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ANNIVERSARY

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Destin High to Division 1: Two Sharks Make School History

When Destin High School opened its doors in 2021, the school did so with a priority on helping its students to excel in all aspects of life.

So, while the first public high school ever located within Destin city limits quickly gained a reputation for small class sizes and academic excellence, it's no surprise that it has also helped to shape some of the best athletes living in northern Florida.

Destin High recently announced that two of its students signed full Division I athletic scholarships. Sharks' standouts **Kate Corollo** and **Kenzie Prosser** became the first ever Sharks to sign National Letters of Intent, and school leadership was thrilled to see two of its best set a trend that many other DHS students hope to follow. "We are so unbelievably proud of Kate and Kenzie. Just to play a role in helping stellar athletes and students such as these is really gratifying, and we cannot wait to see how they continue to



shine at the next level," said Dr. Willy Williams, executive director of DHS.

Corollo will attend The University of New Hampshire to compete in gymnastics, while Prosser, a rising senior with the Sharks, signed to play volleyball for The Citadel in South Carolina.

The success of the duo is emblematic of Destin High's well-rounded approach to education, one in which extra-curricular aspects support academic achievement and student growth – as well as school pride and community engagement. Destin's approach is reflected in the

school's 22 varsity athletic programs, which compete in one of Florida's most challenging athletic associations. As the 2025-26 school year showed, those programs and athletes are already proving

DHS

continued on page 20



A New Front Door to the Gulf

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

Round one goes to the public! In an ongoing tug of war between private development and open shoreline, Destin just added 340 feet to the win column, and this one is permanent. No appeals, no fine print, no fence going up next year. Tarpon Beach Gulf Front Park is now open, and it belongs to all of us.

Early on July 15, 2026, just after the sun came up, officials from the City of Destin and Okaloosa County, along with members of the public,

FRONT DOOR

continued on page 2



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 Community
FRONT DOOR*continued from page 1*

gathered to cut the ribbon on the park, marking a new stretch of public beach access along Scenic Highway 98.

Three hundred forty feet. That is what this project comes down to when you strip away the ceremony and the speeches. Picture a football field, end zones included, and you are close to the width. Three hundred forty feet of beach, open now, free of charge, protected in perpetuity.

Tarpon Beach Gulf Front Park sits at 3310 Scenic Highway 98, and it functions exactly like

the name suggests: a front door to the Gulf. There is no gate. There is no admission fee. There is no membership card to show at the entrance. There is only sand, sky, and water, open to whoever wants to walk through.

The view did not exist a few years ago. In August 2022, the City of Destin and the Okaloosa County Commission entered an interlocal agreement to purchase the beachfront property, a deal negotiated by the Trust for Public Land. The land had previously belonged to Dieter Blasbichler, and in February 2023, once the purchase was complete, the buildings that once stood on the

property came down in a matter of fifteen minutes. When the buildings came down, onlookers cheered as the sparkling waters came into view. But government work can be slow, and it took a few more years to bring the rest of the plan to life.

The people who designed this park thought carefully about how visitors would actually arrive and spend their day. Forty nine standard parking spaces sit ready at no cost, alongside three spaces reserved for accessible parking so that visitors of all abilities can reach the shoreline. Twenty nine additional spaces accommodate the low speed vehicles so many



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residents and visitors use to get around town. Public restrooms and four open air pavilions give families a place to gather, cool off, and settle in for the afternoon. The team is also working to get benches installed under each of those pavilions, a small addition that will make it that much easier for visitors to have a place to sit and switch out tennis shoes for flip flops.

This was a partnership for the people. Tarpon Beach Gulf Front Park is the product of work between the City of Destin, the Okaloosa County Board of County Commissioners, and the Trust for Public Land, an organization that served as the lead agency negotiating the purchase of the properties that made the park possible. Their patience and persistence turned what could easily have become another stretch of private waterfront

into land that will belong to the public for generations to come.

The City and County put real money behind that vision, committing \$16.96 million combined. The decision reflected a priority that tourism revenue generated by area beaches should come back to benefit the residents and visitors who make this community what it is.

The door is open. Come on in.

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Destin'd To Be Director

BY AMBER HELTON

For as long as I can remember, the fishing rodeo has been a part of my life. I was born to Darla Smith and Michael “Mo” Helton and raised in Destin. Long before I could appreciate what the Destin Fishing Rodeo meant for our community, I was already immersed in the world that makes it possible.

Born on the Water

My mother worked at the HarborWalk Charters booking booth, helping visitors connect with the incredible fishing experiences that have made Destin famous, while my father spent his career as a mate aboard many of the boats in our charter fleet, helping anglers create memories on the water. Because of them, my childhood was spent on the docks, around the boats and among the fishermen who built this community. The harbor wasn’t just where my parents worked—it was where I grew up. The captains, mates, business owners and fishing families who made their living on the water be-

came an extension of my family and helped shape the person I am today.

The World Is Your Oyster, Your Grouper or Your Cobia

Fishing isn’t simply a pastime; it is a way of life. The waters that surround our town provide not only livelihoods, but also memories, fellowship and lessons that will stay with me throughout my life. Both of my parents introduced me to the fishing lifestyle that has been such an important part of my life. My mother has shaped the values that have guided me along the way. She has encouraged me to embrace new experiences, travel the world and never miss an opportunity to serve others. Her unwavering support has given me the confidence to pursue opportunities that help me grow, while her example taught me the im-



portance of kindness, gratitude and having a servant’s heart. Those lessons in community involvement and service would eventually lead me to one of the most rewarding experiences of my young adult life—representing the city I love as Miss Destin. There has always been something special about Destin that tugs at my heartstrings; it extends beyond the harbor and

into the community itself. In 2005, I competed in the Miss Destin pageant and was honored to be selected as Miss Congeniality by my fellow contestants. To this day, it remains one of the most meaningful recognitions I have ever received, because it came from the young ladies who shared that experience alongside me. That same evening, I was blessed with the honor of being crowned Miss Destin. Wearing the crown and sash meant far more to me than a title—it was an opportunity to celebrate the people, traditions and hometown that had shaped my life. My year as Miss Destin holds a special place in my heart. It gave me the opportunity to represent the city I treasure through countless appearances, parades, ribbon cuttings for Target and the Destin History & Fishing Museum, youth fishing events

and our annual community celebrations. Spending 31 days in October, with the weigh-in barge as my throne, I celebrated with thousands of anglers when the boats backed in to weigh their catch. That month deepened my appreciation for the people, organizations and traditions that make Destin such a remarkable place to call home. More importantly, it taught me the importance of community service and engagement and of preserving the heritage that makes our “World’s Luckiest Fishing Village” so special. Another pivotal chapter in my journey came during my time as event coordinator for the Boathouse Oyster Bar. In that role, I had the opportunity to organize and oversee multiple fishing tournaments, including the Summer Slam, which ran from June into August, celebrating our town’s summer fishing season. That experience allowed me to wear many hats. I helped secure sponsors, register boats, coordinate event logis-

Continued on page 30





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 Community


When the Gut Speaks First: **Understanding the Back-to-School Stomachache**

By DR. KAREN DEVORE

The first week of school has arrived. The backpacks are packed, the lunches are made, and after one last search for a missing shoe, everyone heads out the door. Then, just as

you're reaching for the car keys, your child quietly says, "My stomach hurts."

For many parents and caregivers, this scene is as much a part of the back-to-school season as shopping for school sup-



plies and navigating busy car lines.

The child who seemed perfectly healthy all summer suddenly doesn't want breakfast, complains of a stomachache before school, or makes repeated trips to the bathroom. Naturally, families wonder: Are they getting sick?

Sometimes they are. But sometimes, the stomach is simply the first place the body speaks.

The brain and digestive system are in constant communication through what scientists call the gut-brain axis. When children experience change, whether it's a new teacher, new classmates, academic expectations, a disrupted routine, or the excitement and uncertainty that naturally come with a new school year, the digestive system may respond before children have the words to describe what they're feeling.

Sometimes, the gut speaks first. That can look like stomachaches, nausea, constipation, diarrhea, changes in appetite, or even changes in bowel habits. The question isn't whether these symptoms are real; it's why they're happening.

One of the most helpful things parents and caregivers can do is look for patterns rather than focusing on a single episode.

Does the stomachache happen only before school? Does it improve later in the day? Does it appear before a test, after a difficult interaction with friends, or on Sunday evenings before the week begins?

Patterns like these may suggest the nervous system is play-

ing a role, but they don't rule out an underlying medical condition. Pain that wakes a child from sleep, is accompanied by fever, persistent vomiting, blood in the stool, unexplained weight loss, poor growth, or continues regardless of the situation deserves prompt medical evaluation.

Rather than asking only, "Where does it hurt?" it can also be helpful to ask: "When does it happen?" "What was happening just beforehand?" "Has anything changed recently?"

Sometimes those questions provide clues that the symptom alone cannot.

Today's children navigate full schedules, academic expectations, extracurricular activities, changing friendships, and a constant stream of information. While these experiences are a normal part of growing up, they can place greater demands on a developing nervous system. For some children, those demands may show up in the digestive tract long before they have the words to explain what they're experiencing.

What Can Parents and Caregivers Do?

If a child says, "My stomach hurts," and otherwise appears well, the first response doesn't always have to be finding the medicine cabinet. Instead, create a few minutes of calm.

Turn off the television or music. Set aside phones and other screens. Sit together quietly. Offer a reassuring hug, hold their hand, or simply be present. Children often take emotional cues

Continued on page 38



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Events Around Town

Pilates with Dolphins Saturday, Aug. 8, 2026 | 7:30 a.m. Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park | Fort Walton Beach

Start your morning with a one-of-a-kind fitness experience overlooking 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.

Open to ages 12 and older. Register at go.gulfarium.com/pilates.

Homeroom on the Harbor Saturday, Aug. 8, 2026 | 4-7 p.m. HarborWalk Village | Destin

Close out summer with a free back-to-school celebration for children of all ages. Festivities include face painting, popsicles, a DJ dance party on the lawn, crafts, games, a foam party and last-minute shopping specials from HarborWalk Village merchants.

The first 50 children will receive a complimentary back-to-school goodie bag. Admission is free.

PAWS Brunch Fundraiser: Stars, Stripes & Second Chances Sunday, Aug. 9, 2026 | 11 a.m.-2 p.m. The Alice | Destin

Support the Panhandle Animal Welfare Society during an elevated brunch benefiting local shelter animals. Guests are encouraged to wear patriotic red, white and blue while enjoying brunch, a silent auction and more.

Visit paws-shelter.org. For sponsorship information, contact mollys@paws-shelter.org.

History Sandwiched-In: "Women in War Today" Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida

Join the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida for History Sandwiched-In, its free, ongoing lunch-and-learn series. Dr. Chiccarelli will present "Women in War Today," exploring how women have become an integral part of today's fighting forces.

Admission is free. Guests are welcome to bring lunch.



The Great Bay Scallop Search Monday, Aug. 17, 2026 | 8 a.m. Choctawhatchee Bay

Join Destin-Fort Walton Beach Natural Resources, Florida Sea Grant and Luther's Pontoon Rentals for a citizen-science event monitoring scallop populations in Choctawhatchee Bay. Participants will survey designated areas and collect valuable environmental data.

Advance registration is required. Register through Eventbrite; participation is free, and each team member must register separately.

America at 250 Symposium Friday-Saturday, Aug. 21-22, 2026 Museum of Commerce and UWF Conference Center | Pensacola

The University of West Florida will host America at 250: Civic Republicanism, Economic Freedom and Dynamic Citizenship, a two-day symposium exploring civic virtue, economic liberty, entrepreneurship and the responsibilities of citizenship.

The event begins Friday evening at the Museum of Com-

merce and continues Saturday at the UWF Conference Center. Programming includes keynote presentations, panel discussions and audience conversations featuring scholars, business leaders and civic thinkers. Businessman and educational philanthropist Robert Luddy will deliver the keynote address.

Attendance is free, but seating is limited and advance registration is required. Visit uwf.edu/AACRevents.

Roman Street in Concert Sunday, Aug. 23, 2026 | 3 p.m.

Christ the King Episcopal Church 480 N. County Highway 393 | Santa Rosa Beach

Acclaimed guitarists and brothers Noah and Josh Thompson blend classical, gypsy jazz, Latin, contemporary jazz and nuevo flamenco influences in a captivating performance that kicks off the church's fall concert series.

Admission is free. Visit christthekingfl.org.

Wine & Fries: Golden Hour for Good

Friday, Aug. 28, 2026 | 6-9 p.m. The Alice | Destin

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

Tickets are \$115. Purchase tickets at givebutter.com/c/wine-and-fries.

Sacred Harp Musical Conversation

Saturday, Aug. 29, 2026 | 1 p.m.

Christ the King Episcopal Church 480 N. County Highway 393 | Santa Rosa Beach

Learn about the history and development of Sacred Harp music, a traditional American art form, during a presentation by Joanna Ellis. Guests will also

Continued on page 10

AJ's Tin Cup Classic

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Fresh from the Gulf:

Destin's 48th Seafood Festival Returns Sept. 25-27

By CALI HLAVAC

Full of flavor, one of Destin's most beloved traditions is back and bigger than ever. The Destin Seafood Festival returns Sept. 25-27 for its 48th year, transforming the Destin Harbor into a mile-long celebration of fresh Gulf seafood, live music and coastal culture. More than 30,000 locals and visitors are expected to attend this free, family-friendly event.

Stretching from HarborWalk Village to Heron Harbor, the festival features five stages of live music with local and regional artists performing everything from rock and reggae to country and tropical tunes—and more. The pedestrian-friendly, waterfront boardwalk and docks become a feast for the senses as more than 75 local food and craft vendors — jewelry, clothing, sculpture, glass, watercolors, oil paintings, designs and more — plus Destin's favorite restaurants — serve up seafood specialties, cold drinks and handmade art. And don't

forget this year's seafood festival T-shirt!

A Festival with Local Flavor

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

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

Fun for All Ages

Kids won't be left out of the fun. The expanded Kids Zone, sponsored by Fudpucker's, features oyster shell painting, sand



art and play areas for little ones. The HarborWalk Kids Fun Zone adds a rock-climbing wall, zip line and face painting —

with a shaded seating tent nearby for parents to relax.

Music on the Harbor

Music lovers can bring a chair, kick back or dance along the docks as local bands play on each of the five stages throughout the weekend. Harbor restaurants and bars will also host their own lineups of local favorites. A full entertainment schedule will be announced at DestinSeafoodFest.com.

Parking and Shuttle Information

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

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

a longtime local or first-time visitor, this is your chance to savor fresh Gulf flavors, soak up harbor views and celebrate the community's fishing heritage.

Hours to attend are Friday 4-10 p.m., Saturday 10 a.m.-10 p.m. and Sunday 10 a.m.-6 p.m.

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

Come hungry. Leave happy. See you on the Harbor!

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The Village of Baytowne Wharf's Big Lineup: Brews, Art, Bubbly, Music & More!

Save the Date for the 18th Annual Baytowne Beer Fest!

Friday, Oct. 16 – Saturday, Oct. 17 | The Village of Baytowne Wharf

Mark your calendars – the barrels are about to roll again! The Village of Baytowne Wharf is gearing up for its 18th Annual Baytowne Beer Fest, one of the Emerald Coast's favorite fall traditions. This two-day celebration of hops, malts, and mouthwatering bites returns Oct. 16-17 with more flavors, more music and more reasons to raise a glass.

The main tasting event happens Saturday, Oct. 17, from 2-5 p.m., featuring more than 200 craft beers plus tempting food tastings to pair with your pours. From local favorites and American specialties to bold, international brews, you'll sip and savor as you chat with brewery reps. Over the weekend you'll have opportunities to sip and savor an incredible selection of craft brews, explore Seltzer Lane for bubbly alternatives, enjoy bourbon tastings for a bold twist, and indulge in flavorful food pairings and tastings. And don't miss the new opportunity to enjoy cozy bonfires during the new BAYTOWNE BACKYARD BASH and soak up live music all weekend long.

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

Tickets on sale now! Stay tuned for updates and full beer and food lineups at baytowne-beerfestival.com.



Perfect Hues: Baytowne Wharf Art Fest!

Friday, September 4th - Sunday, September 6th | 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 p.m., stroll the Village streets as you browse a variety of artwork from local and regional artists. Enjoy LIVE music throughout the festival 7-9 p.m. nightly and a spectacular fireworks show over the lagoon on Sunday at 9 p.m. Kick off the fall season with this unique, moonlit weekend!

Music Line up:

Friday
7-9 p.m. | Jared Herzog
Saturday
7-9 p.m. | Stormfolk
Sunday
The Salty Strays 7-9 p.m. + Fireworks at 9 p.m.!

Want to be a vendor? Visit https://www.baytownewharf.com/files/pdfs/Perfect_Hues_Updated2026.pdf



Bubbly Baytowne Thursday, August 20th 5 p.m. | FREE

Who's ready to sip and shop through The Village streets?! Join Baytowne Wharf for an evening full of FREE champagne, sparkling wine, and shopping during Bubbly Baytowne.

Check in at the stage to receive your complimentary Baytowne Wharf glass and a map outlining specific merchants to visit starting at 5pm.

* This event is free and for 21 and up only. The village will be open to the public during this event.

A Can't Miss Wednesday Night Concert Series! Wednesdays NOW – August 26 | 7-9 p.m. | FREE Events Plaza Stage

Wednesday Night Concerts at The Village of Baytowne Wharf are BACK! Sit back and relax with an outdoor concert and enjoy LIVE entertainment. The concert series features both local and regional talent from a



variety of genres. Don't forget your lawn chairs and blankets.

Live Local Favorites Music Lineup:

August 12th: Sevenply
August 19th: One False Move
August 26th: Almost Famous

Movie Monday Mondays NOW – August 10 8 p.m. | FREE

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

August 10 | DogMan



Boomin' Tuesday Tuesdays NOW – Aug. 11 7:15-9:15 p.m. | FREE

Turn your eyes on the sky and watch as Baytowne Wharf lights up the night with a breath-taking, fireworks show over the Village Lagoon at 9:15 p.m. PLUS now enjoy a DJ Dance Party with DJ Mike Whitty in the Events Plaza at 7:15 p.m.

Thursdaze Lights Show Thursdays NOW - August 13

9 p.m. | 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!

Beach TV LIVE!

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

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 still left to do at The Village of Baytowne Wharf.





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THE CARPENTERS SONGBOOK
November 3, 2026 | 7:00 PM

MYSTIC PIZZA
January 10, 2027 | 7:00 PM

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January 29, 2027 | 7:00 PM

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Holiday Pops: A Candlelight Christmas
DECEMBER 4, 2026
7:00 PM

Stars of Tomorrow: Rising Voices
FEBRUARY 20, 2027
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Final Classics Puccini: La Bohème
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7:00 PM

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 Community

EVENTS

continued from page 6

enjoy a practical introduction to

shape-note singing led by Kristin Wendland.
Admission is free. Visit christ-thekingfl.org.

End-of-Summer DJ Pool Party and Beach Ball Drop
Sept. 5 | Noon–4 p.m.
The Grotto Pool | The

Gulf Coast Jam Announces Star-Packed 2027 Lineup

June 3–6, 2027 | Panama City Beach

Bailey Zimmerman has been announced as the opening-night headliner for the 15th Annual Gulf Coast Jam Presented by Jim Beam. He joins country superstars Jason Aldean and Luke Bryan for four days of live music and beachside fun. A fourth and final headliner will be announced in the coming weeks. Four-day passes are available at General Admission,

College, First Responder and Military levels. Elevated experiences include Caymus Premium Standing, Caymus VIP, Overlook Club and Side Stage. Ticket-and-hotel packages and payment plans are also available. Purchase discounted tickets through Life Media by scanning the QR code in the ad and enter LM27!



Stay tuned to Life Media papers for lineup announcements and festival updates leading up to the event. GulfCoastJam.com

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.

Island Resort, FWB
Make a splash and celebrate the end of summer with an afternoon of music and poolside fun at The Island Resort. Dance to upbeat tunes from the DJ, cool off in the Grotto Pool and don't miss the colorful beach ball drop from the Grotto!

Labor Day Weekend Celebration and Fireworks
Sunday, Sept. 6, 2026 |
Celebration from 6–9 p.m.;
fireworks at 9 p.m.
HarborWalk Village |
Destin Harbor

Celebrate Labor Day weekend along the Destin Harbor, followed by a fireworks show lighting up the sky at 9 p.m. Watch from the boardwalk, the water or a waterfront table. The celebration is free and open to the public.

Emerald Coast Community Singers: Celebration of American Music
Sunday, Sept. 13, 2026 |
3 p.m.
Christ the King Episcopal Church
480 N. County Highway 393 | Santa Rosa Beach
Celebrate America's musical heritage while commemorating

the 25th anniversary of 9/11 and the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. The concert will feature works by Samuel Barber, Leonard Bernstein, Aaron Copland, William Dawson and Duke Ellington, along with traditional American and patriotic songs. Audience participation is encouraged. Admission is free. Visit christ-thekingfl.org.

Battle for the Buckle
Wednesday–Sunday, Sept. 23–27, 2026
Harbor Docks | Destin
The 2nd Annual Westwood Ranch Battle for the Buckle brings together anglers, business leaders and community supporters for four days of competitive fishing, camaraderie and giving back. Tournament highlights include a \$10,000 winner-take-all White Marlin prize and \$2,000 prizes for Catch and Release, Heaviest Tuna, Heaviest Wahoo, Heaviest Dolphin and the Junior Angler Youth Division. A \$1,500 Daily White Marlin Jackpot is also available. Daily and Overall Calcutta

Continued on page 14



GULF COAST JAM
PRESENTED BY JIM BEAM

JUNE 3-6, 2027
1 BEACH ★ 4 DAYS ★ 24 ARTISTS
Endless Memories.
JUST ANNOUNCED

FRIDAY 6.04 SATURDAY 6.05

LUKE BRYAN JASON ALDEAN

+ MORE ARTISTS COMING SOON!
TICKETS, HOTEL PACKAGES AND PAYMENT PLANS AVAILABLE
GULFCOASTJAM.COM

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Kelly Ripa

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Ryan Seacrest

Reservations Required:
MagicDestin.com
For ALL Ages!

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

An Unexpected Stage

How Christ the King Episcopal Church is becoming one of the Emerald Coast's newest homes for live music

BY ARLON JAY SCAGGS

When most people think of a concert venue, they likely don't picture a quiet church tucked away beneath the pines of Santa Rosa Beach.

Yet, that's exactly what Christ the King Episcopal Church is becoming.

This fall, the church launches Music at Christ the King, a new concert and educational series that's bringing internationally acclaimed musicians, local performers, student artists, and music lovers together in one of the area's most intimate listening spaces. The church itself makes an ideal setting. With its soaring wood ceilings, the sanctuary offers warm, resonant acoustics that reward both performers and audiences alike. Still, the series is an ambitious vision rooted in a simple idea: music has the power to build community.

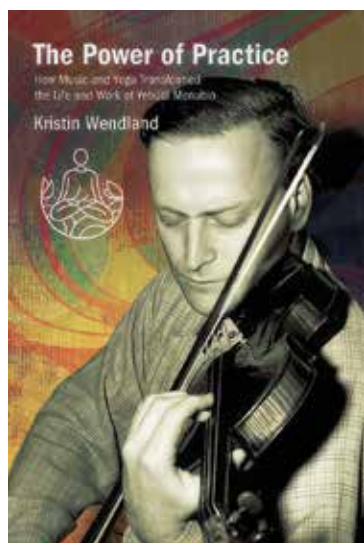
The inaugural season begins Sunday, August 23, with Roman Street, the guitar duo of brothers, Noah and Joshua Thompson. Blending contemporary jazz, Latin, Nuevo Flamenco, classical, and gypsy influences, Roman Street has earned multiple Billboard Top 25 singles, toured internationally, and shared the stage with artists including George Benson, The Gipsy Kings, Dave Koz, Bela Fleck, Ziggy Marley, and Maroon 5.

The music series is the vision of Dr. Kristin Wendland, who joined Christ the King as Director of Music Ministries in February 2025.

For Wendland, this is something of a homecoming.

A Panhandle native, she served as organist at St. Jude's Episcopal Church in Niceville while in high school before earning degrees from Florida State University, the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. She then spent twenty-five years on the music faculty at Emory University in Atlanta and is the author of three books, including two on Argentine tango and a recent work exploring how yoga shaped the life and artistry of violinist Yehudi Menuhin.

After returning home to Northwest Florida, Wendland



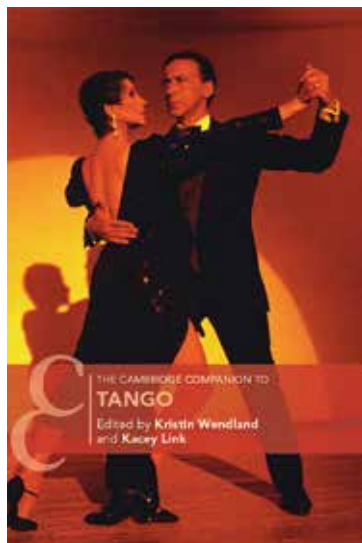
saw an opportunity to help restore Christ the King's role as a musical and cultural resource for the community. "Music has an extraordinary ability to bring people together," she says. "Whether someone comes to hear a concert, joins a community chorus, or simply learns something new, those experiences create connections and moments that last far beyond a performance."

Since arriving, Wendland has strengthened the parish choir, revived the Emerald Coast Community Singers, and begun establishing Christ the King as a place where professional artists, student musicians, and the wider community can share the joy of live music.

Roman Street is only the beginning. While the world-class artists will launch the season, the Emerald Coast Community Singers serve as the heart of the Music at Christ the King series. Recently reinvigorated under Wendland's leadership, the chorus brings together singers from across the community and will present two cornerstone performances this fall: A Celebration of American Music in September and a Christmas concert in December.

Rounding out the season are interactive musical conversations, concerts featuring local artists, and student recitals that reflect Wendland's vision of a music ministry extending well beyond Sunday mornings.

The variety is intentional. Rather than simply presenting concerts, Music at Christ the King invites audiences to experience music from many perspectives—as listeners, learners,



participants, and neighbors.

In a region celebrated for its beaches and outdoor recre-

ation, Christ the King is carving out a unique place within the Emerald Coast's growing arts community by offering a space where people can discover exceptional music together.

Admission for all events is by donation, making the series accessible to everyone. For a complete schedule of concerts and events, visit Christ the King's Music Ministries page at christthekingfl.org.



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SCIENCES

Arlon Jay Scaggs is an award-winning author and Southern storyteller. His debut novel, *Leta Pearl's Love Biscuits* was published in 2025 and was named *Best New Voice in Fiction* by the Independent Book Publishers Association. His writing has appeared in *The New York Times* and *December Magazine*. He teaches English at Northwest Florida State College and lives in Inlet Beach.

MUSIC AT CHRIST THE KING FALL 2026 SERIES

Roman Street
Sunday, August 23 | 3:00PM
www.romanstreet.com



Musical Conversation:
Sacred Harp History & Practice
Saturday, August 29 | 1:00PM



Emerald Coast Community Singers
Celebration of American Music
Sunday, September 13 | 3:00 PM
www.emeraldcoastcommunitysingers.com



Spotlight on Community Musicians: Spooky & Blessed Music Concert for Halloween & All Saints Day
Sunday, November 1 | 3:00PM



Studio 237 Recitals
Saturday, December 5
10:30AM & 1:00PM



Emerald Coast Community Singers
Festival of Nine Lessons & Carols
Sunday, December 13 | 3:00PM



All concerts free • Donations welcomed



480 N County Hwy 393
Santa Rosa Beach, FL 32459

For details of concerts and events,
visit Christ the King Music Ministries
at www.christthekingfl.org



Cali's To Do In Destin! AUGUST 2026

..... 6

Wellness By The Water Yoga | 9am | The Alice
Little Black Dress Night | 6:30pm-9:30pm | Marina Café
Fort Comedy Open Mic Standup | 7pm | Downtown Music Hall
Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse
Ladies Night | 10pm | McGuire's Destin
Harbor Nights | 6 pml HarborWalk Village | Destin

..... 7

Friday Martini Lunch | 11am-4pm | Skybar Destin
Free Beach Bonfire | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille
Locals On The Harbor: Free Beer Friday Fundraiser | 5pm | Boathouse Oyster Bar
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

..... 8

Pilates with Dolphins | 7:30am | Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park
Famers Market | 9am-1pm | Grand Boulevard
Pink Coyote Book Club | 10am | Pink Coyote Dessert Co
Pearls & Prosecco | 2pm | The Alice | Destin

Saturday Sing-A-Long Brunch | 11:30am | Skybar Destin
Homeroom on the Harbor | 4pm | Harborwalk Village
Karaoke | 6pm | Fatboys Destin
80's Dance Party! | 7:45pm | Jake and Henry's | FWB
Karaoke | 8pm | Harry T's Lighthouse
Karaoke | 8pm | 5 o'Clock Somewhere Baytowne Wharf
Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar

..... 9

Beach Clean Up | 6am | Okaloosa Island Boardwalk
DJ Brunch | 10am | Azul @ Harborwalk
PAWS Stars, Stripes & Second Chances | 11am | The Alice | Destin
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
..... 10
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
..... 11
Wellness By The Water Yoga | 9am | The Alice
ECMS Mediation | 9-10:30am | Japanese Garden at Destin Library
Destin Chamber Young Professionals Sunset Social | 5:30pm | 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
Music Bingo | 7pm | Props Brewery Taproom
Open Mic Night | 7pm | Pink Coyote Dessert Co
Boomin' Tuesdays Fireworks | 7:15pm | Baytowne Wharf
Movies on the Beach | 8pm | Al's Beach Club

..... 12

Bonfire on the Beach | 5pm | The Bay
Trivia Night | 5pm | Down Island
Run Club | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery
Bonsai Workshop | 6pm | 125 Lovejoy Road, FWB
Trivia Night | 6pm | Destin Brewery
Trivia Night | 6pm | Craft Bar @ The Harbor
Wednesday Night Concert Series | 7pm | Baytowne Wharf
Karaoke | 7pm | Kenny D's
Karaoke | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty

..... 13

Wellness By The Water Yoga | 9am | The Alice
Harbor Nights | 6 pml HarborWalk Village | Destin
Little Black Dress Night | 6:30pm-9:30pm | Marina Café
Fort Comedy Open Mic Standup | 7pm | Downtown Music Hall
Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse
Ladies Night | 10pm | McGuire's Destin
..... 14
Business Before Hours | 7:30am | Destin FWB Convention Center
Friday Martini Lunch | 11am-4pm | Skybar Destin

History Sandwiched-In: "Women in War Today" | noon | Heritage Museum of NW Florida
Free Beach Bonfire | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille
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

..... 15

Pilates with Dolphins | 7:30am | Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park
Famers Market | 9am-1pm | Grand Boulevard
Saturday Sing-A-Long Brunch | 11:30am | Skybar Destin
Karaoke | 8pm | Harry T's Lighthouse
Karaoke | 8pm | 5 o'Clock Somewhere Baytowne Wharf
Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar

..... 16

DJ Brunch | 10am | Azul @ Harborwalk
Sound Bath Sundays | 6pm | Hotel Effie
Karaoke Sundays | 7pm | AL's Beach Club
Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar
Karaoke | 9pm | Outcast Bar & Grill

..... 17

The Great Bay Scallop Search | 10am | Choctawhatchee Bay
Free Beach Bonfire/SIN Night | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille
Bingo Night | 6pm | American Legion Destin, 311 Main Street

..... 18

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
Music Bingo | 7pm | Props Brewery Taproom

..... 19

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
Wednesday Night Concert Series | 7pm | Baytowne Wharf
Karaoke | 7pm | Kenny D's
Karaoke | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty

..... 20

Wellness By The Water Yoga | 9am | The Alice
Bubbly Baytowne | 5pm | Baytowne Wharf
Harbor Nights | 6 pml HarborWalk Village | Destin

Little Black Dress Night | 6:30pm-9:30pm | Marina Café
Fort Comedy Open Mic Standup | 7pm | Downtown Music Hall
Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse
Ladies Night | 10pm | McGuire's Destin

..... 21

Friday Martini Lunch | 11am-4pm | Skybar Destin
Free Beach Bonfire | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille
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

..... 22

Pilates with Dolphins | 7:30am | Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park
Famers Market | 9am-1pm | Grand Boulevard
Saturday Sing-A-Long Brunch | 11:30am | Skybar Destin
Bubble Festival | 12pm | Hammock Bay
Karaoke | 8pm | Harry T's Lighthouse
Karaoke | 8pm | 5 o'Clock Somewhere Baytowne Wharf
Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar

..... 23

DJ Brunch | 10am | Azul @ Harborwalk
Coastal Wedding Expo | 1pm-4pm | Destin FWB Convention Center
Roman Street Sunday | 3pm | Christ The King Church | SRB
Sound Bath Sundays | 6pm | Hotel Effie
Karaoke Sundays | 7pm | AL's Beach Club
Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar
Karaoke | 9pm | Outcast Bar & Grill

..... 24

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

..... 25

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
Open Mic Night | 7pm | Pink Coyote Dessert Co
Music Bingo | 7pm | Props Brewery Taproom

..... 26

Bonfire on the Beach | 5pm | The Bay
Run Club | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery
Trivia Night | 6pm | Destin Brewery

Trivia Night | 6pm | Craft Bar @ The Harbor
Wednesday Night Concert Series | 7pm | Baytowne Wharf
Karaoke | 7pm | Kenny D's
Karaoke | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty

..... 27

Wellness By The Water Yoga | 9am | The Alice
Business After Hours | 5:30pm | Beachworx
Harbor Nights | 6 pml HarborWalk Village | Destin
Little Black Dress Night | 6:30pm-9:30pm | Marina Café
Fort Comedy Open Mic Standup | 7pm | Downtown Music Hall
Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's Lighthouse
Ladies Night | 10pm | McGuire's Destin

..... 28

Friday Martini Lunch | 11am-4pm | Skybar Destin
Free Beach Bonfire | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille
Wine & Fries Fundraiser | 6pm | The Alice
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

..... 29

Pilates with Dolphins | 7:30am | Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park
Famers Market | 9am-1pm | Grand Boulevard
Saturday Sing-A-Long Brunch | 11:30am | Skybar Destin
Musical Conversation: Sacred Harp | 1pm | Christ The King Church | SRB
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
..... 30
DJ Brunch | 10am | Azul @ Harborwalk
Sound Bath Sundays | 6pm | Hotel Effie
Karaoke Sundays | 7pm | AL's Beach Club
Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar
Karaoke | 9pm | Outcast Bar & Grill
..... 31
Free Beach Bonfire/SIN Night | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille
Bingo Night | 6pm | American Legion Destin, 311 Main Street





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To do in
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"You Only Get to Be Captain Once." Meet Bowlegs Captain Kent Tinsley

BY CHRISTOPHER MANSON

On Saturday, June 13, the closely-guarded identity of the incoming Captain Billy—the 71st—was revealed at the annual Billy Bowlegs Coronation Pageant held at the Mattie Kelly Arts Center in Niceville. The free public event announced Kent Tinsley as Captain Billy 71, along with his Queen, First Mate and Mistress, Honor Guard consisting of 10 couples, and the theme for Bowlegs 2027.

Keeping the new Captain Billy's identity under wraps involves months of planning before the Coronation Pageant. Tinsley was made aware of the honor last November after the seven previous captains came together and narrowed the candidates down to three. The final decision was made by Rique Gwin, Captain Billy 70. "I was honored to pick Kent, knowing him for many years to be a quality, good man," says Gwin. "I also respect his longtime ties to the community and rich heritage in the Krewe."

Tinsley, a lifelong Fort Walton Beach resident, is the son of an Air Force veteran—and past Captain Billy (36). "It's a unique perspective, having had my family involved for so many years," he says. "My dad passed in April, but I was able to share the excitement about being Captain Billy 71." The Fort Walton Beach High School graduate and University of West Florida alum will be using his father's Captain's medallion and sword as a tribute.

Tinsley calls wife Mary his "right hand lady, the driving force behind me and my family." She and Tinsley married 20 years ago and joined the Krewe shortly after. Mary is very involved in the community, notably as president of Impact 100.

The 2027 Billy Bowlegs Festival is set for the weekend after Mother's Day, beginning on Thursday and wrapping up with the Monday evening parade. "It's a busy year, but you plan for it," Tinsley says. Fortunately, his "real" job has afforded him the flexibility to travel

throughout the upcoming year.

The Krewe is a private organization which consists of up to 170 members. In order to join, hopefuls are required to be sponsored by a current member. Tinsley spends a good part of his week managing the inner workings of the organization.



Incoming Captain Billy Kent Tinsley and wife Mary

"It's well worth the effort. You only get to be Captain once!"

Come October, he and his fellow krewe members will attend various festivals in Panama City, Apalachicola, and beyond. When asked if he ever gets any rest, he says, "Whenever I can find time! What's the old saying? 'I'll sleep when I'm dead.'"

Tinsley says his duties as Captain Billy really began six to seven months before he officially took over. "There's a lot of planning leading up to the official start of the year, and now it's time to execute. I've been looking forward to this for a long time."

Captain Billy's Queen is Tade Wolfe, a local speech pathologist. "She and her husband Scott have been in the Krewe for years. We're great friends and work well together," says Tinsley. Local business owners Jason and Nicole Floyd have been tapped as First Mate and Mistress. "They got into the Krewe five years ago, and our relationship has grown in that

time. It was an easy pick."

The theme for Bowlegs 71 is "Whiskey In, Wisdom Out." Tinsley admits that a good bit of thought went into that. "We all enjoy getting together and enjoying a good glass of bourbon. And just maybe we spread

a little wisdom throughout the year, too."

He adds: "It's really about spreading the good news about Fort Walton Beach to other communities."

The Billy Bowlegs Pirate Festival originated in 1954. Over

the years, the Krewe has swash buckled its way into the hearts of locals and visitors with its devotion to service and civic mindedness. And, of course, fun. Learn more at kreweofbowlegs.com.

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

EVENTS

continued from page 10

registration takes place Sept. 23, with 10% benefiting Westwood Ranch. The boat entry fee is \$1,000. Boats should register by Sept. 23; tournament T-shirt sizes may not be guaranteed for entries received after Sept. 1.

The tournament supports Westonwood Ranch and its mission to empower teens and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities through life-skills education, workforce development and meaningful employment opportunities.

Register at westonwood.org/battleforthebucklefishingtournament. For additional information, contact tournament director Joe Donovan at (850) 572-3695.

14th Annual Fore Her Golf Outing

**Friday, Sept. 25, 2026 |
Check-in at 8 a.m.; tee
time at 9 a.m.**

The Links Golf Club at Sandestin

Golfers of every skill level are invited to think pink and hit the links for a great local cause. Presented by Emerald Coast Hospice Care, the outing includes a Bloody Mary Bar from Ruby Slipper Cafe, breakfast from Chick-fil-A, 18 holes of golf, the popular “Dress Like a Lady Hole,” food at the turn and an after-party featuring lunch, music, prizes, giveaways and raffle drawings.

Funds raised help Fore Her offset living expenses for local breast cancer patients undergo-

ing treatment along the Emerald Coast.

Early BIRDIE registration is available through Sept. 1 for \$175 per golfer or \$700 per team of four. After Sept. 1, registration increases to \$200 per golfer or \$800 per team.

Register at foreher.org/golfouting. Sponsorship and volunteer opportunities are also available; contact Amy Walsh at amy@foreher.org.

10th Annual Harvest Wine & Food Festival

Oct. 15-18

WaterColor and locations throughout South Walton

Sip, savor and celebrate during four unforgettable days of exceptional wine and cuisine at the Harvest Wine & Food Festival, produced by the Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation.



The festivities begin Thursday with intimate Harvest Wine Dinners at restaurants and venues throughout South Walton. Friday's Harvest After Dark brings elevated wines, unexpected pairings and culinary creations to Cerulean Park. Saturday features the signature Grand Tasting, followed by a spirited Jazz Cocktail Brunch on Sunday.

Proceeds benefit the Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation and its mission to help children in need throughout Northwest Florida.

Tickets are on sale now. Visit

dcwaf.org/harvest-festival for the complete schedule and ticket information.

Toss for a Cause at Sandy Bags!

4th Annual "Bags on
the Porch" Cornhole
Tournament
Saturday, Sept. 12, 2026 |
9 a.m.–2 p.m.
The Back Porch, 1740
Scenic Hwy. 98, Destin



Grab your favorite cornhole partner and get ready to toss some bags for an incredible local cause! The Destin Rotary Sunset Club's Sandy Bags tournament promises friendly competition, plenty of laughs and a great day at The Back Porch.

Not playing? Come cheer from the sidelines, enjoy the action and support the teams. Proceeds benefit Fore Her, which provides support, transportation and treatment assistance to local women facing breast cancer, as well as other Rotary community initiatives.

Life Media is excited to return as a tournament sponsor! This event is amazing fun for a meaningful cause, and we're honored to be part of it again this year.

Player registration, donations and sponsorships—starting at \$150—are available at tinyurl.com/sandybags2026. Learn more about Fore Her at foreher.org.

Rotary
Club of Destin Sunset

4TH ANNUAL

SANDY BAGS

"Bags on the Porch"

CORNHOLE TOURNAMENT

BENEFITING

FORE her

Supporting Women
Strengthening Futures

and other local
Rotary initiatives

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SEPT. 12, 2026
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- 4 EVENT SHIRTS

TOSS BOSS
SPONSOR

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- SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS PROMOTING SUPPORT
- 1 TEAM IN TOURNAMENT (2 PEOPLE)
- 2 EVENT T-SHIRTS

CORN STARS

\$150

- 1 TEAM IN TOURNAMENT (2 PEOPLE)
- 2 EVENT T-SHIRTS

T-SHIRT
SPONSOR

\$150

- COMPANY LOGO ON EVENT SHIRTS

SCAN TO REGISTER!

WE'LL BE BACK AT THE BEACH! CONTACT: [phone number] FOR MORE INFORMATION AND PRIZES!

https://tinyurl.com/sandybags2026

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Around Town

Destin High Ushers in New Leadership



Destin High School has named Jill McNamara principal and Matt Means assistant principal as Dr. Diane Kelley retires after more than 45 years in public education.

The school's Governing Board of Directors unanimously appointed McNamara and Means. McNamara was recommended by Executive Director Dr. Willy Williams and endorsed by Kelley, while Means was promoted from within the tuition-free public charter school. The new leaders signed commitment letters during a press conference in the Shark Tank.

Kelley began her career in an Okaloosa County classroom in 1979. She spent 36 years with the Okaloosa County School District as a teacher, principal and district administrator, then served on the Okaloosa County School Board from 2018 to 2024. She became principal of Destin High School in 2024.

In retirement, Kelley plans to spend more time with her family. Her husband, Dr. Bill Smith, retired from the school district in February, and their grandson will begin kindergarten this year.

Destin Elementary to Celebrate New Grades 3-5 Center

The Okaloosa County School District will celebrate the completion of Destin Elementary School's new Grades 3-5 Center with a ribbon-cutting ceremony at 10 a.m. Wednesday, Aug. 12.

The expansion includes a 30-classroom addition, multipurpose building and administrative wing. The new instructional space will serve students in grades three through five and welcome fifth-grade students back to the elementary campus from Destin Middle School.

The project is designed to increase student capacity, reduce the school's reliance on portable classrooms and provide modern



learning spaces for students and teachers. District leaders said the expansion reflects ongoing efforts to plan for community growth while making strategic use of capital resources.

Destin Elementary Principal Amy Morgan expressed excitement about welcoming students, families and staff into the new center and thanked the community partners whose planning and support helped bring the project to completion.

Community members, families, elected officials and media representatives are invited to attend the ceremony at Destin Elementary School, 630 Kelly St. Advance arrival is recommended to allow time for check-in. To RSVP, email catherine.card@okaloosaschools.com.

City of Destin Recognizes Civil Rights Attorney Charles Morgan Jr.

The Destin City Council posthumously recognized civil rights attorney and former Destin resident Charles Chuck Morgan Jr. as a Legacy Walk of Fame recipient. Representatives Williams and Jennings of the NAACP joined the council for the presentation.

Morgan earned national recognition for his courage during the Civil Rights era. On Sept. 16, 1963, one day after the bombing of Birmingham's 16th Street Baptist Church, he addressed the city's white business leaders and challenged the silence that had allowed racial violence to continue.

He later litigated landmark cases involving voting rights, equal protection and civil liberties across the country. Morgan also chronicled his experiences in his book, *A Time to Speak*.

Morgan lived in Destin until his death in 2009, and his family's contributions remain part of the community. His son, Charles Morgan III, founded Harbor Docks Seafood Restaurant in 1979. Now owned by Eddie Morgan, the longtime harbor restaurant continues its tradition

of supporting local fishermen, serving residents and welcoming visitors.

Morgan's grandson, Destin City Councilman Chatham, continues the family's legacy of public service through his work on the council.

The Legacy Walk of Fame recognition honors Morgan's influence on the national pursuit of justice and celebrates his enduring connection to Destin.

United Way Celebrates \$3.1 Million Community Impact

United Way Emerald Coast celebrated a year of service and recognized several community partners during its 2026 Annual

Meeting, presented by Eglin Federal Credit Union.

The organization reported a total community impact valued at \$3.1 million during the past year, reaching 48,789 children, individuals and families across Okaloosa and Walton counties. That work was made possible through partnerships with local businesses, schools, military organizations, foundations, community leaders, nonprofits, donors and volunteers.

During the meeting, United Way welcomed David Deitch as its new Board Chair and recognized outgoing Board Chair Sheila Fitzgerald for her service.

The organization also presented its inaugural Hidden

Gems Awards, honoring individuals whose work has helped strengthen the Emerald Coast community. Recipients were Nic Evans and Shaun Foster of United Fidelity Bank; Paul and Donna Montalvo of A2Z Specialty Advertising; Emily Dahm of the 96th Test Wing Mission Support Group; Dakota Scott of Destin-Fort Walton Beach/Okaloosa County; and Coedy Robinson and Noah Scofield of 1Shot Creations.

United Way Emerald Coast President and CEO Kelly Jasen credited the year's accomplishments to the many people and organizations that contribute their time, talents and resources.

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Choose from coin purses, wristlets or clutch handbags. For football weekends, shop clear stadium bags, beaded purse straps, game-day coin purses customized with a name and school colors, and football-themed entertaining pieces.

Because personalized and hand-beaded creations take time—game-day coin purses require approximately three to four weeks. So, order now. Free gift wrapping is available in-store.

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A Fresh Look for the Season Ahead

Pure & Couture Salon | Pure Collective Salon

A new school year, a fall event or a walk down the aisle can all inspire a fresh look. The talented hair and makeup artists at Pure

& Couture Salon and Pure Collective Salon help clients discover the styles and techniques that complement your individual features.

Makeup artists assess facial structure and highlight each client's best features. For hair, a loose style can create natural volume while soft waves frame the face. Other popular wedding looks include polished ponytails, beautiful braids and styles enhanced with extensions for added volume and length.

For brides, the team works with each client and her bridal party to bring the wedding-day vision to life, whether services are provided in the salon or on location. Available services for weddings, special events and seasonal refreshes include consultations, trial sessions, airbrush makeup, blowouts, lash extensions, spray tanning and hair extensions. Step into this season with “pure” confidence. Book today and experience the difference artistry makes.

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Pure Collective Salon: 600 Grand Blvd., Ste. 102

Sweeten the Back-to-School Season

Smallcakes: A Cupcakery

Before summer slips away and school schedules take over, there's still time for a colorful celebration—and Smallcakes is ready to make it sweeter.

From flamingo-topped pool-party carrot cakes to piano-key cupcakes, every creation can be customized for life's sweetest moments. Stop by for 13 signature cupcake flavors, four rotating specialties, house-made ice cream, jumbo cookies, cookie cakes, brownies and even pupcakes for four-legged family members. August favorites

include tropical-inspired treats bursting with color and flavor.

Smallcakes can also add a sweet touch to back-to-school kickoff parties, faculty gatherings, team celebrations and teacher welcome gifts. Customize cakes, cupcakes or cookies with school colors, logos, photos or personal messages to make the start of the year feel extra special.

Planning a birthday, shower or corporate event? Smallcakes can create something memorable for those occasions, too. The mini 12-pack sampler offers a delicious way to try them all.

At Smallcakes, if you can dream it, they can cake it.

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SmallcakesDestin.com | @SmallCakesofDestin

A New Season Deserves a Little Sparkle

Beyond Measure Fine Jewelry

August is a season of transitions, milestones and new beginnings—all wonderful reasons to add a little sparkle. At Beyond Measure Fine Jewelry, owner Ashleigh Woolly blends timeless elegance with fresh seasonal style. The showroom features one-of-a-kind, coastal-inspired pieces in vivid gemstone colors and cuts, perfect for marking a milestone, popping the question or elevating your everyday look.

Custom design is Ashleigh's specialty, who believes jewelry should be personal. From wedding bands and engagement rings to heirloom-worthy creations, she helps couples and clients celebrate life's biggest moments with jewelry that feels personal. The collection ranges from bold statement pieces to refined classics. After all, every romantic proposal starts with a custom engagement ring!

Visit the store for a curated, one-on-one shopping experience and discover—or create—something unforgettable.

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Start the School Year Strong

CRYO850 Performance & Recovery Center

New schedules call for renewed focus, and CRYO850 Performance & Recovery Center is helping students and athletes begin the school year with an edge. The CRYO850 team works with coaches, trainers and parents—from middle school through college—to support wellness, encourage recovery and help reduce the risk of injury.

The Performance Center features Visionbody Wireless EMS Training and Reflexion Neuroscience Vision Training. EMS uses adjustable stimulation to support strength, mobility and fat-burning in a 20-minute session. The Reflexion Vision Board focuses on hand-eye coordination, reaction time, peripheral awareness and concentration. It can also establish individual performance baselines and provide useful information when monitoring recovery after an impact.

Full-time students under age 25 receive 40% off the Student Day Pass, which includes six Traditional Circuit services: whole-body cryotherapy, localized cryotherapy, red light therapy, compression therapy, infrared circuit sauna and vibration plates. These services are available on a walk-in, first-come basis, making them easier to fit around changing school, practice and game schedules.

Send CRYO850 a direct message on Facebook or Instagram, call, schedule a team night or organize a team fundraiser.

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Be On The Coast™ Real Estate Group

Brian K. Locicero, REALTOR® | BeOnTheCoast.com

Those of us who live here already know what makes Destin and the Emerald Coast special. The question isn't always whether to move to the coast—it may be how to make coastal living fit your next stage of life.

Perhaps you're ready to downsize, move closer to family, find a neighborhood that better suits your lifestyle or purchase an investment property. You may even be searching for a nearby home for parents who are ready to retire where the rest of the family already lives.

The qualities locals enjoy every day also make this area appealing for the long term: a mild climate that encourages outdoor living, access to local physicians and regional hospitals, convenient airports for visiting family, and year-round community events and activities. Florida also has no state income tax on Social Security benefits, pensions or 401(k) income.

Whether your next move takes you across town, into a neighboring community or simply closer to the lifestyle you want, Brian Locicero can help you find the property and neighborhood that feel like the right fit.

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From the Publisher: Destin Life Celebrates Eight Years

Eight years ago, in 2018, I became a partner in launching Destin Life, bringing our all-positive, community-centered publishing concept to the Destin market. The response was immediate—and incredibly encouraging.

Today, Destin Life is part of the Life Media family of eight community newspapers, along with our digital platforms and specialty publications serving readers across the Emerald Coast. I'm deeply grateful for company founder and business partner Dave White, our experienced staff, the talented network of writers, photographers, designers, contributors and community partners who help bring our publications to life each month. We could not do what we do without them—or without you, our loyal readers and advertisers.

Throughout the past eight years, Destin Life has maintained its unique hometown personality while staying true to the mission we established from



the beginning: to celebrate local people, support local businesses, strengthen community connections and shine a light on the

positive stories happening all around us.

Each month, 12,000 hyper-local copies of Destin Life are direct-mailed and distributed throughout the community. Thousands more readers connect with us through MyDestinLife.com, our monthly e-newsletter and social media.

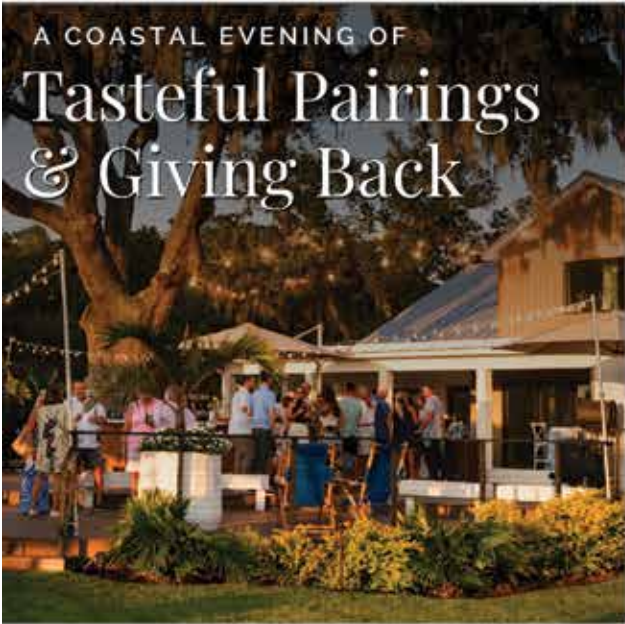
As we look toward the future, our mission remains unchanged: to share positive stories and celebrate the faith, families, businesses and community spirit that make our area so special.

WE'LL CONTINUE providing a trusted community voice while offering affordable, effective promotion through the

Continued on page 20











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13th Annual Soldiers on the Water

Saturday, Sept. 19, 2026 | Veteran check-in begins at 7 a.m.; boats depart at 8 a.m.

Emerald Coast REALTORS® and ECAR Foundation to Honor Combat-Wounded Veterans at 13th Annual Soldiers on the Water

The Emerald Coast Association of REALTORS® (ECAR), in partnership with the ECAR Foundation, local charter boat captains, sponsors and volunteers, will host the 13th Annual Soldiers on the Water on Saturday, Sept. 19, 2026.

For 13 years, Soldiers on the Water has brought together the local community to honor combat-wounded veterans through a day of fishing, fellowship and appreciation. The event is made possible through the generosity of volunteer charter captains, community sponsors and countless volunteers who donate their time and resources each year.

The event is offered at no cost to participating combat-wounded veterans. Organizers expect more than 100 veterans to participate this year.

Following the fishing excursion, return for an afternoon of fellowship, dinner and an awards presentation recognizing accomplishments such as the day's biggest catch and most fish caught.

"Soldiers on the Water is one of the most meaningful traditions our Association has the privilege of hosting," said representatives of the Emerald Coast Association of REALTORS®. "This event is about more than fishing—it's about showing our appreciation, building connections, and giving combat-wounded veterans an opportunity to enjoy a day surrounded by people who are grateful for their service. We are incredibly thankful to the sponsors, charter captains, and volunteers whose generosity makes this event possible year after year."

Soldiers on the Water is dedicated exclusively to combat-wounded veterans, providing a unique opportunity for fellowship, healing and recognition in a relaxed outdoor setting.

For more information: Brandon Schwartz, Brandon@ecaor.com, 850-243-6145.

Veteran check-in begins at 7 a.m. behind Brotula's Seafood House & Steamer. Charter boats will depart at 8 a.m. for a morning of world-class fishing.

STOP Asking if the Real Estate Market is Good or Bad

The answer is simple—It just is. Instead, ask the question that actually matters:
“What can I do to make this market work for me?” I have your answer.

By PAUL A. DOMENECH

One of the questions I’m asked most often is, “Is now a good time to buy or sell?”

My answer usually surprises people. The market isn’t good or bad—it simply is. Markets aren’t emotional. People are.

The real estate market moves through cycles, just as it always has. Interest rates change. Inventory rises and falls. Consumer confidence shifts. Employment changes. Migration patterns evolve. These factors influence the market, but they don’t make it “good” or “bad.” They simply create different opportunities for different people.

There are certainly regions of the country experiencing extraordinary demand as people continue relocating from higher-tax states in search of lower taxes, warmer weather, and a different quality of life. Those areas have seen price spikes that don’t necessarily reflect what is happening across most of the country.

Here along the Emerald Coast, our market behaves much like many established markets that aren’t driven by unusual circumstances. It shifts. It adjusts. It rewards those who are prepared rather than those attempting to predict it.

One of the current misconceptions is the belief that waiting will create the perfect opportunity.

Many buyers tell me they’re waiting for interest rates to come down. Many sellers are waiting for prices to climb higher. The reality is that you generally don’t get both advantages at the same time.

Typically, buyers will experience one of two scenarios: lower interest rates paired with higher home prices, or higher interest rates paired with lower home prices.

Could there be a brief moment when both rates and prices are low? Absolutely. Can anyone accurately predict when that moment will occur? Only if they can

also predict the winning Powerball numbers.

The truth is, nobody consistently times the market. Successful buyers and sellers prepare for it instead. The people who consistently make great real estate decisions share five common characteristics.

They are **Patient, Prepared, Prosperous, Positioned,** and ready to **Pounce.**

Patience means understanding that opportunity doesn’t arrive on your timeline. **Preparation** means having your finances, documentation, and current home in order before opportunity knocks. **Prosperity** means having the financial ability to act without unnecessary obstacles or contingencies. **Positioning** means knowing exactly what you’re looking for and recognizing value when it appears. Finally, when the right opportunity presents itself, you **pounce.** Take the kids, the dog, the cat, grandma, and leave the rest.

Hesitation often costs more

than making a well-informed decision. The buyers who secure exceptional opportunities usually aren’t the luckiest people in the room. They’re simply the ones who were ready when everyone else was still deciding.

Locally, we’ve seen different segments of the market moving at different speeds. The single-family home market has remained relatively strong, while the condominium market has softened. Visitors continue to enjoy our beaches and our community, but fewer are choosing to buy investment properties, creating opportunities for local investors willing to look beyond today’s headlines.

If you have those five qualities in place, I believe there are opportunities in today’s market that didn’t exist just a few years ago.

For homeowners planning to sell and purchase another property, waiting isn’t necessarily a winning strategy. You’ll likely trade one market condition for another.

What I do know is this: People

are buying homes every single day. The question isn’t whether the market is good or bad. The question is whether you’re ready when your opportunity arrives.

At The Domenech Group, we’ve built our business around adapting to today’s market instead of wishing for yesterday’s. Our focus has never been on predicting the market. It’s been on preparing our clients to succeed in it.

That’s what we call The Domenech Effect, a proven strategy designed to help buyers and sellers win in the market we have today. We have sold and have under contract over 90 homes year to date with a team of four, keeping it personal and profitable for our customers.

If you’ve been thinking about buying, selling, or investing, let’s have a conversation and build a strategy that works for the market we actually have, not the one everyone is waiting for.

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Education

DHS

continued from page 1

their worth on the playing field. This past school year featured an individual Florida High School Athletic Association state title in girls weightlifting for Destin's Elena Nava, as well as strong seasons in girls basketball, girls wrestling, flag football, and both tennis programs. "A school that has successful sports programs sees more engagement from its students and parents, and it's proven that just competing is an invaluable teacher for kids; the things they learn about themselves and life are important in developing success in other aspects – including helping them to be better students," Dr. Williams said. "That's why we want to foster the right athletic atmosphere. And you better believe we're here cheering our kids on."

School leaders say that a close-knit atmosphere at the school only enhances that understanding. In fact, they say, small class sizes even help students to feel more involved in supporting each other's success in all fields – including cheering each other on the field of athletic competition.

There was much to cheer for Destin High in 2025-26. On top of Nava's weightlifting crown, there was a regional championship for girls wrestling standout

Veronica Madrid, as well as a girls basketball district championship, a state quarterfinal playoff berth for the girls flag football team and district tennis championships for siblings Charlie and Lucy Frankfurt.

Sharks classmates also watched as Corollo and Prosser took their impressive careers to new heights. In fact, school leadership says the recent graduate and rising senior displayed a commitment to hard work and success that the school wants all its athletes to follow. This is because Corollo and Prosser succeeded by displaying discipline, leadership, and teamwork, both on the playing field and in the classroom. "There was no doubt that Katie and Kenzie would be successful in whatever they set their minds to; they're incredibly gifted athletes. But they didn't just succeed because they could run and jump better than other girls; they got to where they are because they work hard and remain focused even when things get tough," said Destin Athletic Administrator Skylar Walden. "That's the message we hope that all of our Sharks take from them realizing their dreams of competing at the highest collegiate levels."

Even while Corollo did not compete directly for Destin High – as the school does not currently feature a gymnastics program – her presence at

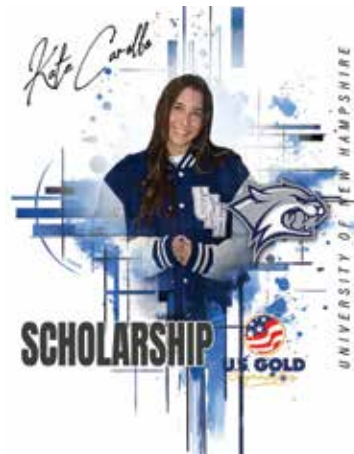


Kenzie Prosser

the school offered classmates a glimpse of what is required of a nationally-ranked athlete, and Sharks leadership is excited to celebrate her accomplishments. "Just being around someone with that kind of dedication shows other students what's possible; plus, she's an amazing person, and we're so excited for her," Dr. Williams said. "We know she's going to go and dominate for New Hampshire."

Corollo started competing in club gymnastics at the age of 7 in Destin with the U.S. Gold team gym. Her commitment and abilities meant that she traveled regionally to compete in USA Gymnastics sanctioned meets, and she has been a level 10 gymnast for the last five years. Some of her career highlights include:

- Earning Level 9 qualification for the Region 8 National Team
- Earning 3-time Level 10 qualification for the Region 8 National Team
- Winning the Florida State Meet all around in Level 10
- Placing top 10 in the nation on beam and vault during the USA Gymnastics Nationals in



Kate Corollo

Oklahoma City in May 2026

While classmates will be able to read about Corollo's exploits next season at the college level, they have one more year to watch Destin's other Division I signee in person.

Prosser's dominant presence on the court has been a joy for the coaching staff, and she's looking forward to seeing what the senior will put together in her final season at DHS. "Kenzie is one of the most impressive athletes and people I've been around, and it's no wonder that The Citadel wanted her to come play for them," Destin High Principal Jill McNamara said. "I know she's going to be a standout at the next level too. The best part is that her teammates look up to her and have something to aim for."

Prosser, who also played for severable notable club teams, noted that earning the scholarship to play at the school, located in Charleston, S.C., was beyond her wildest dreams. "I am so unbelievably excited for what's to come and can't wait for my

chapter at The Citadel," Prosser said. "I want to say thank you so much to my amazing parents who have always been my biggest supporters and have provided me with all the opportunities to achieve my goals. Your constant encouragement, sacrifices, and unconditional love mean the world to me."

Having seen the commitment required for success, Sharks students and coaches believe that there are many more accomplishments on the horizon – both individually and for the school's teams. "Just like everything else we're doing here, we have a clear plan for success, and we're following it," Dr. Williams said. "But those plans wouldn't be anything without wonderful, talented people – and we have that in both our student body and coaching staff. Because of that, the future looks very bright."

If you or your student is interested in joining and competing for the Shark family, there is still time to do so for the 2026-27 school year – though time and room is starting to run out for north Florida's only tuition-free public charter school. Destin High has already accepted more than 300 applications for next school year and has limited space available.

Open enrollment is still open.

For more information, visit destin-highschool.org, call 850-204-4044, or stop by the campus at 4325 Commons Drive West in Destin.

EIGHT YEARS

continued from page 18

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Thank you for reading, supporting and growing with us. We look forward to sharing many more of Destin's stories in the years ahead!

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Start Here. Engineer Your Future Here.

New NWFSC–UWF partnership will allow local students to pursue four engineering degrees without leaving Northwest Florida

For many local students, earning an engineering degree has traditionally meant moving away from home—and taking on the added costs that come with it. A newly approved partnership between Northwest Florida State College and the University of West Florida is creating another option.

Students will soon be able to begin their engineering education at NWFSC's Niceville campus and then transition to UWF to complete a bachelor's degree at the schools' joint campus in Fort Walton Beach.

That means Destin-area students can pursue a high-quality engineering degree while remaining close to their families, jobs and community.

engineering courses through UWF in Fort Walton Beach.

The specialized transfer degree—known as a SAAT degree—allows NWFSC to include required courses beyond those typically offered in a traditional 60-credit Associate in Arts program. This helps ensure students have completed the prerequisites they need before beginning their upper-level engineering studies at UWF.

Importantly for families, the additional required credits can qualify for financial aid. The combination of financial-aid eligibility, NWFSC's affordability and the ability to live at home could make an engineering degree more attainable for many local students.

careers—and encourage them to build their futures here. “Students should not have to leave Northwest Florida to pursue an engineering education or prepare for careers in industries that are vital to our region,” said Rhea Goff, chair of the NWFSC District Board of Trustees. “These new pathways give local students an affordable

and accessible starting point while helping employers develop the highly skilled workforce they need.”

For local high school students who are beginning to consider college options—as well as working adults thinking about a new career—these programs could open the door to an engineering education that once

seemed out of reach.

Information about enrollment, advising, course schedules and anticipated program start dates will be announced as implementation plans are completed.

Students and parents can learn more by visiting NWFSC.edu/engineering.



The Florida State Board of Education recently approved four new Specialized Associate in Arts Transfer degree programs at NWFSC:

- Civil Engineering
- Computer Engineering
- Electrical Engineering
- Mechanical Engineering

“A student can start here, stay here and build a successful future here,” said NWFSC President Mel Ponder. “Students will be able to start their engineering degree at Northwest Florida State College, continue to the University of West Florida and complete a high-quality bachelor's degree close to home.”

A Smoother Path to an Engineering Degree

The new programs are designed to take some of the uncertainty out of transferring from a two-year college to a university engineering program.

Students will complete foundational mathematics, science, engineering and general education courses at NWFSC. They can then move into upper-level

“This partnership reflects what higher education should do—create opportunities that meet students where they are and prepare them for where they want to go,” said UWF President Manny Diaz Jr. “Students can begin their academic journey at NWFSC and then complete a UWF engineering degree without leaving the community they call home.”

Preparing Students for Local Careers

The new pathways are also closely connected to Northwest Florida's workforce needs.

Engineers play important roles throughout the region's military installations and its growing aerospace, defense and technology industries. They are also needed in construction, infrastructure, manufacturing and other industries that support everyday life in our communities.

By creating a clear path from a student's first college course through completion of a bachelor's degree, NWFSC and UWF hope to prepare more local students for these high-demand



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Planning Ahead for Fall Home Improvements

BY KYLE SPARKS, OVATION PAINTING

As summer begins to wind down along the Emerald Coast, many homeowners start thinking about projects they would like to complete before the end

of the year.

August is an excellent time to evaluate the condition of your home and begin planning ahead. Coastal weather throughout the year—sun, humidity, and occasional storms—can gradually

wear down surfaces.

Exterior paint often shows the effects first. Small cracks, fading, or chalky residue can indicate that the protective layer is beginning to break down.

Interior spaces may also ben-

efit from updates after months of summer activity. Fresh paint can restore brightness and create a clean, refreshed feel throughout the home.

Property management companies and rental agencies also begin planning offseason maintenance around this time. Scheduling projects ahead of the slower months helps ensure homes remain in excellent condition without interrupting guest bookings.



especially along the coast.”

Planning ahead now helps ensure projects move smoothly later in the year.

Ready to give your home the loving protection it deserves? Reach out to Ovation Painting and let’s start planning your refresh. Call or text (850) 830-9668 to get started. And as a thank you to those who serve, we proudly offer a military and first responder discount by mentioning this article!

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Kyle's Tip:

“If you’re thinking about repainting your home, planning a few months ahead usually gives the best scheduling flexibility—



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From Kobe to 30A: Extraordinary Evenings Ahead at Old Florida Fish House

This August and September, Old Florida Fish House is bringing a remarkable collection of culinary and cultural experiences to the shores of 30a's Eastern Lake. The season's highlights include an exceedingly rare Kobe beef presentation featuring a visiting Japanese cattle farmer, followed in September by two distinctive evenings with former police officer and nationally recognized media personality Brandon Tatum.

A Rare Taste of Japan

On **August 27** at 6 p.m., Old Florida Fish House will present an exclusive **Usunaga Kobe Beef Dinner Experience** built around the importation of an entire A5 Kobe beef carcass from Japan.

The whole-animal presentation is believed by the restaurant to be unique in the Southeast and possibly throughout the U.S. Rather than showcasing only a familiar premium cut, the dinner will give chefs the opportunity to explore the animal through a thoughtfully composed, 10-course menu.

The evening will also introduce diners to the people and traditions behind the beef. Special guest Yoshiki Usunaga, owner and farmer of Usunaga Ranch in Japan's Hyogo Prefecture, will travel to Florida to present the beef and tell the story of his farm. Throughout the dinner, he will share insights into the care, lineage and exacting standards involved in producing authentic Kobe beef.

"Having the farmer travel from Japan makes this much more than a dinner," the Old Florida Fish House team says. "It is an opportunity to connect our guests with the origin of the product, the traditions behind it and the person who raised it."

Although "Wagyu" and "Kobe" are sometimes used interchangeably, the terms are not synonymous. Wagyu refers to four native Japanese cattle breeds. Authentic Kobe beef must come from Tajima-line Japanese Black cattle born, raised and processed in Japan's Hyogo Prefecture, and it must satisfy very strict standards for quality, marbling, weight and traceability.

A5 is Japan's highest combined yield and quality designation. The "A" refers to the amount of usable meat produced by the carcass, while the "5" represents the highest quality score. Its intricate marbling creates the tenderness, richness and distinctive texture that have made Japanese Wagyu one of the world's most celebrated culinary treasures.

Old Florida Fish House is an officially registered Kobe beef destination and is billed as the only Kobe-certified restaurant in the Florida Panhandle. Its whole-carcass import offers guests a rare opportunity to experience cuts and preparations that go far beyond the customary steakhouse presentation.

The August 27 dinner will feature 10 chef-curated courses accompanied by selected sake, wine and cocktails. Tickets are \$299 per person, excluding tax and gratuity.

Two Evenings with The Officer Tatum

The momentum continues September 16 and 17 when Brandon Tatum brings two special events to Old Florida Fish House.

Tatum is a nationally recognized digital media personality, former police officer and SWAT operator, author, speaker and entrepreneur. He has developed one of the country's most prominent independent conservative media brands, attracting more than 8.6 million followers and subscribers and generating billions of views across YouTube and social media.

On **September 16, The Officer Tatum Bourbon Tasting and Dinner Experience** will combine conversation, cuisine and a curated bourbon tasting. In addition to his work in media, Tatum is the founder or owner of several businesses, including Verdict Bourbon, Blackline Security Operations, Shinergy Life and Pure Choice Apparel.

September 17 will feature **An Evening with The Officer Tatum**. Drawing on his experience in law enforcement, business and media, Tatum will offer his perspective on politics, culture, faith, freedom

and everyday life. Known for blending direct analysis with humor and common sense, he encourages audiences to question prevailing narratives, think independently and live with

courage and purpose.

Reservations for the August 27 Usunaga Kobe Beef Dinner Experience may be made at floridafishhouse.com. Visit the website for tickets, times and ad-

ditional details for September's Officer Tatum events and the complete seasonal calendar.



Fall Events

Aug. 27

Sept. 16 & 17

Sept. 26

August

27 Kobe Wagyu Presentation and Dinner

September

9 SEC Football Watch Party
12 SEC Football Watch Party
16 The Officer Tatum Bourbon Tasting and Dinner Experience
17 An Evening with The Officer Tatum
26 SEC Football Watch Party
26 Japanese Bluefin Tuna Cutting Show
26 Japanese Bluefin Tuna Dinner

October

1 The Will Thompson Band Motown Tribute
31 SEC Football Watch Party
31 Halloween Costume Contest Party

Weekly Events

Live Music Nightly, Featuring:
 · Dueling Pianos Thursday through Saturday
 · Alex Napier Monday - Wednesday
 Brunch by the Lake with Live Music Saturday and Sunday
 Sunday Funday with the Will Thompson Band Sundays Sept. 13 - Nov. 28

Visit OldFloridaFishHouse.com

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33 Heron's Watch Way | Santa Rosa Beach, FL 32459

info@oldfloridafishhouse.com | 850.534.3045

AJ's Seafood & Oyster Bar

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

(850) 837-1913

116 Harbor Blvd.

ajsd Destin.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 austonson98.com.

(850) 842-3200

125 Poinciana Blvd.,

Miramar Beach

Austonson98.com

Boathouse Oyster Bar

Oysters, live music and a local vibe, the Boathouse is where the locals go with live music every night. Located in the heart



of Destin on the Destin Harbor, the Boathouse specializes in making oysters a delicacy. Boathouse's gumbo recipe was written by Mama Gumbo herself. And, of course, the oysters are raw, steamed or baked, just the way you like 'em. The first Friday of each month, The Boathouse hosts locals on the Destin Harbor from 5-7 p.m. Listen and move with live entertainment daily. See ad for bands and times. Music schedule subject to change. Follow on Facebook for updates. During or after the game, mosey on over to hang

with the locals.

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Continued on next page

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

Sunday, Aug. 30, 8-11pm: Chris Kuczynski

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DINING

continued from previous page

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

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Facebook.com/coastalprotein/ | coastal-protein-co.square.site

Lady Ray's Culinary Delights & Tea Room

Lady Ray's Culinary Delights now welcomes visitors to its new Tea Room in Destin, an elegant space created for traditional afternoon tea, celebrations and private events. Guests can enjoy premium teas, finger sandwiches, freshly baked scones and handcrafted pastries during two daily seatings. Tea seatings: Morning Tea, 11 a.m.–12:30 p.m.; Afternoon Tea, 2–3:30 p.m. Reservations are required: LadyRays.com/Pages/Tea-House

Beyond the Tea Room, Lady

Ray's is a charming café, bakery and pastry bar known for small-batch baked goods, artisan fare, specialty cakes, creative seasonal menus and warm, thoughtful hospitality. Hours: Wednesday–Saturday, 8 a.m.–4 p.m.; Sunday, 8 a.m.–2 p.m. Closed Monday and Tuesday.

833 Harbor Blvd., Unit 19, Destin, FL 32541 | (850) 269-0763

LadyRays.com | Facebook: [Lady Ray's Culinary Delights](https://www.facebook.com/LadyRay's-Culinary-Delights)

Surf Bread Company

Surf Bread Company is a cottage bakery in Destin specializing in naturally leavened artisan sourdough, baguettes, bagels, English muffins, sweet breads and seasonal creations. Made fresh in small batches us-

ing slow fermentation methods, every offering reflects patience, quality and craftsmanship.

Hours: Thursday and Friday, 11:30 a.m.–4 p.m.; Saturday pickup: 8–10 a.m.

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Continued on next page

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DINING*continued from previous page*

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SurfBreadCo.com

Tailfins Waterfront Grill

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!

Looking for a locals' favorite breakfast before the game? Start your day off right with Tailfins breakfast from 8-11 a.m., seven days a week. Enjoy a classic breakfast with bacon and eggs, a seafood or Cajun omelet and even a kid's smiley pancake. Be



sure to order up a round of mimosas and Bloody Marys. En-



joy some of your favorite food and drinks, scrumptious early bird dinner specials Monday to Friday, 3-6 p.m. Happy hour from 3-6 p.m. Monday through Friday, featuring \$24 domestic bottle buckets, \$7 house wines and well drinks and \$7 Long Island iced teas. Live music on the docks 7 days a week. Tailfins is a go-to destination for sports watching featuring more than 100 big screen TVs showing college and pro games. March Madness is here. Don't miss a single game and be sure to check out our Jumbotron outside on the docks.

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Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance Announces 2026 Amateur Photo Contest Winners

The Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance (CBA) has announced the winners of its 2026 Amateur Photo Contest, part of the Mattie Kelly Environmental Initiative. Launched earlier this year, the contest challenged amateur photographers of all skill levels to capture the natural beauty and ecological heritage of the Choctawhatchee Bay and the surrounding Northwest Florida region.

Twelve winning images, one for each month, will appear in the 2026 Choctawhatchee Basin

July: Jennifer Pawlik
August: Anna Brotzman
September: Whitney Walker – 3rd Place Winner
October: Richard S. Ives
November: Richard S. Ives – 1st Place Winner
December: Randal R. Ketchem – 2nd Place Winner

“These images are a reminder that people are paying attention to this watershed, and that connection is exactly what keeps it protected,” said Alison McDowell, Executive Director of the

have another chance to celebrate the Bay this fall at the annual Mattie Kelly Family Bay Day, set for Saturday, September 26, 2026, from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM at Fred Gan-

non Rocky Bayou State Park. The free, family-friendly event features exploration stations, hands-on learning activities, and the always-popular fish printing, giving kids and adults alike the

chance to connect with the bay up close. The only cost is the park’s standard \$5 per vehicle entrance fee.



Alliance Photo Contest Calendar, offering a year-long look at the Basin through the eyes of local photographers:

January: Bill Horn
February: David Bailey
March: David Bailey
April: Sarah Brock
May: John Cooper
June: Jessica Temple

Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance. Winning photos, along with more on CBA’s ongoing programs, can be found at basinalliance.org.

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Community members will

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Don't Be a Hurdle, Save a Turtle

Keep the Beaches Clean, Dark and Flat

By HEATHER BENNETT EYE

Long before the beaches were our escape and playground, before we built homes near the dunes, before we built sandcastles, dug holes and left beach chairs and umbrellas behind overnight, beaches were, and still are, nesting grounds for sea turtles. Not for decades. Not for hundreds of years. Not for thou-

sands of years. Scientists have proven that turtles have been nesting along the Gulf beaches for millions of years.

Sea turtle nesting season on the Emerald Coast is May 1 through October 31. During this time, local wildlife authorities and conservation organizations, like South Walton Turtle Watch and Friends of South

Walton Sea Turtles, urge beachgoers to keep the beaches clean, dark and flat. When we fail to do this, there can be detrimental consequences for nesting sea turtles.

In June, a Kemp's ridley, the rarest sea turtle, washed ashore on Blue Mountain Beach, entangled in a beach chair. Deceased. Sea turtles face a gauntlet of survival challenges: predators, storms, climate change, boats, poaching, fishing gear, coastal development and pollution. Of all these hurdles she had to overcome, her life was ended by a beach chair, which was something that could have been prevented.

This tragic event followed a false crawl made by a disoriented loggerhead earlier in the month. While false crawls happen, South Walton Turtle Watch's observation of the tracks led the group to believe this was due to artificial lighting and obstacles on the beach.



She had been stuck in a hole for some time before returning to the Gulf.

Please remember that it's critical to all marine life that we pick up our trash and any other trash we find, and remove it from the beach. At the end of the day, we need to remove all beach furniture and toys. We also need to remove obstacles by knocking down sandcastles and filling in holes. If you have a property near the beach, please turn off your lights at night or use amber or red lights. If your property is a rental, please educate your renters on these best practices. It's up to us to keep

the beach clean, dark, and flat.

The sea turtles that nest on our beaches are protected under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. The Kemp's ridley is the rarest and most endangered sea turtle species in the world, with only around 2,000 to 3,000 nesting females remaining today.

While we choose to use the beaches for our own recreation and enjoyment, we need to remember that we are guests. We are stewards of a land they've chosen to lay their eggs on, and the sea they call home. It's our duty to protect these vulnerable creatures and ensure their species continues and thrives.



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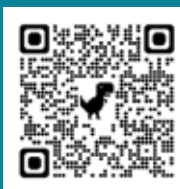
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Last Chance for Summer Fun at Gulfarium

Make the Most of August at Gulfarium

BY MARY FOMBY, GULFARIUM

Summer may be winding down, but there is still time to enjoy some of Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park's most exciting seasonal experiences. Throughout August, guests can explore the park, meet incredible animals, enjoy daily dolphin and sea lion presentations, and take part in special programs that will only be available for a few more weeks.

The Rise & Shine Dolphin Package offers guests a peaceful and memorable way to begin their day at Gulfarium. The experience includes early entry to the park, a guided look around Gulfarium, a dockside encounter with Atlantic bottlenose dolphins, and general admission for the remainder of the day.

Guests can also get closer to Gulfarium's African penguins during Penguin Plunge, a seasonal in-water penguin encounter. This unique experience gives participants the opportunity to step into the water and interact



with members of Gulfarium's penguin colony while learning more about their personalities, behaviors, and care.

Catch the Final Summer Fitness Classes

Gulfarium's summer fitness experiences offer two unique ways to move, stretch, and unwind in settings unlike anywhere else on the Emerald Coast.

Pilates with Dolphins invites

guests to begin the morning with an all-levels Pilates class overlooking Dolphin Oasis. Led by a certified instructor, the class combines an energizing workout with beautiful Gulf views and dolphins nearby.

Guests can also experience UNDERWATER: The Living Sea Experience, an after-hours yoga class inside Gulfarium's Living Sea Aquarium. Surrounded by marine life, par-



ticipants move through a relaxing, ocean-inspired flow in the peaceful atmosphere of the aquarium.

Only a limited number of Pilates with Dolphins and Underwater Yoga classes remain this summer. Guests are encouraged to reserve their spots before the final August sessions sell out.

One More Summer Adventure at Sunset Camp

Kids ages 6 to 14 still have time to experience an evening of animal encounters, exploration, and hands-on learning during Gulfarium's Sunset Camp.

While parents enjoy an evening out, campers explore Gulfarium after hours with activities

that include a dockside dolphin encounter, enrichment time with the penguin colony, beach exploration, conservation activities, and dinner at Seal Harbor.

Sunset Camp gives future marine biologists the opportunity to connect with animals, learn directly from Gulfarium's team, and experience the park in a completely different way.

The final Sunset Camp dates of the summer are approaching, and availability is limited.

Plan Your August Visit

Whether you want to exercise beside dolphins, unwind inside the Living Sea Aquarium, meet a penguin in the water, or give your child one more summer adventure, August is your final chance to enjoy these seasonal Gulfarium experiences.

Visit Gulfarium.com to explore available dates, reserve your experiences, and make the most of the final weeks of summer.



SEA LIONS, DOLPHINS & MANATEES... OH MY!

Plan your visit!

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Gulfarium
 Marine Adventure Park

 Off the Hook
DIRECTOR*continued from page 3*

tics, weigh and record catches, maintain tournament standings and ensure every detail was handled from start to finish. I often joked that I was the tournament's biggest cheerleader because I genuinely loved celebrating every boat and angler's success and sharing in their joy. I thrived in every aspect of tournament management: the organization and camaraderie, the relationships built with captains, anglers and sponsors, and the opportunity to create memorable experiences for people who shared a passion for fishing. I am immensely grateful to the Schofields for entrusting that role to me.

Looking back, that position proved to be one of the most influential experiences in preparing me for where I am today. It was a steppingstone that gave me valuable hands-on experience and reinforced my long-held dream of promoting the fishing traditions and culture that have been such an important part of my life.

My connection to the Destin Fishing Rodeo extends far



beyond attending it as a local or growing up around it. Over the years, I have had the privilege of volunteering in nearly every facet of the rodeo, gaining a firsthand appreciation for the tremendous effort required to make this cherished event a success. I've served as a rodeo judge during weigh-ins, written up fish entries and helped sell merchandise alongside Ann White and Becky Mac in the merchandise trailer. One of my most memorable experiences came in 2021 when I was tasked with



taking over the weigh-in scales for the first five days of the rodeo. I have had the privilege of working side by side with Mrs. Helen Donaldson, learning many of the behind-the-scenes operations that most attendees never see. From entering catch data and managing records to

understanding the countless details that keep the rodeo running smoothly, I gained invaluable insight into the dedication and organization required to preserve this longstanding tradition. My involvement with the rodeo continued to grow, and in 2024, I was honored to serve as chairwoman of the rodeo. That leadership role allowed me to work even more closely with volunteers, anglers, sponsors, captains and community partners. I gained a deeper understanding of the planning and coordination required to produce an event of this magnitude. Each role provided a unique perspective and allowed me to work alongside the dedicated people who are the heart and soul of our town's longest-standing tradition.

As I have prepared to step into the position of director, I find myself reflecting on a few remarkable coincidences. This year marks 21 years since I was crowned Miss Destin 2005, a role that first gave me the opportunity to serve as an ambassador for the city I love. I am the same age today as Mrs. Helen was when she became director of the Destin Fishing Rodeo in 1998.

Over the years, Mrs. Helen has generously shared her knowledge, experience and passion for the rodeo with me. She has taken me under her wing, patiently teaching me the countless details that go into producing an event of this scale. From the technical aspects of rodeo operations to the traditions that have made it a beloved institution for generations, she has been a mentor, teacher and friend.

As the Destin Fishing Rodeo enters its 78th year, I am incredibly grateful for the confidence Mrs. Helen has instilled in me and for the time she has invested in preparing me for this opportunity. Her guidance has helped me approach this new chapter with both excitement and respect for the responsibility it carries.

Fishing is more than a tradition in my family—it's part of our legacy.

My late grandpa, Frank, is remembered by many as one of the pioneers of cobia fishing in our area. He created and patented the famous Ding-A-Ling jig, a lure that became well known among generations of anglers.

EVENT GUIDE

DESTIN FISHING RODEO

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OCTOBER 1 – 31
AJ'S SEAFOOD & OYSTER BAR

2026

MISS DESTIN
KAYLYNN
HAYLES



DIRECTOR

continued from previous page

That passion was carried forward by my father, Michael “Mo” Helton, who continued producing the Ding-A-Ling and spent his life on the water as a respected mate in our charter fleet. His passion for fishing and innovation on the water helped leave a lasting mark on the Destin fishing community.

From both of them, I inherited not only a love of fishing, but also a deep appreciation for the people and traditions that make this community so special.

In February of this year, my Daddy-O passed away. While losing him has been one of the most difficult experiences of my life, it also reminded me just how extraordinary this community truly is. During his burial at sea and celebration of life, nearly 20 boats joined in procession to honor him. As I looked across the water and saw friends, captains and our fishing village coming together to pay their respects, I was overwhelmed with gratitude and pride for the place I call home. In that moment, I felt more connected than ever to the community that raised me.

Destin’s fishing tribe is built on tradition, respect and a shared love of the water. There is competition. There is camaraderie. But at the end of the day, we are a community.

Fishing Life

That day served as a powerful reminder that while fishing may bring us together, it is the celebration of our heritage that keeps us connected.

The fishing lifestyle that defined my childhood continues to shape my life today.

My man friend, Capt. B.J. Teems, and I are raising a blended family of three boys who share the same love for fishing, boating and life on the water that we grew up with. As lifelong Destin locals, we understand how fortunate we are to call this place home, and we have always wanted our children to experience the same connection to our waterways and our outdoor way of life that meant so much to us growing up.

We are, at our core, a fishing family. Over the years, I have been fortunate enough to reel in some memorable catches of my own, but these days, the greatest joy comes from watching our



boys experience those moments for themselves. Seeing the excitement on their faces when they land a fish, hearing them tell the story afterward and watching them create memories on the water remind me why traditions like the Destin Fishing Rodeo matter so much. Those experiences are about far more than the fish. They are about family, friendships and a lifelong appreciation for the place we call home.

As I step into this new role as director, I am especially grateful that my mother continues to be part of the rodeo family. Each October, she can still be found volunteering wherever she is needed—whether judging fish weigh-ins, helping in the merchandise trailer or supporting me and this event behind the scenes. Her servant’s heart and love for this community contin-



ue to inspire me, and I am blessed to have her beside me as I begin this new chapter.

As I step into the role, I think not only about the generations that came before us, but also about the generations that will follow. I never imagined my first year as director would be my first rodeo without the late Bruce Cheves, former Destin Fishing Rodeo weighmaster. He welcomed me as his new “boss.” While October will be slightly different with his absence, the rodeo will continue to honor his legacy.

The Destin Fishing Rodeo has been part of my story for as long as I can remember. When I look at the path that brought me here—from growing up in a fishing family, to serving as Miss Destin, to coordinating fishing tournaments, to volunteering in nearly every capacity the rodeo

has to offer, to serving as chairwoman, and now director—I am filled with gratitude and excitement! It helped shape my childhood, connected me to my community and introduced me to many of the people who have influenced my life. Now, I have the privilege of helping write its next chapter.

For a girl who grew up on the docks of the World’s Luckiest Fishing Village, surrounded by fishermen, boats and the traditions that make Destin so special, serving as director of the Destin Fishing Rodeo feels less like the beginning of a new journey and more like the continuation of one that started many years ago.

I am extremely grateful for the people who are the heartbeat of the rodeo: our members, committees, volunteers, sponsors and everyone who is excited to continue this beloved tradition. As I often say, “It takes a village, and we have the best one!”

I am Amber Helton, your new director of the rodeo.

You could even say I was destined for it.

Happy Rodeo!



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Women’s Tournament Field Announced for Emerald Coast Classic

Four teams will compete in the tournament Nov. 23-24 which will be held at Raider Arena on the campus of Northwest Florida State College. Michigan State will face Alcorn State in a semifinal round game at 11 a.m. central time on Monday, Nov. 23, while Virginia Tech will play UT Martin at 1:30 p.m. The third-place game will be played at 11 a.m. on Tuesday Nov. 24 with the championship game scheduled for a 1:30 p.m. tip off on that Tuesday.

Tournament last year en route to posting a 17-14 record. UT Martin recorded a 13-17 mark in 2025-26.

Online tickets for the tournament will go on sale later this summer through www.emerald-coastclassic.com



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2026 High School Football Schedules

Destin High School Sharks	Fort Walton Beach Vikings
August 14: vs. Arnold (Kickoff Classic)	Aug 13: vs. Niceville (Kickoff Classic), 7:00 PM
August 21: vs. Port St. Joe	Aug 21: vs. Pensacola, 7:00 PM
August 28: @ Baker	Aug 28: vs. South Walton, 7:00 PM
September 4: vs. North Bay Haven	Sep 4: at West Florida Tech, 7:00 PM
September 11: @ Marianna	Sep 11: vs. Milton*, 7:00 PM
September 18: Bye / Open Week	Sep 18: vs. Walton, 7:00 PM
September 25: vs. Pensacola Catholic (District Game)	Sep 25: at Gulf Breeze*, 7:00 PM
October 2: @ Northview	Oct 2: at Navarre, 7:00 PM
October 9: @ Walton (District Game)	Oct 9: at Choctawhatchee*, 7:00 PM
October 16: vs. Graceville	Oct 16: vs. Escambia*, 7:00 PM
October 23: @ Freeport (District Game)	Oct 23: at Booker T. Washington*, 7:00 PM
October 30: vs. Bozeman (District Game)	Oct 30: Open Week
	* Denotes District Game.

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Multi-County Collaboration to Add 224-Foot Vessel to Artificial Reef System

BY NICK TOMECEK, OKALOOSA COUNTY PIO

The Okaloosa County Board of County Commissioners recently approved an agreement between the county and the Panama City Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB) on June 16, 2026, to expand the Gulf’s artificial reef system with the deployment of the 224-foot Henry Alex vessel to create the Sposit Reef, the newest addition to a growing network of large-vessel artificial reefs in the region.

The partnership builds on a successful history of collaboration between Okaloosa County’s tourism department, Destin-Fort Walton Beach, and the Panama City Beach CVB, including the deployment of the 239-foot Deep Stim III in 2023.

“The marine life that benefits from these artificial reefs does not see borders,” said Okaloosa County Board Chairman Trey Goodwin. “We are pleased to be working again with our neighbors in Panama City Beach on

this effort as a showing of how the power of partnerships can create something worthy for our residents, visitors and the environment.”

The \$450,000 cost to purchase, prepare and transport the vessel will be shared equally between Okaloosa County and the Panama City Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau, with each organization contributing \$225,000.

“This project is another example of how strong partnerships can create lasting benefits for our Gulf,” said Erin Graham, coastal resources manager for the Panama City Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau. “By working alongside Okaloosa County and CCA Florida, we are expanding critical habitat for marine life while creating new opportunities for anglers and divers to experience the incredible resources our waters have to offer.”

The Coastal Conservation Association (CCA) Florida, a longtime partner in marine con-



servation and artificial reef development, will provide an additional \$60,000 to cover towing and deployment expenses. Beyond supporting numerous artificial reef deployments, CCA has partnered with the county on invasive lionfish removal efforts, habitat restoration projects, redfish release initiatives and the ongoing SS United States artificial reef project.

All funding for this project is provided through tourism development tax revenue and partner contributions. The Sposit Reef was named by CCA in memory of the late Rebecca Sposit, human resources director at the

CCA national office.

“Rebecca Sposit did so much for marine conservation through her role at CCA, in ways the public could never see,” said Pat Murray, CCA’s national president and CEO. “She was a beloved part of CCA, and this reef is a lasting testament to her impact on the organization and the marine environment.”

“The Sposit Reef deployment serves as a lasting tribute to Rebecca’s life and legacy while reflecting our ongoing commitment to the conservation and enhancement of Florida’s marine resources and coastal ecosystems. We are grateful for the

opportunity to work alongside our partners on initiatives that strengthen marine biodiversity, expand critical habitat for fish and other marine species, and support economically important local industries, including recreational fishing and diving,” said Brian Gorski, executive director of CCA Florida.

The proposed deployment site is located at 30° 05.831’N, 86° 17.749’W, in approximately 120 feet of water, 22 nautical miles from the Destin East Pass and 28 nautical miles from the Panama City Pass. The official reef name will be the Sposit Reef. Deployment is expected in fall 2026.

Okaloosa County has deployed 48 large vessels in the Gulf since the 1970s. Those vessels are part of nearly 600 existing artificial reefs in Gulf waters. Explore 3D imaging of the county’s large-vessel reefs at <https://www.destinfbw.com/explore/eco-tourism/artificial-reefs/3d-models/>.

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 Wellness

Things as They Should Be: A Fight for Strength!



BY LISA LEATH TURPIN,
CERTIFIED PERSONAL TRAINER
AND HEALTH & WELLNESS
COACH

As a personal trainer, two of the most common things I hear are, “My knees hurt” and “My

shoulder just isn’t what it used to be.” While there can be many reasons for pain, one truth remains: Our bodies work best when everything is doing the job it was designed to do.

Think about how the body moves. Muscles are designed to create movement. Tendons connect muscles to bones, while ligaments connect bones and help stabilize joints. Each has a specific purpose, and when everything works together, the body moves efficiently and with less strain.

Strong muscles help support and protect your joints, ligaments, and tendons. But when muscles are weak or imbal-



anced, those supporting structures may be subjected to more stress than they were designed to handle. Over time, that can contribute to discomfort, limited mobility, and even injury.

So, where do you start?

You start exactly where your body is today. If your muscles are weak, that’s where your training should begin. Trying to lift more weight than your muscles can safely control doesn’t make you stronger faster—it simply shifts more of the workload onto your joints and connective tissues. That’s when aches, pains, and setbacks often begin.

Building strength isn’t about impressing anyone at the gym. It’s about teaching your muscles to do their jobs so the rest of your body doesn’t have to compensate. Progress comes from consistency, proper technique, and gradually building your strength over time.

I like to remind my clients that strength is a journey, not a race. Every exercise performed

with good form is an investment in your future. Every small improvement helps restore the body to “things as they should be”—where muscles create movement, connective tissues provide support, and joints move with confidence.

School is about to begin. So, this is a great time to establish a healthy routine. Let’s make the most of our time by focusing on our “why” and on how our bodies function, so that every minute of exercise is purposeful. When you understand how your body is designed to work, you can make better decisions during your workouts and in everyday life.

The reward isn’t just greater strength—it’s often less pain, better movement and the freedom to continue doing the things you love for years to come.

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Self-Care Corner: Take a Break, Mom — You’ve Earned It!

Back-to-School Specials at Beverly Hills
Day Spa Now through September 30



BY KRISY ANDERSON

The kids are back in school, the summer rush has slowed, and your days finally have a little breathing room. Isn’t it time to treat yourself? We’ve curated indulgent Back-to-School Specials to help you reset, recharge and feel your absolute best.

Imagine sinking into relaxation with a **60-minute Swedish Massage** complete with a back and foot scrub and soothing hot towels — just \$95. Or rejuvenate tired skin with an **Anti-Aging Facial** and complimentary eyebrow wax and cleanup for \$100. Want a radi-

ant glow? The **Glow O2 Facial** includes 10 minutes of Red Light Therapy for \$150, leaving you refreshed and luminous.

Deep tension? Try a **60-minute Deep Tissue Massage** paired with a free back facial for \$105, or indulge in the 90-minute **Ultimate Massage Experience** with essential oils, hot stones and warm towels for \$130. Even your feet can get the VIP treatment with the **Deluxe Foot Treatment** — a soak, scrub, callus treatment, mask, and massage — for \$110.

Every treatment includes your choice of a complimentary beverage — coffee, tea, juice, champagne or wine — because relaxation should feel as indulgent as it sounds.

Bonus Offer: Enjoy 10% off Custom Skincare services from August 1 to September 30.

Because let’s be honest — after getting everyone else ready for school, a spa day might be exactly what you need.

Destin Physicians Offer Individualized Health Insights

Two Esteemed Physicians Have Opened MDVIP-Affiliated Practices in Destin and They Can Help You Track What Really Matters for Your Health.

Our bodies undergo more than 3,000 age-related changes over a lifetime. And little by little, they can leave traces that tell a story about how long — and how well — you may live. Typically, standard lab panels and annual physicals do not detect the biomarkers that can reveal insights into a person’s overall health and prospects for longevity.

Dr. John E. Loudermilk, MD, and Dr. Chris G. Pappas, MD, have opened independent MDVIP-affiliated practices at 4608 Opa-Locka Lane. They offer the annual MDVIP Wellness Program, which includes advanced screenings and tests to help identify risk factors like those listed here that could be addressed earlier or even prevented.

They also have more time to spend with each patient, including unhurried visits, same- or next-day appointments and after-hours avail-

ability. Their personalized care and membership-based preventive health and wellness services work with insurance and Medicare.

Doctors Who Offer Insights into Longevity

You may have heard the buzz about “longevity.” It has become one of the most talked-about topics in health and wellness, but pinpointing which biomarkers actually predict how long — or how well — you’ll live is more complicated than the headlines suggest.

Having an MDVIP-affiliated physician at your side to translate biomarker tests and develop a personalized plan to help you pursue living not just longer but better can be a smart, proactive way to protect your health.

For instance: Did you know grip strength, one of the most studied longevity biomarkers, can predict muscle loss (sarcopenia) and bone mineral density? Studies suggest it may be a better predictor of early mortality



than traditional measures like blood pressure.

Also, the time it takes to walk 20 feet (gait speed) reflects both muscle strength and mobility. Similarly, the body roundness index (BRI) has emerged as what researchers consider a more precise longevity indicator than body mass index (BMI).

Biomarker testing for C-reactive protein, cytokine levels and white blood cells offer a window into inflammation, but these labs are not typically included in a typical annual physical.

That’s why you’re invited to learn more about the attentive, personalized care Drs. Loudermilk and Pappas offer. Call 850.424.8729 or visit mdvip.com/JohnLoudermilkMD or mdvip.com/ChrisPappasMD today.

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 Wellness

Punching Back Against Parkinson's Disease:

The Dynamic Duo Behind Rock Steady Boxing Therapy

BY ELLEN FANNON

Optimum Hope. That's what Diane Gordon and her son, Christian McCowen, offer their clients with Parkinson's disease and other neurological disorders.

Taking a huge step of faith, Diane and Christian opened Optimum Hope Gym in Niceville with the goal of making the program accessible to everyone with mobility challenges. Di-



ane, a retired physical therapy assistant with 32 years of experience, and Christian, a physical therapy technician with 10 years of experience, got the idea from Diane's former classmate and friend, Beverly Bell, who opened a similar facility in Tennessee. They saw how the therapy dramatically improved people's quality of life and patterned their gym after hers.

Optimum Hope utilizes the Rock Steady Boxing method, a program specifically designed for people with Parkinson's disease. Rock Steady Boxing is a first-of-its-kind Indianapolis-based nonprofit founded in 2006 to provide effective physical exercise for people with Parkinson's. The organization was founded by former Marion County, Indiana, prosecutor Scott C. Newman, who was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease at age 40.

The fitness programs, tailored to each individual client, provide noncontact boxing to improve strength, balance, endurance, gait, flexibility, posture and stress relief.

Diane and Christian became certified in Rock Steady Boxing by completing online classes and spending a weekend training in Indianapolis. Although the program is designed for people with Parkinson's disease, it can benefit anyone with a mobility disorder. In addition to clients with Parkinson's, Diane and Christian serve people with mul-



tipple sclerosis, cerebral palsy and other neurological and muscular disorders.

They work with each client three times a week in one-hour sessions. In addition to physical exercises, Diane and Christian incorporate cognition and voice exercises into the program. To maximize benefits, they continually vary the routines.

Clients pay \$120 per month for the program, although no one is turned away because of an inability to pay. Diane opened the gym using personal funds and receives no paycheck. Christian, a single father, receives minimal compensation. Currently, the facility operates at a loss while Diane pursues grant opportunities. They also accept tax-deductible donations.

They spread awareness of their ministry by attending Parkinson's support groups, accepting physician referrals, connecting with physical therapists and giving presentations. Word of mouth also continues to play an important role. Recently, they began renting the facility on days it is closed to help offset operating costs.

Diane and Christian begin each day by praying for their clients and asking God to help them show patience, love and kindness. They demonstrate Christ's love through their actions, creating an upbeat and encouraging atmosphere. Laughter

plays a prominent role in their work. Inspiring messages fill the walls and whiteboards. When clients are hospitalized, Diane and Christian visit and pray with them.

Displaying and living out her servant's heart comes naturally to Diane. Prior to opening

Optimum Hope, she founded and operated Genesis House, a faith-based halfway house for men recovering from alcohol and drug addiction.

Men entering Genesis House were required to obtain employment, attend church and participate in Bible studies. It is impossible to measure the physical, emotional and spiritual impact Genesis House had on the lives of the many men who completed the program during its 15 years of operation.

After retiring from her 32-year career as a physical therapy assistant because of her husband's battle with cancer, Diane still felt called to help people. God impressed upon her heart that her 15-year season of operating Genesis House had run its course and it was time for a new chapter.

While visiting Beverly in Tennessee, Diane saw firsthand how Rock Steady Boxing positively affected the lives of people with mobility disorders, and a new vision was born. The calling became even clearer when Christian became excited about joining the ministry alongside his mother.

Together, Diane and Christian model Christ's example of caring for the sick. They have already witnessed dramatic improvements in the lives of their clients. It is truly heartwarming to see a mother and son working side by side to provide a much-needed service to the community, serving an often-overlooked population and offering renewed hope.

"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'"

— Matthew 25:40 (NIV)



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BY KAY LEAMAN, HEALTH ARCHITECT, CERTIFIED NUTRITION AND SKIN ADVISOR

I had heard of microplastics but had not paid much attention to them until recently. However, I think the subject is quite interesting.

A little history: Leo Baeckeland, a Belgian immigrant to the United States, developed Bakelite, considered the first fully synthetic plastic, in 1907. Early uses included electrical components; Bakelite was later used in radios, automobiles, and appliances. In the 1930s and '40s, new synthetic materials included polyester, nylon, polystyrene foam, and plexiglass. In 1955, Life magazine published an article titled "Throwaway Living," focusing on how plastics were helping overburdened housewives. Fast-forward to now, and you will find plastics in modern medicine, food packaging, construction, cosmetics, apparel, paint, cleansers, toothpaste, and the list goes on.

Microplastics are particles smaller than 5 millimeters, and nanoplastics are smaller than 1 micrometer. Some come from larger plastics breaking down, while others are manufactured for use in certain products. Most conventional plastics do not readily biodegrade; instead, they can persist and break into increasingly smaller particles. We find them in the air we breathe, the water we drink, the clothes we wear, and the food we eat. They've been found from the summit of Mount Everest to the ocean depths. To date,

microplastics have been found in more than 1,300 aquatic and terrestrial species and detected in various human tissues and fluids.

Stanford physician Desiree LaBeaud has described this as being "born polluted," after studies reported microplastics in meconium (a newborn's first stool). Researchers have also reported microplastics in breast milk. During preliminary research, Teflon specks were visible under a microscope in one child's tonsil tissue.

Micro- and nanoplastics have been detected in brain and reproductive tissues, among other areas. Researchers are investigating whether smaller particles can cross cell membranes, disrupt signaling processes, or affect other cellular functions. What these findings mean for human health is still being studied.

Researchers struggle to know which substances to study, as more than 10,000 chemicals have been identified as being used in plastics. More than two-thirds have not been fully assessed for safety, and over 2,400 have been identified as potentially hazardous. Heat and sunlight can increase the migration of some substances from plastic bottles, so avoid storing bottled water in hot cars or direct sunlight. Notice how many cases of water are left in the sun at gas stations and other stores.

So, what can we do about it? Ready, set . . .

Children: When practical, choose well-made, age-appropriate metal or wooden toys that meet current safety standards. How many kids put toys in their mouths?!

Here are some more options for reducing plastic use and potential exposure:

- Purchase clothes, towels, bed linens, rugs, and other items made from natural materials

such as cotton, linen, silk, and wool.

- Choose stainless steel, cast iron, glass, or properly made food-safe ceramic or clay cookware.

- Replace single-use plastic water bottles with reusable stainless steel or glass bottles.

- Take a glass container with you when you eat out so you can use it for leftovers. If you receive leftovers in a polystyrene foam container, transfer them to a different container as soon as you get home.

- When microwaving food, use glass, ceramic, or a container specifically labeled microwave-safe. Dispose of plastic items that are damaged or showing wear.

- Plastic wrap and plastic utensils can contribute to plastic waste and may release chemicals or particles, particularly when heated or damaged. Reduce the number of single-use plastic items in your kitchen. When using plastic wrap, follow the label directions and do not allow it to touch food during microwaving. Consider reusable food-grade silicone lids or Bee's Wrap. I have both, and they are great!

- Do not reuse containers designed for single use. Follow the manufacturer's directions for reusable plastic products.

- Look for products sold in glass jars rather than plastic ones, such as peanut butter.

- Once opened, store meat in a leakproof glass or food-grade silicone container.

- Consider using glass food-storage containers.

- Pick up some inexpensive silverware to use at the beach or on picnics, and keep some in the car for those fast-food stops.

As always, don't overwhelm yourself. Start with what you use most often. The next time you're shopping for clothes, check the material label inside



the garment and ask yourself whether the choice supports your health and environmental goals. I recently needed to pick up a few new items and found that some international brands didn't have material labels, so I chose not to buy them.

Look for flatware at thrift stores. Another good place to

start is with bed linens and jammies. We spend up to eight hours in them every day of our lives. IKEA has some good stainless steel cookware at a reasonable price. Lastly, if you're at the farmers market and there is a pottery booth, stop in and look for a new pie pan or other items to replace the not-so-healthy ones at home. Just confirm that the pottery is intended for food use, was made by a reputable potter, and has a food-safe glaze.

As more of us change our buying habits, the market will begin to change as well. This is how we can fight back.

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Wellness

Create and Highlight the Good



BY STEPHENIE CRAIG,
JOURNEY BRAVELY

I was enjoying some sunshine and air show aviation when two adult drunk guys proceeded to fist fight and roll their tent onto our chairs and umbrella. Later, I noticed a mom struggling to both carry beach bags and her crying toddler. Then, a kind stranger walked her bags to her car so she could carry her child. Then, I saw 3 people get out of their cars to check on a woman who fell on a bike. Shortly after, a kind couple helped my son carry a cooler. When I recounted these events to my husband, it struck me that what I emphasized most was the unpleasant and irritating fist fight.

Why is it so much easier to focus on bad behavior than good?

Negativity is often louder and more attention grabbing than goodness. We like to feel in control and when others are engaging in behavior outside of our values, it makes us feel out of control and our brain alerts us. Additionally, focusing on the negative behavior in others can let us off the hook because our behavior isn't as bad.

Generally, when things are going well, it is easy to overlook the good. We get up, get in our cars, go to work, interact with others, come home, all the while forgetting to notice the good warm sun, the good of having money for gas, the good of having meaningful work, the good of relationships that make us smile, and the good of a nice home at the end of the day. And while we are overlooking the good, our brains are scanning for danger and alerting us to bad drivers, a person who looks dangerous, the person yelling out the window in the parking lot, the mean person in the checkout line, the humidity, and people leaving trash on the beach.

Focusing on bad behavior over the good in life can leave us feeling we need to protect ourselves, become cynical, isolated, and embrace a negative mindset. The great news is our brains are trained through patterns of repetition so while brains naturally scan for danger, we can retrain our brains to recognize the patterns of good in the world. And, when you begin to seek the good, you will find good happening all around. People are creating good donating time to pick up trash, sweep boardwalks, and fill in holes on the beach for sea turtles. People are creating good starting meal trains and Go Fund Me pages for those who need support.

Neighbors are creating good by mowing each others' lawns and buying baked goods from one another's children. Volunteers are creating good serving in food pantries and clothing closets for those who could use some community support.

We cannot control the drunk brawlers on the beach, but we can control how we show up in the world. We get to decide

if we will create and highlight the good. We get to decide if we will go out of our way and inconvenience ourselves to create more good in the world. So, how do you shift more focus to the good?

5 Ways to Create and Highlight the Good

Pay attention. Notice when you are annoyed and why. Notice when you are inspired by others doing good and how that feels. Notice your responses in both scenarios. Which are you giving more energy and attention?

Shift energy. When you notice yourself giving more attention to bad than good, say to yourself, "I want to give more energy to noticing and creating goodness." Seek justice in helpful ways when appropriate and when it's not, let go of your righteous indignation and put your energy where it counts.

Watch. Look for opportunities to create good even when it inconveniences you. Do something kind and unexpected for someone in your home. Find

a way to be a good and kind neighbor. Seek ways to create goodness in the larger world. Be creative and have fun with creating goodness.

Name goodness. When you see goodness, talk about it with others. Tell someone their goodness inspired you. Practice naming good things in your life daily.

Repeat until it's a habit. Choose a day each week to create good. Fold goodness creating practice into something you do each week like going to the grocery store or grabbing coffee. Connect creating goodness with specific times like holidays. Put reminders in your phone until it becomes second nature.

The world can feel dark and frustrating at times. And, regular people doing simple good things really does make a transformational difference. Enjoy creating some good and invite others to join you. To connect with us along your growth journey, find us at Journeybravely.com.

GUT SPEAKS

continued from page 4

from the adults around them,

and a calm presence can be incredibly grounding.

Encourage slow breathing. A simple technique such as box

breathing can help calm the nervous system: inhale through the nose for four seconds, hold for four, exhale gently for four, and pause for four before repeating. Younger children may enjoy imagining they're smelling a flower on the inhale and slowly blowing out birthday candles on the exhale.

Offer a few small sips of water and allow the moment to slow down.

These simple steps aren't meant to replace medical care. They create an opportunity to

observe whether symptoms begin to settle while helping children reconnect with their bodies.

If stomachaches have happened around previous school years, don't wait until the first difficult morning to talk about them. A relaxed conversation a few days before school starts can go a long way.

Ask open-ended questions: "What are you most excited about this year?" "Is there anything you're a little nervous about?" "I remember your tum-

my bothering you before school last year. How are you feeling about going back?"

Sometimes children don't know exactly what's bothering them until they're given a safe space to think about it. If this has been a recurring pattern, consider letting your child's teacher or school staff know ahead of time. A little extra reassurance or simply having another trusted adult aware of the situation can make the transition easier.

Supporting the whole child also means supporting healthy daily habits. Consistent sleep, balanced meals with protein and fiber, regular movement, outdoor play, hydration, and opportunities for meaningful conversation all help children adapt more effectively to change.

Not every stomachache is related to the nervous system, and it's important not to assume it is. If stomachaches become frequent, interfere with school or daily life, or are accompanied by concerning symptoms, reach out to your child's pediatrician. They know your child's medical history and can help determine

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Continued on page 45

Wellness in Your Home

BY MARTA ROSE-THORPE,
WWW.ASUPERIORMECHANICAL.COM

One of the fastest growing wellness trends, growing at a rate of nearly 24% per year, is a thought-provoking sector known as Wellness Real Estate. It represents a cultural and economic shift, where homes are no longer seen as just shelters but as infrastructure meant to actively enhance health span, mental wellbeing, and longevity. It is a design and development trend that integrates neuroscience and architecture. It features ergonomic spaces for movement and mindfulness: dedicated spaces for cold plunges, saunas, daily fitness and yoga, mental relaxation, and meditation.

Wellness Real Estate creates environments in the home that support brain health, reduce stress, improve mental clarity, and promote overall wellbeing. Here are eight elements:

Circadian Lighting - Mimics the natural progress of sunlight. Think: cooler, brighter lights in the morning to boost energy, and warmer, dimmer lighting in the evening that supports better sleep.

Aromatic Design - Approaches fragrance as environmental neuroscience to elevate mood, cognitive function, and health. This built-in diffusion system of essential oils is integrated directly into the HVAC system. Think eucalyptus in the home gym; lavender in the bedroom.

Acoustic Insulation - Reduces sensory overload and mental fatigue through sound-masking and noise-dampening architectural materials.

Biophilic Design - Incorporates aromatic plants and herbs directly into the architecture, which allows for natural, plant-based fragrances and helps with air purification.

Low VOC Paint (Volatile Organic Compound) - Emits fewer hazardous airborne chemicals and odors ~ especially important for the bedrooms of family members with allergies.

EMF Home Shielding - Electro Magnetic Fields affect our nervous system regulation, leading to bad sleep. Modify your living environment with shielding fabrics and conductive paint to reduce EMF from outside sources like cell towers.



Indoor Air Quality (IAQ)

- Indoor air is estimated to be 2x to 5x more polluted than outdoor air. Toxic microparticles include VOCs from paints, cleaning supplies and air fresheners. Biological pollutants such as mold, mildew, pet dander and pollen. Combustion pollutants like carbon monoxide (CO) and secondhand smoke. And Radon, a naturally occurring radioactive gas that can build up in homes.

Most AC companies use the standard, high-efficient Merve 13 filter that captures 98% of airborne, fine microparticles, but for truly clean air in the home, an Air Scrubber is essential. These advanced, whole-home air purification systems are installed directly into the central air ductwork and utilize activated carbon filters to capture 99.98% of airborne contaminants.

Water Purification and Water Softening

- Who doesn't want to drink pure water that tastes and smells good? Reverse Osmosis uses a semi-permeable membrane to remove harmful contaminants from drinking water. Whole-home water softening treatments remove hard chemicals from the water – namely calcium and magnesium – and scale build-up in the pipes – to preserve the home's entire plumbing system

and appliances like sinks, dishwasher, and washing machine. Soft water also feels silkier on the skin, is better for your hair, and requires less soap, shampoo and laundry detergent to achieve the same lather.

What's in Our Local Water?

Our primary source of water for the entire Florida Panhandle comes from the Upper Floridan Aquifer. In Bay County, the wa-

ter comes through the Aquafer into Deer Point Lake. Through environmental runoff and treatment processes, local water contains elements including Chlorine, Copper, Aluminum, Barium, Radium, Nitrate, Blue-Green Algae, and Cyanobacteria which, if ingested, can affect our liver and nervous system. When we do a Water Assessment in a home or business, we are looking for not more than one part per million (PPM) of

any of these common toxins.

"Wellness in the Home" embraces a variety of facets, including carefully designed architecture, distinct materials utilized in the home construction process, and placing special systems in the home to optimize Clean Air and Pure Water – the very essence of our bodily health and mental wellbeing. For more information on increasing wellness in your home, feel free to call me at (850) 814-3822.



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 Business

Drawn to Destin: How a Local Artist Turned Her Love of Home Into an Emerald Coast Mahjong Masterpiece

By M. SHAYE SMITH

Marilu Morgan never planned to launch a Mahjong business.

For the Destin artist known for capturing the beauty of the Emerald Coast, inspiration arrived in an unexpected place: a Mahjong table.

When she couldn't find a set that reflected the beauty of the Emerald Coast, she created her own. Filled with hand-drawn illustrations of native flowers, emerald waters, sugar-white beaches and nods to Destin's fishing heritage, the collection has quickly become a local favorite and is now finding homes on Mahjong tables across the country.

Known for her vibrant, colorful coastal artwork celebrat-



ing the Emerald Coast lifestyle, Morgan has built a following through pieces that capture the beauty and charm of coastal living. Designing a Mahjong collection became a natural extension of the place that has inspired her work for years.

When she searched for a set



JAMIE KAMBER PHOTOGRAPHY

that matched her artistic style, Morgan realized something was missing. "There are so many beachy sets out there," Morgan said. "I really wanted one that reflected the place I call home."

So, she picked up her pencil and designed one herself.

Not intending to sell the collection, she shared the finished set with friends before posting a video on Instagram. The response surprised her. "I posted a video on Instagram and it blew up," she said. "I knew I had stumbled on something special at that point."

That personal project has since grown into the Emerald Coast Mahjong Collection, a hand-illustrated tribute to Northwest Florida.

Every tile is illustrated by Morgan without AI-generated artwork or clip art. Native flowers, local wildlife, emerald waters and sugar-white beaches all appear throughout the collection. Even the backs of the tiles feature a photograph Morgan captured while at the beach with her children, transformed into a watercolor-inspired wave pattern.

The local touches continue throughout the set. The Joker tiles depict tourists, her husband's suggestion, with one featuring a fisherman proudly holding a red snapper, a nod to Destin's fishing heritage.

Morgan also credits the local Mahjong community with helping shape the collection.

She learned the game from local instructor Morgan Smith, leaned on Jenn Marvel throughout the design process and relied on her Mahjong group to test sample sets and provide honest feedback. "They've given me so much encouragement, constructive criticism and help," she said. This summer, Morgan celebrated the collection's debut with three launch parties in Destin, two at Bitterroot and one at Camille's at Crystal Beach. Guests enjoyed open play on the new sets, shopped the collection and celebrated almost a year of work coming to life.

During each event, Morgan

asked a simple question: "Who traveled here from out of state?"

More than half the room raised their hands.

Guests had traveled from Texas, Louisiana, Tennessee, Mississippi, Georgia and Alabama to celebrate the launch. "That really blew me away," Morgan said. "That so many folks would plan a trip to Destin to play with the tiles I designed? A pinch me moment, for sure."

The excitement has continued since launch. Morgan said nearly 90% of online orders

Continued on next page

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BY SEAN DIETRICH

It's a quiet night in Avondale. The sun is low in the western sky. The air is lit with lightning bugs. There are a few neighborhood kids, playing in front yards, trying to catch them with Tupperware.

And the memories are getting so thick you have to swat them away like gnats.

I remember the first time I ever heard a lightning bug called a "firefly." I was 11 years old. A kid from California had recently moved into our neighborhood. He got excited when the front yards were alight with summer lightning bugs.

He said, "Look, fireflies!"

All us kids looked at the new boy as though his cheese had slid off his cracker. Fireflies?

"They're not fireflies," said Margaret Ann. "They're LIGHTNING BUGS."

Truer words.

"No they're not," he answered. "They're FIREFLIES."

"What the [expletive] is a firefly?" said my cousin, Ed Lee.

"They're bugs that light up."

We howled with delight. My

cousin Ed Lee almost peed himself. "Californians!" my cousin remarked.

Then the Californian went on to tell us he'd never seen lightning bugs before. He said they didn't have them in the Golden State. We were aghast. No lightning bugs? That was like not knowing Jesus. Or Dale Earnhardt.

"You've never seen lightning bugs?" we said in disbelief.

The Californian shook his head stating that, no, he'd never seen anything like these bugs with the iridescent hindparts.

Which gave us great pride. Because, you see, ever since this Californian had come to our school, he immediately became the hippest kid in our hillbilly class.

Namely, because he had wavy blonde hair, a skateboard, and he knew what tofu was. And one time, for Show and Tell, the kid declared that he had gone surfing. The girls in the class went crazy for him and indicated that they would be interested in bearing his offspring someday.

But he'd never seen lightning bugs. And this made us very proud.

"Wanna catch lightning bugs?" suggested my cousin.

Replied the Californian,

"You mean you can CATCH fireflies?"

"No," answered Cousin Ed Lee. "But you can catch lightning bugs."

So we raided my mother's kitchen cabinets. We emerged from the house with Ball mason jars—something else the Californian had never seen before.

"These are funny-looking jars," he said. "And they have funny lids."

"These are moonshine jars," said Margaret.

"What's moonshine?" said the Californian.

You have to worry about America's youth.

The next thing we knew, we were all outside, using mason jars the way the Good Lord intended—to catch lightning bugs (fireflies). Which as it happens are neither bugs nor flies. They are beetles.

To catch a lightning bug, you had to have good technique:

Sean of the South: Lightning Bugs



to set them free?"

"Because," said Sandra. "They only live 30 days."

We were mesmerized by the bright dots in our mason jars, lit up like miracles, meandering to and fro. Their little butts glowing greenish-yellow.

"I'm going to keep my fireflies," said the Californian.

"You can't," said Margaret. "Lightning bugs have to go free so they can make babies."

"They have to make babies," said Sandra, "or else we'll never have lightning bugs again."

So we kept them for a few minutes. We observed them closely. Then, immediately after our mothers called us inside for supper, we wandered down to the creek and let them all go. We watched the insects fill the night with millions of tiny lights.

"They're so beautiful," said the Californian. "I wish beautiful things lived longer lives."

Truer words.

Sean Dietrich is a columnist, and novelist, known for his commentary on life in the American South. His work has appeared in Southern Living, The Tallahassee Democrat, Good Grit, South Magazine, Alabama Living, the Birmingham News, Thom Magazine, The Mobile Press Register and Life Media publications, and he has authored seven books.

DRAWN

continued from previous page

have shipped outside Florida, with her Emerald Coast-inspired designs now finding homes from California and Idaho to New York and New Hampshire.

For Morgan, the collection has become another way to celebrate the Emerald Coast through art and share a place she loves with people across the country.

The Emerald Coast Mahjong Collection is available online, with select items also available locally at Zoo Gallery, Mahjong Beach House, Patchouli's and Lola's. Sold-out tile sets are expected to return soon, along with new mat designs and matching accessories. MariluMorgan.com/mahjong

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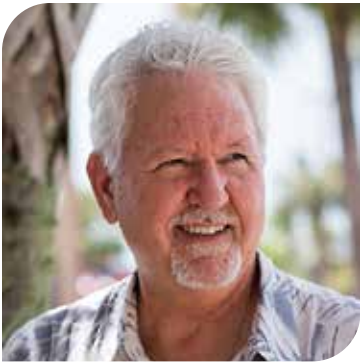
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A Pastor's Ponderings: "God, I Hate Paying Taxes."



BY PASTOR DAVE HOLLAND

"So, the spies questioned him: 'Teacher, we know that you speak and teach what is right, and that you do not show partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?'"

"He saw through their duplicity and said to them, 'Show me a denarius. Whose portrait and inscription are on it?'"

"'Caesar's,' they replied."

"He said to them, 'Then give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.'"

Luke 20:20-25 (NIV)

The religious leaders thought they had finally trapped Jesus.

If He opposed paying taxes, the Romans could arrest Him for rebellion. If He supported paying taxes, the Jewish people would turn against Him. It seemed like the perfect no-win question.

Jesus refused to play their game. Instead, He lifted the conversation from politics to worship.

Like most people, I don't enjoy paying taxes. Every year I search for every possible legal deduction imaginable. Most people do the same.

The Jews of Jesus' day felt even more strongly. Every adult was required to pay a Roman denarius simply for the privilege of living under Caesar's rule. To faithful Jews, the tax was more than a financial burden—it was a painful reminder that they lived under a pagan empire.

Jesus asked for one of those coins.



A denarius was a small silver coin bearing the image of Tiberius Caesar. Around his portrait was an inscription declaring him to be the son of the divine Augustus. To devout Jews, those words bordered on blasphemy.

The irony is striking. The very men trying to trap Jesus immediately produced the coin from their own pockets.

Holding it before them, Jesus asked, "Whose image is on it?"

"Caesar's," they answered.

Then came one of the wisest statements ever spoken: "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

But Jesus was saying far more than, "Pay your taxes." If the coin bore Caesar's image, where is God's image stamped?

Genesis gives the answer. God created humanity in His own image. The coin belonged to Caesar because it bore Caesar's likeness. You belong to God because you bear His image. That fact changes everything.

God is not merely asking for a portion of your income. He is asking for your whole heart.

Catholic mystic Thomas Merton once wrote, "We are what we love. If we love God, whose image we bear, we discover the very purpose for which He created us."

Our culture constantly asks, "What's in your wallet?" Jesus asks a far more important question: "Who's on the throne of your heart?"

There is only room for one king there.

This discussion reminds me of an elderly couple I once knew in Nebraska. They loving-

ly cared for their five-year-old great-grandson. Every afternoon Gary's deep voice lulled the child gently to sleep as they read him Bible stories and prayed with him before his nap.

Eventually, Great-Grandpa Gary needed open-heart surgery. As Grandma Carolyn explained the operation, the little boy asked, "Gamma...when the doctors look inside Grandpa's heart, will they find Jesus in there?"

The greatest question is not whether Jesus is in our wallet. It is whether He is in our hearts.

That belongs to God.

Dave Holland pastored churches for thirty-eight years before retiring in Destin. His new book, Resurrection Jesus, is now available. You can get a copy of his books from his website, DaveHolland.org, or at Amazon.com. Pastor Dave is available to preach and teach at churches and conferences. Contact him at DavidHolland54@gmail.com.

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Emerald Coast Theatre Company Announces Fall 2026 Education Classes



BY NATHANAEL FISHER

Emerald Coast Theatre Company (ECTC) is gearing up for another season of exceptional educational theatre programming with its **Fall 2026 Youth and Adult Education Classes, running Aug. 8 through Nov. 22.** This semester's lineup spans nearly every age and interest, from five-year-olds taking their first bow in Mini Players to seasoned performers refining their craft in Teen Company and adults finding (or rediscovering) their love of the stage in Senior Drama Club. With classes at ECTC's Grand Boulevard campus, its second space on Grand Boulevard (formerly Orvis), the Florida Chautauqua Theatre in DeFuniak Springs, and the Riverwalk Community Clubhouse in Freeport, ECTC continues to expand its reach across the Emerald Coast. Payment plans and scholarships are available for families who need them, and registration is open!

This fall also marks an exciting chapter for ECTC's education program, with two new directors stepping into leadership roles: **Adam Day Howard**, MFA, as education director and **Mallory McGill** as education and outreach coordinator. Together, they bring decades of combined experience in professional theatre, music direction and arts education to a program that already reaches hundreds of students each year.

Mallory McGill was raised in Destin and is thrilled to give back to her hometown community as she shares the transformative power of theatre with the next generation. Before joining ECTC, McGill taught theatre at Destin High School, where her students consistently earned Superior ratings and Critics' Choice Awards at the Florida

District and State Thespian Festivals, and where she was honored with the school's prestigious Golden Shark Teacher Award for her dedication to students and the broader school community.

McGill's résumé extends well beyond the Panhandle. She spent more than 15 years teaching and actor coaching in Los Angeles at Lesly Kahn & Co, one of the nation's premier acting studios. She trained hundreds of actors ranging in age from 6 to 65, and many of her students have gone on to appear on HBO, ABC, NBC, Disney, Nickelodeon and in national Broadway tours. As a working actress, director, filmmaker and writer, her own credits include *The Lincoln Lawyer*, *Stupid Questions*, *The Suite Life: On Deck*, *90210*, *General Hospital*, and stage productions of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Biloxi Blues* and *Misalliance*. She later discovered a passion for writing original stories, and her most recent screenplay was recognized by the Austin Film Festival and Reboot Studios. McGill holds a Bachelor of Science from Vanderbilt University, where she studied Acting/Directing, Communication Studies and Human & Organizational Development. She believes the best rehearsal rooms are built on curiosity, kindness, collaboration and the courage to take creative risks, a philosophy that shapes everything from ECTC's youngest Mini Players

classes to its competitive troupes.

Adam Day Howard steps into the role of education director following a distinguished career in higher education and professional musical theatre. Most recently, he served as Lecturer of Musical Theatre at Youngstown State University's Dana School of Music and University Theatre, where he taught vocal pedagogy, acting for musical theatre, music direction and playwriting, and directed all mainstage musicals. He also directed the university's Voices of YSU University Chorus from 2022 to 2024 and created YSU's minor in Musical Theatre Music Direction in 2024. Before Youngstown State, Howard held faculty positions at Texas Tech University, Centre College, the Institute of the Arts Barcelona and Kent State University, teaching musical theatre performance, vocal studio, acting and the history and literature of musical theatre.

Howard's creative work spans regional theatre, Off-Broadway and international festivals. He produced and music directed *Here There Be Dragons* at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2024, having previously music directed its Off-Broadway run at Players Theatre in Manhattan in



2022. As a composer and writer, he created several original Texas pantomimes for Stages Repertory Theatre in Houston, including "Hansel and Gretel -or- Out of the Woods and Into the Fire." His original music for Tennessee Williams' *Kirche, Kuche, Kinder* was reviewed in *The New York Times*. Howard holds a Doctor of Education from Ohio University (expected 2026), a Master of Performance with Honors from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, and a BA in Theatre Studies from Kent State University. He is the only American certified in the Vocal Process Methodology developed by Gillyanne Kayes, and he holds memberships in Actors Equity Association (UK), the National Alliance for Musical Theatre and the Dramatists Guild.

The **ECTC Education fall lineup** begins with Mini Play-

ers for kindergarten through first grade, where students explore songs, dance and basic theatrical vocabulary through a Trolls-themed class, culminating in a showcase on Nov. 4. Young dancers can also join First Steps Ballet/Tap, taught by Emily Bainbridge, or the Ballet/Jazz Combo, taught by Chelsea Rager. Little Players (grades 2-3) step up to a full production class experience with *Trolls JR*, while Big Players in grades 4-5 take on more complex choreography in their own *Trolls JR* production with technique class options like Group Vocal Techniques and Broadway Dance Styles.

Teens have no shortage of options this fall, from *Legally Blonde JR* for grades 6-12, complete with an Aug. 7 audition workshop and November per-

Continued on page 46





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 Arts & Music

Midnight Mixtape Brings the Soundtrack of a Generation to a Venue Near You

BY WILL ESTELL

If you've ever found yourself smiling from ear to ear when the opening notes of a favorite anthem blast through the speakers, you're definitely not alone. That feeling of instant nostalgia is exactly what Northwest Florida's hottest new band on the block, Midnight Mixtape, has built its reputation on — delivering energetic performances that transport audiences back to some of music's most memorable eras.

Midnight Mixtape has quickly become one of the area's most entertaining live acts, combining exceptional local musicianship, polished vocals and an electric stage presence that transforms every performance into a sing-along. Rather than simply covering familiar songs, this band recreates the feel, emotion, excitement and energy that made these tracks part of the soundtrack of our youth and young adulthood. These

guys and girls aren't simply performing songs — they're playing memories.

For its most recent experiment in music history, the band has shifted to "Y2K Rewind: The Ultimate Early 2000s Live Experience," featuring an impressive collection of hits spanning rock, pop, alternative and dance music from the late 1990s and early 2000s. Think Avril Lavigne, Blink-182, Concrete Blonde, Britney, Evanescence

and many more artists whose music defined an entire generation. Whether you grew up burning cheap CDs for friends or loading your first iPod with these bangers, Midnight Mixtape delivers the sounds and shows that instantly reconnect us with those unforgettable moments.

As band co-founder Dan Collins told me, "The concept behind our Midnight Mixtape shows is essentially to pick an era and build an entire show around it. A Midnight Mixtape show isn't simply an array of cover songs; it's an event." Collins added, "We play different themes and learn full new sets for each new theme. Keeping the performance more organic and unplugged, with acoustic guitars, simple hand percussion, the addition of violin playing many of the lead guitar parts, along with keys and multi-part harmonies gives the shows a more intimate and up-close vibe."

Collins says he and his fellow



PHOTOGRAPHY BY SEAN MURPHY

band members believe this concept is why, to date, all of their limited-run shows have sold out at every venue where they have performed across Northwest Florida.

Dan Collins, whose lead vocals and guitar anchor each performance with confidence and charisma, has become well known throughout Northwest Florida as the frontman and founder of Black Eyed Blonde, as well as for producing unique live entertainment events that go beyond the typical cover band performance. He also built his reputation during his time playing with Naked Gunmen and Miss Demeanor.

Sharing center stage is Dan's equally talented wife, Becca (also of Black Eyed Blonde), whose dynamic lead vocals add both power and versatility to the band's sound. Her ability to move effortlessly between emotional ballads and high-energy rock anthems gives Midnight Mixtape an impressive vocal range that keeps audiences engaged from the first song to the final encore.

The ensemble also includes Sarah Mangum on vocals and keys, adding rich harmonies and melodic depth. Jess Murphy (formerly of Continuum), with her always impressive violin arrangements, gives familiar favorites an unexpected twist, adding a sound and a brand of showmanship that any band would envy. Stacy Clearman delivers strong vocals and percussion that enhance the band's layered sound and infectious rhythm. Together, Midnight Mixtape creates a pol-



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Continued on next page

Destin Artist Natalie Maxted Selected for New York City Exhibition

Destin contemporary artist Natalie Maxted will represent the Emerald Coast in Summer City Idyll, a group exhibition opening July 23 at Agora Gallery in New York City's Chelsea arts district.

Maxted's painting *Eating* (2020) was selected through an international open call organized by Circle Foundation for the Arts.

The recognition marks an important step in the artist's return to her creative practice following a period of profound personal change.

Maxted came to the Emerald Coast through her family's military service and later made Destin her home. After she was widowed in 2022, she stepped away from her art practice to focus on raising the couple's young daughter. In recent years,



she has been steadily rebuilding her career.

Although Maxted's work has previously been exhibited in New York, Madrid, Monaco, London and Miami, she continues to live and work in Destin.

"I am proud to represent our local arts community on an international stage," Maxted said.

Eating is part of Maxted's Mood Series, a body of work exploring the psychology of

being seen and the ways feminine identity is constructed. Her current practice considers how digital alteration and synthetic imagery increasingly shape perceptions of identity.

Working through portraiture and the female gaze, Maxted

uses painting to examine the tension between the polished surface of the female image and the more complicated psychological realities it may conceal.

Before becoming a full-time artist, Maxted worked at Christie's in London. She earned

a bachelor's degree from the University of St Andrews and a master's degree through the University of Warwick and IESA in Paris and London.

More information about Maxted and her work is available at nataliemaxted.com.

GUT SPEAKS

continued from page 38

whether additional evaluation or treatment is needed.

Perhaps the most important takeaway is this: Symptoms are information.

Rather than asking only, "How do we make this go away?" it can be equally valuable to ask, "What might this symptom be trying to tell us?"

Sometimes the answer lies in the digestive system. Sometimes it's the nervous system adapting to change. Often, it's a combination of several factors.

As another school year begins, remember that children don't always have the words to explain what's happening inside. Sometimes the gut speaks first.

When families respond with curiosity instead of assumptions, they become better equipped to recognize when a child simply needs reassurance, when they may need a little extra support, and when it's time to partner with their pediatrician. Because every symptom has a story, and sometimes, listening is the first step toward understanding it.

MIDNIGHT MIXTAPE

continued from previous page

ished production that feels much larger than that of just another local band.

I believe what really separates Midnight Mixtape from many other bands across our coastal communities is the way they invite the audience into the performance. A Mixtape concert becomes an interactive celebration. It's like a show that you also get to be part of — because it is your show, your memories and your music.

Midnight Mixtape will per-

form live at Distillery 98 in Santa Rosa Beach on Friday, Aug. 28, 2026, presenting "The Ultimate Early 2000s Live Music Experience." This two-hour show promises to be a nonstop celebration of the music that defined the Y2K era.

At press time, a limited number of VIP and general admission tickets were available. However, given the band's recent enthusiastic crowds, I definitely recommend purchasing tickets soon. You can also follow the band online for more details, dates and performance videos.



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BY PATRICIA LEE, OWNER,
DESTINITES.COM

This past month, a member of our Destinites Facebook group for locals shared a serious concern about her property. Other people have experienced the same issue, and she would like to raise awareness. Here is what she wrote, along with responses from several members.

A Member's Post:

Does anyone have information on how to resolve a property dispute involving an unrecorded utility easement in Destin that has been in place for more than 20 years? Are there ways to ob-

tain financial assistance to bring this matter before a judge?

I own a home on Calhoun Avenue. I'm landlocked and involved in a property dispute with a disgruntled neighbor whose property I must cross to reach my driveway.

I have involved law enforcement five times, and my utilities have been blocked twice. I failed to obtain a protective order and spent almost \$6,000 on an attorney seven months ago to respond to my neighbor's demands, explain my rights to use these utilities in their current location and request that he allow the attorney to draft an easement so it could be recorded. There was no response.

Five months later, he contacted the City Building Division to indirectly continue bullying me — and now the city. That matter

was resolved with a short phone call. Lastly, my title insurance company denied my request for assistance.

Three properties, including his, use these utilities, but the disgruntled neighbor is demanding that I alone relocate mine. He has no dispute with the adjacent property owner about the utilities on his property — just mine.

He wants mine relocated to the recorded easement of egress and ingress, an agreement dated 2002 that does not state that the current utilities must be relocated. Documentation shows that the utilities were in place by at least 1998, before the single parcel was divided into two.

I'm at my wits' end over how to regain my property value. I do not have a marketable title now, because of a nearly five-year property dispute that I would have to disclose if and when I sell my home.

Even with a new law signed by our governor to protect property owners when a single parcel under unified ownership is divided into two, there's been no help. Florida Statute 704.09 was signed into law in June 2024 to protect individuals in my exact situation.

This behavior isn't fair, especially for a single-income homeowner who is simply trying to live peacefully in our beautiful

little city we call home.

Some Member Responses:

Did you purchase title insurance when you bought the property? Any easements should be listed on existing titles or mortgages. You may have to review records from before your property was divided, since you say you are landlocked. Regardless, your best option is to obtain a title examination and consult a real estate attorney.

Reply from the poster: I did that. The survey exception was not deleted from my policy, so they denied the claim. I had three exceptions deleted, but not that one. I had no idea this was necessary when I purchased the property and never dreamed I needed to purchase a better policy.

It sounds like you need to request mediation with a seasoned mediator.

It is sad that some neighbors act this way. I have wondered about these waterfront properties that were divided into two or three parcels back in the day and how it works if the owners don't get along or someone wants to sell. Scary. I'm sorry you have to go through this!

It is time for a quiet title suit.

If you live in Destin or the surrounding area, I invite you to join our private, targeted Facebook group for locals and prop-

erty owners at [Facebook.com/groups/Destinites](https://www.facebook.com/groups/Destinites). Established in October 2018, the group currently has more than 12,900 members.

Check out our Local Business Directory at www.Destinites.com, where more than 500 local businesses are listed and receive advertising exposure within our targeted community group.

ECTC

continued from page 43

formances, to specialized Masterclasses in Acting for Musical Theatre, Playwriting and Acting and Improv, all taught by Howard and McGill. Dancers can pursue Broadway Dance Styles or the monthly Leaps, Turns & Tricks Skills Lab, and competitive performers have two tracks: the JTF Performance Troupe (grades 2-12), which travels to the Junior Theatre Festival in Atlanta in January, and the Junior Thespian Competition Troupe (grades 6-8), which competes regionally in October and at the state level in February. Students in grades 9-12 can also join Teen Company Fall, a semester-long training program that culminates in a One Act performance at the Florida Theatre Conference in November and includes mentorship toward collegiate auditions, scholarship opportunities and portfolio building.

ECTC's reach extends beyond its home campus through satellite classes at the Florida Chautauqua Theatre in DeFuniak Springs and the Riverwalk Community Clubhouse in Freeport, where K-12 students can participate in Trolls JR. The Homeschool program offers Voice and Movement, Acting and Improv, and a hands-on Sewing and Costume Design course for students ages 9 to 18, while adults can join Beginner/Intermediate Tap, Intermediate/Advanced Tap or the Senior Drama Club for performers 55 and up.

Registration details, scholarships and payment plans are available through ECTC's website, and families with questions about specific classes are encouraged to reach out to education@emeraldcoast-theatre.org or call 850-684-0323. See you at the theatre!

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