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From Death to Life: Stephanie McMinn's BeGenerous Ministry Brings Hope to Local Women

By MICHELLE RUSCHMAN

Stephanie McMinn, founder of BeGenerous, has been providing resources and coming alongside women and their families since 2010. It all began with simply providing diapers to single mothers, but since then, her organization has grown into a source of hope for the women of Okaloosa, Walton, and Bay counties. "I was 16 when I had my first child, so I know what it's like to be a young mother with limited resources. There were food pantries and clothes closets, but there was no diaper bank. One day, I called the health department trying to see where I could help, and the case worker shared with me that while she watched a client dress her baby, she noticed that the baby was dressed without a diaper. When she pointed out that it was missing, the mom told her she hadn't forgotten. She hadn't put it on because they



couldn't afford to have the baby in a diaper while they were at home. From that story, I started going into these homes and seeing how much the mothers were struggling when the home had an absent father, or the dad was in prison. There was poverty, drugs, and sexual exploitation. Once I saw this happening in my own backyard, it wasn't some-

thing I could unsee, and I knew I had to do something about it."

BeGenerous now includes "The Yellow House" and "Pearl House," which offer refuge, healing, and transformation through a 24-month residential recovery program. The women come from the most desperate situations, including domestic abuse,

sex trafficking, incarceration, and, especially close to Stephanie's heart, addiction. In many situations, BeGenerous has been the bridge from death to life.

Sometimes, though, it's when you're battling darkness for others that you can be in the greatest fight of your own. Less than a year after starting BeGenerous, while Stephanie was helping so many families find their fresh start, Stephanie's husband was in the midst of recovery while their sons were in the grip of addiction themselves. Today, Stephanie can say that her oldest son has recovered from addiction and is helping her in her massive efforts, but in 2021, the family got devastating news. "My baby boy, Gage, was 22 years old when he overdosed on fentanyl and passed away. Here I am, doing work in the

BEGENEROUS
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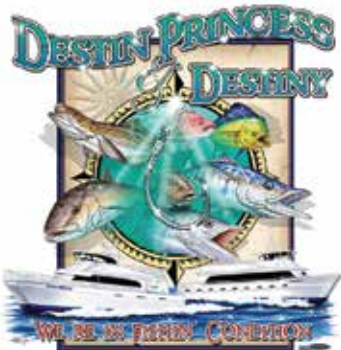
The Hope of Easter

By GUEARY CLENDENING

I have spoken at many funerals, offering hope and comfort to grieving relatives and friends. Yet the reality cannot be denied—there will be an empty place at the table tomorrow and in the days ahead. The absence of a loved one leaves a hole in our hearts that words often cannot fill, and sometimes the pain feels unbearable.

Years ago, just a few days after my wife passed away, I visited her grave. I found myself in tears, my emotions completely frayed. No one was around, and I began to pray aloud, pouring out my heart and my sorrow to God.

EASTER
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Community

BEGENEROUS

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community, and my kids know what I do, but addiction doesn't respect anyone."

To honor Gage, Stephanie started an outreach called "EN-GAGE: From Death to Life," an event that focuses on victory. Along with the concert featuring artists, ASAP Preach and Adrion Butler, attendees will hear messages of hope, learn about community resources, shop with local vendors, and local food trucks will be on-site.



Last year, a concert-goer asked to be baptized. That will continue this year with the hopes that it will become an annual tradition. "During one intermission, a guy came up and said, 'I want



Mama Steph to baptize me. I want to lay this down and leave it behind.' I just dove right into that water with him, and the next thing you know, there's a line of kids waiting to be bap-



tized. We got to close that night, soaking wet, and we knew we had to make this a part of every year from now on."

Coming to EnGAGE means throwing your expectations to

the wind and letting the Holy Spirit move. That's when you know it's going to be fun!

EnGAGE will be held on April 25th at 1140 Circle Dr, Defuniak Springs Lakeyard. If you are a vendor, food truck, or non-profit resource who would like to be part of this dynamic event, you can email info@be-generousinc.org.

Michelle Ruschman is a local artist, speaker, and writer. She can be reached at michelleruschman@gmail.com or michelleruschman.com.

EASTER

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Suddenly, as I prayed, a bird in a nearby tree began to sing. Whether others might believe this or not, I felt deeply that this moment was sent by God, a quiet reminder that He is always near, even in our darkest hours.

When I stopped praying and looked up into the tree, the bird fell silent, and moments later, it flew away. I left the cemetery uplifted in spirit, feeling a sense of peace that I had not experienced in days.

In the Bible, First Thessalonians 4:13-14 speaks of hope. It acknowledges our sorrow when

someone close passes, but it reminds us that we should not grieve as people without hope. If we believe that Jesus Christ, God's Son, died for our sins and rose again to intercede for us before His Father in heaven, then we have hope in God's promise: Christ is coming again, bringing with Him all who have trusted in Him.

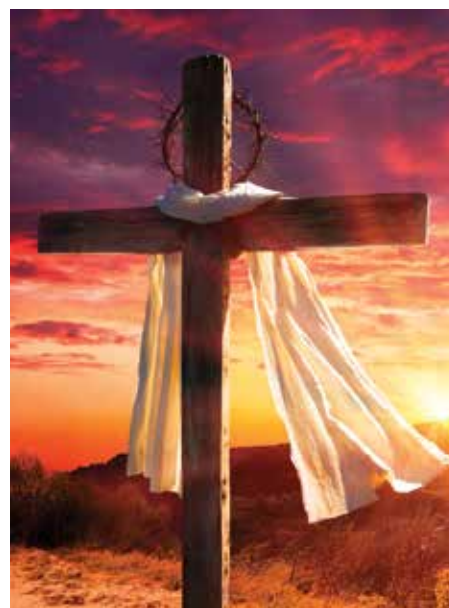
Verses 16 and 17 continue:

"For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the trumpet of God, and the dead shall rise first. Then we who are alive at that time shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall ever be with the Lord."

This is the hope of Easter, promised by God—a hope that comforts our hearts, strengthens our faith, and reminds us that life does not end with death.

As John 3:16 reminds us:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in



Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

This is God's Word for anyone willing to open their heart and receive Christ. Through Him, we experience forgiveness for the past, healing for our pain, and the beginning of a new, eternal life filled with joy and purpose.

Embrace the hope of Easter that God has for you, and let it transform your heart and your life.

Happy Easter!



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70th Annual Billy Bowlegs Festival May 14-18 Downtown Fort Walton Beach www.billybowlegspiratefestival.com

Bowlegs 70 Brings a Swarm of Swashbuckling Pirates to Fort Walton Beach

By CHRISTOPHER MANSON

Rique Gwin, a/k/a Captain Billy Bowlegs LXX, is ready for the annual Billy Bowlegs Pirate Festival happening May 14-16 at the Fort Walton Beach Landing Park; but that's not all he's been up to this year.

Gwin's role as Captain Billy goes beyond the festival. Being "Captain Billy" includes promoting tourism in the area, "advertising how wonderful Fort Walton Beach is," he elaborates. Gwin and his Krewe travel from Bradenton on up to Minnesota, visiting lots of regional pirate festivals. Gwin anticipates around a hundred or so out-of-towners coming to the Emerald Coast in May, a mighty boost for the local economy.

Earlier this year, Gwin – as Billy, in full costume – visited Liza Jackson Preparatory School where he read pirate-themed stories to students and handed out beads. Gwin and his "Air Raiders Krewe" will team up with other Krewes in Tallahas-



Bowlegs Court: Queen Debbie Fisher, Rique Gwin, First Mistress Mollie Grindland, First Mate Mark Grindland, Kelly Gwin, and J. Mark Fisher

see later this year, complete with parade float, to entertain special needs children.

Gwin was announced as this year's Captain Billy at a coronation pageant held last June at Niceville's Mattie Kelly Arts Center. The identities of Billy's Queen (Debbie Fisher), First Mate and First Mistress, and Honor Guard were also revealed. Gwin's involvement with the Krewe dates back 15 years.

This year's festival includes fireworks and live entertain-

ment – the latter in partnership with the City of Fort Walton Beach's much-loved Concerts on the Landing series – along with lots of vendors. The "skirmish" happens Friday night, after which, Gwin says, laughing, "I'll end up in handcuffs."

Spoiler alert: Captain Billy will be back at the festival site Saturday night to officially storm the city of Fort Walton Beach.

The festival is free to attend and attracted roughly 1,000 visitors last year. Gwin says the event was moved back to May

from June after Covid, and thanks to that change, "crowds have started to grow again."

The Billy Bowlegs Parade, set for Monday, May 18, along Eglin Parkway, is a popular Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce event that Gwin and his Krewe support and happily participate in.

Prior to Billy Bowlegs Festival 2026, a Downtown Fort Walton Beach pub crawl is scheduled

for Friday, May 8. Ben Merrell and Soundside Bar are hosting.

On Thursday, May 14, the Little Pirates Scavenger Hunt will be held in Downtown FWB. The Krewe will meet the kids on the side street by Parlour Doughnuts and then the children will proceed through Downtown FWB. Gwin encourages Destin Life readers to listen to the local

Continued on page 30

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Community

The 5 Keys to Longevity



By DR. KAREN DEVORE,
TORTOISE CLINIC

We live in a culture that glorifies speed — fast food, fast results, fast fixes. But true longevity doesn't come from rushing. It comes from consistency, balance, and tending to the body with intention over time.

Longevity isn't simply about

adding years to your life. It's about adding life to your years. Through an integrative and holistic approach to medicine, we focus on optimizing how you feel today while protecting your health for decades to come. Here are the five keys I believe are foundational to living longer and living well.



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1. Reduce Inflammation at the Root

Chronic inflammation is one of the most significant drivers of aging and disease. It's linked to heart disease, diabetes, autoimmune conditions, cognitive decline, and chronic pain.

In integrative health, we don't just suppress symptoms. We ask why inflammation is present. Is it driven by diet? Stress? Gut imbalance? Environmental toxins? Hormonal shifts?

By identifying and addressing root causes through anti-inflammatory nutrition, targeted supplementation, acupuncture, stress management, and lifestyle modifications, we can reduce the internal "fire" that accelerates aging and instead create an environment where the body can repair and regenerate.

2. Support Metabolic Health

Your metabolism is far more than calorie-burning. It's the foundation of energy, hormone balance, blood sugar stability, and long-term vitality.

Insulin resistance, blood sugar spikes, poor sleep, and chronic stress all impair metabolic function and accelerate aging. Supporting metabolic health through whole-food nutrition, strength training, adequate protein intake, sleep optimization, and strategic supplementation helps maintain muscle mass, protect brain function, and reduce risk for chronic disease.

Longevity isn't about restrictive dieting. It's about nourishing your body in a way that sup-

ports resilience and strength at every stage of life.

3. Balance Hormones Thoughtfully

Hormones regulate nearly every system in the body from mood and metabolism to bone density and cardiovascular health. As we age, shifts in estrogen, progesterone, testosterone, thyroid hormones, and cortisol can significantly impact how we feel.

An integrative approach to hormone health looks at the full picture. We assess lifestyle, stress patterns, nutrient status, gut health, and detoxification pathways before determining whether bioidentical hormone therapy or targeted nutritional support is appropriate.

Balanced hormones can improve sleep, mental clarity, libido, energy, and muscle preservation, which are all essential components of aging well.

4. Prioritize Nervous System Regulation

You cannot out-supplement chronic stress. The nervous system plays a powerful role in longevity. Persistent sympathetic ("fight or flight") activation increases inflammation, impairs digestion, disrupts hormones, and accelerates cellular aging.

Practices that activate the parasympathetic ("rest and repair") system such as acupuncture, breathwork, meditation, time in nature, meaningful social connection, and restorative

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Community

It's Back! Destin's Hottest Magic & Comedy Show Returns—Bigger, Bolder and More Interactive Than Ever

The magic is back, and it's hotter than ever. After a wildly successful debut season at The Palms Resort, the Magic & Comedy Destin residency is returning for an encore year—bringing fresh upgrades, up-close illusions and a high-energy experience that's equal parts jaw-dropping and laugh-out-loud fun.

This isn't your typical night out. From the moment you step into the newly enhanced showroom—now featuring all table seating—you're part of the action. Sip your favorite cocktail (or mocktail) delivered straight to your table while world-class performers take the stage just inches away. No lines, no distractions—just pure, immersive entertainment.

At the center of it all is headliner Bart Rockett, a seasoned performer with a global résumé and a knack for keeping audiences on the edge of their seats. With a career that spans more than 90 countries, his own nationally syndicated TV show and a long-running theater in Branson, Rockett brings big-stage talent to an

intimate, coastal setting.

And here's where it gets even more fun—his show blends slick, sophisticated magic with sharp comedy and crowd interaction, making every performance feel personal, unpredictable and completely unforgettable. Add in his signature ventriloquism (honed under the mentorship of Jeff Dunham), and you've got a night that truly delivers something for everyone.

Even better? It's a family affair.

Rockett's children, Kadan and Brooklyn, make special guest appearances throughout the season. You may recognize them from film, television and even a viral Super Bowl commercial with nearly 800 million views. Their star power adds an extra spark to an already electric production.

For Rockett, this residency is more than just another tour stop—it's personal. Having vacationed in Destin since childhood, he's returning to the place that first inspired him. "I am excited to be back for another season here on the Em-

erald Coast and to continue creating magical memories for our guests," he shared.

Make it a full night out by arriving early—or lingering after the final curtain—at the newly opened Blue Lagoon restaurant, located right next to the showroom. Known for its Italian-inspired menu, it's the perfect spot to dine, unwind and keep the evening going. Bonus: you can even bring your drinks into the theater.

Showtimes include 7 p.m. evening performances, with 4 p.m. matinees offered on select Sundays—perfect for date nights, girls' nights, family outings or hosting out-of-town guests.

This show sells out quickly, and seating is limited—so grab your tickets in advance.

Parking is free, the vibe is electric and the magic? Absolutely unforgettable.

Reserve your seats now at MagicDestin.com—and get ready for a night that will leave you wondering, "How did they do that?"

Events at the Beach

Celebrate Golf's Biggest Week at A Walk Down Magnolia Lane

April 8 | 7 p.m. | WaterColor LakeHouse | SRB

Join Embrace Florida Kids for an unforgettable evening inspired by the world's greatest golf tournament at "A Walk Down Magnolia Lane" a golf-themed celebration featuring live music, engaging golf activities, and the opportunity to support vulnerable children in Northwest Florida.

Now in its third year and presented by Shoreline Title, "A Walk Down Magnolia Lane" will take place Wednesday, April 8, 2026, at 5 p.m. at the WaterColor LakeHouse in Santa Rosa Beach.

Inspired by golf's most iconic tradition, the soirée features tournament-inspired cuisine, a signature cocktail, and exciting activities, including a golf simulator, putting contest, closest-to-the-pin challenge, longest drive competition, and even a chance at a \$1,000 hole-in-one.

At 7 p.m., don't miss the Live

Calcutta, featuring more than \$25,000 in prizes, including luxury stays at The Breakers, Old Edwards Inn, The Grand Hotel, and more. Guests can also explore a curated silent auction with exclusive items and experiences.

Tickets are \$150 and available at walkdownmagnolialane.org/florida.

Veterans & First Responders Appreciation Lunch April 21 | Niceville Community Center

A Superior Mechanical will host its inaugural Veterans and First Responders Appreciation Lunch on Tuesday, April 21, from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Niceville Community Center (204 Partin Drive N., Niceville). The community-focused event honors local veterans, active military and first responders with a catered hot lunch from Swiftly Catered, special presentations and an AC system giveaway to one deserving ser-

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A Grand Finale in the Sky: How The Alice Turns Weddings Into Once-in-a-Lifetime Experiences



BY KRISTIN SULLIVAN, GENERAL MANAGER, THE ALICE RESORT & MARINA

I'll never forget the moment a couple approached me with a vision that would truly wow their guests years ago for their Florida Destination Wedding. What began as a conversation about a surprise firework display at the end of their evening quickly evolved into something far more extraordinary.

Not only were we planning a grand finale, but we were also orchestrating a deeply personal moment: a gender reveal that would surprise everyone, including the couple themselves.

Months in advance, I coordinated privately with their doctor. Only three people knew the secret; they were expecting a baby boy: the doctor, the fireworks conductor, and myself. Every detail was carefully planned to ensure the reveal would be seamless, emotional, and unforgettable.

As the evening unfolded, guests believed they were attending a destination engagement party. Then came the first surprise, a wedding ceremony that no one saw coming. And just when they thought the night couldn't get more magical, we lit up the sky in blue!

Fireworks burst overhead, washing the palm trees in brilliant shades of blue. In that moment, the couple, and every guest realized what was being revealed. The joy, the shock, the emotion... it was electric.

Thank you Myly & Rob – (photo credit Tony Gregory) as it remains one of the most unforgettable experiences of my planning career, a perfect example of how thoughtful planning, trust, and a touch of creativity can turn a celebration into something truly once in a life-

time. A key reason we require our clients to have a Planner for their Weddings at The Alice.

Planning a wedding at The Alice Resort & Marina in Destin already sets the stage for something unforgettable and breathtaking, but for couples looking to create a true “wow” moment, few experiences compare to a grand finale in the sky. Whether you choose classic fireworks or a modern drone light show, incorporating an aerial display into your celebration can transform your wedding into a once-in-a-lifetime event for both you and your guests.

Fireworks vs. Drone Shows: Two Spectacular Options

Fireworks have long been associated with celebration, romance, and milestone moments. There's something timeless about the crackle, color, and emotion they bring, especially when synchronized to music or timed with a first kiss or send-off. For couples drawn to tradition and drama, fireworks deliver a powerful sensory experience that never fails to impress.

On the other hand, drone shows are quickly becoming a sought-after alternative. Using coordinated fleets of LED-lit

drones, these displays can create custom shapes, monograms, animations, and even tell a story in the sky. They're quieter, highly customizable, and offer a modern, tech-forward feel that's perfect for couples looking to do something different.

Why The Alice Is the Perfect Setting

The Alice Resort & Marina is uniquely positioned to make either option seamless and spectacular. Its waterfront location allows for barge-based staging, meaning your aerial show can be launched safely from the water, away from guests, while still delivering a front row view from the venue.

This setup not only enhances safety, but also elevates the experience. Imagine your guests gathered all together in one beautiful place when the sky over the water comes alive in color or choreography. The reflection off the water adds another layer of beauty, doubling the visual impact and creating a truly immersive moment.

The Importance of Permits and Regulations

While the idea of a fireworks or drone show is exciting, it's not as simple as booking and



lighting up the sky. Both options require proper permits, coordination with local authorities, and strict adherence to safety regulations.

Fireworks, in particular, are heavily regulated in coastal areas like Destin. Permits may involve the city, county, fire marshal, and sometimes even the Coast Guard due to the military surroundings. Drone shows also require FAA compliance, licensed operators, and airspace coordination.

This is where working with experienced vendor partners that understand the strict and proper processes is essential. Ensuring all permits are secured

well in advance protects your event, avoids last-minute issues, and guarantees everything runs smoothly.

Why Advance Planning Is Key

Aerial displays are not something you can add on at the last minute. The best providers book out months in advance, and permitting timelines can be lengthy. Weather considerations, safety planning, barge logistics, and show design all require thoughtful coordination.

- Starting early allows you to:
- Secure reputable, licensed and insured vendors
 - Navigate permits without stress
 - Customize your show (especially for drones)
 - Coordinate timing with your wedding planner

With enough lead time, your aerial display can be perfectly integrated into your evening whether it is a surprise reveal after dinner or a grand send-off moment.

Creating an Unforgettable Guest Experience

At the end of the day, wed-

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THE ALICE

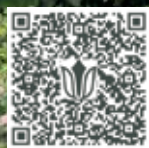
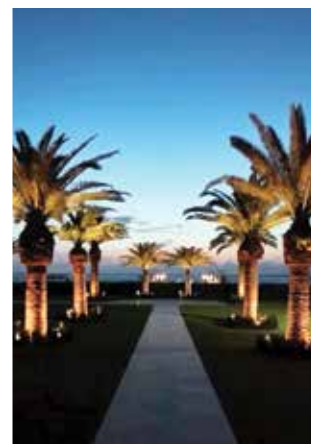
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Cali's To Do In Destin! APRIL 2026

1

Bonfire on the Beach | 5pm | The Bay
Business Entrepreneur Night | 5pm | Soundside
Run Club | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery
Trivia Night | 6pm | Destin Brewery
Trivia Night | 6pm | Craft Bar @ The Harbor
Wednesday Night Concert Series | 7pm | Baytowne Wharf
Karaoke | 7pm | Kenny D's
Karaoke | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty
Comedy After Dark | 8:30pm | Skybar Destin

2

Under The Sea | 3pm | Harborwalk Village
Easter Egg Hunt | 4pm | Urban Air Destin
Bands on the Boulevard: Spring Music Series | 6pm | Grand Boulevard | MB
Little Black Dress Night | 6:30pm-9:30pm | Marina Café
850 Social Babes Pickleball & Dinner Social | 6:30pm | Wood Foot Beer
Fort Comedy Open Mic Standup | 7pm | Downtown Music Hall
ThursDaze Drone Light Show | 8:30pm | Baytowne Wharf
Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse
Ladies Night | 10pm | McGuire's Destin

3

Locals Stick Together Day | 7am | The Pancakery Destin
Friday Martini Lunch | 11am-4pm | Skybar Destin
Free Beach Bonfire | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille
11th Annual Doggie EGGstravaganza | 5:30pm | Grand Boulevard
Jon Boston Memorial Show | 6pm | Downtown Music Hall
Coastal Country Concert | 6pm | Harborwalk Village
Karaoke | 6pm | Kluges Rucken Fidiculous BBQ (1310 Lewis Turner Blvd)
ALMOST ABBA | 7pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville
Karaoke | 7pm | Island Wing Company
Salsa & Bachata Dance Lessons | 8pm | Brica Brac
Latin Night | 8pm-2am | Bosforo in Miramar Beach
Karaoke | 8pm | Harry T's Lighthouse
Karaoke | 8pm | 5 o'Clock Somewhere Baytowne Wharf

4

Valparaiso Spring Plant Festival | 9am | 695 Valparaiso Prkwy
Niceville Vendor Fair | 9am | Niceville High School
Farmers Market | 9am-1pm | Grand Boulevard
Community Easter Egg Hunt | 9:30am | 240 Hughes Street NE, FWB
Florida Concealed Carry Weapons Class | 10am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Val'p
Spring Family Festival | 10am | 3524 US Hwy 98, Santa Rosa Beach
Discover Science Saturday | 10am | Emerald Coast Science Center
Saturday Sing-A-Long Brunch | 11:30am | Skybar Destin
Destin Commons Market | 2pm | Destin Commons
Brooks Street Pub Crawl | 6pm | Downtown FWB
Karaoke | 6pm | Fatboys Destin
Karaoke | 8pm | Harry T's Lighthouse
Karaoke | 8pm | 5 o'Clock Somewhere Baytowne Wharf
Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar

5

Okaloosa's Easter Sunrise Celebration on the Beach | 6am | John C. Beasley Park, Okaloosa Island
Easter Brunch & Egg Hunt | 9:30am | The Island Hotel
DJ Brunch | 10am | Azul @ Harborwalk
Easter Brunch Buffet | 10:30am | Emerald Grande



Easter Brunch & Bubbly | 11am | SkyBar at Edge Seafood
Easter Brunch with Gone Coastal | 11am | Soundside
Easter Egg Dash | 12pm | LuLus Destin
Easter Celebration | 1pm | Harborwalk Village
Easter Sunset Dinner Cruise | 5:45 pm | SOLARIS Yacht | Sandestin
Trivia Night | 6pm | The Wharf 850
Sound Bath Sundays | 6pm | Hotel Effie
Scallywag Sunday | 7pm | Baytowne Wharf
Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar
Karaoke | 9pm | Outcast Bar & Grill

6

Free Beach Bonfire/SIN Night | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille
Bingo Night | 6pm | American Legion Destin, 311 Main Street

7

Mug Club & Bingo | 6pm | Destin Brewery
Karaoke | 6pm | AJ's on the Bayou
Karaoke | 6-9pm | Fatboys Destin
Trivia Night | 6pm | Ricks Crab Trap FWB
Boomin' Tuesday | 6:30pm | Baytowne Wharf
Music Bingo | 7pm | Props Brewery Taproom
Bonfire on the Beach | 5pm | The Bay
Business Entrepreneur Night | 5pm | Soundside
Run Club | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery
Trivia Night | 6pm | Destin Brewery
Trivia Night | 6pm | Craft Bar @ The Harbor
A Walk Down Magnolia Lane | 7pm | Water-Color LakeHouse | SRB
Wednesday Night Concert Series | 7pm | Baytowne Wharf
Karaoke | 7pm | Kenny D's
Karaoke | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty

8

Bonfire on the Beach | 5pm | The Bay
Business Entrepreneur Night | 5pm | Soundside
Run Club | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery
Trivia Night | 6pm | Destin Brewery
Trivia Night | 6pm | Craft Bar @ The Harbor
A Walk Down Magnolia Lane | 7pm | Water-Color LakeHouse | SRB
Wednesday Night Concert Series | 7pm | Baytowne Wharf
Karaoke | 7pm | Kenny D's
Karaoke | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty
Downtown FWB Coffee Club Meet Up | 8:30am | Florida Place Food Trucks
Community Art Supplies Swap | 10am | Fort Walton Beach Public Library
Bands on the Boulevard: Spring Music Series | 6pm | Grand Boulevard | MB
Little Black Dress Night | 6:30pm-9:30pm | Marina Café
Concerts In The Village: Smash Mouth | 7pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Pavilion | Destin
Fort Comedy Open Mic Standup | 7pm | Downtown Music Hall
ThursDaze Drone Light Show | 8:30pm | Baytowne Wharf
Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse
Ladies Night | 10pm | McGuire's Destin

9

FWB Chamber First Friday Coffee | 7am | 126 Harbeson Ave SE FWB
Friday Martini Lunch | 11am-4pm | Skybar Destin
Billy Bowlegs Pickleball Tournament | 3pm | Money Road Tennis Courts
Free Beach Bonfire | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille
City of Destin Kids' Night Out: "Mad Scientist" | 6pm | Destin Community Center
Karaoke | 7pm | Island Wing Company
Beer Pong Tournament | 7pm | Soundside
Salsa & Bachata Dance Lessons | 8pm | Brica Brac

Latin Night | 8pm-2am | Bosforo in Miramar Beach
Karaoke | 8pm | Harry T's Lighthouse
Karaoke | 8pm | 5 o'Clock Somewhere Baytowne Wharf

11

Hunger Run 5K 10K and Kids Fun Run | 8am | Bluewater Bay
2026 Earth Day Beach Cleanup | 8am | Okaloosa Island Boardwalk
Farmers Market | 9am-1pm | Grand Boulevard
Autism All Wheels Poker Run | 9am | Valparaiso
Art in Bloom with Kathy Schumacher Art | 10am | The Shop at Baldwin Turf | Niceville
Destin Pooch Palooza | 10am | 4100 Indian Bayou Trail, Destin
studio625 presents Snow White | 2 pm & 7 pm | FWB Civic Auditorium
Saturday Sing-A-Long Brunch | 11:30am | Skybar Destin

12

Pins & Paradise | 1pm | Fort Walton Beach Bowl
Saturday Social | 6pm | Harborwalk Village
Karaoke | 6pm | Fatboys Destin
Sing Your Heart Out Karaoke Competition | 7pm | Austons on 98
Karaoke | 8pm | Harry T's Lighthouse
Karaoke | 8pm | 5 o'Clock Somewhere Baytowne Wharf
Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar
CARffine | 7am | Maas Coffee Roasters
DJ Brunch | 10am | Azul @ Harborwalk
studio625 presents Snow White | 2 pm | FWB Civic Auditorium

13

Sound Bath Sundays | 6pm | Hotel Effie
Trivia Night | 6pm | The Wharf 850
Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar
Karaoke | 9pm | Outcast Bar & Grill
Free Beach Bonfire/SIN Night | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille
Bingo Night | 6pm | American Legion Destin, 311 Main Street
Afroman Live: Freedom of Speech Tour | 7pm | Soundside

14

The Traveling Painter | 5:30pm | LJ Schooners Restaurant | Niceville
Mug Club & Bingo | 6pm | Destin Brewery
Karaoke | 6pm | AJ's on the Bayou
Karaoke | 6-9pm | Fatboys Destin
Trivia Night | 6pm | Ricks Crab Trap FWB
Ladies Who Launch Powerhouse Women Series | 11:30am | Destin Chamber
Bonfire on the Beach | 5pm | The Bay
Run Club | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery
Trivia Night | 6pm | Destin Brewery
Trivia Night | 6pm | Craft Bar @ The Harbor
Wednesday Night Concert Series | 7pm | Baytowne Wharf
Karaoke | 7pm | Kenny D's
Karaoke | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty

15

Bands on the Boulevard: Spring Music Series | 6pm | Grand Boulevard | MB
Little Black Dress Night | 6:30pm-9:30pm | Marina Café
The Prisoner Wine Company Dinner | 6pm | Poppy's Crazy Lobster
Planetarium Nights | 6pm & 7pm | Emerald Coast Science Center
Fort Comedy Open Mic Standup | 7pm | Downtown Music Hall
Concerts In The Village: Black Jacket Symphony | 7pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation
Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse
Ladies Night | 10pm | McGuire's Destin

16

Friday Martini Lunch | 11am-4pm | Skybar Destin
Free Beach Bonfire | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille
Sandestin Wine Festival Grand Tastings | 5pm | Baytowne Wharf
Karaoke | 7pm | Island Wing Company

Salsa & Bachata Dance Lessons | 8pm | Brica Brac
Latin Night | 8pm-2am | Bosforo in Miramar Beach
Karaoke | 8pm | Harry T's Lighthouse
Karaoke | 8pm | 5 o'Clock Somewhere Baytowne Wharf

18

Seas The Day: Mind. Body. Beach. Yoga & Mimosas | 8:30am | Hilton Sandestin
Farmers Market | 9am-1pm | Grand Boulevard
Farmers Market | 10am | Harborwalk Village
Florida Concealed Carry Weapons Class | 10am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Val'p
5th Annual Rotary Community Fire Truck Pull Fundraiser | 10 am | 3rd Planet Brewing | Niceville
Wiener Dog Race | 10:30am | Destin Commons
Saturday Sing-A-Long Brunch | 11:30am | Skybar Destin
Burning Up The Lanes | 12pm | Fort Walton Beach Bowl
Sandestin Wine Festival Grand Tastings | 1pm | Baytowne Wharf
Destin Commons Market | 2pm | Destin Commons
C.A.R.E. on the Coast Turtle Fest | 3:30pm | Gulfarium
Karaoke | 6pm | Fatboys Destin
NFSO Mahler Symphony No. 2 "Resurrection" | 7pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville

19

Karaoke | 8pm | Harry T's Lighthouse
Karaoke | 8pm | 5 o'Clock Somewhere Baytowne Wharf
Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar
Spring Clean Up Dive | 6am | Okaloosa Island Boardwalk
5th Annual DHS Shark Classic Golf Tournament | 9am | Indian Bayou Golf Club
DJ Brunch | 10am | Azul @ Harborwalk
Sandestin Wine Festival Brunch | 11am | Ovide at Hotel Effie
Sound Bath Sundays | 6pm | Hotel Effie
Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar
Karaoke | 9pm | Outcast Bar & Grill

20

Free Beach Bonfire/SIN Night | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille
Bingo Night | 6pm | American Legion Destin, 311 Main Street
Veteran's & First Responders Appreciation Lunch | 11:30am | Niceville Community Center
Mug Club & Bingo | 6pm | Destin Brewery
Karaoke | 6pm | AJ's on the Bayou
Karaoke | 6-9pm | Fatboys Destin
Trivia Night | 6pm | Ricks Crab Trap FWB
Bonfire on the Beach | 5pm | The Bay
Trivia Night | 5pm | Down Island
Business Entrepreneur Night | 5pm | Soundside
Run Club | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery
Trivia Night | 6pm | Destin Brewery
Trivia Night | 6pm | Craft Bar @ The Harbor
Wednesday Night Concert Series | 7pm | Baytowne Wharf
Karaoke | 7pm | Kenny D's
Karaoke | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty

21

Sun, Sand, Soul | 3pm | Seascape Resort
Bubbly Baytowne | 5pm | Baytowne Wharf
Little Black Dress Night | 6:30pm-9:30pm | Marina Café
Fort Comedy Open Mic Standup | 7pm | Downtown Music Hall
Concerts In The Village: Yacht Rock Schooner | 7pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Pavilion | Destin
Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse
Ladies Night | 10pm | McGuire's Destin

22

Run Club | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery
Trivia Night | 6pm | Destin Brewery
Trivia Night | 6pm | Craft Bar @ The Harbor
Wednesday Night Concert Series | 7pm | Baytowne Wharf
Karaoke | 7pm | Kenny D's
Karaoke | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty
Sun, Sand, Soul | 3pm | Seascape Resort
Bubbly Baytowne | 5pm | Baytowne Wharf
Little Black Dress Night | 6:30pm-9:30pm | Marina Café
Fort Comedy Open Mic Standup | 7pm | Downtown Music Hall
Concerts In The Village: Yacht Rock Schooner | 7pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Pavilion | Destin
Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse
Ladies Night | 10pm | McGuire's Destin

23

Run Club | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery
Trivia Night | 6pm | Destin Brewery
Trivia Night | 6pm | Craft Bar @ The Harbor
Wednesday Night Concert Series | 7pm | Baytowne Wharf
Karaoke | 7pm | Kenny D's
Karaoke | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty
Friday Martini Lunch | 11am-4pm | Skybar Destin
Free Beach Bonfire | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille
Sandestin Wine Festival Grand Tastings | 5pm | Baytowne Wharf
Karaoke | 7pm | Island Wing Company

24

Friday Martini Lunch | 11am-4pm | Skybar Destin
Sun, Sand, Soul | 3pm | Seascape Resort
SoWal Wine Bitters, Brews & Bartenders | 5:30pm | Grand Boulevard
Free Beach Bonfire | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille
Destin Charity Wine Auction Patron Diners | 6pm | Various Homes
Karaoke | 7pm | Island Wing Company
Salsa & Bachata Dance Lessons | 8pm | Brica Brac
Latin Night | 8pm-2am | Bosforo in Miramar Beach
Karaoke | 8pm | Harry T's Lighthouse
Karaoke | 8pm | 5 o'Clock Somewhere Baytowne Wharf

25

Farmers Market | 9am-1pm | Grand Boulevard
Farmers Market | 10am | Harborwalk Village
Saturday in the Park | 10am-4pm | Heritage Museum of NWFL | Val'p
Saturday Sing-A-Long Brunch | 11:30am | Skybar Destin
SoWal Beaches Food & Wine | 3-6pm | Grand Boulevard
Destin Charity Wine Auction | 1pm-6pm | Grand Boulevard
Sun, Sand, Soul | 3pm | Seascape Resort
Sevendust One Tour | 7pm | Club LA
Karaoke | 8pm | Harry T's Lighthouse
Karaoke | 8pm | 5 o'Clock Somewhere Baytowne Wharf

26

DJ Brunch | 10am | Azul @ Harborwalk
Pigs on the Beach | 12pm | Nick's Seafood | Freeport
SoWal Beaches Food & Wine | 1-4pm | Grand Boulevard
Emerald Coast Community Singers Spring Concert: Choral Classics Through Time | 3pm | Christ the King Episcopal Church, SRB
Sound Bath Sundays | 6pm | Hotel Effie
Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar
Karaoke | 9pm | Outcast Bar & Grill

27

Free Beach Bonfire/SIN Night | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille
Bingo Night | 6pm | American Legion Destin, 311 Main Street
World's Greatest Baby Shower | 5:30pm | Emerald Coast Convention Center
Mug Club & Bingo | 6pm | Destin Brewery
Karaoke | 6pm | AJ's on the Bayou
Karaoke | 6-9pm | Fatboys Destin
Trivia Night | 6pm | Ricks Crab Trap FWB
Music Bingo | 7pm | Props Brewery Taproom
Bonfire on the Beach | 5pm | The Bay
Trivia Night | 5pm | Down Island
Business Entrepreneur Night | 5pm | Soundside
Run Club | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery
Trivia Night | 6pm | Destin Brewery
Trivia Night | 6pm | Craft Bar @ The Harbor
Wednesday Night Concert Series | 7pm | Baytowne Wharf
Karaoke | 7pm | Kenny D's
Karaoke | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty

28

Free Beach Bonfire/SIN Night | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille
Bingo Night | 6pm | American Legion Destin, 311 Main Street
World's Greatest Baby Shower | 5:30pm | Emerald Coast Convention Center
Mug Club & Bingo | 6pm | Destin Brewery
Karaoke | 6pm | AJ's on the Bayou
Karaoke | 6-9pm | Fatboys Destin
Trivia Night | 6pm | Ricks Crab Trap FWB
Music Bingo | 7pm | Props Brewery Taproom
Bonfire on the Beach | 5pm | The Bay
Trivia Night | 5pm | Down Island
Business Entrepreneur Night | 5pm | Soundside
Run Club | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery
Trivia Night | 6pm | Destin Brewery
Trivia Night | 6pm | Craft Bar @ The Harbor
Wednesday Night Concert Series | 7pm | Baytowne Wharf
Karaoke | 7pm | Kenny D's
Karaoke | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty

29

Bonfire on the Beach | 5pm | The Bay
Trivia Night | 5pm | Down Island
Business Entrepreneur Night | 5pm | Soundside
Run Club | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery
Trivia Night | 6pm | Destin Brewery
Trivia Night | 6pm | Craft Bar @ The Harbor
Wednesday Night Concert Series | 7pm | Baytowne Wharf
Karaoke | 7pm | Kenny D's
Karaoke | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty
Little Black Dress Night | 6:30pm-9:30pm | Marina Café
Fort Comedy Open Mic Standup | 7pm | Downtown Music Hall
Concerts In The Village: Rumours Atlanta-Fleetwood Mac Tribute | 7pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Pavilion | Destin
Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse
Ladies Night | 10pm | McGuire's Destin



EVENTS • LIVE MUSIC • FOOD

your local guide for everything

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EVENTS

continued from page 6

vice member or first responder in need. Eligible participants include members of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard, EMT/Medics, Police, Sheriffs and Firefighters. Register for the HVAC giveaway at ASuperiorMechanical.com under ABOUT US > HVAC GIVEAWAY. Business partners are welcome to contribute door prizes. For details: Marta Thorpe at (850) 814-3822.

Sip, Savor & Celebrate: South Walton Beaches Wine & Food Festival April 23–26, 2026 | Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach

One of the Emerald Coast’s most anticipated spring events returns in delicious style as the South Walton Beaches Wine & Food Festival uncorks April 23–26 at Grand Boulevard. With more than 600 wines, beers and spirits to sample, this four-day, award-winning festival offers a vibrant blend of flavor, fun and flair.

The weekend begins Thursday, April 23, with Winemakers & Shakers from 5–7 p.m. at Wine World in Destin, where guests can sip, sample local fare and meet the makers behind exceptional wines. On Friday, the experience elevates with a VIP Wine Tasting (4–6 p.m.), featuring rare and collectible pours alongside cuisine from Grand Boulevard restaurants. Later that evening, Bitters, Brews & Bartenders (5:30–8 p.m.) brings the energy, with craft cocktails, live music and a lively mixology competition under the stars.

The signature Grand Tasting takes center stage Saturday, April 25 (3–6 p.m.) and

Sunday, April 26 (1–4 p.m.), as world-class wineries line the boulevard pouring hundreds of selections from across the globe. Highlights include a showcase from Oregon’s renowned Willamette Valley, plus opportunities to meet winemakers, vineyard owners and industry experts throughout the weekend.

Wine World’s Culinary Village adds to the experience with gourmet pairings, artisan cheeses and chef-driven bites designed to complement each sip. Guests can also purchase featured wines on-site at exclusive prices, with proceeds benefiting the Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation and children in need across Northwest Florida.

Tickets are available now at sowalwine.com

Summit on the Circle Returns to Lake DeFuniak April 23–26, 2026 | Lake DeFuniak Historic District | DeFuniak Springs

The second annual Summit on the Circle returns April 23–26, bringing a weekend of history, culture and connection to the scenic shores of Lake DeFuniak. Centered on the theme



“Stories That Shape Us,” the event features a curated mix of conversations, live music, culinary experiences and interactive programming that explores storytelling through art, food, architecture and personal narratives.

Guests can enjoy signature experiences including a beer and wine reception, evening concerts and a Sunday ice cream social by the lake, all set within the charm of the historic district.

Details and tickets: historicpensacola.org/summit

Destin Charity Wine Auction Turns 21 and Goes Wild for Kids April 24–25 | Grand Boulevard

The 21st Annual Destin Charity Wine Auction presented by the Jumonville Family benefits 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.

The 2026 auction will feature an impressive lineup of celebrity chefs and internation-

ally renowned vintners. Held in conjunction with the South Walton Beaches Wine and Food Festival, the auction also takes place at Grand Boulevard the same weekend. The festival showcases hundreds of premium wines, spirits and culinary offerings, with proceeds benefiting DCWAF. Full details are available at dcwaf.org.

Saturday in the Park Brings Family Fun to Valparaiso

Saturday, April 25 | 10 a.m.–4 p.m. (5K begins at 8 a.m.) | Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida, 115 Westview Ave., Val’p

The Heritage Museum Association’s annual “Saturday in the Park” returns with a full day of family-friendly fun, beginning with an 8 a.m. 5K run along Boggy and Tom’s Bayous. Registration is \$30 through April 15 and \$35 after.

Festivities kick off at 10 a.m. with Eglin Air Force Base’s Honor Guard, followed by a lively lineup including craft vendors, historical demonstrations,

Continued on page 15

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SNOW WHITE
the Ballet

Fort Walton Beach Civic Auditorium | APRIL 11 | 2PM & 7 PM
APRIL 12 | 2PM

Scan for tickets

Studio6Twenty5.com
APRIL 11 & 12, 2026

SOUTH WALTON BEACHES WINE & FOOD FESTIVAL
EST. 2013

South Walton Beaches Wine & Food Festival
April 23-26 | Grand Boulevard

www.SoWalWine.com

SCAN FOR TICKETS

GRAND BOULEVARD | SOUTH WALTON FLORIDA | FLORIDA RESTAURANT & LODGING ASSOCIATION | DESTIN CHARITY WINE AUCTION FOUNDATION | WINEWORLD | Hilton | EMERALD COAST MAGAZINE

 Community

Raise a Glass: Sandestin Wine Festival Returns for Year 39 at Baytowne Wharf

The 39th year of being THE BEST! It's time to raise your glasses and celebrate spring right in our own backyard. The 39th Annual Sandestin Wine Festival returns to the Village of Baytowne Wharf from Thursday, April 16, to Sunday, April 19, 2026, offering a weekend full of flavor, fun and coastal charm that has become a signature of our region.

A pioneer among Emerald Coast festivals, the Sandestin Wine Festival has drawn locals and visitors alike for more than three decades, all eager to experience the culture and vibe of the Northwest Florida Gulf Coast in a fun-filled, come-as-you-are atmosphere. Whether you're a wine aficionado or

a curious newcomer, there's something for everyone with hundreds of featured wines.

Consistently topping area polls as a must-experience event, this beloved festival offers four full days of unique experiences including wine dinners with celebrity chefs, yoga, live music, interactive experiences, culinary tents and, of course, wine tastings.

The festival's Grand Wine Tastings, Friday from 5-8 p.m. and Saturday from 1-4 p.m., will feature more than 500 wines from domestic and international vineyards. It's your chance to meet the makers, explore new varieties and discover wines to suit every taste and budget.

Pair your pours with gourmet



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

A returning favorite, the



7-9 p.m. Enjoy tributes to some of the biggest legends in music:
8: Departure
15: 7 Bridges Band
22: Ron Adams - Shadow of the King
29: Emerald Coast Blues Brothers

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

Bubbly Baytowne April 23 | 5-7 p.m.

Don't miss Bubbly Baytowne on Thursday, April 23, from 5-7 p.m. Sip free champagne as you stroll through the shops and boutiques of Baytowne. This 21+ event is a fun way to support local retailers while enjoying a relaxed evening out.

Movie Monday April 6 | 7 p.m. Zootopia 2

Grab a lawn chair or blanket and cozy up on the Events Plaza Lawn for a featured film on our new BIG Screen!!

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

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

Thursdaze Lights Show Thursdays, April 2-April 9, 8:30 p.m. | FREE

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

Bubbly & Boozy Tent on Sandestin's Grand Lawn offers a playful tasting experience featuring sparkling wines and artisan liquors alongside lively local music.

Weekend Event Highlights Include:

- Prisoner Wine Company Dinner (April 16, 6 p.m., Poppy's Crazy Lobster at Baytowne Wharf)

- Beachside yoga and mimosas during "Seas the Day" (April 18, 9-11 a.m., Hilton Sandestin) wellness event

- Farewell Brunch (April 19, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., Ovide)

Whether you're a wine rookie or a seasoned sipper, everyone is welcome.

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

Easter Explosion Saturday, April 4th, 12-3p.m.

Bounce on over to the Village of Baytowne Wharf for an Easter Explosion!

Enjoy a day filled with face-painting, balloons, and more! Also, don't forget to get your picture taken with the Easter Bunny!

Springtime Fun Continues All April at Baytowne Wharf


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

The Wednesday Night Concert Series – Tribute Edition brings music and nostalgia to the Events Plaza Stage every Wednesday, April 2-30, from

THE #1 EVENT ON THE EMERALD COAST







*Wine, Food
& Fun in the Sun!*

APRIL 16-19



**SANDESTIN
WINE FESTIVAL**

ENJOY DISCOUNTED RATES AND
ACCOMMODATIONS AT SANDESTIN

Don't Miss CARE on the Coast TurtleFest on April 18!

BY MARY FOMBY, GULFARIUM

A Coastal Festival for Sea Turtle Conservation

Get ready for one of the most exciting days of the year at the Gulfarium — CARE on the Coast TurtleFest, happening April 18! This lively, all-inclusive coastal celebration brings together music, food, art, animal experiences, and conservation for a festival the whole family will love.

Proudly presented by Valparaiso Coca-Cola, TurtleFest raises critical funds for the Gulfarium CARE Center, which rescues and rehabilitates endangered sea turtles along the Emerald Coast. Every ticket

to-enjoy food and drinks from amazing local restaurants and vendors stationed throughout the Gulfarium. Between performances, guests can wander the park, discover new flavors, and enjoy the festive energy around every corner.

Adding to the creative spirit of the day, local artist Kelly Pierre will be painting live during the event, giving guests the chance to watch a work of art come to life in real time.

Entertainment Around Every Corner

TurtleFest will have surprises waiting throughout the park. Stilt walkers and roaming entertainers will keep the energy

ing Dolphin Oasis, complete with exclusive seating, a private bar, and premium food options. It's the perfect place to relax, enjoy the music, and take in the beautiful coastal setting while supporting sea turtle conservation.

Save with Presale Tickets

TurtleFest is one of the CARE Center's most anticipated events of the year — and the best time to purchase tickets is now. Presale pricing is available for a limited time, along with discounted event T-shirt and commemorative cup add-ons.

Join us on April 18 for a day filled with music, food, wildlife, and community — all in support of protecting endangered sea turtles along the Emerald Coast.

Purchase your tickets now at go.gulfarium.com/turtlefest and be part of the celebration!



purchased helps support the lifesaving care the CARE Center team provides to injured and stranded turtles throughout the year.

Music, Food, and Festival Fun All Day Long

From the moment you arrive, guests will enjoy multiple live musicians and bands performing throughout the park, and kids will especially love the pirate band!

Your all-inclusive ticket means you can explore the park while enjoying all-you-care-

high, while families can visit the Kids Zone for crafts, games, and conservation-themed activities.

Guests will also have opportunities to enjoy animal meet-and-greets with penguins and other Gulfarium residents, making TurtleFest a truly one-of-a-kind experience that blends wildlife, education, and celebration.

VIP Experiences with a View

For an upgraded festival experience, VIP tickets include access to a private area overlook-

CARE
on the
COAST
TURTLE
FEST

April 18
Gulfarium

Gulfarium
C.A.R.E. CENTER

All-you-can-to-enjoy Food & Drinks

Animal Meet & Greets

Live Music and Entertainment

Supports Sea Turtle Rescue and Rehabilitation

Tickets on Sale Now!
SAVE ON PRESALE TICKETS
UNTIL APRIL 3RD!



Community

Warning: Unlimited Tacos and Tequila Ahead — The Gulf Coast’s Biggest Fiesta Returns May 16!

Every May, **Extreme Festival & Events** transforms the Village of Baytowne Wharf at Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort into the Gulf Coast’s most spirited fiesta — and this year is no exception. The **13th Annual Tequila & Taco Fest** returns on **Saturday, May 16, 2026**, bringing together the best tacos, the finest tequilas, and an energy that simply cannot be matched anywhere on the Emerald Coast.

Recognized as the **second longest-running Tequila & Taco Fest in the United States** and a **Gold Medal winner for Best Event in Walton County**, this award-winning festival has earned its place as a beloved spring tradition for locals and visitors from across the Southeast. With a history of sell-outs, early ticket purchases are strongly encouraged.

From **1:00 PM to 4:00 PM**, more than **30 top taco vendors** will fire up their grills and compete for the prestigious title of Best Taco in Northwest Florida, with a **\$4,250 total prize purse on the line** — including a \$2,500 grand prize for first place. Guests enjoy **unlimited**



taco tastings as they make their way through every booth, while judges score each entry on taste, presentation, and texture. The **Best Margarita Competition** adds even more flair, with both judge and People’s Choice awards up for grabs.

Beyond the competition, guests can explore **40 tequila tasting tents** offering **unlimited tequila and margarita tastings**, enjoy imported beers, and dance to **live music** and a mariachi band all

afternoon. Thrill-seekers can test their limits in the **Macho Nacho Eating Contest** and the fiery **Muy Caliente Pepper Eating Contest** — each offering a **\$250 prize** to the bravest competitor. Show off your festival style in the **Best Dressed Contest** for another shot at \$250. Face painting and interactive activities round out a celebration the whole family can enjoy.

For those looking to elevate the experience, the exclusive



Fast Pass Party Pack offers VIP perks including a pre-party at **Ara Rooftop inside Hotel Effie** from 11:00 AM to 1:00 PM, skip-the-line access, premium spirit tastings, drink specials, and an after-party back at Ara



GOD BLESS THE USA



FREE ADMISSION

Northwest Florida Spring Home Show and Patriotic Business Vendor Expo Celebrating The 250th Anniversary Of America At The Northwest Florida Fairgrounds

Saturday April 11th 10am-5pm • Sunday April 12th 10am-3pm

Patriotic Spring Home Show Discounts

and over \$10,000 in Door Prizes and Giveaways Offered By The Vendors

FREE Door Prize to the FIRST 1000 visitors



More Info and Vendor Booth Registration at www.ParadisePromotionsFL.com
This Is Another Great Paradise Promotion

starting at 4:00 PM.

Planning to make a weekend of it? **Book your stay with My Vacation Haven** and enjoy exclusive discount rates for festival guests. A special thank you to the major sponsor, **The Zen Companies Inc.**, for making this year’s event possible.

A portion of proceeds benefits the **Fisher House of the Emerald Coast**, supporting military families in their time of need — making every taco and every sip mean just a little bit more.

Tickets are available now at efestevents.com.



13th Annual **TEQUILA & TACO FEST**

Saturday, May 16, 2026 | 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM
Village of Baytowne Wharf, Sandestin, FL



-  **Unlimited Tacos & Tequila Tastings**
-  **Live Music & Mariachi Band**
-  **\$4,250 Taco Competition Prize Purse**
-  **Muy Caliente Pepper Eating Contest**
-  **Best Dressed Contest – \$250 Prize**
-  **Fast Pass VIP Party Pack Available**

GET TICKETS: efestevents.com

Presented by Extreme Festival & Events | Major Sponsor: The Zen Companies Inc.



“Reel Talk” from the City of Destin

Harboring Change, Growing the Solution: Vertical Oyster Gardens

Mayor Bobby Wagner and
PIO Tamara Young, PhD

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

Most environmental efforts are centered around cleanup and removing debris. And while that work is important, in a place like Destin, which is built around the health and clarity of its waters, we're inviting a forward-thinking approach rooted in restoration rather than simply removal.

On Saturday, April 18, the City of Destin and the Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance are inviting the community to a free

vertical oyster garden event. It's all part of our “Harboring Change. Growing the Solution.” initiative, and it will take place at Captain Royal Melvin Heritage Park from 1-2 p.m. It's a hands-on opportunity to be part of restoring Destin Harbor from the inside out.

Oysters are one of nature's most powerful water quality tools. A single oyster can filter up to 50 gallons of water per day. Multiply that by hundreds or even thousands (eventually millions!) of oysters, and you start to see real impact. It means:

- Cleaner water through natural filtration
- Improved clarity that sup-

ports seagrass and marine life

- Reduction in excess nutrients that can lead to algae blooms
- Stronger habitat for fish, crabs, and other species

In short, oysters don't just live in the harbor. They actively improve it every single day.

So, what's a vertical oyster garden? First, it's not for eating! But second, picture a suspended structure – like a rope – that hangs in the water and provides a place for oysters to grow. These gardens can be placed along docks and waterfront areas, turning underutilized space into environmental assets.

Participants will receive all



materials for free to make their own vertical oyster garden. CBA staff will explain how to maintain and grow the garden, and then participants will see a real oyster garden that has been thriving in Destin Harbor for over a year. Special thanks to John Stephens for his willingness to share that!

With this event supporting

the Keep America Beautiful Greatest American Cleanup and aligning with the Okaloosa County America 250 initiative, it's true local action. Marine safe markers will be available at the event for anyone wanting to decorate their garden with a personal, patriotic touch.

Event Details:

Saturday, April 18, 2026
1-2 p.m.

Captain Royal Melvin Heritage Park, 200 Harbor Blvd., Destin

For questions, contact publicinfo@cityofdestin.com.

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GRAND FINALE

continued from page 7

dings are about creating memories; not just for you, but for everyone celebrating with you. A fireworks or drone show adds a shared moment of awe that guests will talk about long after the night ends.

At The Alice, the combination of waterfront views, marina access, and thoughtful planning makes these experiences not only possible, but exceptional. With the right permits in place and a well-executed plan, you can turn your wedding into something truly extraordinary.

Please remember to keep

your photographer and videographer on to capture this experience. Because when the sky lights up over the water, it's more than entertainment, it is a moment you will want to forever remember and one your guests will never forget.

*At The Alice we work with Alpha Fireworks and Cosmic Drone USA:
CosmicDroneUSA@gmail.com
917-251-8015*

*Alpha Firework Displays
11612 Kent Grove Dr.
Spring Hill, FL 34610
Michael@AlphaFireworkDisplays.com
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The hiring of a lawyer is an important decision that should not be based solely upon advertisements. Before you decide, ask us to send you free written information about our qualifications and experience.

EVENTS

continued from page 9

the Walton Guard, USA 250 activities, children’s crafts, the Valparaiso Garden Club, bake sale, food and live music. Local band 20 West performs from 1–3 p.m., and admission to the museum is free.

For vendor information or 5K registration, call 850-678-2615 or email Manager@heritage-museum.org.

Emerald Coast Community Singers Spring Concert: Choral Classics Through Time

April 26, 2026 | 3 p.m. | Christ the King Episcopal Church, SRB

Celebrate the beauty of choral music across the centuries as the Emerald Coast Community Singers present their Spring Concert, Choral Classics Through Time. This vibrant local ensemble will take audiences on a musical journey spanning from the 12th to the 21st century, showcasing the timeless power of song to connect and inspire. Admission is free, and donations are gratefully accepted.

More info: emeraldcoast-communitysingers.com

Dancing with the Emerald Coast Stars

Saturday, May 2 | 6 p.m. | Hotel Effie Sandestin

Seaside School will debut its newest signature fundraiser, “Dancing with the Emerald Coast Stars,” presented in partnership with Fred Astaire Dance Studios Fort Walton Beach. Inspired by the hit TV show *Dancing with the Stars*, the ballroom-style competition pairs local leaders with professional dancers for an evening of glamour, entertainment and friendly rivalry—all supporting the Seacoast Collegiate High School Expansion Project. The 2026 Emerald Coast Stars include Dr. Lindsey Hoppe of 30A Smiles, Whitney Cooley of Scenic Sotheby’s International Realty and Southern Sand, Destin Mayor Bobby Wagner, and Drew Ward, principal of Seacoast Collegiate High School. Each will perform alongside a professional dancer from Fred Astaire Dance Studios. The evening begins with a cocktail hour and champagne toast, followed by a plated dinner, dance competition, awards

ceremony and VIP after-party. Guests—and supporters watching from home—can vote for their favorite dancer for \$10 per vote.

Tickets: \$350 individual | \$500 couples. Sponsorships and tickets are available at SeasideSchools.net. For sponsorship information, contact Callie Cox at coxc@seasideschools.net.

FORE! The Love of Animals Golf Tournament

May 9 | The Links Golf Club at Sandestin, Miramar Beach

Tee up for a great cause at Alaqua Animal Refuge’s 5th Annual FORE! The Love of Animals Golf Tournament, presented by Sandestin Investments, on Saturday, May 9, at The Links Golf Club at Sandestin (165 Sandestin Blvd. N., Miramar Beach). This signature fundraiser brings golfers and animal advocates together for 18 holes of scramble-format play with a shotgun start, on-course contests, raffles, awards and a “Pups & Pours” after party. Registration includes a cart, boxed lunch and two drink tickets. Fast Fetch Pricing offers teams of four for \$750 through March 9 (\$850 regular; \$250 individual players). Proceeds support Alaqua Animal Refuge’s rescue, veterinary care, rehabilitation and adoption programs across the Southeast. Registration deadline is May 4. Details and sign-up: app.eventcaddy.com/events/2026-fore-the-love-of-animals.

Gate To Gate Memorial Run/Walk 40th Anniversary

May 16 | Eglin East Gate Sports Complex, Eglin AFB

Honor service and sacrifice during the 40th Anniversary Gate To Gate Memorial Run/Walk on Saturday, May 16, at the Eglin East Gate Sports Complex. Held on Armed Forces Day, the historic 4.4-mile race returns to its traditional gate-to-gate course, inviting runners and walkers to pay tribute to America’s fallen heroes while celebrating the spirit of community and military heritage. Opening ceremonies begin at 6:45 a.m., with the race starting at 7 a.m. Participants may register individually or as four-person teams, and are encouraged to dedicate their journey in memory of loved ones or military heroes. On-

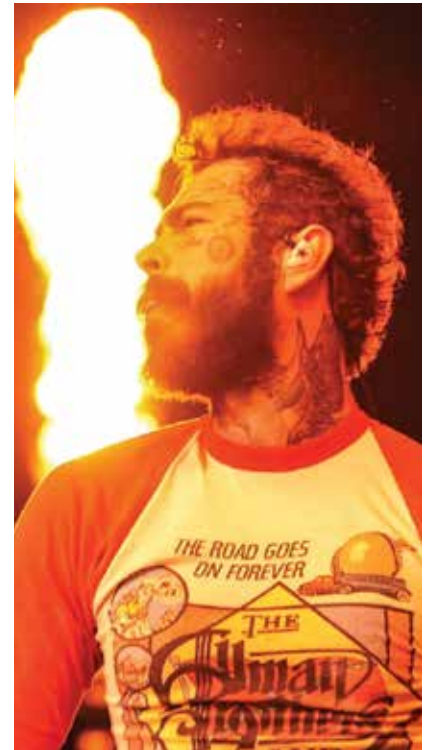
line registration is available at tinyurl.com/40th-GateToGate, with more details at eglin96fss.com/gatetogate. Registration is limited to 1,500 participants, and only 1,000 commemorative medals will be awarded.

Gulf Coast Jam May 28–31 | Frank Brown Park, PCB

One of the country’s most popular beach music festivals returns May 28–31 as Gulf Coast Jam brings four days of live country music to Frank Brown Park in Panama City Beach. Headliners Post Malone, Chris Stapleton, Keith Urban and Riley Green lead a lineup of more than 20 artists performing throughout the high-energy Country On The Coast™ weekend.

Fans can enjoy multiple stages, food vendors, bars and interactive fan experiences while soaking in the coastal festival atmosphere that has drawn sell-out crowds of more than 30,000 in recent years. Pass options currently available include General Admission, Military, College and First Responder tickets, VIP experiences and lodging packages. Several premium viewing areas have already sold out.

Payment plans are available, and attendees are encouraged to follow festival updates online. For passes and full lineup details, visit GulfCoastJam.com.



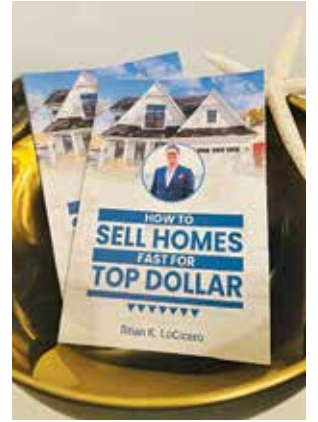
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 Community

Trends & Treasures!



Wellness That Works From the Inside Out

CRYO850 Performance and Recovery Center

Spring is the perfect time to reset—and at CRYO850, renewal goes deeper than the surface.

This state-of-the-art recovery center focuses on cellular wellness, helping your body recharge, restore and perform at its best. Red Light Therapy (PBM), one of their most popular offerings, works to rejuvenate damaged cells, boost energy and improve skin health through advanced light technology.

For a comprehensive approach, the Wellness Circuit combines six drug-free therapies: Infrared Sauna, Red Light, Whole Body Cryotherapy, Localized Cryo, Vibration Plates and Compression Therapy. Whether you're recovering from workouts or simply looking to feel better day to day, there's a solution for every lifestyle.

Targeted treatments like the Pagan Muscle Recovery system use alternating hot and cold to speed healing, while the Collagen Enhancement Facial delivers glowing, refreshed skin using cold therapy, oxygen and WILD ICE exfoliation.

Looking for next-level results? The Cocoon Fitness POD integrates heat, light and vibration for a full-body wellness experience.

With flexible memberships and day passes available, CRYO850 makes it easy to prioritize your health this season.

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

Your Spring Refresh Starts Here

Pure & Couture Salon

A new season calls for a fresh perspective—and at Pure & Couture Salon, that transfor-

mation begins the moment you walk through the door.

From a welcoming beverage to a soothing scalp massage, every detail is designed to help you relax while expert stylists bring your spring vision to life. Whether you're craving sun-kissed blonde, rich brunette tones or dimensional color with extensions, the team tailors each service to your features, lifestyle and budget.

Enhance your experience with a blowout, makeup session, facial or therapeutic massage—because looking your best starts with feeling your best.

At Pure & Couture, the difference is personal. Stylists take the time to listen, ensuring your look reflects exactly who you are this season. You're not just a client—you're part of the family.

With curbside pickup, online ordering and the addition of a second location, Pure Collective Salon at Grand Boulevard, it's easier than ever to prioritize self-care this spring.

Feel confident. Feel refreshed. Feel purely beautiful.

(850) 424-3935 | [Facebook.com/PureandCouture](https://facebook.com/PureandCouture)
pureandcouture.com

A Signature Spring Starts at the Front Door

Frill Seekers Gifts and Personalized Fabulous Finds

Spring is here—and it's time to make a statement before guests even step inside. At Frill Seekers Gifts, that first impression begins at the front door with a custom wooden monogram, a timeless Southern touch that feels both classic and current.

Today's trends offer something for everyone. Contemporary couples are embracing combined monograms, while traditionalists still favor the lady-of-the-house initial. Each piece can be customized in color

and style, creating a look that's uniquely yours.

Beyond door décor, Frill Seekers continues to shine as a go-to for thoughtful, personalized gifts this season. From spring-themed surprises for new parents, grandparents and teachers to party-ready essentials like cups, napkins, koozies and stir sticks, the options are endless. Planning a beach house reveal? A shatterproof monogrammed cup adds the perfect finishing touch. From weddings and showers to girls' trips, graduations and intimate dinner parties, Frill Seekers offers something for every celebration and every budget. If it's personalized, it's from Frill Seekers.

Voted "Best Gift Shop in Destin," shop online at FrillSeekersGifts.com or visit in store.

Open Monday–Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Saturday 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

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frillseekersgifts.com

Celebrate Life's Moments in Brilliant Detail

Beyond Measure Fine Jewelry

Spring is a season of meaning—and at Beyond Measure Fine Jewelry, it's also a season of sparkle. Whether you're marking a milestone, planning a surprise engagement or simply celebrating yourself, owner Ashleigh Woolly and her team specialize in creating pieces that tell your story.

Inside the City Market Bay-side showroom, you'll find an inspiring collection of rings, bracelets, necklaces and earrings, along with the opportunity to design something completely custom. From timeless elegance to bold statement pieces, every creation reflects exceptional craftsmanship and personal detail.

Ashleigh is especially passionate about helping couples find the perfect engagement ring or wedding band, guiding them through every step of the process. "Helping people celebrate life's most meaningful moments is what we love most," says Ashleigh.

With hundreds of custom designs and a reputation for quality, Beyond Measure transforms jewelry into something far more meaningful—something unforgettable.

This Easter and beyond, celebrate love, life and new beginnings with a piece designed just for you.

(850) 424-7011 | [Facebook.com/beyondmeasurejewelers](https://facebook.com/beyondmeasurejewelers)
beyondmeasurejewelry.com

Sweeten Every Spring Celebration

Smallcakes Destin

Spring celebrations call for something sweet—and Smallcakes Destin delivers in the most delightful way.

Located in City Market, this local favorite brings color, creativity and flavor together with seasonal cupcakes, custom cakes and a full dessert lineup designed to impress. Named one of USA Today's "Top Ten Cupcake Places to Try," Smallcakes offers 13 signature cupcakes daily, plus four rotating specialty flavors and 12 ice cream options.

Planning an Easter gathering or spring event? Custom orders take center stage with edible logos, vibrant buttercream designs, gluten-free selections and even pupcakes for four-legged family members. A 12-pack of assorted mini cupcakes makes the perfect addition to brunch tables or Easter baskets.

Beyond cupcakes, guests can indulge in brownies, cookie cakes, gourmet popcorn, jumbo cookies and cupcakes-in-a-jar—

each crafted with a signature touch of fun.

From birthdays to weddings, Smallcakes turns everyday moments into sweet celebrations.

(850) 842-9002 | Smallcakes-Destin.com | [@SmallCakesofDestin](https://twitter.com/SmallCakesofDestin)

Smart Strategies for a Successful Sale

Brian LoCicero, REALTOR®

Selling your home this spring? Preparation—and the right strategy—can make all the difference.

Luxury REALTOR® Brian K. LoCicero is sharing his expertise in a new book designed to help homeowners maximize value while minimizing time on the market. Drawing from years of experience and thousands of successful sales, Brian outlines proven techniques once reserved for high-end sellers. "In this guide, I share what works—practical, powerful strategies for sellers who want results," says Brian.

From pricing and positioning to marketing and negotiation, the book offers clear, actionable insights for properties of all types, from cozy cottages to luxury estates.

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

Destin Life readers can request a FREE copy by emailing Brian@BeOnTheCoast.com or calling (850) 739-3800.

Your next move starts with the right plan.

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Amazing! Rates Have Risen—Whoo Hooo!



BY PAUL DOMENECH

Now, before you think I've officially lost it, hear me out. The conversation around rising interest rates has become one of the most misunderstood and, frankly, overdramatic topics in real estate today. It's not that rates don't matter—they do. But, what matters more is how people interpret them. And right now, the perception is doing more damage than the numbers themselves ever could.

When buyers hear “rates are up,” many instinctively pull back. Not because the math suddenly made homeownership impossible overnight, but because uncertainty crept in. Un-

certainty slows decision-making. But here's the twist, this hesitation creates opportunity. Less competition means more room to negotiate. Closing costs, price adjustments, better terms—the things buyers used to fight for are now back on the table. The question isn't “Should I wait?” The question is “How do I win in this market?”

On the seller side, rising rates can trigger a different kind of reaction, panic pricing. Sellers start thinking they need to drop their price immediately just to keep up. But let's be clear: that's not strategy, that's emotion. If your home is sitting, it's not automatically because of rates. It's because of positioning. The data is always telling a story, views, saves, showings, feedback. The right move is to read that data and adjust with purpose, not react out of fear.

And yes, affordability shifts when rates rise. That's real. But affordability isn't just about the interest rate. It's about the full picture, taxes, insurance, condition of the home, and how the deal is structured. A well-nego-



tiated deal on a properly positioned home can outperform a “better rate” on a poorly structured one every time. Buyers who understand this don't get stuck, they get strategic.

Will there be fewer buyers? Possibly. But fewer buyers doesn't mean no buyers. In fact, the ones still in the market are typically more serious, more qualified, and more prepared to act. That's why preparation matters more than ever. Sellers who focus on condition, pricing

strategy, and strong promotion don't chase the market, they lead within it. And when you lead correctly, you still achieve what every seller wants: the most money, in the shortest amount of time.

Here's the bottom line. The market is never bad, It's just different. And different doesn't mean stop. It means adapt. If your real estate conversation starts and ends with “rates are up,” you're not being led, you're being reacted to. The right con-

versation sounds different. It sounds like, “Here's how we win in this market. Here's how we structure the deal. Here's what we can control.”

Because real estate isn't about luck. It's about leadership, strategy, and execution.

So, whether you're buying or selling, don't lean on noise. Lean on a plan. Not just someone who's “nice” or helped a friend once—but a professional who understands shifting conditions, reads the data, and shows up with a clear strategy rooted in experience.

Markets shift. That's what they do. But with the right approach, you don't just survive the shift, you capitalize on it.

The market isn't bad... it's just different.

And the ones who win in this season aren't waiting on rates—they're adjusting their strategy.

RemainSavage.

Contact me at 850-543-1418 for personalized advice and let's talk about how The Domenech Effect can help you achieve your real estate goals.

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\$10 Million Beach Renourishment Project in Destin to Begin Soon

A long-awaited and much-needed beach renourishment project will begin the week of March 23 in Destin to restore about 150,600 cubic yards of beach that was lost due to erosion from Hurricane Sally in 2020. Immediately following the storm, Okaloosa County staff

FEMA and \$1 million from Okaloosa County tourism beach restoration reserve funds. “We are thrilled that this project is finally beginning,” said Okaloosa County Board Chairman Trey Goodwin. “While we didn’t receive a direct hit from Hurricane Sally, the storm’s

jetty, with a small gap separating the two areas. Mobilization of equipment for the project will begin the week of March 23, with actual dredging beginning in April. Work will begin in

the eastern section of the project (Reach 2), which includes a stretch of 2,200 feet and will quickly move to the western portion (Reach 1), which includes 4,100 feet of shoreline. Beach-

es will remain open, with small temporary closures where sand is being pumped. The work is expected to be completed by the end of April.



met with Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) staff onsite to conduct visual estimates of beach erosion and begin the process of receiving FEMA restoration funds.

impacts were certainly felt in Okaloosa County. This is a great step toward protecting our upland structures and restoring lost sand for the enjoyment of the residents and visitors.”

The \$10 million project is largely funded through federal disaster recovery assistance, with \$9 million coming from

The project encompasses two areas of west Destin beaches, located between the South Bay by the Gulf Condos and the

Crawfish, Community & a Cause: Destin Rotary’s Annual Bash Returns

May 16 | Towne Centre at Seascapes | Food, Music, Auction & Family Fun

Laissez les bons temps rouler! The Rotary Club of Destin’s 14th Annual Cajun Crawfish Bash returns Friday, May 16, from 5:30–9 p.m. at the Towne Centre at Seascapes, co-hosted by Mezcal Mexican Grill.

This high-energy fundraiser supports the Robert Hafner Scholarship Fund, A Bed 4 Me, Harvest House, Emerald Coast Children’s Advocacy Center and Fisher House of the Emerald Coast—benefiting local students and families while helping fight hunger and expand opportunity across the community.

Guests can enjoy fresh Louisiana crawfish with all the fixings—potatoes, sausage and corn—served up by Destin Rotary volunteers. Not a crawfish fan? No problem. Burgers, hot dogs and

chicken will also be grilled fresh on-site. The evening features live music from Black Eyed Blonde, a silent auction, bourbon pull, magic by MagiShaun, a photo booth and face painting for the kids.

Tickets are \$40 for a crawfish plate, \$50 for all-you-can-eat and \$15 for kids’ or non-crawfish meals (ages 3 and under free). Each ticket includes one complimentary drink. VIP tables for 10 are available for \$500, with upgrade options for all-you-can-eat.

The event is family-friendly and open to the public. Tickets are available online. The Towne Centre at Seascapes is located at 80 Seascapes Drive in Miramar Beach, across from Silver Sands Premium Outlets.

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Destin Seltzer Festival Returns May 2, 2026 at The Market Shops

An afternoon of sips, sounds, and sunshine benefiting Opportunity Place

The highly anticipated **Seltzer Festival** is back and set to take over The Market Shops on **Saturday, May 2, 2026 from 1 to 4 p.m.** This lively, coastal

event will bring together locals and visitors alike for an unforgettable afternoon featuring **seltzer samples, light bites from local restaurants, live**

music, and more.

Guests will have the opportunity to sip their way through a wide variety of seltzers from national and regional brands, with

tickets will be available, offering guests an elevated experience with exclusive perks and access to a private VIP tent featuring enhanced food offerings.

“The Seltzer Festival is about bringing the community together for a fun, high-energy event while supporting an incredible local organization,” said event organizers. “We’re excited to partner with The Market Shops as our venue sponsor and to showcase a wide range of seltzer brands, local restaurants, and live entertainment—all for a great cause.”



tasting stations offering **2 oz. samples** poured by event volunteers. The festival is expected to draw **300–400** attendees, creating a vibrant atmosphere in the heart of the Emerald Coast.

More than just a tasting event, the Seltzer Festival is proud to support a meaningful cause. The event is hosted by Opportunity Place, a local low-barrier homeless shelter dedicated to keeping families together while helping individuals transition into stable housing and self-sufficiency. **100% of proceeds from the festival will directly benefit Opportunity Place’s programs and operations**, making every ticket purchased a step toward changing lives in the community.

In addition to general admission, a limited number of **VIP**

Sponsorship opportunities are currently available for brands and businesses looking to gain exposure while giving back to the community. Interested sponsors can inquire by emailing opportunityplacefbw@gmail.com.

For updates, ticket information, and event announcements, follow along on social media and stay tuned for more details.

Event Details:
 Destin Seltzer Festival
 May 2, 2026 | 1–4 PM
 The Market Shops at Sandestin
 Benefiting: Opportunity Place

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What Your Windows Say About Your Home (Before Anyone Walks In)



BY DANICA LAFAIRE

You clean your floors.
You wipe your counters.
You dust the shelves.
You even fluff the pillows before guests arrive.
But when was the last time you really looked through your windows? Not at them... through them.

Because over time, something subtle happens. Dust settles. Salt in the air leaves behind a slick film. Rain dries in soft patterns you don't quite notice anymore. And this time of year—a layer of pollen seems to settle on everything overnight. And slowly, barely noticeable, the light in your home begins to change.

It's a gradual change. You don't wake up one day and realize the house is dark; you just slowly get used to the rooms feeling a bit flatter. The views of the coast start to look more like a faded photograph than the real thing. And that's the tricky part—you stop seeing it.

And whether we realize it or

not... our windows are always saying something. Not in a loud or critical way. Not in a way that asks for perfection.

Because every home is lived in. Full schedules, growing families, busy seasons—it's all part of it.

When the glass is clear, it changes the whole vibe. It makes the house feel like a place that actually welcomes the sun, rather than just blocking the wind. It says that the family that lives here is creating a home that feels open and inviting. This home believes in fresh starts, and that a space can shift your energy. Our family believes small intentional care, over time, strength-



ens each of us. We believe the little things matter.

There's something about clean windows that goes beyond appearance. It's not about perfection or impressing the neighbors; it's about the experience of living there. It's the way the morning light pours into your kitchen—warmer, clearer, more

alive—and shifts your energy without you even realizing it.

Clean windows don't just change how your home looks; they change how it feels to wake up in it. You pause, just for a second, and finally notice the view you fell in love with in the first place.

This time of year, we talk a lot about spring cleaning. About fresh starts. About opening

things up again.

And sometimes, the simplest change makes the biggest difference. What if, instead, you chose to reset the way your home feels—intentionally?

- Letting the light back in and seeing your home clearly.

- Experiencing your space the way it was meant to be.

If it's been a while since you've really looked through

your windows, this might be your moment. And if you see something you can't unsee, we're here to help.

At Fish Window Cleaning, we believe it's often the smallest details that make the biggest difference in how a home feels. Because at the end of the day, it's not just about clean glass. It's about coming home to a space that feels as good as it looks.

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Planning Ahead: The Smart Way to Prepare Your Home for Summer



BY KYLE SPARKS,
OVATION PAINTING

April along the Emerald Coast brings warmer weather, blooming landscapes, and a steady flow of visitors returning to our beaches. While most people are thinking about outdoor fun, it's also a smart time to start looking at the condition of your home.

Along the coast, paint does far more than improve appearance. Salt air, strong sunlight, humidity, and storms all work together to wear down exterior surfaces over time. A solid paint system acts as one of the first layers of protection for siding, trim, and outdoor structures.

Spring is a great time to walk



around your home and take a closer look. Fading color, small cracks, peeling edges, or chalky residue on your hand when you

touch the wall are often the first signs that paint is beginning to break down.

For property managers and

rental agencies around Destin and Santa Rosa Beach, this is also the time when homes begin seeing more activity. Guests start arriving for spring travel, and first impressions matter more than ever. A fresh exterior can make a property feel clean, welcoming, and well cared for before guests even step inside.

Kyle's Tip:

“One of the first places paint starts to fail on coastal homes is the trim around windows and doors. Those areas take the most sun and moisture, so they're often the best place to check first.”

Taking time in April to plan projects can make scheduling much easier before the busy summer season arrives.

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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.,

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

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Continued on next page

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DESTIN DINING

continued from page 24

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.

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

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TailfinsDestin.com

Coastal Protein & Energy Offers Clean Fuel — and Coastal Vibes — to Our Community

By LORI SMITH

There's a fresh energy on our harbor—and it's as colorful as it is crave-worthy.

Coastal Protein & Energy, at 501 Harbor Blvd., Suite F, in

Norred Plaza, offers a vibrant mix of protein-packed favorites, clean energy drinks and a laid-back, welcoming atmosphere that's quickly becoming one of Destin's cutest new places to

hang out.

Whether you're stopping in after a workout, meeting friends for a mid-day pick-me-up or simply looking for a better-for-you indulgence, Coastal Protein

& Energy is designed to fuel both your body and your day.

Owner Cali Hlavac, who took over the shop last July, said bringing this concept to Destin felt like the perfect fit. "I was excited to purchase Coastal Protein & Energy to become a healthy staple in the community," she said. "We are a great option for anyone who is health-focused or looking for alternative options for energy or getting enough protein."

The shop is part of a local family, sister locations Poppy's Protein in Niceville and Dream Coast Nutrition in Fort Walton Beach—both already favorites for their flavorful, nutrition-forward menus.

At Coastal, the menu is anything but boring. Guests can choose from brightly layered clean energy teas packed with vitamins B and C, naturally sweetened with stevia and customizable with add-ins like aloe, collagen or protein. The drinks are designed to deliver a boost of energy—without the dreaded afternoon crash.

Protein shakes are another standout, blending indulgent flavors with smart nutrition. Made with mostly sugar-free ingredients and typically under 250 calories, they offer a satisfying option that doesn't derail your goals.

And for coffee lovers, the protein coffee may be the ultimate game changer—combining 30 grams of protein with 160 milligrams of caffeine in a smooth, 200-calorie drink. "It's a great way to get your energy without the mid-afternoon crash," Hlavac said.

Beyond drinks, Coastal Protein & Energy also serves up protein waffles, smoothie bowls and protein doughnuts—giving guests even more ways to enjoy a treat without the guilt. The doughnuts offer that classic sweet-shop satisfaction with a better-for-you twist, rounding out a menu that proves healthy can still feel indulgent.

But, what truly sets the space apart is its vibe. Bright, beachy and welcoming, it's quickly becoming a go-to spot not just for nutrition, but for connection—whether you're popping in solo or catching up with friends.



With convenient ordering options, customers can grab their favorites in-store, order online at square or simply text their order to 850-904-9738.

In our city known for sunshine and salt air, Coastal Protein & Energy fits right in—bringing a fresh, feel-good way to fuel up and stay energized along the Harbor.

Top Picks to Try:

Protein Coffee – 30 grams of protein, 160 mg of caffeine and just 200 calories for a smooth, energizing boost

Clean Energy Teas – Bright, refreshing and packed with vitamins B and C; customize with aloe, collagen or protein

Protein Waffles – A customer favorite topped with fresh fruit, drizzles and a touch of indulgence

Protein Doughnuts – Tender, cake-style doughnuts finished with a smooth, sweet icing, featuring rotating flavors like Key lime pie, strawberry cheesecake and chocolate peanut butter; often gluten-free and dairy-free for a better-for-you indulgence (flavors rotate weekly)

Signature Protein Shakes – Dessert-inspired flavors made with mostly sugar-free ingredients and under 250 calories

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Destin's Blessing of the Fleet Returns for 69th Year

May 14 | Destin Harbor

There are few traditions that capture the heart and heritage of Destin quite like the annual Blessing of the Fleet—a time-honored celebration where faith, fishing and community come together along the harbor.

Now in its 69th year, the beloved event returns on Ascension Day, Thursday, May 14, 2026, at the docks behind Brotula's Seafood House & Steamer.

nify protection and faith for the year ahead. In 2025 alone, more than 130 vessels took part in the ceremony.

Following the blessings, the community is invited to gather for a Fish Feast beginning around 5:15 p.m., with a suggested donation. Sponsored in part by Ariel Seafood and Brotula's, the feast offers a true taste of Destin while bringing

the famed Destin Fishing Rodeo, which began in 1948.

The tradition reflects the enduring faith of the early fishermen who founded this "Little Fishing Village" and continues to honor those who make their

living from the Gulf today. Each year, families, captains and community members gather not only to celebrate the season ahead, but to pray for protection, provision and safe passage on the water.

The Blessing of the Fleet is part of "Destin's Week of Blessings," a series of faith-based, family-friendly events held throughout the week and

Continued on page 30



PHOTO CREDIT: IMMANUEL ANGLICAN CHURCH / A.Y.I

Clergy board Captain Tony Davis' Anastasia for the last group blessing of the day. Captain Tony serves as Commodore for the event. His father, Captain William Frank Davis served as Commodore for the Blessing of the Fleet for many years as well.

Rooted in Destin's identity as a historic fishing village, the Blessing of the Fleet remains one of the city's most meaningful and uniquely coastal traditions.

The evening begins at 4 p.m. with a Captains' Praise and Worship Service held under a large tent overlooking the harbor. Around 5 p.m., clergy will process to the docks to begin blessing the vessels—everything from commercial fishing boats to safety and recreational watercraft. Each participating captain receives a signature blue Blessing of the Fleet flag, a symbol proudly flown to sig-

neighbors and visitors together in fellowship.

Free parking is available at Brotula's throughout the day, with additional public parking across the street opening at 2 p.m. Event T-shirts will also be available for purchase near the main tent.

While Blessings of the Fleet are celebrated in other coastal communities around the world, Destin's stands out for its scale, spirit and deep connection to the people who built their lives on the water. First held in 1958, it is considered Destin's second-oldest tradition, following



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 Off the Hook

Destin Takes a Bite Out of an Invasive Species

Emerald Coast Open Lionfish Tournament & Festival Returns May 15–17, 2026

What began as a creative response to an environmental threat has grown into one of the Emerald Coast’s most anticipated—and impactful—spring events.

The Emerald Coast Open Lionfish Tournament and Festival returns May 15–17, bringing together divers, chefs, conservationists and families for a weekend that blends competition,

cuisine and conservation. Centered around HarborWalk Village, the event is recognized as the largest lionfish tournament in the world—and one that continues to make measurable



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The numbers tell a powerful story.

During the 2025 tournament, more than 20,000 invasive lionfish were removed from Gulf waters, including 7,180 harvested during the pre-tournament and 13,322 during the two-day competition. Since its inception in 2019, the Emerald Coast Open has now removed over 100,000 lionfish, making a significant dent in one of the region’s most pressing marine challenges.

“This event has brought a lot of awareness to the invasive lionfish species and created a festive atmosphere for the enjoyment of our visitors and residents, while fostering prosperity for our local businesses,” said Okaloosa County Commission Chairman Paul Mixon.

Lionfish, native to the Indo-Pacific, have no natural predators in the Gulf and reproduce rapidly, threatening native fish populations and reef systems. Because they are not easily caught by traditional hook-and-line fishing, divers using spears play a critical role in controlling their numbers.

Competition with a Purpose

Divers from across the country travel to Destin to participate, forming teams and competing for nearly \$175,000 in cash and gear prizes. Categories

include most, largest and smallest lionfish caught.

At the 2025 event, standout teams included:

- Most Lionfish: Deep Water Mafia 1 (2,038)
- Smallest Lionfish: Team Lookin’ Back (2.8 inches)
- Largest Lionfish: Team In the Clouds (17.2 inches)

Behind the scenes, weigh-ins and measurements took place near the harbor, adding to the excitement as teams brought in their hauls and shared stories of early morning dives, deep-water hunts and record-breaking catches.

“While this event continues to flourish, the opposite is happening for this invasive species,” said Natural Resources Chief Alex Fogg. “The public is beginning to realize the impact of the lionfish on our ecosystem and because of the divers and our amazing partners, we are able to make a difference for our environment in Gulf waters.”

From Ocean to Table

Beyond the tournament, the Emerald Coast Open has helped spark a growing culinary trend: lionfish as a sustainable seafood.

Mild, flaky and often compared to snapper or grouper, lionfish is now featured on menus across the area. During the lead-up to the tournament, local restaurants compete in Lionfish Restaurant Week, showcasing creative dishes that highlight the

Continued on page 30

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Not All Estimates Are Created Equal



BY KIMBERLY C. COLE

You've received an estimate for a construction project. Maybe you even have two or three sitting on your kitchen counter, and they all look different. Now what?

Construction estimates are not like buying a product off a shelf. They are not standardized, and they are certainly not all created equal. If you receive

A strong scope outlines demolition, materials, finishes, installation, and cleanup. Many disputes arise not from bad intentions, but from mismatched expectations. If something matters to you, make sure it is written into the estimate.

Next, review materials and debris disposal. Are materials specified by brand or quality? Is haul-off included? These details affect cost. Also, understand how labor is structured—whether it is a lump sum for the project or calculated differently. The structure itself is less important than clarity around what is being provided.

Allowances are another area that often causes confusion. An allowance is a placeholder amount for items not yet selected—such as cabinets, tile, lighting, or fixtures. For example, an

rot, termites, or outdated wiring. The key is documentation. Change orders should be written, priced, and approved before additional work proceeds. Clear communication protects both parties and keeps projects moving forward without unnecessary tension.

You might also see deposits and payment schedules outlined in your estimate. It is common for contractors to request a deposit, especially for larger projects. Deposits help secure materials and scheduling. Progress payments should align with work completed. A clearly defined payment structure benefits everyone and helps avoid misunderstandings.

Beyond the numbers, consid-

er the warranty being offered. Ask what is covered and for how long. Is it a workmanship warranty from the contractor, a manufacturer's warranty on materials, or both? A warranty should be in writing and clearly explained. It provides peace of mind, but it is only as reliable as the company standing behind it.

Finally, do not overlook references. Reputable contractors should be willing to provide recent clients you can contact. Ask about communication, how changes were handled, whether the project stayed on schedule, and how issues were resolved. Online reviews can be helpful, but a direct conversation often gives a clearer picture of what it is like to work with someone.

When comparing contractor estimates, focus on clarity rather than just cost. A well-written estimate protects both the homeowner and the contractor. It establishes expectations before work begins and reduces the likelihood of problems later. By taking the time to compare scope, materials, allowances, documentation, warranties, and reputation—not just price—you are far more likely to have a successful project.

The goal isn't simply to hire the cheapest contractor. The goal is to hire the one who communicates clearly, documents thoroughly, and stands behind their work long after the project is complete. For more information: 850.797.8428.



multiple bids for what seems like the "same" scope of work, they can vary by thousands of dollars. That doesn't automatically mean someone is overcharging—or that someone else is giving you a great deal. It simply means you need to look more closely at what you are comparing.

First, understand that not all estimates are structured the same way. Some contractors provide detailed, itemized breakdowns. Others provide a single lump-sum number. More detail does not necessarily mean higher cost; often, it reflects greater transparency. The important thing is understanding what is included—and what is not.

The most critical part of any estimate is the scope of work. This section should clearly reflect what was discussed between you and your contractor. Vague phrases like "remodel bathroom" or "repair dock" leave room for interpretation.

estimate might include a \$3,000 cabinet allowance. If you later select cabinets that cost \$5,000, you will pay the difference. Allowances can make an estimate appear lower upfront, so when comparing bids, be sure you are comparing allowance amounts side by side.

Permits should also be clearly addressed. Licensed contractors are responsible for pulling permits when required. While homeowners can sometimes pull permits themselves, doing so shifts responsibility for inspections and code compliance onto the owner. If a permit is required but not obtained, it can create issues later—particularly during resale or insurance claims. Your estimate should specify who is handling permitting.

Change orders are a normal part of construction. Sometimes homeowners decide to adjust finishes or add features. Other times, contractors uncover hidden conditions such as wood



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 **Off the Hook**

BOWLEGS 70

continued from page 3

Cumulus radio stations and visit the Billy Bowlegs Pirate Festival Facebook page starting in April to unearth “clues” concerning the Bowlegs coin hunt. The grand prize winner will be announced at the festival Saturday evening.

Gwin wishes to recognize

Felicity Plastic Surgery, this year’s presenting sponsor, whose event-worthy tagline is “Pursue YOUR happiness.” Learn more at felicityplasticsurgery.com. The festival benefits the William Augustus Bowles Historical Foundation, a 501(c)(3) organization that promotes a love for local history.

Vendor applications are available on the Billy Bowlegs

Pirate Festival Facebook page.

“The city is really supportive,” adds Gwin, noting that all of the construction around the Landing is expected to be completed in time for the big event. “Last year was a little challenging with all the traffic barricades.”

Discover more at kreweof-bowlegs.com.

The Bowlegs 70 Krewe

Captain Billy LXX – Rique Gwin

Captain’s Co-pilot – Kelly Gwin

Queen of Bowlegs – Debbie Fisher

Queen’s Navigator – J. Mark Fisher

First Mate – Mark Grindland

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Schuyler and Taylor Black, Michael and Erin Goodson, Joe and Morgan Zwickel, Scott Flint and Nancy Kline, Mike and Kelly Bedsole, Tyler and Casey Murray, Chris and Heather Thomas, William Goolsby and Elizabeth Sager, John and Keri Holguin, Matthew and Katie Jaquet.



PHOTO CREDIT: IMMANUEL ANGLICAN CHURCH / A.Y.I

SeaQuest II pauses in front of the clergy dock to receive their blessing from various clergy from around Destin during the 68th annual Blessing of the Fleet

DESTIN’S BLESSING

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supported by local churches. Together, these gatherings offer opportunities to serve, connect and uplift the community.

Captains wishing to partici-

pate can register their vessels by contacting Immanuel Anglican Church at 850-837-6324 or by emailing immanuel@iacdestin.org with vessel and contact information.

Whether you’re a lifelong local, a member of the fishing

community, or a visitor looking to experience a truly authentic Destin tradition, the Blessing of the Fleet offers a meaningful glimpse into the heart of this coastal town—where faith and the sea have always gone hand in hand.

LIONFISH FEST

continued from page 28

species’ versatility.

In 2025, La Paz took top honors for the third consecutive year—further proof that conservation can be as delicious as it is impactful.

Festival attendees can sample lionfish dishes, watch fillet demonstrations and learn how choosing lionfish supports Gulf ecosystems.

lage, the family-friendly festival features tastings, educational exhibits, interactive booths, local vendors and activities for all ages. Live music and a lively harbor setting create an inviting atmosphere where visitors can learn, explore and connect.

It’s an event designed to engage everyone—from curious kids to seasoned anglers—while raising awareness about protecting the Gulf.

A Win for Tourism and Local Business

The tournament and festival also provide a strong economic boost for Destin and the surrounding area.

Thousands of visitors travel to the Emerald Coast for the event, filling hotels, booking charters and dining at local restaurants. The combination of competition and festival atmosphere reinforces Destin’s reputation as both a premier fishing destination and a hub for conservation-driven tourism.

More Than a Tournament

At its core, the Emerald Coast Open is about people coming together for a shared purpose.

From returning dive teams to first-time participants, the event fosters camaraderie, competition and a commitment to conservation. What started as a localized effort has grown into a signature Destin event with national reach—proving that a community-driven idea can create lasting environmental change.

As the 2026 tournament approaches, one thing is clear: Destin isn’t just hosting a competition—it’s leading a movement.

For more information, registration details or festival updates, visit emeraldcoastopen.com.

A Festival for the Whole Family

While divers compete offshore, the Lionfish Festival brings the celebration onshore.

Held at HarborWalk Vil-



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Golf Series: Green Grass, Green Tees, Great Golf at Bluewater Bay Golf Course Await this Spring!



BY BARBARA PALMGREN

Back in the folk-rock era of the 60's, a hit song had folks humming and smiling. It focused on wandering on to "where the grass is greener still."

*"Green, green, it's green they say,
On the far side of the hill.
Green, green, I'm goin' away,
To where the grass is greener still."*

Today, travelers who wander down to our paradise, see soft white sands, green golf courses, emerald green and blue waters and enjoy air-conditioned comfort of tourist stores and restaurants in every part of the Florida Panhandle.

One such place to stop for both golf and a welcoming bar and restaurant after a golf round, is the Golf Club at Bluewater Bay in Niceville. The Blue Tee restaurant inside the clubhouse offers breakfast, lunch and dinner.

A few days ago, as a golf reporter and one who pretends she is a golfer, I spent time with the person I think is the key to success for any golf course.

That person is the golf course superintendent. Maligned in the movie Caddyshack, Bill Murray was the hopeless man who spent time chasing a gopher in a war he was never going to win. Unlike Bill, Alfredo Riveras, employee of Elite Golf, the management company for the course, is not chasing gophers or other critters. He's stockpiling oak. Lots of oak. Oak trees that once drained precious water from the fairways. And he's winning the battle. If anyone still uses a wood burning fireplace, you may want to contact Alfredo for logs that can be used for your home!

Why is this important? Between the tee box where a golf-

er hits his or her drive and the green where putts determine the score for the hole, lies the long stretch of fairway. The fairway must be green. Not brown. Not grey. But green. Getting water to this stretch of land is critical. Large trees with roots expanding into the fairway won't work. A mature oak tree can consume over 40 gallons of water a day during growing season.

And we have a longer growing season in the south. A much longer growing season. This competition for water between turfgrass and tree roots can only end in dry spots on the fairways and golfers who won't play the course.

Alfredo Riveras was a trusted assistant superintendent working many years in the Dallas area for Elite Golf. Elite Golf selected Alfredo for this new position in Bluewater Bay and Alfredo was the perfect choice to be head course superintendent. Greens that were once brown are now green. Alfredo showed me before and after photos. But, I had to know for myself. I walked on these new greens and was amazed. Alfredo knew how to use the right fertilizer, sand, aeration and water to produce what golfers want above all else: perfect greens. Art Jean, one of



330 owners of Preserve Bluewater Bay, the organization who raised funds to save the course two years ago, is proud of Alfredo's hard work and results. Art had a "I told you so" grin on his face while I took photos of the green.

Alfredo's crew begins work at 6 a.m. mowing fairways, greens, raking sand traps and preparing for morning golfers. They then tackle other tasks: tree trimming, re-edging greens, maintaining equipment and mowing the rough. Equipment is owned



by the course and maintained by a mechanic in the maintenance crew. Golf carts for golfers are leased.

Elite Golf analyzed the course before agreeing to manage the business. In addition to the above improvements for greens and fairways, they wanted greens expanded to the original size of the course designed by Jerry Pate. Elite Golf also wanted certain tee boxes lengthened. Why? Eighteen-hole golf courses should all be a minimum of 6,000 yards for a semi-pro-



fessional golfer. All the 18-hole courses in our area understand this requirement and offer a series of tee boxes to attract all levels of golfers.

So, keep humming that old familiar tune, knowing now, at Bluewater Bay...

*"Green, green, it's green they say,
On the far side of the hill.
Green, green, we're hitting our drives,
To where the grass is greener still."*



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57th Annual All Sports Banquet

The best food. The best company. The best cause.

BY DOUG "DOC" STAUFFER

More than 1,200 people filled the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center for the 57th Annual All Sports Association Awards Banquet—an evening that has become a signature event across Okaloosa and the surrounding counties.

If you love sports and need a shot in the arm for America's future...

If you love reconnecting with old friends and making new ones...

If you enjoy watching one of the greatest live auctions anywhere on the Emerald Coast...

All Sports Banquet is the place to be.

From business leaders and coaches to educators, elected officials, former pros, and rising stars, it truly was a "Who's Who" of our region—all gathered for one purpose: celebrating athletic excellence and strengthening youth opportunities through sports.



PHOTOS BY DOUG STAUFFER

A Hall of Fame Message

NFL Hall of Famer Derrick Brooks served as the keynote speaker, delivering a powerful message on leadership, perseverance, discipline, and service. His words resonated deeply, perfectly capturing the spirit of the evening—success on the field means little without character off it.

The Association extended

sincere thanks to Brooks for not only sharing his journey, but for continuing to invest in communities and young athletes long after his playing days.

Honoring a Legacy of Service

One of the most meaningful moments of the night was the presentation of the 2026 Colonel Al Byrne Award to Taylor

Grigsby of the Okaloosa County Tax Collector's Office. The award recognizes individuals who uplift local youth through athletic support, mentorship, and strong community values. Taylor's dedication reflects the enduring legacy of Colonel Byrne and his lifelong commitment to young people.

Celebrating the Region's Best

Since 1970, the All Sports Association has brought together the finest athletes in Northwest Florida. Each February, the banquet honors the area's top high school, collegiate, amateur, professional, and Special Olympic athletes.

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BY MELANIE YOST,
BE WELL SOLUTIONS

When Antidepressants Don't Work: The Inflammation Connection

If you've tried multiple antidepressants without finding lasting relief, please know you're not alone—and it's not a personal failure. The answer may lie not in finding the "right" medication, but in understanding that your depression may involve biological mechanisms that serotonin-focused treatments simply weren't designed to address. Emerging research points to neuroinflammation as a central driver of treatment-resistant depression, and this discovery is changing the way compassionate clinicians approach care.

How Brain Inflammation Drives Depression

Neuroinflammation refers to inflammatory processes within

the central nervous system. Research consistently shows that people with treatment-resistant depression have elevated levels of pro-inflammatory markers including IL-6, IL-1 β , TNF- α , and C-reactive protein. These inflammatory cytokines quietly disrupt normal brain function through several interconnected pathways.

They activate an enzyme called IDO, which diverts tryptophan away from serotonin production—meaning even when a medication blocks serotonin reuptake, your brain may not have enough raw material to maintain healthy levels. Inflammation also chronically activates microglia, the brain's immune cells, which then damage synaptic connections and impair your brain's ability to grow and adapt. This helps explain why so many people with treatment-resistant depression also struggle with brain fog, concentration, and mental flexibility—symptoms that rarely budge with standard antidepressants. On top of that,

chronic inflammation dysregulates your stress response system, elevating cortisol in ways that further damage neurons and keep the cycle going.

Why Traditional Antidepressants Often Fall Short

SSRIs and SNRIs were built around the idea that depression equals low serotonin or norepinephrine. For many people, they help. But when inflammation is driving your depression, these medications address only part of the picture. The inflammatory cascade keeps disrupting neurotransmitter production and damaging neural connections regardless of what the medication is doing.

This explains something we hear often: "I felt a little better, but never quite right." That partial response isn't a sign that treatment can't work—it's a clue that something deeper needs attention.

Could Inflammation Be Part of Your Story?

Some signs that inflammation may be contributing to your depression include: partial response to multiple antidepressants; significant fatigue, body aches, or pain sensitivity; conditions like autoimmune disorders or metabolic syndrome; elevated inflammatory markers on bloodwork; and persistent brain fog or cognitive difficulties.

A More Complete Approach to Healing

At Be Well Solutions of Destin, we believe you deserve care that addresses the full picture. Our Brain Restore Program combines evidence-based modalities—including Ketamine Therapy, mild Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy, Low Level Laser Therapy, Neurofeedback, and targeted brain health supplements—to address neuroinflammation and support lasting recovery.

Ketamine, for example, doesn't just work on gluta-

mate—research shows it also meaningfully reduces inflammatory cytokines in brain regions associated with depression, which may explain why it helps when so many other treatments haven't.

"We often find that clients who haven't responded to conventional treatment are carrying an inflammatory burden that traditional psychiatry doesn't address. Understanding that changes everything about how we approach care."

— Melanie Yost, LCSW, Co-owner, Be Well Solutions

You don't have to keep trying the same approaches and hoping for different results. We warmly welcome patients from Destin, Fort Walton Beach, Panama City Beach, and throughout the Florida Panhandle.

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Leaning Into Loss and Grief



By STEPHENIE CRAIG

When did you last lose something or someone important to you? When did you last face an expected or unexpected ending? Loss is incredibly uncomfortable and also inevitable.

Throughout life, you will face

many kinds of loss. Sometimes loss is obvious like the death of a pet, a family member, or a friend. Sometimes loss is related to major life transitions such as a loss of a job, moving, or divorce. Other times, loss is a break up or the end of a friendship. And confusingly, sometimes loss is mixed up with celebration like a graduation or wedding. Behind every new and different change in your life is the loss of the way things used to be.

Because loss has so many different faces, it is hard to understand your feelings as you navigate it. Grief is how your brain and body make sense of loss and figure out how to move forward in spite of the loss life brings. Grief gets a bad wrap because no one wants to feel uncomfortable feelings. Most people attempt to avoid grief by any means possible because they fear the discomfort will last indefinitely. You might try avoiding grief by pretending it doesn't exist, by pushing it down, by numbing with things like alcohol, drugs, shopping, scrolling, or staying busy.

The uncomfortable truth about life is that loss and grief will be part of your journey. There is no preventing it. So instead of avoiding, what if you learn to embrace loss and grief as part of being human and an experience you can develop tools to walk through with health and wisdom?

10 Ways to Embrace Loss and Grief with Health and Wisdom

1. Let go of avoiding/numbing. Face the reality that uncomfortable experiences and feelings are part of your hu-



manity. Avoiding discomfort hijacks your growth, learning, and emotional maturing. Loss is a normal, hard part of life. Notice and list activities you engage in to avoid uncomfortable feelings from loss.

2. Notice grief feelings in your body. Grief and loss bring feelings of overwhelm, exhaustion, sadness, despair, anger, confusion, and depression. Notice how these show up in your body. "I am feeling tearful and extra tired."

3. Connect your grief feelings to a specific loss and validate your experience. "I am feeling sad, tired, and overwhelmed. I just moved to a new city and I am starting everything over from scratch. It's normal to feel overwhelmed in this situation."

4. Normalize grief. "Everyone goes through loss and has hard grief feelings. I am normal. It is normal for me to be feeling like this right now."

5. Remind yourself the feelings won't last forever. "My grief feelings are really intense right now and I will find a way through. It won't always feel like this even though it's hard to imagine how I will feel better at this time."

6. Create space for grief. Give yourself time each day to process. Journal about your loss,

talk to a friend, cry, punch a punching bag, scream into your pillow. Give grief a way out of your body rather than pushing it down. Try setting a timer for 30 minutes and sit in your hard emotions. Allow yourself to grieve spontaneously when possible.

7. Accept grief as unpredictable and largely outside your control. It's okay to grieve without judgement. Remember, everyone will experience grief.

8. Continue living normally as you are able. Though it will feel strange to do normal things during times of loss and grief, it is healthy to do so. Moving forward in your life day to day is not a sign of indifference about your loss, rather, it's part of continuing to live with loss.

9. Lean into the growth grief and loss promote. No one wants to experience loss in order to grow. However, growth is often a byproduct of loss and grieving. Lean into your spiritual life knowing that your feelings are not unmanageable to God. Deep learning about yourself, God, and life often occurs in difficult times.

10. Release victimhood. Remember loss happens to us all. Your current loss is not directed at you, rather, it is part of the human journey you are walking through. Despite the difficulty, you can find a way through and will find meaning in life again.

As grief emerges in your personal story, remember that our shared human experience is tied together by grief. As you navigate your own loss and grief, watch for the spaces where you can connect with others in their loss and grief. You aren't alone in grief even when it feels like you are. Connect with us for support along your journey for counseling and coaching at Journeybravely.com.

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5 KEYS

continued from page 4

sleep, allow the body to heal. Neuro-acupuncture and integrative therapies are especially powerful for supporting neurological resilience, reducing chronic pain, and optimizing brain health as we age. A regulated nervous system is one of

the most underestimated keys to long-term vitality.

5. Invest in Preventative, Personalized Care

Longevity is proactive, not reactive. Rather than waiting for lab values to reach “abnormal,” integrative medicine focuses on optimal ranges and early intervention. Advanced lab testing,

nutrient analysis, gut health assessments, and comprehensive evaluations allow us to personalize care based on your unique biochemistry.

No two patients age the same way and they shouldn’t be treated the same way. Preventative care might include optimizing vitamin D levels, improving gut microbiome diversity, supporting detoxification pathways, addressing subtle thyroid dysfunction, or implementing strength and mobility strategies before decline begins.

Small, consistent interventions compound over time, much like investing in your retirement account. The earlier you begin, the greater the return.

Longevity is a Lifestyle

True longevity isn’t found in a single supplement, procedure, or bio hack. It’s built through daily choices that support inflammation control, metabolic resilience, hormonal balance, nervous system regulation, and personalized prevention.

Aging is inevitable. Decline is not.

When we work with the body, honoring its signals, supporting its systems, and addressing root causes, we create the conditions not just to live longer, but to live stronger. Because wellness, like life itself, is not a sprint. It’s a marathon and it’s worth pacing yourself well.

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 Wellness


BY DR. RICHARD CHERN, MD

You turn over for the third time, looking over at the clock. 2:13 a.m. Your heartbeat matches second hand as a thin layer of sweat cools on your skin. You turn to the window, pulling the covers back, then lie awake for an hour replaying the day—emails, errands, the list that never ends and the sleep won't come. Nights like this are the new norm – a few hours of rest followed by morning fog, and the slow erosion of patience and energy. It feels like stress, but lately it's been more—hot flashes, night sweats, and a restlessness that started when the seasons and hormones shifted.

Sound familiar? Bioidentical hormone pellets are the straightforward and lasting solution you need. At The Hormone Restoration Center we use bioidentical hormone pellets to optimize hormone levels—so nights stop

sabotaging your days.

For thousands of patients, when estrogen and testosterone are where they should be, sleep is just better. These hormones help your body make melatonin - the hormone that tells your brain it's time for bed. They support GABA - the calming brain chemical that relaxes you at night.

They also keep serotonin steady, improving mood and sleep quality. They help lower cortisol so you're not wide awake at 3 a.m. Finally, they stabilize body temperature so night sweats don't keep kicking the covers off. When hormones are low, people often describe their sleep as "fragile"—light, restless, and easy to interrupt, with lots of tossing, turning, and clock-watching.

How hormone therapy helps:

Hormone therapy in the form of pellets helps, because it delivers hormones in a slow, steady way. No daily creams. No spikes and crashes. Just consistent support that eliminates hot flashes and night sweats, helps you stay asleep and wake up rested and excited to start your day. Progesterone has a natu-

Stop Counting Sheep



rally calming effect that helps quiet a racing mind at bedtime. As hormones rebalance, everything else just works. Melatonin and serotonin can do their jobs again, and cortisol settles down. The result? Better nights—and better days. When you're sleeping well, your mood, focus, and energy improve, which makes it easier to wind down the next night.

What people usually notice:

Most patients feel the benefits within the first few weeks and reliable improvement by week six as hormone levels stabilize. Hormone pellet therapy elim-

inates hot flashes, night sweats, and hormonal swings. If sleep still isn't right after treatment, then other issues like sleep apnea, restless legs, iron deficiency and other concerns often reveal themselves.

What a hormone consultation and follow up looks like:

Patients can expect a thorough baseline evaluation before starting therapy, including blood testing of sex hormones and key metabolic markers along with a comprehensive symptom review. The insertion procedure itself is brief, performed in the office and involves minimal

downtime.

We don't set it and forget it—follow-up is integral to safe, effective care. After insertion we check labs to make sure your levels are optimal. Dosing is adjusted based on lab results and symptom relief. Our team stays in touch between visits for any questions you may have, or needed tweaks in treatment. Routine reviews ensure your plan evolves with your needs so you get steady relief without surprises.

A simple, practical plan:

We combine hormone therapy with lifestyle guidance, including supplements, so changes stick. So, if you're tired of counting sheep, call The Hormone Restoration Center. We listen, run the right tests, and build a personalized plan aimed at getting you sleeping through the night again – and so much more! Call (850) 837-1271 to schedule a consultation.



Spring Reset Starts Here: Refresh, Restore & Glow at Beverly Hills Day Spa

BY KRISY ANDERSON, OWNER

Spring is in the air—a season of fresh starts, longer days and a renewed sense of energy. It's the

perfect time to reset, recharge and invest in self-care that helps you look and feel your best. At Beverly Hills Day Spa in Destin,

spring-inspired treatments are designed to leave you glowing, relaxed and ready to embrace the season.

As nature comes back to life, it's a reminder to do the same for yourself. A spring self-care routine can boost your mood, restore balance and bring a healthy radiance to your skin. Whether you're stepping into a busy season or simply carving out time to unwind, Beverly Hills Day Spa offers a peaceful escape with results you can see and feel.

Refresh your complexion with a rejuvenating facial that cleanses, exfoliates and hydrates for a brighter, smoother glow. Looking for deeper renewal? Indulge in a therapeutic massage to relieve tension, improve circulation and melt away stress.

Pair your spa day with time outdoors—walk along Destin's white-sand beaches, explore local trails or soak up sunshine by the water. Then return for a final touch of pampering that leaves

you feeling fully restored.

Spring Specials at Beverly Hills Day Spa (Valid through April 30):

- Springtime Glow Chemical Peel – \$85
- Soothing Nutrient Facial with Dermaplaning – \$110
- Microneedling + Red-Light LED Therapy – \$160
- Body Scrub (Brown Sugar or Champagne & Rose) – \$95
- Detoxifying 90-Minute Massage with Cellulite Treatment – \$125
- Revive, Restore & Renew Massage with Aromatherapy – \$125




Dr. Chern, MD,
Sue Griffin, ARNP
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BEST IN DESTIN

Continued on next page

For the Men and More



BY KAY LEAMAN, HEALTH ARCHITECT, CERTIFIED NUTRITION ADVISOR, HEALTHYDAY HEALTHYLIFE

This article covers the basics regarding function, statistics and contributors related to prostate cancer, the second-leading cause of cancer death in men after lung cancer and the leading cause in non-smokers. Only 10% of men have a close relative diagnosed with prostate cancer, which points to the main causes of cancer being high amounts of oxidative stress, obesity, inflammation and unhealthy lifestyle habits. This information is also beneficial for cancer prevention in general.

The prostate's main function is associated with procreation. It also helps keep urine inside the bladder. The most common condition men experience as

they age is benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH), or an enlarged prostate. Signs of BPH include a slower or weaker urine stream, urinating more often or waking at night to urinate, feeling like the bladder isn't empty, or experiencing an intermittent stream. BPH and prostatitis (inflammation caused by an infection) are not thought to increase the risk of prostate cancer, but they can increase PSA test levels by a small amount.

Men 45 and older should consider getting a yearly PSA (prostate-specific antigen) test. In addition to this test, it is recommended that men also evaluate their health habits. This doesn't mean you have to give up what you love, but it does mean your choices affect your health and the quality of life you will have as you age.

There are 10 stages of cancer development. DNA damage, inflammation, cellular disruption and angiogenesis are a few of these stages. I have an extensive article on the subject of cancer (prostate as well as other types) written by a doctor who has researched and treated those with cancer. It includes his personal story of treating his dad, who was diagnosed with stage 4 prostate cancer that had me-



tastasized. His protocol gave his dad another 10 years of a life well lived versus the eight months his doctor predicted. You can request this article by email (please put CANCER in the subject line).

Healthy lifestyle choices include:

- A healthy, balanced diet (Mediterranean diet)
- Staying hydrated
- Regular exercise, including pelvic floor exercises
- Managing stress
- Yearly exams and PSA testing
- Limiting alcohol and not smoking
- Being aware of your body and noting any changes

- Taking high-quality, broad-spectrum, bioavailable nutritional supplements

Knowing what to take for better health is very important. For instance, take vitamin E as an example. If you are taking the wrong form, it can actually

increase the risk of cancer, diabetes and heart disease. Many products have well-crafted ads and attractive pricing but fall short when it comes to the science of how they affect the body. I found a trusted website about prostate health that warned against vitamin E. This is due to a lack of understanding regarding the different forms of this nutrient. This can become a rabbit hole that frustrates many of us—who do we believe? It's about finding a source we can trust, and even that can be daunting.

Our quality of life is in our hands. This doesn't mean we won't ever experience a diagnosis or other setbacks. However, if we treat our bodies well, they will be equipped to fight and repair the way God intended.

Here's to health!
succeed.hdhl@gmail.com

SELF CARE

continued from previous page

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Protect Your Joints, Accelerate Your Progress: Why Good Form Matters



BY LISA TURPIN,
HEALTH & WELLNESS COACH
In the gym, it's easy to believe

lifting heavier, moving faster, and pushing harder is the way to get stronger. While effort is important, how you move matters just as much — if not more. As a personal trainer, I see injuries happen not because people aren't working hard, but because their form breaks down.

Poor movement patterns slowly take a toll on your joints, especially the knees, shoulders, lower back, and rotator joints. Over time, this can lead to nagging pain, limited mobility, and setbacks that stall your progress.

Good form helps protect your body, improves performance and allows you to stay active and strong for years.

Why form matters

Your joints are designed to move in specific ways. When alignment is off, stress shifts to places that aren't built to handle it. This leads to inflammation, muscle imbalances, and injury. Using proper form helps distribute force correctly, keeps your muscles working efficiently and lowers your risk of pain.

The most common problem areas I see are the following:

- Knees – from poor squatting and lunging mechanics
- Shoulders & rotator cuff – from incorrect pressing and pulling
- Lower back – from rounding the spine and weak core engagement

Form basics that can make a big difference:

- Keep a neutral spine — avoid excessive arching or rounding.
- Brace your core for spinal support.
- Stay focused on the contraction of the target muscle
- Use controlled movements, not momentum. Keep tension on the intended muscle.
- Maintain proper alignment — wrists over elbows, elbows in line with shoulders, knees tracking with toes.



Techniques for some common exercises:

Biceps (Curls): Stand tall, keep elbows close to your sides, and avoid swinging the weight. Slow, controlled reps protect your shoulders and lower back.

Triceps (Pushdowns or Extensions): Keep elbows tucked in and movement smooth. Let your triceps do the work, not your shoulders or momentum.

Back Exercises (Rows & Pull-Downs): Pull your shoulder blades down and back first, then drive your elbows toward your ribs. This improves posture and protects the shoulders.

Chest Exercises (Push-Ups & Bench Press): Keep elbows slightly tucked, core tight, and lower with control. This keeps your shoulders healthy and your chest working efficiently.

Squats (basic): Feet about shoulder-width apart, sit back into your hips, keep your chest lifted, and let your knees track in line with your toes. Drive through your heels to stand. This protects your knees and lower back while building strong legs and glutes.

Additional Protection for your shoulders & low back: Your shoulders are built for movement, which also makes them easy to injure. Balanced training, good posture, and controlled reps go a long way toward keeping them healthy. Your lower back is your foundation. Most back issues come from poor movement patterns repeated over time. Bracing your core, hinging properly, and maintaining good posture help prevent pain and injury.

Good form usually means slowing down and training smarter. A breakdown in form is a good indicator you're getting fatigued if you know the good form to begin with. When you move well, your workouts feel better, your results improve and your body holds up long-term.

Train with intention, move with control and protect the body you rely on every day.

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From Basement to Balcony: Fueling Strengths That Drive Results



BY BILL MASON,
ROCKET FUEL COACH

We've all seen it—talented team members who, for a moment, lose their footing. One day they're thriving in their strengths, and the next, they're stuck in patterns that hold them back. The good news? With a little awareness and encouragement, it's possible to help them rise from "basement" behaviors back to their "balcony," where their strengths truly shine.

Unlocking Your Co-worker's Futuristic Superpower

Do you have a co-worker who's usually full of bold, forward-thinking ideas but every so often, they get stuck in the past? I've got one on my team who's typically amazing at imagining what the future could look like. But recently, when we were brainstorming new strategies, they seemed to focus on what had failed in the past instead of dreaming big. It was like watching someone with a vision for the future stuck in the basement of regret!

This is a classic case of "basement" behaviors for someone with the Futuristic strength. When they feel weighed down by past setbacks or uncertainty, they can get bogged down in focusing on what didn't work, rather than looking ahead. But

at their core, they have an amazing ability to envision what's possible and inspire others to reach for exciting, innovative goals.

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

1. Shift the Focus to Possibilities – Encourage them to share what could be, not what's been. Helping them focus on future opportunities reignites their natural optimism.

2. Create Space for Visionary Thinking – Invite them into discussions about long-term goals or big-picture projects where their future-focused ideas can truly shine.

3. Celebrate Bold Ideas – Acknowledge when they share innovative solutions and forward-thinking strategies. Positive reinforcement will fuel their creative vision.

Unlocking Your Co-worker's Focus Superpower

Do you have a co-worker who's usually laser-focused and driven, but every so often, they seem to lose track of what's important? I've got one on my team who's typically amazing at blocking out distractions and staying on task. But recently, during a meeting, they became overwhelmed by too many tasks and started jumping from one thing to the next without finishing anything. It was like watching someone with super focus stuck in the basement of overwhelm!

This is a classic case of "basement" behaviors for someone with the Focus strength. When they feel scattered or have too many things on their plate, they can get bogged down and lose their ability to zero in on what truly matters. But at their core,



they have an incredible ability to concentrate on the big picture and drive toward meaningful goals.

How can we help them get back to their "balcony" and

thrive? Here are 3 ideas:

1. Help Prioritize Tasks – Encourage them to focus on the most important tasks first. Breaking things down into smaller, manageable chunks can help bring back clarity.

2. Encourage Short Breaks – Sometimes, a quick reset can help refocus. Encourage them to step away for a moment to regain perspective and energy.

3. Celebrate Their Achievements – Acknowledge their ability to get things done when they're on track. Recognizing their focus will inspire them to keep pushing forward.

When we recognize these patterns and respond with intention, we not only help others succeed—we strengthen our entire team. The goal isn't perfection, but progress: helping each person rise back to their strengths and operate at their very best.

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 Business


BY DON CARTER, SECUREVISION

Spring along the Emerald Coast is when communities prepare for the busy season ahead. HOAs and condo associations begin their annual maintenance routines. Landscaping is refreshed, roofs are inspected, pools reopen, and common areas are prepared for residents and guests.

These efforts protect property values and keep communities looking their best.

However, one critical system is often left off the checklist: in-

Spring Maintenance Checklist: Don't Overlook Your Community Internet

ternet service.

Today, reliable connectivity is just as essential to a community as water, electricity, and security. Residents depend on it for remote work, streaming, smart home devices, and staying connected with family and friends. In larger condominium communities and master-planned developments, where full-time residents, seasonal owners, and vacation guests all rely on the same infrastructure, connectivity issues can quickly impact hundreds of people at once.

Spring is the ideal time for boards to review their internet service before peak season arrives.

Many associations remain in contracts that automatically re-

new year after year, even as the number of connected devices inside each home continues to grow. A service level that worked five years ago may no longer meet the expectations of today's residents. An annual review gives boards the opportunity to confirm service levels, evaluate pricing, and ensure providers are delivering the performance the community expects.

Equipment should also be part of the conversation. Routers, switches, and wireless access points do not last forever. Older hardware can struggle during periods of high occupancy, particularly during spring break and summer when usage spikes dramatically. Reviewing equipment before the busy season

helps prevent slow speeds and outages when demand is highest.

Planning ahead also reduces resident complaints. When connectivity problems appear during peak occupancy, boards often face urgent decisions and limited options. Communities that evaluate their network in advance are able to address issues strategically instead of reacting under pressure.

Network structure and security are equally important. Guest networks should remain separate from resident and administrative systems, firmware should be current, and modern security practices should be in place. These details may not be visible to residents, but they play

a significant role in performance and reliability.

For Emerald Coast communities, spring preparation sets the tone for the entire year.

Adding an internet service review to the annual maintenance checklist helps boards enter the busy season with confidence, fewer disruptions, and better service for residents and guests.

SecureVision works with HOAs and large condominium communities across the Emerald Coast to evaluate contracts, network infrastructure, and managed WiFi systems. A proactive review today can prevent major connectivity issues tomorrow and help ensure residents stay connected all season long.

Things You Learn After Talking to 100 Business Owners

BY TIPP SPRADLIN

One of the best parts of my work is getting to sit down with local business owners and hear their stories. Every business is different, every path to ownership is different, and every owner has a slightly different definition of "retirement."

After enough conversations, though, you start to notice patterns. Here are a few things you only really learn after talking to a lot of people who run businesses.

1. Every owner has a "junk drawer" in their financials.

It's never actually called a

junk drawer, of course. It might show up as "miscellaneous," "supplies," or the always mysterious "other expenses." But every business has a handful of charges that make the owner pause, squint at the report, and say something like, "You know... I'm not entirely sure

what that one was."

Things happen. Receipts get fuzzy. Decisions get made quickly. It's part of running a business.

Pro tip: Start itemizing personal expenses that run through the business. Clean financials can make a big difference when it comes time for a valuation.



2. Nobody ever feels completely ready to sell.

I've rarely met an owner who wakes up one morning and confidently declares, "Today feels like the perfect day to sell my business."

Most conversations actually start with something closer to:

"I don't have to sell, but..."

That's often the best time to talk. When an owner says "I don't have to sell, but..." what they're really saying is they want data and guidance to help them make a smart decision about the future.

Pro tip: Plan 3-5 years before your retirement goal. A good financial advisor and an experienced business broker make a powerful team when it comes to building a smooth exit strategy.

3. The Vacation Metric.

You might assume the most successful owners are the ones working 80 hours a week and never taking a vacation. Those

Continued on page 46

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A Pastor's Ponderings: Hope Paves the Road to Faith



BY PASTOR DAVE HOLLAND

He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

They stood still, their faces downcast.

One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

"What things?" he asked.

"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel." — Luke 24:13-21a

When Life Feels Bruised

Hope paves the road to faith.

Two disciples walked toward Emmaus after the death of Christ. They carried heavy hearts and slower steps. They had hoped Jesus was the promised Messiah. Now that hope felt bruised—like a candle in the wind—still burning, but barely. Yet it hadn't gone out.

And that matters.

Hope is often the first small step faith takes. We may begin with a shaky maybe, but nurturing it matures it into trust—steady and rooted in what God has promised.

The Difference Between "I Hope So" and Biblical Hope

In everyday conversation, hope usually means something that might happen. We say, "I hope so," when we're unsure of the outcome.

Scripture uses the word differently.

Biblical hope is not wishful thinking. It is a confident and settled expectation anchored in God's character. It looks beyond present pain and says, "God has spoken, and God will be faithful."

Throughout the Bible, hope is tied to what God has promised—

most clearly revealed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That resurrection turns hope into something solid. It steadies the soul in suffering and strengthens believers to endure the present while looking toward eternity. Alongside faith and love, hope stands as one of the great Christian virtues—quietly shaping how we live, how we wait, and how we persevere.

Anchors Of Christian Hope

Several truths help us understand biblical hope more clearly.

First, biblical hope expects God's goodness—even in unwelcome events.

It doesn't call pain "good," but it believes God can work good through pain. That kind of hope turns even difficult days into occasions for gratitude—not because the circumstances are easy, but because God is faithful.

Unlike worldly hope, which is often uncertain, biblical hope—*elpis* in the Greek—carries assurance. It steadies the heart with the confidence that God will fulfill His promises and secure eternal life. As the Apostle Paul writes in Romans 8:24-25, "For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what one sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."

Second, Christ Himself grounds Christian hope.

The resurrection of Jesus confirms God keeps His word. Because Christ lives, our hope is a living hope—not a vague optimism, but a reality anchored in a risen Savior and a coming kingdom.

Third, hope anchors the soul in life's storms.

Hebrews 6:19 describes hope as a sure and steadfast anchor. When circumstances threaten to overwhelm us, hope keeps us from drifting—holding us steady until clarity and peace return.

Fourth, hope breaks passivity and produces perseverance.

Genuine hope doesn't numb us; it strengthens us. It produces courage, patience, and endurance. It moves believers toward faithful living and loving service. Paul captures this in 1 Corinthians 13:13, reminding us that faith, hope, and love remain the greatest virtues.

Finally, biblical hope looks forward with confidence.

It fixes its eyes on God's ultimate redemption—resurrection life, restored creation, and eternal fellowship with Him—while still shaping how we live today. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God speaks these familiar words of reassurance, "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope." Jeremiah 29:11.

Back on the Road to Emmaus

The disciples on the road to Emmaus had plenty working against them. Doubt weighed on their hearts. Confusion clouded their understanding. Grief drained their strength.

Yet hope still lingered: But we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.

That hope—imperfect as it was—became the first brick in the road back to faith.

And even here is the quiet mercy of God: while they were walking away in disappointment, Jesus Himself was already walking toward them—and He's walking toward you.

Dave Holland pastored churches for 38 years before retiring in Destin. His new book, Resurrection Jesus, is now available. Visit DaveHolland.org, or Amazon.com. Pastor Dave is available to preach and teach at churches and conferences. Contact him at DavidHolland54@gmail.com.

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 Musing

Sean of the South: Dispatches Del Camino

BY SEAN DIETRICH

“We have no rooms,” the innkeeper says over the phone.

“None?” I say.

“We are full.”

My wife and I are sitting on the ancient steps of la Iglesia de Santiago. The Church of Saint James. We are dusty and sweaty, and one of us smells like a giant armpit. (Moi.)

The stone doorway arch above us features carvings of angels and demons which date back to Roman times. Eight angels surround Christ, who is looking straight at me as though He is saying, “No room’ at the inn?—Now where have I heard THAT before?”

“Please,” I say to the innkeep-



er. “My wife and I are exhausted, there are no rooms anywhere.”

“I said no room.” And the woman hangs up.



It is late siesta in Spain. No traffic on the highways. No pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago. Streets are vacant. Most pilgrims have already found lodging for the evening and are already getting their complimentary massages.

At least that’s what I imagine. Because we have been hunting for a room all day, and there are no vacancies for another 20 miles. It is Holy Week, and the Camino is packed with hikers. Finding a room is like trying to locate a porta john at a bluegrass festival.

All day we have been seeing pilgrims turned away from hostels. Some, we learn, have been forced to sleep outside on doorsteps.

I am still staring at the call-ended screen. “She hung up on me,” I say in mock disbelief.

So, I take a moment. I need to get my head together. I need to figure out what we should do. Otherwise we’re sleeping on church steps tonight.

I wander into the church while Jamie sits on the steps watching our backpacks. I cross myself. I take a pew.

Tomorrow is Good Friday. And I am looking at a sculpture of Christ on a cross.

My entire evangelical childhood featured imagery of the crucifixion. We sang cute little Sunday school songs about it. We wore tiny crucifixes around our necks. We had paintings portraying the crucifixion. Jesus al-

ways had great abs.

But right now, in light of Good Friday, I’m thinking about what it truly means to truly die by crucifixion.

First, you’re stripped nude. You are not a fitness model. You are a 30-something male who eats a lot of bread and drinks wine with every meal. And it shows in your midsection.

Then, a crowd watches as a group of 18-year-old soldiers with egos to prove kick the proverbial excrement out of you. Next, they place you on timbers. They mutilate your hands with nails. Romans didn’t always use just one nail per hand.

Then, you just hang there.

It’s gross. It’s raw. There are no orchestras playing an overture. No cinematic key lighting. Your cross stands erected on Main Street. Your basic human reflex is to shield your nudity. But you can’t.

The boy-soldiers beneath your cross are screwing around, engaging in locker room banter, shooting craps, seeing which one will win your shoes.

You can’t breathe. Your lips are turning blue. Your arms are numb, devoid of circulation. Your serratus muscles and shoulders are torn from struggling against your own body weight.

The worst part is, almost none of your friends are here.

Few are brave enough to attend your last hours. Doesn’t anyone care? Isn’t anyone going to say goodbye? Aren’t you important in anyone’s life?

Meantime, there are four other guys crucified alongside you. Hollywood films, and various evangelical bumper stickers will depict only three crosses on this fateful Friday. But in reality, there are five crosses, and you’re just one of them.

In other words, you are not given special treatment. No sacred ceremony. Charleston Heston does not attend your death scene. You are just another state inmate on the roadside. No big deal.

Most people who are crucified will hang for entire days before finally dying. Crucified persons do not receive burial, either. Usually, Romans let birds pick their skeletons clean. In simple terms, you are trash.

And you know what hurts most? It’s that people did this to you. Not wild animals. Not an act of nature. Fellow human beings.

Because the harsh truth is, people are not always nice. People hate. People start wars. People hurt each other, and often for no reason. They posture, they compete, they gossip. They invent rules and dogmas so they might force others unto their will.

And in this moment of nude agony, you see all these failings of human nature beneath you. You watch it all, with human eyes. And you forgive them. For we are fools who know not what we do.

I cross myself and exit the chapel.

My wife is sitting on the steps with our bags. We still have no rooms. We are low on food. We are in a foreign country, and we have a long way left to walk. But I think, perhaps, I’ve just remembered why I’m walking.



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Musical Echoes Returns: A Festival Where Ancient Sounds Meet the Emerald Coast

By LORI LEATH SMITH

Each spring, something remarkable happens along the shores of the Santa Rosa Sound. The gentle notes of the Native American flute drift through the air, dancers move in colorful regalia and locals and visitors gather to celebrate one of the Emerald Coast's most unique cultural traditions.

From April 24–26, 2026, the Musical Echoes Native American Flute Festival will celebrate its 25th anniversary, inviting the community to experience three unforgettable days of music, art and heritage at 139 Miracle Strip Parkway SE in Fort Walton Beach. Set against the stunning backdrop of the Santa Rosa Sound, the festival is free and open to the public.

Since becoming part of the fabric of Fort Walton Beach in 2001, Musical Echoes has grown into one of the premier Native American flute and art festivals in the nation, honoring the rich traditions, storytelling and artistry of Native American culture.

You can expect a vibrant weekend filled with live performances, flute concerts, cultural dancing, art displays, storytelling and interactive exhibits. The hauntingly beautiful sound of the Native flute—an instrument long used for storytelling, ceremony and reflection—creates a peaceful atmosphere that perfectly complements our Fort Walton Beach environment.



This year's festival features several acclaimed performers:

Shelley Morningsong, a Northern Cheyenne singer-songwriter and 2019 Native American Music Awards Artist of the Year, brings her powerful alto voice and heartfelt songwriting to the stage. With seven albums and multiple Native American Music Awards to her name, Morningsong blends contemporary Native music with blues influences reminiscent of artists like Buffy Sainte-Marie and Bonnie Raitt.

Joining her is **Fabian Fontenelle**, a Zuni/Omaha performer and descendant of the famed Omaha Chief Big Elk. Fontenelle captivates audiences with powerful dance performances, traditional storytelling and sacred songs performed in the Native Zuni language. His vibrant regalia and rhythmic drumming bring ancient traditions to life in a mesmerizing cultural experience.

Also performing is **Ga-**



reth Laffely, an award-winning Mi'kmaq/Cree composer whose Native flute compositions have been featured on NPR's Hearts of Space and networks including Discovery Channel, PBS and A&E. Laffely is the youngest composer ever to reach No. 2 on the Billboard New Age chart and has collaborated with George Lucas' Skywalker Symphony.

Beyond the stage, the festival also highlights Native-inspired artistry and craftsmanship. Visitors can explore arts and crafts vendors, cultural exhibits and artist demonstrations, while artisans compete in both the Arts Competition and the Flute Makers Competition, showcasing handcrafted pieces that blend music, tradition and visual art.

The event is supported by the local community and volunteers. Those interested in helping can assist with activities such as the

information booth, raffle sales, silent auction support or festival photography. Volunteers who contribute at least four hours re-

ceive a free festival T-shirt, and high school students can earn

Continued on next page

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 Arts & Music

ECMAF to Host World-Renowned American Brass Quintet for Free Concerts and Student Master Class

By DEBBIE CARLONI

The Emerald Coast Music Alliance Foundation (ECMAF) proudly announces that the internationally acclaimed American Brass Quintet (ABQ) will visit the Emerald Coast April 15–18, 2026. During their stay, the ensemble will present free public performances and lead a master class for area high school students at no cost.

The American Brass Quintet is widely recognized as one of the premier chamber music ensembles of our time, celebrated for its peerless leadership in the brass world. Described as “the most distinguished” of brass quintets by American Record



Guide, ABQ has built its stellar reputation through celebrated performances, genre-defining

commissioned works, and a steadfast commitment to educating generations of musicians.

A recipient of Chamber Music America’s highest honor, the Richard J. Bogomolny National Service Award for significant and lasting contributions to the field, the group boasts a rich history that includes performances across five continents, more than 60 recordings, and the premieres of over 150 contemporary brass works. Since its founding in 1960, commissions from esteemed composers have significantly shaped contemporary chamber music and the modern brass quintet repertoire. The New York Times has hailed ABQ as the “premier brass ensemble.”

ABQ will perform a free pub-

lic concert at Crosspoint Church in Niceville on April 16 at 6 p.m. Seating is limited and may be reserved through Eventbrite.

The student master class will be held April 18 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Crestview High School and is open to high school students interested in band and brass instruments. Students can obtain additional information through their school’s band leadership. A performance for students, teachers, parents, and the public will follow the master class.

For more information, visit emeraldcoastmusic.org or email bob@emeraldcoastmusic.org.

MUSICAL ECHOES

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community service hours.

As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, Musical Echoes relies on sponsorships and donations to continue offering this unique

cultural event to the public each year. Contributions of any size—including memorial or honorarium gifts—help sustain the festival’s mission of celebrating Native American music, art and heritage.

Many locals will tell you Mu-

sical Echoes is more than a festival—it’s an immersive cultural experience that leaves a lasting impression long after the final flute note fades.

Whether you come for the music, the art or simply the peaceful atmosphere by the wa-

ter, one thing is certain: once you hear the echoes, you’ll want to return year after year.

Musical Echoes Native American Flute Festival
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Volunteers: volunteers@musicalechoes.org

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Sinfonia Gulf Coast Welcomes Nearly 2,500 Students

Interactive Performances of Link Up: The Orchestra Sings

BY ZANDRA WOLFGRAM

In March, the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center transformed into a vibrant concert hall as Sinfonia Gulf Coast presented two performances of its annual Link Up concert program, The Orchestra Sings, in partnership with Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute.

As the only fully professional orchestra in the region, Sinfonia Gulf Coast continues its commitment to expanding music education across the community. The 2026 Link Up performances are also part of Sinfonia Gulf Coast's 20th anniversary celebration, marking two decades of innovative programming and impactful arts education initiatives throughout Northwest Florida.

This interactive musical experience welcomed nearly 2,500 third- through fifth-grade students from Okaloosa and Walton counties, who performed on recorders and sang alongside

the professional musicians of Sinfonia Gulf Coast.

Through months of classroom preparation, students learn to read music, play the recorder and explore the fundamental elements of melody, harmony, rhythm and expression before joining the orchestra for this culminating performance.

The Link Up: The Orchestra Sings program explores how melodies are created and how different musical lines work together to form harmony and texture. Students discover how composers use melody and lyrics to tell stories, how voices and instruments blend within an orchestra and how musical ideas evolve through collaboration. During the performance, students actively participate by singing, moving to the music and performing recorder parts alongside the orchestra, transforming the concert into a powerful shared musical experience.

Reflecting on the event, Sinfonia Gulf Coast Music & Ar-



PHOTO CREDIT JIM CLARK

tistic Director Demetrius Fuller shared, "Link Up is my favorite concert of the year. While it may be the loudest concert we present all year, it's also one of the most joyful. Often, it's the only music education many of

these children receive. So, it's incredibly important that we continue to support special programs like this."

The annual Link Up concert is also a live example of Sinfonia Gulf Coast realizing its mission to champion music education in the local community. By bringing students, educators and professional musicians together in a shared performance experience, the program demonstrates how music education can inspire creativity, confidence and collaboration among young learners.

Proceeds from Sinfonia Gulf Coast events and donor support benefit Sinfonia Gulf Coast's music education and community engagement initiatives

throughout Northwest Florida, including musicians and guest artists in schools, free orchestra concerts, student transportation, the Sinfonia Youth Orchestra, Link Up concerts in partnership with Carnegie Hall, Paint the Music (with Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation), Arts in Medicine with Sacred Heart Hospital and more.

Sinfonia's Link Up program is made possible through generous support from the St. Joe Community Foundation, the Dugas Family Foundation and the Emeril Lagasse Family Foundation. Additional funding from Sinfonia Gulf Coast's Crescendo! annual fundraiser, Treble Makers (an honorary membership committee of Crescendo!) and community donors has allowed Link Up to grow into Sinfonia's largest education initiative.

For more information, visit SinfoniaGulfCoast.org, call (850) 460-8800 or e-mail info@sinfoniagulfcoast.org.



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Ask Destinites: St. Pete Beach vs. Destin



By PATRICIA LEE, FOUNDER

This past month in our Facebook local's Destinites group (www.Facebook.com/groups/Destinites), one member placed the following post: "St. Pete Beach. My jaw dropped. Do you see it? They don't fight over the public beach. They set their umbrellas and chairs back so everyone else can enjoy the

beach, too. Nobody was crying over anything. Yes, their beach extends out farther which, after Helene, is amazing on its own. Thought I'd share with this group. We should take a lesson from St. Pete beach." A photo was placed with the post showing an extensively wide beach area.

Below are some of the responses from our group members:

1. Look at the size of that beach! What a walk to the water from the hotel. It's amazing what beach renourishment does.
2. Same goes for Amelia Island 20 years ago.
3. I grew up there and Pinellas County has always required the beach to be free. It's always been a wide beach. You can



walk for miles both feet wet and well up the beach in the sand. No signs or fences.

4. I've said it before and I'll say it again: When that category five comes this way, God will show you who owns the beach.
5. God created the beach for everybody, not just a select few.
6. As another person that grew up here, we had no trouble sharing the beach with everyone for decades.
7. Walton county is the only county to have the private beach

problem. (in this area).

8. Let's take our beaches back!

That picture is not telling you two things:

1. St. Pete has much more sand between the dune line and the Gulf than we do. A lot more. Those set-ups are placed where they are, because the guest has already walked a considerable distance from their unit (which is set back even further) with all of their beach stuff. We suffer from a lack of sandy beach area to accommodate the millions we advertise to.
2. This picture is taken in front of a resort where there's zero parking available for the public. That's why you don't see non-resort chairs and umbrellas out front. Look off to the distance in the right side of the

pic and you will see non-resort setups and the general public closer to the waterline as that's where the public can park and access the beach.

This is how it was back in the day in Destin, before they let the crazy start and the chair vendors take over OUR beaches. This is how it should still be.

If you live in Destin or the close surrounding area, I invite you to join our private, targeted group for locals and property owners at Facebook.com/groups/Destinites. Currently 12,600+ members (est. October 2018). Check out our Local Business Directory at www.Destinites.com, where more than 500 local businesses are listed and enjoy advertising in our targeted community group.

THINGS YOU LEARN

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owners are certainly dedicated but often exhausted.

In reality, the strongest businesses are usually the ones where the owner has built systems, trained managers, and can

step away for a week without the place falling apart.

Pro tip: Don't wait until burnout to ask for help. There are many professional services designed to help businesses grow and run more efficiently.

4. Every business has a story behind how it started.

Some begin with careful planning. Others start with a moment of opportunity or desperation.

Many businesses along the Emerald Coast started with someone simply deciding to take

a chance. A contractor who went out on their own. A couple who opened a shop after moving here for a different lifestyle. A hobby that grew into something bigger than expected.

And my personal favorite: someone who thought, "I could do this better."

Pro tip: Share your origin story on your website and social media. People love knowing the story behind the business.

5. Owners rarely give themselves enough credit.

Running a business requires resilience, creativity, and the abil-

ity to solve problems every single day. When owners tell their story, they often downplay it. They'll say things like, "We just kept at it," or "It's nothing special."

But building something that lasts, especially in a town that changes as quickly as Panama City Beach, takes determination.

Behind every storefront, service truck, and restaurant sign in Panama City Beach is someone who took a risk and built something meaningful. Spend enough time talking with business owners and you quickly realize this town runs on their grit.

La Vie en Rouge Raises \$75,000 for ECTC Education Programs

Emerald Coast Theatre Company (ECTC) celebrated a vibrant evening of entertainment, cuisine and community at its annual La Vie en Rouge gala, raising more than \$75,000 to support children's education programming across the Emerald Coast.

Held at ECTC in Grand Boulevard and presented by Blue Water Oral Surgery Center, the Paris-inspired event brought together supporters, chefs, artists and community leaders. Guests enjoyed specialty cocktails, gourmet tastings from a dozen local restaurants and live entertainment, along with a silent auction featuring experiences such as 30A stycations and a chance to perform in Mystic Pizza. "La Vie en Rouge is such a magical night for our theatre and our community," said Nathanael Fisher, Producing Artistic Director of Emer-

ald Coast Theatre Company. "It's an experience unlike any other—our professional performers singing just steps away from an aerialist soaring overhead, while Allison Wickey creates a live painting before your eyes. At the same time, our incredible restaurant sponsors are handcrafting sushi and mixing cocktails right in front of guests. The generosity we witnessed throughout the evening will support our educational programs, performance opportunities for young artists, outreach initiatives, along with continuing to bring the best performers, teachers, and equipment through the doors of ECTC."

Attendees enjoyed performances throughout the evening while sampling cuisine from local favorites including Swiftly Catered, AJA 30A, Cantina Laredo, Grimaldi's Pizzeria, Kilwin's, Wine

World, Ovide, Vin'tij, Beignets & Brew, Fleming's, P.F. Chang's, Fish On Seafood House, Charcuterie by Shelli and Let's Say Graze 30A. The silent auction played a key role in raising funds to expand youth theatre programs, scholarships, camps and outreach.

"La Vie en Rouge continues to grow each year thanks to the incredible support of our community," said Anna Fisher, Co-Founder and Executive Director of Emerald Coast Theatre Company. "The funds raised will help ensure that students and families throughout our region have access to meaningful arts education and professional theatre experiences."

Proceeds will support ECTC's year-round educational programming, including after-school classes, summer camps, workshops and outreach initiatives.

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