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A Natural Treasure in Our Backyard: The E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center

BY LORI LEATH SMITH

For many local residents, it's easy to drive along State Road 20 and not fully realize that just beyond the trees lies one of the most extraordinary environmental education centers in the country.

I had the special opportunity recently to visit the amazing E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center. And, believe me, it isn't just a place to visit — it's a point of pride for our local communities and a powerful example of how our area is helping lead the way in conservation, education and environmental stewardship.

Located in Freeport on the Nokuse Plantation, the center opened in 2009 thanks to the vision of the late M.C. Davis, a Walton County conservationist who believed deeply that people protect what they love. His mission was simple, but profound: give children and families the opportunity to experience nature first-hand, and they will grow up wanting to protect it.



That philosophy is rooted in the concept of “biophilia,” a term coined by famed biologist Dr. E.O. Wilson, meaning a natural love for living things. It's a fitting name for a place that has quietly been changing lives in our own backyard for more than 15 years.

Today, the center operates as a nonprofit environmental education facility serving thousands of students each year, many from Walton and Okaloosa counties. Fourth- and seventh-grade students regularly visit for immersive

field experiences that go far beyond a typical field trip. Here, learning happens outside — in the woods, along trails, and through hands-on discovery.

“The E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center lets children and adults explore a unique ecosystem that inspires curiosity and play with the benefit of having a knowledgeable staff available to answer the questions that naturally arise when engaging with nature. Sharing our passion for nature and conservation is our founda-



tion,” says Executive Director Nicole Schafer.

For local families, it's especially meaningful knowing that children in our own community have access to this kind of experience. Many students leave with not only new knowledge, but a genuine appreciation for the natural beauty that surrounds us every day.

And that beauty is something special.

BIOPHILIA
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Taking a Bite Out of an Invasive Species

What began as a creative response to an environmental threat has grown into one of the Emerald Coast's most anticipated—and impactful—spring events.

The Emerald Coast Open Lionfish Tournament and Festival returns May 15–17, bringing together divers, chefs, conservationists and families for a weekend that blends competition, cuisine and conservation. Centered around HarborWalk Village, the event is recognized as the largest lionfish tournament in

LIONFISH
continued on page 2



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 **Community**

LIONFISH

continued from page 1

the world—and one that continues to make measurable progress beneath the surface.

Big Impact, Growing Each Year

The numbers tell a powerful story.

During the 2025 tournament, more than 20,000 invasive lionfish were removed from Gulf waters, including 7,180 harvested during the pre-tournament and 13,322 during the two-day competition. Since its inception in 2019, the Emerald Coast Open has now removed over 100,000 lionfish, making a significant dent in one of the region’s most pressing marine challenges.

“This event has brought a lot of awareness to the invasive lionfish species and created a festive atmosphere for the enjoyment of our visitors and residents, while fostering prosperity for our local businesses,” said Okaloosa County Commission Chairman Paul Mixon.

Lionfish, native to the Indo-Pacific, have no natural predators in the Gulf and reproduce rapidly, threatening native fish populations and reef systems. Because they are not easily caught by traditional hook-and-line fishing, divers using spears play a critical role in controlling their numbers.

Competition with a Purpose

Divers from across the country travel to our area to partic-

ipate, forming teams and competing for nearly \$175,000 in cash and gear prizes. Categories include most, largest and smallest lionfish caught.

At the 2025 event, standout teams included:

- Most Lionfish: Deep Water Mafia 1 (2,038)
- Smallest Lionfish: Team Lookin’ Back (2.8 inches)
- Largest Lionfish: Team In the Clouds (17.2 inches)

Behind the scenes, weigh-ins and measurements took place near the harbor, adding to the excitement as teams brought in their hauls and shared stories of early morning dives, deep-water hunts and record-breaking catches.

“While this event continues to flourish, the opposite is happening for this invasive species,” said Natural Resources Chief Alex Fogg. “The public is beginning to realize the impact of the lionfish on our ecosystem and because of the divers and our amazing partners, we are able to make a difference for our environment in Gulf waters.”

From Ocean to Table

Beyond the tournament, the Emerald Coast Open has helped spark a growing culinary trend: lionfish as a sustainable seafood.

Mild, flaky and often compared to snapper or grouper, lionfish is now featured on menus across the area. During the lead-up to the tournament, local restaurants compete in Lionfish Restaurant Week, showcasing creative dishes that highlight the species’ versatility.



In 2025, La Paz took top honors for the third consecutive year—further proof that conservation can be as delicious as it is impactful.

Festival attendees can sample lionfish dishes, watch fillet demonstrations and learn how choosing lionfish supports Gulf ecosystems.

A Win for Tourism and Local Business

The tournament and festival also provide a strong economic boost for Destin and the surrounding area.

Thousands of visitors travel to the Emerald Coast for the event, filling hotels, booking charters and dining at local restaurants. The combination of competition and festival at-

mosphere reinforces Destin’s reputation as both a premier fishing destination and a hub for conservation-driven tourism.

A Festival for the Whole Family

While divers compete offshore, the Lionfish Festival brings the celebration onshore.

Held at HarborWalk Village, the family-friendly festival features tastings, educational exhibits, interactive booths, local vendors and activities for all ages. Live music and a lively harbor setting create an inviting atmosphere where visitors can learn, explore and connect.

It’s an event designed to engage everyone—from curious kids to seasoned anglers—while raising awareness about protect-

ing the Gulf.

More Than a Tournament

At its core, the Emerald Coast Open is about people coming together for a shared purpose.

From returning dive teams to first-time participants, the event fosters camaraderie, competition and a commitment to conservation. What started as a localized effort has grown into a signature Destin event with national reach—proving that a community-driven idea can create lasting environmental change.

As the 2026 tournament approaches, one thing is clear: Destin isn’t just hosting a competition—it’s leading a movement.

For more information, registration details or festival updates, visit emeraldcoastopen.com.





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Niceville Honors Vietnam Veterans with Annual Ceremony

By “DOC” DOUG STAUFFER

On a cool, brisk Sunday afternoon, the Okaloosa County community gathered once again at the Mullet Festival Grounds to honor those who served during the Vietnam War. The annual Vietnam Veterans Day Remembrance Ceremony, held March 27 at 1 p.m., brought together veterans, families, community leaders and citizens in a meaningful tribute of gratitude and respect.

This special event, held each year in recognition of National Vietnam War Veterans Day, serves as an opportunity to honor the service and sacrifice of Vietnam veterans and their families—many of whom did not receive the welcome home they deserved decades ago.

The ceremony featured two speakers who shared heartfelt remarks, blending personal reflection with historical perspective. Their words resonated deeply with the crowd, reminding all in attendance that

Vietnam was a different kind of war—one fought without clear front lines, under difficult conditions and often without full support back home. Yet through it all, these men and women served with courage, honor and unwavering commitment.

The crowd reflected a strong sense of community pride and appreciation. Veterans stood shoulder to shoulder, some wearing caps that marked their service, others quietly observing, but all recognized and honored. Families gathered together, children listened attentively and many paused to personally thank those who served. There was a noticeable spirit of enthusiasm—not just for the event itself, but for what it represented: a community determined to remember, honor and support its veterans.

Guests enjoyed commemorative memorabilia, refreshments and a light lunch. The combination of fellowship, remembrance and celebration made



the event both meaningful and memorable.

Beyond the ceremony, the event also highlighted the importance of continuing to care for and support veterans. Many organizations and volunteers were present, demonstrating that honoring veterans is not just something done once a year

but an ongoing commitment to serve those who have served us.

Sponsored by a coalition of veterans organizations and civic groups, the ceremony continues to grow each year, reflecting the deep respect held within the county. Events like this not only honor the past but also strengthen the bonds of the present.

National Vietnam War Veterans Day is officially observed on March 29, and Americans are encouraged to fly the flag in recognition of those who served. However, in Okaloosa County, that spirit of remembrance is already alive and well.

As the ceremony concluded, one thing was clear—this annual gathering is more than just an event. It is a promise. A promise that the sacrifices of Vietnam veterans will never be forgotten and that future generations will understand the cost of the freedoms they enjoy.

If you have never attended, make plans to join next year. The point of contact is Deborah Maloney Cain at 850-974-8285. Come be a part of a community that remembers, honors and says what should have been said long ago: Welcome home.

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Community



The Menopause Conversation Every Woman Needs (But Rarely Gets)

By DR. KAREN DEVORE, TORTOISE CLINIC

What if I told you there would be a period in your life, one that could last up to 10 years, that would fundamentally shift how your body feels and functions?

Imagine a season marked by persistent fatigue, disrupted sleep, weight gain that no longer responds the way it once did, and emotional shifts that feel unfamiliar. And that you would be expected to carry all of this



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while maintaining a career, supporting a family, and showing up for your community. For many women, this isn't theoretical. It is the reality of perimenopause and menopause.

For years, this transition was rarely discussed openly. That is changing, as it should. Many women are still navigating this blindly without understanding what is happening, what to expect, or what options they have to support themselves.

This is a natural progression, but it is not always easy, and most women are never taught how to navigate it. With the right understanding and guidance, this phase can shift from something reactive and uncertain to something far more stable and intentional.

Here's what I would share with every woman, regardless of where she is in her transition:

Build Your Team

You do not have to navigate this phase alone. When you understand what is happening in your body, your decisions, and your outcomes, improve. Your health deserves the same level of support as every other area of your life.

Build a team that will explore this transition with you—one that listens, collaborates, and in-

dividualizes your care. The right support shifts this experience from reactive to intentional.

Explore Your Options

Menopause is not a uniform experience, and your care should not be either.

Support may include nutrition and lifestyle changes, targeted supplementation, hormone therapy when appropriate, and restorative therapies. The goal is not to push through symptoms. It is to understand them and respond appropriately. If something feels off, it is worth addressing.

Rethink How You Fuel Your Body

Hormonal shifts increase sensitivity to blood sugar fluctuations, driving energy instability, cravings, weight gain, and brain fog.

Focus on stability: prioritize protein and hydration, include healthy fats and limit highly processed carbohydrates. When blood sugar is stable, energy, mood, and metabolic function follow.

Build Strength—Not Just Endurance

Muscle becomes increasingly

Continued on page 29



Footloose

the musical

FOOTLOOSE
STAGE ADAPTATION BY DEAN PITCHFORD AND WALTER BOBBIE
BASED ON THE ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY BY DEAN PITCHFORD

MUSIC BY TOM SNOW

LYRICS BY DEAN PITCHFORD

ADDITIONAL MUSIC BY ERIC CARMEN, SAMMY HAGAR, KENNY LOGGINS AND JIM STEINMAN



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Events Around the Bay

Magic & Comedy Destin Returns — Bigger, Bolder and More Interactive Ongoing Shows | The Palms Resort, Destin

It's back — and better than ever. Following a sold-out debut season, the Magic & Comedy Destin residency returns to The Palms Resort with an upgraded, high-energy show featuring up-close illusions, sharp comedy and immersive audience interaction. Headliner Bart Rockett, a



globally recognized performer who has entertained in more than 90 countries and starred in his own nationally syndicated TV show, brings big-stage talent to an intimate coastal setting. His fast-paced performance blends magic, comedy and ventriloquism — with every show offering a unique, interactive experience. Adding to the excitement, Rockett's children, Kadan and Brooklyn, make special guest appearances throughout the season, bringing their own star power from film, television and viral media. Guests can enjoy all table seating with food and drinks delivered directly to their seats, creating a seamless, elevated night out. Arrive early or stay after to dine at the adjacent Blue Lagoon restaurant.

Free to attend. Vendors welcome (apply online).

Dancing with the Emerald Coast Stars
Saturday, May 2 | 6 p.m. | Hotel Effie Sandestin

In partnership with Fred Astaire Dance Studios Fort Walton Beach and inspired by the hit TV show *Dancing with the Stars*, this ballroom-style competition pairs local leaders with professional dancers for an evening of glamour, entertainment and friendly rivalry to support the Seacoast Collegiate High School Expansion Project. The 2026 Emerald Coast Stars include Dr. Lindsey Hoppe of Scenic Sotheby's International Realty and Southern Sand, Destin Mayor Bobby Wagner, and Drew Ward, principal of Seacoast Collegiate High School. Each will perform alongside a professional dancer from Fred Astaire Dance Studios. The evening includes a cocktail hour, plated dinner, dance competition, awards ceremony and VIP after-party. Guests—and supporters watching from home—can vote for their favorite dancer for \$10 per vote.

Tickets: \$350 individual | \$500 couples. Sponsorships and tickets: SeasideSchools.net. To sponsor, contact Callie Cox at coxc@seasideschools.net.

Destin Seltzer Festival Returns to The Market Shops
May 2 | 1-4 p.m. | The Market Shops, Miramar Beach

Sip, savor and soak up the sunshine at the Destin Seltzer Festival on Saturday, May 2. This lively afternoon event features unlimited 2-ounce seltzer

Niceville High School Presents High-Energy Production of "Footloose"

Niceville High School is proud to announce its upcoming production of the electrifying musical *Footloose*, set to take the stage in May. Bursting with dynamic choreography by Nicci Fahle, unforgettable music with vocal direction by Madison Gomez and a powerful story about youth, freedom and standing up for what you believe in, this production promises to captivate audiences of all ages.

Based on the iconic 1984 film, *Footloose* tells the story of Ren McCormack, a teenager from Chicago who moves to a small town where dancing has been banned. Determined to challenge the status quo, Ren inspires his classmates to fight for self-expression and bring joy back to their community. Featuring hit songs like "Holding Out for a Hero," "Let's Hear It for the Boy"

and the title track "Footloose," the musical is a celebration of resilience, friendship and the transformative power of music.

The NHS Theatre cast and crew have been hard at work for months, dedicating countless hours to rehearsals, set design and technical preparation. Under the direction of NHS Theatre Director Ritchie Jackson, the school's talented performing and technical arts students are bringing energy, creativity and passion to every aspect of the show. "This production showcases the incredible talent and dedication of our students," said Jackson. "Footloose is not just about dancing — it's about finding your voice and making a difference. We're excited to share that message with our community."

Performances will take

place at Niceville High School's auditorium on May 1, 2, 8 and 9. Friday shows are at 7 p.m. each night, with 2 p.m. matinee performances on both Saturdays. Tickets can be purchased in advance through gofan.co, subject to availability. General admission tickets are \$15. VIP tickets are \$20 and include early seating, a free small bottle of water and a free bag of popcorn. This show is produced with permission from Concord Theatricals of New York, NY.

Don't miss this exciting theatrical event that will have you dancing in your seat and cheering for more. For more information, follow NHS Theatre on Instagram @theatre_nhs or visit NHS Theatre's Facebook page at facebook.com/NicevilleHSTheatre.

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HAPPENINGS AROUND THE BAY

MAY 2026 EVENTS

01 - 03

Bugs on the Bayou
7 am | Mullet Festival Grounds | Niceville

01

Greater FWB Chamber of Commerce's First Friday Coffee
7 am | First Baptist Church of FWB | FWB

Crafty Creations: May Day Crowns
10 am | Niceville Library | Niceville

Bugs on the Bayou
1 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville

Live Music: John McKinney
6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville

Footloose Opening Night
7 pm | Niceville High School | Niceville

02

14th Annual ONE Run 5K for Autism Awareness
8 am | Emerald Coast Autism Center | Niceville

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

R.E.A.D. - Reading Education Assistance Dogs
10:30 am | Niceville Library | Niceville

Build Your Own Terrarium
10:30 am | Artful Things Niceville | Niceville

Pop-Up: Oils by Holly Oliver Hertig
11 am | Artful Things Niceville | Niceville

Footloose
2 pm | Niceville High School | Niceville

Derby Day Bourbon Tasting
3 pm | American Legion Post 221 | Niceville

Artist Trading Card Club
5 pm | Artful Things Niceville | Niceville

Live Music: Clinch 46
6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville

02 - 03

38th Annual ArtsQuest Fine Arts Festival
10 am | Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach

03

Bluegrass Jam
12 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville

Sunday Sessions featuring Rescue Me
1 pm | Alaqua Animal Refuge | Freeport



Member Appreciation Day
1 pm | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso

Sinfonia Youth Orchestra & After School Beginning Strings in Concert
2 pm | Destin High School | Destin

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

04

Lunch N Learn: Recruiting for Culture
11:30 am | Greater FWB Chamber | FWB

Justice on the Block: Free Legal Help
12:30 pm | Niceville Library | Niceville

Star Wars Day Celebration
4 pm | Valparaiso Library | Valparaiso

04 Continued

Spring Honors Recital
6 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville

05

Lunch N Learn: Business Boot Camp
11:30 am | Greater FWB Chamber | FWB

Niceville Young Professionals Meeting
11:30 am | Niceville Valparaiso Chamber | Niceville

06

Kids One Stroke Painting with Sheila Mahony
4 pm | Artful Things Niceville | Niceville

07

Justice on the Block: Free Legal Help
10 am | Valparaiso Library | Valparaiso

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

Concerts in the Village: Brass Transit
6 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation | Destin



08

Live Music: Melodious Allen and the Funk Heads
6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville

Footloose
7 pm | Niceville High School | Niceville

09

5th Annual FORE! The Love of Animals Golf Tournament
10 am | The Links Golf Club | Miramar Beach

Create a Bookmark with KGC Creations
10:30 am | Artful Things Niceville | Niceville

Margot Handmade Pop-Up Market
11 am | Artful Things Niceville | Niceville

Footloose
2 pm & 7 pm | Niceville High School | Niceville

Sunday Sessions featuring Rescue Me
1 pm | Alaqua Animal Refuge | Freeport

11

"Only Murders in the Library" A Podcast Club
5 pm | Niceville Library | Niceville

12

Craft & Chat
11 am | Niceville Library | Niceville

Chess Night
6 pm | LJ Schooners Restaurant | Niceville

13

Niceville Valparaiso Chamber of Commerce's Second Wednesday Breakfast
7:15 am | Niceville Community Center | Niceville

Kids One Stroke Painting with Sheila Mahony
4 pm | Artful Things Niceville | Niceville

14

Radiance Reset: Mom Edition
10 am | Blissful Beauty Bar Niceville | Niceville

Concerts in the Village: Turnstiles
6 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation | Destin

15

Coloring & Coffee
11 am | Valparaiso Library | Valparaiso

15 Continued

JAWS Film in Concert by Sinfonia Gulf Coast
7:30 pm | Destin-FWB Convention Center | FWB



16

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

South Walton Boys & Girls Club's Spring Bash
11 am | South Walton Boys & Girls Club | SRB

Cookbook Club #2 Spring Meeting
11 am | Niceville Library | Niceville

17

Sunday Sessions featuring Rescue Me
1 pm | Alaqua Animal Refuge | Freeport

18

GSSF Indoor League Match
10 am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso

FiberArts Circle
5 pm | Valparaiso Library | Valparaiso

70th Annual Billy Bowlegs Torchlight Parade
7 pm | FWB

19

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

Women's Council of REALTORS' Purse Bingo Night
5:30 pm | Niceville Community Center | Niceville

20

Kids One Stroke Painting with Sheila Mahony
4 pm | Artful Things Niceville | Niceville

21

Crafty Corner
11 am | Valparaiso Library | Valparaiso

21 Continued

Concerts in the Village: Boogie Wonderband
6 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation | Destin

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

22

Live Music: Sevenply
6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville

23

Coiled Woven Baskets Pop-Up Market
11 am | Artful Things Niceville | Niceville

24

Sunday Sessions featuring Rescue Me
1 pm | Alaqua Animal Refuge | Freeport

Sinfonia Salutes: Memorial Day Concert and Drone Show
7:30 pm | Alys Beach Amphitheatre | Alys Beach

26

Shred-a-thon
10 am | Recreation Complex Parking Lot | Niceville

Writers Group
5:30 pm | Niceville Library | Niceville

28

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

Concerts in the Village: Molly Ringwalds
6 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation | Destin

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

31

Sunday Sessions featuring Rescue Me
1 pm | Alaqua Animal Refuge | Freeport

Sunset Shrimp Boil
4 pm | LJ Schooners Restaurant | Niceville

FARMERS MARKETS

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

MONTHLY EVENTS

Oils and Acrylics with Rosalyn O'Grady 10 am Tues Artful Things Niceville	One Stroke Painting (Adv) with Sheila Mahony 10:30 am Fri Artful Things Niceville
Watercolor Techniques with Theresia McInnis 1 pm Tues Artful Things Niceville	One Stroke Painting (Bgnr) with Sheila Mahony 2 pm Fri Artful Things Niceville
Bingo Night 6 pm Tues Bayou Pub Niceville	Yoga at Turkey Creek 9 am Sat Turkey Creek Nature Trail Niceville
Watercolor Basics (Adults) with Elia Saxer 10 am Thurs Artful Things Niceville	Brunch on the Bayou 9 am Sun LJ Schooners Restaurant Niceville
Watercolor Basics (Youth) with Elia Saxer 3:30 pm Thurs Artful Things Niceville	



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Community

EVENTS

continued from page 6

tastings from national and regional brands, light bites from local restaurants, live music and a fun, coastal atmosphere.

Hosted by Opportunity Place, the festival supports its mission of helping families and individuals transition to stable housing—100% of proceeds benefit the organization's programs.

A limited number of VIP tickets offer access to a private tent with upgraded food offerings and added perks. Sponsorships are available. For details, email opportunityplacefb@gmail.com. Follow along on social media for updates and ticket information.

CCA Emerald Coast Banquet & Auction Returns May 7

May 7 | Shoreline Church, Destin

The 32nd Annual CCA Florida Emerald Coast Chapter Banquet & Auction, presented by The Ships Chandler, returns Thursday, May 7 from 6–10 p.m. at Shoreline Church in Destin. Known as the "fishing

party of the year," this popular event raises critical funds to protect and enhance Florida's marine resources.

Guests will enjoy a catered dinner, drinks, an expansive silent auction, exciting raffles and a lively live auction featuring exclusive items, artwork and trips across the state, country and beyond.

CCA has been actively investing in local conservation efforts, including a recent \$500,000 contribution toward the upcoming sinking of the SS United States, one of the organization's largest project investments to date.

Tickets and sponsorships are available now. Don't miss this opportunity to celebrate, connect and support the future of our coastal habitats and fisheries.

Tickets & info: Register in advance to reserve your spot

Billy Bowlegs Pirate Festival Returns With Swashbuckling Fun May 14–16 | Fort Walton Beach Landing

Ahoy, mateys! The 70th annual Billy Bowlegs Pirate Festival sails back into Fort Walton

Beach May 14–16 at the Landing, bringing a lively weekend of pirate-themed fun, live entertainment, fireworks and family-friendly activities. Led by Captain Billy Bowlegs LXX, Rique Gwin, and his Krewe, the festival celebrates local history while boosting tourism and community spirit. Guests can expect vendors, music and the festival's signature "skirmish" Friday night — with Captain Billy playfully "captured" — before returning Saturday to officially storm the city.

Festivities also include the Little Pirates Scavenger Hunt on Thursday and an ongoing coin hunt leading up to the event, with clues shared on local Cumulus radio stations and the festival's Facebook page. The celebration continues beyond the weekend with the Billy Bowlegs Parade on Monday, May 18, along Eglin Parkway. A downtown Fort Walton Beach pub crawl is also set for May 8 to kick off the excitement.

The festival is free to attend and benefits the William Augustus Bowles Historical Foundation, supporting local history and heritage.

Info: kreweofbowlegs.com |



Follow Billy Bowlegs Pirate Festival on Facebook

Crawfish, Community & a Cause: Destin Rotary's Annual Bash Returns May 16 | Towne Centre at Seascape | Food, Music, Auction & Family Fun

Laissez les bons temps rouler! The Rotary Club of Destin's 14th Annual Cajun Crawfish Bash returns Friday, May 16, from 5:30–9 p.m. at the Towne Centre at Seascape, co-hosted by Mezcal Mexican Grill. This high-energy fundraiser supports the Robert Hafner Scholarship Fund, A Bed 4 Me, Harvest House, Emerald Coast Chil-

dren's Advocacy Center and Fisher House of the Emerald Coast—benefiting local students and families while helping fight hunger and expand opportunity across the community. Guests can enjoy fresh Louisiana crawfish with all the fixings—potatoes, sausage and corn—served up by Destin Rotary volunteers. Not a crawfish fan? No problem. Burgers, hot dogs and chicken will also be grilled fresh on-site. The evening features live music from Black Eyed Blonde, a silent auction, bourbon pull, magic by MagiShaun, a photo booth and face painting for the kids.

Continued on page 39

Advertisement for Gulf Coast Jam featuring Post Malone, Riley Green, Chris Stapleton, and Keith Urban. Includes dates (May 28-31, 2026) and ticket information.

Advertisement for Celebrations by the Sea, featuring Zoran Entertainment and ADJPro. Lists services like Coordinator, Photographer, Music, and Flowers, along with contact info and a QR code.



Probate in Florida Is Not One Thing: What Families Often Don't Realize

BY KIMBERLY COLE

Many people speak about probate as though it is a single, uniform process. In reality, probate in Florida looks very different depending on the estate, the assets involved, and the relationships among those left behind. What one family experiences may bear little resemblance to another's situation, even when both are going through "probate." Understanding that from the outset can make an overwhelming process feel more manageable and far less surprising.

At its core, probate is shaped by variables that are often invisible to families at the beginning. The type and value of assets matter. An estate consisting of a single bank account is handled

very differently from one that includes real property, investment portfolios, or business interests. How those assets are titled is equally important. Some assets pass automatically by beneficiary designation or joint ownership, while others require full court administration. The presence of a will also changes the process, but not always in the way people expect. A well-drafted will can provide clarity and direction, but it does not eliminate probate, and if it is unclear or outdated, it can introduce complications rather than resolve them.

Beyond the legal structure, human factors often play an equally significant role. When beneficiaries are cooperative and communication is open, the process tends to move more smoothly. When there is tension, distrust, or unresolved family dynamics, even a relatively simple estate can become more complex. Creditor issues can also affect the timeline and ad-



ministration, particularly where debts are unclear or substantial. In some cases, the court's involvement is minimal; in others, additional oversight, hearings, or judicial decisions are required. These differences are why probate cannot be reduced to a single, predictable experience.

Despite this, many families enter the process with expectations shaped by online searches. In moments of uncertainty, it is natural to look for quick an-

swers. The difficulty is that most internet advice presents probate as though it follows a standard script. It often assumes facts that may not apply, blends laws from different states, and simplifies legal requirements to the point of inaccuracy. A common example is the idea that probate "only takes a few months" or that certain assets will "automatically avoid probate." While those statements may be true in some situations, they can be entirely wrong in others.

This is where the gap between expectation and reality begins to take shape. Families often expect probate to be quick and largely administrative, only to discover that even straightforward cases take time. There are required steps that cannot be skipped: appointment of a personal representative, notice to creditors, and proper handling of estate assets. Many assume that once someone is named in a will, they can immediately step in and begin distributing property. In reality, authority comes from the court, and that authority must be formally established before action can be taken.

There are also persistent misconceptions that add to the confusion. One of the most common is the belief that probate only occurs when something has gone wrong. In truth, probate is often a normal and necessary process, even when everything has been done correctly. Another

Continued on page 11

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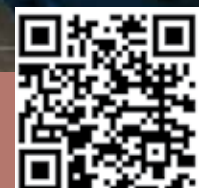
Life doesn't always give us time to prepare—but a clear plan can make all the difference.

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Community

Bay Buzz

America 250 Grand Parade & Celebration Comes to Crestview

Okaloosa County will mark a historic milestone with the America 250 Grand Parade & Celebration on May 9 from 4-10 p.m. in downtown Crestview. One of the county's largest patriotic gatherings to date, the event will feature floats, marching bands, veteran tributes, food trucks, vendors and live entertainment.

Crestview native and Olympic bronze medalist Mia Manganello will serve as a Grand Marshal. Attendees are encouraged to line Main Street in red, white and blue or colonial attire.

Vendor, parade and volunteer registration is available online. For details, visit Facebook at Okaloosa County America 250 or contact america250@myokaloosa.com.

Southwest Crestview Bypass Opens with Major Impact

The Okaloosa Board of County Commissioners will celebrate the grand opening of the Southwest Crestview Bypass on May 1 at 9 a.m. with a ribbon-cutting ceremony near U.S. Highway 90 and Enzor Road.

The \$212 million, multi-



phase project improves traffic flow and access throughout north Okaloosa County, connecting Antioch Road, State Road 85 and U.S. Highway 90. It also aligns with FDOT's Interstate 10 interchange project at P.J. Adams Parkway.

"The vision for this project was recognized years ago by County, City and community leaders who led the way to blaze this new trail for our residents," said Okaloosa County Board Chairman Trey Goodwin. "I can't thank our staff and Anderson Columbia enough for all of the great work that has been

done and all those who helped piece together the funding for this extraordinary project."

Apply Now: Affordable Housing Advisory Committee

Okaloosa County is seeking applicants to serve on the Affordable Housing Advisory Committee. One citizen will be appointed to a three-year term, advising the County and City of Fort Walton Beach on affordable housing strategies, including removing barriers and expanding opportunities.

Applicants must meet qual-

ifications outlined in Florida Statute 420.9076, including experience in planning, housing or related fields.

Applications are due by 5 p.m. May 14, 2026, and can be submitted via email or mail. Learn more and apply at myokaloosa.com/citizen-councils/home.

School Climate Survey Open Through April 29

Families are encouraged to participate in the Okaloosa County School District's School Climate Survey, open through April 29. The survey takes about 10 minutes and allows input for one or multiple schools.

Administered by an independent third party, The Donovan Group, results will help guide future decisions.

Complete the survey at dgsurveys.com/r/Okaloosa-Schools26.

Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive Set for May 9

The 34th annual NALC Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive will take place Saturday, May 9. As the nation's largest one-day



food drive, residents in Niceville and Valparaiso can support Sharing and Caring by placing nonperishable food items near their mailbox before regular mail delivery.

Suggested items include canned soup, pasta, rice and peanut butter.

School District Opens Employee Health Clinic

The Okaloosa County School District recently opened a new Employee Health Clinic at Okaloosa Technical College in Fort Walton Beach, offering free medical services and prescriptions for eligible employees and dependents.

Continued on next page

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BAY BUZZ

continued from previous page

Operated in partnership with Marathon Health, the clinic provides preventive care, chronic condition support and convenient scheduling aligned with school hours.

“This clinic represents an important step forward in how we support our employees,” said Superintendent Marcus Chambers. “By removing barriers like cost and access, we are making it easier for our staff to prioritize their health, something that directly impacts their ability to support our students each day.”

“This is a meaningful investment in our people,” said Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources Lindsay Maxey. “When we support the health and well-being of our employees, we are strengthening our entire district and the communities we serve.”

“By bringing care directly to the people we serve, we help remove barriers so that staff members and their families can get the care they need when they need it,” stated Marathon Health Regional Operations Manager Paul Lutz. “When the people who support our students are healthy and supported, our entire community benefits.”



New Extension Facility Expands Community Services

Okaloosa County has opened a new 3,000-square-foot UF/IFAS Extension Services facility, replacing a storm-damaged building and expanding educational programming in agriculture, horticulture, coastal sciences, family and consumer sciences and 4-H youth development.

Services include soil testing, plant clinics, water quality assistance and free tax preparation.

“Agriculture has always been a passion of mine and I have worked with the team at the Extension service for many years,” said Okaloosa County Commissioner Carolyn Ketchel (District 2). “This will greatly enhance

services offered to the south end of the county. I am grateful to be part of the effort to unveil this new facility that will mean so much to our community.”

The facility is named in honor of Sheila Dunning, a longtime Extension agent recognized for her contributions to horticulture and education.

Learn more at sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/okaloosa.



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PROBATE

continued from page 9

er is the idea that having a will avoids probate altogether. A will directs how assets are distributed, but it does not bypass the legal process required to carry out those instructions. Some believe the court takes control of everything, when in fact the personal representative manages the estate, with the court providing oversight. Others fear that probate will always take years, when many cases are completed within a reasonable timeframe, depending on the circumstances.

What is often overlooked is how small differences at the outset can lead to very different paths. Whether an estate qualifies for summary administration or requires formal administration, whether real estate must be sold, how many beneficiaries are involved, and whether disputes arise - all of these factors influence how probate unfolds.

Even timing can shift based on creditor claims, asset valuation, or the need to locate and secure property.

The reason online advice so often falls short is simple: probate is not just a checklist. It is a legal process shaped by specific facts, timing requirements, and human relationships. Generalized guidance cannot account for those variables. What works in one case may be entirely inappropriate in another, and relying too heavily on broad advice can lead to misunderstandings, delays, and unnecessary stress.

If your experience with probate feels different from what you expected, it does not mean something is wrong. It means your situation is unique. With the right guidance and a clearer understanding of the process, probate becomes far more manageable. The goal is not to fit every estate into the same mold, but to navigate each one thoughtfully, based on its own facts and circumstances.

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 Community

Meet our Hometown Hero: Nurse Pinky Thompson

By “DOC” DOUG STAUFFER

Care Close to Home

There are seasons in life when your body simply refuses to cooperate. Over the past two months, I found myself in one of those seasons for the first time in my life. Three surgeries in quick succession had taken their toll. My stamina was gone. My drive—something I have depended on for decades—had completely evaporated.

Like many, I began looking

for answers. The VA determined that my vitamin D levels were low, so I started supplements. Yet, even with that adjustment, I continued to decline. The energy simply was not coming back. Then came a visit that changed everything.

Recently, I walked into Niceville’s Infuse and met Nurse Pinky Thompson. She listened, assessed and recommended a vitamin D injection along with what is known as a “Myers Cocktail Infusion” combined

with an amino blend. I appreciated her confidence, but I will admit—I was cautiously optimistic at best.

Now, however, I can say something I have not said in months: My stamina is back. My drive has returned. The difference is undeniable.

I cannot adequately express how grateful I am—not only for what Pinky and Infuse has done for me—but for what they are doing for so many others in our community.



differences in patient outcomes. Those with underlying conditions like diabetes or weakened immune systems often struggled the most. Meanwhile, those who had invested in their health—who had stronger immune systems—frequently fared better.

Those experiences left a lasting impact.

The weight of loss during that time was heavy, but it also shaped a new perspective. Pinky became convinced that preventative care—giving the body what it needs before crisis strikes—could make a meaningful difference. She developed a passion not just for treating illness, but for helping people strengthen their bodies and improve their

quality of life. What makes this story even more compelling is the heart behind the care.

Pinky’s journey is one shaped by both challenge and purpose. Originally from Thailand, she came to the United States as a young child, settling first in California before moving to Florida when her grandmother married a service member. She grew up right here, attending Ocean City Elementary School, Pryor Middle School and Choctawhatchee High School.

Her path into nursing was deeply personal. As a child, she spent significant time in hospitals battling anemia and asthma. During those difficult years, she saw nurses not just as caregivers—but as heroes. That impression stayed with her and ultimately shaped her calling.

She pursued her nursing degree at Northwest Florida State College and began her career in 2017. From the emergency room at Sacred Heart in Miramar Beach to the intensive care units at Fort Walton Beach Medical Center and back again to Sacred Heart, she gained frontline experience in some of the most demanding environments in healthcare.

Then came COVID.

As an ICU nurse during the height of the pandemic, she witnessed firsthand the stark

quality of life.

Through extensive research, she explored alternative approaches, including IV therapy, and its potential benefits for those facing autoimmune conditions, chronic fatigue and even cancer-related challenges.

That passion led to action.

In May of 2023, she opened Infuse in Shalimar. By 2024, the demand and impact had grown enough to expand into Niceville. Today, Infuse stands as more than just a medical service—it represents a philosophy of care. One that values prevention, strength and restoring quality of life.

For me, it meant getting my energy back. For others, it might mean something even greater.

In a world where healthcare often feels rushed and reactive, it is encouraging to find someone who is committed to helping people live stronger, healthier lives before problems become crises.

Sometimes, what we need most is not just treatment—but a second wind.

And sometimes, that second wind is closer than we think. I checked things out and I am not alone—a perfect 4.8 of the 5-star reviews! (www.infuseivwellness.com). Tell them Doug sent you.



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Residential & Commercial

May is National Stroke Awareness Month

Rebuilding Lives After a Stroke: The Power of Post-Acute Rehabilitation

BY TERESA HALVERSON,
BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT/
COMMUNITY RELATIONS
DIRECTOR

Recovery after a stroke doesn't end when a patient leaves the hospital – in many ways, that's when the real work and recovery begin. Post-Acute stroke rehabilitation is critical because it helps survivors regain lost abilities, adapt to new challenges, and restore as much independence as possible. Through targeted physical, occupational, and speech therapy services, patients can rebound strength, improve coordination and mobility as well as communication skills. Just as importantly, post-acute rehabilitation supports emotional and cognitive healing, helping individuals cope with life changes a stroke can bring. Early and consistent therapy not only improves physical and cognitive recovery, but also helps reduce the risk of complications and hospital readmissions. For many stroke survivors, this phase of care is the bridge between survival and truly living again.

Guidance from the National Stroke Association emphasizes that recovery, after a stroke, is a long-term process that requires active participation from the patient and family/caregivers. One of the most important recommendations is to begin rehabilitation as early as possible and remain consistent with therapy, as early intervention is closely linked to better outcomes. (<https://www.stroke.org>)

Post-acute rehabilitation is not only vital for the patient's recovery, it also has a profound impact on family members and caregivers. For patients, this phase of care provides the structured support needed to regain as much independence as possible, preventing complications from falls, and rebuilds confidence in performing everyday activities. The ultimate goal of post-acute care is to assist the



patient's best possible chances of returning to their prior level of function.

For families, post-acute rehabilitation offers education, guidance, training and peace of mind during what is often an overwhelming time. Caregivers learn how to safely assist with daily tasks, manage medications, and recognize warning signs of any potential complications. This support reduces stress, prevents caregiver burn-out, and fosters a more positive recovery environment at home. Effective post-acute care strengthens outcomes for both the patient and their support system, turning recovery into a shared, supported journey rather than an uncertain path.

Neurologists play a key role in monitoring the type and severity of the stroke, monitoring complications, and managing any underlying conditions. In collaboration with the post-acute clinical team and primary care physicians, neurologists help tailor rehabilitation plans based on the patient's neurological status and recovery potential. Their continued involvement ensures that care remains coordinated, proactive and responsive to any changes, giving patients and families greater confidence and support throughout the recovery journey.

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in-patient post-acute and out-patient rehabilitation services for stroke recovery, delivered by certified therapists specializing in neurological rehabilitation. Our team is dedicated to supporting recovery, independence and improved quality of life.

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The Rigdon Center

BY CAROLYN NEWCOMER
KETCHEL

The Okaloosa County Fairgrounds, located behind the courthouse on Lewis Turner Boulevard, were historically owned and operated by the City of Fort Walton Beach. In 2022, the Fort Walton Beach City Council declared the property surplus. Recognizing its potential value—and the possibility that it could be sold for private development—the Okaloosa Board of County Commissioners entered into negotiations to acquire the site as a valuable public asset. The county officially purchased the property in March 2023.

In July 2023, the board established a seven-member citizen advisory committee to help guide the enhancement and refurbishment of the fairgrounds. The committee included representatives from the Northwest Florida Fair Association, the Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce and one appointee from each county commissioner. The Fort Walton Beach city manager served in a non-voting, ex officio role.

Based on the committee's recommendations, a long-term, five-phase master plan was developed to guide the future growth and direction of the property. As part of this plan, the facility was rebranded as the Rigdon Center Complex in honor of Bull Rigdon, who managed the facility for many years.

Since acquiring the property, the county has made significant



progress on Phase I improvements. These include the demolition of dilapidated structures and major upgrades to electrical systems, HVAC, lighting, ceilings, drainage and overall aesthetics. Installation of new epoxy flooring is nearing completion, with security and audiovisual systems scheduled for installation soon.

Additionally, construction is underway on a new 3,000-square-foot building between Buildings B and C. This addition will feature event catering kitchens, concession areas and modern restroom facilities. Completion is expected in just over six months. The facade portion of the project will soon

go out for bid and will include three new entrances, updated signage, additional parking, decorative walls, covered walkways and refreshed landscaping.

Once Phase I is complete later this year, the facility will offer approximately 50,000 square feet of affordable event space capable of hosting festivals, trade shows, business meetings and a wide variety of community events.

Designing and permitting projects of this scale requires considerable time—often up to a year. As planning continues for Phases II and III, the next step is to begin the design phase for a new multi-purpose event center. This phase is expected to take about a year, with construction bidding likely in 2027.

The proposed expansion includes approximately 50,000 square feet of new space, complementing the existing 50,000 square feet, an additional 20,000 square feet of storage and 15 acres of outdoor event area. The main event hall—approximately 35,000 to 40,000 square feet—will be designed as a flexible, divisible space with seating capacity for up to 3,000 people.

This facility will support a wide range of events, including cheerleading and dance competitions, volleyball, wrestling, pickleball, large trade shows and community and military gatherings. Its capabilities will position the county to attract larger, multi-day events and remain competitive with similar venues.

Planned features include high ceilings (40-plus feet), durable flooring, a mezzanine level, elevators, multiple flooring types, fixed seating, breakout rooms and specialty-use spaces. The building will be a hardened metal structure, enhancing resilience and offering potential use during hurricane events.

The campus includes 20.4 acres of outdoor space for events and parking, along with an additional 15.83 acres of adjacent county-owned land. The City of Fort Walton Beach also maintains a large asphalt area nearby that may be used for overflow parking or event support on a limited basis.

Project costs include land acquisition, construction, parking, stormwater systems, landscaping and pedestrian access improvements. Funding for the new facility will come from a variety of non-taxpayer sources, including grants from the Gulf Consortium, tourism development funds, legislative appropriations and state agricultural grants. No property tax dollars are planned to be used for this project.

It is an honor to serve as your commissioner.

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



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Paws that Protect: The Military Working Dogs Defending Hurlburt Field

BY 2ND LT. RACHEL HECK,
1ST SPECIAL OPERATIONS WING
PUBLIC AFFAIRS

At 4:30 a.m., while most of Hurlburt Field is still dark and quiet, a security forces handler assigned to the 1st Special Operations Wing begins his shift. He checks his gear, reviews the night's incidents and prepares for a long day of patrol. But before he heads out, he makes sure his partner is ready.

That partner doesn't grab a radio or lace up boots. He waits patiently in a kennel, tail thumping against the gate.

"Me and you—it's time to get to work," the handler tells his four-legged companion.

Together, they are one of several military working dog teams assigned to the 1 SOW. This group of handlers and canines trained in patrol and detection work to enhance installation se-

curity, deter threats and provide an added layer of protection for Air Commandos and their families.

According to the handler, the value of MWDs lies in their unmatched senses and ability to detect subtle changes in an environment long before a human might notice.

"We're able to rely on their ability to think independently," the handler described. "They're going to catch what I don't catch."

Their tactical value relies on a unique partnership built on discipline and unwavering loyalty, he further explained.

"I protect him, but he also protects me," said the handler. "We're in this together."

The kennel houses German Shepherds and Belgian Malinois, each paired with a dedicated handler. While every dog



and handler qualifies in similar mission sets through their respective training programs at Lackland Air Force Base, each team builds its own dynamic and trust.

"You're trying to learn what makes them tick—what winds

them up, what winds them down, what makes them shy away, what amps them up," the handler said.

For this handler, his MWD is more than a partner.

"I get to be a cop," the handler explained. "But I also get my best friend as my ride along partner. It's the best of both worlds."

In the quiet parts of the day, their partnership looks a lot like any other bond between a man and his dog. Each MWD has

a distinct personality ... some playful, some stubborn, some already eyeing retirement and the promise of a couch somewhere down the line, he noted.

"When I'm driving around, he's relaxed in the back."

When the call comes in, however, affection gives way to focus.

"Play time's over. Let's get it done," the handler says to his partner.

In an instant, the same dog that was relaxed moments before is alert, disciplined and mission-ready, serving as a reminder that behind every wagging tail is a highly trained defender, always prepared to protect.

First of Its Kind: F-15E Strike Eagle Lands at Eglin Museum

The Air Force Armament Museum welcomed a historic addition April 10 with the dedication of an F-15E Strike Eagle — the first of its kind ever placed on public display.

Aircraft No. 86-184, a roughly 35-year-old jet, served its entire career as a developmental test aircraft with the 96th and 412th Test Wings at Eglin Air Force Base. It was also one of the oldest F-15Es in the active fleet before its retirement. "This Strike Eagle will take her rightful place here among the equally distinguished artifacts for the public to engage," said retired Brig. Gen. Fran Hendricks, president of the museum foundation.

The aircraft also honors those who flew and maintained it. Former Eglin commander Maj. Gen. Robert Chedister, who piloted 86-184, is commemorated with his name displayed on the canopy. "His name on the canopy is a lasting salute to a



man who gave so much to the country he loved both in and out of uniform," Hendricks said.

Weapons system officer Lt. Col. Rich Bailey and maintainers Master Sgt. Vik Maharaj, Staff Sgt. Robert Lawson and Staff Sgt. Benjamin Haag are also recognized on the aircraft. "This new and first-of-its-kind addition to our museum is both a tribute to all who have served at Eglin and an inspiration to those who will follow," Hendricks added.

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Summer Math Learning Keeps Students on Track for Success

Incorporating consistent, enjoyable, and meaningful opportunities for math learning into your family's summer agenda could benefit your kids long after they bid summer break a fond farewell.

The reason: summer learning loss (or the "summer slide"). This refers to the loss of skills all students experience when they don't participate in educational activities over summer vacation.

In fact, summer learning loss has been extensively documented in studies dating as far back as 1906! According to researchers at Johns Hopkins University, math proficiency is particularly susceptible to the summer slide, with students losing "about two months of grade level equivalency in mathematical computation skills over the summer months."

Additionally, a study conducted by the RAND Corporation states that summer learning loss is cumulative and can have far-reaching effects on a student's long-term academic success. The good news is that it's possible to stop the summer slide in its tracks and help your kids retain concepts they learned throughout the school year. The RAND Corporation report notes the advantages of attending summer programs and embracing summer learning opportunities, adding that "Programming needs to be high-quality, and students need to enroll and attend regularly."



The fact is, summer presents valuable and often overlooked chances for kids to dig deep and explore concepts not necessarily covered in school while learning at their own pace. With regular school year pressures on hold, summer could be the season your child discovers how fun learning math can be! To get the most out of summer math learning, pick a program that...

Ramps up the fun factor... while ensuring that kids make progress. Summer break was made for fun and frolic, so do your child a favor and pick a summer math program that specializes in creative, effective ways to teach math; really

makes concepts come alive; and allows your family to balance math learning with non-academic summer pursuits.

Provides individualized instruction in a comfortable, stress free environment. Summer is the time to break free of the constraints and limitations of a traditional classroom environment. Whether your child is far behind, performing at grade level, or in need of an extra challenge, a high-quality math program meets your child where they are and helps them get to where they want to be—with a smile!

Emphasizes regular attendance and goal setting.

Consistent learning over time is key to staving off the summer slide! A solid summer math program will help you and your child pinpoint learning goals and develop a steady plan of action to ensure progress without causing burnout.

Keeps you in the loop.

Program administrators should be enthusiastic communicators eager to provide you with regular updates about your child's progress.

Committing to the right summer math program can help your child start the next school year on the right foot and gain long lasting confidence and a love of learning along the way. Have a great summer!

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Congratulations to the Rocky Bayou Christian School Graduating Class of 2026!



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Baltz, Henry



Barrett, Jacob



Belanger, Cole



Bielamowicz, Chase



Brandt, Javon



Branch, Elijah



Broussard, Sophia



Burden, Brianna



Burke, Madelyn



Busby, Sierra



Cawood, Lela



Chang, Eleanor



Clifton, Rosemary



Coffey, James



Crawford, Xavier



Ding, Katherine



Duplechain, Matthew



Ellinger, Gabe



Elston, Lily



Frazee III, Raymond



Gonzalez, Maddox



Heathershaw, Danny



Hess, David Samuel



Hood, Sarah



Huyghue, Josiah



Kaiser, Brenley



Keener, Kayla



Lewis, Abigail



Liu, Irene



Martin, Kenley



Mass, Erika Continanza



Maulden, Savannah



McPherson, Mollee



Meadows, Ava



Miller, Annabelle



Moore, Zea



Nagell, Bryce



Nappier, Amber



Newsom, Mckenzie



Nguyen, Thuy



Noggle, Jack



Nolen, Charity



Novoa Romero, Sarai



Parrish, Aaron



Parrish, Carson



Pluhar, Thomas



Reeves, William



Register, Hartley



Riches, Phoebe



Rossell, Justus



Saltamachia, Avery



Satterwhite, Sam



Scott, Trand



Seigfried, Braden



Snyder, Jack



Starling, Angelina



Stevens, Colt



Stevenson, Lily



Stine, Kaine



Stoffel, Lillie



Sutherland, Jayden



Tang, Victoria



Thomason, Tyler



Twine, David



Waller, Elijah



Waller, Jonathan



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White, Natalie



Willis, Everly



Wilson, Josiah



Zhang, Zion

Congratulations!



AJ's Seafood & Oyster Bar

Since 1984, AJ's Seafood and Oyster Bar has been serving cold Gulf Coast oysters and cool libations. What began as a popular local hang out known for fresh oysters and cold beer has grown into one of the most iconic "hot spots" on the Destin Harbor. From its humble beginning shucking oysters off the deck behind a small trailer on the Destin Harbor, it has grown to four locations along our Emerald Coast, serving fresh seafood, live music and exciting water activities in the Destin area. Attention all die

hard football fans, AJ's boasts the one and only Jumbotron on the Destin Harbor. AJ's serves up delicious daily specials, mouth-watering drinks plus entertaining live music all month. Don't miss any of the action just come on down to AJ's Seafood and Oyster Bar all season long.

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LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant

Suds, Songs, Sunsets and Sports! Welcome to LJ Schoo-



ners Dockside Restaurant at the Bluewater Bay Marina Complex. Named after "LJ Schooner" (the LJ is for Lazy Jack), a cherished four-legged icon on Bluewater Bay Marina docks, the open-air oyster bar and restaurant offers a magnificent view of the water, marina and unparalleled sunset any time of year. There are, of course, oysters and a delicious varied menu with dinner specials such as blackened mahi and

grilled shrimp with hollandaise, served over cheese grits.
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.
Saturdays: Steak Night, 5-9 p.m.
May 31: Sunday Shrimp

Boil is Back! Shrimp Boil 4-7 p.m.; Live Music 4-8 p.m.

Sunday, May 10: Mother's Day Brunch, 9 a.m. - 2 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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An iconic favorite of locals, owner and operator of JoJo's Coffee and Goodness Angela "JoJo" Stevenson invites you to enter her cafe and relaxed coffee shop atmosphere for a daily dose of "goodness." Stop in for mouth-watering cinnamon rolls, scones, coffee cake, banana and pumpkin breads, apple cider muffins, chocolate chip cookie bars, or brownies with espresso ganache. Gluten free bakery items available. Coffee roasted every week in-house. Try a breakfast special with quiche or kolache alongside hashbrown casserole and cup of coffee. Breakfast burritos are rolled and ready to grab and go-choose from bacon, birria, chorizo or veggie served with house made cilantro lime or chipotle sauces. Espresso, latte, cappuccino, cold brew or nitro made to order. Breakfast and lunch sandwich specials and a full evening catering menu if you are looking to host an event or party. Come for the coffee, stay for the goodness!

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Sunset Shrimp Boil

Sunday, May 31, 4pm-7pm
Parker Willingham 4pm-8pm

Margarita Mondays
Taco Tuesdays
Wednesdays - Kids Eat Free & Sailboat Race 6pm
Thursdays - Paddle Board Race 6pm & Open Mic/Karaoke 6pm
Sunday Buffet Brunch 9am-1pm



..... More Fun

Friday, May 1: Brianna Steele 6-10pm
Saturday, May 2: Sick Tight 6-10pm
Tuesday, May 5: Cinco de Mayo
Friday, May 8: Something Fishy 6-10pm
Saturday, May 9: David Gautreau 6-10pm
Sunday, May 10: Mothers Day Brunch, 9am-2pm
Tuesday, May 12: Chess Night 6-9pm
Friday, May 15: Jody Lucas 6-9pm & Wear Your Life Jacket to Work Day
Saturday, May 16: Purple Monkey, 6-10pm
Tuesday, May 19: The Traveling Painter 5:30pm
Friday, May 22: Rockers 4 Life, 6-10pm
Saturday, May 23: The Aces 6-10pm
Friday, May 29: After Math 5-10pm
Saturday, May 30: Paradise Vale 6-10pm

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

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

Warning: Unlimited Tacos and Tequila Ahead — The Gulf Coast's Biggest Fiesta Returns May 16!

Every May, **Extreme Festival & Events** transforms the Village of Baytowne Wharf at Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort into the Gulf Coast's most spirited fiesta — and this year is no exception. The **13th Annual Tequila & Taco Fest** returns on **Saturday, May 16, 2026**, bringing together the best tacos, the finest tequilas, and an energy that simply cannot be matched anywhere on the Emerald Coast.

Recognized as the **second longest-running Tequila & Taco Fest in the United States** and a **Gold Medal winner for Best Event in Walton County**, this award-winning festival has earned its place as a beloved spring tradition for locals and visitors from across the Southeast. With a history of sell-outs, early ticket purchases are strongly encouraged.

From **1:00 PM to 4:00 PM**, more than **30 top taco vendors** will fire up their grills and compete for the prestigious title of Best Taco in Northwest Florida, with a **\$4,250 total prize purse on the line** — including a \$2,500 grand prize for first place. Guests enjoy **unlimited taco tastings** as they make their way through every booth, while judges score each entry on taste, presentation, and texture. The **Best Margarita Competition** adds even more flair, with both judge and People's Choice awards up for grabs.

Beyond the competition, guests can explore **40 tequila tasting tents** offering **unlimited tequila and margarita tastings**, enjoy imported beers, and dance to **live music** and a mariachi band all afternoon. Thrill-seekers can test their limits in the **Macho Nacho Eating Contest** and



the fiery **Muy Caliente Pepper Eating Contest** — each offering a **\$250 prize** to the bravest competitor. Show off your festival style in the **Best Dressed Contest** for another shot at \$250. Face painting and interactive activities round out a celebration the whole family can enjoy.

For those looking to elevate the experience, the exclusive **Fast Pass Party Pack** offers VIP perks including a pre-party at **Ara Rooftop inside Hotel Effie** from 11:00 AM to 1:00 PM, skip-the-line access, premium spirit tastings, drink specials, and an after-party back at Ara starting at 4:00 PM.

Planning to make a weekend of it? **Book your stay with My Vacation Haven** and enjoy exclusive discount rates for festival guests. A special thank you to the major sponsor, **The Zen Companies Inc.**, for making this year's event possible.

A portion of proceeds benefits the **Fisher House of the Emerald Coast**, supporting

military families in their time of need — making every taco and every sip mean just a little bit more.

Tickets are available now at efestevents.com.



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 Off the Hook

Blessing of the Fleet Returns for 69th Year

May 14 | Destin Harbor

There are few traditions that capture the heart and heritage of our area quite like the annual Blessing of the Fleet—a time-honored celebration where faith, fishing and community come together along the harbor.

Now in its 69th year, the beloved event returns on Ascension Day, Thursday, May 14, 2026, at the docks behind Brotula's Seafood House & Steamer. Rooted in Destin's identity as a historic fishing village, the Blessing of the Fleet remains one of the city's most meaningful and uniquely coastal traditions.

The evening begins at 4 p.m.



PHOTO CREDIT: IMMANUEL ANGLICAN CHURCH / A.YII
SeaQuest II pauses in front of the clergy dock to receive their blessing from various clergy from around Destin during the 68th annual Blessing of the Fleet



PHOTO CREDIT: IMMANUEL ANGLICAN CHURCH / A.YII
Clergy board Captain Tony Davis' Anastasia for the last group blessing of the day. Captain Tony serves as Commodore for the event. His father, Captain William Frank Davis served as Commodore for the Blessing of the Fleet for many years as well.

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with a Captains' Praise and Worship Service held under a large tent overlooking the harbor. Around 5 p.m., clergy will process to the docks to begin blessing the vessels—everything from commercial fishing boats to safety and recreational watercraft. Each participating captain receives a signature blue Blessing of the Fleet flag, a symbol proudly flown to signify protection and faith for the year ahead. In 2025 alone, more than 130 vessels took part in the ceremony.

Following the blessings, the community is invited to gath-

er for a Fish Feast beginning around 5:15 p.m., with a suggested donation. Sponsored in part by Ariel Seafood and Brotula's, the feast offers a true taste of Destin while bringing neighbors and visitors together in fellowship.

Free parking is available at Brotula's throughout the day, with additional public parking across the street opening at 2 p.m. Event T-shirts will also be available for purchase near the main tent.

While Blessings of the Fleet are celebrated in other coastal

communities around the world, Destin's stands out for its scale, spirit and deep connection to the people who built their lives on the water. First held in 1958, it is considered Destin's second-oldest tradition, following the famed Destin Fishing Rodeo, which began in 1948.

The tradition reflects the enduring faith of the early fishermen who founded this "Little Fishing Village" and continues to honor those who make their living from the Gulf today. Each year, families, captains and community members gather not only to celebrate the season ahead, but to pray for protection, provision and safe passage on the water.

The Blessing of the Fleet is part of "Destin's Week of Blessings," a series of faith-based, family-friendly events held throughout the week and supported by local churches. Together, these gatherings offer opportunities to serve, connect and uplift the community.

Captains wishing to participate can register their vessels by contacting Immanuel Anglican Church at 850-837-6324 or by emailing immanuel@iacdestin.org with vessel and contact information.

Whether you're a lifelong local, a member of the fishing community, or a visitor looking to experience a truly authentic Emerald Coast tradition, the Blessing of the Fleet offers a meaningful glimpse into the heart of this coastal town—where faith and the sea have always gone hand in hand.





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Destin Boat & Yacht Show Makes Big Debut May 1-3

300+ Boats to be Showcased at Sunset Isle Yacht Club on Okaloosa Island

Okaloosa Island is set to host the newest premier boating and celebration of the 'Coastal Lifestyle' event as the inaugural Destin Boat & Yacht Show, which will mark the final stop of the 2026 Gulf Coast Boat Tour, May 1-3 at Sunset Isle Yacht Club. The region's top dealers and boat manufacturers will showcase over 60 boats in the water and another 250 displayed on the marina property, making this the largest boat show in the Destin market.

Special Events, which is the show operator. "This will be a weekend that celebrates Crab Island, East Pass, Destin Harbor, and all of the amazing on-the-water experiences that define Destin's boating community."

Destin, often referred to as the "World's Luckiest Fishing Village," provides the perfect setting for a show of this caliber, according to Chuck O'Neill of Legendary Marine. "The opportunity to have a boat show

ed lineup of Coastal Lifestyle exhibitors and vendors will showcase the best of Gulf Coast living. Boating accessories, fishing tackle, paddleboarding, kayaking, product demonstrations, seminars, beach furniture, a food barge, beer, and cocktails are all part of the show.

The 2026 Gulf Coast Boat Tour culminates in Destin after highly successful shows in Panama City Beach and also in Orange Beach. Show hours for the 2026 Destin Boat & Yacht Show for Friday, May 1st, and Saturday, May 2nd, will be 10-6, and Sunday, May 3rd, from

10-4. Military members with a valid idea can enter the show for just \$5 any of the three days. To purchase individual day passes to skip the line, as well as up-to-date information on boats, brands, models, dealers, and exhibitors, visit DestinBoatShow.com.



The three-day event will feature a 'Boat For Everyone!' Whether you are an experienced boater looking to upgrade your current boat, looking to purchase your first boat, or just enjoy spending a day on the water admiring beautiful boats, this show is for you. Center consoles, tritoons, bay boats, and luxury yachts alongside the latest in marine technology, accessories, and coastal lifestyle exhibits will all be showcased at the 142-slip Marina at the Sunset Isle Resort and Yacht Club, one of the finest and largest marinas in Northwest Florida.

"Just as we do with our other shows along the Gulf Coast, this is more than just a boat show," said Scott Burt of Wheels Up

in Destin in early May is a very critical opportunity for us and other dealers who are most appreciative to be able to showcase our boats to the Destin-area clientele. We know it's going to be a huge success."

Jason Hatcher of MarineMax says Destin has long needed a show like this. "The opportunity for a boat show in May is something no one has done, and it's going to be a hit, because boat buyers have been asking for an event like this." Hatcher also said the show's location is the perfect venue. "Sunset Isle is a brand new state-of-the-art marina, with huge slips, wide docks, plenty of parking, and getting in and out is easy for everyone."

In addition to boats, a curat-

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Environment

BIOPHILIA

continued from page 1

The Biophilia Center sits within the longleaf pine ecosystem, one of the most diverse and endangered habitats in North America. Thanks to restoration efforts on the Nokuse Plantation, millions of longleaf pines have been replanted, bringing this critical ecosystem back to life. It's a quiet but powerful success story happening right here at home.

Visitors to the center can encounter native wildlife, including birds, reptiles, pollinators and the beloved gopher tortoise — a keystone species that plays an important role in the health of the ecosystem. Inside, interactive exhibits and “animal ambassadors” help bring these lessons to life in a way that resonates with all ages.

Beyond its educational programs, the center also supports broader environmental initiatives, hosting researchers, educators and conservation leaders who are working to protect Florida's natural resources. Its sustainable practices — from conservation efforts to environmental programming — reflect

the same values it teaches every day.

For those who haven't visited yet, the center is open to the public on select days and through special events and seasonal programs. It's a perfect outing for your family, grandparents (like me) with visiting grandchildren, or anyone looking to reconnect with nature just minutes from home.

Did you know? The Nokuse Plantation surrounding the center spans more than 50,000 acres, making it one of the largest private conservation efforts in the Southeast — and it's right here in Freeport.

In a fast-growing area where so much is changing, the E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center stands as something steady and lasting — a reminder of what makes this community so special.

It's not just a destination. It's part of who we are.

Upcoming Events
It's Almost Time for the Earth Day Expo!

The E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center will host its Earth Day Expo, presented by Pepsi, on Saturday, April 25, 2026, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Biophilia



PHOTOS: JEFF TALBERT

Center campus, 4956 FL-20 E in Freeport. This family-friendly event will feature environmental education, interactive booths and engaging opportunities for all ages to learn about conservation and sustainable practices.

This year's expo brings together a diverse group of environmental educators and orga-



ing the unique flavors and botanical heritage of Florida's native edible plants. Food trucks will be on site throughout the day.

Admission is \$15 for ages 13 and older and \$10 for children ages 3-12. Biophilia Center members receive free admission.

Summer Kickoff

Mark your calendar for the public's first "non-event" opportunity to come in for the season—

E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center's Summer Kickoff on May 30 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. This family-friendly fundraiser will feature live music by Jennifer Alvarado, food trucks, bounce houses, animal chats, raffles, and access to the Reptile Room. Admission is \$15 for ages 13 and up, \$10 for ages 4-12, and free for Bio-members. Guests are encouraged to bring a towel and spare clothes for water activities, and come ready to celebrate the start of summer surrounded by nature.

nizations, including Panhandle Wildlife Rescue, the Florida Native Plant Society, Florida Trails Association, Florida Forestry, The Longleaf Alliance, the Florida Wildflower Foundation, local native plant nurseries and more. Guests can explore educational exhibits, native plant vendors, conservation resources and hands-on activities designed to inspire stewardship and awareness of Florida's natural ecosystems.

Hourly talks will take place in the theater, along with a Career Hour featuring speakers from forestry, fish and wildlife and other environmental organizations. Attendees can also experience the "Essence of Florida Flora" tasting room, highlight-

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Learning at the E. O. Wilson Biophilia Center: **Snakes!**



BY HELEN PETRE

I volunteer at the E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center, helping Turtle Bob teach fourth and seventh-graders about snakes and turtles. When the students enter the Turtle Bob room, some are terrified. By the time the class is over, Turtle Bob has convinced even the most uneducated that snakes are our friends. All the snakes the students hold are non-venomous and accustomed to being held. We teach the students that they will encounter snakes in the wild if they go outside.

Most of our snakes in the Panhandle are non-venomous, but

a few, like our common cottonmouth, are venomous. Even so, if you wear shoes and keep your hands where you can see them, you will be fine. Venomous snakes do not chase you down or attack you unless you try to kill them, step on them in bare feet, or pick them up. Like bears and bobcats, give them room, do not threaten them, and you will be fine. Any snake will bite if threatened. Any human probably will, too.

Eastern cottonmouth (Agkistrodon piscivorus piscivorus)

The cottonmouth is our most common venomous snake. It swims well, lives near water, and opens its mouth when threatened. Cottonmouths sometimes shake their tails when threatened, sort of like rattlesnakes. They are just trying to let you know they are there, and they hope you will



Turtle Bob and a gray rat snake, or oak snake (Pantherophis spiloides)

go away. When cottonmouths are swimming, you can see their entire body on the surface of the water, unlike other water snakes.

Cottonmouths have big heads and skinny necks. They are very thick snakes with very thick tails. They look scary, but unless you step on them in bare feet or try to kill them, they will not bite. Venomous snakes use venom to subdue prey. You are not prey. You are way too big to swallow. Bites are last resorts to make you go away.

Contrary to public opinion, cottonmouths are not aggressive. I almost stepped on one wearing flip flops (which is not a good idea), and the snake just sat there with its mouth open. Yes, I

was terrified, but it did not bite. Bites are very uncommon, and although they are not fun, they are very rarely fatal.

Cottonmouths are food for eagles, owls, herons, alligators, kingsnakes, and snapping turtles. They eat fish and frogs. They are important members of an ecosystem that we want to preserve.

Banded watersnake (Nerodia fasciata)

Some snakes look like venomous snakes, and they do that on purpose. The banded watersnake is a common snake that lives near water like the cottonmouth, but it is not venomous. The banded water snake hopes you will think it is a cottonmouth and leave it alone.

Sometimes that works. The difference is that banded watersnakes have long, pointed heads (not triangular), round eyes, they do not open their mouths when threatened, and you cannot see their entire body when they swim, only their heads. They, and especially their tails, are much thinner than those of a cottonmouth. They also have dark, vertical lines on their heads that are visible in the photo below and can be seen from a safe distance.

When a banded watersnake is threatened, it flattens out its head, but don't be fooled. The head looks flat, not blocky like a cottonmouth.

Red rat snake (corn snake, oak snake) (Pantherophis guttatus)

Red and gray rat snakes are also called oak snakes and corn snakes. They look alike except some are red and some are gray, or brownish. Red corn snakes are expert climbers. Some people think they look like copperheads, but copperheads are rare in the Panhandle.

Red and gray rat snakes are constrictors, but have no fear, they are way too small to strangle you. They constrict around a mouse, or other rodent when

Continued on page 29

Good Fences Make Great Neighbors (and Better Backyards)

BY JONATHAN & BRITTANY YOUNKER

If your backyard conversations are starting to include your neighbor — whether you invited them or not — it might be time for a fence.

Spring is in full swing along the Emerald Coast, which means longer days, backyard hangouts and a fresh look at your outdoor space. And if what you're seeing includes awkward eye contact over the property line, Dirty N Sturdy Fencing is here to help fix that — quickly and professionally.

At Dirty N Sturdy, fences aren't just built — they're crafted. Every project is treated like it's going in their own backyard, with a focus on quality, durability and clean, polished results. Whether the goal is privacy, security or leveling up curb appeal, the team brings the same energy and attention to detail every single time.

Wood fencing remains a top choice for homeowners and it's easy to see why. It's strong, customizable and can completely transform a property. Dirty N Sturdy offers 4-, 6- and 8-foot wood fences to fit a variety of needs, all built with metal posts for added

strength and longevity. Want to keep things open while still defining your space? A 4-foot fence is a great option. Need full privacy so you can enjoy your backyard without feeling like you're part of the neighborhood group chat? A 6- or 8-foot fence has you covered.

Style matters, too. Classic vertical fencing offers a timeless look, while horizontal designs bring a modern, eye-catching feel that stands out in all the right ways. No matter the style, each fence is built with precision and care to ensure it holds up and looks great for years to come.

What truly sets Dirty N Sturdy apart is the experience. From the first call to the final walkthrough, customers receive clear communication, reliable service and a crew that takes pride in doing the job right — no shortcuts, no cutting corners.

So, this May, if your backyard needs a little more privacy, a little more structure or just a little less neighbor—you know who to call. Because, when it comes to quality fences, Dirty N Sturdy isn't on the fence — they're all in.

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Sports



BY BARBARA PALMGREN

I wonder if Edgar Allan Poe would take up golf knowing there's a course named for his famous poem, *The Raven*. Would he embrace the challenge—or find it as relentless as the raven at his chamber door?

We may never know, but the Raven course proved plenty challenging March 28–29 as it hosted the Emerald Coast Junior Golf

Golf Series: Raven Golf Club Junior Tournament

Tournament. Younger players competed over nine holes Saturday, while older juniors played 18 holes Sunday, vying for spots in the Notah Begay III Junior Championship Regional Qualifier for ages 10–18. Three players in each age group advanced.

The NB3 Junior Golf National Championship is a two-stage qualifying series culminating in a 54-hole national championship broadcast on Golf Channel. In 2026, qualifiers advance to the Florida Regionals—June 8–9 for girls at Indian Springs CC and June 24–25 for boys at Mission Resort Club.

Top Performers

Girls 10–11: Mackenzie Brown (advances to regionals)
Boys 10–11: 1. James Goodman (77), 2. Luke Stuart (78), 3. Eli Woolsey (all advance)
Girls 8–9: Madelyn Morelock (low medalist)
Boys 8–9: Alden Marek (low medalist)

Spring Championship Winners (Day 2)

Boys 16–18: Bo Baxter (155)
Girls 15–18: Julie Waldo (137)
Boys 14–15: Benjamin Lebusburger (152)
Girls 12–14: Finley Jeter (206)

Boys 12–13:

Matthew DeRoy (138)

Bounds, Inc. sponsored the Spring Championship. Additional tournaments this season were held at Hidden Creek, Baytowne and Stonebrook, with ECJGT events also serving as qualifiers for the Optimist International Tournament at Doral and the FCG Callaway World Championship and U.S. Wing Mojing World Championship at Torrey Pines.



Tournament Director Dennis Attaway, who has led the program since 2020, continues to inspire young golfers and grow the game across the Emerald Coast.

Golf Series: Prestigious AJGA Preview Tournament at Shalimar Pointe Celebrates Top Junior Golfers

BY BARBARA PALMGREN

For four days in April, homeowners in Lake Lorraine and Shalimar Pointe watched from their patios as polite, well-dressed and determined young golfers took tee shots, approached greens and sank putts. The 36-hole stroke play tournament officially took place April 11–12, 2026, with a Friday qualifier and Thursday practice round giving these future golf professionals daily opportunities

to chase low scores.

The American Junior Golf Association, headquartered in Braselton, Georgia, has produced notable alumni including Phil Mickelson, Scottie Scheffler, Jordan Spieth and Tiger Woods.

Tournament Director Sophia Thomas, alongside a staff of eight interns and one assistant, coordinated the event with a steady smile and remarkable efficiency. Regional Director



Matt Emmi, who oversees Florida operations, also attended and shared insight into the AJ-

GA's point system and awards structure. Inspired by his father, a head golf professional, Emmi's enthusiasm for mentoring young players reflects a bright future for the game.

In 2025, Destin-Fort Walton Beach helped bring this prestigious tournament to the Gulf Coast. This year, even without that sponsorship, the AJGA chose to return to Shalimar Pointe — not only for its challenging course, but for the club's exceptional hospitality.

Members welcomed staff and players like family, opening their homes to house 10 staff members and volunteering throughout the event. From registration and hydration stations to spotting shots across the course, their support was instrumental.

Course manager John Jenkins, along with staff, earned high marks for maintaining excellent course conditions and providing outstanding clubhouse service. The members lounge served as tournament headquarters, ensuring smooth operations. The club's motto, "Where Everyone is Treated Like a Champion," proved true throughout the event.

Of the 78 golfers, ages 12–19, most had already qualified, while Friday's round added six boys (scores 73–76) and three girls (scores 71–73). Yardage

played at 6,620 for boys and 5,655 for girls.

The field represented 22 states, including 34 players from Florida, along with competitors from three countries outside the United States.

Awards were presented April 12 to the top finishers:

Girls Division:

First place: Gabrielle Kim, Irvine, California (151)

Second place: Qiaoyi Lyu, Celebration, Florida (153)

Third place: Abigail Murphy, Kissimmee, Florida (155)

Boys Division:

First place: Austin Blackburn, Dunwoody, Georgia (145)

Second place: Yigi Wang, Lakewood Ranch, Florida (148)

Third place: Luke Harrigan, Hobe Sound, Florida (148)

A special award went to Nathan Drummond of Westchase, Florida, who shot a 67 over 18 holes.

A personal note of congratulations goes to Mason Dean Hampton of Shalimar Pointe, who at just 12 years old finished in the top 25 among 54 boys. His performance hints at an exciting future in the sport.

With perfect weather throughout the week, the tournament offered an ideal setting for players and families alike. Growing the game of golf for the next generation often begins with opportunities like this — and once again, these young athletes brought their "A" game to Okaloosa County.

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Charlotte Brooks Rides to a National Title and Auburn University

By DOUGLAS “DOC” STAUFFER

At just 17 years old, local resident Charlotte Brooks has already accomplished what many young athletes only dream of — a national championship title and a collegiate athletic future at one of the nation’s premier equestrian programs.

The Okaloosa County native recently captured the coveted Congress Champion title in Youth Hunt Seat Equitation



(age 15–18) at the prestigious All-American Quarter Horse Congress — widely recognized as the largest and most competitive single-breed horse show in the world. For those within the equestrian community, the title alone speaks volumes. For those unfamiliar, imagine winning a national championship on one of the sport’s biggest stages, against the very best riders from across the country.

And this fall, she will continue her journey at Auburn University, joining the nationally respected Auburn Tigers equestrian team.

But Charlotte’s story is about far more than trophies.

A Life in the Saddle

Charlotte did not stumble into the sport. She was raised in it. Horses have been part of her life from an early age, and she began competing seriously around age ten. What followed was not overnight success, but years of early mornings, long travel weekends, disciplined training sessions, and quiet perseverance.

Equestrian competition requires a rare blend of physical skill, technical precision, and mental composure. Riders

must communicate with a thousand-pound animal through subtle cues, balance, and trust. In Hunt Seat Equitation, judges evaluate the rider’s form, control, and effectiveness — not just speed or flash. It is a discipline that rewards poise under pressure.

Charlotte has learned to thrive in that pressure. Winning at the Quarter Horse Congress represents the culmination of years of refinement — hours in the arena, countless practice rounds, and the resilience to improve after setbacks. National titles are not handed out; they are earned stride by stride.

Balancing Excellence

Unlike many student-athletes who compete locally, Charlotte’s competition schedule has taken her across the country. To maintain both academic and athletic excellence, she enrolled in Florida Virtual School, which allowed her the flexibility to travel and train while staying on track academically.

That decision reflects maturity beyond her years. It takes discipline to manage studies independently while competing at a national level. Charlotte has demonstrated that excellence in athletics does not require sacrificing academic responsibility. Her ability to balance both speaks to strong family support, personal determination, and a clear sense of purpose.

The Next Chapter: Auburn

Charlotte’s next step brings her to Auburn’s equestrian program, one of the most respected in collegiate competition. Auburn competes under the umbrella of the National Collegiate Equestrian Association, where varsity riders face elite talent from across the nation.

Auburn has a history of national championships and a culture built around discipline, teamwork, and competitive excellence. Charlotte will now test her skills at the highest collegiate level — representing not only her university, but her hometown of Laurel Hill and Okaloosa County. For a local athlete to step onto that stage is significant. For a national champion to do so is remarkable.

More Than a Title

While the headline reads “national champion,” those who know Charlotte would likely describe her differently: dedicated, humble, steady, and focused.

Champions are often defined by what happens in the spotlight. But true character is revealed in the unseen hours — the practice sessions when no

one is watching, the moments of disappointment that require perseverance, and the quiet discipline of improvement. Charlotte’s journey reminds us that greatness is rarely dramatic. It is built patiently, consistently, and faithfully.

In a world quick to celebrate viral fame and overnight success, her story stands as a refreshing testimony to sustained effort and earned achievement.

A Community to Cheer

As Charlotte prepares to ride

for Auburn this fall, Okaloosa County has every reason to celebrate one of its own. Her success is not only personal—it is shared. She carries with her the pride of a small community that values hard work and excellence.

When she enters the arena in Auburn colors, she will do so as a national champion — but also as a local young woman who never forgot where she started. And if her past is any indication, the best rides may still be ahead.

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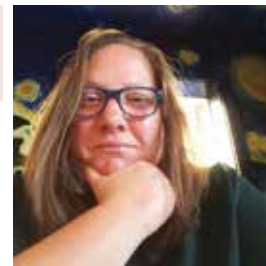
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Pickleball, Heel Pain, and Plantar Fasciitis: What Every Player Should Know

BY DR. JENNIFER M. TRENDT

How can you prevent one of the most common injuries in America's fastest-growing sport—and what do you do if it starts slowing you down?

Pickleball has quickly become one of the most popular ways to stay active, and for good reason. It's fun, social, and accessible to a wide range of fitness levels. I see more and more patients discovering the sport—and many of them are playing several times a week.

But with that rise in popularity, I'm also seeing something else more frequently in the clinic: plantar fasciitis.

If you've ever experienced a sharp, stabbing pain in the bottom of your heel—especially with your first steps in the morn-

ing—you know how quickly it can take the enjoyment out of staying active.

The encouraging news is that plantar fasciitis is often preventable, and when it does develop, there are effective ways to support the body's natural healing process.

Why Pickleball Players Are at Risk

The plantar fascia is a thick band of connective tissue that runs along the bottom of your foot, helping support your arch and absorb impact. Pickleball places repetitive stress on this tissue through quick lateral movements, sudden stops, and frequent push-offs.

Over time, especially without proper preparation or recovery,

this can lead to small micro-tears in the tissue. That's when irritation begins—and pain often follows.

Several common factors increase the risk:

- Sudden increases in playing time
- Tight calves or limited ankle mobility
- Worn-out or unsupportive footwear
- Playing on hard court surfaces
- Returning to activity too quickly after time off



times and more persistent symptoms.

Traditional approaches may include rest, stretching, ice, orthotics, or anti-inflammatory medications. While these can help manage symptoms, they don't always address the underlying issue—tissue that hasn't fully healed.

This is where newer, non-invasive options are changing how we approach recovery.

One such option is SoftWave therapy, which uses electrohydraulic shockwaves to stimulate blood flow and activate the body's natural healing response. Rather than simply masking pain, the goal is to support the repair and regeneration of the affected tissue.

Many active adults are drawn to this approach because it requires no injections, no medications, and no downtime.

Staying Active Without Living With Pain

Pickleball is meant to keep you moving, connected, and enjoying life. Pain shouldn't be the reason you step away from something you love.

If heel pain is beginning to limit your activity, it may be time to explore solutions that focus on healing—not just symptom relief.

At The Reset Room ~ A Chiropractic Studio, I offer complimentary consultations to help determine whether SoftWave therapy is an appropriate option for your condition. Sometimes a simple conversation and evaluation can provide clarity on the best next step.

Because the goal isn't just getting out of pain.

It's getting back to doing what you love. Because your body deserves a comeback.

Simple Ways to Help Prevent Plantar Fasciitis

The good news is that a few

small habits can go a long way in keeping you on the court and out of pain.

Start with a warm-up.

Even five minutes of movement preparation—such as calf stretching, ankle mobility work, and light walking—can help prepare your body for play.

Strengthen your feet.

Your feet contain small stabilizing muscles that are often overlooked. Simple exercises like balancing on one leg or performing towel scrunches can improve strength and support.

Choose the right footwear.

Court-specific shoes provide the lateral stability and cushioning needed for pickleball's quick movements.

Progress gradually.

If you're new to the sport or increasing your playtime, build slowly. Sudden spikes in activity are one of the most common causes of injury.

What to Do If Heel Pain Starts

If you begin to notice heel pain, it's important not to ignore it. Pushing through discomfort often leads to longer recovery

Still in pain?

Before you book the surgeon, ask a better question. Is there a way to help your body heal first?



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Where Did the Golf Cart Come From?

The golf cart has come a long way from its humble beginnings as a simple tool designed to move golfers around the course. What began as a practical convenience has evolved into a lifestyle vehicle — especially in coastal communities along the Florida Panhandle, where golf carts are a familiar part of everyday life.

The story of the golf cart dates back to the early 20th century. In the 1930s, early electric carts were developed to transport equipment across golf courses. Not long after, they were adapted to carry golfers, helping players move around large courses more comfortably.

By the 1950s, golf carts began gaining popularity in recreational golf. Early models were simple, often three-wheeled and powered by basic electric batteries. As demand increased, manufacturers improved the design. Four wheels replaced three, steering wheels replaced



tillers and gas-powered models appeared in the 1960s and



1970s, offering greater power and range.

Over time, people realized golf carts could be useful beyond the course. Resorts, retirement communities and large campuses adopted them for short-distance transportation. Their small size, quiet operation

and ease of use made them ideal for quick trips.

Today, golf carts have entered a new era. Modern models feature lithium batteries, advanced suspension, LED lighting, Bluetooth sound systems and luxury seating. Some even include touchscreen displays and back-

up cameras, transforming them into comfortable neighborhood vehicles.

This evolution is especially visible along the Florida Panhandle. In many beach communities, residents use golf carts for quick trips to the beach, local restaurants or neighborhood events. Families often pile into multi-passenger carts to grab ice cream, visit friends or enjoy a sunset ride.

Golf carts offer a unique mix of convenience and fun. They encourage a slower pace, make it easier to connect with neighbors and add a sense of enjoyment to everyday travel. Once just a golf course utility, the golf cart has become a defining part of coastal community life.

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 Wellness



DR. RICHARD CHERN, MD

You're taking care of all of it — work, home, children or grandchildren, spouses, parents, your boss/clients/students/patients. Mother's Day is for the flowers, but every day you show up — lifting groceries, carrying kids, steadying loved ones — you're asking a lot from your

Hormone Therapy for Stronger Bones

bones. This Women's Health Week (May 10-16), let's celebrate all women (the nurturers, the bosses, and everyone in between) by protecting those quiet workhorses. At The Hormone Restoration Center, we use bi-identical pellets as our method of hormone therapy — here's how pellets can help keep your bones strong.

more likely over time. Testosterone and progesterone help too, by supporting muscle and balance so you're less likely to fall. Pellet therapy delivers bi-identical hormones under the skin in a slow, steady stream — avoiding daily highs and lows — and gives consistent support that helps preserve bone.

Why Pellets — And Why Hormones — Matter

Estrogen slows the breakdown of old bone and supports new bone formation. When estrogen drops around perimenopause and menopause, bone loss can speed up, making fractures

How Pellet Therapy Helps Bones

By keeping hormone levels steady, pellets can slow or even reverse bone loss for many women, especially when started near the time of menopause. Over time, the benefits of pellet therapy reveal themselves as improved bone density and, importantly, a lower risk of fractures. Pellets often also ease hot flashes and improve sleep and energy — benefits that help with strength and fall prevention.

What The Pellet Process Looks Like

Consultation: We review your health, family fracture history, lifestyle, and order baseline labs.

Placement: A brief in-office procedure places small, sterile pellets under the skin. Minimal downtime and a small dressing afterward.

Steady delivery: Pellets re-



lease hormones continuously for about 3–6 months, depending on dose and metabolism. No daily dosing to remember.

Follow-up: We monitor symptoms and labs, adjust dosing as needed.

What To Expect

You won't "feel" bones strengthening day-to-day, but many patients notice fewer menopausal symptoms, better sleep, and steadier energy within weeks.

Pellets are one tool in a practical plan: individualized HRT

when appropriate, adequate calcium and vitamin D, resistance and balance exercise, fall-proofing your home, and regular bone checks.

You carry everyone else — let's help your skeleton keep up. If bone health is on your mind, call The Hormone Restoration Center. We'll review your history, run the right tests, and build a personalized pellet plan so you can keep lifting, hugging, and showing up for the people who matter most. Call (850) 837-1271 to schedule a consultation.

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MENOPAUSE

continued from page 4

important during this phase of life. Hormonal changes contribute to muscle loss, reduced bone density, and slower metabolic function. Resistance training is one of the most effective ways to counter this.

Build up to strength training 2-4 times per week. This not only preserves muscle, but it

places necessary stress on long bones, helping maintain bone density and reduce the risk and progression of osteoporosis.

Address Sleep Directly

Sleep disruption is common and often one of the most impactful symptoms. Difficulty falling asleep, waking during the night, and non-restorative sleep affect everything from mood to metabolism. Support sleep with

a consistent routine, a cool, dark environment, and mindful use of caffeine and alcohol.

For some women, declining progesterone may contribute to sleep disruption. In those cases, targeted support, including progesterone when clinically appropriate, can help restore more consistent, restful sleep. Quality sleep is a cornerstone of hormonal and cognitive health.

Support Your Nervous System

This transition affects both hormones and the brain. Increased anxiety, irritability, and emotional variability reflect real neurological shifts. Daily regulation, through movement, time outdoors, breathwork, or meaningful connection, supports resilience and emotional stability.

These are not luxuries. They are essential tools for navigating

this phase well.

Menopause is not the end of your vitality. It is a significant physiological transition that deserves attention and support, not dismissal. These changes are not random. They are signals.

When you understand what your body is doing and respond accordingly, you move through this phase with greater stability, clarity, and long-term health in mind.

SNAKES

continued from page 23

it exhales, and then it cannot inhale. It sounds terrible, but death is quick. Rat snakes are useful to control rodent populations and are beneficial to humans because rodents carry ticks and disease and spoil human food. Rat snakes live about 15 years in the wild in palmetto flatwoods and forests.

Black racers (Coluber constrictor)

Black racers, or black snakes, are probably the most common urban snake. They are active during the day, so they are often seen. Black snakes live around freshwater and under shrubs. They eat insects, frogs, and toads. They are also slightly hyperactive

and large, so they tend to move quickly and scare people. They do not do well in captivity because they cannot tolerate life in a small box.

What to do if you see a snake

Nothing. Move away. Give the animal room and take a deep breath. The snake does not want to chase you, bite you, or eat you. It wants you to go away. So go away.

There is no good reason to kill a snake, and if you try, it might not end well for you. If you have snakes in your yard, it is probably because there is food: rodents, bird seed, or pet food. Remove the rodent food and the rodents and the snakes will leave.

Snakes are assets to our envi-

ronments. They eat mice, rats, and other things that we do not want around our yards. Snakes are food for owls, herons, snapping turtles, and alligators. Like all wild animals, they were here first, and despite the Adam and Eve story, they do not tell us to

do bad things. They just want to be left alone to enjoy the sun and rodents. We love snakes at the Turtle Bob room, and we hope you love them in your yards and in the wild.

Helen Petre is a retired USDA biologist and college biology instructor.

Turtle Bob is the turtle guy at E. O. Wilson. We both hope to share our passion for the longleaf ecosystem with all the wonderful people who live here. If you have any questions about science, nature, or the wild world of Florida's Panhandle, email petrehelen@gmail.com



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 Wellness

Exploring Powered Mobility

By KELLY STALNAKER

Are you or a loved one starting to consider powered mobility? There are a variety of ways to determine when the time is right. These may include unstable balance resulting in frequent falls or “near falls,” debilitating pain during movement, severe fatigue and shortness of breath, or the need for support with progressive medical conditions such as MS or Parkinson’s, among others. Maybe you’ve noticed that your loved one is avoiding social events due to a lack of confidence in their mobility, or that manual mobility aids such as canes or walkers are no longer sufficient. Whatever

the reason, the many available options can feel overwhelming. Here are a few tips to help you choose the right powered scooter or wheelchair.

First, it is important to know the difference between a powered wheelchair and a powered scooter. A powered wheelchair is a compact unit that utilizes a joystick for precise movements. It can handle a variety of terrain with ease and is a better choice for indoor use, as it has a tighter turning radius. Power wheelchairs are stable and comfortable, usually offering a captain’s seat with multiple adjustment points for a customized fit. They are typically recommended for

those needing permanent, full-time mobility solutions.

A powered scooter is better suited for the occasional user — someone who may not need such robust assistance for daily activities. Powered scooters use handlebars, or a tiller, to steer and can require a bit more coordination and strength. They come in three- or four-wheeled versions but are not always as proficient indoors or on rough terrain, as the turning radius is wider. Powered scooters tend to be lighter and often more portable, breaking down for easier transport.

Regardless of whether you are considering a wheelchair or





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a scooter, there are several key points to keep in mind. According to Mobility Independence Reviews, five critical factors should guide your decision:

Buy from a reputable source to ensure you have support if the equipment needs service.

Understand the daily range you will need so the battery lasts through your regular activities.

Confirm the equipment will fit in your vehicle when folded or that you have a way to transport it.

Test-drive the equipment to make sure it is comfortable and easy to maneuver.

Consider the terrain you will be navigating, such as gravel, grass or sidewalks, when deciding on tire size.

Other considerations include seat size, top speed and weight capacity.

The right mobility solution

can make all the difference, which is why working with a trusted, knowledgeable company is so important. As families look ahead to upcoming celebrations like Mother’s Day and Father’s Day, it’s worth considering options that offer lasting impact. At Baywind Medical, we provide a range of powered wheelchairs and scooters from industry leader Golden Technologies and welcome patients to try the equipment firsthand to ensure the best fit.

Now is the perfect time to find that fit, as all of our powered mobility equipment is 15% off. Greater mobility often means greater independence and a better quality of life. Stop by Baywind Medical today at 540 E. John Sims Parkway in Niceville, or call 850-729-2559 for more information.

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Strength: The Overlooked Vital Sign of Longevity



BY KASSIA GARFIELD,
MAXSTRENGTH FITNESS

For decades, the conversation around health and longevity has focused heavily on cardiovascular fitness. We've been told to walk more, run more and keep our heart rate up. While cardiovascular health is certainly important, an increasing body of research is pointing to another powerful predictor of long-term health and survival: muscular strength.

Researchers across multiple fields — from gerontology to sports medicine — are finding that simple strength measures can predict not only physical function, but also disease risk, independence and even mortality.

One of the most widely studied markers is grip strength. It might seem surprising that something as simple as squeezing a hand dynamometer could tell us much about our health, but large-scale research suggests otherwise. In the massive international PURE Study, which followed more than 140,000 people across 17 countries, researchers discovered that grip strength was strongly associated with health outcomes. For every 11-pound decrease in grip strength, participants experienced a 16% increase in all-cause mortality and a 17% increase in cardiovascular death. Grip strength even proved to be a stronger predictor of mortality than systolic blood pressure.

Another key area researchers frequently examine is quadriceps strength. The quadriceps muscles play a central role in many basic functional movements — standing up from a chair, climbing stairs, maintaining balance and walking. Weakness in these muscles is strongly linked to loss of independence, higher fall risk and increased

hospitalization rates in older adults.

Quadriceps weakness is also a hallmark of sarcopenia, the progressive decline in muscle mass and strength that occurs with aging. Sarcopenia significantly increases the risk of frailty, disability and reduced quality of life.

What's particularly interesting is that researchers are discovering that strength may be even more important than muscle size. While muscle mass has long been studied as a marker of health, strength appears to correlate more strongly with functional outcomes. In other words, it's not just how much muscle someone has — it's how much force they can produce with it. This is evident on body scans showing high muscle mass percentages, yet some individuals cannot stand up from a chair without using their hands.

This is why modern clinical assessments increasingly use functional strength tests rather than just body composition measurements. Simple assessments such as grip strength, sit-to-stand tests, walking speed and leg press strength are now commonly used to evaluate aging and physical resilience.

These tests may look different, but they all measure the

same underlying quality: the body's ability to produce force.

The reason this matters is because muscle strength naturally declines with age. Most people reach peak strength in their 30s. After that, strength typically declines about 5% per decade through the 40s and 50s. After age 60, that decline can accelerate to 10–15% per decade if no resistance training is performed.

By the time someone reaches their 70s, they may have lost 30–40% of their strength compared to their younger years.

Fortunately, research consistently shows that strength is highly trainable — even later in life. Resistance training can dramatically improve strength, balance, mobility and metabolic health in adults well into their 70s, 80s and beyond.

When people look at studies on longevity, they often focus on the specific markers being measured: grip strength, quadriceps strength, walking speed or chair-rise performance. But the reality is that these are simply different ways of observing the same underlying factor.

The bigger story is not grip strength alone. It's not just quadriceps strength either.

The real marker is strength itself.

When researchers study these

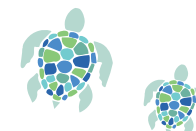
different measurements, they are all essentially examining the same fundamental quality: how strong the human body is.

Strength reflects the health of the neuromuscular system, the integrity of muscles and bones, metabolic function and the ability to perform the movements that keep us independent. It influences how we move, how we work and how resilient our bodies are as we age.

In many ways, strength acts as a summary measure of overall physical health.

So, while the headlines might highlight grip strength or leg strength, the broader message is much simpler: maintaining strength throughout life is one of the most powerful things we can do to support long-term health, independence and longevity.

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 Wellness

For the Men and More



By KAY LEAMAN, HEALTH ARCHITECT, CERTIFIED NUTRITION ADVISOR, HEALTHYDAY HEALTHYLIFE

This article covers the basics regarding function, statistics and contributors related to prostate cancer, the second-leading cause of cancer death in men after lung cancer and the leading cause in non-smokers. Only

10% of men have a close relative diagnosed with prostate cancer, which points to the main causes of cancer being high amounts of oxidative stress, obesity, inflammation and unhealthy lifestyle habits. This information is also beneficial for cancer prevention in general.

The prostate's main function is associated with procreation. It also helps keep urine inside the bladder. The most common condition men experience as they age is benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH), or an enlarged prostate. Signs of BPH include a slower or weaker urine stream, urinating more often or waking at night to urinate, feeling like the bladder isn't empty, or experiencing an intermittent stream. BPH and prostatitis (inflam-



mation caused by an infection) are not thought to increase the risk of prostate cancer, but they can increase PSA test levels by a small amount.

Men 45 and older should consider getting a yearly PSA (prostate-specific antigen) test. In addition to this test, it is recommended that men also evaluate their health habits. This doesn't mean you have to give up what you love, but it does mean your choices affect your health and the quality of life you will have as you age.

There are 10 stages of cancer development. DNA damage, in-

flammation, cellular disruption and angiogenesis are a few of these stages. I have an extensive article on the subject of cancer (prostate as well as other types) written by a doctor who has researched and treated those with cancer. It includes his personal story of treating his dad, who was diagnosed with stage 4 prostate cancer that had metastasized. His protocol gave his dad another 10 years of a life well lived versus the eight months his doctor predicted. You can request this article by email (please put CANCER in the subject line).

Healthy lifestyle choices include:

- A healthy, balanced diet (Mediterranean diet)
- Staying hydrated
- Regular exercise, including pelvic floor exercises
- Managing stress
- Yearly exams and PSA testing
- Limiting alcohol and not smoking
- Being aware of your body and noting any changes
- Taking high-quality, broad-spectrum, bioavailable nutritional supplements

Knowing what to take for better health is very important. For instance, take vitamin E as an example. If you are taking the wrong form, it can actually increase the risk of cancer, diabetes and heart disease. Many products have well-crafted ads and attractive pricing but fall short when it comes to the science of how they affect the body. I found a trusted website about prostate health that warned against vitamin E. This is due to a lack of understanding regarding the different forms of this nutrient. This can become a rabbit hole that frustrates many of us—who do we believe? It's about finding a source we can trust, and even that can be daunting.

Our quality of life is in our hands. This doesn't mean we won't ever experience a diagnosis or other setbacks. However, if we treat our bodies well, they will be equipped to fight and repair the way God intended.


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Museum News



BY BARBARA PALMGREN

250th Celebration Begins!

The Preamble to the Declaration of Independence states:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

This being a special year to celebrate all year long, each month I will submit articles about key events happening around our county. This entire year, we celebrate the birthday of a document that changed our nation and the world. Okaloosa County has already begun plans for several large events to honor this historic moment. The 2026 America 250th Commission participants meet twice a month to coordinate events. Two such events are a grand parade in downtown Crestview at 4 p.m. on May 9 and a gala VIP dinner and drone show on June 12 from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. at the Rigdon Center in Fort Walton Beach.

This month, I highlight a special tribute at the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida. This local history museum is a special place. Tucked away in old downtown Valparaiso, it houses memorabilia and artifacts from all of Northwest Florida. So as not to forget these artifacts, a display case was moved from another part of the museum to the new exhibit hall. It contains artifacts found on Eglin Air Force Base property from the time of and before the Revolution, including tools and pottery.

The rest of the exhibit is a history lesson come alive for residents and visitors. Events, places and key patriot heroes are showcased on large panels designed by CJ Signs, with words and pictures taking us back to the time before and including the signing of the Declaration of Independence. In addition,



a tent, movie and Youth Corner provide more visual and hands-on experiences for visitors.

In March, financial contributors to this exhibit were honored with a reception at the museum. A special thank you to Magnolia Grill and Tom Rice for providing delicious appetizers and desserts for the occasion. Each contributor received a “Betsy Ross” pin and an in-depth presentation of the exhibit by Dr. Marie Hallion, curator of the exhibit. Dr. Hallion is the chair of the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida.

An Honor Long Overdue to a Veteran Volunteer at the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida



With his quiet demeanor and smile, Mike Holt is a friendly face that often greets visitors as he helps with many tasks at the museum. Whenever the manager can't be present at the museum, Mike provides leadership and care for the museum during that absence. A trusted presence, Mike has smiled and served for over 25 years at this historic treasure in Valparaiso that preserves history for all of Northwest Florida.

On Saturday, March 28, 2026, Mike was awarded a plaque for his dedication and service. Applause rang throughout the room as he humbly accepted this thank you from everyone. His lovely wife, Lou Holt, attended the volunteer luncheon with Mike. Each year,

the museum celebrates the work of volunteers who help with school tours, summer camps, “go-to” tasks from management and even sewing colonial hats and other clothing items for display in our newest exhibit, the Celebrate America 250! The Revolution Exhibit.

Trustees Mike Weaver, Ken Walsh, Barb Palmgren and Marie Hallion, served a delicious lunch catered by Sugar Mill Sweets in Fort Walton Beach. It was their turn to serve those who volunteer in so many ways throughout the year.

Community Connection



The ETA Chapter of Delta Kappa Gamma recently held its quarterly meeting in the museum's Exhibit Hall. Surrounded by the new Celebrate America 250! exhibit, members enjoyed a patriotic setting before touring the museum, including the pollinator garden and exhibits spanning from prehistoric times to the region's early industries.

Home School Friday May 8 | 10 a.m.

Homeschool students are invited to a special educational program featuring Travis Souther, UWF librarian, presenting Duty Before Glory: Washington's Enduring Legacy of Leadership. This engaging discussion explores the life and influence of George Washington.

Cost is \$7 per student. Registration is required by calling 850-678-2615.

History Sandwiched In May 8 | Noon

Bring a brown bag lunch and enjoy a free presentation by Travis Souther on Duty Before Glory: Washington's Enduring Legacy of Leadership. This program offers a compelling look at the life and leadership of America's first president.

Mother's Day Tea May 9 | 1-3 p.m.


Celebrate Mother's Day at the Heritage Museum Association's annual tea. Guests are invited to dress in Victorian-era attire or come as they are to

enjoy an afternoon honoring mothers.

Cost is \$30 per person, \$25 for members. Registration is required.

Outdoor Cooking Demonstration May 16 | 11 a.m.

Deb Edgar presents Feeding the Frontier Army, an outdoor cooking demonstration highlighting Revolutionary War-era food preparation. Learn what soldiers ate, how meals were prepared and the limited rations provided by the young government. This program will take place outdoors around a cook fire.



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Musing

A Pastor's Ponderings: When You've Been Wronged



BY PASTOR DOUG STAUFFER

Few things cut as deeply as being wronged. Whether it is betrayal, false accusation or sim-

ple unfair treatment, it touches something personal—our sense of justice, our pride and our desire to be vindicated. From childhood to adulthood, the cry is the same: “That’s not fair.”

And yet, Scripture calls us to respond in a way that rises above what feels natural.

Proverbs 24:17 *Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth.*

Even when justice seems to come to those who have wronged us, God warns against allowing satisfaction to take root in our hearts. Why? Because bit-

terness can quietly replace righteousness, and we begin stepping into a place that belongs to God alone. Jesus raised the standard even higher:

Matthew 5:44 *But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;*

This is not easy—but it is Christlike. It is difficult to remain bitter toward someone for whom you are consistently praying. Prayer shifts our focus from the offense to God’s control and care and begins to soften what



anger has hardened.

There are also times when doing right leads to suffering. Scripture does not ignore this reality:

1 Peter 4:16 *Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.*

There is a difference between suffering for wrongdoing and suffering for doing the right thing. One brings regret; the other brings reward. When we endure wrong for doing right, we have an opportunity to reflect Christ in a powerful way. Perhaps one of the most challenging truths in Scripture is found here:

1 Corinthians 6:7 *...Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?*

In a world that insists on defending every right, God sometimes calls His people to yield—not out of weakness, but out of strength. There are moments when preserving a Christlike

testimony matters more than proving a point, demanding a response marked by grace rather than insistence.

King David modeled this spirit. Though wronged repeatedly by Saul, he refused to retaliate, choosing instead to leave judgment in God’s hands. Even more profoundly, Jesus Himself—reviled, mocked, and crucified—“reviled not again,” but committed all to the Father who judges righteously.

When life presses in, what comes out of us reveals what is within us. The fruit of the Spirit—love, peace, longsuffering, gentleness—does not grow in comfort alone, but often through adversity.

So, when you are wronged, you face a choice: settle the score yourself, or trust God to do it. One leads to continued strife; the other leads to peace. In the end, we rest in this truth: God sees, God knows and God judges righteously.

Savvy Leigh PHOTO

Local, professional photographer specializing in families, weddings, and events. My passion lies in creating lasting memories through photographs, and I cherish the opportunity to be part of such meaningful moments!

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Sean of the South: **Enough**



BY SEAN DIETRICH

What if I told you that you are enough?

Moreover, what if you woke up this morning and, for the first time ever, you actually felt like enough. What if you loved yourself? And I mean really loved yourself.

Do you love yourself? Let's find out.

Are you a perfectionist? No? Yes? Have you ever asked WHY you're a perfectionist? Have you ever wondered why you strive to be flawless so that nobody will find a reason to judge you?

Or are you a people pleaser? Ever wonder why? How did you become a doormat? Why do you fall all over yourself to ensure everyone will like you? Would showing them the real you be that bad?

Or maybe you're critical. Maybe you nitpick those you love. Heck, maybe you nitpick yourself. Maybe you look in the mirror and think, "I'm so fat and ugly."

Perhaps you see photos of yourself and react with true dis-



gust, thinking, "I'm so old and wrinkled. Look at all this flab underneath my neck, jiggling like Jello salad."

Maybe you don't like your nose. Or your teeth. Or the shape of your bootymus maximus.

Then again, maybe you dislike yourself in much simpler ways. Maybe you're embarrassed about your bank account. "Omigod. Is this ALL you have in savings? What a loser."

Maybe you don't like where you are in your career. What a freaking disappointment you are. You should've been MUCH further along in your field by now. Instead, you're just a supporting actor in someone else's

made-for-TV drama.

Maybe you don't feel smart enough. Maybe you are socially anxious. Maybe you think you're too much of an introvert. You're a classic procrastinator. You feel invisible. You hate your

hair. You wish you were prettier. Skinnier. Funnier. Happier.

Either way, your inner critic is always screaming, "You're not enough!" You've tried to shut up this blowhard for years. But it doesn't work. The inner critic just keeps talking smack.

"You're simply not enough," the critic keeps saying.

This is shame you feel. You might not be aware that it's shame, but it is. You don't feel shame because of something you've done. You feel shame over who you are.

You dislike the real you. And thus, you've formed a persona to hide the real you. And hopefully, everyone will like this persona because, God knows, you work really hard building it. You built this persona because the real you is not worthy. The real you just isn't enough.

But...

What if I told you that you don't have to feel this way anymore? What if I told you that you ARE enough? What if I said that you are so insanely

beautiful as a human being, just the way you are in this moment. Moreover, what if I am not prodigiously and majestically full of bovine ordure?

There is a way to never feel ashamed again. You will not find the answer through rituals and creeds, nor through the oppression of pious dogmas. You will not find answers in internet videos or poorly written articles on the internet—such as the one you are currently reading.

I have been ashamed of myself for my entire life. Because of childhood trauma, I became the essence of shame itself. But if I have learned one truth in my short life—if you get nothing out of what I've written you today—I hope you understand one thing, because the entirety of reality rests upon it:

The only way to love yourself is to first love your neighbor. And the only way to love your neighbor is to love the One who made them.

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Arts & Music

ECTC's 1980's Iconic "Mystic Pizza" Debuts April 30

Friendship, love, and small-town dreams take center stage as Emerald Coast Theatre Company (ECTC) closes its 13th season with Mystic Pizza. This iconic coming-of-age story runs April 30 through May 17, with performances Thursday through Saturday at 7 p.m. and matinees on Wednesdays and Sundays at 2 p.m., at ECTC's theater in Grand Boulevard at Miramar Beach.

Based on the beloved classic film, Mystic Pizza follows three young women navigating life, love, and the uncertainty of what comes next, all while working less than glamorous jobs at a local pizza shop in a coastal town. As they chase their dreams and discover who they are, their bond with one another is tested and strengthened in ways that are both heartfelt and relatable.

With humor, nostalgia, and a vibrant soundtrack of 1980s and 1990s hits like "Girls Just Want to

Have Fun," "Addicted to Love," and "Nothing's Gonna Stop Us Now," Mystic Pizza captures the magic of growing up and finding your place in the world.

"Mystic Pizza is a story about friendship, growing up, and the moments you look back on years later and realize changed everything," said Nathanael Fisher, Producing Artistic Director. "It's nostalgic, heartfelt, and full of music that audiences will instantly connect with."

The leading trio features Tennessee natives Shea Grande as Josephina "Jo/Jojo" Barboza and Presley Ann Calonge as Daisy Araujo, alongside Olivia Evans as Katherine "Kat" Araujo, coming to the ECTC stage from Lawrence, Kansas.

Returning to the ECTC stage are several familiar faces, including Darla Briganti as Leona Silva, previously seen as Miss Hannigan in Annie and Genie Klein in Beautiful: The Carole King



Musical. She is joined by ensemble members Teresa Lombardi, last seen as Brooke Wyndham in Legally Blonde; Mikayla House Pilstrom, who portrayed Cynthia Weil in Beautiful; and Martha Wingfield, who appeared as Lily St. Regis in Annie.

ECTC's 2025-2026 season is made possible with generous support from Grand Boulevard Town Center, St. Joe Community Foundation, Visit South Walton, Howard Group, and Jerry and Alice Zich.

To purchase tickets, make a tax-deductible donation, join as a VIP or sponsor, or learn more about Emerald Coast Theatre Company, call (850) 684-0323 or visit emeraldcoasttheatre.org. Engage with ECTC on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. 560 Grand Boulevard, Suite 200, Miramar Beach.

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Local Author Bookshelf:

Doug Stauffer's 25th Book Honors America's 250th Birthday

America is now well into its 250th year — a milestone that invites more than reflection; it calls for renewed appreciation. While much of the public focus remains on July 4, 1776, the true story of America's founding extends far beyond a single date. It is a story forged through years of sacrifice, perseverance and unwavering commitment to the cause of liberty.

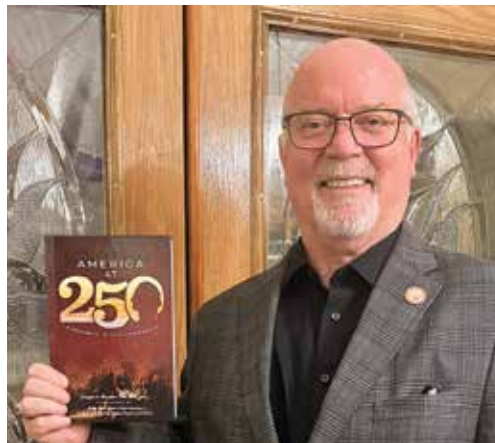
That broader perspective is the focus of America at 250, the 25th book by author, historian and local pastor Doug Stauffer. Rather than simply revisiting familiar moments, the book explores what might be called the "founding decade" — from the Declaration of Independence through the hard-fought victory at Yorktown and the peaceful transfer of power that followed. It reminds readers that freedom was not merely declared; it was defended, secured and entrusted to future generations.

In an era marked by division and uncertainty, the book deliv-

ers a clear message: America has never been perfect — but it has always been worth celebrating. The founding generation faced internal disagreements, external threats and overwhelming odds. Yet they remained united around core principles — liberty, self-government and a recognition that freedom requires both responsibility and virtue.

That enduring spirit continues to resonate today. State Rep. Patt Maney, a decorated veteran and public servant, offered his endorsement of the work in the foreword, noting, "This book captures the spirit of a people who refused to give up on freedom, even when the odds were against them." His words highlight a central theme of the book: resilience has always been at the heart of the American story.

History reinforces that the preservation of a nation depends not just on its founding, but on its people. Chuck Harding observed, "It is not the rev-



olution which builds the nation, but the spirit which maintains it." That "spirit" is precisely what is being tested in our own time.

There are forces — both within and beyond America — that seek to divide, discourage and weaken the nation. Cultural tensions and political disagreements often dominate the headlines, creating the impression that unity is out of reach. Yet history tells a different story. Time and again, America has

demonstrated an ability to stand together when it matters most.

"United We Stand" is more than a phrase — it is a reality that even America's adversaries understand. Those who oppose the nation recognize that division is their greatest opportunity. Con-

versely, unity — rooted not in sameness, but in shared principles — remains America's greatest strength.

America at 250 does not ignore the nation's imperfections. Instead, it places them in proper perspective. The book acknowledges that while America has faced failures, it has also shown a remarkable capacity for correction, growth and renewal. That reality alone provides ample reason to celebrate this historic milestone.

The work also highlights the role of faith and moral conviction during the founding era. From public acknowledgments of divine providence to the emphasis on virtue as essential to self-government, the founders understood that liberty required more than political structure — it required character.

As the nation moves through its 250th-year milestone, the question is not whether there is cause for celebration. There is. The question is whether Americans will take the time to remember what made the nation strong — and what must be preserved for the future.

In the face of voices that seek to divide, the enduring lesson of the founding remains clear: a people committed to principle and united in purpose cannot easily be overcome.

Two hundred and fifty years later, that truth still stands. This book is available on Amazon and at www.BibleDoug.com.



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Arts & Music

Arts News

MKAF Seeks Artists for 31st Festival of the Arts



Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation is now accepting artist applications for the 31st annual Festival of the Arts, set for Oct. 24–25, 2026, at the Mattie Kelly Cultural Arts Village in Destin.

One of the Southeast’s premier art festivals, the event features more than 100 artists from across the country, along with live music, Cuisine on the Green, a wine and beer garden, children’s art activities and more. This juried show includes a wide range of mediums, from painting and sculpture to photography, fiber, glass and digital art. Artists will compete for \$10,000 in cash awards. A \$30 nonrefundable jury fee applies, with booth fees starting at \$350.

“Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation is a champion for arts and culture and the Festival of the Arts helps to build that creative community. This festival attracts artists from across the country and has become a popular annual fall event with locals and visitors alike,” said Deb Nissley, director of operations for Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation.

Application deadline for artist exhibition and poster art is July 1, 2026. Learn more at mkaf.org.

Student Creativity Takes Center Stage in Poster Contest

The Okaloosa Arts Alliance invites K–12 students across the county to participate in the 17th Annual School Poster Contest. This year’s theme, “What Does Art Mean to You?”, encourages students to explore how creativity shapes their lives. Entries may be submitted through schools or individually and must be received by May 2 at 3 p.m. Drop-off locations include Grow Your Gift Conservatory of Music in Fort Walton Beach and the

Okaloosa Arts Alliance office on Beal Parkway.

The community is invited to a free public reception and showcase May 3 from 1–4 p.m. at Grow Your Gift, featuring student artwork, live music, refreshments and an interactive instrument “petting zoo,” along with the announcement of contest winners and Viewer’s Choice awards.

Details: okaloosaarts.org.

Sinfonia Youth Orchestra Performs Free Spring Concerts May 3

Sinfonia Gulf Coast’s Sinfonia Youth Orchestra will present its Spring Concert on May 3 at Destin High School, with performances at 2 p.m. and 5 p.m. as part of the organization’s 20th anniversary season.

Under new director Dr. Thomas Roggio, the program blends cinematic favorites and classical masterworks, including selections from How to Train Your Dragon, Jurassic Park, a creative fusion of The Barber of Seville and Jaws, and Beethoven’s Symphony No. 5. “This



program is designed to inspire both our musicians and our audience,” Roggio said. “We’re bringing together music that students love — from cinematic favorites to cornerstone classical repertoire — and challenging them to perform at a high level while connecting emotionally with the audience. It’s about storytelling through music and creating an experience that resonates.”

The free, family-friendly concert will also honor graduating seniors. “Education is the centerpiece of Sinfonia,” said Music & Artistic Director Demetrius Fuller. “The Sinfonia Youth Or-

chestra provides an invaluable opportunity for young musicians to grow artistically and personally. These students represent the future of music in our community, and we invite everyone to come out and support them.”

‘Jaws in Concert’ Brings Film and Live Orchestra Together May 15

Sinfonia Gulf Coast continues its 20th anniversary season with Jaws in Concert on May 15 at 7:30 p.m. at the Destin–Fort Walton Beach Convention Center.

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JAWS IN CONCERT

SATURDAY, MAY 15 | 7:30 PM
DESTIN-FWB CONVENTION CENTER

Just when you thought it was safe to go back in the concert hall ... experience Academy Award-winning director Steven Spielberg’s classic 1970s adventure thriller like never before. *Jaws in Concert* will keep you on the edge of your seat as Sinfonia Gulf Coast performs composer John Williams’ iconic Academy Award-winning score live, perfectly synced to the film projected in HD on the big screen. Relive the suspense, the terror, and the unforgettable music that forever changed the way we view the ocean.

20 YEARS SINFONIA GULF COAST
DEMETRIUS FULLER
MUSIC & ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

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EVENTS

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Tickets are \$40 for a crawfish plate, \$50 for all-you-can-eat and \$15 for kids' or non-crawfish meals (ages 3 and under free). Each ticket includes one complimentary drink. VIP tables for 10 are available for \$500, with upgrade options for all-you-can-eat.

The event is family-friendly and open to the public. Tickets are available online. The Towne Centre at Seascape is located at 80 Seascape Drive in Miramar Beach, across from Silver Sands Premium Outlets.

Magic For A Mission Brings Illusion, Family Fun and Fundraising To Niceville
May 16 | Niceville Community Center, Niceville
 Scouting America, Gulf

Coast Council invites the community to an unforgettable evening of entertainment and impact with Magic for a Mission, featuring world-class magician Jeff Sobel. Known for his interactive style and mind-blowing illusions, Sobel delivers a one-of-a-kind experience for audiences of all ages.

Two unique performances are offered:

An Adventure in Magic (Family Show) | 2:30 p.m.

Tickets: Children \$30, Adults \$10. Advance special: Buy a child's ticket and receive one adult ticket free.

This family-friendly show includes interactive magic, comedy and take-home magic lessons.

Magic for a Mission Evening Experience

Dinner at 6 p.m. | Show at 7:17 p.m. Tickets: \$97 | VIP \$127

Enjoy a plated dinner with wine, a strolling magic social hour and a full stage performance.

Proceeds benefit Scouting America, Gulf Coast Council, supporting programs that build leadership, confidence and character in local youth.

Tickets & info: gulfcost-council.org/magic

Gate To Gate Memorial Run/Walk 40th Anniversary
May 16 | Eglin East Gate Sports Complex, Eglin AFB

Honor service and sacrifice during the 40th Anniversary Gate To Gate Memorial Run/Walk on Saturday, May 16, at the Eglin East Gate Sports Complex. Held on Armed Forces Day, the historic 4.4-mile race returns to its traditional gate-to-gate course, inviting runners and walkers to pay tribute to Ameri-

ca's fallen heroes while celebrating the spirit of community and military heritage. Opening ceremonies begin at 6:45 a.m., with the race starting at 7 a.m. Participants may register individually or as four-person teams, and are encouraged to dedicate their journey in memory of loved ones or military heroes. Online registration is available at tinyurl.com/40th-GateToGate, with more details at eglin96fss.com/gatetogate. Registration is limited to 1,500 participants, and only 1,000 commemorative medals will be awarded.

Gulf Coast Jam
May 28-31 | Frank Brown Park, PCB

One of the country's most popular beach music festivals returns May 28-31 as Gulf Coast Jam brings four days of live country music to Frank Brown

Park in Panama City Beach. Headliners Post Malone, Chris Stapleton, Keith Urban and Riley Green lead a lineup of more than 20 artists performing throughout the high-energy Country On The Coast™ weekend.

Fans can enjoy multiple stages, food vendors, bars and interactive fan experiences while soaking in the coastal festival atmosphere that has drawn sellout crowds of more than 30,000 in recent years. Pass options currently available include General Admission, Military, College and First Responder tickets, VIP experiences and lodging packages. Several premium viewing areas have already sold out.

Payment plans are available. Follow festival updates online. Visit GulfCoastJam.com.

ARTS NEWS

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This unique experience pairs the full-length film with a live performance of John Williams' iconic score, performed in sync with the action on screen. "We love presenting these film-in-

concert experiences because they create an entirely new way to experience movies audiences already know and love," said Music & Artistic Director Demetrius Fuller. "Hearing this iconic score performed live alongside the film is powerful, immersive and unforgettable.

It's one of those evenings where you feel every note."

Reflecting on the film's famous theme, composer John Williams said, "It was fun and it seemed to have worked."

Tickets range from \$40-\$69.50 and benefit Sinfonia Gulf Coast's music education



and community programs. Learn more at SinfoniaGulfCoast.org or call (850) 460-8800.

Local Coupons

<p>ROOF PRO \$500 OFF ANY NEW ROOF INSTALLATION <small>(NOT VALID WITH ANY OTHER DISCOUNTS OR OFFERS)</small></p> <p>Offer expires 5/31/26 (850) 332-3330 Roofproroofing.com</p>	<p>CULLIGAN WATER \$300 OFF WHEN YOU MENTION THIS AD/COUPON</p> <p>Offer expires 5/31/26 850-664-7771</p>	<p>ROYALL TREATMENT ROOM 20% OFF FOR FIRST TIME CLIENTS</p> <p>Offer expires 5/31/26 141 John Sims Parkway Suite C, Valparaiso 850-585-3134 royalltreatmentroom.glossgenius.com</p>	<p>TORTOISE CLINIC \$30 OFF NEW PATIENT OFFER <small>Present this coupon and receive \$30 off any service at the Tortoise Clinic. One coupon per person.</small></p> <p>Offer expires 5/31/26 2441 U.S. Hwy 98, Santa Rosa Beach TortoiseClinic.com 850.267.5611</p>
<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 5/31/26 290 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 5/31/26 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 5/31/26 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 5/31/26 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 5/31/26 BeachsideSlide.com 850-98-SLIDE (850-987-5433)</p>	<p>BAYWIND MEDICAL ALL POWERED MOBILITY 15% OFF! <small>WITH COUPON</small></p> <p>Offer expires 5/31/26 540 E John Sims Parkway • Niceville 850-729-2559</p>	<p>MAGIC + COMEDY 1/2 PRICE TICKETS <small>for students ages 5-22</small> Bart Rockett Magic & Comedy Show Booking Code DL3</p> <p>Offer expires 5/31/26 MagicDestin.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 5/31/26 Niceville • Santa Rosa Beach 850-530-6064 www.bluewaterplasticsurgery.com</p>

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