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# From the Depths of Despair to Radiant Hope Resilience and Courage Define

# Resilience and Courage Define OHP's Sherry Jones

By Doug Stauffer

This story began four decades ago and details the extraordinary journey of a local girl who, at the tender age of 18 and fresh out of high school, found herself unwittingly intertwined with a drug kingpin. This captivating narrative chronicles a story of redemption and second chances, a tale of reclaiming life from the depth of despair.

In the grand tapestry of human existence, redemption and second chances form the core of our most captivating narratives. They are the vital elements that enable countless individuals to resurrect their lives and produce meaningful change in the world. This account serves as a heartfelt testament that everyone, despite their missteps, deserves a chance at redemption.

Sherry Jones grew up in Fort Walton Beach, graduated from Choctaw High School, and entered such a narrative



in March 1983. This narrative began when she visited her stepfather at the Eglin AFB Federal Prison, unofficially known as "The Country Club." Her stepfather, incarcerated for suspected tax

evasion but later cleared, had been befriended by a charismatic prisoner named Jorge Valdes. This magnetic Cuban man would assert, in no uncertain terms, that he was destined to marry Sherry. Jorge, an intelligent, sophisticated and attractive figure, was serving time for conspiracy to import cocaine into the U.S. However, he avowed that he had turned over a new leaf as a born-again Christian and left his criminal past behind. Young and naïve, Sherry was drawn into Jorge's orbit, her parents' approval strengthening the allure. In October 1983, Sherry and Jorge tied the knot, and Jorge regained his freedom on July 25, 1984.

Unbeknownst to Sherry and her family, Jorge had ascended to U.S. chief of operations for the infamous Colombian Medellín Drug Cartel, headed by the notorious Pablo Escobar. Jorge's journey into this world began innocuously with a position as an accountant at the Federal Reserve Bank. Soon after, he established his own business,

## SHERRY JONES continued on page 2

## Talking Turtles

with Marine Biologist Jessica Valek

By Christopher Manson

In January 2022, a partnership between Okaloosa Island's Gulfarium and the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Tourism Department was launched. "C.A.R.E."ing for Turtles takes place at the Gulfarium every Wednesday through the end of July; then every other Wednesday in August. The hour-long program is \$15 for ages eight and up.

Jessica Valek, Coastal Resource Coordinator for the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Tourism Department, is very involved in the program. "We teach everyone about sea turtles in general, the ones we see along the Gulf of Mexico," she says. "I do a lot of our turtle nesting work. I go out every day and look for nests. This is a good partnership."

Attendees (locals and tourists) learn about the nesting process, how to protect turtles on the beach, and the different threats turtles face on our beaches and fishing piers. In addition, guests get a behind the scenes look at the C.A.R.E. turtle

### **TURTLES**

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## Magnolia Grill

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

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#### Community

#### **SHERRY JONES**

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taking on what appeared to be a simple grocery store as his first client. However, this store operated beneath the surface as a front for illicit drug activities. Jorge's adeptness didn't remain hidden for long, eventually drawing the attention of Pablo Escobar and Manny Graces, resulting in their collaboration in the growing drug trade.

While Sherry joined Jorge's affluent lifestyle, complete with housekeepers and nannies, the origin of his wealth remained obscured. Sherry's life had all the trappings of a fairytale: dinner trips from Miami to Los Angeles on a Lear Jet, an array of luxury cars, a waterfront home

in Coconut Grove, Miami, and a 200-acre horse breeding ranch named Santa Barbara in Clewiston, yachts, along with a beach house in Ft. Myers. Sherry remained blissfully ignorant of the real money-making scheme, assuming it to be quarter horse breeding and horse racing. Sherry did not speak Spanish, so the language barrier cloaked his discussions when people came to their home. Before Pablo Escobar became a visibly recognizable figure, he was already a regular visitor to their home.

In 1986, they welcomed their first child into the world. However, the following year, Sherry's life took an unexpected turn. An accidental discovery of a hidden room filled with money from the floor to the ceiling shattered her illusions about Jorge's wealth and his proclaimed innocence. Upon confronting Jorge, she faced a cold reality: exiting the drug trade could have life-threatening consequences.

Sherry felt trapped with only a high school education, lacking job skills and expecting their second child. When she discovered Jorge's infidelity, she opted to leave him, returning to Fort Walton Beach. Subsequent efforts attempted reconciliation which resulted in the birth of their third child. In 1989, Sherry could not handle the constant fear and insurmountable turmoil, so she filed for divorce. An attorney advised Sherry to copy records for proof of income. Jorge caught her, thinking her intent was dubious, and warned her that she could get everyone killed. She left without the records or proof for future support.

In 1991, prompted by concerns for Sherry's safety and that of their children, Jorge insisted that they leave Florida. This cautionary move was due to his impending role as a federal witness in the high-profile trial of Sal Magluta and Willy Falcon. His testimony was a means to extricate himself from the charges he faced and a protective measure to prevent Sherry's potential indictment due to the federal law's guilt-by-association outcome. It was Jorge who had originally ushered these two infamous figures into the drug trade. Witness assassinations and alleged juror bribes marred the subsequent trial. Although initially acquitted in 1996, Magluta and Falcon were later convicted of money laundering and bribery charges. The cult film, "Cocaine Cowboys," and Netflix's six-part documentary, "Cocaine Cowboys—The Kings of Miami," portrayed their infamous stories. Jorge chronicled his own experience in a series of books, including his autobiography, "Coming Clean," where he details Sherry's life with him

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## **TURTLES** continued from page 1

hospital and what they do there. "It's really cool, because they always have new turtles," says Ms. Valek.

"At the end of the program, we do a mock intake of an injured sea turtle." The attendees assess the turtle and determine whether it should go into rehab or be released. "They get to be a turtle biologist for a day, and they get a little goodie bag with turtle-friendly items to take home. It's a good time."

Ms. Valek's coastal resources team includes two other marine biologists. "I focus on sea turtle conservation and do the morning nest surveys from May to August assessing the nests. I also do outreach and education and assist with anything turtle-related."

She has been in her current position for almost three years. Prior to that, the University of West Florida graduate had other marine biologist jobs throughout Florida. Originally from Minnesota, Ms. Valek says, "I've always been interested in marine biology, so I packed up and moved.



And I haven't regretted it!"

She currently lives in Navarre with her dogs Luna and Jim, as well as four cats. "I enjoy scuba diving, paddleboarding, hiking – anything on the water or anything I can do with my dogs."

"C.A.R.E."ing for Turtles is limited to approximately 15 people, and Ms. Valek says they usually reach that number. "We've gotten really positive feedback," she says. "Most people seem to enjoy the information and getting to see the turtles. It just keeps getting better and better."

Among the things she finds most rewarding? "The impact

the program has on other people and them registering how they can make a difference not just for turtles, but for the environment in general."

Ms. Valek's team is involved with more than just sea turtles. "Our department is helping fund environmental-related projects," she says. "We do beach re-nourishment, invasive species removal and artificial reefs. We monitor anything related to the coast and the water."

Learn more about "C.A.R.E."ing for Turtles at gulfarium.com.



#### **Turtle Tips**

"When you go to the beach, fill in your holes," says Ms. Valek. "Flatten your sandcastles when you leave. Remove umbrellas, chairs and trash. Those are obstacles for sea turtles."

Refrain from using white light on the beach at night. "We are giving away turtle-friendly flashlights at the Welcome Center on Miracle Strip Parkway," she says. "We give you as many as you want."

Be good environmental stewards. "Recycle. And don't litter!"



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#### Chamber Life: Stories from the life and times of Fort Walton Beach Chamber members...

#### **SHERRY JONES**

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during that time.

Jorge, who had been re-arrested in 1990, faced eight life sentences for conspiracy to import narcotics. Following a 5-year prison stint, he earned a Ph.D. at Loyola University in Chicago, authored a biography and established the Tres Hermanos Foundation for criminal reform. The government estimated that the cartel had brought 75 tons of cocaine into the United States; the cartel estimated it to be 175 tons, valued at almost five billion dollars.

Sherry's journey continued as she remarried in 1992, leading a discreet life in Texas. Later, she returned to Fort Walton Beach after another divorce following 26 years in an increasingly turbulent marriage. Meanwhile, Sherry experienced a drastic shift from luxury to poverty. She survived on welfare and worked two jobs to provide for her three children. She sought refuge with her parents, allowing herself some respite and time to heal. Sherry pursued higher education, earning a B.A. in



Communication and Behavioral Science.

Sherry is presently the Director of Communications and Public Relations at One Hopeful Place (OHP), the sole low-barrier shelter in Northwest Florida. OHP assists the homeless population in the community through its inclusive programs, providing temporary housing and resources for reclaiming independence. The shelter accommodates even those with felony convictions, barring those related to sexual abuse. Sherry is grateful to Ted Corcoran, president & CEO of the Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce, for allowing her to make a positive difference in the lives of others.

Veterans are accorded top priority, with the Veterans Affairs Department contacted promptly to activate necessary benefits. Extensive background checks are carried out to validate the narratives of potential residents. OHP also collaborates with the Bridgeway Center in Fort Walton Beach to offer mental health treatment and detox services. Moreover, OHP plans to construct "tiny" homes to provide transitional housing, a venture requiring substantial community support.

OHP also offers a three-daya-week program (Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m.), allowing the homeless to come and eat a hot meal, shower and do laundry. The homeless living in their cars are provided a safe car park area. When winter temperatures fall below 40 degrees, OHP opens a cold night, 48bed area to house the homeless overnight.

Beyond her commitments at OHP, Sherry also devotes her time to several philanthropic pursuits. She serves as a Guardian Ad Litem for the First Judicial Circuit Court in Florida. She offers her experience and empathy as an instructor for a church-based Divorce Care program. In a leadership capacity, she is the Vice President of Parkinson's Strong, Inc., a nonprofit organization based in Destin. She has also established World Class Scholarship Pageantry, LLC, which cultivates philanthropic values in young women, with OHP benefiting from their charitable efforts.

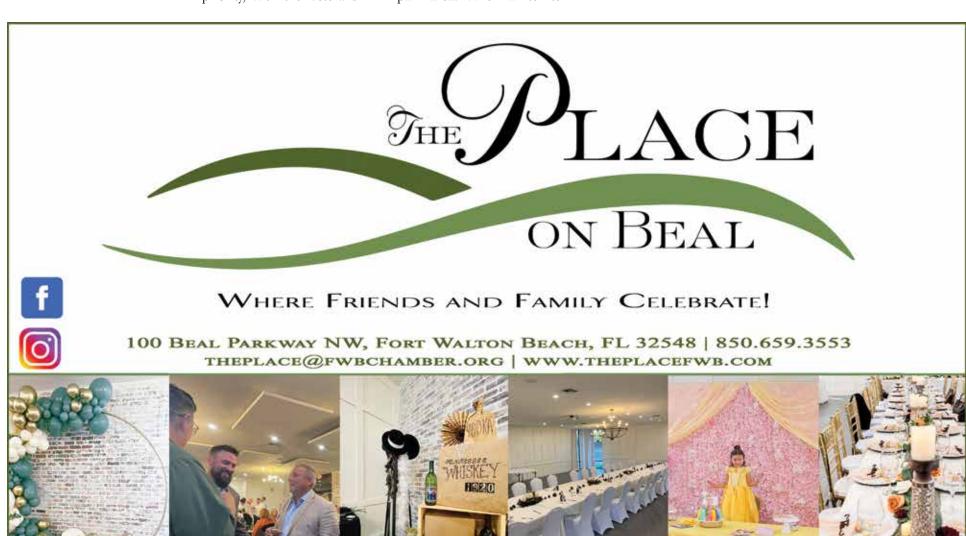
Despite the turbulence in her personal life, Sherry has successfully fostered academic and professional growth in her children. Each of the children graduated from highly ranked universities. Their first daughter has a Master's degree and is a dedicated educator. Their second daughter serves as a Florida Barred attorney. She serves as a risk analyst for the Department of



Education in Washington, D.C. Their son is a CFO of a publicly listed company on NASDAQ. Sherry's youngest daughter is completing a Master's in the Medical Science field. Against all odds, Sherry has been instrumental in shaping her children's successful career paths.

Sherry Jones' story is a testament to her resilience and the power of second chances. With her experience and understanding, it's fitting that she has been called to One Hopeful Place since there are similar stories of hope from those that One Hopeful Place serves. With plans to share her extraordinary journey in a forthcoming book, she stands as a beacon of hope, reflecting the potential for renewal even in the face of adversity. Meet Sherry and consider supporting One Hopeful Place and its mission.







## Pickleball Explodes in Fort Walton Beach

By Christopher Manson

"I played tennis up until college and started playing pickleball, because I had some time on my hands during COVID. I loved it. It's a fun game."

~ Jeff Harris, Owner of Run With It and Pickleball at the Palms

Back in 2016, I was editing the late, great Beachcomber magazine in Destin, and my boss suggested that we run some articles on pickleball. I had no idea what a pickleball was, but thankfully, a man named Phil Gardner explained it to me and my readers.

"Pickleball is a cross between tennis, ping-pong and badminton," he wrote. "It's most often played in two teams of doubles, but can be played as singles. The game is played on a badminton-sized court over a net similar to those in tennis. A whiffle ball is propelled by solid paddles over the net."

He added: "Pickleball is an action game that teaches coordination and exercises reaction and mobility. Players learn quickly that positioning on the small court is paramount to mastering the game...and that mastery of the game is an evolving journey."

In 2018, Mike Minich, president of Southern Events Management, Inc., took up the game. "I was originally part of putting on volleyball tournaments," he says. "Karen Parrish was one of the people who started running pickleball tournaments and had people playing at Destin Meth-









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odist Church. The recreation center in Fort Walton Beach had two courts also."

In 2020, the Fort Walton Beach Recreation and Cultural Services director converted two unusable tennis courts into six pickleball courts at the recreation center on Jet Drive. "They filled up right away," says Mr. Minich. "Pickleball is a sport that can be played by anyone, any age. You see people in their 50s and 60s playing every morning on Jet."

Ms. Parrish left the area to take a job in Arizona with USA Pickleball, the national governing body for the sport, and left the Emerald Coast Pickleball Facebook group in his hands. "I'm still doing it," he says. "We share interesting things, and there is no advertising for products or services. We want to let people know about tournaments."

I've never picked up the paddle. So, Mr. Minich recommended that I check out Joe Baker's YouTube videos. "He's the driest human I've ever seen, but his videos are the best to learn from. He teaches paddle



PHOTOS: SAVVY LEIGH PHOTO

control, strategy... that's how I learned."

Jeff Harris, owner of Run With It since 2008, jumped on the pickleball train in October 2020 and immediately loved the sport. "I realized how popular it was," he says. "There would be six courts and 50 to 60 people waiting to play."

"I also saw that nobody was selling pickleball accessories locally," says Mr. Harris. "Walmart had some cheap stuff, but they were always out of stock."

With the new demand for pickleball equipment, Mr. Harris, his wife Donna and his team brought in paddles, balls and many other accessories. Within a few months, it exploded. "We brought in more brands, as well as court shoes, which are different from running shoes. It opened up a whole new world for us. The cool thing is that we already carried running skirts, which can also be used for pickleball."

Due to its popularity and the

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# Stage Crafters Community Theatre Presents Joseph Heller's CATCH-22

## A Stage Side Chat with Director Douglas Henderson

By Bobby Parker

Stage Crafters Community Theatre is currently in rehearsal for Joseph Heller's CATCH-22. We recently sat down with the director, Army Veteran and Fort Walton Beach resident, Douglas Henderson, to learn a little more about the upcoming production.

**BP:** Are you a Fort Walton Beach native? When did you first discover theatre and how did you get involved with Stage Crafters?

**DH:** I'm originally from Indianapolis, Ind., and I have lived in several other states as well as Europe while in the U.S. Army. I finally found my true home when I moved here in 2013. My senior year of high school I decided I wanted to try my hand at theatre, and I subsequently got cast in every play they did that year. Afterward, I joined the Army, played in bands, went to college and didn't think about

theatre again until I happened to see an ad for auditions for Stage Crafters' 2014 production of The Sound of Music. And, 20 Stage Crafters shows later, here I am directing CATCH-22, which will be the fourth show I've directed for them.

**BP:** Why did you choose Joseph Heller's classic novel turned play, CATCH-22?

**DH:** CATCH-22 is a classic. It is such a well-known and acclaimed book that the title has since become a part of our lexicon. But, not many people know the author, Joseph Heller, also personally adapted his book for the stage. His play takes all the funniest parts of the book and crams them together into two hilarious one-hour acts. It's nonstop, farcical mayhem at its finest

**BP:** Who is this show meant for and what can audiences expect?

**DH:** This show is meant



for anyone who has ever spent any time in the military, which makes it perfect for this area of the Florida panhandle. I believe everyone will enjoy "Catch-22" in their own way, but we do suggest parents take some of the adult themes into account before bringing young children to the show.

What sets the stage adaptation apart is Heller's focus on the humor of the story. This is how I think Heller wanted his book to be represented. The movie had comedic moments, sure,

but they were clouded by the serious tone and horrors of war. Heller adapted his book for the stage in 1971—a year after the movie released—and his play clearly focuses on the comedy. So, what can they expect? They can expect to laugh.

**BP:** What does the cast bring to the show and to their characters?

**DH:** We have a phenomenal cast, which is a healthy mix of newcomers and recent additions to Stage Crafters - with one veteran thrown in for good measure. I think, of the 11 cast members, only five have ever done anything with us. The other six, though having previous experience in high school and elsewhere, are fresh faces for our audience. But, everyone brings a welcomed level of professionalism and charm to this produc-

tion, and I can't wait for people to see all the different characters each actor plays.

**BP:** What is the most challenging part of directing?

**DH:** It's funny that this is the follow-up question to 'Tell us about the cast,' because the most challenging part about directing a show is casting that show. Each show is different, obviously, but, because each show is different, and each director is different and each individual human is different, finding the right person to fulfill the director's specific vision of the specific role in that specific show is extremely difficult. And when you simply don't get enough people to audition, you inevitably have to find someone that might be able to be molded into a reasonable facsimile of your specific vision. On a show like CATCH-22, where you have

Continued on next page

Stage Crafters Community Theatre Proudly Presents

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directed by DOUGLAS HENDERSON

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# The Sound of Freedom Rings Out at Destin Fort Walton Beach Airport (VPS)

By Carolyn Newcomer Ketchel, Okaloosa County Commissioner, District 2

Many of us patriotic individuals refer to the military aircraft that fly over our area daily as "The Sound of Freedom." However, there is a new movie called the Sound of Freedom in theatres as this goes to press. It is a thought-provoking and an emotional journey of human trafficking. I am proud to write that Destin-Fort Walton Beach Airport (VPS), in partnership with the Okaloosa County Commission on the Status on Women, was ahead of this movie with a campaign against human trafficking. We have placed decals in every restroom stall at the airport along with an overhead announcement, which plays hourly, directing victims how to seek help. For an informative write up, read the article recently published in Get the Coast. I have included the URL bit.ly/FightTraffickingOkaloosa

Destin-Fort Walton Airport (VPS) is a commercial service/ military Joint-Use Airport in Okaloosa County along Florida's Gulf Coast, one of only 22 in the nation. Destin-Fort Walton Beach Airport is located on U.S. Department of Defense property and is considered a leading example of a Joint-Use Airport. This designation means VPS is situated on Eglin AFB operating on Eglin's airfield from a leasehold. Established in 1957, the airport provides commercial passenger service for leisure and business travelers. Since 2017 air service has increased over 150 percent making VPS one of the fastest growing airports in the U.S. Today Allegiant Air, Delta Air Lines, American Airlines, Southwest Airlines and Sun Country Airlines provide nonstop service to 13 Large Hub airports and 48 U.S. cities. These commercial activities contribute valuable connectivity worldwide and tourism revenue to the region

and state. The growth at VPS has been supported by numerous capital improvements, some recently completed and some currently underway, including expansions of the aircraft apron, baggage claim and parking lots as well as construction of a new concourse for Allegiant Airlines.

Okaloosa County's three-airport system, Bob Sikes Airport (CEW), Destin Executive Airport (DTS) and Destin-Fort Walton Beach Airport (VPS), operate without any debt, and serve as one of our economic drivers along with our Military as number one. To the best of our knowledge, VPS, CEW and DTS is the only debt free, three-airport system in the nation. Okaloosa County Airports are responsible for a \$2.9 billion dollar annual impact to our local economy, which is a 67 percent increase since 2019. Our airport system has an economic impact across industries on 18,500 jobs and \$785 million in payroll annually, largely flowing into the local economy. By supporting jobs both on and off airport property, VPS supports the infrastructure necessary for important activities such as manufacturing, logistics, tourism and emergency response. In 2021, Okaloosa County welcomed a record 2,006,297 passengers at VPS.

We continue to have exciting initiatives at Bob Sikes Airport, Destin Executive Airport and Destin-Fort Walton Beach Airport. Our airlines fly non-stop to Boston, Chicago, Cincinnati, Knoxville, Las Vegas, New York City, Minneapolis, Pittsburg, Washington DC, Baltimore and Dallas to name just a few. Please visit our website at flyvps. com/ to view the 48 cities that can be flown directly from Destin-Fort Walton Beach Airport. Many have recognized our huge growth and have asked about our on-going plans for expansion. The following link provides a fantastic overview of what can be expected to take place at

VPS as our master plan unfolds. Once you have navigated to the address provided, scroll down and have your sound on. flyvps. com/master-plan-vps/.

We have wonderful airport staff, and I would be remiss if I did not give a shout out to Tracy Stage, our Airports Director, for his tireless leadership and vision that, along with our Aviation Board members and county commissioners, have made this a state-of-the-art community asset

The next time you hear a plane overhead, remember the sacrifices of our men and women who bring us the Sound of Freedom, and say a silent prayer for those little ones who are victims of human slavery.

Carolyn Ketchel is Okaloosa County Commissioner, District 2. She can be reached at CKetchel@myokaloosa.com or 860-651-7105.





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#### **STAGECRAFTERS**

continued from previous page

11 actors portraying 41 individual characters, that part of directing a show becomes very challenging—which makes my choosing to do shows like this so ironic.

**BP:** What is your vision for the show and where are you drawing inspiration?

**DH:** I want to bring our audience what I believe to be the author's true intent of respectfully portraying the often absurd and comedic nature of the military at war, no matter how necessary that war or the military may be. Inevitably, human beings will be human beings. We make dumb decisions based on faulty information and often find ourselves in ridiculous situations all the time. I learned a lot about myself and the world around me when I was serving 15 straight months in Iraq from '03-'04. My military experience was invaluable, and I have always encouraged young people to serve, but I was also exposed to a lot of the same catch-22 type situations we see in the play. I've always found it best to

not dwell on the negative, but learn from it and continue moving forward—wiser, a bit stronger, and hopefully having found a bit of humor in it all along the way.

**BP:** What would you like our readers to know about Stage Crafters Community Theatre?

**DH:** Stage Crafters is the oldest, consecutively running, all-volunteer community theatre in the state of Florida. Every show we do is intended to entertain, but also cover the cost of keeping live theatre alive in our area. One of the great hallmarks of a healthy civilization is the arts, but it can't exist if the people don't get involved and support it. CATCH-22 exists because 11 actors, over a dozen crew members, and an entire not-for-profit organization got together on their own time, without pay, and made it happen.

**CATCH-22 opens August 18, 2023** and runs for two weekends at the Fort Walton Beach Civic Auditorium. For more information and to purchase tickets, visit StageCraftersFWB.com.

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beauty, safeguarding its paint and siding. Roof washing eliminates these nuisances extending the roof's lifespan and avoiding costly repairs.

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## **Around Town**

Wreaths Across America at Beal Memorial Cemetery has a goal to provide a wreath for all 1800+ Veterans laid to rest at Beal. The WAA Placement Ceremony is hosted by the Veterans Tribute Tower Committee on Sat., Dec. 16, at 9 a.m. at Beal Memorial Cemetery. Currently, 900 wreaths are still needed. "This summer appeal is our effort to avoid the other fundraising efforts during the fall and Christmas season,' said Tom Rice. To help, visit www. Wreaths Across America.org/FL0895P.

#### **Okaloosa Students Shine Overall on State Assessments**

Outperforming almost every other school district in the state in proficiency rankings, a combined analysis of all test results recently released by the Florida Department of Education shows that Okaloosa ranks 5th among 67 Florida school districts. These results continue the improvement in recent years from 8th and 7th, in 2021 and 2022, respectively. ELA and Math results in grades 4-8 showed particularly strong improvement in proficiency levels among students despite the fact that a new, more rigorous assessment, the Florida Assessment of Student Thinking (FAST), was administered this year in those areas. Students are required to take statewide assessments in ELA grades 3-10, Mathematics grades 3-8, Algebra, Geometry, Science grades 5 and 8, Biology, Civics, and US History. The assessments for ELA and Mathematics were new and based on the more rigorous BEST standards that were recently implemented in Florida. The results of these assessments, along with other academic indicators, are used to produce school grades. For more information visit www. okaloosaschools.com or https:// www.fldoe.org/accountability/ assessments/k-12-student-assessment/results/2023.stml.

#### **'23-'24 School Bus** Schedule

The transportation department has created a QR code for easy access (or visit www.okaloosaschools.com) to stay updated with notifications about your child's bus. You must register to receive access unique to your children.

#### Step One's **Festival of Speed**



Step One Automotive Group delivered an electrifying and unforgettable experience to all attendees at the highly anticipated Festival of Speed held in June at the renowned Five Flags Speedway. Two esteemed racing drivers, Chris Walsh, GT4 America Porsche, and 718 Cayman GT4 Driver, and Juan Manuel Correa, Formula 2 and WEC Driver, both motorsport icons. The adrenaline-pumping Hot Laps left spectators on the edge of their seats as they witnessed firsthand the raw power and precision of these exceptional drivers. "We are thrilled with the overwhelming success of the Festival of Speed," said Maureen Bierman, Director of Marketing, Step One Automotive Group. "It was truly a day filled with excitement, adrenaline, and unforgettable moments. We are grateful to all the racing drivers, partners, and attendees who made this event a roaring triumph." Visit www. steponeautomotive.com more information!

The Salvation Army of Okaloosa and Walton Counties is receiving a new Disaster Relief Canteen to replace its former 30+ year-old vehicle! Made possible through a grant from Impact 100 for \$100K, this timely and appropriate canteen will be available during both weather disaster and events like the brush fire in South Walton County last year.

#### **NWFSC PTA Program Announces 100% Ultimate Pass Rate with a 100% Employment Rate**

Northwest Florida State College's Physical Therapist Assistant Program (PTA) is a two-year selective admissions program. Students can earn an Associate in Science (A.S.) degree in the 6-semester program which provides skills, knowledge and clinical experience necessary to become Physical Therapist Assistants. New students are accepted in the Spring Term of each year. For more information, visit nwfsc.edu/pta or contact Susan DeSmith, Director, Physical Therapist Assistant Program, at desmiths@nwfsc.

The Heritage Museum of NWF had a great and successful 1st week of Summer Camp, including a K-9 demo. Thank you to the instructors. Week 1 filled up fast and 20 students experienced a range of hands-on



Officer Nathan Chapin and K-9 Partner Odin, Fort Walton Beach Police Dept., and Dr. Marie Hallion Ph.D., Chair of the Heritage Museum of NWF.

#### **Leadership Okaloosa Applications Available**

Leadership Okaloosa is an esteemed leadership training and development program with a 30-year history of the growth and development of Okaloosa County's leaders. This 9-month experience enhances the participant's leadership skills and creates community awareness.

Apply here: https://www. nwfsc.edu/leadership-okaloo-

#### **MKAF Call for FOA Collaborative Art Exhibit**

Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation (MKAF) is now accepting applications for the Adult Collaborative Art Exhibit component of the 28th annual Festival of the Arts (Friday, Oct. 27) Oct. 28-29 (Festival weekend) at the Mattie Kelly Cultural Arts Village in Destin. The Exhibit showcases the work of seasoned and emerging adult artists and local student artists competing for the \$1,050 McIlroy Awards given in honor of the late Patricia McIlroy, Destin's first First Lady and an MKAF advocate and patron. Artwork should be of an artistic caliber associated with a juried fine art show. Artists in the Adult Collaborative Exhibit can display and/or sell up to three pieces of artwork. The competition is open to the first 25 eligible applicants. Entry fee is \$35 per person for up to three pieces of art no larger than 24" x 36." Application deadline is Friday, Sept. 8, 2023. Download the application at mkaf.org/ arts-festival/ or contact Deb Nissley at the Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation by email at deb@ mkaf.org or call (850) 650-2226.

#### Impact100 NWF - 410 members, Four \$100,000 **Grants to Local Nonprofits**

410 women signed up for Impact100 Northwest Florida during its recently concluded membership drive, which will make possible four \$100,000 grants to nonprofits serving Okaloosa and Walton Counties this year. Local nonprofits have submitted grant proposals, and

Continued on page 12

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#### **AUGUST 2023**

Breakfast Under the Sea

8 am | Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park | Fort Walton Beach

Flight Night

5 pm | Twisted Grape | Shalimar

**Teacher Workshop** 

6:30 pm | Painting with a Twist | Fort Walton Beach

Movies on the Beach: "Aladdin"

8 pm | Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar | Fort Walton Beach

Okaloosa Island Fireworks Show 02

9 pm | The Boardwalk on Okaloosa Island | Fort Walton Beach

Yoga on the Island Green 0.3

8 am | The Island Resort | Fort Walton Beach

Breakfast Under the Sea

8 am | Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park | Fort Walton Beach

Al's Luau Beach Party

5 pm | Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar | Fort Walton Beach

Teachers and School Administrators Soundscape Shows 5 pm | Emerald Coast Science Center | Fort Walton Beach

**Greater FWB Chamber First Friday Coffee** 04

7 am | Christian Life Center at First Baptist Church | Fort Walton Beach

Yoga on the Island Green

8 am | The Island Resort | Fort Walton Beach

Repticon 05

9 am | Northwest Florida Fairgrounds | Fort Walton Beach

**Discover Science Saturday** 

10:30 am | Emerald Coast Science Center | Fort Walton Beach

06 Repticon

9 am | Northwest Florida Fairgrounds | Fort Walton Beach

**Pirate Show** 07

5 pm | Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar | Fort Walton Beach

Movies on the Beach: "The Lego Movie"

8 pm | Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar | Fort Walton Beach

Okaloosa Island Fireworks Show 09

9 pm | The Boardwalk on Okaloosa Island | Fort Walton Beach

Mini Makers and Experimenters Lab

10:30 am | Emerald Coast Science Center | Fort Walton Beach

**Greater FWB Chamber Nothing But Networking** 

11:30 am | Career Source of Okaloosa Walton | Fort Walton Beach

Al's Luau Beach Party

5 pm | Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar | Fort Walton Beach

Sift Summit 2023 - Real Estate Sales & Marketing Event

9 am | Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center | Fort Walton Beach 13

Live Music: Parker Willingham Duo

7 pm | Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar | Fort Walton Beach

Women's Climbing Circle 12

9 am | Rock Out Climbing Gym | Destin

**Date Night: Bright Twilight Painting** 

7 pm | Painting with a Twist | Fort Walton Beach

Live Music: James Renshaw

6 pm | Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar | Fort Walton Beach

Family Night: Jellyfish Painting 15

6:30 pm | Painting with a Twist | Fort Walton Beach

**Food Truck Rally** 16

11 am | TownePlace Suites by Marriott | Fort Walton Beach

Planetarium Night

6 pm | Emerald Coast Science Center | Fort Walton Beach

Live Music: The Friskeys 18 |

7 pm | Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar | Fort Walton Beach

19 **Creation Station** 

11 am | Emerald Coast Science Center | Fort Walton Beach

Date Night: Gulf Coast Boardwalk Painting 25

7 pm | Painting with a Twist | Fort Walton Beach

**Greater FWB Chamber Business After Hours** 29

5 pm | Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center | Fort Walton Beach

VFW Post 7674 - Sunday Breakfasts

8 - 11:30 am | Sundays | 231 Carol Ave. FWB

**Emerald Coast Science Center: Creature Feature** 11:30 am | Wednesdays & Thursdays | 31 Memorial Pkwy SW, FWB

1:30 pm | Fridays | 31 Memorial Pkwy SW, FWB

Trivia Night

**EVENTS** 

DNIODNC

7 pm | Wednesdays | The Boardroom Pub and Grub, FWB

Okaloosa Island Fireworks Show

9 pm | Wednesdays | The Boardwalk on Okaloosa Island, FWB

Emerald Coast Science Center: sciPad featuring SMALLab 1 pm - 3 pm | Tues., Wed., & Thurs. | 31 Memorial Pkwy SW, FWB

**Emerald Coast Science Center: Chemistry Corner** 11:30 am - 1 pm | Fridays | 31 Memorial Pkwy SW, FWB

Twisted Grape: Flight Nights

5 - 9 pm | Tuesdays | 1193 B N Eglin Parkway, Shalimar

#### **FARMER'S MARKETS**

**Downtown FWB Farmers Market** 

2nd & 4th Saturdays - August 12, 26

8 am - 1 pm | Fort Walton Beach Landing Park | Fort Walton Beach

Okaloosa County Farmers' Market

Saturdays - August 5, 12, 19, 26

7 am - 2 pm | 1954 Lewis Turner Blvd | Fort Walton Beach













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# From the Publisher: A Letter to the Fort Walton Beach Community

## **Happy Birthday FWB Life!**

WOW! FWB Life has published its first anniversary issue! community for your support.

If we've learned anything in the past year (really the past

eight years of Life Media), it's that stories about people in our owners. leaders, students and others) who have turned circumstances their into a positive are the ones that endure in the minds of our readers. That truth is reflected in so many FWB Life stories that continue to enthrall—the ones readers flock to online (MyF-WBLife.com), e-mail to friends or share through Facebook—nearly involve our own communities' overcomers or generous locals and organizations working to help others. And all help

to foster a connection to and within our dynamic community.

For those of us working at FWB Life, our first year is a big deal. We hear continually how you read it from cover-to-cover, how it's your go-to for events and how it is such a needed local, informational resource. You keep telling us how you enjoy reading about the folks within its pages and prefer doing business with those in our local SmallBizTrends. community. com relays this fact: "For small businesses, positive returns are often present with hyperlocal newspapers, because the papers publish community news and events. By association, your ad finds its way onto a local reader's radar screen... Small community newspapers are actually growing, even while their larger counterparts are struggling.' Many of you have given us your testimony as to the business you've gained through your ads and articles.

Thank you inaugural partners for being forerunners in joining the FWB Life family, and new partners that have come onboard during the year, entrusting us to promote you and convey your stories.

As we delve into our second year, we will continue to relay your positive messages, reinforce your valuable businesses, offer event information, extract those little gems and inspirational stories and accomplishments, and promote and highlight all the positive and valuable activities in the Fort Walton Beach com-

We'll continue to direct mail



and distribute 13,000 copies of FWB Life to households and businesses in Fort Walton Beach, Shalimar, Cinco Bayou, Ocean City and Okaloosa Island—promoting to a market of more than 30,000 people.

We'll continue to offer you platform—a community voice—and represent Fort Walton's niche and partners with an opportunity to effectively promote in an affordable way, combining the best of both worlds marketing and advertising with direct mail plus affordable rates. Our informative and fun website, MyFWBLife.com, will continue to offer additional value: marketing and advertising promotion with our online version of FWB Life, blog posts of feature articles and archived issues, our monthly e-newsletter with featured articles and ads and social media

As you have embraced this thriving publication as your own, naturally our instinct is to celebrate! For those wanting to join the FWB Life family, we are offering a special rate for our anniversary. If you'd like to promote your business or request a media kit, contact Scott Scott@LifeMediagrp.com or 850-688-9886. Visit www. MyFWBLife.com for stories and coupons from the current issue or download the archived issues from the past year. Connect with us: Facebook/MyF-WBLife. Submit story ideas to Lori@LifeMediagrp.com.

We all are blessed...

~ Lori Leath Smith, Publisher





## **Heroes Among Us**

By Bradley Duke Daum

I believe if you search somewhere between the red-light runners and speeders on our highways of bad behavior, there lies submerged the heart of the "Old South"—those that maintain the values and spirit, the brave fight. Those are the heroes among us. On this page, you'll find two separate stories of Hometown Heroes.

The story of "Has Anyone Seen My Leg?" is the story of one of those heroes. The afternoon I was waiting with a group of paddle boarders behind Scullys (now AJ's on the Bayou), I had no idea it was a fundraiser for an amputee foundation.

A young woman was paddle boarding April 11, 2015, on Cinco Bayou near Shalimar when she was struck by a speed boat in a hit-and-run accident. That woman was the Airforce pilot Cristy Wise. Since that accident, she started the foundation "One Leg Up on Life," I found out later after being touched by her simple words while looking for her second watersport prosthetic leg.

On July 22, 2016, Christy was the first female pilot amputee to be cleared to resume flying missions. On that day, she took off in the captain's seat of a HC-130J located at Moody Airforce Base, Ga

#### A Poem: Has Anyone Seen My Leg?

A crowded patio fills with young energy and movement,

Water nearby embraces boards and balance.

Celebration of unfortunate circumstance beyond their control,

Gathering of the best of their generation.

Bodies glisten in near-perfect proportion,

Communication between athletes - not a cloud in the sky.

Silent auction begins with measured excitement,

Chosen treasures with water-sport intention.

Clouds move in as festivities slowly come to a close,

Hugs and handshakes conclude celebration.

Across the room comes the most dramatic sound,

A brave young woman inno-



cently calls five powerful words: "Has anyone seen my leg?" was spoken,

Joking as she searches for her carbon-fiber best friend.

Taking the edge off the pain of losing her limb,

Bravery comes in all shapes and sizes,

Her beauty on the outside was overtaken for a moment,

One leg up on those among us.



## Flying Bridge Warriors

April 19, 1996–Destin, Florida

Waking that morning at 6 a.m., my friend and I shared a numbed excitement for the upcoming adventure. Showered and shaved, we stumbled off in search of breakfast and trophy. The fog so thick like pea soup looming over the harbor enhanced our apprehension for a questionable conclusion.

Greeting us at Harbor Dock's restaurant was a platoon of gracious grandmothers whose only intention was to provide the same continuous supply of nourishment and attention they had shared with family and friends since the beginning of time.

If the strength of the coffee was any indication of the seriousness of events to follow, we were in for a real butt-kicking. Alex looked across the table at



U.S. Air Force Captain Christy Wise: After losing her right leg above the knee in a boating accident, U.S. Air Force Capt. Christy Wise, an HC-130 pilot, never doubted her self that she would return to serving her country and flying. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Perry Aston)

me and asked, "Do you really have this charter all arranged?" "No, not really," I said, "but I think Charlie is a real stand-up guy, and if it falls through, it's probably for the best with bad weather and all."

We finished breakfast and decided to go pick up some beer to go out on the boat with our box lunches provided by the gourmet grandmothers. I couldn't stop thinking about how dedicated they were to be stationed in this sportsman's paradise, building box lunches for fishermen as though they were the ammunition they once toiled in factories to produce for their loved ones to be deployed in battle. It was like a culinary salute to these Flying Bridge Warriors as they slowly penetrated the mist.

Arriving at the dock, we approached the boat and noticed an unshaven local with long hair and baseball hat getting the bait and tackle ready. Inside the galley, the captain was securing some gear and peered out as the owner and his son approached the vessel. Alex and I looked at each other as if to wonder what the hell we had gotten ourselves into this time.

Effortlessly, the gang cast off and started to drift into the fog. Everyone introduced themselves and away we cruised. I quietly sized up the crew to myself. The captain, Mike, looked like he could be a professional baseball player. Owner, Charles, had worked hard never to pass

puberty and feed enough tourists to fish for a lifetime. His son, Eddie, whose seriousness and lack of a sense of humor could scare a prison inmate, and first mate whose hat, hair and camouflaged jacket somehow reminded you of the movie Deliverance.

On our way West to locate the big ones, Captain Mike told me he would probably yell at us, and that we would hate his guts by the end of the day, and things sometimes got a little

violent. But, he ended by saying we would probably have a great trip. It was at that moment when I considered having my first beer.

Big Al and I laid down and napped while the crew stood watch for the cobia on the bridge. As soon as the engines were cut off, we would jump to our feet to grab a bent rod with the expectation of being pulled into the ocean by Jaws.

As the day progressed, it became evident my first impressions of the crew couldn't be farther from the truth. This was an elite precision-fighting squad of the highest caliber. Men and young men that knew their respective skills backward and forward, and demanded the best



from themselves and each other. All the behavior and costumes of these warriors only helped to throw the enemy off their trail long enough to perform their skills in battle with uncommon excellence. True professionals, they never expected not to produce the abundant catch we enjoyed that day, but on the other hand, they didn't pretend for one minute it wasn't going to take total concentration to pull it off

The respect they shared for each other, and the newly developed respectful way we felt towards them, filled the ocean air as we sped back to port, victorious in battle and human endeavor with these Flying Bridge Warriors.



## Reunification: The Primary Goal of Foster Care

By Ramsey Lawrence, Embrace Florida Kids

For many of us, remembering our childhood brings back happy memories: holidays spent with family, playing outside with siblings and friends, field trips, summer camps and home-cooked meals with parents. For thousands of children in Florida, this is not the case.

June was National Reunification Month, a designation created to shine a light on the goal of foster care – reuniting children with their families – and to celebrate the successes of families who have alleviated conditions in the home to prevent

foster care altogether. Many people understand how foster care works and the support it provides for families across our communities. However, most people do not realize the primary goal of fostering is reunification, not adoption.

While there are many organizations across Florida doing great work to support our families in need, few have the history, reach and impact of Embrace Florida Kids. We provide services across the Florida Panhandle as a nonprofit ministry dedicated to providing homes, healing and hope to children coming from families in crisis.

Embrace Florida Kids is caring for kids in Northwest Florida from the cradle to college – and our impact keeps growing. In 2022, we supported nearly 1,000 children and families throughout Florida suffering from ne-

glect, abuse, or abandonment.

One of the core services we offer is family preservation. Keeping a family intact can often be an intensive program that does not happen overnight. So, how does it work?

Our staff supports family unity by working closely with parents and children before reunification whenever possible. When a parent or primary caregiver begins working toward reunification, we provide them with customized support to ensure a safe transition process for children and youth coming out of foster care back into the home of their parent or primary caregiver. This includes parenting skills and education, community resources, recovery support from addiction and targeted intervention to resolve stressors.



Once a child's safety is ensured, our goal is to reunite them with their family. By working proactively with parents and primary caregivers, we strive to prevent future abuse or neglect.

Federal law requires every state to work toward reunification for 12 months in most cases for children entering foster care. During this time, Embrace Florida Kids' staff are available 24/7 to offer crisis intervention. We offer all services directly inside the family's home and community, ensuring we treat all family members with empathy and compassion.

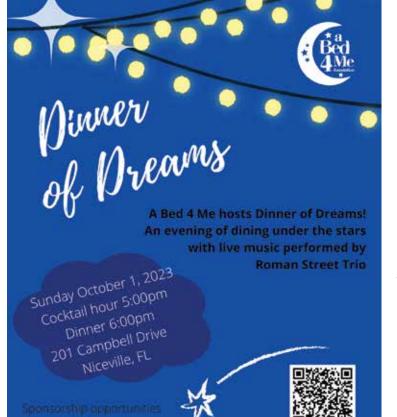
In 2022, our family preservation program generated a 92 percent success rate for keeping families intact. But there is still much work to be done to ensure the health and well-being of Florida's children and families

in crisis. We need financial support from individuals, businesses and organizations who are committed to uplifting Northwest Florida's children.

The funds we receive go directly toward providing homes, healing, and hope for families to safely raise their children. The single greatest investment we can make in our communities is caring for children by equipping their parents through family preservation.

I encourage you to learn how you can make a difference for Florida's families by supporting our mission at Embrace Florida Kids. The children we serve need advocates who will take notice and act on their behalf. Together, we can be a true difference-maker in their lives.

For more information, visit embraceflkids.org.



#### **AROUND TOWN**

continued from page 8

Impact100 Northwest Florida's Focus Area Committees will review them and hold site visits this summer. Finalists will be announced in October 2023, and recipients announced at the Annual Meeting in November.

The Emerald Coast Foundation Presents the 2023 Emerald Coast Poker Run, August 11-12th. Powerboats, fishing boats, pleasure boats, and all in between, will fill the waterways for one of the largest and most popular charity poker runs in the USA! All proceeds from Emerald Coast Boat Week and Poker Run benefit the recipient children's charities

of the Emerald Coast Foundation. For more information visit: https://emeraldcoastpokerrun.com/poker-run.

## Earth Day Cleanup at the Pier

Join Destin-Fort Walton Beach for its fall pier cleanup dive, Sat., Aug. 5 from 6-10 a.m./6 a.m. check-in. Must sign up.





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## **Outside Factors Can Affect the Real Estate Market**



By Melissa Forte-Litscher

When most of us look at buying a piece of property, whether for investment or for a home to live in, we consider many personal issues, location, cost, size and type of place to meet our personal needs. We think of the things within our control, but there are also outside factors that impact the real estate market. Some things to consider are the economy, the government, population changes and interest rates.

First off, our national economy is a major factor. When inflation increases, the general economy slows and real estate typically follows suit. This is true as an overall view. But, like everything in real estate, what matters most is our local atmosphere. For instance, the Shoal River Ranch Business Park in Crestview recently announced that its first manufacturing facility is in development bringing 350 new high paying jobs directly to the area and indirectly over 100 others, according to Jennifer Conoley, President & CEO of Florida's Great Northwest. This means more homes will be needed all over our county either for purchase or as rentals.

The government also has a major impact on home availability and pricing. For example, during the housing crisis of 2008 -2010, there was a federal tax credit for first time home buyers which produced an increase of home purchases. In our area, we have multiple armed forces bases that have a direct impact on our real estate market. The summer PCS season is when we typically see a lot of home sales and purchases as our military members and their families transition in and out of the area. This year, because of a temporary pause in non-essential orders due to budget changes, our rental and sales markets have seen a slowdown. Since this is supposed to change with the new fiscal year in October, we are looking forward to a more active than usual fall mar-

Additionally, major changes in the age and income of an area's population can affect the real estate market, such as when the baby boomers started retiring. Many were downsizing, purchasing second homes or investment properties. Conversely, when the millennials started getting into the workforce, many couldn't afford to get out on their own. So, their parents held onto their bigger homes to help them. As this larger demographic has now started to purchase, there is an even greater need for housing, and we have felt this housing crunch locally. Starter homes in our area are difficult to find as prices have gone up significantly over the past few years. When the prices went up, many investors sold off their rental inventory; this forced many renters to move, creating a challenging shortage in that market as well.

The largest impact on the local and national real estate market came as interest rates nearly doubled last year. The artificially low interest rates we had during 2020 through early 2022 were created to help the economy during the COVID emergency but were not sustainable. These

low rates contributed to increased buyer demand and prices rapidly increased. Many buyers missed out on purchasing a home due to the competitive atmosphere of multiple offers and sales above asking price. The current environment of rates from 5-7% is more sustainable, and we have a more balanced buyer/seller negotiation process. Locally we are seeing homes on the market longer, some price adjustments and more seller contributions to closing or interest rate buydowns.

Many things affect the real estate market. Working with a trusted real estate professional, one who is knowledgeable and in touch with the local landscape, will make it easier to decide when it is a good time for you to make such an important purchase. If you need someone to help you navigate the process, contact me-I'm at your service.

## The Little Black Dress Party Returns

The White-Wilson Community Foundation (WWCF) will host the return of its award-winning fundraising event, The Little Black Dress Party, on Saturday, September 16. Guests will gather at Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort to help raise funds to provide critical health services for individuals in Okaloosa, Santa Rosa and Walton Counties.

The Little Black Dress Party is an evening dedicated to celebrating good health and raising funds for community members in need. This will be the event's 11th year and will feature dinner, dancing, live and silent auctions and entertainment. Dr. Patrick and Mrs. Sandra Anastasio of Emerald Coast Infectious Disease will serve as the evening's honorary chairs.

"Funds from The Little Black Dress Party directly help us achieve our mission," said Teresa Halverson, Chair of the Board of Directors. "The last several years have been nothing short of challenging, so we are bringing the event back to help continue maintaining and building upon support for our local systems of well-being."

Halverson continued, "We are thrilled to have the support of Dr. and Mrs. Anastasio, after



being two of the greatest advocates for our community during the pandemic, we couldn't think of a better pair to honor at this year's event. We are counting down the days until we can come together once again to positively impact the lives of those here who need it most."

First introduced in 2010, The Little Black Dress Party has been a longtime staple on the Emerald Coast. All proceeds from the event benefit the WWCF, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, to help increase access to life-changing health services for underserved people in the community.

Through the event's success in previous years, the WWCF has been able to fund health education and prescription drug programs, provide free physical screenings, generate additional grant opportunities and encourage an extensive focus on local health deficits and collaborative efforts to solve them.

Individuals interested in supporting this event can become a sponsor, donate an auction item or purchase tickets to attend. Supporter opportunities for The Little Black Dress Party are available now. For more information on the event or to purchase tickets, visit LBDParty.

For more information about The White-Wilson Community Foundation and to stay up to date on future events, visit WhiteWilsonCommunityFoundtion.org or its Facebook page.



## Melissa Forte-Litscher

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## Private Flood Insurance vs. FEMA Flood Insurance

## What's the Difference?

By Julie A. Martin

There are two types of personal primary flood insurance in the State of Florida. One is FEMA Flood insurance, in which a standard carrier will offer you up to \$250,000 on the Dwelling and up to \$100,000 in Contents. Those are the maximum flood limits that the Federal Emergency Management Agency will allow on a policy issued under the National Flood

Insurance Program.

If you have a FEMA flood policy, you have two deductibles, one on the Dwelling and one on the Contents. FEMA has a standing rule that if you go more than 30 days without flood coverage, and you wish to purchase a new flood policy through NFIP, there will be a 30-day wait after binding until the coverage becomes effective.

What if the total insurable

replacement cost of your home is more than \$250,000? What



happens if there is a flood and you have only the \$250,000 with which to cover your home in the event of a flood loss, such as happened last year with Hurricane Ian? FEMA also has excess flood insurance available, but it's not easy to get. Several carriers have stopped writing excess flood in certain areas of the state, and those with NFIP policies have a coverage gap that may cost them in the event of a flood.

Private flood insurance offers more comprehensive coverage and is specifically designed to give you the amount of insurance you need in order to protect your home, which is one of the most important, and expensive assets, you will ever have. Private flood will often offer limits as high as \$4 million on the Dwelling and up to \$500,000 in Contents.

There is one deductible for the loss itself, rather than separate deductibles for Dwelling and for Contents. Private flood also offers an endorsement for Additional Living Expenses, which National Flood Insurance policies do not offer. Private flood coverage may also be more expensive than NFIP flood insurance, but it covers more of your home than NFIP does. Another advantage to Private flood is that if you don't have flood insurance right now, but you need to get insurance quickly, Private flood has only a 10-day wait, rather than the 30-day wait required by FEMA when there is a lapse in coverage.

Which option is the best for you depends on the size, quali-



ty and total insurable replacement cost of your home. Your agent is best suited to help you determine the total insurable replacement cost of your home by performing a Replacement Cost Estimator, using your square footage, year built, roof type, roof shape, number of bedrooms and bathrooms, flooring types, etc. If your replacement cost is more than \$250,000, you may wish to consider Private flood as a viable option in order to avoid a gap in coverage. If your home is smaller, the National Insurance Flood program might be the best option for you.

Whichever option you choose, it is important to have flood insurance in Florida, as we live on a peninsula surrounded on three sides by the ocean or Gulf of Mexico. If you believe your home is not in a flood zone, I must remind you dear reader, water doesn't know that.



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still start each morning with the sound of "Reveille" and end your day with the sound of "Retreat."

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## **Major Infrastructure Boost:**

## Brooks Bridge Replacement Project & The Landing Park Renovations Take Shape

By Jared Williams, Get The Coast

Fort Walton Beach is witnessing significant transformations as two major projects, the Brooks Bridge Replacement and The Landing Park Renovations, are well underway. These projects are set to enhance the city's infrastructure and recreational spaces, catering to the growing needs of the community.

#### Brooks Bridge Replacement Project Takes Shape

Construction activities for the \$171-million Brooks Bridge replacement project have commenced, promising a much-needed boost to traffic capacity in the area. The project involves the construction of two new parallel bridges, expanding the total travel lanes to six from the current four-lane bridge that has served the community since 1966.

The construction zone spans from west of Perry Avenue to Pier Road along U.S. 98, encompassing the side streets beneath the Brooks Bridge in Fort Walton Beach and Okaloosa Island. On the water, the work zone extends 1,000 feet from the bridge construction activities into the Okaloosa County "minimum wake zone" within the Santa Rosa Sound.

To ensure safety during the construction, the area within the construction zone, both on land and water, is marked as a minimum wake zone. All motorized watercraft must utilize the navigational channel within the zone, and vessels must maintain a minimum wake to pre-



vent hazards for other vessels, construction equipment, and workers.

The Brooks Bridge Replacement Project marks a significant milestone in the city's infrastructure development, aimed at improving transportation efficiency and minimizing environmental impact. FDOT estimates the project's completion by summer 2027.

#### Temporary Work Trestles Introduced for Brooks Bridge Project

As part of the Brooks Bridge Replacement Project, construction crews have begun erecting temporary work trestles over the Santa Rosa Sound in Fort Walton Beach. These trestles serve as platforms to support cranes and materials during the construction of the new bridge structures, providing an alternative to crane-mounted barges and reducing the need for environmentally harmful dredging.

The trestles are constructed with steel piles driven into the ground using a "vibratory hammer." The work trestle bridge platform will facilitate access for cranes and heavy equipment during the reconstruction without the use of barges. These measures ensure minimal dis-

ruption to traffic flow, as the current Brooks Bridge will maintain its four lanes throughout the construction period.

The use of temporary work trestles highlights the project's commitment to environmentally responsible practices while

efficiently upgrading the city's transportation infrastructure.

#### Utility Relocation Underway for Brooks Bridge Replacement

As the Brooks Bridge Replacement Project progresses, crews have cleared the Business Access Road near the Brooks Bridge Marina on Okaloosa Island to make way for the construction of the new westbound Brooks Bridge structure. The Business Access Road will remain closed during the project's duration, with detour signage in place to guide drivers.

This utility relocation work aims to create space for the construction crews to build the new westbound bridge structure. While the temporary closure may cause some inconvenience to motorists, the end result will be a more efficient and modern transportation system, accommodating the city's growth.

#### Construction Finally Begins at The Landing Park

After facing delays, the construction at The Landing park in Downtown Fort Walton Beach has officially commenced. The project was awarded to GLC Contracting, Inc. of Fort Wal-

ton Beach for Phase 1 of the improvements, which will focus on waterside construction, including the seawall, boardwalk, dock, and pocket beach/kayak launch. Phase 2 will encompass land side improvements, such as the entry canopy and band shell.

Funding for The Landing Improvements comes from multiple sources, including CRA funding, NRDA grant funding, RESTORE Act funding, TDC funding, and Half-Cent surtax revenues. The completion of the project is estimated for 2024.

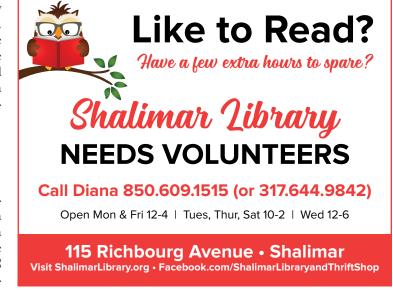
The City is working with the contractor to minimize impacts on events scheduled at The Landing, such as concerts and farmers markets, ensuring that community activities continue smoothly during the construction period.

According to City Manager Jeff Peters, Phase 1 is slated to be complete by December/January timeframe. The City says they will bid out Phase 2 (stage,

restrooms, etc.) in August.

These two major projects are set to redefine Fort Walton Beach, providing improved transportation options, recreational spaces, and revitalized public areas for residents and visitors alike. As both the Brooks Bridge Replacement and The Landing Park Development progress, the city eagerly awaits the positive impact they will bring to the community.

This story first appeared on ILoveFWB.com and was written by Get The Coast, a prominent local, online news publication known for delivering up-to-date news and updates about the Fort Walton Beach community. ILoveFWB is a dedicated section on the website that focuses on all things related to the Brooks Bridge Replacement Project, The Landing Park Renovations and 'Around the Mound', showcasing the exciting transformations taking place in our beloved city.



## There's a lot to LOVE about Fort Walton Beach!

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## **Back to School:**

## What's New for Okaloosa County in 2023-24

By Christopher Manson

"I'm most proud that this school values three things – academics, the arts, and athletics," Okaloosa County School District Superintendent Marcus Chambers says. "We've taken a strong stance to provide students with opportunities to be engaged while they're in the school system.

"The ultimate goal is that when high school seniors walk across the graduation stage, we want them to be prepared for college, the military, or the workforce."

Mr. Chambers oversees all 38 schools in the district, which include roughly 33,000 students and 3,500 employees. The school district is the second largest employer in the county, right behind the military.

All 67 districts across Florida are assessed in reading, math, social studies and science. "We were fifth in the state for 2022-2023. In the last three years, we've placed in the top ten," he says.

Mr. Chambers was appointed by the governor in January 2019 and elected superintendent in August 2020. Prior to that, he was a classroom teacher, assistant principal, and district office administrator. He served as principal at Longwood Elementary in Shalimar, Pryor Middle School in Fort Walton Beach, and Niceville High School.

Since 1998, he has called Niceville home. His father was in the military, and Mr. Chambers graduated from high school in Hawaii. "I played sports and went to the University of South Florida to play baseball," he says. Later, he played baseball and basketball at what is now Northwest Florida State College in Niceville.

At one point, he realized he wasn't going to become a professional athlete, but Mr. Chambers was happy to be getting an education. He graduated with a degree in Elementary Education from the University of West Florida, then earned his Master's

in Educational Leadership.

"I'm excited about the upcoming school year," he says. Many construction projects are underway, thanks to the half-cent sales tax. "We're now able to upgrade facilities, add new buildings, and plan for new school construction. We're currently building classroom additions and cafetoriums (the new way of saying cafeteria/auditorium)."

Mr. Chambers tells me that once a school gets to around 80 percent capacity, it's time to start thinking about new schools. Most of the schools in Okaloosa County are currently at 95 percent capacity.

Construction projects include the addition of a fourth and fifth grade wing at Destin Elementary School and a new elementary school in Niceville. The district recently acquired 80 acres in Crestview for a K-8 school. "We're getting to the point where we can lessen the capacity and free up space," says Mr. Chambers.



Okaloosa County School District Superintendent Marcus Chambers

"We've taken a very proactive approach to Career and Technical Education (CTE). In Okaloosa County, we have 19 programs, including carpentry, engineering, AI, culinary, nursing and more. In the nursing program, we've partnered with HCA Hospital in Fort Walton Beach and North Okaloosa Medical Center in Crestview."

In Fort Walton Beach, nursing students have their own campus from which they can walk to the hospital for their clinical hours. The district received a Triumph grant for that program, courtesy of the folks that oversee the BP oil spill settlement funds.

CTE students take a certification test at the end of the course. "They get a certificate that shows employers they have marketable skills and experience," says Mr. Chambers.

"We talk a lot about the next generation of Okaloosa schools and being an A-plus school district. We are rated A, but we gave ourselves the plus because we do well in arts and athletics."

Three years ago, the Okaloosa County School District had the oldest bus fleet in the state of Florida and no bus replacement program. This changed three years ago, and now the fleet boasts 160 buses. "We've purchased 90 new school buses. In the upcoming year, we'll purchase 15 more," says Mr. Chambers. "Every year going forward, we're looking to buy at least 15 new buses a year."



#### AJ's on the Bayou

Located at the base of the Cinco Bayou Bridge in Fort Walton Beach, AJ's on the Bayou is in a beautiful setting offering indoor as well as outdoor seating on the open-air deck overlooking the Cinco Bayou. AJ's on the Bayou serves brunch and bottomless Mimosas with food purchase and weekday lunch specials for \$10.95. Serving up delicious daily specials and entertaining live music all month.

ajsonthebayou.com 200 NE Eglin Pkwy., FWB (850) 226-7579

#### AJ's Oyster Shanty -**Okaloosa Island**

Located on Okaloosa Island, AJ's Oyster Shanty serves up fresh seafood, cold oysters and the best live music on the Island. Don't miss the Thursday Prime Dinner Special—enjoy a 10 oz.

cut of prime rib served with baked potato and choice of side salad or cup of French onion soup every Thursday at 4 p.m. Combine with live music nightly at 7 p.m. on the outdoor stage and it's a combination you can't

ajsoystershanty.com 108 Santa Rosa Blvd., FWB (850) 226-8108

#### **Magnolia Grill**

In 2001, Magnolia Grill in Fort Walton Beach opened its doors after a renovation that took 18 months-and it's been thriving since. A local's favorite dubbed "The Museum That Serves Food," you'll find equal parts museum and dining establishment. Its second floor contains artifacts from World War II, Vietnam and other segments of American history. And downstairs—is where you'll find lunch

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

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

magnoliagrillfwb.com 157 Brooks Street SE, FWB (850) 812-5761

#### **Ovide at Hotel Effie**

Have you tried the Seasonal Special at Ovide at Hotel Effie? Mondays at 5 p.m., enjoy some of Chef Hugh Acheson's favorite dishes with a seasonal prix fixe menu. Choose one starter, one entrée and one dessert for just \$50. Ask your server about the wine pairing option. Visit Hoteleffie.com for more infor-

#### **Tailfins Waterfront Grill**

Looking for a locals' favorite breakfast? Start your day off right with Tailfins breakfast from 8-11 a.m., seven days a week. Enjoy a classic breakfast with bacon and eggs, a seafood or Cajun omelet and even a kid's smiley pancake. Be sure to order up a round of Bottomless Mimosas. Watch Tailfins' sushi chef create right in front of your eyes. Enjoy some of your favorite food and drinks, including sushi rolls and sake bombs. Scrumptious Early Bird Dinner Specials Monday to Thursday, 4-6 p.m. Happy hour from 4-6 p.m. Monday through Friday,

featuring \$20 domestic bottle buckets, \$5 house wines and well drinks and \$5 Long Island iced teas. Live music on the docks. Tailfins is a go-to destination for sports watching featuring more than 70 big screen TVs. Be sure to check out the new Video Wall upstairs, possibly the largest indoor TV on the harbor.

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Magnolia Gril

pegtom2003@yahoo.com

## Cherish History at Magnolia Grill

The Magnolia Grill is proud to celebrate the history of our community and welcomes back the art deco Eloise Shop sign from its restoration. This iconic West Main Street Fort Walton Beach store front was designed by Pensacola Architects Young, Look and Morrison for dress shop owner, Miss Eloise Smith in the early 1950s, reportedly costing \$5,000. The Art Deco



lettering was built of heavy, galvanized steel and featured white

neon tubing. In addition to the restored signage, the Magnolia Grill will be displaying images from the grand opening including handmade La Lena ceramic ashtrays from the store and pink dress boxes from the popular store. Memorabilia has been added to the collection from the family of the late Miss Eloise joining the sign she gave to Tom Rice in 1995.



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## **Unique Whale Shark Tagging Effort**

By Nick Tomecek, OKALOOSA COUNTY PIO

The Coastal Resource team with Destin-Fort Walton Beach Tourism in Okaloosa County recently participated in a collaborative effort that led to the tagging of two whale sharks, Ivey and Oliver, in the Gulf of Mexico south of Destin-Fort Walton Beach.

This unique research opportunity was successful due to a joint effort between the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the University of Southern Mississippi, Okaloosa County's Coastal Resource team and the fishing community.

"We are extremely excited and proud of the work our Coastal Resources team has done with this collaboration," said Okaloosa County Board Chairman Trey Goodwin. "Whale sharks are an amazing species and we are thrilled they made an appearance in our Gulf of Mexico





waters. We look forward to the results of this research."

Reports from commercial

and recreational fishermen were crucial in identifying the location of these gentle giants to the team of researchers. Ivey, a 25-foot female, was named after the daughter of the boat captain that sighted it. Oliver, a 40-foot male was named after the child that was on a boat fishing with his family when they spotted it.

Both whale sharks were tagged with a satellite and acoustic tag. The satellite tag will send information if the dorsal fin breaks the surface, while the acoustic tag will send location information if the whale shark passes by a receiver.

Biological samples were also collected for genetic research along with video documentation to confirm the length and sex of each animal. The video will also provide imagery of the side of each whale shark showing the unique dot pattern that can be used like a fingerprint and help identify them if they are seen anywhere else.

"This was an incredible opportunity for us as marine biologists and we are lucky that we were able to help with this effort right here in Destin-Fort Walton Beach," said Coastal Resources Manager for Destin-Fort Walton Beach Tourism, Alex Fogg. "We could not have done this without the help of the fishing community. Whale shark aggregations such as this aren't very normal in our area. We get reports of one or two here and there but this is certainly unique, especially for this amount of time. They may be here for food or some other reason but that is one of the reasons why we want to get some tags out, to maybe answer some of these questions."

Note: All whale shark activities were permitted by the state of Florida and the Federal Government. If you see a whale shark, please observe them from a distance to avoid unneeded harassment. The public can help the research by reporting whale shark sightings at https://bit.ly/ WhaleSharkSighting.

## Six Rehabilitated Sea Turtles Released

The Gulfarium C.A.R.E. Center has taken in 89 patients this year and, so far, has released 58 of them. In July, six sea turtles, four Loggerheads, one

Kemps Ridley, and one Green were able to return to the Gulf of Mexico.

Several dedicated C.A.R.E Center staff team members and their volunteers, as well as hundreds of beachgoers and locals were able to observe the release first-hand.

"Lychee," an adult female

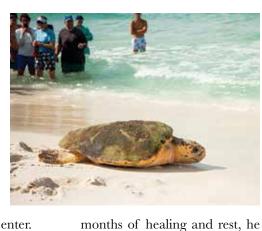
Kemps Ridley weighing in at 73 lbs. was caught on 7/2/23 at Navarre Beach Fishing Pier wrapped in fishing line. After x-rays bloodwork showed no other ailments and no internal hooks, Lychee was cleared for a very short stay

here at the CARE Center.

"Apple," a subadult Loggerhead weighing in at 88 lbs. was accidently hooked in the mouth by a circle hook at Navarre Beach Fishing Pier on 6/27/23.

"Finn," a subadult Loggerhead weighing 100 lbs. was foul-hooked at Okaloosa Island Fishing Pier on 2/26/23 with a j-hook in his esophagus. Finn was very emaciated and anemic upon arrival. After months of rehabilitation and rest, Finn was finally cleared for release.

"Finley," a subadult Loggerhead weighing 96 lbs. was accidentally hooked at Navarre Beach Fishing Pier on 4/4/23. Due to the severity of entanglement he had sustained, his right front flipper was amputated here at the CARE Center. After three



Gulfarium C.A.R.E. Stranding Coordinator. "Mango," a subadult Loggerhead hooked at Navarre Beach Fishing Pier on 7/2/23, and "Coconut," a juvenile Green recently hooked at NBFP, also joined the release this morning.

passed his health exit exam and

was ready to be returned to the

Gulf. "Per FWC regulations,

turtles are releasable if they

have at least one flipper on each

side of their body, and do just as well as turtles with all four flip-

pers," says Tabitha Siegfried,

If you see a sea turtle in distress, injured, or deceased please report it to Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission immediately at 1-888-404-FWCC (1-888-404-3922).



## Sports

#### **PICKLEBALL**

continued from page 4

need for an indoor court, he and his wife Donna launched Pickleball at the Palms in Feb. 2023, a designated indoor pickleball court, one of the very few places to play indoors in our region slated only for Pickleball, as opposed to a regular gym. Mr. Harris says the cool, indoor court is extremely popular and stays booked 70-85% of the time.

Mr. Harris says he also has a competitive streak. "I go to tournaments and I've even qualified to play in some," he says. "But I just turned 60 and can play in the 60-plus division. I'm not competing with teenagers anymore, which makes life a lot easier for me."

Pickleball at the Palms is located at 21 Racetrack Road NE in Fort Walton Beach. Hours of operation are 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Saturday and noon to 4 p.m. on Sundays. "We use an app called Court-Reserve," says Mr. Harris. "Just sign up there for clinics or to rent the court." Open play is Fridays from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. (beginner level) and 4 to 6 p.m. (intermediate level). Cost is \$5 for two hours of play, and if you want to rent the court for an hour, it's only \$24.

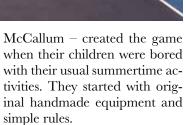
He and Donna were in the restaurant business for 21 years



in Birmingham, Ala. Things came full circle when Mr. Harris stumbled upon a pickleball/ restaurant franchise called Chicken N Pickle, which is sort of the Top Golf of pickleball. "I was interested in opening one, and Donna said, 'You can do that with your next wife, because you're not doing it with me!"

Mr. Harris is one of over 4.8 million pickleball players, or "picklers," in the U.S., according to a 2022 report from the Sports & Fitness Industry Association. Pickleball grew nearly 40 percent between 2019 and 2021, making it America's fastest-growing sport.

According to USApickleball. org, Pickleball is celebrating its 58th anniversary. Interestingly, the game was actually invented in 1965 on Bainbridge Island. Three enterprising dads – Joel Pritchard, Bill Bell and Barney



Although accounts of how the name originated differ (especially since no pickles are used),



according to Joel's wife, she started calling the game pickle-ball, because "the combination of different sports reminded me of the pickle boat in crew where oarsmen were chosen from the leftovers of other boats." However, according to Barney, the game was officially named after

the Pritchards' dog Pickles, who would chase and run off with the ball. With really no official name in its first couple of years, as the game progressed over time, an official name was needed and "pickleball" was it!









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## Golf in Niceville's Bluewater Bay



By Barbara Palmgren

When I think about the beauty of the golf course at Bluewater Bay, and look at its blue and white logo with boat sails and golf clubs, I have to borrow a few lines from Roy Orbison's famous song and change the lyrics:

I'm going back someday, Come what may, To Bluewater. Where the golf is fine, And the world is mine, In Bluewater. With marina fair, And the salty air, Yes, I can only see, The familiar sunrise,

With a par putt there, On hole number three.

I once lived on Prestwick Drive in Bluewater Bay and watched golfers hit their approach shot to the Par 4 green. Bluewater Bay was a magical place back in the mid-80's as it is today. There is a special legacy that this golf community brings to the Florida Panhandle. Located in Niceville, this sprawling community contains friendly, enthusiastic, sports-minded residents of all ages. The roads, round-abouts and cul-de-sacs are filled with walkers and joggers who pass by the marina, tennis courts, pools, pickleball courts, and yes, in the heart of it all, the golf center.

The golf course layout has changed off and on during the 39 years when golf began in Bluewater Bay. Now, golfers play 18 holes, the Bay and the Marsh. One designed by Tom Fazio. One designed by Jerry Pate. Art Jean, a director on the board of Preserve Bluewater Bay C Corporation, says his favorite hole is a Par 3 on the Marsh course. Par 3 overlooks the blue waters of Choctawhatchee Bay...hence my referral to his scenic hole in the lyrics above. Imagine watching a sunrise or being distracted by dolphins breaking the water as if to applaud a rare hole-in-one.

The Golf Club at Bluewater Bay boasts a well-stocked pro shop where the public can rent clubs if necessary to enjoy a golf round. General Manager, Christian Castrodad, and staff welcome tourists and the public to play year-round. Memberships for singles, family, juniors, active military and other categories are available at reasonable fees. Members are well organized with both a men's and ladies golf group that want to include new members and expand weekly play for golfers.

Food and beverage availability? No worries. Food at the Pro Shop bar and grill is provided daily. The Tap Room operates Thursday through Saturday from 3 to 10 p.m. Relaxing with friends and recalling a special





birdie or two is always the perfect end to a golf match. Is there a special event where you need to plan a birthday, a wedding or a charity golf tournament? Bluewater Bay staff will work with an organization, providing a win-win for the club and the group as everyone experiences the joy of being in the heart of the Bluewater community.

So, what can the golfer expect? Dennis Stein, golf course superintendent, arrived in March 2022 to see greens that needed attention. The PBWB board reports that Dennis "brought them back to life." Any golfer knows that the key to a good golf round is having excellent greens and fairways. As for the rough...let's not discuss those troublesome areas that I try to avoid at all costs! This 18-hole golf course has yardage tees that vary according to golf skill and ego. Challenging Par 4-, 5- and 3-holes wind through

community, wetlands and beautiful natural surroundings.

So, as the song says, "Come back today, to Bluewater Bay... where the golf is fine and the world is mine, at Bluewater." I recommend teeing up your next golf shot at this special course and hitting it straight down the middle of a pristine fairway or over a scenic marshland.

This article is one in a series by author Barbara Palmgren where Life Media is highlighting local area golf courses. Barbara's recent book about saving Shalimar Pointe Golf and Country Club has established her as an expert in the field. She recently taught a class at the national PGA Merchandising Show and continues to work with Shalimar Pointe Golf Club. Currently, the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida board chair, she is also a Niceville High School retired guidance counselor and an adjunct professor of Communication Arts at UWF.



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## 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!

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#### **Wellness**



By Stephenie Craig, Journey Bravely

I was stressed and busy. Parenting required more energy than usual. I was irritable and I didn't realize how I was coming across. I thought I was managing stress well until my husband said I was being grumpy. Initially, I became defensive, telling myself

## I'm Getting Some Feedback

he was wrong and I wasn't the problem. After the defensiveness receded, I sorted through the feedback and recognized he was right. The uncomfortable nudge toward self-awareness provided a helpful opportunity to adjust and make amends with my family regarding my stress grumping.

How are you at receiving feedback from those you trust? Do you tend to get defensive and angry? Do you tell yourself you aren't the problem when someone tells you something about your behavior you haven't noticed? What might you be missing by assuming the person giving you feedback is the problem?

When another person tells



you their experience of your behavior, positive or negative, they are providing feedback. While it would be wonderful if we had an accurate view of ourselves, humans have blind spots about how we are showing up, especially when under stress. When done well, both receiving and giving feedback are valuable skills that help you and others grow into wisdom and maturity. Feedback provides an opportunity to embrace the freeing truths that you aren't perfect, you won't be perfect, and life can be a continuous arc of growth as long as you live.

Despite the benefits of feedback, it can be a difficult practice. Receiving suggestions from others about ourselves is humbling, vulnerable work. Feedback can challenge a fragile sense of self, bring up uncomfortable insecurities, and can unearth historical shame resulting in defensiveness. However, working through these discomforts is worth the work to bring you more health and connection. So, how do you navigate feedback as a tool of growth?

#### 6 Healthy Ways to Incorporate Feedback Into Your Life

## 1. Choose trusted sources of feedback.

Avoid choosing people who have been historically unhealthy. Choose people who are gracious, growth-oriented, emotionally healthy, balanced, non-judgmental and able to receive feedback. Don't choose people who invite you to feel poorly about yourself.

- 2. Notice and study your defense patterns. How do you feel in your body and thoughts when someone tells you something difficult about yourself? What stories do you tell yourself? How do you blame others? What words do you say? Remember, you aren't always right
- 3. Calm your body and mind. Notice if your body has gone into fight, flight or freeze. Take deep breaths for 1-2 minutes to reset. Let the person giving the feedback know you need a moment if you are struggling to respond well. Engage a

healthy coping skill like journaling or taking a walk to give yourself space to process.

- 4. Tell yourself the truth about the feedback. Sort who is providing the feedback. Sort who is providing the feedback. If they are a trustworthy source, remind yourself of this. If they aren't a trustworthy source, it's okay to move forward without spending much time or energy on the interaction. Remind yourself feedback does not mean you are a failure, a bad person, or less than you were before. Feedback is a tool to improve your healthy sense of self and maturity.
- 5. Listen and internalize. Really consider what is being said to you. Notice how it might be true. Notice how your awareness of your own behavior might be lacking. Consider how your blind spot might be hurtful to those around you. Notice if you'd like to continue behaving in the ways being reported to you or if you would feel better to know you are behaving differently. Consider how you might want to change the behavior. Remember the person giving you feedback is taking an emotional risk to provide you with this information. Consider being grateful someone cared enough to have a difficult, helpful conversation.
- 6. Make amends and adjustments. Now that you understand and accept something new about your behavior, take responsibility by letting others know you regret how the behavior may have negatively impacted them. Seek healthy support to create a plan for changing the behavior. Try inviting those you trust to let you know when they see the unhealthy behavior and to let you know when you are improving.
- 7. Be a student of giving feedback well. As you learn to receive healthy feedback, notice how you might be a healthy, kind source of feedback to others in your life. Feel what works well for you and incorporate these learnings into your feedback approach with others.

While not an easy practice, receiving feedback provides you with an ongoing opportunity to become a healthier, better version of yourself. As you navigate feedback, connect with us as journeybravely.com for coaching and counseling support along your journey.









## **Stay Safe During Excessive Heat**

Tips from Okaloosa County and the National Weather Service:

- NEVER LEAVE CHIL-DREN OR PETS IN A PARKED CAR: The temperature can raise to 135 degrees in less than ten minutes, which can cause death to children or pets. If you see a child or pet left unattended in a parked car, you should call 9-1-1 and alert authorities.
- Slow down. Strenuous activities should be reduced, eliminated, or rescheduled to the coolest time of the day. Individuals at risk should stay in the coolest available place, not necessarily indoors.
- Dress for summer. Light-weight, light-colored clothing reflects heat and sunlight, and helps your body maintain normal temperatures.
- Drink plenty of water or other nonalcoholic fluids. Your body needs water to keep cool. Drink plenty of fluids even if you don't feel thirsty. Persons who (1) have epilepsy or heart, kidney, or liver disease, (2) are on fluid restrictive diets, or (3) have a problem with fluid retention should consult a physician before increasing their consumption of fluids.
- Do not drink alcoholic beverages.
- Do not take salt tablets unless specified by a physician. Persons on salt restrictive diets should consult a physician before increasing their salt intake.
- Spend more time in air-conditioned places. Air conditioning in homes and other buildings markedly reduces danger from the heat. If you cannot afford an air conditioner, spend-



ing some time each day (during hot weather) in an air-conditioned environment such as malls and libraries affords some protection.

- Minimize direct exposure to the sun. Sunburn reduces your body's ability to dissipate heat.
- Eat light, cool, easy-to-digest foods such as fruit or salads. If you pack food, put it in a cooler or carry an ice pack. Don't leave it sitting in the sun. Meats and dairy products can
  - Use portable electric fans to

spoil quickly in hot weather.

exhaust hot air from rooms or draw in cooler air.

- Do not direct the flow of portable electric fans toward yourself when room temperature is hotter than 90°F. The dry blowing air will dehydrate you faster, endangering your health.
  - Take a cool bath or shower.
- Check on older, sick, or frail people who may need help responding to the heat. Each year, dozens of children and untold numbers of pets left in parked vehicles die from hyperthermia. Keep your children, disabled adults, and pets safe during tumultuous heat waves.
- Don't leave valuable electronic equipment, such as cell phones and GPS units, sitting in hot cars.
- Make sure rooms are well vented if you are using volatile chemicals.



KAY LEAMAN, HEALTH ARCHITECT, HEALTHYDAY HEALTHYLIFE

Every time I see a bird or discover something I've never seen before like the black winged dragonflies I recently had the privilege of bumping into reminds me how grateful I am for my sight. Caring for our eyes is important especially if you want to continue seeing the faces of the people you love and the sights you enjoy spending time in.

There are several diseases that we deal with today such as Amblyopia (Lazy Eye), Macular Degeneration, Color blindness, Diabetic Retinopathy, Dry Eye, Floaters, Glaucoma, Pink eye, Retinal detachment, Astigmatism and Cataracts. I'll be focusing on two of these but the information for maintaining eye health is for everyone.

Risk commonalities exist for several eye conditions such as genetics and health related issues such as obesity, diabetes, etc.

## **Eyes, The Gift of Sight**

**Myopia** (near sighted) where light focuses in front of the retina and hyperopia (far sighted) where light is focused behind the retina are two conditions that can be corrected by glasses, contact lenses or refractive surgery.

**Astigmatism** is caused when either the cornea or the lens has mismatched curves. Vision is blurred because there are 2 image points. Glasses can usually correct this.

Cataracts occurs when proteins in the lens is damaged by oxidative damage. This disease develops slowly and 50% of the US population experience cataracts by age 80. Its likened to an egg; the albumen is clear when the egg is raw and turns white as it cooks. This explains the whitish color that forms over the eye. Risk factors are smoking, UV radiation, diabetes, radiation therapy, long term use of steroid medications, trauma, lack of anti-oxidant and micronutrient protection as well as the commonalities.

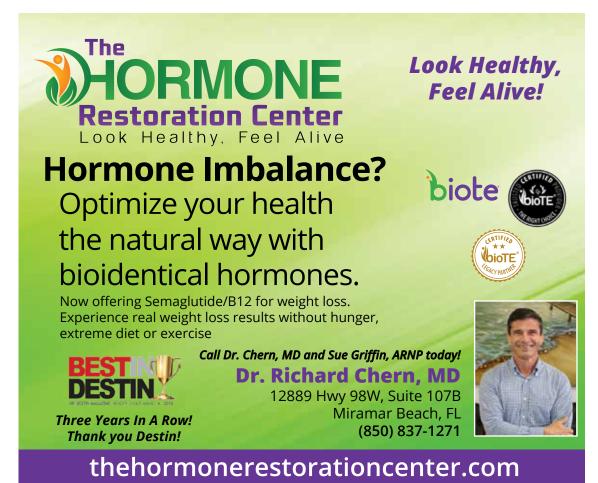
Macular Degeneration is a blurring of our sharp central vision which we need to see straight ahead, read, drive, watch movies or see the details on someone's face. The macula is the focal point of the retina and resides in the center of the back of the eye. The peripher-

al is not affected. There are two types: Wet, (most vision loss) named for when blood leaks or oozes from new blood vessels (very simple def.) and dry which constitutes 80-85% of cases. This disease is the # 1 cause of blindness in people over 60. There is no cure.

Symptoms include blank or dark spots, blurred vision, issues with seeing colors, or straight lines seen as curvy. Nutritional science shows that by reducing free radical damage and inflammation we can slow down progression or prevent macular degeneration from occurring.

Risk factors include toxic chemicals (BPAs, PCBs, aspartame, phthalates, etc. ingested with food or drink), high blood glucose levels as with diabetes, disseminated inflammations as a result of hyper-permeable in-

Continued on next page



## A Workout Worthy of a Patriot



By Lisa Leath Turpin, Health AND WELLNESS COACH

A person who vigorously supports their country and is prepared to defend it against enemies is a true Patriot! Every U.S. military branch has thousands of patriots physically ready to protect us at all cost. To be able to defend our nation, each branch has standards and testing for their physical readiness and shape. These men and women are at the top echelon for their strength and endurance. I went straight to Military.com to learn more about what the requirements are for each branch of the military.

Within the five branches (Army, Navy, Airforce, Marine Corps and Coast Guard), there are similarities but some substantial differences. The Army has made the biggest changes lately by replacing the pull-ups, sit-ups and two-mile run PFT from the 80's.

Since 2022, the Army implemented six new exercises instead of those three of the past. The new six are: 3 rep max deadlifts (MDL), standing power throw (SPT: overhead medicine ball throw), hand-release push-ups (HRP: lift hands off floor during each rep in the down position when chest is on the floor), sprint, drag and carry (SDC: run, drag sled, carry 40 lb. dumbbells or kettlebells in each hand, run 2 x 25 meter distances of each), leg tuck (LTK: hanging knee ups from pull-up bar knees to elbows) and two-mile run (2MR). This change is for the Army Combat Fitness Test only;



special ops and all other military branches still require push-ups, sit-ups and pull-ups.

Instead of G.I. Joe (or Jane), most of us are "Average Joe or Jane;" but that doesn't mean we can't all benefit from a tactical style functional training routine as part of our healthy and fit regime. We can learn from these military fitness tests on how to hold ourselves accountable and set goals. Just like each branch sets standards by using reps over a set amount of time, you can make up your own. Push-ups and pull-ups measure your upper body strength, while deadlifts and sled pulls measure lower body strength.

Getting stronger takes time; it's more of a marathon than a sprint. The key to getting stronger? Consistency. Basic controlled movement builds the most muscle, whereas combination movements build more endurance and synergy.

Let's dissect the push-up from the basic military tests. How to do a good push-up: Starting in plank position, hands about shoulder width (or a smidge wider), lower your body all the way until chest touches the floor then push back up. Goal is full ROM (range of motion). In order to get ROM, you might need to modify by putting your knees down, using a counter top

or even a wall if necessary. To get stronger, do maximum you can do twice daily for 10 days, rest two days, then test yourself to see if you can do more reps, or if modifying, a stronger style and repeat until you can do a regular push-up. Note: Maximum is the amount you can do until you can't keep your form or ROM anymore. You won't want to keep up the cycle of 10 days on and two days off for longthat's more of a strength push to do occasionally that I found and simplified what is suggested on military.com. You will get stronger if you do your best, work your hardest, stay consistent with two-three days/week, get full ROM and control your movement. Benefits of the pushup are toned arms and shoulders and the strength in the chest to help get up if you fall or need to catch yourself.

I want to say an EXTRA thank you to our military and families

#### **EYES**

continued from previous page

testines (leaky gut), low levels of DHEA (hormone) which protects against oxidative damage and pregnenolone which improves electrical activity in the

retina and estrogen blocking drugs such as tamoxifen used in breast cancer treatment which causes harm to the retina. A fun side note is that the eye produces its own homornes.

Eyes also suffer from blue light which can cause eye fatigue, headaches, dry eyes, double vision and difficulty focusing. Using blue light filters such as screen protectors or glasses (they have a yellowish tint) can aid in reducing its affects. Taking 20-30 second eye breaks (turn away and focus on something else.) every 2-3 hours can also help.

High quality nutrition can make a big impact on our eye health. A few of these nutrients

Vitamin C - Found in every cell in the body it supports healthy capillaries and cartilage and is significantly higher in the retina than in the blood. It helps to maintain optimal performance by protection from free radical damage. It must be consumed as the body does not make it (citrus, peppers, broccoli and kale).

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**Zinc** - a trace mineral in high concentrations plays a critical role in transporting vitamin A which is another one that supports the retina. Its been linked to preserving normal night vision (oysters, red meat, shellfish beans and nuts).

Lutein and Zeaxanthin are carotenoids that act as anti-oxidants and built in sunscreen for eyes. It helps support blue light filtration and visual acuity (how well we see) in the retina (dark green veggies).

Omega 3 supports the eye's oily outer layer (fatty fish, plant sources and alpha-linolenic (ALA) found in flaxseeds, chia seeds, walnuts, soybeans).

Grapeseed extract, curcumin, phenol and carotenoids, vitamin E, melatonin, bilberry extract, quercetin, resveratrol and a few more are all used by the body to support the eye and reduce inflammation.

If you would like information on the eye support supplement we use go to:

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## **Local Business Expands Into Bay County**

By J. ZIMCHEK

Gulf Coast Shutter and the Overhead Door Company of Northwest Florida (both Dillard companies) together are such a well-known entity, you'd be forgiven for thinking they've been around forever. But it was in 2011, when Wayne Bernheisel acquired Gulf Coast Shutter (founded in 2001) that this local business really became part of the local community. Now, with the acquisition of Quality Gates and Openers in Panama City, it's poised to extend its reach even farther down the Gulf

Wayne Bernheisel had always wanted his own business, but the path to this end goal wasn't a straight one. It took a stint in the Air Force and corporate jobs with companies like Rolls-Royce and Crane Aerospace & Electronics before he was able to buy Gulf Coast Shutter in 2011. It turned out to be the perfect time for him to combine his love of community with his dream of a self-owned enterprise. "I wanted something that provided me an opportunity to be out serving the community and building relationships," he said. "To me, that was really important and more fulfilling. Coming from the corporate side, the local community was



not such a priority during my tenure." For him, Gulf Coast Shutter and the Overhead Door Company of NW Florida offer a way to provide the community with needed products, for security and otherwise, but also much-needed services. Its tagline - Live Life Beautifully Secure - is reflected in a product line that ranges from basic hurricane screens to Colonial and Bahama Shutters with plenty of curb appeal to a variety of eye-catching garage door op-

And though it got its start primarily in residential, it is now a major supplier for commercial as well. Whether it's dealing with

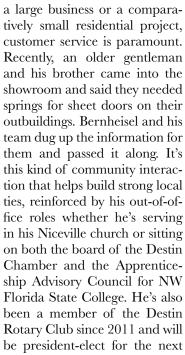
Panama City under the own-



ership of Chris Harris allows Bernheisel and his team to extend this community reach well outside of Walton County. Now, they have over 40 employees spread between two locations, one location to cover the Southport to Port St. Joe region and another to service the Valparaiso/Destin area stretching west to Pensacola, as well as everything in between. Additionally, Quality Gates and Openers offers a broad range of services that will nicely complement those of Gulf Coast Shutter and the Overhead Door Company. "We design, we fabricate, we powder coat, we install, and we service automated gates," explains Harris. He rattles off a list of gates that includes (but is not limited to) driveway gates, gates for residential homes, industrial complexes, boardwalk gates, garden gates, pool gates and pedestrian gates in general. They can also install keypads, card readers, wrist bands - if you can use it to open a gate, Harris is your guy. He's been in the gate business for

16 years, ever since he bumped into a former mentor in the construction industry driving around working on automated gates. Harris had been looking for a new opportunity and the man offered to take him on as a 50/50 partner on the spot. Now, it's a multi-million dollar business with 15 employees. In addition to offering a range of installations, Harris also offers a 24-hour response time for stuck or broken gates, whether or not he installed them. "I don't know anyone around that is reliable doing that," says Harris. "Service is something we pour a lot of effort into." Like Bernheisel though, Harris is also big on community. Every Veteran's Day since 2021, the company has held a dinner and given a veteran and installed an automated gate that Quality Gates. But it doesn't stop there – Harris is also a long-time football coach at Mosley High School, and the company participates in both Bay and Walton County chambers, the Community Association Institute, the American Fence Association and recently joined the Panama City Beach Rotary Club.

For more information or a consultation, call (850) 269-1066 or visit Overhead Door of Northwest Florida at www. destinoverheaddoor.com, Gulf Coast Shutter at www.gulfcoastshutter.com, and Quality Gates and Openers at www.qualitygatesandopeners.com.



The recent merger with Quality Gates and Openers in



Lisa Darnell, APR, currently works in the Office of the President and CEO of the International Fertilizer Development Center. Her current scope of work includes improving employee morale, planning international conferences for 2024, moving a committee forward on their tasks, and general brand management in the community and beyond (within the

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## \$50 Million Project to Electrify the Region

By Doug Stauffer

Central Moloney, Inc., a transformer manufacturer headquartered in Pine Bluff, Ark., unveiled a new venture, "Project LS2." The project's cornerstone is a state-of-theart manufacturing facility that will find its home in Okaloosa County, focusing on producing pad-mounted electrical trans-

This facility, sprawling more than 302,000 square feet, will be on a 48-acre parcel within the 10,500-acre Shoal River Ranch



Gigasite, owned by Okaloosa County. The construction cost and equipping of this advanced



facility is projected to be around \$50 million. It will create 350 advanced manufacturing jobs as it reaches its full production capabilities.

Unveiling the project, Nathan Sparks, Executive Director of One Okaloosa EDC, emphasized the project's fundamental tenets: Vision, Commitment, Perseverance, and Partnership. "Our first encounter with Central Moloney in early 2021 was through our partners at Florida's Great Northwest," said Sparks. "From our initial meeting, followed by a visit to their Arkansas headquarters, it was clear that this company treasures its people and the communities it serves."

County Commission Chairman Trey Goodwin echoed these sentiments. "When we initiated efforts to extend infrastructure to the Shoal River Ranch Gigasite years ago, advanced manufacturing was a priority," he said. "We're elated that Central Molonev chose to construct their new transformer manufacturing facility here, becoming the site's first tenant. Its presence here sets a promising standard for future opportunities."

"Home is where your heart is, and ours is firmly with our employees," said company president/CEO Chris Hart. "We are committed to treating our employees like family, fueling our passion for what we do and the value we bring to this community. As a company known for 'bringing power to the people,' we'll bring that power to Okaloosa County, along with numerous benefits, a substantial payroll, and an empowering work environment.

"We deliver you the power; someone else delivers your bill. But remember, we need you to pay them so they can pay us. We can't wait to begin, and it feels good to be home."

Jennifer Conoley, President & CEO of Florida's Great Northwest, mentioned the new facility's advantages. "This second location in Northwest Florida will have a significant impact on job seekers, suppliers and community partners. Our collaboration with Central Moloney Inc. is projected to create more than 468 direct, indirect and induced jobs, injecting more than \$27 million in new salaries, due to this high-impact industry's ripple effect."

Central Moloney plans a groundbreaking ceremony at Shoal River Ranch in late 2023 or early 2024. To know more about Central Moloney, Inc., www.centralmoloneyinc.



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By Sean Dietrich

Willie Nelson is on my radio. He is singing one of my favorite songs.

"In the twilight glow I see her, "Blue eyes crying in the rain, "When we kissed goodbye and parted,

"I knew we'd never meet again..."

I turn it up because I am a sucker for this tune. Though, I'm not sure why. When I was a boy, the lyrics never made sense to me.

After all, nobody with blue eyes ever cried in the rain for me. And I certainly didn't have blue eyes. My eyes are gray. My mother used to say my eyes were the color of our pump shed.

Even so, there's something about this tune that moves me. I can close my gray eyes and go back in time.

And I see my father's work bench in the garage. A radio sits beside a chest of mini-drawers that is filled with bolts, nuts, screws, washers, and rubber grommets.

Crystal Gayle is singing "Don't it Make my Brown Eyes Blue?"

Then Willie begins playing over the speaker. My father turns it up.

"Love is but a dying ember, "Only memories remain,

"Through the ages, I'll remember,

"Blue eyes crying in the

And I am holding a GI Joe doll, watching a tall, skinny man work on something beneath a shop lamp, holding a screwdriver.

He does all his own repairs, this man. Because he believes it is wasteful to hire people to do work you could do yourself. Just like it's disgraceful, and even unforgivable, to throw away refrigerator leftovers.

The people I come from are proud and self-sufficient, and they are not above eating

#### ten-week old meatloaf that has turned Sea Foam Green. They cut their own hair. And their

own lawns.

When I started travelling a lot for work, I hired a yardman to cut my grass. It only made sense. But it felt wrong. I was so guilty about it that I couldn't sleep. If my father were alive, it would kill him to know I pay a guy to mow my lawn.

I don't know why I just told you that.

Things have changed a lot since the days when I played with GI Joe. Today's radios have replaced Willie's style of music with country singers who have backup dancers.

Over the years, country music kept sinking lower, until it sounded about as interesting as your Uncle Lou using the bathroom in his RV.

Almost every song on modern country stations seems to be about girls in tank tops, or beer, or knocking boots. Much of this music is performed by young men wearing jeans that have been pre-ripped, or young women dressed like centerfolds.

They can have it.

## Sean of the South

Because I still remember Loretta, and George, and Johnny, and Merle. And I will always remember Willie.

I remember sitting in Chastain Park, in Atlanta. I watched Willie Nelson play to a tame crowd. It was drizzling rain. And Willie invited Jimmy Carter and his wife Rosalynn onto the stage.

People went crazy. It sounded like the crowd was going to tear the place apart. Then a hush fell over the audience.

The rain fell harder.

In this moment, Willie could have played any song and we would have loved him for it. He played "Amazing Grace."

Though, to tell you the truth, I couldn't hear Willie's voice because Jimmy and Rosalynn were singing too loud.

It was a great moment, seeing Jimmy and Rosalynn singing a hymn in inclement weather. It was like watching your grandparents warm the front pew.

Jimmy and Rosalynn weren't twirling, waving hands, or hopping up and down like the young people do at the megachurch my cousin attends. They were just singing.

I don't have anything against megachurches, but my cousin's church has a fog machine.

Before Willie, Jimmy, and Rosalynn got to the third verse of the hymn, they were joined by Kris Kristofferson, and Merle Haggard's boys, and seven thousand other people singing.

No fog machines.

And it reminded me of growing up the way I did, with simple people who were not fancy dressers. People who used weekends to do work around the house.

I come from a father who, just for fun, would separate bolts and screws and put them into little Dixie cups. A father who loved Jimmy Carter. And Willie Nelson.

After Willie sang a few more hymns, Jimmy and the others

left the stage. It was still drizzling. And we all knew Willie was going to play it. All seven thousand of us. We just knew.

He started playing the familiar song.

I closed my eyes. All of a sudden, I was in my father's garage. Holding a GI Joe doll. Watching a skinny man. He was alive again, and he was beautiful. Even if only in my memory. He was happy. And so was I.

"Someday when we meet up yonder,

"We'll stroll hand-in-hand again,

"In a land where there's no parting.

"Blue eyes crying in the rain."

Don't it make my gray eyes
blue



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By Pastor Doug Stauffer

Edmund Burke once declared, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." Scripture echoes this truth by instructing, "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Ephesians 5:11). These admonitions highlight the perils of apathy and inaction in the face of wrongdoing. Silence enables harm to spiral upward and eventually out of control.

I believe standing for righteousness and championing the Gospel are compatible and complementary. God chose America not for its inherent worthiness, but for its global ability to shine a beacon of hope. This beacon dims when the voices opposing destructive agendas are silenced or neutralized. Albert Einstein once wrote: "The world is a dangerous place to live, not because

# A Pastor's Ponderings: **The Silent Church** — **Allowing Evil to Triumph**

of the people who are evil, but because of the people who don't do anything about it." Silence in the face of evil is sin.

As Christians, we are responsible for shaping our nation's future, refusing neutrality and upholding America's exceptionalism rooted in understanding the ultimate sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Today, we combat an anti-nationalistic, globalist agenda breeding divisive ideologies, such as the atheistic and Marxist-rooted Critical Race Theory. Radical doctrines promoting abortion and gender reassignments brazenly dismiss the sanctity and dignity of human life. Silence allows evil to triumph!

Every day is a fight against complacency and ignorance. God's truths must permeate every aspect of our lives, extending far beyond the confines of our four-walled meeting houses. Unfortunately, Christian silence has legitimized a seismic shift in America towards secularism, now deeply embedded in our culture and overriding our laws. The complacent church is not God's plan or His will.

America's troubles intensified when Christians let their faith

recede from public discourse and willingly submitted to judicial activism as the arbitrator of morality. Senator Lyndon Johnson's mid-50s strategy severely hampered freedom of speech, claiming faith has no place in public matters. Our sacred duty in the political realm is to oppose government bullying and coercion.

Far too many educational institutions have evolved into platforms for radical ideologies. As believers, we must remain vigilant against child indoctrination with these inappropriate and perverse teachings. We must demand what Lincoln mentioned in his Gettysburg Address, a "government by the people, for the people." We should continually remind our elected representatives that "We the People" are self-governing and that elected officials hold office to serve the needs and desires of their constituents. We must make our voices heard.

Being silent in the presence of wrongdoing amounts to a tacit endorsement. Welcome to the realities of 21st Century America, where the soaring price of dissent discourages many from articulating their beliefs. This pattern, which history repeatedly demonstrates, paves the way for the subjugation of nations. Nonetheless, vocally opposing such forces can inspire a wave of bravery and conviction, safeguarding our nation's future from detrimental influences. Our founding fathers, guided by faith leaders of their time, established this nation, and I will not allow a handful or a multitude of censors to silence me.

A great illustration of allowing evil to triumph: Neville Chamberlain proclaimed "peace in our time after meeting Adolf Hitler." His naivety illustrates the dangers of appeasing evil. Truth does not negotiate with darkness; it stands forthright and unmovable. We must constantly guard against the perils of spiritual complacency and inaction when faced with religious or secular threats.

Appeasement emboldens God's enemies, and a passive stance towards evil encourages proliferation. We must confront spiritual wickedness with God's armor, not appeasement. We must never compromise our spiritual values or principles, but use them as shields against forces seeking to undermine them. Spiritual appeasement can lead to a destructive war on our souls. Therefore, we must stand resolute against complacency, safeguarding our spiritual peace and freedom through unwavering steadfastness.

God's word provides an urgent call to action: "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong." (1 Corin-



thians 16:13) We can never be neutral! We must never be silenced! We must never be complacent!

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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## Theatre: Real and in Real Time; No Al Here

By Anna Fisher, Associate Artistic Director, Emerald Coast Theatre Company

The instinct to roll my eyes to the very back of my head was absolutely overwhelming when I read the headlines about the recent SAG-AFTRA actor's strike The writer's strike I can understand—I mean how often do writers get the same recognition and pay as celebrities for giving us stories like Yellowstone and Succession. But actors? The ones making millions upon millions every year? As my teenagers would say, "Bruh." But then I did a little research and now I'm almost embarrassed at my initial reaction.

What we're really talking about are those thousands of hard-working actors who barely make a livable wage each year and just have to keep their fingers crossed for the next gig. The strike is about a lot of things-lack of residual pay due to streaming platforms, health insurance, cost of living increase, and here's the kicker—Artificial Intelligence. What guarantee does any actor have that their likeness won't be repackaged artificially and served up as an authentically disguised work of art? Fran Drescher, president of SAG-AFTRA (yes, the Fran Drescher with the laugh) said it best when she stated, "Artificial intelligence poses an existential threat to creative professions, and all actors and performers deserve contract language that protects them from having their identity and talent exploited without consent and pay."1

The more I researched (and when I say researched, I mean spiraled further and further into an existential crisis) the more I wrestled with questions like, How can we as humans compete with the many tentacled machine we have wrought? Will anyone ever have an original thought again? Are human beings as we know them obsolete?

And then, I had a singular, glorious ray of realization: Theatre.

You know I had to bring it back to theatre, right? But really, theatre is the answer. For that matter any gathering of real human beings doing real things in real time is the answer. Actors, writers, storytellers, dancers, painters, chefs, garden club ladies, grocery shoppers and babies making weird noises in restaurants- we need you! We need your real authentic voices doing real authentic things

that can only come from you. And if you're looking for light and life and texture and people and real authentic human experiences, come to Emerald Coast Theatre Company. There's something transformational about experiencing live theatre with other audience members, breathing the same air as the actors, and taking in a show that will always be a unique, one-time event.

And on that note, we have an incredible Season 11 this fall opening with Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis and Carl Perkins in Million Dollar Quartet and closing with the beloved classic Mary Poppins in the spring. You can catch a wide array of shows in between like The Play that Goes Wrong, The Marvelous Wonderettes: Caps and Gowns, Crimes of the Heart and the holiday favorite A Christmas Carol in between. For the younger audience members, we have Junie B Jones in October and Yes Virginia, There is a Santa Claus performed by our talented Junior Company members in December, as well as an original Theatre for the Very Young show Mother Goose on the Loose by Heath Carroll, ECTC Education and Outreach Director, premiering in April 2024. Our fall programming for children and teens starts at the beginning of August with

Finding Nemo, Mean Girls and so many other musical theatre workshops, tap, jazz, and ballet classes, and acting opportunities for children of all ages.

All of these things are happening in real time at Emerald Coast Theatre Company. You won't

find anything artificial here. It takes a lot more passion, skill, talent, people, time, resources and hard work to create an event that can only truly be experienced live. And it also takes all of you, because you are the heart of ECTC.

1 Collier, Kevin. "Actors vs. AI: Strike Brings Focus to Emerging Use of Advanced Tech." NBC News, 14 July 2023, https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/tech-news/hollywood-actor-sag-aftra-ai-artificial-intelligence-strike-rcna94191. Accessed 18 July 2023.





## Festival of the Arts Poster Winner Named

Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation (MKAF) has named Roger van Lieshout of Cape Coral, Florida, the 2023 Festival of the Arts poster contest winner.

Recognized as one of Northwest Florida's premier fine art shows, the Festival of the Arts, produced by MKAF, is one of the most anticipated cultural events of the year on the Emerald Coast. This year's 28th annual event will kick off on Friday, Oct 27, with a reception at Henderson Beach Resort. The Festival weekend follows on Saturday, Oct. 28, and Sunday, Oct. 29, at the Mattie Kelly Cultural Arts Village in Destin.

An oil painter since child-hood, Roger van Lieshout, a native of Winnipeg, has worked as a professional artist full-time for 14 years. Originally trained in renewal resources at the Saskatchewan Institute for Arts and Sciences in Saskatoon, Canada, he then completed his undergraduate degree at University of Manitoba.



The winning piece is a 36-by36-inch oil on canvas, titled "Flamboyant." This vibrant, whimsical piece evokes both the color, beauty, and spirit of Florida living.

"Flamingos are often seen as gangly and funny but look more closely and their grace and beauty become evident," van Lieshout says.

A previous Festival of the Arts exhibiting artist, this is van Lieshout's first MKAF Poster Art Contest win.

"I am most honored to have 'Flamboyant' chosen to help represent the 2023 MKAF Festival of the Arts," van Lieshout says. "The organizing committee and volunteers work hard



to produce one of Florida's premier art events, and the location is a fantastic place to spend a memorable day. Last year's turnout was fantastic and having the opportunity to visit with both locals and visitors is always the best part of the fun. The 2023 Festival is bound to be as good if not better than last year!"

As the Poster Art Contest winner, van Lieshout will receive a cash prize of \$500. The winning artwork will be used to promote the 28th Annual Festival of the Arts by being prominently show-cased on the official Festival poster, program guide, T-shirt, in the Festival marketing campaign, on the MKAF website, across MKAF's social media channels, and more.

During the two-

day Festival, more than 100 premier artists from across the United States will exhibit original artwork in the form of oil, watercolor, acrylic and glass paintings; photography, sculpture, pottery, wood, paper, fiber, mosaics, mixed media, jewelry designs and more in order to compete for \$12,000 in cash prizes in 18 award categories, including the coveted Best in Show and People's Choice Award, which is selected by the festival fans. The Festival also

will feature a Collaborative Art

Exhibit, which showcases select artwork of 85 adult and student artists.

A celebration of art, music, food, and family fun, special features of the Festival include a live music lineup, hands-on arts and crafts activities for children, art raffle and more. A diverse menu of delicious cuisine served up by local food trucks, along with a wine and beer garden. On-site parking and free shuttle service are also available.

Admission is free. Proceeds from the Festival help MKAF and its community education outreach initiatives including ArtsReach serving K-12 students, at-risk youth, people with disabilities, and the military population with visible and invisible injuries.

To make a tax-deductible donation or provide a corporate sponsorship, or for more information about becoming a MKAF member, visit www. MKAF.org or call (850) 650-2226.

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ArtsReach is a creatively curated array of performing and visual arts inspiring K-12 students, children and adults with special needs, and the military community along the Emerald Coast.



## **NWF Ballet Lists an Exciting 2023-24 Season**

The Northwest Florida Ballet recently announced its 54th annual season, which will include Carmina Burana, an original production in partnership with the Northwest Florida Symphony Orchestra, along with the return of two patron favorites, "The Nutcracker" and "On the Edge."

The season begins with the 44th annual presentation of The Nutcracker on Friday and Saturday, Nov. 17 and 18, at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday, Nov. 19 at 2:30 p.m. at the Mattie Kelly Arts Center. As the only full-length version of this classic holiday fairytale in the area, NFB's The Nutcracker features a cast

the NFSO, led by maestro Todd Craven, and the choreography of Gregory Schramel, Artistic Director of New Orleans Ballet Theatre, performed by NFB dancers and soloists from NOBT. Rising operatic world stars, including Sarah Vautour, Lunga Eric Hallam and Ben Taylor, and the Northwest Florida Symphony Chorale round out this incredible ensemble of artists for "Carmina Burana." NFB dancers will also take the stage with the neo-classical ballet "Afterglow," choreographed by NFB Artistic Director Todd Eric Allen with live musical accompaniment by the NFSO playing Ralph Vaughan-Wilmore than 10 percent compared to box office prices. Patrons are also eligible to purchase tickets to the VIP parties held on each production's opening night for \$25 and receive a 10 percent discount for additional performance tickets when buying a season subscription.

Visit www.NFBallet.org and NFB's Facebook page for subscription packages and individual ticket sales announcements. NFB is sponsored in part by the State of Florida through the Division of Arts and Culture and the National Endowment for the Arts. Signature Media Co-Sponsors for the season include Emerald Coast Magazine, Scarlett Magazine and Life Media.

In its 54th season, the Northwest Florida Ballet (NFB) is a regionally recognized semi-professional ballet company and school committed to excellence in its training programs and the professional artistry of its productions. The organization's educational endeavors also epitomize excellence with the nationally acclaimed NFB Académie, an integrated arts and education program for third through eighth-grade students. NFB also operates the dance intensive Pre-Professional Program for ninth through twelfth-grade students preparing for a dance career. The organization is led by Artistic Director and CEO Todd Eric Allen and is sponsored in part by the State of Florida through the Division of Arts and Culture and the National Endowment for the Arts.

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of more than 140 performers, including international guest artists and over 100 local children. The NFSO, led by NFB music director and conductor David Ott, will provide live musical accompaniment for all public performances.

In collaboration with the NFSO, NFB returns to the Mattie Kelly Arts Center March 9 at 7:30 p.m. and March 10 at 2:30 p.m. with Carl Orff's powerhouse masterpiece "Carmina Burana." A celebration of spring and new beginnings, this inspiring program is a mesmerizing mix of live music, opera and dance. Created in 1934 and based on texts dating back to the 11th century, "Carmina Burana" is an uproarious and intoxicating depiction of a medieval paradise.

This eclectic partnership features the talented musicians of liams' majestic and ethereal fantasia based on themes by 16th-century composer Thomas Tallis.

The season concludes with "On the Edge" at 7:30 p.m. June 15 at the Mattie Kelly Arts Center. This unique production features the artists of NFB with international guest artists performing a mix of cutting-edge contemporary, neoclassical and classical pieces from guest choreographers and the NFB repertoire. International guest artists performing in this production represent Ballet Memphis, Ballet San Antonio, Ballet Idaho and Colorado Ballet.

Season subscriptions will be available beginning Tuesday, Aug. 1, and include tickets to "The Nutcracker," "Carmina Burana" and "On the Edge" for \$110 per adult and \$48 per child (12 and under), a savings of

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