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Freedom Houses Offer Hope, Healing and a Path Forward for Women in Need

By MICHELLE RUSCHMAN

Stephanie Fitzgerald, Founder of Freedom Life Compass, is on a mission to provide safe supportive housing for the residents who stay at the Freedom Houses located in Niceville, Fort Walton Beach, Crestview, and soon, Laurel Hill. "I want people to know change is possible. A community doesn't always see what brings someone to homelessness. But, for moms who are living in a car with their children, a woman who is escaping domestic abuse, or any other countless circumstances women can find themselves in, we want our program to be a place of hope."

By the age of 23, Stephanie had plenty of reasons to be hopeless. She grew up in a house with drugs, where teaching life skills to be a successful adult was not part of her training. Addiction was the norm in her home, and eventually, she became homeless. At 23, though, someone spoke words that would begin



the journey toward her calling, "You're better than the life you're living."

"Not everybody ends up in homelessness, domestic violence, or addiction because of their own choices. Often, it is, but it can also be a generational issue. It's the lifestyle we grew up in, and we don't know any other way to live. Sometimes we end up in relationships that help our ruin. The Freedom Houses are about giving people who are ready to change the opportunity to

do so. Other people believed in me and encouraged me, and that is how we were able to open Freedom Houses, so that other women and, hopefully, one day men, will have that community around them to help them find and take their next right step."

Each of the three homes has a different mission. Freedom House One is a transitional home for women only. It can house up to six women in a communal living space, and they are able to stay there



for a six to eighteen-month program. While there, in addition to housing, the women get training in life skills and help with clothing, food, medical needs, employment, and counseling. In turn, they are asked to adhere to the following guidelines:

Work Schedule/Rules

- Must be turned in at the weekly case plan or on the

FREEDOM HOUSES

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HEY CULLIGAN MAN!
PFAS
Hard Water
Stinky Water?



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Bring Hope Now:

Local Nonprofit Aims to Solve Youth Mental Health Crisis

By PEGGY BROCKMAN

Imagine receiving a call from your child's school: your middle-schooler, diagnosed with ADD, lost his temper and screamed, "I wish I were dead." Because the staff knows you, they give you the option to take him to the emergency room yourself, instead of calling law enforcement.

You arrive at the ER, but there's no child psychologist. The ER doctor decides to send your child—

BRING HOPE

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Community

FREEDOM HOUSES

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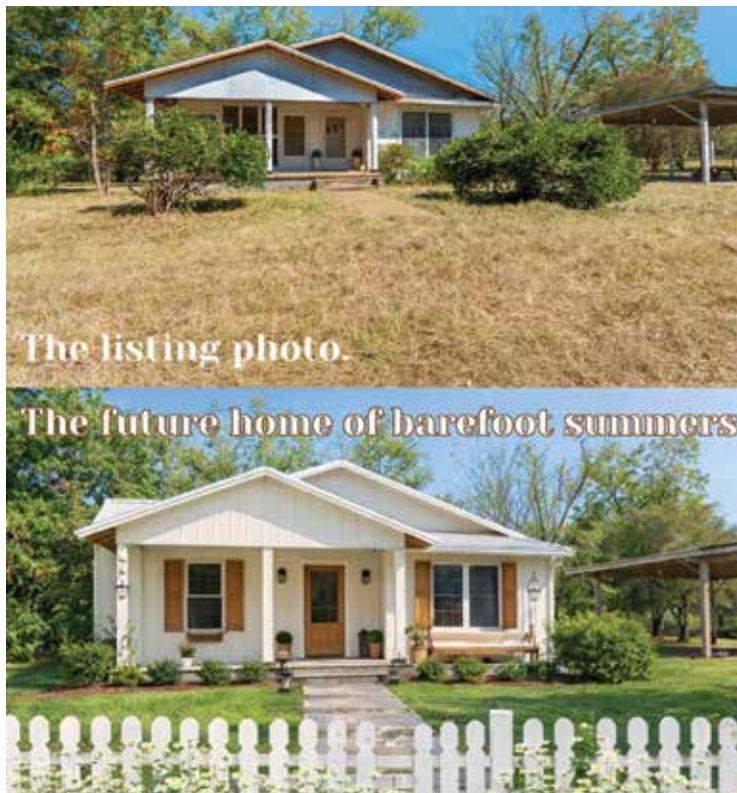
- Changes communicated to the program manager
- No working at restaurants that serve alcohol, convenience stores, clubs, or bars. No pet sitting or babysitting outside of regular working hours.

Daily Routines

- 7 a.m. Wake up, make your bed, get dressed, and have breakfast
- 8 a.m. Ready for Devotions
- Work - (If you do not have employment, start submitting at least 6-8 applications in a regular workday time frame, showing that you are actively seeking employment.)
- 2 hours a day on education/career goals
- Curfew 9 p.m. unless you're working or at other approved activity
- 10 p.m. Lights Out

House Rules

- Always speak from a place of love and encouragement. Let's lift one another up without judgment. We are all perfectly flawed!
- When taking phone calls, be mindful of others and continue your call outside of the house.
- Bring your belongings with you when taking showers, and take everything back to your room, including shampoos, conditioners, clothing, trash, etc.
- We are all grown adults, so please pick up after yourselves. This includes washing any dishes you use and putting them away.
- There will be no overnight stays unless we have the address and phone number and speak with the individual two weeks in advance. If we do not feel it's a safe place for you to take a home pass, we will deny it. This is for your safety and well-being.



Freedom House Two is a short-term shelter for women until they can find a more permanent place to live. Freedom House Three houses women and children. Finally, Freedom House Four will be opening later this year in Laurel Hill for mothers and children. Plans are being made for animal therapy and fostering dogs to use for re-

habilitation. Those who would like to see if they qualify for housing can fill out an application at www.freedomlifecompass.org. It takes \$40 a day per person, per night to house up to the 30 women and children the house can accommodate. This provides safe shelter, food, clothing, medications, and other daily

needs. If you would like to be a sponsor or participate in helping any of the Freedom Houses in Niceville, Crestview, or Fort Walton Beach by mentoring, teaching a class, leading a devotion, offering transportation support, or by donation, go to www.freedomlifecompass.org/get-involved.

You can also attend one of the following events:

- **Spring Soiree**, April 25, 5:30-7:30, Crosspoint Fellowship Hall in Niceville
 - **Blessing of the Emerald Coast**, May 16, 11-3 Niceville Mullet Festival Grounds
 - **Niceville Bazaar**, October 17, 10-4pm, Niceville Mullet Festival Grounds
- For more details, go to freedomlifecompass.org/events.

Michelle Ruschman is a local artist, speaker, and writer. She can be reached at michelleruschman@gmail.com or michelleruschman.com.

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If sunflowers grow in heaven, Lord, please pick a bunch for me. Place them in my Daughter's arms, and tell her they're from me. Tell her that I love her and miss her, and when she turns to smile, place a kiss upon her cheek, and hold her for a while. Because remembering her is easy, I do it every day, But there's an ache within my heart That will never go away

In Loving Memory of my Daughter Love, Mom and Family

Welcome Denise

Denise David has joined Life Media Group as an Advertising Executive. Since moving to Okaloosa County in 2022, she has taken an active role within the local community serving as committee chair within several local networking organizations and is known for the interest she takes in the success of those around her. Denise is a speaker, writer, business builder and friend. She has held national corporate roles in sales, business development, coaching, recruiting and marketing management. Denise has over twenty-five years of marketing experience serving

various types of businesses and personal experience as a small business owner. The unique skill set and creativity she brings will be an asset to the clients she serves.

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BRING HOPE

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seven hours away—to a facility in Orlando for evaluation. You object. Emotions rise. The doctor blames you and asks you to leave. Your child is transported anyway, placed in a holding area with wooden slab beds and other children in crisis, screaming. He’s terrified.

Three days later, a tele-psychiatrist finds your child isn’t a threat and should be released. But when you return from a brief trip home, you discover your child was already transferred to an inpatient facility in Pensacola—without your consent. He must now remain for another three days, all while you watch helplessly.

This is the true story a mother shared with me after a recent Bring Hope Now presentation. Though a few years have passed and improvements have been made—such as the addition of Mobile Response Teams that now evaluate students on campus—children in crisis in our area still face long waits in local ERs and may be transported hours away due to a lack of local facilities.

This is exactly why we founded Bring Hope Now.

A Growing Crisis

In 2019, two community leaders—David Triana, founder of United for a Good Cause, and myself, Peggy Brockman—joined forces to address a terrifying trend: Northwest Florida, particularly Okaloosa County, had one of the fastest-growing youth suicide rates in the state.

We set out to bring hope through a national peer-to-peer suicide prevention program in local schools. Eglin Federal Credit Union kickstarted our mission with a \$50,000 donation. With support from Superintendent Marcus Chambers and the Okaloosa County School Board, the program launched in 2020. By the end of 2022, every school in the district had the program in place. It became a model of success.

In 2024, Bring Hope Now officially separated from United for a Good Cause to pursue broader goals. We expanded into the military community with “Hope on the Line,” a peer-led suicide prevention initiative for active-duty personnel. But, another pressing need was calling us: a lack of lo-



cal youth mental health facilities.

**By the Numbers:
Why Local Help Matters**

The data is staggering. In the 2022–2023 school year, 376 children under 18 in Okaloosa and Walton Counties were involuntarily Baker Acted. Of those, 76% were first-time cases, and 92 were repeat cases.

Statewide, 87% of youth Baker Acts are due to suicidality: 46% had suicidal thoughts, 28% had a plan, and 10% had made an attempt.

Children are typically taken to a local ER, where they wait for an inpatient bed to open in Pensacola or Panama City. Some wait days. If extended treatment is needed, they’re sent even farther—to Jacksonville or Orlando—hours from family and support systems. Many families can’t even afford to retrieve their children afterward.

**What if that Child
Were Yours?**

According to Florida Health Charts, 168 people in Okaloosa

and Walton Counties went to an emergency room for self-harm injuries in 2023. Shockingly, 121 of them—72%—were children ages 5 to 19. Yes, even as young as five.

**From the 2023 Florida
Youth Survey:**

- 22% of students said they almost always felt symptoms of stress, anxiety, or depression.
- 46% said these emotions stopped them from doing daily activities.

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Community

Top 5 Supplements to Spring into Health



By DR. KAREN DEVORE,
TORTOISE CLINIC

Here along the Gulf Coast, the arrival of spring means longer days and a return to the outdoor living that defines our beach communities. For many, it feels like a natural inflection point of renewed momentum and a reminder to re-prioritize

energy, strength, and overall well-being. It's often during this season that people begin reaching for supplements and vitamins in hopes of supporting this shift.

At the Tortoise Clinic, I remind people that supplements are never a substitute for the fundamentals including bal-



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anced, protein-forward meals made from real food, restorative sleep, building and maintaining muscle mass, hydration, and thoughtful stress management. Supplementation and targeted nutrient support are tools within a larger health strategy, most effective when guided by informed science and thoughtful clinical oversight.

Not every supplement is appropriate for every person. When selected strategically, with attention to quality, bioavailability, and individual physiology, they can support the systems that drive sustainable energy and resilience.

Here are five I commonly evaluate this time of year, and how I think about applying them.

Vitamin D - A Hormone with Broad Impact

Despite its name, Vitamin D functions as a hormone in the body. It plays a role in immune balance, bone strength, muscle function, and mood regulation. Vitamin D receptors are found throughout the body, which helps explain its wide-reaching influence.

Deficiency remains common, even living in Florida. Indoor work, sunscreen use, skin tone variability, and seasonal shifts all contribute. When levels are sub-optimal, people may notice fatigue, slower recovery, decreased muscle strength, or a subtle dip in mood.

When I look closer: recurrent illness, low energy that doesn't improve with rest, mood changes, bone or muscle con-

cerns, and limited sun exposure

Practical Tip: Vitamin D absorbs best when taken with food that contains healthy fats. Testing provides clarity — optimal levels are individualized, not guessed.

Magnesium - Calm Energy & Recovery

Magnesium supports muscle relaxation, sleep quality, blood sugar balance, and healthy stress response. It participates in hundreds of biochemical processes and is one of the most common nutrients I see run low.

Despite the beauty of coastal living, daily demands such as work, activity, travel, and stress still accumulate, and magnesium depletion is common.

Two forms I often consider:

Magnesium Glycinate: Supports relaxation and restorative sleep.

Magnesium Threonate: May support focus, cognitive clarity, and emotional steadiness.

When I look closer: muscle tension, poor sleep, stress reactivity, headaches, and difficulty focusing

Practical Tip: Magnesium glycinate is often best tolerated in the evening. Magnesium threonate can be used in the morning when focus support is desired. Some individuals divide doses based on response. Because magnesium influences muscle relaxation, higher amounts may also influence digestive rhythm. Gradual ad-

Continued on page 27

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 Community

Celebrate America 250! American Revolution Children's Corner

By BARBARA PALMGREN

The planning committee for America 250! American Revolution met February 13 to be the first to view the special exhibit staged in the new room addition at the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida. Plans for special events throughout the year will continue and be shared on social media as well as local papers and other media.

Dr. Marie Hallion, Ph.D., curated the panels for the exhibit. Helping Marie was Karl Eschmann, Dooney Tickner and Parker Destin. The staging of the exhibit itself was the responsibility of Dr. Barbara Palmgren with guidance by Dr. Hallion and help from trustee Dr. Kristina Duffy and Arthur Edgar, Museum Manager.

At the meeting, trustee Ken Walsh, Marketing Chair, received ideas from trustee Mike Weaver, radio personality Dan Diamond, and Bay Life publisher Scott Miller. Events throughout the year will be headed by trustee Jene McCracken and Sallie Colwick with a large committee of volunteers.

Not to be forgotten is the important Children's Corner exhibit organized by Connie Wolfe who was joined by members Brittni Darbonnier and Mary Blackwell. Imagine children visiting and trying on colonial hats, jackets and dresses from this period in our history. No hats with plumes or decorations for the ladies, oh no, the hat of the period was a mop cap with a slight ruffled edge



to ensure hair was contained beneath.

The exhibit can be visited as part of the museum entrance fee with no other fee required. The Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida is open Tuesday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and closed Sundays and Mondays. Please visit a history lesson like no other right her in the Florida Panhandle.

BRING HOPE

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- 19% had seriously considered self-harm.
- Encouragingly, 31% sought help.

But we need more resources. And we need them here.

The Mission Ahead

With strong leadership from Board Chair Kathy Houchins and a growing board of community advocates, Bring Hope Now's next mission is clear: establish a youth mental health treatment facility for Okaloosa and Walton Counties.

We're currently seeking a facility or land to build a welcoming, home-like inpatient center. Until that becomes a reality, we continue to train community members through QPR Gatekeeper Training—equipping everyday citizens with the tools to recognize suicide warning signs and how to respond.

We also aim to launch a local loss survivor program to support families who've lost loved ones to suicide.

A Community That Cares

We believe in this mission because we've lived it. I've person-

ally experienced the pain of a suicide attempt and subsequent residential treatment with a grandson. I know what families are facing.

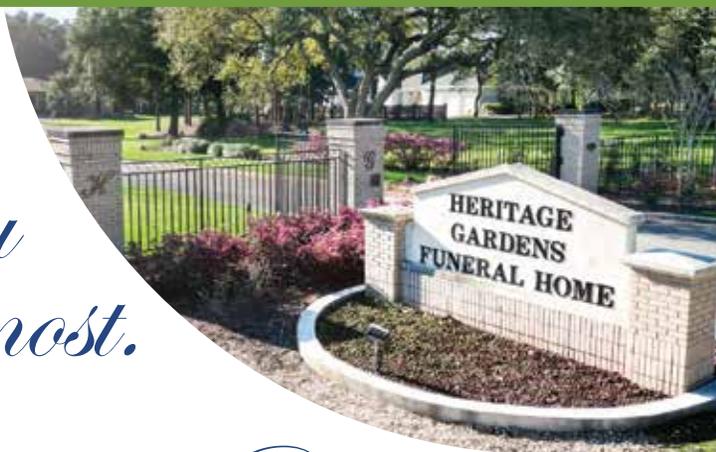
Bring Hope Now is not just one organization—it's a movement of people, volunteers, educators, parents, and advocates committed to changing the story for our youth.

We're looking for sponsors, volunteers, and in-kind support. Do you know a family who's lost a loved one to suicide? To get involved or learn more, visit www.BringHopeNow.com.

Mark your Calendar Now. The 2026 Annual Bring Hope Dragon Boat Race & Festival Will Be April 25th. It's not only a fundraiser—it's a celebration of resilience and community. We're looking for sponsors, racing teams, raffle and auction items, volunteers, and in-kind support. Do you know a family who's lost a loved one to suicide? We'd be honored to include a sign in their memory at the event. To get involved or learn more, visit www.BringHopeNow.com.

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Events Around the Bay

ECTC Hosts "La Vie en Rouge" French-Themed Fundraiser

March 6 | Emerald Coast Theatre Company, Grand Boulevard

Emerald Coast Theatre Company invites the community to an evening of Parisian-inspired elegance at La Vie en Rouge, a French-themed fundraiser on Thursday, March 6, at 6 p.m. at ECTC (560 Grand Blvd., Suite 200, Miramar Beach). The immersive event features bottomless craft cocktails, curated French-inspired cuisine and live performances by ECTC artists, all supporting the organization's youth education programs, artistic initiatives and community outreach. Presented by Blue Water Oral Surgery Center, the evening includes offerings from Ovide, Vin'tij Food & Wine, P.F. Chang's, Fleming's, Kilwin's, Cantina Laredo, Grimaldi's Pizzeria, Beignets & Brew and more. Tickets are \$250. Call (850) 684-0323 or visit emeraldcoasttheatre.org for details.

Ward Cove/Rocky Bayou Clean-Up Day Returns to Bluewater Bay

March 7 | Bluewater Bay Marina & LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant

Help preserve the beauty of Rocky Bayou during the 15th Annual Ward Cove/Rocky Bayou Clean-Up Day on Saturday, March 7, beginning at 9:30 a.m. at Bluewater Bay Marina. Sponsored by Bluewater Bay Marina and LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant & Oyster

Bar, volunteers will collect trash along the shoreline and waterways in preparation for the busy boating season, with special attention given to oyster shells in the swimming area. Participants are encouraged to bring paddle boards, canoes, kayaks or jon boats, along with gloves, water shoes, buckets and grabbers. A limited number of paddle boards will be available. Meet on the beach at LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant. For details, call (850) 897-2821 or visit bluewaterbaymarina.com.

E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center Night Hike

March 7 | 5-8 p.m.

Discover the magic of Florida after dark during the E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center's Night Hike on Saturday, March 7. This family-friendly evening adventure features a guided walk along scenic trails to the Center's bat house, where guests can watch native bats emerge at dusk, plus interactive educational stations highlighting nocturnal wildlife and conservation.

Food vendors will be on site, and guests are encouraged to bring flashlights and dress for an outdoor evening. Admission is \$15 for adults and \$10 for children ages 4-12, with VIP access available for members. Enhance the experience with the Fireside Owl Experience add-on (\$5), featuring a native ambassador owl encounter, marshmallow roasting, hot cocoa and a kid-friendly craft. For more information, contact the E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center.

CALM Celebrates "Decade of Difference" Fundraiser | March 5

Home2 Suites, Fort Walton Beach

Crisis Aid for Littles and Moms (CALM) invites the community to celebrate 10 years of impact at its Decade of Difference fundraiser on Thursday, March 5, at Home2 Suites (1930 Lewis Turner Blvd., Fort Walton Beach). The evening honors a decade of serving local children and moms through vital support programs while raising funds to continue CALM's compassionate outreach. A 5 p.m. cocktail hour is scheduled for sponsors, with general admission doors opening at 6 p.m. Guests are encouraged to wear cocktail attire. Proceeds benefit CALM's ongoing mission of helping families in crisis. For information, registration or sponsorship opportunities, visit nicevillecalm.com or email calm@nicevillecalm.com.

ECCAC Gala & Golf Weekend

March 7-8

The Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center will host its 28th annual signature Gala & Golf Weekend on March 7-8, bringing the community together to support children in need. The Gala takes place Saturday, March 7, at 5:30 p.m. at the Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa and includes dinner, music, a wine pull and live auction led by DawnMarie Kotonis, "The Gavel Girl," with former ECCAC client Isabella Rose as the featured speaker. The weekend continues Sun-



day, March 8, with a noon shotgun-start Golf Tournament at Kelly Plantation Golf Club. Proceeds benefit ECCAC's mission to provide free services to child victims of abuse. Gala and golf reservations are available at eccac.org. For details, contact Kate McDougall at 530-341-0802 or kate@eccac.org.

Northwest Florida Ballet's Alice in Wonderland

March 7 at 7:30 p.m. |

March 8 at 2:30 p.m. |

Mattie Kelly Arts Center

Northwest Florida Ballet closes its 2025-2026 season with the premiere of Alice in

Wonderland, an imaginative full-length ballet choreographed by Jill Eathorne Bahr. This original adaptation of Lewis Carroll's classic features NFB company dancers alongside international guest artists, brought to life through immersive projections, elaborate costumes and a dynamic musical score by renowned French composers. Audiences will follow Alice's whimsical journey through vivid garden landscapes, surreal scenes and larger-than-life characters in a visually stunning production perfect for families and

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Community

EVENTS

continued from page 7

ballet lovers alike. Tickets are \$48 for adults and \$22 for children 12 and under. Learn more at NFBallet.org/alice-in-wonderland or call the Mattie Kelly Arts Center Box Office at (850) 729-6000.

7th Annual International Festival Celebrates Culture, Food and Music March 21 | The Landing, Fort Walton Beach

Celebrate the USA's 250th

anniversary while experiencing cultures from around the world at the 7th Annual International Festival on Saturday, March 21, from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. at The Landing (139 SE Brooks St., Fort Walton Beach). Organized by Conexión Media Group to benefit United for a Good Cause Inc., the family-friendly event features international music, food, folklore and art, bringing "The World UNITES in the Emerald Coast." The festival also welcomes singers, bands, clubs and folkloric groups, along with vendors and business sponsors.

Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber members receive a 25% discount on vendor rates. For details or participation opportunities, email conexionflorida@gmail.com, call 850-368-3505 or visit conexionflorida.com.

Run4Health 5K & Walk Supports Early Learning Programs

April 18 | The Golf Club at Bluewater Bay, Niceville

Lace up and join the fun at the Run4Health 5K Run and Walk on Saturday, April 18,



at The Golf Club at Bluewater Bay (2000 Bluewater Blvd., Niceville). The family-friendly event begins at 8 a.m. and invites participants to run or walk — community helper costumes encouraged — while supporting early learning initiatives across Okaloosa County. Registration is \$25 (price increases after March 13) and includes chip timing and scoring, event T-shirts while supplies last, age-group awards, a Kids' Fun Zone and breakfast specials from The Blue Tee Restaurant. Presented by the Okaloosa County Health Improvement Partnership in support of the Early Learning Coalition of the Emerald Coast, proceeds benefit early learning programs and the SAFE Start Grant, helping childcare providers enhance safety and security. Register at runsignup.com/Race/FL/Niceville/2025Run4Health.

Presale tickets are encouraged before prices increase. Whether you come for the music, the mission or the marine life, TurtleFest offers a meaningful way to support local conservation while enjoying a fun coastal celebration. Purchase tickets and learn more at gulfarium.com/cotc/.

Veterans & First Responders Appreciation Lunch

April 21 | Niceville Community Center

A Superior Mechanical will host its inaugural Veterans and First Responders Appreciation Lunch on Tuesday, April 21, from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Niceville Community Center (204 Partin Drive N., Niceville). The community-focused event honors local veterans, active military and first responders with a catered hot lunch from Swiftly Catered, special presentations and an AC system giveaway to one deserving service member or first responder in need. Eligible participants include members of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard, EMT/Medics, Police, Sheriffs and Firefighters. Register for the HVAC giveaway at ASuperiorMechanical.com under ABOUT US > HVAC GIVEAWAY. Supported by the City of Niceville, Niceville Community Center, Niceville High School, Rocky Bayou Christian School and several local sponsors, the event also welcomes business partners to contribute door prizes. For sponsorship details, call Marta Thorpe at (850) 814-3822.

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Don't Miss This Year's TurtleFest!

April 18 | Gulfarium

Celebrate conservation and coastal fun at the 3rd annual CARE on the Coast TurtleFest, an all-inclusive evening benefiting sea turtle rescue, rehabilitation and conservation efforts. Guests will enjoy live entertainment, unforgettable animal encounters, raffles, and delicious all-you-care-to-enjoy food and drinks from participating vendors.

Hosted by the Gulfarium CARE Center, this family-friendly event honors the more than 1,000 sea turtles the organization has helped heal and release back into the Gulf.

Happenings Around the Bay

2026 EVENTS

MARCH

01

Crescendo! Main Event
3 pm | Sandestin Resort | Miramar Beach



Women's Climbing Circle
5 pm | Rock Out Climbing Gym | Destin

02

Justice on the Block: Free Legal Help
12:30 pm | Niceville Library | Niceville
"Only Murders in the Library" A Podcast Club
5 pm | Niceville Library | Niceville

03

Niceville Young Professionals Meeting
11:30 am | Niceville Val'p Chamber | Niceville

05

Helen's Puzzle Swap
10 am | Niceville Library | Niceville
A Decade of Difference benefiting CALM
5 pm | Home2 Suites by Hilton FWB | FWB
Bands on the Boulevard: Spring Music Series
6 pm | Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach

06

Greater FWB Chamber First Friday Coffee
7 am | Christian Life Center at FBC | FWB
ECTC's La Vie En Rouge
6 pm | 560 Grand Blvd. | Miramar Beach

07

Florida Concealed Carry Weapons Class
10 am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso
Book Carnival with Leer Para Crecer
10 am | Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach
Ward Cove/Rocky Bayou Cleanup Day
9:30 am | Bluewater Bay Marina | Niceville
ECCAC Gala
5:30 pm | Hilton Sandestin Beach | Miramar Beach

10

Craft & Chat
11 am | Niceville Library | Niceville
Chess Night
6 pm | LJ Schooners Restaurant | Niceville
Dirty Dancing in Concert
7 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville

11

Niceville Valparaiso Chamber Second Wednesday Breakfast
7:15 am | Niceville Community Center | Niceville

12

Greater FWB Chamber Nothing But Networking
11:30 am | Home2 Suites by Hilton FWB | FWB
Bands on the Boulevard: Spring Music Series
6 pm | Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach
Gladius in Concert
6 pm | Niceville Community Center | Niceville

14

SoulThreads Pop Up
11 am | Artful Things Niceville | Niceville
4-H Camp Timpoochee's 100th Birthday Friend's & Alumni Celebration
1 pm | 4-H Camp Timpoochee | Niceville

15

8th Annual Mac & Cheese Festival
12 pm | Destin Commons | Destin



16

FiberArts Circle
5 pm | Valparaiso Library | Valparaiso

17

The Traveling Painter
5:30 pm | LJ Schooners Restaurant | Niceville

18

Zen Illustration with Loren Boyer
1 pm | Artful Things Niceville | Niceville

19

Passport to Health - Senior Center Health Fair
10:30 am | Niceville Senior Center | Niceville
Greater FWB Chamber Business After Hours
5:30 pm | Fort Walton Rehabilitation Center | FWB

Bands on the Boulevard: Spring Music Series
6 pm | Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach

21

Florida Concealed Carry Weapons Class
10 am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso

7th Annual International Festival
11 am-7 pm | The Landing | FWB

The Stained Glass Lady Pop Up
11 am | Artful Things Niceville | Niceville

24

Shred-A-Thon
10 am | Niceville Recreation Complex | Niceville

24 CONT.

Craft & Chat
11 am | Niceville Library | Niceville
Writers Group
5:30 pm | Niceville Library | Niceville

26

Helen's Puzzle Swap
10 am | Niceville Library | Niceville

Bands on the Boulevard: Spring Music Series
6 pm | Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach

28

The ARC of the Emerald Coast Poker Run
9 am | American Legion Post 221 | Niceville
Oil Painting with Holly
10 am | Artful Things Niceville | Niceville

ONGOING EVENTS

- 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 (Adv) with Sheila Mahony**
10:30 am | Fri | Artful Things | Niceville
- One Stroke Painting (Bgnr) 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

FARMERS MARKETS

- Niceville Community**
Saturdays | 9 am - 1 pm
Twin Cities Pavilion | Niceville
- Hammock Bay**
1st & 3rd Sundays | 8 am
Victory Blvd | Freeport
- Grand Boulevard**
Saturdays | 9 am - 1 pm
Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach



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Bay Buzz

EFCU Earns National DOSE Award for Veteran Saves

Eglin Federal Credit Union was one of just five credit unions nationwide to receive the Designation of Savings Excellence (DOSE) Award for its leadership and outreach during Veteran Saves Week 2025, held Nov. 4-7. The industry-recognized honor celebrates financial institutions that promote effective saving strategies and finan-



cial readiness within the veteran community. Launched by America Saves in 2023, Veteran Saves Week encourages veterans and transitioning service members to build financial stability through practical, achievable saving habits and real-life financial check-ins. “We are proud to serve a thriving military and veteran community with services, support and solutions that simplify their financial lives,” said Cathie Staton, Eglin FCU president and CEO. “Our Field of Membership includes active and retired military personnel assigned to or receiving services from Eglin Air Force Base, Hurlburt Field, Duke Field, Camp Rudder or the 7th Special Forces Group. Veterans residing in Okaloosa, Santa Rosa and Walton counties are also eligible for membership. Partnering with Veteran Saves Week was a natural fit, as we share a commitment to helping veterans, transitioning service members and their families build financial readiness for life after service.”

Through the efforts of Eglin Federal Credit Union and more than 900 participating organizations nationwide, Veteran Saves Week 2025 generated nearly \$1.9 million in deposits into new and existing savings accounts and \$370,000 in pledged deposits toward personal savings goals. Outreach included educational resources, community engagement and social media campaigns encouraging veterans to take the Veteran Saves Pledge. “At its core, Veteran Saves Week encourages a financial check-in so Veterans and transitioning service members can better understand their day-to-day finances,” said Krystel Spell, program manager of Veteran Saves. “This year, we were especially mindful of the moment we were in. Many households are making tough decisions, adjusting priorities and responding to unexpected financial changes. The organizations recognized this year helped make saving feel realistic for Veterans and service members, even during uncertain times.”

ment has installed a free Narcan (naloxone) distribution box at Niceville Fire Station, located at 216 Partin Drive North. The Narcan box, located directly in front of the building, is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, providing community members with no-cost access to naloxone, a life-saving medication proven to reverse opioid overdoses when administered correctly. This initiative aims to increase access to naloxone as a critical bystander intervention tool and to reduce preventable overdose deaths within the community. “Our mission is to protect life, and this is one more way we can do that,” said Niceville Fire Chief Alex Kukulus. “By placing Narcan directly into the hands of the community, we are increasing the chances that an overdose can be reversed before it becomes fatal. Every second matters, so we want this medication to be widely available.”

The Narcan distribution box contains easy-to-use nasal spray doses, step-by-step instructions for administration, and information on local treatment and recovery resources.

The Niceville Fire Department encourages anyone who may encounter an overdose situation to take advantage of this life-saving resource. This program is made possible through a partnership with Okaloosa County EMS.

Niceville Breaks Ground on Old Town Landing Dock and Pier Project

The City of Niceville recently marked a major milestone in the revitalization of the Niceville Landing area with a groundbreaking ceremony for the new dock and pier at Old Town Landing. Held Feb. 13, the event celebrated the official start of construction on the long-anticipated project. Funded through the Niceville Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) along with Okaloosa County Tourist Development Funds, the dock and pier represent a key piece of the CRA’s broader Niceville Landing Rehabilitation Project. Plans for the area include a new splash pad, commercial upland development and additional community-focused amenities

Niceville Fire Installs Free 24/7 Narcan Distribution Box

The Niceville Fire Depart-

Continued on page 12







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How Medicare Changes Are Impacting Post-Acute Providers and Senior Care

BY TERESA HALVERSON,
BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT/
COMMUNITY RELATIONS

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services is removing 285 procedures labeled inpatient-only, or IPO, many of them for acute care surgeries that have historically driven patients to nursing and rehabilitation facilities for follow-up care. Importantly, the agency's Hospital Outpatient Prospective Payment rule made no blanket provision for skilled nursing coverage for patients opting for outpatient alternatives that doesn't include a requisite three-day stay. (-McK-nights)

Post-Acute care (PAC) is a critical bridge between a hospital stay and a full return to home life. While Medicare continues to evolve its payment rules, quality programs and coverage policies are reshaping the landscape for post-acute providers, including skilled nursing and rehabilitation facilities (SNFs) and other settings that serve seniors after a hospital stay.

The year 2026 brings shifts in In-Patient and Out-Patient Policies Affecting Post-Acute Referrals. Medicare's efforts to shift more procedures from in-patient hospitals to outpatient and ambulatory surgical settings are affecting seniors and post-acute care models. The key issue is outpatient status limits Medicare coverage for rehab. As more surgeries move to "Out-Patient" settings, seniors seeking post-acute care will no longer qualify for the 3-night stay to admit to a skilled nursing and rehabilitation facility under Medicare Guidelines. (-Long Term Care News)

This policy can be tough on:

- Seniors who live alone
- Patients with mobility or cognitive issues
- People recovering from joint, spine, or complex procedures

Why does this matter? Medicare will not pay for SNF rehab unless the patient has:

- Three consecutive in-patient mid-nights in a hospital
- Observation or outpatient days do not count

If surgery is outpatient-only, the patient cannot qualify for

Medicare-covered SNF rehab—even if:

- They cannot walk safely
- They live alone
- Their physician recommends rehab

What is Covered After Outpatient Surgery

Medicare may cover:

- Home health care (nursing, PT, OT) if homebound and medically necessary (Home health is intermittent, not 24/7. Outpatient therapy (PT/OT at a clinic)
- Durable medical equipment (walker, Commode, etc.)
- Follow-up visits

What Seniors and Families Should Do Before Surgery

Ask directly:

- "Is this surgery classified as inpatient or outpatient under Medicare?"

Plan the discharge:

- Who will help at home?
- Are home health services arranged?

Ask about alternatives:

- Is inpatient admission ever possible?
- Can surgery timing or complexity change status?

Appeal if appropriate:

- Rare, but sometimes misclassification happens

Clarify Hospital Status (this is critical)

- "Can you confirm whether they were admitted as inpatient or under observation, and on which dates?"

Follow up if needed:

- "Was inpatient admission medically appropriate at any point?"
- "Can we request a status review before discharge?"

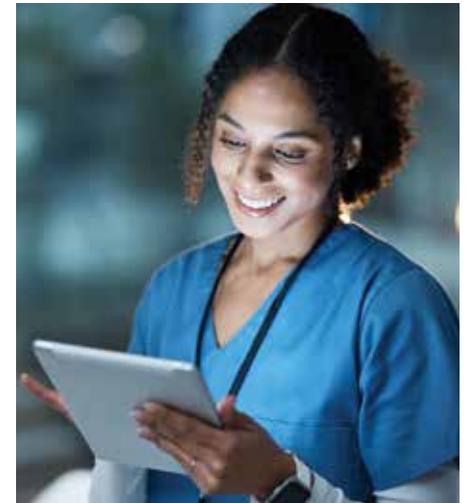
Tie Safety Risks to Specific Limitation

Avoid general statements. Use concrete examples:

- "They cannot transfer safely without hands-on assistance."
- "They are a high fall risk and cannot manage stairs / bathroom independently."
- "They require assistance with toileting, bathing, or medication management."
- "There is no reliable caregiver available 24/7."

If true, say it plainly:

- "Discharging them home today would place them at risk of injury or rehospitalization."
- Push for rehab screening (even if Medicare won't pay)
- "We want them formally evaluated for all rehab options,



including SNF and inpatient rehab."

Specifically ask:

- "Has an inpatient rehab facility (IRF) referral been considered?"
- "Can PT/OT document

Continued on page 15



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 Community

BAY BUZZ

continued from page 10

designed to enhance the waterfront experience for residents and visitors. Learn more about the redevelopment plan at cityofniceville.org/481/Community-Redevelopment-Agency-CRA.

Okaloosa Schools Earn National AP Honor Roll Recognition

The Okaloosa County School District announced that Choctawhatchee High School, Fort Walton Beach High School and Niceville High School have been named to the 2025 College Board AP School Honor Roll, a national distinction recognizing schools that expand access to Advanced Placement coursework while supporting strong student outcomes.

- Choctawhatchee High School earned Gold recognition.
- Fort Walton Beach High School earned Silver recognition.
- Niceville High School earned Silver recognition.

The AP School Honor Roll recognizes high schools that

meet rigorous benchmarks in college readiness and student achievement, based on data from their most recent graduating class. Schools are evaluated on broad access to AP coursework, student success on AP exams, and sustained participation in advanced academics.

“Recognition on the AP School Honor Roll is a testament to the dedication of our students, teachers, and school leaders,” said Superintendent Marcus Chambers. “Choctawhatchee High School’s Gold distinction and the Silver recognition earned by Fort Walton Beach and Niceville High Schools reflect our district’s continued commitment to academic excellence and preparing students for future success.”

Choctawhatchee Audubon March 5 Evening Presentation: Endangered Beach Mice in the Southeastern United States

Jordan Wingate, Natural Resources Coordinator for Destin-Fort Walton Beach, will present a free public program on endangered beach mice in the southeastern United States

on March 5. The event will be held in Room 800 on the second floor of the Chandler Center (northwest door, 519 Helms St.) at Crosspoint Church in Niceville. Social time begins at 6:30 p.m., followed by the presentation at 7 p.m. Admission is free and open to the public.

Snowbirds Honored by Fort Walton Snowbird Club

BY BARBARA PALMGREN

“There’s no place like home,” Dorothy once said, as the red slippers carried her back to Kansas from the land of Oz. While more true words could not be spoken, home for residents of the northern states and Canada is Okaloosa County each winter. Area snowbird groups welcome them back and yes, bid a fond farewell, as our friends return back up north to welcome spring.

This was the scenario one morning in Fort Walton Beach in mid-February at the First Baptist Church in Fort Walton where organizations and vendors shared information before a general meeting and entertainment. Tom Rice and Magnolia Grill provided the

necessary coffee and snacks as did other groups like Saltwater Restaurants with a tuna salad sample for each person.

The Emerald Coast Community Band performed songs from musicals such as *Mama Mia*. Conductor Nathan Frymire led this talented volunteer group of musicians as snowbirds listened and applauded their approval. Ken Walsh and Barb Palmgren, trustees of the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida, also performed a short skit about life in the 1920’s in Valparaiso. Ken was James Plew, a major developer of the area, and Barb was Lula Edge, postmistress and school board member. The audience laughed while this comedy team argued about where to put pickleball courts in Valparaiso.

All this doesn’t magically happen. The officers and staff of the Fort Walton Snowbird Club coordinated this and other meetings and events to keep visitors happy and busy. With volunteers like this in our com-



munity, we should all be proud! Farewell, snowbird friends, until next year when silver sands, specialty restaurants, pickleball courts, golf games, and shopping await you once again. And yes, for a few months you will be saying, “There’s no place like Fort Walton.”







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The Probate Reality Many Florida Families Don't Expect

BY KIMBERLY COLE

When a loved one passes away, families often expect a clear set of next steps. Instead, many Florida families are met with unanswered questions, emotional strain, and a legal process that rarely unfolds as simply as anticipated. The Florida probate process is not just a legal procedure. It is an adjustment period, and understanding that reality can make the early days far less overwhelming.

Families navigating a death often say they wish they had known how quickly certain decisions would be expected of them—and how slowly estate administration itself actually moves. Many are surprised to learn that bank accounts may be frozen shortly after a death,

access to funds can be limited, and even relatively straightforward estates rarely resolve as quickly as assumed. Others are caught off guard by the fact that having a will does not avoid probate in Florida, or that informal promises made by a loved one, however sincere, do not override statutory requirements.

Grief plays a significant role in early probate decision-making. In the days and weeks following a loss, families may be asked to choose a personal representative (often called an executor), decide whether to sell property, address creditor claims, and manage family expectations—all while emotionally exhausted. In probate court, rushing these decisions can create long-term consequences. Choices made under emotional strain may lead to family conflict, unnecessary expense, or actions that are difficult to undo once the court-supervised process is underway.

Many of the most stressful

moments arise from what families believe probate should look like. It is often expected to be quick, private, and largely administrative. In reality, Florida probate is a court-supervised process with formal notices, required filings, creditor deadlines, and judicial oversight. These requirements apply regardless of estate size. While this structure can feel frustrating, it exists to protect beneficiaries, creditors, and the integrity of the estate itself.

There is also frequently a gap between expectations and reality after a death. Families may anticipate immediate access to property, clear financial answers, and unity among loved ones. Instead, they encounter waiting periods, unanswered questions, and differing interpretations of what the deceased “would have wanted.” Even in close families, grief and stress can magnify misunderstandings—particularly when legal timelines do not align with emotional readiness.



Many families expect clarity to arrive quickly after a death, only to discover that probate moves according to court deadlines rather than emotional timelines. Certain filings must be made within specific timeframes, even when families do not feel ready. At the same time, the overall probate process may take months or longer, leaving families feeling stuck in limbo. Recognizing this mismatch early can help reduce frustration and set more realistic expectations.

This article is the first in a year-long series exploring the realities families face after a death—from the earliest decisions to the issues that commonly arise later in probate and trust

matters. Each installment will build on these themes, offering practical insight into how probate works in Florida, why misunderstandings are common, and how families can navigate the process with greater clarity and confidence.

With proper guidance, probate can be managed in a way that reduces stress, protects family relationships, and honors the wishes of the person who passed away. An experienced probate attorney's role is not simply to manage filings and deadlines, but to help families understand what lies ahead, make informed decisions at the right time, and move through this transition with steadiness and care.

Kimberly Cole is an attorney with The Cole Law Firm in Niceville, focusing on estate planning and Florida probate matters. Call her at (850) 610-0185. Visit colelawfl.com on the web.

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The Pursuit of Happiness for a Greater Good

BY CAROLYN NEWCOMER
KETCHEL

This year we celebrate the 250th year of the birth of the United States. The Revolutionary War was fought for a number of reasons. Most of those who lived in the colonies wanted to be treated fairly as British citizens but felt unfairly taxed by the crown. Those who gathered in Philadelphia to write the document we now call the Declaration of Independence began to examine what were considered the fundamental rights of man. Those rights were eventually defined as rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

These phrases which roll off our tongues as we read or recite the preamble to the Declaration of Independence, were highly debated by the men who sought to take these ancient ideas, debated by Aristotle, Cicero and Locke, and synthesize them into a document for a new nation and government. Most of the colonists had lived in a world that was governed by feudal lords and kings. This idea by our founders to pursue happiness was not so much about the happiness of the individual, but to have governance for the good of the whole.

This is a good time in the history of America to discuss the pursuit of happiness, not just for individual reasons, but for the whole of our great nation. When an individual cares more for his duty to his country, public good, than for his own selfish needs, both individual and country win.

Sometimes we lose sight of this principle and focus on our own desires. Each generation must learn the meaning of sacrifice and service for the greater good.

In our community, so many have done so much for this nation. We are a military community, and this makes us different. We understand that freedom is not taken for granted. We walk among heroes that have made a difference to our nation. We celebrate you, and those who have lived before you, that have given us the freedom to call America home.

There are many activities in our community to celebrate our nation as we approach the 250th anniversary, some included in the following.

The Okaloosa County Board of County Commissioners passed a resolution on January 20, 2026, creating the Okaloosa County America250! Commission. This group is charged with developing, coordinating and publishing a series of America250! gatherings in conjunction with other governmental, private and non-profit groups to recognize, remember, and celebrate the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States of America. The 18-member Commission consists of representatives from the following groups:

- Emerald Coast Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution
- Choctawhatchee Bay Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution



- West Florida Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution
- State of Florida America250! Commission
- Okaloosa County Tourist Development Department
- Okaloosa County School Superintendent's Office
- Florida State Historical Commission
- Fort Walton Beach Krewe of Billy Bowlegs
- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
- Gulf Coast Council of Scouting America
- A mayor of a local municipality to be chosen by the Okaloosa County League of Cities
- A Chamber of Commerce representative to be selected by the leadership of the Crestview, Fort Walton Beach, Niceville/Valparaiso, and Destin Chambers of Commerce
- An appointee of the United States military community
- One individual appointment

by each of the 5 County Commissioners

Many events have already been scheduled and are well under way in organization:

- On Feb. 20, The All Sports Association will kick off a new Military Award in honor of Patriots and acknowledge America250!

• On Feb. 28, the Fort Walton Beach Chamber will host A HEROES DINNER, honoring our military. For tickets call the chamber at 850-244-8192.

• United for a Good Cause will host an America250! International Festival during the week of March 23.

• June 12 will bring a Patriotic Drone Show at the Rigdon Fairgrounds from 6-10 p.m. with a community tailgate at Freedom Tech Center/Fairgrounds for the show.

• Also on June 12, a Gala will be held (hosted by the Choctawhatchee Bay DAR) in the evening following the drone show. This event is open to anyone with purchased tickets.

• July 4th America250! Fireworks will be held by our local municipalities.

• In October, the Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce plans to organize a "Remember 9/11" event with a Patriots focus.

• On Nov. 11 at 9 a.m., a cel-

ebration of Veterans Day at the Convention Center on Okaloosa Island, an 11 a.m. ceremony at Beal Cemetery, and a 1 p.m. Veteran's Day Parade in Mary Esther.

Several other area events are in the planning stages:

- The Okaloosa County School District is organizing a Memorial Day flag ceremony at each school in honor of America250!

- A "WE THE PEOPLE" patch to be affixed to all county school sports uniforms is currently in design.

- Local Scout Troops are in discussion about organizing an outdoor America250! hike at Spanish Trail.

- Constitution Week falls annually in September. This year we hope to organize a bell ringing, reminiscent of the ringing of the Liberty Bell, with our local houses of worship.

- NWFSC hosts a rodeo event in November, and planners are considering making this an America250! event.

- The year will close with a celebration of the many Christmas songs from 1776.

Please mark the above events on your calendar. WE THE PEOPLE need to celebrate our citizenship in this great nation.

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

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Okaloosa County America 250 Commission Begins Planning Efforts for America 250 Celebration

BY NICK TOMECEK,
OKALOOSA COUNTY PIO

The Okaloosa County America 250 Commission held its first meeting on Thursday, February 5, 2026, in Shalimar to discuss and plan various 250 anniversary events to celebrate the birth of the United States and encourage every American in Okaloosa County to engage in this historic moment in our nation's history.

Commissioners attending the first meeting included the Sons of the American Revolution, Daughters of the American Revolution, Florida State America 250 Commission, the Florida Historical Commission, Okaloosa County School District, Chambers of Commerce, Okaloosa League of Cities, local US Military Bases, Scouting America NW Florida, Billy Bowlegs Association, first responders, and five (5) at-large appointees of the Okaloosa County Commission. Community volunteers interested in serving as support staff for the Commission were also in attendance.

"We have a rich history that deserves to be recognized both nationally and in Okaloosa County," said Okaloosa America 250 Commission Chairman Graham Fountain. "We can all come together, pause and reflect on the contributions made by our patriot ancestors who fought and died to create our great republic and those many heroes that continue to make the

United States of America a true example of freedom throughout the next 250 years."

The Commission will be identifying, scheduling, and co-sponsoring various 250 anniversary events throughout the 2026 celebration year. Events will be added and adjusted throughout the planning process.

Events include:

February 20 - All Sports Association will kick off a new Military Award in honor of Patriots and acknowledge America250!

February 28 - The Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce will host A HEROES DINNER, honoring our military. For tickets call the chamber at 850-244-8192.

March 21 - United for a Good Cause will host an America250! International Festival

May 9 - Patriots Day will be held in downtown Crestview with a Grand Parade and America 250 celebration at the courthouse.

June 12 - Patriotic Drone Show at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Rigdon Center from 6-10 pm with a community tailgate at Freedom Tech Center/Fairgrounds for the show.

June 12 - A Gala will be held (hosted by the Choctawhatchee Bay DAR) in the evening at Destin-Fort Walton Beach Rigdon Center following the drone show. This event is open to any-



one with purchased tickets.

July 4th America250! - Fireworks will be held by our local municipalities

In October, the Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce plans to organize a "Remember 9/11" event with a Patriots focus.

November 11 - Veterans Day program at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center on Okaloosa Island at 9 a.m., an 11:00 a.m. ceremony at

Beal Memorial Cemetery, and a 1:00 p.m. Veterans Day Parade in Mary Esther.

To get us in the "spirit of 1776", the Commission encourages attendees/participants at events to dress in colonial/continental attire/period clothing; civilian wear, colonial military uniforms, dresses, tricorn hats and ladies' bonnets. "Part of the fun in paying tribute to the colonial/continental period of our

history is learning more about our founders and ancestors and dressing in period attire at America 250 events," said Vice Chairman Mitzi Henley.

How to promote your event:

Organizations wishing to have their event posted and advertised publicly should follow the instructions for submissions on the official Okaloosa America 250 website at getthecoast.com/America250.

The Commission encourages organizations to add @OkaloosaCountyAmerica250 as a co-host on Facebook to help promote the event.

Submit photos, flyers, logos and other assets for your event at <https://bit.ly/Okaloosa250Assets>

For questions, please email the Commission's Chairman, the Hon. Graham W. Fountain at america250@myokaloosa.com or call (850) 830-0002. Find us on Facebook at @OkaloosaCountyAmerica250. For additional information concerning the upcoming May 9 Grand Parade/250 Celebration in Crestview, please contact Melissa Carter, Crestview Special Events Manager at cartere@cityofcrestview.org or 850-974-8136.

MEDICARE

continued from page 11

why skilled rehab is needed?"

- Documentation = leverage.

If Medicare Won't Cover SNF

Use this phrasing:

"We understand Medicare may not cover SNF, but we still need help identifying a safe alternative."

Then ask:

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- "How soon will therapy begin, and how often?"

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Environment

Inspiring Stewardship. Protecting Our Future. Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance 2025 Impact

BY ALLISON MCDOWELL, CBA
For three decades, the Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance (CBA) has worked at the intersection of science, education, and restoration to protect one of Northwest Florida's most vital natural resources. Guided by data and powered by sustainable partnerships, CBA continues to advance meaningful, measurable conservation across the watershed.

- 3.35 acres of salt marsh and oyster habitat restored
- 600+ tons of limestone placed at higher-energy shoreline sites to reduce erosion and support living shoreline development
- Seagrass restoration lab initiated, with pilot plantings launched to expand submerged aquatic vegetation recovery efforts



Restoration

CBA's restoration work in 2025 focused on strengthening natural systems that protect water quality and coastal resilience.

- 140 vertical oyster gardens cultivated throughout the watershed
- 200+ tons of recycled oyster shells collected and returned to local waters for habitat creation

Monitoring & Research

As a leader in environmental monitoring, CBA places science-based conservation at the forefront of protecting the Choctawhatchee Basin.

In 2025, CBA added 8 new sites for a total of 145 active water quality monitoring sites across the watershed, continuing to provide essential field expertise and data support for

environmental monitoring and research throughout the region. Working alongside university, county, state, and federal partners, CBA helped expand monitoring coverage, improve

public access to data, and strengthen the scientific foundation for both coastal and freshwater protection. These collaborative efforts ensure that restoration and management decisions are guided by sound science and a long-term understanding of our waterways.

mental experience, connecting classroom learning to tangible restoration outcomes. Through immersive, standards-based curriculum, CBA is cultivating the next generation of scientists, conservationists, and informed citizens.

Education & Outreach

Environmental stewardship begins in the classroom. In 2025, CBA reached 3,000+ students across 20 public schools and five homeschool groups, delivering monthly hands-on lessons aligned with STEM skills and Florida science standards. Programs like Grasses in Classes and oyster gardening give students real-world environ-

Sustainable Partnerships

CBA's impact is amplified through collaboration. Key partnerships in 2025 included:

- Northwest Florida Water Management District
- Oyster shell recycling restaurants
- Islanders Coastal Outfitter
- JW Couch Foundation

Together, these partners help fund, expand, and sustain restoration and education initiatives throughout the Basin.

Living Shoreline Enhances Choctawhatchee Bay

BY LORI SMITH
Okaloosa County has completed 2,000 feet of living shoreline along the Choctawhatchee Bay at Ross Marler Park on Okaloosa Island, marking a major milestone in shoreline pro-

tection and coastal restoration. The multi-year project utilized a cost-effective, nature-based solution designed to mitigate erosion while enhancing the coastal ecosystem surrounding Veterans Park and

Marler Park. "This unique landscape is home to so many species that we need to protect," said Okaloosa County Commissioner Carolyn Ketchel (District 2). "This living shoreline will supplement



their success, the health of our bay and extend the life of these

Continued on next page

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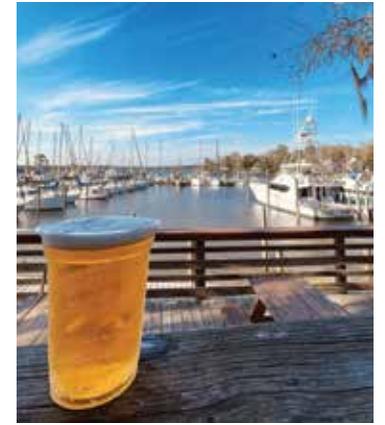
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Sundays: Brunch, 9 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Tuesdays: Taco & Margarita Night, 3-9 p.m.

Wednesdays: Kids Eat Free, 5-9 p.m.

Thursdays: Open Mic/Karaoke, 6-10 p.m.

Continued on next page



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Niceville Community Center

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\$5.00 - Pancakes, Sausage, Juice, Coffee, Milk - Children eat free

Silent Auction items & certificates from local businesses!

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- Children in Crisis
- Sharing and Caring
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- Community Youth Organizations

In collaboration with Niceville High School Key Club

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

March 14: Nautical Flea Market/Flea Market, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

March 22: 11th Annual Sock Burning, 5:30 p.m.

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

Oyster bar hours: Mon-Thurs 3-10 p.m.; Fri-Sat 11 a.m.-Midnight; Sun 10 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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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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Thursdays: Open Mic/Karaoke 6-10pm
Saturdays: Steak Night 5-9pm

Friday, March 6: Abranda 6-10pm
Saturday, March 7: The Aces 6-10pm
Friday, March 13: Purple Monkey 6-10pm
Saturday, March 14: DJ Quite Storm 6-10pm
Friday, March 20: Jared Herzog 6-10pm
Saturday, March 21: Beach Dogz & Pirate Party 6-10pm
Sunday, March 22: Ronny Dean Garrett 4-8pm
Friday, March 27: Mira Mira & the Walls 6-10pm
Saturday, March 28: Rockers 4 Life 6-10pm
Sunday, March 29: Jody Lucas 4-8pm

Oyster Bar Hours: Mon.-Thurs. 3pm-10pm, Fri.-Sat. 11am to midnight, Sun. 10am to 9pm
Restaurant Hours: Mon.-Tues. Closed, Weds.-Sat. 11am to 9pm, Sun. 9am to 9pm, Sunday Brunch 9am to 1pm

 **Outdoors**

Built to Last: Dirty N Sturdy Fencing Delivers Dependable Craftsmanship with a Local Touch

Along the Emerald Coast, where neighbors still value a handshake and quality work speaks for itself, Jon and Brittany Yonker have built Dirty N

Sturdy Fencing on something simple but powerful — trust. As a veteran- and family-owned business, their company reflects a commitment to hard work,

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tion with a clear vision for quality craftsmanship has grown into a trusted local fencing company serving homeowners and businesses throughout the community. Specializing in fencing construction, repair, cleaning and staining, Dirty N Sturdy Fencing offers complete solutions designed to protect, enhance and maintain properties. Rather than chasing rapid growth, the Yonkers have remained focused on dependability, personal service and long-term results.

Professionalism is at the core of the business model. From the first phone call and consultation to punctual arrivals and spotless job sites, the company emphasizes clear communication and reliable service. Each project is treated with the same care and attention they would give their own home, using quality products and proven methods to en-

sure lasting results and satisfied customers.

Hard work and attention to detail continue to set Dirty N Sturdy Fencing apart. Projects are never rushed, and corners are never cut — every fence is built or serviced with durability and long-term performance in mind. Beyond the job site, community engagement remains equally important to the Yonker family. As local residents raising their family here, they stay committed to supporting area events, organizations and fellow small businesses.

“At Dirty N Sturdy Fencing, we’re on the fence about a lot of things — except quality,” Jon Yonker said. “When you choose Dirty N Sturdy, you’re supporting a local, veteran-owned family business that truly cares.”

Emerald Coast Boat & Lifestyle Show March 6-8

“Growth!” That is how Scott Burt of the Emerald Coast Boat & Lifestyle Show described this year’s event, which returns to Panama City Beach March 6th-8th.

Boating, fishing, and outdoor enthusiasts, as well as those who love living the Coastal Lifestyle, will notice the show’s growth, with dealers expanding their footprints and showcasing new brands and models. The Grand Lawn portion of the show will feature 50% more boats this year than in previous years, as Ashley Marine will join longtime Grand Lawn dealers Marine-Max and Grander Marine.

Also joining the show this year is Bill Cramer Chevrolet GMC as the Official Truck of the 2026 Emerald Coast Boat and Lifestyle Show. The local dealer will be featuring Chevrolet and GMC trucks at Aaron Bessant Park for those who will need a new tow vehicle to match their new boat purchase.

Guests at the show will also notice the growth at the show’s venue, Aaron Bessant Park. The

70-acre, meticulously maintained green space has added a new 4,800-square-foot pavilion, new fencing, enhanced landscaping, and a new lighting and sound system.

“The park has never looked better,” said Burt. “The city has done a great job with all the new enhancements, and I know they will be well received by those coming to the show.”

Again this year, the top dealers in the Southeast will display more than 400 boats, which is more than 40 million dollars’ worth of bay boats, pontoons, cruisers, personal watercraft, and center consoles, from 17’ to those well over 40 feet, along with the latest marine electronics and innovations.

This on-site collection of dealers and manufacturers allows buyers to compare boats side by side while taking advantage of the best discounts and incentives available exclusively at the show.

In addition to boats, a curated lineup of Coastal Lifestyle exhibitors and vendors



will showcase the best of Gulf Coast living. Boating accessories, fishing, paddle boarding, kayaking, biking, electric carts, product demonstrations, seminars, beach furniture, coastal artists, condo and beach house furnishing, kids’ activities, live music, food trucks, craft beer, and cocktails are all part of the show.

Parking for the show is always free at the adjacent Pier Park. The show will once again honor military members and first responders on Sunday. For

the most up-to-date information on the show, including dealers, brands, exhibitors, and vendors, or to purchase tickets in advance to ‘skip the line,’ visit Emerald-CoastBoatShow.com.

Show Dates & Time:

Friday March 6 “Red Carpet Opening Day” 10 a.m. to Sunset

Saturday, March 7 “Locals Day” 10 a.m. to Sunset

Sunday, March 8 “Military Appreciation Day” 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.*

* Active and Retired service members enter free with Valid ID (Sunday Only)

Ticket Prices:

Pre-Sale Online Only (1 Day Pass - Valid until March 5th): \$15

General Admission (1 Day Pass): \$20

Platinum Admission (3 Day Pass): \$35

Kids (12 and under): Free



TICKETS



EMERALD COAST BOAT & LIFESTYLE SHOW

MARCH 6-8

AARON BESSANT PARK





Saddle Up for a Cause: **Westonwood Ranch Rodeo**

By LORI SMITH

Our area's hometown rodeo is back — and it's more than just a night of bulls, broncs and barrel racing. The 7th Annual Westonwood Ranch Pro Rodeo returns March 27–28 at the Freeport Regional Sports Complex, bringing high-energy entertainment to the community while raising vital support for one of Walton County's most meaningful nonprofit missions.

Presented in partnership with the Walton County Sheriff's Office and the City of Freeport, the two-night event invites families from across the Emerald Coast to gather for live rodeo action, music, food vendors and kid-friendly fun — all while helping teens and young adults with developmental differences build brighter futures.

Doors open at 6 p.m. each evening, with Professional Cowboy Association performances kicking off at 7:30 p.m. Fans can expect classic rodeo events including bareback bronc riding, steer wrestling, breakaway roping, ladies barrel racing, team roping and bull riding. Chil-



dren's activities, bounce houses and local vendors will add to the festive, family-focused atmosphere.

Tickets are sold at the gate only, with proceeds directly supporting Westonwood Ranch programs that serve individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in our area and throughout Northwest Florida.

More Than a Rodeo: The Heart Behind Westonwood Ranch

While the rodeo has become a beloved local tradition, its true purpose goes far beyond the arena lights. Westonwood Ranch is a Freeport-based nonprofit dedicated to helping teens and young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities gain life skills, job training and independence through hands-

on, real-world experiences.

Located on a holistic ranch campus along U.S. Highway 20, Westonwood provides vocational training, functional learning opportunities and social enterprises that build confidence and prepare participants for meaningful employment. Programs focus on recognizing "ability over disability," giving individuals the tools they need to thrive and live productive, independent lives.

Through farm-based activities, animal care, vocational training and structured life-skills programs, participants experience daily victories — mastering new tasks, developing friendships and discovering their unique potential.

A Growing Impact

Westonwood Ranch has become a vital resource for families across Walton and Okaloosa counties, filling a critical transition gap between high school and adulthood for individuals with developmental differences.

The organization's impact continues to expand. Recent in-

vestments and community support are helping fund new training spaces and future supportive housing initiatives designed to create inclusive living environments where young adults can work, learn and build lasting friendships.

Events like the annual rodeo play a key role in making that growth possible, bringing neighbors together while raising funds that sustain programs year-round.

Whether you're a longtime rodeo fan or simply looking for a unique way to spend a spring evening, the Westonwood Ranch Rodeo offers something for everyone — from thrilling cowboy competition to community connection.

But at its core, the event is about celebrating inclusion and creating opportunities for individuals who often face barriers to independence.

For more information about Westonwood Ranch or its upcoming rodeo, visit westonwood.org.

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Golf Series: Blue Tee Restaurant Serves Golfers and Community at Blue Water Bay Golf Club



BY BARBARA PALMGREN

Growing up in Oklahoma, Trinity Coleman worked at her mother's steakhouse — a restaurant that served three meals a day. Later, she stepped away from the restaurant business as she married Trey Coleman and spent many happy, active-duty military years with Trey and their three children while he served in the United States Air Force.

Five years ago, now retired, Trinity and Trey returned to their restaurant roots. Drawing on years of experience, they

purchased Tisano's restaurant in Bluewater Bay from Mike Tisa. Their culinary creations quickly became part of the Niceville community's favorite reasons to dine out and support local business.

When Trinity learned that the restaurant at Bluewater Bay Golf Club was available, it felt like the perfect opportunity to change locations and help the club once again offer food to golfers and the public. After purchasing the venue in June 2025, Trinity and Trey spent two months preparing the kitchen and restaurant for opening.

What a grand opening it was in August! The community was thrilled that three meals a day would once again be served. And how fitting — Trinity understands that good things come in threes. Her mother's steakhouse served three meals, three children make the perfect family ... and yes, the name Trinity does reference "three," doesn't it? Maybe we should rename a



line from a famous song — "It's three o'clock somewhere."

But don't wait for three o'clock. The Blue Tee opens early with a breakfast menu sure to please, featuring crepes, omelets, egg dishes, burritos, benedicts and more — all the makings of one of the Panhandle's best breakfast menus.

Trinity says the top lunch sellers are the Club Sandwich and the Reuben, though with so

many options, guests may want to return again and again to try them all. Dinner offers a wide variety of choices that won't disappoint. In addition to the restaurant and bar area, a private banquet room is available for rental. Trinity can design special banquets for groups, and food and drink options are also available for meetings and gatherings. She says golfers especially appreciate having the

restaurant open again for food and drinks.

Don't wait any longer to try this outstanding new restaurant, The Blue Tee, located in the Bluewater Bay Golf Course clubhouse in Niceville. It's open to the public for breakfast, lunch and dinner, offering a full bar, cocktails and comfort food in a welcoming setting.



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Museum Series: A Special Exhibit to Honor African American Military History

By BARBARA PALMGREN

Having worked with Jonathan Holmes, Aerospace Museum Curator at the Air Force Armament Museum located on Eglin Air Force Base and

easily accessible to the public, I learned of a new project soon to be shared with everyone. The Armament Museum is one of the members of the county group of museums that support

and promote all museums in Okaloosa County.

The African American Military Historical Society (AAMHS), is a 501C3 nonprofit organization dedicated to pre-





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serving the historical contributions of African Americans in American military history within U.S. borders and overseas from the Revolutionary War to present day.

The mission of the AAMHS is to research, establish and continually develop a well-documented multi-visual educational timeline that can be used to educate on different historical platforms for future generations of the contributions and sacrifices.

The AAHMHS was formed in 2021 by Mr. Jonathan Holmes, Sr., who retired from the USAF in 2013 and then began working at the Armament Museum. Jonathan attended a Tuskegee Airmen event in 2019 and then, after a Juneteenth event in 2021 and the introduction of free-standing military Quonset huts at the Armament Museum, Jonathan asked permission to have one of these buildings dedicated to a project to preserve this legacy of the African American military.

This stand-alone African American Military History Exhibit Hall in the U.S. Air Force's

Heritage Program will be located at the Air Force Armament Museum. Contributions are still needed and appreciated for the displays, which are funded through contributions to the AAMHS. You can visit aamhsociety.org to donate.

The African American Military History Exhibition Hall is set to open in Spring/Summer 2026. This unique exhibition hall will feature interactive displays, artifacts, displays of military artwork, and more. Jonathan told me this is the only exhibit like this in the country! I think this is a project our community can truly be proud of as we share it with everyone who visits the Armament Museum.

I am honored to share this upcoming information with the public in this special year when we celebrate the 250th anniversary of the birth of our nation. During the Revolutionary War, African Americans fought as patriots in the Continental Army to secure our nation as an independent nation, the United States of America.



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Your Brain Isn't Failing – It's Overloaded



BY MELANIE YOST, LCSW

At Be Well Solutions, we hear a version of the same sentence almost every day: “I just don't feel like myself anymore.”

Capable, intelligent, high-functioning adults describe brain fog, poor focus, low motivation, irritability, anxiety, forgetfulness, and emotional overwhelm. Many quietly worry they're developing ADHD, depression, or even early dementia – and that fear alone adds another layer of stress.

But in many cases, something else is happening.

We are living in a time of stacked, chronic stress. Not one crisis followed by recovery, but a steady stream of pressure – financial concerns, job uncertainty, nonstop notifica-

tions, caretaking responsibilities, health worries, social tension, constant news cycles, and sleep disruption layered on top of it all. Individually these may not seem overwhelming, but together they keep the nervous system in continuous activation.

And here's what matters: your brain interprets all of it as threat.

Your brain doesn't distinguish between a physical danger and economic stress or email overload. When it senses an ongoing threat, it shifts from performance mode into survival mode.

Under chronic stress, your brain's prefrontal cortex – the part responsible for focus, planning, motivation, and emotional regulation – becomes less efficient. That's why organized adults suddenly feel scattered, procrastinate, and struggle to make simple decisions. At the same time, the brain's amygdala becomes more reactive, increasing anxiety, irritability, and that constant “on edge” feeling. Additionally, the hippocampus, which supports memory,



becomes sensitive to stress hormones, leading to word-finding difficulty and forgetfulness, symptoms that often scare people into thinking something more serious is wrong.

Stress is not just emotional. It is biological.

The good news is that the brain is adaptable. It shifted to protect you, and with the right

support, it can shift back toward clarity and resilience.

Daily nervous system recovery, consistent sleep, reducing multitasking, real social connection, and physical brain support through movement and nutrition all make a meaningful difference. Small, steady changes help signal safety to the brain.

But we also believe some-

thing powerful happens when you can actually see how your brain is functioning.

At Be Well Solutions, we offer a complimentary QEEG Brain Map – a simple, non-invasive assessment that measures brain-wave patterns and shows us how different regions are communicating. Instead of guessing, we can identify stress-driven overactivity, underperforming executive networks, and imbalances that may be contributing to fog, anxiety, or low motivation.

When we understand what's happening, we can create a targeted plan to help your brain function better – not just temporarily cope, but truly improve.

If you've been thinking, “I don't feel like myself,” that might be your brain asking for support.

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 Wellness

When Spring Comes Back to Life



BY DR. RICHARD CHERN, MD

We don't notice it happening at first. Winter rarely announces itself all at once—it settles in quietly. Shorter days. Colder mornings. Longer evenings spent on the couch. Same house, same routine, but something feels different. There's less energy, less motivation, less desire to care.

Where we once enjoyed moving our bodies, getting outside, and feeling strong and capable, now the alarm rings and staying in bed feels easier. Joints ache. Muscles feel weaker. Even simple routines—exercise, cooking well, making time for ourselves—feel like work instead of something life-giving. It's easy to dismiss it as stress, age, or just “the time of year.”

As spring approaches, the

light begins to change. A familiar spark returns—the desire to feel better, to take care of ourselves again, to re-engage with life. But the energy we expect doesn't necessarily follow the season. Motivation fades as quickly as it appeared, leaving frustration and the quiet question: Why don't I feel like I should?

At The Hormone Restoration Center, we hear this story every year.

Winter blues aren't just about the weather. They're also about hormones. As daylight decreases, hormonal signaling in the body shifts. Testosterone, estrogen, progesterone, thyroid hormones, cortisol—and even Vitamin D—all influence how we feel, how we move, how we sleep, and how we recover. What many people don't realize is Vitamin D isn't just a vitamin; it functions as a hormone, affecting mood, immune health, muscle strength, and bone density. During the winter months, when sunlight exposure drops, Vitamin D levels often fall right along with energy and motivation.



When hormones decline or fall out of balance, energy drops, mood flattens, sleep suffers, and winter feels longer and heavier than it should.

Hormones also do far more than influence mood or libido. They are foundational to the body itself. Testosterone and estrogen are essential for maintaining muscle mass in both men and women. When levels are low, the body loses lean muscle—even with consistent exercise. As muscle declines, metab-

olism slows, joints lose support, and fatigue becomes the norm rather than the exception.

Hormones play a critical role in bone health as well. Estrogen, testosterone, and Vitamin D work together to protect bone density. When any of them are deficient, bone loss accelerates, increasing the risk of osteoporosis and fractures in both men and women. This loss happens quietly, often for years, before it ever makes itself known.

This is why so many people feel tired, frustrated, and fragile. Why workouts stop working. Why motivation disappears. Why winter feels like survival instead of rest—and why spring

can feel like a letdown.

Hormone optimization helps.

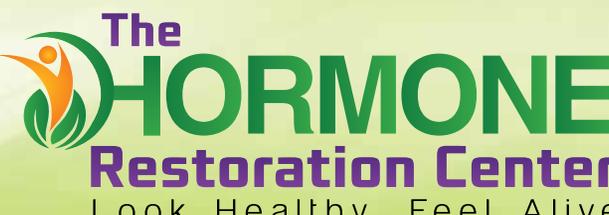
When hormones are restored to healthy levels the body responds. Energy improves. Muscle becomes easier to build and maintain. Bones are protected. Sleep deepens. Mood stabilizes. That natural desire to care for yourself returns.

Hormone Replacement Therapy isn't about pushing the body beyond normal. It's about restoring what time, stress, and life have gradually taken away.

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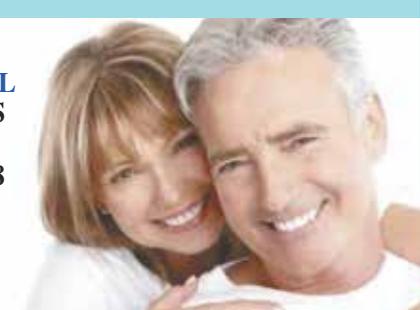
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- Do you dislike your smile in photographs?
- When you look through magazines, do you envy the models' smiles?
- Do you wish your teeth were whiter?
- Do you think you show too much or too little of your teeth when you smile?
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TOP 5
continued from page 4

justments help the body adapt comfortably.

Omega-3 Fatty Acids - Inflammation & Heart Support

Omega-3 fats help regulate inflammation and support heart health, joint comfort, brain function, and mood stability. Even with access to fresh seafood, consistent intake of meaningful amounts of omega-3s is less common than many assume. Modern dietary patterns tend to favor inflammatory fats over anti-inflammatory ones. As activity increases and seasonal allergens rise, balanced inflammatory support becomes increasingly important.

When I look closer: joint stiffness, cardiovascular risk factors, brain fog, mood variability, and seasonal inflammatory symptoms

Practical Tip: If fish oil results in occasional upper digestive discomfort or burping freezing capsules may help. Those taking blood thinners should consult their provider. Wild-caught fatty fish remains an excellent whole-food option.

Probiotics + Prebiotic Fiber - Digestive Precision

The gut influences immune function, hormone balance, inflammation, and mood. Probiotics introduce beneficial bacteria, the "seeds," while prebiotic fibers

provide the nourishment that allows them to flourish. Together, they help shape digestive terrain.

Not all probiotics are the same. Strains and potencies vary, and prebiotic fibers can aggravate some digestive systems if introduced too quickly. Because not every gut responds the same way, they should be introduced thoughtfully and increased gradually.

It's also important to recognize that not every digestive system benefits from supplemental probiotics or prebiotic fibers. Certain digestive patterns or underlying gut conditions may require a more targeted approach rather than broad supplementation.

When I look closer: bloating or irregular digestion, recent antibiotic use, immune imbalance, and skin or hormone concerns

Practical Tip: Start low. Increase gradually. Monitor response carefully. Individuals using GLP-1 medications may benefit from additional digestive support due to slowed gastric emptying, but adjustments should always be gradual and individualized.

B-Complex Vitamins - Cellular Energy & Stress Support

B vitamins are essential for energy production, nervous system signaling, red blood cell formation, and stress adaptation. They are not stimulants. They support the body's ability to

generate steady, efficient energy. Stress, hormonal transitions, digestive variability, dietary restriction, or genetic factors can increase demand.

When I look closer: persistent fatigue, brain fog, elevated stress, hormonal shifts, and limited dietary variety

Practical Tip: Form matters. If B12 has not been helpful

in the past, the issue may be the form rather than the dose.

Supplements are tools, not shortcuts. Quality matters. Formulation matters. Dosage matters. Context matters most. The goal is not to take more. The goal is to take what is appropriate for your body, your current demands, and your season of life.

Spring is about renewal, not rushing. Sustainable health is built through steady habits, thoughtful evaluation, and informed decisions, not trends or impulse purchases. When the foundation is strong and support is chosen strategically, small adjustments create meaningful momentum.

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Wellness

A New Name, the Same Trusted Care: Baywind Medical Continues Serving Our Community

By KELLY STALNAKER

For more than two decades, our team formerly known as J&B Medical has served the Gulf Coast community with reliable, compassionate and high-quality home medical equipment and supplies. A few months after introducing our new name, Baywind Medical, our locally owned company continues its mission of supporting patients, families and healthcare professionals with the same personalized care that has defined it since 2002. Baywind Medical remains the only locally owned

home medical equipment company in Okaloosa County.

While the name Baywind Medical (a fresh new name that reflects our coastal roots and the care that continues to move forward with you) has begun to take root, the people and leadership behind the business remain unchanged. The original name, J&B Medical, was inspired by the founders' sons, Jimmy and Brandon, when they were young. Both continue to play an active role in daily operations, helping guide the company forward alongside the same trusted

team customers have come to know — including Kim, Kenn, Kelly and Elizabeth — all still serving the community with the warmth and expertise clients rely on.

Why the change? The transition to Baywind Medical came as the result of a trademark matter beyond the company's control. Although saying goodbye to the longtime name wasn't easy, the new identity reflects our company's coastal roots and its continued commitment to growth while staying grounded in the relationships we've built

ing individuals find the equipment and supplies they need. Our ownership, our location, our commitment to quality and our dedication to your health remain exactly the same — simply under a new name that reflects the future of the business.

As Baywind Medical continues to settle into this next chapter, the team expresses deep gratitude for the support shown by the community during the transition. Thank you for growing with us and for continu-



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over the years. Even now, some longtime customers still refer to the business as J&B Medical, and the team welcomes the opportunity to gently remind the community that while the name has changed, the care has not.

What remains the same is what matters most. Customers are still finding the same friendly voices answering the phone, the same dependable service and the same dedication to help-

ing to make us your local choice for home medical equipment and supplies.

Our message remains simple: new name, same heart — Baywind Medical.

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Why Business Professionals Struggle to Exercise — and Why Strength Matters More Than They Think



technically exists, energy does not. Modern business roles are mentally exhausting, requiring continuous decision-making, problem-solving, and emotional regulation. By the end of the day, professionals may feel depleted despite having barely moved their bodies.

Work culture compounds the issue. In many industries, long hours are equated with commitment and success. Stepping away to exercise can feel irresponsible or self-indulgent, especially in competitive environments. Physical training is quietly categorized as optional, while work obligations are treated as non-negotiable. What people don't realize is the long sedentary hours are taking more of a toll on the body than you might think. Sitting 8-10 hours a day is not how our bodies were designed.

Ironically, this mindset ignores an important truth: physical strength closely parallels professional strength. Building muscle requires consistency, discipline, patience, and the willingness to tolerate discomfort—qualities that also define effective leadership and career growth. Strength training teaches delayed gratification,



resilience under stress, and the ability to perform even when conditions are not ideal. These traits translate directly to the workplace.

Yet many professionals fail to apply the same standards to their health that they apply to their work. In business, clear expectations drive behavior. Deadlines are met because they matter. Metrics are tracked because they signal performance. Exercise, by contrast, often lacks a defined standard. Without a minimum expectation—two strength sessions per week, for example—it becomes negotiable, and negotiable commitments rarely survive busy schedules.

There is also a tendency toward all-or-nothing thinking. Professionals accustomed to high performance may believe that if they cannot train perfectly, they should not train at all. Missed workouts become failures rather than temporary setbacks.

Over time, this erodes consistency and confidence, making exercise feel like another area of underperformance.

The consequences are not limited to physical health. Lack of strength contributes to chronic fatigue, poor stress tolerance, declining posture, and increased injury risk. These physical limitations quietly undermine focus, patience, and decision-making—the very qualities professionals depend on to succeed.

The solution is not more motivation, but clear standards and intentional stress. Strength improves only when the body is challenged beyond its current

capacity. Similarly, professional growth requires deliberate effort, not comfort. Progressive resistance training—gradually doing more over time—creates the stress that forces adaptation. In work and in health, growth follows the same rule: without challenge, nothing changes.

For business professionals, exercise should not be framed as leisure or self-care alone, but as performance maintenance. Setting a non-negotiable standard for physical strength reinforces identity, discipline, and resilience. It sends a clear message: the same commitment applied to career success applies to the body that sustains it.

In the end, strength is not a distraction from professional life. It is a reflection of it. And like any meaningful standard, it must be defined, protected, and upheld—especially when life gets busy.

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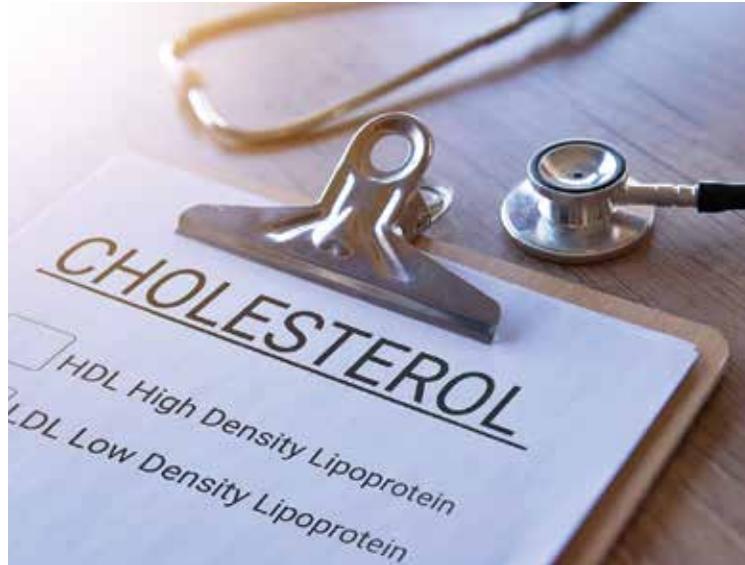
BY KAY LEAMAN, HEALTH ARCHITECT, HEALTHYDAY HEALTHYLIFE

I love learning new things and passing them on to all of you. When it comes to our health, knowledge empowers us to nav-

igate our health journey. We've heard for a long time that high cholesterol is bad. My cardiologist wanted to put me on a statin even though my cholesterol was in a normal range; I declined.

So, let's take a look at what cholesterol does.

Cholesterol is a fat related compound found in all body tissues and in animal products. It is made within the body, primarily by the liver. Some is also produced by the intestinal wall. The body uses cholesterol to make hormones and vitamin D when we are exposed to the sun. The brain is our most cholesterol rich organ and is important in brain health. It is also our body's repair substance,



creating scar tissue and patching damaged arteries. It, along with saturated fats, in the cell membranes gives our cells stability.

Cholesterol is also a primary component of the myelin that surrounds each nerve cell and acts a

protective sheath giving insulation and allowing more efficient nerve impulse conduction.

Note: Many times, when our cholesterol is high, it's because the body needs it to perform its functions.

News Flash: Our LDL cholesterol is not the real problem. It's the oxidized LDL combined with arterial inflammation that can lead to arterial calcification (plaque formation) and hardening of the arteries.

If the percent of LDL cholesterol molecules that are oxidized is low (less than 10% of total LDL) and arterial inflammation is kept at a minimum we won't need to worry about the levels. What is needed to keep these in check is anti-oxidants (nutrients, not medication).

A little science:

Homocysteine along with free radicals oxidizes the arterial lining along with the LDL and triglycerides which leads to the inflammation. This in turn releases the C-Reactive protein (produced by the liver) which is a known marker of arterial inflammation (5-7). Homocysteine causes nicks or cracks in the endothelium (where inflammation takes place) and the oxidized LDL sticks to these nicks. LDL cholesterol that is not oxidized does not stick to these nicks, no matter how much there is.

This is good news because our cells need it to function and without it we would die. Lastly, many health problems can arise if our levels are too low.

There are certain labs that can test and inform you where you actually stand. One doctor recommended lab is Life Extension. The tests to request:

- Oxidized LDL Cholesterol
- HDL Cholesterol, High sensitivity CRP
- Homocysteine (You can request this test with your normal blood work.)

The Big Take Away: If your oxidized LDL is low, and you boost your HDL and keep your homocysteine levels low, you won't be at an increased risk for heart attacks or death.

Our bodies are complex and so many of the functions are interwoven and dependent on each other. Every step we take in our journey makes a difference.

Have a fabulous Valentine's Day (A day to love others and yourself!) and a healthy 2026.

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Cutting-Edge Care — Without the Cutting: A Smarter Option for Joint and Muscle Pain

“Before you schedule the surgery, ask a better question: Is there a way to help my body heal first?”



BY DR. JENNIFER TRENDT

When did surgery become the first conversation instead of the last resort?

Every week, I meet people who have been told their only real option for chronic joint or soft tissue pain is an injection... or a surgical consult. Rotator cuff irritation. Chronic knee pain. Plantar fasciitis that just won't calm down. Lingering hip or low back injuries. They're frustrated. They're active. And they're not ready to go under the knife.

That's where SoftWave Tissue Regeneration Technology (TRT) comes in.

SoftWave TRT is an advanced acoustic wave therapy designed to stimulate the body's own healing response. It uses high-energy sound waves that penetrate injured tissue and trigger biological repair processes. These waves increase blood flow, recruit stem cells, reduce inflammation, and help restart stalled healing cycles. This regenerative response has been increasingly supported in orthopedic and sports medicine research.

In simple terms? It helps your body fix what it hasn't been able to fix on its own.

Unlike surgery, SoftWave is non-invasive. There are no incisions. No anesthesia. No downtime. Treatments are performed in-office, and most patients walk out and go right back to their day. For many people trying to avoid surgery, that matters.

Take one of my recent patients, an avid recreational dancer. Chronic pain in both knees had limited her ability to move and disrupted her sleep for months. Instead of an orthopedic consult, she chose to try SoftWave first. After the very first treatment, she felt a noticeable difference. By the end of her third treatment, her pain had significantly decreased, her range of motion improved, and she was back on the dance floor — without surgical intervention. She went from dancing only a few hours each week to several hours each night. She was even able to travel to Peru for 14 days to compete in an international competition.

Is SoftWave TRT a miracle cure? No. But it is a powerful regenerative tool when applied appropriately.

SoftWave is commonly used for tendon and ligament injuries, joint degeneration, plantar fasciitis, muscle strains, and chronic inflammatory conditions. It works especially well for patients who feel stuck — those who've tried rest, medications, injections, or traditional therapy without lasting results.

At The Reset Room, we



don't jump straight to surgery conversations. We evaluate. We assess movement. We look at the root cause. And when appropriate, we use technologies like SoftWave TRT to help patients heal rather than simply manage pain.

Surgery has its place. There are times when it is necessary and appropriate. But it should not be the automatic next step for every musculoskeletal issue.

Too often, people are told to “wait until it gets worse” or move straight toward injections

and procedures without first exploring regenerative options. That mindset is outdated.

If you're active, motivated, and not ready to accept that pain is just part of aging, there might be another path.

SoftWave TRT offers a way to support healing, restore function, and stay in the game — without incisions, anesthesia, or long recovery timelines. Healing is possible. Sometimes it just needs the right signal.

About the Author

Dr. Jennifer Trendt is a chiropractor and founder of The Reset Room, a chiropractic and regenerative therapy studio specializing in non-surgical solutions for joint and soft tissue injuries. She focuses on movement restoration and advanced technologies such as SoftWave Tissue Regeneration Technology (TRT).

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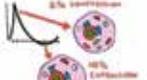


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thus activating our natural, innate healing mechanisms to provide lasting pain relief.

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Surgery isn't the starting point.

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A New Era of Elegance:

McCaskill & Company's Expansion Culminates in a New Rolex Environment

BY CAITLYN BURRUS

In Miramar Beach, McCaskill & Company Fine Jewelry & Watches has completed a carefully curated expansion that redefines the in-store experience while honoring the values that have guided the family-owned jeweler for generations. Long known for its elevated selection of fine jewelry and luxury timepieces, the gallery's multi-year transformation culminates in the completion of a new Rolex space, set to debut in early March 2026.

The expansion began with a practical need—more parking—but quickly evolved into a broader vision with a total showroom renovation and expansion. As McCaskill & Company's designer offerings and customer base grew, so did the desire to create a space that reflected the caliber of the brands represented, particularly Rolex.

For the late Elizabeth Campbell and her daughter, Carolyn Brigman, who together led the gallery alongside husband and father Bill Campbell, the opportunity was about more than square footage.

"We were laser-focused on interesting architectural accents, stonework, and materials that tell a story," they share. "As a family-owned gallery, we wanted the space to feel warm, residential, and elegant—somewhere guests could truly enjoy the experience."

Architect Cherri Pitts of Studio C Architecture in Birmingham, Ala., led the design, while Grand Bay Construction brought the vision to life. While executing one



of the largest commercial renovations in the Miramar Beach area, the team faced the added challenge of keeping the gallery operational throughout the process, which required careful coordination.

The expanded west showroom was the first phase of the transformation, introducing a refined, guest-focused layout with comfortable seating areas, custom artwork, sculptural objects, and lighting designed to enhance the natural brilliance of each piece of jewelry. The Bridal Gallery quickly became a standout, with crystal snowflake-inspired lighting creating a sense of intimacy and celebration.

As work continued, attention shifted to the east showroom, where the most immersive elements of the expansion unfold. Guests will enter through a foyer featuring handblown-glass maple leaves hanging from the ceiling, created by artist Brit Deslonde. "To reflect the store's commitment to exceptional craftsmanship, each glass maple leaf was hand-blown at the furnace without molds and embedded with 24-karat



gold and pure silver, ensuring that every piece is entirely unique," Deslonde says. "I sculpted the leaves to create a light, floating canopy suspended overhead that interacts with light and space, echoing the refinement, individuality, and material beauty found in fine jewelry."



Steps to the right, the Rolex environment represents the grand finale of McCaskill & Company's expansion. Designed to align with Rolex's world-renowned standards of craftsmanship, fit, and finish, the space offers a focused, elevated experience for guests.

Additional brand-focused spaces include a dedicated David Yurman area, reinforcing McCaskill's commitment to full-service, design-driven luxury. The second phase also introduces an enhanced Service Department, including an authorized Rolex Service Center staffed by two highly credentialed watchmakers.

Large viewing windows allow guests to observe the intricate work of watch and jewelry repair and custom design firsthand. "Our goal has always been to offer an elevated shopping experience that still feels personal," Carolyn reflects. "Luxury, to us, means warmth, connection, and artistry."

With the debut of its new Rolex environment, McCaskill & Company completes a transformation defined by intention, craftsmanship, and collaboration, setting a new benchmark for fine jewelry and timepieces on the Emerald Coast.

Visit McCaskillandCompany.com or follow them on Instagram @mccaskillandcompany to learn more.

Publisher's Note:

The Life Media family extends our heartfelt prayers and deepest condolences to the Campbell family and the entire McCaskill & Company team on the recent passing of Elizabeth Campbell. Elizabeth's warmth, vision and dedication helped shape an experience cherished by so many across our community. She will be remembered with admiration, gratitude and great respect.

Sean of the South: **Dogs**



BY SEAN DIETRICH

My truck cab was filled with three barking dogs and one idiot. The dogs were in the backseat. The idiot was behind the wheel.

“Sit down!” the idiot kept saying.

But my dogs do not sit when I drive. They never sit. They dutifully explore their space when the vehicle is underway.

To the untrained eye my dogs appear to be acting disobediently. But that’s not it. Really, they are just looking for food.

They are always looking for food. They even look for food in places where there has never been any food, such as my bathroom. In a pinch, they will even resort to eating non-food items such as my reading glasses, my sandals, sheetrock, etc.

But they particularly go crazy when in my truck because they know the odds of finding abandoned food here are exponential. Thus, they are constantly on the lookout for expired Corn Nuts, old pistachio shells, or a petrified French fry predating the Reagan administration.

So we finally arrived at the dog park. I turned them loose.



They ran. They chased squirrels. They wrestled. They hunted around for any threatening or suspicious objects so they could sniff them, bark at them, then pee on them.

And then, basically, all the dogs in the dog park just stood around. That’s all the dogs do there. They play for short bursts, then they stand around and look at their owners.

“Why do dogs just stand around at dog parks?” one dog owner asked the group of us dog owners who were also, as it happens, just standing around.

Another dog owner said, “I drove forty-five minutes to get here, just so my dog could stand around.”

One of the other dog own-

ers remarked, “You ever wonder what would happen if dog and human roles were reversed? What if DOGS took US to human parks? Would we go to the bathroom in front of each other?”

We all just looked at him.

And, of course, at dog parks, dogs sniff each other’s rears. I don’t know why dogs do this. This behavior has always perplexed me. They are not picky about whose butts they sniff. They’ll sniff any butt you give them.

I’ve read that rear-sniffing is a primal greeting of sorts wherein complex pheromone scents are exchanged. But I think it’s something dogs do because they like nasty things.

I have been owned by 13 dogs in my lifetime. And I have learned that dogs are not above wallowing in stinky objects. I have seen my dogs roll themselves in everything from cat feces to armadillo remains.

And one time when I was in a major city—this is a true story—walking my bloodhound after hours, we were near the dumpsters. It had been a long night. I had just given a speech and I was tired, so I wasn’t pay-

ing attention.

When I got back to the hotel, the clerk looked at me and said, “Sir, there’s something in your dog’s mouth.”

“Drop it, Thelma Lou!” I said.

It turned out to be—remember I am not kidding—a retired breast implant. The thing hit the floor.

The clerk and I stared at the prosthesis and, in a moment I will never forget, the clerk said flatly, “Double D.”

I’m running out of room here, but I’ll close by saying, the more I learn about people, the more I like my dogs.

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 Musing

A Pastor's Ponderings: When Congress Called the Bible "Invaluable"



BY PASTOR DOUG "DOC" STAUFFER

Every generation tends to re-

interpret history—often not to understand the past, but to justify the present. One of the most repeated claims today is that America was founded as a secular nation, with religion confined strictly to private life. Its proponents present this view as authoritative and academic, yet it is a historically false narrative. Here is one proof text.

In 1782, while the Revolutionary War was still underway, the United States Congress officially examined, approved, and recommended the printing of a Bible for the American people. Known as the Aitken Bible, it remains the only Bible in U.S. history to receive formal congressional endorsement.

The reason was simple yet revealing. Before independence, the colonies relied almost entirely on England for printed Bibles. When war severed that supply, Congress was warned of a national shortage. Rather than dismiss Scripture as a private matter, Congress recognized its necessity. They understood that the Bible was not merely a church book—it was foundational to morality, and morality was essential to liberty.

Congress appointed its own chaplains to examine Robert Aitken's text of the King James Bible for accuracy. After their review, Congress passed a resolution recommending the Bible to the inhabitants of the United States and describing it as an "invaluable book." That language was deliberate. Congress was not neutral toward Scripture—they appreciated it.

This single historical act



Supreme Court justices. It was a quiet but powerful reminder that God's Word, once commended by America's first Congress, still speaks to those entrusted with governing today.

As America approaches her 250th anniversary, the Aitken Bible stands as a witness to a forgotten consensus: liberty does not thrive in a moral vacuum. The same Congress that fought for independence

believed the Bible was worthy of public encouragement, national respect, and wide distribution.

When modern voices insist that faith has no place in America's public life, history answers back—clearly, calmly, and conclusively. There was a time when Congress did not apologize for Scripture, but recommended it to all Americans.

And perhaps the most important question as America approaches her 250th year is this: if the Bible was once considered invaluable to the survival of the Republic, what has been the result of dismissing it as optional?

exposes the weakness of the modern secular narrative. The founders did not believe faith threatened freedom; they believed it preserved freedom. They understood that a free people must be virtuous, and that virtue is shaped by biblical truth.

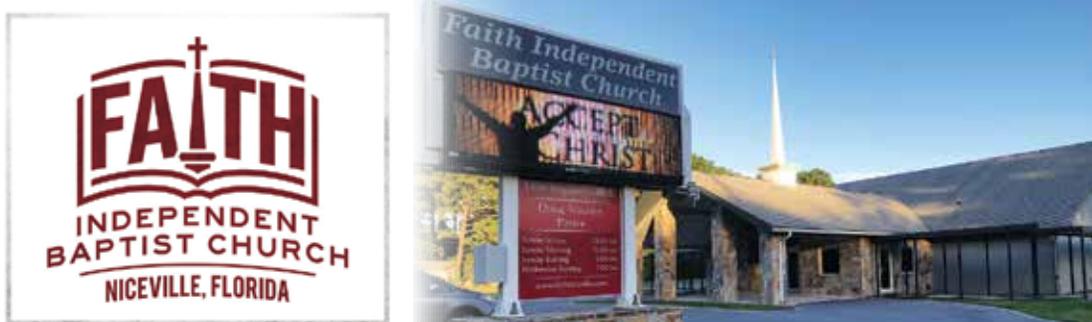
What makes this history especially compelling is that it is not merely an artifact of the distant past. On the opening day of the 2026 Florida legislative session in Tallahassee, an original Aitken Bible was brought into the Capitol, and a copy was presented to every elected official—including Cabinet members and



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Know Your Neighbor: Zoran Subotich

The Person Behind the Music, the Moments, and the Magic

BY LORI SMITH

I'll admit it — when I first sat down to write this, I smiled. Once upon a time, before publishing deadlines and page counts, I was a DJ myself. I know the rush of reading a room, the quiet pressure of timing it just right, the invisible responsibility of holding a moment in your hands and not dropping it.

So, when I say that Zoran Subotich gets it, I mean that in the deepest, most professional, been-there way.

For more than 30 years, Zoran has been the steady heartbeat behind thousands of celebrations across the Emerald Coast — from barefoot beach weddings on 30A and Destin to elegant military galas, mitzvahs, milestone birthdays and reunions that people still talk about a decade later. Four counties. Thousands of events. And somehow — no missed cues, no awkward silences, no stressed brides.

That doesn't happen by accident.

Zoran doesn't just plan parties.

He engineers memories.

Through his company, Celebrations By The Sea, Zoran offers a truly full-service approach — the kind that allows couples and families to relax and stay present in the moment while he quietly handles the flow behind the scenes. His services include:

- DJ and professional emcee services
- Full event planning and coordination
- Licensed wedding and event officiating
- Ceremony and reception direction
- Lighting and atmosphere design
- Timeline creation and flow management
- Multilingual hosting and announcements

All of it is tailored. All of it intentional. And all of it delivered with a calm confidence that makes even the most complex events feel effortless.

Why Locals Love Him

Ask around Destin, Fort Walton Beach, Miramar Beach or along 30A, and you'll hear the same things again and again.



Zoran shows up early. He stays calm under pressure. He listens — really listens.

Locals trust him because he doesn't force a formula. He reads the room, adapts in real time, and keeps the focus where it belongs — on the people, not the production. Brides feel at ease. Families relax. Guests stay engaged. The event flows naturally, without feeling overproduced or rushed.

Another reason locals love Zoran? Range.



His background spans far beyond weddings and private events. Zoran is a former radio professional, trained actor, multilingual host, crisis intervention specialist, and even a black belt — a combination that gives him rare command, empathy and

intuition. His résumé includes television credits on MTV's Road Rules and Prison Break, experiences that sharpened his ability to perform under pressure and connect with audiences of every kind.

That versatility allows him to move seamlessly from a beachfront ceremony at sunrise to a formal military banquet or multigenerational family celebration — always reading the energy of the room before the first guest even arrives.

And perhaps most importantly, he treats every event — big or small — like it matters. Because to the people there, it does.

That mindset has earned Zoran decades of loyalty, word-of-mouth referrals and, most recently, recognition as "Best of Business Rate 2025" for Wedding Services in Fort Walton Beach, an award based on verified reviews and consistent excellence.

This year, that heart for meaningful moments took on even deeper purpose.

Zoran and Celebrations By The Sea partnered with Wish Upon a Wedding, a nonprofit that grants weddings to couples facing terminal illness. On August 18, 2025, Zoran helped make Taylor and Ivan's wedding wish a reality — proof that for him, making moments matter isn't just business. It's deeply personal.

Based in Fort Walton Beach, Zoran serves the full Gulf Coast with a hands-on, full-service approach that has made Celebrations By The Sea a trusted name for locals, military families and destination couples alike.

"Excellence is our standard, but joy is our mission," Zoran says — and honestly, that says it all.

Not everyone knows how to make a moment matter.

Zoran does — every single time.

For more information, visit celebrationsbythesea.com, call (850) 217-5710, or follow @celebrationsbythesea and @wish-uponawedding.

Savvy Leigh PHOTO

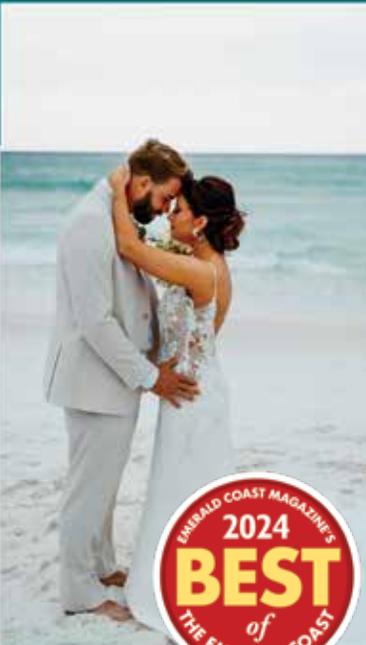
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Arts & Music

Get Ready to Rock, Dance, and Sing Along at the 30th Annual MKAF Concerts in the Village Series

Smash Mouth, Iconic Tribute Acts, and Spring Nights Under the Stars Celebrate a Milestone Season at the Dugas Pavilion

By ZANDRA WOLFGRAM

Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation (MKAF) invites music lovers to celebrate a major milestone with the 30th annual Concerts in the Village series, returning to the scenic Dugas Pavilion from April 9 through June 11, 2026. This beloved Thursday-night tradition features 10 weeks of live music, showcasing premier national musicians and tribute bands performing everything from classic rock and disco to yacht rock, pop, and '80s nostalgia.

The milestone season kicks off on April 9 with Smash Mouth, the chart-topping pop-rock band behind *All Star*, *Walkin' on the Sun*, and *Then the Morning Comes*. With multi-platinum albums, Grammy nominations, and countless film and television appearances, Smash Mouth brings a high-energy, feel-good opening night worthy of the series' 30th anniversary.

On April 16, Black Jacket



Symphony delivers a note-for-note recreation of Van Halen's legendary *1984* album, pairing musical precision with theatrical flair for an electrifying concert experience that has earned national acclaim.

Smooth sounds take the stage on April 23 with Yacht Rock Schooner, an eight-piece Atlanta-based tribute sailing through the mellow hits of the '70s and '80s by artists such as Kenny Loggins, Toto, and Michael McDonald—transforming the Pavilion into a high-energy

“dance party on the high seas.”

Fleetwood Mac fans won't want to miss Rumours ATL on April 30, an authentic tribute capturing the magic, harmonies, and mystique of one of rock's most beloved bands with classics including *Dreams*, *Go Your Own Way*, and *The Chain*.

The horn-driven hits of Chicago take center stage on May 7 with Brass Transit, whose powerhouse musicianship and dynamic vocals bring timeless favorites like *25 or 6 to 4*, *Saturday in the Park*, and *You're the Inspiration* vividly to life.

On May 14, The Turnstiles celebrate the enduring catalog of Billy Joel, performing beloved songs from *Piano Man* to *Uptown Girl* with spot-on arrangements that honor the Piano Man's legendary career.

Disco fever arrives on May 21 with Boogie Wonder Band, one of the world's top disco and funk tribute acts. With colorful costumes, nonstop energy, and hits from Earth, Wind & Fire, Kool & the Gang, and more, the evening promises a full-on dance party under the stars.

The '80s roar back on May 28 when The Molly Ringwalds return with their signature blend of music, fashion, and fun, delivering what fans call the ultimate '80s experience.

On June 4, The Return: A Beatles Tribute transports audiences to the height of Beatlemania with uncanny recreations of the sound, style, and spirit of The Beatles, including music from the iconic *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* album from 1967.

The season closes on a laid-back, island-inspired note on June 11 with A1A: The Official Jimmy Buffett Tribute Band, the only tribute officially licensed

by Buffett himself. Parrotheads can expect a night of tropical anthems, beach vibes, and Margaritaville magic.

Gates open at 6 p.m., with concerts beginning at 7 p.m. General admission is lawn seating. Guests are encouraged to bring blankets or low-back chairs and enjoy dinner al fresco from local food trucks while gathering with family, friends, and colleagues for this must-not-miss spring tradition.

Tickets are \$40 per person (including ticketing fee). MKAF members enjoy early entry and attend concerts free. Learn more about MKAF membership at MKAF.org.

Proceeds benefit ArtsReach, MKAF's community education initiative supporting local K-12 students, individuals with disabilities, and military service members and veterans throughout Northwest Florida and the Southeast.



- ✓ Receive one season pass to Concerts in the Village.
- ✓ Enjoy early admission access to Concerts in the Village.
- ✓ Receive discounts on Festival of the Arts merchandise.
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A Blooming Music Community

Music has a quiet way of weaving itself into the fabric of a community. It plays at local events, fills school auditoriums, drifts from open windows, and brings people together in moments both ordinary and unforgettable. Beyond simple enjoyment, music offers deep social, emotional, and cultural benefits and when music education is accessible, those benefits don't just exist; they grow, multiply, and bloom.

One of music's greatest gifts to a community is connection. Concerts, recitals, festivals, and jam sessions create shared experiences where people of different ages, backgrounds, and stories gather with a common purpose. Music becomes a universal language that tells a story, allowing individuals to communicate and relate even when words fall short. These shared moments build stronger bonds

serve identity and celebrate diversity. Communities are shaped by their histories, traditions, evolving influences, and music reflects all of it. Whether it's classical, jazz, country, pop, or music rooted in cultural heritage, local music scenes honor the past while inspiring creativity for the future. When communities value music, they affirm that creativity and culture matter.

Music lessons play a vital role in nurturing and expanding these benefits. Education transforms passive appreciation into active participation. When individuals learn to play an instrument or use their voice, they gain confidence, discipline, and a sense of accomplishment. It is one of the greatest forms of expression and communication. These personal skills ripple outward, strengthening the community as students perform at



between neighbors and foster a sense of belonging that is essential for a healthy, vibrant community.

Music also supports emotional well-being. Listening to or creating music can instantly change the atmosphere, reduce stress, lift spirits, and provide comfort during difficult times. Music is everywhere if you actively listen for it. In communities where people face busy schedules, economic pressure, or social isolation, music offers a powerful outlet for expression and healing. Local music programs, choirs, bands, and ensembles give individuals a safe and supportive space to process emotions and feel seen and heard.

Culturally, music helps pre-

events, collaborate with others, and eventually mentor the next generation of musicians. Music speaks when words cannot be spoken.

For children, music lessons build foundational life skills. They enhance focus, listening, teamwork, and perseverance skills that extend far beyond the music room. For adults, lessons offer lifelong learning, goal development, stress relief, and renewed creativity. In both cases, education keeps music alive and evolving within the community rather than letting it fade into the background.

Perhaps most importantly, music lessons create sustainability. They ensure that community music programs, ensembles, and traditions continue to thrive.

Each new student represents a future performer, teacher, audience member, or advocate for the arts. With guidance and encouragement, a single lesson can spark a lifelong relationship with music that enriches not only the individual but everyone around them.

When a community invests

in music education, it invests in connection, well-being, and cultural vitality. Music benefits us all but music lessons give those benefits roots, allowing them to grow deeper, stronger, and more beautifully with each passing year.

Studio 237 Music Lessons offers private music education lessons to students of all ages. Our teachers are ready to teach you to bloom on: voice, piano, drums, guitar (acoustic, bass, electric, classical), Ukulele, shofar, and song writing. Call the studio at 850.231.3199, visit/register for free on our website at www.studio237music.com.

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This year's special guest is internationally renowned and iconic big band **Pink Martini**, the "little orchestra" that's wowed audiences around the globe with a dazzling blend of jazz, classical, and old-school pop sung in more than 25 languages. Founded by pianist Thomas Lauderdale, Pink Martini is known for its playful, cosmopolitan style and vibrant, genre-bending performances. As part of Sinfonia's 20th anniversary celebration, Pink Martini will be accompanied by the full **Sinfonia Gulf Coast orchestra**. This marks the first time the orchestra has performed at Crescendo!

Guests will enjoy reserved table seating, hors d'oeuvres, an elegant, seated late lunch, and an all-inclusive afternoon of music, wine, food, and fabulous fun — all in support of Sinfonia Gulf Coast's music education and community engagement initiatives throughout Northwest Florida.

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Arts & Music

Gulf Coast Jam 2026 Brings Star Power, Theme Nights and High-Energy

One of the Gulf Coast's most anticipated music events is gearing up for another unforgettable year as the 14th Annual

Gulf Coast Jam Presented by Jim Beam returns May 28-31, 2026, at Frank Brown Park in Panama City Beach. Recently

named by Billboard as one of "The 10 Best Country Music Festivals," the four-day celebration promises chart-topping performances, themed nights and a high-energy coastal vibe that continues to draw fans from across the country.

Headliners **Post Malone, Chris Stapleton, Keith Urban and Riley Green** will lead a lineup of more than 20 artists performing across the Country On The Coast™ experience. The festival has seen tremendous momentum in recent years, selling out with crowds of 30,000 the past two years and earning recognition as the No. 1 festival in Music Festival Wizard's Top 50 Most Popular Fests In The World 2024 – Voter's Choice poll, along with top honors among beach music festivals in 2025.

A Star-Studded Lineup

The festival kicks off Thursday, May 28, with Keith Urban headlining alongside Treaty Oak Revival, Wyatt Flores, Cooper Alan, Walker Montgomery and Gannon Fremin. Friday night brings powerhouse vocals from Chris Stapleton, joined by Marcus King, Jackson Dean, Brent Cobb, Cole Goodwin and

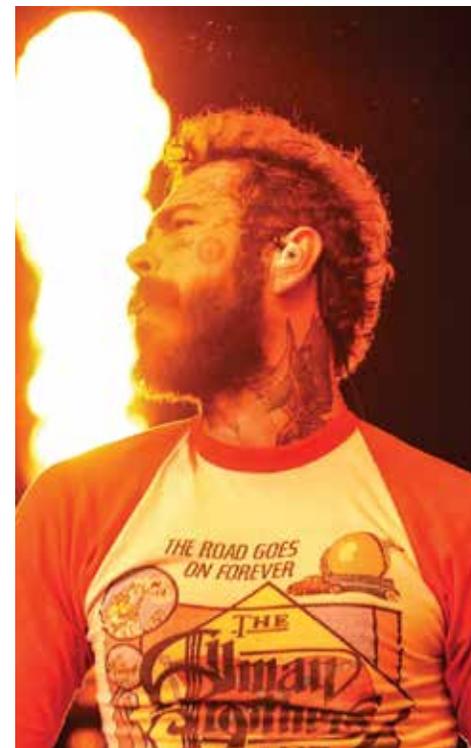
Houston.

Saturday's high-energy lineup features Riley Green, Koe Wetzell, Ole 60, Josh Ross, Ashland Craft and Hannah McFarland. The weekend wraps Sunday, May 31, with genre-blending superstar Post Malone, plus Muscadine Bloodline, 49 Winchester, Elizabeth Nichols, Them Dirty Roses and Skeez.

Theme Nights Add Extra Fun

Beyond the music, Gulf Coast Jam's fan-favorite Theme Nights are returning bigger than ever, giving attendees a chance to dress up and lean into the festival spirit each evening.

Thursday's Neon Night invites bright colors and glowing outfits as Keith Urban launches the weekend. Friday's 'Merica Night celebrates country pride with red, white and blue flair during Chris Stapleton's headlining set. Saturday turns to Camo Night for Riley Green's high-octane performance, while



Sunday's Rhinestone Cowboy Night encourages fans to shine alongside Post Malone for a sparkling finale.

Whether guests go all out in themed attire or add a simple nod to the night's vibe, organizers say the goal is to create shared memories and a fun, welcoming atmosphere.

Passes and Packages Available

A variety of pass options are currently on sale, including General Admission, Military, College and First Responder passes, Caymus Vineyards VIP Pit experiences and hotel or lodging packages. Premium offerings such as Skyboxes, Luxury Suites, Super VIP, Side Stage access, The Overlook Club and the new Eagles Nest have already sold out — a testament to the festival's continued popularity.

Payment plans are available for all pass levels, making it easier for fans to secure their spot early.

Jammers are encouraged to follow Gulf Coast Jam Presented by Jim Beam online and on social media for lineup updates, special announcements and festival news as the countdown to Memorial Day weekend begins.

For tickets and details, visit www.GulfCoastJam.com.

Museum Series: The 250th Celebration of America! American Revolution Exhibit at the Heritage Museum

BY BARBARA PALMGREN

In late January, several trustees removed the Vietnam Refugee Camp exhibit panels that had been on display in 2025 to make room for the Celebrate America 250! American Revolution. This new exhibit is one of two in the area to develop an historical exhibit honoring the birthday of our nation, the Signing of the Declaration of Independence.

That being said, Ken Walsh, Mike Weaver and myself encountered the worst imaginable scenario. Using blow dryers and then trying a heat gun, removal began. Apparently, these panels wanted to stay a little longer and additional implements had to be used and when they finally came off the wall... so did the paint and part of the drywall. The panels had been attached with two-sided tape that was easily



removed when several panels were used at the college years ago. Ace Hardware came to the rescue and donated spackling compound to fill the holes and the trustees applied and sanded what they could.

A professional painter, James Roberts, then retextured and repainted the walls. Next, Chris and crew from CJ Signs

installed descriptive panels, a large copy of John Trumbell's famous painting of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, and a valuable colonial paper money collection display in a large decorative frame. Flora Kerr, donated her time and expertise with years of experience at Jo Ann Fabrics, to make a replica of the drape viewed

in the Trumbell painting. The drape covers a window and a nearby table with quill and pen adds to the ambiance of being with those heroes 300 years ago.

Special thanks go to Dr. Kristina Duffy, Arthur Edgar, and Dr. Marie Hallion who helped arrange the exhibit panels in this order; British Florida on one wall, the original thirteen

British colonies located on the main wall, main events on several walls, and the Trumbell painting and colonial money on a wall that viewers see immediately upon entering the exhibit hall from the museum. The exhibit honors the history of events, places and people prominent prior to the signing of the Declaration of Independence. A tent replica and movie are also part of the exhibit as well as a Children's Corner where interactive experiences will delight and inspire young people.

Words alone don't describe this journey but a few photos may help! Please come this year to a special tribute that is now on display in your local community and view the other exciting exhibits at the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida located in old downtown Valparaiso.

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<p>LJ SCHOONERS DOCKSIDE RESTAURANT AND OYSTER BAR FREE APPETIZER OR DESSERT <small>WITH AN ENTREE PURCHASE. VALUE UP TO \$11.95. LIMIT ONE COUPON PER VISIT, PER CUSTOMER. RESTRICTIONS APPLY.</small></p> <p>Offer expires 3/31/26 290 Yacht Club Dr., Niceville • 850-897-6400 www.bluewaterbaymarina.com</p>	<p>MAX STRENGTH FITNESS 2 FREE SESSIONS! NEW CLIENTS ONLY</p> <p>Offer expires 3/31/26 4576 E Hwy 20, Niceville • (850) 373-4450 www.maxstrengthfitness.com/niceville</p>	<p>POGO PASS 50% OFF WITH CODE: FUNLIFE</p> <p>Offer expires 3/31/26 www.pogopass.com</p>	<p>BLUEWATER PLASTIC SURGERY \$100 OFF LASER PACKAGES <small>INCLUDES LASER HAIR REMOVAL, PHOTOFACIALS, AND PIGMENTATION TREATMENTS (EXCLUDES ULTRACLEAR). PLUS ENJOY A COMPLIMENTARY CONSULTATION WITH MICHELLE, NP.</small></p> <p>Offer expires 3/31/26 Niceville • Santa Rosa Beach 850-530-6064 www.bluewaterplasticsurgery.com</p>
<p>BEACHSIDE SLIDING GLASS DOOR MAINTENANCE, LLC \$25 OFF SLIDING DOOR TRACK REPAIR WITH ROLLER REPLACEMENT FREE ESTIMATES</p> <p>Offer expires 3/31/26 BeachsideSlide.com 850-98-SLIDE (850-987-5433)</p>	<p>GULF COAST BURGER CO. \$15 BUCKET OF BUD LIGHT OR ULTRA BEER \$5 OFF SEAFOOD BOIL DURING GAME WATCHING</p> <p>Offer expires 3/31/26 gcburgerco.com</p>	<p>BE WELL SOLUTIONS FREE QEEG BRAIN MAPPING SESSION <small>(NOT JUST A CONSULTATION)</small></p> <p>Offer expires 3/31/26 4641 Gulf Starr Dr #105 • Destin 850-786-2051 • Completeketaminesolutions.com</p>	<p>BLUEWATER PLASTIC SURGERY 20% OFF ANY FACIAL <small>PLUS A FREE SKIN CONSULTATION WITH OUR AESTHETICIAN, MAYA. NEW PATIENTS ONLY.</small></p> <p>Offer expires 3/31/26 Niceville • Santa Rosa Beach 850-530-6064 www.bluewaterplasticsurgery.com</p>



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