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DESTIN Life

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Lights! Decorations! Parades! 40 Years of Christmas in Destin

By CHRISTOPHER MANSON

This year's big Christmas events commemorate the 40th anniversary of the City of Destin. Those of us who lived through December 1984 will fondly remember movies like "Beverly Hills Cop," David Lynch's stab at Frank Herbert's "Dune" and "Breakin' 2: Electric Boogaloo." Okay, maybe not that last one.

The most-viewed TV shows were "Dallas," "Dynasty" and "60 Minutes." Madonna's "Like a Virgin," Duran Duran's "Wild Boys" and Daryl Hall & John Oates' "Out of Touch" flew high atop the pop charts. Bestselling books included "The Talisman" by Stephen King and Peter Straub, "Love and War" by John Jakes and Mario Puzo's "The Sicilian."

But, you don't need to be well-versed in any of these pop culture milestones to participate in and enjoy this year's holiday events. The City of Destin's Holiday Decorating Competition is underway now



PHOTOS PROVIDED BY CITY OF DESTIN

and is open to all residents within the city limits. It's free to enter, and entries must be received no later than 5 p.m. Monday, Dec. 16.

The contest is for exterior decorations only, according to CityOfDestin.com, and does not include the side and back areas of yards. Categories in-

clude Best Decorated Home (single homes, duplexes, mobile homes), Best Decorated Business (shops, restaurants, schools, professional offices), and Best Organization (homeowner's associations, golf courses, etc.).

Best Overall Holiday includes all homes, businesses

and organizations that "go above and beyond." To enter, call 850.654.5184 or email recreation@cityofdestin.com.

Judging takes place Tuesday, Dec. 17, from 5 to 8 p.m. Depending on the number

40 YEARS
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The Perfect Christmas



By GUEARY CLENDENNING

What was your perfect gift you received as a child during Christmas? You know, the one gift that stands out in your memory even after all these years?

I remember my perfect gift was a fully loaded red, chrome Schwinn bicycle! How many of you from my generation got that bike for Christmas? But of the gifts we all received, I

PERFECT
continued on page 2



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Community

PERFECT

continued from page 1

would think being with family and friends is what we cherished the most.

Living in Illinois for many years, driving home in the snow, and listening to carols being played on the radio was a lot of fun. At Grandfather's house, some of us would sleep on the floor, so all the family could stay together. On Christmas morning, we would be awakened by the shouting of the Children, "Wake up it's Christmas!" Reading the Christmas story from St. Luke's gospel was first on the agenda. Then we would pray, giving thanks to God for sending His Son. Afterwards, some would



share what they were most thankful for. Next was the madhouse, as everyone started opening their gifts. Joy and laughter filled the room as we modeled our new clothes and opened sometimes unexpected gifts. And soon the living room floor was littered

with Christmas wrappings and ribbons.

Breakfast was always special on Christmas day, which always included sausage gravy and biscuits with various egg casseroles. Can you tell there's a little southern blood in us? And Christmas

dinner, what a feast! A huge bowl of chicken and dumplings, garden salad, and freshly baked dinner rolls was the tradition at our house; followed by desserts we couldn't resist! The memories have lasted a lifetime.

I realize for some, Christmas

is a difficult time. Many have experienced heartaches, broken relationships, disappointments and the passing of family members. Such is the case with me.

Is that why God sent his Son? Into an imperfect world Jesus came, showing God's love for us by dying on the cross. He paid the penalty for our sins, and through putting our faith in Him we will become children of God.

(Read St. John 1:12 and 3:16 and Romans 10:13). The perfect gift is to spend Christmas with God and His family forever. That's God's ultimate purpose for you!

May you receive God's perfect gift this Christmas!

Merry Christmas to all!

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Holiday Hometown Heroes Are Easy to Find This Season

BY CHRISTOPHER MANSON

Good news! There are plenty of opportunities to be a Hometown Hero this holiday season by donating, volunteering or simply spreading the good word about our local nonprofits. Here are just a few ways you can make the holidays a lot brighter for those in need:

Harvest House Destin provides for families in Destin and Miramar Beach during the holidays and year-round. If you and your family are in need or would like to donate, call 850.837.2777, stop by 300 Mountain Dr. in Destin, or visit harvesthousedestin.org. Volunteers are needed, too.

The **Okaloosa County School District** and **Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office** join forces for this year's **Angel Tree Program**, which assists students requiring support during the holidays. Through school guidance counselors and school resource officers, students in need are identified. Last

year, more than 300 Okaloosa students received gifts from the two organizations, thanks to the generosity of staff and community members. You can help this year by contributing monetary funds or sponsoring a student and purchasing gifts from their wish list. Sponsor an "angel" or make a monetary donation at ocstarcharity.com.

Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center's Christmas Toy Drive has begun! Bring joy to area kiddos and help ECCAC stock its toy room for its families and agency partners to "shop"! Choose from ECCAC's wish list at eccac.org. Every contribution makes a difference in ending abuse and restoring childhood one child at a time. Contact Hailey (Hailey@eccac.org) to schedule your drop-off.

The Salvation Army once again provides opportunities to give joy, by making an anonymous donation of new clothes and toys to the Angel Tree pro-

gram; and time, by volunteering to distribute gifts and holiday meals to those in need. Items can be dropped off at the Salvation Army's Thrift Store, 425 Mary Esther Cutoff in Mary Esther. Call 850.243.4531 for more information.

A Bed 4 Me, providing beds for children in Okaloosa and Walton counties since 2016, provides a full bedding kit at no cost to local children and families in Okaloosa and Walton Counties. You can volunteer to help with bed delivery assistance, fundraising event support or to host bedding drives. To volunteer, email diane@abed4me.org or send a message at abed4me.org. A Bed 4 Me also accepts in-kind donations; a wish list is posted on the website and you can always donate new, standard size sleeping pillows, Amazon and Walmart gift cards.

One Hopeful Place provides shelter and "hope" for those in dire need—single men, women and veterans with no



org) has geared up for the holidays and its annual food services. The nonprofit's Holiday Food List includes instant potatoes, stuffing, cornbread mix, canned vegetables, dry beans, rice, macaroni and cheese, pasta and sauce, cereal, pancake mix, boxed milk and juice. Individuals and local

shelter, medical supplies, transportation or basic necessities, Community support creates a significant ripple effect on the lives of the homeless. Donations to One Hopeful Place do more than provide shelter and meals, they instill hope and open doors to new beginnings. Even a small monthly pledge can make a significant impact. Visit onehopefulplace.org or call 850.586.7879.

businesses are encouraged to drop off food items for holiday meals at Food for Thought's Destin or Santa Rosa Beach pantries. Email support@fftfl.org to learn more.

This is just a small sample of the worthy charities in the DESTIN LIFE readership area. We encourage you to search online for additional opportunities to help others this holiday season! They need you and you'll be glad you did!

Food for Thought (fftfl.org)



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 Community

Mel Ponder Named President of NWFSC

By "DOC" DOUG STAUFFER

Northwest Florida State College (NWFSC) has appointed County Commissioner Mel Ponder as its next president. Known for his unwavering dedication to Okaloosa County and his tireless commitment to public service, Ponder's selection promises a new chapter for the college and for the students it serves.

Ponder's appointment marks the culmination of a storied career in leadership, community involvement and faith-based advocacy. He brings to the role a rich background, having served in several influential positions, from mayor of Destin to Florida State Representative and, most recently, as Okaloosa County Commissioner. His wide-ranging experience has endowed him with a profound understanding of the needs of Northwest Florida and its people. Mel Ponder is no stranger to championing causes that matter to residents.



His contributions to the area's growth and development have solidified his reputation as a beloved leader.

A third-generation Floridian and a graduate of Florida State University, Ponder has devoted his life to serving others. His impressive career trajectory has also included roles

in the private sector, where he has demonstrated his passion for community and business development. Through his company, Business Empowered, a ministry focused on equipping individuals to make a positive impact in the marketplace, Ponder has demonstrated his dedication to empowering others to lead lives of service grounded in faith. As Association Director for the Emerald Coast Association of Realtors, he has been instrumental in fostering collaboration and advocacy across the region's economic landscape.

Ponder's leadership style reveals a deep commitment to conservative values, family, and faith. For him, leadership is about more than holding titles; it is about living a life of purpose and making a meaningful difference in the lives of others. His roots in Ocala, coupled with his faith and his enduring love for his family—his wife Mona and

their three children, Preston, Casey and Grace—serve as the foundation of his character and vision.

The NWFSC Board of Trustees' chair, Lori Kelley, expressed optimism for the college's future under Ponder's stewardship. "Commissioner Ponder brings deep experience and passion for our community to this critical role," she said, noting that his record demonstrates a readiness to lead the college into its next phase of growth and innovation. Ponder was selected from a pool of esteemed candidates, each of whom brought their unique perspectives and experiences. It was Ponder's demonstrated commitment to the community and his dedication to fostering educational and economic opportunities in Northwest Florida that set him apart.

As president, Ponder will oversee the college's growth, spearheading initiatives to en-

hance the educational experience and promote a welcoming environment for students, staff, and the larger community. He steps into the role at a transformative time, with the support of a NWFSC community that eagerly anticipates his vision.

With his extensive background in leadership, finance and legislative accomplishments, Ponder is well-equipped to guide Northwest Florida State College toward a bright and prosperous future. The community, the board, and his colleagues are confident in his ability to create positive change and to inspire the next generation of learners and leaders. With Ponder at the helm, the horizon for Northwest Florida State College is boundless, and together, they are poised to reach new heights, ensuring a future where opportunity and growth seem limitless. Congratulations Mel!

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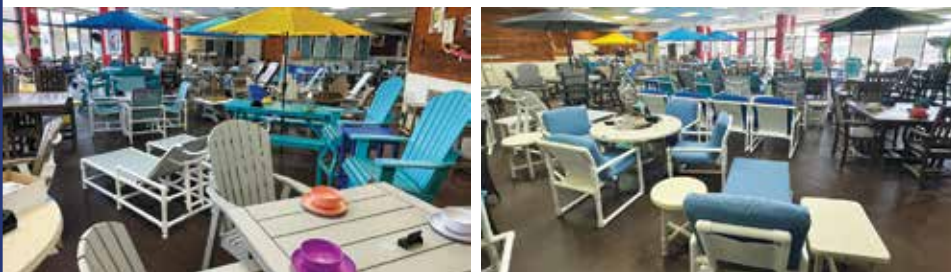


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Community



Mayor Bobby Wagner and PIO Tamara Young, PhD

"Reel Talk" from the City of Destin

"Grounded"

TAMARA L. YOUNG, PhD, PUBLIC INFORMATION DIRECTOR

This time, the Mayor and I sat down to share the latest on the underground utilities conversion project. We appreciate everyone's patience with the stretch of Hwy. 98 being worked on presently!

TY: Our underground utilities project kicked off in November. This will not only be terrific for resiliency in storms, but also, aesthetically, it's much more pleasing without extra overhead wires. What all area encompasses Phase 1, which is the current work being done?

BW: Phase 1 covers Hwy. 98 in our Harbor District and Town Center area, stretching from the Marler Bridge to Airport Road. We prioritized this section because of its critical role during hurricanes. Undergrounding

here helps first responders and utility crews work more efficiently, facing fewer roadblocks and safety hazards. This means residents can regain access faster and begin recovery. As we've seen from other Florida communities this hurricane season, every day counts for recovery.

TY: The contractor said the biggest challenge, like other underground conversion projects, has been site layout and locating existing infrastructure. They did a great job limiting impacts on the sidewalks, working in short, intermittent sections. They even had sections temporarily stabilized with compacted millings so that they could be utilized by pedestrians during our city's Christmas parade. Have you been pleased with the work so far?

BW: I've been very pleased with the contractor's hands-on approach. My expectations are high, especially after how long it took the state to expand Hwy. 98 on the east side of town. Unlike



that five-year ordeal, we're planning to finish this project in just 18 months, with minimal impact on traffic and businesses. So far, they're doing an excellent job meeting those expectations as they were able to underground 1,800 linear feet in the first week!

TY: Phase 1 is expected to take about 18 months total. What are your thoughts in getting Phase 2 a reality and where would it encompass?

BW: My goal is to finish Phase 1 during my first term and begin undergrounding all of West Destin. This is the logical next step after Hwy. 98 and aligns with making Destin a model for storm resiliency and

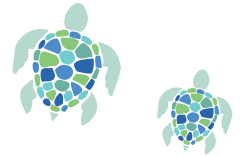
beautification across Florida. Of course, this depends on budget and grant opportunities. I plan to advocate in Tallahassee for state matching

funds and build partnerships with regional stakeholders to secure the necessary resources. We can't keep rebuilding the grid the same way after every storm. For example, FPL is requesting a \$1 billion hurricane damage bailout this season alone. Instead, those funds could help coastal communities like ours invest in infrastructure that's built for the future, reducing costs and risks long-term.

TY: Some people are getting FPL work being conducted, for instance around Fudpucker's, confused with our city's undergrounding project. We've shared that those particular new poles near the restaurant are part of

the FPL transmission line improvements, and that those are never undergrounded as the cost is excessive. Anything to add to help with clarification of the different projects?

BW: It's definitely a bit confusing to see both projects happening at the same time. The reality is that burying high-voltage transmission lines requires extensive trenching, which increases costs by up to five times. That's why these lines remain above ground. FPL is covering the cost of their improvements while the city funds the undergrounding project. The upside is that the new poles and additional lines provide redundancy, helping keep the power even if one line fails.



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Holiday Magic Is Here!

Baytowne Countdown Ushers in 2025!

Twinkling lights, skating on ice, magical tunes and streets filled with sparkle, tinsel, holly and jolly beckon your inner child to “believe” in the magic of the holidays all over again. Kids know it and we know it, too! The wonder of Santa and the holiday season jingles in our hearts and in the joyful Village of Baytowne Wharf!

Wednesday Night Holiday Concerts Holiday Edition + Visits with Santa

Get into the holiday spirit! Listen to some of your favorite holiday classics from 6-8 p.m. during the holiday edition of Baytowne Wharf’s Wednesday Night Concert Series. Each concert features a festive choreographed light show and fun. Visit with St. Nick and share your holiday wish list Dec. 11 and 18, 6-8 p.m. for a Holiday Concert and Visits with Santa. No cost to attend! PLUS, visit with Santa from 5-7 p.m. during Tuba Christmas on Dec. 14!

December 11 | Fort Walton Beach High School Chorus
December 18 | Matt McCarty Band

Lighting up the holiday nights are Nights of Lights!

Enjoy a festive, choreographed light show where the NEW tree lights in the events plaza will dance and blink to music every night in December leading up to Christmas on the Events Plaza Lawn! This sparkling event will also be featured during the special holi-

day edition of the Wednesday Night Concert Series. No cost to attend, watch three dazzling shows on The Village tree at 6, 7 and 8 p.m.

Baytowne On Ice Continues through Feb. 9!

Dust off those skates and get in the winter spirit at The Village of Baytowne Wharf’s Baytowne on Ice. For those visitors who miss the cold and ice, this seasonal ice rink is the perfect opportunity to share some of your favorite holiday traditions, open now – Feb. 8th. Hours vary daily. Check the schedule at baytownewharf.com. The cost is \$15 for 90-minute skate and \$3 skate rentals. Skaters must be at least 3 years of age and fit into appropriately sized skates. Children under the age of 6 must be accompanied by a parent or adult family member. Rent the rink for private parties and functions starting at \$300. Call 850-428-2736 or visit baytownewharf.com.

The Polar Express—a Holiday Favorite December 6 | 6 p.m.

Join us for a special showing of the Polar Express December 6 at 6 p.m. on the Events Plaza Lawn.

Who-liday spectacular—Grinchmas December 13, 5-9 p.m.

During this holiday season, put a little snark in your holiday spirit with The MEAN One on December 13th! Meet the ma-



ven of mischief himself for a photo opportunity from 5-7pm, then enjoy a movie showing of The Grinch starting at 7pm. FREE

It’s a Tuba Christmas December 14 | 5-7 p.m.

Join us for a free, special, unique holiday event from 5-7 p.m. at The Village of Baytowne Wharf. Enjoy your favorite holiday classics with Tuba Christmas and Visits with Santa!

Ice-Skating Extravaganza December 20 | 6 & 7:30 p.m.

Baytowne on Ice is hosting its annual Ice-Skating Extravaganza featuring two performances by Sandestin LOCAL professional ice skater on Friday, December 20th at 6 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. Both shows are FREE. Between the shows, lace up those skates and skate around the ice!



Baytowne Countdown | NYE

December 31

After a full season of holiday magic, ring in the New Year at Baytowne Countdown | NYE from 6 p.m. – 1 a.m.—The Village of Baytowne Wharf’s end-of-the-year celebration! It’s an evening to remember with two breathtaking fireworks displays at 8 p.m. and midnight. Enjoy fun for kids and kids at heart from 6-8 p.m. with face painting, kids’ activities and eatureing DJ QMoney on the Baytowne Live Stage. But, the fun doesn’t stop there! Dance the night away with live music from 7 p.m. until 1 a.m. featuring Party Feels on the Events Plaza Stage. End the night with a spectacular, midnight fireworks show. There is no better place to ring in 2025!

For 21 and over after 10 p.m.

Twenty and under must be accompanied by a legal guardian after 10 p.m.

Baytowne Countdown’s Drone Spectacular Celebration December 31

On New Year’s Eve, turn your eyes to the sky for the Baytowne Countdown’s Drone Spectacular celebration. Shows will be after the 8 p.m. Fireworks show and then another at 11:30 p.m. You’ll marvel at the eye-catching drone light show! Watch as 200 drones light up the night sky over the lagoon with swimming dolphins, shooting stars, and much more!

Beach TV LIVE! Join Beach TV LIVE during the holidays, every day year-round!

All holiday events are free!



Community

A Destin Holiday!

BY CHRISTOPHER MANSON

Now-Monday, Jan. 6, 2025

Geek Lights On The Corner Christmas Light Show

At the corner of Bluewater Blvd. & Antiqua Way, Bluewa-



ter Bay

Free performances feature thousands of Christmas lights and other themed display elements, all under computer control and synchronized to music and stories. Shows every 30 minutes starting at 6 p.m., with the last show at 9:30 p.m. Sun-

day-Thursday, and 10:30 p.m. on Fridays, Saturdays and holiday eves. Donations benefit Caring & Sharing of Niceville. Facebook.com/GeekLightsOnTheCorner

Friday, Dec. 6-Saturday, Dec. 28

Horse-Drawn Carriage Rides! "Rock Around The Christmas Tree" Music Revue! Photos With Santa!

Town Center, Grand Boulevard at Sandestin, Miramar Beach

Enjoy complimentary carriage rides while soaking in the Coastal White Christmas Lights and Festival of Trees display. Seasonal sounds by Emerald Coast Theatre Company. grandboulevard.com

Saturday, Dec. 7-Monday, Jan. 6, 2025

Annual Troon Goon Christmas Light Show

1074 Troon Drive E., Niceville, 6-9:30 p.m.

FREE residential graphic light show combining classic and modern Christmas songs for a fun and energetic jolt of entertainment. High tech animated dancing and limitless pixel combinations. The 30-minute show starts every hour and half-hour. Watch from your vehicle while listening to holiday music on 101.3 FM. www.troongoon-christmas.com

Sunday, Dec. 8

Sinfonia Gulf Coast's Big Band Holiday Toast 'n Jam With Vocalist Morgan James

The Crystal Ballroom, Henderson Beach Resort, Destin, 10:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.

Broadway star James makes her triumphant return, performing holiday favorites, Broadway classics, American Songbook standards, and selections from her album A Very Magnetic Christmas. Enjoy an elegant brunch complete with Bloody Mary and mimosa cash bar.

Tickets start at \$125 per person, which includes the live performance, brunch, valet service and gratuities. Limited front-row seating available; early purchase recommended.

Ticket sales support Sinfonia Gulf Coast's music education and community outreach initiatives throughout Northwest Florida. sinfoniagulfcoast.org



Thrill Of Hope! A Christmas Musical

Destin Methodist Church, 200 Beach Drive, Destin, 9:30 a.m.

The production celebrates God's promise and is presented by Kim Cannon and the DMC Worship Arts Department.

Sunday, Dec. 8-Sunday, Dec. 22

Emerald Coast Theatre Company Presents "All Is Calm: The Christmas Truce Of 1914"

560 Grand Boulevard, Miramar Beach, 7 p.m. Thursday-Saturday, 2 p.m. Sundays and 6 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 22.

Christmas 1914. All quiet on the Western Front, then a song, kicking off an extraordinary night of camaraderie, music and peace. This is the true story of soldiers laying down their weapons to celebrate Christmas together, based on firsthand accounts from the soldiers who lived through it. Tickets available for purchase online. emeraldcoasttheatre.org

Monday, Dec. 9-Friday, Dec. 20

City Of Destin Outdoor Decorating Contest

cityofdestin.com

Wednesday, Dec. 11 & Wednesday, Dec. 18

Holiday Concert Series And Visits With Santa

The Village of Baytowne Wharf, Miramar Beach, 6-8 p.m.

Holiday classics and quality time with Mr. Claus. baytowne-wharf.com

Dec. 13-20

Live Nativity

First Baptist Church of Fort Walton Beach, 2nd St. & Church Ave., 6-8:30 p.m. nightly

In its 36th year, the nativity scene includes Mary, Joseph

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Holiday rates apply to new advertisers only and good through December 31.

Continued on page 10

Cali's To Do In Destin! DECEMBER 2024

ONGOING HOLIDAY EVENTS: Now - Jan. 6

A Victorian Christmas at the Wesley House | Tours 10am - 3pm | Thurs.-Mon. weekly | Eden State Gardens

Dec. 6-22
All is Calm: Christmas Truce of 1914! | Emerald Coast Theatre Co. | Miramar Beach

Dec. 7-Jan. 6
8th annual Troon Goon Christmas Light Show | 1074 Troon Dr. E. | Niceville

Dec. 2-Jan. 6
Geek Lights on the Corner Christmas Lights & Music Show | 30-min shows nightly beginning 6pm | Final shows: nightly 9:30pm Sun.-Thurs. | 10:30pm Fri., Sat. & holiday eves

Dec. 13-20
Live Nativity | 6-8:30pm nightly | 2nd St. & Church Ave. | First Baptist Church of Fort Walton Beach

Holiday Ladies Night Out | 4-7pm | Blue Bay Lifestyle Co.

Jolly Jubilee Holiday Festival | 5pm | Destin Commons

Coastal White Christmas w/Santa | 5pm | Grand Boulevard (Happening daily Dec 6-28)

Holiday Pops: Christmas on Broadway | 6pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center Niceville

Movie on the Lawn: The Polar Express | 6pm | Baytowne Wharf

Holiday Movies on the Lawn | 6:30pm | Destin Commons

Jingle Bell Jog | 8am | The Island FWB

Breakfast With Santa | 8am | Aegean Shalimar

Farmers Market | 8am | Village of Baytowne Wharf

Farmers Market | 9am-1pm | Grand Boulevard

Holiday Market | 9am | DeFrance Antiques

Niceville-Valparaiso Christmas Parade | 10am | City of Niceville

Jolly Jubilee Holiday Festival | 10am | Destin Commons

Seaside Holiday Market | 10am | Seaside, FL

Christmas Holiday Celebration | 10am | Florida Place Food Trucks

Discover Science Saturday | 10:30am | Emerald Coast Science Center

Brunch With Santa | 10:30am | Destin Library

Painting at the Park | 11am-1pm | Royal Melvin Park Destin Harbor

Holiday Bazaar | 11am | Alaqua Animal Refuge

Scoops With Santa | 11am | Pink Coyote Desserts

Santa Days | 12pm-3pm | Pecan Jacks Gulf Place

Visits with Santa | 1pm | Harborwalk Village

Photos with The Grinch | 1pm | NextHome Cornerstone Realty



Christmas Cruise with Santa | 11am | Sound-side FWB

Holidays at the House | 11am | Ronald McDonald House Charities of NWFL

Jolly Jubilee Holiday Festival | 11am | Destin Commons

Photos with The Mean & Green One | 12pm | Crab Trap

Visits with Santa | 1pm | Harborwalk Village

Santa Paws & Bark Street Market | 1pm | Harborwalk Village

Trivia Night | 6pm | The Wharf 850

Karaoke | 7pm | The Palms Good Vibes Bar

City of Destin Christmas Decorating Contest | Through Dec. 20

Free Beach Bonfire/SIN Night | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille

Multi Chamber Ugly Sweater Party | 5pm | 3rd Planet Brewing

Trivia Night | 6:30pm | Destin Brewery

Singo Music Bingo | 7pm | Soundside FWB

Karaoke | 6pm | AJ's on the Bayou

Trivia Night | 6pm | Ricks Crab Trap FWB

Bingo Trivia Mash Up | 7pm | Wood Food Beer

Bonfire on the Beach | 5pm | The Bay

FWB Chamber Holiday Party | 5pm | 213 Carol Ave, FWB

Santa Is Coming | 5pm | North Beach Social

Renta Club | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery

Songwriters Support Group | 6pm | La Calle Food Court

Holiday Concert Series & Visits with Santa | 6pm | Baytowne Wharf

Cultural Arts Alliance Lunch & Learn w/ Maxine Orange | 11am-1pm | Farm & Fire

9th Annual Niceville Track & Field Ugly Sweater 5K Run/Walk | 8am | Hurricane Wings

Farmers Market | 8am | Village of Baytowne Wharf

Farmers Market | 8am | The Landing FWB

Farmers Market | 9am-1pm | Grand Boulevard

Breakfast With Santa | 9am | Ovide @ Hotel Effie

Breakfast With Santa | 9am | Props Brewery Hammock Bay

Main Brew Merry Market | 9am | Main Brew Coffee

Santa's Firehouse Cruz Thru Toy Drive | 9am | FFWB Fire Department

Yule of Yesteryear | 10am - 4pm | Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida

City Of Destin Christmas Parade | 10am | Hwy 98 by Destin Harbor

Jolly Jubilee Holiday Festival | 10am | Destin Commons

Breakfast With Santa | 10am | Old Florida Fish House

Breakfast With Santa | 10am | The Henderson Beach Resort

Photos With Santa | 11am | Emerald Coast Harley Davidson

Santa Days | 12pm-3pm | Pecan Jacks Seagrove

Beachy Little Christmas | 12pm | The Island FWB

Mistletoe Market | 12pm | Harborwalk Village

Billy Claus & the LuLuBelles | 1pm | LuLu's Destin

Visits with Santa | 1pm | Harborwalk Village

Season 12 Auditions | 2pm | Emerald Coast Theatre Company

Merry Main Street Holiday Market | 3pm-8pm | Main Street DeFuniak Springs

Photos With Santa | 4pm | Seaside, FL

Christmas Celebration | 4pm | MJs Place Niceville

Tube Christmas | 5pm | Baytowne Wharf

Holiday Film Fest | 5:30pm | Harborwalk Village

Comfort & Joy Performance | 7pm | FFWB Civic Auditorium

The Grinch in Concert | 7:30pm | Destin FWB Convention Center

Fireworks | 8pm | Harborwalk Village

Karaoke | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse

Salt Strong - Emerald Coast Chapter | 5:30pm | Fudpucker's Destin

Karaoke | 6pm | AJ's on the Bayou

Trivia Night | 6pm | Ricks Crab Trap FWB

Trivia Night | 6pm | Beachcamp BrewPub

Bingo Trivia Mash Up | 7pm | Wood Food Beer

Santa Paddle Parade for Caring & Sharing | Noon | LJ Schooner's

Photos With Santa | 4pm | Seaside, FL

Paws & Claus | 4pm | The Gulf on Okaloosa Island

Bonfire on the Beach | 5pm | The Bay

Run Club | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery

Holiday Concert Series & Visits with Santa | 6pm | Baytowne Wharf

Paint, Sip, Shop | 6pm | Pescado 30A

Yoga Class | 6pm | Destin Community Center

Act4Mystery's "Murder Under the Mistletoe" | 6:30pm | Jackacuda's Seafood & Sushi

Little Black Dress Night | 6:30-9:30pm | Marina Cafe

Ladies Night | 10pm | McGuire's Destin

Friday Martini Lunch | 11am-4pm | Skybar Destin

FREE Photo With Santa | 2pm | Fudpucker's Destin

Fire Pit Friday | 4pm | 30A Distilling Co

Free Beach Bonfire | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille

Jolly Jubilee Holiday Festival | 5pm | Destin Commons

Karaoke | 6pm | Native's Cove

The Nutcracker by Studio6Twenty5 | 6pm | FFWB Auditorium

Salsa & Bachata Dance Lessons | 8pm | Bric a Brac

Karaoke | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse

Farmers Market | 8am | Village of Baytowne Wharf

Farmers Market | 9am-1pm | Grand Boulevard

Santa Paws | 11am | Pet Supplies Plus

Community Hannukah Menorah Lighting | 5:30pm | The Landing FWB

The Nutcracker by Studio6Twenty5 | 2pm | FFWB Auditorium

Trivia Night | 6pm | The Wharf 850

Karaoke | 7pm | The Palms Good Vibes Bar

Free Beach Bonfire/SIN Night | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille

Trivia Night | 6:30pm | Destin Brewery

Christmas Eve Dinner | 5pm | Henderson Beach Resort

Karaoke | 6pm | AJ's on the Bayou

Trivia Night | 6pm | Ricks Crab Trap FWB

Trivia Night | 6pm | Beachcamp BrewPub

Bingo Trivia Mash Up | 7pm | Wood Food Beer

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

Christmas Day Brunch | 8am-2pm | Henderson Beach Resort

Little Black Dress Night | 6:30-9:30pm | Marina Cafe

Ladies Night | 10pm | McGuire's Destin

Friday Martini Lunch | 11am-4pm | Skybar Destin

Fire Pit Friday | 4pm | 30A Distilling Co

Free Beach Bonfire | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille

Fireworks | 8pm | Harborwalk Village

Karaoke | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse

Farmers Market | 8am | Village of Baytowne Wharf

Farmers Market | 8am | The Landing FWB

Farmers Market | 9am-1pm | Grand Boulevard

Santa Paws | 11am | Pet Supplies Plus

Community Hannukah Menorah Lighting | 5:30pm | The Landing FWB

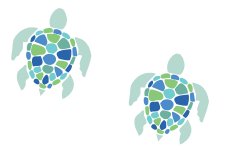
Trivia Night | 6pm | The Wharf 850

Karaoke | 7pm | The Palms Good Vibes Bar

Karaoke | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse

Destin Community Farmers Market | 9am-1pm | Beall's Parking Lot, Destin

DJ Brunch | 10am | Azul @ Harborwalk



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 Community

DESTIN HOLIDAY

continued from page 8

and the baby Jesus as well as the three Wise Men and Angels. You can feed the sheep, miniature donkeys and camels! Guests receive a free photo, candy cane, listen to music, partake of cookies, hot chocolate or coffee and hear the Christmas story. It is a no cost, no donation event; simply volunteers and church members sharing the Love of Jesus as His birth is celebrated.

Saturday, Dec. 14

Destin Christmas Parade: Flashback To 1984

City of Destin, 10 a.m.
Commemorating the city's 40th birthday, the parade begins at Destin Methodist Church on Beach Drive and proceeds down Harbor Boulevard to Stahlman Avenue. If you wish to enter a float in the parade, please donate a new toy or money by Dec. 6. Call 850.654.8998 or email recreation@cityofdestin.com to learn more. cityofdestin.com

The Grinch In Concert

Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center, Fort Walton

Beach, 7:30 p.m.

Dr. Seuss' immortal classic comes to life, with the Sinfonia Gulf Coast orchestra performing James Horner's musical score from the Ron Howard movie. Enjoy scenes from the film as your heart grows exponentially. Tickets start at \$40. Purchase online. sinfoniagulfcoast.org

Mistletoe Market

HarborWalk Village, Destin, Noon-8:30 p.m. emeraldgrande.com

Heritage Museum Of Northwest Florida's Yule Of Yesteryear

114 Westview Ave., Valparaiso, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.
A FREE event at Perrine Park, with a Valparaiso Garden Club sale, craft vendors, music, children's crafts and more. Call 850.678.2615 for more information. heritage-museum.org

Sunday, Dec. 15

Christmas Market With Santa

15003 Emerald Coast Parkway, Destin, 9 a.m.-2 p.m.
Hot cocoa, freshly baked gingerbread, handmade gifts and



seasonal produce from local vendors, and more. The Destin Community Farmers Market informs us that Santa will be making an appearance.

Christmas Walk The Bridge

Destin Bridge, 3 p.m.
Dress Christmas and walk the bridge!

Holiday On The Harbor Lighted Boat Parade

Destin Harbor (Harbor Docks West to Emerald Grande), 6 p.m.
FREE for participants. Register your boat online. This year's theme, in keeping with the celebration of Destin's 40th

anniversary, is "Christmas in the 1980s." destinhistoryand-fishingmuseum.org

Thursday, Dec. 19

Act4Mystery's "Murder Under The Mistletoe"

Jackacuda's Seafood & Sushi, 36120 Emerald Coast Parkway, Destin

Paula Hilton's award-winning comedy troupe puts on a hilarious holiday whodunit, complete with three-course meal. Make reservations online. act4mystery.com

Friday, Dec. 20-Sunday, Dec. 22

"The Nutcracker"

Presented By Studio6twenty5

Fort Walton Beach Civic Auditorium, Miracle Strip Parkway, 6 p.m. Friday and Saturday, Sunday Matinee at 2 p.m.

Join Clara on her magical journey to the Kingdom of Sweets with the talented dancers from the studio's children's program and adult/open program.

Tickets are \$15-\$45 and available to purchase at studio6twenty5.com.

Saturday, Dec. 21

Victorian Christmas Tea

Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida, 1-3 p.m.

Mrs. Connie Wolff will transform the Veterans Common Meeting room into an enchanting tea room that would meet with the approval of Queen Victoria. Highlighted: History of Tea by Dr. Marie Hallion, Chair of the Museum Trustees.

RSVP by Dec. 19. 850-678-2617

Dec. 20-22

Free Photos With Santa At Fudpucker's

Each family receives a FREE digital photo with Santa—and he'll be holding an alligator! 2-6 p.m. Fudpucker.com

Sunday, Dec. 22

Twentieth Annual Emerald Coast Christmas Miracle Children's Fiesta

Northwest Florida Fairgrounds, 1958 Lewis Turner Blvd., Fort Walton Beach, Noon-6 p.m.

Benefiting financially challenged families. Call 850.368.3505 for more information. unitedforagoodcause.org

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Christmas at the Wesley House!

By MARGARET ZONIA MORRISON

Are you seeing visions of sug-arplums dancing in your head? Are you anticipating the patter of tiny hooves on the roof? Perhaps you may enhance your excitement about the holidays by taking a trip to Eden Gardens State Park. Not only will you be able to enjoy the grounds, with the early blooming Sasanqua camellias, but you will find an additional treat to add to your enjoyment.

While the holidays are often preceded by many days of anxious activity, there is an area tradition that will afford you an oasis of peace, and a chance to step back in time to the late 1800s, to contemplate Christ-



mas traditions of families in years gone by. In keeping with the style of the Wesley House, this year's theme for decorating the rooms and exterior will be a Victorian Christmas. The house and all the rooms are ready for viewing by the public. Tours happen each hour, Thursday to Monday each week, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. You will learn the history of the house, which is

a treasure for the park and the community, and get a chance to enjoy the very creative ways in which each room has been decorated by an amazing group of dedicated volunteers.

The groups who have offered their time and talent to provide us with this glimpse into the past are:

- Point Washington Historical Association
- Green Thumb Garden Club
- Coastal Seniors of South Walton
- Seaside Style and Seaside Kids
- Impact 100
- Fort Walton Beach High School Garden Club, and the

Community Garden at Padgett Park

- Point Washington Medical Clinic
- Grace Corradino, and
- Walton County Master Gardeners.

As part of the ongoing celebration, The Christmas Candlelight Open House is anticipated each year at Eden Gardens. On Saturday, December 7th, from 5 to 8 p.m., weather permitting, you will enjoy a ride through luminary lined pathways at Eden Gardens after sunset, and be able to tour the historic Wesley House at no charge. Live music, cookies and hot beverages will be provided by the Friends of Eden in the Pavilion.

The festive decorations will remain in place until Monday, January 6, 2025. Make plans to come and to bring along any visitors you have during this celebratory time of year. It will be a visit to remember, and an interesting way to learn about the history of Walton County before we end its Bicentennial Year (1824-2024). This effort is sponsored by the Friends of Eden, the Citizens Support Group that provides assistance to the state park staff to repair, maintain and enhance the park. Please accept this invitation to add Wesley House to your holiday schedule. The Park is opened from 8 a.m. to sunset each day, with fees of \$4 per vehicle.



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For information contact tammy@tammysjourneys.com or 850-243-3809



Trends & Treasures!



Gift an Experience! CRYO850 Performance and Recovery Center

Consider the gift of a new experience for those you love this season. Locally owned CRYO850 is now offering “Experiences” for everyone on your list for as low as \$50. Try the Fire and Ice Experience for Cryo + Red Light (\$50), Chillax for Cryo + Compression (\$50), or combine all three for a Tri-fecta (\$75). Want more? Try the six-service Day Pass (\$99) or a Day Pass with a Friend (\$175). For muscle relief or weight loss, Chill & Sweat offers Cryo and the Cocoon Sauna Pod with full body relaxation. For respiratory health, Just Breathe offers Cryo and Dry Salt Therapy to clear the lungs and reduce infection and effects of COPD and long COVID. Fitness enthusiasts can Level Up with Cryo and the Cognitive Vision Training Board or try the Next Gen Fit Experience the try latest in wireless EMS training by Vision Body (\$50). More geared towards esthetics? A Cryo Express Facial builds collagen, smooths wrinkles and reduces teen acne.

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ing a gift of sweets! Transform any event into a cake heaven on earth! The merriest month means new holiday specials, too! Smallcakes has the corner on decadent, delightful and delicious for your parties, family gatherings and scrumptious gift-giving! Made-from-scratch cupcakes are made fresh daily with unique flavors, edible logos and images and a variety of cupcake personalities to please everyone on your list! Specializing in custom, holiday, gourmet cupcakes, housemade ice cream, wedding cakes and birthday cakes—even “pup” cakes—every day Smallcakes offers 13 signature flavors, 4 specialty flavors, 12 ice cream flavors, jumbo cookies, gourmet popcorn, gourmet cupcakes, cookie cakes, brownies, cupcakes-in-a-jar and more. Sample all flavors with a 12-pack of assorted minis! Call ahead for pre-orders, DoorDash or curbside pickup! Hours: Mon. through Sat., 11 a.m. – 7 p.m.; Sun. 11 a.m. – 4 p.m.

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With all the shopping and planning, taking a little time out to stay rejuvenated goes a long way in getting things done! Pure & Couture owner Adrienne Bracket and her talented team of experts will make sure you're at your best throughout December and ready for the new year! Who on your list wants a beautiful, colorful, trendy transformation for the holiday season? Why not get them the gift of hair extensions? Like magic, Pure & Couture's hand-tied hair extensions are a thoughtful gift for anyone wanting to add

thickness and volume. Purchase Gift Cards to give all the holiday vibes in addition to hair care flair — a bit of color, styling, extensions, makeup, a pampering facial or even a therapeutic massage and anyone on your list can experience a mighty makeover. Stuff your stockings with Pure & Couture's travel bars, candles and essential styling products all with custom gift wrapping! Curbside pick-ups and online ordering available, too!

Stop in at City Market Beachside or at their second location at Grand Boulevard at Sandestin—Pure Collective Salon, 600 Grand Blvd., Suite 102.

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are the cutting edge of major trends...The diamonds are unbelievably “sparkling” and dynamic in nature. I love shopping the store and have received the finest customer service available in the, well, world!” So, what's on your wish list this Christmas? A special gift? An engagement ring? Diamonds galore? Beyond Measure is here!

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Are you ready to tap into the best-kept secrets of successful home sellers? You can sell any home in any market when you know these secrets. Luxury REALTOR® Brian K. LoCicero's new book reveals the most effective tactics to get the most money out of your home in the shortest amount of time. These strategies have helped sell thousands of homes, and now, you have them all at your fingertips.

The strategies in Brian's book have been thoroughly tested and proven effective time and time again. Sellers won't want to miss out on this opportunity to learn tips and plans employed by the wealthiest home sellers. “In this book, I've provided an effective guide for you to have the most successful real estate transaction possible,” shares Brian.

“We hired Brian to help us navigate 30A's tough real estate market. He has serious negotiating skills and expertise. Because of his efforts and strategies that he details in his book, we quickly sold our Destin home and bought a 30A beach front home, below asking price,” said client, A. Albright.

Destin Life readers can get a FREE copy of the book, for a

limited time, by emailing Brian@BeOnTheCoast.com or give him a call at (850) 739-3800.

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5 Tips to Lower Your Insurance Costs in a Rough Market

By JULIE A. MARTIN

1. Update your home. In this property insurance market, most of the standard carriers are imposing strict age guidelines on Roof, Heating, Wiring,

and Plumbing. If your home is 20 years old or older, keep in mind that the older your roof is, the harder it will be to move your insurance to a different carrier. The same holds true



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for your hot water heater, which most carriers regard as too old once it has been in your home for at least 15 years.

2. Confirm with your agent that your insurance has all applicable discounts. Wind Mitigation discounts weigh heavily on your premium. Roof credits such as FBC, or Florida Building Code Equivalent, Hip roof, for roofs that slope on all four sides like a pyramid, and single wraps, may vastly decrease your premium from what it is now. If you have recently replaced your roof, it is best to order a new mitigation inspection directly afterwards, and submit it to your agent. Carriers acknowledge new inspections as of the date they are received by the underwriting department, rather than the date they are performed.

3. Check your Total Insurable Replacement Cost. Ask your agent to update your replacement cost estimator. Most standard carriers have some form of inflation guard on their policies, which is designed to keep your dwelling coverage at or above the level required in order to fulfill the Florida Valued Policy Law. Due to the recent burst of inflation in materials and the costs of hiring a licensed contractor, some policies may experience a bigger jump in dwelling coverage from policy term to policy term. It is best to check with your agent to be sure your home is not over-insured.

4. Smart Water Protection System. Some newer homes have a Smart Water Protection system which automatically shuts off the water in the



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event of accidental leakage, and many carriers offer a good discount to policyholders for having this device installed in their homes.

5. Increase Deductibles. This is a valid way to reduce your overall property insurance premium. However, there is a downside. For one thing, if raising your deductible significantly increases your potential out of pocket expenses in the event of a claim, you have to decide if you are prepared for that risk. Secondly, some deductibles can only be changed at renewal. If you change your wind deductible from 2% to 5%, you will have to wait another year before changing it back, so be sure to calculate your potential out of pocket exposure before making this decision.

In this rough market, it is difficult to shop rates between carriers, but the best time to do that is after hurricane season ends, which is in December.

The guidelines are always the toughest in high summer, so that by December, many of the carriers have relaxed their rules enough for people to move from carrier to carrier with much less fuss and expense, and that, dear reader, is what we all want—peace of mind with less expense.

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Mastering the Market: How Knowledge and Guidance Can Make Your Home-Buying Journey Stress-Free



BY PAUL DOMENECH

Buying a home is one of the biggest decisions you'll make, but understanding the market and the process can save you money and stress.

The Most Important Factor: Economic Conditions

The housing market is heavily influenced by supply and demand. When there are more buyers than available homes,

prices rise and competition gets intense. Buyers in this situation often need to act quickly and make strong offers to secure a home. On the other hand, when there are more homes than buyers, prices tend to stabilize or drop, giving buyers more options and negotiating power.

Why does this matter? Understanding these conditions allows buyers to decide when to make their move. For example, if interest rates are low and demand is high, you may need to be strategic and prepared to compete. Conversely, if the market is slower, you can take your time, negotiate more aggressively, and get a better deal.

How Knowledge Helps Buyers

Being informed about the market gives buyers an advantage. Here's how:

Better Timing: Knowing whether it's a buyer's or seller's market helps you choose the best time to make a purchase.

Smarter Budgeting:



Awareness of price trends and mortgage rates ensures you plan your finances realistically, avoiding surprises.

Stronger Offers: In competitive markets, understanding the process helps you craft offers that are appealing to sellers without overpaying.

Good Investments: Knowledge of the market and trends helps you choose a home with good long-term value.

Demographic Factors Play a Role Too

Demographic trends like job growth, income levels, and

population changes also affect home values and neighborhood desirability. Areas with growing job opportunities and a strong influx of residents often see an increase in demand, pushing property values higher. By researching these trends, buyers can identify neighborhoods with growth potential and make smart investments.

Don't Go It Alone

Navigating the housing market and understanding all these factors can feel overwhelming. That's where a real estate professional comes in. An experienced agent knows the market, stays on top of trends, and helps you avoid costly mistakes. They can guide you through every step, from finding the right home to negotiating the best deal, making the process easier and less stressful.

rienced agent knows the market, stays on top of trends, and helps you avoid costly mistakes. They can guide you through every step, from finding the right home to negotiating the best deal, making the process easier and less stressful.

Happy Holidays from the Domenech Group!

At the Domenech Group, we're here to help you succeed in your home-buying journey. With our local expertise and commitment to your goals, we'll make sure you're informed and prepared every step of the way.

Visit us at 503 Harbor Blvd., Destin, or give us a call at 850-543-1418. Whether you're buying your first home or upgrading to your dream home, we're ready to help.

Don't let the housing market intimidate you. With the right knowledge and a trusted guide, you can turn buying a home into a confident and rewarding experience.

At the Domenech Group, we live and work in gratitude and duty to the communities we serve.

To create the most impact, we partner with heavily-vetted organizations whose missions align with ours and whose focus is Northwest Florida.

27

Organizations Served

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Families Supported

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The Gift That Gives More

Support the Communities You Love by Shopping Local for the Holidays

By WILL ESTELL

We've all heard the benefits over-and-over, from social memes to chamber advertising to local news outlets. But do we really shop local as much as we could and should?

It's no secret that many of our friends and family may be smackdab in the middle of the holiday buying spree; some of them a little extra stressed this season due to somewhat treacherous financial times. Don't fret though. Shopping local doesn't really cost more as many incorrectly assume. It can also be faster, as well as sending a positive message to those you're gifting: Locally sourced presents do more than simply gifting the receiver — they actually gift a local business, and our entire community's economy. Our local businesses are the backbone of our economy, providing employment opportunities and retaining wealth within our community. How can you not love that extra special "keep Christ in Christmas" touch?



Another plus of keeping more of your holiday shopping local is that it creates the opportunity to gift the ones you love with unique items that can potentially mean so much more to them, especially in the long run than another run-of-the-mill item from some big box online retailer.

Do you remember what the hottest new toy, or must-have fashion accessory was the Christmas before last? How about last year? See what I mean? Me either. But, I do still recall and relish that personalized and signed, cool, one-off Cowboy painting by local South Walton

artist and musician extraordinaire, Chris Coleman, that someone gave me in 2020 that still hangs in our living room today. And the local branded apparel by coastal brands such as Tribe Kelley Surf Post, Modus Captured, 30A or even a cool hat from Blue Bay Lifestyle or a local restaurant, monogrammed gifts from Frill Seekers Gifts or cool sunglasses from Run With It. Somehow, we just tend to remember the locally sourced unique gifts better—and so will those we give them to.

For beach to coastal, outdoor to edible, dazzling to functional themed gifts right now, some

favorites are Lily Pads Interior Market, The Shop at Baldwin Turf, Patios Plus, Beyond Measure and even a photo session with Savvy Leigh Photo. There's something on that list for a wide array of needs and desires, all while contributing to the prosperity and success of the beach localities we call home.

Even if someone's gift list includes a national brand, you can still keep the holiday spirit local. With shopping centers like Destin Commons, Grand Boulevard, Silver Sands Premium Outlets and PCB's Pier Park, you quite literally have access to over 500 major brand national

and international retailers within our local Northwest Florida coastal communities. Keep in mind that buying items directly from these local shopping centers and outdoor malls isn't like buying from Amazon, eBay, Poshmark, or the endless slew of online retailers that do nothing to support your friends and neighbors in business, or working for, the businesses that make up our local coastal community.

The truth is that between the local brands and all of the retailers in our area, there is practically nothing that anyone can

Continued on next page



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THE GIFT

continued from previous page

ask for that you can't find here locally.

Even the major purchase, big ticket items are often available right here in our area, where they can also help local people when you purchase them. Looking for a new Rolex Submariner or Porsche 911 Targa for your husband? Need a Diamond ring or Mercedes G-Class SUV for your wife? How about a new swimming pool for the entire family? Thinking about a kitchen remodel or a new media room? Been wanting a new golf cart, low speed vehicle, board or electric bike? From McCaskill & Company to Porsche of Destin to Mercedes of Fort Walton to Step One Automotive to the local boutique near the beach, there are endless possibilities. And don't forget YOLO Board & Bike, ECCO Motors or Electric Cart Company. Or an experience-oriented gift like a membership to Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation, or tickets to a Mattie Kelly Arts Center per-



formance and Sinfonia Gulf Coast performances, 30A Songwriters Festival or Gulf Coast Jam. I bet your friends and family would love tickets to studio6t-venty5's The Nutcracker Dec. 20-22 at the FWB Civic Auditorium! And who doesn't love to be pampered at the spa or the



Salon? Gift cards are always in fashion!

No matter how small or elaborate your gifting need is, it is likely available right here within our area. We just have to remember to source it locally and to be aware of the beneficial economic and social impact we are making by doing so. From employment opportunities to neighborhood vitality projects

to better roadways, parks and beaches, buying local this holiday season makes a difference, and it really does make sense.

Will Estell is a writer, media entrepreneur and real estate professional with over 700 published articles. He is currently the chief creative officer of Estell Hussey Media, and the co-founder of the nationally sold Navarre Beach Magazine.

Christmas Sausage Balls

FROM SUSAN BENTON,
30AEATS.COM

My father has made sausage balls for Christmas morning as long as I can remember. I often wonder why he did not get recipe credit for this amazing comfort food as he has been making them for 50 + years! Sausage balls are wonderful for tailgating and a delicious cocktail appetizer, but most of all as a breakfast snack on Christmas morning. The ingredients are simple and the prep and cleanup are easy. If selecting regular sausage, then add about 1/4 tsp of cayenne pepper. I prefer to grate my own cheese rather than buying pre-shredded, as I do not like the caking ingredients used in packaging. I also prefer not to use low-fat cheddar as it does not melt well and the sausage balls will be dry. You will be surprised at how quickly they disappear!



2 cups Bisquick baking mix
3 tablespoons water

Preparation:

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F.

In a large bowl, combine sausage, cheese, and baking mix using hands to mix well.

Only add water if portions of the mix are too dry, and just drops until it gets to the consistency where you can roll into 1 to 1.5-inch balls.

Place on an ungreased baking sheet.

Bake 18-22 minutes (depending on your oven) until golden brown.

Remove and cool on rack or parchment paper.

Quickly move to sealed container or Ziploc storage bags.

These keep for up to two weeks in the refrigerator and freeze very well.

Ingredients:

1 lb. ground hot breakfast sausage
3 cups cheddar cheese, shredded

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Community



Simplifying Medicare Advantage vs. Supplement Choices

By GREG DURETTE, FLORIDA HEALTH CONNECTOR

This is the time of year when you should review your Medicare options and make important decisions about your cover-

age for 2025.

Right now, we are in the Annual Election Period (AEP) for all Medicare beneficiaries. It is often referred to as the Annual Open Enrollment Period. This

annual event runs from October 15th through December 7th.

Because this period allows ALL Medicare eligible folks to make switches and changes to their plans, it is the most heavily advertised time of the year—not like I have to tell you that! Folks on Original Medicare (Parts A&B), Supplements (MediGap), Stand Alone Prescription Plans (Part D) and Advantage Plans have a chance to pretty much do anything they want with their coverage mix. The hard part comes with sorting it all out.

One of the things I often talk about with Medicare beneficiaries around this time of year is to make sure you don't get so overwhelmed by all the information out there that you run out of time to take action. It can sometimes become "paralysis by analysis" syndrome. Remember, the AEP ends on December 7th!

Figuring out which coverage options are best for you can be confusing at any age, but understanding healthcare options for those 65 and older can be even more difficult.

I suggest considering these three things when shopping for Medicare Advantage/Supplement plans:

Choice: When it comes to Medicare, one size does not fit all - what works for your neighbor (or doctor/provider!) may not work best for you. Take the time to learn and understand the benefits and costs of each plan so you can feel confident in your decision and your health care coverage. Remember, you are getting the best for you, not your doctor or other provider.

Care: Care starts with a strong relationship with your primary care provider. If your plan has a network, make sure you're comfortable with the doctors and hospitals in that network. Check to see if your plan will coordinate your care with the rest of your providers...in and out of State.

Experience: Medicare can be complex and confusing. It's important to find a seasoned agent that works for you and supports you throughout your health care journey with plan benefits and resources that can help you live more and worry less about out of pocket costs.

Since Medicare Advantage Plans are offered by private companies, one excellent feature is they have more freedom and motivation to include extra benefits such as vision, hearing, gym memberships, dental, over-the-counter pharmacy items and more.

However, it is important to note that, not only do Medicare Advantage plans vary by state, but are different right down to each individual county in each state. Supplements are universal regardless of state/county, but often times cost more premium per month and do not cover prescriptions, requiring additional premium costs to pick up that coverage.

Your sibling in North Dakota is not going to have the same insurance company/coverage options you would in your Florida county. Try not to get trapped into believing the terms Supplement and Advantage are the same. It is critical to know your specific differences before making choice that works for you.

This is why it is vitally important to work with a local agent that knows the area and understands the benefits landscape as it applies to you. A famous actor or retired athlete on TV touting a toll-free number from who knows where will likely not.

Greg Durette is a qualified, licensed agent with Florida Health Connector providing Medicare throughout the State of Florida and is based in Niceville. He has been in the insurance industry for over 41 years and can be reached at his office number of 850-842-2400 or mobile at 978-509-2941.

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Stress-Free Christmas Decorating Tips



BY KIM SCHNEIDER,
COASTAL DESIGN BY KIM

Thanksgiving has come and gone, and Christmas is just around the corner. For many, the holiday season is the most magical time of the year, but it can also come with a lot of stress. To help make your Christmas decorating simple, I'm sharing a few of my favorite stress-free tips.

First, let's remove all your items that don't fit your Christmas theme. Pack them away, so you can bring out your Christmas decorations and embrace the holiday season.

Swap out your everyday



greenery with seasonal stems. Poinsettias, holly berries and evergreen stems are great artificial options that help set the holiday mood. Remember to arrange your stems in odd numbers to keep it interesting.

Many of us have an overabundance of keepsake holiday ornaments. It can be stressful going through all of them and you may want to protect them for nostalgic reasons. Now is a great time to keep those packed and decorate your tree with simple classic ball ornaments. They're inexpensive and never go out of style!

Hanging a wreath adds instant holiday cheer to a room. Use a wide holiday inspired ribbon and hang a wreath over a mirror or remove a piece of artwork and hang a wreath in its place. Battery operated fairy lights will add a touch of warmth and charm to your wreath, too.

Throw pillows make a big impact. You can add warmth and texture by incorporating buffalo checks, velvets, cable knits and faux furs. You can also add extra warmth by setting out a few sherpa, velour or cable knit blankets.

Nothing adds ambiance like twinkling white lights. Imagine a late night, dark room, quiet house and twinkling lights. Yes, please! Oh, and if you strategically hang your lights (think bookshelves, faux olive tree, etc.), you can keep them up and capture a wistful moment whenever you want. The warm glow of a candle never disappoints either!

If you're anything like me,

you put a lot of thought into buying gifts. What I didn't do was spend a lot of time wrapping them. Then I realized that I'm looking at these wrapped gifts under the tree and I wanted them to look nice, too. Gather a few rolls of your favorite wrapping paper, gift bags, tissue, ribbon and tags that coordinate with one another. Store everything together along with your tape, scissors and a few metallic pens. Wrap your gifts as

you buy them (or as they arrive) and proudly display them under your tree. You'll enjoy looking at them under your tree and you'll avoid having a midnight wrapping party when you'd rather be sitting near the twinkling lights admiring your beautifully decorated home.

I hope these simple stress-free decorating tips will help you create a magical Christmas for you and your loved ones. Embrace the spirit of the season, focus on

what matters most to you and enjoy the holiday magic. Wishing YOU and yours a Merry Christmas and a sparkling New Year!

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Keeping Your Hair Healthy and Fabulous All Winter Long



Winter Trends for Every Texture

One of the best ways to start the season is with a fresh cut that suits both your style and the season's latest trends. This winter, it's all about embracing texture, layers, and movement. If you have natural curls, consider a curly bob or shag cut, which lets your curls breathe while adding volume and shape. A well-styled shag will enhance your curls' natural bounce, creating an effortlessly chic look with minimal daily styling.

By ALLEN PADGETT, OWNER OF THE SALON TRINITY

As winter approaches, many of us look forward to cozy sweaters, holiday gatherings and the festive chill in the air. But, with the season's charms also come challenges for our hair. Cold, dry air outside combined with indoor heating can wreak havoc on our locks, stripping them of moisture and leaving them brittle, dull and prone to breakage.

At The Salon Trinity, we're dedicated to helping you keep your hair looking fabulous all season long with some essential winter hair care tips and styling trends.

For those with straight or fine hair, we're loving the modern "butterfly cut," which layers and feathers the hair in a way that adds volume and creates a fuller look. This layered style brings dimension and life to finer textures, making it both on-trend and easy to manage. At The Salon Trinity, our stylists are trained to tailor each cut to your face shape and hair texture, ensuring you leave with a look that complements your individuality and style goals.

Moisture is Key

Hydration is essential for hair during the winter months, and The Salon Trinity has a few go-to solutions for keeping your



locks nourished and resilient. Our top recommendation? The Paul Mitchell Awapuhi Wild Ginger collection. The Nourishing Shampoo and Cream Rinse are formulated to deeply hydrate and strengthen hair, restoring softness and shine even in the harshest weather conditions.

Adding a weekly hair mask to your routine is also a game-changer. Paul Mitchell's Awapuhi Wild Ginger Intensive Treatment and Hydrasoft Glossing Treatment are two deeply hydrating masks that can help lock in moisture and com-



bat the effects of winter dryness. These treatments not only keep hair looking glossy but also provide long-term resilience, making your strands less susceptible to breakage.

Finishing Touches

When it comes to winter hair, finishing products can make all the difference. To tame frizz, add shine, and protect against dryness, try a serum like the Paul

Mitchell Super Skinny Serum. This product is a powerhouse for winter hair care—it smooths the hair, boosts shine, and even speeds up drying time, making it perfect for chilly mornings when you're in a hurry.

As you prepare for the holiday season, take a moment to refresh your hair care routine. Investing in quality products and a seasonal cut not only keeps your hair looking its best but also promotes overall hair health.

Visit Us at The Salon Trinity

Winter is the perfect time to visit us at The Salon Trinity to refresh your look and get expert guidance on protecting your hair from seasonal stressors. Whether you're interested in trying out one of the latest cuts or finding the right Paul Mitchell products to suit your needs, our team is here to make sure you leave the salon with both fabulous hair and confidence in your winter hair care routine.



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The Ultimate Guide to Gifting Men: Stylish and Comfortable Apparel He'll Love

BY LIESEL SCHMIDT

Shopping for the special guy in your life can feel like a daunting task. But, it doesn't have to be—even if you've got one of those "I don't need anything" types who already seems to have everything he could possibly need. (Guys: You know who you are!) Regardless of their helpfulness in giving you their wishlist, clothing gifts can strike the perfect balance between thoughtfulness and practicality, especially when you focus on quality, comfort and style. Brands like Vuori, Rhythm, The North Face and 2Undr offer options that are sure to impress, blending premium materials with modern designs and comfort that he'll love you for. Here's how to build a wardrobe of perfect gifts for him.

Comfort Plus Style: Vuori Essentials

When it comes to combining fashion and function, Vuori is a standout that has been mak-



ing waves over the past few years. Known for its performance-driven materials and sleek designs, Vuori is a favorite for active men and those who prioritize comfort. Perfect for cooler temps, travel days and pretty much any day ending in -y, Vuori joggers are made with soft, stretchy fabric that feels as good as it looks. Whether lounging at home or heading to the gym, their versatile design makes them a must-have.

Choose from neutral tones for a classic look or darker shades for a sleeker vibe.

Need to upgrade his casual wardrobe? Check out Vuori's polos and tees. These staples are designed for effortless style, featuring a tailored yet relaxed fit and ultra-soft fabrics you'll love to touch, and he'll love to wear. The polos are ideal for casual Fridays at the office or weekend outings, while the tees offer a deliciously soft feel he won't want

to take off.

Vuori's shorts are as comfortable for hiking trails as they are for coffee runs. Look for styles that provide moisture-wicking technology and durable construction for more active pursuits, as well as everyday options that exude effortless cool without sacrificing comfort.

Top off his look with Vuori's selection of hats. These modern accessories blend sporty and stylish, making them ideal for both workouts and outdoor adventures.

Graphic and Solid Tees: Rhythm and Flag & Anthem

For a guy who loves understated cool, shirts from Flag & Anthem and Rhythm are the way to go. Known for their laid-back aesthetic, both brands offer a range of tee shirts that balance quality and style. For those with something to say, Rhythm's graphic tees feature subtle yet striking designs that

stand out without being loud, making them perfect for casual outfits and weekend wear. Not a fan of brand messaging? Solid tees from Rhythm and Flag & Anthem are versatile wardrobe essentials. Opt for rich, earthy tones or classic neutrals that complement his complexion and style. These tees work well on their own or layered with a jacket.

Outdoor Appeal: The North Face

Whether your guy is a weekend warrior or a city slicker, The North Face offers functional clothing with a rugged edge. Start with The North Face's comfy and stylish tees, which are great for layering. Add a pair of shorts or versatile pants designed for hiking, traveling or running errands. Whatever combo you choose, these are pieces that provide comfort and durability for any occasion.

Continued on next page



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Check out the special kids menu, too. Indoor and outdoor seating are both available. Book after-hours for private events or special occasions. Open for breakfast and lunch every day, 7 a.m.-2 p.m.

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mas at **Santa's Strawberry Workshop!** Decorate Christmas Strawberries with the whole family on Sunday, Dec. 22, at 2 p.m.. Enjoy tasty charcuterie and a sweet dessert board while you decorate delicious holiday themed strawberries with all the tools and toppings in Santa's Strawberry Workshop.

\$20 per child 12 and under; \$35 per adult. Includes 6 strawberries, decorating supplies, sweet charcuterie board and savory charcuterie board. Limited spots available.

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GIFTING MEN

continued from previous page

Looking for something a little more substantial? A quarter-zip or jacket from The North Face is a timeless gift, from lightweight options perfect for spring to heavier options that will wear into winter. Whatever the style, North Face outerwear combines technical features with a polished aesthetic.

Whimsical Comfort: 2Undr Boxer Briefs

Gifting underwear might seem uninspired (we all remember those dreaded gifts of socks

and undies from grandma), but 2Undr's modal cotton boxer-briefs will change his mind. These boxers combine luxurious softness with fun, whimsical prints, making them both practical and playful. Look for designs that reflect his personality—whether he prefers bold colors, quirky patterns like foamy beer mugs and popsicles or understated solids.

Hats with Function and Flair

For sun protection with style, check out hats from Sunday afternoons. Their UPF-rated options provide excellent coverage for outdoor activities while remaining lightweight and breathable. Perfect for the beach, hiking, or everyday wear, these hats are a blend of fashion and functionality.

Whether you're shopping for one guy on your list or multiple someones, consider getting pieces that will help widen their options for everyday wear and make them feel comfortable and stylish. You'll find them all at Blue Bay Lifestyle Co.—as well as gift cards that are one size, one style fits all...

Happy shopping and a very Merry Christmas to you!



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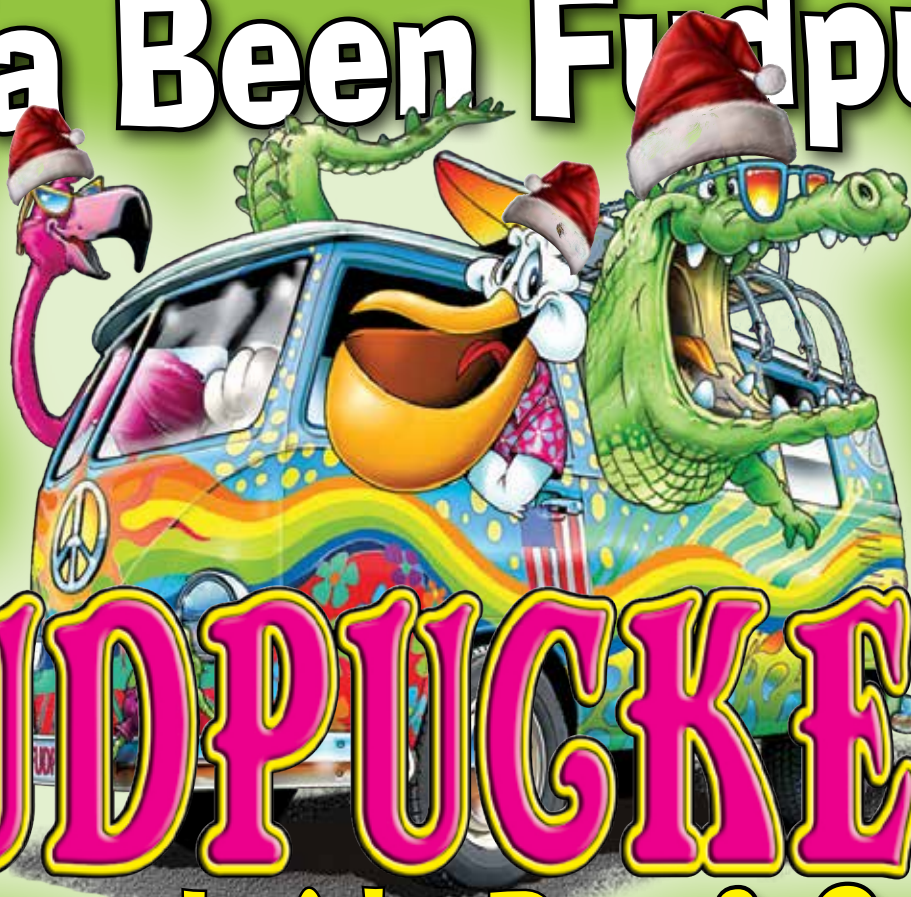
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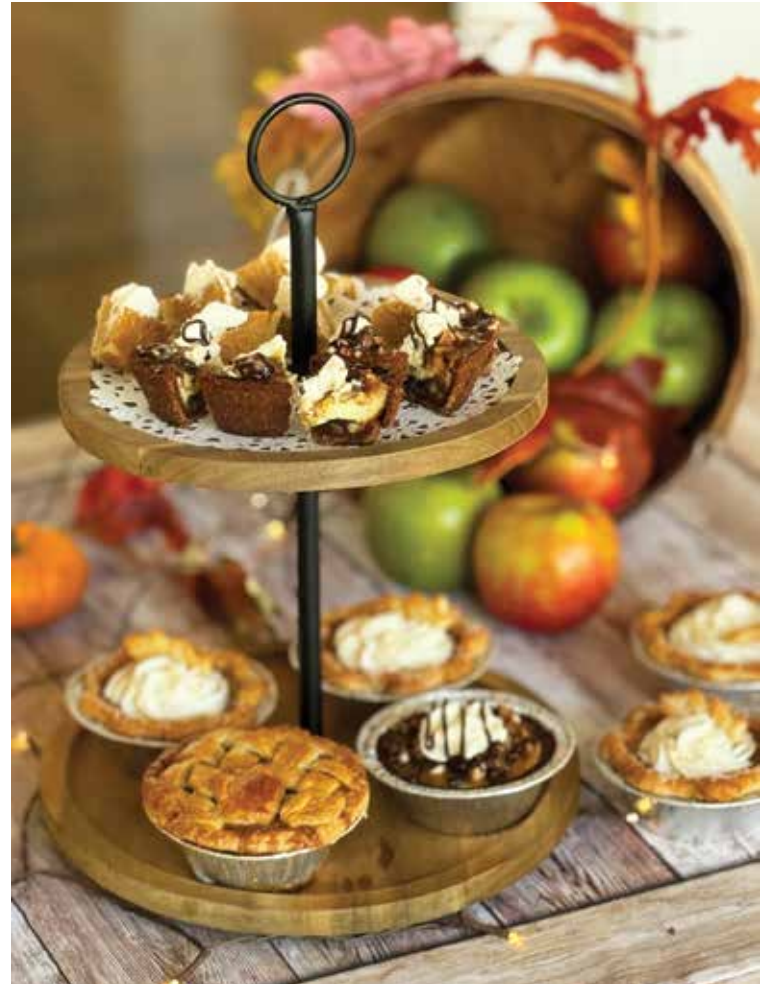
By LORI LEATH SMITH, PUBLISHER

You know that saying, “Not your mama’s [insert something here]”? It’s often used to describe things that are modern, edgy or reimagined. But at Pies & Provisions, that idea is beautifully portrayed. Here, you want exactly what your mama used to make. It’s a joyful celebration of everything comforting and nostalgic—pies, desserts, honey and more that bring back the warmest memories of home.

Pies & Provisions lovingly honors the timeless traditions, flavors and care that make you think, “Yes, this is my mama’s.” When you add a little Texas tradition to that recipe, you get an irresistible mix of love and flavor, perfect for warming any heart. Founded by a mother-son duo, Julie and Ryan Robinson from Texas, Pies & Provisions in Santa Rosa Beach brings together family, passion and a commitment to quality. Their handcrafted pies are made with

natural ingredients—a throw-back to simpler times when everything tasted like a hug from someone you love.

Ryan Robinson, co-founder of Pies & Provisions, put it beautifully: “Our vision for Pies & Provisions was simple - to share our love for pies with the community and create moments of joy and indulgence,” he said. “We believe that every pie should not just taste delicious, but also evoke memories and emotions. Pie has always been



more than just dessert for us—it’s a connection to our past, a way to share joy with others.”

I recently had the chance to visit Pies & Provisions and chat with the Robinsons. Let me tell you—I was blown away. The menu is a treasure trove of both sweet and savory pies, with seasonal offerings that keep things fresh and exciting.

This season, dive into rich flavors like Turtle Cheesecake and Peanut Butter pies. For the holiday season, festive treats such as Peppermint Hot Cocoa, Black Forest and Apple Pear Cranberry Spice pies become the stars, perfect for family gatherings, holiday celebrations, or even just for savoring on a cozy Christmas morning.

The Robinsons’ dedication to authenticity shines through in every hand-made bite. They make their own vanilla extract, golden syrup, caramel and invert sugar, ensuring a perfectly balanced sweetness. Their beloved pecan pie, a standout favorite, uses only a handful of pure, simple ingredients to let the flavors shine.

Pies & Provisions operates mostly on a pre-order basis, with

pickups and deliveries available Monday through Saturday. But if you’re in a pinch, the shop opens up for walk-in orders on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2 to 5 p.m. Located at 35 Apple Ct. in Santa Rosa Beach, the shop is a welcoming spot for both locals and visitors, making it easy for you to provide a slice of homemade goodness for your holiday table.

Every pie from Pies & Provisions is crafted to bring people together, honor the past and create new, cherished memories. It’s about sharing love, tradition and the sweet coastal charm of Santa Rosa Beach with every mouthful. Whether you’re a local or just visiting, you’ll find that Pies & Provisions makes every family gathering or holiday celebration a little warmer, a little sweeter and a lot more special.

For more information and to experience the Robinson’s delicious menu, visit piesandprovisions.com. And don’t forget to follow @30APies for the latest updates and a peek into the magic of artisanal pie-making. Your next unforgettable pie moment is just a click away!

2024 Football Guide

Football. Food. Fun. Fans. Let the Games Begin...



Best Places to Watch Your Favorite Teams



By SCOTT MILLER

All I want for Christmas is... well, I already have my two front teeth, as the song goes. I credit my mom for that. Why, you ask? Because, as a child, she would never let me or my brothers play hockey.

You see, growing up in Philadelphia in the early 70s, the Philadelphia Flyers were a dominant force in NHL winning several Stanley Cup Championships and the captain of the team was Bobby Clarke.

You couldn't go a day without seeing his smiling face on TV and no front teeth to be seen. It seems that was a common theme among pro hockey players back in those days. And, so, my mom stood firm and said no playing hockey! And she meant it. To her, football, believe it or not, seemed like a much safer way to go. Maybe that's why I became such an avid football fan. Oh, yes, back to football—I got a little off track for a moment.

December football is here and oh, what fun it is to cheer. We've got the Army Navy game set for December 14 and away we go. Seems like every year there's a new bowl game added to the mix and, why not? These kids deserve it and football fans love it. It will be interesting to watch how the new playoff sys-

tem shakes out and see who gets crowned National Champion this year! Where will you be watching?

Here are a few of my favorite places to go on game day. I hope to see you there, too!

AJ's Seafood & Oyster Bar

For 40 years, AJ's Seafood and Oyster Bar has been serving cold Gulf Coast oysters and cool libations. What began as a popular local hang out known for fresh oysters and cold beer has grown into one of the most iconic "hot spots" on the Destin Harbor. From its humble beginning shucking oysters off the deck behind a small trailer on the Destin Harbor, it has grown to four locations along our Emerald Coast, serving fresh seafood, live music and exciting water activities in the Destin



area. Attention all die hard football fans, AJ's boasts the one and only Jumbotron on the Destin Harbor, where you can watch your favorite games on the BIG, BIG screen surrounded by the energy and beauty of the Destin Harbor. AJ's serves up delicious daily specials, mouth-watering drinks plus entertaining live music all month, too. Don't miss any of the action! Come on down to AJ's Seafood and Oys-

ter Bar all season long.
(850)837-1913
116 Harbor Blvd.
ajsdestin.com

Austons on 98

Offering an amazing raw oyster bar and the best happy hour in town, Austons is the place to be and home of the 102-foot bar, including 32 beers

Continued on page 26

AJ's FOOTBALL IS BACK!

WATCH
THE **BIG** GAMES
NFL SUNDAY TICKET
& COLLEGE GAMEPLAN

EAT
SPECIAL FOOTBALL
MENUS AT EACH LOCATION

DRINK
BEER SPECIALS & GREAT DRINKS!

AJ's Seafood & Oyster Bar **AJ's On the Bayou** **AJ's Oyster Shanty** **AJ's Grayton Beach**

NFL SUNDAY TICKET **ESPN COLLEGE GAMEDAY**

BEST PLACES

continued from page 25

on draft! Some of the specialties

include little neck clams, freshly shucked raw oysters, New England-style clam chowder and jumbo shrimp cocktail. With



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- Billy Surf
Surf's Up In The Morning
- Dan Collins
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- Ellie Adair
Weekends
- @The850Foodie Joanna Davis
Foodie Friday 7a, 8a, 9a

big screen TVs all around and football season upon us, there's no bad seat in the house. So, come by and watch the games all season long. Happy Hour Specials from Monday-Friday, 2-5 p.m., \$2 off all bar drinks and Monday-Friday from 3 p.m. - 5 p.m. \$3 off a dozen raw oysters. Bucket Specials all day every day. Austin's on 98 is open daily from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. and features its own "Real Deal Nashville Hot Sauce." View full menu at austonson98.com.

(850) 842-3200
125 Poinciana Blvd.,
Miramar Beach
Austonson98.com

Boathouse Oyster Bar

Oysters, live music and a local vibe, the Boathouse is where the locals go with live music every night. Located in the heart of Destin on the Destin Harbor, the Boathouse specializes in making oysters a delicacy. Boathouse's gumbo recipe was written by Mama Gumbo herself.

And, of course, the oysters are raw, steamed or baked, just the way you like 'em. The first Friday of each month, The Boathouse hosts locals on the Destin Harbor from 5-7 p.m. Listen and move with live entertainment daily. See ad for bands and times. Music schedule subject to change. Follow on Facebook for updates. During or after the game, mosey on over to hang with the locals.

(850) 837-3645
288-B Harbor Blvd., Destin
Boathouseoysterbardestin.com

Tailfins Waterfront Grill

Hey football fans, Tailfins Waterfront Grill is calling YOU! That's right y'all, Destin's favorite season is here and there's not a better place in Destin to come and watch your team play.

Looking for a locals' favorite breakfast before the game? Start your day off right with Tailfins breakfast from 8-11 a.m., seven days a week. Enjoy a classic breakfast with bacon and eggs,

a seafood or Cajun omelet and even a kid's smiley pancake. Be sure to order up a round of mimosas and bloody marys. Watch Tailfins' sushi chef create right in front of your eyes. Enjoy some of your favorite food and drinks, scrumptious early bird dinner specials Monday to Friday, 4-6 p.m. Happy hour from 4-6 p.m. Monday through Friday, featuring \$24 domestic bottle buckets, \$7 house wines and well drinks and \$5 Long Island iced teas. Live music on the docks. Tailfins is a go-to destination for sports watching featuring more than 70 big screen TVs showing all college football games and Sunday Ticket.

(850) 650-1200
On the Harbor in Destin,
172 Harbor Blvd.
tailfinsdestin.com

Tequila's Sports Bar & Grill

Did someone say Margaritas? Tequila's Mexican Restaurant is a local favorite, with world class, jumbo-sized margaritas, Mexican food favorites inspired by years of tradition and authentic spices such as the Tequila's Plate, chili con carne, The Three Amigos and the new Master Parrillada – a unique fusion of sports bar food and delightful Mexican dishes. Football season is here, so don't miss a game all season long. Celebrate Taco Tuesdays with 2-for-1 margaritas. Lunch specials are offered Monday-Friday for \$8.99. "Our love lies in the food we make and the connections we create with our customers every day," says Oni, Tequila's owner. "Our goal is to have the widest selection of tequila brands in town. You're sure to find your favorites here." Open seven days a week for lunch and dinner or call ahead to place your take out and to-go orders.

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Tequilasmiramarbeach.com

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- Tuesdays:** 8pm: Austin Jennings
- Wednesdays:** 4pm: Hunter & Tony
8pm: Smoke Show
- Thursdays:** 4pm: Flash Flood
8pm: Austin Jennings
- Fridays:** 4pm: Jason Findley
8pm: Airavata
- Saturdays:** 12pm: Rotating Spot
4pm: Flash Flood
8pm: Gunner
- Sundays:** 12pm: Rotating Spot
4pm: Shane Curle
8pm: Rotating Spot

Open Daily from 11 am-2 am
Lunch Specials M-F for \$9.99
Slacker Sunday Oyster Brunch 11 am

288 Harbor Blvd, Destin
(850) 837-3645

Facebook: www.facebook.com/BoathouseOysterBar
www.boathouseoysterbardestin.com



2024/25 College Football Bowl Games

Saturday 12/14

Navy vs Army CBS 2 p.m.
Celebration Bowl ABC 11 a.m.
Veterans Bowl ESPN 8 p.m.

Tuesday 12/17

Frisco Bowl ESPN 8 p.m.

Wednesday 12/18

Boca Raton Bowl ESPN 4:30 p.m.
LA Bowl ESPN 8 p.m.

Thursday 12/19

New Orleans Bowl ESPN2 6 p.m.

Friday 12/20

Cure Bowl ESPN 11 a.m.
Gasparilla Bowl ESPN 2:30 p.m.
Playoff Game 1st Round ABC/ESPN 7 p.m.

Saturday 12/21

Playoff Game 1st Round TNT 11 a.m.
Playoff Game 1st Round TNT 3 p.m.
Playoff Game 1st Round ABC/ESPN 7 p.m.

Monday 12/23

Myrtle Beach Bowl ESPN 10 a.m.
Idaho Potato Bowl ESPN 1:30 p.m.

Tuesday 12/24

Hawaii Bowl ESPN 7 p.m.

Thursday 12/26

Game Above Sports Bowl ESPN 1 p.m.
Rate Bowl ESPN 4:30 p.m.
68 Ventures Bowl ESPN 8 p.m.

Friday 12/27

Armed Forces Bowl ESPN TBD
Birmingham a.m. Bowl ESPN TBD
Liberty Bowl ESPN 6 p.m.
Holiday Bowl FOX 7 p.m.
Las Vegas Bowl ESPN 9:30 p.m.

Saturday 12/28

Fenway Bowl ESPN 10 a.m.
Pinstripe Bowl ABC 11 a.m.
New Mexico Bowl ESPN 1:15 p.m.
Pop-Tarts Bowl ABC 2:30 p.m.
Arizona Bowl CW 3:30 p.m.
Military Bowl ESPN 4:45 p.m.
Al a.m.o Bowl ABC 6:30 p.m.
Independence Bowl ESPN 8:15 p.m.



Monday 12/30

Music City Bowl ESPN 1:30 p.m.

Tuesday 12/31

ReliaQuest Bowl ESPN 11 a.m.
Sun Bowl CBS 1 p.m.
Citrus Bowl ABC 2 p.m.
Texas Bowl ESPN 2:30 p.m.
Fiesta Bowl/Playoff Game Quarterfinal ESPN 6:30 p.m.

Wednesday 1/1

Peach Bowl / Playoff Game Quarterfinal ESPN 12 p.m.
Rose Bowl / Playoff Game Quarterfinal ESPN 4 p.m.
Sugar Bowl / Playoff Game Quarterfinal ESPN 7:45 p.m.

Thursday 1/2

Gator Bowl ESPN 6:30 p.m.

Friday 1/3

First Responder Bowl ESPN 3 p.m.
Duke's Mayo Bowl ESPN 6:30 p.m.

Saturday 1/4

Bah a.m.as Bowl ESPN/ESPN2 10 a.m.

Thursday 1/9

Orange Bowl / Playoff Game Semifinal ESPN 6:30 p.m.

Friday 1/10

Cotton Bowl / Playoff Game Semifinal ESPN 6:30 p.m.

Monday 1/20

National Championship Game ESPN 6:30 p.m.

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NCAA College Football Conference Championship Games

WEEK 15: DECEMBER 6

Mountain West Championship
UNLV vs. Boise St
7 p.m. | FOX

American Athletic Championship
Tulane vs. Army
7 p.m. | ABC

WEEK 15: DECEMBER 7

Big 12 Championship
Iowa St. vs. Arizona St.
11 a.m. | ABC

SEC Championship

Georgia vs. Texas
3 p.m. | ABC

Big 10 Championship

Penn St vs Oregon
7 p.m. | CBS

ACC Championship

Clemson vs SMU
7 p.m. | ABC

NFL Football Schedule

Week 14

Thursday, Dec. 5

Green Bay Packers at Detroit Lions — 7:15 p.m., Prime Video

Sunday, Dec. 8

New York Jets at Miami Dolphins — Noon, CBS
 Atlanta Falcons at Minnesota Vikings — Noon, Fox
 New Orleans Saints at New York Giants — Noon, Fox
 Carolina Panthers at Philadelphia Eagles — Noon, Fox
 Cleveland Browns at Pittsburgh Steelers — Noon, CBS
 Las Vegas Raiders at Tampa Bay Buccaneers — Noon, CBS
 Jacksonville Jaguars at Tennessee Titans — Noon, CBS
 Seattle Seahawks at Arizona Cardinals — 3:05 p.m., CBS
 Buffalo Bills at Los Angeles Rams — 3:25 p.m., Fox
 Chicago Bears at San Francisco 49ers — 3:25 p.m., Fox
 Los Angeles Chargers at Kansas City Chiefs — 7:20 p.m., NBC*

Monday, Dec. 9

Cincinnati Bengals at Dallas Cowboys — 7:15 p.m., ESPN/ABC*

Week 15

Thursday, Dec. 12

Los Angeles Rams at San Francisco 49ers — 7:15 p.m., Prime Video

Sunday, Dec. 15

Dallas Cowboys at Carolina Panthers — Noon, Fox
 Kansas City Chiefs at Cleveland Browns — Noon, CBS
 Miami Dolphins at Houston Texans — Noon, CBS
 New York Jets at Jacksonville Jaguars — Noon, Fox
 Washington Commanders at New Orleans Saints — Noon, Fox
 Baltimore Ravens at New York Giants — Noon, CBS
 Cincinnati Bengals at Tennessee Titans — Noon, Fox
 New England Patriots at Arizona Cardinals — 3:25 p.m., CBS
 Indianapolis Colts at Denver Broncos — 3:25 p.m., CBS
 Buffalo Bills at Detroit Lions — 3:25 p.m., CBS
 Tampa Bay Buccaneers at Los Angeles Chargers — 3:25 p.m., Fox
 Pittsburgh Steelers at Philadelphia Eagles — 3:25 p.m., Fox
 Green Bay Packers at Seattle Seahawks — 7:20 p.m., NBC*

Monday, Dec. 16

Chicago Bears at Minnesota Vikings — 7 p.m., ABC*
 Atlanta Falcons at Las Vegas Raiders — 7:30 p.m., ESPN*

Week 16

Thursday, Dec. 19

Cleveland Browns at Cincinnati Bengals — 7:15 p.m., Prime Video

Saturday, Dec. 21

Houston Texans at Kansas City Chiefs — Noon, NBC
 Pittsburgh Steelers at Baltimore Ravens — 3:30 p.m., Fox

Sunday, Dec. 22

New York Giants at Atlanta Falcons — Noon, Fox
 New England Patriots at Buffalo Bills — Noon, CBS
 Arizona Cardinals at Carolina Panthers — Noon, Fox
 Detroit Lions at Chicago Bears — Noon, Fox
 Tennessee Titans at Indianapolis Colts — Noon, CBS
 Los Angeles Rams at New York Jets — Noon, CBS
 Philadelphia Eagles at Washington Commanders — Noon, Fox



Denver Broncos at Los Angeles Chargers — 3:05 p.m., Fox
 Minnesota Vikings at Seattle Seahawks — 3:05 p.m., Fox
 Jacksonville Jaguars at Las Vegas Raiders — 3:25 p.m., CBS
 San Francisco 49ers at Miami Dolphins — 3:25 p.m., CBS
 Tampa Bay Buccaneers at Dallas Cowboys — 7:20 p.m., NBC*
Monday, Dec. 23
 New Orleans Saints at Green Bay Packers — 7:15 p.m., ESPN*

Week 17

Wednesday, Dec. 25 (Christmas)

Kansas City Chiefs at Pittsburgh Steelers — Noon, Netflix
 Baltimore Ravens at Houston Texans — 3:30 p.m., Netflix

Thursday, Dec. 26

Seattle Seahawks at Chicago Bears — 7:15 p.m., Prime Video — 7:15 p.m., Prime Video*

Saturday, Dec. 28

Denver Broncos at Cincinnati Bengals — TBD
 Arizona Cardinals at Los Angeles Rams — TBD
 Los Angeles Chargers at New England Patriots — TBD
 Indianapolis Colts at New York Giants — TBD

Atlanta Falcons at Washington Commanders — TBD

Sunday, Dec. 29

New York Jets at Buffalo Bills — Noon, CBS
 Tennessee Titans at Jacksonville Jaguars — Noon, CBS
 Green Bay Packers at Minnesota Vikings — Noon, Fox
 Las Vegas Raiders at New Orleans Saints — Noon, Fox

Carolina Panthers at Tampa Bay Buccaneers — Noon, CBS
 Dallas Cowboys at Philadelphia Eagles — 3:25 p.m., Fox
 Miami Dolphins at Cleveland Browns — 7:20 p.m., NBC*
Monday, Dec. 30
 Detroit Lions at San Francisco 49ers — 7:15 p.m., ESPN/ABC* (edited)

Week 18

Saturday, Jan. 4 and Sunday, Jan. 5, 2025

San Francisco 49ers at Arizona Cardinals — TBD
 Carolina Panthers at Atlanta Falcons — TBD
 Cleveland Browns at Baltimore Ravens — TBD
 Washington Commanders at Dallas Cowboys — TBD
 Kansas City Chiefs at Denver Broncos — TBD
 Minnesota Vikings at Detroit Lions — TBD
 Chicago Bears at Green Bay Packers — TBD
 Jacksonville Jaguars at Indianapolis Colts — TBD
 Seattle Seahawks at Los Angeles Rams — TBD
 Los Angeles Chargers at Las Vegas Raiders — TBD
 Buffalo Bills at New England Patriots — TBD
 Miami Dolphins at New York Jets — TBD
 New York Giants at Philadelphia Eagles — TBD
 Cincinnati Bengals at Pittsburgh Steelers — TBD
 New Orleans Saints at Tampa Bay Buccaneers — TBD
 Houston Texans at Tennessee Titans — TBD



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40 YEARS

continued from page 1

of entries, judging may continue the following day. All lights, decorations and animations should be in place and activated for judging on both nights, and decorations are to remain on display from Dec. 16 to 31. Winners will be recognized by Mayor Bobby Wagner at the January 2025 Destin City Council meeting. “I have always had a love for Christmas lights and have continued my family’s tradition of going all out on decorations during the holiday season,” says Mayor Wagner. “One of my favorite parts of this time of year is when my family and I pile into a car to drive around and see everyone’s Christmas lights. I am hopeful that we will see even more spectacular light displays in the future.”

This is the 18th year the city is holding the competition, says City of Destin Public Information Director Tamara L. Young. In addition to a lovely plaque, winners will receive “huge bragging rights in the community,” she says.

In 2023, the Roberts family

from Indian Trail took Best of Holiday honors with a dazzling display of lights and inflatables. Best Business went to the La Paz restaurant on Gulf Shore Drive, The Palms of Destin was chosen as best Organization, and Bent Arrow Drive resident Renee Potter won Best Home.

Young says last year’s winners are eligible to compete for top honors again this season.

Prior to the decorating to-do, the city will host its annual Christmas parade Saturday, Dec. 14, starting at 10 a.m. The procession kicks off at Destin Methodist Church on Beach Drive and brings the merry westward on Harbor Boulevard (U.S. 98) to Stahlman Avenue.

This year’s theme is “Flashback to 1984,” and we’re not sure if Santa will arrive decked in purple Prince-inspired duds surrounded by moonwalking elves.

The next day, Sunday, Dec. 15, the Holiday Harbor Lighted Boat Parade, a time-honored tradition in our little fishing community, makes its way from Harbor Docks to the Emerald Grande.

Boats will line up at Harbor



Docks and begin the parade at 6 p.m. Judging commences at roughly 6:15 p.m. at Sky Bar at Edge Seafood, and then boats will arrive at Harborwalk Village at approximately 6:30 p.m. It’s free to participate, and you can register your boat online at destinhistoryandfishingmuseum.org for an entry fee of only \$25.



Organized and executed by the Destin History and Fishing Museum, three community judges will watch and cast their votes on the best decorated boat for each category, and the public is welcome to join. Upstairs at Sky Bar will be a ticketed event, which includes a complimentary glass of champagne and passed hors d’oeuvres, meet and greet with the parade judges and emcee, live coverage of the event, fireworks show, DJ and more. Upstairs is an adults-only venue, while all ages are welcome on the lower level of Edge Seafood. Tickets can be

found on their social media channels, and proceeds will benefit the Destin History & Fishing Museum for its efforts in organizing the parade.

The parade route will be visible from all local businesses along the Harbor, and there are a variety of additional holiday events that day surrounding the parade, including the Mistletoe Market & Photos with Santa at Harborwalk Village and Dock the Halls and Holiday Block Party fundraisers at Boathouse Oyster Bar. Fireworks will also follow the parade at 8 p.m., sponsored by Harborwalk Village. If you’d like to ride IN the boat parade, several local companies sell seats on their boats for the parade time frame.

In keeping with the City of Destin 40th anniversary celebration, the parade’s theme is “Christmas in the 1980’s.” No word yet on whether or not Mrs. Claus will be attending in her Madonna outfit.



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 Sports

Golf Series: The Raven at Sandestin

An "Evermore" Challenge Awaits!



By BARBARA PALMGREN

This is the final article in a series about the four golf courses at Sandestin. Have I saved the best for last? That's what you will find out as you tee your ball up and navigate your way around the Raven, a semi-private course available to the public. Memberships are also available and information about rates can be found by contacting the course.

I'm not sure who named the course that was opened in 2000. A mystery for sure. Perhaps the haunting words of Edgar Allan Poe's most famous poem, The Raven, can suggest a comparison.

Poe's The Raven is a narrative poem renowned for its



haunting imagery and the unforgettable repetition of "Nevermore." The narrator resigns himself to a life in the shadow of the Raven, Nevermore. Sandestin's famous course has similar haunting imagery as it challenges the golf enthusiast to say, "Evermore" and resign himself to a life of golf on the Emerald Coast.

And who can blame a golfer for wanting to play this signature course? Rick Hileman, PGA Executive Director of Golf Operations, shared some

interesting facts about The Raven. Designed by Robert Trent Jones Jr., famous golf course designer for numerous courses throughout the south, this 6,900-yard par 71 marvel is carved through marshes and pine trees of the Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort. The Raven has 19 holes. When constructing the golf course, parts of the existing Baytowne Golf Course were used. One such hole, a Par 4, dogleg right, was too narrow once homes were developed along its corridor. So, the de-

signer created back-to-back Par 3's. 16A plays as long as 228 yards and 16B plays 172 yards. The two holes are rotated daily.

Golf accolades pour in from many golf magazines and the Boeing Championship was held at The Raven in 2006 and 2007. Other high-level tournaments include Division III Men's National Championship in 2013 and the PGA Korn Ferry Tour in 2021.

Rick couldn't decide which hole was his favorite. He said there are three memorable holes. The first is an island green Par 3 on the sixth hole. Next is the Par 4 ninth hole of 460 yards that requires an accurate

tee shot to a small landing area. Finally, the 18th hole Par 4 is a masterpiece from tee to green. Water protects on the right side with bunkers along the left... again demanding an accurate tee shot. The green is protected by a large oak tree to the right, a bunker in the back and water to the left. Wouldn't a par on this final hole bring you back for more? Or "Evermore?"

The Raven is definitely a course for those golfers who want to elevate their game with undulating greens, marshes, water hazards and strategically placed sand traps that demand precise golf shots.

Seacoast Collegiate High School Seniors Sign with Major Golf Programs



Senior McKazlyn "Kazz" Payne has officially signed to play collegiate golf at Oglethorpe University in Brookhaven, Ga., in addition to receiving more than \$100K in academic and athletic scholarships.

Kazz, a golfer for South Walton High School, has not only excelled in athletics, but has also demonstrated exceptional academic commitment through Seacoast Collegiate High School's Dual Enrollment program. In May, she is set to graduate with both her high school diploma and an Associate of Arts degree from Northwest Florida State College, positioning her for a smooth transition into collegiate academics and athletics.



Senior Ava Kight has signed with the University of Southern Mississippi. Ava has been a distinguished player and leader on the South Walton High School Golf Team for the past four years. Under her leadership, the team secured two district titles, a regional championship, and a regional runner-up title. Individually, Ava has also made her mark, finishing in the Top 10 at the state level as a freshman and qualifying for prestigious tournaments like the Jr. PGA Championship and World Teen Championships. Additionally, she has numerous Top 10 finishes in the AJGA and FJT events.

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Healing in Harmony: Acupuncture's Role in Modern Medicine



BY DR. KAREN DEVORE

In the story of the tortoise and the hare, there's a lesson we often overlook—the power of steady, patient progress over quick, short-lived victories. True wellness, much like the journey of the tortoise, is about a measured approach. Acupuncture, which has been practiced for thousands of years, aligns with this principle, offering a way to support the body's natural healing processes through slow, purposeful adjustments. It's a reminder that lasting health isn't achieved overnight, but cultivat-

ed over time.

Acupuncture, in its traditional form, works by targeting specific energy pathways, or meridians, within the body. These meridians are thought to carry "chi," or vital energy, and when they become blocked or disrupted, physical symptoms often arise. The careful placement of needles along these pathways reestablishes flow, reducing inflammation and pain, and promoting harmony within the body. In this way, acupuncture doesn't just address surface symptoms but fosters an inner balance that can profoundly support the body's resilience and overall health.

While traditional acupuncture is widely known, the field has evolved to include specialized techniques like Neuro-Acupuncture. Neuro-Acupuncture focuses on conditions that affect the central nervous system, such as stroke recovery, nerve pain, and various neurological disorders and diseases. By blending traditional acupuncture meth-

ods with insights from neurology, Neuro-Acupuncture can help restore functionality in ways that complement conventional treatments. Having studied this technique extensively across the globe and in some of China's most prestigious hospitals, Dr. Lisa Forsythe, Tortoise Clinic's Acupuncture Physician, witnessed its transformative potential. This type of acupuncture integrates Eastern philosophy with Western medical understanding, offering patients an evidence-based approach to address complex neurological challenges.

Today, acupuncture is recognized as a valuable therapeutic modality across some of the world's top institutions, including Johns Hopkins and Sloan Kettering, where it's used alongside conventional treatment protocols. Studies have demonstrated its safety and effectiveness, particularly for pain management, stress reduction, and immune support. For patients dealing with chronic conditions

or those recovering from illness or injury, acupuncture offers a natural, non-invasive way to aid in the body's recovery process and enhance the effects of traditional medical treatments.

At the Tortoise Clinic, we take a holistic approach, recognizing that true health lies in addressing the root causes of imbalance. Alongside acupuncture, we offer an extensive dispensary with customized Chinese medicine herbal formulas and medical grade supplements to further support the body's natural defenses. These herbal therapies work in tandem with acupuncture, nourishing the body from within and offering additional support to systems under stress.

Acupuncture isn't a quick fix; it's a commitment to a path of healing. Each session builds on the previous one, gradual-



ly promoting equilibrium and resilience in the body. Like the tortoise's journey, acupuncture's effects unfold gradually, each treatment moving us closer to a balanced, sustainable state of well-being.

I invite those who are curious to explore this path and learn more about what acupuncture has to offer. In a world often focused on fast solutions, acupuncture offers an opportunity to step back and engage with our health in a meaningful, enduring way—one that prioritizes the journey as much as the destination.



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Book Review:

“The Gifts of Imperfection” by Brené Brown

By MICHAEL McMANUS LCSW

This is a wonderful book that I often recommend to clients struggling with perfectionism, worthiness, and self-acceptance.

In “The Gifts of Imperfection,” Brené Brown offers a profound exploration of the importance of embracing our imperfections and cultivating a life rooted in

authenticity and self-acceptance. This transformative book serves as a guide for individuals seeking to overcome the societal pressures of perfectionism and to live wholeheartedly.

Brown’s writing is both relatable and insightful, drawing from her extensive research on vulnerability, shame, and resilience. She introduces the concept of “wholehearted living,”

which encourages readers to let go of the relentless pursuit of perfection and instead embrace their true selves, flaws and all. Through a series of ten guideposts, she outlines practical strategies to foster self-compassion, gratitude, and resilience.

One of the book’s most powerful messages is that imperfection is not something to be ashamed of; rather, it is a fun-

damental aspect of being human. Brown’s candid anecdotes and relatable examples resonate deeply, allowing readers to reflect on their own struggles with self-worth and the desire for acceptance.

“The Gifts of Imperfection” is not just a self-help book; it is a heartfelt invitation to embrace vulnerability and to recognize that our imperfections can lead us to deeper connections and a more meaningful life. Brown’s warm and empathetic voice encourages readers to step into their authenticity and cultivate a sense of belonging—both to themselves and within their communities.

In conclusion, “The Gifts of Imperfection” is an essential read for anyone looking to break free from the shackles of perfectionism and to live a more authentic life. Brené Brown’s insights are both empowering and transformative, making this book a valuable resource for personal growth and self-discovery.

Michael Mcmanus LCSW is a psychotherapist in private practice in Santa Rosa Beach, Florida and can be reached at (850) 837-0123 or at Psychotherapy30A.com.



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BY LISA LEATH TURPIN, HEALTH & WELLNESS COACH

Happy Holidays Destin! It's that season again when I encourage you to just get moving and stay moving... any movement/activity counts toward your ability to burn calories and stay healthy. I also challenge you to use movement to keep from gaining the dreaded, what I call, the "holiday halo" around your waist. Below are recommendations to help you stay in control, but still partake and enjoy yourself! You'll yield a healthy balance of fun, family time, giving and receiving cheer, and still feel good along the way.

10. Drink! Water, that is. Before attending that holiday gathering, drink a few big glasses of water prior to arriving. You'll stall your hunger and cut down on cravings when you encounter the beautiful display of goodies.

9. Eat! Don't go unsatisfied. Eat a protein rich food before your party. Protein digests more slowly and will keep you satiated, help with blood sugar, and also help with making better choices.

8. Have Everything! Try the several varieties of dips and casseroles, but make sure each portion is small enough to fit in the palm of your hand. This concept goes a long way any day of the year.

7. Follow the Leader. Start with the veggies, then move to the protein, then to the starches: breads, puddings and sweets. Ideally, fill up on meats and veggies. Limiting carb intake will ideally keep you from the yearning to sleep in the middle of gift opening.

6. Cheers to You! Eating big and getting toasted don't mix if you're trying to keep your figure. If you want to stay lean this year, you have to choose between that one and that one too many. A good rule of thumb is stop drinking alcohol an hour before you eat and wait an hour before drinking again—another

great idea for any day of the year as it can really help in keeping your waistline chiseled.

5: Leave it! If you don't have it, you can't eat it. Leftovers can really sabotage your efforts and can really be the culprit of holiday weight gain. Because we all know it's not just one day that does the damage! Leave the sweets there!

4: If You're Achy, Fishy Takey. Take more fish oil by spoon or capsule. By bumping Omega-3 consumption, you can help keep your body from becoming inflamed from processed foods, and keep your Omega 3/6/9 ratios in check. This results in increased fat burning.

3: Keep it Fresh! Brush your teeth after a meal. Brushing the teeth is a sign of finality, and will keep you from snacking more.

2: Be a Rule Breaker! Just because we serve it up BIG or "super-sized" in the South doesn't mean you have to play by the rules. Enlist one person to split food with you, or take half a portion.



And TOP TIP #1... Pre-Burn. Exercise on the day of any party or food-based gathering. The more intense the better, but anything is beneficial! Getting an intense full body workout will ensure that the calories you eat later will most likely go toward fueling the muscles, and not just building the gut.

Can't make it to a gym? Your home or park will do. Get your family to join. A family that plays together, stays together! Make it fun, even a good brisk low impact walk will raise metabolism as well as endorphins to make you feel good, and should I say, JUSTIFY a little overeating when tempted.

Don't have a workout pro-

gram? Try this holiday fat burning, muscle building treat—a gift from me to you. Exercises are arranged in blocks. Each block should be completed twice before moving on to the next. Do 15 repetitions per exercise.

*Warm up with a 5-minute walk.

Block 1

- Stationary Lunges (split lunges)
- Plank with alternating row (in plank, pull one arm back like you are pulling a lawn mower cord from the floor then alternate to other side)
- Push-up to Downward Dog (alternate from single pushup to piking your hips up making a teepee shape with your body then back to pushup)
- Side Elbow Plank

Block 2

- Wide Squats – see if you can reach the floor with back straight & chest and head up (you can bend over from hips only and as little as possible. heels planted knees direction of toes)
- Grocery Biceps (fill a grocery bag to desired weight with cans or rocks, or whatever)

- Tricep Dips
- Grocery Shoulders (fill grocery bags and press overhead or straight out to sides)

Block 3

- Bridge Dips (on back, feet on floor, knees bent, push hips up toward ceiling then back to floor)
- Seated Side Twists (Russian Twists) lean back to engage abs
- Anchored Leg Lifts or Knee Arcs (on floor, stabilize by grabbing something overhead with hands and raise and lower either straight legs or bent legs)

Note: To raise intensity, add jumping jacks, jumping rope, running in place or any cardio movement of choice for 1-3 minutes in-between each block. I suggest this only if you have already been doing this form of exercise and you have no underlying reasons not to.

Remember Be Active, Stay Active 850!

Fun Holiday Fact: The average person can burn an estimated 75-100 calories per 30 minutes of shopping! Add a shopping cart and move more briskly, and that number can be higher!

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 Wellness

What Version of You Will You Be?



BY STEPHENIE CRAIG,
JOURNEY BRAVELY

It's easier to be loving and kind when you agree and have things in common with others. But, what happens when you're sitting around the table and someone shares an opinion wild-

ly different than yours? Or, what happens when someone you don't really know expresses ideas counterintuitive to your beliefs or values? What happens when someone is rude and critical of your thoughts and beliefs? What version of yourself shows up in that moment?

Culture currently encourages polarized thought and cutting people out of your life when you disagree. News and social media feed the narrative of each person having freedom to do and say what they want regardless of how it impacts others. And, legally, in most cases you do have that freedom. However, it might be



wise to take a moment to reflect on who you want to be regarding your long-term character goals.

When you get to the end of life, how do you want to have shown up in the world? Do you want to be known for what you were against or what you were for? Do you want to be known for being right or for having healthy relationships? Do you want to be known for making people feel small or lifting people up?

So, in a world with so many conflicting perspectives, how do you become a loving, mature version of yourself?

8 Ways to Engage Your Loving, Mature Version of Self

Investigate value origins. Values originate from sources including family of origin, national origin, faith background, generational influences, trauma background, racial background,

ethnic background, media influences, political background, life experience, and many others. Reflect on the tapestry of your own values background. Remember the above variables have many expressions that have shaped another's values.

Consider different does not equal less. When surrounded by others who hold similar views to your own, you can assume people with different views/values/attitudes are less righteous, less intelligent, less moral, less patriotic, less religious, have less inherent worth, and are generally less than you. Viewing others as less leads to self-righteous posture that repels connection and relationship.

Consider you don't have the corner on values definitions. Values such as integrity, kindness, decency, morality, and freedom have various expressions. While it is important that values have some commonly agreed upon definitions, it can be helpful to remember defining values incredibly specifically assumes you are right and most everyone else is wrong.

Hold fast to your values while making space for others. Defining and living by your values is a healthy pursuit. And, remember that others are walk-

ing through the same process with different value backgrounds. You can be clear about what you believe while respecting the humanity of those with different views.

Disagree with curiosity rather than judgment. Knowing what you believe and living your life in open alignment with your values is good. When interacting with someone who holds conflicting ideas, try suspending judgment and asking curious questions about how they developed their perspective. Openness to others' life experiences often results in growth for the listener and we all have room to grow.

Focus more on your character than on the conflicting values. Acknowledge the conflict of values while asking yourself what character you want to exhibit toward other humans. Allow your character goals to lead as you engage conflicting values rather than allowing the values conflict to lead your character.

Engage boundaries before ending relationship. If values conversations get heated or disrespectful, try suggesting avoidance of the topic to preserve the relationship or refuse to participate in conversations that feel hostile. Ending relationships can be necessary at times when boundaries are continuously disrespected, however, working through boundaries communication first helps preserve relationship in many cases.

View people with different values as a challenge to grow rather than as villains. When we define others as villains, we give energy to feeling resentful and disempowered. When we define others as a challenge to grow, we give energy to expanding our emotional and behavioral capacities both in immediate interactions with those who challenge us and beyond into many other areas of life.

Remember to give yourself and others compassion and patience as you evaluate and grow in showing up as a loving, mature version of yourself in the world. The discomfort of growth most often results in widespread positive life change over time. Connect with us as Journeybravely.com for counseling and coaching support along your journey.



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Safe Connections Curbs Domestic Violence

By KENNETH BOOKS

Divorce can be vicious. Sometimes marriage can, too. Until 1997, there were few local places families could turn to in order to exorcise the hatred, violence and mistrust that are often the aftermaths of a failed marriage.

But since 1997, an organization has existed to serve children and families dealing with domestic violence and other related issues.

Safe Connections, with offices in Okaloosa and Walton counties, “specializes in supervised visitation and court-ordered custody exchanges,” according to executive director Carole Antoon. “Our staff is very well trained and our training is quite extensive. Our manual on sex abuse is almost 200 pages. The supervised visitation training manual is over 400 pages.” In addition, there is roughly 24 hours of further training annually.

Helping that goal is the passage of Florida House Bill 385, “The Safe Exchange of Minors” law, which came into effect in

July, and which allows families experiencing domestic violence to use Safe Connections for their court-ordered custody exchanges. When there is a domestic violence injunction, the court can order monitored exchanges, or supervised visitation, to take place at Safe Connections’ facility. “This ensures that parents do not have any contact during the exchange, and the process is documented and conducted smoothly,” Antoon said.

One of the founders, Sharon Rogers, who recently retired as executive director, said the organization’s birth was a joint venture between volunteers and Shalimar United Methodist Church. “It was brought to the church that we needed a safe place for kids,” Rogers said. “The church formed a committee, which offered the old church building for the organization.

“We had no money, but we had space and interested people,” Rogers, who was serving as a Guardian ad Litem, providing a legal advocate for the child in difficult circumstances, at the time, said.



“Everything was free,” Rogers said. “We had donated furniture, toys. We used a model that had been started in Jacksonville and just went from there. Eventually, we got some money and decided we should hire somebody. I applied. It was just a very small amount, just a part-time job.”

Donated space was the early prerequisite for Safe Connections. “The only way we could have done it was with that donated space,” she said. It allowed us to expand into other areas, such as Walton County, in 2001.

Then, in 2012, Safe Connections got a substantial grant from Impact 100, its first. “We bought a building in Crestview and we’ve been there since,” Rogers said

Recently, the organization bought a building on Beal

Parkway, just past Hollywood, for \$86,000. “It needs a ton of work,” Rogers said. “We have to put in the safety parameters, flooring and bathrooms need to be done and it needs an entirely new air conditioning system.”

“We’re in the process of getting handicapped accessible ADA compliance bathrooms done,” Antoon said. “We need money for a security system. We do have parents who get really angry and threaten us. Those systems cost a lot but we’re trying to get to the point where we’re self-sustainable.

“We want this to be a place where parents and children can rebuild those bonds from prior to whatever family event happened.”

“Child sex abuse, neglect, domestic violence – We have parents who have tried to kidnap their kids,” Antoon said.

“We have so many different categories. It’s so hard to understand others’ experiences so we try to put ourselves in their situations.”

Safe Connections had a “giant field grant that carries us for years,” (a federal grant that supplied 200k of our budget for three years) she said. “We were competing with major entities (for grants).” But that grant wasn’t renewed. “We’re in a major funding crisis right now,” she said.

Those wanting to help can do so on the Safe Connections Website, safe-connections.org/donate.

Some of Safe Connections’ encounters are less than cordial. For example, said Antoon, “We had a military father. We could tell from his domestic violence injunction that he had lot of anger and he was horrible to our staff. Finally, we let him know his actions were unacceptable, and that we understood why he was angry, but he couldn’t treat our staff poorly anymore.

Continued on page 40



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BY KRISY WHITELEY ANDERSON

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BY KAY LEAMAN, HEALTH ARCHITECT, HEALTHYDAY HEALTHYLIFE

Hello to fall, holidays, family, friends and events. I hope yours are fun, memorable and healthy.

The word health is a condition of being sound in body, mind and spirit. It is also a condition in which someone or something is thriving or doing well. With that in mind, what does healthy mean to you?

Here are some questions I thought of to ask: Is my family healthy? Are my relationships healthy? Is my home healthy? Is my work environment healthy? Are my pets healthy? Is my daily schedule healthy? Are my choices healthy? Is my town, city, county, state or nation healthy?

I'm not one for resolutions and overwhelm doesn't suit me either. However, I do ponder the fact that having a safe and healthy environment is up to

me. We choose to say yes or no, choose to participate or not, choose to make a difference. We choose our level of healthy every day.

How can we make our family and relationships healthier? Some thoughts that come to mind is working on the attitude we convey when we speak, especially if we are irritated, tired or disagree with a current task or situation. Take time to listen, support, agree to disagree or stay silent until we can speak with sincerity. Take time to have fun together, hang out to connect and listen to each other, go on new adventures, etc. There is so much we can 'do.' The most important thing is our commitment to be a part of the solution. Sometimes, when we are dealing with difficult people, our only choice is to love them anyway. This stuff isn't easy, but it is worth it. We'll also never be perfect; so, don't forget to add some grace for ourselves and others while we journey through this amazing life.

Having a healthy home is dependent on what's in our home. If you have man-made fiber rugs, curtains, bedding, etc., consider replacing them gradually with natural fibers (wool, jute, cotton, silk, hemp, linen). Exchange cleaning prod-

ucts to healthier options: vinegar, baking soda, borax, plant-based soaps, etc. are great alternatives. Open windows as often as you can to allow the gases from these man-made fabrics to escape. Furniture and vinyl flooring have chemicals as well. Decreasing the toxic load of what's in our homes can make a big difference.

This also includes clothing, cosmetics, lotions potions, candles, etc.

We love our pets! They love us unconditionally and no one can wag their tale and offer us the joy they show when we come home after being gone. Moving from 'dead food' to 'live food' can make a huge difference. I have a vegan friend who cooks for her dogs. When she has their blood tested, it shows that they have a strong immunity system and do not need ANY vaccines. That being said, improving what we feed them can improve their lives (This goes for us, too!).

I have been working on a healthy schedule for a while



now. Scheduling "me" time (to read, exercise, pamper, meditate, pray, etc.) has proven to be difficult. So, because the stress in my life has caused a few health issues, my choices of how and what I schedule needs to change. I am so grateful for a healthy family life that keeps me grounded and allows me to make the changes necessary for a healthier 2025 and beyond.

This past year has had an extraordinary amount of goings on, positive and negative. Americans come from every nation, culture and color. We are a melting pot with all different beliefs, experiences, and thoughts. The one thing that binds us to-

gether is our desire for freedom. America is the greatest success experiment of all time. People who flee oppression come here for a chance to be free. My family tree shows we came from Germany. I have a letter my grandpa kept from a family member in Germany talking about the devastation of Hitler's rein. It was their strength and decision to survive that brought them through. This takes hope and courage.

I guess the health of this nation is at the forefront of my thoughts these days. We, as Americans, have a part to play in the health of this nation. If everyone does their part where they're planted, change will happen. We don't have to always agree in order to lock arms and stand for what we cherish most, our right to be free in mind, body and spirit.

I am grateful every day for being able to live here, for the friends I've made, the leaders who lead us and the possibilities for tomorrow. I hope you have a fun and memorable holiday season filled with surprises and hope. Embrace the challenges this season brings and laugh more; it reduces stress.

Here's to Health!
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Rise of the "Bro-tique"

Redefining Men's Retail Experience

The world of men's fashion has witnessed a significant transformation in recent years, and with it, a new term has emerged to describe a unique breed of stores: the "bro-tique." Combining the words "bro" and "boutique," this catchy nickname perfectly encapsulates the essence of a new era in men's retail. These establishments are not merely stores; they are immersive spaces that cater to the modern man's evolving needs, preferences, and sense of style.

Gone are the days when men's shopping was limited to a few basic options. The emergence of the "bro-tique" concept marks a departure from the traditional and paves the way for an elevated and personalized shopping experience. These stores have become synonymous with a fresh take on men's fashion, grooming, and lifestyle, providing a haven where men can explore their individuality without compromise. So, what sets Captured Clothing apart from conventional men's stores?



It starts with the ambiance. Step into this bro-tique, and you'll find yourself in an atmosphere carefully crafted to radiate style, sophistication and masculine

energy. The decor, lighting, and overall aesthetic are designed to create an inviting space that appeals to the sensibilities, making you right at home.

Captured Clothing Interior

The selection of merchandise in Captured is equally distinctive, curated with experience for the latest trends and timeless classics, offering a range of high-quality clothing, accessories, grooming products, and lifestyle essentials. Every item is handpicked to reflect the desires and aspirations of the discerning gentleman, ensuring that he can find everything he needs to express his unique style and personality.

Perhaps one of the most appealing aspects of the "bro-tique" phenomenon is the personalized attention provided to customers. Unlike their mass-market counterparts, these stores prioritize individualized service with knowledgeable staff members who are passionate about being able to help customers. The "bro-tique" is more than just a place to buy clothes or grooming products; it has become a destination for men seeking inspiration, community, and a sense of belong-

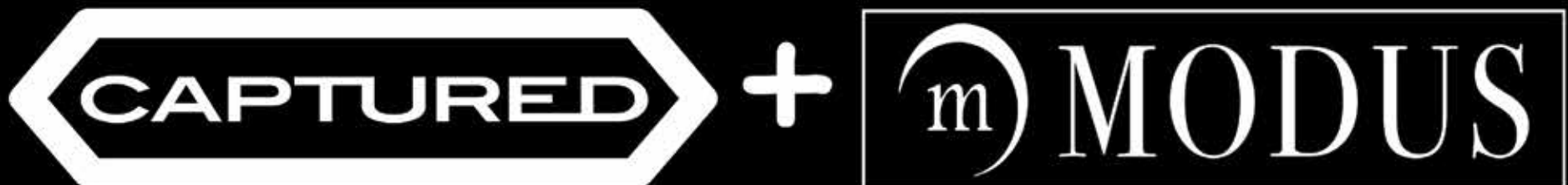
ing. Many of these stores host events, workshops, and collaborations, creating a platform for men to connect, network, and share their experiences and interests. As the popularity of the "bro-tique" continues to rise, it has become a game-changer in the retail industry. Its success can be attributed to its ability to adapt to the changing demands and expectations of the modern man with individualized service, and a vibrant community atmosphere.

Here at Captured Clothing, we are excited and proud to embrace this new era of men's retail and be known as 30A's Bro-tique!

Stay tuned for father-son workshops, the launch of the on-line store and much more!

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An Explosion of Lights from Panama City to Biloxi and Beyond

By CHRISTOPHER MANSON

“You wouldn’t know it’s the holiday season around here,” says Doug Kuba, owner of the Gulf Breeze-based Everlights by Design as well as Everlights Orlando. “Things don’t die down in January.”

Today, Kuba is in Fairhope, Ala., installing 551 feet of Everlights and over 700 feet of gutters (his other business, Gutters by Design, has been going strong for years). The site is a new neighborhood of upscale homes, and it’s Kuba’s second biggest project of 2024.

Kuba’s work entails a lot of travel. Everlights by Design’s service area covers Biloxi, Mississippi through Panama City and everything in between. Plus, Orlando, where he employs a full-time sales manager and visits at least once a month.

A typical day runs about 12 hours, and Kuba’s companies install six days a week. Come mid-November, Sundays are added to meet customer demand.

“On the Gulf Coast alone, we’re selling around \$10,000 of Everlights every day.” Based on that success, Kuba decided to take on the Orlando territory. “A lot of people didn’t want to buy it because it was such a big area, and expensive.”

Along with residential lighting, Everlights by Design has taken on commercial projects, including the Chick-Fil-A restaurant in DeFuniak Springs. “Customers are making the investment and earning it back,” says Kuba. “They thank us for setting them apart from other businesses.”

“We can custom install Everlights anywhere. You tell us where you want them, and we can do it.”

Everlights by Design is one of the fastest growing businesses on the coast and is celebrating its one-year anniversary this month. “This is the only company in the world that does fourth-generation red-green-blue LED lighting,” says Kuba.

“If you mix the colors, you



can get every color on the spectrum, over 20,000. The lights have multiple effects for every occasion, every holiday – everything you can think of. Some of our customers use the lights for security.”

Before Everlights was added to Kuba’s gutter business, his customers often called on him and his team to put up and remove their Christmas lights. “So, I toured the Everlights fac-

tory in Utah, and my wife and I decided to make another company.”

Actually, two other companies if you include Orlando. “It’s one of the hottest markets in the country,” Out of 271 Everlights dealers, Everlights of the Gulf Coast is currently the second largest in the country after Sacramento, Calif. “We may overtake them by January,” he says.

“One day, we’re a gutter company in Gulf Breeze, and the next we’re a multi-million-dollar business. Our product is for everyone. You don’t have to be a millionaire.”

One benefit of Everlights is the ability to mix and choose for any occasion. “With the touch of a button, you can go from Fourth of July to Saint Patrick’s Day,” says Kuba. “Every holiday on the calendar is pre-pro-

grammed, and you can do it from your smartphone.”

Everlights employs AI technology to identify and diagnose potential power and data issues. “We call and then we go out there and take care of it.”

The company is growing as fast as Kuba can enlist more installers and gutter people. “Gutter installation is a skill,” he says. “You need about 17 years of experience, and usually you apprentice for five to seven years to get onto a crew.”

Customer feedback has been consistently positive. “We refuse to take your final payment if we don’t earn a five-star review.” Kuba also offers a referral program where clients can earn a \$200 VISA gift card. “Our customers get to share in the profits.”

Learn more by calling 877.646.7367 or visiting everlightsbydesign.com. But don’t put off your home makeover too much longer. “I had seven requests for appointments yesterday,” says Kuba.



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Say Goodbye to Toxicity: Building Healthy Teams with Confidence - Part 2 of 6



BY BILL MASON,
ROCKET FUEL COACH

Backstory:
In a buzzing marketing firm, Sarah and Mike, two team members, found themselves clashing over a big project. As deadlines loomed, Sarah grew frustrated with Mike's reluctance to share his ideas during meetings. She felt he was holding back valuable input and suspected betrayal. With a mix of confusion and annoyance, she

confronted Mike one afternoon, accusing him of slacking. Mike, feeling cornered, fired back, insisting he was trying to contribute but felt Sarah often brushed off his ideas. Their exchange quickly turned into a heated argument, leaving both feeling unheard and unsupported, creating a tense team atmosphere.

The tension affected not just Sarah and Mike but the whole team. Ideas were stifled, collaboration faded, and the once-exciting project was on the brink of failure. Luckily, their manager noticed the growing rift and introduced the Clifton Strengths Deep Dive Program, aka the Ignite Course, along with some team-building sessions. Through these, Sarah and Mike engaged in guided conversations and trust-building exercises, allowing them to express their feelings without fear of judgment. They realized that a lack of trust led them to mis-



interpret each other's actions. Rebuilding that trust not only improved their working relationship, but also reignited the team's collaborative spirit, proving that healthy conflict can lead to amazing breakthroughs!

In this six-part series, we are talking about six ways to improve Building Healthy Teams with Confidence. The second way is:

Grudges and Conceal-

ment are clear signs of underlying trust issues. When team members hold grudges or hide their weaknesses and mistakes, it creates a toxic environment where transparency and collaboration are stifled. To overcome this, the Ignite Course helps individuals identify their superpowers and kryptonite—essentially understanding their strengths and areas for growth. By recognizing what makes

them unique and acknowledging their vulnerabilities, team members learn to be more open and honest.

To learn how the Ignite Course can transform your team, visit [Rocket Fuel Coach](http://RocketFuelCoach.com). Let's create teams that foster trust, embrace constructive conflict, and achieve remarkable success!

Book a free 30-minute discovery call at our website, www.rocketfuelcoach.com, or contact me Bill Mason, PCC, 850-855-3403 or bill@rocketfuelcoach.com.

Life is too short to waste on unnecessary conflict when it's avoidable. As Mahatma Gandhi once said, "Be the change that you wish to see in the world."

Come back next month to learn other ways to improve Building Healthy Teams with Confidence.

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SAFE CONNECTIONS
continued from page 35

"He came in one day after that and apologized to the staff. He's now a much more engaged parent. He asked questions like 'what should I do here?' We got his daughter to write him a letter and tell him what her concerns were. He got angry and said

he was never coming back. We asked him, 'What if this was you talking to your father and you just wanted him to know what was going on and how you felt?' We talked to him about not canceling his visits. Every so often get a text that things are going well. He got his children back. He's been doing unsupervised visitation for over a year now."



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BY SEAN DIETRICH

The Third Day of Christmas. My three French hens must have gotten lost in the mail. The weather was a stolid 34 degrees. The water in the dog bowls was stone. The sun was out.

Waffle House was warm and inviting. The parking lot was mostly empty except for a few muddy trucks. My wife and I had an 11-year-old with us. She is blind. This is her first time attending a Waffle House.

“Have a seat wherever,” said the server.

We found a table in the corner. A booth. Red vinyl. Faux wood table. Laminated menus. Napkin dispenser.

Going to Waffle House is one of my most cherished habits. I go a few times every week. Sometimes more often, if I’m on the road. I give the Waffle House corporation half my annual income. And I do it gladly.

But going to a Waffle House with a blind child is another matter entirely. The whole ordeal is different. For starters, the multisensory experience begins with the nose.

“That smell,” the child said, as we walked into the door.

She used her white cane to trace the perimeter of the aisle, navigating between booth and bar and jukebox.

“What is that smell?” she said. Nose to the ceiling.

“It’s bacon,” said my wife.

When you walk into a Waffle House, it’s the smell that gets you first. The smell of cured pork and frying tuber vegetables. It hits you in the back of the throat. If you’re lucky, the scent works its way into the fibers of your clothes. And it stays with you all day.

The child was smiling. “This place smells delicious.”

“Welcome to Waffle House,” said the server.

We told the waitress it was the kid’s first time visiting.

The employees made a big deal about it. You would have thought Young Harry and Meghan Markle were entering the premises.

We sat. We talked. The waitress gave the kid a complimentary paper hat.

I’ve known people who worked at Waffle House. The industry term for this hat is the Confidence Killer. But it looked good on the girl.

The waitress gave me a paper hat too. She put it on my head. I looked like an unhappy mess-hall sergeant.

The child is thrilled to be here and she doesn’t care who knows. She is dancing in her seat. Bouncing in rhythm to the jukebox music. Which is Taylor Swift.

Sean of the South: Waffle House

“Are you having a good day” says our waitress.

“Yes, we are!!” says the kid, using not one but two exclamation points.

She ordered eggs, scrambled. Bacon, crispy. White toast, buttered within an inch of its grain. Strawberry jam. An Irish pint of chocolate milk. A giant waffle—blueberry.

The waitress drew a whipped-cream smiley face on the waffle. Nobody asked her to do that.

When the meal was finished, the waitresses asked, “Has it been a good first visit to Waffle House?”

But the kid can’t answer. Her mouth is still full.

So the waitresses offered to pose for a picture with us, to commemorate the monumental occasion. One that will not soon be forgotten.

We all pose. The photogra-



pher holds the camera and tells us all to smile. “Say cheese,” says the photographer.

“No,” says one waitress, kissing the blind girl’s head. “Don’t say cheese. On the count of three, let’s everyone say, ‘Love!’”

Whereupon every customer joined in unison, counting down with the photographer. We all counted.

“ONE...! TWO...!” Love.




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 Musing



A Pastor's Ponderings: God Gives Us A Gift

BY PASTOR DAVE HOLLAND

"And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. She gave birth to her first child, a son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the village inn." (Luke 2:6, NIV)

The 80-mile walk from Nazareth left Mary exhausted. Sharp pains erupted in her pregnant body as she and Joseph arrived in his hometown of Bethlehem. Overrun with visitors because of the Roman census, the young couple sought desperately for a place to lie down. Did Joseph run from family member to family member seeking a guest room? Probably.

Finally, a stable was offered.

The eastern inn was the crudest of arrangements, typically, a series of stalls that opened into a common courtyard where animals fed and slept. Where the traveler's animals lay, Mary gave birth to Jesus, with only Joseph attending.

Joseph likely wept as much as Mary. Seeing her pain, people's lack of empathy, and the humiliation of their circumstances, would leave Joseph feeling helpless and rejected by his own family. These realizations will make a man either curse or cry.

If we imagine Jesus was born in a freshly swept county fair stable, we miss the whole point. It was wretched and scandalous. There was sweat, pain, and blood as Mary cried to heaven for help. The ground was cold and hard. The smell of birth



mixed with the stink of manure and straw made for an offensive odor. Joseph's trembling hands clumsily grasped God's Son, slippery with blood. While the baby's limbs waved helplessly, he gasped his first breath of chilly evening air and wailed like any other newborn.

God allowed himself to be

born as a helpless infant. The Son of God was not born into the world as a prince, but poor as a pauper. Christ sets the example by coming to the needy and lowly of heart.

The Son of God becoming human is a marvelous model of Christ's work in us. Look long and hard at the paradox, God of very God, light of very light, lying in an animal's feeding trough, the God-man. Fully divine and fully human. The Eternal Word came with a cry and a whimper. He who embodies eternal light lays wrapped in swaddling clothes.

What does all this mean for us? Jesus became fully human, one of us. He empathizes with our situation. He is also fully God with the ability to save us from ourselves.

What would have happened if Christ had never come, had never been born in a manger? Humanity would have devolved into chaos. What does the birth of Jesus Christ mean to the

world? It gave us the hope of heaven and love that dispels loneliness.

Jesus came and gave himself as a gift to us. From his birth in the manger to his death on the cross, Christ came to build a bridge of relationship between God and people. When they drove nails into his hands and the wood of the cross, they were nailing down the last boards of the bridge that crosses from darkness to light, from earth to glory, from dying to living.

The people in Bethlehem did not have time or room for Joseph, Mary, and Jesus. Will we make room for Jesus this Christmas season?

This article is taken from Dave Holland's book Christmas Jesus. This book can be ordered on his website DaveHolland.Org or from Amazon.com. Dave pastored churches for over 40 years before retiring in Destin, Florida. He can be reached at David-holland54@gmail.com.

5

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New Year's Resolutions: A Journey of Renewal for 2025



BY PASTOR DOUG STAUFFER

On December 31, the clock strikes midnight, and one second later, we step into 2025. Many hearts will be full of hope, eyes fixed on the horizon. Like every new year, the coming year brings a fresh slate, a chance to start again, grow and live more purposefully. But how often do our New Year's resolutions fade as quickly as they are made? This year, let's aim higher. What if our resolutions were not just about temporary change, but were rooted in eternal truth?

God's Vision for Renewal

The Bible reminds us that

change is not just possible—God promises change. “Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17). In Christ, the old—our mistakes, regrets and failures—are swept away, and we are made new! This divine renewal serves as the best foundation for our goals.

When we lean on God, the Bible reminds us that transformation is attainable. “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Philippians 4:13) isn't just a cliché; it's a declaration. This year, let's anchor our resolutions in God's strength, not our own or that of others.

Resolutions That Matter Most

Here are five key areas where I believe we can align our aspirations with God's purpose:

Spiritual Growth: Why not deepen your connection with the Creator this year? Resolve to pray daily, immerse yourself in scripture, and seek

opportunities to serve others. The intimacy you will build with God will transform your life and all those within your sphere of influence.

Physical Health: The Believer's body serves as a temple of God (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Caring for it serves as an act of worship. Set realistic goals for movement, rest, and nourishment—honoring God through stewarding His gift of health.

Mental and Emotional Well-being: “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life” (Proverbs 4:23). Guard your mind and heart by meditating on God's word, finding support for struggles, and seeking peace that surpasses understanding.

Relationships: Our faith thrives in community relationships. This year, let's resolve to forgive more freely, love more deeply, and invest time in relationships that reflect Christ's love.

Financial Stewardship: Proverbs 3:9-10 calls us to “Honour the Lord with thy substance.” Create a budget that



prioritizes generosity, responsibility and faith. Your giving could fundamentally impact lives.

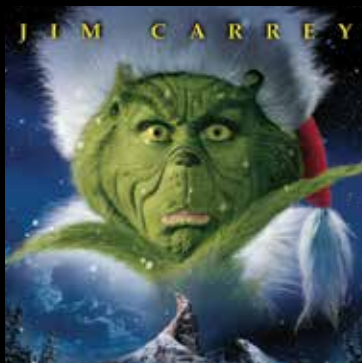
Practical Steps for a Meaningful Year

- Start each day with a devotional or scripture memory challenge.
- Begin a “Gratitude Journal” that reminds you of God's daily provisions and blessings.

Schedule time to reconnect with loved ones or mentor someone in faith.

- Commit to eating better, moving more and resting well.
- Track your finances and pray over your spending choices; not just some spending, but all of it.

Continued on page 46



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The Grinch in Concert
 Saturday, Dec. 14 | 7:30 PM
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 TICKETS: FROM \$40 PER PERSON

Bring the whole family to experience *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* live with Sinfonia Gulf Coast performing the film score as the movie unfolds on screen. Relive this beloved holiday classic about The Mean One and rediscover the true spirit of the season.



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 Sunday, Dec. 8 | 10:30 AM
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 Arts & Music

Miracles Small and Grand

By ANNA FISHER, ASSOCIATE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, ECTC

Recently I traveled with our Emerald Coast Theatre Company (ECTC) Junior Thespian Troupe to the state district competition in Tallahassee. This is the qualifying event for the Florida State Thespian Festival,

which is essentially like the Florida theatre Olympics. Each of our 18 students participated in solo, duet and group pieces as well as everyone performing in the one act play entitled “Box.” We were a giant roving group of students and parent supporters, cheering each other on

with silent jazz hands as we also cheered on our fellow thespians who were competing alongside us. It was a day of tiny miracles, watching young middle schoolers sing their hearts out, act with conviction, and dance like everyone was watching. The highest rating one can receive is a “Su-

perior.” This rating allows the monologue, duet or acting scene to advance to the State competition. Our students racked up 15 superiors and won Critic’s choice in the pantomime category. They also won the honor of performing their One Act at the state festival. The aforementioned miracles

lie not in the fact of winning, for they worked tirelessly to achieve these rankings. The miracle lies in the motivation and determination of each student to bring their very best, the willingness to sacrifice their weekends and after school time to work on a scene, and in their understanding that this is more than just a hobby; it’s a passion.

I’ve always loved the general feeling that Christmas is a time when miracles are more prevalent and anything is possible. Just like these students experienced the miracle of working hard, believing and achieving, we continue to believe with them that “Anything Can Happen.” In keeping with ECTC’s Season 12 theme for the holidays, we chose the beautiful a cappella musical All is Calm; The Christmas Truce of 1914 to keep that spirit alive. This story is based on true events that transpired on Christmas Eve, 1914 in the Belgian territory of Ypres between the English and French soldiers, and German soldiers.

British Soldier Albert Moren of the 2nd Queen’s Regiment wrote of that night:

“There was a lot of commotion in the German trenches and then there were those lights — I don’t know what they were. And then they sang ‘Stille Nacht.’ I shall never forget it. It was one of the highlights of my life.”

In a miraculous and risky show of peace, a German soldier reached out through the darkness of the trenches and sang “Silent Night.” What followed was an incredible truce, lasting hours, and, in some places, days.

Within moments, soldiers from both sides found themselves standing in the middle of “no man’s land,” unarmed, shaking hands, laughing and doing their best to communicate in a foreign tongue. During the next several hours, they would exchange gifts, share a little rum, pause to bury fallen comrades, play a game of soccer and sing Christmas carols.



The Christmas Truce is a story that is almost too far-fetched to believe. But, the overwhelming evidence based on letters from soldiers and diaries of those who lived through it has corroborated this miraculous event. To experience the beauty of this story, as told through those words and the music that weaves seamlessly throughout the performance, is a miracle, too. This show will also feature a return to the stage of some of your favorite ECTC performers.

Bruce Collier, local actor and playwright best known for his one-man Winston Churchill show, will be joining the illustrious cast alongside many of your favorites that you know and love. Vincent Pelligrino, last seen as Bert in Mary Poppins, brings his musical direction and vivid stage presence once again. Chris Saltalamacchio, who last took a turn on our stage as buttoned up Mr. Banks with a change of heart in Mary Poppins, will once again share his velvety tenor voice with us this season. Also gracing the stage is the dynamic Logan Polson of Jersey Boys and Baskerville; A Sherlock Holmes Mystery and the multi-talented Gavin Parmley, also of Jersey Boys and The Play That Goes Wrong.

On Christmas Eve in 1914, Allied and German troops shared a “Stille Nacht” and laid down their arms to shake hands across a muddy trench. It was the smallest of gestures that resulted in a grand miracle that made history. Miracles small and grand are happening all around us in the everyday normalness of life, even the tiny miracles of confidence and achievement our students experienced at competition. I hope that during this holiday season, you experience a few miracles of your own. In fact, come join us at ECTC for All is Calm and walk away believing in your heart that “Anything Can Happen.”



December 6TH - 22ND

Christmas 1914. Out of the violence of World War I, a silence, then a song. A German soldier steps into No Man’s Land singing “Stille Nacht.” Thus begins an extraordinary night of camaraderie, music, and peace. An a cappella chorale, All is Calm is a remarkable true story in the words and songs of the men who lived it.



Presents



January 9TH - 17TH

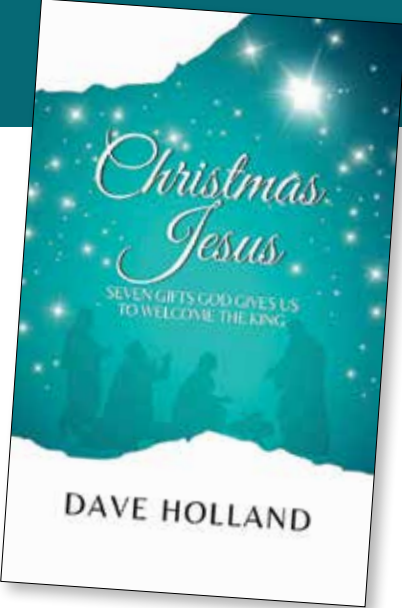
In Every Brilliant Thing, a young boy attempts to ease his mother’s depression by creating a list of all the best things in the world worth living for. This heart wrenching and at times hilarious one-man play is based on true and untrue stories and told with the help of the audience.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dave Holland loves Jesus and has dedicated his life to sharing God’s love. While studying at Gordon-Conwell Seminary and pastoring churches for almost forty years, he discovered Jesus is so much more than school and church—Jesus is life. Genuine faith is not about organizations, denominations, or personalities, but it is about discovering the depths of God’s love and grace. Dave and his wife Jonie live in Destin, Florida. Contact Dave on his website, DaveHolland.Org.



Cultural Arts Alliance Advocacy Alert—You Can Help!

BY JENNIFER STEELE,
CAA PRESIDENT & CEO

In the past, the Florida Division of Arts & Culture (DAC) grants received regular funding through state budget approvals. For the FY25 budget, the state legislature recommended \$32 million for two of the DAC's four grant programs. However, the governor vetoed this funding, leaving hundreds of arts and cultural organizations like ours that provide education, enrichment, and economic impact in our communities without state support for the year—a first in state history.

For FY26, arts advocates are closely watching the budget process. The Department of State submitted a legislative budget recommending zero funding for DAC grants, although this isn't yet the governor's final decision. This is all especially disappointing because the state's investment has shown a 9:1 return year after year.

Importantly, this isn't the governor's official budget recommendation, and the governor's budget has not been



published yet. But this is a recommendation for the governor to consider.

In Walton County, the arts & culture sector generated \$57.3 million in economic activity during 2022—\$8.6 million in spending by arts and culture organizations and an additional \$48.6 million in event-related expenditures by their audiences. That economic activity supported 652 jobs, provided \$23.9 million in personal income to residents, and generated \$8.1 million in tax revenue to local, state, and federal governments. To learn more about these important findings, visit our website.

We are at the beginning of the budgeting process, where advocacy can make a big difference. For now, I ask that you write our state representative and senator. Make them aware of this situation and ask them to reinstate the arts & culture recommendation to include

funding for the FY26 Division of Arts & Culture grants (DAC). A letter template from the Florida Cultural Alliance is at <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1eNUhh4mQH-f5Eaxl9aR3usS-D3seu9iAeh-GcdAbihagY>, ready for you to insert your programming and share your impact. For individuals, please remove any section which may not be applicable.

Contacts for Walton County legislators are below.

Representative Shane Abbott: Shane.Abbott@myflorida-house.gov

Samantha Sullivan, Aide: Samantha.Sullivan@myflorida-house.gov

Senator Jay Trumbull: Trumbull.Jay@flsenate.gov

Andrea Gainey, Aide: Gainey.Andrea@flsenate.gov

We remain in close communication with The Florida Cultural Alliance and other local arts agencies throughout the

state working towards and hoping for a positive outcome. The legislative session in March 2025 offers time for advocates to meet with lawmakers and highlight the arts' value in the state and we plan to attend once again.

Save the Date for Taste of the Race

Get ready for an unforgettable evening the Seaside School™ kicks off its annual Half Marathon + 5K Race Weekend with one of 30A's most eagerly awaited events—Taste of the Race, presented by Publix and headlined by The Velcro Pygmies, the high-energy rock band known for bringing 80s hair band flair to fan favorites across rock, dance, and country genres!

Mark your calendar for Friday, February 14, 2025, at the iconic SEASIDE® Lyceum. Experience the culinary talents of the Gulf Coast's top chefs and restaurants as they compete for prestigious

awards like People's Choice, Judges' Choice, and Chef's Choice. Enjoy delicious tastings from over a dozen talented chefs, complemented by fine wines, craft cocktails, and local brews, all while soaking in the lively musical entertainment. There will also be a special performance by the Seaside Neighborhood School™ Performance Band.

Proceeds from Taste of the Race support the Seaside School Foundation™, benefiting programs that enhance academic and extracurricular opportunities for students at Seaside Neighborhood School™ and Seacoast Collegiate High School.



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 **Around Town**

Ask Destinities: Concern About Trashcan Code and Fines



By PATRICIA LEE, OWNER
DESTINITIES.COM

Below is a question raised by

one of our members and some of the responses they received.
Group Member Question: So now there's going to be a code that if you leave your trash can by the road before or after trash day the city will have the right to look up if you homestead your home and if you haven't you will receive a code (potentially monetary) violation? Am I understanding this correctly? Fines anywhere from \$300-\$500 dollars for trash cans?

Some Member Responses:

1. I know I'm going to get hate for this, but I see so many trash cans being left out and blocking the bike paths, sidewalks, even in the road, which is a hazard for bikers, pedestrians and drivers. So, maybe the threat to be charged will help people be mindful of pulling their trash cans in.

2. Love how the first line (of the ordinance) is about getting your neighbors to call and complain about your fellow neighbors. If you have someone that does not like you, oh, the harm they could cause.

3. I think they are trying to improve the standard and make the city more appealing. I don't know what the timeframe is for the cans, but I do think it should be reasonable. One day before and one day after, because some-

times we forget or may be out of town. That's my opinion anyway. Also, I'm pretty sure they discussed a warning first. So, it seems to be more geared towards those that are habitual in leaving cans out.

4. So, all of Destin is a HOA now. Great. I mean sometimes you forget. Busy with kids and work and moving a can is the last thing on your mind. City needs to chill on some of these things.

5. I know the tickets go to the owners. But then who gets in trouble or is going to have to pay those tickets eventually when landlords start including that verbiage into their lease agreements? But, that's all beside the point. I'm not stressing huge on the looking up people part, but the fact that they're trying to put more rules and restrictions on

Destin residents.

6. I don't see what's wrong with keeping Destin looking nice and trash cans off the street. I don't think it's much to ask to move your trash can.

7. Just bring your trash can in!

If you are a Destin resident or in the close surrounding area, I invite you to join our private targeted group for locals and property owners at www.Facebook.com/groups/Destinities with 10,900+ members (Est. Oct. 2018). Check out our monthly newsletter and local business directory at www.Destinities.com. If your business is listed in our local directory, you may advertise in our Facebook group. Stay tuned to see what locals are discussing next month. Merry Christmas to all of you, Happy New Year and may God bless!



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NEW YEAR

continued from page 43

A Year of Purpose & Hope

Let's approach 2025 not with

fleeting ambition, but with a deep resolve to glorify God in every aspect of our lives. Meaningful change starts with Him—He's the author of transformation, the source of our strength

and the reason for hope.

So, as you pen your resolutions, pray over them. Dream big. Trust God for the journey ahead. This could be the year when you step into the abundant life He's prepared for you.

The Greatest Resolution

Let your greatest resolution be to seek God with all your heart. When you do, God promises that everything else falls into place. "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." (Matthew 6:33)

Think of the calendar as representing the pages of your life. January 1, 2025, marks a new opportunity to focus on faith, hope and renewal. Start or continue an unforgettable journey with God at your helm. All of us probably remember the license plates, "God is my co-pilot." Change your perspective from God is your co-pilot to God is your pilot!

This renewed perspective shifts the focus from us being in control (with God merely assisting) to God controlling entirely as we surrender to Him. When God pilots your life, you recognize His authority, trust His perfect wisdom and depend on His guidance and timing. Let go of the steering wheel and let God chart your course and direct your ways. **Happy New Year!**

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