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FWB Life

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Holiday Happenings 'Round Town

Visits with Santa, Holiday Lights, Parades and Much More!

BY LORI LEATH SMITH

For many years, our piece of Paradise has ignited the holiday spirit in each of us and allowed the season to come to life for the young and young at heart. With a unique blend of theatrical storytelling, musical notes and beautiful and whimsical Christmas lights, we are welcomed into a world of yuletide nostalgia and local flavor and personalities where reindeer fly, sugarplums dance in our heads and Christmas comes alive in our own area, coastal style. I invite you to explore the vast, unique holiday traditions, some many years in the making and new ones to delight our senses and usher in the "reason for the season" – the celebrated birth of Jesus, our Savior. Join FWB Life in some of these holiday celebrations where you can create some new family traditions of your own while rekindling your favorites.

You can visit **St. Nick at The Village of Baytowne**



Wharf at his sleigh Weds. Dec. 7, 14 and 21 from 6-8 p.m. Tap your feet to some of your favorite sing-along classics each Wednesday during the holiday edition of the Wed. Night Concert Series. Dec. 7 – Gateway Academy and Fort Walton Beach

High School Choir; Dec. 14 – Niceville High School; Dec. 21 – Matt McCarty Band. Plus, visit with Santa from 5-7 p.m. Dec. 4 during Tuba Christmas! Visit baytowne-wharf.com.

Visit **Santa at Harbor-**

Walk Village weekends until Dec. 18 from 1-4 p.m.

Visit **Santa at Bass Pro Shop** at Destin Commons through Dec. 24. There are

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Heroes: The Horse Soldiers of ODA 595 (Part 1)

BY DOUG STAUFFER

Sept. 11, 2001: the first enemy attack upon American soil since Pearl Harbor. World attention immediately focused on the innocent victims of the attack and the first responders who gave the ultimate sacrifice. Until recently, another heroic part of the story remained classified and hidden from public view. The release of a Warner Bros. movie called "12 Strong" gave the world a glimpse into the secret missions that took place in the aftermath of 9/11. The film depicts the true story of the retaliatory attack by the first Special Forces soldiers entering Afghanistan.

These soldiers were tasked with a broad mission: defeat the Taliban; eliminate the terrorist haven in Afghanistan. The Special Forces team chosen to lead the offensive was the Operational Detachment-Alpha

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Magnolia Grill

Equal parts museum and dining establishment, the walls of this 1910 catalog house are covered with pieces of local history

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Community

SOLDIERS

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595 (ODA 595). The mission, expected to take several years, toppled the Taliban in just a matter of months. ODA 595 led an unconventional warfare campaign by partnering with indigenous forces to topple the terrorist-supporting Afghan government. The Western media appropriately labeled ODA 595 "The Horse Soldiers."

The Greater FWB Chamber of Commerce, with President and CEO Ted Corcoran at the helm, celebrated history by making history. The Fort Walton Beach gathering was the first time the Horse Soldiers reunited. Remarkable as that is, the Chamber is the only organization in the world to host the final reunion of the Doolittle Raiders in 2013 and the first reunion of the ODA 595 Horse Soldiers.

Backstory: conflicts have raged in Afghanistan for more than 100 years. Ethnic factions have been continuously at war. The ODA 595 operation was aptly described as a 19th century Afghan military using horse cavalry with 20th century weapons systems. When ODA

595 arrived, it added 21st century technology and the might of the most powerful nation on earth to eradicate the threat. The mission brought devastating air power with the full force of the United States military's advanced weapon systems. The mission of ODA 595 was not accomplished with tanks or mechanized vehicles but on horseback with only one man experienced with horses. Horseback riding lessons started as the men traveled through the treacherous terrain.

ODA 595 was inserted about 100 miles from Mazar-i-Sharif, which linked up with ethnic Uzbek fighters under Gen. Abdul Rashid Dostum. They had to earn Dostum's trust and help him capture Mazar-i-Sharif, opening a beachhead into the rest of the country.

Ted said the Chamber is no stranger to honoring our brave military heroes. Earlier this year, it held the Final Goblet Ceremony honoring the Doolittle Raiders. Just like the goblets for the Raiders, the Horse Soldiers will have silver canteen cups, the Army equivalent of goblets. The Chamber commissioned these mementos, which were unveiled at the banquet, with



PHOTOS BY TIM WOODRUM, EXCEPTIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY

the support of the local business community.

"The United States of America has been attacked twice," said Ted. "Pearl Harbor, with the first group to retaliate being The Doolittle Raiders. Sept. 11, 2001, with ODA 595 being the first in Afghanistan to defend our country. Brave bombers,

heroic horsemen." The Green Berets advised Afghan commanders for two months and directed a massive air campaign to rout the Taliban from power. This retaliatory mission is considered the most successful unconventional warfare campaign in modern history. It is hard to describe what it was like to meet

10 of the soldiers gathered together in the room.

New York City erected a statue near Ground Zero. It depicts a Special Forces soldier on horseback, honoring the special operations teams who headed into Afghanistan in the weeks following the 9/11 attacks. Now America has the Silver Canteen memorabilia to serve as a reminder, never to be forgotten. This is only the beginning of a historic story yet to be finished. (To be continued.)

HOLIDAY

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also free games, crafts and a free 4-by-6 professional photo with Santa, as well as a free digital download. To book, visit basspro.com.

Jolly Jubilee, a festive celebration of the holiday season, happens every Friday, Saturday and Sunday at **Destin Commons** through Dec. 24. Centered around the iconic 50' Christmas tree, there's magical free entertainment featuring Christmas carolers, local vocal groups, student ensembles, theatrical groups and more!

It's almost time for the **Ice Skating Extravaganza at The Village of Baytowne Wharf**, Fri., Dec. 2, 6-8 p.m. at the Baytowne skating pavilion. You can watch free, featured performances from well-known skaters at 6 and 7:30 p.m., who will also share tips and tricks. Before and in between the shows, lace up those skates and skate around with the pros. The Village of Baytowne Wharf's ice rink is open through Feb. 5. Hours vary daily. Visit BaytowneWharf.com.

It's **Fort Walton Beach Police Department's** biggest event of the year—**Winter Wonderland 2022**—Fri., Dec.

9, 2022 6-10 p.m. at Chester Pruitt Park, 15 Hollywood Blvd. NE. Bring a new, unwrapped toy which will benefit Toys for Tots. Stroll down Pallet House Ln., drink hot chocolate, meet Santa, and interact with your favorite local police department and businesses. Pallet houses will be decorated by the police department, city facilities, local businesses and charities! Each group decorates their own little holiday houses. There will be festive movies playing, local businesses present with games and giveaways, food trucks, music and much more!

"Keep a Little Christmas in Your Heart" with the

Fort Walton Beach Community Chorus as they sing through a lovely and humorous collection of Christmas songs sure to get you into the holiday spirit. From traditional tunes like "Silent Night" and "Away in a Manger" to more modern hand-clapping toe-tapping pieces like "The Big Guy in Red" and "Jingle All the Way," there is sure to be a song everyone in the family will enjoy. Shows: Fri., Dec. 9 at 7 p.m.; Sat., Dec. 10 at 7 p.m.; and Sun., Dec. 11 at 3 p.m. All shows held at Fort Walton Beach Civic Auditorium. Tickets: <https://fwbc-chorus.square.site>.

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FWB Chamber Honors the Horse Soldiers of Afghanistan: A Hero and His Extraordinary Family

BY KELLY MURPHY-REDD

A feminist focused on a degree and career, who didn't want marriage or children, meets a steely eyed, barrel-chested freedom fighter while skydiving. This story sounds like fiction, but it's the true-life adventure of an extraordinary family.

Dawn met U.S. Army Special Forces Sergeant Will Summers on May 4, 1997. They married two months later on July 4th. Dawn freely admits the marriage was rocky during the first couple of years. Will had filed for divorce and moved out, but God intervened. When Will and Dawn gave their lives to Christ, their marriage changed for the better and grew strong. Today, they have 11 children!

They did not set out to have 11 children or even a large family. Dawn and Will believe it was God's will and thank God for the freedom that comes from giving your entire life to Him. Life wasn't always easy or without struggles. Dawn had five miscarriages. However, she says the 25 ½ years of marriage and 22 years of pregnancy, nursing, and raising children have been the great joy of her life.

This former feminist, raised by her father, not knowing how to be a mother because she didn't grow up with a mother, says everything she was told about motherhood was a lie. Dawn enthusiastically refutes the notion motherhood takes from you. Instead, she describes the year 2000 and the birth of their first child as a wonderful time of wholeness. She felt so alive and had found her purpose.



Soon after Sept. 11, 2001, on October 19, 2001, Will left Dawn and their one-year-old and six-week-old children for a mission to Afghanistan. Dawn describes Will's "agonizing tension." Will wanted to stay with his family, but knew God made him a warrior. This was his moment. Like a racehorse at the gate, he was raring to go.

Knowing nothing about the

mission, Dawn wasn't scared because she trusted they were in God's hands. She remembers sitting in her car, holding the babies, and crying. She missed Will and thought about her children. Thankful to have them in her arms, she didn't feel alone. These little "Wills" were a comfort and never a burden. Though stressful caring for two babies with Will gone, she found

fulfillment and peace. Their church at Fort Campbell provided constant support.

Will was part of the 5th Special Forces Group's Operational Detachment Alpha 595, the first Special Forces group inserted into Afghanistan to topple the Taliban, who were providing a safe haven for Osama bin Laden. The mission was called Task Force Dagger, and they were told some of them might not come home. Having to use horses, not tanks or trucks, they had a crash course on horseback riding as soon as they arrived. The horses were not trained, Will's saddle was a cow's pelvic bone, and they had to jerry-rig the short stirrups with parachute cords. They worked with Afghan allies they didn't know if they could trust and trained and fought alongside the Northern Alliance.

Able to travel day or night, the horses allowed them to get around and behind the enemy, cutting them off from reinforcements or retreat. A critical function of the Special Forces team was to call in air strikes on the Taliban. The horses allowed them to find the enemy's position in the primitive and rugged terrain. This is how they became known as The Horse Soldiers of Afghanistan.

One evening, Dawn watched Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld on the news. He showed a picture of the Horse Soldiers. Dawn could swear she saw Will in the photo. Several weeks into the mission, she spoke with Will on a satellite phone. She told him what

she saw on the news. Will said, "Babe, we're making the news." Dawn said, "I knew that was you!"

Hollywood made a movie titled "12 Strong" about this extraordinary mission. Never imagining the mission would turn into a movie someday, Will feels humbled, saying hundreds of missions deserve to have movies made about them. He doesn't feel he deserves the accolades and says they were just doing the right thing.

Dawn explains that God was missing from the movie. Most of the soldiers in-country prayed together and memorized the first psalm. Will shared the gospel in Afghanistan by talking to imams about God's provision. They didn't understand, so he showed them scriptures. They had questions and kept com-

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Murphy-
Redd

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Certified Economic Developer
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There is Good News for All People



BY MELISSA FORTE-LITSCHER

As we head into the busyness of the holiday season and look towards the new year, many of us are hearing doomsday reports in the news and wondering what the future of real estate looks like. Well, according to Florida Realtors Chief Economist Dr. Brad O'Connor, "In terms of closed sales in Florida, 2022 started out a lot like 2021. But, soon, the shock of the rapid rise in mortgage rates caused many buyers to suspend their home searches and sit on the fence; some even had to drop out when their planned budget for a home couldn't keep pace. As a result, the second half of

2022 has seen the level of existing home sales in Florida more-or-less fall in line with the typical pre-pandemic seasonal trends." O'Connor added, "The fact that monthly sales still remain in the neighborhood of pre-pandemic levels despite today's significantly higher home prices and mortgage rates only illustrates that despite these headwinds, housing demand in Florida continues to receive support from its recent surge in post-pandemic in-migration, vacation home purchases, and the ever-increasing number of millennials looking to find a home for their growing families."

Locally, our numbers reflect a market returning to a more "normal" pace in Okaloosa County. In October, 418 properties sold, 1,297 properties were actively for sale, with a median time from listing to closing of 63 days, and a median sale price of \$345,000.00. The average sale price was also 11% higher than October of last year. These are numbers from all property types throughout the county,

and your favorite Realtor can help you with the numbers for specific types and cities which are of interest to you. A calmer market means your lenders, appraisers, inspectors and other industry professionals who help with your sale or purchase can provide their services without the hectic, high pressure we saw in the early months of this year. The good news is homes that are priced well for their location, condition and age are still selling.

If you are interested in selling your home, a recent article from realtor.com outlined tips homeowners can use to sell their homes in markets like this. You can offer an interest rate buy down. Higher mortgage rates mean monthly payments become more expensive, making some buyers hesitant to purchase real estate. You, the seller, pay money to the buyer's lender to lower (or "buy down") their interest rate to make their monthly payments more affordable, therefore more attractive to potential buyers. Repair big-ticket items if possible. In economic

uncertainty, many buyers are wary of buying homes that need expensive repairs, like a new roof or HVAC systems. If you want your home to sell, consider making those repairs either before you list or as part of your real estate deal. If this isn't possible for you, offering a home warranty or escrowing funds from the sale proceeds at closing could be an option that works for both parties. You can offer something unexpected. Sellers may need to think outside of the box to sell their property. One idea to grab buyer attention is to offer something unexpected with the real estate deal. This may be something physical like a new TV, or brand-new appliances, or maybe leaving the riding lawn mower. Or consider providing a year's worth of lawn service, housekeeping, or pest control. This is a gift that could sweeten a deal and help a new homeowner with costs that they may not have considered incurring.

If you are looking to purchase a home, the good news is there are more homes on the market

and more time to look at them and make an informed decision. But don't wait if you fall in love with one, someone else might as well. Sellers are also more willing to help with closing costs or prepaids during negotiations. And yes, the interest rates and home prices are higher than earlier in the year, so work closely with your team, your agent and lender, to find the best option for your situation.

Some tips for Buyers: Be honest with yourself and your lender about your finances, income and outgoing payments, don't forget the little things like cell phone bills. Be aware if some of your income is temporary, such as child support, that it might help you qualify now, but if it stops, ensure you will still be able to make your monthly commitments. If this is your first time purchasing a home, there are programs to help you get into a home with little money down, and there are areas of our county that you can purchase without a down pay-

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Melissa Forte-Litscher

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Community

HOLIDAY

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desk@bwb-marina.com

Sun., Dec. 18, 5:30 p.m., the annual 2022 **Niceville Valparaiso Rotary Club Christmas Boat Parade**, presented by Emerald Coast Marine, will feature a traditional display of fun onboard holiday-themed lights and decorations. Festivities include complimentary hot cocoa, a visit from Santa Claus, Mrs. Claus and the elves, provided by the Rotary. The parade route travels southwest from Emerald Coast Marine to Tom's Bayou, past Lincoln Park, then east toward Lions Park, returning back to Emerald Coast Marine. Boat entries are \$30 each. All proceeds raised will benefit Sharing and Caring Niceville. For more information, visit nicevillevalparaisorotary.org.

The **Village of Baytowne Wharf at Sandestin** will hold a special light show Wed., Fri. and Sat. nights Dec. 2-23 during the **12 Nights of Lights**. The tree lights in the events plaza will dance and blink to music at 6, 7 and 8 p.m. Visit Baytowne-Wharf.com.



Join **Sinfonia's Holiday Pops**, featuring The Doo Wop Project Dec. 9, 7:30 p.m. at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center. The Doo Wop

Project boys will get you into the holiday spirit! Hear old-school holiday classics like The Drifters' White Christmas, The Temptations' Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer, along with "Doowopified" contemporary hits like This Christmas and Last Christmas. It's sure to be a jolly good time! Tickets at SinfoniaGulfCoast.org.

The Annual 2022 **Fort Walton Beach Christmas Parade** is coming to town Monday, Dec. 5 at 6:30 p.m. and will start at the south end of Eglin Parkway and travel north to Uptown Station.

The **Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida** presents the **Yule of Yesteryear** Annual Christmas Event Sat., Dec. 10, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Gather together to enjoy the carols and other festivities after the Niceville Christmas Parade ends for free admission to the museum, food vendors, craft vendors, walton guard reenactors, school choir groups, bake sale, raffle ticket prizes, letters to Santa and more! 115 Westview Ave., Perine Park, Valparaiso.

The **EO Wilson Biophilia Center** will hold its **Winter Extravaganza** from 9 a.m.-2 p.m. Sat., Dec. 10. There will be a special visit from Santa, a hot chocolate bar, food trucks, games, and more. Please bring any canned food and nonperishable goods you can spare.

Enjoy a memorable family holiday experience at **LuLu's** (at the foot of the Mid-Bay Bridge) for its seventh annual **Billy Claus** free event Sun., Dec. 11, 1-3 p.m. Billy Claus is Santa's warm weather-loving brother who lives in the Carib-



bean, but comes this way every year to help Santa during the Holiday season. The **LuLuBelles** are Billy's version of Santa's elves. Billy will pass children's wishes on to Santa and will be available for photos. In addition to kid's arts and crafts activities, there will also be a reading of the children's book authored by Lucy Buffett, Billy Claus and the Spirit of Christmas. LulusFunFoodMusic.com/destin/ (850) 710-5858.

Put a little snark in your holiday spirit with **The Mean One** Dec. 16 at **The Village of Baytowne Wharf** at 5 p.m. Meet the maven of mischief himself for a photo opportunity from 5-7 p.m., then enjoy a movie showing of Dr. Seuss's *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* starting at 7 p.m. — a Who-liday spectacular!

Visit the **Festival of Trees at Grand Boulevard at Sandestin** through Christmas Day, an annual event in the park at Grand Boulevard shopping center showcasing uniquely decorated Christmas trees from 12 local, non-profit organizations. Participating non-profit organizations compete to win cash prizes totaling \$7,000 for beautifully decorated Christmas trees. Cast your vote for the People's Choice award.

Enjoy free **horse-drawn carriage rides** around the



Town Center at Grand Boulevard at Sandestin while taking in the **Coastal White Christmas** lights and the **Festival of the Trees** display. To add to the festivities, get a professional photo with Santa while listening to the seasonal sounds of the **Emerald Coast Theatre Company's Dickensian Carolers** singing popular holiday carols, Dec. 2 - 17 Fridays and Saturdays from 5 to 8 p.m.; Dec. 19 - 23 all week from 5 to 8 p.m.

Eden Gardens State Park will be illuminated Sat., Dec. 10, 5-8 p.m. More than 2,000 luminaries will light the garden paths of Eden Gardens at nightfall. The Historic Wesley House will be decorated for Christmas and visitors can see all the rooms decorated by local organizations from throughout the community. Music and carolers voices will fill the air throughout the evening and cookies and hot beverages will be provided by the Friends of Eden Gardens. The event is free and park entry fees will be waived from 5-8 p.m.

The **Destin Harbor** will dance with lights and cheer during the 36th Annual **Destin Boat Parade** Sun., Dec 11, 6-6:30 p.m. followed by a fireworks finale and fire spinning.

Main Street DeFuniak Springs brings back **Merry Main Street!** Free to attend,



Merry Main Street boasts live music and theatrical performances, an outdoor market, food trucks, rides on the Choctaw Express Train, visits with Santa and Mrs. Claus, kids character appearances and more family fun — all taking place outdoors along Baldwin Avenue in downtown DeFuniak Springs. Events occur every Friday and Saturday until Christmas. https://bit.ly/MSD_MerryMain, Info@mainstreetdfs.org (850) 296-9051.

Hosted by the **City of DeFuniak Springs** through New Year's Eve, Chipley Park lights up with the annual **Christmas Reflection Displays**, a light display like no other in our area with more than 10 million lights reflecting on the lake and throughout the park. You can view the lights by walking, driving or even taking a horse-drawn carriage ride. Admission is \$5 per person and children 5 and under are free. Fri.-Sat., 5:30 – 9:30 p.m.; Sun.-Thurs., 5:30-9 p.m. nightly. \$5 per person, free for children under 5, Tues. discount for military; \$10 for carload up to five people. Carriage rides are available on select nights. \$10/person. (850) 978-2999.

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Remember our Seniors During the Holidays

Caring for Those that Cared for Us

The holidays are here and once again, we are most thankful to live, work and play along the Emerald Coast. It is also time to remember to spend time with those that have cared for us. The holidays can be a depressing time for a lot of people, especially seniors. It tends to serve as a reminder about who is not there to celebrate anymore and how they cannot often go to where everyone else is gathering. Long-Term Care/Skilled Nursing and Assisted Living facilities often have seniors without any extend-

ed family in the area. Little to no visitors, birthdays and holidays often leaves an empty feeling for our aging population. While caregivers do their best to make every occasion special, having a visitor, friend and/or family member visit makes all the difference in the world to each individual. It is human nature to feel loved, appreciated and cared for.

One reason why the holidays are so important to seniors, is they give them time to reflect on their lives. Looking through photo albums is a great way to

reminisce about the past. Taking time to look at photos and ask questions creates an opportunity for one to “tell a story.” Becoming a “senior” is an achievement in life. We need to remind them how blessed they are and how much richer our lives are for spending time with them.

Perhaps it is time to start a new tradition this holiday season and carry it through 2023. All facilities have a volunteer program. Have you considered including in your holiday plans to adopt a “grandmother or grandfather”



in a facility? Maybe your church or civic group would be interested in volunteering and spending time with seniors. Spare a little time to help bring joy to others during this joyous time of the year.

Perhaps this holiday season is your year to “make a difference” the lives of others. Happy Holidays!

~Teresa Halverson
Director of Business Development
& Community Relations
The Manor at Blue Water Bay

HORSE SOLDIER

continued from page 3

ing back to talk with him. Their leaders soon stopped them, but God had opened a door for soldiers to bring God into a godless place.

Something had died in Will when he retired from the U.S. Army. Dawn says he had a renewed sense of the mighty man he was after seeing the movie. She believes the movie was God’s way of providing a chance for the Horse Soldiers to unify again. It was time for them to rise. Together, they examined a few business ideas and landed on making bourbon. Horse Soldier Bourbon has allowed Dawn to work alongside Will as a co-promoter of the product. They lived in Navarre for a time and then moved to Texas where they run a dairy farm. Will is the Texas regional manager for Horse Soldier Bourbon.

The Horse Soldier statue stands at the 911 Memorial in New York City. The Port Authority held back some I-beams from the World Trade Center and gave one to the Horse Soldiers. They used part of the I-beam to create a monument at the Horse

Soldier Bourbon headquarters in St. Petersburg, Florida. The other part was melted down to make the Horse Soldier Bourbon bottle mold. Each bottle sold has touched ground zero steel.

The Summers’ 11 children think their dad is awesome and a fantastic father. They love his stories. Dawn says he has amazing storytelling skills. She has homeschooled their children. They are older now and go with Will to events to support him. Dawn loves that they see their dad being a successful businessman. The children present themselves as confident. They look you in the eye and are engaging, intelligent, and polite.

Dawn maintains she couldn’t have done what she’s done without Will’s leadership. She says that leadership doesn’t mean everyone will agree with you. “In our differences, we can come together to fulfill God’s vision for our family,” Dawn explains.

She describes the FWB Chamber’s Horse Soldier event as a gift. A family of 11 can’t afford vacations or dinners out. Sponsoring the Horse Soldiers and their families gave them a once-in-a-lifetime experience they will never forget. The event

was a chance to teach their children about the generosity and kindness of a community. Dawn feels it is a symbol of the com-

munity coming together to “pass the torch” from the Doolittle Raiders avenging Pearl Harbor to 911. They are thankful. We

are thankful for their service, inspired by their courage, and grateful for their positive spirit.

GOOD NEWS

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ment. Keep in mind that even without a down payment, such as a VA loan, there are costs associated with purchasing that you will need to pay for out of pocket. Inspections, appraisals and insurance pre-payments are a few of them. Make sure you

get the full financial picture to protect your future in a home you own. It will be somewhere you can pick out the paint color and the pets you desire!

Glad tidings to you and your family. Here’s wishing you all peace, hope and joy! Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!


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Community



FWB Happenings DECEMBER 2022



..... 1

Sequins and Suits Niceville-ValP Chamber | 7 pm | NWFSC | Niceville

Anastasia: The New Broadway Musical | 7:30 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville

Christmas Sweaters & PJ's Wine Tasting | 5 pm | Taste | Fort Walton Beach

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FWB Chamber First Friday Coffee | 7-9 am | First United Methodist Church | FWB

Ice Skating Extravaganza | 6-8 pm | Baytowne Wharf | Miramar Beach

..... 2-17

Grand Boulevard Horse Drawn Carriage Rides, Carolers & Photos with Santa | Fridays & Saturdays | 5 pm | Grand Boulevard at Sandestin | Miramar Beach

Eli Young Band w/ Special Guest Luke Langford Band | 6 pm | Seascape Drive | Destin

..... 3

Visit Santa | 1-4 pm | Harborwalk Village | Destin

44th Annual Jingle Bell Jog | 8 am | The Island Resort | FWB

December Market and Festival 2022 | 9 am | De'France Indoor Fleamarket Antiques & Collectibles | FWB

A Beachy Little Christmas | Noon | The Island Resort | FWB

Holiday on the Harbor | Sounds of the Season | 1 pm | HarborWalk Village | Destin

Holiday Arts Gallery | 5 pm | HH Arts | FWB

Discover Science Saturday | 10:30 am-1 pm | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB

Agents Got Talent on the Emerald Coast | 5pm | Club L.A. | Destin

Grimp, Grudge, Grouch 2022 | 3 pm | The Crab Trap | FWB

DeFrance Christmas Open House 2022 | 9 am | De'France Indoor Fleamarket Antiques & Collectibles | FWB

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Visit Santa | 1-4 pm | Harborwalk Village | Destin

Tuba Christmas | 5 pm | The Village of Baytowne Wharf | Sandestin

SERRV Market | 11:15 am | First Presbyterian Church | FWB

..... 5

Fort Walton Beach Christmas Parade | 6:30 pm | Starts at the south end of Eglin Pkwy. and travel north to Uptown Station.

Maker Days: Fantastic Fossils | 9 am-12 pm | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB

..... 6

Cruisin' into Christmas | 6:30 pm | Emerald Coast Harley-Davidson | FWB

Multi-Chamber Young Professionals Ugly Sweater Holiday Party | 5 pm | 3rd planet Brewing | Niceville

ECPro 30th Anniversary Holiday Party | 5:30 | TASTE | FWB

..... 7

Visit with Santa | 6-8 pm | Baytowne Wharf | Miramar Beach

..... 8

Yule of Yesteryear | 10 am | Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida | Valparaiso

Grinch Glow Ride | 5:30 pm | Livin' Right Real Estate | FWB

Sordid Secrets of the Stars | 6 & 7 pm | Planetarium | FWB

..... 9

Winter Wonderland 2022 | 6 -10 pm | Chester Pruitt Park | FWB

FWB Chorus Keep a Little Christmas in Your Heart | 7 pm | FWB Civic Auditorium | FWB

NFSO's Holiday Pops: "Christmas at the Movies" | 7:30 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Niceville

Sinfonia Gulf Coast's Holiday Pops featuring The Doo Wop Project | 7:30 pm | Destin-FWB Convention Center

Studio6twenty5 The Nutcracker | 5:30 pm | Destin Community Center | Destin

Donnie at VFW in Ft Walton | 7-10 pm | Veterans of Foreign Wars | FWB

Rumours: A Tribute to Fleetwood Mac | 6 pm | Club L.A. | Destin

One-year Anniversary & Holiday Market Party | 3 pm | Maxine Orange Art & Design Gallery | FWB

A Rat Pack Christmas with Ron Adams | 7 pm | The Palms | Destin

2022 Fall Mackerel Classic After Party | 6-9 pm | Angler's Beachside Grill | Okaloosa Island

..... 9-11

Building Industry Association's Parade of Homes | 12 pm | Multiple Locations



..... 10

Visit Santa | 1-4 pm | HarborWalk Village | Destin

FWB Chorus Keep a Little Christmas in Your Heart | 7 pm | FWB Civic Auditorium | FWB

Reindeer Dash 5k/10k 2022 | 8 am | Run With It | Fort Walton Beach

Monthly Board Game Night | 6 pm | TBS Comics | FWB

Niceville ValP Community Christmas Parade | 10 am | Marc Smith Blvd. | Niceville

Heritage Museum of NWFL's Yule of Yesteryear | 10 am-4 pm | Perrine Park | ValP

Christmas CuddleCot Concert benefiting Asher's Hope | 2 pm | Crosspoint Bluewater Bay | Niceville

Winter Extravaganza | 9 am-2 pm | EO Wilson Biophilia Center | Freeport

Holiday Pops Concert featuring Sinfonia Gulf Coast | 5 pm | Seaside Amphitheatre

Eden Gardens State Park Illumination | 5-8 pm | Santa Rosa Beach

Women's Climbing Circle | 9 am | Rock Out Climbing Gym | Destin

Breakfast With Santa & Holiday Festival | 8-11 am | Aegean Restaurant | Shalimar

Date Night Couples or Friends Melt My Heart | 7-9 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB

..... 11

Visit Santa | 1-4 pm | HarborWalk Village | Destin

FWB Keep a Little Christmas in Your Heart | 3 pm | Fort Walton Beach Civic Auditorium | FWB

Santa Breakfast | 8, 9:30 & 11 am | Grand Ballroom Harborwalk Village | Destin

Holiday on the Harbor Boat Parade | 6 pm | Destin Harbor

Deck the Halls Slacker Event | 2-4 pm | Boathouse Oyster Bar | Destin

Billy Claus | 1-3 pm | Lulu's | Foot of Mid-Bay Bridge

..... 12

Visit Santa | 1-4 pm | Harborwalk Village | Destin

..... 13

FWB Chamber Holiday Party | 5 pm | WaterVue at Brooks Street | FWB

BOGO 50% Off Holiday Pickup Truck | 2-4:30 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB

Ugly Sweater Themed Wine Tasting | 5 pm | Toast Wine Bar | Niceville

..... 14

Visit with Santa | 6-8 pm | Baytowne Wharf | Miramar Beach

Mid-Week Advent Service | Holy Trinity Lutheran Church | Fort Walton Beach

Stealin' Christmas | 6:30-8:30 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB

..... 15-21

Blessing of the Live Nativity | 6:30-8:30 pm each night | First Baptist Church | Fort Walton Beach

..... 15

Planetarium Night | 6 pm | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB

How The Grinch Stole Christmas Movie Night | 5 pm | Baytowne Wharf | Sandestin

December Moon | 6:30-8:30 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB

Wil' E. Fontaine's Chrimuh Special | 9-11 pm | The Sound Cafe + Enlightened Studios | FWB

..... 17

Visit Santa | 1-4 pm | HarborWalk Village | Destin

Santa Breakfast | 8, 9:30 & 11 am | Grand Ballroom Harborwalk Village | Destin

Santa Paddle Parade | Noon | LJ Schooners | Bluewater Bay

Christmas Boat Parade | 5:30 pm | Bluewater Bay Marina, Nelson's Cove and Rocky Bayou

Wreaths Across America - Wreath Laying Ceremony | 9 am | Beal Memorial Cemetery | Fort Walton Beach

All Ages Holiday or Regular Paint Your Pet | 12-3 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB

..... 18

Visit Santa | 1-4 pm | HarborWalk Village | Destin

Santa Breakfast | 8, 9:30 & 11 am | Grand Ballroom Harborwalk Village | Destin

Emerald Coast Christmas

Miracle Fiesta | 1 pm | Northwest Florida Fairgrounds | FWB

Niceville-ValP Rotary Christmas Boat Parade | 5:30 pm | Emerald Coast Marine, Tom's Bayou, Lincoln Park, Lions Park

Temple Beth Shalom 1st Hanukkah Community Celebration | 6 pm | The Landing | FWB

..... 19

Santa Breakfast | 8, 9:30 & 11 am | Grand Ballroom Harborwalk Village | Destin

..... 19-23

Grand Boulevard Horse Drawn Carriage Rides, Carolers & Photos with Santa | 5 pm | Grand Boulevard at Sandestin

FPRA Mingle & Jingle Holiday Mixer | 5 pm | Maxine Orange Art & Destin Gallery | FWB

Holiday Kid's Camp Christmas Llama | 11 am - 1 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB

..... 21

Visit with Santa | 6-8 pm | Baytowne Wharf | Miramar Beach

..... 24

All Ages Free Ornament Holiday Open Studio | 1-3 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB

Fireworks!

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Okaloosa Schools Shine: Gov. DeSantis Announces Inaugural Purple Star Campuses of Distinction

Gov. Ron DeSantis made a surprise visit to Okaloosa County recently to announce the inaugural group of schools to receive Florida Purple Star recognition. The Purple Star designation recognizes schools that provide extra support for children of military families. Once the school names were released, it was apparent why Okaloosa County was chosen for the announcement. Thirty-five of the 114 schools receiving the recognition were from right here in Okaloosa County.

“Purple Star Schools have the tools and knowledgeable faculty needed to help children of military families succeed regardless of the obstacles they face,” said Governor DeSantis. According to militarychild.org, a child whose parents are in the military can “expect to move six to nine times from kindergarten through their high school graduation, with approximately 200,000 students transitioning to a new school in any given year.” To

qualify for Purple Star status, a school must have a trained staff member who helps ease entry into the new academic environment, a student-led program to help create social connections, a military family webpage on the school website to inform parents, and hold school-wide military recognition events that encourage tolerance and inclusion.

The Okaloosa County School District is privileged to support the highest percentage of military students of any county in the state of Florida. With that privilege comes a commitment to serve the students and families of those who serve our country. Superintendent Marcus Chambers said the district began tracking the Purple Star program when it was first proposed during the 2021 legislative session. “Our own Representative, Pat Maney, was key in bringing The Purple Star program to Florida, and we are excited to see our schools recognized for the great work they are doing to



support our military children.” Chambers continued, “Our schools have programs in place to make students comfortable and to make the transition from a school in another state or even another country less stressful. I could not be more proud of our teachers, staff, and administrators for earning this distinction. Their commitment and dedication to our military students, as well as all of our students, is making a difference. We are

proud in Okaloosa to support our military students as their parents support and defend our nation!”

Congratulations on one or more of the schools in your district being designated by the Florida Department of Education as a Purple Star School of Distinction!

Antioch Elementary School, Baker School, Bluewater High School, Bob Sikes Elementary School, Choctawhatchee High

School, Crestview High School, Davidson Middle School, Destin Elementary School, Destin Middle School, Edge Elementary School, Edwins Elementary School, Eglin Elementary School, Florosa Elementary School, Fort Walton Beach High School, Kenwood Elementary School, Laurel Hill Elementary School, Lewis School, Longwood Elementary School, Mary Esther Elementary School, Meigs Middle School, Niceville High School, Northwest Florida Ballet Academie, Northwood Elementary School, Okaloosa STEMM Academy, Plew Elementary School, Pryor Middle School, Richbourg School/Fast Track, North Riverside Elementary School, Ruckel Middle School, Shalimar Elementary School, Shoal River Middle School, Silver Sands School, Southside Primary School, Walker Elementary School and Wright Elementary School.

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Around Town

The **Fort Walton Beach Woman's Club 2023 calendar** is for sale! Created by 1st vice president Linda Evanchyk, a popular retired teacher in the Okaloosa County School System, as well as an active School Board member, and Eric Finn, a former student who took photos of the local area and captured the local beauty of our area. What a great Christmas gift for us locals and visitors alike. The cost is \$10 each and all profit from the calendar sales benefits those in need in our community and community service projects, including school supplies and toiletry for students at nine local schools. Purchase by emailing fwbwomansclub@yahoo.com.

The Fort Walton Beach Fire Department is collecting new unwrapped toys and clothing for their annual **Santa's "Firehouse Cruz Thru Toy Drive"** on Dec. 10th and 17th. Make your donations now and bring holiday cheer to those in need. Email jfreudenberg@fwb.org for more info.



L-R: Deborah Stone, President Republican Women of Okaloosa Federated, General Horner, Maddie McNeal, Immediate Past President of RWOFF

The **Republican Women of Okaloosa Federated held its 4th Annual Veterans Appreciation Luncheon** on November 2nd at the Wyndham Gardens on Okaloosa Island with 155 guests in attendance. Flags from all services were provided by the Shalimar United Methodist Church and made a

beautiful backdrop for the ceremony. Thanks to Scott Newbold and Pat Brantley for making this happen. Retired 4-star General Charles Horner was the special guest speaker. The Emerald Coast Chorus, led by Kevin Wilson, sang all the service anthems, patriotic and songs from the past. Corlene Ziegler, with the American Legion, presented the VietNam Era veterans and veteran's widows in attendance with commemorative pins and certificates. As in previous years, the program was coordinated and emceed by Immediate Past President Maddie McNeal.

The downtown **Bluewater Zoo building was deeded to the City of Fort Walton Beach** by the Chris Gibson estate back in 2020. After evaluation, it was determined that the building should be demolished. The plans are to replace it with a new 2-story Museum that will feature a large gift shop, offices, and meeting rooms for school groups. Demolition should start in the next month.



Boy Scouts of America Gulf Coast Council is partnering with several sponsors to hold its first-ever **Gulf Coast Council Legendary Roast** in December. The goal is to make this an annual event that recognizes and honors legendary leaders in the community for going above and beyond to give back to the Emerald Coast. The inaugural event will honor Bernard Johnson, Regional Manager of Florida Power & Light, former Cub Scout, and huge supporter of Scouting to this day. Event leadership says he was chosen because his contributions to the community align with the values of Scouting's Oath and Law.

The Gulf Coast Council Legendary Roast will be held at 5 p.m., Thursday, Dec. 1, at WaterVue at Brooks Street in Fort Walton Beach. Individual tickets cost \$75 and will include a buffet-style dinner and drinks. The event will also feature a silent auction and a "roast" of Bernard Johnson. Visit gulfcoast-council.org to register email greg.voyzey@scouting.org for event sponsorship opportunities.



Hilton Garden Inn Fort Walton Beach was recently named one of **12 Businesses Honored as Exceptional Employers** in the state of Florida by the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD).

Continued on next page

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Mended Hearts of Gold

By LISA WOODRUM

Did you know that heart disease is the leading cause of death in the U.S., with almost half of all people living with some form of cardiovascular disease? Also, congenital heart disease is the No. 1 birth defect in the U.S.

To answer this need, Mended Hearts (MH) is a national and community-based non-profit organization that has been offering the gift of hope to millions of heart disease patients, their families and caregivers for 70 years. MH's local Chapter 399, based out of HCA Florida Fort Walton-Destin Hospital, is dedicated to "inspiring hope and improving the quality of life for heart patients and their families through ongoing peer-to-peer support" through their volunteers. These



post-heart patients' motive is to serve with empathy those who are walking through this trial, living the Golden Rule: Doing for others what they would desire to be done for them.

The president, David Richards, said, "Our local community chapter is here to help people understand that there can be a rich, rewarding life after a heart disease diagnosis. MH volunteers listen, share their experiences and talk to other heart patients about non-medical concerns." MH fills the gap where many patients and caregivers would otherwise feel isolated, anxious and confused.

David and his compassionate team are like minded and like hearted, as they are familiar with the infirmity of heart disease in their personal lives. Volunteers receive free accredited training and certification, equipping them to talk with patients, families and caregivers by phone, email and in-person hospital/

home visits, encouraging and educating them. It is common for patients to feel confidence, relief and a sense of control over their condition as a result of the compassionate education received. Examples of topics range from generalized processes of healing and cardiac rehab, anxiety, nutrition, exercise, direction to areas of assistance and more.

Dr. Zarate of Okaloosa Heart & Vascular has enjoyed a three-year relationship with MH. Likewise, The Meridian has worked with them for five years. MH welcomes doctors and facility administrators to contact them to consider and discuss the possibility of a cooperative relationship to serve their patients and families.

To raise awareness of their

presence in the community and garner new volunteers, MH needs more post-heart patient volunteers. It plans to man a booth at the American Heart Association Heart Walk on Nov. 19 at Northwest Florida State College grounds starting at 8 a.m.

Whether you are a patient, caregiver, family member, doctor or facility administrator, Mended Hearts, Chapter 399 of Northwest Florida welcomes your inquiry. Likewise, those who have heart event experience and desire to join the ranks of MH can reach David Richards to learn the (free, online) simple process of training and certification by reaching him at (850)582-6026 or mended-hearts399@mail.com.

AROUND TOWN

continued from previous page

Blind Services and Vocational Rehabilitation. The Exceptional Employer Award is presented to companies that exhibit a strong commitment to employing and retaining people with unique abilities. Hilton Garden Inn has partnered with Vocational Rehabilitation since 2019 offering on-the-job training opportunities to young people. This employer hired five individuals when they completed the VR program, with two full-time employees continuing to be employed. Additionally, they employ two more people with unique abilities. The hotel invites past VR participants back to work during the busy season since they already know the ropes. On August 11, the Hilton Garden Inn became the host site for Project Search

in Okaloosa County with six students enrolled in the program.

The **Choctawhatchee Audubon invites you to "Birding with Noah Stryker"** in Utah and a quick stop at High Island Thursday, Dec. 1st in Room 800 on the 2nd floor of the Chandler Center (NW door of 519 Helms St.) at the Crosspoint Church in Niceville. Socializing with refreshments begins at 6:30 PM, and the program begins at 7:00. Admission is free and open to the public. Hear Donna Cronwell who was fortunate to go birding for three days in northern and central Utah with Noah Stryker, a renowned world birder. On the flight back home to Florida, she and her husband, Dale Cronwell, were able to stop over in Houston and visit High Island during bird migration. During their trip to Utah and Texas,

they recorded a total of 185 species of birds. For more information, email choctawhatchee-audubon@gmail.com.



There will be a **Christmas Bird Count** coordinated by Malcolm Swan, on Sat., Dec. 17. To participate, contact Malcolm at 210-452-4899 so that he can configure birding assignment areas.

Step One Automotive Group and Subaru Fort Walton Beach have announced **OCSO Sheriff's Star Charity and Healing Hoof Steps Equine Assisted Mental Health Counseling and Therapeutic Riding** as their hometown charities for the 2022 Subaru Share the Love® Event. Through Jan. 3, anyone who buys or leases a new Subaru can select OCSO Sheriff's Star Charity, Healing Hoofsteps, or one of four national charities to receive a \$250 donation from Subaru of America, Inc. For more information, visit www.subaru.com/share.

Vertex Solutions, a leading developer of high-fidelity learning technology, including extended reality (XR) training, was selected by the Defense Innovation Unit (DIU) to develop

a reconfigurable **Multi-Place Mixed Reality (MPMR) flight simulator**. The MPMR flight simulator will replace the currently fielded Weapon Systems Trainers (WSTs) and save several times their initial fielding, modification and sustainment costs, all while providing greater access to pilot training for students. This is exciting news for the USAF, who will be able to train more pilots effectively, at a lower cost, to help address the pilot shortage! Vertex Solutions' Immersive Training Devices are a great example of dual-use technology that benefits both the military and commercial industry. This technology not only satisfies U.S. DoD pilot training needs, but is directly applicable to commercial aviation training in passenger and cargo flight operations.



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 Community

History in the Making: One Hopeful Place

By LISA WOODRAM

In October, FWB Life introduced an organization called One Hopeful Place (OHP), that offers “A Hand up” to the homeless along with an invitation to attend their open house and ribbon cutting in November. More than one hundred attended to celebrate phase II of OHP, that being the Cold Night Shelter, fondly referred to as “the blue building!” OHP has actually been an ongoing endeavor, with the vision evolving and expanding from a temporary residential facility to adding a Day Program, a Cold Night Shelter, and on the horizon, Transitional Housing, in the form of tiny houses! The heart of its mission is being “the front door to permanent housing and providing an end to the cycle of homelessness” by educating and empowering the homeless through the community’s networking via finances and volunteers. This is accomplished by providing various programs such as life skills education, mental health treatment, detox assistance and counseling to name a few approaches.

Sherry Jones, the Community Public Relations Director of OHP stated that she has done extensive research on a national level to glean methods other communities have utilized to address homelessness. She noted that ultimately, OHP is completely unique in its approach to solve the homelessness concern. OHP apparently has become the first to use this combination



of programs to impact this issue in such a profound and effective manner-what has been termed “a one-stop shop.” Sherry called OHP “History in the making,” potentially being a prototype for other communities to emulate!

Ted Corcoran, President and CEO of the Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce, officiated the Open House/Ribbon Cutting ceremony. He graciously recognized and thanked the numerous businesses, churches, people and the city who have contributed to this endeavor, without which OHP could not become a reality! Current and past residents

of OHP had the opportunity to share their heartfelt gratitude (at times, tearfully) and positive experiences of the care and comradery they have found-and yes, restoration of hope to believe and pursue a better life with OHP’s hand up!

Walter Arrington, a previous homeless resident who successfully transitioned out of homelessness with the help of OHP (who is now completing his Master’s in social work) spoke and acknowledged that “anyone who lives on the streets wants help... [but]-they can’t do it themselves.”

He applauded donors of



OHP who are “changing lives in a meaningful way and being fiscally responsible,” noting a statistic that a community’s cost of leaving a homeless person on the streets totals \$30,000 to \$66,000 per year as opposed to housing one at \$7,500 per year!

Though more economical, it takes \$25,000 per month for OHP to maintain the ongoing expenses to support the 69 full-time residents, run the Day Program and the Cold Night Shelter. Along with supporting the day-to-day operations, the vision for growth to complete the process to end homelessness must be kept in sight. To accomplish this, the next phase is to undertake the demolition of the sedimentation tanks, availing the land for tiny houses for residents to transition to their final phase in the process to in-

dependence. The quote for this is \$25,000. OHP is appealing to churches to consider including this worthy cause in their 2023 budgets. If 25 churches contributed \$10,000 each, the project would be a reality! Since Covid, the financial resources have considerably diminished. There are occasional grants from the county and city, but OHP is primarily dependent upon the continued generosity of the citizens and businesses of the community.

Ultimately, Ted appealed to the audience that their takeaway be “How can we help?” and to communicate this request to their businesses, organizations, churches, etc.

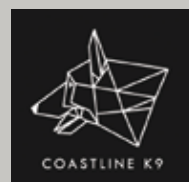
On that note, this article now carries this message to you, the reader. In the words of Bonnie Barlow, president and CEO of Bridgeway (partner with OHP), whose motto is, “How can we say yes?” “During this season of giving, I challenge you to find a way to financially support OHP. We will all be remembered for how we loved our neighbor, gave to others and how our existence made a difference to those in need.” Consider how you too could say “yes” to joining your community of heroes who have extended a hand up to the needy and vulnerable and create a legacy as a history maker!

Details of specific opportunities to make item donations, volunteer and financial contributions can be viewed at onehopefulplace.org.

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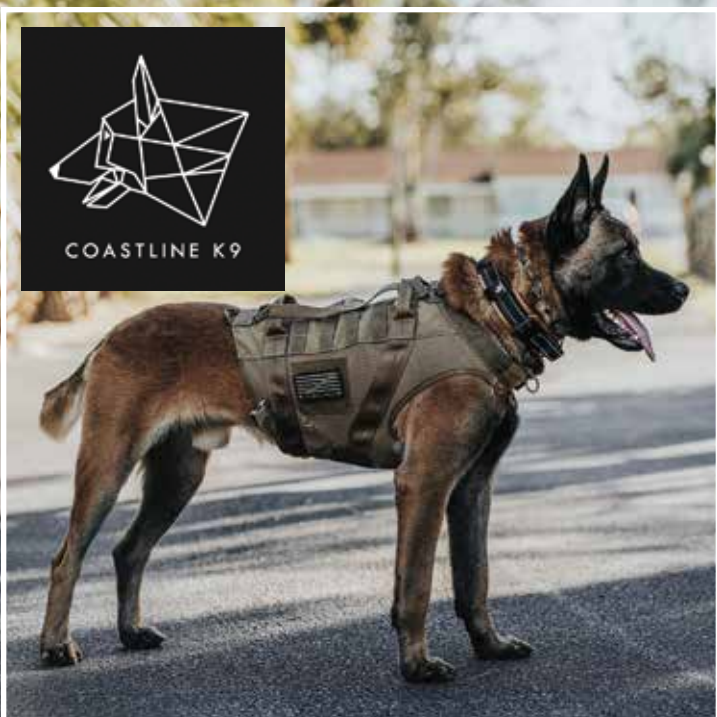
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Sorting Through the Noise of Medicare Annual Enrollment



BY GREG DURETTE

For those folks new to the Medicare Annual Enrollment Period (AEP), the overwhelming volume of mailing pieces, emails and phone calls are dizzying. For those folks more experienced in this time, the sigh of despair and cries of “Oh no, not again!” can be heard from every balcony and rooftop.

Keep in mind, the closer we get to Dec. 7 (the official end of the AEP), the more intense it will get if you let it. Regardless of your experience level, there are some things you can do to quell the noise and help make the best possible decision for you.

First, make sure you pay attention to the mail and phone calls you receive from your existing insurance company. These communications will be very valuable to you as they likely will be about the changes to your current plan in the new year. Too often, because of the volume of clutter mail, folks tend to throw these out along with everything else just to try and keep the kitchen counter clear. As the saying goes, don’t throw the baby out with the bath water!

Next, try to make a real effort to understand everything you can about your current plan. Know the exact name and type of plan as well as how much you are paying in premiums. Is it a Supplement Plan? If so, which

one; M, N, G, F, etc.? Know which type of Part D or Stand-Alone Prescription plan (if any) you have, to go along with this Supplement Plan. Know your deductibles, co-insurance and copays. Know if you are able to use your pharmacy of choice. Know how the coverage Gap (commonly known as the “Donut Hole”) works in your plan.

Perhaps you have an Advantage Plan instead. Again, know

there will be a separate deductible for the Advantage Plan and the Prescription coverage within the plan. Also, know your copays and whatever Extra Coverages your plan offers such as Dental, Hearing, Vision, Rewards Programs, Silver Sneakers, etc.

The two last, most important pieces of information you will need to know about your current plan is, what your premium will be and are your doctors/medi-

covered. It all depends on where you live and the plan you have.

Now, finally, you are armed and ready to attack that onslaught of external information. Be careful of where you look! Many of those ads you see on TV with famous sports figures/actors are nothing more than marketing companies looking to get your information to sell to anyone willing to pay for it. If you respond to those ads, you will only make the onslaught of mail, emails, texts and calls that much bigger.

Work with people you know and/or reputable insurance companies you know and recognize. Deal directly and don’t be afraid to let someone know you would prefer they not contact

you again if you have settled on what you want to do.

That is the final important point. Now that you are well informed and have made a well-informed decision, you will feel much better about changing the channel when the next Medicare ad shows up on TV. You can sort your mail over the trash barrel. Talk about stress-free living!

Greg Durette is a qualified, licensed agent with Florida Health Connector providing Medicare throughout the State and is based in Niceville. He has been in the insurance industry for over 39 years and can be reached at his office at 850-842-2400 or his mobile at 978-509-2941.



the exact name and type of plan as well as how much you are paying in premiums. Being that most Advantage plans have the Prescription coverage built in, you will likely not have a separate premium for Part D. However, you will need to know the deductibles and co-insurances for the entire plan. Oftentimes,

cations going to be on the plan in 2023. Will you have in-network options in other States? Some plans get better, some plans not so much. Some get more expensive and some reduce to as low as \$0 per month. Some doctors stay and some doctors go. Some medications get more expensive, less expensive or simply are not

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The Blessing of the Live Nativity

First Baptist Church of Fort Walton Beach will present the 34th Live Nativity celebration from Thurs., Dec. 15 to Wed., Dec. 21. The Live Nativity is open from 6 to 8:30 p.m. each night and is the first time in several years that it will be open on a Sunday evening. This year's event will again include a drive-through option as well as the direct interaction with Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus and petting and feeding the animals. The shepherd's field is filled with sheep, donkeys and Naomi the camel. In addition, there will be one alpaca on hand that must have escaped from Noah's Ark!

This celebration of the birth of Jesus is a free event that includes Angels, Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus, the three Magi and Shepherds. You can have your photo taken in the nativity scene and it will be waiting for you as you leave the event. Don't forget your cookie, coffee or hot chocolate, too! If the weather turns cold, there are fire pits to gather around to keep warm. As visitors depart the shepherd's field, children receive a candy cane



and they learn the Christian story behind its invention.

To illustrate the complete salvation story from Jesus' miraculous birth, to his crucifixion and resurrection there are Roman Soldiers at the Cross and Angels at the Empty Tomb.

Most nights, there will be musical presentations from the church's choir and other talented individuals. On Thurs., Dec. 15 (opening night) the Emerald Coast Chorus will be singing,

Clyod Key, a particularly gifted singer and soloist, will be singing Fri., Dec. 16 and Sun., Dec. 18. Jeff Keeman, formally the Music Minister at First Baptist, will be singing on Wed., Dec. 21. The remaining three nights of the Live Nativity are to be determined and will likely include other talented singers from the praise team and choir.

This depiction of the birth of Christ has become a special part of the Christmas celebration in

Fort Walton Beach. The family photo in the nativity is a keepsake that now stretches back over three decades. Last year, more than 800 family portraits were taken in the nativity scene.

First Baptist Church was blessed to have Dr. Bill Bucklew and his wife, Jane, in the congregation 34 years ago when the church started the Live Nativity. Although Dr. B has passed on, Jane still tells the children about the candy cane story and all the animals still come from

the Rockin' BAB Ranch in DeFuniak Springs. Josh Nelson, his former ranch manager and now the Rockin' BAB owner, has continued Dr. B's legacy of providing the animals for the Live Nativity.

The entrance to the nativity field is at the corner of 2nd St. and Church Ave., right by the First Baptist Church sanctuary. Parking is available in the church parking lot. For more information on First Baptist's free gift to the community, visit fbcfwb.org.



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The Road to Redemption: Children in Crisis and The Children's Neighborhood

BY VICTORIA OSTROSKY

When she heard the authoritative knock on her front door, she quickly ran to her baby brother and grabbed his hand. Her eyes were great pools of fear and, with a trembling voice, she begged to not be separated from her little brother. Their home, such as it was, was home no longer, and she didn't know what would happen next.

The vision for Children in Crisis, a non-profit 501(c)(3), began in 2002 in a living room of concerned citizens who worked in school systems and foster care. They were concerned about how many times children, removed from their abusive and unsafe homes, were shuffled from one foster home to another because of the severe shortage of foster parents. More often than not, siblings were separated, further traumatizing the children. This core group wanted a better way to meet the needs of these vulnerable children, with a vision of opening a foster care neighborhood.

Children in Crisis and their Children's Neighborhood is now a reality, sitting on 20 acres of beautiful land in Fort Walton Beach, through a charity land lease by Northwest Florida State College. They serve Circuit 1,



comprising the counties of Walton, Okaloosa, Escambia, and Santa Rosa. On this land, Children in Crisis has an emergency shelter for children removed from abusive environments on short notice, where they can stay temporarily. Then there are five family-style foster homes where foster parents live on site, and eight studio apartments for young adults who have aged out of foster care but aren't ready to be on their own yet.

Children in Crisis' mission is to keep brothers and sisters together. They've worked diligently to obtain the funding to build the neighborhood and have placed foster parents in each home to watch over and care for children, keeping broth-

ers and sisters together, greatly mitigating the need to move them from one home to another; thereby giving them a better chance to heal and grow strong.

Every adult who works at The Children's Neighborhood lets the children know they are in a safe environment. Many of the kids that are removed from homes arrive with only a Walmart bag of a few items. Many don't even know how to use a shower. And because



many have lived not knowing when they would eat again, hide food in their rooms. These are just some of the behaviors these abused children need help with overcoming.

Children in Crisis has seen lives transformed and children able to trust adults again and flourish at school because of the unique setting at The Children's Neighborhood.

Their greatest need right now are foster parents. They have two empty homes waiting to accept and house children, but no foster parents to receive them. Fostering is a calling, and though it's not an easy job, God

equips those who are prepared to do the work.

The Bible doesn't directly instruct us to be foster parents, but it does speak of taking care of the fatherless and the widow and loving each other sacrificially. We are told to take in strangers and be like the Good Samaritan who stopped and got involved, giving his time and money to care for another.

Who is our neighbor? The person in need who God puts in front of us.

To get involved, please check out www.childrenincrisisfl.org. You can fill out their application online, or call 850-864-4242, come visit the neighborhood, and find a way to be part of rescuing children in great need right in your backyard.

You can hear the entire story about Children in Crisis and listen to many other incredible interviews on the weekly Road to Redemption radio show and podcast at www.roadtoredemptionpodcast.com

Impact100 Awards Five \$100,000 Grants

Impact100 of Northwest Florida Inc. awarded five \$100,000 grants to nonprofits in Okaloosa and Walton counties.

The 2022 grants are:

Arts & Culture

Stage Crafters Community Theatre Inc. – "The Show Must Go On..." Save Our Community Theatre's Home

Education

Crestview Area Shelter for the Homeless – The Impact Village Opportunity Zone (Phase One)

Environment, Recreation & Preservation

Pyramid, Inc. – Outdoor Recreation Equity for Individuals with Disabilities

Family

The Salvation Army – Mobile Kitchen for Disaster & Community Assistance

Health & Wellness

Healing Paws for Warriors – Save a Veteran, Rescue a Dog: Mobile Support

Since the creation of Impact100 NWF in 2012, it has granted \$4.1 million to 501(c)(3) nonprofits in Okaloosa and Walton counties. Every membership dollar goes toward the grant award fund. The concept is simple. Each member contributes \$1,000 to fund the grants. This year, the organization has 532 members, making possible five \$100,000 grants. Members evaluate and vote on grant applications submitted by nonprofits in our area.



*From the FWB Life and
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*We wish you a very, Merry Christmas
and a Happy New Year!*

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 Community


BY JOE CAPERS,
INSURANCE ZONE

Every time a storm threatens our state, we are reminded of how many homeowners and business owners either do not carry flood and wind insurance at all, or have inadequate limits to cover their loss. Unfortunately, the 2022 Atlantic hurricane season runs to Nov. 30.

When Hurricane Ian hit our state, the property insurance market was already in peril. The market was the most volatile in the U.S. well before Hurricane Ian formed, and will most likely become even more unstable in the wake of the storm. The market has been strained under billion-dollar losses, insolvencies and skyrocketing premiums. The massive storm barreled into southwest Florida, delivering catastrophic winds, rain and flooding. The majority of the estimated losses in Florida come from wind damage, estimated between \$22 billion and \$32 bil-

lion, while insured storm surge losses in the state are expected to be an additional \$6 billion to \$15 billion.

The increasing unpredictability of hurricane threats underscores the need for property owners – especially those close to water – to raise their standard of preparation. The most significant risks for these homeowners are wind and water. Windows are particularly vulnerable points during a hurricane, but any exterior points – including shingles, gutters, and railings – are at risk from wind. Homes, in general, should have window protection in advance. Owners should either board up the windows or install hurricane shutters. This is one of the more important decisions individuals make.

Without adequate reinforcement, windows can be a source of indoor damage during a storm. A home's occupants could also be injured near windows when a hurricane strikes. Similarly, doors could become a weak point, so these entryways should also be secured.

Although most standard homeowners and business insurance policies can include wind coverage, they do not cov-



er flooding. So it is important to have protection from flooding associated with tropical storms, hurricanes, heavy rains, broken levees, outdated or clogged drainage systems, rapid accumulation of rainfall and other conditions that impact our area. Almost everyone in a participating community of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) can buy flood insurance. Recently, Florida has become the leader in the country in encouraging private markets to respond to our needs with competitive alternatives, but the prevailing market condition will slow down this development.

A flood is defined by FEMA as a general and temporary condition in which two or more properties of normally dry land are inundated by water. Just because you haven't experienced a flood in the past does not mean you won't in the future. Flood risks are based partly on history, but also on rainfall, river-flow and tidal-surge data, topography, fold-control measures and changes due to building and development.

The NFIP's Dwelling Form offers coverage up to a maximum of \$250,000 for building property and up to \$100,000 for

contents and the Commercial Form provides up to a maximum of \$500,000 for building and/or contents. Both should be purchased as well as excess flood for limits up to the replacement cost of the dwelling and personal property over the basic limits. Recent storms and predictions of a future with bigger and stronger storms highlight more than ever the importance of flood insurance.

You can buy flood insurance through the NFIP no matter where you live if your community participates, except in Coastal Barrier Resources System (CBRS) areas. For properties in these areas, the private market is available.

We recommend you call an experienced insurance agency with access to the NFIP as well as private markets to help evaluate your flood exposures.

Insurance Zone, founded by Joe and Lea Capers, is a full-service commercial and personal lines insurance agency serving Destin, Miramar Beach, Santa Rosa Beach (30A) and Inlet Beach. Visit its Video Library on ins-zone.com and watch the informative video on "Flood Insurance," or call (850) 424-6979.



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9am - 2pm



By CHRIS BALZER, ECES

I cannot believe the holiday season is here. It has been nice getting a break from the high humidity and I am especially enjoying those attic inspections this time of year. With the holiday season comes more energy use. Here are a few holiday energy savings tips to help brighten your nights and lower your energy bills.

Switch to LED lights when decorating and in general. LED lights use 80 to 90 percent less energy than incandescent lights. It is estimated that four strands of LED lights will save \$30 this month, compared to four strands of the traditional lighting. When I changed out my landscape lighting bulbs to LED, they were brighter, looked great, will last longer and use less energy. It is also a clever idea to use timers to reduce the amount of time holiday lighting stays on.

When cooking the holiday feast, do not forget about the smaller appliances. Microwaves, slow cookers and multi-use smart appliances all use less energy and give off less heat than ovens and stoves. Also consider co-cooking. If one dish needs to bake at 400 degrees and the other at 350 degrees, consider sharing the baking time and set your oven at 375 degrees to bake both dishes.

We typically use our common appliances more during the holidays. Many of our water heaters are set to 140 degrees from the manufacturer. Lowering the setting to 120 degrees will save energy and money. When showering, many of us will start with the hot water turned all the way up and then add cold water for a comfortable temperature. By doing this, you are cooling the hot water which you spent energy and money to heat.

Do not run dishwashers when they are half full; this wastes energy. Fill up those baskets and try adding a drying agent. These agents help lower the surface tension of water, causing it to sheet off dishes, use less drying

time and save you money. Also, use cold water in your clothes washer. Most new clothes washers and detergents are designed for cold water and get your clothes just as clean. When drying clothes, throw a few dryer balls into the dryer with your load. This will reduce drying time by preventing laundry from clumping, allowing the warm air to circulate better. If your dryer has an auto dry option (moisture sensing), use that option instead of timed dry and clean the lint trap between loads – this improves air circulation and increases the efficiency of the dryer.

If you plan to leave this holiday season, think about automating your home. Put exterior and interior lighting on timers to avoid being on all day and night. Add a thermostat that you can

control via Wi-Fi and your smart phone, so, in the event we get a cold streak or heat wave during the time you are away, you can control your home's temperature. Also remember to unplug those energy vampire electronics which use energy even when turned off.

Buying local foods and goods not only supports our community but saves energy by reducing transportation related energy costs.

Be innovative and give your home an energy checkup by a professional. He can pinpoint your biggest energy loss areas and provide suggestions and solutions to become more energy efficient.

We wish you and your loved ones a happy, safe and energy-efficient holiday season.

Ways to Save this Holiday Season

ENERGY TIPS

by Emerald Coast Energy Solutions



Chris Balzer is Founder and President of Emerald Coast Energy Solutions, which is a Smile Provider Company. For more information on how to save and become energy efficient, schedule an inspection by calling (850) 588-2870, visit trusteces.com or email wecare@trusteces.com and Beat the Heat.

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Continued on next page

Raider Athletes Join FCSAA's 2021-2022 All-Academic Team

Northwest Florida State College (NWFSC) is pleased to announce that 16 Raider athletes have been named as members of the Florida College System Activities Association's (FCSAA) 2021-2022 All-Academic Team.

The FCSAA is a statewide non-profit corporation that regulates, coordinates, and promotes intercollegiate activities in athletics, brain bowls, forensics, model united nations, music, student governments, student publications, and theatre.

This year, 1,161 students participating in FCSAA programs were recognized for maintaining a minimum 3.30 GPA throughout the 2021-2022 academic year.

"We are proud of our Raider athletes for their commitment to excellence in everything they do," said NWFSC President Dr. Devin Stephenson. "I look forward to seeing what they accomplish as they continue working toward their academic goals and hone their talents and skills

this season."

Below are the current NWFSC student-athletes who achieved this honor:

Softball: Gracie Bellard, Brilee Broussard, Riley Gibson, Maycie Hardy, Kassidy Hood, Emma Langston, Julia Petty, Abigail Pippen, and Layla Thompson

Baseball: Samuel Wyatt Castoe, Will Cannon, Kelly Crumpton, and Cade Easterbrook

Women's Basketball: Marissa Gasaway and Zyniah Thomas

Men's Basketball: Jaylon McDaniel

For more information on Northwest Florida State College Athletics, please contact Ram-

sey Ross, Northwest Florida State College Athletic Director, at (850) 729-5358 or ramseyr@nwfsc.edu.

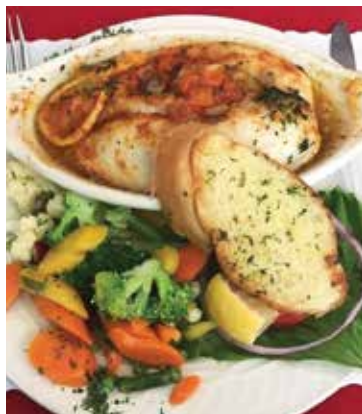
DINING

continued from previous page

dian spices, but also customizes the spice level for greater experience. The menu is available online with orders available for takeout or pickup.

holirestaurants.com

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you'll find lunch favorites such as Meatloaf with Mashed Potatoes, Crabcake with Fettuccine and Shrimp Alfredo Sauce, Red Beans and Rice and many types of burgers, sandwiches, soups and salads. For dinner, we've been told the Italian dishes such as Italian Sausage and Peppers with Marinara Sauce and Filet Tips Florentina are divine. But there's steaks, seafood "Camp Walton style" and even a kids' menu.

Hours: Lunch M-F 11-2; Dinner M-Th 5-8; F-Sat 5-9; Closed Sundays.

magnoliagrillfwb.com

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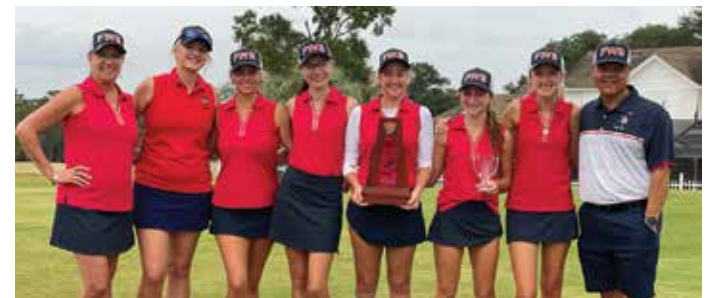
Magnolia Grill

In 2001, Magnolia Grill in Fort Walton Beach opened its doors after a renovation that took 18 months—and it's been thriving since. A local's favorite dubbed "The Museum That Serves Food," you'll find equal

parts museum and dining establishment. Its second floor contains artifacts from World War II, Vietnam and other segments of American history. And downstairs—is where



Congratulations to FWBHS Student-Athlete (Varsity Golf and Tennis) Miller Lindsley! Miller has been selected as Viking's 2023 Sunshine State Scholar nominee! The Sunshine State Scholars' Program recognizes Florida's top 11th grade students in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).



Congratulations to the Lady Vikings Golf Team which placed 1st in the District, 3rd in Regionals and 11th at State Finals!



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45 Buried in Lazarus Field Service

By KENNETH BOOKS

One of the most solemn rituals of our civilization is the respectful burial of the dead. But some, whether for lack of family or loved ones' lack of funds, are deprived of this final, sacred rite. The Lazarus Field Service provides these souls, whose bodies have been cremated, with a respectful service and final resting place at Beal Memorial Cemetery.

"When I became a county commissioner, I knew the county was responsible for unclaimed persons," Okaloosa County Commissioner Carolyn Ketchel said. Thus, was born the annual Lazarus Field Service, which took place Wednesday, Nov. 2, before roughly 100 spectators and participants.



Okaloosa County Commissioner Carolyn Ketchel opens the Book of Life, containing the names of 45 people who were buried at the Nov. 2 Lazarus Field Service.

Clergy from several Okaloosa County churches participated with prayers and talks.

To date, seven burial plots have been obtained, Ketchel said, only one of which has been used so far. At the annual service, 45 cremains were honored and interred. All 67 Florida counties share the cost of the plots.

"We're hoping this catches on throughout Florida," Ketchel said. Each person's name is entered into a Book of Life. "The Lord, we believe, honors them by giving them this send-off," she said.

In her introductory remarks, Ketchel said of the 45, "Your life was important. You walked among us. We believe all lives matter."

The names were read from the Book of Life by Deacon Wayne Walker of Saint Mary Catholic Church and the Rev. Herstel Carter of Crosspoint Church. As each name was read, retired Army Master Sgt. Tom Rice sounded the bell on the Veterans Tower, which cost about half a million dollars, raised locally over three years.

The ceremony is in reference to Luke 16:19-31, in which Jesus tells a parable of the contrast between the afterlife of a rich but aloof man and that of a spiritual but poor man. The Rev. Doug Martin of Saint Peter Catholic Church, stressed that the parable focused on acts of commission and omission.

"This is a beautiful thing we're doing here today," Martin

said. But, he added, "No one in our world feels responsibility for our brothers and sisters... We fail to notice the Lazaruses God places at our doorstep."

Music for the ceremony was provided by the chancel choir of First United Methodist Church of Fort Walton Beach and a soulful rendition of "Amazing Grace" was sung by Natalie McClure, accompanied by Joey Ferreira on the organ.

"This was a good, sacred, holy thing here today," Ketchel said. "Such a beautiful outpouring from our community. It was like a veil was parted just a little bit and we saw what Heaven was like."



Wreaths Across America Honors Fallen Comrades

Join the 3rd annual Wreaths Across America ceremony on Dec. 17, 9 a.m., at Beal Memorial Cemetery as veterans honor and remember fallen comrades this holiday season. Part of the national Wreaths Across Amer-

ica program, wreaths are purchased by local donors online and delivered by truck a few days before the Dec. 17 ceremony. Help from the community is needed by sponsoring wreaths, helping on Wreath Day or by

attending the event where the motto "Honor, Remember and Teach" is witnessed in practice. All ages, from all walks of life are welcome to honor the lives of the veterans who served. Last year, more than 1,300 wreaths were laid at the Beal Memorial cemetery (up from 600 in the first year) sponsored by members of the community.

Wreaths Across America was started 29 years ago this December, when a wreath-maker from Maine had 5,000 extra wreaths. Rather than letting them go to waste, he gave the wreaths as a gift of thanks for the service and sacrifice made by our nation's military so he could live freely to work and raise his family. Morrill Worcester could never have foreseen then how this simple gesture would ignite a passion in the hearts and souls of millions of Americans many years later.

On its 25th Anniversary in December 2016, what started as 5,000 wreaths at Arlington, Va., grew to 1.2 MM wreaths at 1,228 locations nationwide. At Arlington National Cemetery specifically, 245,000 wreaths were placed by more than 44,000 — one for each marker in the cemetery. More than 400 truckloads of wreaths were transported across the country through a network of hundreds of volunteer drivers, donated trucking and diesel, and countless hours of dedicated volun-



A Fort Walton Beach Police officer helps to place wreaths during the 2021 ceremony.

teers committed to remember, honor and teach.

Each live, balsam remembrance wreath is a gift of respect and appreciation, donated by a private citizen or organization and placed on the graves by volunteers as a small gesture of gratitude for the freedoms Americans enjoy. For centuries, fresh evergreens have been used as a symbol of honor and have served as a living tribute renewed annually. Wreaths Across America believes the tradition represents a living memorial that honors veterans, active duty military and their families.

This year's 30-minute ceremony will include remarks by Lt. Gen. Jim Slife, commander of the U.S. Air Force's Special Operations Command and the unveiling of wreaths for each individual branch of service, including wreaths for POW/MIAs and Gold Star Families.

Dennis Krebs by phone at 850-855-3357 or by email at DNomadChief@aol.com.

For \$15, you can sponsor a wreath by visiting wreathsacrossamerica.org. To volunteer, call 850-855-3357 or email DNomadChief@aol.com.

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It's Manatee Awareness Month: Go Slow, Look Out Below

This time of year, it's important for boaters to go slow and lookout below to watch for man-

atees as they travel to warmer water sites around the state. Manatees are a protected species and it is illegal to feed, harass, disturb or harm them.

Learn more about how officials are responding to this event by visiting MyFWC.com/Manatee

amazing aquatic mammals.

Are you interested in supporting the FWC's manatee research, rescue and management efforts? You can purchase a Flor-

ida manatee license plate or donate \$5 to receive a collectable FWC manatee decal. Both are available from your local Tax Collector's office.



atees as they travel to warmer water sites around the state.

Manatees depend on water generally warmer than 68 degrees Fahrenheit to survive the winter. So, in the fall they travel to Florida springs, power plant discharges and other warm-water sites.

While manatees are large, they can be difficult to see in the water. That is why it is important to: follow guidelines and follow all manatee protection zones; look out while boating; wear polarized glasses and always give them space. Manatee protection zones are marked by waterway signs and maps of manatee protection zones are available online at MyFWC.com/Manatee by clicking on "Data and Maps."

During the colder months, seasonal manatee zones require boaters to slow down in certain areas to prevent manatees from being injured or killed by motorboats or personal watercraft. Boat strikes continue to be a major threat to Florida manatees. Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) law enforcement officers are on patrol in state waters to inform boaters of the seasonal manatee speed zones and take appropriate enforcement actions. Boaters are reminded to abide by the regulatory signs they see on the water.

Remember, disturbing manatees at warm-water sites can cause them to swim out of protected areas and into potentially life-threatening cold water. Man-

Physically handling a distressed or stranded manatee can cause more harm. Instead, report injured, distressed, sick or dead manatees to the FWC's Wildlife Alert Hotline at 888-404-FWCC (3922) or by dialing #FWC or *FWC on a cellphone so trained responders can assist.

The FWC and USFWS take manatee conservation seriously by actively implementing science-based conservation measures that are making a difference for manatees and habitat.

and clicking on "Learn More" in the banner at the top of the page.

Resources for boaters, educators and other interested members of the public are available at MyFWC.com/Manatee. What should you do if you see a manatee? The Viewing Guidelines page provides helpful tips on respectfully viewing manatees, additional guidelines for boat and personal watercraft operators, and information on what you can do to help these



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Make a Difference with Guardian ad Litem

BY MICHELLE RUSCHMAN

One of the greatest gifts you can give to a child is the knowledge they have someone on their side. Carita Smith, Volunteer Recruiter, for the Florida Guardian ad Litem, is on a mission to ensure that local children who find themselves displaced from their homes know there is someone they can still count on to advocate for their best interests. In our area, there should be 136 volunteers. There are currently only 43.

The Guardian ad Litem is made up of a three-pronged system that becomes part of a child's team when a judge rules they need to be sheltered, or removed from the home. One part of Guardian ad Litem is the Case Advocacy Manager, who maintains the level of care from the office and supports the volunteers to ensure they can advocate effectively. These managers are on staff along with the child's Best Interest Attorney to make sure the team is running smoothly. At the center of the trio, is the Volunteer Child Advocate. It is this volunteer who visits the children to make sure their needs are being met. If they find the children are in need they report back to the Case Advocacy Manager and the attorney to see if services



can be put in place. They are the thread that connects the child to the judge and all other agencies that work with the court. Their sole mission is to take care of the child. It is this Volunteer Child Advocate position that Carita is working hard to fill and it is mission-critical.

"We work alongside any agency that's in contact with that child," Carita said. "If the child is in foster care, we visit with them at least once a month, but our volunteers usually go more often. We talk to the child, make sure they're getting what they need, and ask how they feel. We want to make sure their innermost person is taken care of."

"We also talk with the foster parent to get a sense of how the child is behaving and what their day looks like," she continued. "If the child has interactions with their parents, we want to know how they responded to the visitation so we can keep an eye out for any triggers. If they're visiting with a parent twice a

week for 30 minutes to an hour, how's that child's behavior when they come back? There are a lot of variables that go into a visit like how the visits are maintained and observing how the child feels after these visits. What we observe then becomes information that we provide to the court."

Due to the shortage of volunteers, Case Managers often have to fill the additional role of the Child Advocate Volunteer, which is far from ideal. Carita shares the steps to becoming a CAV.

"There's a three-phase training process," she said. "The first phase is talking with me, submitting your application, and having your fingerprints taken at no cost to the volunteer. You must also pass a level two background screening because of the confidentiality that is required and the places you're going to. You're part of the court system and officially taking care of the needs of a child on the state level. Have a clean background."

"Phase two is the classroom portion which is 30 hours, so you do get a lot of training before you get started. Volunteers can choose to do it all online or



in two parts by doing the majority online and then coming to a one-day class from 9a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

"Phase three is the most important because it's when you go out and do the work," Carita said. "This is when you're visiting with a child, going to court, seeing how the parents react, and seeing how the judges behave. Just going into court can be scary but when you just observe and start building an understanding of what people are doing, then it becomes easier. You understand that you're just putting down on paper what

you observed and passing it on to someone else. You understand your role in the process of helping these children."

So who would make the ideal volunteer?

"Someone who loves children," Carita said. "You have to want to see children get beyond traumatic situations. Children remember what's happened to them so you have to be patient. Be confident in your abilities so you can ask critical questions."

Carita stresses that once someone becomes a volunteer, they have plenty of support from the case manager and attorney on their team. In addition to their immediate team, there are also mentors who have been in the position for multiple years, and events are put together so volunteers can be together and make a connection.

As for community support, Carita asks that you contact her to speak about Guardian ad Litem to your churches, small groups, networking groups, businesses, classrooms, etc. She will talk to any group that can help grow the volunteer base.

If you're interested in talking to Carita about being a Child Advocate Volunteer or would like to book a speaking engagement, call (850) 461-3877 or email carita.smith@gal.fl.gov.

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BY RICHARD CHERN M.D.

The holidays are coming up and these are the best times of the year. At least that's what we are led to believe. In fact, the holidays can be very stressful for people. Even though most people enjoy the holidays, nearly forty percent of people report in-

creased stress and anxiety during these times. This often leads to substance abuse, relapse, or other worsening medical conditions.

In preparation for these potential stressful times, I'd like to tell you about some of the not so commonly discussed effects of hormone replacement. Many of our patients initially complain of physical exhaustion, generalized aches and pains, weight gain, lack of sleep or low libido. I honestly don't think even one patient has come to the clinic specifically complaining about depression or anxiety. This is not to say they don't have these symptoms, but it is rarely the reason they seek us

for treatment.

What many of our patients don't realize is that optimizing hormones can reduce or eliminate depression and anxiety. I ask every patient who gets treated, "What effects do you see that you didn't expect?" Many patients talk about the overall reduction in joint or arthritis pain, some talk about the increased desire for physical activity but I think the most common comment is the huge reduction in stress levels and positive effects on mood.

I believe that the reduction in stress levels and improvement in mood are probably the most im-

portant benefit of hormone optimization. That huge weight of problems you must pick up and carry every day is nowhere near as heavy. And you stop viewing stressors as problems to deal with but more like challenges to overcome. Your outlook changes from just trying to survive the day to waking up feeling rested and ready to attack the day.

So, if you are dreading the holidays then this is a sure sign that you need to at least get your hormone levels looked at and let us review the results with you. Remember, normal levels don't necessarily represent optimal health. In order to get optimal

benefits and optimal health you will need optimal levels.

Dr Richard Chern, MD provides hormone therapy to men and women who travel from across the globe to be treated here in Miramar Beach. He is on staff at BioTE Medical as an instructor to teach hormone therapy to new providers including providers right here in our local area. Dr Richard Chern treats many of the providers in the community and might even be treating your doctor. Dr Richard Chern, MD is a platinum BioTE provider and runs one of the largest BioTE hormone clinics in the country right here in Miramar Beach. Call Dr Richard Chern, MD today at 850-837-1271 for an appointment.

Arthritis Is A Pain

BY KAY LEAMAN,
HEALTH ARCHITECT

There are several types of arthritis: Osteo, Rheumatoid, Lupus Erythematosus, Gout, Infectious and Reactive, and Psoriatic. The American Arthritis Foundation shows 58.5 million Americans suffer with this disease and annual costs for medical care and lost earnings is \$303.5 billion.

Osteoarthritis is a degenerative joint disease and affects the hands, feet, knees, hips and spine. Oxidative stress is a pathological process that leads to osteoarthritis. Wear and tear over the years or traumatic injury generates oxidative stress/damage which in turn creates excessive inflammation which spirals to even more oxidative damage. This is why once present, the disease accelerates without treatment.

Antioxidants become the most effective antidote for further progression of the disease. A high quality, full spectrum, pure supplement can be more effective than prescribed medications (which are prescribed to treat "symptoms") without any side effects (This statement is not intended to be medical advice

and was extrapolated from a scientific article.).

Rheumatoid arthritis is a type of autoimmune disease in which the body attacks healthy joint tissue. It is characterized by auto-antibodies created against the specific proteins in the connective tissues in and around the joints. The immune response causes high levels of inflammation, swelling, pain, damage, scarring and distortion to affected joints. Symptoms include morning stiffness and joint pain, typically in the same joints on both sides of the body. This disease can also affect the heart, lungs, eyes and skin.

To be fully explained here would require a much deeper dive into the science of the body's functions of the autoimmune process. This process has disclosed the possibility that consuming harmful immunosuppressant drugs may not be the answer.

Psoriatic arthritis is the result of chronic inflammation where an overactive immune system attacks the joints and skin. It can include either or both plaque or nail psoriasis. It varies in severity, from mild to crippling.

Essential oils can aid in relieving symptoms of arthritis. Some curb inflammation or have numbing effects. Others can interrupt pain receptors in the brain and others work in a combination of ways. Some of these oils are eucalyptus oil, ginger oil, curcumin, copaiba oil mix, orange oil and lavender oil mix. Be sure to choose a pure

oil (no additives such as alcohol) and ones that are stored in dark containers. Oils can degrade in strength when exposed to light. Always talk to a knowledgeable oils expert before using.

As mentioned above, a high quality, full-spectrum pure supplement can be effective as well. Nourishing the body with the minerals, micronutrients and antioxidants that it needs to combat inflammation can make a noticeable difference in the quality of life when living with arthritis.



As always, you can reach out with questions or requests for more information.

Have a fun, healthy and joy

filled holiday season.

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The Efficiency of Emotions



BY TODD CRAIG,
JOURNEY BRAVELY

I grew up believing emotions were inefficient and to be avoided. Emotions, even the “good” ones, were not to be trusted. They were to be overcome by being tough and powering through. So, I learned how to ignore emotions for the sake of efficiency. While this approach enabled me to perform and accomplish many tasks, it didn’t allow me to enjoy those accomplishments. It also left me feeling disconnected from myself and others, including my wife and boys. When I avoided emotions,

I lived with low-grade anger and discontentment that, ironically, demanded more of my time and energy than the original emotions I was avoiding.

Maybe you, too, were taught feelings aren’t safe and should be suppressed. But, what if that isn’t true? What if there is a purpose to emotions? What if acknowledging them is a pathway to growth and progress? What if there is a depth of life and relationship to be experienced through emotional awareness? What if emotions aren’t something to escape but the path to the life, relationships and influence you have been searching for?

Four Steps to Allow Emotions to Work for You: Slow down to speed up

The speed and busyness of life is one way we are taught emotions are to be ignored. There is simply no time for emotions. We pursue more work or activities as a means of escaping or numbing emotions. However, if emotions have pur-

pose and can provide important information about the abundant life path we desire, we must slow down and create space to experience and acknowledge them. When we create space for emotions, we bring them to the light instead of allowing them to drain our energy while operating in the shadows. Next time you sense an emotion, whether comfortable or uncomfortable, pause and take three to four deep breaths, allow yourself some space to experience the emotion, and then move on to the next step.

Name the emotion

At first glance, naming the emotion appears to be simple. However, this can be difficult without a strong emotional vocabulary. When asked how we are feeling, we often have two or three go-to answers such as “fine,” “good,” “frustrated,” or a favorite of my son’s, “meh.” If moving beyond words like these is difficult, you are not alone. A simple hack is finding and printing an emotion word bank. We have a printable “Feeling Word

List” available in the Resources tab at Journeybravely.com. Keep a picture of this on your phone or fridge. When you are tempted to use words like good, fine, or meh, look at the word bank and find words like thankful, valued, respected, overwhelmed, relaxed, betrayed.

What’s the story

After naming the emotion, consider the narrative behind the emotion. How are your beliefs shaping your emotional interpretation. If you are feeling rejected when your friend turned you down for lunch, try investigating your story about your friend’s intentions. Are you believing you aren’t important to your friend? When you identify your emotional story, it is important to test the story with three questions. Is the story true? Is it kind? Is it helpful? If the answer to any of these questions is “no,” it’s time to adopt a new narrative. Try challenging the original story with a version that gives your friend the benefit of the doubt. Perhaps he would like to get together another time

because your friendship is important to him.

What are your action steps?

Now that you understand your emotion, how will it guide your actions? Maybe it’s time to replace old thought patterns that are no longer serving you. Maybe there are relational boundaries you need to establish. Maybe it’s time to set boundaries with news, social media or other cultural input. Maybe it’s time to start saying “no” so you can slow down and be present with yourself and others in more meaningful ways. Remember, you are ridiculously in charge. You largely get to make your own decisions as well as what and who you allow in your life. Emotions can help make these decisions more efficient if we give them the space to do so.

As you allow your emotions to work for you, we are here to support you along your journey. Coaching sessions are currently available. Connect with us at Journeybravely.com.

CarePatrol Helps Find the Right Assisted Living Facility – Free

BY KENNETH BOOKS

Transitioning to an assisted living facility can be traumatic, an onerous chore that no one really wants to undertake. It can be expensive, time-consuming and, sometimes, dangerous.

But where to turn for advice, help and protection?

“We help steer our clients to resources to help pay for assisted living,” said Cynthia Gilley, 57, a Senior Care Consultant with CarePatrol, an organization with some 150 outlets around the country, serving more than 20,000 communities. It was founded in 1993 by a social

worker who observed the personal trauma experienced by a family whose loved one had been placed in the wrong type of facility. “I’ve been in the field caring for people pretty much most of my career,” she said. She has spent 35 years in caring for people, mainly older adults and those with cognitive difficulties, last two of which were spent working for CarePatrol.

Gilley’s compassion is home-grown. Her father suffered with Alzheimer’s Disease for 13 years before dying, and caring for him was an ordeal for all concerned.

CarePatrol not only finds fi-

nancing for those destined for assisted living, it helps find facilities, as well as home health care, for its clients. And the service is completely free for the client. “We have contacts within the community which pay for the service,” the Fort Walton Beach native said. “We’ve contracted with probably 95 percent of the communities. They see this as a benefit to them.”

Gilley said she “tours clients around like a Realtor. We evaluate a facility’s violations, which can include lack of maintenance, state regulation violations, insufficient staff, medical

errors, abuse and neglect.”

Among the criteria Gilley examines in order to serve her clients are location (“They want to be close to family”), finances and the needs of the client. Not all facilities can handle certain medical issues, she said. And, if a client wishes to remain in his home, she finds resources to provide whatever help he needs to retain a reasonable quality of life.

“The hardest thing is trying to find affordable memory care,” she said. “There’s a huge lack in that area.”

Gilley has a passion for her

work and her company. “I can’t think of anything I don’t like,” she said. “My boss is great, my co-workers are wonderful. They share a common passion with me. There’s a cohesiveness.”

The most interesting aspect of her job, Gilley said, is “being able to place Alzheimer’s clients. Alzheimer’s is my passion because of my father having it. I know how hard it is on the families.”

To reach CarePatrol, call (850) 898-1401 or email cgilley@carepatrol.com.

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Becoming a Smarter Giver



BY MAURICE STOUSE, FINANCIAL ADVISOR AND BRANCH MANAGER

The United States and its citizens are among the most charitable in the world. And even though tax laws have made some changes to charitable giving, investors and savers alike are not only thinking how and what they are giving, but also how they might be able to be smarter givers. The question is, how do you do it? Giving is motivated by the three Ts: Time, Talent and Treasure. This article is focused on the giving of treasure.

It all starts with a review of today's givers, the "who." In 2018, Raymond James produced a white paper on charitable giving, and we are sharing some of that insight for you here. If you looked at some numbers, you would find that a giver is typically a mature American (88 percent) and 72 percent of all givers are classified as baby boomers. Next, what are their causes? The study says the top four are: 31 percent to religious institutions; 14 percent for education; 12 percent to human services and 11 percent to foundations. And lastly, where do the givers typically come from? The leaders are Utah, D.C., Mississippi and Tennessee.

So, how and why are people giving? People want to make a difference, to create a legacy and to act upon a sense of moral duty. There are incentives as well: Potentially lower taxes, managing their wealth and guidance on estate planning. Giving can be as straightforward as a cash, check or even stock donation. Other assets might qualify as well. This can be cumbersome, however, if you have several nonprofits you want to support.

An idea growing in popularity is the Donor Advised Fund or DAF. Raymond James calls it "the new face of giving" and it is the fastest growing charitable vehicle in America. DAFs are pub-

lic charities and qualify under IRS section 501(c)3. They take in contributions from the giver by way of cash (or check) but also securities (stocks and bonds, for example). Depending on someone's situation, a tax deduction might even apply. The DAF in turn invests the contributions into mutual funds for growth or income or preservation of capital.

Note the wording of "donor advised." That means that the donor can directly ask the DAF to periodically, or when they would like to, send contributions on to another charity. That charity could be educational (a college, university or any educational nonprofit), religious (church), human services or foundations (educational, athletic as example). In the meantime, any amounts not given can be left to grow and accumulate over time, for many years.

In the end, giving is simpler – one contribution to one charity, which can then be dispersed as you request or advise. Many firms allow you to do this online or even delegate it to your adviser, at your direction. You can title or name the account as well. These accounts also allow you to name successor donor advisers or a final recipient charity of the value of the account at your death. Many people appreciate having this available for making donations to their schools, churches, hospitals and various local or national/international causes.

Donors are urged to consult their attorneys, accountants or tax advisers with respect to questions relating to the deductibility of various types of contributions to a Donor-Advised Fund for federal and state tax purposes.

Maurice Stouse is a Financial Advisor and the branch manager of The First Wealth Management and Raymond James. The main office is located at First Florida Bank, a division of The First, 2000 98 Palms Blvd. Destin, FL 32451 with branch offices in Niceville, Mary Esther, Miramar Beach, Freeport and Panama City. Phone 850.654.8124. Raymond James advisors do not offer tax advice. Please see your tax professionals. Email: Maurice.stouse@raymond-james.com.



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Community Helping Community



By MATTHEW VANDERFORD

Being a part of a community means different things to different people. As a public insurance adjuster, being a part of the community means being present for businesses, property owners, renters and contractors who've experienced damage, suffered loss and need assistance in reaching a fair insurance

claim payment from insurance companies.

From the most severe natural disasters like hurricanes, fires, floods and tornadoes, to lesser, simpler damages like pipe breaks, theft and vandalism, I've witnessed the stress that comes to others while they make every effort to work with insurance companies hoping to obtain an accurate recovery. It's unfortunate that often many people feel hopeless and helpless, unsure of what to do when they experience a crisis in their claim.

However, being a public insurance adjuster is just one aspect of being present. Another reflection of living and breathing as a part of community means showing up for myself and others in ways that honor the unique expression of who we are as individuals with opportunities to raise awareness



and give back to those that help and heal in times of crisis. Because crises, and the traumas that follow, tend to come in many shapes and sizes.

And crisis seems to be what I am or at least was attracted to at one point. Maybe that's because I was used to living a life in a heightened state of survival crisis mode since I was little. Being exposed to extreme circumstances and living life through the lenses of traumas that never seem to end are real catalysts in who I am today and what I do now.

That's why Claimology is

proud to highlight the Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center and Children In Crisis, two local nonprofit groups whose missions are to provide services and housing for children in Okaloosa and Walton counties that have been abused, neglected or assaulted. It's organizations like these that are made of people who care for the safety and well-being of others. It's organizations like these that are there for others in times of crisis. It's organizations like these that need our support too.

Children in Crisis, Inc. is a non-profit organization of "caring people, working together to provide homes and keep brothers and sisters together. It gives a home to the abused, neglected, and abandoned children of our community. Before Children in Crisis, there was no emergency shelter in Circuit One (which includes Okaloosa, Walton, Escambia, and Santa Rosa counties) for young children removed from an unsafe environment on short notice. Without CIC and the stability it brings, many foster children would be moved from home to home, some as

many as 10 times per year. It has given a safe, loving home to more than 995 children since 2008."

The beginnings of Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center is one of grassroots support from the communities it serves. The motivation for establishing a Children's Advocacy Center using a multidisciplinary team response to child abuse in Okaloosa and Walton counties grew out of a high-profile case in the early 1990s. Together, the Department of Children and Families and the State Attorney's Office formed a Child Abuse Task Force in 1992. That group recommended a Children's Advocacy Center be built and the ECCAC was incorporated in July 1997 and in June of 2007 and has received its re-accreditation from the National Children's Alliance.

Please take the time to check out these amazing groups by visiting them online at: eccac.org and childrenincrisisfl.org and see how you may become involved in helping the area's vulnerable.

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Okaloosa County Educate the Educator Plus One

On Friday, November 4th, Bit-Wizards, Beast Code, and HCA Florida Fort Walton-Destin Hospital opened their doors to 10 Okaloosa County School District educators and their +1 (a student) for Educate the Educator +1 (EtE+1). The goal of the event was to enhance Okaloosa County educator and student knowledge of local industry sectors and to introduce attendees to local employers at their facilities.

Attendees began their day at Career Source Okaloosa-Walton in Fort Walton Beach, where Nathan Sparks, Executive Director of One Okaloosa, provided an overview of local industry and job possibilities in our area. Then, Superintendent Marcus Chambers provided some motivation as he shared his journey to his job as the leader of our school district. Michele Burns, Executive Director of Career Source Okaloosa-Walton, of-

fered tips and tricks for a job hunt, and HSU Educational Foundation CEO, Amanda Negron, shared ways to find and create opportunities when meeting new people.

After light refreshments provided by Florida Power & Light and an opportunity to network with each other and the guest speakers, the teachers and students from our secondary schools in our District's Central and South zones boarded a school bus and traveled to several destinations: Bit-Wizards, Beast Code and HSA Fort Walton-Destin Hospital.

Superintendent Chambers explained, "One of our goals in the Okaloosa County School District is to prepare students for college, the military and the workforce. So, this was a great opportunity for our students and teachers to see companies in our



community who offer opportunities for students after high school. Companies like Beast Code, Bit-Wizards, and the HCA Florida Hospital are great places for our students to work. We appreciate them opening their doors and enthusiastically sharing what they do!" Educate the Educator +1 is an organic program that will continue to evolve. This program has been around for six years and has also occurred in the county's north end. We live in a beautiful area and would love our students to find a career here on the Emerald Coast.

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For over a decade, Matthew Vanderford has worked in the Construction, Restoration and Insurance Industries as an Insurance Company Preferred Vendor, Insurance Industry Continuing Education Instructor, Public Adjuster/ Policy Holder Advocate and Licensed Contractor. He's proud to call Destin his home, with his wife Candice and four children: Matthew, Blake, Jordan and Scarlett.

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Sean of the South



BY SEAN DIETRICH

Christmas Eve night. The mountains of North Carolina were giant silhouettes in the darkness. Sheriff Andy Taylor sat on the bench outside the courthouse, watching the stars.

It had been a hard year. Maybe the hardest of his career. The sheriff was downhearted, which didn't happen often. But then, sheriffs have feelings too.

When it started to snow, Taylor shoved his hands deep into his coat pockets and slipped into a trance. Christmas morning was only a few hours away, and he wanted to feel cheerful, but he couldn't seem to make it happen.

His deputy joined him on the bench. The scrawny, high-strung lawman had just finished doing his nightly rounds, shining a flashlight into storefront windows; checking doorknobs. All quiet in Mayberry.

"Whatcha doing, Ange?" said his deputy. "Why the long face?"

Taylor flashed a fake smile. "I'm just looking at stars."

The deputy was obviously concerned, but Taylor hardly noticed. He was too busy thinking about all he'd seen during his years serving this sleepy hamlet. He'd seen it all. Or just about.

He'd once seen the town drunk ride a cow down main-street. He'd seen a local goat eat dynamite. He'd jailed bank robbers, swindlers, chicken thieves, speeders, escaped convicts, moonshiners, and Danny Thomas.

Life was moving too fast. The world had gone from AM radios to color TVs. He'd watched the tailfins on Chevys and Fords get taller each year. He'd seen skirts get shorter, hairstyles get shaggier, music get louder, and people get meaner. Airplanes gave way to rocketships. A man hit a golf ball on the moon. Divorce was becoming more fashionable than blue jeans.

But this year...

This year was a humding-

er. It was worse than the rest. This was the year the world fell apart. People in town were more frightened and skittish than ever before. And sometimes it seemed like nothing in Mayberry was going right.

Taylor looked at the night-cape and tried to figure out which constellations he was looking at. But he was never very good with astronomy. A single star hung in the distance over the nearby backwater of Mount Pilot.

"You see that star?" said Taylor to his deputy.

"Which star?"

"That one."

"Yeah. I see it."

"You reckon that's how the Bethlehem star looked?"

"Bethlehem? Are you sure you're okay? You worry me."

The sheriff never took his eyes from the sky. "What do you think it was like, Barney? Bethlehem and everything?"

The deputy seemed to be thinking about this. The sheriff could hear the cogs in his friend's head.

His deputy said, "Well, I think it woulda been darn crowded in that stable, for one thing. All them goat herders and wise guys."

"Men. You mean wise men."

"Correct. Males. No ladies were present."

The sheriff paused. "No women? It was a childbirth."

"Well, except for Mary. She stopped in for a little bit."

Good old Barney.

The deputy went on, "I, for one, think it woulda been pretty dang exciting to see the Three Kings bearing their gifts, the gold, the silver, and the bronze."

"You mean the frankincense and myrrh."

"Exactly."

"Do you even know what myrrh is, Barn?"

"Do I? What do you take me for? What I know is that it was quite an important night. There were angels in the sky, and cherubs proclaiming, 'Peace on earth! Goodwill to men! Glory on the eggshells day-oh!'"

"Eggshells?"

"It's French. Read the book, Ange."

The sheriff and the deputy fell silent. They watched their tiny hometown do what it did best. Which was nothing at all. Wreaths adorned each window.



Shopfronts featured twinkling lights. The snow was picking up tempo.

Sheriff Taylor asked his deputy, "You think we'll get through this year, Barney? It's been a difficult one."

It was a serious question indeed. And it hung between them for a while. Even the sheriff could feel the weight within his own voice. There was doubt in it.

"Yes, I do," said his deputy. "I know we're gonna get through it. In fact, I'm certain."

"What makes you so sure?"

"What makes me sure?" The deputy raised his voice. "Because, Andy. I just know it."

"But how? How do you know?"

His deputy looked away like he was blowing a fuse. "You beat everything, you know that?"

Because I know, Ange. I just do. You wanna know how I know?"

"Yes."

"You really wanna know?"

He nodded.

"Well, then I'll tell you. I know because this morning I drove to pick up Miss Emma Brand from her hospital check-up. And do you know what I saw when I walked into the hospital?"

Taylor shook his head.

"Babies, Ange. I passed the maternity ward and saw all kinds of babies. Lots. The nurse even let me hold a few. They spit up on me and everything."

"Is that right?"

"It was beautiful. And last week, when I directed traffic for the school crossing, do you know what every boy and girl did when they passed me? They said 'Merry Christmas, Barney,'

and gave me handmade Christmas cards."

"They didn't."

"Every last one. I got forty-three cards. It's enough to make a grown man go all to pieces."

The sheriff looked at his shoes. The somber silence made his deputy uncomfortable.

"Andy..." The deputy's voice was breaking now. "You can't be sad. Cheer up, pal. You're the heart of this town. You're my best friend. I need you. If we lose you, we've lost everything. C'est la vie, man! E pluribus unum! Status quo! Non sequitur! Et cetera, defacto!"

"Huh?"

"It's Latin, it means 'tit for tat,' and qué será será, and livin' la vida loca."

Taylor was laughing now. "What are you talking about?"

"It means we're gonna get through this, Ange. One day we won't even remember this horrible year, and it'll be like old times."

Then the skinny deputy threw his arms around his old pal in an embrace and slapped the sheriff's back so hard it stung. Taylor could hear his deputy sniffing in his ear. The sheriff smiled, then squeezed his oldest friend in earnest.

And somehow Andy Taylor knew that no matter what happens in this raggedy world, a person can face anything if they have a friend.

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A Pastor's Ponderings: Yours, Mine & Ours

By RICK MOORE

During the first year of college, I was elected freshman class president. Two days before the first monthly meeting that I was to preside over, a tornado

ripped through the city destroying dozens of homes. I proposed we do our part and help those who were less fortunate. The entire class voted unanimously to volunteer their time on Saturday by cleaning up residential areas which were hit the hardest. When Saturday morning came, only seven students out of the hundreds of freshmen actually showed up to help. It was at that moment I learned a profound lesson. We can share our response, have the ability to help, but not accept response + ability. It's easy to speak up. It's harder to show up. The word



this season of my life to do the same. There are dozens of worthy causes I do not contribute to. All of us are all limited on how much responsibility we can take on. I can't help everyone, but I can help someone.

Another pitfall to avoid is volunteering others. It took me years to realize that volunteering myself was often "volunteering my wife," even if she was not going to be directly involved. If I agree to coach a ball team, be a camp counselor for a week, help children with disabilities, or volunteer in youth ministry at my church, that equals less time for me to be at home helping my family. Often, my wife has handled the chores I would have been doing if I was home. Every time I went on a mission trip, I had to remind myself how blessed I am to have an awesome spouse who is willing to do so many extra things behind the scenes so I could be gone. No one likes to be "volun-told" (told they have to volunteer). It is wise to ask your spouse or family members for their blessing before taking on new responsibilities.

Maybe it's been a while since you volunteered at a local church, school or community event. Maybe it has been a while since you contributed to Shriners Hospitals or Saint Jude's Hospital. Refrain from becoming involved out of guilt or pressure. Ask yourself what is a good fit for you. Usually, when people buy vehicles, they kick the tires and take it out for a test drive. Approach volunteering in a similar way. Don't make long-term commitments until you discover what you are most fulfilled doing. You may believe you will be happy working with fifth graders, but later discover you enjoy working with high schoolers instead. You may think soccer is the sport you want to coach, but later find out you enjoy t-ball instead. You can't do everything, but always remember, you can do something.

I cannot take resources with me once I leave this earth. You cannot take resources with you once you leave this earth. One day yours will be gone. One day mine will be gone. The only thing which will be left is ours.

Rick Moore is Communications Pastor at Destiny Worship Center.

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TOYS FOR TOTS

and the deed should go hand in hand.

What is a response without responsibility? Let's look at a couple of examples. If a city says they are a sanctuary city but refuse to provide sanctuary, that is a response without responsibility. If some say they support adoption but do not adopt, become a foster parent, or at least support an adoption organization, that is a response

without responsibility. In no way does this make the response wrong. It just makes it weak and hollow.

When we do take responsibility to make a difference with the resources we have, it is important not to guilt trip others, or become involved in virtue signaling. I know someone who volunteers by assisting patients in a hospice. I do not feel guilty that I don't have time during

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Sinfonia Gulf Coast Music & Artistic Director Appointed to Prestigious Young Concert Artists Board of Directors

Young Concert Artists (YCA), the prestigious New York-based international advocacy organization to champion young classical musicians, has appointed Sinfonia Gulf Coast Music & Artistic Director Demetrius Fuller to its board of directors.

“Maestro Fuller has a long association with our organization and has engaged many YCA artists over the years,” said YCA president Dan Kellogg. “He cares deeply for our mission and supporting young artists. It will be a gift to have his voice on our board as we begin the many bold initiatives outlined in our new strategic plan. He not only brings the passion and expertise of an accomplished conductor, Demetrius is also a skilled administrator and fundraiser. His many skills and long dedication to our work make him an excellent addition to our board of directors.”

A versatile conductor and

accomplished musician, Fuller founded Sinfonia Gulf Coast in 2005 to “redefine” the symphony experience in Northwest Florida. The nonprofit orchestra is in its 17th season of innovative musical programming, designed to entertain, educate and inspire the community. Since 2020, he has also served as CEO of the Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation in Destin.

A Fort Walton Beach native, Fuller trained at the University of Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music, earning both bachelor and master of music degrees. An innovative and energetic conductor, Fuller has been chosen to work with some of the world’s most prestigious conductors and orchestras. A champion of contemporary music, he has premiered, commissioned, and/or collaborated with numerous international composers from Augusta Read-Thomas, Dorothy Hind-



Maestro Demetrius Fuller awarding the Sinfonia Gulf Coast Prize to saxophonist Steven Banks in 2019.

man, and Nico Muhly to Tan Dun and Chris Brubeck. Fuller is an award recipient from the National Foundation for the Advancement in the Arts, the Werner Foundation, and the International Music Foundation.

“I am honored to join the board of the Young Concert Artists, a venerable international institution dedicated to nurturing young musicians. As a prize giver each year for a winner, Sinfonia already has a

standing relationship with YCA and I am excited to serve in this additional capacity to help the organization continue to be a leading and guiding force in the development of young musicians.”

YCA was founded in 1961 to discover and launch the careers of brilliant but unknown young classical musicians from all over the world. Each year, the organization holds its international auditions in New York City and hears hundreds of applicants. The winners are presented in their New York debuts as part of the Young Concert Artists Series. The list of YCA’s discoveries includes some of the most illustrious names in the classical music world today: Pinchas Zukerman, Emanuel Ax, Dawn Upshaw, and Jean-Yves Thibaudet. For information, contact info@sinfoniagulfcoast.org or (850) 460-8800.

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 Arts & Music

ECTC: Christmas Time is Here

By NATHANAEL FISHER

"Christmas time is here. Happiness and cheer. Fun for all that children call their favorite time of year."

It doesn't matter if I am in the car, in a store, or walking down the street at Grand Boulevard listening to their outdoor music...this song makes me stop and feel the holiday season. Back in 1994, as an intern at Jupiter Theatre, I was in a production of A Charlie Brown Christmas in Jupiter, Florida. We sang this song as part of the production. I played Linus with those famous lines of, "Lights please! And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night." One of my favorite parts of the play was when Snoopy and I were choreographed to "skate" across the stage as if suddenly the stage was ice and we had skates on. One of the other interns that played Charlie Brown and I became friends through the process. I'd always loved the cartoon A Charlie Brown Christmas, but from that wonderful song to "skating" across the stage to playing Linus to becoming friends with the guy playing Charlie Brown... all of these are such fond memories. We are so thrilled to be bringing this classic show live on stage at Emerald Coast Theatre Com-



pany, and our high school program (Jr. Company) students are doing such a wonderful job with this play. You are guaranteed to feel ALL the happiness and cheer.

Our professional holiday

production is The Best Christmas Pageant Ever: the Musical. This is directly taken from the holiday novel that was written in the 1970s by Barbara Robinson. This musical adaptation of the book originated at the Charlotte Children's Theatre in 2016. One of the things I am most excited about this production is that it is a collaboration between ECTC's growing educational program and our professional company. With songs like "Our Perfect Little Town" contrasted with "Die Herod Die," this musical is full of fun comedic moments and finishes with all the heart and warmth we all want for the holiday season. Many of the children in this production will be making their professional debut. We always get

really excited about milestones here at ECTC. Anna and I sometimes talk about how we get to see our community's children grow up. You can be a part of that too while enjoying a night of exceptional profession-

al theatre. If you have or know a child that would be interested in taking a theatre class or having a part in our spring educational program productions check out our website for a full list of classes and programs: emeraldcoasttheatre.org/youthclasses

Another offering this holiday season is our Christmas Cabaret. Vincent Pelligrino will be hosting again this year and if you want to see a musical theatre guy living his best life, then this holiday cabaret is a must. We have a talented cast of singers to perform some classic holiday songs you will definitely know and others you may not. Vincent pulls it all together with some jokes and a song or two himself. It's more fun than a stocking full of puppies.

Finally, since this is the giving season, we thought it would be nice to share that we helped 38 children through our scholarship program this past fall. This means that these families were helped with anything from a \$200 to \$600 scholarship towards educational theatre class tuition. Our goal is to make sure that anyone who wants to can participate, and that cost does not prevent any child from experiencing the joy of theatre. This holiday season, if you can make a contribution to help a child out, please go to our website and donate to the scholarship fund. You can also call the box office for ways to sponsor, donate, or volunteer.

We hope you'll let us usher in the holiday season with you and yours. We happen to love Christmas around here... and we love our community. As Charlie Brown and his friends would say, "Christmas time is here, families drawing near, oh that we could always see such spirit through the year."

Happy Holidays,

Nathanael Fisher, Producing Artistic Director and CoFounder

A Charlie Brown Christmas

By Charles M. Schulz, Adapted by Eric Schaeffer with special ar-

range ment by Arthur Whitelaw and Ruby Persson

December 2-10: Saturdays at 9:30 a.m. & Sunday, December 4 at 2:30 p.m.

Discover the true meaning of Christmas with Charlie Brown, Snoopy and the rest of the Peanuts Gang in this classic adaptation of "A Charlie Brown Christmas." Presented by ECTC's talented Junior Company teen players.

The Best Christmas Pageant Ever: The Musical

Book and Lyrics by Jahanna Beecham, Music and Lyrics by Malcom Hillgartner, Based on the play by Barbara Robinson, Orchestrations and vocal arrangements by Deborah Wicks LaPuma

December 8 - 18: Thursday - Saturday at 7:30 p.m., Sundays at 2:30 p.m., Wednesday, December 14 at 2:30 p.m.

The Herdmans are the worst kids in the history of the world—so when they crash Sunday school and demand parts in the Christmas pageant, the whole town panics. There's not supposed to be biting or cigar-smoking in Bethlehem and soon everyone is calling for reluctant director Grace Bradley to cancel the whole thing. It's now up to the Bradleys to help the community see the Herdman kids through new eyes in this buoyant musical adaptation of the funny and touching holiday classic.

Christmas Cabaret at the Boulevard

Wednesday, December 14 at 7:30 p.m. and Saturday, December 17 at 2:30 p.m.

Mix, mingle and enjoy live musical selections performed by our talented actors. Enjoy classic holiday songs and join in some carols as well. Like a mug of hot cocoa, this limited-run event will warm your heart and get you in the holiday spirit!

For more information or to purchase tickets go to emeraldcoasttheatre.org or call 850-684-0323.



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Painting with a Twist is FUN art, not FINE art! This season, connect with your friends in a warm, festive, supportive and positive environment. Wine, art and fun combine, whether you’re hanging out with friends, a date or the whole family.

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Want to host a private party in an exclusive party room? Party Rooms are available for

your holiday gatherings, business, family, Krewe, Girls Night Out, special event or whatever you can dream up! Set your kid-do’s creativity free with a new twist on fun! Book a birthday party or Mommy & Me event!

Check out the December calendar and then request an event. For your private event:

- You get to pick the painting.
- Mention this write up and the party host gets a free seat with

a private party minimum (15 seats minimum after 5pm, Fri. and Sat. or 10 seats minimum any other time.) through Dec. 31!

Call (850) 226-7218 or text “PARTY” to our studio to request a party! We are able to host private parties any day and time (subject to artist availability).

The December calendar offers a variety of paintings—from seasonally-inspired landscapes to decorative DIY wood

board signs, funny self-portraits, and more! Sign up at painting-withatwist.com/studio/fort-walton-beach/calendar.

Let’s Ring in the New Year!

We’re looking forward to the **Okaloosa Island Boardwalk New Year’s Eve Fireworks** at the end of the fishing pier at 8 p.m. Great places to watch are from anywhere along the Boardwalk areas including the pier, beach and the beach-facing restaurants and bars.

The **New Year’s Eve Bash at Rick’s on Okaloosa Island** will be held from 4 p.m. – 1 a.m. Join the Rick’s family for an afternoon and evening of FUN! There will be activities, food and beverages for all ages including live music! A bouncy house and the arcade kicks off the afternoon, pizza by the slice, drink and food specials (TBA) and an amazing lineup of music! A champagne toast at midnight and fellowship into the New Year will wrap up 2022! Details will be announced in the event!



The Village of Baytowne Wharf will host **Baytowne Countdown**, Sat., Dec. 31, 6 p.m.-1 a.m., with two breathtaking fireworks displays at 8 p.m. and midnight. Enjoy a family-friendly evening from 6-8 p.m. The first fireworks display happens at 8 p.m. Dance the night away with live music from Bay Kings Band 7 p.m-1 a.m. End the night with a spectacular midnight fireworks show.

Noon Year’s Eve is just for kids at **LuLu’s Destin**. It’s the 7th annual Noon Year’s Eve celebration Tues., Dec. 31, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. with non-stop, free kid-friendly fun. There will be arts and crafts, inflatables, face painting, live music and more. Kids can have their fun by counting down to Noon with kid-safe “fireworks” and a huge Beach Ball Drop. Visit LulusFunFoodMusic.com/destin or call (850) 710-5858.



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