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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.

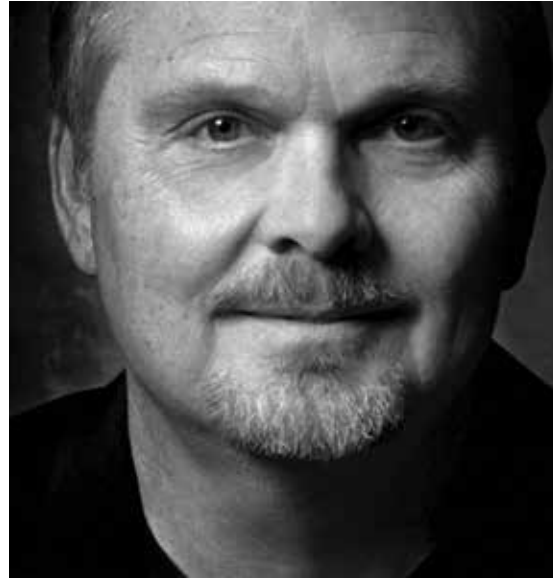


James Otto

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

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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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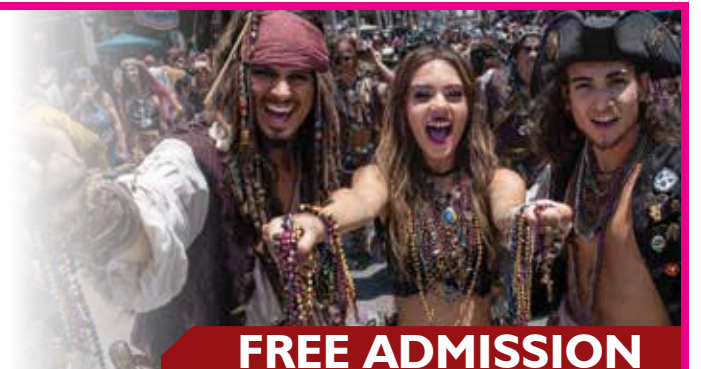
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 Community

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.

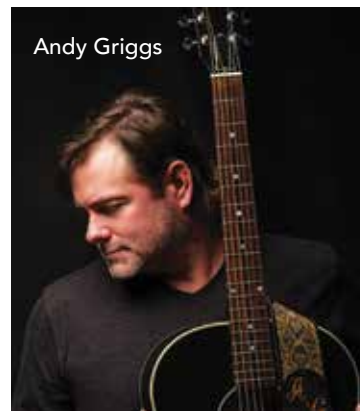
Pennings, also reminded me that while the festival is about

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.

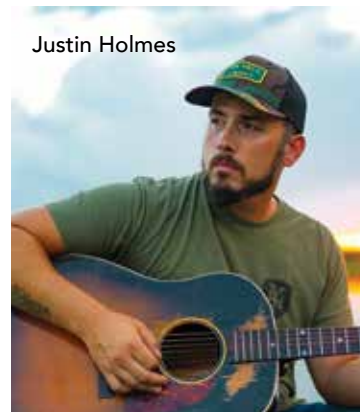
Will Estell is a writer, editor, and media entrepreneur with more than 750 published articles in regional and national magazines covering tourism, real estate, automobiles, golf, food, music, and celebrity cover-story interviews. As chief creative officer of Estell Hussey Media LLC, he has



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 friends



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 Community

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 ex-



ams, 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 active 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 community 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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 Community

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



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.

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, surround 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.

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 Alzheimer'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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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 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 typically 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 internal systems. 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 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 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

Debunking the Top 5 Misconceptions About Acupuncture

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 symp-

Continued on next page

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 Community

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 Palmerton, 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

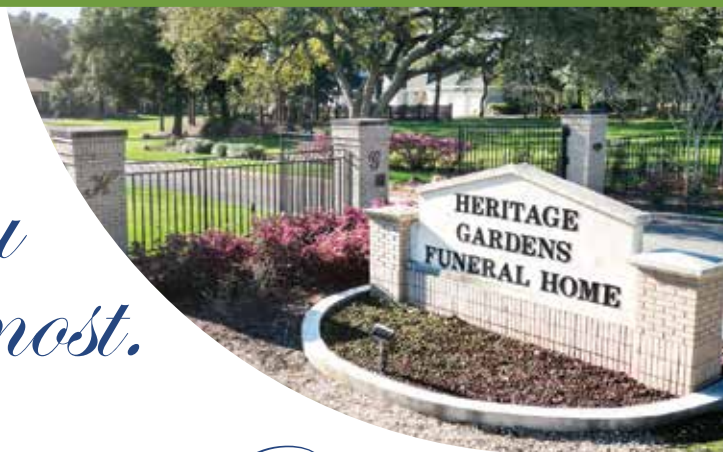
followed, where Solt worked under Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger and later served as Division Chief for International Programs, supporting U.S. policy in Latin America during the tumultuous Contra War era. His final active-duty role was as Commander of Foreign Military Training, overseeing a 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.

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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.

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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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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



Jay Collins,
Florida Lt. Governor



Ron DeSantis,
Florida Governor



Blaise Ingoglia,
Florida CFO

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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 12



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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 in October 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.

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		

 Community

EVENTS

continued from page 10

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 ex-



clusive 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 South-

east’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

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: emeraldcost-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: ecautismcenter.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

Continued on page 21



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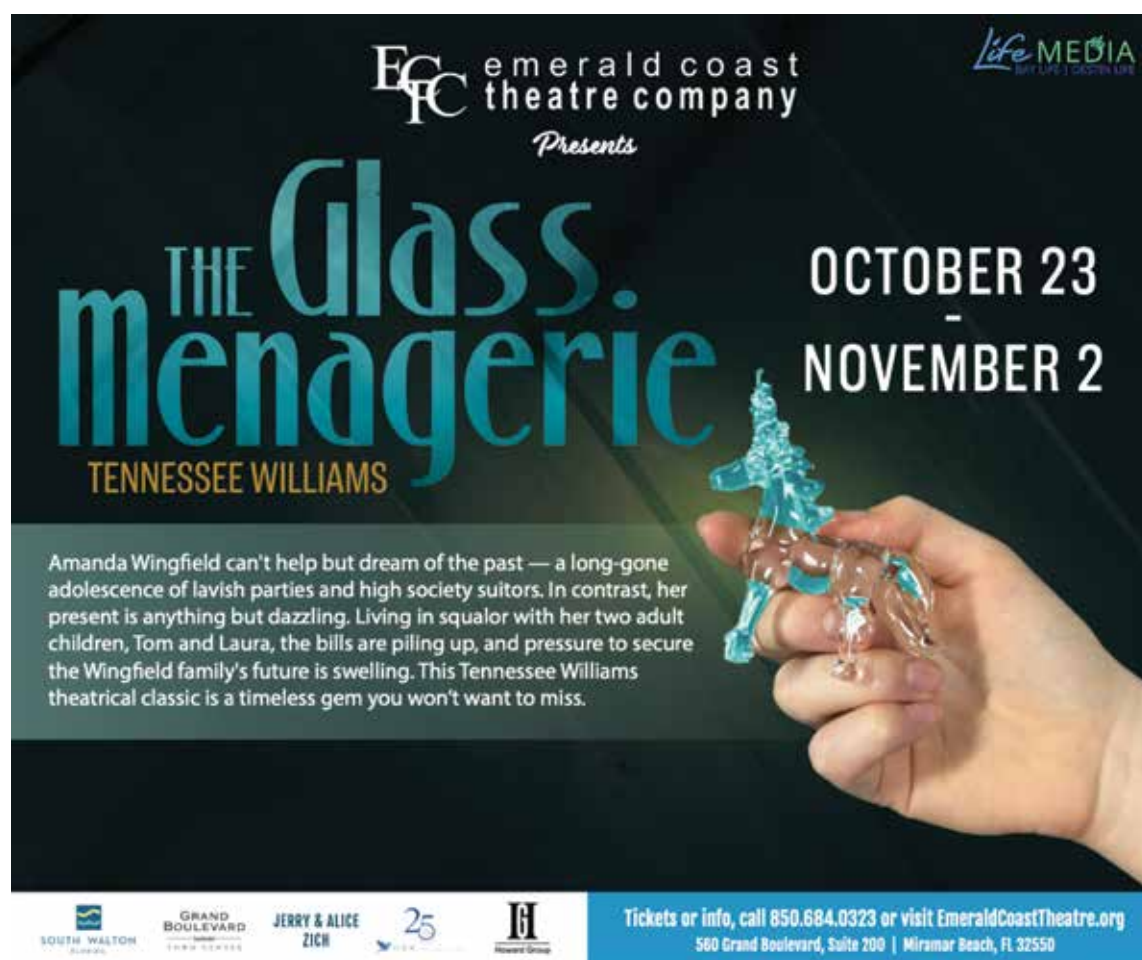
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OCTOBER 23 - NOVEMBER 2

Amanda Wingfield can't help but dream of the past — a long-gone adolescence of lavish parties and high society suitors. In contrast, her present is anything but dazzling. Living in squalor with her two adult children, Tom and Laura, the bills are piling up, and pressure to secure the Wingfield family's future is swelling. This Tennessee Williams theatrical classic is a timeless gem you won't want to miss.

Tickets or info, call 850.684.0323 or visit EmeraldCoastTheatre.org
560 Grand Boulevard, Suite 200 | Miramar Beach, FL 32550

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 North-

west Florida.

To learn more about the health sciences programs at Northwest Florida State College, visit www.lookatmenow.nwfsc.edu.

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

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



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 treasury of knowledge available

she collected photos for Florida Congressman Jimmy Patronis to use for showing America this special county in his district.

Continued on page 21





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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

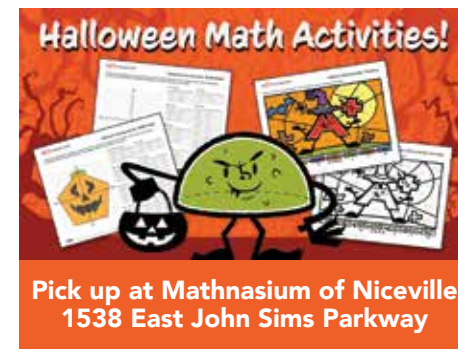
their ability to absorb information. Some students may benefit from traditional methods like note-taking and flashcards, while others prefer more interactive approaches such as group discussions or teaching the material to someone else.

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 per-



spectives, 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.

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 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.todayssparent.com/family/education/report-card-anxiety-tips-to-improve-student-grades/>.



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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 services 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 “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 company. “We have a variety of



PHOTO CREDIT: SAVVYLEIGHPHOTO.COM

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.

Savvy Leigh
PHOTO

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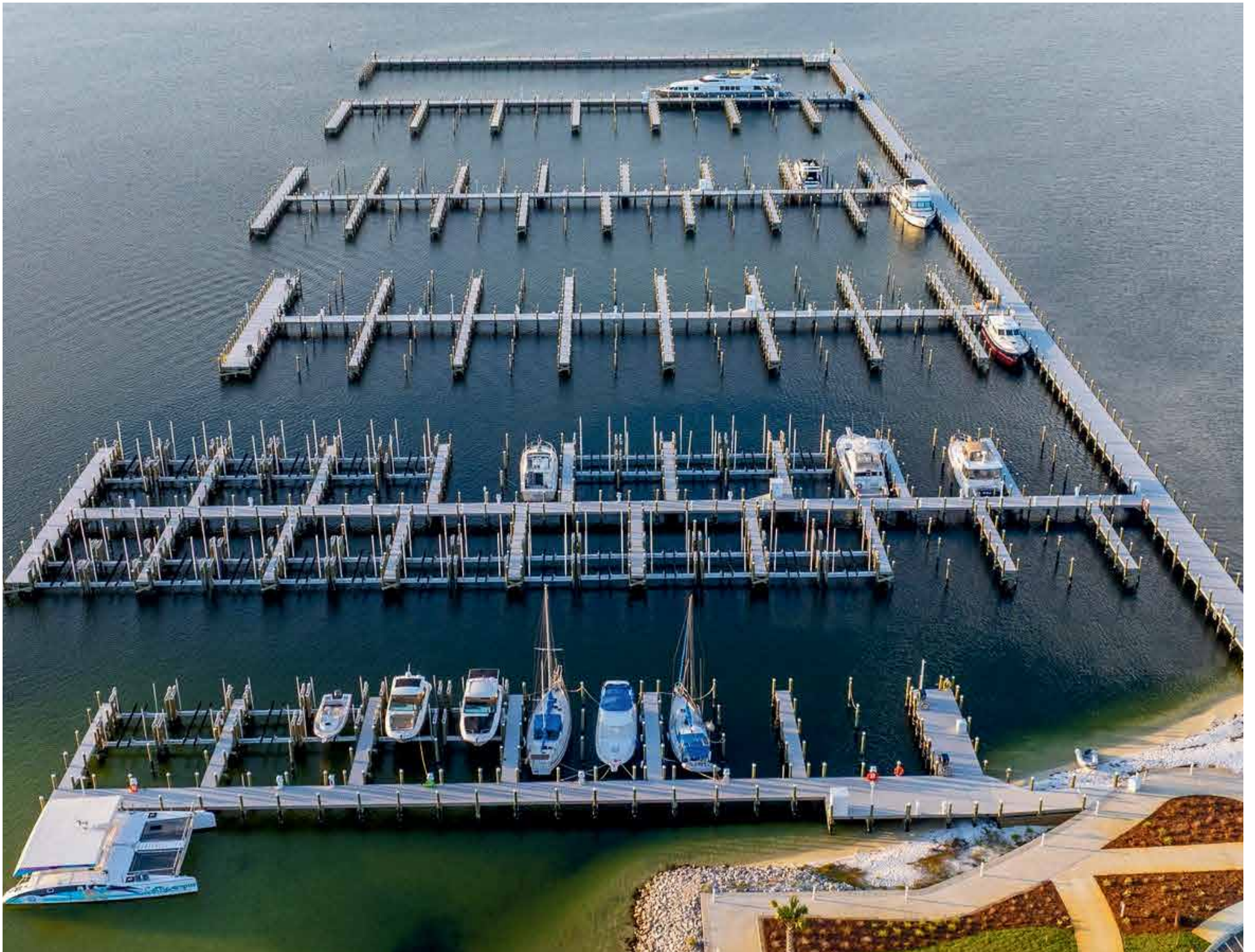
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 Off the Hook



SUNSET ISLE

YACHT CLUB
OKALOOSA ISLAND

SunsetIsle.com

1350 Miracle Strip Pkwy SE
Okaloosa Island, FL 32548

Doctoberfest 2025!

“It’s so hot, and so humid, even the dock lines are sweating!” said Caitlin Jewett, the marina operations manager for Sunset Isle Yacht Club. She was right. It was late August, and it was Gulf Coast August hot, and it wasn’t even 7 a.m. yet!

And that’s when it hit her... when the weather finally cools down, even a little bit, not only is she going to enjoy it, but she is going to celebrate it! Maybe even throw a party!

All day, as she walked the docks and talked with customers and other marina staff members, everyone complained about the heat. She just nodded in agreement. But now her thoughts were preoccupied with planning a celebration instead of another day that felt stickier than a bait bucket left in the sun!

When we get to October, it will feel at least a little cooler then, and it won’t be quite as humid, she tried to assure herself.

She started brainstorming.

I’ll get a tent. I’ll get some TVs to put underneath it so we can watch college football. I’ll invite all of our marina customers to stop by. We can grill up some food. We can have some cold beer and soft drinks.

All summer, she had communicated with so many boaters, via e-mail, text, and phone calls, about them wanting to see the sparkling new marina gem on the Gulf Coast. Not just locals, but also captains who were planning on bringing their yachts to the marina for this fall, winter, and spring from places like South Florida. I’ll invite them too, she thought.

I’ll invite our local boat dealer friends. They will be ready to celebrate after a long summer. Heck, I’ll even tell them they can bring some boats here to the marina for people to look at during our celebration. I know by October, they will have some inventory they would love to sell before winter. She was on a roll, like the sweat dripping off a

deckhand’s brow into the bilge!

I’m doing it, I’m throwing a dock party the first weekend in October, like a little festival here at our Yacht Club, she proclaimed out loud to no one in particular. And I’m going to call it...”Yactober... no wait, I’m going to call it Doctoberfest!!!! We are going to have a party on our docks!”

And that is how Doctoberfest came to be!

October 3-5 at Sunset Isle Yacht Club, the new 142-slip marina on Okaloosa Island is hosting Doctoberfest, featuring a Boat Show and sticking with the borrowed Bavarian theme, Beers, and Brats!

Local boat dealers will be showcasing their most popular models from their best brands onsite at the marina, all with special, end-of-the-season prices, financing, and incentives which will not be available again until boat show season in the Spring of 2026.

In total, more than fifty boats



will be on display from featured dealers, Legendary Marine, Two Georges Marina, Marine-Max, Emerald Coast Marine, and Gulf Coast Marine Centers. Marine Group, Great Southern Yachts, Nautical Ventures, and Sunrise Marine will also have boats at the Doctoberfest Boat Show.

Doctoberfest features free ad-

mission and parking, live music, big-screen TVs, food, and much more.

Show hours are Friday and Saturday, October 3rd-4th, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., and Sunday, October 5th, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

For more information, visit Sunsetisle.com or Sunset Isle Yacht Club on Facebook.

DOCTOBERFEST BOAT SHOW OCT 3-5



Featured Dealers:



- Friday & Saturday 10am-6pm
- Sunday 10am-4pm
- Free Admission & Parking
- Live Music, Food & More!

Sunsetisle.com

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: Mullet Toss 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.

(850) 897-6400

bluewaterbaymarina.com/schooners

290 Yacht Club Dr., Unit 200,
Niceville in Bluewater Bay

2025 High School Football Schedules

Niceville Eagles

Head Coach: Grant Thompson

8/15 – vs. Bay (Preseason)

8/22 – at Tallahassee Lincoln

8/29 – vs. Escambia

9/5 – at Pensacola Pine Forest

9/12 – vs. Crestview

9/19 – vs. Choctawhatchee

*10/3 – Open Week (Freeport only)

10/10 – vs. Mosley

*10/24 – vs. Milton

10/31 – vs. Navarre

Rocky Bayou Knights

8/15 – vs Lighthouse

8/22 – vs Monroe Academy

9/5 – vs Eagles View Academy

9/12 – at Aucilla Christian

9/19 – at Franklin County

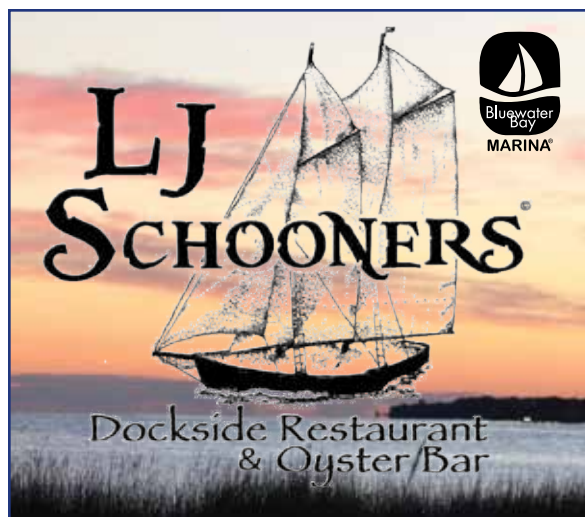
9/26 – at Central (Milton)

10/3 – vs Crenshaw Christian

10/17 – at Graceville

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

* District Game



Nautical Flea Market & Flea Market

Oct. 11th - 10AM to 2PM

32nd Annual Single Handed Race

Oct. 18th

Missing the Mullet

Oct. 19th

Mullet Toss 4PM

Mullet Hair Contest 6PM



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

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



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• 251 Mary Esther Blvd.

Pensacola
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Fort Walton Beach
• 901 Beal Pkwy NW

• 1285 Eglin Pkwy.
• 290 NE Eglin Pkwy.

Crestview
• 297B James Lee Blvd.

Panama City
• 1360 West 15th St

Callaway
• 809/807 N. Tyndall Pkwy.

Pensacola
• 4600 Mobile Hwy.

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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	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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850.428.2333

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 12

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

MUSEUM SERIES

continued from page 13

Okaloosa County boasts beautiful beaches in the south and pristine rivers and rich farmland 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 Her-

itage 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!



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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 Cu-parencu 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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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 Choctawhatchee 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 Destins 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.

Opening Classics with the NFSO

The Northwest Florida Symphony Orchestra (NFSO) opens its new season Saturday, Oct. 25, at the Mattie Kelly Arts Center in Niceville. Music Director Todd Craven welcomes internationally acclaimed pianist Zhang Zuo ("Zee Zee") for a program featuring Ravel's spirited, jazz-tinged Piano Concerto in G and Beethoven's revolutionary Symphony No. 3 "Eroica." Expect an evening of brilliance, energy and symphonic power on the Emerald Coast.

Chinese-American pianist Zhang Zuo is celebrated worldwide for her vivid, com-

municative performances. A former BBC New Generation Artist, she has performed with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, BBC Symphony and Philharmonic, London Philharmonic, Cincinnati Symphony, Hong Kong Philharmonic and Shanghai Symphony. She studied at Eastman and The Juilliard School, where she won the William



Petschek Piano Debut Award, and is a founding member of the Z.E.N. Trio, recording with Decca/Deutsche Grammophon.

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Wellness



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 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 refocus 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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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.

Ready to Feel Like Yourself Again?

You’ve given so much of yourself to your family. If now feels like the right time to reclaim a part of yourself, we’re here to help. A Mommy Makeover can be a powerful act of self-care — one that’s deeply personal and uniquely tailored to you.

To schedule a private consultation and explore your options,

contact Bluewater Plastic Surgery today. As a board-certified plastic surgeon, my practice is dedicated to cosmetic surgery, and I have performed thousands of procedures over the

past 25 years. My priority has always been patient safety and achieving superior cosmetic results. I believe the best measure of success comes from my patients themselves—with more

than 250 five-star reviews, their experiences speak louder than anything I could say.

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 Wellness


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. We have vinyl flooring so I don't walk around the house barefoot. Slippers and socks are my choice for lessening the exposure load. Another good habit is to open your windows whenever possible to allow the gases from the products to escape and 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!

~ HealthyDay HealthyLife, succeed.hdhl@gmail.com

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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. Because 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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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 atmo-



sphere 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 out-

come—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 beginning. 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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FESTIVAL OF ARTS

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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, partnering 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

Continued on next page



- ✓ Receive one season pass to Concerts in the Village.
- ✓ Enjoy early admission access to Concerts in the Village.
- ✓ Receive discounts on Festival of the Arts merchandise.
- ✓ Receive membership rates on select MKAF events.

BECOME A MEMBER
- JOIN TODAY!

MKAF.org



ART, MUSIC, AND MORE
FREE EVENT!
OCTOBER 25 & 26



THURSDAY NIGHT
CONCERT SERIES
APRIL 9 - JUNE 11, 2026



CHANGE A LIFE -
SUPPORT THE ARTS!
160+ ARTSREACH
PROGRAMS

Arts & Music

FESTIVAL OF ARTS

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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.

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

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

All Abilities, Warrior Arts and Arts Empower—programs that create safe spaces, provide therapeutic experiences and inspire growth for thousands in our region.

ing. “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.”

Volunteers: The Heart of the Festival

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

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.

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YEARS

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SINFONIA GULF COAST

CABARET

AT SEAGAR'S

An Evening with Bernadette Peters

Ms. Peters' performance is generously
underwritten by Lynn McKenzie

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 2 | 5:30 PM

SEAGAR'S PRIME STEAKS & SEAFOOD

Photo by: Andrew Eccles

UPCOMING SHOWS

MATTIE KELLY
ARTS CENTER
NORTHWEST FLORIDA STATE COLLEGE

2025-2026 SEASON

MKAC SHOWS

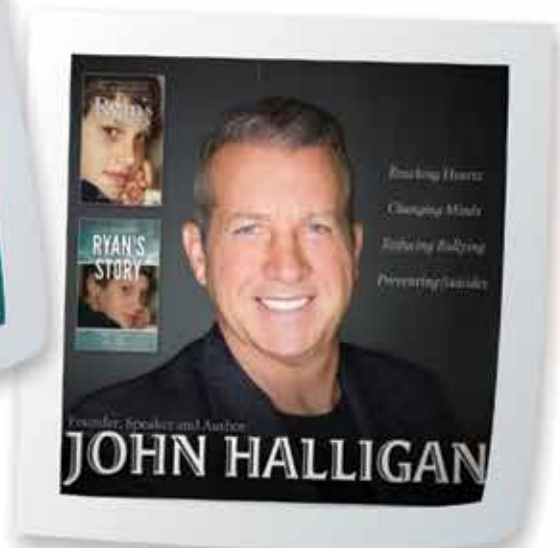
Eric O'Shea, Comedian
SEPTEMBER 4, 2025

John Halligan, Speaker
SEPTEMBER 26, 2025

Dance to the Holidays
DECEMBER 9, 2025

Choir of Man
FEBRUARY 12, 2026

Dirty Dancing in Concert
MARCH 10, 2026



Northwest Florida
Symphony Orchestra

Opening Classics: The Hero Within
OCTOBER 25, 2025

Holiday Pops: A Celtic Christmas
DECEMBER 5, 2025

January Pops: Stand in the Light
JANUARY 24, 2026

Stars of Tomorrow: Joyfully Free
FEBRUARY 21, 2026

**Final Classics:
Resurrection Symphony**
APRIL 18, 2026



2025-2026 SEASON

UPCOMING SHOWS



Scan, Call or Click for Tickets!
850.729.6000
MattieKellyArtsCenter.org

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