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Freedom Houses Offer Hope, Healing and a Path Forward for Women in Need

By MICHELLE RUSCHMAN

Stephanie Fitzgerald, Founder of Freedom Life Compass, is on a mission to provide safe supportive housing for the residents who stay at the Freedom Houses located in Niceville, Fort Walton Beach, Crestview, and soon, Laurel Hill. “I want people to know change is possible. A community doesn’t always see what brings someone to homelessness. But, for moms who are living in a car with their children, a woman who is escaping domestic abuse, or any other countless circumstances women can find themselves in, we want our program to be a place of hope.”

By the age of 23, Stephanie had plenty of reasons to be hopeless. She grew up in a house with drugs, where teaching life skills to be a successful adult was not part of her training. Addiction was the norm in her home, and eventually, she became homeless. At 23, though, someone spoke words that would begin



the journey toward her calling, “You’re better than the life you’re living.”

“Not everybody ends up in homelessness, domestic violence, or addiction because of their own choices. Often, it is, but it can also be a generational issue. It’s the lifestyle we grew up in, and we don’t know any other way to live. Sometimes we end up in relationships that help our ruin. The Freedom Houses are about giving people who are ready to change the opportunity to

do so. Other people believed in me and encouraged me, and that is how we were able to open Freedom Houses, so that other women and, hopefully, one day men, will have that community around them to help them find and take their next right step.”

Each of the three homes has a different mission. Freedom House One is a transitional home for women only. It can house up to six women in a communal living space, and they are able to stay there



for a six to eighteen-month program. While there, in addition to housing, the women get training in life skills and help with clothing, food, medical needs, employment, and counseling. In turn, they are asked to adhere to the following guidelines:

Work Schedule/Rules

- Must be turned in at the weekly case plan or on the

FREEDOM HOUSES

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Bring Hope Now:

Local Nonprofit Aims to Solve Youth Mental Health Crisis

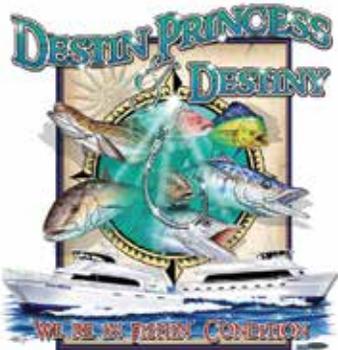
By PEGGY BROCKMAN

Imagine receiving a call from your child’s school: your middle-schooler, diagnosed with ADD, lost his temper and screamed, “I wish I were dead.” Because the staff knows you, they give you the option to take him to the emergency room yourself, instead of calling law enforcement.

You arrive at the ER, but there’s no child psychologist. The ER doctor decides to send your child—seven hours away—to a facility in Orlando

BRING HOPE

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 Community

FREEDOM HOUSES

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day received

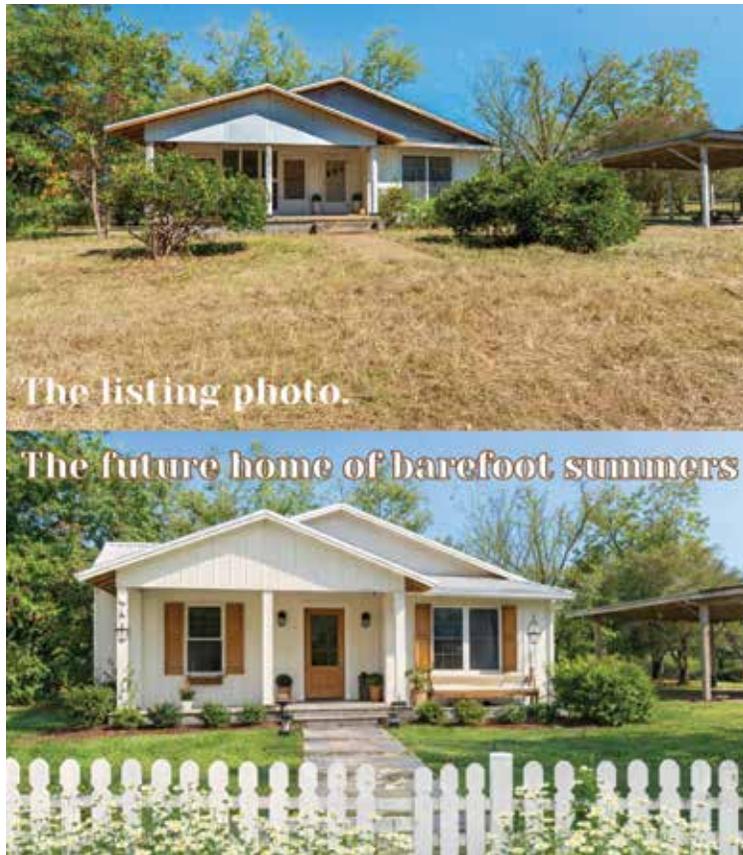
- Changes communicated to the program manager
- No working at restaurants that serve alcohol, convenience stores, clubs, or bars. No pet sitting or babysitting outside of regular working hours.

Daily Routines

- 7 a.m. Wake up, make your bed, get dressed, and have breakfast
- 8 a.m. Ready for Devotions
- Work - (If you do not have employment, start submitting at least 6-8 applications in a regular workday time frame, showing that you are actively seeking employment.)
- 2 hours a day on education/career goals
- Curfew 9 p.m. unless you're working or at other approved activity
- 10 p.m. Lights Out

House Rules

- Always speak from a place of love and encouragement. Let's lift one another up without judgment. We are all perfectly flawed!
 - When taking phone calls, be mindful of others and continue your call outside of the house.
 - Bring your belongings with you when taking showers, and take everything back to your room, including shampoos, conditioners, clothing, trash, etc.
 - We are all grown adults, so please pick up after yourselves. This includes washing any dishes you use and putting them away.
 - There will be no overnight stays unless we have the address and phone number and speak with the individual two weeks in advance. If we do not feel it's a safe place for you to take a home pass, we will deny it. This is for your safety and well-being.
- Freedom House Two is a short-term shelter for women until they can find a more per-



manent place to live. Freedom House Three houses women and children. Finally, Freedom House Four will be opening later this year in Laurel Hill for mothers and children. Plans are being made for animal therapy

and fostering dogs to use for rehabilitation. Those who would like to see if they qualify for housing can fill out an application at www.freedomlifecompass.org. It takes \$40 a day per person,

per night to house up to the 30 women and children the house can accommodate. This provides safe shelter, food, clothing, medications, and other daily needs. If you would like to be a sponsor or participate in helping any of the Freedom Houses in Niceville, Crestview, or Fort Walton Beach by mentoring, teaching a class, leading a devotion, offering transportation support, or by donation, go to www.freedomlifecompass.org/get-involved.

You can also attend one of the following events:

- **Spring Soiree**, April 25, 5:30-7:30, Crosspoint Fellowship Hall in Niceville
 - **Blessing of the Emerald Coast**, May 16, 11-3 Niceville Mullet Festival Grounds
 - **Niceville Bazaar**, October 17, 10-4pm, Niceville Mullet Festival Grounds
- For more details, go to freedomlifecompass.org/events.

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

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FREE PARKING

BRING HOPE

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for evaluation. You object. Emotions rise. The doctor blames you and asks you to leave. Your child is transported anyway, placed in a holding area with wooden slab beds and other children in crisis, screaming. He's terrified.

Three days later, a tele-psychiatrist finds your child isn't a threat and should be released. But when you return from a brief trip home, you discover your child was already transferred to an inpatient facility in Pensacola—without your consent. He must now remain for another three days, all while you watch helplessly.

This is the true story a mother shared with me after a recent Bring Hope Now presentation. Though a few years have passed and improvements have been made—such as the addition of Mobile Response Teams that now evaluate students on campus—children in crisis in our area still face long waits in local ERs and may be transported hours away due to a lack of local facilities.

This is exactly why we founded Bring Hope Now.

A Growing Crisis

In 2019, two community leaders—David Triana, founder of United for a Good Cause, and myself, Peggy Brockman—joined forces to address a terrifying trend: Northwest Florida, particularly Okaloosa County, had one of the fastest-growing youth suicide rates in the state.

We set out to bring hope

through a national peer-to-peer suicide prevention program in local schools. Eglin Federal Credit Union kickstarted our mission with a \$50,000 donation. With support from Superintendent Marcus Chambers and the Okaloosa County School Board, the program launched in 2020. By

Continued on next page

Welcome Denise

Denise David has joined Life Media Group as an Advertising Executive. Since moving to Okaloosa County in 2022, she has taken an active role within the local community serving as committee chair within several local networking organizations and is known for the interest she takes in the success of those around her. Denise is a speaker, writer, business builder and friend. She has held national corporate roles in sales, business development, coaching, recruiting and marketing management. Denise has over twenty-five years of marketing experience serving vari-



ous types of businesses and personal experience as a small business owner. The unique skill set and creativity she brings will be an asset to the clients she serves. Email her at Denise@LifeMediaGrp.com

BRING HOPE

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the end of 2022, every school in the district had the program in place. It became a model of success.

In 2024, Bring Hope Now officially separated from United for a Good Cause to pursue broader goals. We expanded into the military community with “Hope on the Line,” a peer-led suicide prevention initiative for active-duty personnel. But, another pressing need was calling us: a lack of local youth mental health facilities.

By the Numbers: Why Local Help Matters

The data is staggering. In the 2022–2023 school year, 376 children under 18 in Okaloosa and Walton Counties were involuntarily Baker Acted. Of those, 76% were first-time cases, and 92 were repeat cases.

Statewide, 87% of youth Baker Acts are due to suicidality: 46% had suicidal thoughts, 28% had a plan, and 10% had made an attempt.

Children are typically taken to a local ER, where they wait for an inpatient bed to open in Pensacola or Panama City. Some

wait days. If extended treatment is needed, they’re sent even farther—to Jacksonville or Orlando—hours from family and support systems. Many families can’t even afford to retrieve their children afterward.

What if that Child Were Yours?

According to Florida Health Charts, 168 people in Okaloosa and Walton Counties went to an emergency room for self-harm injuries in 2023. Shockingly, 121 of them—72%—were children ages 5 to 19. Yes, even as young as five.

From the 2023 Florida Youth Survey:

- 22% of students said they almost always felt symptoms of stress, anxiety, or depression.
- 46% said these emotions stopped them from doing daily activities.
- 19% had seriously considered self-harm.
- Encouragingly, 31% sought help.

But we need more resources. And we need them here.

The Mission Ahead

With strong leadership from

Board Chair Kathy Houchins and a growing board of community advocates, Bring Hope Now’s next mission is clear: establish a youth mental health treatment facility for Okaloosa and Walton Counties.

We’re currently seeking a facility or land to build a welcoming, home-like inpatient center. Until that becomes a reality, we continue to train community members through QPR Gatekeeper Training—equipping everyday citizens with the tools to recognize suicide warning signs and how to respond.

We also aim to launch a local loss survivor program to support families who’ve lost loved ones to suicide.

A Community That Cares

We believe in this mission because we’ve lived it. I’ve personally experienced the pain of a suicide attempt and subsequent residential treatment with a grandson. I know what families are facing.

Bring Hope Now is not just one organization—it’s a movement of people, volunteers, educators, parents, and advocates committed to changing the story for our youth.



We’re looking for sponsors, volunteers, and in-kind support. Do you know a family who’s lost a loved one to suicide? To get involved or learn more, visit www.BringHopeNow.com.

Mark your calendar now. **The 2026 Annual Bring Hope Dragon Boat Race & Festival** will be April 25th. It’s not only a fundraiser—it’s a celebration of resilience and community. We’re looking for spon-

sors, racing teams, raffle and auction items, volunteers, and in-kind support. Do you know a family who’s lost a loved one to suicide? You can include a sign in their memory at the event. To get involved or learn more, visit www.BringHopeNow.com.

It may take a village to raise a child—but it takes a whole community to save one.



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Community

Top 5 Supplements to Spring into Health



By DR. KAREN DEVORE,
TORTOISE CLINIC

Here along the Gulf Coast, the arrival of spring means longer days and a return to the outdoor living that defines our beach communities. For many, it feels like a natural inflection point of renewed momentum and a reminder to re-prioritize

energy, strength, and overall well-being. It's often during this season that people begin reaching for supplements and vitamins in hopes of supporting this shift.

At the Tortoise Clinic, I remind people that supplements are never a substitute for the fundamentals including bal-



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anced, protein-forward meals made from real food, restorative sleep, building and maintaining muscle mass, hydration, and thoughtful stress management. Supplementation and targeted nutrient support are tools within a larger health strategy, most effective when guided by informed science and thoughtful clinical oversight.

Not every supplement is appropriate for every person. When selected strategically, with attention to quality, bioavailability, and individual physiology, they can support the systems that drive sustainable energy and resilience.

Here are five I commonly evaluate this time of year, and how I think about applying them.

Vitamin D - A Hormone with Broad Impact

Despite its name, Vitamin D functions as a hormone in the body. It plays a role in immune balance, bone strength, muscle function, and mood regulation. Vitamin D receptors are found throughout the body, which helps explain its wide-reaching influence.

Deficiency remains common, even living in Florida. Indoor work, sunscreen use, skin tone variability, and seasonal shifts all contribute. When levels are sub-optimal, people may notice fatigue, slower recovery, decreased muscle strength, or a subtle dip in mood.

When I look closer: recurrent illness, low energy that doesn't improve with rest, mood changes, bone or muscle con-

cerns, and limited sun exposure

Practical Tip: Vitamin D absorbs best when taken with food that contains healthy fats. Testing provides clarity — optimal levels are individualized, not guessed.

Magnesium - Calm Energy & Recovery

Magnesium supports muscle relaxation, sleep quality, blood sugar balance, and healthy stress response. It participates in hundreds of biochemical processes and is one of the most common nutrients I see run low.

Despite the beauty of coastal living, daily demands such as work, activity, travel, and stress still accumulate, and magnesium depletion is common.

Two forms I often consider:

Magnesium Glycinate: Supports relaxation and restorative sleep.

Magnesium Threonate: May support focus, cognitive clarity, and emotional steadiness.

When I look closer: muscle tension, poor sleep, stress reactivity, headaches, and difficulty focusing

Practical Tip: Magnesium glycinate is often best tolerated in the evening. Magnesium threonate can be used in the morning when focus support is desired. Some individuals divide doses based on response. Because magnesium influences muscle relaxation, higher amounts may also influence digestive rhythm. Gradual ad-

Continued on page 35

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E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center Night Hike March 7 | 5-8 p.m.

Discover the magic of Florida after dark during the E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center's Night Hike on Saturday, March 7. This family-friendly evening adventure features a guided walk along scenic trails to the Center's bat house, where guests can watch native bats emerge at dusk, plus interactive educational stations highlighting nocturnal wildlife and conservation.

Food vendors will be on site, and guests are encouraged to bring flashlights and dress for an outdoor evening. Admission is \$15 for adults and \$10 for children ages 4-12, with VIP access available for members. Enhance the experience with the Fireside Owl Experience add-on (\$5), featuring a native ambassador owl encounter, marshmallow roasting, hot cocoa and a kid-friendly craft. For more information, contact the E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center.

ECCAC Gala & Golf Weekend | March 7-8

The Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center will host its 28th annual signature Gala & Golf Weekend on March 7-8, bringing the community together to support children in need. The Gala takes place Saturday, March 7, at 5:30 p.m. at the Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa and includes dinner, music, a wine pull and live auction led by DawnMarie Kotsonis, "The Gavel Girl," with former ECCAC client Isabella Rose as the featured speaker. The weekend continues Sunday, March 8, with a noon shotgun-start Golf Tournament at Kelly Plantation Golf Club. Proceeds benefit ECCAC's mission to provide free

services to child victims of abuse. Gala and golf reservations are available at eccac.org. For details, contact Kate McDougall at 530-341-0802 or kate@eccac.org.

Northwest Florida Ballet's Alice in Wonderland | March 7 at 7:30 p.m. | March 8 at 2:30 p.m. | Mattie Kelly Arts Center

Northwest Florida Ballet closes its 2025-2026 season with the premiere of Alice in Wonderland, an imaginative full-length ballet choreographed by Jill Eathorne Bahr. This original adaptation of Lewis Carroll's classic features NFB company dancers alongside international guest artists, brought to life through immersive projections, elaborate costumes and a dynamic musical score by renowned French composers. Audiences will follow Alice's whimsical journey through vivid garden landscapes, surreal scenes and larger-than-life characters in a visually stunning production perfect for families and ballet lovers alike. Tickets are \$48 for adults and \$22 for children 12 and under. Learn more at NFBallet.org/alice-in-wonderland or call the Mattie Kelly Arts Center Box Office at (850) 729-6000.

CVHN Soirée on the Bay | March 13

Enjoy a lavish gathering with fine wine, food and spirits at Soiree On The Bay: Act V, an elevated weekend benefiting Children's Volunteer Health Network honoring 20 incredible years of care, compassion and community impact. Presented by the Dugas family, the weekend will take place on their stunning family estate overlooking the

Continued on page 9

Where Strategy Meets Stillness: The Alice Expands Its Role in the Growing Corporate Retreat Economy



BY KRISTIN SULLIVAN,
GENERAL MANAGER

As corporate America continues to redefine workplace culture in the wake of remote and hybrid work models, executive retreats and board meetings are taking on renewed importance. Leadership teams are gathering less frequently, but with greater intention. Increasingly, the setting itself is viewed as a strategic variable, influencing the quality of discussion, collaboration and long-term planning.

That national shift is shaping business hospitality trends right here along Florida's Emerald Coast.

In Destin, we are positioning ourselves at The Alice within this evolving landscape, serving both traveling executive teams and companies based throughout the region seeking a nearby offsite environment that balances privacy, productivity and well-being.

Situated along the waterfront, the privately held property offers 18 individual guest accommodations and integrated meeting space overlooking the bay. Unlike large convention focused venues, The Alice was designed to host focused, small-group leadership gatherings, including board meetings, executive retreats and strategic planning sessions.

While destination retreats remain part of its business model, the property has seen growing demand from Emerald Coast companies looking to step away from their daily office environments without incurring the time and expense of air travel.

We are seeing more local businesses recognize the value of getting leadership teams out of the day-to-day setting. For organizations in Destin, Fort Walton Beach, Niceville, Crestview, Pensacola, and Panama City Beach,

we provide a local escape that still feels immersive and removed.

Midweek Activation and Year-Round Business Impact

At The Alice we host executive retreats and board meetings primarily Mondays through Wednesdays, a scheduling model that aligns with corporate calendars while activating the property during traditionally quieter midweek periods.

That structure not only serves leadership teams seeking uninterrupted time for strategy work, but also contributes to more consistent economic activity beyond peak tourism/wedding weekends.

Corporate retreats generate spending that extends beyond lodging. Catering services, audiovisual support, leadership facilitators, wellness instructors, marina operators and other regional vendors participate in each program. By hosting business gatherings during midweek windows, properties like ours help stabilize revenue streams for hospitality professionals and service providers throughout the year.

The Emerald Coast has long been known for leisure travel and seasonal tourism. However, steady growth in sectors such as

healthcare, professional services, finance, real estate development and technology has gradually diversified the regional economy. As these industries mature, so does demand for professional meeting environments capable of supporting governance responsibilities, investor reporting and executive-level planning.

A Shift in How Leaders Gather

Traditionally, board meetings and executive planning sessions were hosted in hotel conference rooms designed for scale rather than intimacy. Today, many organizations are prioritizing environments that foster focus, psychological safety and deeper meaningful conversation.

The Alice reflects that shift.

Meeting areas are designed with natural light and expansive waterfront views, complemented by outdoor decks and smaller lounge spaces that allow teams to move fluidly between structured presentations and informal breakout discussions. The absence of large crowds or shared convention traffic creates a contained environment conducive to confidentiality and sustained concentration.

Strategic conversations require more than an agenda; they



require presence. When leaders feel grounded and unhurried, the quality of key decisions making and thinking improves.

Wellness as a Leadership Strategy

One of the distinguishing features of our retreat model here at The Alice is the integration of wellness programming into the business agenda. As conversations around executive burnout and leadership sustainability gain traction, wellness is increasingly viewed not as a luxury, but as a performance strategy.

At The Alice, wellness components can be incorporated directly into meeting schedules. Morning yoga sessions, guided breathwork, stretching exercises and structured reflection periods are offered alongside traditional board reporting and strategic planning sessions.

Among the most requested programs is vision boarding; a facilitated workshop format that blends creative exercises with long-range strategic alignment. Participants are guided through exercises designed to clarify goals, values and organizational direction, encouraging discussion that extends beyond quarterly metrics.

Coaching and Creative Partnerships

To further deepen the leadership experience, The Alice works with a curated network of executive coaches and facilitators specializing in organizational strategy, governance, communication and performance development.

In addition, the property has established creative partnerships that offer story writing, song writing, and speech writing courses as part of select retreat programming. While unconventional in a corporate setting, these sessions are designed to engage different cognitive pathways and encourage personal reflection.

Leadership development experts increasingly note that creative outlets can strengthen executive resilience and communication skills. Writing, whether

Continued on page 14





THE ALICE

A GATHERING PLACE

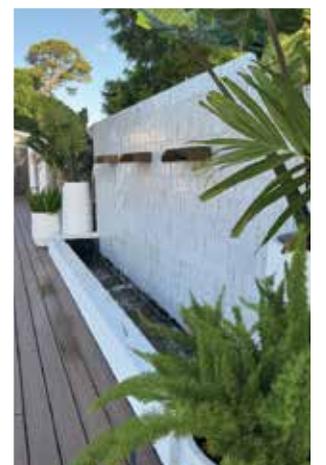
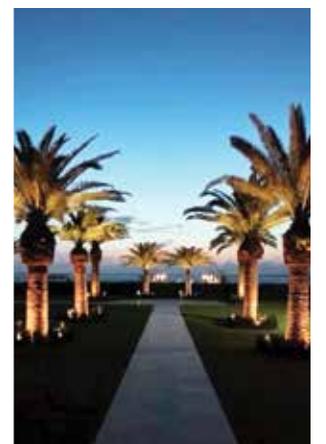
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Magic & Comedy | Nightly | Palms of Destin | MagicDestin.com
..... 6

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

Free Beach Bonfire | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille

La Vie En Rouge | 6pm | Emerald Coast Theatre Company

Karaoke | 7pm | Island Wing Company

Shells, Swim & Sip | 6:30pm | Fud-pucker's Down Under Bar

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

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

Karaoke | 8pm | Harry T's Lighthouse

Karaoke | 8pm | 5 o'Clock Somewhere Baytowne Wharf
..... 7

Farmers Market | 9am-1pm | Grand Boulevard

Farmers Market | 9am | Seaside, FL

Discover Science Saturday | 10am | Emerald Coast Science Center

DHS Neighborhood Treasure Hunt Bazaar | 10am-4pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation

Motors in March Auto Show | 11am | Baytowne Wharf

Big Rig Bonanza | 11am | Destin Commons

Women United Brunch & Bubbly | 11am | Home2Suites | FWB

Saturday Sing-A-Long Brunch | 11:30am | Skybar Destin

Destin Commons Market | 2pm | Destin Commons

Night Hike | 5-8 pm | E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center

ECCAC Gala | 5:30 pm | Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort

Light Up The Light | 6pm | Emerald Coast Harley Davidson

Northwest Florida Ballet's Alice in Wonderland | 7:30 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville

Karaoke | 6pm | Fatboys Destin

Karaoke | 8pm | Harry T's Lighthouse

Karaoke | 8pm | 5 o'Clock Somewhere Baytowne Wharf

Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar
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DJ Brunch | 10am | Azul @ Harborwalk

AJ's Crawfish Boil | 1pm | AJ's Destin Harbor

Save Suds n Cinema | 3pm | Suds n Cinema FWB

Sound Bath Sundays | 6pm | Hotel Effie

Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar

Karaoke | 9pm | Outcast Bar & Grill
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Women's Build Night | 5pm | Habitat for Humanity Restore, Walton County

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

Bingo Night | 6pm | American Legion Destin, 311 Main Street
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ECPRO Media Panel | 11:30am | FWB Chamber

YP of Destin Sunset Social | 5pm | Melting Pot



Mug Club & Bingo | 6pm | Destin Brewery

Karaoke | 6pm | AJ's on the Bayou

Karaoke | 6pm | Hooters Destin

Karaoke | 6pm-9pm | Fatboys Destin

Trivia Night | 6pm | Rick's Crab Trap FWB

Dirty Dancing in Concert | 7pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center

Music Bingo | 7pm | Props Brewery Taproom
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Bonfire on the Beach | 5pm | The Bay

Trivia Night | 5pm | Down Island

Run Club | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery

Silent Disco | 6pm | Harborwalk Village

Music Bingo | 6pm | Wood Foot Beer

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
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Downtown FWB Coffee Club Meet Up | 8:30am | Florida Place Food Trucks

Mini Makers & Experimenters | 10:30am | Emerald Coast Science Center

Business Expo & Networking Brunch | 11am | Shoreline Church

Under The Sea | 3pm | Harborwalk Village

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

Fort Comedy Open Mic Standup | 7pm | Downtown Music Hall

Comedy on the Boulevard | 7pm | Emerald Coast Theatre Company

Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse

Ladies Night | 10pm | McGuire's Destin
..... 13

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

Free Beach Bonfire | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille

Coastal Country Concert | 6pm | Harborwalk Village

Karaoke | 7pm | Island Wing Company

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

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

Karaoke | 8pm | Harry T's Lighthouse

Karaoke | 8pm | 5 o'Clock Somewhere Baytowne Wharf
..... 14

Lucky Leprechaun 5k & 1 Mile Fun Run | 8am | AJ's on the Bayou

Farmers Market | 8am | The Landing FWB

Farmers Market | 9am-1pm | Grand Boulevard

Farmers Market | 9am | Seaside, FL

Authors at The Alice | 11am-3pm | The Alice Destin

Petals & Pop Ups Spring Market | 11am-3pm | The Alice Destin

Strawberry Festival | 10am | Props Brewery – Hammock Bay

1 Year Anniversary Party | 11am | Thick Cookie Co

Saturday Sing-A-Long Brunch | 11:30am | Skybar Destin

Saturday Social | 6pm | Harborwalk Village

Karaoke | 6pm | Fatboys Destin

Karaoke | 8pm | Harry T's Lighthouse

Karaoke | 8pm | 5 o'Clock Somewhere Baytowne Wharf

Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar
..... 15

DJ Brunch | 10am | Azul @ Harborwalk

Spring Market | 11am | Soundside FWB

Mac n Cheese Festival | 12pm | Destin Commons

Strawberry Festival | 12pm | Props Brewery – Hammock Bay

AJ's Crawfish Boil | 1pm | AJ's Destin Harbor

St Patrick's Day on the Harbor | 1pm | Harborwalk Village

Sound Bath Sundays | 6pm | Hotel Effie

Murder on the Rocks | 6pm | On The Rocks @ Harborwalk Village

Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar

Karaoke | 9pm | Outcast Bar & Grill
..... 16

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

Bingo Night | 6pm | American Legion Destin, 311 Main Street
..... 17

St Patty's Day Celebration | All Day | AJ's Destin

Bunco Ladies Night | 5:30pm | 311 Main Street

Mug Club & Bingo | 6pm | Destin Brewery

Karaoke | 6pm | AJ's on the Bayou

Karaoke | 6pm | Hooters Destin

Karaoke | 6pm-9pm | Fatboys Destin

Trivia Night | 6pm | Rick's Crab Trap FWB

St Paddy's Day Delight | 6pm | Baytowne Wharf

Music Bingo | 7pm | Props Brewery Taproom
..... 18

Spring into Science | 10am | Emerald Coast Science Center

Bonfire on the Beach | 5pm | The Bay

Trivia Night | 5pm | Down Island

Run Club | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery

Bingo Fundraiser for SAFE in the Panhandle | 6pm | Island Wing Company

Silent Disco | 6pm | Harborwalk Village

Music Bingo | 6pm | Wood Foot Beer

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
..... 19

Under The Sea | 3pm | Harborwalk Village

Bubbly Baytowne | 5pm | Baytowne Wharf

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

Fort Comedy Open Mic Standup | 7pm | Downtown Music Hall

Comedy on the Boulevard | 7pm | Emerald Coast Theatre Company

Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse

Ladies Night | 10pm | McGuire's Destin
..... 20

Animal Tales | 10:30am | Emerald Coast Science Center

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

Free Beach Bonfire | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille

Coastal Country Concert | 6pm | Harborwalk Village

Karaoke | 7pm | Island Wing Company

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

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

Karaoke | 8pm | Harry T's Lighthouse

Karaoke | 8pm | 5 o'Clock Somewhere Baytowne Wharf
..... 21

Farmers Market | 9am-1pm | Grand Boulevard

Farmers Market | 9am | Seaside, FL

Farmers Market | 10am | Harborwalk Village

Harbor In Bloom | 11am | Harborwalk Village

International Festival | 11am | The Landing | FWB

Saturday Sing-A-Long Brunch | 11:30am | Skybar Destin

Destin Commons Market | 2pm | Destin Commons

Oyster Shell Workshop | 4pm | Holmes Blvd NW FWB

Saturday Social | 6pm | Harborwalk Village

Karaoke | 6pm | Fatboys Destin

Karaoke | 8pm | Harry T's Lighthouse

Karaoke | 8pm | 5 o'Clock Somewhere Baytowne Wharf

Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar
..... 22

DJ Brunch | 10am | Azul @ Harborwalk

AJ's Crawfish Boil | 1pm | AJ's Destin Harbor

Sound Bath Sundays | 6pm | Hotel Effie

Scallywag Sunday | 7pm | Baytowne Wharf

Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar

Karaoke | 9pm | Outcast Bar & Grill
..... 23

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

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

Movie Monday | 7pm | Baytowne Wharf
..... 24

Mug Club & Bingo | 6pm | Destin Brewery

Karaoke | 6pm | AJ's on the Bayou

Karaoke | 6pm | Hooters Destin

Karaoke | 6pm-9pm | Fatboys Destin

Trivia Night | 6pm | Rick's Crab Trap FWB

Boomin' Tuesday | 6:30pm | Baytowne Wharf

Music Bingo | 7pm | Props Brewery Taproom
..... 25

Bonfire on the Beach | 5pm | The Bay

Trivia Night | 5pm | Down Island

Run Club | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery

Silent Disco | 6pm | Harborwalk Village

Music Bingo | 6pm | Wood Foot Beer

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
..... 26

Under The Sea | 3pm | Harborwalk Village

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

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
..... 27

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

Free Beach Bonfire | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille

2026 Bunny Hop Trail | 5:30pm | 132 Jet Drive, FWB

Coastal Country Concert | 6pm | Harborwalk Village

Karaoke | 7pm | Island Wing Company

School of Rock The Musical | 7pm | 215 Hollywood Blvd, FWB

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

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

Karaoke | 8pm | Harry T's Lighthouse

Karaoke | 8pm | 5 o'Clock Somewhere Baytowne Wharf
..... 28

Farmers Market | 8am | The Landing FWB

ARC of Emerald Coast Poker Run | 9am | 1444 John Sims Pkwy.

Farmers Market | 9am-1pm | Grand Boulevard

Farmers Market | 9am | Seaside, FL

Farmers Market | 10am | Harborwalk Village

FWBHS Cheer Food Truck Festival | 11am | FWB High School

Saturday Sing-A-Long Brunch | 11:30am | Skybar Destin

Karaoke | 8pm | Harry T's Lighthouse

Karaoke | 8pm | 5 o'Clock Somewhere Baytowne Wharf

Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar
..... 29

Spring Dive Clean Up | 6am | 1030 Miracle Strip Pkwy.

DJ Brunch | 10am | Azul @ Harborwalk

Sound Bath Sundays | 6pm | Hotel Effie

Scallywag Sunday | 7pm | Baytowne Wharf

Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar

Karaoke | 9pm | Outcast Bar & Grill
..... 30

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

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

Movie Monday | 7pm | Baytowne Wharf



EVENTS • LIVE MUSIC • FOOD

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EVENTS

continued from page 6

Choctawhatchee Bay in Santa Rosa Beach. Details and tickets at givebutter.com/c/SoireeontheBayACTV.

7th Annual International Festival Celebrates Culture, Food and Music | March 21 | The Landing, Fort Walton Beach

Celebrate the USA's 250th anniversary while experiencing cultures from around the world at the 7th Annual International Festival on Saturday, March 21, from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. at The Landing (139 SE Brooks St., Fort Walton Beach). Organized by Conexión Media Group to benefit United for a Good Cause Inc., the family-friendly event features international music, food, folklore and art, bringing "The World UNITES in the Emerald Coast." The festival also welcomes singers, bands, clubs and folkloric groups, along with vendors and business sponsors. Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber members receive a 25% discount on vendor rates. For details or participation opportunities, email conexionflorida@gmail.com, call 850-368-3505 or visit conexionflorida.com.

ida@gmail.com, call 850-368-3505 or visit conexionflorida.com.

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

Tickets are on sale now for the South Walton Beaches Wine & Food Festival, returning April 23-26 to Grand Boulevard with more than 600 wines, beers and spirits to sample across four days of tastings, live entertainment and culinary experiences.

The weekend kicks off Thursday with Winemakers and Shakers at Wine World in Destin, followed by Friday's VIP Wine Tasting (4-6 p.m.) featuring rare selections and expert pours, plus Bitters, Brews & Bartenders (5:30-8 p.m.) showcasing craft cocktails, lite bites and a lively mixology competition. The Grand Tasting takes place Saturday (3-6 p.m.) and Sunday (1-4 p.m.), highlighting world-class wineries — including the Willamette Valley Vintners Association — alongside chef-driven pairings in Wine World's Culinary Village.

Guests can purchase featured wines on site, with proceeds ben-

efiting Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation and children in need across Northwest Florida. Pre-sale tickets are available now at sowalwine.com; prices increase April 1.

Destin Charity Wine Auction Turns 21 and Goes Wild for Kids | April 24-25

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 internationally 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.

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 Swifly Catered, special presentations and an AC system giveaway to one deserving service 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. Supported by the City of Niceville, Niceville Community Center, Niceville High School, Rocky Bayou Christian School and sev-

eral local sponsors, the event also welcomes business partners to contribute door prizes. For sponsorship details, call Marta Thorpe at (850) 814-3822.

FORE! The Love of Animals Golf Tournament Returns to Sandestin 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.



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Green Beer & Great Food Specials all day!
Live Music By:

Bimini Stage	Tiki Stage
Sean Williams 4pm	Brendon Preece 3pm
DJ Charles 8pm	
Black Eyed Blonde 9pm	Jumbotron Stage
	Chase Mitchell Band 7pm

 **Tuesday, March 17**
116 Harbor Blvd, Destin, FL 32541

 Community

Make Your Way to the Area's Very First Wine Festival!

39 Years of the Sandestin Wine Festival!

**Thursday, April 16 –
Sunday, April 19**

Grand Wine Tastings

**Friday the 17th, 5-8 p.m.
and Saturday the 18th,
1-4 p.m. | The Village of
Baytowne Wharf**

The 39th year of being THE BEST, the Annual Sandestin Wine Festival, voted “Best Event” by Visit South Walton and known as the “Kentucky Derby of Wine Festivals,” will run Thursday, April 16, through Sunday, April 19 at The Village of Baytowne Wharf at Sandestin.

A pioneer among Emerald Coast festivals, the Sandestin Wine Festival has been drawing like-minded wine-enthusiasts looking to discover more about the culture and vibe of the Northwest Florida Gulf Coast with a fun filled, come-as-you-are ambiance for almost four decades! Whether you're a wine aficionado or a grape novice looking to learn more, there's



something for everyone with 100's of featured wines!

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

On Friday, 5-8 p.m. and Saturday 1-4 p.m., the main events shine with 100's of featured wines and gourmet bites! Enjoy

two days of discovery with hundreds of domestic and international wines represented from premier vineyards throughout the globe! Speak with vintner representatives in a rare, intimate setting to learn more about your favorites. Tastings are complemented by gourmet experiences from featured chefs along the Emerald Coast with tents offering delectable bite-sized appetizers perfect for pairing. Local and regional music also set the vibe for fun days of discovery. Rain or Shine, there will be wine! Tickets on sale now! For more information and tickets, visit Sandestin-WineFestival.com.

Spring has Sprung in The Village of Baytowne Wharf!

March Wednesday Night Concerts

**Wednesdays, March 4-25,
7-9 p.m.**

This free concert series features both local and regional talent from a variety of genres. Concerts are held on the Events Plaza Stage each Wednesday.
March 4: Below Alabama
March 11: High Tide
March 18: Funky Lampshades
March 25: Forrest Williams

Fun, Sun & Cars! Motors In March

**Saturday, March 7 |
11 a.m.-3 p.m.**

Calling all Muscle Cars, Euros, Jeeps, Trucks, Corvettes, Imports, Hot Rods, Classics & Exotics! Emerald Coast Customs and 3M Window Tinting Presents the 7th Annual Auto Show on Saturday, March 7, 11 a.m. - 3 p.m. at The Village of Baytowne Wharf to benefit Chil-



The village will be open to the public during this event.

Scallywag Sunday Sundays, March 22 - March 29 | 7-9 p.m.

Watch as featured pirate Captain Davy takes you on an adventure with two magic shows on stage at 7 and 8 p.m. FREE to attend.

Movie Monday Mondays, March 23 - March 30 | 7 p.m.

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

Spring Break Movie Line Up - March:

3/23: Lilo & Stitch
3/30: Elio

FREE to attend.

Boomin' Tuesday Tuesdays, March 24 - March 31 | 6:30-8:30 p.m.

Enjoy singing and dancing with DJ Mike Whitty in the Events Plaza from 6:30-8:30 p.m. Then watch a breathtaking fireworks show over the Lagoon at 8:30 p.m.

Thursdaze Lights Show Thursday, March 26 | 8:30 p.m.

Join us Thursday, March 26 at 9 p.m. as we light up the sky with drones that will form images of our favorite beach scenes!

All March Baytowne Wharf events are FREE to attend.

Don't forget to tune in on Beach TV to watch all that's going on in The Village of Baytowne Wharf LIVE!

dren In Crisis. Join in for a day of fun, sun, and cars! Awards and trophies will be awarded in nine classes and a Best of Show award. FREE to attend!

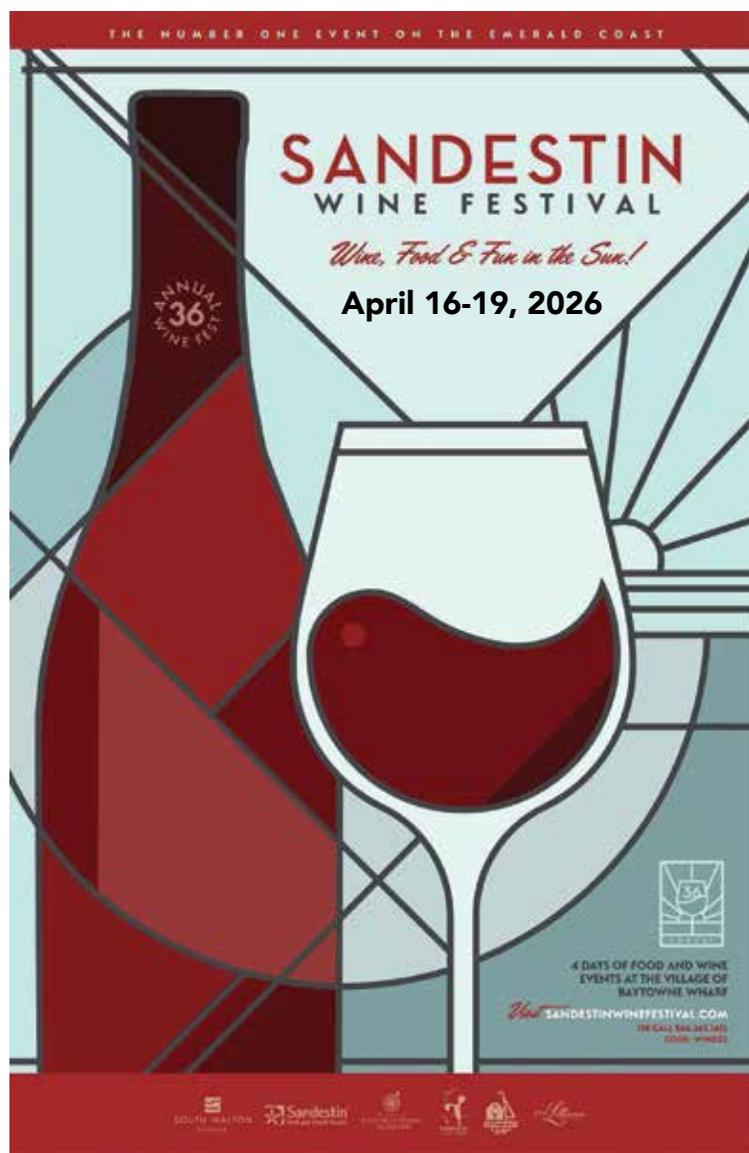
St. Paddy's Day Delight- Paint the Village Green Monday, March 17 | 6-9 p.m.

Baytowne Wharf is painting The Village GREEN from the lagoon to the lights! Celebrate the Luck of the Irish on Wednesday, March 17, 6-9 p.m., featuring Carpenter Academy of Irish Dance and Live Music from She-nanigans! FREE to attend.

Bubbly Baytowne Thursday, March 19 | 5-7 p.m.

Join The Village of Baytowne Wharf for an evening full of free champagne and shopping during Bubbly Baytowne. Sip and Shop through the village streets and stop in various retail merchants as you enjoy a selection of premium champagnes.

* Free and for 21 and up only.



CARE on the Coast TurtleFest Returns 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 Emer-

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

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 surpris-

perience, VIP tickets include access to a private area overlooking 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!



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-to-enjoy

es waiting throughout the park. Stilt walkers and roaming entertainers will keep the energy 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 ex-



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!



News Around Town

Destin Chamber Honors Outstanding Members for 2025

The Destin Chamber recently recognized several exceptional individuals and organizations for their leadership, service and commitment to the business community.

Paul Woolman Ambassador of the Year: Brenda Gray, Hilton Garden Inn – Destin/Miramar Beach

“This year’s winner certainly earned the honor. Always smiling or laughing, and just plain having fun, she makes it easy for everyone,” said Jenni Brunson, Okaloosa Gas.

Brunson credited Gray’s role as a major cause of the effectiveness of the entire Ambassador organization.

Ann Gibson Community Service Award: Jessica Holzaple, Shoreline Church

The Ann Gibson Community Service Award, sponsored by Okaloosa Gas, recognizes individuals who demonstrate outstanding dedication to service and community involvement.

“Since moving to the area in 2011, she has been a driving force behind meaningful change both locally and globally. She has coordinated disaster relief efforts, established community-wide serve days to meet the needs of local organizations, and worked with mission partners around the world, including building a school in Uganda, Africa,” said Brunson.

“As a mom of four, including a child with special needs, her passion for connection and inclusion drives her leadership of



initiatives like Night to Shine, a prom night celebrating individuals with special needs, and the reason she was nominated and chosen as the winner.”

Business Person of the Year: Jennifer Gutai Comella, Hand Arendall Harrison Sale

John Sumrall, President of Trustmark’s Emerald Coast Operation, announced Jennifer Gutai Comella as the 2025 Business Person of the Year, which aligns with the organization’s core values of integrity, service, accountability, relationships and solutions.

“She is a 2018 graduate of Destin Forward. She has led numerous state and local organizations as a board member and chair of the board of those organizations. She’s done a great job of becoming known as a top-notch attorney and plays a vital role in the success of her firm. Her involvement locally includes the Destin History and Fishing Museum, HCA Florida Twin Cities Hospital, and Destin Water Users boards. She recently served the Destin Chamber Board of Directors and was chairman in 2022,” said Sumrall.

James D. Neilson Sr.

Chairman’s Award for Volunteer Service:

David Butler, Faith Assembly Christian Church

The James D. Neilson Sr. Chairman’s Award for Volunteer Service is determined by the Chairman of the Board and President & CEO, with input from Chamber staff.

“This year’s winner has gone so far and above that it’s impossible to describe his value to the Destin Chamber and the business community. He attends almost everything the chamber does. He is truly an extension of the staff,” said Brunson.

David Butler was recognized for his many contributions, including being a graduate of the very first Destin Forward class, emceeding HarborWalk Village’s Thursday night All American Concert Series each year, serving on the Chamber Board for the fifth year, and being a multi-year Honorary Commander on Eglin Air Force Base and Hurlburt Field.

Trustee Milestones: Trustee membership represents the highest level of commitment to the Destin Chamber and the business community. Trustmark, Warren Averett and Destin – Fort Walton Beach have 20 years of Trustee membership, and Eglin Federal Credit Union was recognized for its five-year commitment.

WFLDAR Honors Student Essayists and Good Citizens

Founded in 2014, the West Florida Chapter of the National Society Daughters of the Amer-



ican Revolution (WFLDAR, NSDAR) recently celebrated local students during its annual American History Essay Contest and Good Citizens Awards Ceremony.

WFLDAR Regent Robbie Carroll welcomed special guests, students, teachers, principals and parents to the event, which recognizes academic excellence and civic character.

The American History Essay Contest invites students in grades 5–8 to explore the nation’s past through creative writing. This year’s theme, “Lunch with a Signer,” coincides with America’s 250th birthday on July 4, 2026. Students were asked to imagine returning to 1776 to meet a signer of the Declaration of Independence and reflect on how that individual’s service contributed to the nation’s independence.

First place was awarded to sixth grader Connelly Grelle, who selected John Hancock and titled her essay “Put Your John Hancock on That.” In her winning entry, she wrote that Han-

cock “was passionate about our country becoming independent from Britain” and noted that his famously bold signature was “a statement to King George III.” She referenced the well-known quote attributed to Hancock: “There, I guess King George will be able to read that without his spectacles!” His signature, she explained, symbolized patriotism, courage and unity, inspiring the phrase still used today.

Second place was awarded to Freeport Middle School student Sheila Boulldridge.

The WFLDAR Good Citizen Program honors outstanding senior high school students who demonstrate dependability, service, leadership and patriotism in their homes, schools and communities. Each recipient receives a Good Citizen pin featuring 13 stars for the original colonies, a blue enamel band representing the DAR and symbols of honor and understanding.

This year’s focus question, “Our American Heritage and Our Responsibility for Preserving It,” asked students to reflect on how the characteristics of a good citizen can strengthen the democracy secured by the Patriots of the American Revolution.

The 2026 Good Citizen Award recognized first-place winner Anaya Patel of Seacoast Collegiate High School, with runners-up Elijah Brooks Ordiss of Destin High School and Austin Hays Hostetler of South Walton High School.

VENDOR BOOTH SPACE SELLING OUT FAST
for the NEW TWO DAY Northwest Florida Spring Home Show

Saturday and Sunday • April 11 & 12, 2026
at the Rigdon Center at the Northwest Florida Fairgrounds
1958 Lewis Turner Boulevard, Fort Walton Beach, FL
This is A **PATRIOTIC Red, White and Blue**
250th Anniversary of America Event with
FREE ADMISSION to the public

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RECOMMENDED FOR MATURE AUDIENCES.

NFSO Presents Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 2, the Awe-inspiring "Resurrection"

On April 18, the Northwest Florida Symphony Orchestra — the region's premier professional orchestra — transforms the stage of the Mattie Kelly Arts Center into a space of breathtaking scale and sound. More than 200 musicians and singers will gather for Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 2, the awe-inspiring "Resurrection" Symphony, in what promises to be one of the most powerful artistic events of the season.

Mahler's Second is not merely a symphony; it is an emotional and spiritual journey. It begins in darkness and uncertainty, wrestling with life's deepest questions, and rises steadily toward a radiant conclusion that proclaims renewal and hope. In its final movement, a full chorus and vocal soloists join the orchestra in a breathtaking affirmation of life after struggle — a moment that has moved audiences for more than a century.

This extraordinary performance unites the Northwest Florida Symphony Orchestra with the Northwest Florida Symphony Chorale, the Choral Society of Pensacola, and Niceville High School Opus One. The sheer scale of the collaboration — more than 200 performers filling the stage — creates a sound both intimate and immense, surrounding the audience in a shared experience of uncommon magnitude.

Works of this scope are rarely presented in our region. Months of preparation and exceptional artistic forces are required to bring it to life. When the final chorus rises from a whisper to a thunderous declaration, the effect is overwhelming — not only heard, but deeply felt.

Mahler's "Resurrection" Symphony will be performed on Friday, April 18 at 7 p.m. at the Mattie Kelly Arts Center. Tickets are available at MattieKellyArtsCenter.org or by calling 850-729-6000.

Ann Toomey, Soprano

American soprano Ann Toomey is enjoying a significant international career, praised for her rich voice and dramatic presence. She has performed major operatic roles including *Madama Butterfly* and *Tosca* with



Lyric Opera of Kansas City and Florentine Opera, and made a celebrated European debut in *Suor Angelica* at the Berlin Philharmonie under Kirill Petrenko. She has also appeared with the Los Angeles Philharmonic under Gustavo Dudamel and sung Mahler's Symphony No. 8 with the Nashville Symphony, among other acclaimed engagements. A former member of the Ryan Opera Center at Lyric Opera of Chicago, she was a national semifinalist in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions.

Zoie Reams, Mezzo-Soprano

Mezzo-soprano Zoie Reams has garnered recognition for her "velvety" tone and versatile artistry. A graduate of the Houston Grand Opera Butler Studio, she



appears regularly at Lyric Opera of Chicago in roles from *La traviata* to contemporary works, and has sung the title role in *Carmen* at Canadian Opera Company and Oregon's Piedmont Opera. She made her Met-

ropolitan Opera debut in *Porgy and Bess* and appears in major concert engagements including Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with the Boston Symphony Orchestra and Handel's *Messiah* at Washington National Cathedral.

Reams' season also includes appearances with Cincinnati Opera, Minnesota Opera, and the Los Angeles Philharmonic under Gustavo Dudamel.

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Mayor Bobby Wagner and
PIO Tamara Young, PhD

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

This time, Mayor Bobby Wagner and I sat down and talked about his State of the City Address. He led with highlights from last year and finished with hope for this coming year.

TY: In previous years, you've touched upon resiliency, infrastructure and parks. Describe your SOCA theme that you recently shared on February 17, 2026.

BW: This year's theme is "Year of the Local." Bekah and I traveled through the North-

east on our honeymoon, and I got to walk places where the Revolutionary War era literally happened. It reminded me how much can change when everyday people decide to own their community. That is the spark behind this theme. While the City keeps pushing the big projects, I want to rally a grassroots spirit in Destin: small wins, cleaner corners, and more neighborly acts. A local renaissance, for locals, by locals, with locals.

TY: You referenced a number of impressive City wins in 2025, including departmental statistics, public projects, and behind-the-scenes work that most people never think about or realize. It boils down to high but realistic expectations and more action and less talk.

BW: I'm proud of the progress, and I'm even more focused on momentum. We are continuing to move the ball on the work residents care about most: mobility and safety, infrastructure like undergrounding where possible, parks and quality of life, and long-range planning like Town Center and Harbor priorities. But "action not talk" also applies outside City Hall. Some of the fastest wins come when neighbors decide, "Let's fix this," and they do it together.

TY: It was nice to see the City Annex full that night with interested residents listening to the State of the City Address. How would you categorize the crowd?

BW: It was a great crowd, but more importantly it was an engaged crowd. People were ask-



ing thoughtful questions, sharing ideas, and leaning in. That kind of participation is a really good sign because it shows Destin is not sitting on the sidelines. People want to help shape what's next.

TY: What takeaways are you hoping for?

BW: Two things. First, the City is working and the big projects are real, even when they take time. Second, you don't need a title to improve Destin. My hope is that this becomes a year where we all do something local every month: pick up litter, beautify a corner, improve the neighborhood sign, and support a local business. If enough of us do that, we'll feel the difference fast, and we'll be proud that we built it together.

You can watch a recording of the State of the City Address on the City's YouTube Channel at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wjbpGjUS9OU>.

Join us for the inaugural TACP Foundation Golf Cup Weekend, featuring a beachfront kickoff and a premier golf tournament in support of U.S. Air Force Tactical Air Control Party (TACP) Airmen, Veterans, and Gold Star families.

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Saturday | April 18 - Golf Cup Tournament

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THE ALICE

continued from page 7

narrative, lyrical or speech-focused requires clarity of thought, emotional intelligence and the ability to articulate vision. Engaging in creative expression can help leaders reconnect with purpose, refine messaging and approach complex challenges with renewed perspective.

By incorporating structured creative sessions into corporate retreats, The Alice aims to foster a healthier work mindset, one that balances analytical rigor with imaginative thinking. For some leadership teams, these programs serve as exercises in storytelling and brand articulation; for others, they provide a rare opportunity to step outside traditional corporate roles and reconnect with individual creativity.

The result, organizers say, is often greater cohesion and more authentic communication when leaders return to formal strategy discussions.

Business Infrastructure Without the Convention Atmosphere

Despite its emphasis on tranquility and well-being, The Alice maintains professional-grade audiovisual capabilities to support investor updates, financial reporting, board governance presentations and virtual conferencing when necessary.

Meeting technology is integrated into the space upon

request without creating the atmosphere of a large-scale conference center. Groups can transition from board-level reporting to smaller strategy discussions and reconvene for collective synthesis without leaving the property.

Meals are similarly integrated into the retreat structure. Custom culinary programming emphasizes fresh, coastal ingredients while accommodating dietary preferences. Rather than functioning as rushed intermissions between sessions, shared meals are designed to facilitate conversation and reflection.

The onsite marina also provides opportunities for kayaking, paddleboarding, fishing charters and sunset sails, which can be incorporated into retreat agendas as informal networking or structured team-building exercises.

Supporting a Diversifying Emerald Coast Economy

The Emerald Coast's economic landscape has evolved significantly over the past decade. While tourism remains a central pillar, the region has seen expansion in corporate offices, health-care systems, financial firms and entrepreneurial ventures.

As professional sectors expand, so does demand for environments capable of hosting executive governance work at a high level. Board meetings, leadership summits and strategic planning sessions require privacy, technological reliability and

Continued on page 27

A New Era of Elegance: **McCaskill & Company's Expansion Culminates in a New Rolex Environment**

BY CAITLYN BURRUS

In Miramar Beach, McCaskill & Company Fine Jewelry & Watches has completed a carefully curated expansion that redefines the in-store experience while honoring the values that have guided the family-owned jeweler for generations. Long known for its elevated selection of fine jewelry and luxury timepieces, the gallery's multi-year transformation culminates in the completion of a new Rolex space, set to debut in early March 2026.

The expansion began with a practical need—more parking—but quickly evolved into a broader vision with a total showroom renovation and expansion. As McCaskill & Company's designer offerings and customer base grew, so did the desire to create a space that reflected the caliber of the brands represented, particularly Rolex.

For the late Elizabeth Campbell and her daughter, Carolyn Brigman, who together led the gallery alongside husband and father Bill Campbell, the opportunity was about more than square footage.

"We were laser-focused on interesting architectural accents, stonework, and materials that tell a story," they share. "As a family-owned gallery, we wanted the space to feel warm, residential, and elegant—somewhere guests could truly enjoy the experience."

Architect Cherri Pitts of Studio C Architecture in Birmingham, Ala., led the design, while Grand Bay Construction brought the vision to life. While executing one



of the largest commercial renovations in the Miramar Beach area, the team faced the added challenge of keeping the gallery operational throughout the process, which required careful coordination.

The expanded west showroom was the first phase of the transformation, introducing a refined, guest-focused layout with comfortable seating areas, custom artwork, sculptural objects, and lighting designed to enhance the natural brilliance of each piece of jewelry. The Bridal Gallery quickly became a standout, with crystal snowflake-inspired lighting creating a sense of intimacy and celebration.

As work continued, attention shifted to the east showroom, where the most immersive elements of the expansion unfold. Guests will enter through a foyer featuring handblown-glass maple leaves hanging from the ceiling, created by artist Brit Deslonde. "To reflect the store's commitment to exceptional craftsmanship, each glass maple leaf was hand-blown at the furnace without molds and embedded with 24-karat



gold and pure silver, ensuring that every piece is entirely unique," Deslonde says. "I sculpted the leaves to create a light, floating canopy suspended overhead that interacts with light and space, echoing the refinement, individuality, and material beauty found in fine jewelry."



Steps to the right, the Rolex environment represents the grand finale of McCaskill & Company's expansion. Designed to align with Rolex's world-renowned standards of craftsmanship, fit, and finish, the space offers a focused, elevated experience for guests.

Additional brand-focused spaces include a dedicated David Yurman area, reinforcing McCaskill's commitment to full-service, design-driven luxury. The second phase also introduces an enhanced Service Department, including an authorized Rolex Service Center staffed by two highly credentialed watchmakers.

Large viewing windows allow guests to observe the intricate work of watch and jewelry repair and custom design firsthand. "Our goal has always been to offer an elevated shopping experience that still feels personal," Carolyn reflects. "Luxury, to us, means warmth, connection, and artistry."

With the debut of its new Rolex environment, McCaskill & Company completes a transformation defined by intention, craftsmanship, and collaboration, setting a new benchmark for fine jewelry and timepieces on the Emerald Coast.

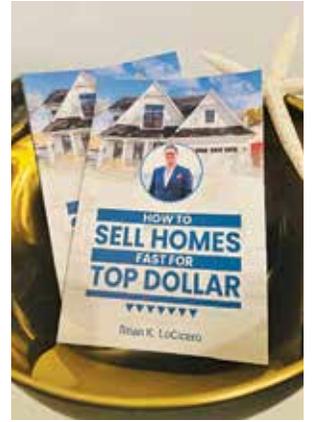
Visit McCaskillandCompany.com or follow them on Instagram @mccaskillandcompany to learn more.

Publisher's Note:

The Life Media family extends our heartfelt prayers and deepest condolences to the Campbell family and the entire McCaskill & Company team on the recent passing of Elizabeth Campbell. Elizabeth's warmth, vision and dedication helped shape an experience cherished by so many across our community. She will be remembered with admiration, gratitude and great respect.

 Community

Trends & Treasures!



Fresh Designs, Timeless Sparkle Beyond Measure Fine Jewelry

Spring is a season of new beginnings — and sometimes that calls for something that sparkles. At Beyond Measure Fine Jewelry, owner Ashleigh Woolley invites you to design something uniquely yours. Whether you're planning a proposal, celebrating an anniversary or simply treating yourself, the showroom at City Market is filled with diamond and gemstone bracelets, rings, necklaces and earrings in every shape and style imaginable.

Ashleigh specializes in diamond, gemstone and precious metal pieces, with a passion for custom design. Engagement rings and wedding bands hold a special place in her heart. "It is truly special to help people celebrate one of the biggest moments of their lives," she says.

Beyond Measure designs hundreds of custom projects each year, guiding clients through a one-on-one experience that ensures every detail reflects their story. Whether it's an engagement, wedding or milestone occasion, your vision can come to life with craftsmanship you can trust.

This spring, discover color, brilliance and beauty — and prepare to be amazed and satisfied with YOUR unique creation!

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

Easter Magic Starts Here Frill Seekers Gifts and Personalized Fabulous Finds

Spring celebrations begin with the sweetest traditions — and Easter arrives Sunday, April 5! At Frill Seekers Gifts, it's time to think beyond the basket and

add those meaningful, personalized touches that make the holiday unforgettable. From custom Easter baskets and bags to spring-themed treasures for parents, grandparents and teachers, the creative team at Frill Seekers specializes in details that delight. Choose festive basket name tags shaped like bunnies or chicks, elegant monograms or personalized names to make little ones (and grown-ups!) smile.

Entertaining this Easter? Consider a timeless charcuterie board engraved with your family name or monogram, or a set of custom wine glasses perfect for spring gatherings all year long. And if you're celebrating at someone else's home, don't forget the Southern tradition of a thoughtful hostess gift. A monogrammed tote, blessing beads, stationery or a beautiful tea towel makes a gracious statement.

Hosting Easter brunch? Frill Seekers can create custom menus and letter place cards to elevate your table setting.

Personalize it. Customize it. Hop to it! Shop online at FrillSeekersGifts.com or visit the motherland of all things monogrammed.

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

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frillseekersgifts.com

Step Into Spring Beautiful Pure & Couture Salon

A new season is the perfect excuse for a refresh — and Pure & Couture Salon is ready to pamper you from the moment you walk in the door. From a welcoming beverage to a relaxing scalp massage during your shampoo, the experience is designed to help you unwind while elevating your look. Whether you're brightening up with

blond sparkle, embracing rich brunette curls or blending in gorgeous extensions for added texture, Pure & Couture's experienced and creative team listens carefully to what you want and works with your skin tone, face shape, lifestyle and budget.

Spring is about lightness and glow — warm up your color, add fresh styling or complete your makeover with makeup, a facial, kinesiology or a therapeutic massage. When you leave, your hair says it all. Have your wedding coming up? No problem. Let the team help you with hair, makeup and more!

Pure & Couture also offers curbside pickup and online ordering, making it easy to stay connected. And for even more reason to celebrate — the second location, Pure Collective Salon, is open at 600 Grand Blvd., Suite 102.

Feel confident. Feel refreshed. Feel purely beautiful.

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

A Sweet Taste of Spring Smallcakes Destin

Spring calls for color — and cupcakes deliver!

USA TODAY named Smallcakes one of the "Top Ten Cupcake Places to Try" in the country, and the City Market location continues to wow guests with award-winning creations that have even found their way to celebrities.

March brings a fresh lineup of seasonal flavors and frostings in bright spring hues, along with the daily favorites guests love. Each day features 13 signature flavors, four specialty flavors and 12 house-made ice cream flavors. From gourmet cupcakes and jumbo cookies to brownies, cookie cakes, cupcakes-in-a-jar and gourmet popcorn, there's something for every sweet tooth.

Planning a celebration such as St. Patrick's Day? Custom orders are welcome — from birthday and wedding cakes to custom edible logos and images on cupcakes. Gluten-free options are available, and yes, even "pup" cakes for furry friends.

Can't decide? Sample them all with a 12-pack of assorted minis.

Call ahead for pre-orders, DoorDash or curbside pickup.

Hours: Monday–Saturday, 11 a.m.–7 p.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m.–4 p.m.

(850) 842-9002 | [SmallCakes-Destin.com](https://www.facebook.com/SmallCakes-Destin.com) | [Follow @SmallCakesofDestin](https://www.instagram.com/SmallCakesofDestin)

Recharge, Restore, Renew CRYO850 Performance and Recovery Center

March is a perfect time to reset — and CRYO850 Performance and Recovery Center offers powerful, drug-free ways to help your body feel its best.

Red Light Therapy, also known as Photobiomodulation (PBM), supports cellular renewal by rejuvenating damaged cells from the inside out. The Mito Red Light Therapy system delivers three wavelengths of light for full-body exposure, while Near Infrared lighting helps boost ATP (energy) and balance hormones.

Looking for a comprehensive wellness approach? The Wellness Circuit includes access to six therapies: Infrared Sauna, Red Light Therapy, Whole Body Cryotherapy, Localized Spot Treatment CRYO, Vibration Plates and Compression Therapy. Membership options allow consistent access, while visitors can choose a day, week or two-week pass.

Beyond the Circuit, Pagani Muscle Recovery Therapy alternates hot and cold application to mimic hours of traditional heat and cold therapy. For

next-level recovery, the Cocoon Fitness POD combines heat, light and full-body vibration.

Memberships start as low as \$99 per month, with 10% military discounts, 15% spousal discounts and 25% off for students. Pre-register online and make this season about focusing on you.

(850) 279-4145 | [facebook.com/CRYO850](https://www.facebook.com/CRYO850)
cryo850.com

Love Where You Live — and Profit from It Brian LoCicero, REALTOR®

Spring often sparks fresh starts — and for many homeowners, that means thinking seriously about selling. If love is in the air, let it extend to your bottom line. Luxury REALTOR® Brian K. LoCicero is sharing insider strategies designed to help sellers get top dollar in any market.

Brian's popular book reveals proven tactics used by the most successful home sellers — strategies that shorten time on market while maximizing value. These are the same methods Brian has used to help sell thousands of homes across Northwest Florida.

"In this book, I've provided an effective guide for you to have the most successful real estate transaction possible," Brian said. "We hired Brian to help us navigate 30A's tough real estate market," said client A. Albright. "Because of his efforts and strategies that he details in his book, we quickly sold our Destin home and bought a 30A beachfront home, below asking price."

Ready to fall in love with your selling results?

Email Brian@BeOnTheCoast.com or call.

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Community

Museum Series: A Special Exhibit to Honor African American Military History

By BARBARA PALMGREN

Having worked with Jonathan Holmes, Aerospace Museum Curator at the Air Force Armament Museum located on Eglin Air Force Base and

easily accessible to the public, I learned of a new project soon to be shared with everyone. The Armament Museum is one of the members of the county group of museums that support

and promote all museums in Okaloosa County.

The African American Military Historical Society (AAHMS), is a 501C3 non-profit organization dedicated to

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preserving the historical contributions of African Americans in American military history within U.S. borders and overseas from the Revolutionary War to present day.

The mission of the AAMHS is to research, establish and continually develop a well-documented multi-visual educational timeline that can be used to educate on different historical platforms for future generations of the contributions and sacrifices.

The AAHMHS was formed in 2021 by Mr. Jonathan Holmes, Sr., who retired from the USAF in 2013 and then began working at the Armament Museum. Jonathan attended a Tuskegee Airmen event in 2019 and then, after a Juneteenth event in 2021 and the introduction of free-standing military Quonset huts at the Armament Museum, Jonathan asked permission to have one of these buildings dedicated to a project to preserve this legacy of the African American military.

This stand-alone African American Military History Exhibit Hall in the U.S. Air Force's

Heritage Program will be located at the Air Force Armament Museum. Contributions are still needed and appreciated for the displays, which are funded through contributions to the AAMHS. You can visit aamhsociety.org to donate.

The African American Military History Exhibition Hall is set to open in Spring/Summer 2026. This unique exhibition hall will feature interactive displays, artifacts, displays of military artwork, and more. Jonathan told me this is the only exhibit like this in the country! I think this is a project our community can truly be proud of as we share it with everyone who visits the Armament Museum.

I am honored to share this upcoming information with the public in this special year when we celebrate the 250th anniversary of the birth of our nation. During the Revolutionary War, African Americans fought as patriots in the Continental Army to secure our nation as an independent nation, the United States of America.

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Emerald Coast Boat & Lifestyle Show March 6-8

“Growth!” That is how Scott Burt of the Emerald Coast Boat & Lifestyle Show described this year’s event, which returns to Panama City Beach March 6th-8th.

Boating, fishing, and outdoor enthusiasts, as well as those who love living the Coastal Lifestyle, will notice the show’s growth, with dealers expanding their footprints and showcasing new brands and models. The Grand Lawn portion of the show will feature 50% more boats this year than in previous years, as Ashley Marine will join longtime Grand Lawn dealers Marine-Max and Grander Marine.

Also joining the show this year is Bill Cramer Chevrolet GMC as the Official Truck of the 2026 Emerald Coast Boat and Lifestyle Show. The local dealer will be featuring Chevrolet and GMC trucks at Aaron Bessant Park for those who will need a new tow vehicle to match their new boat purchase.

Guests at the show will also notice the growth at the show’s venue, Aaron Bessant Park. The

70-acre, meticulously maintained green space has added a new 4,800-square-foot pavilion, new fencing, enhanced landscaping, and a new lighting and sound system.

“The park has never looked better,” said Burt. “The city has done a great job with all the new enhancements, and I know they will be well received by those coming to the show.”

Again this year, the top dealers in the Southeast will display more than 400 boats, which is more than 40 million dollars’ worth of bay boats, pontoons, cruisers, personal watercraft, and center consoles, from 17’ to those well over 40 feet, along with the latest marine electronics and innovations.

This on-site collection of dealers and manufacturers allows buyers to compare boats side by side while taking advantage of the best discounts and incentives available exclusively at the show.

In addition to boats, a curated lineup of Coastal Lifestyle exhibitors and vendors



will showcase the best of Gulf Coast living. Boating accessories, fishing, paddle boarding, kayaking, biking, electric carts, product demonstrations, seminars, beach furniture, coastal artists, condo and beach house furnishing, kids’ activities, live music, food trucks, craft beer, and cocktails are all part of the show.

Parking for the show is always free at the adjacent Pier Park. The show will once again honor military members and first responders on Sunday. For

the most up-to-date information on the show, including dealers, brands, exhibitors, and vendors, or to purchase tickets in advance to ‘skip the line,’ visit Emerald-CoastBoatShow.com.

Show Dates & Time:

Friday March 6 “Red Carpet Opening Day” 10 a.m. to Sunset

Saturday, March 7 “Locals Day” 10 a.m. to Sunset

Sunday, March 8 “Military Appreciation Day” 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.*

* Active and Retired service members enter free with Valid ID (Sunday Only)

Ticket Prices:

Pre-Sale Online Only
(1 Day Pass - Valid until March 5th): \$15

General Admission
(1 Day Pass): \$20

Platinum Admission
(3 Day Pass): \$35

Kids (12 and under): Free



TICKETS



EMERALD COAST BOAT & LIFESTYLE SHOW

MARCH 6-8

AARON BESSANT PARK





No More Property Tax for Florida's Homesteaded Residences



By PAUL DOMENECH

It's interesting timing. I've been talking about affordability and why lowering interest rates alone isn't the solution. Lower taxes and lower insurance—that's how you relieve pressure without pouring fuel on inflation. That's how you protect purchasing power the right way.

Right now, Florida Governor DeSantis is calling for the removal of property taxes for Florida's homesteaded residents, rooted in the belief that the American Dream was built on owning land free and clear. On the surface, that resonates. If you've paid off

your home, why should you continue paying on it? Fair question. But the deeper conversation isn't just about eliminating a tax, it's about how we maintain what protects and supports that property.

Property taxes currently fund public schools, law enforcement, fire departments and EMS, roads and drainage systems, hurricane and emergency management, parks and beach access, libraries, courts, planning and zoning, infrastructure maintenance, and in many areas, water and sewer systems. Especially here on the Emerald Coast, where resilience and public safety are not luxuries but necessities, those services are foundational. So, the real issue isn't simply removal; it's what replaces that revenue and how we continue funding the backbone of our communities.

If not us, then who will pay? If we're going to talk about removing property taxes, then we also need to have an honest conversation about who should car-



ry the weight. I'm comfortable saying it—the companies using our beautiful Emerald Coast to generate profit should be part of that solution. We're no longer just competing with local families building a life here. We're competing with investment funds, short-term rental operators, and out-of-state cash that view our community as a revenue stream. To them, these aren't homes, they're balance sheet assets. When properties are purchased as income vehicles instead of primary residences, supply tightens for the people who actually want to homestead, raise their kids, and plant roots. In a premier

destination market like ours, demand isn't just local, it's national and global. And when outside capital extracts profit without living here, prices rise and affordability becomes tougher for the very workforce that keeps this place running.

If we're going to restructure property taxes, let's be intentional. Protect the homeowners. Protect the workforce. And have the real conversation about how companies profiting from our paradise can help sustain the infrastructure, safety, and systems that make it valuable in the first place.

Let me be clear; this is not a done deal. It's still being worked through. Nothing has been finalized. But, this is the moment to keep your ears open and start paying attention. Because, if this moves forward, it will be up to us to get behind the wheel. This isn't a Democrat issue. It isn't a Republican issue. This is

a for-the-people, by-the-people moment. A chance for our community and our state to champion and pioneer what was once a cornerstone of the American Dream, affordable homeownership, and shape it in a way that truly works for the people who live here.

Home selling is not about a pretty picture, social media popularity, or being known as a Realtor. It's about being worth knowing. So, before buying or selling, when you ask the question, "How is the real estate market?" If the answer starts and ends with interest rates, you might want to find the person who has much more to say. I will continue to follow up to make sure our community is informed. Until then, if you have any questions about buying or selling, feel free to reach out to me personally at 850-543-1418. I welcome all conversations that create a higher level of thinking about real estate and, really, anything.

God Bless AMERICA.

A House Sold Name



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Watersound Fountains is the kind of place best experienced firsthand.

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Whether for a few days, a few weeks, or an entire season, a short-term stay allows guests to step into the rhythm of the community without pressure or long-term commitment. It's an opportunity to live here — not imagine it.

Mornings begin quietly. Sunlight filters through the windows. Coffee is unhurried. Some guests head to the fitness center or pool. Others ease into the day with a walk, breakfast with neighbors, or time outdoors near the surrounding protected forest.

"I happened to be here spending the weekend," one



member laughs. "And I haven't left. I just stayed."

That moment, when a stay starts to feel like everyday life, often comes as a surprise.

During a short-term stay, guests enjoy full access to the community. Chef-prepared meals. Wellness classes. Fitness studios. Social spaces designed for conversation and connection. Maintenance and daily details are handled, freeing up



both time and mental space.

By mid-morning, the community hums gently with activity. A balance class here. Coffee with new friends there. Someone deciding, on a whim, to try the golf simulator or join a book discussion. There's always something happening, but nothing is required.

That flexibility is intentional. "I like that I don't have to commit to anything," a member shares. "Some days I'm busy. Some days I'm not. Either way feels right."

Afternoons stretch into easy hours. Guests gather in the W

Lounge, spend time poolside, or explore nearby favorites along 30A. On Fridays, many discover one of the community's most loved traditions: dinner at The Mark, where reservations, conversation, and chef-prepared meals turn an ordinary evening into something to look forward to.

For some, a short-term stay is about proximity — spending more time near children or grandchildren and being close enough for everyday moments, not just holidays. For others, it's about location: enjoying coastal living, escaping colder climates,

or simply experiencing a different pace of life for a while.

What short-term guests often mention isn't just the amenities or the setting. It's how effortless daily life becomes.

No home maintenance. No property upkeep. Beaches, shops, and local favorites just a short drive away. A new Publix supermarket is right next door.

"It's life, just with fewer things to manage," one member explains. "There's more time to enjoy the day."

That's the heart of a short-term stay at Watersound Fountains. It's not about deciding right away. It's about giving yourself time to settle in, observe, and see what fits.



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BY DANICA LAFAIRE
Before they ever walk in, your

customers have already decided. Spring Break is coming whether we are ready or not.

If you're a business owner, you can feel it. The conversations are shifting. Attention to detail is back in the room. Customer experience isn't just a buzzword this year—it's strategy.

Because here's the truth: Just because it's built... doesn't mean they will come. We have to earn it. And earning it starts before a customer ever opens your door.

The Purchase Begins on the Sidewalk

Picture this: You walk up to a restaurant. The windows are streaked. There are cobwebs in the corners. The entry glass hasn't been touched in weeks.

You haven't even looked at the menu yet — but your brain already has. You may still go inside. But instead of ordering the fresh catch or the chef's special, you play it safe.

"Maybe I'll just get the chick- en strips."

Why? Because the brain is wired to look for signals of safety and quality. Cleanliness is one of the fastest indicators we use to assess whether something is trustworthy (Journal of Environmental Psychology).

The mind starts building a story long before a transaction happens.

Now imagine the opposite.

You walk up to a storefront that is bright. Inviting. The glass is spotless. The entry feels intentional.

There are no red flags firing in your brain.

Instead of scanning for problems, you're thinking:

"I can't wait to see the menu."

"I want to try that dress on."

"This looks promising."

Clean glass doesn't shout.

It simply removes friction.

The Hard Truth: Your exterior is either reinforcing your brand... or quietly working against it.

High Volume = High Impression Count

Seasonal surges don't just bring more people; they bring more first-time visitors. These are customers who:

- Don't know your reputation yet.
- Don't know your history.
- Haven't built loyalty with you.

All they have is what they see.

Customer experience isn't just what happens inside your walls.

It starts in the parking lot.

On the sidewalk.

In the reflection of your glass.

Are you being intentional about all of it?

This Season, Be Intentional

Spring Break will bring opportunity.

The traffic will increase.

The impressions will multiply.

The opportunities will show up.

The question is — are you positioned to earn them?

Before you invest more in ads this season, take a walk across the street from your building.

Look at it the way a first-time visitor would.

Is there anything creating friction?

Because clean windows don't just look good.

They remove doubt.

They signal care.

They support spending.

And in a season where every interaction matters, why would we leave something that visible to chance?

A Final Thought

At Fish Window Cleaning, we maintain more than glass.

We care for entryways, doors, frames, and storefront facades — because your exterior is part of your marketing whether you plan for it or not.

Our job isn't just to make something shine.

It's to help you protect your reputation and position your business to earn every opportunity that walks up to your door.

If you're preparing for season and want to be intentional about the impression you're making, we're here to help. 850.842.2162



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Exterior Maintenance Impacts Spending Behavior

Research shows that exterior appearance significantly influences whether customers choose to enter a business and—more importantly—how long they stay.

The Psychological Reality:

- If your building looks cared for, customers assume your product is cared for.
- If your exterior feels neglected, customers subconsciously question everything inside.
- When uncertainty enters the “buying brain,” spending decreases. Not because your product isn't good, but because doubt arrived first.

Windows Are Marketing – Whether You Mean Them to Be or Not

We spend thousands on social media ads, SEO, and promotions. But one of the most overlooked marketing tools is the physical condition of the building itself.

Your windows.

Your entry doors.

Your frames.

Even the facade your signage sits against.

They are not just surfaces.

They are signals.

After years working with storefronts, I've seen the difference firsthand. Businesses that consistently maintain their glass don't just look better—they feel more established, more intentional, and more trustworthy.

Spring Prep: Refreshing Exteriors Before the Busy Season Arrives



BY KYLE SPARKS,
OVATION PAINTING

March on the Emerald Coast signals the start of one of the busiest times of year. With spring break visitors arriving in full force, homes and rental properties are suddenly in the spotlight. First impressions matter — and nothing makes a property feel fresh, clean, and cared for like a newly painted exterior.

For homeowners, a spring exterior refresh protects against salt, sun, and rain while boosting curb appeal. It's a smart way to tackle peeling paint, fading, or water damage before those issues grow. By updating now, you'll enjoy the fresh look all season long while adding a protective layer that carries you through summer.

For property management companies and rental agencies, spring is make-or-break season. Families notice details the moment they pull up, and a home that looks tired on the outside can leave the wrong impression



before guests even step inside. A clean, crisp exterior communicates quality, care, and professionalism — all of which help boost bookings and keep owners confident in your services.

March and April are high-traffic months, so scheduling painting projects can take coordination. That's why it's wise to look

ahead to May, when spring break slows and there's a short window of breathing room before the summer surge begins. Planning now means your property — or

your portfolio of homes — will be ready to shine when the next wave of seasonal activity arrives.

Whether you're a homeowner, a rental agency, or managing multiple properties, spring is the season to get ahead. A freshly painted exterior not only protects your investment but ensures your property looks its absolute best during one of the busiest times of the year.

Ready to give your home the protection it deserves? Reach out to Ovation Painting and let's plan your refresh today. Call or text us at (850) 830-9668 to get started. And as a thank you to those who serve, we proudly offer a military and first responder discount!

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AJ's Seafood & Oyster Bar

Since 1984, AJ's Seafood and Oyster Bar has been serving cold Gulf Coast oysters and cool libations. From its humble beginning shucking oysters off the deck behind a small trailer on the Destin Harbor, it has grown to four locations along our Emerald Coast, serving fresh seafood, live music and exciting water activities in the Destin area. AJ's serves up delicious daily specials, mouth-watering drinks plus entertaining live music all month.

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

Austons on 98

Offering an amazing raw oyster bar and the best happy



hour in town, Austons is the place to be and home of the 102-foot bar, including 32 beers on draft! Some of the specialties include little neck clams, freshly shucked raw oysters, New England-style clam chowder and jumbo shrimp cocktail. With big

screen TVs all around and football season upon us, there's no bad seat in the house. So, come by and watch the games all season long. Happy Hour daily from 3-6 p.m., \$2 off all bar drinks. Bucket Specials all day every day. Monday-Friday from 3 p.m. - 5 p.m. \$3 off a dozen raw oysters. Austons 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 austons98.com.

(850) 842-3200
125 Poinciana Blvd.,
Miramar Beach
Austons98.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.

(850) 837-3645
288-B Harbor Blvd., Destin
Boathouseoysterbardestin.com

Café Destin

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

(850) 424-6777
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cafedestin.com

Coastal Protein & Energy

Fuel your day the healthy way at Coastal Protein & Energy, Destin's cutest spot for clean caffeine and protein-packed treats. Sip on energizing loaded teas, protein coffee and shakes, or dig into protein waffles, smoothie bowls and even guilt-friendly protein donuts - all crafted to keep you going strong. Tucked along Harbor Boulevard in Norred Plaza across from Boshamps, this bright, beachy hangout has quickly become a favorite for locals looking for fast, feel-

Continued on page 26

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Fridays:	4pm: Jason Findley 8pm: Airavata
Saturdays:	12pm: Joey Collins 4pm: Flash Flood 8pm: Gunner
Sundays:	12pm: Brendon Preece 4pm: Shane Curle 8pm: Shane Curle Trip

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SCAN FOR TICKETS

Gators + Food + Booze = Fun At Fudpucker's GatorFest 2026

GatorFest 2026

Get ready for GatorFest 2026, returning on May 2, 2026 from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. for four action-packed hours of food, fun, and Florida wildlife. Hosted at Destin's favorite family hotspot, this annual celebration brings locals and visitors together to honor one of the Gulf Coast's most iconic creatures, the alligator.

And here's the best part: General Admission is FREE.

GatorFest Activities

GatorFest 2026 delivers an immersive Florida festival experience with something for every age group.



- Thrilling Gator Shows featuring up-close demonstrations and educational insights

- The fan-favorite Gator Tail Cook-Off Competition, where local chefs compete for bragging rights

- Live entertainment and music throughout the event

The Kid Zone is packed with family-friendly fun, including face painting and gator-themed games designed to keep young adventurers engaged and smiling all afternoon.

Adults can explore specialty vendors, sample bold flavors, and soak in the coastal festival energy that makes this event a local favorite year after year.

Admission Options

General Admission is FREE. Enjoy full access to the vendor marketplace, Kid Zone, live music, gator shows, and all general festival entertainment.

Bring the whole crew, no ticket needed.

VIP Experience

Upgrade your day with exclusive access to the VIP tent and Gator Tail Cook-Off tasting.

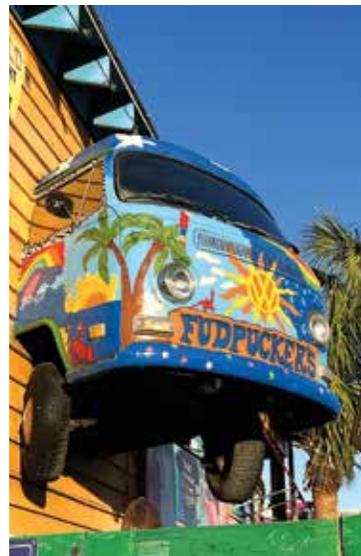
\$30 (21+) – Includes alcoholic samples.

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VIP is your ticket to tasting the best gator tail on the Emerald Coast in cool, shaded comfort.

Fudpucker's Beachside Bar & Grill

Fudpucker's Beachside Bar & Grill continues to lead the way in family-friendly entertainment along the Emerald Coast. Home to Gator Beach, known as "The



World's Greatest Alligator Park," guests can experience safe, educational interactions with live alligators all year long.

From Pirate Brew Fest to Kid's Day to the Noon Year's Eve Balloon Drop and other signature events, Fudpucker's has built a reputation for unforgettable experiences, and GatorFest is no exception.

Food, Fun & Gators

Whether you're coming for the free family fun, the VIP tastings, the live shows, or just an excuse to spend a Saturday surrounded by great food and great people, GatorFest 2026 is the place to be.

Mark your calendar, invite your friends, and join us at Fudpucker's, where the wild is welcomed and the memories are legendary.

So, stop by and have some fun at Fud's Gatorfest – see you later, alligator!

Visit Us in Destin
20001 Emerald Coast Pkwy
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www.Fudpucker.com

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DESTIN DINING

continued from page 24

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

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Fudpucker's Beachside Bar & Grill

"Ya Ain't Been Pucked Til Ya Been Fudpucked!" Fudpucker's

Beachside Bar & Grill in Destin has been locally owned and operated since its inception in 1982. Fudpucker's restaurant stands out by being dedicated to its owners' three favorite "F" words: Food, Fun and Family. Fudpucker's is not just a restaurant, it's not just a bar, it's a one-of-a-kind entertainment experience, and one that can be enjoyed by locals, kids and fam-

ilies 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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Looking for a locals' favorite breakfast before the game? Start your day off right with Tailfins breakfast from 8-11 a.m., seven days a week. Enjoy a classic breakfast with bacon and eggs, a seafood or Cajun omelet and even a kid's smiley pancake. Be sure to order up a round of mimosas and Bloody Marys. Enjoy some of your favorite food and drinks, scrumptious early bird dinner specials Monday to Friday, 3-6 p.m. Happy hour from 3-6 p.m. Monday through Friday, featuring \$24 domestic bottle buckets, \$7 house wines and well drinks and \$7 Long Island iced teas. Live music on the docks 7 days a week. Tailfins is a go-to destination for sports watching featuring more than

100 big screen TVs showing college and pro games. March Madness is here. Don't miss a single game and be sure to check out our Jumbotron outside on the docks.

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Destin Gets Magic + Comedy for Another Year!

After a well-received, successful first season at The Palms Resort in Destin, the Magic & Comedy Destin show has signed on for a second season — along with several new enhancements for guests.

The showroom now features all table seating, with bar wait-staff taking drink orders prior

to the performance. Guests can enjoy alcoholic and nonalcoholic beverages delivered directly to their tables so they don't miss a moment of the live show.

The action-packed production features world-class magic, comedy and ventriloquism, with interactive illusions performed just inches from the audience.

While the sophisticated magic and smart comedy are geared toward adults, the show remains family-friendly and appropriate for all ages.

The residency is headlined by Bart Rockett, who hosted his own nationally syndicated television show for three seasons, had a co-starring role on the former NBC drama "Parenthood," and headlined his own 1,000-seat theater in Branson, Missouri, for nine seasons. He has performed

in more than 90 countries and headlined for most major cruise lines worldwide.

Rockett, who began performing at age 10, trained under Jeff Dunham and is recognized for his ventriloquism, which is featured prominently in the show. After growing up in the South, Rockett moved to Hollywood, California, where his management team is based. He also coached his children to the finals of NBC's "America's Got Talent," and they

have since appeared in major Hollywood projects.

His son, Kadan, starred in the film "Dark Skies" with Keri Russell and appeared on CBS's "Rush Hour." He joins his sister, Brooklyn, for guest appearances in the Destin show.

Brooklyn gained national attention for her viral Super Bowl commercial, which has nearly 800 million views on YouTube.

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THE ALICE

continued from page 14

space for focused discussion.

By accommodating these gatherings locally, particularly during midweek windows properties like ours at The Alice contribute to a more diversified business ecosystem. Executive retreats extend economic activity beyond weekend leisure peaks and support local service providers across multiple industries.

In addition, attracting out-of-region corporate groups introduces new business travel spending into the area. Multi-day retreats generate lodging, dining, recreation, and vendor engagement that complement traditional tourism revenue streams.

The Role of Place in Leadership Decision-Making

As companies navigate economic uncertainty, workforce transformation and long-term growth strategies, leadership alignment has become increasingly critical. Where those conversations take place can influ-

ence both tone and outcome.

Environmental psychology research suggests that natural surroundings can support cognitive clarity and reduce stress, factors that may contribute to more effective decision-making. While corporate retreats alone do not determine strategic success, many organizations are reconsidering how physical space influences collaboration dynamics.

With its focus on privacy, structured programming, creative partnerships and midweek executive convening, The Alice reflects a growing recognition that productivity and well-being need not be separate priorities.

As the Emerald Coast continues to diversify its economic base, executive retreat destinations such as The Alice are becoming part of a broader conversation about how business, hospitality and leadership development intersect in a changing professional landscape.

We welcome you to tour and talk with our team here at The Alice about how we can best support you and your meeting intentions.

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Why Hiring a Licensed and Insured Contractor Protects More Than Your Project

By KIMBERLY C. COLE

Homeowners rarely intend to hire unlicensed or uninsured contractors. Often, it starts with a recommendation from a neighbor, a name shared at a gathering, or someone familiar with local projects. The price seems reasonable, the process feels informal, and the timeline promises efficiency—until something goes wrong.

Construction projects, especially those involving structural elements, utilities, or waterfront improvements, come with significant risks. When issues arise, many homeowners are surprised at how much responsibility can

fall back on them. Understanding contractor licensing and insurance isn't about being overly cautious; it's about protecting your home, investment, and peace of mind.

Licensing: Accountability and Protection

A licensed contractor meets state requirements to legally perform construction work—typically passing exams, demonstrating financial responsibility, complying with codes, and pulling necessary permits. Licensing creates accountability: if a licensed contractor violates building codes or cuts corners, a regulatory body

can intervene. There's no such oversight with unlicensed work.

Many routine projects—such as structural repairs, electrical work, plumbing, HVAC installation, roofing, major renovations, dock or seawall work—require a licensed contractor. Even straightforward jobs may trigger permitting and inspection requirements if they impact safety or infrastructure.

Homeowners should feel comfortable requesting a contractor's license number, which can be independently verified. In Florida, for example, the DBPR license portal allows users to review a contractor's status, classi-

fication, and disciplinary history. It's also important to confirm who will pull permits; a properly licensed contractor does this in their own name, not the homeowner's. Licensing is more than a formality—it proves the contractor is qualified, accountable, and legally authorized to protect your home.

Not all services need a specialty construction license. Routine tree trimming, landscaping, pressure washing, pool cleaning, and general maintenance usually do not. However, even if licensing isn't required, any provider should offer a current certificate of insurance and, if employing workers, proof of workers' compensation or a valid exemption. Verifying insurance is smart, even for basic services.

In Florida, hiring an unlicensed contractor for work requiring a license carries a major risk: the contract may be legally unenforceable. State courts have repeatedly held that such contracts are void, meaning the contractor generally cannot sue for unpaid fees or enforce payment provisions, even if the homeowner agreed to the terms. This law protects the public by discouraging unlicensed work and ensuring only qualified professionals handle critical projects.

If a dispute with an unlicensed contractor arises, homeowners may find themselves unable to enforce contract terms like completion deadlines, warranty obligations, payment schedules, or fixes for defective work. The law intends to discourage unlicensed activity but often leaves homeowners with fewer legal remedies when problems occur. Verifying licensure before work begins ensures the contract is valid and enforceable, giving homeowners clear legal protection if the work is delayed, substandard, or abandoned.

Insurance: Essential Safeguards

Insurance is just as critical as proper licensing—and in many ways, it is the homeowner's last line of protection when something goes wrong. An insured contractor carries coverage designed to protect you, not just their business. If a worker is injured on your property, a neigh-

boring home is damaged, or something fails after installation, insurance helps cover those costs and prevents the financial burden from falling back on the homeowner.

When a contractor is uninsured or underinsured, the risk shifts dramatically. Homeowners can be held personally responsible for injuries, property damage, or code-related issues, even if they had no direct involvement in the work. In some cases, a homeowner's own insurance policy may deny coverage if the contractor lacked proper insurance, leaving the homeowner exposed to lawsuits, medical claims, or repair costs that far exceed the original project price.

Before any work begins, homeowners should always request proof of insurance. Reputable contractors expect this request and provide it readily. At a minimum, homeowners should look for an active general liability policy, and when workers are present, workers' compensation coverage. Review the certificate carefully: confirm the policy is current, the coverage limits are appropriate for the scope of the project, and the business name exactly matches the contractor listed on the contract and any permit applications.

Taking a few minutes to verify insurance is not an inconvenience—it's a smart safeguard. Proper insurance helps ensure that if something unexpected happens, the financial and legal consequences do not land on the homeowner.

Choosing a licensed and insured contractor isn't about spending more—it's about protecting your home and your investment. Proper licensing and insurance help ensure the work can be permitted, inspected, insured, and defended if problems arise later. Spending a few minutes up front to verify credentials can prevent costly mistakes, unexpected liability, and long-term frustration. When you hire professionals who meet these standards, you're not just getting the job done—you're safeguarding your property, your financial security, and your peace of mind by doing it right the first time.

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Inspiring Stewardship. Protecting Our Future. Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance 2025 Impact

BY ALLISON MCDOWELL, CBA

For three decades, the Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance (CBA) has worked at the intersection of science, education, and restoration to protect one of Northwest Florida's most vital natural resources. Guided by data and powered by sustainable partnerships, CBA continues to advance meaningful, measurable conservation across the watershed.

Restoration

CBA's restoration work in 2025 focused on strengthening natural systems that protect water quality and coastal resilience.

- 140 vertical oyster gardens cultivated throughout the watershed

In 2025, CBA added 8 new sites for a total of 145 active water quality monitoring sites across the watershed, continuing to provide essential field expertise and data support for environmental monitoring and research throughout the region.

Working alongside university, county, state, and federal partners, CBA helped expand monitoring coverage, improve public access to data, and strengthen the scientific foundation for both coastal and freshwater protection. These collaborative efforts ensure that restoration and management decisions are guided by sound science and a long-term understanding of our waterways.

Sustainable Partnerships

CBA's impact is amplified through collaboration. Key partnerships in 2025 included:

- Northwest Florida Water Management District
- Oyster shell recycling restaurants
- Islanders Coastal Outfitter

- JW Couch Foundation
- Together, these partners help fund, expand, and sustain restoration and education initiatives throughout the Basin.



- 200+ tons of recycled oyster shells collected and returned to local waters for habitat creation
- 3.35 acres of salt marsh and oyster habitat restored
- 600+ tons of limestone placed at higher-energy shoreline sites to reduce erosion and support living shoreline development
- Seagrass restoration lab initiated, with pilot plantings launched to expand submerged aquatic vegetation recovery efforts

Education & Outreach

Environmental stewardship begins in the classroom. In 2025, CBA reached 3,000+ students across 20 public schools and five homeschool groups, delivering monthly hands-on lessons aligned with STEM skills and Florida science standards. Programs like Grasses in Classes and oyster gardening give students real-world environmental experience, connecting classroom learning to tangible restoration outcomes. Through immersive, standards-based curriculum, CBA is cultivating the next generation of scientists, conservationists, and informed citizens.

Monitoring & Research

As a leader in environmental monitoring, CBA places science-based conservation at the forefront of protecting the Choctawhatchee Basin.

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 Sports

Golf Series: Blue Tee Restaurant Serves Golfers and Community at Blue Water Bay Golf Club



BY BARBARA PALMGREN

Growing up in Oklahoma, Trinity Coleman worked at her mother's steakhouse — a restaurant that served three meals a day. Later, she stepped away from the restaurant business as she married Trey Coleman and spent many happy, active-duty military years with Trey and their three children while he served in the United States Air Force.

Five years ago, now retired, Trinity and Trey returned to their restaurant roots. Drawing on years of experience, they

purchased Tisano's restaurant in Bluewater Bay from Mike Tisa. Their culinary creations quickly became part of the Niceville community's favorite reasons to dine out and support local business.

When Trinity learned that the restaurant at Bluewater Bay Golf Club was available, it felt like the perfect opportunity to change locations and help the club once again offer food to golfers and the public. After purchasing the venue in June 2025, Trinity and Trey spent two months preparing the kitchen and restaurant for opening.

What a grand opening it was in August! The community was thrilled that three meals a day would once again be served. And how fitting — Trinity understands that good things come in threes. Her mother's steakhouse served three meals, three children make the perfect family ... and yes, the name Trinity does reference "three," doesn't it? Maybe we should rename a



line from a famous song — "It's three o'clock somewhere."

But don't wait for three o'clock. The Blue Tee opens early with a breakfast menu sure to please, featuring crepes, omelets, egg dishes, burritos, benedicts and more — all the makings of one of the Panhandle's best breakfast menus.

Trinity says the top lunch sellers are the Club Sandwich and the Reuben, though with so

many options, guests may want to return again and again to try them all. Dinner offers a wide variety of choices that won't disappoint. In addition to the restaurant and bar area, a private banquet room is available for rental. Trinity can design special banquets for groups, and food and drink options are also available for meetings and gatherings. She says golfers especially appreciate having the

restaurant open again for food and drinks.

Don't wait any longer to try this outstanding new restaurant, The Blue Tee, located in the Bluewater Bay Golf Course clubhouse in Niceville. It's open to the public for breakfast, lunch and dinner, offering a full bar, cocktails and comfort food in a welcoming setting.



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Living Shoreline Enhances Choctawhatchee Bay

By LORI LEATH SMITH

Okaloosa County has completed 2,000 feet of living shoreline along the Choctawhatchee Bay at Ross Marler Park on Okaloosa Island, marking a major milestone in shoreline protection and coastal restoration.

The multi-year project utilized a cost-effective, nature-based solution designed to mitigate erosion while enhancing the coastal ecosystem surrounding Veterans Park and Marler Park.

“This unique landscape is home to so many species that we need to protect,” said Okaloosa County Commissioner Carolyn Ketchel (District 2). “This living shoreline will supplement their success, the health of our bay and extend the life of these wonderful parks.”

Living shorelines are natural or nature-based solutions that protect coastal areas from erosion while supporting habitat and improving water quality. Unlike traditional hard structures such as seawalls or riprap, living shorelines use native vegetation, oyster reefs, coir logs,



and other natural materials to stabilize shorelines. These systems work with natural coastal processes by absorbing wave energy, trapping sediments, and providing essential habitat for fish, crabs, and birds, while also enhancing nutrient filtration, carbon storage, and overall ecological health.

The living shoreline approach was significantly more cost-effective than traditional shoreline barriers and aligned with the parks’ intended use by visitors while prioritizing preser-

vation of the surrounding natural environment.

“Projects like these involve a team from multiple departments in the County,” said Okaloosa County Vice Chairman Drew Palmer (District 5). “I want to thank the engineers, project managers, coastal scientists and grant specialists who worked together to complete this project and ensure that our shorelines are protected for the future enjoyment of the public.”

In addition to reducing long-term erosion maintenance costs,

the living shoreline is expected to grow and strengthen over time. Funding for the project included \$1.5 million in tourism bed tax revenue, a \$1.5 million grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and \$1.6 million from the RESTORE Council through the Gulf Consortium.

“It’s never wrong to be good stewards of the blessings that surround us, and thankfully, this now includes our shoreline,” said Okaloosa County Commissioner Sherri Cox (District 3).

Residents can learn more about living shorelines, including local projects in Choctawhatchee Bay, through the UF/IFAS Okaloosa County Extension Sea Grant program, which works to educate the community on resilient, sustainable coastal solutions that balance shoreline protection with ecological function. Learn more at

sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/okaloosa/fl-sea-grant-coastal-science/choctawhatchee-bay-living-shorelines/

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 Environment

Pine Pollen and Smilax: Ready for Spring?



BY HELEN PETRE

Yes, we are! Winter has been cold and dreary, even though there was no snow this year. While wishing for warm weather, I read a book about Theodore Roosevelt and J.P. Morgan and their solution to the coal strike. I empathize with the cold, wet, mine workers. I am grateful that I am not a coal miner and I do not live in 1902.

In 1902, in the middle of the coal strike, Roosevelt had a state dinner for the King of Prussia to celebrate his new yacht. None

Smilax species. Edith's decorative display for the state dinner.

of them had any idea things were not going to end well for Prussia or Germany, so they all had a great time being rich and spending money. World War I dissolved Prussia and the poor king was not a king anymore, however the state dinner was a fabulous success. They ate terrapin and ice cream, and Edith Roosevelt decorated the dining room with Smilax species vines (those briar kind of vines that grow up trees and everywhere).

The Roosevelt dining room is minus Edith's Smilax, but complete with Theodore's moose and elk. Library of Congress. <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/whitehouse-tour/state-dining-room>.

Smilax is the reason they make those jeans with the extra layer of jean on the front legs so foresters, and other people who crash through the brambles, don't tear their jeans to shreds. Edith strung the vines from the chandeliers and light fixtures, and everywhere she could around her husband's stuffed bears, elk,

Wax myrtle (*Myrica cerifera*). Wikipedia.

bison, and moose heads.

The state dinner was in February, so there was probably nothing else green in DC, however I think Edith is quite the genius, encouraging native plants in an environment of yachts and expensive cigars.

What's Blooming?

Southern wax myrtle is just starting to produce flowering parts. This evergreen shrub smells like bayberry. It is dioecious, with separate male and female plants. Fruit forms on female plants and is food for turkeys and other birds. Wax myrtle fixes nitrogen more efficiently than legumes.

Another dioecious, evergreen shrub that grows well in our sandy forests, **American olive** is just about ready to produce white, fragrant flowers, which will mature into blue black fruit in the fall.

It is the time of yellow pine pollen from all our pine trees, but especially from our native **Choctawhatchee sand pine**, which grows on marine, acid, sandy Entisol soils deposited during the Pleistocene.

Choctawhatchee sand pines grow only on the Panhandle between Pensacola and Panama City and nowhere else. All Choctawhatchee sand pines grow within one degree of latitude, on about 100,000 acres.

As with all pine trees, pollen forms on the male structures, which grow on the bottom half of the tree. Pollen is wind-blown

up to the female pinecones at the top of the tree. Each scale of the female cone contains a winged seed. The female cones open when mature, without fire, but stay on the tree for what seems like forever.

Sand pines provide food and cover for birds and small mammals and make great Christmas trees.

Pine pollen, like goldenrod pollen, is way too big and heavy to cause allergies. It is advertised on Amazon for men, and you are welcome to buy it, but I am quite sure it does nothing.

Embrace our Natives!

There are many other native trees, shrubs, and flowers getting ready to bloom as the weather warms. Here in the Panhandle, we are blessed with native plants and pleasant weather, dune lakes, and the Gulf of America, along with Smilax vines and pine pollen. Embrace nature and the natives. If Smilax is good enough for a White House state dinner for presidents and royalty, it is certainly good enough for us. Enjoy.

If readers have questions or suggestions for articles that concern science, nature, or wild things around the Panhandle, please email petrehelen@gmail.com.

Helen Petre is a retired USDA biologist and college biology professor. She spends her time volunteering, teaching, and writing science articles to share her interests with future generations.

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Your Brain Isn't Failing – It's Overloaded



BY MELANIE YOST, LCSW

At Be Well Solutions, we hear a version of the same sentence almost every day: “I just don’t feel like myself anymore.”

Capable, intelligent, high-functioning adults describe brain fog, poor focus, low motivation, irritability, anxiety, forgetfulness, and emotional overwhelm. Many quietly worry they’re developing ADHD, depression, or even early dementia – and that fear alone adds another layer of stress.

But in many cases, something else is happening.

We are living in a time of stacked, chronic stress. Not one crisis followed by recovery, but a steady stream of pressure – financial concerns, job uncertainty, nonstop notifica-

tions, caretaking responsibilities, health worries, social tension, constant news cycles, and sleep disruption layered on top of it all. Individually these may not seem overwhelming, but together they keep the nervous system in continuous activation.

And here’s what matters: your brain interprets all of it as threat.

Your brain doesn’t distinguish between a physical danger and economic stress or email overload. When it senses an ongoing threat, it shifts from performance mode into survival mode.

Under chronic stress, your brain’s prefrontal cortex – the part responsible for focus, planning, motivation, and emotional regulation – becomes less efficient. That’s why organized adults suddenly feel scattered, procrastinate, and struggle to make simple decisions. At the same time, the brain’s amygdala becomes more reactive, increasing anxiety, irritability, and that constant “on edge” feeling. Additionally, the hippocampus, which supports memory,



becomes sensitive to stress hormones, leading to word-finding difficulty and forgetfulness, symptoms that often scare people into thinking something more serious is wrong.

Stress is not just emotional. It is biological.

The good news is that the brain is adaptable. It shifted to protect you, and with the right

support, it can shift back toward clarity and resilience.

Daily nervous system recovery, consistent sleep, reducing multitasking, real social connection, and physical brain support through movement and nutrition all make a meaningful difference. Small, steady changes help signal safety to the brain.

But we also believe some-

thing powerful happens when you can actually see how your brain is functioning.

At Be Well Solutions, we offer a complimentary QEEG Brain Map – a simple, non-invasive assessment that measures brain-wave patterns and shows us how different regions are communicating. Instead of guessing, we can identify stress-driven overactivity, underperforming executive networks, and imbalances that may be contributing to fog, anxiety, or low motivation.

When we understand what’s happening, we can create a targeted plan to help your brain function better – not just temporarily cope, but truly improve.

If you’ve been thinking, “I don’t feel like myself,” that might be your brain asking for support.

You are not broken.

You might simply be overloaded – and we’re here to help you move forward with clarity.

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The Art of Healthy Unproductivity



By STEPHENIE CRAIG,
JOURNEY BRAVELY

Healthy unproductivity is an art and a practice worth learning. Are you a person who has fun and rests without any guilt or internal drive to return quickly to productivity? If so, well done

and others can learn from you. Or, are you a person who feels pressure to be productive, to work, to tend to your to-do list all of your waking hours? Maybe you're a person who says work must come first and be complete before you can enjoy yourself and relax. Perhaps you believe that unproductivity is useless and lazy. Life gives you all sorts of messages about productivity vs. unproductivity that can be very hard to sort.

American culture transmits clear values about productivity. Get up earlier, fit more into a day, work harder, earn more, save more, buy more, buy bigger...all in the name of achieving success and the American Dream. The family you come from may also have transmitted some values regarding productivity. Work before play, the early bird gets the worm, only lazy people rest, always moving, never sitting, slowing down will get you left behind. Your personal goals can also be strong drivers that do not permit unproductivity.

While having a good work ethic is admirable and important, it can be overdone. Personal growth matters, and at the same time, your brain and body need breaks from the stimulation of productivity. Living in over-productivity can result in hypervigilance in your physical body that often leads to anxiety, depression, excessive tension, chronic pain, other health issues, and relationship problems. Balance between productivity and unproductivity is actually a worthy goal. You don't always need another growth-oriented book, Instagram account, or podcast.

Sometimes what you need is consistent time to intentionally



of rest/fun?

3. Give yourself permission to engage in healthy unproductivity.

Remind yourself that life is best lived with a balance of productivity and fun/rest. Your mental and physical health need some unproductivity. Rest/fun are not lazy but healthy and kind for yourself. You will

put away productivity and embrace fun and rest. Your body was made to need both productive work and unproductive activities meant to spark enjoyment.

So, how do you slow down and pursue some healthy unproductive time?

7 Ways to Practice Healthy Unproductivity

1. Evaluate your current balance of productivity vs. unproductivity. Do you have trouble resting or being still? Do you turn fun activities into something productive? Are you ruled by a to-do list? How often do you engage in intentional unproductive fun or rest?

2. Go deeper. Reflect on what is driving your over-productivity. What current or historical messages make you feel behind or guilty when you rest or are unproductive? What did your parents and other family members teach you about productivity and rest/fun? What are you afraid will happen if you stop producing? How might your sense of value as a person be connected with your productivity? What spiritual messages might be influencing your views

be more productive in your work time when you take unproductive rest time.

4. Explore unproductive activities. Remember the whole point is that it is not productive. Remember what has been fun or restful to you before. Read an unproductive book, use creativity for the sake of fun, play with your pet, lay in a hammock, take a nap, dance to music you love, bake for the joy of it, color, do puzzles, watch a funny show, take a long bath, sit in nature, take a stroll, soak up some sun. Find your version of unproductive fun and rest.

5. Plan. Create intentional and consistent space in your schedule for healthy unproductivity. Mark your calendar. Keep things you need for your fun pursuits handy so participating in activities is accessible. Create restful space where you can enjoy rest and fun regularly.

6. Practice. Pick an unproductive activity and spend an hour engaging in it. It's okay if it is uncomfortable at first. Gently remind yourself that some unproductivity is good for your mind, body, and soul. Let yourself get immersed. Your tasks will still be there later.

7. Repeat. Mark time off in your calendar once a week when you will not schedule other things. Use that time for healthy unproductivity and through repetition, your brain will begin to embrace your new habit.

Taking time for restorative unproductivity is very likely to bring energy and enthusiasm back into your productive life pursuits. Be gracious and consistent with yourself as you explore healthy unproductivity as a life practice. Connect with us along your journey for counseling and coaching at Journeybravely.com.

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TOP 5

continued from page 4

adjustments help the body adapt comfortably.

Omega-3 Fatty Acids - Inflammation & Heart Support

Omega-3 fats help regulate inflammation and support heart health, joint comfort, brain function, and mood stability. Even with access to fresh seafood, consistent intake of meaningful amounts of omega-3s is less common than many assume. Modern dietary patterns tend to favor inflammatory fats over anti-inflammatory ones. As activity increases and seasonal allergens rise, balanced inflammatory support becomes increasingly important.

When I look closer: joint stiffness, cardiovascular risk factors, brain fog, mood variability, and seasonal inflammatory symptoms

Practical Tip: If fish oil results in occasional upper digestive discomfort or burping freezing capsules may help. Those taking blood thinners should consult their provider. Wild-caught fatty fish remains an excellent whole-food option.

Probiotics + Prebiotic Fiber - Digestive Precision

The gut influences immune function, hormone balance, inflammation, and mood. Probiotics introduce beneficial bacteria, the “seeds,” while prebiotic fibers provide the nourishment that allows them to flourish. Together, they help shape digestive terrain.

Not all probiotics are the same. Strains and potencies vary, and prebiotic fibers can aggravate some digestive systems if introduced too quickly. Because not every gut responds the same way, they should be introduced thoughtfully and increased gradually.

It’s also important to recognize that not every digestive system benefits from supplemental probiotics or prebiotic fibers. Certain digestive patterns or underlying gut conditions may require a more targeted approach rather than broad supplementation.

When I look closer: bloating or irregular digestion, recent antibiotic use, immune imbalance, and skin or hormone concerns

Practical Tip: Start low. Increase gradually. Monitor response carefully. Individuals using GLP-1 medications may benefit from additional diges-

tive support due to slowed gastric emptying, but adjustments should always be gradual and individualized.

B-Complex Vitamins - Cellular Energy & Stress Support

B vitamins are essential for energy production, nervous system signaling, red blood cell formation, and stress adaptation. They are not stimulants. They support the body’s ability to generate steady, efficient energy. Stress, hormonal transitions, digestive variability, dietary restriction, or genetic factors can increase demand.

When I look closer: persistent fatigue, brain fog, elevated stress, hormonal shifts, and limited dietary variety

Practical Tip: Form matters. If B12 has not been helpful in the past, the issue may be the form rather than the dose.

Supplements are tools, not shortcuts. Quality matters. Formulation matters. Dosage matters. Context matters most. The goal is not to take more. The goal is to take what is appropriate for your body, your current

demands, and your season of life.

Spring is about renewal, not rushing. Sustainable health is built through steady habits, thoughtful evaluation, and informed decisions, not trends or impulse purchases. When the foundation is strong and support is chosen strategically, small adjustments create meaningful momentum.





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 Wellness



BY DR. RICHARD CHERN, MD

We don't notice it happening at first. Winter rarely announces itself all at once—it settles in quietly. Shorter days. Colder mornings. Longer evenings spent on the couch. Same house, same routine, but something feels different. There's less energy, less motivation, less desire to care.

Where we once enjoyed moving our bodies, getting outside, and feeling strong and capable, now the alarm rings and staying in bed feels easier. Joints ache. Muscles feel weaker. Even simple routines—exercise, cook-

ing well, making time for ourselves—feel like work instead of something life-giving. It's easy to dismiss it as stress, age, or just “the time of year.”

As spring approaches, the light begins to change. A familiar spark returns—the desire to feel better, to take care of ourselves again, to re-engage with life. But the energy we expect doesn't necessarily follow the season. Motivation fades as quickly as it appeared, leaving frustration and the quiet question: Why don't I feel like I should?

At The Hormone Restoration Center, we hear this story every year.

Winter blues aren't just about the weather. They're also about hormones. As daylight decreases, hormonal signaling in the body shifts. Testosterone, estrogen, progesterone, thyroid hormones, cortisol—and even Vitamin D—all influence how

we feel, how we move, how we sleep, and how we recover. What many people don't realize is Vitamin D isn't just a vitamin; it functions as a hormone, affecting mood, immune health, muscle strength, and bone density. During the winter months, when sunlight exposure drops, Vitamin D levels often fall right along with energy and motivation.

When hormones decline or fall out of balance, energy drops, mood flattens, sleep suffers, and winter feels longer and heavier than it should.

Hormones also do far more than influence mood or libido. They are foundational to the body itself. Testosterone and estrogen are essential for maintaining muscle mass in both men and women. When levels are low, the body loses lean muscle—even with consistent exercise. As muscle declines, metab-

olism slows, joints lose support, and fatigue becomes the norm rather than the exception.

Hormones play a critical role in bone health as well. Estrogen, testosterone, and Vitamin D work together to protect bone density. When any of them are deficient, bone loss accelerates, increasing the risk of osteoporosis and fractures in both men and women. This loss happens quietly, often for years, before it ever makes itself known.

This is why so many people feel tired, frustrated, and fragile. Why workouts stop working. Why motivation disappears. Why winter feels like survival instead of rest—and why spring can feel like a letdown.

Hormone optimization helps.

When hormones are restored to healthy levels the body responds. Energy improves. Mus-

cle becomes easier to build and maintain. Bones are protected. Sleep deepens. Mood stabilizes. That natural desire to care for yourself returns.

Hormone Replacement Therapy isn't about pushing the body beyond normal. It's about restoring what time, stress, and life have gradually taken away.

At The Hormone Restoration Center, we take a comprehensive, personalized approach. You're not broken, and you're not alone. You don't have to wait for another season to feel like yourself again. Just call us: (850) 837-1271. It might just change your life.



When Spring Comes Back to Life



BY KRISY ANDERSON, OWNER

We spend the winter bundled up — sweaters, boots, layers. But when spring arrives along the

Emerald Coast, it happens fast. Suddenly, it's sundresses, swimsuits and sunshine.

This is the time of year many

of my clients start thinking not just about skincare — but about skin confidence.

After months of cooler weather, circulation slows, skin can appear dull and areas of the body may feel less firm or toned. Spring is the perfect season to reset and stimulate your skin before summer is in full swing.

One of the most effective ways we do that at Beverly Hills Day Spa is with the Curve — a non-invasive treatment designed to firm, smooth and stimulate collagen on both the face and body.

Rather than focusing on one single method, the Curve works through four complementary technologies that stimulate circulation, encourage collagen production and support the body's natural detox process.

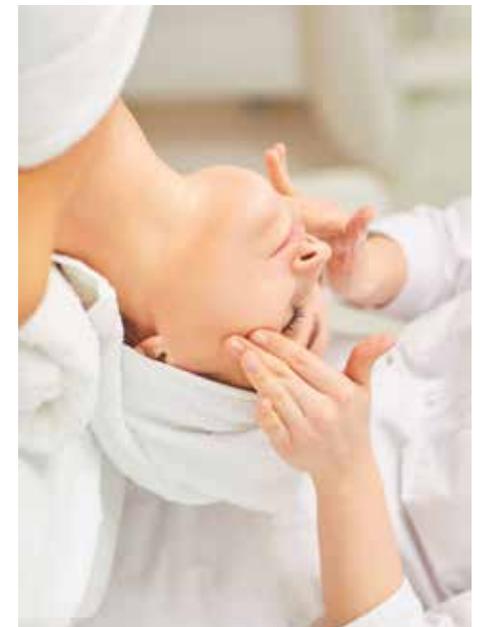
- **Radiofrequency** gently warms tissue to tighten and improve elasticity.
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collagen formation.

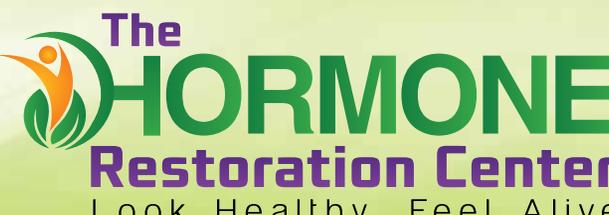
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Self-Care Corner: From Winter Layers to Spring Confidence



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Continued on next page

How Are Your Quercetin Levels?



BY KAY LEAMAN,
HEALTH ARCHITECT

This little gem belongs to a group of plant compounds called flavonoids. It is found in fruits such as grapes, blueberries, strawberries, cherries, apples, grapefruit, cranberries, raspberries and blackberries; vegetables including onions, peppers and broccoli; and beverages like coffee, green tea and red wine.

fee, green tea and red wine.

Quercetin is one of the most abundant antioxidants, and its role is to fight free radical damage. Free radicals can damage our cells, which in turn can promote inflammation. Hippocrates is often quoted as saying, "All disease begins in the gut," and this is closely linked to inflammation.

In an eight-week study, 50 women with rheumatoid arthritis took 500 mg of quercetin daily. They experienced significantly reduced early morning stiffness, morning pain and after-activity pain. Quercetin has also been found to help protect against degenerative brain disorders such as Alzheimer's disease and dementia.

Quercetin offers cardiovascular benefits as well. It may help lower blood pressure and reduce



cholesterol levels by improving endothelial function. This makes it a promising candidate for supporting heart health and helping prevent cardiovascular disease.

In addition, studies have found that quercetin exhibits anti-cancer properties by inhibiting cell proliferation and inducing apoptosis — a type of programmed cell death in which a cell destroys itself when it threatens the survival of its host.

Many studies continue to explore the benefits of this powerful flavonoid. Research has shown:

- Neuroprotective properties
- Inhibition of tumor growth
- Liver protection
- Prevention support for macular degeneration and cataracts
- Quercetin has also demonstrated anti:
 - Bacterial activity
 - Viral activity
 - Obesity-related effects
 - Diabetic complications
 - Hypertensive conditions
 - Allergic responses
 - Asthmatic responses

This is not an exhaustive list of its benefits, but they are certainly worth noting. Look up foods and herbs that contain

quercetin and begin incorporating them into your diet. Check your multivitamin to see whether it contains this antioxidant and in what quantity. A common supplemental target is 500 mg daily.

Quercetin is also available in supplement form; Solaray is one brand often recommended.

Disclaimer: If you are currently taking medication for any of the conditions mentioned above, consult your physician and perform your due diligence regarding potential interactions before beginning supplementation.

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

SELF CARE

continued from previous page

such as thighs, hips, abdomen and upper arms. For the face, it provides lifting and toning benefits — especially along the neck and jawline.

The goal isn't drastic change. It's refinement. Tightening. Smoothing. Feeling confident stepping into spring.

For best results, I recommend two to three treatments per week for four to six weeks, followed by maintenance every three to four weeks. Even once weekly sessions can create noticeable improvement over time.

Spring is about renewal — and your skin deserves that same fresh start.

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Wellness

What if it's Not the Heat? What if it's the Healing?

For years, most of us have treated heat like something to endure. We've been told to sweat harder, stay longer, and push through the discomfort.

But, what if we've been looking at it backward? What if the heat isn't the obstacle? What if

it's the catalyst for the healing your body has been asking for?

Infrared therapy has quietly moved from boutique wellness spaces into the daily routines of professional athletes, high-performing executives, and longevity-focused physicians. Not be-

cause it's trendy—but because our understanding of stress, recovery, and performance has evolved.

Traditional Sauna vs. Infrared: A Deeper Connection

Most people are familiar with traditional saunas that heat the air around you, warming the body from the outside in. Infrared works differently. Instead of just heating the air, infrared panels emit wavelengths that gently penetrate the body's tissues, warming you from the inside out.

The result? The temperature is lower and more comfortable than a traditional sauna, yet the sweat is more efficient. It feels less overwhelming and more sustainable.

It's Not About the Sweat—It's About the System

Sweating is simply your body's

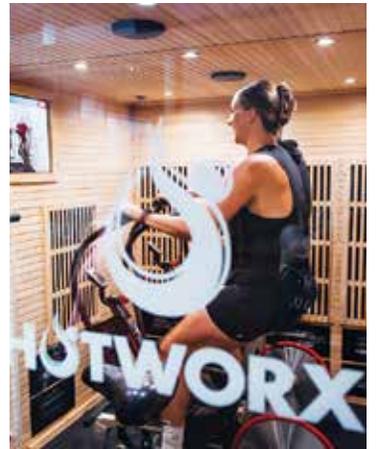
cooling system; the real magic lies in circulation.

When your body is exposed to controlled infrared heat, your blood vessels dilate. Oxygen and nutrients move more efficiently to your muscles and joints. For those of us in Destin who spend our days behind desks, in cars, or managing the beautiful (but busy) chaos of coastal life, intentional circulation isn't just a luxury. It's a strategic necessity for physical longevity.

The Nervous System Reset

Even in a place as scenic as the Emerald Coast, many of us operate in a constant state of "low-level" stress. The endless pings of emails, family schedules, and community responsibilities keep us in a fight-or-flight response.

Controlled heat exposure supports the activation of the parasympathetic nervous system—



your "rest and restore" system. This shift is what influences better sleep quality, lower inflammation, and sustained energy.

Efficiency by Design

At HOTWORX, we believe your time is your most valuable resource. We pair infrared heat with intentional, time-bound movement.

By combining 15 to 30 minutes of structured strength work or interval training with deep infrared warmth, the body is challenged efficiently. You are training intelligently to preserve muscle, support your joints, and protect your energy.

An Invitation to Stillness

Finally, but just as vital is Stillness. When you step into a timed, heated environment, there is nowhere else to be. No multitasking. No rushing. Just breath, warmth, and presence. In a culture that equates intensity with effectiveness, that kind of pause is radical. It may be exactly what you need.

So... is it worth exploring?

Infrared isn't a miracle cure. It doesn't replace smart training, balanced nutrition, or healthy sleep habits.

But, as we continue learning more about inflammation, stress physiology, muscle preservation, and recovery, heat therapy is less about "toughing it out" — and more about supporting the body intelligently.

At HOTWORX Destin, 15–30-minute infrared sessions are designed for busy adults who want efficient strength work paired with intentional recovery. It's structured, sustainable, and surprisingly accessible.

Sometimes the heat isn't the hard part. Sometimes, it's the healing.

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- Do you think you show too much or too little of your teeth when you smile?
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From Basement to Balcony: Helping Co-Workers Use Their Strengths at Work



BY BILL MASON,
ROCKET FUEL COACH

Every team has them — the organized planner who keeps projects on track and the compassionate listener everyone turns to when things get tough.

But what happens when those very strengths start working against them?

As a strengths coach, I often talk about “balcony” and “basement” behaviors. In the balcony, our strengths shine. In the basement, those same strengths can become overused, stressed or misdirected. Two common examples I see in workplaces are Discipline and Empathy.

Unlocking Your Co-worker’s Discipline Superpower

Do you have a co-worker who’s usually the one to keep everything organized and on track, but every so often, they seem to get overwhelmed by the details? I’ve got one on my team who’s typically the epitome of structure, always keeping things running like clockwork. But recently, when faced with an unexpected project, they seemed bogged down by perfectionism, unable to make any progress. It was like watching a master planner stuck in the basement of over-analysis!

This is a classic case of “basement” behaviors for someone with the Discipline strength.

When things feel chaotic or off-track, they can get paralyzed by the need for order and control. But at their core, they have an incredible ability to create structure, stay focused, and make progress with precision.

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

Break Down the Tasks – Help them take things one step at a time. Simplifying complex tasks into smaller chunks can reduce the pressure to be perfect.

Celebrate Progress, Not Perfection – Encourage them to acknowledge progress over perfection. Small wins can help them stay motivated and remind them that good enough is often enough.

Reinforce Their Strength – Recognize their natural ability to bring order to chaos. Highlight how their structured approach keeps everything on track and is an invaluable asset to the team.

Unlocking Your Co-worker’s Empathy Superpower

Do you have a co-worker who’s usually amazing at understanding and connecting with others, but every so often, they seem overwhelmed by everyone else’s emotions? I’ve got one on my team who’s typically the go-to person for offering support and understanding. But recently, after hearing a few colleagues venting about their challenges, they became emotionally drained and started withdrawing. It was like watching someone with a superpower stuck in the basement of burnout!

This is a classic case of “basement” behaviors for someone with the Empathy strength. When they feel overwhelmed by others’ emotions, they can be



come too absorbed, losing their own sense of balance. But at their core, they have an amazing ability to sense the emotions of others, offering deep understanding and building meaningful connections.

How can we help them get

back to their “balcony” and shine? Here are 3 ideas:

Encourage Boundaries – Remind them to take time for themselves and set emotional boundaries. It’s okay to care, but they don’t have to carry everything.

Provide Positive Feedback – Acknowledge their incredible ability to connect with and support others. Highlight how much their empathy contributes to the team’s morale.

Help Them Recharge – Encourage them to take moments to recharge and focus on

their own well-being. A balanced Empathy strength will allow them to continue to offer support without burning out.

Fuel the Strength, Don’t Fight It

The key is not to “fix” the person — it’s to redirect the strength.

Discipline brings order to chaos. Empathy builds bridges between people. When supported well, both strengths elevate the entire workplace.

Stay strong. Fuel your strengths. Ignite your potential!



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 Business

Spring Maintenance Checklist: Don't Forget Your Internet Services

BY DON CARTER, SECUREVISION

Spring on the Emerald Coast is a time for fresh starts. HOAs and condo associations across Panama City Beach, Santa Rosa Beach, Miramar Beach, and Destin begin seasonal projects like landscaping, roof checks, pool prep, and cleaning common areas. These efforts help protect property values and keep residents happy. One important system often left off the list, though, is community internet service.

Reliable internet is now as essential as water, power, and

security. Residents depend on it for remote work, school, streaming, smart home devices, and staying connected. In larger communities with full-time residents, seasonal owners, and vacation guests, even small connectivity issues can lead to frustration.

Spring is the right time for boards to review internet contracts before the busy season begins. Many agreements renew automatically each year, even as the number of devices in each home continues to grow. What worked a few years ago may not

meet today's needs. A yearly review helps confirm service levels, spot gaps, and ensure providers are delivering as promised.

Equipment should also be checked. Routers, switches, and access points wear out over time. Older or basic hardware may struggle when usage rises, especially during spring break and summer when occupancy is higher. Addressing equipment now can help prevent slow speeds and outages later.

Planning ahead can reduce complaints. Waiting until residents report buffering or

dropped connections often leads to rushed decisions. Communities that plan early can make improvements in a thoughtful way. Residents notice when boards stay ahead of problems, and that builds trust.

Security and network setup matter too. Spring is a good time to make sure guest networks are separate from resident and office systems, updates are current, and best practices are in place. These steps help improve performance and reliability, especially in large communities with shared Wi-Fi.

For Emerald Coast communities, spring sets the tone for the year. Adding an internet service review to the maintenance checklist can help ensure a smoother season, fewer disruptions, and a better experience for residents and guests. Secure Vision works with HOAs and large developments across the region to review contracts, equipment, and network design, helping communities stay connected year-round.



BY TIPP SPRADLIN

Most small business owners didn't set out to become HR managers.

Run the Business. Let the Pros Handle HR. Build a Stronger Exit.

They built their companies around an idea, a skill, or a service. Then somewhere along the way, they found themselves Googling employment law at 10:47 p.m., double-checking payroll, and hoping that employee classification was done correctly.

Over time, payroll got handled. Policies were written.

Benefits were chosen. Compliance became something to stay ahead of—at least most of the time. It worked. Mostly.

In many small businesses, HR lives quietly in the background, stitched together by experience, good intentions, and a bit of owner oversight. That's fine—until a buyer evaluates the business.

When a buyer or lender looks at a company, profit is only part of the equation. The deeper question is whether the business can operate cleanly and compliantly without the owner personally managing every people-related issue. Payroll errors, inconsistent policies, unclear classifications, or outdated compliance practices introduce risk. Not dramatic risk. Subtle risk, the kind that slows deals down and lowers confidence.

This is often where a Professional Employer Organization, or PEO, becomes part of the strategy.

A PEO supports the administrative and compliance side of employment—payroll processing, tax filings, benefits administration, workers' compensation, and regulatory updates. For owners, that translates to fewer unknowns and systems that don't rely solely on memory or improvisation.

Companies with roughly 7 to 200 employees tend to benefit

the most from this structure. At that size, you're large enough for HR complexity to matter—but often not large enough to justify a full in-house department. A PEO bridges that gap.

In our brokerage work, we regularly refer business owners to trusted PEO partners years before they ever list their company for sale. Preparing a business for market isn't about last-minute polishing. It's about strengthening the foundation well in advance. Clean HR systems, documented policies, and compliant classifications signal stability. They protect valuation.

Here locally, Amy Yates and Landrum HR Solutions are a resource we confidently connect owners with when it's time to add that structure. As a family-owned and privately held company with more than 55 years of experience, Landrum takes a hands-on, relationship-driven approach to

Continued on page 46

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A Pastor's Ponderings: They Beat Him



BY PASTOR DAVE HOLLAND

The men who were guarding Jesus began mocking and beating him.

They blindfolded him and demanded, "Prophesy! Who hit you?"

And they said many other insulting things to him.

- Luke 22:63-65

The Unthinkable Reality

They beat Him—the King of the World. They mocked Him—the Author of life.

This is one of the most difficult scenes in Scripture to absorb. The brutality is brief in description but overwhelming in meaning. The Son of God stood silent while fallen men unleashed their cruelty.

What looks like weakness is, in truth, restrained power.

Heaven Holds Its Breath

I imagine heaven's armies gathering as the blows fell. Strange and glorious beings mounting chariots of fire, taking up sword and shield, assembling at the edge of eternity. Twelve legions of angels—more than enough to erase the earth in a moment—waiting for a single word from their Commander.

As iron spikes would later be driven through flesh, heaven rumbled.

Michael paced the ranks crying, "Hold!" Gabriel stood ready, trumpet lifted, breath held.

Michael approached the throne. "Father, Your armies are ready to rescue the Son."

Tears streamed down the Father's immortal face. He spoke only one word: Wait.

Mocked by the Blind

The guards jeered, laughing as they struck Him. "Prophesy! Who hit you?"

They did not know who they were mocking. The One they struck was the eternal Son, the One who upholds all things by the word of His power. The hands they would pierce were

the same hands that flung galaxies into space.

Men acquainted with death pierced His side, and life itself poured out.

Again Michael pleaded, "Now, Father?"

The engines of heaven roared like thunder.

"No," the Father said. The Father said, "The time has not yet arrived."

Love That Would Not Strike Back

Humanity killed Him. The One who spoke and the earth was born died.

He entrusted His spirit into the same hands that once shaped Adam from dust and formed Eve from his side. Heaven fell silent. Swords dropped. Chariots powered down. Angels wept.

It must have seemed impossible. Could the universe continue without Him? Would creation unravel without its Creator?

Then—movement at heaven's gates.

Victory Hidden in Defeat

Through the gates came Christ—alive. At His side, a multitude no one could count, from every tribe, tongue, and nation. They sang a new song—the song of the redeemed.

The armies that once stood

ready for battle now burst into worship.

"Worthy is the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world. Worthy is He who conquered sin, death, and the grave."

The Son led His people to the throne. The Father rose in majesty. Heaven hushed as the Ancient of Days surveyed the redeemed.

Then He struck the floor with His scepter and thundered His verdict over all who believe:

"Innocent."

The Cost of Our Healing

The prophet Isaiah foresaw this moment:

"He was wounded for our transgression, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed." (Isaiah 53:5, NKJV)

God allowed His Son to be beaten—to absorb the punishment of our disobedience—so we could be forgiven and restored. Jesus carried heartache, mental anguish, and physical suffering so we might be made whole in spirit, soul, and body.

He paid the price.

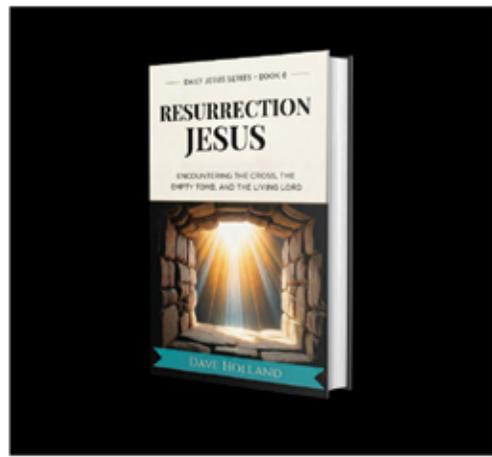
That is why He is our Savior. That is how He is our Healer.

Dave Holland pastored churches for 38 years before retiring in Destin. This devotional is from his book, "Resurrec-

tion Jesus." You can get a copy of his books from his website, DaveHolland.org, or at Amazon.com. Pastor Dave is

available to preach and teach at churches and conferences. Contact him at DavidvHolland54@gmail.com.

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Musing



BY SEAN DIETRICH

My truck cab was filled with three barking dogs and one idiot. The dogs were in the backseat. The idiot was behind the wheel.

“Sit down!” the idiot kept saying.

But my dogs do not sit when I drive. They never sit. They dutifully explore their space when

the vehicle is underway.

To the untrained eye my dogs appear to be acting disobediently. But that’s not it. Really, they are just looking for food.

They are always looking for food. They even look for food in places where there has never been any food, such as my bathroom. In a pinch, they will even resort to eating non-food items such as my reading glasses, my sandals, sheetrock, etc.

But they particularly go crazy when in my truck because they know the odds of finding abandoned food here are exponential. Thus, they are constantly on the lookout for expired Corn Nuts, old pistachio shells, or a petrified French fry predating

the Reagan administration.

So we finally arrived at the dog park. I turned them loose. They ran. They chased squirrels. They wrestled. They hunted around for any threatening or suspicious objects so they could sniff them, bark at them, then pee on them.

And then, basically, all the dogs in the dog park just stood around. That’s all the dogs do there. They play for short bursts, then they stand around and look at their owners.

“Why do dogs just stand around at dog parks?” one dog owner asked the group of us dog owners who were also, as it happens, just standing around.

Another dog owner said, “I drove forty-five minutes to get here, just so my dog could stand around.”

One of the other dog owners remarked, “You ever wonder what would happen if dog and human roles were reversed? What if DOGS took US to human parks? Would we go to the bathroom in front of each other?”

We all just looked at him.

And, of course, at dog parks, dogs sniff each other’s rears. I don’t know why dogs do this. This behavior has always perplexed me. They are not picky about whose butts they sniff. They’ll sniff any butt you give them.

I’ve read that rear-sniffing is a primal greeting of sorts where-in complex pheromone scents are exchanged. But I think it’s something dogs do because they like nasty things.

I have been owned by 13 dogs in my lifetime. And I have learned that dogs are not above wallowing in stinky objects. I

Sean of the South: Dogs



walking my bloodhound after hours, we were near the dumpsters. It had been a long night. I had just given a speech and I was tired, so I wasn’t paying attention.

When I got back to the hotel, the clerk looked at me and said, “Sir, there’s something in your dog’s mouth.”

“Drop it, Thelma Lou!” I said.

It turned out to be—remember I am not kidding—a retired breast implant. The thing hit the floor.

The clerk and I stared at the prosthesis and, in a moment I will never forget, the clerk said flatly, “Double D.”

I’m running out of room here, but I’ll close by saying, the more I learn about people, the more I like my dogs.

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have seen my dogs roll themselves in everything from cat feces to armadillo remains.

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Comedy On The Boulevard!

Emerald Coast Theatre Company (ECTC) invites audiences for the year's first Comedy on the Boulevard, a one-night comedy showcase taking place at 7 p.m. on March 12 at ECTC's theatre in Grand Boulevard. Featuring some of the Southeast's most entertaining stand-up comedians, this event packs big laughs, quick wit, and

entertainment. Hosting the evening is ECTC favorite Jason Hedden, fresh off his recent turn as Monsieur Bouc in Murder on the Orient Express. March's Comedy on the Boulevard will be headlined by Nathan Wallace, a standout comic known for his high energy and crowd-pleasing humor who traded being a plumber

in for comedy. Rounding out the lineup is Holly Ballantine, whose relatable storytelling has earned her a growing fan base across the region. Together, the trio brings a dynamic mix of comedic styles, ensuring there's something for everyone. "Comedy on the Boulevard is all about bringing people together for a fun and relaxed

night out," said Nathanael Fisher, Producing Artistic Director of ECTC. "We're excited to continue to showcase great comedic talent while giving our community a chance to experi-

ence something different on our stage." Visit emeraldcoasttheatre.org. Follow ECTC on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube for the latest updates.

DESTIN GETS MAGIC

continued from page 27

Most recently, she portrayed the daughter of Bradley Cooper in a project involving Steven Spielberg and Martin Scorsese.

The Rockett family has vacationed in Destin for many years. Now that his children are nearly grown, Rockett says he is excited to return for a long-term residency in the place his grandparents first introduced him to as a child. "I am excited to be back for another season here on the Emerald Coast and to continue creating magical memories for our guests," Rockett said.

A new restaurant, The Blue Lagoon, is now open before and after each show where guests can enjoy an extensive menu. Known for its Italian fare, the restaurant is located next to the showroom, and beverages may be brought into the theater.

For a full schedule and reservations, visit MagicDestin.com. This season includes 7 p.m. evening performances and 4 p.m. matinees on select Sundays. Advance reservations are required. Parking is free and plentiful.

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Gulf Coast Jam 2026 Brings Star Power, Theme Nights and High-Energy

One of the Gulf Coast's most anticipated music events is gearing up for another unforgettable year as the 14th Annual Gulf Coast Jam Presented by Jim Beam returns May 28-31, 2026, at Frank Brown Park in Panama City Beach. Recently named by Billboard as one of "The 10 Best Country Music Festivals," the four-day celebration promises chart-topping performances, themed nights and a high-energy coastal vibe that continues to draw fans from across the country.

Headliners **Post Malone, Chris Stapleton, Keith Urban and Riley Green** will lead a lineup of more than 20 artists performing across the Country On The Coast™ experience. The festival has seen tremendous momentum in recent years, selling out with crowds of 30,000 the past two years and earning recognition as the No. 1 festival in Music Festival Wizard's Top 50 Most Popular Fests In The World 2024 - Voter's Choice poll, along with top

honors among beach music festivals in 2025.

A Star-Studded Lineup

The festival kicks off Thursday, May 28, with Keith Urban headlining alongside Treaty Oak Revival, Wyatt Flores, Cooper Alan, Walker Montgomery and Gannon Fremin. Friday night brings powerhouse vocals from Chris Stapleton, joined by Marcus King, Jackson Dean, Brent Cobb, Cole Goodwin and Hueston.

Saturday's high-energy lineup features Riley Green, Koe Wetzel, Ole 60, Josh Ross, Ashland Craft and Hannah McFarland. The weekend wraps Sunday, May 31, with genre-blending superstar Post Malone, plus Muscadine Bloodline, 49 Winchester, Elizabeth Nichols, Them Dirty Roses and Skeez.

Theme Nights Add Extra Fun

Beyond the music, Gulf Coast Jam's fan-favorite Theme

Nights are returning bigger than ever, giving attendees a chance to dress up and lean into the festive spirit each evening.

Thursday's Neon Night invites bright colors and glowing outfits as Keith Urban launches the weekend. Friday's 'Merica Night celebrates country pride with red, white and blue flair during Chris Stapleton's headlining set. Saturday turns to Camo Night for Riley Green's high-octane performance, while Sunday's Rhinestone Cowboy Night encourages fans to shine alongside Post Malone for a sparkling finale.

Whether guests go all out in themed attire or add a simple nod to the night's vibe, organizers say the goal is to create shared memories and a fun, welcoming atmosphere.

Passes and Packages Available

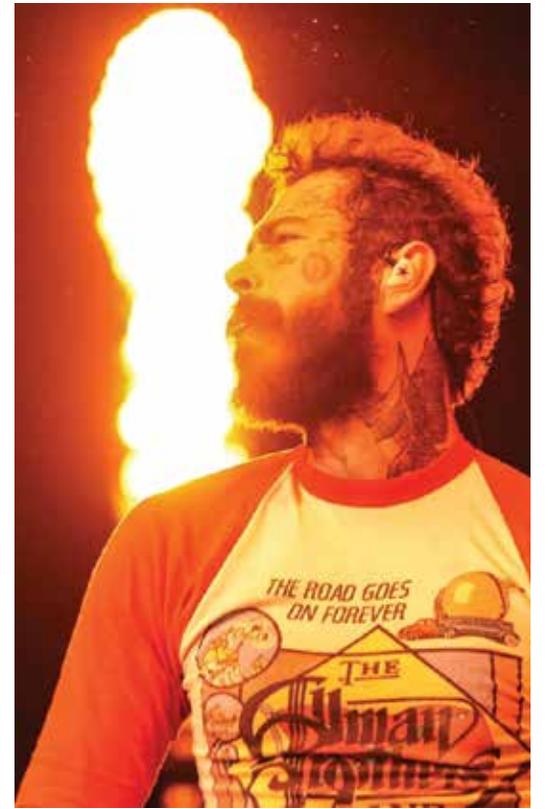
A variety of pass options are currently on sale, including General Admission, Military, College and First Responder

passes, Caymus Vineyards VIP Pit experiences and hotel or lodging packages. Premium offerings such as Skyboxes, Luxury Suites, Super VIP, Side Stage access, The Overlook Club and the new Eagles Nest have already sold out — a testament to the festival's continued popularity.

Payment plans are available for all pass levels, making it easier for fans to secure their spot early.

Jammers are encouraged to follow Gulf Coast Jam Presented by

Jim Beam online and on social media for lineup updates, special announcements and festival news as the countdown to Me-



morial Day weekend begins.

For tickets and details, visit www.GulfCoastJam.com.



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Okaloosa County America 250 Commission Begins Planning Efforts for America 250 Celebration

By NICK TOMECEK, OKALOOSA COUNTY PIO

The Okaloosa County America 250 Commission held its first meeting on Thursday, February 5, 2026, in Shalimar to discuss and plan various 250 anniversary events to celebrate the birth of the United States and encourage every American in Okaloosa County to engage in this historic moment in our nation's history.

Commissioners attending the first meeting included the Sons of the American Revolution, Daughters of the American Revolution, Florida State America 250 Commission, the Florida Historical Commission, Okaloosa County School District, Chambers of Commerce, Okaloosa League of Cities, local US Military Bases, Scouting America NW Florida, Billy Bowlegs Association, first responders, and five (5) at-large appointees of the Okaloosa County Commission. Community volunteers interested in serving as support staff for the Commission were also in attendance.

"We have a rich history that deserves to be recognized both

nationally and in Okaloosa County," said Okaloosa America 250 Commission Chairman Graham Fountain. "We can all come together, pause and reflect on the contributions made by our patriot ancestors who fought and died to create our great republic and those many heroes that continue to make the United States of America a true example of freedom throughout the next 250 years."

The Commission will be identifying, scheduling, and co-sponsoring various 250 anniversary events throughout the 2026 celebration year. Events will be added and adjusted throughout the planning process.

Events include:

February 20 - All Sports Association will kick off a new Military Award in honor of Patriots and acknowledge America250!

February 28 - The Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce will host A HEROES DINNER, honoring our military. For tickets call the chamber at 850-244-8192.



March 21 - United for a Good Cause will host an America250! International Festival

May 9 - Patriots Day will be held in downtown Crestview with a Grand Parade and America 250 celebration at the courthouse.

June 12 - Patriotic Drone Show at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Rigdon Center from 6-10 pm with a community tailgate at Freedom Tech Center/Fairgrounds for the show.

June 12 - A Gala will be held (hosted by the Choctawhatchee Bay DAR) in the evening at Destin-Fort Walton Beach Rigdon Center following the drone show. This event is open to anyone with purchased tickets.

July 4th America250! - Fireworks will be held by our local municipalities

In October, the Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce plans to organize a "Remember 9/11" event with a Patriots focus.

November 11 - Veterans Day program at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center on Okaloosa Island at 9 a.m., an 11:00 a.m. ceremony at Beal Memorial Cemetery, and a 1:00 p.m. Veterans Day Parade in Mary Esther.

To get us in the "spirit of 1776", the Commission encourages attendees/participants at events to dress in colonial/continental attire/period clothing; civilian wear, colonial military uniforms, dresses, tricorn hats and ladies' bonnets. "Part of the fun in paying tribute to the colonial/continental period of our

history is learning more about our founders and ancestors and dressing in period attire at America 250 events," said Vice Chairman Mitzi Henley.

How to promote your event: Organizations wishing to have their event posted and advertised publicly should follow the instructions for submissions on the official Okaloosa America 250 website at getthecoast.com/America250.

The Commission encourages organizations to add @OkaloosaCountyAmerica250 as a co-host on Facebook to help promote the event.

Submit photos, flyers, logos and other assets for your event at <https://bit.ly/Okaloosa250Assets>

For questions, please email the Commission's Chairman, the Hon. Graham W. Fountain at america250@myokaloosa.com or call (850) 830-0002. Find us on Facebook at @OkaloosaCountyAmerica250. For additional information concerning the upcoming May 9 Grand Parade/250 Celebration in Crestview, please contact Melissa Carter, Crestview Special Events Manager at cartere@cityofcrestview.org or 850-974-8136.



Ask Destinites: Neighborhoods & Code Compliance



BY PATRICIA LEE, FOUNDER

In our Destinites local Facebook group (www.Facebook.com/groups/Destinites), there was discussion about code compliance taking place in neighborhoods. A member wrote: “Has

anyone else noticed Code Compliance starting to enforce rules that literally everyone is breaking? I live in a neighborhood off Azalea, and I see them giving warnings to cars parked on the curb. I think literally over half the houses in my neighborhood have a car parked on the curb. I've been here five years and they have never bothered me — now they want to suddenly start writing tickets for it. Anyone with eyes can see it's not feasible for everyone to have all their cars parked in the driveway.” Here are just some of the group member responses to the Code Compliance post:

- They literally allow it in my

neighborhood after I got a warning for the same thing. No consistency.

- I wonder if it could be due to all the utility work that's been going on lately? Maybe they complained that they couldn't access the parkway. Who knows.

- They do this every couple of years. They go around for a day or two issuing warnings, and then all goes back to normal for a couple years.

- Wish they would come to Crystal Beach and give tickets for garbage cans at the street for a week!

- Somebody in your neighborhood complained. Code Compliance isn't proactive right now; they're reactive, which means they're complaint-driven, so somebody complained about cars parked over sidewalks and whatnot.

- I didn't think they had enough people left in Code to be able to have anyone write warnings. That department has

a revolving door and can't seem to stay staffed. Thankless job for sure.

- Lol, that's why he passed my house like five times today, because me or my daughter park between the road and sidewalk. But there is still room to walk by on the sidewalk, and the vehicle is not on the white line. If they are going to give tickets, they can start cutting the grass.

- I live in the same area. Parking is a mess. The issue is that so many people have multiple cars and refuse to use their garage, so they park on the street. If one or two people do it, no big deal; however, so many people do it where I am that trash trucks can't even get down the street at times. Cars driving the road can't pass each other, and it is becoming a safety issue. Watching some of these bigger trucks trying to get down the street — and then back up because they can't turn around — makes me wonder how those drivers don't lose their

patience every day.

- Husband just got a ticket today, and he was servicing a yard — landscaping truck/trailer. Pretty ridiculous.

- Clean out your garage. I'm sure there is room for two cars there. Problem solved. Then emergency vehicles can get in and through.

Join our group to view this and other discussions or to ask for help and recommendations from your neighbors.

For Destin and the close surrounding area, I invite you to join our private, targeted group for locals and property owners at Facebook.com/groups/Destinites. We now have 12,500+ members (est. October 2018). Check out our local business directory at Destinites.com, where more than 500 local businesses are listed and enjoy advertising in our targeted community group.

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RUN THE BUSINESS

continued from page 40

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