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DESTIN Life

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Unsinkable Rose: A Titanic-Inspired Adventure

By TAMARA L. YOUNG,
PHD, PUBLIC INFORMATION
DIRECTOR FOR THE WORLD'S
LUCKIEST FISHING VILLAGE

If you've seen the movie Titanic, you'll remember Rose DeWitt Bukater (portrayed by Kate Winslet) who falls in love with Leonardo DiCaprio's character.

But this is Rose Skelton, and she was in love with Glen Richard Skelton. And the ship she was on is bigger than the Titanic; over 100 feet longer, in fact. It's the SSUS and, to this very day, she holds the Blue Riband for the fastest transatlantic crossing by an ocean liner.

Acquired by Okaloosa County with the Tourist Development Department leading the way, the SSUS is prepping her way to becoming the world's largest artificial reef, a habitat for marine life and attracting divers and anglers from all over the world.

But before that, she had a long, storied life. One of those stories includes Destin



City Councilmember Terésa Hebert. She was a baby when her mother, Rose Skelton, took her and two of her siblings across the ocean to London.

Coming full circle this month, Terésa met up with her sister Juliana Skelton and their mother, who is now in her 90s and lives with Juliana in Mississippi. The three met

in Mobile, Alabama, where crews are working on the ship to get her ready for deployment.

"I was too young to remember any of it, so my mother being one of the travelers on this massive ship was a surprise to me up until a year ago," said Terésa. I sit on the Destin City Council, and my husband heard us talking

about the future artificial reef at a meeting that was being livestreamed, and he mentioned he thought that was the ship my mother had taken. So, to go from that to then getting a chance to visit the ship together was incredible. Being able to see her sitting outside the ship and talking about having to deal with the three tiny little people that we were, all by herself, for the five days crossing. It was so amazing!"

It was toward the end of 1961 when Rose's husband Glen requested his next assignment to be at an Air Force base in the United Kingdom. Part of the government budget cuts at the time were that all dependent travel was suspended. "Military members had the option to resubmit requests for orders, but they would be unaccompanied tours," recalled Rose. "He received orders for Weath-

ROSE

continued on page 2

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See coupon pg. 47.

Saddling Up for Success with Westonwood Ranch

By HEATHER BENNETT EYE

Whether you're navigating a new diagnosis or have recently moved to the Emerald Coast, finding the right resources for a child or family member with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) can feel overwhelming. Knowing where to turn for therapy, education, social support and recreational opportunities can make all the difference. Our community offers several resources to help you connect, advocate and thrive.

Lindy Wood, founder of Weston-

WESTONWOOD

continued on page 2



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 Community
ROSE*continued from page 1*

ersfield AFB to arrive by April 1962. I wrote to my mother who was living in London and told her he was coming, but I couldn't afford the plane tickets to England."

The only option was to go a more affordable route – by sea. "As our household goods wouldn't be shipped for free, we figured we could take more needed household items if we went by sea. The car had to be shipped by sea out of New Jersey, and the USS United States was in New York. So, it was easy for us all to take a road trip from Maxwell AFB in Montgomery to New York."

They chose the last cruise in April to book, right before the pricier summer rates kicked in for travelers.

"My husband was able to

help bring our bags and steamer trunk onto the ship and get us settled in," said Rose.

Rose elicited laughter from Terésa and Juliana recalling what happened just after she waved goodbye to her husband. "As the ship's horn blasted, my eldest son wet his pants."

Her other memories were equally spirited. "Our room must have been on the upper deck, because I remember going downstairs to the dining room. I also remember the bar was very close to our cabin, probably 30 feet away." One late night Rose slipped away for a drink while the kids (Terésa and her two brothers Dominic and Anthony) were sleeping. Dominic woke up crying, and that woke up Anthony, and soon enough the noise was heard outside the cabin by the steward. He headed to the bar to find Rose.

"She remembered dad giving

her permission to leave and have a glass of wine each night," said Terésa. "And then of course the one night she does, Dominic needed her!"

Rose was quick to chime in with what a good baby Terésa was. "She just ate and slept, so when I put her down, it was easy for me and the boys to go to the dining room where we could eat. I don't remember seeing a lot of people, and for a couple of days the weather was so rough that we preferred to stay in the room. When we did go out on rough days, we had to hold onto the ropes that were strewn from one side of the ship to the other. I had friends who told me that I would have plenty of help with taking care of three little ones. Well, that wasn't the case as most of the passengers were dependent wives in the same boat as I was. No pun intended!"

There was also the added

complication that there were not disposable diapers. All of Rose's three kids on board wore cloth diapers at night, so "there was a lot of washing diapers out in the morning and hanging them around the cabin."

Soon enough, they arrived on land and found a place close to base, with the towels, pots, cutlery and other items she'd packed. It also wasn't long before "the budget opened up and dependents were able to travel again on the government dime."

But Rose wouldn't have had their experience any other way. She's a part of history, having cruised on the SSUS. Due to a bit of walking instability, she was unable to tour the ship alongside Terésa and Juliana on their recent visit. Instead, Rose stood on the concrete slab next to the ship, looking up and waving enthusiastically as she saw her daughters through an upper

deck porthole.

They all wish Glen was here to be part of this (he passed away in 2015 at the age of 81), but Terésa is grateful to have this experience with her mother.

"It was mixed emotions of funny, inspiring, and just happy she's still alive to be able to see the ship up close 63 years later.

Rose plans to travel to our area for the ship's deployment, which is scheduled to take place later in 2025. The exact location in the Gulf has not been set, but it is expected to be about 20 miles south of the Florida Panhandle region in the Destin-Fort Walton Beach area.

Unlike the tragedy of the unexpected sinking of the Titanic, Rose said she is excited for the purposeful sinking of the SSUS and knowing it will continue to serve a valuable purpose.

WESTONWOOD*continued from page 1*

wood Ranch in Freeport, was once in your shoes. Her 15-year-old son Weston was diagnosed with autism when he was two. "It's overwhelming. You do not get a lot of guidance from the diagnostic physician. They tell you that you need to start therapy, but you walk away, and you don't know where to turn to," said Lindy.

In rural Alabama, where they lived, extensive therapy was limited. After visiting several schools, they decided the Emerald Coast Autism Center in Niceville was the best choice for Weston, and

they moved to Freeport to give Weston better opportunities. Here, they navigated a new community and new opportunities.

Now Lindy and her family work to help others. "The most important, or critical thing, when they're young, is that you're more aggressive with therapy. It's shown to have the best outcomes as they continue to age," stated Lindy. "Take advantage of that time ahead of the game. Be proactive. You have to advocate for alternate learning opportunities. Because those are critical." Westonwood Ranch started as a vision of a place where individuals with disabilities could learn,

grow and thrive, and since opening in 2019, they've worked hard to help teens and young adults with IDD realize their potential and develop life skills to foster independent and productive lives.

While there are numerous therapy and skill-building opportunities available for young children with autism and other developmental disabilities, resources tend to become more limited as children grow older. For adolescents and young adults, access to developmentally appropriate services, such as life skills training, social development programs, or transition support, can be significantly harder to find. Additionally, insurance coverage for these types of services may be restricted, leaving families to navigate financial barriers during a critical period of growth and independence.

Westonwood Ranch works hard to raise money and find community support to help offset costs for participants through financial aid. "We never want finances to be a barrier to obtaining this higher level of programs," said Lindy. They also have an aquaponic farm where they grow and sell produce. They currently have seven local restaurants sourcing lettuce from them regularly. They also have a bakery where they produce their own Brew Chews Gourmet Dog Treats. Proceeds from those businesses are reinvested back into the ranch.

There are several programs to



assist children and young adults with IDD offered at Westonwood Ranch. The Transitional Services Day Program is full-time, year-round for those 12 and up, providing opportunities to gain critical skills to be more independent. The LIFT OFF Program for those 18 and older is designed to help those exiting the school system and focuses on developing soft skills with real hands-on learning at the aquaponics farm and pet treat bakery. The program culminates in an internship and an opportunity to be employed. The ranch also provides an Afterschool Equine Therapy on Mondays and Wednesdays for ages four to adult.

"No matter where you are on your walk with autism or other developmental disabilities, don't let their age be a limit on their ability to learn. No matter what age you are, you're still capable of learning whether you have a disability or not," added Lindy. "They are still able and capable of learning and capable of doing

amazing things if given the right opportunities and pathways."

Many cities and counties face the challenge of affordable housing for people with IDD, and the Emerald Coast is no different. Westonwood Ranch is looking to change that. They are currently working on securing funding for a supportive living community for 44 young adults that will include apartments, townhomes and tiny homes with a pool and a clubhouse. This community will be 180 degrees from the traditional group homes.

In addition to Westonwood Ranch, there are a variety of resources available along the Emerald Coast to support individuals with IDD, as well as their families and caregivers. These resources span early intervention services, educational supports, therapy providers, community programs, and advocacy organizations. Notable organizations include the Emerald Coast Autism Center, Great Gains Behavioral, Project 10, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Florida Center for Students with Unique Abilities, Centers for Autism and Related Disabilities, Autism Society of Florida, Walton County Arc, Grace Rides, and the Special Olympics of Walton County.

If you would like to learn more about Westonwood Ranch, visit www.westonwood.org or contact them at info@westonwood.org or (850) 880-2220.

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The Father of All Holidays: Celebrating Dad

By CHRISTOPHER MANSON

Father's Day is Sunday, June 15, and you are kindly reminded that the celebration happens all day long, regardless of whether the old guy is awake or not.

Warm up—or rather, cool off—Friday, June 6, by treating Dad to a cold one at **"Free Beer Friday: Locals on the Harbor" at Destin's Boathouse Oyster Bar** "while the keg lasts." The event is a fundraiser for Road Dogg Rescue, a local volunteer-driven foster-based rescue that saves dogs from kill shelters and is responsible for many happy doggie daddies. It's scheduled from 5 to 7 p.m.

On Saturday, June 7, radio station **99 ROCK presents The Word Alive and The Funeral Project** live in concert at Club L.A. in Destin. The band Melrose Avenue is also scheduled to perform. Ages 16 and older. More at rockdestin.com.

Kick off Father's Day weekend early with the nostalgic Eighties rock stylings of **Def Leppard tribute band Adrenalize at the Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation's Dugas Pavilion** in

Destin Thursday, June 12, at 7 p.m. (doors open at 6 p.m.). And good news! You and Dad are not required to pose for a photograph or pour sugar on yourselves, but you can rocket on over for tasty bites from choice local restaurants and food trucks. Purchase your tickets at mkaf.org.

Guardians of the Jukebox hit the Club L.A. stage Friday, June 13. The event is presented by Coast 93.3 FM and is an age 16 and up show. On Saturday, June 14, HarborWalk Village hosts the Summer Sun-Sets Concert Series at 6 p.m. (band to be announced; check the HarborWalk Facebook page for updated information).

On Father's Day proper, take the old man to **AJ's Seafood & Oyster Bar in Destin for the Sunday Crawfish Boil**, starting at 1 p.m. Since 1984, our friends at AJ's have been serving up delicious crawfish with fresh new potatoes, sweet corn and tasty mushrooms. Meanwhile, Jones and Company serve up their award-winning fusion of pop, jazz and rhythm and blues from 4 to 8.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MANSON FAMILY ARCHIVES
Christopher Manson (right) with the late great C.E. Manson, Sr., on the Destin Harbor about a hundred years ago.

If fishing is Dad's passion, the **Seventh Annual Summer Slam Fishing Tournament** is in full swing through the end of July. Daily weigh-ins happen at Destin's Boathouse Oyster Bar from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. And while you're on the Destin Harbor, there are plenty of appealing options for charter fishing adventures (among other things).

For more Harbor fun, treat Dad to a one-of-a-kind **adventure on the water with Tailfins Island Adventure!** Tailfins offers two unforgettable experiences: climb aboard the Always Workin', a spacious 45-foot cruiser perfect for sight-seeing and relaxing, or opt for the Talk of Town Tikis, Tailfins' newest and most unique tiki boats—complete with island vibes and panoramic Gulf views. Whether Dad's in the mood for dolphin watching, a harbor cruise or just some laid-back fun on the water, it's a perfect way to make Father's Day memories.

Looking for a more laid-back way to treat Dad this Father's Day? Head over to Bluewater Bay Marina in Niceville and **kick back at LJ Schooners Dockside Restaurant & Oyster Bar**. On Sunday, June 16, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., enjoy "Brunch on the Bay"—a delicious buffet with waterfront views and salty breezes. As a special toast to all the amazing dads out there, each dad gets a complimentary mimosa or draft beer. Brunch is \$15.99 for

adults, \$5.99 for kids ages 7–12, and free for little ones under 6.

After brunch, spend some quality time together exploring the marina—rent a boat, try paddleboarding, or simply take in the **beauty of the Bay**. It's a great way to slow down, connect and celebrate Dad. For more info, visit bluewaterbaymarina.com.

As far as Dad-friendly movies are concerned, **From the World of John Wick: Ballerina** hits the big screen June 6. A spin-off of (or shameless attempt to cash in on) Keanu Reeves' action-packed franchise, the events of this film take place between John Wick: Chapter 3 – Parabellum and John Wick: Chapter 4... in case you thought those two movies weren't long enough. There's also a new How to Train Your Dragon movie hitting theaters, in case you or your father happen to be nine years old.

Other ideas include enjoying quality time with Dad by exploring local parks, having a family barbecue or taking a scenic walk along the Bay. And remember to let Pop sleep in.



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Community



Mayor Bobby Wagner and PIO Tamara Young, PhD

"Reel Talk" from the City of Destin

Accessibility is Not a Checkbox— It's a Commitment

BY TAMARA LEIGH YOUNG, PHD, PUBLIC INFORMATION DIRECTOR FOR THE WORLD'S LUCKIEST FISHING VILLAGE

In this Reel Time, the Mayor and I sat down to talk about how to help everyone enjoy Destin.

TY: It was terrific to see so many people enjoying the refreshed Morgan Sport's Center Playground at the re-opening on May 24th. One of my favorite pieces to the playground is the addition of some wheelchair-accessible and inclusive playground equipment. It was heartwarming to hear from several parents who were over-the-moon excited for their kids who struggle to find equipment to meet their needs.

BW: I couldn't agree more. Accessibility is not a checkbox—it's a commitment. And in Destin, we're committed to making sure that everyone, regardless of ability, gets to experience the joy of our parks and the sense of belonging that makes this city so special.

TY: The musical pieces and the merry-go-round, in particular, have been big hits. We're hoping to see more of this type of equipment in the future in Destin. It's only right that kids have access to enjoy our beautiful parks. All kids deserve a place to be playful!

BW: As a former music major in college, I was drawn to



the music equipment and was thrilled to see the kids so engaged with all the unique gear. It's proof that when we design with inclusivity in mind, everyone benefits. I'd love to see this kind of thoughtful equipment become the standard in all future playground projects!

TY: Yes! And not just our parks, but our beaches, too. I recently posted on the City's official Facebook page about the beach wheelchairs. Right

now, there are two beach chairs that individuals can borrow from Destin Fire Control District, but they've ordered a third which should be in soon. It's no cost to use. So, we hope people take ad-

vantage of the program. The "beach wheels" as they are often called are available right now to be used at James Lee Park and Shirah Street public beach access. The third will be here soon at June White Decker. The number to call about the beach wheels is 850-837-8413.

BW: Absolutely—it's not just about the playground or the beach; it's about creating a Des-

tin where everyone feels invited. I'm so glad you highlighted the beach wheelchair program. It's a perfect example of how a relatively simple initiative can unlock an entirely new experience for someone. Whether it's a child spinning on the merry-go-round or a grandparent finally able to dip their toes in the Gulf, these moments matter.

Women Veterans Recognition Day Set for June 12

Each year on June 12, Florida recognizes the women who have served in our military, thanks to a proclamation by Governor Ron DeSantis designating the date as Women Veterans Recognition Day. The occasion commemorates the 1948 signing of the Women's Armed Services Integration Act, which granted women an opportunity to serve as full members of the U.S. military.

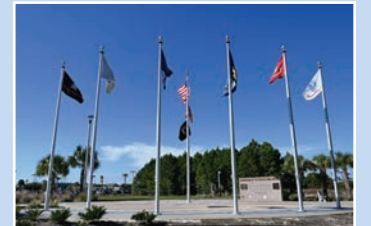
The beloved annual ceremony returns to the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center this year, featuring keynote speaker Col. Kristen N. Wood, Commander of the 1st Special Operations Mission Support Group at Hurlburt Field. The Snowden-Horne Chapter of the Children of the American Revolution will lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

Open to everyone of every age, from children to our old-

est citizens, following the program, attendees will process to the beautifully laid-out Dedication Plaza to lay wreaths in honor of women veterans and tour the scenic Women Veterans Monuments, which trace the history of women in service from the Revolutionary War to present day.

Visitors will also notice progress on the new 2,000-foot living shoreline project along Choctawhatchee Bay, aimed at restoring storm-damaged areas from Hurricane Sally and preventing future erosion. The effort is funded by a combination of grants from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the RESTORE Act and local tourism dollars.

This 20-acre site is also a haven for wildlife, with 248 bird species, a nesting heron rookery and a critical stopover for migrating monarch butterflies.



Two new statues will be unveiled this year: Captain Linda Bray, the first woman to lead U.S. troops in combat during Operation Just Cause in Panama, and Florence Finch, a WWII heroine who aided POWs in the Philippines before joining the Coast Guard. Placement of the statues will follow the shoreline project's completion.

Submitted by Carolyn Ketchel, Okaloosa County Commissioner, District 2, Vice-Chairman 2024-2025. She can be reached at CKetchel@myokaloosa.com or 850-651-7105.



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Community

Cali's To Do In Destin! JUNE 2025



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Bonfire on the Beach | 5pm | The Bay
Trivia Night | 5pm | Down Island
Music Match Game Night | 5pm | The
Island Resort
Run Club | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery
Rock n Roll Bingo | 6pm | Fatboys Niceville
Trivia Night | 6pm | Craft Bar @ The Harbor
Music Bingo | 6:30pm | Palm Folly
Wednesday Night Concert Series - She-
nanigans | 7pm | Village of Baytowne
Wharf
The Island Concert Series | 7pm | The
Island Resort
Trivia Night | 7pm | Boardroom Pub FWB
Karaoke | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty
Fireworks | 9pm | Okaloosa Island Board-
walk

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Tie-Dye Camp | 1:30pm | Destin Community
Center
Yoga Class | 6pm | Destin Community
Center
Karaoke | 6pm | The B Bar Niceville
Concerts in the Park - Jimmy Buffet Tribute |
6pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation
All American Thursday | 6:30pm | Harbor-
walk Village
Little Black Dress Night | 6:30pm-9:30pm |
Marina Café
Goat Yoga | 6:30pm | St. Michael's Brewing
Company
Karaoke | 7pm-10pm | Soundside FWB
Fort Comedy Open Mic Standup | 7pm |
Downtown Music Hall
Sounds of Summer! Performance | 7:30pm |
Emerald Coast Theatre Co.
Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse
Fireworks | 9pm | Harborwalk Village
Thursdaze Light Show | 9pm | Baytowne
Wharf
Ladies Night | 10pm | McGuire's Destin
..... 6

Friday Martini Lunch | 11am-4pm | Skybar
Destin
Tie-Dye Camp | 1:30pm | Destin Community
Center
Free Beach Bonfire | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille
Singo Music Bingo | 5pm | The Island Resort
Coastal Country Concert | 6pm | Harborwalk
Village
Salsa & Bachata Dance Lessons | 8pm | Bric
a Brac
Latin Night | 8pm-2am | Bosforo in Miramar
Beach
Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse
..... 7

NextHome Cornerstone Realty 5K Walk/Run
| 7:30am | 3rd Planet Brewing
Billy Bowlegs 5k | 7:30am | Fort Walton
Beach High School
Painting in the Park | 9am | Royal Melvin Park
- Destin Harbor
Farmers Market | 9am-1pm | Grand Bou-
levard
Farmers Market | 10am-2pm | Harborwalk
Village
Summer Sun-Sets Concert Series | 6pm |
Harborwalk Village
Goat Yoga | 6:30pm | Palm Folly
Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse
Free UFC Main Event Fight Night Watch
Party | 9pm | Native's Cove
..... 8

Beach Church Service | 7:30am | Crab Trap
Destin
Beach Clean-up for World Oceans Day |
9am | The Boardwalk | Okaloosa Island
Destin Community Farmers Market | 9am-
1pm | Beall's Parking Lot, Destin
DJ Brunch | 10am | Azul @ Harborwalk
Trivia Night | 6pm | The Wharf 850
Karaoke | 9pm | Outcast Bar & Grill

..... 9

Free Beach Bonfire/SIN Night | 5pm | Royal
Palm Grille
Trivia Night | 6pm | Beachview Breakfast &
Grille
Trivia Night | 6pm | Soundside FWB
Trivia Night | 6:30pm | Destin Brewery
Silent Disco | 7pm | Captain's Deck Harbor-
walk Village
Movie Monday | 8pm | Baytowne Wharf
Fireworks & Fire Spinning | 9pm | Harbor-
walk Village

..... 10

Karaoke | 6pm-9pm | Fat Boys Destin
Karaoke | 6pm | AJ's on the Bayou
Trivia Night | 6pm | Rick's Crab Trap FWB
Harbor Nights | 6pm | Harborwalk Village
Open Mic Night | 7pm | Soundside FWB
Boomin' Tuesday Party | 7:15pm | Baytowne
Wharf
Boomin' Tuesday Fireworks | 9:15pm |
Baytowne Wharf

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Destin Community Farmers Market | 4pm-
7pm | Beall's Parking Lot 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
Trivia Night | 6pm | Craft Bar @ The Harbor
Rock n Roll Bingo | 6pm | Fatboys Niceville
Wednesday Night Concert Series - Seven-
ply | 7pm | Village of Baytowne Wharf
The Island Concert Series | 7pm | The Island
Resort
Trivia Night | 7pm | Boardroom Pub FWB
Karaoke | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty
Fireworks | 9pm | Okaloosa Island Boardwalk
..... 12

Women Veterans Ceremony | 8am | Des-
tin-FWB Convention Ctr | FWB
Downtown Coffee Club FWB | 9am | Florida
Place Food Trucks
Community Art Supplies Swap | 10am | Fort
Walton Beach Library
Karaoke | 6pm | The B Bar Niceville
Concerts in the Park - Adrenalize: Music of
Def Leopard | 6pm | Mattie Kelly Arts
Foundation
Little Black Dress Night | 6:30pm-9:30pm |
Marina Café
All American Thursday | 6:30pm | Harbor-
walk Village
Fort Comedy Open Mic Standup | 7pm |
Downtown Music Hall
Karaoke with Mary-aoke | 7pm | Soundside
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Wharf
Ladies Night | 10pm | McGuire's Destin
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Friday Martini Lunch | 11am-4pm | Skybar
Destin

Backyard & Brews | 4pm | Elite Cabinet
Design
Singo Music Bingo | 5pm | The Island Resort
Free Beach Bonfire | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille
Coastal Country Concert | 6pm | Harborwalk
Village
Comedy on the Boulevard | 7pm | Emerald
Coast Theatre Co
Salsa & Bachata Dance Lessons | 8pm | Bric
a Brac
Latin Night | 8pm-2am | Bosforo in Miramar
Beach
Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse
..... 14

Farmers Market | 8am | The Landing FWB
Farmers Market | 9am-1pm | Grand Bou-
levard
Book Club | 10am | Pink Coyote Ice Cream
Farmers Market | 11am | Harborwalk Village
Father's Day Angels Envy Bottle Engraving
Event | 12pm | The Island Resort
Beer Olympics | 1pm | Salt Hop Brewing
Summer Sun-Sets Concert Series | 6pm |
Harborwalk Village
Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse
Free UFC Main Event Fight Night Watch
Party | 9pm | Native's Cove
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Destin Community Farmers Market | 9am-
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DJ Brunch | 10am | Azul @ Harborwalk
Village
Trivia Night | 6pm | The Wharf 850
Father's Day Dinner Cruise | 6:30pm | Sun-
Quest Cruises | Miramar Beach
Karaoke | 9pm | Outcast Bar & Grill
..... 16

Free Beach Bonfire/SIN Night | 5pm | Royal
Palm Grille
Trivia Night | 6pm | Beachview Breakfast &
Grille
Trivia Night | 6pm | Soundside FWB
Trivia Night | 6:30pm | Destin Brewery
Silent Disco | 7pm | Captain's Deck Harbor-
walk Village
Movie Monday | 8pm | Baytowne Wharf
Fireworks & Fire Spinning | 9pm | Harbor-
walk Village

..... 17

Karaoke | 6pm | AJ's on the Bayou
Karaoke | 6pm-9pm | Fatboys Destin
Trivia Night | 6pm | Rick's Crab Trap FWB
Harbor Nights | 6pm | Harborwalk Village
Open Mic Night | 7pm | Soundside FWB
Boomin' Tuesday Party | 7:15pm | Baytowne
Wharf
Boomin' Tuesday Fireworks | 9:15pm |
Baytowne Wharf

..... 18

Babysitting Safety Course | 1pm | Destin
Community Center
Destin Community Farmers Market | 4pm-
7pm | Beall's Parking Lot Destin
Bonfire on the Beach | 5pm | The Bay
Music Match Game Night | 5pm | The Island
Resort
Trivia Night | 5pm | Down Island
Run Club | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery
Rock n Roll Bingo | 6pm | Fatboys Niceville
Trivia Night | 6pm | Craft Bar @ The Harbor
Music Bingo | 6:30pm | Palm Folly
Wednesday Night Concert Series - Jared
McConnell & The High Aces | 7pm |
Village of Baytowne Wharf
The Island Concert Series | 7pm | The Island
Resort
Trivia Night | 7pm | Boardroom Pub FWB
Karaoke | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty
Fireworks | 9pm | Okaloosa Island Boardwalk
..... 19

Karaoke | 6pm | The B Bar Niceville
Little Black Dress Night | 6:30pm-9:30pm |
Marina Café

All American Thursday | 6:30pm | Harbor-
walk Village
Fort Comedy Open Mic Standup | 7pm |
Downtown Music Hall
Karaoke with Mary-aoke | 7pm | Soundside
FWB
Sounds of Summer! Performance | 7:30pm |
Emerald Coast Theatre Co.
Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse
Fireworks | 9pm | Harborwalk Village
Thursdaze Light Show | 9pm | Baytowne
Wharf
Ladies Night | 10pm | McGuire's Destin
..... 20

Friday Martini Lunch | 11am-4pm | Skybar
Destin
Singo Music Bingo | 5pm | The Island Resort
Free Beach Bonfire | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille
Cornhole Tournament | 6pm | CJ's Hangout
Karaoke | 6pm | Kluges Rucken Fidiculous
BBQ (1310 Lewis Turner Blvd)
Coastal Country Concert | 6pm | Harborwalk
Village
Salsa & Bachata Dance Lessons | 8pm | Bric
a Brac
Latin Night | 8pm-2am | Bosforo in Miramar
Beach
Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse
..... 21

Farmers Market | 8am | The Landing FWB
Fore! The Love of the Animals Golf Tourna-
ment | 8:30am | The Links Sandestin
Farmers Market | 9am-1pm | Grand Bou-
levard
Florida Conceal Carry Weapons Class |
10am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport |
Val'p
Pet Adoption Event | 10am | Pet Supplies
Plus
Summer Sun-Sets Concert Series | 6pm |
Harborwalk Village
Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse
..... 22

Destin Community Farmers Market | 9pm-
1pm | Beall's Parking Lot, Destin
DJ Brunch | 10am | Azul @ Harborwalk
Trivia Night | 6pm | The Wharf 850
Karaoke | 9pm | Outcast Bar & Grill
..... 23

Archery Camp | 1pm | Destin Community
Center
Gardening Camp | 1:30pm | Destin Commu-
nity Center
Free Beach Bonfire/SIN Night | 5pm | Royal
Palm Grille
Trivia Night | 6pm | Beachview Breakfast &
Grille
Trivia Night | 6pm | Soundside FWB
Trivia Night | 6:30pm | Destin Brewery
Silent Disco | 7pm | Captain's Deck Harbor-
walk Village
Movie Monday | 8pm | Baytowne Wharf
Fireworks & Fire Spinning | 9pm | Harbor-
walk Village

..... 24

Archery Camp | 1pm | Destin Community
Center
Gardening Camp | 1:30pm | Destin Commu-
nity Center
Karaoke | 6pm | AJ's on the Bayou
Karaoke | 6pm-9pm | Fatboys Destin
Trivia Night | 6pm | Rick's Crab Trap FWB
Harbor Nights ft. Harbor Street Parade |
6pm | Harborwalk Village
Open Mic Night | 7pm | Soundside FWB
Boomin' Tuesday Party | 7:15pm | Baytowne
Wharf
Boomin' Tuesday Fireworks | 9:15pm |
Baytowne Wharf

..... 25

Archery Camp | 1pm | Destin Community
Center
Gardening Camp | 1:30pm | Destin Commu-
nity Center

Destin Community Farmers Market | 4pm-
7pm | Beall's Parking Lot Destin
Bonfire on the Beach | 5pm | The Bay
Music Match Game Night | 5pm | The Island
Resort
Trivia Night | 5pm | Down Island
Run Club | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery
Rock n Roll Bingo | 6pm | Fatboys Niceville
Trivia Night | 6pm | Craft Bar @ The Harbor
Wednesday Night Concert Series - Funky
Lampshades | 7pm | Village of Baytowne
Wharf
The Island Concert Series | 7pm | The Island
Resort
Trivia Night | 7pm | Boardroom Pub FWB
Karaoke | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty
Fireworks | 9pm | Okaloosa Island Boardwalk
..... 26

Archery Camp | 1pm | Destin Community
Center
Karaoke | 6pm | The B Bar Niceville
Little Black Dress Night | 6:30pm-9:30pm |
Marina Café
All American Thursday | 6:30pm | Harbor-
walk Village
Fort Comedy Open Mic Standup | 7pm |
Downtown Music Hall
Sounds of Summer! Performance | 7:30pm |
Emerald Coast Theatre Co
Karaoke with Mary-aoke | 7pm | Soundside
FWB
Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse
Fireworks | 9pm | Harborwalk Village
Thursdaze Light Show | 9pm | Baytowne
Wharf
Ladies Night | 10pm | McGuire's Destin
..... 27

Friday Martini Lunch | 11am-4pm | Skybar
Destin
Singo Music Bingo | 5pm | The Island Resort
Free Beach Bonfire | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille
Topic Like It's Hot Ladies Night Out | 5pm |
Salt Hop Brewing / Downtown FWB
Coastal Country Concert | 6pm | Harborwalk
Village
Free Outdoor Movie Night | 7pm | Native's
Cove
Salsa & Bachata Dance Lessons | 8pm | Bric
a Brac
Latin Night | 8pm-2am | Bosforo in Miramar
Beach
Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse
..... 28

Farmers Market | 9am-1pm | Grand Bou-
levard
Grand Opening Celebration | 10am | Silver
Sands Premium Outlets
Summer Sun-Sets Concert Series | 6pm |
Harborwalk Village
Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse
Free UFC Main Event Fight Night Watch
Party | 9pm | Native's Cove
..... 29

Destin Community Farmers Market | 9pm-
1pm | Beall's Parking Lot, Destin
DJ Brunch | 10am | Azul @ Harborwalk
Destin Commons Farmers Market | 11am |
Destin Commons
Trivia Night | 6pm | The Wharf 850
Karaoke | 9pm | Outcast Bar & Grill
..... 30

Fishing Camp | 7:30am | Captain Leonard
Destin Park
Free Beach Bonfire/SIN Night | 5pm | Royal
Palm Grille
Trivia Night | 6pm | Beachview Breakfast &
Grille
Trivia Night | 6pm | Soundside FWB
Trivia Night | 6:30pm | Destin Brewery
Silent Disco | 7pm | Captain's Deck Harbor-
walk Village
Fireworks & Fire Spinning | 9pm | Harbor-
walk Village



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Alice, Sweet Alice... Destin Is About to Get a Lot More Breathtaking

Luxury Destination Wedding Venue Set to Open in 2026, Now Booking Holiday Parties

BY CHRISTOPHER MANSON

The Alice, a spectacular new event venue, located at 109 Calhoun Ave. in Destin, is set to officially launch in January 2026—but is already accepting bookings for holiday parties starting this fall.

General Manager Kristin Sullivan recently and proudly joined the team that has been creating The Alice over the past two-and-a-half years. With extensive property renovations by a skilled team of builders, contractors, electricians, plumbers and landscapers, “There has been nothing spared,” she says. An all-too-brief tour of The Alice evokes vintage elegance and a stunning waterfront view. I am advised that the sunsets here are spectacular!

The main building has had a complete makeover, and a state-of-the-art catering kitchen is being added, along with an indoor bar and two outdoor bar areas.

Kristin has 25 years of in-

dustry experience, primarily as a destination wedding manager. Like a marriage made in heaven, she and the owners found each other. “I love it here,” she says. “Being this close to the water every day makes me already feel very connected to my roots growing up in New England and living in Florida for over two decades now.”

The Alice is identifying as a “destination wedding experience,” Kristin says. “We have eight guest cottages across the street that sleep 46. The idea is that our guests arrive on Thursday and stay through Sunday. They can have multiple events on the property.” The cottages, also recently fully renovated, include a pool, a grill station, a fire pit and plentiful parking with more to come. “We’re building an additional 250 parking spots, which will be ready by next year.”

The venue includes six ceremony locations, depending on



the size of the group. The deck and multiple lawns are ideal for wedding receptions. The outside will also feature a vintage mobile bar and a tree bar. “Destination weddings give people a period of time to spend with close family and friends in a special place—a lot more time to celebrate together. What we envision is a welcome party on Thursday on one part of the

property, watersports from our docks and a rehearsal dinner on Friday, the wedding ceremony and reception on Saturday, and a farewell brunch on Sunday.”

The Alice is named in honor and memory of the owner’s mother, whose pictures are shared on display throughout the property. The partnership with LDV (located next door) enables guests to rent pontoon

boats, jet skis, kayaks, paddleboards and bicycles. “The intention is that people will have everything they need on the property,” says Kristin. “We have a 30-slip marina that LDV manages, and the slips are available for lease now. We even have the fun boats with the slides that go right into the water.”

Continued on page 11




THE ALICE
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Step into the charm of old Destin with this beautiful waterfront venue. Vintage elegance meets coastal serenity, offering breathtaking sunsets and a peaceful retreat by the Bay.

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 Community

Trends & Treasures!



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From Father's Day and the 4th of July to unforgettable "yes" moments, Beyond Measure Fine Jewelry has the perfect piece to mark any occasion. Whether you're celebrating Dad, planning a proposal or simply want to dazzle in red, white and blue, owner Ashleigh Woolly invites you to discover a custom jewelry experience like no other.

Looking for inspiration? A stunning Ceylon sapphire or an art deco-style diamond ring with a ruby halo could be just the statement you're after. Beyond Measure offers a curated collection of one-of-a-kind pieces also in coastal summer hues, along with an array of vibrant gemstones and brilliant diamonds.

Perhaps you'd like to try on the dazzling "Bubble Bands" to stack or wear solo, or ex-

plore the shop's full selection of bracelets, rings, necklaces and earrings. And Ashleigh's passion for helping couples design custom engagement rings and wedding bands makes every visit feel personal and special.

Let Ashleigh design something just for you—because every celebration deserves sparkle beyond measure. Hours: Monday – Saturday, 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.

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Groom Like a King This Father's Day Pure & Couture Salon | Pure Collective Salon

This Father's Day, upgrade Dad's grooming game—or your own—with expert hair care and styling products from Pure & Couture Salon or their sister salon, Pure Collective at Grand Boulevard.

At Pure & Couture, men's grooming is anything but basic. Their curated collection of hair and skincare products is designed to hydrate, protect and elevate—because looking good shouldn't come at the expense of healthy hair and skin. You'll find top-tier grooming creams, clay effect sprays and a range of pomades that deliver the perfect hold without buildup or dryness.

Even better, their stylists are pros at helping you choose the right products for your hair and scalp—whether it's fine, thick, curly or thinning. These professional-grade products help you achieve your hair goals daily, not just on special occasions.

This Father's Day, ditch the drugstore and give the gift of confidence. Book a cut, explore premium products or just stop by for advice from the experts.

Call (850) 424-3935 or visit pureandcouture.com or purecollectivesalon.com to book for your "dad, you or your special event.

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Make a Splash with Personalized Beach Style Frill Seekers Gifts and Personalized Fabulous Finds

If you're beach-bound, poolside, or road-tripping this summer, personalized accessories are a must—and Frill Seekers Gifts has everything you need to stand out in style.

Add flair (and function) with embroidered beach towels, sunhats, or tote bags featuring your name, monogram, beach house name, or favorite phrase. Not only do these custom touches make your items instantly recognizable on a crowded shore, they also bring serious style points.

Coordinate your beach towel with your swimsuit for a photo-ready look—think bold solids or playful stripes that match or complement your suit. Toss on a cool pair of shades and you're officially summer-ready!

Frill Seekers' fan-favorite zipper swimmie bags are perfect for stashing wet swimsuits, and their team can personalize them with a stylish two-tone name.

Pro tip: a great beach towel doubles as a chic cover-up or cozy wrap when the breeze kicks in—or for warming up by a beach bonfire.

Shop the summer collection in-store at City Market Bayside or online at FrillSeekersGifts.com.

Because summer style should always come with a personal touch.

Free gift wrapping, too! Visit the store Monday-Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturdays, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

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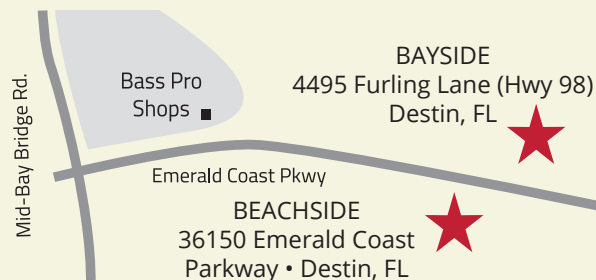


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 Community

Summer Sparkles at The Village of Baytowne Wharf!

When the sun sets a little later and the nights warm up, The Village of Baytowne Wharf comes alive with the energy of summer. Packed with exciting activities, from live concerts under the stars to outdoor movie nights the whole family can enjoy, Baytowne is the place to be. As summer unfolds, look forward to the dazzling Independence Day celebration, too!

Red, White & Baytowne!

Friday, July 4th
7-9:15 p.m. | FREE

Celebrate Independence Day at the Village of Baytowne Wharf, July 4th, from 7-9:15 p.m. After a day of fun in the sun, come out for an evening that lights up the sky! Join Baytowne Village merchants for a spectacular 4th of July Red,

White and Baytowne 2025 celebration with LIVE music from Tanner Gray Band on the Events Plaza Stage from 7-9:15 p.m., followed by a patriotic Fireworks display to light up the night sky at 9:15 p.m. The kids will love activities including kids crafts, face painting and balloon sculpting, too!

Baytowne is boomin' with events, activities and family fun all summer long! The Village and all of its merchants welcome you to visit, shop, dine and play!

Scallywag Sunday

Sundays NOW – August 3rd
7-9 p.m. | FREE

Join Baytowne Wharf for magic, music and mayhem! Watch as the featured pirate Captain Davy takes you on an adventure with two magic shows on stage! Shows at 7 and 8 p.m.



Movie Monday

Mondays NOW – August 11
8 p.m. | FREE

Grab a lawn chair or blanket and cozy up on the Events Plaza Lawn for a featured film.

June Movies:
June 2 | Despicable Me 4



June 9 | Wicked Sing Along
June 16 | Luca
June 23 | Kung Fu Panda 4
June 30 | Mufasa: The Lion King

Boomin' Tuesday

Tuesdays NOW – Aug. 12th
7:15-9:15 p.m. | FREE

Turn your eyes on the sky and watch as Baytowne Wharf lights up the night with a breath-taking, fireworks show over the Village Lagoon at 9:15 p.m. PLUS now enjoy a DJ Dance Party with DJ Mike Whitty in the Events Plaza at 7:15 p.m.

A Can't Miss Wednesday Night Concert Series!

Wednesdays NOW – June 25th
7-9 p.m. | FREE
Events Plaza Stage

Wednesday Night Concerts at The Village of Baytowne Wharf are BACK and popular! Sit back and relax with an outdoor concert and enjoy LIVE entertainment. The concert series features both local and regional talent from a variety of genres. Don't forget your lawn

chairs and blankets.

June Lineup:

June 4 | Shenanigans
June 11 | Sevenply
June 18 | Jarred McConnell and The High Aces
June 25 | The Funky Lampshades

Thursdaze Lights Show

Thursdays NOW - Aug. 14
9 p.m. | FREE

This one-of-a-kind aerial display blends technology and coastal charm, making it the perfect way to celebrate the magic of the Village under the stars!

Don't forget to tune in to Beach TV to watch all that's going on daily in The Village of Baytowne Wharf LIVE—Each day, all year long!

And don't forget all the fantastic, fun activities with Adventure Land Playground, Baytowne Adventure Zone, Baytowne Carousel and Blast Arcade & Laser Maze. So much summer...so much to do at The Village of Baytowne Wharf!



Photo by The Good Life Destin

THE ALICE

continued from page 11

The Alice has joined the local visitor's bureau (Destin/

FWB), the Destin Chamber of Commerce and Visit Florida. "I think it's very important to establish yourself in the community," says Kristin. "We need to support each other."

The grand opening week next January will include a Top Chef Celebrity Dinner and live music with award-winning Coral Reefer Band veteran Mac McAnally. The Alice also plans

to host community events—the Young Professionals Organization and a Chamber After Hours, among others—and already has weddings booked through May 2026. Kristin credits word of mouth by the local photographers' community, tourism partners and social media—"The power of Instagram is amazing."

If that hasn't sealed the deal

for you, The Alice is happy to host company retreats, board meetings and "any type of celebration or milestone." And the giant, outdoor stage is perfect for dancing under the stars and beautifully up lit palm trees.

Schedule a tour and discover more at the-alice.com.

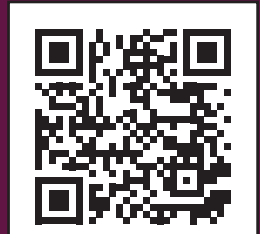


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 Community

2025 Okaloosa County Mosquito Control Schedule

FROM NICK TOMECEK,
OKALOOSA COUNTY PIO

Okaloosa County Mosquito Control and the Florida Department of Health urge the public to remain diligent in their personal mosquito protection efforts. These should include remembering to “SWAT:”

- Stay inside with screened doors and windows when mosquitoes are biting (dusk and dawn).

- When outside, wear clothing

that covers skin.

- Apply mosquito repellent that includes DEET [N, N diethyl-m-toluamide] on your skin when you are outside

- Turn over standing water where mosquitoes lay eggs or rid your outdoor area of standing water in which mosquitoes can lay their eggs.

Remember to apply all mosquito repellents in accordance with the recommended frequency and methods suggested by the

manufacturer.

Okaloosa County Mosquito Control suggests the following steps to prevent mosquito-borne illnesses:

- **DRAIN** standing water to stop mosquitoes from multiplying: Drain water from garbage cans, house gutters, buckets, pool covers, coolers, children’s toys, flower pots or any other containers where sprinkler or rain water has collected.

- Discard tires*, drums, bot-




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MAY 27

THE ROSHAMBEAULES

JUNE 10

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JUNE 3 **JUNE 17**

JULY 1 **JULY 15** **JULY 29**

OCEAN REEF

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THE PURPLE MADNESS

PRINCE TRIBUTE

JULY 22

TRAVOLTA

DESTINEM

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9pm Every Tuesday

ALL AGES - NO COVER

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cles, cans, pots and pans, broken appliances and other items that aren’t being used.

- Empty and clean birdbaths and pets water bowls at least once or twice a week.

- Protect boats and vehicles from rain with tarps that don’t accumulate water.

- Maintain swimming pools in good condition and appropriately chlorinated. Empty plastic swimming pools when not in use.

- * Waste tires can be dropped off FREE to residents at the South Okaloosa County Transfer Station and the Baker Landfill. Free waste tire drop-off is limited to passenger car and light truck tires, with a cap of five tires per household per month. Businesses are required to pay a small fee.

COVER skin with clothing or repellent:

Clothing: Wear shoes, socks, and long pants and long-sleeves. This type of protection may be necessary for people who must work in areas where mosquitoes are present.

Repellent: Apply mosquito repellent to bare skin and clothing. Always use repellents according to the label. Repellents with DEET, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus and IR3535 are effective. **Netting:** Use mosquito netting to protect children younger than two months old.

COVER doors and windows with screens to keep mosquitoes out of your house. Repair broken screening on windows, doors, porches, and patios.

The County Mosquito Control Program sprays throughout the county, excluding state and federal lands. Treatments typically begin an hour before sunset or after sunrise, aligning with peak mosquito activity, though spraying may occasionally occur

outside these times. By law, all spraying must be justified using surveillance data and approved methods. Schedules may shift due to weather or equipment issues.

Beyond spraying, the county runs a robust larviciding program, treating around 2,000 sites that are regularly monitored. In addition, over 750 ponds and spots with standing water are stocked with gambusia fish, which feed on mosquito larvae and reproduce quickly.

Residents are encouraged to vaccinate their outdoor animals against mosquito-borne diseases. Horses need protection against Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) through vaccination. While West Nile and EEE can pop up year-round, they peak in August, September, and October. Horses require two vaccine shots, spaced three to six weeks apart, followed by boosters every three to six months. Dog owners should also ensure their pets are treated for heartworms, as some mosquitoes in Okaloosa County can transmit this disease too.

The schedule for the Destin area is Mondays from the Walton County Line to Airport Rd., and Tuesdays from Airport Rd. to the Destin Bridge.

For the full mosquito spray schedule, preventative tips and other related information, visit <https://www.myokaloosa.com/pw/environmental/mosquito-control>. To view the interactive spray schedule map showing the general treatment areas organized by days of the week, visit <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/78a38f77f-8d94511ad1e2ab55027a1c3>. The Mosquito Control Division of Public Works is open Monday through Thursday from 8 a.m. until 4:30 p.m., (850) 651-7394 or (850) 689-5772.

The Tide Is Going Out: Why Pricing, Timing and Mindset Matter Now More Than Ever



By PAUL DOMENECH

If you're thinking about putting your home on the market, let me give it to you straight: the old rules don't apply anymore. Pricing is no longer about what your neighbor sold for last year or even last month — it's about what's active right now, what's sitting and where the market is heading.

We're in a shift. High inventory means more competition. More homes on the market = more pressure to stand out. And that means sellers need to take a

“price is right” approach — not a “hope it works out” approach. Looking at past sales in today's market is like trying to drive forward while staring in the rear-view mirror. It's not going to get you where you want to go.

The homes that are sitting are telling a story. Days on market are climbing. Price cuts are increasing. And when price reductions start showing up across the board, those past sales you've been banking on? They become irrelevant.

So how do you win?

You create separation — not participation.

Don't list your home at the same price as everyone else and hope for the best. List where the market is going — not where it's been. Price just ahead of the next wave of reductions, and you position your home as the deal buyers have been waiting for. You become the standout, not the one stuck waiting.

And let's talk presentation. If you want to maximize your val-

ue, focus on the details buyers don't want to deal with:

- Fresh paint
- Clean floors
- Pressure-washed exterior
- Fogged windows replaced
- Chipped paint handled
- Simple, neat landscaping

These aren't major renovations — they're high-impact touch-ups. Most buyers would rather roll that extra \$10,000 into a 30-year mortgage than come out of pocket after closing. Make it easy for them to say yes.

Now, for the buyers who are sitting on the sidelines, waiting for interest rates to drop — I get it. But let's be honest: what you're really hoping for is that rates drop and everything else stays the same. That's not how this works.

When rates drop, buyer demand goes up. Competition spikes. And guess what? Home prices usually follow.

So, while you might save a few hundred bucks a month on interest, you may be paying tens



of thousands more on the house — and fighting to win the offer.

Here's the truth: there's never a perfect time to buy. Anyone who says they timed it perfectly is just lucky, or lying. But if you're buying a home for your life, not just your portfolio — it's never a bad time.

And if you want to find opportunity? Look at the homes that have been sitting. Be willing to do some work. That's where the real value lives. Add your touch, build equity and move forward knowing you made a decision based on your reality — not someone else's predictions.

Bottom line: Whether you're buying or selling, this market rewards clarity, not hesitation.

Do the work. Make the move. Control what you can.

Because the tide is going out — and those who act with strategy and intention won't get swept away.

What to talk more about the sale or purchase of a home reach out to your HOMEboy at Itspaul.com.

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 Community



Storm-Ready Starts with Coverage: What You Need to Know Before Hurricane Season

By JULIE A. MARTIN

As we do every year, Bay Life is bringing readers up-to-date guidance on preparing for hurricane season—this time with the help of local expert Abora Insurance. With this year's storms predicted to be more frequent and intense and Hurricane Season beginning June 1, making sure your homeowner's and flood insurance policies are in order is more critical now than ever.

Here are the essential coverages every Florida homeowner should review now:

Hurricane & Wind Coverage

Most Florida policies (HO3, DP3, HO6, HO4) include hurricane, named storm or wind/hail coverage under a separate deductible. Ideally, your wind

coverage should be included in your main home policy to avoid gaps. If your insurer doesn't offer wind in your area, you'll need a stand-alone wind policy—and must ensure coverage details match to avoid surprises.

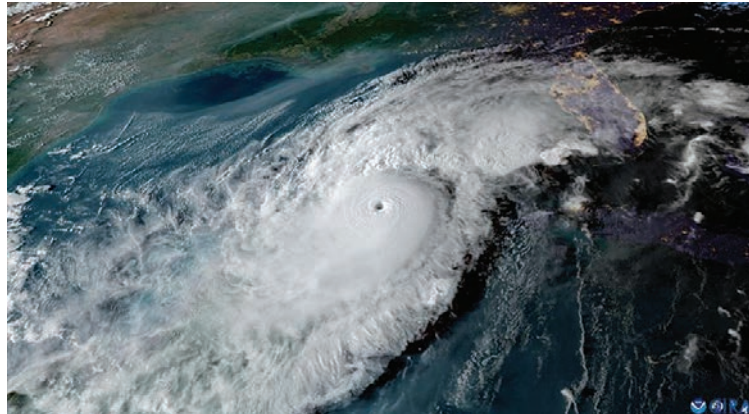
Tip: "Hurricane" coverage typically offers the best protection, applying your larger deductible only to named hurricanes. Smaller deductibles would apply to other wind-related damage.

Coverage A (Dwelling Limit)

Make sure your home is insured for today's rebuild costs—not what it cost years ago. Data shows nearly 2 in 3 homes are underinsured. If disaster strikes, inadequate coverage could leave you paying thousands out of pocket.

Loss of Use (or Loss of Rents)

This coverage pays for temporary housing if your home is unlivable. For landlords, Loss of Rents ensures continued income during repairs. Not all rental policies include this—check with your agent. Remember, there needs to be direct physical



damage to trigger this coverage. Some rental policies don't include Loss of Rents so you will want to read your policy or call your insurance agent so you know for sure.

Law or Ordinance Coverage

Florida's building codes change often, especially after major storms. If your home needs to be rebuilt to new code, this coverage helps cover the added cost. Most carriers, if they have it available, offer either 10%, 25% or 50% coverage. This percentage is tied to your Dwelling Limit. If you have extensive hurricane damage, like we saw with Hurricane Michael, there may be new

building codes you must adhere to in order to rebuild. The additional Law or Ordinance coverage is crucial to your protection, since your policy is designed to rebuild your home as it was before the damage, with similar materials and quality, and not with more costly materials that could now be required by more stringent construction codes that may have come into play. After storms like Hurricane Michael, this protection proved essential.

Flood Insurance

Standard homeowners insurance does not cover flood damage—and floodwaters can result from both hurricanes and regular rain events. While some carriers offer limited flood endorsements, most homeowners need a separate flood policy. Although there are a few carriers who will add flood coverage as an endorsement to a home policy, it is infrequent.

You have two main options:

- **NFIP (National Flood Insurance Program):** For most insureds, your flood policy will be a separate policy written through the NFIP (National Flood Insurance Program), and, unless your lender requires the policy, or you're closing on a new purchase, there is a standard 30-day waiting period through the NFIP before your flood policy will become effective.

- **Private Flood Insurance:** Growing in availability, often with broader coverage and less waiting, Private flood insurance is an alternative. Many of the private markets in the country, and especially in Florida, offer broader coverages than the NFIP and these should be considered as an alternative to maximize your protection.

Call (850) 424-6979 or visit www.getabora.com to review your policy before the next storm blows in.

Stay ready. Stay protected. We're here each year to help you do just that.

Abora Insurance has served Destin, Niceville, Fort Walton Beach, Miramar Beach, Freeport, Santa Rosa Beach (30A) and Inlet Beach for over a decade. They work with top-rated carriers to tailor coverage for home, auto and life insurance.

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Gulf Coast Prepared: Readyng Your Property for Extreme Heat & Storms

By TODD MORRIS

I've lived and worked along Florida's Gulf Coast long enough to know how quickly things can change. One minute, the sun's out and the beach is calling—and the next, you're pulling out storm prep checklists and securing the shutters. The good news? A little maintenance ahead of time can save you a whole lot of trouble later.

As someone who's been part of this community for years—living here, working here and walking through plenty of job sites—I've seen how a little planning goes a long way. Folks who keep up with maintenance usually come through storms and long summers with fewer problems and a lot less stress. So, if you're like me—someone who'd rather be fixing things before they break—here's what you should know.

The Quiet Culprit — Heat and Salt Air: Living and working this close to the coast has its perks, but the salt air and

summer heat can quietly wear things down. Salt particles in the air settle on your windows and frames, especially anything metal. Over time, they eat away at the finish and start corroding anything they touch—including your window seals. Once those seals go, you're looking at foggy glass, less insulation and more strain on your air conditioning.

The heat doesn't help either. Hot days followed by cooler nights cause your windows to expand and contract constantly. That stress makes seals crack and eventually fail. Once moisture starts getting between the panes, you've got a problem that's only going to get worse.

Cleaning your windows regularly gets rid of the salt before it can do any real damage. And when your windows are clean and working like they should, your home stays cooler, your energy bills stay lower and you avoid costly replacements down the line.



Recognizing Warning Signs: Protecting Against Damage:

Take a slow walk around your home or business and really look at each window. Run your hand along the edges. If anything feels soft, warped or drafty—make a note of it. A little attention now could save you a big repair bill later.

Foggy windows, sticky frames or signs of water leaks? Don't ignore them. Are you seeing cloudiness between the panes? That's not dirt—it's usually a broken seal. These are early signs your window seals might be compromised. Rust on hinges or latches? That means salt and moisture are doing damage. Mildew or mold around the corners? Water might already be getting in.

Even small things—like a rise in your energy bill—can point to problems with your seals or insulation. If you don't address them, these issues can let water seep into your walls and framing, leading to rot, mold and major structural problems.

The sooner you catch these issues, the better. Keith Window Company is a great go-to for that kind of work.

Storm Readiness: Windows, Doors and Shutters:

Once you've checked for warning signs, a solid storm plan starts with a hands-on look at your windows and shutters. Check your window seals by looking for cracks in the caulking or feeling for any air leaks around the edges—especially on windy days.

When it comes to shutters, don't wait for a storm to see if they work. Open and close them

a couple times each season to make sure the tracks are clear and everything locks in place like it should. Spray a little lubricant if they're sticking.

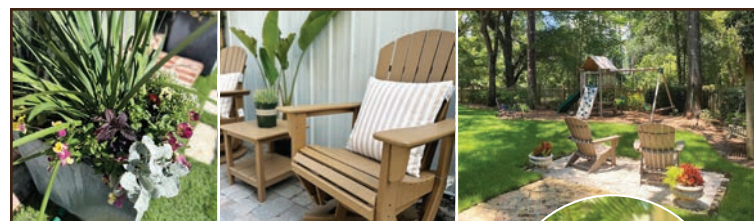
And don't overlook your yard. Make sure large tree limbs are trimmed back away from your home. Branches that hang near windows or doors can snap off in high winds and do serious damage.

Hurricane season's no joke. If windows are dirty, trapped grit and salt can scratch the glass when shutters go up—like sandpaper in high winds. A proper cleaning before storm prep helps avoid that.

While you're at it, give your doors, screens and storm shutters a once-over. I recommend calling Higgins Home Repair or Seaview Glass & Mirror if you need screen or patio door work. For new windows, City Glass or G&S Glass are solid choices.

Also—don't leave outdoor furniture or signs unsecured. It doesn't take much wind to turn something small into a big problem. And check the weather-stripping and caulking on your windows and doors. If it's peeling or cracked, water's going

Continued on page 38





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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, there's no bad seat in the house. So, come by and watch the games all season long. Happy Hour Specials from Mon.-Fri., 2-5 p.m., \$2 off all bar drinks and Monday-Friday from 3 p.m. - 5 p.m. \$3 off a dozen raw oysters. Bucket Specials All day every day. Auston's on 98 is open daily from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. and



features its own "Real Deal Nashville Hot Sauce." View full menu at austonson98.com. Check out February's amazing live music line-up at Facebook.com/austonson98.

(850) 842-3200

125 Poinciana Blvd.,

Miramar Beach

Austonson98.com

Boathouse Oyster Bar

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

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

(850) 837-3645

288-B Harbor Blvd., Destin

Boathouseoysterbardestin.com

Café Destin

Looking for dining the entire family can enjoy? Looking for a place to work with free WiFi while enjoying your cup of coffee? For breakfast and lunch, Café Destin offers an expanded menu serving breakfast staples such as pancakes, waffles with Nutella, omelets, eggs benedict, biscuits and gravy and more. For a lighter take, it also has a variety of fancy toasts (avocado, salmon and more), along with pastries and muffins. For lunch, choose from a variety of 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 lattes. And there are diverse fresh fruit smoothies and a variety of tantalizing teas. Check out the special kids menu, too. Indoor and outdoor seating on the large covered patio are both available. Book after-hours for private events or special occasions. Open for breakfast and lunch every day, 7 a.m.-2 p.m.

(850) 424-6777

985 US-98 E, Destin

cafedestin.com

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

Continued on page 18



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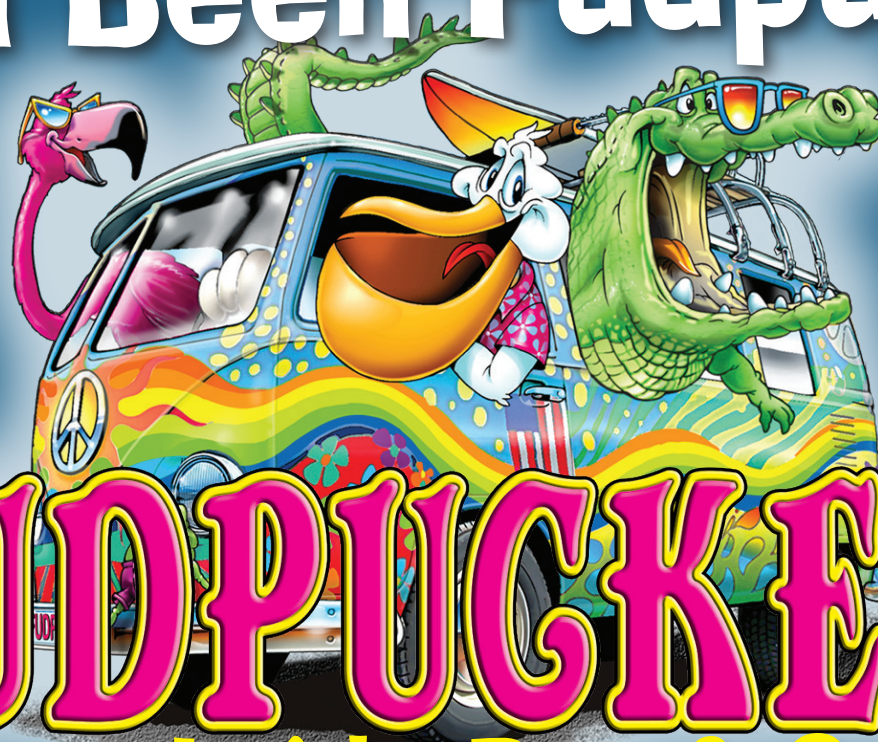
Mondays:	4pm: Cole Jordan 8pm: Roshambo
Tuesdays:	8pm: Austin Jennings
Wednesdays:	4pm: Hunter & Tony 8pm: Smoke Show
Thursdays:	4pm: Flash Flood 8pm: Austin Jennings
Fridays:	4pm: Jason Findley 8pm: Airavata
Saturdays:	12pm: Rotating Spot 4pm: Flash Flood 8pm: Gunner
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DINING

continued from page 16

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Melting Pot Destin

Celebrate Dad at Melting Pot this June! Treat him to delicious cheese fondue, decadent chocolate fondue and all his favorite premium meats in our tasty broths or on the grill! Make your reservations today for Father's Day on Sunday, June 15th, or early on Saturday, June 14th! Open menu both days.

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

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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

New in Town

Sandos Beachside Serves Up Sandwiches, Sips and a Laid-Back Vibe



Destin's food scene just got a whole lot cooler with the opening of Sandos Beachside, a creative new hangout tucked away at 36 Terra Cotta Way. Built from repurposed shipping containers and bursting with waterfront atmosphere, this two-story eatery and fun-vibes bar is the brainchild of locals Shaun Cooper and Nic Ascenzo, who bring their beverage industry experience—and serious style—to the table.

Downstairs, Sandos Beachside Café serves up Onyx Coffee Lab

brews and a bold lineup of sandwiches from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m., Wednesday - Sunday. Favorites include the "FUHGEDDABOUDIT," piled high with Italian flavor, and "THE WEEKENDER," perfect for when you're in full vacation mode. Many creations come "Sandos Style," layered with chips, parmesan, salt, pepper and their signature house-made Sandos Sauce.

Upstairs, the Nineteen33 Bar keeps the good vibes flowing from noon to 9 p.m. with a full menu of cocktails, beer and wine—all set in a relaxed, coastal-cool space made for lounging.

More than just a spot to eat and drink, Sandos Beachside plans to give back through beach cleanups and support for sea turtle conservation. Follow on Instagram @sandosbeachside or Facebook.

The Gulf Club Restaurant & Sports Pub Scores Big

The Gulf Club, an elevated pub experience, beyond-the-basics food, cold beer and nonstop sports action with 27 beers on draft, a full bar featuring specialty cocktails, and a menu packed



with high-quality, affordable eats. Whether you're here for happy hour, game day or a casual night out, the vibe is always on point. Pair your favorite drink with bold bites that break the

pub grub mold, then settle in for an immersive viewing experience with every angle covered. From after-work wind-downs to unforgettable nights with friends, The Gulf Club is a go-to for flavor, fun and fan-fueled energy. Visit www.thegulfclub-destin.com.

New Luxury Yacht 'Sol y Luna' Sets Sail from Baytowne Marina

A stylish new addition has arrived at Baytowne Marina in Sandestin—Sol y Luna, a 54-foot luxury yacht operated by Sun-Venture Cruises. This custom-designed vessel offers a range of unforgettable experiences on the waters of Choctawhatchee Bay and beyond.

Guests can enjoy a 1.5-hour narrated eco-dolphin cruise, where they'll encounter dolphins in their natural habitat while learning about the local marine ecosystem. For a longer adventure, the 4-hour Crab Island excursion includes complimentary floats and water toys, perfect for soaking up the Florida sunshine.

Sol y Luna is also available for private charters, making it an ideal venue for weddings,

rehearsal dinners, corporate events, or sunset celebrations. With a spacious deck layout, comfortable amenities, and a Coast Guard-certified crew, every cruise promises a relaxing, upscale experience.

Departing from the Baytowne Marina inside the Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort, Sol y Luna is poised to become a new favorite for both locals and visitors.

To learn more or book your cruise, visit sunventure-cruises.com.

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 Off the Hook

23rd Annual Emerald Coast Blue Marlin Classic Returns June 18–22

One of the most thrilling big-game fishing tournaments in the world is back! The 23rd Annual Emerald Coast Blue Marlin Classic (ECBC) returns to Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort® June

18–22, 2025—bringing high-stakes sportfishing, family-friendly fun and unforgettable summer energy to Northwest Florida’s premier resort destination.

“The Emerald Coast Blue

Marlin Classic has become a summertime tradition, and it’s all thanks to our generous sponsors and the passion of our teams including South Walton, Pelagic, Galati Yacht Sales, and MarineMax,” said Tournament Director Jason Draughn. “We’re excited to welcome back our anglers, crews, and spectators for another incredible year.”

With more than \$2 million in cash and prizes, top-tier teams from across the Gulf Coast and beyond will compete to land the biggest blue marlin—each fish must measure at least 110 inches from the lower jaw to the fork of the tail to qualify. In past tournaments, winners have reeled in marlin weighing more than 650 pounds.

Beyond the blue marlin division, the tournament also features catch-and-release categories for blue marlin, white marlin, sailfish, and spearfish, as well as weighed competitions for tuna, wahoo, and dolphin (mahi-mahi)—scored one point per pound.

The tournament kicks off at noon on Thursday from the Destin Pass, with the biggest spectacle unfolding each evening at Baytowne Marina. Official weigh-ins on Friday and Satur-



day nights draw thousands of spectators who gather to watch the scales in action—cheering on crews as massive catches are hoisted on stage. The energy is electric, with live music setting the perfect summer vibe, vendor exhibitions showcasing coastal treasures, and on Friday night, fireworks lighting up the sky over the marina.

The ECBC is a qualifying event for the Florida Panhandle Billfish Series, InTheBite’s Captain of the Year Program, and the Gulf Coast Triple Crown Championship. To register, contact Julia Brakhage at julia@tournamentcontrol.com, call 910-264-3947, or visit fishcebc.com.

Also returning is the fan-favorite ECBC Golf Scramble, happening Wednesday, June 18, sponsored by Hancock Whitney Bank and Tito’s Handmade Vodka. Open to tournament anglers and sponsors, this friendly competition requires pre-registration. Entry fees are cash only. Sign up at fishcebc.com/scramble.

“We’re proud to host such a prestigious tournament that blends world-class sportfishing with the spirit of coastal camaraderie,” said April Sarver, Director of Marketing and Communications at Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort. “Whether you’re here to fish or simply soak up the excitement, this is a weekend you won’t want to miss.”

For full tournament details,

registration, dockage, and the complete schedule of events, visit fishcebc.com.



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New Encounters and Old Friends: A Summer to Remember at Gulfarium

By MARY FOMBY

Romeo Finds a Forever Home at Manatee Cove

A new chapter in manatee care has begun at the Gulfarium! We are proud to welcome Romeo, a rescued male manatee, to his forever home at Manatee Cove as part of a statewide initiative led by the Manatee Rescue & Rehabilitation Partnership (MRP) and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC).

At 68 years old and weighing in at 2,080 pounds, Romeo is the oldest living manatee under managed care. With his advanced age, Romeo required a long-term placement where he could receive expert care while continuing to socialize and exhibit natural behaviors. The MRP identified Gulfarium's newly renovated habitat as the ideal permanent home for this gentle giant.

Manatee Cove was transformed from a former dolphin habitat into a lush, 300,000-gal-



lon environment specifically designed for rescued manatees. Romeo will join fellow residents Lil Joe and Inigo, giving guests a rare opportunity to observe and learn about one of Florida's most iconic and endangered species.

Start Your Day with Dolphins: Rise and Shine Dolphin Package

Make your morning unfor-

gettable with our brand-new Rise and Shine: Dolphin Package! This exclusive experience gives guests early entry to the park before it opens to the public, a dockside dolphin encounter, and discounted general admission for the rest of the day.

Led by our expert marine mammal team, this intimate experience offers the chance to interact with one of our Atlantic bottlenose dolphins while learn-

ing all about their care, behaviors and personalities. It's the perfect way to beat the crowds and start your day with a splash!

Sunset Camp Returns for a Summer of Fun

Looking for a magical summer night activity just for kids? The Gulfarium's Sunset Camp is back and better than ever! This evening camp gives kids ages 6-14 a chance to explore



the park after hours, enjoy exclusive animal encounters and learn about marine life through hands-on fun.

While parents enjoy a night out, campers will dive into adventure with a dolphin dockside encounter, a reptile meet-and-greet, up-close time with our penguin colony, and dinner by Seal Harbor. They'll also join our education team for beachside learning activities to inspire conservation and curiosity.

Sunset Camp fills up quickly with limited dates throughout the summer, so don't wait! Visit Gulfarium.com to view camp dates and secure your child's spot today.

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98-Year-Old Pilot Sees Skyraider Legacy Live on in AFSOC's OA-1K Skyraider II

By STAFF SGT. NATALIE FIORILLI, AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

Editor Note: A testament to our area's commitment to its veterans and their families, Hawthorn House at the Air Force Enlisted Village in Shalimar quietly honors the legacy of service for retired enlisted members and their surviving spouses. This 64-apartment, assisted living home offers care and community helping them live with dignity, purpose and connection. The story that follows highlights one of those remarkable residents—a 98-year-old veteran whose life of service was recently honored in a moving ceremony. His journey is a powerful reminder of why Hawthorn House matters and what a profound impact compassionate care and community support have on the lives of our veterans and their families.

At 98 years old, retired U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Bill Buice never imagined he'd see another Skyraider take flight.

Looking ahead, he smiled as the hum of the aircraft's turbo-prop engine deepened as it drew closer.

Joined by his family and members of Air Force Special Operations Command, Buice watched as the first missionized OA-1K Skyraider II arrived at Hurlburt Field, April 3, 2025.

As the OA-1K Skyraider II taxied, Buice said the moment brought back a wave of memories. To him, this was more than a new aircraft—it was a tribute to the original A-1 Skyraider, the plane he piloted during the Vietnam War until the day he was shot down nearly 60 years ago.

...

Rolling in for a pass to inspect the area below, Buice heard a sudden explosion.

It was July 9, 1968, and Buice, call sign "Firefly 16," and his wingman, "Firefly 17," were providing cover for a formation of American helicopters flying in northern Laos, near the Vietnam border.

Looking through the canopy of his A-1 Skyraider, he spotted a fire on the left wing of his aircraft.

Buice dumped the hydraulic system pressure to extinguish the flames. It worked, but the wing had a gaping hole, and the magnesium casting continued to burn.

He pulled the aircraft into a climbing turn, looking for a place to land. His teammates warned him over the radio.

"Not in the valley, whatever you do," they urged, warning the enemy could be there.

Knowing he would soon lose complete control of the aircraft, he reversed his rudder controls, forcing the A-1 into a faster roll. Inverting the plane, he pulled the ejection handle as soon as he could see the sky through the canopy.

"The canopy disappeared with a bang," Buice recalled. "Then nothing."

He saw the jungle rushing up. His airspeed increased and altitude dropped. He pulled the handle again.

The rocket fired, pulling him from the cockpit. His parachute deployed, slowing his descent. He crashed through the jungle, hitting a tree and injuring his shoulder and quickly realized he couldn't move his right arm.

Hearing noise nearby, he used his left hand to reach for his pistol and call for help with his radio.

Moments later, an Air Amer-



PHOTO BY STAFF SGT. NATALIE FIORILLI

ica helicopter arrived. Owned and operated by the CIA, Air America was a cargo and passenger airline that provided air support for the U.S. and its allies during the Vietnam War.

A pilot came down to help Buice onto the lift, but as they ascended, the weight was too much.

"I insisted that he join me for the trip up, but it was too heavy," Buice recalled. "So I gave him my radio and pistol, and he stayed behind, hoping another chopper would get to him before the bad guys did."

Buice was airlifted to Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base, Thailand for urgent medical treatment. Ultimately, his shoulder injury would end his 20-year Air Force career.

For decades, Buice often thought about the man who had rescued him, wondering if he made it out alive.

...

Sitting beside Buice at the OA-1K delivery ceremony was Phillip Jennings, a retired Air America helicopter pilot—the very man who had saved him that day. Over the years, the two had reunited only a handful of times, making this moment even more special, Jennings noted.

"I knew from the moment I watched him get shot down that we would have to go get him," Jennings said. "I'm elated to be

able to be here to see him be recognized and honored. He was the real hero that day, saving the Air America helicopters from landing in the deadly gunfire that shot his A-1 down."

Though the crash ended his flying career, Buice said he has always felt a connection to the A-1 Skyraider.

As a pilot, Buice liked the A-1 for its ability to fly for an extended period while also being able to carry a large payload of ammunition.

The OA-1K Skyraider II now carries on that role, equipped with advanced weapons systems for light attack and reconnaissance missions for AFSOC.

Taking a moment to look at the new aircraft, Buice reflected on what it meant for the next generation of Skyraider pilots.

"I hope they embrace the challenges, the accomplishments—even the fear and the adrenaline," he said. "There will be a day when they can no longer do this. Today is not that day."

Today, Buice lives at the Hawthorne House, an assisted living neighborhood in the Air Force Enlisted Village in nearby Shalimar. The Air Force Enlisted Village is a community for retired enlisted military members and their surviving spouses.

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Eglin Welcomes New F-35 Test Force, Expanding Role of Reserve Units in Fighter Innovation

A new chapter in fighter jet innovation has officially taken off at Eglin Air Force Base. On May 1, 2025, the first-ever F-35 Lightning II Combined Test Force (CTF) was established as part of Eglin’s expanding fighter test community—a significant milestone not just for the base, but for the Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve Command Test Center (AATC) as well.

This groundbreaking unit marks the first time the Air Reserve Component (ARC) has stood up a test force dedicated to fifth-generation fighter aircraft, solidifying its place in developmental and operational testing alongside the active-duty force.

AATC pilots have long been integrated into Eglin’s test programs, regularly flying Developmental Test (DT) and Operational Test (OT) missions with aircraft from the 96th Test Wing and the 53rd Wing. Now, with the formal activation of the CTF, the ARC is moving from

a supporting role to a leading one—shaping the future of air combat capability.

“Coordinating and streamlining across the Total Force by tirelessly testing, evaluating, and extrapolating our capabilities is how we bring the future faster,” said Maj. Gen. Duke Pirak, Air National Guard’s acting director.

Traditionally operating legacy aircraft, the ARC’s expansion into F-35 testing reflects a broader mission evolution. The CTF now stands at the forefront of integrating cutting-edge technologies into combat-ready strategies.

“We are primarily accountable to the warfighter,” said Col. Daniel J. Wittmer, AATC commander. “Our weapons and tactics process create a bottom-up approach to solving critical capability gaps for warfighters across all mission sets in all areas of responsibility. It is simply not possible to modernize as fast and effectively as AATC does



without benchmark processes coupled with the best operators, analysts, and engineers.”

This philosophy underpins AATC’s well-known model of delivering “an 80% solution at 20% the cost”—targeting the most impactful upgrades with

streamlined efficiency.

Currently, CTF pilots are conducting test flights in F-35As supplied by the Alabama and Vermont Air National Guard units, representing a unified, cross-state commitment to advancing U.S. airpower.

With the stand-up of this new test force, Eglin continues to cement its status as a national leader in next-generation air dominance—where tradition meets innovation, and the future of flight is being forged today.



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 Wellness

Celebrating Fathers Through Fitness and Connection

BY LISA LEATH TURPIN, HEALTH & WELLNESS COACH

Exercising as a family, particularly fathers and their children, offers exceptional benefits that go beyond physical fitness. It creates opportunities to celebrate the unique role fathers play in their children's lives, fostering emotional bonds, enhancing mental health and instilling lifelong habits of wellness. As Father's Day approaches, reflecting on the value of shared physical activities highlights the profound impact fathers can have within their families.

Improved Health: Joint exercise sessions provide fathers and children with

remarkable physical benefits. Fathers can manage weight, improve cardiovascular health, and build muscle strength, while children reduce their risk of obesity and develop stronger bones and muscles. Such activities not only improve individual health, but also foster a shared commitment to well-being.

Research published in "Pediatrics" emphasizes that children who exercise with their parents, especially their fathers, are significantly more likely to meet daily activity guidelines, laying the foundation for a lifelong appreciation for fitness.

Strengthened Emotional Bonds: Father-child exercise

routines offer priceless opportunities for connection. Quality time spent through shared physical activities allows children to feel supported and valued while fathers experience the joy of witnessing their children's growth and resilience. These interactions not only nurture familial relationships, but also provide a platform for fathers to teach important values, such as perseverance, teamwork and determination.

A study from the University of Cambridge illustrates that families who exercise together report better communication and closeness. For fathers, these activities serve as meaningful ways to strengthen relationships with their children. As families prepare to honor fathers on Father's Day, incorporating physical activities into the celebration can deepen the meaning of this special occasion. A family hike, a neighborhood game of basketball or even a simple walk can strengthen bonds while acknowledging the vital role fathers play in their children's lives.

Fathers Play a Unique Role: Fathers hold a distinct role in their children's development, complementing but differing from that of mothers. While mothers often excel in nurturing and emotional caregiving, fathers frequently encourage indepen-

dence, physical exploration and risk-taking. Their involvement in activities such as active play, sports and physical challenges plays a critical role in building resilience and confidence in their children.

Through physical activities, fathers embody their unique parenting style. These experiences highlight the important balance fathers bring to family dynamics, inspiring qualities like bravery and self-assurance in their children.

Suggestions for Destin Dads: Our amazing Destin provides a wealth of opportunities for fathers and children to exercise together while making the most of our natural beauty and community resources:

Beach Activities: Destin's stunning beaches are perfect for family-friendly activities such as swimming, paddle boarding, beach volleyball or even a simple jog along the shoreline.

Fishing and Boating: The "World's Luckiest Fishing Village" offers our fathers and children the chance to bond over fishing trips or kayaking adventures in the Gulf.

Nature Trails: Explore scenic trails like those at Henderson

Beach State Park or Topsail Hill Preserve State Park for hiking, biking, or leisurely walks.

Community Sports: Join local sports leagues through Destin's recreational facilities for basketball, soccer or tennis, or check The Morgan Sports Center.

Water Sports Classes: Families interested in learning new skills can try paddle boarding or snorkeling lessons offered by local vendors.

Family Yoga: Look for yoga classes at local studios or organize an outdoor session at one of Destin's parks to promote relaxation and flexibility.

Playgrounds and Parks: Destin has several parks with playgrounds and outdoor exercise equipment, such as Clement Taylor Park, where families can combine play and fitness.

Exercising together enriches physical, emotional and social well-being. It strengthens bonds, cultivates healthy habits and promotes a positive family dynamic. Fathers, particularly, play a pivotal role in guiding their children's development, emphasizing resilience, independence and teamwork. Dads that invest in the importance of health will create the happiness and growth of their children. Be Active, Stay Active!

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Considering Ketamine After Psilocybin? Here's What to Know



BY MELANIE YOST

If you've experienced the healing power of psilocybin, you already understand how transformative psychedelic therapies can be — revealing hidden truths, releasing emotional weight and restoring a sense of meaning. If you're exploring what's next in your healing journey, ketamine may be a natural and meaningful next step.

While the experience is different from psilocybin, the intention is the same: to help you heal from the inside out — especially if you're continuing to navigate depression, anxiety, PTSD or trauma.

Different Medicines, Shared Purpose: Both psilocybin and ketamine support the brain's natural ability to heal; they just take different routes to get there.

Psilocybin often brings deeply emotional or spiritual experiences. It opens the door to insight, compassion, and reconnection by activating serotonin receptors and disrupting rigid thinking patterns in the brain's default mode network, the area linked to self-reflection and rumination.

Ketamine works differently. It blocks NMDA receptors and boosts levels of glutamate and BDNF (brain-derived neurotrophic factor), enhancing neuroplasticity allowing your brain to form new connections and healthier patterns. While psilocybin dives deep into the emotional landscape, ketamine often offers a more spacious, observational experience that quiets the inner critic and creates room for relief.

Both are Psychedelic —



But in Different Ways: It's important to know that ketamine is also a psychedelic, though in a different category than psilocybin. Psilocybin often brings intense, symbolic and immersive experiences. Ketamine typically feels more floaty, dissociative and dreamlike.

This "softer" psychedelic state may feel less overwhelming, but still opens a window into subconscious thought. Intensity does not equal therapeutic effectiveness. Ketamine offers a different kind of access to healing.

Why Consider Ketamine?: If you're still experiencing emotional distress, loop-

ing thoughts or trauma responses, ketamine can offer support in ways that build upon your previous work with psilocybin:

- It offers relief without requiring emotional breakthroughs. Sometimes healing happens through subtle shifts — lighter days, quieter thoughts, steadier emotions.

- It provides a new perspective. The dissociative quality of ketamine creates space between you and your pain, helping you gain clarity and calm.

- It increases resilience. Many people report better sleep, fewer spirals, and a greater ability to respond, rather than react, to life's stressors.

- It supports long-term integration. If psilocybin opened the door to transformation, ketamine can help you walk through it with steadiness and support.

A Continued Journey, Not a Restart: Choosing ketamine after psilocybin isn't about start-

ing over; it's about continuing your healing with new tools. Psilocybin helps uncover emotional truths. Ketamine helps you integrate and sustain those insights. The self-awareness you've built can deepen your ketamine experience. You're not replacing one medicine with another; you are expanding your capacity to heal.

Trust the Process, Trust Yourself: You've already done courageous work. Choosing to keep going, even in a new way, is a powerful act of self-care.

Ketamine activates healing pathways already within you. The medicine opens the door, but your body and brain do the healing.

Whether you're seeking clarity, relief or stability, ketamine offers a path forward that is gentle, effective and uniquely supportive. If psilocybin helped you see what's possible, ketamine can help you sustain it.

Both are powerful. Both are worthy of your trust. And most importantly, so are you.

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Your Whole-Hearted Yes

By STEPHENIE CRAIG

Are you overscheduled? Perhaps you're rushing, exhausted and regretting your full calendar. Maybe commitments are positive like kid activities, time with friends, volunteer work, a celebration. However, when

those events become the reality of your week and month, you want more time to just be with people, to be with yourself, to slow down and be present in the moment.

Saying too many yeses is tempting with many options



and cultural encouragement to be involved or be left behind. Saying yes feels good and comes from a genuine place, but excessive yeses create feelings of regret and resentment regarding your time. Excessive yeses are a result of poor boundaries, guilt, fear of disappointing others, fear of being judged by others, obligation, proving your worth, fear of missing out, trying to earn approval, and attempting to keep yourself and others from experiencing uncomfortable feelings.

While saying no is healthy, it can be scary and hard. Saying no can upset people, result in missing out and creates uncomfortable feelings. However, learning to say no opens the pathway to your whole-hearted yes. Your whole-hearted yeses are commitments in alignment with your deep values and purpose. You can find your whole-hearted yeses by imagining you are at your life's end reflecting back on how you spent your time. What yeses feel worthwhile? What yeses might you regret? Will you feel good about doing 10 things with exhaustion and obligation? Will you feel better about doing three things with presence, connection and meaning?

Saying no and embracing your whole-hearted yeses allows you to release overwhelming stress. Your no's allow you to embrace simple joys and be present in your life. Saying no creates space to notice the vibrant color of the sky, the squirrel in the yard, the unfiltered laugh of a child, the snuggle of a pet, the flirty smile of your significant other. Your no's create space to appreciate rest, creativity, nature, unrushed conversation and your spiritual life. No makes way for the beauty of your deep and profound yes. So, how do you begin the journey to your whole-hearted yes?

Five Ways to Find Your Whole-Hearted Yes

1. Evaluate your schedule. Look at your week/month. Notice how you feel. Are you exhausted? Do you have a sense of dread about commitments? Are you wishing for quality time for things that matter most to you? If yes, acknowledge it's time for a change.

2. Begin cutting long-term commitments. Think through how many commitments you'd like to have on any week/weekend to feel balanced. Discuss with your family. Determine which current commitments are keepers based on your values and desired number of healthy commitments. Decide which commitments go. Perhaps each child has a limit on extra-curricular activities. Maybe you don't renew your membership on a board or social group. Maybe you volunteer for one very important cause instead of five moderately important causes. This won't be easy and you will likely find sacrifice



is required to create more margin.

3. Start saying no to short-term commitments.

If you have decided you want no more than two weeknight commitments and two weekend commitments, once you've used up your whole-hearted yeses, no is the answer to other opportunities. Or swap one opportunity for another so you are holding your boundary on commitments.

4. Process your uncomfortable feelings. You might feel guilt, fear of missing out, fear of upsetting others. These feelings are normal and you can feel them and remember your whole-hearted yes to fewer high priority commitments is worth much more in the world than your exhausted, resentful half-hearted, over-committed yes. Also, remember you are the only person who can set boundaries for yourself in the pursuit of joy and purpose.

5. Unapologetically communicate your whole-hearted yeses and your healthy no's to others. People who don't respect your healthy no's are not respecting your boundaries. You have no reason to be ashamed of wanting to give whole-hearted yeses. People in your life can learn to hear, "Thank you so much for the invitation. I appreciate your thoughtfulness. I won't be able to join the event due to other commitments."

Embracing your no and your whole-hearted yes can feel difficult at first. However, over time, it brings joy and flourishing to your life and relationships. Connect with us for counseling and coaching support along your journey at Journeybravely.com.

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BY DR. KAREN DEVORE

If there's one thing I wish more people understood about their health, it's this: you cannot out-supplement or out-caf-feinate your way through poor sleep. Sleep is not a luxury or a badge of productivity to skip—it's foundational to healing, balance and long-term wellness. At the Tortoise Clinic, where we approach health through both integrative and holistic lenses, sleep is often the thread that ties it all together.

We live in a culture that applauds hustle, thrives on stimulation and often views rest as a weakness. Yet, as a practitioner, I've seen time and again that when sleep suffers, everything else starts to unravel—hormones become imbalanced, digestion slows, inflammation increases,

cravings intensify and mental clarity disappears.

Why Sleep Is Your Body's Reset Button

During sleep, your body performs its most critical behind-the-scenes work. Cells repair. Muscles recover. Hormones reset. The brain processes and detoxifies. In fact, deep sleep is when your body releases growth hormone, which helps repair tissues and regulate metabolism. Your liver is busy detoxing. Your immune system recalibrates. And your nervous system has a rare moment to truly rest.

When sleep is disrupted or insufficient, the effects can be wide-ranging and sneaky. You might wake up exhausted despite getting “enough” hours. You might feel wired at night and sluggish in the morning. You might have trouble losing weight, staying focused, or regulating mood. And here's the kicker: traditional labs may show everything as “normal.”

That's where a holistic approach makes all the difference.

The Integrative Approach to Sleep

In integrative medicine, we don't just ask how many hours are you sleeping? We ask:

- How do you feel when you wake up?
- Do you have trouble falling asleep—or staying asleep?
- Do you feel wired at night and wide awake at 2 a.m.?
- Are you struggling with anxiety, hormone shifts or night sweats?
- Are you using screens late at night? Eating late? Skipping morning sunlight?

We look at the entire picture—nervous system function, cortisol rhythms, melatonin production, hormone balance, stress exposure, nutrition, lifestyle and more.

What many people don't realize is that sleep disturbances are often not about the sleep itself—they're symptoms of deeper imbalances. At the Tortoise Clinic, we blend Western diagnostics and Eastern wisdom to get to the root. That might include looking at adrenal fatigue, estrogen/progesterone shifts, thyroid dysfunc-

tion, or gut inflammation—all of which can disrupt your rest.

Beyond the Sleep Aids

It's tempting to reach for sleep aids or melatonin when nights get restless. And while they can offer short-term relief, they rarely address the why.

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To better understand the sleep patterns and hormonal rhythms of our patients, I'm thrilled to share that we've launched a new,

non-invasive sleep assessment at the Tortoise Clinic. This easy, at-home saliva test measures your melatonin and cortisol levels at key times throughout the night, along with progesterone, giving us a clearer picture of what's happening behind the scenes.

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If you're tired of feeling tired—or if sleep has quietly slipped out of your routine and left chaos in its place—know this: rest is not a weakness. It's your body's greatest tool for repair.

And you deserve more than temporary fixes. You deserve answers, insight and support that meets you where you are.

At the Tortoise Clinic, we believe healing happens one steady, intentional step at a time—and sometimes, the first step is simply learning how to rest.



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The Impact of EMF Radiation

BY KAY LEAMAN, HEALTHYDAY HEALTHYLIFE

I have to admit upfront that I found myself wading through science when I jumped down the rabbit hole. Electromagnetic Fields are a part of modern life. But, that doesn't mean we should accept their potential risks without question. By understanding them and how they affect our bodies, we can take steps to minimize our exposure thus improving our health.

EM spectrum, EM waves, EM induction, EM energy, EM radiation (EMR), EM field, EM pulse and EM force are all parts of this field of study. We will be focusing on EM Spectrum (Classified electromagnetic waves on the basis of frequency or wave length). There are seven bands: Gamma Rays discovered in 1896, X-Rays discovered in 1895, Ultra Violet Rays discovered in 1801, Visible Rays (visible by people and contains seven colors), Infra-Red Waves produced by hot bodies or by excitation of atoms and molecules, Micro-Waves are oscillating electrons in a cavity or by special vacuum tubes and Radio-Waves which are the longest to all waves produced by oscillating charge in the circuit.

Fun Facts:

EMR can travel through empty space.

Not all forms of EMR are harmful.

EMR, other than visible light, can be used to view an object. For example, bees use ultraviolet waves to help them see patterns on flowers.

We use EMF waves for seeing, talking (light) on phones and watching tv (radio waves), cooking (micro waves), staying warm (infrared) and getting sunlight (ultraviolet). Our lives are improved through new technology and health care. All EMFs transfer energy. When the energy is absorbed by matter, it is converted into heat which causes the particles to vibrate more rapidly. This is important, because all life, including humans, have different vibration levels, and when we interact with these invisible waves, there can be changes.

High energy radiation includes x-rays, gamma rays and some higher energy ultraviolet (UV) rays. This is called ionizing radiation, meaning this energy can affect cells on the atomic lev-

el by removing an electron from an atom, or ionizing it. Ionizing radiation can damage the body's DNA and cells which may contribute to genetic mutations such as cancer.

Low energy frequency (ELF) radiation is non-ionizing radiation. It can move atoms around in the body or make them vibrate. But, most researchers agree that it's not enough to damage our DNA or cells. These frequencies include phones, smart meters, tablets, laptops and computers. It also includes radios, TV signals, radar, satellite stations and MRI machines. Note that non-ionizing EMFs in the radio frequency range, noted as Group B's, have the possibility to become a human carcinogen. This group includes cell phones, smart devices, tablets, etc.

When reading the above paragraph, you'll note the conflict in statements. That is because the danger is in the length of time the device is in close proximity to the body. People wear their phones, lap their laptops or hold their tablets, etc. Research has links to glioma, a malignant type of brain cancer; increased risk of acute myeloid leukemia (AML) in adults and a 1.5 - 5% of childhood leukemia can be attributed to ELF EMFs.

In our homes we have televisions, wifi, routers, devices such as Apple TV, appliances, lighting, etc. Did you know that even when our lamps are off they still emit ELF's, that can be measured by a meter?

So, what can we do about it?

Workstations: Use wired internet connections vs. bluetooth. Keep routers and other EMF sources as far away as possible. Opt for incandescent or LED lights vs. fluorescent lighting which can emit harmful frequency waves.

Auto EMFs, a driving concern: Turn off bluetooth and WIFI when it's not needed. You can also disable this feature from your car's settings. Avoid using in-car entertainment systems for long periods of time. If you drive an electric car, consider getting a seat cover that blocks the EMFs coming from the battery you are sitting on.

Smart use of smart phones and tablets: Use the speakerphone or wired headsets to keep the phone away from your head. Use a bag or purse instead of

pockets to carry your phone. Switch your device to airplane mode when not in use, especially when you sleep. Cut down exposure by downloading content such as books, music and videos while on airplane mode.

Be aware of EMF sources in our environment and understand

the symptoms of EMF sensitivity.

Make simple adjustments by implementing practical tips like turning off WIFI at night, use wired devices when available and keep all electronics out of the bedroom.

Focus on making your home a sanctuary to rest and rejuvenate,

free from EMF intrusion.

Stay educated and up to date with the latest research and safety practices.

The more we know the better equipped we are to take charge of what we eat, drink and expose ourselves to. Here's to Health! succeed.hdhl@gmail.com

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 Business

What We Repeatedly Do: Gratitude Over Contempt



By BILL MASON, EXECUTIVE COACH AND FOUNDER OF ROCKET FUEL COACH

Last week, I was in Colorado Springs for a coaches' training, soaking up the mountain views and investing in my growth. On Sunday, we packed our bags, ready to fly home. But Dallas had other plans—thunderstorms delayed our flight. No problem. We were rebooked for

Tuesday.

Tuesday rolled around. We went to the airport. Same story. Thunderstorms again in Dallas. Another delay. A little more frustrating, but I took it in stride. Then came Wednesday. This time, the aircraft was broken. No weather to blame. Just a maintenance issue. I was done. My patience, thin. My attitude, sour.

By day three, I wasn't just frustrated—I was complaining. Snapping at airline staff, short with my wife, muttering to myself like a grown man who lost his toy. I didn't like the guy I was becoming. I caught myself mid-rant and thought, This isn't who I want to be. It's okay to express frustration—but turning into a whiny baby who didn't get his way? That's not the man I want

to be.

So, I sat. I took a breath. And I brewed—not in anger this time, but in reflection.

We were stuck in Colorado Springs, not a cramped airport terminal. We had a friend's empty house all to ourselves. We had their car. We had each other. We weren't stranded in a storm or sleeping in a gate chair. We were safe. Comfortable. In a stunning place. God was giving me something I hadn't planned for: rest.

In that moment, I remembered a simple truth: I get to choose. Aristotle once said, "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit." And it hit me—if I keep choosing frustration, I become frustrated. If I keep choosing gratitude, I become grateful.

So I chose gratitude. Not just once, but again and again. Every time my heart wanted to pout or point fingers, I turned it toward what was good. I stopped rehearsing what went wrong and started remembering what was right.

By Thursday, our plane finally took off. No delays. No drama. Just a peaceful trip home. I walked off that plane not just relieved to be home—but grateful for who I became in the waiting.

We don't become who we are in the big moments. We become who we are in the small ones—when plans get delayed, when expectations aren't met, when people disappoint us. That's when character is shaped. That's when habits are formed.

So, let me ask you:

Are you choosing gratitude

over contempt?

Are you becoming someone who sees life as happening for you—or against you?

If you're ready to train your mindset the same way we train muscles or leadership skills—let's talk. Executive coaching isn't just about business outcomes. It's about becoming the kind of person your future self—and your team—can be proud of.

Gratefully,

Bill Mason

Bill Mason, Rocket Fuel Coach

www.rocketfuelcoach.com

Eglin Federal Credit Union Celebrates Grand Opening of New Operations Center

By LAURA COALE

Eglin Federal Credit Union (Eglin FCU) recently opened its state-of-the-art Operations Center, a milestone in the credit union's comprehensive growth and expansion project. The event was marked by a celebratory gathering attended by board members, volunteers, team members and partners who supported the successful completion of this project.

Eglin FCU's President/CEO, Cathie Staton, expressed her gratitude and excitement during the opening ceremony. "This Operations Center is a testament to our commitment to innovation and excellence," said Staton. "We believe that a well-designed space can inspire creativity and productivity, and we are thrilled to offer our employees a dynamic and inviting atmosphere that reflects our corporate values."

The new Operations Center, a four-story, 100,000-square-

foot building, includes an attached parking garage and is designed to accommodate up to 400 employees. It features energy-efficient windows, geothermal wells, charging stations for employees' electric vehicles, and flexible interior workspaces designed for employee comfort and efficiency. The bright and open workspaces foster creativity, collaboration and communication, with various types of collaboration spaces, balconies and outdoor tables with shading.

The building also houses a state-of-the-art training center, an expanded call center with chat and text support, a growing Video Teller team and departments such as loan services, indirect lending, collections, Information Technology, Information Systems, mortgage services, facilities management and operations training and projects. Additionally, the Operations Center can serve as a



BUILDING PHOTO CREDIT: JOHN MAGNOSKI

disaster recovery site if needed.

Staton highlighted the collaborative efforts that made this project possible, recognizing key contributors including the board of directors, volunteers, President Emeritus Jerry Williams, former COO Kenny Girot and several team members who were involved from the beginning such as SVP/CTO Tim Farnsworth, SVP/CIO Rocky Magee, SVP/

COO Kim Nauta, and Facilities Manager/Security Officer Alan Campbell. Staton also acknowledged the La Macchia Group for its excellent work on the design and build of the Operations Center. "We embrace the credit union philosophy of people helping people, and we believe that when you lead with values and do the right things, good things happen," Staton added. "We are excited to con-

tinue to attract and retain new employees and members, while having room to grow and deliver five-star service."

EFCU's new Operations Center marks a major milestone in its growth. Learn more at lamacchiagroup.com and visit eglinfcu.org for updates, financial education or career opportunities.

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How to Achieve Freedom as a Business Owner

By ROSS VOLLMER,
VDX MARKETING

Why did you start your business in the first place? For most entrepreneurs, the answer includes a desire for freedom—freedom from a rigid schedule, freedom to earn more and freedom to build something meaningful. But somewhere along the journey, that dream often gets buried beneath long hours, constant stress and the weight of doing everything yourself.

If you feel like your business owns you instead of the other way around, you're not alone. The good news is, you can reclaim that freedom. It starts by implementing three core strategies: creating inbound leads, embracing automation and building systems.

Inbound Leads: Stop Chasing, Start Attracting

The first step toward freedom is getting off the hamster wheel of lead generation. If you're still spending your days cold-calling, relying on word-of-mouth or hoping referrals magically appear, it's time for a shift. Inbound marketing is a smarter way to grow—bringing

potential customers to you rather than chasing them down.

When done right, inbound marketing saves you countless hours. Through a mix of SEO, digital advertising and a well-designed website, you can build a funnel that attracts qualified leads around the clock. It's like hiring a full-time salesperson who works while you sleep.

Automation: Work Smarter, Not Harder

Once leads start coming in, the next challenge is managing them efficiently. That's where automation becomes your best friend. Simply put, automation uses technology to handle repetitive tasks for you—things like follow-up emails, appointment confirmations, review requests or lead nurturing sequences.

Imagine this: someone fills out a form on your site. Within 30 seconds, they receive a personalized email and text, along with a link to schedule a consul-



ation. The appointment shows up on your calendar—all without you lifting a finger. That's not a fantasy. That's a well-built automation system in action.

Automation reduces the risk of human error and ensures a consistent experience for every customer. Best of all, it frees up your time and energy to focus on big-picture strategy instead of daily admin work. You only need to build these systems once, and they'll continue run-

ning in the background forever.

If you're not sure where to begin, start with a good CRM (Customer Relationship Management) platform. Tools like these make it easy to create automations that follow up, nurture and convert your leads. The idea of setting up software like this can seem daunting, but companies like VDX Marketing not only provide the software, but they also offer setup services to make it easy and stress-free for the business owner.

Systems: Build a Business That Runs Without You

Automation handles the repetitive tasks, but systems ensure your entire operation delivers consistently—whether you're in the office or on vacation. A system is simply a documented process that anyone on your team can follow to get the same result every time.

Too many entrepreneurs avoid systems because they think it'll box them in. In reality, systems create freedom. They allow you to delegate with confidence, improve your customer

experience and scale your business without becoming the bottleneck.

Start by documenting your most frequent or important tasks—like onboarding a new client, delivering your service or handling support issues. Once you've written out the steps, look for ways to improve or automate parts of the process. Then, train a team member to take it over. Over time, your role shifts from doer to leader—and that's when freedom becomes real.

The Takeaway

Reclaiming your freedom as a business owner isn't about working harder. It's about building smarter. With a consistent stream of inbound leads, well-placed automation, and reliable systems, you can finally step out of the technician role and into the role of visionary.

You don't have to do it all overnight. But every smart step you take brings you closer to the business—and life—you imagined when you decided to start your own business.

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Musing

Sean of the South



BY SEAN DIETRICH

The radio was on. WSM 650 AM. It was a summer night. The crickets were out. The garage door was open.

Daddy was changing the oil. He was lying beneath the Ford. I was sitting there, watching him work. Because that's what kids did before TikTok.

The garage was peppered with posters of fighter jets, and model airplanes. My father was obsessed with planes. All kinds. He wanted to be a fighter pilot as a boy. But he was deaf in his left ear. So he became an iron-worker.

His voice came from beneath the car. "Be a pal and get me another one from the fridge?"

He wasn't talking about Coca-Cola. He wanted another bottle of Weekend Lubricant. I didn't have far to walk. The



fridge was beside his workbench. Our family's beer fridge was always kept in the garage because we were Baptist.

I fetched another bottle. I handed it to my old man, who slid from beneath the car on one of those slider things with the wheels.

He was still wearing work clothes. Denim. Boots. He was still covered in soot from a day of welding column splices. It was Saturday. He had worked overtime, but still somehow had energy enough to cut the grass,

paint the shed, and change the oil after work. Just how he was.

"Turn up the radio, Opie," he said.

He called me that because I had red hair. Although the truth was, I was pretty chubby and looked nothing like Ron Howard. In fact, I looked more like I had eaten Opie Taylor.

Low Sweet Chariot."

"Do you have regrets?" I asked my father.

"Huh?" came the voice beneath the four-wheeled piece of Dearborn Steel.

"Where'd you hear that word?"

Shrug.

He slid from beneath the car.

The radio was playing the Grand Ole Opry. The garage swelled with the sounds of steel guitars and twin fiddles.

My father discovered that I was a musical child from a young age. I was 4 when he marched me into the music minister's office and said, "My boy can sing. I want you to learn him to do it good." Daddy paid \$9 per week for voice lessons. That was a lot back then. The first song I learned was "Swing

He stared at me. "You mean do I wish I'd done anything different? Of course I do. Everyone has regrets."

"Like what?"

He was still lying on his back. Socket wrench resting on his chest. "Why do you ask?"

Another shrug.

"Well," he said, "I wish I'd gone to college. That's Number One. Wish I'd made something of myself. Wish I didn't walk on iron beams all day. Lotta men die doing what I do."

"What else?"

He thought. "Oh, I wish I would've taken flying lessons. I always wanted to fly. But when they told me I'd never be a Navy pilot, on account of my dead ear, I cried for a whole year. I hated myself. Hated this gimp body God gave me. But I shouldn't have given up. Shoulda taken flying lessons. But I didn't. I regret that."

"Is it too late?"

"For flying lessons?"

Nod.

He sighed and took a sip. He looked into the faroff. "I don't know. Maybe."

The music of Loretta Lynn filled our garage. "But it doesn't matter, because you know what I've learned?"

"What?"

"When you were born, I learned that the most important thing I would ever do was be a daddy. I didn't care about me no more. I only cared about you. Cared about watching you succeed."

"Me?"

"Yessir. You shoulda seen yourself. You were pitiful. You came out of your mama helpless and nekkid. You didn't even have a name. So I gave you mine."

"And when I held you that first time, I promised myself that anything I ever did, from that day on, would all be for you. That was my job. To look after you. Not to be a pilot. Not to be rich. Even after I die, so help me, I'll be looking out for you however I can. Because you're mine. And I'm your'n."

I am a middle-aged man now, older than my father was in my memory. But tomorrow night I will be performing at the Grand Ole Opry. And I wonder if he isn't the reason why.

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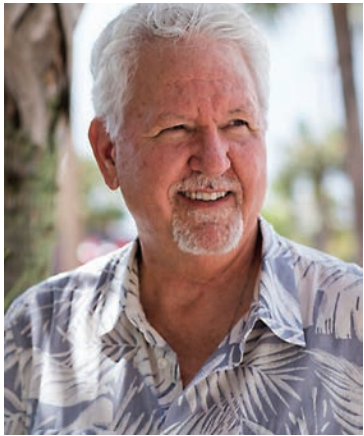
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A Pastor's Ponderings: I Am Dad



BY PASTOR DAVE HOLLAND

“Something happens when you become a father. Hold that little piece of you people call a baby, and something shifts in your heart. Liquid courage floods your veins, and suddenly, you’d work day and night, fight off enemies, climb mountains—whatever it takes—because you’re now earth’s truest superhero. You are Dad.”

But fatherhood is more than protection and provision—it’s formation. Your child learns to walk like you, talk like you, carry themselves like you. Even if you leave.

My dad left when I was five. But I still walk like him. I still sound like him. I am him all over again.

As a boy, I would run to the door when I heard his car, waiting for my hero. But then... he stopped coming home. I remember looking to the bleachers during my little league games, searching for his face. He never showed.

I promised myself then I would never be that kind of dad. Thankfully, I’ve come to know another Father.

One whose presence lingers like an aroma in the air. One who, even when silent, still surrounds me.

Yes, there were seasons I felt

distant from God, but looking back, I see—He never left. And since believing in His Son’s death and resurrection, I hear Heaven’s voice in my soul: “Come home.”

When my kids were small, I’d pull my old Chevy Nova into the driveway and hear them squeal, “Daddy’s home!” My heart would soar. Those were the happiest sounds of my life.

When they left home to marry and start lives of their own, I rejoiced for them—but missed them every day. The girls found new superheroes. And my son became one.

At age 50, our family gathered in Colorado for my nephew’s wedding. My sister Linda won box seat tickets to a Colorado Rockies game, and I got getting volunteered for the on-field “Coca-Cola Challenge.”

Before the seventh-inning

stretch, a Rockies PR rep explained I’d need to sprint from left field to second base, then to first, in under 25 seconds. Easy, I thought.

Then the gun fired. I ran for my life in front of 47,000 screaming fans and a national TV audience. Huffing and puffing, I lunged across first base—barely.

The crowd roared.

As the jumbotron replayed my race, I looked up and saw my dad waving his hat wildly, cheering for me.

My mind flashed back to all the games he’d missed, all the years I looked for his face in the crowd. And in that moment, God washed it all away. The hurt. The resentment. The longing.

You see, divorce leaves scars. Fathers fail. Even superheroes have their kryptonite.

But there is One Father who never fails. One who never walks away. One whose love heals even what seems too broken to mend.

Today, a tribe of grandkids calls me “Papa Dave.” Some folks call me “Pastor Dave.” But in my heart, I’m still just a dad—longing to be like my Heavenly Father.

Happy Father’s Day to every dad showing up, every father healing from hurt, and to the One who never left us.

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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DNA Evidence

BY MICHAEL YODER, RETIRED
FBI CRIMINAL PROFILER

By now, everybody has heard of DNA and what an amazing forensic tool it is for solving homicide investigations. If there is a DNA match at a crime scene, the DNA belongs to only one person on the planet (unless there is an identical twin). Scientifically, the FBI estimates a DNA match to be around 1 in 113 billion - WAY more than there are people on Earth. Since its discovery and ongoing refinement of its analysis, DNA remains the gold standard of forensic tools. Every detective yearns to solve homicides with a DNA match to ensure a fair verdict. Non-matching DNA can clear a suspect, saving law enforcement resources.

DNA (Deoxyribonucleic

acid) is a molecule that contains genetic information for an organism's development and function, consisting of two chains that coil around each other to form a double helix. DNA is present in blood, saliva, semen, hair follicles, tissue, perspiration, urine, feces, bone, teeth and skin cells. It is microscopic and invisible to the naked eye.

Though DNA is valuable in solving homicides and uncovering the truth, there are challenges in using DNA analysis effectively. Three primary obstacles include obtaining DNA samples, matching DNA found at a crime scene to a DNA database, and finally, putting DNA evidence in perspective of the crime scene.

The first obstacle is obtaining DNA evidence. An investigator



must identify likely locations for DNA, then blindly extract the microscopic DNA, collect it in a sterile container and send it to the crime lab for analysis. Results often take several months, and DNA analysis is expensive. So, the investigator must make smart choices on what to analyze and what not to analyze. This knowledge comes exclusively from experience and a thorough analysis of the crime scene.

The second obstacle is in matching the DNA sample collected at the crime scene to a DNA database that contains biographical information of the owner. In 1994, Congress passed the DNA Identification Act which authorized the FBI to create a national DNA database of convicted offenders.

The FBI formed CODIS (Combined DNA Index System) that provides access to local and state crime labs. Crime labs can compare DNA profiles electronically from any participating crime lab and identify suspects by matching DNA from crime scenes to convicted offenders.

As of September 2020, CODIS contained more than 14 million offender profiles. While this is a large number, if you compare it to the population of the U.S. (roughly 300 million), the chance of a match is less than 5 percent. Additionally, when accounting for births and deaths since CODIS's inception, the percentage is further reduced. By comparison, civilian genealogical companies like Ancestry.com have over 22 million DNA profiles, 23andme.

com over 12 million DNA profiles and MyHeritage.com over 6 million DNA profiles. With only a few exceptions, these civilian companies do not cooperate with law enforcement's request to compare their DNA profiles taken at crime scenes to their database. The conclusion is that the chance of a DNA match of a profile collected at a crime scene to a known DNA profile is exceedingly small.

The third obstacle to the use of DNA in a homicide investigation is putting the matched sample in perspective of the crime. DNA is non-biased and purely scientific; however, DNA samples are not time stamped. A DNA sample cannot indicate if it was deposited an hour ago or a year ago. It only states the DNA sample was left at that particular place. Unfortunately, DNA matching in a violent crime between two people who know each other well may not be an effective tool since their encounter may have been from a non-criminal activity in days, months or years past. It is up to the investigator to determine that a suspect (who is potentially lying) was not supposed to be at that location.

If you're passionate about true crime and want to learn how to become a sleuth, join the Destin True Crime Club on Facebook. We meet monthly to investigate a real cold case and share research ideas. It's a serious—but fun—group of dedicated individuals. Questions or speaking requests? Email myoder0361@gmail.com.



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2025 ECTC Summer Theatre Camps

Mini Player Camps (Ages 5-7)

For rising kindergarteners, half-day camps run Monday - Friday from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. Each week features a different theme inspired by popular musicals and films. Tuition \$250 which includes a \$30 non-refundable registration fee.

- June 2-6 Disney Dreams
- June 9-13 Snow White
- June 16-20 Seussical
- June 23-27 Moana
- June 30-July 4 Encanto
- July 7-11 Trolls

Camp Broadway: Disney Dreams (Grades 2-5)

9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Focus on acting, singing and dancing to popular Broadway Disney show tunes. Simple choreography, theatre games and screenings of classic musicals. Tuition \$325. June 2-6, 9 a.m. - 3 p.m., ECTC at Grand Boulevard, Miramar Beach



Snow White and the Seven Dwarves - Non-Musical (Grades 2-5)

A one-act straight play where young performers learn stage directions and theatrical language while bringing a classic story to life. 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., with a final performance on the last Friday. Tuition \$375. June 9-13, 9 a.m. - 3 p.m., ECTC at Grand Boulevard, Miramar Beach

Seussical the Musical (Grades 2-5)

A two-week musical theatre camp featuring characters from Dr. Seuss's beloved stories. Engage in group singing and cho-

reography, culminating in ticketed performances. 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Monday - Friday. Tuition \$375. June 16-27, 9 a.m. - 3 p.m., ECTC at Grand Boulevard, Miramar Beach

Camp Broadway: Rock and Pop! (Grades 2-5)

Act, sing and dance to popular rock and pop songs by artists like Taylor Swift and Ariana Grande. The program includes theatre games and improvisation exercises. 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Monday - Friday, \$375. June 30-July 4, 9 a.m. - 3 p.m., ECTC at Grand Boulevard, Miramar Beach

Acting for Film: Harry Potter Edition (Grades 5-12)

Learn the essentials of acting for the camera using scenes and

materials from the Harry Potter series. 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Monday - Friday. Concludes with a final showcase. \$375. July 7-11, 9 a.m. - 3 p.m., ECTC at Grand Boulevard, Miramar Beach

Camp Broadway: The Best of Broadway (Grades 6-12)

Explore songs and scenes from popular Broadway shows like "Hamilton" and "Wicked" with focus on singing, dancing and acting, ending with a showcase performance. 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Monday - Friday, \$375. June 2-6, 9 a.m. - 3:30 p.m., ECTC at Grand Boulevard, Miramar Beach

Too Many Detectives at the Murder Mansion - Non-Musical (Grades 6-12)

A two-week straight play

camp. Develop comedic timing and ensemble work through a murder mystery storyline. 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Monday - Friday. Final performances last Friday & Saturday. \$675. June 16-27, 9 a.m. - 3:30 p.m., ECTC at Grand Boulevard, Miramar Beach

Beetlejuice JR! Musical Theatre Intensive (Grades 6-12)

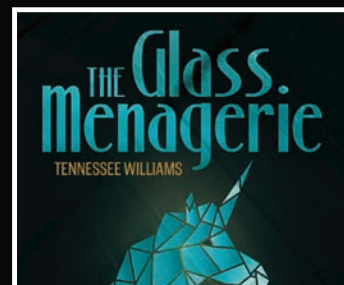
A three-week intensive camp. Work on acting, voice, and dance through the production of "Beetlejuice JR!" 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Monday - Friday. \$1,125. July 14-August 1, 9 a.m. - 3 p.m., ECTC At Grand Boulevard, Miramar Beach. *Final Performances: Friday, August 1, 7 p.m. and Sat., Aug. 2, 7 p.m.



Season 13 Coming this Fall!



Sept. 18 - Oct. 12



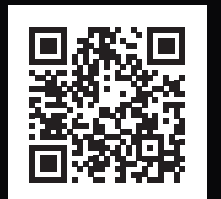
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 Arts & Music

Sinfonia Youth Orchestra Celebrates Seniors and Expands Awards Scholarships

Sinfonia Gulf Coast's Sinfonia Youth Orchestra (SYO) capped off its 2024–2025 season with an uplifting and memorable Spring Concert entitled "Out of This World" on Sunday, May 4, at Destin High School. The free concert series featured nearly 100 student musicians performing intergalactic-inspired music across two concerts showcasing all levels of the SYO music education programs.

Kalle Guerrero, a homeschool student and French horn player, was named the 2025 recipient of the Grace Fulcher Memorial Scholarship, awarded annually to a Sinfonia Youth Orchestra senior who demonstrates exceptional leadership and service. Guerrero's involvement spans a wide range of impactful activities including founding a homeschool co-op, mentoring peers, and supporting individuals with disabilities—all while excelling musically.

Two additional scholarships were introduced this year, each carrying a \$500 award. Ava McCallister, a violinist from South Walton High School, was selected by teaching staff to receive the Exemplary Character Scholarship, which honors a student who consistently demonstrates integrity, compassion, and resilience. The inaugural Talented Musician Scholarship went to Zaki Beckler, a tuba player from Gulf Breeze High School, in recognition of his musical excellence and creativity throughout his time in the program.



cians but great citizens."

Since it was established in 2007, Sinfonia Gulf Coast has served more than 220,000 children

in Okaloosa and Walton Counties. SYO programs include the Symphonic Orchestra, for intermediate to advanced (All-State level) middle and high school student musicians who play strings, winds, brass, and percussion; Sinfonietta Strings, open to beginning string students; and Intermediate Strings, open to intermediate string players. SYO will open auditions for 2025-2026 in June.

For information on how to audition for the Sinfonia Youth Orchestra or to support its education initiatives, contact Margaret Gordon at mgordon@sinfoniagulfcoast.org or call (850) 460-8800.


"These students are not only talented musicians—they're future leaders, educators, and creators," said Sinfonia Youth Orchestra music director Margaret Gordon. "Their contributions have helped shape our ensemble and their impact will be felt long after they graduate."


"Education is the cornerstone of Sinfonia Gulf Coast's mission," added Demetrius Fuller, Sinfonia Gulf Coast music & artistic director. "Honoring our seniors and awarding scholarships reflects our commitment to shaping not only great musi-

Northwest Florida Ballet Academy Registration Now Open!

Register now for the School 2025/26 season. Classes begin Aug. 4 and run through May for K-12 students, with adult classes offered year-round. Pre-School Ballet is also provided weekly for 45 minutes, Aug.-Dec and Jan.-May. All classes are taught by experienced dancers and teachers who make dance exciting and

engaging. A student concert is held each May at the Mattie Kelly Arts Center. Ask about 2025 summer Pre-School Ballet classes, a camp for students K-2, and adult classes. To learn more or register online, visit NFBallet.org/Classes. dates, financial education or career opportunities.





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Around Town

DWU Welcomes New General Manager as Wernet Retires After 25 Years

Destin Water Users (DWU) has named Monica Wallis as its new general manager following the retirement of Lockwood Wernet, who served the organization for 25 years and led it through a decade of growth and innovation.

Wernet began his DWU journey in 2000 as a board member, later serving as assistant general manager in 2010 and general manager in 2014. Under his leadership, DWU completed several major infrastructure projects, including a new well-field and transmission line, construction of hurricane-resistant offices and warehouse space, upgraded water towers and the installation of automated meter readers. DWU also modernized its treatment disinfection process to enhance public safety.

“Not only did we invest in improving our equipment and facilities, but we also invested in the people who carry out the daily operations,” Wernet said.

“I am most proud of the people I’ve worked with at DWU and their dedicated professionalism to serve the public health and safety of our community.”

During Wernet’s tenure, DWU received numerous accolades, including multiple Plant Operations Excellence Awards, Tank of the Year in 2020, and repeated Safety Awards for its employee-led program. DWU’s wastewater operators also earned top honors in statewide Operators Challenges, and the utility took home several local awards for its Destin Christmas Parade floats.

Wernet praised his successor, Monica Wallis, as “a natural born leader who possesses the knowledge, education and experience to lead Team DWU into the future.”

Wallis, a longtime DWU engineer and operations manager, is continuing a family legacy—her grandfather was a founding board member, and her mother currently serves on the board. “Continuing in their footsteps and helping chart a vision for a growing community with the

most precious resource of water—what better way than to lead DWU,” she said.

Destin Forward Graduates 13 Local Leaders, Honors Allyson Anger

On May 8, the Destin Chamber celebrated the graduation of

13 business professionals from its 16th Destin Forward class—a community education and leadership program designed to develop future city and business leaders.

This year’s Destin Forward Leadership Award, chosen by class vote, was presented to Ally-

son Anger of Home2 Suites by Hilton for her outstanding leadership throughout the program.

Following an opening retreat in August, the class spent eight months exploring Destin’s waterways, tourism, arts and cul-

Continued on next page



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- May 15 | Kickstand Jenny
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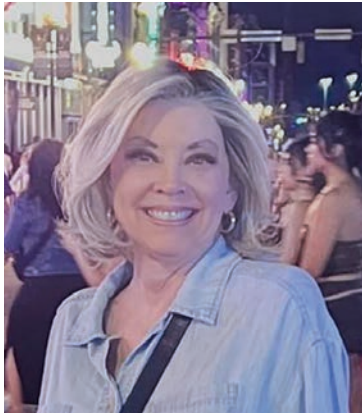


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Proceeds from all events benefit MKAF and its ArtsReach education and community engagement initiatives.

Destinites



BY PATRICIA LEE, OWNER DESTINITES.COM

This month in our Destinites Facebook group (www.Destinites.com/groups/Destinites) we had a member to place the post below regarding 15 public dedicated boat slips. Please be aware and attend the next city council meeting (TBA) to make

Ask Destinites: 15 Boat Slips for Public Use or Are They?

your voice heard.

Post placed by a Destinites member...

DESTIN TAXPAYERS—IT'S TIME TO SPEAK UP!

In 2019, a landowner dedicated 15 transient boat slips for public use on the Destin Harbor in exchange for being excused from over \$119,000.00 in fees that would have been otherwise owed to the City of Destin — this agreement approved by the City of Destin to allow residents and visitors to dock at all 15 transient boat slips and enjoy local restaurants and businesses (including several located on the

landowner's property).

But today? Only four of those transient slips remain available to the public. The rest are being rented out for commercial use, directly violating the intent of the original agreement.

Worse yet, those of us who try to use the public slips are being confronted and told we can't park there. I was personally approached just a few weeks ago in a rude and aggressive manner by someone "policing" the slips—despite them being designated for public access. I attempted to use the public slip for the exact purpose for which it was intended, that is for City

of Destin residents to be able to dock on the harbor and patronize the businesses on the harbor. I have heard other similar stories from our fellow Destinites.

As a City of Destin landowner and taxpayer, I'm not getting what my money is paying for... that is to say, the money the City of Destin gave up to allow us to have some water public access to the harbor businesses—and I know I'm not alone. This is not just about boat slips—it's about fairness, accountability and protecting public access on the Destin Harbor. Join me at the City Council Meeting (date TBD) and make your voice heard.

Let's urge the city to enforce the agreement and restore full public access to these transient slips.

End of member's group post.

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 11,700+ members (Est. Oct. 2018). Check out our local business directory at Destinites.com where 400+ local businesses are already listed and enjoy advertising in our targeted group.

AROUND TOWN

continued from previous page

ture, nonprofits, environment, city services, economic development, and military presence. Class requirements included

attending local civic events and completing a group project.

This year's project focused on preserving Destin's heritage by creating an interactive audio trail at Captain Leonard Destin Park, celebrating the history of

the "World's Luckiest Fishing Village."

With this graduating class, 266 professionals have now completed the program. Four class members—Allyson Anger, Alicia Hurwood, Bailey Rathmann and Springer Williams—were selected to serve on the Destin Forward Advisory Board.

Applications for the Destin Forward Class of 2026 are now open. For details, call (850) 837-6241 or email mail@Destin-Chamber.com.

GULF COAST

continued from page 15

to find a way in.

And here's the bigger picture: fixing these issues now doesn't just save you money—it strengthens your home or business before the next big storm. Solid seals, dry walls and windows that work like they should all add up to a structure that's ready to handle whatever weather rolls in.

Community Strength

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