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# Military Association Awards \$29,000 In Scholarships

By Lori Leath Smith

The Northwest Military Officers Association (NWF-MOA) Annual Scholarship and Awards Luncheon in May saw eight scholarships awarded totaling \$25,500 to JROTC cadets at six of our communities' local high schools and one \$4,000 scholarship awarded to a local ROTC cadet at the University of South Florida.

NWFMOA board members Maj. Dave Parisot, USAF, Ret., and president of the Scholarship Fund, Lt. Col. George Colton, Lt. Col. Bob Allen, Lt. Col. Fred Westfall, Col. Karl Eschmann and Lt. Col. Charles Farmer establish the scholarship policies and procedures, review and score the applications, and interview the applicants in March and April each year.

"The MOAA Medal was crafted to recognize leadership and academic achievements of ROTC and JROTC cadets," said Maj. Parisot. "It is presented annually to specially selected junior year stu-



2023 NWFMOA JROTC scholarship awardees (from left): Cadet Major Kelvin Lora, Cadet Colonel Paige Lettelleir, Cadet First Lieutenant Alissa Easley, Cadet Major Jeremy Fiueroa-Olmeda, Cadet colonel Mark Almazan, Cadet Petty Officer First Class Jacob Herrera. Not pictured: Cadet Colonel Dawn Kerwin.

dents who are participating in ROTC or JROTC programs throughout our country and who exhibit high potential for military leadership. This award reflects the cadet's superior accomplishments and support of his or her high school Junior ROTC program, high academic achievements and service to school and community. This award further reflects the high regard of each school's JROTC instructors."

"When you hear what they [these students] have done, you know our nation is in good hands," said Brig. Gen. Fran Hendricks, chapter president.

Begun last year, NWFMOA continued its program of naming its scholarships in honor of deceased NWFMOA Chapter members. Following are this year's JROTC scholarship recipients:

1. Cadet Col. Dawn Kerwin, Fort Walton Beach AFJROTC, received the Lt. Col. James "Jim" Heavener, USAF, Ret., and Mrs. Una Heavener Memorial Scholarship – \$4,500.

2. Cadet Col. Mark Almazan, Fort Walton Beach

> SCHOLARSHIPS continued on page 2

## Music Fans Swarm to Northwest Florida for Country on the Coast

By WILL ESTELL

If you're a music fan and live or play anywhere along the beaches of Northwest Florida's Gulf Coast, you likely already know about country music's biggest party at the beach, Gulf Coast Jam. The festival, which takes place in Panama City Beach, is now one of the largest outdoor music festivals (of any genre) in the country, boasting an attendance of more than 30,000 people per day for each night's headlining shows.

For 2023, Gulf Coast Jam will be more popular than ever, having sold out most ticket packages six months in advance. The party is right around the corner, June 1-4, and brings millions in revenue to accommodation providers, restaurants, retailers and entertainment establishments across the three-county (Okaloosa, Walton, Bay) area, where most of the thou-

> **MUSIC FANS** *continued on page 2*



#### Community

#### **SCHOLARSHIPS**

continued from page 1

AFJROTC, received the Dr. Howard Fisher, Lt. Col., USA-FR, Ret., and Mrs. Irene Fisher Scholarship - \$3,000.

3. Cadet Petty Officer First Class Jacob Herrera, Navarre NJROTC, received the Dr. Fred Westfall, Lt. Col., USAF, Ret., and Mrs. Janet Westfall Scholarship - \$3,000.

4. Cadet Col. Paige Lettelleir, AFJROTC, Choctawhatchee received the Mrs. Chong Cha (Kim) Parisot Memorial Scholarship - \$3,000.

5. Cadet Lt. Col. Maziah Davis, Crestview Army JROTC, received the Cdr. Olive Clyde Locke, USN, Ret., Memorial Scholarship - \$3,000.

6. Cadet Maj. Jeremy Figueroa-Olmeda, Choctawhatchee AFJROTC, received the Col. Richard "Dick" Prater, USAF, Ret., Memorial Scholarship - \$3,000.

7. Cadet Maj. Kelvin Lora, Baker School Army JROTC, received the Col. Jack Gardner, USA, Ret., Memorial Scholarship - \$3,000.

8. Cadet 1st Lt. Alissa Easley, Niceville AFJROTC, received the Col. Donald Panzenhagen, USAF, Ret., Memorial Scholarship - \$3,000.

9. Cadet Col. Kayla McCarthy, AFROTC, University of South Florida in Tampa criminology major, received the Col. Douglas L. 'Doug' Hardin, USAF, Ret., Memorial Scholarship - \$4,000.

KENNY

Three local high school seniors who have received appointments the United States Air Force Academy at Colorado Springs, Colo., were also honored and selected for the USA-FA Class of 2027: Olivia Beard and Alexander Davidson, both Fort Walton Beach High School, and Therese Sherwin, Niceville High School.

Maj. Parisot also recognized two retiring JROTC Senior Instructors: Col. Mark Batcho, USAF, Ret., is retiring after seven vears at Fort Walton Beach High School AFJROTC, and Maj. Scott Bates, USAF, is retiring after 11 years of leading the Choctawhatchee High School AFJROTC. During their tenures, these instructors have influenced more than 3,500

MIRANDA

JROTC cadets.

NWFMOA is a local, non-profit organization of more than 200 local active, retired and separated officers, including warrant officers, who have served in one of the eight uniformed services: Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Coast Guard, Space Force, Public Health Service and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The membership also includes surviving spouses who belong in an auxiliary member context.

In addition to scholarships, one of NWFMOA's missions is to purchase gift cards at the base commissary to distribute to young enlisted families in grades E-4 and below to purchase food. NWFMOA partners with the

Eglin and Hurlburt First Sergeant Councils, the 7th Special forces Group and the Military Family Readiness Centers at Hurlburt and Duke Field to distribute the gift cards to their neediest enlisted families. In the past three years, this local chapter has donated 610 commissary gift cards of \$25 each, for a combined value of \$15,250! The chapter also advocates for Wreaths Across America, Bob Hope Village, and other community outreach projects.



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sands of jammers stay, dine and take in the beach.

Having covered the festival for six years now, I can attest to its growing popularity and draw. I've seen everyone from Tim McGraw, Luke Bryan, Old Dominion, Brooks & Dunn, Cadillac Three and Florida Georgia Line to Riley Green, Big & Rich, Lynyrd Skynyrd, LOCASH and Kid Rock, along with many other well-knowns playing to growing crowds of music lovers from every state and those who travel from abroad to attend the festival

For 2023 Gulf Coast Jam's headliners encompass some of country's most popular artists, including Kenny Chesney, HARDY, Maranda Lambert and Kane Brown, as well as well-known hitmakers such as Chase Rice, Justin Moore, Gabby Barrett, Breland and Bailey Zimmerman – with many others rounding out the total 32 artists taking the stage over the fourdav event.

Kenny Chesney's late addi-



tion to the bill was secured only four weeks out from the festival weekend, having been added as the replacement for Morgan Wallen, who was originally on the ticket, but was forced to cancel a chain of concert dates due to a vocal issue.

I've had the pleasure to see Kenny play at both festivals and live at the CMA Awards, as well as, having conducted one-onone feature magazine cover interviews with him twice in the past seven years (with a third interview set for next year before his 2024 tour) and I can assure anyone who hasn't seen him work a stage and crowd that he knows how to throw a party. Craig Campbell of Campbell Entertainment Group in Nash-

ville, who has played an instrumental role in orchestrating various behind-the-scenes aspects of Gulf Coast Jam since its first year, says the talent alone runs well into the multi-millions each year.

"It's actually because of our great sponsorships, and the generous support of Panama City Beach that we are able to throw this level of music festival and keep the ticket prices where they are," Campbell said. "That's one of the aspects that Rendy and Mark, (the festival founders and organizers) are most proud of: bringing great music to Panama City Beach and making it attainable to most everyone."

For additional information, follow Gulf Coast Jam on Facebook and Instagram or visit GulfCoastJam.com where you can grab your T-shirts, hats and festival merchandise early, and, if you're lucky, grab one of the few secondary market tickets as they become available.

Will Estell is a writer, media entrepreneur, and real estate professional with more than 600 published magazine features in an array of genres. Over the past 25 years, he has been instrumental in founding 12 new magazines – both regional and national in scope and distribution - from concept to fruition, as well as serving as editor in chief for numerous others. Originally from the backwoods of rural Mississippi farm country, Will is a father of three young adults, who splits his time between Destin and Navarre, with his wife, ABC 3 news anchor, Laura Hussey. He is a regular contributor to Life Media's publications and does a little songwriting himself these days.



# Know Your Local Pro: Window Hero and Owner Ryan Jackson

There are three hallmarks of a great business: a trustworthy brand, a hard-working business owner dedicated to customer service and a team of highly trained professionals. When you choose businesses to work with, you deserve the best. Introducing Ryan Jackson, owner of Window Hero Pensacola-Destin – the only name you need when you're looking for professional, reliable exterior cleaning for your home or business.

Founder Tyler Kirk started the business in Charlotte, NC, in 2006 under the name Labor Panes, offering window and pressure washing. In 2022, the company rebranded as Window Hero and expanded to serve even more customers with a franchise model. Since then, it has achieved rapid growth, and there are now 24 locations across six states. Window Hero's meteoric success comes from building strong relationships, responding to customer needs and adding value to their lives. It has extended the selection of services to better serve its customers, adding full-home and building exterior washing, window cleaning, gutter cleaning, gutter guard installation, roof washing, and solar panel cleaning. Window Hero has become the go-to company for quality exterior cleaning, earning a fivestar rating on Google and thousands of satisfied customers.

Ryan Jackson is proud to serve the community as your local Window Hero owner. He graduated from the United



States Naval Academy, followed by Naval Flight Officer training. Ryan served 24 years in the Navy flying combat operations during his deployment in Operation Enduring Freedom. After retiring from the military, he returned to the Emerald Coast to be a permanent part of the community he fell in love with while at NAS Pensacola for flight school from 2004-2006.

Window Hero allows Ryan to achieve a longtime goal: to own a business that supports initiatives to get involved in the community and create jobs that will enable employees to achieve personal and professional growth. Ryan knew he wanted to be a part of the Window Hero family when he read the core values of its parent company, HomeFront Brands: "Community – We make a difference in the community one person, friend, or neighbor at a time. Accountability – We do more than expected, by our own choice and our own will. Respect – We treat others as we would like to be treated. Excellence – We set high standards and rise to meet them. Service – We meet others' needs with a servant's heart."

Window Hero Pensacola-Destin has it all. It's a trusted brand with 17 years of experience, a local veteran business owner focused on giving back to the community, and a team of friendly, skilled technicians.

Make your home or business shine. Call your local pro, Ryan Jackson, at (850) 601-9609 for your free quote. Visit Windowhero.com/locations/pensacola-destin/ to find out more.



## **Historic Capital Improvements**



By CAROLYN NEWCOMER KETCHEL, OKALOOSA COUNTY Commissioner, District 2

Okaloosa County is addressing a number of needed and historic projects in regard to infrastructure. The projects range from small to large, but the commonality is the historic level of capital investment for the future of our county. Completion of

these projects will add to an ever-improving quality of life for our residents and business community. I wanted to share with my readership the significant progress that your County Commission is working towards with a listing of our initiatives.

**Airport / VPS** 

Our airport system is one of the few airports in the country that does not have debt. We are therefore able to make the following improvements with more parking planned.

• East & West baggage claim expansion

#### • Covered Walkways **Public Works**

These projects are financed by Triumph dollars, grants surtax (1/2 penny sales tax), Legislative initiatives, DOT grants, gas tax and Tax Increment Financing.

· Southwest Crestview Bypass

• Shoal River / Jerricho Road Economic Infrastructure Improvements

• P.J. Adams Widening

• Santa Rosa Boulevard Redevelopment

• Bridge-to-Bridge Multi-Use Trail Project

• County Road 2 Safety/ Bridge Upgrades

#### **Information Technology**

These much-needed projects are paid for by the half penny surtax program voted in by our Okaloosa County constituents. The communication project will assist the Sherriff and public safety officials in times of emergency.

• North county broad band project

• 800 Mhz P25 Phase II

Emergency Communications Project

#### **Parks and Facilities**

The purchase of additional beach front property was a cooperative venture by the City of Destin and Okaloosa County tourism development funds.

• Destin Beach Parks Development

• Purchase of the Fairgrounds from City of Ft. Walton Beach (to be finalized this summer) Water & Sewer

The Water and Sewer department is one of 4 enterprise funds in the county. These proposed projects are paid for in large part by your W & S Department and grants.

• Shoal River Ranch Wastewater Plant

• Niceville/Eglin Reclaimed Water Project

• Arbennie Pritchett Water Reclamation Facility Solids Handling Expansion

Perhaps the most important part of these projects is that we have not raised ad valorem taxes (which are among the lowest in Florida), and continue to live within our means. During these uncertain times, Okaloosa County continues to lead NW Florida towards historic capital investments for the future. As we watch our Congress struggle with the debt ceiling, we are proud that we have been able to accomplish so much with so little.

Okaloosa County Commissioner Carolyn Ketchel, District 2, can be reached at cketchel myokaloosa.com or 850-651-7105.

## Sinfonia Presents Beginning Strings Summer Camp

June 12-16 | 9 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. | Destin High School

Calling all young string musicians to Destin. Sinfonia Gulf Coast Youth Orchestra announces the Sinfonia Beginning Strings Summer Camp, a fun-filled fiveday program designed to intro-

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world of string instruments. The camp will take place from June 12-16, 2023, from 9 a.m. to 11:30

DER

a.m. at Destin High School. This beginner strings summer

camp is open to all children, regardless of prior musical experience. Participants will have the opportunity to choose between violin, viola, cello, or bass and learn the fundamentals of music theory, music history, and how to play their chosen instrument. Throughout the week, dedicated instructors will provide comprehensive instruction, ensuring a supportive and engaging learning environment for all participants.

To enhance the learning experience, each student will receive a rental instrument for the duration of the camp, along with all the necessary accessories. The tuition fee for the camp is \$125 per student, which covers instruction, instrument rental and all required accessories. The camp is limited to 25 students, and registration will be accepted on a first come, first serve basis.

The highlight of the camp will be a final presentation where students will showcase their newfound skills to their parents and families on the last day of class. It will be an excellent opportunity for the young musicians to demonstrate their progress and celebrate their accomplishments.

"Education is the centerpiece of Sinfonia. It was founded in

NF-31546088



2005 not only for its entertainment value, but for the fact that Northwest Florida needed an organization that could be the proponent for arts education in schools, specifically music education," said Sinfonia Gulf Coast Music & Artistic Director Demetrius Fuller. "Beginning Strings Summer Camp is a wonderful way for local young musicians to experience a new music adventure and have fun doing it."

To register for Sinfonia's Beginning Strings Summer Camp, interested individuals can visit the following link:https://app. arts-people.com/index.php?class=sgc.

For additional information, please contact Margaret Gordon, Music Director, Sinfonia Youth Orchestra Coordinator of Education & Community Engagement by calling (850) 460-8800 or emailing mgordon@ sinfoniagulfcoast.org.

duce children ages 7-11 to the

FFTIME

DECK

BRADLEY

DUKE

DAUM

**35 Yrs. Experience** 



By Melissa Forte-Litscher

Summer is here! Kids are out of school and it's vacation time. In our area, that means there are picnics and barbecues to have, beach outings to plan, and boats to ride. Summer is a wonderful time to enjoy the outdoors, but it's also a crucial time to give some attention to home maintenance. Regular maintenance improves the comfort, efficiency, and safety of your home and can prevent costly repairs in the future.

First off, check your air conditioning system. Start inside by cleaning or replacing the air filters to improve air quality and efficiency. Pour about a full cup of vinegar down the condensation line to inhibit algae growth, which can block the drain line. Clear away any debris, weeds, or obstructions from the outdoor unit for proper airflow. A pro-

## **Essential Summer Home Maintenance Tips**

fessional HVAC inspection will detect any potential issues and make sure your system is running smoothly during the hottest days of the year. Efficient insulation is also important for keeping you cool and reducing energy costs. Inspect the caulking around windows, doors, and other exterior openings for any gaps. Seal them with weatherstripping or caulk to prevent air and water leaks.

Next you need to inspect your gutters to protect your home's foundation and prevent water damage. Clear out any leaves, twigs, or debris that may have accumulated in the gutters and downspouts. Make sure that the water flows freely through the system, directing it away from the foundation. Summer is a good time to trim back any overgrown trees or shrubs that may be touching your home. This can prevent additional build up in your gutters, prevent damage to your property, and promote healthy plant growth.

Don't forget to give your outdoor spaces some love; this is the perfect time to spruce up for those backyard barbecues and pool parties. Clean and inspect your deck or patio area; sweep away debris, pressure wash if needed, and apply a fresh coat of sealer or stain to protect the wood or concrete surface. Check your outdoor furniture for damage, tighten loose screws, and replace worn-out cushions.

If you have an irrigation system, test it for proper functioning. Adjust sprinkler heads, repair any leaks, and be sure water is directed where it's needed most, not watering the sidewalk or fence. Also, inspect and repair your fences and gates to maintain security, especially if you have a pool. Speaking of pools, keep the skimmers emptied, remove leaves and debris, and maintain your pool chemicals. Those frequent summer showers can interfere with the pH balance. Though emerald green is a great color for the Gulf, it's awful in the pool. Before hosting your summer cookouts, clean and inspect the barbecue grill. Remove grease buildup, check for gas leaks, and ensure all parts are in working order. Don't forget to fill the tank; no one likes to run out of gas with half cooked burgers on the grill!

Lastly, outdoor lighting not only improves the look of your home, but is also important for safety and security. Inspect and clean light fixtures, replacing any faulty bulbs, maybe with energy-efficient LED bulbs that will save energy and last longer. Keep all pathways, entryways, and key areas around your home well-lit, creating a welcoming and secure

space for your family and guests.

While summer is a time for relaxing and enjoying the outdoors, it's vital to schedule in some time for home maintenance. You can easily perform some of these tasks just before taking part in your favorite outside activities. Enjoy your summer along the Emerald Coast. And, if you are looking for your NextHome, I'm at your service.







### Melissa Forte-Litscher

Realtor<sup>®</sup> ABR, RSPS, MRP, PSA

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#### The community

#### Similarity

## **Around Town**

**Okaloosa County and Miss Niceville pageants** were held Saturday, May 6, at the Fort Walton Beach Civic Auditorium.

Baby Miss Okaloosa County Blakely Echols, Crestview Baby Miss Niceville

Chloe Brown, Niceville

Itsy Miss Okaloosa County Andi McDorman, Freeport

Itsy Miss Niceville Knoxley Gundy, Crestview

Tiny Miss Okaloosa County Emma Kelley, Crestview

Tiny Miss Niceville Saylor Martin, DeFuniak Springs

Little Miss Niceville Mila Hope Palero, Fort Walton Beach

Junior Miss Okaloosa County Vivian Berry, Niceville

Young Miss Okaloosa County Macy Phillips, Niceville

Teen Miss Okaloosa County

Jessi Powers, Crestview Teen Miss Niceville Bailey

Scheel, Fort Walton Beach Mr Okaloosa County Rhen

Tetreault, Shalimar Little and Miss Okaloosa County Queens will participate in the National Peanut Festival in Dothan in the fall.

Volunteer of the Year is Amanda Morgan, Santa Rosa Beach.

#### Foundation Pledges More Than \$45,000 in Support for PAWS

To kick off its third year of partnership with the Panhandle Animal Welfare Society, Bit-Wizards' Be the Magic Foundation (BTMF) is doubling down on its



support. On Saturday, April 29, BTMF presented PAWS Executive Director Ashley Degraaf a check for \$20,000 and spent the afternoon volunteering on site. In addition to the cash donation and more than 40 hours of Wizard volunteer time, PAWS will receive \$20,000 in hardware and skill-based services.

PAWS recently launched the Kennels for Canines project to improve the lives of the pets in their care through a Kennel Rebuild Initiative. Various parts of the kennel are up for sponsorship. BTMF pledged to support the rebuilding of an entire wing for the facility. Along with the new wing donation, Bit-Wizards' Managed IT Services team donated and installed a new server to assist with PAWS' dayto-day operations.



#### Dog-Harmony Launches "Love is in the Air" Calendar Contest

Show dogs how much you adore them by entering the 2024 Dog-Harmony calendar contest themed "Love is in the Air."

World-renowned photographer, Jane Shirek, whose work has been featured in major publications such as Vogue and Vanity Fair, will capture winning dogs looking their most "fetching" at the elegantly romantic Hotel Effie Sandestin.

Scenes the camera could capture in this spectacular venue include being a pampered pooch at Spa Lilliana, whining and dining, enjoying a muttmosa in the Lobby Bar and canine couples exchanging vows.

To be a canine calendar girl or boy, a dog must fetch enough money to be ranked in the top 12. It also must be available to strut its stuff at the photo shoot July 16-19.



The contest runs June 1-30. To enter, register at https:// secure.qgiv.com/event/ 2023calendarcontest or email hello@dog-harmony.org.

#### **Brooks Bridge Update**

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) recently announced beginning of construction on the new westbound structure of Brooks Bridge. Motorists will continue to use the current Brooks Bridge (four lanes) constructed in 1966 while the new construction begins. As most readers know, the new \$171-million bridge replacement will increase capacity as there will be two new, parallel bridges, totaling six travel lanes. FDOT projects the Brooks Bridge replacement to be completed by summer 2027.

#### Curtains Up! "And Then There Were None" on Stage!

Get your tickets now and reserve your seats. Performance June 2, 3, 4 and June 9, 10, 11 at the FWB Civic Auditorium.

Don't miss this classic Agatha Christie murder mystery that will spice up your summer. Ten strangers are invited to a remote island mansion. All the guests have in common is a wicked past they are unwilling to reveal and a secret that will seal their fate; each has been marked for murder. As the weather grows grim, the group is cut off from the mainland and retribution begins as one by one they are murdered in accordance with the lines of a sinister nursery rhyme. The stage version is based on one of Christi's most successful novels written during World War II, and its growing sense of dread and tension will keep you guessing to the very end. Get your tickets now at https://www.ticketor.com/stagecrafters.

#### Art at the Shalimar Library: View Original Artwork by Pyramid Artists

The Shalimar Library is featuring the artwork by students in the visual arts program at Pyramid School for Fine Arts. Pyramid is a nonprofit organization located in Fort Walton Beach. The artists are people with developmental disabilities applying the principles of art. They receive instruction in color, various techniques, media, and design. Works range from abstract, impressionism, and representation. The beautiful and creative work can be viewed at the Shalimar Library, 115 Richbourg Avenue, Shalimar, or the website https://shalimarlibrary. org.

Framed artwork and prints are available for purchase.

#### OAA School Poster Contest Winners

The Okaloosa Arts Alliance recently held the 14th annual OAA Okaloosa County School Poster Contest, "What art means to me." A photo gallery is available online at https://www. okaloosaarts.org/2023-schoolposter-contest.html.

Participating schools include Rocky Bayou Christian School, Crestview High School, Silver Sands School, Shalimar Elementary, Edge Elementary, Kenwood Elementary, Meigs Middle School, Plew Elementary, Liza Jackson Preparatory School, and Homeschool students. Prizes were sponsored by Eglin Federal Credit Union.

Winners include the follow-ing:

#### Elementary (K5-4)

- First Place, Hannah Leitheiser, 4th Grade, Liza Jackson Preparatory School
- Second Place, Lisa Velazquez, 4th Grade, Kenwood Elementary School
- Third Place, Nora Wohlin, 4th Grade, Kenwood Elementary School

#### Middle (5-8)

- First Place, Genevieve Rocca, 8th Grade, Homeschool
- Second Place, Oly Stephens, 6th Grade, Rocky Bayou Christian School
- Third Place, Sunnee Hipp, 5th grade, Edge Elementary School

#### High (9-12)

- First Place, Breanna Enright, 10th Grade, Crestview High School
- Second Place, Johnmichael Irani, Silver Sands School
- Third Place, Chance Bollinger, 9th grade, Crestview High School

For more information, visit www.okaloosaarts.org.

STRATEGY

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Happenings Around 7MB

**JUNE 20** 

01	Creature Feature 11:30 am   Emerald Coast Science Center   Fort Walton Beach		
	Concerts in the Village: Gotta Groove Band ———— 7 pm   MKAF Cultural Arts Village   Destin		
02	Greater FWB Chamber First Friday Coffee 7 am   Christian Life Center at First Baptist Church   Fort Walton Beach		
	Live Music: Paradise Vale 7 pm   Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar   Fort Walton Beach		
02-	"Stage Crafters' And Then There Were None" Time varies   Fort Walton Beach Civic Auditorium   Fort Walton Beach		
04		Jach	
03	15 Year Customer Appreciation Day    10 am   3 Dogs & a Chick   Fort Walton Beach    16		
	Discover Science Saturday 10:30 am   Emerald Coast Science Center   Fort Walton Beach		
	Art for the Heart Watercolor Painting Class with Donna Bu 12 pm   Alaqua Animal Refuge   Freeport	rgess 17	
05	Pirate Show		
06	5 pm   Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar   Fort Walton Beach Movies on the Beach: "The Mitchells vs The Machines"		
	8 pm   Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar   Fort Walton Beach		
07	C.A.R.E.ing for Turtles 5 pm   Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park   Fort Walton Beach	19	
	Live Music: Joey Collins 6 pm   Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar   Fort Walton Beach	-	
08	Greater FWB Chamber Nothing But Networking 11:30 am   The Islander   Fort Walton Beach		
	Concerts in the Village: Adam Ezra Group 7 pm   MKAF Cultural Arts Village   Destin	- 21	
09	Chemistry Corner 11:30 am   Emerald Coast Science Center   Fort Walton Beach		
	Johnny Ocean Photography Featured Artist Show		
	5 pm   Maxine Orange Gallery   Fort Walton Beach Live Music: Grape Drink	22	
	7 pm   Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar   Fort Walton Beach	23	j.
09- 11	"Stage Crafters' And Then There Were None" Time varies   Fort Walton Beach Civic Auditorium   Fort Walton Beach 24		
10	Women's Climbing Circle		
	9 am   Rock Out Climbing Gym   Destin Advanced Pistol Skills Class 27		
	10 am   Emerald Coast Indoor Shooting & Sport   Niceville    21      Top Hats and Tails: The ACATemy Awards presented by SOCKS    20		ļ
	6 pm   The Elks Lodge on Okaloosa Island   Fort Walton Beach	29	
12	Women Veterans Day Celebration      3        8 am   Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center   Fort Walton Beach      3		
13	Movies on the Beach: "Jumanji" 8 pm   Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar   Fort Walton Beach		
	· · ·	1	
FARMER'S MARKETS	Downtown FWB Farmers MarketOkaloosa County Farmers' MarketJune 10, 24June 3, 10, 17, 24		
FARM	8 am - 1 pm   Fort Walton Beach Landing Park 7 am - 2 pm   1954 Lewis Turner Blvd, FWB		

23	3		
4	sciPad 1 pm   Emerald Coast Science Center   Fort Walton Beach Live Music: Hitide Duo 6 pm   Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar   Fort Walton Beach		
5	Greater FWB Chamber Business After Hours 5:30 pm   Fort Walton Beach Planetarium Night 6 pm   Emerald Coast Science Center   Fort Walton Beach Concerts in the Village: Journeyman - A Tribute to Eric Clapton 7 pm   MKAF Cultural Arts Village   Destin		
6	Planetarium Special Feature: Sordid Secrets of the Stars 5 pm   Emerald Coast Science Center   Fort Walton Beach Live Music: Aftermath 5 7 pm   Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar   Fort Walton Beach		
7	Building Industry Association of Okaloosa & Walton Counties Father's Day Block Party 11 am   Emerald Coast Flooring America   Fort Walton Beach Art for the Heart Watercolor Painting Class with Donna Burgess 12 pm   Alaqua Animal Refuge   Freeport		
9	Live Music: Teague Brothers Band 8 pm   Docie's Dock   Fort Walton Beach Pirate Show		
	om   Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar   Fort Walton Beach		
0	STEAM Machine 10:30 am   Emerald Coast Science Center   Fort Walton Beach Movies on the Beach: "Detective Pikachu" 8 pm   Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar   Fort Walton Beach		
1	C.A.R.E.ing for Turtles 5 pm   Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park   Fort Walton Beach Greater FWB Chamber Young Professionals Mixer 5:30 pm   Fort Walton Beach		
2	Concerts in the Village: Big Bad Voodoo Daddy    ———      7 pm   MKAF Cultural Arts Village   Destin		
3	Freedom Fest on Hurlburt Field 5 pm   Outdoor Recreation Marina   Hurlburt Field		
4	Festival of Speed powered by Step One Automotive Group 10am   Five Flags Speedway   Pensacola June Jam 11 am   Boys & Girls Club of Pensacola   Pensacola		
7	Movies on the Beach: "HOOK"      8 pm   Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar   Fort Walton Beach		
9	Concerts in the Village: Roman Street Party Band — 7 pm   MKAF Cultural Arts Village   Destin		
0	Creature Feature 1:30 pm   Emerald Coast Science Center   Fort Walton Beach		
	VFW Post 7674 - Sunday Breakfasts 8 - 11:30 am   Sundays   231 Carol Ave. FWB HarborWalk Village: Rock the Docks Spring on the Harbor 7 - 9 pm   Saturdays   HarborWalk Village Destin HarborWalk Village: Silent Disco Party		

7 - 9 pm | Wednesdays | HarborWalk Village Destin



## **Prepare Now for Hurricane Season**

FROM THE INSURANCE INSTITUTE FOR BUSINESS & HOME SAFETY

Hurricane Season starts June 1. Not quite five years removed from the devastating impact of Hurricane Michael, our area does not need to be reminded about the importance of being prepared. But, with information available from various sources, it can be hard to discern the best steps to take.

Based on decades of field and lab research, the Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety (IBHS) has released its 2023 Hurricane Ready guide featuring preparedness tips to help home and business owners strengthen their properties against storms. IBHS research shows resilient construction and re-roofing can significantly reduce the risk of storm damage. The nonprofit research organization has also identified some low-cost DIY projects that can help any building better withstand high winds and heavy rain.

"One of the things we note when investigating storms is that homeowners can do things to reduce the likelihood and severity



of storm damage," said Dr. Ian Giammanco, lead research meteorologist at IBHS. "Even with Hurricane Ian, which caused extreme damage due to storm surge, we saw limited wind damage in homes built after 2002 when the Florida Building Code was first adopted. Amid the overall destruction, this positive result helps show that we are not powerless against Mother Nature."

#### First Line of Defense: The Roof

IBHS analysis shows that as much as 90% of all disaster-related insurance claims include damage to the roof, and that oftentimes relatively minor roof damage leads to extensive interior repairs. One way to reduce the risk posed by high winds is to identify existing damage or wear on your roof. Most roofing contractors will provide an inspection, sometimes at no cost, and then make necessary repairs. If it is time for roof replacement due to age or existing damage, reroof to the FORTIFIED standard. Based on decades of the nonprofit's research, FORTI-FIED is a voluntary construction and reroofing method requiring third-party verification of the key elements that strengthen roofs against severe weather. Lab studies and real-world events show FORTIFIED prevents damage from high winds up to 130 mph.

#### Wind-Rated Garage Doors

Garage doors represent another common source of "cascading damage" during hurricanes or other severe weather events. When the largest opening in most buildings fails, pressure can build inside the garage and push up on the roof and out against surrounding walls. This can lead to major structural damage and even collapse. In this area, property owners should have wind-resistant garage doors with a rating of at least 130 mph. If a garage door is not labeled as wind resistant, it should be replaced or at least reinforced to provide needed protection.

#### **Cost-Effective Repairs**

While a stronger roof and garage door will significantly help to reduce the risk of storm damage, other more budget-friendly steps can be taken, as well. Hurricane Ready suggests sealing gaps and cracks to keep wind-driven rain from intruding into a home or business. Other actions like securing soffits and trimming trees can also help to limit damage caused by wind.

#### **Know Your Codes**

Modern and enforced building codes are critical to reducing the damage and destruction caused by hurricanes each year. Florida ranks atop IBHS's Rating the States which examines building codes in 18 Gulf Coast and Atlantic states and grades them based on adoption, enforcement, and contractor licensing.

While Florida's building codes have been among the nation's strongest for the past 20 years, they have improved over time. Therefore, a home built "to-code" in 2005 does not have the same level of protection as a home built in 2023. One key example is the sealed roof deck, which only became part of Florida's statewide code last year. Homes built or reroofed prior to that are missing this important level of protection that IBHS studies show can stop escalating damage which often leads to expensive repairs and homeowner displacement.

"If your home wasn't built or re-roofed to the newest code, you can make it stronger," Giammanco added. "If your budget doesn't allow bigger ticket items like a new roof or garage door, something as simple as trimming trees could help to make your home better protected. The most important thing is to take the first step."

Visit www.disastersafety.org for a full Hurricane Ready guide and downloadable checklists to schedule and track progress.

Okaloosa County: myokaloosa.com/ps/emergency-management.



# May the Fish be With You Fish Window Cleaning Owner Danica LaFaire

By Kelly Murphy-Redd, CEcd

A force of nature, Danica La-Faire, the owner of Fish Window Cleaning, is the Official Window Cleaner of the Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce. Danica's energy and passion are a reflection of how she runs her business and how she participates as a chamber member. She maintains a clear focus on growing her business and helping others to grow theirs.

Danica LaFaire was a beauty school dropout who worked in the restaurant industry for 10 years. She says that's where she honed some of her marketing skills. At age 23, she went back to school and earned her Bachelor's degree in Advertising and Marketing and her Masters's degree in Communication Management and Leadership.

Having lived most of her adult life in St. Louis, Mo., Danica worked for a startup company in an entrepreneurial community. In 2013, she went to work for a marketing agency and along the way got experience in acquisition strategy.

Deciding to interview for a position as head of marketing for a broadband company, Danica got into her car for an hour's drive. She thought to herself there was no way they would hire her and she ought to turn around and go home. But, then again, what did she have to lose? Danica says she doesn't know where the words came from but it was the first time she was completely her authentic self. She talked about her scuba diving certification, growing a garden, leadership, and relationships. She got the job.

She spent three years at Fidelity Communications and was involved in transforming the culture. With 500 employees across seven states, Danica was part of a team. The team was accountable to each other and had goals and disagreements, but they were "all rowing in the same direction." Growing together, they were an unstoppable force. In the broadband industry, if you are not ac-



quiring other companies you are dying. Eventually, Fidelity was sold.

Danica and her husband Josh began talking about franchise opportunities and Danica became a franchise consultant to learn about the industry. Josh was offered a job opportunity in the Florida Panhandle territory including seven states and Danica stayed in broadband for a time while still doing franchise consulting. While on a call for a client to learn about Fish Window Cleaning, Danica felt her values aligned with the company. Fish is built on the concept of "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." A blue-collar person could own a business. In 2021, Danica and Josh decided to open Fish Window Cleaning in Destin.

Fish Window Cleaning serves primarily commercial clients but does serve some residential clients. During the Covid pandemic, hotels and hospitals needed emergency cleaning services. Fish cleans windows but they do more than that; they help create a good first impression. They keep businesses looking beautiful. There is immediate gratification in helping a business look its best and in going home at night knowing you did good work.

Fish builds their culture on the values of trust, kindness, fairness, respect, choosing a positive attitude, doing the right thing, and creating "wow moments. At Fish, employees are team



members and are encouraged to think of working at Fish as a career path and not just a job. They have year-round employment and are proud to be technicians with world-class training. Danica invests time in her team

Continued on next page



Certified Economic Developer Florida Real Estate Broker Official Storyteller of the Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce



#### June 2023

#### By Heather Bennett Eye

You probably know someone who's had a cancer diagnosis, or know someone who knows someone. It's hard to find anyone who hasn't been touched by cancer in some way. Our community is no different. People are affected everyday.

Michele Bailey, founder of Bailey Brigade, and her family were affected in a big way when her husband Scott passed away in December 2021 from a rare salivary gland cancer. He was only 54. While there are many organizations giving resources to more common specific types of cancer, we need to remember that there is a wide variety of debilitating cancers. Bailey Brigade was started to honor Scott and support locals battling all types of cancer. It's a non-profit organization that provides copay assistance, backpacks with self care items, and scholarships for those wanting to go into the medical field.

All money donated goes to help patients from The Emerald Coast. "Your money stays local," stated Michele, who is working with oncologist Dr. Hayes at Ascension Sacred Heart. Part of the donations go towards helping patients with their copay. Qualifying patients are handed a card at checkout letting them know the Brigade covered their copay that day.

Backpacks provided to patients consist of self care items in themed zip lock bags such as "All Wiped Out" with cleaning and sanitizing wipes along with "Take It Easy Queasy" that comes with anti nausea items to help with the side affects of chemotherapy. The backpacks also come with letters of encouragement and support. Local students have supplied them with letters, but anyone wanting to offer letters of encouragement can send them to Bailey Brigade. Inside the backpacks are cards with a QR code. The code will



Join the Brigade

take the patients directly to a patient-only patience resource page where they can find assistance with services or discount services for them.

Another way to give back to the community for Bailey Brigade is through their scholarship program. Lukas Burgis was just announced as a scholarship winner. Lukas has also been affected by cancer in his family. He is studying medicine at Florida Atlantic University and holds a 4.6 GPA.

The community has been a huge support for Bailey Brigade. South Walton High Lacrosse and Basketball have both held fundraiser nights. The local Young



Professional Networks through the Emerald Coast Association of Realtors held a costume party and silent auction with proceeds benefitting the Brigade. Owners of First Watch opened a new location in Tallahassee and donated all the proceeds from their soft opening weekend to Bailey Brigade. As Scott and Michele's oldest son is their Operations Manager, it was personal for them as well.

"We've been here for 30 years," stated Michele, referring

to Walton County. "Our roots run so deep in the sand. We've seen the community grow and change. The heart of the community has only gotten bigger."

If you are interested in making a donation, you can check out their website at www.baileybrigade.com. Monthly subscriptions are encouraged, but one-time donations are always appreciated. It takes approximately \$50 to fill one backpack for a patient. They are always looking for corporate sponsors as well. Businesses can get their name on backpacks they sponsor, links on the patient resource page, or even a scholarship given in their company name.

Bailey Brigade is gearing up for a fall fundraising event. They are still looking for an outdoor location. If you are interested in donating space, please reach out to Michele at info@baileybrigade.com.

#### FISH

#### continued from previous page

and will help them rise as high as they want to go even if it means leaving Fish. Currently, she has five employees and will be adding three to four more in the next two months. Fish serves clients from Pensacola to Inlet Beach.

If anyone had told her years ago she would own a window cleaning company, Danica would have said they were crazy. But, even with the setbacks that come her way, she still thinks it has been a "100% good idea."

Joining the Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Com-

merce was also a 100% good idea. Danica will tell you from her experience, rural broadband survives and thrives on community involvement. She says it all starts at the chamber level. Some chambers function as economic development entities even when there are economic development organizations in town. Chambers understand the needs of their communities. The Greater Fort Walton Chamber of Commerce is a community development organization that advocates for businesses across Okaloosa County. Danica heard people talking about how active this chamber was and decided to join when she

opened Fish Window Cleaning.

She recalls attending the new member luncheon with Josh. During lunch, she turned to him and said "This chamber is legit. They care." Danica and Josh felt welcomed and began to see the chamber's embracing of Okaloosa County as not just a slogan but actual practice. The fact the chamber is the only chamber to also run a homeless shelter spoke volumes to Danica. She knew she wasn't being fed "marketing speak."

The kicker, she says, was when President and CEO, Ted Corcoran contacted her by personal email asking her what she wanted to do next to maximize her membership. Ted walked her through the levels and made recommendations. He never tried to "sell" her or ask her to spend more money. Ted helps make connections and wants members to succeed. It was a defining moment for Danica and she jumped in with both feet.

She asked herself where she should start. She applied to be a member of the chamber's Women's Entrepreneur Group and was selected. She started attending the After-Hours functions and chamber lunches. Her chamber mentor introduced her to other members. These activities could be incorporated into her busy schedule. She started the "Friends of Fish" where businesses could put introductory items into bags and Fish employees would hand them out to their customers. It was a way to help others grow.

After a couple of months, she thought, "Now I know people." It felt awesome as a newcomer to instantly be a part of a community that cares and is excited about service. Danica looks at the chamber as a way to celebrate each other. Even when you are struggling, you can reach out to the chamber. It's easy to be a champion for others when you have the same goals of mutual success.



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# **Congressman Waltz's Call to Action:** Unity and Security

BY DOUG STAUFFER

Congressman Mike Waltz, representing Florida's 6th Congressional District, has taken the reins from Gov. DeSantis in the continued fight for national security, veterans' affairs and economic growth. This former Green Beret serves on several House committees, including Armed Services-a natural fit, given his Army Special Forces experience. This committee has jurisdiction over the Department of Defense, including military research and development, nuclear energy and construction.

Waltz recently visited Okaloosa County. The congressman took to the stage at the Air Force Enlisted Village, a luncheon that was anything but ordinary as he began by reminiscing. Picture a young Waltz in training, kneedeep in swamp water, shivering in the freezing Florida night. "You'd never think you could get that cold in the Sunshine State," he said, "but I did." Fortunately, this memory has long since faded, replaced with his love for his constituents.

Now, fast-forward to a world where the Federal government's number one priority is no longer keeping its citizens safe. Waltz passionately declared, "I am trying to get Washington to do less and focus on the right things." With fire in his eyes, he warned us that "the Big One is coming."

The formidable Chinese government, he explained, is locked in an economic struggle with the U.S., seeking to outmaneuver and overpower us. With a navy now larger than ours, outbuilding our ships at an astonishing 5:1 ratio, and launching more into space than all other nations combined, the Chinese threat cannot be ignored. "They control the U.S. supply chains," Waltz warned, "including antibiotics, with 90% of computer chips made in Taiwan, a nation China seeks to control."

Waltz also criticized the Green New Deal, claiming it would merely replace one dependency with another, as China controls much of the world's cobalt, manganese and other essential minerals in battery production." Arming Taiwan and Japan in advance is crucial," he declared, "I am 100% focused



on that, and it gets me up in the morning."

Yet, he explained that the challenges our military faces aren't just external. The Congressman lamented the worst recruiting crisis since Vietnam, misguided strategies for electric tanks, and an unnecessary focus on differences rather than unity. "Unit cohesion in combat is life and death," he argued. "I have called in every plane in the Air Force for close air support, and no one ever asked what color or sexual orientation the pilot was."

Waltz emphasized the importance of supporting our troops and their families, who sacrifice so much for our nation. "The last thing they need," he said, "is to return to a moldy barracks or concrete chunks falling from the ceilings in the hangers." With that, the audience was left to ponder the gravity of the situation and the responsibilities we must all bear in the face of these challenges. As a House Armed Services Committee member, Waltz has been involved in oversight of Eglin AFB and Hurlburt Field, which are both critical to America's national defense. Waltz has been a strong advocate for these installations in Congress, securing funding for important programs and infrastructure projects and advocating for policies that support military readiness and strengthen America's defense capabilities. Additionally, as a veteran, Waltz understands the sacrifices and contributions of the men and women who serve in uniform. He has been a strong advocate for their needs and priorities.



The ladies pictured above were recognized at the Women of Honor event at UWF Emerald Coast May 4. The event was sponsored by the Okaloosa County Commission on the Status of Women (OCCSW). Each woman's name has been added to a plaque that hangs on the Wall of Honor at the UWF Emerald Coast campus library. A letter that includes the honoree's photo and brief nomination bio, along with the names of the person or people who nominated her, will be placed in the Book of Honor below the plaque. From left, front row: Quandra Pace, Clara Oates, Mary Bell Lundsford, Joyce Loughrige and Teneka Locks; standing at left, Pam Strecker and LaShana Douville; second row, Deborah Stone, Doris Scaife, Christie Pratt, Jan Pooley, Belva Parrott; standing at right, Kathie H. Blue; third row, Lija Eldridge, Caralee Gibson, Maureen Bierman, Rochelle Brown, Cindy Frakes, Kathy Marler Blue and Sabina Zungze (chair of OCCSW); back row, Michelle Carmical, Kristen Genrich and Sheila Hale. Not pictured arre Nitsi Bennett, Dr. Sandra Hanson, Holly Karr, Lenda McCain and Dr. Maxine Reed.



#### Military

## Heroes Among Us: Courage and Resilience

By Doug Stauffer

Ted Corcoran and the Fort Walton Beach Chamber hosted the American Veterans Center (AVC) from Washington D.C. (www.americanveteranscenter. org). They interviewed numerous local veterans who have bravely served their country. I was honored to be invited by Ted to share in this incredible experience and interact with the seven men telling their stories.

Col. George Ferkes served in the Air Force during Operation Eagle Claw, the mission to rescue American hostages in Iran in 1980. The operation faced numerous challenges, including harsh weather conditions, malfunctioning equipment and complex logistics. Ultimately, the mission was unsuccessful, resulting in the tragic loss of eight American servicemen. Ferkes shared his experiences and lessons from the operation, emphasizing the importance of preparation, teamwork, and resilience.

Retired Cols. Ron Webb, David Gray, Howard Hill and Ed Hubbard were Air Force Vietnam War veteran POWs. Each of them recounted their time in captivity: the brutality, and how they and their fellow POWs supported one another throughout



the ordeal. Their powerful stories evoke a sense of awe as they emphasized the importance of camaraderie, perseverance, and the indomitable human spirit in overcoming extreme adversity.

During the interview breaks, I had the opportunity to sit across the table from the POWs as they recalled their experiences. This unforgettable event left a lasting impression on me. I was present for Ron Webb's television interview, where he discussed the midair collision of two F-4s, resulting in his subsequent capture. Two of the pilots in the collision died. After the crash, he managed to avoid immediate capture but was eventually taken by enemy forces. Communities in the area were rewarded for turning in soldiers, which contributed to his eventual capture. During his first interrogation, Webb was told, "You and your President L. Johnson are now prisoners of war." Ron thought this was a shrewd comment because the Vietnam War haunted Johnson throughout his presidency.

I never tire of hearing the POW stories, including the Tap Code used to communicate in secret. The military trains servicemen to provide only the basic four pieces of information as required by the Geneva Convention: name, rank, service number, and date of birth. The captors wanted much more. The POWs were kept alive with the intention of reforming, proselytizing and ultimately turning them against their own country. Webb said there was no chance of this because every service member considered communism and socialism revolting. The captors also demanded tactical intelligence from their prisoners.

Webb's captors wanted to know how he got shot down, which turned into a cat-andmouse game. He initially told them it was a large gun, but they checked and found no large guns in the area. He then claimed it was a Russian MiG jet, but they checked with their air force and discovered that no MiGs had been in the area.

The next day, Ron Webb and I were together at the Crispy Warriors breakfast, and I jokingly suggested that he could have simply said, "I was in the backseat, and I couldn't see a thing." We laughed at the thought as he said, "I never thought of that."

Col. Larry Ropka was interviewed next as he retold the Son Tay Raid, the rescue attempt of Vietnam POWs. Although the mission was ultimately unsuccessful, Ropka's story underscores the dedication of those involved in attempting to bring home their fellow servicemen. His account highlighted the desire and dedication to free fellow servicemen held prisoner by the North Vietnamese.

CMSgts. Bill Walter and Bernie Oder were interviewed. Both served in the U.S. military during the 1989 invasion of Panama, known as Operation Just Cause. Walters and Oder shared their experiences during the mission, challenges and lessons learned from the operation. Their stories provide insights into the complexities of modern warfare and the importance of adaptability and cooperation.

By sharing these stories, the AVC hopes to honor the sacrifices made by these veterans and educate future generations about their contributions to American history. The personal narratives of these brave individuals serve as a poignant reminder of the resilience of the human spirit and the importance of perseverance, hope, and unity in the face of hardship. A heartfelt salute to Ted and the Chamber for organizing yet another remarkable event to celebrate our military heroes. The interviews will be posted on www.americanveteranscenter.org.

## **Junior ROTC Cadets Receive Monetary Scholarships**

On Tuesday, May 16, five Okaloosa County high school JROTC Cadets and one University of South Florida AFROTC cadet, a graduate of Navarre High School, were recognized and awarded scholarships at the Air Force Armament Museum at Eglin Air Force Base. Each

year, the Eglin Air and Space Force Association (Eglin AFA) scholarship committee reviews and scores scholarship applications submitted by cadets. Selections are based on the cadet's strong academic achievement and demonstrated leadership accomplishments within their JROTC unit. In addition, each student received a certificate of special recognition from Congressman Matt Gaetz.

Cadet Colonel Mark Almazan, Fort Walton Beach High School, \$4,000 Cliff Long Sr. Leadership Scholarship. Almazan has been accepted into

the AFROTC at the University of West Florida, where he will major in major in Business.

Cadet Major Kayla Browne, Fort Walton Beach High School, \$5,000 Maggie Hsu Scholarship. Browne has been accepted into the AFROTC at the University of Central Florida, where she will major in Aerospace Engineering.

Cadet Colonel Dawn Kerlin, Fort Walton Beach High School, \$4,000 Jimmy Doolittle Scholarship. Kerlin has been accepted into the AFROTC at

Continued on next page



🐲 Military

## Legacy of Bravery and Sacrifice in Vietnam

By Doug Stauffer

The 174th Assault Helicopter Company (AHC) recently held its 30th reunion at the Island Resort, Fort Walton Beach. I was privileged to meet with them and talk with some of the members.

When the Vietnam War raged on, the United States military faced numerous challenges in combating the Viet Cong (VC) and North Vietnamese Army (NVA). Among the many units that fought valiantly during this tumultuous period in U.S. history was the 174th AHC, whose bravery and sacrifice deserve commemorating and honoring.

Established on April 1, 1966, the 174th AHC was essential to U.S. Army aviation during the Vietnam War. The group operated the UH-1 "Huey" helicopters. The company participated in countless operations, including the Tet Offensive in 1968, the Battle of Hamburger Hill in 1969 and the Cambodian Incursion in 1970.

Tragically, the Vietnam War claimed the lives of many brave soldiers who fought for freedom and democracy. Among them were 62 members of the 174th AHC, who paid the ultimate



price. The story of the 174th AHC reminds us that behind every statistic and historical record are the lives of real people who fought, suffered and died for this country.

I sat down with Capt. Cliff Stern, a platoon leader who oversaw 10 aircraft during "Operation Lam Son 719," as he shared his first-hand account. As part of a broader mission in early 1971, the South Vietnamese forces, backed by the United States, aimed to sever the NVA's supply lines along the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos. Known as the "Dolphins," the 147th AHC provided aerial support to the ground troops throughout this daring operation. The company mainly operated the UH-1 "Huey" helicopters nicknamed the "Sharks," transporting the South Vietnamese Army and inserting and extracting soldiers in the battle zone.

Stern vividly described the numerous challenges and hazards the 147th AHC faced during the 45-day operation. The helicopter crews were under constant enemy fire, with the NVA maintaining a strong presence and deploying extensive anti-aircraft defenses along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Despite the odds, the 147th AHC displayed an unyielding spirit. Beginning the operation with a fleet of 35 helicopters, they suffered the staggering loss of 30 aircraft.

I also asked to speak with Wally Nunn, a 24-year-old door gunner at the time, who recalled his experiences during the war. He mentioned a common expression among soldiers that a helicopter was "280,000 parts flying in close formation," a humorous yet accurate way to describe the complexity and intricacy of a helicopter's design and functionality. Helicopters have many components that must coordinate precisely for

the aircraft to operate safely and effectively. It also underscores the inherent vulnerability of helicopters, as any malfunction or failure in one of those many parts could potentially lead to catastrophic consequences.

They relied on their "Witch Doctors" to ensure the aircraft remained in optimal condition. The term "Witch Doctors" highlights the seemingly magical ability of these maintenance crews to diagnose and repair complex mechanical issues, often under challenging and time-sensitive conditions.

Nunn elaborated on their mission: "Our job was to save people, keep the guys on the ground alive by stopping people from killing people." He shared an interesting perspective on the war, stating that, initially, soldiers believed they were in Vietnam to win. However, they later realized their role was to hold off the communists until their economy collapsed under the strain of conflict.

Their experiences are a testament to the unbreakable bonds they formed while fighting side by side, not just for their country but for each other. Their sacrifices and unwavering determination, symbolized by their motto "Nothing Impossible," are a powerful reminder of the courage and resilience of all who served in the Vietnam War. The 174th AHC, their families, and the memories of those who never made it home continue to inspire deep gratitude and respect for their selfless service. Their stories of heroism, sacrifice, and camaraderie are a poignant reminder of the true cost of war and the unvielding spirit of those who answer the call to serve.

During Military Awareness Month, FWB Life would like to thank and honor all those who have served and are serving in our U.S. Military!

#### JUNIOR ROTC

continued from previous page

the University of Central Florida, where she will major in Biochemistry.

Cadet Colonel Paige Lettelleir, Choctawhatchee High School, \$4,000 Jimmy Nabors Memorial Scholarship. Lettelleir has been accepted into the AFROTC at the University of West Florida, where she plans to major in Biomedical Sciences.

Cadet Colonel Kayla McCa-

rthy, University of South Florida, and a graduate of Navarre High School, \$4,000 Colonel Douglas and Carol Hardin Memorial Scholarship. McCarthy is an AFROTC cadet at the University of South Florida, majoring in Criminal Justice with a minor in Russian.

Cadet Colonel Erik Sirmans, Niceville High School, \$5,000 General Bill Kirk Scholarship. Sirmans is still weighing his options on where he plans to attend college.



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Pictured L to R: General Michael Kostelnik (Retired), Cadet Colonel Erik Sirmans, Cadet Major Kayla Browne, Cadet Colonel Dawn Kerlin, Cadet Colonel Mark Almazan, Cadet Colonel Kayla McCarthy, Cadet Colonel Paige Lettelleir, and Deputy Superintendent Steve Horton

#### Military

# Honoring the Fallen: The 54th Annual EOD Memorial

BY DOUG STAUFFER

Sunday morning, while preparing my sermon, I received a call from Lt. Kearns about a death in Niceville that required my attention as a police chaplain. A retired EOD (Explosive Ordinance Disposal) technician had passed away in his home. After arriving, I comforted the grieving widow and met another retired EOD officer and his wife. He invited me to attend the 54th annual EOD Memorial Ceremony taking place that Saturday.

The EOD community is tight-knit, and the Kauffman EOD Training Complex memorial service was both humbling and emotional. Assembled military personnel, civilians, and Gold Star Families were present, along with distinguished guests like Congressman Matt Gaetz and Congressman Brian Mast. Capt. Beall, USN, welcomed everyone and expressed gratitude to the Gold Star Families, emphasizing the EOD community's commitment to remembering their fallen heroes.

The memorial walls bear the names of 343 EOD men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice in service of their country. This year, the 344th name was added: Lieutenant JG Aaron Paul Fowler. General Poole described him as "a man of faith who lived it out and exemplified it every day of his life."

The most moving part of the ceremony was the reading of the 344 names, starting with the Army, followed by the Navy, Marines, and Air Force. The atmosphere was solemn as the crowd listened to each name be-



ing read, honoring the memory of those who served, and sacrificed their lives.

I flew to Washington two days later to meet with twenty Congressmen and women, including Congressmen Gaetz and Mast. In addition to other subjects, I wanted to get their impression of the memorial and ceremony. As I stood with Congressman Mast, I asked him about his perception of the memorial and ceremony. The Congressman is a member of the EOD community who lost both legs while serving in Afghanistan.

Congressman Mast stated, "I knew many of the names personally, along with others not mentioned with life-altering injuries. The memorial is a testament to the fact that the job is inherently dangerous and often deadly." It was a surreal experience standing with him in his office, knowing that his name was not on that wall but that he, too, paid dearly for his sacrificial service to our country. EOD graduation ceremonies traditionally take place at the memorial, a solemn reminder of the sacrifices made. Brigadier General Poole addressed the gathering, emphasizing the importance of honoring the fallen. A wreath-laying, three-volley salute, and playing of taps were a moving tribute to those who gave their lives.

Supported by the EOD Warrior Foundation, the ceremony reinforced the bravery and dedication of these heroes. As I left, the profound impact of the event stayed with me. The 54th EOD Memorial Ceremony was a stark reminder of the selfless service and ultimate sacrifice of these brave individuals.



## **Okaloosa County to Celebrate Women Veterans Day**

The Okaloosa Board of County Commissioners is continuing its tradition of celebrating veterans with a Women Veterans Day event and wreath laying at 8 a.m. on June 12, 2023. An indoor ceremony will take place inside the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center followed by a wreath-laying ceremony at the base of the Margaret Corbin statue at



Women Veterans Monuments at Veterans' Park. Women Veterans Day was recognized by the State of Florida by proclamation from Gov. Ron DeSantis in 2021.

"Florida has the second largest population of women veterans in the country. With our military presence in Okaloosa County, it is only fitting that we take a moment to recognize the courageous contributions women have made to this nation," said Okaloosa County Commissioner Carolyn Ketchel. "We are so fortunate to have a oneof-kind park that honors women veterans like Margaret Corbin, who bravely took up arms to protect our freedom in the Revolutionary War."

A total of eight women who served in combat, during various U.S. military conflicts, are honored at Veterans Park with life-sized bronze statues strategically placed along a quarter-mile path. It is surrounded by native wildlife that includes a nearby great blue heron rookery.

Another hero recognized at Veterans Park is Cathay Williams. She was the first documented African American woman who served as a soldier in the U.S. Army and the only known female to serve with the famed Buffalo Soldiers in the Civil War. Despite the ban allowing women to serve in the war, she nobly posed as a man to enlist.

A Northwest Florida veteran, Jackie Cochran, is also among the eight recognized at the park. Cochran was a pilot from De-Funiak Springs who held more speed, distance, and altitude records than any other flyer during her career. In 1964 she flew an aircraft faster than any woman had before. In 1953, eager to make the transition to jet aircraft, Cochran became the first woman to break the sound barrier, piloting an F-86.

In honor of Cochran, Northwest Florida State College is holding a production of "Flight of Jackie Cochran," at the Mattie Kelly Arts Center's Sprint Theater on June 4, 2023, at 2 p.m. The cost is \$30 and proceeds will benefit the Okaloosa County Women's Veterans Monuments. Tickets can be purchased at mattiekellyartscenter.org.

Learn more about the heroes depicted at Women Veterans Monuments at Veterans' Park at http://myokaloosa.com/bcc/ women-veterans-memorial



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🌸 Education

## NASA Astronauts Visit the Okaloosa County School District

By Catherine Card, PIO, OCSD

Two Nasa Astronauts, Colonel Raja Chari and Lieutenant Colonel Robert Hines, stopped by Niceville High School and Bluewater Elementary to speak to Okaloosa County School District students about their experience as astronauts and their journey to become one. ROTC Cadets from Crestview, Niceville, Choctawhatchee and Fort Walton Beach High Schools and students from the Okaloosa STEMM Academy convened at Niceville High School on Thursday, April 13, and the Astronaut Club members from Antioch Elementary and Bluewater Elementary met at Bluewater on Friday, April 14. The astronauts shared a video with the students that showed the primary dayto-day duties and activities they performed on the International Space Station then opened the floor to a Question and Answer session.

Col. Raja Chari was part of Expedition 66 (October 2021 -March 2022) where crew members conducted experiments that could help identify new materials with innate antimicrobial properties that could be used in designing future spacecraft. New hydrogen sensors were tested on the station's oxygen generation system to determine their stability over time. Astronauts also manufactured optical fibers in microgravity and contributed to research aimed



at improving the infectious disease risk assessment for astronauts. Lt. Col. Bob Hines was part of Expedition 67 (March 2022 - September 2022). He and his crew members conducted experiments that studied the aging of immune cells and the potential to reverse those effects during post-flight recovery. A commercial off-the-shelf technology that could help diagnose medical conditions on deep space exploration missions was also tested and sutured wounds heal in microgravity. A new external facility was installed on the orbiting laboratory to map Earth's dust-producing regions and they conducted an experiment to look at how a new concrete alternative behaves in microgravity could help develop in-situ construction materials on the Moon or Mars.

Lieutenant Colonel Bob Hines was selected by NASA to join the 2017 Astronaut Candidate Class. He reported to the Astronaut Office in August 2017. He has served more than 23 years in the United State Air Force (USAF) as an instructor pilot, fighter pilot and a test pilot. Before his selection in 2017, he was serving as a Research Pilot at NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas. He has accumulated more than 4,000 hours of flight time in 50 different types of aircraft and has flown 76 combat missions in 3 different aircraft types while supporting contingency operations around the world. Hines served as the pilot on NASA's SpaceX Crew-4 mission to the International Space Station,

which concluded on Oct. 14. 2022. The mission was the first spaceflight for Hines. He logged 170 days in space, overseeing the arrival of crew and cargo, maintaining the space station, and conducting science experiments of various disciplines. Hines is familiar with the Emerald Coast and while was assigned to Eglin AFB, his daughter attended Bluewater Elementary School. At Eglin AFB, he served as an F-15C/D/E Experimental Test Pilot and later went on to serve as the first F-15 Developmental Test Program Director with the 84th Test and Evaluation Squadron where he continued to perform flight test on all models of the F-15.

Colonel Raja Chari was selected by NASA to join the 2017 Astronaut Candidate Class. He reported for duty in August 2017. The Iowa native graduated from the U.S. Air Force Academy in 1999 with a Bachelor's Degree in astronautical engineering and engineering science. He continued on to earn a Master's Degree in aeronautics and astronautics from Massachusetts Institute of Technology and is a graduate of the U.S. Naval Test Pilot School. He served as commander of the NASA SpaceX Crew-3 mission to the ISS, which launched on November 10, 2021. He served on the International Space Station as part of Expedition 66 and 67 before returning to Earth May 6, 2022, completing the agency's third long-duration commercial crew mission. The international crew of four spent 177 days in orbit.

## VISIT **MYFWBLIFE.COM** TO READ THIS ISSUE ONLINE



## **Class of 2023 Honor Students Thrived Through Covid**

By Linda Evanchyk, Okaloosa County School Board Member

On April 18, the Okaloosa County School District held the Anne T. Mitchell Academic Senior Honors awards on the campus of Northwest Florida State College. Each year the school district recognizes students who are graduating Cum Laude (3.75 - 3.99 weighted GPA), Magna Cum Laude (4.0 - 4.29weighted GPA), and Summa Cum Laude (4.25+ weighted GPA).

In the class of 2023, 607 students met the criteria to graduate with honors designation.

I was asked to deliver remarks to the students and their families at the ceremony. The more I reflected on the events that have taken place since these students started their freshman year in 2019, the more in awe of their success I became.

I told them they made history without intending to do so. When they started their high school career, all indications were that it would be a normal year of learning and adjusting to life as a high school student. No one anticipated that in March 2020 the students would have the longest spring break ever, since the week prior to spring break would be the last week students would attend classes in their school buildings that school year. Students finished the year in an online format.

For their sophomore year, there was a delay in the start of the school year as protocols were put into place for the safety of students and employees. Terms including Coronavirus, Covid 19, social distancing and quarantining would become part of the everyday vernacular. Students were sent home from school, sometimes several times that year, and were told to quarantine as contact tracing was put into place by the Okaloosa County Health Department.

While these actions were deemed necessary for the safety of everyone at the schools, by the end of the 2020-2021 school year, the stress was beginning to take its toll on students. They told me, along with Supt. Marcus Chambers, in a town hallstyle meeting at Baker School a year after that long spring break, that they were weary of being in and out of school, and that it had affected them mentally. The school district and school board responded by hiring more mental health counselors for each school, and by instituting the Hope Squad peer-to-peer suicide prevention program in high schools.

On a lighter note, during my address at the honors program, I reminded them that they would have some great stories to share with future generations.

"Tell your grandchildren about the 'to mask or not to mask' debate, about sitting behind desk shields, and about the pungent scent of hand sanitizer that permeated the school each day," I joked.

As I shook their hands and congratulated these honor students, it hit me that the students in the Class of 2023 do not want to be defined by the pandemic. While they have overcome obstacles no other class has, they not only survived, but they have thrived.



The top academic students from each Okaloosa County High School are: Christian Oglesby, Baker High; Kendall Small, Niceville High; Ella Shelton, Choctawhatchee High; Tyniyah Haughton, Crestview High; Rachel Allen, Ft. Walton Beach High; and Mikayla Long, Laurel Hill School.

Truly, they seemed to be ready to move on from high school and the pandemic. I did ask them to please take some time, when all the pomp and circumstance has calmed down, to reflect on the last four years, noting their challenges and accomplishments.

Hats off to the approximately 2,200 Okaloosa County students who will graduate in the Class of 2023. What stories they can tell of their high school days, but

hopefully their greatest stories have yet to be written.

FWB Life congratulates all 2023 graduating seniors!



#### 🌸 Education

## **District Hosts Take Stock in Children STARS Ceremony**

The Okaloosa Public Schools Foundation is in its 26th year of sponsoring Take Stock in Children and celebrated the accomplishments of 14 graduates and the potential of 17 newly selected scholars May 4 at the Niceville Community Center. Special guest speakers included TSIC alumna, Justice Woods, and TSIC Leader 4 Life Fellow, Tyniyah Haughton, who shared a few words about their Take Stock experience and the impact the program and their mentors have had on their lives. "Take Stock in Children is positively changing the lives of deserving Okaloosa County students through the support of caring mentors and the opportunity to be awarded tuition scholarships to the post-secondary institutions of their choice," said Deputy Superintendent Steve Horton.

The Take Stock in Children Scholarship Program is a unique and innovative program that provides post-secondary scholarships to deserving youth who may not go on to college because of their families' financial situations. Students with good grades, good attendance and good discipline records who meet the income eligibility requirement can apply for these scholarships. Each student who is selected by the Foundation signs a contract, along with his or her parent, promising to maintain a good school record, to remain drug- and crime-free and to meet weekly with a community-based mentor. Students who maintain the terms of their contracts are awarded tuition scholarships to the post-secondary institutions of their choice.

#### Congratulations to our 2023 Take Stock in Children Graduates

"We are incredibly proud of our Take Stock in Children program graduates," said Superintendent Marcus Chambers. "They have worked incredibly hard, and I wish them success in their future endeavors. It's exciting to see this program grow as we welcome more students and provide the support they need to suc-

ceed."

#### **Baker School**

Kayleb Wagner – Choctawhatchee Electric Cooperative Scholar

Choctawhatchee High School

Emily (Emerson) DeSimone – Panhandle Job Fair Foundation Scholar

Jonathan Dutton

Dylan Wagoner – Linda Evanchyk Scholar

**Collegiate High School** Amyas Worthen - Florida

Power and Light Northwest FL Scholar

**Crestview High School** Sydney Ganey – Florida Power

and Light Northwest FL Scholar

#### Tyniyah Haughton Fort Walton Beach High School

Adriana Asque

Jania Bartley - Florida Power and Light NW FL Scholar Angelo Posadas Adria Womack – Cindy and

Michael Gates Scholar



#### Niceville High School Riley Clark

Caden Gatlin – David Morgan Scholar Erik Sirmans – Mid-Bay Rotary Scholar

#### Congratulations to our Newly Selected Scholars

All newly selected scholars will be matched with a mentor in the upcoming school year. **Choctawhatchee High School** Brooke Mignard - Panhandle Job Fair Foundation Scholar **Davidson Middle School** Enrique Boyett Jocelyn Brame Bradley Mastanduno Aiden Neese - Choctawhatchee

Electric Cooperative, Inc Scholar

Fort Walton Beach High School

Isabelle Crabb - Pathway To

Prosperity/ FL Power & Light Scholar Taniha Higgins - Pathway To Prosperity/ FL Power & Light Scholar Jayden Holt - Pathway To Prosperity/ FL Power & Light Scholar Nathan Jucha - Be the Magic Foundation, Inc. Jackai Nathaniel - Pathway To Prosperity/ FL Power & Light Scholar **Meigs Middle School** Sofia Rosell Carreno **Pryor Middle School** Destiny Cortez-Reyes Caleb Pearce Ayanne Tomlinson **Ruckel Middle School** Allyson Matthews - Mid-Bay Rotary Scholar Lillyan Matthews Shoal River Middle School Bianca Arevalo

#### Special thanks to our 2022-23 Full 2-Year Scholarship Donors

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To learn more about the TSIC program or about mentoring a scholar, visit the OPSF website. To learn more about the individual TSIC Scholars, you can view the STARS Ceremony Presentation here.

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# Off the Hook: Cobia Season is Back



By CALI HLAVAC It's Cobia Season on the Emerald Coast, a short window of time each year where the cobia migration rolls through our waters and fishermen ride high in their towers trying to spot them. However, things are looking a bit different around here this year, with very minimal cobia being spotted anywhere.

Boshamps held its annual Destin Flathead Classic Cobia Tournament April 20-23, with 31 boats participating, but very few fish overall – including only one being weighed in over the 45-lb. limit. That fish was caught by the boat Lucky Dog, and was worth \$108,000 in prizes. One weighed in at 44.8 lbs. with a few others between 25-



35 lbs. The consensus from all the boats participating was that almost no cobia were spotted in our local area over that weekend.

The Boathouse Oyster Bar follows the Flathead Classic with its own tournament, the Ding-A-Ling Cobia Tournament, April 28-30. Fish will need to be 45 lbs. to qualify for that tournament as well. It's open to charter boats and private boats, with anglers hoping to see a larger population of fish before that tournament in hopes of being able to weigh in a fish or two.

The Cobia fishery has slowed

over the years, with the FWC now requiring them to be 36inch fork length to be legal. Anglers can keep one per day or two per vessel, whichever is less.

If you've been on the docks, you've probably heard stories of the massive schools of fish our Emerald Coast used to see during the cobia migration, with the average fish size 30 lbs.plus. So, what has happened? Some captains will say the water temps have pushed our migration farther up the East Coast so we are seeing less, while others will say that we have overfished the population. Which one is true? That's up to you.

# Destin-Fort Walton Beach Sets New Records at World's Largest Lionfish Tourney

BY NICK TOMECEK, OKALOOSA COUNTY PIO Divers participating in the 5th Annual Emerald Coast Open Li-

Seafood and Oyster Bar on May 21. The tournament had 144 divers participate, competing in a variety of categories. The



onfish Tournament set a new record with the successful removal of 24,699 lionfish! Last year's total was 13,835. Divers from throughout the country competed for prize money totaling more than \$100,000 in an effort to eradicate this invasive species in the Gulf of Mexico. Lionfish have few known predators due to their venomous spines.

"Okaloosa County continues to be a leader in helping to create sustainable marine ecosystems," said Okaloosa County Board Chairman Trey Goodwin. "We are thankful for all of the divers and sponsors who helped make this event so successful."

The Emerald Coast Open, hosted by Destin-Fort Walton Beach Tourism and Florida Fish and Wildlife was held May 19-20 with an award ceremony at AJ's largest lionfish was caught by a diver from the team Dibs on Bottom and measured 17.95 inches while the diving team Deep Water Mafia caught the most lionfish at 2,898. In addition to the main tournament over the weekend, the event also set a pre-tournament record of 5,139 lionfish caught.

The tournament coincided with the 5th Annual Lionfish Removal & Awareness Festival along the HarborWalk Village in Destin. The festival included Lionfish & Libations, an event where the public tried samplings of various local brews paired with food provided by participating vendors. Various educational booths were also set up for a crowd of about 5,000 to learn about the species.

Leading up to the tourna-

ment, Emerald Coast Open Restaurant Week offered the public unique lionfish dishes prepared by chefs at local restaurants that both satisfied their customers while also informing them of this beautiful, yet invasive species. Judges selected La Paz as this year's winner who served Filete de Lionfish Empapelado. Ingredients included lionfish, epazote, calabacitas, carrot, potato, and peppers.

"Every year this event gets bigger and bigger and wouldn't be possible without the community's support," said Alex Fogg, Coastal Resource Manager with Destin-Fort Walton Beach Tourism. "We know that lionfish removal events have significant positive impacts on the local ecosystem. Hosting the Emerald Coast Open in Destin – Fort Walton Beach at the beginning of the season really does help our local fishery that is so important to our destination."

More results and information can be found at www.emeraldcoastopen.com or for local information, visit www.destinfwb. com.



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## **Relentless Raiders:** A Season of Resilience and Unforgettable Comebacks

BY DOUG STAUFFER

The Northwest Florida Raider baseball team, a group of tenacious young athletes, demonstrated exceptional resilience, grit and an unwavering spirit throughout the season, especially in their recent games. Their journey, punctuated by numerous comeback victories, is a testament to their will to win and the enduring heart of this remarkable team.

They embarked on their journey to clinch the Panhandle Conference, which required them to face Gulf Coast State in the season's final three games. Every game was a thrilling spectacle, filled with suspense and nail-biting moments. The Raiders, always maintaining their composure, clinched the series with a trail of electrifying late-inning performances. It was a true spectacle of sportsmanship, a testament to their never-say-die attitude. They fought tooth and nail, displaying an extraordinary combination of



skill and courage that saw them overcome the odds.

Then came the district championship series against Polk State. After suffering a blow in the first game, the Raiders dusted themselves off and rallied to win the next two games, proving that they were not to be underestimated. The deciding third game was nothing short of a sports classic. Behind 11-8 going into the 8th inning, the Raiders clawed back, scoring two critical runs. But in the 9th inning, under the most intense pressure, the team's spirit truly shone. With two outs and a 3-2 count, the Raiders launched a 3-run walk-off home run, a moment of pure magic that will forever echo in the annals of Raider history. Every player and supporter felt the euphoria of that 14-11 victory, a reward for their unwavering faith and perseverance.

In the words of sports enthusiast Mo Young, the team's energy was infectious. He shared, "This team was so much fun to watch. They were playing great pressure-packed baseball for the last several weeks of the season." Pausing for effect, he added, "The often used 'cardiac kids' moniker can apply to this team." His words echo the pulsating thrill that the Raiders brought to the diamond,

encapsulating the adrenaline and excitement gripping fans game after game. As Young aptly dubbed them, the "cardiac kids" kept spectators' hearts racing with their nerve-wracking comebacks and unyielding spirit.

The Raiders then entered the double-elimination District Tournament with their heads held high. Despite losing their opening game to the College of Central Florida, they bounced back with characteristic determination. They beat the State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota, in an extra-innings thriller, scoring three runs in the bottom of the 10th to win 8-7. Then they edged out Miami Dade College in a nerve-wracking encounter that saw the Raiders maintain their lead for an 8-7 win. However, in their final game against the College of Central Florida, the Raiders, exhausted yet unbroken, succumbed 7-2.

Despite the final defeat, the Raiders' journey was extraordinary. Their unwavering spirit, tenacity, and refusal to be beaten defined this remarkable team and season. They showcased the true essence of sports-that it's not just about winning but also about the heart, the determination, and the will to keep fighting, no matter the odds. The Northwest Florida Raider baseball team truly lived this ethos, and their unforgettable performances will resonate in the hearts of their fans for many vears to come.



## Know Your Neighbor: Saving a Golf Course Leads to PGA Show

By Lori Leath Smith

Never wanting to learn the game of golf, local resident Barbara Palmgren found herself doing just that when she ended up marrying Lornie, an avid golf player. So, she found a professional and took lessons. "The most important lesson I learned was that golf is a humbling game," Barbara said in her book "Saving a Golf Course." The moment a golfer thinks he or she has the game under control, the next shot lands in the water, the nearby woods or the formidable sand trap, cancelling the illusion of victory. On the plus side, a random long drive or miracle putt can bring the golfer back to play. This cycle of yin and yang continues throughout years of hope and frustration. Golf is a sport that can be enjoyed well in old age if knees and hips cooperate."

Little did Barbara know that years later, not only would she end up helping to save a local golf course, but also write a book about it!

Her book about saving Shalimar Pointe Golf and Country Club is about how the course was almost bulldozed and lost to a developer wanting to build 180 new homes. But Barbara,



Lornie and other residents were determined to fight to save it. Many challenges arose as they worked with others to save the course and their way of life for the good of their community.

Barbara's book established

her as an expert and caught the attention of the national PGA Merchandising Show organizers. She was invited to teach a class at the largest golf show in the country held in Orlando in late January. "It's so large that there are golf carts to take folks around!" she said.

Education classes are held for the PGA pros so they can upgrade or document progress as a professional card-carrying PGA pro. "PGA Pros have to accumulate so many points. So, they have to attend classes," she the said. Barbara's class, "Thrive or Survive" was one of those classes. "It was a onehour class exploring

the importance of prioritizing goals as well as being ready for the necessary Plan B's if there is an unforeseen circumstance that could threaten the progress of a course," she said.

Barbara said she wanted

"students" to come away with three main takeaways:

1. The importance of a business plan

2. The importance of marketing

3. The critical element of communication: verbal, vocal and non-verbal with staff and clients.

"Saving A Golf Course" gave her the background of an actual experience.

Celebrating its 70th anniversary for the largest global golf business gathering of the year, Barbara relayed that all aspects of the golf industry are marketed at the large convention center. "At one end is a huge net with 16-20 range stations where golfers can try out new clubs from all major manufacturers. Throughout the three days you can see clothing, golf carts, new golf inventions and schedule photoshoots with famous golfers. There are new inventions and you can hit balls." There are various countries merchandising their countries," she said. "Scotland and England are always there." To attend, you must be a PGA Professional, Golf Club Owner or Golf Club Pro, or a Golf Industry Vendor, Pro or Owner. "The golf channel is situated on a high central stage and broadcasts from the event throughout the show," said Barbara.

During the show, people who were successful during the year receive awards, world-wide golf courses have booths to promote the important courses in their country and, of course, the PGA Pro classes are held.

Closer to home, Barbara is again working with Shalimar Pointe currently under renovation. When she's not trying to save a golf course, you can usually see her hanging around the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida as board chair working on fundraising events, such as the recent one held at Regatta Bay in Destin. Barbara is also a retired guidance counselor at Niceville High School and an adjunct professor of Communication Arts at the University of West Florida.

Barbara has come a long way since her first aversion to the game. But now she hopes golf will become the center of Okaloosa County. "I want people to see we have a fantastic golf community. We have the presence to be a phenomenal tourism driver," she said.



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#### Wellness

Page 22

## **Adjusting Life Input to Experience Healthier Output**



By Stephenie Craig. JOURNEY BRAVELY

A few months ago, I found my brain scattered, tired, and generally tense. When I slowed to reflect, I realized I was carrying stress outside my awareness. Juggling work, home, parenting, relationships, life transitions, emails, texts, news, professional research, social media, etc. was overwhelming my brain. These activities weren't unhealthy, but the output of my life was out of balance. I took a social media break and noticed quickly I felt better. That break has become a more permanent practice as

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I've remembered that what we put in, our life input, significantly impacts how we show up daily in life, our life output.

Do you ever find yourself trying to make an external change and it just isn't working? Maybe you're trying to reduce stress, increase joy, improve a relationship, or live less overwhelmed. You may keep trying to make adjustments to the output of your life without slowing down to consider how the input might need to be adjusted. In reality, true change happens from the inside out.

In our fast, achievement-focused. entertainment-hungry culture, it's easy to become desensitized to anxiety-inducing input available daily. You wake up to news, social media, political commentary. You are inundated with messaging about how you aren't enough, you need to be better, you need to have more. You are told who is right, who you should be against, what you should fear, what you should know, and how the world is going to hell in a handbasket. It's hard to be more patient, kind, and peaceful when the input screams to worry more, do more, and be angrier.

The great news is you have the power to evaluate and adjust your input to create life balance. You get to decide the quantity and sources of information. You get to choose the boundaries regarding your time, activities, and practices you engage to pursue more joy and peace. So, what does it look like to begin adjusting your input to experience a healthier output?

#### **5 Ways to Practice Adjusting Your Life Input** to Experience Healthier Life Output

1. Slow down and notice where you are out of balance. Notice body tension, relationship tension, negative thoughts, unhealthy self-talk, road rage, impatience, irritability, sleep problems, anxiety, over/under eating, overspending, drug/ alcohol use, feeling victimized by life.

2. Evaluate your input. Take a week to notice and note your input practices. Notice what you're looking at/listening to when you wake, drive, work, in your leisure time, before bed. Check the hour count on your phone use. Notice the hour count



on social media, what you follow, and how it makes you feel. Notice the messaging/attitudes of input. Are they fear-based, critical, dehumanizing? Are they encouraging, solution-focused, inspiring?

3. Curate your input life feed. Give yourself radical permission to unfollow, quit the show, change the station, distance from relationships, reduce exposure to input that is not a fit with the world view you desire. You don't have to follow things that make you feel irrational fear, insecurity, and hopelessness. It's okay to unfollow positive things and friends if they are impacting you negatively. Try unfollowing negative inputs for 1-2 weeks and make notes about your feelings,



mindset, clarity of thought, state of overwhelm or calm. Keep in mind this can be challenging as your brain may be addicted to the dopamine hit you've been getting from some of the inputs. Push through the discomfort. It's worth it.

4. Create space. In place of excessive input, try incorporating an activity or two that creates calm and mental space. Take a walk, look at something beautiful, listen to calming music, be quiet, engage a spiritual practice, garden, hike, go for a bike ride, whatever else works for creating space.

5. Implement long-term input changes. Use your collected input data to decide which things you will let go of long-term and take action steps. Remove apps, unfollow, find a new station, put limits on your phone, etc. Find consistent time to include your space activities. Determine the balance that works and begin practicing. This doesn't need to be perfect. You can continue observing, learning, and making adjustments over time.

Evaluating your input is uncomfortable work but very worth the payoff of living a more balanced, less overwhelmed life. Connect with us for coaching and counseling support along your journey at www.journeybravely.com.



Wellness

# **Pharmacy The Way It Should Be**



By Tracy McMorrow, PharmD, Owner, Consultant Pharmacist

Looking back, it shocks me to say that I have been serving this community as a pharmacist for over 30 years! I feel honored to have been given that privilege and fortunate to practice the profession I am still so very passionate about.

As owner of IV Stat, Inc. Specialty Pharmacy Services, proudly serving Okaloosa County's long-term care facilities since 1998, I have seen a lot of changes in the industry. The greatest being that the trend toward using big box pharmacies has taken over simply due to convenience. But with convenience, there is often a price. What is lacking with this fast-food approach to medicine is the traditional pharmacist-patient relationship, which is vital to your overall health and wellness. Rather than a pharmacist managing your medications, that task has been placed on you, leaving no one to oversee your big picture. This lack of specialized attention is the catalyst that inspired me to launch WeManageMeds.

I want to bring the CARE back to healthcare. It is my vision to offer the same impeccable service and adherence packaging to my family, friends, neighbors and community who need help managing their medications that I have been providing to those in long-term care facilities. Specialty Pharmacy Services has been managing, synchronizing, consulting, vaccinating and coordinating healthcare for our patients for 25 years, and we hold ourselves to the highest standard of excellence to bring you the highest level of care.



With the launch of WeManageMeds at Specialty Pharmacy Services, we want to provide a unique pharmacy experience. I am excited to have recently revamped our pharmacy to elevate healthcare to a new standard. Your comfort and privacy are important to us as you will see reflected in our appointment-based approach and peaceful surroundings. As the only independent pharmacy in town, we provide a one-on-one consultation with our pharmacy professionals in a boutique style environment. And no long lines! We'll deliver your RxSTRIP right to your door!

Adhering to your doctor's medication plan is not just for seniors in assisted living anymore. It's for everyone who wants to live a healthy, active lifestyle.

Make an appointment today and let us STRIP for you! Call us at (850) 226-8162 or email rxstrip@ivstatinc.com.

Visit us on the web at www. wemanagemeds.com. Our of-





fice is located at 533 Eglin Pkwy. NE, Fort Walton Beach, in Paradise Plaza next to Denny's.



# WeManageMeds

lt's **Free**. It's **Smart**. It's **Easy**.



## What is Normal?

By Dr. RICHARD CHERN, MD How many times have you been told, "Labs look normal, see ya next year?" But that voice inside says "I don't feel normal." Why is that? Well, because it's normal to age, get tired, gain weight, have achy joints, thinning hair, move slower, and have brain fog. It's normal for women to get hot flashes, vaginal dryness, depression, osteoporosis, and have increased risk of breast cancer, heart attacks and strokes after they stop producing estrogen. It's normal for men to lose muscle mass, sex drive, and get erectile dysfunction as the testicles produce less testosterone every year.

Are you happy with normal? I was living a normal life before I started The Hormone Restoration Center. I had normal testosterone and a normal thyroid. I thought falling asleep after lunch was normal, I thought my cold feet were normal, I thought my brain fog was normal. Let me tell you what most doctors don't know, don't understand or don't believe. We don't want to live a normal life. We want to live an optimal life.

After I got treated I realized I had been on the wrong path for years. Living every day feeling optimal is something that cannot be described, it has to be experienced. I felt so indescribably fantastic that I stopped everything else and opened The Hormone Restoration Center. Our goal at The Hormone Restoration Center is not to get you back to normal, go see your doctor for that. We want you to feel optimal! Do you remember the last time you had a great day? How about two great days? How about a month of great days? Can you even imagine how that feels?

The Hormone Restoration Center starts with a simple blood draw done right here in our office. You can choose from the \$99 basic or the \$295 comprehensive lab which includes nearly 60 different tests and a genetic test. The "big labs" charge \$1700 for the same tests. You can see the doctor the next week! At the consultation you will receive an in-depth lesson about what is going on, why you feel like you do and how to fix it.

Many patients (and doctors) have no idea that a normal testos-terone, estrogen and thyroid can

wreak havoc to the body. When was the last time a doctor listened to you instead of the piece of paper with the normal labs?

"Great news Mrs Jones, the labs are normal, you just need to diet and exercise."

"But I feel..."

"Now, now, Mrs Jones, you're not getting any younger. This is just a normal part of aging."

Yes, it is, and I don't want any part of it!

Dr. Richard Chern, MD uses bio-identical hormone pellet therapy and his staff and providers are all BioTE certified. Call 850-837-1271 to make an appointment.

## The Ins and Outs of Headaches and Migraines



By Kay Leaman, Health Architect, HealthyDay HealthyLife

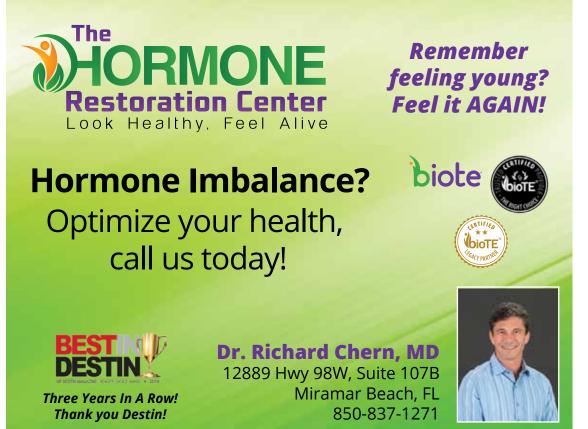
Most of us have experienced a headache and/or migraine; I have experienced both. There are several types of headaches, classified by the cause:

Primary – caused by chemical, nerve, and blood vessels or muscles around the head and neck. The skull aches with these types.

Cluster – Normally centered in or around one eye and side of head. They are very painful and occur in cyclical patterns or periods of time. This pattern can last weeks or months with remission following, which can last for months or years before returning. In some instances remission is permanent.

Sinus – Infections or irritations in the sinuses can trigger these and are centered above and below the eyes where the sinuses are located.

Tension – Mild to moderate pain. The pain can feel like a tight band around the forehead



thehormonerestorationcenter.com

and can include the back of the neck. The scalp, neck and shoulders and be tender to the touch.

The last class is Migraines. They create a severe throbbing pain accompanied by a pulsing sensation on one side of the head. These headaches can also trigger nausea, vomiting and extreme sensitivity to light and sound. They can last for hours or days and can interfere with daily activities. An Aura migraine can happen before (acting as a precursor) or during and include visual disturbances such as flashes of light or blindspots, tingling in the extremities and difficulty speaking.

Migraines are usually attributed to genetic or environmental factors. The trigeminal nerve (complex nerve in the cranium) is involved which interacts with the brain stem. Triggers can be hormonal changes or medications (including birth control) stress, sleep changes, foods and drinks (dyes, preservatives, MSG, artificial sweeteners), skipping meals and sensory stimulation such as bright lights, strong smells, loud noises or weather changes. There is also evidence that chemical imbalances play a part.

Electrical and magnetic stimulation are approved treatments for migraines. The FDA has approved the Cefaly device (transcutaneous supraorbital neurostimulator) and the Spring TMS (single pulse transcranial magnetic stimulator). Another device that offers a successful treatment (offers resolutions of active migraines) is the Electro-Equiscope (unharmful micro-current electrical device).

Things to consider that can aid in preventing headaches are aerobic exercise, having a regular sleep schedule and maintaining a healthy diet.

From the holistic side, nutrients have offered great success to those suffering from the various classifications. Among these are: Vitamin D and B complex Magnesium and Co-enzyme Q10 Curcumin and Omega 3 (fish oil), High-quality Grape Seed Extract and Resveratrol (Free radicals and oxidative stress significantly increase during attacks. Measuring thiol levels indicates that consuming these nutrients also aids in reducing the severity and incidences of migraines.), Melatonin and DHEA.

So much of our health is attributed to the attention and care we give to nourishing our cells. I have personally found, as have thousands of others, that feeding my body with the correct amounts of macro and micro nutrients on a daily basis has improved my quality of life. Factors that we have no control over such as air and EMF pollutants, chemicals we unknowingly ingest, etc., affect our health and overload our body systems. Being proactive with our health can and does give our body a greater ability to combat these invaders.

Here's to Health! succeed.hdhl@gmail.com

## Niceville Children's Advocacy Center Re-opened and Re-named

May 5 was a memorable day for the Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy's (ECCAC) Niceville Center. Not only did it mark the official reopening after the almost nine-month restoration and renovation of the Center after it experienced fire and significant water damage, it was also the official re-naming and dedication of the Center to the Julie Sacco Porterfield Children's Advocacy Center.

Guests at the ceremonies met the ECCAC team, took tours of the newly restored center and learned about the programs and services offered to locally abused children and their families. Along with several guest speakers, students from the C.W. Ruckel Middle School Choir entertained attendees just before the ribbon-cutting.

Julie Sacco Porterfield is a special lady with a big heart when it comes to the well-being of children. She was at the forefront of this major under-



taking and became the founding CEO of ECCAC. It started before the Niceville center became a reality when Porterfield undertook a grassroots community and governmental effort to establish ECCAC in 1999. A small 900-square-foot office was opened in what was once a dry cleaners in Valparaiso. During the first few years of ECCAC's beginning, her passion, dedication and energy, along with the financial support of the community and a strong volunteer base, enabled a new \$2.1 million, 13,000-square-foot center to be built and open in Niceville in October 2000.

Porterfield, who prefers not to be in the limelight, commented

## OCSD Highlights Efforts in Support of Mental Health

Throughout the 2022-2023 school year, the Student Services Department and its mental health providers developed a monthly Mental Health Matters focus. Each month the Okaloosa County School District's (OCSD) mental health team, along with school administration, faculty, staff, and students, focused on one specific component of mental wellness and practiced self-care activities and resources to develop that area of focus for the month. "Our District's commitment to promoting mental health extends far beyond what the State of Florida requires. Currently, we have 21 mental health counselors, 9 social workers, and 8 CDAC counselors on staff. As we look ahead to the 2023-2024 academic year, we plan to expand our team by adding three more CDAC counselors and two additional mental health counselors," stated Superintendent Marcus Chambers. We also plan to have a full-time Mental Health Counselor available on campus at each middle and high school." In addition, each school is proud to have HOPE Squad, a peer-to-peer suicide prevention and awareness program.

The District joined Mental Health America's nationwide recognition of May's Mental Health Awareness Month where each school participated in activities to promote mental health for students and staff. Knowing what mental health resources are available in our community is "key" to accessing those resources," stated Teri Schroeder, Student Services Program Director. Families can reference OCSD's Student Services Counseling Resources to find a myriad of resources in our community to assist in accessing treatment, counseling and support for mental illness or to improve their mental wellness. For more information, visit www.mhanational.org.

to the guests, "I am still in awe... and incredibly humbled to be honored in this way. I give the glory to God. He certainly has given me the grace, wisdom, and discernment to do my very best to make lives better for children. You all have given me the incredible gift of leaving a legacy for my family, especially my son."

In ECCAC's 24-year history, more than 15,000 children have received more than 170,000 services at no cost. For further information about the Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center, visit www.eccac.org. If abuse is suspected, call the anonymous Florida Abuse Hotline at 1-800-96-ABUSE.



#### Discover for yourself what Stem Cell Activation Therapy can do. Meet Dr. Jeffrey Hubbard, M.D., M.S.



Dr. Jeffrey Hubbard, M.D., M.S. is a concierge medical doctor, researcher, and entrepreneur on a quest to enlighten people about the long-term effects of poor diet, stress, and unhealthy lifestyle habits on the body. Through provision of personalized proactive wellness solutions and technologies, he believes these potential health problems can be prevented. In addition to his love for the core sciences and genuine empathy for the sick, Dr. Hubbard sought a career in medicine because the urban areas of Houston, TX where he grew up were underserved and lacked access to quality healthcare providers.

In 2014, Dr. Hubbard's career shifted from the traditional practice of medicine towards integrated functional approaches to wellness, the delivery of care, and medical entrepreneurship. His pursuit of the latest advancement in products and services led to the biotechnology patch company called Lifewave and their Stem Cell X39 Patch. Dr. Hubbard says "This patch is the future of stem cell therapy."

#### **Practitioners Tuesday, June 13:**

On Tuesday, June 13th, Dr. Hubbard will share the science, testimonials and how you can find relief from acute pain, inflammation, chronic fatigue, restless sleep and much more.. while focusing on the science he will show you how to expand your practice with this leading edge, revolutionary (all natural) technology! Register Here: https://bit.ly/DrJeffEventJune13

#### **General Public Wednesday, June 14:**

We invite you to see how you can find natural relief from pain, inflammation, fatigue, sleeplessness, as well as age related issues. Register Here: https://bit.ly/DrJeffEventJune14

University of West Florida Auditorium 11000 University Parkway Building 22 Pensacola, FL 32514

#### Business

# Is Your Insurance Ready for Hurricane Season?

June 1st marks the beginning of hurricane season. Researchers at North Carolina State said the 2023 Atlantic hurricane season will see 11 to 15 named storms forming in the Atlantic basin. The basin includes the entire Atlantic Ocean, the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico.

So, it is time to make sure you're ready for the next round of tropical depressions, storms and hurricanes that visit the Gulf Coast every year.

**Get the Smile You Deserve** 

. When you look through magazines, do you envy the models' smiles?

· Do you think you show too much or too little of your teeth when

· Would you like to change the way your teeth or gums are shaped?

If the answer is "ves" to any of these questions, you

may be a good candidate for A Smile Makeover.

Smile with Confidence Again

· Are you embarrassed about smiling in front of people?

Do you ever put your hand up to cover your smile?

· Do you have gaps or spaces in between your teeth?

Do you dislike your smile in photographs?

· Do you wish your teeth were whiter?

vou smile?

Do you have what you need when it comes to homeowner's and flood insurance and hurricanes? There are a few things that should be on your radar. If you have these coverages in place, you'll be better equipped to ride out whatever storm blows through.

First on the list is hurricane/ wind coverage. Most home policies (HO3, DP3, HO6, HO4) in Florida include either hurricane, named storm, or wind/ hail under a separate deductible.



This is preferred since coordination and consistency of coverages is important. Some carriers don't write wind coverage close to the water. So, a stand-alone wind-only policy would be needed. If this is the case, extra care must be taken to avoid any coverage inconsistencies. In a previous article last year, we addressed the differences in hurricane, named storm, and wind/hail coverage. But suffice it to say, when it comes to wind coverage, the best option is hurricane. Under this coverage scenario, the larger deductible in the policy, usually a percentage of the Dwelling Limit, applies to declared hurricane activity, while the smaller deductible in the policy would apply to other wind losses and all other perils in the policy. There are several deductible options available that can have a large impact on what would be your out-of-pocket responsibility if you file a claim.

Make sure you know you have sufficient Dwelling Limit (Coverage A) coverage to rebuild your home in the event of

a loss. Local and national data indicates that nearly two out of three homes and structures are underinsured.

Another important coverage is Loss of Use that pays for you to live somewhere else while repairs are being done to your temporarily unlivable home. This goes for rental properties with Loss of Rents coverage as well. Remember, there needs to be direct physical damage to trigger this coverage. Some rental policies don't include Loss of Rents so you will want to read your policy or call your insurance agent so you know for sure.

Another often misunderstood coverage not offered with each carrier, but always recommended, is Law or Ordinance coverage. Most carriers, if they have it available, offer either 10%, 25% or 50% coverage. This percentage is tied to your Dwelling Limit. If you have extensive hurricane damage, like we saw with Hurricane Michael, there may be new building codes you must adhere to in order to rebuild. The additional Law or Ordinance coverage is crucial to your protection, since your policy is designed to rebuild your home as it was before the damage, with similar materials

and quality, and not with more costly materials that could now be required by more stringent construction codes that may have come into play.

Another vital policy to have, especially during hurricane season, is flood insurance. Flood and water damage from a wind event are not necessarily the same thing. This coverage is so vital that we will again devote our next month's article to this topic. Although there are a few carriers who will add flood coverage as an endorsement to a home policy, it is infrequent. For most insureds, your flood policy will be a separate policy written through the NFIP (National Flood Insurance Program), and, unless your lender requires the policy, or you're closing on a new purchase, there is a standard 30day waiting period through the NFIP before your flood policy will become effective. Private flood insurance is an alternative. Many of the private markets in in the country, and especially in Florida, offer broader coverages than the NFIP and these should be considered as an alternative to maximize your protection.

We hope this helps ease your concerns this hurricane season, in terms of coverage.

Insurance Zone, founded by Joe and Lea Capers, is now Abora Insurance Group. Voted Top in the Market for 10 years in a row, Abora is a full-service commercial and personal lines insurance agency serving Destin, Miramar Beach, Fort Walton Beach, Niceville, Freeport, Santa Rosa Beach (30A) and Inlet Beach. Abora can find solutions from a wide variety of the best insurance carriers in the market for Home, Auto and Life insurance on your terms. Call (850) 424.6979 or visit Getabora.com.



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# INSUFANCE ZONE



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🐲 Business

## Meet Our Local Pros: Heroes Lawn Care

By Lori Leath Smith

Niceville local Brad Buinicky's mantra is, "Learn from the past and cling to good memories. Plan for the future and hope for the best. But live in the present and maximize your potential there."

As the local Emerald Coast area owner of Heroes Lawn Care, Brad has definitely started a business with maximum potential; Heroes Lawn Care is fulfilling a great need in our area and Brad says he's excited to serve our local communities. For example, "Many people don't realize they need to set their soil up for success. But, with the proper soil structure and fertilization, the lawns we care for reap benefits such as higher water retention, soil nutrition permeability  $\Box$  and improved drainage. We provide the specific structure for your grass roots to grow strong."

The company, based in Valparaiso, launched locally with a Grand Opening event at 3rd Planet Brewery in March, attended by as many as 200! It provides lawn care services such as fertilization, "Doody Duty" and Irrigation.

Fertilization programs include an 8- or 10-step system with seasonal pesticides and pre-emergent fertilizers scientifically selected to be applied at the correct times of the seasons, customized to our area to make the biggest difference towards a green lawn.

Irrigation services include yearly and mid-season inspections, turn on, sprinkler and irrigation repairs, winterization, and system and controller upgrades.

Eco-Conscious Lawn Conservation can include pet waste packages such as monthly, onetime, weekly or bi-weekly service, Doody Deodorizer Plus brown patch treatment and brown spot repair.

Providing instant estimates through the website, on-site consultations or over-the-phone estimates, Heroes serves Valparaiso, Crestview, Destin, Fort Walton Beach, Mary Esther, Miramar Beach, Navarre, Niceville, Santa Rosa Beach and Shalimar.

Brad says he plans for Heroes Lawn Care to be a part of vital local support. "Being an active presence within our community and pushing programs centered around eco-friendly sustainability and support for local troops and veterans is part of what makes Heroes a stand-out community leader," says Brad. "It is our aim to provide assistance to local community events, charities and more in the hopes that we make our neighborhoods a little safer, our futures a little brighter and provide our friends and family with an abundance of opportunities for communal growth."

Brad holds a special tie to the Heroes brand - he's served in the military as an Air Force Officer since 2004. Through his operations training, he's built the skillset and know-how to coordinate teams with efficiency and quality at the forefront. "We take a special interest in initiatives that involve making our community clean and helping out our local and active-duty military families with lawn care and access to holistic health resources," says Brad. When Brad isn't leading the charge for clean, green lawns, you'll find him enjoying the salt life, watching his daughters participate in Taekwondo and soccer, or cheering on his alma mater's football program.

A family business, Brad's wife Fernanda, a Brazilian native, has been a veterinary technician and hospital head technician by trade since 1996, with experience in the restaurant and education industries. Fernanda is passionate about serving others and values hard work, sacrifice, honesty and a good laugh. She



also enjoys spending time with Brad, her mom and two daughters.

General Manager Lloyd Young retired from the HM Forces of Great Britain where he served several tours of Armed Conflict. Lloyd has a BS in Hotel and Catering Management and an Associate in Golf and Turf Science. For Lloyd, joining Heroes was a natural step for him. "I have been working in the Turfgrass industry for over 20 years and moving from golf courses to domestic and commercial properties just seemed right." His professional background includes construction of more than 16 golf courses, plan operator/plant operator instructor and chief instructor of the Royal Aerospace Establishment. He and his wife having moved to our area just last October, Lloyd says he desires the ability to affect the jobs and lives

of the Heroes' customers, taking proposals from conception to completion. And apparently he is having a huge impact; he was just awarded Employee of the Month for the entire nationwide franchise organization in March! Lloyd's main interest? Golf, Golf and Golf-from watching it to playing it!

Having lived on the Emerald Coast since 2017, Brad says he takes great pride in Heroes Lawn Care and he can't wait to help you with your lawn care needs. Give Brad and the crew a call at (850) 495-7829 or fill out a short contact form at HeroesLawnCare.com to learn more or schedule a personalized lawn assessment! Have a charity, event or donation drive that you think would be a great fit for Heroes? Be sure to let them know. And check them out at facebook.com/heroes.emeraldcoast.

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#### 🔅 Musing



#### BY SEAN DIETRICH

I am an imaginary old man. I am every World War II veteran you never knew. I am each faceless GI from the bygone European War. Or any other war for that matter.

I am in my 90s and 100s now. Lots of young folks probably don't even know I exist.

In my war, I was one of the hundreds of thousands of infantrymen, airmen, sailors, marines, mess sergeants, seabees, brass hats, engineers, doctors, medics, buck privates and rear-echelon potato-peelers.

We hopped islands in the Pacific. We served in the African war theater. We beat the devil, then we came home and became the old fart next door.

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No limit on edited photos

Sean of the South: Dear Young Person Wartime was one heck of an era to be young. Let me tell ya. When we went overseas we were still teenagers, smooth skinned, scared spitless, with government haircuts, wearing brand new wedding rings. We hadn't seen action yet, so we were jittery and lots of us smoked through a week's rations of Luckies in one day.

Then it happened. It was different for everyone, but it happened. Shells landed everywhere. People screamed. And in a moment our fear melted away and we had war jobs to do. It didn't matter who we were or which posts were ours. Everyone worked in the grand assembly line of battle.

When the smoke cleared and the action was over, we had new confidence in ourselves and we were no longer boys.

And anyway, we weren't just boys, we were girls, too. There were 350,000 females serving in the U.S. Armed Forces in World War II. People forget that.

Speaking of women. We guys were always talking about our sweethearts, wives, and mothers. If you mentioned someone's girl



a man was liable to talk for hours about her. And even if you'd already seen his wallet photos before, you never interrupted a guy talking about his gal. Because eventually you'd be talking about vours.

There were nights overseas when we would stare at the moon and wonder if our sweethearts were looking at the same moon. There were moments of indescribable loneliness.

Infantrymen had it the hardest. I don't know how our doughboys did it. They lived like pack mules. Their boots got wet, their feet swelled, and their flesh became waterlogged. Chunks of their heels would fall off; the dreaded "trench foot."

The funny thing is, even though their feet were falling off, these men still didn't want to leave their posts. Many had to be dragged away cussing. That's how committed these guys were.

Oh, and the food was god awful. You learned to appreciate the rarity of a creative company cook.

In Italy, sometimes we could buy eggs from local merchants for outrageously inflated prices. One time I knew a guy who ate 32 scrambled eggs in his tent one night. I asked him why he did this and he told me he didn't want to die without tasting eggs one last time.

A lot of guys brought banjos, guitars and fiddles over there. They'd play music at night sometimes in the open Italian air. We'd square dance and laugh. Others would sit on their helmets, smoking, thinking of home, wiping their eyes.

The Germans had a local radio station that broadcast American stuff like Bing and Frank. Then, between songs, a German gal talked propaganda over the airwaves to us American GIs in a sexy voice, trying to mess with our heads.

She would speak flawless English and say, "Give up, boys, there's no point trying, you can't win. Everyone hates you. Your girls are at home cheating on you. They don't love you anymore. Give up. It's over. You lost."

This was supposed to discourage us, but it usually just made us laugh. Or cry. Sometimes both.

When the war ended, we felt too much joy at once. In fact, most weren't totally sure they could trust good news. A lot of guys got like that.

So when we heard the official papers had been signed and the war was over, it was Christmas morning multiplied times a hundred. No. Times a trillion.

Those of us overseas immediately wrote letters to family and told our wives we were coming home, told our kids to grease up their baseball gloves. Our letters were covered in little wet polka dots, if you get my drift.

Stateside, there were huge celebrations happening. Sailors climbed lampposts to unfurl flags. Infantrymen stood on rooftops, toasting mugs of homebrew. Mothers were frying chickens out the wazoo.

People were partying everywhere from San Bernardino to Flatbush. Big cities, little towns, and the rural parts between. There were ticker tape parades, auto processions and girls would kiss any guy in government clothes.

But on this important day, you know what I think about? I think about all the guys who never got kissed again. Our men in the soil.

They were those who evaporated like the early morning fog over Anzio, or the thick mists of Normandy. They died young. And they died for a lot more than a three-day weekend of barbecues and Budweiser.

These were men who fell upholding the mantle of our unalienable American spirit, the Blessings of our liberty and the pride of their homeland. They were friends. They were the kids next door. They were children of God who once proved, beyond speculation, that even hellfire cannot kill the great idea that is America. I hope we never forget them. I know I never will.

I hope you had a happy Memorial Day.

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🌸 Musing

## A Pastor's Ponderings: An Open Letter to Fathers



By Pastor and Father Doug Stauffer

As we approach Father's Day, I wanted to use this opportunity to honor and celebrate the fathers in our community. As a pastor (and traveling evangelist for 20 years), I have witnessed how the love, dedication and strength of fathers make a lasting impression (moms, too!). Like so many of you, my father is someone I admire as an incredible example. To all dads everywhere:

In the beginning, our Heavenly Father above,

Crafted us using His wisdom and infinite love.

His image we bore, in His likeness were made,

Forever we praise Him, our debt fully paid.

Our earthly fathers, with strength God imparts,

Guide us through valleys through broken hearts.

Their love and protection, like a sheltering wing,

As we walk with our Lord, God's praises we sing.

Proverbs teaches that fathers have the crucial role of train-

ing their children in the way they should go. As mentioned in Ephesians, your dedication to nurturing and admonishing your children in the Lord is a testament to your commitment to their spiritual well-being.

With hands firm yet gentle, they nurture and hold,

Reflections of God's love, characters they mold.

Through trials and triumphs, their faith remains strong,

In the arms of their fathers, they truly belong

The 20th Proverb refers to the blessings the children receive through their father's integrity. Your compassion, like the Lord's in Psalm 103, comforts them. Through your loving correction and guidance, you help your children grow in wisdom and grace (Proverbs 3).

So thank you, dear fathers, for all that you do,

Your love, like a beacon, points to what's true.

On this special day, our voices we raise,

In gratitude, love, and endless praise.

The Bible teaches us that fatherhood is a sacred responsibility and blessing, reflecting the love and guidance of our Heavenly Father. I encourage you, fathers, to continue walking in faith, setting an example for your children and others. Nurture the spiritual growth of your family, the dividends are immeasurable.



On behalf of our church family, I wish you a blessed and joyful Father's Day. May God's love and grace continue to shine upon you and your families as you lead by example and fulfill your roles as earthly fathers.

Scripture References

Proverbs 22:6 "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it."

Ephesians 6:4 "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

Proverbs 20:7 "The just man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed after him."

Psalm 103:13 "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him." Proverbs 3:11 "My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of his correction: 12 For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth."

Dr. Doug Stauffer is pastor of Faith Independent Baptist Church. He was saved July 6, 1980, in Niceville, while stationed at the 33rd Tactical Fighter Wing at Eglin Air Force Base and has now been in the ministry for over 35 years. He has written 20 books including the best selling "One Book" trilogy ("One Book Rightly Divided, One Book Stands Alone, One Book One Authority"); along with several devotionals ("Daily Strength" series); and prophecy books ("Reviving the Blessed Hope, When the End Begins").

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#### Arts & Music

## FWB Native's 1st Solo Art Exhibit

Fort Walton Beach local and University of Florida College of the Arts BFA senior, Ora Wolfgram, presented her first solo art exhibit titled "Florida: A Familiar Fantasy" at the GFAA Gallery in Gainesville.

The exhibition showcased eight mixed media landscape paintings ranging from 24" x 36" to 84" x 48" illustrating the extremes of the coastal environment of Northwest Florida. Wolfgram's work depicts her experience of living on Okaloosa Island, a barrier island located in Northwest Florida.

In her artist statement, she said, "The works I created are part of a series to illustrate an escapist fantasy based on living along the Gulf Coast in Northwest Florida. Each painting captures a different experience from living on Okaloosa Island-highlighting the impressiveness of the natural flora that can easily shift from a peaceful and inviting to rageful and frightening."

The exhibit ran from April



18 to April 22 with an evening gallery reception on April 21. The reception was attended by 87 people, including family, friends, Fort Walton Beach High School alumni, and fellow University of Florida students and professors.

Wolfgram's artwork has previously appeared in several art shows, including the DAMN Art Show (2023), the Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation (MKAF) Collaborative Art Exhibit (2023), the SA&AH Briccetti Exhibition (2022), and the WARP Student Exhibition (2020). As a high school senior, Wolfgram won the MKAF Festival of the Arts Best in Show Collaborative Art Exhibit award (2018). She was the first student invited to exhibit in the Destin Banner Art Beautification Project. When she graduated Fort Walton Beach High School in 2019, she was the most awarded art student in the school's history.

"I'm grateful to my family and friends who attended to support me, as well as my professors, Julia and Bethany," said Wolfgram. "They've done an incredible job guiding me and my classmates in understanding where we want to position ourselves with our art and in the art world."

Wolfgram, 21, a native of Fort Walton Beach, will be graduating summa cum laude with a BFA in drawing and a minor in art history in May. A credited costume designer and advocate of the performing arts, she plans to return to Northwest Florida, where she will work as a production assistant for the Emerald Coast Theatre Company.

To view artwork by Wolfgram, follow her on Instagram @Art\_by\_Orabel.

## Water is Key to Art Reception

The next featured artist at the Maxine Orange Studio Gallery, 21A Eglin Pkwy NE Fort Walton Beach, is Johnny Ocean Photography. A reception will celebrate this event on Friday, June 9.

John Oja is a lifelong waterman with a passion for combining his love of art and the element of water to create beautiful, unique and ethereal images. His art captures elegance through a whimsical and dreamlike perspective that is sure to be a conversational piece in any setting. These images are meant to mesmerize us with magic, wonder, emotion, and fairytale, which is exactly how the water mesmerizes John.

John's latest collection, which will be featured in this show, was specifically captured in collaboration with a selection of Emerald Coast creatives as his subjects, including artists Harley Van



Bradley Copeland, Hyning, Maxine Orange, photographer Sean Murphy, violinist Jessica Heit and dancers Kate Beliaeva and Rico Dias Garcia. Seeing little pieces of what each unique artist does through John's lens translates in a very unique and magical way under the water and has fueled his passion forward. Join us to celebrate this Emerald Coast artist at the opening reception on June 9th, at Maxine Orange Studio Gallery, 21A Eglin Pkwy NE FWB 32548. @johnnyoceanphotography @maxineorange

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## **Emerald Coast Theatre Company's 10 Years of Magic Continues with Season 11 on the Horizon**

By Anna Fisher, Associate ARTISTIC AND EDUCATION DIRECTOR

We just closed our 10th season with a sold out run of one of my absolute favorite musicals. "Sound of Music." It was a little bit magical to end 10 years of incredible shows with such a profoundly beautiful story. I look forward to Season 11 with such excitement and anticipation for what another year of great theatre will bring!

We launch Season 11 next fall with Million Dollar Quartet in September/October. This smash-hit musical tells the story of legendary music icons Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis and Carl Perkins as they come together on Dec. 4, 1956, at the famous Sun Studios. This show has so many great songs including "Blue Suede Shoes," "Sixteen Tons," "Great Balls of Fire" and "I Walk the Line" just to name a few. Elvis will be in the building y'all!

We follow that with the timeless holiday classic A Christmas Carol in December. This fastpaced stage version is so fun and includes all of your favorite

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characters like Tiny Tim, the Fezziwigs, all the ghosts and, of course, the original grumpy old man, Ebenezer Scrooge. This show is a mug of warm wassail on a cold winter's night and just the right thing to get you into the holiday spirit. Our favorite Scrooge, Bruce Collier, will be returning to the stage as well in this production.

There's plenty of chances to catch The Marvelous Wonderettes: Caps and Gowns throughout the winter months with shows in January, February and March. This is the delightful sequel to The Wonderettes and follows our favorite girls as they graduate in 1958. With songs like "Rock Around the Clock," "At the Hop," "Dancing in the Street" and "River Deep, Mountain High," you will find yourself tapping along to this gem of a musical!

Another offering we have during those winter months is The Play That Goes Wrong. I absolutely adore the humor in this show! If you want a good laugh while trying to solve a

murder mystery, this is the perfect night out. It was a smash hit on Broadway and we are thrilled to produce the show at ECTC!

If you liked Steel Magnolias, you will love Crimes of the Heart pre-

miering in late February. This is a deeply touching, funny play about three eccentric sisters in a small southern town who deal with the fallout when Babe, the youngest, shoots her husband. This story serves up humor and pathos along with a large glass of sweet tea!

And since everyone loves a

mystery, we're keeping the final musical of our season under wraps! Just plan to come on out to ECTC for a fantastic show in May 2024.

If Season 11 can't get here fast enough for you, make plans to catch "Broadway on the Boulevard, Dancin' in the Street" outdoors in the Grand Park at Grand Boulevard every Thursday during the summer through the end of July. We also have a fantastic group of teens performing Grease at the end of July at 560 Grand Boulevard, upstairs in our theatre. I hope no matter how busy life gets, you always make time for the joy of a well-told story and the richness of a night out with friends and family. See you at the theatre!



