6] f baldwinturf





## Local Entrepreneur Brings D1 Training to Niceville

Former Coach and Father of Three Opens State-of-the-Art Fitness Facility for Youth and Adult Athletes

D1 Training, a leading fitness enrichment concept utilizing the five core tenets of athletic-based training, has opened a new location in Niceville at 4544 Hwy. 20 E. on 12 May 2025. The new group fitness facility employs a sports-science backed training regimen led by certified trainers to help people of all ages achieve their sport and fitness goals.

Steven Killebrew will join a roster of impressive existing franchisees, including professional athletes such as Kylie Fitts and Jordan Gay. Additional franchise partners include notable figures such as Super Bowl MVP Von Miller, Tim Tebow and Michael Oher.

Killebrew, a University of Florida graduate, began his career at Elgin Air Force base before spending two years in Africa as a missionary with Youth For Christ. After returning, he became a math teacher and

soccer coach at Niceville High School, blending his passion for education with athletics. Later, he moved into franchising, joining his wife and the rest of the Costa Family in McDonald's, where he honed his business skills. When considering his next venture, Killebrew wanted to align his career with his lifelong passion for sports and youth development. Seeing how dedicated his three active children are in athletics, Killebrew was especially drawn to D1 Training's commitment to helping young athletes reach their potential, making it the perfect next chap-

"When I started thinking about what was next, I knew I wanted to own a business where people could come together to support their physical, mental, and spiritual well-being," said Killebrew. "With D1, athletes not only have the opportunity to train toward their athletic goals,

but they also build the confidence needed to succeed in all aspects of life beyond sports." D1 Niceville opened in May with close to 200 members of adults and youth. "I love the sense of community and team that has already developed in the adult and youth classes," said Killebrew. Speaking of his staff, he stated "People are ultimately what make the D1 experience come to life. I am so grateful for the level of knowledge and talent here on the D1 Niceville team led by General Manager Dennis Ealy and Head Coach Cotten who will positively impact every adult and youth athlete that comes through the doors."

D1 Training offers four agebased programs including Rookie (ages 7-11), Developmental (ages 12-14), Prep (ages 15-18) and D1 Adult. Each fitness program is based on the five athletic-based tenets: dynamic warmup, performance, strength program, core and conditioning and cool down. Outside of group workouts, D1 Training offers team training, semi-private and

one-on-one training with worldclass coaches. The goal is simple: to continue to train athletes who are dedicated to their sport or fitness goals, regardless of age or athletic background.

"Steven is the ideal candidate to bring the D1 Training experience to Niceville," said the brand's Chief Operating Officer, Dan Murphy. "We're thrilled to welcome him to the D1 family and are confident in his ability to show the Niceville area what they've been missing out on. D1 is a one-of-akind fitness experience that's built around the individual and meant to help people meet their

athletic goals. Our strong network of franchisees embodies our core values to bring the D1 Training vision to life, and we know Steven will do just that in Niceville and its surrounding communities."

Strategically expanding across the nation through franchising, D1 Training has more than 100 performance centers open with over 250 additional locations in various stages of development.

For more information, visit https://www.dltraining.com/niceville/or call (850) 605-8431.

### **EVENTS**

continued from page 21

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# **Growing the Game:** 58th Annual Southern Juniors Golf Tournament Almost Gets Rained Out!



By Barbara Palmgren

With an unusual tropical system developing along the Gulf Coast there was increased shower and thunderstorm activity for our area in late June and early July. This two-day, 36-hole tournament was therefore changed to a 27-hole event as only nine holes were able to be played on June 30. Torrential downpours even continued for a brief period on July 1, catching several boys' teams near the end of the tournament.

Umbrellas, anyone? Imagine carrying your clubs while

somehow holding an umbrella to protect yourself and those special drivers and irons. Not an easy feat! Fortunately for the girls, they finished before the boys and watched the sudden rain from the covered protection on the large patio at Fort Walton Beach Golf Club who hosted this event for the first time.

The 58th Annual Southern Juniors Tournament was hosted by the First Tee Gulf Coast, an organization dedicated to the golf skills and core values: confidence, sportsmanship, courtesy, integrity, honesty, judgement, perseverance, respect and responsibility.

With over 90 players from along the gulf coast, some coming as far as New Orleans, this tournament was the last of five this summer. Previous clubs hosting the summer tour included Hidden Creek, Osceola, Marcus Point, and AC Reid. The top five winners for three of these five tournaments in both boys' and girls' divisions

somehow holding an umbrella receive an exemption to play in to protect yourself and those special drivers and irons. Not la Country Club in late July.

Ty Aulger, Tournament Director, an FSU graduate, organizes approximately 27 events a year. He is enthusiastic about helping young golfers improve. Ty is not new to the organization and was a young member at the age of 9. The First Tee of Northwest Florida is headquartered in Pensacola under the leadership of Executive Director, Marty Stanovich.

Younger winners included Holly Mae Jones (Girls 5-6); Sawyer Laxton (Girls7-9); Kinsler Rains (Boys 7-9); Taylor Wells (Girls 10-11); John Luke Henry (Boys 10-11). Overall winners in the teen category; Jasmine Nguyen (Girls) with a +7 for two days and Baylor Touchstone (Boys) with a +5 for two days.

I ventured out on the course to take a few photos before the rain started on the second day. They say golf is an outdoor



sport. A dry outdoor is always better than a wet one. I think bonus points should have been given to the young men who





finished the round with a wet scorecard but a smile on their face







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By Melanie Yost

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

Ketamine has proven to be highly effective in helping people struggling with treatment-resistant depression, anxiety, PTSD, and chronic inflammatory pain. By providing relief, ketamine enables people to lead happier, healthier lives. Initially developed as an anesthetic over 60 years ago, ketamine was used in the 1970s to successfully treat PTSD in Vietnam War soldiers. Unfortunately, its use was abandoned due to the stigma surrounding other psychedelics like LSD and PCP. Instead, selective

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

serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) emerged as the preferred treatment, as they were believed to lack the addictive qualities of psychedelics.

After 50 years of SSRI usage, however, researchers are now finding little evidence to support the theory that depression is caused by a lack of serotonin, dopamine or norepinephrine. In fact, SSRIs are effective in only about 40% of the people who take them. In contrast, ketamine shows an 80–85% efficacy rate in treating mood disorders and chronic pain.

Over the past 10–15 years, more than 2,000 papers have been published on ketamine's potential to help with treatment-resistant mood disorders. Researchers have found that ketamine can begin to relieve symptoms of depression immediately after the first treatment. Long-term relief, however, stems from neuroplasticity. When patients complete six ketamine treatments over a 2-3-week peri-

od, the drug helps rewire neural circuits, leading to sustained positive mood changes. Additionally, ketamine binds to receptors in the opioid pathway, providing relief from chronic inflammatory pain.

Methods of Ketamine Administration and Side Effects

Ketamine can be administered in four ways: sublingually, via nasal spray, intramuscular injection, or IV infusion. All methods come with three possible side effects: nausea, elevated blood pressure, and the potential for a negative psychedelic experience.

At clinics like Be Well Solutions and Complete Ketamine Solutions, medically supervised IV infusions are the preferred method. IV administration makes ketamine 100% bioavailable, meaning patients receive the exact dose they are given. Other methods require the body to metabolize the drug, which varies from person to person, making the actual dose received uncertain. Furthermore, IV infu-

sions allow for immediate management of any side effects, ensuring a safer and more positive experience. At Be Well Solutions and Complete Ketamine Solutions, all infusions are administered in a comfortable, spa-like setting by compassionate Nurse Practitioners, ensuring client safety and well-being throughout the treatment.

How Was Ketamine Involved in Matthew Perry's Death?

According to reports, Matthew Perry was receiving ketamine infusions from a reputable clinic, and they were helping with his depression. His last infusion occurred two weeks before his death, and was not found to be a contributing factor. Perry, however, had a lifelong struggle with substance abuse. Like many individuals with addiction, he believed that "if a little is good, more is better." With his financial means, Perry was able to find people who took advantage of his addiction by selling him injectable ketamine to use at

home without medical supervision. Tragically, he died from an overdose.

Perry's story underscores the importance of choosing a reputable clinic with established protocols and experienced medical professionals who prioritize client safety and well-being. If you or someone you care about is exploring ketamine therapy, it's essential to seek care from experienced medical professionals in a safe, clinical setting. Education, oversight and compassionate support can make all the difference.

To learn more or schedule a confidential consultation, feel free to reach out—we're here to help you navigate the path forward with clarity and care.

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

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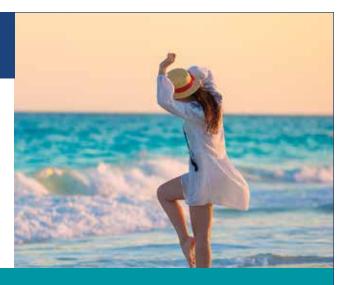
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**Wellness** 



#### By Kassia Garfield, MaxStrength Fitness

GLP-1 (glucagon-like peptide-1) receptor agonists—like semaglutide (Ozempic, Wegovy) and liraglutide (Saxenda)—are making headlines for their impressive weight-loss effects. Initially designed to manage type 2 diabetes, these medications are now widely prescribed for weight management. But amid the excitement, a critical yet often overlooked issue is emerging: muscle loss.

While the pounds may drop quickly on GLP-1s, a significant portion of that weight can come from lean muscle mass. This hidden consequence carries serious implications—not just for physical performance, but also for long-term health, bone density, metabolic function, and even joint stability.

## Why Muscle Loss Happens on GLP-1s

GLP-1 medications work by suppressing appetite, slowing

FITNESS

# A Hidden Consequence of GLP-1s: Muscle Loss and Why It Matters More Than You Think

gastric emptying, and changing insulin secretion. These effects help people eat less and lose weight. However, when calorie and protein intake are reduced—especially alongside rapid weight loss—the body can break down muscle tissue for energy.

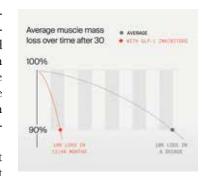
Clinical studies show that 25% to 40% of the weight lost on GLP-1 medications may come from lean mass, including muscle. This is concerning because muscle isn't just about strength or appearance—it plays a crucial role in nearly every aspect of health. 40% muscle loss is like not getting out of bed for 2 weeks!

Unfortunately, many people don't realize how vital muscle is for independent living, injury prevention, metabolic resilience, and even reducing joint pain by supporting proper alignment. Plus, once muscle is lost, it's challenging to rebuild—it takes time, consistency, and effort.

#### **Why Muscle Mass Matters**

Maintaining muscle is essential for:

**Bone Health:** Muscle contractions place mechanical stress on bones, stimulating bone



growth and maintaining bone density. Losing muscle accelerates bone loss, increasing the risk of osteoporosis and fractures—especially in older adults.

Metabolic Health: Muscle tissue is a primary site for glucose disposal and insulin sensitivity. Less muscle can lead to poorer blood sugar control and a higher risk of insulin resistance.

**Mobility and Daily Function:** Muscle supports balance, posture, and movement. Loss of muscle mass can lead to frailty, falls, and a reduced ability to live independently.

**Longevity:** Higher levels of muscle mass and strength are strongly associated with reduced risk of chronic disease and longer lifespan.

## How Strength Training Can Help

The good news? Muscle loss is not inevitable—even on GLP-1 medications. Strength training (also called resistance training) is one of the most effective ways to preserve or build muscle. It works by stimulating muscle fibers to grow in response to stress from weights, resistance bands, or bodyweight exercises.

People who include strength training during weight loss tend to lose more fat and less muscle, improving their overall body composition. Bonus: building muscle also helps reduce loose skin by filling out the space beneath it.

#### **Key Recommendations:**

**Lift Weights 2–3 Times per Week:** Prioritize heavy resistance. If you're not challenging your muscles, you're not triggering adaptation. Progressive overload is key.

**Eat Enough Protein:** Aim for .7-1.0 grams per pound of

ideal body weight per day to support recovery and growth.

**Start Early:** Begin strength training at the start of your GLP-1 journey. Don't wait until muscle loss has already occurred.

### **Conclusion**

GLP-1 receptor agonists are powerful tools for weight loss and diabetes management—but they aren't without downsides. Muscle loss is a hidden risk that can impact your health, functionality, and longevity if left unaddressed.

By combining these medications with resistance training and smart nutrition, you can protect your muscle mass, safeguard your bones and joints, and ensure your weight loss is not only effective—but truly healthy. If you are on these medications and not actively strength training (walking does not count!) you are losing muscle!

Continued on page 31



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By Kay Leaman, HealthyDay HealthyLife

Life Osteoporosis happens when bones become weak and brittle. The most important thing to note that doctors don't tell you is that we cannot only prevent it, but it can be reversed. In some cases, it may be more difficult reversing it if the remodeling process isn't functioning.

Did you know that bones are living tissue (living, breathing, functioning cells) that remodel, rejuvenate and recycle continuously? We have the ability to keep them strong and healthy despite the aging process. With this in mind, let's dive in.

### First, the statistics:

- 1 in 2 women after 50 will break a bone
- 1 in 5 men after 50 will break a bone
- 1 in 5 women can break a bone three or more times before being diagnosed
- Women reach peak bone mass between ages 20-35
- 10 million Americans have osteoporosis
- 44 million people have low bone density in over half of adults over 50 globally
- 25% of people with hip fractures end up in long term care. The loss of independence and mobility is often irreversible.
- Osteoporosis and it' effects are costlier than breast cancer, heart attacks and strokes.
- 39% of the population are deficient in calcium
- $\bullet$  95% of the population are deficient in vitamin D
- Women who strength train can increase spinal bone density by 13% in 6 months (Tufts University).

Bones are made up of osteocytes (bone cells), osteoblasts which build up and form new bone cells continuously, osteogenic cells are stem cells and osteoclasts which kind of reabsorb or break down the bone cells.

Muscles and bones work hand-in-hand. There needs to be a 'push and pull' on the bones to ensure the remodeling process actually takes place. Hence, resistance training can help your bones in the remodeling process. Six exercises that aid in strengthening bones are squats, walking, lunges, push-ups, jumping jacks and planks.

After menopause women experience increased bone loss primarily due to the decline in estrogen production. The decline in estrogen increases the risk of developing osteoporosis. As a side note, with men it's testosterone that declines, and for both men and women it's progesterone.

Risk factors we can control are sedentary lifestyles, poor calcium and vitamin D intake, smoking, alcohol, certain medications or medical conditions, hormonal imbalances and posture. Posture is critical. If you slouch when you sit or bend slightly when standing or walking, you limit the amount of oxygen coming in. Our bones need oxygen! Practice keeping your shoulder back and down. The ribcage needs to expand for quality oxygen to nourish our bones.

**Risk factors we can't control** are age, gender, family history, body frame size and ethnicity.

Calcium rich foods (Eat a variety of foods every week.):

- Vegetables: collards, broccoli, spinach, okra, kale, bok choy Beans: white, red, green, chickpeas, lentils
- Dairy: cheese, almond milk, yogurt, milkshakes, whole milk
- Nuts and Seeds: sunflower, sesame, chia, almonds, hazel, walnuts Fruit: oranges, raisins, dried figs, currants, apricots, kiwi
- Other: eggs, tofu, seaweed, sardines, shrimp

#### **Five Holistic Strategies:**

Nutrition: Cellular nutrients (antioxidants, core minerals) including calcium, vitamin D, magnesium and vitamin K are important for healthy bones.

- Exercise: Weight bearing, resistance, and impact
- Hormonal Balance: estrogen, testosterone, DHEA Supplement: We can't get what we need in food alone
- **Preventative Measures:** Create meal plans incorporating many foods. Incorporate strength training 30 minutes three times per week. Maintain a consistent supplement routine.

Get regular health assessments

· Lifestyle: Diet, sleep, activity

## **Unbreakable Bones**

including a bone density test (DEXA).

Lastly, consider a collagen supplement, adequate protein intake (70 grams/day for women), natural hormone therapy, a weighted vest and utilize vibratory training (With whole-body vibration, you stand, sit or lie on a machine with

a vibrating platform. As the machine vibrates, it transmits energy to your body, forcing your muscles to contract and relax dozens of times each second. The activity may cause you to feel as if you're exerting yourself.). You can also purchase a vibration plate that you stand on.

Making too many changes at once can be overwhelming. Start with one to three things and build up from there. Let's get stronger together.

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Wellness



By Stephenie Craig, Journey Bravely

Remember a time someone else's behavior really got under your skin. Maybe your partner's emotional reaction stirred you up. Perhaps your child's behavior or attitude upset you.

A friend may have responded to you in a way that felt unsupportive. A stranger may have been unkind for seemingly no reason. Think about how you felt in that moment and how you instinctually wanted to respond or did respond. Did you call them out for their behavior? Did you withdraw and

become silent and emotionally disengaged? Did you have big emotions and freeze and try to pretend everything was okay without engaging in a conversation?

We all have emotional triggers that cause our nervous system to move into emergency mode. Our brain is prepared to engage in one of four behaviors to protect us when it determines we might be physically or emotionally unsafe including fight, flight, freeze or fawn. The fight instinct tells you to move toward danger and confront. The flight instinct tells you to physically flee the situation. The freeze instinct tells you doing and saying nothing will keep you safe. The fawn instinct tells you to move toward danger and appease or placate the threat to find safety. When you are in emergency mode, your rational thinking goes off line and becomes un-

## **Emotional Triggers**

available to you. Your brain's primary concern is survival and safety.

When someone's behavior triggers an emergency response, you are likely to respond to the other person from a place of self-defensiveness, judgement, shame, blame, avoidance, fear or attack. These emergency driven responses lead to disconnection and eventual escalation in relationship problems. If you stay prolonged in emergency mode, you will begin to make up negative stories in your head about others that will make it difficult to repair and rebuild trust. The negative stories begin to feel true and you see yourself as a victim and others as villains. Your brain searches for negative examples to reinforce the negative story and begins filtering out the positive. And, before you know it, the relationship as a whole has become negative in

Both you and others will inevitably have big feelings and emotional triggers. Often, people are responding to one another's big feelings and triggers more than to the heart of the person.

When triggered, most people respond better to compassion and connection than they do to shame and judgement. So,



if you don't want your relationships to feel negative and you want to respond to others on a compassionate, heart level, what can you do?

## 7 Ways to Navigate Your Emotional Triggers

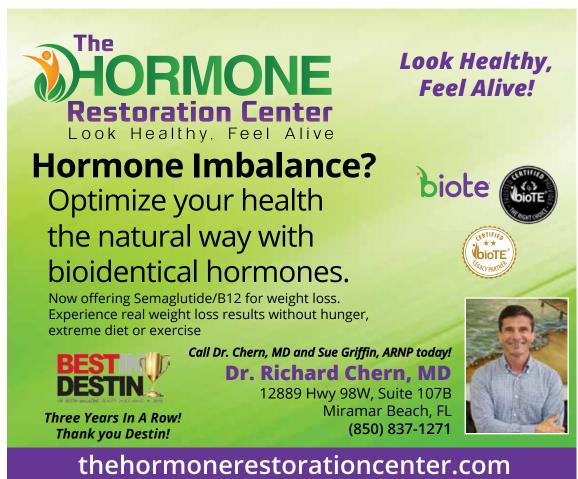
- 1. Notice your brain moved into emergency mode. Notice body changes like tension, stomach and chest sensations, jaw grinding, heart rate increase. Notice changes in thoughts focused on fear, anger, self-defense, and blame. Notice thoughts related to gathering negative evidence.
- 2. Take steps to regulate your nervous system. Try taking deep breaths, taking a restroom break, stepping outside for fresh air, take off your shoes and feel the floor/ground, eat sour candy or a strong mint, splash cold water on hands or face.
- 3. When calmer, check the negative story in your head. Remind yourself the other person is a whole person with strengths, weaknesses, and big feelings too.
- 4. Release judgement to embrace curiosity. Instead of, "You're being so rude and I didn't do anything to deserve it." try, "You seem overwhelmed. What's happening for you right now? How can I support you."

Or try saying, "Are you okay?" "What do you need right now?

- 5. Move toward with compassion instead of withdrawing in punishment. Sit near quietly and take deep breaths. Ask the person if a hug would be helpful. Try validating their emotional experience instead of shaming it. "That does seem overwhelming. I can see why you're feeling emotional right now."
- 6. Let go of winning and pursue connection. "I'm here with you while you have big feelings. I want to be supportive. I'm also working hard to manage my feelings about your big feelings so I can be here for you."
- 7. When both parties are calm, try talking about the big feelings that happened and what you can each do to support one another when big feelings happen.

These strategies are not meant for relationships with emotionally or physically abusive dynamics. In those cases, distance is more appropriate. Next time you are feeling triggered by someone's behavior or big feelings, try something new and notice how it shifts the interaction. Connect with us for counseling or coaching along your journey at Journeybravely. com.











By Pastor Doug Stauffer

"Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." (Ephesians 5:16)

The month of August: Summer is winding down, school is about to start, and routines are shifting from relaxed to more structured. Before the busyness takes over, this is a perfect moment to pause and reflect on how you're spending your time—and how you can make the most of it.

The Bible reminds us in Ephesians that we are to redeem the time because the days are evil. This phrase expresses a sense of urgency. The Apostle

## A Pastor's Pondering: Time—What a Terrible Thing to Waste

Paul wrote to believers living in a world filled with distractions, temptations, and danger. One wonders if today's distractions are not multiplied even more. The culture around us pulls us constantly toward apathy, entertainment, and self-indulgence. But God calls us to something higher—He calls us to what I call intentional living.

Redeeming the time means more than staying busy; it means living with a sense of divine purpose. It means seizing every opportunity to glorify God, serve others, and deepen our faith. Summer may have brought moments of rest, travel or family time, but we must ask: Have we used that time to draw nearer to the Lord, or has another opportunity slipped through our fingers?

August provides a natural opportunity to refocus and recalibrate. As families prepare for the new school year, why not strengthen your spiritual focus? Just as children get ready to go back to class, so should each of us get our hearts ready for a new season of ministry and discipleship. The world will try to push in—but we need to press on spir-

For parents, this is a critical time. The world is working overtime to disciple your children; so, we must be even more diligent to teach them God's truth.

'And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." (Deuteronomy 6:7)

God commands us to use everyday moments as opportunities to disciple. Teaching children the truth of God's Word isn't limited to Sunday mornings—it's to be a way of life.

As believers, we must also recognize the times. From rising immorality to growing confusion, we do not live in spiritually neutral days. The enemy is active—but so is our Saviour. That's why our time is important. Redeeming the time isn't just about managing our schedules; it's about aligning our lives with God's eternal purpose. It's about living with holy urgency.

As you look toward fall, don't just count the days-make the days matter. Reevaluate your priorities. Recommit to person-

al prayer and Bible reading. Reengage with your local church. Reconnect with those who need Christ. Time is a gift—but it's also a test. What we do with it shows who we are becoming.

Let August be a turning point—not just in the calendar, but in our hearts.

"And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." (Romans 13:11)

Wake up!

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.

### **GLP-1S**

continued from page 28

#### **Practical Tips** to Get Started

If you're new to strength training or unsure where to begin, here are a few steps that can help:

Trainer: Especially in the beginning, a professional can teach proper form, build a customized program, and help prevent injuries. Look for trainers with experience in strength training and, ideally, familiarity with medical weight loss or GLP-1 users.

Start Small but Stay Con-Hire a Certified Personal sistent: You don't need to lift heavy weights right away. Start with bodyweight exercises or resistance bands and gradually increase the intensity.

Use a Program or App: If hiring a trainer isn't an option, there are plenty of reputable strength training apps and programs designed for beginners. Look for evidence-based programs with progressive overload

Join a Group Class or **Gym:** Sometimes the motivation and structure of a community can make all the difference. Classes like strength circuits, small group training, or supervised lifting sessions can be effective and supportive.

Track Your Progress: through strength

benchmarks, body composition tracking, or how your clothes fit, monitoring your progress keeps you motivated and focused.

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## Sean of the South: Get a Life



By Sean Dietrich

The electricity went out. I don't know why it happened. It wasn't storming. The weather was nice. All I know is I was watching TV when the lamps suddenly flickered and died.

And that was that.

The house fell silent. The refrigerator quit vibrating. The A/C compressor was no longer humming. My dog stared at the ceiling fan slowing down. The power must have affected cell towers, too. I had no phone service.

For a few minutes I just sat in my living room, watching my dog dutifully perform an act of intimate hygiene.

Panic set in. What was I going to do? No electricity? No internet? No phone service? How would I contact a loved one in an emergency? How would I

dial 911? How was I going to order cat food on Amazon?

I was becoming dangerously isolated from humanity, and fast. As an American, I am obligated by the Bill of Rights to keep current with essential news headlines at all times.

But without vital electronic devices, I had no idea what key events were happening in the global community. I was missing out.

What if something was happening in North Korea I needed to know about? How about Quebec? What if I missed vital updates on court hearings? Or the baby monkey kidnappings in Panama? Or the videoed rescue of the runaway zebra in Murfreesboro, Tennessee?

How was I supposed to live without constant head-lines about various billionaires' sex scandals? What about my 24-hour footage of violent demonstrations in Third World countries, massive explosions, terrorist bombs, bodies lying in streets, or "Live with Kelly and Mark?"

No more TV means no more rich dudes in courtrooms talking about rappers' prostitution rings. No more news anchors gleefully saying the words "Harvey Weinstein." No more commercials urging me to purchase gold, Colonial Life insurance, or any other valuable service Joe Namath provides.

Also, no more fast food commercials advertising plasticized meat-like "products," injected with industrial-grade cholesterolized gelatine before being served upon "buns" that aren't actually—in the legal sense—bread. This is usually followed by weight-loss commercial.

No more pharmaceutical ads about breakthrough drugs with vaguely Star-Trekky names that can (a) improve your life and

improve your life, and (b) kill you. No more lengthy drug company disclaimers which last about as long as law school:

("Zelabubracil may cause kidney failure, brain bleeding, rare forms of eyeball fungi, inability to form sentences without spontaneously soiling your underwear, depressive disorders, suicidal thoughts, sudden interest in C-Span...")

And what about my phone? No text conversations with family members that are purely based on sharing memes? No more spam marketers texting information about my auto warranty?

No more robo-calls from pre-recorded machines offering me critical information about debt consolidation services, urgent health insurance opportunities, or scams about fundraisers for upcoming congressmen's balls. Everyone knows congressmen don't have those.

No. Without electricity there was nothingness.

I felt lost and disconnected. Where was I going to get my excitement? How was I going to adequately feel afraid? How in the WORLD was I going to defend my principles on social

Wait. I know. Maybe it's time I lived my life.

to do with myself?

media by engaging with people

whom I've never met and subse-

quently calling them buttholes?

What in the world was I going



### **BRIDGEWAY**

continued from page 10

Bridgeway provides the long-term support — including on-

site mental health evaluations, therapy, recovery programs, case management, and connections to critical health services.

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housing people. They're helping them build a new life.

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Thank you, Bridgeway Center. Thank you, Bonnie Barlow.

Because of them, freedom isn't just something we celebrate. It's something we get to live.

If you need help at Bridgeway, contact 850-833-7500 or visit https://bridgewaycenter.org.







Business

## The Christian Capitalist College Clubs:

Helping Students Grow in Their Faith and in Business

By RICH SANDERS

Last April, my wife Rebekah and I had a terrific visit with two professors at the Mendoza College of Business at Notre Dame University while we were in South Bend to see our son, Will, pitch for the South Bend Cubs. We talked with Dr. James Otteson and Dr. John Sikorski about the Christian Capitalist movement and learned about their efforts to prepare students to be better Christians in business. We were truly inspired by the stories they shared about the rapid growth of their academic programs. Within about thirty minutes of visiting with them and seeing the "Force for Good" banner outside the bookstore, it occurred to Rebekah and me that we should start Christian Capitalist clubs on college campuses around the nation!

These clubs serve as training grounds for the next generation of leaders who want to integrate their faith with their business efforts. Through guest speakers, community service projects, book discussions, and local outreach, students can explore how capitalism and Christianity thrive together when rooted in scriptural values. "The more we make, the more we give!"

Our daughter, Caroline, a junior majoring in public relations, has a strong entrepreneurial spirit and was quick to volunteer to start the first club at the University of Alabama. She proclaimed: "Having the Christian Capitalist Club on campus gives students the opportunity to prepare for the next step of entering the workforce with Christian values."

Students at Auburn, Ole Miss, South Carolina and Notre Dame have since volunteered to start clubs at their schools. Most of the presidents were able to gather in Atlanta last Thanksgiving for a retreat to prepare for the launch of the Clubs, and several of them held informational meetings at the end of the Spring semester.

The Christian Capitalist College Clubs support students in growing their careers in business, regardless of their majors or academic fields of study, and developing an ethic of hard work and generous giving to the poor and needy during their time on campus and beyond. The Clubs will work with churches,







Informational meetings hosted: 1 - Quinn Schaeffer, the President of the University of Notre Dame Christian Capitalist Club. 2 - Caroline Sanders, the President of the University of Alabama Christian Capitalist Club. 3 - Drew Moss, the President of the Auburn University Christian Capitalist Club.



Rebekah and Rich Sanders outside the bookstore at Notre Dame with the banner that inspired the idea of the Christian Capitalist College Clubs.

local non-profit organizations and businesses in their greater communities, giving students a chance to directly express their love of neighbor during their time in college. Students are also learning through the Clubs that they can use their faith in business after graduation, not hide

Quinn Schaeffer, the President of the Christian Capitalist Club at Notre Dame and a double-major in accounting and finance at the Mendoza College of Business, summarizes the thoughts of many of her peers: "The Christian Capitalist Club at Notre Dame is a combination of what every student in the Mendoza College of Business came to our Catholic school for: the interconnection of faith with commerce."

As the summer winds down, and college students head back to campus, if you or any students you know might be interested in joining or starting a Club at their schools, please pass along our website: christiancapitalist.life.

Rich Sanders is a pastor, small business owner, retired healthcare attorney and adjunct professor at Emory University, and former intelligence officer in the U.S. Navy, He and his wife, Rebekah, met at church in 1996, have been blessed with three children (James, William and Caroline) and live in Destin with their large golden retriever,

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## **Twenty-Five Years of Bit-Wizardry**

By Christopher Manson

"Business is a force for good if you build it that way."

- Vince Mayfield

Twenty-five years ago, with the 21st century and the third millennium on the horizon, widespread anxiety about something called "Y2K" reared its worry-making head. Also, in 2000, America Online purchased Time Warner for a cool 162 billion. The final Peanuts comic strip by the late great Charles M. Schulz was published in something called "newspapers"—after a glorious 50-year run, Charlie Brown never got to kick that football, nor did Pig Pen get himself cleaned up.

And a pair of military veterans, Vince Mayfield and Louis Erickson, founded Bit-Wizards, a company that has displayed exceptional growth and positive community impact in a quarter century.

Bit-Wizards CEO Mayfield says the company is already outgrowing the 25,000 square-foot building in Fort Walton Beach's Industrial Park it has occupied for the last three-and-a-half years. A move to an even larger building at Freedom Tech Center—over 50,000 square feet—is planned for late 2026. Bit-Wizards has upped its number of team members from 50 in 2020 to around 95 at this writing.

Some of the services initially offered by Bit-Wizards—notably software development—have been transferred to Mayfield's



The Bit-Wizards family celebrates 25 years.

other company, TalkingParents. The product-oriented TalkingParents provides a software communications platform "for divorced people who are co-parenting," says Mayfield, while Bit-Wizards' focus is on managed IT services.

Before they founded Bit-Wizards, Mayfield and Erickson wrote custom software while working for various defense contractors. "When the dot-com boom was happening, we wanted to go off on our own into a commercial venture," says Mayfield. "At my niece's birthday party at Chuck E. Cheese, we started sketching out ideas on a napkin."

Erickson lost his sister that year and relocated to Austin, Tex., while Mayfield went to work for another company. Not long after that, Erickson reached out to Mayfield about contracting for building commercial software. "Look, we're single and we don't have any kids, now is the time to do this' he said to me," remembers Mayfield. Since the domain name for Bitwise—the company's original moniker—wasn't available, the guys went with Bit-Wizards, wand, magic smoke and all.

"We spent our first year in Austin then moved back here in 2001. Then 9/11 happened, and we were able to scrape by taking a SBA business loan against my house, and we borrowed 25K from my father at 14 percent interest."

Bit-Wizards hired its first employee in 2003, and the business has been blowing up ever since. TalkingParents, the company Mayfield and Erickson founded in 2012 with Stephen Nixon, is also "growing super well.

"We've created a great place to work, and we've watched a lot of people come in and grow their careers," Mayfield adds. "Some have gone off to start their own companies, and some have gone on to work for companies like Microsoft."

In the last 25 years, Bit-Wizards has chalked up 15 mentions in Florida Trend's Best Places to Work in Florida. Inc. magazine named the

company one of the best places to work for the past eight years. Bit-Wizards also appeared on Inc.'s fasted growing companies list five times, four of which were in consecutive years. In addition, it has been recognized by former Florida Governors Jeb Bush and Rick Scott for its continued growth and for employing veterans.

"We've been heavily involved in community things," says Mayfield. He and Erickson have both served on the board of the Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce, and they started Be the Magic Foundation, an organization "committed to helping the Northwest Florida community through time, talent and money."

"My business partner and I both grew up here, and we have a pretty strong drive to give back to the local community," says Mayfield. "I grew up in Shalimar and graduated from Choctawhatchee High School. Louis graduated from Fort Walton Beach High School. We've known each other since we were in junior high school at Meigs, and both of our dads were in



PHOTOS COURTESY OF NATALIE EWING Bit-Wizards Founders Vince Mayfield and Louis Erickson.

the Air Force."

Bit-Wizards started out specializing in custom software, then added digital marketing and infrastructure to its services. "We'll continue to grow the companies and flourish," says Mayfield. "In the Bit-Wizards realm, we've decided to focus on managed IT services that a lot of small and medium-sized businesses need. These days, every company is an IT company no matter what you do." The TalkingParents user base is over half a million and continues to increase.

Earlier this year, Bit-Wizards held its annual awards dinner, and other "mini celebrations" will continue throughout the remainder of 2025. Mayfield publishes monthly articles about his business experiences and lessons learned on LinkedIn.

"Most technology businesses fail within three years, and the fact that we're still thriving 25 years later is pretty monumental," says Mayfield.

Discover more at bitwizards. com, bethemagicfoundation.org and talkingparents.com.







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Arts & Music

# ECP Announces Art Escape, A Cultural Initiative Featuring Regional Artists

Work from select area artists to be showcased in the airport's concourse

Northwest Florida Beaches International Airport (ECP), together with Life Media Publications, announces a new cultural initiative, Art Escape, which showcases contemporary work by local artists in the airport's concourse. The inaugural exhibit "Where am I Going?" opened July 1, with a plan for rotating works to cycle through the space over the next five months. Comprised of artists from across the region, this project brings together dynamic regional voices with the intent of enhancing the airport experience for those traveling to and from the Emerald Coast. Welcoming nearly 1.9 million passengers in 2024, ECP acts as a gateway to the cultural attractions of surrounding counties, which, beyond airport doors, include art galleries, world-class live music, documentary film festivals, stand-up comedy, and much more.

"Where am I Going?" includes the work of artists Francisco Adaro, Christon Anderson, Mark Little, Chandler Williams, Mandy Yourick, and Jamie Zimchek in mediums that range from painting to photography and installation.

"ECP is a gateway to both beautiful beaches and a region rich in culture. We're honored to enhance the passenger experience by sharing a little of that culture (with a touch of beach) at our facility," stated Parker Mc-Clellan, ECP Executive Director.

"We see this as a unique opportunity to bring the more contemporary work of local artists to an unconventional space," said Jamie Zimchek, who helped launch this endeavor. "Though visitors can get a glimpse of these working artists in galleries throughout the region, this show offers them the opportunity to present work that's a little more experimental and boundary pushing while working around a theme that relates to ideas about personhood, place, and, of course, travel."

#### **About the Artists**

Francisco Adaro, a Walton County-based artist originally from Buenos Aires, Argentina, blends whimsical charm with refined technique. From a young

age, he dreamed of a life in art, studying at La Salle and painting murals while selling sketches on the streets. A chance encounter with his now wife and Florida native Brooke, led him to 30A, where they opened Adaro Art Gallery. His vibrant oil paintings feature playful, stylized figuresboth human and animal—capturing moments of joy, curiosity, and tenderness. Inspired by his wife, children, and a lively menagerie of rescue animals, Adaro's work is a celebration of life's magic, infused with humor, warmth, and storytelling. His unique visual language invites viewers to see the world through a more joyful lens.

Christon Anderson is a self-taught Bay County artist out of Panama City. Anderson cultivates work that bridges the gap between poverty and privilege. Both bold and subtle mixed with abstraction and realism, Anderson's work acknowledges the duality in every singular subject.

Mark Little is a Walton County-based photographer whose work considers the connections that bring us together. Little's images bring into focus these connections, both with one another

and the environments we inhabit; his photographs capture energy unfolding, offering a glimpse of the way it all intertwines. His work can be found in a variety of national spaces as well as 30A and greater Walton County.

Chandler Williams, a local photographer, was Walton County's artist of the year in 2021. His work has allowed him to experience life in many countries and interact with many amazing people along a multi-decade journey. Williams is assisted by an experienced crew in tune with his working style and has a fine art photography gallery in Grayton Beach.

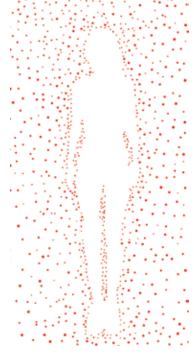
Mandy Yourick is an artist and educator whose work includes drawing, collage, and installation. Her work engages with broader themes of creative placemaking and ecology, often reflecting on how we inhabit public and private spaces. She studies structures and shelters, as well as individual and collective agency as they relate to environments and change. Mandy earned her MFA in Visual Arts from Vermont College of Fine Arts and has completed artist residencies in Gijipo, South Ko-



Christon Anderson, "Complementary Nuts"

rea, Madison, Wisconsin, and Skopelos, Greece. Her sculpture, Hometown, is part of the collection at the Underwater Museum of Art in Grayton Beach.

Jamie Zimchek is a multi-disciplinary artist with a background in painting and photography. Zimchek's work revolves around an exploration of popular narratives promulgated by power systems in private and public domains. She is particularly interested in the ways these systems use calculated storylines and absurd social constructs to shore up deeply entrenched self-interests. She has an MA in Mediterranean Studies from King's College London and an



Jamie Zimchek, detail from "Connect the Dots"

MFA in Visual Art from Vermont College of Fine Arts. Zimchek is co-founder of the I I I Artist Fund and an instructor in the art department at Gulf Coast State College.





# Why and How to Begin Taking Music Lessons: Unlocking the Joy and Benefits of Music

Whether you're inspired by a favorite song, looking for a new hobby, or eager to expand your brain's capabilities, music lessons can be a life-changing experience. Learning to play an instrument not only unlocks creativity, but also offers mental, emotional and social benefits. Here's why you should consider taking music lessons and how to start your journey.

## The Benefits of Music Lessons

Cognitive Boost: Music training strengthens brain functions, enhancing memory, problem-solving, and even mathematical abilities. Research shows that learning to play an instrument stimulates both the left and right hemispheres of the brain, improving overall cognitive flexibility.

**Emotional Well-Being:** Music is a form of emotional expression. Whether you're playing a soothing melody or an energetic tune, making music can help reduce stress, increase happiness, and provide a sense of accomplishment. It's a unique outlet for self-expression and emotional release.

**Discipline and Focus:** Mastering an instrument re-



quires patience and practice. Through regular lessons, you'll learn the value of consistent effort, time management, and perseverance. These skills extend beyond music, benefiting other areas of life such as school or work.

**Enhanced Creativity:** Music is a form of art, and learning it opens doors to creative and critical thinking. Whether composing your own music or interpreting a song, lessons push your creative boundaries, fostering a sense of accomplishment and imagination.

## How to Begin Taking Music Lessons

Starting music lessons is simple and accessible. We can help you and here's how to get started:

We can help you choose an Instrument: Look for which instrument excites you. If you're not sure, our studio will let you try a few instruments. We offer trial lessons for beginners. Popular choices include Piano (acoustic-electric), Guitar (Bass-Lead-Electric-Classical-Acoustic), Ukulele (Baritone-Tenor-Alto-Soprano), Voice (male or female), or drums (at any age 5 and older). Any of our eight teachers can recommend where to purchase / find vour instrument.

We have qualified Teachers: They are not only skilled at their instrument but also experienced in teaching. Ask to briefly visit the teacher to see if you are a "good fit." Studio 237 Music Lessons offer beginner-friendly

programs, very much like having a private tutor.

We provide around 20 weeks to meet your goals: Start with learning basic notes and simple songs. Don't rush the process, music is about enjoying the journey, not just the destination. Be patient with yourself as you develop your skills.

**Practice Regularly:** Consistency is key to making progress. Set aside time each day to practice, even if it's only for 15-30 minutes. Over time, you'll notice a significant improvement.

**Have Fun:** Music is meant to be enjoyed. Don't focus solely on perfection; embrace the joy of playing and learning. Whether it's mastering your first song or jamming with friends, music has the power to bring joy and connection.

Taking music lessons is an enriching experience that can enhance your cognitive abilities, emotional well-being and social life. Whether you're a total beginner or returning to music after years of rest, the key is to start. Explore, enjoy and let music transform your life one note at a time.

Studio 237 Music Lessons, located in Santa Rosa Beach has a staff of eight teachers ready to help you begin your musical journey. To begin a good start, contact us at 850.231.3199 and/or email us at studio237music@gmail.com. Our teachers are ready to start teaching in August. Visit/register on our website at www. Studio237Music.com.



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## **Gulf Coast Jam:**

## Twelve Years of Bringing Country to the Coast

By Paul Bonnette

For over twelve years, despite stormy weather conditions, pandemics, and hurricanes, Gulf Coast Jam has been bringing "Country to the Coast." This multi-day country music festival has seen its fair share of challenges, but has weathered them to become a staple event on the Emerald Coast. This year, thousands of fans from all 50 states packed into Frank Brown Park as headliners such as Sam Hunt. Blake Shelton, Tyler Childers and Lainey Wilson took to the stage for four nights of legendary country music. Whether it is shopping at the numerous vendors, enjoying food and fun or just coming to enjoy world-class country music, this event seems to offer something that brings out residents and visitors alike as tens of thousands of fans make this event a must-do.

However, it wasn't always the massive music festival it is now. Gulf Coast Jam began in 2013 as headliners such as Toby Keith,



The Charlie Daniel's Band and Trace Adkins took to the stage and played to a crowd of 6,000.

According to Executive Producer Rendy Lovelady, seeing the growth of the festival to what it is now is something he holds close to his heart.

"We've walked this path and seen it grow from the first year with 6,000 people being in October...the talent has grown, the crowd capacity has grown, the pull of the festival is in all fifty states now, just the overall texture of the festival has grown," says Lovelady.

According to Lovelady, they are always looking at new ways to grow and provide extra experiences. As part of the ten-year anniversary, Gulf Coast Jam added a fourth night to the already stacked festival as well as unique experiences, including the now popular Ferris Wheel ride.

Gulf Coast Jam continues to grow and expand, and next year looks to be the biggest event in its history. For the first time in the event's history, Lovelady took to the stage on the first night to announce the full lineup for Gulf Jam 2026, which features legendary performers such as Chris Stapleton, Riley Green, Keith Urban and Post Malone. In addition to the headliners, Gulf Coast Jam 2026 will also feature performances by Koe Wetzel, Muscadine Bloodline, Marcus King, Treaty Oak Revival and many others.

Tickets have already been selling out for many of the tiers as fans eagerly await next year's festival

For Rendy Lovelady, despite the challenges, Gulf Coast Jam is an event that he hopes and plans will be around for a long time to come.

"I think Gulf Coast Jam is always going to be a staple for Panama City Beach. We have a long-term agreement with the city and it's in the top ten country events in the country. It draws from all fifty states, CMT covers it, so it has national television on it. It has become a real staple and I see it being very much a part of the future and hopefully it never goes away. I believe that Gulf Coast Jam is going to be here forever."





#### Creative Growth in Walton and Okaloosa Counties Fueled by Local Grants and Music Programs

Arts education is thriving across Walton and Okaloosa Counties thanks to two local organizations working to nurture the next generation of creatives. From classroom mini-grants to full orchestral training, both the Cultural Arts Alliance of Walton County (CAA) and Sinfonia Gulf Coast are making a lasting impact on students, educators, and young artists throughout the region.

### CAA Awards \$30,000+ in Arts Grants for Walton County Students

The Cultural Arts Alliance recently awarded more than \$30,000 in Art For All grants, supporting arts education projects that will reach over 900 K–12 students. Sixteen teacher mini-grants were awarded across 11 Walton County schools, funding projects that enhance visual, literary, and performing arts in both traditional and homeschool settings. Grants support materi-



als, guest artist visits, field trips, and other enrichment activities.

Additional awards included a college scholarship to Avery Joyner of DeFuniak Springs, a professional development grant to local artist Lexi Holt, and funding for youth programming through Emerald Coast Theatre Company and Longleaf Writers Conference.

"These grants reflect the heart of our mission: supporting the creative development of our community," said CAA President & CEO Jennifer Steele. "When we invest in arts education, we invest in a future that values imagination, empathy, and innovation. We're proud to help empower educators, students, and local creatives to shape a vibrant,

## **Arts News**

art-rich Walton County."

The next Art For All grant deadline is November 15, 2025. Applications are open to teachers, students, artists, and non-profits. Visit CulturalArtsAlliance.com for details.

#### Sinfonia Gulf Coast Opens Registration for 2025-2026 Youth Programs

Sinfonia Gulf Coast has announced open registration for its 2025–2026 youth music education programs, offering beginner to advanced student musicians the chance to train and perform with the only professional orchestra in the region.

Programs include the Sinfonia Youth Orchestra (SYO) with advanced, intermediate, and beginner-level ensembles, as well as an After School Beginning Strings program expanding to new schools this fall. The ensembles welcome strings, winds, brass, percussion, and piano accompanists.

Since its launch in 2007, Sinfonia's education efforts have reached more than 220,000 local children. The organization offers

the schools in partnership

with Florida State University

unique performance opportunities, mentorship from professional musicians, Bright Futures volunteer hours, free concert tickets, and scholarship eligibility for senior members.

"We believe our youth orchestra programs foster a strong sense of community, allowing members to connect with like-minded fellow musicians in a safe, collaborative, and welcoming environment," says Sinfonia Youth Orchestra director Margaret Gordon. "It is our goal to achieve high level performances while making sure every student is assisted in reaching their full potential as musicians."

Gordon adds, "It is an honor to be able to offer beginning strings instruction to students of Okaloosa and Walton Counties through our after-school programs. I am incredibly excited to welcome a potential 160 new students in our programs this year."

For more information or to register, visit SinfoniaGulfCoast. org or contact Margaret Gordon at mgordon@sinfoniagulfcoast. org.

## Arts & Music Opportunities – Key Dates

## Cultural Arts Alliance (CAA)

- Next Grant Deadline: November 15, 2025
- Eligible Applicants: Teachers, students, artists, nonprofits
- More Info: CulturalArtsAlliance.com | (850) 622-5970

## **Sinfonia Gulf Coast Youth Programs**

- 2025–2026 Registration: Open now
- Program Start: Fall 2025 (rehearsals on Sundays)
- Scholarship Opportunities: Grace Fulcher Memorial (SYO seniors)
- More Info: SinfoniaGulfCoast.org | mgordon@sinfoniagulfcoast.org





STIOE

Arts & Music

## 2026 Gulf Coast Jam Lineup Revealed

Post Malone, Chris Stapleton, Keith Urban and Riley Green to Headline May 28-31, 2026 in PCB

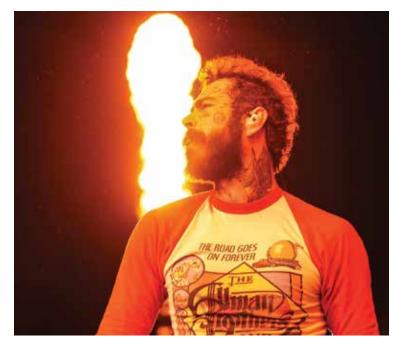
Organizers of the 13th Annual Gulf Coast Jam Presented by Jim Beam surprised fans by unveiling the full 2026 artist lineup on opening night of this year's festival in Panama City Beach—a first in the event's history.

Headliners Post Malone, Chris Stapleton, Keith Urban and Riley Green will be joined by more than 20 acts over four days at Frank Brown Park, May 28–31, 2026.

"Our four headliners are some of the most high-profile, in-demand artists we've ever had in our lineup," said Executive Producer Rendy Lovelady. "I mean, Keith Urban was presented the Triple Crown Award, Chris Stapleton won Male Artist of the Year, Riley Green won Single of the Year, and Post Malone is one of the biggest artists in music, period. We're beyond excited about 2026!"

The festival has drawn more than 30,000 attendees annually in recent years and continues to earn national recognition. Billboard called it one of "The 10 Best Country Music Festivals," and Music Festival Wizard named it the #1 Festival in the World (2024, Voter's Choice) and a top pick among Best Beach Music Festivals (2025).

COO Mark Sheldon added, "To have our full lineup in place and announced this early is testament to our Jammers giving



us amazing feedback and to the incredible work our team puts in year after year to make this one of the top festivals in the country at one of the most beautiful beaches in the world. We love showing off our home, Panama City Beach!"

Tickets for 2026 are on sale now at www.GulfCoastJam.com, including General Admission, Military, College and First Responder passes, VIP options, hotel packages and payment plans. But they're going fast—get yours before they sell out!





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