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# BAY Life

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## Answering the Call with Emerald Coast United

BY HEATHER BENNETT EYE

The past year for Justine and Joey Sauvageau has been one of both heartache and reward. They started their non-profit, Emerald Coast United, last year to assist with search and rescue, and disaster relief efforts along the Panhandle and in nearby states. While they've been a blessing to many, the organization was created out of personal loss.

Their close friend and diver, Jeremy Carmical, went missing September 22, 2024, while spearfishing in Destin. With Hurricane Helene closing in on the Gulf, and Destin still in the range of impact zones, every minute in the search counted. Once Justine and Joey found out Jeremy was missing, they were able to assist in organizing search and rescue efforts. A collective group rallied approximately 45 boats together over the span of the two-day search and they became points of contact for the United Cajun Navy.

Volunteers were able to



recover Jeremy two days later, just before Hurricane Helene made landfall in the Big Bend area, east of Destin. Although it wasn't the outcome they hoped for, Justine and Joey felt peace knowing they could help bring closure to Jeremy's family. "The community supported us in ways I never thought possible," said Justine. "I'm extremely thankful."

After assisting in the rescue efforts for Jeremy, and working closely with Justine and

Joey, the United Cajun Navy urged them to start their own nonprofit to assist in future efforts along the panhandle. Jeremy's mother, Michelle Carmical, also encouraged them to follow their calling to help others.

Along with Justine and Joey, Emerald Coast United is led by Shelby Harkins, John Brown, Cara Teeter and Jana Ramsey. They bridge a gap between law enforcement and volunteers and are an asset to the United Cajun Navy

and other out-of-town volunteers, helping them navigate the area. They have a strong working relationship with the United Cajun Navy, who assists them in searches when they need more resources. "It's nice that it's not up to one organization. It's nice to have the collaboration and access to resources as needed," stated Justine.

Emerald Coast United has assisted with several search and rescue efforts in the area. Bret Valona, a U.S. Marine veteran, went missing in the Blue Mountain Beach/Point Washington State Forest area after being dropped off at the Eastern Lake Trailhead, where he planned to spend several weeks in the forest. Although extensive canvassing of the area was carried out, his location remains unknown. Early March is when his phone was last known to be in service. He was last seen wearing a plaid shirt, cargo

**EC UNITED**  
*continued on page 2*

## Celebrating 70 Years of Marine Animal Magic



BY MARY FOMBY, GULFARIUM

Since opening its doors on August 14, 1955, Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park has been a cornerstone of the Emerald Coast—captivating guests with unforgettable marine animal encounters while making a lasting impact on ocean conservation.

For 70 years, the Gulfarium has remained dedicated to educating, entertaining, and inspiring generations of visitors. What began as one of the world's first oceanariums has grown into a beloved institution and a leader in marine animal care and

**CELEBRATING**  
*continued on page 2*



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## Community

### EC UNITED

continued from page 1

pants, a yellow raincoat, brown hiker boots, and carrying two backpacks. If you have any information, please contact the Walton County Sheriff's Office at (850) 892-8111.

Their most recent search and rescue effort was for Trinity Eslinger, a search that greatly affected the entire Florida Panhandle and surrounding areas. The United Cajun Navy assisted in the search effort, bringing in resources such as search and recovery K9s, helicopters, boats, search spotter aircraft that fly above the spotter choppers, and drones that fly lower, scanning the water, looking under docks. Their resources provided multi-layered details to the search area.

Emerald Coast United and

the United Cajun Navy continued to search for Trinity after the Okaloosa Sheriff's office and Coast Guard made the decision to scale back their resources. As long as Mother Nature is cooperative and they have resources, Emerald Coast United will continue search efforts when local officials need to pull back. "It took a village to help look for Trinity. Unfortunately, we came up empty-handed, but it wasn't for lack of effort," said Justine. "I wish we were able to provide that closure for the family."

Accidents happen to even the most prepared and knowledgeable people on the water, as Jeremy's friends and family know too well, but continuing to educate and remind people could make a big difference. Justine suggests that locals and tourists alike pay attention to the water conditions and educate them-

selves on water safety. "People don't realize how dangerous the water is," stated Justine.

One suggestion is that more information be available for those coming in from out of town. "The biggest thing we need to do as a community is we need to teach people what a rip tide looks like and what to do during a rip tide," said Justine. "If every property management company around here could have a laminated flyer in their houses, it would be beneficial for our area to get them in the hands of all these wonderful people visiting."

Other safety resources include looking at surf conditions on local beach cams, or texting one of the beach alert system numbers (Panama City Beach – Text "PCBFLAGS" to 888777, Destin/Fort Walton Beach/Okaloosa Island – Text

"BEACH" to 44144, Walton County – Text "SAFETY" to 31279). In response to recent water emergencies, Bailey Brooks started the new nonprofit, Safe on the Emerald Coast. On their Facebook page, you can find water safety tips and other relatable content.

In addition to search and rescue on the water, Emerald Coast United and the United Cajun Navy also helped with post-hurricane disaster relief. Immediately after Hurricane Helene and Hurricane Milton, they began organizing donation stations with fire departments and volunteers across the panhandle and were able to fill 10 semis full of essential items to send to storm victims throughout the affected areas. The United Cajun Navy was able to assist in rescue operations in the affected areas and help with the distribution of

donations and essential supplies.

Emerald Coast United is gearing up for hurricane season again, preparing to be ready to assist with post-storm recovery and assistance as needed. Getting essential items to storm victims is a vital part of recovery efforts.

They hope to continue gaining volunteers and expanding beyond the region to help as many people in need as they can. "I hope to continue to grow and get more volunteers willing to work with us," said Justine. "We only want to grow and get bigger."

If you are interested in volunteering or donating to Emerald Coast United, you can reach them at (850) 312-3303 or ECUnited850@gmail.com. You can follow them on Facebook for more up-to-date information.

### CELEBRATING

continued from page 1

rescue. From dolphins leaping into the hearts of visitors to rescued sea turtles returning to the waves, the Gulfarium's mission has always centered on connecting people with marine life—and protecting it for the future.

In 2023, the Gulfarium unveiled Dolphin Oasis, a stunning new habitat designed to

enhance both animal well-being and guest engagement. This 24-million-dollar expansion includes expansive saltwater habitats, lush surroundings, and state-of-the-art features. Dolphin Oasis reflects our continued commitment to providing the highest standard of care for our animals. It's also a beautiful and immersive addition for guests, offering new opportunities to connect with our resident



dolphins. As we celebrate this milestone year, the Gulfarium remains focused on both our guest experiences and the lives of the animals in our care.

In recent years, the park's conservation efforts have taken center stage. Since 2015, the Gulfarium C.A.R.E. Center has rescued, rehabilitated, and released hundreds of sea turtles back into the Gulf. This vital work supports the survival of endangered species like the Kemp's ridley and loggerhead turtles, and it's only growing.

In addition, the Gulfarium recently partnered with the Manatee Rescue and Rehabilitation Partnership (MRP) to provide continuous care for rescued manatees at the newly opened Manatee Cove habitat. This 3.5-million-dollar collaboration is a milestone in the park's history and an exciting opportunity to contribute to national manatee conservation efforts. Fittingly, one of our current manatee residents—Romeo—is also over 70 years old, making him the oldest known manatee in human care and a living symbol of the Gulfarium's own 70-year journey.

As the Gulfarium celebrates



its 70th anniversary year, the community is invited to join in the celebration. From August 10–17, a special membership sale will offer guests the chance to enjoy unlimited visits at a reduced rate. And on August 16–17, the park will offer admission for just \$19.55—a nod to the year it all began. This discounted rate applies to all ages, making it the perfect time for families, friends, and longtime fans to experience the wonder of the Gulfarium.

The celebration doesn't stop in August. Throughout the rest of the year, the Gulfarium will mark this milestone with exclusive 70th-anniversary merchandise, special member-only events, and community programs that honor the legacy of marine conservation and education.

From its earliest days to its newest achievements, the Gulfarium has remained committed

to marine life, innovation, education, and community. Now, as we celebrate 70 years of care, we look forward to continuing that legacy with new generations of ocean advocates.

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## Bay Buzz



### Niceville Senior Named Distinguished Young Woman of Okaloosa County

Niceville High School senior Avary Ritenour has been named the Distinguished Young Woman (DYW) of Okaloosa County for the Class of 2026. Selected from a group of 13 high school seniors, Avary earned top honors in four of the program's five categories—Scholastics, Talent, Self-Expression, and Fitness—and was named the overall winner. In total, she received \$3,750 in scholarships.

Participants in the program were evaluated in five areas: Scholastics (25%), Interview (25%), Talent (20%), Fitness (15%), and Self-Expression (15%).

Principal Charlie Marelllo praised Avary's achievement, saying, "Avary is an exceptional young person who is very deserving of this honor. As well as being one of our top academic students, Avary is a leader amongst her classmates, and we are very proud of her!"

Reflecting on her experience, Avary shared, "This experience pushed me way beyond my comfort zone, and I can honestly say I've grown so much because of it. For any rising seniors looking to challenge themselves and develop new skills, I'd highly recommend DYW—it's an incredible opportunity!"

Over the next year, Avary and her fellow participants will represent the Distinguished Young Women program at community events and parades while promoting the national "Be Your Best Self" initiative, which en-

courages youth to embrace five guiding principles: Be Healthy, Be Involved, Be Studious, Be Ambitious, and Be Responsible.

For more information, contact Brooklyn Peters at (850) 525-3144 or email [okaloosa@DistinguishedYW.org](mailto:okaloosa@DistinguishedYW.org).

### PAWS in Urgent Need of Support

The Panhandle Animal Welfare Society (PAWS) is facing a financial crisis that could lead to closure in early 2026 without immediate help. Serving Okaloosa County for nearly 60 years, PAWS operates as both animal control and shelter—one of only two nonprofits in Florida to do so. With only 56 kennels and more than 2,200 animals taken in since October 2024, costs have soared to over \$1.1 million, while local contracts provide just \$900,000. PAWS does not euthanize for space, but the shelter is full nearly every day. Donations are critical to continue lifesaving services. Learn more or give at [paws-shelter.org](http://paws-shelter.org) or email Executive Director Tracey Kinsley at [traceyk@paws-shelter.org](mailto:traceyk@paws-shelter.org).

### Hanshi on the Gulf Summer Karate Camp

Niceville had a taste of Okinawa the weekend of Aug. 1–3, when CD Williamson Karate School welcomed Hanshi Minoru Nakazato and his wife, Hiroko, from Okinawa, Japan, for the Hanshi on the Gulf Summer Karate Camp.



mer Karate Camp.

Sensei Nakazato, 10th Dan and world leader of the Okinawan Shorin-Ryu, Shorinkan Karate system—the oldest form of karate—was joined by 19 Seventh- and Eighth-Degree instructors (Kyoshi) from around the globe. Together, they taught Shorinkan students from across the U.S. throughout the three-day camp.

Hosted by Kyoshi (8th Dan) CD Williamson, the camp drew more than 300 students to Ruckel Middle School Gym, including 90 children ages 5–11. Training sessions covered self-defense, kata (forms), kobu-

do (Okinawan weapons), and sparring. Many students had the rare honor of testing for their next rank before Sensei Nakazato himself. "The 2025 'Hanshi on the Gulf' Summer Camp was one of the largest ever held in the United States," said Kyoshi Williamson. "Hanshi Nakazato was very impressed not only with the turnout, but with the strong family support of each student."

### Boys 2 Men Seminar Set for Sept. 13

The Rho Omicron Lambda Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. will host its annual Boys 2 Men Seminar on Saturday, Sept. 13, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Okaloosa County School District office, 202 FL-85, Niceville. The free seminar is open to male high school students for the 2025–26 school year and includes lunch.

Topics will focus on furthering education, keys to success, financial management, interacting with law enforcement and health awareness, encouraging open discussion and practical skills for young men preparing for adulthood. Presenters represent diverse fields including medicine, engineering, law enforcement, marketing and the military.

The seminar is part of Alpha Phi Alpha's Go-to-High School, Go-to-College national

*Continued on page 6*



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 Community

**BAY BUZZ**

*continued from page 4*

program, which promotes scholarship and leadership among youth. Space is limited to 30 students; interested participants should consult their parents and contact Finley Woods at (478) 919-5923 by Aug. 31 to reserve a spot.

**SOCKS Launches 2026 “Show Us Your Kitties” Contest**

Save Our Cats and Kittens (SOCKS) has opened entries for its 2026 Show Us Your Kitties calendar contest. Cat lovers can upload photos of their pets—any cat, anywhere—and rally votes to win a spot. Entry is \$5



(includes five votes); additional votes are \$1 each. The top vote-getter earns the calendar cover and SOCKS swag, with the next 12 featured as “Cats of the Month.” Special dates can

also be reserved for \$10 donations, and all cats with 50+ votes will appear in a back-cover collage. The contest runs through Sept. 5 at 9 p.m. Info & entry: [saveourcatsandkittens.com](http://saveourcatsandkittens.com)

**American Airlines Expands at VPS**

American Airlines will launch daily nonstop service to Miami International Airport beginning Dec. 19, 2025, from Destin-Fort Walton Beach Airport (VPS). The new route connects travelers to more than 70 destinations across Mexico, the Caribbean and Latin America. American will also expand its Chicago O’Hare service to run year-round, offering daily flights through both winter and summer seasons.

**EFCU Donates \$50K to Westonwood Ranch**

Eglin Federal Credit Union (EFCU) recently presented Westonwood Ranch in Freeport with a \$50,000 donation to upgrade technology and communication systems. The funding will expand learning opportunities for children and young adults with developmental differences. Westonwood Ranch, a nonprofit on a 10-acre campus, provides hands-on programs that teach life skills, job readiness and social confidence, along with unique enterprises like aquaponics and dog treat



EFCU presented Westonwood Ranch a \$50,000 check at its headquarters in Freeport in July. Left to right: VP Marketing and Public Relations Laura Coale, SVP/Chief Human Resources Officer Gina Denny, Founder and CEO of Westonwood Ranch Lindy Wood, President/CEO Cathie Staton, SVP Membership and Community Development Neko Stubblefield

production. “With this \$50,000 gift, we’re going to be able to invest in our technology here at Westonwood Ranch,” Lindy Wood, founder and CEO of Westonwood Ranch, said. “To have a partnership like this with Eglin Federal Credit Union is incredible, and we are beaming with gratitude knowing we have a team we can count on. Thank you for believing in our mission and investing in some of the most vulnerable lives in our community, those with develop-

mental disabilities.” “Eglin Federal Credit Union is proud to support Westonwood Ranch in Walton County,” said President/CEO Cathie Staton. “We toured their impressive 10-acre ranch in Freeport and are truly inspired by the programs and unique learning environments they offer. We’re grateful for the meaningful work Westonwood Ranch is doing and are honored to contribute to their continued success.” Info: [westonwood.org](http://westonwood.org)

OCSO 2026 GRADUATION CEREMONIES		
School	Date & Time	Location
 Baker School	Tuesday, May 19, 2026 7:30pm	Doug Griffith Stadium
 Choctawhatchee High School	Thursday, May 21, 2026 7:30pm	Joe Etharedge Stadium
 Crestview High School	Friday, May 22, 2026 7:00pm	Jack Foster Stadium
 Fort Walton Beach High School	Friday, May 22, 2026 7:30pm	Steve Riggs Stadium
 Laurel Hill School	Tuesday, May 19, 2026 6:00pm	Laurel Hill Gym
 Niceville High School	Thursday, May 21, 2026 7:00pm	Niceville Eagle Stadium
 Richbourg School	Friday, May 15, 2026 10:00am	Richbourg Gym
 Silver Sands School	Wednesday, May 20, 2026 6:00pm	Silver Sands Multipurpose Room

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# Calm the Chaos: Understanding Cortisol and How to Take Back Control of Your Health



BY DR. KAREN DEVORE

Let’s talk about cortisol. You’ve probably heard it called “the stress hormone”—and while that’s true, it’s also a bit of an oversimplification. Cortisol is one of the most essential hormones in your body, playing a key role in everything from your energy levels and metabolism to your mood and immune system.

But like anything in the body, balance is everything. When cortisol is too high or too low for too long, it can wreak havoc on your health.

I see this every day—patients who are feeling tired, wired, inflamed, anxious, or burnt out, but whose lab work comes back “normal.” Often, the missing piece of the puzzle is cortisol imbalance.

So, What Exactly Is Cortisol?

Cortisol is a hormone produced by your adrenal glands, two small glands that sit on top of your kidneys, and acts like a built-in alarm system. Its job is to help your body respond to stress—physical, emotional, or environmental. It also plays a role in blood sugar regulation, blood pressure, circadian rhythm (your sleep-wake cycle), and inflammation control.

When your body perceives a threat—whether it’s a traffic jam or a tough meeting—your brain sends a signal to your adrenals to release cortisol. In the short term, this is a good thing. It sharpens your focus, gives you a burst of energy, and helps you respond quickly.

But here’s the problem - most of us are living in a state of chronic stress. And your body doesn’t always know the

difference between an actual emergency and an overflowing inbox or constant worry. In a healthy rhythm, cortisol rises in the morning to wake you up and drops in the evening to help you sleep. This natural rise and fall is what keeps your energy, focus, and mood stable.

### Signs Your Cortisol Might Be Out of Balance

When cortisol levels stay elevated for too long (or crash too low after prolonged stress), your body begins to show signs. Common symptoms include:

- Fatigue that doesn’t improve with rest



- Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Anxiety, irritability, or feeling “on edge”
- Weight gain, especially around the abdomen
- Brain fog or poor memory
- Low libido or irregular cycles
- Frequent illness or slow recovery
- Cravings for sugar, salt, or caffeine

Sound familiar? You’re not alone. Cortisol dysregulation is incredibly common—but it’s often overlooked or misunderstood in conventional medicine.

### Why Conventional Approaches Often Miss the Mark

In a traditional medical model, symptoms like these are often treated individually: fatigue gets a stimulant, mood gets a prescription, sleep gets a sedative. But those approaches rarely look at the bigger picture.

Instead, we ask: What’s going on beneath the surface? Why

is your body stuck in survival mode? How can we help it shift into healing mode?

That’s where integrative care—and a deeper understanding of cortisol—can make all the difference.

### How We Help: An Integrative Approach to Cortisol Health

We begin by mapping your body’s stress response through advanced testing. This often includes saliva-based cortisol pan-

els or the DUTCH test, which track your hormone rhythms over the course of the day. From there, we create a personalized plan that supports your whole

*Continued on page 13*

## WOMEN’S WELLNESS REIMAGINED

What if your story mattered as much as your labs?

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# PAWS Faces Critical Funding Crisis — Community Help Needed to Save Shelter

For nearly 60 years, the Panhandle Animal Welfare Society (PAWS) has been a cornerstone of compassion in Okaloosa County, providing shelter, rescue, and lifesaving medical care for thousands of animals. Now, PAWS is facing its greatest challenge yet. Without immediate funding, the shelter could be forced to close its doors in early 2026—leaving thousands of homeless animals with nowhere to go.

## A Shelter at Capacity

The crisis stems from an overwhelming intake of animals and a building that simply wasn't built to meet today's needs. PAWS has just 56 kennels for dogs, yet those spaces must serve every situation: strays, surrenders, cruelty cases, danger-

ous dogs and bite quarantines. Built in 1990, the facility no longer matches the size of the community it serves.

Unlike some shelters, PAWS does not euthanize for space. But that means the kennels are full nearly every day. This isn't just a local problem—shelters nationwide are at capacity—but PAWS is determined to continue its mission right here at home.

## The Role of Animal Control

Few realize the scope of what PAWS does. As one of only two shelters in the state that also serves as municipal animal control, PAWS is both a shelter and a first responder service. Officers handle hundreds of calls each month, rescuing strays, investigating cruelty cases,

quarantining bite animals and removing dangerous dogs from neighborhoods.

Each animal brought in receives a medical assessment, vaccinations and often emergency treatment ranging from antibiotics to amputations. These are not optional costs; they are acts of compassion that every animal deserves.

## The Financial Reality

So far this fiscal year—since October 2024—PAWS has taken in 2,240 animals. At an average cost of \$500 per intake, the shelter has already spent more than \$1.1 million on basic needs: food, shelter, utilities, vaccines and medical care. That total doesn't include staff salaries, insurance, or vehicle expenses. Yet contracts with



are sustained almost entirely by donations, sponsorships, and fundraising events.

## Why It Matters

The difference between PAWS and nearby counties is stark. For example, Walton County budgets \$1.7 million for animal services, Escambia \$1.4 million, and Santa Rosa \$1.2 million. Each of those departments is government-operated and does not include the full

cost of animal intake or medical care. By contrast, PAWS—serving a population of 221,000 in Okaloosa County—receives just \$900,000 to cover everything from enforcement to lifesaving surgeries.

Without PAWS, lost pets would have no place to be safely housed until owners reclaim them. Stray and dangerous animals would remain in neighborhoods. Injured or abused animals would have nowhere to receive treatment or shelter.

## Clearing Up Misconceptions

A frequent misconception is that PAWS is part of the county or city government, funded by tax dollars. It is not. PAWS is a nonprofit that negotiates voluntary contracts with local jurisdictions to provide animal control and sheltering services. Some contracts are based on per capita rates—meaning a city pays a flat fee per resident for animal services.

But these rates have not kept up with rising costs, leaving PAWS underfunded year after year. Staff salaries, adoption programs, foster care and emergency medical treatments are not covered by tax dollars. They

are sustained almost entirely by donations, sponsorships, and fundraising events.

## A Call to Action

PAWS is negotiating for fairer agreements with local governments, but that won't be enough to solve the crisis. Immediate community support is critical to prevent closure. Donations from individuals, businesses and animal lovers are urgently needed to bridge the funding gap. "This is not a threat; it's our unfortunate reality," Kinsley said. "If we cannot raise the funds, PAWS may be forced to close. And the animals in our community will have no place to go."

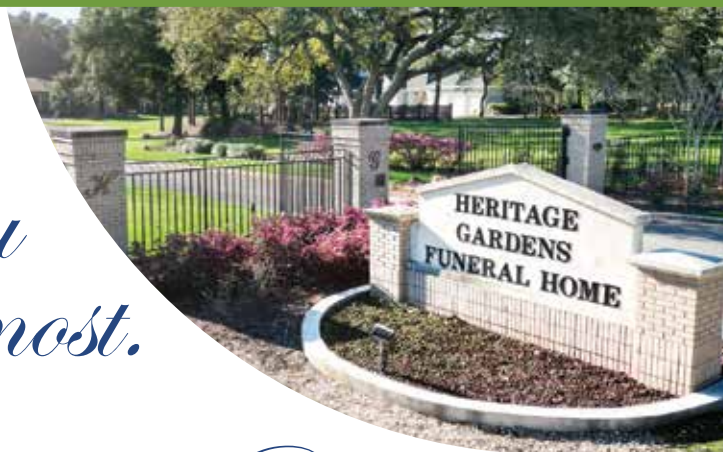
## Standing by the Animals

For nearly six decades, PAWS has stood by Okaloosa County through growth, challenges, and change—always there for the animals and the families who love them. Now, PAWS is asking the community to stand by them.

Donations can be made at [www.paws-shelter.org](http://www.paws-shelter.org), or by contacting Executive Director Tracey Kinsley at [traceyk@paws-shelter.org](mailto:traceyk@paws-shelter.org) or (850) 243-1525.

The need is urgent, and the future of thousands of animals depends on the community's response.

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# Skilled Nursing and Rehabilitation Facilities: What to Expect

BY TERESA HALVERSON, BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT/COMMUNITY RELATIONS DIRECTOR, THE MANOR AT BLUE WATER BAY

Skilled Nursing and Rehabilitation facilities provide a wide range of medical and rehabilitative services for individuals who are recovering from an illness, injury or surgery. The goal of the stay is to help a patient regain strength and independence, so they can safely return home. Choosing a skilled nursing facility (SNF) is often a decision made after a hospital stay when a patient needs more intensive medical care and rehabilitation than can be provided at home. The primary purpose is to bridge the gap between a hospital stay and a patient's home, helping them recover fully and regain independence. This constant supervision is crucial for patients needing post-acute (hospital) care and requires monitoring to watch for complications and manage pain after surgery.

**What type of conditions and services are normally available?**

**Surgery:** Especially joint replacement surgeries (hips, knees, shoulders) or other major procedures to include back surgery.

**Acute Illness:** Pneumonia, infections or complications from chronic conditions like heart failure or COPD.

**Injury or Fall:** For patients who need to regain mobility and strength after an accident.

**Stroke or other Brain Injuries:** Skilled nursing facilities have a strong focus on neurological rehabilitation.

**Wound Care:** Complex or Chronic wound management including dressing changes and monitoring for infection. Some SNFs now utilize the Vaporox wound care system that greatly enhances the healing of wounds.

**IV Therapy:** Includes the administering of medications or fluids intravenously.

**Medication Management:** Supervising and administering a patient's medication regimen, which is very important for complex cases.

**Pain Management:** Licensed staff are trained to monitor and assess a patient's pain levels and implement a plan to



manage it. These discussions are held with the patient's physician.

**Medical Monitoring:** Includes the continuous monitoring of vital signs and other health conditions.

**Catheter and Colostomy Care:** Specialized care for patients with these specific needs.

**Respiratory Care:** Management of conditions such as COPD and other lung problems.

**Chronic Condition Management:** While many stays

are temporary, SNFs can also provide long-term care for individuals with chronic conditions who require a higher level of medical support. This may include specialized units for conditions like:

**Dementia and Memory Care:** Providing a safe a structured environment with specialized programs.

**Hospice and Palliative Care:** Focusing on comfort and quality of life for patients with serious illnesses.

These services are provided on-site, allowing patients to focus on their recovery without the stress of arranging multiple appointments and transportation.

**Rehabilitative Services:**

A core component of a skilled nursing facility is rehabilitation. These services are designed to help patients restore function

and improve their quality of life. The therapy teams include:

**Physical Therapy (PT):** Physical therapists help patients improve mobility, strength, balance, and gait. They may work on tasks to include learning to use a walker or climbing stairs.

**Occupational Therapy (OT):** Occupational therapists focus on regaining the skills a patient needs for activities of daily living (ADLs) such as dressing, bathing, and eating. They also help patients adapt to their environment and use assistive devices if necessary.

**Speech-Language Pathology (SLP):** Speech Therapists address a variety of issues including communications difficulties, cognitive impairments, and swallowing disorders (Dysphagia) which can be common after a stroke or with certain condition of dementia.

**What to expect:**

**Assessment:** Upon admission, a team of specialists will assess the patient's needs and create a personalized care plan.

**Therapy Services**

**Clinical Nursing and Medical Supervision:** Physicians and nurses will monitor the patient's progress and manage any medications or medical needs.

**Social and Recreational Activities:** Most facilities offer social events, recreational activities, and spiritual care to support overall well-being.

**Transitioning home: A Focus on Returning Home Safely:**

While skilled nursing and rehabilitation facilities offer Long-

*Continued on page 14*



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# Bay Buzz Events

## 33rd Emerald Coast National Juried Art Exhibition

Aug. 18–Dec. 18, 2025 | McIlroy Gallery, Niceville

The Mattie Kelly Arts Center presents the 33rd Emerald Coast National Juried Art Exhibition, showcasing contemporary artists working in a wide range of styles and mediums. This year's theme, Texture and Touch, explores connection, involvement, function, and comfort.

An Artists' Reception will be held Thursday, Sept. 4, from 5–7 p.m. at the MKAC Galleries (Bldg. 110, 100 College Blvd. E., Niceville). The evening includes guest speakers Nicholas Croghan, director of the Pensacola Museum of Art and this year's guest judge, along with artist Kevin Haran. Enjoy food by Brozinni's and music by DJ Spinzy while meeting the featured artists. Info: [MattieKellyArtsCenter.org](http://MattieKellyArtsCenter.org)

## Perfect Hues: Baytowne Wharf Art Fest

Friday, Aug. 29 – Sunday, Aug. 31 | The Village of Baytowne Wharf, Sandestin

Celebrate Labor Day weekend at Perfect Hues: Baytowne Wharf Art Fest, where the streets of The Village come alive with art, music, and coastal charm. Browse works from local and regional artists, enjoy live performances by Jessie Ritter, Tanner Gray, Almost Famous, Emily Bass, and Jared Herzog, and soak in the festive atmosphere.

The weekend finale features a dazzling fireworks show over the lagoon on Sunday at 9 p.m. Vendor registration is open through Aug. 18 for artists who want to be part of this moonlit tradition. Info: [BaytowneWharf.com](http://BaytowneWharf.com)

## Solaris Dinner Cruise for Taylor Haugen Foundation

Wednesday, Sept. 10, 2025 | Baytowne Marina, Miramar Beach

Set sail for an unforgettable evening supporting the Taylor Haugen Foundation and its mission to protect student athletes from abdominal injuries. Enjoy fine yacht cuisine with chef-selected desserts, a wine pull, and silent and live auctions—all while hearing inspiring stories from founders Brian and Kathy Haugen.

Boarding: 5:30 p.m. | Sail: 6–8 p.m.

Proceeds provide education and advanced protective gear for secondary youth athletes.

Tickets & sponsorships: [TaylorHaugen.org](http://TaylorHaugen.org)

## Golf4TheCure - Gulf Coast Tournament

Friday, Sept. 12 | Raven Golf Club, Sandestin

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

Register or sponsor at [Golf4TheCure-Gulf-Coast.perfectgolfevent.com](http://Golf4TheCure-Gulf-Coast.perfectgolfevent.com)



## Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance Hosts Mattie Kelly Family Bay Day

Saturday, Sept. 27 | 10 a.m.–2 p.m. | Fred Gan-non Rocky Bayou State Park | \$5 per vehicle (park entrance fee)

Families are invited to celebrate the Choctawhatchee Bay at the annual Mattie Kelly Family Bay Day. Presented by the Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance (CBA), in partnership with the Choctawhatchee Bay Estuary Program and the Mattie Kelly Environmental Initiative through the Northwest Florida State College Foundation, the event highlights the bay's ecological richness through hands-on activities, exploration stations, and the always-popular fish printing.

Bay Day is designed to connect children and adults with nature, encouraging environmental awareness and coastal stewardship. All ages are welcome, and families are encouraged to learn, explore, and play along Rocky Bayou's shoreline. For more information, visit [www.basinalliance.org](http://www.basinalliance.org) or email [CBA@nwfsc.edu](mailto:CBA@nwfsc.edu).



## Niceville Oktoberfest

Saturday, Sept. 20 | Noon–9 p.m. | 3rd Planet Brewing, Niceville

Raise a glass at the 5th Annual Oktoberfest, one of Niceville's favorite fall traditions! Hosted at 3rd Planet Brewing, the festival runs all day with more than 20 locally brewed beers on tap. The Knights of Columbus Council 13527 will serve up freshly grilled brats with sauerkraut and potato salad, plus hot dogs, desserts, and soft drinks.

Proceeds benefit local charities including the Twin Cities Pavilion, Niceville Catholic Outreach Food Bank, Special Olympics, Emerald Coast Autism Center, ARC of the Emerald Coast, and Children in Crisis. Info: [jwpurka@gmail.com](mailto:jwpurka@gmail.com) | 850-974-1491

## Think Pink & Fight Cancer Awareness Conference

Saturday, Sept. 20 | 7:45 a.m.–11 a.m. | Rosemont Baptist Church, Niceville

Join the community for the 2025 Think Pink & Fight Cancer Awareness Conference, a morning of encouragement and education for both men and women. The event theme, inspired by 2 Timothy 4:7, is "I have fought the good fight,

*Continued on page 12*

26th Annual

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26th ANNUAL

EMERALD COAST HOME & BOAT SHOW

Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center • 1250 Miracle Strip Pkwy, Fort Walton Beach

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

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

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

• Insurance, Roofing, A/C, Plumbing, Mortgages, Homes

• Interior Design, Flooring, Pools, Spas, Shutters, Leaf Guards

• Furniture, Generators,

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

• Closets, Bath & Kitchen Remodeling, Windows, Doors, and more

• Electronics, Computers, Cell Phones, Vacations

• Plus, health and wellness vendors including Chiropractic, Hearing, Massage Therapy, and Skin Care

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

To register for booth space or for more info, contact Wes Fell at 850-353-2832 or email [wesfell@cox.net](mailto:wesfell@cox.net).

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

Learn more at [www.ParadisePromotionsFL.com](http://www.ParadisePromotionsFL.com).

Happenings Around the Bay

2025  
EVENTS

- SEPTEMBER
- 02

Niceville Young Professionals Networking Meeting  
11:30 am | Niceville Chamber of Commerce | Niceville
- 04

Justice on the Block  
10 am | Valparaiso Library | Valparaiso  
  
ATA Martial Arts Ribbon Cutting  
10 am | ATA Martial Arts | Niceville
- 05

Greater FWB Chamber First Friday Coffee  
7 am | Christian Life Center at FBC | FWB  
  
Live Music: Kyle Lamonica  
6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing Co. | Niceville  
  
Rocky Bayou Christian Football Game vs. Eagle's View  
7 pm | Rocky Bayou Christian School | Niceville
- 06

Cars & Coffee  
7:30 am | JoJo's Coffee and Goodness | Niceville  
  
Florida Concealed Carry Weapons Class  
10 am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso  
  
Jazz Brunch Fundraiser  
11:30 am | Niceville Community Center | Niceville  
  
Live Music: Saltwater Revival  
6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing Co. | Niceville
- 07

Bluegrass Jam  
12 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing Co. | Niceville  
  
A Craftersnoon Social  
2 pm | Salt & Story | Niceville  
  
She Speaks Women's Circle  
4 pm | Yoga By You Studio | Niceville  
  
Women's Climbing Circle  
5 pm | Rock Out Climbing Gym | Destin
- 09

Chess Night  
6 pm | LJ Schooners Restaurant | Niceville
- 10

Niceville Valparaiso Chamber Second Wednesday Breakfast  
7:15 am | Niceville Community Center | Niceville  
  
Book Club: The Stolen Life of Colette Marceau  
6 pm | Salt & Story | Niceville
- 11

Helen's Puzzle Swap  
10 am | Niceville Library | Niceville  
  
Greater FWB Chamber Nothing But Networking  
11:30 am | The Crab Trap at The Boardwalk | Okaloosa Island  
  
Prime IV Hydration & Wellness Ribbon Cutting  
12 pm | Prime IV Hydration & Wellness | Niceville

- 12

Niceville High School Football Game vs. Crestview High School  
7 pm | Niceville High School | Niceville  
  
Golf 4 the Cure  
11 am | Raven Golf Club | Sandestin
- 13

The Ground Up Project's Putting for a Purpose  
4 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing Co. | Niceville  
  
Live Music: Goodbye to Sunshine  
6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing Co. | Niceville
- 15

GSSF Indoor League  
10 am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso  
  
FiberArts Circle  
5 pm | Valparaiso Library | Valparaiso
- 16

Lunch N Learn: Creating Emotional Resilience During Stressful Times  
11:30 am | Greater FWB Chamber of Commerce | FWB  
  
The Traveling Painter  
5:30 pm | LJ Schooners Restaurant | Niceville
- 18

Greater FWB Chamber Business After Hours  
5:30 pm | Renasant Bank | FWB  
  
Anchored in Freeport Fundraiser for CAA  
6-9 pm | Freeport Marina | FW
- 19

Niceville High School Football Game vs. Choctawhatchee High School  
7 pm | Niceville High School | Niceville
- 20

Florida Concealed Carry Weapons Class  
10 am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso  
  
5th Annual Burgers, Bourbon, & Beer Festival  
12 pm | Destin Harbor | Destin
- 23

Writers Group  
5:30 pm | Niceville Library | Niceville
- 27

Mattie Kelly Family Bay Day  
10 am | Fred Gannon Rocky Bayou State Park | Niceville
- 28

Sunset Shrimp Boil  
4 pm | LJ Schooners Restaurant | Niceville


ONGOING EVENTS

Fall Lawn Games at Grand Park  
5 pm | Daily | Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach  
  
Oils and Acrylics with Rosalyn O'Grady  
10 am | Tues | Artful Things | Niceville  
  
Watercolor Techniques with Theresia McInnis  
1 pm | Tues | Artful Things | Niceville  
  
Bayou Pub Trivia Nights  
6 pm | Wed | Bayou Pub | Niceville  
  
Watercolor Basics (Adults) with Elia Saxer  
10 am | Thurs | Artful Things | Niceville  
  
Watercolor Basics (Youth) with Elia Saxer  
1 pm | Thurs | 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 Saturdays | 4-8 pm  
Victory Blvd | Freeport  
  
Grand Boulevard Saturdays |  
9 am - 1 pm  
Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach

SAVE THE DATE



9TH ANNUAL  
HARVEST  
WINE & FOOD  
FESTIVAL  
WATERCOLOR, FL  
OCT. 16-19, 2025

 Community

## EVENTS

continued from page 10

I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”

Festivities begin at 7:45 a.m. with sponsor and craft tables (first 50 attendees receive goody bags), followed by breakfast at 8:15 a.m. The conference program runs from 8:30–11 a.m. and includes special speakers, skits, door prizes, and more.

All donations benefit cancer research. Info: Rosemont Baptist Church, 1601 27th Street, Niceville

**LadyWorld Festival - Pop Culture, Podcasts & Power Vibes**
**Sept. 26–28 | Seascape Resort, Miramar Beach**

The LadyGang is back with LadyWorld 2025, an immersive weekend escape packed with pop culture, comedy, music, and inspiration. This 3-day retreat features powerhouse headliners like Hannah Berner and the Girls Gotta Eat pod-

cast duo, plus Kaitlyn Bristowe, Rachel Lindsay, Stassi Schroeder, and more. Dive into glam workshops, wellness events, live podcasts, signature cocktails, photo ops, and plenty of Instagrammable moments! Multiple ticket tiers and accommodation options available. VIPs get exclusive merch, private planning access and more.

Grab your girlfriends and get your passes at [Ladyworld.co](http://Ladyworld.co)

**Fore Her 13th Annual Golf Outing - Swing for a Cause**
**Friday, Sept. 26 | 9 a.m. | The Links Golf Club, Sandestin**

Fore Her invites golfers of all levels to tee off for a very “pink” cause at its 13th Annual Golf Outing, presented by Emerald Coast Hospice Care. Proceeds help local breast cancer patients cover living expenses, utilities, and transportation costs during treatment.

The four-person scramble includes on-course food and

drink, a catered lunch by Evie Mae’s BBQ, the fan-favorite “Dress Like a Lady” hole, and an after-party with prizes, raffles, and giveaways. Early BIRDIE pricing: \$175 per golfer or \$700 per team through Aug. 31 (\$200/\$800 after Sept. 1). Info, registration, and sponsorships: [ForeHer.org/golfouting](http://ForeHer.org/golfouting)

**10th Annual Bloody Mary Festival - A Decade of Delicious!**
**Saturday, Oct. 11 | 11 a.m.–2 p.m. | The Market Shops, Miramar Beach**


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

the-top garnishes from grilled cheese to sushi. Also enjoy craft brews, bubbly, food vendors, live music, a cigar bar, and SEC football on the big screen. 21+ only. Proceeds benefit Habitat for Humanity – Walton County. Info and tickets: [TheMarketShops.com/Bloody-Mary-Festival](http://TheMarketShops.com/Bloody-Mary-Festival)

**Mid-Bay Rotary Oktoberfest Returns**  
**Sept. 26–27 | Merchants Walk**

Prost! The Mid-Bay Rotary Club invites the community to raise a glass at its 31st Annual Oktoberfest, happening Friday, Sept. 26, and Saturday, Sept. 27, at Merchants Walk in Bluewater Bay.

The two-day celebration features authentic German food, beer, music, and family-friendly fun. Friday night kicks off with live entertainment from accordionist Walter Kasprzyk, local favorite Gary Schmitz, and the Edelweiss German Band. Saturday’s lineup includes the Emerald Coast Community Band, Jody Lucas, and a full evening of German tunes to keep the festivities lively. Guests can also enjoy balloons by Mickey Cam-

eron, traditional dancing, and plenty of Bavarian spirit.

Sponsored by the Mid-Bay Rotary, this beloved annual event supports local service projects and international initiatives, making every bratwurst and beer count toward a good cause.

So, grab your lederhosen and join the fun Sept. 26–27 at Bluewater Bay—where the music is lively, the beer is cold, and the community comes together to celebrate Oktoberfest.

**Annual FWB Greek Festival Returns!**
**Oct. 17–19, 2025 | Sts. Markella and Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church | FREE | Fri. 4–8 p.m.; Sat. 11 a.m.–8 p.m.; Sun. 11:30 a.m.–4 p.m.**

Experience the sights, sounds, and flavors of Greece at the annual Greek Festival! Enjoy authentic food, pastries, Greek coffee, live music, dancing, vendor booths, children’s activities, and church tours featuring newly completed icons. Admission is free, and all are welcome to join this festive weekend celebrating Greek culture. Info: [greekfestfwb.com](http://greekfestfwb.com) | 850-244-0822

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## 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: [USA-TourTickets.LIVE](http://USA-TourTickets.LIVE).

# SOF Missions Hosts 9th Annual GALA to Ignite Hope and Honor Our Nation’s Heroes

BY MYRNA CONRAD

Shield of Faith (SOF) Missions is proud to announce the 9th Annual Emerald Coast Gala, returning to the prestigious Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center on September 13, 2025. This year’s theme, Military Code: RED, represents our steadfast commitment to Resilience, Empowerment and Determination in support of our Nation’s warriors.

SOF Missions remains dedicated to its mission of combating the tragic epidemic of suicide among our warriors, including active-duty service members, Veterans and first responders. To



date, the organization has provided more than \$10.1 million in support to over 3,500 warriors nationwide through the Be Resilient Clinics and local Warrior Retreats held at EXOS at Andrews Institute, delivering comprehensive, no-cost care to those who need it most. These clinics focus on the psychological, physical, social, and spiritual health of each person. Care plans are provided through clinical, coordinated, and collaborative care.

With a striking red theme and formal flair, the evening promises a powerful blend of elegance, celebration, and purpose. Guests will enjoy live entertainment by

dining experience showcasing their exceptional talent and creativity.

The gala will feature an inspiring keynote address from a distinguished warrior guest speaker, alongside exciting live and silent auctions, signature drinks, and opportunities to connect with others who are passionate about honoring and supporting our heroes.

All proceeds from the event will directly benefit the warriors who need it most, ensuring they receive personalized care regardless of their financial circumstances.

This is more than a gala. It is a statement. It is a celebration. It is a night to stand united in RED and boldly declare that our Warriors matter.

- **Tickets:** \$100 per person OR Sponsorship Opportunities
- **Live music** by Thin Ice

Ticket includes dinner, dessert, and one complimentary drink

- **Attire:** Formal Red Theme. Elegant. Fierce. Unapologetically bold.
- **Location:** Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center

To purchase tickets or explore sponsorship opportunities, please visit [www.sofmissions.org/gala](http://www.sofmissions.org/gala).

### CALM

*continued from page 7*

system—mind and body.

True healing takes a whole-body approach. Here’s how we support cortisol health with integrative strategies:

**Nervous System Support:** Acupuncture is one of the most powerful tools we have for regulating the nervous system. It helps shift the body out of “fight or flight” and into “rest and digest,” lowering cortisol and promoting resilience over time.

**Herbal & Nutritional Therapy:** Adaptogenic herbs like ashwagandha, rhodiola, and holy basil can help regulate stress response and support adrenal function. We also assess your nutrition and supplement needs to ensure you have the raw materials (like magnesium and B vitamins) to make and regulate cortisol.

**Sleep & Circadian Rhythm Repair:** We address sleep habits and may use gentle support like melatonin or phosphatidylserine to help reset your rhythm. A good night’s sleep is one of the most powerful cortisol regulators.

**Lifestyle Coaching:** Sometimes, the biggest breakthroughs come from the smallest shifts: boundaries, breathwork, journaling, or simply learning how to say no. We partner with you to identify and reduce your unique stress triggers.

**Your Body Isn’t Broken—It’s Communicating**

If you’ve been feeling off, tired, anxious, or just not like yourself, your cortisol levels could be part of the story. At the Tortoise Clinic, we believe that symptoms are signals—not failures. When you give your body the right support, it knows how to heal.

Whether you’re in the early stages of stress overload or feeling the long-term effects of burnout, we’re here to help you find your balance again—slowly, steadily, and intentionally.

Ready to rebalance your stress response? Schedule your consultation at TortoiseClinic.com or call 850.267.5611 to learn how integrative care can support your cortisol and your overall well-being. Because wellness isn’t a sprint—it’s a marathon. Let’s walk it together.

Join us for a spectacular evening as we join forces to end SUICIDE and PTSD among our Nations Heroes.

9TH ANNUAL  
*Emerald Coast*  
GALA

**CODE RED**

A CALL TO ACTION

Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center

**SATURDAY | SEPT 13, 2025**

\$100 Per Guest  
Attire RED!  
(Table Sponsorships Available)  
Evening will include dinner, entertainment, and live & silent auction.


More info contact: Kristi Beckman-[kristi@sofmissions.org](mailto:kristi@sofmissions.org)

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AND MORE ANNOUNCED SOON!

[www.destinsongwriterfestival.com](http://www.destinsongwriterfestival.com)

MORE INFO:  




# Those Who Served: Honoring Our Vietnam Veterans

By BARBARA PALMGREN

Once in a lifetime, one has a privilege of viewing a piece of history that comes to life so it is not just a memory. I was honored to sit in the presence of four gentlemen who shared personal experiences of defending freedom 50 years ago.

On Saturday, July 25, 2025 at the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida, William Clifton, Air Force Special Operations Command History Office, introduced the panel of veterans who served in the Vietnam War. These outstanding patriots were from three branches of the military: General Charles (Chuck) Horner, U.S. Air Force; Col. Bill Keeler, U.S. Air Force; Major Charles (Chuck) Merkel, U.S. Army; and SFC Jimmie Baugh U.S. Marines.

The four-person panel conveyed stories that brought both tears and laughter to members

of the audience. Each was dedicated to this mission of freedom. Several have close ties even today with those they view as Vietnamese brothers and sisters.

After the presentation, everyone was invited to a free lunch graciously catered by Tom Rice and Magnolia Grill. Museum volunteers served food and drink. The museum was open at no charge so guests could roam through various exhibits and view the beautiful pollinator garden behind the Discovery Room exhibit.

In the audience was Kim Develett who had traveled from California to spend another few precious minutes with Col. Bill Keeler and his wife, Virginia. Col. Keeler talked about his part of being in charge of the Vietnam Refugee Camp immediately established after the fall of Saigon in April, 1975. Kim was only a small child but re-



members the camp and the water tower behind the tents. Kim

organized a reunion on May 3 of this year for over 40 former refugees who were at the camp. They came to the Vietnam Refugee Camp exhibit at the museum on a Saturday and visited the camp site on Eglin Air Force Base on Sunday.

Eglin was one of three refugee camps that housed over 11,000 refugees for a period of five months. Imagine not knowing the language of a new country, of suddenly fleeing for your life, of arriving in the darkness on a plane and not knowing what would happen when you stepped out onto an entirely new landscape. But there was Col. Keeler with a red hat and a translator leading everyone to a bus to take them to safety and a new life.

The exhibit at the Heritage

Museum will be available for viewing through mid-December of 2025. Please come and see this remarkable story organized in three phases from the beginning of their journey to the end when everyone had obtained a sponsor somewhere in the United States. View personal oral histories videotaped and available for viewing by Barbara Palmgren and Mike Weaver. View Col. Keeler's personal documents and photos with every copy of the daily Dot Moi newspaper written in both English and in Vietnamese. This daily paper was important to communicate military events and personal items like recipes, births and marriages.

The Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida is located at 115 Westview Ave in Valparaiso Florida and open Tuesday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

## SKILLED NURSING

continued from page 9

term residential living, the focus of rehab is to set goals to help patients recover enough to return to their own home or an assisted living facility. Staff members work as teams with patients and family members to create a personalized care plan that

focuses on achieving this goal. The focus on "transitional care" can lead to a faster and more complete recovery, reducing the risk of complications and hospital readmissions. Nurses, Physicians, therapists and other team members work together, share information and adjust the patient's care plan as needed. This integrated and holistic approach

ensures that all of the patient's needs—from medical to emotional — are being addressed. The goal is to help patients return home safely with the skills and confidence to manage their daily lives. This may involve training in assistive devices, home modifications or arranging for home health services.

*The Manor at Blue Water Bay is the only locally owned and operated skilled nursing rehabilitation facility in the area. A 5-Star, CMS rated facility with over 32 years of experience serving our community's healthcare needs, we have built a strong foundation of trust and expertise. This long-standing commitment allows us to provide reliable, compassionate care that truly understands and addresses the unique*

*needs of the people we serve. We are proud to have been a consistent and dedicated partner in the well-being of our community for more than three decades. Questions? We are here to help. Please contact our Admission's Team at 850-897-5592 or email: [we-care@manoratbwb.com](mailto:we-care@manoratbwb.com) for more information and how we can assist you in your future health care needs.*



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[thehormonerestorationcenter.com](http://thehormonerestorationcenter.com)

# 7 Reasons to Seek Math Help as Soon As School Starts

**Students often need more individual attention than their school can provide.**

It's a widely known fact that strong math skills are vital for success in high school, college, and beyond. Unfortunately, this hard truth causes an undue amount of anxiety and stress in kids who have not yet been taught math in a way that makes sense to them. And, quite often, there are no clear signs that they're struggling. So when is the best time to get math help for your child? As soon as the school year begins (if not sooner!). Here are seven good reasons why:

**1. Sometimes individual instruction is necessary to get a good grasp on math.**

The only way to do well in math throughout high school and beyond is to truly understand the concepts. While some students are able to get by in the early years through memorization, this won't work as the material becomes more advanced. A qualified, caring instructor can give students the individual attention they need to develop a deep understanding of math and ultimately become high achievers.

**2. Any gaps need to be addressed right away.**

Many students have learning gaps in their math foundation that prevent them from reaching their potential. Because math concepts build on each other, these gaps need to be addressed and remedied before students take on new material in order to

keep from falling further behind as the school year progresses. This is where a math-learning program with a structured approach backed by a proven curriculum will be most effective.

**3. Some math knowledge is generally lost over the summer.**

Speaking of learning gaps, have you heard of the "summer slide?" On average, children lose 2-3 months of math skills during



the summer months if they aren't involved in a summer math program. This means they may be starting the school year a little behind where they left off. Getting them the math help they need right away will reinforce concepts they're encountering early in the year and introduce them to new ones, so they're on the right track for a successful school year.

**4. Confidence in math leads to confidence in other subjects.**

When students are able to solve math problems, they feel

a tremendous sense of pride and accomplishment. A good instructor will help a child challenge and exercise their own mind. As comprehension increases, the child's enthusiasm for math grows and they develop confidence, not only in math but in all of their classes. This can be life-changing for a child, so why not get them on the right path now?

**5. Just doing okay means**

**they could be doing better.**

Sometimes it isn't obvious that your child could use math help. You may even have accepted that they're just "average" math students. But all students are capable of being good at math if they're given the right kind of individual instruction. When they start believing this themselves, there's no reason why they can't be high achievers.

**6. If math class is too easy, it's time for more advanced concepts.**

Students who already excel in math have a wonderful opportunity to expand their skills beyond what they're learning

*Continued on next page*

## Ace the School Year from Day One

**Get Ahead Now. Stay Ahead All Year.**

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

**Experience the Mathnasium difference:**

- Expert instructors that teach for comprehension
- Results that stick, not temporary fixes
- A fun environment where students actually get excited about math

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

**FREE Assessment**

**BACK-TO-SCHOOL BACK-TO-MATH**



**MATHNASIUM**  
The Math Learning Center



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
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## Book a dermaplane facial for a smooth start to the school year!

Dermaplaning is a manual exfoliation technique that removes surface dead skin cells and vellus hairs. It's an advanced exfoliation technique utilizing a dermaplaning scalpel blade.



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4590 Highway 20 • Niceville • (850) 585-3134  
[royalltreatmentroom.glossgenius.com](http://royalltreatmentroom.glossgenius.com)

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*  
*144 Palm Blvd N., Niceville*  
*brozinnispizza.com*



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 home-

made 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!

Hours 7:30 a.m.-2 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday.  
(850) 737-6194  
4652 Hwy. 20 East, Niceville  
[bigorangedesigns.com](http://bigorangedesigns.com)

*continued from previous page*

in the classroom. By mastering complex concepts, they can reach higher math levels and unlock their true potential. The right kind of supplemental math help will show them all the doors that being good at math can open.

Students who are looking ahead to college shouldn't wait

until the last minute to get test-prep help. To get the best results on standardized tests, students need to truly understand the math, not cheat themselves by relying on test-taking strategies. The sooner they can get targeted math help for these tests, the more prepared they'll be.

As you weigh the different options for supplemental math help, consider enrolling your child in a math-learning program with a history of setting

children on the right path toward academic success. The curriculum and methodology at Mathnasium Learning Centers has been proven through the achievements of over a million students.

Mathnasium's proprietary teaching method — the Mathnasium Method™ — has been transforming the way children learn and appreciate math since 2002. It does more than just raise their grades and scores — it teaches them to think critically, solve problems and work independently — skills that go

beyond the classroom and last a lifetime. Students are assessed individually and given a customized learning plan detailing the specific type of math help they need. Attentive, highly trained math tutors will teach your child face-to-face at the pace that's right for them. And both in-center and online tutoring in math is available. Whether they're struggling at math, wanting to jump ahead, needing to be challenged, or looking for test-prep help, your child will get the individual attention they need to achieve great things.

No matter where you decide to turn for math tutoring, the key is not to wait. Get them started right away, so they can enjoy the school year ahead with confidence and a positive outlook.

Mathnasium proudly serves students from Niceville, Bluewater Bay, Shalimar, Valparaiso, and Fort Walton Beach. Visit us at 1538 E. John Sims Parkway, Niceville. Call (850) 987-6284 or learn more online at [mathnasium.com/niceville](http://mathnasium.com/niceville).



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- SPIKED SELTZERS  
by Palm Folly
- LIVE MUSIC & DJ
- LIVE STREAMING  
of SEC Football
- LOCAL EATS & SHOPPING
- PHOTO BOOTH
- CIGAR BAR
- CUSTOM TRUCKER HAT BAR



By SCOTT MILLER

**Football season is here—Check out the local top spots to eat, cheer and high-five your way through the games.**

What makes football so popular? Of all the sports Americans play and watch year-round, football stands tall at the top of the heap. High school, college or pro—no other game rallies such a passionate, loyal fanbase. It's more than a sport; it's a tradition. Football brings people together, stirs anticipation long before kickoff and delivers the kind of excitement that keeps us talking long after the final whistle. No other sport even comes close. We love our football—and that, my friends, is just the way it is.

Here in Florida, we joke that there are four seasons:

Tourist Season, Hurricane Season, Snowbird Season and, of course, Football Season. And as fall edges closer, you can feel it in the air. Friday nights under the lights. Saturdays filled with rivalries. Sundays and Mondays devoted to the pros. Football season is here!

We'll be wearing our favorite team jerseys, cheering and high-fiving, glued to every play on the big screen surrounded by a sea of fans who feel the same electric charge. Oh yes, football season is back—and I, for one, can't wait for the games to begin.

And here along the Emerald Coast, we're blessed. Some of the best sports bars and restaurants anywhere are ready to welcome us in, serve up great food and cold drinks, and make every game feel like a championship. Here are a few of my favorites. So, grab your crew, claim your spot and get in on the action—I'll see you there!

**AJ's Seafood & Oyster Bar**

Since 1984, AJ's Seafood and Oyster Bar has been serving cold Gulf Coast oysters and cool libations. What began as a popular local hang out known for fresh oysters and cold beer has grown into one of the most

iconic "hot spots" on the Destin Harbor. From its humble beginning shucking oysters off the deck behind a small trailer on the Destin Harbor, it has grown to four locations along our Emerald Coast, serving fresh seafood, live music and exciting water activities in the Destin area. Attention all die hard football fans, AJ's boasts the one and only Jumbotron on the Destin Harbor. AJ's serves up delicious daily specials, mouth-watering drinks plus entertaining live music all month. Don't miss any of the action just come on down to AJ's Seafood and Oyster Bar all season long.

(850)837-1913  
116 Harbor Blvd.  
aj'sdestin.com

**FUBAR Pizza Bar**

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

FUBAR has plenty of games for the kids along with pool tables, corn hole, dart boards and

more. When out on the water all day, come dock your boat on one of FUBAR'S boat slips and enjoy the incredible view. Feel free to bring along your furry friends to join you on the patio.

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

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

**LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant**

Suds, Songs, Sunsets and Sports! 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.

**Sept. 7:** Card Board Boat Race 4 p.m.

**Tuesdays:** Tacos & \$5 House Margaritas

**Wednesdays:** Kids Eat Free with Adult Purchase.

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

**Sundays:** Brunch 9 a.m.-1 p.m. buffet style, bottomless Mimosas!; Bingo 2-4 p.m.

**Sunday, Sept. 28:** Sunset Shrimp Boil 4-7 p.m. Live music w/Jody Lucas 4-7 p.m. Shrimp, sausage, corn on the cob, potatoes, bread

See ad for live entertainment each weekend. Dine-in, pick-up, to-go.

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.-9 p.m.

(850) 897-6400  
bluewaterbaymarina.com/schooners  
290 Yacht Club Dr., Unit 200,  
Niceville in Bluewater Bay



## FOOTBALL IS BACK!









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**LJ SCHOONERS**

Dockside Restaurant & Oyster Bar



## 18th Annual Cardboard Boat Race

### Sunday, Sept. 7 • 4PM

**Entry Fees:**

Adult Division \$25 • Junior Single Division (12 & under) \$25  
Junior Team of 2 \$35 • Business \$25 • Business Team of 2 \$35  
Day of race entry fees will be Single \$35/Team \$45.

Course to be run in front of LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant & Oyster Bar.

Boats are intended to be biodegradable. Clean up: simple, if you brought it you clean it up.  
(Includes hauling what is left of your boat.)

**MORE INFORMATION:** (850) 897-2821 or bluewaterbaymarina.com

**Oyster Bar Hours:** Monday-Thursday 3pm-10pm • Friday-Saturday 11am to midnight • Sunday 9am to 9pm, Lunch served 2pm  
**Restaurant Hours:** Monday-Tuesday Closed • Wednesday-Saturday 11am to 9pm • Sunday 9am to 9pm • Sunday Brunch 9am to 1pm, Lunch served 2pm

**Events and Live Entertainment:**

Sept. 1 - LABOR DAY - Abranda 4-8pm  
Sept. 5 - The Rememdy 6-10pm  
Sept. 6 - Mechanical Lincoln 6-10pm  
Sept. 7 - Cardboard Boat Race 4pm, Niceville Valparaiso Rotary Club DUCK RACE  
Sept. 9 - Chess Night 6pm  
Sept. 12 - Beach Dogz 6-10pm  
Sept. 13 - Spear Fishing Tournament  
Sept. 16 - The Traveling Painter 5:30pm  
Sept. 19 - Parker & Ivoree Willingham 6-10pm  
Sept. 20 - After Math 5 6-10pm  
Sept. 27 - Southsiders 6-10pm  
Sept. 28 - Sunset Shrimp Boil 4-7pm, Jody Lucas 4-7pm

**290 Yacht Club Dr., Niceville • Bluewater Bay • (850) 897-6400 • Visit [www.bluewaterbaymarina.com](http://www.bluewaterbaymarina.com) for more events!**

SEC Football Schedule

SEC	Aug 30	Sept 6	Sept 13	Sept 20	Sept 27	Oct 4	Oct 11	Oct 18	Oct 25	Nov 1	Nov 8	Nov 15	Nov 22	Nov 29
BAMA	@ FSU	UL-Monroe	Wisconsin	Open	@ UGA	VANDY	@ MIZZ	TENN	@ SCAR	Open	LSU	OKLA	Eastern Illinois	@ AUB
ARK	ALA A&M	ARK State	@ OLE MISS	@ Memphis	Notre Dame	Open	@ TENN	TEXAS A&M	AUB	MISS ST	Open	@ LSU	@ TEXAS	MIZZ
AUBURN	@ Baylor	Ball State	South ALA	@ OKLA	@ TEXAS A&M	Open	UGA	MIZZ	@ ARK	UK	@ VANDY	Open	Mercer	BAMA
FLA	Long Island	South FLA	@ LSU	@ Miami	Open	TEXAS	@ TEXAS A&M	MISS ST	Open	vs UGA	@ UK	@ OLE MISS	TENN	FSU
UGA	Marshall	Austin Peay	@ TENN	Open	BAMA	UK	@ AUB	OLE MISS	Open	vs FLA	@ MISS ST	TEXAS	Charlotte	GA Tech
UK	Toledo	OLE MISS	Eastern Mich	Open	@ S CAR	@ UGA	Open	TEXAS	TENN	@ AUB	FLA	TENN Tech	@ VANDY	@ Louisville
LSU	@ Clemson	Louisiana Tech	FLA	So. Louisiana	@ OLE MISS	Open	S CAR	@ VANDY	TEXAS A&M	Open	@ BAMA	ARK	Western UK	@ OKLA
MISS ST	@ So Miss	Arizona State	Alcorn State	Northern Illinois	TENN	@ TEXAS A&M	Open	@ FLA	TEXAS	@ ARK	UGA	@ MIZZ	Open	OLE MISS
MIZZ	Central ARK	Kansas	Louisiana	S CAR	U Mass	Open	BAMA	@ AUB	@ VANDY	Open	TEXAS A&M	MISS ST	@ OKLA	@ ARK
OLE MISS	UGA State	@ UK	ARK	Tulane	LSU	Open	Washington St	@ UGA	@ OKLA	SCAR	The Citadel	FLA	Open	@ MISS ST
OKLA	Illinois State	Michigan	@ Temple	AUB	Open	Kent State	TEXAS	@ S CAR	OLE MISS	@ TENN	Open	@ BAMA	MIZZ	LSU
S CAR	Virginia Tech	S CAR St	VANDY	@ MIZZ	UK	Open	@ LSU	OKLA	BAMA	@ OLE MISS	Open	@ TEXAS A&M	Coastal Car	Clemson
TENN	Syracuse	East TENN St	UGA	UAB	@ MISS ST	Open	ARK	@ BAMA	@ UK	OKLA	Open	New Mexico St	@ FLA	VANDY
TEXAS	@ Ohio State	San Jose State	UTEP	Open	Sam Houston	@ FLA	vs OKLA	@ UK	@ MISS ST	VANDY	Open	@ UGA	ARK	TEXAS A&M
Texas A&M	UTSA	Utah State	@ Notre Dame	Open	AUB	MISS ST	FLA	@ ARK	@ LSU	Open	@ MIZZ	S CAR	Samford	@ TEXAS
VANDY	Charleston So	@ Virginia Tech	@ S CAR	GA State	Utah State	@ BAMA	Open	LSU	MIZZ	@ TEXAS	AUB	Open	UK	@ TENN



2025 College Football Game Day Highlights

**WEEK 1:**  
**Friday 8/29**  
Auburn @ Baylor 7 p.m. FOX  
**Saturday 8/30**  
Texas @ Ohio State 11 a.m. FOX  
Alabama @ Florida St. 2:30 p.m. ABC  
LSU @ Clemson 6:30 p.m. ABC  
**Sunday 8/31**  
Virginia Tech @ S. Carolina 2 p.m. ESPN  
**WEEK 2:**  
**Saturday 9/6**

San Jose St. @ Texas 11am  
Ole Miss @ Kentucky 2:30 p.m. ABC  
South Florida @ Florida 3:15 p.m. SECN  
Ball St. @ Auburn 6:30 p.m. ESPU  
Michigan @ Oklahoma 6:30 p.m. ABC  
**WEEK 3:**  
**Saturday 9/13**  
Wisconsin @ Alabama 11 a.m.  
South Alabama @ Auburn 11:45 a.m. SECN

Georgia @ Tennessee 2:30 p.m. ABC  
Texas A&M @ Notre Dame 6:30 p.m. NBC  
Florida @ LSU 6:30 p.m. ABC  
**WEEK 4:**  
**Saturday 9/20**  
Florida @ Miami (TBA)  
Auburn @ Oklahoma (TBA)  
UAB @ Tennessee 11:45 a.m. SECN  
SE Louisiana @ LSU 6:45 p.m. SECN

Sam Houston @ Texas 7 p.m. ESP+  
**WEEK 5:**  
**Saturday 9/27**  
Notre Dame @ Arkansas 11 a.m. ABC  
LSU @ Ole Miss (TBA)  
Auburn @ Texas A&M (TBA)  
Tennessee @ Mississippi St. (TBA)  
Alabama @ Georgia 6:30 p.m. ABC

2025 High School Football Schedules

**Niceville Eagles**  
Head Coach: Grant Thompson  
8/15 – vs. Bay (Preseason)  
8/22 – at Tallahassee Lincoln  
8/29 – vs. Escambia  
9/5 – at Pensacola Pine Forest  
9/12 – vs. Crestview  
9/19 – vs. Choctawhatchee  
\*10/3 – Open Week (Freeport only)  
10/10 – vs. Mosley  
\*10/24 – vs. Milton  
10/31 – vs. Navarre

**Rocky Bayou Knights**  
8/15 – vs Lighthouse  
8/22 – vs Monroe Academy  
9/5 – vs Eagles View Academy  
9/12 – at Aucilla Christian  
9/19 – at Franklin County  
9/26 – at Central (Milton)  
10/3 – vs Crenshaw Christian  
10/17 – at Graceville

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

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**Friday:** Two 16" 1 Topping Pizzas \$29.99  
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 Off the Hook

# Okaloosa County Advances Plans for World’s Largest Artificial Reef

Crews in Mobile took a major step recently toward transforming the SS United States into the world’s largest artificial reef. Workers removed the vessel’s 65-foot forward smoke stack, which will be preserved for the

SS United States Conservancy’s future land-based museum. The aft funnel is expected to be removed soon.

Okaloosa County purchased the 990-foot ocean liner in 2024 with plans to create new



marine habitat and boost the Gulf Coast’s fishing and diving industries. The ship will join more than a dozen large vessels already deployed by the Natural Resources Team at Destin-Fort Walton Beach, further strength-

ening a tourism economy that contributes more than \$2 billion annually.

“This is a massive next step toward an environmental effort that will benefit our local marine habitat and build upon our robust tourism industry in Destin-Fort Walton Beach,” said Okaloosa County Board Chairman Paul Mixon. “I applaud the efforts of our contractor, Coleen Marine and the Natural Resources Team at Destin-Fort Walton Beach for their work in pre-

serving this ship’s history as the World’s Largest Artificial reef.”

Deployment is scheduled for late 2025 about 20 nautical miles south of Destin-Fort Walton Beach. The ship will rest in 180 feet of water, with its upper deck just 55 feet below the surface—accessible to both beginner and advanced divers. An exact deployment site has not yet been finalized.

For more information:  
FAQs: [myokaloosa.com/SSUSFAQs](http://myokaloosa.com/SSUSFAQs)  
Interactive reef map: [destin-fwb.com/explore/eco-tourism/artificial-reefs](http://destin-fwb.com/explore/eco-tourism/artificial-reefs)  
SS United States history: [ssusc.org](http://ssusc.org)

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\$5 Park entrance fee Fred Gannon Rocky Bayou State Park

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Funneling for this free program comes from the Mattie Kelly Environmental Initiative through the Northwest Florida State College Foundation.



## Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance Hosts Family Bay Day

This September, families across the Emerald Coast can celebrate one of the region’s most treasured natural resources, the Choctawhatchee Bay. The annual Mattie Kelly Family Bay Day, hosted by the Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance (CBA), takes place Saturday, September 27, at Fred Gannon Rocky Bayou State Park in Niceville from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

The event features interactive exploration stations, hands-on learning activities, and the popular fish printing activity,

offering a fun way for children and adults to explore and play along the beautiful shoreline of Rocky Bayou while learning about the bay’s plants, animals, and ecosystems.

“This event is an opportunity for families to connect with nature and understand the vital role the bay plays in our ecosystem,” says Alison McDowell, Executive Director of CBA. “We’re proud to continue our collaboration with the Choctawhatchee Bay Estuary Program to make environmental

education accessible and fun.”

Admission is \$5 per vehicle (state park entry fee). The program is supported by the Mattie Kelly Environmental Initiative, a project of the Northwest Florida State College Foundation, in partnership with the Choctawhatchee Bay Estuary Program, all working to protect and preserve the bay for future generations.

For additional details, visit [www.basinalliance.org](http://www.basinalliance.org) or email [CBA@nwfsc.edu](mailto:CBA@nwfsc.edu).

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# Disc Golf Comes to Bluewater Bay

Bluewater Bay has a new recreational amenity: its very first disc golf course.

The course sits on newly acquired community green space, once part of the former Lake Golf Course. This land—north of Bluewater Boulevard and once home to holes 1, 2, 3 and 9—is no longer used for golf and will remain protected from development. It was purchased by Bluewater citizens in 2024 as part of a 150-acre acquisition, most of which is still operated as an 18-hole golf course.

The idea for the disc golf course came in February when resident Steve Duresky approached the Preserve Bluewater Bay Board, which manages the land and golf course. The board unanimously approved, and the project quickly took flight.

Duresky and his wife, Sharon, sponsored the installation of the first nine professional-grade baskets, completed in July. “We always enjoyed the game and were just happy to give back to our wonderful community,” Duresky said.

He teamed up with Valparaiso resident Craig Hamilton, who has designed several other area courses. “Craig has been an amazing asset,” Duresky said. “I could not have done this without his vision, advice and sweat equity.”

The nine-hole course begins just behind the Bluewater Golf Course Clubhouse and plays clockwise. Players should note a longer walk between holes six and seven, including a short stretch along Bluewater Boulevard, though future baskets are planned to fill that gap.

Ultimately, the course could expand to 14 holes. Donations



al baskets (about \$450 each), signage, markers and mainte-

nance. Contributions may be dropped off at the Bluewater Bay Golf Course Clubhouse, designated for the Preserve Disc Golf Course.

“Disc golf is great family fun that requires no special skills or equipment,” Duresky said. A set

of free “loaner” discs will soon be available at the start of the course.

Bluewater Bay residents and visitors are invited to give it a try, support its growth and enjoy a new way to play outdoors.

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# How Strength Training Helps with Osteoporosis



BY KASSIA GARFIELD, Ed.D., PT, DPT, ATC, COMT, OCS, CERT. DN

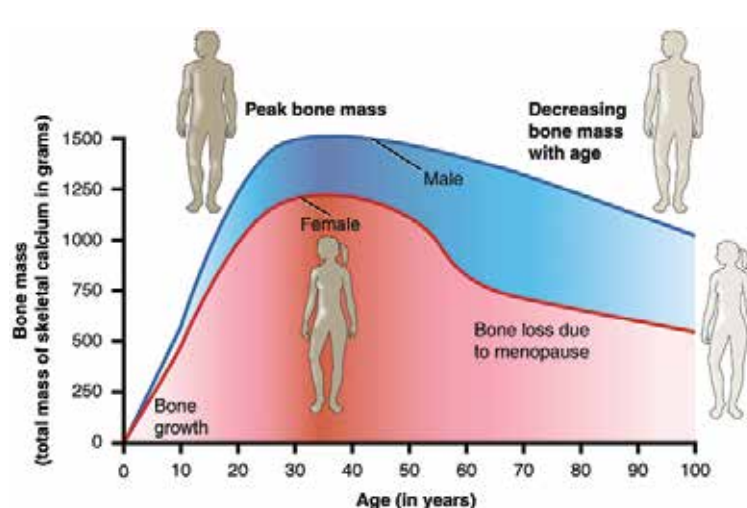
Bones are not static structures—they are dynamic, living tissue that is constantly being broken down and rebuilt. This ongoing process makes bones highly metabolic, responding to the stresses placed on them. Throughout childhood and adolescence, bones grow in size and strength, and people typically reach their peak bone mass in their late teens to early 20s. The more active and physically engaged a person is during these formative years—especially through weight-bearing activities—the stronger their bones will be later in life. This “bone bank” built during youth becomes a crucial reserve as we age. Once we hit our 30s, bone loss can begin to slowly outpace bone formation, and that pace

accelerates significantly in women around menopause.

One major factor influencing bone health is estrogen, a hormone that plays a critical role in regulating bone turnover. Estrogen helps slow the breakdown of bone, preserving bone density. As women approach menopause, their estrogen levels decline significantly. This hormonal change accelerates bone loss, which is why postmenopausal women are at a much higher risk of developing osteoporosis. In fact, women can lose up to 20% of their bone density in the five to seven years following menopause.

This is where strength training comes into play. Also known as resistance training, strength training involves exercises that make your muscles work against a force—such as weights, resistance bands or even your own body weight. While most people associate strength training with building muscle, it is equally important for building and maintaining strong bones. When you engage in resistance exercises, the mechanical load stimulates osteoblasts—cells responsible for forming new bone—leading to increased bone formation and improved bone density.

Studies have consistently shown that strength training can



slow bone loss and may even help rebuild bone in people with osteoporosis or those at risk. Exercises like squats, lunges, and deadlifts apply targeted stress to key areas vulnerable to osteoporotic fractures, such as the hips, spine and wrists. Over time, this stress prompts bones to adapt by becoming stronger and denser.

In addition to improving bone health directly, strength training also enhances muscle mass, coordination and balance—factors that reduce the likelihood of falls and related fractures. For older adults, this benefit is crucial. A broken hip or vertebra can lead to long-term disability, reduced mobility or even increased mortality.

Regular resistance training helps maintain independence and quality of life.

Starting a strength training routine doesn't require a gym or heavy weights. Simple bodyweight exercises, resistance bands or light dumbbells performed two to three times per week can be effective. The key is consistency and progression—gradually increasing resistance over time as strength improves. An important thing to consider is impact. Walking is not enough. Including running or even just jumping rope for 10 minutes a few days a week can limit bone loss as we age. It is hard to increase bone density after a certain age. So, the key is just NOT TO LOSE it. This requires effort and specific stimulus to preserve the bone that was grown in the early 20s.

It's important to note that those with osteoporosis or other health concerns should consult with a healthcare provider before beginning a new exercise

regimen. A physical therapist or certified trainer with experience in osteoporosis can help design a safe, personalized program. If osteoporosis is showing in the spine, it is even more important to work with a professional to start. Bones do take longer to be stimulated compared to muscle, but studies have shown up to 12% changes in bone mass after nine months of resistance training. There is no drug that comes even close that level of change, plus there are so many benefits of being strong!

Remember, bones are metabolically active and respond well to mechanical stress. As estrogen levels fall, especially around menopause, the risk of bone loss increases significantly. Strength training is a powerful, science-backed way to combat osteoporosis by improving bone density, enhancing balance and reducing fall risk. For women approaching or beyond menopause, lifting weights isn't just about fitness—it's an essential step toward protecting long-term bone health. Waiting until there is already bone loss makes it harder to recover. So, starting impact and strength training in your 40s, especially for women, is one of the best things you can do for long-term health and aging independence.

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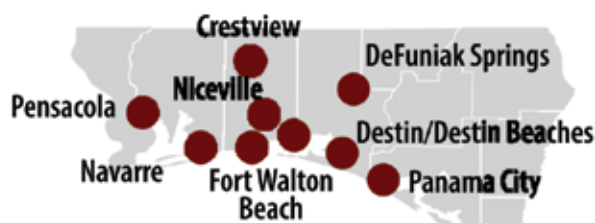
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 Wellness



# Hey, Honey

By KAY LEAMAN, HEALTHYDAY  
HEALTHYLIFE

There are more than 300 types of honey, each with its own unique flavor, color and nutritional properties. Be sure to look for raw and unfiltered honey. Other honeys are usually pasteurized (exposed to high

heat) destroying the yeast that is naturally present as well as destroying most of the honey's nutritional properties.

Visiting as many as 50,000 flowers every day to collect nectar and pollen and then delivering it to the hive where the worker bees turn it into honey,

are a honey bee's job. The flowers they thrive on determines the color, tastes, benefits and uses. Honey has been found in ancient tombs and it was still edible. It has no expiration date unless it is introduced to water.

The varying glucose and fructose levels found in honey is what causes it to crystallize at different rates. This does not affect the honey. It can be softened by placing a bowl with the honey in warm water. To help prevent honey from crystallizing store in a room temperature area and out of direct sunlight in glass jars rather than plastic containers. It is also recommended to use wood vs. metal for extracting honey from the jar. Consistent exposure can affect the enzymes in the honey, and since honey its acidic, it can cause corrosion of the metal over long exposure.

Honey can also contain antioxidant and antibacterial or expectorant properties, probiotics, anti-inflammatory agents or be rich in iron. There are other properties as well, and each honey has its own medicinal applications. Here are some great ones to place in your arsenal.

**Tupelo Honey** - Found in Florida and the remote swamps of Georgia. Buttery and sweet making it good for BBQ sauces and as a drizzle over desserts or ice cream. Benefits include antioxidant and antibacterial properties.

**Alfalfa Honey** - Also known as Lucerne honey is good for baking or as a sweetener for lemonade, teas, etc. Consume regularly to treat diabetes, anemia and fever. It's rich in probiotics.

**Eucalyptus Honey** - Australia and California. Use for mild coughs and colds. Acts as a potent anti-inflammatory and antioxidant agent to boost the immune system

**Buckwheat Honey** - Darkest and strongest among popular types of honey in the world. High in antioxidants and rich in iron. Great for treating anemia, sore throats, coughs and boosts lower cholesterol levels. Also good for wound cleaning and skin care.

**Sage Honey** - California. Incredible for fighting diabetes



and helps indigestion. It has antioxidants, antibacterial and expectorant properties.

**Orange Blossom Honey** - Spain and Mexico and common in Texas, southern California and Florida. Boasts high natural anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties that support the immune system.

**Wildflower Honey** - Widely used to fight allergies, especially when consumed as a natural sweetener in smoothies and teas

**Dandelion Honey** - Australia. Excellent for boosting immune system and superb for gastrointestinal tract and bowel health

**Fireweed Honey** - This honey is created by the plant that sprouts and grows after a forest fire. Great for baking, gourmet cooking, glazes, marinades and grilled food. Has antibacterial and antioxidant properties boosts immune system

**Sourwood Honey** - Appalachian Mountains. Superior antibacterial and antioxidant properties.

**Linden Honey** - Most part of Europe. Used in desserts, tasty cheese and tea sweeteners. Helps alleviate insomnia (before-bed herbal tea) and anxiety as it acts as a sedative. Ideal for treating coughs and colds and detoxifying the body

**Avocado Honey** - Mexico and California. Rich in minerals, antioxidants, and vitamins. Boosts immune system, aids in preventing anemia and hastening wound healing.

**Acacia Honey** - North America and parts of Europe. Great for treating diabetes, cleansing the liver and regulat-

*Continued on next page*

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# A Pastor's Ponderings: Grandparents Day — Honoring Wisdom and Love on September 7th

BY PASTOR DOUG STAUFFER

A few months ago, we welcomed another grandchild, and the joy is indescribable. This is how the Bible describes it. *“Children’s children are the crown of old men; and the glory of children are their fathers” (Proverbs 17:6).* The spiritual influence of a godly grandmother and mother demonstrates how faith can be passed down through generations—here is an example of living faith. *“When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also” (2 Timothy 1:5).*

Each year, on the first Sunday after Labor Day, we celebrate Grandparents Day—a time to honor the faithful presence, enduring love, and godly wisdom of those who have gone before us. In 2025, this special day falls on September 7, offering a meaningful opportunity to recognize the spiritual legacy passed down from one generation to the next.

While it’s easy to focus on birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays marked by gifts and greeting cards, Grandparents Day offers something much



more profound: the opportunity to recognize the lasting importance of generational faithfulness. In a world propelled by speed and self-interest, grandparents act as anchors of stability—reminding us of where we come from and guiding us toward what truly matters.

God designed the family as a multi-generational institution. In Deuteronomy 4:9, we are exhorted, *“Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen... but teach them thy sons, and thy sons’ sons.”* Grandparents are not just spectators—they are

teachers, counselors, and prayer warriors. Their influence often reaches farther than any other person in a child’s life.

Many grandparents today are not only enjoying their golden years—they’re actively helping raise their grandchildren, praying over their families, and offering guidance based on Scripture. Their life experiences serve as living proof of God’s faithfulness. While the world may celebrate youth, Scripture encour-

ages us to honor age and wisdom: *“The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness” (Proverbs 16:31).*

To the grandparents reading this: never underestimate your importance. You serve as a living bridge between the past and the future. Your stories act as lessons. Your faith provides a strong base. Whether you’re actively raising grandchildren or just cheering them on from the sidelines, your influence is everlasting when rooted in Christ.

To the younger generations: take time to listen, learn, and love. Ask for stories. Seek wisdom. Treasure the spiritu-

al inheritance handed down from those who fought battles, weathered storms—yet are still standing, still praising, and still praying.

This Grandparents Day, try to do more than just call or send a card. Pray with them. Read Scripture together. Thank them for their sacrifices, prayers, and faithfulness. If your grandparents are no longer here, think about how they’ve influenced you and honor their memory by living out the values they cherished.

In a society that often forgets the importance of the past, let us be the generation that remembers. As Psalm 145:4 states, *“One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts.”*

This September 7, let us honor our grandparents not only with words but also with gratitude that reaches from earth to Heaven.

*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.*

## HEY HONEY

*continued from previous page*

ing the intestines.

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**Clover Honey** - New Zealand and Canada. Excellent in salad dressings, sauces and cooking recipes. High amounts of phenolic acids improves heart and lung function and boosts the nervous system.

**Blueberry Honey** - Michigan and New England. Excellent spread on toast and biscuits and sweetener for granola or drizzles on fruits and yogurt. Boost immune system and fighting colds. Exceptional antioxidant and antibacterial powers.

I have a few on my list to try. Using it in recipes in place of sugar as well as a teaspoon for a special evening treat sounds like to good place to start.

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Musing



BY SEAN DIETRICH  
Seldovia, Alaska, sits somewhere near the top of the world. It's a nanoscopic village on the

Sean of the South: **The Whale**

North Pacific. Population 225. Tons of fishing boats. A lot of cold, icy, Kachemak Bay water.  
A few days ago, a local spotted something huge stranded on the beach. It was a minke whale. About the same length as a mid-size Toyota.  
The whale was struggling. Thrashing around and panting. The whale was fighting to breathe.  
The passerby ran for help. When a live whale finds itself



stuck on a beach, you don't have a lot of time. Maybe 20 minutes, tops.  
Dehydration is often what kills the whale. Or the whale might drown because its airway faces the tide. Often, it's suffocation that kills a stranded whale.  
Remember when you were a kid, and you swam in the pool all day? Remember how when you got out of the pool, your whole body felt heavy? That's because for hours water supported your body weight while all your friends played Marco Polo, thereby traumatizing some unfortunate child so that this child would be receiving therapy for the next, say, 30 or 40 years of his or her respective adulthood. Not that I would know anything about this.  
So anyway, after being buoyant all day, your little-kid muscles weren't used to supporting your weight. Once you got out

of the pool, your body felt heavy.  
Likewise, whales spend a lifetime in the water. Their bodies are not built to handle their own weight. When a whale lies on the beach, gravity crushes its huge frame, making it almost impossible to breathe.  
The whale in Seldovia was gasping, with roughly three tons sitting on its lungs. It was dehydrating in the sun. It wouldn't be long before the whale would just give up and die.  
Each year, about 2,000 whales strand themselves on beaches and die. That number is rising. Nobody really knows why. Even fewer seem to care.  
Someone in the village contacted Stephen Payton, the environmental coordinator. In his 10-year career, he had never encountered a live beached whale. He wasn't sure what to expect when a neighbor offered him a ride on a four-wheeler.  
"It was really scratched up," Payton said. "You could tell it had probably been rolling around on the rocks."  
When he got to the beach, he had likely expected to find a dead whale. What he found, however, was not a deceased cetaceous creature.  
When Payton arrived at the shore, there was a crowd of locals who had formed a bucket brigade. They were hauling seawater from the Pacific, using five-gallon buckets, dousing the whale.  
The villagers had wrapped the whale in wet towels to protect it from sun exposure. They did not leave the whale's side. Twenty minutes turned into an hour. One hour turned into six.  
After a full day of caring for the animal, the tide arrived. The whale reoriented itself and swam into the water and the crowd cheered.  
But the whale did not swim off into the deep. The whale stayed in local waters for days, surfacing frequently, and spouting at local villagers. Like it was saying thank you.  
Now think of all the times you honestly believed you weren't going to make it. Try to remember the individuals who appeared, seemingly out of nowhere, who stood beside you during hard times, even when odds were not in your favor. Remember those people?  
Good.  
Now go be that person for someone else today.

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# United Fidelity Bank Gives Back with Fourth Annual Community Day

BY CHRISTOPHER MANSON

United Fidelity Bank Community President Ed Burns has served in his position for the past four and a half years. Prior to that, he worked for a couple other banks. The Fort Walton Beach native and FWB High School alumnus has 20 years of banking experience to his credit.

United Fidelity Bank purchased the old First City Bank, which had been around since 1948, in October 2020. UFB was founded in 1914, expanding from a couple employees at its flagship location in Indiana to over 280 employees with 22 locations spanning five states, including the U.S. Virgin Islands, and over \$6 billion in assets.

"We always look for opportunities," says Burns of the bank's Destin and Fort Walton Beach acquisitions. "First City Bank was needing to sell, and the opportunity to purchase a long-standing bank with that kind of history was a good decision. This area has always been, and continues to be, a really good area for growth."

United Fidelity Bank is a full-service bank that offers consumer and business banking and lending services. "We excel in really attractive interest rates on our CDs," says Burns. "And we pride ourselves on the way we interact with our community, especially our not-for-profits. We're always looking for different ways to engage with the community."

On Saturday, October 25, United Fidelity Bank hosts its Fourth Annual Community Day at the Fort Walton Beach location from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Partnering once again with Early Learning Coalition of the Emerald Coast, specifically its Storybook Village endeavor, the event features what Burns describes as "a Fall Festival atmosphere with hot dogs, sno-cones, bouncy houses and live entertainment." Over 4,000 books will be given away at the free family event. "We'll be featuring an additional 30 not-for-profits as well."

Since the first Community Day, the event has grown from a few hundred to over 1,000 visitors. "Early Learning Coalition of the Emerald Coast has



always been a great partner for us," says Burns. "We connected two years ago when they were looking to change their banking services, and it was a natural fit—the way they service all of their families and how we pride ourselves on being a part of the community."

"We're big fans of what they do." More information is available at [elc-ec.org](http://elc-ec.org).

As Community President, Burns maintains "the profitabil-



ity and growth of the bank and continue to drive home our mission and community values. We do that by really engaging with our customers on a one-to-one basis. We have a rich culture of volunteerism and encourage our employees to interact with the United Way and to sit on boards. It's kind of 'old school' community banking, making our community the best that we can."

The United Fidelity team

brings with it a wealth of experience. "Loretta has worked for us and for First City Bank for 48 years," says Burns. "All of our bankers are local and have been here for a while. We're all vested in where we live, work, and worship." The newly added employees have up to 20 years in the business as well as "new generation" staffers who will lead the way into the future of banking.

For Burns, one of the most rewarding aspects of his work is witnessing some of his bankers that have worked for the bigger regional banks adapting to "this level that's like family." And he never tires of sharing in the success and growth of small businesses and not-for-profit customers.

"I always tell people (what distinguishes us) is our ability to truly engage on a personal level," says Burns. "Most of our clients can contact us directly. They see us in the community, in the grocery store. If you don't have direct contact with your banker, you don't have a banker. You have a bank."

"The main thing for us, for this bank, is really diving in and enjoying all the things that make banking fun—knowing our customers and making them feel like they're not a number."

*United Fidelity Bank is located at 135 Perry Avenue SE in Fort Walton Beach and 363 U.S. Highway 98 East in Destin. Call 850.244.5151 to learn more, or visit [unitedfidelity.com](http://unitedfidelity.com).*

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 Arts & Music

# From Palette Knife to Poster: Kathy Schumacher's Art Sets Sail for MKAF's 30th Festival

BY ZANDRA WOLFGAM

With bold strokes and vibrant color, Niceville artist Kathy Schumacher will set the tone for the Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation's 30th Annual Festival of the Arts as this year's official poster artist. This milestone event kicks off Friday, October 24 with the Arty Kickoff Party, followed by the festival weekend October 25-26 at the Mattie Kelly Cultural Arts Village in Destin.

Schumacher's winning piece, **Symphony in Sails**, is a 30 x 24-inch impasto oil painting bursting with jewel-toned sailboats poised for a magical coastal voyage. "It's inspired by Destin—by the water, by the coastal lifestyle—and it just feels like Mattie Kelly," says Schumacher. "I wanted it to be more colorful than my usual sailboat paintings so it would stand out on a poster. It reflects the beauty of our area and pairs perfectly with the festival's music and atmosphere."

While this is Schumacher's first time as the featured poster artist, she is no stranger to the event. She first exhibited at the MKAF Festival of the Arts in 2013, taking home the People's Choice Award her debut year, and has returned nearly every

year since. "I love the festival," she says. "It offers such a wonderful variety of art—paintings, jewelry, pottery and more—in a beautiful setting with live music, great food and activities for all ages."

## From Wisconsin Fields to Florida's Gulf Coast

Schumacher's journey as an artist began later in life. Raised in Wisconsin's rolling farmlands, she developed an early appreciation for the natural world but didn't pick up a paintbrush until her 40s. At the time, she was a busy mom and military spouse, traveling with her husband and raising two children. A casual acrylic painting class with friends sparked an instant passion. "From day one, I loved it," she recalls. Encouraged by instructors impressed with her natural ability, she began exploring oils using traditional Old Masters techniques.

A move to New Mexico proved pivotal. With no job or kids at home, she immersed herself in classes at the New Mexico Art League, experimenting with pastel, watercolor, figurative work and realism. The turning point came when she discovered the work of a Ukrainian

palette knife artist. Captivated by the sculptural texture and bold color, Schumacher set out to master the technique herself. Over time, she developed her signature style: richly textured oils with luminous layers of color and an almost three-dimensional effect.

## The Palette Knife Signature

Today, Schumacher paints exclusively with palette knives. Her process begins with toning the canvas in underlying colors that peek through the top layers, adding depth and vibrancy. "I think that underpainting gives my work another dimension," she says. While many palette knife artists work in acrylics, she prefers the richness of oil pigments.

Her subjects—often coastal landscapes, sailboats, marshes, wildflowers and birds—reflect her deep connection to nature and her Niceville waterfront surroundings. "Whether it's a quiet marsh, a burst of wildflowers or



this journey with her," Kathy says. "Watching her develop her own style in the medium we both love has been a source of immense pride."

## Meet the Artist at the Festival

Festivalgoers can meet Kathy Schumacher in person and view **Symphony in Sails**—alongside her other works—in Tent No. 61 during the festival. As the official poster artist, her winning design will appear on the festival's poster, program guide, t-shirt, MKAF website, social media channels and throughout the event's marketing campaign.

The Festival of the Arts will feature more than 100 artists from across the U.S., competing for \$12,000 in cash prizes across 18 categories, including Best in Show and People's Choice. Visitors can enjoy live music, a collaborative art exhibit, children's activities, an art raffle and a variety of food trucks with beer and wine available. Admission is free, and proceeds benefit MKAF's ArtsReach initiatives serving K-12 students, individuals with special needs and the military community.

Reflecting on her selection, Schumacher says, "This is truly such an honor. The festival has been such a big part of my journey as an artist, and I'm thrilled to help represent its 30th anniversary."

For more about Kathy Schumacher and her work, visit [kathyschumacherart.com](http://kathyschumacherart.com). For more on the Festival of the Arts, visit [MKAF.org](http://MKAF.org).



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# Something from Nothing

BY ANNA FISHER, ASSOCIATE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, EMERALD COAST THEATRE COMPANY

One big regret I have, which dates back to 2016, is my lack of historical documentation. I think back to the day that Stacey Brady, ECTC board member and advocate, brought Nathanael and I to the empty, echoey 17,000 sq. ft. space that now houses Emerald Coast Theatre Company and asked “Do you think this will work?” We laughed, and then we cried, overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of the gift that we were being given from Grand Boulevard. I never dreamed of how full it would become. Full of people, full of things, full of life. I should have created a time lapse video of the curtain track being hung in the rafters and how our theatre friends and colleagues showed up to do math and hang curtains in all the right places. The space slowly began to take shape and form—a curtained off black box area with room for 100 seats, a shop area, a small corral of desks, and a spot in the corner for the bins of

costumes and props we had accumulated and stored in my Father’s shed when it outgrew our garage. We finally had our own space! We could build a set and install it without loading it into our car for transport. Costume and props creation could now happen at a table in our new theatre instead of my kitchen table at home. We could strike the set and not have to load it up for two or three trips back to our garage. It was practically a life of leisure to have an actual location!

Even after the curtains were hung, the space felt massive. I was given a bright blue scooter that Christmas and I used it to get from the back where our “offices” are to the front lobby area. There came a point when I had to abandon my mode of transportation, because the growing number of cords, curtains and people had multiplied so much that there were just no more pathways for scootering. We recently extended the green room to hold 15 people and two racks of costumes—and if everyone turns sideways and sucks



in, they can maneuver around fairly well.

This past season we moved our curtains again to maximize our mainstage seating to 260 seats. We’ve also challenged Beca, our Resident Designer, and Carl, our Master Carpenter, to work in less and less shop space as they simultaneously build bigger and more elaborate sets for the larger shows we are producing. The resourcefulness of our production team always inspires me, because they always figure out a way to make the magic happen.

If I were to give you a tour today, you would see every inch of this incredible space in use.

During the summers, we have some weeks where we simultaneously run four camps totaling almost 100 students. It is a cacophony of joy and energy and so much life happening in real time. There are the little ones in our small dance studio, the big kids dancing their hearts out in the larger rehearsal room, the serious teens working on their murder mystery in the second stage area of the lobby, and our audition-only group singing at full volume on the main stage theatre. You would see Taylor, our Costume Designer, up on the 12 foot high rolling step ladder to pull costumes that have been hung from the

ceiling while Ora, our Props Master, forges a path between the shelves of prop bins and set furniture to find that one perfect centerpiece for the show. This year we were so grateful when friends and supporters Brooks and Cari-Beth McDonald gifted the administration team a separate office space to work in for the summer. We affectionately named it “the quiet place.”

Just like this once empty and echoey space, theatre is about creating something from nothing. The playwright creates that first spark and ignites a firestorm of imagery, music, lyrics and emotion. We then get to build those flat words into three dimensional miracles that exist for a moment in time. Ephemeral little worlds filled with texture and life and color and structure and wood and velvet and people moving and breathing in a way that never happens the same way twice. I hope you’ll join us in real time for Season 13, and see all the worlds that ECTC has made into something from nothing.

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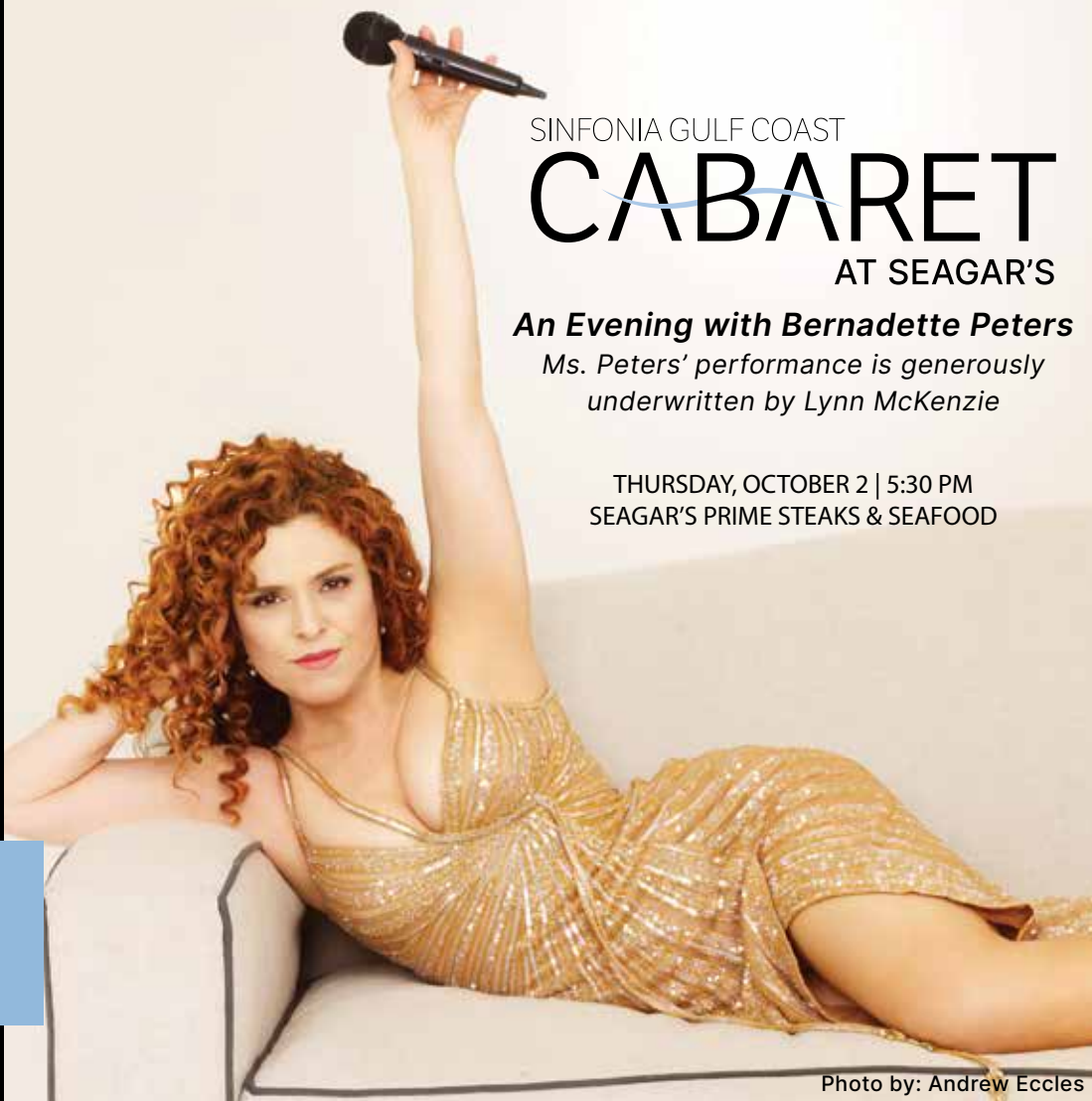


Photo by: Andrew Eccles

Arts & Music

# Florida Artist Blacksmith Association Keeps Craft Alive

Blacksmithing may have been popularized in recent years by shows like *Forged in Fire* and *Men at Arms*, but in Florida the tradition has been thriving for decades thanks to the Florida Artist Blacksmith Association (FABA).

Founded in 1984, FABA has spent 40 years teaching the craft, preserving its history and setting up historical blacksmith shops across the state. Its mission is simple: “To teach – To preserve.” The organization will mark its 40th anniversary with a three-day celebration in Gainesville, Oct. 10-12, featuring demonstrations and hands-on classes.

Monthly meetings are also part of FABA’s educational program, held at eight locations statewide. The Fort Walton Beach chapter—known as the Far West Panhandle Blacksmiths—is headquartered at Traditions Workshop, 418 Green Acres Road. Meetings often include demonstrations, open forges where attendees can try projects themselves, and a provided lunch with donations



appreciated.

First-time visitors are welcome free of charge. Annual family memberships cost \$30 and include access to every FABA event statewide, discounts for the annual convention, and a digital copy of *The Clinker Breaker*, the group’s monthly newsletter.

Upcoming events include:

**Sept. 27, 9 a.m.–4 p.m. at Traditions Workshop:** Final preparations for the conference, including completion of

the gift exchange project “something that opens.”

**Oct. 10–12: FABA CON 40** in Gainesville.

**Nov. 8, 9 a.m.–4 p.m. at Timber Creek Distillery, 6451 Lake Ella Road, Crestview:** Annual club-level competition with a five-hour pizza cutter challenge. Wood and tools for handles will be available, and participants can expect pizza from the stone oven, drinks from the distillery, and possibly axe throwing.

**Dec.:** No meeting due to

holidays and festivals.

**Jan. 24 and Feb. 28, 9 a.m.–4 p.m. at Traditions Workshop:** Indoor winter meetings with a focus on Journeyman standards and ABANA Level 1 curriculum projects.

**March 28, 9 a.m.–4 p.m. at John Butler’s farm, 4112 Bell Lane, Pace:** Make-and-take class crafting a Viking-era utility knife. Class cost is \$130, including lunch. Limited to 12 participants. Register at [traditionsworkshop.com/classes](http://traditionsworkshop.com/classes).

Spring and summer meeting

sites for April through June are to be announced, and FABA is seeking host locations with room for a truck, trailer and 20-by-30-foot tent, plus access to 120v power and water.

For details, contact David at [david@traditionsworkshop.com](mailto:david@traditionsworkshop.com) or call/text 850-974-1548. Safety glasses, solid shoes or boots, long trousers and long-sleeve shirts made of natural fabric are required for all events.



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# Arts & Music News

## 30A Songwriters Festival - Jan. 16-19, 2026

The 30A Songwriters Festival returns for its 17th year Jan-

uary 16-19, transforming Scenic Highway 30A into a music lover's paradise. More than 125 artists will perform over 300 shows across 30 unique venues, from cozy cafés and patios to amphitheaters and outdoor stages.



Presented by Grand Boulevard, this year's festival features main stage performances at Grand Boulevard's Town Center in Miramar Beach by Mavis Staples, Toad the Wet Sprocket, 10,000 Maniacs, I'm With Her, Nikki Lane, and Paul McDonald

Walton County and Russell Carter Artist Management, with support from Visit South Walton, WaterColor Inn & Resort, and ASCAP.

Weekend passes and VIP packages are on sale now. For tickets and details, visit [30ASongwritersFestival.com](http://30ASongwritersFestival.com).

## Lyrics on the Harbor: Destin's First Songwriter Festival Debuts This Fall

**October 10-11, 2025 | Heron Harbor, Destin**

For the first time, the histor-

ic Destin Harbor will echo with the stories behind the songs you love. The inaugural Destin Songwriter Festival arrives October 10-11, 2025, transforming Heron Harbor (314 Harbor Blvd.) into two days of music, storytelling and coastal beauty.

Expect free daytime performances on three side stages at harbor-front bars and restaurants, followed by ticketed evening headliner shows on the Main Stage — all set against

our beautiful Destin Harbor. Acclaimed songwriters from throughout the country will share intimate acoustic sets and the inspiration behind their hits, creating an unforgettable experience for music lovers and storytellers alike.

### Tickets & Details

GA 2-Day Pass: \$60

GA Friday or Saturday: \$35/day

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Main Stage shows require

GA or VIP tickets; side stages are free.

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Visit [DestinSongwritersFestival.com](http://DestinSongwritersFestival.com) to learn more and get your tickets.





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