

Chasing Perfection: Inside the World of the Blue Angels



By WILL ESTELL

Soaring by on a high-speed pass, barely one hundred feet above the runway—at a speed I'm told at the time is in excess of 700 mph—I can literally smell the fuel and feel the jet wash, before I hear the powerful roar of the F/A -18 Super Hornet as it soars by then climbs steeply just ahead of us, disappearing into the clouds, before diving back down in a corkscrew then leveling out about a mile away. All of this happens in about 20 seconds before another pilot with cojones of steel, and the skills to match, flies by completely inverted, slightly further away, but still close enough to feel the change in the atmosphere from where I am standing on the tarmac.

What I am witnessing up close and personal today is the same magical breath of patriotism that fans see at airshows all over this great country each year. The only difference is, today I'm taking it all in from the Blue Angels communication cart, surrounded by a small team of just eight of the Blues support staff, along with my wingman for the day, Blue Angels Public Affairs Officer, Lt. Ben Bushong.

Since being established in 1946, the U.S. Navy Blue Angels hold the unique distinction of being the most wellknown aerobatic team in the entire world. While they regularly wow crowds with breathtaking performances right here in our own backyard, their mission extends far beyond dazzling crowds at airshows, as they aim to inspire future generations of patriotic Americans, by demonstrating the unmatched aptitude, attitude and professionalism of the men and women serving in the U.S. armed forces.

These aero superstars do so much more than simply entertain with a breathtaking aerial showcase. Their performances represent thousands of hours of precision flight, discipline, unshakable resolve and the unwavering spirit of naval aviation. For decades,

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Bowlegs 70! Meet the New Captain Billy and Krewe

By Christopher Manson

The 70th Annual Billy Bowlegs Coronation Pageant was held Saturday, June 14, at Niceville's Mattie Kelly Arts Center. The free public event unveiled the tightly-guarded identity of Captain Billy 70, Rique Gwin, along with his Queen, his First Mate and Mistress, his 10-couple Honor Guard, and the theme for the new Bowlegs year. The first half of the event bid a hearty farewell to Captain Billy 69 Michael Castleberry and the Bottoms Up Krewe.

BOWLEGS *continued on page 3*



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Community

BLUE ANGELS

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they've captivated millions with gravity-defying maneuvers. embodying the excellence and teamwork that define the U.S. Navy Blue Angels-or as we affectionally refer to them along our beautiful Northwest Florida coastal communities, The Blues. I had the opportunity to spend a day inside the world of The Blues, guided by LT. Bushong, and gained some firsthand insight into their headquarters at NAS Pensacola. Including observing a morning flight meeting, pre-flight preparations, and the behind-the-scenes maintenance and logistics performed by their team of 158 active-duty Sailors and Marines, that keep this elite squadron at peak performance.

Here are some Q&As from my behind-the-scenes day with LT. Ben Bushong and the Blue Angels team, part of a multi-publication media experience with The Blues:

What is the age range of the pilots and does age play a part in the selection process?

The age of our pilots usually range from early 30s to late 40s. Age isn't necessarily a factor when applying for the team. All pilots need to have a minimum number of flight hours and experience to be able to apply.

As popular as the Blue Angels are around the country, how do you and your team feel about the escalation of attention after last year's hit Amazon original, The Blue Angels?

The film definitely gives viewers an inside look into what it means to be a part of the U.S. Navy's flight demonstration squadron, and it does it for an entire show season, including the selection process and intense training that the pilots endure to get to where they are. As a team we're happy about the depiction and think the movie can only





help bring our fans closer and hopefully create more interest in our mission.

Do the pilots still get any sense of nervousness when they fly or is it such a welloiled repetitive motion, due to all the practice and shows, that it becomes like driving your vehicle from home to work and back?

Everything we do is based on safety and having absolute complete trust in one another. We absolutely all have to count on that up there and on the ground. So, during winter training, we incorporate the crawl, walk, run mentality to continue to work towards the tight formations. As a team, we are always chasing perfection, 100% of the time.

What criteria would you say does play the largest part in the pilot and support team selection?

With all team members, trust and personality are two big factors when selecting new team members. If your current command is letting you apply for this team, then that means you have already checked all the boxes on paper for the prerequisites. But we are looking for people who would make great ambassadors for the Navy and Marine Corps, and someone that you would potentially spend 300 days on the road with in a given season. Our Maintainers and Crew Chiefs perform all the preflight inspections on every aircraft, so the pilots can strap in and go! It takes complete trust in a person, to be able to strap in and fly without performing your own preflight inspection of the aircraft. We are a successful team. because everybody has complete trust that the person next to you is doing their job effectively and efficiently.

With such vicious schedules between practices, social and event obligations, and traveling 300 days per year, how much sleep does the average pilot get?

Wait...we're supposed to be sleeping too? [laughs] Thursday morning we fly to our show site. The first flight at every city is our "circles" flight, where we fly over the airfield to find all the checkpoints for the show. Followed by a practice. Thursdays are typically the longest, because it's a three-flight day: Transit, Checkpoint Flight and Practice. Friday we perform community outreach, visiting local schools and hospitals, then perform a full practice. Saturday and Sunday are show days, then we transit back to Pensacola after the show. Monday our team gets our day off, then it's back to Tuesday and Wednesday practices here in Pensacola. Actually, not getting enough sleep is never really too much of a factor. We always perform in



the afternoons, so there's typically not many early mornings on the road.

Any other closing insight you and the team would like readers to know about the mission you all are fulfilling?

The Blue Angels are direct representatives of the 800,000 men and women serving in the Navy and Marine Corps. All of us are from the fleet and will return to the fleet after our time here. By design, our Navy and Marine Corps is expeditionary in nature, meaning all our operations are happening overseas and out of sight. The Blue Angels were designed to showcase the teamwork and professionalism of the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps to the American public, and like we always say, "We're glad to be here!"

Will Estell is a seasoned writer, editor, and media entrepreneur with over 700 published articles spanning regional and national publications. His work covers coastal tourism, real estate, dining, automotive reviews, and celebrity interviews, earning him a strong reputation in Northwest Florida media. Currently the Chief Creative Officer of Estell Hussey Media, LLC, Will has co-founded 12 magazine titles and served as editor-in-chief for several others. Originally from Booneville, Miss., Will is a father of three and lives in Destin and Navarre with his wife, ABC 3 news anchor Laura Hussey-Estell.



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> P.O. Box 1424 Santa Rosa Beach, FL 32459

Editor & Publisher Lori Leath Smith Lori@LifeMediagrp.com

Director, Advertising Sales Scott Miller Scott@LifeMediagrp.com

> Art Director Kim Harper

Contributing Writers Will Estell Heather Bennett Eye Mary Fomby Christopher Manson Allison McDowell Michelle Ruschman Doug "Doc" Stauffer Tamara Young

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BOWLEGS

continued from page 1

Keeping the new Captain Billy's identity a secret involves a lot of planning carried out through anonymous emails starting in the eight or so months leading up to the Coronation Pageant.

The criteria for selecting Bowlegs and the rest of the key players/pirates is very specific, but boils down to candidates' experience in the Krewe. "The previous Captains get together and decide who should lead the crew," says Gwin/Billy.

"Captain Billy picks everyone else in their Top 26. The First Mate and Mistress have been our friends for years. When I was First Mate, the new Queen was on the honor guard. It was a natural selection that just made sense. It's a huge undertaking. They really have to want to be involved."

In addition, rising high school seniors are invited to take part as Princesses and Privateers. And younger children are encouraged to serve as Children of the Court. "This year, we have 11 Children of the Court ranging in ages from one to nine years old." Gwin's two grown



Queen of Bowlegs 70 Debbie Fisher, Captain Billy 70 Rique Gwin, First Mistress Mollie Grindland, First Mate Mark Grindland, Kelly Gwinband and J. Mark Fisher.

children served as Princesses in previous years while attending high school.

Gwin has been involved with the Krewe for 14 years. "One of our friends from church invited us to attend some social events, and the Bowlegs people were so friendly and supportive." The Gwins are originally from Alabama—Rique is a Birmingham transplant, and his wife Kelly was born in Fort Rucker. They are both retired Air Force. Gwin was First Mate during the Covid outbreak, which, if you count that, would make this year 71. So, we're not counting it.

Captain Billy 70 will be plan-

ning out the year's numerous events—including travel and costumes—with the Queen, Debbie Fisher, and her husband, J. Mark Fisher; and the First Mate and Mistress.

The Billy Bowlegs Pirate Festival originated in 1954. Through the years, the Krewe has swash buckled at the center of it all—civic-minded, volunteer-driven, and devoted to fun and service. "The original thing for the crew 70 years ago was to attract tourism, which is still one of our main goals," says Gwin. "We travel as far north as Minnesota and as far south as Sarastota, building relationships



The Krewe of Bowleas

Children of the Court.

"Every year, costumes are custom made, funded by the Krewe out of our own pockets. This year D and D Creations, one of the Mardi Gras houses in New Orleans, made them. The colors have a lot of significance—since I'm an aviator, I picked blue and silver as our colors, for the sky and lightning storm effect. Our new logo will reflect that symbolism as well." The theme for Year 70 is



PHOTOS COURTESY OF KREWE OF BOWLEGS Queen of Bowlegs 70 Debbie Fisher and Captain Billy 70 Rique Gwin.

Doolittle's Raiders, in honor of the courageous men who participated in America's 1942 bombing mission against Tokyo. The Raiders have strong ties to our local military community.

"I absolutely love this Krewe, the area and the patriotic spirit we have here," says Gwin. "I'll do anything I can to improve the relationship between the Krewe and the community. One of the major themes this year is honoring not only our history as a Krewe, but also the history of the community."

Set sail for more pirate fun at kreweofbowlegs.com.

relationships The theme for Year 70 is ALIRENK





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Community



Mayor Bobby Wagner and PIO Tamara Young, PhD

By Tamara L. Young, PhD, Public Information Director for the World's Luckiest Fishing Village

This time, Mayor Wagner and I sat down to discuss building bridges. We look forward to working with the community to get ideas and considerations for a new Marler Bridge structure.

TY: Anyone who has ever passed over Marler Bridge realizes the view is stunning. However, the traffic flow can be less than stellar. What's in the works for that bridge?

BW: You're right, the view is outstanding, but the congestion and aging structure are real concerns that must be addressed. That's why the state has placed the Marler Bridge in the queue to be fully replaced. The current plan is to widen the bridge to six

"Reel Talk" from the City of Destin Bridging Tomorrow, Today

boaters, views and public spaces.

lanes, add 10-foot-wide multi-

use pathways on both sides for

pedestrians and cyclists, and

increase the clearance height

to 65 feet. These upgrades are

part of FDOT's regional vision

for Highway 98, similar to what

we're seeing across the Panhan-

the potential to be an iconic en-

trance into Destin. The forma-

tion of a Bridge Aesthetics Com-

mittee will be exciting. We'll

want citizen input on the visual

of it, but also pedestrian path-

sit back and accept the default

plan, we'll get a standard "util-

ity bridge"-no frills, just con-

crete. Instead, we're working

with residents and businesses to

create something iconic: a land-

mark that reflects who we are as

a community. We're tasking a

committee and launching a pub-

lic input process to ensure it's not

just about cars, but also people,

BW: That's the goal. If we

ways, water access and more.

TY: A new bridge there has

dle.

TY: We've got a solid public engagement plan in place to survey, hold workshops and round tables and such. What else would you like the community to be thinking about in terms of that space?

BW: This is our chance to speak up and create something better. But the window is short—we must act now to influence the state's final design and investment strategy.

TY: I've heard some people ask: "Is this just a vanity project?" Does the bridge actually need to be replaced?

BW: That's one of the most common questions I get—and the answer is a firm yes. This isn't just about looks. The bridge has received low structural ratings in past evaluations. If you look closely at the west side, you'll see extra braces that were added years ago to support failing pillars. This is a need, not a want. **TY:** So, what about cost? Does going for something more elaborate drive the price up significantly?

BW: Surprisingly, no. Most of the cost goes into building the bridge itself. Enhancements like wider pedestrian paths, improved design elements, or fewer support columns for better water views are a small percentage of the total budget. And the return on investment is huge:

• Safer walkability for locals and tourists.

• Better fishing platforms and scenic overlooks.

• Improved boating access thanks to the raised height.

• And an elevated quality of life and economic potential for our entire region.

TY: Let's talk about boating. Why is the bridge height increase so important?

BW: We're home to a huge number of marinas and boating families—not to mention the blue economy that surrounds them. A 65-foot clearance allows more vessels, including tall sailboats and commercial boats, to pass underneath. That opens up Choctawhatchee Bay to more visitors by water and makes it easier for locals to access the Gulf. We're working with marina owners and the boating community to make sure this bridge supports their needs.

TY: What kind of design philosophy are you envisioning?

BW: For me, less is more. That means:

• Fewer pillars, giving better views from the water.

• Simplified, elegant design that blends with our coastal landscape.

• Dedicated space for people—not just cars.

At the end of the day, I want something that honors where we've been and leads us into where we're going—something we can point to and say: we built that together.



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

Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse

Farmers Market | 9am-1pm | Grand Boulevard Kids Fishing Clinic | 9am | 14 Miracle Strip Parkway, FWB

Slacker Olympics | 10am | Boathouse Oyster

Ride For Hope | 10am | Emerald Coast Harley

Inaugural Harbor Hangout | 11am | The

Summer Sun-Sets Concert Series | 6pm |

Karaoke Night I 9pm I Harry T's Lighthouse Free UFC Main Event Fight Night Watch

Destin Community Farmers Market | 9pm-1pm | Beall's Parking Lot, Destin DJ Brunch | 10am | Azul @ Harborwalk

Destin Commons Farmers Market | 11am |

Rosé All Day | 1pm | The Henderson Resort Scallywag Sundays | 7pm | Village of Bay-

Free Beach Bonfire/SIN Night | 5pm | Royal

Grille Trivia Night | 6:30pm | Destin Brewery Silent Disco | 7pm | Harborwalk Village Fireworks & Fire Spinning | 9pm | Harborwalk

Trivia Night | 6pm | Beachview Breakfast &

Karaoke | 6pm | AJs on the Bayou

Karaoke | 6pm-9pm | Fatboys Destin

Mindful Meditation | 9am | Destin Library

Trivia Night | 6pm | Ricks Crab Trap FWB Harbor Nights feat. Harbor Street Parade | 6pm | Harborwalk Village Boomin' Tuesday Party | 7:15pm | Baytowne

Trivia Night | 5pm | Down Island Music Match Game Night | 5pm | The Island

Trivia Night | 6pm | Craft Bar @ The Harbor

ao | 6:30pm | Palm Folly

The Island Concert Series | 7pm | The Island

Fireworks | 9pm | Okaloosa Island Boardwalk

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Planetarium Show: Global Soundscapes

Yoga Class | 6pm | Destin Community Center

All American Thursday | 6:30pm | Harborwalk

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

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

Ladies Night | 10pm | McGuire's Destin

Boomin' Tuesday Fireworks | 9:15pm |

Bonfire on the Beach | 5pm | The Bay

Run Club | 5:30pm | Destin Brewerye

Resort Karaoke | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty

2pm | Emerald Coast Science Center

Karaoke | 9pm | Outcast Bar & Grill

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Party | 9pm | Native's Cove

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Villad

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Bar

Harbor Taverr

Destin (

towne Wharf

Palm Grille

Grille

Village

Wharf

Music Bi

Marina Ca

Whar

Baytowne Wharf

Community

Cali's To Do In Destin! JULY 2025

Mindful Meditation | 9am | Destin Library

City of Destin's Annual Independence Bike Parade | 4pm | Destin Elementary School Karaoke | 6pm | AJs on the Bayou Karaoke | 6pm-9pm | Fatboys Destin Trivia Night | 6pm | Rick'ss Crab Trap FWB Harbor Nights | 6pm | Harborwalk Village Boomin' Tuesday Party | 7:15pm | Baytowne

Boomin' Tuesday Fireworks | 9:15pm | Baytowne Wharf

nfire on the Beach | 5pm | The Bay Trivia Night | 5pm | Down Island Music Match Game Night | 5pm | The Island

Run Club | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery Trivia Night | 6pm | Craft Bar @ The Harbor Wednesday Night Concert Series – Modern Eldorados I 7pm I Village of Baytowne Wharf The Island Concert Series I 7pm I The Island

Karaoke | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty Pre 4th of July Celebration | 9pm | Okaloosa Island Boardw

Star-Spangled Food Truck Festival | 5pm |

Destin C mons

Luau on the Beach | 5:30pm | AL's Beach Club Yoga Class | 6pm | Destin Community Center All American Thursday | 6:30pm | Harborwalk

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

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

Independence Day Celebration | Festivities 9am | Fireworks 8:30pm | Seaside Amphithe

Friday Martini Lunch | 11am-4pm | Skybar

4th of July at The Gulf | 11am | The Gulf

4th of July Party in the Sound & Fireworks ive's Independence Day BBQ | 4pm | The Hen-

Free Beach Bonfire | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille

Singo Music Bingo | 5pm | The Island Resort 4th of July Concert & Celebration, Coastal Country Edition | 6pm | Harborwalk Village 4th of July Dinner & Fireworks Cruise | 6pm | Sunquest Cruises – Solaris Yacht Red, White, Baytowne | 7pm | Village of

Baytowne Wharf Salsa & Bachata Dance Lessons | 8pm | Bric

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

Beach Fireworks Over the Gulf | 9pm | Okaloosa

Island Board Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse 4th of July Late Night Party | 10pm | Harbor

Tavern 5

Farmers Market | 9am-1pm | Grand Boulevard Farmers Market | 10am-2pm | Harborwalk

Always Above Planetarium Show | 10:30am |

Harborawlk Village Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse

Free UFC Main Event Fight Night Watch Party | 9pm | Native's Cove

Beach Church Service | 7:30am | Crab Trap

Emerald Coast Science Center Discover Science Saturday | 10:30am | Emerald Coast Science Center Summer Sun-Sets Concert Series | 6pm |



Destin Community Farmers Market | 9am-1pm | Beall's Parking Lot, Destin DJ Brunch | 10am | Azul @ Harborwalk Rose All Day | 1pm | The Henderson Resort Aperol Spritz Sundays | 6pm | The Gulf

Scallywag Sundays | 7pm | Village of Bay-

Karaoke | 9pm | Outcast Bar & Grill

Free Beach Bonfire/SIN Night | 5pm | Royal Trivia Night | 6pm | Beachview Breakfast &

Trivia Night | 6:30pm | Destin Brewen **illent Disco** | 7pm | Harborwalk Villa Movie Monday | 8pm | Baytowne Wharf Fireworks & Fire Spinning | 9pm | Harborwalk

Village Planetarium | 2pm | Emerald Coast Science

Gulf Coast Boating & Fishing Seminar | 6pm Legendary Marine

Karaoke I 6pm-9pm I Fatboys Destin Karaoke I 6pm I AJs on the Bayou I 6pm I Ricks Crab Trap FWB Harbor Nights I 6pm I Harborwalk Village Boomin' Tuesday Party | 7:15pm | Baytowne Wharf

Boomin' Tuesday Fireworks | 9:15pm | Baytowne Wharf •••••• 9 •••••

Destin Community Farmers Market | 4pm-7pm | Beall's Parking Lot Destin om I Beall's Parking Lot Destin Onfire on the Beach | 5pm | The Bay

Trivia Night | 5pm | Down Island Music Match Game Night | 5pm | The Island C.A.R.E.ing for Turtles | 5pm | Gulfarium

Run Club | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery Trivia Night | 6pm | Craft Bar @ The Harbor Wednesday Night Concert Series – Six Piece Suits I 7pm I Village of Baytowne Wharf The Island Concert Series I 7pm I The Island

Karaoke | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty Fireworks | 9pm | Okaloosa Island Boardwalk Mini Makers & Experimenters Lab | 9am |

Emerald Coast Science Center Magical Night at Bosforo | 5pm-11pm | Bosforo Mediterranean Karaoke I opm I The B Bar Niceville

Little Black Dress Night | 6:30pm-9:30pm | /larina Café

All American Thursday | 6:30pm | Harborwalk Full Buck Moon Yoga | 6:30pm | Native's Cove 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

Ladies Night | 10pm | McGuire's Destin

Friday Martini Lunch | 11am-4pm | Skybar

Chemistry Corner | 11am | Emerald Coast

Singo Music Bingo | 5pm | The Island Resort Free Beach Bonfire | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille Locals on the Harbor | 5pm | Boathouse Oyster E

Coastal Country Concert | 6pm | Harborwalk Village Comedy on the Boulevard | 7pm | Emerald

Salsa & Bachata Dance Lessons | 8pm | Bric a Bra Latin Night | 8pm-2am | Bosforo in Miramar

Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse

Summer Health Fair | 8am | Gold's Gym Farmers Market | 9am-1pm | Grand Boulevard Farmers Market | 10am | Harborwalk Village Pink Coyote Book Club | 10am | Pink Coyote Dessert Co

Summer Sun-Sets Concert Series | 6pm | Harborawlk Village Harborawlk Village Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse Free UFC Main Event Fight Night Watch Party | 9pm | Native's Cove

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

Rosé All Day | 1pm | The Henderson Resort Scallywag Sundays | 7pm | Village of Bay-towne What Karaoke | 9pm | Outcast Bar & Grill

Free Beach Bonfire/SIN Night | 5pm | Royal Trivia Night | 6pm | Beachview Breakfast &

Silent Disco | 7pm | Destin Brewery Silent Disco | 7pm | Harborwalk Village Movie Monday | 8pm | Baytowne Wharf Fireworks & Fire Spinning | 9pm | Harborwalk Village

Karaoke | 6pm | AJs on the Bayou ke | 6pm-9pm | Fatboys Destin Trivia Night | 6pm | Ricks Crab Trap FWB Charcuterie Board Workshop | 6pm | Bluewa

ter Bay Golf Club Harbor Nights | 6pm | Harborwalk Village Boomin' Tuesday Party | 7:15pm | Baytowne

Boomin' Tuesday Fireworks | 9:15pm | Baytowne Whar

City of Destin – "Friday Night Bites" | 4:30pm | Destin Elementary School Bonfire on the Beach | 5pm | The Bay Music Match Game Night | 5pm | The Island

Trivia Night | 5pm | Down Island Run Club | 5:30pm | Destin Brewer Prose & Pours Book Club | 6pm | 30A

Distilling Co **Trivia Night** | 6pm | Craft Bar @ The Harbor Music Bingo | 6:30pm | Palm Folly

Wednesday Night Concert Series – Catalyst | 7pm | Village of Baytowne Wharf The Island Concert Series | 7pm | The Island Resort Karaoke | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty

Fireworks I 9pm I Okaloosa Island Boardwalk Planetarium Show: Global Soundscapes 2pm | Emerald Coast Science Center

Agave Cocktail Class | 5pm | 30A Distilling Co Little Black Dress Night | 6:30pm-9:30pm | Marina Café All American Thursday | 6:30pm | Harborwalk

Village 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

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Ladies Night | 10pm | McGuire's Destin

Friday Martini Lunch | 11am-4pm | Skybar

Singo Music Bingo | 5pm | The Island Resort Free Beach Bonfire | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille Coastal Country Concert | 6pm | Harborwalk Village

edy on the Boulevard | 7pm | Emerald Con Coast Theatre Co Salsa & Bachata Dance Lessons | 8pm | Bric

a Bra Latin Night | 8pm-2am | Bosforo Miraman

Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse

Farmers Market | 9am-1pm | Grand Boulevard Farmers Market | 9am | Seaside RADBAR Beach Cleanup | 9am | Shalimar Bridge

Community Health Fair | 10am-4pm | Am. Legion Post 296 Destin Adoption Event | 10am | Pet Supplies Plus Summer SunSets Concert Series | 6pm | Harborwalk Village Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse

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Destin Community Farmers Market | 9pm-1pm | Beall's Parking Lot, Destin DJ Brunch | 10am | Azul @ Harborwalk Rose All Day | 1pm | The Henderson Resort Air Guitar Competition | 3pm | Boathouse

Scallywag Sundays | 7pm | Village of Bay-

Karaoke | 9pm | Outcast Bar & Grill Free Beach Bonfire/SIN Night | 5pm | Royal

Trivia Night | 6pm | Beachview Breakfast &

Movie Monday | 8pm | Baytowne Wharf Fireworks & Fire Spinning | 9pm | Harborwalk

Trivia Night | 6:30pm | Destin Brewery Silent Disco | 7pm | Harborwalk Village

Village 22

Karaoke | 6pm | AJs on the Bayou

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Karaoke | 6pm-9pm | Fatboys Destin Trivia Night | 6pm | Ricks Crab Trap FWB

Boomin' Tuesday Fireworks | 9:15pm |

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

Run Club 15:30pm | Destin Brewery Trivia Night | ópm | Craft Bar @ The Harbor Wednesday Night Concert Series – Emily Bass Band | 7pm | Village of Baytowne Wharf

The Island Concert Series | 7pm | The Island

Karaoke | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty Fireworks | 9pm | Okaloosa Island Boardwalk

24 ••••

Planetarium Show: Global Soundscapes

2pm | Emerald Coast Science Center Burn After Tasting Candle Making Class |

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

Village Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse

Thursdaze Light Show | 9pm | Baytowne

Ladies Night | 10pm | McGuire's Destin

Friday Martini Lunch | 11am-4pm | Skybar

Singo Music Bingo | 5pm | The Island Resort

Fireworks | 9pm | Harborwalk Village

Marina Café All American Thursday | 6:30pm | Harborwalk

30A Distilling

Baytowne Wharf

Trivia Night | 5pm | Down Island

Harbor Nights ft. Harbor Street Parade | 6pm | Harborwalk Village Boomin' Tuesday Party | 7:15pm | Baytowne



BY KRISTIN SULLIVAN, GENERAL MANAGER OF THE ALICE -FORMER LUXURY DESTINATION WEDDING PLANNER

With more than two decades of experience planning luxury destination weddings across Florida and the Caribbean, I can say with confidence: one of the most important (and often overlooked) conversations I have with couples is about wedding insurance.

From beachfront estates to historic venues, I've planned celebrations in breathtaking locales-but nature and the unexpected don't always follow the timeline. Hurricane season, travel disruptions, or last-minute vendor issues can quickly turn dream days into difficult ones. That's why wedding insurance isn't just smart-it's essential.

Every Couple Should Make What Is Wedding From luxury resorts to barns, Insurance, and Why

Should You Care?

Today's couples are making

significant financial investments

in their weddings. From cus-

tom-designed décor to exclusive

culinary experiences, the details

matter-and so does protecting

them. In fact, many venues now

require liability coverage just to

book your date, and cancella-

tion insurance is fast becoming a

must-have for couples planning

events with premium partners

The Benefits of Wedding

If your venue requires liabili-

ty coverage (and many now do),

event insurance satisfies that re-

quirement with ease. Most poli-

• Simple to purchase online

• Accepted at thousands of

• Automatically include alco-

hol liability when disclosed-so

• Affordable and flexible

Liability Insurance

venues nationwide

make sure to disclose

and vendors.

cies are:

vineyards, museums, or coastal properties like ours at The Alice, liability coverage is an easy box to check-and one that offers invaluable protection.

Why Cancellation Insurance Is Worth Every Penny

Now more than ever, couples are adding cancellation insurance to their wedding plans. If you have to cancel or postpone for reasons beyond your control, this coverage can reimburse non-refundable deposits, vendor payments and other contract costs. You will be shocked to learn how affordable these policies are compared to what you are spending on your celebrations.

It Can Protect You Against:

• Hurricanes or severe weath-

- Sudden venue closures · Canceled flights or impassable roads
 - · Key family members un-

able to attend

Why Wedding Insurance Is the Investment

• Vendor no-shows or disruptions

· Damaged or stolen wedding attire

• The cost of retaking photographs

Policies typically need to be purchased at least 14 days before your event to ensure weather-related incidents are covered. Planning ahead is key.

Real Life: Hurricane Ian, 2022

When Hurricane Ian hit Florida in 2022, it was initially forecasted to strike Tampa and Sarasota. Instead, it devastated the southwest coast-destroying homes, businesses, and wedding plans in its path. I know this personally. I lost my home, Airbnb and office to Ian, and many of my clients had to make last-minute cancellations or relocate their events entirely.

It was a powerful reminder that no matter how seasoned your planner or how stunning your setting, some things are

beyond your control. What is within your control is how you prepare.

For clients who had wedding venues booked for late 2022 and 2023 were of course affected by this storm when venues were damaged and destroyed.

At The Alice, we do require every couple to protect their celebration.

We believe peace of mind is part of the luxury experience. We have no affiliation with any of the recommend trusted providers listed below:

- WedSure
- WedSafe
- Travelers Markel

These reputable companies offer tailored policies that can meet your venue requirements and safeguard your investment—so you can focus on what matters most.

Your wedding is one of life's most beautiful milestones. Protect it like the treasure it is.







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.

Opening Soon. Booking now!

Corporate Events | Holiday Parties | Weddings Contact Kristen at inquiry@the-alice.com | (850) 460-0425 www.the-alice.com









July 2025

The community

Where Summer Memories Begin: The Village of Baytowne Wharf

Movie Monday

8 p.m. | FREE

Mondays NOW - August 11

Grab a lawn chair or blanket

and cozy up on the Events Plaza Lawn for a featured film.

It's Officially Summer when the sun sets a little later and the nights warm up, and The Village of Baytowne Wharf comes alive! 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. Whether you're a visitor or a local, there's something for everyone to enjoy all summer long.

Red, White & Baytowne! Friday, July 4th 7-9:15 p.m. | FREE

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.





July Movies:

- 7 | Under the Boardwalk
- 14 Cars
- 21 | Paddington In Peru
- 28 | The Wild Robot

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.

July Lineup:

- 2 | Modern Eldorados
- 9 | Six Piece Suits
- 16 | Catalyst
- 23 | Emily Bass Band
- 30 | Cadillac Willy

Thursdaze Lights Show Thursdays NOW -August 14th 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!

Save the Date! Perfect Hues: Baytowne Wharf Art Fest Friday, Aug. 29 - Sunday,

Aug. 31 | 5-9 p.m. nightly | FREE

This Labor Day Weekend join Baytowne Wharf for Perfect Hues: Baytowne Wharf Art Fest. Each evening from 5-9, stroll The Village streets as you browse a variety of artwork from local and regional artists. Enjoy LIVE music throughout the festival and a spectacular fireworks show over the lagoon on Sunday at 9 p.m.

Also, on Sunday night, be sure to check in by the breezeway to enjoy a Sip & Shop through The Village. We love kicking off the fall season with such a unique, moonlit weekend.

Music Line up:

Friday 5-7 p.m. | Jessie Ritter 7:30-9 p.m. | TBD Saturday 5-7 p.m. | Casey Kearney 7:30-9 p.m. | Almost Famous Sunday

5-7 p.m. | Emily Bass 7:30-9 p.m. | TBD

Vendor Registration ends Aug. 18.

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!



Page 9

Palms Resort Brings Dinner, Drinks, Live Magic & Comedy to Destin!

An action-packed live show featuring World-Class Magic Comedy and Ventriloquism is now open with nightly shows at the newly renovated Palms Destin Resort Showroom.

Interactive magic takes place just inches away in an intimate showroom that offers excellent table seating. The performance features sophisticated magic & smart comedy targeting adults but is family-friendly and appropriate for all ages. The show is headlined by Bart Rockett who hosted his own nationally syndicated television show for three seasons, had a co-starring role on the former NBC Drama Parenthood and headlined his own 1.000-seat theater in the tourist mecca of Branson, Missouri for nine seasons. He has appeared in 85 countries around the globe



and headlined for most every major cruise line.

Rockett, who started at the age of 10, trained under Jeff Dunham and is recognized for his excellent comedy ventriloquism which is featured in the show. After growing up in the South, Rockett moved to Hollywood, California where his management team is located. He produced his teens to the finals of NBC's America's Got Talent and they have gone on to do major Hollywood projects over the years. Kadan, who starred in the movie Dark Skies with award winning actress Keri Russell and on CBS's rush hour combines forces with his Sister, Brooklyn to make guest appearances in Rockett's Destin show.

Brooklyn is well known for her viral Super Bowl commercial that currently has nearly 800 million views on YouTube and most recently played Hollywood superstar Bradley Cooper's daughter in a project with Steven Spielberg and Martin Scorsese.

This talented family has been vacationing in Destin for many years and now that Rockett's kids are almost grown, he is excited to be back for a longterm residency in the place his Grandparents first introduced him to as a child. Rockett shared, "For me, coming back here feels like coming home. Some of my greatest childhood memories happened on these beaches and it's my desire to bring something unique to the area that is a fun experience for families to attend & make their own amazing memories."

Nightly shows happen at 7:30 p.m. with 5 p.m. early seatings offered on Sunday's and se-

lect dates. A variety of alcoholic & non-alcoholic beverages are available as well as a full menu of food and dessert offerings before or after the show. Parking is plentiful and free in The Palms Destin Resort multi-level parking garage, that is attached to the showroom.

Advance reservations are required and can be made at the official ticketing site: USATourTickets.LIVE.







The Community



This Summer Recover! **CRYO850** Performance & Recovery Center

Whether you're an athlete, first responder, military member, or someone simply looking to feel your best, CRYO850 Performance & Recovery Center offers a powerful way to restore, recharge, and reclaim your wellness. Choose from Day, One-Week, or Two-Week Passes to experience the benefits of CRYO850's full wellness circuit.

Services include:

· Infrared sauna to detox and relax

• Red light therapy for deep tissue rejuvenation

 Whole-body cryotherapy, a three-minute icy blast that boosts circulation and promotes healing

· Localized cryotherapy to target sore muscles

• Vibration plates and compression therapy to enhance circulation, reduce inflammation, and speed recovery

Benefits are both immediate and long-lasting: improved sleep, reduced pain, sharper focus, stronger immunity, and overall better performance-all without medication.

CRYO850, voted Best in Destin, now accepts HSA and FSA cards-so you can invest in your health with tax-free dollars. It's also the perfect gift for you or someone who could use a reset.

Start your journey to wellness today.

(850) 279-4145 | www. cryo850.com

Follow @CRYO850 on Facebook and Instagram.

Step Into Summer Style Beyond Measure Fine Jewelry

Looking for a custom design that's truly your own? Visit Beyond Measure Fine Jewelry, where timeless elegance meets fresh summer style. Whether you're searching for a bold statement piece, a colorful new



accessory, or the perfect engagement ring, owner Ashleigh Woolly is ready to help you find or create something unforgettable.

From July 7-19, don't miss the Summer Sale Event with up to 40% off select pieces! It's the perfect time to treat yourself or surprise someone special with a unique piece of fine jewelry.

Summer is the season to embrace color and shine with confidence. Consider an aquamarine accented with a double halo of baguette diamonds. You'll find one-of-a-kind coastal-inspired pieces in a wide range of gemstone colors and cuts, all curated for the season.

Prefer diamonds? Check out the popular "Bubble Bands," a stunning choice for stacking or collecting. From special-occasion rings and elegant necklaces to custom wedding bands, the showroom is filled with handcrafted fine jewelry made with care and creativity.

Ashleigh's passion is designing meaningful piecesespecially engagement rings and wedding bands-because helping couples celebrate life's biggest moments is what she loves most. Whether it's a gift, a personal milestone, or a dream design in the making, Beyond Measure Fine Jewelry offers an elevated, one-on-one experience you won't forget.

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

beyondmeasurejewelry.com

Plan Your Wedding With "Pure" Confidence Pure & Couture Salon | **Pure Collective Salon**

Your wedding day is one of the most important days of your life-let the expert stylists at Pure & Couture Salon and Pure Collective Salon help you look and feel your absolute best. Their talented team of hair and makeup artists specialize in customizing each look to enhance your natural beauty and bring



tails, braids, and voluminous hair extensions, they'll create a hairstyle that flatters your features and fits your style. Their professional makeup artists use techniques tailored to your facial structure, highlighting your

updos to prettied-up pony-

your bridal vision to life.

artistry. Pure & Couture offers both in-salon and on-location services for weddings, special events, consultations, and trials. Services include airbrush makeup, blowouts, lash extensions, spray tanning, and more.

Now with two locations to serve you-Pure & Couture in Destin and Pure Collective Salon at 600 Grand Blvd., Suite 102-both offer top-tier beauty services including facials, haircuts, extensions, makeup, and soon, barbering.

Feel confident and radiant as you walk down the aisle-with Pure, your big day is in the best hands.

(850) 424-3935

pureandcouture.com | purecollectivesalon.com

Pickleball Craze Inspires Fun Finds at Frill Seekers Gifts

Frill Seekers Gifts and Personalized Fabulous Finds

Pickleball isn't just trending-it's officially taken over as one of America's favorite sports! What started as a quirky paddle game has evolved into a full-on lifestyle, with players of all ages hitting the courts in neighborhoods, parks, and clubs across Destin, 30A, and beyond.

Blending elements of tennis, ping-pong, and badminton, pickleball is easy to learn, fun to play, and a great way to stay active and social.

To celebrate the sport's skyrocketing popularity, Frill Seekers has curated a colorful and cheeky collection of pick-



player package. Shop in-store at City Market Bayside in Destin or browse the entire collection online at FrillSeekersGifts.com. Complimentary gift wrapping always included-because every pickleballer deserves a little flair!

Mon-Fri: 10 a.m.-5 p.m. | Sat: 10 a.m.-2 p.m. (850) 460-2700 frillseekersgifts.com

Lock In Your Future: Why Now Is a Smart Time to Buy a Home Be On The Coast[™] Real **Estate Group**

Thinking about buying a home or second home this year? You're not alone—but you may also be wondering if now is the right time or if you should wait.

Here's the truth: homeownership remains one of the smartest ways to protect yourself against rising costs-especially during times of inflation. As prices climb, both home prices and rent continue to rise, too. The key difference? Owning a home lets you stabilize your biggest monthly expense: your housing payment.

With a fixed-rate mortgage, your monthly payment stays the same for the life of your loanoften 15 to 30 years. That means no unexpected rent hikes or cost-of-living surprises when it comes to your home. In contrast, renters have little control over rising lease rates year after year. "Homeownership is a historically strong hedge against inflation," explains REALTOR® Brian K. LoCicero. "And once



you own, any increase in your home's value builds equity and strengthens your net worth." Lock in today's rates and prices before they rise.

Ready to start your homeownership journey?

brian@beonthecoast.com 850-739-3800 BeOnTheCoast.com

Welcome to Summer **Cupcake Heaven Smallcakes: A Cupcakery**

At Smallcakes, we live by the motto: "Maybe a cupcake will help?"-and we know it will! Located in City Market, Smallcakes brings joy by the dozen with cupcakes so delicious, they've wowed national judges and even caught the attention of celebrities.

This summer, step into cupcake heaven with a rotating lineup of irresistible July flavors and rich, creamy frostings in every hue. Whether you're craving a sweet treat for yourself, planning a party, or just want to brighten someone's day, Smallcakes has something freshly baked and fabulous just for you.

From gourmet cupcakes and custom cakes to housemade ice cream (yes, you read that right!) and gluten-free goodies, the menu is stacked with daily delights. Choose from 13 signature cupcake flavors, 4 rotating specialties, 12 decadent ice cream flavors, cookie cakes, jumbo cookies, brownies, cupcakes-ina-jar, gourmet popcorn-and even "pup" cakes for your furry friend.

Custom orders? Absolutely! Add your logo, image or message to cupcakes for a personal touch. Try a 12-pack of assorted minis and taste your way through all the flavors!

Open Mon.-Sat. 11-7; Sun. 11 - 4.

(850) 842-9002

SmallcakesDestin.com | @Small-**CakesofDestin**

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Ready to buy or sell Residential Property? Looking to buy or lease Commercial Property? CALL: Brian LoCicero (850) 739-3800



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(Community

BY PAUL DOMENECH, MINDSET

"If I sell for that much, I

won't have enough to buy what

I hear this all the time -

usually right before fear stalls

action. It's the same mindset as:

That's not strategy. That's

"We're waiting for

Here's the truth:

before we buy."

interest rates to drop

COACH, REALTOR, TEAM

LEADER, THE DOMENECH

GROUP

we really want."

You Will Lose Money If You Sell Today, Hmmm. Why Selling and Buying in the Same Market Isn't a Loss — It's Leverage

wishful thinking.

And the market doesn't reward hope — it rewards clarity, timing, and execution.

The Market Moves as One

If prices are adjusting in your neighborhood, they're adjusting in the one you're buying into too. Like the tide, it all moves together.

So no — you're not losing money when you sell. You're staying in step with the market.

Dollar for dollar, you're making a fair trade.

The Perfect Time? It Doesn't Exist

Waiting for lower interest rates? Be careful what you wish for.

When rates drop, buyer demand spikes, inventory shrinks, competition heats up, and yes home prices climb.

That "better deal" could end up costing you more in bidding wars and price jumps than you ever saved in interest.

You didn't wait — you missed.

Price Smart, Win Bigger

If you price correctly today, you sell faster and buy smarter.

With a solid plan, you might even land your next home with money left in your pocket.

It's not about timing the market — it's about moving with intention.

What Actually Hurts Sellers?

Only two things: condition and price.

Today's buyers care about value and presentation. That means fresh paint, clean floors, fog-free windows, a pressure-washed exterior, simple landscaping, and small repairs handled. These aren't renovations —

"This home is move-in ready." And that confidence? It clos-

es deals.

The Bottom Line

There's no perfect time to sell. There's just your time. If it's time to go, go with a

plan — not with fear. Done right, this market still

holds gold for sellers ready to move.

That's the truth.

That's **Dollar for Dollar.** Need help making the right move — not just any move?

We have the system, strategy,

and network to help you prep, price, and present your home — with possible repairs and update at no unfront cost

dates at no upfront cost. Call Pauly at 850-543-1418. Visit thedomenechgroup.com

We won't sell you anything. We just tell the truth — backed by a system that sells.

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Emerald Coast Real Estate

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Paul A. Domenech

Paul@TheDomenechGroup.com (850) 543-1418 thedomenechgroup.com



Forget the Sprint: Real Healing Happens in the Marathon!

At The Tortoise Clinic, personalized care and patience lead to powerful, lifelong wellness



By Dr. Karen DeVore

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

In a world where we're constantly bombarded with quickfix solutions-miracle diets, instant detoxes, and one-pill answers-it's easy to lose sight of the long game. But with integrative healthcare practitioners, that's exactly what we focus on: your long-term, sustainable wellness. Not the shortcut, not the sprint—but the journey that leads to resilience, balance, and vitality for years to come.

What Is Integrative Health?

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

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

Instead of asking, "What drug treats this disease?" we ask, "Why is this symptom happening-and what's the best way to restore balance?" That might include medication, but it may also include herbs, dietary changes, movement, sleep support, or acupuncture. The goal is not to replace one system with another, but to combine the best of both to offer more comprehensive, compassionate care.

Blends East and West

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

A typical visit here might include lab testing to evaluate hormones, inflammation, or nutrient deficiencies, followed by acupuncture to support ner-

vous system regulation and pain relief. A patient might receive customized herbal formulations from our Chinese herb dispensary - the largest in Northwest Florida, paired with guidance on nutrition and daily habits to support their health goals.

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

How Is This Different From Traditional Medicine?

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

I hear it often:

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

"My doctor told me it's just part of getting older."

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

Integrative medicine fills those gaps.

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

The Power of **Personalized Wellness**

No two bodies are the same.

How The Tortoise Clinic the story behind them and to You are not your neighbor, your parent, or your coworker. What works for one person may not work for another-and that's why personalized care matters.

When you work with an integrative provider, you're not handed a one-size-fits-all solution. You're invited into a partnership, where we co-create a wellness plan that evolves with you. Whether you're working on hormone balance, fertility, digestion, chronic stress, weight loss,

Continued on page 28

WOMEN'S WELLNESS REIMAGINED

What if your story mattered as much as your labs?

What if "normal" isn't optimal for you?

What if your fatigue, bloating, or anxiety isn't just stress - but a sign your body needs support?



Present this coupon and receive \$30 off any service at the Tortoise Clinic. One coupon per person.

The community

374 Combat Missions, One Local Hero's Legacy: Wayne Warner's Story of Service and Survival

By Michelle Ruschman

When veteran, attorney and author Wayne Warner thinks about the beginning of his love for military service, he remembers that he was only age four as World War II was drawing to a close. He wore child-sized versions of military uniforms, and growing up in Lexington, Ky., his family served proudly. One uncle had fought in World War II, with an aunt serving with the Women's Army Corps, his cousin had been wounded in Iwo Jima, and later, another uncle fought in Korea. Even in elementary school, Wayne loved military history. By junior high, he knew he wanted an education that would move him toward the military career he desired. His heart was set on being a pilot. But, at the time, West Point was the only option. In 1954, however, Congress decided they would create the United States Air Force Academy, and at 17, that's where Wayne began his years in college. His class was the first to spend all four years at the permanent site in Colorado Springs. At graduation, the commencement speaker was John F. Kennedv.

Wayne then went to Craig Air Force Base in Selma, Ala., for pilot training. "The only airplanes that were available to us that were in Vietnam were Pacific Air Forces C-130s," said Wayne. "I knew that the supplies were getting into Vietnam by C-130 Hercules, so that's what I applied for. I reported into the 21st Troop Carrier Squadron at Naha, Okinawa, in February of 65. So, my first landing in Vietnam was in March of 1965."

For the next year and a half, Wayne flew C-130s and would serve the Air Force over the next four years until March 1969. In those four years, Wayne also flew the F-105 Thunderchief and the A-1 Skyraider, a plane that had rescued many of his friends from the jungle. In these three aircraft, Wayne flew 374 combat missions, which included 169 missions over North Vietnam and 84 blind bat night missions. His C-130 crew would come to be known as the Kool-Aid Kids when their commander, a Lieutenant Colonel decided to fly with them, and while looking for coffee with a crew who didn't like coffee, accidentally drank the fruit juice from the thermos that was handed to him.

"I flew my 100th F-105 mission over North Vietnam on June 8th, 1968. I was slated to become an instructor, teaching foreign students how to deliver ordnance. I wanted to keep flying in Southeast Asia, though, so the Air Force granted my request to do search and rescue missions. That's when I went to Hurlburt to train on the A-1. In 1969, I reported to Thailand



and flew 12 combat missions in that aircraft."

Among the many awards and distinctions, Wayne was awarded the Silver Star when his efforts delayed a North Vietnamese takeover of a special forces camp in South Vietnam. Thanks to his flight, the assault was destroyed, and everyone was rescued from the camp.

In March of 1969, Wayne experienced two catastrophic engine failures, the first resulting in a bailout and subsequent pickup by a Jolly Green helicopter, and the second being the last time he'd fly for the Air Force.

"I had engine and instrument failure on takeoff and crashed and burned. I was trapped in the cockpit with a full load of personnel ordinance and AVgas. I watched the legs and sleeves burn off my flight suit, but I couldn't undo my harness. Fortunately, a Jolly Green (helicopter) was taking off and saw the



problem I was having. He hovered over me so his rotor wash could blow the flames down. I managed to finally kick myself out of the cockpit, but I was still tangled in my harness. It so happened that there was a PJ (para jumper) who was out jogging, and another pilot who saw me. So, they ran to cut me off the side of the airplane. They loaded me on the Jolly Green that would fly me to the front door of the dispensary to get medical attention. My first flight to Vietnam was in March of '65, and this flight was in March of '69."

After being medically retired from the Air Force in September of 1969, Wayne earned his law degree. With fond memories of childhood vacations in Fort Walton Beach and then spending his honeymoon there with his wife, Vickie, they were excited for Wayne to eventually get hired at Eglin Air Force Base as a civilian attorney acquiring weapon systems. He worked for



Eglin for 28 years.

Wayne has also written a book, One Trip Too Many: A Pilot's Memoirs of 38 Months in Combat over Laos and Vietnam, not only as a legacy piece for his family and fellow veterans, but to record what it was like firsthand to serve in Vietnam. It can be found at Amazon.com.

All these years later, Wayne continues to love the military and the camaraderie that it inspired among those he had the privilege to serve with. To those who are currently on active duty, Wayne offers these words of encouragement: "Believe in what you're doing and keep the faith of your comrades. Your military service is a benefit to everyone."

If you would like to reach out to Wayne directly, he can be contacted at wwarner83@ gmail.com.





Through My Clear Eyes

By A WINDOW I stand in silence, day by day, a frame for all I see from blush of dawn to star-

strewn night,

the world looks back at me. I watch the sun climb from the gulf,

its warmth against my face. I cradle morning's gentle light and watch the world awaken,

bright. When I am clean, oh what a

gift the world shines brighter than

before.

Colors sharpen, sky expands, each view a living grace.

I catch the waves of waving hands.

the press of small, wide eyes. Their chalked rainbows,

smudged and sweet, become my best disguise. I watch the people passing by;

I hope they'll pause and look inside

to see the welcome waiting there, the space where smiles reside.

Through My Clear Eyes





And then the clouds come

gathering near, the sky turns steel and gray. The rain taps gently, cool and

clear a storm is on its way.

The downpour fades; the light returns,

and bathes all I embrace. The world feels fresh, the air is clear

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Destin Diving, Entertainment, Specials

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.

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DJ Zoran, Event Coordinator

DJ / Emcee

DestinZoran@Celebrat

shytheSea.com

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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 everyday, 3-6 p.m., \$2 off all bar drinks and Monday-Friday from 3-5 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 our amazing live music line-up at Facebook.com/ austonson98.

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Slacker Olympics Fundraiser: July 26 @ 10am w/ Road Dogg Rescue

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	8pm: Roshambo
Tuesdays:	4pm:Zach Renzi
	8pm: Austin Jennings
Wednesdays:	4pm: Hunter Dawson
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Thursdays:	4pm: Flash Flood
	8pm: Austin Jennings
Fridays:	4pm: Jason Findley
	8pm: Airavata
Saturdays:	12pm: Joey Collins
	4pm: Flash Flood
	8pm: Gunner
Sundays:	12pm: Grayson Turner
i i i i i i i i i i i i i i i i i i i	4pm: Shane Curle
	8pm: Shane Curle Trip

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Facebook: www.facebook.com/BoathouseOysterBar www.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 lattés. And there are diverse fresh fruit smoothies and a variety of tantalizing teas. Check out the special kids menu, too. Indoor and outdoor seating on the large covered patio are both available. Book after-hours for private events or special occasions. Open for breakfast and lunch every day, 7 a.m.-2 p.m.

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Fudpucker's Beachside Bar & Grill

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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.



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Zoran Entertainment

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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

> ule subject to change. Follow on Facebook for updates. (850) 837-3645

> bands and times. Music sched-

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Boathouse Oyster Bar

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the locals go with live music ev-

ery night all month long. Locat-

ed 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,

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Destin Diving, Entertainment, Specials

ree admission to fudpucker's gator beach "Ya Aint Been Pucked, Till Ya Been Fudpucked"



Destin Nining, Entertainment, Specials

DINING

continued from page 16

Tailfins is a go-to destination for sports watching featuring more than 70 big screen TVs showing all your favorite college and pro teams.

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

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AYS · 1PM

come on in for live music on the docks.

DAILY CRUISES: Introducing Tailfins Island Adventure! Departures seven days a week aboard "Always Workin'," Tailfins' 45-foot-long cruiser, and "Talk of Town" Tikis, Tailfins' newest, one-of-a-kind tiki boat. Both feature on-board restrooms and certified captains. Talk of the Town tikis are



the only Coast Guard certified Tiki boats in the United States! Enjoy the Destin Harbor and Crab Island like never before. Choose between the three-hour tour, sunset cruise or Thursday night's spectacular fireworks cruise. Book online: tailfinsislandadventure.com.

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

Tequila's Mexican Restaurant

Did someone say Margaritas? Tequila's Sports Bar and Grill is a local favorite, with world class, jumbo-sized margaritas, Mexican food favorites inspired by years of tradition and authentic spices such as the Tequila's Plate, chili con carne, The Three Amigos and the new Master Parrillada - a unique fusion of sports bar food and delightful Mexican dishes. Celebrate Taco Tuesdays with 2-for-1 margaritas. Lunch specials are offered Monday-Friday. "Our love lies in the food we make and the connections we create with our customers every day," says Oni, Tequila's owner. "Our goal is to have the widest selection of tequila brands in town. You're sure to find your favorites here." Open seven days a week for lunch and dinner or call ahead to place your take out and to-go orders.

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Destin Diving, Entertainment, Specials

Cook Team Registration Now Open for the 11th Annual "Eggs on the Beach" Big Green Egg Fest

Get fired up! Bay Breeze Patio, the official retailer of Big Green Egg and host of the beloved Eggs on the Beach Big Green Egg Festival, announces that cook team registration is now open for the 11th Annual "Eggs on the Beach" Cooking Competition, happening Saturday, November 1 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Seascape Resort in Miramar Beach, Florida.

Recognized three times as "Best Local Annual Event" by VIP Destin Magazine readers, Eggs on the Beach is back and better than ever—bringing together backyard grillers, pro chefs, restaurants, and non-profit teams to compete for cash, trophies, a brand new Big Green Egg, and of course, the ultimate prize: bragging rights.

"We're fired up for year eleven," said Wayne Paul, co-owner of Bay Breeze Patio and founder of the event.

"It's a celebration of great food, community spirit, and incredible support from our sponsors and cook teams. We've got some exciting surprises in store for both teams and tasters this year."

Each registered team of up to six grillers will be provided with a large or XL Big Green Egg to showcase their skills, serving up bite-sized creations for both the public and a panel of honorary judges. Teams compete for crowd and judges' votes in a high-heat showdown of flavor. creativity, and presentation. The grand prize is a large Big Green Egg for the most Taster votes. Cash prizes will be awarded to non-profit cook teams to support their cause, and trophies will be awarded by a team of honorary judges. Every team gets commemorative t- shirts and Wayne's Get Grillin' Rubs.

The delicious event raises funds for Fisher House of the Emerald Coast and Food For Thought, two local charities making a big difference in the community. Located on Eglin Air Force Base, the Fisher House provides a "home away from home" for military families to be together during treatment for serious illness or physical/occupational therapy. Based in Santa Rosa Beach, Food for Thought provides backpacks filled with healthy, easy-to-prepare foods for students who are dependent on free or reduced school meals.

For those who have considered owning a Big Green Egg,

26th Annual Emerald Coast Home & Boat Show Coming to Destin-FWB Convention Center

Wes Fell, a longtime resident of Destin/Fort Walton Beach and the promoter of the Emerald Coast Home & Boat Show, invites the community to the 26th Annual event on Saturday and Sunday, September 20–21, 2025, at the Destin-FWB Convention Center, 1250 Miracle Strip Parkway, FWB.

This exciting two-day event—now in its 26th consecutive year—will feature over 100 Home Show and general business vendors. Attendees can explore information and discounts on:

Insurance, Roofing, A/C, Plumbing, Mortgages, Homes
Interior Design, Flooring, Pools, Spas, Shutters, Leaf Guards

• Furniture, Generators, disePromotionsFL.com.

Siding, Heating & AC, Solar, Painting, and Remodeling

• Closets, Bath & Kitchen Remodeling, Windows, Doors, and more

• Electronics, Computers, Cell Phones, Vacations

• Plus, health and wellness vendors including Chiropractic, Hearing, Massage Therapy, and Skin Care

Emerald Coast Marine will also host a Super Boat Show and Sale with discounted boat show specials.

To register for booth space or for more info, contact Wes Fell at 850-353-2832 or email wesfell@cox.net.

Mention LIFE MEDIA and receive a 10% discount on booth space!

Learn more at www.ParadisePromotionsFL.com. Demo Eggs, which will be used during the event, will be sold in advance with nest (metal stand) and plate setter for a discounted price. Both large and XLarge Eggs include a limited lifetime

warranty, and can be picked up after the event. ing for a cash donation toward their cause. Taster tickets will be

Cook team registration is \$50 for a team of six and cook team fees are waived for non-profit cook teams, which are competing for a cash donation toward their cause. Taster tickets will be on-sale soon. To learn more or to register a cook team or become a sponsor, visit www.Eggsonthe-Beach.com or call 850-269-4666.



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🔅 Off the Hook

CBA's "State of the Basin": How Oyster Gardening Is Reviving Choctawhatchee Bay

By Allison McDowell, CBA

Along the shores of Choctawhatchee Bay, a quiet but powerful movement is taking place – one oyster at a time. Families, retirees, and students are rolling up their sleeves to take part in a unique conservation effort led by the Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance (CBA). Their mission? To rebuild the bay's critical oyster



reefs through an innovative and community-driven initiative: the

Oyster Gardening program. Now entering its 2025 season, this hands-on program invites local volunteers to help restore

the bay's ecosystem by growing young oysters at their homes or designated dock locations. It's a project where science meets stewardship, turning everyday citizens into environmental champions.

A Simple Solution with a Big Impact

Each oyster grown through the program can filter up to 50 gallons of water daily, making them natural purifiers for Choctawhatchee Bay. Beyond water quality, these tiny powerhouses also create habitat for fish and crabs and help stabilize shorelines.



The program has supported habitat restoration efforts at multiple sites around the bay, an impressive achievement that's benefiting marine life and bolstering the overall health of the ecosystem. It's a grassroots effort with ripple effects far beyond the shoreline.

Science Comes to Life

One of the most inspiring aspects of the Oyster Gardening program is its educational value. Whether it's a retiree tracking oyster growth or a middle schooler observing changes in the water, participants are engaged in real-world marine science. The program transforms conservation into a fun, local, and impactful experience, nurturing the next generation of environmental stewards in the process.

Get Involved

With the 2025 season underway, CBA is calling on new volunteers to help make waves. No experience is needed, just a love for the water and a willingness to learn.

For more information or to get involved, visit www.basinalliance.org or email reynol59@ nwfsc.edu.



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Off the Hook

Shell-ebrations and Splashy Starts: Summer at Gulfarium

BY MARY FOMBY, GULFARIUM

Wake Up with Dolphins: **Rise and Shine Dolphin** Package

There's no better way to start your day than with dolphins! The Gulfarium's new Rise and Shine: Dolphin Package offers guests early access to the park and an exclusive dockside encounter with one of our Atlantic bottlenose dolphins-all before the gates open to the public.

Your morning begins with a guided walking tour of the park, offering a behind-the-scenes look at the animals and exhibits before the crowds arrive. Then, you'll head to the dolphin habitat for a memorable dockside encounter with one of our playful dolphins. After the experience, enjoy full general admission and explore the park at your own pace-it's the ultimate way to start your Gulfarium adventure.

Sea Turtle Release Season is in Full Swing

It's officially sea turtle release



patients and long-term rehabilihome.

season at the Gulfarium CARE Center, and we're off to a strong start! With four successful releases already this summer, including a mix of quick-recovery

tations, the CARE team is working hard to return as many sea turtles as possible to their ocean

For those hoping to witness one of these inspiring moments, the best way to stay informed is by following the CARE Center on social media. Release events are free to attend, but due to weather and permitting, they are often announced only a few days in advance-so keep your



eyes on our pages for the next one!

Sunset Camp: A Nighttime Adventure Just for Kids

Looking for a unique evening activity for your child this summer? Sunset Camp is the perfect mix of fun, education, and after-hours excitement at the Gulfarium. This special camp invites kids ages 6-14 to explore the park after it closes to the public, with exclusive animal

encounters, hands-on learning, and dinner included!

Campers will enjoy dockside dolphin time, a meet-and-greet with our penguin colony, and a chance to get up close with reptiles and other animals. Add in beachside activities with our education team and a night under the stars-it's a summer memory in the making. Space is limited, so visit gulfarium.com to secure your child's spot!



Located in Destin-Fort Walton Beach

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New Wildlife Hospital Opens in Freeport, Offering Hope and Healing to Florida's Native Species

Panhandle Wildlife Rescue (PWR) has opened the doors to its new full-scale rehabilitation center and wildlife hospital in Freeport, a major milestone for the nonprofit that serves 11 counties from Navarre to Tallahassee.

Founded in 2024 by Shelby Robinson, Jim Johnson and Raven Smith, PWR provides critical, often life-saving care to Florida's native wildlife—admitting between 1,000 and 2,000 sick, injured or orphaned animals each year. The new facility, made possible by a generous donation from Ryan Jumonville and family, significantly expands its ability to treat and release animals in one of the most ecologically diverse regions in the country.

Florida's Panhandle is home to hundreds of native species, and many of them end up at PWR after encounters with cars, urban development or human intervention. One current patient, a bald eagle rescued off a Bay County highway, suffered complex wing fractures after likely being struck by a car. After evaluation and surgery by PWR's Dr. Phil Blumer, the eagle now undergoes daily physical therapy as he works toward recovery. The rescue was a coordinated effort with Wildlife Harbor (WH) in Panama City Beach, a close partner in the region.

But, it's not just the dramatic adult rescues that require intense care—often, it's the orphans who stay the longest. PWR currently houses 11 fledglings, including owls and hawks. While they prioritize reuniting babies with their mothers, it's not always possible. Predators, injury or human reluctance to renest on their property can complicate efforts. Still, PWR successfully renests about 70% of downed raptors.

For the remaining 30%, the care is extensive. These young birds must be taught to self-feed, fly and hunt, all while maintaining a healthy fear of humans. Weekly medical checks, enrich-



ment activities, and simulated hunting are all part of their rehabilitation plan.

PWR also raises awareness about preventable threats like rodenticide poisoning. About 25% of admitted adult raptors suffer from secondary poisoning after eating contaminated prey. "Most people don't think of the ripple effects when using poisons, but it causes immense suffering in our native wildlife," said Robinson.

The nonprofit hopes to raise

funds to complete a 100-foot flight cage and additional enclosures to accommodate its growing caseload. Donations also help cover the cost of food, medical supplies, and formula, especially during baby season, when PWR can field more than 100 calls daily.

Staffed by just three people and supported by Wildlife Harbor's Cindy Levine, the team covers a region once served by eight full-time employees. They rely heavily on volunteers whether for rescues, nursery care or medical support. "Compassion and kindness go a long way," Robinson said.

Robinson, a wildlife rehab specialist with 15 years of experience, leads the organization alongside Johnson, PWR's lead rescue tech, and Smith, a nursery expert known for her dedication to orphaned wildlife. Together, they've cared for over 200 different species—from redtailed hawks and snapping turtles to squirrels and raccoons.

Support also comes from

community veterinary clinics like Emergency Veterinary Clinic in Niceville and Destin, which help with intakes and imaging needs while PWR works toward funding its own medical clinic.

As PWR looks ahead, it continues to educate the public through its "Respect the Locals" campaign, encouraging safer coexistence between humans and wildlife. "Nothing feeds the soul more than watching a once-broken creature return to the wild," says co-founder Raven Smith.

Panhandle Wildlife Rescue receives no federal, state or local funding. All care, rescues and the 24/7 wildlife hotline are funded entirely by community donations.

To donate, volunteer, or learn more, visit www.panhandlewildliferescue.com.

Facility address: 5951 Highway 20, Freeport

Alternate intake: 256 Miley Road, Freeport

Wildlife Emergency Hotline: (850) 889-1104





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Governor DeSantis Signs New Law Restoring Public Beach Access in Panhandle

BY DOUGLAS D. STAUFFER

Governor Ron DeSantis signed landmark legislation in Walton County recently that restores public beach access and returns local authority to communities across Florida's Gulf Coast. The bill, Senate Bill 1622, repeals restrictive provisions from a 2018 law that had limited customary use access to dry sand areas of privately owned beaches, creating years of controversy and confusion, especially in Walton County.

Speaking before a crowd of lawmakers, local officials, and beachgoers at Shunk Gulley Oyster Bar in Santa Rosa Beach, DeSantis emphasized that the new law will "put the power back in the hands of local governments and their citizens."

"This bill is about restoring local control, cutting the legal red tape, and putting our residents first," DeSantis said. "The people of this area have fought long and hard to regain the access they've traditionally enjoyed. Today, we're making that a reality."

Reversing a Controversial Law

The legislation repeals part of the 2018 law that required local governments to get court approval before enforcing customary use, an unwritten public right to access dry sand areas of beaches that has been traditionally practiced in many parts of Florida. The 2018 change forced counties to initiate costly, parcel-by-parcel legal battles, sparking widespread opposition in coastal communities.

State Senator Jay Trumbull, a sponsor of the bill, remembered how the 2018 legislation caught many residents off guard.

"Overnight, people who had walked the same stretch of beach for generations were being told that they were trespassing," Senator Trumbull said. "This law fixes that."

The new bill allows counties and municipalities to pass local customary use ordinances without first obtaining court judgments, reasserting the right of the public to access Florida's beaches for walking, fishing,



swimming, and sunbathing.

Accelerating Beach Restoration

Beyond public access, SB 1622 also simplifies the process for beach renourishment projects in smaller Gulf Coast counties like Walton. Under the law, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) can now establish erosion control boundaries using the state's existing mean high-water line instead of conducting lengthy surveys or requiring separate approvals.

This change is expected to save time and money while enabling faster responses to severe beach erosion, a growing concern in the region. DEP Secretary Alexis Lambert noted nearly 19 of Walton County's 26 miles of coastline are critically eroded.

"Beach nourishment isn't just about tourism," said Representative Shane Abbott, who co-sponsored the bill. "It's about protecting our coastline, preserving property, and ensuring that locals and visitors alike can enjoy these beaches for years to come."

Local Impact and Funding

Florida has invested over \$550 million in beach restoration efforts since 2019, with an additional \$53 million allocated in this year's state budget. In Walton County, nearly \$60 million in state funds have been committed to local projects, and another \$60 million is expected in federal matching funds.

DEP Secretary Alex Lambert emphasized the significance of the new process: "This legislation simplifies how we set erosion control lines, allowing vital beach nourishment projects to move forward more efficiently."

A Victory for Coastal Communities

The signing of SB 1622 marks a significant victory for coastal communities and pub-

lic access advocates across the state. Local leaders praised the decision as a return to common sense and a reaffirmation of Florida's longstanding tradition of beach enjoyment for everyone.

"This is a great day for Walton County and the entire Panhandle," said Commissioner Danny Glidewell. "Our residents have been waiting for this for years, and I thank Governor DeSantis for listening and taking action." The bill takes effect immediately.



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The Sport Called LIFE

machine can make every other



By LISA LEATH TURPIN, HEALTH

& Wellness Coach

The internet is crawling with self-made social media "gurus" leading people away from "cardio." This has prompted me to counterbalance this attack on our bodies' fundamental and foundational inner system. Without strengthening your inner system, you will have a hard time doing other more strenuous activities. Your inner system, a.k.a., your cardiovascular system, manages your blood flow, cleans your arteries, builds your heart's efficiency and transports oxygen to your organs and muscles so they can perform their jobs.

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dition. This is why doctors encourage movement immediately after surgery, even if you are not pain-free. Waiting to be painfree might never come and doing nothing will only make you weaker and worse.

Supporting Studies

Research consistently shows that exercise training, including steady-state cardiovascular exercise, reduces the risk factors associated with cardiovascular disease (CVD) and improves overall cardiovascular health. Current guidelines recommend specific levels of physical activity for various age groups, emphasizing the importance of incorporating exercise into daily routines. Even lower-intensity physical activity has demonstrated significant benefits in reducing mortality rates and increasing life expectancy among individuals at risk of CVD.

Steady-state cardio activities like jogging, cycling and swimming are still valuable and, in some cases, may even be preferable to high-intensity interval training (HIIT) workouts. These

activities provide protection against coronary heart disease, heart attacks and strokes. Regular exercise helps people live longer, mainly because it prevents early death from heart disease.

Cardiovascular Health Statistics

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) accounted for 941,652 deaths in the U.S. in 2022.

Heart disease and stroke claimed more lives in 2022 in the U.S. than all forms of cancer and chronic lower respiratory disease combined.

In 2022, coronary heart disease (CHD) was the leading cause of deaths attributable to CVD in the U.S., followed by stroke.

Approximately every 40 seconds, someone in the U.S. will have a myocardial infarction.

In 2022, 702,880 people died from heart disease in the U.S., equivalent to 1 in every 5 deaths.

Regular exercise can reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease by up to 30%.





Life is movement, and if we go above and beyond the basics, then the basics become easier. Everyday life becomes less cumbersome. It is rare to go through life without any aches and pains. But, exercise generally improves this in the long run. Exercise rarely causes more harm; it often alleviates the aches, pains or glitches you might experience. Sometimes, you need to rest, as rest is part of the process. However, being still and stagnant for too long can worsen your con-

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habits create strength.

PTSD and the Healing Brain: Understanding Trauma and Emerging Treatments



BY MELANIE YOST

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a brain health diagnosis that develops after someone experiences or witnesses a traumatic event involving a threat to the personal safety of self or others. While it's often associated with military combat and first responder situations. PTSD can affect anyone-survivors of abuse, accidents, natural disasters, medical trauma or violence. It's not about weakness: it's about how the brain and body respond to overwhelming stress.

PTSD symptoms fall into four main categories: intrusive mem-

ories (like flashbacks or nightmares), avoidance of reminders, negative changes in thinking or mood, and hyperarousal (feeling constantly on edge or easily startled). For a diagnosis, these symptoms must last more than a month and cause significant distress or impairment. Many people with PTSD also experience depression, anxiety or substance use as they try to manage overwhelming feelings.

Anyone can develop PTSD, but certain factors increase risk. These include a history of trauma, lack of social support, chronic stress, or previous brain health conditions. First responders, veterans, abuse survivors, and even children or caregivers can experience PTSD. Not everyone who faces trauma develops PTSD, but for those who do, the impact can be life-altering without support.

So, what happens in the brain? Trauma disrupts normal brain function. The amygdala (fear center) becomes overactive, while the prefrontal cortex (thinking and regulation) becomes underactive. The hippocampus, which helps differentiate past from present, often shrinks. These changes make it difficult for the brain to accurately process danger, contributing to flashbacks, emotional dysregulation (inability to effectively manage emotions), and hypervigilance. Chronic inflammation and disrupted communication between brain regions also contribute to symptoms.

Traditional treatments for PTSD include trauma-focused therapy (like EMDR or cognitive processing therapy) and medications such as antidepressants. While these help many people, others struggle to find relief. Fortunately, innovative treatments like ketamine therapy and Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy (HBOT) are offering new hope.

Ketamine therapy works differently than traditional antidepressants. Originally developed as an anesthetic, ketamine is

now recognized for its rapid-acting antidepressant and anti-trauma effects. It works by blocking NMDA receptors in the brain, which increases glutamate and boosts brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF). This neuroplasticityjumpstarts helping the brain form new connections and "rewire" from trauma. Many patients experience fast relief from symptoms like depression, intrusive thoughts and suicidal ideation after just a few sessions.

Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy (HBOT) is another promising treatment. During HBOT, patients breathe 100% oxygen in a pressurized chamber, increasing oxygen delivery to the brain and body. This reduces neuroinflammation, promotes healing, and improves blood flow to damaged areas of the brain. Research, especially with veterans, shows HBOT can improve mood, reduce anxiety, enhance sleep and restore cognitive function in PTSD patients.

While neither ketamine nor HBOT is a cure-all, they are powerful tools that can help trauma survivors find relief when traditional methods fall short. As our understanding of PTSD grows, so does our ability to support healing-not just through talk therapy or medication, but by addressing the physical, neurological, and emotional roots of trauma. With compassionate care and innovative therapies, recovery is not only possible-it's within reach. If you or someone you love is exploring options for healing, we invite you to reach out and learn more about how we can help.

Melanie Yost is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and owner of Be Well Solutions and Complete Ketamine Solutions in Destin. She has been in the healthcare field for more than 35 years and can be reached at (850) 786-2051.





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🀞 Wellness

Emotional Triggers

By Stephenie Craig, Journey Bravely

Remember a time someone else's behavior really got under your skin. Maybe your partner's emotional reaction stirred you up. Perhaps your child's behavior or attitude upset you. A friend may have responded to you in a way that felt unsupportive. A stranger may have been unkind for seemingly no reason. Think about how you felt in that moment and how you instinctually wanted to respond or did respond. Did



you call them out for their behavior? Did you withdraw and become silent and emotionally disengaged? Did you have big emotions and freeze and try to pretend everything was okay without engaging in a conversation?

We all have emotional triggers that cause our nervous system to move into emergency mode. Our brain is prepared to engage in one of four behaviors to protect us when it determines we might be physically or emotionally unsafe including fight, flight, freeze or fawn. The fight instinct tells you to move toward danger and confront. The flight instinct tells you to physically flee the situation. The freeze instinct tells you doing and saying nothing will keep you safe. The fawn instinct tells you to move toward danger and appease or placate the threat to find safety. When you are in emergency mode, your rational thinking goes off line and becomes unavailable to you. Your brain's primary concern is survival and safety.

When someone's behavior triggers an emergency response, you are likely to respond to the other person from a place of self-defensiveness, judgement, shame, blame, avoidance, fear or attack. These emergency driven responses lead to disconnection and eventual escalation in relationship problems. If you stay prolonged in emergency mode, you will begin to make up negative stories in your head about others that will make it difficult to repair and

rebuild trust. The negative stories begin to feel true and you see yourself as a victim and others as villains. Your brain searches for negative examples to reinforce the negative story and begins filtering out the positive. And, before you know it, the relationship as a whole has become negative in your mind.

Both you and others will inevitably have big feelings and emotional triggers. Often, people are responding to one another's big feelings and triggers more than to the heart of the person.

When triggered, most people respond better to compassion and connection than they do to shame and judgement. So, if you don't want your relationships to feel negative and you want to respond to others on a compassionate, heart level, what can you do?

7 Ways to Navigate Your Emotional Triggers

1. Notice your brain moved into emergency mode. Notice body changes like tension, stomach and chest sensations, jaw grinding, heart rate increase. Notice changes in thoughts focused on fear, anger, self-defense, and blame. Notice thoughts related to gathering negative evidence.





2. Take steps to regulate your nervous system. Try taking deep breaths, taking a restroom break, stepping outside for fresh air, take off your shoes and feel the floor/ground, eat sour candy or a strong mint, splash cold water on hands or face.

3. When calmer, check the negative story in your head. Remind yourself the other person is a whole person with strengths, weaknesses, and big feelings too.

4. Release judgement to embrace curiosity. Instead of, "You're being so rude and I didn't do anything to deserve it." try, "You seem overwhelmed. What's happening for you right now? How can I support you." Or try saying, "Are you okay?" "What do you need right now?

5. Move toward with compassion instead of withdrawing in punishment. Sit near quietly and take deep breaths. Ask the person if a hug would be helpful. Try validating their emotional experience instead of shaming it. "That does seem overwhelming. I can see why you're feeling emotional right now."

6. Let go of winning and pursue connection. "I'm here with you while you have big feelings. I want to be supportive. I'm also working hard to manage my feelings about your big feelings so I can be here for you."

7. When both parties are calm, try talking about the big feelings that happened and what you can each do to support one another when big feelings happen.

These strategies are not meant for relationships with emotionally or physically abusive dynamics. In those cases, distance is more appropriate. Next time you are feeling triggered by someone's behavior or big feelings, try something new and notice how it shifts the interaction. Connect with us for counseling or coaching along your journey at Journeybravely. com.



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By Kay Leaman, HealthyDay HealthyLife

Life Osteoporosis happens when bones become weak and brittle. The most important thing to note that doctors don't tell you is that we cannot only prevent it, but it can be reversed. In some cases, it may be more difficult reversing it if the remodeling process isn't functioning.

Did you know that bones are living tissue (living, breathing, functioning cells) that remodel, rejuvenate and recycle continuously? We have the ability to keep them strong and healthy despite the aging process. With this in mind, let's dive in.

First, the statistics:

• 1 in 2 women after 50 will break a bone

• 1 in 5 men after 50 will break a bone

• 1 in 5 women can break a bone three or more times before being diagnosed

• Women reach peak bone mass between ages 20-35

• 10 million Americans have osteoporosis

• 44 million people have low bone density in over half of adults over 50 globally

• 25% of people with hip fractures end up in long term care. The loss of independence and mobility is often irreversible.

· Osteoporosis and it' effects are costlier than breast cancer, heart attacks and strokes.

• 39% of the population are deficient in calcium

• 95% of the population are deficient in vitamin D

• Women who strength train can increase spinal bone density by 13% in 6 months (Tufts University).

Bones are made up of osteocytes (bone cells), osteoblasts which build up and form new bone cells continuously, osteogenic cells are stem cells and osteoclasts which kind of reabsorb or break down the bone cells.

Muscles and bones work hand-in-hand. There needs to be a 'push and pull' on the bones to ensure the remodeling process

actually takes place. Hence, resistance training can help your bones in the remodeling process. Six exercises that aid in strengthening bones are squats, walking, lunges, push-ups, jumping jacks and planks.

After menopause women experience increased bone loss primarily due to the decline in estrogen production. The decline in estrogen increases the risk of developing osteoporosis. As a side note, with men it's testosterone that declines, and for both men and women it's progesterone

Risk factors we can control are sedentary lifestyles, poor calcium and vitamin D intake, smoking, alcohol, certain medications or medical conditions, hormonal imbalances and posture. Posture is critical. If you slouch when you sit or bend slightly when standing or walking, you limit the amount of oxygen coming in. Our bones need oxygen! Practice keeping your shoulder back and down. The ribcage needs to expand for quality oxygen to nourish our bones.

Risk factors we can't control are age, gender, family history, body frame size and ethnicity.

Calcium rich foods (Eat a variety of foods every week.):

• Vegetables: collards, broccoli, spinach, okra, kale, bok choy Beans: white, red, green, chickpeas, lentils

• Dairy: cheese, almond milk, yogurt, milkshakes, whole milk

• Nuts and Seeds: sunflower, sesame, chia, almonds, hazel, walnuts Fruit: oranges, raisins, dried figs, currants, apricots, kiwi • Other: eggs, tofu, seaweed,

sardines, shrimp

Five Holistic Strategies:

Nutrition: Cellular nutrients (antioxidants, core minerals) including calcium, vitamin D, magnesium and vitamin K are important for healthy bones.

• Exercise: Weight bearing, resistance, and impact

• Hormonal Balance: estrogen, testosterone, DHEA Supplement: We can't get what we need in food alone

• Lifestyle: Diet, sleep, activity **Preventative Measures:** Create meal plans incorporating many foods. Incorporate strength training 30 minutes three times per week. Maintain a consistent supplement routine.

Unbreakable Bones

Get regular health assessments including a bone density test (DEXA)

Lastly, consider a collagen supplement, adequate protein intake (70 grams/day for women), natural hormone therapy, a weighted vest and utilize vibratory training (With whole-body vibration, you stand, sit or lie on a machine with a vibrating platform. As the machine vibrates, it transmits energy to your body, forcing your muscles to contract and relax dozens of times each second. The activity may cause you to feel as if you're exerting yourself.). You can also purchase

a vibration plate that you stand on.

Making too many changes at once can be overwhelming. Start with one to three things and build up from there. Let's get stronger together.

Here's to Health!

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> Wellness



By Krisy Whitely Anderson, Beverly Hills Day Spa Owner

Summer is the perfect time to reset, and there's no better place to bask in self-care than Beverly Hills Day Spa in Destin. Whether you're looking to refresh sun-kissed skin, relax tired muscles, or simply enjoy a little pampering, their Summer Specials are designed to help you



feel your best-inside and out.

From rejuvenating facials and invigorating body scrubs to stress-melting massages and tropical-inspired pedicures, each treatment is tailored to restore your glow and elevate your well-being. You'll also enjoy the little luxuries that make a big difference—like complimentary fruit, coffee, juice, tea and yes, champagne!

Summer Specials (Valid through July 31, 2025): #1 Glow O2 Facial – \$125 Choose from: • Exfoliation & Lightening • OR Shiny & Rehydrate

#2 Deep-Clean Hydro Facial – \$135 Includes:

- Cleanse
- Peel
- Extractions
- Hydrate
- Red Light Therapy

#3 Summer Escape Massage Features hot towels, a sugar scrub for your back, and a choice of essential oils. • 30 min – \$60 • 60 min – \$95

• 90 min - \$130

#4 Smooth Summer Body Scrub with Full Body Red Light Therapy – \$95

#5 Summer-Ready Pedi – \$60 Choose from: • Coconut & Lime • Lavender • Champagne & Rose • Cranberry

Includes: Scrub, Mask, Oil, and Moisture Cream

Indulge in the full spa experience and leave feeling polished, pampered, and peaceful. These specials are a great way to beat the heat and treat yourself or someone you love.

Sounds divine? It is! Book now and let Beverly Hills Day Spa help you embrace your summer glow—inside and out! 114 Palmetto Street, Destin.

Call Krisy at (850) 654-8544. beverlyhillsdayspa.com.

REAL HEALING *continued from page 13*

Book Review: Becoming Supernatural: How Common People are Doing the Uncommon

Reviewed by

MICHAEL MCMANUS, LCSW

"Becoming Supernatural: How Common People Are Doing the Uncommon" by Joe Dispenza is a captivating blend of science, spirituality, and personal development that invites readers to explore their potential for transformation. In this book, Dispenza presents a compelling case for how individuals can harness the power of their minds to create extraordinary changes in their lives.

The book is structured into two main parts: the science behind the phenomena and practical applications. Dispenza delves into the latest research in quantum physics, neuroscience, and epigenetics, illustrating how thoughts and emotions can influence our reality. He articulates complex concepts in an accessible manner, making it easy for readers to grasp the implications of his findings.

One of the most engaging aspects of "Becoming Supernatural" is the myriad of real-life stories from individuals who have experienced significant healing and transformation through the principles Dispenza teaches. These testimonials serve as powerful motivators, demonstrating that the techniques he describes can lead to tangible results.

Dispenza emphasizes the importance of meditation and visualization as tools for personal change. He provides step-bystep guidance on various meditation practices, encouraging readers to delve into their subconscious and reprogram their beliefs and habits. This handson approach empowers readers to take charge of their lives and cultivate a deeper sense of self-awareness.

However, some readers may find that Dispenza's reliance on anecdotal evidence and spiritual concepts can come across as unscientific. Skeptics might question the validity of some claims, particularly those related to miraculous healings. Nevertheless, for those open to exploring the connection between mind and matter, the book offers a wealth of insights and practical strategies.



or simply optimizing your energy, our role is to guide and support your process with the right blend of tools.

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

The Tortoise Mentality

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

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

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

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



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Wellness

Local Entrepreneur Brings D1 Training to Niceville

Former Coach and Father of Three Opens State-of-the-Art Fitness Facility for Youth and Adult Athletes

D1 Training, a leading fitness enrichment concept utilizing the five core tenets of athletic-based training, has opened a new location in Niceville at 4544 Hwy. 20 E. on 12 May 2025. The new group fitness facility employs a sports-science backed training regimen led by certified trainers to help people of all ages achieve their sport and fitness goals.

Steven Killebrew will join a roster of impressive existing franchisees, including professional athletes such as Kylie Fitts and Jordan Gay. Additional franchise partners include notable figures such as Super Bowl MVP Von Miller, Tim Tebow and Michael Oher.

Killebrew, a University of Florida graduate, began his career at Elgin Air Force base before spending two years in Africa as a missionary with Youth For Christ. After returning, he became a math teacher and soccer coach at Niceville High School, blending his passion for education with athletics. Later, he moved into franchising, joining his wife and the rest of the Costa Family in McDonald's, where he honed his business skills. When considering his next venture, Killebrew wanted

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to align his career with his lifelong passion for sports and youth development. Seeing how dedicated his three active children are in athletics, Killebrew was especially drawn to D1 Training's commitment

to helping young athletes reach their potential, making it the perfect next chapter.

"When I started thinking about what was next, I knew I wanted to own a business where people could come together to support their physical, mental, and spiritual well-being," said Killebrew. "With D1, athletes not only have the opportunity to train toward their athletic goals, but they also build the confidence needed to succeed in all aspects of life beyond sports." D1 Niceville opened in May with close to 200 members of adults and youth. "I love the sense of community and team that has already developed in the adult and youth classes,' said Killebrew. Speaking of his staff, he stated "People are ultimately what make the D1 experience come to life. I am so grateful for the level of knowledge and talent here on the D1 Niceville team led by General Manager Dennis Ealy and Head



Coach Cotten who will positively impact every adult and youth athlete that comes through the doors.'

D1 Training offers four age-based programs including Rookie (ages 7-11), Developmental (ages 12-14), Prep (ages 15-18) and D1 Adult. Each fitness program is based on the five athletic-based tenets: dynamic warm-up, performance, strength program, core and conditioning and cool down. Outside of group workouts, D1 Training offers team training, semi-private and one-onone training with world-class coaches. The goal is simple: to continue to train athletes who are dedicated to their sport or fitness goals, regardless of age or athletic background.

"Steven is the ideal candidate to bring the D1 Training experience to Niceville," said the brand's Chief Operating Officer, Dan Murphy. "We're thrilled to welcome him to the D1 family and are confident in his ability to show the Niceville area what they've been missing out on. D1 is a one-of-akind fitness experience that's built around the individual and meant to help people meet their athletic goals. Our strong network of franchisees embodies our core values to bring the D1 Training vision to life, and we know Steven will do just that in Niceville and its surrounding communities."

expanding Strategically across the nation through franchising, D1 Training has more than 100 performance centers open with over 250 additional locations in various stages of development.

For more information, visit https://www.dltraining.com/ niceville/ or call (850) 605-8431.



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The Place for The Athlete

🐞 Business

Page 30

By Bill Mason, Executive Coach and Founder of Rocket Fuel Coach

We all have that colleague who usually thrives under pressure-quick to adapt, sharp with details, a natural problem-solver. But even the strongest strengths can hit a snag. Ever noticed a typically adaptable teammate suddenly overwhelmed by too much change? Or a data-driven coworker stuck in decision paralysis? It happens-and often, it's a signal that their greatest strength is momentarily operating from the "basement" instead of the "balcony." Understanding how to spot these moments-and how to guide your teammates back to their strengths-can transform how your team performs and supports one another. Let's explore how.

Unlocking Your Co-worker's Adaptability Power

Unlocking the Power of Your Team's Strengths—Even on Tough Days

Do you have a co-worker who's usually the first to roll with the punches but, every so often, seems to hit a wall? I've known one who's typically a champion of change, juggling new tasks and pivoting on a dime. But recently, when the team was thrown a curveball, they seemed to struggle with all the shifting priorities and became visibly frustrated. It was like watching a master of Adaptability stuck in quicksand!

What was happening? It's a classic case of "basement" behaviors for an Adaptability strength. When overwhelmed by constant change, they can get caught up in reacting, rather than embracing the flexibility they usually excel at. But at their core, they have an amazing ability to flow with any situation and keep things moving forward.

How can we help them get back to their "balcony" and shine? Here are three ideas:

1. Provide Stability – Give them a clear framework or structure, then release them to accomplish things at their own pace, allowing to be flexible in the moment.

2. Encourage Reflection – Help them step back and reflect on their past successes in managing change. A little reminder of their past adaptability can reignite their confidence.

3. Focus on Strengths – Let them know their ability to pivot is a superpower. Reinforcing this can shift them from frustration to innovation.

Elevating Your Co-worker's Analytical Power

Do you have a co-worker who's usually the go-to person for data and details, but every now and then, seems to spiral into analysis paralysis? I've known one who's typically sharp and logical, but recently, when faced with a tough decision, they got so caught up in analyzing every single detail that it held up the entire project. It was like watching a master of analytical thinking stuck in a maze of data!

This is a classic case of "basement" behaviors for someone with an analytical strength. When overwhelmed, they can get bogged down in the need for more information, delaying action and losing sight of the bigger picture. But at their core, they have an amazing ability to think critically, solve problems, and bring clarity to complex situations.

How can we help them get back to their "balcony" and unleash their potential? Here are three ideas:

1. Encourage Focus – Help them narrow their focus to the most important data points. Simplifying the information can guide them toward faster decision-making.

2. Set Deadlines – Sometimes, Give them the time they need to analyze data to come to a great decision and set deadlines for them to make the decision by.

3. Celebrate Decisions – Acknowledge when they make bold, informed decisions. Positive reinforcement boosts their confidence and reminds them of their ability to move forward.

Let's help your coworkers get back into their adaptable groove, keep moving forward, break through that analysis fog and get back to solving problems with ease! Let's talk.

Bill Mason

RocketFuelCoach.com (850) 855-3430

 Image: Note of the state o

Billion Dollar Investment: 1M-Square-Foot Engine Facility Set for Okaloosa

The State of Florida and Williams International have announced a major capital investment expected to total more than \$1 billion in Okaloosa County easily placing the project among the largest in the history of the Northwest Florida region. This announcement follows a comprehensive, multi-state search initiated by aerospace and aviation manufacturer Williams International in 2023.

Williams International's planned high-volume aviation gas turbine engine manufacturing facility will be constructed in three phases within the Shoal River Industrial Park.

In 2022, Gov. Ron DeSantis awarded \$3.2 million through the Florida Job Growth Grant Fund to expand manufacturing in Okaloosa County. Florida-Commerce partnered with several state and local organizations including CareerSource Florida, Florida's Great Northwest, Space Florida, Okaloosa County and Triumph Gulf Coast on this major economic development win for Florida.

"This billion-dollar investment is a major win for the Free State of Florida and for Floridians," said Gov. DeSantis. "Williams International's investment in the Florida Panhandle will create more than 330 jobs, and is a success story of the Florida Job Growth Grant Fund in Northwest Florida."

"Northwest Florida is proving itself to be a rising hub for aerospace activity and an essential part of Florida's expanding aerospace ecosystem. Williams International's expansion in this community is a stellar example of how new opportunities for innovation and investment are being built in every corner of the state—reinforcing all of Florida as the global and interplanetary center for aerospace commerce," said Rob Long, president and CEO, Space Florida.

The company's first 250,000 sq. ft. facility is slated to begin construction later this year, with completion scheduled for late 2026. Subsequent facilities will be constructed in 2028, with the final 500,000 sq. ft. planned for the 2035/2036 timeframe.

Visit www.Williams-Int.com.

Ignite your success with a Rocket Fuel Coach!

Bill Mason

Executive Leadership Coach, CPLC, ICF PCC, Strengths Champion

Stuck? Frustrated? Tired of conflict? Need accountability? Visit rocketfuelcoach.com to get started today! Call now to schedule a consultation (850) 855-3430

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Why Your Website Might Be Costing You Business



By Ross Vollmer

The Cost of an Outdated, Unoptimized Site in Today's Local Market

As a business owner in Destin, your website is often the first impression you make on a potential customer. And, whether they realize it or not, visitors are making decisions about your credibility, professionalism and trustworthiness in a matter of seconds.

But here's the truth: even if you're excellent at what you do, a poorly built or outdated website can quietly kill your opportunities. And if your site isn't optimized for local SEO? You're likely handing over some of the most valuable leads in your area to your competitors — every single day.

First Impressions Matter (Even Online)

People in Destin don't have time to hunt down information or wait for slow pages to load. They're scanning sites quickly on their phones while planning home renovations, booking a charter boat or researching local wellness providers. If your site isn't user-friendly, mobile-optimized and visually up to par, visitors will bounce and move on to someone who looks more "put together."

Some of the most common mistakes that drive potential customers away include slow page speed, confusing navigation, outdated or clunky design, broken contact forms and a lack of clear calls to action like "Schedule a Quote" or "Call Now." Many small business websites also fail to build trust through real reviews, updated photos, or recognizable credentials and badges. A good website doesn't just look nice - it converts. It should act like a 24/7 salesperson for your business, turning curious visitors into paying customers.

If You're Not Showing Up in Google, You're Losing the Game

Here's where things get even more important and more painful. Your website might not just be underwhelming; it might be invisible.

When people in Destin search Google for things like "roofing company near me," "boat catering in Destin," "chiropractor in Okaloosa County," or "best HVAC company in Destin FL," they're not casually browsing. These are high-intent searches from people who are ready to buy, book or schedule.

And this kind of traffic is incredibly valuable because it's inbound. These are people already looking for the services you provide. If your website isn't showing up in those results or worse, if it doesn't even rank for your business name, then someone else is collecting those leads.

What Is Local SEO — And Why Should You Care?

Local SEO, or local search engine optimization, is what helps your business appear in Google when people search for services in your area. It involves optimizing your Google Business Profile, adding location-based keywords and maps to your website, earning quality online reviews, and structuring your site properly with the right meta titles, headers, and backend code so search engines can understand what your business does and where it operates.

When your website is opti-

mized for local SEO, it sends strong signals to Google that your business is relevant and trustworthy for your service category in a specific geographic area. That can dramatically increase your visibility, website traffic, and most importantly, the number of customers calling, booking, or walking through your door.

What You Can Do Right Now

If you're unsure whether your website is helping or hurting your business, there are a few simple ways to assess its performance.

Start by testing your site speed using Google's Page-Speed Insights tool to see how quickly your pages load. Visit your website on your phone and take note of whether the design is mobile-friendly, easy to navigate, and fast to load. Do a Google search for your business name or one of your core services along with "Destin." Are you showing up at the top of the page? Review your site and see if it's obvious how a potential customer can get in touch with you, and check whether your Google Business Profile is fully filled out with up-to-date contact information, hours, photos, and service descriptions.

The Bottom Line

In a competitive market like Destin, your website is more than just a digital business card, it's a critical piece of your marketing engine. If it's not fast, clear, mobile-optimized and locally visible in Google search results, you're missing out on real opportunities every day.

The good news is that these issues are completely fixable. And the sooner you get them right, the sooner your website will start working for you generating leads, building trust and helping your business grow.

Ross Vollmer is the owner of VDX Marketing, a Destin-based agency helping local service providers grow through web design, SEO and automation. With over a decade of experience in digital marketing, Ross has spent the last 4.5 years building his business right here in the Destin community. Learn more at vdxmarketing com.

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🀲 Musing

Sean of the South: Get a Life

By Sean Dietrich

The electricity went out. I don't know why it happened. It wasn't storming. The weather was nice. All I know is I was watching TV when the lamps suddenly flickered and died.

And that was that.

The house fell silent. The refrigerator quit vibrating. The A/C compressor was no longer humming. My dog stared at the ceiling fan slowing down. The power must have affected cell towers, too. I had no phone service.

For a few minutes I just sat in my living room, watching my dog dutifully perform an act of intimate hygiene.

Panic set in. What was I going to do? No electricity? No internet? No phone service? How would I contact a loved one in an emergency? How would I dial 911? How was I going to order cat food on Amazon?

I was becoming dangerously isolated from humanity, and fast. As an American, I am obligated by the Bill of Rights to keep current with essential news headlines at all times.

But without vital electronic devices, I had no idea what key events were happening in the global community. I was missing out.

What if something was happening in North Korea I needed to know about? How about Quebec? What if I missed vital updates on court hearings? Or the baby monkey kidnappings in Panama? Or the videoed

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rescue of the runaway zebra in Murfreesboro, Tennessee?

How was I supposed to live without constant headlines about various billionaires' sex scandals? What about my 24-hour footage of violent demonstrations in Third World countries, massive explosions, terrorist bombs, bodies lying in streets, or "Live with Kelly and Mark?"

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Also, no more fast food commercials advertising plasticized meat-like "products," injected

with industrial-grade cholesterolized gelatine before being served upon "buns" that aren't actually-in the legal sensebread. This is usually followed by weight-loss commercial.

No more pharmaceutical ads about breakthrough drugs with vaguely Star-Trekky names that can (a) improve your life, and (b) kill you. No more lengthy drug company disclaimers which last about as long as law school:

("Zelabubracil may cause kidney failure, brain bleeding, rare forms of eyeball fungi, inability to form sentences without spontaneously soiling your underwear, depressive disorders, suicidal thoughts, sudden interest in C-Span...")

And what about my phone? No text conversations with family members that are purely based on sharing memes? No more spam marketers texting information about my auto warranty?

No more robo-calls from pre-recorded machines offering me critical information about debt consolidation services, urgent health insurance opportunities, or scams about fundraisers for upcoming congressmen's balls. Everyone knows congressmen don't have those.

No. Without electricity there was nothingness.

I felt lost and disconnected. Where was I going to get my excitement? How was I going to adequately feel afraid? How in the WORLD was I going to defend my principles on social media by engaging with people whom I've never met and subsequently calling them buttholes? What in the world was I going to do with myself?

Wait. I know. Maybe it's time I lived my life.

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A Pastor's Ponderings: The Defining Forces of Freedom



By PASTOR DAVE HOLLAND

We Americans cherish freedom. It's built into who we are. We celebrate the right to choose our path, speak our minds, and live without fear of oppression. But freedom isn't free. Behind every liberty we enjoy, there's a story of sacrifice.

Take Luke Air Force Base, just outside Phoenix. As the city expands around it, noise complaints have become more common. One local resident recently wrote a letter sarcastically asking, "Who do we thank for the air show?" after F-16s flew low over Arrowhead Mall. The writer assumed the jets were just showboating—maybe trying to impress someone grabbing coffee at Mervyn's.

But the truth behind that flyover was anything but trivial.

Lt. Col. Grant Rosensteel Jr. responded to the letter, explaining that the formation of jets on that June morning wasn't for fun—it was a tribute. At precisely 9:12 a.m., four F-16s from the 63rd Fighter Squadron flew over the grave of Capt. Jeremy Fresques, an Air Force officer who had once served at Luke and was killed in Iraq on Memorial Day.

At 9 a.m., family and friends gathered at Sunland Memorial Park in Sun City to honor him. The jets flew overhead in what's called a four-ship flyby—a sacred tradition in military aviation that signifies a final farewell. The roar of the engines may have drowned out the 21-gun



salute and taps for the crowd, but the flyover itself conveyed deep meaning and respect.

Lt. Col. Rosensteel closed his letter with a line that drove his point deep:

"Only two defining forces have ever offered to die for you—Jesus Christ and the American soldier. One died for your soul, the other for your freedom."

It's easy to forget that the men and women who serve are more than uniforms. They're fathers and mothers, daughters and sons. They carry the weight of duty and often the burden of loss. Their sacrifices preserve the freedom we so easily take for granted.

But there's another kind of freedom we often overlook—the one that doesn't come from constitutions or courts.

Jesus Christ offers freedom that goes deeper than politics or war. He frees us from the grip of sin, from the things that enslave us on the inside: anger, greed, fear, guilt. His sacrifice wasn't for a nation—it was for humanity. He died to restore our souls.

Thomas Jefferson once said, "The God who gave us life gave us liberty at the same time." Without the spiritual foundation of grace and truth, even a free society can drift into chaos.

This Fourth of July, remember those who have fought and died to protect our rights. But also pause to consider the One who offers the freedom of the heart—a freedom no army can secure and no enemy can take away.

"Truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin... But if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." — John 8:34, 36

Let Christ's freedom reign in you. When it does, it becomes the foundation for the liberty that lasts.

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.



Mystery

The Miracle of Trash in Homicide Investigations

BY MICHAEL YODER, RETIRED FBI CRIMINAL PROFILER

Trash can help solve crime. Maybe not in small towns such as Destin or Fort Walton Beach, but in major metropolitan cities like New York, Chicago and Los Angeles, understanding the conveyance of trash can be an investigative tool in finding a missing person who is the victim of a homicide. Anywhere there are low-income communities. a shortage of automobiles, severe physical domestic issues or intense stressors, there is a likelihood that an offender will use the trash system to efficiently hide a body, body parts or items used in a homicide.

Think about your own trash for a second. What happens to it once it leaves your curbside? You know that a sanitation truck picks up your garbage. Do you know the route of that sanitation truck? Do you know where the truck ends up? The conveyance of trash is a modern-day miracle of our society that moves tons of unwanted items from a home to a landfill. It is invisible and efficient.

The modern waste disposal

system is a highly-scientific and rigorously-managed operation to keep our environment clean. Let's say, hypothetically, you are a homicide investigator, and you arrive at a crime scene immediately after a person is reported missing and you suspect it's a homicide. You make a quick assessment and guess that the trash was just picked up by the local garbage truck. Would you be able to find the route of that truck and follow it to its next stop so that you could cordon off the items in the truck for a thorough search?

A normal truck can fit approximately 10-12 tons of compressed garbage in its container. While that is a lot of garbage, it's better than hundreds of tons of garbage that may end up in a land fill. The good news is that these sanitation trucks are on a pre-planned and standard route and have a GPS tracking its movement. Once it is filled, the truck goes to a nearby transfer station where the garbage is dumped and sorted. The garbage is sorted in a specific location at the transfer station which is recorded by GPS within 10



meters accuracy.

Finally, the trash is reloaded onto a truck and sent to a landfill. Again, the location of where that specific truck is offloaded is recorded by GPS to within 10 meters accuracy. Here's the tricky part: since landfills are finite spaces, the landfill manager must eventually stack loads on top of each other-thereby creating a three-dimensional record of trash. In larger metropolitan cities, the overlay is frequent, and the trash is deep, unlike smaller districts. If a search is not conducted immediately and there is a risk of overlay, the chance for a successful recovery becomes exponentially smaller.

Therefore, the key to a homicide investigator's search for a body or body parts that have been possibly disposed of in trash is to first determine when the trash was picked up. Next, the investigator can dispatch a team of search and rescue per-

Seeking Justice Destin True Crime Club

sonnel who have had specialized training in landfill operations. These team members wear full anti-bacterial Tyvek suits to safely comb through sections of 10-12 tons of compressed trash, regardless of weather conditions. The estimated cost for this operation can become exorbitant, reaching hundreds of thousands of dollars for every week of the operation, with no guarantee of success.

I have participated in a homicide investigation of a missing three-year-old child that incorporated a successful landfill operation. The crime occurred in a medium-sized city. The investigation showed signs of poverty, lack of a car, out-of-control issues, severe domestic issues among the two adult caretakers, drug use and child abuse. Finding the child's body was critical and led to a successful prosecution of the stepfather and the mother. Despite the lies told to investigators, the autopsy confirmed that the child had been physically abused and did not die accidentally.

When a missing person is suspected to be a homicide, investigators should immediately consider trash recovery options. Quick action is critical for success, and while challenging, the potential to find the missing person is rewarding. If landfill recovery is needed, plan carefully, address health risks and coordinate with landfill staff. For guidance, contact the FBI or the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

Interested in true crime and want to learn how to be a sleuth? Join the Destin True Crime Club on Facebook! We meet monthly to research a real cold case and brainstorm investigative ideas. It's a serious—but fun—group for those passionate about solving cases. For questions or speaking requests on violent crime topics, email myoder0361@gmail.com.



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and an experienced product de-

signer, Clint Eagar's entry into

the FLOW universe represents

the kind of creative synergy that's special in this industry.

This deal may be the first of

its kind for the Latvian studio

behind FLOW, but it signals

the beginning of a much big-

ger movement: storytelling that

doesn't just live on screen, but

in our homes, hearts, and every-

day spaces. From gallery walls to

global shelves, Eagar is bringing

the soul of FLOW to life—one

brushstroke, one character, and

one story at a time.

Page 35

Local Artist Clint Eagar Signs Global Deal With Oscar-Winning Film "Flow"

Clint Eagar, the internationally acclaimed artist and designer known for his emotionally charged, visually intricate works, recently inked a global licensing deal with *FLOW*, the Oscar and Golden Globe-winning animated film, a work which pushes at the boundaries of independent cinema.

The new partnership gives Eagar, a Walton-county based artist, creative control to produce original artwork and a creative line of consumer products and gifts based on the characters, themes, and aesthetic of *FLOW*. The collaboration will result in a worldwide collection of *FLOW*-inspired fine art, décor, and lifestyle merchandise, set to reach international markets by the end of 2025.

"This is more than a licensing deal," said Eagar. "It's a shared vision of how visual storytelling can move across mediums, connect with people emotionally, and leave a lasting impact."

Created in Latvia, "FLOW" is a dialogue-free animated feature that follows a grey cat separated from its family by a devastating flood. The cat's journey unfolds through a beautifully rendered, wordless narrative that explores themes of survival, resilience, hope, and unlikely friendship with a cast of expressive animal companions. "FLOW" won the Academy Award for Best Animated Feature, outpacing other contenders, and was described as "a silent masterpiece that radiates humanity in a world without humans.'

Clint Eagar is no stranger to global design. A creative force with over 30 years of experience, Eagar has developed licensed products for top brands under the license including Disney (The Lion King, Pocahontas), and Fiestaware. His ability to blend artistry with mass appeal makes him uniquely suited for this new chapter of "FLOW."

Over the course of his career, his work has spanned fine art, home décor, and consumer design—one of the reasons he's such a good fit for translating this deeply emotional film into a physical world of merchandise. Eagar's own artwork, particularly his *Futurescape* series—which debuted at the Aqua Art Miami Show—is a perfect aesthetic match for *FLOWs* silent storytelling and emotional arcs. His futuristic, human-animal hybrids, bold compositions, and richly symbolic textures complement the tone and visuals of the film.

Through this licensing collaboration, Clint Eagar will create a curated collection of original artworks and contribute to the design of select gift and home décor items inspired by the film's powerful visual storytelling.

His work will celebrate *FLOW*'s signature emotional depth, bringing the spirit of the film into beautifully crafted, globally resonant designs.

"The magic of *FLOW* is how it speaks directly to the heart without a single word," said Eagar. "Translating that kind of emotional storytelling into visual art and design is an incredible creative opportunity."

The collaboration between *FLOW* and Clint Eagar signals

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an evolution in how animated films can extend their emotional resonance beyond the screen. Rather than producing traditional artwork, Eagar is introducing mixed media techniques that mirror the film's visual atmosphere—layering texture, light, and form to recreate the immersive, cinematic quality of *FLOW* in physical space.

By fusing his fine art background with innovative materials and formats, Eagar aims to make the spirit of the film tangible and enduring, offering fans a way to experience the story long after the credits roll.

"This isn't just about merchandise—it's about preserving the emotional experience of the film," said a licensing executive close to the project. "Clint's vision brings a tactile, lasting quality that connects art collectors, fans, and new audiences in a fresh and meaningful way."

As both a fine artist

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🔅 Arts & Music

The Christian Capitalist Podcast: Discussions of Hard Work and Generous Giving

BY RICH SANDERS

The Christian Capitalist: The Gospel of Hard Work and Generous Giving offers a clear vision to people who work hard in all levels of the American economy: the more we make, the more we give. Founded on the concepts of the book, this movement is mobilizing Christians across the country to embrace business success and radical generosity as acts of worship.

The Christian Capitalist Podcast is based on discussions with people who embrace these concepts and encourage others to do the same. In the coming months, we will feature guests on the podcast from the Emerald Coast with inspiring stories of hard work and generous giving to the poor and needy in our community. With Christian Capitalists, "Locals Get It" refers both to readers and listeners hearing the message from our podcast guests and the poor and needy receiving the blessings that these hard-working people share with our community!



At its core, The Christian Capitalist movement is not about prosperity for its own sake, but about thanking God for the blessings we receive by sharing them with our poor and needy neighbors. It teaches that we are created in God's image to work—diligently, ethically, and

joyfully. The message is particularly urgent today. Christianity is in decline in America, especially among younger generations, while interest in socialism has grown. At the same time, many wealthy Christians feel conflicted by the Bible's warnings about riches. The Christian Capitalist addresses these tensions head-on, offering a theology of wealth that is neither indulgent nor ashamed. Instead, it offers a call to action: work hard and give generously to the poor and needy in Jesus' name!

The Christian Capitalist Podcast amplifies voices living out this ethic in the real world business, family. and community leaders who demonstrate that success and generosity are not mutually exclusive. From a realtor who provides holiday gifts to families in shelters, to business owners mentoring others in faithful entrepreneurship, these stories reveal the transformative power of using wealth for good.

Importantly, guests of The Christian Capitalist Podcast don't promote a prosperity gospel, which promises wealth in exchange for faith. Instead, it promotes a "gospel of hard work and generous giving," rooted in Scripture and modeled after Jesus' commandment to love our neighbors. As Paul wrote to Timothy two thousand years ago, the wealthy are not to be arrogant or trust in riches, "but to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share" (1Tim. 6:18).

That's the heart of The Christian Capitalist: a renewed Christian ethic of work and giving that brings glory to God and good to others. In a world in need of both economic wisdom and spiritual revival, this message is timely, transformative, and profoundly needed.

The Christian Capitalist Podcast is available through links on the website at christiancapitalist. life.

Rich Sanders is a pastor, small business owner, retired healthcare attorney and adjunct professor at Emory University, and former intelligence officer in the U.S. Navy, He and his wife, Rebekah, met at church in 1996, have been blessed with three children (James, William and Caroline) and live in Destin with their large golden retriever, Cowboy.



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Around Town

Around Town

DHS Board Member Wins Statewide Charter School Award!



Destin High School's own Heidi LoCicero has been named a 2025 Charter School Champion of the Year by the Florida Consortium of Public Charter Schools (FCPCS).

LoCicero is one of only three governing board members statewide to earn the prestigious honor, which recognizes individuals who have made a significant impact on the success of their charter schools. The award covers contributions made during the 2024–2025 school year.

In accepting the award, LoCicero said, "I am honored to be named a Charter School Champion for the state of Florida. I love this school, our staff and students deeply and feel blessed to be able to volunteer and serve Destin High. While my name is on the award, I share the honor and accept on behalf of the entire governing board and my co-founders of the school. Their support, encouragement, knowledge and tireless efforts, brought Destin High to fruition. Each championed the need for a high school in Destin and sacrificed a great deal to start a school from the ground up. This has been one of the most rewarding opportunities of my life and I am proud to stand among our Sharks who are doing remarkable work in our community."

Now in its 12th year, the FCPCS Charter School Champions program highlights outstanding teachers, school leaders, board members, pioneers, and innovators from across Florida's charter school system, spanning kindergarten through high school. This year's recipients include nine teachers, three school leaders, three board members, two pioneers, and one innovator.

LoCicero's recognition brings pride not only to Destin High but to the entire local charter school community.

Regatta Bay Golf & Yacht Club Earns Prestigious ICONIC Rating Regatta Bay Golf & Yacht

Club has been awarded the elite ICONIC status for 2025 by THE BOARDROOM magazine in partnership with Forbes Travel Guide—an honor given to only the top 1% of clubs worldwide for outstanding ambiance, service, and guest satisfaction. Known for its luxury amenities, championship-level course designed by Robert C. Walker, and superior hospitality, Regatta Bay offers a private-club caliber experience to both members and guests.

"We are honored to be recognized," said General Manager Michael Giammaresi. "This achievement reflects our dedication to providing world-class facilities, exceptional service, and unforgettable moments on the course."

Developed by Legendary LLC, Regatta Bay remains one of the Gulf Coast's top golf destinations.

Visit RegattaBay.com or contact Courtney Geiger at CKing@RegattaBay.com.

DMS's Noah Finkler Wins Florida Civics Title, Heads to Nationals

Destin Middle School 8th grader Noah Finkler has been



named the Florida State Champion of the 2025 National Civics Bee. Noah claimed first place at the state finals held May 31 at Florida State University, earning a \$1,000 prize and a spot at the National Championship in Washington, D.C. this fall, where he'll represent Florida against top students from across the country. Noah's journey began with a win at the inaugural local National Civics Bee hosted March 11 by the Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce. He was joined by two finalists from Northwest Florida Ballet Académie, and received a \$500 prize.

Learn more at civics.uschamberfoundation.org.

Graffiti Pizza - Destin Opens in Destin Commons

Locally owned and operated, Graffiti Pizza in Destin has opened its doors, specializing in New York-style pizza, with dough made from scratch. You may enjoy pizza by the slice or pie. This family-friendly restaurant, located in Destin Com-



mons, offers indoors and outdoor dining, with a full outdoor bar and 20 TVs. Check out the full menu at DestinGraffitiPizza.com and stop by the restaurant to see local artwork from local artist Kelly Pierre.

Bayside Café Now Open at Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort



Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort has unveiled its newest dining experience—Bayside Café, a full-service restaurant open to the public and resort guests. Located along the scenic shores of Choctawhatchee Bay near the Bayside Inn, the café blends Southern hospitality with coastal-inspired flavors in a welcoming, laid-back setting. Guests can enjoy breakfast, lunch, or dinner indoors or relax with light bites and cocktails at the poolside bar.

Hours: Daily from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Menu and more: sandestin. com/bayside-cafe

Walton Chamber Seeks Speakers for "The Next BIG Thing" Conference

The Walton Area Chamber of Commerce is now accepting speaker applications for its 2025 "The Next BIG Thing" Annual Conference, set for October 6 at the Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort and Spa. Presented by Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast and Eglin Federal Credit Union, the event will feature dynamic sessions focused on Leadership Development, Entrepreneurship and Women in Business. Over 200 professionals are expected to attend the one-day event, which includes TED Talk-style presentations, breakout workshops, networking, complimentary headshots, and more. Speaker applications are due by midnight August 9 at waltonareachamber.com.

To register or sponsor, visit waltonareachamber.com/thenext-big-thing or contact Gabrielle Hamilton at (850) 892-3191 or Gabrielle@WaltonArea-Chamber.com.



Destinites



Ask Destinites: Eliminate Mid-Bay Bridge Tolls for Residents - Petition

By Patricia Lee, Owner Destinites.com

This month in our local's Facebook group (www.Facebook.com/groups/Destinites), there was discussion about elim-

BOOTH SPACE SELLING OUT FAST

inating the Mid-Bay Bridge toll for residents. Here is the link to the petition, if you would like to sign, and below are some comments made under the post which was shared to the group.

Link: https://www.change. org/p/eliminate-mid-baybridge-tolls-for-okaloosa-andwalton-county-residents OR contact your Mid-Bay Bridge governing board at MID-BAY. com.

Member replies to the Mid-Bay Bridge toll controversy:

1. What's the distribution of revenue from residents versus tourists?

I'm all for cutting us that live here a break. But, you also have to account for the fact that usage equals maintenance requirements. Average tourists will use the bridge maybe three or four times per visit.

People who live here are using it sometimes that many times per day.

Which of these numbers do you think would be most responsible for the heavy usage? And, thus, maintenance requirements of said bridge?

Removing the tolls for us would then increase the tax burden on the county elsewhere to make up for the shortfalls in revenue to maintain said bridge, or cause shortages elsewhere.

Interested to see the numbers before making any decision one way or another. But I would prefer these factors be looked into for everyone when making these sorts of decisions.

2. Maintain the bridge? Have you seen the trash on that bridge?

The bridge was built with inferior products and has been crumbling at the base that holds the bridge up for years. You could even see the rebar through the areas where the product crumbled off. And there's been issues with the expansion joints as well. It's a money pit that we have been paying since it opened and toll prices have increased a lot for locals, too.

I differ with the opinion that tourists only use it three or four times while here. The fact is even if they just use it coming and going, that's a lot of revenue.

Has anyone counted the ve-

hicles on a Friday, Saturday, Sunday or turnover day during the week for just 10 minutes? There are hundreds of vehicles that come across or leave in 10 minutes. And if you count 300 (and there are more than that) and assume that they all have the Sunpasses, they would collect at the very least \$5,400+ an hour during peak times. There's at least eight hours of peak usage on that bridge which equals \$129,600 for just 24 peak hours over three days.

Now, add the people who use it the other 16 hours for those same three days to equal another 48 hours to add to that \$129,600 and you can see how much money they make in just three days in peak season. Add another four days of tolls and the bridge authority makes a ton of money off the tolls.

They can afford to not charge locals or at the very least no more than \$.50 per crossing. There has been no real transparency on the real total per week that they collect.

3. It's a decent idea. I think maybe keeping the tolls for a few years and using some of the revenue to add a lane on each side. I'm certainly not knowledgeable in engineering, but it seems like a bridge with one lane on each side was a bad decision.

4. It's waaay past time to stop the tolls for residents.

5. When I lived in Hilton Head, residents could pay a monthly fee, like \$40-\$50. I couldn't believe it when we moved here and found out that wasn't offered here.

6. This elected official has the plan to end them. https:// midbaynews.com/post/boylestalks-mid-bay-bridge

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 11,800+ members (Est. Oct. 2018). Check out our local business directory at Destinites.comwhere 400+ local businesses are already listed and enjoy advertising in our targeted group.

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