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DESTIN Life

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Postal Customer Local

Special Event to Help Finance Facility for Adults with Autism

BY KENNETH BOOKS

The Ground Up Project, an organization designed to find homes for adults who have autism, plans a unique event to raise funds to further that goal. And it promises to be a “wacky” and “crazy” time.

“This is our inaugural marquee event,” said spokesperson Lisa Pitell. “We’re throwing a ball and we’ll judge the wackiest, craziest outfit to christen the wacky, tacky king and queen.”

The Ground Up Project has operated for a little more than two years. Its founders describe it as a “think tank” project.

“What about when the kids with autism are adults?” asked project board member Kendra Brownlee. She said Project members examined facilities for grownups with autism and “what we saw, we didn’t like. There was nothing to hope for.”

According to thegroundup-project.org, only 7% of adults with autism have access to liv-



ing outside their family home, 48 percent of them report feeling lonely and no living situations are available in our area for individuals with special needs to live independent, fulfilled and happy lives.

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental dis-

ability caused by differences in the brain.

People with ASD often have problems with social communication and interaction, and restricted or repetitive behaviors or interests.

Common signs of autism in adults include finding it hard

to understand what others are thinking or feeling, getting very anxious about social situations, finding it hard to make friends or preferring to be on one’s own, seeming blunt, rude or not interested in others without meaning to, finding it hard express feelings, taking things very literally – for example, not understanding sarcasm or phrases like “break a leg” and having the same routine every day and getting very anxious if it changes.

“Even when a child accomplishes something he didn’t do in the past, it opens up new challenges,” Project board member Eric Hambright told Life Media in 2023. If The Ground Up Project is successful in creating this facility,” he said, “there will be plenty of demand.”

The group’s concept includes not only a standard facility with plenty of amenities and first-class care, but

GROUND UP
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Emerald Coast Fitness Foundation Offers Year-Round Public Swimming

BY WENDY RUDMAN

Ten years ago in January, four swimming enthusiasts sat around a kitchen table in Fort Walton Beach brainstorming on how to bring community pools and competitive swimming opportunities back to the area. The last publicly accessible pools had shut down overnight in October of

SWIMMING
continued on page 2



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 Community

GROUND UP

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a community of group homes and apartments, each suited to individual residents' needs and desires. According to the group's presentation to the commissioners, the facility will have a support staff onsite 24/7, along with security measures on multiple levels. Each residence will be centered around an activities center, furthering residents' bonds with the community, sense of belonging and opportunity to be socially active.

"To my knowledge, between Pensacola and Panama City, there's nothing like we're contemplating," says Lisa Pitell. "We're

trying to establish a real community."

The goal is to establish a facility that will enable adults to live a little more freely," says Project board member Kendra Brownlee.

"We want to ensure people like us don't have to worry about people not doing what we planned to do," Hambright says.

The gala event is scheduled for Feb. 22 at 6 p.m. at the Hilton Sandestin Beach Resort. Ground Up hopes to see 150 individuals attending. Tickets for the event, which has been in the planning stages for about six months, Pitell said, are \$150 per person. All proceeds will go toward a residential facility for adults with autism.



A disc jockey will be on hand, as will a photo booth, entertainment and a silent auction. Also

provided will be heavy hors d'oeuvres.

"We're hoping to sell out,"

said Pitell. "This is our first year, so we don't have any kind of expectations."

The organizers hope to see outfits that are "the most outrageous or the silliest that we've ever seen," Pitell said. "Of course, it's not required that people dress up, but the goal is to get as many people participating as possible. Dress can be casual or formal. People can come with whatever level of dress they want."

Some VIP judges have already been set: The event's platinum sponsor, Life Media and another event sponsor.

For more information on The Ground Up Project, visit TheGroundUpProject.org.

SWIMMING

continued from page 1

2014, leaving swim teams, children, lap swimmers, and aqua-

cisers without places to learn or practice.

The foursome – Kathi and Gary Heapy and Pam and Bruce Braseth – were all deeply in-

involved in the swimming community, coaching numerous teams for children of all ages. The closures of the Emerald Coast YMCA in Fort Walton Beach



and the Destin Aquatic Center in Destin were a deep personal loss for them, as well as an immeasurable impact on the community.

Middle school swim season had been set to start in two weeks when the pool closed overnight in October. The sport was shifted to the spring, but even then, students were being bussed to the nearest indoor pool in Pensacola to compete.

The foursome decided something had to be done.

"We're not getting any support for the reopening of these pools and they are sitting there," Kathi said of the time leading up to that kitchen table session. "Vacant, empty, and deteriorating."

"At one point the city started talking about demolishing the facility (in FWB)," she added. "They were getting bids."

That night, they all agreed. It was time to form a nonprofit, Emerald Coast Fitness Foundation, to raise hundreds of thousands of dollars, and find ways to bring pools back to Okaloosa County.

The Fort Walton Beach pool – now called the Bernie R. Lefebvre Aquatic Center – was the first to reopen, thanks to cooperation from the City of Fort Walton Beach, the leadership of Liza Jackson Preparatory School, and a deep dive into serious fundraising. It opened less than a year

later in December of 2015 and the renovated indoor pool serves thousands of swimmers each year.

The Destin facility took a bit longer. The year after the Bernie was opened, the founders learned that the Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation was entertaining the possibility of leasing the two-pool facility to the Emerald

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THE GROUND UP PROJECT'S

WACKY TACKY BALL & SILENT AUCTION



FEBRUARY 22, 2025

06:00 - 10:00 | HILTON SANDESTIN BEACH RESORT
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Because Autism doesn't end at 18, join us for an evening of outrageous and silly fun at our inaugural marquee fundraising event. All proceeds raised will support construction of a residential community for adults with Autism.

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Editor & Publisher
Lori Leath Smith
Lori@LifeMediagr.com

Director, Advertising Sales
Scott Miller
Scott@LifeMediagr.com

Production & Layout
Kim Harper

Contributing Writers
Kenneth Books
Bobby Parker
Will Estell
Christopher Manson
Wendy Rudman
Doug "Doc" Stauffer

To Advertise
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To submit events: Cali Hlavac
cali.hlavac@gmail.com

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Athletes Shine at Annual All-Sports Banquet

Championship Football Coach, Urban Meyer, To Inspire All

The All Sports Association will host its 56th Annual Awards Banquet on Friday, Feb. 21, 2025, from 5:30-10 p.m. at Northwest Florida State College. A key event for the association, the event honors outstanding athletes and people who have significantly contributed to youth sports in the area and nationally, recognizing excellence and character of worthy athletes in the categories of Professional, Amateur, Collegiate, Scholastic and Special Olympian.

Guest speaker, Urban Meyer, is one of the most successful and celebrated college football head coaches in recent history. Having coached 17 seasons as a head coach, Meyer is most well-known for his tenures at both the University of Florida and Ohio State University, where he earned three national championships (2008 and 2009–University of Florida; 2014 Ohio State University (OSU)).

Though well-known for his football success, Meyer has been

a key figure in community initiatives through his involvement in charitable organizations. He and his wife, Shelley Meyer, co-founded the Urban and Shelley Meyer Fund for Cancer Research, which focuses on raising money to support cancer research at Ohio State University's Wexner Medical Center. Meyer also helped shape a culture of responsibility and personal growth for student-athletes by developing the "Real Life Wednesdays" program during his tenure at Ohio State University.

Through this initiative, student-athletes were given opportunities to intern, network and gain real-life experience in various industries, preparing them for life after football. Currently, Urban Meyer works as a college football studio analyst on the Big Noon Kickoff show on Fox Sports, and serves as a co-host The Triple Option podcast.

Kevin Bowyer, All Sports Association President, shared his



excitement about Meyer's involvement. "We are thrilled to have Urban Meyer as our guest speaker this year. His contributions to college football and his commitment to nurturing young talent make him a perfect fit for our event. Our goal is to inspire and celebrate those who excel in athletics, and having a figure like Coach Meyer aligns perfectly with that mission," Bowyer said.

Held every February, the An-

nual Awards Banquet celebrates top athletes from high school, college, amateur, professional and Special Olympic levels. It also acknowledges individuals who have made notable efforts in promoting youth activities. Several prestigious honors are awarded, including the Wuerffel Trophy, the Colonel Al Byrne Award and the Taylor Haugen Trophy.

The Wuerffel Trophy is awarded to a college football

player who shines not only on the field but also in community service and academics. The Colonel Al Byrne Award goes to a local individual who has shown exceptional support for youth sports. The Taylor Haugen Trophy, established in memory of Taylor Reid Haugen, a Niceville High School wide receiver who tragically passed away from football injuries in 2009, is

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Community

Snow Day in Destin!

January 21, 2025, is a day Destin locals won't forget anytime soon—a historic winter storm brought us something we rarely see: snow! A few inches blanketed the area, with some

spots even breaking records. The Emerald Coast transformed into a stunning winter wonderland, and we didn't waste a second enjoying it. Families built snowmen topped with sea-

shells, seaweed, palm branches and beach hats, blending our beachy, coastal charm with a picture-perfect winter scene right off a Hallmark Christmas card. Snowball fights broke out,

snow angels filled the yards, kids and kids-at-heart "snow surfed" on anything they could find and we all soaked in a moment we might not see again for years. Even our sugar-white sand was

overlaid with glistening snow! It was pure magic—one of those rare experiences that stick with you forever. Or, as my 8-year-old grandson put it: "Best day ever!"



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Guest Soloists:
 Winners of the 24/25 John Leatherwood Concerto Competition

Guest Composer in Residence:
 Audrey Kelly






Clara Gonçalves Annelise Ossi Christopher Wheaton

6:00 pre-concert lecture in Tyler Recital Hall with guest composer Audrey Kelly

February 22, 2025 | 7:00 PM

Adults: \$35
 Youth: \$16

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 850.729.6000 or visit
MattieKellyArtsCenter.org



The NFSO Presents: "Stars of Tomorrow: The Roaring Twenties!"

February 22, 2025 | 7 PM | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Main Stage | Niceville

Step back in time and experience the energy, innovation and glamour of the Jazz Age as the Northwest Florida Symphony Orchestra presents Stars of Tomorrow: The Roaring Twenties! on February 22, 2025, at the Mattie Kelly Arts Center in Niceville.

This dynamic concert celebrates a transformative decade when jazz, classical music and culture collided to create something entirely new. The evening features Audrey Kelly's *Speakeasy: Four Vignettes of the Roaring Twenties*, a bold and vibrant tribute to the flapper era and the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage. The program also includes Ravel's swirling *La Valse*, Gershwin's jazzy *An American in Paris* and the grandeur of Respighi's *Pines of Rome*, capturing the era's artistic revolution.

Highlighting the next generation of musical stars, the concert showcases winners of the John Leatherwood Concerto Competition, students from the Northwest Florida Symphony Youth Orchestra and a special appearance by guest composer Audrey Kelly.

Join the Northwest Florida Symphony Orchestra for an unforgettable night of music that bridges the past and the future—where the Roaring Twenties come alive once again!

Tickets are \$35 for adults and \$16 for youth. To purchase and for more information, call 850-729-6000 or visit MattieKellyArtsCenter.org.

Don't miss this captivating journey through one of history's most exciting decades!

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Laissez Les Bon Temps Rouler!

All Things Gumbo!

Pursue the Roux at the 36th Annual Sandestin Gumbo Festival.

Known as one of the largest and most popular winter food events along our Emerald Coast, this exciting, Gumbo winter festival is back for its 36th year!

Kick-Off Party at 5 O'clock Somewhere

Friday, February 21st | 5-7 p.m.

Kick off your tasting days, Friday, Feb. 21, with a traditional, Seafood Boil Kick-Off Party at 5 O'clock Somewhere from 5-7 p.m.

Sandestin Gumbo Festival Saturday, February 22nd | 12-4 p.m.

On Saturday, Feb. 22, Gulf Coast restaurants will feature their top-secret gumbo recipes and compete for your vote at the Sandestin Gumbo Festival. Dark or light roux? Chicken, sausage or seafood? Sample the variety of gumbos and vote for your favorite as the "People's Choice" winner. Celebrity judges will name the "Area's Best." Serving up fun for everyone, listen to live music from Dikki Du and the Zydeco Krewe and enjoy free kid's activities while you taste varieties of gumbo from restaurants in our area vying for your coveted vote.

AND—the popular Bloody Mary competition is back again this year, featuring the Best Bloody Marys at the beach. Taste some of the finest local bars' and restaurants' Bloody Marys and judge those, too. Vote for your favorite and help contestants win the title of "Best Bloody Mary at The Beach."

Visit SandestinGumboFestival.com for tickets and details, including a daily schedule of events and entertainment. General admission tickets are \$45 before Feb. 22 and allow tastings of all gumbo and Bloody Marys and \$55 at the door. If you're interested in entering the event, visit baytownewharf.com. The event will happen rain or shine.

It's Almost time for the Annual Mardi Gras Parade! Sunday, March 2 | 2 p.m. | FREE

Join the Village of Baytowne

Wharf as the Village streets are filled with costumed dogs and their humans, along with unique and colorful floats, golf carts, vehicles, pick-up trucks and Mardi Gras cheer for the Baytowne Mardi Gras parade. Let the good times roll with dressed-up marchers in their Mardi Gras best and Mardi Gras music filling the air as four-pawed friends and parade participants shower parade-goers with a barrage of beads, moon pies and other trinkets.

To participate, register by Friday, Feb. 28, at 5 p.m. at baytownewharf.com.

Laissez Les Bon Temps Rouler! Baytowne Beads & Bingo Bash Tuesday, March 4 | 6-8 p.m. | FREE

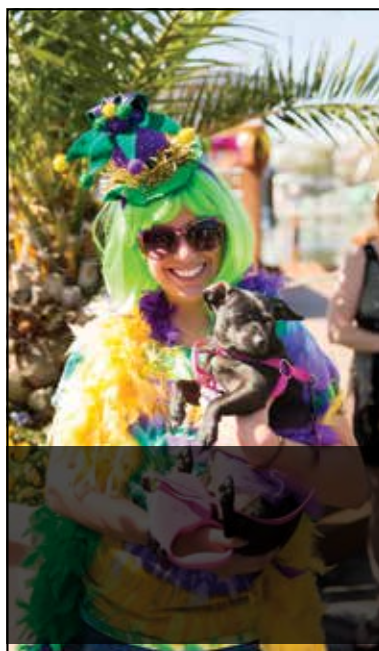
Let the good times roll at Baytowne's FIRST Mardi Gras Merchant Bingo Crawl!

Grab a Bingo Card by the stage and stroll through the Village to discover bead-worthy merchant specials! Check off the square, complete bingo and turn it in for a festive prize. The fun doesn't stop there--enjoy live music on the main stage from Boukou Groove.

Join in for an evening full of beads, bargains and beats! Cos-



tumes and Mardi Gras spirit encouraged!



Mardi Gras

The Village of Baytowne Wharf presents

Mardi Gras Parade

Sunday, March 2
Time: 2pm | No Cost to Attend

Baytowne Beads & Bingo Bash

Tuesday, March 4
Time: 6-8pm | No Cost to Attend

FOR MORE INFO VISIT: WWW.BAYTOWNEWHARF.COM

 Community

Event Highlights Around Town

Camellia Festival at Eden Gardens State Park Feb. 8

The Friends of Eden Gardens invite the community to the annual Camellia Festival at Eden Gardens State Park on Saturday, February 8th from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. The grounds of Eden Gardens State Park have over 370 camellias throughout. Beginning to bloom in late November, Camellias bring beautiful blooms to the park through the winter months. Visitors are invited to stroll through amazing gardens full of unique Camellias, see displays and demonstrations, historic re-enactments, and learn about Camellia propagating and growing. There will also be Camellias for sale as a

fundraiser for the park.

Tropical Reunion Wedding Vow Renewal at LuLu's Feb. 15



Looking for the perfect romantic Valentine's Day present for your spouse? Celebrate your love and commitment by offi-

cially renewing your wedding vows at LuLu's Tropical Re-Union on Sat., Feb. 15, 1 to 3 p.m. at Lulu's at the foot of the Mid Bay Bridge. Couples should pre-register at the restaurant or LuLu's website, so LuLu's can have special Certificates of Reunion ready. There will be complimentary champagne toasts, wedding cake, flowers for the "brides" and photos for the couples. Prizes will be awarded to the couples who were married the longest, shortest and dressed the most festively. To register, visit www.LulusFunFoodMusic.com/destin or call (850) 710-5858.

Calling all Shrimp & Grits Enthusiasts! Feb. 22

Don't miss out on the 6th Annual Shrimp & Grits Festival on February 22, 12-4 p.m. behind Brotula's Seafood House and Steamer benefiting the Boys and Girls Clubs of the Emerald Coast. Delight your taste buds with creative twists on this classic

southern dish from local chefs, sip on refreshing drinks, groove to a live DJ and cast your vote for the best Shrimp and Grits on the Emerald Coast. To purchase tickets, visit www.eventbrite.com/e/5th-annual-shrimp-grits-festival-tickets-741754897867.

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A Taste of Mardi Gras: Food, Wine, Craft Beer and More!

A Taste of Mardi Gras, this year's Food and Wine Tasting Festival supporting the Northwest Florida Symphony Orchestra's youth programs, will feature a jazz combo, tastes of 40 different wines, local craft beers and samples of cuisine from area restaurants, such as Aegean Greek Restaurant, Cafe Bienville, Magnolia Grill, Peppers Mexican Cantina, Papa's Smokehouse, PB&J Bistro & Cafe and several others.

Scheduled for Sunday, Feb. 16, 2025, from 1-4 p.m. in the Raider Central of Northwest Florida State College in

Niceville, the event will also include a silent auction containing a variety of items such as gift cards, art, jewelry and gift baskets.

Sponsored by the Northwest Florida Symphony Guild, the event raises funds to support the Symphony's youth programs, such as the Fifth-Grade concerts and the annual John Leatherwood Concerto Competition.

Tickets are \$65 and can be purchased by calling the Mattie Kelly box office at 850-729-6000 or online at www.MattieKellyArtsCenter.org.

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February 16, 2025

1-4 PM
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To be directed to the Mattie Kelly Arts Center events page, scan the QR code below:



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Cali's To Do In Destin! FEBRUARY 2025

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Sealights Festival | 5pm | Seascape Resort
Cheers for Change | 5pm | Richardson Realty
Galentine's Event | 5:30pm | Margaret Ellen Bridal
Craft Club | 5:30pm | East Pass Coffee Co.
Yoga Class | 6pm | Destin Community Center
Little Black Dress Night | 6:30pm-9:30pm | Marina Café
Fort Comedy Open Mic Standup | 7pm | Downtown Music Hall
Ladies Night | 10pm | McGuire's Destin
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Hard Hats & High Heels | 11am | Hilton Sandestin
Friday Martini Lunch | 11am-4pm | Skybar Destin
Fire Pit Friday | 4pm | 30A Distilling Co
Sealights Festival | 5pm | Seascape Resort
Free Beach Bonfire | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille
Singo Music Bingo | 5pm | The Island Resort
Under the Big Top with the Tip Tops | 5:30pm | Grand Boulevard
Night to Shine | 6pm | Shoreline Church
Artworx Gallery Reveal | 6pm | Beachworx
Karaoke | 7pm | American Legion
Salsa & Bachata Dance Lessons | 8pm | Bric a Brac
Latin Party | 10pm-Close | Pedro's Destin
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Valentine's 8K | 8am | Ferry Park in Fort Walton Beach
Farmers Market | 8am | Village of Baytowne Wharf
Pink Run Benefiting Fore Her | 8:30am | Village of Baytowne Wharf
Farmers Market | 9am-1pm | Grand Boulevard
Camellia Festival | 10am-2pm | Eden Gardens State Park
CAA's Valentine Tour of Homes | South Walton
Galentine's Celebration with Glow | 10am | OM Relaxation Spa
Chili Cookoff Benefit | 10am | De'France Indoor Flea Market
Birds & Brews | 11am-3pm | E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center | Freeport
Painting at the Park | 11am-1pm | Captain Royal Melvin Heritage Park | Destin
Brunch Fest | 12pm | Harborwalk Village
Family Valentine's Day | 2-3:45pm | The Melting Pot Destin
2025 Super Butt Rub – Destin Rotary Fundraiser | 1pm | Dave Morrow: All-state Insurance
Winter Music Fest | 4pm | Destin Commons
Sealights Festival | 5pm | Seascape Resort
Palate & Palette | 6pm | Legendary Marine
Movie Night | 6pm | East Pass Coffee Co.
Sushi Class | 6:30pm | Palm Folly
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Beach Church Service | 7:30am | Crab Trap Destin
DJ Brunch | 10am | Azul @ Harborwalk
Destin Community Farmers Market | 10am-2pm | Beall's Parking Lot in Destin



CAA's Valentine Tour of Homes | South Walton
Family Valentine's Day | 2-3:45pm | The Melting Pot Destin
Self Defense Course | 12pm | Destin Health & Fitness
Marys, Melodies & Mimosas | 2pm | Harborwalk Village
Sealights Festival | 5pm | Seascape Resort
Trivia Night | 6pm | The Wharf 850
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Free Beach Bonfire/SIN Night | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille
Valentine's Charcuterie Workshop | 6pm | 3rd Planet Brewing
Trivia Night | 6:30pm | Destin Brewery
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Mindful Meditation | 9am | Destin Library
Share the Love – Social & Volunteer | 10am | Hilton Garden Inn Destin Miramar Beach
Run Club | 4:30pm | Idyll Hounds Brewery
Young Professionals of Destin Meetup | 5pm | Fudpucker's
Impact 100 Membership Event | 5:30pm | Emerald Coast Science Center
Pasta Class | 5:30pm | Palm Folly
Kids Valentine Craft Night | 5:30-6:30pm | Destin Library
Karaoke | 6pm | AJs on the Bayou
Trivia Night | 6pm | Ricks Crab Trap FWB
Trivia Night | 6pm | Beachcamp Brewery
Karaoke | 6pm-9pm | Fat Boys Destin
Bingo Trivia Mash Up | 7pm | Wood Foot Beer
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Power of Networking Luncheon (Walton County Chamber) | 11:30am | Mezcal
Women in Business Networking | 5pm | Pure Collective Salon
Bonfire on the Beach | 5pm | The Bay
Trivia Night | 5pm | Down Island
Music Match Game Night | 5pm | The Island Resort
Music Bingo | 5pm | Pedros Destin
Run Club | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery
Rock n Roll Bingo | 6pm | Fatboy's Niceville
Galentine's Women in Business Networking | 6pm | Pure Collective
Trivia Night | 6pm | Idyll Hounds Brewery
Music Bingo | 6:30pm | Palm Folly
Karaoke | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty
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Sealights Festival | 5pm | Seascape Resort
Singo Music Bingo | 5pm | The Island Resort

Pasta Class | 5:30pm | East Pass Coffee Co
Yoga Class | 6pm | Destin Community Center
Galentine's Event | 6pm | The Boardroom Pub
Little Black Dress Night | 6:30pm-9:30pm | Marina Café
Fort Comedy Open Mic Standup | 7pm | Downtown Music Hall
Ladies Night | 10pm | McGuire's Destin
..... 14

Destin Chamber Business Before Hours | 7:30am | Destin Methodist Church
Cirque Italia: Water Circus Shows | Fort Walton Beach Fairgrounds
Friday Martini Lunch | 11am-4pm | Skybar Destin
Timeless Love: Songs through the Ages Valentine's Day Musical Revue | 2pm & 6pm | Emerald Coast Theatre Co. | Miramar Beach
Fire Pit Friday | 4pm | 30A Distilling Co
Valentine's Dinner for Two! | 4:30-7pm | Gulfarium Okaloosa Island
Special Valentine's Day Dinner | 4-11pm | The Melting Pot | Destin
Sealights Festival | 5pm | Seascape Resort
Free Beach Bonfire | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille
Singo Music Bingo | 5pm | The Island Resort
Ballroom Dancing Lessons | 5pm | Palm Folly
Taste of the Race Food & Wine Event | 6pm | Seaside Town Centre
Salsa & Bachata Dance Lessons | 8pm | Bric a Brac
Latin Party | 10pm-Close | Pedro's Destin
..... 15

Cirque Italia: Water Circus Shows | Fort Walton Beach Fairgrounds
Farmers Market | 8am | Village of Baytowne Wharf
Farmers Market | 9am-1pm | Grand Boulevard
Pet Adoption Event | 10am | Pet Supermarket
1 Year Anniversary Party | 11am | Wood Foot Beer
Chili Cook Off | 11:30am | Emerald Coast Harley Davidson
Aly Gray Fit Class | 12pm | Palm Folly
Tropical Re-Union Wedding Vow Renewal Ceremony | 2pm | LuLu's Destin
Special Valentine's Day Dinner | 4-11pm | The Melting Pot | Destin
Valentine's Dinner for Two! | 4:30-7pm | Gulfarium Okaloosa Island
Sealights Festival | 5pm | Seascape Resort
..... 16

Cirque Italia: Water Circus Shows | Fort Walton Beach Fairgrounds
Seaside School Half Marathon & 5k | 8am | Seaside Florida
Galentine's Brunch | 10am | Boathouse Oyster Bar
Destin Community Farmers Market | 10am-2pm | Beall's Parking Lot in Destin
DJ Brunch | 10am | Azul @ Harborwalk
Mardi Gras Food & Wine Festival | 1-4pm | Northwest Florida State College Bldg. 400
Marys, Melodies & Mimosas | 2pm | Harborwalk Village
Valentine's Dinner for Two! | 4:30-7pm | Gulfarium Okaloosa Island

Sealights Festival | 5pm | Seascape Resort
Trivia Night | 6pm | The Wharf 850
Karaoke | 9pm | Outcast Bar & Grill
..... 17

Cirque Italia: Water Circus Shows | Fort Walton Beach Fairgrounds
Free Beach Bonfire/SIN Night | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille
Trivia Night | 6:30pm | Destin Brewery
..... 18

WOTY Awards | 5pm | The Island Resort
Singo Music Bingo | 5pm | The Island Resort
Karaoke | 6pm | AJs on the Bayou
Trivia Night | 6pm | Ricks Crab Trap FWB
Trivia Night | 6pm | Beachcamp Brewery
..... 19

Ladies Who Launch | 11:30am-1pm | Destin Chamber
Bonfire on the Beach | 5pm | The Bay
Trivia Night | 5pm | Down Island
Music Match Game Night | 5pm | The Island Resort
Run Club | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery
Rock n Roll Bingo | 6pm | Fatboy's Niceville
Music Bingo | 6:30pm | Palm Folly
Karaoke | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty
..... 20

New Year. New You. A Fresh Start Workshop | 12-1:30pm | Beachworx Destin
Sealights Festival | 5pm | Seascape Resort
Bubbly Baytowne | 5pm | Baytowne Wharf
Planetarium Night | 6pm | Emerald Coast Science Center
Little Black Dress Night | 6:30pm-9:30pm | Marina Café
Fort Comedy Open Mic Standup | 7pm | Downtown Music Hall
Ladies Night | 10pm | McGuire's Destin
..... 21

Destin Forward Pins & Pancakes Fundraiser | 8am | Hurricane Lanes
Friday Martini Lunch | 11am-4pm | Skybar Destin
Fire Pit Friday | 4pm | 30A Distilling Co
Sealights Festival | 5pm | Seascape Resort
Singo Music Bingo | 5pm | The Island Resort
Free Beach Bonfire | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille
Winter Coffee House Concert feat. Kimberly Burke | 6pm | Destin Library
All Sports Awards Banquet | 6:30-9pm | The Arena at Northwest Florida State College
Salsa & Bachata Dance Lessons | 8pm | Bric a Brac
Latin Party | 10pm-Close | Pedro's Destin
..... 22

Son of a Beach 5K | 8am | Back Porch Destin
Farmers Market | 8am | Village of Baytowne Wharf
Farmers Market | 9am-1pm | Grand Boulevard
Shrimp 'n Grits Festival | 12pm | 210 Harbor Blvd (Behind Brotulas)
Gumbo Festival | 12pm | Village of Baytowne Wharf

Bojanz | 12pm | Boshamps
Sourdough Bread Class | 2pm | Palm Folly
Sealights Festival | 5pm | Seascape Resort
Blind Light Beer Tasting Competition | 5:30pm | Soundside FWB
Wacky-Tacky Ball | 6-10pm | Hilton Sandestin Beach Resort | Miramar Beach
Trivia Night | 6pm | The Wharf 850
Roaring 20s Feat. Stars of Tomorrow | 7pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center
..... 23

Destin Community Farmers Market | 10am-2pm | Beall's Parking Lot in Destin
DJ Brunch | 10am | Azul @ Harborwalk
Destin Commons Farmers Market | 11am | Destin Commons
Bridal Wars | 12pm | Laurel Hill Farm
Dog-Harmony Hops for Hounds | 1-3pm | Props Brewery | Hammock Bay, Freeport
Marys, Melodies & Mimosas | 2pm | Harborwalk Village
Sip & Paint | 4pm | Palm Folly
Sealights Festival | 5pm | Seascape Resort
Karaoke | 9pm | Outcast Bar & Grill
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Free Beach Bonfire/SIN Night | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille
Trivia Night | 6:30pm | Destin Brewery
..... 25

FPL Northwest Florida Economic Symposium | Sandestin Golf & Beach Resort
Karaoke | 6pm | AJs on the Bayou
Trivia Night | 6pm | Ricks Crab Trap FWB
Trivia Night | 6pm | Beachcamp Brewery
Karaoke | 6pm-9pm | Fat Boys Destin
Bingo Trivia Mash Up | 7pm | Wood Foot Beer
..... 26

FPL Northwest Florida Economic Symposium | Sandestin Golf & Beach Resort
..... 27

Multi-Chamber Business After Hours | 5pm | Venue at Beach Weekend
Bonfire on the Beach | 5pm | The Bay
Music Match Game Night | 5pm | The Island Resort
Sealights Festival | 5pm | Seascape Resort
Trivia Night | 5pm | Down Island
Pokémon Party | 5:30-7pm | Destin Library
Run Club | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery
Rock n Roll Bingo | 6pm | Fatboy's Niceville
Music Bingo | 6:30pm | Palm Folly
Karaoke | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty
..... 28

Sealights Festival | 5pm | Seascape Resort
Crescendo! Vintner Dinners | 6pm | Various Venues
Little Black Dress Night | 6:30pm-9:30pm | Marina Café
Direct from NY: The NY Rockets Presents "Good Rockin' Tonight" | 7pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center Niceville
Fort Comedy Open Mic Standup | 7pm | Downtown Music Hall
Ladies Night | 10pm | McGuire's Destin



EVENTS • LIVE MUSIC • FOOD

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 Community

EVENTS

continued from page 8

Dog-Harmony Hops for Hounds Feb. 23

Dog Harmony's 5th Annual "Hops for Hounds" dog walk and after party, will be held February

23rd, 1-3 p.m. at Props Brewery in Hammock Bay, Freeport. The day will start with a picturesque, short stroll followed by a lively after-party at Props Brewery, complete with craft beer (for thirsty humans 21 and older), live music, vendors, food trucks and more.

Tickets are \$35 per entry (includes one human and one fur friend), an adult-sized t-shirt, and a digital photo of participants with their pets. Each human walker will also receive a complimentary craft beer from Props Brewery – Must be age 21 or over to partake.

To register, visit <https://dog-harmony.org/hops-for-hounds-2025/>. (All dogs must be current on rabies vaccinations and at least six-months old. No prong, shock or choke collars will be permitted.) To become a sponsor, contact hello@dog-harmony.org. All proceeds benefit Dog-Harmony and its efforts to support the pups and programs in our communities.

Emerald Coast Quilt Show March 7-8

Flying Needles Quilt Guild of Niceville presents Emerald Coast Quilt Show 2025, Friday, March 7 from 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. and Saturday, March 8 from 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. at the Northwest Florida Fairgrounds, 1958 Lewis Turner Blvd. in Fort Walton Beach.

Quilt Entry Categories include: Large Pierced, Medium Pierced, Small Pierced, Applique, Modern and Mixed Techniques.

Show Theme is Gulf of Dreams. Attendees will also experience mini-demonstrations, vendors, boutique, quilter's Walk and Quilt of Valor Block Party. For more information, visit flyingneedlesquiltguild.org.

La Vie En Rouge Friday, March 7th, 6 pm - 9 pm.

Immerse yourself in the glamour of 19th-century Parisian cabaret at La Vie En Rouge, presented by Emerald Coast Theatre Company on Friday, March 7th. This exclusive signature event will feature exhilarating live performances, dazzling costumes, and a vibrant atmosphere for guests 21+. Get ready to indulge yourself in an evening of elegance, as we transport you to the iconic Moulin Rouge for a night of dinner, dancing, entertainment, silent auction, and many more

unforgettable moments.

TICKETS:

Reserve a table up to 4 seats for \$600.

Reserve a seat at a table for \$150.

General Admission for \$125.

Purchase tickets at emeraldcoasttheatre.org/special-events.

ECCAC's Signature Gala & Golf Events March 8-9

The Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center (ECCAC) is putting on its annual signature Gala & Golf event this year, presented by Peggy and Jerry Swanson. The Gala features a cocktail hour starting at 5:30 p.m., with dinner at 6:30 p.m. on Saturday, March 8, at the Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa. Guests will enjoy dinner and live entertainment; an exciting live auction, as well as a featured guest speaker. The Gala is an energetic, yet important ECCAC fundraiser to benefit children by providing services at no cost to help identify, treat and support child victims in abusive situations.

The Golf Tournament, also to benefit ECCAC, will take place on Sunday, March 9, at Kelly Plantation Golf Club with registration and a cookout meal from 10:30 to 11:45 a.m. to be ready for a tournament shotgun start at noon. An Awards Ceremony will follow the tournament. Teams of 4 players are



\$1,000. Gala tickets are \$250 per individual and \$500 per couple. Please make reservations on-line at eccac.org. Sponsorships are still available.

NFB to Perform Cinderella March 8-9!

Northwest Florida Ballet returns to perform Cinderella at the Mattie Kelly Arts Center to conclude Season 55 on Sat., March 8, at 7:30 p.m. and Sun., March 9, at 2:30 p.m. With live music by the Northwest Florida Symphony Orchestra led by NFB Music Director and Conductor David Ott, this beloved classic features the choreography of NFB Artistic Director Todd Eric Allen and the music of Serge Prokofiev. Presented in three acts, Cinderella brings to life a cavalcade of enchanting characters, brilliant dancing, vibrant costumes and magical scenery sure to hold you under its spell.

Box office prices for NFB's Cinderella are \$48 for adults and \$22 for children 12 and under. Cinderella is brought to you by Season Production Sponsor the Mattie Kelly Arts Center, and Season Signature Sponsors, Scarlett Magazine and NFB's Official Sports Medicine & Orthopaedic Provider, NFBJS Foot & Ankle Surgeon Dr. Sonya Ahmed.

Visit <https://www.nfballet.org/cinderella> or call 850-729-6000 to learn more or purchase your tickets.

SeaLight Festival Returns! Thursdays to Sundays, Through - April 13, 2025

Kaleido Entertainment presents a dazzling wonderland of light and Chinese culture, running January 30 through April 13, 5:30 p.m. - 9:30 p.m., with last entrance at 8:30 p.m. at Seascape Golf, Beach & Tennis Resort in Miramar Beach.

Each unique piece holds



a story of its own with depictions of Chinese legends and lore, as well as the beauty of nature. Modern LED lights are combined with traditional hand-crafted lantern frames made from small pieces of Chinese silk cloth and steel wire.

In addition to the spectacular lights display, guests can also enjoy live entertainment by the award-winning Zigong Acrobatic Troupe. The circus group has traveled the world and will perform incredible show-stopping acts including juggling, balancing, face-changing and more. There will also be a variety of vendors, games, food & drink, and cultural booths boasting artisanal gifts for purchase. Ticket prices start at \$24.99 for adults and \$17.99 for children ages 12 and under and are available here. For more information, visit www.sealightfestival.com/destin.

Wear Shades of Pink! Women United Brunch & Bubbly March 8

Join the ladies of Women United for Brunch and Bubbly presented by Eglin Federal Credit Union Sat., March 8, at 10:30 a.m. and hosted by Home 2 Suites by Hilton, 1930 Lewis Turner Blvd., Fort Walton Beach. Contributions support the work of United Way Emerald Coast and Women United to provide mental health resources, access, and education to local women and girls. Tickets available for purchase at united-way.org/womenunited.



March 8 & 9, 2025

Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa
Kelly Plantation Golf Course

You're invited to the
Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center's

eccac gala & golf
presented by Peggy & Jerry Swanson

Special Thanks to Our Title Sponsors:
Amy H. Rogers, Coastal Accounting, Kiwanis of Freeport-South Walton,
Merrill Lynch - Krueger, Fosdyck & Associates

Scan the QR code to purchase tickets, buy a table, team, sponsorship, or donate if you can't attend.



eccac.org/gala-golf

Your Future Starts Here!

Are you ready for a high school experience that goes beyond the ordinary? Open enrollment for Destin High School (DHS) is happening NOW, and this is your opportunity to join a thriving academic and extracurricular community in a supportive, innovative charter school environment.

form in award-winning productions.

Marching & Concert Band – Showcase musical excellence at competitions.

Dance – Compete and perform in competitions.

Choir – Develop vocal talent and perform at prestigious events.

pendent Team in Florida (Two years in a row!)

Boys Soccer – #2 Independent Team in Florida this year!

Baseball, Softball & Basketball – Multiple college scholarships awarded to DHS athletes.

DHS Cheer – Recently won 2nd place at the Disney World Cheer Nationals!

✓ **One-of-a-Kind Saltwater Fishing Program:** DHS is the only high school in Florida where students can earn a captain's license through our unique saltwater fishing program. This outside-the-box, hands-on experience immerses students in charter and commercial fishing, providing real-world skills that

benefit both their futures and our coastal community.

✓ **Culinary Arts Program:** Our new hands-on culinary program allows students to develop their cooking skills, preparing them for careers in hospitality, restaurant manage-

Continued on page 32



We don't just prepare you for graduation—we prepare you for life!

We prioritize academic excellence while fostering creativity, leadership and innovation, going beyond textbooks to provide career-driven, life-changing opportunities and a dynamic high school experience—all tuition free with no zoning restrictions!

Why choose Destin High School?

At DHS, we believe that education should be engaging, personalized and inspiring. That's why we offer a diverse range of academics, extracurricular activities and real-world experiences to set students up for success. With state-of-the-art facilities, highly qualified teachers and diverse, hands-on, real-world programs, you can tailor your education to fit your interests and career goals.

✓ **Academic Excellence:** From Advanced Placement (AP) and dual enrollment to honors and standard courses, DHS provides a variety of academic pathways to challenge and support every student. Whether you're preparing for college or a specialized career, we ensure you have the foundation to excel.

✓ **Award-Winning Performing & Visual Arts:**

Theatre – Compete and per-



Visual Arts – Express creativity through a variety of artistic mediums.

Our talented students have excelled in regional competitions, proving that creativity and passion thrive at DHS!

✓ **Athletic Excellence:** With over 20 varsity sports programs, our athletes compete at the highest level and bring home major victories!

Varsity Football – FSU Hall of Famer and former NFL player Coach E.G. Green is shaping DHS football into a legacy team, blending tradition with teamwork, kindness and respect!

Girls Volleyball – #1 Inde-



1st Application Period is Open Until February 15th for School Year 2025-26

SEATS ARE LIMITED!

Why Choose Destin High School?

- ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE
- PERFORMING and VISUAL ARTS (Art, Band, Dance, Theatre)
- AWARD WINNING ATHLETICS
- CONVENIENCE
- FISHING PROGRAM
- CULINARY ARTS
- BUSINESS PROGRAM

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Celebrating Valentine's Day 2025 Along Northwest Florida's Gulf Coast

By WILL ESTELL

The celebratory day of chocolate hearts, rose bouquets, stuffed bears and love is right around the corner. However, that doesn't mean you have to

celebrate this Valentine's Day just like everyone else, and just like every year in the past. It's often good to shake things up a bit, and brainstorm some ideas for your day, and night, of fun.

So that's exactly what we're going to help you with.

Keep your heart open, because some of these might just make you feel luckier than you even knew you were.



"The Ultimate Elvis in Vegas" Comes to Niceville:

Experience "Burning Love" and all the King's hits with the one that's always on your mind during this unforgettable evening as The Ultimate Elvis in Vegas comes to Niceville's Mattie Kelly Arts Center.

Headlined by one of the world's top Elvis tribute artists and Ultimate Elvis Champion, Cote Deonath, you'll experience a night to remember, that is officially endorsed by Elvis Presley Enterprises.

You'll hear some of the greatest moments in Elvis's historical career, from his iconic 1968 Comeback Special to the over-the-top glamour of his Las Vegas performances. Deonath will be backed by The Infnit-E Tribute Band - often referred to as the world's best Elvis tribute band - bringing you a show that captures the spirit and sound of Elvis's legendary hits with a stage performance reminiscent of the King's signature moves.

This remarkable experience takes place Saturday February 15th at 7 p.m. with tickets ranging from \$35 - \$65 depending on seating location. Visit MattieKellyArtsCenter.org for tickets.

The Gulfarium's Valentine's Dinner for Two: Valentine's Dinner for two at The Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park is definitely an experience like no other to celebrate the big day of love. You and your date or mate can take in an enchanting after-hours experience at the Gulfarium, where you can meet and mingle with the resident penguins, while sipping on a beverage.

Afterwards your evening adventures will move indoors, where the two of you can enjoy a delectable three-course meal

while surrounded by the majestic tropical fish backdrop of The Gulfarium's massive aquarium full of interesting inhabitants.

These special dining events run from Saturday the 11th through Valentine's Day, and are only \$350 per couple. But hurry, as the spots are filling fast! For more information and to book, visit Gulfarium.com



Strike a Pose with Your Valentine:

What better way to make a memory last than to pose together for a Valentine's Day special mini photo session with Savvy Leigh Photo? Savannah Smith of Savvy Leigh Photo has become one of the most requested and reputable photographers in our area for unique couples' photos. Savvy Leigh Photo has been featured as one of the Destin area's top photographers, and is sure to provide you and yours with photos to treasure for years to come. Best of all, you receive all the edited digital images! Savvy Leigh also does family, baby and bridal photos. Visit SavvyLeighPhoto.com to book.

Celebrate Valentine's, Galentine's and Thursdats® at Melting Pot Destin: It's no secret that Melting Pot Destin has been in the business of helping couples, just like you, celebrate love for over a decade, and this Valentine's month is no exception. From that special first date to a 50th anniversary

Continued on next page

Bluewater PLASTIC SURGERY Steven J. Clark, MD, DMD, FACS

Michelle Sasala MSN, APRN, FNP-BC
Nurse Practitioner/Aesthetic Injector



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- Gynecomastia (Male Breast Reduction)
- Post Weight Loss

Non-Surgical

- Botox Bar
- Facial Fillers
- Profound (RF Microneedling)
- Laser Hair Removal
- OBAGI Skin Care
- Laser Pigmentation / Wrinkles

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VALENTINE'S

continued from previous page

sary, this favorite couples' go-to has you covered and keeps it all exciting from the fondue to the main course. This year Melting Pot Destin is turning the entire month of February into their "Total Love Takeover," giving you 28 days to make it happen! But move fast, as reservations are limited. Visit MeltingPot.com to book

Chill with Your Significant Other at CRYO850: If you're ready for something a little out of the ordinary this Valentine's Day, the two of you can have some fun getting your health on at Destin's CRYO850. The attentive staff at CRYO850 are at it again, offering some great VD specials for couples, so the two of you can experience the remarkable benefits of CRYO Therapy together this year! What better way to give the gift of love than to enhance the health and wellbeing of your special someone? CRYO850 has something for everyone and has the dedication and experience to help you, and yours, become the best version of the well-balanced couple!

For more information about these specific specials and benefits, call (850) 279-4145, or visit Cryo850.com to book your special session and just chill!

"Love Hurts" Murder Mystery and Dinner at AJ's on the Bayou: They're always killing it at AJ's, and this special Valentine's Day dinner is no exception! AJ's on the Bayou in Fort Walton Beach presents "Love Hurts," a thrilling dinner murder mystery that will have you laughing in suspense as you take part in three hours of food, fun and sleuth work. This is a unique and entertaining event for couples – or friends – who love to figure it all out while enjoying a night out with delicious cuisine, drinks, and other fun-loving friends.

Limited seating is available, so don't wait to secure your spot for the perfect date night putting the pieces together. For more information, and to book, call Nicole Dickson at (850) 207-7115, or email icmtheatre@gmail.com

Hit the Gulf Waters with Your Own Favorite Catch: Hit the Gulf together and experience what "The World's Luckiest Fishing Village" is perhaps

most famous for! V-Day is a great time to do some deep-sea fishing as a couple, and there are more than a few charter businesses to help you... and your catch, snag a catch for your table. Start planning your upcoming excursion by checking out the array of charter companies headquartered along Destin Harbor, Fort Walton Beach and online. Tell them we sent you!

Grab a Weekend Getaway at Henderson Park Inn: If you want to extend the Valentine's celebration into a few nights away from it all, then Destin's Henderson Park Inn is the perfect Valentine's getaway! This famous adults-only luxury boutique hotel is nestled along Destin's white sands and offers fabulous views of the Gulf of America. The Cape-Cod style cedar shingled B&B features a quaint coastal cottage feel, with each room having its own unique design and furnishings.

I may very well be the only person to have spent over 100 nights at Henderson Park Inn, across the past two decades, and, as such, I can assure you there literally isn't anything quite like it along the beautiful Destin coastline. While you're

there, remember to start each day with a remarkable breakfast at the inn's BeachWalk Café, included with each stay!

You can also make your Valentine's celebration even more special with a scrumptious dinner at their top-tier BeachWalk Café, located inside Henderson Park Inn and offering water views from each dining table. Trust me, no matter what you order, it's a meal to remember every time! Book soon, though, as BeachWalk is one of the most sought-after Valentine's Day fine-dining experiences across all of Northwest Florida's Gulf Coast. For more information and to book your stay and dining, visit HendersonParkInn.com

Rub Out the Tension with a Romantic Couples Massage at Beverly Hills Day Spa: Celebrate the month of love as a couple at Beverly Hills Day Spa by experiencing your choice of a 60- or 90-minute Swedish or Deep Tissue massage in the same spa room. Want more? How about a pedicure side-by-side in their ultra-comfortable Jacuzzi chairs while partaking in a complimentary glass of champagne or

wine? It's a great way to unwind and relax together! Call (850) 654-6544 to book today.

Take in the Love Songs at Emerald Coast Theatre Company: If you've taken in a show at Emerald Coast Theatre Company you already know how remarkably entertaining their events are, so why not couple that excitement with a Valentine's Day musical revue? This one-day performance of Timeless Love: Songs Through the Ages will be brought to you at 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. February 14th and features favorite love songs from yesteryear brought to you by top-notch vocalists rocking the ECTC stage.

Your special evening can be complemented with a bottle of wine, and a sweet or savory charcuterie box, as a fun way to celebrate with your Valentine – or Galentine – and avoid the packed restaurants. ECTC has everything you need to spend a memorable evening together, with the love of your life... or just another date!

Visit www.EmeraldCoastTheatre.org or call the box office at 850-684-0323.



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Romance is in the Air! Show Love with Trends & Treasures!



Sweets for Your Sweetheart! Smallcakes Destin

Get your orders in for the sweetest day of the year or all month long! Smallcakes has something for every relationship. There's even Chocolate covered strawberries—perfect for your lover! And February brings Mardi Gras King Cake, too! There's traditional king cakes as well as scrumptious king cakes filled with cream cheese, bavarian cream, pecan praline, strawberry and apple. Your Valentine will fall in love with custom edible logos and images on gourmet cupcakes, custom cakes, mini cupcakes and tempting treats baked fresh. Specializing in custom, holiday, gourmet cupcakes, housemade ice cream, wedding cakes and birthday cakes—even “pup” cakes for your furry friend—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. Choose from an array of frostings in colors of the season. Sample all flavors with a 12-pack of assorted minis! With all these flavors, you can celebrate your “love” all month long—because cupcakes are “love” with icing on top!

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.

(850) 842-9002

SmallcakesDestin.com

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Breathe Better with Nano Salt Therapy CRYO850 Performance and Recovery Center

Introducing Nano Salt therapy! Nano salt therapy uses nano-sized salt particles much smaller than those used in salt caves. The ultra-fine particles are more easily inhaled and

absorbed into the body, particularly in the deeper parts of the lungs, to provide more targeted benefits to respiratory and skin conditions such as asthma, bronchitis, allergies, eczema and psoriasis.

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- **Respiratory Health.** Dry salt particles help loosen mucus and phlegm in airways providing relief from congestion, asthma, bronchitis, COPD and sinusitis;

- **Skin Health.** Antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory properties promote healing, reduce itching, and improve skin appearance by reducing bacteria and toxins;

- **Immune Support/Detoxification.** Increases the body's ability to fight off bacteria and viruses and draw out toxins. Often used during cold and flu season.

- **Air Quality Improvement.** Purifies air by absorbing toxins and particles, making it easier to breathe - particularly beneficial for people with allergies or sensitivities to environmental factors like dust, smoke, or pollen.

- **Enhanced Athletic Performance.** Improves lung function and breathing to enhance endurance.

- **Chronic Fatigue & Sinus Issues.** Combats chronic fatigue by improving oxygen flow and clears sinuses.

*See our coupon on the back page for 50% off any Nano Salt Therapy Session or Package or visit cryo850.com for more information.

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www.cryo850.com

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For centuries, savvy Southerners have been sporting their letters on everything from jewelry, clothing, cars and exqui-

site fine stationery to establish a form of identity. People want them for family traditions, new names upon marriage, new babies, new homes with the family's personal home insignia or a beach house name. For many, monograms are a popular way to pass on their heritage, especially on pieces of jewelry. These personalized items become treasured heirlooms to pass down from generation to generation. The monogram trend isn't new, especially in the South. Rulers as far back as early Greek and Roman history placed their seal on currency to help identify it. In the Middle Ages, artists took the idea and applied monograms to their work as signatures. Even later, the Victorians also made monogramming their own to show off their wealth and status by wearing precious jewelry and expensive embroidery with their initials. Order these gold leaf trimmed deluxe notepads with Kensington monograms and expect to receive love notes all year long!

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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. To get your copy, email Brian@BeOnTheCoast.com or call.

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What You Should Do Right After An Accident

By JULIE A. MARTIN

It can be scary to be driving along one minute, and the next, either you've been run off the road, or spun out into the intersection, or even into a ditch.

You or your passenger might even be injured, and need medical attention. Here is the short version of how to handle auto accidents so that you know you handled everything correctly

and your stress level can come down.

Pull over safely to the side of the road and call 911. Calling for help is the first essential step in making sure that any injuries



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are treated in a timely fashion, as well as making sure the police arrive to do a full accident report.

Take photos of the other vehicle(s) involved including the drivers, as the position of the vehicles, for your insurance company, so that there is photo evidence of all damage as well as an accurate representation of who was in which car, as well who was driving.

Make sure you have your license, registration and insurance information on hand. I recommend keeping a copy of your declarations page, your auto id cards and your registration in your glove box.

If your vehicle is not drive able after the accident, you have two choices. If you have AAA, you can have them pick up your vehicle and drop it off at your preferred auto repair shop. If you have towing on your auto policy, and the site of your accident is less than five miles away from your repair shop, you can potentially use the towing coverage on your policy for this accident.

If you are injured, go to the hospital to get checked out or your primary care physician, if your injuries are not serious. Personal Injury Protection in the state of Florida pays 80% of your \$10,000 coverage, minus the deductible. This includes

hospital bills, medical bills relating to your accident injuries, physical therapy, casts, crutches, etc. If you have medical payments on your policy as well, they will start where the Personal Injury Protection ends. If the at fault driver is not you, and they either have no bodily injury liability coverage, or not enough to cover your injuries, this is where uninsured/underinsured motorist coverage comes in. You insure for those times that you get hit, you're hurt, but the person who causes the accident does not have enough coverage to cover your medical expenses.

If you have not already called your insurance company to put in the claim, do so now, calling your agent and explaining to them what happened. Answer their questions and do not guess if you do not know the answer. Let them know that the police have been on the scene. Give them the case number the police give you and they will get the accident report when it becomes available. Write down the claim number and any other instructions the claims representative, and your agent give you for the accident.

Dear reader, we all get into a scrape from time to time, and hopefully this list is helpful when you need to know what to do. Call 850-424-6979.



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Understanding Long Term Care

BY TERESA HALVERSON,
DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT/COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Understanding when long-term care becomes necessary can be a challenging and emotional journey for families. Long-term care refers to a range of services and support provided to individuals who are unable to perform basic daily activities due to chronic illness, disability or aging, allowing them to maintain their quality of life by assisting with tasks like bathing, dressing, eating and transferring. It is crucial to recognize the signs that indicate a loved one might need additional support to maintain their quality of life. At Destination Health and Rehabilitation facility, we understand that this transition can be daunting, and we are here to provide the compassionate support families need during this time.

The need for long-term care can arise suddenly, such as after a heart attack or stroke. More often, however, the need for long-term care develops gradually. People require more care as they get older and frailer or as a serious, ongoing illness or health condition worsens.



One of the unique benefits of Destination Health and Rehabilitation is our personalized care planning. We work closely with families to develop tailored

plans that address the specific needs and preferences of their loved ones. This collaborative approach ensures that families feel confident in their deci-

sion-making process regarding long-term care, knowing they have a supportive partner by their side.

Our dedicated team is com-

mitted to helping families navigate the complexities of long-term care, offering a warm and welcoming environment where every individual is treated with respect and dignity. We believe that every person deserves to live their life to the fullest, and our focus is on enhancing the independence and well-being of our residents.

If you find yourself unsure about the next steps in your caregiving journey, we encourage you to reach out for a consultation. Destination Health and Rehabilitation is here to offer guidance and resources, positioning ourselves as a trusted partner in your family's long-term care needs. You are not alone, and help is available for your loved ones. Have a family member desiring to relocate? Looking for another facility? We have several openings for long-term care in our new facility located in the heart of Destin. Please contact us at 850-654-4588 for additional information and tours.

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Why is the Medicare Open Enrollment Period Important to You?



BY GREG DURETTE, FLORIDA HEALTH CONNECTOR

Now that the Medicare Annual Election Period (AEP) is over (ended December 7th), you can finally take a breather from all those ads, phone calls and mailers. As of January 1st, you

are now able to try out your new Medicare Advantage, Supplemental and/or Prescription plan.

If you suddenly discover the plan you selected during the AEP is not right for you, all is not lost. You will get one more bite at the apple to make changes to your plan.

As with many situations, in order to have a good outcome, you first have to ask the right questions. In this case, the questions you should ask first are:

Did you sign up for a new Advantage Plan or a stand-alone Part D prescription drug plan during the last Annual Enrollment Period (AEP)?

Do you have an existing Advantage Plan or a stand-alone Part D prescription drug plan that renewed with a January 1st effective date?

If the answer to either of these questions is yes, then the Medicare Open Enrollment Period (OEP) is very important to you.

The OEP runs annually from January 1st to March 31st.

During this time, Advantage plan holders are given the option to make certain changes to the plan they selected in the AEP.

These allowed changes are:

- Cancel your stand-alone Part D prescription drug plan
- Drop your Medicare Advantage Plan and return to

Original Medicare (A & B only)

- Enroll in a stand-alone Medicare Part D prescription drug plan

- Elect to change from one Medicare Advantage Plan to another

Let's take a look at each option a bit deeper. First, why would someone elect to cancel their stand-alone Part D prescription plan? The only reason one could have would be it was being replaced by other qualifying coverage. If you cancel without replacing, penalties will accrue and be waiting for you when you do put this coverage back in place at a later date. Plus, those penalties will be with you for life!

Second, there are a few rare circumstances when it makes sense for someone to cancel an Advantage plan and return to Original Medicare known as Part A and Part B. Usually, this may have something to do with provider networks which are insufficient for the beneficiary or some other unusual event. Again, this rare circumstance would require you to also remain in or enroll in a stand-alone Part D prescription drug plan in order to avoid accruing the future



penalties I just mentioned.

Again, enrolling in a stand-alone Part D prescription drug plan is a requirement if you do not have qualifying coverage elsewhere and want to avoid those penalties. If you neglected to get that done during the AEP, now is the time to look at this.

Last, some folks have a change of heart once they see the detailed materials of the Advantage plan they enrolled in during the AEP. Perhaps you find your HMO plan does not have the providers you need, but a PPO plan does. Or, perhaps the terms of coverage are better in a plan different from your current plan. Maybe another plan costs less (or even \$0!).

You don't need any reason to switch plans provided you do so before the OEP expires on March 31st. Just remember, you only get one chance to make this change. Once you do, you will have to keep that plan until the next AEP, which begins on October 15th of every year.

The best options for your particular situation should be thoroughly discussed with your insurance agent/broker to make sure you have all the facts about the choices you might be thinking about, and get all your questions answered.

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 nearly 42 years and can be reached at his office at 850-842-2400 or his mobile at 978-509-2941.

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Believe in the HYPE — For Now



BY PAUL DOMENECH

Is the Market Good or Bad? The Truth About Today's Real Estate Climate

The big question on everyone's mind: Is now a good time to buy or sell a home? You've likely seen the headlines—interest rates fluctuating, inflation still looming and talk of an economic rollercoaster. So, what's really driving the real estate market? The answer might surprise you: it's not just numbers, rates or even the economy itself. It's feelings—yes, emotions.

Most people couldn't explain how interest rates are set, and even fewer really worry about them until it's time to buy a home. But despite what the economic data says, there's an underlying force that's pushing the market forward: hope. That's right—hope.

The Power of Hope in Real Estate

You might be wondering, how does hope impact the real estate market? The reality is that despite interest rates being higher than many would like and inflation still a factor, hope has become a driving force behind consumer behavior. People are motivated to buy homes not just because the market is perfect, but because they're hopeful for the future. This sense of optimism has led many to take the plunge into homeownership once again.

Even if the economy is still shaky, and inflation is biting, the promise of future growth and stability can make a difference. The current administration—regardless of political affilia-

tion—has inspired consumer confidence, creating an environment where people feel motivated to invest in their futures. This hope is enough to get people back into the housing market, making now a good time for both buyers and sellers.

However, it's important to note that this hope might not last forever. If the government doesn't manage to spark real, tangible economic growth, things could shift. But for now, that optimism is powering a wave of homebuyers and sellers.

Winning Strategies for Buyers and Sellers

So, whether you're buying or selling, here are some tips to help you come out on top:

For Buyers:

Avoid Lender Fees: Don't fall for loans that come with extra fees. Many local lenders offer competitive rates with zero lending fees. Make sure to shop around, and don't be afraid to negotiate. Lenders want your business, so you may be able to secure a better rate than what's initially offered.

Leverage Your Hope: Yes, hope is a powerful motivator. If you're feeling optimistic about the future, use that to your advantage. Real estate is a long-term investment, and today's market is an opportunity to build wealth for tomorrow.

For Sellers:

Prepare Your Property: Buyers are more likely to pay top dollar for a home that's move-in ready. Invest in small updates that can make a big impact—whether it's a fresh coat of paint, new appliances, or landscaping. When buyers don't have to worry about making repairs, they'll be more inclined to pay a premium.

Maximize Your Home's Value: Remember, rolling a \$20,000 renovation cost into a 30-year loan is easier for a buyer than having to pay upfront. This investment could not only increase your sale price, but also make your home more attractive to buyers.

For Both:

Work with a Professional: Don't rely on a friend who "knows someone." Work with

a professional real estate agent who has the experience, network, and negotiation skills to get you the best deal. A seasoned agent can leverage relationships with lenders and vendors to ensure you stay ahead in this market.

The Domenech Effect: Why You Need Us on Your Side

At the end of the day, the key to success in today's real estate market is knowledge, preparation and hope for the future. Whether you're buying or selling, the right strategy and support can make all the difference.

If you're thinking of buying, or want to know the current value of your home and how you can increase your equity for the future, don't hesitate to reach out. I've got the experience and network to help you win, no matter what the market throws our way in 2025 and beyond.

Contact me at 850-543-1418 for personalized advice and let's talk about how The Domenech Effect can help you achieve your real estate goals.

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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!

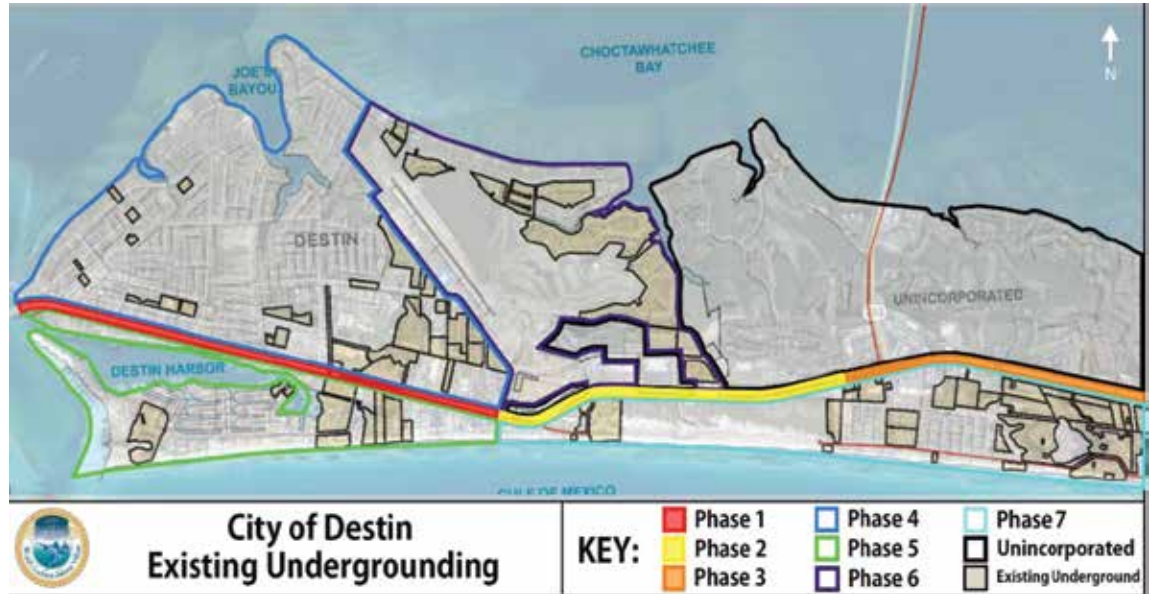
TY: Our underground utilities project kicked off in November. This will not only be terrific for resiliency in storms, but also aesthetically it's much more pleasing without extra overhead wires. What all area encompasses Phase 1, which is the current work being done?

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 under-



ground 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, Florida Power & Light (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.

5

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Love and Fashion Is in the Air!

BY LIESEL SCHMIDT

Welcome to February—the month of amethysts, violets and—of course—so many pink and red heart-shaped everything that you have no excuse for forgetting that Valentine’s Day is mere weeks away. And while love is in the air, we at Blue Bay Lifestyle Co. can’t think of a better time to dive into date-night dressing.

For those of us who have put thought and effort into what we wear on a date only to have the other party show up in dirty jeans and a ratty tee after mowing the lawn—well, the importance of “date night dressing” is not a point that needs much making. What you wear—i.e., the care you take—in getting ready to go out, whether it’s with your friends, your spouse, your significant other or even someone you’re on a date with for the very first time, shows that you consider them worth making an effort over. So, what, pray tell, constitutes proper date night attire? As with anything, the answer is situational and depends on the type of date. For instance, are

we talking a casual coffee date, or are you headed to an upscale restaurant or fancy party? Is there an activity involved—say, hiking or bowling? Weather is also an important consideration. After all, if you’re uncomfortable because you’re too cold or even overly warm, you won’t be able to enjoy the actual date.

Casual First Dates: As anyone who’s spent time swimming in the dating pool knows, first dates can be stressful simply for the fact that you’re headed into a situation filled with unknowns—making your choices over what to wear even more difficult. Nine times out of ten, your first date will be on the casual side—which means opting for something comfortable yet fashionable.

Ladies, denim on denim has made a resurgence. So, consider pairing Liverpool’s fitted jeans with a concert T-shirt and a denim blazer. Top it off with Maui Jim oversized sunglasses, a classically chic leather purse, like one from Hobo, and a pair of Aetrex leather flats or mules.

Guys, try a collared shirt from



Vuori or Flag & Anthem paired with Vuori khakis. You’ll look pulled together and confident, and your date will feel like you took time to look good for them.

Coffee Meet-Ups: Coffee dates are a common choice for first dates, because they offer a low-pressure atmosphere for the getting-to-know-you game. Your outfit should match the laid-back vibe of the date. Keep it low-key,

easy, and chic. Once again, jeans will be your friend here. Try styling some high-rise jeans with a striped cardigan from Flag & Anthem or bomber-style jacket from Liverpool, depending on the weather. White sneakers and a simple leather belt keep the look classic, while a fun cross-body bag from lululemon or Vuori adds a pop of color and personality.

For the male counterparts of the equation, why not break out a pair of Vuori Sunday Joggers and a North Face three-quarter zip-up? You’ll exude comfort without looking sloppy, and—who knows—you might end up extending the date for a walk or a few frames at the bowling alley. So, you’ll be ready to roll for whatever comes next.

Movie Nights: Since the advent of motion pictures, movies have been a go-to date option for couples, whether they’re on a first date or can’t remember a time when they weren’t together. Sure, movie dates are casual—but you still want to look stylish. Just because you’ll spend hours in the dark doesn’t mean you can

Continued on page 22



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(Located in the Run With It plaza)

Throw Pillows 101: The Do's and Don'ts



By KIM SCHNEIDER,
COASTAL DESIGN BY KIM

Throw pillows are everything! Okay, I'll admit it... throw pillows are not an essential item in our homes. Some even say they're not necessary; but I beg to differ. Throw pillows can absolutely help change

the look of a room. They can add texture, color, prints and patterns to your space and even take attention away from that piece of furniture that you're not ready to replace yet. Throw pillows are front and center in most spaces and here's a few tips on how you can make sure your pillows don't fall flat.

DO: Buy pillow covers or fabric that will add color, texture, print, plaid or patterns to your sofa. This allows you to add personality to your space that's uniquely yours.

DON'T: Refrain from using the pillows that came with your couch on the couch. They're too matchy-matchy and don't usual-

ly add much personality. However, you can use those pillows on a chair (since most chairs are in a different fabric than the sofa) to create a cohesive look. You can also use a pillow cover to create a new look in another room.

DO: Invest in good pillow inserts such as a 50/50 blend of feathers and down. But, if you've got allergies or prefer not to have anything from an animal, I highly recommend a down alternative fill.

DON'T: Whatever you do, don't by foam inserts. They tend to go flat and become shapeless. This ends up making your throw pillows look cheap.



DO: For that overstuffed look, always buy an insert that is 2-4 inches larger than the cover. For example, if you have a 20x20 pillow, purchase a 22x22 or 24x24 insert.

DON'T: Avoid keeping the insert that came with the pillow your purchased. They're never full enough and are almost always too flat, unless you've purchased a high-end pillow. Those are typically sold with the upgraded inserts.

DO: Buy pillow covers that have full sized zippers. This will allow you to accommodate the larger sized inserts and it will also allow you to easily change your pillow covers and reuse the inserts.

DON'T: Try not to flatten your inserts once you've fluffed them. You don't want them to lose the shape or get lumpy

when it's time to use them again.

DO: Go big! Bigger is better when it comes to throw pillows. In fact, 20x20 is as small as you should go on a sofa. To achieve a designer look, try mixing the sizes of your pillows. A great combination of pillows is 22x22, 20x20 and a 10x20 on one side of your sofa and a 20x20 and 18x18 on the

other side. Mixing fabrics, textures and prints, stripes, etc., is best.

DON'T: Try not to use a bunch of small pillows on your sofa. It looks messy, lacks in visual interest and has that off-the-shelf look.

By now, I'm sure you can see why I think throw pillows really are everything! I hope you can agree that throw pillows have the potential to completely change the look of your space. They can help pull your room together and shouldn't be an afterthought. If you're still unsure how to get the perfect throw pillow vibe in your home, Coastal Design by Kim is just a phone call away. Contact us today at (850) 904-6622 to schedule an appointment or you can visit our website at www.coastaldesignbykim.com.

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850.904.6622

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LOVE & FASHION

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get away with looking like you got dressed in the dark. Think comfortable, a little bit flirty and 100-percent put-together. And remember that movie theaters are typically aggressively air-conditioned, so layering is ideal. Try a cute jacket paired over a bodysuit with a plunging neckline for a comfortable, sexy look and complete the outfit with a crossbody bag and Aetrex ankle boots for a modern vibe.

Guys will want effortless comfort and style, as well; so, check out Roark's tees to pair with your favorite jeans or joggers.

Romantic Dinners: Dinner dates are a classic option for romancing—and who doesn't love to get dressed up for a night out on the town? Ladies, you'll want to balance out how much skin you're showing. For short dresses, keep the skin exposure up top minimized with

long sleeves or a high neckline. Longer length skirts, dresses or faux-leather trousers give you the opportunity to show off a little with a deep-V neckline or an off-the-shoulder top. Embrace the idea of getting dressed up and add some fun high heels and accessories.

Step up your game, gentlemen, with comfortable but stylish button downs from Flag & Anthem and some sharp trousers from Vuori. Your lady will appreciate the effort, and you'll feel like you're worthy of her company.

Whatever the occasion, check out all the date night-worthy options at Blue Bay Lifestyle Co. in Fort Walton Beach. From footwear and accessories to dresses, bottoms and jackets, you'll find a look to love.

*bluebaylifestyle.com,
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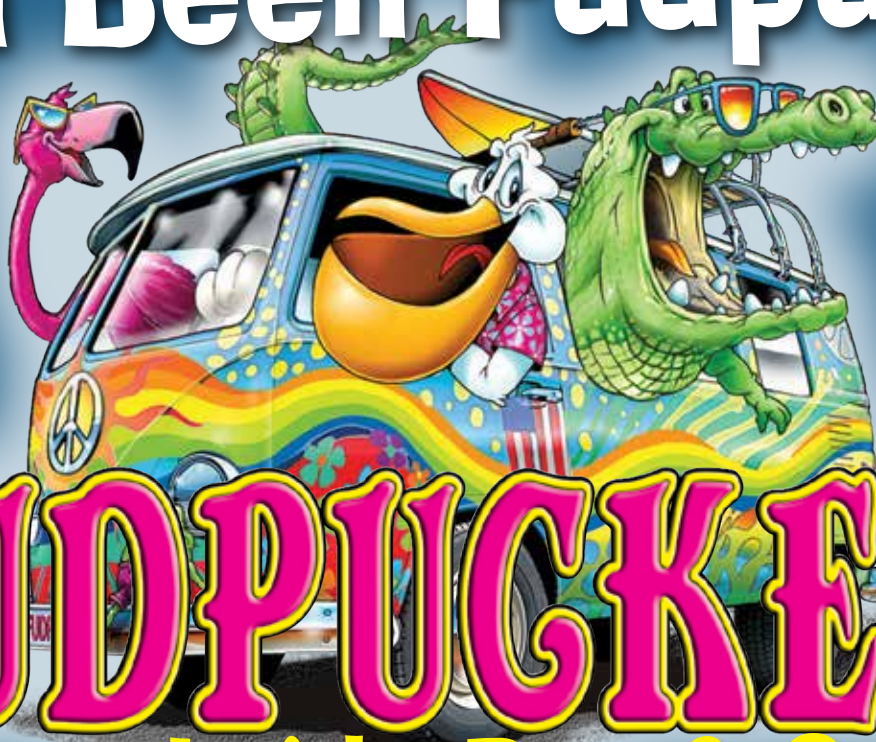
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AJ's Seafood & Oyster Bar

SUPER BOWL PARTY AT AJ'S DESTIN, Sun. Feb. 9th!

Join AJ's for the biggest game of the year at AJ's Destin! Come early to snag the best seats, because no matter what team you're cheering for, you won't want to miss the action on the largest TV in town! With TVs at the upstairs bar and downstairs, plus surround sound, you'll feel like you're right in the game! Enjoy Specialty Burgers and Drink Specials all night long! Register for Super Bowl Giveaways every quarter! Plus, enter to win a 65" TV to be given away in the 4th quarter.

"Let the Good Times Roll" at AJ's on the Destin Harbor Saturday, March 1. The Mardi Gras Street Party kicks off at 2 p.m. with Dikki Du and The Zydeco Krewe playing on the outdoor Jumbotron stage. The parade rolls in at 4 p.m., bringing with it a spectacular display of beads, dazzling floats and street performers that you won't want to miss! The parade starts at AJ's and travels down the harbor to HarborWalk Village!

Since 1984, AJ's Seafood and Oyster Bar has been serving cold Gulf Coast oysters and cool libations. 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 ex-



citing water activities in the Destin area. AJ's serves up delicious daily specials, mouth-watering drinks plus entertaining live music all month.

(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 on draft. Some of the specialties include little neck clams, freshly shucked raw oysters, New England-style clam chowder and jumbo shrimp cocktail. With big screen TVs all around and March madness, there's no bad seat in the house. So, come by and watch the games all season long. Happy Hour Specials from Mon.-Fri., 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. Auston'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. Check out February's amazing live music line-up at Facebook.com/austonson98.

(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 all month long. 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.

(850) 837-3645

288-B Harbor Blvd., Destin

Boathouseoysterbardestin.com

Café Destin

Looking for dining the entire family can enjoy? Looking for a place to work with free WiFi while enjoying your cup of coffee? For breakfast and lunch, Café Destin offers an expanded menu serving breakfast staples such as pancakes, waffles with Nutella, omelets, eggs benedict, biscuits and gravy and more. For a lighter take, it also has a variety of fancy toasts (avocado, salmon and more), along with pastries and muffins. For lunch, choose from a variety of burg-

ers, sandwiches and salads. You will love the full-service coffee shop, offering everything from hot or iced fresh, local Amavida coffee to espresso and lattes. And there are diverse fresh fruit smoothies and a variety of tantalizing teas. Check out the special kids menu, too. Indoor and outdoor seating on the large covered patio 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.

(850) 424-6777

985 US-98 E, Destin

cafedestin.com

FUBAR Pizza Bar

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

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

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

850-226-7084

114 Amberjack Dr.,

Okaloosa Island

fubarfwb.com

Continued on page 26

BOATHOUSE

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



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DINING

continued from page 24

Fudpucker's Beachside Bar & Grill

"Ya Ain't Been Pucked Til Ya Been Fudpucked!" Fudpucker's Beachside Bar & Grill in Destin has been locally owned and operated since its inception in 1982. Fudpucker's restaurant stands out by being dedicated to its owners' three favorite "F" words: Food, Fun and Family. Fudpucker's is not just a restaurant, it's not just a bar, it's a one-of-a-kind entertainment experience, and one that can be enjoyed by locals, kids and families of all ages and all occasions with plenty of fun included!. Bring your family and come for the food! Come for the fun! Get your Birthday or Valentine's Day shopping done with a Fudpucker's gift card or shop the Fudpucker's gift shop for unique gifts and merchandise all year long!

This month, laugh till you can't stop at Everything Is Funny Comedy Show, a LIVE interactive comedy show, Wednesday, Feb. 12 at 6:30 p.m., with a panel of hilarious comedians. Each comic has 5-10 minutes to

perform some of their best jokes and then they are interviewed live in front of an audience.

Comedians include Patrick Sirmon, Nick Brackett, Jeff Vance, Asa Dalphone, Yasha Kuzmin and Hunter Stuart.

(850) 654-4200
20001 Emerald Coast Pkwy.
Destin
fudpucker.com

Melting Pot Destin

Known as the most romantic restaurant nationwide, Melting Pot Destin is offering amazing Valentine's experiences all month.

Family Valentine's Day: Bring your little Valentines in and celebrate love with the whole family on February 8th and 9th from Noon to 3:45 p.m. at Melting Pot! Get a meal for a family of four for just \$199.95. Reserve a table today! Reservations Required. Includes Soda, coffee, iced tea

\$119.95 per family (2 adults, 2 kids), \$39.95 per adult, \$19.95 per child

"Gal"entine's Ladies' Night Out: Go all out with the girls during our early "Gal"entine's Celebration. Valentines isn't just about couples; it's about love – including the love for your



besties! Reserve a table to enjoy delicious fondue and a make-your-own bath salts bar!

\$32.00 per person 3-course; \$48.00 per person 4-course; Featured Cocktail: Love Martini

Valentine's Prix-Fixe Menu: Valentine's Day Prix-fixe dates: Celebrate with us on February 14th and 15th with one of our romantic package options! Three amazing ways to celebrate love and share a sweet evening together.

Valentine's Prix-Fixe Menu Dates:

February 14th–Open Noon to 11 p.m., Open Menu: Noon

to 3:45 p.m., Prix-Fixe Menu ONLY: 4 p.m. to 11 p.m.

February 15th–Open Noon to 10 p.m., Open Menu: Noon to 3:45 p.m., Prix-Fixe Menu ONLY: 4 p.m. to 10 p.m.

Prix-fixe menu available ALL FEBRUARY!

(850) 269-2227
11394 US-Hwy. 98
Miramar Beach
www.meltingpot.com/destin-fl

Tailfins Waterfront Grill

Hey sports fans, Tailfins Waterfront Grill is calling YOU! That's right y'all, Destin is a sports-loving town and Tailfins

is a must-be place in Destin to come and watch your team play. Cheer with Chiefs and Eagles fans watching the Super Bowl Feb. 9! And there's plenty of sports watching coming up with March Madness! Tailfins is a go-to destination for sports watching featuring more than 70 big screen TVs showing all college football games and Sunday Ticket.

Looking for a locals' favorite breakfast before the game? Start your day off right with Tailfins breakfast from 8-11 a.m., sev-

Continued on next page

Mardi Gras

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DINING

continued from page 26

en 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, upstairs, perfect for Super Bowl watching and upcoming March Madness!

DAILY CRUISES: Introducing Tailfins Island Adven-

ture! Departures seven days a week aboard "Always Workin'," Tailfins' 45-foot-long cruiser, and "Talk of Town" Tikis, Tailfins' newest, one-of-a-kind tiki boat. Both feature on-board restrooms and certified captains. Talk of the Town tikis are the only Coast Guard certified Tiki boats in the United States! Enjoy the Destin Harbor and Crab Island like never before. Choose between the three-hour tour, sunset cruise or Thursday night's spectacular fireworks cruise. Book online: tailfinsislandadventure.com.

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On the Harbor in Destin,

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DJ / Emcee

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Tequila's Mexican Restaurant

Did someone say Margaritas? Tequila's Sports Bar and Grill 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. "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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Destin Charity Wine Auction Celebrates 20 Years of Helping Local Children in Need April 25-26

Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation (DCWAF), one of the nation's premier fundraising organizations, is excited to announce the details of the

20th Anniversary Destin Charity Wine Auction presented by the Jumonville Family scheduled for April 25-26, 2025. All funds raised at the annual auc-

tion benefit children in need in Northwest Florida through the Foundation's 17 partner children's charities. In 2024, DCWAF donated \$3 million to



'DUE SOMETHING
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charity following one of its most successful auctions to date.

This year's auction will feature an impressive line-up of celebrity chefs and vintners from around the world, hosted by philanthropic couples within the local community. This year's vintner line-up includes owners and winemakers from AXR Napa Valley, Domaine Serene, Verité, Jarvis Estate, Memento Mori, Pahlmeyer, Lando Wines, Roy Estate, Seven Apart, Thompson 31Fifty, Dakota Shy, Perchance Estates, Innumero Wines, William Cole Winery, Chateau Montelena, Fisher Vineyards, Nysa, and many more.

Patrons attending the Destin Charity Wine Auction presented by the Jumonville Family can expect a weekend filled with exclusive wines and excellent food from a variety of celebrity chefs beginning Friday, April 25 with the patron dinner experience. Each year, patron dinners are hosted in the most exquisite homes and restaurants across the Emerald Coast. Each dinner features a nationally recognized chef paired with world-class vintners. This evening provides a unique opportunity for patrons to interact with fellow wine enthusiasts while enjoying innovative cuisine and the world's best wines. Each dinner benefits one of DCWAF's 17 partner children's charities.

All confirmed vintners and chefs are listed online at dcwaf.org/auction. More participants will be announced in the coming months as the auction approaches.

The Destin Charity Wine Auction is the main event of the weekend, beginning at 1pm on Saturday, April 26. The Reserve Tasting and Live Auction will be held under an air-conditioned tent at Grand Boulevard Sandestin Town Center. The event will feature distinctive wines from internationally acclaimed vintners poured and paired with cuisine curated by a selection of the area's top restaurants. The event culminates with a high-energy, live auction boasting rare and distinctive wines, spectacular trips, and other incredible one-of-a-kind items.

The Destin Charity Wine Auction presented by the Jumonville Family is hosted each year in conjunction with the South Walton Beaches Wine and Food Festival, which also takes place in Grand Boulevard Sandestin Town Center the same weekend. South Walton Beaches Wine and Food Festival will showcase hundreds of premium wines along with a diverse selection of spirits and culinary creations that deliver a world class experience to each guest throughout the weekend. Auction attendees also have access to South Walton Beaches Wine & Food Festival's Grand Tasting on Sunday, April 27, beginning at 1 p.m.

A limited number of patron packages are on sale now at dcwaf.org/tickets. Sponsorships for the event are also available by contacting the DCWAF staff at info@dcwaf.org.



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The Emerald Coast Boat & Lifestyle Show Returns February 28-March 2nd

\$40 Million Dollars of Marine Inventory Coming to Aaron Bessant Park
 More Than 400 Boats to be Displayed in Panama City Beach
 Curated Premier Line-Up of Exhibitors for Those Who Love the Coastal Lifestyle

It only happens one weekend a year. From the Panhandle to Tallahassee, boating, fishing and outdoor lifestyle enthusiasts gather in Panama City Beach for the Emerald Coast Boat and Lifestyle Show at Aaron Bessant Park, which returns February 28th-March 2nd.

Whether buying their first boat or upgrading their cur-

Bob Price of Panama City Beach, who never misses the show, purchased a 17-foot center console in 2019 and upgraded to a 24-foot center console last year. "Boat show pricing is a real thing," he said. "I know for a fact I got my best deal on both boats I purchased at this show."

In addition to boats, this show also highlights the best of

honor military members and first responders on Sunday. For the most up-to-date information

on the show, including dealers, brands, exhibitors, and vendors, or to purchase tickets in ad-

vance allowing you to 'skip the line,' visit EmeraldCoastBoat-Show.com



the Coastal Lifestyle. Attendees who love the sugar-white sand, glistening Gulf waters, sunrises and sunsets, salty breezes, and making family memories along the coast celebrate together at The Emerald Coast Boat and Lifestyle Show!

The curated line-up of exhibitors and vendors showcases boating, fishing, paddle boarding, kayaking, biking, electric carts, product demonstrations, seminars, beach furniture, coastal artists, condo and beach house furnishing, kids' activities, live music, food trucks, beer, and cocktails inspire thoughts of outdoor activities and glorious weather all along the Emerald Coast.

Parking for the show is always free at the adjacent Pier Park. The show will once again

rent model, boat buyers enjoy a shopping experience featuring the top dealers in the Southeast displaying more than 400 boats, valued at more than 40 million dollars. Bay boats, pontoons, cruisers, personal watercraft, and center consoles, from 17' to those well over 40', will be on display, along with the latest marine electronics and innovations.

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



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 Off the Hook

A New Chapter in Manatee Care: The Gulfarium Welcomes Lil Joe and Inigo

In a profound stride toward protecting one of Florida's most beloved marine creatures, the Gulfarium proudly announces the arrival of two rescued manatees—Lil Joe and Inigo—to its newly renovated manatee habitat. This milestone is the culmination of a three-year vision that began in 2022, when Patrick Berry, CEO of the Gul-

farium, first spoke with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service about creating a haven dedicated to nurturing manatees in need of long-term care.

Originally a 300,000-gallon dolphin habitat, the space, now named Manatee Cove, has been meticulously transformed to meet the specialized needs of rescued manatees. Improved

viewing windows invite guests into the gentle underwater world of these animals, while enhanced Life Support Systems (LSS), a dedicated medical area, and intentionally designed resting ledges ensure that Lil Joe, Inigo, and future manatee residents receive the focused attention they need to thrive.

Yet this undertaking is about far more than a physical renovation—it is a testament to the Gulfarium's dedication to giving manatees a second chance at life. With so many of these gentle giants, a federally threatened species, facing threats in the wild, it became clear that an expanded facility was necessary to help manatees beyond their initial critical care stages.

By joining forces with the Manatee Rescue and Rehabilitation Partnership (MRP), U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), the Gulfarium is now the first facility in the Florida Panhandle to provide housing for rescued manatees requiring extended care. This vital collaboration relieves pressure on central Florida's critical-care facilities, allowing them



these animals, we enable facilities in central Florida and elsewhere to devote critical resources to those manatees in acute need. We're proud to stand with our partners in the MRP to protect these vulnerable creatures."

Central to the Gulfarium's mission is public engagement. In addition to providing top-tier animal care, the new manatee habitat fosters a deeper understanding of manatees' plight. Through interactive programs, visitors can learn about Florida's marine ecosystems, ongoing rescue efforts, and the simple steps we can all take to protect wildlife.

This vision aligns seamlessly with the Gulfarium's accreditations by the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks & Aquariums (AMMPA) and the International Marine Animal Trainers' Association (IMATA), underscoring an unwavering commitment to the highest standards of animal care, conservation, and public education. By welcoming Lil Joe and Inigo, the Gulfarium demonstrates the power of compassion, collaboration, and community engagement in safeguarding Florida's remarkable marine life.

to focus on more urgent cases and strengthening statewide efforts to save manatees from harm. Additionally, the Gulfarium plans to further develop its manatee program by expanding to provide critical care for manatees in need within the northern Gulf Coast region.

Lil Joe and Inigo, who previously called The Seas with Nemo & Friends their home, will serve as living ambassadors for their species—sharing a message of resilience and hope with everyone who comes to see them. Visitors will discover their stories in a newly created education area, where daily chats and additional educational programming with the Gulfarium's team shine a light on the challenges manatees face in the wild and how each of us can play a role in their protection.

"The Gulfarium is honored to welcome Lil Joe and Inigo, two extraordinary manatees who will help illuminate the urgent conservation needs of their species," said Patrick Berry. "Our vision has always been to create a caring environment where manatees can continue their healing journeys while inspiring our guests to connect more deeply with marine life. By taking on the long-term care of

For those eager to learn more about manatees and experience the wonder of these gentle giants firsthand, Lil Joe and Inigo can be viewed as part of general admission to the Gulfarium. Guests are encouraged to explore Manatee Cove, attend daily educational chats, and discover how their own actions can make a positive impact on manatee conservation efforts.

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SWIMMING

continued from page 2

Coast Wildlife Refuge for rehabilitating marine life.

There were many obstacles, including the fact that the City of Destin and the Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation had both invested in the YMCA's Destin facility and lawsuits were pending. In late 2016, after those matters were settled in bankruptcy court, Pam and Kathi forged on to convince the MKA and the city to support their efforts to bring a pool back to Destin.

In January, 2017, an agreement was signed and once again crews of volunteers got to work.

"It was all those ugly colors," Pam recalled. "It looked like it belonged in a circus. We wanted it to be a place that people felt comfortable coming to and happy when they got there."

Eight months later, the Destin facility – now known as the Taj Renee Community Aquatic Center – opened.

Facility Manager Jackie White, who volunteered 20 hours a week during the rehabilitation phase, remembers the day well.

"It was Aug. 15, 2017, at 2:15 p.m.," White said. "I made a note to always mark that day in my head."

Today, the Taj serves as a hub for competitive swimming, hosting 20 meets a year for high school and middle school teams, as well as summer league and year-round teams like Coast Aquatics. Collegiate teams from across the southeast train there over winter break and the Panhandle Pirates Water Polo Club



practices there twice a week. Lap swim and deep water aquacise are offered year-round.

From October through April, the eight-lane competition pool, which is heated during the winter and chilled during the summer, is the center of activity. A family pool opens late in the

spring for aquacise, swim lessons, pool parties and family play time, closing each season with the Des-



tin Doggie Swim Day.

"People who didn't know Pam and me when we started this whole process thought we were crazy," Kathi said. "The people

that knew us, and they knew us because we had coached their kids, they believed we could do it. "And we did it."

More Info

The Emerald Coast Fitness Foundation, a local nonprofit, operates two pools open year-round to the public in Okaloosa County. Pay by the day, week, month, or purchase a 10-visit punch card.

temperature drops below 40 degrees.

Bernie R. LeFebvre Aquatic Center

1127 Hospital Road (entrance is off Lewis-Turner Boulevard), Fort Walton Beach, 850-863-7946

Taj Renee Community Aquatic Center

4345 Commons Drive West, Destin, 850-837-7946

Eight lane 25-yard pool heated and open year-round. Facility closes when the air

Six-lane 25-yard indoor heated pool, open year around with 10 aquacise classes a week and hours of lap swim every day. Family swim times are also available at discounted rate.

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 Sports

ATHLETES

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awarded to an area athlete who best demonstrates a balance between academics, athleticism, leadership, community service and faith.

Based in Fort Walton Beach, the All Sports Association is a non-profit organization focused on supporting local youth sports programs. Founded in 1970, the association has raised over \$2 million in the last 10 years, due to the support of its volunteers and supporters. These funds help various youth sports organizations and charitable causes, fostering the development of young athletes.

Key beneficiaries include the Boys & Girls Club of the

Emerald Coast, Special Olympics Florida-Okaloosa, Eleanor J. Johnson Youth Center, and Okaloosa Walton FCA. The association's dedication to youth sports and community development is also seen in its Hall of Fame, which honors individuals who've made significant contributions to sports in Northwest Florida.

Join All Sports Association for a fun evening supporting this year's award winners! There will be great food, silent and live auctions and more! The event starts at 6 p.m. (Doors open at 5:30 p.m.) The program will begin at 6:45 p.m. The silent auction takes place from 5:30-6:30 p.m. and the live action takes place during the event.

To purchase tickets:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/all-sports-association-annual-awards-tickets-1146081453479>. All tickets sales are final. To become a table sponsor: ASATickets850@gmail.com.

"This event is more than just a celebration; it's a testament to the hard work and dedication of our young athletes and the community that supports them," said Bowyer. "Having Urban Meyer speak adds an extra layer of inspiration that we hope will resonate with everyone involved!"

For more information, visit allsportsassociation.com or [Facebook.com/AllSportsAssociation](https://www.facebook.com/AllSportsAssociation).

YOUR FUTURE

continued from page 11

ment and the culinary arts.

✓ **Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) Program:** DHS students are proving themselves as top business minds in the state! Our FBLA team is currently:

#1 in Florida out of 1,201 teams in the High School Stock Market Game.

#1 in the district for Entrepreneurship the second year in a row!

Students don't just learn about business—they become future business leaders!

✓ **Prime Location & Convenience:** Located in the heart of Destin, DHS offers easy access to a top-tier academic education and extra-curricular opportunities.

✓ **A Boutique School Experience:** Meaningful teacher-student relationships allow students to thrive academically while also receiving support and guidance to plan for their future, empowering them to reach their full potential.

DHS is dedicated to preparing students academically, phys-

ically and mentally to become responsible, productive and empowered citizens. Embracing the area's history as a tourist destination, military hub and "world's luckiest fishing village," and supported by strong public/private partnerships, our diverse and specialized programs provide the foundation each student needs to secure a solid future.

DHS isn't just a school—it's a family!

Anchored in excellence, DHS provides an exceptional, tuition-free education where passion meets performance in the classroom, on the stage, on the field and beyond. Whether you're a scholar, an athlete, an artist or an aspiring entrepreneur, you'll find your place to grow and shine here.

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Staying Healthy This Cold & Flu Season: A Q&A with Dr. Karen DeVore

BY BOBBY PARKER

As the seasons change and the air gets crisp, so does the likelihood of sniffles, sore throats and seasonal viruses. The Tortoise Clinic, located in Santa Rosa Beach, believes in blending Eastern and Western medicine to support the immune system naturally. Their medical-grade dispensary, open to the public, offers third-party tested supplements, vitamins, and herbs to ensure quality, safety, and therapeutic effectiveness.

We sat down with Dr. Karen DeVore, Naturopathic Doctor at the Tortoise Clinic, to discuss immune support, stress management and how natural supplements can play a key role in overall wellness this time of year.

Dr. Karen, what are your favorite formulas during cold and flu season?

Dr. Karen: Prevention is key when it comes to cold and flu season, and supporting the immune system proactively is the best way to keep illness at

bay. For my family, I rely on a few key supplements to give our immune defenses a strong foundation.

One of my favorites is Pure Defense, a powerful all-in-one formula that includes vitamin C, NAC, elderberry, quercetin, vitamin D, zinc, and a probiotic—all crucial for upper respiratory health and immune support. I also use Viracid, which has broad-spectrum antiviral properties with lysine and vitamin A, echinacea, astragalus, and andrographis. Either formula is great for both prevention and early intervention if you start feeling under the weather.

Beyond supplements, lifestyle factors play a huge role in immune health. Adequate sleep, stress management, proper hydration and a nutrient-dense diet all help the body fight off infections more effectively. If you're not prioritizing these areas, even the best supplements won't be as effective.

Stress can take a huge



toll on the immune system. What are your go-to recommendations for managing stress naturally?

Dr. Karen: Absolutely! Chronic stress weakens the immune system and can make us more susceptible to illness. When someone comes to us struggling with stress, the first step is to assess how stress is affecting their biochemistry—including hormones, sleep, and metabolism.

One of my favorite stress-support supplements is

Cortisol Manager, an ashwagandha-based formula that's particularly effective for people dealing with prolonged stress, sleep disturbances, and difficulty managing weight. For those who need more adrenal support, HPA Adapt is a combination of adaptogenic herbs to help the body adapt to stress more efficiently. Chelated Magnesium L-Threonate is a favorite of mine to support the brain with anxiety due mental stress, and is a great option for those needing support with focus, memory, and mood.

In addition to supplements, I encourage everyone to prioritize stress-relief techniques including meditation, breathwork, acupuncture, exercise, and mindfulness practices—all of which can help manage stress and the toll it takes on the body, and support the nervous system.

What is your favorite way to naturally support kids and teens?

Dr. Karen: Although noth-

ing takes the place of sunshine, a balanced and low sugar diet, exercise, and limited screen use, a great liquid multivitamin with methylated B vitamins and minerals is a great way to get good nutrients into sensitive pallets. My favorite is by Eddie Bee, called Liquid Multivitamin + Mineral Support. This can be paired with a high quality probiotic like a refrigerated formula by Klaire or Metagenics.

How can people access high-quality supplements, and why does it matter?

Dr. Karen: Not all supplements are created equal, and quality matters immensely when it comes to effectiveness and safety. We stock medical-grade brands at the Tortoise Clinic that undergo third-party testing to ensure purity, potency, and proper formulation. Each product is vetted for therapeutic dosages and clinically-backed ingredients, so our patients can

Continued on page 40



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BY STEPHENIE CRAIG,
JOURNEY BRAVELY

Have you ever done something kind for someone you value to then feel like it went largely unnoticed? Do you feel frustrated when you spend time and energy investing in a relationship to feel like the other person doesn't really see or appreciate your investment? Doing thoughtful things for your loved ones matters. However, the human instinct, most often, is to do for others what you would like someone to do for you. And, while that approach works sometimes, often the other person in the relationship feels most loved and seen in ways that might be different than what helps you feel loved and seen.

Maybe you are spending energy cleaning your child's room and packing time consuming lunches when what really makes your child feel seen and loved is playing a game with you. Maybe you are spending energy buying something for your partner when

Investing Relationship Energy Strategically

what really makes them feel seen or loved is time and meaningful conversation. Maybe you are spending energy planning a party for a friend when what makes them feel most loved is spontaneous lunch with you.

Investing energy in relationships unintentionally can create frustration, confusion and disconnection over time as both parties can end up feeling unseen. So, how do you figure out how to invest energy in your relationships strategically so your effort is landing in a way that feels meaningful to the other person? And, how do you learn to communicate your needs clearly to others, so they can invest energy strategically in their relationship with you?

Seven Ways to Invest Relationship Energy Strategically

1 - Let go of mind reading. Mind reading is a myth. Culture has sold you a false idea that mind reading equals love. No one can read your mind and you can't read theirs. And, that's perfectly okay. Let go of expecting yourself or others to read minds when it comes to what makes you or them feel seen and loved.

2 - Reflect on what makes you feel seen and loved.



Notice what makes you feel valued, connected, deeply seen and known. Do you feel most seen with side by side time together, meaningful conversation, acts of service, physical touch, encouraging words, gifts, surprises? Notice that what makes you feel seen works for you but is not necessarily the same for others.

3 - Ask the other person what makes them feel seen and loved. Be curious and take notes. Remember, your way of feeling seen is not the right way, it's just your way. Let the other person have space to need and want what feels best and most connecting to them in the relationship.

4 - Make adjustments in your approach. Make consistent and meaningful efforts to spend more energy on what helps the other person feel seen and loved and less energy on things that do not matter as much to them.

5 - Tell people what you need. Communicate clearly what helps you feel seen and

connected in your relationships. Remember that communicating what you want and need does not take away from the value when the other person gives you what you're asking for. Being clear about your needs makes you more likely to get what you need and to feel connected in your relationships. Instead of hoping someone reads your mind about wanting a nice dinner for your birthday, tell them a nice dinner would make you feel loved.

6 - Give and notice positive feedback. When your friend does something that felt meaningful, tell them directly what it meant to you. When your family member tells you the fo-

cus time you spent with them was meaningful, take mental note and prioritize spending focused time with them.

7 - Initiate check in conversations periodically. Try directly discussing connection in your relationships. Ask the other person how it's going for them? Don't judge their response. Share your connection needs.

Spending your relationship energy strategically feels better and much less frustrating. Be patient with yourself and others as you learn. Connect with us along your journey for coaching and counseling at Journeybravely.com.



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Self-Care Corner: It's Time for Love & Romance! Hugs & Kisses Please!



BY KRISY ANDERSON, OWNER,
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I love Valentine's Day, because it's a special day dedicated to expressing love for yourself and for others. We all deserve and need love in our lives. So, don't neglect this special time. Set time aside and make a point to spoil yourself (and/or a loved one) all month long. You deserve it!

Make your Valentine's month extra special by spending it with us! Spice up your date night with ultimate relaxation, pampering and self-care. Or, bring in your significant other for a combined spa package before you head out for date night. You both deserve relaxing moments together.

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THRIVE

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as yoga, meditation or nature walks. Regular physical activity can be a powerful tool for maintaining mental well-being.

Functional Fitness Training: Functional fitness training focuses on exercises that mimic everyday movements, enhancing overall strength and flexibility. Exercises like squats, lunges and push-ups improve balance, coordination and endurance, making daily activities easier and safer.


Health/Wellness Coaching: Health and wellness coaching is gaining traction as

people seek holistic approaches to fitness. Coaches provide personalized guidance on nutrition, exercise and lifestyle choices looking at the body as a whole and being proactive in catching potential issues before they begin.

Remember, the key to thriving in 2025 is staying informed and adaptable. Embrace these trends, experiment with new techniques and find what works best for you. Let's make this year our healthiest and happiest yet! Be Active, Stay Active!!

Lisa Leath Turpin is a degreed and certified health and fitness lifestyle coach and consultant who has devoted her

life to motivating and strengthening the body and mind of others. With over 20 years' experience, Lisa has a B.S. degree in Sports & Fitness Management from the University of Alabama, developed and managed the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Health & Wellness Facility and programs in Huntsville, Ala., is board certified by the National Board of Fitness Examiners and possesses certifications from AFAA, Polestar/Balanced Body, Reebok U, SCW Fitness and American Heart Association. She is currently a group exercise leader at Destin Health & Fitness and an independent personal trainer in the Destin area, diversely and extensively trained in classical and modern Pilates, lifestyle management, personal training, group exercise and post-rehabilitation.




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How's Your Vagus Nerve?



By KAY LEAMAN, HEALTH ARCHITECT, HEALTHYDAY HEALTHYLIFE

This very crucial nerve (the 10th of 12 cranial nerves) winds its way from the brain down the spinal column to the heart, lungs, liver, stomach, spleen and GI tract. As part of the parasympathetic system (rest and digest) its role is to transmit signals from the brain to the body. This nerve plays a role in our heart rate, immune system, mood, mucus and saliva production, skin and muscle sensations, speech, taste and more.

When the vagus nerve is not functioning properly, one can experience symptoms such as heart rate irregularities like bradycardia (slow beat), palpitations or an irregular heart-beat. Our mood and wellbeing can change due to a change in the neurotransmitter levels and stress responses. These heightened stress levels and/or mood swings can be experienced with no apparent cause.

Managing daily stress is a huge part in our optimal health. Because stress stems from the sympathetic system (fight or flight), it is important to have a strong vagus nerve which tells the sympathetic system that everything is ok and we can relax. This happens by stimulating the vagus nerve.

By exercising and stretching the vagus nerve on a regular basis, we can build up a resilience against stress. There are many different ways we can do this, and if you meditate, exercise, sing or gargle, you are on the right track. This being said, exercising the vagus nerve when we are experiencing stress or symptoms of a compromised nerve can be done at work, in the car, at the movies or while fishing. In other words, any time anywhere.

Other things we can do to

keep this very important nerve strong are:

- Strength training
- Running
- Yoga
- Diaphragmatic breathing
- Box breathing (inhale (nose) for 4, hold for 4, exhale (mouth) for 4, hold for 4)
- Fasting
- Massage
- Laughter (Fake it if you have to.)

- Spending time outside
- Stimulating acupressure points: carotid artery and 3 points on the ear.
- Tapping - EFT (emotional freedom technique)
- Singing - slower songs are better
- Gargle - 30 to 60 seconds. This causes vibration in the throat which stimulates the nerve.

There are plenty of videos online with stretches and other exercises. There are also machines that can stimulate the nerve. My vote is to incorporate a few of the options into my daily routines. The one thing I didn't mention that can stimulate the

nerve is a cold face plunge. So, if you're a cold plunger go for it. I'll keep my face warm and happy as I make a joyful noise in song.

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 Business

Insights for Investors: Some Things to Watch for 2025



BY MAURICE STOUSE, FINANCIAL ADVISOR & BRANCH MANAGER

Leading off our list would be interest rates. We watch, daily, the yield on the 10-year U.S. Treasury Note (USTN). That is a leading indicator for the stock and bond markets. It also is a leading indicator for mortgage rates as well. It is important to be aware of how changes in the rate can impact stocks. A rising yield means a declining price for bonds (and investors are selling bonds and buying stocks). A declining yield might mean Treasury prices are going up and there is more demand for those, and investors are moving assets from stocks to bonds.

When we refer to **investors**, we are pointing more toward professional investors vs. individual investors. By some

indicators, professional investors account for almost 80% of the daily volume in the stock market. What or who are professional investors? Those could be hedge funds, mutual funds, private equity funds, trading firms, pension funds as well as others. Professional investors are less likely to be buy and hold vs. individual investors, because they rely on shorter term profits or returns for performance (in our opinion).

The question on everyone's mind is will **rates** on the 10 year remain the same, head higher or go lower? A few things impact that, the first of which is inflation. While inflation has come down, it remains to be seen if it will continue to decline, head back up or remain the same.

Next would be the **borrowing demand of the U.S. Treasury**. That is from the issuance of new debt as well as the refinancing of maturing debt.

Lastly is the **strength of the U.S. dollar**. At this writing, it is up in value almost 4% over the past 12 months. Many would think the dollar is too high citing the fact that a too strong dollars makes U.S. exports costlier overseas.

Next, we look at **valuations**. In other words, the prices for



stocks and bonds and if they are becoming over-valued, undervalued or fairly valued. We would agree the overall stock market (after two straight years of 20% returns) has grown rapidly and is overvalued. What follows would mean earnings would have to up or prices would have to come down. We do also share the concern that a majority of the returns have been from just 10-20 stocks.

Bonds, on the other hand, might be seen as cheap. The risk with bonds is if they move down from where you bought them and you feel like it is a losing proposition. A few things about bonds: 1) You know what you will have and when you will have it. 2) You can sell them at any time (subject to market movement) and they help reduce risk in your overall portfolio. We have heard and read that Warren Buffet, the famous U.S. investor, prefers stocks over bonds, because of the greater potential over time. But we have also learned that he does include short-term bonds in his holdings, but also that he currently has built a lot into cash or money markets. Money markets continue to offer a compelling yield and do not come with the same risk as bonds—after having said we believe bonds can be used to diversify portfolios. The

same can be said for tax-free bonds which have experienced lower prices and hence higher yields.

Gold, silver and other precious U.S. metals, we feel, should play a part in a long-term, diversified portfolio. We also believe that a small percentage of commodities in a portfolio can be beneficial. Also take note that precious U.S. metals, gold and silver and others have seen significant rises in price over the past 12 months. Many wonder what might be driving that, particularly with the U.S. dollar so high. We think it is a lot of foreign buying that has driven those prices. By the way, foreign investment in the U.S. stock market has grown significantly over the past decade. The strong dollar has helped to fuel that. We do take note that if the dollar were to eventually begin to decline that investments in foreign markets might see stronger returns.

And then there is **crypto**. That is a difficult one to address as many investors do not want to overlook what might be an emerging choice for them to allocate their assets. Raymond James has continued to decline to offer trading in these types of assets and we take note of that with a cautionary tone. We agree that it has added elements of risks, among them, as Raymond James points out, lack of regulation. There are some known and some unknown risks and we do not encourage investors to consider investing in crypto assets at this time.

There is much more for savers and investors to consider when it comes to investing and saving. Investment objective, time frame and risk tolerance cannot be overstated in their importance when making investment decisions.

Maurice Stouse is a Financial Advisor and the branch manager of The First Wealth Management/Raymond James. Main office: The First Bank, 2000 98 Palms Blvd., Destin, 850.654.8124. Raymond James advisors do not offer tax advice. Please see your tax professionals. Email: Maurice.stouse@raymondjames.com.

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Book Review: Secure Love by Julie Menanno



REVIEWED BY MICHAEL McMANUS LCSW

Reading "Secure Love" by

Julie Menanno is like having a heart-to-heart chat with your best friend about what makes relationships tick. One of the main things I love about this book is that it gives specific examples and strategies of how to interrupt toxic communication patterns that couples have been unconsciously repeating for years. Many couples that come in to see me report that they start out discussing a seemingly simple topic and then it escalates into an argument and they don't even know how they

got there. Julie breaks down the often confusing world of love and attachment styles in a way that's super easy to understand. You don't need a psychology degree to get it!

Imagine this book as your personal guidebook to love, where each chapter feels like a cozy conversation over coffee. The author shares relatable stories that make you nod your head in agreement, thinking, "Wow, that's so me!" It's all

Continued on page 44



Say Goodbye to Toxicity: Building Healthy Teams with Confidence - Part 4 of 6

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 misinter-

pret 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 6-part series, we are talking about six ways to improve Building Healthy Teams with Confidence. The fourth way is:

Our approach leverages emotional intelligence to repair and enhance team dynamics. Understanding, gratitude, thankfulness, and appreciation are at the heart of our strategy. By cultivating these team values, we create an environment where team members feel valued and supported. This emotional foundation encourages openness and collaboration,

allowing individuals to express themselves without fear of judgment.

To learn how the Ignite Course can transform your team, visit Rocket Fuel Coach. 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."

Cheers,

Bill Mason

Publisher's Note: To catch up on Parts 1, 2 & 3 of "Say Goodbye to Toxicity," visit MyDestinLife.com and view November and December 2024 and January 2025 issues.

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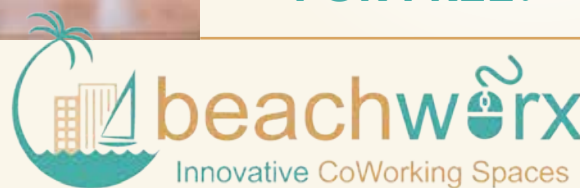


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Musing



A Pastor's Ponderings: The Rude Funeral Figure

BY PASTOR DAVE HOLLAND

My title may remind you of the rude relative who is inappropriate at a family funeral. You know, the one who lets his cell phone ring and then talks loudly. Or they cry noisily on your shoulder. No, I'm talking about Jesus.

Jesus is the rudest funeral guest ever. Every funeral Christ attended he raised the dead person back to life. That will ruin the best of funerals, especially when it's your own. The ladies at the tomb discovered it's hard to prepare Jesus' body for burial

because he just won't stay down. Since the Holy Spirit raised Christ from the dead, it prompts several questions for me.

Who is Jesus? What did He say? What did He do? What does that mean for us? 80% of Americans cannot answer these questions with any reasonable amount of certainty or faith. This fact disturbs me and drives me to share this living message of Jesus.

The Lord wakes me up every morning to write the answers to these questions from the Gospel of Luke. You are holding the result in this paper. Each of my four books focuses on the Jesus chronicled in the Gospel of Luke. Each of these books contains 40 daily devotional studies written for the common

person. Without theological, denominational, or religious bias, my books are well received. I am humbled by the reader's response.

Though I pastored over 40 years, I've discovered most people today are not looking for God in church. They are searching for a God who will be active in their lives. That's what Jesus came to be. He gets into the nitty-gritty and the grime, the laughter and the agony. He wants to live in the sanctuary of people's hearts.

Funerals are not an attractive look for the title of a story. But we see Jesus assaulted at every turn in Luke. The religious community is at the point of attack, stabbing at Jesus as he marches toward Jerusalem.



colored tattoos and facial hardware. She asked about my books and when I described Jesus from the Gospel of Luke she said, "I would read a book like that, I would like to know that Jesus." How many others want to know Christ without religion?

I think we need to have a great, big ol' funeral for Jesus. But look out because dirt is going to fly. Hell will shake. Jesus will rise with a roar and dead people come to life. Somewhere along the line, the Holy Spirit will join us and show us the resurrected one—Jesus. That's when the fun starts.

Dave Holland pastored churches for over 38 years before retiring in Destin. He released his devotional-Bible study based on the Gospel of Luke called "Every Day Jesus: Experience the Jesus Who Ignites Your Soul." You can get a copy of this book from his website, DaveHolland.org, or Amazon.com. Contact him at davidvholland54@gmail.com. Pastor Dave is available to preach and teach at churches and conferences.

They feel threatened by the upstart rabbi from Galilee. Finally, they have him killed by the Romans. But like a life-preserver dragged deep in the water will continually rise to the surface—Jesus ruins the funeral. He rises to save all who believe.

Your Bible can be a tomb that condemns you to death and dust forever. Or it can be the birthplace of faith and resurrection power. Society thinks of Jesus as a dead, inactive figure buried in the tomb of history. But Jesus won't stay dead. He gets up, walks and talks with people. He's ALIVE.

I'm haunted by a young lady I met on an airplane years ago. Her hair was half shaved off her head, and she had various

STAYING HEALTHY

continued from page 33

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Sean of the South: Love



BY SEAN DIETRICH

We were newlyweds, living in a grungy apartment.

Each morning, I would wake before her. I would pass my morning hours writing poetry on a yellow legal pad, sipping coffee.

Mostly, I'd write the kinds of god-awful things you'd expect newlyweds to write. I'm talking painfully corny stuff. I'd leave these poems on slips of paper scattered throughout our apartment for her to find.

One such poem read:

"Together, the two of us,

"In thought, and deed, and breath, and heart,

"Shall never be lacerated apart."

Gag me with number-two pencil. "Lacerated?" What kind of a dork uses that word? In fact, I'm not certain this verb works in this particular case.

LACERATE [verb: las-uh-reyt] lac'er at'ed, lac'er at'ing
1. to tear; mangle; rip. Example: "Hey dude, that poem you wrote really freakin' lacerated."

My wife saved all my crummy poems in a shoebox, and today they reside in a storage closet.

Anyway, when we first married, we lived in an apartment that smelled like dead squirrels. I am not being figurative. I mean our apartment actually had a nest of decomposing squirrels in the attic above our master bedroom.

The place was tiny, and about as ugly as homemade soap. The tenant before us had painted the walls black and greenish-gray. Sherwin Williams officially titled this color "Seasick Granite®."

When we moved in, we made the place our own. We painted the walls brown and khaki. We bought a used coffee table and some scented candles.

My friend, Chubbs, found an old console television on the side of the road. I was lucky enough

to claim the TV before the garbage man came.

The thing was heavier than a dead preacher, but we got it up the stairs. Chubbs, however, would suffer from severe disc degenerative problems for the rest of his life.

Our building sat across the street from a Waffle House, a Chick-fil-A, and an ice cream shop. And this is why we gained nearly fifty pounds within our first year of marriage.

We never went to the movies because we didn't have the money. We ate Hamburger Helper without hamburger sometimes.

We saved our cash for a new window unit AC—our air conditioner was on the fritz. The thing would only work on days of the week beginning with "R."

On weekends, every weekend, we ate donuts. It was our simple ritual, and I loved it. Krispy Kreme was only a stone's throw from us, and when the hot-and-ready light would glow, by God, we were there.

Over donuts, we would talk for hours about nothing. Heavy doses of sugar can do things to the human mind. It can make a person honest.

She told me all her stories. I told her mine. You can do a lot of soul-searching over crullers.

My professional life was non-existent, I took whatever jobs I could get. I spent days crawling rooflines, swinging a hammer, or operating a commercial lawn mower. She worked as a preschool teacher at



church, or in a kitchen.

For extra income, I played piano at a Baptist church on Sundays, Sunday nights, Wednesday nights, Thursday night choir practices, and Saturday night prayer meetings.

We learned things about each other. We learned important things.

We learned how to argue in the middle of a Winn-Dixie, and how to attend two Thanksgivings in one day. How to share a sunset, seated on the hood of a truck. How to read in bed with a flimsy battery-powered book light.

We learned how to travel together with paper maps. And after years of practice, we finally learned how to make a bed together without me getting murdered.

We learned how to hold each other when loved ones die. We learned how to sit together—me reading a magazine, her playing a crossword puzzle.

We learned how to wring our hands in hospital waiting rooms. We learned how bury dogs with a shovel and a burial sheet.

We learned how to make a life together.

A lot has changed since those days, but I still wake early in the mornings to write. I don't use a legal pad anymore, I use a laptop.

This morning, however, I did not write. Instead, I sifted through our storage closet. I

found things. An old coffee-tin sewing kit, some scented candles, love poems, and the picture of a young man and his new wife in their first apartment.

In the picture, the place had ugly gray walls, but that's the only ugly thing about this photo.

He's holding her. She's holding him. They are young. Their skin is smooth. I wish I could tell you how much I love these two people in the picture.

I wish you could see their faces, and their punch-drunk smiles. You can tell they belong together by looking at them. You simply know that their names should never be said apart.

It's as though nothing bad in this life can ever touch them. As though the two of them, in thought, and deed, and breath, and heart, shall never be lacerated apart.

I suppose that word is growing on me.

Happy Valentine's Day, Jamie.






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Musing



Seeking Justice

Destin True Crime Club

Victimology: Part 2 of a Series on Homicide Investigations

BY MICHAEL YODER, RETIRED
FBI CRIMINAL PROFILER

Murder is an intentional act often as the result of extreme emotions such as anger, hatred, revenge, jealousy or even love. Or, it could be due to a desire to conceal a different crime (self-preservation) or to gain something (greed). A relationship between the murderer and the victim – however slight –

somehow causes this fatal interaction.

I recently watched a true crime show in which the victim was initially described as having no enemies. Yet, he was brutally murdered in his store and the safe was open. I wondered if my premise of extreme emotions was incorrect. As the investigators looked further, his best friend became a suspect.

The friend later confessed that he was jealous of the victim's successes and was angry that his friend refused to give him a loan to pay his gambling debts. It was only after the investigators dug into the victim's background and social circle that they came upon the "best friend" and his troubles.

The investigator must understand not only the victim's biographical information, such as name, age, gender, health status, living conditions prior to death and identification of immediate family members, but a deeper examination of every aspect of their lives prior to death. Victimology is the term used in the law enforcement community.

By determining the victim's acquaintances, their last known location and the reasons for their presence there, an investigator can effectively narrow down the suspect pool to individuals who were with the victim shortly before their death. Witnesses who observe prior events can further corroborate a suspect's culpability.

Victimology is composed of three major categories: background information, a timeline of the last known locations of the victim and risk assessment. Background information can include understanding the personality of the victim, lifestyle, routines and daily habits, employment, health habits and economic status. It also includes the victims' family, friends, acquaintances and any people interacting with the victim – both casually and more deeply. A timeline is then established in-



dicating where the victim was, when and why they were there. This is cross checked with anyone in the suspect pool to see if there are any unusual gaps or unexplained connecting points. Finally, an investigator must assess the level of risk-taking the victim engages in. A victim who routinely engages in risky behavior or interacts with violent or questionable people is at a higher risk and, consequently, has a larger pool of suspects. On the contrary, a victim who is risk adverse and constantly moves away from risky situations has a much smaller pool of suspects to investigate.

The well-known disappearance and murder of Laci Peterson by her husband, Scott Peterson (December 24, 2002), is a classic example of a low-risk victim. Laci, 8 months pregnant, stayed home most of the time and took care to protect her health and the baby. Inves-

tigators quickly looked at her husband as a prime suspect. By contrast, a high-risk victim could be a street prostitute, a drug user or a gang member. They are at risk from a multitude of people simply because of life choices. But, their murder still matters and deserves to be solved. The victim cannot speak on their own behalf, but it doesn't mean they can't help the investigation. Their lives matter, and victimology is a meaningful step.

If you have an interest in true crime and want to know how to become a sleuth, please join our Facebook page at Destin True Crime Club. We meet once a month to discuss our ongoing research of an actual cold case we choose and brainstorm ways to continue our research. This is a serious, but fun, group of people who have the passion to solve cases. Email me at myoder0361@gmail.com for questions or to request I speak to a group on a variety of violent crime issues.



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Sinfonia Gulf Coast Presents Crescendo! 2025: A Cultural & Culinary Extravaganza, Feb. 28 & March 2

Sinfonia Gulf Coast's Crescendo! 2025, its highly anticipated annual fundraiser will be held February 28 to March 2, 2025. This multi-day cultural and culinary extravaganza will bring together world-class entertainment, exceptional cuisine and fine wine in support of Sinfonia's music education and community outreach programs.

Crescendo! 2025 Lineup

Crescendo! Kick-Off Lunch: Thursday, Jan. 30 at Bijoux Restaurant + Spirits in Miramar Beach. This chic luncheon will feature award-winning cuisine, elegant wines, and exclusive shopping opportunities. Tickets are \$175 per person.

Vintner Dinners: Friday, Feb. 28 at 6 p.m. Carefully curated dinners hosted in elegant homes and venues across the Emerald Coast, featuring "celebrity" chefs paired with renowned vintners. Tickets are \$500 per person.

Crescendo! Main Event: Sunday, March 2 at 11:30 a.m. at the Hilton Sandestin Beach

Golf Resort & Spa. Enjoy an all-inclusive afternoon of culinary delights, live and silent auctions, and exceptional entertainment. This year's theme is "Paint the Town Red." Tickets are \$225 per person.

Featured Entertainment for the Main Event

Crescendo! 2025 will highlight extraordinary talent, including the acclaimed string rock band Violectric. Proclaimed "House Band for the City of Orlando" by Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer, Violectric captivates audiences with cutting-edge technology and live performances that span rock history, from The Beatles to The Weeknd. Led by artist and producer Michelle Jones, known for Grammy-nominated projects, Violectric's interactive performances promise an unforgettable experience.

Also featured is Bradley Copeland, a rising 25-year-old visual artist based in Santa Rosa Beach. Copeland, named Walton County Artist of the Year



(2023), will be showcasing her award-winning talent with a live painting demonstration and a pop-up art gallery. With over 600 pieces in her collection, Copeland's work reflects her passion and creativity, shaped by her experiences and surroundings. Her vibrant career includes solo exhibitions, public art projects, and a mural at Linda Miller Real Estate on 30A. Copeland's dedication to art as a transformative medium extends to her teaching at the Walton Correctional Institution,

where she leads an art program aimed at inspiring creativity and healing.

Supporting Music Education

Proceeds from Crescendo! 2025 benefit Sinfonia Gulf Coast's mission to redefine the symphony experience and provide exceptional music education. Programs

supported include support of Sinfonia's signature music education program, musicians in schools, free orchestra concerts, transportation for students, and partnerships with Carnegie Hall's Link Up initiative and Ascension Sacred Heart's Arts in Medicine program and more.


Sinfonia Music & Artistic Director Demetrius Fuller states, "Crescendo! is more than a fundraiser; it's a celebration of our community's commitment to the arts. The funds raised allow us to continue bringing mu-


sic and education to thousands across Northwest Florida."

Are you a "treble" maker? If so, Sinfonia Gulf Coast invites you to join this honorary committee. For a \$650 contribution, Treble Makers will receive one ticket to the Crescendo! Kick Off Lunch and Main Event, recognition in the event program, a reserved seat at the closed-to-the-public student Link Up performances on March 12, 2025, at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center, a special Treble Maker gift, and more.

Tickets, Sponsorship & Volunteering

Tickets are available at www.SinfoniaGulfCoast.org or by calling (850) 460-8800. Sponsorship opportunities are also available. For inquiries, contact Daniel Milana at dmilana@sinfoniagulfcoast.org. For more information on how you can join Sinfonia's team of volunteers, contact Beth Clavier at (850) 460-8800 and bclavier@sinfoniagulfcoast.org.





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Arts & Music

ECTC Presents Timeless Love: Songs through the Ages Valentine's Day Musical Revue

Emerald Coast Theatre Company (ECTC) is proud to present Timeless Love: Songs through the Ages Valentine's Day Musical Revue on Friday, February 14th at 2pm and 6pm.

Share this evening or afternoon event with the ones you love. Enjoy beautiful love songs from yesteryear performed by our top vocalists. This very special evening can be complemented with

a bottle of wine and a sweet or savory charcuterie box. This is a fun way to celebrate with your Valentine or Galentine and avoid the packed restaurants. We have everything you need

right here at ECTC to spend a memorable afternoon or evening with your favorite people! Each couple will enjoy their own private table for the evening. If you would like to join another couple please leave their last name in the checkout questions.

Nathanael Fisher, co-founder and producing artistic director of ECTC says, "Grab your Valentine or Galentine and enjoy some beautiful music with delicious charcuterie and a bottle of wine.

This intimate performance is the perfect way to show that special someone how much you care about them!"

Timeless Love will be staged on the Main Stage at ECTC located on the second floor of 560 Grand Boulevard in Grand Boulevard Town Center in Miramar Beach. Tickets are \$75



per person (\$150 per couple) and must be bought in pairs. If you need three tickets, call the box office at 850-684-0323. Purchase tickets online at emeraldcoasttheatre.org/special-events.

Visit www.emeraldcoasttheatre.org. Engage with ECTC on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube.

February 14th 2PM & 6PM

Share this evening or afternoon event with the ones you love. Enjoy beautiful love songs from yesteryear performed by our top vocalists. This special evening can be complemented with a bottle of wine and a sweet or savory charcuterie box. This is a fun way to celebrate and avoid the packed restaurants. We have everything you need right here at ECTC.

Presents

February 20th - March 2nd

In this hilarious comedic romp a la "Golden Girls," four friends have sworn to keep the promise they made on the night of their Senior Prom: to be in each other's weddings...no matter what. More than thirty years later, these Southern friends-for-life are still making "the long walk" for each other, determined to honor that vow.



Tickets or info, call 850.684.0323 or visit EmeraldCoastTheatre.org
560 Grand Boulevard, Suite 200 | Miramar Beach, FL 32550

BOOK REVIEW

continued from page 38

about figuring out why we act the way we do in relationships and how our past experiences shape our love lives.

One of the best parts is the emphasis on communication. The book teaches you that being open and honest is like the secret sauce for a healthy relationship. It gives you tips on how to express your feelings without sounding like a robot or starting a fight.

Whether you're single, dating, or in a long-term relationship, this book has something for everyone. It's packed with wisdom that can help you build stronger connections and maybe even find a little more happiness in your love life.

If you're looking for a fun, insightful read that helps you navigate the wild world of love, "Secure Love" is a fantastic choice! Grab a copy, settle in, and get ready to rethink love in the best way possible.

Michael McManus LCSW is a psychotherapist in private practice in Santa Rosa Beach, Florida and can be reached by phone or text at 1-850-837-0123 or Psychotherapy30A.com

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MKAF Announces 2025 Concerts in the Village!

The stellar, 10-concert, live-music series, Thursdays, April 10 – June 12, will feature premier musicians and bands performing everything from classic rock and yacht rock to soulful tributes and high-energy hits. From iconic blues rock to soulful Amy Winehouse tributes, danceable yacht rock and Def Leppard classics—plus a special performance of Journey’s album *Escape* from start to finish by Black Jacket Symphony—the 2025 Concerts in the Village presented by the Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation offers a dynamic lineup for every music lover.

The area’s longest-running live concert series is held each spring on Thursday evenings at the MKAF Dugas Pavilion in Destin. This year’s family-friendly series will run from April 10 to June 12, featuring premier regional and national musicians and bands performing everything from classic rock and rhythm & blues to modern pop and nostalgic tributes.

The series kicks off on Thursday, April 10, 2025, with an electrifying performance by

The Fabulous Thunderbirds, setting the stage for an unforgettable season.

“This is an exceptional lineup of live music in a beautiful outdoor venue at an affordable price for a great cause,” says MKAF CEO Demetrius Fuller. “When you purchase a concert ticket, you’re helping us provide high-quality arts education and community engagement across Northwest Florida. Whether you’re a regular or joining us for the first time, we promise an unforgettable experience.”

Gates open at 6 p.m., and concerts begin at 7 p.m. This come-as-you-are outdoor concert series encourages attendees to bring a lawn chair, picnic, or wine. Food and beverages also will be available for purchase from local food trucks on-site.

2025 Concerts in the Village Schedule:

April 10 – The Fabulous Thunderbirds Kick off the season with blues rock legends known for hits like *Tuff Enuff* and *Wrap It Up*.

April 17 – Journeyman: An Eric Clapton Tribute Celebrate



Clapton’s timeless hits like *Layla* and *Wonderful Tonight* with stunning authenticity.

April 24 – Yacht Rock Revue Dance to soft rock classics from the ‘70s and ‘80s by artists like Christopher Cross and Hall & Oates.

May 1 – Black Jacket Symphony: Journey’s *Escape* Relive Journey’s iconic album *Escape*, featuring *Don’t Stop Believin’* and *Open Arms*.

May 8 – Dear Amy: Amy Winehouse Tribute The official

estate-approved band, pays tribute to Winehouse’s soulful legacy with hits like *Rehab* and *Back to Black*.

May 15 – Kickstand Jenny Experience a high-energy night with this dynamic rock ‘n’ roll band.

May 22 – The Molly Ringwalds Journey through the ‘80s with this ultimate tribute to the decade’s greatest hits.

May 29 – Petty Hearts Celebrate Tom Petty classics like *Free Fallin’* and *American Girl*.

June 5 – A1A: Jimmy Buffett Tribute *Escape* to Margaritaville with the original, Jimmy Buffett estate-approved tribute band.

June 12 – Adrenalize: Music of Def Leppard Rock out to Def Leppard’s biggest hits like *Pour Some Sugar on Me* and *Love Bites*.

General admission tickets are \$35 per person, plus a ticketing fee. Save \$5 by purchasing tickets in advance online at MKAF.org. Children under 12 attend for free. MKAF members enjoy early entry and free admission to every concert as well as discounted pricing for other MKAF events. A limited number of VIP tables (reserved for eight guests for the entire season) are available for \$3,000. To reserve a VIP table, call Deb Nissley at (850) 650-2226.

To purchase tickets, become an MKAF member, make a tax-deductible donation or provide a corporate sponsorship, visit www.MKAF.org or call (850) 650-2226. Follow MKAF on Facebook and Instagram for the latest updates.



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- April 10 | The Fabulous Thunderbirds
- April 17 | Journeyman: An Eric Clapton Tribute
- April 24 | Yacht Rock Revue
- May 1 | Black Jacket Symphony: Journey’s *Escape*
- May 8 | Dear Amy: Amy Winehouse Tribute
- May 15 | Kickstand Jenny
- May 22 | Molly Ringwalds
- May 29 | Petty Hearts
- June 5 | A1A: Jimmy Buffet Tribute
- June 12 | Adrenalize: Music of Def Leppard

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Proceeds from all events benefit MKAF and its ArtsReach education and community engagement initiatives.

 Community

Ask Destinities: Destin Area Manhole Covers



BY PATRICIA LEE, OWNER
DESTINITIES.COM

In our Destinities Facebook group for locals this past month (www.Facebook.com/groups/Destinities), a new resident addressed the issue of manhole covers around town. An excerpt from his post: “The placement of manhole covers are precisely located and positioned where you have to drive over them (many, many times), destroying your shocks, struts and suspension over time.” According to the 100 comments, it is also of great concern to many citizens of Destin. Below are

some of their replies.

Members Comments:

1. That’s why we drive 4x4’s.
2. Sewer lines installed prior to lane expansion within the city. I don’t like either, however, very expensive retrofit.
3. Totally get it. Cost would be astronomical to relocate them, just very annoying. Guess I’ll have to become a professional “swerver” hoping not to get pulled over.
4. I’ve got self-driving on my car and I can’t use it, because it doesn’t understand avoiding the manhole covers. (ha)
5. The City’s Department of Public Works provides maintenance on all publicly-owned streets, storm sewer infrastructure, grounds, facilities and pub-

lic equipment.

6. This is definitely one of those issues where we have multiple agencies and “jurisdiction” to work through—yay government. We did pass a financial ordinance to repave every road in Destin in the coming years. I will speak with our team about ways to incorporate solutions to reduce the bump into this already-funded program.
7. Yessssss. From like Big Kahuna’s all the way down to just before McDonald’s. Could be further down. That right lane driving west! Omg. this needed to be said.
8. Everywhere I have lived before, when they add a layer of asphalt, they add a spacer of equal thickness underneath the

- manhole cover, to bring it up to level. Not sure why they didn’t do that here, but driving down that right lane through there is a freaking joke.
9. Lack of quality control of the planners, vendors and inspectors! I think we need to spend some money on more experienced planners and bypass the prettifying of the median areas on 98! It seems like they have been done and redone several times!
10. Wow we must really be running out of things to complain about. Manholes are for utilities and they are usually put in city property (roads). Would you prefer it in your yard or not have plumbing, gas or possibly electric? We are blessed to have

what we have here. Most cities are full of potholes and other vehicle-damaging issues. Roads around here are fantastic.

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 Facebook.com/groups/Destinities with 11,300+ members (Est. Oct. 2018). Check out our monthly newsletter and local business directory at 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.

Meet Our Hometown Hero:

Destin Native James Uthmeier – Florida’s New Attorney General

BY DOUG STAUFFER

The Florida panhandle has a

new reason to celebrate as one of its own, James Uthmeier,

has assumed a very influential role in the state. Governor Ron DeSantis appointed Uthmeier as Chief of Staff in 2021 and has now tapped Uthmeier to succeed Ashley Moody as Florida’s Attorney General following Moody’s appointment to the U.S. Senate. This exciting development highlights Uthmeier’s impressive career and deep Florida roots, promising a bright future for the state under his leadership.



values and constitutional principles. “James is someone who has consistently demonstrated his commitment to serving the people of Florida. He has big shoes to fill, but I am confident he is more than up to the task,” DeSantis said.

A proud native of Destin, Uthmeier’s journey began at Fort Walton Beach High School, where he cultivated the discipline and determination that have defined his career. As a University of Florida graduate, he earned academic accolades. He competed as part of the Florida Gators track and field team, helping to bring home a Southeastern Conference championship in 2010. His athletic and academic achievements earned him recognition as one of the University of Florida Alumni Association’s “40 Gators Under 40.”

as an associate at the prestigious law firm Jones Day. Uthmeier then moved into public service, working as senior advisor and counsel to U.S. Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross during the Trump administration.

Uthmeier’s appointment as Attorney General comes at a pivotal time for Florida. His legal acumen and experience in both the state and federal government position him as a formidable advocate for Floridians. Whether tackling critical issues such as public safety, constitutional rights, or judicial integrity, Uthmeier is expected to bring the same passion and dedication that have defined his career.

Uthmeier’s rise to prominence in the Florida political arena has been swift and impactful. After earning his law degree from Georgetown University Law Center and serving as managing editor of the Georgetown Journal of Law and Public Policy, he began his legal career

In 2019, Uthmeier returned to his home state to join Governor DeSantis’ legal team as Deputy General Counsel. His leadership skills quickly earned him a promotion to General Counsel in 2020 and Chief of Staff in 2021. In these roles, Uthmeier played a central part in shaping and implementing the governor’s agenda, including leading the state’s judicial nominations process and taking on some of Florida’s most significant legal battles.

He and his wife, Jean, have made Tallahassee their home, where they co-teach religious education classes and actively participate in their community. As James Uthmeier takes the helm as Florida’s Attorney General, Destin, and the entire Emerald Coast can take pride in the accomplishments of a hometown hero. His journey from the Panhandle to one of Florida’s highest offices serves as an inspiring reminder that with hard work and dedication, the sky is the limit. Uthmeier’s future—and Florida’s—is undeniably bright.

Governor DeSantis praised Uthmeier as a “proven leader” who has been at the forefront of Florida’s fights for conservative

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