



NOVEMBER 2025
VOL. 7, NO. 2

BAY Life

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Alaqua Well-Being:

Finding Healing in the Company of Animals and Nature

BY LAURIE HOOD, ALAQUA
FOUNDER & CEO

Tucked among the pines and pastures of Freeport, Alaqua Animal Refuge has always been a place of second chances. Every rescued animal carries a story of survival, and every visitor feels the quiet peace that comes from being near them. It is that same sense of connection that inspired Alaqua's newest initiative, Alaqua Well-Being, a program that invites people to slow down, breathe deeply, and heal alongside the animals who live there.

The idea for Alaqua Well-Being grew out of simple conversations with volunteers. When asked what brought them to the refuge, the first answer was always their love of animals. But as those talks went deeper, something more profound emerged. Many were walking through their own seasons of grief or change — the loss of a spouse, recovery from illness, divorce, or other personal challenges. Again and



again, they shared that it was the animals who gave them the courage to keep going. Watching a once-broken animal learn to trust and love again gave them hope that they could heal, too. It be-

came clear that the refuge was helping people as much as it helped animals.

Alaqua Well-Being was born from that truth. It is built on the idea that when we care for animals and connect with

nature, we also heal ourselves. The program brings together experiences that nurture the mind, body and spirit, including meditation, art, nature walks, counseling and animal-assisted activities. It is a place where compassion becomes a practice and not just a feeling.

One of the most beloved parts of the program is Doggie Day Out, where community members can take an adoptable dog for a few hours or an afternoon adventure. Whether it is a walk on the beach, a car ride or relaxing in the park, these outings give the dogs a break from the shelter and offer people a joyful, stress-relieving experience. Participants often say it is the best therapy they did not know they needed, and many end up adopting their new, furry friends.

Another cornerstone of Alaqua Well-Being is Humane Heroes, the refuge's

ALAQUA

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SAFE in the Panhandle

BY CHRISTOPHER MANSON

SAFE (Strategic Alliance to Fight Exploitation) on the Panhandle, in collaboration with Ruthlake Farm, hosts its inaugural Christmas Market at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center Nov. 21 and 22.

SAFE In the Panhandle is a local 501(c)(3) "working to end exploitation in the Florida Panhandle," says Director Marissa Osborne. The nonprofit will soon offer the only 24/7 emergency safe home for survivors on the Emerald Coast. SAFE provides free state-approved and state-mandated training for law enforcement, first responders, the hospitality industry, medical professionals, and community groups. "The

SAFE

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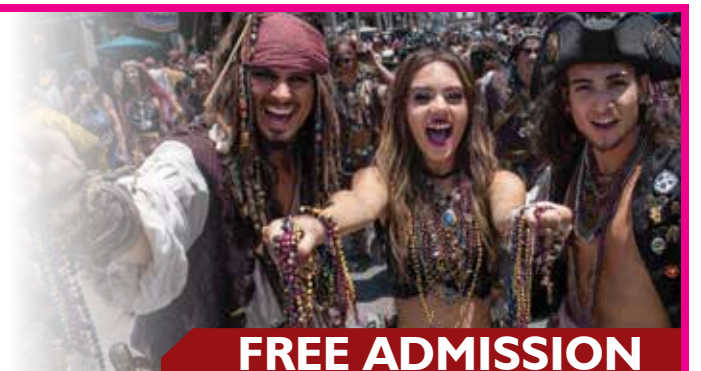
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 Community

ALAQUA
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hands-on learning experience for young people. Students spend time caring for animals, hearing their rescue stories, and learning how empathy and responsibility can change lives. “We have seen kids open up in ways that surprise even their teachers,” says Alaqua founder Laurie Hood. “Animals have a way of reaching the parts of us that words cannot.”

The program also extends to senior citizens, both at the refuge and through offsite visits. Many seniors find comfort in brushing a horse’s mane, holding a gentle cat or simply sitting quietly with a dog by their side. These simple moments bring back memories, spark conversation and lift spirits in ways that medicine alone cannot.

For anyone seeking stillness, guided nature walks and meditation sessions on Alaqua’s trails offer a peaceful escape from the pace of everyday life. The sounds of birds, the rustle of leaves and the presence of animals create a kind of natural therapy — a reminder that calm often lives in the simplest places.

Creativity also plays a key role in Alaqua Well-Being. Art classes invite participants to express themselves and find mindfulness through painting, sketching and other forms of creative expression. Alaqua also hosts live music events that bring people together in celebration of community, compassion and the bond we share with animals.

In addition, Alaqua is developing opportunities for coun-



is the next chapter in that story — a reminder that kindness heals, and that sometimes, the best medicine has four legs and a heartbeat.



Published Monthly
Mailed FREE to the communities of
Bluewater Bay & Hammock Bay

P.O. Box 1424
Santa Rosa Beach, FL 32459

Publisher/Executive Editor
Lori Leath Smith
Lori@LifeMediaGrp.com

Director, Advertising Sales
Scott Miller
Scott@LifeMediaGrp.com

Art Director
Kim Harper

Writers
Laurie Hood
Cameron Hughes
Christopher Manson
Scott Miller
Barbara Palmgren
Helen Petre
“Doc” Doug Stauffer

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seling and natural healing, connecting participants with professionals and holistic practitioners who share the belief that animals and nature can be powerful partners in emotional wellness.

What ties every part of Alaqua Well-Being together is compassion. The program reflects the refuge’s long-standing belief that empathy for animals teaches empathy for people. It is a full-circle approach to wellness that reminds us that healing does not always happen in a clinic, but often in the quiet moments when we simply allow ourselves to connect.

At Alaqua, rescue has always meant more than saving animals. It is about creating a refuge for all living things, people included. Alaqua Well-Being

The Power of a Thankful Heart

BY LORI LEATH SMITH,
BAY LIFE PUBLISHER

“Gratitude is a quality similar to electricity: It must be produced and discharged and used up in order to exist at all.” — William Faulkner

They say people with a thankful heart see their glass as half full, while others see it as half empty. But, in my opinion, the truth is that gratitude isn’t about “what’s” in the glass—it’s about “how” you choose to see it.

A spirit of thankfulness doesn’t just make life sweeter; it actually transforms it—physically, mentally, emotionally and the “ly’s.” In fact, studies show that gratitude can lead to better health, stronger relationships, higher productivity and greater peace of mind.

In the upcoming “Thanks” season, why not take a moment to reflect on what truly fills your heart—and how you can live out gratitude every day?

Being thankful means slowing down long enough to notice life’s blessings—big and small.

Yes, most of us are grateful for our families, health and homes, but there’s also beauty in the seemingly little things (but are actually life-giving): a sunrise over the Gulf, a kind word from a stranger, a job that provides or the simple gift of another day. Just try it. I believe, that when you cultivate your thankful heart, the result will manifest in a host of positive benefits, such as better health, higher productivity, healthier relationships, more satisfaction with life, relief from stress and defense against depression.

You see, gratitude grows when we’re intentional about it. Try this: Keep a short list or “thankfulness journal.” When frustrations creep in, balance each complaint with something good. You’ll be amazed how quickly your perspective shifts from what’s missing to what’s meaningful. I’m not pure with this, but when I’ve taken the time to do, it’s miraculous and goes a long way for my state of mind!

Being thankful is more than a thought—it’s something we do.



Over the years, I’ve learned a few simple ways to put gratitude into motion:

Speak it. Don’t keep your appreciation to yourself. Say it out loud! Go beyond a quick “thank you” and be specific—tell someone exactly what they did that made a difference.

Show it. Write a note, leave a kind review, treat a friend to coffee or surprise a service worker with a small token of appreciation. (Perhaps even write a short note of thanks after a job interview. It’s not a guarantee you’ll get the job, but this thoughtful, timely gesture is a

genuine touch that will leave a lasting impression.) Little acts of kindness go a long way.

Serve it. Gratitude grows when we give it away. Volunteer, donate or simply lend a helping hand to someone in need. You’ll find that serving others multiplies your own joy—and from a business perspective, it also builds trust and goodwill within your community.

As we gather around the table, I urge you to remember the first Thanksgiving. The Pilgrims had every reason to despair—but instead, they chose to give thanks for life, provision and hope. It set the stage to move forward. Their gratitude became the foundation of a nation, and it can become the foundation of our lives, too.

In addition to a Thanksgiving Day filled with turkey and football, consider the Pilgrims—despite tremendous loss and hardship, they chose to give thanks for their blessings: life, new beginnings, a bountiful harvest, friendship, family and a faithful God.

What if we did the same?

What if we focused less on what’s missing and more on what’s already been given? It’s not always easy and sometimes you just don’t feel like it—I know; I’ve been there. But, at this stage of life, I can look back and see how God’s hand was faithfully guiding and getting me through. For that, I am truly grateful.

In thinking about how our nation was built on gratitude, our lives can and will hold that same promise when they’re grounded in a thankful heart. So, here’s a challenge: Enter this season intentionally living and breathing with eyes wide open to the goodness around you—and let gratitude flow through your home, community, family and friends. You won’t be sorry.

Whether your glass feels half full or half empty, remember—gratitude is what fills it. The more you notice and appreciate the blessings around you, the more your cup overflows.

“Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His love endures forever.” — Psalm 107:1



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Community

SAFE to recognize human trafficking and how to report it.”
continued from page 1 The for-profit Ruthlake Farm, owned by SAFE, is a 31-acre goal is to educate groups on how



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SAFE in the Panhandle board members Marissa Osborne, Bonnie Waters, founder Bruce Bailey, Pastor Gary Wiggins, Trei McMullen, and Phillip Poundstone.

acre working farm that, according to Osborne, will one day—in addition to providing funding for SAFE—join forces with other nonprofits around the world at no charge, guiding them on how to implement a business model for funding.

“We are growing satsumas, blueberries and Christmas trees, and will eventually offer a ‘you pick’ experience, a Christmas market on the property and more,” says Osborne. Currently, the farm crafts artisan soaps, honey and pottery. Ruthlake Farm also has its own private coffee label.

Osborne says the November event will be “our big introduc-

tion of Ruthlake Farm products and its mission.” Admission is \$10 and includes a complimentary shopping bag and raffle basket entry. “The goal is to go into the market and do all your holiday shopping.” The market will offer a variety of male, female and kid -friendly items, along with photo and letter-writing opportunities with Santa and other children’s activities.

“Choosing the (event) space was very important,” says Osborne, “and we wanted it to be convenient for the community we serve.” Ruthlake Farm will have items for sale, and all of those sales will find their way



Chase Bailey crafts away at Ruthlake Farm.

back to SAFE to further the mission.

The market has enticed many vendors to step up, and Osborne says vendor opportunities are still available. Anyone interested in sponsorship can email support@ruthlakefarm.net or call 205.478.3862. Sponsorship perks include logo placement on the event’s website, marketing materials and social media platforms; on-site recognition; and “the joy of spreading Christmas cheer.”

Osborne’s uncle, Bruce Bailey, a businessman who wished to give back to the community, founded SAFE four years ago, and Osborne jumped on board in March. “I’m at a point where I can do something I’m passionate about.” Previously, her church family provided opportunities for Osborne to serve as director of the preschool and as part of the women’s ministries, and she has numerous fundraising projects under her belt.

Osborne says trafficking is a big problem in all areas of the country. “It truly does hide in plain sight. No community is immune. Learn the signs, how to report and how to keep your family safe.”

SAFE is collaborating with The Freedom Collective of Northwest Florida to help run its safe home. Osborne calls the nonprofit “a trusted leader in emergency and stabilization care for victims of human trafficking.”

Learn more at safeinthepanhandle.com and ruthlakefarm.net.



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Christmas Countdown: Santa, Ugly Sweaters and More

BY CHRISTOPHER MANSON

Saturday, Nov. 15



“Christmas Switch” Book Signing with Author Kate Hendrickson

Salt & Story Books & Gifts, 1103-B East John Sims Parkway, Niceville, 11 a.m.-2 p.m.
saltandstorybooks.com

Local author Hendrickson’s “Christmas Switch” is the story of a husband and wife who swap Christmas duties, resulting in unputdownable holiday chaos. Signed copies of the book will be available for purchase.

Saturday, Nov. 15

Movie Night: Will Ferrell’s Immortal Holiday Classic “Elf”

Mattie Kelly Arts Center Amphitheater, Niceville, 6 p.m.
mattiekellyartscenter.org

theater, Niceville, 6 p.m.

mattiekellyartscenter.org

Enjoy the beloved Christmas movie on the inflatable screen.

Friday, Nov. 21 Saturday, Nov. 22 St. Paul’s Christ-kindl-Markt

1407 John Sims Parkway East, Niceville, 5-8 p.m. Friday, 9 a.m.-2 p.m. Saturday
stpaulniceville.com

Unique gifts, handcrafted goods, and artisan treats from local vendors, plus seasonal eats, twinkling lights, festive decorations, photo opportunities with Santa Claus, and lots of holiday cheer.

Friday, Nov. 21 Saturday, Nov. 22



The Nutcracker 2025

Mattie Kelly Arts Center, Niceville, 7:30 p.m.
nfballet.org

The Northwest Florida Ballets 46th annual production of the classic holiday fairytale, with a cast of over 140 performers and live music from Northwest Florida Symphony Orchestra conductor David Ott.

Saturday, Nov. 22 Ruthlake Farm Christmas Market

Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center, Fort Walton Beach, 8 a.m.-5 p.m.
ruthlakefarm.net

Photos with Santa, vendors, gift wrapping, raffles and more. Admission is \$10 and includes a shopping bag and raffle ticket.

Sunday, Nov. 23 The Nutcracker 2025

Mattie Kelly Arts Center, Niceville, 2:30 p.m.
www.nfballet.org/the-nutcracker

The Northwest Florida Ballet returns to the Mattie Kelly Arts Center on Nov. 21 and 22 at 7:30 p.m. and on Nov. 23 at 2:30 p.m. for the 46th annual production of The Nutcracker. As the only full-length version of this classic holiday fairytale in the area, NFB’s The Nutcracker features a cast of more than 140 performers, including international guest artists and over 100 local children.

The Northwest Florida Symphony Orchestra will provide music for all public performances under the leadership of NFB Music Director and Conductor David Ott. Box office prices for

NFB’s The Nutcracker are \$48 for adults and \$22 for children 12 and under.

Saturday, Nov. 29

Here Comes Santa Claus

Saturday, Nov. 29 | 6 p.m. | The Village of Baytowne Wharf

Santa arrives in style for Baytowne’s annual holiday kickoff, complete with festive lights, music, and a fireworks finale! Free admission. Info: baytowne-wharf.com

Tuesday, Dec. 2

Multi-Chamber Young Professionals Ugly Sweater Holiday PARTY

3rd Planet Brewing, Niceville, 5-6:30 p.m.
business.waltonareachamber.com

Mix and mingle with area Young Professionals in your ugliest holiday sweater. Cost is \$10, and includes one drink ticket and small bites.

Wednesday, Dec. 3 Thursday, Dec. 4

Katie’s House of Flowers Christmas Wreath Workshop

402 Bayshore Drive, Niceville, 6 p.m.
nicevilleflowers.com

Create a beautiful 24-inch Christmas wreath at this festive outdoor event. All supplies provided, plus light refreshments. Classes typically run one hour. Cost is \$90 per person. Call 850.678.7811 to register.

Saturday, Dec. 6

Niceville-Valparaiso 2025 Christmas Parade

nicevillevalparaisorotary.org

Parade kicks off at 10 a.m. This year’s theme is “Unite for the Holidays.”

Monday, Dec. 8

Niceville High School Chorus Holiday Concert

Mattie Kelly Arts Center, Niceville, 7 p.m.
850.226.4643

Ring in the season as all seven Niceville choirs perform, along with a guest instrumentalist on handbell and students from Ruckel Middle School. Tickets are \$10 through Dec. 1, \$15 after Dec. 1.

Saturday, Dec. 13

Tenth Annual Niceville Track and Field Ugly Sweater 5k Run/Walk

Hurricane Grill & Wings, 8-11 a.m.
NHSeagletack.com



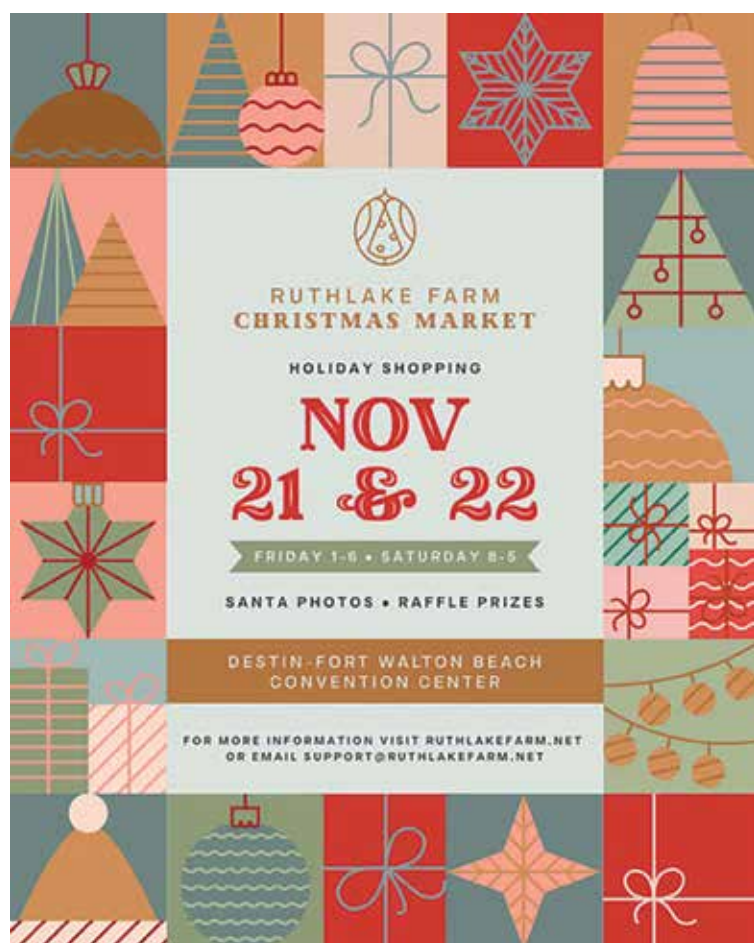
Don your tackiest holiday apparel in support of the Niceville High School Track and Field Facilities Fund. The event is open to all ages. One-mile fun run for children 12 and under at 8:30 a.m. Register at NHSugly-sweater.com.

Saturday, Dec. 20

Bluewater Bay Christmas Golf Cart Parade

The Blue Tee, 2000 Bluewater Blvd., Niceville, 5 p.m.
blue-tee.com

Deck your cart out for a festive parade through Bluewater Bay benefiting Sharing & Caring, followed by a cheery after-party. Prize for best decorated cart. Entry cost is a non-perishable food item. To register, stop by the Blue Tee or message the Facebook event page.



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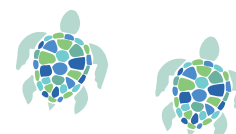


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Happenings Around the Bay

2025
NOVEMBER EVENTS

01	Freeport Bayfest 9 am Freeport Sports Complex Freeport 11th Annual Eggs on the Beach 10 am Seascape Towne Centre Miramar Beach Florida Concealed Carry Weapons Class 10 am Emerald Coast Indoor Shooting & Sport Valparaiso Christmas Open House 10 am Cottonwood Company Niceville Military Family Appreciation Day presented by Eglin Federal Credit Union 10:30 am The Landing FWB Taste of the Bay Cook Off 11 am Freeport Sports Complex Freeport Pride & Prejudice 2 pm Sprint Theater at NWFSC Niceville Artist Trading Card Club 5 pm Artful Things Niceville Live Music: The Typos 6 pm 3rd Planet Brewing Co. Niceville Pride & Prejudice 7 pm Sprint Theater at NWFSC Niceville	07 CONT.	Live Music: Dismystic 6 pm 3rd Planet Brewing Co. Niceville Full Moon Restorative Experience 7 pm Yoga by You Studio Niceville Best of Broadway 7 pm Sprint Theater at NWFSC Niceville	22	Thanksending 10 am Rock Out Climbing Gym Destin Christmas Open House 9 am Katie's House of Flowers Niceville Live Music: One False Move 6 pm 3rd Planet Brewing Co. Niceville
02	Bluegrass Jam 12 pm 3rd Planet Brewing Co. Niceville Pride & Prejudice 2 pm Sprint Theater at NWFSC Niceville Women's Climbing Circle 5 pm Rock Out Climbing Gym Destin	08	Bluegrass Barn Jam & Fall Festival 11 am Alaqua Animal Refuge Freeport Low Country Boil to benefit The Taylor Haugen Foundation 4 pm 3rd Planet Brewing Co. Niceville 33rd Annual Freedom Fund Banquet 5 pm Niceville Community Center Niceville	23	La Luna Children's Boutique Holiday Open House 11 am Grand Boulevard at Sandestin Miramar Beach
04	Lunch N Learn: Change Your Story, Change Your Life 11:30 am Greater FWB Chamber of Commerce FWB EMERGE: Environmental Monitoring through Education, Research, & Geospatial Engagement 11 am Valparaiso Library Valparaiso Niceville Young Professionals Networking Meeting 11:30 am Niceville Chamber of Commerce Niceville	09	Goat Yoga 10 am 3rd Planet Brewing Co. Niceville	25	Writers Group 5:30 pm Niceville Library Niceville
05	Chess Night 6 pm LJ Schooners Restaurant Niceville	12	Niceville Valparaiso Chamber Second Wednesday Breakfast 7:15 am Niceville Community Center Niceville	26	Live Music: Clinch46 6 pm 3rd Planet Brewing Co. Niceville
06	Justice on the Block 10 am Valparaiso Library Valparaiso Helen's Puzzle Swap 10 am Niceville Library Niceville Book Club: Dictionary of Lost Words 6 pm Salt & Story Niceville	14	Sinfonia Gulf Coast's Gala featuring Chaka Khan 6 pm Hotel Effie Sandestin Miramar Beach Live Music: Kyle Lamonica 6 pm 3rd Planet Brewing Co. Niceville	27	Thanksgiving Lunch Cruise 11:30 am Sunquest Cruises Miramar Beach Thanksgiving Dinner Cruise 6 pm Sunquest Cruises Miramar Beach
07	Greater FWB Chamber of Commerce's First Friday Coffee 7 am Christian Life Center at FBC FWB 30A BBQ Festival 5 pm Grand Boulevard at Sandestin Miramar Beach Animoré Weekend 2025: 9th Annual 100 Point + Cult Wine Dinner 5 pm Alaqua Animal Refuge Freeport	15	Florida Concealed Carry Weapons Class 10 am Emerald Coast Indoor Shooting & Sport Valparaiso City of Niceville's Veterans Day Parade 10 am John Sims Parkway & Partin Drive Niceville 7th Annual Chili Cook-Off benefiting CALM 4 pm LJ Schooners Restaurant Niceville "Christmas Switch" Signing, Kate Hendrickson 11 am-2 pm Salt & Story Books Niceville Movie Night: ELF 6 pm Mattie Kelly Arts Center Amphitheatre Niceville	29	Live Music: Below Alabama 6 pm 3rd Planet Brewing Co. Niceville
		16	Tim Hawkins Live 7 pm Mattie Kelly Arts Center Niceville	21-23	The Nutcracker Ballet Fri & Sat 7:30 pm Sun 2:30 pm Mattie Kely Arts Center Niceville
		17	GSSF Indoor League 10 am Emerald Coast Indoor Shooting & Sport Valparaiso FiberArts Circle 5 pm Valparaiso Library Valparaiso		
		19	Holiday Open House 4 pm The Cottages Spa on Elm Niceville The Traveling Painter 5:30 pm LJ Schooners Restaurant Niceville		
		20	Helen's Puzzle Swap 10 am Niceville Library Niceville Greater FWB Chamber Business After Hours 5:30 pm Holiday Inn Resort Fort Walton Beach		
		21	Hometown Holiday Parade & Celebration 5 pm Grand Boulevard at Sandestin Miramar Beach New Moon Aerial Yoga Nidra 7 pm Yoga by You Studio Niceville		

ONGOINGEVENTS

Oils and Acrylics with Rosalyn O'Grady
10 am | Tues | Artful Things | Niceville

Watercolor Techniques with Theresia McInnis
1 pm | Tues | Artful Things | Niceville

Bingo Night
6 pm | Tues | Bayou Pub | Niceville

Watercolor Basics (Adults) with Elia Saxer
10 am | Thurs | Artful Things | Niceville

Watercolor Basics (Youth) with Elia Saxer
3:30 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

FARMERSMARKETS

Niceville Community
Saturdays | 9 am - 1 pm
Twin Cities Pavilion | Niceville

Grand Boulevard
Saturdays | 9 am - 1 pm
Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach



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Community

"Geek Lights" Season 18 Preparations Underway

Preparations are in full swing for the 18th annual Geek Lights on the Corner Christmas lights and music show. The main set-up will take place throughout November, with Community Build Days scheduled for Nov. 8, 15 and 22, beginning at 9 a.m. each day. Volunteers are invited to sign up at [Facebook.com/](https://www.facebook.com/GeekLightsOnTheCorner)

GeekLightsOnTheCorner.

This year, Geek Lights on the Corner has selected the Junior League of the Emerald Coast's Child Clothing Project (CCP) as its Season 18 sponsored charity. Through the CCP, the all-volunteer Junior League provides hundreds of elementary students in Okaloosa and Walton

counties with a full wardrobe—from the inside out, top to bottom—plus a book, book bag and toy. The CCP event also features drone demonstrations, STEM activities, and hands-on engagement with partners such as the Emerald Coast Science Center, Gulfarium, FWB Police and Fire Departments, local li-

braries and more.

"We are truly humbled, honored, and beyond grateful to be selected as the sponsored charity for Geek Lights on the Corner this year," said Bethe Manning, President of the Junior League of the Emerald Coast. "This generous support will help us continue to make a meaningful impact in



The 24th annual running of the
**SEASIDE SCHOOL
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is back on Sunday, February 15, 2026,
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The Nutcracker

November 21-23 | Mattie Kelly Arts Center

With Live Music by the
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\$48 Adults | \$22 Children (12 & Up)

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NFBallet.org | 850.729.6000



our community and advance the mission of the Junior League. Thank you for lighting up our corner of the world!"

Donation boxes and QR codes will be available at the show's viewing area, with 100% of funds going directly to the sponsored charity.

Featuring thousands of synchronized lights and themed displays set to music and storytelling, Geek Lights runs Dec. 1-Jan. 6 at the corner of Bluewater Blvd. and Antiqua Way in Bluewater Bay. Shows begin every 30 minutes from 6 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. Sunday-Thursday, and until 10:30 p.m. on Fridays, Saturdays and holiday eves. Admission is free.

The show is the creation of Jeff Werner, the "Northwest Florida Geek," and Wendy Werner, his "Spouse Peripheral." Jeff is also author of the weekly technology Q&A column It's Geek to Me, published locally on Niceville.com and in newspapers across the country.

Join the Holiday Heroes:

Volunteer, Donate and Make a Difference

BY CHRISTOPHER MANSON

The season of giving is here, and local nonprofits are inviting residents to step up, spread cheer, and make a difference. From food and toy drives to wreath-laying ceremonies, there are countless ways to help your neighbors in need and celebrate the true spirit of the holidays.

• Rev up for a great cause: the **Harley-Davidson Owners Group (H.O.G.) #3605 hosts its 46th annual Toys 4 Tots Ride** on Sunday, Nov. 16, starting at Emerald Coast Harley Davidson and ending up with festivities at the Mullet Festival Fairgrounds. As in years past, toy and cash donations will benefit children served by the Emerald Coast Children’s Advocacy Center (ECCAC) and Children In Crisis (CIC).

Kickoff & preregistration: Friday, Nov. 14, 6–9 p.m. at Emerald Coast Harley-Davidson, 788 Beal Pkwy NW, Fort Walton Beach. Details: emeraldcoasthd.com.

Day-of registration: Sun-



day, Nov. 16, 8:30 a.m. at Emerald Coast Harley-Davidson. Fee: \$10 per person + a new toy or gift card. Kickstands up at 11 a.m. for the ride to Niceville’s Mullet Festival grounds.

After-ride festivities: Bike games, best-decorated bike/auto contest, truck show, 50/50 drawing, DJ Anthony, food trucks, and 100+ prizes.

ECCAC helps prevent and heal trauma from child abuse and neglect through advocacy and child-friendly therapies at no cost in Okaloosa and Walton counties (ECCAC does not house children). CIC provides shelter, foster homes, and transitional living in Fort Walton

Beach for children removed from their homes.

Learn more: ECCAC.org/event or contact Kate McDougall at kate@ECCAC.org. Volunteers from ECCAC and CIC will be working the high-low

games and handing out raffle tickets.

• Kick off the countdown to Christmas Saturday, Nov. 22, with the **Ruthlake Farm Christmas Market**, happening at the Destin–Fort Walton Beach Convention Center on Okaloosa Island from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. The event supports the mission of SAFE (Strategic Alliance to Fight Exploitation), a nonprofit working to end exploitation in the Florida Panhandle.

Guests will enjoy photos with Santa Claus, vendors, gift wrapping, and more. Admission for the event is \$10 and includes a complimentary shopping bag

and raffle entry.

• The **Food for Thought (fftfl.org) 2025 Christmas Food Drive** runs Dec. 2–18. Suggested donations include instant potatoes, stuffing, cornbread mix, canned vegetables, rice, dried beans, macaroni and cheese, pasta and sauce, cereal, pancake mix, juice, and boxed milk.

The nonprofit discourages glass containers and does not accept expired, open, or left-over foods. “Easy-open pop-top cans” are preferred.

Individuals and local businesses are encouraged to drop off food items for holiday meals at Food for Thought’s Destin (908 Airport Road) or Santa Rosa Beach (132 Market Street) pantries. Email support@fftfl.org to learn more.

• The **Niceville Police Department** recently announced that new, unopened, and unwrapped gifts for **Toys for Tots** can be dropped off in the NPD lobby through Dec. 11. Additional collection locations in-

clude the Niceville Senior Center (through Dec. 12) and the Hiller Group office at 4654 East Highway 20, Monday through Friday, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

• Heroes helping heroes—The Twin Cities will participate in a **Wreaths Across America** ceremony Saturday, Dec. 13, at Heritage Gardens Funeral Home & Cemetery in Niceville at 11 a.m. You can help honor fallen heroes by sponsoring a remembrance wreath, volunteering, or inviting family and friends to attend.

Wreaths will also be placed at Sunset Cemetery in Valparaiso beginning at 9 a.m. To learn more, visit wreathsacrossamerica.org.

• Let your light shine this Thanksgiving and Christmas season for moms and littles. **CALM (Crisis Aid for Littles and Moms)** depends on Niceville and neighboring communities to maintain a safe place for mothers and children

Continued on page 39



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What's Happening in Okaloosa County?

BY CAROLYN NEWCOMER
KETCHEL

I thought it might be of interest to have a few highlights of community projects from your Board of County Commissioners.

Lazarus Memorial Service



On Monday, November 3, 2025, at 10 a.m. at the Beal Memorial Cemetery, more than 35 clergy and members from various faith communities will gather to remember and say goodbye to the invisible members of our local community. The Lazarus Memorial Service is an ecumenical ceremony to bury individuals in our community who have died without means to provide for their own burial. The ceremony provides a dignified manner to memorialize the remains of those who otherwise would not have funeral services. It is our community's outpouring of

respect and community spirit to provide the unclaimed deceased a dignified resting place.

The ceremony has become a much-celebrated event within the faith community, and in the life of our county, as a dignified way to memorialize those we have lost. Some of the deceased are senior citizens who have outlived their relatives, some are infants and children whose parents and families are without financial means, but many individuals are those members of our community who have become estranged from their families. This year we have 30 individuals.

Fairground Renovation



The renovation of the fairground facility, now known as The Rigdon Center, is in full swing. The county has almost completely renovated much of the inside of the buildings, ceilings, walls, lighting, electric, HVAC and roofing, and de-



molished several of the older, obsolete buildings. We are now working on flooring, technology, bath rooms and storm water. We are now bidding out a project addition for two new catering kitchens, bathrooms and a concession area. Behind this project will be a project to redo the entrances and façades.

Bridge to Bridge Bike Path Ribbon Cutting

The much-anticipated opening of the 12-foot-wide Bike Path from Brooks Bridge to Destin (Marler Bridge) will be on October 23rd, 2025 at 10 a.m. This project has been a

partnership of the county and Eglin AFB using public funding as well as private. The roadway is open to walkers and bikes, not golf carts. We continue to work with Eglin to prevent cars from using it. A rope fence is being considered along the roadway to prevent any vehicles from accessing it.

The path will sparkle blue at night as the photo luminescent rocks added to the asphalt glow from the absorption of sunlight during the day. The pathway will be a community asset that is fun for recreation while protecting individuals from injury as it provides a safe pathway.

Extension Services Building



The new south end Extension Services Building will soon be open for business and classes. This long-awaited building at the Rigdon Fairgrounds will replace the old facility that was finished off by Hurricane Sally. Classes will be held for those who enjoy gardening, cooking and learning to grow flowers. Currently classes can only be held in the Crestview location.

Carolyn Ketchel is Okaloosa County Commissioner, District 2 / Vice-Chairman 2024-2025. She can be reached at CKetchel@myokaloosa.com or 850-651-7105.



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How to Make Enrollment in Medicare Smooth and Easy



BY GREG DURETTE, FLORIDA
HEALTH CONNECTOR

As with most big transitions/life elections, normalcy tends to fade and turmoil prevails. Medicare enrollment, while a big adjustment on many levels, can be relatively simple and painless—once you know how!

Most people looking to learn more about Medicare and their enrollment options could visit a local office, attend a seminar or sit down in the comfort of their home with a qualified, licensed agent among the many available avenues. This process could take several visits to become comfortable with the available choices, and it should. Even Joe Namath (not a qualified, licensed agent by the way!) would be hard pressed

to help a person feel knowledgeable and comfortable with just one phone call, despite claims to the contrary.

Well, even with those in person options available, most folks like to do a little research on their own in advance of taking any additional steps. This makes sense since the questions you have for you are far more important than what your friends and family tell what you should be thinking. Keep in mind they bring only their perspective to the conversation and likely don't know the details that make up the intimate considerations you are facing.

So, what are your options to gather the information you need to make sure you are making the right choices to make your enrollment happen as smoothly as possible?

The first step is getting in touch with someone qualified to provide you with information for your specific needs. As you approach age 65, you get bombarded with email, regular mail, TV ads and phone calls and then every Annual Election Period (October 15 – December



7) thereafter. That type of information overload typically helps no one figure things out and, as I have been told on many occasions, tends to make things even more confusing. When it comes to Medicare, quality, individualized information trumps volume of information every time.

Let's get started on the right foot. The first thing you will need to do is apply for your Medicare Parts A & B. There are a number of issues surrounding this first step so again, it would be wise to seek out a qualified, licensed person to guide you. Also, it is best

to begin this process right when you are first eligible which for most, is 3 months prior to the month in which you will turn 65.

While waiting for your Medicare card to be issued (sometimes up to 6-8 weeks), you will have the perfect opportunity to explore your other options. Those options range from (but are not limited to) simply sticking with Original Medicare (Parts A & B only) plus getting a Stand-Alone Prescription Plan (Part D) to avoid unintended, lifelong penalties or choosing between an Advantage Plan or a Supplement Plan. Each comes with its own benefits and potential issues/considerations.

It seems like a lot because it is. However, if you take the time and are able to ignore the constant din of your telephone ringing and mailbox being stuffed, you will eventually come to understand the best choice for you and your specific set of needs.

Fast forward where you have your Medicare card in hand and have decided on the best plan choice for you. Congratulations! There is only one last step to take—actually getting enrolled. With so many enrollment options available, what is a person to do?

You can relax in knowing many insurance companies have implemented multiple options to help get you enrolled in a timely manner. The two most popular being an in-person sit down with a licensed, trained professional or telephone call to your local representative. You can meet at an office or sit back in the com-

fort of your own home and rest assured all will be taken care of quickly and professionally.

Some, not all, insurance agents/brokers will be able to offer you the options of not just different insurance companies from which to choose but also, help you understand the costs and benefits of both Advantage plans and Supplement plans.

The differences can be dramatic and will have a tremendous impact on your healthcare and the ability to choose the doctors and hospitals of your choice—not to mention out of pocket costs.

Following these tips will help alleviate much of the hectic stress this major transition/continuation often causes.

As a side note, you can use this process to help eliminate the stress of comparing your existing plan to another as well as oftentimes, most companies/plans change their benefits and/or costs every year. This upcoming year looks to be a doozie!

The ability to review and make changes to your previous choices is an extremely powerful tool you have at your disposal, so long as you know how and when to use it.

Boom! Welcome to stress-free Medicare enrollment.

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

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As a local, licensed Blue Cross Blue Shield agent, I can answer your questions and help you find a plan that fits your needs.



Cold Night Shelter Opens in Niceville

Generations United Church has opened a cold night emergency shelter for families with children and elderly residents, offering warmth and care when temperatures drop below 41°F.

Located at 108 Hwy. 85 N in the GroupLife Building off Niceville Avenue, the shelter provides:

Warm overnight accommodations with cots and linens

Hot meals and beverages
Basic hygiene facilities and kits

A supervised environment for children

Accessibility support for elderly guests

Connections to additional community resources

The shelter activates on cold nights to ensure no family or senior in Niceville faces dangerous winter temperatures alone.

 Community

Museum Series: Ribbon Cutting at Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida

BY BARBARA PALMGREN

Whenever there are special occasions to celebrate at one of our nine area museums, we share this with the community. There was such an event in the fall of 2025 at the history museum in Valparaiso that houses historical artifacts for the entire area.

They say it takes a whole village to raise a child. In this case, after five years of setting up the outdoor rail gun and the indoor prototype and display, the effort was complete and not done by museum staff alone. Thanks for this exhibit goes to the additional expertise and work of the following groups: Eglin Air Force, Eglin Armament Museum, IS4S, and Eagle Scouts Shane Hestilow and Zachery Freeman. We also thank Construction



Service Co. of Florida, Inc. of Villa Tasso for unloading the largest rail gun from Eglin onto museum property in 2020.



Zachery living now in Arkansas, arrived for a noon ribbon cutting, being sure he left in time for an afternoon flight home. Shane, taking time off work, attended with his parents. Both boys were presented a Norman Rockwell copy of the famous painting of two boy scouts with George Washington praying in the background. The boys are looking back up at the first president of the United States, a true role model.

Russ Klug, Vice President Fort Walton Beach Ops IS4S, attended and described the part this company played in cleaning up the huge and heavy prototype and mounting it on a steel frame with wheels. Russ described the projectiles that were now mounted perfectly by the Armament Museum. Unlike a conventional gun which relies on an explosive charge, the railgun uses magnetic rails and electric current to propel a projectile down the barrel and to its target.

There was also a short video of a conversation between Dr. Barbara Palmgren, Museum

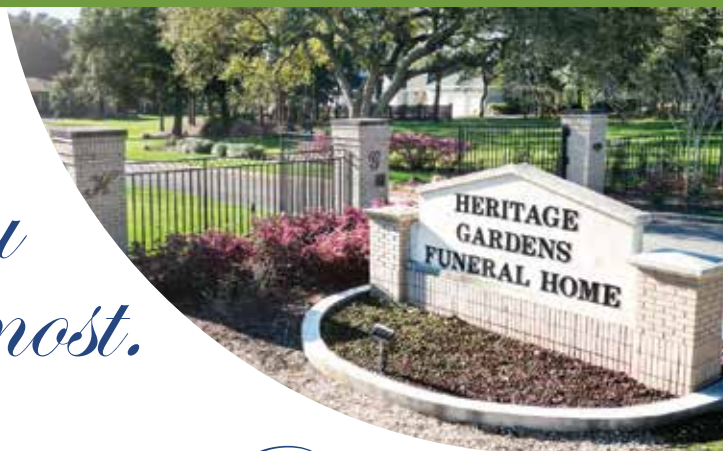
Chair in 2020 and Russ Klug, describing the rail gun exhibit. The video is part of the exhibit and can be viewed so visitors understand what is being seen both indoors and outdoors.

Photos were taken inside and outside the museum. Both boy scouts contributed to this exhibit. Shane cleaned and painted the large rail gun and Zachery researched and described the exhibit itself in a permanent display next to the three outdoor rail guns protected by a fence and roof.

The Strategic Defense Initiative program began in 1983 under President Ronald Reagan's initiative and was nicknamed Star Wars. It ended in 1993 and the railguns had been gathering dust at Eglin. Eglin generously donated them to the museum along with the prototype and projectiles.

No worries, everyone. These large non-functioning railguns will never be used again. Come and visit this exhibit without fear. Shock and awe, yes indeed!

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Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida Celebrates Valparaiso's History



BY BARBARA PALMGREN

The long-awaited official ribbon-cutting for the Impact 100 Exhibit Hall addition was celebrated in late September. Additional contributions were required to build the 1400 sq

mid-December, 2025.

Dr. Barbara Palmgren, Exhibits Chair for the Board of Trustees, explained the exhibit and how to view it in chronological order along with movies and oral histories collected for several months and now saved. Much of their work will later be sent to the permanent collection at Texas Tech University's Vietnam Center and Archive and shared with historians at Eglin Air Force Base and Hurlburt Special Operations Historian, Bill Clifton.

Entertainment began with several musical numbers played by Ellen Shepard on the hammered dulcimer. Next was the

Cook, and June Jones.

Dr. Marie Hallion, Chair of the Board of Trustees, was also present to explain that the new exhibit for 2026, "Celebrate America 250: American Revolution" will be a histo-

ry of the events leading to the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The museum had applied for a state grant to help fund this exhibit but didn't receive it and is now asking for contributions to create what will

be a unique and important experience for next year's national celebration of 250 years of our being a great nation. Anyone interested in making a needed contribution please contact the museum.



mini-musical, Valparaiso. The history musical was written and directed by Barbara Palmgren and featured Mike McMain as John Perrine, Ken Walsh as James Plew, Chris Galloway as Addie Lewis and Barbara as Lula Edge. It explored the beginning of the city in the early 1920's up to present day. The audience joined in the chorus of "Valparaiso" at the end of the play. Music for the play and video accompaniment was provided by Scott Stone and Michael Weaver. The members of the cast are all trustees for the museum.

The museum thanks Corner Café and The Fresh Market for their culinary donations. Barbara thanks Ellen Shepard and the cast and crew of the musical for their long hours of hard work and final masterpiece. The lovely tables and additional preparation were done with help from Arthur Edgar, Museum Manager, and volunteers Debbie Edgar, Jene McCracken, Carole Barlow, Elvira Chicarelli, Susan

fit addition to the Heritage Museum and many of the donors were present for this official event.

The magical evening was filled with food and entertainment in addition to having donors experience the new Vietnam Refugee Camp exhibit now available for viewing until

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 Community

Niceville Shows Its Love For Charlie Kirk

BY KENNETH BOOKS

Some 75 residents of Niceville and nearby communities gathered at Faith Independent Baptist Church

on Valparaiso Boulevard Tuesday, Oct. 14, which would have been Kirk's 32nd birthday, for a celebration of the legacy of assassinated speaker and Christian Charlie Kirk. The event was sponsored by the West Florida Young Republicans, whose vice president, Nathan DiPietro, opened the celebration with a stirring reminder of what Kirk stood for.

Kirk, the founder of the conservative, Christian student organization Turning Point USA in 2012 was assassinated by a lone sniper Sept. 10, while speaking at a TPUSA public debate event on the Utah Valley University campus. His death garnered international attention and led to the condemnation of political violence by prominent domestic and international figures.

"We're here to remember Charlie's birthday and his life," DiPietro said, "and his legacy.

Not just what he did, but what he inspired people to do."

The event drew an eclectic mix of individuals, families, races and ages.

"We love Charlie Kirk," said Brian Miles, who attended with his wife, Clara. "This is another opportunity to pray for him and for his family."

Clara Miles agreed. "I can't believe he's gone," she said. "It's so senseless. I feel that God's still with him and his movement."

Colby and Marlana Stewart said they were simply there "for Charlie. And to learn more about his movement. Their 9-year-old daughter, Mazzy, added that "My mom used to watch him all the time."

Another patron, Tabatha Schaefer, said she was there to pay her respects because "I believe in what he stood for and his faith and to honor his family."

A parade of speakers addressed the crowd regarding the meaning of Kirk's life, organization and faith.

"Charlie Kirk's assassination has been my generation's 9/11," said West Florida Young



Republican John Franklin. "No one can replace Charlie Kirk... but we can all try to be like Charlie."

He likened Kirk's mission to that of Isaiah, chapter 6, verse 8: "Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?'"

And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'"

Former Green Beret John Frankman said he's seen an eruption of faith due to Kirk. "More politicians are talking about Jesus Christ than before," he said, urging the crowd, "Don't separate your faith and your politics."

DiPietro delivered a heartfelt talk about Kirk and his legacy.

"I've been asked 'What can my generation do?'" he said. "That's the hardest question. (Kirk) was shot because he confidently defended the truth." He compared Kirk to heroes of the Christian faith—Daniel of the Bible, Smyrna Christian bishop Polycarp who refused to deny Christ, Bible translator John Tyndall, Plymouth Pilgrim William Bradford who created the Mayflower Compact which guaranteed individual liberty, and Elijah Lovejoy, a Presbyterian minister, editor and abolitionist before the Civil War.

Faith Independent Baptist church pastor Dr. Doug Stauffer said he sees "hope for America. Not just as conservatives, not just

as Christians. Your true legacy is what outlives you for God's glory. Charlie said truth matters. Charlie didn't hate. He believed America's greatest hope was through revival. Charlie's active voice may be silenced, but his message lives on."

Journalist and public speaker Ron Martin reminded the crowd that "You must commit to doing what you can where you are. When he started, Charlie wasn't anybody. I remember when he realized his faith was key."

"Charlie showed up because even leaders need leaders. We will show up and stand up. That's how we will honor Charlie," he continued. "You have to be willing to stand for something that matters."

President Donald Trump posthumously awarded Charlie Kirk the nation's highest civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, on Oct. 14 at the White House. He held the ceremony in the White House Rose Garden, with members of TPUSA, as well as friends and Kirk's widow, Erika Kirk, attending.

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Math Homework Success! 6 Tips & Tricks

Just the mere mention of math homework brings out strong feelings in most people, and, regrettably, these feelings are rarely positive. Most children dread it, and as parents, though you might try to maintain a positive game face, dread it too.

6 Tips & Tricks to Create and Stick to A Schedule

It's easier for your child to focus when there is a clear understanding of when homework is expected to be completed.

Your routine can be the same everyday – directly after school, after 30 minutes of play, after dinner, etc.; or different depending on the day's specific activities. If your schedule varies, take time on Sunday to outline a plan for the upcoming week.

Important: Include your child in the development of a routine that works for your entire family, and then stick to it – consistently!

Minimize Distractions: When setting up a homework space, think about: Noise – can your child hear siblings playing? the television in the background? Video games/toys/books/etc. – is your child surrounded by more tempting activities? Family activity – is your child sitting in the middle of the action, distracted by movement, conversa-

tions, and the hustle and bustle of family life?

Some people work better with calming music in the background, some need complete silence to think. Adjust the environment to serve your child's specific needs.

Remember, if your child is struggling with a specific concept, each time they are interrupted they lose their place in the academic process. It requires additional energy to redirect their thoughts back to the task at hand, which increases the potential for frustration. This is an especially vicious cycle for children who lack the ability to complete homework independently and successfully.

Create A Designated Homework Space: To focus and get homework done with minimal fuss, your child needs a comfortable, organized space. Make sure all necessary supplies are available and easily accessible; this will limit the disruptions that come with searching for supplies.

Include supplies such as: pencils erasers and sharpener markers, colored pencils, crayons Lined and blank paper ruler scissors, glue and anything else that the specific assignment requires.

It helps if the desk and chair are the appropriate size for your



child. Some children benefit from a ball chair, a wiggle seat, or an exercise band to bounce their feet on, this allows for a natural need for movement while working.

Pick a place in your home that can be a designated area for quiet work—one with minimal distractions.

If you don't have a designated space, have each child make a portable supply bin that can be taken to a quiet area of the house. Allow them decorate, organize and stock their bin with supplies to get them involved and invested.

Eat A Healthy Snack: A healthy snack will wake up your child's brain and increase their ability to focus.

Encourage Breaks: If a child has a lot of homework, or works at a slower pace, use a timer to plan breaks and adjust to fit individual needs. When the timer goes off, encourage them to complete a quick physical activity such as: jumping jacks, wall

push-ups, crab walk, bear crawl. With your child's input, outline a plan for the number and length of breaks ahead of time.

Motivation: Children must be inspired to work and can be motivated by many things: A family outing, good grades, special time with an adult or friend, a new toy or gift, verbal recognition and praise like candy or sweets, screen time, money.

Determine what motivates your child, and then incorporate it into your routine. Small rewards can be earned regularly, while working towards larger re-

wards over time.

Developing good homework habits will begin to feel like a reward in and of itself.

At Mathnasium of Niceville, we can help identify your child's specific working style and needs, and take some of the math homework burden off your plate. We can also give you tips to help you design an individual homework plan that will work best for your family. Give us a call or text us! We're here to help. Call (850) 987-MATH (6284) or visit mathnasium.com/math-centers/niceville.

Thanksgiving Math Fun at Mathnasium of Niceville!

Keep young minds sharp this Thanksgiving with two hands-on math activities from Mathnasium of Niceville — free for pickup at the center!

Thanksgiving Color-by-Sum – Perfect for lower elementary students, this festive coloring sheet helps kids practice addition while revealing a hidden Thanksgiving picture.

Thanksgiving Graphing Challenge – Designed for up-

per elementary students, this connect-the-dots graphing activity uncovers a secret holiday message through coordinate plotting.

Stop by to pick up your copies at Mathnasium of Niceville, 538 E. John Sims Pkwy., Niceville, or call 850-987-MATH (6284). A fun way to mix math, creativity and Thanksgiving spirit!

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Education News

Angel Tree Partnership Brings Holiday Joy to Local Students



In the true spirit of the season, Superintendent Marcus Chambers and Sheriff Eric Aden have announced a collaboration between the Okaloosa County School District and the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office for this year's Angel Tree Program, which brings holiday cheer to students in need.

At the start of the school year, school staff and SROs identified students and created wish lists for community members to sponsor or donate toward.

"This partnership is about more than just presents; it's about showing our children that they are seen, valued, and cared for," Chambers said. "Every year, I am deeply moved by the generosity of our community, staff, and volunteers who come together to bring joy to children who need it most. Knowing that

we can make a holiday brighter for even one child is truly inspiring. Through this partnership, we have the opportunity to touch even more families and create memories these students will treasure forever."

Sheriff Aden added, "The program has been a cherished way to restore hope, dignity, and bring joy to children in our community. We're honored to work with the school district to make Christmas special for children who deserve every bit of joy this season. Together, we can make this holiday season brighter, one child at a time."

To sponsor a child or make a donation, visit ocsostarcharity.com/angel-tree. For more information, contact Catherine Card at catherine.card@okaloosa-schools.com or Katie Tingle at ktingle@sheriff-okaloosa.org.

Chambers Elected President of Florida High School Athletic Association

The Okaloosa County School District is proud to announce that Superintendent Marcus Chambers has been elected president of the Florida High School Athletic Association (FHSAA) Board of Direc-

tors. The election took place Sept. 23 in Gainesville.

Appointed to the board by Governor Ron DeSantis in June 2024, Chambers now helps guide interscholastic athletics across the state as part of the FHSAA's 13-member governing body.

"I am truly honored to serve as president of the Florida High School Athletic Association," Chambers said. "High school athletics play such an important role in the lives of students, building character, teaching teamwork, and creating opportunities that last a lifetime. I look forward to working alongside my colleagues across the state to continue supporting student athletes, coaches, and schools, and to ensure that athletics remain a vital part of the educational experience in Florida."

He added, "Throughout my youth and now as an adult, sports have been an integral part of my life. Growing up, I spent countless hours playing various sports, which taught me the values of teamwork, discipline, and perseverance. These experiences have profoundly shaped who I am today. As an adult, I have had the privilege of coaching numerous students, witnessing



firsthand the positive impact sports can have on young lives. It is a tremendous honor to continue this journey where I can contribute to fostering a vibrant and inclusive sports environment for Florida's high school athletes."

Learn more at fhsaa.com.

Okaloosa Schools Receive \$210K Grant for Workforce Education

The Okaloosa County School District has been awarded \$210,778 through the Workforce Development Capitalization Incentive Grant Program (Workforce CAP) by the Florida Department of Education.

Funds will expand two Ca-

reer and Technical Education (CTE) programs: Welding Technology at Crestview High School and Applied Cybersecurity at Destin High School, a public charter school within the district.

"Our CTE team continues to raise the bar when it comes to creating meaningful opportunities for students," said Superintendent Marcus Chambers. "This grant is a direct result of their hard work, vision, and belief in the power of workforce education. Thanks to their efforts, more students will graduate with the skills and certifications needed to thrive in today's economy."

Part of Florida's \$40 million initiative to expand workforce programs, the latest round of Workforce CAP grants will increase capacity statewide by 59%. Since launching in 2023, the program has invested more than \$240 million into building Florida's talent pipeline.

This funding will allow Okaloosa schools to expand training opportunities, upgrade equipment, and improve access to industry certifications—continuing the district's commitment to preparing every student for high-demand careers.

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

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5th Annual BBQ & Bingo Fundraiser!



The Okaloosa Public Schools Foundation (OPSF) will host its 5th Annual BBQ & Bingo fundraising event, Thursday, November 6, at the HSU Educational Foundation, 70 Ready Ave. NW, Bldg. 5, in Fort Walton Beach. The evening will kick off with a social hour at 5 p.m., followed by Bingo from 5:30 to 8 p.m. Guests can look forward to great food, exciting games and opportunities to win prizes, all while supporting programs that directly benefit students and educators across Okaloosa County.

Funds raised through BBQ & Bingo support OPSF's mission to enhance educational opportunities for students in the Okaloosa County School District, including scholarships, classroom grants and innovative learning initiatives. Tickets available at the Givebutter site -<https://givebutter.com/c/5z4Dmu>. Community members and businesses are encouraged to participate by attending, donating or sponsoring the event. OPSF is also seeking contributions for its silent auction and live auction, as well as volunteer assistance for various event committees, including sponsorships, registration, food, beverages, setup and cleanup.

For more information, tick-

ets or volunteer opportunities, please get in touch with Debbie

Tate at (850) 974-0742 or tate@okaloosaschools.co



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Game On!

Check out the local top spots to eat, cheer and high-five your way through the games.



BY SCOTT MILLER

Well, I didn't see that coming... Those six little words can spark up a whole host of conversations, especially in the world of college football. For example, to most fans, especially the southern variety, seeing Indiana University sitting with a 7-0 record and firmly entrenched as the number 2 ranked college football team in the country... well, I didn't see that coming. Ok, how about another one? Coming into the college football season this year, Penn State was a pre-season favorite, ranked number 2 or number 3 in the nation, depending on which poll you were looking at. And now, rolling into week 10, they have already fired head coach James Franklin and sit with a record of 3 wins and 4 losses, with Ohio State poised to send them to 3-5. Well, I didn't see that coming. And neither did Coach Franklin. After all, he's been Penn State's head coach since January 11, 2014. Florida Gator fans understand—their head coach, Billy Napier, was just fired too (although not nearly as surprising as Franklin's unexpected exit). You just can't make this stuff up, folks.

So, what's the next big sur-

prise coming our way? There are sure to be a few more before the season is over; there always are. It's part of the lure, I suppose, part of the intrigue and excitement that only college football can bring. But don't fret too much for these coaches. Once the sting wears off a bit, they will have plenty of free time on their hands to count their \$40 million and \$20 million parting gifts. That's right; Franklin collects \$40 million + to go away, and Billy Napier will receive \$20 million +. Not such a bad deal after all, in my opinion.

The 2025 season has not disappointed, and we've got the entire month of November left to play before the bowl games begin. What teams will continue to rise to the top? Will the SEC do the expected and win out? Will Indiana shock the football world and pull off an unexpected National Championship victory? I can't wait to find out. Here along the Emerald Coast, we are fortunate to have some of the best sports bars and restaurants in the country right here in our backyard, ready and waiting to welcome us in, serving up some great food and cold drinks, and make every game feel like a championship. Here are a few of my favorites. So, grab your crew, claim your spot and get in on the action—I'll see you there!

AJ's Seafood & Oyster Bar

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

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

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

FUBAR Pizza Bar



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

FUBAR has plenty of games for the kids along with pool tables, corn hole, dart boards and more. When out on the water all day, come dock your boat on



one of FUBAR'S boat slips and enjoy the incredible view. Feel free to bring along your furry friends to join you on the patio.

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

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

LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant

Suds, Songs, Sunsets and Sports! Welcome to LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant at the Bluewater Bay Marina Complex. Named after "LJ Schooner" (the LJ is for Lazy Jack), a cherished four-legged icon on Bluewater Bay Marina docks, the open-air oyster bar and

restaurant offers a magnificent view of the water, marina and unparalleled sunset any time of year. There are, of course, oysters and a delicious varied menu with dinner specials such as blackened mahi and grilled shrimp with hollandaise, served over cheese grits.

Nov. 15: 7th Annual Chili Cookoff, 4-6 p.m.

Wednesday Nights: Prime Rib Dinner Special, 5-9 p.m.

Thursdays: Taco & Margarita Thursday; Open Mic/Karaoke

Saturdays: Steak Night, 5-9 p.m.

Sundays: Bingo 2-4 p.m.

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

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

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

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SEC Football Schedule

SEC	Nov 1	Nov 8	Nov 15	Nov 22	Nov 29
BAMA	Open	LSU	OKLA	Eastern Illinois	@ AUB
ARK	MISS ST	Open	@ LSU	@ TEXAS	MIZZ
AUBURN	UK	@ VANDY	Open	Mercer	BAMA
FLA	vs UGA	@ UK	@ OLE MISS	TENN	FSU
UGA	vs FLA	@ MISS ST	TEXAS	Charlotte	GA Tech
UK	@ AUB	FLA	TENN Tech	@ VANDY	@ Louisville
LSU	Open	@ BAMA	ARK	Western UK	@ OKLA
MISS ST	@ ARK	UGA	@ MIZZ	Open	OLE MISS
MIZZ	Open	TEXAS A&M	MISS ST	@ OKLA	@ ARK
OLE MISS	SCAR	The Citadel	FLA	Open	@ MISS ST
OKLA	@ TENN	Open	@ BAMA	MIZZ	LSU
S CAR	@ OLE MISS	Open	@TEXAS A&M	Coastal Car	Clemson
TENN	OKLA	Open	New Mexico St	@ FLA	VANDY
TEXAS	VANDY	Open	@ UGA	ARK	TEXAS A&M
Texas A&M	Open	@ MIZZ	S CAR	Samford	@ TEXAS
VANDY	@ TEXAS	AUB	Open	UK	@ TENN

ACC Football Schedule

ACC	Nov 1	Nov 8	Nov 15	Nov 22	Nov 29
Boston College	Notre Dame	SMU	Georgia Tech	Open	@ Syracuse
California	Virginia	@ Louisville	Open	@ Stanford	SMU
Clemson	Duke	Florida State	@ Louisville	Furman	@ South Carolina
Duke	@ Clemson	@ UConn	Virginia	@ North Carolina	Wake Forest
Florida State	Wake Forest	@ Clemson	Virginia Tech	@ NC State	@ Florida
Georgia Tech	@ NC State	Open	@ Boston College	Pitt	Georgia
Louisville	@ Virginia Tech	California	Clemson	@ SMU	Kentucky
Miami	@ SMU	Syracuse	NC State	@ Virginia Tech	@ Pitt
North Carolina	@ Syracuse	Stanford	@ Wake Forest	Duke	@ NC State
NC State	Georgia Tech	Open	@ Miami	Florida State	North Carolina
Pitt	@ Stanford	Open	Notre Dame	@ Georgia Tech	Miami
Syracuse	North Carolina	@ Miami	Open	@ Notre Dame	Boston College
Virginia	@ California	Wake Forest	@ Duke	Open	Virginia Tech
Virginia Tech	Louisville	Open	@ Florida State	Miami	@ Virginia
Wake Forest	@ Florida State	@ Virginia	North Carolina	Delaware	@ Duke
Stanford	Pitt	@ North Carolina	Open	California	Notre Dame
SMU	Miami	@ Boston College	Open	Louisville	@ California

2025 College Football Game Day Highlights

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

Week 11
Saturday 11/8
Auburn @ Vanderbilt (TBA) ESPN
Indiana @ Penn State (TBA)
Texas A&M @ Missouri (TBA) ESPN
LSU @ Alabama (TBA) ESPN
Florida @ Kentucky (TBA) ESPN
Georgia @ Mississippi St. 11 a.m. ESPN
Florida St. @ Clemson (TBA)

Navy @ Notre Dame 6:30 p.m. NBC
Week 12
Saturday 11/15
Oklahoma @ Alabama (TBA) ESPN
Texas @ Georgia (TBA) ESPN
Florida @ Mississippi (TBA) ESPN
N.C. State @ Miami (FL) (TBA)
South Florida @ Navy 11 a.m. ESPN
Penn State @ Michigan St.(TBA)
N.C. State @ Miami (FL) (TBA)
Notre Dame @ Pittsburgh (TBA)

Week 13
Saturday 11/22
Mercer @ Auburn
Tennessee @ Florida (TBA)
Missouri @ Oklahoma 11 a.m. ESPN
Nebraska @ Penn State (TBA)

USC @ Oregon (TBA)
Florida St. @ N.C. State 7 p.m. ESPN
Week 14
Saturday 11/29
Alabama @ Auburn (TBA)
Georgia @ Georgia Tech 2:30 p.m. ABC
Texas @ Texas A&M 6:30 p.m. ABC
Mississippi @ Miss St. 11 a.m. ESPN
Vanderbilt @ Tennessee (TBA) ESPN
LSU @ Oklahoma (TBA) ESPN
Ohio State @ Michigan 11 a.m. FOX
Oregon @ Washington (TBA)



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Wednesday Nights 5-9pm
Nov. 5, Nov. 19, Dec. 3, Dec. 17,
Jan. 7, Jan. 21, Feb. 4, Feb. 18
10 oz. Prime Rib Steak, Chef's Featured Potatoes,
Cucumber Salad or Garden Salad and Roll \$28.95

7th Annual Chili Cookoff
Nov. 15th: Tasting 4-6pm
Chef's Judging 4:15pm • Awards 6:30pm
Compete or Consume!
Details and Rules at:
bluewaterbaymarina.com/2025/10/08/7th-annual-chili-cookoff

Oyster Bar Hours: Monday-Tuesday 3-9pm • Wednesday-Thursday 3pm-10pm • Friday-Saturday 11am to midnight • Sunday 9am to 9pm
Restaurant Hours: Monday-Tuesday Closed • Wednesday-Saturday 11am to 9pm • Sunday 9am to 4pm • Sunday Brunch 9am to 1pm

Special Dates:
Thursday: Taco & Margarita Thursday
Thursday: Open Mic/Karaoke
Saturday: Steak Night 5pm-9pm
Sunday: Brunch 9am-1pm
Sunday: Bingo 2pm-4pm
Nov. 5: Chess Night 6pm • Prime Rib Night 5pm • Wine Tasting 5pm-7
Nov. 7: Dan & Renee 6-10 p m
Nov. 14: Jody Lucas 6-9pm
Nov. 15: 7th Annual Chili Cook-Off 4-6pm, Benefits: CALM- Crisis Aid for Littles & Moms • Ronni Kay & Matt McCarty 6-10pm
Nov. 19: Prime Rib Night 5-9pm • Wine Tasting 5-7pm • The Traveling Painter 5:30pm
Nov. 28: The Remedy 6-10pm
Dec. 20: Santa Paddle Parade 12pm • Boat Parade 5pm



Fall Fishing Fun at Bluewater Bay Marina

Tucked along the north shore of Choctawhatchee Bay in Niceville, Bluewater Bay Marina is one of those hidden coastal gems every angler should know about. Just three miles north of the Intracoastal Waterway and seven miles from Destin, it's

the perfect launch point for a fall fishing adventure—whether you're a weekend caster or a seasoned pro chasing redfish glory.

With more than 120 boat slips, Bluewater Bay Marina offers easy dockage, full ame-

nities and the kind of relaxed, "locals-only" vibe that makes you want to linger. The docks are equipped with 110/30-amp and 220/50-amp power, on-site fuel, free pump-out service and bagged ice (because every great fishing story begins with a cold

drink and ends with a chilled catch).

Inside the Ship Store, anglers will find everything from nautical hardware, clothing, tumblers, sandals, eyewear, snacks, drinks, toiletries, sundries, clothing, souvenirs and galley goods. Seasonal live bait is available on premises and you can even grab your fishing or hunting license at the dry storage facility before heading out. And when you return, showers, laundry, Wi-Fi and a courtesy car await—because catching fish shouldn't mean roughing it.

Add experienced local staff, night-marked channels for safe entry, and a view that never gets old, and you've got the makings of a perfect base camp for your fall fishing run.

November on the Bay—Reds, Trout & Flounder, Oh My!

When the Gulf breeze cools and the summer crowds fade, Choctawhatchee Bay lights up with some of the best fishing of the year. November brings redfish, speckled trout and flounder into prime action, and the waters around Choctawhatchee Bay are teeming with opportunity.

Redfish (Red Drum) are the undeniable headliners this time of year. You'll find them tailing



on shallow flats or schooling along deeper channels. The bull reds—those copper giants that make your drag sing—are especially active in fall.

Not far behind are the speckled trout (spotted seatrout), cruising grass edges and shallow bays in schools. They're ideal for anglers who like a little fast action and plenty of top water strikes.

And don't overlook the flounder, those clever ambushers that blend perfectly into sandy bottoms. November is one of the top months to target them in the Bay as they migrate toward deeper water for winter.

Sheepshead and black drum also make solid supporting cast members, especially around bridges, pilings and rocky structure.

Continued on next page

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Meanwhile, on the Gulf, Record-Breaking Gulf Red Snapper Season in Full Swing

With 126 total fishing days, this year marks the longest Gulf red snapper season in state history, giving locals and visitors alike more opportunities to reel in one of Florida's most prized catches.

"Florida is the fishing capital of the world—with 4 million licensed anglers and generations of families who enjoy our waters," DeSantis said in May during the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) announcement. "Smart state management of Gulf waters has allowed us to offer these record-breaking opportunities year after year."

The 2025 Gulf red snapper season continues with fall weekend openings through December, including Veterans Day, Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays.

Remaining fall season

dates include: Oct. 31–Nov. 2, Nov. 7–9 and 11 (Veterans Day)

Nov. 14–16, Nov. 21–23, Nov. 27–30 (Thanksgiving weekend), Dec. 5–7, 12–14, 19–21 and 25–28 (Christmas weekend)

The extended season is made possible through data collected by the State Reef Fish Survey, which helps the FWC monitor recreational harvests and ensure sustainable fisheries management.

Anyone fishing for red snapper from a private recreational vessel in state or federal waters must be registered as a State Reef Fish Angler, even if exempt from fishing license requirements. Registration and more information: GoOutdoorsFlorida.com.

Full regulations and updates: MyFWC.com/Marine.

Local Photographers Shine in CBA's 2025 Amateur Photo Contest

The Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance (CBA) continues to celebrate the natural beauty and ecological diversity of our region through creativity, education, and community connection. Earlier this year, CBA invited local photographers of all skill levels to turn their lenses toward the Choctawhatchee Bay and surrounding waterways for the 2025 Amateur Photo Contest, a highlight of the Mattie Kelly Environmental Initiative.

The response was nothing short of inspiring, and the submitted images captured the Basin's wild and serene character in vivid detail. Now, those moments have been brought together in the 2025 Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance Photo Contest Calendar, featuring twelve winning photographs, each representing a month, a

story, and a slice of the region's environmental heritage.

The featured photographers include:
January: Augusto Cayson Barreto
February: Kayla Gallant (2nd Place Winner)
March: Randal R. Ketchem
April: Stacey Tobik
May: Margot Penner
June: Guy Donaldson (3rd Place Winner)
July: Lisa D. Hill
August: Richard Ives
September: Jennifer Chapple
October: David Bailey
November: Anna Brotzman (1st Place Winner)
December: Jessica Temple

"These photographs highlight the incredible talent in our community and remind us why



protecting the Choctawhatchee Basin matters," said Alison McDowell, Executive Director of the Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance. "Each winning image tells a story about the beauty and importance of our environment."



The contest not only celebrates artistic expression but also reinforces CBA's mission to raise awareness for the Basin's ecosystems. Every photograph, whether selected or not, reflects a shared appreciation for the

waterways, wildlife, and habitats that define our region.

As the Basin continues to evolve, CBA's initiatives, including this annual contest, provide meaningful opportunities for residents to engage with and protect the environment that sustains us all.

Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance (CBA) is committed to sustaining swimmable, fishable, livable waterways in the Choctawhatchee watershed through monitoring, restoration, education and research. We are driven to provide education and experiences that empower local and visitors alike to be good stewards of our waterways, wetlands, and shorelines.

To learn more about the Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance, visit <https://basinalliance.org/>.

FALL FISHING

continued from previous page

Pro Fall Fishing Tips:

- Fish the transitions. Work the edge where shallow flats drop off into deeper water.
- Watch the tides. Moving water brings bait—and the predators that follow.

- Go live, stay light. Live shrimp, minnows and soft plastics keep bites consistent.
- Mind the weather. Cooler mornings call for layers, and a thermos never hurts.
- Use the Marina as home base. Launch early, return for lunch at LJ Schooners and clean your catch before sunset.

Whether you're chasing your next trophy or teaching the kids to cast, fall at Bluewater Bay Marina offers all the makings of a classic, no fuss, memorable fishing day—bright skies, calm water and plenty of local know-how.

So, grab your tackle, check the tide chart, and meet us at

290 Yacht Club Drive in Niceville. Call to book your slip at (850) 897-2821. The fish are biting, the ice is cold and the sto-

ries are just waiting to be told.





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Military News

New Commander Takes Over 1st Special Operations Wing

U.S. Air Force Col. Mark Hamilton took command of the 1st Special Operations Wing Oct. 6 during a ceremony at Hurlburt Field. He succeeded Col. Patrick Dierig, who had led the wing since February 2024. Lt. Gen. Michael Conley, commander of Air Force Special Operations Command, presided over the transfer of authority. Hamilton, a Virginia Military Institute ROTC graduate commissioned in 2004, is a command pilot with more than 2,200 flight hours and deployments supporting Operations Iraqi Freedom, Enduring Freedom, and Inherent Resolve.

“Col. Hamilton’s proven leadership is just what the 1 SOW needs to ensure our Air Commandos remain ready to answer the Nation’s call,” said Lt. Gen. Conley. “We have a lot of work ahead and must continue to maximize Air Commando attributes of boldness, valor, and ingenuity to ensure that when called...we win.”



As commander of the 1 SOW with 20 years of Air Force service, Col. Hamilton will be responsible for preparing special operations forces for worldwide missions in support of joint and coalition objectives. The 1 SOW at Hurlburt Field is one of six Air Force active duty special operations wings which fall under AFSOC. Hurlburt Field employs more than 7,600 military and approximately 1,700 civilian personnel.

Previously, Col. Hamilton served as the 1 SOW’s Deputy Commander of Operations, where he was responsible for employing manned and remotely piloted fixed-wing aircraft, including the

AC-130J Ghost Rider, MC-

130J Commando II and MQ-9 Reaper. He also served as the primary operations advisor to Col. Dierig.

Air Force Enlisted Village Breaks Ground on Bob Hope Village 7

The Air Force Enlisted Village (AFEV) hosted a groundbreaking ceremony for Bob Hope Village 7 on Friday, October 17 in Shalimar.

Okaloosa County Commissioner Drew Palmer served as the guest speaker. Brooke McLean, AFEV President and CEO, shared remarks on the organization’s history and mission, while Todd Simmons, Chairman of the AFEV Board of Directors, reflected on the present and future of the community. The ceremony also included a blessing of the ground and a turning of the soil with Lord and Son Construction, the project’s contractor.

Bob Hope Village 7 represents the next phase of growth for the Air Force Enlisted Village, expanding its

ability to serve surviving spouses of retired enlisted Air Force members and retired couples. The new addition is planned to feature 51 modern, accessible residences—two bedrooms and two bathrooms plus dens—with connection to the existing Bob Hope Village 6 community spaces designed to enhance connection, comfort, and independence among residents.

Founded in 1968, the Air Force Enlisted Village is a private, nonprofit organization that provides safe, secure housing and compassionate care for surviving spouses of retired enlisted Airmen and Space Force Guardians. As of October 2025, AFEV is home to nearly 600 residents at Bob Hope Village and Hawthorn House, offering peace of mind and a true sense of community under the guiding principle of “Taking Care of Our Own.”

Navigating a Government Shutdown: Resources for Airmen, Families & Federal Employees

Team Eglin is committed

to ensuring all members have the support they need during a government shutdown. The following resources are available to help navigate potential challenges.

For Airmen and Families: Air Force Aid Society (AFAS): Supports Airmen and enhances the Air Force mission by providing timely and effective aid.

Emergency Assistance: If you’re facing financial hardship due to a government shutdown, don’t hesitate to reach out to AFAS:

Apply for Assistance: <https://afas.org/>
<https://afas.org/frequently-asked-questions-in-the-event-of-a-government-shutdown/>

For Military Personnel: Army Emergency Relief (AER), Coast Guard Mutual Assistance (CGMA), and Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society (NMCRS), contact the Red Cross at 1-877-272-7337.

For Federal Employees: Employee Assistance Program

Continued on next page



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EVolution	Club Car	Atlas



Butterflies of Fall

BY HELEN PETRE

Blooms of fall bring butterflies, gathering sweet nectar provided by the colorful flowers. Nectar provides energy for migration and egg production. Flowers and butterflies are abundant on recently burned pine savannahs, where flowers have sun and room to bloom.

Gulf Fritillary (Dione vanillae)

The most common butterfly in the fall is the Gulf Fritillary, which lays its eggs on passion-flower (*Passiflora incarnata*), so the caterpillars can eat the leaves. While Gulf Fritillaries use lantana and other flowers for nectar, lantana is an invasive nonnative and poisonous to animals. Since animals cannot eat the leaves, nothing inhibits its invasive spread.

The adult Gulf Fritillary lives for only two weeks. Adults migrate north in spring and south in fall.

Gulf fritillaries, like monarchs, have chemical defense mechanisms, which make them unpalatable to predators.

Blazing star (Liatris species)

Gulf Fritillaries are especial-



Gulf fritillary feeding on a Mexican sunflower. Wikipedia.

ly attracted to *Liatris*, feeding on nectar before their southern migration. *Liatris* attracts other butterflies, such as swallow-tails, hairstreaks, monarchs, and buckeyes, as well as native bees and moths. There are many species of *Liatris* native to Florida, and different species often grow together in dunes and pine savannahs. Common names include blazing star and gayfeather. All have lavender flowers and bloom from August to October.

Liatris grows best in disturbed areas and scrub, areas prone to wildfire, and recently burned areas. If there is no disturbance, pines overgrow, preventing sunlight from reaching the ground, and preventing *Liatris* from

growing. This demonstrates the importance of natural areas and fire. *Liatris* is also threatened by coastal development.

Frostweed (Verbesina virginica)

Frostweed blooms with pretty, terminal white flower clusters in late summer through fall and grows tall among *liatris* and goldenrod on the edges of woods, in disturbed areas, and in the dunes. It is a food source for butterflies, especially monarchs, as well as native bees.

Sweet goldenrod (Solidago odora)

Sweet goldenrod leaves smell like licorice when crushed.



Monarchs on *Liatris*. NC State Extension

There are many species of goldenrod, but sweet goldenrod is the only one that is aromatic. Sweet goldenrod is an important nectar source for native bees and moths. No goldenrod species causes hay fever. Goldenrods bloom from August to September along with ragweed, so people often erroneously attribute allergies to goldenrod. Ragweed has windborne pollen. Goldenrod pollen is carried from flower to flower by native bees. It is not windborne, so it cannot cause hay fever.

Ragweed (Ambrosia artemesifolia)

Ragweed is an annual, native species, but it is invasive and a



Frostweed. Wikipedia.

noxious weed. It blooms from July to October and induces allergies due to copious amounts of windblown pollen. The seeds contain oil, which is coveted by birds.

All of these fall-blooming plants are important food sources for butterflies, birds, and native bees. Fall provides an amazing display of wings and blooms. Enjoy the native ecosystems!

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

MILITARY

continued from previous page

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Top College Hoops Return to Raider Arena for Emerald Coast Classic

Tickets still available for men's and women's tournaments Thanksgiving week

College basketball fans will have plenty to cheer about this Thanksgiving as both the men's and women's Emerald Coast Classic tournaments return to Raider Arena on the campus of Northwest Florida State College. Tickets are still available at www.emeraldcoastclassic.com and start at \$20 per session, which includes two games.

Women's Classic: Nov. 24-25

The second annual women's Emerald Coast Classic, presented by Global Sports, will tip off Monday and Tuesday, Nov. 24-25, featuring two brackets of top NCAA programs. Mississippi State, Providence, Middle Tennessee State, and Alcorn State make up the Bay Bracket, while Nebraska, Virginia, Northwestern State, and Purdue Fort Wayne compete in the Beach Bracket.

In the Bay Bracket semifinals

on Nov. 24, Providence faces Middle Tennessee State at 11 a.m., followed by Mississippi State vs. Alcorn State at 1:30 p.m. The third-place game is set for 11 a.m. Tuesday, with the championship tipping off at 1:30 p.m.

The Beach Bracket opens Monday evening with Nebraska meeting Purdue Fort Wayne at 5 p.m., then Virginia facing Northwestern State at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday's third-place game begins at 5 p.m., with the championship at 7:30 p.m.

Mississippi State posted a 22-12 record last season, advancing to the second round of the 2025 NCAA Women's Basketball Tournament. Nebraska went 21-12 and also reached the NCAA Tournament, while Middle Tennessee State finished 26-8 and earned a WBIT berth. Alabama and Creighton captured titles in last year's inaugural women's event.



Men's Classic: Nov. 28-29

The tenth annual men's Emerald Coast Classic follows Thanksgiving weekend, Friday and Saturday, Nov. 28-29. DePaul will face Georgia Tech in the semifinals at 6 p.m. Friday, followed by Drake vs. LSU at 8:30 p.m. The third-place game tips at 3 p.m. Saturday, with the

championship scheduled for 6 p.m.

LSU returns to Niceville after winning the 2021 Emerald Coast Classic, defeating Wake Forest 75-61 in the title game. "This is going to be the wave of the future for weather," said Matt McMahon, now in his fourth season as LSU's head

coach, who welcomes a transfer class ranked No. 16 nationally by 247Sports.

Drake enters with momentum after a school-record 31-4 season, sweeping the Missouri Valley Conference and advancing to the second round of the 2025 NCAA Tournament. Georgia Tech, under third-year coach Damon Stoudamire, finished 17-17 last year with a trip to the NIT. DePaul, guided by first-year coach Chris Holtmann, reached the College Basketball Crown tournament—its first postseason appearance since 2019.

Produced by Global Sports, which has managed 57 multi-team college basketball tournaments since 2007, the Emerald Coast Classic continues to bring national-level excitement to the Emerald Coast.

Tickets are available now at www.emeraldcoastclassic.com.

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Why Seniors are Most Vulnerable in the First 30 Days After a Hospital Stay

By TERESA HALVERSON,
DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS
DEVELOPMENT/COMMUNITY
RELATIONS

After a major medical event and a lengthy stay in an acute setting, seniors often are at a loss during the transition of care. This may include the breakdown in communication and coordination between the hospital, the patient/family, and the next care provider, directly leading to preventable readmissions. The senior/caregiver often is unaware of “red flag” symptoms of a worsening condition (i.e. fluid retention in heart failure) or when to call their physician versus 911. This often leads to delayed, inappropriate or overcautious care (i.e. an unnecessary ER visit).

The transition period, particularly the first 30 days post hospital discharge, is the most vulnerable time for seniors because they shift abruptly from 24/7 acute medical care to an often-fragmented system of self-management and family care. This period is often referred to as a state of “post-hospital syndrome,” where patients have depleted physiological reserves and are at high risk for new or worsening conditions. Some of these conditions may include:

Deconditioning and Frailty: Even a short hospital stay can lead to significant muscle loss, weakness, and decline in mobility, making the senior highly susceptible to falls and subsequent injury upon returning home.

Physiological Vulnerability: The stress of illness and hospitalization leaves the body’s immune system weakened, increasing the risk of new infections (like pneumonia or UTIs) or complications from the initial illness.

Cognitive Decline: Hospitalization can often trigger or worsen confusion and delirium, which severely compromises a senior’s ability to understand and follow complex discharge instructions.

Medication Chaos: Seniors are often discharged with an average of 3-5 new medication changes (new drugs, discontinued drugs, or dosage changes). Medication errors, a leading cause of readmission, are most likely to occur within the first 48

hours of being home.

Hospitals work diligently with senior care facilities and health care partners to ensure that seniors are discharged with confirmed plans for support (i.e. home health, skilled nursing and rehab facilities, medical equipment and transportation). If you are being discharged from acute care and require specialized follow-on care, it is important to know your options. A skilled nursing and rehab center relies on a variety of specialists to address the patient’s acute needs following hospitalization.

Going to post-acute rehab after a hospital stay is an essential step for many people because it bridges the gap between acute medical treatment and safely returning home. The primary goal of post-acute rehabilitation is to help you regain the strength, mobility, and skills you need to live

independently, while also preventing complications that could land you back in the hospital. Your treatment plan is customized to your specific condition and goals, ensuring you make measurable progress towards independence.

Who is Post-Acute Rehab For?

Post-acute rehab is typically recommended if you:

- Need continued medical care that can’t be safely managed at home.
- Require multiple types of therapy (PT, OT, SLP).
- Have the physical and cognitive ability to tolerate intensive therapy and are motivated to participate.
- Are recovering from a major event like:
 - Stroke or Brain Injury
 - Major Orthopedic Surgery

(e.g., hip or knee replacement)

- Major Illness (e.g., severe pneumonia, heart failure, prolonged critical illness)
- Major Trauma or Amputation

Your hospital care team (doctors, case managers, and therapists) will assess your condition and recommend the appropriate level of post-acute care for your needs. Reasons why post-acute rehab is highly beneficial:

Types of Medical & Rehabilitation Specialists

Medical Specialists (Consulting Physicians): While the primary care physician (PCP) or medical director in a skilled nursing and rehabilitation facility oversees general medical care, specialists act as highly focused resources within the interdisciplinary team.

These physicians are typically

consulted on an as-needed basis for specific conditions:

Physiatrist (Rehabilitation Medicine Specialist): Directs the overall rehab program. They specialize in nerve, muscle, and bone injuries and aim to restore function lost due to injury or illness.

Cardiologist: Manages conditions like Congestive Heart Failure (CHF) and post-heart attack recovery, adjusting medications and monitoring cardiac status.

Pulmonologist: Treats respiratory issues such as Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) or pneumonia recovery, often managing oxygen therapy.

Wound Care Specialist (Physician, Certified Nurse or Certified Therapist): Provides advanced care

Continued on next page



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Wellness



BY DR. RICHARD CHERN

As the season of Thanksgiving reminds us to pause and reflect on what we're grateful for, there's no better time to appreciate the gift of health and balance. Hormones play a vital role in how we feel every day—our energy, sleep, focus and even our joy. When those hormones fall out of balance, it can be difficult to feel truly thankful for the moments that matter most.

Restoring Harmony Naturally

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placement Therapy (BHRT) uses hormones that are identical to those your body naturally produces. Derived from plant sources and carefully customized to your individual needs, BHRT helps restore balance in a way that feels natural and seamless.

Benefits to Be Thankful For

Renewed energy helps you wake up ready to take on the day with vitality and purpose. Emotional balance brings steadier moods and a brighter outlook. Restful sleep restores the body and mind. Sharper focus enhances mental clarity and motivation. And with revitalized confidence, you can feel more like yourself—inside and out.



A Season for Renewal

Just as autumn reminds us of cycles and renewal, BHRT offers a way to restore your own natural rhythm. Through personalized treatment, you can rediscover balance, vitality, and gratitude for how good life can feel when your hormones are working with you, not against you.

This Thanksgiving, Give Thanks for You

Health is something we often take for granted until it begins to fade. With bioidentical hormones, you can nurture your well-being, reclaim your energy, and fully embrace the season with gratitude—for your body, your balance, and your life.

Finding Balance and Gratitude Through Bioidentical Hormones

Ready to Feel Like Yourself Again?

This November, make your health the first thing on your gratitude list. A simple lab panel and a thoughtful consultation can reveal exactly what your body needs—and a personalized BHRT plan can help you sleep better, think clearer, and

feel more like you.

Call The Hormone Restoration Center at 850-837-1271 to schedule your labs, consultation, and treatment. Our team will guide you step-by-step, answer your questions, and design a plan tailored to your goals. Don't wait to feel well—give yourself the gift of balance and energy now.

SENIORS

continued from previous page

for non-healing ulcers, surgical wounds, or pressure injuries (bedsores).

Neurologist: Manages patients recovering from stroke, Parkinson's disease, or other neurological conditions.

Importance and Impact of Specialty Care

The specialized expertise is critical because patients in a skilled nursing facility are in a transition phase, requiring complex, time-sensitive care.

Precision and Complexity Management: Specialists possess a deeper knowledge of high-risk, complex conditions (e.g., managing post-operative joint infection or fine-tuning diabetes control). Their involvement ensures the patient receives care that goes beyond general medicine.

Optimizing Rehabilitation Outcomes: The Physiatrist and therapy specialists (PT, OT, SLP) create highly personalized, goal-oriented treatment plans. Their expertise is required to classify the service as "skilled" by Medicare, ensuring intensive, rapid functional improvement necessary for the patient to return home.

Reducing Hospital Readmissions: The primary goal of SNF/Rehab is to prevent the patient's condition from worsening and requiring a return to the hospital. Specialists help achieve this by:

Early Detection: Catching subtle changes in a specific condition (e.g., a Cardiologist spotting signs of impending CHF exacerbation).

Aggressive Management: Implementing swift, expert interventions for conditions like severe wounds or complex IV

antibiotic protocols.

Care Collaboration: Specialists communicate their findings and treatment directives to the facility's interdisciplinary team (nurses, social workers, dietitians), ensuring all aspects of the patient's care plan are integrated and coordinated

Transition to Home

Rehab is designed to prepare you for a safe discharge back to your home environment.

Practice Daily Living Skills: Occupational therapists work with you to practice everyday tasks in a simulated home environment, teaching you how to manage stairs, get in and out of a shower, or prepare a meal safely with your current limitations.

Equipment and Support Planning: The team (social worker/case manager) coordinates your transition, ordering necessary durable medical equipment (walkers, shower chairs, etc.) and arranging for follow-up services like home health or outpatient therapy.

Family Training: The rehab team can train your family members or caregivers on how to safely assist you once you get home, ensuring continuity of care.

The Manor at Blue Water Bay, a skilled nursing and rehabilitation facility, offers a range of high-level specialized services that include neurology, wound care and physiatrist consultations. These specialized physicians work with the patient's primary care physician, medical director and our interdisciplinary care team to ensure the best possible outcomes. For additional information and a tour, please contact us at 850-897-5592 or email: we-care@manoratbwb.com.

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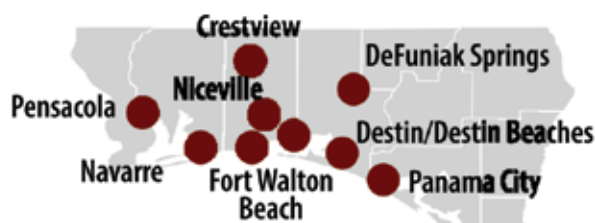


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Gratitude for Health: Nourishing the Body with Strength, Love and Movement



BY KASSIA GARFIELD

In a world where busyness often overshadows well-being, it's easy to take our health for granted—until it falters. Whether it's waking up pain-free, taking a walk in the sunshine or breathing deeply without struggle, our health is the quiet foundation of our lives. Being grateful for our health means recognizing it not as a given, but as a gift—a resource that allows us to live fully, love deeply and engage in all that brings us joy.

But, gratitude alone isn't enough. Just like any valuable asset, health must be nurtured, protected and strengthened. One of the most empowering ways to do this is through strength training and intentional movement—not as punishment, but as an act of deep self-respect and care.

Shifting the Motivation: Love Over Hate

Too often, the motivation behind working out stems from dissatisfaction: trying to lose weight, chasing a certain body type, or “fixing” perceived flaws. This mindset can create a cycle of guilt, shame and burnout. But when we shift the narrative from “I need to change my body” to “I want to care for my body,” everything transforms.

Working out because you love your body, not because you hate it, invites a more sustainable and compassionate approach. It means celebrating what your body can do today, while honoring its potential for tomorrow. Exercise becomes less about punishment and more about gratitude. Every rep, every stretch, every bead of sweat becomes a thank-you note to the vessel that carries you through life.

The Power of Strength Training

Strength training, in particular, offers unique benefits that go beyond aesthetics. It helps maintain muscle mass, supports joint health, boosts metabolism and even improves mental

health by releasing endorphins and reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression. As we age, it becomes a powerful tool in preventing falls, increasing bone density and maintaining independence.

But strength training isn't just for athletes or bodybuilders. It's for everyone—no matter your size, shape or fitness level. Lifting weights, doing bodyweight exercises or using resistance bands can all contribute to a stronger, more resilient body.

When you engage in strength training from a place of self-love, you're not just building muscle. You're building trust with your body. You're teaching yourself that your body is worthy of care, attention, and nourishment—not because it meets a certain standard, but because it's yours.

Gratitude in Motion

Being grateful for your health doesn't mean you ignore your challenges. It means recognizing your capacity to take small, intentional steps toward well-being. It's saying, “I'm thankful for what my body can do, and I choose to support it.” That might mean walking instead of



relationship rather than a short-term project, your choices become more sustainable and fulfilling. You stop chasing quick fixes and start cultivating lasting habits.

Gratitude turns health into a daily practice. And strength training becomes a ritual of self-care—a way to say, “I value this body, this breath, this life.”

So, the next time you pick up a dumbbell, go for a walk or roll out your yoga mat, take a moment to thank your body. Not because it looks a certain way, but because it shows up for you every single day. Treat it with love. Move it with joy. And let gratitude be your guide.

At MaxStrength Fitness we strive to create a healthy environment for all individuals at any point in their fitness journeys. Exercise is for longevity, and we try to create lifestyle changes that are not a fad, and doable for long periods of time. If you need help finding your balance, give us a call at 850-373-4450.

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Navigating the Holidays with Confidence: Tips for Looking and Feeling Your Best



BY DR. CLARK,
BLUEWATER PLASTIC SURGERY

The holiday season is filled with special moments — family gatherings, festive parties and countless photo opportunities. While this time of year brings joy and celebration, it can also come with added stress, late nights and the desire to look refreshed despite a busy schedule. At Bluewater Plastic Surgery, we understand that confidence matters — especially during the holidays — and there are several easy ways to help you look and feel your best, without downtime or drastic changes.

Whether you want to glow for the camera, feel more comfortable in social settings or just give your skin a little extra love, here's how we help patients shine through the season.

Skincare That Works for the Holidays

Cooler temperatures, indoor heating and holiday stress can all take a toll on your skin. That's why it's important to adapt your routine and invest in products that nourish and protect.

At Bluewater Plastic Surgery, we offer medical-grade skincare tailored to your skin's needs — including products that hydrate, brighten and strengthen your skin barrier. We may recommend:

- A hydrating serum with hyaluronic acid for plump, dewy skin
- A gentle exfoliator to smooth texture before events
- Vitamin C to boost radiance and fight dullness
- A tinted SPF moisturizer to protect and perfect in one step

Even small changes in your skincare routine can give your skin a refreshed, holiday-ready appearance with no downtime.

Quick In-Office Treatments That Deliver

If you're looking for a bit more of a boost before a big event or family photo, we offer several minimally invasive treatments that require little to no recovery time:

Botox, Xeomin or Daxxity: Smooth out frown lines, crow's feet, or forehead creases in just a few days.

Dermal Fillers: Restore subtle volume to areas of the face— cheeks, lips, or under-eye areas with natural-looking results that appear almost instantly.

Laser or Light Treatments: Gentle to aggressive laser treatments can improve skin tone, brighten complexion, and

a form of self-care that can help you show up with confidence and energy. Whether you're prepping for holiday photos, planning a vacation or simply wanting to feel refreshed head-

ing into the new year, we're here to support you.

Schedule a consultation at **Bluewater Plastic Surgery** to explore holiday-friendly treatments that work for your

goals and timeline. Let's help you step into the season looking and feeling your best.



reduce redness or sun spots.

Chemical Peels: Light peels can refresh your complexion and reduce fine lines with just a few days of mild peeling.

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Most of these treatments can be performed in under an hour, and results begin to appear quickly — often with no downtime at all. They're a great option for patients who want to feel more confident without looking like they've "had work done."

A Thoughtful Approach to Self-Care

The holidays are about connection — with others and with yourself. Taking time to care for your appearance isn't vanity; it's

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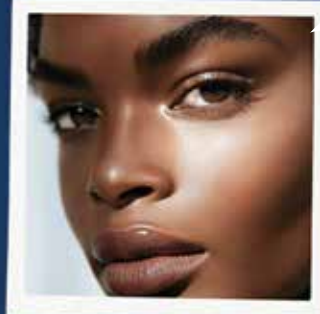
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 Wellness

Journey Bravely: Spread Gratitude



By STEPHENIE CRAIG,
JOURNEY BRAVELY

When did you last compare your life to someone else's and find yours lacking? When did you last have physical symptoms of stress? When did you last spend hours, days, weeks or months focused primarily on the things in your life you wish

were different? Life with technology offers you piles of information to sort daily. Some information is helpful, while much of it leaves you wondering if you and your life measure up to the social media cultural standard. What do you do when you find yourself feeling stressed or your life feeling not enough?

While simple, gratitude often gets overlooked as a highly useful and practical tool for actually feeling better and feeling enough. Gratitude gets the most attention in November when you think about what you're thankful for around the Thanksgiving table. While a meaningful practice once a year, gratitude can hold a more significant space in your life that can actually change how you feel and



experience the world.

Gratitude in its fuller form is a daily practice of slowing down, reflecting on what is already good in your life, savoring and celebrating the goodness, then intentionally acknowledging the goodness in some way such as writing it down, noting it in your phone, or saying it aloud to yourself or another person. Gratitude is scientifically known to potentially reduce stress, reduce blood pressure, help anxiety, help depression, improve health, increase optimism and increase happiness.

Gratitude is not designed to minimize your struggles. For example, statements like, "I should just be grateful, I don't have real problems like people who are hungry or sick" aren't helpful to

caring for yourself properly. Your pain and struggle are real and it is healthy to validate and tend to the hard parts of your life. Gratitude instead offers some balance and perspective to the struggle. Statements like, "I am really

struggling with anxiety today and it is hard. And at the same time, I am also so grateful for my support system, for the sun being out today, and for my pet who makes me smile," invite the goodness that exists into your processing of the hard.

Gratitude can be contagious if you let it. It has a sneaky way of taking self-focused, negative thoughts and transforming them into healthy connection with God, self, and others. You begin to notice kind things others have done toward you and you begin to engage spiritual gratitude. At its best, gratitude can motivate you toward kindness, generosity, and creating opportunities for others to experience gratitude.

So, how do you engage and spread gratitude?

Ways to Practice and Spread Gratitude:

Slow down. Set aside a time each day for 3-5 minutes. Set a reminder in your phone to help support the habit. Take a few deep breaths and say to yourself, "I am slowing down to notice the good."

Reflect on a gratitude question. What was good today? What am I taking for granted in my life I could be grateful for? What nature do I see around me? Who am I grateful for? What am I looking forward to? What can I celebrate today? What kind thing has someone done for me?

Savor and celebrate the good. Think in detail about the beauty of nature. Think about the person you are grateful for and why you enjoy them. Notice deeply what a gift it is to have all of your basic needs met.

Record your observations. Journal, use notes in your phone, send a thank you note, or tell someone what feels good in your life. Note how it feels inside to spend time thinking about good things.

Spread gratitude. Allow gratitude to motivate generosity and kindness. Watch for opportunities to create grateful moments for others. Send a kind note, give a thoughtful gift, use loving words of affirmation, go out of your way to be helpful or meet a need, share your gifts with others.

In a time that encourages you to do more, get more, and keep up. Try engaging in the radical rebellion of slowing down, being grateful and spreading gratitude to others. Be gracious with yourself and others as you grow in gratitude. For support along your journey, connect with us at Journeybravely.com.



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Peace Over Perfection: Caring for Your Mental Health During and After the Holidays



By MELANIE YOST, LCSW

The holiday season is often described as “the most wonderful time of the year.” But, for many people—especially those living with depression, anxiety or PTSD—it can be one of the most challenging. While lights twinkle and calendars fill with celebrations, many individuals quietly struggle with intensified emotions, disrupted routines and painful reminders of loss or trauma.

Why Symptoms Flare During the Holidays

For those dealing with mood dysregulation or trauma, the holiday season often brings a perfect storm of stressors. Financial pressure, family conflict, grief and unrealistic expectations can combine to heighten anxiety and emotional distress. People living with PTSD might find the season triggers “anniversary reactions”—powerful emotional or physical responses linked to past trauma that resurface through familiar sights, sounds and memories.

Even though hospitalizations and crisis calls tend to drop briefly during the holidays, research shows that symptoms often worsen after the celebrations end. Studies have consistently found that while suicide rates are lowest in November and December, they often increase in early January. This “post-holiday rebound” reflects the emotional exhaustion, loneliness and letdown many people feel once the rush is

over and routines resume. After weeks of socializing, disrupted sleep, indulgent food and drink, and financial strain, many people experience a crash in both energy and mood. For those already vulnerable and struggling with compromised brain health, this period can intensify depression, anxiety or trauma-related symptoms. Shorter days and reduced sunlight during winter add another layer of challenge, as Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) commonly peaks at this time.

Practical Tips for Protecting Your Mental Health

Awareness and preparation can make a world of difference. Here are seven practical, research-informed ways to care for your mental and emotional well-being throughout the holidays—and beyond:

- **Acknowledge your emotions.** It’s okay if the season feels heavy or complicated. Give your-

self permission to feel what’s real rather than forcing yourself to be cheerful.

- **Simplify your schedule.** Over commitment fuels anxiety and fatigue. Choose what truly matters to you and let go of the rest.
- **Maintain your routines.** Sleep, nutrition and movement are powerful stabilizers for mood and nervous system regulation.
- **Set boundaries with compassion.** You can love people and still say no. Limit exposure to toxic dynamics and protect your peace.
- **Stay connected.** Reach out to trusted friends, support groups or your care team. Connection is a protective factor against depression.
- **Limit alcohol and sugar.** Both can temporarily lift mood but often worsen sleep and emotional regulation later.
- **Plan for post-holiday care.** Schedule therapy sessions,

wellness visits, or restorative downtime in January. Think of it as a recovery plan for your body and mind.

The bottom line: The holidays can stir up deep emotions—and the weeks that follow can be even harder. By planning ahead, setting gentle boundaries, and caring for your emotional health through and beyond the holidays, you can create space for genuine peace, presence, and renewal.

If the holiday season feels too overwhelming, we invite you to connect with us at Be Well Solutions and Complete Ketamine Solutions in Destin where Brain Health is our mission, and kindness is our vibe. We are happy to help!

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

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Pain in the Foot



By KAY LEAMAN,
HEALTH ARCHITECT

Over the last couple months, I have talked to friends and acquaintances that have shared their struggle with Planter Fasciitis. Maybe you or someone you know is dealing with this 'pain in the foot.'

The plantar fascia (noted as pf) is a fibrous tissue that connects the toes to the heel along the bottom of the foot. This thick band can become over-stretched or have excess strain due to repetitive stress, which can lead to chronic degeneration or small tears in the fascia fibers where it connects to the heel bone. In addition, ultrasounds often show calcifications

and a thickening of the pf.

The cause is not fully understood, but has been connected to activities such as running, ballet and other types of dance, age, weight or occupation.

The pain experienced most often shows up first thing in the morning when the foot first touches the floor and is localized in the heel. This is due to overnight inactivity and the pf stiffening (like a sore muscle). Choosing to avoid walking on the foot can eventually lead to problems in the foot, knee, hip or back.

There are several therapies that can aid in the healing process:

- **Stretching:** Take time before letting your feet hit the floor to slowly stretch. Place your ankle over your knee, pull the toes up until you feel the stretch. Holding that position gently massage the pf for a few minutes. This will help the pf to relax relieving some of the sharp pain one experiences after a period of inactivity.

- **Calf Stretch:** Standing in front of a wall bend the knee on

the good foot a step back on the affected foot. Slowly move the injured foot from the balls of the foot to placing the heel on the ground. This stretches both the calf and the pf. If you can't place your heel on the ground due to the pain, bring the leg in a bit to lessen the 'stretch.'

- **Ice the foot** after stretching or if your pf begins to act up due to over-activity.

- **Athletic Tape:** Learn how to properly apply from a professional such as a physical therapist to support your pf during your active times.

- **Night Splints:** This over the counter product keeps the pf in a stretched position while you sleep which can lessen the pain experienced upon rising.

- **Orthotics:** These can support your pf during the day.

- **Boot, Cane, Crutches:** These can be helpful with severe cases or to allow the inflammation to decrease before adding other treatments.

- **Steroids:** The use of steroid injections can offer temporary relief. However, multiple shots are not recommended as they can weaken the pf and pos-



sibly cause it to rupture.

- **Plasma Injections:** Platelet rich plasma from your own blood can be injected to promote healing. An ultrasound is used to aid in precise needle placement.

- **Extracorporeal Shock Wave Therapy:** This is for chronic plantar fasciitis when other therapies have failed. Sound waves are directed at the area of the heel pain to stimulate healing. This therapy hasn't

been shown to be consistently effective even though some studies have shown promising results.

- **Ultrasonic Tissue Repair:** A minimally invasive technology where ultrasound imaging is used to guide a needlelike probe into the damaged pf tissue. The probe tip vibrates rapidly to break up the damaged tissue which is then suctioned out.

- **Surgery:** When all else fails. The surgery entails detaching the pf from the heel bone.

There are so many fall festivals coming our way. If you don't want to miss your favorite ones, be sure to include breaks throughout your day to stretch and massage your pf and don't forget your orthotics. Taking care of our feet allows us to have a more active and fun life. Even if you have healthy feet, a good foot massage from time to time couldn't hurt.

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A Pastor's Ponderings: Charlie Kirk's Legacy and the Power of Truth



BY PASTOR DOUG STAUFFER,
FAITH INDEPENDENT BAPTIST
CHURCH

The tragic death of Charlie Kirk has deeply saddened many. Recognized nationwide as a bold conservative voice, Kirk was more than just a commentator—he was a husband, a father of two, and a man dedicated to preparing the next generation to stand for truth. His sudden passing serves as a sobering reminder that words matter, actions carry weight, and life is fragile.

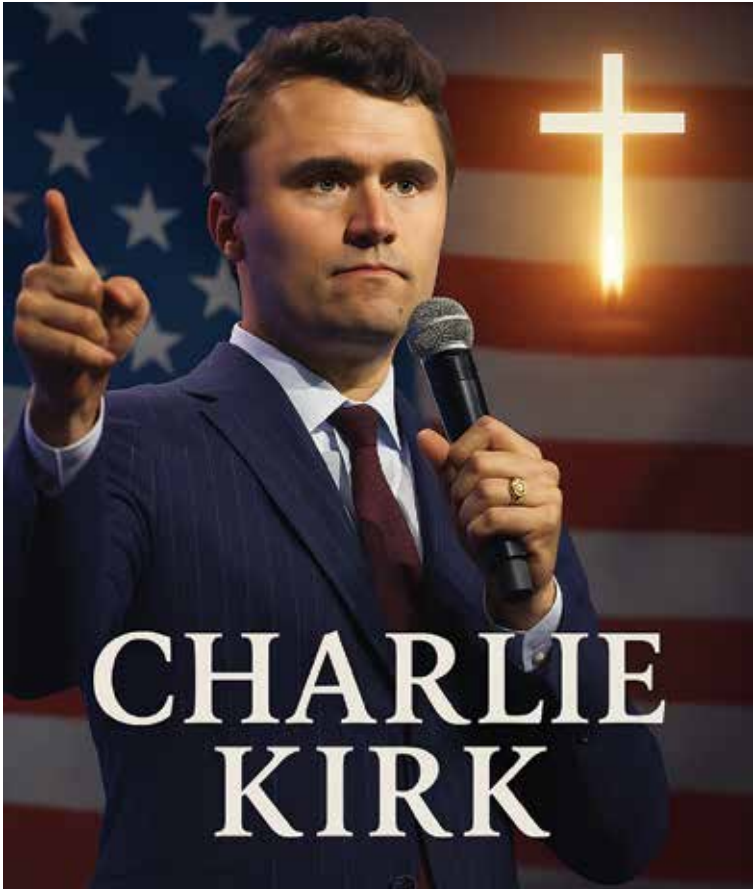
Reports revealed that Kirk's assassin etched messages onto the bullet casings—phrases filled with contempt and distorted accusations. Such hatred did not appear in a vacuum. For years, reckless rhetoric has cast those who love their country and hold traditional values as “fascists” or “Nazis.” These careless words are not harmless. Scripture warns, *“Death and life are in the power of the tongue”* (Proverbs 18:21). Words can poi-

son hearts, shape perceptions, and—as this tragedy shows—push vulnerable minds toward destruction.

But in contrast to the labels pinned on him, Charlie Kirk was a man of conviction and dialogue. On college campuses, he became known for giving the microphone to his critics, trusting truth to hold its own. That spirit reflected a biblical principle: “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). Kirk believed that when truth is spoken openly and received honestly, it liberates people from lies.

His passing forces us to wrestle with how we will respond. As believers, we cannot allow hatred to dictate our course. The Apostle Paul reminds us, *“Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good”* (Romans 12:21). The temptation in times of loss is to retreat in fear or lash out in anger, but the better path is to follow Christ's example—standing firmly for righteousness yet responding with grace—be like Erika!

The legacy Charlie Kirk leaves is one of resolve, not bitterness. Through Turning Point USA, he worked to instill courage and critical thinking in young people. The seeds he planted continue to grow—new chapters are forming on campuses. The work must continue. Just as the Apostle Paul



next generation and model lives of integrity.

We also need to be reminded where our ultimate hope lies. Politics, personalities, and movements rise and fall, but *“Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever”* (Hebrews 13:8). When leaders we admire are silenced, the mission of God's people does not end. We are still called to be salt and light in a dark and divided world.

Charlie Kirk's life was a turning point for many, and his death, though senseless, can stir us to a deeper commitment. Let us use our words to heal rather than wound, our influence to build rather than tear down, and our faith to guide rather than falter.

May his legacy remind us that courage and conviction still matter, truth is still worth defending, and hope is still found in Christ. Be the next Charlie Kirk!

urged young Timothy, “The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2). The mission of raising strong, faithful leaders must be passed from one generation to the next.

For the church, this tragedy also serves as a call to prayer and a reminder to have a presence in the public arena. Our nation needs godly grandparents, parents, pastors, and mentors who will intercede for the

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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 Musing

Sean of the South: Highway Café



BY SEAN DIETRICH

The little boy was with his mom, sitting in a truck stop diner. The boy was bald, wearing a loose T-shirt. A large bandage showed from beneath his collar.

Before the boy sat a massive meal. Bacon. Eggs. Huge glass of chocolate milk. Stack of pancakes bigger than a midsize SUV.

"It feels so weird, my stitches itch," the boy said.

"Eat your pancakes," said Mom.

Mom looked tired. Her hair looked like she had slept on it. Her clothes, crumpled.

"How many days was I in the hospital?" the boy asked.

The mother sighed. "Twenty-six. Now eat your pancakes."

Everyone in the little restaurant was staring at mother and son. Especially the trucker in the booth behind them, who couldn't help but eavesdrop.

Mother and son ate in silence for a while. The boy was inhaling his food while Mom nursed a mug in both hands, staring wistfully out the window.

"Did they cut all the cancer out?" the boy asked.

Mother was crying now. "Eat your pancakes."

She tried to hide her face but was unsuccessful. Sometimes there is nowhere to hide one's face.

The boy just watched his

mother weep. "I'm worried about you, Mom."

Mom laughed through snot and tears. "You're worried about ME?"

He nodded.

Things went silent for a while.

That's when something happened. The trucker from the nearby booth rose to his feet. He approached their table. He was every American truck driver you've ever seen. Powerfully built, slightly round in the middle, a ring of keys on his belt, and scuffed boots.

The man stood before their table, wearing a meek expression, hat in hand. The man said he couldn't help but

overhear their conversation. And, well, the man was wondering, would it be okay if he

prayed for the boy, ma'am?

Truthfully, Mom was a little weirded out by this request. After all, people HAD been praying for the boy back home. Friends and family had been praying around the clock, actually.

Then again, one more prayer couldn't hurt.

"Thank you," said Mom. "We'd be honored."

Mom and boy rose to their feet, per the man's request. Whereupon the man placed both hands on the boy's head. And as the man prayed aloud, others in the restaurant stopped eating and joined the circle.

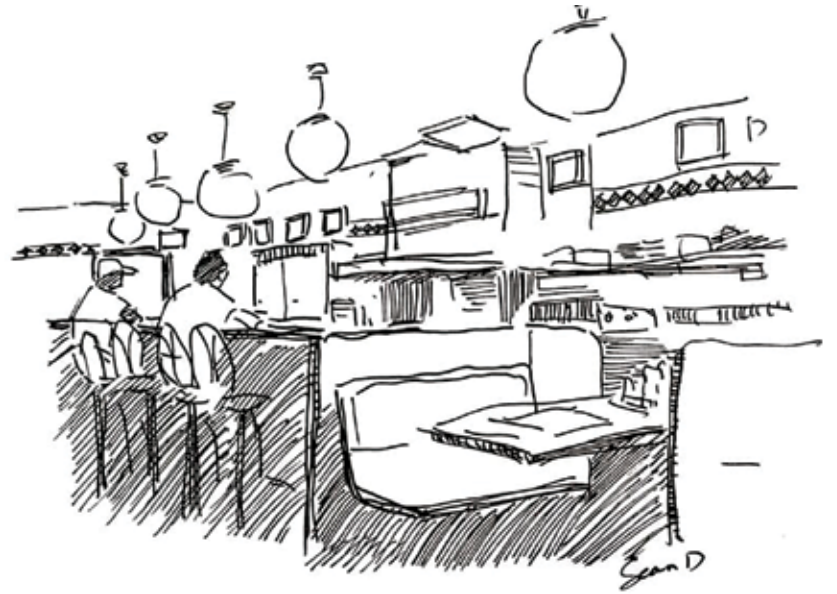
First, a waitress. Then a few guys from the bar. Then more customers. A dishwasher. A cook. Within moments, the boy was standing at the center of a mass of hands, all resting upon his weary body.

The prayer was simple. The trucker prayed the boy would be healed. After his prayer, others in the circle took turns praying. Many prayers were spoken. Tears were shed by perfect strangers.

When mother and child left the highway café that night, the boy had no idea what had just happened to him.

Forty-three years later, the boy emailed me to say that he still doesn't know what happened. But every day he's getting closer to figuring it out.

Eat your pancakes.



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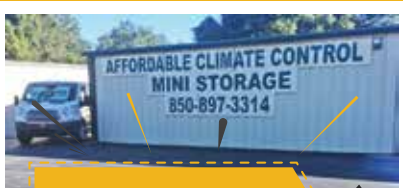


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Road to Redemption Podcast: Lori Smith – the God Who Sees Me

BY VICTORIA OSTROSKY

Hagar was in trouble. Twice. The Bible says the angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, weeping. Her mistress, Sarai, had mistreated her, so she ran. She was all alone, pregnant, and without resources. The LORD spoke kindly to her, instructing her to go back to her mistress. The second time, she was forcefully expelled, along with her young son, where she wandered in the wilderness, again. And again, God saw her and rescued her. “The God who sees me,” she called Him.

Naomi’s husband died, then her two sons died. She was left alone with two daughters-in-law. Between the three of them, they had nothing. She journeyed back from Moab to Judea, her home, and Ruth came with her where Ruth gleaned in the fields, picking up the left-over grain so they could have something to eat. Do you know who King David’s great-great-grand-

mother was? Naomi.

Lori Smith was like most of us. Working hard every day, doing the best to take care of her family. Then divorce happened and her mom died. “When you go through things like that, you have an array of emotions. It becomes a hopeless situation, at least it feels like that.” Life grabs you by the throat sometimes and shakes you. Three years of slogging through a divorce, even when you’ve done everything you possibly could to save the marriage, and the word ‘failure’ comes to mind. You feel very alone, and things are often out of your control.

Lori remembers that through the whole ordeal, losing everything materially, moving to a new location and starting over, she knew God was there watching over her. “The feelings are real, the hopelessness you feel is real and the suffering and heartaches are real, but just like the fear, God is there. You have to know on the inside that He is



there for you. Call to Him and He will answer.”

For Lori, spending time in God’s Word, praying, and finding characters in the Bible who also went through tough times, brought her comfort. Joel 2:25 is one of her favorite verses: “I will restore to you the years the locust has eaten.” Lori knows the “the latter is greater than the former. Though it’s a process, God gives you little nuggets to let you know



He’s there.”

Lori understands what shaky ground feels like, but she also understands that “you don’t have the spirit of fear but are an overcomer. Allow Him to take you and cover you. He is all you have, and He can lift you up. Those wounds will be healed even though it can take years. You must believe also that you’re not a victim; but a victor in Christ, putting one foot in front of the other to move forward!”

During that devastating time in her life, Lori sought God’s will. She wanted to know what direction He desired her to go.

She considered going into ministry. “I was so afraid I didn’t know my calling. It took many years, but then God said.. – you are a marketplace minister.”

Being a publisher and executive editor of Life Media Group, a multi-media company, Lori finally realized just where God wanted her to be. “In this role, I get to sometimes go and see clients and even pray with them.” God uses her career to open up doors of opportunity to individually care for others.

Each follower of Jesus is called to ministry. Each believer has been given a specific spiritual gift that we are called to use to its fullest. If you aren’t sure what yours is, ask Him. His plan is for you to have a life full of service to others, pointing them to Jesus.

You can listen to Lori Smith’s entire interview and many other incredible stories on the weekly Road to Redemption radio show and podcast at www.rtrdestiny.com.



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A New Name, the Same Trusted Care: Introducing Baywind Medical

BY KELLY STALNAKER

Since 2002, our team at J&B Medical has been honored to serve the Gulf Coast community with reliable, compassionate and high-quality home medical equipment and supplies. We are the only locally owned home medical equipment company in Okaloosa County. Over the years, we've built lasting relationships with patients, families and healthcare professionals who have trusted us to support their care with the best products and personal service.

Today, we're excited to share an important update about our future. J&B Medical is becoming **Baywind Medical**, a fresh new name that reflects our coastal roots and the care that continues to move forward with you. The original name, J&B, was inspired by the founders' sons, Jimmy and Brandon, when they were young. Both have been an important part of our company for many years and will continue to play a key role in shaping its future. As we move forward under our new name, Jimmy and Brandon will remain actively involved in daily operations, ensuring the same strong leadership and personal commitment that our customers have trusted for years. And the rest of the team you know so well, including Kim, Kenn, Kelly and Elizabeth, will also remain right here, continuing to support you with the same warmth and expertise you've come to expect.

You may be wondering, why the change? Due to a trademark matter beyond our control, we'll be transitioning away from the name J&B Medical by the end of this year. While it's never easy



to quality and our dedication to your health remain exactly the same.

As we begin this new chapter as **Baywind Medical**, we're filled with gratitude for the trust you've placed in us for more than two decades, and we're excited for what's ahead. Thank you for growing with us and for continuing to make us your local choice for home medical equipment and supplies.



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to say goodbye to a name that has meant so much to our family, we see this as an opportunity to grow, refresh our brand and continue serving our community under a name that feels right at home here on the Bay.

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New name, same heart — **Baywind Medical!**

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Emerald Coast Theatre Company: Dreams



BY CAMERON HUGHES

Since I was a little boy, I've always been a fan of Dolly Parton. I can remember watching Hee Haw with my grandfather as a little boy, mesmerized any time Dolly Parton came on the screen. When you hear her full story, starting with her humble childhood in Tennessee, you can see that big dreams, and chasing those dreams, have guided her. I particularly like her perspective that... "dreams build convictions because you pay the price to make sure that they come true."

In 2009 she delivered a speech where she said, "Do not confuse dreams with wishes. There is a difference. Dreams are where you visualize yourself being successful at what's important to you to accomplish. Now, dreams build convictions because you work hard to pay the price to make sure that they come true. Wishes are hoping good things will happen to you, but there's no fire in your gut that causes you to put everything forth to overcome all the obstacles. So you have to dream more and never, ever, ever blame somebody else if it doesn't happen. That is in your department." She expounded upon that in a 2014 interview when she said, "I've always been a dreamer, and yes, I have always tried. And dreams are special things. But dreams are of no value if they're not equipped with wings and feet and hands and all that. If you're going to make a dream come true, you've got to work with it. You can't just sit around. That's a wish. That's not a dream."

Here at Emerald Coast Theatre Company, we have a lot of dreams. I'm not just talking about the dreams that Anna and I have as co-founders for our organization, I'm talking about Trenton's dream to provide for his family while producing the-

atre, Emily's dream to choreograph shows, and Beca's dream to create sets that put us in other worlds on our stage. The rest of our team here at ECTC... each one has dreams, each one of them backs those dreams up with action. They are passionate about what they do and wholeheartedly let that passion drive their dream in service to our community.

Shirley Simpson, a dear friend who passed away last year, had a lifelong career in theater. She was a huge fan of Emerald Coast Theatre Company and every time she came to one of our Children's Educational Theatre Productions she would say she's never seen a professional theatre company do so much for children. In her experience, she has seen theatres do children's programming "on the side." She commended us for giving the children the same quality and attention that our professional theatre programming receives.

When Taylor puts together the costumes for the children in those productions, she does it with all the passion and conviction that is built into her dreams. Ora's dreams are built into every prop. I once asked Mr. Heath, who grew up in rural Holmes County, why he is so passionate about educational theatre. He said "because theatre changed my world." Theater expanded his dreams, took him to New York City, and showed him that there was a huge world out there that he could explore.

We have more dreams here at ECTC, dreams that are cultivated through our education classes and then bloom in the future of our students. We recently caught up with Marci and Gary, the parents of one of those students we've been able to watch blossom over the years from elementary school to high school. With pride, they shared that their daughter Alison credits her involvement at ECTC with her success in law school at Florida State University. Her professors and classmates are impressed with her ability to think quickly, improvise dialogue, and play various characters for mock trials. As a sophomore, she has been nominated

to serve on the steering committee of the Trial Law Club, an honor usually reserved for upperclassmen. Richard Olivarrez, Chief Marketing Officer of Ocean Reef Vacation Rentals recently sent us an email where he raved about ECTC alum Clara. He highlighted her poise, professionalism, and ability to improvise quickly as a spokesperson for their video marketing project. He experienced first hand how Clara's training with ECTC informed her performance with the project. We also heard from Tate, another ECTC alum. He is headed off to college and is working toward a degree in Sports Broadcasting. This young man was one of our first students in our inaugural summer camp at Butler Elementary school in 2014, and stayed with us through middle and high school. He credits his time at ECTC with helping him prepare for his chosen career path.

I see dreams coming true every day at ECTC. I see it when our 5 and 6-year-old Mini Players sing in full voice "It's Possible, anything's possible." from Seussical the Musical. I see it

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Big Orange House Designs Creates!

November Classes and Events

Nov. 1 – Permanent Jewelry Drop-In! Artist Sherrie Venghaus is bringing PERMANENT JEWELRY to CREATE! \$53.50

Homeschool Art Lab – Tuesdays: Tuesdays 10 a.m.–2 p.m. Explore art mediums & STEM projects. (2 spots available!) \$160.50 per month

Homeschool Art Lab – Thursdays: Thursdays 10 a.m.–2 p.m. Explore all art mediums & STEM projects. Creative learning! \$160.50 per month (Spots available)

Nov. 6 – Fall Back into Wellness! Join JoJo for a night of health and wellness information.

Nov. 7 – Open Studio Glass Art: Join JoJo in the studio to CREATE a beautiful piece of glass art! \$48.15

Nov. 7 – Private Class: Deb's Charcuterie Board: One-night class with Laurel – make a resist pottery charcuterie board. \$80.25

Nov. 8 – Glass Art Open Studio: Create a medium piece of glass art with JoJo in

the studio. \$37.45

Nov. 14 – Open Studio Glass Art: 10 a.m.–2 p.m. Join us for a fun Open Studio day creating Glass Art! \$32.10

Nov. 15 – Private Party (Trinity): Glass Art – Medium Piece: Create a medium glass art piece with the Trinity group. \$30.00

Nov. 15 – Private Party (Trinity): Glass Art – Small Piece: Create a small glass art piece with the Trinity group (non-profit discount applied). \$22.50

Nov. 20 – Come to the Table: Active duty military, veterans and families – Dinner at JoJo's.

View the remaining schedule and book your spot at bigorangehousedesigns.com.

Want to book a private table or host a party? Contact JoJo at (334) 320-6658 or bigorangehousedesigns@gmail.com.

Big Orange House Designs, 4652 Hwy. 20E, Pineapple Plaza, Bluewater Bay, Niceville, (850) 737-6193 | bigorangehousedesigns.com



 Arts & Music

Sinfonia Gulf Coast Presents an Evening With The Legendary Chaka Khan

Part Of 20th Anniversary Season | Nov. 14 | Hotel Effie | 6 p.m.

Sinfonia Gulf Coast continues its stellar 20th anniversary season by presenting An Evening with the Legendary Chaka Khan, a gala celebration on Friday, Nov. 14 at 6 p.m. in the Juniper Ballroom at Hotel Effie.

"The Gala Event supports Sinfonia's most important work in the community: bringing quality music to school children at no cost to them or their schools," says Sinfonia Gulf Coast founder and music director Demetrius Fuller. "We are thrilled to celebrate Sinfonia Gulf Coast's 20th Anniversary of bringing the highest quality orchestra, award-winning artists and music education to Northwest Florida."

With a career spanning more than five decades, Chaka Khan has delivered timeless hits like I'm Every Woman, Ain't Nobody, Tell Me Something Good, and I Feel for You. A 10-time Grammy Award winner with 22

nominations, she is lauded for her versatility across R&B, jazz, pop, rock, gospel, and more.

General admission tickets are from \$250 per person. The evening will include valet service, cocktail reception, dinner, table wine service, gratuities, cash bar, silent and live auctions, and a commanding live performance by Chaka Khan. Full tables seating 10 are also available for purchase.

All proceeds benefit Sinfonia Gulf Coast's mission: music education and community engagement in Northwest Florida, which includes musicians/guest artists in schools, free orchestra concerts, bus transportation for students, Sinfonia Youth Orchestra program, Arts in Medicine initiative with Sacred Heart Hospital, and Link Up concerts for third through fifth graders in partnership with Carnegie Hall.

Sinfonia is committed to entertaining, educating, and in-



spiring the community through imaginative and innovative musical programming. Its goal is to enrich and expand the traditional orchestral experience through unique artistic disciplines and collaborations, enhancing Northwest Florida's cultural vitality. Purchase tickets at SinfoniaGulfCoast.org or by calling (850) 460-8800.

Save The Dates: 2025-2026 Season Highlights

The Toast 'n Jam Sunday

brunch series is back with Broadway's best: Ann Hampton Callaway & Liz Callaway in Broadway Holiday the "Calla-way" on December 7 and Nicholas Rodriguez in Sincerely, Sondheim on February 8.

Main Season Concerts include Sinfonia's beloved Holiday Pops

Spectacular (December 13); Simply the Best: The Music of Tina Turner (January 8); Classical Connections featuring the world premiere of a new work by Howard Levy, harmonica and piano (February 7); and the Film in Concert will be Steven Spielberg's thrilling 1975 classic thriller, Jaws (May 15). These events are at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center, except Classical Connections, which will be held at Destin High School.

Sinfonia's signature fundraiser, Crescendo! 2026, kicks off Friday, Jan. 23 at Hotel Effie, followed by Vintner Dinners on Friday, Feb. 27 and the Main Event on Sunday, March 1 in the Magnolia Ballroom at Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort.

Also on the calendar: the Sinfonia Youth Orchestra Winter Concert (Sunday, Dec. 14) and Spring Concert (Sunday, May 3) at Destin High School.

Follow Sinfonia Gulf Coast on Facebook and Instagram and sign up for the free e-newsletter at SinfoniaGulfCoast.org to stay current on the season.

For more information and to purchase tickets, go to SinfoniaGulfCoast.org or call (850) 460-8800. To learn how you can sponsor or volunteer, email Sinfonia at info@sinfoniagulfcoast.org or call (850) 460-8800. To donate, visit SinfoniaGulfCoast.org.



SINFONIA GULF COAST

GALA event

Featuring Chaka Khan

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SinfoniaGulfCoast.org
850.460.8800



HOLIDAY HEROES

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in crisis situations. Donations provide shelter, provisions, and guidance for women seeking a better way of life for themselves and their kids.

Donations (please make checks payable to CALM Organization Inc.) can be mailed to CALM Organization Inc., 201 Redwood Avenue, Niceville, FL 32578. Visit nicevillecalm.com for more information.

- What a great Christmas gift for a child with no bed! A donation, even small, to **A Bed 4 Me Foundation**—a nonprofit providing beds for children who would otherwise be sleeping on floors or in other inadequate spaces—can help put a child into a new bed. Make your one-time or monthly donation at abed4me.org/donate.
- **Sharing & Caring of Niceville** has been supporting

families in Niceville needing holiday food/gifts since 1989, beginning as a food pantry. The nonprofit has since grown to offer help to local families with rent, utilities, prescriptions, school supplies, and meals for Thanksgiving and Christmas.

According to sharing-n-caring.org, a \$48 donation will pay for a family of four's holiday meal, while \$57 can provide gifts for a child whose family may not be able to afford them. If you'd like to become a sponsor, call 850-678-8459 or email info@sharing-n-caring.org.

- **How you can help:** Adopt a family (or child) via their Angel Tree: buy gifts, wrap or ask what the family needs.
- Donate a turkey or holiday meal food items.
- Volunteer for distribution when they do food drop-offs / family pickup.
- **Tip:** Reach out to them early to secure a family to adopt. Ask



for drop-off deadlines (often early December) and list of needed items (e.g., toys, gift cards, warm clothes).

- **The Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center** (ECCAC) is once again spreading Christmas cheer through its annual **Toy, Gift, and Adopt-a-Family Pro-**

gram — a heartwarming tradition that ensures local children experience the joy of the season. Each year, ECCAC's "Wish List" program connects generous individuals, businesses, and organizations with children and families in need across Okaloosa and Walton counties. Donors can adopt a child or family, do-

nate new toys and gifts, or give monetary contributions to help stock ECCAC's Toy Room.

The Toy Room becomes a magical "shop" where parents can select gifts for their children — all at no cost. Donations also support ECCAC's partner agencies who serve area families year-round.

"This effort helps us remind children and families that they are seen, valued, and loved," said the ECCAC team. "Every gift is a message of hope."

How to Help: Bring new, unwrapped toys or gift cards to ECCAC's Niceville Center (401 McEwen Dr.) or DeFuniak Springs Center (336 College Ave.). Monetary donations can be made online at ECCAC.org.

ECTC

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in our 2nd-5th grade Little and Big Players, and their full bodied expression of physical storytelling as they take the stage at the amazement of their friends and families. I see dreams come true every Saturday as eighty middle through high school Teen Players descend on our building and find a unique community where they always belong. A place that accepts them, and actually celebrates them.

All of these dreams are com-

ing true every day at ECTC... all the dreams from our Mini Players to the whole expanse of our community... and you are a part of that. You, our patrons, our VIP Members, our Sponsors, and our incredible Family of Donors. Your support is the platform that we at ECTC can step up on and reach into the heavens to make dreams come true. Your support, your contribution, your encouragement is foundational to our work and we are so grateful. You truly are the Heart of ECTC.

30A Songwriters Festival Returns for 17th Year!

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

Presented by Grand Boulevard, this year's festival will feature headline performances at Grand Boulevard's Town Center main stage by Mavis Staples, Toad the Wet Sprocket, 10,000

Maniacs, I'm With Her, Nikki Lane, and Paul McDonald & the Mourning Doves. Additional artists will be announced this summer.

Venues throughout South Walton will once again be converted into state-of-the-art listening rooms, ranging from 100 to 1,000 seats. Amphitheaters, town halls, restaurants, bars, and theaters provide fans with the rare opportunity to experience world-class songwriters in intimate settings. WMOT, based in Nashville, will again record select performances for its World Cafe sessions in partnership with WXPB Philadelphia.

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

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

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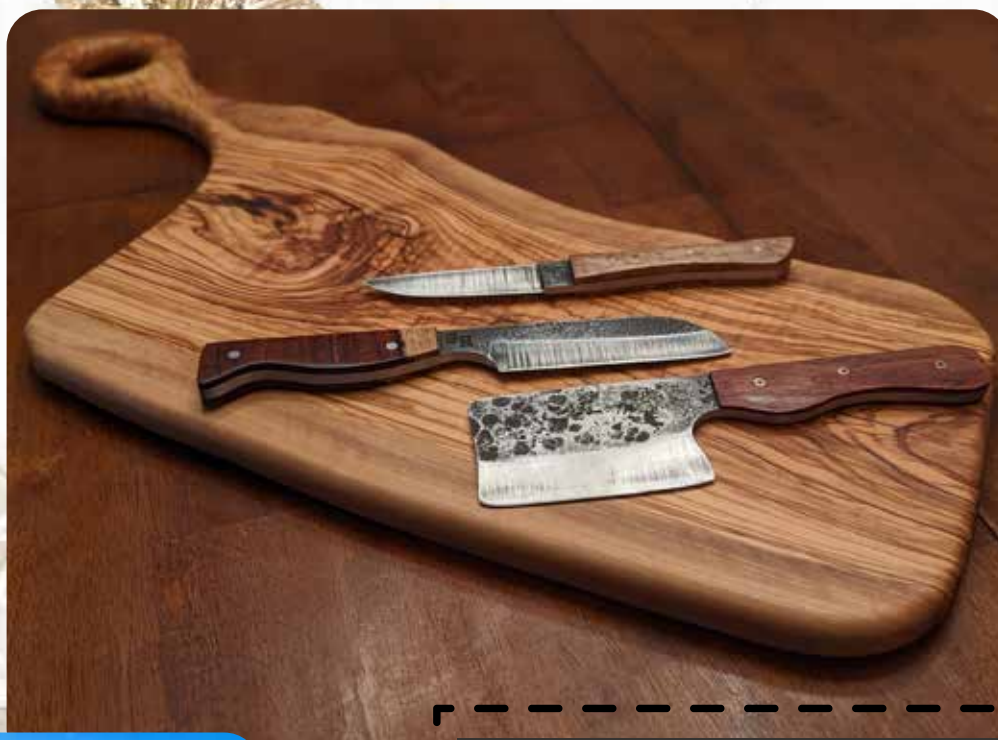
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