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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

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

traumatic disruptions. Guard- for their best interests. It's a

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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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



time.

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

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



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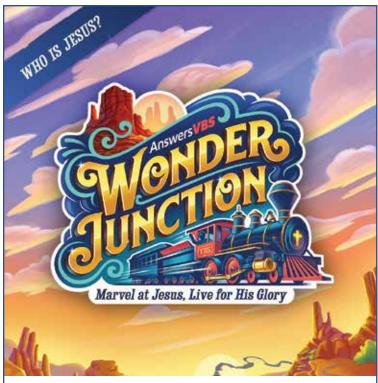
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Established in 2021

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.





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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 malformation. She says the medical community "has got kind of a grasp on it now. Once I put it out there, a lot of people let me know that they or their kids have it." She formed a support group for "Chiarians" and people with

related conditions.

She meets people with Chiari malformation every month and is planning for other meet and greet type events in the future. "I've put together Purple Night Out to bring the Chiarians in this area (together). We have a pot luck, and everyone wears purple" which is to Chiari what pink is to breast cancer.

For years, Gipson says she "didn't have a clue what was going on." She kept having symptoms, and her doctors kept dispensing medication. "My chiropractor actually told me what was happening to me and sent me to a neurologist," she says. The neurologist told Gipson she would need to undergo brain decompression surgery, but she ended up not having the procedure.

"My issues are mild," says Gipson. "I'm able to function and drive around the area. There are limitations. I can't lift over 10 pounds, do anything strenuous, or stand or sit for long periods of time, because of the pressure of the brain tissue on the spine. I have to be very cautious.'

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













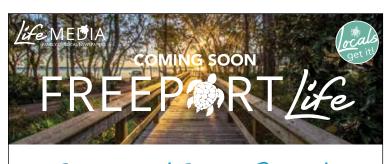




is no cure for this condition, and funding is really needed for research," says Gipson.

"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 re-

Discover more at walk.conquerchiari.org.



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a decade. "My husband was

working at Hurlburt Field. I

came down to visit and wanted

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

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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 consent. 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.

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.
- 19% had seriously considered self-harm.
- Encouragingly, 31% sought nelp.

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

Continued on next page





Awards, Spirit & Finish Line, \$500 Friends of Bring HOPE Now



It's Turtle Time!

By Heather Bennett Eye

It's that special time of year again on the Emerald Coast. Sea turtle nesting season has officially begun! So what does that mean? From now until Halloween, our beaches become a vital nesting ground for several species of sea turtles, many of which are threatened or endangered. Whether you're a local or just visiting, your actions can make a big difference during this critical period, and this means keeping the beaches clean, dark and flat.

Each summer, female sea turtles return to our shores, often the very beach where they were born, to lay their eggs. In our area, nesting typically occurs in the dry sand above the high tide line, closer to the dunes. Turtle watch volunteers survey the beaches daily, looking for turtle tracks to identify and mark nests, protecting them from accidental damage by people, pets, or vehicles. They monitor the nests throughout the incubation period.

After about 50 to 60 days, hatchlings begin to emerge, usually under the cover of darkness. These tiny turtles instinctively look for the brightest horizon, which under natural conditions is the reflection of the moonlight on the ocean. From there, they begin their treacherous



journey to the water, dodging predators and battling the surf.

To give these hatchlings the best possible chance of survival, we encourage everyone to help keep our beaches clean, dark, and flat:

Clean: Remove all trash, leftover food, beach toys, and especially beach furniture at the end of each day. Items left behind can become barriers or traps for hatchlings trying to reach the water.

Dark: Turn off any artificial lights that face the beach at night. Bright lights from homes, businesses, and flashlights can disorient hatchlings, leading them away from the ocean. If lighting is necessary, use turtle-safe options like red or amber LED bulbs.

Flat: Before leaving the beach, fill in all holes and knock down sandcastles. Deep holes and uneven sand can trap baby turtles or redirect them off course.

Please make sure to respect nest markers and avoid walking through dune areas. If you see a hatchling struggling, don't touch it. Instead, contact the Gulfarium Care Center at (850) 865-4503, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission at (888) 243-9046 or the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office at (850) 651-7400.

Sea turtles have been making this journey for millions of years, but their survival now depends more than ever on human awareness and cooperation. By keeping our beaches clean, dark, and flat, you're playing a vital role in protecting one of nature's most awe-inspiring creatures. Please help educate others. Many people aren't aware of how simple actions like turning off a porch light can save dozens of lives. Let's work together to ensure these incredible animals have a safe start to life. The sea turtles are counting

BRING HOPE

continued from previous page

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 in-kind 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.





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 sky.

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







Menopause Doesn't Have to Be Miserable

By Dr. Karen DeVore

Let's start with something every woman deserves 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.

Acupuncture: These therapies help calm the nervous system, improve circulation, balance hormones, and reduce the intensity of menopausal symptoms naturally.

Nutrition & Lifestyle Coaching: We guide you in making smart, sustainable changes that support hormone health, blood sugar stability, and overall vitality. No fads. No deprivation.

Real Conversations: We take the time to listen to your story, your goals, and your challenges. You won't be rushed or brushed off. You'll be heard.

Why This Matters

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.

Your Next Step Toward Vibrant Health

If you're in perimenopause, menopause, or even postmenopausal and struggling with energy, mood, sleep, or weight—don't wait for it to get worse.

Let's get to the root of it, together.

We're proud to be voted Best in Destin for Women's Wellness—and we'd be honored to support you on your wellness journey. Give us a call at 850.267.5611 or visit Tortoise-Clinic.com to schedule your consultation and mention this article to receive \$30 off your first service as a new patient.

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-

WOMEN'S WELLNESS REIMAGINED

What if your story mattered as much as your labs?

What if "normal" isn't optimal for you?

What if your fatigue, bloating, or anxiety isn't just stress - but a sign your body needs support?



BESTINUT DESTIN

WOMEN'S WELLNESS PROVIDER

Scan the QR code to schedule your in-person or virtual consultation today!





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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

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 Hu-



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 com-Doors, and more munity to the 26th Annual event on Saturday and Sunday, September 20–21, 2025, at the Destin-FWB Convention Center, 1250 Miracle

26th Annual Emerald Coast

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,
- 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.

Mention LIFE MEDIA and receive a 10% discount on booth space!

Learn more at www.ParadisePromotionsFL.com.

manity - 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 Fisher Proceeds 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 Re-

sort, 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**

porting 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.

Register or sponsor at Golf4TheCure-Gulf-Coast.perfectgolfevent.com

Freeport Night Out -**Locals Under the Lights** Friday, Nov. 1 | 4-7 p.m. | Props Green, Hammock Bay, Freeport

Join the Freeport Merchants Association and The Windmills at Hammock Bay for Freeport Night Out, a family-friendly fall evening filled with live bluegrass, shopping, food, and community cheer! Held alongside the Hammock Bay Farmers Market and Bluegrass on the Green, the event benefits Children's Volunteer Health Network and Caring & Sharing of South Walton.

Enjoy local artisans, food trucks, and a Business Expo. Want to be a sponsor or vendor?

Email events@thefma.online or cblackerby@absolutecamservices.com

30A BBQ Festival - 10 **Years of Sizzling Flavor!** Friday, Nov. 7 | 5-8 p.m. Grand Blvd., Miramar Bch.

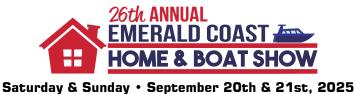
The 6th Annual 30A BBQ Festival, presented by 360 Blue, serves up all-you-can-eat barbecue, live music by River Dan, drinks, a silent auction, and more—all benefiting The Sonder Project's 10th anniversarv.

GA: \$60 | VIP: \$125 | Kids 12 & under free

Tickets: bit.ly/30a-bbq-2025 Sponsorships: jessica@proffittpr.com

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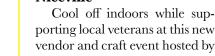














This is Another Great Paradise Promotion



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

















Palms Resort Brings Dinner, Drinks, Live Magic & Comedy to Destin!

An action-packed live show featuring World-Class Magic Comedy and Ventriloquism is now open with nightly shows at the newly renovated Palms Destin Resort Showroom.

Interactive magic takes place just inches away in an intimate showroom that offers excellent table seating. The performance features sophisticated magic & smart comedy targeting adults but is family-friendly and appropriate for all ages. The show is headlined by Bart Rockett who hosted his own nationally syndicated television show for three seasons, had a co-starring role on the former NBC Drama Parenthood and headlined his own 1.000-seat theater in the tourist mecca of Branson, Missouri for nine seasons. He has appeared in 85 countries around the globe and headlined for most every major cruise line.



Rockett, who started at the age of 10, trained under Jeff Dunham and is recognized for his excellent comedy ventrilo-

quism which is featured in the show. After growing up in the South, Rockett moved to Hollywood, California where his management team is located. He produced his teens to the finals of NBC's America's Got Talent and they have gone on to do major Hollywood projects over the years. Kadan, who starred in the movie Dark Skies with award winning actress Keri

Russell and on CBS's rush hour combines forces with his Sister, Brooklyn to make guest appearances in Rockett's Destin show.

Brooklyn is well known for her viral Super Bowl commercial that currently has nearly 800 million views on YouTube and most recently played Hollywood superstar Bradley Cooper's daughter in a project with Steven Spielberg and Martin Scorsese.

This talented family has been vacationing in Destin for many years and now that Rockett's kids are almost grown, he is excited to be back for a longterm residency in the place his Grandparents first introduced him to as a child. Rockett shared, "For me, coming back here feels like coming home. Some of my greatest childhood memories happened on these beaches and it's my desire to bring something unique to the area that is a fun experience for families to attend & make their own amazing memories."

Nightly shows happen at 7:30 p.m. with 5 p.m. early seatings offered on Sunday's and select dates. A variety of alcoholic & non-alcoholic beverages are available as well as a full menu of food and dessert offerings before or after the show. Parking is plentiful and free in The Palms Destin Resort multi-level parking garage, that is attached to the showroom.

Advance reservations are required and can be made at the official ticketing site: USATour-Tickets.LIVE.



Reservations required: USATourTickets.LIVE

"Brilliant, incredible magic,

& fantastic showmanship!"

- Simon Cowell

Now Appearing (and Disappearing) Nightly
The Palms of Destin Resort & Conference Center
4201 Indian Bayou Trail, Destin, FL
FREE PARKING

BRIDGEWAY

 $continued\ from\ page\ 8$

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, Bridgeway provides the longterm support — including onsite mental health evaluations, therapy, recovery programs, case management, and connections to critical health services.

Together, they're not just housing people. They're helping them build a new life.

And the impact doesn't end when someone walks out Bridgeway's doors. It spreads — to families reunited, to employers welcoming people back into the workforce, to children who finally get to grow up with healthy, present parents. It shows up in classrooms, in churches and in neighborhoods once written off.

Bridgeway isn't just saving lives — they're restoring community. They're proving what's possible when care is consistent, leadership is compassionate and no one is ever treated as a lost cause.

Freedom from addiction, trauma, homelessness, mental illness, and hopelessness.

That kind of change doesn't happen overnight. It happens because people like Bonnie Barlow — and the incredible team at Bridgeway Center — refuse to give up on anyone.

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.

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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 promoting and preserving the visual arts. The volunteer staff gives tirelessly of their time to teach and organize events that are focused on keeping the arts a necessary and vibrant component of our daily lives. Their social

media platforms include their website, a Facebook Group, Instagram and an online newsletter.

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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How to Prepare for the Upcoming Medicare Enrollment Season



By Greg Durette, Florida Health Connector

Nobody can "prepare" for the Medicare Enrollment season which, in normal terms (I'll explain later) means you get in-

FloridaBlue 💩 🗑

Your Health Solutions Partner

undated with snail mail, email and worst of all, telephone bombardment courtesy of your newest best friends that want nothing more than to guide you through the transition process... of course so long as you choose them!

This is an overwhelming time which, especially for the unseasoned, can be mind boggling.

There is a better way, and it will make sense, so long as you align with the right people to give you the best guidance they have, to help you in your particular situation.

Everyone is different. Maybe you are about to retire and may have a question about your employer coverage continuing.

MEDICARE

How does that cost and coverage compare to a Medicare Supplement/Advantage option? Maybe you have access to the VA or Tricare. Are there additional coverages you could be eligible for in addition to those?

Maybe you and your spouse are aging in (65 years old...congrats if you made it!) at different times and need to figure out a best-case scenario to make both of you happy with the coverage and costs you are facing.

Everyone, and I mean everyone, has a unique story. Do not approach your story with suppositions or because of the wise sages of the water cooler that can tell you stories of their own or perhaps those of their out of State relatives. Almost assuredly, their circumstances have little to nothing to do with your decision.

Get the facts. Get them from an expert. Get them and then test them against other experts. Once you are satisfied with your vetting, now you are ready to trust the one you selected, not



based on any bias but rather, your own research. Then ask more questions!

It all starts with the basics. Medicare is locally based. Therefore, your facts should be gathered in the local area with someone who understands the details of such.

Unless you are very lonely and want to make dozens

of new "friends," I would encourage you to not respond to national ads from TV or otherwise. There are many local options to guide you and give the best local service.

This is a critical time and there are innumerable considerations. Aging in is only one potential option. Maybe you are eligible for a Special Enrollment Period of which, there are many. You may be missing out on an opportunity if you are not privy to these.

Narrowing them down to what matters to you is simply the most important thing you can do for you. You can always make changes in the future but, some changes may expire before you even know about them. Deadlines are deadlines.

Gather your data. Write down all of your questions. Then, make the call. If you deal locally, you can be certain (especially if you ask the questions relevant to you) your data/info will not be shared or sold to anyone not involved in the placement of your coverage. Privacy is paramount.

No telemarketers welcome here!

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. The Medicare recorded line is (850) 462-7807.

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You were dropped by your Medicare Advantage plan



You have moved to a new service area



You are retiring and leaving your employer's group coverage



You are eligible for LIS Extra Help



You qualify for other special situations that meet the criteria for a special enrollment period

Find out if you qualify

1-850-842-2400

Gregory Durette Florida Health Connector Licensed Blue Cross Blue Shield agent





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.

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.









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JoJo's Coffee Shop and Lilly Pads (Pineapple) Shopping Center.















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

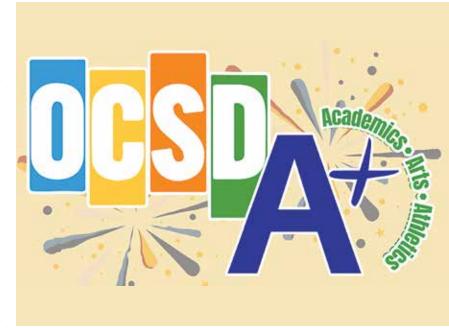
Both Districts Celebrate "A" Ratings and Significant Academic Gains

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

Okaloosa County The 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.

Niceville, FL



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
- 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 statewide. 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.

The Florida DOE's grading system considers achievement and learning gains, graduation rates, middle school acceleration, and college and career readiness. 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
- Maude Saunders Elementary B
- Walton Middle School A
- Walton High School A
- Freeport $\check{\text{High}}$ 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.





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, more than half of the loss comes with math," said Kama Friedman.

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 mindset.

"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 Niceville, expert tutors use the proven Mathnasium MethodTM 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 individual needs and learning style.

The Proof Is in the Numbers:

- 94% of parents report improvement in their child's math skills and understand-
- 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 assess-

We proudly serve students from Niceville, Bluewater Bay, Shalimar, Valparaiso, and Fort Walton Beach, including those attending:

• Niceville High School



ment to identify what they already know and where they need support. From there, getting started is simple:

3 Easy Steps to Enroll:

- 1. Schedule an Assessment
- 2. Receive a Personalized Learning Plan
- 3. Start Your Sessions

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 easy access for busy fami-

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- 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-

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Senior Session / Professional headshots

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No limit on edited photos

Newborn / Lifestyle

\$300

Up to an hour

No limit on edited photos

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August 2025



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. 2**

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 Nicev-





ille. 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 made via the Amazon Wishlist 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.

Northwest Florida State College Making a Difference in Our **Community**

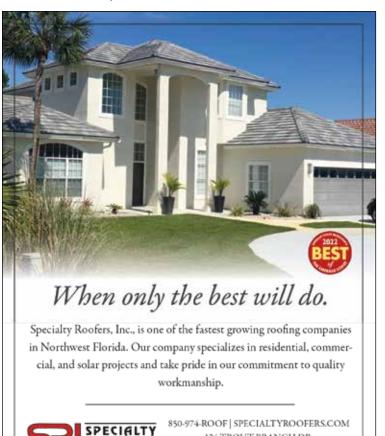
23 Cadets Graduate **NWFSC Law Enforcement** Academy

Twenty-three cadets recently graduated from the Law Enforcement Academy at Northwest Florida State College (NWFSC), completing a six-month, 785-hour training program. These graduates have undergone rigorous instruction and are now prepared to take the oath to serve and protect their communities.

Many were sponsored by local agencies, including the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office, Walton County Sheriff's Office, Fort Walton Beach Police Department, Crestview Police Department, and-for the first time-cadets from the Florida State Guard, marking a milestone for both the program and the state. Florida State Guard Chief of Staff Jay Arnold was recognized during the ceremony by NWFSC President Mel Ponder for his leadership and support.

NWFSC's Public Safety Training Center remains a regional leader in law enforcement education, also offering certification pathways for officers relocating from other states. Its commitment to high standards ensures both new recruits and seasoned professionals are equipped for successful careers in public safety.

Learn more at nwfsc.edu/academics/public-safety/.



124 TROUT BRANCH DR. FREEPORT, FL 32439



Brozinni Pizzeria

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

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

FUBAR Pizza Bar

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



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

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

SUMMER CAMP

Schedule

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

JoJo's Coffee and Goodness

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

"JoJo" Stevenson invites you to enter her cafe and relaxed coffee shop atmosphere for a daily dose of "goodness." Stop in for mouth-watering cinnamon rolls; scones: cranberry orange, chocolate caramel and cheddar thyme; strawberry coffee cake; cranberry orange muffins; red velvet cookies; brownies with

espresso ganache or caramelitas. Try a breakfast special with a piece of quiche or kolache-hash brown casserole. Breakfast burritos are rolled and ready daily! Choose from andouille, bacon, chorizo or veggie. Or tantalize your taste buds with a made-

Continued on next page





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! 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: 🛐 🧑 📀 4652 HWY. 20 EAST • NICEVILLE • (850) 737-6193 bigorangehousedesigns.com

Local Diving, Drinks and Coffee

DINING

continued from previous page

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

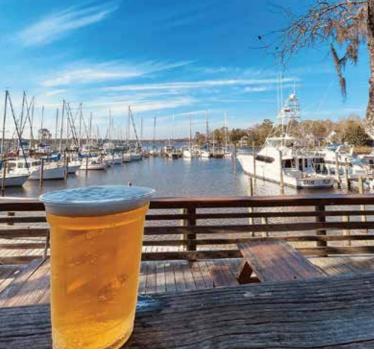
LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant

Suds, Songs and Romantic Sunsets! Welcome to LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant at the



Bluewater Bay Marina Complex. Named after "LJ Schooner" (the LJ is for Lazy Jack), a cherished four-legged icon on Bluewater Bay Marina docks, the open-air oyster bar and

restaurant offers a magnificent view of the water, marina and unparalleled sunset any time of year. There are, of course, oysters and a delicious varied menu with dinner specials such



as blackened mahi and grilled shrimp with hollandaise, served over cheese grits.

August 2: 14th Annual Pinfish Tournament!

Aug. 16: Casino Night Ben-

efiting 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

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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

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Slice + drink + wings +

bread stick \$14.99 2 slices + drink \$13.99

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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

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- 1285 Eglin Pkwy.
- 290 NE Eglin Pkwy.

Crestview

• 297B James Lee Blvd.

JORS Panama City

• 1360 West 15th St

Callaway

• 809/807 N. Tyndall Pkwy.

Pensacola

• 4600 Mobile Hwy.

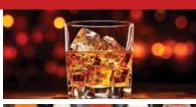
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Cast a Line for Fun: 14th Annual Pinfish Grand Nationals Set for August 2

The 14th Annual Bluewater Bay Marina Pinfish Grand Nationals 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



escape—his reset button. "It's 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



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

The Emerald Coast Classic is bringing high-level college hoops back to Raider Arena this Thanksgiving week, with both the men's and women's tournaments set to showcase 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 fea-

Rocky Bayou Knights

9/5 - vs Eagles View Academy

8/15 - vs Lighthouse

8/22 - vs Monroe Academy

9/12 - at Aucilla Christian

9/19 – at Franklin County

9/26 - at Central (Milton)

10/17 - at Graceville



tures a star-studded lineup with DePaul, Drake, Georgia Tech, and LSU battling it out Thanksgiving weekend.

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
- 6 p.m. CT: Championship Game

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

NOVEMBER 28-29, 2025 LOUISIANA STATE GEORGIA TECH UNIVERSITY NORTHWEST FLORIDA STATE COLLEGE WWW.EMERALDCOASTCLASSIC.COM

2025 High School Football Schedules

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

10/10 - vs. Mosley

*10/24 - vs. Milton

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

10/3 – vs Crenshaw Christian

10/31 - vs. Navarre

* District Game



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Teams, One Incredible

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 p.m. | Championship – Tues. 7:30 p.m.

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.



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 chapter.

"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 ex-



perience 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 age-based 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 warm-up, performance, strength program, core and conditioning and cool down. Outside of group workouts,

D1 Training offers team training, semi-private and one-onone training with world-class 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."

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Sports

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







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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 receive an exemption to play in the FJT tournament at Pensacola 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

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By Kassia Garfield, Max-STRENGTH 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

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 en-

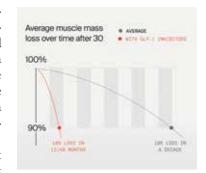
Clinical studies show that 25% to 40% of the weight lost on GLP-1 medications may come from lean mass, including muscle. This is concerning because muscle isn't just about strength or appearance—it plays a crucial role in nearly every aspect of health. 40% muscle loss is like not getting out of bed for

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 essen-

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 fracturesespecially 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 kev.

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 30



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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 your mind.

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

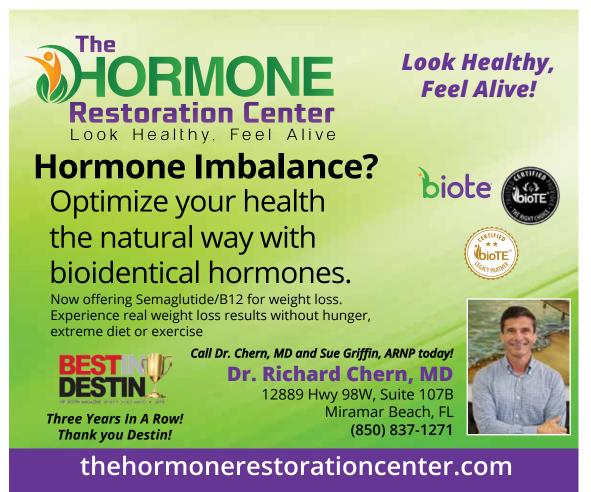
- 1. Notice your brain moved into emergency mode. Notice body changes like tension, stomach and chest sensations, jaw grinding, heart rate increase. Notice changes in thoughts focused on fear, anger, self-defense, and blame. Notice thoughts related to gathering negative evidence.
- 2. Take steps to regulate 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 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
- Lifestyle: Diet, sleep, activity **Preventative Measures:**Preste meal plans incorporate

Create meal plans incorporating many foods. Incorporate strength training 30 minutes three times per week. Maintain a consistent supplement routine. Get regular health assessments

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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Musing



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 27

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 built in.

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

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- Would you like to change the way your teeth or gums are shaped?
- Do you have gaps or spaces in between your teeth?

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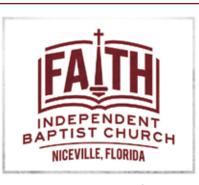
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Romans 10:17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

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Musing

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 headlines 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 cholester-

> olized 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 (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 media by engaging with people whom I've never met and subsequently calling them buttholes? What in the world was I going to do with myself?

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









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!







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.

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 to-

gether 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, 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



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

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, Cowboy.





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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 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



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

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 Bitwisethe 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



The Bit-Wizards family celebrates 25 years.

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 Erickson and have both served on the board of the Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber Commerce, and they started Be the Magic Foundation, an organization "com-

mitted 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 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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Fun, Prizes and Community: Bay Life After-Hours

A huge thank you to everyone who joined us for the 2025 Niceville-Valparaiso Chamber's Life Media After Hours, hosted by LJ Schooner's in beautiful Bluewater Bay! We're incredibly grateful for this community—your support, stories, and friendships inspire everything we do. It was wonderful to spend the evening celebrating alongside so many of you who make this area so special.

As we look ahead to an exciting year, we're committed to bringing you even more of what you love—uplifting articles, local events, inspiring people, community news, dining, sports, fishing, entertainment, and so much more. Our mission is to share it all with the masses, connecting neighbors and shining a spotlight on the good happening right here at home.

And for local businesses—thank you for trusting us to help tell your story. We're proud to offer the best advertising around, with options to fit every budget. Here's to a year of growth, connection, and celebrating the heart of our community together!





























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Arts & Music

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."



2026 Gulf Coast Jam Lineup Revealed

Post Malone, Chris Stapleton, Keith Urban and Riley Green to Headline May 28–31 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!





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





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Bay Buzz

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

By Barbara Palmgren

In November, 2023, the Heritage 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 donations. The room included two handicapped bathrooms and a ramp connecting the room to the museum itself.

The evening of November 2023, Susan Page, trustee for 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 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 compete for the title of "Mrs. Asia USA" later this year.

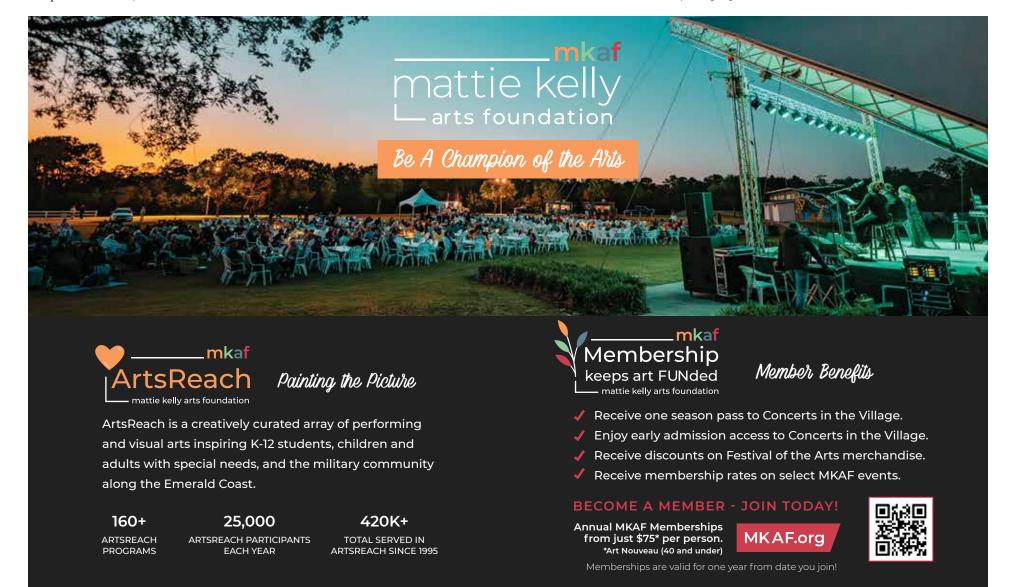
Mid-Bay Rotary Supports Tools for Schools Drive

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.

American Airlines Expands Service at VPS with New Miami Route, Year-Round Chicago Flights

American Airlines, a longtime legacy carrier at Des-

Continued on next page





BAY BUZZ

continued from previous page

tin-Fort Walton Beach Airport (VPS), is deepening its partner-ship with the airport by adding a new intrastate route and expanding a popular existing service to year-round operations.

Beginning December 19, 2025, American will launch daily, nonstop flights to Miami International Airport (MIA). As a premier U.S. gateway to the Caribbean and Latin America, MIA connects travelers to more than 70 destinations across Mexico, the Caribbean and Latin America, while serving as a major hub for business, leisure, trade and cultural exchange.

In addition, American will extend its Chicago O'Hare International Airport (ORD) service to operate daily year-round, providing continuous access to this key hub throughout both winter and summer travel seasons.

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 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.

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 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.

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.

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 details, 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

Continued on next page



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BAY BUZZ

continued from previous page

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 manpow-

"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.

Northeast Okaloosa County Named Rural Area of Opportunity

Northeast Okaloosa County

has officially been designated a Rural Area of Opportunity (RAO) by Gov. Ron DeSantis, joining a regional network of counties poised for economic growth. The designation is designed to attract job-creating industries by offering key incentives and support for develop-

"This designation strengthens our efforts to bring higher-wage jobs to residents, especially as we continue expanding infrastructure in the Shoal River Industrial Park," said County Commission Chairman Paul Mixon.

The RAO now includes Okaloosa's northeast quadranteast of State Road 85 and north of I-10-including Laurel Hill and the unincorporated areas of Auburn, Deerland, and Svea. Okaloosa joins nearby counties like Holmes, Wakulla, and portions of Walton in the Northwest RAO region.

Recent RAO success stories include Probes Unlimited and Busy Bee in Holmes County, and armor manufacturer Point Blank Enterprises in Wakulla

"This gives us another powerful tool to attract industry and jobs," said One Okaloosa EDC Executive Director Nathan Sparks. "We're grateful to Gov. DeSantis for recognizing our region's potential."

RAO benefits include:

- · Waivers for state grant match and wage requirements
- Access to rural job tax credits and incentives
 - Expedited state permitting
- · Representation by Opportunity Florida (opportunityflorida.com)
- Scholarships for local leaders to attend development conferences

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