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Postal Customer Local

## Yo Ho Ho! Billy Bowlegs and His Krewe Return to Fort Walton Beach in May

By Christopher Manson

"Now and then we had the hope that if we lived and were good, God would permit us to be pirates."

- Mark Twain, Life on the Mississippi

The Billy Bowlegs Pirate Festival returns to Fort Walton Beach May 15-19 with fireworks, a parade, fun family activities and much more. This is the 69th festival benefiting the William Augustus Bowles Historical Foundation, a 501(c)(3) organization that promotes a love for local history.

In 1955, Fort Walton Beach businessman Nathan Fleet reigned over the inaugural festival as Captain Billy Bowlegs. The successful event led to the current multi-day festival that takes place at the Landing Park. Around 5,000 pirates and landlubbers are expected to attend this year.

Captain Billy Bowlegs LXIX Michael Castleberry has called Fort Walton Beach



home since 1998. He will be joined by Pirate Queen Zabrina Horne, along with First Mate and Mistress Matt and Kacy Turpin.

High school students from Niceville, Destin, Choctawhatchee and Fort Walton Beach will serve as Princesses and Privateers. The Hon-

or Guard LXIX consists of Shane and Jessica Atkinson, Ben and Jaris Buehler, Creed and Elizabeth Burkhart, David and Remi Densmore, Scott and Regina Groundwater, Larry and Donita Messinger, Joe and Tammy O'Gallagher, Matt and Becky Scaringe, John and Channa

Schuster, and Michael Voit and Angela Hassell, all of whom look forward to representing the Krewe.

The Krewe of Bowlegs was founded in 1954 with the goal of attracting tourists to

> **BILLY BOWLEGS** continued on page 2



## **Easter** Reflections

By Guery Clendening

It is Spring! The flowers are blooming and Azaleas are beautiful this year. I love this season. To me, spring speaks of new beginnings.

When I lived in Illinois, the winters could be harsh at times. I remember during one winter, looking out my office window at a very large tree. With snow and ice covering its branches, you would have thought the frozen limbs were dead. But when spring came, an amazing thing happened; what seemed to be dead came alive! The branches budded and before long the tree was filled with green leaves.

It is fitting that Easter is celebrat-

**EASTER** continued on page 2



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### **BILLY BOWLEGS**

continued from page 1

the area. Today, the Krewe provides invaluable service beyond the annual festival. According to the Krewe's website, you can find them "wherever a daring, adventurous swashbuckler (or just a guy in a funny pirate hat) is needed."

### 2025 Events

The Bowlegs Treasure Hunt begins in April, with clues being announced on local radio. Participants can search for Bowlegs coins and win a piece of Captain Billy's treasure. Look for updates at kreweofbowlegs.com, along with an irresistible poem.

On Thursday, May 15 at 4 p.m., Captain Billy and his Krewe arrive on Ferry Road for the Pre-Invasion. Children will be greeted, photos taken and treasure given away until 6 p.m.

The Skirmish at the Landing Park follows on Friday, May 16, at 8 p.m. An Arts and Crafts Festival is planned for 5 p.m., followed by a performance by blues rockers Thin Ice at 6 p.m. Captain Billy and his scouting party are expected to land at 7 p.m., and make sure you stick around





for a spectacular fireworks show at 8:45 p.m.

Saturday, May 17, the much-anticipated pirate invasion takes place at the Landing Park with Captain Billy and his Krewe landing around 3:30 p.m. Arts and crafts begin at 10 a.m., followed by live music from The



Friskeys from 1 to 3 p.m. The celebration continues until 7 p.m.

The band Duchess kicks off its first Bowlegs gig at 4 p.m. Duchess has performed at numerous Krewe of Bowlegs parties, as well as the Concert on the Landing series. Duchess' Doug Bowers and Chuck Tidwell have played the festival before with





the band 423. Bowers says festivalgoers can expect "high-energy Seventies and Eighties classic rock (from a) band that loves to interact with its audience." Learn more at duchessband.

The 2025 festivities wrap up with the Torchlight Parade Monday, May 19, beginning at 7 p.m. The parade route begins

Continued on next page



Published Monthly
Mailed FREE to the communities
of Destin, FL (32541)

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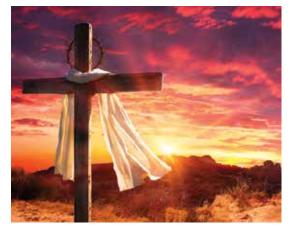
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### **EASTER**

continued from page 1

ed in the spring. On that Sunday, people from throughout the world celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Years ago, I was on a plane travelling to Israel. The person sitting next to me was an Israel native who knew the historical record concerning Christ. As we discussed the story, he made a statement that got my attention. He said, "You know, they never did find the body of Christ." I breathed a silent prayer and said to him, "The reason they never found the body is because He rose from the grave. That is the foundation of the Christian faith."



There is a passage of scripture in the New Testament found in First Corinthians, chapter 15, verses 12-15 and verse 20, that says, "Now if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how is it that some among you say

resurrection from the dead? ...for if there is no resurrection from the dead, then not even Christ has been raised: then our preaching is useless, and your faith is also useless... But now, (as things really

that there is no

are) Christ, in fact, has been raised from the dead...

So, what people were celebrating on Easter was not only the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but also, they were celebrating the hope they have in Christ; that they too will rise from the grave to live forever with him!

Jesus said this: "Because I

live, you will live also." -John 14:19. That's why Easter is so special for so many. Not only do they celebrate Christ's resurrection and His promise of Resurrection for them, but also because through Christ's death, sins are forgiven and new life is theirs through faith in Christ!

Yes, miracles do happen. Just like the tree that blossomed in the spring, those who put their faith in Christ will experience a new life of peace and freedom from the past. As we enjoy spring, may we celebrate and experience the power of Christ to make all things new.



Billy Bowlegs Festival

MAY 15: LITTLE SCALLYWAGS PIRATE WALK MAY 16: CONCERTS AT THE SANDING, SKIRMISH & FIREWORKS MAY 17: VENDOR BOOTHS, SIVE MUSIC, PIRATES SANDING MAY 19: TORCHLIGHT PARADE

DOWNTOWN FORT WALTON BEACH WWW.BILLYBOWLEGSPIRATEFESTIVAL.COM





### **BILLY BOWLEGS**

continued from page 2

at First Street and Eglin Parkway and rolls northward to Hughes Street, with sea-worthy floats, eye-popping floats and non-stop entertainment. For registration information and more, visit fwb-chamber.org.

Videos of previous parades are widely available on a number of YouTube channels, notably Emerald Coast TV's clip from the 2018 event which has attracted thousands of viewers.

This year's presenting/title sponsor for the Billy Bowlegs Pirate Festival is Felicity Plastic Surgery, specifically noted reconstructive/plastic surgeon Dr. Liz Sager. "We would not be able to have this festival at all if we didn't have her generous sponsorship," says Festival Coordinator Cali Hlavac. Felicity's slogan is, appropriately enough considering the Bowlegs Festival vibe, "Pursue your happiness." Discover more at felicityplasticsurgery.com.

"The tradition of Billy Bowlegs has spanned over 75 years and has become an important part of our local history," says Hlavac. "From finding the hid-





den coins and the Friday fireworks to watching Captain Billy take over the Landing, there is something all ages can enjoy. We are looking forward to bringing the community together for another great year of festivities."

## To Get You in the Pirate Mood

### A Dozen Tunes To Get Your Pirate Playlist Starrrrrr-Ted

- Jimmy Buffett, "A Pirate Looks at Forty"
- Roger McGuinn, "Jolly Rog-
- The Irish Rovers, "Drunken Sailor"
- Klaus Badelt, "He's a Pirate (From the Motion Picture Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl)
- Ukelele Jim, "Yo Ho (A Pirate's Life for Me)"
- The Celtic Connection, "The Last Shanty"
- Kenny Chesney, "Pirate Flag"
- Zac Brown Band featuring Mac McAnally, "Pirates & Parrots"
- Jesse Rice, "Pirate Girl"
- Peppa Pig, "Pirate Treasure"
- The Poker Dogs, "Pirate Rap"
- Pinkfong, "Pirate Baby Shark"

### A Half-Dozen Groan-Worthy Pirate Jokes

- What did the pirate say on this eightieth birthday? "Aye, matey!"
- How much did the pirate pay for his earrings?
  A buccaneer!
- What's a pirate's favorite letter of the alphabet?
  You might think it's "R," but it's the "C"!
- Why couldn't the pirate play cards?He was sitting on the deck!
- What's a pirate's favorite fast food restaurant?
   ARRRRRRR-by's. But if they're closed will settle for HARRRRRRR-dee's!
- What's a pirate's favorite music?

  ARRRRRR & B, or anything with a good "hook"!

  Sources: Various.

### These are ARRRRguably the Best Pirate Movies Ever

1. Pirates of the Caribbean:

The Curse of the Black Pearl (2003)

2. Captain Blood (1935). Starring Errol Flynn, Olivia de Havilland, and Basil Rathbone. 3. The Princess Bride (1987) 4. Walt Disney's Treasure Is-

- land (1950). This was Disney's first full live-action movie and the first version of Robert Louis Stevenson's classic novel to be filmed in color.
- 5. Hook (1991). Directed by Steven Spielberg, with Academy Award winner Dustin Hoffman in the title role trading his acting chops with the likes of Robin Williams and Julia Roberts.
- 6. Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest (2006)
- 7. Captain Phillips (2013)
- 8. The Goonies (1985). Eighties kids would say this is one of the best movies ever.
- 9. Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End (2007)
- 10. Muppet Treasure Island (1996)

Source: imdb.com







Mayor Bobby Wagner and PIO Tamara Young, PhD

TAMARA L. YOUNG, PhD, Public Information Director

Since the 1930s, the American Legion Oratorical Contest has worked to encourage knowledge and appreciation by high schoolers of the U.S. Constitution. This time, the Millennial Mayor and I sat down to discuss

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## "Reel Talk" from the City of Destin

## Voices of Freedom: The Ultimate Youth **Constitution Oratory Challenge**

the contest and contestants.

TY: In January, I had the pleasure of being one of the judges of the local American Legion Post 296 oratorical contest, and I know you were a judge the previous year. What a treat to listen to those young people rattle off 10-minute presentations by memory about the obligation of a citizen to our government.

o f @djzoranusa

**CELEBRATIONS BY THE SEA** 

DJ Zoran, Event Coordinator

They were impressive!

**BW:** When Jim Wood asked me to judge, I didn't fully grasp what an incredible experience it would be. What I remember most from that day was watching high school students use

their gift of communication to bring the patriotic heritage of

### our country to life—all presented onstage for a chance to win and represent Destin at the next level. TY: How fantastic that we

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both got to hear our very own local student William Kiker present his wise words. He won here in Destin, went off to State in Orlando and won, and now will head to Nationals in May in Michigan. How important is it to you that young people become involved in the understandings and workings of government, rights, and freedoms?

BW: He was incredibly impressive when I met him, and I believe he's destined for great things if he continues to follow his passions in life. We need more young people sharing their thoughts and input. We're stronger together.

**TY:** The contest is of course for high schoolers, but it wouldn't be as successful without Jim Wood, Corlene Ziegler, and other local residents. I love to see the generational passion shared.

**BW:** Absolutely. These local leaders do so much for our community, and they've done an outstanding job improving the American Legion Post on Main Street. A well-deserved shoutout: I highly recommend everyone-military or not-visit and support their post. They offer everything from Sunday breakfasts to weekly events, plus a full bar with darts and a pool table.

## **BOOTH SPACE SELLING OUT FAST**

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## Let's Taco 'Bout It!

## 12th Annual Tequila & Taco Fest - May 8-11

So. Many. Tacos! Chicken, Pork, Beef, Steak, Shrimp, Barbacoa - you name it; we have it at the wildly popular Tequila & Taco Festival – the 2nd longest-running Tequila and Taco Fest in the U.S. and recently honored with the Gold Award for Best Event in the 2025 Perfect in Walton County Awards! Sample many types of Tequilas and Margaritas from Blancos, Reposados, Anejos and even Mezcals. So, get ready for Tacos, Tequila and fun and find your favorite at the 12th Annual Tequila & Taco Festival, happening May 8-11, 2025, at The Village of Baytowne Wharf at Sandestin! Local restaurants and food trucks will compete for the Best Taco on the Emerald Coast with a \$2,500 grand prize.

Enjoy Tequila and Margarita tastings, live music, DJ and face painting.

### **Event Highlights:**

Tequila Dinner - May 8, 6:30-9 p.m. at Cantina Laredo (\$79.99). Call 850-654-5649 for reservations.

**Kickoff Party** – May 9, 6-9 p.m. at Baytowne Wharf. Live music, unlimited appetizers, tequila & margarita samplings (\$75).

### Festival Main Event -

May 10, 1-4 p.m. (VIP noon-4 p.m.) Unlimited taco tastings & tequila samplings (\$40-\$175). VIP at Jimmy Buffett's 5







O'Clock Somewhere.

**BYE BYE Brunch** – May 11, 11 a.m.-2 p.m. at Sunset Bay Cafe at Sandestin. \$50 includes two Margaritas or Bloody Marys (limited seating).

New Yacht Charters that include Tequila, Latin

Small Plates, Boating and one VIP Ticket per person.

Get your tickets NOW at EfestEvents.com. Part of the

proceeds benefit Fisher House and A Bed For Me Foundation. Don't miss this Emerald Coast







**Community** 





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The Village of Baytowne Wharf







## Tip a Glass at the 38th Annual Sandestin Wine Festival

## and More Spring Fun at the Village of Baytowne Wharf

### **Sandestin Wine Festival!**

It's time to raise your glasses and celebrate spring right in our own backyard! The 38th Annual Sandestin Wine Festival returns to the Village of Baytowne Wharf from Thursday, April 10, to Sunday, April 13, 2025, offering a weekend full of flavor, fun and coastal charm that's become a signature of our region.

Known as the "Kentucky Derby of Wine Festivals" and honored as the "Best Event" by Visit South Walton, this beloved gathering offers an unbeatable experience for locals and guests who want to enjoy a world-class event. The festival's Grand Wine Tastings, Friday from 5-8 p.m. and Saturday from 1-4 p.m., will feature more than 500 wines from domestic and international vineyards. It's your chance to meet the makers, explore new varietals and discover wines to suit every taste and budget.

Join Seas The Day, a special beachside yoga session hosted by Hotel Effie and Spa Lilliana on April 12 from 9–11 a.m., followed by mimosas for a refreshing start to Saturday—because what better way to ease into the Grand Tasting?

Pair your wine with gourmet bites during the Savor South Walton experience, featuring creative, coastal-inspired, gourmet bite-sized creations from some of the area's top chefs, expertly paired with wine selections.

A returning favorite, the Bubbly & Boozy Tent, on Sandestin's Grand Lawn, offers a playful tasting experience featuring bubbly wines and artisan liquors flowing alongside lively, local music.

### **Event Highlights Include:**

- Over 500 wine selections from global vineyards
- The Bubbly & Boozy Tent with champagne and specialty spirits
- Savor South Walton gourmet food pairings by top local chefs
- Live music from regional bands throughout the weekend
- Beachside yoga and mimosas during "Seas The Day" wellness event

Whether you're a wine rook-







ie or a seasoned sipper, everyone is welcome.

Tickets are available at SandestinWineFestival.com. Be sure to book early—this is one of the most anticipated events of the season!

Past attendees have raved about their experiences: "I stayed here with some girlfriends the weekend of the Sandestin Wine Fest and it was AMAZ-ING! We love coming here... they always take such great care of us..."

"Sandestin Wine Festival is one of the top events in the Destin area, and it's easy to see why. Hundreds of wines are available to taste."

### Easter Explosion! Saturday, April 19th | 12-3 p.m.

Bounce on over to the Village of Baytowne Wharf for an Easter Explosion! Enjoy a day filled with face-painting, arts and crafts, and more! Also, don't forget to get your picture taken with the Easter Bunny!

### Springtime Fun Continues All April at Baytowne Wharf

### Wednesday Night Concert Series - Tribute Edition Wednesdays | 7-9 p.m.

The Wednesday Night Concert Series – Tribute Edition



brings music and nostalgia to the Events Plaza Stage every Wednesday, April 2–30, from 7–9 p.m. Enjoy tributes to some of the biggest legends in music: 2: "The Lads" British Invasion

- Show A Tribute to the Best of The British Hits of the 60's
- 9: Midnight Blue The Foreigner Tribute
- 16: Still Standing Elton John Tribute
- 23: Elvis Tribute
- 30: Freebird The Ultimate Lynyrd Skynyrd Experience

These concerts are free and a great midweek treat for the whole family.

## **Bubbly Baytowne** April 17 | 5-7 p.m.

Don't miss Bubbly Baytowne on Thursday, April 17, from 5–7 p.m. Sip free champagne as you stroll through the shops and boutiques of Baytowne. This 21+ event is a fun way to support local retailers while enjoying a relaxed evening out.

And every Saturday from 8 a.m. to noon, the Baytowne Farmers Market brings together local vendors, farmers, and makers offering everything from fresh seafood and baked goods





to local honey and handmade crafts.

### Boomin' Tuesday Tuesdays, March 18-April 1 6:30-8:30 p.m. | FREE

Enjoy singing and dancing with DJ Mike Whitty in the Events Plaza. Then watch as Baytowne Wharf lights up the night sky with a breathtaking fireworks show over the Lagoon at 8:30 p.m.!

## Thursdays, March 20-April 3 9 p.m. | FREE

Join Baytowne Wharf every Thursday as they light up the sky with drones that will form images of favorite beach scenes!

Whether you're sipping, shopping, dancing or dining, April at Baytowne Wharf is full of ways to celebrate the season in style.



## Ode to Joy—A Grand Symphony of Unity and Joy!

Beethoven's Ninth Featuring World-Class Opera Stars April 12, 2025 | 7 p.m. | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Tickets: \$35

Join Northwest Florida Symphony Orchestra (NFSO) and Todd Craven Music Director and Conductor for the Season Finale: "Ode to Joy" – April 12 at 7 p.m. at the Mattie Kelly Arts Center in Niceville. "Ode to Joy" is more than music—it is a resounding anthem of brotherhood, hope and the unbreakable bond of humanity. Beethoven's Ninth Symphony calls us together in a powerful celebration of unity, and now, this timeless masterpiece comes to life in an unforgettable performance at the Mattie Kelly Arts Center!

The Northwest Florida Symphony Orchestra (NFSO), the NFSO Chorale and the Niceville High School Chorus join forces to present this monumental work, featuring internationally renowned opera soloists:



**Kather- ine Henry,**soprano – A
Metropolitan
Opera rising
star, American soprano Kathryn
Henry is acclaimed for

her "clean coloratura and silvery voice." A native of Sheboygan, Wis., she earned her Master of Music from The Juilliard School and a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Henry has performed notable roles such as Lucy Harker in the world premiere of The Lord of Cries at The Santa Fe Opera, the title role in Janáček's Jenůfa at Lyric Opera of Chicago, and Arminda in Mozart's La finta giardiniera at Juilliard. She was a finalist in the 2015 Metropolitan Opera National Council



**Cierra Byrd,** mezzo-soprano

A powerhouse artist fresh from her acclaimed performances at the Met and Houston

Grand Opera, American mezzo-soprano Cierra Byrd is a recent graduate of the Lindemann Young Artist Development Program at the Metropolitan Op-

era. In the 2024/25 season, she joined Chicago Opera Theater for the world premiere of She Who Dared and Opera Theater of St. Louis for their New Works Collective. She has performed at the Metropolitan Opera, Houston Grand Opera and Boston Lyric Opera, including roles in Fire Shut Up in My Bones, Madama Butterfly, Omar and Dialogues des Carmélites. A winner of the Duncan Williams Voice Competition, she holds degrees from Ohio State University and Peabody Conservatory.



Christopher Bozeka, tenor – A dynamic and expressive performer, lighting up opera houses across the country, Ten-

or Christopher Bozeka is gaining recognition for his "expressively captivating" performances and "beautiful, piercing tone" (San Francisco Chronicle). Recent highlights include Alfredo Germont (La traviata, Opera Las Vegas), Rodrigo (Otello, Central City Opera), and soloist appearances with the New Mexico Gay Men's Chorus. He has performed with the Metropolitan Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Sarasota Opera, and Opera Southwest, covering roles in Nabucco, Le comte Ory, The Magic Flute, and Salome. A Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions winner, he holds a master's degree from University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music.



William
Guanbo Su,
bass-baritone - A
commanding presence
on the world
stage and a
Grand Finals
Winner of the

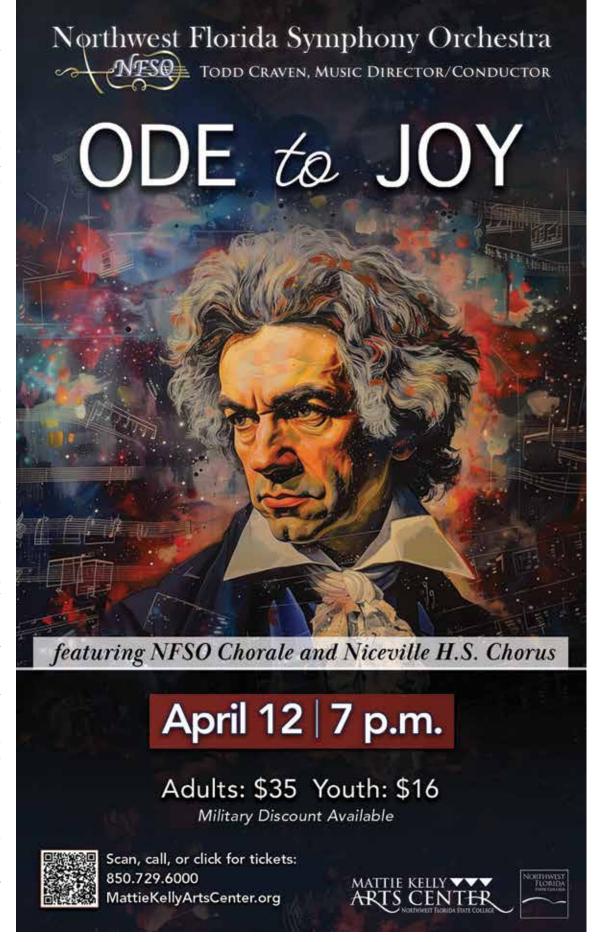
Met Opera National Council Auditions, Chinese bass William Guanbo Su is acclaimed for his "musical taste" and "solid voice" (The New York Times). A 2019 Grand Finals Winner of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, he has performed with Houston Grand Opera, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis and Boston Lyric Opera, portraying roles such as Zuniga in Carmen, Olin Blitch in Susannah and Colline in La bohème. Su holds degrees from The Juilliard School and the Manhattan School of Music. In the 2024 season, he is set to debut as Masetto in Don Giovanni with The Santa Fe Opera.

Tickets: Call 850.729.6000 or visit MattieKellyArtsCenter.

org. Adults: \$35; Youth: \$16. Military discount available.









## Cali's To Do In Destin! APRIL 2025

Under The Sea | 3pm | Harborwalk Village Sealights Festival | 5pm | Seascape Resort Yoga Class | 6pm | Destin Community

Songwriter's Showdown | 6pm | Water-

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

Fort Comedy Open Mic Standup | 7pm |

Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Light-

Fireworks & Fire Spinning | 9pm | Har-

Ladies Night | 10pm | McGuire's Destin

Friday Martini Lunch | 11am-4pm | Skybar

Free Beer: Locals On The Harbor | 5pm | Boathouse Oyster Bar

Sealights Festival | 5pm | Seascape Resort Free Beach Bonfire | 5pm | Royal Palm

Singo Music Bingo | 5pm | The Island Resort Grand Boulevard Lawn Games | 5pm | Grand Blvd, Miramar Beach

Karaoke | 7pm | American Legion
Coastal Country Concert | 7pm | Harbor-

Sinfonia Gulf Coast's Classical Conne tions Feat. Howard Levy | 7:30pm | Destin

High School | Destin

Salsa & Bachata Dance Lessons | 8pm |

Latin Night | 8pm-2am | Bosforo in Miramar

Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse

Farmers Market | 8am | The Landing FWB Farmers Market | 9am-1pm | Grand

Farmers Market | 9am | Niceville Boardwalk Cleanup | 9am | Boardwalk Okaloosa Island

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

Sip & Thrift | 12pm | Boardroom Pub Grand Boulevard Lawn Games | 5pm | Grand Blvd Miramar Beach

Gumbo Cook Off | 5pm | 3rd Planet

Sealights Festival | 5pm | Seascape Resort Golden Hour Movie | 7:30pm | Harborwalk

Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse

Beach Church Service | 7:30am | Crab Trap

DJ Brunch | 10am | Azul @ Harborwalk Destin Community Farmers Market | 9am-1pm | Beall's Parking Lot in Destin **Sealights Festival** | 5pm | Seascape Resort Trivia Night | 6pm | The Wharf 850

A Walk Down Magnolia Lane | 6pm | The Lakehouse Watercolor | SRB

Maker Days: Wild World of Flora & Funga Free Beach Bonfire/SIN Night | 5pm |

Women's Climbing Circle | 5pm | Rock Out Climbing Gym | Destin Trivia Night | 6:30pm | Destin Brewery

Trivia Night | 7pm | Soundside FWB

Maker Days: Wild World of Flora & Funga Run Club | 4:30pm | Idyll Hounds Brewery Karaoke | 6pm | AJs on the Bayou Trivia Night | 6pm | Ricks Crab Trap FWB Karaoke | 6pm-9pm | Fatboy's Destin



Impact 100 NWF Social | 10am | Main Brew Coffee

Pathways: 3D Innovation Lab | 1pm | onfire 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 Trivia Night | 6pm | Craft Bar @ The Harbor Silent Disco | 7pm | Harborwalk Village Wednesday Night Concert Series | 7pm |

Village of Baytowne Wharf

Karaoke | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty

Mini Makers & Experimenters Lab 10:30am | Emerald Coast Science Center Under The Sea | 3pm | Harborwalk Village Singo Music Bingo | 5pm | The Island

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

Yoga Class | 6pm | Destin Community

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

Fort Comedy Open Mic Standup | 7pm | Downtown Music Hall

Sea Themed Movie on the Lawn | 7:30pm

| Harborwalk Village **Karaoke Night** | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse **Fireworks & Fire Spinning** | 9pm | Harbor-

Ladies Night | 10pm | McGuire's Destin

Friday Martini Lunch | 11am-4pm | Skybar

Sandestin Wine Festival | 5pm | Village of

Free Beach Bonfire | 5pm | Royal Palm Singo Music Bingo | 5pm | The Island Resort

Grand Boulevard Lawn Games | 5pm | Grand Blvd. Miramar Beach

Coastal Country Concert | 7pm | Harbor-

Salsa & Bachata Dance Lessons | 8pm |

Latin Night | 8pm-2am | Bosforo in Miramar

Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse City of Destin's Community Yard Sale

8am | Destin Community Cente Farmers Market | 9am-1pm | Grand

Farmers Market | 10am-2pm | Harborwalk Autos for Autism | 10am | Santa Rosa Mall,

Adult Easter KEG Hunt | 10am | Boathouse

Spring Extravaganza | 10:30am | Eglin

Girls Empowered with Math & Science Workshops | 10:30am | FWB Library City of Niceville Egg Dash | 11am |

Easter Eggstravaganza | 11am | Trinity

Rotary Fire Truck Pull | Noon | 3rd Planet

Sandestin Wine Festival | 1pm-4pm | Village of Baytowne Wharf Grand Boulevard Lawn Games | 5pm |

Grand Blvd. Miramar Beach
Rad Prom 80s/90s | 6pm | RADBar
Ode to Joy | 7pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center

Golden Hour Movie | 7:30pm | Harborwalk

Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse Beach Church Service | 7:30am | Crab Trap

Destin Community Farmers Market | 9am 1pm | Bealls Parking Lot, Destin **DJ Brunch** | 10am | Azul @ Harborwalk

BBQ With The Bunny | 12pm | The Place

4 Legs & Easter Eggs | 12pm | 3 Dogs & a Chick

Goat Yoga | 2:30pm | Palm Folly Trivia Night | 6pm | The Wharf 850 Karaoke | 9pm | Outcast Bar & Grill

Free Beach Bonfire/SIN Night | 5pm |

Trivia Night | 6:30pm | Destin Brewery
Singo Music Bingo | 7pm | Soundside FWB 3rd Annual Homeschool Science Fair

4pm | Emerald Coast Science Cente Singo Music Bingo | 5pm | The Island Resort Karaoke | 6pm | AJs on the Bayou Trivia Night | 6pm | Ricks Crab Trap FWB Karaoke | 6pm-9pm | Fatboy's Destin

Bonfire on the Beach | 5pm | The Bay Trivia Night | 5pm | Down Island

Music Match Game Night | 5pm | The

Cocktails & Canvases | 5pm-7pm | Distillery

Run Club | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery Trivia Night | 6pm | Craft Bar @ The Harbor Rock n Roll Bingo | 6pm | Fatboy's Niceville Concerts in the Village: Journeyman: An Eric Clapton Tribute | 7pm | Mattie Kelly ArT's Foundation | Destin Silent Disco | 7pm | Harborwalk Village

Wednesday Night Concert Series | 7pm | Village of Baytowne Wharf Karaoke | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty

Under The Sea | 3pm | Harborwalk Village Bubbly Baytowne | 5pm | Baytowne Wharf

Planetarium Nights | 6pm | Emerald Coast

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

Fort Comedy Open Mic Standup | 7pm | Downtown Music Hall Downtown Music Hall

Sea Themed Movie on the Lawn | 7:30pm |

Harborwalk Village
Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse
Fireworks & Fire Spinning | 9pm | Harbor-

Ladies Night | 10pm | McGuire's Destin

Friday Martini Lunch | 11am-4pm | Skybar

Singo Music Bingo | 5pm | The Island Resort Free Beach Bonfire | 5pm | Royal Palm

Grand Boulevard Lawn Games | 5pm | Grand Blvd, Miramar Beach

Doggie Eggstravaganza benefiting Dog-Harmony | 5:30pm | Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach Salsa & Bachata Dance Lessons | 8pm |

Latin Night | 8pm-2am | Bosforo in Miramar

Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse Farmers Market | 8am | The Landing FWB

**Eggstravaganza Egg Hunt** | 8:30am Hurlburt Field Lil' Commandos Park Hurlburt Field Lil' Commandos Park Farmers Market | 9am-1pm | Grand Wood Foot Beer Mile: Spring 2025 | 9am |

Wood Foot Beer

Pet Adoption Event | 10am | Pet Super-

Easter Bunny Paddle & Egg Hunt | 11am |

Tails on the Trails | 11am | Alaqua Animal

Refuge
Thrive in 2025! Health & Wellness Fair Easter Floral Centerpiece Workshop 3pm | Wildwood Garden Shoppe Grand Boulevard Lawn Games | 5pm |

Grand Blvd. Miramar Beach
Trivia Night | 6pm | The Wharf 850
Golden Hour Movie | 7:30pm | Harborwalk Village Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse

Destin Community Farmers Market | 9am-1pm | Bealls Parking Lot, Destin Grand Easter Brunch | 9am-2pm | Crystal Ballroom I Henderson Beach Resort D Easter at The Island | 9:30am | The Island

DJ Brunch | 10am | Azul @ Harborwalk Easter Brunch | 10am | AJ's on the Bayou
Easter Brunch | 11am | Skybar Destin **Destin Commons Farmers Market** | 11am |

Easter Bunny & Egg Dash | 12pm | LuLu's Easter Celebration | 1pm | Harborwalk

Salt Hop Tie Dye Party | 2pm | Salt Hop

Adult Easter Egg Hunt | 5pm | Native's Karaoke | 9pm | Outcast Bar & Grill

Home School Academy: Green Guardians Free Beach Bonfire/SIN Night | 5pm |

**Trivia Night** | 6:30pm | Destin Brewery

Karaoke | 6pm | AJs on the Bayou Trivia Night | 6pm | Ricks Crab Trap FWB Karaoke | 6pm-9pm | Fatboy's Destin

Bonfire on the Beach | 5pm | The Bay Trivia Night | 5pm | Down Island Music Match Game Night | 5pm | The Run Club | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery
Trivia Night | 6pm | Craft Bar @ The Harbor

Rock n Roll Bingo | 6pm | Fatboy's Niceville Wednesday Night Concert Series | 7pm | Village of Baytowne Wharf

Karaoke | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty Winemakers & Shakers | 5pm | Wine World

Grand Boulevard Little Black Dress Night | 6:30pm-9:30pm

Concerts in the Village: Yacht Rock Revue 7pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation | Destin Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse Fireworks & Fire Spinning | 9pm | HarborLadies Night | 10pm | McGuire's Destin

Friday Martini Lunch | 11am-4pm | Skybar

Kick Off VIP Wine Tasting | 4pm-6pm | Grand Boulevard Towne Center Botanicals, Bitters & Brews | 5:30pm-8pm |

Grand Boulevard Towne Center
Singo Music Bingo | 5pm | The Island Resort
Free Beach Bonfire | 5pm | Royal Palm

Grand Boulevard Lawn Games | 5pm | Grand Blvd. Miramar Beach

Destin Charity Wine Auction Patron

Dinners | 6pm | Private Homes Salsa & Bachata Dance Lessons | 8pm |

Latin Night | 8pm-2am | Bosforo in Miramar Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse

Heritage Museum 5K Run/Walk | 8am |

115 Westview Ave. I Val'p Saturday in the Park | 10am - 4pm | Heri-Farmers Market | 9am - 1pm | Feritage Museum of NWFL | Val'p
Farmers Market | 8am | The Landing FWB
Earth Day | 9am - 2pm | E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center | Freeport
Famers Market | 9am-1pm | Grand

Emerald Coast Crime Stoppers Crawfish **Boil** | 11am | Uptown Station FWB **Destin Charity Wine Auction Reserve** Tasting | 1pm-6pm | Grand Boulevard South Walton Beaches Wine & Food Festival Grand Tasting | 3pm-6pm | Grand

C.A.R.E. on the Coast 2025 | 3:30pm | Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park Trivia Night | 6pm | The Wharf 850 Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse

Destin Community Farmers Market | 9am-1pm | Bealls Parking Lot, Destin **DJ Brunch** | 10am | Azul @ Harborwalk

Destin Commons Farmers Market | 11am | Crawfish Festival | 11am | Shades 30a

Pygs on the Beach | 1pm | Nick's Seafood South Walton Beaches Wine & Food 1pm-4pm | Grand Boulevard Karaoke I 9pm | Outcast Bar & Grill

Free Beach Bonfire/SIN Night | 5pm | Trivia Night | 6:30pm | Destin Brewery

Members Only Night at the Museum | 5pm | Emerald Coast Science Center World's Greatest Baby Shower | 5:30pm | Destin FWB Convention Center

Karaoke | 6pm | AJ's on the Bayou Trivia Night | 6pm | Ricks Crab Trap FWB Karaoke | 6pm-9pm | Fatbov's Destin

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

Dine & Dive | 6pm | Grand Boulevard

Rock n Roll Bingo | 6pm | Fatboy's Niceville Trivia Night | 6pm | Craft Bar @ The Harbor Wednesday Night Concert Series | 7pm | Village of Baytowne Wharf

Karaoke | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty





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## **Event Highlights Around Town**



## Pull for a Cause! Charity Fire Truck Pull - April 12

The Rotary Clubs of Destin, Midbay, Niceville/Valparaiso, and Crestview are hosting the Charity Fire Truck Pull on Saturday, April 12, 2025, at noon at 3rd Planet Brewery, Niceville.

Teams of 10 can register for \$250 to compete in pulling a fire truck, with proceeds benefiting Twin Cities Pavilion & Crestview Manor Assisted Living.

The event also features a 50/50 raffle, silent auction, kids' fun pull and face painting. Check-in starts at 10:30 a.m.; first pull at noon.

Register online: form.jotform.com/240494111268150. Pull together. Lift lives.

### Doggie EGGstravaganza Returns April 18 to Grand Boulevard



Calling all dog lovers! Dog-Harmony's 10th Annual Doggie EGGstravaganza hops into Grand Boulevard at Sandestin on Friday, April 18, 2025, from 5:30–7:30 p.m. This canine-only Easter egg hunt features 800 treat-filled eggs, live music, pet photos, games, prizes, and delicious bites from JC's Gourmet, plus beer and wine for the humans.

Two egg hunt zones—divided by dog size—ensure every pup has a chance to play. A \$20 donation in advance (\$25 at the event) includes a souvenir treat bag and helps support Dog-Harmony's mission of reducing shelter populations through education, training, and outreach.

Part of the Coastal Culture Series by Grand Boulevard Arts & Entertainment, tickets are available at events.humanitix.com/doggieeggstravaganza-2025. For sponsorships, email hello@dog-harmony.org.

## Celebrate Earth Day at the E.O. Wilson Biophilia



Mark your calendars for an exciting Earth Day Expo on Saturday, April 26, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center, 4956 State Hwy. 20 East in Freeport.

This community-centered event, sponsored by CHELCO Operation Round Up, is a celebration of nature, sustainability and environmental education.

Expo Vendors present including:

- Native Plant Nurseries
- Community Food Forest
- Master Gardeners & Garden Clubs
- Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance
- Camp Rudder's Army Rangers Reptiles
- Vale of Paradise Mush-
- NoWal Farm

In addition to vendor exhibits, attendees can enjoy theater presentations featuring experts from Vale of Paradise Mushrooms, the Community Food Forest, and Sandhill Native Nursery, who will share insights into sustainable practices and local ecosystems.

Admission: \$10 for ages 13

and up; \$7 for ages 4-12

Local food vendors, including The Bentea Stop and The Rican Vegan, will offer delicious refreshments. Join us in celebrating our planet, connecting with the community and learning how we can all contribute to a healthier, more sustainable environment. For more information, visit www.eowilsoncenter.org.

### Save Our Cats and Kittens (SOCKS) is Putting A Cat-Tastic Twist on the Legendary Run for the Roses!

The nonprofit feline shelter is hosting "The Kittucky Derby" from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday,



April 26, at its event building, a.k.a. "Catnip Downs."

The family-friendly event includes games such as horseshoes and cornhole; a contest for the

most flamboyant derby hat; a silent auction with top-notch prizes, such as a VIP local distillery tour; bourbon punch and mint julep drinks in the Feline Lucky Lounge; delicious hors d'oeuvres including pimento cheese, of course; and the stars of the show, kittens "racing" to a feline photo finish.

Tickets are \$25 and can be purchased on the SOCKS website, www.saveourcatsandkittens. com. To become a sponsor or donate silent auction items, call (850) 865-6866 or email socks@saveourcatsandkittens.com.

Continued on page 25



Mark your calendars and grab your tickets now for a night filled with nostalgia, energy and pure

musical bliss. Piano Man live in concert for one night only to ignite the stage with an electrifying

performances and iconic songs.

**Tickets:** www.mattiekellytickets.com or call 850-706-5206

reserved tickets \$19.50-\$44



## **Trends & Treasures!**

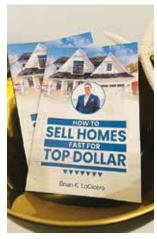












### Hippity Hoppity– Easter's Almost Here!

Spring has sprung, and the Easter Bunny's bouncing our way! Get ready for Sunday, April 20, with a little help from Frill Seekers Gifts, your onestop shop for all things precious, personalized and perfectly festive. From bunny-shaped basket tags to monogrammed bags, charcuterie boards and wine glasses engraved with your family name, Frill Seekers has you covered with charming gifts that will make every bunny smile.

Hosting Easter brunch or heading to a loved one's gathering? It's tradition in the South to bring a thoughtful hostess gift—think tea towels, blessing beads, stationery, or a custom tote bag. Want to wow your guests? Let our team create personalized menus or place cards for a table that's as beautiful as your holiday spirit. Whether you're filling baskets or celebrating in style, Frill Seekers has custom gifts for kids, grandparents, teachers and everyone in between.

Personalize. Customize. Celebrate.

Hop to it at FrillSeekers-Gifts.com or visit the shop at City Market Bayside —the motherland of all things monogrammed!

Open Monday-Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Saturdays 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

(850) 460-2700 | Facebook. com/FrillSeekersGifts frillseekersgifts.com

### Celebrate Spring with Sparkle at Beyond Measure Fine Jewelry

As spring brings new beginnings, it's the perfect time to create something beautiful—just for you. At Beyond Measure Fine Jewelry, the season's colors inspire dazzling designs in diamonds, gemstones, and precious

metals. Whether you're planning a surprise engagement, marking a milestone, or simply treating yourself, owner Ashleigh Woolly and her team are ready to craft your next showstopper.

Step into the City Market Bayside showroom and explore stunning rings, bracelets, necklaces, and earrings-or sit down for a one-on-one custom design experience. From classic to bold, Ashleigh's passion for jewelry shines, especially when helping couples choose the perfect engagement ring or wedding band. "Helping people celebrate life's most meaningful moments is what we love most,' says Ashleigh. With hundreds of custom creations and an eye for exceptional quality, Beyond Measure makes every piece personal and unforgettable.

This Easter and beyond, celebrate love, life and new beginnings—with jewelry that's truly beyond measure. Visit Beyond-MeasureJewelers.com or stop by the shop to begin your custom journey.

(850) 424-7011 | Facebook. com/beyondmeasurejewelers beyondmeasurejewelry.com

## **Spring into Radiance at Pure & Couture Salon**

Ready to refresh your look for Easter and beyond? Pure & Couture Salon is here to pamper you from the moment you walk in. Sip a welcome beverage, enjoy a relaxing scalp massage and let our talented stylists bring your spring beauty goals to life. Whether you're dreaming of sun-kissed blonde, rich brunette waves, or dimensional color with extensions, we'll create the perfect texture and tone for spring's breezy days. Add a blowout, makeup session, facial, or even a therapeutic massage—because this season is all about feeling fresh and fabulous.

Our stylists truly listen, working with your features, lifestyle, and budget to make your beauty vision a reality. At Pure & Couture, you're not just a client—you're part of the family.

This Easter, embrace the season with a new look that says: Hello, spring. I've arrived.

Curbside pickup and online ordering available. Visit Pure & Couture Salon and step into spring purely pampered.

Now open – second location: Pure Collective Salon, 600 Grand Blvd., Suite 102.

(850) 424-3935 | facebook. com/PureandCouture pureandcouture.com

## **Spring into Sweetness at Smallcakes Destin!**

Spring has sprung—and it's never tasted so good! Smallcakes Destin, located in City Market, brings cupcake dreams to life with vibrant seasonal flavors, pastel-perfect frostings, and custom creations that are as stunning as they are scrumptious. Named one of USA TODAY's "Top Ten Cupcake Places to Try," Smallcakes serves up 13 signature cupcakes daily, plus 4 rotating specialty flavors, 12 ice cream varieties, and a dessert menu that includes brownies, cookie cakes, gourmet popcorn, jumbo cookies, and cupcakesin-a-jar. Celebrate Easter with a custom order—think edible logos, colorful buttercream, gluten-free options, and even pupcakesfor your furry friends. Whether you're hosting brunch, filling baskets, or treating yourself, a 12-pack of assorted mini cupcakes is the perfect spring sampler. From birthday cakes to wedding masterpieces, Smallcakes makes every day delicious-with a side of joy and creativity.

Hop in or order online for

sweet, personalized treats that say "hello, spring!" the tastiest way. 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 Follow @SmallCakesofDestin

## Rejuvenate & Radiate This Spring at CRYO850

Spring is all about renewal—so why not start at the cellular level? At CRYO850 Performance & Recovery Center, cutting-edge therapies like Red Light Therapy (PBM) help rejuvenate damaged cells, boost energy, and restore skin from the inside out. The Mito Red Light Therapy system offers full-body exposure with three therapeutic wavelengths, enhancing ATP production and balancing hormones. Paired with Near Infrared Light, it's a powerful way to refresh your body this season.

Discover CRYO850's popular Wellness Circuit, featuring six drug-free therapies: Infrared Sauna, Red Light, Whole Body Cryotherapy, Localized Cryo, Vibration Plates, and Compression Therapy. Flexible memberships and day passes are available for locals and visitors alike.

For tired muscles, the Pagani Muscle Recovery Treatment uses alternating hot and cold to accelerate healing. Want glowing spring skin? Try the Collagen Enhancement Facial, complete with cold therapy, pure oxygen, and WILD ICE exfoliation for radiant, acne-free results

For even more, the Cocoon Fitness POD, combining heat, light, and full-body vibration for next-level recovery. Feel renewed, refreshed, and ready for spring—only at CRYO850. com.

Membership options start as low as \$99 a month with military discounts of 10%, spousal discounts of 15% and students always get 25% off! Pre-register online.

(850) 279-4145 | facebook. com/CRYO850 www.cryo850.com

### Unlock the Secrets to Selling Your Home for Top Dollar! Brian LoCicero, REALTOR®

Thinking of selling your home? Discover the insider strategies used by top sellers with the new book from luxury REALTOR® Brian K. LoCicero. With years of experience and thousands of successful sales, Brian reveals the proven methods that can help you get maximum value in minimum time—in any market.

Inside his book, you'll find battle-tested techniques once reserved for high-end sellers, now available to you. Whether you're selling a cozy cottage or a luxury estate, these insights will give you the edge you need. "In this guide, I share what works—practical, powerful strategies for sellers who want results," says Brian.

Clients agree. "Brian helped us navigate 30A's competitive market with ease. Thanks to his strategies, we sold our Destin home quickly and bought a beachfront home on 30A—below asking price!" shares happy client A. Albright.

Destin Life readers can claim a FREE copy of Brian's book for a limited time by emailing Brian@BeOnTheCoast.com or calling (850) 739-3800.

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# The Beach is Calling: **Destin-Fort Walton Beach Tourism Trends for 2025**

By WILL ESTELL

If you're a resident of the Destin-Fort Walton Beach area, you're well aware of the important role tourism plays in our local economy. And, hopefully, you're aware of the strategic role our local tourist development department plays in following and forecasting the trends that allow for optimal promotion of our beautiful beach communities to families throughout the globe.

While tourism numbers are the math that creates the magic, national economic factors such as tariffs, rising auto costs and inflation stand to have a big impact on spending, likely affecting travel plans this year. However, the Northwest Florida Gulf Coast (better than most regions of the country) is well-positioned to weather the storm-hopefully not a literal one. Thanks to the enduring appeal of our crystal white sand and emerald waters, visitors continue to return to Destin, Fort Walton Beach, and surrounding areas. Tourism remains the key driver of our local magic, even amid broader challenges. As a longtime writer, editor, and publisher in coastal tourism, I've often said that no matter what else we do, Northwest Florida's coastal communities can thrive thanks to our stunning beaches and the millions of beach lovers—both domestic and international—who often become hooked after just one or two visits to the Destin-Fort Walton Beach area.

That said, there is a big difference in surviving and thriving, and that is where the monumental efforts and dedication of our local Destin-Fort Walton Beach Tourist Development Department shines.

Beyond the obvious economic issues facing many vacationers in 2025, accommodation providers are finding that much of the planning is being done in a very short window from the booking dates, as opposed to the travelers of yesterday that would often plan their family vacations four to six months, or more, in advance of their arrival dates. Though this national trend has emerged over the past four to five years, DestinFWB actively addresses it by using innovative marketing to encourage travelers to plan their beach trips ear-



Additionally, as the proliferation of A.I. and travel social media continue to soar, people are undoubtedly changing the way they become aware of potential vacation destinations, as well as how they research, decide upon and book them. These are all things DestinFWB must stay on top of and constantly monitor and learn from, to not only anticipate changes in consumer planning and spending, but also to stay two steps ahead of it.

A recent nationally compiled travel survey showed that 72% of the 6,000 people polled said they would, or already do, use

A.I. (specifically Chat GPT) in researching and deciding where to take their next vacation. I would say that is quite remarkable when we consider that we are talking about a technology that didn't even exist at all for the average person's use, just two years ago.

As added insight into the changing world of vacation planning, another study by TravelPerk found that 48% of active travelers surveyed said they used their mobile phones (as opposed to a computer) to do destination research, while 47% used their phones to compare transporta-





tion and accommodation pricing, and a whopping 40% say they actually booked their stays using their mobile phone. This serves as another example of how both tourism professionals and our TDD leaders are using beneficial data like this in order to best represent our area and the businesses that depend on continued strong tourism numbers

Another interesting trend in the past two to three years is the increase in family oriented and education added vacations, whereby the activities available

Continued on next page



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### Community

### **TOURISM**

continued from previous page

– for both young children, teens and adults – may be as much of the destination decision making process as the popularity, pricing or weather conditions. Essentially, more and more families are considering the desires of even ages 3-4, (what they want to do, see or learn) as well as teenagers and what activities they want to take part in on their upcoming getaway.

This aspect of vacation planning is something DestinF-WB think tanks and marketing minds are well aware of, and one of the prime reasons our area continues to thrive. DestinFWB is continuously adding new and innovative programs such as Little Adventures (See www.adventuredfwb.com), as well as the opportunity for visitors to engage with locals called Scouts who can provide them with insight into local activities, and even assist them in planning and booking their local adven-

With vacation planning evolving due to technologies, shifting mindsets and economic factors, it's a strong positive





that our area is well-positioned to hold steady through the 2025 spring, summer and shoulder seasons—something many tour-ism-driven destinations in our great country aren't projecting this year.

I asked DestinFWB Tourism Director, Jennifer Adams, her thoughts on the trajectory of tourism for the coming summer



and remainder of 2025, as well as her organization's focus for the remainder of the year:

"Destin-Fort Walton Beach's Tourism Department's mission is to make time spent here, whether visiting, living or working, more valuable for all. This can be seen in Okaloosa County through partnerships with our local municipalities and projects such as Women's Veteran's Park, our artificial reef program, or the newly renovated Ross Marler Park playground. With approximately 8 million visitors to the destination per year, the bed-tax collection is key to providing funding for these projects that benefit both tourists and locals alike. We look forward to a strong year ahead and have shifted our marketing strategy to capture potential visitors during their inspiration and planning phases and encourage off-season bookings."

Some locals miss the days when our area was just a "100 days of summer" destination with a quiet off-season—but there's more upside than down. As visitors discover Northwest Florida's Gulf Coast beach communities from a broader, even global, reach, tourism has spread out on the tourism calendar more evenly throughout the year. This helps ease peak-season crowding and traffic hinderances while boosting tourism numbers and year-round revenue that local accommodations, restaurants, retailers and entertainment venues rely on.

With the state of Florida experiencing 75% growth in tourism revenue since 2019, and our

little piece of Northwest Florida paradise continuing to reap the discovery of millions around the world, I think it's safe to say that even if 2025 is not the year of huge increases in local tourism revenue, we are definitely poised to hold onto our popularity and past growth, and maintain our status as a top-destination for beach-loving families everywhere. And that is a lot to be proud of!

Locals and visitors can join in on DestinFWB's innovative, local programs. Visit destinfwb. com. Visit the tourist information center for maps, hotels and restaurant suggestions—1540 Miracle Strip Pkwy. S.E., Fort Walton Beach. Center opens a 9 a.m. For more DestinFWB information, call (800) 322-3319.

Will Estell is a writer, editor, media entrepreneur with over 700 local and national published works from tourism, music and real estate articles to automobile reviews and celebrity interviews. He is currently the Chief Creative Officer of Estell Hussey Media. His 27-year career in publishing includes founding 12 magazine startups while serving as editor in chief for others. Originally from rural Mississippi, Will is a father of three who, along with his wife WEAR ABC 3 Pensacola news anchor Laura Hussey Estell, call the beaches of Northwest Florida home. Will is a regular contributor to our Life Media family of tublications.

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# Vietnam Vets Ed Hubbard and Tom Moody: Heroes Among Us

By Kelly Murphy-Redd

Local resident Ed Hubbard joined the United States Air Force in 1955. He flew the RB66 Destroyer while stationed in England and spent nine months in France. One Saturday afternoon, he received orders to deploy to Thailand. Ed dropped off his family in the U.S. and went to the Philippines for three weeks of survival school. He was stationed at Takhli Air Base in Thailand flying into Vietnam. Thirty days later, he was shot down by a surface to air missile. Ed spent eight hours in the jungle before he was captured. He spent six years, seven months and 12 days in prison.

In prison, two Cuban interrogators controlled 10 Americans in one building. One day, guards threw a new American prisoner on the floor. He was comatose, couldn't speak or eat, and was beaten badly. After three days, they had to do something.

The group decided to force-feed him twice a day. They did this for a year. At this time Ed had a broken jaw, lost 75 pounds, and boils all over his body. He was supposed to die. Feeding this comatose American taught him something. He cites a quote from the book, Man's Search for Meaning: "Life without a purpose is no life at all." Keeping this man alive kept Ed alive.

Feeding took one-and-a-half

Many styles and colors, from statement pieces to succulent pots

Commercial planters • Fountains and accents

hours. Four people held him down. They held his nose shut and put a stick in his mouth. He had to swallow to breath. He regained consciousness one time and was almost normal, but in 1970, he died.

Ed was put in solitary confinement twice for 30 days each and once for 91 days. He wasn't cooperating with the indoctrination and wrote something the guards didn't like. He was beaten every day for 28 days.

In solitary, Ed paced the floor all day talking to himself, convincing himself he would be O.K. He decided if he changed the way he viewed the situation, he could change how he dealt with it. He tried to think of who had it worse than he did. His answer was orphans, because they don't know who their parents are. He decided 90% of people in the world had it worse than he did

He promised himself he would survive no matter what. Ed says a pity trap is where you go to die. He vowed he would never feel sorry for himself again and would never have another bad day as long as he lived.

In January of 1973 the peace treaty ended his tour and he was released. He flew for 12 more years

Ed had no problem adjusting to coming home. In fact, he went back to Hanoi on the 30th and





Ed Hubbard

50th anniversaries of Vietnam. Walking out of the prison door, he looked around, and thought he would never have done all he has done in the last 50 years had he not been a POW.

He has been to 84 countries and spoken to four million people as a motivational speaker. He has no animosity towards the North Vietnamese. He saw many POWs who were filled with hate and they suffered. Ed says it up to us to decide how we want to live. He says you can't make him have a bad day and he hasn't had one since.

**Tom Moody** joined the United States Army out of high

850-960-POTS (7687)



Tom Moody

school. His dad wanted him to go to college and become a civil engineer. Tom decided college was not for him and went to the Navy recruiting office downtown. He wanted to be a pilot and the Navy told him he had to have a four-year degree. So, Tom went to the Army recruiter. They had an opening for military police. After some time, Tom decided he didn't want to be a security guard and heard the 82nd Airborne needed paratroopers. He worked his way up and joined the 1st Army Aviation Battalion, was a part

of the Rangers, went to jump school, and OCS school. He went through flight school and became a helicopter pilot. He was the only Sergeant who was Airborne Ranger qualified.

He was part of the Aviation Battalion at Ft. Bragg, renamed the 118th Air Assault Unit. This unit was first into Vietnam. Tom received the Soldiers Medal for Heroism in 1970 for the following incident.

Tom was flying the command and control helicopter above the landing zone on a mission to transport troops to a particular opening with jungle on both sides. One helicopter was there to disperse smoke to protect the troops from being seen and shot at. This helicopter ran into a tree, tipped over and caught fire. Tom landed his helicopter close to the wreckage. He ran into the fire, grabbed the pilot, and carried him 50 yards to his

Continued on page 18







## Believe in the HYPE — For Now



By Paul Domeneche

### 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.

# The Real Estate Guy



DOMENECH

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## Paul A. Domenech

Paul@TheDomenechGroup.com (850) 543-1418

thedomenechgroup.com



## **Covering Your Assets**



By Julie A. Martin

Insurance is everywhere, and there are so many different kinds, it gets confusing. What kind of coverage are you supposed to have to cover your homes, cars, boats and other fun things that you and your family use? Is it Property Insurance or Casualty Insurance?

The answer is both. **Property Insurance** covers your homes, your condos, your furniture, electronics and all the things you use in your home that is not permanently attached to your home. **Casualty Insurance** usually refers to the items that move, such as your cars, motorcycles, boats and jet skis.

Both Property insurance and Casualty insurance include coverage for your covered items as well as liability. The liability coverage levels may go as high as 500K on a single policy. When you feel it isn't enough to protect you and your family, there is the Umbrella policy.

Umbrella policies include coverage for liability losses over and above what your primary underlying policies would pay. For instance, if you are playing golf and you accidentally hit someone in the head with a golf ball, that person can sue you if they are hurt, even if you yelled "Fore." The incident would need to be sudden and accidental in nature, as no intentional acts are covered.

The umbrella policy covers in levels from \$1M to 5M, with requirements to maintain a minimum level of liability on the underlying policies for auto,

boat, etc. of 250/500 Bodily Injury Liability and 100K Property Damage Liability. The minimum underlying liability requirement for home insurance or any property policies the umbrella covers would be 300K.

It is a common misconception that if someone has an umbrella policy, that its primary function is to pay out what is demanded. That is not how this works. The umbrella policy acts to defend its policyholder and attempt to keep the client from financial ruin. Many standard carriers offer umbrella coverage, and it is even possible to bundle your auto insurance with your umbrella in many cases for an extra multi-policy discount.

If you have more than one home, two cars and even one toy, whether it's a motorcycle, boat or wave runner, it would be a good idea for you to have an umbrella to cover excess liability over all of your assets. Speaking with an independent agent to find out what kind of coverage is right for you will give you the peace of mind in knowing that there are no coverage gaps. And you can live your life not worrying about your insurance!

Covering your assets is only a phone call away. For more, contact me, Client Advocate at Abora Insurance Group, at 1-800-494-1333, Julie@GetAbora.com or visit www.GetAbora.com

## **VIETNAM** continued from page 16

helicopter. He went back for the crew chief and carried him over his shoulder. He transported the pilot and crew chief to medivac and they survived.

Tom spent 39 months in

Vietnam! After his first tour, the Army sent him back to the U.S. and told him he was going to Germany. Tom said he wanted to go back to Vietnam. After the second year, the Army sent him back to the U.S. and again told him he was going to Germany. Tom said he still didn't want to go to Germany and wanted to go back to Vietnam. That third tour was extended three months.

During his first tour, the helicopter door gunners, from the 25th Infantry out of Hawaii, only had M14 rifles. The next tour, the door gunners had machine guns. They often coordinated with the Air Force F100s for support. One time Tom was sent up north at Thanksgiving to rescue POWs but they had been moved.

He says they did what they were told to do, didn't ask questions, and didn't know the big picture. They were there to support their brothers. In retrospect, Tom thinks the U.S. government got us into a war we shouldn't have gotten into. We lost over 50 thousand men. Their hands were tied, because they couldn't shoot unless shot at.

Out of 7000 helicopters in Vietnam, 3000 were destroyed. Eleven hundred helicopter pilots lost their lives and 1,200 crew were killed. From start to end, 100,000 pilots and crew served in Vietnam.

After Tom retired, he owned a well-known boating business in Destin. He is a humble and generous man who enthusiastically acknowledges the contribution and bravery of others. He has been named Crestview's Citizen of the Year.

This year the Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce will be hosting "Honoring Our Heroes," a tribute to our Vietnam veterans on the 50th anniversary of the end of the war. The April 28-30th event will be filled with historical presentations, panel discussions, and a banquet featuring distinguished speakers. The event is open to the public, with free admission to the educational programs on April 28-29. Ticket information for the Heroes' Tribute Banquet on April 30 is available online at FWBcham-





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Fashion

## Color of the Season:

## How to Wear Mocha Mousse This Spring

By Liesel Schmidt

Designers of every ilk, be it fashion or home and interior, wait expectantly for Pantone's annual release of its color of the year, anticipating the ways said color will influence trends on the runway and the real way. And while some in the know had an inkling that rich chocolate browns would be a wise wardrobe addition, those of us who don't have a finger on the pulse might not have seen 2025's color of the year coming. So, what exactly are we expecting to see in a big way this year? The answer might very well be staring back at you from over the rim of your coffee cup.

Tantalizingly called "Mocha Mousse," Pantone's color of the year for 2025 was chosen for very specific reasons. A mellow shade of brown, the color evokes a sense of comfort, intimacy and elegance while hinting at indulgence through its correlation to cacao, chocolate and coffee. Sounds yummy to



us, and we at Blue Bay Lifestyle Co. have the perfect ways to add this delicious color to your wardrobe for spring and summer—whether you want to take a big bite or just a nibble.

We're loving lightweight shell sweaters from Lovestitch, which make transitioning into the warmer months ahead a breeze. Pair one in this year's color with fitted white jeans or shorts from Liverpool for days that you want to look chic and pulled together. Linen tops are high on our list of spring faves, and this breezy material is perfect for the mellow tones of 2025's mocha madness. Lovestitch linen tanks give you versatility in styling and a fashion-forward vibe that looks effortless and clean. Add your favorite pair of jeans, shorts or even wide-leg linen pants to be dressed and ready for wherever the day takes you, from work to play. A pair of mocha-hued flats or sandals from Aetrex makes a



great finishing touch that your feet will love and your inner fashionista will heartily approve.

Shorts are a staple of everyone's wardrobe in Florida, and Liverpool's lightweight drawstring shorts can be dressed up or down. Choose a pair in that luscious color we're craving, and pull on a fluttery white broderie Anglaise blouse or a cotton tank with feminine detailing. We've got some looks to love from Lovestitch, Liverpool and Gretty Zeuger. Of course, you'll need to accessorize, and Hobo has dreamy leather clutches, crossbodies and satchels in shades of brown that add a great pop to your ensemble.

Stripes are getting in on the action, and we can't get enough of mocha and white striped tops and bottoms. Pin striped pants are a fun way to add subtle patterns to your look, or go bold with wide stripes that stand out in a crowd. Striped knit hoodies are a great layer for cooler evenings on the beach or out on the town, pulled on over a bathing suit, shorts and shirt or even a flirty little sun dress.

As neutral as this year's color trend may be, there are great ways to add your own touches and take it from meh to mouthwatering. Stop into Blue Bay Lifestyle and check out everything we have for your springtime fashion cravings—we'll see you soon!







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### **Community Events**

Public Racing Events • Tuesday Night Group Runs Yoga at Blue Bay Lifestyle Co. (next door)

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Demo Paddles • Reservations Available at courtreserve.com

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## Destin Niving, Entertainment, Specials

### 850 Froyo

Swirl, top and enjoy! Get your Froyo fix at 850 Froyo, Destin's favorite self-serve frozen yogurt spot! With 16 rotating flavors and 30+ toppings, the possibilities are endless.

Flavors you'll love: Red Velvet, Salted Caramel, Cookie Monster, Espresso, Tigers Blood (dairy-free), and more!

Toppings galore: Brownies, Sugar Cookies, Pretzels, Sour Patch Kids, Cookie Dough, Cheese Cake Bites, Kit-Kats, Reeses, Blueberries, Cherries, Strawberries, Mochi, Boba, Coconut, Oreos, Animal Crackers, Nerds, M&M, Sprinkles, Hot Fudge, Carmel and more!

Just 73¢ per oz. – mix, match and indulge! Stop by today and build your perfect swirl!

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(850) 353-2093 985 U.S. 98 E, Unit E, Destin

### AJ's Seafood & Oyster Bar

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

our Emerald Coast, serving fresh seafood, live music and exciting water activities in the Destin area. Attention all sports fans, AJ's boasts the one and only Jumbotron on the Destin Harbor, where you can watch your favorite games on the BIG, BIG screen surrounded by the energy and beauty of the Destin Harbor. AJ's serves up delicious daily specials, mouth-watering drinks plus entertaining live music all month, too. Don't miss any of the action! Come on down to AJ's Seafood and Oyster Bar all season long.

(850) 837-1913 116 Harbor Blvd. ajsdestin.com

### **Austons on 98**

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

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.

### **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 burgers, sandwiches and salads. You will love the full-service coffee shop, offering everything from hot or iced fresh, local Amavida coffee to espresso and lattés. 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

### **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 shopping done with a Fudpucker's gift card or shop the Fudpucker's gift shop for unique Easter gifts and merchandise!

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

### **Kwench Destin**

Fuel your body, elevate your health, savor the goodness! Welcome to Kwench Juice Café, Destin's go-to spot for fresh-pressed juices, smoothies, and nourishing acai and pitaya bowls. Since 2023, Kwench Destin has been blending up pure, raw goodness to energize your wellness journey.

"At Kwench, we believe in quality ingredients, bold flavors, innovative recipes and fresh nutrition—because your body deserves the best." Every sip is a boost of vitality, every bite a step toward better health.

Craving something fresh? Stop by today and taste the dif-

(850) 842-2802 985 US-98, Unit E, Destin kwenchjuicecafedestin.com

### **Melting Pot Destin**

Join Melting Pot Destin on Easter Sunday for delicious fondue starting at noon with

recipe was written by Mama

**Mondays:** 4pm: Cole Jordan 8pm: Roshambo Tuesdays: **8pm: Austin Jennings** 4pm: Hunter & Tony Wednesdays: 8pm: Smoke Show 4pm: Flash Flood Thursdays: 8pm: Austin Jennings Fridays: 4pm: Jason Findley 8pm: Airavata 12pm: Rotating Spot **Saturdays:** 4pm: Flash Flood 8pm: Gunner 12pm: Rotating Spot **Sundays:** 

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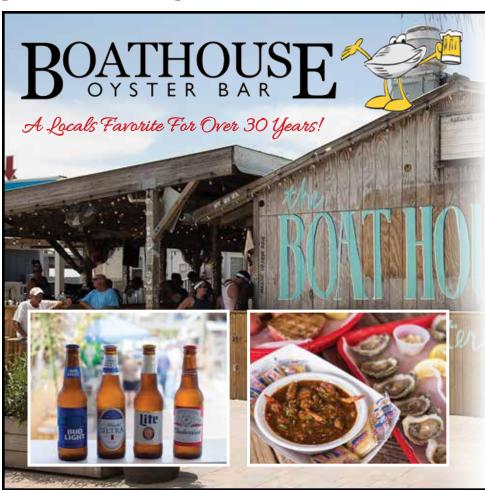
Open Daily from 11 am-2 am Lunch Specials M-F for \$9.99 Slacker Sunday Oyster Brunch 11 am

4pm: Shane Curle

**8pm: Rotating Spot** 

288 Harbor Blvd, Destin (850) 837-3645

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



# Gators + Food + Booze = Fun at Fudpucker's GatorFest 2025

### **GatorFest 2025**

Fudpucker's Beachside Bar & Grill is set to host GatorFest 2025, a spectacular event promising an exhilarating blend of entertainment, education, and gastronomic delights. Scheduled for May 3th, 2025, this four-hour extravaganza at Destin's most family-friendly venue aims to bring together individuals of all ages for an unforgettable experience dedicated to one of nature's most awe-inspiring creatures — the alligator. Festivities go from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

### **GatorFest Activities**

GatorFest 2025 is more than just an event; it's a journey into the heart of Florida's beloved wildlife culture, set against the backdrop of Fudpucker's renowned hospitality. From thrilling Gator Shows that offer an up-close look at these magnificent reptiles to a Gator Tail Cook Off Competition that showcases culinary creativity, the festival is a testament to the diverse attractions that make it a must-visit destination.

A standout feature of the festival is its dedicated Kid's Zone, a paradise for young adventurers. Here, children can engage in a variety of activities, from face painting to Gator-themed games, fostering an environment of joy and creativity. Meanwhile, adults can savor Cocktail Tastings, indulge in Hot Sauce Tasting, and enjoy music, ensuring there's something for everyone.

## **GatorFest Charity Partnership**

But GatorFest is not just about fun and games. It stands as a beacon of community involvement and environmental conservation.

Partnering with Alaqua Animal Refuge, the festival channels its energy and passion into raising awareness and funds for the refuge's mission to rescue and care for animals in need. This collaboration highlights the event's commitment to making a positive impact, offering attendees a chance to contribute to a noble cause while enjoying the festivities.



## Fudpucker's Beachside Bar & Grill

Fudpucker's itself is a destination that embodies the spirit of family-friendly fun, with its title of "Best Family-Friendly Restaurant" earned through a commitment to providing memorable dining experiences. Gator Beach, dubbed The World's Greatest Alligator Park, allows visitors to interact with these fascinating creatures, offering an educational experience that leaves lasting memories.

The anticipation for GatorFest 2025 reflects a broader community excitement, drawing visitors from across the United States.

Known for hosting vibrant events like Teen Night, Kid's Day, the Noon Year's Eve Balloon Drop, Kick-Off Parties for EC Volleyball and Jeepalooza, and Jazz Dinner Shows, Fudpucker's continues to be a beacon for family entertainment, making it the perfect venue for GatorFest.

### Food, Fun & Gators

GatorFest 2025 promises a day of exhilarating entertainment, delicious food, and a shared commitment to wildlife conservation. By integrating fun with educational and charitable endeavors, the festival not only offers a unique experience but also reinforces the importance of community and environmental stewardship.

Mark your calendars and join the celebration at Fudpucker's, where the wild is welcomed, and memories are made.

So, stop by and have some fun at Fud's Gatorfest. See you later, alligator!

### Visit Us in Destin at

20001 Emerald Coast Pkwy. www.FudsGatorFest.com www.Fudpucker.com



WWW.FUDSGATORFEST.COM

## Destin Diving, Entertainment, Specials

### **DINING**

continued from page 20

all your fondue favorites for the whole family to enjoy. Make your reservations now! Easter Sunday, April 20th: Noon - 8 p.m.

Celebrate friendship and our beautiful Earth at Melting Pot's Ladies Night Out this April! Enjoy delicious fondue from the Best Fondue Friends Forever Menu, tasty cocktails and a complimentary Spring bouquet making station on Tuesday, April 22nd, Earth Day! Make your reservations for Melting Pot Ladies' Night Out.

- $\bullet$  3 course BFFF- \$32 per person
- $\bullet$  4 course BFFF- \$48 per person

Melting Pot is now open at

Noon every Saturday and Sunday for lunch!

Fondue Cravings Menu: Saturdays and Sundays from 12 - 4 p.m. \$30 per person

Choice of Cheese Fondue, Fresh Salad and Chocolate Fondue. Sharing is not permitted.

Reserve a table today at Melting Pot Destin and celebrate the start of spring!

(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. Tailfins is a go-to destination for

sports watching featuring more than 70 big screen TVs showing all college 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., seven days a week. Enjoy a classic breakfast with bacon and eggs, a seafood or Cajun omelet and even a kid's smiley pancake. Be sure to order up a round of mimosas and bloody marys. Enjoy some of your favorite food and drinks, and scrumptious early bird dinner specials Monday to Friday, 3-6 p.m. Sip and unwind with happy hour from 3-6 p.m. Monday through Friday. And come on in for live music on the docks. \$5 drink specials: Margarita's, Johnny's Red Ale, Michelob Draft Pints, Well Drinks,



Long Island Teas, House Wines. DAILY CRUISES: Tailfins Island Adventure! Departures seven days a week aboard "Always Workin'," Tailfins' 45-footlong cruiser, and Tailfins 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.

(850) 650-1111 On the Harbor in Destin, 172 Harbor Blvd. tailfinsdestin.com

## 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. "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.

EAT. DRINK. FIESTA! (850) 279.6402 11225 U.S. 98 W., Miramar Beach Tequilasmiramarbeach.com





# Lady Ray's Expands to Walton County Through New Bakery Partnership

Lady Ray's, a renowned name in custom cakes and confections in Destin, is bringing its signature creations to Walton County through an exciting new partnership with The Little Bluebird Bakery. The collaboration marks a significant step in Lady Ray's expansion, allowing local customers to enjoy their handcrafted cakes in a fresh, new way.

The Little Bluebird Bakery, a beloved mobile bakery based in Defuniak Springs, has been serving the community since 2020 with its made-fromscratch treats. Known for its creativity and dedication to quality, the bakery has built a strong local following. Now, through this partnership, customers in Walton County will have easier access to Lady Ray's custom cake designs and specialty desserts.

"We are extremely excited about this partnership, as we've been looking to expand our product offerings to Walton County over the last couple of years," says Lady Ray's owner, Tim Vondell. "Working with The Little Bluebird Bakery is the perfect opportunity to bring our custom cakes to a wider audience while collaborating with a fantastic local business that



shares our passion for quality and creativity."

This partnership will allow both businesses to enhance their offerings, giving customers more options for weddings, birthdays, and special events. Orders for Lady Ray's custom cakes will now be available for delivery through The Little Bluebird Bakery, providing a convenient and local way for Walton County residents to enjoy their stunning and delicious cakes.

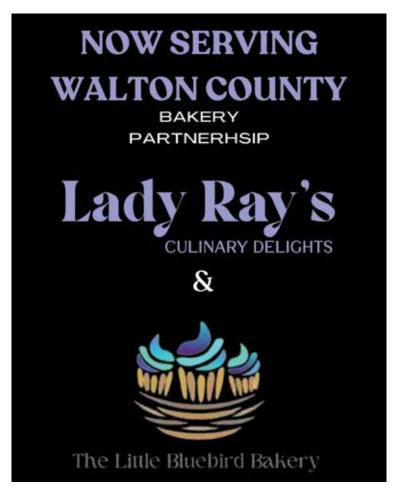
With this expansion, Lady Ray's continues to grow its presence in the Florida Panhandle, staying true to its commitment to delivering exceptional baked goods and unforgettable cake designs.

For details on custom orders and availability, customers can follow Lady Ray's on social media or visit the website at ladyrays.com. In Destin, 833 Harbor Blvd. Unit 19, near Target.









## Wine Fests on Tap!

### **Sandestin Wine Festival April 10-13**

The 38th Annual Sandestin Wine Festival at the Village of Baytowne Wharf at Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort will take place April 10-13. Topping area polls as a must-experience

event, this beloved festival offers four full days of unique events including wine dinners with celebrity chefs, yoga, live music, interactive experiences, culinary tents, and, of course, wine tastings. Tickets, schedule and lodging info: www. sandestinwinefestival.com.

(850) 269-2227

meltingpot.com

Wine novices are able to learn more about wines and sample from a comprehensive selection in all varieties, styles, and price ranges. Wine aficionados enjoy meeting winemakers, asking detailed questions, and



acquiring hard to get selections. Everyone gets to enjoy the live music, interactive experiences at the Culinary tents, and shops and dining of the Village of Baytowne Wharf.

### **Destin Charity Wine Auction April 25-26**

The Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation (DCWAF) marks 20 years of fundraising with the 2025 Destin Charity Wine Auction, presented by the Jumonville Family, on April 25-26. Proceeds benefit 17 children's charities in Northwest Florida. Patron packages are on sale now at dcwaf.org/tickets. Sponsorships available—contact info@dcwaf.org.

### **Event Highlights:** April 25 - Patron Dinners: Exclusive vintner and chef pairings at private homes, supporting DCWAF charities.

April 26 - Charity Wine **Auction:** A Reserve Tasting & Live Auction at Grand Boulevard Sandestin Town Center featuring world-class wines, gourmet cuisine, and high-energy bidding on rare wines, trips, and more.

The auction coincides with the South Walton Beaches Wine & Food Festival, offering hundreds of premium wines and culinary delights. Auction attendees receive access to the festival's Grand Tasting on April 27 at 1 p.m. Learn more at dcwaf.org/ auction

### **South Walton Beaches Wine & Food Festival April** 24-27, 2025

A dazzling roster of celebrity winemakers, mixologists, and chefs will converge April 24 -27, 2025, for a world-class wine and food experience—the South Walton Beaches Wine & Food Festival in Grand Boulevard Town Center—to wine, dine, educate and entertain guests as

part of the four-day celebration of wine, spirits, food, music, sunshine, fun and goodwill.

South Walton Beaches Wine & Food Festival features a stunning showcase of some of the best in the world—the perfect blend of 600+ world-class wines, industry experts, culinary icons, Nashville singer/songwriters, educational seminars and a sprinkle of fun and funky activations.

Celebrity wine producers and chefs present fine wine and food pairings from the world's most famous appellations. The Culinary Village offers a sumptuous array of foods to taste, wines to pair, as well as wine and food tasting seminars.

### **Event Highlights:** Botanicals, Bitters & Brews April 25 | 5:30-8 p.m.

Enjoy a cocktail competition, craft beer, lite bites and live music in a stunning garden-inspired setting under the stars. Sample specialty cocktails and vote for your favorite, sip local craft brews, and nosh on delectable cuisine while you dance the night away to The Forrest Williams Band!

### **Saturday Grand Tasting** April 26 | 3-6 p.m.

At SoWalWine, it's all about the quality, diversity, scope and relevance of wines being offered and the people bringing them to the table. There are over 600 high-quality, diverse selections!

### **Sunday Grand Tasting** April 27 | 1pm - 4 pm

Welcome back to day two of the Grand Tastings, where you can taste wines from around the world and buzz-worthy, award-winning craft spirits, then stroll on over to sample delicious foods while listening to live music.

For more information and to purchase tickets, visit www.So-WalWine.com.





### **EVENTS**

continued from page 11

SOCKS is a no-kill, free-roaming, feline-only cat shelter funded by donations. Event proceeds will provide food, shelter and medical care for cats and kittens waiting for their forever homes.

## **Swing into Action May 3 FORE the Love of Animals**

Get ready to hit the greens for a great cause May 3 at the Links Golf Club at Sandestion! Registration is now open for the FORE! the Love of Animals Golf Tournament, presented by Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort and benefiting Alaqua Animal Refuge. This premier event combines friendly competition, camaraderie and a shared commitment to helping animals in need.

Secure Your Spot Today! Foursomes are \$850 and individuals are \$250 with proceeds directly supporting Alaqua's mission of providing shelter, safety, and second chances to animals in need.

REGISTER NOW at https://app.eventcaddy.com/events/fore-the-love-of-animals-2025.

Want to make an even bigger impact? Sponsorship opportunities offer premium visibility, brand exposure, and the chance to be a leader in supporting animal welfare. Sponsor a Hole for Just \$100! Spots fill up fast, so don't wait! Join us on the course and help change lives — one swing at a time.

## **Destin Rotary Crawfish Bash May 16**

Get ready for a flavorful evening at the Rotary Club of Destin's 13th Annual Cajun Crawfish Bash on Friday, May 16, 2025, from 5:30 to 9 p.m. at The Towne Centre at Seascape. This family-friendly event promises authentic Cajun cuisine, including fresh Louisiana crawfish served with traditional fixings like potatoes, sausage, and corn on the cob. For those preferring alternatives, grilled hamburgers, hot dogs, and rotisserie chicken will be available. Enjoy live music from the Fais Do-Do Band. bringing their unique blend of zydeco and R&B to keep you dancing all night. Tickets are priced at \$40 for a regular crawfish meal, \$50 for all-youcan-eat crawfish, and \$15 for kids and non-crawfish meals.



Proceeds support young families in need and the Rotary Club of Destin Scholarship Fund. For more information and to purchase tickets, visit www.Destin-Rotary.com or Facebook/RotaryClubofDestin or contact any Destin Rotarian.

## Spring into Savings at the Northwest Florida Spring Home & Boat Show!

### Saturday, May 17, 2025 | Northwest Florida Fairgrounds | FREE Admission!

Get ready, Northwest Florida! One of the most anticipated events of the season is sailing your way—the Northwest Florida Spring Home & Boat Show is coming to the Northwest Florida Fairgrounds for one exciting day only on Saturday, May 17, 2025—and admission is completely FREE!

Presented by Paradise Promotions and powered by sponsors Life Media (Destin Life, Bay Life, FWB Life), Ecoview Windows, Defined Interiors, JVC Broadcasting, Fast Signs, Peaden AC, Zoo Graphics, and The Honey Do Service, this dynamic event will feature 50+vendors showcasing everything you need to upgrade your home and lifestyle—with exclusive show-only discounts and give-aways.

Expect to find the best deals on everything from roofing, remodeling, and restoration services to flooring, furniture, pools, spas, windows, and doors. Plus, explore innovations in solar energy, tech gadgets, closets, kitchens, bathrooms, and more—all under one roof!

And that's not all—Emerald Coast Marine will be on-site hosting a Super Spring Boat Show & Sale, offering fantastic boat deals you won't want to miss. Whether you're dreaming of hitting the water or refreshing your home, this show has it all.

On top of that, there will be over \$10,000 in swag and door prizes up for grabs! And with vendors from health and wellness to tech and travel—including Scentsy, chiropractic care, massage therapy, and more—there's something here for everyone.

Don't miss this chance to connect with local experts, score unbeatable deals, and get inspired for your next home or boating adventure.

Want to be a vendor? Visit www.ParadisePromotions-



FL.com to register your booth space today!

It's all happening Saturday, May 17—one big day, one fantastic event. See you at the fairgrounds!

### Destin's 68th Annual Blessing of the Fleet Set for May 29

Destin's cherished maritime tradition, the 68th Annual Blessing of the Fleet, will take place on Thursday, May 29, 2025, at the docks behind Brotula's Seafood House & Steamer, located at 210 Harbor Blvd. The event begins at 4 p.m. with a Captain's Testimony, Worship, and Prayer Service, inviting the public to join in prayer and worship. Following the service,

at 5:15 p.m., local clergy will commence the blessing of the vessels, offering prayers for safe voyages and abundant catches for the upcoming season. A fish fry will follow the blessings, with donations requested to support the event.

Free parking is available at Brotula's and at the City of Destin's lots in the harbor district. Boat owners and captains who earn their living on the sea are encouraged to participate. To register your vessel, please call (850) 837-6324.

Join the Destin community in honoring its rich fishing heritage and supporting local fishermen at this heartfelt event.

(850) 650-1200

TailfinsDestin.com



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Long Island Teas, House Wines



## Destin Gears Up for the 2025 Lionfish Festival:

## A Celebration with a Purpose

Destin is once again diving into conservation and coastal celebration with the highly anticipated 2025 Lionfish Festival, returning this spring with a splash. Set to take place May 17–18, 2025, along the Destin Harbor Boardwalk, this vibrant, family-friendly event merges environmental awareness with fun, food, music, and marine education.

The festival will run from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on both Saturday and Sunday, transforming the Destin Harbor into a bustling celebration of local culture and ecological stewardship. The event is free and open to the public, making it the perfect weekend destination for families, divers and seafood lovers alike.

At the heart of the festival is the mission to combat the invasive lionfish, a striking but destructive species threatening native marine life in the Gulf. The Lionfish Festival not only raises awareness about this growing issue, but also encourages action through organized lionfish removal tournaments and educational outreach.

### **Activities & Entertainment**

Visitors can enjoy a variety of engaging attractions, including:

## Lionfish Filleting and Cooking Demonstrations -

Learn how to safely handle and prepare lionfish with guidance from local chefs and marine experts.

Live Music - Enjoy per-



formances from regional bands and artists throughout the day.

### **Educational Exhibits**

Dive into marine conservation with booths hosted by local en-

vironmental organizations, universities, and state agencies.

**Interactive Kids Zone** – Hands-on activities, games, and art projects for the younger festivalgoers.

**Local Artisans and Vendors** – Browse ocean-themed crafts, artwork and sustainable products from local makers.

**Tastings** and Food Trucks – Sample lionfish-inspired dishes and classic coastal cuisine from a diverse selection of food vendors.

## **Lionfish Tournament Details**

A centerpiece of the event is the Emerald Coast Open, where licensed divers compete to remove as many lionfish as possible from local waters. Registration is now open (through May 15 at emeraldcoastopen. com) and participants must pre-register and possess a valid saltwater fishing license. The LARGEST Lionfish Tournament in the world, there are monthly prizes for pre-tournament participants and huge cash prizes for the main tournament. In 2024, there were 147 participants, 11,844 Lionfish removed! Emerald Coast Open gave away

\$65,000 in cash prizes and over \$60,000 in gear prizes.

## Pre-Tournament February 1-May 15, 2025

Participating in the ECO pre-tournament is easy for everyone! Simply go out and hunt lionfish. Drop them off at designated drop off locations (emeraldcoastopen.com) and you will receive two raffle entries for each fish you turn in. That's it! Hunt lionfish and win prizes!

### Main Tournament May 16-17, 2025

Win big money and big prizes! Each team of up to four can go out for two days and harvest lionfish. Tournament fish must be turned in at the official weigh station before 3 p.m. on Sunday, May 18, to be eligible for prizes. Awards will be given for categories such as Most Lionfish, Largest Lionfish and Smallest Lionfish. This friendly competition not only supports reef conservation, but also provides data for ongoing scientific research. You don't have to be a professional, but you do have to sign up and get out on the water. You can't win if you don't compete!

While no special permit is required to harvest lionfish in Florida waters, divers must follow all standard safety and boating regulations. For rules and more information, visit emeraldcoastopen.com.

### Emerald Coast Open Restaurant Week May 9-17, 2025

Concurrent to the Festival and Tournament is Restaurant Week, an event hosted by Destin-Fort Walton Beach during the week leading up to the Emerald Coast Open Lionfish

Continued on page 42





M Off the Hook

## A Celebration of Marine Life: Join Us for Gulfarium's 2nd Annual CARE on the Coast Sea Turtle Fundraiser!

Get ready for an unforgettable evening of conservation, celebration, and coastal fun at Gulfarium's CARE on the Coast on April 26, 2025, at 3:30 PM! This annual festival brings together delicious food, refreshing drinks, live entertainment, and marine animal encounters for a one-of-a-kind event benefiting the Gulfarium CARE Center's mission to rescue and rehabilitate sea turtles.

As soon as you arrive, you'll be swept up in the excitement of this vibrant, festival-style event, complete with mouthwatering cuisine, cocktails, and lively music to set the mood. Whether you're mingling with fellow ocean enthusiasts, bidding on exclusive experiences in the silent auction, or enjoying a frontrow seat at the dolphin presentation, there's no shortage of things to see and do.

For those eager to dive into marine conservation, CARE on the Coast offers a rare chance to go behind the scenes and learn



how Gulfarium's dedicated animal care team works to rehabilitate sick and injured sea turtles. Hear inspiring success stories, get up close with some of our current patients, and discover how you can play a role in protecting these incredible crea-

Kids and adults alike will love the interactive activities and hands-on experiences scattered throughout the park, including conservation-themed games, crafts, and fun challenges designed to inspire the next generation of ocean advocates. Whether you're exploring these activities, sipping a cool drink under the Florida sunset, or dancing to live music, the night promises to be a true celebration of marine life.

Tickets are on sale now, and



they're going fast! General admission grants access to all activities, entertainment, and behind-the-scenes insights, while VIP packages offer exclusive perks like early entry, premium seating, and a special meet-andgreet with Gulfarium's animal care experts.

Don't miss out on this incredible evening of food, fun, and conservation for a cause. Visit our official event page at gulfarium.com/cotc to purchase your tickets today, and get ready for an unforgettable night at CARE on the Coast!





Help us save our local sea turtles at this exciting, family-friendly event!

Live music

In-depth look at C.A.R.E. Center

Dolphin presentation

Silent auction and raffles

**SCAN TO BUY TICKETS NOW** THIS EVENT WILL SELL OUT!

www.gulfarium.com/cotc



Thank you to our sponsors!









# Golf Series: Kelly Plantation Bunkers and Tee Boxes Get Updated!

By Barbara Palmgren

What do you do when that old sand in the sand traps just won't work to at least help the golfer escape from its' clutches? The first solution, of course, is not to get into the trap in the first place. I personally avoid them at all costs. My ball doesn't always listen and so I stare at the evil little thing and proceed to bury it even further with a sand wedge acting like a hammer.

At Kelly Plantation, the old bunkers from 1999 were deteriorating and balls would land and sometimes dig themselves into the sand, making it difficult to use even the best sand wedge shot to land the ball onto the green. Two years ago, Kelly Plantation began to solve this problem by renovating bunkers.

With members in mind, this update was skillfully organized so as not to stop play on the course. Two phases were arranged. Phase One from December 2023 to March 2024 closed holes 1-5 and 9-11. One hole at a time each day was tar-



geted and hole number 16 never had to be shut down as no bunkers loomed around it. Phase Two from December 2024 to March 2025 followed the same pattern with closing holes 6-8 and 12-18. Both phases were scheduled in the winter when the growing season is short and summer tourist season is not affected.

John Townsend, Gener-

al Manager, proudly told me about the new type of sand that was placed in the bunker. Who wants old round sand that buries a ball? I don't. Who wants friendly Tour Angled sand with flat, irregular but friendly shaped particles that welcome a golf ball to sit up, waiting for you to hit that perfect shot onto the green? I do.

As part of an excellent plan-



ning strategy, while the holes were closed in each phase, tee boxes were also renovated. Each tee box was stripped of old sod and laser leveled to allow a perfect surface for the execution of a long drive. Finally, around the practice area, the chipping green was redone with a bunker removed to create a larger chipping area.

Careful planning over a two-

year period allowed members to play golf while improving an already gorgeous golf course. Kelly Plantation is to be congratulated for providing the ideal setting to improve and lower golf scores.

Now, if I could only keep my ball out of those perfect sand traps...







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## Diving the Expanded Underwater Museum

The Cultural Arts Alliance (CAA) of Walton County was recently approved by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) for a Grants for Arts Projects award of \$20,000! This grant will support the 2025 installation of sculptures to expand the nation's first Underwater Museum of Art (UMA). The NEA awarded 1,127 Grants for Arts Projects awards nationwide totaling more than \$31.8 million as part of the recent announcement of fiscal year 2025 grants.

"The CAA's very first NEA grant was received in 2018, making it possible for us to collaborate with the South Walton Artificial Reef Association to create the nation's first Underwater Museum of Art. So, it is incredibly rewarding to be recognized again by the NEA now that the UMA is approaching its seventh anniversary," said CAA President & CEO Jennifer Steele

In addition to this exciting news, J & The Causeways will return to headline Dine + Dive, CAA's upcoming fundraising event benefiting the Underwa-



ter Museum of Art, Wednesday, April 30, 6-9 p.m. at Grand Boulevard's Town Center. Dine + Dive serves as the official kick-off for Art Month Walton County, a month-long celebration of the arts featuring a diverse line-up of cultural events throughout May.

This year, the CAA and South Walton Artificial Reef Association (SWARA) are ele-

vating the former Under the Sea event into an immersive celebration of fine art, exquisite cuisine, exceptional wines and marine conservation. This multi-sensory experience will feature an extensive selection of incredible wines to sample, more than a dozen tasting stations showcasing exclusive dishes from the area's most renowned restaurants and celebrated chefs, and a cash bar serving signature

cocktails and craft beer.

In addition to continuous live music, Dine + Dive party-goers will have an opportunity to meet UMA artists from current and previous installations as well as receive an exclusive preview of several of the original works created for the 2025 installation before the sculptures are deployed to the UMA site over the summer

Tickets fare \$100 per person in advance and \$125 per person day of the event, if available. Purchase at CulturalArtsAlliance.com/upcoming-events.

Funds raised will directly support the 7th deployment of sculptures into the UMA. A collaborative initiative with SWARA, the UMA is the nation's first permanent underwater sculpture museum. Recognized as one of TIME magazine's 100 World's Greatest Places (2018), National Geographic's Best Trips (2019), and a 2023 CODA Award winner, the UMA continues to gain international acclaim for its unique fusion of art, marine conservation, and eco-tourism.

The UMA is a signature initiative of the Cultural Arts Alliance's Art in Public Spaces program, developed in partnership with SWARA. Designed to serve both ecological and artistic purposes, the UMA enhances marine habitats and supports the growth of fish populations while also enriching South Walton's cultural landscape.

The 2025 UMA installation will include the following piec-

es of sculpture: Concretion by William Braithwaite (United Kingdom), Seahorse by Jessica Bradsher (Greenville, NC), The Neptunian Oak by Nathan Hoffman (Highlandville, MO), Happy Hour by Sarah Wilkinson (United Kingdom), and Hometown by Mandy Yourk (Panama City, FL), and The Menina of the Reef: An Infinite Message by Antonio Azzato (Spain).

Select sculptures, including The Menina of the Reef: An Infinite Message, which is a special collaboration between the Florida Cancer Specialists Foundation and CAA, will be on display at Dine + Dive and during the 37th annual ArtsQuest Fine Arts Festival in Grand Boulevard's Town Center May 3 and 4 and will then be transferred to Orange Beach, Ala., to be prepared for their deployment into the Gulf this summer. The UMA site is located less than one mile off the coast of Grayton Beach State Park in a one-acre permit patch of seabed.

For more information, visit UMAFL.org.





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## Struggling with Sleep? Hormone Therapy Can Help You Rest and Restore Your Health



By Dr. Richard Chern

If you're tossing and turning at night, waking up drenched in sweat, or simply unable to sleep through the night, you're not alone. Poor sleep is one of the most common complaints among women approaching menopause or who are postmenopausal. And the most common cause of this frustrating issue is estrogen deficiency.

As estrogen levels decline, the body experiences disruptions in temperature regulation, melatonin production and serotonin levels—all critical factors for a deep, restful restorative sleep. This leads to insomnia, frequent waking, night sweats and poor sleep quality, leaving you feeling drained, irritable and unable to function at your best.

Poor Sleep Affects Every Part of Your Life

Many women don't realize that sleep isn't just about feeling rested. Lack of sleep can have serious effects on physical and mental health. Without proper rest, emotions become harder to regulate, leading to increased irritability, anxiety and even depression. The immune system weakens, making you more susceptible to illness and slowing down your body's ability to heal.

Poor sleep also interferes with metabolism and weight management. When you're not sleeping well, your body produces more cortisol, the stress hormone that encourages fat storage, particularly in the midsection. Over time, sleep deprivation can also increase the risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and even dementia. In fact, research indicates that consistently poor sleep can reduce life expectancy due to its widespread impact on overall health.

If you feel like you're aging overnight, struggling with low energy or battling daily exhaustion, it's time to address the root cause. Hormone therapy can

The Hormone Restoration

Center Can Give You Back Your Sleep!

At the Hormone Restoration Center, we specialize in helping both women and men achieve hormonal balance, restoring energy, vitality and overall well-being. For women struggling with sleep due to declining estrogen, hormone therapy can be a life-changing solution.

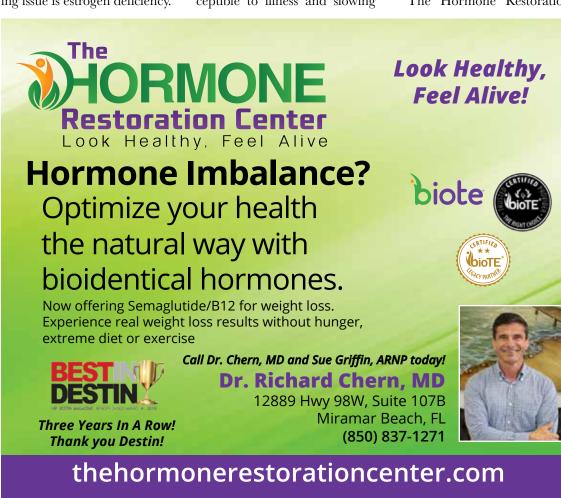
Bioidentical Hormone Replacement Therapy (BHRT) is a safe and effective treatment that replenishes the hormones your body is missing. By restoring optimal estrogen levels, you can experience deep, uninterrupted sleep, relief from night sweats and hot flashes, improved mood and reduced anxiety. Energy levels will increase throughout the day, mental clarity will in years!

sharpen and your metabolism will function more efficiently, making weight management easier.

Imagine waking up refreshed, energized, and ready to take on the day without feeling groggy, moody or exhausted. That's what hormone therapy can do for you.

You don't have to suffer through sleepless nights or accept exhaustion as your new normal. Your body is telling you something and we can help. If poor sleep is affecting your quality of life, it's time to take action.

Call the Hormone Restoration Center at 850-837-1271 today to schedule your consultation. Let us help you reclaim your nights, restore your energy and feel better than you have



## Get the Smile You Deserve

### Smile with Confidence Again

- · Are you embarrassed about smiling in front of people?
- Do you ever put your hand up to cover your smile?
- Do you dislike your smile in photographs?
- When you look through magazines, do you envy the models' smiles?
- Do you wish your teeth were whiter?
- Do you think you show too much or too little of your teeth when you smile?
- · Would you like to change the way your teeth or gums are shaped?
- Do you have gaps or spaces in between your teeth?

If the answer is "yes" to any of these questions, you may be a good candidate for A Smile Makeover.







f 😈 📵

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Wellness

## Wellness Is a Marathon, Not a Sprint:

## Why Integrative Care Matters



By Dr. Karen DeVore

If you know the story of the tortoise and the hare, you already understand one of the most important lessons we can apply to health: slow and steady wins the race.

In a world where we're constantly bombarded with quick-fix solutions—miracle diets, instant detoxes, and one-pill answers—it's easy to lose sight of the long game. But with integrative healthcare practitioners, that's exactly what we focus on: your long-term, sustainable

wellness. Not the shortcut, not the sprint—but the journey that leads to resilience, balance, and vitality for years to come.

## What Is Integrative Health?

Integrative health is an approach to care that puts you, the whole person, at the center. It draws from both conventional Western medicine and evidence-based Eastern traditions to treat not just symptoms, but root causes.

This model acknowledges the value of modern diagnostic tools, lab testing, and pharmacology, while also embracing the centuries-old wisdom of acupuncture, herbal medicine, nutrition, and lifestyle medicine. At its core, integrative health is collaborative, personalized, and preventative.

Instead of asking, "What drug treats this disease?" we ask, "Why is this symptom happening—and what's the best way to restore balance?" That



might include medication, but it may also include herbs, dietary changes, movement, sleep support, or acupuncture. The goal is not to replace one system with another, but to combine the best of both to offer more comprehensive, compassionate care.

## **How The Tortoise Clinic Blends East and West**

At the Tortoise Clinic, we

live and breathe this philosophy. We've served the communities of North Florida for over 30 years, building a practice that reflects the needs of our patients and the realities of modern life.

A typical visit here might include lab testing to evaluate hormones, inflammation, or nutrient deficiencies, followed by acupuncture to support nervous system regulation and pain relief. A patient might receive customized herbal formulations from our Chinese herb dispensary - the largest in Northwest Florida, paired with guidance on nutrition and daily habits to support their health goals.

Because we're not bound by one medical model, we have more flexibility—and more tools—to help you feel your best

## How Is This Different From Traditional Medicine?

Traditional, Western medicine has done incredible things. It excels in acute care, emergency response, and surgical interventions. But when it comes to chronic illness, long-term prevention, and quality of life, many patients are left wanting more.

I hear it often:

"My labs are normal, but I still don't feel well."

"My doctor told me it's just

Continued on next page







## Choosing Healthy vs. Toxic Relationships



By Stephenie Craig

Have you ever found yourself in a relationship that is feeling unhealthy? Do you notice a pattern of unhealthy relationships in your life over time and wonder why you keep attracting people who don't treat you well? Maybe a relationship seems great at first. The other person seems fun, friendly, and interested in a relationship with you. You share significant information about yourself pretty quickly and develop a connection. Then, perhaps, you start to notice your new friend ignores you when you say no, or is only interested in talking about themself, or punishes you emotionally when you don't give them what they want, or yells and calls you names when they are frustrated. Maybe they express jealousy when you spend time with another friend, belittle your values, or refuse to take responsibility for their behavior and blame you when they behave badly. And, when these things occur, perhaps you make excuses for them telling yourself they are just upset and won't do it again or focus on the good moments while ignoring the disrespectful ways they are treating you.

Over time, when you stay in unhealthy relationships, your brain becomes trained to believe this is how you deserve to be treated. As you tolerate being treated poorly, you are unintentionally setting yourself up to choose other unhealthy relationships in the future. It's also possible you grew up in an unhealthy environment that set a pattern of being treated poorly by parent figures. This scenario also creates patterns and beliefs that how you were treated as a child is what you deserve in your adult relationships. Repetitive unhealthy relationships can leave you wondering what is wrong with you and why you can't seem to find healthy people in your life. No one wants to be surrounded by toxic relationships, but, how are you supposed to stop the cycle? How do you start choosing healthy relationships and distance from toxic relationships?



### 7 Ways to Choose Healthy Relationships and Distance from Toxic Relationships

• Define and notice deal breakers. Try making a list of qualities/behaviors that are relationship enders for you. Examples include: abuse of any kind (verbal, physical, sexual, emotional, financial), name calling, cursing at you, demeaning/belittling, disrespecting your consent, drug/alcohol abuse, infidelity, pushing, hitting, etc.

• Define and notice red flags. Try making a list of qualities/behaviors that signal unhealthy patterns. Examples include: offloading anger on you, blaming you for their behavior, shaming, jealous/controlling patterns, isolating you from oth-

er relationships, passive aggressive punishment of you instead of direct, respectful conversations, hateful words, talking behind your back, insecurity, holding you responsible for their mood/mental health, refusal to have conversations about your experience in the relationship, disrespect of your values.

## • Define and notice green flags. Try

making a list of qualities/behaviors you believe are important to have in a healthy relationship. Examples include: honesty, loyalty, respect, kindness, directness, caring, reciprocity, respect for your boundaries, calm conversations, taking responsibility, willing to apologize, listens, manages anger in healthy ways, communicates needs.

- Approach relationships slowly and intentionally. Sharing too much too fast and getting close without having time to observe long-term behavioral patterns can result in missing red flags.
- Clarify your values. When you know what is most important to you in life and relationship, it will be easier for you to notice if someone is a

healthy fit for your values. Values fit does not require the other person to agree with you about everything. Values fit requires that your most important values are not in conflict with the character and lifestyle of the other person.

- Be the friend you want to have. If you want a new friend to be kind, compassionate, and respectful of your boundaries. Engage in personal growth and become kind, compassionate and respectful of boundaries. You are more likely to pursue and attract health when you are healthy.
- Be honest and let go. Be honest with yourself when someone is treating you poorly. Remember that while it is hard and sometimes complicated, you have the choice and power to step away from or end a relationship when needed. Grieving the end of a relationship is hard, however, staying in toxic relationships leads to more future toxic relationships.

Choosing more healthy relationships produces a life of positive community and support. Be patient with yourself as you navigate learning new relationship skills. Connect with us for counseling and coaching along your journey at Journeybravely. com.

### **WELLNESS**

continued from previous page

part of getting older."

"I was given medication, but no one asked about my diet or stress levels."

Integrative medicine fills those gaps.

We take time to listen. We

look at patterns, history, and lifestyle. We ask about your sleep, digestion, energy, and emotional well-being—not because it's "extra," but because it all matters. Our goal isn't just to mask symptoms, but to understand the story behind them and to create a care plan that's tailored to your unique biology,

goals, and life circumstances.

## The Power of Personalized Wellness

No two bodies are the same. You are not your neighbor, your parent, or your coworker. What works for one person may not work for another—and that's why personalized care matters.

When you work with an integrative provider, you're not handed a one-size-fits-all solution. You're invited into a partnership, where we co-create a wellness plan that evolves with you. Whether you're working

on hormone balance, fertility, digestion, chronic stress, weight loss, or simply optimizing your energy, our role is to guide and support your process with the right blend of tools.

Sometimes, that's acupuncture. Sometimes, it's a dietary shift, a carefully selected supplement, or lab-guided medical intervention. Often, it's all of the above.

### **The Tortoise Mentality**

Health is not a destination. It's not a number on a scale or a perfect lab result. It's a relationship with your body, and like any relationship, it requires time, trust, and patience.

True wellness isn't about "fixing" what's wrong—it's about learning what your body needs to thrive and honoring that through intentional, steady steps. That's what we mean when we say, "Wellness is a marathon, not a sprint."

As an integrative team, we walk beside you for the long haul—not racing to the finish, but pacing with purpose. With every visit, every conversation, and every personalized plan, we aim to help you move closer to the healthiest version of yourself

So, whether you're just starting your health journey or looking for a deeper, more connected approach to care, I invite you to embrace the pace of the tortoise—and discover the kind of health that lasts a lifetime.





Wellness

## **Understanding Your GLP-1 Journey**



Kay Leaman, HealthyDay HealthyLife

Whether you've taken, are currently taking or are thinking about taking GLP-1, understanding what it is, how it works and the side effects will help you support your body for the best possible results.

GLP-1 is a glucagon-like peptide and comes in three forms; natural, injection and oral.

Natural GLP-1 is a hormone naturally produced in the gastrointestinal tract. The lifestyle factors that enhance your natural GLP-1 production are certain foods, physical activity and maintaining a healthy gut.

Injection and oral applications are manufactured substances called agonists (a manufactured substance that causes an action similar to a naturally occurring substance.) and mimic the effects of naturally produced GLP-1, but in a more potent and longer-lasting form. The injections last up to seven days in the blood (Ozempic, Wegovy), whereas the oral tablets last for 24 hours and need to be taken daily.

These drugs are used for diabetes and obesity. Worldwide, 1.9 billion adults are overweight and, of these, 650 million are children. There is not much difference between men and women as obesity is the #1 killer in both sexes.

How it works: In the pancreas it increases the release of insulin and decreases glucagon (A hormone that raises blood sugar.) secretion. The stomach is also affected as it slows the emptying of food from the stomach which helps you feel fuller longer and aids in extracting nutrients into the bloodstream. It also acts on the brain to suppress appetite ('food noise').

### The side effects consist of:

• Gastrointestinal issues such

as bloating, nausea, diarrhea, constipation, heartburn and nutrient deficiency.

• Muscles are an organ and muscle loss can negatively impact our metabolic rate making long term weightmanagement more difficult. It can also affect mobility and bone density. One can expect their muscle loss to be 24-40%. Muscle loss slows the metabolism, reduces strength, lowers BP related to

berine. It's found in plants and may have an effect on sugar levels, but has not been researched beyond the Petri dish.

As with any weight loss program, if our lifestyle doesn't change, the pounds will return. We usually find what we lose. However, this is not true for the lost muscle. It must be exercised and cared for to get it back.

Adopting a healthy diet to enhance the effectiveness of

are quality supplements that can help the body respond well. Contact me if you're interested in more information.

I have seen excellent effects from taking GLP-1. My biggest caution is that overuse can suppress the body's ability to make its own. Supporting our body's naturally created functions will ensure a healthier life as we age. GLP-1 is a tool not a replacement for the responsibility we have to care for our bodies well.

Here's to Health!

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fatigue, weakens bones and increases risk of fractures.

• Overdosing can cause hypoglycemia, gastrointestinal distress, loss of consciousness, etc. Because of the reduced caloric intake, nutrient deficiency is also an issue and reduced fertility and hair loss has also been experienced.

Drawbacks consist of heart issues as the heart is also a muscle. Sagging skin can be seen depending on how much weight one is losing vs. it being a symptom of the drug. GLP-1 also starves your body due to the decrease in caloric intake. This is why long-term use is NOT recommended. The sad news is that at this time there are no safe alternatives. There has been some talk coming out about ber-

GLP-1 can ensure sufficient intake of essential nutrients (protein, fats, fiber, vitamins and minerals) can minimize muscle loss during weight loss.

A healthy lifestyle consists of eating well, exercising, lowering stress and getting quality sleep.

## Regarding foods, here are some suggestions:

**Fats** - Avocado and avocado oil, olives (especially black), flax-seed and flaxseed oil

**Lean Protein** - Fish, chicken, turkey, eggs, lean beef, cottage cheese, tofu, soybeans

**Fibers** - Fruit, veggies, whole grains, legumes, flaxseed, chia seeds

### Probiotics/Prebiotics

- Yogurt, kombucha, kefir, sauerkraut, supplements. There



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## Meet Our Local Wellness Pro - Dr. Steven Clark: A Trusted Name in Wellness & Transformation

For more than 25 years, Dr. Steven Clark has been more than just a board certified plastic surgeon—he's been a guide, a confidant and a trusted expert for those seeking renewal, confi-

physically and emotionally-here on our own Emerald Coast. His work isn't just about aesthetics; he's dedicated to helping people feel their best-inside and

dence and transformation-both out. "I always strive to achieve safe results that enhance each person's natural beauty while preserving individuality and uniqueness. I want my patients to still look like themselves-

only better," he says.

This philosophy has resonated deeply with the countless men and women who have walked through his doors, searching not just for cosmetic changes, but for a renewed sense of self, represented by 300, 5-star Google reviews.

### A Legacy of **Excellence & Dedication**

A proud U.S. Air Force veteran, Dr. Clark was once stationed at Eglin AFB and Hurlburt Field, where he quickly gained recognition as one of the top plastic surgeons on the Gulf Coast. In 1999, he launched Bluewater Plastic Surgery in Niceville, later expanding to Santa Rosa Beach, and most recently Watersound, to welcome patients from throughout the country.

His expertise is unparalleled, with more than two decades of membership in the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS) and the American Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ASAPS—which selects board certified plastic surgeons who have demonstrated advanced experience in cosmetic surgery)—ensuring he stays at the forefront of an ever-evolving field with sterling credentials. Most recently Dr. Clark was honored to be made a board member and serve the Florida Society of Plastic Surgeons

From facelifts and breast augmentations to liposuction and tummy tucks, along with their newest solution—Ultra-Clear, a laser facial rejuvenation treatment that targets multiple skin layers to reduce the signs of aging—Dr. Clark's approach blends technical precision with a deep understanding of his patients' goals, addressing a full range of aesthetic needs. "There is no substitute for excellent surgical training and experience," says Dr. Clark, "but having a warm, supportive staff is equally important. We want our patients to feel comfortable, confident and informed at every step."



### Compassion **Meets Expertise**

At Bluewater Plastic Surgery, that supportive environment starts with his dedicated team, including Board-Certified Nurse Practitioner Michelle Sasala (ARNP-BC). With 20 vears of healthcare expertise, Michelle's passion for helping patients feel their absolute best shines through in every consultation.

Dr. Clark also holds a deep respect for those who serve, offering military discounts for cosmetic procedures to current and former U.S. Armed Forces members. "It's important to me that we give back," he says, reflecting on his time in uniform and his admiration for military families.

### **Making Transformation Attainable**

Understanding that cost can be a hurdle, Bluewater Plastic Surgery partners with Care-Credit to offer flexible financing, making procedures more accessible than ever.

One patient's heartfelt words sum up Dr. Clark's impact: "He is a master of his craft. His staff is wonderful and kind, and I have nothing but good things to say about the overall experience. I couldn't be happier!"

### **Confidence Begins Here**

For those looking for a trusted local wellness pro, the search ends here. Whether you're considering a full facelift, subtle refresh or body contouring, Dr. Steven Clark and his caring, expert team are ready to help you feel strong, confident and whole in your own skin.

Call 850.530.6064 or visit bluewaterplasticsurgery.com.

# Bluewater

PLASTIC SURGERY

Steven J. Clark, MD, DMD, FACS

Michelle Sasala MSN, APRN, FNP-BC

Nurse Practitioner/Aesthetic Injector



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- Tummy Tuck, Mommy Makeover
- Liposuction (Vaser, 360)
- Facelift, Necklift, Eyelid Lift
- Gynecomastia (Male Breast Reduction)
- Post Weight Loss

### **Non-Surgical**

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- Laser Hair Removal
- OBAGI Skin Care
- Laser Pigmentation / Wrinkles
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Easter is a season of renewal—a time to refresh your spirit, revive your energy and embrace new beginnings. What better way to celebrate than by prioritizing your own well-being with self-care that nourishes body, mind and soul? At Beverly Hills Day Spa in Destin, springtime specials are designed to help you

# Celebrate Easter with the Gift of Self-Care at Beverly Hills Day Spa

feel radiant, relaxed and ready for the season ahead.

Self-care isn't a luxury—it's essential. As flowers bloom and the sunshine lingers a little longer, it's the perfect time to invest in yourself. Whether you're looking to prepare for Easter gatherings or simply want a peaceful escape, Beverly Hills Day Spa offers a variety of services to help you glow from the inside out.

Start your spring reset with a spa facial that cleanses, exfoliates, and hydrates your skin, removing impurities and brightening your complexion for a fresh, radiant look. For deeper rejuvenation, indulge in a massage that melts away stress, eases muscle tension and boosts your mood through the release of natural endorphins.

Pair your spa day with some time in nature—take a peaceful stroll along Destin's white-sand beaches, explore scenic coastal dune trails, or spend a sunny afternoon with friends on a pontoon boat in the harbor. Then, return to the spa for a finishing touch to your day of renewal.

Easter and Spring Specials at Beverly Hills Day Spa (Valid through April 30, 2025):

**Springtime Glow:** Chemical Peel – \$85



**Soothing Nutrient Facial** (with Dermaplaning) – \$110

**Boost Collagen:** Micro needling + Red-Light LED Therapy - \$160

**Body Scrub:** Brown Sugar or Champagne & Rose – \$95

**Detoxifying 90-Minute Massage** with Cellulite Treatment – \$125

Revive, Restore & Renew Massage with Aromatherapy -\$125

Osmo Pro Bright White Teeth Whitening (3 Sessions + Home-Care Pen) – \$325

**Red-Light Panel Therapy Add-On** – \$1 per minute (10–30 min)

Located in the heart of Destin, Beverly Hills Day Spa is here to help you feel your best this Easter season. Book your spring renewal today at beverlyhillsdayspa.com or call (850) 654-8544.

## **Book Review:**

## Maybe You Should Talk to Someone by Lori Gottlieb



REVIEWED BY MICHAEL MCMANUS, LCSW

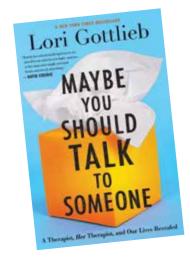
"Maybe You Should Talk to Someone" by Lori Gottlieb is an insightful and engaging exploration of the human experience through the lens of therapy. Gottlieb, a therapist herself, weaves her personal journey into the stories of her patients, creating a rich tapestry of vulnerability, humor, and profound insight. I love this book and find it to be one of the better books describing the therapy experience.

The book stands out for its candid approach to mental health, breaking down the stigma surrounding therapy. Gottlieb's writing is both relatable and deeply moving, as she shares her own struggles and the lessons learned from her clients. Each character is well-crafted, bringing unique challenges and perspectives that resonate with

readers, allowing them to reflect on their own lives.

What makes this book particularly compelling is its balance of humor and seriousness. Gottlieb's witty observations and self-deprecating anecdotes provide levity to the heavier themes of loss, love, and personal growth. The narrative flows seamlessly, making it a page-turner that invites readers to ponder their own emotional landscapes.

Overall, "Maybe You Should Talk to Someone" is not just a book about therapy; it's a book



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Michael McManus LCSW

about life itself. It encourages readers to embrace their vulnerabilities and seek connection, reminding us that we are all in this together. This heartfelt and thought-provoking read is a must for anyone looking to understand themselves better or simply seeking a compassionate reminder of the beauty and

complexity of the human condition.

Michael McManus LCSW has been a psychotherapist for 38 years and is in private practice in Santa Rosa Beach, Florida. To set an appointment call or text (850)837-0123 or visit Psychotherapy30A.com.





## Oh No! Please Say It's Not So... Yellow Flies!

By Bernadette Canut, Public Outreach Coordinator and Amy Anguiano, Biologist

Yellow Flies, known for their persistence and painful bites, are about to make their return. If you haven't had the "pleasure" of encountering this dreaded insect, well, you just might want to have a seat and buckle up because you are about to embark on a bumpy 6-week adventure! Let us, your friends at South Walton Mosquito District introduce you to the terrifying yellow fly!

Unlike mosquitoes, these nas-

ty flies create an open wound to draw your blood. Their mouth is well designed for this, featuring stabbing and scissors-like appendages. The combination of these allows the dreadful yellow fly to stab its host and to hang on. It then inserts the scissors to enlarge the wound before piercing further inward. We know what you're thinking, and yes! It does get worse! The scissors have both sharp and serrated edge surfaces, and then they release anticoagulants to keep the blood flowing which potentially may trigger an allergic reaction,

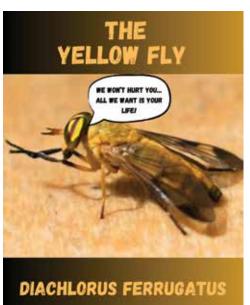
in some. Finally, another specialized mouth organ absorbs the blood meal from you!

Like mosquitoes, only the females seek out blood meal for egg production while males feed on nectar and pollen. These daytime feeders are often found near tree lines in wet areas, especially on cloudy days. They're fast and quiet, often going unnoticed until they bite and will continue to bite until they're satisfied.

Unfortunately, there does not seem to be an effective means of population control, but we have some possible words of wisdom for you. We recommend NOT wearing dark colored clothing, as the female yellow flies are attracted to those black yoga pants and dark baseball caps. Dark

sunglasses can also catch their attention. Aside from staying inside, we also recommend loose, light colored clothing, and you will want to use a mosquito repellent containing DEET. As we stated above, these mean ladies are out all day enjoying the weather and looking for their victims, but their numbers do seem to increase during dusk and dawn hours.

Oh, and please don't forget your pets! Yellow flies love your furry friends just as much as they love you! If you have concerns

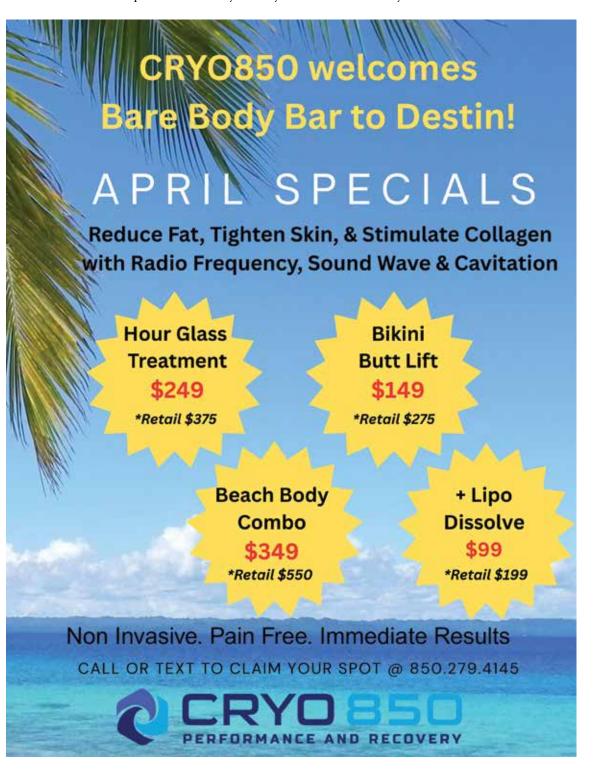


about how yellow flies might affect your pets, please contact your vet.





12909 Panama City Beach Pkwy., Panama City Beach, FL 32407





# Fish Window Cleaning:

# A Great Catch for Destin and Beyond

By Christopher Manson

We believe in:
Fairness, Kindness and Respect
Choosing a Positive Attitude
Doing the Right Thing
Creating Wow Moments
Because culture eats strategy for
breakfast.

Our mission is to provide yearround growth-focused employment while keeping Northwest Florida beautiful, delivering excellent service, and being positive community stewards.

— Fish Window Cleaning of Northwest Florida Mission and Values Statement

What's my line
I'm happy cleaning windows...
— Van Morrison, "Cleaning Windows"

Fish Window Cleaning of Northwest Florida started serving Destin, Seaside, Rosemary Beach, Inlet Beach, Santa Rosa Beach, Fort Walton Beach, Niceville, Pensacola, Gulf Breeze, Navarre, Mary Esther, Milton, Miramar Beach and 30A in August 2021. It is part of a franchise that boasts nearly 300 locations nationwide.

Local Danica LaFaire worked in marketing for a Missouri-based broadband company that was about to be bought out. "I knew I needed to prepare for an exit," she says. Danica and husband Josh began to look into franchising while she was teaching classes on entrepreneurship. "My husband was about to make a big career change, too." When the LaFaires landed on the Emerald Coast, Danica remained in the broadband industry for another year and also became a franchise consultant.

She kept her eyes open for franchise opportunities here. "I learned about Fish Window Cleaning in February of 2021, and it just clicked. No nights, weekends or holidays, nobody calling at two in the morning." Her marketing skills came in handy as well—not just sales and marketing, but the vital areas of safety, training and customer service.

Fish Window Cleaning's team includes skilled window cleaning technicians, estimate writers, an office manager and "whatever you call me," says La-Faire. Supervisor Todd Morris handles team leading, management and troubleshooting.

"We train in a lot of aspects that help employees continue with their growth as team members and work their way into leadership positions, whether they stay with us or not," says LaFaire. "We have several leadership positions we plan to fill from within. We let our people know what we're working toward so we're on the same page and that they know how they can contribute."





have been on having a culture where our team members want to get out of bed and come to work," says LaFaire. "You get what you put in, and we will continue to focus on our team members so they can set and achieve their goals."

While some companies offer numerous additional services, LaFaire believes in focusing on windows—cleaning, identifying problems, and maintaining integrity. She notes that "stacking services" can cause a window cleaning operation to lose its focus, adding that Fish Window Cleaning has partnerships in other service industries such as pressure washing and housecleaning.

The current list of satisfied clients is made up of structures, homes and buildings four stories and under. "We are focused on making our business clients shine," she says.

"If you had asked me five years ago, I would have looked at you like... It's just that I'm not a very strong physical, getout-and-do-it person. I was the worst cleaner we had! I couldn't have imagined the team we have today," she says. "I'm so blessed that I get to see the best folks on a daily basis. I have an amazing team I can count on, and they bring it every single day."

LaFaire often drives around town with her nephews, pointing out all the places Fish Window Cleaning services. "By the end, they're like, Aunt Danica, please be quiet!"

The LaFaires have made a commitment to local involvement, as noted in the mission statement above. Fish Window Cleaning donates a portion of its

topline revenue to Semper Fi & America's Fund (thefund.org), a nonprofit that serves needy military, veterans and their families. "We clean 'in kind' for the United Way of the Emerald Coast, the Children in Crisis Neighborhood buildings and Path of Grace in Miramar Beach," adds LaFaire. Fish Window Cleaning is very active in the local Chambers of Commerce.

"This is home, and there's no chance of me leaving this area. If I get stuck on a bridge, I can look left or right and stop and pause to be grateful every single minute. My community here is so strong. I have more friend-ships and positive relationships here than I've ever had in my life"

Beginning next month, La-Faire will contribute a series of articles dealing with everything from window cleaning and maintenance to marketing ideas.

Fish Window Cleaning of Northwest Florida, located at 623 Harbor Boulevard, Unit 7, is open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Call 850.842.2162 for a free estimate, and visit www.fishwindowcleaning.com/Destin-FL-3249/ for additional information.







# Say Goodbye to Toxicity:

# Building Healthy Teams with Confidence - Part 6 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, a.k.a. 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 misinterpret 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 sixth way

Building a Safe Environment where team members feel comfortable speaking up and helping each other is essential

for trust. Through the Ignite Course, we guide teams in creating a culture of mutual support and respect. By focusing on strengths facilitating complementary partnerships, we enable team members to rely on each other's expertise, reducing friction enhancing

overall team performance.

In short, Rocket Fuel Coach's Ignite Course is designed to tackle trust issues head-on by helping individuals understand their strengths and weaknesses, fostering emotional intelligence, and building a supportive team culture. By focusing on strengths rather than weaknesses and encouraging collaboration, we create a safe environment where trust can flourish, and teams can reach their highest potential.

Want help with your conflict? 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.

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."

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!

Bill Mason

Publisher's Note: To catch up on Parts 1-5 of "Say Goodbye to Toxicity," visit MyDestinLife.com and view November 2024 through February



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#### Musing

# Sean of the South: What is Easter?



By Sean Dietrich

"What is Easter?" the boy asked his grandfather.

The old man and boy sat on the front porch. That's where people used to sit in the olden days. They used to build porches on the fronts of houses so you could wave at your neighbors. Now they build "decks" on the back so you can wave at your above-ground pool.

"Easter is a day of rebirth," said Granddaddy.

The two cohorts were still wearing their Sunday best. The boy: His necktie and khakis. The grandfather: His button down, crisply pressed, with only a few tobacco-spit stains on the collar.

"What's rebirth?" the boy said.

"Well, you remember when you was born, don't you?"

"No."

"Well, trust me you were born, or else you wouldn't be here." Granddaddy took a sip of his Doctor Pepper. "And today it all happens again."

"What happens again?"

"You get born."

"I get born twice?" the boy said.

He nodded. "Look at the trees and the flowers, see how they're all blooming? You see those azaleas across the street."

"Which ones are the azaleas?"

"The pink ones that Mrs. Wannamaker will slit your throat you if you touch."

"I see them."

"And the trees, look at them. They're turning green. The birds are singing. That's what resurrection means."

"It means birds?"

"No. Resurrection means, when something comes back to life. And it's a miracle, every time something gets reborn. Because a new beginning is a miracle."



"Is that why we look for eggs on Easter?"

"No. Hell. I don't know why we look for eggs."

He took another sip. "Look," he went on, "you know all those crosses people wear around their necks?"

"Yes."

"Well, I think we're wearing the wrong thing around our necks. We shouldn't be wearing the cross. The cross is death. It's a tool of execution. It's like wearing an electric chair around your neck. Or a hangman's noose.'

"Granny wears a cross around her neck."

"Your Granny was raised Pentecostal."

"What's that mean?"

"It means don't go to her church if you're afraid of reptiles."

He unbuttoned his top button. "The point is," he went on, "maybe we should be wearing the empty tomb around our necks. Because that's where it all starts."

"Where what starts?"

"That's where your life begins. You will come to a point in your life when you have nothing. You will reach a moment in your life when everything falls apart. You will find yourself in a tomb, of sorts. You will be as good as dead."

"Just like Jesus?"

"Just like Him. And I wish I could save you from that fate, but I can't. Because on that day, there will be nothing left for you, boy. Your life will be a wreck. You will be at your bitter end.

"And in that moment, you will have only two choices: You can either lie down and die, or you can look up.

"What happens if I look up?" "Rebirth."

"Have you ever been reborn?"

"Many times."

"How did it happen?"

"It first happened to me when

I was in Italy, fighting. And there were men with guns all around us. And my young soldiers were all going to die."

"And what'd you do?"

"We all looked up, and we asked God to help us. My men started praying. Out loud. We started talking to God. And that's all it takes. You just have to talk.

"Ain't no magic words, no secret handshake, no special membership rules. Don't ever let anyone tell you it's more complicated than that. You just talk to God. And He'll hear you. And He heard us that day in Italy."

"And what happened next?"

"I'm sitting right here drinking a Doctor Pepper, ain't I?"

Granddaddy always had a way of explaining things so I could understand them.





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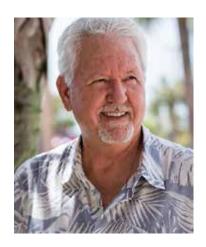
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# A Pastor's Ponderings: Torn Open



By PASTOR DAVE HOLLAND

"And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' When he had said this he breathed his last."

Luke 23:45-46

I admit it, dead bodies give me the heebie—jeebies.

People rarely talk about death in our culture. It's a taboo subject. Many think of death like a light bulb. After so many hours of use, it blows out. Over, finished.

Other people vaguely hope for a heavenly life without a basis for their opinions. Equipped with rainbows and lollipops, heaven is a place where they can run free with their dog without poop to clean up. It is amazing how many people live in this self-delusion.

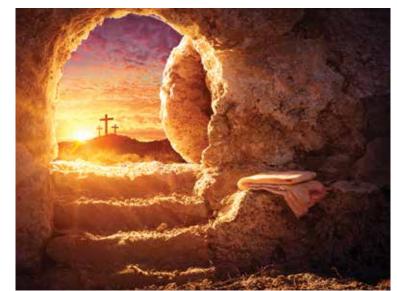
Christians believe in living forever with the Lord in heaven. Eternal life that is based on faith in Christ's death on the cross two thousand years ago. In our passage, Christ shows he had power over death, to the extent he could dismiss his spirit from his body. His subsequent resurrection became his ultimate declaration of his dominion

over death. This dark moment reveals a detail that not only gives us insight into the eternal, but also an access point whereby we can enter God's presence.

Tucked into the events surrounding Christ's death is this odd phrase, "And the curtain of the Temple was torn in two." This moment turns the page from the Old Testament to the New Testament. From condemnation to new life.

The veil in the Temple kept people out of the Holy Place to prevent them from violating God's holiness and to prevent immediate judgement on their disobedience. Jesus breathed His last breath, died, and in that instant, He appeased the wrath of God against sin. Christ paid the penalty for our sin.

Why is this detail about the curtain in the Temple being torn mentioned concurrently with



Christ's death? Because it is the moment everything changed. Formerly, if a person were to see God, they would die immediately. But from the instant Jesus died, the veil ripped from top to bottom and the way opened to come into the presence of God. God granted believers access to his presence. We are now invited to know God as our Father, rather than fear him as our judge.

The historian Josephus describes the veil as made of "Babylonian tapestry," scarlet and purple, clearly depicting royalty. Made with "marvelous skill," the veil oozed rich symbolism. Portraying the elements of the universe, the embroidered veil displayed "a panorama of the heavens." It resembled the starry night, likely the heavenly constellations.

The veil, a visible barrier, showed God's holiness prevented access to Him. The atoning death of Jesus on the cross tore down the veil and opened the pathway to God. Jesus diffused God's wrath—He's not mad at you anymore! We can enter boldly into His holy presence

and know him. Forever.

Thanks be to Jesus, He forgave our sin. We are reborn, at peace with God, washed clean and invited to know Him openly.

The author of Hebrews expounds on this, "we have confidence to enter the holy places," because of the blood of Jesus. This access is the "new and living way" that Christ opened for us through the veil, which is through his flesh. The breaking of Christ's body at the crucifixion is the unprecedented means by which believers have access to God. Therefore, all believers can draw near to God.

God tore the veil, and the way is open—come on in!

Dave Holland pastored churches for 38 years before retiring in Destin. This devotional is from his book, "Extraordinary Jesus." You can get a copy of his books from his website, DaveHolland.org, or at Amazon.com. Pastor Dave is available to preach and teach at churches and conferences. Contact him at DavidvHolland54@ gmail.com.



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# Seeking Justice

# **Destin True Crime Club**

# **Crime Scene Analysis**

By Michael Yoder, Retired FBI Criminal Profiler

Homicide crime scene analysis is both an art and a science. It takes a rare and well-trained individual who can look at a never-seen-before collection of objects and view an area macroscopically (big picture) and microscopically (too small for the naked eye to see), to include looking at all items that are in place and to discern what is NOT in place but should be. Careful observations help create a narrative of what happened-not impossible, but very difficult. To make it even more challenging, the investigator usually only has one chance at collecting evidence. Once the crime scene is released, it no longer holds any evidentiary value.

A good homicide investigator wants to be on scene as soon as possible, so they can see every item in the scene. They will survey the area and look at items such as furniture, displayed items, clothes, and the typical items that personalize the space. They will look at the victim's body for position, wounds, weapons, and signs of struggle. They do this initial survey while minimizing contamination of the crime scene. For an experienced investigator, they can start drawing a hypothesis of what happened.

Either the homicide investigator or a trained crime scene specialist will view the scene from a microscopic perspective to gather potential evidence. Microscopic evidence may consist of hairs, fibers, fingerprints and DNA. Due to the enormous expense of laboratory testing, each potential piece of evidence must be collected with care and foresight. The critical choice of where they collect DNA is the "art" of evidence collecting. It depends on the scene and the acts committed. It depends on the gut instinct of the collector. The evidence collector must know what to collect and where to collect it, without really knowing what exactly happened at the scene.

A living room or a bedroom, for example, usually has normal items that personalize it for the owner. Furniture and display items are common. An upturned piece of furniture or broken glass may suggest a struggle—Blood on the floor or walls may indicate movement through various rooms. Any items out of place or not properly displayed becomes a question of why it became that way. These visible traits of the crime scene will be mentally captured in the initial hypothesis as the investigator seeks to create a running narrative.

The final piece to consider is what is missing or has moved unexpectedly. Is there an imprint that show something was at that exact location earlier? Does the absence look out of place? What items are missing or moved? Why? Is it important to the hypothesis? Is the missing piece a weapon? A computer? Or something seemingly inconsequential like a heavy candlestick in an unlikely place. If the missing item is important to the



murderer, knowing what is missing may be an important aspect of the crime.

Finally, murderers may try to "stage" a crime scene to throw off the true analysis. By doing so, they hope to misdirect the investigators toward an innocent party. Not knowing the difference between a true crime scene and a staged crime scene can have severe consequences. An experienced investigator will usually spot the staged crime scene as they continue their investigation. Ultimately, the

step-by-step narrative of what happened has to be supported by the evidence collected at the scene, the interviews conducted of potential suspects and witnesses and the facts of the investigation. Once aligned, they will point to the perpetrator.

If you have an interest in true crime and want to know how to be-

come 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 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 with questions about our club or to request a talk on violent crime issues.



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# Spring is Blonde this Year!

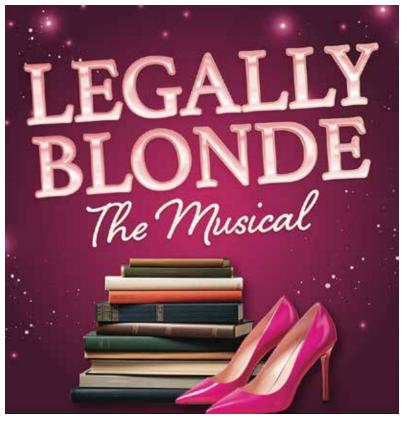
By Anna Fisher, Associate Artistic Director, Emerald Coast Theatre Company

Spring is always my favorite time of year. I love it for all the usual reasons—cool breezes, beautiful flowers, and Easter celebrations with family. I also love it because we have our K-12 student performances in April when we get to watch our ECTC kids shine on stagemost recently in "The Wizard of Oz." Last but not least, we end our season in the spring with a show-stopping musical,

which is none other than Legally Blonde this May!

One of the things I absolutely love about this show is the humor that is woven through every part of the show. The song lyrics, the writing, and the scenes always bring a laugh or a smile and yet manage to show depth and character development at the same time. Elle Woods, the lead character, is a great example of this balance of humor and depth.

Everyone around Elle- including the audience- expects



her to be a shallow sorority girl who only cares about getting her MRS. degree. This might be true in the beginning, but one of the joys of the show is watching her grow and overcome every obstacle thrown in her path. She proves us wrong time and time again and defies all odds by being kind, persistent, and not quite as "blonde" as we think she is. If you're somehow not familiar with the story, I won't spoil it for you, but I will say it's gonna surprise you how much you end up rooting for this pink loving blonde.

We always deliberate at length about what shows to put in our season at Emerald Coast Theatre Company, and we always look for stories with heart. This show is no exception. I think you'll find that like a cool refreshing breeze, Elle is the hero we all need this spring. Don't miss the laughs and the joy! Come join us May 2nd- 18th in real time for a live show experience that will never happen the same

way twice. That's why the heart of ECTC is you!

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#### **LIONFISH**

 $continued\ from\ page\ 26$ 

Tournament. This event provides an opportunity for local restaurants to put their spin on a lionfish special while educating their customers about the impact of this invasive species.

Taste delicious lionfish at one of Destin-Fort Walton Beach's featured restaurants during the Emerald Coast Open Lionfish Restaurant Week! Local chefs will highlight lionfish in unique dishes to help bring awareness to the invasive species in our waters.

May 9 • Crab Trap Destin

May 10 • Bitterroot

May 11 • Jasmine Thai

May 12 • Beach Walk Cafe

May 13 • La Paz

May 14 • Brotula's Seafood House & Steamer

May 15 • Harbor Docks
May 16 • Sura Korean Steak

May 16 • Sura Korean Steakhouse

May 17 • AJ's Seafood and Oyster Bar (All-day special)

#### **Why Lionfish Matter**

Originally from the Indo-Pacific, lionfish have become a significant problem in the Gulf due to their rapid reproduction and voracious appetite. With no natural predators in local

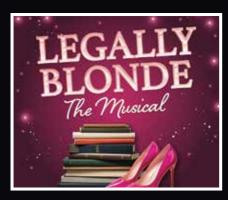
waters, they threaten to disrupt native fish populations and coral reef ecosystems. Events like the Destin Lionfish Festival are vital in promoting removal efforts and educating the public about how they can help.

Whether you're a diver looking to make a difference, a foodie curious about lionfish cuisine, or a family seeking a fun-filled day by the water, the 2025 Lionfish Festival offers something for everyone. Mark your calendar for May 17–18 and join Destin in the fight to protect our Gulf waters, one fish at a time.



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The Tortoise and The Hare: Fast Friends, Slow Foes MARCH 27 - 30



**Legally Blonde The Musical**MAY 2 - 18





### Gerard Frank is 2025 ArtsQuest Featured Artist

The Cultural Arts Alliance (CAA) of Walton County will feature Gerard Frank for the 37th Annual ArtsQuest Fine Arts Festival. Frank's custom artwork—One Man Show—will be showcased on all ArtsQuest marketing materials. The festival will take place May 3-4, 2025, at Grand Boulevard Town Center's North Park.

Frank, a professional artist for 26 years, holds the distinction of being the first living artist included in the permanent collection of the Anna Lamar Switzer Center for the Visual Arts. His work is also featured in The Lofts Gallery in Pensacola and a prestigious Central Park West lobby in New York City. His collectors span the U.S., from Miami to NYC's SoHo district to Long Beach, CA, and internationally in Germany. In addition to his fine art career, Frank has dedicated more than two decades to tattoo artistry, owning and operating his own shop while exhibiting in multiple galleries across the country.

A self-taught painter with a background in commer-

cial screen printing, Frank has worked with clients such as Hewlett-Packard, Boeing and Lucent Technologies. His expertise in printing on diverse materials—including plastics, metals, wood and glass—helped shape his abstract style. Encouraged by his wife, Teri, he continues to explore creative boundaries, blending fine art and tattoo artistry.

"As humans we have a desire to belong to something. As artists, we exist in a paradox—trusting our process even when it separates us from the group," says Frank. "When people connect with your work as deeply as you connect with creating it, you've achieved a fundamental human desire: belonging. Being named the Featured Artist for ArtsQuest 2025 is an incredible honor, reinforcing my passion and obligation to keep creating."

"Gerard Frank's work embodies the bold creativity and dedication to craft that ArtsQuest celebrates," said Melissa Wheeler, Vice-President Marketing & Strategy of the Cultural Arts Alliance. "His



unique artistic journey and powerful storytelling through visual art make him an inspiring choice as our Featured Artist for 2025. We are thrilled to showcase his incredible talent and share his work with our community and visitors."

ArtsQuest will feature over 125 artists from across the U.S.,

exhibiting in a variety of mediums, including sculpceramics, ture, glass, oils, acrylics, mixed media, photography, metal and wood, jewelry, and works on paper. Artists will compete for awards and cash prizes totaling \$10,000, judged by a panel distinguished experts.

Beyond the art, attendees can enjoy live demonstrations, a CAA member exhibit featuring artists

from The Foster Gallery, a Walton County student exhibit, a special showcase from the CAA's Prison Art program, an interactive public art installation, a silent auction, continuous live entertainment, and "ImagiNation: Where Kids Rule." A full cash bar will be available throughout the weekend in Grand Park.

ArtsQuest is part of Art Month Walton County, a collaboration of visual, performing and literary arts events presented in diverse formats and venues throughout Walton County in May. Art Month Walton also includes Dine + Dive - a fundraiser for the Underwater Museum of Art, Digital Graffiti at Alys Beach, the Longleaf Writers Conference, an Open Mic Night with Emerald Coast Storytellers, Sinfonia Goes Pop at Alys Beach, Legally Blonde - a production from Emerald Coast Theatre Company, Gallery events, concerts and more.

Volunteers are needed throughout ArtsQuest weekend to work on all aspects of the festival. Sign up at CulturalArtsAlliance.com/volunteer. Sponsorships are still available, and interested businesses can contact Gabby@culturalartsalliance.com.

A rain or shine event, the festival is open to the public and a \$5 admission donation is requested. Visit CulturalArtsAlliance.com.





# The Health Benefits of Playing a Musical Instrument

Playing a musical instrument and problem-solving skills than offers more than just an avenue for creativity or entertainment, it can also contribute significantly to mental, emotional, and physical health. Whether you're strumming a guitar, playing the piano, drumming or writing a song, the act of making music can have profound positive effects on the body and mind.

#### **Mental Health Benefits**

One of the most well-known benefits of playing an instrument is its positive impact on mental health. Music has been shown to reduce stress and anxiety levels. When you focus on playing an instrument, your mind is often occupied with the intricate details of rhythm, melody, and technique, which can serve as a form of mindfulness. This focus helps to calm one's nerves, reducing cortisol levels, a stress hormone. Playing music activates areas of the brain linked to emotions, enhancing mood, and a sense of accomplishment.

Playing an instrument also improves thinking abilities. Research suggests that musicians have better memory, attention,

non-musicians. The process of learning and playing music exercises the brain in ways that improve concentration and mental agility. For example, reading music requires deciphering symbols, which improves your ability to interpret complex information. Additionally, playing in time with a rhythm improves coordination between the mind and body, a skill transferable to other activities.

#### **Emotional Well-being** and Social Benefits

Music has a profound ability to express and regulate emotions. Many musicians find that playing an instrument serves as an emotional outlet, to release pent-up feelings or to process complex emotions. This emotional expression can increase feelings of happiness.

The rewards of playing music with others help develop longterm friendships and a sense of belonging. Group performances, such as orchestras, bands or song writing, encourage collaboration and teamwork. Those who attend music concerts or a



live local band performance can foster a similar sense of group support.

#### **Physical Health Benefits**

Playing a musical instrument can also provide physical health benefits, especially for those who regularly practice. Instruments such as the piano or guitar require dexterity and hand-eye coordination, which strengthens fine motor skills. The repetitive nature of practicing a piece of music also promotes muscle memory and improves hand and finger strength. For wind and brass instrument players, blowing into instruments strengthens the lungs and diaphragm, improving respiratory function.

Playing an instrument can improve posture and balance. Musicians, especially those who perform standing or playing larger instruments like the guitar, bass, violin, or trumpet need to maintain an upright position for extended periods. This helps to strengthen core muscles and improve overall body posture. Playing an instrument can even burn calories, though not in the same way as exercise, performing actively on an instrument engages the body and uses energy, promoting better physical health.

Playing a percussion instrument like a drum set, as young as 6 and up to 60, provides count ability, muscle coordination, communication from head to hands and feet, tempo management, beat creation and a balanced consistent movement of music rhythms.

#### **Cognitive Development** in Children

For children, learning to play an instrument provides a wide range of cognitive and developmental advantages. Studies show that young musicians tend to perform better academically, particularly in areas such as mathematics, language, and reading comprehension. The skills developed through music such as pattern recognition, critical thinking, and memorization help children in other subjects. Learning an instrument at a young age helps children develop discipline, patience, and time management skills.

#### **Conclusion**

The health benefits of playing a musical instrument are vast and varied, offering advantages for mental, emotional, and physical well-being. Whether it's reducing stress, improving cognitive function, or fostering social connections, playing an instrument contributes to a healthier, more balanced life. If you haven't yet picked up an instrument, now is the perfect time to start. Your mind, body, and soul will thank you.

Contact Studio 237 Music Lessons to continue or get started. Call (850) 231-3199 or email studio237music@gmail.com or visit our website at www.Studio237Music.com.

















#### THURSDAY NIGHT CONCERTS **APRIL 10 - JUNE 12**

Annual Thursday evening concert live music series featuring family-friendly premier musicians and bands performing everything from classic rock, reggae and disco to modern pop.

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













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

Arts & Music

# Sinfonia Gulf Coast Swells To An Orchestra Of Nearly 3,000 For Special Interactive Student Performance Of **Link Up: The Orchestra Swings**

On March 12, the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center in Fort Walton Beach was transformed into a lively concert hall as Sinfonia Gulf Coast presented its 13th Link Up concert performance, "The Orchestra Swings." Sinfonia Gulf Coast is the only orchestra offering this program to students on the Emerald Coast. This interactive musical experience, held in partnership with Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute, showcased the talents of nearly 3,000, local 3rd to 5thgrade students from Okaloosa and Walton Counties, who performed on recorders and sang alongside the professional musicians of Sinfonia Gulf Coast.

This year's Link Up program was conducted by Aaron King Vaughn, bringing fresh energy to this beloved music education initiative. Vaughn guided the young performers through a program exploring the rhythmic elements that create the iconic swing feel in music.

With recorders in hand, students enthusiastically joined the orchestra in performing Duke Ellington's It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing) and Duke's Place, and George Gershwin's I Got Rhythm. Students were on their feet performing the high-energy rendition of When the Saints Go Marching In.

Reflecting on the event, Sinfonia Gulf Coast Music & Artistic Director Demetrius Fuller shared, "Link Up is my favorite concert of the year because it's a culmination of all of our partnership activities with Carnegie Hall in the schools for third through fifth graders throughout Okaloosa and Walton counties, and nearly three thousand kids come to perform live with Sinfonia. And while it's the craziest sound vou've ever heard, it's just a wonderful amalgamation of music notation, history, theory, and learning how to play the recorder. And often it's the only music education that many of these kids receive, so it's very important that we continue to support this."

The Link Up curriculum, developed by Carnegie Hall's Wei-





ll Music Institute, is designed for 3rd to 5th-grade students and, in many cases locally, serves as the primary music education they receive during the school year. This year's theme focused on discovering how rhythm and time unite musicians, singers, and audiences.

Sinfonia's Link Up program is made possible through generous support from the St. Joe Community Foundation, the Dugas Family Foundation, and the Emeril Lagasse Family Foundation. Additional funding from Sinfonia Gulf Coast's



Crescendo! annual fundraiser, Treble Makers (an honorary membership committee of Crescendo!), and community donors has allowed Link Up to grow into Sinfonia's largest education initiative.

Sinfonia Gulf Coast was founded in 2005 on Florida's Northwest Gulf Coast with the mission of redefining the symphony experience. Under the guidance of founder and Music Director Demetrius Fuller and a dedicated board of directors, the nonprofit orchestra is in its 19th season of innovative musical programming, designed to entertain, educate and inspire the community. Since its



founding, Sinfonia Gulf Coast has presented more than 700

concerts and events that have reached over 500,000 patrons, has collaborated with numerous nonprofits and businesses throughout the community and has reached more than 220,000 children through its Sinfonia Guest Artists in the Schools program/music education outreach initiatives.

For more information on Sinfonia Gulf Coast, visit SinfoniaGulfCoast.org, call (850) 460-8800 or email info@sinfoniagulfcoast.org.

#### **NFB Auditions!**

The Northwest Florida Ballet (NFB) Académie is now taking audition appointment reservations for the 2025-2026 academic year. Auditions for incoming third-grade students will be on April 26 from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. and April 27 from 2:30 p.m.-4:30 p.m. Incoming fourth-grade students will audition on April 26 from 2:30 p.m.-4:30 p.m. Appointment reservations are required and must be made

Celebrating more than 20 years of excellence, the NFB Académie is a free, integrated arts and academic program for third through eighth-grade boys and girls who demonstrate the potential to excel in dance. The NFB Académie is a nationally acclaimed program recognized as an A+ school since its inception. Register or learn more at NF-

by April 24 at 2 p.m.







Ballet.org/Auditions.



2025-2026 Academic Year Auditions

**Incoming 3rd Grade Student Auditions:** April 26- 10am to 2pm April 27 - 2:30pm to 4:30pm

**Incoming 4th Grade Student Auditions:** April 26 - 2:30 pm to 4:30pm

NFBallet.org/Auditions All auditions are by appointment only.

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#### Around Town



### By Patricia Lee, Owner Destinites.com

This month in our private Facebook Destinites group (www.Facebook.com/groups/Destiinites), a member shared a post from Okaloosa Board of County Commissioners. It read as follows, "We know it is very pretty and inviting, but please DDDDDDGT off the Okaloosa Island Bridge-to-Bridge path. The photoluminescent path is

### Ask Destinites:

# Okaloosa Island Bridge-To-Bridge Path

still very much under construction. While the path paving is nearing completion, there is still much more work to do to stabilize and create safe parking areas at the federally-owned beach accesses. The approximately 4-mile pedestrian/cycling path, traversing between Brooks and Marler bridges, will also be photoluminescent and will glow in the dark at night. Completion is expected in spring or early summer 2025. No traffic disruptions or lane closures are expected, but motorists should use caution in the area." Here are some responses from our Destinites group members. One main concern seems to be lack of signage.

1. The county needs signage. There is zero way for a tourist to know it's not a driving lane like we do (except maybe common sense). We've seen them driving on it every day this week.

- 2. Someone just posted a car driving down it all the way across the island.
- 3. Seen it happening yesterday as I was traveling to FWB. Seems the highway patrol or sheriff's office would be patrolling this, especially since it's spring break...someone is going to be killed by this!
- 4. Anyone: if you are able get a video or picture of people parking or driving, please email them to sblalock@myokaloosa. com. He is collecting data at this point. You can also call the non-emergency number for the sheriff's dept. The more complaints

and concerns they receive, the more likely it will be realized as a serious issue. (850) 651-7400

- 5. Why are these cars not being ticketed? That's easy money Okaloosa.
- 6. Trees/landscaping would help tourists understand it's not a lane—theoretically anyway.
- 7. Tourists have no idea. Something has to be done before someone is hurt.
- 8. I spent about 30 minutes on the phone with the engineer in charge of the project yesterday. It was enlightening, but also frustrating. People need to email photos and videos of people misusing the pathway so there is data to back it up.

Do you own property or live in the local surrounding Destin area? We would love for you to attend our 4th Meet-n-Greet. These gatherings are always a lot of fun and include local business product/services giveaways! Details will be posted in our Destinites private Facebook group. 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/Destinites with 11,500+ members (Est. Oct. 2018). Check out our monthly newsletter and local business directory at Destinites. com where 400+ local businesses are already listed.



# Heritage Museum Honors 50th Anniversary of Eglin Refugee Camp with Exhibit

By Barbara Palmgren

This is the 50th year of the ending of the Vietnam War in April, 2025, and many military and civic groups will conduct tributes to the veterans of our nation who served. In addition, the U. S. military organized three refugee camps to help citizens of South Vietnam escape from the current regime and come to the United States of America to begin new lives.

Eglin Air Force Base was selected as one of these camps. From early May through mid-September, 2015, more than 10,000 Vietnamese refugees were housed in a tent city on Eglin property awaiting relocation by a sponsor in the U.S.

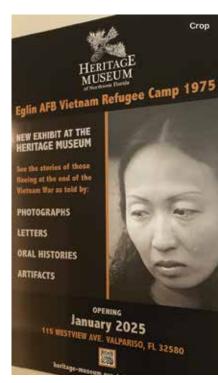
The Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida recently added a 1,400 sq. ft. exhibit hall to the museum and is completing the Vietnam Refugee Camp as its first exhibit. During the weekend of May 3, approximately 60 former refugees from Texas, Massachusetts, North Carolina and California will visit the exhibit as well as the original site for the camp itself, also attending a reception at the museum with a luncheon courtesy

of Magnolia Grill in Fort Walton Beach.

The exhibit contains a mock-up of one of the tents with photos and articles about each of the three phases of operation: Phase One-The Buildup; Phase Two-The Pipeline; and Phase Three-The Phasedown. Newspaper articles for these phases are enlarged and mounted for easy reading. In addition, a touchscreen allows viewers to read the daily Dot Moi newsletter, written in both Vietnamese and English as well as photos digitized from the collection of USAF Col. (Ret.) Bill R. Keeler, former Commander for this operation. The Heritage

Museum is also recording oral histories from military leaders, former refugees and volunteers who worked during this five-month operation. A movie is shown about the camp, donated by Ngiep Tran who currently resides in Niceville. It is an excellent overview from start to finish of the five-month event.

Please plan to visit the new



room addition and special 2025 exhibit of the Vietname Refugee Camp at the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida located in old downtown Valparaiso at 115 Westview Ave, Valparaiso, Florida 32580. There is a minimal charge for museum entrance and no additional charge for this exhibit.

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