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BAY Life

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Postal Customer Local

Lyrics and Music Meet Sand and Sun at the Inaugural Destin Songwriter Festival

By WILL ESTELL

If you're a beach lover from near or afar and consider yourself a fan of music and the men and women that make it happen, you're going to want to make plans to attend Destin's first ever songwriter fest.

This October 10 and 11th, the white sands and emerald waters of the World's Luckiest Fishing Village will also serve as the picturesque backdrop for the inaugural Destin Songwriter Festival, bringing together an array of talented songwriters and performers for a weekend of meaningful lyrics, great music and fun-loving music fans converging along the beautiful coastline.

Situated along Destin Harbor, the festival will feature everything from intimate acoustic sets to unforgettable headliner performances and offer a first-hand glimpse into the stories behind the songs. Fans will have the opportunity to feel every lyric and the weight each song carries in its journey to become a musical story.

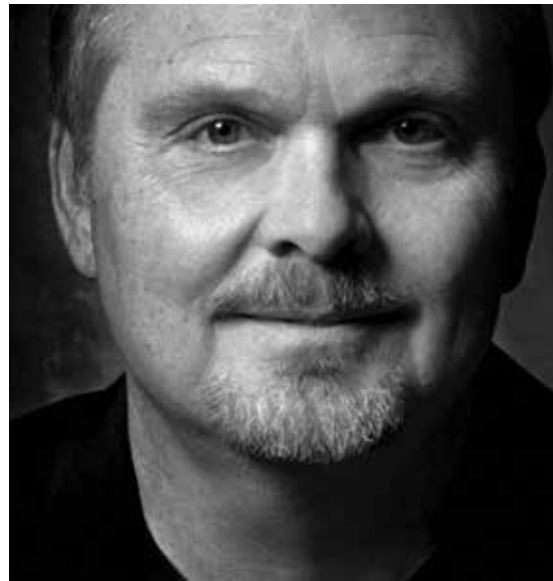


James Otto

In my two decades of covering festivals and writing feature cover story interviews on well knowns from Alan Jackson and Brian Kelley to Kenney Chesney, Darius Rucker, and the late great Jimmy Buffett, I've often said that to sing is one thing, but to write and breathe lyrical life into a song is quite another. Remarkably, the Destin Songwriter Festival

offer attendees the opportunity to experience both. Whether you're a lifelong music devotee, a casual festivalgoer or simply a beach lover looking for a soundtrack to paradise, this is where the art of songwriting meets the beauty of Destin.

I talked with organizer and Destin Songwriter Festival CEO, Matthew Pennings, who



Kent Blazy

gave me a little insight into the festival and how the two-day event would run.

"Throughout the festival, music lovers can enjoy free performances at multiple popular venues along Destin Harbor, coupled with paid ticketholders being able to access the

SONGWRITER
continued on page 2

Festival of the Arts Marks 30 Years of Color, Creativity and Community



By LORI LEATH SMITH

The first time I walked into the Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation office, it felt like coming home. It reminded me of my mom—a talented artist with a gift for detail who loved bringing barns, old buildings, people, trees and landscapes to life

FESTIVAL OF ARTS
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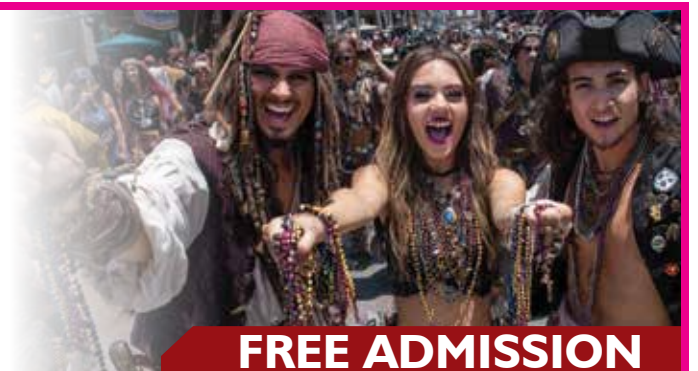
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 Community

SONGWRITER

continued from page 1

mainstage, and feature acts, just up the hill at 314 Harbor Blvd. These waterfront stages include popular Destin venues like Boat House, Sky Bar at Edge Seafood and Harbor Tavern. All of the shows in those venues will be free to attend, while the mainstage will be a ticketed, patrons-only area."

The festival's Main Stage at 314 Harbor Blvd. is where the weekend crescendos, with both general admission and VIP tickets available. Here fans will get up close with a premium production setup complete with drink and food vendors, along with world-class performances by such renowned writers and performers such as James Otto, Kent Blazy, and Andy Griggs.

Lyrics on the Harbor:

Destin's First Songwriter Festival

October 10–11, 2025 |
Heron Harbor

Tickets & Details

- GA 2-Day Pass: \$60
- GA Friday or Saturday: \$35/day
- VIP Table (2-Day): \$1,000

Main Stage shows require GA or VIP tickets; side stages are free.

The three aforementioned not only for their stage presence, but for their hit songs gracing country radio and streaming playlists around the globe.

Supporting artists performing on the Destin Songwriter Festival Main Stage include Justin Holmes, Matt Wynn, Justin Andrews and Nashville recording artist, Jessie G — who also happens to be festival founder Matthew Pennings' lovely and talented wife.

I asked my friend and fellow music lover, Destin Mayor Bobby Wagner, what the new songwriter festival means to him, and he gave it a resounding thumbs up.

"Our harbor area has always been the heart of Destin, and welcoming songwriters alongside our own local talent can really turn it into a stage that celebrates community and culture. As someone who loves music, just like you do, I see this festival as more than entertainment. It's a chance for our locals to share their voices, and for our visitors and vacationers to experience the spirit of Destin through both song and the beautiful backdrops you mentioned," said Mayor Wagner.

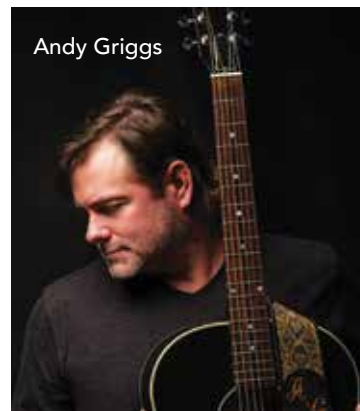
Pennings, also reminded me that while the festival is about

music, it's also about giving back. As such, a portion of proceeds will benefit Operation Song, a 501(c)(3) dedicated to helping veterans, active-duty service members, and their families tell their stories through songwriting. The organization will take center stage on Friday, October 10, leading the headlining round and reminding audiences of the powerful connection between music and healing.

With free harbor performances, ticketed headliner shows and one of the most stunning destinations in the South, the inaugural Destin Songwriter Festival promises a weekend that pairs perfectly with a cold drink, good company and great stories set to music.

Music lovers can visit **www.destinsongwriterfestival.com** for the latest updates, ticket information, artist announcements and insider travel tips for making the most of your festival fun.

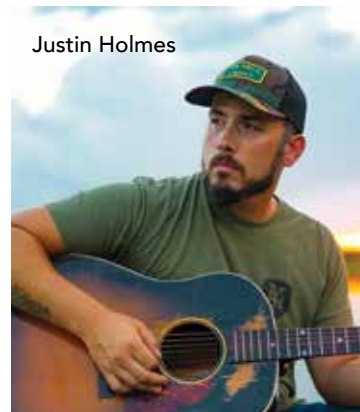
Will Estell is a writer, editor, and media entrepreneur with more than 750 published articles in regional and national magazines covering tourism, real estate, automobiles, golf, food, music, and celebrity cover-story interviews. As chief creative officer of Estell Hussey Media LLC, he has



Andy Griggs



Jessie G



Justin Holmes



Matt Wynn

helped launch 12 magazine titles from concept to market and served as editor in chief for several others. His latest project—a men's lifestyle magazine blending Esquire, GQ, fitness, outdoors and auto—debuts nationwide in 2026. A Mississippi native, Will is the father of three who now lives in Destin and Navarre Beach with his wife, WEAR ABC 3 news anchor Laura Hussey-Estell.

FESTIVAL OF ARTS

continued from page 1

in watercolor and pen & ink. Growing up, weekends often meant traveling to art shows,

helping her set up and soaking in the creative buzz of those events. I even sold my own pet rocks (don't judge—some of you remember!) and tried my hand at leatherwork and paint. Those early shows were my first classrooms in community—how art unites strangers in one place and somehow sends them home as friends.

Perhaps that's why today, as a Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation (MKAF) board member, my love of art and artists still runs deep. And the Festival of the Arts remains one of my favorite times of year. This year, we celebrate MKAF's 30th anniversary, a milestone for one of the Southeast's premier juried art festivals.

Arty Kick Off Party

The celebration begins Friday night, October 24, with the Arty Kick Off Party at 6 p.m. at the MKAF Cultural Arts Village. Guests will vibe to tunes by DJ Josh, sip curated pours from Vinuv and enjoy light bites while mingling with artists and



INAUGURAL
DESTIN SONGWRITER FESTIVAL

LIVE PERFORMANCES | 4 STAGES
October 10 & 11, 2025

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JAMES OTTO **KENT BLAZY** **ANDY GRIGGS**

MATT WYNN **JESSIE G** **JUSTIN HOLMES**

AND MORE ANNOUNCED SOON!

TICKETS ON SALE NOW!

MORE INFO:

www.destinsongwriterfestival.com

A portion of proceeds will benefit Operation Song and their work with Veterans

Operation Song logo

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Continued on page 37

A Beacon of Hope: Crossroads Center Expands with Spiritual Health and Wellness Building

By MICHELLE RUSCHMAN

On Tuesday, August 26th, 2025, Crossroads Center celebrated breaking ground for its new Spiritual Health and Wellness building. Cindy Bray summarizes what defines their growth.

"I may be the Executive Director, but really, Crossroads directs me."

Since 2007, Crossroads Center has served our community faithfully, not only through the mission to provide spiritual, medical, and dental care through God's love, but in the unwavering dedication of its Board of Directors, administration, medical providers, counselors and volunteers. Cindy recalls how Crossroads got started.

"In 2005, a mobile dental ministry visited the area, organized by Dr. Herschel Adams, a pastor who has since passed. At that time, he knew he had availability for approximately 70 appointments. On the day he arrived, however, close to 200

people were there, hoping for help. Knowing he didn't have enough appointments, he had to tell over a hundred people that they would not receive care that day, and it broke his heart."

Dr. Adams, acknowledging the need and determined not to ignore the call, spent the next two years partnering with medical and law professionals, business entities, churches and individuals who wanted to serve their communities.

Since Crossroads opened in 2007, they have served Okaloosa and Walton counties in a way that acknowledges all the different aspects of what it takes to truly feel well – having your medical, emotional, and spiritual needs met with compassionate care.

Three branches make up Crossroads' primary services, free of charge to qualifying patients: medical, dental, and counseling. First, the medical team addresses primary and preventative care with a focus



on the management of chronic disease and medication assistance. Select specialists are also available onsite and through referrals. Next, area dentists donate their time to administer initial and comprehensive exams, cleanings, and panoramic x-rays, as well as fillings and extractions. Finally, counselors and life coaches provide Christian counseling while offering spiritual, emotional, and mental health resources. While all these are available, the patient gets to decide what they need.

It is this last branch that will be most impacted by the new

building and the rooms that it will provide.

"Crossroads Center is our name because we don't just care for physical needs. In 2022, we started our counseling services. We knew that for our patients to truly move toward healing, mental health and counseling had to be addressed. Sometimes people just need some encouragement. We currently have a licensed clinical social worker who helps our patients connect to resources, and we also have a patient liaison who is a life coach. She is a big encourager and recently helped five people



gain employment. That really is our goal – keep people working and participating in their lives."

The new expansion will offer rooms with more privacy and soundproofing for counseling sessions as well as spaces to meet and conduct classes for diabetes education, nutrition, and possibly cooking classes.

"We want to equip people to make better choices and know what to do with what they learn."

Crossroads' efforts not only serve the individual, but Okaloosa and Walton counties as a whole:

- With a more robust and ac-

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Bigger, Brighter, More Brilliant
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Bay Buzz

Okaloosa County Women's Hall of Fame Celebrates 30 Years

The Okaloosa County Commission on the Status of Women recently celebrated the 30th anniversary of its Women's Hall of Fame, honoring seven outstanding women whose contributions have left a lasting mark on Okaloosa County.

Since 1995, 147 women have been inducted into the Hall of Fame, which recognizes those who have shaped the community through leadership in business, education, the arts, military service, and public service.

This year's inductees were:

Peggy Brockman (Business Professional): Founder of Bring Hope Now, Brockman has spent three decades advocating for youth mental health, suicide prevention, and domestic violence awareness.

Martha "Jenny" Hamilton (Education, post-humous): Beloved Choctawhatchee High School educator, cheer sponsor, and student activities director whose career spanned more than 35 years.

Helen Harris (Mattie Kelly Cultural Arts): President of ADSO and owner of HH Arts, Harris has fostered artistic growth and public arts initiatives across the county.

Sherry Harlow (Pioneer): Retired Eglin Federal Credit Union PR manager



with 45 years of service; founding member of the Emerald Coast PR Organization and champion of financial education.

Kay Rasmussen (Military): Associate Director of One Okaloosa EDC, national board-certified economic developer, and longtime military liaison instrumental in securing federal defense funding.

Eloise Stevens (Community Service): Retired Air Force Lt. Colonel and community leader involved in mentoring, Bible studies, voter drives, and women's health advocacy.

Donna Tashik (Carolyn Spencer Humanitarian): Executive Director of Fresh Start for Children & Families, dedicated to helping homeless families achieve self-sufficiency.

Together, these women join the ranks of those whose vision, service, and leadership have shaped Okaloosa County for the better over the past three decades.

Call for Local History Help

The Heritage Museum is assisting Professor Amy Milligan of Old Dominion University in her research on Jewish service members stationed at Eglin AFB between 1938 and 1990. Community members with information are encouraged to contact Collections Trustee Jené McCracken at 850-678-2615. Contributions will aid Milligan's forthcoming article in the Journal of Southern Jewish History.

Niceville Veterans Day Parade Returns

The City of Niceville's annual Veterans Day Parade is set for Saturday, Nov. 15, at 10 a.m. Registration is open for groups, organizations, and individuals wishing to participate. The city is also seeking nominations for Grand Marshal — a veteran who embodies patriotism and service. Nominations and parade inquiries can be sent to pjo@nicevillefl.gov. Register online at cityofniceville.org.

line at cityofniceville.org.

Patriotic Start to America 250



The Snowden-Horne Society, Children of the American Revolution, opened the America 250 ceremony at the Hsu Foundation on Sept. 3 with the Pledge of Allegiance, the American's Creed, and the Preamble — presented in both spoken word and American Sign Language. Foundation CEO Amanda Negron also presented a \$1,000 donation to support the Society's America 250 mural project.

Exploring Shipwrecks of the Blackwater

On Nov. 5, the local chapter of the Daughters of the American Colonists will host Dr. Nicole Grinnan for Shipwrecks of the Blackwater River. Grinnan will share the maritime histo-

ry of the region through the remains of lumber schooners, steam tugs, and fishing smacks resting on the riverbed. The free event begins at 10 a.m., with refreshments at 9:30.

Niceville Town Hall Meeting Oct. 2

The City of Niceville invites residents to a Town Hall Meeting on Thursday, Oct. 2, from 6–7:30 p.m. at the Niceville Community Center, 204 Partin Dr. N, Ste. C. Mayor Dan Henkel and City Manager David Deitch will provide updates on projects and answer community questions. No RSVP is required.

Apply Now for Free & Reduced Meals

The Okaloosa County School District reminds families to apply for free and reduced-price meals for the 2025–26 school year. Applications must be renewed each year, with a Sept. 22 deadline for students with expiring benefits. Apply anytime online at www.myschoolapps.com or call 850-301-3020 for assistance. Nutritious meals help students stay focused and ready to learn.

Celebrating Creativity with the Cultural Arts Alliance of Walton County

The Cultural Arts Alliance of Walton County (CAA) believes the arts are essential to a thriving community. For more than 30 years, the nonprofit has nurtured creativity through programs, exhibitions, education, and cultural events that connect all ages to the power of the arts. From supporting local artists and teachers to producing beloved festivals and performances, funds raised through memberships, donations, and events are reinvested directly into the community.

CAA also invites supporters to join its Circle of Champions, a group of donors dedicated to sustaining the arts for generations to come. Learn more about upcoming events, arts education, and ways to get involved at CulturalArtsAlliance.com.

Upcoming Events

Oct. 12 – 30A Songwriters Festival Stage @ Porchfest, Watersound Origins

Stretch out on the lawn and enjoy live music from 3–6 p.m. Porchfest is free, open to the public, and the perfect recipe for good music, good people, and good neighbors.

Oct. 23 – Clay for a Cause: Mugs for Jugs @ Point Washington Medical Clinic

In honor of Breast Cancer Awareness Month, join us from 5–7 p.m. for an evening where art meets heart. Browse handmade mugs while supporting the Point Washington Medical Clinic and the CAA Pottery Studio.

Nov. 9 – 33rd Annual Flutterby Arts Festival @ Watersound Town Center

Celebrate creativity and the Monarch migration! From 10 a.m.–4 p.m., enjoy hands-on art, live performances, student exhibits, an artist market, a butterfly parade, and more. Free and family-friendly.

Nov. 12–16 – Alys Beach Crafted benefiting CAA

Five days of flavor, craft, and creativity! Crafted brings together master makers, culinary artists, and beverage pros for tastings, demos, and the Spirited Soirée — all to benefit the CAA.

Nov. 27 – 30A 10K Thanksgiving Races benefiting CAA

Kick off Thanksgiving in Rosemary Beach with a 10K, 5K, or 1-mile fun run. Scenic, flat, and family-friendly — it's the perfect holiday tradition.

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Bay Buzz Events

Destin-Ft Walton Beach Convention Center

Fundraiser for the Okaloosa, Walton, Santa Rosa, & Escambia Republican Party

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 18TH, 2025

FLORIDA GOVERNOR'S DINNER

*** DINNER ***



Jay Collins,
Florida Lt. Governor



Ron DeSantis,
Florida Governor



Blaise Ingoglia,
Florida CFO

Early Bird Price thru Sept 21st
Dinner \$150 VIP \$300
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Event starts at 6:45 pm

For Further Details:
media@okaloosagop.com
Chairman Doug Stauffer
(850) 543-8742

Paid for by Okaloosa County Republican Executive Committee

Women in Science Conference
Tuesday, Sept. 30 | 5:30–7:30 p.m. | The Place on Beal, 100 Beal Parkway NW, Fort Walton Beach



Future scientists, take note! The Emerald Coast Science Center and MTSI host their Ninth Annual Women in Science Conference, spotlighting brilliant local professionals in biology, software, analytics, and more. Hear inspiring journeys, ask your burning questions, and enjoy light refreshments. Adults \$10, students free (reservation required).
Info: <http://bit.ly/2025womeninscience>

United for Impact Non-Profit Conference
Thursday, Oct. 2 | 9 a.m.–3 p.m. | Beachside Church, 200 Racetrack Rd NW, Fort Walton Beach

Non-profit changemakers, this day is for you! United Way Emerald Coast brings back its action-packed conference with keynotes, panels, and workshops designed to spark new ideas and strengthen missions. Networking and fresh strategies guaranteed.
Details: united-way.org

Homeschool Friday: Lexington & Concord
Friday, Oct. 3 | 10 a.m. | Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida, Valparaiso

Step back to April 1775 and the “shot heard round the world!” Military historian Karl Eschmann kicks off a yearlong celebration of America’s 250th anniversary with homeschool students. Ages 7+, \$7 per student.
Register: 850-678-2615

Taylor Swift Album Release Party
Friday, Oct. 3 | 6–10 p.m. | Marina Bar & Grill, Sandestin

Calling all Swifties! Sequins, fringe, and sparkle required at this free marina bash celebrating Taylor’s brand-new album. DJ Quincy spins Taylor hits until the big first play at 7:30 p.m. Themed cocktails, pop-up jewelry, and prime rib on the menu. It’s a Swiftie’s dream night!
More info: sandestin.com

Cars of 30A at Alys Beach
Oct. 3–4 | 10 a.m.–4 p.m. daily | Alys Beach

Luxury meets horsepower! Over 150 rare and high-performance cars take over Alys Beach for two unforgettable days of automotive eye candy. Perfect for collectors, car lovers, and anyone who appreciates craftsmanship.
Tickets: carsof30a.com

Moonlight Glow: Hunter’s Moon Edition
Saturday, Oct. 4 | 7 p.m.–midnight | Bayside Sandestin

Glowing lights, DJ beats, fire performers, cocktails, and s’mores by the bay — all under October’s full Hunter’s Moon. This adults-only (21+) poolside bash promises the ultimate fall night out. Tickets \$10.
Details: sandestin.com

‘Beetlejuice JR.’ by Mosaic Theatre Company
Oct. 3–5 | 7 p.m. Fri–Sat; 2 p.m. Sun | Mattie Kelly Arts Center Sprint Theatre, Niceville

He’s the ghost with the most! Local students reimagine Tim Burton’s cult classic in a musical comedy filled with laughs, catchy tunes, and spooky fun. Perfect for all ages. Tickets \$15 students, \$20 adults.
Info: mattiekellyartscenter.org

Toast on the Coast
Sunday, Oct. 5 | 12–2:30 p.m. | Henderson Beach Resort, Destin

Raise your glass! The Junior League of the Emerald Coast hosts its 3rd Annual Toast on the Coast — an afternoon of food, craft drinks, and community. GA \$60, VIP \$110 (with early entry). All proceeds benefit women and families locally.
Tickets: JLEC.org

Continued on page 8



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Florida Governor’s Dinner Coming to Okaloosa Island

The Republican parties of Okaloosa, Walton, Santa Rosa, and Escambia counties are joining forces this fall to host the first-ever Panhandle Governor’s Dinner. The event is set for Saturday, Oct. 18, 2025, at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center on Okaloosa Island.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis will deliver the keynote address, joined by Lt. Gov. Jay Collins and Chief Financial Officer Blaise Ingoglia. A VIP reception, social hour, and silent auction begin at 5:30 p.m., followed by dinner and the program at 6:45 p.m.

Early bird tickets are available through Sept. 21 at \$150 (general) and \$300 (VIP). Prices increase after the deadline. Proceeds benefit the four participating county Republican parties, helping fund operations, outreach, communications, and state-level participation.

Sponsorship opportunities range from \$3,000 to \$10,000, each including a reserved VIP table for 10. Silent auction donations are also welcomed, with businesses contributing items valued at \$1,000 or more receiving sponsorship recognition. A Patriot Sponsor level of \$600 provides two VIP tickets for First Responders, Veterans, or young Republicans.

Organizers emphasize the dinner as a major fundraising opportunity to support upcoming elections and strengthen conservative leadership across Northwest Florida.

For more information, sponsorship details, or ticket reservations, visit www.OkaloosaGOP.com or email Media@OkaloosaGOP.com. Business or semi-formal attire is requested.



Happenings Around the Bay

2025
OCTOBER EVENTS

01	Coding for Kids 4:15 pm Niceville Library Niceville	09 CONT.	Greater FWB Chamber Nothing But Networking 11:30 am Trinity UMC FWB FWB Best of the Emerald Coast Winners Soiree 6 pm Grand Boulevard at Sandestin Miramar Beach Pumpkin Design Class 6 pm Katie's House of Flowers & Gifts Niceville Niceville HS Football Game vs. Mosley 7 pm Niceville High School Niceville	25	The Hero Within Featuring Guest Pianist Zhang Zu 7 pm Mattie Kelly Arts Cente Niceville
02	Justice on the Block 10 am Valparaiso Library Valparaiso Sinfonia Gulf Coast Cabaret at Seagar's: An Evening with Bernadette Peters 5:30 pm Seagar's Prime Steaks & Seafood Miramar Beach Book Club: The Story She Left Behind 6 pm Salt & Story Niceville	10	Live Music: Rick Esguerra 6 pm 3rd Planet Brewing Co. Niceville	26	5th Annual BrunchFest 11 am Seville Quarter Pensacola
03	Greater FWB Chamber First Friday Coffee 7 am Christian Life Center at FBC FWB Live Music: Josh Davis 6 pm 3rd Planet Brewing Co. Niceville Homeschool Friday 10 am Heritage Museum of NWFL Valparaiso Niceville HS Football Game vs. Godby 7 pm Niceville High School Niceville Rocky Bayou Christian Football Game vs. CCA 7 pm Rocky Bayou Christian School Niceville	11	Nautical Flea Market 10 am LJ Schooners Restaurant Niceville Baytowne Beer Festival 2-5 pm Village of Baytowne Wharf Sandestin Bloody Mary Festival 11 am The Market Shops Miramar Beach	28	Writers Group 5:30 pm Niceville Library Niceville
04	Dog Daze presented by Friendship Veterinary Hospital 9 am The Landing Downtown FWB Florida Concealed Carry Weapons Class 10 am Emerald Coast Indoor Shooting & Sport Valparaiso Artist Trading Card Club 5 pm Artful Things Niceville	16	Greater FWB Chamber Business After Hours 5:30 pm Ashley Furniture HomeStore FWB	29	Coding for Kids 4:15 pm Niceville Library Niceville
05	Bluegrass Jam 12 pm 3rd Planet Brewing Co. Niceville Toast on the Coast 12 pm Henderson Beach Resort Destin Dinner of Dreams benefiting A Bed 4 Me 5 pm Niceville Senior Center Niceville Women's Climbing Circle 5 pm Rock Out Climbing Gym Destin	16-19	9th Annual Harvest Wine & Food Festival Various Times & Locations WaterColor	30	Barktoberfest benefiting Dog Harmony 4:30 pm Grand Boulevard at Sandestin Miramar Beach
07	Niceville Young Professionals Networking Meeting 11:30 am Niceville Chamber of Commerce Niceville Youth Still Life Drawing with Loren Boyer 3:30 pm Artful Things Niceville National Night Out 5 pm Niceville Police Department Niceville Chess Night 6 pm LJ Schooners Restaurant Niceville	17	Live Music: The L.A. Strangers 6 pm 3rd Planet Brewing Co. Niceville	31	Halloween on the BOOlevard 4 pm Grand Boulevard at Sandestin Miramar Beach 10th Annual Tricks and Treasures 5 pm The Boardwalk on Okaloosa Island FWB Live Music: Almost Famous 850 6 pm 3rd Planet Brewing Co. Niceville Niceville HS Football Game vs. Navarre 7 pm Niceville High School Niceville Halloween Dinner Cruise 7 pm Sunquest Cruises - Solaris Yacht Miramar Beach
08	Niceville Valparaiso Chamber Second Wednesday Breakfast 7:15 am Niceville Community Center Niceville Coding for Kids 4:15 pm Niceville Library Niceville	18	32nd Annual Single Hand Race 9 am LJ Schooners Restaurant Niceville Katie's Autumn Festival 9 am Katie's House of Flowers & Gifts Niceville Florida Concealed Carry Weapons Class 10 am Emerald Coast Indoor Shooting & Sport Valparaiso Niceville Bazaar 10 am Boggy Bayou Mullet Festival Site Niceville Books & Boo's Trick or Treat 4 pm Salt & Story Niceville Live Music: Modern Eldorados 6 pm 3rd Planet Brewing Co. Niceville	ONGOINGEVENTS DESTIN FISHING RODEO! OCT 1-31 Daily Docks behind A.J.'s Destin Harbor Oils and Acrylics with Rosalyn O'Grady 10 am Tues Artful Things Niceville Watercolor Techniques with Theresia McInnis 1 pm Tues Artful Things 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 One Stroke Painting (Lvl 2) with Sheila Mahony 10:30 am Fri Artful Things Niceville One Stroke Painting (Lvl 1) with Sheila Mahony 2 pm Fri Artful Things Niceville Yoga at Turkey Creek 9 am Sat Turkey Creek Nature Trail Niceville Brunch on the Bayou 9 am Sun LJ Schooners Restaurant Niceville	
09	Crack The Code Workshop: 10 Communication Strategies Influential Leaders Must Master 9 am Northwest Florida State College Niceville Helen's Puzzle Swap 10 am Niceville Library Niceville	20	GSSF Indoor League 10 am Emerald Coast Indoor Shooting & Sport Valparaiso FiberArts Circle 5 pm Valparaiso Library Valparaiso	FARMERSMARKETS Niceville Community Saturdays 9 am - 1 pm Twin Cities Pavilion Niceville Hammock Bay 1st & 3rd Sundays 8 am Victory Blvd. Freeport Grand Boulevard Saturdays 9 am - 1 pm Grand Boulevard Miramar	
		21	The Traveling Painter 5:30 pm LJ Schooners Restaurant Niceville	NOVEMBER 1 Pirate Brew Fest 11 am - 9 pm Fudpucker's Destin Decades on Display Car Show 10 am - 4pm Heritage Museum of NWFL Valparaiso	
		22	Lunch N Learn: QuickBooks Online Tips & Tricks for Beginners 11:30 am Greater FWB Chamber of Commerce FWB Jazz Ambassadors—America's Big Band 7 pm Mattie Kelly Arts Center Niceville Trunk-or-Treat 6:30 pm La Petite Academy Niceville Niceville HS Football Game vs. Milton 7 pm Niceville High School Niceville		
		25-26	30th Annual Festival of the Arts Various Times Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation Destin		



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BAY BUZZ EVENTS*continued from page 6***Tom Glavine's Field of Dreams Golf Outing****Monday, Oct. 13 | 9 a.m. shotgun start | Camp Creek Golf Course, Water-sound**

MLB Hall of Famer Tom Glavine invites golfers for a legendary day at Camp Creek Golf Course. Enjoy a world-class course, silent auction, and the chance to support Walton County students. Sponsorships and foursomes available.

Register: seasideschools.net**Baytowne Beer Festival****Oct. 10-11 | Friday 6-8 p.m.; Saturday 2-5 p.m. | The Village of Baytowne Wharf, Sandestin**

Cheers to 17 years! Sample 200+ craft brews at the "Best Beer Fest on the Coast." Festivities include Friday's "Beer from Around Here" and Saturday's Grand Tasting with live music. Proceeds support Fisher House

and Sandestin Foundation for Kids.

Info: baytownebeerfestival.com**Bloody Mary Festival****Saturday, Oct. 11 | 11 a.m.-2 p.m. | The Market Shops, Miramar Beach**

Raise a glass (or 18)! Sample unlimited bloody marys crafted by local restaurants and vote for your favorite. Non-bloody options available, plus live music and creative garnishes galore. Proceeds support Habitat for Humanity.

Tickets: themarketshops.com/bloody-mary-festival**Florida Chamber CEO Business Update****Tuesday, Oct. 14 | 11 a.m. | Crosspoint Niceville, 214 South Partin Drive, Niceville**

The Niceville Valparaiso Chamber of Commerce welcomes Mark Wilson, President & CEO of the Florida Chamber of Commerce, for an exclu-



sive business update on Florida's economic future. Wilson will share insights on Okaloosa County growth, workforce development, infrastructure investments, and the long-term competitiveness of Northwest Florida — all backed by data from TheFloridaScorecard.org. Named Floridian of the Year by Florida Trend in 2023, Wilson is one of the state's most influential voices for business and policy. Don't miss this opportunity to hear firsthand what's ahead for our community.

Info & registration: Niceville Valparaiso Chamber, 850-678-2323

Harvest Wine & Food Festival**Oct. 16-19 | Times vary by event | Cerulean Park, WaterColor**

Four days. World-class wine. Unforgettable food. From Friday's sultry Harvest After Dark to Saturday's legendary Grand Tasting and elegant Sunday brunch, this is one of the Southeast's premier festivals. Proceeds

benefit Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation.

Tickets: dcwaf.org**32nd Annual Single Handed Race****Saturday, Oct. 18 | 11 a.m. start | Bluewater Bay Marina, Niceville**

One sailor. One boat. Bragging rights on the bay! Celebrate 32 years of this unique sailboat race. Skippers meeting Oct. 17 at LJ Schooners.

Info: bluewaterbaymarina.com or 850-897-2821**Cornhole Tournament Fundraiser****Saturday, Oct. 18 | 10 a.m.-1:30 p.m. | United Fidelity Bank, Fort Walton Beach**

Bags, brews, and big prizes! \$25 per adult team, \$15 for kids. Enjoy food, DJ music, raffle, and kids' activities while supporting the Emerald Coast Science Center.

Info: 850-974-1820

Continued on page 17

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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: USATourTickets.LIVE.

Debunking the Top 5 Misconceptions About Acupuncture



BY DR. LISA FORSYTHE

Despite being practiced for thousands of years, acupuncture remains one of the most misunderstood healing modalities in modern medicine. As a licensed acupuncturist with a background in both Eastern medicine and neuro-acupuncture, I've seen how powerful

cally a calming, restorative experience. Some patients feel a light tingling or warmth, which is simply the body responding to the stimulation.

Misconception #2: "It's only for pain relief."

While acupuncture is well known for its ability to reduce pain—including back pain, arthritis, and migraines—its applications go far beyond that. I regularly treat patients for anxiety, insomnia, digestive issues, hormonal imbalances, immune support, and even neurological conditions like stroke recovery and PTSD.

Truth: Acupuncture works by regulating the nervous system, improving circulation, and restoring balance to the body's

pain, cancer support, fertility and more.

Truth: Acupuncture is backed by evidence-based research and is increasingly integrated into mainstream health-care systems.

Misconception #4: "It's not safe for kids, older adults, or people with medical conditions."

Acupuncture is one of the safest medical therapies when performed by a licensed practitioner.

At the Tortoise Clinic, I treat patients of all ages—from kids with anxiety or ADHD to seniors with arthritis or stroke recovery needs. We tailor every

Continued on page 16



this therapy can be—not just for pain relief, but for whole-body wellness. I've also heard just about every myth and misconception along the way.

Let's set the record straight.

Misconception #1: "Acupuncture is painful."

This is the most common fear I hear, and it's almost always followed by surprise once someone finally tries it. Acupuncture needles are extremely thin—about the width of a human hair—and nothing like the hypodermic needles used for injections. Most people feel little to no discomfort when the needles are inserted. In fact, many feel deeply relaxed or even fall asleep during treatment.

Truth: Acupuncture is typi-

cally a calming, restorative experience. That's why it benefits both physical and emotional health.

Misconception #3: "There's no science behind it."

This one couldn't be further from the truth. Over the past several decades, research on acupuncture has exploded. Studies have shown that acupuncture influences the brain, nervous system, and endocrine function. It can reduce inflammation, release endorphins (your body's natural painkillers) and modulate the immune response.

Major institutions like Johns Hopkins, Cleveland Clinic, and Mayo Clinic now offer acupuncture as part of integrative treatment programs for chronic

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Good News for Our Readers: Auto Insurance Rates Are Finally Dropping



BY BRANDON CERVENKA

After years of rising premiums, Florida drivers are finally seeing some good news: auto insurance rates are dropping

across the state, bringing much-needed relief and new opportunities for savings. For families, commuters and retirees alike, 2025 marks a turning point—one where shopping for coverage feels optimistic rather than daunting.

This news was prompted by a wave of recent announcements from top insurers and state regulators, revealing the first major rate reductions in years. With broad market reforms, improved claim numbers, and heightened competition driving these changes, Florida's auto insurance industry is finally offering

relief in a highly inflationary market.

What's Driving the Drop in Florida Auto Insurance Rates?

Over the past few years, Florida has faced some of the highest auto insurance rates in the country. Now, several important changes are steering the market in a more favorable direction:

Legal Reforms: Recent state legislation targeting lawsuit abuse and rampant fraud has dramatically lowered legal costs for insurance providers. By curtailing excessive lawsuits



and fraudulent claims, reforms have stabilized the market and enabled insurers to pass cost savings along to consumers.

Consider this example:

Profile: Two adults (ages 45 and 50), clean driving record, good credit, two vehicles (Toyota RAV4 and Toyota Camry—two of Florida's most popular family vehicles).

- Prior average full coverage premium (2024): ~\$2,516 per six months.

- Current average full coverage annual premium (2025): ~\$2,340 per six months.

- Estimated annual savings: ~\$352 per year per household (Some households may see even greater savings depending on insurer, location, and eligibility)

As Florida's reforms continue and insurers compete for business, the state's auto insurance market is moving into a period of greater stability, affordability and consumer-focused innovation. For many residents, this may be an ideal moment to revisit insurance needs, explore the changes in rate structures and even request new quotes—ensuring that recent market improvements can be put to work for every policyholder.

Questions about auto insurance or other coverage? Contact Brandon Cervenka Insurance Agency—local, friendly, and here for your family. Phone (850) 622-0448.

and fraudulent claims, reforms have stabilized the market and enabled insurers to pass cost savings along to consumers.

Loss Ratio Improvements: Insurers are currently paying out less in claims relative to the premiums they collect. Florida's auto insurers are reporting their lowest personal auto liability loss ratios in years, a strong indicator of improved profitability and risk control.

Increasing Competition: With market conditions improving, large firms like Allstate, GEICO, State Farm, and Progressive have announced permanent rate reductions. Smaller providers are following suit, encouraged by the surge of consumer rate shopping. The result is a dynamic, competitive landscape offering Florida drivers more choices and access to better pricing than ever before.

What This Means for Consumers

The impact for policyholders is straightforward: most drivers will notice renewal notices with lower premiums, and new customers can explore a wider array of affordable options. Along

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A Life of Service: Colonel Richard Solt

BY "DOC" DOUG STAUFFER

Local resident Colonel Richard "Dick" Solt has lived a life marked by leadership, service and dedication to both country and community. Born in Palmerston, Pa., in 1938, Solt stood out from a young age—quarterbacking his high school football team, pitching for the baseball team and serving as Senior Class President in 1956.

As a proud alumnus of Penn State University, Solt graduated in 1960 and received his commission as a Second Lieutenant in the United States Air Force through ROTC. His career started during the tense period of the Cold War, including an assignment to Incirlik Air Base in Turkey during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Early in his service, he was mentored by Colonel Travis Hoover, who had flown the second aircraft behind Jimmy Doo-

little in the famous raid on Japan during World War II.

From those beginnings, Solt's Air Force career spanned nearly three decades, taking him around the world during key moments in history. In 1968, he deployed to Vietnam during the Tet Offensive, where he saw firsthand the realities of combat. He later served with the Tactical Air Command, the Personnel Center and the Military Command and Staff College, helping to guide the careers of more than 1,000 officers.

His work in Foreign Military Sales became a hallmark of his career. At Kelly Air Force Base, he collaborated with Northrop Aircraft to deploy over 1,500 F-5 fighter jets to allied air forces worldwide. Chosen as the only American to attend the elite Australian Defence College in Canberra, he built lasting inter-



national relationships that led to a strategic assignment at U.S. Pacific Command (CINCPAC) in Hawaii. There, he served under three successive four-star Navy commanders, helping prepare for Senate and Congressional hearings, monitoring Soviet submarine activity and assisting in sensitive White House negotiations over Micronesian status.

Assignments at the Pentagon

followed, where Solt worked under Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger and later served as Division Chief for International Programs, supporting U.S. policy in Latin America during the tumultuous Contra War era. His final active-duty role was as Commander of Foreign Military Training, overseeing a staff of more than 100 personnel responsible for pilot, naval, technical and language training for students from over 100 countries.

After retiring from the Air Force, Solt's expertise remained in high demand. He served at the Royal Saudi Air Force headquarters during Desert Storm and later took on a role at Boeing as the Director for the delivery and support of 72 F-15S aircraft. For over a decade, he continued consulting for Boeing and Saudi Arabia, ultimately retiring in 2016.

His distinguished service has been recognized with some of the nation's highest military honors, including the Defense Superior Service Medal (personally awarded by Secretary Weinberger), the Legion of Merit, the Bronze Star, the Defense Meritorious Service Medal with two oak leaf clusters, the Meritorious Service Medal with three oak leaf clusters, the Air Force Commendation Medal with two oak leaf clusters, and the Vietnam Gallantry Cross.

Today, Colonel Solt and his wife Dulce remain active in their community. Dick continues his service on the Military Officers Association Board and is a familiar face at civic meetings across the region. A devoted Penn State alumnus and loyal friend, his life is a testament to duty, sacrifice and lasting commitment to both his nation and neighbors.

CROSSROADS

continued from page 3

tive population, working citizens benefit the economy.

- Ongoing care provided for their patients lessens traffic in emergency rooms.

- When patients without insurance are unable to pay the high cost of medical care, places like Crossroads help keep local healthcare costs down for everyone.

Non-profit organizations like Crossroads Center are invaluable for a flourishing commu-

nity and mental health is a key component. With the Spiritual Health and Wellness building projected to open by June 2026, the center will continue to be a beacon of hope for years to come.

You can support Crossroads Center's mission through a direct donation or by volunteering, especially as a medical, dental, or mental health professional. To learn more about their current needs, or to see if you qualify to be a new patient, go to www.crossroadscenter.org.

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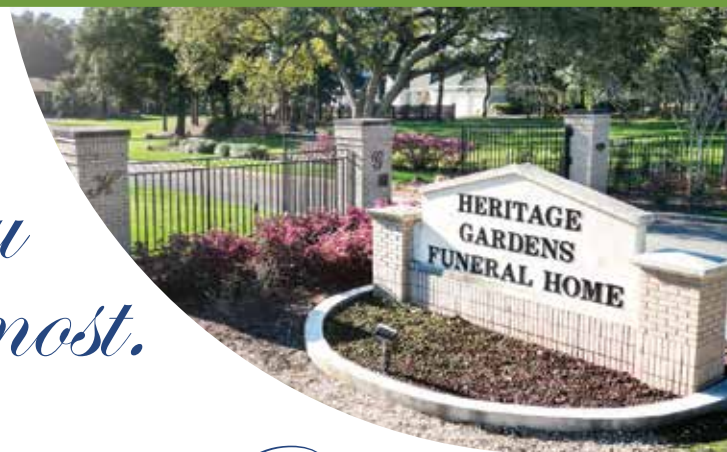
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Museum Series: A Unique New Look at Local Museums by Our Congressman



BY BARBARA PALMGREN

Several years ago, the museums of Okaloosa County formed a museum coalition to support one another and market our gifts to local citizens and tourists. Museum offerings range from national armament museums to science centers to fishing history to art galleries



and to local history. Beginning with this article, I will introduce our citizens and tourists to this treasure of knowledge available in Okaloosa County. Many times, local citizens wonder if elected officials truly have time to think about

the many events that go on in their district. Clearly, we have elected a servant of the people who cares about his district and wants to learn more about each county he serves. So, what happens when the new congressman wants to

showcase Okaloosa County? Stepping up to help was Dr. Marie Hallion, Chair of the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida. Contacting each of the museums in our coalition she collected photos for Florida Congressman Jimmy Patronis to use for showing America this special county in his district. Okaloosa County boasts beautiful beaches in the south and pristine rivers and rich farm land in the north. Golf courses, recreation of all sorts (including stores and outlets for shopping), all occupy our time during the day. But often, even local retirees and families forget that we are a unique county in that we have ten museums to enjoy. Ryan Walker, Press Secretary for Congressman Patronis, sent

a response upon receipt of the many photos. “On behalf of Congressman Patronis, thank you to Dr. Hallion and the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida for sharing historical photos with our team. These resources will help the Congressman highlight the rich history of our district across our website and social media platforms and help tell the story of our beautiful congressional district, from Escambia to Walton Counties.” This writer thanks both Dr. Hallion and Congressman Patronis for embracing the value of our museums in this special paradise in which we all live. Stay tuned each month to learn more about one of the museums that is part of Explore Okaloosa!

NWFSC Opens New School of Nursing Ribbon Cutting Marks a Major Milestone for Healthcare Education

On September 4, Northwest Florida State College celebrated a proud new chapter with the ribbon cutting of its state-of-the-art School of Nursing building on the Niceville campus.

Community leaders, alumni, and supporters joined NWFSC President Mel Ponder and Dean of Health Sciences Dr. Charlotte Kuss for tours of the new 64,000-square-foot facility.

“This expansion is more than bricks and mortar—it’s a bold investment in the future of healthcare in our region,” said President Mel Ponder. “With over \$34 million dedicated to



growing our nursing program, we’re doubling enrollment and equipping students with the most advanced technology available.” The project was made possible through \$13 million in state education construction funds and a \$21.8 million Triumph Gulf Coast grant awarded in 2023. Inside the new facility are immersive learning spaces, including virtual reality labs and high-fidelity simulation suites, giving students hands-on training in a safe, real-world environment. “This new building is a reflection of the incredible caliber and vision that guides our nursing program,” said Trustee Chair Rhea Goff. “This will allow our faculty to do even more for students’ learning experiences, ensuring they are prepared better than anyone for their field.”

NWFSC’s nursing program already outperforms state and national benchmarks. In 2024, the Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) program achieved a 98.65% pass rate on the NCLEX-RN exam, compared to Florida’s average of 84.1% and the national average of 90.6%. Retention rates are also strong, with 94.3% of students completing the program, far above the statewide average of 77.2%. With the new facility now open, the college is poised to double nursing enrollment by 2026, helping to meet the growing demand for skilled healthcare professionals across Northwest Florida. To learn more about the health sciences programs at Northwest Florida State College, visit www.lookatmenow.nwfsc.edu.



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The Resting Tree Opens in Niceville: A Safe Haven for Adults with Special Needs

On September 15, 2025, The Ground Up Project officially opened the doors to The Resting Tree, an adult day program in Niceville designed to provide a safe, supportive and enriching space for individuals with autism and other special needs.

For families across Northwest Florida, the opening marked more than just a ribbon cutting—it answered a critical question: What happens when children with autism become adults? Too often, programs end at 18, leaving families scrambling for resources and support. The Resting Tree was created to change that, offering adults ages 16–55 opportunities to learn, connect and thrive long after traditional services end.

Inside the center, participants find dedicated spaces including a Technology Room, Activities Room, Reading Room, Skills Room and Sensory Room. Programming blends skill-building with joy—arts and crafts, physical fitness, life skills and social interaction. Local businesses



and volunteers enrich the curriculum with sessions in yoga, art and financial literacy. With both half-day and full-day options, caregivers can feel confident their loved ones are in a nurturing environment designed for growth and independence.

The Resting Tree also offers peace of mind through professional oversight. A medical professional is available on site five days a week to assist participants with limited medical needs, and the program operates within the best practices of the Agency for Persons with Disabilities.

“This is more than a day program—it’s the beginning of something bigger,” the Ground Up Project team shared. The day program represents Phase One of a broader vision: building a long-term residential community where adults with autism and special needs can live in a supportive, inclusive environment.

That vision wouldn’t be possible without the community. Sponsors, families, and volunteers rallied around the mission, donating time, resources, and expertise to bring The Resting



Tree to life. As one parent put it, the program provides not only care for their child but also “a place where they can belong, build friendships, and feel valued.”

Income from the day program will directly support this future growth, ensuring sustainability while meeting immediate needs. Families who attended the August 24 Open House described it as “a dream becoming reality” and emphasized the relief of having an option that nurtures their adult children with dignity and purpose.



Applications are now open, though spaces are limited. To learn more, apply or schedule a private tour, visit thegroundupproject.org/therestingtree or email therestingtree@thegroundupproject.org.

With The Resting Tree now open-- a new chapter for families across Northwest Florida—adults with special needs have opportunities to belong, grow and thrive in a community that believes autism doesn’t end at 18.



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 Education

Seacoast Collegiate High School and Northwest Florida State College Celebrate the Opening of Expanded South Walton Center

A new era of education has officially begun. In August, Seacoast Collegiate High School (SCHS), the high school under the SEASIDE SCHOOL™, and Northwest Florida State College (NWFSC) held a celebratory ribbon cutting with the Walton Area Chamber of Commerce to mark the grand opening of the newly expanded Northwest Florida State College South Walton Center – home to brand new college facilities and Seacoast Collegiate High School.

The event brought together key state and local leaders including Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, Congressman Jimmy Patronis, Senator Jay Trumbull, Representative Shane Abbott, Florida Department of Education Commissioner Anastasios Kamoutsas, Major League Baseball Hall of Famer Tom Glavine, and many other local and state officials. Their presence underscored the importance of this groundbreaking project that expands the high school's capacity but also ensures all students of Walton County have personal access to a Northwest Florida



PHOTO CREDITS AMY WARD PHOTOGRAPHY

State College education where they live. The project is designed to expand access to high-quality high school and post-secondary education and prepare the next generation of leaders in STEM, business, healthcare, and beyond.

"This center is more than a building—it's a bold investment in the future of Walton County," said Dr. Tom Miller, Executive Director of SEASIDE SCHOOL™. "Together with Northwest Florida State College, we're creating a center that expands access, inspires achieve-

ment and prepares our students to lead in a rapidly changing world."

The expansion comes during a historic milestone year for the SEASIDE SCHOOL™—celebrating its 30th year in operation as one of Florida's first and most successful public charter schools. The project also highlights the ongoing impact of the SEASIDE SCHOOL™, which has partnered with the SEASIDE SCHOOL™ since 2008.

The new, state-of-the-art facility represents a dynamic part-



nership between Seacoast Collegiate High School and NWFSC. The College's South Walton Center houses both the Seacoast Collegiate High School facility and Northwest Florida State College facilities. The College will use its buildings on-site to provide opportunities for both dual enrollment students from any Walton County high school and traditional college students with direct access to college-level instruction, labs, workforce training, and advanced academic pathways.

"The South Walton Center is a model for how collaboration between K-12 and higher education can change lives," said Mel Ponder, President of Northwest Florida State College. "We're not just opening doors to classrooms – we're opening doors to opportunity for every student in Walton County. Critically, this landmark expansion of the South Walton Center will welcome students to the College from all walks of life, whether they are a traditional college student seeking their college education or a dual enrollment from SCHS, any Walton County school, or a home educated student."

The center will serve more than 500 students across the high school and College this fall, with the capacity for more significant growth in the coming years. But the impact reaches far beyond enrollment. With the College offering dual enrollment, workforce certifications, and student-focused resources on a local center, families across South Walton now have affordable, high-quality college education within reach.

This milestone was made possible through significant state and local investment. Triumph Gulf Coast awarded a \$9.5 million grant to expand STEM and workforce programs, and Governor Ron DeSantis approved \$9 million in state appropriations in

2023, \$500,000 in 2024, with an additional \$750,000 granted in 2025. An investment of over ten million dollars in South Walton's education and workforce development.

"We are proud to invest in educational infrastructure that meets the needs of Florida's future workforce," said Governor Ron DeSantis. "This center is an example of how public dollars, strategic vision, and local leadership can come together to make a real, lasting impact."

In addition, the Glavine Family Foundation contributed a \$1 million leadership gift, securing lifetime naming rights and helping launch the project from vision to reality.

"As a longtime advocate for education and youth development, I'm proud to support this incredible initiative," said Tom Glavine. "This center gives students the chance to dream big, work hard, and succeed in ways that impact their entire community."

From ninth graders beginning their high school careers to high school graduates and adult learners pursuing college credentials, this expanded center is designed to serve a diverse range of students. Whether preparing students for college, career, or both, the expanded NWFSC South Walton Center is set to strengthen the local talent pipeline and fuel regional economic growth.

"Students in Walton County now have a homegrown path to higher education, career advancement, and personal growth," said A. Russell Hughes, Walton County School District Superintendent. "This is what it means to invest in people, not just buildings."

With this expansion, Northwest Florida State College and Seacoast Collegiate High School continue to lead the way in educational innovation, workforce development, and community impact. This collaborative project stands as a beacon of what's possible when public education, higher education, government, and philanthropy work hand-in-hand.

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Report Card Anxiety:

5 Tips to Help Students Improve Their Grades

BY JOHN BIANCHETTE, VICE PRESIDENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING – MATHNASIUM

Research findings indicate that approximately 64% of parents consider report cards to be a crucial indicator of their child's progress. As students are still struggling to catch up post-pandemic, there is a pressing need to address this issue and explore steps that can be taken to improve performance and ease the anxiety that comes along with receiving lower grades.

Encouraging a positive mindset and resilience can help students navigate challenges and setbacks more effectively, leading to improved academic performance and confidence overall.

Here are five ways to help students improve their grades and avoid report card anxiety in the future.

Set Realistic Goals

Setting achievable goals involves students and parents working together to define clear targets that align with the student's abilities and ambitions, often far beyond grades. Students can track their progress more effectively and stay motivated by breaking down larger goals into smaller, manageable steps. For example, instead of aiming to improve all subjects simultaneously, they can focus on one subject at a time, setting targets for each grading period.

Implement Effective Study Strategies

Not all students learn or process information in the same way. Experimenting with various study techniques and time management methods is crucial for finding what works best for each student. Additionally, understanding different learning styles and customizing learning experiences can significantly improve their ability to absorb information. Some students may benefit from traditional methods like note-taking and flashcards, while others prefer more interactive approaches such as group discussions or teaching the material to someone else.



Have Discussions with Teachers

Open communication between students, parents and teachers is essential for addressing academic challenges and finding practical solutions. Encouraging students to initiate discussions with their teachers about areas of difficulty, clarification on concepts or strategies



Encourage Active Learning

Active learning promotes deeper engagement and understanding by involving students in interactive activities such as discussions and problem-solving. Students develop a stronger grasp of the subject matter by participating in group activities with their peers. Additionally, immediate feedback in active learning environments helps identify areas for improvement, ultimately contributing to improved grades and academic success.

Seek Out External Support

External support can come in many forms, such as tutoring services, study groups, or online resources. Seeking additional help outside the classroom can provide students with new perspectives, reinforce concepts, and offer guidance for individual needs. Whether joining a learning center for assistance or forming a study group to work with peers, external support can complement classroom learning and provide valuable resources for improving grades.

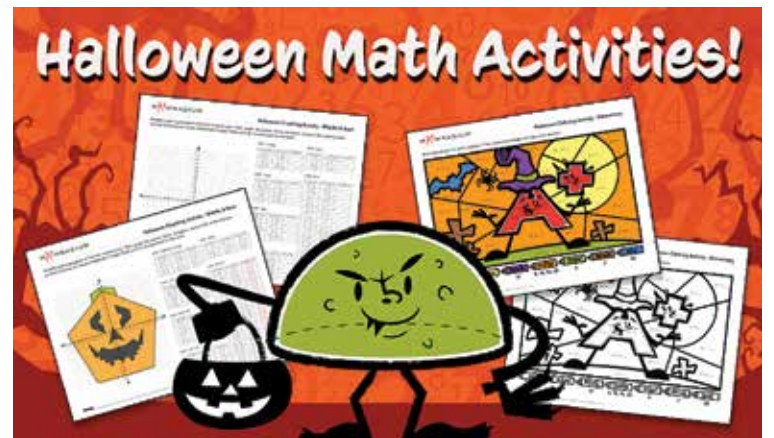
for improvement creates a supportive learning environment. Teachers can provide valuable insights, guidance and resources to help students overcome obstacles and succeed academically.

By implementing these strategies, parents can support their children in developing confidence across multiple subjects, reigniting their enthusiasm for learning. Acknowledging and tackling challenges encountered in the classroom pave the pathway to academic success, enhancing self-esteem and ultimately leading to improved grades.

Mathnasium of Niceville is located at 1538 East John Sims Pkwy. Visit Mathnasium.com/math-centers/niceville or call (850) 987-6284.

John Bianchette, Vice President of Education and Training of Mathnasium, is responsible for developing the curriculum of mathematics that is being taught across the globe in over 1,100 learning centers.

Source: <https://www.today'sparent.com/family/education/report-card-anxiety-tips-to-improve-student-grades/>.



Mathnasium is getting ready for a spooktacular Halloween with two Mathnasium Halloween activities that you can do at home with your child: Mystery Coloring (for elementary-level students), and Mystery Graphing (for middle-school-level students). Your child will have the opportunity to practice their addition, subtraction, multiplication and division skills before revealing a Halloween image to color in—and for higher-level students, they will get to practice their integer addition and subtraction skills!

Pick up free Halloween-themed math fun at **Mathnasium of Niceville**, located at **1538 East John Sims Parkway, Niceville**. Stop by the center to grab spooky mystery coloring and graphing activity pages along with their answer keys — and while you're there, check out more engaging math activities for kids of all ages!

To schedule a free assessment, visit Mathnasium.com/math-centers/niceville or call (850) 987-6284.



Kids who learn to love math gain confidence for a successful year. Mathnasium students learn from highly trained instructors in a fun and engaging environment. As their skills increase, they grow in confidence not just in math, but in all their subjects.

Mathnasium of Niceville
850-987-MATH (6284) | niceville@mathnasium.com
mathnasium.com/niceville
1538 E. John Sims Parkway, Niceville

Contact us for a FREE Assessment.
Mathnasium.com

MATHNASIUM
The Math Learning Center

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Advanced Sacred Hope Academy Expands in FWB to Serve Growing Autistic Student Population

School Launches Sponsorship Opportunities to Equip New Classrooms and Build Sensory-Friendly Playground

Advanced Sacred Hope Academy (ASHA), an Okaloosa County private school for autistic children has expanded into a larger, state-of-the-art facility at 106 Racetrack Rd. NE, Fort Walton Beach, marking a transformative leap from its modest start of just seven students in 2018 to 75 students registered for the 2025-2026 school year.

This growth reflects both the increasing demand for specialized education tailored to the unique learning profiles of neurodiverse children and ASHA's proven success in preparing students to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. The new campus is designed with these needs in mind, featuring adaptive classrooms, dedicated therapy spaces, and plans for an inclusive, sensory-friendly playground.

"As we move into this next chapter, we are building more than a school. We are creating a comprehensive environment where our students can grow, learn, and develop skills that prepare them for meaningful engagement in their families, communities, and future workplaces," said Robert Hruska, Director of Operations at ASHA. "But we can't do it alone. Community support has been the backbone of our journey from the very beginning."

To help bring this vision to full realization, ASHA is seeking Classroom Sponsors and Playground Sponsors to partner in creating spaces that foster growth, exploration, and confidence in autistic students. Sponsorship opportunities provide local businesses, civic groups, and individuals a meaningful way to invest in education, inclusion, and the future of children in our region.

Sponsorship benefits include naming rights, permanent recognition on campus, and visibility in ASHA's ongoing community outreach and events.

For those interested in sponsoring a classroom, contributing to the sensory-friendly playground, or learning more about ASHA's mission, please contact Robert Hruska at roberthraska.abhathrapy@gmail.com or visit <https://advancedsacredhope-academy.org>.

Founded in 2018, Advanced Sacred Hope Academy is a private nonprofit school based in Fort Walton Beach, Florida, dedicated to serving autistic and neurodiverse students. ASHA provides individualized education programs, therapeutic support, and structured socialization, guiding students toward academic achievement and life readiness in a supportive, nurturing environment.

ACUPUNCTURE

continued from page 9

treatment to the individual's age, condition, and comfort level.

Truth: Acupuncture is gentle and can be adapted for almost anyone, including those who are medically fragile or on multiple medications.

Misconception #5: "If I don't feel better after one session, it didn't work."

This is where the tortoise—yes, like our clinic's namesake—has it right: healing takes time.

Acupuncture is a cumulative therapy, meaning each session builds on the last. Some people feel immediate relief, but for most, noticeable improvements happen gradually over several treatments.

Truth: Consistency is key. Like exercise or nutrition, the effects of acupuncture are most powerful when practiced regularly.

So, Why Choose Acupuncture?

Acupuncture invites your body to do what it's designed to



do: heal. Whether you're dealing with chronic illness, stress, fatigue, hormonal imbalance, or recovery from injury or trauma, acupuncture offers a safe, natural, and effective way to reset

your system and restore balance.

It's not about masking symptoms—it's about treating the root cause, gently and holistically.

Experience the Difference at The Tortoise Clinic

As the only Neuro-Acupuncture specialist within 300 miles of Santa Rosa Beach, I offer advanced treatments that blend classical Chinese medicine with cutting-edge

neuroscience to support complex neurological conditions. And as a team, we're committed to delivering integrative, personalized care that truly listens to your story and your goals.

Curious about how acupuncture could support your health? Schedule your consultation today at TortoiseClinic.com or give us a call at 850.267.5611 and mention this article to receive \$30 off as a new patient.

At the Tortoise Clinic, healing is not a race—it's a journey. Let's walk it together.

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JoJo's Coffee and Goodness

An iconic favorite of locals, owner and operator of JoJo's Coffee and Goodness Angela "JoJo" Stevenson invites you to enter her cafe and relaxed coffee shop atmosphere for a daily dose of "goodness." Stop in for

mouth-watering cinnamon rolls, scones, coffee cake, banana and pumpkin breads, apple cider muffins, chocolate chip cookie bars, or brownies with espresso ganache. Gluten free bakery items available. Coffee roasted every week in-house. Try a breakfast special with quiche or kolache alongside hashbrown



casserole and cup of coffee. Breakfast burritos are rolled and ready to grab and go—choose from bacon, birria, chorizo or veggie served with house made cilantro lime or chipotle sauces. Espresso, latte, cappuccino, cold brew or nitro made to order. Breakfast and lunch sandwich specials and a full evening cater-

ing menu if you are looking to host an event or party. Come for the coffee, stay for the goodness!

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

Tuesday-Saturday.

(850) 737-6194

4652 Hwy. 20 East, Niceville
bigorangehousedesigns.com

BAY BUZZ EVENTS

continued from page 8

Fall Silent Auction for Emerald Coast Food Rescue

Friday, Oct. 24 | 6-9:30 p.m. | Local Market, Destin

Help fight hunger in Okaloosa and Walton counties while enjoying food, drinks, and community fun. Proceeds support ECFR's mission to deliver 250,000 pounds of food monthly.

Details: emeraldcoast-foodrescue.org

Fleets and Eats: A Party for a Purpose

Saturday, Oct. 25 | 6 p.m. | Destin Harbor (Tailfins, The Edge, Harbor Docks)

Hop aboard tiki boats for a

Lu'au-style harbor crawl with cocktails, hors d'oeuvres, and live music. Proceeds support autism services at ECAC. After-party at Tailfins!

Info: ecacautismcenter.org

Barktoberfest

Thursday, Oct. 30 | 4:30-6:30 p.m. | Grand Park, Grand Boulevard at Sandestin

Paws down, the cutest fall fest around! Bring your pup in costume for trick-or-treating, a legendary doggie costume contest, live DJ, photo booth, and tasty bites. \$15 preregistration (\$20 day-of). Benefits Dog-Harmony. Register: dog-harmony.org



Escape to Wonderland Halloween Party

Friday, Oct. 31 | 6-11 p.m. | Ara Rooftop Pool & Lounge, Hotel Effie Sandestin

Sip, dance, and play croquet with the Queen of Hearts at this Alice in Wonderland-themed rooftop party. DJ, costume contest, themed bites, and cocktails. Tickets \$35.

Info: hoteleffie.com

Trick or Treat Street

Friday, Oct. 31 | 6-8 p.m. | The Village of Baytowne Wharf, Sandestin

Ghosts, ghouls, and goblins take over Baytowne! Trick-or-treat at merchant booths, enjoy live music, and don't miss the fireworks at 8 p.m. Free admission.

Details: baytownewharf.com

Eggs on the Beach

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

Big Green Egg fans unite! Sample smoky bites from backyard grillers, chefs, and nonprofits. A fun foodie fest benefiting Fisher House and Food For Thought.

Tickets: eggsonthebeach.com

Pirate Brew Fest

Saturday, Nov. 1 | 11 a.m.-9 p.m. | Fudpucker's, Destin

Ahoy, mateys! Pirates, pints, live music, magicians, and mermaids — this free festival has it all. Costumes encouraged (first 100 pirates get gifts).

Info: piratebrewfest.com

Decades on Display Car Show

Saturday, Nov. 1 | 10 a.m.-4 p.m. | Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida, Valparaiso

Shiny chrome, classic rides, and family fun! Vote for your favorite, browse vendors, and tour the museum (free admission all day).

Info: 850-678-2615

SOWAL Jazz Fest

Nov. 6-8 | Times vary by venue | Along Scenic Highway 30A

A cool new tradition debuts! Three nights of intimate jazz at local venues, with tributes to Sinatra, Billie Holiday, Amy Winehouse, and more. Tickets start at \$50.

Tickets: sowaljazzfest.com



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Game On!

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



BY SCOTT MILLER

Did you see that heartbreaking loss the Tennessee Volunteers suffered in week 3? The game was all but in the bag. The only thing that stood between the Vols and a generational victory against SEC rival Georgia was a very, very makeable 43-yard field goal. The Tennessee fans stood together waiting to hear, “It’s good!!!” Instead they heard “wide right.” Oh no! He missed! The emotions on both sides were as high as the sky. On the Tennessee sidelines heads dropped. On the Georgia sidelines, exuberation ran rampant. I’m not even a Tennessee fan. I root for Penn State and I root for Auburn. But I felt that loss—it hurt. I felt for that sophomore kicker, for his teammates, for the entire state of Tennessee. But, my friends, that is part of the game, part of the lure. Games like that are why we watch college football. It’s exhilarating.

So who’s next? Who will feel the joy? Who will feel the pain? Hopefully, once the emotions settle, both sides will realize it’s just a game. But, between the lines it’s everything, from the opening kickoff to the final whistle—these kids give it all they

have. That’s what makes football America’s sport. Well, the season is underway, the games have begun. So, keep the faith if your team let one slip away and don’t get too overconfident if your team squeaked one out. There’s a lot more football yet to be played.

And here along the Emerald Coast, we are truly 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.
ajdestin.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 Com-

plex. 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.

Oct. 11: Nautical Flea Market & Flea Market, 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Oct. 18: 32nd Annual Single-Handed Race

Oct. 19: Milling the Mullet: MulletToss at 4 p.m. and Mullet Hair Contest at 6 p.m.

Oct 16: Thursday Throw-downs End

Oct. 31: Halloween Party with DJ Diamond Dan, 6-10 p.m.

Tuesdays: Tacos & \$5 House Margaritas

Wednesdays: Kids Eat Free with Adult Purchase.

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

Sunday, Oct.. 26: Sunset Shrimp Boil 4-7 p.m. Live music w/Coconut Radio 4-8 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.

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Niceville in Bluewater Bay

2025 High School Football Schedules

Freeport Bulldogs

Head Coach: Sean Arntz
8/15 – at Rutherford (KO Classic)
8/22 – vs. North Bay Haven
8/29 – vs. Jay
9/5 – at Northview
9/12 – vs. Cottondale
9/19 – at Vernon
9/26 – vs. Catholic
10/3 – Open Week
10/10 – at South Walton
10/17 – at Baker
10/24 – vs. Walton *
10/31 – at North Florida Christian

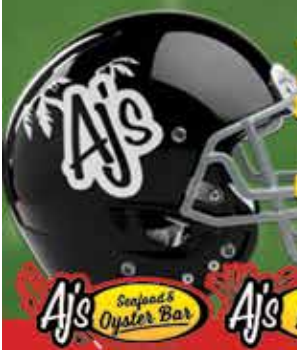
Niceville Eagles

Head Coach: Richard Morgan
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

Head Coach: KC Woods.
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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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

ACC Football Schedule

ACC	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
Boston College	Fordham	@ Michigan State	@ Stanford	Open	California	@ Pitt	Clemson	UConn	@ Louisville	Notre Dame	SMU	Georgia Tech	Open	@ Syracuse
California	@ Oregon State	Texas Southern	Minnesota	@ San Diego State	@ Boston College	Duke	Open	North Carolina	@ Virginia Tech	Virginia	@ Louisville	Open	@ Stanford	SMU
Clemson	LSU	Troy	@ Georgia Tech	Syracuse	Open	@ North Carolina	Boston College	SMU	Open	Duke	Florida State	@ Louisville	Furman	@ South Carolina
Duke	Elon	Illinois	@ Tulane	NC State	@ Syracuse	@ California	Open	Georgia Tech	Open	@ Clemson	@ UConn	Virginia	@ North Carolina	Wake Forest
Florida State	Alabama	East Texas A&M	Open	Kent State	@ Virginia	Miami	Pitt	@ Stanford	Open	Wake Forest	@ Clemson	Virginia Tech	@ NC State	@ Florida
Georgia Tech	@ Colorado	Gardner-Webb	Clemson	Temple	@ Wake Forest	Open	Virginia Tech	@ Duke	Syracuse	@ NC State	Open	@ Boston College	Pitt	Georgia
Louisville	Eastern Kentucky	*9/5-JMU	Open	Bowling Green	@ Pitt	Virginia	Open	@ Miami	Boston College	@ Virginia Tech	California	Clemson	@ SMU	Kentucky
Miami	Notre Dame	Bethune-Cookman	South Florida	Florida	Open	@ Florida State	Open	Louisville	Stanford	@ SMU	Syracuse	NC State	@ Virginia Tech	@ Pitt
North Carolina	TCU	@ Charlotte	Richmond	@ UCF	Open	Clemson	Open	@ California	Virginia	@ Syracuse	Stanford	@ Wake Forest	Duke	@ NC State
NC State	East Carolina	Virginia	@ Wake Forest	@ Duke	Virginia Tech	Campbell	@ Notre Dame	Open	@ Pitt	Georgia Tech	Open	@ Miami	Florida State	North Carolina
Pitt	Duquesne	Central Michigan	@ West Virginia	Open	Louisville	Boston College	@ FSU	@ Syracuse	NC State	@ Stanford	Open	Notre Dame	@ Georgia Tech	Miami
Syracuse	Tennessee	UConn	Colgate	@ Clemson	Duke	@ SMU	Open	Pitt	@ Georgia Tech	North Carolina	@ Miami	Open	@ Notre Dame	Boston College
Virginia	Coastal Carolina	@ NC State	William & Mary	Stanford	Florida State	@ Louisville	Open	Washington State	@ North Carolina	@ California	Wake Forest	@ Duke	Open	Virginia Tech
Virginia Tech	South Carolina	Vanderbilt	Old Dominion	Wofford	@ NC State	Wake Forest	@ Ga Tech	Open	California	Louisville	Open	@ Florida State	Miami	@ Virginia
Wake Forest	Kennesaw State	Western Carolina	NC State	Open	Georgia Tech	@ Virginia Tech		Open	SMU	@ Florida State	@ Virginia	North Carolina	Delaware	@ Duke
Stanford	Open	@ BYU	Boston College	@ Virginia	San Jose State	Open	@ SMU	Florida State	@ Miami	Pitt	@ North Carolina	Open	California	Notre Dame
SMU	East Texas A&M	Baylor	@ Missouri State	@ TCU	Open	Syracuse	Stanford	@ Clemson	@ Wake Forest	Miami	@ Boston College	Open	Louisville	@ California

2025 College Football Game Day Highlights

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

Week 6:
Saturday 10/4
Miami @ Florida St. (TBA)
Texas @ Florida (TBA)
Kentucky @ Georgia 11 a.m.

Vandy @ Alabama (TBA) ESPN
Penn State @ UCLA (TBA)
Week 7:
Saturday 10/11
Georgia @ Auburn (TBA) ESPN
Ohio St. @ Illinois (TBA)
Pittsburgh @ Florida St. (TBA)
Florida @ Texas A&M (TBA) ESPN
Alabama @ Missouri 11 a.m. ESPN
Oklahoma @ Texas 2:30 p.m. ESPN

Week 8
Saturday 10/18
Missouri @ Auburn (TBA) ESPN
LSU @ Vanderbilt (TBA) ESPN
Mississippi @ Georgia (TBA) ESPN
Tennessee @ Alabama (TBA) ESPN
Miss. St. @ Florida (TBA) ESPN
Fla. St. @ Stanford 9:30 p.m. ESPN

Week 9
Saturday 10/25
Auburn @ Arkansas (TBA) ESPN
Texas A&M @ LSU (TBA) ESPN

Texas @ Miss. St. (TBA) ESPN
Alabama @ S. Carolina (TBA) ESPN
Tennessee @ Kentucky (TBA) ESPN
Wisconsin @ Oregon (TBA)

Week 10
Saturday 11/1
Penn St. @ Ohio St. (TBA)
Kentucky @ Auburn (TBA) ESPN
Oklahoma @ Tennessee (TBA) ESPN
Georgia @ Florida 2:30 p.m. ABC
Vanderbilt @ Texas 11 a.m. ESPN



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32nd Annual Single
Handed Race
Oct. 18th

Missing the Mullet
Oct. 19th
Mullet Toss 4PM
Mullet Hair Contest 6PM



More Events and
Live Entertainment:

- Oct. 3: Rewind 74 6-10pm
- Oct. 4: Beach Dogz 6-10pm
- Oct. 9: Clinch 46 6-10pm
- Oct. 11: David Gautreau 6-10pm
- Oct. 12: Witch Paddle 10am
- Oct. 14: Chess Night 6pm
- Oct. 16: Thursday Throwdown Season Ends
- Oct. 17: Parker Willingham 6-10pm
- Oct. 18: Southsiders 6-10pm
- Oct. 19: Ronny Dean Garrett 4-8pm
- Oct. 21: Traveling Painter 5:30pm
- Oct. 25: Dismystic
- Oct. 26: Shrimp Boil 4-7pm, Coconut Radio 4-8pm
- Oct. 31: Halloween Party & DJ Diamond Dan 6-10pm

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



October Means One Thing: Rodeo Time!

For 77 years, the Destin Fishing Rodeo has reeled in anglers, families, and festival-goers for a month-long, fun celebration on the Destin harbor. From weigh-ins behind A.J.'s to kids' parades, movie nights and even Halloween on the Harbor, there's something for everyone to enjoy. Whether you're fishing, cheering from the docks, or just soaking up the waterfront vibes, the Fishing Rodeo is a Destin tradition you won't want to miss!

77th Annual Destin Fishing Rodeo

OCTOBER 1-31

Join us all month long for the 77th Annual Destin Fishing Rodeo! Daily weigh-ins are held behind A.J.'s from 10 a.m.-7 p.m.

Destin 5K Rodeo Run Sunday, October 5

Kick off at picturesque Clement Taylor Park on Choc-tawhatchee Bay. This scenic run

winds through historic Destin neighborhoods and ends back at the park. Proceeds benefit the Miss Destin Scholarship Fund. Info: kimmymeyers@yahoo.com.

Kid's Wagon Boat Parade Sunday, October 5 | 4 p.m. | A.J.'s Seafood & Oyster Bar

A free, family-friendly Destin Fishing Rodeo tradition! Elementary school children decorate wagons to resemble



Bruce Cheves Day Thursday, October 16 | A.J.'s Docks

Celebrate Destin's beloved weighmaster, Bruce Cheves, with stories and laughter on the docks.

Ring of the Bell Thursday, October 16 | 5 p.m.

Held annually on Bruce Cheves Day, this special ceremony honors the lives and legends of those we lost this year.

Larry Hatchett Fishing Foundation Day Saturday, October 18

Children from foster care enjoy a day of fishing, marine education and fun. Sponsored by The New Florida Girl's American Spirit, Fish Florida, A.J.'s Seafood & Oyster Bar, Pilot Company, Zup-Med Memphis and Destin Realty.

3rd Annual Miss Destin Mingle Saturday, October 25

Former Miss Destin's return for a reunion and harbor cruise, celebrating the newest member of their club with photo ops at the weigh-in.

Halloween on the Harbor Friday, October 31

Destin's largest Halloween party! Wear your costume and join Rodeo captains, anglers, Miss Destin, judges and volunteers for spooky fun on the harbor.

NOVEMBER 77th Annual Destin Fishing Rodeo Awards Wednesday, November 5 | 5:30 p.m. | A.J.'s

Celebrate this year's lucky anglers, captains and mates as they receive prizes at a festive, casual gathering downstairs at A.J.'s.



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Niceville’s One-Stop Shop for Premium Outdoor Living

BY CHRISTOPHER MANSON

The Shop at Baldwin Turf has quickly established itself as the go-to for everything outdoor entertainment and patio/garden décor for Niceville and beyond. Owner Jenny Herndon has nearly a decade of experience in fashion merchandising and sales, and Wynn, her mother, has a passion for outdoor living spaces that is evident throughout the aesthetics and environment at The Shop.

The Shop is an extension of the Baldwin Turf, a full-service lawn care and landscaping company that has been providing quality and reliable service for residential and commercial customers since 2002.

Herndon was born and raised in Niceville and spent eight years in New York after graduating from Florida State University. She returned to the area in August 2023. Her mom always dreamed of opening a store, and with Jenny’s brother Matt and sister Leigh Anna managing the company’s landscaping operations, it is a true blue (green?) family business. “We work together on all of the buying and curating,” says Jenny. “Mom has the best eye for all things design.

“We had a vision to enhance Baldwin Turf’s offerings to include outdoor products including planters, water features, furniture and décor. We saw an opportunity to offer quality ser-



vices and products in Niceville. With my mom’s dream to open a store and my experience in wholesale sales, we decided to go for it.

“You won’t find the level of local expertise, personalized service and commitment to quality at the big box stores,” Herndon says. She adds that you’ll find



PHOTO CREDIT: SAWYLEIGHPHOTO.COM



“quality, unique and specially curated items for your home and garden, plus a friendly staff

and a lovely, enjoyable shopping experience.” Herndon is excited about the fall-themed items available at The Shop. “Mums, marigolds, zinnias and fall plants are coming in gradually, as well as our POP colored pine straw,” she says, the latter from the Santa Rosa Beach-based landscape

Continued on next page



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Tickets On Sale for Emerald Coast Classic Basketball Tournaments

College hoops fans, mark your calendars—tickets are now on sale for both the men's and women's Emerald Coast Classic tournaments, set for Nov. 24–29 at Raider Arena on the campus of Northwest Florida State College in Niceville. Tickets start at

just \$20 per session, with each ticket including entry to two games.

Women's Tournament (Nov. 24–25)

The second annual women's Emerald Coast Classic, pre-

sented by Global Sports, tips off Monday, Nov. 24. Eight teams will compete across two brackets: Mississippi State, Providence, Middle Tennessee State, and Alcorn State in the Bay Bracket; and Nebraska, Virginia, Northwestern State, and Purdue Fort Wayne in the Beach Bracket. Championship games will be held Tuesday, Nov. 25.

Men's Tournament (Nov. 28–29)

The 10th annual men's Emerald Coast Classic runs



Thanksgiving weekend, Nov. 28–29. Friday night features DePaul vs. Georgia Tech at 6 p.m. and Drake vs. LSU at 8:30 p.m. Saturday brings the third-place game at 3 p.m. followed by the

championship at 6 p.m. LSU, the 2021 champion, returns alongside a strong Drake team coming off its third straight NCAA Tournament appearance.

Both tournaments bring nationally recognized programs to the Emerald Coast, making Raider Arena the place to be for exciting holiday basketball action.

Tickets and full schedules are available now at www.emeraldcoastclassic.com.

Registration Open for 24th Annual Seaside Half Marathon + 5K

Registration is now open for the 24th Annual SEASIDE SCHOOL™ Half Marathon + 5K Race Weekend, set for February 12–15, 2026, along Scenic Highway 30A in Seaside, Fla. Presented by Visit South Walton, the popular race draws thousands of runners from across the Southeast, with proceeds benefitting the Seaside School Foundation™. Funds support Seaside Neighborhood School™ and Seacoast Collegiate High School, helping provide one of Florida's top public charter school experiences.

The race weekend includes the Taste of the Race culinary event, early packet pickups,

Race Expo, live entertainment, and an after-party to celebrate participants. The half marathon, a USATF-certified course and qualifier for the New York City and Chicago Marathons, kicks off Sunday at 7 a.m., followed by the 5K at 7:30 a.m.

Every registration includes a commemorative medal, T-shirt with original artwork by local artist Billie Gaffrey, and exclusive swag from The Seaside Style™. Spots are limited, and the event sells out each year, so early registration is encouraged. Discounts are available for military, first responders, and educators.

Learn more or register at RunSeasideFL.com.

ONE-STOP SHOP

continued from previous page

company. “We have a variety of seasonal outdoor décor, pumpkins and fun gift items sure to transition your home into the fall beautifully.”

As The Shop's owner, no two days are ever the same for Herndon. “Some days include visiting clients at their homes, merchandising and working with customers in The Shop, delivering furniture or installing planters,” she says. “Some days include more paperwork and assessing the products we will be

bringing in and when.” Coming from a sales background, Herndon says that her favorite thing to do is work the sales floor and engage with her customers.

Herndon says The Shop brings “a unique and special shopping experience where you are guaranteed to find something you may have never seen before” to the community.

The Shop and its owner are also happy to give back. “We have hosted charity events for Guardian ad Litem, the Taylor Haugen Foundation and the Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation,”

says Herndon. She serves as a board member for the Niceville Chamber of Commerce and loves to host chamber events.

The Shop at Baldwin Turf is located at 739 John Sims Parkway in Niceville. Hours of operation are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturdays. Call 850.842.2221 or visit baldwinturfniceville.com/the-shop to find out more. Also, follow them on Instagram and Facebook for new products and exciting events @baldwinturf.

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Golf Series: Teeing It Up to Fight Cancer at The Raven Golf Club



BY BARBARA PALMGREN

As I write columns about our area golf courses, often describing the physical challenges of the layout of the course itself, I am reminded that these acres of green represent more than opportunities to enjoy a sport. They are opportunities for the community to help non-profits and charities in a special way. I have several friends who are fighting battles with cancer. I personally understand what it feels like to have the doctor tell you that you have cancer. I know what it's like to be hooked

up and injected with bags of chemical during chemotherapy. I know what it's like when the doctor tells you that you are in "remission." I know. What I don't know is what a parent must feel when their precious child is diagnosed with cancer. How do they feel? How do they explain this to their child? What do they do? Where do they go? So, when I read in Destin Life that there was a golf tournament to support this fight against cancer, I knew I had to learn more about this cause. On Friday, September 12 at The Raven Golf Club over 70 golfers responded to play golf in the 2nd Annual Golf4TheCure- Gulf Coast Tournament. I reached out to Scott Erby, co-sponsor with Kellyanne Bartleson to tell me more. Hosted at The Raven Golf Club at Sandestin in Miramar Beach, Florida, golfers were sure to enjoy the outing in perfect autumn weather.



Scott shared the background for this unique fundraiser that began with a devastating experience no parent should have to face. In 2009, Scott's young son, Cooper, just 4 years old, was diagnosed with a rare brain stem tumor- Ependymoma. Over the next three years, thanks to groundbreaking research and care at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, with 64 radiation treatments and 10 months of chemotherapy, Cooper was cured. Today, Cooper, 21 years old, is pursuing his undergrad-

uate degree at the Business School at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. Inspired by his journey, Scott and others founded Golf4TheCure in the Westhaven community of Franklin, Tennessee. Did you know that September is Childhood Cancer Awareness Month? Yes, the focus every year in September is on curing childhood cancer. This golf nonprofit raised over \$1 million dollars from 2009-2016 for St. Jude. At St.Jude Children's Research Hospital families never receive a bill for treatment, travel housing or food. To continue raising awareness and support, Golf4TheCure Gulf Coast was launched in 2024 with the Sandestin community. The tournament was organized in 2 person and 4 person teams. Winners of the two-person teams were as follows: Danny and Marlo Thomas team: Brian Giaccone and Steven Ross with a score of 59

Ronald McDonalod team: Jake Gonzales and Chase Pfohl with a score of 67 Make a Wish team: Raz Cuparencu and Shannon Merritt with a score of 71 Brain Tumor Research team: Jon Creinin and Jon Lovett with a score of 78 The first place four-person team winners of the St. Jude's Heroes with a score of 57 was Liz Sibley, Brady Smith, David Smith and Pete Reichel. In my golf articles I usually share photos or winners or folks hitting difficult shots. Today, I want to leave the reader with a photo that says more than words can ever say. It's the lighting of the lanterns ceremony at the end of the tournament. Each lantern honors a cancer survivor or someone who has lost their life to cancer. A special month indeed. The fight to eradicate cancer especially for children is one that must continue until a cure is found.

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Environment

Coastal Dune Plants

By HELEN PETRE

The Gulf Coast is a high-energy coast with a large quantity of quartz sand deposited in off-shore bars. This results in white sand beaches with no vegetation

and sandy dunes shoreward of the high tide line. Protection of the dunes is protection of the beach. If the dunes are destroyed, the sand goes away, and there is no beach.

There is a good reason you see signs in the dunes suggesting that humans should not enter. These are seabird breeding and essential plant and animal habitats. Plants maintain the dunes because they have roots that hold the sand in place. There is no nutrition in the sand, but the sea spray brings potassium, calcium, sodium, and magnesium that plants use.

The most obvious tall plants close to the gulf are sea oats (*Uniola paniculata*). They are wind-pollinated, and the seeds are wind-dispersed, perfect for this location. The roots are long, deep, and colonized by fungi that help the plant to grow. In Florida, sea oats are protected plants. Sea oats are food for red-winged blackbirds and beach mice.

Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle bonariensis*) is a nonnative plant from South America that naturalized in the early 1900s. The

spreading stems root into the sand. Pennywort has little white flowers blooming in summer.

Ilex vomitoria, or yaupon holly, is common in the back dunes where there is more organic matter and shelter from salt spray. Yaupon is dioecious. There are separate male and female plants. The females produce white flowers that attract bees and butterflies and develop into red berries that make excellent wildlife food but are toxic for humans. The leaves of yaupon contain caffeine. Yaupon was used in native American cleansing rituals. People fasted for days, then drank large quantities of yaupon tea, which induced vomiting. Yaupon tea is commercially available. Unless you drink a few gallons after fasting for three days, it is like drinking weak coffee or tea. The leaves are fine. The berries are not.

Rosemary, *Ceratiola ericoides*, is a fragrant, long-lived shrub of the back dunes. Separate male and female plants form rounded shrubs often growing with Choctawhatchee sand pine (*Pinus clausa* immugi-



nata) and sand live oak (*Quercus geminata*). Rosemary is allelopathic. It prevents other plants from growing nearby. Rosemary shrubs can live 50 years, but only if there is no fire. Fire destroys the plant. Seeds germinate after fire, but the plant takes 12 years to flower.

Sand live oak (*Quercus geminata*) defines the forest behind the back dunes. It is often sculpted by the salt spray and onshore winds, with the leaves and trees facing landward. Sand live oak is not the same majestic tree as live oak (*Quercus virginiana*) that grows farther inland, although they look similar. Sand live oak is scrubby and forms thickets, although it can grow to 50 feet if there is no fire. Leaves look like inverted bowls and are evergreen. Leaves are replaced in the spring, and the year-old leaves fall when the new ones emerge. A member of the white oak group, the acorns are preferred food for birds, deer, turkey and squirrel because white oak contains less tannin than red oaks. Acorns are usually in pairs. With winter burns, germination increases but trees only grow to 20 or 30 feet.

Helen Petre is a retired USDA biologist and college biology professor. She spends her time volunteering, teaching, and writing science articles to share her interests with future generations.

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HWY 331 Paddle Club Launched at Lake DeFuniak

Locals often say there is something magical about Lake DeFuniak — a rare, perfectly round, spring-fed lake whose natural beauty has drawn people to its shores for generations. It is a place that inspires reflection, connection, and a return to its quiet majesty time and again.

Beginning this fall, the HWY 331 Paddle Club adds to that tradition, launched Saturday, Sept. 13, 2025, at 9 a.m., with weekly gatherings planned every Saturday morning thereafter.

The kickoff event begins behind the historic Chautauqua Hall of Brotherhood, where participants may paddle across the calm, glassy waters of Lake DeFuniak or walk the paved path that circles the lake. Both paddling and walking are integral parts of the experience, making the club welcoming and accessible to everyone.

The HWY 331 Paddle Club will become a weekly tradition, inviting people to circle back each Saturday at 9 a.m. to en-



joy fun, fitness, and friendship. Beyond the lake, members will have opportunities to share paddle adventures and organize gatherings across Walton County’s nearby springs, creeks, bay, and Gulf waters.

“The HWY 331 Paddle Club is about connecting Walton County’s paddle-lovers and outdoor enthusiasts alike,” said Kerri Parker, founder and organizer of the HWY 331 Paddle Club and RUNSUP certified instructor. “It is an opportunity to celebrate our natural resources, stay active, and build friendships through shared experiences on the water and trails. And

where better to begin than Lake DeFuniak — one of the most unique and inspiring lakes in the world?”

The HWY 331 Paddle Club is free and open to the public. It welcomes participants of all ages and skill levels, including walkers and paddlers, and even four-legged friends. Participants do not need to paddle to be part of the club, as the walk around the lake is a full part of the experience. To help organizers plan for the kickoff, participants are encouraged to register in advance at HWY331.com/paddle-club.

Steady Progress on World’s Largest Artificial Reef

Okaloosa County is making steady progress on transforming the SS United States into the world’s largest artificial reef. Recently, in Mobile, Ala., crews removed the ship’s massive 65-foot forward smokestack, which will be preserved for display at the SS United States Conservancy’s future land-based museum. The aft funnel is scheduled for removal soon.

The 990-foot vessel, purchased by the county in 2024, will expand marine habitat in the northern Gulf and boost the fishing and diving industry. Once deployed, the reef will build on Destin-Fort Walton Beach’s thriving tourism economy, which already generates 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 Oka-



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

Deployment is planned for late 2025 about 20 nautical miles south of Destin-Fort Walton Beach. The ship will rest at a depth of 180 feet, with its upper deck just 55 feet below the surface—accessible for both beginner and technical divers.

Learn more at myokaloosa.com/SSUSFAQs or explore the region’s existing reef system at destinfwb.com.



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 Wellness

Caregiving for a Loved One with Alzheimer's: Tips for a Compassionate Journey

BY NICOLE LESSON

Brook Batson and her family recently moved to Freeport, FL from Tennessee to help take care of her Father-in-law who has Alzheimer's.

They moved in with her mother-in-law to assist her in taking care of her husband.

"He is mobile but gets very confused," Batson said. "Thankfully, he does remember myself, my husband, Danny and my kids. Once we knew what was going on, we wanted to come before there was a crisis."

Batson shares what she wants people to know about Alzheimer's and other dementia.

"This is a disease, not just age appropriate behavior; yes some behaviors are age appropriate but if they can't manage a majority of their daily activities on

their own, it's more than aging," Batson said.

According to research from the Alzheimer's Association International Conference, more than 1,500 Walton County residents age 65 and up are living with the disease. Florida has the second highest prevalence of Alzheimer's in the U.S, with more than 580,000 Floridians living with the disease supported by 870,000 unpaid caregivers.

For more than 17 years Brook worked in senior care, both assisted living and memory care. Her passion for helping families through their journey with dementia has now hit her own family. She offers this advice.

"Find a support group, go to the alz.org website, call an assisted living facility as some have memory care daycare, sur-

round yourself with those who understand what you are going through," she said. "Manage it as a family, as it takes a village."

For many, caregiving can be overwhelming and individuals in the role often report experiencing higher rates of stress. According to the Alzheimer's Association 2025 Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures report, 66% of Florida caregivers reported at least one chronic health condition, 29% reported having depression and 14% reported being in poor physical health.

Practicing self-care is vital to ensure both the caregiver and the person being cared for can have the best quality of life. Services like respite care, adult day care, and support groups can ease the challenges of caregiving. Many of these are available at low or no cost to Floridians through state and local programs. For more information, call the Alzheimer's Association free, 24/7 Helpline at 800.272.3900.

Walk to End Alzheimer's®, an event held across Florida to raise awareness and funds for Alzheimer's, has been a place of support for Batson. She is the new Community Engagement



Chair for the Walk to End Alzheimer's Emerald Coast-Ocala County.

"At the Walk you will meet people, companies and vendors that understand exactly what you are dealing with," she said. "You are going to walk away with information you didn't have."

Join others impacted by Alz-

heimer's for the 2025 Walk to End Alzheimer's Emerald Coast Okaloosa County on Saturday, November 1 at Northwest Florida State College in Niceville. Registration starts at 9 am with the ceremony at 10 am, followed by the Walk. Register your team today at Alz.org/EmeraldCoastOCWalk.

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Mommy Makeovers: What They Are and When to Consider One



BY DR. CLARK, BLUEWATER
PLASTIC SURGERY

Motherhood is an extraordinary journey — one filled with love, transformation and growth. However, the physical changes that occur during pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding can leave many women feeling disconnected from their pre-pregnancy bodies. At Bluewater Plastic Surgery, we often hear from women who say, “I love being a mom, but I just don’t feel like myself anymore.” For those looking to restore confidence and feel comfortable in their skin again, a customized Mommy Makeover may be the solution.

What Is a Mommy Makeover?

A “Mommy Makeover” isn’t a single procedure, but rather a personalized combination of surgeries designed to address the areas most commonly affected by pregnancy and childbirth. The most common procedures include:

- **Tummy tuck (abdominoplasty)** to remove excess skin and tighten weakened abdominal muscles.
- **Breast augmentation, lift, or reduction**, depending on how the breasts have changed post-pregnancy.
- **Liposuction** to sculpt and remove stubborn pockets of fat that diet and exercise alone can’t address.

These procedures are usually performed in a single surgical session, which minimizes recovery time compared to spacing them out over months. The goal is not to “snap back” to a previous version of yourself, but to help you feel empowered, confident, and at ease in your own body.

Is It Right for You?

- Ideal candidates for a Mommy Makeover are women who:
- Are finished having children (future pregnancies can impact the surgical results).
 - Are close to their target weight and committed to a healthy lifestyle.
 - Have completed breastfeeding for at least six months.
 - Are in good overall health with realistic expectations about results and recovery.

A Mommy Makeover is not about perfection — it’s about feeling more like you again. Whether it’s restoring volume to your breasts, regaining core strength, or simply being able to wear clothing comfortably, these changes can be deeply meaningful.



What to Expect

Recovery varies depending on the combination of procedures, but most women take about two weeks off work and gradually resume normal activities over 4–6 weeks. While the initial results are visible fairly quickly, final results continue to refine over the following months as swelling subsides and the body heals.

At Bluewater Plastic Surgery, we take a thoughtful, individualized approach. During your consultation, we’ll discuss your goals, medical history, and any concerns. Together, we’ll build a safe, strategic plan that supports your vision and lifestyle.

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Strength Training and Menopause: A Vital Combination for Health and Well-being



BY KASSIA GARFIELD,
MAXSTRENGTH FITNESS

Menopause is a natural biological process that marks the end of a woman's reproductive years. Typically occurring between the ages of 45 and 55, menopause brings with it a host of physical and hormonal changes—many of which can have significant effects on a woman's body composition, bone health and overall well-being. One of the most effective ways to combat these changes is strength training, good nutrition and sleep. But every perimenopausal woman will laugh at those three things being easy. Totally understand! Sleep can be one of the biggest struggles, but it helps with weight control, memory and body recovery. It

can take years for hormones, weight struggles and sleep issues to settle around this time. It is frustrating and takes patience. But, being kind to yourself and focusing on the things you can control are important.

Why Strength Training Matters During Menopause

As estrogen levels decline during menopause, women may experience a decrease in bone density and muscle mass, an increase in abdominal fat and a slower metabolism. These shifts can lead to an increased risk of osteoporosis, cardiovascular disease and weight gain. Strength training, also known as resistance or weight training, can counteract many of these changes. It is never too late to start!

Regular strength training helps build and maintain muscle mass, which naturally decreases with age. More muscle mass leads to a higher resting metabolic rate, which helps control weight gain. Additionally, strong muscles support joint health, improve balance and reduce the risk of falls and fractures—a critical concern as bone density



ty tends to decline post-menopause.

One of the most pressing concerns for menopausal women is bone loss. According to the National Osteoporosis Foundation, women can lose up to 20% of their bone density in the five to seven years after menopause. Strength training places controlled stress on the bones, stimulating the cells responsible for bone growth. This can slow or even reverse the loss of bone density, especially when combined with adequate calcium

and vitamin D intake. Getting started with strength training before these hormonal changes start help reduce the loss of bone and continue to help maintain independence with age.

Mental and Emotional Benefits

Beyond the physical advantages, strength training can significantly improve mood and mental health. Menopause is often accompanied by mood swings, anxiety and depression due to hormonal fluctuations. Exercise, particularly strength training, promotes the release of endorphins—natural mood elevators. It also contributes to better sleep, improved self-esteem and a sense of empowerment, all of which can help women navigate this transitional phase more confidently. Often women around this age feel like they need to start taking care of themselves, as most children are growing and are out of the house. This is a good time to re-focus on personal health, good habits and being as healthy as possible to enjoy retirement.

How to Get Started Safely?

It's never too late to start strength training. For beginners, it's wise to start with bodyweight exercises—like squats, lunges and push-ups—and gradually incorporate resistance bands or light weights. Ideally, strength training should be done two to three times per week, focusing on all major muscle groups. Working with a certified personal trainer or physical therapist can help ensure proper technique and reduce the risk of injury, especially for women with existing joint issues or osteoporosis. It might feel overwhelming, but starting small like committing to 1-2 things a week, finding an accountability buddy or just a 20-minute exercise video can help start creating these habits.

Strength training is far more than a fitness trend—it's a vital tool for maintaining health, strength, and independence during and after menopause. Regular resistance training helps women counter the effects of hormonal changes and embrace this new chapter with confidence, resilience, and vitality. Research continues to show the benefits of heavy resistance training at every age, with greater muscle mass helping to reduce or even prevent many health conditions, especially later in life.

Here at MaxStrength Fitness of Niceville, we offer all one-on-one strength training, allowing for personal attention for those feeling like they need help or a steppingstone to start healthy habits. We can start seeing results in just 20 mins, twice a week!

—Kassia Garfield, Ed.D, PT, DPT, ATC, COMT, OCS, Cert. DN

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that support strong, healthy bones. Attendees will also learn ways to manage and even reverse some effects of the condition.

Kindness: Powerful Medicine for Healing the Mind and Body



BY MELANIE YOST, LCSW

In today’s fast-paced medical environment, the focus is often on medications, procedures, and technology. Yet one of the most powerful tools in promoting healing is not found in a medication bottle - it’s the simple, human act of kindness. Research shows that compassion, empathy, and genuine care are not only beneficial for emotional well-being but can also have measurable effects on physical health.

People who experience kindness in medical settings report lower levels of anxiety, stress,

and emotional distress. Feeling “seen and heard” by their healthcare providers fosters a sense of safety and trust, essential for healing.

Studies have shown that empathetic communication before procedures can significantly reduce patient anxiety, while supportive interactions during painful treatments can even lessen perceived pain. This effect is not just psychological: it triggers physiological responses that calm the nervous system and promote recovery.

Kindness also has measurable effects on the body. Compassionate care can reduce stress-related cortisol levels, stabilize heart rate and blood pressure, and enhance immune function. These biological responses help the body focus on healing rather than coping with stress. Moreover, patients who perceive their providers as caring and attentive are more likely to follow treatment recommendations, take medications consistently, and attend follow-up



appointments. In other words, kindness improves compliance, which in turn supports better long-term health outcomes.

Neuroscience helps explain why kindness is so powerful. Positive, compassionate interactions can trigger the release of oxytocin, the “bonding hormone,” which fosters trust, peace, and social connection. Neuroimaging studies show that empathetic behaviors activate reward centers in the brain, providing both the giver and the receiver

with feelings of satisfaction and well-being. This “care effect” demonstrates that kindness is not just a social nicety—it is deeply rooted in human biology. The benefits of kindness extend beyond individual interactions. Hospitals and clinics that prioritize compassionate care report higher patient satisfaction scores, reduced complaints, and even lower rates of staff burnout. Healthcare providers who are supported by their employer to practice empathy and kindness experience increased job satisfaction and resilience, creating a virtuous cycle: happier, healthier staff deliver better care, which in turn supports patient well-being.

Kindness in healthcare is powerful medicine. It lowers

stress, enhances mood, reduces perceived pain, improves treatment compliance, and supports faster recovery. It strengthens the bond between patient and provider, fostering trust, hope, and resilience. In a world where the human element often takes a back seat to technology, kindness remains a timeless, life-affirming intervention—one that heals not only the patient but the provider, the community, and the broader culture of care.

If you’re ready to experience care where compassion and science work hand in hand, we invite you to connect with us at Be Well Solutions and Complete Ketamine Solutions in Destin. Healing is our mission, and kindness is our vibe—come see the difference it can make.

Melanie Yost, LCSW is the co-owner of Be Well Solutions and Complete Ketamine Solutions in Destin and can be reached at 850-786-2051 to schedule a complimentary confidential consultation.

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Transitional Brain



BY STEPHENIE CRAG

I'm 17 years into sending kids back to school. And, every year, it is still hard. Switching from one life rhythm to another in a day is hard on the brain and body. The sleep schedule changes, the morning and evening rhythms shift. Everyone in the house is a little overwhelmed

and irritable. It gets better each week, but I've found six weeks to be the sweet spot when we are all reoriented and things feel normal again.

Transitional discomfort is not isolated to returning to school. Maybe you've started a new job, added a child to the family, started care-giving for a family member, moved homes or dropped off a child at college. Or, maybe you're making a habit change like quitting smoking, eating healthier, moving your body or trying to be more optimistic. All kinds of life transition can feel overwhelming at first and you might find yourself saying, "Why is this so hard?"

Your brain is wired for routine and repetition. Whatever you have been doing most con-

sistently is what your brain gravitates toward. When you shift gears, make a change or transition into a new way of doing things, your brain initially pulls you back toward your old, familiar routines it associates with safety and security. Rewiring your brain to the new pattern requires daily repetition over 3-6 weeks. In the beginning, you might feel overwhelmed and frustrated with the effort required to sustain your new rhythm. However, as you reach week three, you will often find it's getting a little easier. After week 3, your brain begins to gravitate more and more toward the new behavior. And usually, around the 6-week mark, your brain doesn't feel like it's fighting the new direction you've purposed to go.

So, what are you supposed to do when transitional brain strikes and sticks around for 3-6 weeks?

8 Ways to Support Yourself Through Transitional Brain

Notice and acknowledge. Notice feelings of overwhelm, irritability, brain fog, stress and exhaustion. Remind yourself you are experiencing transitional brain and it's normal. Be

kind and remind yourself it will take several weeks to feel your normal groove again.

Name the source of transition. Observe what might be a transitional event in your life. Name back to school, moving homes, new responsibilities or whatever else defines your transitional time.

Slow down. Your brain won't go from zero to 60 in a day. Give yourself steps. This week we are going to focus on sleep schedule and homework. Next week we will focus on family dinners. The week after that we will focus on balancing school with weekend fun. When you force your brain to overhaul everything at once, you are less likely to sustain anything well.

Prioritize rest. Transitional brain makes you tired. Try getting enough sleep at night and saying no to some commitments so you have time to rest and recharge.

Regulate your mood. You are more likely to be frustrated, grumpy, and irritable during transitional brain. Notice when



you are getting edgy and engage some regulating practices like stretching, sitting in nature, deep breathing, watching a funny show, reading a book, moving your body, or talking to a friend. Remember to circle back and apologize to others if you've not been your best self.

Be gracious to others. Try remembering others around you are also often having transitional brain. Be kind and curious rather than judgmental and shameful when others are struggling.

Keep going. Put one foot in front of the other and you will find that days turn into a week and weeks turn into a month. At some point, you will be surprised to look up and notice you are feeling more normal and settled in your new life rhythm.

Remember for next time. Try writing yourself a brief note in the notes of your phone about your experience with transitional brain so you can look back and see in your own words that you really will make it through next time.

You aren't alone. People all around you are navigating various changes resulting in transitional brain. Try talking about it and connecting with your friends to normalize your experience. Hard things together feel better than alone. Connect with us for counseling and coaching along your journey at Journey-bravely.com.



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Creating Health in the Home



BY KAY LEAMAN,
HEALTH ARCHITECT

When we think about health we normally think of our bodies; what we put on them and especially what we put in them. On the inside we watch what we eat, continually making better choices as we learn new things. We do the same thing on the outside of our body, choosing healthier lotions, potions, deodorants, makeup, hair products, etc. We add exercise and increase our water intake. But then...

We spend time in our homes where we feel comfortable and safe. The place of our favorite things and people. But how safe

are our homes, really?

Some time back, a study was done on the air in downtown Los Angeles vs. the air in the homes around the area. Would you have guessed that the air in downtown L.A. was healthier than the air in their homes? It was.

Here is another interesting find. I watched a video in a training on fires. They set up two rooms with identical furniture, drapes, lamps, etc. One room was from my grandmother's time and the other one was from modern time. An ignition was set in the exact same spot in each room. Once ignited, in less than three minutes, the modern room reached the flash point. In the other room, the couch arm and part of the drapes were burning. Everything else was fine. The difference? Grandma's room was made with all-natural materials such as cotton, wool, etc. The modern room was made up of polyester, nylon, foam, etc. Many of these materials have a petroleum base in their manufacturing. Manmade versus natural.



We nestle into our favorite toxic chair or couch. Sleep in our non-wrinkled sheets. Slip into our favorite synthetic fabrics and breathe the off gases from all of it. In the morning we head into the bathroom with all our products to dress for the day. (By the way, the bathroom is usually the most toxic room in our house.)

It's time to stretch our health goals to the home. This is not an easy task. If you thought buying organic was expensive, try pricing out a natural fiber couch or mattress. However, there are steps we can take to offset what we are breathing and absorbing through our skin. Small changes can make a big difference.

Looking for a new rug? Focus on natural fibers such as cotton, wool, jute, hemp, silk, linen, etc. These are also the choices for clothing, curtains, drapes, etc.

let the fresh air in. Even if it's only for 20 minutes early in the morning and longer when the weather is cooler can improve the health of our home. Take your car as an example. The windows always get that film on it after awhile. I used to wonder why they got like that since I wasn't a smoker. Then I learned that it was the off gassing of all the materials.

Our homes are no different. To minimize harmful substances entering your home take your shoes off at the door. You would be amazed what we track in from parking lots and yards.

It's a bit harder when it comes to the bedroom. The clothes we wear, the mattress we sleep on and the products in the bathroom if it's connected to the bedroom are filled with manufactured materials and chemicals. We spend about 9-10

hours daily sleeping or dressing. Start off small. Update the pillows and sheets with natural materials. Wear natural fiber sleepwear. Switch out products as they need to be replaced.

When it comes to the kitchen, consider switching dishwasher and dishwashing liquid for a more natural option. The other items to consider replacing are aluminum cookware, plastic storage containers and glasses. Best choices are stainless steel, ceramic, cast iron or glass. Food-grade silicone, stainless steel or wood is a better choice vs. plastic utensils.

Lastly, check the cleaners you use. More natural options are Borax, baking soda and vinegar. If you opt to stick with certain cleaners, such as for toilets, take precautions to prevent breathing in the fumes and wear gloves.

Spend some time looking around your home. Read the labels on your towels, products, clothes, etc. A little at a time can make a big difference. Be sure to open the windows for a while as often as possible (Do this for your vehicle as well.). Here's to Health!

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A Pastor's Ponderings: Home Field Advantage



BY PASTOR DOUG STAUFFER,
FAITH INDEPENDENT BAPTIST
CHURCH

This is the time of year when many of us gather around the TV or head to the stadium to watch football or basketball. Whether it's the roar of the crowd in college football's packed stadiums or the excitement of a basketball arena coming alive, one thing is clear: home field advantage is real. When a team has thousands of fans cheering them on, momentum shifts, players push a little harder, and the energy of the crowd has a significant impact.

As a proud Penn State alumnus, my favorite game each year is the "Whiteout" at Beaver Stadium. Over 100,000 fans dressed in white fill the stands, waving towels, chanting in unison, and creating an atmosphere that opponents dread.

The electricity is unmatched—a sight to behold. I sometimes imagine what it would look like if Christians showed that same level of excitement and unity about serving the Lord. What if we cheered for Christ with the same passion that fans cheer for their team? The impact would be eternal.

The Bible paints a similar picture of the Christian life. In Hebrews 12:1, we read: *"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us."* The writer reminds us that we, too, have a kind of "home crowd" advantage. You cannot see them, but surrounding us are the faithful saints who have gone before—Abraham, Moses, David, the apostles, and countless unnamed believers who endured trials and remained faithful.

Like athletes on the field, Christians can become weary. Life's battles, temptations, and trials sometimes make us feel like we're not winning. But we're not alone. The testimony of those who endured before us encourages us: "Don't give up. Keep going. Stay faithful. The prize is worth it." Their voices remind us that the same God



who carried them through will carry us through.

There's also another aspect of this home-field advantage—our encouragement to one another in the present. The crowd in the stands doesn't just come from the past; it comes from today's church family. Just as teammates rally around each other when the game gets tough, we strengthen one another through fellowship, prayer, and shared burdens. A word spoken in love, a simple prayer lifted up, or even showing up faithfully at church can encourage someone else to keep going.

And most of all, we look to Jesus Himself, the One who secured the victory. Hebrews 12:2 continues: *"Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith."* No matter how hostile the "away crowd" of this world might feel, the believer knows the outcome—Christ has already won. Our victory is guaranteed because of what He accomplished on the cross.

And while games may leave us biting our nails until the final whistle, our faith rests on a certainty already written. The book of Revelation reveals the outcome—Christ reigns victorious, Satan is defeated, and God's people dwell with Him forever. Unlike a football game, where the result is sometimes uncertain until the last play, our victory is settled from the be-

ginning. That truth should give us courage and confidence, no matter how fierce the opposition feels today.

So, the next time you watch a game and see the crowd on their feet, cheering loudly for their team, let it be a reminder: we have the home-field advantage, too. Heaven's witnesses are cheering, the church is encouraging, and Christ is leading. Keep running your race. Victory is already ours in Him.

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



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

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Sean of the South: Our Father



BU SEAN DIETRICH

Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Even though this name has been so misused, misapplied, and misappropriated throughout history.

I mean, what even is your actual name? People in various countries call you different things. There have been wars over which is the correct name.

How many people have been slaughtered in, quote-unquote, “Your Name?” We humans are still fighting about what, exactly, that name is.

The American evangelicals, ironically, choose a Middle English translation of a Latinized version of a Greek iteration of a Hebrew nickname, that was officially sanctioned by King James I, who most historians believe was bisexual. I’ll bet the evangelicals love that.

Still, other people use other words for Your name. But the Jewish culture, in my humble opinion, gets it right. Because they won’t even say your name. It’s too holy. Plus, once you use someone’s name, you’ve already kind of boxed that someone in. But you can’t be boxed in.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Because heaven knows sometimes it sucks down here.

Even so, there’s got to be a plan to this mess we call life. There are all these coincidences happening. People call these instances different things: Grace, providence, karma, synchronicity, God winks. Whatever you call them, they happen. Every moment. And there seems to be a reason for it.

Give us this day our daily bread. Us. Not just me. Us. Collective. Personally, I have never known hunger, I was raised in a food secure household. But there are many other people included in “us.” People who are starving. People who don’t have



what they need. And it’s not just bread.

There are people lying in hospitals, prisons, nursing homes, or crack houses. They are drunk, and homeless, living from dumpsters. They have

needs. And it doesn’t seem fair that I sit on my duff, eating Fritos while others go without.

And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Why is it that we humans

have no problem asking a great invisible omnipotent being for forgiveness. But we’d rather burn in hell before saying “I’m sorry” to our loved ones? I have questions, Lord.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Because, let’s face it, when left to our own devices we screw everything up.

There was a scientific experiment done with laboratory rats recently. The rats were put into a cage with an electrical device that would shock them, giving them immense pain. The rats were held in the cage with nothing to entertain them.

In less than 24 hours the rats became so bored they started shocking the crap out of themselves just for entertainment value. We aren’t that different from rats.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory. Be-

cause it all belongs to you.

None of this is ours, even though we pretend like we own everything. We try to own land, we try to own people, we try to own everything. But man owns nothing.

We’re just guests in your world. We’re expressions of your beautiful nature. But we are not owners. The whole train-model set belongs to You, Lord. Everything and every-ONE.

After all, we’re all your children. Believer and atheist. Clergy and inmate. Straight and gay. Republican and Democrat. Christian, Islamic, Jewish, Hindu, Native American. Everyone. Every race. Every tribe. Every creed. Every confused and lost idiot who tries to put words into your mouth. Sort of like I did here.

Amen.

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5 Benefits of Outsourcing Your Business IT

By BIT-WIZARDS

Outsourcing IT services offers substantial advantages for businesses of all sizes and industries. Technology is the backbone of most operations today, and just like partnering with an accounting firm for financial needs, companies can turn to a third-party IT provider, or Managed Service Provider (MSP), to handle their technological infrastructure.

Outsourced IT services generally fall into three categories: fully managed IT, co-managed IT, and special projects.

Fully managed IT is ideal for companies with little to no in-house IT support, providing complete oversight of your net-

work and infrastructure.

Co-managed IT is perfect for organizations with an internal IT team that needs to offload specific tasks or gain additional expertise.

Special projects are best suited for businesses with targeted initiatives but limited resources, such as cloud migration or cybersecurity upgrades.

Here are five key benefits of outsourcing your business IT:

1. Manage Technical Expenses: Relying on a small IT team can limit your ability to respond to problems—especially when staff are unavailable. Additionally, technology costs



can be unpredictable and expensive. Outsourcing IT helps bring consistency to your budget. Most MSPs offer fixed, predictable pricing based on the number of users or devices, making it easier to plan expenses and avoid surprises.

2. Improve Flexibility and Scalability: Businesses often experience fluctuating de-

mands. Whether you're scaling back during slower seasons or ramping up to meet increased customer needs, internal IT teams can struggle to keep pace. Outsourced IT services offer the agility to scale support up or down as needed, helping your business stay ahead of demand without the cost or delays of hiring and training new staff.

3. Boost Cybersecurity Measures: Cyber threats are more frequent and sophisticated than ever. Without the right tools and expertise, your business could be vulnerable to attacks that compromise sensitive data and disrupt operations. MSPs specialize in implementing robust cybersecurity practices, including monitoring, threat detection, firewalls, and data backups. Whether fully or co-managed, outsourced IT

services give you access to enterprise-level security without having to build it yourself.

4. Leverage a Team of Experts: Filling skill gaps within your IT team can be time-consuming and costly. Hiring, onboarding, and retaining top talent is increasingly difficult in today's competitive job market. Outsourcing provides immediate access to a team of IT professionals with a wide range of skills and certifications. Instead of relying on one or two individuals, your business benefits from the collective knowledge of an entire team.

5. Minimize Operational Disruptions: Downtime can be expensive and damaging to your reputation. If your IT staff is overloaded or lacks the tools to resolve issues quickly, even minor disruptions can grow into major problems. MSPs are equipped with redundant systems and dedicated support teams to address issues promptly. By outsourcing help desk support, routine tech hiccups are handled quickly—freeing up your team to focus on more strategic work.

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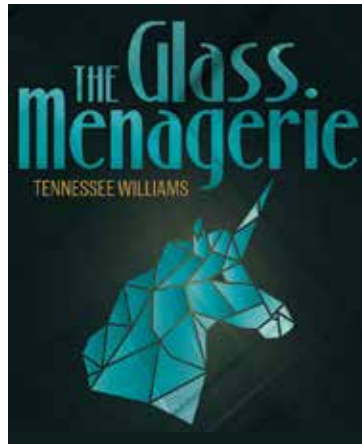
Fragile Dreams, Heavy Expectations: Why The Glass Menagerie Still Speaks to Us Today

BY CAMERON HUGHES

There's something about The Glass Menagerie that stays with you after the curtain falls.

Tennessee Williams' classic play feels both intimate and universal, showcasing the raw struggles of family, the reality of dreams, and the weight of expectations we all carry. It's a story that hits close to home, not through flashy moments, but through the honest feelings we usually bottle up to ourselves.

This is why The Glass Menagerie is such a powerful addition to ECTC's thirteenth season. It's not simply a play about a family in the height of the Great Depression; it's a reflection of the weight of societal pressures and expectations we all carry. Tom feels the pull between family obligations and his own ambitions, Amanda shows the distance that parents go to protect and guide their families, even while wrestling with their own disappointments and "what ifs". These "what ifs" highlight the tragedy of Amanda's character but also a universal challenge of balancing love, guidance, and the limits of control as both a parent and a partner. Laura shows a universal vulnerability of not measuring up in a world that often feels overwhelming. For so many of us today, the path to success feels steeper than ever. College degrees are the expectation, yet the job market is tougher. Social media makes it feel like everyone else is thriving in extravagant cars and on vacation in the Maldives, adding a new layer of



comparison. Many people feel like they're running out of time to "figure it out," and the weight of those expectations can be overwhelming in an everchanging world.

The characters feel trapped in their circumstances, but their aspirations for something greater is universal. We've all experienced moments where our dreams feel out of reach, where we're torn between what we owe to others and what we owe to ourselves. That's what makes The Glass Menagerie such a timeless piece of theatre. It's a story that mirrors our humanity, reminding us of both our fragility and our resilience even in the toughest of times. In recent years, we lived through COVID-19 lockdowns where the entire planet hit the pause button. It forced us to slow down, to reevaluate priorities, and to confront our own dreams and fears in a way we never expected. Like the characters on stage seeking escapism, we've experienced uncertainty, longing, and the quiet hope that something

better lies ahead all while looking for outlets to make things feel as normal as we could. And it's why I think this season at ECTC is so special. Each show holds up a mirror to the human experience. The ups and downs, the struggles and triumphs, the dreams and nightmares.

Here at ECTC, we believe storytelling is a bridge that connects us all, no matter where we

come from or what we're going through. Just like Laura's glass menagerie, they reflect our vulnerabilities, our dreams, and the strength we find in community. That's why The Glass Menagerie isn't just another play on the ECTC stage, it's an invitation to see ourselves more clearly.

About Cameron Hughes

Cameron is the Marketing and

Sponsor Relations Manager at Emerald Coast Theatre Company. He grew up on 30-A, graduating from Florida State University in 2023 with a Bachelor's in Marketing and an M.B.A in 2024. After becoming a first generation master's graduate, Cameron returned to the Emerald Coast in search of a valuable way to contribute to his community, thus landing him at ECTC.



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 Arts & Music

Sinfonia Gulf Coast Presents Cabaret At Seagar's: An Evening With Bernadette Peters, Oct. 2

Sinfonia Gulf Coast launches its 20th anniversary season in spectacular style with Cabaret at Seagar's: An Evening with Bernadette Peters on Thursday, October 2, 2025, at 5:30 p.m. at Seagar's Prime Steaks & Seafood, Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa in Miramar Beach.

A true Broadway legend, Bernadette Peters—affectionately known as the Queen of Broadway—will headline this exclusive evening of dining and performance. Peters is one of the most critically acclaimed performers of our time, with a career spanning stage, film, television, and recordings. She has earned three Tony Awards, a Golden Globe, four Emmy

nominations, four Grammy nominations, and a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

On Broadway, Peters has captivated audiences in unforgettable productions including Song and Dance, Annie Get Your Gun, Hello, Dolly!, Gypsy, Sunday in the Park with George, and Stephen Sondheim's Old Friends. On screen, her credits include Pennies from Heaven (Golden Globe), The Jerk, Annie, tick, tick...BOOM!, and acclaimed television roles in Zoey's Extraordinary Playlist (Emmy nomination), Mozart in the Jungle, The Good Fight, Smash, Grey's Anatomy, and Ally McBeal.

This appearance marks Peters' return to the Sinfonia Gulf



Coast stage, where she headlined the organization's inaugural Gala Event in 2006. Nearly

20 years later, she once again lends her star power to Sinfonia's mission of "Your symphony experience... redefined."

"Welcoming Bernadette Peters back to sparkle on the Sinfonia stage for this very special evening is truly extraordinary," said Demetrius Fuller, founder and Music & Artistic Director of Sinfonia Gulf Coast. "Her artistry, legacy, and connection to our very first Gala Event in 2006 make her the perfect guest to help us celebrate our 20th anniversary season."

Sinfonia Gulf Coast is committed to entertaining, educat-

ing, and inspiring the community through imaginative and innovative musical programming. Its goal is to enrich and expand the traditional orchestral experience through unique artistic disciplines and collaborations, enhancing Northwest Florida's cultural vitality.

Tickets are from \$500 per person. The evening includes valet, sparkling wine reception, a multi-course gourmet dinner paired with fine wine, gratuity, and Peters' live performance. Seating is limited, and this event is expected to sell out.

For more information and to reserve seats, visit SinfoniaGulfCoast.org, call (850) 460-8800, or emailinfo@sinfoniagulfcoast.org.

Four Habits of Successful Music Students

Success in music doesn't come overnight. Behind every impressive performance are hours of regular practice, strategic learning, and consistent effort. While talent plays a role, it is the habits that students build over time that often determine their success. Whether you're a beginner or aspiring profes-

sional, adopting the right habits can dramatically improve your musical journey. Here are four key habits that successful progressing music students have in common.

1. Consistent and Focused Practice

The most successful music

students don't just practice, they practice "well." This means setting aside regular time each day to work on technique, songs and musicianship. But, it's not just about logging hours. These students are taught how to focus during practice sessions, break down difficult passages, use a metronome to improve timing,

and set small, achievable goals for each practice session. They learned that mindless repetition doesn't lead to progress whereas thoughtful intentional practice does.

For example, instead of playing a whole piece from start to finish repeatedly, a successful student might isolate a tricky

section, slow it down, check their fingering and gradually increase the speed. This methodical approach leads to more efficient learning and better long-term memory.

2. Active Listening and Musical Awareness

Successful students are not only performers; they are also keen listeners. They listen to recordings of great musicians, study different interpretations and develop a critical ear. This habit helps them understand phrasing, dynamics, articulation and tone in a deeper way. Listening is how they internalize the language of music and learn to express themselves artistically.

Additionally, they often record their own practice sessions (with their cell phone or iPad) to listen back and assess their progress. This self-evaluation helps them notice issues they might miss while playing and adjust accordingly. Developing this level of musical awareness is a game-changer for any student aiming to perform at a high level.

3. Seeking Feedback and Being Open to Critique

Another hallmark of successful music students is their openness to feedback and change.



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FESTIVAL OF ARTS

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friends in a colorful, artsy crowd. Illustrator Janae Erickson—best known for the Niceville mural, MKAF’s 30th anniversary logo and her role as Sr. Director of Design at Frances Roy Agency—will be creating live digital art on the Dugas Stage, bringing her process to life in real time.

It’s also the perfect chance to learn about MKAF’s new Artist Level Membership, designed to support the arts while unlocking exclusive perks. Tickets are \$50 per person and include one drink voucher, with MKAF members saving \$20. Proceeds benefit MKAF and its ArtsReach community outreach education initiatives.

A Celebration for All

On October 25–26, the MKAF Cultural Arts Village in Destin will transform into a kaleidoscope of creativity, color and connection. Festivalgoers can stroll through more than 100 artist tents filled with original artwork from throughout the U.S., experience live demonstrations, enjoy continuous live music, and sample food truck



fare or relax in the beer and wine garden. Street performers will bring their playful artistry, children can dive into hands-on art activities, and visitors can cast their vote for the People’s Choice Award on Saturday. Admission is free, ensuring this beloved event remains accessible to all.

“The Festival of the Arts is one of our signature events,” says Festival Producer Deb Nissley, “It’s where our mission to enhance and inspire every life through Arts and Culture truly comes alive.”

A Legacy Rooted in Community

The festival is inseparable

from the story of the Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation itself. Founded in 1995 in honor of Destin matriarch Mattie May Kelly, the Foundation grew out of her vision that the cultural arts should be available to everyone. A pianist, organist, composer, poet and patron of the arts, Mattie dedicated her life to learning and to lifting others. Together with her husband, Coleman, she helped pioneer Destin’s tourism and fishing industries while remaining a generous benefactor of culture and community.

Today, MKAF carries her legacy forward. Over the past three decades, the Foundation has delivered more than 160 ArtsReach programs, part-



nering with 100+ schools and agencies to bring the arts to students, veterans and individuals with special needs. Each year, more than 25,000 participants experience these programs—everything from music residencies in classrooms to therapeutic art sessions for military families. Since its founding, MKAF has touched more than 420,000 lives throughout Northwest Florida. And it’s not just individuals—more than 500 business and individual patrons continue to fuel this work, proving that when a community invests in the arts, everyone benefits.

A Showcase for Artists

Hospitality is at the heart of the Festival of the Arts. Year after year, artists return not only for the opportunity of multi-



year sales, but for the experience itself. Staff and volunteers work year-round to create a warm and welcoming environment where creativity thrives. Jurying is conducted by three art industry professionals, and awards totaling \$12,000 are distributed, including Best in Show, People’s Choice, Awards of Excellence, Awards of Merit and Judge’s Recognition Awards.

For artists, it’s more than a weekend—it’s a stage to share their life’s work and connect with collectors who appreciate it. For the public, it’s an accessible way to experience museum-quality art outdoors in our own paradise.

Continued on page 39



- ✓ Receive one season pass to Concerts in the Village.
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 Arts & Music

30A Songwriters Festival Returns for 17th Year!

For 17 years, the 30A Songwriters Festival has drawn thousands of music fans from around the world to Scenic Highway 30A, transforming the Gulf Coast into a mecca for original songwriters. The 2026 festival takes place January 16–19 with more than 125 artists performing over 300 shows across 30 unique venues, from intimate patios to 6,000-seat outdoor stages.

Presented by Grand Boulevard, this year's festival will feature headline performances at Grand Boulevard's Town Center main stage by Mavis Staples, Toad the Wet Sprocket, 10,000 Maniacs, I'm With Her, Nikki Lane, and Paul McDonald & the Mourning Doves. Additional artists will be announced this summer.

Venues throughout South Walton will once again be converted into state-of-the-art listening rooms, ranging from 100 to 1,000 seats. Amphitheaters, town halls, restaurants, bars, and theaters provide fans with

the rare opportunity to experience world-class songwriters in intimate settings. WMOT, based in Nashville, will again record select performances for its World Cafe sessions in partnership with WXPB Philadelphia.

Weekend passes and VIP tickets are available now. VIP packages include premium seating and complimentary gourmet food and drinks in the VIP tent during main stage shows, as well as full weekend transportation options for groups.

The festival is produced by the Cultural Arts Alliance of Walton County and Russell Carter Artist Management, presented by Grand Boulevard with support from Visit South Walton, WaterColor Inn & Resort, and ASCAP. Festival passes and details are available at 30ASongwritersFestival.com.

Sean Dietrich Releases New Novel *Over Yonder* Explores Family, Fatherhood and the Unexpected Roads of Redemption

Acclaimed Southern storyteller Sean Dietrich—known for

Art News



his warm reflections on family, faith, and finding joy in the ordinary—releases his newest novel, *Over Yonder*, on Oct. 7.

Part Southern road novel, part meditation on fatherhood, *Over Yonder* follows a defrocked priest just out of prison, a pregnant teen searching for a way forward, and an emotional support goldfish as they journey through the Deep South. Poignant and humorous, the story is Dietrich's tribute to second chances, flawed families, and the unexpected ways people find grace and connection.

"This book is a love letter to fatherhood," said Dietrich. "Fa-

thers, those misguided, flawed, beautifully imperfect humans who tried, failed, got everything wrong, and, in spite of themselves, somehow became our greatest teachers on the subject of love."

Laura Wheeler, senior acquisitions editor for Thomas Nelson Fiction, added: "Sean is an innately gifted storyteller—his voice can't be taught; it's simply who he is. His novels are emotional and redemptive, filled with cantankerous old men with big hearts, tongue-in-cheek humor, and flawed characters who remind us that forgiveness and kindness can be found in the most unlikely places."

Over Yonder will be available in bookstores nationwide Oct. 7. Learn more at tnzfiction.com/9781400235681/over-yonder/sean-dietrich.

Northwest Florida Ballet Unveils 2025–26 Season

Northwest Florida Ballet's upcoming season features three distinctive productions. It opens Sept. 19–20 with the Emerging Choreographers' Project

Blackbox at NFB Studios in downtown Fort Walton Beach. Showcasing the innovative choreography of selected members of the NFB company, this production features ballet and contemporary works set to a diverse range of music genres, accompanied by a visual art exhibition that offers audiences a compelling glimpse into the next generation of artists from the NFB Académie.

The beloved holiday classic *Nutcracker* returns Nov. 21–23 to the Mattie Kelly Arts Center, featuring more than 140 performers, including international guest artists and over 100 local children, with live music by the Northwest Florida Symphony Orchestra.

The season concludes March 7–8 with the company premiere of Jill Eathorne Bahr's *Alice in Wonderland*, a vibrant new adaptation blending neoclassical dance and imaginative storytelling.

Season subscriptions, which include tickets to *The Nutcracker*

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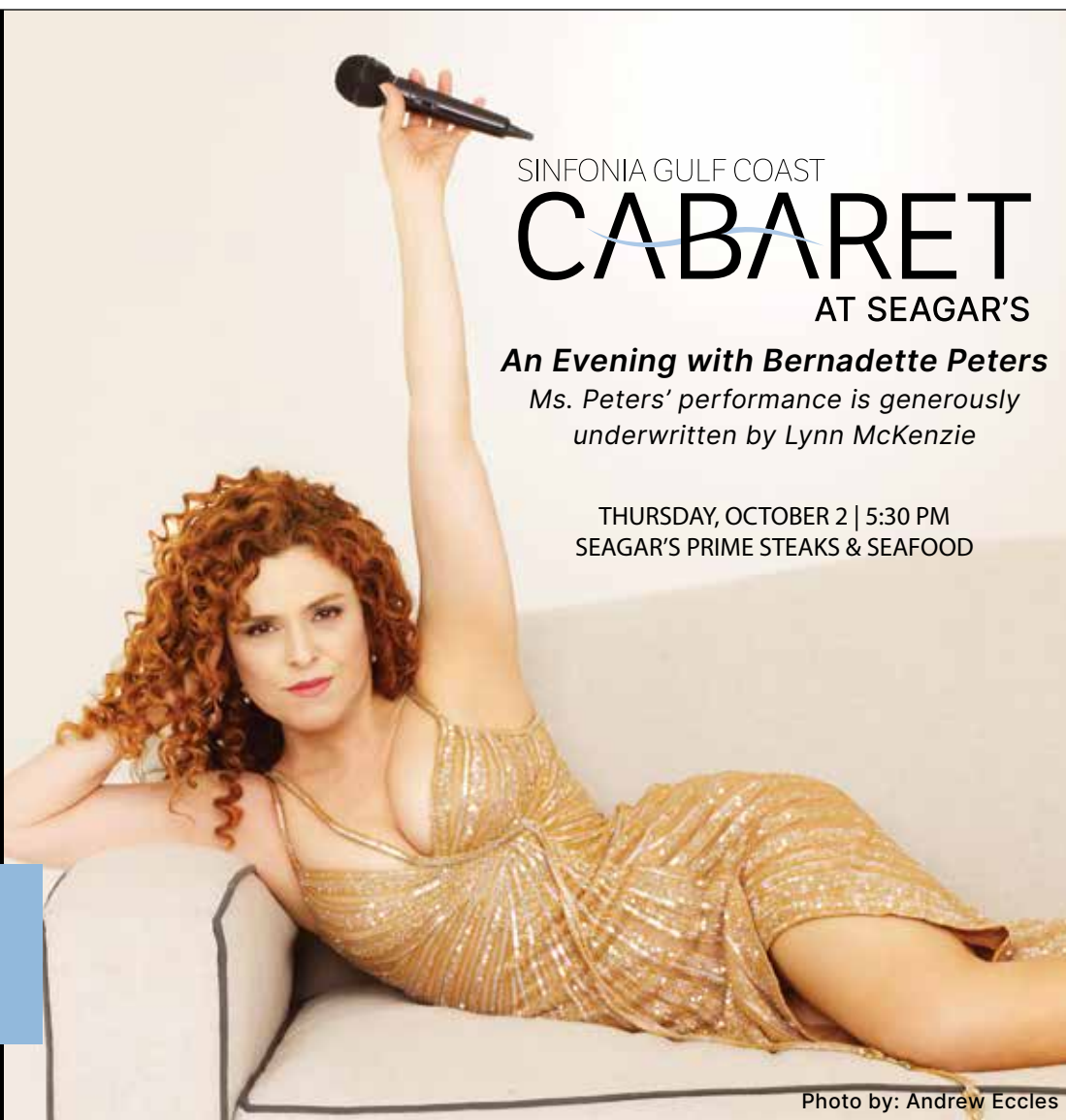
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FESTIVAL OF ARTS

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Membership: Fueling the Mission

Becoming a member of MKAF means more than access to events; it means fueling a mission that changes lives. Membership levels—from the \$75 Art Nouveau tier (for those 35 and under) to the \$500 Impresario tier—offer benefits such as early admission to Concerts in the Village, discounts on Festival merchandise and season passes. But the real benefit is knowing that membership dollars help sustain programs like Arts for All Abilities, Warrior Arts and Arts Empower—programs that create safe spaces, provide therapeutic experiences and inspire growth for thousands in our region.

Volunteers: The Heart of the Festival

It takes an army of helping hands to bring the Festival of the

Festival of the Arts 30th Anniversary!

Arty Kick Off Party – Friday, October 24, 2025 | 6 p.m.
Saturday, October 25, 2025 | 9 a.m.–5 p.m.
Sunday, October 26, 2025 | 10 a.m.–4 p.m.

MKAF Cultural Arts Village, 4323 Commons Drive West, Destin
Free Admission to Festival | On-site Parking Available

Arts to life, and volunteering is one of the most rewarding ways to be part of it. Opportunities include everything from setting up tents and greeting guests at the main entry to assisting artists, helping in the children’s tent or staying for breakdown on Sunday evening. High school seniors can even earn community service hours while participating. “All volunteers are welcome to arrive early or stay after their shift to enjoy the festival,” says Volunteer Coordinator Stephanie Shea. “It’s a wonderful way to both give and receive.”

More Than a Festival

Beyond the art tents, food trucks and live music, the Festival of the Arts symbolizes something larger: the weaving together of a community that values creativity as an essential part of life. In our area—a place already blessed with white sand and emerald waters—the arts bring depth, connection and meaning. They remind us that beauty isn’t just found in landscapes, but in the resilience of a child with special needs learning through paint, in the courage of a veteran rediscovering expression through the arts, and in the collective joy of friends and



family gathering under tents, sharing culture, laughter and hope.

As a MKAF board member for several years, I hope you’ll join us for our 30th Annual Festival of the Arts. I say this not just as a publisher and writer, but as someone who believes in what this event stands for. Browse these amazing artists from all over. By supporting them, you’re also supporting those who need help right here

in our community. This October 25–26, at the MKAF Cultural Arts Village in Destin, come for the art, stay for the memories and leave knowing you’ve been part of a tradition that for 30 years has helped transform not just canvases and clay, but lives. We appreciate you and look forward to seeing you all there! For more information, visit mkaf.org.

ART NEWS

continued from previous page

er and Alice in Wonderland plus numerous subscriber perks and discounts, are now available at NFBallet.org—\$80 per adult and \$37 per child (12 and under), a savings of more than 15% compared to box office prices. You can also purchase season subscriptions, additional performance and event tickets, and membership packages.

FOUR HABITS

continued from page 37

They actively seek input from teachers, peers, and even audiences. Rather than becoming defensive, they view critique as an essential part of growth. This mindset allows them to continuously refine their skills and deepen their understanding of their instrument.

They also tend to ask relevant questions during lessons, showing curiosity and a desire

to understand not just what to play, but why something works musically or technically. This proactive approach accelerates learning and fosters a deeper engagement with their instrument.

4. Goal Setting and Self-Motivation

Successful music students set both short-term and long-term goals. Whether it’s preparing for a recital, mastering a song or improving sight-reading skills,

having clear goals keeps them motivated and focused. They also understand that progress has highs and lows and that self-discipline keeps them moving forward.

In conclusion, while every musician’s path is unique, these four habits: focused practice, active listening, openness to feedback and goal-oriented motivation, are common among those who succeed. Cultivating these behaviors at a young age (or old) can turn raw talent into true

musical excellence and make their musical journey both productive and rewarding.

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MARCH 10, 2026



Northwest Florida
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Opening Classics: The Hero Within
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DECEMBER 5, 2025

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2025-2026 SEASON

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