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# BAY Life

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## Chasing Perfection: Inside the World of the Blue Angels

By WILL ESTELL

Soaring by on a high-speed pass, barely one hundred feet above the runway—at a speed I'm told at the time is in excess of 700 mph—I can literally smell the fuel and feel the jet wash, before I hear the powerful roar of the F/A -18 Super Hornet as it soars by then climbs steeply just ahead of us, disappearing into the clouds, before diving back down in a corkscrew then leveling out about a mile away. All of this happens in about 20 seconds before another pilot with cojones of steel, and the skills to match, flies by completely inverted, slightly further away, but still close enough to feel the change in the atmosphere from where I am standing on the tarmac.

What I am witnessing up close and personal today is the same magical breath of patriotism that fans see at airshows all over this great country each year. The only difference is, today I'm taking it all in from the Blue Angels commu-



nication cart, surrounded by a small team of just eight of the Blues support staff, along with my wingman for the day, Blue Angels Public Affairs Officer, Lt. Ben Bushong.

Since being established in 1946, the U.S. Navy Blue Angels hold the unique distinction of being the most well-known aerobatic team in the entire world. While they regularly wow crowds with breathtaking performances right here in our own backyard,



their mission extends far beyond dazzling crowds at airshows, as they aim to inspire future generations of patriotic Americans, by demonstrating the unmatched aptitude, attitude and professionalism of the men and women serving in the U.S. armed forces.

These aero superstars do so much more than simply entertain with a breathtaking aerial showcase. Their performances represent thousands of hours of precision

flight, discipline, unshakable resolve and the unwavering spirit of naval aviation. For decades, they've captivated millions with gravity-defying maneuvers, embodying the excellence and teamwork that define the U.S. Navy Blue Angels—or as we affectionally refer to them along our beautiful Northwest Florida coastal communities, The Blues. I

**BLUE ANGELS**  
*continued on page 4*

## Panhandle Wildlife Rescue Opens New Rehabilitation Hospital

Panhandle Wildlife Rescue (PWR) has officially opened its new, full-scale wildlife rehabilitation center and hospital in Freeport. Serving 11 counties from Navarre to Tallahassee, PWR plays a vital role in the region by providing life-saving care and rehabilitation for native wildlife throughout Northwest Florida.

The new facility will allow PWR to expand its mission of rescuing, rehabilitating and releasing sick, injured and orphaned wildlife, admitting between 1,000 and 2,000 patients annually. With a focus on medical care, orphan rearing and intensive rehabilitation, PWR gives Florida's wild animals a second chance at survival in one of the fastest-developing and ecologically rich regions in the country.

"The opening of this facility, thanks to a transformative donation from Ryan Jumonville and Family, marks a major step forward in our commitment to the wildlife of the Emerald Coast," said Shelby Robinson, founder and executive director of Panhandle Wildlife Rescue.

**WILDLIFE**  
*continued on page 2*



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## Community

### WILDLIFE

*continued from page 1*

The Florida Panhandle is home to the most biodiverse terrestrial ecosystem in the contiguous United States. From the upland pine forests to the pelagic depths of the Gulf, PWR treats hundreds of species every year, striving to mitigate the growing impact of human development on native wildlife.

One of its current patients is a handsome bald eagle rescued from the side of a highway in Bay County, likely clipped by a car while feeding. Wildlife Harbor (WH), which helps with many calls in Bay County, rescued him late one night. He was stabilized at WH overnight, then transferred to PWR the following morning for a thorough medical examination that revealed he had multiple metacarpal fractures on his left wing. These types of fractures are often difficult to stabilize due to the size of the hollow bones present and are also often injured during recovery due to their distal location. After PWR staff gathered radiographs and bloodwork to check for the possibility of lead poisoning, PWR veterinarian, Dr. Phil Blumer, opted to surgically place a pin in the largest affected bone, a procedure that took just under an hour. Since the surgery, the eagle has been having daily physical therapy, laser treatment and has been kept in an enclosure that prevents excessive movement. During his last doctor's visit, he has shown great signs of progress, but still exhibits a limited range of mo-

tion and will require weeks more of physical therapy before he can be placed in a flight cage for conditioning. Wildlife rehabilitation takes teamwork, from the public to specialists with advanced equipment, to other organizations and volunteers. PWR is currently fundraising to finish its 100-foot flight cage, not only for this patient, but also for the hundreds of other raptors that come through the doors each year.

Sometimes, injured adult patients are not the most difficult intakes, such as the eagle pictured. Although injuries come with intense treatment plans, surgical procedures and long timelines for recovery, orphaned raptors often require longer care plans that come with life lessons and an enormous appetite. PWR currently has five owl and six hawk fledglings in care. In these cases, they always try to encourage re-nesting if it's a safe option. But, sometimes mom or the baby is injured, the nests are over a body of water, predators are stalking the young on the ground, they are sick or injured so mom kicked them out of the nest, or finders just don't want them re-nested back on their property. Although they successfully re-nest, approximately 70% of downed raptor nestlings and fledglings, it still leaves the clinic full with the remaining 30%. Raptor moms are very attentive and protective, and when mom is present, nearly 100% of re-nestings are successful, even if they aren't returned to the native nest. These



cases are often difficult to navigate, as PWR must take into consideration many variables to determine when these patients truly need human intervention.

Several of PWR's patients have siblings who were predated upon, fell into artificial bodies of water and nearly drowned, were left in the middle of a highway with no nest in sight, or their mom has no interest in caring for them once returned. If these patients are unable to be re-nested, they are often in PWR's care for 4-6 months, where they are taught how to self-feed, how to fly, how to hunt live prey, and everything in between (while ensuring they retain a healthy fear of humans).

Techniques vary among species, so each patient will have the greatest success of sustaining itself when eventually released back into the wild. Bloodwork is done to track health throughout their stay, and weekly medical checkups to monitor progress. PWR encourages the public to take a photo and pin the location of a young raptor so it can send staff to canvass the area. It's so important to return them to the family unit if at all possible. Then, even when they can successfully fly and hunt prey and it's time to let them return to freedom, there are external factors that can't be controlled, such as secondary rodenticide poisoning. Each time a hand-raised raptor is released, the team worries they'll come back through their doors after eating a poisoned rodent. Secondary rodenticide toxicity comprises about 25% of admitted adult raptor species, and it's preventable! Most don't think of the effects up the food chain when poisoning rats and mice in their home, but it causes death and suffering in the local raptor population, and in many instances, the effects can't be reversed. So, before you think about using

rodenticides, please consider a friendlier option for native wildlife. PWR is also trying to fundraise additional raptor mews for patients like these, since its caseload is so high this year. If you'd like to donate or sponsor an enclosure, please reach out to PWR.

#### Some things to know about Panhandle Wildlife Rescue:

PWR works very closely with Wildlife Harbour in Panama City Beach. Combined, PWR consists of three humans serving the same region and quantity of patients that was once serviced by eight employees. So, compassion and kindness go a long way, especially during baby season when they receive 100 or more calls per day. Wildlife Harbour founder, Cindy Levine, has been working with PWR staff for over three years and her skills and dedication to Florida's wildlife is incredible. With Cindy's willingness to go on rescues in Bay County while concurrently running her own rehabilitation center, it allows for patients to get into care quicker than waiting for our staff to respond on some occasions.

PWR needs volunteers! Rescue, nursery, release, medical, etc. If anyone is looking for an opportunity to work hands-on with wildlife, please reach out to [jim@panhandlewildliferescue.org](mailto:jim@panhandlewildliferescue.org)

#### Meet the staff:

Shelby Robinson is CEO, with 15 years of experience in wildlife rehabilitation throughout the country. Shelby started working with wildlife during graduate school in Seattle and hasn't stopped since. She has directed two larger facilities previously, then founded PWR with co-founders Jim Johnson and Raven Smith in March of 2024. Jim Johnson (co-founder) has been working with Shelby for five years and has mastered being the best raptor dad, hand-raising hundreds of orphaned raptors during his tenure. Jim is the lead rescue technician and has driven thousands of miles to offer rescue services to wildlife in need, spanning 14 different counties. Raven is a nursery specialist, giving unmatched care and love to orphaned native wildlife. Her compassion and care is second to none, and it is thanks to her that PWR exists today.

Although nearly 80% of forwarded calls come from Florida

Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, PWR is completely funded by supporter donations and currently receives no state, local or federal funding. The workload is tremendous, and they are on call 24/7/365. With the addition of the new facility and 10 acres, it gives them the opportunity to assist more patients in need, but also increase their resources, making it possible to provide the best care possible. They are fundraising to build more enclosures so they can increase their intakes and buy formulas, food, medical supplies, and support rescue team's efforts.

To date, PWR has assisted over 200 different species of patients, ranging from huge alligator snapping turtles to red-tailed hawks, to tiny pinky squirrels and all rabies vector species. PWR accepts all native Florida wildlife and works to help the public find resources for exotic pets and fowl. PWR also responds to any requested services for containing rabies vector species.

Big shout out goes to Emergency Veterinary Clinic in Niceville and Destin as they assist with patient intakes and allow the PWR team the use of their digital radiograph machine while PWR works to obtain funding for their own medical clinic. So, if anyone is interested in donating towards those efforts, it would be so greatly appreciated.

Finally, PWR's "Respect the Locals" campaign highlights the increasing frequency of human/wildlife interactions in the region. Through education and citizen science initiatives, the campaign empowers residents and visitors to coexist more peacefully with native Florida species. "Nothing feeds the soul more than watching a once-broken creature return to the wild," says Raven.

The 24-hour hotline is (850) 889-1104, and the address for the actual facility is 5951 Highway 20 in Freeport. An alternate facility for intakes is 256 Miley Road in Freeport.

As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, PWR receives no federal, state or local funding. All operations, including rescues, surgeries, critical care, and a 24/7 wildlife rescue hotline, are funded entirely by community donations. For more information, to donate, or to get involved, visit [www.panhandlewildliferescue.com](http://www.panhandlewildliferescue.com).

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## Community

### BLUE ANGELS

continued from page 1

had the opportunity to spend a day inside the world of The Blues, guided by LT. Bushong, and gained some firsthand insight into their headquarters at NAS Pensacola. Including observing a morning flight meeting, pre-flight preparations, and the behind-the-scenes maintenance and logistics performed by their team of 158 active-duty Sailors and Marines, that keep this elite squadron at peak performance.

Here are some Q&As from

my behind-the-scenes day with LT. Ben Bushong and the Blue Angels team, part of a multi-publication media experience with The Blues:

**What is the age range of the pilots and does age play a part in the selection process?**

The age of our pilots usually range from early 30s to late 40s. Age isn't necessarily a factor when applying for the team. All pilots need to have a minimum number of flight hours and experience to be able to apply.

**As popular as the Blue Angels are around the**

**country, how do you and your team feel about the escalation of attention after last year's hit Amazon original, The Blue Angels?**

The film definitely gives viewers an inside look into what it means to be a part of the U.S. Navy's flight demonstration squadron, and it does it for an entire show season, including the selection process and intense training that the pilots endure to get to where they are. As a team we're happy about the depiction and think the movie can only help bring our fans closer and hopefully create more interest in our mission.

**Do the pilots still get any sense of nervousness when they fly or is it such a well-oiled repetitive motion, due to all the practice and shows, that it becomes like driving your vehicle from home to work and back?**

Everything we do is based on safety and having absolute complete trust in one another. We absolutely all have to count on that up there and on the ground. So, during winter training, we incorporate the crawl, walk, run mentality to continue to work towards the tight formations. As a team, we are always chasing perfection, 100% of the time.

**What criteria would you say does play the largest part in the pilot and support team selection?**

With all team members, trust and personality are two big factors when selecting new team members. If your current command is letting you apply for this



team, then that means you have already checked all the boxes on paper for the prerequisites. But we are looking for people who would make great ambassadors for the Navy and Marine Corps, and someone that you would potentially spend 300 days on the road with in a given season. Our Maintainers and Crew Chiefs perform all the preflight inspections on every aircraft, so the pilots can strap in and go! It takes complete trust in a person, to be able to strap in and fly without performing your own preflight inspection of the aircraft. We are a successful team, because everybody has complete trust that the person next to you is doing their job effectively and efficiently.

**With such vicious schedules between practices, social and event obligations, and traveling 300 days per year, how much sleep does the average pilot get?**

Wait...we're supposed to be sleeping too? [laughs] Thursday morning we fly to our show site. The first flight at every city is our "circles" flight, where we fly over the airfield to find all

the checkpoints for the show. Followed by a practice. Thursdays are typically the longest, because it's a three-flight day: Transit, Checkpoint Flight and Practice. Friday we perform community outreach, visiting local schools and hospitals, then perform a full practice. Saturday and Sunday are show days, then we transit back to Pensacola after the show. Monday our team gets our day off, then it's back to Tuesday and Wednesday practices here in Pensacola. Actually, not getting enough sleep is never really too much of a factor. We always perform in the afternoons, so there's typically not many early mornings on the road.

**Any other closing insight you and the team would like readers to know about the mission you all are fulfilling?**

The Blue Angels are direct representatives of the 800,000 men and women serving in the Navy and Marine Corps. All of us are from the fleet and will return to the fleet after our time here. By design, our Navy and Marine Corps is expeditionary in nature, meaning all our operations are happening overseas and out of sight. The Blue Angels were designed to showcase the teamwork and professionalism of the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps to the American public, and like we always say, "We're glad to be here!"

*Will Estell is a seasoned writer, editor, and media entrepreneur with over 700 published articles spanning regional and national publications. His work covers coastal tourism, real estate, dining, automotive reviews, and celebrity interviews, earning him a strong reputation in Northwest Florida media. Currently the Chief Creative Officer of Estell Hussey Media, LLC, Will has co-founded 12 magazine titles and served as editor-in-chief for several others. Originally from Booneville, Miss., Will is a father of three and lives in Destin and Navarre with his wife, ABC 3 news anchor Laura Hussey-Estell.*

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# EFCU Opens New Operations Center

BY LAURA COALE

Eglin Federal Credit Union (Eglin FCU) recently opened its state-of-the-art Operations Center, a milestone in the credit union's comprehensive growth and expansion project. The event was marked by a celebratory gathering attended by board members, volunteers, team members and partners who supported the successful completion of this project.

Eglin FCU's President/CEO, Cathie Staton, expressed her gratitude and excitement during the opening ceremony. "This Operations Center is a testament to our commitment to innovation and excellence," said Staton. "We believe that a well-designed space can inspire creativity and productivity, and we are thrilled to offer our employees a dynamic and inviting atmosphere that reflects our corporate values."

The new Operations Center, a four-story, 100,000-square-foot building, includes an attached parking garage and is designed to accommodate up to 400 employees. It features



energy-efficient windows, geothermal wells, charging stations for employees' electric vehicles, and flexible interior workspaces designed for employee comfort and efficiency. The bright and open workspaces foster creativity, collaboration and communication, with various types of collaboration spaces, balconies and outdoor tables with shading.

The building also houses a state-of-the-art training center, an expanded call center with chat and text support, a growing Video Teller team and departments such as loan services, indirect lending, collections,

Information Technology, Information Systems, mortgage services, facilities management and operations training and projects. Additionally, the Operations Center can serve as a disaster recovery site if needed.

Staton highlighted the collaborative efforts that made this project possible, recognizing key contributors including the board of directors, volunteers, President Emeritus Jerry Williams, former COO Kenny Girot and several team members who were involved from the beginning such as SVP/CTO Tim Farnsworth, SVP/CIO Rocky



BUILDING PHOTO CREDIT: JOHN MAGNOSKI

Magee, SVP/COO Kim Nauta, and Facilities Manager/Security Officer Alan Campbell. Staton also acknowledged the La Macchia Group for its excellent work on the design and build of the Operations Center. "We embrace the credit union philosophy of people helping people, and we believe that when you lead with values and do the right things, good things happen,"

Staton added. "We are excited to continue to attract and retain new employees and members, while having room to grow and deliver five-star service."

EFCU's new Operations Center marks a major milestone in its growth. Learn more at [lamacchiagroup.com](http://lamacchiagroup.com) and visit [eglinfcu.org](http://eglinfcu.org) for updates, financial education or career opportunities.

## 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 long-term 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: [USATourTickets.LIVE](http://USATourTickets.LIVE).

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- Are you using screens late at night? Eating late? Skipping morning sunlight?

We look at the entire picture—nervous system function, cortisol rhythms, melatonin production, hormone balance, stress exposure, nutrition, lifestyle and more.

What many people don't realize is that sleep disturbances are often not about the sleep itself—they're symptoms of deeper imbalances. At the Tortoise Clinic, we blend Western diagnostics and Eastern wisdom to get to the root. That might include looking at adrenal fatigue, estrogen/progesterone shifts, thyroid dysfunction, or gut inflammation—all of which can disrupt your rest.

## Beyond the Sleep Aids

It's tempting to reach for sleep aids or melatonin when nights get restless. And while they can offer short-term relief, they rarely address the why.

We prefer to ask: What is your body trying to tell you?

Sometimes it's a stress response that needs rewiring. Other times it's low progesterone, blood sugar instability or even chronic inflammation. Instead of masking those signals, our job is to decode them—and guide your body back into balance.

That might mean incorporating acupuncture to calm the nervous system, adaptogenic herbs to support stress resilience, magnesium to relax tight muscles or simple lifestyle shifts like screen-free evenings and earlier meals.

## Introducing: The Sleep Assessment

To better understand the sleep patterns and hormonal rhythms of our patients, I'm thrilled to share that we've launched a new, non-invasive sleep assessment at the Tortoise Clinic. This easy, at-home saliva test measures your melatonin and cortisol levels at

key times throughout the night, along with progesterone, giving us a clearer picture of what's happening behind the scenes.

Unlike standard tests that offer a snapshot in time, this assessment helps us understand how your sleep hormones fluctuate overnight, guiding more precise and personalized care—with-

out the need for blood draws or guesswork.

If you're tired of feeling tired—or if sleep has quietly slipped out of your routine and left chaos in its place—know this: rest is not a weakness. It's your body's greatest tool for repair.

And you deserve more than

temporary fixes. You deserve answers, insight and support that meets you where you are.

At the Tortoise Clinic, we believe healing happens one steady, intentional step at a time—and sometimes, the first step is simply learning how to rest.

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 Community

# Bowlegs 70! Meet the New Captain Billy and Krewe

BY CHRISTOPHER MANSON

The 70th Annual Billy Bowlegs Coronation Pageant was held Saturday, June 14, at Niceville's Mattie Kelly Arts Center. The free public event unveiled the tightly-guarded identity of Captain Billy 70, Rique Gwin, along with his Queen, his First Mate and Mistress, his 10-couple Honor Guard, and the theme for the new Bowlegs year. The first half of the event bid a hearty farewell to Captain Billy 69 Michael Castleberry and the Bottoms Up Krewe.

Keeping the new Captain Billy's identity a secret involves a lot of planning carried out through anonymous emails starting in the eight or so months leading up to the Coronation Pageant.

The criteria for selecting Bowlegs and the rest of the key players/pirates is very specific, but boils down to candidates'

experience in the Krewe. "The previous Captains get together and decide who should lead the crew," says Gwin/Billy.

"Captain Billy picks everyone else in their Top 26. The First Mate and Mistress have been our friends for years. When I was First Mate, the new Queen was on the honor guard. It was a natural selection that just made sense. It's a huge undertaking. They really have to want to be involved."

In addition, rising high school seniors are invited to take part as Princesses and Privates. And younger children are

encouraged to serve as Children of the Court. "This year, we have 11 Children of the Court ranging in ages from one to nine years old." Gwin's two grown children served as Princesses in previous years while attending high school.

Gwin has been involved with



Queen of Bowlegs 70 Debbie Fisher, Captain Billy 70 Rique Gwin, First Mistress Mollie Grindland, First Mate Mark Grindland, Kelly Gwinband and J. Mark Fisher.



The Krewe of Bowlegs Children of the Court.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF KREWE OF BOWLEGS  
Queen of Bowlegs 70 Debbie Fisher and Captain Billy 70 Rique Gwin.

the Krewe for 14 years. "One of our friends from church invited us to attend some social events, and the Bowlegs people were so friendly and supportive." The Gwins are originally from Alabama—Rique is a Birmingham transplant, and his wife Kelly was born in Fort Rucker. They are both retired Air Force. Gwin was First Mate during the Covid outbreak, which, if you count that, would make this year 71. So, we're not counting it.

Captain Billy 70 will be planning out the year's numerous events—including travel and costumes—with the Queen, Debbie Fisher, and her husband, J. Mark Fisher; and the First Mate and Mistress.

The Billy Bowlegs Pirate Festival originated in 1954. Through the years, the Krewe has swash buckled at the center of it all—civic-minded, volunteer-driven, and devoted to fun and service. "The original thing for the crew 70 years ago was to attract tourism, which is still one of our main goals," says Gwin. "We travel as far north as Minnesota and as far south as Sarasota, building relationships with other Krewes. They do variations similar to our festival,

some as long as two weeks and some a couple of hours. Our goal is ambassadorship for the city of Fort Walton Beach.

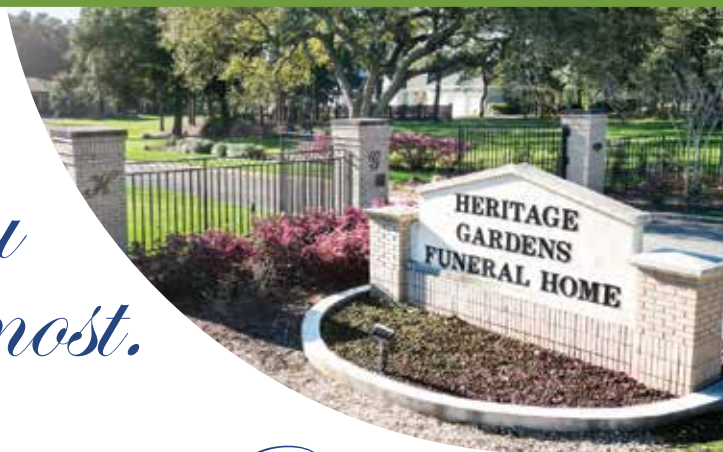
"Every year, costumes are custom made, funded by the Krewe out of our own pockets. This year D and D Creations, one of the Mardi Gras houses in New Orleans, made them. The colors have a lot of significance—since I'm an aviator, I picked blue and silver as our colors, for the sky and lightning storm effect. Our new logo will reflect that symbolism as well."

The theme for Year 70 is Doolittle's Raiders, in honor of the courageous men who participated in America's 1942 bombing mission against Tokyo. The Raiders have strong ties to our local military community.

"I absolutely love this Krewe, the area and the patriotic spirit we have here," says Gwin. "I'll do anything I can to improve the relationship between the Krewe and the community. One of the major themes this year is honoring not only our history as a Krewe, but also the history of the community."

Set sail for more pirate fun at [kreweofbowlegs.com](http://kreweofbowlegs.com).

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## The New Bowlegs Krewe at a Glance:

**Captain Billy 70** – Rique Gwin

**Captain's Co-pilot** – Kelly Gwin

**Queen of Bowlegs** – Debbie Fisher

**Queen's Navigator** – J. Mark Fisher

**First Mate** – Mark Grindland

**First Mistress** – Mollie Grindland

**The Honor Guard** –

Schuyler and Taylor Black, Michael and Erin Goodson, Joe and Morgan Zwickel, Scott Flint and Nancy Kline, Mike and Kelly Bedsole, Tyler and Casey Murray, Chris and Heather Thomas, William Goolsby and Elizabeth Sager, John and Keri Holguin, Matthew and Katie Jaquet.

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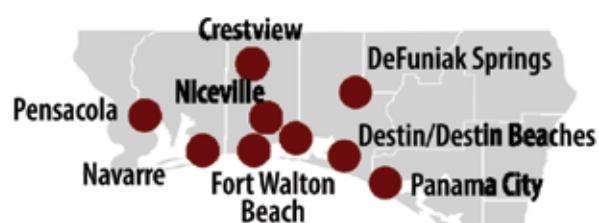
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# When Can or When Do You Need to Change your Medicare Coverage? Right Now!

BY GREG DURETTE, FLORIDA HEALTH CONNECTOR

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

I'm talking Medicare issues. If you moved, retired, your current employer plan dropped you or so many other reasons your

coverage has left you at this most vulnerable age, now is the time to take action and know your options.

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

It can be an overwhelming time, and information is the



key to helping understand what choices you have and making the best decisions for you...not what your friends or water cooler talk has led you to believe is best. Everyone is different and

personal situations are personal.

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

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

What people don't like is the cost. It is the highest premium per month option and does not cover prescriptions. So,

you have to add a Part D plan to avoid future penalties. That plus the Part B you pay to the government can get expensive, particularly if you are on a fixed income.

Then come Advantage plans. What people love first is the premium. Typically, they start at \$0 per month. Hard to beat that! However, they are a co-pay model meaning many services have a small payment as services as needed. The kicker is, though, there is a cap on your annual out of pocket that can limit your expenses annually. That could potentially make the personal math on these make a lot of sense.

These plans often INCLUDE prescription, dental, vision and hearing. Another big plus.

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

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

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

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



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Gregory Durette  
Florida Health Connector  
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Community Health Fair

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Saturday July 19th  
10am - 4pm  
Food Fun Live Demos

American Legion Post 296  
311 Main Street in Destin  
in the Event Room





Happenings Around the Bay

2025  
EVENTS

JULY		
01	Niceville Young Professionals Lunch Meeting 11:30 am   Niceville Valparaiso Chamber   Niceville	11 CONT Coloring & Coffee 11 am   Valparaiso Library   Valparaiso Full Moon Restorative Experience 7 pm   Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation   Destin
03	Stars & Stripes Classic Golf Tournament 8 am   Eglin AFB Golf Course   Niceville  Puzzle Swap 10 am   Valparaiso Library   Valparaiso	12 Cookbook Club 11 am   Valparaiso Library   Valparaiso
03-04	E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center Summer Public Hours 9 am   E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center   Freeport	14-18 Youth Camp Training: NRA Basics of Pistol Shooting 10 am   EC Indoor Shooting & Sport   Valparaiso
04	4th of July Parade 4 pm   Freeport  4th of July Sunset, Dinner, & Fireworks Cruise 6 pm   SunQuest Cruises   Miramar Beach  Sinfonia Gulf Coast Seaside Pops! 7 pm   Seaside  Fireworks 8:30 pm   Freeport Regional Sports Complex   Freeport  Boggy Bayou Fireworks 8:45 pm   Lion's Park, Landing, Kiwanis Park   Niceville	15 The Traveling Painter 5:30 pm   LJ Schooners Restaurant   Niceville
05	Florida Concealed Carry Weapons Class 10 am   EC Indoor Shooting & Sport   Valparaiso  Live Music: Shenanigans 6 pm   3rd Planet Brewing Co.   Niceville	16 Family Movie: Paddington in Peru 2 pm   Niceville Library   Niceville
06	Live Music: Bluegrass Jam 12 pm   3rd Planet Brewing Co.   Niceville  Women's Climbing Circle 5 pm   Rock Out Climbing Gym   Destin	17 Puzzle Swap 10 am   Niceville Library   Niceville  Greater FWB Chamber Business After Hours 5:30 pm   Big Gues Tractor & Equipment   Mary Esther
08	Sticker Mosaics 10 am   Valparaiso Library   Valparaiso  Chess Night 6 pm   LJ Schooners Restaurant   Niceville	17-18 E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center Summer Public Hours 9 am   E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center   Freeport
09	Niceville Valparaiso Chamber Second Wednesday Breakfast 7:15 am   Niceville Community Center   Niceville	19 Florida Concealed Carry Weapons Class 10 am   EC Indoor Shooting & Sport   Valparaiso  Community Health Fair 10 am - 4 pm   Am. Legion Post 296   Destin
10	Emerald Coast Science Center at the Library 2 pm   Valparaiso Library   Valparaiso	21 Adult Paint Like an Artist hosted by The Traveling Painter 6 pm   3rd Planet Brewing Co.   Niceville
10-11	E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center Summer Public Hours 9 am   E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center   Freeport	21-25 Youth Camp Training: NRA Basics of Rifle Shooting 10 am   EC Indoor Shooting & Sport   Valparaiso
11	Greater FWB Chamber First Friday Coffee 7 am   Christian Life Center at FBC   FWB	22 Tropical Design Class 9 am   Katie's House of Flowers & Gifts   Niceville  Free Community Shred-it Event 10 am   Niceville Recreation Complex   Niceville
		23 Lunch N Learn - Brand Smart: Tools, Trust, & Online Tactics 11:30 am   Greater FWB Chamber   FWB  Sand Art 3 pm   Valparaiso Library   Valparaiso
		24 Pittman Magic, Juggling, & Comedy 11 am   Niceville Library   Niceville
		24-25 E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center Summer Public Hours 9 am   E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center   Freeport
		25 Safe Within: Free Somatic Yoga for Women 5 pm   Yoga by You Studio   Niceville  Card Making Class 5 pm   Salt & Story   Niceville  5th Annual Niceville Sunset Stampede 5K 7:30 pm   Northwest Florida State College   Niceville
		27 Sunset Shrimp Boil 4 pm   LJ Schooners Restaurant   Niceville
		31 Scavenger Hunt at the Park 10 am   Valparaiso Library   Valparaiso

ONGOING EVENTS

Summer Lawn Games in Grand Park  
5 pm | Daily | Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach  
Free Pirate Show  
5 pm | Mon | Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar | FWB  
Oils and Acrylics with Rosalyn O'Grady  
10 am | Tues | Artful Things | Niceville  
Watercolor Techniques with Theresia McInnis  
1 pm | Tues | Artful Things | Niceville  
Movies on the Beach  
7:30 pm | Tues | Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar | FWB  
Bayou Pub Trivia Nights  
7 pm | Wed | Bayou Pub | Niceville  
Okaloosa Island Fireworks on the Beach  
9 pm | Wed | The Boardwalk | FWB  
Luau Beach Party  
5:30 pm | Thurs | Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar | FWB  
Sounds of the Summer! Live!  
7:30 pm | Thurs | Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach  
One Stroke Painting (Lvl 2) with Sheila Mahony  
10:30 am | 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



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# Preventing the Summer Slide: Favorite Summer Learning Must-Haves to Prevent Brain Drain

Without school routines, kids can experience a “summer slide” where they forget some of what they’ve learned — especially in math. The good news? Math learning during summer doesn’t have to feel like schoolwork.

These travel-friendly brain games are fun, compact and packed with plenty of critical thinking and math practice. Whether you’re road-tripping, waiting for a flight or enjoying a lazy afternoon, these games will keep kids engaged and learning.

## 5 Brain-Boosting Games to Keep Kids Sharp During Summer

If you’re looking for easy ways to incorporate some math practice this summer, these five brain-boosting games are just the thing.

They’re screen-free, fun and designed to help kids build problem-solving, strategy, logic and number sense skills — all while keeping those summer smiles going strong.

### Möbi

**Recommended Age: 8+**

**Skills:** Mental math, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division

Möbi is a fast-paced, tile-based math game that’s a bit like Scrabble — but with numbers! Kids race to create math equations using addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. It’s great for building number sense



and quick-thinking skills.

**Bonus:** It comes in a cute whale-shaped pouch — perfect for tossing into a beach bag or backpack.

### Kanoodle

**Recommended Age: 7+**



**Skills:** Spatial reasoning, logic, problem-solving

Got a puzzle lover in the house? Kanoodle is their perfect match. With over 200 brain-bending challenges, kids use colorful pieces to build everything from flat designs to 3D pyramids. It’s pocket-sized, portable, and guaranteed to keep little minds engaged anywhere — from car rides to quiet time under a shady tree.

**Bonus:** There are several versions to keep it fresh, in-

cluding Kanoodle Genius and Kanoodle Extreme.

### Stellö

**Recommended Age: 5+**



**Skills:** Pattern recognition, strategic thinking

Stellö — a colorful pattern-building game that sharpens logic and spatial reasoning. Players match tiles based on shapes and colors, kind of like dominoes with a creative twist. It’s perfect for developing critical thinking — and it’s just as fun for grown-ups, too!

**Bonus:** Stellö can be played anywhere as it comes with a bag for easy travel.

### Proof!

**Recommended Age: 9+**



**Skills:** Mental math, operations, speed

Ready, set, solve! Proof! is a

lightning-fast card game where players race to solve math equations using addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, and square roots. It’s like a math scavenger hunt that builds mental math fluency — perfect for competitive kids who love a challenge.

### Math Dice

**Recommended Age: 6+**



**Skills:** Mental math, operations, flexible thinking

Roll the dice and let the brain games begin! In Math Dice, players roll a pair of target dice, then combine the results of three scoring dice using addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, and powers to hit the target number before the other players. It’s part math, part strategy, and 100% engaging.

**Bonus:** It packs up small for on-the-go learning — perfect for a road trip or a day at the pool. Math Dice Jr. is also available for younger learners using only addition and subtraction.

## Preventing the Summer Slide

Research shows that consistent mental stimulation over the summer helps prevent the “summer slide,” especially in math. These games don’t just reinforce school skills — they encourage kids to problem-solve, reason logically, and think creatively. Even 10 - 15 minutes a day can make a big difference.

**On-the-Go Learning Tip:** Pack a small “brain games” bag for the car or your summer travels, including dry-erase markers, dice, a mini notebook, and one or two of these games. Your kids might even start choosing math over screens — voluntarily!

And for even more enrichment, consider adding a structured learning program to the mix. Mathnasium Niceville’s Summer Program offers engaging, flexible and distraction-free learning to help students get ahead for the upcoming school year.

Come see us at Mathnasium Niceville or visit <https://www.mathnasium.com/math-centers/niceville> to see how we can help your child succeed. To schedule a free assessment, call (850) 987-6284 or email [niceville@mathnasium.com](mailto:niceville@mathnasium.com).

*Disclaimer: Mathnasium does not endorse or sponsor any products or retailers listed in this summer math games guide.*

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- Kids can start the new school year with confidence



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## Brozinni Pizzeria

Brozinni Pizzeria's family-friendly pizza place offers you a taste of New York right here in Niceville. Featuring the Big Apple's signature crust, its famous buttery garlic knuckles will leave you wanting more, including appetizers such as bread sticks, homemade stuffed pepperoni or sausage sticks, cheese bread, meatball sticks, pizza, Cocoon's 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](http://bronzinnis.revelup.online) and have your mouth-watering fare delivered! (850) 678-7778  
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## 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-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 Spring!  
Hours 7:30 a.m.-2 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday.  
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Continued on next page

## SUMMER CAMP

\$85 for Non-Members  
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**July 14th**  
Learning about the native plants and Butterflies

**July 15th**  
UWF Panhandle Archaeology

**July 16th**  
Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance (CBA) Local Creek Critters and Boggy Buddies

**July 17th**  
Reptiles and Amphibians Jackson Guard

**July 18th**  
Boggy History ICE CREAM SOCIAL

## JOIN NOW!

Call us at 850-678-2615 to reserve your spot today. Spots are limited!

**July 14-18 Ages Grades 3rd-6th 10am-1pm**  
Snacks and Water are provided, but a Lunch must be provided by parents

## FUBAR Pizza Bar

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

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

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

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### Weekly Specials

**Monday:** One 20" Specialty Pizza \$21.99  
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**Wednesday:** Family Size Chicken, Alfredo or Spaghetti & Meatballs, Family Salad, 6 Breadsticks, 2l/Gal Tea \$40  
**Thursday:** Buy One Pizza, Get Another 1/2 Price  
**Friday:** Two 16" 1 Topping Pizzas \$29.99  
**Saturday:** Family Night XI 20" Pepperoni, 1/2 Cheese Bread, 6 Wings, Tea/2l \$40

### JULY SLICE SPECIALS

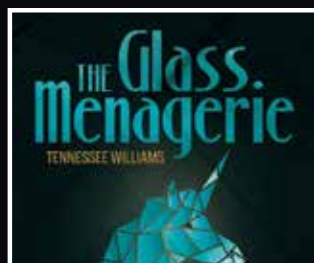
Slice **\$5.99**  
Slice + drink **\$8.99**  
Slice + drink + salad + bread stick **\$10.50**  
Slice + drink + wings + bread stick **\$14.99**  
2 slices + drink **\$13.99**

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

Season 13 is Coming!



Sept. 18 - Oct. 12



Oct. 23 - Nov. 2



Nov. 28 - Dec. 31



More Info and Tickets:  
[www.emeraldcoasttheatre.org](http://www.emeraldcoasttheatre.org)

## DINING

continued from previous page

## LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant

Suds, Songs and Romantic Sunsets! Welcome to LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant at the Bluewater Bay Marina Complex. Named after "LJ Schooner" (the LJ is for Lazy Jack), a cherished four-legged icon on Bluewater Bay Marina docks, the open-air oyster bar and restaurant offers a magnificent view of the water, marina and unparalleled sunset



any time of year. There are, of course, oysters and a delicious

varied menu with dinner specials such as blackened mahi and

grilled shrimp with hollandaise, served over cheese grits.

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

Tuesdays: Tacos & \$5 House Margaritas

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

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

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

Sunday, July 27: Sunset Shrimp Boil 4-7 p.m. Live music 4-8 p.m. Shrimp, Sausage, Corn on the Cob, Potatoes, Bread

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

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

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290 Yacht Club Dr., Unit 200

Niceville in Bluewater Bay

## Bay Buzz

## Niceville Biology Instructor Wins Statewide Charter School Award



Sean Gordon, a biology instructor at Collegiate High School in Niceville, has been named a 2025 Charter School Champion of the Year by the Florida Consortium of Public Charter Schools (FCPCS). Gordon is one of only nine educators across Florida to earn this distinction for the 2024-25 school year.

"Champion" teachers are recognized for inspiring high achievement and serving as role models within their charter schools. "Each of the winners helps deliver quality education

to Florida's charter school students," said FCPCS President Robert Haag. "They are important contributors to Florida's hugely successful charter school movement."

## Okaloosa Students Raise Over \$9,600 to Support Children in Crisis

Students across Okaloosa County recently demonstrated the power of compassion and community by raising more than \$9,600 for the 2024-2025 Change for Children Campaign. The student-led initiative, held each year from September through May, benefits Children in Crisis, Inc., a non-profit organization that provides emergency shelter, food and care for local children removed from unsafe home situations.

The Okaloosa County School Board formally recognized participating schools, students and sponsors at its May 27 meeting, commending their commitment to service and leadership. Funds raised go directly to The Children's Neighborhood, a safe

haven that offers stability and support to children in need.

Each participating school brought creativity and heart to their fundraising efforts, with top honors awarded in multiple categories for their contributions to this vital cause.

"This campaign is about more than raising money—it's about teaching compassion, community and the power of service," said Superintendent Marcus Chambers. Supporting Children in Crisis is one way we can help make sure every child in Okaloosa has the opportunity to feel safe, cared for and valued."

## 2024-2025 Winners:

Middle School Division: Ruckel Middle School, Total Raised: \$3000

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Continued on page 31



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**July 13:** Brianna Steele 4-8pm  
**July 15:** The Traveling Painter 5:30pm  
**July 18:** Below Alabama 6-10pm  
**July 19:** LUAU/Tacky Tourist Party with Rockers 4 Life 6-10pm  
**July 25:** Jody Lucas 6-9pm  
**July 26:** Niceville Valparaiso Rotary Club SUP Poker Run 10am, The Remedy 6-10pm  
**July 27:** Shrimp Boil 4-7pm, Parker & Ivoree Willingham 4-8pm

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# Bringing a Swift Creek Dream Kitchen to Life with Apex Customized Detail

BY CHUCK HALL

Apex Design Center showcases, yet again, their exemplary work in redesigning and remodeling kitchens with this incredible custom kitchen renovation in Swift Creek.

The company’s semi-custom solutions blend personalization, functionality and aesthetics while emphasizing Apex’s core commitment to ensuring that each client’s home reflects their personal preferences and lifestyle as well as their functional needs.

This Swift Creek kitchen remodel highlights the seamless integration of the homeowner’s new appliances with custom built-ins to maximize space, storage and overall functionality. The Apex team expertly crafted made-to-measure cabinetry and built-ins that flawlessly fit around the range, oven and wine cooler. The remodel also features a

semi-custom-made wine rack, as well as countertops and back-splashes that create perfect harmony within the space.

Apex worked closely with the homeowner in choosing the right colors for their kitchen. The result is a polished, cohesive and uncluttered aesthetic that indulges their love of wine and delivers smart efficiency.

Throughout the remodel, Apex’s team prioritized the homeowner’s personal style, selecting materials and finishes based on their reference photos and requests.

From first contact to thoughtful planning and final installation, Apex always strives to provide a smooth and enjoyable remodeling journey. With a licensed and insured team, Apex clients can feel confident knowing their home is in the hands of skilled professionals committed to precision and care.

Kitchen remodeling is one of the Niceville-based company’s most requested services. Whether it’s a modern and open-concept space or a cozy and traditional kitchen with rich finishes, Apex will bring your vision to life!

Some of Apex’s most popular kitchen remodel features include:

- Custom built-ins that integrate specific appliances or awkward spaces.
- Made-to-measure cabinetry that maximizes storage and also matches each client’s unique style.
- Optimized layouts for efficient workflow and functionality.
- Elegant countertops, back-splashes, and hardware that deliver a harmonious and polished aesthetic.
- Integrated lighting for warmth and clarity.

Apex’s custom cabinetry ser-

vices are designed to fully utilize every square inch of kitchen space, with the smart addition of hidden pull-outs, built-in spice racks, cutting boards, trash bins, vertical storage options and more. The company offers thoughtful solutions to any problem — whether it’s fitting around unusual appliances, creating specialized drawers for utensils or crafting cabinetry that complements existing architecture.

Homeowners can rest assured that they’ll have a kitchen that is both practical and inviting. Apex’s semi-custom design and remodel services take storage and functionality to the next level while keeping aesthetics front and center.

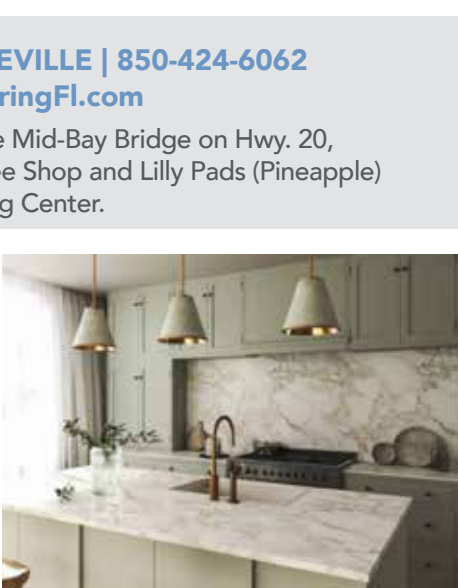
Tying it all together is the client’s personal style. The Apex team works side by side with their clients to align every choice — materials, hardware, paint

colors and lighting — with their lifestyle and preferred aesthetic.

Do you need help building your dream kitchen? Explore Apex Design Center’s full suite of design and remodeling services. Whatever the size of your project — whether you want to replace countertops, cabinets or undertake a full kitchen remodel — the Apex team is committed to helping homeowners create a space that is organized, welcoming and uniquely theirs.

Start your remodeling journey today with a FREE home consultation! Contact Apex at 850-424-6062 or [manager@apexhomedesign.com](mailto:manager@apexhomedesign.com). You can also visit the showroom, located at 4641 E HWY 20, Niceville. Apex Design Center services Niceville, Destin, Fort Walton Beach and nearby areas.

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# Give Your Sunroom a Facelift with These Bright Ideas



BY STACY SARIKANON, STUNNING SPACES - DECORATING DEN INTERIORS

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

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

## Choose Functionality Over Fashion

The first step is to decide how you plan to use the sunroom. Do you want it to be an inviting place where people want to gather, serving as a central spot that connects the backyard and the

rest of the house? Or would you rather have this sunny room be an isolated sanctuary where you can escape from reality for a few hours? Or do you have something else in mind for the space, a home office maybe?

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

## Start with the Obvious

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

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

## Dress those Windows

Yes, you want an open look. But dressing up those windows

can add color, create privacy, and add a homey touch.

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

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

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



gold hardware for a whimsical enchanting combination.

## Comfort. Comfort. Comfort.

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

work for most spaces.

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

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



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# Hurricane Season Is Here—Are You Prepared?

## Essential Tips for Homeowners

BY BYRON TOUPS

As hurricane season approaches, it's more important than ever to ensure your family and home are ready for whatever Mother Nature may bring. Storms can be unpredictable, but with the right preparation and knowledge, you can minimize risks and protect what matters most. Here's a comprehensive guide to help you get started.

### 1. Plan Ahead: Your Family's Safety Comes First

- Create an Emergency Plan. Start by sitting down with your family to discuss what to do in case of a hurricane. Make sure everyone knows the emergency contacts, including fire, police, family, neighbors, friends, tree services, utility companies, and your insurance agent.

- Develop a Communication Strategy. Choose someone outside the danger zone as your central contact. Use text messages during the storm, as they often work even when calls don't. If all else fails, communicate through social media.

- Decide on Meeting Locations. Pick safe spots both inside and outside your neighborhood where you can meet if you get separated or if an evacuation order is issued.

- Prepare an Emergency Supply Kit. Stock up on essentials like water, non-perishable food, medications, flashlights, batteries, and first aid supplies. Plan for at least three days' worth of supplies.

- Practice Your Plan. Run through your emergency plan with your family so everyone knows what to do and where to go.

### 2. Stay Informed: Knowledge Is Power

- Set Up Multiple Alert Systems. Don't rely on just one source for weather updates. Purchase a NOAA weather radio (preferably with a hand crank), enable wireless emergency alerts on your cell phone, and follow reliable weather apps or websites.

- Monitor Updates Regularly. Keep an eye on forecasts from the National Hurricane Center and your local National Weather Service office. Follow them on social media for real-time updates.

- Know Your Location. Familiarize yourself with your county and location on a map. This will help you understand evacuation routes and local warnings.

### 3. Review Insurance and Document Belongings.

- Check Your Insurance Coverage. Review your homeowner's insurance policy to understand what is and isn't covered. Keep your insurance agent's contact information in your phone and in a safe, accessible place offsite.

- Create a Home Inventory. Use your cell phone to video each room of your house, including the contents of cabinets and closets. Make a detailed list of your belongings and store the video and list in the cloud for safekeeping.

- Why It Matters. A thorough home inventory can speed up the claims process and ensure you receive fair compensation if your home is damaged.

### 4. Inspect and Repair Your Roof.

- Hire a Licensed Professional. Have your roof inspected by a trusted and licensed roofing company. They will check for damaged or loose shingles, tiles, or panels, as well as issues with vents, skylights, and chimneys.

- Look for Warning Signs. Pay attention to curling, loose, missing, or torn shingles; cracked or unattached tiles; dents, loose screws, or rust on metal panels; and leaks around vents, skylights, and chimneys.

- Address Problems Promptly. Repairing minor issues now can prevent major damage during a storm.

### 5. Secure Soffits

- Use Stainless Steel Screws. Attach soffit material securely to the fascia and channels using stainless steel screws.

- Apply Sealant. Use polyurethane sealant over the screws and allow it to dry for 72 hours. This extra step helps protect your home from wind and water damage.

### Why Choose a Fortified Roof? The Gold Standard in Storm Protection

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### The Science Behind Fortified Roofs: Proven Results

Recent research highlights the effectiveness of Fortified construction:

A groundbreaking study by the Center for Risk and Insurance Research (CRIR) at the University of Alabama examined over 40,000 properties affected by Hurricane Sally. The findings are clear: homes built to the IBHS FORTIFIED standard were 70% less likely to have an insurance claim compared to traditional construction.

Peer-reviewed and real-world tested, the study confirmed that FORTIFIED homes suffered significantly less damage and required fewer insurance claims. When a claim was filed on a FORTIFIED home, the average damage was 22% less severe

than on a standard home.

The financial impact is equally impressive. The report estimates that if every affected home had been built to the FORTIFIED Roof standard, total damage would have been reduced by more than \$147 million—saving homeowners \$42 million and insurers \$105.6 million in losses.

Even more compelling: Homes with a FORTIFIED Roof designation outperformed homes roofed to building codes with very similar requirements by nearly 40%. This demonstrates the importance of the program's rigorous documentation and review process, en-

*Continued on page 21*



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 Off the Hook

# Romeo Joins Rescued Manatees Lil Joe and Inigo

Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park has welcomed a special new resident: Romeo, the oldest known manatee at over 70 years old, is now calling Manatee Cove home.

Romeo's arrival is part of a statewide conservation effort led by the Manatee Rescue & Rehabilitation Partnership (MRP), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. After receiving over a year of critical care at Zoo Tampa's Manatee Critical Care Center, Romeo was deemed non-releasable due to his long history in managed care. Gulfarium was chosen for his permanent placement thanks

to its specialized facilities and experienced animal care team. His placement at our Gulfarium enables acute care centers in other areas, central Florida, for example, to remain available for manatees in need of urgent rescue and rehabilitation.

"Helping to create space at critical care centers while giving permanent homes to conditionally non-releasable manatees is a vital part of the MRP's work, and we're honored to play a role in that mission," said Patrick Berry, CEO of Gulfarium. "Our dedicated animal care team is excited to provide Romeo with the support and enrichment he deserves."



Romeo now joins rescued manatees Lil Joe and Inigo in the 300,000-gallon Manatee Cove habitat, where he can

thrive in a safe, enriching environment. Opened earlier this year, Manatee Cove features underwater and above-ground viewing areas, allowing guests to connect with these gentle giants while learning about manatee conservation.

Florida's manatees face on-

going threats from boat strikes, red tide, habitat loss and more. Romeo's story highlights the importance of coordinated care and public education in protecting this beloved species.

Visit Romeo daily at the Gulfarium. Learn more at [www.gulfarium.com](http://www.gulfarium.com).



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- When you look through magazines, do you envy the models' smiles?
- Do you wish your teeth were whiter?
- Do you think you show too much or too little of your teeth when you smile?
- Would you like to change the way your teeth or gums are shaped?
- Do you have gaps or spaces in between your teeth?

If the answer is "yes" to any of these questions, you may be a good candidate for **A Smile Makeover**.



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# CBA's "State of the Basin": How Oyster Gardening Is Reviving Choctawhatchee Bay

By Allison McDowell, CBA

Along the shores of Choctawhatchee Bay, a quiet but powerful movement is taking place – one oyster at a time. Families, retirees, and students are rolling up their sleeves to take part in a unique conservation effort led by the Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance (CBA). Their mission? To rebuild the bay's critical oyster reefs through an innovative and community-driven initiative: the Oyster Gardening program.

Now entering its 2025 season, this hands-on program invites local volunteers to help restore the bay's ecosystem by growing young oysters at their homes or designated dock locations. It's a project where science meets stewardship, turning



everyday citizens into environmental champions.

## A Simple Solution with a Big Impact

Each oyster grown through the program can filter up to 50 gallons of water daily, making them natural purifiers for Choctawhatchee Bay. Beyond water quality, these tiny powerhouses also create habitat for fish and crabs and help stabilize shorelines.

The program has supported habitat restoration efforts at multiple sites around the bay, an impressive achievement that's benefiting marine life and bolstering the overall health of the ecosystem. It's a grassroots effort with ripple effects far beyond the shoreline.

## Science Comes to Life

One of the most inspiring aspects of the Oyster Gardening program is its educational val-

ue. Whether it's a retiree tracking oyster growth or a middle schooler observing changes in the water, participants are engaged in real-world marine science. The program transforms conservation into a fun, local, and impactful experience, nurturing the next generation of environmental stewards in the process.

## Get Involved

With the 2025 season underway, CBA is calling on new volunteers to help make waves. No experience is needed, just a love for the water and a willingness to learn.

For more information or to get involved, visit [www.basinalliance.org](http://www.basinalliance.org) or email [reynol59@nwfsc.edu](mailto:reynol59@nwfsc.edu).

## HURRICANE

*continued from page 19*

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# Golf Series: The Emerald Coast Golf Tour Rolls On!

By BARBARA PALMGREN

Summer is here and golfers are teeing up their shots and hoping for a hole-in-one, a low round, a 50-ft. putt and/or all

the bragging rights that can be shared on the 19th hole. If you are a low handicap golfer and dreaming of making it to the Korn Ferry Tour and ultimately

to the PGA tour, you begin with winning on tours such as the Emerald Coast Golf Tour.

For most of these tournaments, the three-day event

begins with a Pro-Am tournament on the first day followed by tournament play for the next two days. June 4-6, 2025, found golf hopefuls at Shalimar Pointe Golf Course. On July 15-17, they will enter another tournament at Kelly Plantation followed by competition in August at Aroostook Golf Course in Montgomery, Ala., and Quail Hollow Golf Club in McComb, Miss.

The Emerald Coast Golf Tour is owned and directed by Geno Celano from Destin who organized these tournaments over 30 years ago. A professional golfer, Geno knew that competition like this needs to be offered in the Panhandle area and nearby states.

The winning team during the first day of the Pro-Am competition was the team of Jacob Hill, Chris Iron, John Sykes and Joe Frye. They posted a -6 score to leave with bragging rights. In this event with a four-person team, where the top two scores for each team were entered for scoring.

The next two days, the game



got even more serious at this challenging golf course. Players from as far as Canada and Tennessee were focused on winning first place and a large pay-out. At the end of a very warm two-day grind, the top three players emerged victorious:

• **1st Place:** Mitchell Bowen from Tennessee with a score of 229 (+4)

• **2nd Place:** Gary Glassman from Alabama with a score of 221 (+5)

• **3rd Place:** Marco Trstenjak from Winnipeg Canada with a score of 225 (+9)

Congratulations, gentlemen! Hunting low scores is a lure that continues to draw players to competition with other golfers and the golf course itself.

## DePaul, Drake, Georgia Tech, LSU Headline Emerald Coast Classic

The 2025 Emerald Coast Classic basketball tournament, presented by Global Sports, will be played Thanksgiving weekend Nov. 28-29 at Raider Arena on the campus of Northwest Florida State College.

DePaul will face Georgia Tech in a semifinal round game at 6 p.m. central time on Friday, Nov. 28, while Drake will play LSU at 8:30 p.m. The third-place game will be played at 3 p.m. on Saturday Nov. 29 with the championship game scheduled for 6 p.m. that Saturday.

Both of the semifinal round games as well as the championship game will be televised on CBS Sports Network.

LSU will be making its second appearance in the Emerald Coast Classic, claiming the 2021 title after beating Wake Forest, 75-61, in the championship. Matt McMahon enters his fourth year as head coach welcoming an incoming transfer class that is ranked No. 16 by 247sports.

Drake is coming off a school-record 31-4 mark, sweeping the Missouri Valley Conference regular season and tournament titles along with a trip to the second round of the 2025 NCAA Tournament. Eric Henderson was named the school's 31st head coach March 28.

Georgia Tech, under third-year coach Damon

Stoudamire, posted a 17-17 record last season, advancing to the National Invitational Tournament.

In his inaugural year as head coach Chris Holtmann guided DePaul to the first round of the 2025 College Basketball Crown, marking the school's first appearance in the postseason tournament since the 2018-19 season. Holtmann led Ohio State to the 2023 Emerald Coast Classic championship.

Global Sports has produced 57 multi-team college basketball tournaments since 2007. Tickets will go on sale for the tournament later this summer. For more information visit, [www.emeraldcoastclassic.com](http://www.emeraldcoastclassic.com).

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# 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

experience come to life. I am so grateful for the level of knowledge and talent here on the D1 Niceville team led by General Manager Dennis Ealy and Head Coach Cotten who will positively impact every adult and youth athlete that comes through the doors."

D1 Training offers four 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-on-one 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

ues to bring the D1 Training vision to life, and we know Steven will do just that in Niceville and

out on. D1 is a one-of-a-kind 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 val-

its surrounding communities."

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

For more information, visit <https://www.d1training.com/niceville/> or call (850) 605-8431.

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## Wellness

# A Position of Strength: Why Health and Fitness Are the Ultimate Signs of Strength in Leadership



BY KASSIA GARFIELD

In today's fast-paced, high-pressure world, leadership is often associated with intellect, strategy and vision. But one of the most underappreciated – yet incredibly powerful – ways a leader can demonstrate strength is by promoting health and embodying fitness. Being physically and mentally healthy doesn't just benefit the individual; it sets the tone for an entire organization or team. When leaders prioritize wellness, they send a clear, lasting message: strength starts from within. Prioritizing wellness is not just sending out emails about health, stretching during the workday or trying to start step count competitions. It is allowing your staff to be healthy DURING the day. This means 2-3 hours a week of time during the day to walk, work

out or go to a fitness class. This is putting the money where the priority is. As a company, showing and demonstrating health, is just as important as allowing staff to be healthy.

## Health is the Foundation of Performance.

Leadership requires stamina – not just mental, but physical. Long hours, tough decisions and high-stakes situations demand resilience, and that resilience is rooted in physical well-being. A healthy leader can show up consistently, think clearly under pressure and maintain energy throughout the day. It's not about having a six-pack or running marathons (though that's impressive); it's about having the capacity to lead with clarity, focus and presence.

When leaders take care of their bodies – through regular exercise, proper nutrition, and rest – they perform better. They're more alert in meetings, more composed during crises and more able to handle the emotional weight of leadership. That kind of endurance communicates true strength, not just in words, but in action. This is setting the example, but if a more focused and healthier

work force increases productivity, job satisfaction and workforce retention, creating the time during the day for your employees really shows that dedication and investment in their health just as much as your own.

## Actions Speak Louder than Words.

People follow what leaders do, not just what they say. If you want a culture of well-being, you must live it. Leaders who prioritize their health inspire others to do the same. It's easy to tell a team to manage stress less or to take care of themselves, but when employees see their leader hitting the gym, taking walking meetings or setting boundaries for work-life balance, it becomes part of the culture.

Healthy leaders also tend to create healthier workplaces. They encourage work environments that don't glorify burnout. They model balance and productivity, showing that it's possible to succeed without sacrificing personal well-being. This, in turn, increases team morale, engagement and retention.

## Fitness Fuels Discipline and Confidence.

One of the core traits of ef-

fective leadership is discipline. Fitness builds that. Whether it's committing to a daily workout, waking up early to train or pushing through discomfort during a tough session, those habits translate directly into professional leadership. They demonstrate commitment, follow-through, and perseverance – qualities any great leader needs.

Plus, there's a psychological edge to being in shape. A fit leader often walks into the room with more confidence, not just because of how they look, but because they know they've earned that strength. That quiet confidence is contagious. It radiates competence, self-control and presence – qualities that followers respect and gravitate toward.

## Strong Position: Strong Leaders are Healthy Leaders.

Leadership isn't just about making the right calls – it's about inspiring others to bring their best selves to the table. A

healthy leader sets the example, creating a ripple effect that influences team culture, energy and productivity. Fitness is more than a personal goal; it's a leadership tool. And leadership can look different in the work place than just being a CEO, a manager or a supervisor. Leadership is helping your friend, training a new employee, understanding what a coworker needs without asking for it. So, even if you are not in a formal position of leadership, that doesn't mean people do not see the strength in people around them. One never knows who they might inspire. In a world that needs more strength, clarity and resilience, the healthiest leaders will always stand out. They don't just talk about strength – they live it.

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BY KAY LEAMAN, HEALTHYDAY  
HEALTHYLIFE

I have to admit upfront that I found myself wading through science when I jumped down the rabbit hole. Electromagnetic Fields are a part of modern life. But, that doesn't mean we should accept their potential risks without question. By understanding them and how they affect our bodies, we can take steps to minimize our exposure thus improving our health.

EM spectrum, EM waves, EM induction, EM energy, EM radiation (EMR), EM field, EM pulse and EM force are all parts of this field of study. We will be focusing on EM Spectrum (Classified electromagnetic waves on the basis of frequency or wave length). There are seven bands: Gamma Rays discovered in 1896, X-Rays discovered in 1895, Ultra Violet Rays discovered in 1801, Visible Rays (visible by people and contains seven colors), Infra-Red Waves produced by hot bodies or by excitation of atoms and molecules, Micro-Waves are oscillating electrons in a cavity or by special vacuum tubes and Radio-Waves which are the longest to all waves produced by oscillating charge in the circuit.

### Fun Facts:

EMR can travel through empty space.

Not all forms of EMR are harmful.

EMR, other than visible light, can be used to view an object. For example, bees use ultraviolet waves to help them see patterns on flowers.

We use EMF waves for seeing, talking (light) on phones and watching tv (radio waves), cooking (micro waves), staying warm (infrared) and getting sunlight (ultraviolet). Our lives are improved through new technology and health care. All EMFs transfer energy. When the energy is absorbed by matter, it is convert-

ed into heat which causes the particles to vibrate more rapidly. This is important, because all life, including humans, have different vibration levels, and when we interact with these invisible waves, there can be changes.

High energy radiation includes x-rays, gamma rays and some higher energy ultraviolet (UV) rays. This is called ionizing radiation, meaning this energy can affect cells on the atomic level by removing an electron from an atom, or ionizing it. Ionizing radiation can damage the body's DNA and cells which may contribute to genetic mutations such as cancer.

Low energy frequency (ELF) radiation is non-ionizing radiation. It can move atoms around in the body or make them vibrate. But, most researchers agree that it's not enough to damage our DNA or cells. These frequencies include phones, smart meters, tablets, laptops and computers. It also includes radios, TV signals, radar, satellite stations and MRI machines. Note that non-ionizing EMFs in the radio frequency range, noted as Group B's, have the possibility to become a human carcinogen. This group includes cell phones, smart devices, tablets, etc.

When reading the above paragraph, you'll note the conflict in statements. That is because the danger is in the length of time the device is in close proximity to the body. People wear their phones, lap their laptops or hold their tablets, etc. Research has links to glioma, a malignant type of brain cancer, increased risk of acute myeloid leukemia (AML) in adults and a 1.5 - 5% of childhood leukemia can be attributed to ELF EMFs.

In our homes we have televisions, wifi, routers, devices such as Apple TV, appliances, lighting, etc. Did you know that even when our lamps are off they still emit ELFs, that can be measured by a meter?

So, what can we do about it?

Workstations: Use wired internet connections vs. bluetooth. Keep routers and other EMF sources as far away as possible. Opt for incandescent or LED lights vs. fluorescent lighting which can emit harmful frequency waves.

Auto EMFs, a driving concern: Turn off bluetooth and WIFI when it's not needed. You

can also disable this feature from your car's settings. Avoid using in-car entertainment systems for long periods of time. If you drive an electric car, consider getting a seat cover that blocks the EMFs coming from the battery you are sitting on.

## Smart use of smart phones

and tablets: Use the speakerphone or wired headsets to keep the phone away from your head. Use a bag or purse instead of pockets to carry your phone. Switch your device to airplane mode when not in use, especially when you sleep. Cut down exposure by downloading content

such as books, music and videos while on airplane mode.

Be aware of EMF sources in our environment and understand the symptoms of EMF sensitivity.

Make simple adjustments by

*Continued on page 26*

# The Impact of EMF Radiation

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A square QR code located in the bottom right corner of the advertisement, which likely links to the clinic's website.

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Wellness



By STEPHENIE CRAIG

Are you overscheduled? Perhaps you're rushing, exhausted and regretting your full calendar. Maybe commitments are positive like kid activities, time with friends, volunteer work, a celebration. However, when those events become the reality of your week and month, you want more time to just be with people, to be with yourself, to slow down and be present in the moment.

Saying too many yeses is tempting with many options and cultural encouragement to be involved or be left behind. Saying yes feels good and comes from a genuine place, but excessive yeses create feelings of regret and resentment regarding your time. Excessive yeses are a result of poor boundaries, guilt, fear of disappointing others, fear of being judged by others, obligation, proving your worth, fear of missing out, trying to earn approval, and attempting to keep yourself and others from experiencing uncomfortable feelings.

While saying no is healthy, it can be scary and hard. Saying no can upset people, result in missing out and creates uncomfortable feelings. However, learning to say no opens the pathway to your whole-hearted yes. Your whole-hearted yeses are com-

mitments in alignment with your deep values and purpose. You can find your whole-hearted yeses by imagining you are at your life's end reflecting back on how you spent your time. What yeses feel worthwhile? What yeses might you regret? Will you feel good about doing 10 things with exhaustion and obligation? Will you feel better about doing three things with presence, connection and meaning?

Saying no and embracing your whole-hearted yeses allows you to release overwhelming stress. Your no's allow you to embrace simple joys and be present in your life. Saying no creates space to notice the vibrant color of the sky, the squirrel in the yard, the unfiltered laugh of a child, the snuggle of a pet, the flirty smile of your significant other. Your no's create space to appreciate rest, creativity, nature, unrushed conversation and your spiritual life. No makes way for the beauty of your deep and profound yes. So, how do you begin the journey to your whole-hearted yes?

**Five Ways to Find Your Whole-Hearted Yes**

**1. Evaluate your schedule.** Look at your week/month. Notice how you feel. Are you exhausted? Do you have a sense of

dread about commitments? Are you wishing for quality time for things that matter most to you? If yes, acknowledge it's time for a change.

**2. Begin cutting long-term commitments.** Think through how many commitments you'd like to have on any week/weekend to feel balanced. Discuss with your family. Determine which current commitments are keepers based on your values and desired number of healthy commitments. Decide which commitments go. Perhaps each child has a limit on extra-curricular activities. Maybe you don't renew your membership on a board or social group. Maybe you volunteer for one very important cause instead of five moderately important causes. This won't be easy and you will likely find sacrifice is required to create more margin.

**3. Start saying no to short-term commitments.** If you have decided you want no more than two weeknight commitments and two weekend commitments, once you've used up your whole-hearted yeses, no is the answer to other opportunities. Or swap one opportunity for another so you are holding your boundary on commitments.

**4. Process your uncomfortable feelings.** You might feel guilt, fear of missing out, fear of upsetting others. These feelings are normal and you can feel them and remember your whole-hearted yes to fewer high priority commitments is worth much more in the world than your exhausted, resentful half-hearted, over-committed yes. Also, remember you are the only person who can set boundaries for yourself in the pursuit of joy and purpose.

**5. Unapologetically communicate your whole-hearted yeses and your healthy no's to others.** People who don't respect your healthy no's are not respecting your boundaries. You have no reason to be ashamed of wanting to give whole-hearted yeses. People in your life can learn to hear, "Thank you so much for the invitation. I appreciate your thoughtfulness. I won't be able to join the event due to other commitments."

Embracing your no and your whole-hearted yes can feel difficult at first. However, over time, it brings joy and flourishing to your life and relationships. Connect with us for counseling and coaching support along your journey at [Journeybravely.com](http://Journeybravely.com).

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**IMPACT OF EMF**  
*continued from page 25*

implementing practical tips like turning off WIFI at night, use wired devices when available and keep all electronics out of the bedroom.


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BY SEAN DIETRICH

“Why do we celebrate the Fourth of July?” my 6-year-old niece asked me.

We were by the swimming pool. It was the perfect afternoon. The sky was Technicolor blue. The smell of Kingsford smoke was in the air. In the distance some hapless teen with a mullet haircut was attempting to shoot a bottle rocket from a well-known orifice of his body.

At first, I wasn’t sure how to answer my niece’s question. At least not in a way she would understand.

After all, this particular American holiday is a grandiose thing. How do you describe to a 6-year-old the significance of Old Glory, Purple Mountains Majesty and the inexpressible splendor of Dale Earnhardt Sr.?

“Well, sweetie,” I said. “That’s a good question...”

But then I sort of drew a blank. Why DO we celebrate the Fourth?

I suddenly realized I know less about this American holiday than I thought I did. In fact, one could say that I don’t know Sh-nola about the Fourth of July.

And apparently I’m not alone. Because I conducted an informal study wherein I asked students in Mrs. Anderson’s Sunday school class why we celebrate this uniquely American holiday.

Here are some answers I received:

John, 11, said, “It was the French or something.”

Eilene, 9, “That’s when we won the war against Mexico. No wait. I mean China.”

Benji, 9, “Because that’s when we do the fireworks.”

Ashley, 12, “We celebrate this holiday because in 1812, we signed a Treaty of Paris, and it just became a thing.”

And my favorite answer of all comes from Landon, age 8, who answered with the utmost sincerity when he said: “It’s when Diana Ross made our flag.”

So all this got me thinking,

# Sean of the South: Fourth of July

Exactly how much do my fellow adults know about the Fourth of July? I posed the same question to grown-ups.

Pamela, 32, “Well, the Fourth of July is our nation’s literal birthday, when all those guys signed the Consitution.”

Anders, 63, said, “It’s America’s birthday. Everyone knows that. The Pilgrims and all that.”

Emily, 21, “It’s the anniversary of our nation, when the big war finally ended in Germany.”

Robert, 39, “I can’t remember which battle we won. The Revolution, maybe? All I know is that our nation is going to be 230 years old.”

So we had some work to do.

Because the Fourth of July is not the date of a famous battle. Neither does it mark the beginning of the Revolutionary War, nor the ending. The Revolutionary War started on April 19, 1775 and ended September 3, 1783.

Neither is the Fourth of July the date of the writing of the Declaration of Independence, which was written between June 11 and June 28, 1776. The Declaration wasn’t signed on July 4, either. It was signed on August 2.

Similarly, the Fourth has nothing to do with the Constitution, which was penned September 17, 1787. And no, July Fourth is not George Washing-



ton’s birthday. It is, however, the birthday of President Calvin Coolidge. Also, Geraldo Rivera.

The reason we celebrate this date is straightforward and simple.

On July 4, 1776, the 56 members of the Second Continental Congress officially adopted a document that confessed high treason against Great Britain.

It was a document the 13 colonies had been pleading for. A document that would change global history.

It was a humble manuscript, engrossed on animal skin, which took Thomas Jefferson 17 arduous days to draft. A declaration.

A document whose second paragraph reads, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all

men are created equal...”

But the reason I personally celebrate this holiday is deeper than a sheet of parchment. I don’t celebrate because we are the most powerful nation, or the most economically prosperous, or the country with the highest funded military.

I celebrate the Fourth of July for one simple reason:

Because I love you. Plain and simple.

You see, being an American means that we live in a place where you and I are equals. Not metaphorically, not philosophically, but literally. It says so on our founding document.


You matter as much as I do. This is true not only because it was written in the most beauti-

ful English prose, by a deft hand. It’s true because it’s true.


So, I celebrate because, no matter who you are, no matter what you believe, no matter where you come from, no matter which language you speak, or who you marry, or what kind of wild stuff you post on social media, you’re my brother. You’re my sister. And I love you dearly.

And even though we don’t always get along, even though we aggravate each other, you and I are on the same side. Our ancestors died proving it. And Thomas Jefferson put it in writing.

So, happy 249th birthday, America. And may God bless Diana Ross.



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BY PASTOR DOUG STAUFFER

As our nation prepares to celebrate its 250th birthday next year (1776-2026), every American should take a moment to reflect on the spiritual foundation laid by our forefathers. Their timeless words echo the eternal truths found in the Bible. These were not idle musings; they were convictions shaped by a profound reverence for God and His Holy Word.

Patrick Henry once declared, *"It cannot be emphasized too strongly or too often that this great nation was founded, not by religionists, but by Christians."* This truth resonates directly with Scripture: *"Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance"* (Psalm 33:12). The health of America has always depended upon the spiritual heartbeat of the faithful. The Bible declares, *"Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people"* (Proverbs 14:34). When Christ is central in any society, righteousness exalts that nation.

George Washington affirmed, *"It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible."* Without the guidance (the light) of Scripture, a nation loses its direction and forfeits its God-given blessings. *"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path"* (Psalm 119:105). Washington understood that leadership without God's guidance is like a ship without a rudder. The Bible provides the moral clarity and divine direction that every leader and citizen needs. America's problem today is clear: God and the Bible have been pushed out of public discourse, and efforts intensify to silence those who still unapologetically proclaim His truth.

John Adams, our second president, wrote, *"Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."* Morality without the Word of God is like building on shifting sand. The Bible says, *"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding"* (Proverbs 9:10). Laws alone cannot restrain a corrupt heart. Only hearts transformed by God's truth will consistently uphold liberty.

Noah Webster, known as the

father of American education, once said, *"The Bible is the chief moral cause of all that is good, and the best book for regulating the concerns of men."* The Bible declares, *"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness"* (2 Timothy 3:16). Webster believed the Bible was not merely informative but truly transformative. Education without the Word of God lacks the power to shape intellect and form godly character. The founders recognized these truths. And let us be reminded: Education without salvation ensures eternal damnation. Knowledge alone cannot redeem a soul—only Christ can do that. *"For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"* (Mark 8:36).

America's founding was not perfect because flawed men built it, but most of the founders were grounded in a perfect Savior. They acknowledged divine providence and sought wisdom from above. As we approach our nation's 250th anniversary, let us recommit ourselves to the faith that shaped our past and must guide our future—if it is to be bright and blessed.

Let us never forget the words



of our first President: *"The foundations of our national policy will be laid in the pure and immutable principles of private morality."* Washington's thoughts were undoubtedly rooted in Scripture. *"If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?"* (Psalm 11:3).

May we do what the righteous can do—pray, proclaim, and persevere. These United States are worth the sacrifice and

commitment. Our heritage is not only American; it is also spiritual, and America is worth saving with the help of Almighty God.

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



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# Art News

## OAA Celebrates Student Creativity at 16th Annual Poster Contest

The Okaloosa Arts Alliance (OAA) recently hosted its 16th Annual Okaloosa County School Poster Contest, themed “Arts in Outer Space,” featuring 138 imaginative entries from students across the county. A public reception was held on May 4 at the Emerald Coast Science Center to showcase the artwork and honor the winners.

Special thanks to the Science Center for hosting, Melissa Forte Litscher of NextHome Cornerstone Realty for sponsoring, and Eglin Federal Credit Union for providing gift cards. HH Arts, the Arts & Design Society, and the Science Center also donated art supplies and tickets for top winners and Viewer’s Choice recipients.

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

### Winners:

#### Elementary (K–4th)

- 1st: Christine Blatz, 1st grade – Montessori Learning Center
  - 2nd: Rachel Ard, Kindergarten – Montessori Learning Center
  - 3rd: Alexa Gonzalez, 4th grade – Kenwood Elementary
- #### Middle School (5th–8th)
- 1st: Aria Berry, 8th grade –



Rocky Bayou Christian School

- 2nd: Ahymn Kim, 6th grade – Ruckel Middle School
- 3rd: Trinity Ricciardi, 6th grade – Rocky Bayou Christian School

#### High School (9th–12th)

- 1st: Jingxuan Lee Song, 10th grade – Crestview High School
  - 2nd: Ryan Jaime, 11th grade – Crestview High School
  - 3rd: Kennedy Glenn, 12th grade – Crestview High School
- To view winning entries and photos, visit: [okaloosaarts.org](http://okaloosaarts.org).

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

## Northwest Florida Ballet Academy Registration Now Open!

Register now for the School

2025/26 season. Classes begin Aug. 4 and run through May for K-12 students, with adult classes offered year-round. Pre-School Ballet is also provided weekly for 45 minutes, Aug.-Dec and Jan.-May. All classes are taught by experienced dancers and teachers who make dance exciting and engaging. A student concert is held each May at the Mattie Kelly Arts Center. Ask about 2025 summer Pre-School Ballet classes, a camp for students K-2, and adult classes. To learn more or register online, visit [NFBallet.org/Classes.dates](http://NFBallet.org/Classes.dates), financial education or career opportunities.

## Artists Invited to Apply for 30th Annual Festival of the Arts!

The Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation (MKAF) is now accepting artist applications for the 30th Annual Festival of the Arts, set for October 25–26, 2025, at the Dugas Pavilion in Destin.

This juried show features

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

Applications, including four images, are due by June 30, 2025. Fees are \$30 to apply and \$350–\$700 for booth space. Proceeds support MKAF’s arts outreach programs. Details at [mkaf.org](http://mkaf.org) or call (850) 650-2226.



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Tickets:  
<https://mattiekellyartscenter.org/events>



July 26, 2025

7:00 PM

## Big Orange House Designs Creates July Art & Events Schedule

### Kids & Teens:

- Create Art Camp (Ages 6–12) – Tuesdays & Thursdays, 10 a.m.–2 p.m. | \$50
- Preschool Art Camp – Wednesdays, July 2, 16, 30 | 9–10:30 a.m. | \$35
- Teen Watercolor with Ashlen – July 1 & 16 | 12–2 p.m.

### Pottery & Glass:



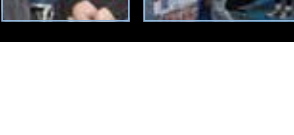
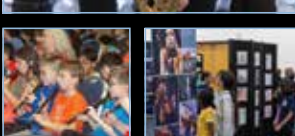


- Two-Week Pottery Class – July 2 & 9 | 10 a.m.–1 p.m. | \$100
- Glass Art Flags (Drop-In) – July 5 | 10 a.m.–2 p.m. | \$45
- Glass Art Open Studio – July 12 & 19 | 10 a.m.–2 p.m. | \$25+

### Specialty Workshops:

- Leather & Pearls Open Studio – July 5 | 11 a.m.–2 p.m. & July 19, 12–2 p.m. | \$25+
- Permanent Jewelry – July 12 | 12–2 p.m. | \$50+
- Summer Mini Cake Decorating – July 12 | 9:30–11 a.m. | \$25

### Community Events:

- Cars & Coffee – July 5, 7:30–9:30 a.m. | FREE Coffee for Drivers!
  - John Birch Meeting / Common Sense Florida – July 10 | 6 p.m. | FREE
- Sign up at [bigorangehousedesigns.com](http://bigorangehousedesigns.com).



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## Billion Dollar Investment:

One million square foot high-volume aviation gas turbine engine manufacturing facility to be constructed at Shoal River Industrial Park in Okaloosa County

The State of Florida and Williams International have announced a major capital investment expected to total more than \$1 billion in Okaloosa County—easily placing the project among the largest in the history of the Northwest Florida region. This announcement follows a comprehensive, multi-state search initiated by aerospace and aviation manufacturer Williams International in 2023.

Williams International's planned high-volume aviation gas turbine engine manufacturing facility will be constructed in three phases within the

Shoal River Industrial Park. Numerous state, regional and local partners worked together to facilitate this major economic development success story for Northwest Florida.

In 2022, Gov. Ron DeSantis awarded \$3.2 million through the Florida Job Growth Grant Fund to expand manufacturing in Okaloosa County. FloridaCommerce partnered with several state and local organizations including CareerSource Florida, Florida's Great Northwest, Space Florida, Okaloosa County and Triumph Gulf Coast on this major economic development win for Florida.

"This billion-dollar investment is a major win for the Free State of Florida and for Floridians," said Gov. DeSantis. "Williams International's investment in the Florida Panhandle will create more than 330 jobs, and is a success story of the Florida Job Growth Grant Fund in Northwest Florida."

"Under Gov. DeSantis' leadership, Florida continues to attract advanced manufacturing throughout the state—strengthening Florida's economy and creating opportunities for job seekers and job creators," said Secretary of Commerce J. Alex Kelly. "This is a win for Northwest Florida and was made possible through partnership with CareerSource Florida, Okaloosa County, One Okaloosa EDC, Space Florida and Triumph Gulf Coast—Williams International's investment in Florida will drive long-term economic growth and opportunity."

"We are very excited about starting our next phase of growth in Northwest Florida," said Gregg Williams, Chairman, President, and CEO of Williams International. "We are grateful to the Triumph board and for the strong, unified support from all of our Florida stakeholders that will enable us to create many high quality, high technology jobs producing the world's best gas turbine engines."

"This is an exciting win for Northwest Florida's growing



aviation industry sector, said Triumph Gulf Coast Chair Jay Trumbull, Sr. "Triumph is proud to continue its commitment to developing high paying jobs in the region. We are especially pleased to see this major manufacturer choose the Shoal River Industrial Park as its new home!"

"Northwest Florida is proving itself to be a rising hub for aerospace activity and an essential part of Florida's expanding aerospace ecosystem. Williams International's expansion in this community is a stellar example of how new opportunities for innovation and investment are being built in every corner of the state—reinforcing all of Florida as the global and interplanetary center for aerospace commerce," said Rob Long, president and CEO, Space Florida.

"This is a monumental project that will have a lasting impact on both Okaloosa County's economy and the entire region," said Commissioner Paul Mixon, Okaloosa County Board of County Commissioners. "We are fortunate to have been able to in-

vest in the infrastructure at Shoal River Industrial Park to attract an aerospace industry leader like Williams International, and I am thankful to One Okaloosa EDC and Florida Commerce for their hard work and support in this effort."

"Today's announcement is a true testament to the importance of preparation, partnerships and persistence. Without key partners like Gov. DeSantis, FloridaCommerce, Triumph Gulf Coast, Florida's Great Northwest and many others who consistently supported Okaloosa County's vision for Shoal River Industrial Park, our community would not be celebrating this tremendous success today," said Nathan Sparks, Executive Director, One Okaloosa EDC.

The company's first 250,000 sq. ft. facility is slated to begin construction later this year, with completion scheduled for late 2026. Subsequent facilities will be constructed in 2028, with the final 500,000 sq. ft. planned for the 2035/2036 timeframe.

Headquartered in Pontiac, Mich., Williams International is the world leader in the design, manufacturing and support of aviation gas turbine engines. In addition to its world class reputation for customer support, Williams International is also well known for establishing highly integrated and automated manufacturing facilities in the world to support high-quality, high-volume production and on-schedule delivery of its rapidly growing family of commercial and military products. Visit [www.Williams-Int.com](http://www.Williams-Int.com).



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