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DESTIN Life

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Lyrics and Music Meet Sand and Sun at the Inaugural Destin Songwriter Festival

BY WILL ESTELL

If you're a beach lover from near or afar and consider yourself a fan of music and the men and women that make it happen, you're going to want to make plans to attend Destin's first ever songwriter fest.

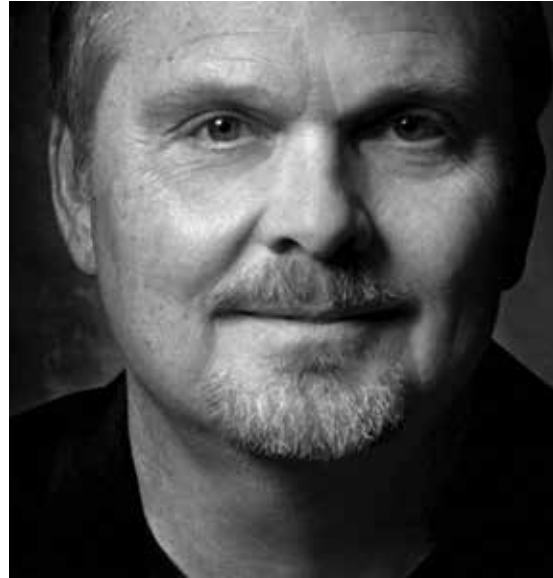
This October 10 and 11th, the white sands and emerald waters of the World's Luckiest Fishing Village will also serve as the picturesque backdrop for the inaugural Destin Songwriter Festival, bringing together an array of talented songwriters and performers for a weekend of meaningful lyrics, great music and fun-loving music fans converging along the beautiful coastline.

Situated along Destin Harbor, the festival will feature everything from intimate acoustic sets to unforgettable headliner performances and offer a first-hand glimpse into the stories behind the songs. Fans will have the opportunity to feel every lyric and the weight each song carries in its journey to become a musical story.



James Otto

In my two decades of covering festivals and writing feature cover story interviews on well knowns from Alan Jackson and Brian Kelley to Kenney Chesney, Darius Rucker, and the late great Jimmy Buffett, I've often said that to sing is one thing, but to write and breathe lyrical life into a song is quite another. Remarkably, the Destin Songwriter Festival



Kent Blazy

offer attendees the opportunity to experience both. Whether you're a lifelong music devotee, a casual festivalgoer or simply a beach lover looking for a soundtrack to paradise, this is where the art of songwriting meets the beauty of Destin.

I talked with organizer and Destin Songwriter Festival CEO, Matthew Pennings, who

gave me a little insight into the festival and how the two-day event would run.

"Throughout the festival, music lovers can enjoy free performances at multiple popular venues along Destin Harbor, coupled with paid ticketholders being able to access the

SONGWRITERS

continued on page 2



Answering the Call with Emerald Coast United

BY HEATHER BENNETT EYE

The past year for Justine and Joey Sauvageau has been one of both heartache and reward. They started their nonprofit, Emerald Coast United, last year to assist with search and rescue, and disaster relief efforts along the Panhandle and in nearby states. While they've been a blessing to many, the organization was created out of personal loss.

Their close friend and diver, Jeremy Carmical, went missing September 22, 2024, while spearfishing

EC UNITED

continued on page 2



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 Community

SONGWRITERS

continued from page 1

mainstage, and feature acts, just up the hill at 314 Harbor Blvd. These waterfront stages include popular Destin venues like Boat House, Sky Bar at Edge Seafood and Harbor Tavern. All of the shows in those venues will be free to attend, while the mainstage will be a ticketed, patrons-only area."

The festival's Main Stage at 314 Harbor Blvd. is where the weekend crescendos, with both general admission and VIP tickets available. Here fans will get up close with a premium production setup complete with drink and food vendors, along with world-class performances by such renowned writers and performers such as James Otto, Kent Blazy, and Andy Griggs.

Lyrics on the Harbor:

Destin's First Songwriter Festival

October 10–11, 2025 | Heron Harbor

Tickets & Details

- GA 2-Day Pass: \$60
- GA Friday or Saturday: \$35/day
- VIP Table (2-Day): \$1,000

Main Stage shows require GA or VIP tickets; side stages are free.

The three aforementioned not only for their stage presence, but for their hit songs gracing country radio and streaming playlists around the globe.

Supporting artists performing on the Destin Songwriter Festival Main Stage include Justin Holmes, Matt Wynn, Justin Andrews and Nashville recording artist, Jessie G — who also happens to be festival founder Matthew Pennings' lovely and talented wife.

I asked my friend and fellow music lover, Destin Mayor Bobby Wagner, what the new songwriter festival means to him, and he gave it a resounding thumbs up.

"Our harbor area has always been the heart of Destin, and welcoming songwriters alongside our own local talent can really turn it into a stage that celebrates community and culture. As someone who loves music, just like you do, I see this festival as more than entertainment. It's a chance for our locals to share their voices, and for our visitors and vacationers to experience the spirit of Destin through both song and the beautiful backdrops you mentioned," said Mayor Wagner.

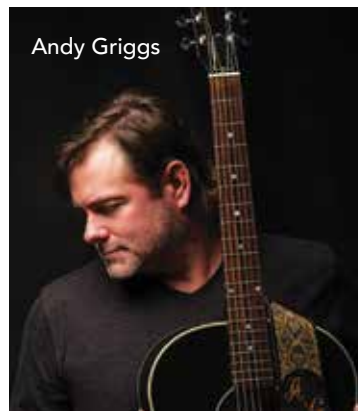
Pennings, also reminded me

that while the festival is about music, it's also about giving back. As such, a portion of proceeds will benefit Operation Song, a 501(c)(3) dedicated to helping veterans, active-duty service members, and their families tell their stories through songwriting. The organization will take center stage on Friday, October 10, leading the headlining round and reminding audiences of the powerful connection between music and healing.

With free harbor performances, ticketed headliner shows and one of the most stunning destinations in the South, the inaugural Destin Songwriter Festival promises a weekend that pairs perfectly with a cold drink, good company and great stories set to music.

Music lovers can visit **www.destinsongwriterfestival.com** for the latest updates, ticket information, artist announcements and insider travel tips for making the most of your festival fun.

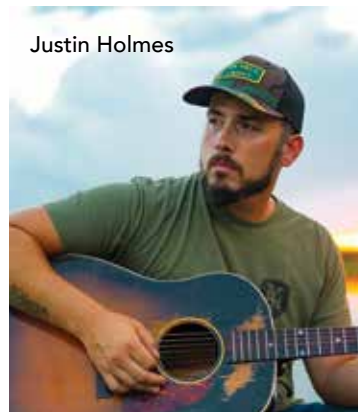
Will Estell is a writer, editor, and media entrepreneur with more than 750 published articles in regional and national magazines covering tourism, real estate, automobiles, golf, food, music, and celebrity cover-story



Andy Griggs



Jessie G



Justin Holmes



Matt Wynn

interviews. As chief creative officer of Estell Hussey Media LLC, he has helped launch 12 magazine titles from concept to market and served as editor in chief for several others. His latest project—a men's lifestyle magazine blending Esquire, GQ, fitness, outdoors and auto—debuts nationwide in 2026. A Mississippi native, Will is the father of three who now lives in Destin and Navarre Beach with

his wife, WEAR ABC 3 news anchor Laura Hussey-Estell.

EC UNITED

continued from page 1

in Destin. With Hurricane Helene closing in on the Gulf, and

Destin still in the range of impact zones, every minute in the search counted. Once Justine and Joey found out Jeremy was missing, they were able to assist

in organizing search and rescue efforts. A collective group rallied approximately 45 boats together over the span of the two-day search and they became points of contact for the United Cajun Navy.

Volunteers were able to recover Jeremy two days later, just before Hurricane Helene made landfall in the Big Bend area, east of Destin. Although it wasn't the outcome they hoped for, Justine and Joey felt peace knowing they could help bring closure to Jeremy's family. "The community supported us in ways I never thought possible," said Justine. "I'm extremely thankful."

After assisting in the rescue efforts for Jeremy, and working closely with Justine and Joey, the United Cajun Navy urged them to start their own nonprofit to assist in future efforts along the panhandle. Jeremy's mother, Michelle Carmical, also encouraged them to follow their calling to help others.

Along with Justine and Joey, Emerald Coast United is led by Shelby Harkins, John Brown,

INAUGURAL
DESTIN SONGWRITER FESTIVAL

A portion of proceeds will benefit Operation Song and their work with Veterans

LIVE PERFORMANCES | 4 STAGES
October 10 & 11, 2025

HEADLINERS

JAMES OTTO **KENT BLAZY** **ANDY GRIGGS**

MATT WYNN **JESSIE G** **JUSTIN HOLMES**

AND MORE ANNOUNCED SOON!

TICKETS ON SALE NOW!

MORE INFO:

www.destinsongwriterfestival.com



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Continued on page 18



Mayor Bobby Wagner and
PIO Tamara Young, PhD

TAMARA L. YOUNG, PhD,
PUBLIC INFORMATION DIRECTOR
FOR THE WORLD’S LUCKIEST
FISHING VILLAGE

TY: It’s a good day when the Mayor and I can meet up to discuss sea turtles! The Destin-Fort Walton Beach Sea Turtle Patrol regularly evaluates nests, and this season we are excited to say that we have 15 nests in Destin. The critical piece is those nests developing and emerging into thousands of tiny little hatchlings and ultimately making it to the Gulf and living long lives. That trek to the water is perilous, though, and that’s where we’re seeing some problems lately. More hatchlings are crawling toward buildings and roads because artificial light is brighter than the beach. What can residents and visitors do right now to help?

“Reel Talk” from the City of Destin

Lights Out for Our Sea Turtle Hatchlings

BW: The good news is that simple habits save hatchlings. Keep the beach dark after sunset. Turn the balcony and porch lights off. Close curtains on gulf-facing windows. Fill in holes and flatten sand before you leave. Give space to the patrol and early morning crews.

TY: FWC Sea Turtle Management reached out to us this season about disorientation reports. A report might include two or more dead hatchlings found, or live hatchlings found out of habitat, like a road, a parking garage, or even a pool. The reports also estimate which properties may be contributing so we can educate owners. People can also share problem spots with us so we can follow up.

BW: It’s been heartbreaking to see the many pictures of these sad situations. But the good news is that we can make significant strides to fix this through knowledge and dedication from our city and community.

TY: We still have red light



friendly flashlights at City Hall to give out, up to two per household for both residents and visitors. But we also need beach property owners to use sea turtle compliant fixtures and bulbs. Porch lights are a big driver of disorientation.

BW: If you own or manage a place by the beach, or help run an HOA or hotel, you can swap bright white bulbs for amber,

add shields and aim lights down and away from the beach, put lights on timers or motion sensors, and close curtains or add tint on gulf-facing windows at night. Take a quick evening walk with your team to spot problem lights, share information with residents and staff, and please get your free red flashlights at City Hall.

TY: Many local governments

use beachfront lighting ordinances to address this impact. Not that I want more rules, but is that worth exploring for Destin?

BW: Yes, and we will keep it education first. Let’s start with a voluntary Lights Out Destin push and targeted outreach using FWC data, then bring a simple, fair code update for new construction and major renovations so turtle-friendly lighting is the default from day one. If we all do the basics now, most disorientations go away, and future projects will be built right from the start.

Call to action: Keep beaches dark and clear, use red light and report injured or disoriented hatchlings to 850-243-9046 or 1-888-404-3922. Owners, managers, HOAs and hotels, email tyoung@cityofdestin.com if you want a quick evening walkthrough or access to more resources. Let’s light the way to the water, not the road.

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Events Around Town

Solaris Dinner Cruise for Taylor Haugen Foundation

Wednesday, Sept. 10, 2025 | Baytowne Marina, Miramar Beach

Set sail for an unforgettable evening supporting the Taylor Haugen Foundation and its mission to protect student athletes from abdominal injuries. Enjoy fine yacht cuisine with chef-selected desserts, a wine pull and silent and live auctions—all while hearing inspiring stories from founders Brian and Kathy Haugen.

Boarding: 5:30 p.m. | Sail: 6–8 p.m.

Proceeds provide education and advanced protective gear for secondary youth athletes.

Tickets & sponsorships: TaylorHaugen.org

Golf4TheCure - Gulf Coast Tournament

Friday, Sept. 12 | Raven Golf Club, Sandestin

Swing into action for a great cause at the 2nd Annual Golf4TheCure - Gulf Coast Tournament, benefiting St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. Enjoy 18 holes at the stunning Raven Golf Club, plus player gifts, raffle prizes, hole contests, and a post-play celebration complete with dinner, live music, a Kid's Zone and the magical Lighting

of the Lanterns tribute.

Register or sponsor at Golf4TheCure-Gulf-Coast.perfectgolfevent.com

SOF Missions Gala Honors Heroes Sept. 13

Saturday, Sept. 13, 2025 | Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center



Shield of Faith (SOF) Missions hosts its 9th Annual Emerald Coast Gala. This year's theme, Military Code: RED—Resilience, Empowerment, Determination—honors warriors including veterans, active-duty service members and first responders. Guests will enjoy a formal red-themed evening with dinner, dessert, live music by Thin Ice, auctions and a keynote address from a distinguished warrior guest. Proceeds benefit SOF's Be Resilient Clinics and Warrior Retreats, which provide

no-cost, comprehensive care for those struggling with suicide and mental health challenges. Tickets are \$100 and include dinner, dessert and one drink. Sponsorships available. Formal red attire encouraged. Tickets and further details: sofmissions.org/gala

Wine & Fries Returns with a Carnival Twist

Sept. 19, 6–9 p.m. | Hotel Effie Sandestin Rooftop, Miramar Beach



Ronald McDonald House Charities of Northwest Florida and McDonald's bring back Wine & Fries, presented by Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast—an elevated evening pairing favorite wines with McDonald's French fries. Enjoy rooftop views, a DJ-led dance floor, a silent auction and “Classic Carnival” charm, plus a moving story from a family served by RMHC. Proceeds support RMHC's “home away

from home” for families with children receiving medical care. Tickets: \$115 at rmhc-nwfl.org (available until one hour before start). Details: Allie Moore, 850-477-2273; allie@rmhc-nwfl.org

Support the Fall Silent Auction Benefiting Emerald Coast Food Rescue

Friday, Oct. 24 | 6–9:30 p.m. | Local Market, Destin

Emerald Coast Food Rescue (ECFR) invites the community to its Annual Fall Silent Auction—an evening of giving, good food and meaningful impact raising vital funds to support ECFR's mission of rescuing food surplus and redirecting it to those facing hunger in Okaloosa and Walton counties. In-kind donations for the auction will directly help fund operations that deliver over 250,000 pounds of food each month—at no cost—to 43 local programs, including food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, after-school programs and subsidized clinics. Your support ensures that food

doesn't go to waste—and families don't go hungry.

To donate or learn more, visit Emerald Coast Food Rescue or email info@emeraldcoast-foodrescue.org.

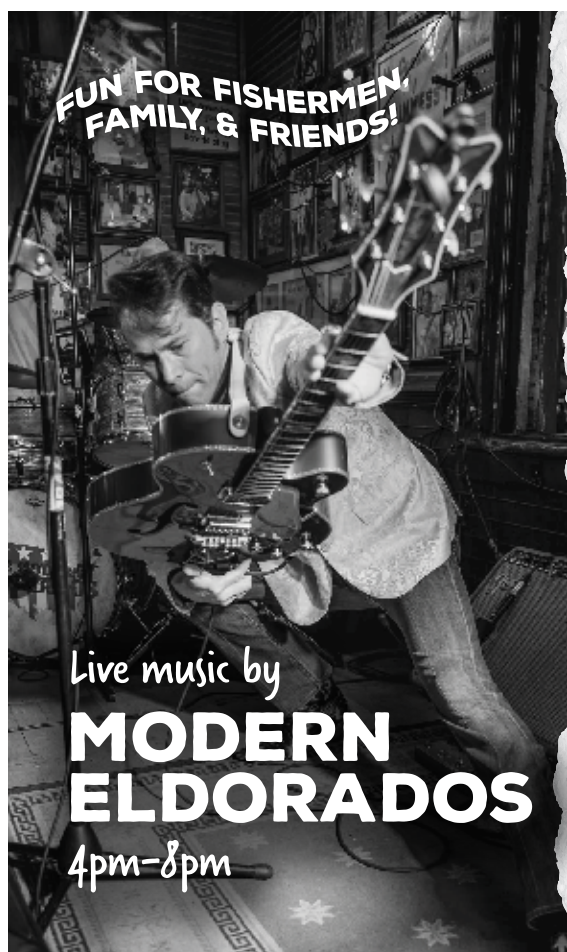
Fore Her 13th Annual Golf Outing - Swing for a Cause

Friday, Sept. 26 | 9 a.m. | The Links Golf Club, Sandestin

Fore Her invites golfers of all levels to tee off for a very “pink” cause at its 13th Annual Golf Outing, presented by Emerald Coast Hospice Care. Proceeds help local breast cancer patients cover living expenses, utilities, and transportation costs during treatment.


The four-person scramble includes on-course food and drink, a catered lunch by Evie Mae's BBQ, the fan-favorite “Dress Like a Lady” hole, and an after-party with prizes, raffles, and giveaways. Info, registration, and sponsorships: ForeHer.org/golffouting

Continued on page 10



FUN FOR FISHERMEN, FAMILY, & FRIENDS!

Live music by
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4pm–8pm




Kick off the 77th annual Destin Fishing Rodeo like a

REEL LOCAL

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 25
AJ'S JUMBOTRON

4pm	Captains & Mates Registration
5pm	Captains & Mates Meeting-Downstairs Restaurant
4pm-6pm	Rodeo Kickoff Dinner



3rd Annual SANDY BAGS on the Bay CORNHOLE TOURNAMENT



SEPTEMBER 20TH, 2025
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Baggin' Rights – \$800

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- 2 Team Entries (4 Players)

Toss Boss – \$500

- Social Media Recognition & Marketing
- 1 Team Entry (2 Players)

Corn Stars – \$100

- 1 Team Entry (2 Players)

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314 GAZELLE COURT, NICEVILLE, FL
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\$699,000 | ready September 2025
Listed by Yeska Sand 850.368.5936



421 SORREL WAY, NICEVILLE, FL
4 Bedroom | 3 Bath | 2,301 SF
\$799,990 | ready October 2025
Listed by Val Waters Auclair 850.855.6205



312 GAZELLE COURT, NICEVILLE, FL
5 Bedroom | 3 Bath | 2,259 SF
\$612,000 | ready December 2025
Listed by Jodie Snell 850.621.6535

Cali's To Do In Destin! SEPTEMBER 2025

..... 5

Friday Martini Lunch | 11am-4pm | Skybar Destin
Singo Music Bingo | 5pm | The Island Resort
Free Beach Bonfire | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille
Locals on the Harbor | 5pm | Boat-house Oyster Bar
Karaoke | 7pm | Island Wing Company
Salsa & Bachata Dance Lessons | 8pm | Bric a Brac
Latin Night | 8pm-2am | Bosforo | Miramar Beach
Karaoke | 8pm | 5 o’Clock Some-where | Baytowne Wharf
Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T’s Lighthouse

..... 6

Farmers Market | 9am-1pm | Grand Boulevard
Soundwave Concert Series | 6pm | Harborwalk Village
Karaoke | 6pm | Fatboys Destin
Karaoke | 8pm | 5 o’Clock Some-where Baytowne Wharf
Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar Pizza Bar
Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T’s Lighthouse

..... 7

Destin Community Farmers Market | 9am-1pm | Beall’s Parking Lot, Destin
DJ Brunch | 10am | Azul @ Harbor-walk Village
Women’s Climbing Circle | 5pm | Rock Out Climbing Gym
Karaoke | 9pm | Outcast Bar & Grill
Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar Pizza Bar

..... 8

Free Beach Bonfire/SIN Night | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille
Trivia Night | 6pm | Beachview Break-fast & Grille
Trivia Night | 6:30pm | Destin Brewery

..... 9

ECPRO Presents: Pitch Perfect Mas-tering Media Outreach for PR Success | 11:30am | FWB Chamber
Karaoke | 6pm | AJ’s on the Bayou
Karaoke | 6pm-9pm | Fatboys Destin
Trivia Night | 6pm | Rick’s Crab Trap

..... 10

Sip & Shop | 3pm-7pm | EKKO at Destin Commons
Bonfire on the Beach | 5pm | The Bay SRB
Music Match Game Night | 5pm | The Island Resort
Trivia Night | 5pm | Down Island
Taylor Haugen Foundation’s Solaris Dinner Cruise | 5:30pm | Baytowne Marina
Run Club | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery
Trivia Night | 6pm | Craft Bar @ The Harbor
Trivia Night | 7pm | Boardroom Pub FWB
Karaoke | 7pm | Kenny D’s
Karaoke | 7pm | AJ’s Oyster Shanty
Wednesday Night Concert Series: Duchess | 7pm | Baytowne Wharf

..... 11

Little Black Dress Night | 6:30pm-9:30pm | Marina Café
Karaoke with Mary-aoke | 7pm | FWB



Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T’s Lighthouse
Ladies Night | 10pm | McGuire’s Destin

..... 12

Destin Chamber Business Before Hours | 7:30-9am | Lulu’s
Golf4TheCure – Gulf Coast Tourna-ment | 11am | Raven Club Sandestin
Friday Martini Lunch | 11am-4pm | Skybar Destin
Singo Music Bingo | 5pm | The Island Resort
Free Beach Bonfire | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille
Karaoke | 7pm | Island Wing Com-pany
Salsa & Bachata Dance Lessons | 8pm | Bric a Brac
Latin Night | 8pm-2am | Bosforo in Miramar Beach
Karaoke | 8pm | 5 o’Clock Some-where Baytowne Wharf
Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T’s Lighthouse

..... 13

Farmers Market | 9am-1pm | Grand Boulevard
Farmers Market | 10am | Harborwalk Village
Slacker Olympics | 10am | Boathouse Oyster Bar
Jerk Off – Prostate Cancer Fundrais-er | 12pm | Boathouse Oyster Bar
Hispanic Music Festival | 2-10pm | 1900 Lewis Turner Blvd | FWB
Ground Up Project’s Putting for a Purpose | 4pm | 3rd Planet Brewery Niceville
SOF Missions Gala | 6pm | Des-tin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center
Soundwave Concert Series | 6pm | Harborwalk Village
Karaoke | 6pm | Fatboys Destin
Bon Jovi Tribute – Shot Thru The Heart | 7pm | Club LA
Karaoke | 8pm | 5 o’Clock Some-where Baytowne Wharf
Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar
Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T’s Lighthouse

..... 14

Destin Community Farmers Market | 9pm-1pm | Beall’s Parking Lot, Destin
DJ Brunch | 10am | Azul @ Harbor-walk
2nd Annual Okinawa Festival | 12pm | Fort Walton Beach Fairgrounds
Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar Pizza Bar
Karaoke | 9pm | Outcast Bar & Grill

..... 15

Free Beach Bonfire/SIN Night | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille
Trivia Night | 6pm | Beachview Break-fast & Grille
Trivia Night | 6:30pm | Destin Brewery

..... 16

Karaoke | 6pm | AJ’s on the Bayou
Karaoke | 6pm-9pm | Fatboys Destin
Trivia Night | 6pm | Rick’s Crab Trap FWB

..... 17

Tourism & Hospitality Lunch | 11:30-1pm | Destin Chamber
Sip & Shop | 3pm-7pm | EKKO at Destin Commons
Bonfire on the Beach | 5pm | The Bay
Music Match Game Night | 5pm | The Island Resort
Trivia Night | 5pm | Down Island
Run Club | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery
Rock n Roll Bingo | 6pm | Fatboys Niceville
Trivia Night | 6pm | Craft Bar @ The Harbor
Wednesday Night Concert Series MECO | 7pm | Baytowne Wharf
Karaoke | 7pm | Kenny D’s
Karaoke | 7pm | AJ’s Oyster Shanty

..... 18

Bubbly Baytowne | 5pm | Baytowne Wharf
United Way 40 Under 40 Awards | 5pm | Shoreline Church
Little Black Dress Night | 6:30pm-9:30pm | Marina Café
Fort Comedy Open Mic Standup | 7pm | Downtown Music Hall
Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T’s Lighthouse
Ladies Night | 10pm | McGuire’s Destin

..... 19

Friday Martini Lunch | 11am-4pm | Skybar Destin
Singo Music Bingo | 5pm | The Island Resort
Free Beach Bonfire | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille
International Talk Like A Pirate Day + Fireworks | 5pm | Baytowne Wharf
Wine & Fries | 6pm | Hotel Effie Rooftop
Karaoke | 7pm | Island Wing Com-pany
Salsa & Bachata Dance Lessons | 8pm | Bric a Brac
Latin Night | 8pm-2am | Bosforo in Miramar Beach
Karaoke | 8pm | 5 o’Clock Some-where Baytowne Wharf
Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T’s Lighthouse

..... 20

Emerald Coast Home & Boat Show | Emerald Coast Convention Center
Famers Market | 9am-1pm | Grand Boulevard
Destin Rotary Sandy Bags Corn-hole Tournament | 10am | Lulu’s
Burgers, Bourbon & Beer Festival | Noon | Destin Harbor
Soundwave Concert Series | 6pm | Harborwalk Village
Karaoke | 6pm | Fatboys Destin
Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar

Karaoke | 8pm | 5 o’Clock Some-where Baytowne Wharf
Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T’s Lighthouse

..... 21

Emerald Coast Home & Boat Show | Emerald Coast Convention Center
Destin Community Farmers Market | 9pm-1pm | Beall’s Parking Lot, Destin
DJ Brunch | 10am | Azul @ Harbor-walk
Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar Pizza Bar
Karaoke | 9pm | Outcast Bar & Grill

..... 22

Free Beach Bonfire/SIN Night | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille
Trivia Night | 6pm | Beachview Break-fast & Grille
Trivia Night | 6:30pm | Destin Brewery

..... 23

Mindful Meditation | 9am | Destin Library
Run Club | 4:30pm | Idyll Hounds Brewery
Destin Chamber Business After Hours | 5 - 6:30 p.m. | Henderson Beach Resort
Karaoke | 6pm | AJ’s on the Bayou
Karaoke | 6pm-9pm | Fatboys Destin
Trivia Night | 6pm | Rick’s Crab Trap FWB

..... 24

Sip & Shop | 3pm-7pm | EKKO at Destin Commons
Bonfire on the Beach | 5pm | The Bay
Trivia Night | 5pm | Down Island
Music Match Game Night | 5pm | The Island Resort
Run Club | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery
Trivia Night | 6pm | Craft Bar @ The Harbor
Music Bingo | 6:30pm | Palm Folly
Wednesday Night Concert Series: Casey Kearney Band | 7pm | Bay-towne Wharf
Karaoke | 7pm | Kenny D’s
Karaoke | 7pm | AJ’s Oyster Shanty

..... 25

Destin Chamber Annual Golf Tour-ney | Noon | Emerald Bay Golf Club
77th “Reel Local” Annual Destin Fishing Rodeo Kickoff Party | 4pm | AJ’s Destin
LevelUp Money Marketing Mind-set Conference | 4-8pm | Oceans Church Destin
Yoga Class | 6pm | Destin Community Center
Little Black Dress Night | 6:30pm-9:30pm | Marina Café
Fort Comedy Open Mic Standup | 7pm | Downtown Music Hall FWB
Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T’s Lighthouse
Ladies Night | 10pm | McGuire’s Destin

..... 26

LadyWorld | Seascape Resort
LevelUp Money Marketing Mind-set Conference | 8-5pm | Oceans Church Destin
Fore Her Swing for a Cause | 9am | Links Golf Club Sandestin

Friday Martini Lunch | 11am-4pm | Skybar Destin
DESTIN SEAFOOD FESTIVAL | 4pm | Destin Harbor
Free Beach Bonfire | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille
Singo Music Bingo | 5pm | The Island Resort
Karaoke | 7pm | Island Wing Com-pany
Salsa & Bachata Dance Lessons | 8pm | Bric a Brac
Latin Night | 8pm-2am | Bosforo in Miramar Beach
Karaoke | 8pm | 5 o’Clock Some-where Baytowne Wharf
Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T’s Lighthouse

..... 27

LadyWorld | Seascape Resort
LevelUp Money Marketing Mindset Conference | 8-2pm | Oceans Church Destin
Farmers Market | 9am-1pm | Grand Boulevard
CBA’s Mattie Kelly Family Bay Day | 10am | Fred Gannon Rocky Bayou State Park
DESTIN SEAFOOD FESTIVAL | 10am | Destin Harbor
National AJ’s Day | 4-6pm | AJ’s Destin, Okaloosa Island, Grayton Beach, FWB
Karaoke | 6pm | Fatboys Destin
Karaoke | 8pm | 5 o’Clock Some-where Baytowne Wharf
Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar
Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T’s Lighthouse

..... 28

LadyWorld | Seascape Resort
Beach Church Service | 7:30am | Crab Trap Destin
Destin Community Farmers Market | 9am-1pm | Beall’s Parking Lot, Destin
DESTIN SEAFOOD FESTIVAL | 10am | Destin Harbor
DJ Brunch | 10am | Azul @ Harbor-walk
5K Mullet Run & Walk | 4pm | Destin Brewery
Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar Pizza Bar
Karaoke | 9pm | Outcast Bar & Grill

..... 29

Free Beach Bonfire/SIN Night | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille
Trivia Night | 6pm | Beachview Break-fast & Grille
Trivia Night | 6:30pm | Destin Brewery

..... 30

9th Annual Women in Science | 5:30pm | Emerald Coast Science Center
Karaoke | 6pm-9pm | Fatboys Destin
Karaoke | 6pm | AJ’s on the Bayou
Trivia Night | 6pm | Rick’s Crab Trap FWB

..... OCTOBER

..... 1-31

77th Annual Destin Fishing Rodeo! | Weigh-ins Daily | 10am-7pm | AJ’s Destin

..... 5

Destin 5K Rodeo Run | 8am | Clem-ent Taylor Park
Destin Fishing Rodeo Annual Kids’ Wagon Parade | 4pm | AJ’s Destin



EVENTS • LIVE MUSIC • FOOD

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Pets in Weddings: A Guide to Including Your Furry Friend in Your Big Day



BY KRISTIN SULLIVAN, GENERAL MANAGER, THE ALICE

For decades, I have had the pleasure of meeting several distinguished guests with paws, as pets participating in weddings are not a new tradition. (photo 1) In 2009, this guy was the best man as he was responsible for the couple meeting. Billy ran off in a park in Boston and the groom held him until the bride found him. They were strangers up until that very moment; years later adorned in an orchid collar, he proudly walked down

the aisle at Saint Paul’s Church on Duval Street in Key West.

Weddings are a celebration of love, and for many couples that love extends beyond each other to their beloved pets. While dogs are the most common four-legged guest, pets, including cats, are increasingly becoming part of the wedding festivities, not just being present, but as honored participants.

Including your pet in your wedding can add a personal, heartwarming touch that reflects your shared life and values. But, it also requires thoughtful planning to ensure everything goes smoothly.

How Common Is It to Include Pets in Weddings?

Recent surveys reveal just how popular this trend has become:

- 81% of engaged or recently married pet parents in the U.S. plan to include their pet in their wedding celebration.
- 38% of pet owners have already included their pet in their



wedding or engagement, whether in person or through design elements like invitations.

- 60% of dog owners know someone who had their dog at their wedding, and 93% believe pets should be involved because they are part of the family.

These numbers show that pets are no longer just spectators; they are becoming stars of the show.

Why Include Pets in Your Wedding?

Pets calm people who are nervous: Many people have anxiety about being the center of attention, and/or standing in front of large crowds. Having that familiar unconditional love by your side can help to ease the stress away.

Symbol of your bond: Pets often represent the life you have built together. Including them is a nod to your shared journey.

Memorable moments: A dog trotting down the aisle or a cat lounging in a flower-adorned basket makes for unforgettable photos—many times becoming a viral sensation.

Guest delight: Animals bring joy and charm, often becoming the highlight of the event.

Roles Pets Can Play

Here are a few unique and creative ways to involve your pet:

Ring Bearer: Pets can carry

rings in a pouch or box attached to their collar or harness. Make sure they are secure!

Flower Pet: Adorned with floral garlands, pets can walk down the aisle with the flower girl.

Greeter: Positioned at the entrance to welcome guests with tail wags and cuddles.

Honorary Guest: Simply present at the ceremony or reception, dressed in wedding attire.

Photo Companion: Featured in engagement shoots or wedding portraits.

Planning Tips for a Pet-Friendly Wedding

To make your pet’s participation stress-free and safe, consider these tips:

Assess your pet’s temperament: Not all pets enjoy crowds or noise. Choose a role that suits their personality.

Check venue policies: Confirm that pets are allowed

Continued on page 11





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 Community

17th Annual Baytowne Beer Fest Returns Oct. 10 & 11!

Known as the “#1 Beer Fest on the Emerald Coast,” this popular event features more than 40 on-site craft brewers!

**Friday, Oct. 10 -
Saturday, Oct. 11 |
Tickets on sale now |
BaytowneBeerFestival.com**

Time to roll out the barrel and discover unique suds & ales! The Village of Baytowne Wharf at Sandestin is gearing up for its 17th Annual Baytowne Beer Fest, one of the Emerald Coast's favorite fall traditions. This two-day celebration of hops, malts, and mouthwatering bites returns Oct. 10-11 with more flavors, more music and more reasons to raise a glass. American specialty beers from around the nation will be available for participants to sample and savor.

Friday, October 10th | Baytowne Backyard Bash

Kick off Baytowne Beer Festival weekend in true tailgate style at the Baytowne Backyard Bash!

Join us Friday night from 6-8 p.m. for football on the big screen, ice-cold beer, smooth bourbon, sizzling food, and cozy bonfires under the stars. Enjoy live music from Duchess that keeps the party going, delicious bites from local favorites, and all the backyard vibes you love—Baytowne style.

Ticket: \$65 Pre-Sale General Admission and \$75 the day of the event if not sold out.

*Ticket includes admission to Friday night's event from 6-8 p.m. only.



Saturday, October 11th | Grand Craft Beer Tasting

Get ready for the ultimate beer lover's experience at the Baytowne Beer Festival main event, Saturday, October 11th! Sample your way through 150+ domestic and international craft beers, chat with brewery reps and discover new favorites from crisp lagers to bold ales. New this year are delicious food options to keep you fueled for the day!

Seltzer Lane is back by popular demand, plus explore exciting new tasting spots like Beer From Around Here—featuring local brews—and Import Lane with flavors from across the globe. Live music from The Typos will keep the good vibes flowing all afternoon in the heart of Baytowne Wharf.

Ticket: Early Bird General Admission \$50 *limited tickets available; Pre-Sale General Admission \$55; Day of the Event General Admission \$65.

*Ticket includes admission to the Saturday Beer Tasting event from 2-5 p.m. only.



Saturday, October 12th | Grand Craft Beer Tasting | Pour Pass

Go straight to the good stuff with a Baytowne Pour Pass Ticket!

Skip the festival entrance lines with exclusive entry through a dedicated festival entrance and kick off your day without the wait. This limited-availability ticket also includes Baytowne Beer Fest swag and access to a specialty tasting experience you won't find anywhere else at the festival. Quantities are limited—grab yours before they're gone!!

\$85 Pour Pass

*Ticket includes Pour Pass Admission + the Saturday Beer Tasting event from 2-5 p.m. only.

2 Day Ticket

\$110 General Admission for Friday and Saturday.

*Ticket includes admission to Friday Night's Beer From Around Here Event from 6-8 p.m. AND Saturday's Grand

Tasting Event 2-5 p.m.

Beer Tasting Glass included with all tickets. Please drink responsibly.

Best of all, it's beer and bites for a cause – a portion of proceeds benefits Fisher House of the Emerald Coast and the Sandestin Foundation for Kids.

Visit baytownebeerfestival.com for updates and full beer and food lineups. Event is rain or shine. No refunds.

A Can't Miss Wednesday Night Concert Series!

**Wednesdays NOW –
September 24**

**7-9 p.m. | FREE | Events
Plaza Stage**

Wednesday Night Concerts at The Village of Baytowne Wharf are BACK! 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.

Live Local Favorites Music Lineup:

September 3rd: Below Alabama

September 10th: Duchess

September 17th: MECO

September 24th: Casey Kearney Band

Bubbly Baytowne

**Thursday, September 18 |
5 p.m. | FREE**

Who's ready to sip and shop through The Village streets?! Enjoy an evening full of FREE champagne and shopping. Check in by the fountain to receive your complimentary Baytowne Wharf glass and a map outlining specific merchants to visit starting at 5 p.m. *For 21 and up only. The village will be open to the public during this event.

International Talk Like a Pirate Day

**Friday, September 19 | 5
p.m. | FREE**

Ahoy Matey! Join Baytowne Wharf for an evening full of adventure with Special Guest Captain Davy. Come dressed in your best pirate costume and get ready for a scavenger hunt, magic show, costume contest and loads more of mayhem! PLUS enjoy a fireworks show at 8 p.m. over the lagoon.

Beach TV LIVE!

Tune in on Beach TV daily to watch what all is going on in The Village of Baytowne Wharf LIVE!

Destin Seafood Festival Returns for 47th Year!

Friday, Sept. 26, 4-10 p.m. | Saturday, Sept. 27, 10 a.m.-10 p.m. | Sunday, Sept. 28, 10 a.m.-6 p.m.

By CALI HLAVAC

One of Destin's most beloved traditions is back and bigger than ever. The Destin Seafood Festival returns Sept. 26-28 for its 47th year, transforming the Destin Harbor into a mile-long celebration of fresh Gulf seafood, live music and coastal culture. More than 30,000 locals and visitors are expected to attend this free, family-friendly event.

Stretching from HarborWalk Village to Heron Harbor, the festival features five stages of live music with local and regional artists performing everything from rock and reggae to country and tropical tunes—and more. The pedestrian-friendly, waterfront boardwalk and docks become a feast for the senses as more than 100 local food and craft vendors — jewelry, clothing, sculpture, glass, watercolors, oil paintings, designs and more — plus Destin's favorite restaurants — serve up seafood specialties, cold drinks and handmade art. And don't forget this



year's seafood festival T-shirt!

A Festival with Local Flavor: What began in 1978 as a one-day gathering on "Kelly's Hill" to honor local fishermen has grown into a can't-miss Destin tradition. Proceeds still benefit the community, supporting the Destin Charter Boat Association, Miss Destin scholarships, the Destin Fisherman's Fund and other local causes.

Festival organizers pride themselves on keeping admission free, though VIP passes are available for those who want an elevated experience. With your paid ticket, the VIP area offers unlimited tastings from local restaurants and chefs, private restrooms, a cash bar, TVs and exclusive live music. This year's



VIP highlight is Cajun TwoStep founder, viral cooking sensation and influencer Stalekracker, who will take over the VIP Main Stage on Sunday with live demos and plenty of Louisiana flair!

Fun for All Ages: Kids won't be left out of the fun. The expanded Kids Zone, sponsored by Fudpucker's, features oyster shell painting, sand art and play areas for little ones. The HarborWalk Kids Fun Zone adds hamster balls, a rock-climbing wall, zip line and face painting — with a shaded seating tent nearby for parents to relax.

Music on the Harbor: Music lovers can bring a chair, kick back or dance along the docks as local bands play on each of the five stages through-



out the weekend. Harbor restaurants and bars will also host their own lineups of local favorites. A full entertainment schedule will be announced at DestinSeafoodFestival.com.

Parking and Shuttle Information: Festival parking will be available at Heron Harbor, HarborWalk Village, the Marler public lots, Destin Community Center and the Destin Fishing Museum. Free shuttles will run from Morgan Sports Complex to the Destin Harbor throughout the weekend.

The Destin Seafood Festival serves as the kickoff to October's month-long Destin Fishing Rodeo, another cornerstone of local tradition. Whether you're a longtime local or first-time



visitor, this is your chance to savor fresh Gulf flavors, soak up harbor views and celebrate the community's fishing heritage.

For festival maps, vendor information, VIP passes and sponsorship opportunities, visit DestinSeafoodFestival.com or email info@destinseafoodfest.com.

Come hungry. Leave happy. See you on the Harbor! **Info & VIP Tickets: DestinSeafoodFestival.com.**




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47TH ANNUAL

DESTIN SEAFOOD Festival

SEPTEMBER 26-28, 2025
TICKETS ON SALE NOW
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VIP INCLUDES:

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- + PRIVATE BAR
- + SEAFOOD COMPETITION
- + FOOD SAMPLES
- + LIVE MUSIC
- + AND MORE!

 Community

EVENTS

continued from page 4

10th Annual Bloody Mary Festival - A Decade of Delicious!
Saturday, Oct. 11 | 11 a.m.-2 p.m. | The Market Shops, Miramar Beach

Get ready to Eat, Drink, and B MARY! Celebrate 10 years of bold flavors and brunch vibes at the 10th Annual Bloody Mary Festival, powered by Step One Automotive Group. Sample un-

limited creative bloody marys from the area's best restaurants and bars—loaded with over-the-top garnishes from grilled cheese to sushi.

Also enjoy craft brews, bubbly, food vendors, live music, a cigar bar, and SEC football on the big screen. 21+ only. Proceeds benefit Habitat for Humanity – Walton County.

Info and tickets: TheMarketShops.com/Bloody-Mary-Festival

Sip, Savor & Support! Harvest Wine & Food Festival | Oct. 16-19 | WaterColor

Raise your glass to four days of epicurean delight at WaterColor's acclaimed Harvest Wine & Food Festival—one of the Southeast's finest wine-and-food celebrations and a meaningful fundraiser for our local children's charities. Held in beautiful Cerulean Park, this year's lineup delivers world-class experiences throughout the weekend: intimate wine



dinners, Friday's sultry Harvest After Dark evening, Saturday's legendary Grand Tasting or go VIP for enhanced lounge access and live music; and elegant Sunday brunches such as Brunch de Blanc.

Want more? Multi-day bundles let you combine favorites such as Harvest After Dark and Grand Tasting or VIP combo—while taking advantage of some savings. Tickets are on sale now—rain or shine—and proceeds benefit the Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation's efforts supporting our children throughout Northwest Florida.

3rd Annual Sandy Bags Cornhole Tournament
Sept. 20 | 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. | Lulu's

Join the Destin Sunset Rotary Club for the 3rd Annual Sandy Bags Cornhole Tournament—a day of tossing bags, friendly competition, and community spirit. Benefiting Healing Paws

for Warriors, a nonprofit pairing rescue dogs with veterans, the event features doubles bracket play with prizes for top teams, plus food, drinks, music, raffles and a silent auction. Proceeds help save two lives at a time. Spots are limited, so register today and join your friends at Lulu's on the Bay for a cause that matters! See ad on p. 4 to sign up for a team!

5th Annual BrunchFest - Pensacola
Sunday, Oct. 26 | 11 a.m.-2 p.m. | Seville Square, Downtown Pensacola

Savor the best brunch bites in town while supporting a great cause at the 5th Annual BrunchFest, benefiting the Boys & Girls Club of the Emerald Coast. Top local restaurants and chefs will serve up creative dishes alongside beverages in this fan-favorite foodie event.

All proceeds support Boys & Girls Club programs focused on academic success, character and healthy lifestyles for local youth. Tickets are on sale now and expected to sell out quickly.

Info & tickets: zeffy.com/ticketing/5th-annual-brunchfest | Sponsorship/vendor info: cmayes@bgcec.com

LadyWorld Festival – Pop Culture, Podcasts & Power Vibes

Sept. 26-28 | Seascape Resort, Miramar Beach

The LadyGang is back with LadyWorld 2025—an immersive weekend escape of pop culture, comedy, music, and inspiration. Presented by e.l.f. Cosmetics and produced with Topeka, the three-day retreat brings powerhouse podcasters, comedians, musicians, and TV personalities to the Emerald Coast.

This year's lineup includes Giggly Squad's Hannah Berner; Girls Gotta Eat duo Ashley Hesseltine and Rayna Greenberg; Dancing with the Stars champion Kaitlyn Bristowe; Vanderpump Villa's Stassi

Schroeder; former Bachelorette Rachel Lindsay; E! News host Justin Sylvester; comedian Gina Brillon; and Ria and Fran from Chicks in the Office. Each night caps off with concerts featuring Ryan Cabrera, The Maine, Mark McGrath of Sugar Ray, Chris Kirkpatrick of *NSYNC, O-Town, LFO, and BBMak.

By day, festivalgoers can choose from beachside workouts, pickleball, yoga and sound baths, wellness and self-care classes, sip-and-sing socials, creative workshops, and the always-bustling Vendor

Village. "Think summer camp for grown women—bonfires, crafts, friendships, and fun," said LadyGang's Keltie Knight.

Weekend passes start at \$300, with new \$145 day passes offering flexibility for single-day guests. VIP tiers include exclusive merch and access perks.

Grab your girlfriends, dive into glam workshops, signature cocktails, live podcasts, and plenty of Instagrammable moments. Tickets and full details are available at ladyworld.co.

Aj's Seafood & Oyster Bar + **KIDS ON THE COAST FOUNDATION**

PRESENTS A MINECRAFT MOVIE

KIDS MOVIE DAY
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Monday, Oct. 13 • 12:00PM
FREE Hot Dogs & Snacks!

Join us for a spectacular evening as we join forces to end SUICIDE and PTSD among our Nations Heroes.

9TH ANNUAL
Emerald Coast
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A CALL TO ACTION

Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center
SATURDAY | SEPT 13, 2025

\$100 Per Guest
Attire RED!
(Table Sponsorships Available)
Evening will include dinner, entertainment, and live & silent auction.

More info contact: Kristi Beckman- kristi@sofmissions.org

PETS IN WEDDING

continued from page 7

and ask about any restrictions. At The Alice we do have a pet policy; service animals are permitted.

Designate a handler: As-

Pack essentials: Bring food, water, toys, waste bags and perhaps their bed or blanket for a cozy spot for rest.

Dress smartly: Choose pet attire that is comfortable, breathable and safe; no tight elastics or choking hazards.



sign a trusted friend or hire a professional to manage your pet during the event.

Practice beforehand: Rehearse your pet's role to reduce anxiety and ensure they are comfortable.

Capturing the Moment

Pets add spontaneity and charm to wedding photos. I highly suggest that you have your photographer meet your fur baby in advance. This is not something to spring on them the day of:

- Schedule pet-friendly photo sessions.
- Use treats or toys to get their attention.
- Capture candid moments like snuggles, kisses or playful antics.
- Alternatives If Your Pet Cannot Attend
 - If your pet is not suited for the big day or the venue does not allow animals, you can still honor them:
 - Include them in invitations or signage: Use illustrations or photos.
 - Add a pet-themed cake top-

per: Miniature versions of your furry friend.

- Create a tribute table: Display their photos with a sweet message.
- Incorporate them into vows: Mention your shared love for your pet.
- Have a to-go doggie bar: people love to bring treats home to their pet.

Final Thoughts

Including pets in weddings is a beautiful way to celebrate the full scope of your love story. With thoughtful planning and

a touch of creativity, your furry friend can be part of your most cherished memories. Whether they are walking down the aisle or simply wagging their tail from the sidelines, pets bring a unique kind of joy that makes your wedding truly unforgettable.

This incredibly special guest will play a part in Kiana & Anthony's upcoming celebrations at The Alice in February, and we cannot wait!



Florida Governor's Dinner Coming to Okaloosa Island

The Republican parties of Okaloosa, Walton, Santa Rosa, and Escambia counties are joining forces this fall to host the first-ever Panhandle Governor's Dinner. The event is set for Saturday, Oct. 18, 2025, at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center on Okaloosa Island.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis will deliver the keynote address, joined by Lt. Gov. Jay Collins and Chief Financial Officer Blaise Ingoglia. A VIP reception, social hour, and silent auction begin at 5:30 p.m., followed by dinner and the program at 6:45 p.m.

Early bird tickets are available through Sept. 21 at \$150 (general) and \$300 (VIP). Prices increase after the deadline. Proceeds benefit the four participating county Republican parties, helping fund operations, outreach, communications, and state-level participation.

Sponsorship opportunities range from \$3,000 to \$10,000, each including a reserved VIP table for 10. Silent auction donations are also welcomed, with businesses contributing items valued at \$1,000 or more receiving sponsorship recognition. A Patriot Sponsor level of \$600 provides two VIP tickets for First Responders, Veterans, or young Republicans.

Organizers emphasize the dinner as a major fundraising opportunity to support upcoming elections and strengthen conservative leadership across Northwest Florida.

For more information, sponsorship details, or ticket reservations, visit www.OkaloosaGOP.com or email Media@OkaloosaGOP.com. Business or semi-formal attire is requested.

Destin-Ft Walton Beach Convention Center

Fundraiser for the Okaloosa, Walton, Santa Rosa, & Escambia Republican Party

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 18TH, 2025

FLORIDA GOVERNOR'S DINNER

*** DINNER ***



Jay Collins,
Florida Lt. Governor



Ron DeSantis,
Florida Governor



Blaise Ingoglia,
Florida CFO

Early Bird Price thru Sept 21st
Dinner \$150 VIP \$300
Tickets at OkaloosaGOP.com

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Includes a VIP Table for 10

VIP Reception, Social Hour and Silent Auction start at 5:30 pm
Event starts at 6:45 pm

For Further Details:
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Chairman Doug Stauffer
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63 Defuniak St
Santa Rosa Beach, FL
850-231-4102
ajsgrayton.com



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 long-term 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 select 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.

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, 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.

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Featuring:

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"Jaw-dropping magic act"
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"Brilliant, incredible magic, & fantastic showmanship!"
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Reservations required:

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Now Appearing (and Disappearing) Nightly
The Palms of Destin Resort & Conference Center
 4201 Indian Bayou Trail, Destin, FL
FREE PARKING

26th ANNUAL

EMERALD COAST HOME & BOAT SHOW

Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center • 1250 Miracle Strip Pkwy, Fort Walton Beach

FREE ADMISSION TO THE PUBLIC

Saturday, September 20 • 10AM-5PM & Sunday, September 21 • 10AM-3PM

Over \$20,000 in Door Prizes and Free Giveaway Items offered by the Vendors

Featuring over 100 awesome, Home & Boat Show and Auto & Commercial vendors

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Tequila Lesson 101

By LARRY MCCRARY,
PRESIDENT, AGAZUL USA

You have probably noticed that whiskey bottles often list the actual age of the whiskey. Unlike whiskey (and some other spirits), tequila doesn't list the year on its bottles. Instead, you'll see terms such as **Blanco, Reposado, Añejo, Extra Añejo, Cristalino** and more.

Blanco (also known as silver) is often unaged and bottled directly after distillation; but it can be aged in wood for as long as 30 days and stainless steel for up to two months.

Reposado is the next level. It can mature as long as a full year. This tequila is versatile and a top choice for premium margaritas.

Next is añejo. When it comes to sipping tequilas, añejo is the sweet spot. This is the tequila variety for fans of bourbon and single malt Scotch whisky. It's complex, nuanced and perfect for sipping neat or on the rocks. añejo tequila is defined by being aged for one to three years. It



gets its name from the Spanish word for "old."

Extra añejo is aged for a minimum of three years, making it the smoothest and most refined type of tequila. Cristalino is a newer style of tequila, made by filtering aged tequila to remove color and impurities.

Tequila is usually aged in barrels made of oak. While there are other barrels used, they are most often American or French oak. Additionally, a number

of tequilas are aged in barrels previously used for bourbon or other American whiskeys. The barrel used will impart different aromas and flavors.

In general, tequila aged in bourbon barrels will have flavors and aromas such as charred oak, sticky toffee, toasted vanilla

beans, pipe tobacco, roasted agave, honey, cinnamon, cracked black pepper, dried fruits, caramelized sugar and more.

Añejo may be the most versatile tequila. Aged for at least one year, and sometimes longer, this tequila is appropriate for drinking neat, over ice, or with water. At the same time, if you buy a reasonably-priced bottle of añejo tequila, you'll still feel comfortable mixing with it.

If you're a tequila drinker, you can elevate your favorite whiskey-based cocktails by swapping out bourbon, blended Scotch whisky and other types of whiskey with añejo tequila. You can also use añejo tequila as the base for classic tequila-driven drinks like the Paloma or Margarita to add depth and flavor.

You can step up your cocktail by using extra añejo. Try a classic Old Fashioned with extra añejo tequila instead of the usual rye or bourbon for a unique, roasted agave take. The same goes with the Manhattan.

Whiskey drinkers who would like to branch out into tequila, añejo is the right choice for you. You should stock up on a bottle or two for sipping neat or on the rocks. As a bonus, añejo is an excellent choice for mixing. It can be used as a base for tequila beverages or as an alternative ingredient in drinks that are typically made with whiskey.



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Ashleigh's passion shines through in every custom project, offering a personal, one-on-one experience that makes jewelry shopping truly special. Discover the piece that tells your story—because your moments deserve to shine beyond measure.

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Is Now the Perfect Moment to Make A Move in the Real Estate Market? Let's Dive In...



BY PAUL DOMENECH

Is it a Good Time to Buy?

A good time to buy is when you are in a position to buy. Often, people think they should wait for interest rates to go down. Well, let's walk through that scenario. If you are waiting, do you think you are the only one? Most likely not. So, if the rates drop and more buyers come to the table to purchase

the same home, what do you think will happen to that value? Yup, you guessed it—multiple offers drive the price up, which then causes an increase in price and multiple offers for the next round. Not a great place to be as a buyer.

So, is now a good time to buy? If you can do it, do it now, and if or when the interest rate drops, refinance. Just make sure you have a team in your corner that will 'DOMEnate' the process, ensuring all the major items are inspected properly to avoid big-ticket expense surprises.

Is it a Good Time to Sell?

What a great question. With interest rates being what they are and a limited pool of buyers, the correct answer is both YES and NO. I am noticing that consumers in the market to buy are leveraging their "upgrading funds" to increase their monthly payment budget. So, if your home has all the big-ticket

items and features upgraded, it's a JACKPOT—perfect selling conditions with the right team that can "DOMEnate" the promotion and marketing of the property.

If you don't have the means to improve the space and major items but want or need to sell, the answer is still yes, it is a good time. However, you need the right team that will be able to present and navigate the value of the property to buyers and if necessary help you with the items that need upgrading. My team does have a program to help those in need get top dollar.

However, today is not the time to have the "Let's just put it on the market as is and see if someone will bite" mentality. The only bites taken for those listings are right out of the listing price. This is where we are seeing most of the drop-in prices. That's a NO-go situation.

So, plan to "DOMEnate" the market as close to turn-key, or hold tight; the time is not right.



When Should I Refinance?

Talk to your original lender. Sadly, the mortgage industry, like the real estate industry, has shifted, and when that happens, people tend to shift their focus to survival. A lot of promises and offers tend to shine but lose their luster in the long run. The habit of "have now and deal with later" is a culture that has been adopted by many, and a good talk track from a stranger with no long-standing relationship with you can lead to a win-lose situation. So, I advise making sure you are calling your original lender or feel free to contact me for a lender that, in the end,

will lead you into the future, not have you living just for today.

Thank you for taking the time to read my thoughts. If you need anything related to real estate—from roofs to cleaning and anything in between—give me a call. I've got a guy. I'm your HOMEboy. It's what has been coined by our customers as the Domenech Effect.

Check us out at Thedomenechgroup.com or feel free to contact me directly at 850-543-1418 or Paul@thedomenechgroup.com.

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BY DR.
KAREN
DEVORE

Let’s talk about cortisol. You’ve probably heard it called “the stress hormone”—and while that’s true, it’s also a bit of an oversimplification. Cortisol is one of the most essential hormones in your body, playing a key role in everything from your energy levels and metabolism to your mood and immune system.

But like anything in the body, balance is everything. When cortisol is too high or too low for too long, it can wreak havoc on your health.

I see this every day—patients who are feeling tired, wired, inflamed, anxious, or burnt out, but whose lab work comes back “normal.” Often, the missing piece of the puzzle is cortisol imbalance.

So, What Exactly Is Cortisol?

Cortisol is a hormone produced by your adrenal glands, two small glands that sit on top of your kidneys, and acts like a built-in alarm system. Its job is to help your body respond to stress—physical, emotional, or environmental. It also plays a role in blood sugar regulation, blood pressure, circadian rhythm (your sleep-wake cycle), and inflammation control.

When your body perceives a threat—whether it’s a traffic jam or a tough meeting—your brain sends a signal to your adrenals to release cortisol. In the short term, this is a good thing. It sharpens your focus, gives you a burst of energy, and helps you respond quickly.

But here’s the problem - most of us are living in a state of chronic stress. And your body doesn’t always know the difference between an actual emergency and an overflowing inbox or constant worry. In a healthy rhythm, cortisol rises in the morning to wake you up and drops in the evening to help you sleep. This natural rise and fall is what keeps your energy, focus, and mood stable.

Signs Your Cortisol Might Be Out of Balance

When cortisol levels stay ele-

vated for too long (or crash too low after prolonged stress), your body begins to show signs. Common symptoms include:

- Fatigue that doesn’t improve with rest
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Anxiety, irritability, or feeling “on edge”
- Weight gain, especially around the abdomen
- Brain fog or poor memory
- Low libido or irregular cycles
- Frequent illness or slow recovery
- Cravings for sugar, salt, or caffeine

Sound familiar? You’re not alone. Cortisol dysregulation is incredibly common—but it’s



often overlooked or misunderstood in conventional medicine.

Why Conventional Approaches Often Miss the Mark

In a traditional medical model, symptoms like these are often treated individually: fatigue gets a stimulant, mood gets a prescription, sleep gets a sedative. But those approaches rarely look at the bigger picture.

Instead, we ask: What’s going on beneath the surface? Why is your body stuck in survival mode? How can we help it shift into healing mode?

That’s where integrative care—and a deeper understanding of cortisol—can make all the difference.

How We Help: An Integrative Approach to Cortisol Health

We begin by mapping your body’s stress response through advanced testing. This often includes saliva-based cortisol panels or the DUTCH test, which track your hormone rhythms over the course of the day. From

there, we create a personalized plan that supports your whole system—mind and body.

True healing takes a whole-body approach. Here’s how we support cortisol health with integrative strategies:

Nervous System Support: Acupuncture is one of the most powerful tools we have for regulating the nervous system. It helps shift the body out of “fight or flight” and into “rest and digest,” lowering cortisol and pro-

moting resilience over time.
Herbal & Nutritional Therapy: Adaptogenic herbs like ashwagandha, rhodiola, and holy basil can help regulate

Continued on page 45

WOMEN’S WELLNESS REIMAGINED

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 Community

EC UNITED
continued from page 2

Cara Teeter and Jana Ramsey. They bridge a gap between law enforcement and volunteers and are an asset to the United Cajun Navy and other out-of-town volunteers, helping them navigate the area. They have a strong working relationship with the United Cajun Navy, who assists them in searches when they need more resources. “It’s nice that it’s not up to one organization. It nice to have the collaboration and access to resources as needed,” stated Justine.

Emerald Coast United has assisted with several search and rescue efforts in the area. Bret Valona, a U.S. Marine veteran, went missing in the Blue Moun-

tain Beach/Point Washington State Forest area after being dropped off at the Eastern Lake Trailhead, where he planned to spend several weeks in the forest. Although extensive canvassing of the area was carried out, his location remains unknown. Early March is when his phone was last known to be in service. He was last seen wearing a plaid shirt, cargo pants, a yellow raincoat, brown hiker boots, and carrying two backpacks. If you have any information, please contact the Walton County Sheriff’s Office at (850) 892-8111.

Their most recent search and rescue effort was for Trinity Eslinger, a search that greatly affected the entire Florida Panhandle and surrounding areas.

The United Cajun Navy assisted in the search effort, bringing in resources such as search and recovery K9s, helicopters, boats, search spotter aircraft that fly above the spotter choppers, and drones that fly lower, scanning the water, looking under docks. Their resources provided multi-layered details to the search area.

Emerald Coast United and the United Cajun Navy continued to search for Trinity after the Okaloosa Sheriff’s office and Coast Guard made the decision to scale back their resources. As long as Mother Nature is cooperative and they have resources, Emerald Coast United will continue search efforts when local officials need to pull back. “It took a village to help look for



Trinity. Unfortunately, we came up empty-handed, but it wasn’t for lack of effort,” said Justine. “I wish we were able to provide that closure for the family.”

Accidents happen to even the most prepared and knowledgeable people on the water, as Jeremy’s friends and family know too well, but continuing to educate and remind people could make a big difference. Justine suggests that locals and tourists alike pay attention to the water conditions and educate themselves on water safety. “People don’t realize how dangerous the water is,” stated Justine.

One suggestion is that more

information be available for those coming in from out of town. “The biggest thing we need to do as a community is we need to teach people what a rip tide looks like and what to do during a rip tide,” said Justine. “If every property management company around here could have a laminated flyer in their houses, it would be beneficial for our area to get them in the hands of all these wonderful people visiting.”

Other safety resources include looking at surf conditions on local beach cams, or

Continued on next page



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Around Town

Okaloosa County Women’s Hall of Fame Celebrates 30 Years

The Okaloosa County Commission on the Status of Women recently celebrated the 30th anniversary of its Women’s Hall of Fame, honoring seven outstanding women whose contributions have left a lasting mark on Okaloosa County.

Since 1995, 147 women have been inducted into the Hall of Fame, which recognizes those who have shaped the community through leadership in business, education, the arts, military service, and public service.

This year’s inductees were:

Peggy Brockman (Business Professional): Founder of Bring Hope Now, Brockman has spent three decades advocating for youth mental health, suicide prevention, and domestic violence awareness.

Martha “Jenny” Hamilton (Education, post-humous): Beloved Choctawhatchee High School educator, cheer sponsor, and student activities director whose career spanned more than 35 years.

Helen Harris (Mattie Kelly Cultural Arts): Pres-



ident of ADSO and owner of HH Arts, Harris has fostered artistic growth and public arts initiatives across the county.

Sherry Harlow (Pioneer): Retired Eglin Federal Credit Union PR manager with 45 years of service; founding member of the Emerald Coast PR Organization and champion of financial education.

Kay Rasmussen (Military): Associate Director of

One Okaloosa EDC, national board-certified economic developer, and longtime military liaison instrumental in securing federal defense funding.

Eloise Stevens (Community Service): Retired Air Force Lt. Colonel and commu-

nity leader involved in mentoring, Bible studies, voter drives, and women’s health advocacy.

Donna Tashik (Carolyn Spencer Humanitarian): Executive Director of Fresh Start for Children & Families, dedicated to helping homeless

families achieve self-sufficiency.

Together, these women join the ranks of those whose vision, service, and leadership have shaped Okaloosa County for the better over the past three decades.

EC UNITED

continued from previous page

texting one of the beach alert system numbers (Panama City Beach – Text “PCBFLAGS” to 888777, Destin/Fort Walton Beach/Okaloosa Island – Text “BEACH” to 44144, Walton County – Text “SAFETY” to 31279). In response to recent water emergencies, Bailey Brooks started the new nonprofit, Safe on the Emerald Coast. On their Facebook page, you can find water safety tips and other relatable content.


In addition to search and rescue on the water, Emerald Coast United and the United Cajun Navy also helped with post-hurricane disaster relief. Immediately after Hurricane Helene and Hurricane Milton, they began organizing donation stations with fire departments and volunteers across the panhandle and were able to fill 10 semis full of essential items to send to storm victims throughout the af-

ected areas. The United Cajun Navy was able to assist in rescue operations in the affected areas and help with the distribution of donations and essential supplies.

Emerald Coast United is gearing up for hurricane season again, preparing to be ready to assist with post-storm recovery and assistance as needed. Getting essential items to storm victims is a vital part of recovery efforts.

They hope to continue gaining volunteers and expanding beyond the region to help as many people in need as they can. “I hope to continue to grow and get more volunteers willing to work with us,” said Justine. “We only want to grow and get bigger.”

If you are interested in volunteering or donating to Emerald Coast United, you can reach them at (850) 312-3303 or ECUnited850@gmail.com. You can follow them on Facebook for more up-to-date information.



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Birkenstock: Centuries of Comfort, Now at Blue Bay Lifestyle Co.

BY LIESEL SCHMIDT

Look down at your feet. What shoes are you wearing? How long have you been wearing them, and what roads have those shoes travelled?

If you're like most of us, you don't give much thought to your shoes beyond how they'll serve

you—if they look good, if they feel good, how well they'll navigate the terrain ahead. And sure, your shoes have a personal history attached to you: where they've taken you, where you've taken them, the memories you've made in them (some good, some bad, some best left

in the dust behind you). But, here's something you probably never think about when you pull those shoes out of the closet: They have a history all their own.

Interestingly, some of the oldest shoe companies are hundreds of years old—and the

name Birkenstock ranks near the top of the pile. And no, they weren't invented for the free-love-giving, Woodstock-bound hippie era of the late '60s and '70s. Get a cup of coffee and settle in—it's story time at Blue Bay Lifestyle Co.

This one actually begins in 1774, with a cobbler in the small German village of Langen-Bergheim named Johann Adam Birkenstock. Yep. That Birkenstock. Over the next hundred years, Johann and the men of his family mastered their craft of shoe making, passing down techniques to generation after generation of fathers to sons.

And then something incredible happened. In 1896, Konrad Birkenstock created something that, for the times, was pretty profound: a flexible footbed. It was kind of unheard of—shoes of the era were rigid, narrow and conformed to the dictates of fashion, making them stylish, but decidedly uncomfortable and unsupportive. Konrad's groundbreaking idea was that footwear should conform to the human foot—not the other way around. To bring his vision to life, he began producing contoured insoles, essentially revolutionizing the shoe industry around the world.

By 1902, Konrad's first design had been refined into the first contoured arch support. Of course, it wasn't anything glamorous—and it was sold mainly to shoemakers who put them into custom footwear. But it addressed a problem that, during the industrial age, was becoming more of an issue. Factory workers who stood for hours at a machine or spent their days on cobblestone streets needed relief from the pain caused by stiff, nonconforming shoes. Birkenstock's arch supports offered it.

In the 1930s, Birkenstock's footbeds had found their way into medical use. Orthopedists, podiatrists and even soldiers realized the benefits of proper foot support, but the product was still only considered a medical tool. It was still decades away from becoming a fashion statement.

Birkenstock's time to shine came in 1963, when Karl

Birkenstock launched the company's first sandal—complete with a deep, anatomically designed footbed. Marketed as a fitness sandal, the Madrid was touted to strengthen leg muscles and promote natural gait. But here's the kicker: Birkenstock had finally stepped into the limelight and was no longer hidden inside a shoe.

By the 1970s, Birkenstocks had become part of the uniform of American counterculture. College students, artists and free thinkers embraced them as a symbol of nonconformity—they were authentic, comfortable and flew in the face of fashion norms. Hippies wore them to festivals and protests, while professors wore them in the lecture halls of colleges and universities. Without having to utter a word, the sandal's signature wide straps and unpretentious cork soles spoke the language of a lifestyle that was all about simplicity and questioning authority.

That representation of the counterculture remained for decades, and Birkenstock continued as a niche non-fashion fashion statement until the 1990s and early 2000s, when minimalism came back into vogue and comfort became chic. Designers began collaborating with Birkenstock, sending its sandals down Paris and New York runways, and even celebrities began wearing them.

Nearly 250 years after it began, Birkenstock is more than a shoe brand—it's a cultural touchstone that straddles the line of so many categories: medical, practical, fashionable, sustainable. It's the best of all worlds. And here's something we love: Birkenstock still proudly manufactures in Germany, still uses its original cork-latex formula, still maintains its focus on foot health.

Now that you know the history of the shoe on your foot, we'll teach you how to say it properly: Beer-ken-shtok.

Want your own pair? Whether it's your first or your 50th, come into Blue Bay and check out our selection of Birkenstock Arizona sandals, in great colors

Continued on page 31

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Hire for Safety: What Every Homeowner and Business Should Know



BY DANICA LAFAIRE

Picture this: a ladder leaning against your siding, a roofer balancing in the breeze, or a housekeeper stretching to dust a transom no one’s touched since hurricane season. Most home projects look routine — until they aren’t. The difference between a close call and a catastrophe is rarely luck. It’s preparation: safety training, the right equipment, and the right kind of insurance carried by a company that takes responsibility for its people.

Why safety training matters

Falls remain the leading cause of death in construction. OSHA reported more than 400 fatal falls in 2023 alone — tragedies that experts say are almost always preventable with proper

training and equipment. That’s why OSHA requires fall protection at as little as four feet in many industries, and specific ladder and stairway training for anyone who climbs them.

And here’s something most people don’t realize: it doesn’t take a rooftop fall for things to go wrong. Even a tumble from a simple step ladder — the kind most of us keep in the garage — can cause life-changing injuries. The CDC reports that falls are the most common cause of traumatic brain injury nationwide, and many of those happen from heights under ten feet. A bump to the head on concrete or tile might not sound dramatic, but it can lead to concussions, fractures, or worse. That’s why proper training and safe practices matter at every height, not just on high roofs.

If a company can’t show you how it trains its crews, that’s a red flag.

The insurance side homeowners can’t ignore

In Florida, workers’ compensation (WC) isn’t optional — it’s the law. Construction employers must carry coverage with one or more employees, and non-construction companies must carry

it with four or more. Homeowners can verify coverage through Florida’s state-run “Proof of Coverage” database.

Why this matters: if someone is injured on your property and the company doesn’t carry WC, the fallout can get complicated. Coverage generally protects the worker and the company — but without it, a worker may turn to the homeowner for damages.

And here’s the tricky part: in construction, even “1099 independent contractors” are usually treated as employees unless they’ve filed a legal exemption. That means the hiring contractor is liable for their coverage. Companies that rely on loosely defined 1099 labor often leave both workers and homeowners exposed.

For businesses, the stakes are even higher. If you’re a shop owner, property manager, or office leader, hiring uninsured or untrained contractors doesn’t just put workers at risk — it puts your business at risk of lawsuits, downtime, and reputational damage. One accident on your property can disrupt operations, lead to costly claims, or even draw OSHA’s attention if employees are present. Choosing vendors with verified workers’

comp coverage and strong safety training isn’t just about compliance — it’s smart business risk management.

Spotting the companies that put safety first

So, how can you tell if a contractor truly values safety? Here are a few signs you can see right away:

Uniforms and PPE: Do crews arrive in company gear, using harnesses, gloves, or goggles where needed? If not, ask why.

Well-maintained equipment: Ladders, cones, and safety gear should look cared-for and ready to use, not thrown together.

Clear insurance answers: A reputable company will gladly show you proof of coverage and point you to the state website to double-check.

Direct employees: When workers are W-2 employees, coverage and training are consistent. Ask if the crew is in-

house or all 1099 subcontractors.

Visible safety habits: Look for small routines — ladders tied off, walkways cleared, teammates spotting each other. Safety is a culture, not a checklist.

For commercial jobs, these signs are even more important. Look for vendors who provide site-specific safety plans, use signage or cones to protect customer walkways, and communicate clearly about when and how work will be done. These habits show they’re thinking beyond their crew — they’re protecting your employees, customers, and reputation too.

Five safety questions to ask any contractor

- Want a quick gut-check before you sign? Try these:
- Do you carry workers’ comp, and can I verify it through the state?

Continued on page 25



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Game On!



BY SCOTT MILLER

Football season is here—Check out the local top spots to eat, cheer and high-five your way through the games.

What makes football so popular? Of all the sports Americans play and watch year-round, football stands tall at the top of the heap. High school, college or pro—no other game rallies such a passionate, loyal fanbase. It's more than a sport; it's a tradition. Football brings people together, stirs anticipation long before kickoff and delivers the kind of excitement that keeps us talking long after the final whistle. No other sport even comes



close. We love our football—and that, my friends, is just the way it is.

Here in Florida, we joke that there are four seasons: Tourist Season, Hurricane Season, Snowbird Season and, of course, Football Season. And as fall edges closer, you can feel it in the air. Friday nights under the lights. Saturdays filled with rivalries. Sundays and Mondays devoted to the pros. Football season is here!

We'll be wearing our favorite team jerseys, cheering and high-fiving, glued to every play on the big screen surrounded by a sea of fans who feel the same electric charge. Oh yes, football season is back—and I, for one, can't wait for the games to begin.

And here along the Emerald Coast, we're blessed. Some of the best sports bars and restaurants anywhere are ready to welcome us in, serve up great food

and cold drinks, and make every game feel like a championship. Here are a few of my favorites. So, grab your crew, claim your spot and get in on the action—I'll see you there!

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 die hard football fans, AJ's boasts the one and only Jumbotron on the Destin Harbor, where you can watch your favorite games on the BIG, BIG screen surrounded by the energy and beauty of the Destin Harbor. AJ's serves up delicious daily

specials, mouth-watering drinks plus entertaining live music all month, too. Don't miss any of the action! Come on down to AJ's Seafood and Oyster Bar all season long.

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

Austons on 98

Offering an amazing raw oyster bar and the best happy hour in town, Austons is the place to be and home of the 102-foot bar, including 32 beers on draft! Some of the specialties include little neck clams, freshly shucked raw oysters, New England-style clam chowder and jumbo shrimp cocktail. With big screen TVs all around and football season upon us, there's no bad seat in the house. So, come by and watch the games all season long. Happy Hour daily from 3-6 p.m., \$2 off all bar drinks. Bucket Specials all day every day. Monday-Friday from 3 p.m. - 5 p.m. \$3 off a dozen raw oysters. Auston's on

Continued on page 25

AJ's FOOTBALL IS BACK!

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

EAT
SPECIAL FOOTBALL
MENUS AT EACH LOCATION

DRINK
BEER SPECIALS & GREAT DRINKS!

SEC Football Schedule

SEC	Aug 30	Sept 6	Sept 13	Sept 20	Sept 27	Oct 4	Oct 11	Oct 18	Oct 25	Nov 1	Nov 8	Nov 15	Nov 22	Nov 29
BAMA	@ FSU	UL-Monroe	Wisconsin	Open	@ UGA	VANDY	@ MIZZ	TENN	@ SCAR	Open	LSU	OKLA	Eastern Illinois	@ AUB
ARK	ALA A&M	ARK State	@ OLE MISS	@ Memphis	Notre Dame	Open	@ TENN	TEXAS A&M	AUB	MISS ST	Open	@ LSU	@ TEXAS	MIZZ
AUBURN	@ Baylor	Ball State	South ALA	@ OKLA	@ TEXAS A&M	Open	UGA	MIZZ	@ ARK	UK	@ VANDY	Open	Mercer	BAMA
FLA	Long Island	South FLA	@ LSU	@ Miami	Open	TEXAS	@ TEXAS A&M	MISS ST	Open	vs UGA	@ UK	@ OLE MISS	TENN	FSU
UGA	Marshall	Austin Peay	@ TENN	Open	BAMA	UK	@ AUB	OLE MISS	Open	vs FLA	@ MISS ST	TEXAS	Charlotte	GA Tech
UK	Toledo	OLE MISS	Eastern Mich	Open	@ S CAR	@ UGA	Open	TEXAS	TENN	@ AUB	FLA	TENN Tech	@ VANDY	@ Louisville
LSU	@ Clemson	Louisiana Tech	FLA	So. Louisiana	@ OLE MISS	Open	S CAR	@ VANDY	TEXAS A&M	Open	@ BAMA	ARK	Western UK	@ OKLA
MISS ST	@ So Miss	Arizona State	Alcorn State	Northern Illinois	TENN	@ TEXAS A&M	Open	@ FLA	TEXAS	@ ARK	UGA	@ MIZZ	Open	OLE MISS
MIZZ	Central ARK	Kansas	Louisiana	S CAR	U Mass	Open	BAMA	@ AUB	@ VANDY	Open	TEXAS A&M	MISS ST	@ OKLA	@ ARK
OLE MISS	UGA State	@ UK	ARK	Tulane	LSU	Open	Washington St	@ UGA	@ OKLA	SCAR	The Citadel	FLA	Open	@ MISS ST
OKLA	Illinois State	Michigan	@ Temple	AUB	Open	Kent State	TEXAS	@ S CAR	OLE MISS	@ TENN	Open	@ BAMA	MIZZ	LSU
S CAR	Virginia Tech	S CAR St	VANDY	@ MIZZ	UK	Open	@ LSU	OKLA	BAMA	@ OLE MISS	Open	@ TEXAS A&M	Coastal Car	Clemson
TENN	Syracuse	East TENN St	UGA	UAB	@ MISS ST	Open	ARK	@ BAMA	@ UK	OKLA	Open	New Mexico St	@ FLA	VANDY
TEXAS	@ Ohio State	San Jose State	UTEP	Open	Sam Houston	@ FLA	vs OKLA	@ UK	@ MISS ST	VANDY	Open	@ UGA	ARK	TEXAS A&M
Texas A&M	UTSA	Utah State	@ Notre Dame	Open	AUB	MISS ST	FLA	@ ARK	@ LSU	Open	@ MIZZ	S CAR	Samford	@ TEXAS
VANDY	Charleston So	@ Virginia Tech	@ S CAR	GA State	Utah State	@ BAMA	Open	LSU	MIZZ	@ TEXAS	AUB	Open	UK	@ TENN



2025 College Football Game Day Highlights

Week 1:
Friday 8/29
Auburn @ Baylor 7 p.m. FOX
Saturday 8/30
Texas @ Ohio State 11 a.m. FOX
Alabama @ Florida St. 2:30 p.m. ABC
LSU @ Clemson 6:30 p.m. ABC
Sunday 8/31
Virginia Tech @ S. Carolina 2 p.m. ESPN

Week 2:
Saturday 9/6
San Jose St. @ Texas 11am
Ole Miss @ Kentucky 2:30 p.m. ABC
South Florida @ Florida 3:15 p.m. SECN
Ball St. @ Auburn 6:30 p.m. ESPU
Michigan @ Oklahoma 6:30 p.m. ABC

Week 3:
Saturday 9/13
Wisconsin @ Alabama 11 a.m.

South Alabama @ Auburn 11:45 a.m. SECN
Georgia @ Tennessee 2:30 p.m. ABC
Texas A&M @ Notre Dame 6:30 p.m. NBC
Florida @ LSU 6:30 p.m. ABC

Week 4:
Saturday 9/20
Florida @ Miami (TBA)
Auburn @ Oklahoma (TBA)
UAB @ Tennessee 11:45 a.m. SECN
SE Louisiana @ LSU 6:45 p.m. SECN

Week 5:
Saturday 9/27
Notre Dame @ Arkansas 11 a.m. ABC
LSU @ Ole Miss (TBA)
Auburn @ Texas A&M (TBA)
Tennessee @ Mississippi St. (TBA)
Alabama @ Georgia 6:30 p.m. ABC

2025 High School Football Schedule

- Destin Sharks:**
Head Coach: E.G. Green
August 22 – vs. Northview
August 29 – vs. Baker
September 5 – Open Week
September 12 – at Pensacola
September 19 – vs. Taylor County
September 26 – at Opp (AL)
October 3 – at Pensacola Catholic
October 10 – Open Week
October 17 – at Chipley
October 24 – vs. B.T. Washington
October 31 – at Port St. Joe
- Fort Walton Beach Vikings:**
Head Coach: Josh Pulliam (1st Year)
August 15 – vs. Blountstown (KO Classic)
August 22 – at Tate
August 29 – at South Walton
September 5 – vs. West Florida
September 11 – vs. Washington
September 19 – at Walton
September 26 – at Rickards *
October 3 – vs. Wakulla
October 10 – vs. Arnold *
October 17 – Open Week
October 24 – vs. Choctaw *
October 31 – at Crestview
- * Denotes District Game

BOATHOUSE
OYSTER BAR

A Locals Favorite For Over 30 Years!

- Locals On The Harbor:** July 11 @ 5pm
Air Guitar Competition: July 20 @ 3pm w/ \$500 Prize
Slacker Olympics Fundraiser: July 26 @ 10am w/ Road Dogg Rescue
- LIVE MUSIC!**
- Mondays:** 4pm: Cole Jordan
8pm: Roshambo
- Tuesdays:** 4pm: Zach Renzi
8pm: Austin Jennings
- Wednesdays:** 4pm: Hunter Dawson
8pm: Boathomies
- 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
4pm: Shane Curle
8pm: Shane Curle Trip

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

288 Harbor Blvd, Destin
(850) 837-3645

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

Destin Harbor just got a taste of Louisiana. Chef Ernie of Café Nola, with his partners from the Bayou State, has introduced **Tony Chachere's Crispy Cajun Chicken** to the Destin Harbor dining scene—and locals are already raving. Open 11 a.m.–2 p.m. Monday through Saturday and 11 a.m.–4

p.m. on Sundays, Crispy Cajun serves up chicken that's marinated for a full 24 hours before it ever hits the fryer. So, the rich Cajun flavor runs deep on the inside, not just the outside. Add in their signature extra-crispy batter, and you get chicken that's perfectly golden, crunchy on the outside and bursting with



Pair it with Tony's jambalaya, dirty rice, red beans & rice, Cajun fries or onion rings, and you've got a plate that tastes like home in Louisiana. Or grab a sandwich to go. On a boat? Find their sandwiches on Crab Island, too!

ings, nothing beats the Crispy Cajun Big Game Family Special Pack—\$49.99 for 12 pieces bone-in or 24 tenders with sauces, four hearty Cajun sides and warm, cornbread biscuits with honey.

As Chef Ernie promises:
 “This is the best chicken you
 will ever eat.”

ONLY!

\$49.99



plex, aged to reveal de

Come out, celebrate community and discover your new favorite tequila with Agazul at the Hispanic Music Festival, 1900 Lewis Turner Blvd., Fort Walton Beach.

BEST PLACES

continued from page 22

98 is open daily from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. and features its own “Real Deal Nashville Hot Sauce.” View full menu at austonson98.com. (850) 842-3200

125 Poinciana Blvd.,
Miramar Beach
Austonson98.com

Boathouse Oyster Bar

Oysters, live music and a local vibe, the Boathouse is where the locals go with live music every night. Located in the heart of Destin on the Destin Harbor, the Boathouse specializes in making oysters a delicacy. Boathouse’s gumbo recipe was written by Mama Gumbo herself. And, of course, the oysters are raw, steamed or baked, just the way you like ‘em. The first Friday of each month, The Boathouse hosts locals on the Destin Harbor from 5-7 p.m. Listen and move with live entertainment daily. See ad for bands and times. Mu-

sic schedule subject to change. Follow on Facebook for updates. During or after the game, mosey on over to hang with the locals.

(850) 837-3645

288-B Harbor Blvd., Destin
Boathouseoysterbardestin.com

Tailfins Waterfront Grill

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

Looking for a locals’ favorite breakfast before the game? Start your day off right with Tailfins breakfast from 8-11 a.m., seven days a week. Enjoy a classic breakfast with bacon and eggs, a seafood or Cajun omelet and even a kid’s smiley pancake. Be sure to order up a round of mimosas and bloody marys. Enjoy some of your favorite food and drinks, scrumptious early bird dinner specials Monday to Friday, 4-6 p.m. Happy hour

from 4-6 p.m. Monday through Friday, featuring \$24 domestic bottle buckets, \$7 house wines and well drinks and \$5 Long Island iced teas. Live music on the docks. Tailfins is a go-to destination for sports watching featuring more than 70 big screen TVs showing all college football games and Sunday Ticket.

(850) 842-3333

On the Harbor in Destin,
172 Harbor Blvd.
tailfinsdestin.com

DAILY CRUISES: “Talk of the Town” Tikis, Tailfins’ newest, one-of-a-kind tiki boat, features on-board restrooms and certified captains. Talk of the Town tikis are the only Coast Guard certified Tiki boats in the U.S.! En-

joy 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) 842-3333

On the Harbor in Destin,
172 Harbor Blvd.
tailfinsdestin.com

HIRE FOR SAFETY

continued from page 21

- Are the people coming to my home or business W-2 employees or subcontractors?
- What safety training do your crews receive?
- How often do you update or inspect your equipment?
- Can I see your written safety policy or plan for my project?

The bottom line

Whether it’s your family home or your business storefront, the principle is the same: safety is good stewardship. For homeowners, it protects your household. For businesses, it

protects your people, your customers, and your livelihood. Choosing companies that invest in training, carry the right insurance, and employ people they’re proud to call their own makes all the difference.

At Fish Window Cleaning in Northwest Florida, safety isn’t an afterthought — it’s the very first measure on our scorecard. We believe the most important part of every job is that our team members return home safely at the end of the day. Clean windows may shine, but nothing matters more than protecting the people who make it possible.

PRO FOOTBALL

continued previous from page

Dallas Cowboys at Chicago Bears, 3:25 p.m., Fox
Arizona Cardinals at San Francisco 49ers, 3:25 p.m., Fox
Kansas City Chiefs at New York Giants, 7:15 p.m., NBC

Monday, Sept. 22

Detroit Lions at Baltimore Ravens, 7:15 p.m., ESPN/ABC

WEEK 4

Thursday, Sept. 25

Seattle Seahawks at Arizona Cardinals, 7:15 p.m., Prime Video
Sunday, Sept. 27
Minnesota Vikings at Pittsburgh Steelers (Dublin), 8:30 a.m., NFL Network
New Orleans Saints at Buffalo Bills, Noon, CBS
Washington Commanders at Atlanta Falcons, Noon, CBS
Los Angeles Chargers at New York Giants, Noon, CBS

Tennessee Titans at Houston Texans, Noon, CBS
Cleveland Browns at Detroit Lions, Noon, Fox
Carolina Panthers at New England Patriots, Noon, Fox
Philadelphia Eagles at Tampa Bay Buccaneers, Noon, Fox
Jacksonville Jaguars at San Francisco 49ers, 3:05 p.m., Fox
Indianapolis Colts at Los Angeles Rams 3:05 p.m., Fox
Baltimore Ravens at Kansas City Chiefs, 3:25 p.m., CBS
Chicago Bears at Las Vegas Raiders, 3:25 p.m., CBS
Green Bay Packers at Dallas Cowboys, 7:20 p.m., NBC

Monday, Sept. 29

New York Jets at Miami Dolphins, 7:15 p.m., ESPN
Cincinnati Bengals at Denver Broncos, 7:15 p.m., ABC



RAW BAR!

Open 7 Days a
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11 AM - 9 PM



Home of the 102 ft. bar
including 32 beers on draft!

LIVE MUSIC!

Every Night Except Thursday
6-9 PM

TRIVIA

Thursdays 7-9 PM

HAPPY HOUR!

Everyday 3-6 PM

Specialties include
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oysters, New England style clam chowder
and jumbo shrimp cocktail!



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7 Days a Week, 8 am until 11 am

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Baja Fried Fish Tacos \$12.95

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KC Smashed Cheeseburger \$12.95

EARLY BIRD DINNER SPECIALS

Monday-Friday 3-6pm

Local Catch Mahi \$19.95

New Orleans Cajun Gulf Shrimp \$19.95

Kansas City Baby Back Ribs

Half Rack \$15.95 / Full Rack \$24.95

HAPPY HOUR DRINKS

Monday-Friday 3-6pm

Margaritas, Johnnys Red Ale,

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\$5



Live Music on the Docks

172 Harbor Blvd. Destin

(850) 650-1200

TailfinsDestin.com

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NOV. 1, 2025
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Fudpucker's Beachside Bar & Grill

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

Fudpucker's is going all out with its Pirate Brew Fest on Saturday, Nov. 1, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Expect a lively afternoon of food, fun and games, plus live music, artists, vendors and plenty of drink samples. Highlights include a pirate costume contest, beer memorabilia displays, a magician, mermaid and even a fire performer. Pirate attire is highly encouraged, and the first



100 swashbucklers through the gate will score special gifts. Admission is FREE.

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

Café Destin

Looking for dining the entire family can enjoy? Looking for a place to work with free WiFi while enjoying your cup of coffee? For breakfast and lunch, Café Destin offers an expanded menu serving breakfast staples such as pancakes, waffles with Nutella, omelets, eggs benedict,

biscuits and gravy and more. For a lighter take, it also has a variety of fancy toasts (avocado, salmon and more), along with pastries and muffins. For lunch, choose from a variety of burgers, sandwiches and salads. You will love the full-service coffee shop, offering everything from hot or iced fresh, local Amavida coffee to espresso and lattes. And there are diverse fresh fruit smoothies and a variety of tantalizing teas. Check out the special kids menu, too. Indoor and outdoor seating on the large covered patio are both available. Book after-hours for private events or special occasions. Open for breakfast and lunch every day, 7 a.m.-2 p.m.

(850) 424-6777
 985 US-98 E, Destin
cafedestin.com

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- Photographer
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850.217.5710

CelebrationsbytheSea.com

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 DJ Zoran, Event Coordinator
 DJ / Emcee
DestinZoran@CelebrationsbytheSea.com

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TENTH ANNUAL BLOODY MARY FESTIVAL

PRESENTED BY **SOUTH WALTON FLORIDA** POWERED BY **STEP ONE GMC FORT WALTON BEACH**

SATURDAY,
OCTOBER 11, 2025
11 AM - 2 PM

\$60 IN ADVANCE | \$75 AT THE DOOR

TO PURCHASE TICKETS, VISIT THEMARKETSHOPS.COM

PROCEEDS BENEFIT 

TICKET INCLUDES:

- BLOODY MARYS
by the area's top restaurants and your vote for the Best in South Walton
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by Idyll Hounds
- BUBBLY BAR
- SPIKED SELTZERS
by Palm Folly
- LIVE MUSIC & DJ
- LIVE STREAMING
of SEC Football
- LOCAL EATS & SHOPPING
- PHOTO BOOTH
- CIGAR BAR
- CUSTOM TRUCKER HAT BAR

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 Boutiques & Eateries

30A EATS                               <

**FREE
ADMISSION**



PIRATE BREW FEST

**SATURDAY
Nov 1st, 2025
11am - 3pm
at Fudpucker's**

www.PirateBrewFest.com

*Food, Fun & Games, Live Music
Artists/Vendors, Alcohol Samples
Pirate Costume Contest • Beer Memorabilia
Magician • Mermaid • Fire Performer*



**PIRATE ATTIRE
ENCOURAGED**

GIFTS FOR THE FIRST 100 PIRATES!



Environment

Kayak on a Bay: Be Amazed. Be Free. Be Here.

For Joel and Kristen Lavy, kayaks are not just small boats. Kayaks are vessels that transport people into nature together, creating a shared experience that gives way to treasured lifetime memories. A memory discussed fondly amongst friends or family as the years pass by, as they do all too quickly. Kayak on a Bay's mission is simple: to help people slow down, reconnect, and be outdoors, be together, be present, and to create life long



memories for its participants—one paddle at a time.



Joel, who previously served in the U.S. Air Force, fell in love



with kayaking years ago while navigating the demands of military life. Paddling became his escape—his reset button. “It’s where I’m at peace,” he says. That feeling stuck with him. Now, as a husband, dad, and local business owner, he’s sharing that same peace—and sense of play—with others. Joel’s calm energy and love for the outdoors shape every part of the Kayak on a Bay experience, making it feel more like a neighbor inviting you out for an adventure.

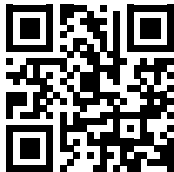
Each rental includes everything you need: high-quality, non-sinkable kayaks, paddles, life vests, biodegradable cooling towels, and foam water shooters

for a little splash of fun. It’s easy, safe, and designed for all ages and all adventure levels.

Kayaking isn’t just exercise—it’s memory-making. It’s a chance to be with family, be social, be wild, or simply be still. Whether it’s a screen-free afternoon with your kids, a unique date idea, or solo time to recharge, kayaking lets you feel something real.

Kayak on a Bay operates daily—not just on weekends. Locals enjoy special pricing, and it’s the perfect recommendation for visiting friends and family looking to experience the real magic of the bay.

Because the bay is calling. Be ready. Book your experience at www.kayakonabay.com, or scan the QR code to start your story.



DEPARTURES
7 DAYS A WEEK

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Tiki Boat Tours
6-15 passengers, capt. operated, restroom

The World Famous 3-Hour Tour • Fireworks Tour • Sunset Tour

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Now!

Located at 172 Harbor Blvd., Destin | Tailfins Tikis 850-650-1111
Book online: tailfinsislandadventure.com - or - tailfinstikis.com

Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance Hosts Mattie Kelly Family Bay Day

Saturday, Sept. 27 | 10 a.m.–2 p.m. | Fred Gannon Rocky Bayou State Park | \$5 per vehicle (park entrance fee)

Families are invited to celebrate the Choctawhatchee

Bay at the annual Mattie Kelly Family Bay Day. Presented by the Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance (CBA), in partnership with the Choctawhatchee Bay Estuary Program and the Mattie Kelly Environmental Initiative through the Northwest Florida State College Foundation, the event highlights the bay’s ecological richness through hands-on activities, exploration stations, and the always-popular fish printing.

Bay Day is designed to connect children and adults with nature, encouraging environmental awareness and coastal stewardship. All ages are welcome, and families are encouraged to learn, explore, and play along Rocky Bayou’s shoreline. For more information, visit www.basinalliance.org or email CBA@nwfsc.edu.

KAYAK
On A Bay

AMERICA'S BEST KAYAK RENTAL

Learning, Laughs, and Conservation Await this September at the Gulfarium!

By MARY FOMBY, GULFARIUM

The weather may be cooling down, but things are heating up at Gulfarium this September with programs designed to educate, inspire, and connect families with marine life like never before.

Dive into Learning: Homeschool Week Returns!

Mark your calendars for Monday, September 8 – Friday, September 12, because Homeschool Week at the Gulfarium is back and better than ever! Families can enjoy exclusive discounted admission—just \$14 for students ages 3–17 and \$22 for one parent or chaperone per group. Plus, students receive 20% off animal encounters throughout the week.

Each morning kicks off with Daily Storytime in the Living Sea Aquarium at 10:20am, followed by a hands-on guided experience at 11:20 a.m. From helping feed turtles at Turtle



Creek to getting up close with horseshoe crabs in the Tidepool, every day brings a new adventure in learning. Homeschool Week is the perfect mix of education and excitement that your budding marine biologist won't want to miss!

PBS Kids Day at the Gulfarium!

Get ready for a family day full of fun and imagination! On Saturday, September 13th, the

Gulfarium is thrilled to welcome Carl the Collector and Clifford the Big Red Dog for a special PBS Kids Day celebration.

Kids can dive into PBS KIDS-themed arts & crafts, explore the park through a scavenger hunt, and, of course, enjoy meet-and-greet time with their favorite characters. Combine that with all the excitement of marine life encounters, and you've got the perfect recipe for an unforgettable family outing!



CAREing for Turtles: A Behind-the-Scenes Experience

Don't miss the last opportunities of the season to take part in the CAREing for Turtles program—an after-hours, behind-the-scenes look at our Gulfarium CARE Center. Guests are invited to tour the rehabilitation facility, meet current patients, and even practice a mock sea turtle intake to see firsthand how our team responds to rescue calls.

In partnership with Des-

tin-Fort Walton Beach, the program highlights the importance of protecting nesting beaches and the tireless work being done to rescue and rehabilitate sea turtles right here on the Emerald Coast.

Since opening in 2015, the CARE Center has successfully released hundreds of turtles back into the Gulf. Your participation not only supports conservation but also helps spread awareness about the challenges these incredible animals face in the wild.

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Gulfarium
Marine Adventure Park

 Off the Hook

This Ain't My First Rodeo, But It Is My Last...

BY HELEN DONALDSON, DESTIN FISHING RODEO DIRECTOR

As we come together to celebrate the 77th Annual Destin Fishing Rodeo, I find myself reflecting on what this event has meant to me—and to so many others—over the years. After more than two decades at the helm, this year will mark my final Rodeo as Director. It's a moment filled with emotion, pride and deep gratitude.

The Journey

In 1998 I was hired as director of the Rodeo, we operated out of the Fisherman's Co-Op. Not long after, we moved to Harborwalk Marina, and eventually found a long-term home at AJ's Seafood & Oyster Bar. That move was transformative for the event.

In those early years, weigh-ins were held in two shifts with a long midday break—a schedule that worked well for a while. But, after paying closer attention to boat patterns, we realized many charters returned around 1 p.m. and quickly turned around for afternoon trips. We adjusted our



"When I started, we sold T-shirts under a tent. Today ... we have a trailer for sales, and a stock trailer to keep up with growing demand."

hours to remain open continuously from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.—a decision that made a meaningful difference for our anglers and helped the Rodeo to grow.

We've now been hosted by AJ's for nearly 20 years. I'm especially thankful to Alan Laird for his ongoing support, the



dedicated maintenance team and Rachel Green, who has worked tirelessly to help bring all the moving parts of this event together every year.

The People Behind the Scenes

No one accomplishes something like this alone. From the very beginning, Ham and Marion Palmgren were instrumental in guiding me. Marion stood beside me throughout the years, offering knowledge, encouragement and the kind of friendship that sustains a person. Mr. Ham passed in 2013, and I still miss his wit, his generous spirit and his willingness to wear any Hal-



loween costume we asked him to. Bruce Cheves has also been a constant presence—offering not only wisdom and institutional memory, but also a deep love of the fishing community. Tina Harbuck at the Destin Log has documented the Rodeo's story faithfully each year, and Angela Kalthoff has ensured that our operations remained organized and efficient, especially during the busiest of times.

I would be remiss not to mention Ann White, who has led our merchandise and marketing efforts with creativity and dedication for 20 years. Her work helped define the visual identity of the Rodeo, and her

friendship has been one of the great gifts of my time here.

Growth and Change

So much has changed. When I started, we sold T-shirts under a tent with a single design in two colors. Today, our Rodeo merchandise includes multiple designs and colors, a full-size trailer for sales and an additional stock trailer to keep up with growing demand. Our shirts are everywhere! You can't walk along the Harbor or go to a local store without seeing someone in a Rodeo T-Shirt! That's why our slogan is "Dress Like a Local."

Our recordkeeping has evolved too. In the early days, we used simple computers and kept most information by hand. Today, our digital system updates in real time, allowing anglers and spectators alike to follow the action every day throughout October.

And through it all, we've endured. Hurricanes, the BP oil spill and even a global pandemic challenged us—but they never stopped us.

77TH ANNUAL

2025

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Make Plans to Attend Emerald Coast Classic Basketball Tournament Thanksgiving Week

Since its debut in 2014, the Emerald Coast Classic has become the premier sporting event in the area, drawing top college basketball programs from around the country. The tournament also shines a national spotlight on Northwest Florida State College, showcasing its facilities and vibrant campus life.

For the first time, fans will be able to watch some of the nation's best men's and women's basketball teams compete within a six-day span. Tickets for both tournaments are on sale now at www.emeraldcoastclassic.com.

Held every Thanksgiving week at Northwest Florida State College, the men's tournament has earned a reputation as one of the NCAA's best, regularly attracting NBA scouts and national media coverage. CBS Sports Network will televise both the semifinal and championship rounds.

The men's tournament will be played Nov. 28-29 at

Raider Arena.

- Friday, Nov. 28: DePaul vs. Georgia Tech at 6 p.m.; Drake vs. LSU at 8:30 p.m.
- Saturday, Nov. 29: Third-place game at 3 p.m.; championship at 6 p.m.

LSU returns for its second appearance, having won the 2021 title over Wake Forest, 75-61. Head coach Matt McMahon, now in his fourth year, welcomes a transfer class ranked No. 16 nationally by 247Sports. Drake is coming off a program-record 31-4 season, sweeping the Missouri Valley Conference titles and reaching the second round of the 2025 NCAA Tournament. The Bulldogs, now led by first-year head coach Eric Henderson, have advanced to three straight NCAA Tournaments.

Georgia Tech, under third-year coach Damon Stoudamire, finished 17-17 last season and advanced to the NIT. DePaul, led by first-year head coach Chris Holtmann, reached

the 2025 College Basketball Crown—the Blue Demons' first postseason appearance since 2019. Holtmann previously guided Ohio State to the 2023 Emerald Coast Classic championship.

The women's tournament will feature eight teams Nov. 24-25, divided into the Bay and Beach Brackets.

Bay Bracket (Nov. 24-25):

- Semifinals: Providence vs. Middle Tennessee State, 11 a.m.; Mississippi State vs. Alcorn State, 1:30 p.m.
- Tuesday, Nov. 25: Third-place game, 11 a.m.; championship, 1:30 p.m.

Beach Bracket (Nov. 24-25):

- Semifinals: Nebraska vs. Purdue Fort Wayne, 5 p.m.; Virginia vs. Northwestern State, 7:30 p.m.
- Tuesday, Nov. 25: Third-place game, 5 p.m.; championship, 7:30 p.m.

Mississippi State went 22-



12 last season, advancing to the second round of the 2025 NCAA Tournament. Nebraska finished 21-12 and also made the NCAA field. Middle Tennessee State posted a 26-8 record in 2024-25 and competed in the 2025 WBIT.

BIRKENSTOCK

continued from page 20

for the fall season ahead. Pair your new Birkenstocks with some of the other pieces we love at Blue Bay—like versatile Liverpool denim, tailored jackets, trousers, and easy blouses; laid-back athleisure from Vuori; or boho-chic 14k gold-filled wa-

terproof jewelry from Bara Boheme—for a look that's effortless, stylish and uniquely yours.

You never know where your shoes will take you—or what history they'll make with you while they're on your feet. Follow us on Instagram at [@bluebaylifestyle](https://www.instagram.com/bluebaylifestyle) and share a pic of yours with us. Show us where your Birks have been!



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 Wellness


By STEPHENIE CRAG

I'm 17 years into sending kids back to school. And, every year, it is still hard. Switching from one life rhythm to another in a day is hard on the brain and body. The sleep schedule changes, the morning and evening rhythms shift. Everyone in

the house is a little overwhelmed and irritable. It gets better each week, but I've found six weeks to be the sweet spot when we are all reoriented and things feel normal again.

Transitional discomfort is not isolated to returning to school. Maybe you've started a new job, added a child to the family, started care-giving for a family member, moved homes or dropped off a child at college. Or, maybe you're making a habit change like quitting smoking, eating healthier, moving your body or trying to be more optimistic. All kinds of life transition can feel overwhelming at

Transitional Brain



first and you might find yourself saying, "Why is this so hard?"

Your brain is wired for routine and repetition. Whatever you have been doing most consistently is what your brain gravitates toward. When you shift gears, make a change or transition into a new way of doing things, your brain initially pulls you back toward your old, familiar routines it associates with safety and security. Rewiring your brain to the new pattern requires daily repetition over 3-6 weeks. In the beginning, you might feel overwhelmed and frustrated with the effort required to sustain your new rhythm. However, as you reach week three, you will often find

it's getting a little easier. After week 3, your brain begins to gravitate more and more toward the new behavior. And usually, around the 6-week mark, your brain doesn't feel like it's fighting the new direction you've purposed to go.

So, what are you supposed to do when transitional brain strikes and sticks around for 3-6 weeks?

8 Ways to Support Yourself Through Transitional Brain

Notice and acknowledge.

Notice feelings of overwhelm, irritability, brain fog, stress and exhaustion. Remind yourself you are experiencing transitional brain and it's normal. Be kind and remind yourself it will take several weeks to feel your normal groove again.

Name the source of transition. Observe what might be a transitional event in your life. Name back to school, moving

homes, new responsibilities or whatever else defines your transitional time.

Slow down. Your brain won't go from zero to 60 in a day. Give yourself steps. This week we are going to focus on sleep schedule and homework. Next week we will focus on family dinners. The week after that we will focus on balancing school with weekend fun. When you force your brain to overhaul everything at once, you are less likely to sustain anything well.

Prioritize rest. Transitional brain makes you tired. Try getting enough sleep at night and saying no to some commitments so you have time to rest and recharge.

Regulate your mood. You are more likely to be frustrated, grumpy, and irritable during transitional brain. Notice when you are getting edgy and engage some regulating practices like stretching, sitting in nature, deep breathing, watching a funny show, reading a book, moving your body, or talking to a friend. Remember to circle back and apologize to others if you've not been your best self.

Be gracious to others. Try remembering others around you are also often having transitional brain. Be kind and curious rather than judgmental and shameful when others are struggling.

Keep going. Put one foot in front of the other and you will find that days turn into a week and weeks turn into a month. At some point, you will be surprised to look up and notice you are feeling more normal and settled in your new life rhythm.

Remember for next time. Try writing yourself a brief note in the notes of your phone about your experience with transitional brain so you can look back and see in your own words that you really will make it through next time.

You aren't alone. People all around you are navigating various changes resulting in transitional brain. Try talking about it and connecting with your friends to normalize your experience. Hard things together feel better than alone. Connect with us for counseling and coaching along your journey at Journeybravely.com.



Stephenie Craig, LCSW
Therapist
918-221-9987 | stepheniecraig@journeybravely.com

Todd Craig
Life & Leadership Coach
918-740-1232 | todd@journeybravely.com

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- Do you think you show too much or too little of your teeth when you smile?
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Shattered by Suicide: A Mother's Mission to Save Lives

By MELANIE YOST



In the early hours of December 23, 2018, Diane Cooke's life was forever changed by a heartbreaking phone call. Her 20-year-old son, Drew, had taken his own life. As a mother, Diane was devastated and confused. She had known that Drew was struggling emotionally in the months leading up to his death, but she had believed that this difficult period was just a passing chapter in his life. Drew was under the care of a counselor and a psychiatrist, and Diane felt confident that, with the support of professionals, medication and the love of their family, he would be able to navigate through the storm.

Tragically, this was not the case. September is National Suicide Prevention Month—a time to raise awareness, support one another and reduce the stigma around mental health. Diane is sharing her story to encourage others to speak up, seek help and know they're not alone in hopes of saving others. According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (afsp.org), 49,476 Americans died by suicide in 2022, making it the 11th leading cause of death in the U.S. An estimated 1.6 million people attempted suicide that year. Reflecting on Drew's experiences, Diane suspects that the actual number might be even higher. "During the last five years of his life, Drew had several incidents that, in hindsight, appear to have been suicide attempts, although they were not recognized as such at the time," said Diane.

What Diane Has Learned About Suicide:

Not Everyone Talks About Their Struggles: In the days before his death, Drew

did not speak about ending his life. On the contrary, he spent time with his mother, helping her bake cookies just the day before. While Diane was aware that Drew was dealing with the challenges many young adults face—such as the end of a serious relationship and hurtful rumors—she did not realize these issues felt like life and death for him. She wishes she had asked him directly about his feelings. Though she can't be certain he would have opened up, the conversation might have provided an opportunity to offer him life-saving support. "It's a common fear that asking someone if they are having suicidal thoughts might introduce the idea," said Diane. "But, this fear is unfounded. If a loved one seems to be struggling, asking if they feel safe can be crucial, especially if they have had past incidents like single-car accidents, overdoses or risky behavior."

Take Every Statement Seriously: When someone expresses thoughts of suicide, it's vital to take them seriously. Sometimes, these expressions

are mistaken for attention-seeking behavior. But, suicidal thoughts often manifest as casual comments such as, "It would be easier for everyone if I were gone," "I don't know if I can do this anymore," or "If I died tomorrow, life would go on." Drew was a vibrant and joyful young man who loved to make others laugh. "He had many friends and was known for his kindness and sense of humor," said Diane. "However, he also struggled with significant mental health issues that affected his mood, perceptions, impulsivity and judgment. If a loved one makes comments that hint at giving up or dying, it's important to ask questions, listen carefully and help them access resources that can keep them safe."

Explore All Treatment Options: Diane believed that the love and support Drew received would be enough to carry him through his difficult time. "Since his passing, I've learned much more about mental health and the various ways it can be treated," Diane said. "There are now many innovative treat-

ments available that are highly effective for those struggling with mood disorders that don't respond well to traditional therapies." To help others, Diane partnered with me, Melanie Yost, her childhood friend, to open Be Well Solutions and Complete Ketamine Solutions in Destin. Our mission is to provide affordable and effective brain health therapies, such as Ketamine Infusion Therapy and Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy, to help people heal and reclaim their lives. Diane hopes that by offering these treatments, others won't have to suffer as Drew did.

If you or a loved one are struggling with thoughts of suicide, please reach out to the National Suicide Prevention Hotline at 988. If current treatments aren't providing the help needed, consider a free consultation with Be Well Solutions to see if our services might be the right fit.

These treatments have brought hope and healing to Diane in her darkest moments,

Continued on page 40

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Self-Care Corner: Look Your Best This Fall

Seasonal Specials at Beverly Hills Day Spa – Now through September 30

BY KRISY ANDERSON

Fall is here on the Emerald

Coast, and that means a calendar packed with festivals, concerts, galas and gatherings. From seafood feasts on the harbor to art festivals and charity events, this season is all about stepping out — and looking your absolute best while you do it. Whether

you're suiting up or slipping into your favorite dress, Beverly Hills Day Spa has created indulgent specials for both men and women to refresh, recharge and get you event-ready.

Relax into a **60-minute Swedish Massage** with back

and foot scrub and soothing hot towels for just \$85, or revive tired skin with an **Anti-Aging Facial** plus complimentary eyebrow wax and cleanup for \$90. Want to glow all season long? **The Glow O2 Facial**, including 10 minutes of Red Light Therapy, leaves you radiant for \$125.

Feeling tension? The **60-minute Deep Tissue Massage** comes with a free back facial for \$95, while the 90-minute **Ultimate Massage Experience** with essential oils, hot stones and warm towels is a full-body reset for \$130. Don't forget your feet — the **Deluxe Foot Treatment** (soak, scrub, callus treatment, mask and massage) is \$110 of pure comfort.

Every treatment includes your choice of complimentary beverage — coffee, tea, juice, champagne or wine — because fall self-care should feel as indulgent as the season itself. Plus, enjoy 10% off Custom Skincare services through Sept. 30.

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Michael McManus LCSW

Two years ago, a German girl walked into CRYO850 asking if I would work with her with EMS technology. New to town (and the U.S.), she needed someone to buy into her training system that used electricity to create contractions, allowing for muscle building without heavy weights.

EMS Training works 10 muscle groups simultaneously cutting a workout down to only 20 minutes.

I loved the idea of offering this technology to my customers. So, I rented the space next door and began remodeling it to build her a studio. The project stalled when my dear friend and contractor tragically passed. She decided she no longer wanted the studio, and I was left with an empty space and no clue how to fill it. A time of horrible loss and sadness was topped off with what seemed like a financial disaster.

BUT GOD HAS A PLAN & THERE IS ALWAYS A SILVER LINING!

After deliberating with staff, I decided to stick with the original plan. I researched EMS and found a newer and more advanced version that would also work for athletes looking to gain a competitive edge.

While traditional EMS requires the user to be wet and tethered to a machine (think Dolph Lundgren on the treadmill in Rocky), **Vision Body EMS** uses a dry suit with bluetooth capability allowing users full freedom of movement and no wetsuit. In the end, I traded the flip phone for an Apple 16 and now can serve a broader clientele! With the help of Gina Loya and Bonnie Bee, we launched the new program, and everyone has seen amazing results. I'm excited to announce with our new partnership with Personal Trainer, Susie Rodriguez, **Vision Body Next Level EMS Training** is taking the Emerald Coast by storm! We are now helping clients to ENGAGE 10 muscle groups at a time to ENHANCE strength, performance and recovery with the most EFFICIENT technology on the fitness market today! Whether you want to go deeper into muscle fibers to gain a competitive edge, need to build muscle without heavy weight, or just need to double the workout in half the time, we've got you.

~ Amy Milligan, Owner/General Manager

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HOTWORX Destin: It Really Worx!

By CHRISTOPHER MANSON

Kathy Whidden is the franchise owner of HOTWORX Destin. Before she opened the studio, Whidden served as CEO of Emerald Coast Chiropractic, the family business. “My role is a mix of management and community outreach,” she says. “I oversee daily operations, support our amazing staff, and make sure every member has the best experience possible.”

She also collaborates closely with the HOTWORX team on outreach and events, and “keeping the studio atmosphere welcoming and motivating.”

HOTWORX is a 24-hour infrared fitness studio with virtually instructed workouts inside patented infrared saunas. At the Destin studio, members can choose from nine different 35-to-40-minute isometric workouts (ISO, Buns, Yoga, Pilates, Stretch, Barre None, Warrior, Core, and Bands), plus three quick but intense 15-minute HIIT (high-intensity interval training) sessions (Cycle, Blast, and Row). “Each workout is designed to maximize calorie burn, detoxification and muscle recovery while saving time,” says Whidden.

Whidden’s “small but mighty team of five” includes a full-time general manager and three part-time sales associates. “Everyone on staff is passionate about fitness and customer care,” she says. The key skills for HOTWORX Destin team members are communication, motivation, a knack for sales and a genuine ability to connect with people. “It’s not just about checking in members, it’s about encouraging them, keeping the studio running smoothly and making sure the energy is always positive.”

HOTWORX Destin celebrates its second anniversary this month. A celebratory event, September 6, offered raffle sales to benefit the Destin Fire Department and donations were taken to cycle with a firefighter. “It’s a big milestone for us and a chance to thank our members and the community for their support,” says Whidden.

Throughout September, HOTWORX Destin continues its monthly challenges and member appreciation events, which Whidden calls “a fantastic way to keep people motivated and connected.”



Whidden says HOTWORX has provided a way for people to work fitness into their busy lives without sacrificing results. “For many, it’s the first time they have found a routine they can truly stick to.” The rewards program motivates them to keep coming back. “Beyond that, we have created a community. People don’t just come in for a workout, they come in for support, accountability, and a healthier lifestyle overall.”

Membership is straightforward. “With our \$79 Elite Membership, you have 24/7 access to the studio and unlimited workouts. It also includes our nutrition program (DietTrax), the Virtual Personal Trainer, and HOTWORX On the Go integrated into your app. Plus, you will enjoy free access to 800-plus standard studios across the U.S. No complicated rules—just the freedom to book sessions whenever it fits your schedule,” says Whidden.

Some members make it a family affair. Lori Smith, Destin Life publisher, is a member with both daughters, Shaye Smith and Savannah Smith, Savannah’s fiancé Brandon VonLanken, her sister Lisa Turpin and niece Lauren Turpin. “Being a HOTWORX member with my family has been such a gift. Working out together keeps us accountable, pushes us to challenge ourselves, and—honestly—it’s just fun. We leave every

session not only feeling better and healthier, but also more connected when we’re working out together. It’s become something we look forward to and a way to support one another while building healthier habits,” says Smith.

In addition to their web site, HOTWORX Destin is active on Facebook and Instagram. “It’s a big part of how we connect with the community. It’s where we share events, celebrate member success stories, and highlight the unique benefits of infrared training.” Whidden says social media is “crucial to keep people engaged and excited. While our corporate team pushes out targeted ads, our local team collaborates on the rest of the content. We make sure it feels authentic and local.”

HOTWORX’s motto is “More Workout, Less Time,” and they mean it. “With our 3D training—infrared heat, energy, and exercise—you can get an effective workout in just 15 to 30 minutes. We’re also open 24/7, so your schedule never holds you back,” says Whidden. “On top of the time savings, members enjoy real health benefits like detoxification, improved circulation, stress relief, and faster recovery. It is fitness and wellness all in one.”

Other benefits include increased strength, weight loss, improved flexibility, and lower blood pressure. The infrared

heat also boosts detoxification, reduces inflammation, and helps with overall stress relief. “Many tell us they sleep better and feel more energized throughout the day,” says Whidden.

Hotworx is located at 4489-

C Commons Drive West in Destin. Staffed hours are 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Fridays, and 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturdays. Visit hotworx.net/studio/destin to learn more, or call 850.468.9679.

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 Wellness


BY KAY LEAMAN,
HEALTH
ARCHITECT

When we think about health we normally think of our bodies; what we put on them and especially what we put in them. On the inside we watch what we eat, continually making better choices as we learn new things. We do the same thing on the outside of our body, choosing healthier lotions, potions, deodorants, makeup, hair products, etc. We add exercise and increase our water intake. But then....

We spend time in our homes where we feel comfortable and safe. The place of our favorite

things and people. But how safe are our homes, really?

Some time back, a study was done on the air in downtown Los Angeles vs. the air in the homes around the area. Would you have guessed that the air in downtown LA was healthier than the air in their homes? It was.

Here is another interesting find. I watched a video in a training on fires. They set up two rooms with identical furniture, drapes, lamps, etc. One room was from my grandmother's time and the other one was from modern time. An ignition was set in the exact same spot in each room. Once ignited, in less

than three minutes, the modern room reached the flash point. In the other room, the couch arm and part of the drapes were burning. Everything else was fine. The difference? Grandma's room was made with all-natural materials such as cotton, wool, etc. The modern room was made up of polyester, nylon, foam, etc. Many of these materials have a petroleum base in their manufacturing. Manmade versus natural.

We nestle into our favorite toxic chair or couch. Sleep in our non-wrinkled sheets. Slip into our favorite synthetic fabrics and breathe the off gases from all of it. In the morning we head into the bathroom with all our products to dress for the day. (By the way, the bathroom is usually the most toxic room in our house.)

It's time to stretch our health goals to the home. This is not an easy task. If you thought buying organic was expensive, try pricing out a natural fiber couch or mattress. However, there are steps we can take to offset what we are breathing and absorbing through our skin. Small changes can make a big difference.

Looking for a new rug? Focus on natural fibers such as cotton, wool, jute, hemp, silk, linen, etc. These are also the choices for

clothing, curtains, drapes, etc. We have vinyl flooring so I don't walk around the house barefoot. Slippers and socks are my choice for lessening the exposure load. Another good habit is to open your windows whenever possible to allow the gases from the products to escape and let the fresh air in. Even if it's only for 20 minutes early in the morning and longer when the weather is cooler can improve the health of our home. Take your car as an example. The windows always get that film on it after awhile. I used to wonder why they got like that since I wasn't a smoker. Then I learned that it was the off gassing of all the materials.

Our homes are no different. To minimize harmful substances entering your home take your shoes off at the door. You would be amazed what we track in from parking lots and yards.

It's a bit harder when it comes to the bedroom. The clothes we wear, the mattress we sleep on and the products in the bathroom if it's connected to the bedroom are filled with manufactured materials and chemicals. We spend about 9-10 hours daily sleeping or dressing. Start off small. Update the

pillows and sheets with natural materials. Wear natural fiber sleepwear. Switch out products as they need to be replaced.

When it comes to the kitchen, consider switching dishwasher and dishwashing liquid for a more natural option. The other items to consider replacing are aluminum cookware, plastic storage containers and glasses. Best choices are stainless steel, ceramic, cast iron or glass. Food-grade silicone, stainless steel or wood is a better choice vs. plastic utensils.

Lastly, check the cleaners you use. More natural options are Borax, baking soda and vinegar. If you opt to stick with certain cleaners, such as for toilets, take precautions to prevent breathing in the fumes and wear gloves.

Spend some time looking around your home. Read the labels on your towels, products, clothes, etc. A little at a time can make a big difference. Be sure to open the windows for a while as often as possible (Do this for your vehicle as well.). Here's to Health!

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From Stuck to Strong: Unlocking Belief & Command

BY BILL MASON,
ROCKET FUEL
COACH

Every workplace is full of hidden superpowers—but even the strongest can sometimes slip into the “basement.” Belief can turn rigid when values feel challenged, and Command can hesitate when confidence wavers.

Unleashing Your Co-worker's Belief Superpower

Do you have a co-worker who's usually a pillar of purpose and conviction but, at times, seems a little... rigid? I've got one on my team who's normally driven by a strong sense of values and commitment. But recently, when their team's priorities shifted, they dug their heels in, refusing to adapt to the changes. It was like watching someone with a deep belief in their mission get stuck in a basement of frustration!

This is a classic case of “basement” behaviors for someone with the Belief strength. When their values are challenged, they can become inflexible or resistant to change. But at their core, they have an amazing ability to inspire others with their deep-rooted purpose and guide teams with unwavering integrity.

How can we help them get back to their “balcony” and thrive? Here are 3 ideas:

- Encourage Open Dialogue – Have a conversation to understand their values and what's driving their resistance. Acknowledge their concerns and help align their beliefs with the new direction.
- Reinforce Their Mission – Remind them of the bigger picture and how their values contribute to the team's success. This helps them see how change can still align with their beliefs.
- Celebrate Their Integrity – Recognize their commitment and the positive impact their

strong values have on the team. This boosts their confidence and reminds them of their power to lead with purpose.

Unlocking Your Co-worker's Command Power

Do you have a co-worker who's usually the one to take charge and lead with confidence, but every so often, they seem to take a step back? I've got one on my team who's usually the go-to person when things need direction. But recently, in a meeting, they hesitated to speak up and let the conversation drift without their usual decisive input. It was like watching a natural leader stuck in a basement of doubt!

This is a classic case of “basement” behaviors for someone with the Command strength. When they feel uncertain or things aren't going their way, they might retreat instead of asserting themselves. But at

their core, they have an incredible ability to take charge, make tough decisions, and inspire others to follow with confidence.

So how can we help them get back to their “balcony” and shine? Here are 3 ideas:

- Encourage Confidence – Remind them of their past successes in leading with clarity. A little reassurance can reignite their natural leadership skills.
- Invite Their Input – Involve them in decision-making and ask for their strong opinions. This can help them feel more empowered to step back into their leadership role.
- Celebrate Their Boldness – Acknowledge their ability to take control and make tough calls. Recognition can help boost their confidence and reinforce their leadership power.

By encouraging dialogue, inviting input, and celebrating integrity and boldness, we can help

these strengths climb back to the “balcony,” where conviction and leadership shine brightest.

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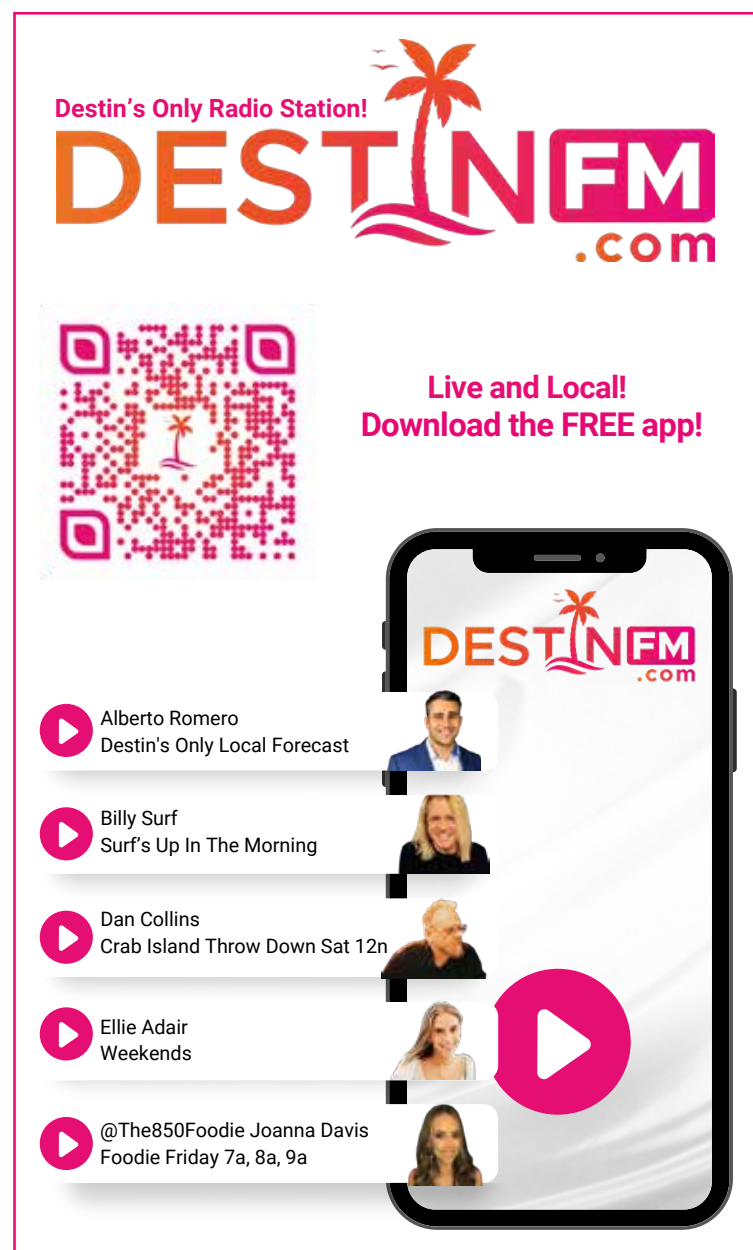
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Level Up Sept 25-27: Chris Cumby Brings Faith and Business Together on the Emerald Coast

BY RICH SANDERS

Chris Cumby grew up in a rough-and-tumble neighborhood in Toronto, Canada, but has become an important part of the Emerald Coast community during the last decade. Through inspirational leadership, coaching and networking in churches and Bible studies, Chris has developed a role that he describes as a “super-connector of people,” culminating each year in a business conference called Level Up. This



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I’ve seen the poor.” All that experience led him to Jesus, and he was born again through baptism last year on March 16th!

Now, as a follower of Jesus, Chris has developed an incredible level of discipline. Early each day, he awakens to read the Bible, calls his father (his parents still live in Canada and have been married nearly 60 years), then heads to the gym for strenuous exercise. After all that morning preparation, he’s ready to be the super-connector! “Every day I seek walking with Jesus in my heart and looking for opportunity from a perspective of helping people. I’ve just always been a helper, a servant.”

That servant leadership inspired Level Up. “I truly believe you have to interact, go with intention, and be full of faith,” Cumby says. “Because when you are, people, places, events, and circumstances show up.”

This year’s conference, he says, is more than a business event. “Level Up Emerald Coast isn’t just an event – it’s a movement. It’s where faith meets action, leaders rise, and vision turns into reality. This is the room where breakthroughs are born!”

Registration is open at levelupemeraldcoast.com. Cumby also recently shared his story on Episode 21 of the Christian Capitalist podcast, available at SouthWalton.life.

As host of the podcast, I’m excited to share inspirational stories of hard work and generous giving to the poor and needy in the name of Jesus Christ, such as Chris Cumby’s and the Level Up Conference!

year’s Level Up Emerald Coast conference will break out at the Oceans Church in Destin from September 25-27th and host more than 400 entrepreneurs!

Before he came to this beautiful part of the world, Chris was had two successful careers in different industries: soft drinks and energy. First, he learned the basics of corporate life with a variety of roles with Pepsi in Toronto. After seven years with Pepsi, Chris became a powerful force in the energy business.

In describing his role with a start-up company in the energy business, Chris describes an early surge: “We did 12 million in profit in the first 18 months!” By helping large consumers of energy, such as hotel chains, manage their risk in consuming electricity, Chris’ company likewise became energized. This put him in an environment of abundance.

It also taught him important lessons about life and wealth. As he started to travel and experience more of the world, Chris says: “I’ve seen the richest, and



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Sean of the South: Our Father



Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Even though this name has been so misused, misapplied, and misappropriated throughout history.

I mean, what even is your actual name? People in various countries call you different things. There have been wars over which is the correct name.

How many people have been slaughtered in, quote-unquote, “Your Name?” We humans are still fighting about what, exactly, that name is.

The American evangelicals,

ironically, choose a Middle English translation of a Latinized version of a Greek iteration of a Hebrew nickname, that was officially sanctioned by King James I, who most historians believe was bisexual. I’ll bet the evangelicals love that.

Still, other people use other words for Your name. But the Jewish culture, in my humble opinion, gets it right. Because they won’t even say your name. It’s too holy. Plus, once you use someone’s name, you’ve already kind of boxed that someone in. But you can’t be boxed in.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Because heaven knows sometimes it sucks down here.

Even so, there’s got to be a plan to this mess we call life. There are all these coincidences happening. People call these instances different things: Grace, providence, karma, synchronicity, God winks. Whatever you call them, they happen. Every moment. And there seems to be a reason for it.

Give us this day our daily bread. Us. Not just me. Us. Col-

lective. Personally, I have never known hunger, I was raised in a food secure household. But there are many other people included in “us.” People who are starving. People who don’t have what they need. And it’s not just bread.

There are people lying in hospitals, prisons, nursing homes, or crack houses. They are drunk, and homeless, living from dumpsters. They have needs. And it doesn’t seem fair that I sit on my duff, eating Fritos while others go without.

And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Why is it that we humans have no problem asking a great invisible omnipotent being for forgiveness. But we’d rather burn in hell before saying “I’m sorry” to our loved ones? I have questions, Lord.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Because, let’s face it, when left to our own devices we screw everything up.

There was a scientific experiment done with laboratory rats recently. The rats were put into

a cage with an electrical device that would shock them, giving them immense pain. The rats were held in the cage with nothing to entertain them.

In less than 24 hours the rats became so bored they started shocking the crap out of themselves just for entertainment value. We aren’t that different from rats.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory. Because it all belongs to you.

None of this is ours, even though we pretend like we own everything. We try to own land, we try to own people, we try to own everything. But man owns nothing.

We’re just guests in your world. We’re expressions of your beautiful nature. But we are not owners. The whole train-model set belongs to You, Lord. Everything and every-ONE.

After all, we’re all your children. Believer and atheist. Clergy and inmate. Straight and gay. Republican and Democrat. Christian, Islamic, Jewish, Hindu, Native American. Everyone. Every race. Every tribe. Every creed. Every confused and lost idiot who tries to put words into your mouth. Sort of like I did here.

Amen.

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By PASTOR DAVE HOLLAND
“Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be ex-

A Pastor’s Ponderings: The Place of Forgiveness

ecuted. When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals — one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:32–34 NIV)

Picture yourself in a church in ancient Rome, Corinth or Ephesus in the second century.

Your pastor has just received a scroll from Dr. Luke describing the death of Christ. As a Roman citizen, you feel uneasy, because it was your people who carried out the crucifixion. In truth, humanity itself drove the nails.

Two criminals were led out with Jesus to be executed. They were guilty; He was not. Pilate admitted as much. It was hatred, pride and greed that demanded Jesus’ death. Yet, in His agony, Jesus prayed: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

Who was He forgiving? The criminals? The soldiers? The religious leaders? The crowd? The truth is staggering: Jesus laid bare the promise of forgiveness for us all. Past, present, and future.

The cross was not His darkest hour, but His finest. This is the peak of Christian revelation—grace revealed as forgiveness.

We see this same spirit in Acts 7 when Stephen, as stones rained down upon him, prayed, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” Forgiveness is the rarest, most heroic act of faith. Paul echoes it in Ephesians 4:32: “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving

each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

Even Marcus Aurelius, the Roman emperor and philosopher, seemed to glimpse this truth. Each morning he reminded himself: “Today you will meet unpleasant people; they will hurt you, insult you. But you cannot live like that. You know better.”

The Place of the Skull

What is Calvary—the place of the skull? It’s where humanity told God, “We don’t want You interfering in our lives.” And yet it is also where Jesus showed us what to do with humanity’s worst sins: forgive. That is the Jesus prayer. It must become ours, too.

A Modern Picture of Grace

Jessica, a young woman from Guthrie, Oklahoma, recently offered a living example. While shopping, a man stole her wallet. She tracked him down quietly and said, “I think you have something of mine. You have two choices—return it and I’ll forgive you, or I can turn you in.”

Ashamed, the man handed it back, apologizing repeatedly. Jessica then stunned him further—she walked with him to the checkout and paid \$27 for his groceries: bread, milk, bologna, crackers, cheese and soup.

“The last thing he said was, ‘I’ll never forget tonight. I’m

broke, I have kids, I’m embarrassed, and I’m so sorry.”

Critics said she should have pressed charges, but Jessica replied, “Sometimes all you need is a second chance.”

That is Christian forgiveness—releasing someone from what they owe, even when they don’t deserve it.

Forgiving Like Jesus

So, who has wronged you? Who took from you, spoke against you, betrayed you, or hurt you deeply? Jesus absorbed the blame of the world so you wouldn’t have to carry it. Your part is to extend the grace you’ve received.

The place of forgiveness is not easy ground. It often feels like the skull—bleak, painful, humiliating. Yet, it is the place where resurrection hope begins.

When bitterness tempts you, return to Calvary. Listen again to Jesus’ words: “Father, forgive them.” Then make them your own.

Dave Holland pastored churches for over 38 years before retiring in Destin, Florida. He recently released a new devotional Bible study based on the Gospel of Luke titled Every Day Jesus: Experience the Jesus Who Ignites Your Soul. Learn more at DaveHolland.org or by emailing davidvholland54@gmail.com. Pastor Dave is also available to preach and teach in churches and conferences.

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Heroes in the Backyard

A Review of Raiding the Rising Sun: The Doolittle Raid—America Strikes Back

BY DAN STEELMAN

REVIEWED BY DAVE HOLLAND

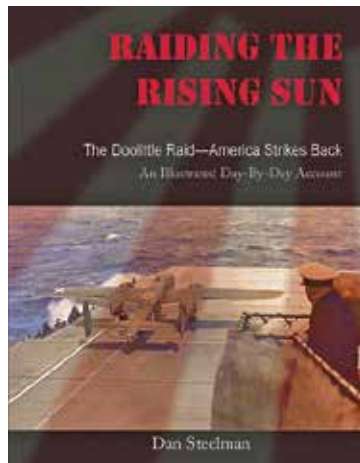
Few moments in American military history match the daring and determination of the Doolittle Raid. In his newly released book, *Raiding the Rising Sun: The Doolittle Raid—America Strikes Back*, aviation historian Dan Steelman revisits this bold World War II operation in a format that's as informative as it is visually rich.

This isn't your typical war history. Steelman walks readers through the mission in a day-by-day format, beginning on December 7, 1941—the day of the attack on Pearl Harbor—and continuing through April 18, 2022, marking the 80th anniversary of the raid. Told in the present tense, the story unfolds with immediacy, allowing readers to experience the tension, bravery, and resolve of the men involved as though it were happening now.

Led by Lieutenant Colonel James Doolittle, the April 1942 raid targeted Tokyo, Yokohama, Kobe, and other Japanese cities. It was America's first counter-strike following the attack on Pearl Harbor and served as a powerful symbol of national resolve. Though the physical damage inflicted was limited, the psychological impact was profound—boosting American morale and shaking Japanese confidence.

What makes this story especially meaningful for readers along the Gulf Coast is its deep local connection. The crews that would take part in the raid trained at Eglin Field in Northwest Florida. They practiced low-altitude bombing runs, night flying, and learned how to take off from a short runway—all in preparation for launching B-25 bombers from the deck of the USS Hornet. Naval flight instructor Lt. Henry L. Miller from NAS Pensacola played a pivotal role, teaching the crews how to simulate takeoffs on a carrier deck using makeshift runways on base.

Their mission had no return plan. The crews knew they'd be flying into hostile territory with no landing strip waiting on the



other side. Most would have to bail out or crash-land in occupied China, risking capture or worse. Yet they went anyway.

Steeleman's account is notable for its attention to detail and historical accuracy. Drawing from both American and Japanese sources, it offers a balanced perspective, supported by more than 200 high-quality photographs—many rarely seen. The images, in both color and black and white, are integrated throughout the book to help bring the mission to life.

The author's background adds credibility. Steelman is a seasoned museum professional and lifelong aviation enthusiast. His love of history began in his youth and led to a career preserving artifacts that ranged from dinosaur bones to Apollo-era spacecraft. His admiration for the men who carried out the Doolittle Raid is evident on every page.

For readers who remember a time when patriotism wasn't just a word but a way of life, *Raiding the Rising Sun* is both a history lesson and a tribute. It reminds us of a time when America responded to tragedy with unity,

grit, and courage—and of the young men who trained right here in our own backyard before taking off into history.

The USAF Armament Mu-

seum will be hosting Author Dan Steelman for an author signing event on August 16 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. The Museum is located at 100 Museum Drive,

Eglin AFB, Fort Walton Beach. The museum has a B-25 on display in the colors of Jimmy Doolittle. Admission to the museum is free.

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 Arts & Music

From Palette Knife to Poster: Kathy Schumacher's Art Sets Sail for MKAF's 30th Festival

BY ZANDRA WOLFGAM

With bold strokes and vibrant color, Niceville artist Kathy Schumacher will set the tone for the Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation's 30th Annual Festival of the Arts as this year's official poster artist. This milestone event kicks off Friday, October 24 with the Arty Kickoff Party, followed by the festival weekend October 25-26 at the Mattie Kelly Cultural Arts Village in Destin.

Schumacher's winning piece, *Sails in Symphony*, is a vibrant 30 x 24-inch impasto oil painting bursting with jewel-toned sailboats poised for a magical coastal voyage. "It's inspired by Destin—by the water, by the coastal lifestyle—and it just feels like Mattie Kelly," says Schumacher. "I wanted it to be more colorful than my usual sailboat paintings so it would stand out on a poster. It reflects the beauty of our area and pairs perfectly with the festival's music and atmosphere."

While this is Schumacher's first time as the festival's featured poster artist, she is no stranger to the event. She first exhibited at the MKAF festival of the Arts in 2013, taking home the People's Choice Award her debut year,

and has returned nearly every year since. "I love the festival," she says. "It offers such a wonderful variety of art—paintings, jewelry, pottery, and more—in a beautiful setting with live music, great food, and activities for all ages."

From Wisconsin Fields to Florida's Gulf Coast

Schumacher's journey as an artist began later in life. Raised in Wisconsin's rolling farmlands, she developed an early appreciation for the natural world but didn't pick up a paintbrush until her 40s. At the time, she was a busy mom and military spouse, traveling the globe with her husband and raising two children. A casual acrylic painting class with friends sparked an instant passion. "From day one, I loved it," she recalls. Encouraged by instructors impressed with her natural ability, she began exploring oil painting using traditional Old Masters techniques.

Her artistic path took a new turn during a move to New Mexico. With no job or kids at home, she immersed herself in classes at the New Mexico Art League, experimenting with pastel, watercolor, figurative work, and realism. The turning

point came when she discovered the work of a Ukrainian palette knife artist. Captivated by the sculptural texture and bold color, Schumacher set out to master the technique herself, eventually developing her signature style: richly textured oils with luminous layers of color and an almost three-dimensional effect.

The Palette Knife Signature

Today, Schumacher paints exclusively with palette knives. Her process begins with toning the canvas in underlying colors that peek through the top layers, adding depth and vibrancy. "I think that underpainting gives my work another dimension," she says. While many palette knife artists work in acrylics, she prefers the richness of oil pigments. Her subjects—often coastal landscapes, sailboats, marshes, wildflowers, and birds—reflect her deep connection to nature and her Niceville waterfront surroundings.

Nature, she says, is endlessly inspiring. "Whether it's a quiet



marsh, a burst of wildflowers, or the rhythm of the sea, I'm captivated by the way light, color, and space interact. My goal is always to create a moment of connection between the viewer and the natural world."

A Family Legacy in Art

Art is a family affair for Schumacher. Her daughter, Krista Schumacher, is an award-winning palette knife artist based in San Diego, and the two occasionally collaborate on projects, including large-scale commercial installations. "It's been such a joy to share this journey with her," Kathy says.

"Watching her develop her own style in the medium we both love has been a source of immense pride."

Meet the Artist at the Festival

Festivalgoers can meet Kathy Schumacher in person and view *Sails in Symphony*—alongside her other original works—in Tent No. 61 during the festival. As the official poster artist, her winning design will appear on the festival's poster, program guide, t-shirt, MKAF website, social media channels, and throughout the event's marketing campaign.

The Festival of the Arts will feature more than 100 artists from across the U.S., competing for \$12,000 in cash prizes across 18 categories, including Best in Show and People's Choice. Visitors can enjoy live music, a collaborative art exhibit, hands-on children's activities, an art raffle, and a variety of local food trucks with beer and wine available. Admission is free, and proceeds benefit MKAF's ArtsReach initiatives serving K-12 students, individuals with special needs, and the military community.

Reflecting on her selection, Schumacher says, "This is truly such an honor. The festival has been such a big part of my journey as an artist, and I'm thrilled to help represent its 30th anniversary."

For more about Kathy Schumacher and her work, visit kathyschumacherart.com. For more information on the Festival of the Arts, visit MKAF.org.



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Art News



30A Songwriters Festival Returns for 17th Year!

For 17 years, the 30A Songwriters Festival has drawn thousands of music fans from around the world to Scenic Highway 30A, transforming the Gulf Coast into a mecca for original songwriters. The 2026 festival takes place January 16–19 with more than 125 artists performing over 300 shows across 30 unique venues, from intimate patios to 6,000-seat outdoor stages.

Presented by Grand Boulevard, this year’s festival will feature headline performances at

Grand Boulevard’s Town Center main stage by Mavis Staples, Toad the Wet Sprocket, 10,000 Maniacs, I’m With Her, Nikki Lane, and Paul McDonald & the Mourning Doves. Additional artists will be announced this summer.

Venues throughout South Walton will once again be converted into state-of-the-art listening rooms, ranging from 100 to 1,000 seats. Amphitheaters, town halls, restaurants, bars, and theaters provide fans with the rare opportunity to experience world-class songwriters in intimate settings. WMOT, based in Nashville, will again record select performances for its World Cafe sessions in partnership with WXPB Philadelphia.

Weekend passes and VIP tickets are available now. VIP packages include premium seating and complimentary gourmet food and drinks in the VIP tent during main stage shows, as well as full weekend transportation options for groups.

The festival is produced by the Cultural Arts Alliance of Walton County and Russell

Carter Artist Management, presented by Grand Boulevard with support from Visit South Walton, WaterColor Inn & Resort, and ASCAP. Festival passes and details are available at 30ASongwritersFestival.com.

Sean Dietrich Releases New Novel Over Yonder Explores Family, Fatherhood and the Unexpected Roads of Redemption

Acclaimed Southern storyteller Sean Dietrich—known for his warm reflections on family, faith, and finding joy in the ordinary—releases his newest novel, *Over Yonder*, on Oct. 7.

Part Southern road novel, part meditation on fatherhood, *Over Yonder* follows a defrocked priest just out of prison, a pregnant teen searching for a way forward, and an emotional support goldfish as they journey through the Deep South. Poignant and humorous, the story is Dietrich’s tribute to second chances, flawed families, and the unexpected ways people find grace and connection.



“This book is a love letter to fatherhood,” said Dietrich. “Fathers, those misguided, flawed, beautifully imperfect humans who tried, failed, got everything wrong, and, in spite of themselves, somehow became our greatest teachers on the subject of love.”

Laura Wheeler, senior acquisitions editor for Thomas Nelson Fiction, added: “Sean is an innately gifted storyteller—his voice can’t be taught; it’s simply who he is. His novels are emo-

tional and redemptive, filled with cantankerous old men with big hearts, tongue-in-cheek humor, and flawed characters who remind us that forgiveness and kindness can be found in the most unlikely places.”

Over Yonder will be available in bookstores nationwide Oct. 7. Learn more at tnzfiction.com/9781400235681/over-yonder/sean-dietrich.

Northwest Florida Ballet Unveils 2025-26 Season

Northwest Florida Ballet’s upcoming season features three distinctive productions. It opens Sept. 19–20 with the Emerging Choreographers’ Project *Blackbox* at NFB Studios in downtown Fort Walton Beach. Showcasing the innovative choreography of selected members of the NFB company, this production features ballet and contemporary works set to a diverse range of music genres, accompanied by a visual art exhibition that offers audiences a compelling glimpse into the next gen-

Continued on page 44



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Arts & Music

From Carole King to Our Community: Beautiful Ushers in a Season of Storytelling at ECTC

By CAMERON HUGHES

Fresh out of graduate school for business administration and taking on a new marketing role at Emerald Coast Theatre Company, I find myself connecting with Carole King in ways I previously never thought of. Her story is deeply individualistic and personal, starting out as a teenager writing songs for others, struggling with self-doubt, then stepping into the spotlight and forever changing music. Though what dawned on me is how her journey doesn't just belong to her. It belongs to all of us.

That's why I think that Beautiful: The Carole King Musical is a fantastic opener to ECTC's biggest season yet. It's a reflection of the universal journey of finding yourself. Every one of us, in some way, goes through those same pitfalls and struggles.

We stumble through uncertainty, question ourselves, and, at some point, have to decide to step forward into who we really are. For someone like myself in their twenties, it can be about moving to a new city, starting a career or trying new hobbies once the tassel is turned. It may be back in high school, where we are pressured to fit into the everchanging trend, but at the same time testing out who we want to be. For parents, it can be learning how to balance their own identity with the responsibility of raising a family. For those later in life, it might be deciding to move on from a lifelong career and finally retire or pursuing long-held dreams they once set aside.

Carole King's music has always had that wide-reaching quality that doesn't just speak to individuals but rather to entire

generations. They carry themes of love, connection, resilience and hope that transcend time and circumstance with the same importance as all those years ago. That's why, decades later, her work still resonates with audiences who weren't even alive when those songs first topped the charts. Especially in a world that can feel divided, distracted or disconnected, her story reminds us that art brings people together, across generations and backgrounds.

Here at ECTC, our Season 13 lineup feels like an extension of that idea—that storytelling is never just about one person, but about us as a community. The Glass Menagerie reminds us of the weight of societal expectations. Annie gives us hope in the



and identity in this giant world as we come of age. All of the stories, like Carole's, are mirrors we hold up to ourselves.

Carole King's life is about resilience, reinvention, and the universal search for meaning which is what makes Beautiful the perfect start to this season at Emerald Coast Theatre Company: it's a story that belongs to all of us.

About Cameron Hughes

Cameron is the Marketing and Sponsor Relations Manager at Emerald Coast Theatre Company. He grew up on 30-A, graduating from Florida State University in 2023 with a Bachelor's in Marketing and an M.B.A in 2024. After becoming a first-generation master's graduate, Cameron returned to the Emerald Coast in search of a valuable way to contribute to his community, thus landing him at ECTC.

ART NEWS

continued from page 43

eration of artists from the NFB Académie.

The beloved holiday classic Nutcracker returns Nov. 21–23 to the Mattie Kelly Arts Center, featuring more than 140 per-

formers, including international guest artists and over 100 local children, with live music by the Northwest Florida Symphony Orchestra.

The season concludes March 7–8 with the company premiere of Jill Eathorne Bahr's Alice in Wonderland, a vibrant new ad-

aptation blending neoclassical dance and imaginative storytelling.

Season subscriptions, which include tickets to The Nutcracker and Alice in Wonderland plus numerous subscriber perks and discounts, are now available at NFBallet.org—\$80 per adult

and \$37 per child (12 and under), a savings of more than 15% compared to box office prices. You can also purchase

season subscriptions, additional performance and event tickets, and membership packages.

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Life MEDIA

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Florida Artist Blacksmith Association Keeps Craft Alive

Blacksmithing may have been popularized in recent years by shows like *Forged in Fire* and *Men at Arms*, but in Florida the tradition has been thriving for decades thanks to the Florida Artist Blacksmith Association (FABA).

Founded in 1984, FABA has spent 40 years teaching the craft, preserving its history and setting up historical blacksmith shops across the state. Its mission is simple: “To teach – To preserve.” The organization will mark its 40th anniversary with a three-day celebration in Gainesville, Oct. 10-12, featuring demonstrations and hands-on classes.

Monthly meetings are also

part of FABA’s educational program, held at eight locations statewide. The Fort Walton Beach chapter—known as the Far West Panhandle Blacksmiths—is headquartered at Traditions Workshop, 418 Green Acres Road. Meetings often include demonstrations, open forges where attendees can try projects themselves, and a provided lunch with donations appreciated.

First-time visitors are welcome free of charge. Annual family memberships cost \$30 and include access to every FABA event statewide, discounts for the annual convention, and a digital copy of *The Clinker Breaker*, the

group’s monthly newsletter.

Upcoming events include:

Sept. 27, 9 a.m.–4 p.m. at Traditions Workshop: Final preparations for the conference, including completion of the gift exchange project “something that opens.”

Oct. 10–12: FABA CON 40 in Gainesville.

Nov. 8, 9 a.m.–4 p.m. at Timber Creek Distillery, 6451 Lake Ella Road, Crestview: Annual club-level competition with a five-hour pizza cutter challenge. Wood and tools for handles will be available, and participants can expect pizza from the stone

oven, drinks from the distillery, and possibly axe throwing.

Dec.: No meeting due to holidays and festivals.

Jan. 24 and Feb. 28, 9 a.m.–4 p.m. at Traditions Workshop: Indoor winter meetings with a focus on Journeyman standards and ABANA Level 1 curriculum projects.

March 28, 9 a.m.–4 p.m. at John Butler’s farm, 4112 Bell Lane, Pace: Make-and-take class crafting a Viking-era utility knife. Class cost is \$130, including lunch. Limited to 12 participants. Register at traditionsworkshop.com/classes.

Spring and summer meeting sites for April through June are



to be announced, and FABA is seeking host locations with room for a truck, trailer and 20-by-30-foot tent, plus access to 120v power and water.

For details, contact David at david@traditionsworkshop.com or call/text 850-974-1548. Safety glasses, solid shoes or boots, long trousers and long-sleeve shirts made of natural fabric are required for all events.

CALM

continued from page 17

stress response and support adrenal function. We also assess your nutrition and supplement needs to ensure you have the raw materials (like magnesium and B vitamins) to make and regulate cortisol.

Sleep & Circadian

Rhythm Repair: We address sleep habits and may use gentle support like melatonin or phosphatidylserine to help reset your rhythm. A good night’s sleep is one of the most powerful cortisol regulators.

Lifestyle Coaching: Sometimes, the biggest breakthroughs come from the smallest shifts: boundaries, breathwork,

journaling, or simply learning how to say no. We partner with you to identify and reduce your unique stress triggers.

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Ready to rebalance your stress response? Schedule your consultation at TortoiseClinic.com or call 850.267.5611 to learn how integrative care can support your cortisol and your overall well-being. Because wellness isn’t a sprint—it’s a marathon. Let’s walk it together.

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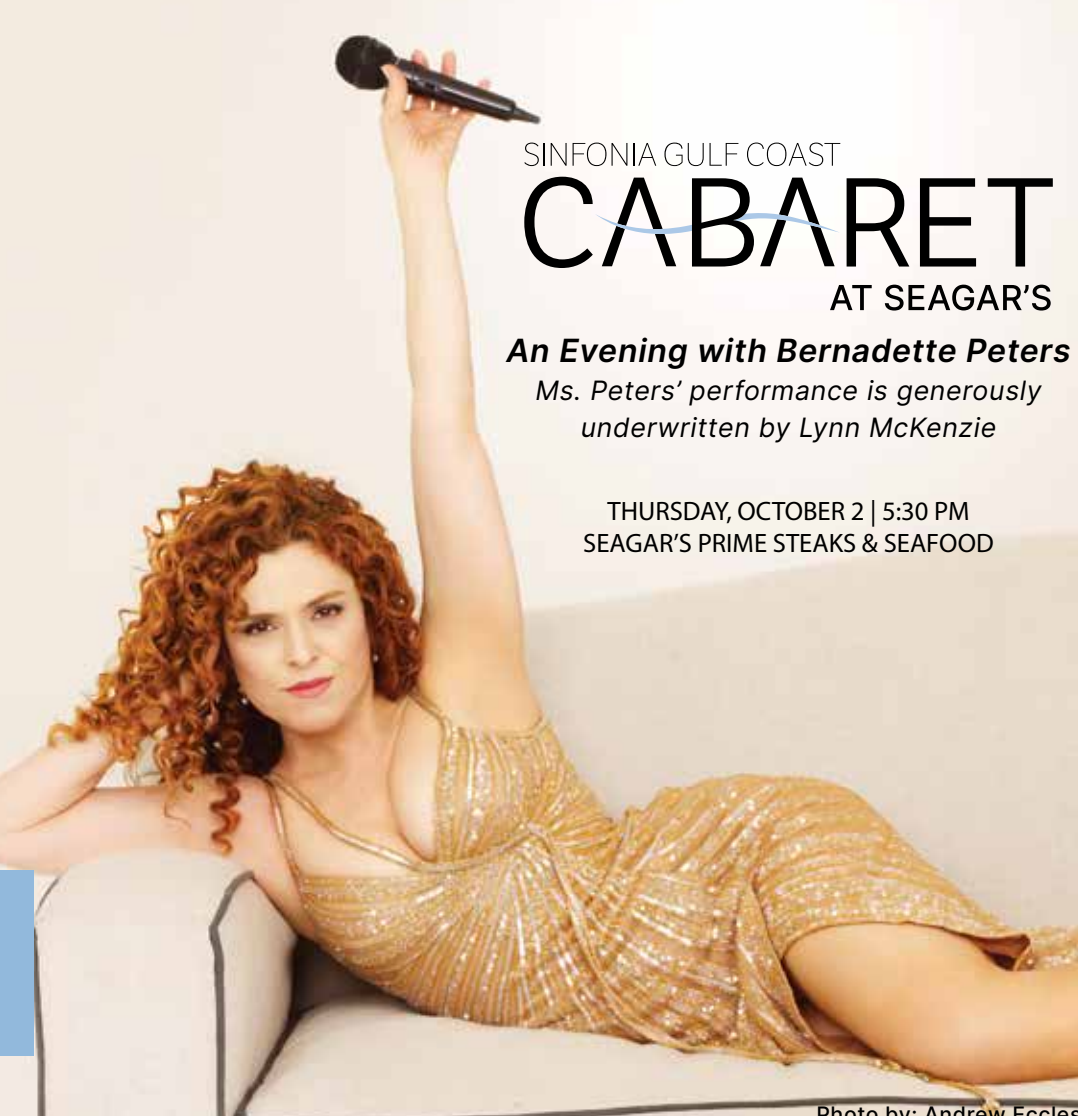
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Ask Destinites: Florida Brings Back Black Bear Hunting

By PATRICIA LEE - OWNER:
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In our local's Facebook group this month (www.Face-

book.com/groups/Destinites), there was some discussion about Florida bringing back black bear hunting. Listed below are concerns expressed by Destin area locals. The black bear population has risen across the state by 4,050 since 2015, at the time of the last hunt. It was a planned seven-day event, but was closed after two days due to rules being violated, such as: 1. Some hunters were unlicensed. 2. Pregnant bears and cubs were killed. 3. Hunters were caught using bait which had been prohibited. Dare we think things will be different this time? No doubt hunting will take place in the Panhandle area, as it is one of the more heavily black bear populated regions of Florida.

Here are some responses by our Destinites Facebook group members:

1. They will be killing cubs and their moms.
2. Rules will be broken again. People are uneducated on how to legally go about the hunt.
3. They are not letting just anyone bear hunt and you've got to pay a good bit to even try and get to see an animal. I only see maybe one time a year or so while I'm hunting...They ain't

easy to find.

4. Florida is now the state to which the ultra-rich flock (at least they have second homes in Miami). There is plenty of money flowing in this state without killing bears if you want to look at it that way - every Florida resident should be concerned about its unique ecosystem (no party lines in this) - much different than all other states. I was just looking at how much concrete Seaside has now compared to how very green it used to naturally be (30A posted an aerial view). If you don't actively preserve Florida year after year, it will be gone.

5. They are only giving a few tags out...not everyone can do so. You can't go buy it like a fishing license... bunch of hoops they make you go through, then and only then you get the chance to get out in a drawing. So, to get a zone, you're allowed to get a chance to kill one, which will probably be tagged or something and you got to check it in regardless. So, you can't just go outside and shoot one—just like you can't speed or text and drive—not legal but still gonna happen.

6. The idea of planting food that bears eat into the woods

and wetlands areas was a really good one - also a few ponds stocked with certain types of fish might help. Not sure why some of them can't be relocated to the wildlife corridor the state has been funding. Opening up a hunt like this will have ripple consequences - some very serious.

7. The public gets to weigh in - that's why they have meetings to vote and even announce an agenda ahead of time. The moment the *proposal* went forth, it became everybody's business - at least all Florida residents. Right now, it's in the "update the rules" phase, but a lot can happen between now and December.

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 12,000+ members (Est. Oct. 2018). Check out our local business directory at Destinites.com where 400+ local businesses are already listed and enjoy advertising in our targeted group.

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