

JANUARY 2026  
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# DESTIN *Life*

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## The 17th Annual 30A Songwriters Festival Brings Top-Notch Talent and Music Lovers from Around the Globe

BY WILL ESTELL

If you consider yourself a fan of great music and the talented songwriters who make the music you love come to life, you definitely want to make plans to attend the 17th Annual 30A Songwriters Festival. Ranked as one of the top three songwriter festivals in the entire country, there are plenty of reasons to make this your first musical event of the new year: over 125 reasons in fact—and that's just the number of artists playing it!

The renowned festival of music and fun celebrates its 17th year, January 16 - 19, 2026, with four days of performances, including two days of headliners on presenting sponsor Grand Boulevard's main stage in beautiful Miramar Beach. The winter weekend of music and fun is celebrated by music lovers around the globe and somehow seems to get better every single year. That's something I can attest to, as



I attended the very first one! With performances at more than 30 venues, spanning over 30 miles of South Walton's beach communities, this year's festival offers something for everyone. Whether you're a fan of Americana, rock, folk, country or jazz, the popular

festival brings some of the best songwriters to ever grace any stage: all converging on our beautiful, NWFL beaches.

This year's lineup is another assortment of phenomenal artists, from Saturday's Grand Boulevard main stage headliners Paul McDonald & The

Mourning Doves, I'm With Her, and 10,000 Maniacs to Sunday's headliners, Nikki Lane, Toad The Wet Sprocket, and the iconic Mavis Sta-

### SONGWRITERS continued on page 2



## The New Year's Evolution:

How Modern Integrative Medicine Is Redefining Wellness

BY DR. KAREN DEVORE,  
TORTOISE CLINIC

January is a natural invitation to reevaluate how we care for ourselves—not just in terms of resolutions, but in how we want to feel as we move through a new year. More rested. More resilient. More focused. More capable of adapting to life's changes without feeling depleted by them.

### WELLNESS continued on page 2



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 **Community**
**SONGWRITERS**
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ples. Additionally, 2026's lineup includes such well known lyrical masters as Abe Partridge, Charlie Starr of Blackberry Smoke, Benji Shanks, Shawn Mullins, Jeffrey Steele, Paul Thorn, David Ryan Harris, Murray Attaway, Dan Navarro, Brian White, Charlie Mars, Jesse Lynn Madera, and a plethora of both first timers and returning 30A SWF favorites.

When I asked multi-hitmaker and award-winning songwriter Jeffrey Steele what keeps him coming back to perform year-after-year, he said, "I always look forward to 30A Songwriter's Festival, not only as another opportunity to do what I love: singing and entertaining, but also seeing the fans and many of my writer friends I don't see often. Just catching up and hangin' at the beach."

Another returning favorite, Baton Rouge native CJ Solar tells me, "I've been going to 30A Songwriters Fest on and off since its first year. I drove over from Baton Rouge my senior year of high school to see my hero Jeffrey Steele in person for the first time. Jump ahead and I've been invited to play the ASCAP stage a handful of times over the years and am so excited to be back again as a performer! There's

nothing like starting the year off in my favorite part of Florida, doing my favorite thing: playing songs for people who love them!"

Since its inception in 2010, 30A Songwriter's Festival has grown year after year, and is one of many endeavors made possible by Walton County Cultural Arts Alliance (CAA), a remarkable organization that adds so much to Northwest Florida's coastal community through numerous artistic and philanthropic endeavors. 30A Songwriters Festival is co-produced by Russell Carter Artist Management who has been the driving force behind booking the talent since the festival began in 2010. With 100% of the festival's net profits going toward supporting the CAA's mission to advance the arts in Walton County through education, leadership, advocacy, and the funding of special arts related programs within the community, festival goers are not only having a great time, they are also making a positive difference in the lives of so many that CAA serves.

Festival Co-Producer Russell Carter, President of Russell Carter Artist Management, has good reason to be immensely proud of the festival he helped to create. Carter tells me, "This festival began as a small event and grew quickly into a premier one-of-



a-kind showcase for world-class songwriters. Our goal was to curate a festival that presents the absolute best in touring songwriters and performers. We always want our audiences to experience musicians representing diverse genres of music – jazz, blues, country, folk, Americana and rock, with just two stipulations – they have to write their own music and they have to be really great at it!"

I asked Carter about some of the aspects of the 2026 festival that he's most excited about. He said, "We're excited to add

a new headline show on Friday, January 16th at Seaside Amphitheater, featuring 2026 Grammy Nominee Margo Price with her full band. She will feature songs from her catalog, including the just released deluxe album version of 'Hard Headed Woman.' We pride ourselves on supporting emerging artists on the verge of mainstream success. I highly encourage everyone to take this opportunity to see Nikki Lane and Paul McDonald & The Mourning Doves. Both have opening sets on the mainstage, as well as late night club sets at various 30A area venues, and both have critically acclaimed new albums and that are poised to break big, commercially, sooner than later."

**Grab Your Festival Passes Fast!**

Full weekend passes start at only \$395.00, premium seating VIP passes are just \$1,040, and Premiere VIP passes, with special front row seating at the Grand Boulevard Headliners Stage are only \$1,385. All of these ticket packages come in at quite the bargain considering you have the ability to see and hear so many remarkable songwriters across four days along the idyllic beach communities that have become a favorite vacation destination around the world.

For a full menu of perform-

ers, venues and showtimes, as well as grabbing those limited passes while you still can, visit: [30ASongwritersFestival.com](http://30ASongwritersFestival.com) and join us for the festival of music and fun!

*Will Estell is a writer, editor, and multimedia consultant with more than 750 published features across travel, music, real estate, and automotive genres. He has conducted one-on-one interviews with a wide range of notable artists, including Kenny Chesney, Jimmy Buffett, Alan Jackson, Darius Rucker, Lyle Lovett, Amy Grant, Sara Evans, Brian Kelly, Styx, Eli Young Band, Drake White, and many others.*

*Will Estell is the chief creative officer of Estell Hussey Media and has co-founded 12 magazines from concept to launch, while also serving as editor for numerous additional titles. His newest media venture, HIM Magazine—a lifestyle publication for men—is slated to debut on newsstands nationwide in the third quarter of 2026.*

*Originally from rural Mississippi, Estell is a father of three who now lives in Destin and Navarre Beach with his wife, WEAR ABC 3 news anchor Laura Hussey-Estell. He is a longtime regular contributor to Life Media's family of publications.*

**WELLNESS**
*continued from page 1*

It's become quite common for me to see more and more patients shifting from simply treating illness to supporting

everyday function and long-term vitality. They want to sleep more deeply, recover more efficiently, think more clearly, move through hormonal transitions with confidence, and understand how food, environment,



and genetics influence their health. This reflects a growing recognition that real wellness is less about chasing symptoms and more about supporting the body's natural ability to regulate and restore.

At the heart of that regulation is communication between the nervous system, hormones, immune function, and metabolism. When these systems communicate clearly, the body adapts with remarkable precision. When that communication becomes disrupted, however,

we start to feel "off," even if we can't pinpoint exactly why.

Integrative medicine aims to restore this clarity. It blends foundational practices such as nutrition, acupuncture, herbal medicine, medical massage, and lifestyle therapeutics with modern clinical tools including IV nutrients, hormone support, advanced testing, targeted supplementation, and, when appropriate, peptides. None of these replace conventional medicine;


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**Editor & Publisher**  
Lori Leath Smith  
[Lori@LifeMediagrp.com](mailto:Lori@LifeMediagrp.com)
**Director, Advertising Sales**  
Scott Miller  
[Scott@LifeMediagrp.com](mailto:Scott@LifeMediagrp.com)
**Art Director**  
Kim Harper

**Contributing Writers**  
Deborah Carloni  
Dr. Karen Devore  
Will Estell  
Barbara Palmgren  
Kay Phelan  
Christopher Manson

**To Advertise**  
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*Continued on page 4*

# Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center Celebrates 25 Years of Helping Children Heal

BY KAY PHELAN

For a quarter of a century, the Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center (ECCAC) has been dedicated to providing hope, healing and justice to child abuse victims and their families in Florida's Okaloosa and Walton Counties. ECCAC has two centers—the Pierce Family Children's Advocacy Center in DeFuniak Springs and the Julie Sacco Porterfield Children's Advocacy Center in Niceville. ECCAC is an accredited part of the National Children's Advocacy Center non-profit organization. There are 900 Centers across the country, with 28 of them located in Florida.

## How ECCAC Works

The centers don't house children, but instead provide many needed services 24/7 in a child-friendly environment where children can safely tell their stories. Along with ECCAC's staff and volunteers, both of our local centers house a mul-

tidisciplinary team of child protection representatives from the Florida Department of Children and Families, Child Protection Team, State Attorney's Office, local law enforcement and licensed mental health counselors. In ECCAC's 25-year history, over 33,000 children have received more than 200,000 services at no cost.

The single most important hallmark of ECCAC's process is the fact that the impacted child, dealing with the immediate trauma and stress of their situation, can tell their story in one room, just one time. They do not have to repeat it numerous times at different places to different people. In other words, all pertinent parties that can help the child victim are all there at the centers at the same time. Once the child tells their story, action is immediately taken as required for that particular case. It is estimated that for every child ECCAC helps in the two counties, there are two children out there



25th ECCAC Anniversary celebration.

who are not helped due to lack of reporting to authorities.

## The Progress to Help Children Continues

The Niceville center was the

first to open 25 years ago. With Jim and Tammy Pierce's major financial support in 2015, the second center in DeFuniak Springs was made possible. The Pierce Family Children's Advo-



cacy Center became a reality and opened on April 8, 2016. This enabled a major increase in the number of children who can be helped. As well, with prevention being key to making a difference for children, many support programs have been instituted over the years, such as Child Safety Matters, which has advocates who have taught awareness programs to over 17,000 students in both counties. Also, through another grant program, 2 1/2 years ago ECCAC implemented its CARES program, a preventative family-oriented initiative with a myriad of services designed to be the bridge to keeping children

*Continued on page 11*



*It's Time to Ring in the  
New Year!*

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 Community
**WELLNESS***continued from page 2*

rather, they deepen and complement it, allowing us to treat both root causes and overall function.

**Evolving Tools for a New Year: Peptides, IV Nutrients & Hormone Support**

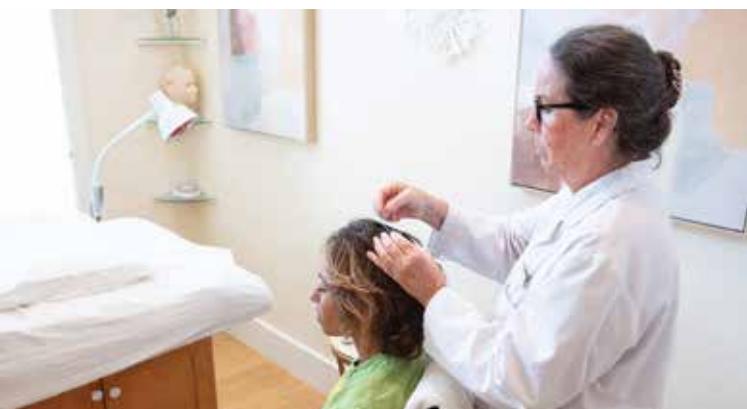
Peptides are one of the most discussed emerging tools in

modern integrative care. These naturally occurring amino acid chains act as subtle messengers, helping regulate inflammation, tissue repair, metabolic and hormonal signaling, and connections between the gut, brain, and immune system. Their goal isn't to override the body but rather to support pathways that have been strained by stress, aging, illness, or environmental demands.

Current research explores

peptides' role in recovery, immune modulation, inflammation balance, gastrointestinal support, and healthy aging. Within my practice, peptides are chosen with careful consideration of each patient's history, medications, lab results, stress patterns, and goals. They are never used as a quick fix, but as a targeted support within a broader, thoughtful plan.

IV nutrient therapy provides




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another route for restoring balance. Delivering hydration, vitamins, and minerals directly into the bloodstream can be especially helpful for correcting deficiencies, supporting energy production, or aiding recovery after illness or exertion.

Hormone replacement therapy, when appropriate and medically supervised, can bring relief and stability during transitions such as perimenopause, andropause, or thyroid dysfunction. Balanced hormones can support cognitive clarity, metabolism, sleep, and overall well-being.

These advanced therapies are most effective not on their own, but when combined with a strong foundation.

**The Nervous System: The Center of Regulation**

No matter which therapies we use, everything ultimately returns to the nervous system. Stress, disrupted sleep, past trauma, or chronic inflammation can keep the nervous system in a heightened state, affecting mood, hormones, digestion, immunity, and pain perception.

I always begin with a comprehensive evaluation including history, lifestyle, symptoms, and both conventional and specialty lab testing to understand the patterns at play. From there, treatment may include acupuncture or neuro-acupuncture, medical massage, tailored herbal formulations, nutritional support, or breath and lifestyle

practices aimed at restoring regulation.

When the nervous system is supported, peptides, IV nutrients, and hormone therapy gain a clearer path to work. Without that foundation, progress is often slower or less sustainable.

**A Thoughtful Approach to the Year Ahead**

Optimization is not instantaneous; it unfolds gradually. The smallest physiological shifts such as better sleep, steadier energy, fewer inflammatory flares are often the signs that regulation is returning. They build upon one another, creating resilience in ways that feel both subtle and profound.

For over 30 years, the Tortoise Clinic has brought together Eastern tradition and Western science to support our community's well-being. Our mission remains unchanged to offer thoughtful, individualized care rooted in safety, evidence, and respect for the body's natural intelligence.

As we move into a new year, consider that meaningful transformation doesn't require dramatic reinvention. It begins with understanding your body's needs, supporting its communication pathways, and allowing small shifts to create meaningful change over time because your wellness is a marathon, not a sprint.

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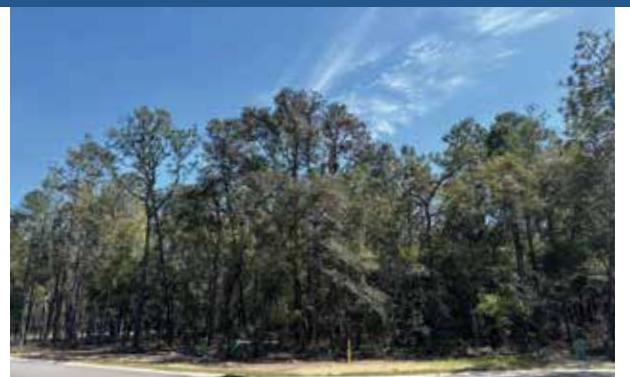
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## A Taste of Mardi Gras: Food, Wine, Craft Beer and More

A Taste of Mardi Gras, this year's Food and Wine Tasting Festival benefiting the Northwest Florida Symphony Orchestra's youth programs, will feature live jazz, tastings of more than 40 wines, local craft beers, and samples of cuisine from area restaurants. Participating eateries include Aegean Greek Restaurant, Cafe Bienville, Magnolia Grill, Peppers Mexican Cantina, Papa's Smokehouse, Olive Garden, Twisted Grape Wine Bar and several others.

The event is scheduled for Sunday, Feb. 1, 2026, from 1 to 4 p.m. at Raider Central (Building 400) on the campus of Northwest Florida State College in Niceville. Guests can also browse a silent auction featuring a variety of items, including gift cards, art, pottery, jewelry and themed gift baskets.

Sponsored by the Northwest Florida Symphony Guild, A Taste of Mardi Gras raises funds to support the Symphony's youth initiatives, including the annual John Leatherwood Concerto Competition.



Tickets are \$65 and may be purchased by calling the Mattie Kelly box office at 850-729-6000 or online at [MattieKellyArtsCenter.org](http://MattieKellyArtsCenter.org).

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

## Pink Out for a Purpose

Fore Her's annual Pink Run 5K and Walk returns Saturday, Jan. 31, 2026, at the Village of Baytowne Wharf in Miramar Beach, inviting participants of all ages and abilities to run, walk or stroll in support of breast cancer patients along the Emerald Coast.

The event begins at 8:30 a.m. and features a timed 5K followed by the popular Survivors' Stroll, a meaningful walk through Baytowne Wharf honoring and celebrating breast cancer survivors. The morning wraps up with a lively after-party featuring a DJ, photo booth, breakfast bites, prizes and more.

Early-bird registration is \$50 through Jan. 5 and includes a race T-shirt. Registration increases to \$60 after Jan. 6, plus the cost of a shirt. Breast cancer survivors receive a discounted \$45 rate, and participation in the Survivors' Stroll is free. Registration is available at [PinkRunBenefitingForeHer.org](http://PinkRunBenefitingForeHer.org).



[itsyourrace.com](http://itsyourrace.com). Additional T-shirts will be available for purchase on race day while supplies last.

Packet pick-up will be held Friday, Jan. 30, from 3-5 p.m. and race morning from 7-8 a.m. at the Baytowne Wharf Village Stage. Complimentary parking is available in the lot north of the Village, past Hotel Effie, with signage directing participants.

Presented by Emerald Coast Hospice Care, learn more about the 2026 Pink Run at [foreher.org/pinkrun](http://foreher.org/pinkrun) or by emailing Amy@foreher.org.

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# Live Interactive Entertainment:

## The New Standard for Luxury Weddings in 2026



BY KRISTIN SULLIVAN, GENERAL MANAGER, THE ALICE

At today's most sought-after luxury venues, weddings are no longer designed as just a timeline of events, they are orchestrated as immersive, guest-driven experiences. In 2026, live interactive entertainment will become the defining element that will transform a beautiful celebration into an unforgettable destination level event.

Luxury couples are no longer asking, "What entertainment should we have?"

They are asking, "How will this experience feel?"

At The Alice, the answer lies in thoughtfully curated, live, interactive moments woven seamlessly throughout the celebration utilizing all aspects of the venue.

### A New Era of Luxury: Where Guests Become Part of the Experience

The modern luxury wedding guest expects more than exquisite décor and exceptional cuisine. They expect to be engaged, delighted and surprised. The most prestigious venues such as ours now design weddings as multi-sensory environments rather than static spaces.

Live interactive entertainment creates:

- Movement throughout the property
- Emotional storytelling through performance
- Personalized moments for each guest
- A sense of discovery and exclusivity

This approach transforms the venue into a living stage, where every space offers its own memorable experience.

### Signature Entertainment Experiences Guests Now Expect Live Artistic Installations

We are receiving inquiries to partner with:

- Fashion sketch artists
- Live portrait painters
- Custom calligraphy stations
- Runway-style illustrators

Guests can receive bespoke keepsakes created in real time, an elevated, tactile memory of the celebration that reflects the level of detail and personalization expected of a luxury property.

### Roaming Performers & Atmospheric Ambience

Rather than isolating entertainment on a single stage, high-end celebrations now feature mobile performance artists:

- Live string musicians moving through garden and terrace spaces
- Vocalists offering intimate serenades
- LED and light performers activated after sunset
- Drone shows
- Stylized dancers guiding guests naturally toward transitions between spaces

This creates a fluid guest



journey and a sense of cinematic movement throughout the venue.

In November, we hosted 55 destination luxury wedding colleagues from all over the USA and Canada. We worked with ESU Productions (Orlando) to curate a program designed to wow our guests, including Celebrity Wedding & Event Planner Colin Cowie. The experience was wonderful; we had four sets throughout cocktail hour and dinner that people are still talking about.

### Experiential Culinary & Cocktail Theatre

Cuisine is no longer presented—it is performed!

Top-tier experiences include:

- Live mixology bars featuring theatrical cocktail creation
- Tableside dessert presentations
- Interactive champagne and caviar tastings
- Espresso bars with live latte artistry

- Fire and flame-based culinary moments

These activations elevate hospitality into a form of entertainment, creating defined moments guests photograph, share, and remember.

### Technology as Quiet Luxury

Future Technology is seamlessly integrating rather than overtly visible, enhancing the guest journey without distracting from elegance.

The Alice is embracing:

- Ambient projection mapping that subtly shifts environments
- Interactive lighting synchronized with music and guest movement
- AI-enhanced audio guest books that transform messages into visual art
- Intelligent LED elements embedded into décor, flooring, and table design

This style of invisible innovation defines modern luxury.

### Why Luxury Venues Are Leading This Evolution

Luxury venues are uniquely positioned to deliver these immersive experiences because

they offer:

- Architectural depth for layered entertainment zones
- Professional partnerships with elite performers and creatives
- Spatial flow that supports storytelling and pacing
- On-site production partner teams capable of executing high-level experiences

For couples, the venue becomes more than a location—it becomes a creative partner in designing a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

### The Luxury Difference: Experience Over Excess

The future of luxury weddings is not defined by more, it is defined by meaning.

Today's discerning couples value:

- Personalization over performance
- Emotion over extravagance
- Experience over decoration

Live interactive entertainment delivers intimacy, wonder, and lasting emotional impact.

Couples are not just planning a wedding; they are commissioning a masterpiece; luxury is no longer about scale. It is about sensation, storytelling and unforgettable moments.





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# Cali's To Do In Destin! JANUARY 2026

**Baytowne on Ice** open daily at Baytowne Wharf!

\*\*\*\*\* 7 \*\*\*\*\*  
**Bonfire on the Beach** | 5pm | The Bay

**Trivia Night** | 5pm | Down Island

**Winter Youth Climbing Club** | 5pm | Rock Out Climbing

**Run Club** | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery

**Run Club** | 5:30pm | Destin Commons x lululemon

**Trivia Night** | 6pm | Craft Bar @ The Harbor

**Karaoke** | 7pm | Kenny D's

**Karaoke** | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty

\*\*\*\*\* 8 \*\*\*\*\*  
**Walton County Snowbirds** | 9am | Destin Methodist Church

**Little Black Dress Night** | 6:30pm-9:30pm | Marina Café

**Sinfonia's "Simply the Best" - Music of Tina Turner** | 7:30pm | Destin-FWB Convention Center

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

**Ladies Night** | 10pm | McGuire's Destin

\*\*\*\*\* 9-12 \*\*\*\*\*  
**Evening with the Stars** | 4pm & 7pm | The Palms Resort | Destin

\*\*\*\*\* 9 \*\*\*\*\*  
**Destin Chamber Business Before Hours** | 7:30am | Emerald Grande | Destin

**Friday Martini Lunch** | 11am-4pm | Skybar Destin

**Fire Pit Friday** | 4pm | 30A Distilling Co.

**Free Beach Bonfire** | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille

**Karaoke** | 7pm | David-Sikes American Legion Post 296 | Main St. Destin

**Karaoke** | 7pm | Island Wing Company

**Salsa & Bachata Dance Lessons** | 8pm | Bric a Brac

**Latin Night** | 8pm-2am | Bosforo | Miramar Beach

**Karaoke** | 6pm | Fatboys Destin

**Trivia Night** | 6pm | Ricks Crab Trap FWB

\*\*\*\*\* 14 \*\*\*\*\*  
**Bonfire on the Beach** | 5pm | The Bay

**Trivia Night** | 5pm | Down Island

**Run Club** | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery

**Trivia Night** | 6pm | Craft Bar @ The Harbor

**Karaoke** | 7pm | Kenny D's

**Karaoke** | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty

\*\*\*\*\* Jan 15-Feb 1 \*\*\*\*\*  
**Murder on the Orient Express** | Various Times | ECTC Grand Blvd. | emeraldcoasttheatre.org

\*\*\*\*\* 15 \*\*\*\*\*  
**Walton Co. Snowbirds TGIT** | 3pm | Sandlots Sports Bar

**Bubbly Baytowne** | 5-7pm | Baytowne Wharf

**Burn After Tasting Candle Making Class** | 6pm | 30A Distilling Co

**Massolini Italian Wine Dinner** | 6pm | The Wine Bar - Destin

**Little Black Dress Night** | 6:30pm-9:30pm | Marina Café

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

**Ladies Night** | 10pm | McGuire's Destin

\*\*\*\*\* 16-19 \*\*\*\*\*  
**30a Songwriters Festival** | various times & locations | South Walton/30a

\*\*\*\*\* 16 \*\*\*\*\*  
**MEC Breakfast & Bowling for Better Futures** | 8:30am | Hurricane Lanes

**Friday Martini Lunch** | 11am-4pm | Skybar Destin

**Fire Pit Friday** | 4pm | 30A Distilling Co.



**Free Beach Bonfire** | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille

**Karaoke** | 7pm | David-Sikes American Legion Post 296 | Main St. Destin

**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 somewhere Baytowne Wharf

\*\*\*\*\* 17 \*\*\*\*\*  
**Farmers Market** | 9am-1pm | Grand Boulevard

**Destin Commons Market** | 2pm | Destin Commons

**Karaoke** | 6pm | Fatboys Destin

**Karaoke** | 8pm | 5 o'clock somewhere Baytowne Wharf

**Karaoke** | 9pm | Fubar

\*\*\*\*\* 18 \*\*\*\*\*  
**Sunday Breakfast** | 8:15-11am | David Sikes Am. Legion Post 296 | Main St. Destin

**DJ Brunch** | 10am | Azul @ Harborwalk

**Walton County Snowbirds - Art Class** | 8am | Destin Methodist Church

**Melodies & Mimosas** | 2pm | Harborwalk Village

**Karaoke** | 9pm | Fubar

**Karaoke** | 9pm | Outcast Bar & Grill

\*\*\*\*\* 19 \*\*\*\*\*  
**Blood Drive** | 11am | American Legion, 311 Main Street

**Free Beach Bonfire/SIN Night** | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille

**Bingo Night** | 6pm | American Legion Destin, 311 Main Street

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

\*\*\*\*\* 20 \*\*\*\*\*  
**Destin Snowbirds General Meeting** | 10am | Destin Community Center

**Destin Snowbirds TGIT Dance Party** | 3-6pm | Lulu's | Destin

**Bunco Ladies Night** | 5:30pm | 311 Main St.

**Karaoke** | 6pm | AJ's on the Bayou

**Karaoke** | 6pm | Hooters Destin

**Karaoke** | 6pm-9pm | Fatboys Destin

**Trivia Night** | 6pm | Ricks Crab Trap FWB

\*\*\*\*\* 21 \*\*\*\*\*  
**Destin Chamber's Tourism & Hospitality Lunch** | 11:30am-1pm | Destin Chamber

**Bonfire on the Beach** | 5pm | The Bay

**Trivia Night** | 5pm | Down Island

**Run Club** | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery

**Trivia Night** | 6pm | Craft Bar @ The Harbor

**Karaoke** | 7pm | Kenny D's

**Karaoke** | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty

\*\*\*\*\* 22 \*\*\*\*\*  
**Walton County Snowbirds** | 9am | Destin Methodist Church

**Little Black Dress Night** | 6:30pm-9:30pm | Marina Café

**Karaoke** | 9pm | Fubar

\*\*\*\*\* 23 \*\*\*\*\*  
**Karaoke Night** | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse

**Ladies Night** | 10pm | McGuire's Destin

\*\*\*\*\* 24 \*\*\*\*\*  
**Free Beach Bonfire/SIN Night** | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille

**Bingo Night** | 8pm-2am | Bosforo | Miramar Beach

**Karaoke** | 8pm | 5 o'clock somewhere Baytowne Wharf

**Karaoke** | 9pm | Fubar

\*\*\*\*\* 25 \*\*\*\*\*  
**Sunday Breakfast** | 8:15-11am | David Sikes Am. Legion Post 296 | Main St. Destin

**DJ Brunch** | 10am | Azul @ Harborwalk

**Sandy's 4th Annual Chili Cook Off** | 11:45am | American Legion, 311 Main St. Destin

**Melodies & Mimosas** | 2pm | Harborwalk Village

**Karaoke** | 9pm | Fubar

**Karaoke** | 9pm | Outcast Bar & Grill

\*\*\*\*\* 26 \*\*\*\*\*  
**Free Beach Bonfire/SIN Night** | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille

**Bingo Night** | 6pm | American Legion Destin, 311 Main Street

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

\*\*\*\*\* 27 \*\*\*\*\*  
**Destin Snowbirds General Meeting** | 10am | Destin Community Center

**Karaoke** | 6pm | AJ's on the Bayou

**Karaoke** | 6pm | Hooters Destin

**Karaoke** | 6pm-9pm | Fatboys Destin

**Trivia Night** | 6pm | Ricks Crab Trap FWB

\*\*\*\*\* 28 \*\*\*\*\*  
**Bonfire on the Beach** | 5pm | The Bay

**Trivia Night** | 5pm | Down Island

**Run Club** | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery

**Prose & Pours Book Club** | 6pm | 30A Distilling Co

**Trivia Night** | 6pm | Craft Bar @ The Harbor

**Karaoke** | 7pm | Kenny D's

**Karaoke** | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty

\*\*\*\*\* Jan 28-Feb 8 \*\*\*\*\*  
**Emerald Coast Music Alliance Festival 2026** | Various Times & Locations | emeraldcoastmusic.org

\*\*\*\*\* 29 \*\*\*\*\*  
**Walton Co. Snowbirds TGIT** | 3pm | Beachcamp Brewpub

**Destin Chamber Awards Party & Wine Dinner** | 6pm | Brotula's

**Little Black Dress Night** | 6:30pm-9:30pm | Marina Café

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

**Ladies Night** | 10pm | McGuire's Destin

\*\*\*\*\* 30 \*\*\*\*\*  
**Friday Martini Lunch** | 11am-4pm | Skybar Destin

**Fire Pit Friday** | 4pm | 30A Distilling Co.

**Free Beach Bonfire** | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille

**Founders Club Cocktail Contest** | 6pm | 30A Distilling Co

**Karaoke** | 7pm | David-Sikes American Legion Post 296 | Main St. Destin

**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 somewhere | Baytowne Wharf

\*\*\*\*\* 31 \*\*\*\*\*  
**Pink Run Benefitting Fore Her** | 8am | Village of Baytowne Wharf

**Farmers Market** | 9am-1pm | Grand Boulevard

**Farmers Market** | 10am | Harborwalk Village

**2026 Panhandle Travel Show** | 1-3pm | Trinity United Methodist Church | FWB

**CALM Chili Cook-Off** | 5pm | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville

**Wacky Tacky Ball** | 6pm | Emerald Grande

**Karaoke** | 6pm | Fatboys Destin

**Karaoke** | 8pm | 5 o'clock somewhere | Baytowne Wharf

**Karaoke** | 9pm | Fubar

## FEBRUARY

\*\*\*\*\* Feb 1 \*\*\*\*\*  
**NFSO's A Taste of Mardi Gras** | 1-4pm | Raider Central (Building 400) | NWFSC | Niceville

\*\*\*\*\* Feb 6-8 \*\*\*\*\*  
**Yakov Smirnoff-Film/TV Star & Comedy Legend** | 4pm & 7pm | The Palms Resort | Destin



## EVENTS • LIVE MUSIC • FOOD

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## Snowbirds Flock to Destin

It's all about making the most out of your visit to Destin and the Emerald Coast according to organizers of the Destin Snowbirds Club. December 15 marked the opening of "The Roost" at the Destin Community Center, home to the Destin Snowbirds December through February. The Club began humbly in 1973, when a small group of like-minded individuals gathered for potluck dinners and activities to bring snowbird visitors together.

The organization's membership has fluctuated since its



inception in 1973, at one point reaching over 3,000 members. However, like other snowbird clubs in the region, membership declined following COVID. Given all the wonderful events and activities planned by the Club for this year, Board members are hopeful membership will increase.

The Destin Snowbird Club is open to local residents as well. Residents are great resources for information on restaurants, shopping, museums, church services and many other special events and activities. Snowbirds have developed lasting friendships with local citizens. Having ties to Destin keeps the snowbirds informed on recent developments and programs and, hopefully, helps create a feeling of home away from home for them.

This season, the Club offers a series of programs, events and activities including bus trips, dances, casino trips, golf, craft shows, poker, fishing trips, harbor cruises and more. Every Tuesday, January through February at 10 a.m., the snowbirds meet at the Community Center to hear local entertainment and meet and talk with local vendors who support our Club and provide door prizes. Vendors say, "The opportunity to share information about who we are and what we do helps bring snowbirds to our business year after year."

The Destin Snowbird Club

website—[thedesinstsnowbirds.com](http://thedesinstsnowbirds.com)—has information about registration, activities and special events. They also have a Destin Snowbird Facebook page allowing members to keep close contact with other members not only while the snowbirds are here, but throughout the year as well. Best of all, snowbirds say that the friendships they have created by joining the Destin Snowbird Club make returning to Destin very special and rewarding.

**Local residents can join the Destin Snowbird Club.**

### Schedule of Events for the Destin Snowbird Club for the 2025-26 Season

#### January 5

BIG REGISTRATION from 1 - 3 p.m., Destin Community Center, Stahlman Ave.

#### January 6

General Membership Meeting at the Destin Community Center, Stahlman Ave., 10 a.m.

Registration 8:30 - 9:45 a.m., Music by FLASH FLOOD.

TGIT Dance Party at Lulu's, 3-6 p.m., Music by FLASH FLOOD.

#### January 13

General Membership Meeting at the Destin Community Center, Stahlman Ave., 10 a.m.

Registration 8:30 - 9:45 a.m., Music by Diki Ross.

#### January 20

General Membership Meeting at the Destin Community Center, Stahlman Ave., 10 a.m.

Registration 8:30-9:45 a.m., Music by Todd Herendeen.

TGIT Dance Party at Lulu's, 3-6 p.m., Music by Todd Herendeen.

#### January 27

General Membership Meeting at the Destin Community Center, Stahlman Ave., 10 a.m.

Registration 8:30-9:45 a.m., Music by Hashtag Swing Band

#### February 10

General Membership Meeting at the Destin Community Center, Stahlman Ave., 10 a.m.

Registration 8:30 - 9:45 a.m., Music by Voices NWFCC Chorus.

#### February 17

General Membership Meeting at the Destin Community

Center, Stahlman Ave., 10 a.m.

Registration 8:30 - 9:45 a.m., Music by Bobby D.

TGIT Dance Party at Lulu's, 3 - 6 p.m., Music by Bobby D.

#### February 24

General Membership Meeting at the Destin Community Center, Stahlman Ave., 10 a.m.

Registration 8:30 - 9:45 a.m.,

Music by Tareva and Fly.

#### February 3

General Membership Meeting at the Destin Community Center, Stahlman Ave., 10 a.m.

Registration 8:30 - 9:45 a.m., Music by Michael Bethea.

TGIT Dance Party at Lulu's, 3-6 p.m., Music by Michael Bethea.

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 Community

# Gumbo to Mardi Gras: Winter Fun at Baytowne Wharf

## Pursue the Roux at the 37th Annual Sandestin Gumbo Festival!

**Friday, Feb. 20, and Saturday, Feb. 21, 12-4 p.m.**

Tantalize your taste buds at the Sandestin Gumbo Festival celebrating 37 years as the Best Gumbo Cook-Off on the Emerald Coast! Yum! Yum! Known as one of the largest and most popular winter food events in our region, our own Gulf Coast area restaurants will feature their top-secret gumbo recipes and compete for your vote. Sample the variety of gumbos and vote for your favorite as the "People's Choice" winner. Dark or light roux? Chicken, sausage or seafood? Celebrity judges will name the "Area's Best." This festival's atmosphere is filled with fun—live Zydeco music from Dikki Du and the Zydeco Krewe while you taste, free kids' activities and restaurants from all over our area vying for your coveted vote.

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

Friday, Feb. 20 details TBD. Visit [www.SandestinGumboFestival.com](http://www.SandestinGumboFestival.com) for tickets and details, including a daily schedule of events and entertainment. General admission tickets are \$45 before Feb. 20 and allow tastings of all gumbo and Bloody Marys; \$55 day of. If you're interested in entering the event, visit [baytownewharf.com](http://baytownewharf.com). The event will happen rain or shine.



boFestival.com for tickets and details, including a daily schedule of events and entertainment. General admission tickets are \$45 before Feb. 20 and allow tastings of all gumbo and Bloody Marys; \$55 day of. If you're interested in entering the event, visit [baytownewharf.com](http://baytownewharf.com). The event will happen rain or shine.

## Annual Mardi Gras Parade!

**Sunday, February 15, 2 p.m. No Cost to Attend.**

Mardi Gras is bigger and better than ever at The Village of Baytowne Wharf! The Village streets will be filled with unique and colorful floats, golf carts, vehicles and costumed dogs along with their humans. Mardi Gras music will fill the air as parade participants and four-pawed friends shower parade-goers

with a barrage of beads, moon pies and other trinkets.

For more information, visit [baytownewharf.com](http://baytownewharf.com).

## Baytowne Beads & Bingo Bash

**Tuesday, Feb. 17 | 5-8 p.m.**

**No Cost to Attend**

Laissez Les Bon Temps Rouler! (Let the good times roll!) at Baytowne's Mardi Gras Merchant Bingo Crawl! Grab a bingo card by the stage and stroll through The Village to discover bead-worthy merchant specials! Check off those squares and complete bingo and turn it in for a festive prize. The fun doesn't stop there—enjoy live music on the main stage from Boukou Groove. Join us for an evening full of beads, bargains and beats! Costumes & Mardi Gras spirit encouraged!

## There's still time to have your Winter Fun at Baytowne On Ice

**Now-Feb. 8**

Lace up those skates and continue the magical winter spirit at The Village of Baytowne Wharf's Baytowne on Ice. For locals and visitors who miss the cold and ice, Baytowne's seasonal ice rink is the perfect opportunity to share some of your favorite winter traditions. The ice rink is open through Sunday, Feb. 9. Hours vary daily. Check the schedule at [baytownewharf.com](http://baytownewharf.com). The cost is \$15 for 90-minute skate and \$3 skate rentals. Skaters must be at least age 3 and fit into appropriately sized skates. Children under age 6 must be accompanied by a parent or adult family member. Call (850) 428-2736 or visit [baytownewharf.com](http://baytownewharf.com) for more information.

## Even More Baytowne Wharf January Fun!

Let it Snow, Let it Snow, Let it Snow! at the **Winter Wonderland**, Saturday, Jan. 10, 9 a.m.-12 p.m. The Village of Baytowne Wharf's Event Plaza is turning into a Winter Wonderland full of real snow! Bundle up and bring the whole family for a day of free, frosty fun!

On Thursday, Jan. 15, 5 p.m., join Baytowne Wharf for an evening full of free champagne and shopping during its **Bubbly Baytowne**. Sip and shop through the Village streets. Stop in various retail merchants as you enjoy a selection of premium champagnes.\* This event is free and for 21 and up only. The village will be open to the public during this event.

Walk or run with friends and family at the **Pink Walk & 5K Benefiting Fore Her** on Saturday, Jan. 31, at 8:30 a.m. Wear your pink and have fun while raising funds for breast cancer patients in financial need. Register at [www.foreher.org/pinkwalk5k](http://www.foreher.org/pinkwalk5k).



**ECCAC**

continued from page 3

in safe and supported homes and out of the judicial child welfare system. CARES stands for Community Awareness, Advocacy, Resources, Education and Support.

**Leadership and the Community Make A Difference**

Julie Sacco Porterfield, ECCAC's CEO has been heading up the organization since the very beginning. Her dedication and diligence have been significantly responsible for ECCAC's success and continuing commitment to help area children.

Porterfield commented, "Twenty-five years ago, we stood on the front porch to open the



ECCAC's child-friendly therapy.

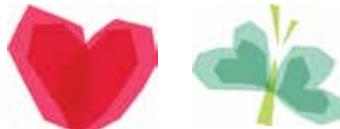
Niceville Center. Our dedicated team members made a promise to our community to protect the most vulnerable in our community. This would not have been possible were it not for our incredible agency partners, our



DeFuniak Springs Center in Walton County.



Niceville Center in Okaloosa County.



Board of Directors, generous donors, dedicated volunteers and our caring community." She further added, "One day we will hang that "Closed for Business" sign – not in defeat, but in tri-

umph, because every child will be living free from abuse, abandonment and neglect. Children deserve absolutely no less. We will continue to build a better, healthier future by ending child abuse, one child at a time."

**How to Help Make a Difference in a Child's Life**

Until that day, the commu-

nity can help by serving on the Board of Directors, volunteering, giving or advocating for the children. For more information, visit [www.eccac.org](http://www.eccac.org), or call 850-400-3488. If abuse is suspected, report it by calling the anonymous Florida Abuse Hotline at 1-800-96-ABUSE.



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Mayor Bobby Wagner and  
PIO Tamara Young, PhD

BY TAMARA L. YOUNG, PID FOR  
THE WORLD'S LUCKIEST FISHING  
VILLAGE

As 2026 gets underway, Destin is buzzing with momentum. From Joe's Bayou to Clement Taylor Park, long-anticipated projects are becoming reality, signaling a fresh year of progress designed to enhance life in the World's Luckiest Fishing Village. Here's a look at some of the city's ongoing projects and

improvements:

**Joe's Bayou:** This Department of Environmental Protection project is in the permitting phase.

"If there is one thing I have learned in government, it is that state projects take time," said Mayor Bobby Wagner. A good example of this is with the Joe's Bayou upgrades. Currently in the permitting stage, Joe's Bayou will see over an acre of improved waterfront access, upgraded piers, and more fam-

ily-friendly spaces. "But once this is done, Joe's Bayou will be one of the coolest locals parks we have."

Councilwoman Teresa Herbert agreed. "The upgraded piers, boat launches and improved parking are all much needed changes for our citizens and visitors."

**The Crosstown Connector:** Storm water drainage is being installed, with roadway and multi-use path construction to begin this year. The project



aims to relieve neighborhood congestion while enhancing walkability.

"Apps like Google Maps and Waze have already pushed traffic into our neighborhoods," said Wagner. "The Crosstown Connector takes that traffic off local streets and puts it behind people's backyard fences where it belongs. And we are not just planning for cars, we are building for people."

**Batting Cages at Morgan Sports Complex:** With its renewed Children's Park, Morgan Sports Complex continues to be a gathering spot for families, especially with batting cages with six bays having been completed — a permanent addition designed to serve athletes young and old.

"Having fixed, permanent batting cages at Morgan's will be a huge asset for the community of Destin as well as all visitors that come to this park," said Councilman Kevin Schmidt. "For the Destin community, having access to multiple cages at this park will allow great practice opportunities."

**Morgan Sports Lighting—Field and Parking Lot:** "Having the lights replaced and upgraded to new LED is monumental for every field at Morgan's, including baseball, softball and soccer," said Schmidt. "This is a major improvement and an amazing cost savings over time."

**Pickleball:** The fastest-growing sport in America has found a home here. Four



new courts, canopy-covered benches, restrooms and parking upgrades are expected to be ready by Spring 2026.

"This project has been years in the making, and it is exciting to finally see work happening on site," said Wagner. The hardest part was starting from scratch with a brand-new facility, which meant most of the budget had to go toward the foundation and infrastructure. The silver lining is that once these first four courts and bathrooms are done, the groundwork is in place. If the community wants more courts or even new amenities like a skate park, the site is ready to expand."

**Terpont Park:** The new beachfront park will offer 340-feet of additional public beach access, free parking with 49 standard spaces, 3 ADA accessible spaces, 29 LSV spaces, bathroom facilities, and four pa-

## "Reel Talk" from the City of Destin

### Reeling in Progress: Destin Casts Big Plans for the Future

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Continued on next page

## REELING

*continued from previous page*

vilions. The County is leading this effort with hopes to have it ready Summer 2026.

"For years, crowded beaches and legal disputes have left people asking, 'Where is the line in the sand?'" said Wagner. "The surest solution is simple. Buy back beachfront property so locals and visitors alike always have access. That is what Tarpon Park represents. When we secure public beaches, we are not just buying sand. We are protecting a family tradition that stretches across generations. Many visitors tell me about their first family vacations here, and now they are bringing their kids back to repeat the cycle. These are the kinds of stories that bind visitors and locals together, and keeping our beaches open ensures that cycle continues for generations to come."

**Norrieo Point:** New dunes walkovers, conservation features, bathrooms, and boardwalks are in place.

**Clement Taylor Park:** Restoration has begun. The pier has been completed, board-for-board, and the new playground will be in place in Fall 2026.

"I will admit I am biased because this is my favorite park, with some of the oldest trees in Destin," said Wagner. "What I love is how this project shows we can modernize without losing the natural beauty. The new playground, restrooms, pavilions and dock are much-needed upgrades, but the real heart of Clement Taylor is still its trees."

and shoreline. Nature remains the star here."

**Undergrounding Utilities:** Phase 1 project and restoration work has begun and is located along U.S. Highway 98 from the Marler Bridge to Airport Road. "Undergrounding utilities is about preparing Destin for the future," said Wagner. "It makes us more resilient to storms, cleans up the look of our streets, and future proofs our infrastructure."

**Dredging:** There is an existing 100-foot-wide Army Core of Engineer channel that helps guide boat traffic in and out of Destin Harbor from the nearby East Pass. The larger boats with greater drafts that utilize Destin Harbor have requested that the City dredge the harbor channel, because they are struggling to maneuver within the existing channel given the amount of boat traffic and the lack of depth within portions of the channel.

**Four Prong Lake:** Permitting is complete, and the City is working to secure funding. "Four Prong Lake shows what local government can do when we partner and find the right funding," said Wagner. "This is a nearly 3-million-dollar project, and two-thirds of that money is coming from the state. It is also a great case study for annexation. A gated neighborhood with flooding issues, and yet by working together with their HOA, the City, and outside partners, we are solving real problems while being good stewards of our local tax dollars."

**Dalton Threadgill:** The

City and Destin Little League partnered to install a drainage system and artificial turf on two fields.

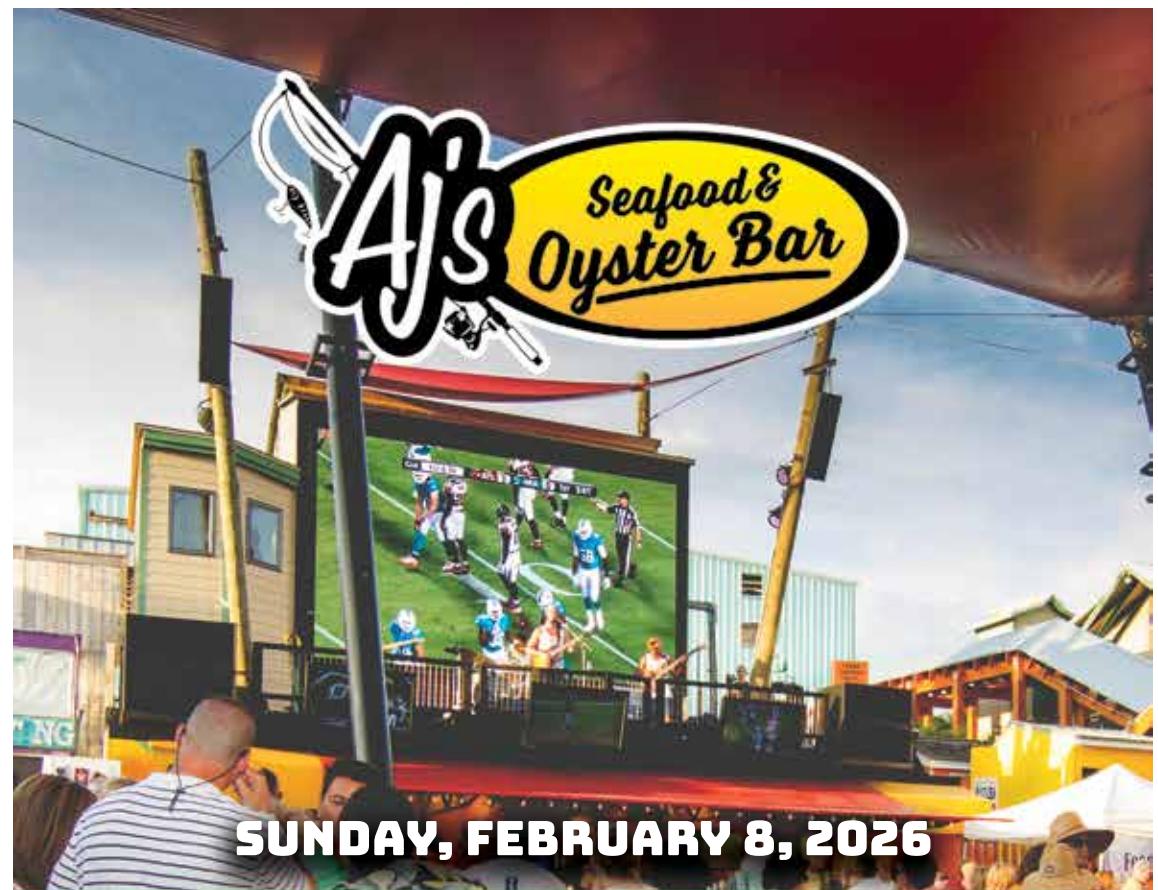
"Dalton Threadgill holds a special place in everyone's heart in the City of Destin," said Schmidt. "The partnership that the city has with the Destin Little League (a 501c3 organization) has been in place for nearly 50 years! The fields and playing surfaces are prepped

and maintained by volunteers of the league during season in partnership with the city. Having turf playing infields allows significant savings in maintenance for all, a much better and safer playing surface, and field prep a breeze. We should almost never have a cancellation due to flooded infield."

There are, of course, more projects in motion, such as Calhoun (446) Ave., Mattie Kelly,

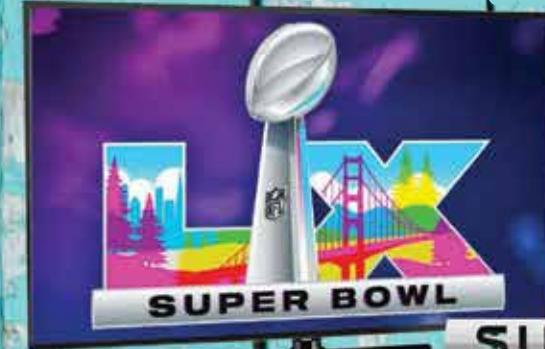
the Linear Trail (a new east-to-west connector for walkers and cyclists and the Shore at Crystal Beach.

"As our schools grow and more families call Destin home, our parks, roads, facilities and beaches need to grow with them. Years from now, people will see this time as a turning point for our city," said Wagner.



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## Trends & Treasures!



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A new year is the perfect time to refresh your look — and at Pure & Couture Salon, confidence is always in style. Known for its personalized approach to beauty and self-care, the salon offers a full range of hair, makeup and wellness services designed to help clients look and feel their best.

Owner Adrienne Brackett and her team of experienced stylists and makeup artists take time to truly listen, creating looks that reflect each client's personality, lifestyle and goals. From vibrant color and precision cuts to hand-tied hair extensions, Pure & Couture focuses on healthy, beautiful hair at every stage. The salon also carries professional-grade products, including Oribe's Renewal Remedies Treatment, to support stronger, longer and healthier hair at home.

Beyond hair, clients can enjoy makeup services, spray tans, pampering facials and therapeutic offerings that elevate the beauty experience into total self-care. Every visit is about building a relationship — not just a style.

With convenient curbside pickup and online ordering available, Pure & Couture makes it easy to invest in yourself. Step into the new year feeling polished, confident and completely you.

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everyday moments into sweet celebrations.

From classic favorites to bold, seasonal creations, Smallcakes offers an ever-changing lineup of cupcakes topped with swirls of colorful, crave-worthy frosting. With daily signature flavors, rotating specialties and house-made ice cream, there's always something new to discover. Hosting a party or celebrating a milestone? Smallcakes specializes in custom and holiday cupcakes, birthday and wedding cakes, edible logos and images — and even "pup cakes" so furry friends don't miss out on the fun.

Beyond cupcakes, the menu is packed with irresistible options including jumbo cookies, gourmet popcorn, brownies, cookie cakes and cupcakes-in-a-jar. Can't choose just one? A box of assorted mini cupcakes lets you sample the best of everything.

Perfect for parties, gifting or just treating yourself, Smallcakes adds a pop of color and joy to the year ahead. Because life is sweeter when dessert comes first. And who doesn't like a gift of sweets?

Call ahead for pre-orders, DoorDash or curbside pickup! Hours: Mon. through Sat., 11 a.m. – 7 p.m.; Sun. 11 a.m. – 4 p.m.

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Owner and designer Ashleigh Woolly is especially passionate about creating engagement rings and wedding bands, working closely with couples to bring their love stories to life. "It is truly special to help people celebrate one of the biggest moments of their lives," Woolly shared. Over the past year, Beyond Measure has had the honor of designing hundreds of custom pieces, each

one as unique as the milestone it represents.

Whether your style leans classic, modern or completely one-of-a-kind, a visit to Beyond Measure promises inspiration at every turn. From heirloom-worthy designs to bespoke creations, this is where craftsmanship, elegance and heartfelt moments come together.

2026 design consultations are now being booked for a personalized, one-on-one jewelry experience — where every detail is crafted beyond measure.

(850) 424-7011 | [Facebook.com/beyondmeasurejewelers](http://Facebook.com/beyondmeasurejewelers)  
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Brian's goal is simple: empower sellers with the knowledge to make the smartest decisions possible. "I've provided an effective guide to ensure the most successful transaction possible," he says. And his track record proves it. One Destin homeowner shared, "Because of Brian's efforts, we quickly sold our home and purchased a 30A beachfront property below asking price."

From maximizing curb appeal to winning in multiple-offer situations, Brian's expertise gives sellers a true edge. If you're ready to sell smarter — not harder — this guide is the place to start. Destin Life readers can get it FREE by calling the number below.

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One of the center's most popular services is whole-body cryotherapy, which uses cold exposure to calm inflammation, support immune health and accelerate recovery. Many clients pair cryotherapy with red light therapy to promote cellular repair, circulation and skin health, or with compression therapy to ease muscle soreness and improve lymphatic flow.

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# Why is the Medicare Open Enrollment Period Important to You?



BY GREG DURETTE, YOUR FLORIDA HEALTH CONNECTOR

Now that the Medicare Annual Election Period (AEP) is over (ended December 7th), you can finally take a breather from all those ads, phone calls and mailers—sort of. Come January 1st, you will have a chance to try out your new Medicare Advantage, Supplement and/or Prescription plan.

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

As with many situations, in order to have a good outcome,

you will first have to ask the right questions. In this case, the questions you should ask yourself are:

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

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

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

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

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

## These allowed changes are:

- Cancel your stand-alone Part D prescription drug plan
- Drop your Medicare Advan-

tage Plan and return to Original Medicare (A & B only)

- Enroll in a stand-alone Medicare Part D prescription drug plan
- Elect to change from one Medicare Advantage Plan to another either with the same insurance company or an entirely different one

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

Second, there are a few rare circumstances when it makes sense for someone to cancel an Advantage plan and return to Original Medicare known as Part A and Part B. Usually this



may have something to do with provider networks which are insufficient for the beneficiary or some other unusual event. Again, this rare circumstance would require you to also remain in or enroll in a stand-alone Part D prescription drug plan in order to avoid accruing the future penalties I just mentioned.

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

Last, some folks have a change of heart once they see

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

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

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

*Greg Durette is a qualified, licensed agent with Florida Health Connector providing Medicare throughout the State of Florida and is based in Niceville. He has been in the insurance industry for nearly 43 years and can be reached at his office at 850-842-2400 or his mobile at 978-509-2941.*

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## A New Way to Live in Retirement

Before the first streaks of sunrise settle over Inlet Beach, one member is already at the gym — stretching, lifting, moving with a quiet determination. “I wake up at 4:30,” he says with a shrug, as if it’s the most natural thing in the world. “I work out, head back for breakfast, and then I decide: golf simulator... or swimming?”

He smiles. “I feel better than I have in years.”

Across the community, the day opens at its own gentle tempo. A woman clips a leash on her dog and walks toward one of the community’s dog-friendly outdoor areas, grateful for the easy routine they’ve settled into. Not long ago, she was living with her daughter in Alys Beach, watching Watersound Fountains being built across the highway. She never imagined it would one day be home.

“I thought, Those places aren’t for me,” she admits.

But when her daughter insisted she come take a look, everything shifted — the bright, thoughtfully designed apartments, the welcoming outdoor



spaces for her dog, the light, the openness, the surprising sense of possibility.

“After the first week,” she says, “there was no going back.”

The beauty of a morning here is that everyone’s version looks a little different. Some head to the balance studio for physical therapy. Others meet friends on the walking trails that curl through Watersound and 30A. Some hop on a bike. Some linger over coffee. Each person finds their own pace.

By mid-morning, the community hums with activity. One member laughs as she lists her schedule: “Today I had, back-to-back: physical therapy, a fitness class, book club, then happy hour.” She shakes her head, still amused. “It’s just kind of nonstop here.”

And yet, it’s never rushed. Life simply unfolds — with options around every corner.

For many, the choice to move to Watersound Fountains was about proximity. After years in



Georgia, far from children and grandchildren, one couple realized they wanted the holidays, the milestones, and the simple weekends back. Now their son, daughter-in-law, and granddaughter live minutes away. “We do more now,” they say. “Especially with family so close.”

Afternoons often stretch into easy hours. Neighbors meet in the W Lounge. Others gather around the open hearth pizza oven, where flatbreads are rolled out right in front of them. On Fridays, The Mark dining room becomes the community’s favorite tradition — a dressed-up, reservations-only dinner with filet, snapper, grouper, and the kind of conversations people look forward to all week.

There’s always movement, always laughter, always someone waving from a walkway or

calling out a hello — the kind of natural, everyday community that makes a place feel alive.

What surprises many is not how much there is to do, but how effortless daily life feels here. The physical therapist is downstairs. The gym is steps away. The trails are safe and beautifully maintained. The beaches and local favorites are just a short drive. Every day can unfold at its own pace.

“You can do as much or as little as you want,” a member says as she waves to a neighbor. “It’s like living in a resort — but it feels like home.”

And maybe that’s the truest throughline here.

Occasionally, one member’s daughter will call and say, “Come home — come stay some.” And she’ll laugh and reply, “But I am home. This is my home.”

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## On the Market, Get Set... Go! Attitude Makes the Difference



BY PAUL ANDRES DOMENECH

Every new year brings the same familiar question every Realtor hears: "So... how's the market looking?"

For some people, the answer feels negative. Yet very often, the problem is not truly the market itself. The real difference is attitude and expectation. When expectations don't line up with affordability and availability, frustration grows. When attitude aligns with reality and strategy, opportunity shows up.

The word that continues to define today's market is affordability. The key question for a

seller is simple: Is your home being priced in alignment with the buyers currently searching? When price meets reality, homes move. When price ignores reality, homes sit.

Real estate is fair in a unique way. If you sell for more in a strong market, you often pay more when you buy. If you buy at a discount, you likely sold at one too. Some people do catch amazing timing, but that usually comes from staying prepared, patient and engaged, not guessing perfectly. Good things happen to people who stay ready.

### What to Expect Heading into Spring

Many people held off during the holidays and will now enter the market at once. That means competition will increase. Homes that didn't sell last year normally weren't victims of a "bad market." More often they were misaligned on price, presentation, or strategy. Look closely at what is currently not



selling; that tells the truth about buyer behavior.

The properties that did sell were the desirable ones. They were priced right, well-prepared, or offered value in location, upgrades, or lifestyle. It is rarely just "seasonal." It's about value that matches today's buyer.

Time on market also has a cost. Every extra month adds stress, mortgage interest, upkeep, utilities, and missed opportunity. Sometimes giving the buyer a slight advantage saves far more than waiting.

### For Buyers

Be ready. The best homes still move fast, and sellers know spring brings activity. Have lending prepared and be willing to act when you see the right fit. Look at comparable properties and write your best offer the first time. Early in the year, multiple offers are common on desirable homes. Avoid the regret of saying, "I wish I would have gone higher."

And most of all, keep faith and a positive mindset. If you lose a home after doing your best, something better is ahead. We worry most where we trust least, move forward with confidence.

### For Expired Listings

If your listing expired last year, it is not over. Regroup, reset, and recharge. Treat the property as a fresh listing in a fresh market. Review whether you had a real pricing and mar-

keting strategy or simply "listed and hoped." Identify the moment momentum stopped, and be honest about whether decisions were data-driven or emotional.

Sometimes the best plan is simple: start again, new photos, new presentation, new price alignment. There is a buyer for every home when strategy, price, and attitude all match.

### The Bottom Line

Attitude is not everything, but it is the difference maker. With professional guidance comes competence. With competence comes confidence. And confidence shapes the attitude that attracts success.

Let's make 2026 a year of movement, clarity, and action. The market doesn't control us.

We lead it.

Visit [Thedomenechgroup.com](http://Thedomenechgroup.com), contact me directly at 850-543-1418, [Paul@thedomenechgroup.com](mailto:Paul@thedomenechgroup.com) or contact a trusted real estate advisor.

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# Preparing Students for Any Future: **Celebrating 30 Years of Excellence at THE SEASIDE SCHOOL™**

This year marks 30 years of excellence for The Seaside School, a public charter school system recognized throughout South Walton for academic achievement, strong relationships, and a future-focused approach to education. Serving students in grades 5–12 through Seaside Neighborhood School and Seacoast Collegiate High School, The Seaside School has built a reputation for preparing students not only for college, but for life.

At the foundation of The Seaside School's success is a deep understanding of how adolescents learn, grow, and develop confidence. Across both campuses, students engage in rigorous academics while developing durable life skills including critical thinking, communication, collaboration, adaptability, leadership, and problem-solving that equip them for any path they choose.

At Seaside Neighborhood School (grades 5–8), students ex-

perience a learning environment intentionally designed for adolescents. Small cohorts, strong teacher-student relationships, and engaging, interdisciplinary instruction help students feel safe, known, and academically confident during these critical years. SNS is known for its focus on literacy, numeracy, inquiry-based learning, and the arts, while also providing leadership and mentorship opportunities that empower students to find their voice.

Community engagement is central to the SNS experience. Through arts programming, mentorship, service leadership, and community-based projects, students learn responsibility, empathy, and civic engagement, developing a strong sense of purpose and belonging while contributing meaningfully to the world around them.

This strong academic and developmental foundation carries seamlessly into Seacoast Collegiate High School (grades 9–12),



where students experience a re-imagined high school model that blends traditional student life with advanced academic opportunity. Students participate in athletics, arts, debate, leadership programs, clubs, and school traditions while also accessing dual enrollment and career-aligned pathways.

Ranked in the Top 2% of Florida public schools, Seacoast students benefit from highly qualified, relationship-driven educators, daily tutoring, and personalized academic and college planning. Many graduate, having earned up to 60 tuition-free college credits, often completing an Associate's Degree before high school graduation, saving

families an average of \$30,000 in college tuition.

Seacoast student voices reflect the impact of this model. Fernanda Leyva shared, "I'm grateful for every single person and opportunity—everyone here is an advocate for me."

Sullivan Stubley noted, "Seaside prepares me through its accelerated tracks."

And Kincső Tischler emphasized the strength of relationships, saying, "The faculty genuinely cares about my well-being, and I have a special relationship with my counselors."

Seacoast's impact continues to grow through its expansion at the Northwest Florida State College South Walton Center campus, where the high school now operates within a new, state-of-the-art facility featuring an Innovation Lab, advanced technology and engineering spaces, and collaborative learning environments. Students engage with industry-standard tools while exploring fields such as engi-

nering, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, design, business, healthcare, and the arts—all without leaving South Walton.

As a tuition-free public charter school, enrollment at The Seaside School is completed through an annual lottery. Families interested in Seaside Neighborhood School or Seacoast Collegiate High School are encouraged to apply during the current application window from January 9th to February 13th.

With 30 years of proven results, a strong foundation of trust, and a bold vision for the future, The Seaside School continues to set the standard for innovative, student-centered public education, supporting students from early adolescence through college readiness and beyond.

Families must apply before February 13 to be considered in the open lottery. For more information, visit [SeasideSchools.net](http://SeasideSchools.net).

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**3** **Personalized Support in a Safe, Close-Knit Community**  
Small cohorts, daily tutoring, individualized academic and college planning, and strong student-adult relationships ensure every student is known, supported, and challenged.

**4** **Education Beyond Textbooks – Experiences That Build Confidence**  
Students grow through leadership, athletics, arts, and real-world experiences. Programs include AI, STEM, cybersecurity, robotics, Rock Band, Theatre, Debate, service leadership, mentorship, and dozens of clubs and sports—building confidence, resilience, teamwork, and voice.

**5** **Dual Enrollment, Certifications & Flexible Pathways for the Future**  
Students can earn up to 60 tuition-free college credits through dual enrollment at Northwest Florida State College, often completing an Associate's Degree and saving families an average of \$30,000. Along the way, students earn industry certifications (AI, cybersecurity, CAD, Fusion 360), the Florida Seal of Biliteracy, and develop durable life skills—critical thinking, adaptability, and problem-solving—preparing them for any path they choose.



# The Season of Maintenance: Why Small Actions Over Time Matter Most



BY DANICA LAFRAIRE,  
FISH WINDOW CLEANING

January has a way of making people feel like they're already behind.

The holidays are over, routines are settling back in, and suddenly we're surrounded by messages about transformation — new goals, new habits, new versions of ourselves. But most meaningful progress doesn't

come from one big push at the start of the year. It comes from something far less glamorous: maintenance.

Maintenance doesn't get much credit. It's quiet, repetitive, and often invisible. Yet it is what keeps homes comfortable, businesses running, bodies healthy, finances stable, and confidence intact. Small actions, taken consistently over time,



not something we should only think about when it's gone; it is something we protect through regular care.

Financial health may be where maintenance is most misunderstood. Firms like McGregor Financial Group help individuals and families focus on long-term strategy rather than quick wins. Wealth is rarely built in a single decision. It is built through steady planning, routine reviews, and thoughtful adjustments over time.

Dental care tells the same story. Practices like Mid Bay Dental and Sea Breeze Endodontics know that most major dental issues don't appear overnight. Routine care helps address small concerns before they turn into painful — and expensive — problems.

What all of these examples have in common is consistency. Research on habit formation shows that small, repeatable behaviors become automatic over time — often after just a couple of months of consistency. As those habits take root, something else happens too: confidence grows. Psychologists call it self-efficacy — the belief that we can follow through, handle challenges, and trust ourselves to maintain what matters.

That confidence does not come from grand gestures. It comes from keeping promises to ourselves in small ways. Scheduling the maintenance. Showing up for the workouts. Booking the check-ups. Taking care of things before they break.

Personally, this season has reinforced that strength isn't always loud. Sometimes it looks like quietly doing the work — even when no one's watching, even when progress feels slow. Especially then.

Physical fitness follows the same pattern. Places like Hard Body Fitness and HOTWORX aren't built on overnight results — they're built on routine. Showing up regularly, even when motivation dips, is what creates strength, endurance, and confidence over time. One intense workout doesn't change much. Consistency does.

Vision care works much the same way. Routine eye exams at Wells Vision and Laser Eye Care Center or Special-Eyes Vision Center help catch changes early, often before we notice them ourselves. Clear vision is

Because over time, maintenance isn't just what keeps things running.

It is what helps us believe we can keep going.



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# Winter Productivity: The Best Time to Tackle Big Home Projects



BY KYLE SPARKS,  
OVATION PAINTING

After the whirlwind of the holidays, January brings a quieter pace along the Emerald Coast. The guests have gone home, schedules settle, and life finally slows down. That calm stretch makes it the perfect time to tackle bigger home projects — the ones that are easy to put off when things get busy.

Interior painting often tops that list. During the winter months, humidity drops and paint cures more evenly, producing a smooth, lasting finish. With fewer distractions, it's easier to focus on transforming entire spaces instead of piecemeal touch-ups. A full-home repaint now means you'll start the new year with clean walls, sharp trim, and rooms that feel refreshed and ready for daily life.

This is also an ideal time to address updates that make your home more comfortable for the year ahead. Whether it's



finally giving attention to that high-traffic hallway, brightening a dark living room, or repainting a space you've been meaning to reclaim, winter offers the breathing room to make it happen without interruption.

For property managers and owners of vacation rentals, Jan-

uary's slower pace is an advantage, too. With fewer guests and open schedules, this is the perfect time to refresh interiors and prepare for the spring rush.

When it's cold outside, investing in your interior is one of the smartest ways to use the season. By the time warmer weather and busier days return, your home will already look and feel renewed.

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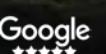


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BY SCOTT MILLER

Here along the Emerald Coast, we're fortunate to have some of the best sports bars and restaurants around, ready and waiting to welcome us. They serve up great food, cold drinks, and make every game feel like a championship. So grab your crew, claim your spot and get in on the action — I hope to 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 hangout known for fresh oysters and cold beer has grown into one of the most iconic "hot spots" on the

Check out the local top spots to eat, cheer and high-five your way through the games.

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 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!

*Continued on next page*

**AJ's** **FOOTBALL IS BACK!**

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**AJ's Seafood & Oyster Bar** **AJ's On the Bayou** **AJ's Oyster Shanty** **AJ's Grayton Beach**

**GAME ON***continued from previous page*

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., sev-

en days a week. Enjoy a classic breakfast with bacon and eggs, a seafood or Cajun omelet and even a kid's smiley pancake. Be sure to order up a round of mimosas and bloody marys. 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.

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## Derrick Brooks to Headline 2026 All Sports Association Banquet

Get ready for an inspiring evening of recognition, community and athletic excellence as the All Sports Association (ASA) hosts its 2026 Annual Awards Banquet on Friday, February 20, 5:30 p.m. at the Destin / Fort Walton Beach Convention Center. The banquet promises to bring together athletes, community leaders, coaches and sponsors in Northwest Florida for an evening to remember.

**A Star-Studded Keynote**

This year's keynote speaker is NFL Hall of Famer Derrick Brooks — Super-Bowl champion, defensive powerhouse and

committed community leader. With 11 Pro Bowl selections, nine All-Pro honors and induction into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 2014, Brooks brings not only elite athletic credibility, but a passion for service and character.

You can expect a formal awards dinner celebrating the top athletes, coaches and civic partners of 2025–2026, with honors presented to individuals who excelled not only on the field, but also in the classroom and the community. Brooks' keynote address will offer powerful

*Continued on next page*

WE'RE HONORED TO ANNOUNCE OUR  
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FOR THE  
**ALL SPORTS ASSOCIATION**  
*Awards Banquet*

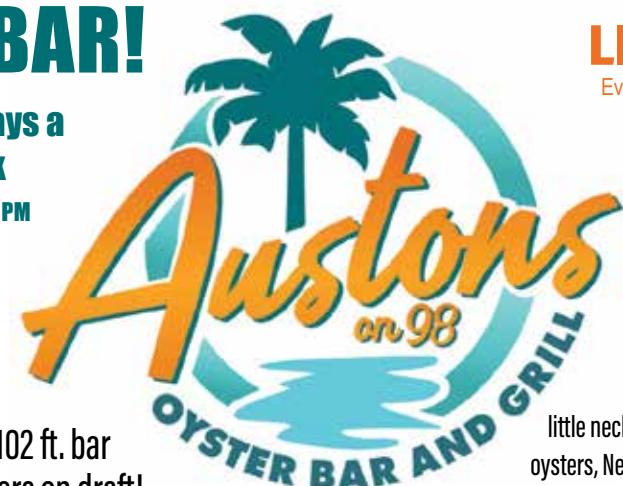
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# 2025-26 College Football Bowl Game Schedule



## Thursday, Jan. 1

- CFP Quarterfinals
- Orange Bowl — Texas Tech vs. Oregon/James Madison winner — 11 a.m. | ESPN
- Rose Bowl — Indiana vs. Oklahoma/Alabama winner — 3 p.m. | ESPN
- Sugar Bowl — Georgia vs. Ole Miss/Tulane winner — 7 p.m. | ESPN

## Friday, Jan. 2

- Armed Forces Bowl — Texas State vs. Rice — 12 p.m. | ESPN

- Liberty Bowl — Navy vs. Cincinnati — 3:30 p.m. | ESPN
- Duke's Mayo Bowl — Mississippi State vs. Wake Forest — 7 p.m. | ESPN
- Holiday Bowl — No. 17 Arizona vs. SMU — 7 p.m. | FOX

## Championship Week

### Thursday, Jan. 8

- CFP Semifinal (Fiesta Bowl) — 6:30 p.m. | ESPN

## Friday, Jan. 9

- CFP Semifinal (Peach Bowl) — 6:30 p.m. | ESPN

## Monday, Jan. 19

- College Football Playoff National Championship — 6:30 p.m. | ESPN

## Bowl Game Results (Final)

### Saturday, Dec. 13

- Celebration Bowl — South Carolina State 40, Prairie View A&M 38

- LA Bowl — Washington 38, Boise State 10

## Tuesday, Dec. 16

- Salute to Veterans Bowl — Jacksonville State 17, Troy 3

## Wednesday, Dec. 17

- Cure Bowl — Old Dominion 24, South Florida 10
- 68 Ventures Bowl — Delaware 20, Louisiana 13

## Thursday, Dec. 18

- Xbox Bowl — Arkansas State 34, Missouri State 28

## Friday, Dec. 19

- Gasparilla Bowl — Memphis ??, NC State ??
  - College Football Playoff First Round — Alabama ??, Oklahoma ??
- (All Times Central)

## ALL SPORTS

*continued from previous page*

insights on leadership, perseverance and success in sports and in life. In addition, you'll enjoy opportunities to network with local sports programs, sponsors and youth volunteers and also receive updates on upcoming ASA initiatives and the distribution of funds that support youth-focused sports and service organizations throughout the region.

### The ASA Mission

The All Sports Association was founded in 1970 under the leadership of Colonel Al Byrne, with the first banquet held at the Holiday Inn on Okaloosa Island. From those modest beginnings, ASA's membership of volunteers has grown to raise funds and provide time-based service to support youth sports and community programs across the Emerald Coast.

Funded primarily through

the awards banquet and an annual golf tournament, the organization channels its proceeds to local non-profits including the Boys & Girls Club of the Emerald Coast, Special Olympics Florida-Okaloosa, the Eleanor J. Johnson Youth Center and Okaloosa Walton FCA.

At the heart of the ASA's recognition program lies a simple, yet powerful, standard: the athletes honored must excel not only in their sport but also in

their academics and community involvement. Through the banquet and associated awards, ASA underscores the belief that true excellence includes character, responsibility and service.

Recipients are those who maintain strong grades, are active in their schools and volunteer in the community — reflecting ASA's full mission to boost youth, sport and citizenship alike.

Over the years, ASA's ban-

quet has hosted renowned keynote speakers who bring experience, inspiration and perspective to the local stage among them Herschel Walker, Bo Jackson, Tim Tebow, Nick Saban, Urban Meyer, Chad Hennings and several others. From professional athletes to community champions, these voices have helped elevate the banquet beyond mere awards to a moment of collective motivation and connection.

For athletes, coaches, volunteers and sponsors in our region, the ASA banquet is more than a gala—it's a celebration of the values we prize: teamwork, dedication, citizenship and community investment. It brings together high school and youth sports programs, local businesses, civic leaders and families under one roof to honor triumphs and galvanize support for what's next.

With Derrick Brooks as this year's keynote, the event carries added prestige and excitement—offering both young athletes and the wider community a chance to hear from someone who not only mastered football, but leveraged his platform for impact.

### Want to Help?

Those interested in sponsorships, table reservations or event participation can visit the ASA website: [www.allsportsassociation.com](http://www.allsportsassociation.com).

Join on February 20, 2026, as we celebrate champions in sport, service and character — and help invest in the bright future of youth athletics right here on the Emerald Coast.

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

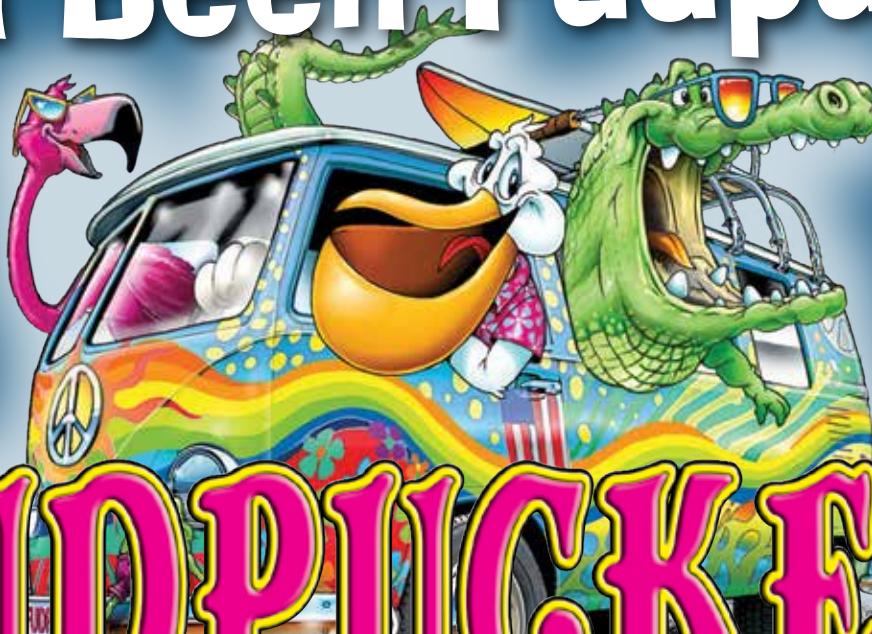
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# Comedy Legend Yakov Smirnoff Brings Heart, Humor and Hope to Destin

TV and film star and comedy legend Yakov Smirnoff is coming to Destin to perform his most up-close and personal shows ever. From his first appearance on The Tonight Show

Starring Johnny Carson to his most recent return with Jimmy Fallon, Yakov's career has truly stood the test of time.

A beloved regular on the hit TV comedy Night Court,

Smirnoff has also appeared in films alongside Tom Hanks, Meryl Streep, Robin Williams, Jack Nicholson and Richard Pryor. He is set to join Mark Wahlberg in a brand-new fea-

ture film scheduled for worldwide release in late 2026.

Yakov's incredible journey began in 1977 when he left his homeland in the former Soviet Union to pursue the American dream. His charming, insightful perspective as a newcomer to America quickly resonated with audiences, propelling him to the top of the comedy world and leading to success on both the big screen and television. His PBS television special Happily Ever After was named "Best Special" in both 2016 and 2017, and he has had the rare honor of performing for four U.S. presidents.

More than just jokes, Yakov Smirnoff's comedy is a journey of heart, humor and hope. His storytelling blends innocence with wisdom, absurdity with insight, and laughter with humanity, appealing to families, couples and anyone seeking clean, timeless comedy with genuine meaning.

Yakov will perform in Destin on Feb. 6, 7 and 8, with 4 and 7 p.m. showtimes at The Palms of Destin Resort. The venue features an intimate showroom with excellent table seating, alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages, and plentiful free parking. The Palms is also home to a year-round house show produced by Hollywood-based entertainment producer Bart Rockett, featuring never-before-seen magic, illusions and hilarious comedy ventriloquism. While written for adults, the show is family-friendly and regularly enjoyed by children as well.

Tickets for Yakov Smirnoff's performances, as well as other shows at The Palms, are available at MagicDestin.com. Scroll down on the home page to find Yakov's link or explore additional performances. Reservations may also be made by emailing the box office at MagicTicketAgent@gmail.com.

**TV/Film Star & Comedy Legend Yakov Smirnoff is coming to Destin to perform his most up-close & personal shows ever!**



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

(850) 654-4200

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## Café Destin

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

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## Coastal Protein & Energy

Fuel your day the healthy way at Coastal Protein & Energy, Destin's cutest spot for clean caffeine and protein-packed treats. Sip on energizing loaded teas, protein coffee and shakes, or dig into protein waffles, smoothie bowls and



even guilt-friendly protein donuts – all crafted to keep you going strong. Tucked along Harbor Boulevard in Norred Plaza across from Boshamps, this bright, beachy hangout has quickly become a favorite for locals looking for fast, feel-good fuel between school runs, gym sessions and days on the water. Special holiday flavors are available for a limited time and December specials include Gift Cards, wellness shots and koozies for gift-giving. Swing by

for your morning energy, mid-day pick-me-up or post-workout refuel and see why everyone's talking about Coastal Protein & Energy.

(850) 904-9738  
501 Harbor Blvd., Ste. F, Destin  
Facebook.com/coastalprotein/ |  
coastal-protein-co.square.site

## Crispy Cajun Chicken

"Get Your Crunch On" with a big taste of the Bayou right here on the Destin Harbor at Crispy Cajun Chicken. Mari-

nated for 24 hours and flavored with Tony Chachere's Creole spices, their hand-breaded fried chicken and tenders come out golden, juicy and packed with Cajun kick in every bite. Load up your tray with Southern favorites like dirty rice, jambalaya, red beans and rice, Cajun dirty rice, cornbread biscuits and more – plus beignet fries and other sweet treats to finish

things off. Game day or any day, Crispy Cajun also offers family packs and catering boxes so you can feed a crowd without lifting a finger. Come hungry, leave happy and let Chef Ernie and his crew give you a true Louisiana welcome on the Emerald Coast.

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<b>CHICKEN &amp; ANDOUILLE JAMBALAYA</b> 1 quart of Tony Chachere's Crispy Cajun chicken & andouille sausage jambalaya with New Orleans French bread loaf, Ayeee! \$19.99	<b>RED BEANS &amp; RICE</b> 1 quart of Tony Chachere's andouille sausage red beans and rice with 1 quart of steamed white rice & a French bread loaf \$19.99	<b>CAJUN DIRTY RICE</b> 1 quart of Tony Chachere's dirty rice Cajun style with fresh sautéed ground meat and lots of flavor with French bread loaf \$19.99
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## Museum Series: Destin's History and Fishing Museum

BY BARBARA PALMGREN

Several years ago, I began teaching a class for the Center for Lifelong Learning at the UWF Emerald Coast Campus. This non-profit organization offers adult classes designed to provide unique learning experi-

ences. Classes are scheduled in the fall and winter semester over an eight-week period. I usually offer my class one semester a year in the winter semester.

My class, titled "The Museum Trail," is a weekly visit to one of our county museums.

Following the museum visit, the class might enjoy lunch at a local restaurant. I value keeping things local. So, we might have a delicious lunch overlooking the water at Dewey Destin's original restaurant on Calhoun Avenue. Not that this is a lunch and

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learn experience, but it could be. During winter term, visitors might see their first pelican perched on a piling on Dewey's dock.

Focused now on learning about the first museum in this new series, let's enter the Destin History and Fishing Museum at 108 Stahlman Ave. close to Highway 98 and open Tuesday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Ticket prices are Adults \$10, Military and First Responders \$9, Seniors \$8, Students \$5 and 5 and under are free. The museum features the history of what used be a sleepy fishing village in the 1830's to the tourist attraction it is today.

Is Destin truly the "Luckiest Fishing Village in the World?" You might agree after visiting the museum and wandering into a large room to view movies and a huge scoreboard of competitors prize catches for the Destin Fishing Rodeo fall competition. One can be mesmerized and get "hooked" on fishing just by viewing all the fish caught during October each year.

But, is luck the reason for Destin's success? There is rich history that began this story and the museum honors and exhibits that history. Books, manuscripts, photographs, exhibits and artifacts educate the community and visitors. The museum opened in 2005 close to the foot of the Destin Bridge and directly across from the Destin Community Center.

Outside the museum is an old sein fishing boat and the original Destin Post Office. Inside is the history of settlers and businesses surrounding an immense wall with examples of fish that can be caught in the



Gulf waters. The Mike Long Fish Wall encircles the center of the main room and is the centerpiece of the museum. Yes, there are 25 sharks or parts of sharks throughout the museums. But, don't worry about the shark with a large open mouth; he is no longer a predatory danger for tourists! Interactive touch screens and friendly volunteers and staff help visitors learn more.

I met Kathy Marler Blue, former Museum Director and a member of one of Destin's founding families in 2017. Together we worked with several other museums to form the Greater Okaloosa Museum Coalition. When Kathy retired in 2021, she passed her responsibilities to Vivienne Williams. Vivienne earned a Master's Degree in Public History from the University of West Florida. A lifelong Florida resident, Vivienne learned about museums first hand with an Internship at the Mystic Seaport Museum in Mystic, Conn.

No, Vivienne did not trade Mystic Pizza for Destin's seafood, because her love of the white Destin sands would always win. Don't believe me? Vivienne's favorite exhibit or place in the museum is the front exhibit room where visitors learn about what makes Destin so special. And, yes, one of those reasons is that famous white sand.

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# Golf Series: The Golf Club at Bluewater Bay Welcomes Golfers as Winter Approaches



BY BARBARA PALMGREN

There are "come back kids" and then there are those special events or times when people fight to be sure a precious institution remains in place for the community and visitors to enjoy.

The story of the fight two years ago to save the Bluewater Bay Golf Course — and the successful effort to raise \$2.5 million to do so — is well known throughout the community. Residents rallied behind the cause, determined to preserve one of Bluewater Bay's most cherished assets. Today, the Golf Club at

Bluewater is under the guidance of Elite Golf management and is experiencing a true comeback. Saving the course not only protected a beloved local landmark, but also preserved a precious and vital green space for the entire community to enjoy.

Nestled among homes in the Bluewater Bay community, golfers enjoy a course layout that is challenging, but fair. Tee times can be booked with Golf Now or by phoning the pro shop. With scenic views that often distract in a positive way, the course can now be enjoyed by golfers at all levels of play. With overseeded greens and tee boxes as well as reasonable fees, the beautiful course is ready for the winter. This could not have been accomplished without the efforts of Golf Course Superintendent, Alfredo Francisco, and his staff.

Stephan Kleemeyer, general manager, has worked tirelessly over the past year to ensure growth and success for the club. With the added bonus of now



having a full-service restaurant, the Blue Tee, golfers and residents can enjoy breakfast, lunch or dinner from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. It might be chilly in January, but a warm lunch with accompanying beverage should be a perfect way to share stories of how an approach shot to the green resulted in a birdie on the hole! Plans are underway for a welcome snowbird party in January. I sense that

once parties become part of the fabric of this club, membership will enjoy more than watching a tee shot head straight down the fairway.

Membership is the heart and soul of a golf course and new member rates encourage golfers to join. Golf carts are included in the rate. Yes, public play is important, but membership is the key to continued revenue to

support the club.

So, congratulations, Preserve Bluewater Bay, INC. You have protected 150 acres of valuable, green space for community enjoyment and golf club operations. Golfers and the Bluewater Bay community are the beneficiaries of this gift to the Florida Panhandle!



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# Golf Series: First Tee Winter Ball Tournament Inspires Young Golfers

BY BARBARA PALMGREN

On a cold, really cold and windy Sunday in December, young golfers with a parent partner, braved the weather to participate in an annual event at Shalimar Pointe Golf Club. This was the club's 8th year to participate in the First Tee event.

Organizers, Jean Wallace

and Donna Rayburn, members of the Shalimar Pointe Ladies Golf Association, spent months fundraising and preparing for 54 juniors with adult playing partners to play the front nine of the golf course. Other members helped register players and Doris Anderson baked cookies for the entire crowd. Of course, a delicious meal with hamburg-



ers and chips awaited each team when they finished.

The First Tee organization is a youth development organization that enables young golfers to build strength of character as well as learn golf skills. As part of this national organization, First Tee Gulf Coast is located in Pensacola, and hosts events all along the Gulf Coast. Marty Stanovich, Executive Director, arrived to congratulate all the players and Ty Aulger, Tournament Director, presented awards.

ing from Freeport to Santa Rosa Beach. Here are the first-place winners:

**Girls 5-11:** Charlie Miller from Santa Rosa Beach

**Boys 5-11:** Dillon Bond from Niceville

**Girls 12-18:** Rayna Perkins from Freeport

**Boys 12-18:** Luke Pearce from Gulf Breeze

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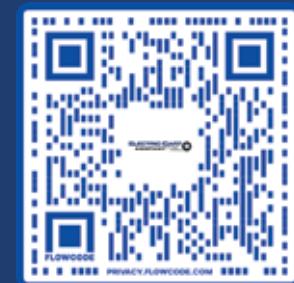
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# 2026 Seaside School™ Race Weekend Returns Feb. 12–15 with Races, Flavor and Community Spirit

One of the Emerald Coast's most anticipated winter traditions is gearing up for another memorable year as the 2026 Seaside School™ Half Marathon + 5K Race Weekend returns Feb. 12–15, 2026. With race registration now officially open, runners, families and supporters are invited to be part of a high-energy weekend where scenic beauty, community connection and a meaningful mission come together along 30A.

More than just a race, Seaside School™ Race Weekend is the school's largest annual fundraiser, with every mile run directly supporting classroom technology, academic programs and teacher initiatives that impact students across Walton County. Each year, the event sells out, drawing participants from across the Southeast who come for the views and stay for the cause.

"This weekend truly captures the spirit of our community," organizers said. "From runners and volunteers to chefs, sponsors and spectators, everyone plays a role in supporting education while celebrating everything that makes Seaside special."

## A Weekend Packed with Events

Festivities begin with early packet pickup at Seacoast Collegiate High School, 109 Greenway Trail in Santa Rosa Beach, from 4 to 7 p.m. Thursday and Friday, Feb. 12–13, and from 8 to 11 a.m. Saturday, Feb. 14. Runners can also enjoy the Race Expo and official packet pickup from noon to 4 p.m. Saturday at Seaside Neighborhood School, 10 Smolian Circle.

Race day arrives Sunday, Feb. 15, with the Half Marathon starting at 7 a.m. CST, followed by the 5K at 7:30 a.m. Participants will wind through Seaside's

iconic streets and along picturesque stretches of 30A, cheered on by spectators and volunteers who help make the event a true community celebration.

Registration is open now, and spots are expected to fill quickly. To register, visit [www.runseasidefl.com](http://www.runseasidefl.com).

### Taste of the Race: A Culinary Kickoff

Race Weekend officially kicks off Friday night with Taste of the Race, one of 30A's most anticipated culinary events. Set for 6 to 9 p.m. Friday, Feb. 13, at the iconic SEASIDE® Lyceum, the 21-and-up, rain-or-shine event brings together top Gulf Coast chefs and restaurants for an evening of friendly competition and unforgettable flavors.

Guests will enjoy tastings

from more than a dozen acclaimed chefs, paired with complimentary fine wine, craft cocktails and local brews, all set to live entertainment and a festive Race Weekend atmosphere. Chefs will compete for People's Choice, Judges' Choice and Chef's Choice awards, making the night as exciting as it is delicious.

Tickets for Taste of the Race are on sale now in limited quantities, with Early Bird pricing available through Dec. 31 and new couples pricing options for added savings. Tickets can be purchased at [runsignup.com/TicketEvent/TOTR2026/Register](http://runsignup.com/TicketEvent/TOTR2026/Register).

### Rubiks Groove Brings the Party

Adding to the excitement,

nationally acclaimed party band Rubiks Groove will take over Taste of the Race with a high-energy throwback show featuring the biggest hits of the 80s, 90s and 2000s. Known for full-costume characters and nonstop crowd interaction, the band promises to transform the Lyceum into a flashback dance floor and keep the celebration going all night long.

### Opportunities to Support and Sponsor

Businesses and community partners are also invited to get involved by sponsoring Race Weekend. Sponsorship offers meaningful visibility before thousands of runners, families and spectators while directly supporting educational excellence at Seaside School™.



"As our largest fundraiser, Race Weekend fuels innovation in the classroom and supports the teachers who make a difference every day," organizers said. "Sponsors play a vital role in that impact."

With races, music, food and a mission that matters, the 2026 Seaside School™ Race Weekend promises four days of unforgettable moments. Whether you're running, cheering, tasting or sponsoring, this February tradition offers a powerful way to celebrate community while investing in the future.



## The 24th annual running of the SEASIDE SCHOOL HALF MARATHON + 5K

is back on Sunday, February 15, 2026, in beautiful Seaside, Florida.

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# IDIDAHIKE 2026 Invites Destin Residents to Fall in Love with Florida's Wild Side

For locals accustomed to sugar-white sand, emerald water and harbor sunsets, one of Northwest Florida's most extraordinary natural landscapes lies just inland — and closer than many realize. This Valentine's Day, locals are invited to explore that wilder side of Florida during IDIDAHIKE 2026, hosted by the Choctawhatchee Chapter of the Florida Trail Association.

Set for **Saturday, Feb. 14, 2026**, the annual event brings hikers, families and outdoor enthusiasts together for a day of guided exploration through the Nokuse Land Conservancy, a protected expanse of more than 55,000 acres of longleaf pine forests, wetlands and wildlife habitat stretching across Walton and Okaloosa counties.

For those who spend most days on the water, IDIDAHIKE offers a refreshing change of scenery — an opportunity to step off the beach and into an inland landscape that plays a vital role in conservation efforts statewide.

## A Regional Treasure with Statewide Importance

Nokuse — a Creek word

meaning "bear" — is a cornerstone of the Florida Wildlife Corridor, providing critical habitat for Florida black bears, gopher tortoises and countless other native species. Its preserved landscape safeguards ecosystems that once dominated the Southeast and are now increasingly rare.

Winding through Nokuse is the Florida National Scenic Trail, one of only 11 national scenic trails in the country. Nearly 28 miles of the trail pass through the preserve and are maintained by dedicated volunteers from the Florida Trail Association, including members of the Choctawhatchee Chapter who live and work throughout Okaloosa and Walton counties.

IDIDAHIKE highlights this regional gem with four curated hikes designed to showcase Nokuse's diverse environments — from open pine flatwoods and shaded forest corridors to wetlands and elevated boardwalks. Along the way, participants may spot deer, migratory birds and signs of the wildlife that give the preserve its name.

"These hikes help people understand why protecting places like Nokuse matters," organiz-



ers say. "It's about conservation, stewardship and ensuring future generations can experience Florida the way it once was."

## Education, Conservation and a Day Well Spent

A key feature of IDIDAHIKE 2026 is access to the E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center in Freeport, operated by the Nokuse Education Foundation. Named for the late world-renowned biologist and conservationist Edward O. Wilson, the center serves as a hub for environmental education, scientific research and community engagement.

Open to IDIDAHIKE participants on Saturday afternoon, the Biophilia Center features interactive exhibits, nature-based learning programs and outdoor

spaces designed to connect visitors of all ages to the surrounding preserve. For Destin families, it offers an educational complement to the day's hikes — and a deeper look at conservation work

happening right here in Northwest Florida.

## Community, Connection and Valentine's Day on the Trail

While the trail itself is at the heart of the event, IDIDAHIKE is designed as a welcoming community gathering. Educational speakers will share insights into local ecosystems, while food trucks and gathering areas provide space for hikers to relax, refuel and connect.

With its playful Valentine's Day and "bear" themes,

IDIDAHIKE welcomes couples, families, friend groups and solo hikers alike, offering a meaningful way to celebrate the holiday through shared experiences in nature.

## Make It a Weekend Escape

For those looking to turn the event into a weekend adventure, overnight camping is available Friday, Feb. 13, and Saturday, Feb. 14, at Pine Log Wildlife Management Area in Bay County near Youngstown, just north of Panama City. A limited number of 40 campsites will be offered, providing a peaceful overnight experience under the stars — all within easy driving distance of Destin.

For more information, visit [floridatrail.org](http://floridatrail.org). To register for the hike, visit [floridatrail.org/ididahike](http://floridatrail.org/ididahike).



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# New Year, New You: Setting Realistic Aesthetic Goals



BY DR. CLARK, BLUEWATER PLASTIC SURGERY

As the holiday season winds down, many of us begin to reflect on the year behind us and set intentions for the one ahead. While health and wellness resolutions are common in January, more patients are also choosing to include aesthetic goals as part of their personal care and confidence-building journey. At Bluewater Plastic Surgery, we

maintain a youthful appearance in a professional setting or align their outward appearance with the vibrancy they feel inside. When your motivation comes from self-respect rather than comparison or pressure, the experience is far more rewarding.

Setting the right goals is equally important. Success doesn't come from doing everything at once—it comes from choosing steps that fit your lifestyle, health, budget, and timeline. Some patients start with subtle enhancements such as a refreshed skincare regimen or trying Botox for the first time. Others are ready to address a single feature that has bothered them for years or explore a larger transformation. During your consultation, we take time to discuss what's realistic, what options make sense, what timing looks like, and whether surgery

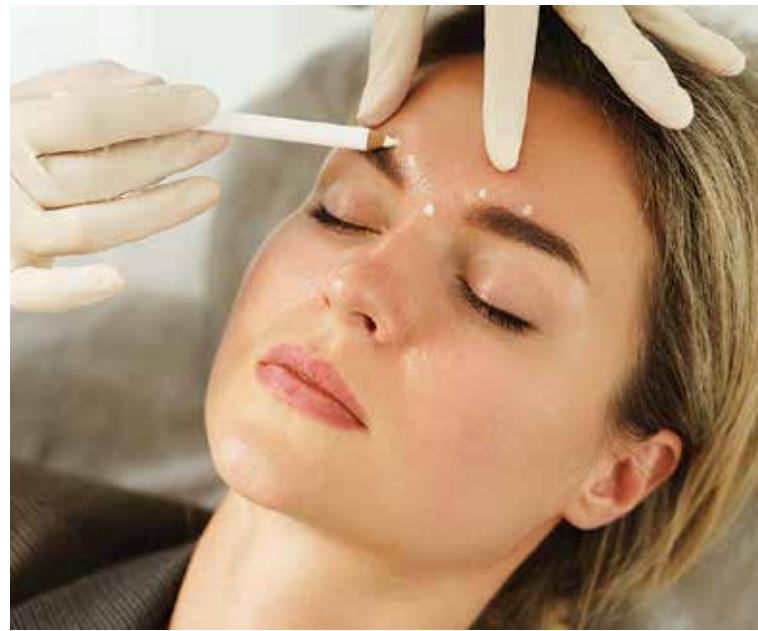
care can support a larger commitment to confidence, wellness, and self-care in the year ahead. At Bluewater Plastic Surgery, we approach every patient's goals with education, safety, discretion, and thoughtful guidance at the forefront.

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tation and explore your options, contact Bluewater Plastic Surgery today. As a board-certified plastic surgeon, my practice is dedicated exclusively to cosmetic surgery, and I have performed thousands of procedures over the last 25 years. My highest priorities are patient safety and

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believe in setting realistic, safe, and empowering goals—not for vanity, but for the meaningful impact that feeling good in your own skin can have on every aspect of life.

Whether you're considering a procedure for the first time or looking to refresh your routine, the new year is a wonderful moment to reset, refocus, and approach your aesthetic goals with clarity.

A fresh start begins with reflection. Before making any decisions, it helps to pause and consider why you're seeking a change. Some patients want to feel more confident in their bodies, while others hope to reverse changes from aging, pregnancy, or weight loss. Many want to

or non-invasive treatments are the best fit. From injectables and skin-tightening to procedures like a facelift or tummy tuck, every plan is customized.

Timing itself is a powerful part of the process. If you have an event, milestone, or vacation coming up, we help you work backward to create the right timeline for healing and results. Many people choose the quieter winter months for procedures that require downtime so they can welcome spring and summer feeling refreshed and confident.

You've spent the year caring for others—now may be the perfect time to invest in yourself. Whether it's a subtle boost or a transformative change, aesthetic

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 Wellness


# Journey Bravely: Increase Your Life Experience and Impact in 2026

BY STEPHENIE CRAIG,  
JOURNEY BRAVELY

When did you last experience a big, uncomfortable feeling you did not manage well? Maybe

you experienced rejection and felt deeply sad. Maybe someone treated you poorly and you felt intense anger. Perhaps you made a mistake and you felt shame. How did you behave when you experienced the feeling? Were you unkind to yourself? Did you behave poorly and then blame others? Did you drink or scroll to numb out? Did you break something?

Feelings come and go throughout each day and yet most of us do not have a sense of confidence about managing uncomfortable feelings. In his book, Dealing with Feeling, Marc Brackett, PhD, founding director of Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence shares that only 10% of the American population receive any education about how to understand or manage feelings. In my experience meeting with people for 25 years, about 9 out of 10 people entering therapy do not understand how to identify or work through uncomfortable feelings.

Most of us are engaging in avoidance or numbing strategies such as drinking, other substance use, scrolling, shopping, gambling, controlling others, over scheduling, among others to

keep from facing uncomfortable feelings. Avoidance produces a cycle of emotional dysregulation that negatively impacts relationships, life performance, and overall health. In short, not knowing how to identify and manage your feelings well is likely reducing your quality of life and your positive impact in the world.

So, if you want to grow in emotional maturity to increase your positive experience and impact in life, what do you do?

## 6 Ways to Learn How to Manage Your Feelings Well

### Reflect and set intention.

How are you managing feelings? Take notes about how you and others are experiencing your emotional highs and lows. Note if you have been ashamed or received negative feedback regarding your emotional expression. Create 1-2 goals about how you would like to improve your handling of feelings. "I would like to know how to use 3-4 healthy strategies to manage feelings."



**Cultivate physical emotional curiosity.** Notice your body's signals about what you are feeling. Notice sensations in your stomach, chest, face, head, and extremities. Notice body temperature, muscle tension, energy level. Notice tears, urge to slam something, exhaustion level. Your physical body gives you signals to help you determine what specific feeling you are experiencing. Listen closely to your body rather than ignoring physical signals.

**Name your feelings.** After collecting physical data, practice matching data to a feeling word. When you notice tight jaw, hot body temperature, and desire to slam something, that might be anger. When you notice tight chest, pit in your stomach, and fast heart rate, that might be anxiety. Try recording your common feelings and list physical sensations that go with each feeling. Continue recording over time until you feel confident your list reflects your emotional experience.

**Evaluate emotional coping tools.** Name/record avoidance/numbing strategies, and record trends of when and how you use them. "I start drinking around 4 and continue until bedtime to take the edge off." "I start scrolling when I'm stressed and bored and am logging 5 hours per day." Begin practicing healthy coping strategies that regulate emotional highs and lows creating space to return to a feeling from a calm state to process its meaning for your life. Try taking a walk, voice or regular journaling, talking to a trusted person, deep breathing exercises, fitness activities, creative pursuits, getting into nature, and nervous system regulation tools (search "vagal toning exercises").

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# Brain Health in America: A Crisis and a Path Forward



BY MELANIE YOST

When most people hear the phrase brain health crisis, they immediately think of Alzheimer's disease. Dementia alone is alarming, but it represents only part of a much larger problem. Across all age groups in the U.S., we are witnessing a gradual decline in brain resilience—showing up as struggles with mood, memory, focus, emotional balance and overall quality of life.

Neurodegenerative disorders such as Alzheimer's and other dementias are increasing rapidly. Over 13 million Americans are projected to be affected by 2050, and studies show these disorders grew by 117% between 1990 and

2016. By the time someone receives a dementia diagnosis, the brain has often been under strain for years, sometimes decades, due to chronic stress, inflammation, poor sleep, metabolic challenges, under treated TBI/concussions and unresolved trauma.

At the same time, anxiety, depression, emotional dysregulation and burnout are rising sharply, especially among younger adults. These conditions are often labeled “mental health issues,” but recent research shows they are also brain health issues. Stress and trauma don’t just affect how we feel; they change how the brain functions and adapts.

Lifestyle patterns add another layer. Today, many people live with chronic exhaustion, constant stimulation, inadequate sleep, processed foods and social disconnection. Rates of insulin resistance, hypertension and systemic inflammation are climbing, further straining the brain. As a result, more individuals report brain fog, memory lapses, low motivation and mental fatigue at younger ages.



A major blind spot in our healthcare system is the continued separation of brain health from whole-body health. In reality:

- Vascular health is brain health.
- Metabolic health is brain health.
- Emotional regulation is brain health.

Unfortunately, most care begins only after symptoms become severe.

Despite these challenges, there is hope.

Neuroscience now knows that the brain is adaptable and capable of healing at any age. Many aspects of cognitive decline and emotional dysregulation are modifiable. Early identification, targeted interventions and lifestyle support can improve symptoms and

strengthen long-term brain resilience.

Even more encouraging, modern therapeutic tools are helping people restore function and improve daily living. Evidence-backed, non-invasive therapies—such as neurofeedback (to retrain brainwave patterns), low-level laser therapy (to reduce inflammation and boost cellular energy) and hyperbaric oxygen therapy (to promote oxygen-driven healing) are giving individuals a real path forward.

When combined with better sleep, movement, nutrition and stress regulation, these therapies support measurable improvements in clarity, memory, focus and emotional stability.

The truth is simple: Brain decline is not always inevitable. Many symptoms can be slowed and/or improved and some can even be reversed.

At Be Well Solutions, we believe awareness must be paired with action. To support our community, we are offering a FREE advanced Brain Scan—not just a consultation—to help individuals understand how their brain is functioning and what steps can be taken to improve brain health.

If you or a loved one are struggling with brain fog, memory changes, emotional instability or signs of cognitive decline, please reach out. There is hope. Your brain can heal and modern therapies can help you reclaim clarity, resilience and quality of life.

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 Wellness

## Time to Get the Plump Out

### Aren't You Done Eating Yet?



BY DR. RICHARD CHERN, MD

It's almost over! Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Years. If you are anything like me, you'll be five pounds heavier with stairs harder than usual. Eating is such a social event and Thanksgiving starts the social smorgasbord. One scoop of everything followed by seconds of the good stuff. A few cookies left on the sheet, a bit of potatoes in the pan, one lonely slice of pie? And work on those left overs just before bed. I can hear Amanda asking, "Aren't you done eating yet?" as I'm bringing some scraps to bed.

Well, once the holidays are over, it's the time to hear it. I love you all, but you're plumping out. It's the time to get life under control and start working

towards the same goal we all have. Eat better, get active, lose weight, feel better. It sounds so easy. Change is hard, but The Hormone Restoration Center can help you achieve your goals.

It's not all about weight loss, but it's a good start. Weight loss has multiple causes, so any solution needs to be customized to you. That is what we do so well. After providing a comprehensive consultation, discussing symptoms and reviewing labs, we give our recommendation and provide a range of options for the best path to success.

Most important, and often forgotten, is hormone optimization. If your estrogen is out of whack or your thyroid is not optimal, you will never lose weight. Unfortunately, traditional medicine does not look at labs properly and that's why you will always hear, "Everything's normal." It's not.

Optimizing hormones can significantly reduce weight. It also routinely improves sleep, mood, libido and energy while eliminating fatigue, brain fog, hair loss and sexual dysfunction.

Proper thyroid function can supercharge weight loss, increase energy levels, as well as



promote healthy hair growth and healthier skin. Plus optimizing thyroid reduces cardiovascular risk. Why would you not?

GLP-1 options like Semaglutide and Tirzepatide provide almost magical results. I have never seen medications that work so well to help lose weight while also reducing chronic diseases.

Sometimes motivation and weight loss are just a micronutrient away. Our practitioners can

get the weight off, you will be destined to gain the weight back until you develop healthy habits to keep the weight off.

Luckily for you, at The Hormone Restoration Center we can do the heavy lifting for you. We will get you on track and headed in the right direction. Once your weight loss starts, energy increases, and mood improves, the hard stuff just gets easier.

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# How to Subtract Fat From Your Body - Part II



BY KAY LEAMAN, HEALTH ARCHITECT, HEALTHYDAY HEALTHYLIFE

Happy New Year! This year can be a year of change, of promise and of surprises. Personally, I am looking forward to stepping into new habits and new adventures. I hope yours will be a year of adventure and surprises too!

Last month, we covered the effects of food preservatives in processed food. We also discussed the role of our gut and what can happen when we don't treat it right. So, what's next?

## #3 Over Eating

Calories in and calories out. Eating too many calories in a short amount of time adds fat, because what the body can't convert it stores. Eating carbohydrates causes our glycemic index to rise. This releases energy more quickly and causes us to feel hungry sooner which leads to eating more. On the flip side, when we eat low glycemic meals, energy is released over time and we feel fuller longer; thus we eat less. Bottom line, our bodies can only convert so many carbohydrates into energy at a time. Did you know that if you reduce your food intake by 500 calories per day (182,500 calories per year) you have the potential to lose of 52 pounds of fat over one year?

Suggestions: Eat smaller meals and focus on whole foods vs. processed foods. Search for

a glycemic foods index that you like and keep it in the kitchen. This index can aid in substituting higher glycemic foods for lower options. Space your meals throughout the day, eating less in the evening. Be sure you have fiber in each meal. Lastly, practice eating more slowly which helps with eating less.

## #4 Slow Metabolism

Learning what can cause a slow metabolism can help us make the changes to keep our metabolism running in our favor.

Skipping meals means we have less glucose (fuel). So, our metabolism slows down to conserve energy.

If the body is triggered into starvation mode, our next meal can be stored as fat to be used later.

Making poor choices or overeating when we eat again can keep the body's metabolism slow. The body learns and will protect itself by maintaining a healthy fat storage.

Stress releases hormones that also aid in fat storage.



We need micro-nutrients as these are difficult to get in our diet. Other important nutrients are magnesium, alpha lipoic acid, coenzyme Q10 and curcumin turmeric extract as well as milk thistle and N-acetyl-L-cysteine (aids the liver). These nutrients need to be in their correct forms and amounts in order to be processed and utilized efficiently in the body.

We also need to exercise. In order to maximize the effectiveness of our efforts, we should move to reach our maximum heart rate (Look up the equation of finding your maximum

heart rate) for one minute then rest for two minutes. Repeat; 10 cycles = 30 minutes. The body will continue to burn fat for 12-14 hours. Building muscle also burns fat, so consider adding resistance to your exercises.

Looking at things differently or 'out of the box' from our current thought processes can create change and that change can create success. It's not about a quick fix; it's about the long haul. The long haul creates permanent change and allows the body to heal and function the way it was created to. Our bodies depend on our minds and habits, so they can deliver on everything we expect from them.

Love your body and it will love you back. Here's to Health! succeed.hdhl@gmail.com



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 **Wellness**


BY KRISY ANDERSON, OWNER,  
BEVERLY HILLS DAY SPA

January often arrives with big goals, packed calendars and the pressure to do more — move more, work harder, be better. As we step into 2026, the healthiest approach to the new year isn't about pushing your body to the limit. It's about restoring balance, building sustainable habits and caring for your body in ways that support long-term well-being.

Massage therapy remains one of the most effective — and often overlooked — tools for doing just that. Whether you're returning to the gym, managing chronic tension, recovering

from injury or simply resetting after the holidays, massage supports the body from the inside out. And it's not just a luxury; it's an essential part of modern self-care for both women and men.

#### Relief That Goes Beyond the Surface

Instead of reaching for pain relievers when soreness strikes, massage offers a natural alternative. Overworked muscles produce waste products like lactic acid that lead to stiffness and discomfort. Massage improves circulation, helping the body flush these out while easing pressure on compressed nerves and blood vessels. The result is real relief — not just temporary symptom management.

When pain is caused by stress, injury or post-surgical recovery, a customized massage

approach can make all the difference. Communication with your therapist ensures pressure and techniques are tailored to your specific needs.

#### Supporting the Body's Natural Detox System

Lymphatic support is gaining attention in wellness circles, and for good reason. The lymphatic system plays a vital role in immune health, fluid balance and detoxification, yet it depends on movement and gentle stimulation. Massage encourages lymph flow, helping reduce swelling, support recovery and enhance the body's natural cleansing process — especially helpful during the slower winter months.

#### Circulation, Recovery and Energy

Improved circulation is one

of massage's most powerful benefits. Increased blood flow delivers oxygen and nutrients to muscles and tissues, accelerating repair and revitalization. For those starting new fitness routines in January, massage aids recovery, helps prevent injury and promotes consistency. Many clients are surprised to find that regular massage actually boosts energy rather than causing fatigue.

#### Stress Relief, Mood and Sleep

Massage has been shown to increase serotonin and endorphins — the body's "feel-good" chemicals — while lowering cortisol, the stress hormone. This helps calm the nervous system, improve sleep quality and restore emotional balance during a season when stress and overwhelm often peak.

#### Posture and Long-Term Alignment

Muscle imbalances caused by stress, desk work or repetitive movement can slowly alter posture and lead to chronic pain. Massage helps release overly tight areas, restore balance and prevent minor issues from becoming long-term problems.

Rather than chasing quick fixes or short-lived resolutions, consider making self-care part of your routine. Consistent massage supports your health goals and helps you move better, feel better and show up stronger — not just in January, but all year long.

Questions? I'm happy to help create a customized massage plan tailored to your needs. Visit [beverlyhillsdayspa.com](http://beverlyhillsdayspa.com) or call me, Krisy, at (850) 654-8544.

## Book Review: The Compound Effect by Darren Hardy

REVIEWED BY MICHAEL McMANUS, MSW, LCSW

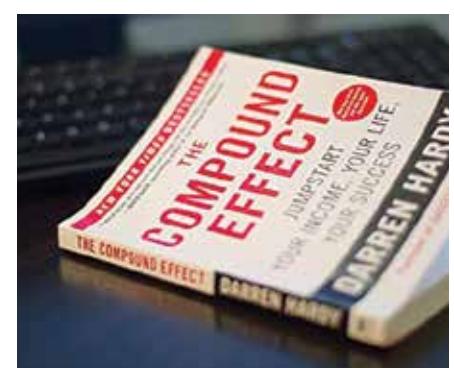
"The Compound Effect: Jumpstart Your Income, Your Life, Your Success" by Darren Hardy is a straightforward,

no-nonsense guide to personal development that distills a powerful truth: success isn't born from dramatic overhauls or overnight breakthroughs, but from the cumulative impact of

small, consistent choices made day after day. As the former publisher of SUCCESS magazine, Hardy draws on interviews with high achievers, personal anecdotes, and practical insights to argue that the "compound effect" — the principle of reaping massive rewards from tiny, smart actions repeated over time — is the hidden engine behind extraordinary results in health,

wealth, relationships, and career.

What makes this book stand out in a crowded self-help genre is its refreshing rejection of hype. There's no promise of quick fixes, magic formulas, or lottery-like windfalls. Instead, Hardy emphasizes discipline, accountability, and pa-



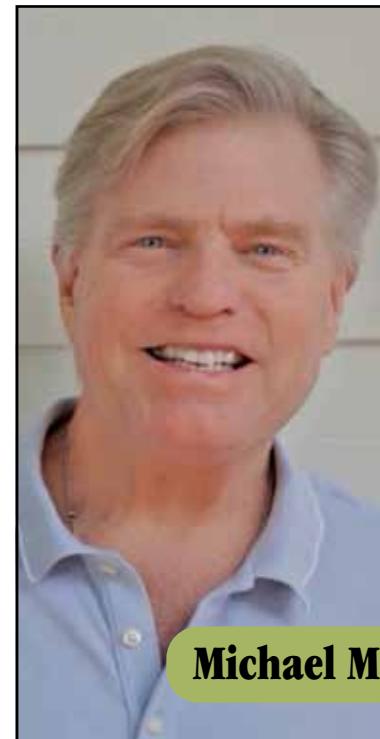
tience, reminding readers that the same compounding principle works in reverse for negative habits, leading to gradual decline if ignored. The writing is engaging and conversational, packed with relatable stories (like the three friends whose lives diverge based on minor daily differences) and analogies (e.g., a penny doubling daily reaching over \$10 million in 31 days). It's motivational without being overly preachy.

I love this book because I can refer it to clients who will use it to make small pivotal changes in their life, which can turn into major life changes over time. The core message is timeless and evidence-based, echoing principles from classics like Atomic Habits but with

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*Continued on page 46*

# Unlocking Hidden Strengths at Work: **Helping Deliberative and Developer Superpowers Thrive**



BY BILL MASON,  
ROCKET FUEL COACH

Every team benefits from people who think carefully and those who help others grow. But under pressure, even our strongest traits can slip into “basement” behaviors. Recognizing what’s happening beneath the surface helps us support co-workers in returning to their “balcony,” where their natural strengths shine.

## Unlocking Your Co-worker's Deliberative Superpower

Do you have a co-worker who's usually great at carefully weighing options and making thoughtful decisions, but every so often, they seem stuck in a loop of overthinking? I've got one on my team who typically shines by thinking things through, ensuring that every move is well-considered. But recently, during a project meeting, they became paralyzed by the need to analyze every possible risk and outcome. It was like watching a master of deliberation stuck in the basement of indecision!

This is a classic case of “basement” behaviors for someone with the Deliberative strength. When they feel overwhelmed by options or pressure, they can get bogged down in analysis, which delays progress. But at their core,

they have an amazing ability to make well-informed, thoughtful decisions that minimize risk and lead to success.

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

- Provide Clear Priorities – Help them focus on the most important decisions first. Having a clear framework can reduce the overwhelm and enable quicker action.
- Encourage Small Wins – Give them opportunities to make decisions on smaller, lower-risk items to build their confidence and momentum.

• Celebrate Their Thoughtfulness – Acknowledge their careful approach and how it brings clarity and stability to the team. Positive reinforcement can help them feel empowered to trust their judgment.

Let's help them tap into their deliberative strength and keep making thoughtful, confident decisions!

## Unlocking Your Co-worker's Developer Superpower

Do you have a co-worker who's usually amazing at spotting potential and helping others grow, but every so often, they seem to get discouraged when progress feels slow? I've got one on my team who's typically great at nurturing talent and developing skills in others. But recently, when things didn't seem to be improving fast enough, they became frustrated and started focusing on what wasn't working. It was like watching a coach stuck in the basement of impatience!

This is a classic case of “basement” behaviors for someone with the Developer strength. When they don't see immediate progress or growth, they can

become disheartened and lose sight of their incredible ability to cultivate potential. But at their core, they have an amazing knack for seeing the best in others and helping people develop into their best selves.

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

- Celebrate Small Wins – Encourage them to acknowledge even small progress. Recognizing these achievements can help them stay motivated and focused on the positive growth.
- Provide Encouraging Feed-

back – Remind them of how much impact they've had on others' development. Positive reinforcement can reignite their confidence in their role as a mentor.

• Foster Patience – Help them see the long-term potential in the people they're developing. Remind them that growth takes time and their efforts are creating lasting change.

Let's help them tap into their Developer strength and keep growing amazing talent!

When we understand how strengths behave under stress,

we can lead with empathy and intention. Supporting thoughtful decision-makers and patient people-developers helps teams grow stronger, healthier and more effective.

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*Bill Mason*

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 Events

## Events Around Town

**Destin Charity Wine Auction Turns 21 and Goes Wild for Kids April 24-25**  
**Patron packages to go on sale January 12 online at [dcwaf.org/tickets](http://dcwaf.org/tickets)**

The 21st Annual Destin Charity Wine Auction presented by the Jumonville Family is set for April 24–25, 2026. Proceeds from the annual auction

benefit children in need across Northwest Florida through Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation's (DCWAF) 16 partner children's charities. In 2025, the foundation donated \$3.1 million following one of its most successful auctions to date.

A limited number of patron packages can be purchased starting Jan. 12 at [dcwaf.org/tickets](http://dcwaf.org/tickets). Sponsorship opportunities are

also available by contacting DCWAF at [info@dcwaf.org](mailto:info@dcwaf.org).

The 2026 auction will feature an impressive lineup of celebrity chefs and internationally renowned vintners. Confirmed vintners include owners and winemakers from Allegri, Cardinale and Lokoya, Domaine de la Clos Chapelle, Dossier, Doubleback, Forman, Jarvis Estate, Phifer Pavitt, Aaron Pott Wines, Revana Wine Portfolio, Thompson 31Fifty, VGS Chateau Pottelle and more.

The weekend begins Friday, April 24, with the signature patron dinner experience, hosted in private homes and premier restaurants across the Emerald Coast. Each dinner pairs a nationally recognized chef with world-class vintners.

The main event, the Destin Charity Wine Auction, begins at 1 p.m. Saturday, April 25, with the Reserve Tasting and Live Auction held under an air-conditioned tent at Grand Boulevard Sandestin Town Center.

Guests will enjoy exceptional wines paired with cuisine from top local restaurants before a high-energy live auction featuring rare wines, luxury trips and one-of-a-kind items.

The Destin Charity Wine Auction is held in conjunction with the South Walton Beaches Wine and Food Festival, also taking place at Grand Boulevard the same weekend. The festival showcases hundreds of premium wines, spirits and culinary offerings, with proceeds benefiting DCWAF. More participating chefs and vintners will be announced in the coming months. Full details are available at [dcwaf.org](http://dcwaf.org).

**ECTC Presents Agatha Christie's "Murder on The Orient Express" Jan. 15 - Feb. 1**

Mystery and suspense take center stage as Emerald Coast Theatre Company (ECTC) presents Ken Ludwig's adaptation of Agatha Christie's Murder on the Orient Express, running Jan. 15 through Feb. 1 at its theatre at Grand Boulevard in Miramar Beach.

Set aboard the famed Orient Express, the story unfolds after a shocking murder halts a lavish European train journey. With the train stranded by snow, legendary detective Hercule Poirot must solve the crime before the killer strikes again. Featuring Christie's signature twists, sharp dialogue and a cast of memorable characters, the production invites audiences to play detective until the final reveal. "Murder on the Orient Express is the perfect way to kick off the new year at ECTC," said Producing Artistic Director Nathanael Fisher. "It is suspenseful, atmospheric and a richly layered experience that invites the audience to play detective alongside fan favorite

Bruce Collier as Poirot."

The production is directed by Scott Hayes with a creative team that includes Managing Director Trenton Bainbridge, Scenic Designer Rebeca Lake, Lighting Designer Matteo Morris, Costume Designer Taylor Walker and Sound Engineer Gavin Young, among others.

The cast features Bruce Collier as Hercule Poirot and Darla Briganti as Princess Dragomiroff, joined by Jason Hedden, Hayes Mercure, Kindra Steenerson, Karly Johnson, Cara Chesney, Tommy Bergeron, Charlie Meeks and Rebeca Lake.

Performances take place at ECTC, 560 Grand Blvd., Suite 200, Miramar Beach. For tickets and information, call (850) 684-0323 or visit [emeraldcoasttheatre.org](http://emeraldcoasttheatre.org).

**DCWAF Annual Galentine's Fundraiser Feb. 7**

DCWAF's Galentine's Day Fundraiser is turning five, and we're going all out to honor the queens in our community that come together to give back! Hosted in Destin at the home of Candis Wilson, Galentine's brings influential women in the community together to support one another while raising money for programs designed to empower young girls through DCWAF's 16 partner children's charities and beyond. All individuals and businesses affiliated with the production of this event are female owned and operated. The cards have been dealt, and every Queen deserves her moment during this fun day of giving.

More info/tickets: <https://www.dcwaf.org/events/5th-annual-galentines-day-fundraiser>

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By PASTOR DAVE HOLLAND

*When He had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, He lifted up His hands and blessed them. While He was blessing them, He left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. — Luke 24:50–52*

What do these verses tell us about Jesus?

They tell us He is alive—and still at work.

Forty days after His crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus leads His disciples to a hillside near Bethany. There, He speaks His final words and ascends into heaven, disappearing into the clouds.

What a dramatic exit!

Over five hundred people saw Christ alive after His resurrection and testified to this astonishing reality. In fact, there is more historical and legal evidence supporting Jesus' death and resurrection than for any other figure in ancient history.

Yet what strikes me most is not how Jesus leaves—it is what He does while leaving. As He ascends, He lifts His hands and blesses His followers.

That is who He is.

That is what He does.

And He is still doing it today.

To bless someone is to release God's favor upon them. Where the Mosaic Law exposes shortcomings and failures, Christ's blessing announces God's goodness—overflowing, unearned, and freely given. His final earthly act was not instruction, correction, or warning. It was a blessing.

Cursing, of course, is the opposite of blessing.

When I was a boy in grammar school, the other kids taught me how to swear—and I became very good at it. I was angry. My father had left us a few years earlier, and all that unprocessed hurt needed somewhere to go. Swearing became my outlet.

I remember a volunteer recess monitor named Mrs. Miller. She supervised us while we played kickball and basketball. Fights would break out from time to time, and I was often in the middle of them. One day, when Mrs. Miller stepped in to break things up, I unleashed a stream of curses at her. The principal, Mrs. Pauley, called me into her office and gave me a firm swat from her big paddle for that one.

Looking back now, I can see it clearly: my words were not merely misbehavior—they were woundedness crying out. Cursing was the language of a heart that had never learned how to process hurt and anger.

So how did the disciples respond to Christ's blessing? They worshiped Him—with great joy.

Luke's Gospel closes with the Ascension, but it also serves as a bridge to its sequel, The Acts of the Apostles, which opens with this same event. In Acts, we learn the Ascension did not occur on Easter morning but forty days later:

"After His suffering, He presented Himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that He was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God." (Acts 1:3)

Jesus appeared not only to the apostles, but to over five hundred disciples.

The Ascension unfolds like a priestly benediction. Jesus lifts His hands—like an Old Testament priest—and begins blessing them. As He continues blessing, He continues rising. Luke's use of the imperfect tense suggests a gradual ascent, as though Christ were being taken up slowly, raining down blessing the entire time.

Jesus ascended back to His Father—the same God who had spoken from the cloud on the Mount of Transfiguration, "This is My beloved Son." The Father received the Son back into the fullness of divine glory, to reign forever.

I once experienced something that helped me understand God's blessing deeply, personally.

I was in Bible college, exhausted. My early-morning



evangelism class met at 7:15 a.m., and I had worked the night before until 3:00 a.m. When the professor opened the class in prayer, he stopped and said, "I believe the Lord wants us all to pray quietly this morning."

I thought, Great. Now I can sleep.

I kneeled at my chapel chair, closed my eyes, and drifted off. I dreamed of a little boy running—happy, light, and free. His hair was neatly slicked with a bit of Vaseline, like he had just come from the barber. He was chewing bubble gum—the kind

barbers give you if you sit still for your haircut.

As the boy ran faster, the wind blew through his hair. Ahead of him stood a massive white cloud. Without fear, he ran straight toward it, leaping

inside. Instantly, the cloud enveloped the boy into the presence of God the Father.

Pure love wrapped its arms around him. Warmth—liquid, cleansing goodness—washed over him, dissolving the anger, the cursing, and the wounds he had carried for so long.

Then I woke up with a quiet realization: I am that little boy. But I was changed.

Renewed.

Free.

Cleansed.

Blessed.

Christ has risen.

A new day of blessing has dawned.



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 **Musing**


BY SEAN DIETRICH

A lot has changed in a year. The entire world has changed. Many will tell you that 2025 has been full of bad stuff—the media, for example.

Tune in to the news. You will see footage of explosions, nuclear weapons, and random acts of reality TV. But if you look

deeper, you'll see good peeking through the surface.

For starters, on September 12, Betty Kellenberger made history by becoming the oldest woman to complete a thru-hike of the Appalachian Trail.

Betty began her hike, amazingly, almost immediately after knee replacement surgery. She traversed muddy bogs, snow, cold rain, and impossible rocks.

After completing her hike she told reporters, "I decided the Lord must love rocks because He made so many of them."

Betty Kellenberger is 80 years old.

Also, Americans are making true progress in the fight

against technological slavery. As of December, 35 U.S. states and Washington, D.C., have enacted laws effectively banning student cellphone usage in classrooms.

Now, if only we could get Congress to ban speakerphone calls in supermarkets.

Also, this year, Japan elected its first female prime minister, Sanae Takaichi, shattering a centuries-old glass ceiling.

Takaichi is turning out to be a real go-getter, saying she sleeps two hours per night, "four hours at the longest." Her first words in office were: "I will abandon the idea of a 'work-life balance'—I will work, work, work, work and work."

Takaichi's husband has likewise pledged to abandon the "work-life balance idea" and commits to playing significantly more golf.

The world also got its first American Pope, Robert Francis Prevost. Pope Leo XIV was born in Chicago, raised in Dolton, Illinois, and he roots for the White Sox. Unfortunately, there is a conflict of interest inasmuch as God is a Braves fan.

Either way, Pope "Bob" is a regular guy. That's why people love him. He watches movies. Makes jokes. And shortly before participating in a holy ceremony in the Sistine Chapel, the Pope was seen by several cardinals—really—playing Wordle on his phone.

The Pope told reporters, "I use a different word for World every day, so there's no set starting word."

This past year also saw major medical breakthroughs. Particularly in the treatment of blindness.

Herculean advances in gene therapy, optogenetics, and wireless retinal prosthetic implants are already partially restoring vision in some.

The PRIMA subretinal implant is a two-part device consisting of a small camera, mounted on a pair of smart-glasses, capturing images and instantaneously projecting them via infrared light to a wireless chip embedded within the eye.

And, in case you were wondering, violent crime is lower than it's been in decades. A lot lower, actually.

The U.S. homicide rate, in only one year, has dropped by 20 percent. There have also been significant drops in committed crimes, such as rape, robbery, aggravated assault, vehicle theft, burglary, and pop-country rap.

In ecological news, a recent study of Yellowstone National

Park revealed that the migration of 5,000 bison across the park's grasslands is successfully restoring ancient patterns, reshaping the landscape to pre-civilization conditions. A feat which, 20 years ago, ecologists would have told you was impossible, after which they would've told you to refill their vegan beers.

I could go on and on.

Heart attack deaths dropped by nearly 90 percent since 1970.

Green sea turtles were removed from the endangered species list—global population has increased by 30 percent.

Misty Combs, a Kentucky registered nurse, saved a drunk raccoon by administering CPR.

A new therapy is capable of slowing Huntington's disease. For the first time in history, treatments have slowed progression by nearly 75 percent.

After almost 20 years off the air, "Reading Rainbow" is back on television.

Nine Guam kingfishers—previously extinct birds—were released into the wild. The species has not been seen since 1988.

The Antarctic hole in the ozone layer has shrunk to its smallest size in three decades.

A doctor in London discovered a way to successfully treat brain cancer in infants.

Advances in finding a cure for HIV were made by Melbourne scientists who found a groundbreaking way to force the virus out of hiding.

So a lot has happened, as I say. But if you ask me, the best news of this past year isn't found in the headlines. Neither is it found in all the amazing advances, nor the wondrous beauty humanity is capable of. To me, the best news of 2025 is that you're still here.

I love you dearly, whoever you are.

Happy 2026.

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# The Alice Announces Upcoming 2026 Special Events

The Alice, Destin's premier luxury waterfront venue, has announced a lineup of upcoming special events that celebrate music, community and elevated coastal experiences all set against the unforgettable, Choctawhatchee Bay backdrop.

## • The Alice Bridal Affair

**Sunday, Jan. 11, 2026 | 1-5 p.m.** (advance ticket purchase only)

Discover wedding inspiration at The Alice Bridal Affair, a luxury showcase featuring designer gowns, curated vendors and all things bridal. Perfect for brides-to-be, bridesmaids and wedding lovers alike, the event offers a wide selection of bridal gowns, bridesmaid dresses, accessories and tailored suits from top industry professionals.

Sip champagne, enjoy chef-curated bites and live music in a private bayfront setting while exploring stunning floral designs, elegant table settings and beautiful wedding décor. Connect with wedding planners, photographers, caterers and cake designers, sample delicious offerings, and uncover exclusive deals, giveaways and

special offers available only at The Alice Bridal Affair.

## • Yoga & Meditation with Terminally Chill Wellness

**Tuesdays beginning Jan. 13 | 9-10 a.m.**

— Terminally Chill Vinyasa: A strong, fluid, breath-led vinyasa designed to energize the body, clear the mind and build heat through intentional, soulful movement.

Thursdays beginning Jan. 15 | 9-10 a.m. — Slow Flow + Restorative: A calming, slower-paced class focused on deep release, nervous system regulation and true relaxation — your exhale for the week.

## • The Bridgerton Brunch Bash

**Sunday, Feb. 1, 2026 | 11 a.m. -2 p.m.** (advance ticket purchase only)

Step into a world of charm and sparkle with our Bridgerton themed brunch catered by Lady Ray's Bakery Bar. Dress up, sip on delightful drinks and indulge in delicious bites while soaking in that Regency vibe with live music and beautiful surroundings. It's all about fun, fancy fashions and making new



## Fiber & Hancock Whitney Bank

**Friday, Feb. 13 | 5-10 p.m.** (advance ticket purchase only)

**Saturday, Feb. 14 | 3-10 p.m.** (advance ticket purchase only)

Celebrate Valentine's Day weekend with an intimate, waterfront live music experience at The Alice. For the Love of Songwriting is a limited-capacity, two-night event created for those who love authentic stories, heartfelt songs and meaningful moments. The amazing lineup includes: Jerrod Neiman, Rob Hatch, Billy Montana, Jason Michael Carol, Jessie G, Matt Wynn, Justin Holmes and Ava Connell.

Food and beverages will be available for purchase onsite from SkyBar/The Edge and other vendors. Several local artisans will be set up during the shows, and the Alice Signature Concierge Team can arrange special table-side surprises upon arrival — from flowers and chocolates to engagement rings.

## • Angel Force Foundation Winter Ball

**Sunday, Feb. 28 | Time TBA** (advance ticket purchase only)

For additional information, private bookings or venue tours, visit [www.the-alice.com](http://www.the-alice.com) or follow on Instagram @thealicevents.



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 Arts & Music

# The Emerald Coast Music Alliance Festival 2026

By DEBBIE CARLONI

## Our Passion for Music Education

"Music is a more potent instrument than any other for education," Plato quoted. This belief is at the heart of The Emerald Coast Music Alliance (ECMA). Our mission is to foster a love for classical music and to share its significant educational and health benefits with students, seniors, individuals with developmental challenges, and the broader community of the Emerald Coast.

## Festival 2026: A Week of World-Class Music

We are thrilled to announce our 10th annual Festival 2026, featuring accomplished artists who will perform from January 28th through February 8th at various locations. Performances will take place in Okaloosa-Walton County schools, senior centers, assisted living facilities, and agencies serving special needs populations, among others. Each festival includes 50-60 performances, and there is no cost to

any participating school, agency, or organization.

## Featured Artists

Under the guidance of our artistic director and concert pianist, Alon Goldstein, we have invited an outstanding roster of musicians for Festival 2026:

- The Cerus Saxophone Quartet
- Clarinetist Alexander Fiterstein
- Guitar Duo Ziggy & Miles
- Pianist Regina Tanujaya
- Free Community Concerts

In addition to performances at schools and community agencies, ECMA will present three Free Community Concerts featuring Alon Goldstein and our guest musicians:

- Fort Walton Beach Civic Auditorium on February 5th
- Crosspoint Church Niceville on February 6th
- Chautaugua Theatre Defuniak Springs (date TBA)

## What People Are Saying

ECMA is grateful for the encouragement and support we



## Join Us and Support Our Mission

We can't wait to perform for you this January – February!

Emerald Coast Music Alliance is a 501c3 organization that operates on the generous donations of businesses and individuals. Sponsorship opportunities for individual concerts are also available. To make a donation or for more information on how to become a sponsor, please visit <https://www.emeraldcoastmusic.org/donate.html>.

Please check our website <https://www.emeraldcoastmusic.org> for more information and updates on Free Concert times and how to reserve your seats. Or contact us by Email at [info@emeraldcoastmusic.org](mailto:info@emeraldcoastmusic.org).

receive through testimonials, which reinforce our mission to enrich lives through music.

## Bob Hope Village

We had absolutely amazing performances from Emerald Coast Music Alliance Foundation!!!! They were absolutely amazing and our ballroom was FULL. Thank you for joining us! They are a very talented group of performers and heavily rely on donations.

## Rocky Bayou Christian School

When I think that our students woke up in the piney

woods of the Central Florida Panhandle, came to school this morning, and were able to hear a world-class musician spend an hour and a half demonstrating to them the beauty and passion of great music, I am amazed that such a program exists and that such people exist to make this possible. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts and PLEASE come back!

## Kenwood Elementary School

I am a VE / ESE teacher of 4th and 5th graders.



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# Sinfonia Gulf Coast Kicks Off 2026 with Tina Turner Tribute and Crescendo! Extravaganza

Sinfonia Gulf Coast is turning up the volume on its 20th anniversary season, launching 2026 with a one-two punch of powerhouse performances and its signature cultural fundraiser — proving that symphonic music on the Emerald Coast is anything but ordinary.

The celebration begins Thursday, Jan. 8, when Simply the Best: The Music of Tina Turner takes the stage at 7:30 p.m. at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center. Backed by the full Sinfonia Gulf Coast orchestra, this electrifying tribute honors the Queen of Rock 'n' Roll with Broadway-caliber vocals, symphonic scale and pure, unapologetic energy.

A trio of acclaimed performers brings Tina Turner's legendary catalog to life, including Shaleah Adkisson, known for her work in Hair and Rent and her commanding presence in all-female tribute productions; two-time Grammy winner Tamika Lawrence, whose Broadway credits include Come From Away, Dear Evan Hansen, Caroline, Or Change, Beautiful and The Book of Mormon, along with film and television appearances in The Greatest Showman and The Wiz Live!; and Tyler Huckstep, a University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music graduate with an international touring and regional theater career.

Together, the trio delivers iconic hits such as "Proud Mary," "Private Dancer," "What's Love Got to Do With It" and "Simply the Best" — all amplified by the lush power of a live orchestra.

"This concert captures everything audiences love about Sinfonia Gulf Coast — bold programming, extraordinary artists and music that moves you," said Demetrius Fuller, Music & Artistic Director of Sinfonia Gulf Coast. "Tina Turner's music was made for this kind of scale and energy, and hearing it performed live with orchestra is nothing short of exhilarating."

Presented in collaboration with New York-based Spot-On Entertainment, founded by award-winning producer Scott Coulter, the concert blends Broadway sophistication with



symphonic force. Tickets range from \$40 to \$75.

From there, the spotlight shifts to Sinfonia's highly anticipated annual fundraiser, Crescendo! 2026: A Cultural & Culinary Extravaganza, unfolding across three standout dates — Jan. 23, Feb. 27 and March 1 — and widely considered the pinnacle of the Northwest Florida social season.

Crescendo! launches Friday, Jan. 23, at 11 a.m. with the Kick Off Lunch, Bubbles, Bourbon + More, in the Juniper Ballroom at Hotel Effie in Miramar Beach. The stylish afternoon features high-tea vibes, a seated lunch with bubbles, wine and bourbon craft cocktails, a live DJ and a curated fashion experience highlighting Balmain. Tickets are \$175 per person and include lunch, wine and gratuities.

The celebration continues Friday, Feb. 27, at 6 p.m. with the beloved Crescendo! Vintner Dinners — intimate evenings hosted in elegant homes and venues throughout the Emerald Coast. Guests enjoy multi-course dinners pairing celebrated local and national chefs with premier wineries such as Opus One, Promontory, Groth Estates, AXR, Reynold's Family Winery, Mondavi Sisters Wine and more. Tickets are \$500 per person.

The grand finale arrives Sunday, March 1, at 3 p.m. in the Magnolia Ballroom at Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort, where the Crescendo! Main Event takes center stage. This year's special guest is internationally renowned Pink Martini, performing live with the full Sinfonia Gulf Coast orchestra — a first for Crescendo!. Known for its genre-blending style and songs sung in more than 25 languages, the "little orchestra" promises a dazzling, cosmopolitan performance.

"Crescendo! is unlike any other annual event we produce,"

Fuller said. "We call it an event extravaganza because we're intentional in how we bring people together to raise funds and awareness for our music education and community engagement outreach programs

throughout Northwest Florida."

Tickets for the Crescendo! Main Event are \$225 per person, with tables of 10 available. Proceeds support Sinfonia's extensive education and outreach initiatives, including school pro-

grams, youth orchestras, free concerts and community partnerships.

Tickets for all performances and Crescendo! events are available at [SinfoniaGulfCoast.org](http://SinfoniaGulfCoast.org) or by calling (850) 460-8800.



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## Ask Destinates: Holiday Isle Public Park



Happy New Year to everybody! In our Facebook Destinates ([www.facebook.com/groups/Destinates](https://www.facebook.com/groups/Destinates)) group recently, I shared the following information which was posted by the City of Destin Government, on their Facebook page, December 18, 2025.

"Okaloosa County Commissioner Drew Palmer, who is Destin's representative, announced today (12/18/25) that a town hall meeting will be held 12/30/25 at 3 p.m. at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center (1250 Miracle Strip

Pkwy SE in Fort Walton Beach) to discuss plans for a 4-acre parcel of land on Holiday Isle that was recently purchased by the State of Florida to be used as a public park. There will be a brief presentation by County staff and an opportunity for the public to speak and give their input on this unique waterfront property."

This link will guide you to the draft Management Plan for the park that the County created: [cityofdestin.com](http://cityofdestin.com). (Info is currently on their website's Home page). "The City of Destin encourages residents to review this draft County Plan and participate in the town hall meeting by sharing any thoughts, concerns or ideas."

Below are some of the concerns and suggestions from our Destinates group members. Keep in mind that not everybody read the plans first before responding. I would like to strongly advise reviewing the plans and attending town hall

meetings when possible. Let your voice be heard!

1. Parking. The end of Gulf Shore Drive needs PARKING!!!!

2. Crime, streets overcrowded into and out of Holiday Isle, ability of county to handle drownings on dangerous current, all a factor. Public beach should be on the other side where Air Force property is.

3. Unfortunately, just like the parking over there for the Harbor, any new parking that comes up will be subject to probably \$20 for four hours or for the day either way when you look

at South Florida, and the fact that all your public access to taxpayers pay for to upkeep all the parking has to be paid by the taxpayer when he goes to enjoy God's gift to us.

4. Can we get a party pool at the park?!

5. Be a perfect spot for a skate park! (ha)

6. Kids playground.

7. Enough room for storage units, a car wash and even an Alvins Island. (ha)

8. Not a preserve? Why not?

9. Now the fight begins to keep it FREE for EVERYONE.

10. Sometimes the best idea

is to simply do nothing and leave the earth alone.

If you are a Destin resident or in the surrounding area, I invite you to join our private, targeted group for locals and property owners at [Facebook.com/groups/Destinates](https://Facebook.com/groups/Destinates). We now have 12,300+ members (est. Oct. 2018). Check out our local business directory at [Destinates.com](http://Destinates.com), where more than 500 local businesses are listed and enjoy advertising, in our targeted community group.

### BOOK REVIEW

*continued from page 38*

Hardy's unique spin from mentoring millionaires. It's concise (under 200 pages), making it an easy read that punches above its weight in inspiration. I particularly appreciated the focus on tracking behaviors – a simple yet transformative habit that forces awareness and progress.

**Weaknesses:** Some readers might find the anecdotes a bit repetitive or the tone occasionally boastful (Hardy name-drops successful contacts frequently). It also leans heavily toward business and financial success, with less depth on creative or non-material goals. Still, these

are minor quibbles in an otherwise solid, motivating read.

**Overall rating:** 4.5/5.

This book is essential for anyone feeling stuck or overwhelmed by big goals – it shifts your mindset to celebrate the "unsexy" daily grind that truly builds lasting success. If you're tired of motivational fluff and ready for practical wisdom, *The Compound Effect* delivers. It's not revolutionary, but it's profoundly reinforcing, and applying its ideas can genuinely change your trajectory.

Darren Hardy's *The Compound Effect* breaks down success into a predictable, measurable process: Small, smart choices plus Consistency plus

Time equals Radical Difference. Over months and years, these steps addressed in the book compound into transformative success, proving that anyone can achieve extraordinary results without innate genius – just disciplined, repeated action.

*Michael McManus MSW, LCSW* is a psychotherapist in private practice in Santa Rosa Beach he along with his wife Angela raised four children here in Santa Rosa Beach and enjoy swimming, biking, hiking, reading, yoga, cooking and spending time with our children.

*Michael can be reached by text or phone at 1-850-837-0123 to discuss setting up an appointment. Or visit his website at [Psychotherapy30A.com](http://Psychotherapy30A.com).*

## Nutcracker Ballet Continues Its Magic

By BARBARA PALMGREN

Studio6Twenty5 presented The Nutcracker in December as did Mattie Kelly Arts

Center hosted by Northwest Florida Ballet in mid-November. It seems the public can't get enough of this classic holiday fairytale.

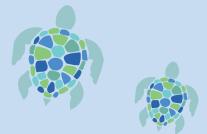
What is so magical about this timeless treasure? Is it the music composed by Tchaikovsky which leaves the audience applauding to iconic pieces like "Dance of the Sugar-Plum Fairy," Waltz of the Flowers," or "Dance of the Reed Flutes?" Or is it the exquisite ballet dancing that accompanies the music?

The full ballet score unfolds across two acts, taking the audience first to a Christmas party in the late 1800's where we



meet teenage Clara receives a nutcracker doll that comes to life. The brave nutcracker first leads the toys in a battle against the Mouse King and his army and then, transformed as a handsome prince, transports Clara to a mystical kingdom where the Sugar Plum Fairy and her court perform dances representing different cultures (Spanish, Arabian, Russian and Chinese.)

Of course, Clara wakes up from her dream as does the audience, holding on to a precious memory of the annual ballet that continues to mesmerize us.



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