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DESTIN Life

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Celebrate the Songs at the Second Annual Destin Songwriter Festival!

BY WILL ESTELL

This Oct. 24 and 25, the white sands and emerald waters of the World's Luckiest Fishing Village will serve as the picturesque backdrop for five stages of music and fun at the second annual Destin Songwriter Festival. If you're a fan of great songs, beautiful backdrops and all the fun that fall along our coastal paradise offers, you're going to want to grab your tickets fast and join in on the celebration.

This year's festival features intimate acoustic, songwriter-round-style performances and unforgettable headliner sets across five stages over two days, offering music lovers a firsthand glimpse into the stories behind the songs.

In my two decades covering festivals and writing interview features on numerous songwriters — from Kenny Chesney, Alan Jackson and Sara Evans to Darius Rucker, Lyle Lovett and even the late, great Jimmy Buffett — I've often said that to sing is one



thing, but to write and breathe lyrical and musical life into a song is another entirely. This is what the Destin Songwriter Festival is all about.

I asked festival CEO and co-founder Matthew Penning for a little insight into

some of the second-year changes to the festival, and this is what he had to share: "Throughout the festival, music lovers can enjoy free performances at multiple popular venues along Destin Harbor, coupled with paid

ticket holders being able to access the main stage and featured acts. The Destin Harbor stages include Boat-house Oyster Bar, Sky Bar and Edge Seafood Restaurant. All of the shows at those venues will be free to attend, while the main stage events will be available to ticketed patrons only."

As for the talent on hand for this second rendition of the growing music fest, fans are sure to be impressed. The most notable headliner, Jeffrey Steele, is a personal favorite of mine, having seen him perform numerous times at various festivals I have covered. Steele is a six-time Grammy nominee with more than 65 million airplays for hits penned for artists such as Keith Urban, Eric Church, Zac Brown Band, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Cher, Faith Hill, Tim McGraw, Rascal Flatts and numerous others.

SONGWRITERS

continued on page 2



One Child, One Book, One Patient Dog:

How Dog-Harmony Builds Confident Readers

BY BREANNA BECKER

There is a particular kind of courage required of a child who struggles to read. But what if the one listening never judged you? What if your reading partner simply rested a furry head nearby and listened?

For Nancy Bown, founder of Dog-Harmony, that simple relationship between a child and a dog has been part of a calling decades in the making. "I've always loved to read," Bown said, recalling that nearly 20 years ago she and her therapy dog

DOG-HARMONY

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Community

SONGWRITERS

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His accolades include induction into the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame, the Country Music Hall of Fame's Poet and Prophet Honor and multiple BMI and NSAI Songwriter of the Year awards. Steele's chart-toppers include "Raise 'Em Up," "What Hurts the Most" and "My Wish," along with so many other hits you will know and sing along to. Steele has received more than 35 BMI Country and Pop awards, a Golden Globe nomination for "I Thought I Lost You" from Disney's "Bolt" and recognition as one of Billboard's top five writers for eight consecutive years.

Other artists on hand to share their songwriting and performance talents include: Terri Jo Box has an impressive catalog that includes Lainey Wilson's "Hillbilly Hippie," Ashley McBryde and Trisha Yearwood's "Bible and a .44," Cody Johnson's "God Bless the Boy" and Miranda Lambert's "Dear Old Sun."

Carolyn Dawn Johnson is a well-versed hit songwriter and recording artist. Johnson penned

Chely Wright's No. 1 hit "Single White Female" and Jo Dee Messina's "Downtime," in addition to Johnson's own 2001 hit, "Complicated."

Bridgette Tatum, best known for writing Jason Aldean's "She's Country," Randy Houser's "Back" and Gretchen Wilson's "Big Wood Deck," has helped shape the sound of modern country music.

Saturday's main stage will be located directly in front of The Edge Seafood restaurant. Pennings says the main stage shows are bring-your-own-chair events and run from 4 to 8 p.m. Saturday main stage tickets are only \$30, with a very limited number of eight-person tables also available for purchase.

Saturday Main Stage

4-4:50 p.m. — Destin Songwriter Competition finalists

5-5:50 p.m. — "Next of Nashville" with Bryce Leatherwood, Jessie G and Reed Foley

6-6:50 p.m. — "Female Power Round" with Terri Jo Box, Bridgette Tatum and Carolyn Dawn Johnson

7-7:50 p.m. — Headliner Jeffrey Steele, solo

For Sunday, the festival moves



to the remarkable grounds of The Alice, where lucky ticket holders will relish an intimate VIP experience with reserved high-top seating. Sunday tickets are remarkably priced at only \$60, with on-site food and beverages available for purchase. Pennings tells me that a very limited quantity of only 10 tables, with eight seats each, are also available for purchase and will include special VIP swag.

Sunday at The Alice

Doors open: 3 p.m.

4-4:30 p.m. — Surprise artist

TBA

4:45-6:15 p.m. — Operation Song presents Jamie Floyd, Matt Wynn and Kelli Johnson

6:15-6:30 p.m. — Official premiere of the music video "Something Blue," the story of Kristin Sullivan, written by Jessie G and Matt Wynn

6:30-7:30 p.m. — "Female Power Round" featuring headliners Terri Jo Box, Bridgette Tatum and Carolyn Dawn Johnson

7:45-8:45 p.m. — Headliner Jeffrey Steele, solo

I asked my friend and fellow

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DESTIN SONGWRITER FESTIVAL

2026 HEADLINERS

JEFFREY STEELE

OCTOBER 24 & 25, 2026

★ 4 HEADLINERS

🎵 18 #1 HITS

🏆 7 GRAMMY NOMINATIONS

🏆 50+ SONGWRITING AWARDS

TERRI JO BOX

BRIDGETTE TATUM

CAROLYN DAWN JOHNSON

★★ 5 STAGES OF LIVE MUSIC ★★

Full schedule & tickets found at
WWW.DESTINSONGWRITERFESTIVAL.COM

In “Paradise,” a Promise: Harvest Wine Festival Turns 10 with NWF’s Children at Heart

By Lori Leath Miller

The wine is exceptional. The food is unforgettable. But the true beauty of **Harvest Wine & Food Festival** is found in the lives being changed long after the final glass is poured.

As Harvest Wine & Food Festival prepares to celebrate its 10th anniversary, Kate MacMillan is marking a milestone of her own: 10 years with Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation (DCWAF). I recently caught up with Kate, now DCWAF’s senior director of strategic partnerships, about what the festival’s first decade has meant beyond the festivities. She has had a front-row seat to Harvest’s growth—and the deeply personal ways its mission touches local families.

A few years ago, a young mother and local business owner called Kate out of the blue about sponsoring the festival. Her connection to DCWAF had begun long before that call. Years earlier, her youngest son

had spent time in the NICU at Sacred Heart Hospital on the Emerald Coast. She first noticed the Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation name at the NICU entrance. Then she saw it again on equipment throughout the room where she sat rocking her baby.

Later, after learning her son was on the autism spectrum and would likely need specialized educational support, she encountered the DCWAF name once more while touring Westonwood Ranch and Emerald Coast Autism Center.

DCWAF had quietly been there throughout her family’s journey, supporting trusted local organizations when help was needed most.

Years passed. Her business grew. And when she found herself in a position to give back, she knew exactly which organization she wanted to support. “Her story captures the heart of our mission: supporting a network of trusted nonprofit part-



ners that can care for children through different needs and stages of life,” Kate said. “It also demonstrates how generosity comes full circle—helping a family during a critical time and inspiring that family to create the same opportunity for others.”

That story explains the heart of Harvest better than I—or any event schedule—ever could: a family receiving support during

a frightening time, then one day extending that same support to someone else.

It’s also a reminder that behind every ticket purchased, every bottle poured, every auction bid, every wine dinner hosted and every sponsorship is a child whose life may be changed in ways most festival guests will never see.

Harvest returns **Oct. 15-18 in WaterColor**. Over the



past decade, the festival alone has raised more than \$1 million for programs addressing healthcare, education, housing, food security, mental health and other essential needs of children throughout Northwest Florida. “As we celebrate this milestone, we are especially proud that every ticket purchased, every bottle poured and every partner-

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Simon G.[®]

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 Community


BY DR. KAREN DEVORE

Mention acupuncture and most people still think of one thing: pain. Back pain. A stubborn shoulder. Sciatica. Headaches. An injury that just doesn't seem to completely resolve.

And for good reason. Acupuncture can be an extraordinarily useful tool for managing pain, muscle tension and many musculoskeletal complaints. But what often surprises patients is how much further its clinical ap-

Beyond Pain Relief: A Broader Approach to Acupuncture



plication can extend.

Acupuncture may support patients navigating stress, insomnia, headaches and migraines, digestive issues, fertility, inflammatory conditions and long COVID. With specialized training in neuroacupuncture, its applications can extend to neuropathy, vertigo, Parkinson's disease, stroke rehabilitation, PTSD, autism, ADHD, anxiety and other neurological and neuropsychiatric concerns.

For some patients, acupuncture addresses a specific problem. For others, it becomes part of how they support their health, function and quality of life over time.

Acupuncture Through a Contemporary Lens

Acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine have remarkably long histories of clinical use. What I find particularly interesting today is the convergence of that accumulated clinical tradition with our evolving scientific understanding of the nervous system, pain signaling, physiology and botanical medicine.

Modern research continues to investigate how acupuncture influences nervous-system signaling and pain processing, while pharmacological research examines the bioactive compounds found within medicinal plants.

We don't have to position traditional medicine in opposition to modern healthcare. Instead, we can ask thoughtful questions: What works? How does it work? For whom might it be useful?

And where can it fit within a comprehensive health plan?

Acupuncture also doesn't have to be something you try only after everything else has failed. Nor does choosing acupuncture mean stepping away from conventional medicine. It can complement care from a primary care physician, neurologist, physical therapist, OB/GYN, psychiatrist or other specialist.

More than Needles

Acupuncture treatment is highly individualized. Two people with the same complaint may receive different treatment based on their health histories, symptoms and goals.

Care may also extend beyond needles. Depending on the individual, traditional Chinese medicine can incorporate cupping, fire cupping, gua sha, food-based recommendations or customized Chinese herbal medicine.

Like many therapies, acupuncture is rarely best understood as a "one-and-done" treatment. Some people notice changes quickly, while others experience therapeutic benefit over a series of treatments. Frequency and duration depend on the individual, the complexity and chronicity of the concern, and how that person responds.

That individualized approach matters because the body doesn't organize itself into separate compartments. Sleep affects pain. Stress can affect digestion. Pain influences mood and sleep. Our

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Events Around Town

Emerging Choreographers' Project Blackbox

Date: Friday–Saturday, Sept. 11–12, 2026

Time: 7:30 p.m.

Location: Northwest Florida Ballet Studios | Fort Walton Beach

Northwest Florida Ballet opens its 2026–27 season with this intimate, dancer-led production featuring original ballet and contemporary works choreographed by selected company members. A visual art exhibition by NFB Académie students will accompany the performances.

Individual tickets are \$30. Subscribers may purchase tickets for \$26 each with a season subscription. Tickets and details.

Emerald Coast Community Singers: Celebration of American Music

Date: Sunday, Sept. 13, 2026

Time: 3 p.m.

Location: 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 christthekingfl.org.

Aces for Autism

Date: Sat., Sept. 19, 2026

Time: Noon

Location: Shoreline Church | Destin



Play for a purpose during the second annual No Sweat Poker Tournament—Aces for Autism. The afternoon features Texas Hold'em, food, prizes, drawings and a bourbon-and-tequila liquor pull, all benefiting Advanced Sacred Hope Academy and the neurodivergent students it serves.

Organizers are also seeking prize and bottle donations. To play, donate or become involved, call or text AJ at 850-

333-1625 or email marketing@millshvac.com. Registration.

Battle for the Buckle

Date: Wednesday–Sunday, Sept. 23–26, 2026

Time: Tournament schedule varies

Location: Harbor Docks | Destin

The second annual Westonwood Ranch Battle for the Buckle brings together anglers, business leaders and community supporters for 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 registration takes place Sept. 23, with 10% benefiting Westonwood 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.

Proceeds support 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. For information, contact tournament director Joe Donovan at 850-572-3695.

14th Annual Fore Her Golf Outing

Date: Friday, Sept. 25, 2026

Time: Check-in at 8 a.m.; tee time at 9 a.m.

Location: The Links Golf Club at Sandestin | Miramar Beach

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, breakfast, 18 holes of golf, the popular "Dress Like a Lady Hole," food at the turn and an after-party with lunch, music, prizes, giveaways and raffles.

Funds raised help Fore Her offset living expenses for local breast cancer patients undergoing 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. For sponsorship or volunteer information, email Amy Walsh at amy@foreher.org.

4th Annual 5K Mullet Run/Walk

Date: Sun. Sept. 27, 2026

Time: Packet pickup at 2 p.m.; race from 4–6 p.m.

Location: The Deck at Destin Brewery, 110 Melvin St. | Destin

Grab your friends, lace up your running shoes and break out your best mullet-inspired attire for the Destin History & Fishing Museum's family-friendly 5K. The race begins and ends at The Deck at Destin Brewery, where participants can enjoy beer and snacks followed by an after-party.

Prizes will be awarded for the best costume and best mullet,

Continued on page 9

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MIRAMAR BEACH, FLORIDA

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!

VIP Experience!

- Unlimited tastings from local restaurants and chefs
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Cali's To Do In Destin! SEPTEMBER 2026

..... 10-27

Come From Away | Times Vary | Emerald Coast Theatre Company | Miramar Beach

..... 23-27

Battle for the Buckle for Westwood Ranch | Times vary | Harbor Docks | Destin

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Bags on the Porch Fundraiser | 9am | Back Porch

Public Friday | 9 am–2 pm | E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center | Freeport

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

History Sandwiched In | Noon | Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida | Val-paraiso

Free Beach Bonfire | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille

Locals On The Harbor: Free Beer Friday Fundraiser! | 5pm | Boathouse Oyster Bar

Perfect Hues: Baytowne Wharf Art Fest | 5–9pm | Baytowne Wharf | Miramar Beach

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

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

Farmers Market | 9am–1pm | Grand Boulevard

Discover Science Saturday | 10am | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB

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

Perfect Hues: Baytowne Wharf Art Fest | 5–9pm | Baytowne Wharf | Miramar Beach

Labor Day Weekend Concert Celebration | 6pm | Harborwalk Village

Karaoke | 6pm | Fatboys Destin

Karaoke | 8pm | Harry T's Lighthouse

Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar

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Perfect Hues: Baytowne Wharf Art Fest | 5–9pm | Baytowne Wharf | Miramar Beach

Beach Clean Up | 6am | Okaloosa Island Boardwalk

DJ Brunch | 10am | Azul @ Harborwalk

Labor Day Karaoke | 6pm | AL's Beach Club

Labor Day Weekend Concert Celebration | 6pm | Harborwalk Village

Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar

Karaoke | 9pm | Outcast Bar & Grill

Fireworks | 9pm | Okaloosa Island Pier

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

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

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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

Open Mic Night | 7pm | Pink Coyote Dessert Co

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

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Girlfriends in Business Networking & Coffee | 9am | Beach Weekend Coffee

C.A.R.E.ing for Turtles | 5pm | Gulfarium | Okaloosa Island

Bonfire on the Beach | 5pm | The Bay

Trivia Night | 5pm | Down Island

Business Entrepreneur Night | 5pm | Soundside

Run Club | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery

Trivia Night | 6pm | Destin Brewery

Trivia Night | 6pm | Craft Bar @ The Harbor

Wednesday Night Concert Series | 7pm | Baytowne Wharf

Karaoke | 7pm | Kenny D's

Karaoke | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty

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

Wellness By The Water Yoga | 9am | The Alice

Helping Heroes Fall in Love With Fisher House | 5pm | The Henderson

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

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

Karaoke Night | 9pm | Harry T's

Ladies Night | 10pm | McGuire's Destin

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Ink Masters Tattoo Show | Destin FWB Convention Center

Public Friday | 9 am–2 pm | E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center | Freeport

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

Free Beach Bonfire | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille

Karaoke | 7pm | Island Wing Company

Emerging Choreographers' Project: Blackbox | 7:30pm | NFB Studios at Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville

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

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

Karaoke | 8pm | Harry T's Lighthouse

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Ink Masters Tattoo Show | Destin FWB Convention Center

Holistic Health Expo | Destin FWB Convention Center

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

From 9/11 to Today: Strength in Every Long Walk | 8 a.m. & 4:30 p.m. | EOD Training Squadron Eglin AFB

Destin Rotary Sandy Bags Cornhole Tourney! | 9am–2pm | The Back Porch | Destin

Farmers Market | 9am–1pm | Grand Boulevard

Pink Coyote Book Club | 10am | Pink Coyote Dessert Co

Women's Expo | 10am–2pm | The Island Hotel Saturday

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

Cirque Du Canines | 7 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville

Emerging Choreographers' Project: Blackbox | 7:30pm | NFB Studios at Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville

Karaoke | 8pm | Harry T's Lighthouse

Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar

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Ink Masters Tattoo Show | Destin FWB Convention Center

Holistic Health Expo | Destin FWB Convention Center

DJ Brunch | 10am | Azul @ Harborwalk

Emerald Coast Community Singers: Celebration of American Music | 3pm | Christ the King Episcopal Church | SRB

Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar

Karaoke | 9pm | Outcast Bar & Grill

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

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

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Wellness By The Water Yoga | 9am | The Alice

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Karaoke | 6pm | AJ's on the Bayou

Karaoke | 6pm–9pm | Fatboys Destin

Trivia Night | 6pm | Ricks Crab Trap FWB

Open Mic Night | 7pm | Props Brewery Taproom

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Bonfire on the Beach | 5pm | The Bay

Trivia Night | 5pm | Down Island

Business Entrepreneur Night | 5pm | Soundside

Run Club | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery

Trivia Night | 6pm | Destin Brewery

Trivia Night | 6pm | Craft Bar @ The Harbor

Wednesday Night Concert Series | 7pm | Baytowne Wharf

Underwater: The Living Sea Experience Yoga | 7pm | Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park

Karaoke | 7pm | Kenny D's

Karaoke | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty

..... 17

Wellness By The Water Yoga | 9am | The Alice

Bubbly Baytowne | 5pm | Baytowne Wharf

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

..... 18

Public Friday | 9 am–2 pm | E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center | Freeport

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

Free Beach Bonfire | 5pm | Royal Palm Grille

International Talk Like A Pirate Day | 5pm | Baytowne Wharf

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

..... 19

13th Annual Soldiers on the Water | 7am check-in; 8 am boat departure | Brotula's | Destin

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

International Coastal Clean Up Day | 8am | Navarre Beach Sea Turtle Conservation Park

Farmers Market | 9am–1pm | Grand Boulevard

Oktoberfest | 11am – 4pm | Fort Walton Elks Lodge | Okaloosa Island

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

Aces for Autism | Noon | Shoreline Church Destin

Burgers Bourbon & Beer | 2–6pm | Mattie Kelly Cultural Arts Village | Destin

Croctoberfest | 6pm | Gulfarium

Karaoke | 8pm | Harry T's Lighthouse

Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar

..... 20

DJ Brunch | 10am | Azul @ Harborwalk

Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar

Karaoke | 9pm | Outcast Bar & Grill

..... 21

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

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

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Wellness By The Water Yoga | 9am | The Alice

Destin Chamber Business After Hours | 5pm | The Henderson

Women in Science Conference | 5:30–7:30pm | Beachside Church

Mug Club & Bingo | 6pm | Destin Brewery

Karaoke | 6pm | AJ's on the Bayou

Karaoke | 6pm–9pm | Fatboys Destin

Trivia Night | 6pm | Ricks Crab Trap Okaloosa Island

Open Mic Night | 7pm | Pink Coyote Dessert Co

Music Bingo | 7pm | Props Brewery Taproom

..... 23

C.A.R.E.ing for Turtles | 5pm | Gulfarium | Okaloosa Island

Bonfire on the Beach | 5pm | The Bay

Business Entrepreneur Night | 5pm | Soundside

Run Club | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery

Trivia Night | 6pm | Destin Brewery

Trivia Night | 6pm | Craft Bar @The Harbor

Wednesday Night Concert Series | 7pm | Baytowne Wharf

Karaoke | 7pm | Kenny D's

Karaoke | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty

..... 24

Wellness By The Water Yoga | 9am | The Alice

Destin Chamber Business After Hours | 5:30pm | Beachworx

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

..... 25

Fore Her Golf Outing | 8 am check-in; 8:45 am announcements; 9 am tee-off | The Links Golf Club at Sandestin

Public Friday | 9 am–2 pm | E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center | Freeport

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

Destin Destin Seafood Festival! | 4–10pm | Destin Harbor

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

..... 26

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

Farmers Market | 9am–1pm | Grand Boulevard

Destin Seafood Festival | 10am–10pm | Destin Harbor

Day of Play with ACM and Nickelodeon | 10:30 am | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB

Karaoke | 6pm | Fatboys Destin

Karaoke | 8pm | Harry T's Lighthouse

Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar

..... 27

Destin Seafood Festival! | 10am–6pm | Destin Harbor

DJ Brunch | 10am | Azul @ Harborwalk

4th Annual Mullet Fun/Walk 5K | 4pm | Destin Brewery

Karaoke | 9pm | Fubar

Karaoke | 9pm | Outcast Bar & Grill

..... 28

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

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

..... 29

Northwest Florida Fair | Northwest Florida Fairgrounds

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 Open Mic Night

..... 30

Northwest Florida Fair | Northwest Florida Fairgrounds

Bonfire on the Beach | 5pm | The Bay

Business Entrepreneur Night | 5pm | Soundside

Run Club | 5:30pm | Destin Brewery

Trivia Night | 6pm | Destin Brewery

Trivia Night | 6pm | Craft Bar @ The Harbor

Wednesday Night Concert Series | 7pm | Baytowne Wharf

Karaoke | 7pm | Kenny D's

Karaoke | 7pm | AJ's Oyster Shanty



EVENTS • LIVE MUSIC • FOOD

your local guide for everything

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 TO DO IN DESTIN  @TODOINDESTIN  TO DO IN DESTIN



EVENTS

continued from page 6

and the popular Mullet Toss returns. Open to ages 8 and older, the event will be held rain or shine. Proceeds benefit the museum. Event details and registration.

Cars of 30A Grand Tour
Date: Sat., Oct. 3, 2026
Time: 1-4 p.m.
Location: Alys Beach



Cars of 30A presents a highly curated collection of rare and high-performance automobiles along the streets of Alys Beach and around Lake Marilyn. Specialty displays, live music, art activations, food trucks and beverages will be featured throughout the all-ages event.

The afternoon concludes at Central Park with lounge seating, live music, food and games on the big screen. Tickets are \$60 for adults and \$20 for children. Tickets and details at www.carsof30a.com.

Nighttime Neighbors
Date: Sat., Oct. 3, 2026
Time: 4-8 p.m.
Location: E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center | Freeport

Explore the nocturnal side of the E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center. Hike to the bat house to watch the evening bat flight just after sunset, learn about nocturnal wildlife and enjoy activity stations along the trail.

Admission is \$15 for adults and \$10 for children. A \$5 Camp Longleaf add-on includes s'mores, cocoa, coffee and a bounce house. Bring a flashlight. Proceeds benefit the nonprofit E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center.

Night at the Museum
Date: Sat., Oct. 3, 2026
Time: 6-8 p.m.
Location: Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida, 115 Westview Ave. | Valparaiso

The Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida brings America's 250th anniversary to life with costumed portrayals of historical figures. The evening

also includes drinks, appetizers, photo opportunities and a silent auction.

Admission is \$60 per person and \$50 for museum members. For information, call 850-678-2615 or email assistant@heritage-museum.org or manager@heritage-museum.org.

Cabaret at Seagar's: An Evening With New York Voices
Date: Thurs., Oct. 8, 2026
Time: 5:30 p.m.
Location: Seagar's Prime Steaks & Seafood | Miramar Beach

Sinfonia Gulf Coast presents an intimate evening with Grammy Award-winning vocal ensemble New York Voices as part of the group's farewell tour, "The Four and Only." Peter Eldridge, Kim Nazarian, Darmon Meader and Lauren Kinhan will celebrate 40 years of vocal jazz with inventive arrangements and seamless harmonies spanning jazz, pop and Brazilian influences.

Tickets are \$375 per person and include valet parking, a sparkling-wine reception, a multicourse dinner with wine, gratuity and the performance. Proceeds benefit Sinfonia Gulf Coast's music education and community engagement programs throughout Northwest Florida.

11th Annual Bloody Mary Festival
Date: Sat., Oct. 10, 2026
Time: 11 a.m.-2 p.m.
Location: The Market Shops | Miramar Beach

Guests ages 21 and older can enjoy unlimited tastes of creative Bloody Marys prepared by area restaurants, bars and caterers, along with local food samples, live music, champagne, craft beer, seltzers, a cigar bar, SEC football, a photo booth and shopping.

Attendees can vote for the People's Choice Award, while local celebrities and food critics select the overall and Best Accontrement winners. Proceeds benefit Habitat for Humanity-Walton County and its work to provide stable, affordable housing for local families.

Purchase tickets at themarketshops.com/bloody-mary-festival.

Eggs on the Beach Cooking Competition
Date: Sat. Nov. 7, 2026

Time: To be announced
Location: Seascape Resort | Miramar Beach

Bay Breeze Patio will host the 12th annual Eggs on the Beach Big Green Egg Cooking Competition. Nonprofit teams will compete for cash donations determined by taster votes, with every participating nonprofit receiving a donation. A limited number of nonprofit team spots remain, and registration fees are waived.

Backyard and restaurant teams may register for \$50, with up to six cooks per team. Advance taster tickets are \$60 for adults and \$21 for ages 11-17. Children 10 and younger at-

tend free. Discounted demo Big Green Eggs will also be available.

Visit EggsOnTheBeach.com or call 850-269-4666.

Alaqua's Bluegrass Barn Jam & Fall Fest
Date: Sat., Nov. 14, 2026
Time: 11 a.m.-6 p.m.
Location: Alaqua Animal Refuge, 155 Dugas Way | Freeport

Music, fall fun and Alaqua's lifesaving mission come together during this family-friendly celebration presented by Café Thirty-A.

Angel's Arena will feature

more than six hours of live bluegrass headlined by Grammy-nominated Grand Ole Opry favorite Sister Sadie, along with Firetown Bluegrass and Black Creek Strings Band. The back acreage will offer jam sessions, vendors, food trucks, a full bar, fall crafts, games, photo opportunities and encounters with rescued animals. General admission and VIP options are available.

Proceeds support Alaqua's mission to provide shelter, safety and second chances to animals in need. For sponsorship information, email ssalatch@alaqua.org.

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Mayor Bobby Wagner and
PIO Tamara Young, PhD

"Reel Talk" from the City of Destin

Reflections from the Florida League of Cities Conference

WITH MAYOR BOBBY AND DR. T, PUBLIC INFORMATION DIRECTOR FOR THE WORLD'S LUCKIEST FISHING VILLAGE

Destin Mayor Bobby Wagner recently returned from the Florida League of Cities (FLC) Annual Conference, held August 13-15 at The Diplomat Beach Resort. The three-day gathering brought together municipal officials from across the state for workshops, ethics training, and conversations about the future of Florida's cities.

TY: Mayor, you and a few Councilmembers recently got back from the Florida League of Cities conference in Hollywood, Florida. For readers who've never been to one of these, what happens over three days with 2,000+ municipal officials in one building?

BW: Picture a family reunion where every cousin runs a city. Mornings are workshops on the nuts and bolts, like disaster planning with the Florida

Division of Emergency Management, AI in City Hall, and social media. Afternoons are the big sessions, and this year that meant a fireside chat with historian Doris Kearns Goodwin and a talk from Jefferson Fisher on how to have better conversations. We knock out our state required ethics training, and the League elects its officers. The best news for Destin is that the new FLC President is Shalimar Mayor Mark Franks, so for the next year the voice of Florida's cities lives right here in Okaloosa County.

TY: Florida obviously has cities of all sizes. Does our close-knit coastal community give you a different perspective in the room, or did the challenges feel universal?

BW: That is one of the best parts of these events. You get to see how communities like Destin operate, how they solve problems, and how they create real benefits for their residents. The challenges are similar from city to city, so if another city has



already solved something and has a working solution, we do not need to reinvent the wheel or spend taxpayer money figuring it out from scratch. We borrow what works, adapt it to Destin, and move faster because of it. The other thing you gather in that room is relationships, with other cities and with the state agencies that fund them, and that is a big reason Destin does so well with state grants. We understand what each department is trying to accomplish, so we know which of our projects fits their priorities and has the highest chance of being funded.

TY: One of the sessions on the agenda was about social media. I'm a little jealous I wasn't there to learn if I should be doing anything different with our City social Facebook and Instagram accounts. Did I miss anything critical on how it could be improved?

BW: Social media is always a tricky tool. A lot of officials shy away from open dialogue. I prefer it. The session's best line was that city social media is not measured by going viral, it is measured by building trust, and our pages already do that job when a storm is in the Gulf or a

road is closed. The part I would add is that trust is not only built digitally. It is built face to face, which is why I hold a fireside chat every month. Come sit down, ask me anything, and let's talk it through.

TY: You've spent the last few years navigating Destin's own high-stakes issues — infrastructure issues, resiliency planning, and disputes like the one with the County and the City on how the new State-acquired land should be managed. Did any of the breakout sessions speak directly to what we're dealing with here, or make you think about it differently?

BW: Not directly, but the League's number one goal speaks to all of it. That goal is Home Rule. It means the government closest to the people should be the government that makes the rules and regulations

Continued on page 16

Rotary Club of Destin Seaside

4TH ANNUAL SANDY BAGS "Bags on the Porch" CORNHOLE TOURNAMENT

SATURDAY SEPT. 12, 2026 9AM - 2PM

THE BACK PORCH DESTIN, FL

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PRESENTING SPONSOR Okaloosa Gas District

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SCAN TO REGISTER!

<https://myevent.com/sandybags2026>

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Simon Cowell

"Really good magic!"
Kelly Ripa

"He will blow you away!"
Ryan Seacrest

Reservations Required:

MagicDestin.com

For ALL Ages!

Alcoholic & Non-Alcoholic Drinks Available in Showroom

FREE Parking - 4207 Indian Bayou Trail - Destin

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.

A Community Honors Its Veterans with More Than a Day of Fishing

Soldiers on the Water Returns Sept. 19

By Lori Miller

With deep military roots and generations of veterans living and working nearby, Destin has a special connection to the upcoming 13th Annual Soldiers on the Water. On Saturday, Sept. 19, combat-wounded veterans will board local charter boats for a day created entirely in their honor.

The Emerald Coast Association of REALTORS® (ECAR), in partnership with the ECAR

of the most meaningful traditions our Association has the privilege of hosting,” said representatives of ECAR. “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

For veterans in Destin and surrounding communities, that fellowship can be particularly meaningful since many remain in the area after military service, continuing to work, raise families

and serve their neighbors here. A past participant, Grady B., described the event’s impact this way: “After the retreat was over and back home, I realized that there are people that care about

us. Second, this experience has been a great transformation not only in myself but in others.” His words capture the heart

Continued on page 28



ty makes this event possible year after year.”

The event will take place behind Brotula’s Seafood House & Steamer at the Destin Fishing Fleet Marina. Veteran check-in and a light breakfast begin at 7 a.m., followed by an 8 a.m. boat departure. Participants will spend the morning fishing the waters surrounding Destin aboard vessels provided by volunteer charter captains and boat owners.

Foundation, local charter boat captains, sponsors and volunteers, presents the event at no cost to participating veterans. The day combines world-class fishing with fellowship, recognition and the reassurance that their service and sacrifices have not been forgotten.

Since its beginning in 2013 with 35 military participants, Soldiers on the Water has grown to serve more than 100 combat-wounded veterans. Organizers hope to welcome approximately 125 participants this year.

“Soldiers on the Water is one

After the excursion, everyone will return to shore for an afternoon meal, fellowship and an awards presentation recognizing accomplishments such as the day’s biggest catch and most fish caught. The full event is scheduled from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Soldiers on the Water is dedicated exclusively to combat-wounded veterans. The relaxed outdoor setting gives participants an opportunity to spend time with fellow veterans, form new friendships and experience the camaraderie that develops naturally during a shared day on the water.



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 Community

Ham Radio Connects Generations, Builds Community

By MICHELLE RUSCHMAN

Ham Radio is a hobby that is not only intergenerational for men and women, but can be started with varying ability and interest in amateur radio. DJ Stewart (call sign KI4ZER) is the president of Playground Amateur Radio Club (PARC) and North Okaloosa Amateur Radio Club (NOARC). He has great memories from starting with Ham radio from early childhood.

"My father and grandfather were both hams in Wisconsin. When we moved to St. Peter's, my dad started the St. Peter's Emergency Operations Center. They had no emergency resources at the time and were dependent on St. Louis, Missouri, which was 35 miles east. Since few resources were allocated to people outside the city, the response times were slow. The center became a very robust program as they helped people during times our community faced tornadoes, fires, floods, and even tremors. Watching my dad help our town through those efforts taught me a lot.

From there, we started working with local governments and local police. Other hams got involved, and that experience led to a love affair with electronic equipment and communications of all types."

In the early 19th century, the

term "Ham" radio distinguished amateurs from professional operators. It stemmed from "ham-fisted," an old wired-telegraph slang term describing clumsy Morse code operators. It has evolved into a term signifying the fellowship of those interested in a communication style that endures through the digital age.

"Our clubs are where every walk of life comes together - men and women of varying occupations, veterans and civilians, seasoned operators and people who are brand new to amateur radio. What we have in common is our desire to understand this hobby. We help each other get to whatever level the individual wants to reach, whether it be in selecting or setting up equipment, figuring out the various signals, or getting ready for the next license."

To fully experience amateur radio, operators can use a variety of handheld gear or desktop transceivers communicating by voice, Morse code, or digital data. However, acquiring a license is required. Individuals do this by passing a test for a fee, which legally earns the operator privileges to broadcast on the specific frequencies for that class. There are three issued licenses: Technician Class, General Class, and Amateur Extra Class. Each license dictates what frequencies



a ham radio operator can legally transmit, and the range of frequencies that can be used. Each test to obtain these licenses becomes more difficult as you learn radio theory and regulations. In the United States, the FCC (Federal Communications Commission) manages and enforces these rules.

"Based on how much someone wants to get involved, I would encourage people to try different



meetings at different clubs. This is an incredibly social hobby, and each club has unique areas of focus, whether it be more technical or community-oriented. Some people come seeking help with electrical projects, others want to get together to prepare for the next license, and others appreciate the sense of camaraderie until they decide to commit to the hobby. You'll learn something no matter what you come for, and the club members are some of the greatest people I've met."

Not only will you find a new hobby and friends through amateur radio, but you'll also have an opportunity to serve the community and take part in community events. Club members have served as points of contact at 5K events and other races, escorted parades, and helped supplement communication. Members will also be at these upcoming events:

Saturday, October 10 from 8 am to 12 pm

Trade show: Amateur Radio Club Hamfest at the Crestview Community Center at 1446 Commerce Dr in Crestview

Saturday, November 21 from 8 am to 1 pm

Amateur radio electronics flea market: SwampFest at the roller derby hangar, Hangar 41, at 41 Wyndham Ave SE in Ft. Walton Beach

In addition to these events, there are opportunities to practice picking up radio signals using personal equipment well before emergencies occur. During The Fox Hunt, a mini transmitter is

hidden in a defined area, and operators work their way to it using their mobile radios. From a local to a nationwide event, Field Day, twice a year in June and January, brings together amateur radio operators throughout the nation to see how many other hams they can find using a variety of frequencies.

To learn more about what Ham radio operators can do, visitors are welcome to club meetings to meet area experts.

PARC meets the 1st and 3rd Thursdays at 17 1st St. in Ft. Walton Beach at 7:30 pm. W4ZBB.Org

NOARC meets the 2nd and 4th Thursdays at 4565 Live Oak Church Rd. in Crestview at 7:00 pm. W4AAZ.Org

You can also email parcfwb@gmail.com with any questions.

For those in Walton County, there is the **Walton County Amateur Radio Club**. The club meets the first Tuesday of every month at the Life Enrichment Senior Center in DeFuniak Springs at 7:00 pm. There is also a monthly club breakfast the Saturday before their club meeting at the Eagle Springs Golf Course at 8:00 am, also in DeFuniak Springs. For additional information, go to wf4x.wordpress.com.

Additional clubs in the area include the Panama City Amateur Radio Club and the Milton Amateur Radio Club.

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



FORT WALTON ELKS LODGE #1795

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2026

SATURDAY • SEPTEMBER 19, 2026 • 11AM - 4PM

Bringing the Community Together to Give Back



FOOD



BEER



LIVE MUSIC

18th Annual Baytowne Beer Fest Returns Oct. 16 & 17!

**Friday, Oct. 16 –
Saturday, Oct. 17 |
Tickets on sale now |
BaytowneBeerFestival.com**

Time to roll out the barrel and discover unique suds & ales! The Village of Baytowne Wharf at Sandestin is gearing up for its 18th Annual Baytowne Beer Fest, one of the Emerald Coast's favorite fall traditions. Known as the “#1 Beer Fest on the Emerald Coast, this two-day celebration of hops, malts and mouthwatering bites returns with more flavors, more music and more reasons to raise a glass. American specialty beers from around the nation will be available for participants to sample and savor. 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.

Friday, October 16th | Baytowne Backyard Bash

Kick off Baytowne Beer Festival weekend in true tailgate style at the **Baytowne Backyard Bash!**

Join on Friday night from 6-8 p.m. for football on the big screen, ice-cold beer, smooth bourbon, sizzling food, and cozy bonfires under the stars. Enjoy live music from 55 South that keeps the party going, delicious bites from local favorites, and all the backyard vibes you love—Baytowne style.

\$55 Pre-Sale General Admission and \$65 the day of the event if not sold out.

*Ticket includes admission to Friday night's event from 6-8 p.m. only.

Saturday, October 17th | Grand Craft Beer Tasting

Get ready for the ultimate beer lover's experience at the Baytowne Beer Festival main event, Saturday, October 17th! Sample your way through 150+ domestic and international craft beers, chat with brewery reps and discover new favorites from crisp lagers to bold ales as well as delicious food options to keep you fueled for the day!

Seltzer Lane is back by popular demand, plus explore exciting new tasting spots like



Beer From Around Here—featuring local brews—and Import Lane with flavors from across the globe. Live music will keep the good vibes flowing all afternoon in the heart of Baytowne Wharf.

Ticket: Early Bird General Admission \$50 *limited tickets available; Pre-Sale General Admission \$45; Day of the Event General Admission \$55.

*Ticket includes admission to the Saturday Beer Tasting event from 2-5 p.m. only.

Saturday, October 17th | Grand Craft Beer Tasting | Pour Pass

Go straight to the good stuff with a **Baytowne Pour Pass Ticket!**

Skip the festival entrance lines with exclusive entry through a dedicated festival entrance and kick off your day without the wait. This limited-availability ticket also includes Baytowne Beer Fest swag and access to a specialty tasting experience you won't find anywhere else at the festival. Quantities are limited—grab yours before they're gone!!

\$80 Pour Pass

*Ticket includes Pour Pass Admission + the Saturday Beer Tasting event from 2-5 p.m. only.

2 Day Ticket

\$95 General Admission for Friday and Saturday.

*Ticket includes admission to Friday Night's Beer From Around Here Event from 6-8 p.m. AND Saturday's Grand Tasting Event 2-5 p.m.

Beer Tasting Glass included with all tickets. Please drink responsibly.

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.

Visit baytownebeerfestival.com for tickets, updates and full beer and food lineups. Event is rain or shine. No refunds.

A Can't Miss Wednesday Night Concert Series!

**Wednesdays NOW –
September 30
7-9 p.m. | FREE | Events
Plaza Stage**

Fall 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:

September 9: Six Piece Suits
September 16: Saltwater Revival
September 23: Duchess
September 30: Modern Eldorados

Bubbly Baytowne Thursday, September 17 | 5 p.m. | FREE

Who's ready to sip and shop through The Village streets?! Enjoy an evening full of FREE champagne and shopping. Check in by the fountain to receive your complimentary Baytowne Wharf glass and a map



and loads more of mayhem! PLUS enjoy a fireworks show at 8 p.m. over the lagoon.

Great News! The Village Door Earns No. 8 Momentum Ranking

One of Baytowne's popular merchants, The Village Door, recently ranked No.

8 in BusinessRate's July Momentum rankings. Based on Google data, the rankings recognize businesses showing strong recent customer-review activity and satisfaction. Owner John Wehner credited the restaurant's team and loyal guests for the recognition. Known for its coastal cuisine, welcoming atmosphere and lively nightlife, The Village Door remains a favorite gathering place for locals and visitors to The Village of Baytowne Wharf.

International Talk Like a Pirate Day

**Friday, September 18 |
5 p.m. | FREE**

Ahoy Matey! Join Baytowne Wharf for an evening full of adventure with Special Guest Captain Davy. Come dressed in your best pirate costume and get ready for a scavenger hunt, magic show, costume contest





Trends & Treasures!



Good Fortune Is Brewing in Destin Lucky Goat Coffee

Destin's coffee scene is getting a fresh jolt this September as husband-and-wife owners Tom and Koley Houle open Lucky Goat Coffee at City Market Beachside. After years of moving, the couple returned to their Florida roots to create something special in their new community.

Founded in Tallahassee in 2010, Lucky Goat grew from a wholesale roaster serving cafés across the Southeast into a growing family of coffee shops, with quality still at the heart of every cup. Coffee is roasted fresh throughout the week at its Tallahassee roastery.

The Destin café will pour classic espresso drinks, drip coffee, single-origin roasts and nitro cold brew. Try a creamy Luckycino, the espresso-powered Goat Bomb, signature lattes, chai, hand-whisked matcha or a rotating seasonal sip. Pastries from local favorite Blue Mountain Bakery complete the menu. The Houles envision a welcoming spot where friends meet, families linger and neighbors become familiar faces. Stop in for a morning pick-me-up or beach-day iced latte.

Opening Sept. 10 | City Market Beachside

36150 Emerald Coast Parkway, Suite 107, Destin

(850) 460-9981

luckygoatcoffee.com

Instagram: @luckygoatcitymarket

Sweeten the Season Smallcakes: A Cupcakery

Fall celebrations deserve a sweet game plan, and Smallcakes is ready for every kickoff, watch party and milestone. The 12-pack of assorted mini cup-

cakes lets guests sample different flavors, while team-colored treats bring extra spirit to the dessert table. Add edible logos, images or personal messages for a custom creation made for the occasion.

The fun extends beyond football. Smallcakes welcomes the school year with cakes, cupcakes or cookies for faculty gatherings, team celebrations, kickoff parties and teacher gifts. Birthdays, showers, weddings and corporate events get a memorable—and delicious—finishing touch, too.

With up to 18 flavors available daily, there is always something new to cheer. The bakery lineup includes cupcakes, cookie cakes, brownies, cupcakes in a jar, wedding cakes, gourmet creations, gluten-free treats, housemade ice cream, jumbo cookies, gourmet popcorn and pupcakes. No matter the occasion, Smallcakes has the perfect recipe for smiles. Call ahead to preorder, stop by for curbside pickup or order through DoorDash.

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smallcakes.net

Sparkle With a Story Beyond Measure Fine Jewelry

The season's richest colors shine at Beyond Measure Fine Jewelry, where owner Ashleigh Woolly pairs timeless elegance with fresh, personal style. Explore coastal-inspired pieces, vivid gemstones and distinctive cuts for everyday wear, meaningful milestones and unforgettable proposals. Custom design is Ashleigh's specialty—and her one-on-one approach makes the experience as personal as the

finished piece. Whether the vision is a sparkling engagement ring, a timeless wedding band or an heirloom-worthy creation, she helps each client shape the details into jewelry that tells a story. Find elegant earrings, bracelets, necklaces and rings, from refined classics to bold statements.

Shopping for a loved one or ready to celebrate your next chapter? Visit the store for a curated experience, or browse online to discover the piece that feels just right. If the perfect design is not in the case, Ashleigh can help create it. Because love is in the details—and life's most meaningful moments deserve to shine beyond measure.

(850) 424-7011

beyondmeasurejewelry.com

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

Fall Hair, Fresh Flair Pure & Couture Salon | Pure Collective Salon

A new school year, special event or walk down the aisle can inspire a fall beauty refresh. At Pure & Couture Salon and Pure Collective Salon, talented hair and makeup artists create looks that complement each client's features, style and vision.

This season's inspiration ranges from caramel swirls, bronzed curls and bold reds to chocolate melts and beachy blonde bobs. Clients seeking extra volume or length can explore Invisible Beaded Extensions, seamlessly applied and styled by certified IBE specialists. For weddings and events, soft waves, polished ponytails, intricate braids and flowing styles offer fresh ways to frame the face and complete the moment.

Makeup artists assess facial structure to highlight each cli-

ent's best features. The salon menu includes cuts, color, blow-outs, lashes, airbrush makeup, spray tans and extensions, while gift cards, professional products, curbside pickup and online ordering add convenience. Step into the new season with a look that feels polished, personal and unmistakably you.

Pure Collective Salon: 600 Grand Blvd., Suite 102

(850) 424-3935

pureandcouture.com

Make Your Next Move Count

Brian K. LoCicero,
REALTOR® |
BeOnTheCoast.com

Whether you are selling, downsizing or searching for a property closer to family, the right strategy can make every step more manageable. Luxury REALTOR® Brian K. LoCicero helps clients navigate moves across town and along the Emerald Coast, matching properties and neighborhoods to the lifestyle they want.

For sellers, Brian has gathered methods used to help sell thousands of homes into a practical new book. It shares pricing, marketing and negotiation strategies to attract buyers, protect value and reach closing in any market. One client credits Brian's approach with a quick Destin sale and a 30A beachfront purchase below asking price. Destin Life readers can request a free copy of the book by email or phone. If your next chapter includes a home sale, purchase or investment property, Brian can help you move forward with a clearer plan, informed guidance and a sharper understanding of the local market—so you can make confident decisions from listing to closing.

brian@beonthecoast.com
(850) 739-3800 | BeOnTheCoast.com

Cheer-Worthy Style for Every Fan Frill Seekers Gifts & Personalized Fabulous Finds

Football season is here, and Frill Seekers has everything fans need to give sideline style a spirited upgrade. Whether wearing a favorite jersey or dressing from the clear bag to the shoes, beaded purse straps, stadium-approved handbags and statement earrings add a cheer-worthy finish. Officially licensed designs for SEC schools and NFL teams make it easy to represent colors, slogans and mascots in fabulous fashion. Frill Seekers also creates custom team pieces. The football lineup includes clear stadium bags, hand-beaded straps, themed entertaining accessories and game-day coin purses personalized with a name and school colors.

Because customized and hand-beaded creations take time, ordering early is the winning play. Personalized game-day coin purses typically require three to four weeks, so now is the time to plan for rivalry weekends, tailgates and gift giving. Shop in-store or online, and enjoy complimentary gift wrapping on in-store purchases. With the right accessories, every fan can show team pride from kickoff to overtime.

Mon.–Fri., 10 a.m.–5 p.m.; Sat., 10 a.m.–2 p.m.

City Market Bayside, 4495 Furling Lane, Suite 130, Destin

(850) 460-2700

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REFLECTIONS

continued from page 10

that affect those people. The slogan is Local Voices Making Local Choices, and I believe it to my core. Whether the subject is our roads, our resiliency plan, or how land inside our city limits gets managed, the people who live here should be the ones making those calls.

TY: Conferences like this are often as much about the hallway conversations as the scheduled sessions. Was there a conversation with another mayor or oth-

er delegate that stuck with you and why?

BW: The conversations that stuck with me were about technology and transparency. Florida has some of the most open government laws in the country. Budgets, ordinances, and public documents are all available to anyone who wants them. The catch is that they can run thousands of pages and are cumbersome for anyone who is not a lawyer or an accountant. Open is not the same as understandable. I am very interested in using technology to summa-

rize, and even gamify, City documents and data so that a resident can spend a small amount of time and truly understand what their government is doing.

TY: Florida cities are watching a lot of the same legislative fights play out regarding home rule authority, short-term rental regulation, insurance costs, and growth management. What came out of this conference that you think Destin residents should be paying attention to heading into the next legislative session?

BW: The same thing I would say any year. Pay less attention to the marketing ads and the paid players on any topic, and take the time to understand how a bill or a ballot measure will affect you personally. Everyone has an angle and an agenda. This November, you will hear a lot about Amendment 3 on property taxes, and it is a good example of why. Read what it does, look at what

your City taxes actually pay for, and decide for yourself. I simply want people to be informed and to vote their conscience, whatever their final decision. That is how we repair and strengthen our democracy.

TY: If you had to bring back one idea of a policy, a program, or a way another city is solving a problem, that you would like to try to implement in Destin, what would it be?

BW: Making the City budget readable by everyone. I want a resident to be able to open a short, plain language summary, or a simple interactive tool, and see in a few minutes where every dollar comes from and where it goes. Other cities are starting to use technology to do exactly that, and there is no reason Destin should not be one of the first to get it right. If you can understand the budget, you can hold us accountable. That is the whole point.

TY: After three days of workshops and panels on the future of Florida's cities, what's your quick read on where Destin stands? Are we ahead of the curve, keeping pace, or playing catch-up?

BW: Ahead of the curve. We are repaving all of our roads, buying back our beaches, creating more parks, and completing our sidewalks. And we are doing all of it while carrying one of the lowest city tax rates among Florida's 411 cities. A lot of that comes back to what these events give us. The knowledge and the connections we gather in Hollywood turn into grant dollars in Destin, like the walkway under the Marler Bridge that FDOT is funding, because we know the state's priorities and we bring them projects that fit. I came home proud of this place and more convinced than ever that the way we do things works. We keep going.



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Is Now the Perfect Moment to Make A Move in the Real Estate Market? Let's Dive In...



BY PAUL DOMENECH

Is it a Good Time to Buy?

A good time to buy is when you are in a position to buy. Often, people think they should wait for interest rates to go down. Well, let's walk through that scenario. If you are waiting, do you think you are the only one? Most likely not. So, if the rates drop and more buyers come to the table to purchase the same home, what do you think will happen to that value?

Yup, you guessed it—multiple offers drive the price up, which then causes an increase in price and multiple offers for the next round. Not a great place to be as a buyer.

So, is now a good time to buy? If you can do it, do it now, and if or when the interest rate drops, refinance. Just make sure you have a team in your corner that will 'DOMEnate' the process, ensuring all the major items are inspected properly to avoid big-ticket expense surprises.

Is it a Good Time to Sell?

What a great question. With interest rates being what they are and a limited pool of buyers, the correct answer is both YES and NO. I am noticing that consumers in the market to buy are leveraging their "upgrading funds" to increase their monthly payment budget. So, if your home has all the big-ticket items and features upgraded, it's a JACKPOT—perfect selling

conditions with the right team that can "DOMEnate" the promotion and marketing of the property.

If you don't have the means to improve the space and major items but want or need to sell, the answer is still yes, it is a good time. However, you need the right team that will be able to present and navigate the value of the property to buyers and if necessary help you with the items that need upgrading. My team does have a program to help those in need get top dollar.

However, today is not the time to have the "Let's just put it on the market as is and see if someone will bite" mentality. The only bites taken for those listings are right out of the listing price. This is where we are seeing most of the drop-in prices. That's a NO-go situation.

So, plan to "DOMEnate" the market as close to turn-key, or hold tight; the time is not right.



When Should I Refinance?

Talk to your original lender. Sadly, the mortgage industry, like the real estate industry, has shifted, and when that happens, people tend to shift their focus to survival. A lot of promises and offers tend to shine but lose their luster in the long run. The habit of "have now and deal with later" is a culture that has been adopted by many, and a good talk track from a stranger with no long-standing relationship with you can lead to a win-lose situation. So, I advise making sure you are calling your original lender or feel free to contact

me for a lender that, in the end, will lead you into the future, not have you living just for today.

Thank you for taking the time to read my thoughts. If you need anything related to real estate—from roofs to cleaning and anything in between—give me a call. I've got a guy. I'm your HOMEboy. It's what has been coined by our customers as the Domenech Effect.

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 Community
DCWAF*continued from page 3*

ship formed has helped create meaningful, lasting impact right here at home,” Kate said.

That is certainly worth celebrating!

What began as an elevated wine and culinary experience has grown into one of our area’s most anticipated fall events. I know—I’ve attended for several years, and it’s truly one of the best I’ve experienced. It is beautiful and sophisticated, but also warm, lively and fun. There’s something special about strolling beneath the trees in WaterColor, discovering a remarkable wine, tasting food prepared by gifted local chefs and sharing it with friends.

I’ve even had the delightful surprise of running into friends from Birmingham—my hometown. Those unexpected reunions, warm hugs and opportunities to catch up over a glass of wine help make Harvest so special. It’s fun to look across the crowd and spot a familiar face.

Harvest gives guests every reason to enjoy themselves. But it also gives that joy a greater purpose.

In Northwest Florida, we live in a place so beautiful we often describe it simply as paradise. Visitors see white-sand beaches, emerald water, lovely homes, thriving businesses and bustling restaurants. But what they might not see are the families sustaining that tourism economy while struggling with rising housing and living costs. “Our area is known for its beauty and hospitality, but that image can obscure the realities facing many families who sustain our tourism economy,” Kate said. “As housing and other living costs continue to rise, even those working full time can struggle to meet basic needs, leaving their children vulnerable to housing and food insecurity, limited healthcare access and educational disruption.”

They may not see the child living with housing instability or hunger. The child whose education is repeatedly disrupted. The child recovering from abuse. The child who needs medical treatment, therapy or specialized instruction that a family cannot afford alone. Those hardships rarely exist in isolation. “The challenges facing children in Northwest Flor-



ida are deeply interconnected, making it difficult to identify any single need as the most urgent,” Kate explained. “A child experiencing housing instability may also face food insecurity, limited access to healthcare, disruptions in education or trauma.”

That is why DCWAF’s network of 16 partner charities is so important. “Their collective strength lies in working together to support the whole child,” Kate said. “By sharing resources, identifying gaps in services and connecting families with additional support, our partners create a coordinated network of care that extends far beyond what any one organization could provide alone.”

Since its founding in 2005, DCWAF has donated more than \$38 million to Northwest Florida children’s charities, impacting more than 100,000 young lives. Those are extraor-



dinary numbers. But numbers alone cannot fully express what that help means.

I was reminded of that at a recent DCWAF check presentation where \$3 million in funding was awarded in a single year. Pure joy—that is what I felt walking into the ballroom and seeing the people behind these local charities: founders, directors, board members, volunteers and donors who serve children day in and day out.

I witnessed tears of joy. Excited joy. Thankful, grateful joy. You could hear it in the voices of those who stepped to the microphone, and you could feel it throughout the room.

Every person who donates, volunteers, serves on a board, bids in an auction, hosts a wine dinner or simply purchases a ticket to an event such as Harvest plays a part in changing

real lives right here in our own backyard.

You may never know how many children you helped grow up and graduate. How many you helped escape a terrible situation. How many you gave hope, healing, a safe place to sleep or even a beautiful new smile. You might never meet them or hear their stories. But the difference is real.

That deeper purpose does not diminish the fun of Harvest. If anything, it adds to it. “Wine and food have a remarkable ability to bring people together and create a shared sense of community,” Kate said. “Our events begin with an exceptional experience, but the connection to our mission gives that experience greater meaning.”

“This anniversary is an opportunity to celebrate how far Harvest has come, but it is also the beginning of its next chapter,” Kate said.

That next chapter begins Thursday with six intimate wine dinners at acclaimed locations throughout South Walton, featuring Alpha Omega Wine Collective, Bordeaux wines, Innumero Wines, Lerner Project, Pahlmeyer and Sign of the Dove.

On **Friday, Harvest After Dark** returns to Cerulean Park with elevated wines and culi-

Continued on page 20



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Eight Women, Lasting Legacies: Meet Okaloosa’s 2026 Hall of Fame Class

Across Okaloosa County, their influence can be seen in courtrooms and classrooms, health care and business, emergency services, foster care, national defense and the arts. Eight women whose leadership has opened doors, strengthened institutions and changed lives now share a new distinction: induction into the 2026 Okaloosa County Women’s Hall of Fame.

The Okaloosa County Commission on the Status of Women (OCCSW) honored the eight distinguished inductees as part of an annual tradition celebrating extraordinary women whose visionary leadership, dedicated public service and pioneering achievements have elevated the status of women and enriched the quality of life throughout Okaloosa County.

This year’s class represents a remarkably diverse group of leaders spanning business, health care, advocacy, education, public service and the arts. Olympic medalist and Crestview

native Mia Manganello was also honored as a Hometown Heroine. “Each of these extraordinary women embodies the courage, resilience, and spirit of service that defines Okaloosa County,” said Kelley Fuller, Chair of the Okaloosa County Commission on the Status of Women. “From groundbreaking business ventures and healthcare advocacy to dedicated mentorship and public service, their decades-long contributions have reshaped our community for the better and serve as a powerful inspiration for future generations.”

The 2026 Hall of Fame honorees are:
Megan Blanco, Niceville — Professional/Business
A magna cum laude graduate of the University of Akron



School of Law, Blanco built a statewide legal practice specializing in health care license defense while actively mentoring women launching their own firms. She co-founded the Okaloosa Chapter of the Florida Association for Women Lawyers (FAWL), received the Leader in the Law Award at the 2026 FAWL State Convention and serves on the First Judicial Circuit’s Professionalism Panel.

Vanessa d’Aquin, MSN, APRN, FNP-C, Niceville/Valparaiso — Humanitarian

As director of clinical services at Crossroads Center, d’Aquin has expanded health care access for vulnerable women, increasing patient services by more than 200% and providing free care to nearly 1,000 women. An alumna of Northwest Florida State College and the University of West Florida, she has secured



no-cost mammograms for uninsured patients, supported women recovering from addiction through multiple local recovery networks and cared for patients within the Florida correctional system.

Simona Faroni, Fort Walton Beach — Pioneer

After arriving in Okaloosa County from Italy in 1996, Faroni overcame immense regulatory and language hurdles to co-found GS Gelato, a nationally distributed manufacturer

Continued on page 20

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Community

DCWAF

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nary creations from celebrated chefs across the Southeast. “This year’s festival will honor the experiences guests have come to love while adding a little extra sparkle in celebration of our 10th anniversary,” Kate said.

That reimagined evening will blend glamorous after-hours energy, unexpected pairings and a touch of Studio 54 flair. “It will feel distinctly celebratory while remaining true to what has made Harvest so special for the past decade: exceptional wine and food, meaningful connections and a shared commitment to supporting children in need across Northwest Florida,” she said.

Saturday brings the signature **Grand Tasting**, where guests can explore hundreds of wines from around the world



while enjoying seafood, barbecue and other creations from talented chefs and makers.

The weekend concludes

Sunday with a **jazz cocktail brunch** featuring ingredient-driven cocktails and a New Orleans-inspired menu by award-winning chef Tory McPhail.

A virtual silent auction featuring rare wines, luxury travel and staycations will add another way to participate—even for those unable to attend in person.

It promises to be a spectacular four days. Yet the most meaningful result will not be found on a menu, in a wineglass or beneath the lights of a beautifully decorated tent. Through stories like the young mother’s, we know that impact extends far beyond the festival weekend. It is found months—and even years—later in a NICU, a classroom, a counseling room, a safe home or a mother’s arms.

I have long believed the compassion and generosity of our relatively small Northwest Flor-

ida communities rival those of much larger cities and regions. We may be small in size, but when it comes to giving, serving and taking care of our own, our hearts are huge. Harvest is one more beautiful expression of that heart.

In a place known as paradise, it is easy to celebrate what is visible. Harvest asks us to look deeper—to notice the needs that are often hidden, to pull up another chair and to make room at the table for children who deserve every opportunity to thrive.

Ten years in, that is something truly worth raising a glass to!

The **10th annual Harvest Wine & Food Festival** will be held **Oct. 15-18 in WaterColor**. **Tickets** for available events, the complete schedule and virtual-auction information are available at **HarvestWineandFood.com**.

HALL OF FAME

continued from page 19

employing more than 150 people and reporting \$38 million in sales in 2025. A naturalized citizen, GrowFL mentor and philanthropist supporting local schools and the Boys and Girls Club, Faroni has received honors including Enterprising Women of the Year and multiple appearances on the Inc. 5000 list.

Dr. Cristie Kedroski, Niceville — Community Service

During more than 15 years

at Northwest Florida State College, Kedroski grew the NWFSC Foundation’s endowment from \$36 million to more than \$62 million and oversaw \$75 million in grants before serving as interim president in 2024. She serves on the boards of HCA Florida Fort Walton-Destin Hospital and CCB Community Bank and chairs the Niceville-Valparaiso Chamber of Commerce.

Christina Larson, Shalimar — Mattie Kelly Cultural Arts

Okaloosa County’s first female paramedic, Larson has spent more than 50 years bridg-

ing emergency services, advocacy and the arts. She founded “Paddle Power” for residents with disabilities, fostered 145 children with special needs and founded the county’s Foster Parent Association. Larson also assisted Mattie Kelly in establishing the Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation and co-created the Shoal Sanctuary Nature Preserve.

Heather Ruiz, Fort Walton Beach — Contemporary

A graduate of Niceville High School and Florida State University, Ruiz built a prominent career in marketing and

commercial real estate, including leadership roles at Destin Commons, Talking Parents and Bit-Wizards. One of the youngest women to chair the Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce, she also serves on the Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation board and mentors young people through Take Stock in Children.

Dr. Linda Smith, Niceville — Education

A local resident since 1961, Smith spent decades as a teacher and principal before becoming a Guardian ad Litem Certified Child Advocate Manager.

She oversees more than 25 volunteers, guides young people in protective custody toward graduation and mobilizes community groups to provide essential clothing and comfort items for children entering care.

Dr. MiChele Stevenson, Shalimar — Military/Government

Holding degrees from the University of West Florida and Virginia University of Lynchburg, Stevenson leads the Mentor Protégé Program for the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, supporting small businesses in defense contracting. Locally, she partnered with the City of Fort Walton Beach to restore the historic NAACP Legacy Walk of Fame and serves on the Homelessness and Housing Alliance’s Grants Review Committee.

Stevenson is also the first Hall of Fame legacy inductee. Her mother, Mary Stevenson, was inducted in 2012.

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Established in 1995 by the Okaloosa County Commission on the Status of Women, the Okaloosa County Women’s Hall of Fame recognizes and preserves the contributions of outstanding women whose achievements in education, business, health care, human services, the military and the arts have made a lasting impact.

For more information, visit occsww.com.

Getting Homes Ready for the Fall Season



BY KYLE SPARKS, OVATION PAINTING

September often brings a welcome change of pace along the Emerald Coast. With the busy summer season winding down, homeowners and property managers finally have an opportunity to focus on maintenance and improvement projects.

Fall is widely considered one of the best seasons for painting. Temperatures are more moderate, humidity begins to ease, and weather conditions are often more predictable.

For homeowners, this makes it an ideal time to refresh both



interior and exterior spaces before the holiday season arrives. A well-maintained home not only looks great but also stays protected against the elements.

Rental property owners and management companies frequently use this time to schedule updates that may have been difficult during the peak summer months.

Kyle's Tip:

"One of the easiest ways to keep a home looking sharp year-round is staying ahead of maintenance. Small updates done at the right time can prevent much bigger repairs later."

Taking advantage of the quieter fall months helps keep homes across the Emerald Coast looking their best.

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Destin's Best Places to Watch Your Favorite Teams!



BY SCOTT MILLER

Ah, September. I'm always a little happier when the calendar turns and football season begins.

Why, you ask? Because, like so many others living in this paradise we call Destin, we love God, we love our families, we love the beach, we love our friends—and we sure do love ourselves some football!

In my humble opinion, no other sport delivers the passion, excitement and camaraderie of good ol' American football. So, break out your favorite team's jersey, rally your friends and head to one of the area's best sports bars to watch the action.

Whether you're a die-hard

SEC fan who shouts "War Eagle!" whenever you spot someone in Auburn gear, or a transplant like me who still loves cheering on Penn State, one thing holds true: Football season is upon us.

Let's kick off the 2026 season with a bang. I hope to see you out there!

AJ's Seafood & Oyster Bar

Football season is back, and there's no better place to catch the action than right on the Destin Harbor. For more than 40 years, AJ's Seafood & Oyster Bar has been serving cold Gulf Coast oysters, refreshing drinks and plenty of local flavor. What began as a popular hangout for fresh oysters and cold beer—with oysters shucked from the deck behind a small trailer—has grown into one of the Destin Harbor's most iconic hot spots. Today, AJ's has four locations along the Emerald Coast, serving fresh seafood, live music and memorable waterfront experiences.

Die-hard football fans can

settle in beneath the one-and-only Jumbotron on the Destin Harbor and watch their favorite college and professional teams play on the big, big screen. Surrounded by the energy and beauty of the harbor, it's a game-day atmosphere that's hard to beat.

Whether you're arriving early for kickoff, staying through the final whistle or celebrating a big win afterward, AJ's has delicious daily specials, mouth-watering drinks and live music to keep the good times going. Don't miss a minute of the action—make AJ's part of your football tradition all season long.

(850) 837-1913

116 Harbor Blvd., Destin
ajsgiving.com

Austons on 98

Build your perfect game-day lineup at Austons on 98, home to an impressive raw oyster bar, one of the best happy hours in town and a massive 102-foot bar with 32 beers on draft.

The menu features little neck clams, freshly shucked raw oys-



ters, New England-style clam chowder, jumbo shrimp cocktail and plenty of other favorites to keep your football crew well-fed. Add Austons' own "Real Deal Nashville Hot Sauce" when you want to bring a little extra heat to the game.

With big-screen televisions throughout the restaurant, there's no bad seat in the house. Grab your friends, choose your team and settle in for college and professional football all sea-

son long.

Happy hour is offered daily from 3–6 p.m., with \$2 off all bar drinks. Bucket specials are available all day, every day. From 3–5 p.m. Monday through Friday, guests can also enjoy \$3 off a dozen raw oysters.

Austons on 98 is open daily from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. View the complete menu online.

(850) 842-3200

Continued on next page

AJ's FOOTBALL IS BACK!

WATCH

THE **BIG** GAMES
NFL SUNDAY TICKET
& COLLEGE GAMEPLAN

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SPECIAL FOOTBALL
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FOOTBALL

continued from previous page

125 Poinciana Blvd.,
Miramar Beach
austonson98.com

Boathouse Oyster Bar

Some football Saturdays and Sundays call for more than a sports bar. Sometimes you want fresh oysters, live music and the kind of laid-back local atmosphere that makes every game-day weekend feel like a coastal getaway.

Located in the heart of Destin on the Destin Harbor, Boathouse Oyster Bar is where the locals go. Its specialty is turning oysters into a true delicacy, served raw, steamed or baked just the way you like 'em. The menu also features Boathouse's signature gumbo, made from a recipe written by Mama Gumbo herself.

Stop in before the game to fuel up, or mosey over afterward to celebrate a win, shake off a tough loss and hang out with the locals. With live entertainment every night, the fun continues long after the final play.

On the first Friday of each month, the Boathouse hosts a locals' gathering on the Destin Harbor from 5-7 p.m. See the ad for featured bands and performance times. Music schedules are subject to change, so follow Boathouse Oyster Bar on Facebook for the latest updates.

(850) 837-3645

288-B Harbor Blvd., Destin
BoathouseOysterBarDestin.com

Tailfins Waterfront Grill

Hey, football fans—Tailfins Waterfront Grill is calling your name! Destin's favorite season is here, and Tailfins has everything you need for a winning game day on the harbor.

If your team has an early kickoff, start the day with a local-favorite breakfast served from 8-11 a.m., seven days a week. Choose a classic plate of bacon and eggs, a seafood or Cajun omelet, or a smiley pan-

cake for the youngest fans. Add a round of mimosas or Bloody Marys and get ready for kickoff.

When it's game time, Tailfins is one of Destin's go-to sports-watching destinations, with more than 100 big-screen televisions showing college and professional matchups. Fans can also catch the action on the outdoor Jumbotron overlooking the docks. With so many screens, you won't have to miss a single touchdown, field goal or game-changing play.

Tailfins offers early-bird dinner specials from 3-6 p.m. Monday through Friday. Happy hour is also available from 3-6 p.m. Monday through Friday, featuring \$24 domestic beer buckets, \$7 house wines and well drinks, and \$7 Long Island iced teas.

Come early, stay late and enjoy live music on the docks seven days a week. Whether you're gathering before the game, cheering through all four quarters or celebrating after the final whistle, Tailfins brings together football, food, drinks and waterfront fun.

(850) 650-1111

172 Harbor Blvd., on the
Destin Harbor
tailfinsdestin.com

Daily Cruises

Turn your football weekend into a complete Destin Harbor adventure with Tailfins' Tikis. Tailfins' newest one-of-a-kind tiki boat features onboard restrooms and certified captains, making it easy to relax and enjoy the water.

Talk of the Town tikis are the only Coast Guard-certified tiki boats in the United States. Experience the Destin Harbor and Crab Island like never before by choosing a three-hour tour, a sunset cruise or Thursday night's spectacular fireworks cruise.

Book your cruise online at tailfinsislandadventure.com.

(850) 842-3333

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LIVE MUSIC!

Every Night Except Thursday
6-9 PM

TRIVIA

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and jumbo shrimp cocktail!



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Monday-Friday 11am-3pm

Baja Fried Fish Tacos \$12.95

Maine Lobster Roll \$24.95

KC Smashed Cheeseburger \$12.95

EARLY BIRD DINNER SPECIALS

Monday-Friday 3-6pm

Local Catch Mahi \$19.95

New Orleans Cajun Gulf Shrimp \$19.95

Kansas City Baby Back Ribs

Half Rack \$15.95 / Full Rack \$24.95

HAPPY HOUR DRINKS

Monday-Friday 3-6pm

Margaritas, Johnnys Red Ale,

Michelob Draft Pints, Well Drinks,

Long Island Teas, House Wines

\$7



Live Music on the Docks 7 Days a Week

172 Harbor Blvd. Destin
(850) 650-1200
TailfinsDestin.com

SEC Football Schedule

SEC	Sept 5	Sept 12	Sept 19	Sept 26	Oct 3	Oct 10	Oct 17	Oct 24	Oct 31	Nov 7	Nov 14	Nov 21	Nov 28
Alabama	E CAR	@UK	FSU	S. CAR	@MISS ST	UGA	@TENN	A&M	OPEN	@LSU	@VANDY	UTC	AUBURN
Arkansas	NALA	@UTAH	UGA	TULSA	@A&M	TENN	@VANDY	OPEN	MIZZOU	@AUB	S CAR	@TEX	LSU
Auburn	BAYLOR (ATL)	S. MISS	FLA	VANDY	@TENN	OPEN	@UGA	LSU	@OLE MISS	ARK	@MISS ST	SAMFORD	@BAMA
Florida	FLA ATL	CAMPBELL	@AUB	OLE MISS	@MIZZOU	S CAR	@TEX	OPEN	UGA (ATL)	OKLA	@UK	VANDY	@FSU
Georgia	TENN ST	WKU	@ARK	OKLA	VANDY	@BAMA	AUB	OPEN	FLA (ATL)	@OLE MISS	MIZZOU	@S CAR	GA TECH
Kentucky	YSU	BAMA	@A&M	S ALA	@S CAR	LSU	@OKLA	VANDY	OPEN	@TENN	FLA	@MIZZOU	LOUISVILLE
LSU	CLEMSON	LA TECH	@OLE MISS	A&M	MCNEESE ST	@KU	MISS ST	@AUB	OPEN	BAMA	TEXAS	@TENN	@ARK
Ole Miss	LOUISVILLE	CHARLOTTE	LSU	@FLA	OPEN	@VANDY	MIZZOU	@TEXAS	AUB	UGA	@OKLA	WOFFORD	MISS ST
Miss St	ULM	@MINN	@S CAR	MIZZOU	BAMA	OPEN	@LSU	OKLA	@TEX	VANDY	AUB	TENN TECH	@OLE MISS
Missouri	UAPB	@KANSAS	TROY	@MISS ST	FLA	A&M	@OLE MISS	OPEN	@ARK	TEX	@UGA	KU	OKLA
Oklahoma	UTEP	@MICH	N MEX	@UGA	OPEN	TEX (DAL)	KU	@MISS ST	S CAR	FLA	OLE MISS	A&M	MIZZOU
S Carolina	KENT ST	TOWSON	MISS ST	@BAMA	KU	@FLA	OPEN	TENN	@OKLA	A&M	@ARK	UGA	@CLEMSON
Tennessee	FURMAN	@GA TECH	KENNESAW ST	TEX	AUB	@ARK	BAMA	@S CAR	OPEN	UK	@A&M	LSU	@VANDY
Tex A&M	MIZZ ST	ARIZ ST	UK	@LSU	ARK	@MIZZOU	CITADEL	@BAMA	OPEN	@S. CAR	TENN	@OKLA	TEX (11/27)
Texas	TEXAS ST	OHIO ST	UTSA	@TENN	OPEN	OKLA (DAL)	FLA	OLE MISS	MISS ST	@MIZZOU	@LSU	ARK	A&M (11/27)
Vanderbilt	AUSTIN PEAY	DELAWARE	NC ST	@AUB	@UGA	OLE MISS	ARK	@KU	OPEN	@MISS ST	BAMA	@FLA	TENN

2026 College Football Game Day Highlights

Week 1, September 5

Baylor @ Auburn 2:30 pm, ABC
Clemson @ LSU 6:30 pm, ABC
Louisville @ Ole Miss, (Sunday 9/6) 6:30 pm, ABC
Marshall @ Penn St. 2:30 pm, FS1
Wisconsin @ Notre Dame, (Sunday 9/6) 6:30 pm, NBC
Miami @ Stanford, (Friday 9/4) 8:00 pm, ESPN

Week 2, September 9/12

Southern Miss @ Auburn 6:45, SECN
Oklahoma @ Michigan 11 am, FOX
Ohio State @ Texas 6:30 pm, ABC

Tennessee @ Georgia Tech 6:30 pm, ACCN
Penn State @ Temple 11 am, ESPN
Alabama @ Kentucky 2:30 pm, ABC

Week 3, September 19

Florida @ Auburn 6 pm, ESPN
Florida St. @ Alabama 2:30 pm, ABC
LSU @ Ole Miss 6:30 pm, ABC
North Carolina @ Clemson 11 am, ESPN
Georgia @ Arkansas 11 am, ABC

Week 4, September 26

Vanderbilt @ Auburn, TBD

Texas @ Tennessee 11 am, ESPN
Oklahoma @ Georgia, TBD
Texas A&M @ LSU, TBD
Ole Miss @ Florida, TBD
South Carolina @ Alabama, TBD
Wisconsin @ Penn State, TBD

Week 5, October 3

Auburn @ Tennessee, TBD
Alabama @ Miss. St., TBD
Florida @ Missouri, TBD
Notre Dame @ N. Carolina, TBD
Miami @ Clemson, TBD
Virginia @ Florida St., TBD



2026 High School Football Schedules

Destin High School Sharks

August 14: vs. Arnold (Kickoff Classic)
August 21: vs. Port St. Joe
August 28: @ Baker
September 4: vs. North Bay Haven
September 11: @ Marianna
September 18: Bye / Open Week
September 25: vs. Pensacola Catholic (District Game)
October 2: @ Northview
October 9: @ Walton (District Game)
October 16: vs. Graceville
October 23: @ Freeport (District Game)
October 30: vs. Bozeman (District Game)

Fort Walton Beach Vikings

Aug 13: vs. Niceville (Kickoff Classic), 7:00 PM
Aug 21: vs. Pensacola, 7:00 PM
Aug 28: vs. South Walton, 7:00 PM
Sep 4: at West Florida Tech, 7:00 PM
Sep 11: vs. Milton*, 7:00 PM
Sep 18: vs. Walton, 7:00 PM
Sep 25: at Gulf Breeze*, 7:00 PM
Oct 2: at Navarre, 7:00 PM
Oct 9: at Choctawhatchee*, 7:00 PM
Oct 16: vs. Escambia*, 7:00 PM
Oct 23: at Booker T. Washington*, 7:00 PM
Oct 30: Open Week
* Denotes District Game.

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4pm: Cole Jordan
8pm: Roshambo

Tuesdays:

4pm: Zach Renzi
8pm: Austin Jennings

Wednesdays:

4pm: Hunter Dawson
8pm: Boathomies

Thursdays:

4pm: Flash Flood
8pm: Austin Jennings

Fridays:

4pm: Jason Findley
8pm: Airavata

Saturdays:

12pm: Joey Collins
4pm: Flash Flood
8pm: Gunner

Sundays:

12pm: Brendon Preece
4pm: Shane Curle
8pm: Shane Curle Trip

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

Open Daily from 11 am-2 am

Lunch Specials M-F for \$9.99

Slacker Sunday Oyster Brunch 11 am

288 Harbor Blvd, Destin

(850) 837-3645

Facebook: www.facebook.com/BoathouseOysterBar
www.boathouseoysterbardestin.com

Two Distinctive Nights with Officer Tatum at Old Florida Fish House

A five-course bourbon dinner and a live edition of The Officer Tatum Show headline a September calendar filled with food, music and lakeside entertainment.

Old Florida Fish House is bringing two distinctive evenings with **Brandon Tatum** to the shores of Eastern Lake on **September 16 and 17**. The nationally recognized media personality, former police officer and SWAT operator, author, speaker and entrepreneur will meet guests in two very different settings—first over a carefully paired dinner, then during a live presentation centered on the issues shaping American life.



Set beneath moss-draped oaks overlooking the water, Old Florida Fish House has long combined dining with live entertainment. These back-to-back events take that approach further, offering one evening built around the kitchen and bar and another focused on conversation and commentary.

The series begins at **6 p.m. September 16** with the **Officer Tatum Bourbon Tasting and Five-Course Dinner Experience**. The intimate evening will pair five courses from the Old Florida Fish House culinary team with cocktails featuring Tatum's Verdict Bourbon. Between courses, guests will hear about the inspiration behind the brand and how he brought it to life.

The restaurant's beverage team has created a lineup of pairings with names inspired by the courtroom. "The Indictment" combines Verdict Bourbon and Amaro Nonino with fresh-pressed apple juice. "Voir Dire" takes a savory turn with roasted beet juice, fresh lemon and orange juices and basil, while "The Objection" reimagines an old fashioned with brown butter fat-washed Not Guilty Bourbon, maple syrup and bitters.

"Sustained" offers a Manhattan-style blend with espresso liqueur and Amaro Averna. Dessert brings bread pudding and ice cream alongside Not Guilty Bourbon, served neat or poured over the top for an affogato-style finish. A curated wine pairing will also be available for guests who prefer an alternative to bourbon. Although the complete five-course menu is still

to be announced, the cocktails offer a preview of the bright, savory, rich and sweet flavors planned throughout the meal.

At **6 p.m. September 17**, the focus shifts from the table to the stage for **An Evening with The Officer Tatum**, featuring a live edition of his show. Drawing on his background in law enforcement, business and independent media, Tatum will share his perspective on politics, culture, faith, freedom, law enforcement and everyday life. His presentations are known for direct analysis delivered with humor and an emphasis on questioning conventional narratives, thinking independently and living with purpose.

Tatum has built a digital audience of more than 8.6 million followers and subscribers, with billions of views across YouTube and other social platforms. His business ventures include Verdict Bourbon, Blackline Security Operations, Shinerly Life and Pure Choice Apparel. A VIP option for the September 17 show includes a welcome cocktail, meet-and-greet and preferred seating. Guests may attend either evening or experience both.

The September calendar continues beyond these two special nights. **Coastside 30A wine tastings** are offered on select Fridays, while singer-songwriter **Alex Napier** brings his mix of bluegrass, country, blues and audience requests to the restaurant on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. **Dueling Pianos** delivers interactive performances, sing-alongs and musical surprises Thursdays through Satur-

days. **Brunch on the Lake** is served Saturdays and Sundays, offering another way to enjoy

the restaurant's Eastern Lake setting.

For tickets, reservations, event

times and the latest schedule, visit **oldfloridafishhouse.com/special-events**.



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

OLD FLORIDA FISH HOUSE

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

info@oldfloridafishhouse.com | 850.534.3045

Café Destin

Looking for a place the entire family can enjoy—or a comfortable spot to work with free Wi-Fi while sipping a cup of coffee? Café Destin offers an expansive breakfast and lunch menu featuring pancakes, Nutella waffles, omelets, eggs Benedict, biscuits and gravy and more. For something lighter, choose from specialty toasts, including avocado and salmon, along with pastries and muffins.

The lunch menu includes a variety of burgers, sandwiches and salads. Café Destin also has

a full-service coffee bar serving fresh, locally roasted Amavida coffee, hot or iced, as well as espresso drinks, lattes, fresh fruit smoothies and a tempting selection of teas. A special kids menu is available, too. Guests can enjoy indoor seating or relax outside on the large, covered patio. The café is also available after hours for private events and special occasions.

Open daily for breakfast and lunch from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m.

(850) 424-6777

985 U.S. 98 E., Destin
cafedestin.com

Coastal Protein & Energy

Fuel your day the healthy way at Coastal Protein & Energy, Destin's popular spot for clean caffeine and protein-packed treats. Sip on energizing loaded teas, protein coffee and shakes, or enjoy protein waffles, smoothie bowls and better-for-you protein donuts—all crafted to keep you going strong. Located along Harbor Boulevard in Norred Plaza, across from Boshamps, this bright, beachy hangout has quickly become a favorite among locals looking for fast, feel-good fuel between school runs, gym sessions, classes and days on the water. Seasonal flavors are also available for a limited time.

Beginning in September, Coastal Protein & Energy will open at 6:30 a.m. Monday through Friday and introduce two new fall menu drops.

September also brings Social Media Saturdays. Post about or check in at Coastal Protein & Energy each Saturday and receive \$2 off any drink.

First-time visitors can receive \$5 off their first purchase of \$9 or more by joining the loyalty program.

Take it from a regular: these crave-worthy drinks and treats can easily become part of your daily routine. Stop by for morning energy, a midday pick-me-

up or a post-workout refuel and discover why everyone is talking about Coastal Protein & Energy.
(850) 904-9738

501 Harbor Blvd., Ste. F, Destin
Facebook.com/coastalprotein |
coastal-protein-co.square.site

Fudpucker's Beachside Bar & Grill

The motto says it all: "Ya Ain't Been Pucked 'Til Ya Been Fudpucked!"

Locally owned and operated since 1982, Fudpucker's Beachside Bar & Grill is built around its owners' three favorite "F" words: Food, Fun and Family. More than a restaurant or bar, Fudpucker's offers a one-of-a-kind dining and entertainment experience for locals, visitors, children and families of all ages.

Bring the family for the food and stay for the fun. A Fudpucker's gift card makes a great birthday present, and the restaurant's gift shop is filled with distinctive gifts, souvenirs and branded merchandise.

This fall, Fudpucker's is going all out with its Pirate Brew Fest, happening Saturday, Nov. 7, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Guests can enjoy live music, local food trucks serving coastal favorites, talented artists and vendors, beer memorabilia, drinks and games for children.

The festival marketplace will



showcase handcrafted goods, unique collectibles and plenty of treasures worth taking home. Craft beer enthusiasts can also explore a diverse selection of brewing memorabilia and collectibles that bring together local beer culture and Destin's legendary pirate spirit. Pirate attire is highly encouraged, and the first 100 swashbucklers through the gate will receive special gifts. Admission is free, while VIP drink tickets for adults start at just \$10. Gather your crew and get ready for a lively afternoon of food, music, shopping and family-friendly fun.

(850) 654-4200

20001 Emerald Coast Pkwy.,
Destin
fudpucker.com

Surf Bread Company

Few things are more inviting than the aroma of freshly baked bread, and Surf Bread Company brings that experience to

Continued on page 29



SURF BREAD CO.
SOURDOUGH

Healthy. Local. Artisanal.
Proudly Serving Destin For 5 Years!

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Protein Shakes, Protein Waffles,
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Drinks without the afternoon crash!

Try our different flavors, and add
collagen or protein to your drink.

ORDER ONLINE

Instagram: @coastalprotein
850-904-9738 - TEXT YOUR ORDER
501 Harbor Blvd, Destin FL

Destin Is About To Get A Little Luckier!

Lucky Goat Coffee is opening this September at City Market Beachside, bringing Tallahassee-roasted coffee, handcrafted drinks and warm hospitality to the Emerald Coast.

Local owners Tom and Koley Houle are excited to bring Lucky Goat to the community they now call home. After years of moving across multiple states for career opportunities, returning to their Florida roots was always the dream... and they look forward to creating something special here in Destin.

Lucky Goat began in Tallahassee in 2010 with one simple mission: make great coffee. What started as a wholesale roaster serving cafés across the Southeast has grown into a collection of welcoming coffee shops, while keeping quality at the heart of every cup. Coffee is roasted fresh throughout the



week at Lucky Goat's Tallahassee roastery.

The Destin café will serve classic espresso drinks, drip coffee, single-origin roasts and smooth nitro cold brew. Guests can try favorites like the Luckyccino, made with nitro cold brew, vanilla and cream, or the espresso-powered Goat Bomb. Signature lattes, chai, hand-whisked matcha, rotating seasonal drinks and pastries from local favorite Blue Mountain Bakery will round

out the menu.

For Tom and Koley, this is about more than coffee. Their vision is to create a welcoming place where friends meet, families feel at home, neighbors become familiar faces and both locals and visitors feel part of the community.

Whether you need a morning pick-me-up, a beach-day iced latte or a comfortable place to connect, Lucky Goat Coffee - Destin looks forward to welcoming you this September.

Follow @luckygoatcitymarket on Instagram for progress updates and the official Grand Opening announcement.

OPENING SEPTEMBER
City Market Beachside
36150 Emerald Coast Parkway, Suite 107, Destin
850-460-9981

luckygoatcoffee.com
Instagram: @luckygoatcitymarket

Pirates + Food + Booze = Fun Pirate Brew Fest 2026

Brew Fest Returns to Destin

Ahoy, mateys! Pirate Brew Fest is returning to Fudpucker's Beachside Bar & Grill in Destin on Saturday, November 7, 2026, for five hours of pirate-themed fun, live entertainment, local shopping, food, and cold drinks. The festival runs from 11 AM to 4 PM, and admission is completely free.

This year's event brings together everything needed for a proper coastal celebration: live music, food trucks, artists, vendors, beer memorabilia, drinks, and games for kids. Families can explore the festival, browse one-

the most colorfully crewed pirate port on the Emerald Coast.

Families can also look forward to games for kids and plenty of room to enjoy the atmosphere. With free admission, Pirate Brew Fest makes it easy to bring the whole crew, spend the afternoon together, and choose the food, shopping, and ticketed experiences that suit your group.

Brews, Bites, Music, and More

For adults ready to raise a glass, VIP drink tickets start at just \$10. Admission to the festival remains free, so guests can enjoy the entertainment and explore

the music with friends, there will be plenty to explore between 11 AM and 4 PM.

A Pirate Festival at a Destin Landmark

Fudpucker's Beachside Bar & Grill has been a Destin landmark since 1982, known for family dining, colorful coastal character, and memorable experiences. The restaurant is also home to Gator Beach, where visitors can see live alligators

and learn more about the animals that have become part of the Fudpucker's story.

That mix of family fun, local flavor, and larger-than-life personality makes Fudpucker's a natural home port for Pirate Brew Fest. The festival adds vendors, artists, music, games, food trucks, drinks, and pirate pageantry to the venue's already unmistakable Destin atmosphere.

Make Plans to Join the Crew

Pirate Brew Fest 2026 takes place Saturday, November 7, from 11 AM to 4 PM at Fudpucker's Beachside Bar & Grill, located at 20001 Emerald Coast Parkway in Destin, Florida. Admission is free, and VIP drink tickets start at \$10.

SO, STOP BY AND HAVE A SOME FUN AT PIRATE BREW FEST – YA SCALAWAGS!



of-a-kind finds, grab something delicious to eat, and enjoy a lively afternoon at one of Destin's best-known family attractions. Guests are strongly encouraged to arrive in pirate attire - whether that means a full captain's coat and tricorne hat or simply an eye patch and a convincing 'Arrr!'

Dress Like a Pirate and Claim Some Booty

The first 100 guests who arrive dressed like pirates will receive a free gift. Pirate attire is encouraged throughout the event, giving visitors of every age a chance to become part of the spectacle. Break out the bandanas, striped shirts, boots, hats, sashes, and other seaworthy accessories. The goal is simple: help turn Fudpucker's into

the event without purchasing a ticket. Those who want to take part in the featured drink experience can select the VIP ticket option that works for them.

A lineup of food trucks will be serving festival favorites throughout the day, giving guests plenty of choices when hunger strikes. Live music will provide the soundtrack, while artists and vendors offer hand-crafted goods, local creations, collectibles, and other treasures worth taking home.

Beer fans can browse displays of beer memorabilia and collectibles - a fitting addition to a festival that celebrates brewing culture alongside Destin's playful pirate spirit. Whether you come to discover a rare piece, support a local artist, sample the food-truck fare, or simply enjoy

FREE ADMISSION

DRINK UP, YE SCURVY DOGS!

PIRATE BREW FEST

**SATURDAY
Nov 7th, 2026
11am - 4pm
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Off the Hook

SOLDIERS

continued from page 11

of Soldiers on the Water: Fishing may provide the setting, but the relationships formed among veterans, caregivers, captains, volunteers and community members carry the event's impact far beyond the day itself.

Answering the Call

Soldiers on the Water reflects a spirit Destin residents know well—neighbors stepping forward to support those who serve.

The event is made possible through the generosity of people and organizations across the Emerald Coast. Charter cap-

tains and boat owners provide vessels, equipment, expertise and time. Businesses and professional organizations contribute financial sponsorships and in-kind donations, while volunteers assist with registration, meals, supplies and logistics.

Community support also provides participants with bags



containing water, snacks, sunscreen and other necessities. Additional in-kind needs may include lip balm, coolers, raffle prizes, gift certificates and food support.

Destin businesses, civic organizations, professional groups and residents can all take part. Whether someone volunteers, provides supplies, registers a boat or connects an eligible veteran with the program, each contribution becomes part of a larger expression of gratitude.

ECAR represents more than 5,000 REALTOR® members across Okaloosa and Walton counties and maintains an office in Santa Rosa Beach. Soldiers on the Water allows the organization to extend its community involvement beyond the real estate profession, uniting REALTORS®, local businesses, charter captains and volunteers in honoring those who have sacrificed in service to the country.

Businesses and community organizations can assist through financial sponsorships or in-kind donations.

Destin-area residents interested in volunteering or providing other support should contact ECAR to learn which needs remain.

Veterans can register at form.jotform.com/ECAOR/2026-sow-attendee. Prospective sponsors and in-kind donors can visit form.jotform.com/ECAOR/2026-sow-sponsors. Boat owners, charter captains, volunteers and other supporters can find information at www.emeraldcoastrealtors.com/soldiers-on-the-water/. For additional information or to ask about remaining opportunities, contact Wendy Permenter at info@ecaor.com.

For Destin—a home to many veterans and military families—Soldiers on the Water offers a meaningful way to honor neighbors whose courage and sacrifices continue long after their uniforms are put away.

Want to Get Involved?

Combat-wounded veterans must register in advance. There are no tickets to purchase, and eligible veterans participate at no cost. Space is limited, and applicants may be placed on a waitlist.

Local charter captains and boat owners are invited to register a vessel.

DINING

continued from page 26

Destin one delicious small batch at a time. This local cottage bakery specializes in naturally leavened artisan sourdough, crusty baguettes, chewy bagels, English muffins, sweet breads and tempting seasonal creations.

Using traditional slow-fermentation methods, each loaf is given the time it needs to develop its distinctive flavor, texture and perfectly golden crust. Whether you're picking up a baguette for dinner, bagels for breakfast or a

specialty loaf to share, every offering reflects the bakery's commitment to patience, quality and craftsmanship.

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

Preorders are available Tuesday through Saturday by calling (850) 650-2334.

Follow Surf Bread Company for weekly menus, specialty loaves, seasonal offerings and bakery updates.

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Don't Miss Croctoberfest on September 19!

By MARY FOMBY, GULFARIUM

Raise a Glass to Oktoberfest, Gulfarium Style!

Grab your event cup and get ready to say Prost! **Croctoberfest** returns to Gulfarium on **Saturday, September 19**, for an adults-only evening filled with craft beer and wine tastings, live music, food, games, and plenty of wild Gulfarium fun.

From 6 to 9 p.m., guests ages 21 and older can explore the park after hours while sampling drinks from breweries and wineries from across the region. VIP guests can get the celebration started even earlier with entry beginning at 5:30 p.m.

Unlimited Tastings from Local and Regional Favorites

Every General Admission and VIP ticket includes an exclusive Croctoberfest event cup, which guests can use for unlimited craft beer and wine tastings throughout the evening.

More than 20 breweries, win-



eries, distilleries, and food vendors are joining the celebration, including Perfect Plain Brewing, McGuire's Irish Pub of Destin, Coastal County Brewing Company, Ology Brewing Co., Destin Brewery, 3rd Planet Brewing, Florida Avenue Brewing Co., Duplin Winery, 30A Distilling, Simply Brats, Salty Pop Popcorn, and more.

Come hungry, too. Local food vendors will be serving up

bites throughout the evening, with food available for purchase separately.

Gators, Reptiles, and After-Hours Fun

Of course, it wouldn't be Croctoberfest without the crocodilians!

Throughout the night, guests can enjoy gator chats, reptile meet-and-greets, and animal training demonstrations along-



side live music and yard games. It's a chance to experience Gulfarium in a completely different way, combining the atmosphere of an Oktoberfest celebration with some of the animals that make a night at Gulfarium anything but ordinary.

Get Your Croctoberfest Tickets

Croctoberfest takes place Saturday, September 19, from 6

to 9 p.m., with VIP entry beginning at 5:30 p.m. Gather your crew, raise your cup, and join us for an adults-only evening of beer, bites, gators, and Gulfarium fun.

Purchase your tickets now at go.gulfarium.com/croctoberfest and join us for Croctoberfest 2026!





Unlimited tastings

20+ Local Vendors

Animal Meet & Greet

Live Music and MORE!!



September 19

6 PM to 9 PM

Beer. Bites. Gators. Prost!

Tickets at go.gulfarium.com/croctoberfest

Larry Hatchett Fishing Foundation: Casting Hope, Building Futures

*“Give a man a fish, he’ll eat for a day.
Teach a man to fish, he’ll eat for a lifetime.
Teach a child to fish, he may feed the world.”*
- Larry Hatchett

Teaching kids to fish is the very heart of the Larry Hatchett Fishing Foundation, and for the last 35 years the foundation has done just that.

The Foundation

The Larry Hatchett Fishing Foundation was created as a memorial to Larry Hatchett, a life-long Memphian who fished all over the world. His greatest joy, however, was fishing in the gulf. Larry called Destin “the capital of his soul.” He often took children fishing with him, as he enjoyed both teaching them how to fish as well as seeing their elation when they reeled in their first catch. Larry faced an untimely death at the age of 34, and this prompted the forma-



tion of the Larry Hatchett Fishing Foundation’s annual trip so that Larry’s legacy could live on. The 36th annual trip is scheduled for October 16-18, 2026 and will include foster children from homes in Florida, Tennessee, and Mississippi. Many of the participants have never had the opportunity to see the beach or swim in the gulf, and some



have never traveled outside of their hometown. Each year approximately 115 kids will have the opportunity to fish in the gulf while learning about marine habitats and environmental awareness. They will also have the chance to form meaningful relationships with others in similar situations as their own.

It’s About the Kids

Justice, a former participant states, “These trips were like the light at the end of the tunnel... we could forget about all of our problems and the difficult times we went through and will continue to go through. The LHFF made my time in the foster care system so much better.” Justice is now an adult volunteer for the



foundation. Furthermore, the event affects the volunteers that help make the trip a reality. “This has been both an honor and a privilege for us to help those

Continued on next page

EVENT GUIDE

DESTIN
FISHING
RODEO

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2026

MISS DESTIN
KAYLYNN
HAYLES

DESTIN FISHING
Rodeo

RODEO

continued from previous page

who have faced so many challenges throughout their lives. Our goal is to eventually take 1,000+ kids each year.” (Bob Wilder, Foundation President). Eric Westbrook, director on The American Spirit as well as LHFF board member states, “This is one of my favorite trips each year because the foundation is very dear to my heart.” Throughout the years our volunteers have worked with the foster parents to become mentors to many of the participants. These mentor-type relationships have helped teach kids life skills such as how to shave their face, how to write a college essay, and have guided them through challenging life situations.

Aboard the American Spirit

The Larry Hatchett Fishing Foundation as well as everyone involved always looks forward to the rodeo competition. In 2008,



LARRY HATCHETT



fishing foundation

one of our participants won first place in the triggerfish division and another placed third overall. In 2010 one of our youth won a \$2,500 Education IRA

from the rodeo. The Foundation is also a rodeo sponsor and funds the Bonnie Orr Memorial Award for the Miss Destin Pageant winner.

This year the kids will fish with Captain Jim Green aboard The American Spirit. Fish Florida contributes funds towards the cost of the boat, and corporate as well as individual spon-

sors donate funds to pay expenses for travel, fuel, lodging, meals/snacks, fishing rods, and other souvenirs that each child gets to take home with them. As a non-profit organization, each contribution is vital for the foundation to continue our mission to one day “feed the world.” We extend many thanks to the Destin community and all that

support this mission.

For more information or to donate, please contact Larry-HatchettFishing@gmail.com, call/text our Treasurer Liz Wilder Lemley (901-833-6760), find us on Facebook, Instagram, or visit www.LarryHatchett.com

Reprinted with permission from 2026 Destin Fishing Rodeo program.



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A Memorial Made for the Gulf

I was honored to join members of my family and more than 40 passengers aboard the Destin Princess as the Charlie Kirk Memorial Reef was lowered into the Gulf about two miles off Henderson Beach.

Spearheaded by Capt. Mike Parker with help from his wife, Marguerite and several local donors, the project came together through tremendous community support. The group raised \$17,000 to have the 18-foot-tall reef constructed by Walter Marine in Orange Beach, Ala. Weighing more than 17 tons, it is considerably larger than a typical memorial reef.

Before its deployment, the structure was personalized with Kirk's name, the Turning Point USA logo, a microphone, his familiar “Prove Me Wrong” message and other meaningful dedications.

Several vessels gathered for the occasion, including the Blanchita, Destination, Discipleship and private boats. One especially moving moment came when Capt. Parker praised God for the reef's successful completion and deployment.

Watching this massive



PHOTO COURTESY MARGUERITE PARKER

memorial disappear beneath the water was something I will never forget. It was both a tribute and a gift to our Gulf—a monument that will grow into a thriving habitat for marine life and become a special destination for divers and anglers for years to come.

A heartfelt thanks go to Capt. Mike and Marguerite Parker, the private donors and everyone whose vision and hard work brought this remarkable memorial to life.

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 Off the Hook

Veteran Divers Clear 1,000 Pounds of Local Reef Debris

By NICK TOMECEK,
OKALOOSA COUNTY PIO

Some of the most damaging debris beneath the waters off Destin-Fort Walton Beach weighs almost nothing at all. Nearly invisible fishing line can remain tangled across artificial reefs for years, threatening marine life long after it is lost or discarded. During a recent cleanup mission, military veteran combat divers with FORCE BLUE joined the Destin-Fort Walton

Beach Natural Resources Team to confront that underwater hazard. Working across 10 sites in the area's artificial reef system, divers recovered 1,022.93 pounds of debris—including an estimated 40 pounds of derelict fishing line. By the county's conservative estimate, that line stretched roughly 64,000 linear feet, or approximately 12 miles.

The artificial reef system off Destin-Fort Walton Beach is one of the largest in the nation,

drawing divers and anglers from across the country and supporting a significant share of the region's marine tourism economy. Left unaddressed, derelict fishing line and other debris accumulate on reef structures over time, entangling marine life, damaging habitat and posing a hazard to the divers and anglers who rely on these reefs. "We take the responsibility of being good stewards of the environment very seriously," said Okaloosa County Board Chairman



loosa County Board Chairman Trey Goodwin. "Partnering with FORCE BLUE to maintain our growing artificial reef system is a great collaboration that prioritizes both the marine habitat and the well-being of our veterans."

Though fishing line made up a comparatively small share of the debris removed by weight, its ecological footprint is disproportionately large. Nearly invisible underwater, fishing line continues to entangle fish, sea turtles and marine mammals long after it is lost or discarded, a phenomenon commonly known as "ghost fishing." The material can take years to break down. The 12-mile estimate uses a conservative assumption of heavier, 100-pound test line; lighter or braided line recovered in the same haul would represent significantly more linear footage per pound. "Forty pounds of fishing line sounds small next to a thousand-pound total, but by our conservative estimate that's about 12 miles of line that can pose a threat to marine life and these habitats," said Danielle Lasseigne, Coastal Resources Coordinator for Okaloosa County. "This material doesn't weigh much, but it does a disproportionate amount of damage the longer it stays on the reef. Partnerships like this one with FORCE BLUE let us tackle that problem directly, and they help us document the ongoing maintenance our reef system needs to keep supporting healthy fish populations and a strong diving community."

This marks the sixth mission FORCE BLUE has conducted in partnership with Destin-Fort Walton Beach. Past missions have included living shoreline creation, invasive lionfish removals and additional marine debris removal efforts across the area's reef system and Destin East Pass jetties. Funding for this mission was generously provided to FORCE BLUE through a Publix cash register campaign.

FORCE BLUE is a nonprofit that recruits and trains U.S. military special operations veterans and first responders as professional divers, pairing their skills with hands-on marine conservation work. Beyond each mission's environmental impact, the organization gives veterans a renewed sense of purpose and community following their service, channeling their training toward restoring reefs, shorelines and marine ecosystems that coastal communities depend on. "Our divers train for exactly this kind of mission, methodical, structure-heavy dives where visibility and current can change fast," said Brown, FORCE BLUE Mission Leader. "The Destin-Fort Walton Beach reef system is an impressive resource, and it was clear from the amount of debris we recovered how much value there is in doing this work regularly. We're proud to give these veterans a continued mission, and we're grateful to Okaloosa County for making this partnership possible."

Okaloosa County's Natural Resources team manages one of the largest artificial reef programs in the country, with dozens more artificial reef construction projects currently underway. The county continues to pursue partnerships with research institutions and conservation organizations to support the long-term health of its reef system.

For more information on Okaloosa County's artificial reef program, visit the Tourist Development Department's Natural Resources page at destinfbw.com/explore/eco-tourism/artificial-reefs.



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ROOFSCAPES

\$5 Million Crunch Fitness Coming to FWB

The 37,000-square-foot club will feature Crunch Reform Pilates™ and Pump Strength Training™ studios, with pre-sales beginning this winter.

If you've driven past Longhorn Plaza on Mary Esther Cut Off and wondered what is taking shape, here's the answer: a brand-new Crunch Fitness—and it is going to be big.

The \$5 million, 37,000-square-foot club is expected to open this winter at 546 Mary Esther Cut Off NW, with membership pre-sales beginning this fall. It will serve members from Fort Walton Beach, Mary Esther, Destin and communities around Choctawhatchee Bay, including residents connected to Hurlburt Field and Eglin Air Force Base.

The former retail space is being transformed into a modern fitness club that will be open and staffed 24 hours a day—making it a practical option for shift workers, military members and anyone whose workout schedule doesn't fit neatly between nine and five.

Crunch's 3.0 design will give the club a modern look while or-

ganizing the space so members can move easily between cardio, strength, classes and recovery.

Never been inside a Crunch? Think less "quiet room full of treadmills" and more high-energy fitness playground. Crunch built its name around making serious exercise fun, with a "No Judgments" philosophy that welcomes beginners, longtime lifters, busy parents and everyone in between.

"The Crunch experience is a natural fit for the area's active coastal lifestyle and strong, family-friendly, military-connected community," said Mike Goodsell, Chief Officer for Fit Fusion, the franchisee opening the club. "Crunch will give the community a place to challenge themselves, connect and feel stronger together."

Two new specialty studios will help set this location apart. The Crunch Reform Pilates™ Studio will offer instructor-led reformer workouts with digital guidance—bringing the feel of a boutique Pilates studio into a full-service gym. The Pump Strength Training™ Studio will



feature structured, coach-led sessions designed to help members build strength and track their progress. Both studios are included with Peak Results memberships.

There is plenty more under one roof. Plans include expanded cardio, strength and functional training areas; Olympic lifting platforms; indoor turf;

TRX®; hot yoga; advanced HIIT classes; Power Half Hour circuit training; personal training and Crunch's signature group fitness classes.

And because recovery matters, too, the Relax & Recover® area will include HydroMassage® beds, red light therapy and cryotherapy. Members will find tanning, a sauna, full-service locker rooms with showers and Kids Crunch babysitting—a welcome perk for parents trying to fit in a workout without arranging separate childcare.

Memberships start at \$9.99 per month, and

Crunch Fort Walton Beach will offer an exclusive, limited-time promotion for founding members. The first 500 members can join for only \$1 and receive their first month free, a limited-edition founding member T-shirt and free Crunch swag, to be part of this Founding 500 group reserve your rate here. Prospective members can also enter

to win one of 10 free one-year memberships info.crunch.com/sweepstakes-presale?club=821.

Local businesses can get involved, too. Crunch's Corporate Membership and Perk Partners programs offer employee discounts and opportunities for small businesses to reach members through the Crunch app, in-club events, gym TVs and social media. Partnership information is available at fitfusion-team.com/crunch-partnerships.

Think Crunch sounds like a great place to work? Explore career opportunities at fitfusion-team.com/careers.

Whether your ideal workout is Pilates, heavy lifting, hot yoga, a quick circuit or simply 30 minutes to yourself while the kids are nearby, Crunch is preparing to offer our Gulf Coast communities plenty of ways to move—and a little more fun while doing it.

To learn more visit:

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 Wellness


A New Chapter in Feeling Your Best

By DR. RICHARD CHERN, MD

Life can feel different when your energy, motivation, sleep, mood, or sense of vitality changes. For some men and women, those changes may be connected to shifting hormone levels. That's why more people are exploring options such as

bioidentical hormone therapy (BHT) pellets as part of a personalized approach to feeling better.

BHT pellets are small implants placed under the skin by a qualified healthcare professional. They can provide a steady release of hormones

over time, rather than requiring daily applications or frequent dosing. For appropriate patients, hormone therapy may help address certain symptoms associated with hormone deficiency or menopause and may support improvements in overall well-being.

But feeling better isn't simply about taking a pellet—it's about finding the right treatment for you. At the Hormone Restoration center we can review your symptoms, medical history, laboratory results, and individual goals to determine whether hormone therapy is appropriate.

Imagine approaching each day with renewed confidence:

having the energy to stay active, the focus to pursue your goals, and the motivation to make the most of the life you've built. The right treatment plan can be one piece of a broader commitment to wellness.

If you've been feeling unlike yourself, don't assume you simply have to accept it as part of getting older. Schedule a consultation by calling (850)837-1271. Together, we'll determine whether BHT pellets—or another treatment option—may be right for you.

Your best chapter may still be ahead.



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BEST IN DESTIN 

ACUPUNCTURE

continued from page 4

nervous, hormonal, immune and musculoskeletal systems are deeply interconnected.

That interconnectedness is one reason acupuncture can fit naturally within a broader health plan.

A Specialized Approach to Neurological Care

One of the most fascinating developments within the field is neuroacupuncture.

Neuroacupuncture is not simply traditional acupuncture applied to someone with a neurological diagnosis. It requires advanced specialized education integrating acupuncture techniques with detailed study of neurological anatomy, function and rehabilitation.

This specialized approach may be incorporated into care for people navigating Parkinson's disease, neuropathy, vertigo, stroke recovery and other neurological conditions, as well as PTSD, autism, ADHD, anxiety and complex neuropsychiatric concerns.

Many of these patients already have neurologists, psychiatrists, therapists or rehabilitation specialists involved in their care. The goal is not to replace those relationships. A more useful question is whether adding another appropriate modality may help support function, symptom management and quality of life, particularly when recovery has plateaued or symptoms persist despite appropriate treatment.

Fertility and Women's Health

Fertility is another area where acupuncture can complement conventional care.

Some women incorporate acupuncture while trying to conceive naturally, while others use it alongside care from an OB/GYN or reproductive endocrinologist. Treatment may also address accompanying concerns such as stress, sleep or menstrual symptoms during what can be a physically and emotionally demanding process.

It illustrates an important point: patients don't necessarily have to choose between two worlds of healthcare.

Where Could Acupuncture Fit for You?

Perhaps you're living with persistent pain. You're sleeping but rarely waking refreshed. Your headaches have become too frequent. Stress is affecting your digestion. You're navigating fertility treatment or lingering symptoms after COVID. Or perhaps you or someone you love is managing Parkinson's, vertigo, neuropathy, stroke recovery or another complex neurological concern.

These are very different reasons to consider acupuncture. And that's precisely the point.

The best healthcare doesn't always require choosing one approach over another. Sometimes it means understanding how much more we may be able to accomplish when we thoughtfully bring different disciplines together.

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If you’ve ever felt overwhelmed by conflicting nutrition advice or discouraged by the number on the scale, you’re not alone. At **Miramar Beach Strength & Conditioning**, we believe lasting results begin with understanding your body—not relying on guesswork.

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yond meal plans. We take a personalized, whole-health approach that addresses the foundations of lasting wellness: nutrition, sleep, daily movement, stress management, exercise, and accountability. Every client receives a customized plan built around their lifestyle and goals—whether they want to lose body fat, improve health

markers, build confidence, or simply feel better every day.

One of the most valuable tools we offer is the InBody Body Composition Scan. Unlike a traditional scale or BMI measurement, an InBody scan provides a detailed breakdown of your muscle, body fat, and water levels—giving you a clearer, more meaningful picture of

your progress. You’ll see exactly what you’re gaining, losing, or maintaining, so your next steps can be guided by real data.

Ready to get started? We’re offering a complimentary InBody scan. Simply scan the QR code in our advertisement to schedule your appointment and book a discovery call. You’ll meet with one of our expert

coaches, gain valuable insight into your body, and receive personalized guidance for reaching your health and wellness goals.

Your healthiest, strongest self starts with understanding where you are today. Let us help you take the first step.



DOG HARMONY

continued from page 1

were already visiting libraries and working with children. “It’s so funny in life how things just all come together of what you’re meant to do.”

Today, Dog-Harmony carries that work into schools and libraries across North-west Florida through evaluated therapy dog teams, literacy programming and humane education.

The need remains real. According to the Florida Department of Education, 61% of Florida students in grades 3 through 10 scored Level 3 or above in ELA/Reading at the end of the 2025-26 school year. Okaloosa County reached 65%, Walton County 70% and Bay County 61%. Encouraging numbers, but ones that still leave thousands of local children with ground to gain.

Nationally, only 31% of American fourth graders performed at or above NAEP Proficient in reading in 2024.

Bown believes dogs can help change that story. “I know the good we’re doing,” she said. “I know we’re reducing anxiety. I know that we increased our literacy rate by using those reading education assistance dogs.”

In the first six months of 2026, Dog-Harmony’s therapy teams provided 994 hours of service across three pillars: Youth Mental Health and Crisis Intervention, Literacy Advancement and Educational Enrichment, and Adult Wellness and Healthcare Support. Of those hours, 279 were devoted to literacy and educational enrichment in local schools and libraries. Together, those 994 hours represent nearly \$100,000 in community investment.

That breadth matters because Dog-Harmony can be easy to misunderstand.



Yes, there are wagging tails, wet noses and photographs that make people smile. But behind those moments is serious community work.

Evaluated therapy teams walk into schools where children are struggling to find confidence in their own voices. They support youth experiencing anxiety and crisis. They enter healthcare facilities where patients and frontline workers are carrying difficult days. Through literacy and humane education programs, children are also learning compassion, empathy and respect.

The dogs may make the work look effortless. It is anything but.

On Oct. 30, Dog-Harmony’s 11th Annual Barktoberfest returns to Grand Park at Grand Boulevard at Sandestin from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. The organization’s primary fundraiser will feature its beloved dog costume contest, music, light bites, libations and a canine-only trick-or-treat celebration.

Barktoberfest matters, but Dog-Harmony’s mission cannot be sustained by one night alone. When the costumes come off, another child still needs encouragement. Another therapy team still walks through the doors of a school, youth program or healthcare facility.

The work continues. So must the support.

Recurring gifts, sponsorships, volunteers and community advocates allow Dog-Harmony to keep showing up where the human-canine bond can do the

most good. “When you support our mission, your generosity does not just stay within our walls, it ripples out across our entire community,” Bown said.

Perhaps nowhere is that ripple easier to imagine than beside a child with a book.

One child. One difficult word. And one patient dog who does not care how long it takes.

Then another word. Another page.

And, little by little, a child who begins to believe, I can do this.

To learn more about Dog-Harmony’s literacy and library programs, Barktoberfest, volunteer opportunities and ways to provide year-round support, visit Dog-Harmony’s website. www.dog-harmony.org.

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 Wellness

Self-Care Corner: **Get Fall-Event Ready**

Seasonal Specials at Beverly Hills Day Spa – Now through September 30

BY KRISY ANDERSON

Fall on our Emerald Coast means a packed calendar of festivals, concerts, galas, holiday celebrations and gatherings. From seafood feasts on the harbor to art festivals, charity events and seasonal parties, there are plenty of reasons to step out—so now is the time to get in and make sure you look and feel your best.

Whether you’re suiting up or slipping into your favorite dress, Beverly Hills Day Spa has created indulgent specials for both men and women who want to refresh, recharge and arrive event-ready.

Relax with a **60-minute Swedish Massage**, complete with a back and foot scrub and soothing hot towels, for just \$95. Rejuvenate tired skin with an **Anti-Aging Facial** and complimentary eyebrow wax and cleanup for \$100. For a radiant, camera-ready glow, the **Glow O2 Facial** includes 10 minutes of Red Light Therapy for \$150, leaving you refreshed and luminous.

If deep tension is slowing you down, try a 60-minute **Deep Tissue Massage** paired with a free back facial for \$100. For head-to-toe indulgence, choose the 90-minute **Ultimate Mas-**



sage Experience, featuring essential oils, hot stones and warm towels, for \$150. Even your feet can receive 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 preparing for a busy fall season should feel as indulgent as it sounds.

Fall Special: Enjoy 10% off Custom Skincare products now through September 30.

Let’s be honest: After getting everyone else ready for school and preparing for the season ahead, a spa day might be exactly what you need.

Fall events and holiday gatherings will be here before you know it. Get in, get refreshed and get ready to look as good as you feel.



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Destin Physicians Offer Individualized Health Insights

Two esteemed physicians have opened MDVIP-affiliated practices in Destin and they are currently accepting new patients.

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 availability. 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.

Drs. Loudermilk and Pappas

are currently accepting new patients. Learn more about the attentive, personalized care they

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The Electro Magnetic Field



BY KAY LEAMAN HEALTH
ARCHITECT, CERTIFIED
NUTRITION AND SKIN ADVISOR

Also known as EMFs, these unseen waves have been extensively debated as far back as Thomas Edison. They exist in everything from power lines to cell phones, appliances to batteries. The electromagnetic fields are typically classified as low-frequency, 0-300 Hz, such as power lines and appliances up to high-frequency, 10 MHz-300 GHz, such as mobile phones and microwave ovens.

Radiation does not accumulate in the body in the same way that some substances do. However, it can cause damage to cells and DNA when absorbed. The body can repair some of this damage.

Repeated exposure to radiation can increase the risk of

long-term health effects, such as cancer.

Low-frequency fields may induce weak currents in tissues, affecting neural and muscular systems. High-frequency fields on the other hand are linked to both thermal and non-thermal effects, including oxidative stress, calcium overload, and cellular dysfunction.

Below is a list of affected areas based on low to high frequencies:

- (Earth's EMFs) Brain orientation, plant growth direction and circadian system
- Nervous, muscular and cardiovascular systems
- Cellular stress
- Organ level functions
- Endocrine disruptions
- Reproductive system
- Oxidative systems
- Circadian regulation
- Neuronal oscillation

Documented impacts from a study (2017-2024) include effects on humans, animals, and plants, targeting various cell types (e.g., blood, cancer, thyroid, cochlea), genotoxicity, cardiovascular parameters (e.g., heart rate, blood pressure), male fertility (e.g., testes, sperm), neuronal brain activity, and photo-



synthesis in plants. The findings demonstrated that EMFs negatively affect a wide array of biological systems of living organisms, including mechanisms of oxidative stress, inflammatory responses, and disruptions in cellular, physiological, and ecological processes.

While radiation does not accumulate in the body, some forms of radiation can damage cells and DNA after sufficient energy is absorbed. Ionizing radiation, including X-rays and gamma rays, can break DNA directly or through the production of reactive molecules. Ultraviolet radiation can also create DNA lesions. Radiofrequency EMFs from cell phones, Wi-Fi, and household appliances are non-ionizing and do not have enough photon energy to break DNA directly. Although some laboratory and animal studies have reported DNA damage under particular exposure conditions, the results are inconsistent and do not establish that ordinary, low-level radiofrequency exposure causes DNA damage

or cancer in humans.

So, basically, radiation itself does not accumulate in the body, but unrepaired or incorrectly repaired DNA damage can persist. The body is able to repair some of this damage. However, repeated exposure to some of these types of radiation can increase the risk of long-term health effects, such as cancer and inflammation. Many believe inflammation is a root cause of all disease.

Did you know? In electric and hybrid vehicles, the highest concentration of EMFs is sometimes found in the back seat (where your kids sit). Though available research has generally found in-vehicle exposure levels to be within established safety guidelines, cars today, in general, have more EMF emissions in part due to the increase of electronic systems that produce electromagnetic fields.

So, what can we do? Being mindful and informed is the first step. As it goes with health, every step we take makes a difference and these accumulating

steps can make a big impact on our health.

If you would like to reduce your everyday exposure as a precaution, consider some practical measures:

- Don't stand in front of the microwave. Inspect it regularly. Do not use it if the door, hinges, latch, or seals are damaged.
- Stop putting your cell phone to your ear when talking. Use the speaker.
- Don't keep your bluetooth ear buds in constantly. Give your head an EMF break.
- Don't wear your cell phone. Put it in your purse or choose the side pocket of cargo pants so that it does not come in direct contact with your organs. Note: My friend who was diagnosed with breast cancer was told two things: stop storing your phone in your bra and stop using deodorant containing aluminum. You can also purchase a case that has a lining in it which blocks the EMF's (this is the side that would be against your body.)
- Reduce the EMFs in the bedrooms. Take the TV out, put your phone in the drawer, etc. Your TV may be off but it continues to emit EMFs as does any appliance that is plugged in, including lamps.
- Don't work with your computer on your lap. You can purchase a protective case or place it on a pillow or box or book to separate it from your body.
- Turn off or unplug electronic devices when they are not needed. This may reduce energy use as well as unnecessary exposure.

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Tell Me You're Stressed Without Telling Me You're Stressed



BY STEPHENIE CRAIG,
JOURNEY BRAVELY

I was sitting at the kitchen counter putting together the Fall family calendar when I realized Summer is over and life is about to get very busy. I got up to get a snack and before I knew it, I had cleaned out the entire pantry and then moved on to the refrigerator. The deep cleaning went on the rest of the night and the following morning when the stress energy subsided. When I start deep cleaning, my family starts asking, "What's wrong? Are you upset about something?" It's a known family fact that one of my stress behaviors is passionate cleaning.

While stress is a year-round struggle, Fall is a high stress season when school, activities, and commitments pick up pace after having a break during Summer. It can be difficult to get your brain and body back on board with the alarm clock, the car pools, the games, the homework, and all of the other Fall things that need to be done. Sometimes it's obvious when you're stressed and other times you can carry stress under the radar, not realizing you're stressed until you become irritable with others, feel pain in your body, or you get physically sick.

When is the last time you were stressed? Do you tend to know when you are stressed or do others in your life tend to point it out to you?

Awareness of your stress level and skills to regulate stress are valuable tools for navigating daily life. Lacking awareness of stress can lead to poor relationship behavior, forgetting to care for yourself physically, emotional distress, stalled motivation, and lack of regular enjoyment.

Sometimes you can predict stress like in the case of Back to

School season and other times stress surprises you out of nowhere on an otherwise sunny day. Commonly, the first life structures to become compromised during stress are what you eat, whether you move your body, and your quality of sleep. Letting these foundational structures go often feeds stress and creates a cycle that can be hard to stop.

All people have stress behaviors. Some common stress signs are grumpiness, irritability, anxiety, exhaustion, driving angry, rushing, slamming things, sighing, carrying excessive body tension, headaches, stomachaches, and avoidance. When stress sets in, most people have go to strategies both healthy and unhealthy for managing stress. Some common strategies include drinking alcohol, shopping/spending, gambling, sleeping, scrolling, controlling, eating excessively, and restricting food. Other strategies include cleaning, music, journaling, dancing, creating art, walking, running, gym workouts, sitting at the water, talking to a friend, and spiritual practices.

Knowing your personal signs of stress and understanding how to be more intentional in managing stress can be life changing. So how do you do it?

7 Ways to Identify and Manage Stress

1. Notice your stress cues. Where do you experience stress in your body? Check in with your stomach, chest, breathing, neck, shoulders. Notice intensity of body move-



ments, tone of voice, words you are using. Try making a list of your top 3-5 signs of stress like "jaw grinding, cussing in my head or out loud, audible sighing."

2. Rate your stress on a scale of 1-10. Notice if you are mildly, moderately, or intensely stressed and try to assign a number.

3. Reflect on what is causing the stress and whether there is meaningful action you can take to reduce stress like having a conversation, using stress management tools, or setting a boundary.

4. Notice stress management behaviors you gravitate toward. Do you want to drink, clean, sleep, scroll or something else?

5. Evaluate the health of your stress management behaviors. Ask yourself, "Is drinking, cleaning, shopping or scrolling going to help reduce my stress? Is this behavior going to cause me secondary problems later like a hang over or a hit to my bank account." If you deter-

ondary problems later. Examples include: deep breathing, saying no, exercising, talking to a trusted friend, or sitting in nature.

7. Use your healthy stress management tools until your stress level is down to a reasonable level on your rating scale. Many people find 4 or below manageable on a scale of 1-10.

Repeating consistent, healthy stress identification and management can change the overall quality of your life for the better. Repetition creates new patterns in your brain so be patient and consistent. Connect with us at Journeybravely.com for counseling and coaching support along your journey.



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Beyond the Festivals: An October Weekend for Big Ideas

By LORI LEATH MILLER

October on the Emerald Coast does not exactly slow down. If anything, the local calendar shifts into another gear.

Weekends fill with festivals, concerts, food events and community celebrations. In that busy fall lineup, the 27th Annual Emerald Coast Home & Boat Show offers something distinctly different: a weekend devoted to the homes we maintain, the projects we imagine and the outdoor lifestyle that makes this area home.

The show returns Saturday and Sunday, **Oct. 10-11**, to the **Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center**. Admis-

sion is FREE, and the doors will be open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sunday.

Inside, more than 100 home and general business vendors will offer ideas for projects large and small. Some attendees may arrive with renovation plans and lists of questions. Others may come simply to see what is new and leave thinking differently about a kitchen, backyard or long-postponed repair.

That is part of what separates the Home & Boat Show from many other October events. It is a place to ask questions, handle materials, compare options and talk face-to-face with profession-



als who understand homes and businesses along the Emerald Coast.

Exhibitors will represent nearly every corner of homeownership, including roofing, plumbing, heating and air conditioning, flooring, furniture, windows, doors, generators and landscaping. Visitors can also meet professionals specializing in pools and spas, shutters, painting, restoration, remodeling and interior design.

Kitchen and bath projects will have a strong presence, along with information about insurance, mortgages and solar energy. Bringing so many specialists together gives residents an opportunity to explore several ideas without scheduling appointments all over town.

General business and retail exhibitors will also introduce products and services ranging from computers and mobile phones to health and wellness, including chiropractic care, hearing services and massage therapy.

Outside, the focus moves



from the home to the water and the open road.

Emerald Coast Marine, Captains Choice Boats and Camping World are scheduled to bring boats and recreational vehicles to the convention center grounds for a combined display and sale. Guests can step aboard, look around and imagine their next fishing trip, family outing or road-bound adventure.

That combination feels especially at home in Northwest Florida, where home improvement and outdoor living often overlap. A renovated patio may be where fishing stories are told. New storage may be designed around paddleboards and beach gear. A boat or RV may represent not simply a purchase, but weekends with family and friends.

The event is organized by Wes Fell, a 36-year resident of the Destin-Fort Walton Beach area. Fell moved to Northwest Florida from Louisville, Kentucky, in 1990 and has since organized home and boat shows, business expos, health and job

airs, networking events and music festivals throughout the area.

He also supports Networks of Northwest Florida, a free business-networking organization, and has promoted the Paradise Music Festival and other community events.

For Fell, the Home & Boat Show continues a tradition of bringing local businesses and residents together. Companies can explain what they do while homeowners move beyond online searches and speak directly with people who may help bring a project to life.

In an October filled with entertainment, the show offers a different kind of outing — one that may begin with a few hours of browsing and end with the first real step toward a new idea.

The show will be held at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center, 1250 Miracle Strip Parkway SE in Fort Walton Beach. Look for our Life Media table, come by to say hi and register for a FREE giveaway!

For more information, contact Wes Fell at **850-353-2832** or wesfell@cox.net, or visit **ParadisePromotionsFL.com**. Businesses interested in exhibiting may also ask about booth space and the 10% Life Media reader discount.



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Sean of the South: Dearest Morgan



BY SEAN DIETRICH

Dearest Morgan,
It's four in the morning. And I'm awake. Just sitting here. Thinking about you.

I haven't slept since your last text. Your text about how doctors placed you under hospice care. Your text asking me to come say one last goodbye.

Here I am, in the dark of morning, sitting in my kitchen. Lost.

And for some reason, I'm thinking about the thief on the cross. The Sunday school story about the remorseful thief who hung crucified next to the Humble Nazarene. Remember him? I'm thinking about how in his final moments of life, life became so clear to him.

Right now, I feel a little like that thief. I'm thinking about the impact you've had on my life. Thinking about all the little ways I have changed since we first met. So many changes. Too many changes to count.

Beautiful little changes. Millions of them.

Like the way I say "yes" to stuff now. Even stuff I don't want to do. I choose yes instead of no. I say yes to friends' schemes more often, whereas once upon a time I wouldn't have. I do this because it was you who once told me, shortly after you almost died, "I've learned to ALWAYS say yes to fun, especially when it's bad timing."

You were 19 when you said that.

Also, I work less now. Because it was you who once told me—and you said this while attached to life support—you said: "I've learned that life is not about how hard you work."

I also hang out with people more often now, even when I don't feel like peopling or being social. Because you once told me, after one of your near-death experiences, you said you learned that life itself wasn't the

main gift. You realized people were the gift.

I use my phone less. I listen more. I strike up conversations in the supermarket with random people, anyone who seems like they want to talk.

And, not least of all, I pay more attention to the food I eat while I'm eating it. I try to consciously enjoy every bite. I FORCE myself to be aware, noticing how amazing this gift of food is. How delicious. How beautifully sacred food is. How amazing food feels in my mouth, and how privileged I am to be eating it.

I do this because I once watched you eat a supper consisting of only five tater tots. You were still attached to your TPN line, the life support system that feeds you through your bloodstream; you hadn't eaten an actual meal for a long time. Your teeth ached because they hadn't been used. Your stomach was burning because it had been empty for literally years.

But you could tolerate five tater tots.

And so you did not waste them. You ate slowly, savoring each bite, spending upwards of half an hour enjoying them. I watched you in a kind of dazed wonder. Namely, because you experienced more enjoyment from five tater tots than I've ever derived from a single Thanksgiving feast.

Those are just some of the lessons you taught me. Just a few of the changes you brought to my life. Each minor change, like poking a hole in my Canopy of Existence, thereby letting more sunlight through.

You see, a man can go through life so hidden from the sunlight that he forgets the light

is even there. He lives in darkness, with scales over his eyes, hidden from the noble truths that govern all things. He gets lost. He loses his bearings. His priorities get out of whack.

But no matter how confused he gets, no matter how screwed-up, Heaven always sends him a guide. This messenger is often disguised for man's benefit. For man is too dense to recognize God. But beneath the guide's flesh-and-blood cloak is the beating heart of an ancient master. Someone sent to earth to point the way home. Someone to show us how to love. How to forgive. Someone to knead, shape, and bake our daily bread.

You were that teacher to me.

It's funny how you remember significant moments in life. The moments which, at the time, you did not find significant at all. They just seemed like average moments. You had no idea these moments were divine when they were happening. But



Your smile, electric. You were just a kid.

"Who is she?" I asked someone.

My liaison got this warm look all over their face. "Oh, that's Morgan."

And I'll never forget the tone they used to say those three simple words. It was the same tone of voice a grandmother uses when removing a sheet pan from the oven, saying, "Wait until you try these brownies."

You and I talked. And that's when I learned your story. You told me how a stroke left you paralyzed. How your intestines were paralyzed. Your leg. Your arm. Your hand. You told me about your epilepsy. About your near-fatal diabetic adventures. About your blindness.

And the whole time we talked, I felt chill bumps. All over. Like, actual gooseflesh. I held back tears.

You could not have known what I was going through at the time. I was undergoing a very difficult period in my own life. Maybe the worst period I've ever experienced.

But after our meeting, I felt lighter. I felt peaceful. I knew, somehow, that something had happened to me. Something divine. Granted, I was too stu-

Continued on page 43

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A Pastor's Ponderings: Heaven Heard Two Small Coins

BY DAVE HOLLAND

As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins... "All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put

in all she had to live on." —Luke 21:1-4 (NIV)

More than once, my mother marshaled us older children into searching the house for enough loose change to buy milk for my

baby brothers. After the food stamps and welfare money were gone, we looked beneath couch cushions and swept floors, desperate to find a few forgotten coins. So when Jesus spoke of a widow giving two tiny copper

coins, I knew something about her world.

After silencing His critics in the Temple, Jesus lingered and watched people bring their offerings. Thirteen brass collection boxes stood nearby. As coins dropped through their openings, they rang against the metal, each gift announcing itself.

Some gave generously from their abundance. Then a poor widow stepped forward and dropped in two tiny lepta—the smallest coins in circulation, worth only a fraction of a penny. Larger offerings may have drowned out their sound, but Heaven heard them.

While everyone else noticed the amount, Jesus perceived the heart.

The wealthy gave from their surplus, but the widow gave out of her poverty. Her offering was more than money; it was an act of surrender. She seemed to say, "Lord, I have little, but what I have belongs to You."

Jesus commended her because her gift demonstrated wholehearted trust and genuine sacri-

fice. Others gave what they could comfortably afford. She gave what she could not comfortably spare.

That is the difference between generosity and sacrifice.

God is not primarily interested in our money. He desires our hearts. Yet our giving often reveals what our hearts truly treasure.

The Lord taught me this during one of the darkest seasons of my life. Following my divorce, I had lost my marriage, my ministry of twenty-five years, my home, and my financial security.

While waiting at LAX Airport for my daughter to pick me up, I reached into my pocket and found my LAST twenty dollars. Shortly afterward, a woman approached asking for donations to support a halfway house for recovering drug addicts.

A quiet voice whispered to my heart, Give her the twenty dollars.

I hesitated, then placed the bill in her hand.

Continued on page 46



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ECTC Kicks Off Season 14 with the Tony Award Winning Musical, "Come From Away," Sept. 10–27



BY CAMERON HUGHES

Emerald Coast Theatre Company (ECTC) opens its landmark 14th season with the critically acclaimed musical *Come From Away*. Celebrating compassion, community and the triumph of the human spirit, this inspiring true story runs from Sept. 10 – Sept. 27, at ECTC's theater in Grand Boulevard. Performances are held Thursday through Saturday at 7 p.m., with matinees on Wednesdays and Thursdays at 1 p.m., and Sundays at 2 p.m.

Based on the events following the September 11 attacks, *Come From Away* shares the remarkable story of 7,000 air passengers stranded in a small Canadian town, Gander, after US airspace was shut down. The local residents open their homes and hearts to strangers from all over the globe known as "come

from aways," turning a tragedy into a display of kindness and unity.

"Opening our 14th season with *Come From Away* sets a powerful tone for what ECTC is all about: storytelling that unites, uplifts and connects our community," said Nathanael Fisher, Producing Artistic Director. "It's a high-energy show with a foot-tapping score that reminds us of the profound impact that hospitality and human kindness can make."

The talented cast features several returning favorites including Darla Briganti, who returns as Beulah, previously seen as Leona Silva in *Mystic Pizza*, Princess Dragomiroff in *Murder on the Orient Express*, Genie Klein (Carole King's mother) in *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical* and Miss Hannigan in *Annie*. Joining her is Teresa Lombardi, who takes on the roles of Hannah/Margie after cracking audiences up with her Portuguese accent as Mrs. Araujo in *Mystic Pizza*. Rebeca Lake returns to the ECTC stage as Diane/Crystal, most recently seen on stage as Greta Ohlsson in *Murder on the Orient Express*. Adam Silorey returns as Kevin, following his standout performances as Phileas Fogg in *Around the World in 80 Days*,

Zeus in *Xanadu*, as well as Aaron in *First Date*, and Zachary Ryan returns to the stage as Claude, having previously played Barry Mann in *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical*.

Produced right here on the Emerald Coast, the creative team includes Nathanael Fisher as Director, Emily Bainbridge as Choreographer, Rebeca Lake as Scenic Designer, and Taylor Walker as Costume Designer. Tom Baroco returns as Music Director, joined by New York

City based Lighting Designer Matt Morris. Baroco and Morris most recently collaborated on Season 13's hit finale *Mystic Pizza*. Morris also designed the lighting for *Murder on the Orient Express*.

Performances will be held at Emerald Coast Theatre Company, located at 560 Grand Boulevard, Suite 200, Miramar Beach, FL.

ECTC's 2026–2027 season is made possible with generous support from Grand Boulevard

Town Center, St. Joe Community Foundation, Visit South Walton, Howard Group, and Jerry and Alice Zich.

To purchase tickets, make a tax-deductible donation, join as a VIP or sponsor to get the best of what Season 14 has to offer, or learn more about Emerald Coast Theatre Company, call (850) 684-0323 or visit emeraldcoasttheatre.org. Engage with ECTC on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube.

Savvy Leigh PHOTO

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

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2024

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DEAREST MORGAN

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pid to know WHAT happened, exactly. But I knew it was real. And even though I am no rocket scientist, I knew I wasn't wrong—even a broken clock is right twice per day.

After that encounter, I knew there was no going back for me. I knew we would be lifelong friends. Allies. Buddies. I knew that something had shifted in the cosmos. Something had happened.

Unto me a great light had shone. A gift had been given. A gift to all. To your family. Your friends. To me. To my wife. To the world. To everyone. And the gift was you.

I refuse to say goodbye, Morgan. I don't believe in goodbyes. For this life is an illusion. An intense dream. Nothing more. You taught me that. It is only

when one awakens from the dream, safely in the arms of the Gentle Nazarene, that real life shall begin.

I love you more than you'll ever know. And in the time that we will soon be apart, I will hold you in my bosom, every moment. Every day. Every breath. I only ask one favor of you, dearest Morgan. I ask that you remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.

Your forever friend,
—Sean

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.

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Arts & Music

SONGWRITERS

continued from page 2

music lover Destin Mayor Bobby Wagner what having Destin Songwriter Festival back for its second year means to him. “As someone who loves music, I see this festival as more than entertainment. It’s a chance for our locals to revel in the talent and for our visitors and vacationers to experience the spirit of Destin through both song and the beautiful backdrops of our harbor area and The Alice.”

Organizer and CEO Pennings also reminded me that while the festival is about music, it’s also about giving back. As such, a portion of the proceeds will benefit Operation Song, a 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to helping veterans, active-duty service members and their families tell their stories through songwriting — a mission that reminds us of the powerful connection between music and healing. Being a veteran-owned festival is something Pennings says he is especially proud of.

When I asked Pennings what he was most excited about in coming back for a second year of Destin Songwriter Festival, he enthusiastically said, “I couldn’t be prouder of how much this festival has grown in just one year. A huge part of that momentum comes from the incredible support of our presenting sponsor, Patriot Vodka, and North American Spirits Inc. Their belief in this festival and commitment to helping us bring it to life has been instrumental in taking us to the next level.



Destin Dresses Up for a Cause at Second Annual Mayor’s Charity Gala

Emerald Coast Entertainment Group will present the second annual Mayor’s Charity Gala from 5:30-10 p.m. Friday, Oct. 16, at Henderson Beach Resort in Destin.

The black-tie evening will bring together community leaders, businesses and supporters for cocktails, a plated dinner, live entertainment, a live auction, inspiring stories and community awards—all in support of Northwest Florida organizations.

Destin Mayor Bobby Wagner will deliver the opening welcome, with Bernard



Johnson and Shane Moody co-hosting the evening. Destin City Councilman Dewey Destin will receive the Mayor Mike Anderson Award for his

service and commitment to the community. Guest speaker Mark Wilson will be presented with the Community Appreciation Award.

Event proceeds will benefit Destin Parks Foundation, The Honor Foundation and Boys & Girls Clubs of the Emerald Coast.

Individual tickets are \$86 and include dinner, entertainment and live auction access with open seating. Table and event sponsorships are also available. For tickets and additional information, visit mayorcharitygalanwfl.com.



We’re incredibly grateful to have Patriot Vodka in our corner as we build something truly special that we believe can become a signature event for Destin. I want to encourage everyone to come out, experience it for yourself and help us continue building.”



Visit destinsongwriterfestival.com for the latest updates, ticket information, artist announcements and insider travel tips for making the most of your festival fun.

Will Estell is a writer, editor and entrepreneur whose 25-plus-year media career includes more than 750 regional and national articles and the launch of 12 magazines. Chief creative officer of Estell Hussey Media and CEO of 399 Ventures, he has written one-on-one features on Kenny Chesney, Darius Rucker, Alan Jackson, Florida Georgia Line, Sara Evans, the iconic Jimmy Buffett and dozens of other artists. He also consults for media entities nationwide and works in coastal real estate and development. A father of three from the backwoods of Booneville, Miss., Estell and his wife, WEAR ABC 3 news anchor Laura Hussey Estell, call Destin and Navarre home. He is a longtime regular contributor to Life Media’s family of publications.

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MKAF Names PCB Artist Jamie Babula 2026 Featured Festival of Arts Poster Artist

BY ZANDRA WOLFGRAM

Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation (MKAF) has named Jamie Babula of Panama City Beach as the Featured Poster Artist for the 31st Annual Festival of the Arts, set for Saturday and Sunday, Oct. 24-25, 2026, at the Mattie Kelly Dugas Pavilion Green in Destin.

Recognized as one of Northwest Florida's premier juried fine arts festivals, the two-day celebration brings together more than 100 acclaimed artists from across the country, along with live music, local cuisine, interactive children's activities and family-friendly entertainment.

Admission and parking are free.

For Babula, the honor represents the realization of a dream nearly three decades in the making. "I first attended the Festival when I was 16 years old and remember dreaming about exhibiting here someday," Babula says. "To now be selected as the Featured Poster Artist is

both an incredible honor and a little surreal."

At 44, Babula has spent nearly three decades inspired by the Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation Festival of the Arts. Known for her hyperrealistic colored-pencil drawings, the Panama City Beach artist creates remarkably lifelike works that often leave viewers questioning whether they're looking at a drawing or a photograph. A self-taught artist who later studied art at Gulf Coast State College, she has exhibited at the Festival numerous times and earned six MKAF Festival awards, including Best of Show, First Place, two Judges Recognition Awards and two Awards of Excellence.

Her featured artwork, Drawn to Paint (20 x 30 inches, colored pencil on paper), offers a fresh interpretation of the Festival's creative spirit. Rather than depicting a finished painting, Babula chose to draw an artist's palette featuring paint mixed to match the Mattie Kelly Arts



Foundation's signature colors, capturing the quiet moment before creation begins. "I thought, 'If I'm going to create the Festival poster, it still has to be me,'" Babula says. "I draw, so I drew the paint that would be used to create it."

Completed in approximately 60 to 70 hours using nearly 40 colored-pencil hues, the artwork reflects Babula's fascination with hyperrealism and her desire to spark curiosity. "I hope people stop, ask questions and wonder whether they're looking at a drawing or a photograph,"



she says. "If it makes them curious, then I've done my job."

As the annual Featured Poster Artist, Babula will receive a \$750 cash award, and the winning artwork will serve as the visual centerpiece of the Festival, appearing on the official Festival poster, Festival Guide, commemorative T-shirt, marketing campaign, website, social media and promotional materials throughout the year.

Festival attendees will have the opportunity to meet Babula, view Drawn to Paint on display and shop her collection of original artwork throughout the weekend. The original art-

work will be included in a Silent Auction to benefit MKAF. The auction will be live during the Festival for those who would like to bid on it.

More than 100 artists from across the United States will compete for more than \$10,000 in cash awards in 18 categories, including Best in Show and the People's Choice Award. Guests also can enjoy live entertainment, artist demonstrations, hands-on children's activities, an art raffle, local food vendors, a beer and wine garden, and more.

Proceeds from the Festival benefit MKAF's ArtsReach education initiatives, which provide arts programming for K-12 students, individuals with special needs and members of the military community along the Emerald Coast.

For more information, sponsorship opportunities or to become a Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation member, visit MKAF.org or call (850) 650-2226.



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Ask Destinites: Fuel in the Harbor

This past month, a member of our Destinites Facebook group for locals (www.Facebook.com/groups/Destinites) posted the following:

Member Post:
“There is so much of this fuel (?) covering the harbor today. Won’t this be harmful to dolphins and other marine life?”
Here are some responses the member received:

1. Terrible. I don’t remember seeing that back when we had charter boats. That was so long ago—haha, 25 years.
2. There are more than 200 boat rentals on the harbor now. There’s one floating tiki or pontoon for every two visitors during the season, lol!
3. There are too many docks permitted in the harbor. That

is why the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) partnered with the City of Destin to conduct a comprehensive Destin Harbor Carrying Capacity Study. Released in early 2023, the study confirmed that vessel traffic and social capacities had officially been exceeded inside Destin Harbor, Crab Island, and the East Pass.

4. As long as there’s a permit, it doesn’t hurt wildlife. I learned that during the great Fourth of July fireworks debate.
5. It occurs accidentally when you overfill your fuel tank and when you have fuel or hydraulic fluid leaking into the bilge. Bilge pumps turn on to pump out any water that naturally finds its way into the vessel’s bilge compartment. They also activate if the

vessel starts taking on water in an emergency. Oil sheens like this one are, unfortunately, very common on the water. It comes with owning and operating a motor vessel. Just be thankful you’ve never experienced an older boat that leaks oil or fuel like a sieve! Newer vessels are a lot better for the environment in terms of leaking oil and gas. However, I applaud you for keeping an eye on our waterways.

6. And that was before the new docks were built on Noriega Point. Those docks should be removed now.

If you live in Destin or the surrounding area, I invite you to join our private, targeted Facebook group for locals and property owners at Facebook.com/

groups/Destinites. Established in October 2018, the group currently has more than 13,000 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.

HEAVEN

continued from page 42

Now I had nothing. Later that day, a friend invited me to lunch. As we finished eating, he shook my hand and quietly slipped me two hundred dollars. He knew nothing about my circumstances or the woman at the airport. He was simply obeying God’s prompting. Not long afterward, the Lord opened the door for meaningful employment and supplied my needs.

God reminded me that He is faithful.

The widow’s story is not about giving everything away hoping to receive more. It is about trusting the character of the One to whom we give. God knows our

needs better than we do. Jesus still notices small acts of trust—not because He needs our money, but because He loves our hearts.

The question is not simply, “How much did I give?” The deeper question is, “How much of myself have I entrusted to God?”

Dave Holland pastored churches for thirty-eight years before retiring in Destin, Florida. 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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