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1776 Meets 2026:

Okaloosa County Launches America 250 Celebration in Grand Style

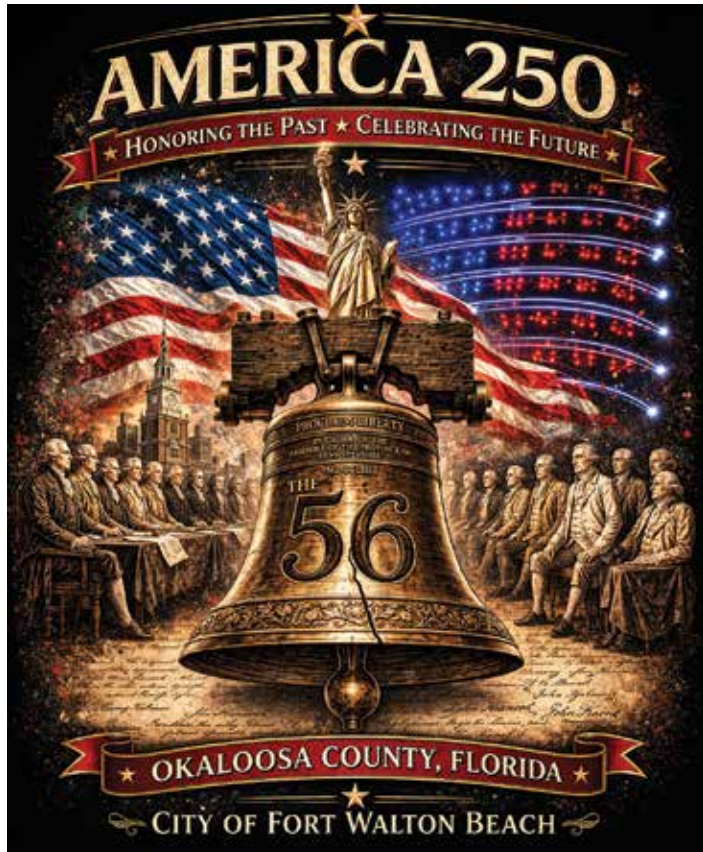
BY LORI LEATH MILLER

As America approaches its 250th birthday, Okaloosa County is preparing to celebrate in a way that's both deeply patriotic and unmistakably local — with fireworks in the sky, colonial coats in the crowd and its continued, year-long effort designed to bring history to life for an entirely new generation.

And next up on that growing calendar of celebrations? A gala unlike anything our area has seen before.

On June 12, the Okaloosa Commission 250 will host its highly anticipated "250th Birthday of America Gala & Drone Show" at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Rigdon Center, formerly known as the Northwest Florida Fairgrounds. The event will blend colonial-era pageantry with modern spectacle — creating what organizers hope will become one of the signature patriotic experiences of the year.

The evening, set for 6–10 p.m. with doors opening at 5:30 p.m., promises far more



than a traditional dinner event. Guests can expect a colonial feast, live entertainment, 1776 reenactments, music, dancing and a patriot-

ic drone show designed to illuminate the ideals of freedom, unity and resolve.

The invitation itself describes the experience as

"1776 Meets 2026," encouraging attendees to step into an evening "where the bold spirit of our nation's founders meets the brilliance of modern America." Guests are even encouraged to wear semi-formal or colonial attire — from tricorne hats and military uniforms to elegant gowns and bonnets — helping transform the event into a living celebration of America's founding era.

But beyond the gala's grandeur is a much bigger story unfolding across Okaloosa County.

The America 250 movement marks the semiquincentennial — 250 years since the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776. While national celebrations are taking place across the country, Okaloosa County leaders wanted to ensure the local community had a meaningful role in commemorating the milestone.

1776

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Paws and Pages:

Dog-Harmony Brings Animal-Assisted Children's Literacy Program to Niceville

This summer, children across Okaloosa and Walton counties have a new way to build reading confidence — with the help of some four-legged friends. Dog-Harmony's animal-assisted literacy program, Paws and Pages, is now offering monthly reading sessions at four public libraries, including the Niceville Public Library. Additional participating locations include libraries in Freeport, Fort Walton Beach and Crestview.

The program pairs children with registered therapy dog teams trained

PAWS & PAGES

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 Community

PAWS & PAGES

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through READING Paws, an affiliate of R.E.A.D.® (Reading Education Assistance Dogs®), the nation's first comprehensive animal-assisted literacy program. Sessions are open to children of all reading levels and are designed to create a calm, encouraging environment where young readers can thrive.

"Paws and Pages is about more than just books — it's about the connection between the child and the dog that opens the door to a lifelong love of reading," said Nancy Brown, founder of Dog-Harmony. "We see children who were once hesitant to read aloud suddenly blossom when they have a dog by their side."

Research shows four key elements help encourage children to read: a sense of self-efficacy, motivation, viewing reading as a

social activity and having a calm environment. Therapy dogs naturally help create that atmosphere. Their nonjudgmental presence can reduce stress and anxiety while encouraging children to read aloud with greater confidence and joy.

One Okaloosa County teacher shared that her student's participation in Dog-Harmony's READING Paws program improved both his confidence and reading abilities. "His state testing score went up a level, and I believe reading with a dog helped him achieve this goal!" she said. "The help they gave him in building a good reading foundation and raising his reading confidence will be with him throughout his education!"

Families are invited to register for individual reading time slots directly through the participating libraries. Current schedules include:

Niceville Public Library:



Every first Saturday morning

Freeport Public Library:

Every first and third Wednesday afternoon

Crestview Public Library: Every second Saturday morning

Fort Walton Beach Library: Every third Saturday morning

Dog-Harmony also plans to introduce Paws and Pages programs at Walton-DeFuniak Library and Coastal Branch Li-

brary by the fall.

Founded in 2015 by certified professional dog trainer Nancy Brown, CPDT-KA, Dog-Harmony is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to strengthening the bond between dogs and humans through education and community outreach. The organization's mission is simple: helping dogs rescue people. Its programs include therapy dog team support services, youth education and

well-being initiatives, Keeping Dogs in Homes and pet bereavement counseling. These efforts are made possible through grants, donations and dedicated volunteers.

READING Paws, also a nonprofit 501(c)(3), is an affiliate of R.E.A.D.® (Reading Education Assistance Dogs®), a program launched in 1999 by Intermountain Therapy Animals® in Salt Lake City, Utah. Today, READING Paws teams serve schools, libraries and community programs across Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Nevada and Tennessee. All therapy animal-handler teams undergo national criminal background checks and meet strict health, safety and temperament standards.

For more information about Dog-Harmony and participating libraries, visit Dog-Harmony or READING Paws Program Information.

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That vision led the Okaloosa County Board of County Commissioners to establish the America 250 Commission earlier this year. Formed by county resolution on Jan. 20, 2026, the commission is tasked with organizing events throughout the year that honor America's founding principles while educating, engaging and inspiring local residents and visitors alike.

The commission officially held its first organizational meeting Feb. 5 in Shalimar,

launching what has quickly become one of the area's most ambitious community-wide patriotic initiatives.

Leading the effort is Chairman Graham Fountain, president of the Sons of the American Revolution, alongside Vice Chairman Mitzi Henley of the Daughters of the American Revolution's Choctawhatchee Bay Chapter. Together with 18 appointed commissioners and more than 50 volunteers, the group represents a wide cross-section of Okaloosa County leadership and civic life.

Participants include repre-

sentatives from the Sons of the American Revolution, Daughters of the American Revolution (Choctawhatchee Bay Chapter), West Florida Daughters of the American Revolution, Tourist Development Department, Okaloosa County School District, Florida State Historical Commission, chambers of commerce, the Okaloosa League of Cities, local military installations, Scouting America, first responders, the Billy Bowlegs organization, NAACP leadership and county-appointed at-large members.

In many ways, the structure mirrors the spirit of the original colonies themselves — diverse groups coming together around a shared purpose. "We have a rich history that deserves to be recognized both nationally and in Okaloosa County," Fountain said during the commission's inaugural meeting. "We can all come together, pause and reflect on the contributions made by our patriot ancestors who fought and died to create our great republic."

Together, they will honor our Founding Fathers and their enduring principles, recognize our patriotic ancestors, commemorate the Revolutionary War era, and promote education and community awareness across Okaloosa County.

And while history is certainly central to the effort, organizers say they also want these events

to feel celebratory, interactive and fun.

Future America 250 events already in planning include expanded Fourth of July celebrations with local municipalities, a patriotic-focused "Remember 9/11" event organized by the Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber this fall and a full Veterans Day lineup Nov. 11 featuring ceremonies and a parade across the county.

Organizers are also encouraging local businesses, nonprofits and civic groups to participate by hosting their own themed events and partnering with the commission through social media and community promotions.

To have an event added to the Life Media calendar, organizers may contact Cali Hlavac at To Do in Destin at cali.hlavac@gmail.com and Shantelle at shantelle@francesroy.com. Organizers can also visit getthecoast.com/America250 for submissions.

Organizations are also encouraged to add @OkaloosaCountyAmerica250 as a co-host on Facebook to help expand visibility and community engagement.

Businesses and event organizers interested in advertising America 250-related events may also contact Scott Miller at Scott@LifeMediaGrp.com for promotional opportunities through local media partner-

ships and community outreach campaigns.

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The Modern Men's Health Conversation



By DR. KAREN DEVORE

June is Men's Health Month, and it's time to broaden the conversation around what men's health actually means.

For years, it was almost expected that men would only seek care when something became impossible to ignore such as when symptoms disrupted

daily life or concern from others became unavoidable. That mindset is starting to shift.

More men are thinking about longevity, prevention, recovery, and performance. They're paying attention to sleep, nutrition, strength, and how their bodies function before a crisis happens. And that shift matters.



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Because many of the issues men experience daily are common, closely tied to overall health, and often more manageable when addressed early.

I hear consistent themes from men across all stages of life and from the people who care about them.

“Why don't I feel like myself anymore?”

This concern rarely comes out directly. More often, it shows up as fatigue, low motivation, irritability, poor recovery, or unexplained weight gain.

While aging plays a role, what I often see is the cumulative effect of chronic stress, poor sleep, under-recovery, inconsistent nutrition, declining muscle mass, and sedentary work.

Modern life doesn't support physiology well. Many men are overstimulated, under-recovered, and running at a high level while quietly depleted. Over time, that catches up but the body is often highly responsive with consistent support.

“Why am I gaining weight around my stomach even though I'm trying?”

Abdominal weight gain isn't just cosmetic; it's often a metabolic signal.

As muscle declines and stress stays elevated, the body becomes more efficient at storing fat, especially around the midsection. Blood sugar becomes less stable, energy drops, recovery worsens, and cravings increase.

Many men feel like they're trying, but habits are often more inconsistent than they realize such as skipping meals, under-eating protein, relying on convenience foods, eating late, or cycling between restriction and overeating.

What works better is return-

ing to fundamentals including prioritizing protein, maintaining muscle, walking regularly, strength training, improving sleep, eating consistently, and supporting recovery.

The goal isn't perfection; it's consistency and long-term metabolic resilience.

“Why am I exhausted but still sleeping poorly?”

Sleep disruption has become so normalized that many underestimate its impact.

Sleep affects metabolism, recovery, mood, cognition, inflammation, and hormone regulation. Yet many men operate in a chronically sleep-deprived state relying on caffeine, late-night stimulation, alcohol, and inconsistent schedules while expecting optimal performance.

Sometimes the issue is sleep apnea. Sometimes it's chronic stress or years of running in “go mode” without real recovery. Improving sleep often changes far more than expected.

“Why do I feel more anxious, irritable, or mentally checked out?”

These symptoms are often rooted in physiology as much as psychology.

Brain fog, low motivation, irritability, and anxiety frequently reflect an overloaded system including poor sleep, unstable blood sugar, chronic stress, and inflammation layered onto demanding lives.

Many men are balancing work, family, and responsibility while running on empty. This is where preventive care matters, not because every symptom is serious, but because early understanding can prevent years of unnecessary struggle.

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Bay Buzz

Emerald Coast Open Removes More Than 20,000 Lionfish

The Gulf waters surrounding Destin-Fort Walton Beach are a little healthier this month thanks to more than 100 divers from across the country who participated in the 2026 Emerald Coast Open — now recognized as the world’s largest lionfish tournament.

This year’s tournament removed an impressive 20,752 invasive lionfish from Gulf waters surrounding the region’s extensive artificial reef system.

The annual event paired conservation efforts with family-friendly entertainment during the Lionfish Festival at HarborWalk Village and a popular Restaurant Week featuring creative lionfish-inspired cuisine throughout the area.

“This free family-friendly event has brought divers from across the country to our amazing area since 2019,” said Okaloosa County Board Chairman Trey Goodwin. “What our natural resources staff and partners have been able to do is remarkable. They have created a festive event for the community that also gives back to our marine ecosystem.”

The tournament included a pre-event competition that yielded 5,734 lionfish, followed by the main two-day tournament earlier this month that added another 15,018 to the final total.

Behind AJ’s Seafood and Oyster Bar at HarborWalk Village, divers lined up to have their catches measured and weighed as festivalgoers watched the action unfold throughout the weekend.

Teams competed for more than \$100,000 in cash and gear prizes in categories including largest lionfish, smallest lionfish and most lionfish harvested.

Top winners included:
 • Most Lionfish — DWM Off the Deep End with 2,641 lionfish

• Largest Lionfish — Lady Ray at 461 mm

• Smallest Lionfish — Nole Mercy Spearfishing at 56 mm

• Restaurant Week Winner — La Paz Restaurante & Cantina for the fourth consecutive year

One lucky attendee, Trenlon Harris, also won the “Guess



How Many Lionfish Will Be Caught?” contest by guessing 15,014 — just four fish shy of the official tournament total of 15,018 during the main event.

Lionfish remain one of the Gulf’s most problematic invasive species because they reproduce rapidly and have few natural predators in local waters. Divers armed with spears remain the most effective method for removing them from the ecosystem.

Complete standings and additional information can be found at www.emeraldcoastopen.com.

Learn more about Destin-Fort Walton Beach natural resource initiatives at www.destinfbw.com/explore/eco-tourism.

One Okaloosa EDC Receives Statewide Honor

A transformational economic development project in



northern Okaloosa County has earned statewide recognition.

One Okaloosa EDC recently received the 2026 “Deal of the Year” award from the Florida Economic Development Council for the Williams International project now under construction at Shoal River Industrial Park near Crestview.

Williams International is building the first phase of a 1,000,000-square-foot gas turbine engine manufacturing facility representing more than \$1 billion in capital investment — one of the largest economic development projects in Florida history. The company plans to create 336 jobs with an average salary of \$69,434.

One Okaloosa EDC received the Urban category award, which recognizes projects based on economic impact and the expertise required to bring them to fruition.

“We are deeply honored to

receive this prestigious recognition from the Florida Economic Development Council,” stated Nathan Sparks, One Okaloosa EDC Executive Director. “While our organization’s name may be on it, this is truly a team award. Without Williams International’s belief in our community — and without incredible partners like the Okaloosa County Board of County Com-

missioners, FloridaCommerce, Triumph Gulf Coast, Space Florida, CareerSource Okaloosa Walton, Northwest Florida State College, the University of West Florida, Okaloosa Technical College, Okaloosa County School District and so many others — this monumental success simply would not have been possible.”



It’s June’s Biz After Hours and You’re Invited!

Tuesday, June 23 | 5–6:30 p.m.

Join **Niceville Valparaiso Chamber of Commerce, LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant & Oyster Bar** and **Bay Life** for an exciting evening of networking, community connections and waterfront fun during the **2026 Life Media After Hours** in beautiful Bluewater Bay.

In honor of America’s upcoming 250th Anniversary celebration, we encourage you to wear festive red, white and blue attire as we celebrate community, patriotism and the spirit of our nation together.

Hosted at LJ Schooners, this popular Chamber Business After Hours event brings together local business leaders, entrepreneurs, community members and friends for a relaxed evening of conversation, relationship-building and celebration. Whether you’re looking to grow your business, meet new people or simply enjoy a fun night out overlooking the water, this is the place to be!

Members and guests are welcome, and there is no cost



to attend. Bring a door prize for an opportunity to spotlight and promote your business to fellow attendees throughout the evening.

At **Life Media**, we’re incredibly grateful for our **Bay Life** community and the many businesses, readers and relationships that continue to make Niceville, Valparaiso and Bluewater Bay such a special place to live and work. We’re looking forward to celebrating alongside all of you.

Mark your calendar, invite a friend and join us June 23 for one of the area’s favorite business networking evenings of the summer. **We can’t wait to connect with you there!**

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A Revolutionary Year: Heritage Museum Brings America 250 to Life

Publisher's Note: As the United States approaches its 250th birthday, communities across the country are beginning to reflect on the people, ideals and sacrifices that shaped the nation. Here in our piece of paradise, that reflection is taking on a uniquely local flavor — one rooted in family, patriotism, storytelling and community connection.

While major cities may host massive fireworks displays and national ceremonies, Northwest Florida's America 250 celebrations are becoming something far more personal: an invitation for neighbors, families and children to rediscover history

together.

One of the strongest examples of that effort is unfolding right here in our area at the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida in Valparaiso, where a yearlong "Celebrate America 250!" series is bringing Revolutionary-era history to life through exhibits, lectures, reenactments, educational programs and family-friendly events throughout 2026.

For residents of Bluewater Bay and Niceville, the series offers a nearby opportunity to participate in the nation's semiquincentennial celebration even as local America 250 planning efforts continue. This

year's Heritage Museum's programming goes far beyond traditional exhibits. Organizers are creating immersive experiences designed to make history feel tangible and relevant to modern audiences—ones like the following:

History Lesson on Historic Date Thrills Audience

BY BARBARA PALMGREN

On April 18, 2026, retired Colonel Karl Eschmann, shared a history lesson surrounding two famous battles influencing the decision to formally revolt from Great Britain and form a new

Continued on next page



AMERICA 250

continued from previous page

nation. This formal document was the Declaration of Independence.

We know and remember so little of these battles, but hear the words of Longfellow's famous poem echoing in our heads:

"Listen, my children, and you shall hear

Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere,

On the eighteenth of April in Seventy-Five,

Hardly a man is now alive,

Who remembers that famous day and year."

We also remember the description of the signal lanterns in the Old North Church ("one if by land and two if by sea") and the cry of "The British are Coming!" although the poem used more poetic language as this cry alerted farmers to prepare to fight. There was no trained, standing colonial army as this was only the beginning of a war that would lead to our victory and independence as a new nation, the United States of America. According to Karl, after that battle, the patriots considered themselves Americans.

So, imagine you are stationed on active duty in the late 20th century at Hanscom Air Force Base in Massachusetts, a base bordering the towns of Bedford, Lincoln, Concord and Lexington. The towns featured prominently in the first battle of the American Revolution. Would you be as intrigued as Karl was, to learn more about this crucial period in our nation's beginning?

That's what happened for Karl and Charlotte Eschmann. Karl devoted time to research the first two battles of the revo-



lution, the battles of Lexington and Concord. Karl graduated from Texas A&M University in 1971 with a Bachelor's Degree in Aerospace Engineering followed by a Master's Degree from the Air Force Institute of Technology in Logistics Management in 1989. Karl is also a distinguished graduate of the Air Command and Staff College, the Air War College, and the Naval War College.

Karl is considered a subject matter expert on these two battles and shared this knowledge free of charge for the public at the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida on Saturday, April 18, 2026—250 years after the historic event itself. Truly, a history lesson to be celebrated! Karl is also a member of the museum's 250th committee of "Celebrate America 250! American Revolution" that established the new exhibit to honor the U.S. celebration of 250 years.

One of the history panels, "First Battles of the American Revolution," documents these two battles. The entire exhibit of people, places and events leading to the signing of the Declaration of Independence can be viewed this entire year at the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida, 115 Westview Ave, Valparaiso. Museum hours

are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday. Special events for this celebration can be found periodically by visiting heritage-museum.org.

Save the date of July 4 to attend an official community ribbon-cutting at 1 p.m. with a reenactment "shot fired around the world" by Travis Souther in colonial uniform with a flintlock fowling piece, a smoothbore .62 caliber used for self-defense and hunting purposes. No fear, it is not rifled and no live ammunition will be used. Only black powder put down the barrel and all safety standards and regulations for historic black powder weapons will be followed. Travis will then share a presentation titled "Life, Liberty, and Hard Rations."

Karl will be on-site in the exhibit hall to answer questions about the two famous battles after Travis presents his program. At noon, Tom McKnight will present a special "History Sandwiched In" lecture to explain "Colonial Paper Currency" using his prestigious donation of that currency beautifully mounted on the exhibit wall next to the famous Trumbell painting of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

What an exciting opportunity during the day on July 4 to hear about unique aspects of a day we celebrate this year as the 250th anniversary of the birth of our nation. And, at night, throughout the county, fireworks will complete the evening with displays of red, white and blue lighting up the skies.

A special day, a special night for a special year!

Throughout the year, the museum's "History Sandwiched-In" lecture series is exploring pivotal Revolutionary War moments and founding-era stories, including the Battles of

Lexington and Concord, the drafting of the Declaration of Independence, George Washington's leadership and the role women played during the Revolution.

Additional programming includes:


- an "America in 1776" student poster contest
- a "Spirit of '76" Book Club
- a theatrical "Night at the Museum" event in October
- and "Yule of Yesteryear: Christmas in the Colonies" during the holiday season

For the Niceville and Valparaiso communities, the anniversary also offers an opportunity to reflect on local identity and heritage at a time of continued growth and change across Northwest Florida. While the

area has evolved significantly over the years, many residents remain deeply connected to the values that have long defined these communities — faith, family, patriotism, military service and a strong sense of community. I believe that is part of what makes the America 250 milestone resonate so strongly here.

At its heart, America's 250th anniversary is not simply about looking backward. It is about asking what kind of legacy communities hope to leave for the next generation.

More information about the Heritage Museum's America 250 programming can be found at heritage-museum.org and Florida's statewide initiative at america250fl.com.



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1776

continued from page 2

One especially fascinating detail woven throughout the campaign is the commission's tribute to "The 56" — the 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence. Organizers point out that these founders represented nearly every profession imaginable: merchants, ministers, farmers, musicians, physicians, military leaders, printers, lawyers and scientists. In other words, Ameri-

ca's founding wasn't built by one type of person — but by ordinary citizens willing to step into extraordinary moments.

Perhaps that's part of what makes the America 250 celebration resonate so strongly here on the Emerald Coast.

In a community shaped by military service, patriotism, volunteerism and small-town pride, the celebration feels less like looking backward — and more like reconnecting with the ideals that still unite Americans today.

For questions, please email the Commission's Chairman, the Hon. Graham W. Fountain at america250@myokaloosa.com or call (850) 830-0002. Submit photos, flyers, logos and other assets for your event at <https://bit.ly/Okaloosa250Assets> For gala information, tickets and schedule of events, visit Get The Coast America 250 or on Facebook at @OkaloosaCountyAmerica250.



Events Around the Bay

Biophilia Center Hosts Summer Kickoff Celebration

May 30 | E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center, Freeport

The E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center will celebrate the start of summer from 9 a.m.–2 p.m. with live music, local food trucks, bounce houses, raffles, wildlife ambassador chats and visits from The Reptile Room. Families can enjoy a day of outdoor exploration and educational fun.

Event details: eowilsoncenter.org/events.

Alaqua Sunday Session Sunday, May 31 | Alaqua Arena, Freeport

Alaqua Animal Refuge continues its Sunday Sessions series from 1–4 p.m. The free gathering features live music by Rescue Me — Tim Jackson, Holly Winter and John Link — along with rotating food trucks and the peaceful atmosphere of the refuge.

Magic & Comedy in Full Swing!

Ongoing Shows | The Palms Resort, Destin

The Magic & Comedy Destin is an upgraded, high-energy production featuring illusions, comedy and audience interaction.

Headliner Bart Rockett, an internationally known entertainer who has performed in more than 90 countries and starred in his own nationally syndicated television show, blends magic, comedy and ventriloquism into an interactive performance designed for all ages. Special guest appearances by Rockett’s children, Kadan and Brooklyn, add to the family-friendly fun.

Guests can enjoy all-table seating with food and drinks delivered directly to their seats, plus dining options at the adjacent Blue Lagoon restaurant. Showtimes include 7 p.m. evening performances and select 4 p.m. Sunday matinees. Seating is limited and advance reservations are recommended. Free parking is available. Tickets & info: MagicDestin.com

Baytowne Wednesday Night Concert Series Wednesdays | The Village of Baytowne Wharf

The Wednesday Night Concert Series continues weekly from 7–9 p.m. on the Events Plaza Stage at The Village of Baytowne Wharf. Bring lawn chairs and blankets for free performances featuring regional talent.

June 3 - Cadillac Willy

June 10 - Clinch 46

June 17 - The Typos

June 24 - Sunshine Wranglers

Island Summer Concert Series Returns to Okaloosa Island

Wednesdays Through July 29 | 6:30–9:30 p.m. | The Island Resort at Fort Walton Beach

The Island Resort brings back its popular Island Summer Concert Series with free beachfront live music every Wednesday evening through July 29. The family-friendly series features live bands, food trucks, cocktails and a fireworks finale over the Gulf.

This year’s lineup includes Rockstar Fish on June 3, The Aces Band on June 10, Seven Ply on June 17, Boukou Groove on June 24, Shenanigans on July 1, Tribe Zion on July 8, Lex and the Luthors on July 15, Below Alabama on July 22 and Jones & Company on July 29. Enjoy food and drinks from The Frosty Palm, Sizzle & Smash and The Beach Bar while relaxing on the resort’s beachside patio.

Concerts are FREE to attend, with food and beverages available for purchase. For more in-



formation, visit www.theislandfl.com.

30 Years of Concerts in the Village

Through June 11 | Dugas Pavilion, Destin

The Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation continues its 30th Anniversary Concerts in the Village season through June 11 at the Dugas Pavilion in Destin. Concerts are held Thursday evenings and feature tribute acts and crowd-favorite performers.

June 4 — The Return: A Beatles Tribute

June 11 — A1A: The Official Jimmy Buffett Tribute Band

Grand Boulevard Launches Summer Entertainment Series

Thursdays through-July 2 | Grand Park at Grand Boulevard, Miramar Beach

Grand Boulevard is turning up the summer fun with two free weekly entertainment series in Grand Park.

Bands on the BLVD returns

Thursdays from 6–8 p.m. with live outdoor performances from local and regional artists. The summer lineup includes Casey Kearney on June 4, Xcetrics on June 11, The Wildlife Specials on June 18, Cadillac Willy on June 25 and “America Salutes | A Musical Celebration of 250 Years of Freedom,” presented by Emerald Coast Theatre Company (ECTC), on July 2.

The all-new Big BLVD Bash debuts Tuesdays from May 26 through June 30 from 6–8 p.m. Hosted by ECTC, the open-air DJ dance party series offers family-friendly music and entertainment in Grand Park. Bring lawn chairs or blankets and enjoy dinner from Grand Boulevard restaurants before the festivities. Free.

History Sandwiched In Explores Railroad’s Impact on Northwest Florida

June 5 | Noon | Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida

Local historian Bert Moore will present a special “History Sandwiched In” program June 5 at the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida in Valparaiso. The free lunchtime presentation will explore the significance of the railroad in Northwest Florida and its lasting economic, societal, political and cultural impact on the region and its residents.

The program begins at noon at the museum, located at 115 Westview Ave. Admission is free. For more information, call (850) 678-2615 or email assistant@heritage-museum.org.

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HAPPENINGS AROUND THE BAY

JUNE 2026 EVENTS

01
Painted Rocks
 9 am | Valparaiso Library | Valparaiso

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

02
Dinosaur Egg Hunt at the Park
 10 am | Valparaiso Library | Valparaiso

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

04
Justice on the Block: Free Legal Help
 10 am | Valparaiso Library | Valparaiso

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

Dinosaur Scavenger Hunt
 3 pm | Valparaiso Library | Valparaiso

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

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

05
Greater FWB Chamber First Friday Coffee
 7 am | First Baptist Church of FWB | FWB

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

06
Concealed Carry Weapons Class
 10 am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso

Live Music: Sicktight Band
 6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville

07
Bluegrass Jam
 12 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville

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

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

08
Nature Movie: 'Microcosmos'
 2 pm | Valparaiso Library | Valparaiso

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

08 - 12
NRA Basics of Rifle Shooting Youth Camp
 10 am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso

09
Craft & Chat
 11 am | Niceville Library | Niceville

Chess Night
 6 pm | LJ Schooners Restaurant | Niceville

10
Niceville Valparaiso Chamber Second Wednesday Breakfast
 7:15 am | Niceville Community Center | Niceville

11
Greater FWB Chamber Nothing But Networking
 11:30 am | Harvey F. Eckhoff VFW | FWB

Concerts in the Village: A1A - Jimmy Buffett Tribute
 6 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation | Destin

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

12
Coloring & Coffee
 11 am | Valparaiso Library | Valparaiso

Live Music: Lips Manly
 6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville

13
Young Entrepreneurs Market
 9 am | Katie's House of Flowers & Gifts | Niceville

Live Music: Mechanical Lincoln
 6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville

14
Sunday Sessions featuring Rescue Me
 1 pm | Alaqua Animal Refuge | Freeport

15
Fiberarts Circle
 5 pm | Valparaiso Library | Valparaiso

15 - 19
NRA Basics of Pistol Shooting Youth Camp
 10 am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso

16
The Traveling Painter
 5:30 pm | LJ Schooners Restaurant | Niceville

Summer Design Class
 5:30 pm | Katie's House of Flowers & Gifts | Niceville

17
Donuts with Dad
 3 pm | Valparaiso Library | Valparaiso

18
Crafty Corner
 11 am | Valparaiso Library | Valparaiso

Greater FWB Chamber Business After Hours
 5:30 pm | Emerald Coast Harley-Davidson | FWB

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

19
Live Music: Singer-Songwriter Corey Fernandez Band
 6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville

20
Concealed Carry Weapons Class
 10 am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso

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

21
Father's Day Brunch Cruise
 11:30 am | Sunquest Cruises | Miramar Beach

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

22
Maker Space
 10 am | Valparaiso Library | Valparaiso

23
Acrylic Art Class
 11 am | Valparaiso Library | Valparaiso

Craft & Chat
 11 am | Niceville Library | Niceville

25
Bands on the Boulevard: Summer Music Series
 6 pm | Grand Boulevard at Sandestin | Miramar Beach

26
Pyramids & Papyrus: Egyptian Craft Event
 2 pm | Valparaiso Library | Valparaiso

Live Music: Killer Robot Army Band
 6 pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville

28
Sunday Sessions featuring Rescue Me
 1 pm | Alaqua Animal Refuge | Freeport

Sunset Shrimp Boil
 4 pm | LJ Schooners Restaurant | Niceville

29
America 250 Party: Unearth a Story of America!
 3:30 pm | Valparaiso Library | Valparaiso

FARMERS MARKETS

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

Hammock Bay
 1st & 3rd Sundays | 8 am
 Victory Blvd | Freeport

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

MONTHLY EVENTS

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

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

Bingo Night
 6 pm | Tues | Bayou Pub | Niceville

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

Watercolor Basics (Youth) with Elia Saxer
 3:30 pm | Thurs | Artful Things | Niceville

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

One Stroke Painting (Bgnr) with Sheila Mahony
 2 pm | Fri | Artful Things | Niceville

Yoga at Turkey Creek
 9 am | Sat | Turkey Creek Nature Trail | Niceville

Brunch on the Bayou
 9 am | Sun | LJ Schooners Restaurant | Niceville



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 Community

Meet Our Hometown Hero: Mia Manganello

A Proud Olympian Honored in Crestview by Okaloosa County America 250 Commission

By BARBARA PALMGREN

There is an old adage that “in each life, some rain must fall.” On May 9, after careful planning for a memorable parade in Crestview to honor the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the predicted rains did just that and soaked all of Okaloosa County.

The City of Crestview made the postponement decision on Wednesday, May 6, and Chairman Graham W. Fountain announced the postponement

after the decision was affirmed by a unanimous vote of the present members of the Okaloosa County America 250 Commission on Thursday, May 7. The parade will be rescheduled for the fall.

That being said, Mia Manganello, the parade’s grand marshal, was still going to be cele-



skating. In 2016, at the U.S. National Championships, she won the 3,000-meter race with a personal best and a national title.

In 2018, the City of Crestview held a ceremony at Warriors Hall and declared “Mia Manganello Day,” presenting her with a key to the city.

Six years after that day at Warriors Hall, Mia, at 36 years old, won the bronze medal in the mass start speed skating event at the Winter Olympics in Milan-Cortina. Mia is the first American to win an Olympic medal in the mass start event. She is a three-time Olympian and a two-time bronze medalist in long-track speed skating.

Team USA, the City of Crestview and Okaloosa County can all be proud of this outstanding athlete. During this anniversary year of the Declaration of Independence, the county and the nation once again extend thanks and honor to Mia Manganello — an inspiration to us all.

Summer Camp Activities July 2026— Heritage Museum of NW Florida

Cost: \$100 and \$90 museum member.

Phone the museum Tuesday through Saturday at 850-678-2615 to register.

July 6-10: Students Kindergarten through Grade 5
Time: 9 a.m. to noon

Each day is themed with how the Revolutionary War affected family life through lessons, crafts and games.

July 13-17: Students Grade 3 through Grade 6.
Time: 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Monday July 13: Art activities

Tuesday July 14: Music, percussion and washboard band

Wednesday, July 15: Zoology and Care of Animals



Thursday, July 16: Space Science

Friday, July 17: History about the Revolutionary War and Ice Cream Social.

brated — in a drier location, of course. Mia, who lives in Salt Lake City, Utah, was in town to join the anniversary celebration. At 11 a.m. at The Loft on Main Street in Crestview, Mia was recognized for her Olympic achievements, her loyalty to Crestview and for being an inspiration to area youth.

One photo shows Mia with officers of the America 250 Commission: J.D. Peacock II, Graham W. Fountain and Mitzie Henley. Another photo includes Crestview Mayor J.B. Whitten.

Mia grew up in Crestview. Her parents, Dominic and Karen, owned an Italian restaurant named after her, Mia’s Italian Restaurant. While attending

Walker Elementary School, she began inline skating at age 8. When her feet first touched ice, Mia knew what her goal would be. Her loving and motivated parents were ready for the challenge as well. In 2002, following the Salt Lake City Winter Olympics, her father drove her to Utah to attend an ice speed skating camp.

And the rest is — yes, there is more to the story. Even after taking a break from skating and competing internationally as a professional cyclist, her love for the ice drew her back to speed

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Niceville Fire Department Expands Lifesaving Capabilities Through New Paramedic Program

The Niceville Fire Department is taking a major step forward in emergency medical care with the launch of its inaugural paramedic program — an initiative designed to significantly expand Advanced Life Support services for the community.

Helping make that vision possible is a \$10,000 donation from the Mayor Randall Wise First Responders Foundation, funding that will support training, equipment and continued program development as the department builds its ALS capabilities.

The donation will be used to purchase training aids, manikins, EMS bags, ECG simulators and other essential equipment needed for both the current paramedic class and future training efforts.

Currently, four members of the department hold paramedic certifications. With the new program now underway, an additional 10 firefighters will begin paramedic school through intensive on-site instruction conducted around rotating shift schedules.

Participants will also complete extensive clinical training at local hospitals, emergency rooms, medical facilities and alongside ambulance providers. Altogether, the program requires more than 1,200 hours of advanced training over the next 11 months.

The transition from Basic



Life Support to Advanced Life Support represents a significant advancement in emergency care available to Niceville residents. While BLS focuses primarily on stabilization, CPR, oxygen administration and basic emergency treatment, ALS-trained paramedics are able to perform advanced lifesaving procedures before patients even arrive at the hospital.

Those expanded capabilities include cardiac monitoring, IV access, advanced airway management, medication administration and comprehensive ECG analysis.

The program is also being developed in coordination with Okaloosa County EMS to ensure all paramedics are certified in local operational standards and treatment protocols ahead of the department's anticipated

ALS launch in the coming months. Additional ALS-equipped units are expected to be added next year once the training program is completed.

Beyond the operational im-

pact, the initiative also carries special meaning for the community through the legacy of the late Mayor Randall Wise. "The Mayor Randall Wise First Responders Foundation is honored to support the City of Niceville with a significant donation to help fund 12 new paramedics.

This contribution is made in memory of the late Mayor Randall Wise, whose lifelong dedication to Niceville continues to inspire everything we do. Born and raised in the community, Mayor Wise spent decades serving others with humility, faith, and a deep love for his hometown. From his leader-

ship as mayor to his service as a volunteer firefighter, he always put the well-being of Niceville first.

Our Foundation was created to carry on that spirit of service. Supporting first responders was something Mayor Wise cared deeply about, and we are grateful for the opportunity to continue that work in a meaningful way. "We hope this contribution helps strengthen the care and protection of the community he loved so much. It is simply one small way we can honor his legacy and give back to the city that meant so much to him," the Foundation said.

For more information about the Mayor Randall Wise First Responders Foundation, visit the organization online.

EVENTS

continued from page 8

Emerald Coast Blue Marlin Classic

June 17-21 | Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort

The 24th Annual Emerald Coast Blue Marlin Classic returns June 17-21 at Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort. Timed with the Gulf Coast's peak blue marlin season, the tournament attracts anglers from across the region for world-class sport-fishing competition and nightly weigh-ins open to the public at Baytowne Marina..

Peach Festival Brings Sweet Summer Fun to our Area

June 19-21 | Props Brewery at The Windmills, Freeport

Props Brewery at The Windmills will host its Peach Festival June 19-21 at 1799 Great Hammock Bend in Freeport. Festival hours are 3-9 p.m. June 19 and 12-6 p.m. June 20-21. The family-friendly event will feature local vendors, food trucks, a petting zoo and craft brews from the brewery. Vendor applications: forms.gle/fB37dY1QP-WXhud937

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 Community

Niceville Paddles to Victory at Dragon Boat Festival

BY "DOC" DOUG STAUFFER

The skies looked threatening early in the morning, and the temperatures felt more like winter than spring. Jackets and hoodies were everywhere at sunrise, but by afternoon, the crowds were enjoying sunshine, music, food trucks, and even ice cream along the waterfront. None of the shifting weather dampened the excitement surrounding the 4th Annual Bring Hope Now Dragon Boat Race

& Festival, held on May 2 at the newly renovated Fort Walton Beach Landing.

Once again, Team Niceville proved they were among the best on the water, with team captain Mayor Dan Henkel leading the way.

For the second consecutive year, Niceville captured the coveted Mayor's Cup and led the event's fundraising efforts. The competition was fierce, with Emerald Coast Okinawa nar-

rowly taking first place overall by less than a second, the day's closest finish. Still, Niceville's team left no doubt they remain one of the premier dragon boat teams on the Emerald Coast—and they are already talking about a possible "three-peat" next year.

The Niceville team included community members, city officials, the Niceville Police Department, the Niceville Fire Department, and city staff, all





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paddling in sync as thousands watched from the shoreline. Dragon boat racing requires twenty paddlers and a drummer who work in perfect rhythm to propel the forty-foot boats across the water. The result is part athletic competition, part teamwork exercise, and part community celebration.

But many people may not realize that the Dragon Boat Festival is about far more than racing.

The event is the largest annual fundraiser for Bring Hope Now, an organization dedicated to reducing suicide among youth and military personnel through education, advocacy, and mental health support programs. This year's event raised more than \$22,000 to support the construction of a youth residential mental health care center in Fort Walton Beach and to support 42 school C.A.R.E. crews throughout the region.

The story behind Bring Hope Now is deeply rooted in the needs of Northwest Florida. In 2019, community leaders David Triana and Peggy Brockman came together after recognizing the alarming rise in youth suicide rates across Okaloosa County and the surrounding region. Their vision grew into a major community effort

focused on suicide prevention, peer-to-peer support programs in schools, and military mental health initiatives.

Since becoming an official nonprofit organization in 2023, Bring Hope Now has continued to expand its mission while building partnerships across the Emerald Coast. Today, the Dragon Boat Festival has become one of the organization's most visible and unifying events.

The atmosphere at the Landing captured that spirit throughout the day. Vendor booths lined the waterfront, raffles and auctions drew crowds together, and teams from businesses, nonprofits, government agencies, and local organizations filled the park with energy and friendly rivalry.

For Niceville, however, the day was another reminder of what can happen when a community rows together toward a common goal. Whether on the water or supporting a cause larger than themselves, Team Niceville once again demonstrated determination, teamwork, and hometown pride.

And after two straight Mayor's Cup victories, one question was asked as the paddles were packed away: Can Niceville make it three in a row next year?

Karlina's Painting: Three Decades of Vibrant Solutions

BY CHRISTOPHER MANSON

"I've worked with tons of painting companies in the past and by far, Karlina's was the best... outstanding! 'On point' every step of the way!" — Stacey W.

Since June 1990, Karlina's Painting has brought craftsmanship, expertise and customer satisfaction to Shalimar and surrounding areas in Northwest Florida. The company specializes in residential and commercial painting.

Chad Quick recently took ownership of Karlina's, while the long-running business' namesake (and founder) continues to look over projects, price projects, and make crucial deci-

ment with a lawn service that catered to VA "repo" homes in Okaloosa and Escambia counties. "A gentleman asked if I knew how to paint, and we got something going at one of the houses." This led to the founding of Karlina's Painting. "Thirty years ago, it was unheard of for a female to own and operate this type of business," says Neubauer. She hung on to most of the core team members almost from the get-go; Quick came on board about three years after the company's launch.

Quick says the day-to-day business "hasn't changed too much." He continues to build relationships with customers and make decisions vital to the success of Karlina's. "This job

here," says Neubauer. "The growth was bound to happen. You can't stop progress and, really, why would you want to? Every place will grow until it can't grow anymore."

Quick started working with Karlina at age 22 and at some point between then and his early 50s he met, dated and married Karlina's niece. They're one big happy family "if there is such a thing," calling Shalimar home with their two daughters and half a dozen dogs. "I love giving

something new life," Quick says of his work. "When you paint a room (or anything), it's brand new again." When he's not running Karlina's Painting, Quick likes to head out on his boat to "people watch" on Crab Island. He and his wife also operate the Little Learning Academy, a child care center in Fort Walton Beach that will celebrate its one-year anniversary this month.

Despite the ownership shift on the painting front, Quick assures the community that Kar-

lina's Painting's customers can continue to expect the same treatment they've come to expect for the past three decades – "timeliness, cleanliness, and professionalism."

Karlina's Painting is accredited by the Better Business Bureau. Discover more, view the company's projects gallery, and get your free estimate at karlinaspainting.com. Call 850.585.7717 to speak to a member of the Karlina's team.





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has supported my family for a long time."

Karlina's specializes in interior and exterior painting – full patios, concrete roofs, and metal roofs for starters. "We've done quite a few concrete roofs, power washing and repainting, and it's very important to do that in this area. It's much better, and a lot less expensive than replacing them," says Neubauer.

Karlina's serves Okaloosa County and the Navarre area, and the crew is willing to travel to Pensacola and Panama City for certain commercial painting jobs. "It was a much smaller community when I moved

sions. "Karlina is still 100 percent involved," says Quick.

Karlina Neubauer relocated from the Chicago area in early 1989 to work as an officer for the Fort Walton Beach Police Department. "It didn't take long for me to realize that I needed to supplement my income," she says.

She found additional employ-

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Education News

Space Florida and OCS D Launch Space Florida Academy Program to Propel Students into High-Demand Aerospace Careers

Space Florida, the state's aerospace finance and development authority, and the Okaloosa County School District (OCS D) recently implemented the Space Florida Academy Program. The announcement was highlighted by a ceremonial signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Space Florida President and CEO Rob Long and Superintendent Marcus Chambers during the 9th annual Technology Coast Manufacturing & Engineering Network (TeCMEN) Industry Day at the Destin-Fort



From left: Superintendent Marcus Chambers and Space Florida President/CEO Rob Long, seated at the table with Okaloosa students standing behind them.

Walton Beach Convention Center, marking a significant step toward expanding workforce development opportunities for students seeking careers in the rapidly-growing global aerospace sector.

The Space Florida Academy Program helps students earn high-demand credentials and develop skills needed for aerospace jobs. These industry-rec-

ognized credentials open immediate career opportunities and give students a competitive edge as they enter the workforce, including pathways not traditionally linked to aerospace.

In collaboration with industry leaders, the Florida Department of Education, the Florida Department of Commerce, the REACH Office (Reimagining Education and Career Help), and Career-Source Florida, the program focuses on reframing aerospace job pathways by emphasizing the following high-demand sectors:

- Aviation/Aerospace
- Advanced Manufacturing
- Construction
- Cybersecurity/IT
- Logistics
- Semiconductors

"The Space Florida Academy Program offers a new trajectory for students to explore careers in aerospace by breaking down legacy perceptions of what an aerospace career requires," said Rob Long, President and CEO of Space Florida. "By bringing industry together with education, the program helps highlight these opportunities and

identifies what is truly needed now, and in the future, to meet workforce demands."

"This partnership represents an incredible opportunity for our students to access high-demand, high-wage career pathways while still in high school," said Superintendent Marcus Chambers. "By aligning our programs with industry needs, we are not only preparing students for success after graduation, but also strengthening the future workforce right here in Okaloosa County."

For more information about the Space Florida Academy Program, please visit www.spaceflorida.gov/workforce-initiatives.

OPSF Launches Free CTE Student Summer Camps

If you are a rising 6th through 9th-grade Okaloosa County student, you can register for free, hands-on summer programs that introduce high-demand career pathways while developing essential skills in creativity, leadership, teamwork, and technical proficiency.

Camp offerings include:

- AI Masterminds: Innovate with Intelligence at Fort Walton Beach High School
- NextGen Engineers: Build the Future at Niceville High

School

- Builder Academy: Building Tomorrow at Meigs Middle School
- Justice Leaders: Lead with Integrity at Baker School
- Web Explorers: Explore. Design. Launch. at Shoal River Middle School
- Creative Coders: Design the Web at Davidson Middle School
- EMR: Start Your Rescue Skills at Crestview High School
- EMR: Jump into Action at Crestview High School

"These Career and Technical Education summer camps provide students with hands-on, real-world experiences in high-demand fields such as artificial intelligence, engineering, construction, public safety, web design, and emergency medical response," said Superintendent Marcus Chambers.

All camps are free for students and occur from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. Transportation will not be provided. Space is limited, and registration will be accepted on a first-come, first-served basis.

Register early due to limited availability. Click on each camp name to access the registration form or visit the CTE website. Note that registration deadlines apply.

For additional information, contact Morena Mannucci with the Okaloosa County School District Career and Technical Education Department at Morena.Mannucci@Okaloosa-schools.com.

Math Nation Winner

Ruckel Middle School eighth grader Dean Penberthy is a statewide winner in the Math Nation Show What You Know Showdown, a Florida competition designed to encourage students in grades 6-8, Geometry, Algebra 1, and Algebra 2 to strengthen their math skills through practice and perseverance. He scored a perfect 10/10 on a Unit 14 assessment, winning an ice cream party for his class.

Academic Title

The Okaloosa County School District Academic Team won the 2026 Commissioner's Academic Challenge Division

Register Early

Register early for the 2026-2027 school year in the Okaloosa County. Early registration helps schools plan staffing, classroom assignments and student resources before the first day of school. Children who turn 5 on or before Sept. 1, 2026, are eligible for kindergarten. New students and incoming kindergarteners

can register online through the district's FOCUS system at <https://www.okaloosa-schools.com/o/ocsd/page/registration>. Returning students already enrolled in the district do not need to register again. Explore the district's kindergarten program at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=728HaUx5I74>.



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How To Beat The Summer Slide: 6 Ways To Keep Kids Learning

Summer is a time for fun and relaxation, but it can also lead to the “summer slide”—the learning loss that happens when kids take a long break from educational activities. Research shows that students can lose up to 27% of their progress in math over the summer, making it harder to catch up when school starts again. Luckily, there are plenty of ways to prevent this and keep young minds engaged all summer long!



1. Math Magic Everywhere

Math doesn't have to feel like schoolwork—it's all around us! Incorporate math lessons into everyday fun, like calculating lemonade stand profits, tracking mileage on a road trip, or budgeting for summer treats. Bonus hack: online learning games and apps are great for travel entertainment and keeping math skills sharp on the go.

2. Make Reading A Daily Habit

Reading every day helps children build their vocabulary, comprehension, and critical thinking skills. Encourage kids to explore different types of books, from adventure novels to science-themed stories. Local libraries often offer summer reading programs with incentives to keep kids motivated. Audiobooks and graphic novels are also great alternatives for reluctant readers.

3. Encourage Hands-On Learning Through Stem Activities

Science experiments, building projects, and coding games offer interactive ways to explore math and science concepts. Some fun ideas include:

Making slime to learn about measurements and chemical reactions.

Building a model bridge to understand engineering principles.

Using online coding platforms to create simple animations or games. These activities promote problem-solving and analytical thinking in an enjoyable way.

4. Summer Routine Remix

Kids thrive on structure, so

having a loose schedule for summer learning can help them stay on track. Set aside specific times during the day for educational activities, like solving brain-teaser puzzles or trying out pool-side math challenges. Structure and consistency are key to retaining knowledge while still keeping summer fun!

5. Get Outside And Explore

Learning doesn't have to happen indoors! Exploring nature can teach kids valuable skills while keeping them active. Try these outdoor learning activities:

Visiting a nature center or science museum.

Identifying different plants and animals during a hike.

Using a compass and map to navigate a scavenger hunt. Combining education with movement helps reinforce lessons in an engaging way.

6. Enroll In A Summer Enrichment Program

One of the best ways to prevent summer learning loss is to join a structured learning pro-

gram. Mathnasium's Summer Program offers engaging, distraction-free learning to help students get ahead for the upcoming school year. With:

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Interactive and fun sessions, both in-person and online. Mathnasium ensures your child stays on track and enters the school year with confidence. Don't let summer break slow down your child's math skills—get started with a free assessment today!

Keep Learning All SUMMER LONG!

Beating the summer slide is all about consistency and creativity. Whether through reading, outdoor adventures, or structured learning, keeping kids engaged ensures they return to school feeling confident and prepared. Try incorporating these strategies into your summer plans to make learning a fun and ongoing part of everyday life!

Mathnasium of Niceville serves students from Niceville,

Bluewater Bay, Shalimar, Valparaiso and Fort Walton Beach. Local schools include Niceville High School, Bluewater Bay Elementary School, Plew Elementary School, Ruckel Middle

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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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ly friendly, Fubar is known for its almost-famous pizza and wings and carries all sports games and live entertainment, along with impeccable service. You can enjoy all that while enjoying the waterfront view.

FUBAR has plenty of games for the kids along with pool tables, corn hole, dart boards and more. When out on the water all day, come dock your boat on one of FUBAR'S boat slips and enjoy the incredible view. Feel free to bring along your furry friends to join you on the patio.

Need the perfect space to host your event in 2026? FUBAR is equipped with numerous private sections with the option of having a private bar as well. The outside deck can hold up to 300 people comfortably and can be sectioned off to fit your needs. In addition to the pizza and wings, FUBAR can customize a menu from Italian food to Prime Rib and everything in between. Open 7 days from 11 a.m.-2 a.m.
(850) 226-7084
114 Amberjack Dr., Okaloosa Island
fubarfwb.com

LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant

Suds, Songs, Sunsets and Sports! Welcome to LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant at the Bluewater Bay Marina Complex. Named after "LJ Schooner" (the LJ is for Lazy Jack), a cherished four-legged icon on Bluewater Bay Marina docks, the open-air oyster bar and restaurant offers a magnificent view of the water, marina and unparalleled sunset any time of year. There are, of course, oysters and a delicious varied menu with dinner specials such as blackened mahi and grilled shrimp with hollandaise, served over cheese grits.

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.

June 20: Beach Party 6-10 p.m.

June 21: Father's Day Brunch, 9 a.m.-1 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 9 a.m.-9 p.m.

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

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- Every Thursday—Thursday Throw Down SUP Race 6pm
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19th Annual Cardboard Boat Race
Sunday, September 13, 2026



More Fun

- June 5—South Siders 6-10pm
- June 6—Clinch 46 6-10pm
- June 9—Chess Night 6pm
- June 12—Jody Lucas 6-9pm
- June 13—Rewind 74 6-10pm
- June 16—The Traveling Painter 5:30pm
Tasting: Weber Ranch Blue Weber Agave Vodka 5-7pm
- June 19—Donnie Morgan 6-10pm
- June 20—Beach Party 6-10pm | Beach Dogz 6-10pm
- June 21—Father's Day Brunch 9am-1pm
- June 26—Parker Willingham 6-10pm
- June 27—20 West 6-10pm
- June 28—Martin Lane 4-8pm
- June 28—Shrimp Boil 4-7pm

Oyster Bar Hours: Mon.-Thurs. 3pm-10pm, Fri.-Sat. 11am to midnight, Sun. 9am to 9pm

Restaurant Hours: Mon.-Tues. Closed, Weds.-Sat. 11am to 9pm, Sun. 9am to 9pm, Sunday Brunch 9am to 1pm

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Hurricane Safety Tips from Florida Power & Light

It is not a matter of if, but when the next hurricane will hit our state, which is why it's important to be proactive in planning for the six-month-long hurricane season.

Whether you're a longtime Floridian or new to the state, having a plan in place is the best way to stay safe this storm season. Below is a list of what you can do before, during and after a storm.

What is a Hurricane Emergency Plan?

- Determine whether your home or business is located in a flood or evacuation zone and review local evacuation routes.
- Determine your backup power source or make arrangements to relocate if a storm warning is issued.
- The Division of Emergency Management recommends that drivers keep their gas tanks at least half full throughout hurricane season. Electric vehi-



cle (EV) owners should aim to maintain a charge between 50% and 80% at all times.

- Reach out to your local emergency management office if you or anyone you know has

special medical needs, in case of evacuations. Apply for our Medically Essential Service designation if someone in your home relies on electric-powered equipment.

What Should a Hurricane Emergency Kit Contain?

- Build an emergency kit with non-perishable food, bottled water, flashlights, batteries, medications, and a first-aid kit. Don't forget phone chargers, power banks, and a waterproof container for important documents.
- Don't forget information such as include insurance policies, health cards, birth certificates, Social Security cards, a list of emergency contacts, and a recent copy of your FPL bill.

How to Prepare Your Home for a Hurricane?

- Install approved hurricane shutters over windows and doors or using alternate covering such as plywood.
- Move patio furniture and outdoor items indoors, fasten doors and windows, and cover valuables and furniture with plastic and move away from windows.

• Turn off and unplug unnecessary electronics, including pool equipment, and set your refrigerator and freezer to their coldest settings to keep food fresh longer during an outage.

• DO NOT attempt to trim trees or vegetation near overhead power lines yourself – only hire qualified professionals to trim trees and other vegetation near power lines.

• Visit FPL.com/trees for more information on our tree trimming policies.

• Look up and note the location of power lines before you begin working on a ladder. Be sure that any ladders or scaffolds are far enough away so that you – and the ends of the tools you're using – don't come within 10 feet of power lines.

What are Important Safety Steps After a Hurricane?

- If you're planning to use a portable generator, read and

Continued on page 20



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Niceville High Softball Honors America 250 with Custom Military Appreciation Jersey

By CATHERINE CARD,
PIO OCSD

As America celebrates its 250th anniversary, Okaloosa County schools are finding meaningful ways to honor both the milestone and local military families. At Niceville High School, the Lady Eagles softball team honors America's 250th anniversary in a highly visible way. This season, the team unveiled custom-designed Military Appreciation jerseys, paying tribute to America 250 and recognizing the service and sacrifice of military members, veterans, and first responders.

The jerseys feature a bold blue-and-black camouflage design, accented with red, white, and blue elements, along with the official America 250 logo. A custom patch representing all six branches of the United States Armed Forces further reflects the deep respect for military service that defines both the program and the broader Okaloosa community. Special thanks to Niceville parent and veteran Vince Mayfield of Bit-Wizards and TalkingParents, who designed and personally funded the jerseys. His generosity ensured that each player received and kept their own custom jersey. "This is about more than a uniform," said Head Coach Danny Hensley, a military veteran, teacher, and Air Force Junior ROTC instructor. "It's about honoring those who have served, recognizing the families who support them, and helping our players understand the importance of service, sacrifice, and community."

Niceville High School's annual Military Appreciation Day game is a proud tradition. It features a ceremonial first pitch by an honored veteran, on-field recognition of veterans in attendance, and a presentation of the colors by the Niceville High School Cadet Corps. The color guard carries flags from all six military branches, creating a powerful, patriotic atmosphere. The initiative demonstrates the



values the Okaloosa County School District upholds. Every school and the District earned the Purple Star designation, showing a deep and ongoing commitment to support military-connected students and their families. Educators, staff, community partners, parents, and students all foster this culture of support.

While the team continues to excel on the field, recently celebrating Coach Hensley's 500th career win and building on a state runner-up finish, the program's impact goes far beyond competition. "These uniforms represent who we are as a community," said Superintendent

Marcus Chambers. "In Okaloosa County, we take great pride in our connection to the military and our responsibility to honor those who serve. The Niceville softball program exemplifies those values through leadership, service, and a deep sense of patriotism."

As the Lady Eagles compete in the postseason, their America 250 uniforms serve as a visible reminder of the team's commitment to unity, gratitude, and community pride.



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Outdoors

2026 Niceville-Valparaiso Mosquito Control Schedule

The Okaloosa County Mosquito Control Program's schedule for broadcast pesticide spraying, aimed at controlling adult mosquito populations, is outlined below. You'll also find weblinks to maps showing the general treatment areas organized by days of the week. Spraying takes place in the evening and, per State Law, must be justified. Justification is accomplished through mosquito population surveillance data and other State approved meth-

ods. The schedule may shift due to weather conditions or equipment problems. Treatments are set to start at sunset.

Map Link for Niceville area:
South Okaloosa County – Niceville Area: <https://myokaloosa.com/sites/default/files/users/pwuser/SouthCountyNicevilleArea2.pdf>

Mondays:
Wynnehaven Beach, Florosa and Valparaiso

Tuesdays:
Airport Rd to Destin Bridge, Mary Esther/Fort Walton Beach and Bluewater Bay

Wednesdays:
Streets off of Lewis Turner Blvd to Carmel Dr, Rocky Bayou, Fort Walton Beach from Brooks Bridge to Memorial Pkwy

Thursdays:
Shalimar, Ocean City, Mooney Rd area and Niceville



HURRICANE TIPS

continued from page 18

follow all the manufacturer's instructions. Be sure to set it up outside – not in your home or garage – and connect appliances directly to it. Do not wire your generator directly to your home's breaker or fuse box, as the power you generate may flow back into power lines and cause injuries.

- Stay far away from and do not touch any downed power lines or flooded and debris-laden areas that may be hiding downed power lines.

How Can Floridians Stay Informed After a Storm?

- Bookmark FPL.com and save 1-800-4-OUTAGE (1-800-

468-8243) to your cell phone to report and check the status of your restoration.

- Stay informed by following your local news and @insideFPL for updates on storm conditions and heed warnings.

- FPL works year-round to be ready for severe weather and urges customers to prepare by making safety a priority this storm season. For more tips, visit [FPL.com/storm](https://www.fpl.com/storm).

Publisher's Note:

An average Atlantic hurricane season typically produces 14 named storms, seven of which become hurricanes, including three major hurricanes, according to long-term climate averages used by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Ad-

ministration (NOAA). The 2025 hurricane season proved active across the Atlantic Basin and Gulf Coast, continuing a recent trend of above-average tropical activity and reinforcing the importance of storm preparedness for coastal communities.

The 2026 Atlantic hurricane

season officially begins June 1 and runs through Nov. 30. Forecasters are again anticipating another active season, according to NOAA and the National Hurricane Center. Early outlooks project between 13 and 19 named storms in the Atlantic Basin, with six to 10 expected to

strengthen into hurricanes and three to five potentially reaching major hurricane status at Category 3 strength or higher.

Visit [AlertOkaloosa.com](https://www.AlertOkaloosa.com) to sign up for alerts and daily updates and <https://www.facebook.com/OkaloosaCounty> for timely storm-related updates.

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Alaqua Gives Rescued Beagles a Second Chance National Rescue Effort Reaches Northwest Florida

By LORI LEATH MILLER

A heartbreaking national animal rescue effort is now reaching Northwest Florida, where dozens of rescued laboratory beagles are beginning new lives only a short drive from the Niceville and Valparaiso communities.

This month, Alaqua Animal Refuge in Freeport welcomed 20 rescued beagles from Ridgeman Farms, a Wisconsin breeding and research facility that supplied dogs for laboratory testing. The group includes senior dogs as well as several believed to be pregnant, all now beginning an entirely different chapter of life.

The dogs are part of a much larger nationwide rescue operation involving approximately 1,500 beagles being relocated to shelters, rescues and foster programs across the country. Animal welfare organizations report hundreds of dogs may still remain at the facility as discussions continue regarding their future placement and care.

The large-scale rescue effort has drawn national attention and united numerous organizations, including the Center for Humane Economy, Big Dog Ranch Rescue, Beagle Freedom Project and the Dane County Humane Society.

For many of the dogs arriving at Alaqua, everyday experiences are completely new. “These beautiful dogs have never experienced life outside of a cage,” said Laurie Hood, founder of Alaqua Animal Refuge and Florida state director for Animal Wellness Action. “They were born specifically for science —



the breeding operation. Despite their difficult beginnings, staff members say signs of hope appeared almost immediately. “When the doors opened, literally they’re all standing and their tails are wagging, and they’re just happy to be alive,” Hood said. “I don’t think there was a dry eye in the whole house.”

Several of the rescued beagles are expected to give birth soon either at Alaqua or in foster homes equipped for neonatal care. Either way, they will be cared for in safe, compassionate environments rather than research confinement.

For residents throughout Niceville, Valparaiso and surrounding Okaloosa County communities, the rescue effort offers an opportunity to support a meaningful cause happening right here in Northwest Florida. Alaqua officials say community support will help provide veterinary treatment, rehabilitation, transportation and long-term care for the rescued animals.

The refuge is also encouraging families to consider fostering, volunteering, donating or eventually adopting. Future adopters, the organization says, will need patience and under-

standing as many of the dogs continue learning basic trust and adjusting to life beyond confinement.

While the rescued beagles’ difficult past has sparked emotional reaction nationwide, their arrival in Freeport also highlights the role local organizations continue playing in large-scale national rescue efforts. “These dogs are experiencing life for the first time,” Hood said. “Our responsibility is to ensure their next chapter is safe, compassionate and filled with dignity.”

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Wellness



KAY LEAMAN, HEALTH ARCHITECT, CERTIFIED NUTRITION ADVISOR

The word exercise triggers a range of definitions from 'it's work', I love it, I hate it, I should, I have to, I get to and the list goes on. The bottom line is we should all be moving. Back in the 'old days' we had to get off the couch to change the channel or turn the record over, kids played

outside every day, we spent more time on our feet in the kitchen because we didn't have appliance garages, we had to push the manual lawn mower and clip the bushes by hand. We have so many things today that make our lives easier, not paying attention to the gradual move toward lethargy.

We all know we should be exercising but how do we start and what is our goal? Some of us have a home gym while others go to a gym and others use the internet for their gym. So, where do we start?

The first decision we need to make is what do we want to achieve. We then need to determine what our physical limits are. Our next decision is what

type of exercise or exercises do we need and how much time are we willing to commit to it.

The Department of Health shows (Seems to be focused on cardio, but what about everything else?) 150 minutes of moderate intensity exercise (heart rate = 50-70% of our maximum) weekly.

OR

75 minutes of high intensity exercise (heart rate = 70-85% of our maximum) weekly.

PLUS

2 days of muscle strength exercises (30 minutes/5 days a week or 10 minutes/3 times daily).

AND

Always warm up with stretches before.

It's Time to Exercise



Now, let's take a look at our choices:

- **Aerobic:** walking, running, jogging, cycling, swimming, dancing
- **Strength:** free weights, body weight (does not use any appliance), resistance bands, Pilates (core muscles, posture, flexibility)
- **Flexibility and Stretching:** Yoga, static stretching, dynamic stretching (arm circles, leg swings, etc.)
- **Balance and Stability:** Tai Chi, single leg stands, heel to toe walking, ankle exercises, coordination routines
- **HIIT (high intensity interval training):** sprint intervals, circuit training, jump rope, R.I.P.P.E.D. (resistance, interval, power, plyometrics, endurance, diet).

Dancing is a great place to start. Put on music you love and just start moving! This will exercise your joints, muscles and cardiovascular system as well as lift your spirit and reduce stress. Another good way to start is to take a short walk after dinner. This helps with digestion, decreases stress and ends the day on a fresh air note.

If you have joint issues I encourage you to start with pool exercises. There are cardio, resistance and other options available. The water gives excellent support and cuts down on the whole sweat thing.

Some of the exercises cross categories. Advanced yoga includes body weight postures as well as balance. Pilates is also good for flexibility. Tai Chi exercises the brain.

Let's say you want to start a cardio program and have only been walking. Try this: walk for 10 steps, walk fast for 10 steps, run fast for 10 steps, repeat. How many times can you do this? You would be amazed how well this works.

Look up chair exercises. These are great during commercials or while you're sitting at your desk.

Are you someone who just doesn't have enough time in your day? If that's you then it's time to think outside of the box. Stop trying to find the closest parking spot at the store, power walk the isles of the grocery store, do squats when you're at the washer/dryer, stand on one leg when you're at the kitchen sink, do ankle exercises at the stoplight, or how about lunges walking between rooms. You can also have walking meetings at work. The options are endless.

There are no excuses. Even the most inactive person can find a place to start. Start with 10 minutes a day and build from there. Oh, did I hear you say you want to increase muscle strength but can't afford weights? Use a one gallon container of milk or a couple large cans of beans. What about your laundry detergent bottle? Like Tom Bodett (Motel 6) once said, 'We don't have a gym but you can carry your luggage around the parking lot.'

It's not about what we can't do or don't have. It's about taking that first step every day and every step makes a difference.

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BY KASSIA GARFIELD,
MAXSTRENGTH FITNESS

Why Strength Training May Be One of the Best Treatments for Arthritis

Arthritis is one of the most common causes of pain and disability in adults, especially as people age. Many people assume that painful joints mean they should avoid exercise and “take it easy.” While rest can help during severe flare-ups, research consistently shows that one of the best long-term treatments for arthritis is strength training. Building muscle not only improves movement and function, but also helps reduce inflammation throughout the body.

Inflammation is a major driver of arthritis pain. In conditions like osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis, the joints become irritated, swollen and stiff. This inflammation can slowly damage cartilage, weaken surrounding tissues and make everyday tasks more difficult. Strength training helps combat this process in several important ways.

First, strength training improves the support system around joints. Muscles act like shock absorbers for the body. When muscles are weak, more stress is placed directly on the joints themselves. Stronger muscles around the knees, hips, shoulders and spine help distribute force more evenly and reduce wear and tear. For exam-

ple, stronger quadriceps muscles reduce pressure on the knees during walking, stair climbing and standing up from a chair. This often leads to less pain and improved mobility for people with arthritis.

Second, strength training directly lowers inflammation inside the body. Muscle tissue is now recognized as an active organ that releases beneficial substances called myokines during exercise. These compounds help regulate the immune system and reduce chronic inflammation. Regular resistance training has been shown to decrease inflammatory markers such as C-reactive protein and inflammatory cytokines. In simple terms, building muscle changes the body’s chemistry in a positive way.

Strength training also improves body composition, which further reduces inflammation. Excess body fat — especially abdominal fat — produces inflammatory chemicals that can worsen arthritis symptoms. Resistance exercise helps preserve and build lean muscle while reducing fat mass. Even modest improvements in muscle mass and body composition can significantly decrease stress on joints and lower systemic inflammation.

Another major benefit is improved joint stability and balance. Arthritis often caus-

es people to move less because they fear pain or injury. Unfortunately, inactivity leads to muscle loss, stiffness and weaker bones, which can worsen symptoms over time. Strength training reverses this cycle. Stronger muscles improve coordination and joint control, helping people move more confidently and safely. This can reduce falls, improve independence and make daily life easier.

Importantly, strength training does not need to be extreme to be effective. People with arthritis can benefit from controlled resistance exercises using body weight, resistance bands, machines or light free weights. The key is gradual progression and consistency. Exercises should challenge the muscles without excessively irritating the joints.

Many people are surprised that regular strengthening actually decreases pain rather than increasing it. Much of the stiffness people feel in the morning comes from inflammation increasing overnight without movement. This is why movement often feels good. It helps move fluid around the joints. That stiffness is often caused by

increased fluid buildup, which takes up joint space and makes movement more difficult. The stronger a person becomes, the less stress placed on the joints, which can decrease swelling and inflammation over time. Over the course of six to eight weeks of adding strength training, many people notice a significant reduction in stiffness.

The benefits extend beyond the joints themselves. Strength training improves energy levels, sleep quality, mood and overall health. Chronic inflammation is linked not only to arthritis, but also to heart disease, diabetes and many other chronic conditions. By improving strength, people often improve their entire health profile.

Ultimately, arthritis is not simply a joint problem. It is strongly influenced by inflammation, muscle weakness and reduced physical function. Strength training addresses all of these factors at once. Stronger muscles protect the joints, reduce inflammation, improve movement and help people maintain an active and independent life.

If you are having a hard time fitting in a workout, try MaxStrength Fitness. We offer effective, efficient and safe 20-minute workouts just twice a week. Our science-backed program is designed to deliver results. Call 850-373-4450 in Niceville or 850-467-9729 in Fort Walton Beach for more information.

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DR. RICHARD CHERN, MD

You're at the gym, pushing for that final set, but the explosive power just isn't there. Back at the office, you're staring at the same report for the tenth time, your focus drifting as a familiar cloud of irritability settles in. By 2:13 a.m., you're staring at the ceiling, heart racing, replaying the day's endless list while a thin layer of sweat cools on your skin.

It's easy to shrug this off as "just getting older," but this slow erosion of muscle, mood, and mental sharpness is often a biological decline, not an inevitable part of aging. While national health trends often highlight mental health and sleep during specific awareness months, maintaining your peak performance is a year-round commitment to your biology.



Precision Performance, Not a Rollercoaster

At The Hormone Restoration Center, we use bio-identical pellets to optimize hormone levels so your body stops sabotaging your efforts. Unlike messy gels that can rub off on your family or weekly injections that cause emotional "spikes and crashes," pellets provide a steady, consistent release that

mimics your body's natural rhythm.

How Pellet Therapy Restores Your Foundation:

- **Mental Focus & Resilience:** Hormonal imbalance is frequently the hidden driver behind "brain fog" and a loss of your competitive edge. Pellets support GABA—the calming brain chemical—and keep se-

rotonin steady, sharpening your focus and eliminating the irritability that can strain your professional and personal life.

- **Tactical Recovery & Sleep:** When testosterone is low, sleep becomes "fragile". Pellets help your body optimize melatonin and lower nighttime cortisol so you aren't wide awake at 3 a.m. They stabilize your internal thermostat, meaning you wake up recharged rather than restless.

- **Muscle Retention & Physical Power:** Your physical foundation depends on testosterone as the primary driver of protein synthesis. Optimized levels prevent your body from breaking down muscle for energy, helping you regain the strength, lean muscle mass, and recovery speed you need to perform at your best.

- **Long-Term Preventive Health:** Beyond immediate performance, optimization is an investment in your future. Maintaining healthy hormone levels has a protective effect on heart health and supports bone density, reducing the long-term risk of chronic decline.

The Path to Peak Optimization

We start with a thorough baseline evaluation, including blood testing of sex hormones and key metabolic markers. The insertion procedure is brief, performed right here in the office, and involves zero downtime.

Most men feel the "lifting of the veil" within the first two weeks, with reliable peak performance by week six. We don't "set it and forget it"—we check labs after insertion to ensure your levels are dialed in perfectly for your specific goals.

A Practical Plan for Results

We combine hormone therapy with lifestyle guidance so the changes stick. Don't let another day pass feeling like a shadow of yourself. Whether you want to hit a new personal best or simply want the energy to be the man your family relies on, we are here to help.

Reclaim your vitality and get back in the game. Call The Hormone Restoration Center at (850) 837-1271 to schedule your consultation and blood work.

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- Do you think you show too much or too little of your teeth when you smile?
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- Do you have gaps or spaces in between your teeth?

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Beyond Comfort: The Hidden Health Benefits of Power Lift Recliners

By KELLY STALNAKER

A powered lift chair isn't just a recliner; it's a helping hand when you need it most. By smoothly raising you to a standing position and easing you back down, these chairs significantly reduce physical strain and improve daily safety. For those managing chronic pain, surgical recovery, or mobility challenges, it is a simple home upgrade that makes a big difference.

Falling at home is a top concern for seniors, and surprisingly, the struggle often begins at the edge of a seat. Standard recliners frequently rely on jerky manual levers that can cause sudden, disorienting movements. Combined with natural muscle weakness or a sudden bout of vertigo, the simple act of sitting or standing can be the riskiest part of the day. Avoid these dangers with equipment that moves as smoothly as you do.

A quality lift chair isn't always just about comfort; it's about staying on your feet and maintaining independence. Golden Technologies lift chairs provide the perfect combination of medical-grade safety and living-room luxury. Available in dozens of fabrics and colors with a wide array of features, it's easy to forget these are sophisticated medical devices.

In addition to the super cozy exterior, these chairs are equipped with a motorized feature that lifts the chair up and tilts it forward for assistance into a standing position. For anyone seeking next level wellness, several premium upgrades are available. The Twilight feature gives the user the ability to recline into the Trendelenburg position (also known as weightlessness or zero gravity, elevating the feet and legs of the patient above the level of the heart) to improve circulation and reduce

swelling. Some chairs come equipped with micro-adjustment controls in the seated and reclined positions to improve posture and allow for optimal comfort. Additionally, heat and Swedish air massage are also available.

Golden lift chairs are built with pride by American workers in Old Forge, Pa. They are practical, luxurious, and incredibly comfortable to sleep in (especially for those who need elevation while resting). If you or your loved one has a difficult time sitting down or rising to a standing position, a Golden lift chair could be a game changer allowing for more independence. At Baywind Medical, we have Golden lift chairs available for sale and rent. A rental chair is perfect for someone just needing a little extra assistance during recovery from a surgery or injury.

Stop by and check out all



of the chairs we have in stock, Monday through Friday from 9-5 at 540 E. John Sims Pkwy. in Niceville. We have several chairs available for you to try before you buy. We are also able to order in-stock chairs from Golden and even help you build

your own custom, dream recliner. Our knowledgeable team can help ensure you get the right chair, in the right size, with all the features you need to maximize your comfort, health, and safety.

MODERN MEN

continued from page 4

“Why is this starting to matter more now?”

At some point, often in the late 30s, 40s, or 50s, health stops feeling theoretical. Energy changes become more noticeable, recovery slows, and small shifts become harder to ignore.

At the same time, many begin noticing changes in others like aging parents, friends facing health issues, or loved ones dealing with diagnoses that once felt distant.

What was once abstract be-

comes personal. For many men, this isn't about fear. It's about staying capable, present, and well for the people who depend on them.

“How do I know if something is actually wrong?”

The body often signals change long before disease becomes obvious through shifts in energy, sleep, weight, recovery, and lab markers.

That doesn't mean every symptom is dangerous. But it also doesn't mean it should be ignored. Paying attention to your health is a practical way to protect long-term quality of life.

The Bigger Picture

Men's health isn't about quick fixes or single solutions. It's about staying strong, protecting metabolic and cardiovascular health, maintaining clarity, preserving muscle and mobility, improving resilience, and building sustainable habits.

It requires a more comprehensive approach looking at how systems interact rather than treating issues in isolation.

Health optimization isn't just for athletes or people in crisis. It's for everyday men who want to feel well, function well, and stay ahead of preventable decline.

You don't need perfection. You don't need extremes. And you don't need to wait until something breaks. It starts with awareness, fol-

lowed by consistent action and the right support to understand what your body is telling you.

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Business

Mr. Nick Azzarita Wins HVAC From A Superior Mechanical

A Superior Mechanical recently held its inaugural Veterans & First Responders Appreciation Lunch in Okaloosa County. “We were blown away by the attendance of Veterans from every branch and local First Responders,” shared Jimmy Thorpe, founder of this 24-year-old, veteran-owned business. The HVAC winner, Mr. Nick Azzarita, served 20 years in the US Air Force in the Korean War and in Vietnam. The following 20 years, he served as a math teacher at Niceville High School. “To say this gentleman is humble is an understatement,” shared event organizer Marta Thorpe. “There couldn’t have been a nicer human being to win this.”

Thank you to event sponsors: Beachworx, Chelco, Blanken Financial Management, NHance Cabinet Makeovers, United Community Bank, One Beach Real Estate specializing in Homes For Heroes, Randy Wise Homes, Gulf Coast State College VBOC, and Okaloosa Vet Center. Also present at the event was the Chamber Choir from Rocky Bayou Christian School, the Niceville High School ROTC, and a beautiful invocation by Pastor Dave



A Superior Mechanical to Host Its Second Appreciation Lunch in October

The Walton and Okaloosa communities are coming together again to give recognition and thanks to our first responders, veterans, and active military. A Superior Mechanical will hold its next Veterans and First Responders Appreciation Lunch at the Niceville Community Center, 204 Partin Drive North, Niceville, FL 32578 on Tuesday, October 20, 2026. Doors open at 11 a.m.; Lunch and the program will begin promptly at 11:30 a.m.

During the event, A Superior Mechanical will donate a new AC system complete with installation to one First Responder or Veteran in need. This giveaway is open to all who have served in the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard, and all first responders including EMT/ Medics, Police, Sheriffs and Fire Fighters. Register to win at ASuperiorMechanical.com and go to About Us > Hvac Giveaway.

Local businesses are invited and encouraged to donate

door prizes and giveaways. A Superior founder Jimmy Thorpe says he hopes this giveaway serves as an example of how others can give back. “We wanted to somehow give back to others, and decided to give back what we have: AC systems.”

The event includes a delicious hot lunch catered by Swiftly Catered, a brief welcome from the sponsors and supporters, and the AC Giveaway. This event is supported and sponsored by the City of Niceville and Niceville Community Center, Niceville High School (who will present the colors), Rocky Bayou Christian School (who will sing the National Anthem), Chelco, United Community Bank, NHance Cabinet Makeovers, One Beach Real Estate, and Beachworx Co-Working Spaces. Walton and Okaloosa County businesses are encouraged to sponsor; for more information contact Marta Thorpe at (850) 814-3822.

Butler. “Big thanks to Jeff and Christi at the Niceville Community Center,” added Marta.

Save the date for the next Appreciation Lunch: Tuesday, October 20, 2026. For information on sponsoring, contact

Marta Thorpe at (850) 814-3822. For general information visit us at ASuperiorMechanical.com.

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Sean of the South: You Can Tell a Lot About a Person



BY SEAN DIETRICH

My granddaddy said you can tell a lot about a person by the way they treat a dog. Someone who treats a dog badly, is a bad person. A person who treats a dog with regard and deference is a good egg.

Right now, my wife is holding our blind coonhound, Marigold. She holds our rescue adoptee like a baby. Not like a dog.

Marigold's face was struck with a blunt object. Her optic nerve scarred over. She lost her vision. The doctor removed one eye.

"What probably happened," the vet said, "is that someone paid a lot of money for this

hunting dog, but Marigold turned out to be gun shy."

Her abuser wasn't happy about shelling out thousands of bucks for a dog who doesn't like noise. So he took his frustration out on the animal. He used a

hard object. Perhaps the butt of a rifle.

My wife is softly humming to Marigold. "I love you," she is quietly singing to the animal.

We've had our dog several years now. Life with a blind

dog was tricky at first. Not like having a regular dog at all. When we feed Marigold treats, for example, you have to touch her to let her know you're near. Then, Marigold simply opens her mouth widely, gyrating her head back and forth.

"I don't know where you are," she's saying, "but I'm opening my mouth to make it easier for you."

Marigold's internal schedule is all screwed up, too, because blind dogs can't sense light or darkness. So they have no idea what time it is. Sometimes Marigold wakes up at 1 a.m. and starts licking my face. And I start cussing and I say, "Please go back to bed." Whereupon Marigold barks with glee. Because there is nothing half as fun as 1 a.m.

But, we love this animal. Namely, because we don't have kids. As a result, my wife and I have a huge vacuum in our hearts. Which is why we sometimes fall deeply in love with other people's children. And it's embarrassing because they aren't ours, and people look at

us funny.

Marigold is like our kid. Because this blind dog needs us for everything. She can't do anything for herself.

She needs us for simple tasks like finding her food bowl, or walking through new places. We hold her when she has nightmares—which is common for blind animals. We talk to her, from whatever room we are in, just so she knows where we are in the house.

It's been the most rewarding animal relationship I've ever had. And whenever I see Marigold crawl onto my wife's lap, when I see this woman speak softly to this wounded animal, when I see her stroke Marigold's fur and kiss her broken skull, I feel something profound.

Jamie Dietrich holds the animal like an infant. She kisses the mangled scars where Marigold's eye used to be.

"Oh, I love you so much," whispers my wife. She is a woman who is filled with compassion and goodwill. And she has proven to me that my grandfather was absolutely right.



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Musing

A Pastor's Ponderings: "Give Me This Mountain"



BY PASTOR DOUG STAUFFER
One of the most pervasive

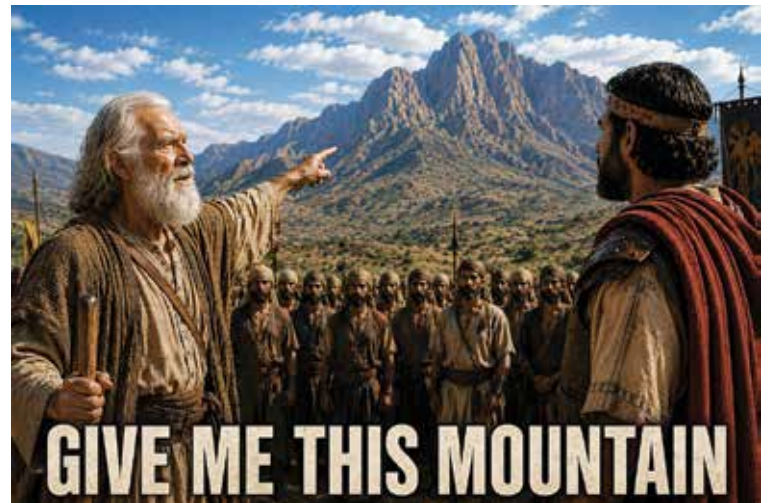
lies people come to believe as they grow older is this: "My useful years are behind me." Society constantly glorifies youth, speed, and strength while quietly implying that age means slowing down, stepping aside, and fading into the background. Yet the Bible offers us a very different picture.

At eighty-five years old, Caleb stood before Joshua and declared, "Now therefore give me this mountain" (Joshua 14:12).

Caleb was not asking for

comfort. He was not asking for retirement. He was not asking for the easiest place in the land. Caleb wanted the mountain where the giants still lived and where battles still needed to be fought. That statement reveals a remarkable spirit.

Forty-five years earlier, Caleb had been one of the twelve spies sent into the Promised Land. Ten spies saw giants and convinced the nation of certain defeat. Caleb saw God and proclaimed future victory. Decades



passed. An entire generation died in the wilderness because the majority spread defeatism and unbelief. Yet Caleb never lost his faith, his vision, or his desire to serve the Lord. That is one of life's great lessons:

Growing older does not have to mean growing weaker spiritually.

Some people grow bitter, discouraged, and cynical as they age. Others grow older, becoming stronger in faith, wiser, and more determined to finish well. The difference is not physical strength—it is their spiritual perspective, nurtured over years of faithfulness.

Caleb understood something many people forget: as long as God gives breath, He still gives purpose. You may retire from a profession or even from a specific position of ministry, but you never retire from serving God.

There is no retirement from: prayer, encouragement, witnessing, loving others, mentoring younger believers, or being a godly example.

Some of the greatest ministries occur in later years. Moses was eighty when God used him to lead Israel out of Egypt. Anna faithfully served God in the temple into her eighties. The Apostle John, in his later years, was still being led by God to pen the scriptures.

Modern culture often worships youth, but the Bible honors faithfulness. Proverbs 16:31 says, "The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness." The "hoary head" refers to those who have aged.

There is something powerful about a believer who has walked with God through burdens, disappointments, heartbreaks, victories, answered prayers, and trials—and who continues to serve faithfully.

Many people today feel discouraged because life did not unfold as they expected. Dreams were delayed. Opportunities were lost. Health may have become fragile. Difficult seasons came unexpectedly. Caleb understood those feelings better than most. He waited forty-five years to receive what God had promised him. Yet he never gave up believing. Delayed circumstances do not mean God's promises have failed.

God had not forgotten Caleb, and God has not forgotten you.

The greatest danger in life is not aging—it is quitting before life ends. The enemy would love nothing more than to convince believers that their usefulness has reached its end. Yet some of the most influential people in any church are faithful older saints who pray, encourage, offer wisdom, and quietly strengthen others.

Psalm 92:14 declares of the righteous, "They shall still bring forth fruit in old age." What a promise. Do not surrender your mountain. Do not lose your vision. Do not let discouragement silence you.

There are still prayers to pray, people to influence, souls to reach, and mountains to climb. As long as God gives strength, may our hearts continue to cry out like Caleb: "Lord...give me this mountain."

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Summer on the Green at ECTC

By Cameron Hughes

Summer is teeing up for an unforgettable day on the course as Emerald Coast Theatre Company hosts its first-ever Charity Golf Tournament on Monday, June 29 at Noon at the exclusive Burnt Pine Golf Club in Sandestin. Benefitting ECTC Youth Education Programs, this exciting inaugural event will bring together community leaders, local businesses, golf lovers, and supporters of the arts for an afternoon packed with great food, drinks, prizes, live entertainment and giving back to the next generation of performers.



the event.

Known as the crown jewel of Florida golf, Burnt Pine Golf Club offers a breathtaking course experience overlooking the Choctawhatchee Bay, featuring rolling fairways, stunning natural scenery, and one of the most sought-after private golf destinations in the region. Players will enjoy an elevated tournament experience from start to finish, including lunch provided by Firehouse Subs before play begins and post-tournament food included following

Throughout the day, golfers can also enjoy complimentary beverages provided by Tito's Handmade Vodka, Birdie Cocktails, and Odd Pelican Beer Company while networking, competing, and supporting arts education along the Emerald Coast. Every player will receive one free mulligan, and excitement will build across the course with contests, prizes, and more throughout the tournament.

One of the biggest highlights of the day will be the Hole-In-One Challenge, where players will have the opportunity to win a Rolex watch — provided by McCaskill & Company.

Proceeds from the tournament directly support Emerald

Coast Theatre Company's Youth Education Programs, helping provide camps, classes, top teaching talent, scholarships, and training opportunities that inspire creativity, confidence, and community in young performers that carries far beyond the stage.

ECTC would also like to extend a heartfelt thank you to the generous outpour from our sponsors and supporters who are making this inaugural event possible: Alice and Jerry Zich, Jim and Tammy Pierce, Chancey Design Architecture, Seaside Sport, McGill Escrow & Title, Shades Bar & Grill, The Agency, Cafe Thirty-A, Jennifer Crawford with Own at the Beach Keller Williams, and Dave and Jo Menary.

Sponsorship opportunities and team registrations are still available, and community support is already helping make this inaugural tournament one of the standout celebrations of the summer.

EDUCATION

continued from page 14

II state championship against top teams from across Florida. Team members included Captain Colt Stevens of Rocky Bayou Christian School, Cole Rewis and Jeda Srichareon of Fort Walton Beach High School, Landon Weinberg of Niceville High School, Caden Veach of Destin High School, Asher Newcomer of Choctawhatchee



High School, Hailey Nutt of Rocky Bayou Christian School and Rosemary Pace, who is homeschooled. Coaches included Lisa Nall, Dr. Michael Mosley and Julie Mosley. Established in 1986, the Commissioner's Academic Challenge is a statewide competition that showcases student achievement across a wide range of disciplines, including language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, fine arts,

world languages, physical education, health, and technology. Each year, Florida's top academic teams compete in this rigorous event, making OCSD's first-place finish a remarkable accomplishment.

Project SEARCH Grads

Okaloosa County School District celebrated Project SEARCH graduates Hailey Eubank of Niceville High School, Antonio Latimer of Fort Wal-



ton Beach High School, Isaiah Parish of Choctawhatchee High School, Jessica Parker of Crestview High School and David Wahl of Baker School during a May 20 ceremony at the Hilton Garden Inn on Okaloosa Island. The program provides workplace and career training for young adults with disabilities through a partnership with Innisfree Hotels.



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Arts & Music

OCSD & MKAF Celebrate Student Talent at 2026 K-12 Art Show

The Okaloosa County School District (OCSD), in partnership with the Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation (MKAF), hosted the 2026 K-12 Student Art Show in April at the Destin Fort Walton Beach Rigdon Center. The annual event showcased more than 2,000 student artworks from over 14 elementary schools and 15 secondary schools across the county.

2026 Best of Show & Superlative Winners:

Middle School 2D Best of Show – Hannah Leitheiser, Liza Jackson Preparatory School
 Middle School 3D Best of Show – Olivia McClain, Lewis School
 High School 2D Best of



From L to R: Ms. Kim Moran (Fort Walton Beach High School Art Teacher), Hannah Leitheiser, Olivia McClain, Addie Kelly, Sofia Perez, Ellie Aldrich, Lucia Schrand, and Superintendent Marcus Chambers



High School Show – Addie Kelly, Destin High School
 High School 3D Best of Show – Sofia Perez, Crestview

High School 2D Superlative – Ellie Aldrich, Niceville High School
 3D Superlative – Lucia Schrand, Destin High School



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SINFONIA INITIATIVES



- ♪ Link Up IN PARTNERSHIP WITH CARNEGIE HALL
- ♪ Sinfonietta Strings & Intermediate Strings
- ♪ Sinfonia Youth Orchestra
- ♪ Musicians in Schools
- ♪ Guest Artists in Schools
- ♪ Live orchestra performances for students
- ♪ Ensembles in Residence in the schools in partnership with Florida State University

Educational outreach remains at the forefront of Sinfonia's mission. Since it was established in 2007, Sinfonia Gulf Coast has introduced music to more than 220,000 children in Okaloosa, Walton, and Bay Counties.

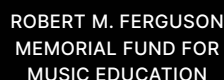
Donate today to help Sinfonia bring music, education, and the arts to our schools.
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YOUR SUPPORT IS INSTRUMENTAL TO OUR SUCCESS

Proceeds benefit Sinfonia Gulf Coast and its music education and community engagement initiatives throughout Northwest Florida.

SEASON PRESENTING EDUCATION SPONSORS



Big Orange House Designs Summer Camps & Creative Classes

Weekly Camp Schedule

Art Camp (Ages 6-12): Tuesdays & Thursdays | 9:45 a.m.-2 p.m.
 Preschool Art Camp: Wednesdays | 9-10:30 a.m.
 Middle School Art: Wednesdays | 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.

May Events & Classes

May 29: Glass Art Window Class | \$80+
 May 30: Open Studio Glass Art | 10 a.m.-2 p.m. | \$35+
 May 30: Permanent Jewelry | Noon-2 p.m. | \$50+

June Camps & Classes

June 2: Art Camp: Cookies & Shell Mobile | 9:45 a.m.-2 p.m. | \$60
 June 3: Preschool Art: "Sharks and Sea Creatures" | 9-10:30 a.m. | \$35
 June 3: Middle School Art: "Junk Journaling" | 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. | \$35
 Students will need to purchase a \$10 art journal at their first class.
 June 4: Art Camp: Cow Cupcakes & Cow Painting | 9:45 a.m.-2 p.m. | \$60
 June 5: Open Studio Glass Art | 10 a.m.-2 p.m. | \$35+
 June 6: Open Studio Glass Art | 10 a.m.-2 p.m. | \$25+

June 9: Art Camp: Butterfly Painting & Insect Cookies | 9:45 a.m.-2 p.m. | \$60
 June 10: Preschool Art: "Seahorses" | 9-10:30 a.m. | \$35
 June 10: Middle School Art: "Junk Journaling" | 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. | \$35
 June 11: Art Camp: Bread in a Bag & Woven Animals | 9:45 a.m.-2 p.m. | \$60
 June 12: Open Studio Glass Art | 10 a.m.-2 p.m. | \$35+
 June 16: Art Camp: Tackle Box Cookies & Father's Day Box | 9:45 a.m.-2 p.m. | \$60
 June 18: Art Camp: Glass Art & Paper Collage | 9:45 a.m.-2 p.m. | \$60
 June 19: Open Studio Glass Art | 10 a.m.-2 p.m. | \$35+
 June 23: Art Camp: Paint Pour & Bracelet/Keychain Creations | 9:45 a.m.-2 p.m. | \$60
 June 24-July 29: Pottery Series | 10 a.m.-1 p.m. | \$250
 June 25: Art Camp: Animal Bowls & Pipe Cleaner Animals | 9:45 a.m.-2 p.m.
 June 26: Open Studio Glass Art — Word Boards | 10 a.m.-2 p.m. | \$55
 June 30: Art Camp: Under the Sea Painting & Cookies | 9:45 a.m.-2 p.m. | \$60

Museum Series: Public Event Celebrates 50 Years at Heritage Museum

BY BARBARA PALMGREN

It was an early Saturday morning. The temperature was warm. Vendors were in place throughout Perrine Park. The Valparaiso Garden Club and local nonprofits were ready on site. Runners wearing patriotic 5K shirts crossed the finish line around 9:30 a.m. The Mustang Car Club paraded down Eastview Avenue toward Perrine Park and the museum parking area. Valparaiso police officers closed streets with bright orange cones while the Eglin Honor Guard presented the nation's colors.

The event was officially ready to begin. And then, the rain arrived.

With the area experiencing drought conditions, most attendees welcomed the much-needed precipitation. Ken Walsh, museum trustee and organizer of the 5K race, smiled as he headed inside the museum when thunder and heavy rain temporarily shut down the outdoor activities during the mid-morning hours. His work was complete and, thankfully, the runners were already dry.

Although the event became



more than a little soggy with intermittent showers throughout the morning, skies began clearing before noon, allowing the public to enjoy the annual tradition they look forward to each year — Saturday in the Park.

This year's celebration included something especially meaningful inside the museum's new exhibit hall. The long-awaited "Celebrate American 250! The Revolution" exhibit officially opened, and the public was invited to tour both the exhibit and the museum free of charge for the day.

Adding to the experience was reenactor Travis Souther, dressed in colonial uniform near the military tent display. Souther spent hours interacting with children, allowing them to wear



uniforms and pose with wooden rifles for photos with their families. Later in the afternoon, once conditions dried out, he demonstrated the firing of a Revolutionary War-era firearm.

While one musical group canceled because of the weather, Dr. Marie Hallion and her friend Rosie the Riveter presented a lecture under umbrellas beside the museum. Jay Denny and his band performed soft rock favorites for the crowd,

followed by Zac Broxton with easy-listening selections. Earlier in the day, museum trustee Mike Weaver provided fitting music from a playlist honoring the Mustang Car Club during its parade into the park.

After all, what's not to love about music celebrating classic cars? Surely "Mustang Sally" would approve of having a song written in her honor.

Food vendors kept attendees well-fed throughout the day,

while the bake sale offered plenty of sweet treats to enjoy on-site or take home. Thanks to the skilled efforts of volunteer Debi Moon and her team, the bake sale proved to be another successful part of the event.

In the end, the rain cooperated just enough to make this year's Saturday in the Park one more memorable reminder of why residents are proud to call this special Panhandle community home.



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