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CrossCountry3: Helping Veterans Rediscover Purpose Through Service

"The transformative effects of building resiliency are life changing" — Bruce Duty

In our community, military service is woven into the fabric of everyday life. From active-duty personnel at Eglin Air Force Base and Hurlburt Field to the thousands of veterans who call the Emerald Coast home, many have dedicated their lives to serving others. Yet, when military service ends, some find themselves searching for a renewed sense of purpose, identity and hope.

That need inspired the creation of CrossCountry3, a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping veterans rediscover purpose by empowering them to serve others in the fight against human trafficking.

At its heart, CrossCountry3 exists because many veterans possess unique skills, leadership abilities and a deep desire to continue making a difference. After years of serving their country, some veter-



ans struggle to find a renewed sense of purpose once military service ends. The organization believes every veteran has tremendous value and untapped potential that can continue to positively impact society.

CrossCountry3 was created to help bridge that gap. Rather than focusing solely on the challenges veterans face, the organization emphasizes

opportunities for transformational growth. By connecting veterans with meaningful missions that combat human trafficking, CrossCountry3 provides a pathway for them to use their strengths, experiences and commitment to service in ways that directly benefit vulnerable individuals and communities.

A key part of CrossCountry3's impact is the leadership

and community engagement of its founder, Bruce Duty. Based locally, the organization serves a region with one of the nation's largest concentrations of military personnel, veterans and military families, including those connected to Eglin Air Force Base, Hurlburt Field and the 7th Special

CROSSCOUNTRY3
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Ten Years Later:

How a Dream,
a Turtle and Local
Support Started It All

BY LORI LEATH MILLER

Ten years ago, many South Walton residents could still remember when Highway 30A felt more like a scenic backroad than a nationally recognized brand. Growth was already underway, but the area still carried the slower rhythm and small-town familiarity locals cherished. Summers were busy, but the quieter months still belonged to the teachers, fishermen, artists, restaurant owners and entrepreneurs who formed the backbone of the com-

TEN YEARS
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 Community

CROSSCOUNTRY3

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Forces Group (Airborne).

Through years of relationship-building within the military and veteran community, Duty has helped create a mission that reflects the values of service, sacrifice and freedom deeply rooted throughout the Florida Panhandle. By fostering partnerships and encouraging veterans to engage in the fight against human trafficking, CrossCountry3 offers veterans a pathway to continue making a meaningful difference while helping protect some of society's most vulnerable individuals.

The organization's approach is built upon three core values: **faith, family and freedom.** Whether through workshops, retreats or individual training, CrossCountry3 remains committed to helping veterans build resilience and discover renewed purpose.

Resilience training teaches veterans the importance of a positive self-identity, living with purpose and embracing a horizon of hope through serving the brokenhearted and vulnerable.

Faith serves as the foundation for hope and personal growth. CrossCountry3 encourages veterans to discover a deep-



er sense of purpose and meaning, helping them understand their lives and experiences continue to have significant value.

Family represents the importance of relationships, connection and community.



Veterans often miss the camaraderie and brotherhood they experienced during military service. CrossCountry3 fosters a supportive environment where veterans can build meaningful connections, strengthen families and encourage one another.

Freedom is both a principle and a mission. Veterans have dedicated portions of their lives protecting freedom, and CrossCountry3 extends that commitment by fighting human

trafficking, one of the greatest assaults on human freedom. By engaging veterans in efforts that help protect and advocate for victims, the organization creates opportunities for continued service that align with the values many veterans have upheld throughout their lives.

Ultimately, CrossCountry3 exists because veterans deserve more than gratitude for their service — they deserve opportunities to continue living lives of significance and impact. By providing identity, meaning and hope through a mission-centered approach, the organization helps veterans write a new chapter of service.

In doing so, CrossCountry3 demonstrates that purpose does not end when military service concludes. Instead, it can evolve into a powerful force for good — helping veterans, families and victims of human trafficking move toward a future defined by hope, freedom and human dignity.

At CrossCountry3, building resilience in the face of adversity and experiencing restoration physically, mentally and spiritually remain at the core of the mission.

For more information, visit crosscountry3.com.

Bruce Duty, Maj. (Ret.), U.S. Army, is the founder and president of CrossCountry3. A retired Army chaplain with more than 22 years of active-duty military service, Duty served with the 3rd Infantry Division, 2nd Infantry Division and 10th Mountain Division, including two combat deployments to Iraq.

Prior to becoming an Army chaplain, Duty served nearly nine years as an enlisted service member before earning both a Bachelor of Arts and Master of Divinity degree. He also served as a pastor in Missouri and Florida before answering the call to military chaplaincy during the Iraq War surge in 2007.

Throughout his military career, Duty received numerous honors, including the Bronze Star Medal, Meritorious Service Medal, Meritorious Unit Commendation, Iraqi Campaign Medal and additional military awards and decorations. He is also certified in Master Resilience Training, Pathfinder Resilience Training, ASIST Suicide Intervention Training, Strong Bonds Family Training and several military medical and leadership programs.

Today, Duty uses both his military and civilian experience to help individuals and organizations build resilience, overcome adversity and pursue restoration physically, mentally and spiritually. He remains passionate about faith, family, freedom and helping others discover hope and purpose through service. Duty resides in Niceville.

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The 250th Anniversary: A Night to Remember

By BARBARA PALMGREN

There are extraordinary moments in time that we remember.

Most people know where they were when President Kennedy was assassinated. They know where they were on 9/11 when the Twin Towers came down, part of the Pentagon was destroyed and brave Americans forced a plane to crash into the ground rather than strike a target in Washington, D.C. They remember special visits or places in 1976 when we celebrated the Bicentennial of our nation.

And now many will remember this special night: June 12, 2026. The gala at the Rigdon Center in Fort Walton Beach to reenact the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

The celebration was organized by the Okaloosa County America 250 Commission, led by Chair Graham W. Fountain and Vice Chair Mitzi Henley. As a commission member and trustee of the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida, I was honored to help plan the event. The museum is also hosting



the yearlong exhibit, Celebrate America 250! The Revolution.

The America 250 Commission has scheduled more patriotic events throughout the year. A few of these include a Faith Community Event, a Northwest Florida Symphony Orchestra performance at the Mattie Kelly Arts Center, a Heroes and First Responders event honoring our military and first responders and a Patriots Grand Parade in Crestview.

What amazed me was seeing the majority of several hundred dinner guests clothed in period attire of the era, including your publishers and Walton County residents Scott and Lori Miller. And not just dresses and uniforms, but white wigs of all

shapes and sizes. Most of those portraying the signers of the Declaration stood and walked up to the document looking as though they were the actual individuals, ready to sign for liberty despite the costs.

I was seated at a table with Valparaiso Mayor Joe Morgan, who proudly portrayed signer John Hart of New Jersey and walked forward to sign alongside Parker Destin, who portrayed George Washington, at the table where the historic document awaited signatures. Close by was Scott Miller portraying signer George Clymer of Pennsylvania, and another friend, Niceville Mayor Dan Henkel, portraying Benjamin Harrison V of Virginia.



Friends from other parts of Northwest Florida attended as well, including retired South Walton High School Principal Alexis Tibbetts, a renowned educator in both Okaloosa and Walton counties.

At the podium, emcee Bernard Johnson Jr., External Affairs Manager for Florida Power & Light; Mary Katharine Goddard, portrayed by Honorable Ginger Madden, State Attorney for Florida's 1st Judicial Circuit; and Reverend George Whitefield, portrayed by Mel Ponder, president of Northwest Florida State College, shared descriptions of the signers, including their professions and the size of their families.

When all 56 signers were

seated, the Honorable Patt Maney, Florida House Representative for District 4, invited everyone to rise with champagne glasses in hand and toast the signers and our Declaration of Independence. A large and beautiful cake was then cut and served, followed by the drone show and cannon salute.

More America 250 events are planned throughout Okaloosa County, offering residents across Northwest Florida opportunities to celebrate our shared history and heritage. Follow the Okaloosa County America 250 Facebook page and visit Life Media publications or GetTheCoast.com/America250 for upcoming events.

Happy Birthday, America!



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The Top 5 Things Your Doctor Wishes They Could Tell You (Without Hurting Your Feelings)

By Dr. Karen DeVore

If you've ever sat across from a healthcare provider and wondered what they were really thinking, I can assure you it's not judgment. Most of us chose this profession because we gen-

uinely want to help people live healthier, happier lives.

That said, there are a few things many doctors wish we could say more directly. Not because we're frustrated, but because these truths have the pow-

er to change your health more than any prescription, supplement, or procedure ever could.

Here are five things your doctor would probably tell you if they knew it wouldn't hurt your feelings.

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1. Your body is talking to you. Stop waiting until it's screaming.

Many people ignore symptoms for months or even years. Fatigue becomes "normal." Weight gain is blamed on age. Brain fog gets brushed aside. Digestive issues become part of daily life.

The problem is that most chronic health issues don't appear overnight. They often start as whispers before they become alarms.

When your energy changes, your sleep deteriorates, your mood shifts, or your body starts functioning differently, pay attention. These are not inconveniences to ignore. They are valuable pieces of information. The earlier you investigate a problem, the easier it often is to address.

2. You can't out-supplement a lifestyle that isn't working.

I say this as someone who believes supplements can be incredibly helpful when used appropriately. But no supplement



When patients come to me with fatigue, digestive issues, weight struggles, hormone imbalances, headaches, anxiety, or chronic pain, stress is often somewhere in the picture.

We've become so accustomed to being busy, overwhelmed, and constantly connected that many people no longer recognize what chronic stress feels like. They simply assume it's normal. Your body, however, keeps score.

Stress influences inflammation, blood sugar regulation, hormone production, immune function, sleep quality, and even how quickly you age. Managing stress is not selfish. It is a fundamental part of maintaining your health.

4. Aging is inevitable. Feeling terrible is not.

One of the most common statements I hear is, "I guess I'm just getting older."

While aging does bring changes, we often blame age for things that deserve



can consistently overcome poor sleep, chronic stress, a sedentary lifestyle, excessive alcohol consumption, or a diet built primarily around convenience foods.

Many people are searching for the one thing that will fix everything. The reality is that health is usually built through hundreds of small decisions repeated over time. The basics are not exciting, but they work. Sleep. Movement. Nutrition. Stress management. Meaningful relationships. Consistency. Those habits may not come in a bottle, but they are often the most powerful medicine available.

3. Stress is affecting your health more than you realize.

a closer look. Low energy, poor sleep, decreased strength, brain fog, loss of motivation, weight gain, and declining vitality are not things you simply have to accept.

Many of these concerns may be related to nutrition, hormones, inflammation, stress, metabolic health, or other factors that can often be improved. The goal isn't to look 25 forever. The goal is to feel your best at every age.

5. Nobody cares more about your health than you do.

This may be the hardest truth on the list. Your doctor can guide you. We can educate

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The Rain Was Never the Story

How our Emerald Coast Wedding Became a Celebration of Family, Friendship, Faith and Community

BY LORI LEATH MILLER

Upstairs in the bridal suite at The Alice in Destin, I stood at a large square window watching what looked like my wedding plans being carried away. Massive floral arrangements were being moved from the cross to beneath a tent we had rented that very morning. A last-minute decision. A rain decision.

For a year, I had envisioned walking down the aisle toward a large wooden cross overlooking the water. The spot was perfect. The view was perfect. Everything had been planned around that moment. But on May 1, 2026, the rain was relentless.

However, a few minutes before the ceremony, as I watched from above, the florals were being moved again—this time back toward the cross. I remember standing there in complete bewilderment. What was happening? Hadn't we already decided the ceremony would have to take place under the tent?

Somebody—I honestly can't remember who because I was so nervous—came running upstairs and exclaimed, "Lori! You're getting married at the cross!" I stared at them. "What?" They explained there appeared to be a brief break in the weather. Fifteen or twenty minutes. Maybe. And according to the radar, it would happen right at 5 p.m.—our ceremony time.

I couldn't believe it. For days, I had been praying for one thing: that somehow we could be mar-



ried at the cross. And suddenly, there it was. The answer.

The sun never came out. But the rain stopped. For those precious moments, the skies opened just enough.

Our guests stood instead of sitting, because the ceremony chairs had already been moved beneath the reception tent. Yet, somehow that made the ceremony even more intimate.

Afterward, our officiating pastor, Dr. Doug Stauffer, smiled and said, "I think everyone should have a wedding ceremony standing."

Maybe he was right. There was something beautiful about everyone gathering close, fully present, completely engaged in the moment. And, we were married exactly where we had hoped to be married.

The rain returned later. But by then, everyone was safely beneath the tent, laughing, celebrating and sharing a night we'll never forget.



Looking back, I realize something important. The rain was never the story. The people were. And what follows is my attempt to thank many of them.

When the Weather Has Other Plans

As a publisher, I write about weddings, businesses, events and celebrations all the time. But, when it's your own wedding, everything changes. You suddenly discover there are a thousand decisions you never knew existed.

My first wedding happened when I was 23. Back then, weddings were simpler. You booked a church. You had a reception in the fellowship hall. Your friends decorated your car with shaving cream and "Just Married" painted on the windows. And off you went.

Fast forward nearly four decades and wedding planning feels like coordinating a small city. Thank goodness I had Rob-

in Wright, owner of Serenade Weddings & Events, holding my hand through it all. Her creativity, vision and ability to keep everything on track were invaluable.

If there's one piece of advice I would give any bride, regardless of age, budget or venue, it's this: Hire a wedding planner. Immediately. Trust me, there are details you don't know exist until they go wrong.

Robin became guide, counselor, creative director, logistics manager and sometimes therapist. After our first meeting, she created an entire presentation based on the vision I had shared. Sea glass blue. Butter yellow. Sage green. White. Pearls. Organic textures. Coastal elegance.

A little refined. A little whimsical. A little "under the sea." It became the roadmap for everything that followed.

And when the rain came? Robin pivoted flawlessly. What could have been chaos became



calm. What could have been disappointment became beauty.

The Venue That Made It All Possible

Long before The Alice officially opened, Scott and I toured the property with General Manager Kristin Sullivan.

Construction was still underway. Landscaping was still being installed. But even then, we could see what it would become.

Nestled along the water in Destin with views toward Crab Island, The Alice felt unlike anything else on the Emerald Coast. The grounds are stunning. Palm trees. Walking paths. Beautiful cottages. Water views. Sunsets that seem almost unreal. It felt like home.

And now, after experiencing it firsthand, I can tell you the team—Kristin, Kelly and Diane—is every bit as impressive as the venue itself.

Continued on next page

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An Emerald Coast Wedding

WEDDING

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When the weather threatened everything we'd planned, they never panicked. They simply moved to Plan B. Then Plan C. Then back to Plan A. They handled every challenge with professionalism, grace and genuine care. Our friend Will Estell perhaps said it best:

"That was an absolutely beautiful ceremony and reception in celebration of Lori and Scott Miller. Even despite the weather, Kristin and her staff made it spectacular.

"In all my days in the wedding magazine business, I never attended a wedding that was handled that well despite the weather obstacle that was thrown into the mix. The Alice knocked it out of the park."

I couldn't agree more.

Website: thealicedestin.com

Sea Glass, Pearls and Oyster Shells

Once the colors were chosen, the fun began.

Robin introduced me to one of the most unique ideas from the entire wedding—decorated oyster shells. They became part décor, part keepsake and part labor of love.

Robin connected us with local artist Debbie DePew, who graciously taught us the process. Soon my daughters, sister and I were gathered around tables creating shells adorned with pearls and coastal touches. Every one was unique. Every one was handmade. Every one carried a little piece of our story.

Robin also expanded on another creative twist from my good friend Cali that guests absolutely loved: bridesmaids carrying elegant clutch purses adorned with calla lilies instead of traditional bouquets. Not only were they beautiful, but afterward the bridesmaids had a keepsake they could continue to use for special occasions. It was thoughtful, practical and perfectly reflected the personality of our wedding.

The details reflected everything we loved about the coast without feeling themed or overdone. Soft sea glass tones, pearls, oyster shells and lush florals created a look that felt elegant, organic and deeply personal. Every element seemed to tell part of our story.

Adding another meaningful touch, my niece Lauren Turpin,



also our flower girl, shared her artistic talents throughout the celebration. She hand-painted champagne glasses adorned with florals in our wedding colors for the bridesmaids and family to enjoy during our day at Beverly Hills Day Spa. She also transformed a simple mirror into a beautiful work of art, painting it with calla lilies and coordinating blooms that welcomed guests as they arrived at The Alice.

The oyster shells, pearls, sea glass colors and organic coastal details tied everything together, creating what many guests later jokingly called our "Under the Sea" wedding.

The Song That Told Our Story

Most couples choose a song. We had one written.

Our dear friend Bekah Wagner sat down with Scott and me and spent hours learning about our relationship. How we met. What we loved about one another. What made us laugh. What made us strong.

Weeks later, she delivered something neither of us expected: a song called *Southern Gentlemen Have Nothing on You*, now available on Spotify under artist Bekah Lauren. The title makes me laugh, because Scott is a Philly boy and I'm originally an Alabama girl (War Eagle!), but somehow Bekah perfectly captured our relationship and love story in a song we'll treasure



forever.

She also wrote a custom song for my daughter Savannah and her husband, Brandon, *Fireman and a Southern Girl*, also available on Spotify. Apparently, writing songs for the women in our family has become one of Bekah's hidden talents!

It became our first dance. Our final private dance. And perhaps one of the most meaningful gifts we have ever received. To this day, when life gets hectic, we'll play it in the car and instantly remember what matters most.



The Dress I Never Would Have Chosen

Like many brides, I spent months looking online. And like many brides, I found absolutely nothing.

Eventually, I visited Simply Elegant Bridal in Fort Walton Beach. Amber greeted us and began pulling dresses. I tried on several. One seemed to be winning.

Then Amber held up another dress. Honestly? I wasn't impressed. Not on the hanger. Not even a little. But she insisted. I tried it on. And immediately everyone in the room started smiling.

That was the dress. The one I never would have chosen. The one that somehow felt like it had been waiting for me all along. And on my wedding day, I felt like royalty in it! It was ME!

Amber, Bob and the entire Simply Elegant team were incredible. Scott's suit came from them as well.

Website: sebridals.com

Flowers That Brought the Vision to Life

If you've ever seen Kristin Lockhart's work at Couture Florals & Events, you already know she is an artist. From our first conversations, Kristin understood exactly what I was hoping to create. Working within my budget, she designed a floral plan that felt elegant, organic and uniquely us.

White calla lilies. White and green hydrangeas. Lush moss. Flowing amaranthus. Pearls woven throughout. Every floral element felt intentional, sophisticated and perfectly suited to our sea glass-inspired theme.

One of my favorite details was that no two tables were exactly alike. Robin and Kristin worked together to bring our design boards to life, creating stunning tablescapes featuring driftwood, pearls, florals and cascading amaranthus. Each table had its own unique look while still tying beautifully into the overall sea glass-inspired theme.

My bouquet was one of my favorite details of the entire wedding. Kristin created a stunning arrangement of white calla lilies wrapped in strands of pearls that felt both timeless and distinctive. It was elegant, coastal and unlike anything I had seen before.

When the rain forced everyone to pivot throughout the day, Kristin and her team adjusted seamlessly, ensuring every floral element remained beautiful no matter where it needed to be moved.

Website: couturefloralsdesign.com

Continued on next page

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An Emerald Coast Wedding

WEDDING

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A Feast Worth Celebrating

When it came to food, Chef Ernie from Café Nola delivered exactly what we hoped for. Guests enjoyed mini muffulettas, mini NOLA po-boys, seafood gumbo shooters and Cajun chicken shooters before moving into a buffet featuring grilled chicken, prime rib, penne Alfredo, garlic mashed potatoes, vegetables and fresh bread.

Throughout the evening, guests repeatedly told us how much they loved the food. Chef Ernie brought a little New Orleans flair to Destin and created a menu that appealed to everyone. His staff was professional, attentive and helped make the reception flow seamlessly.

Website: cafenola.net

Sweet Details

Rachel Vondell of Lady Ray's transformed an idea floating around in my head into reality. Our cake featured oyster shell inspiration, pearls and approximately 1,400 pieces of delicate rice paper that gave it texture and movement. Stun-



ning! It looked like it belonged beneath the sea.

Adding to its uniqueness, Rachel designed the cake in one of 2026's emerging wedding trends—a sophisticated rectangular cake rather than the traditional stacked design. It perfectly complemented our elegant, organic coastal theme.

Even better, it tasted incredible. Half chocolate. Half vanilla. A perfect compromise between bride and groom.

Lady Ray's also created beautiful coordinating cupcakes, as well as sea glass blue and ivory, pearl-wrapped, French macarons that echoed our wedding

colors and added another elegant touch to the dessert display.

Website: ladyrays.com

Meanwhile, Cindy Smith-Wojdac of CiCi's Cookies & Treats welcomed our guests with beautifully curated gift boxes waiting in their cottages, making them feel welcomed and appreciated.

Later, Cindy created a dessert display that quickly became a guest favorite. One of the most memorable touches was her sea glass and butter candies, each uniquely designed as though they had washed ashore from the Gulf itself. Guests were invited to take home small mesh bags filled with the candies as a sweet reminder of the evening.

The display also featured an assortment of beautifully decorated treats, including chocolate-covered goodies, cookies



and other handcrafted sweets that perfectly complemented our wedding colors and coastal theme. Guests returned to that table throughout the evening.

Website: <https://bakesy.shop/b/cicis-cookies-and-treats>

Facebook: [Cicis Cookies & Treats](https://www.facebook.com/CicisCookies&Treats)

Capturing the Memories

One of the greatest gifts of the day was having my daughter, Savannah VonLanken, a professional wedding photographer, photograph her mother's wedding. Yet, I also wanted her to enjoy it. To be present. To celebrate. To dance. To laugh.

To be my daughter that day.

That's where Hayleigh stepped in. Together, Savannah and Hayleigh beautifully documented every moment. Rainy skies. Happy tears. Unexpected laughter. Family. Friends. Love.

The photographs throughout these pages tell the story far better than I ever could.

Savvy Leigh Photography: savvyleighphoto.com

Hayleigh Photography: hayleighphoto.com

A Little Pampering; a Lot of Laughter

A few weeks before the wedding, Krisy Whitely Anderson at Beverly Hills Day Spa convinced me to try a facial and chemical peel. I wish I had done it years ago. My skin looked amazing. In fact, now that I've experienced it, I'm hooked.

The day before the wedding, my daughter, Shaye, hosted a spa gathering with Krisy for bridesmaids and family that became our version of a bachelorette celebration. We enjoyed facials, massages, laughter, champagne and precious time together.

Website: beverlyhillsdayspa.com

Adrianne Brackett of Pure & Couture and Pure Collective salons helped restore fullness and length to my hair with hand-tied

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An Emerald Coast Wedding

WEDDING

continued from previous page

extensions that I absolutely love. Let's just say hair in your 60s isn't quite the same as it was in your 20s. Adrienne worked her magic and now I'm hooked! My hair hasn't looked this great in years!

Websites: pureandcouture.com; purecollectivesalon.com

On wedding day, family member Linsey Robinson styled mine and the wedding party's hair beautifully despite the humidity and rain, while Baylee Elliott somehow managed to make us feel beautiful and camera-ready all day long.

Find Linsey at Destin Blowout Bar (@hairby_linseyrobinson) and Baylee at @mua_by_bayleelizabeth

Lights, Music and Memories

Music has always been important to Scott and me. That's why I immediately knew Zoran Subotich would be part of our day. A longtime friend and fellow radio veteran, Zoran handled every musical moment perfectly. I created a custom playlist and he brought it to life in a way that felt personal, joyful and uniquely us. He really just let us be us.

Website: zoranentertainment.net; celebrationsbythesea.com

Ryan Alan Linguiti sang and played the guitar live for our ceremony and cocktail hour. Then he surprised me with something unforgettable—a custom audio tribute featuring voices of family members, lifelong friends and loved ones who could not attend. There wasn't a dry eye around. You can find Ryan around town singing at Tailfins or The Edge, both at the Harbor.

Instagram: @ryanlinguiti; Facebook: @ryanalanmusiq

As evening fell, Destin/30A Lighting transformed the property. Palm trees wrapped in twinkling lights shimmered through the rain. The reflections danced off the wet pathways and the see-through tent's water droplets, creating a glow that somehow made everything feel even more magical.

Website: destinoutdoorlighting.com

And thanks to Matthew Kuka's photo booth and 360 experience, guests left us with hilarious videos, keepsakes and



memories we'll treasure forever. Before long, guests of all ages were grabbing props, striking poses and laughing their heads off. The fun, interactive atmosphere brought people together and captured some of the most candid moments of the evening.



The Finishing Touches

Frill Seekers helped bring so many of our personal details to life. From embroidered sea glass bridesmaid bags to custom cups, napkins and my favorite koozie that read, "It's Miller Time," every detail reflected our personality and wedding theme. They also created a special memorial sign honoring my nephew, whom we lost far too soon. Having his memory represented in such a meaningful way touched our hearts deeply.

Website: frillseekersgifts.com

We also relied on Destin Event Rentals for many of the elements that brought our vision to life—ghost chairs and tables to chandeliers, lighting and the beautiful, transparent reception tent. As evening fell—and the rain—the transparent tent over the reception tables became part of the magic. Reflections from the water shimmered across the clear canopy while the wrapped

palm trees glowed outside it, creating a twinkling atmosphere more beautiful than anything we could have planned.

Thanks to the rain, a last-minute tent for the dance floor from Big Day Rentals became one of the most important details. Their quick response gave us one less thing to worry about and helped keep the party going long after the ceremony ended.

destineventrentals.com; thebigdayrentals.com

The People Beside Us

Standing with us that day were our children, grandchildren, family and closest friends.

Austin, who walked me down the aisle. Nick, the best man. Michaela. Savannah. Shaye. My sister Lisa. Flower girl Lauren. Josiah. Jax. Cas.

As beautiful as the venue was...as amazing as the flowers were...as wonderful as the food, music, cake and decorations

were...they were the real reason the day mattered.

More Than a Wedding Day

Our wedding celebration extended beyond May 1. We gathered with family and friends for a rehearsal dinner at AJ's on the Harbor the night before and capped off the weekend with a post-wedding cruise aboard Tailfins Tikis around the Destin harbor and Crab Island. Sharing some of our favorite Destin experiences with the people we love, from near and far, made an unforgettable weekend even more special.

tailfinstikis.com, ajsd Destin.com

Looking back now, I don't remember the weather. I remember the way Scott adoringly looked at me—the way every woman hopes to be seen at least once in her life. I remember Austin's arm in mine. I remember hearing our song. I remember our children and grandchildren. I remember family and friends dancing beneath the tent while rain tapped softly overhead. I remember feeling loved. I remember feeling grateful. And I remember standing beneath that cross, exactly where I had hoped to stand, realizing that sometimes God doesn't remove the storm. He simply creates a break in the rain at exactly the right moment.

The rain was never the story. Love was.



Local, professional photographer specializing in families, weddings, and events. My passion lies in creating lasting memories through photographs, and I cherish the opportunity to be part of such meaningful moments!

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Floral Trends We're Loving in 2026



BY KRISTIN LOCKHART, OWNER & LEAD DESIGNER, COUTURE FLORALS & EVENTS

One of my favorite parts of being a floral designer is watching wedding trends evolve while helping couples create celebrations that feel timeless and uniquely their own. Every year brings fresh inspiration, and 2026 is proving to be a beautiful blend of modern elegance, organic design and personal expression.

As we continue designing weddings and events across the Emerald Coast, several trends are standing out in a big way this year.

One trend that continues to dominate wedding receptions is the use of bud vase tablescape. Couples are embracing the understated beauty of individual stems arranged in collections of small vases rather than large,



traditional centerpieces. The look feels intentional, romantic and sophisticated while maintaining the minimalist aesthetic many couples are seeking. Bud vases create visual interest across a table while allowing guests to easily connect and converse.

Another trend we're seeing is a move away from the traditional floral arbor and toward statement floral columns. Large floral installations create a dramatic focal point while offering a more contemporary, architectural feel. Whether framing a ceremony or anchoring a recep-



tion space, floral columns make an impact without overwhelming the venue.

I'm also loving the continued

shift toward organic, nature-inspired floral design. Today's couples are less interested in perfectly symmetrical arrange-

ments and more drawn to florals that feel gathered, textured and naturally beautiful. These designs often incorporate movement and unexpected elements that create depth and visual interest while still feeling refined and elegant.

If there's one floral element making a statement this year, it's hanging amaranthus. Its flowing texture adds drama and romance to bouquets, ceremony installations and reception designs.

We're also seeing continued demand for calla lilies and other modern floral varieties with clean lines and sculptural forms. White-and-green palettes remain incredibly popular, offering a fresh, sophisticated look that complements nearly any setting.

But don't get me wrong—modern neutrals aren't the only trend here to stay.

Soft pastel palettes continue to be a favorite among brides, bringing romance and timeless beauty to wedding celebrations. We're also seeing plenty of blue-toned palettes, especially along the Emerald Coast, where the colors naturally complement the water, sky and coastal surroundings. From soft blush and lavender to dusty blue and French blue, these color combinations continue to create stunning, memorable events.

While trends are always fun to follow, the most beautiful weddings are the ones that reflect the couple's personality and story. Flowers should do more than decorate a space—they should help create an experience and leave guests with lasting memories.

The best part of 2026's wedding trends is that there truly is something for everyone. Whether your style leans modern and minimalist, romantic and colorful or somewhere in between, today's floral designs offer endless opportunities to create something uniquely your own.

And honestly? We love it ... all of it.

Kristin Lockhart is owner and lead designer of Couture Florals & Events, serving couples across the Emerald Coast with custom floral and event design. Visit www.couturefloralsdesign.com.



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Why Giving Back Matters at The Alice



BY KRISTIN SULLIVAN, GENERAL MANAGER, THE ALICE

When we opened The Alice, we envisioned more than a wedding venue. We wanted to create a gathering place, a space where people could come together to celebrate life's biggest moments, build relationships, and strengthen our community.

That vision is what inspires our commitment to giving back.

This August, The Alice will host three fundraising events benefiting organizations that are making a meaningful difference right here in our community. On August 8, we will welcome supporters of The Ground Up, an organization dedicated to

helping individuals and families build stronger futures. On August 9, we will support PAWS and the incredible work they do for animals in need. Then on August 28, we will host Wine & Fries benefiting Ronald McDonald House Charities, whose mission provides comfort and care to families navigating some of life's most difficult moments.

We are inviting the community to join us by purchasing tickets, becoming sponsors, or donating raffle items. Every contribution, large or small, helps these organizations continue their important work.

While weddings are at the heart of our business, August tends to be a quieter season for celebrations. Rather than viewing that as downtime, we see it as an opportunity to focus on something equally important by serving our community.

At The Alice, we are committed to supporting local nonprofit organizations throughout the year by hosting monthly fundraising and awareness events. Last month, we were honored to welcome ASHA (Ad-



vanced Sacred Hope Academy), and seeing the community rally around such an important and meaningful cause reminded me why this work matters so much.

Our Ownership fully supports serving on fundraising committees and the volunteer efforts we make throughout our area. The causes closest to my personal heart are those that support animals, children, and individuals facing challenges. Whether it is finding homes for pets, helping families during

times of crisis, or ensuring people have access to the educational resources they need, these efforts strengthen the fabric of our very community.

I genuinely believe that we all have a responsibility to help one another. These organizations are not serving strangers. They are serving our neighbors, our friends, our coworkers, and sometimes even our own families.

A healthy community is built on compassion, connection, and a willingness to step forward when help is needed. When local nonprofits succeed, our entire community benefits.

As we continue building The Alice as "The Gathering Place," I hope you will join us this August in supporting these incredible organizations. Together, we can make a meaningful impact and ensure that the people and causes that need us most know they are not alone.

I look forward to seeing you at one or all three of these extraordinary events. You will find contact information for each group provided here.

Contacts

Panhandle Animal Welfare Society (PAWS)

Contact: Molly Schulz,
Community Development
Specialist
Address: 752 Lovejoy Road
NW, Fort Walton Beach, FL
32548
Office: 850-243-1525
Cell: 850-305-6978
Website: www.paws-shelter.org

The Ground Up Project

Contact: Lisa Y. Shorts Pitell,
CEO & Founder
Address: 1177 E. John Sims
Pkwy., Niceville, FL 32578
Phone: 850-368-2454
Email: lisapitell@thegroundupproject.org
Website: thegroundupproject.org

Ronald McDonald House Charities of Northwest Florida

Contact: Sam Kelleher,
Events Coordinator
Address: 5200 Bayou Blvd.,
Pensacola, FL 32503
Email: Sam@rmhc-nwfl.org
Direct: 850-741-4306
Main: 850-477-2273
Website: rmhc-nwfl.org



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Mayor Bobby Wagner and
PIO Tamara Young, PhD

“Reel Talk” from the City of Destin

Lights Out for Loggerheads (and All Sea Turtles)

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

This month Mayor Wagner and I sat down to discuss why beachfront lighting is one of the most important choices we can make for Destin's sea turtles.

TY: People hear “sea turtles” and “lighting”, and they reach for flashlights that emit red light. That's a big step, but there's an even bigger story of lighting, and it is the buildings themselves. How beachfront houses and condos can support nesting sea turtles is the narrative we need to push in 2026.

BW: A flashlight matters, but it is one beam for one person on one walk. The lighting on a beachfront condo runs every night for months, and it

points at the same stretch of sand whether anyone is home or not. When the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission talks about protecting nesting beaches, the thing they keep coming back to is artificial light from structures. A nesting female will avoid a brightly lit beach altogether, and the hatchlings that do emerge crawl toward the brightest horizon they can see. On a natural beach, the open Gulf glows. On a developed one, too often, it is somebody's back porch.

TY: We had a season not long ago in a neighboring city where nearly every hatchling from the early nests was disoriented by beachfront lighting — turned the wrong way, away from the Gulf. That is the saddest! These are animals that have been find-



ing the water by instinct for tens of millions of years, and a porch light overrides that in a single night. Every condo really does matter.

BW: It does, and here's the encouraging part: because lighting is the problem, lighting is also the fix, and it's a fix that's almost entirely in the property owner's hands. FWC boils it down to three things they call the golden rules of beachfront lighting: Keep it low, keep it long, and keep it shielded. Low means mount the fixture as low to the ground as it can be while still doing its job. You want light

on the steps, not broadcast over the dune line. You also want to use the lowest wattage possible. Nobody needs a floodlight to find a door handle. Dial it down and you've helped the turtles and your power bill in the same move.

TY: Win-win! And then there is “long,” which is a bit counter-intuitive. It's about wavelength. Sea turtles are far less sensitive to long-wavelength light, like amber, orange and red, at 560 nanometers or greater. Short-wavelength white and blue light is what disorients them. It's the same reason our giveaway flashlights at City Hall are red rather than white. The good thing is the turtle-safe amber and red LEDs you'd put in an outdoor fixture are widely available now, and

BW: Which brings us to the last rule, shielded. The fixture has to be fully cutoff, meaning no light escapes above a 90-degree plane, and you should not be able to see the lamp or the

glowing lens at all when you are standing on the sand. Globe lights and old carriage lamps that throw light in every direction are the classic offenders, and they are usually an easy swap.

TY: So, that covers the exterior. But it's also important to realize that the interior lights of a condo can actually be the worst culprit. These are often brighter than anything outside, and they can shine straight through a big glass slider toward the water.

BW: For our taller condos, it may be the single biggest issue. A wall of glass facing the Gulf is essentially a lighthouse if the lights are on and the blinds are open. The good news is the fixes are about as easy as it gets, and most of them are free. Close the curtains or blinds after dark. Move lamps back away from the windows. Small habits, big difference for a nest just past the dune.

TY: And for the units that want a permanent solution, window tint is the gold standard. FWC points to tint that allows 45 percent or less of the interior light through to the outside, and darker is better on those big glass-front units. Pool lights are a bit trickier because the water reflects and spreads the glow, so the recommendation there is to lock the pool light on an amber or red setting through at least May-October, which is sea turtle nesting season.

BW: Almost everything we have talked about, closing a blind, swapping a bulb to amber, aiming a fixture down, flipping off the decorative lights, costs little or nothing and works the very night you do it. If every owner on the beach made one change before next season, we would see it in the survey numbers.

TY: Sea turtles are one of our favorite visiting groups each year that we all agree we want coming back!

BW: They have found their way to this coast for tens of millions of years, long before any of us got here. The least we can do is leave the horizon dark enough for them to find it again. Lights out for loggerheads. It is that simple, and it is that important.



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Florida Lt. Gov. Jay Collins Brings Message of Leadership, Opportunity to Locals

By Lori Leath Miller

Florida Lt. Gov. Jay Collins visited Beachworx recently for a community conversation with local business owners, elected officials and residents, sharing his personal story, leadership philosophy and views on issues affecting Northwest Florida.

Collins, a former Green Beret, state senator and nonprofit leader, opened with a message rooted in resilience and service. He described being born to a teenage mother, adopted by his grandparents and raised on a family farm that was later lost. “A son never forgets,” Collins said,

referring to a phrase passed down by his father. “You don’t forget where you come from. The roots that create who you are drive you.”

Collins served in the Army as a Green Beret, surviving serious injuries that ultimately led to the amputation of his leg. Afterward, he requalified as a Green Beret and continued serving for five more years. He later led a nonprofit that provided millions of meals after disasters, including hurricanes across Florida. “Leadership isn’t about talking,” he said. “Leadership is about being on the ground where people need help.”

Throughout his remarks, Collins emphasized that government, business and the economy are ultimately about people. He said his priorities have remained consistent from his time in the Florida Senate to his current role as lieutenant governor: safety, the economy, education and opportunity. “It’s not about me,” he said. “It’s about we.”

Education and workforce development drew significant attention during the question-and-answer portion. Collins voiced support for school choice while also emphasizing accountability. He said most Florida students will continue to



attend public schools and said every educational option receiving public dollars should be held responsible.

He also called for stronger alignment between education and the workforce, particularly through trades, apprenticeships and career pathways in high school. “I don’t believe in second-class citizens,” Collins said. “We have to equally reward people who go down different paths, whether that is college, trades, entrepreneurship or going straight into a career.”

Collins said Florida should better connect commerce, universities, state colleges and high schools to identify workforce needs. He pointed to shortages in trades and agriculture, noting the average age of both tradesmen and farmers is near 58.

Questions also focused on housing affordability, insurance and the challenge of retaining skilled workers in tourism, health care and construction. Collins said the state must pursue short-, mid- and long-term strategies, including veteran transition programs, apprenticeship opportunities and policies that reduce the cost of building and owning homes.

He said permitting and impact fees are adding significant

costs to home prices and should be part of the affordability conversation. On insurance, he said Florida has made progress attracting more insurers but still has more work to do, particularly related to fraud, litigation and rebuilding barriers after storms. “We cannot allow the conversation about affordability and the American dream to be about just getting by,” Collins said. “I want homeownership to be on the rise.”

Growth and development were also part of the discussion. Collins said Florida must manage growth thoughtfully while

protecting farmland, water, beaches and green spaces. “People are going to move here,” he said. “The question is how we manage growth while keeping Florida what it is.”

Local attendees also asked about small business concerns, agriculture costs, women entrepreneurs, wildlife rescue funding and community projects, including an America 250 initiative called Patriots Point. Collins repeatedly encouraged residents to bring specific facts, maps and details to the table. “Come with details and we can talk problems,” he said. “You

will have a seat at the table.”

For the Panhandle, Collins said the region’s military and veteran population is especially important to him. “If you signed your name on the dotted line, the very least we can do is be present, hear you out and help make a difference in your life,” he said.

Collins closed by returning to the theme of opportunity, saying his own life is proof that the American dream remains possible. “When people tell you the American dream isn’t real, they’re wrong,” he said. “I’ve lived it.”

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Events Around Town

Pilates with Dolphins at the Gulfarium

Start your morning with a one-of-a-kind fitness experience at Gulfarium's Dolphin Oasis. Led by certified instructor Desiree, this all-levels Pilates class allows participants to strengthen, stretch and recharge while Atlantic bottlenose dolphins swim nearby.

July 11, 7:30 a.m.

July 21, 7 a.m.

July 25, 7:30 a.m.

Aug. 8, 7:30 a.m.

Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park

Ages 12 and up

go.gulfarium.com/pilates

UNDERWATER: The Living Sea Experience

Experience an immersive after-hours yoga session inside Gulfarium's Living Sea Aquarium. Surrounded by marine

life, guests will enjoy a slow, ocean-inspired flow followed by a spectacular view of The Boardwalk's Okaloosa Island fireworks display.

Aug. 5, 7:30-8:30 p.m.

Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park

Ages 12 and up

go.gulfarium.com/underwater

PAWS Annual Brunch Fundraiser: Stars, Stripes & Second Chances



Support the Panhandle Animal Welfare Society during an elevated brunch experience benefiting local shelter animals. Guests are encouraged to dress in patriotic red, white and blue while enjoying a curated brunch, silent auction and more. Sponsorship opportunities are available.

Aug. 9, 11 a.m.-2 p.m.

The Alice, Destin

paws-shelter.org

For sponsorship information: mollys@paws-shelter.org

9th Annual Wine & Fries: Golden Hour for Good



Ronald McDonald House Charities of Northwest Florida's signature fundraiser returns for an evening of waterfront views, wine, local brews, McDonald's famous French fries, live entertainment and auctions. Proceeds help families stay close to children receiving medical treatment.

Aug. 28, 6-9 p.m.

The Alice, Destin

\$115

givebutter.com/c/wine-and-fries

14th Annual Fore Her Golf Outing

Join golfers and supporters for a day on the links benefiting local breast cancer patients throughout Northwest Florida. The tournament features refreshments, prizes, contests and Fore Her's signature "Dress



Like a Lady" hole. Early-bird registration is available through Sept. 1.

Sept. 25

The Links Golf Club at Sandestin

Check-in: 8 a.m. | Announcements: 8:45 a.m. | Tee-off: 9 a.m.

foreher.org

Harbor Nights at HarborWalk Village

Spend Thursday evenings on the Destin Harbor with live music, DJs, glow stilt walkers, lawn games, fire spinners and a fireworks show over the water.

Every Thursday, 6-9 p.m.

HarborWalk Village, Destin

Free admission (parking fees apply)

harborwalkvillage.com

Coastal Country Concert Series

Kick off the weekend with live country music on the HarborWalk Village main stage. Enjoy waterfront views, dancing, fire spinning and fireworks over the harbor.

Fridays, July 24 and 31, 6-9 p.m.

HarborWalk Village, Destin

Free admission (parking fees apply)

emeraldgrande.com/harborwalk-village/harborwalk-village-events

Silent Disco on the Harbor

Grab a pair of glowing wireless headphones and dance the Monday night away while switching between two competing live DJs. This family-friendly event is a unique summer favorite on the Destin Harbor.

Every Monday

HarborWalk Village, Destin

Free admission (parking fees apply)

harborwalkvillage.com

Bingo, Bubbly & a Chance to Win a Designer Handbag

If your idea of a perfect Saturday afternoon includes a little sparkle, a glass of prosecco and the chance to take home a designer handbag, mark your calendar for Pearls & Prosecco Handbag Bingo at The Alice in Destin.

Presented by The Alice and benefitting The Ground Up Project Inc., this elevated twist on traditional bingo combines fashion, fun and philanthropy into one stylish afternoon. Guests will enjoy light bites, drink tickets and 10 rounds of bingo, with designer handbags up for grabs. After all, who

says bingo is just for grandma?

The event takes place Saturday, Aug. 8 at 2 p.m. at The Alice, one of Destin's most beautiful waterfront gathering spaces.

General admission is \$100 and includes light bites, two drink tickets and one bingo card for each round. VIP guests receive all general admission benefits plus an extra drink ticket, raffle tickets, a Grand Finale bingo card, VIP recognition and table service.

Whether you're hoping to win your dream handbag or enjoy an afternoon out with

friends, you'll also be helping support a mission that extends far beyond childhood.

Because autism doesn't end at 18.

The need for support, opportunities and community doesn't end either.

So, gather your friends, don your pearls and enjoy an afternoon of laughter, bubbly, a little friendly competition, lots of memories—and perhaps even a fashionable victory! Pearls & Prosecco Handbag Bingo is shaping up to be one of the season's most stylish events.



~ Presents ~

PEARLS & PROSECCO

Handbag Bingo

THE ALICE | DESTIN
Saturday August 8 | 2:00 PM

An elevated afternoon of bingo, bubbly, and designer handbags benefitting




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General Admission \$100
Includes light bites, 2 drink tickets, and 10 bingo cards (1 per round).

VIP Admission \$150
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EGLIN FEDERAL CREDIT UNION
KRUEGER WELLNESS INSTITUTE

Where Summer Memories Last: The Village of Baytowne Wharf

Longer days, warm Gulf Coast evenings and a calendar packed with family-friendly fun can only mean one thing—summer is in full swing at The Village of Baytowne Wharf. From live music and outdoor movies to fireworks, special events and entertainment for all ages, Baytowne becomes a hub of activity throughout the season. Whether you’re making vacation memories or looking for a fun night out close to home, there’s always something happening at The Village. Gather your family and friends and discover why Baytowne Wharf remains one of the Emerald Coast’s favorite summer destinations.

Scallywag Sunday

Sundays Now – July 26
7-9 p.m. | FREE

Join Baytowne Wharf for magic, music and mayhem! Watch as the featured pirate Captain Davy takes you on an adventure with two magic shows on stage! Shows at 7 and 8 p.m.

Movie Monday

Mondays Now – July 27
8 p.m. | FREE

Grab a lawn chair or blanket and cozy up on the Events Plaza Lawn for a featured film.

- July Movies:
- 6 | Goat
 - 13 | The Incredibles
 - 20 | Hoppers
 - 27 | Elemental



Boomin’ Tuesday

Tuesdays Now – July 28
7:15-9:15 p.m. | FREE

Kick off the evening with a DJ Dance Party featuring DJ Mike Whitty in the Events Plaza starting at 7:15 PM, then turn your attention to the Lagoon at 9:15 PM for a spectacular fireworks show lighting up the sky.



A Can’t Miss Wednesday Night Concert Series!

Wednesdays Now – July 29
7-9 p.m. | FREE | Events Plaza Stage

Wednesday Night Concerts at The Village of Baytowne Wharf are BACK and popular! Sit back and relax with an outdoor concert and enjoy LIVE entertainment. The concert series features both local and regional talent from a variety of genres. Don’t forget your lawn



- chairs and blankets.
- July Lineup:
- 1 | Below Alabama
 - 8 | Scratch 2020
 - 15 | The HooDoos
 - 22 | Casey Kearney Band
 - 29 | Shenanigans

Thursdaze Lights Show

Thursdays Now - July 30
9 p.m. | Events Plaza | FREE

This one-of-a-kind aerial display blends technology and

coastal charm, making it the perfect way to celebrate the magic of the Village under the stars!

Save the Date!

Perfect Hues: Baytowne Wharf Art Fest
Labor Day Weekend,
September 4-6 | 5-9 p.m. nightly | FREE

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

Interested in being a vendor? Apply now or, for more information, email lindsey@baytownewharf.com.

And don’t forget all the fantastic, fun activities with Adventure Land Playground, Baytowne Adventure Zone, Baytowne Carousel and Blast Arcade & Laser Maze. So much summer...so much to do at The Village of Baytowne Wharf!

Beach TV LIVE!

LIVE from The Village of Baytowne Wharf every day! Tune into Beach TV to watch what’s going on in The Village of Baytowne Wharf!





The Village of
BAYTOWNE WHARF

Summertime

in Baytowne Wharf

MAY 26 - AUGUST 13

SCALLYWAG
SUNDAY

7PM + 8PM

MOVIE
MONDAY

8:00 PM

BOOMIN
TUESDAY

7:15PM-9:15PM

WEDNESDAY
NIGHT CONCERT

7PM - 9PM

THURSDAZE
LIGHT SHOW

9:00PM



Cali's To Do In Destin! JULY 2026

..... 8

Power of Networking Breakfast by United Way Emerald Coast | 7:30am | Mezcal Mexican Grill

Bonfire on the Beach | 5pm | The Bay

Run Club | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery

Shark Paint Night & Fireworks | 6pm | Gulfarium

Trivia Night | 6pm | Destin Brewery

Trivia Night | 6pm | Craft Bar @ The Harbor

Island Concert Series | 6:30pm | The Island Hotel

Wednesday Night Concert Series: Scratch 2020 | 7pm | Baytowne Wharf

Karaoke | 7pm | Kenny D's

Karaoke | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty

Fireworks | 9pm | Okaloosa Island Pier

..... 9

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

Wellness By The Water Yoga | 9am | The Alice

Bands on the Blvd: Summer Music Series | 6pm | Grand Boulevard

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

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

Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse

Fireworks | 9pm | Harborwalk Village

Ladies Night | 10pm | McGuire's Destin

..... 10

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

Concerts at The Landing | 6pm | The Landing Fort Walton Beach

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

..... 11

Pilates with Dolphins | 7:30am | Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park

Interlibrary Beach Clean Up | 8am | Boardwalk on Okaloosa Island

Farmers Market | 9am-1pm | Grand Boulevard

Farmers Market | 9am | Seaside, FL

City of Destin's Painting at the Park Class | 9am | Royal Melvin Park

Farmers Market | 10am | Harborwalk Village

Book Club | 10am | Pink Coyote Dessert 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

..... 12

Wellness at the Water | 9am | Harborwalk Village

DJ Brunch | 10am | Azul @ Harborwalk

Sound Bath Sundays | 6pm | Hotel Effie

R&B In The Park | 6pm | The Fort Walton Beach Landing

Scallywag Sunday | 7pm | Baytowne Wharf

Karaoke Sundays | 7pm | AL's Beach Club

Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar

Karaoke | 9pm | Outcast Bar & Grill

..... 13

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

Free Pirate Shows | 5:30pm | AL's Beach Club on the Boardwalk

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

Movie Monday | 8pm | Baytowne Wharf

..... 14

Young Professionals of Destin Coffee Social | 7:30am | Coastal Protein

Wellness By The Water Yoga | 9am | The Alice

Mug Club & Bingo | 6pm | Destin Brewery

Karaoke | 6pm | AJ's on the Bayou

Karaoke | 6pm-9pm | Fatboys Destin

Trivia Night | 6pm | Ricks Crab Trap FWB

Boomin' Tuesdays Fireworks | 7:15pm | Baytowne Wharf

Movies on the Beach | 8pm | AL's Beach Club

..... 15

Ladies who Launch | 11:30am | Destin Chamber

Bonfire on the Beach | 5pm | The Bay

Trivia Night | 5pm | Down Island

Run Club | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery

Trivia Night | 6pm | Destin Brewery

Trivia Night | 6pm | Craft Bar @ The Harbor

Island Concert Series | 6:30pm | The Island Hotel

Wednesday Night Concert Series | 7pm | Baytowne Wharf

Karaoke | 7pm | Kenny D's

Karaoke | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty

Fireworks | 9pm | Okaloosa Island Pier

..... 16

Wellness By The Water Yoga | 9am | The Alice

Bands on the Blvd: Summer Music Series | 6pm | Grand Boulevard

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

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

Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse

Fireworks | 9pm | Harborwalk Village

Ladies Night | 10pm | McGuire's Destin

..... 17

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

..... 18

Farmers Market | 9am-1pm | Grand Boulevard

Farmers Market | 9am | Seaside, FL

Farmers Market | 10am | Harborwalk Village

Pickle Fest 2026 | 11am | Wood Foot Beer

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

Saturday Social | 6pm | Harborwalk Village

Karaoke | 8pm | Harry T's Lighthouse

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

Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar

..... 19

DJ Brunch | 10am | Azul @ Harborwalk

Sound Bath Sundays | 6pm | Hotel Effie

Scallywag Sunday | 7pm | Baytowne Wharf

Karaoke Sundays | 7pm | AL's Beach Club

Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar

Karaoke | 9pm | Outcast Bar & Grill

Fireworks | 9pm | Harborwalk Village

..... 20

Tackle Boxes not Xboxes Kids Fishing Day | 7am | American Spirit Party Boat

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

Free Pirate Shows | 5:30pm | AL's Beach Club on the Boardwalk

Silent Disco | 6pm | Harborwalk Village

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

Movie Monday | 8pm | Baytowne Wharf

..... 21

Wellness By The Water Yoga | 9am | The Alice

Harbor Days ft. The Harbor Street Parade | 5pm | Harborwalk Village

Mug Club & Bingo | 6pm | Destin Brewery

Karaoke | 6pm | AJ's on the Bayou

Karaoke | 6pm-9pm | Fatboys Destin

Trivia Night | 6pm | Ricks Crab Trap FWB

Boomin' Tuesdays Fireworks | 7:15pm | Baytowne Wharf

Movies on the Beach | 8pm | AL's Beach Club

..... 22

Bonfire on the Beach | 5pm | The Bay

Trivia Night | 5pm | Down Island

Run Club | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery

Trivia Night | 6pm | Destin Brewery

Trivia Night | 6pm | Craft Bar @ The Harbor

Island Concert Series | 6:30pm | The Island Hotel

Wednesday Night Concert Series: Casey Kearney Band | 7pm | Baytowne Wharf

Karaoke | 7pm | Kenny D's

Karaoke | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty

Fireworks | 9pm | Okaloosa Island Pier

..... 23

Wellness By The Water Yoga | 9am | The Alice

Harbor Nights | 6pm | Harborwalk Village

Bands on the Blvd: Summer Music Series | 6pm | Grand Boulevard

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

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

Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse

Thursdaze Light Show (Drones) | 9pm | Baytowne Wharf

Fireworks | 9pm | Harborwalk Village

Ladies Night | 10pm | McGuire's Destin

..... 24

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

..... 25

Farmers Market | 9am-1pm | Grand Boulevard

Farmers Market | 9am | Seaside, FL

Farmers Market | 10am | Harborwalk Village

Alpha Day in the Park | 11am | Fort Walton Beach Landing

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

Saturday Social | 6pm | Harborwalk Village

80s Murder Mystery Party | 6pm | 125 Lovejoy Road NW, FWB

Karaoke | 8pm | Harry T's Lighthouse

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

Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar

..... 26

DJ Brunch | 10am | Azul @ Harborwalk

Sound Bath Sundays | 6pm | Hotel Effie

Scallywag Sundays | 7pm | Baytowne Wharf

Karaoke Sundays | 7pm | AL's Beach Club

Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar

Karaoke | 9pm | Outcast Bar & Grill

..... 27

Tackle Boxes not Xboxes Kids Fishing Day | 7am | American Spirit Party Boat

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

Free Pirate Shows | 5:30pm | AL's Beach Club on the Boardwalk

Silent Disco | 6pm | Harborwalk Village

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

Movie Monday | 8pm | Baytowne Wharf

..... 28

Wellness By The Water Yoga | 9am | The Alice

Harbor Days: Pulse & Petals | 9am | Harborwalk Village

Mug Club & Bingo | 6pm | Destin Brewery

Karaoke | 6pm | AJ's on the Bayou

Karaoke | 6pm-9pm | Fatboys Destin

Trivia Night | 6pm | Ricks Crab Trap FWB

Boomin' Tuesdays Fireworks | 7:15pm | Baytowne Wharf

Movies on the Beach | 8pm | AL's Beach Club

..... 29

Bonfire on the Beach | 5pm | The Bay

Run Club | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery

Trivia Night | 6pm | Destin Brewery

Trivia Night | 6pm | Craft Bar @ The Harbor

Island Concert Series | 6:30pm | The Island Hotel

Wednesday Night Concert Series: Cadillac Willy | 7pm | Baytowne Wharf

Karaoke | 7pm | Kenny D's

Karaoke | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty

Fireworks | 9pm | Okaloosa Island Pier

..... 30

Wellness By The Water Yoga | 9am | The Alice

Free Beach Luau | 5:30pm | AL's Beach Club at The Boardwalk

Harbor Nights | 6pm | Harborwalk Village

Bands on the Blvd: Summer Music Series | 6pm | Grand Boulevard

850 Social Babes Pickleball & Dinner Meet Up | 6:30pm | Wood Foot Beer

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

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

Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse

Fireworks | 9pm | Harborwalk Village

Ladies Night | 10pm | McGuire's Destin

..... 31

City of Destin's Annual Big Truck Day | 9am | Destin Community Center

EVENTS • LIVE MUSIC • FOOD

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SOF Missions Celebrates 10 Years of Impact at Diamond Gala

Shield of Faith (SOF) Missions will celebrate a decade of serving our nation's warriors at its 10th Annual Emerald Coast Gala—The Diamond Gala—on Aug. 29, 2026, at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center.

Marking 10 years of unwavering commitment to active-duty service members, veterans and first responders, this milestone event promises to be the organization's most memorable gala yet.

SOF Missions is dedicated to combating the devastating epidemic of suicide among our warriors by providing comprehensive care that addresses psychological, physical, social and spiritual well-being. Through its Be Resilient Clinics and Warrior Retreats held locally at EXOS at Andrews Institute, the organization has provided more than \$10.7 million in support to more than 4,000 warriors nationwide. These programs deliver personalized, coordinated care at no cost to participants, ensuring those in need receive the support necessary to heal and thrive.

The Diamond Gala will be an evening of inspiration, celebration and purpose. Guests will experience an unforgettable



evening featuring dinner and dessert service, a distinguished guest speaker, performances by First Dance Ballroom Studio and the Bow Tied Music Quartet, dancing, silent auction experiences, and powerful stories highlighting the impact made

possible through community support over the past decade..

Proceeds from the gala directly support SOF Missions' warrior care programs, helping ensure that financial barriers never prevent a warrior from receiving life-changing assis-

tance.

The 10th Annual Diamond Gala is more than a celebration of the past—it is an investment in the future.

A moment to honor how far we've come.

A moment to stand be-



side those we serve.

And a moment to invest boldly in the future of warrior care.

Whether you are a longtime

supporter or new to the SOF Missions community, you are invited to join us for an evening of elegance, a decade of impact and a legacy in the making. Sponsorship opportunities are also available for individuals and businesses looking to make an even greater difference in the lives of our nation's heroes.

Tickets: \$150 per person

Includes dinner, dessert and one complimentary drink.

To purchase tickets or learn more about sponsorship opportunities, **visit www.sofmissions.org/gala.**

Magic & Comedy at The Palms Resort Destin!

The popular Magic & Comedy Destin residency is back at The Palms Resort with new enhancements, interactive illusions and family-friendly entertainment.

Headliner Bart Rockett brings a blend of magic, comedy, audience participation and ventriloquism to the intimate showroom experience. A veteran performer who has

appeared in more than 90 countries and hosted a nationally syndicated television show, Rockett performs alongside special guest appearances by his children, Kadan and Brooklyn.

Guests can enjoy table seating with food and beverages available from the adjacent Blue Lagoon restaurant.

Shows are held at 7 p.m.,



with select Sunday matinees at 4 p.m. Seating is limited and advance reservations are recommended.

MAGIC + COMEDY

VOTED
"Best Date-Night Activity"
"Best Indoor Family Activity"

The Palms of Destin Resort

"Brilliant, incredible magic & fantastic showmanship!"
Simon Cowell

"Really good magic!"
Kelly Ripa

"He will blow you away!"
Ryan Seacrest

Reservations Required:

MagicDestin.com

For ALL Ages!

Alcoholic & Non-Alcoholic Drinks Available in Showroom
FREE Parking - 4207 Indian Bayou Trail - Destin



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 Community

Around Town

DAR Honors Destin Middle Student with Civics Award



The West Florida Chapter of the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) recently presented the Patti Kroeger Excellence in Civics Award to Destin Middle School eighth-grade graduate Colton Romeo.

Established in 2022 in memory of longtime Destin Middle civics teacher Patti Kroeger, the award recognizes a student who demonstrates civic knowledge,

community service and school leadership. Colton was selected by eighth-grade teachers for exemplifying those qualities through his leadership, integrity and positive impact on fellow students and faculty.

West Florida DAR Regent Robbie Carroll welcomed members of Patti Kroeger's family, including her husband, Chester, and son, Austin, to help preserve her legacy and commitment

to civic education. The West Florida Chapter serves Destin and Walton County, supporting historic preservation, education and patriotism.

Rotary Club of Destin's Clayton Hicks Begins Service as District Governor



Destin Rotary Club Secretary Brenda Gray with new Area Rotary District Governor Clayton Hicks

Congratulations to Rotary Club of Destin member Clayton Hicks, who officially began his term as Rotary District Governor on July 1, serving Rotary clubs throughout Northwest Florida and beyond.

A longtime Rotarian and dedicated community leader, Hicks will spend the coming year supporting local clubs, strengthening community impact and advancing Rotary's mission of Service Above Self.

"As I begin my year serving as District Governor, I wanted to take a moment to introduce myself and express how honored I am to have the opportunity to work alongside each of you," Hicks said. "I am excited about what we can accomplish together in support of our clubs and the communities we serve."

Hicks emphasized the importance of communication, collaboration and partnership among Rotary leaders and members across the district, adding that his goal is to help clubs and communities thrive through service and shared purpose.

The Rotary Club of Destin congratulates Hicks on this well-deserved honor and looks forward to supporting his leadership throughout the coming year.

NWFSC Wins Statewide America 250 Welding Challenge

Northwest Florida State College has earned the Commissioner's Choice Award among



Florida College System institutions in the Florida Department of Education's Statewide Welding & Fabrication Challenge commemorating America's 250th anniversary.

The winning project, a handcrafted B-25B Mitchell bomber replica known as the "Mighty Mitchell," was created by students in the college's Welding Technology Program. The aircraft honors the historic Doolittle Raiders, who trained at nearby Eglin Field before their famed World War II mission.

The project required more than 2,000 hours of design, fabrication and finishing work, bringing together students and faculty from both the Welding Technology Program and Art Department. Led by Skilled Trades Department Director Scott Bennett and welding faculty, the installation showcases technical skill, craftsmanship and historical significance.

The Mighty Mitchell remains on display outside Building 320 on the Niceville campus as part of the college's America 250 initiatives.

Applications Open for Wayne Werner Memorial Scholarship

The Gulf of America Reef Fish Shareholders' Alliance is accepting applications through July 31 for the Wayne Werner Memorial Scholarship.

Created in honor of the late commercial red snapper fisherman Wayne Werner, the scholarship recognizes his dedication to collaboration between fishermen, scientists and policymakers. One scholarship of up to \$5,000 will be awarded for the 2026-27 academic year.

Eligible applicants must be upper-level undergraduate or graduate students studying marine science, fisheries management, oceanography, communications, journalism or a related

Continued on next page



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(850) 259-2057 • golf@ajs-destin.com

DHS Graduate Among 12 Florida Students Awarded Prestigious Dr. Carlo Rodriguez Scholarship

Destin High School graduate Tyrus Grimes has been selected as one of only 12 students statewide to receive a 2026 Dr. Carlo Rodriguez Scholarship, a prestigious award presented by the Florida Consortium of Public Charter Schools.

The merit-based scholarship recognizes graduating charter school seniors who have demonstrated strong academic achievement while also showing financial need. Each recipient receives a \$1,500 scholarship that may be used toward college or technical school expenses, including tuition, textbooks, supplies and computer equipment.

Grimes joins an elite group of students from charter schools across Florida chosen for the honor.

"Congratulations to the recipients of the 2026 Dr. Carlo Rodriguez Scholarships," said Robert Haag, president of FCPCS. "The Florida Consortium of Public Charter Schools salutes their accomplishments and dedication. We expect even more great things as they continue with their education."

The scholarship is named in memory of Dr. Carlo Rodriguez, a longtime education advocate who worked to expand

quality school choice opportunities for Florida students. Rodriguez served as head of the charter school office for Miami-Dade Public Schools and later led the Florida Department of Education's Office of Independent Education and Parental Choice before his untimely passing in 2007.

The Florida Consortium of Public Charter Schools, with support from EGIS Insurance & Risk Advisors of Boca Raton awards the scholarships annually to outstanding students pursuing higher education.

The 2026 scholarship recipients include Dana Aljubouri of River City Science Academy Middle-High in Jacksonville, Kezia Alvin of State College of Florida Collegiate School in Bradenton, D'Jorn Cox of Odyssey Charter School in Palm Bay, Alisha Drake of Babcock High School in Babcock Ranch, Andrea Gatson-Saintil of Somerset Preparatory Charter High School in North Lauderdale, Tyrus Grimes of Destin High School in Destin, Abigail King of Clark Advanced Learning Center in Stuart, James Mohan of State College of Florida Collegiate School Venice in Venice, Andres Mosquera of SLAM

North in North Miami Beach, Daschle Nelson of Pensacola State College Charter Academy in Pensacola, Anthony Rivas of Pepin Academy in Tampa and Mateo Suarez of Manatee School for the Arts in Palmetto.

Founded in 1999, the Florida

Consortium of Public Charter Schools is the state's leading charter school membership organization, providing advocacy, training and support to public charter schools throughout Florida.

For Destin High School and

the local community, Grimes' selection highlights the achievements of the school's graduating class and places him among a distinguished group of students recognized for their academic success and future potential.

Summer Sale

OVER **25** Attractions

QR Code: Emerald Coast

\$74.95 with waterpark add on
GET OUT
\$44.95 without waterpark add on

Logos: Emerald Coast Science Center, VR Reality, Urban Air Adventure Park, Uncle Buck's, Duncos, Cafe & Play, Emerald Coast Zoo, The Party Lab, Big Kahuna's, Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park, Shipwreck Island Waterpark, Man of the Sea, Naylor's Splash Fast, VR Adventure Zone, First Tee Gulf Coast, Strikerz, Pensacola Museum of Art, Do Play, Swampy Jack's Wongo, Mochas & Minis, PCM, Skate World.

*Venues and Prices Subject to Change

AROUND TOWN

continued from previous page

field at institutions in Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana or Texas. For information, contact Ashford Rosenberg at ashford@shareholdersalliance.org.

Emerald Coast Title Services Announces Merger with Osprey Title

Emerald Coast Title Services (ECTS), an attorney-run title and escrow company serving Northwest Florida since 1983, has announced the merger of Osprey Title into Emerald Coast Title Services.

The merger combines two established title companies

committed to personalized service and local expertise. Existing Osprey Title clients will continue working with familiar professionals while gaining access to expanded resources and support.

As part of the transition, Licensed Title Agent Lindsay Roberts joins the ECTS team. Roberts has worked in the Florida title insurance industry since 2003 and earned her Florida Licensed Title Agent certification in 2017.

ECTS serves residential and commercial real estate clients throughout the Emerald Coast, with offices in Destin, Fort Walton Beach, Freeport and Santa Rosa Beach.

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More Info & Registration Form at www.ParadisePromotionsfl.com

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Trends & Treasures!



A Sweet Summer Tradition Smallcakes: A Cupcakery

Some summer traditions involve the beach. Others involve ice cream. At Smallcakes: A Cupcakery, you can enjoy both—in dessert form.

Known for its gourmet cupcakes, custom cakes and house-made ice cream, Smallcakes continues to be a favorite destination for locals and visitors looking to satisfy a sweet tooth.

Their display case is filled daily with signature cupcake flavors, rotating seasonal specialties and colorful creations that are almost too pretty to eat. Almost.

Beyond cupcakes, guests can enjoy gourmet cookies, brownies, cookie cakes, cupcakes-in-a-jar, gourmet popcorn, gluten-free options and even pup cakes for four-legged family members.

Planning a celebration? Smallcakes also creates custom orders featuring logos, photos and personalized messages, making them perfect for birthdays, weddings, corporate events and special occasions.

Their assortment of mini cupcakes is a great way to sample a variety of flavors—or share with friends if you're feeling generous.

Open Mon.–Sat. 11 a.m.–7 p.m.

Sun. 11 a.m.–4 p.m.

(850) 842-9002

SmallcakesDestin.com

[@SmallCakesofDestin](https://www.instagram.com/SmallCakesofDestin)

Recharge Your Summer Routine CRYO850 Performance & Recovery Center

Summer is meant for making memories—not dealing with aches, fatigue or burnout. Whether you're chasing personal fitness goals, spending long days on the water, working demanding shifts, or simply looking for ways to feel healthier and more energized, CRYO850 Performance & Recovery Center

offers innovative wellness solutions designed to help you recover and perform at your best.

With Day, One-Week and Two-Week Pass options, guests can experience CRYO850's complete wellness circuit, including infrared sauna, red light therapy, whole-body cryotherapy, localized cryotherapy, vibration plates and compression therapy.

The combination is designed to help reduce inflammation, improve circulation, promote recovery, support better sleep and boost overall wellness. Many clients report feeling refreshed and rejuvenated after just one visit.

Voted Best in Destin, CRYO850 now accepts HSA and FSA cards, making it even easier to prioritize your health and wellness.

Start feeling your best this summer.

(850) 279-4145

www.cryo850.com

Follow @CRYO850 on Facebook and Instagram.

Summer Sparkle Starts Here Beyond Measure Fine Jewelry

Summer is the perfect time to add a little extra sparkle to your collection, and Beyond Measure Fine Jewelry offers beautiful pieces designed to shine all season long.

Owner Ashleigh Woolly specializes in custom jewelry design, helping clients create meaningful pieces that celebrate life's biggest moments. From engagement rings and wedding bands to statement jewelry and everyday favorites, each piece is thoughtfully selected or designed with exceptional craftsmanship.

Now through July 25, take advantage of the Summer Sale Event. Shop in-store or online and receive 20% off plus free shipping using promo code Summer2026.

This season's trends include

vibrant gemstones, coastal-inspired designs and stackable diamond bands that can be worn individually or layered for a customized look. Whether you're searching for a gift, commemorating a milestone or creating a one-of-a-kind design, Beyond Measure offers a personalized experience you'll treasure for years to come.

Some items online may not be available. Larger inventory available in-store. Call or message with questions.

(850) 424-7011

[Facebook.com/beyondmeasurejewelers](https://www.facebook.com/beyondmeasurejewelers)

beyondmeasurejewelry.com

Your Bridal Beauty Dream Team Pure & Couture Salon | Pure Collective Salon

Every bride wants to feel confident, beautiful and completely herself on her wedding day. Having recently experienced it firsthand, I can tell you that the talented professionals at Pure & Couture Salon and Pure Collective Salon helped make all the difference.

For my wedding, I chose hand-tied hair extensions, and they were truly a game-changer. They added the fullness, length and confidence I had always wanted, helping me feel like the very best version of myself as I walked down the aisle.

From customized hair extensions and bridal styling to flawless makeup application, their team specializes in creating looks that enhance your natural beauty while bringing your wedding vision to life.

Whether your style is classic, romantic, boho or glamorous, their experienced artists create personalized looks designed specifically for you. Services include bridal hair, airbrush makeup, spray tanning, lash extensions, blowouts, consultations and trial appointments.

The salons offer both in-studio and on-location wedding

services, making planning even easier for busy brides.

Now serving clients from two locations—Pure & Couture Salon in Destin and Pure Collective Salon at 600 Grand Blvd., Suite 102—the team also provides a full range of beauty services year-round, including haircuts, extensions, facials, makeup and more.

(850) 424-3935

pureandcouture.com

purecollectivesalon.com

Celebrate Your Big Day in Personalized Style Frill Seekers Gifts and Personalized Fabulous Finds

Planning a wedding comes with countless details, and the personalized touches are often the ones guests remember most. As a recent bride myself, I can attest that Frill Seekers Gifts was one of my favorite resources for adding those special details that made our wedding feel uniquely ours.

From beautifully embroidered bridesmaid bags and personalized gifts to custom cocktail napkins, koozies, cups and more, Frill Seekers helped bring our wedding vision to life while creating keepsakes our bridal party and guests could enjoy long after the celebration ended.

Looking for the perfect bridal party gift? Their popular Letter Luggage collection offers stylish overnight bags, totes and cosmetic bags that can be personalized with initials, making them thoughtful gifts for bridesmaids, mothers of the bride and groom, or even the bride herself. The elegant bags are not only beautiful but practical for destination weddings, bridal weekends, honeymoons and future travel adventures.

Whether you're planning an intimate beach ceremony, a grand celebration or a destination wedding along the Emerald Coast, Frill Seekers specializes in helping couples add mean-

ingful, personalized details that make every event feel extra special.

Visit their City Market Bay-side location in Destin or shop online to discover custom gifts, wedding accessories and personalized treasures for every member of your wedding party.

Mon.–Fri. 10 a.m.–5 p.m.

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One Last Summer at Sea Oats Motel

For more than 60 years, generations of visitors have made memories at the Sea Oats Motel, one of only two lodging properties located directly on the beach in Destin. This summer, guests will have a final opportunity to experience the iconic beachfront motel in its current form before a major renovation and rebranding project begins later this year.

Now under the management of Dallas-based RREAF Holdings, the 46-room property is expected to begin accepting reservations by July 7, 2026, for what will be its final season before renovations get underway following the peak summer season.

Originally opened in 1964, Sea Oats has long been known for its laid-back atmosphere, beachfront location and authentic Old Destin



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charm. Planned improvements will modernize guestrooms, add new accommodations and introduce a refreshed brand identity while preserving the character that has made the property a favorite among generations of visitors.

According to RREAF Holdings, the renovation will be designed to honor Sea Oats' history while enhancing the guest experience for years to come.

The company has also committed to retaining the motel's on-site team and the personalized service that has helped define the property for decades.

For longtime guests and locals alike, this summer offers a chance to revisit a true Destin landmark before it begins its next chapter.

Rotary Club of Destin Honors Gil Osterloh with the 2026 Service Above Self Award

The Rotary Club of Destin is proud to recognize Gil Osterloh, president and CEO of Beverage Law Professionals, as the recipient of our 2026 Service Above Self Award.

A lifelong Okaloosa-Walton County local, Gil has built a successful consulting and lobbying firm serving the food service, alcohol and lodging industries throughout the Southeast. But what truly sets him apart is his unwavering commitment to helping others.

Many in our community know Gil through his Facebook page, where he serves as a trusted source of information, keeping residents informed about everything from new businesses and community happenings to emergencies, accidents and neighbors in need. His dedication to connecting and informing our community has made a meaningful difference in countless lives.

Gil's service extends far beyond social media. Following Hurricane Michael, he and his wife, Alyssa, were among the first volunteers to enter Panama City after landfall, helping rescue residents and later establishing the non-profit Panhandle Prayers to assist



families recovering from disasters. During the COVID-19 shutdowns, Gil freely translated complex state orders affecting restaurants and bars into plain language, providing critical guidance to business owners across Florida at a time of great uncertainty.

Alongside their professional endeavors, Gil and Alyssa also donate their time and resources to help families facing terminal illness enjoy wish trips to Destin and create lasting memories together.

When informed he had been selected for the award, Gil's response was classic Gil: "No way. There are far more people more deserving."

That humility, combined with a lifetime of servant leadership and community involvement, is exactly why he was chosen.

Congratulations, Gil, and thank you for living Rotary's motto of Service Above Self every day.

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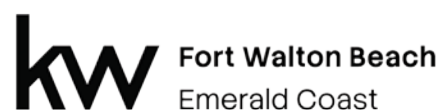


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Patriots Point Aims to Create a Lasting Tribute for America 250

BY LORI LEATH MILLER

As communities across the nation celebrate America's 250th anniversary throughout the year, a project taking shape in West Bay is inviting local families, veterans, businesses and community supporters to become part of a permanent tribute to our nation's history.

Known as Patriots Point, the initiative is the nonprofit arm of The Corner PCB, a community-focused development in Panama City Beach that seeks to create a gathering place centered on faith, patriotism, history and civic engagement. At the heart of the project will stand a towering American flag surrounded by a commemorative plaza designed to honor the nation's founding, military service and enduring ideals.

What began as a local passion project led by Steven Franco, owner of Rodos Realty, and his daughter, Bebe Franco, is quickly evolving into something much larger. Franco and a team of longtime Beachworx members, Rodos Realty colleagues and respected community leaders—including decorated military veterans Gary Redden and Bill Blanken, real estate partner



Greg Ganske, and service providers Jeff Margaretten, Aerial Payne and Dillon Turner—have collaborated on community-focused initiatives for years. Together, they believe Patriots Point has the potential to become a regional destination and a meaningful part of the nation's America 250 celebration. "Patriots Point started as a local project, but the more we developed the vision, the more we realized it represents something much larger," Franco said. "Northwest Florida has one of the strongest military connections anywhere

in the country. We want this to be a place where residents and visitors alike can reflect on the freedoms we enjoy and the people who have helped protect them."

That military connection is one reason Franco, Redden and the others believe the project is uniquely positioned to resonate with residents throughout Northwest Florida. In close proximities to West Bay are military installations including Tyndall Air Force Base, Eglin Air Force Base, Hurlburt Field, Naval Air Station Pensacola,

Duke Field, Naval Air Station Whiting Field, Naval Support Activity Panama City and additionally Corry Station (Center for Information Warfare Training), the U.S. Coast Guard Station Panama City and Fort Novosel (formerly known as Fort Rucker) nearby in Alabama. Generations of Air Force, Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard personnel have trained and served throughout the region, making the area one of the nation's most significant military corridors.

As America approaches its semiquincentennial, Patriots Point seeks to create a place where local families, veterans, business owners and community leaders can leave their mark and ensure their stories become part of a larger American story.

One of the most distinctive features of the project is a 1,776-square-foot commemorative walkway that will surround the flag plaza, symbolically honoring the year America declared its independence. The walkway will be constructed using custom engraved brick pavers purchased by supporters.

Each engraved paver can feature a family name, business, veteran tribute, memorial dedication or personal message. The pavers will become a permanent part of Patriots Point, creating a lasting connection between community members and the landmark itself. Project plans call for up to 5,000 engraved pavers, allowing individuals to honor loved ones, celebrate family legacies, recognize military service or showcase local businesses that

support the effort. Supporters can also purchase duplicate engraved pavers as keepsakes.

The vision extends well beyond the paver program, however. Design plans reveal a thoughtfully crafted public space featuring elements that symbolize key aspects of American history and government. Monument columns will represent significant eras of American history, while additional features will honor the nation's military branches, the 50 states and the three branches of government.

For Redden, the project is ultimately about creating something that future generations can experience and appreciate. "As America approaches its 250th anniversary, we have a unique opportunity to create something lasting," Redden said. "Every brick tells a story. It might honor a veteran, recognize a family or celebrate a local business, but together they become part of a larger story about our community and our country."

At a time when communities throughout the country are reflecting on what it means to be American, Patriots Point seeks to create a place where the stories of local residents can be shared and remembered for generations to come. Whether through a family name engraved in brick, a tribute to a veteran or support from local businesses, Franco's team hopes Northwest Florida residents will come together to build a lasting legacy that reflects the patriotism, service and community spirit that have long defined the region. More than a monument, Patriots Point is envisioned as a place where future generations can gather, reflect and remember the people whose service, sacrifice and love of country helped shape the community they call home.

For more information or to purchase an engraved paver, visit thecorneratpatriotspoint.org or scan the QR code.



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By KYLE SPARKS,
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Living near the Gulf is one of the best parts of calling the Emerald Coast home. The views, breezes, and sunshine are hard to beat—but they can also be tough on a home’s exterior.

Salt in the air and intense sun exposure gradually wear down paint over time. Exterior surfaces that face the afternoon sun often experience fading and chalking sooner than other areas of the home.

Paint acts as a protective shield, helping prevent moisture from penetrating siding and wood trim. Maintaining that protective layer helps extend the life of exterior materials and

keeps homes looking sharp year-round.

For rental properties, curb appeal also plays a major role in guest impressions. When visitors pull up to a clean, well-maintained home, it immediately sets the tone for their stay.

Kyle’s Tip:

“The west-facing side of a house usually takes the most beating from the sun. If one side of a home needs repainting sooner than the others, that’s usually the reason.”

Observing how your home holds up through the summer can help guide future maintenance and improvements.

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(850) 837-1913
116 Harbor Blvd.
ajdestin.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.,
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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 Boat-

house hosts locals on the Destin Harbor from 5-7 p.m. Listen and move with live entertainment daily. See ad for bands and times. Music schedule subject to change. Follow on Facebook for updates. During or after the game, mosey on over to hang with the locals.

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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

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501 Harbor Blvd., Ste. F Destin
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Hey sports fans, Tailfins Waterfront Grill is calling YOU to watch March Madness 2026! With TV's all around, it's a local favorite for ALL sports watching fans!

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Surf Bread Company: Where Every Loaf Tells a Story

There is a moment, just after a loaf of fresh sourdough is pulled apart, when the crust crackles, steam rises and the aroma fills the room. Conversations pause. Hands reach for another piece.

For a few minutes, nothing else seems quite as important.

At Surf Bread Company in Destin, those moments happen every day.

What began as a small cottage bakery fueled by a passion for traditional sourdough has grown into one of the Emerald Coast's favorite destinations for handcrafted artisan bread. Yet, despite its growth and devoted following, Surf Bread Company still remains a home-based, cottage business rooted in a simple belief: good bread has the power to bring people together. "We've always believed bread is more than food," the owners say. "It's something that connects people around the table, creates memories and turns ordinary moments into something special."

That philosophy is baked into every loaf.

Founded by a team committed to the art of slow fermentation and traditional baking methods, Surf Bread Company specializes in naturally leavened sourdough crafted with patience, care and high-quality ingredients. Every loaf undergoes



a lengthy fermentation process that develops the rich flavor, chewy texture and crisp crust that sourdough lovers crave.

In a world filled with shortcuts, Surf Bread Company embraces a slower approach. "Our goal has never been to be the biggest bakery," owners Brad and Michelle say. "We simply

want every loaf that leaves our bakery to reflect the care and craftsmanship that went into making it."

Customers have responded enthusiastically. Many describe Surf Bread Company's sour-

dough as the best they've ever tasted. Others make weekly trips to stock up on favorite loaves and specialty breads. Customers frequently praise not only the quality of the products, but also the welcoming atmosphere and personal touch that have become hallmarks of the bakery.

In fact, one visitor from Oklahoma discovered Surf Bread Company's sourdough English muffins while vacationing along the Emerald Coast

and was so impressed that he returned home and organized a blind taste test with friends and neighbors. Surf Bread Company's English muffins were compared against several well-known brands and emerged as the clear favorite. Today, the group regularly coordinates large orders—sometimes as many as 50 packs at a time—to be shipped to Oklahoma, ensur-

Continued on page 29



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Sweet Moments Begin in Cindy's Kitchen

BY LORI LEATH MILLER

Some of the sweetest moments from my wedding day began long before Scott and I said, "I do."

As our family and friends arrived from out of town to stay in the charming cottages at The Alice, we wanted them to feel welcomed the moment they opened the door. We envisioned something warm, thoughtful and personal—a little surprise to let them know how much we appreciated them traveling to celebrate with us.

That's when Cindy Smith-Wojdac, owner of CiCi's Cookies & Treats, stepped in. She created charming, thought-

fully curated welcome gift boxes filled with homemade cookies and hand-selected treats that greeted our guests upon arrival, setting the tone for the warm, welcoming experience we hoped they would enjoy throughout the weekend.

It was one of those small details that made a big impression. Guests immediately commented on how special it made them feel, and more than one person asked, "Where did these amazing cookies come from?"

That question is becoming more common as Cindy's home-based bakery continues to delight customers throughout the Emerald Coast. For Cindy,

however, baking has never been just about creating something delicious (though it IS)! It has always been about creating connection.

"Why CiCi?" she asks on her website. The answer is simple. Her greatest inspiration comes from her two beloved granddaughters, who love spending time baking alongside their CiCi. Those flour-covered afternoons filled with laughter, measuring cups and sweet treats eventually inspired a business built around the very things Cindy values most: family, hospitality and bringing joy to others. "This venture is a true labor of love," Cindy says. "For me, cookies and treats are more than just sweets; they're a way to spread joy, comfort and connection."

That philosophy is evident in every order she creates. Through CiCi's Cookies & Treats, Cindy offers handcrafted cookies, brownies, cookie cakes, dessert boxes and custom gift packages designed for birthdays, weddings, baby showers, holidays, corporate gifts and everyday celebrations. Each order is carefully prepared, artfully packaged and designed to make every recipient feel a little extra special.

Our wedding was no exception. In addition to the welcome gift boxes, Cindy created a beautiful dessert display that quickly became a guest favorite. Filled with cookies, chocolate-covered treats and other sweet delights



PHOTO BY SAVVY LEIGH PHOTO FROM LORI & SCOTT MILLER'S WEDDING



in shades that perfectly complemented our wedding colors, the table was as beautiful as it was delicious. Throughout the evening, guests gathered around it, sampling treats and returning for seconds.

In fact, I never even got one of the cookies I had specifically chosen and couldn't wait to try. Between greeting guests, dancing and enjoying the evening, I didn't make it to the dessert table in time. They were literally gone before the wedding ended! While I was disappointed to miss out, it was also the ultimate compliment to Cindy. The guests clearly loved them every bit as much as I thought they would. It wasn't simply dessert. It became part of the celebration.

That's what makes Cindy's business unique. Whether she is preparing treats for a wedding reception, assembling welcome gifts for vacation guests or creating a special surprise for a birthday or holiday, she understands that food often becomes part of life's most meaningful moments.

In today's fast-paced world, where so many gifts are ordered with a click and delivered without a personal touch, Cindy's creations feel different. Every cookie, every package and every ribbon reflects the care of someone who genuinely enjoys making others happy.

And perhaps that's no surprise. After all, when something is made with love, people tend to notice. For Cindy, it all comes back to those moments in the kitchen with her granddaughters—the inspiration behind the business and the reason she continues to bake.

Her hope is simple: that every treat she creates brings a little warmth, happiness and sweetness into someone's day. Based on the smiles she helped create at our wedding, I'd say she's accomplishing exactly that.

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DESTIN DINING

continued from page 26

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Lady Ray's Culinary Delights



A charming café, bakery and pastry bar known for its handcrafted baked goods, artisan sandwiches, specialty coffees and custom cakes, this boutique eatery is the creation of Chef Rachel "Lady Ray," whose culinary background includes work with Ritz-Carlton properties in New Orleans and West Palm Beach, award-winning catering companies and innovative farm-to-table restaurants.

they walk through the door.

The bakery has become a gathering place where neighbors connect, visitors discover a local treasure and families create traditions centered around fresh bread and shared meals. In many ways, it reflects the laid-back coastal lifestyle that inspired its name.

As the business continues to grow, the mission remains unchanged: create exceptional bread while fostering community one loaf at a time. "We love seeing customers come back week after week," the owners say. "Knowing our bread is part of family dinners, celebrations and everyday moments is what makes this work so rewarding."

In an age when so much feels rushed, Surf Bread Company serves as a reminder that some things are still worth waiting for. A handcrafted loaf. A shared meal. A conversation around the table.

And sometimes, all it takes is the simple act of breaking bread.

For orders: (850) 650-2334 | SurfBreadCo.com

Open Thursday & Friday: 11:30 a.m. – 4 p.m. | Saturday Pickup: 8–10 a.m.

Pre-orders available Tuesday through Saturday.

Follow on social media for weekly menus, specialty loaves, seasonal offerings and bakery updates.

What began as a passion for culinary artistry has grown into a local favorite offering everything from fresh pastries and breakfast treats to lunch fare, wedding cakes, tea parties and event planning services. Rachel's philosophy blends elevated hospitality with a commitment to supporting fellow local

businesses, creating an experience that feels both personal and memorable.

Guests can stop in for a latte and pastry, enjoy a handcrafted sandwich for lunch or browse an ever-changing selection of sweet treats made in small batches. The café also specializes in custom cakes and desserts for

weddings, birthdays and special occasions.

Hours: Wednesday–Saturday, 8 a.m.–4 p.m.; Sunday, 8 a.m.–2 p.m.; closed Monday and Tuesday.

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SURF BREAD

continued from page 27

ing they never run out of their newfound favorite.

Stories like that have become increasingly common as word of the bakery spreads beyond Northwest Florida. One customer shared that Surf Bread Company's bread has become a staple in their home, while another noted that after trying the bakery's sourdough, store-bought bread simply doesn't compare. Others rave about the bakery's consistent quality, friendly service and ever-changing lineup of specialty offerings.

While artisan sourdough remains the heart of the business, visitors quickly discover there's much more waiting behind the counter. Fresh baguettes, handcrafted bagels, sweet breads/treats and seasonal creations regularly tempt customers, with many favorites selling out quickly.

Because everything is made fresh in small batches, planning ahead has become part of the Surf Bread Company experience. Loyal customers know that pre-ordering often guarantees access to their favorite loaves, especially during busy weeks and holidays.

What makes Surf Bread Company stand out isn't simply the bread itself. It's the feeling customers experience when

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From Seacrest Beach to the White House: Lulu's Story Changes America

By LORI LEATH MILLER

Two years ago, our community witnessed something that few who were there will ever forget.

On June 7, 2024, what began as a beautiful summer afternoon at Seacrest Beach turned into one of the most extraor-

dinary stories of courage, faith and humanity our area has ever experienced. (See July 2024 issue of MyDestinLife.com for original article: <https://destin.lifemediagrp.com/the-miracle-at-seacrest-beach-america-responds/>)

A shark attacked 15-year-

old Lulu Gribbin as she swam in the Gulf. Within moments, complete strangers rushed into the water. A beach attendant, vacationing families, physicians, nurses, an EMT, a former life-guard and countless others worked together to save her life before South Walton Fire



PHOTO: LULU STRONG (INSTAGRAM)

Today, Lulu has become much more than a survivor. She has become an advocate, sharing her story across the country and encouraging lawmakers to improve beach safety.

In addition to helping inspire Lulu's Law at both the state and federal levels, she and her family established the Lulu Strong Foundation, which works to improve the accessibility, performance and affordability of advanced prosthetics, virtual reality therapy and other life-changing technologies for individuals with limb differences.

Her resilience has drawn national attention. In 2025, Southern Living named Lulu its "Southerner of the Year," recognizing not only her advocacy efforts, but also the remarkable way she has embraced life after the attack. Today, she is an accomplished adaptive golfer and water skier who continues to inspire others while still enjoying life as a teenager.

While Florida has not created its own statewide shark alert system, the new federal law directs the Federal Communications Commission to establish rules allowing state and local emergency officials to use Wireless Emergency Alerts after confirmed shark attacks.

For those of us along the Emerald Coast, this legislation is deeply personal.

We remember the helicopters overhead. We remember praying for Lulu and the other victims. We remember the countless heroes who stepped forward without hesitation. And we remember a frightened teenage girl who whispered just one sentence after surgery: "I made it."

Today, because of her courage and determination, Lulu's story is helping protect beachgoers not only here on the Emerald Coast, but across America's coastlines.

Publisher's Note: We believed then that God was working through ordinary people to save Lulu's life. Today, her story continues to save lives in a different way—by changing how America responds when every second counts.

District crews, Walton County Sheriff's deputies and emergency medical personnel arrived.

When we first shared Rick Karle's powerful story, "The Miracle at Seacrest Beach: America Responds," we weren't simply reporting on a tragedy. We were celebrating the remarkable people God placed on that beach that day. As one physician later reflected, "When we come together, great things can happen."

Now, that miracle has led to something even bigger.

Recently, President Donald Trump signed Lulu's Law, federal legislation that will allow shark attacks to become eligible for Wireless Emergency Alerts—the same emergency notification system used for Amber Alerts and severe weather. The goal is simple: if a confirmed shark attack occurs, emergency officials can quickly notify people nearby before another family unknowingly enters the water.

The legislation, sponsored by U.S. Alabama Sen. Katie Britt, is named for Lulu, who was one of three people bitten during a string of shark attacks along the Florida Panhandle that day. Lulu lost her left hand and part of her right leg in the attack and has spent the time since advocating for better safety measures to help protect others.

The idea grew from a heart-breaking reality. About 90 minutes before Lulu was attacked off Seacrest Beach, another swimmer had been bitten just a few miles away. Had beachgoers throughout the area known about that first attack, Lulu's family has often said, the outcome might have been very different.

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Summer Fun Is in Full Swing at Gulfarium

Visit the Gulfarium This Summer

Summer is the perfect time to plan a visit to Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park, where guests can enjoy dolphin and sea lion presentations, exciting animal encounters, and two of the park's newest additions: Manatee Cove and Dolphin Oasis.

At Manatee Cove, guests can observe rescued manatees Romeo, Lil Joe, and Inigo from multiple viewing levels while learning more about their stories and the conservation efforts helping protect this beloved species.

Over at Dolphin Oasis, guests can take in beautiful Gulf views while enjoying engaging dolphin presentations and unforgettable opportunities to connect with Gulfarium's Atlantic bottlenose dolphins.

For an extra special way to start the day, guests can book the Dolphin Rise and Shine Package, which includes early entry, a guided look at the park, a dockside dolphin encounter, and admission to enjoy the Gulfarium for the rest of the day.



Get Fit with the Gulfarium This Summer

This summer, Gulfarium is giving guests a whole new way to move, stretch, and unwind with two unique wellness experiences surrounded by marine life.

Pilates with Dolphins invites guests to start the morning with an all-levels pilates class at Dolphin Oasis. Led by a certified instructor, this special class offers



an energizing workout with dolphins nearby, creating a one-of-a-kind fitness experience in one of the most beautiful settings on the Emerald Coast.

Guests can also experience UNDERWATER: The Living Sea Experience, an after-hours yoga class inside Gulfarium's Living Sea Aquarium. Surrounded by marine life, participants will move through a slow, ocean-inspired flow and step into another world for an evening of movement, relaxation, and wonder.

Whether you are starting your morning with dolphins or winding down inside the Living Sea Aquarium, Gulfarium's summer wellness experiences offer a fun and refreshing way to get fit this season.



Sunset Camp Returns for a Summer of Fun

Looking for a magical summer night activity just for kids? The Gulfarium's Sunset Camp is back and better than ever! This evening camp gives kids ages 6-14 a chance to explore the park after hours, enjoy exclusive animal encounters, and learn about marine life through hands-on fun.

While parents enjoy a night out, campers will dive into adventure with a dolphin dockside encounter, a reptile meet-and-

greet, up-close time with our penguin colony, and dinner by Seal Harbor. They'll also join our education team for beachside learning activities to inspire conservation and curiosity.

Sunset Camp fills up quickly with limited dates throughout the summer, so don't wait! Visit Gulfarium.com to view camp dates and secure your child's spot today.

Visit gulfarium.com.



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SS United States Nears Final Voyage as World's Largest Artificial Reef

After more than 50 years of retirement and several unsuccessful attempts at restoration, America's fastest ocean liner is preparing for one final record-breaking voyage—not across the Atlantic, but beneath the Gulf waters off Destin-Fort Walton Beach.

The historic SS United States is one step closer to beginning that next chapter. Okaloosa County officials recently announced that environmental remediation of the legendary vessel is complete. The ship remains docked in Mobile, Alabama, awaiting final approvals from the U.S. Army Corps of

Engineers and the Environmental Protection Agency before deployment as the world's largest artificial reef.

For many local residents, the announcement marks another milestone in a project they have followed closely since Okaloosa County purchased the ship in 2024. What began as an ambitious vision to preserve an American icon has become one of the most unique environmental and tourism projects in the nation.

Launched in 1952, the SS United States carried four U.S. presidents, Hollywood celebrities, military personnel and



countless travelers during her years at sea. More than seven decades later, she still holds the trans-Atlantic speed record, a title no passenger ship has ever surpassed.

Rather than allowing the vessel to be scrapped, Okaloosa County chose a different path. The Okaloosa County Board



SS United States Update (Photos taken May 2026)

of County Commissioners approved the purchase on Oct. 1, 2024. After nearly 30 years docked in Philadelphia, the ship departed on Feb. 19, 2025, arriving in Mobile on March 3, 2025, where extensive environmental remediation began. That work was completed in May 2026, bringing the project significantly closer to deployment.

The approximately \$13 million effort is funded through tourism development revenues and partner contributions. Funding covers the ship's purchase, towing, environmental preparation, deployment and support for a future land-based museum dedicated to preserving its history.

Partners include Visit Pensacola, the Coastal Conservation Association, Yamaha Rightwaters, the Fish & Wildlife Foundation of Florida, Force Blue, NAUI Worldwide, the Explorers Club and Diver's Alert Network. Scientists from Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution will conduct long-term research documenting how an entirely new reef ecosystem develops on the vessel from day one.

Once deployed, the SS United States will become the crown jewel of one of the nation's most successful artificial reef programs. Since the 1970s, Okaloosa County has deployed 48 large vessels and developed nearly 600 artificial reefs in Gulf waters.

County officials expect the

ship to generate significant tourism benefits as divers from around the world travel to experience the historic vessel. The project is also expected to support local hotels, restaurants, charter operators, retailers and other businesses throughout the region.

Equally important are the environmental benefits. Prepared under strict federal and state standards, the vessel will create vital habitat for marine life, including grouper, snapper, tuna, mahi-mahi, marlin, sea turtles and countless other species that support a healthy Gulf ecosystem.

For those concerned about preserving history, county leaders emphasize that the project does exactly that. Rather than disappearing into a scrapyard, the SS United States will continue telling her story beneath the Gulf as a thriving artificial reef while a future museum shares her remarkable legacy with visitors from around the world.

For a ship that once connected continents, her final voyage will connect history, conservation and tourism in a way few projects ever have. Soon, the world's fastest ocean liner will begin her slowest journey—settling beneath the Gulf and becoming home to thousands of marine creatures while inspiring future generations of divers, anglers, scientists and visitors.

For updates on the project, visit destinfwb.com/explore/eco-tourism/ssus.





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Golf Series: Children In Crisis Tournament at Shalimar Pointe Golf Course Knows its “Fore the Kids”



BY BARBARA PALMGREN

For over 19 years, Children in Crisis, a non-profit organization, has hosted a golf tournament to support a program that provides emergency shelter services for children who have been removed from their homes from the Department of Children

and Families due to abuse, neglect, or other emergencies. The dedicated staff offer emergency shelter, housing, educational support and tutoring as well as counseling and emotional support.

This organization is committed to keeping brothers and sisters together, providing foster care for abused, neglected, and abandoned children. They work to recruit and support foster parents in the four-county area of Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa and Walton counties.

Renamed the Ken Hair Charity Golf Classic for former CEO, Ken Hair, the shot-gun start for a four-person team, began on Friday, May 22 at 9 a.m. with a scramble format. This



means only one person on the team has to hit a perfect drive off the team, or a second shot, a putt, etc. Your partner hits

an errant shot into the woods? No problem. You won't use that golf shot for sure! Brunch, a golf shirt, a silent

auction and an awards party awaited all golfers upon return to the clubhouse. The weather was perfect in late spring with cloud cover and a slight breeze. So, no excuses for not hitting golf shots straight, or having balls find their way inside that ever so tiny hole on the putting green.

The winners were:

- First place:** David Schneeberger, Ken Isham, Bobby Massingill, Fred Wantland
- Second place:** Bob Hollbrook, George Wall, Julius Turner, Bob Sivill
- Third place:** John Lewis, Hap Meadows, Sam Carelly, John Hargather

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Perfecting Form: Little Tweaks That Really Pay Off



BY LISA LEATH TURPIN, LOCAL HEALTH & WELLNESS COACH

Everyone wants to get results from their efforts. In fitness, it takes time to get stronger, leaner and healthier. With consistent dedication, you will see results.

Even more so, if you focus on targeting each exercise correctly, you will begin seeing those results more quickly and safely.

Training with efficiency and precision can make the difference in weeks instead of months, leading to faster transformations. Even the length of your workouts can be shorter when you put more thought into your form. Focusing on the purpose of each movement is a huge time-saver.

Can you isolate the muscle, or is it a muscle-group action? What is the purpose of this move? What is the muscle or joint action? Am I performing the exercise in the safest way?

I have picked out a few pop-

ular strength-training target areas that I commonly see performed under par, along with tweaks to make them better serve your efforts.

Plank – The purpose is to strengthen the core and stabilize all joints. All muscles are engaged, making this a full-body exercise. It can be performed on the hands or elbows and toes.

If you begin sliding, you are not stacked correctly. You should be balanced directly over your hands or elbows, so adjust until you feel that balance. If your arms are at an angle, your plank will be off-balance, and the diagonal force will push you in a direction instead of holding you up. This makes your plank much more difficult to hold than it has to be.

You should feel balanced on your toes as well. Pull in your bellybutton, square your chest and shoulders, and engage your rib cage to stabilize the core.

Note: Your head is an extension of your spine, so it needs to be aligned with your body instead of bending down or lifting too high. A key point for any exercise: Your head is a guide. Your



spine and shoulders generally follow where you look. If you want a really solid, safe plank, keep your head in line with your body. Strengthening your neck is a very important and beneficial part of the plank.

Don't forget your thighs. They need to be engaged and firm because they are an essential part of the movement. Tuck your tailbone slightly if you feel extra tension in your lower back.

Literally every muscle is being used in a plank, and the benefits are outstanding, but the mistakes can be detrimental.

Biceps – The purpose is to flex the elbow joint so you can pick things up. This muscle can be isolated if you stabilize the shoulder joint.

If your elbows move forward or backward during a biceps curl, you are adding assistance from the shoulders, which diminishes the full use of the biceps. All you need to focus on is the elbow bending and unbending.

Full range of motion (ROM) is from a straight arm to a bent arm, pertaining only to the elbow. To perform a good strengthening set, always keep the elbow engaged. Never let it fully release when you straighten the arm. Elbows stay in one place throughout the movement. Keep moving for a series of 10-12 reps before you rest, and repeat for two to four sets.

Triceps – The purpose is to extend the elbow to push things away. Isolate the triceps by eliminating movement of the shoulder for the same reason as with biceps.

Full ROM is going from about a 90-degree bent elbow to straight. Keep the elbows in one place throughout the set.

Note: Triceps are the opposite of the biceps. When the biceps contract, the triceps cannot, and vice versa. So, if you "swing" through your movement, especially in triceps exercises, you will lose your contraction and not get as much out of it.

By stabilizing your body in the right position, using the joints and muscles correctly, and keeping tension through the full range of motion, you will unleash your body's full potential and see results in record time.

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A Little Glow Before “I Do”



By KRISY WHITELY ANDERSON,
OWNER, BEVERLY HILLS DAY SPA

A few weeks before her wedding, Lori Leath Miller decided to try something she had never done before—a chemical peel facial. Today, she calls it a game changer. “I had no idea what I was missing,” Lori said. “Krisy made the experience so comfortable, and my skin looked amazing. With a busy schedule full of community events, business functions and being in front of a camera, I need my skin looking its best. The results were incredible, and now I’m hooked.

TOP 5

continued from page 4

you. We can order tests, recommend treatments, and help create a plan. But we cannot make choices for you.

The patients who experience the greatest transformations are not necessarily the ones with the most resources or the perfect genetics. They are the ones who become active participants in their own health. They ask questions. They stay curious. They follow through. They view their health as an investment rather than an expense.

Your healthcare team can walk beside you, but ultimately, you are the most important member of the team.

At the end of the day, these truths are not meant to make anyone feel guilty. They’re meant to be empowering. Your body is remarkably resilient. It is constantly adapting, healing, and responding to the choices you make each day. Small improvements, practiced consistently, can create extraordinary changes over time.

And if there’s one thing I hope every patient understands, it’s this: it’s never too late to start listening to your body and giving it the care it deserves.



Honestly, I only wish I had started doing this years ago instead of waiting until I was in my 60s. Along with her products I use at home, my skin has never looked or felt better.”

Chemical peels have become one of our most requested treatments, because they do so much more than simply refresh the skin. They can help improve texture and tone, soften the appearance of fine lines, reduce acne scars, fade dark spots, brighten the complexion and minimize the appearance of pores. Many clients also see improvement in melasma and other forms of discoloration.

Whether you’re preparing

for a wedding, reunion, vacation or simply want healthier-looking skin, we offer treatments designed to help you glow with confidence.

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Ultimate Skin Refiner Hydro Facial (\$150)

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For even more personalized results, facial treatments can be

enhanced with add-ons such as dermaplaning, red light therapy, collagen eye and lip treatments, microcurrent lifting, lash tinting and brow services.

As Lori discovered before her big day, sometimes the best beauty secret isn’t found in a

bottle—it’s investing in healthy, glowing skin. And it’s never too late to start.

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Wellness



By KAY LEAMAN, HEALTH ARCHITECT, CERTIFIED NUTRITION & SKIN ADVISOR

I was cleaning up the side of my fridge the other day where I keep healthy things I need to remember. My June article discussed reading food labels. What I forgot to add are the labels on produce.

Four-digit codes that begin with a 3 or 4 = Conventionally grown

Five-digit codes that begin with 9 = Organic

Five-digit codes that begin with 8 = Genetically modified

The first two codes are what they say. Genetically modified produce tends to be a gray area since producers do not have to tell us how the produce was modified. Take corn, for example. Did you know that they found a way to insert insect-resistant chemicals into corn seeds, thereby making the corn insect resistant? Those kernels may taste good, but what might those chemicals be doing to us? There are many other ways produce is being genetically modified, so by avoiding these, we can put a checkmark next to making another healthier choice.



Next, let's revisit cholesterol as it pertains to heart disease. There is a doctor and research that have shown that the statistics for mortality and morbidity alone prove that cholesterol-lowering drugs (statins) fail to significantly lower the death rate from cardiovascular disease. Risk factors for heart disease include:

Age, low HDL cholesterol, low free testosterone (for men), smoking, HBP, elevated C-reactive protein, homocysteine > 7.0, oxidized LDL, diabetes, genetics, obesity, inactivity, chronic periodontal disease, stress, arterial calcifications and nutritional deficiencies.

Notice that it is not the level of LDL cholesterol, but the level of oxidized LDL. This is why it is so important to pay for the tests that doctors never run (listed in the February article). It is also notable that diet, exercise and nutritional supplementation play important roles in test results and overall health.

Another note of importance is that, when researching information, be sure to note the parameters of the study being done.

Now on to plastics. Plastic is everywhere, especially in our kitchens: food containers, beverage bottles, dishes, glasses, etc.

One thing to remember is to never microwave food in plastic. I have glass containers for leftovers, but I never use the plastic lid to cover the container when reheating. I use my food-safe silicone pad.

All plastic containers have a triangle on the bottom with a number in it. Here is the breakdown:

Green:

- #2** – Laundry detergent bottles, milk jugs, folding chairs and tables: No known health concerns.
- #4** – Juice and milk cartons (as the waterproof inner and outer layer), grocery bags: No known health concerns.
- #5** – Yogurt and margarine tubs, plastic cups and baby bottles, kitchenware, microwavable plastic containers and lids: Microwavable/dishwasher safe does NOT mean it's a healthy practice. It only means it will not warp when heated. Hand-washing is recommended.

Yellow:

- #1** – Cosmetics, household cleaners, water, juice, soft drinks, salad dressings, oil, peanut butter: Studies have found antimony (a toxic chemical) leaching from water bottles exposed to heat (Note: They are shipped

in cases on pallets in trucks.). PETE plastic is only intended for one-time use. Reusing plastic water bottles, etc., can cause chemicals to leach into the liquid.

- #7** – Electrical wiring, CD/DVD cases, baby bottles, 3- and 5-gallon reusable bottles: BPA found in these products has been found to be an endocrine disruptor. Look for green numbers as an alternative.

Red:

- #3** – Shower curtains, cling wrap (avoid using, or place a paper towel between food and plastic), pool toys, inflatable structures, clothing, vinyl IV bags used in neonatal intensive care: PVC is toxic and releases gases into the air. Let your cars off-gas before driving. Choose baby toys and pool and bath toys that are PVC-, phthalate- and BPA-free.
- #6** – Disposable cutlery, egg cartons, foam cups and to-go foam packaging from restaurants: Long-term exposure to small quantities of styrene can cause neurotoxic, hematological, cytogenic and carcinogenic effects. It is classified as a possible human carcinogen by the EPA. Transfer your restaurant leftovers to a safe container as quickly as possible. Avoid foam egg cartons. (A study showed that, after three hours, chemicals from the egg carton had leached through the eggshell into the eggs.)

If enough consumers stop buying certain products, it can signal the industry that we demand safer products. I think I'm going to start educating the restaurants we frequent about the dangers of their take-home products as well as their foam cups. ;-)

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BY STEPHENIE CRAIG, JOURNEY BRAVELY

When was the last time you remember experiencing such fun and glee that your face hurt from smiling and your body was overwhelmed with joy? Do you remember being a kid pushed super high on the swing, getting a delicious, cold popsicle from the ice cream truck or riding a bike fast with the wind in your face? Little children who have not yet been taught to be measured and self-conscious say, “Weeeeeeee!” when they have deeply joyful experiences. “Weeeeeeee!” is another way to say “I love life,” “This is amazing,” “I was made to live in this moment.”

Somewhere along the way of growing up and adulthood, you can begin to lose both the pursuit and the childlike fascination with joy. You can lose the “Weeeeeeee!” in life and days can run into weeks tending to responsibilities and forgetting that life was also made for joy regardless of your age. Loss of joy and over-focusing on the hard, uncomfortable experiences in life can leave you feeling emotionally numb, depressed, exhausted, lacking purpose and generally grumpy. Adult life is best lived in a state of balance between taking care of business and consistent, intentional pursuit of “Weeeeeeee!” moments.

You might view joy as an extra, unnecessary, low priority in life. However, it’s hard to stay motivated and emotionally checked in if life is primarily full of bills, stress, obligations, annoying people, exhausting experiences and unengaging tasks. Your body was designed to also experience a sense of passion, fun, purpose, creativity, light-heartedness, laughter, connection and feeling lit up from the inside out.

So, you know you need more joy and “Weeeeeeee!” moments in life, but how can you make it happen?

6 Ways to Chase the “Weeeeeeee!” Moments

1. Remember and learn from earlier versions of yourself. Think about what used to spark joy and light you up as a kid. Maybe it was singing, dancing, art, reading, bike riding, rides at the fair, catching bugs, fishing, running fast, splashing, rolling in the grass, playing with your pet or building. Remember times of laughing, silliness and being un-self-conscious and notice what you were doing at the time.

2. Notice your body sensations. Think about where you felt the joy and the “Weeeeeeee!” in your body in childhood. Maybe your face hurt from laughing, your chest felt warm and full, your limbs felt light and floaty or you felt energetic.

3. Connect the past with the present. Try noticing when your body feels the joy sensations now. Maybe being in the ocean, riding in a boat, riding your bike, seeing dolphins, being in nature, creative pursuits or some other current experience gives you a “Weeeeeeee!” feeling if you pay closer attention.

4. Return to past experiences of joy. Try bringing childhood joyful activities into your adult life. Write a story,



pick up painting, make a fun cake, read a book you have loved, make a handmade card, roll down a hill with your kids, catch a big fish, watch the squirrels, build Lego, tie-dye a shirt or ride a roller coaster.

5. Track your joy. Try keeping a list in your notes app of “Weeeeeeee!” activities. Then try planning intentional time in your calendar each week for those activities. Start with once a week for 15 to 30 minutes and work your way up to more

amounts of time that work into your life.

6. Reflect. Over time, re-

flect on how life feels different as you look for and intentionally incorporate more “Weeeeeeee!” moments into your life. Use reminders in your phone and on sticky notes for a few months to keep you on track with your practice of joy until it becomes a habit.

If you are a person who experienced a difficult childhood, it may be hard to find historical times of joy to guide you. That’s okay. You aren’t alone. You can start noticing now what makes you want to say, “Weeeeeeee!” and intentionally pursue those activities while you cultivate a practice of joy for the first time. Have fun as you chase the “Weeeeeeee!” in your day-to-day life. Connect with us along your journey for coaching and counseling at Journeybravely.com.

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Pure Water in Your Home

By MARTA ROSE-THORPE,
WWW.ASUPERIORMECHANICAL.COM

A Superior Mechanical is a 24-year-old Veteran-owned business, now serving Bay, Walton and Okaloosa Counties. For the first 23 years we focused on Air Conditioning, keeping our customers Cool as a Cucumber! Now as you know, in our current economic climate, many service companies are getting bought out by larger corporations; we've been made our fair

share of offers. Companies have a choice: to either sell out or expand, and we decided to expand. I sometimes call us One of the Last Local Mom & Pops. Late last year, we started adding services: Plumbing and Electrical. We started expanding our reach, and we now serve Destin, Niceville, Fort Walton Beach... and we continue to head west. We wanted to be our customer's One-Stop Service Shop. So, when we really started thinking

about Whole Home Systems, two more things kept coming up: Clean Air and Clean Water. Last year, we entered the world of IAQ, also known as Indoor Air Quality. This is particularly important for family members with allergies or asthma. We can come to your home or business and add Air Scrubbers, which remove pollutants in the air and reduce allergens and irritants. These activated carbon filters also help neutralize odors from



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pets, cooking and smoke. We started to realize all the interest in IAQ, which led us to diving into the Pure Water space two months ago. So now we offer Water Purification Solutions such as Reverse Osmosis, which uses a semi-permeable membrane to remove impurities and contaminants from the water. Reverse Osmosis is commonly used for drinking water, desalination, water treatment in industrial processes, and F&B production. What is the importance of Water Purification? First, Health, because its removing harmful pathogens and contaminants. We use a water softening process to remove hard chemicals from the water, namely calcium and magnesium; this also improves taste and odor of water. Hard water can lead to scale build-up which leads to problems with plumbing and problems with your appliances including dishwasher and washing machine. Softening the water feels silkier on the skin, is better for skin and hair, and you can actually use less soap, shampoo and laundry detergent. The primary source of water for Walton County is the Upper Floridian Aquifer; the primary

source of water for Bay County is Deer Point Lake. What we're looking for is not more than one part per million (PPM) of any of these common toxins that are in these waters: Chlorine, Lead and Copper. Environmental runoff and water treatment processes can add contaminants to water like Aluminum, Barium, Radium and Nitrate. In the warmer waters of summertime, Blue-Green Algae and Cyanotoxins are frequently found in the water and can produce toxins affecting the liver and nervous system. Currently, A Superior Mechanical is offering a FREE WATER ASSESSMENT for your home or office. Just call our office at (850) 258-3225 to set your appointment, and we'll come out, totally free of charge, and check your water. If you have particulates in your water, we have numerous solutions to remove them, and we can discuss that. We're here for you and are happy to be your One-Stop Service Shop, and part of your Whole Home Wellness System. For more information, feel free to call me at (850) 814-3822.



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Destin Business Selected for National America 250 Showcase

A Destin-based company has earned national recognition as part of a special initiative celebrating America’s 250th anniversary.

The Alliance for American Manufacturing (AAM), known for its annual Made in America Holiday Gift Guide featured on CBS Sunday Morning, has selected Destin’s Sunrise Chair Co. for its American-Made 250 Showcase, an online collection highlighting makers from all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. The showcase celebrates American-made products and the workers whose craftsmanship continues to strengthen the nation.

“There is no better way to celebrate 250 years of American history than with products that are actually made here,” said AAM President Scott Paul. “The American-Made 250 Showcase tells the story of the workers and makers who are building this country. Every time we choose to buy an American-made good, we’re investing in our nation’s next 250 years. A strong domestic manufacturing base is essential if we want the United States to continue to lead the world and ensure that the American Dream is within



reach for generations to come.”
Made in Florida: Sunrise Chair Co.

Founded by Brad McDowell, Sunrise Chair Co. was born after more than a decade working in the beach chair industry. McDowell set out to create a beach chair focused on quality, comfort and durability. Today, Sunrise Chair Co.’s products are featured at high-end beach resorts across the country and are also available for retail purchase, allowing customers to bring a piece of the Emerald Coast home with them.

The American-Made 250 Showcase comes as consumer demand for American-made products continues to grow. According to AAM, 81% of Americans say they are as likely or more likely to purchase Ameri-

can-made goods, while 83% say they would buy more products made in the USA if they were more readily available.

The showcase aims to connect consumers with American manufacturers and the quality, craftsmanship and jobs supported by buying domestic products.

For those interested in discovering more American-made businesses, AAM’s Made in America Directory features more than 1,000 companies and can be searched by state and product category.

About the Alliance for Ameri-

can Manufacturing

The Alliance for American Manufacturing is a nonprofit, nonpartisan partnership formed in 2007 by leading U.S. manufacturers and the United Steel-

workers. Through research, education and advocacy, AAM works to strengthen American manufacturing and promote policies that support domestic production and jobs.



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Musing



BY DON CARTER,
SECURE VISION

Summer is here, and across the Emerald Coast, communities are seeing what they wait all year for: full parking lots, packed pools, busy amenity spaces, and high occupancy.

For HOA boards and property managers, however, peak season brings a different challenge. Every arriving resident and vacation guest brings multiple connected devices, creating a dramatic increase in demand on a community's internet infrastructure.

A typical vacationing family may arrive with smartphones, tablets, laptops, streaming devices, gaming systems, smart watches, and connected home technology. Multiply that across hundreds of units, and a network that performed well in February can quickly be tested in July.

When connectivity issues occur, residents rarely see them as technical problems. They see interrupted streaming, dropped video calls, buffering televisions, and unreliable Wi-Fi around the pool or clubhouse. The result is frustration, complaints, and in some cases negative reviews that impact the overall perception of the community.

The strongest-performing communities don't wait for



complaints to identify issues. They take a proactive approach by evaluating network performance before occupancy reaches its peak.

Key areas boards should consider include:

- Available bandwidth during peak occupancy periods
- Wi-Fi coverage in amenity areas such as pools, fitness centers, clubhouses, and outdoor gathering spaces
- Aging equipment that may

no longer support modern device demands

- Network design that separates resident, guest, and operational traffic
- Visibility into performance issues before residents experience them

Internet service has evolved from a convenience into a critical utility. Residents and guests expect the same reliable connectivity they experience at home, regardless of whether they are visiting for a week or living in the community year-round.

Communities that invest in reliable connectivity create a

better resident experience, reduce support issues, and position themselves for long-term success.

As occupancy reaches its highest levels of the year, now is the ideal time to evaluate whether your community's network is performing as expected and identify opportunities for improvement before small issues become larger problems.

Secure Vision works with associations throughout our area to design, implement, and support connectivity solutions built for modern demand.

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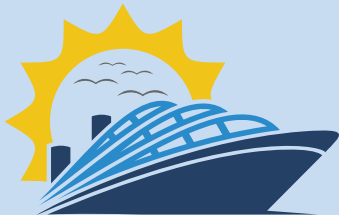
EFCU Celebrates America 250 with Cruise Giveaway

Eglin Federal Credit Union (EFCU) is inviting Northwest Florida residents to celebrate America's 250th birthday with special in-branch festivities and the chance to win a dream vacation.

The celebration begins July 1 and 2, when visitors to any EFCU branch can enjoy complimentary cookies and patriotic-themed giveaways while supplies last.

The festivities continue throughout the summer with the credit union's "Cruise on in for America's 250th Celebration Giveaway." From July 1 through Aug. 31, community members can enter for a chance to win a five-day, four-night cruise vacation for two to Mexico, the Bahamas or the western Caribbean.

A total of 12 winners — one from each EFCU branch — will be selected through a random drawing. Entries must be submitted in person at an Eglin FCU branch, with



a limit of one entry per person per day. Participants must be at least 21 years old to enter. "This is a special opportunity for us to celebrate our country's history while connecting with the communities we serve," said Laura Coale, EFCU senior vice president of marketing and public relations. "We're excited to provide a memorable experience for our members, welcome prospective members into our full-service locations, and give everyone a chance to win an unforgettable vacation."

Complete giveaway rules and entry details are available at local Eglin FCU branches and online. For more information, visit EglinFCU.org.



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Sean of the South: Ball Games



BY SEAN DIETRICH

I remember going to a ball game with my old man. I remember the smells. Stale beer, human sweat, and the odor of unnaturally pink hotdogs that turned your bowels into stone.

I remember before the game, things got very quiet. All 30-odd thousand people rose. The throngs of stadium chairs creaking sounded like the world was splitting.

Everyone's dad put down his non-evangelical beverage, SLOWLY, careful not to spill. Thousands of American grandpas removed lit cigars and balanced them, with surgical-like care, onto armrests.

The anthem was played.

Back in those days, the anthem was handled differently than it is today. Back then, guest artists did not take the mound, wearing asymmetric haircuts and crotch-revealing trousers. Neither did singers demonstrate 10 minutes of vocal gymnastics until their anthem performance resembled a febrile seizure.

No. Back then the organ played. And everybody sang.

We used to be a nation of singers. Remember that? Singing was just normal for us. Our childhood classrooms had upright console pianos, and our teachers knew how to play them. Mrs. Moore would bang out "My Country 'Tis of Thee" before each class. Mrs. Smith played "This Land is Your Land" every Friday after the Pledge.

Well, that was a long time ago.

Recently, I attended a modern baseball game. It was a very different experience. My wife and I ordered \$34 nachos from a kiosk, and the cashier asked whether I wanted to leave a 25-percent tip. Beers were \$18 apiece.

During the game, a huge LED timer runs between pitches

so TV producers can fit in more commercials on broadcasts. The bases are now bigger, the distance between bases is now shorter. They're changing our game.

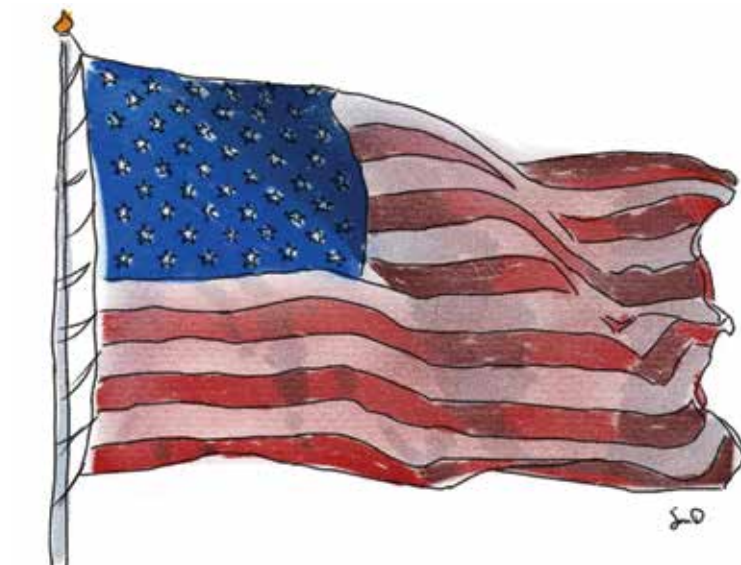
But none of that bothered me. Not really. A Major League park is what it is. Get over it. At a ball game, you get what you get, and you don't pitch a fit.

What I was most interested in, truthfully, was the anthem. I was curious about it. I wondered: Do people still sing together the way they did 40 years ago?

After all, our world is nothing like it was. Our current world, for example, is almost devoid of classroom pianos. In 1938 the New York Times reported that 5.8 million pianos were sold in America each year. Whereas last year we barely sold 30,000.

So anyway, the moment of truth arrived. The announcer asked everyone to rise for the anthem.

People stood. Chairs creaked. Dads placed beers beneath seats. People who were vaping expelled a final blast and hid



their devices from security.

Everyone looked at the flag. The music began.

And...

Everyone knew the words. Everyone sang. The stadium sounded like it was going to crumble beneath the volume of mass singing.

The boy next to me held his hat over his heart, singing so loudly the vein in his head showed. The old man beside the boy was singing even louder.

the crowd was only just getting warmed up. They kept cheering. For whole minutes, they cheered.

Fists pumped into the air. People were hugging. A flag waved on the mega-tron screen. The sound of unified voices was engulfing. Fighter jets flew overhead. Fireworks. People were amazingly, wholeheartedly, demonstratively together. Even if only for a few seconds in time.

And in that beautiful moment of oneness, that moment of palpable joy, do you know something?

Nobody seemed to care about Cracker Barrel's sign.

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Musing

A Pastor's Ponderings: Who's Really in Charge?



BY PASTOR DAVE HOLLAND

"One day as Jesus was teaching in the Temple courts and preaching the good news, the chief priests, teachers of the law, and elders approached Him. 'Tell us by what authority you are doing these things,' they demanded. 'Who gave you this authority?'"

It was actually a good question. "By what authority are you doing these things?"

Every leader should be accountable. Every teacher should be questioned. Every claim should be tested. The problem with the question was the dark motive lurking beneath the surface.

The Rabbis and clerics en-

joyed great prestige in the shadow of the Temple and they flitted about in grand religious robes like peacocks. The crowd hushed when they came near. But they were not seeking truth. They were protecting power—their power. Jesus always cuts through appearances and gets to the heart of the matter.

The religious leaders already knew enough to believe. John the Baptist had publicly identified Jesus as the Messiah. He called Him "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." He testified that Jesus was God's Chosen One.

The evidence was there. The problem wasn't a lack of information. The problem was a lack of surrender.

We are often no different. To acknowledge Christ's authority is to submit to His Lordship. And that is where many of us struggle.

We want Jesus as Savior. We are less enthusiastic about Jesus as King.

We want forgiveness. We are less certain about obedience.

When the Lord speaks clear-



ly through His Word, we often respond the same way the religious leaders did. We stall. We argue. We make excuses. We

look for another interpretation that is more comfortable.

I remember when I was dating the young woman who would eventually become my wife. The temptation to become sexually involved before marriage was strong. That temptation possessed every cell in my body! Yet Scripture was clear. God's design reserved intimacy for the covenant of marriage.

I argued with God. How could something that felt so natural be wrong? Didn't God want us to be happy? Didn't He know how deeply we loved one another?

Of course, He knew. But He also knew something I didn't. Sex outside of marriage destroys trust and commitment. Within marriage it strengthens and deepens them.

The issue was never whether I understood God's command. The issue was whether I would submit to His authority. Eventually I had to accept His answer. No. And looking back, I am grateful I did.

The religious leaders feared losing their position, prestige,

and influence. If they acknowledged Jesus, everything would change.

Many of us fear the same thing. What if Jesus asks us to forgive someone? What if He calls us to give generously? What if He asks us to change direction? What if He tells us to surrender something we desperately want to keep?

The question is never whether Christ has authority. The question is whether we will recognize it.

As a pastor, this passage convicts me. How often have I preferred what is safe over what is faithful? How often have I worried more about approval than obedience? I can still feel the insecure little boy inside me who wants affirmation and applause.

Yet, Jesus speaks with a different voice. Not the voice of public opinion. Not the voice of tradition. Not the voice of personal preference. The voice of the King.

And every disciple must eventually answer the same question: Who's really in charge?



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Think Blacksmiths Disappeared? Think Again.

Local craftsmen are keeping a centuries-old tradition alive through fire, steel and fellowship

BY LORI LEATH MILLER

Blacksmithing may have been popularized in recent years by television shows such as *Forged in Fire* and *Men at Arms*, but in our state, the tradition has been thriving for more than four decades thanks to the Florida Artist Blacksmith Association (FABA).

Founded in 1984, FABA has spent the last 41 years teaching the craft, preserving its history and helping establish historical blacksmith shops throughout the state. Its mission is simple: To teach – To preserve. “Blacksmithing has experienced a renaissance in recent years, but this isn’t new to us,” said David Sandlin of the Far West Panhandle Blacksmiths chapter. “FABA has been teaching the craft and preserving the traditions of blacksmithing in Florida for more than four decades.”

Today, FABA includes eight chapters across the state, each hosting monthly meetings where blacksmiths of all skill levels gather to share techniques, ideas and stories while working hot iron at the forge.

For local residents, that opportunity is available through the Far West Panhandle Blacksmiths chapter, headquartered at Traditions Workshop, 418 Green Acres Road in Fort Walton Beach. Meetings regularly feature demonstrations, hands-on projects and open forge time, allowing participants to learn new skills or work on personal projects alongside experienced smiths. “Our mission is to teach and preserve the noble art of

blacksmithing,” Sandlin said. “We enjoy the open exchange of ideas as we smite hot iron on the anvil.”

First-time visitors are always welcome at no charge. After that, annual family memberships are just \$30 and provide access to FABA events across Florida, discounts on the organization’s annual conference and a digital subscription to *The Clinker Breaker*, FABA’s monthly newsletter featuring blacksmithing news, projects and events from around the state.

One of the highlights of each year is the statewide convention in Gainesville, where blacksmiths gather for three days of demonstrations, classes and fellowship. This year’s event, FABA CON 41, is scheduled for Oct. 16-18 at the Best Western Gateway Grand in Gainesville.

Beyond teaching traditional skills, FABA members actively seek opportunities to introduce the public to blacksmithing through demonstrations at museums, libraries, festivals and community events. “FABA is always looking for opportunities to put the noble craft of the blacksmith before the public eye,” Sandlin said. “Museums, libraries and community venues have proven to be great places to meet people and generate interest in our craft.” The organization also welcomes recommendations from groups interested in hosting a demonstration or “hammer-in” event.

Upcoming Far West Panhandle Blacksmiths Events

July 25 John Butler Family Farm, 4112 Bell Lane, Pace | 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

The focus shifts to the annual gift-exchange project, “Something That Twists or Turns.” Demonstrations will include forging a corkscrew under the shade of the pecan trees. Lunch provided; donations appreciated.

Aug. 22 Traditions Workshop | 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

Members pursuing Journeyman certification will work toward completing required standards in preparation for recognition at the October state conference.

Sept. 12 Traditions Workshop | 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

This special out-of-cycle meeting will focus on completing both the chapter competition project and individual gift-exchange projects before the conference season begins.

Oct. 10 Traditions Workshop | 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

Members will prepare equipment and pack the trailer in advance of FABA CON 41 in Gainesville.

Oct. 16-18 FABA CON 41 | Best Western Gateway Grand, Gainesville

The statewide convention features three days of demonstrations, classes and educational opportunities for blacksmiths of all experience levels.

Oct. 31 Traditions Workshop | 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

Members will share tech-



niques, ideas and discoveries gathered at the conference while resetting equipment for upcoming competitions.

Nov. 7 Timber Creek Distillery, 6451 Lake Ella Road, Crestview | 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

The annual chapter competition returns with a mystery challenge announced closer to the event. Participants will have five hours to create a forged project using either their own steel or material from the chapter’s scrap

supply. The day traditionally includes pizza from Timber Creek’s stone oven, fellowship and plenty of friendly competition.

Winter Schedule: No December meeting is planned due to holiday activities and Renaissance fair commitments.

For safety, all participants and visitors under the forge tent are required to wear safety glasses and sturdy closed-toe

Continued on next page

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BLACKSMITH

continued from previous page



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For more information about membership, events or hosting a demonstration, visit www.blacksmithing.org or contact David Sandlin at david@traditionsworkshop.com or 850-974-1548.

TEN YEARS

continued from page 1

munity before much of the country fully discovered it.

Then came 2016.

That was the year newspaper man Dave White arrived from New England carrying a simple, but ambitious, dream: to create a publication devoted entirely to the people, stories and spirit of South Walton.

Like so many who now call this area home, Dave's connection to the Emerald Coast actually began years earlier during visits with friends Ray and Lisa Cyr, owners of Studio 237 Music School in Santa Rosa Beach. They introduced him to the charm, beauty and strong sense of community found throughout South Walton. What started as admiration soon became something more — a desire to move here permanently and become part of the community itself. And he did.

Ray helped introduce Dave to local business owners and community leaders while Dave shared the vision for an all-positive publication centered on storytelling, connection and, most importantly for local business owners, direct-mail distribution.

But a brand was still need-

ed that truly reflected the local lifestyle. That inspiration came through South Walton resident and the paper's first-year editor Sarah Stewart. She suggested the now-iconic sea-glass blues and greens, a turtle "mascot" and logo, and a tagline that instantly separated locals from tourists: "Locals get it," which, to be clear, they did. And still do.

And just like that, SoWal Life was born.

The concept was simple — deliver the publication directly to mailboxes and fill it with stories locals actually cared about: community happenings, events, arts, local personalities, hometown heroes and positive news. Nationally known author Sean Dietrich came aboard alongside monthly columns such as the now longtime faith-based column, A Pastor's Ponderings. With no established playbook, the small team juggled ad sales, last-minute content submissions, production challenges and tight deadlines while working to prove the concept month after month. The vibe was less "breaking news" and more "Hey, did you hear about this?" As SoWal Life continued gaining momentum and reader support, a second SoWal Life edition was launched to expand the publication's reach to Miramar Beach. The strong response confirmed what Dave White and the team had believed from the



PHOTO CREDIT: SAVVY LEIGH PHOTO

(Left to Right) Paul Willms, Sales; Sarah Stewart; Scott Miller; Lori Leath Miller; Dave White; Lisa and Ray Cyr; Grace Ann Russell, Sales; and Denise David, Sales. Not pictured: Jamie Zimchek, Editor Socal Life and PCB Life; John Tower, Accounting; Dawna Shackley, Socal Life Graphic Designer; Kim Harper, Life Media Art Director.

beginning: people were hungry for positive, community-focused local media that celebrated the place they called home.

The Next Chapter

What started as one community newspaper soon became something much bigger.

In 2018, publisher Lori Leath Smith became a partner in launching Destin Life, bringing the same all-positive, community-centered concept into the Destin market. The response was immediate and enthusiastic.

The momentum continued with the launch of Bay Life in 2019. Through another business partnership, Lori and Scott Miller introduced the publication to the Bluewater Bay community, followed shortly thereafter by a second Bay Life edition

serving Niceville and Valparaiso. Growth continued across the Emerald Coast with the addition of PCB Life in Panama City Beach, FWB Life in Fort Walton Beach and the newest publication, Freeport Life.

As the family of publications expanded, Scott recognized the need for a stronger umbrella brand to unite the growing network. Together, they established Life Media Group, creating a cohesive identity for what had become a thriving collection of community-focused media outlets.

Today, Life Media Group encompasses eight all-positive community newspapers, digital platforms and specialty publications serving readers across the Emerald Coast. The organization is supported by a dedicated team of 13 staff members, along with a talented network of writers, photographers, designers, contributors and community partners who help bring each publication to life every month.

While each publication maintains its own unique hometown personality, the mission has remained the same from the beginning: celebrate local people, support local businesses, strengthen community connection and shine a light on the positive stories happening all around us every day.

"Readers have embraced the publications as their own," says Dave. "Many say they read the papers cover-to-cover each month for local events, uplifting stories and hometown happenings often difficult to find elsewhere. Others intentionally support businesses they discover inside the pages."

Life Media direct-mails and distributes more than 87,000 hyper-local copies monthly



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Continued on next page

ECTC Announces Blockbuster Season 14

September 10, 2026 – May 23, 2027

Emerald Coast Theatre Company (ECTC) has unveiled its highly anticipated Season 14, featuring a lineup of Tony Award-winning musicals, gripping dramas, holiday entertainment and a magical regional premiere. Running Sept. 10, 2026, through May 23, 2027, the season promises unforgettable stories that inspire, entertain and bring audiences together.

Leading the season is the Tony Award-winning *Come From Away*, the remarkable true story of 7,000 airline passengers stranded in a small Canadian town following the events of Sept. 11. The production celebrates compassion, resilience and the power of community.

Audiences will then buckle up for *The 39 Steps*, Alfred Hitchcock's fast-paced thriller that blends suspense, comedy and nonstop adventure.

For the holidays, ECTC presents *Million Dollar Quartet Christmas*, a festive spin on the popular musical featuring legendary rock 'n' roll icons reunited for a high-energy celebration

filled with seasonal favorites and classic hits.

The new year begins with *9 to 5: The Musical*, the hit stage adaptation inspired by the beloved film and featuring music and lyrics by Dolly Parton. The crowd-pleasing production celebrates ambition, friendship and workplace empowerment.

Continuing the season is *Dear Jack, Dear Louise*, a heartfelt play inspired by a true World War II love story that unfolds through letters exchanged across the Atlantic.

Closing the season is the regional premiere of Disney's *Frozen*, bringing the beloved modern classic to life on stage in a spectacular production designed to delight audiences of all ages.

Season 14 offers something for everyone, from first-time theatergoers and families to longtime patrons seeking memorable nights out. ECTC's VIP program enhances the experience with early access to preferred seating, exclusive events, cast meet-and-greets and be-

hind-the-scenes opportunities. "This is one of the most exciting seasons we've ever put on our stage," said Nathanael Fisher, ECTC's Producing Artistic Director. "From the scale of these productions to the stories we're telling, everything about Season

14 is designed to raise the bar for what audiences experience at ECTC."

Performances will be held at ECTC, located at 560 Grand Blvd., Suite 200, Miramar Beach.

For tickets, VIP member-

ships, sponsorship opportunities, donations or more information, call (850) 684-0323 or visit emeraldcoasttheatre.org. Follow ECTC on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

TEN YEARS

continued from previous page

throughout the Emerald Coast while also reaching thousands more readers digitally through websites, e-newsletters and social media platforms.

More than newspapers, Life Media has always been about connection — and interaction. We love hearing from our readers, receiving story ideas, celebrating accomplishments, spotlighting businesses and learning about the people and organizations making a difference throughout our communities. Some of our readers and advertising partners have been with us since the very beginning, and for that loyalty and support, we are deeply grateful.

The Next Decade

As Life Media moves into its next decade, the mission remains unchanged: sharing positive stories and celebrating the faith, family, businesses and community spirit that make our area so special.



WE'LL CONTINUE providing a trusted community voice while offering affordable, effective promotion through the powerful combination of direct-mail print and digital marketing.

WE'LL CONTINUE connecting readers through engaging editorial, websites, e-newsletters, social media, events and community involvement throughout the region.

Most importantly, WE'LL CONTINUE believing positive news still matters.

What began with one dream, one turtle and one small newspaper in South Walton has grown into something far greater than anyone imagined 10 years ago.

And we're just getting started.

Cheers to 10 Years!



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In our Destinites Facebook group for locals this month (www.facebook.com/groups/Destinites), there was serious discussion about the new Henderson Beach State Park reservation system.

The park implemented the system in an effort to help relieve backed-up traffic on U.S. Highway 98. One of our members placed this post in the group, saying:

"Monday afternoon, June 22, 2026, at Henderson Beach

State Park — we are locals with reservation in hand. The line was backed up onto Hwy. 98 in three directions. Took us 25 minutes to get up to have our barcode scanned. Once inside, lots of empty parking spaces."

Here are some group member responses:

1. It's all about money — easily could have added another ticket booth. State should have talked to Chick-fil-A on how they keep their lines moving. Just a thought.

2. Mainly because of people in line without reservations.

3. They really need to charge people as they leave. Everyone leaves at different times, and it wouldn't cause any backup traffic on Hwy. 98. And if it did, it would only be in their parking

lot heading out! Such a bad idea, especially for us locals!

4. They need a booth with someone in it verifying, before people even get off 98, that they already have a reservation. If they don't, they need a new turnaround lane close to the road where they must turn around and go make their reservation before they can enter. The people who work and volunteer there did not change this, but they are the ones having to deal with it, unfortunately.

5. Local here. When I first read about this, I knew it wouldn't work. Tourists don't know they have to buy a pass before they show up. City Council should get the opinions of locals.

6. I hope after this season they realize what a terrible idea

the reservation system is. The park is practically empty once you get in. It's actually annoying. Yes, there are other places you can go, but when you have an annual pass and it's convenient with the amenities there, there has to be something better.

7. My husband and I are annual pass holders, and we liked being able to go over around 2:30 for a quick swim and then leave. Never had a parking problem. I used to see families head over after work with the kids. The spur-of-the-moment "let's go for a swim" is gone, at least for me.

8. Can you please try to have a town meeting on this issue? Many locals would appreciate an opportunity to weigh in.

Destin Mayor Bobby Wagner also responded to the group

thread, commenting that he has brought the issue to the state's attention and pointed out that Henderson Beach State Park is a state park governed by state regulations.

He said, "Hopefully we can find meaningful compromise."

If you live in Destin or the close surrounding area, I invite you to join our private, targeted group for locals and property owners at Facebook.com/groups/Destinites. Currently 12,800+ members (est. October 2018). Check out our Local Business Directory at www.Destinites.com, where more than 500 local businesses are listed and enjoy advertising in our targeted community group.

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Museum Series:

**Students Celebrate America 250 with an
essay and poster contest!**

BY BARBARA PALMGREN

How do visual artists see America's 250th celebration when sitting in front of a blank posterboard? That's what the Heritage Museum wanted to know as it launched a poster contest for all children in Okaloosa County. How do future writers and historians view this special anniversary? With the help of Okaloosa County Schools, rubrics were designed and a timed-writing contest took place in 7th grade history classes.

The poster competition could not have been done without the skill and dedication of volunteer Carole Schneider who coordinated the contest. The team of judges, Connie Wolfe, Deborah Edgar and Elvira Chiccarelli, had a difficult task as all entries were creative and inspirational. All the posters are displayed in the gift shop area of the Heritage Museum so please come and view all these exciting creative works of art!

The essay competition, the first "Plank-Schlitt United States History Writing Contest" to honor retired history



teachers at Niceville High School, was judged by Dr. Marie Hallion and Dooney Tickner.

Congratulations to the following poster winners:

Middle School: First Place: \$100 Ahymn Kim (Ruckel); Second Place: \$50 Jaucelyn Miller (Baker)

High School: First Place \$100 Asher Guillory (Crestview); Second Place: \$50 Kyrie Smith (Farling School of Excellence)

Congratulations to the following 7th grade essay contest winners. The Okaloosa School system offers this period in our American History only in 7th grade:

First Place: \$100 Lilly Lopez (Destin Middle)

Second Place: \$50 Aisha Ramirez (Pryor Middle)

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