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FWB Life

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Lakeside Songwriters Concerts Feature Renowned Country Songwriters and Performers

Fridays | March 22-May 3 | Old Florida Fish House on 30A

BY LORI LEATH SMITH

Over the past few years, our area has become known as one of the best for songwriters to gather and perform some of their heartfelt lyrics and amazing vocals. Each has a story with a passion to tell in song to their listeners. How blessed we are to have this most beautiful and unique coastal backdrop, impeccable dining and magnificent musical mecca. As music lovers, we crave it — no experience is better!

That's why Old Florida Fish House, already known as an acclaimed, exceptional dining and live entertainment venue, is bringing a brand-new concert series to your door—the Lakeside Songwriters Concert Series! Each Friday this spring from March 22 through May 3, this intimate concert series, set against the picturesque backdrop of East-



ern Lake and 30A, will showcase creators and performers of some of the best-known music of our time.

"Our new Lakeside Songwriters Concert Series prom-

ises to be an extraordinary experience for music enthusiasts, offering them a unique opportunity to engage with acclaimed artists in an intimate setting," said Old Florida Fish

House owner Keith O'Leary. Locals and visitors alike will not only have the chance to enjoy captivating musical performances, but also get to know them by participating in pre-show meet and greets with the artists themselves. "We are thrilled to provide a platform for these incredibly talented artists to share their creations and connect with their fans in a more intimate way," he said.

Featuring a lineup of top-notch, popular talent, the Lakeside Songwriters Concert Series kicks off with Craig Campbell on March 22nd, followed by Keith Stegall and Bradley Gaskin on March 29th, Michael Morgan on April 5th, Charles Esten on April 12th, Leslie Satcher and Kevin Mac on April 19th and

LAKESIDE
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Easter Reflections

BY GUERY CLENDENING

It is Spring! The flowers are blooming! I love this season. To me Spring speaks of new beginnings. When I lived in Illinois, the winters could be harsh at times. I remember during one winter, looking out my office window at a very large tree. With snow and ice covering its branches, you would have thought the frozen limbs were dead.

But when spring came, an amazing thing happened; what seemed to be dead came alive! The branches budded and before long the tree was filled with green leaves. It is fitting that Easter is celebrated in the Spring. Sunday, March 30, people from all over the world will celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Years ago, I was on a plane traveling to Israel. The person sitting next to me was a man from Israel who knew the historical record concerning Christ. As we discussed the story, he made a statement that got my attention. He said, "You know, they never did find the body of Christ." I breathed a silent prayer and said to him, "The reason they never found

EASTER
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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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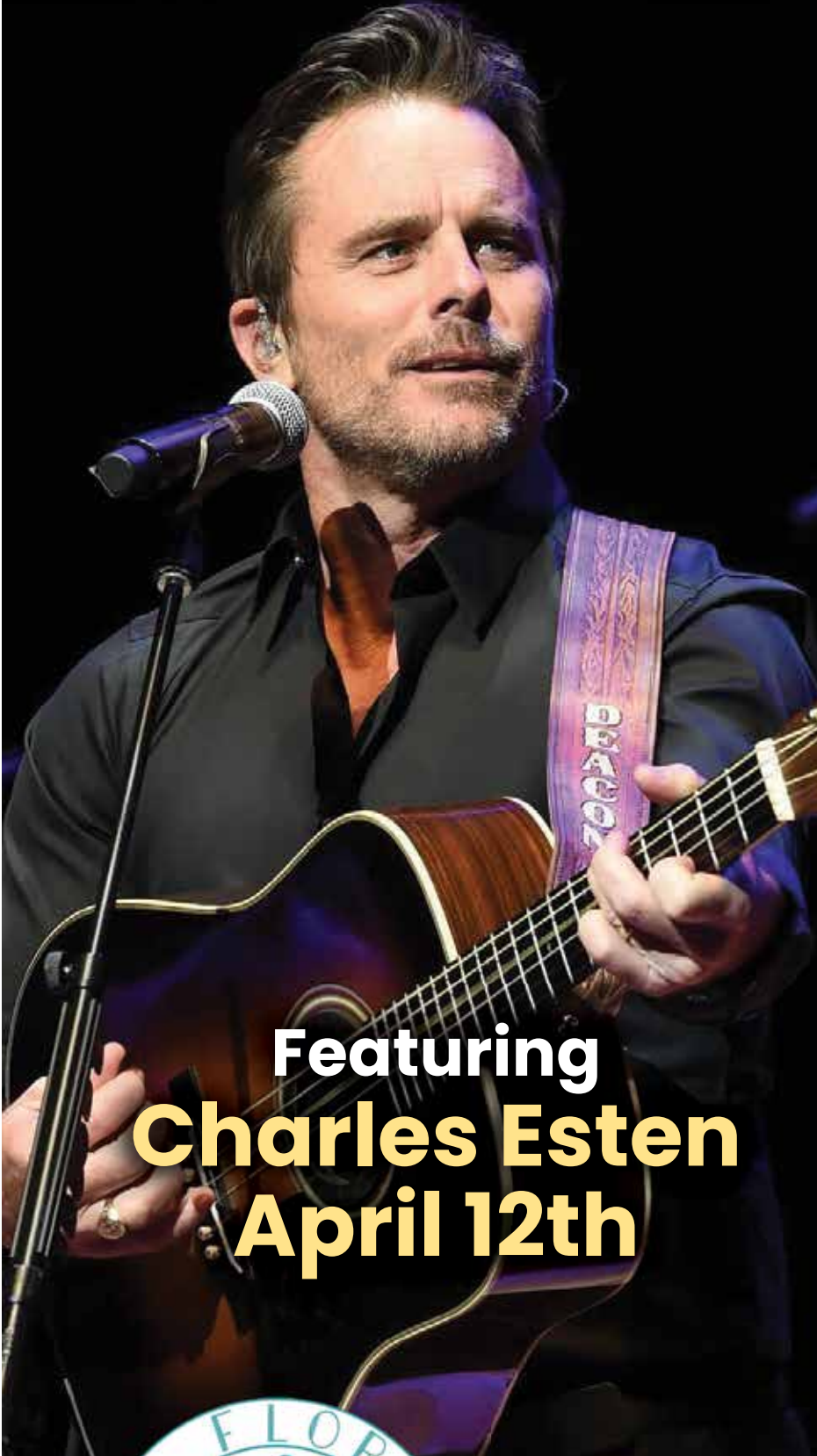
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SPRING 2024



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Charles Esten
April 12th



March 22
Craig Campbell



March 29
Keith Stegall &
Bradley Gasken



April 5
William Michael Morgan



April 19
Leslie Satcher &
Kevin Mac



May 3
Brian White

An intimate concert series featuring creators and performers of some of the best known music of our time.



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Scan for Tickets and Information

The Magic Ingredients of The Boys & Girls Club

By LISA WOODRUM

The atmosphere was electric as I entered the gymnasium: confetti falling from above, balloons floating around, popping, the smell of pizza, rousing music resounding above the din of laughter and chatter of young and old! Youth were running about, others playing foosball, hoops and presenters at their stations ready to enthusiastically share their Club theme and expertise on their subjects.

It certainly was a great reason for this celebratory atmosphere at the Boys & Girls Club of the Emerald Coast (BGCEC). The ribbon was just cut at the front door of the Jacobe Turner Teen Center (hosted by the Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce). This act initiated a new season of serving the community's youth with their Grand Re-opening—a new beginning with a name that honors a youth from the recent past. Jacobe Turner's life modeled and exemplified the values espoused at BGCEC. He was a longtime member who was their 2019 Organizational Youth of the Year. He tragically lost his life in a car accident in 2020. His life and



Layna McBride & Sebastian McDonald — Robotics



Clayton Goehl, Dewayne Dixon, Sherman Cain, Jonathan Hamilton — Manhood Club

tial as productive, caring and responsible citizens.” It is evident that the staff and volunteers of this organization have successfully taught this as I spoke to the youth.

Shervin Rassa, the Chief Executive Officer shared, “I am a firm believer that our magic ingredient in our Boys and Girls Club mission is the amazing, informal mentorship young people get from dynamic and caring adults.”



Taylor Davis & Danica Fears — Smart Girls Club

legacy are appropriately commemorated through this organization.

While I spoke with the youth, they each referred to the center's prior rundown condition, but then gleamed as they expressed pride in the facility's upgrade and new face.

The mission of the BGCEC is: “To enable all young people, especially those that need us most, to reach their full poten-

Here are samples of a few Clubs they offer:

Passport to Manhood Club: Jonathan Hamilton and Dwayne Dixon shared they learn maturity, responsibility, respect for elders and all individuals. **Smart Girls:** Taylor Davis and Danica Fears spoke of learning self-esteem, healthy relationships and nutrition. They

Services

- **Personal Services**
Help with bathing, dressing, mobility and more
- **Companionship**
Regular visits to help combat loneliness and isolation
- **Meal Prep and Home Helper**
Preparation of nutritious meals, medication reminders and light housekeeping
- **Transportation**
Rides to doctor appointments, prescription pickup, grocery shopping and more
- **Hospice Support**
Comfort for your loved one and respite for family members

Home Care for Chronic Conditions
Receiving care at home can make life easier when someone is living with a chronic health condition. Our CAREgivers can provide:

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 Community

Love and Legacy: NWFMOA's 2nd Annual Valentines for Veterans

By DOUG STAUFFER

In a touching tribute to community and service, the Northwest Florida Military Officers Association (NWFMOA) celebrated its 2nd Annual Valentines

for Veterans event, a gesture of love and respect to the veterans residing at the Bob Hope Village, part of the Air Force Enlisted Village. This special event, founded in 2023 on the

initiative of General Ron Follgeman, former Air Force Chief of Staff, is becoming a tradition, embodying the spirit of Valentine's Day through community outreach and intergenerational




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You've dedicated your life to service but, in retirement, it's time for us to serve you. After years of short- and long-distance moves, settle down in a place you chose for yourself. With a close proximity to military bases and a like-minded community all around, living at Air Force Enlisted Village feels just like coming home. With our neighbors at Eglin Air Force Base and Hurlburt Field, you can

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

From independent living to assisted living and memory care, our community will have you confidently thriving at every age. Call us today to schedule a tour and learn why our residents chose us as their next home base.

SCHEDULE A TOUR TODAY!

<p>BOB HOPE VILLAGE 850-612-8684 bobhopevillage.us</p>		<p>HAWTHORN HOUSE 850-517-4323 hawthornhouse.us</p>
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connections. Retired Brigadier General Fran Hendricks resurrected Valentines for Veterans for NWFMOA last year following the community outreach initiative he did while he was the 96th Wing Commander at Eglin (2002-2004).

Under the guidance of their teachers and Principal Lisa Tucker, Longwood Elementary School students made the heartwarming journey to Bob Hope Village, delivering over 300 handmade Valentines to the eagerly waiting residents. The children's efforts ensured that no one was left out of this celebration of love and appreciation, marking the event with smiles, laughter, and an abundance of hugs, solidifying it as a resounding success for the second year.

The musical contributions of the Emerald Coast Chorus further enhanced the celebration by adding a layer of festive joy to the atmosphere. Yet, it was not just the performances and Valentines that made the day memorable. The presence and words of Dr. Lamar White, an Okaloosa County School Board member, lent a deep resonance to the occasion. His connections to the military are awe-inspiring. "I love the military, but also have deep military connections in my family," said Dr. White. "I am the son of a U.S. Army Korean War Veteran and married to Connie, whose father was a retired U.S. Air Force pilot. Connie's dad flew the P-47 against the Nazis when he was nineteen at the beginning of his career and ended his career in Vietnam, flying the F-105. I was blessed to see these school children providing the valentines and the association's participa-

tion with the Bob Hope Village residents."

Key members of the NWFMOA, including Tom Azar, Ray Alexander, Dick Solt, Dave Parisot, Fred Westfall, Rod Gerdes, Mel Claxton, Bob Allen, Kim Wintner and Fran Hendricks, were in attendance. Their support underscored the collective effort behind the association's endeavors. The unveiling of the new NWFMOA Chapter Banner, led by Jim Shoff, was a proud moment, symbolizing the association's growth and ongoing commitment to its mission.

The NWFMOA, a non-profit organization comprising over 200 active, retired and separated officers from the Uniformed Services, along with surviving spouses, invites individuals to join its ranks and partake in a broad spectrum of social, cultural, professional and service activities. With a history of excellence and service, the association remains dedicated to advocating for military rights and benefits and supporting legislative actions in favor of all veterans through its affiliation with the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA).

For those inspired by service, community and legacy values, the NWFMOA offers a welcoming platform for engagement and support. Additional information about the association and its activities can be found at www.nwfmooa.org, inviting all interested parties to explore how they can contribute to and benefit from this distinguished community.

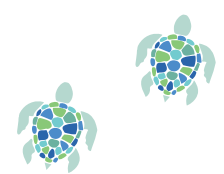


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Happenings Around FWB

2024 EVENTS

ONGOING EVENTS

- VFW Post 7674 - Sunday Breakfasts
8 am | Sundays | 231 Carol Ave | FWB
- SINGO Music Bingo Nights
6 pm | Tuesdays | The Island Resort | FWB
- Open Mic Night
7 pm | Wednesdays | The Sound Cafe + Enlightened Studios | FWB
- Live Trivia Nights
6 pm | Thursdays | The Island Resort | FWB
- Live Trivia Nights
6:30 pm | Thursdays | AJ's on the Bayou | FWB

MARCH

- 04-16** March Madness Competition
Emerald Coast Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso
- 06** Paint Party: By the Moon and Stars
6:30 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB
- 07** Wine Tasting
4 pm | Taste Tapas & Wine Bar | FWB
- 08-10** Freshie & Craft Expo
9 am | The Island Resort | FWB
- Paradise Music Festival
2 pm | Destin-FWB Convention Center | FWB
- 09** Kiwanis Annual Pancake Breakfast
8 am | Trinity United Methodist Church | FWB
- Women United's Brunch & Bubbly
10:30 am | The Venue at Beach Weekend | FWB
- Girls Empowered with Math and Science (GEMS) Workshop
10:30 am | FWB Public Library
- Downtown FWB Block Party
8 pm | Downtown FWB
- 10** 6th Annual Mac & Cheese Festival
12 pm | Destin Commons | Destin
- 
- 13** Horizons Annual Murder Mystery Dinner Theater
6pm | Wyndhman Garden Inn | FWB

- 14** Mini Makers and Experimenters Lab
10:30 am | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB
- Greater FWB Chamber Nothing But Networking
11:30 am | The Place on Beal | FWB
- Pinot & Pioneers
6 pm | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB
- 15** 1st Annual Ken Hair Charity Golf Classic
11 am | FWB Golf Club | FWB
- Impact100 Northwest Florida Grant Workshop
2 pm | Salvation Army | Mary Esther
- Bunny Hop Trail
5:30-7 pm | FWB Rec Center | 132 Jet Dr NW
- 16** Shamrock Stroll Adventure Hike
10 am | Alaqua Animal Refuge | Freeport
- Creation Station
11 am | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB
- 4 Legs and Easter Eggs
12 pm | Downtown FWB
- 17** St. Patrick's Day Brunch
10 am | AJ's on the Bayou | FWB
- 18-19** Spring Break Workshop: Creature Feature & sciPad
12:30 pm | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB
- 19** Spring Break Kid's Camp: Choose Your Arsty Animal
10 am | Painting with a Twist | FWB
- 20** Business Security Mini-Course: Active Attacker/Crisis Management
11 am | Greater FWB Chamber of Commerce | FWB
- Spring Break Workshop: Flutter & Fly
10:30 am | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB
- 21** Greater FWB Chamber Business After Hours
5:30 pm | Beach Weekend - The Marina | FWB
- Spring Break Workshop: Animal Adventure Day
10:30 am | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB
- Planetarium Night
6 pm | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB
- 22** Spring Break Workshop: Spring Skies Exploration
2 pm | Artful Things | Niceville
- Lakeside Songwriters Concert
6 pm/7 pm | Old Florida Fish House | SRB

- 23** Bunny Hope Adventure Hike
10 am | Alaqua Animal Refuge | Freeport
- Sinfonia Gulf Coast's Classical Connections
7:30 pm | Destin-FWB Convention Center | FWB
- 
- 25** Holi Festival of Colors
1 pm | FWB Landing Park
- 26** All Ages Blacklight Paint Party: Mushroom Forest
6:30 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB
- 27** Spring Break Workshop: A Sprout's Journey
10:30 am | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB
- 28** ECTC's La Vie En Rouge
6 PM | Emerald Coast Theatre Co. | Miramar Beach
- 28-29** Spring Break Workshop: Creature Feature & sciPad
12:30 pm | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB
- 29** Lakeside Songwriters Concert
6 pm/7 pm | Old Florida Fish House | SRB
- Doggie EGGstravaganza
5:30pm | Grand Boulevard
- 30** Emerald Coast Harley Davidson Swap Meet
10 am | Emerald Coast Harley Davidson | FWB
- Date Night Paint Party: Copper Moonrise
7 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB
- Spring Hop - Silver Sands School
7 pm | American Legion Post #235 | FWB
- 31** 50th Annual Easter Sunrise Celebration
6 am | John Beasley Park | FWB
- Easter Brunch
10 am | AJs on the Bayou

APRIL

- 6** 2024 Emerald Ball
6 pm | Hilton Sandestin Beach Resort
- 7** Okaloosa's Got Talent!
5 pm | Enlightened Studios
- 21** International Festival
11 am-7 pm | The Landing | FWB
- 27** South Walton Beaches Wine & Food Festival
3 pm | Grand Boulevard Sandestin Town Center

FARMER'S MARKETS	Okaloosa County	Downtown FWB	Grand Boulevard
	Saturdays 7 am - 2 pm	2nd & 4th Saturdays 8 am - 1 pm	Saturdays 9 am - 1 pm
	1954 Lewis Turner Blvd FWB	FWB Landing Park	Grand Boulevard Miramar Beach



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 Community

More Than Medals: Beyond the Finish Line with the Special Olympics

BY HEATHER BENNETT EYE

As our regional athletes of Special Olympics Florida gear up for the Summer Games, I want to share with you how the organization is more than just a place for those with intellectual disabilities to train and compete in Olympic-style sports. It's also an organization that fosters leadership growth and provides access to free health care. I'll also share ways you can get involved.

Our Northwest Region consists of Area 1 (Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, Walton, Bay, Washington, and Jackson counties) and Area 2 (Gadsden, Leon, Wakulla, Taylor and Hamilton counties). They'll each have their own Area competitions (Area 2 on March 2nd and Area 1 on

March 16) before competing against each other at the Northwest Region Summer Games on April 6 in Defuniak Springs. Prior to that, two athletes from our region, Sara Dunbar and Ashley Harrell, are preparing for a very special trip to Washington, D.C. On February 5-7, athletes, program leaders, unified partners and family members will gather on Capitol Hill to address members of the House of Representatives and the Senate. This is an annual, national event known as Capitol Hill Day. Athletes will advocate the importance of continued funding for the program, and ending health care disparities and discrimination against people with intellectual disabilities.

Athlete Stacy Barns of Pensacola attended Capitol Hill Day in 2015 and 2016 and recently assisted in prepping the national athletes who will make their way to Washington, D.C. this month. Along with the Chief Health Officer of the Special Olympics, she co-presented via Zoom the health initiatives in Florida and across the globe. "It's something that's really inspiring, not just about Stacey, but many athletes, where they gain these leadership roles and they assume these positions within Special Olympics and their communities and they use it to leverage their voice to become advocates," stated Damien McNeil, Regional Director of the Northwest. "That's one of my favorite things to witness."



March 22-23, 2024
Westonwood Ranch
PCA Rodeo



FREEPORT FL SPORTS COMPLEX
Gates open at 6pm
6:30 Concert | 7:30 show time

TICKETS SOLD AT GATE
\$20 adult, Children 12 and under \$15

Proceeds support Westonwood Ranch programs for individuals with developmental disabilities
www.westonwood.org



Advocacy is important for various reasons. Not only does the Special Olympics provide opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities to demonstrate their skills and talents through sports and leadership, but it's also internationally the number one provider for free health screenings for people with intellectual disabilities. "People are going without things that they need. They need those resources," said Damien. This also rings true for those who live along the Emerald Coast. The disparity that affects those with intellectual disabilities happens right there as well.

The Special Olympics provides free optometry, audiology, dental, podiatry and mental health screenings, along with referrals for those who need medical care. They also provide free hearing aides. "It gives life to the mission at work," stated Damien. The free screenings take place at events like the Summer Games, in which Doctors volunteer their time and resources for these screenings. Screenings are available to athletes and non-athletes with intellectual disabilities. At this year's Northwest Region Summer Games, around 600 athletes are expected. With as many athletes, and additional non-athletes, that will be in attendance, healthcare

workers are encouraged to reach out if they are interested in volunteering to assist with screenings.

How can you help the Special Olympics? Day-of or long-term volunteers are always needed. You can also sign up to coach or play. Those without intellectual disabilities who have a passion for sports can participate as a Unified Partner. This offers the opportunity to contribute and foster connections between communities. "We want to make sure we are advocates for people with disabilities in any way that might look like," said Damien. Volunteering is a great opportunity to demonstrate that.

If you are a physician or health organization looking to volunteer for health screenings, you can contact Blair Mackie, Health Manager for Areas 1 and 2 at blairmackie@sofl.org or (850) 778-7573. For anything else, please reach out to Damien McNeil at damiencmcneil@sofl.org or (407) 402-8604. To learn more about volunteering opportunities, please visit www.specialolympicsflorida.org/northwest and click on Get Involved. If you are interested in attending an event to cheer on our athletes, the summer games are free and open to the public.

Dust Off Your Boots! It's Almost Time to Rodeo!

5th Annual Westonwood Ranch Pro Rodeo
March 22-23 | Freeport Regional Sports Complex

Dust off your boots and get ready to rodeo again this year! The 5th Annual Westonwood Ranch PCA Rodeo returns to the City of Freeport Sports Complex March 22nd –23rd. You don't want to miss some of the nation's top cowgirls and cowboys compete. So, bring the family and friends for a fun-packed weekend!



Contestants will compete in events including Bareback Riding, Calf Roping, Saddle Bronc Riding, Steer Wrestling, Breakaway Roping, Barrel Racing, Team Roping, and Bull Riding. Rodeo gates open at 6 p.m. with a 7:30 p.m. each night. Come early to enjoy live pre-rodeo entertainment at 6:30 by David Gautreau, food vendors, children's inflatable play area and more!

"We are so thankful for the partnership with Walton County Sheriff's Office, the City of Freeport, our 2024 Presenting Sponsor New Life Church and other community sponsors that make it possible to raise funds that help support our programs," said Lindy Wood, Founder of Westonwood Ranch. "So many youth with developmental disabilities miss irreplaceable opportunities to gain critical life skills and job skills needed to lead an independent life. These special individuals want the same thing as we do — to be fully participating members of society",.

The professionally sanctioned rodeo benefits Westonwood Ranch, an organization whose mission and programs serve teens and young adults with Autism and related developmental disorders. Located in Freeport, it provides therapeutic programs designed to fill the transition gap from high school into adulthood by incorporating functional learning opportunities in a therapeutic farm environment. All net proceeds from the event go to support Westonwood Ranch programs.

More than five years ago, Lindy Wood had a dream—a dream of a program geared towards older youth and young

adults with autism and special needs. She wanted to be able to offer more for her son, Weston, diagnosed with autism at age 2, and other teens and young adults affected by Autism. So, with a hope to create opportunities to develop and cultivate independent, life-changing skills, Lindy and her husband, founders of Westonwood Ranch, purchased a 40-acre tract of land in Freeport to begin a farm and, eventually, birth a new local non-profit.

In just a short period of time, Westonwood Ranch has grown into a sustainable, working farm providing life and vocational skills for adolescents and young adults in our area with vary-

ing developmental disorders. The farm offers a comprehensive, holistic learning program for full-time students, ages 12 through adult, that focuses on providing functional learning opportunities. Through hands-on ranch operations, students learn skills in aquaponic farming, animal feeding and care, kitchen operations, creative art exploration and fitness classes. Young individuals and adults with developmental differences learn to transition into independent living by receiving hands-on, job skill training leading to employment opportunities.

Tickets for the Rodeo are \$20 for adults and \$15.00 for children 12 years and younger at the gate. Children ages 2 and under are free. There will be no presale of tickets, so spectators are encouraged to arrive early. Westonwood Ranch is seeking additional local business sponsors. For more information about how to support the rodeo and Westonwood Ranch, email admin@westonwood.org or visit our website at www.westonwood.org.

FWBHS Celebrates New Multi-Purpose Building!



On Thursday, February 22, the Fort Walton Beach Vikings and Principal Lindsey Smith rolled out the red carpet for the Okaloosa County School District's first Multipurpose Building ribbon cutting! Their band and chorus performed, their cheer and dance teams welcomed guests, their ROTC presented the colors, and the leadership students served refreshments! It was so exciting to see a space that will be available to all students on one of our high school campuses. This will be a facility that will support athletics, band, robotics, PE classes, theatre, archery, homecoming dances, ROTC, testing, cheer, dance and so

much more. We can't wait for all of them to open!

We appreciate the local dignitaries, School Board Members, Community Members, and Faculty who attended. Thank you, Jacobs-Titan and Lord & Son Construction for doing such a great job on the project, and thank you to the Okaloosa Voters for making this building possible with the Half Cent Sales Tax!

For more information on the District's Half-Cent Sales Tax Capital Program, visit <https://okaloosashools.com/okaloosa-capital-improvement-program/>.

~ Okaloosa County Superintendent Marcus Chambers

50th Annual Easter Sunrise Celebration
At Beasley Park, Hwy 98
Okaloosa Island
6:00 AM Sunday March 31st

Sponsored by Good Shepherd
Lutheran Church, Shalimar



The Florida Aquifer is the Fountain of Life

BY CAROLYN NEWCOMER KETCHEL

Nothing is more essential to life than water. Most of us can only live three days without water. We are blessed to live at a time and place in history where water comes from a faucet and is clean. However, even a century ago, water had to be brought from rivers or natural springs. Water-borne diseases were part of 19th century life. A significant development was the construction of sewers to collect wastewater, which has its origins in ancient Rome. The tremendous growth of overcrowded cities in Europe and North America forced municipal sanitation to be addressed in the 19th century and early 20th century with outbreaks of typhoid and cholera. The information that follows might answer many questions and concerns.

The primary legislation governing drinking water quality is the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) passed by Congress in 1974 and amended in 1986 and further strengthened in 1996. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), after consulting with the National Academy of Science, sets a Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL) for each regulated substance. Periodically, these standards are reviewed and refined based on scientific and technological advancements.

Contaminants that can cause acute health effects are monitored daily. Others are moni-

tored weekly and monthly. Testing and monitoring results are reported regularly to the state health department and are available to the public. Strict adherence to monitoring and testing are the best guarantees for safe drinking water. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) and EPA ensure all requirements are followed.

In addition to the Standards of the Safe Drinking Water Act SDWA, there are other federal laws that safeguard the quality of drinking water by regulating surface and groundwater pollution, management of hazardous substances and use of chemical pesticides. Public water utilities test and monitor drinking water to meet two types of standards. The primary standards, called Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCLs), are set to protect human health and the secondary standards address aesthetic considerations such as taste, odor and appearance. Health and aesthetic aspects are the driving force behind drinking water regulations.

It would seem that "safe" drinking water would be obvious and easy to define. However, in the drinking water world this is not the case. In fact, the Safe Drinking Water Act does not clearly define what is "safe" drinking water. For Okaloosa Water and Sewer (OCWS), we categorize our drinking water as safe, because we know that we have followed strict guidelines for the treatment and delivery

of drinking water. We know the water has been monitored and tested to ensure compliance with the SDWA.

The Florida Aquifer: OCWS drinking water is groundwater that is pumped out of the Florida Aquifer. This Aquifer is a limestone aquifer, so the water contains calcium, magnesium, and other minerals dissolved from the limestone. These minerals cause the water to have a slight to moderate hardness classification of water quality, the Florida Aquifer with its thick confinement layer is far superior to the water quality within the Sand and Gravel Aquifer. Fluoride is not added to our water, because we have naturally occurring fluoride in the Florida Aquifer.

Chlorine Added: The OCWS treats all drinking water at each well with chlorine disinfection which reduces hydrogen sulfide odor. Chlorine disinfection not only reduces odor but also kills pathogenic and harmful microbial activity that could be harmful in drinking water. Disinfection is one of the most vital components of delivering safe water in addition to the filtration work of the Florida Aquifer. Additionally, public utilities are required by FDEP to maintain a chlorine residual throughout the system. The chlorine residual can provide some disinfection capacity but is mainly required to ensure the water is free from microbial activity. If microbial activity comes in contact with

chlorine, it is destroyed but the chlorine is consumed. If a small chlorine residual is present, it indicates the absence of any microbial activity that would ultimately consume the chlorine in the disinfection process.

PFAS Chemicals: The Unregulated Contaminant Monitoring Rule (UCMR5) list includes 30 contaminants and 29 of the contaminants are PFAS compounds. PFAS is the acronym given to "forever chemicals", in other words, chemicals that do not break down. Scientific studies have shown that exposure to some PFAS in the environment may be linked to harmful health effects in humans and animals. There are thousands of PFAS chemicals, and they are found in many different consumer, commercial, and industrial products. This makes it challenging to study and assess the potential human health and environmental risks.

PFAS compounds are not being regulated by the EPA. Currently under the SDWA, EPA does not require testing by public water systems for PFAS. The EPA is working toward developing regulation for PFAS compounds but will likely not have those regulations before 2025.

PFAS are widely used, long lasting chemicals, which break down very slowly over time. Because of their widespread use and their persistence in the environment, many PFAS are found in the blood of people and animals all over the world and are

present at low levels in a variety of food products and in the environment.

Pharmaceuticals: Pharmaceuticals are not regulated by the EPA yet, but are on the Emerging Contaminants of Concern listing. The UCMR6 list of 30 contaminants has not yet been determined, but many suspect UCMR6 (2028-2030) will focus on pharmaceuticals in much the same way UCMR5 has focused on PFAS compounds. The bad news is that the number of pharmaceutical compounds in existence are extremely vast. So, regulation by EPA will be slow. In addition, many pharmaceutical compounds are very small and it is uncertain if even reverse osmosis can fully remove these compounds. The fortunate news is that pharmaceuticals in a given water supply are, at least, from FDA approved drugs (meaning they are not toxic in and of themselves). Most pharmaceuticals are very dose dependent and are relatively ineffectual at low concentrations. Extremely low concentration is exactly what one would expect if pharmaceuticals have found their way into the Florida Aquifer given the enormous volume (limited data is available on this subject). It is also logical to assume that if PFAS compounds have not been detected in the OCWS system in part due to the Confinement Layer as well as the dilution factor, it may be logical to assume that the same would be true for pharmaceuticals.

The safe way to dispose of Pharmaceuticals is to return unused medicine to the pharmacy or to place the medicine in used coffee grounds and dispose in the garbage. DO NOT FLUSH!

We are fortunate to have a great team at OCWS that makes sure we have the best water in the Southeast. In fact, we have such healthy water, it is sought after by other states. Thanks for reading; I know you now have a better understanding of the Okaloosa Water.

Carolyn Ketchel is Okaloosa County Commissioner, District 2, CKetchel@myokaloosa.com or 850-651-7105.

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OCSO Prepares for 2024 Spring Break

By MICHELLE NICHOLSON

There's typically a range of emotions when you start talking about Spring Break rolling back around in Okaloosa County; those who welcome the influx and those who don't. It's important to remember our county caters primarily to families who travel here to enjoy the warmer temperatures, crystal clear temperatures and the slew of family friendly activities available.

The majority of high school and college students also show up to have a good time at some of the world's most beautiful beaches while behaving in a safe, respectful and lawful manner.

And then, of course, there are the ones who see Spring Break as an opportunity to binge drink and get rowdy. Each year the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office (OCSO) reminds our Spring Break visitors with that type of partying on their mind that we have a zero tolerance for underage drinking. That's because the goal is to promote safety for citizens and visitors using our public roadways,



beaches, parks, neighborhoods and recreation areas. "We have special staffing with extra units assigned to Spring Break patrol seven days a week while it runs, essentially from March 2nd to April 6th" said Sheriff Eric Aden. "The priority for our deputies is public safety, which means making sure everyone follows the rules. We also want to emphasize that beachgoers who swim in the Gulf should always pay attention to our beach flag safety system."

The 2023 Spring Break operation started the last week of



February 2023 and ended at the end of April 2023. When OCSO enacted the operation and daily patrols, they addressed underage possession of alcohol, narcotics and miscellaneous calls for service. Over the course of the 52 days of the Spring Break operation, the members of the Beach Unit initiated 233 of the 409 total arrests.

There were the usual issues with large house parties, trespassing and fake I.D.s, but tragically a 17-year-old visitor from Kentucky lost his life in an alcohol-related fall from the balcony of a Destin condominium April 4th. "Our deputies are trained to recognize the indicators most common with impaired individuals," said Sheriff Aden. "If we

encounter an underage individual with alcohol, he or she will be issued a notice to appear with a court date before a judge. Repeat violations by an underage person would result in an individual's physical arrest."

OCSO deputies will be monitoring beach and vacation rentals for criminal activity, using proactive patrol methods to detect and apprehend anyone involved in criminal activity, and assisting Okaloosa County and Destin lifeguard with the prevention of drowning incidents.

The objectives behind the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office Spring Break zero tolerance mission is to deter underage possession, thereby reducing the potential for property damage, injuries or deaths by impaired individuals. "We plan to conduct patrols with a minimum amount of intrusion and inconvenience to citizens and visitors," added Sheriff Aden. "But we will be vigilant in our efforts to keep everyone safe because ultimately we want everyone to go home with only positive memories from their stay."



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Community

Events Around Town

Doggie EGGstravaganza March 29

Dog-Harmony presents the 9th Annual Doggie EGGstravaganza, a canine-only Easter egg hunt and doggie social, at Grand Boulevard at Sandestin's Grand Park on Friday, March 29, 5:30-7:30 p.m. Hundreds of dogs and their "furrless" friends will trample the North Lawn while hunting for colorful treat-filled eggs and enjoying live music, libations and lite bites. Puppy-friendly treats will be hidden in over 800 colorful eggs scattered throughout the lawn with designated

areas for pets over and under 25 pounds. Free to the public, with a \$15 donation or \$20 day of the event to participate in the egg hunt. All dogs must be leashed — no prong, choke or shock collars permitted. Tickets for the egg hunt: <https://events.humanitix.com/9th-annual-doggie-egg-stravaganza>. Proceeds support the pups and programs in our community. To learn more, visit dog-harmony.org.

Okaloosa's Got Talent! April 7

Okaloosa Arts Alliance and

DJ Zoran, in collaboration with the Hope & Restoration Tour, will host the final round of "Okaloosa County's Got Talent" (OGT), Sunday, April 7. Mu-

sic artists throughout Okaloosa County have been showcasing their talents leading up this final competition. The event is free and open to the public at Enlight-

ened Studios, 142 Miracle Strip Parkway SE, Fort Walton Beach. Qualifying rounds have featured performances from K-12 and 18+ artists of all types including solo acts, duos, trios, bands, dance troupes, theater groups, vocalists and poets. A panel of judges determine the qualifiers who advance to the final "Okaloosa's Got Talent" event. Visit <https://www.okaloosaarts.org/2024-okaloosa-s-got-talent.html> for more information.

The FWB Recreation Center Presents its 2024 Annual Bunny Hop Trail!

Businesses, organizations, work groups and families are invited to participate. Join businesses, community organizations and some family sponsored stations along the walking trail and pass out candy and other goodies to the children. Promote your business through handouts, signs and other advertisements.

The 2024 Annual Bunny Hop Trail will be held Friday, Mar. 15, 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m., 2024 at the Fort Walton Beach Recreation Center, 132 Jet Dr. NW, Fort Walton Beach. There will be bouncy houses, face painting, candy and treats, and of course, the Easter Bunny.



Sponsors may begin setting up at 4:30 p.m. Bring your own tables and pop-up tents.

For additional questions, contact Pat Sherman at 850-833-9576 or email at psherman@fwb.org.

Makes Plans Now to Attend The International Festival! April 11

You are invited to Conexion Media Group's 6th Annual International Festival at the beautiful Landing Park in Fort Walton Beach, Sunday, April 21, 11 a.m. – 7 p.m. More than 60 nations will be represented via music, food, folklore and art with attendees traveling from as far as Tallahassee, Panama City, Pensacola and the surrounding states of Georgia, Mississippi and Alabama!

For this year's festival, Conexion Media Group (CMG) selected the Advanced Sacred Hope Academy (ASHA) as the local non-profit to benefit. SHA is a 501c3 nonprofit independent private school dedicated to the individualized learning of students with autism or other neurological disorders that prevent them from succeeding in a traditional school setting.

Visit ASHA at advancedsacredhopeacademy.org.

Corporate sponsorships and vendor opportunities available. Contact David at 850-368-3505 or via conexionflorida@gmail.com.

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What to Check Before the End of Open Enrollment for Medicare



BY GREG DURETTE, FLORIDA HEALTH CONNECTOR

The end is near! Hopefully, not in the mortal sense, but rather the end of the Open Enrollment Period for predominantly Medicare Advantage plan members in 2024. We will leave the mortality prognostications to the crazy guy wearing a sandwich board roaming various city streets around the country.

Keep in mind, if you are “aging-in” this year, you have a whole different set of deadlines and circumstances. (See last month’s article.)

This article will cover what you should be checking up on before the March 31st deadline rolls around and locks you in until the next Annual Enrollment Period (October 15 – December 7).

So, what should you do to make sure this year’s coverage selection treats you well and is something you will be happy with until next year?

First, you will have hopefully had some time to try out your new coverage. Whether that is a visit to the doctor of your choice or a trip to the pharmacy, you likely have had a chance to use your current coverage. If you are one of those folks that needs neither, bully for you! However, you should still take this time to conduct further research into whether the doctors, hospitals and pharmacies you favor are included in your network at a reasonable cost.

If you find some changes would be required of your intended selections, you have until March 31st to do something about that.

Note: If you have already made a change during this Open Enrollment Period, you have used your last bite at the apple for the year. Changes made during this Period are final and cannot be changed unless there is a government declared Special Enrollment Period. (This would take another whole article to get your head around!) If you have yet to use this last chance opportunity, then you still have that one chance available.

Second, have you reviewed the functionality of your plan? What I mean is, are you able to easily use your new insurance card and have the providers accept it without a hassle? Do you find it difficult to know why your neighbor with a PPO has a much easier time finding an in-network doctor or facility (especially when travelling) than you have with an HMO? Has your doctor or medical group suddenly stopped accepting your coverage with little to no explanation?

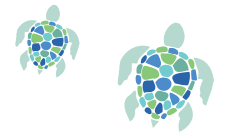
If so, it is time for you to get busy with the business of taking care of you. If you have read my articles for any length of time, you know I am no fan of the grand promises made by the sports figures and celebrities

on television about “potentially available” benefits. They love to use the kicker statement, “You MAY be eligible to receive these benefits.” Talk about slick!

The fact of the matter is, the proof is in the pudding. Nobody but you can get you what you need. Do the work. Do the research. Call local, knowledgeable people and get the details that matter to you and ignore those with opinions that might be in their best interests and not your own.

Once you make that final call for the Open Enrollment Period, you can sit back and relax in the comfort of knowing you did the very best for you. Happy 2024!

Greg Durette is an agent with Florida Health Connector based in Niceville providing Medicare throughout the state. He has been licensed in the insurance industry for more than 40 years and can be reached at his office at 850-842-2400, mobile at 978-509-2941 or dedicated and recorded Medicare Line at 850-462-7807.







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Greg Durette
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Protect Your Real Estate Funds



By MELISSA FORTE-LITSCHER, NEXTHOME

Let's face it, buying a home can be stressful. We know that dealing with the finances, the house hunting, the contract negotiations and, finally, the pack-

significant threat that we all must be vigilant about is wire fraud. Let's look at how it works and what steps you can take to avoid it.

Wire fraud in real estate transactions occurs when cybercriminals exploit vulnerabilities in our communication channels to deceive buyers into wiring funds to fraudulent accounts. Typically, these scammers strike during the final stages of a transaction when large sums of money are being transferred electronically. They often gain access to email accounts or intercept communication between parties, impersonating legitimate individuals involved in the transaction.

To protect yourself from falling victim to wire fraud, there are several precautions you can take. First, establish secure communication channels. We can use en-

thentication adds an extra layer of protection against unauthorized access.

Furthermore, it's crucial to work with reputable professionals throughout the transaction process. From real estate agents to title companies and financial institutions, choose partners who have robust protocols in place to detect and prevent wire fraud. Together, we can ensure that your assets are safeguarded against potential threats.

Take the time to carefully review all documentation related to the transaction, including purchase agreements and closing statements. Any discrepancies or inconsistencies should be addressed immediately to prevent fraudulent activity. Consider alternative payment methods, such as cashier's checks or electronic funds transfers directly from your bank account, to minimize the risk of funds being diverted to fraudulent accounts.

By taking these proactive measures and staying informed about potential threats, you can protect yourself against wire fraud and enjoy a smooth and secure home buying experience. As your realtor, my priority is to ensure a smooth and secure transaction process for you. Let's work together to make your dream home a reality while safeguarding your financial assets. As always, I'm at your service.



ing and moving can be a lot of pressure. Imagine how devastated you would be if you did all of that and then your funds were stolen. Then, you are not only out the money, but the house too!

The recent 2024 State of Wire Fraud Report by CertifID found approximately 1 in 20 Americans who bought or sold a home within the past three years has been victimized by some sort of real estate fraud and half of those were wire fraud issues. The importance of protecting your financial assets during the home buying process is essential. One

crypted email systems or secure messaging platforms to exchange sensitive information. Additionally, it's essential to verify the identity of all parties involved before initiating any wire transfers. This can be done through direct phone calls or face-to-face meetings to confirm transaction details and wiring instructions.

Also, be cautious with your online activity. Avoid clicking on suspicious links or attachments in emails, and regularly update your passwords to strengthen the security of your email accounts. Implementing multi-factor au-



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Community

BOYS & GIRLS CLUB

continued from page 3

said they now felt more confident about their futures.

Robotics: Sebastian McDonald and Layna McBride explained the cooperation of two groups to successfully have fully functional robots, of which they take to competitions! Good Luck!

Career Fields: Layna McBride recounted her experience with Old Navy guest instructors teaching interviewing skills, cashing, etc. They also learn of (in part) budgeting, public speaking, etiquette and networking.

Some outstanding qualities



Layna McBride — Career Club



Madison Turner — Art Club



Elizabeth Jackson — Community Club

I noted in the youth as I spoke with them were articulate, knowledgeable, leaders, mature, authentic, enthusiastic, confident and exemplary, to name a few descriptive words. I am con-

fident each has a bright future! The BGCEC is positioning itself in this new chapter to once again serve many more teenagers. They can't do it alone. BGCEC welcomes new volunteers,

mentors and potential staff candidates to apply online. If it is in your heart to partner with them, visit the website at <https://emeraldcoastbgc.org/> to inquire as well as learn the history and de-

tails of the organization.

The new face lift could not have happened without Florida Power & Light and the ALL Sports Association, Inc. Thank you for your generosity!

As one would expect, to continue with their mission, funds continue to be needed and welcome. There are upcoming fundraisers you can enjoy attending while contributing to a very worthy cause, such as the Bowling Tournament, Saturday, April 13. Tickets are \$160 per four-person team; FWB Bowling Center, 745 Beal Parkway. View all the events and purchase tickets at <https://www.facebook.com/BGCEC/>.

EASTER

continued from page 1

the body is because He rose from the grave. That is the foundation of the Christian faith."

There is a passage of scripture in the New Testament found in First Corinthians, chapter 15, verses 12-15 and verse 20, that says, "Now if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how is it that some among you say that there is no resurrection from the

dead? ...for if there is no resurrection from the dead, then not even Christ has been raised; then our preaching is useless, and your faith is also useless...But now, (as things really are) Christ, in fact, has been raised from the dead."

So, what people were celebrating on Easter was not only the resurrection of Jesus Christ; but they were also celebrating the hope they have in Christ; that they too will rise from the grave to live forever with him!



Jesus said this: "Because I live, you will live also." John 14:19. That's why Easter is so special for so many. Not only do they celebrate Christ's resurrection and His promise of Resurrection for them, but also they celebrate because through Christ's death, sins are forgiven and new life is theirs through faith in Christ! Yes, miracles do happen. Just like the tree that blossomed in the Spring, those who put their faith in Christ will experience a new

life of peace and freedom from the past.

As we enjoy Spring, may we celebrate and experience the power of Christ to make all things new.

From the publisher: FWB Life wishes you a blessed and peaceful Easter this year!



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Baldwin Turf Expands Services and Opens The Shop at Baldwin Turf

By MICHELLE RUSCHMAN

After eight years of working in the Manhattan fashion industry, Jenny Herndon, one of the co-owners of Baldwin Turf's Lawn and Landscaping, is excited to be back home where she can enjoy the sunshine and beaches year-round again. "My brother and sister, Matthew, and Leigh Anna, have managed the landscaping side of our business for several years. With the opening of our retail store in November, it was the perfect time for me to join the family and use my merchandising background to help open the new store."

Baldwin Turf was originally acquired by their father, Tim Herndon, and his partners in 2002 to service Niceville, Ft. Walton Beach and Destin. When the company first opened, the primary business was selling sod and offering minimal landscaping services. Now, 22 years later, Tim and Wynn's three kids manage Baldwin Turf. They purchased Grass Roots Lawn & Landscape in 2020 and as a result, they've been able to expand their service area into Walton County. Their goal is to be a one-stop destination for all of our area's outdoor needs. "When Baldwin Turf started, we were mainly providing materials to other landscaping companies. Now that we've grown, our focus is on full-service lawn care. We continue to offer sod, but now we also provide lawn and landscape maintenance, irrigation installation and repairs, landscaping installations, lawn and shrub care, and turf and landscape materials. Specialty fertilizers can also be purchased."

Baldwin Turf's client base is predominantly residential, but they do have a team that can handle commercial projects as well. "Leigh Anna manages the crew, the timing of all our jobs, and takes care of schedules. Matthew meets potential customers, assesses the work needed, and oversees the projects. We have a full-time head landscaper, truck driver, and customer specialist who helps with sales and operations. In the spring and summer, we also participate in the H-2B program which provides a great crew that does



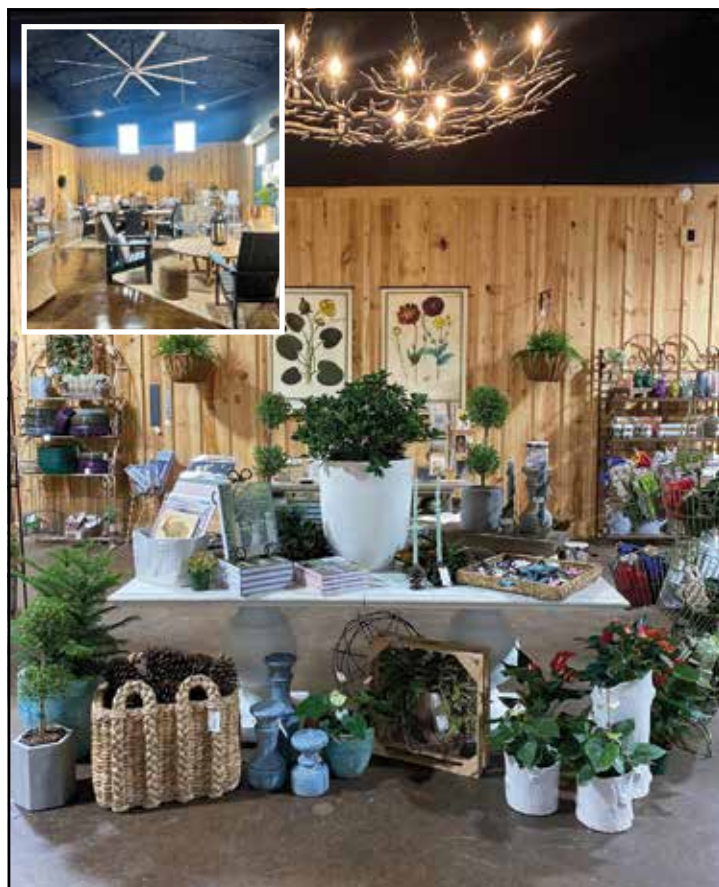
incredible work."

The newest addition to their business, The Shop at Baldwin Turf, offers botanical gifts, unique gardening supplies, ambient lighting and outdoor entertainment. The inventory of furniture has also been thoughtfully selected so that it's durable and long-lasting, even with the bright sun and salty air, which can make outdoor furniture hard to maintain. The Herndon family grew up loving the outdoors and truly wants our community to enjoy it as much as they do. "We live in such an amazing place and want to help bring that to homes and businesses throughout our community. We want to help elevate your outdoor space and provide those final touches."

As Jenny settles into her new role as the manager of Baldwin Turf's retail division, she reflects on what makes this area so special to her and her family. "What I love most about coming back to Niceville is our sense of community. Being able to provide great customer service is my favorite part of the job. I'm getting to meet people and talk about their new homes and projects, and we get to be part of that. The Shop has only been open a few months and I can already see how special it is that

people want to support local businesses and local businesses want to be there for people in this area. I've become involved with the Chamber of Commerce as well as The Young Professionals group. We enjoy sponsoring local youth activities and helping with charitable donations. Our community encourages all of us to step up."

Baldwin Turf's Lawn and Landscaping office is located at 1440 Live Oak Street. Call 850-897-9060 to schedule a free estimate or ask about their services. The Shop at Baldwin Turf is located at 739 John Sims Parkway.



BALDWIN TURF

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Baldwin Turf is a family owned company offering the full scope of service and supplies in lawn care and landscape, and has most recently expanded with a retail location in Niceville. The Shop at Baldwin Turf is your new go-to for everything outdoor entertainment and décor for your patio and garden. We have carefully curated a selection of high-quality outdoor décor, furniture, lighting, unique supplies, and special touches fit to enhance any and all al fresco needs. Come shop with us!

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Record Fundraising at Annual All-Sports Banquet

BY DOUG STAUFFER

The recent 55th Annual All Sports Banquet on the picturesque Okaloosa Island celebrated athletic combined with academic excellence and demonstrated the power of philanthropy as the community joined together to give. The Em-

erald Coast Convention Center was alive with the spirit of competition, not just on the fields and courts, but in the bidding war that saw donations soar to a record-breaking \$126,200 from the evening auction. By the night's end, nearly \$400,000 had been raised, surpassing the

2022-2023 total and setting a new benchmark for support towards area athletics.

The award winners of the evening ranged from high school sensations to professional athletes, all of whom share a commitment to academic excellence and philanthropy with



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a spiritual emphasis. The banquet, known for recognizing the who's-who of local talent, did not disappoint, spotlighting individuals from prep to college and the amateur ranks to the professional stage.

The evening's emotional pinnacle arrived when the Thomas brothers, Azareye'h and Juanyeh, took the stage. Azareye'h Thomas, an FSU defensive back lauded for helping to lead the Seminoles to an unbeaten regular season record, won the Male Collegiate Award. Meanwhile, his brother, Juanyeh Thomas, a defensive back for the Dallas Cowboys, who helped lead his team to a 12-5 season and the NFC East title, clinched the Professional Award.

Their success on and off the field was recognized by their tribute to their mother, whom they invited on stage to a standing ovation. The brothers, both Niceville High School graduates, honored her for the sacrifices that paved their paths to personal and professional achievements. One phase by Momma Thomas encapsulated the depth of her influence, "Every lesson is a blessing."

The banquet also highlighted the stars of tomorrow, with Lauren Bage and Titus Thornell winning the Female and Male Scholastic awards, respectively. Bage, a multi-sport star from Choctaw, broke barriers as the first female in town to play tackle football. She is No. 5 in her graduating class and told the crowd, "With God and hard work, all things are possible."

Thornell, a three-sport let-

terman, also excelled at Choctaw in football, wrestling and weightlifting. He earned a 4.36 GPA and volunteers in mentoring youth at his local church. Their stories of determination and faith echoed the sentiment that hard work and divine guidance overcome all obstacles.

Further accolades were bestowed upon Liliana Fernandez, the Female Collegiate award winner from Tulsa, and Garrison Lemire, the Taylor Haugen winner, embodying perseverance and dedication ideals.

Lemire, a Niceville senior originally from Abilene, has set his sights on Texas A&M, studying Psychology and exercise physiology. "We look up to Coach Lou and Coach Dussault, both retired marines who believe in tough love."

Other award winners include Blake Orr, an FIU javelin thrower aiming for the Junior Olympics, and Shane Patty, a Special Olympics multi-sport star and the voice of NWF State Raiders baseball and softball.

The banquet concluded on a high note, with FSU and NFL legend Warrick Dunn delivering a keynote speech resonating with his journey of overcoming adversity through faith, hard work and community support.

The 55th Annual All Sports Banquet not only celebrated the achievements of these remarkable athletes, but also underscored the importance of giving back, setting a precedent for future generations to aspire to greatness both on and off the field.



Golf Series: What Golfers Deserve Close to Home In Crestview

By BARBARA PALMGREN

Okaloosa County is a diverse place, indeed. I have taught a class for several years for seniors at the Center for Life Long Learning called “The Museum Trail.” We explore each of the nine museums beginning with the Destin Fishing Museum and ending with one farthest north, the Baker Block Museum. I’m amazed that folks living near the coast have never stopped to visit shops and venues in the Crestview and Baker area. When they do, they learn, for the first time, that cotton is grown and agricultural products are part of a sustainable industry for this area.

As I began writing my golf series for our local paper, I followed the same format. I started with the golf courses along the Emerald Coast and now move to a special place at the north end of the county, Blackwater Golf Club.

A short history lesson first. In 1915 the Florida House of Representatives approved the creation of a new county from the existing counties of Santa Rosa and Walton. The county was named after a steamboat called “The Okaloosa,” a Choctaw word meaning black water. The diverse ecosystem of darker river waters in the north end of the county contrast with the emerald green waters and sugar white sands of Destin and Fort Walton Beach. It reminds me of the song, “Black Water” by the Dobbie Brothers. I’ll change a few of the lyrics:

*Well, if it rains, I don't care
Don't make no difference to me.
Just take my old 9 iron out
Par the hole and get on down.
Gonna make everything all right
Gonna make everything all right
Old black water, keep on rollin'
Crestview moon, won't you keep on
shinin' on me?
Keep on shinin' on me.*

I interviewed an old friend, Mykal Bailey, a former assistant pro at Shalimar Pointe Golf Course. Now, assistant general manager and head golf professional at Blackwater Golf Club, Mykal graciously shared information about the course that’s been renovated to become the family friendly destination in



the Crestview area. Mykal has local roots, playing baseball at Choctawhatchee High School and then at LBW college in Andalusia. Always a fan of golf, a physical injury ended hope of pursuing baseball after college, but led him to another sport and work in the golf industry.

Always impressed with Mykal at Shalimar Pointe, I can attest that Blackwater Golf Club, formerly Foxwood Country Club, is in good hands. Again, back to a little history. Foxwood Country Club in Crestview was built in 1961 with a golf course, pool and tennis courts. Whatever economic circumstances led to it being closed in 2017, the City of Crestview purchased the property in 2019 and began renovating with plans to reopen in 2021.

Working with Kansas-based Mammoth Sports Construction, repairs included replacing irrigation lines, improving drainage and reshaping and re-sodding the course’s greens. Having vis-



ited and played the course when it was Foxwood, I was delighted to view the changes that were made, not only to the course, but also to the clubhouse area as well.

Now partnering with Great Life Golf, a management company, Blackwater Golf Club is a new and exciting venue. If you are not a golfer, there are other opportunities for enjoying sports. A tennis and pickleball court are located next to a large outdoor eating space with welcoming fireplace and a full bar. Inside, the Eagle’s Nest restaurant advertises itself as a “gastro pub like no other.” This warm embrace of the local community is felt by members as well as the public who visit, especially at Sunday Brunch. How do you choose between a classic breakfast and shrimp & grits? Or do

I just enjoy delicious eggs benedict?

Focusing on the golf course itself, Blackwater is a Par 72, 18-hole course, with tee box markers denoting the most challenging distances as well as user friendly markers for high handicap players. Ideal for every skill level, public play is welcome along as reasonable membership fees for those who support the game of golf. Mykal’s favorite hole is number 3. A Par 5, with a creek that surrounds it.

The club is doing well again, in part due to its unique offering—the “sports bragging rights” of the virtual golf experience, the Blackwater Driving Range.

The Blackwater Driving Range combines golf with a video-game experience that’s fun for all ages. With 14 individual hitting bay stalls with Top Tracer technology, get ready to experience golf in an exciting way. Imagine teeing up, hitting your drive and tracking the golf shot as it travels down the third fairway at Pebble Beach. Yes, your shot is correlated with a famous course you are playing, like Pebble Beach. It’s fantasy golf, of course, but who doesn’t like a little fantasy in their life?

A virtual golf experience like no other for every member of the family, sounds like a great family outing, doesn’t it? And after achieving par on Pebble Beach, one can always be awarded with a signature libation at the clubhouse.

Life is good at the north end of the county.



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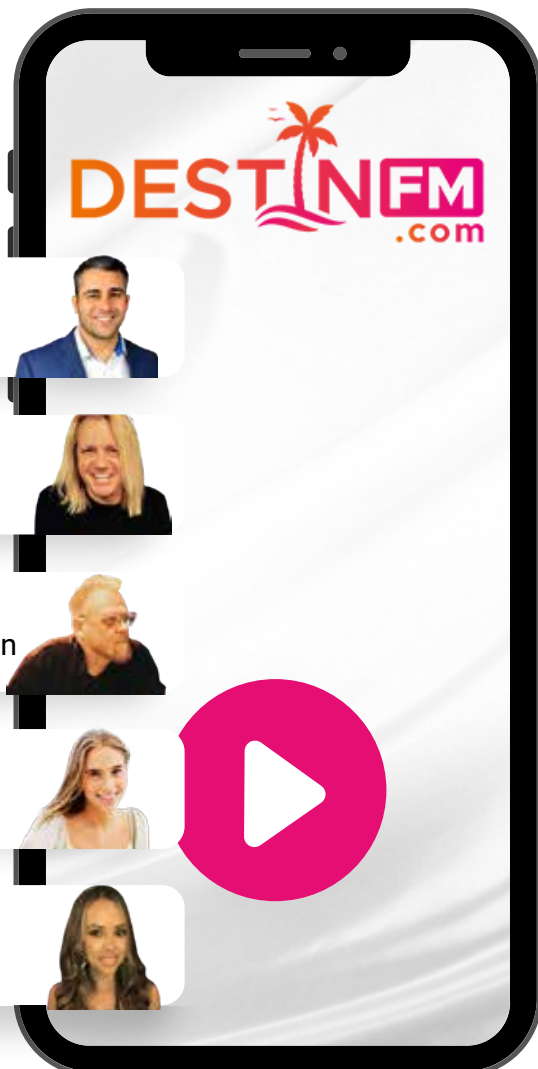
In 2001, Magnolia Grill in Fort Walton Beach opened its doors after a renovation that took 18 months—and it's been thriving since. A local's favorite dubbed "The Museum That Serves Food," you'll find equal parts museum and dining establishment. Its second floor contains artifacts from World War II, Vietnam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

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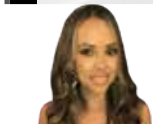
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There's A New Chef In Town!

Juan Bochenski is the new executive chef at Hotel Effie. Bochenski helms the kitchen at the hotel's signature restaurant, Ovide, and oversees all aspects of food and beverage operations across the hotel's four restaurant outlets and in-room dining. An elegant, culinary adventure, Ovide brings together classic Gulf Coast flavors and southern culinary traditions fueled by a passion for sustainability and seasonality that gives each bite incredible flavor. To do that, Bochenski works closely with local farmers and vendors to serve farm-fresh and sustainable ingredients whenever possible.

Born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Bochenski has worked at luxury resorts across the globe, including Arcis Golf in Dallas; Baker's Bay Golf & Ocean Club on Great Guana Cay, Abaco, Bahamas; Resorts & Residences



by Cuisinart on Anguilla; Jade Mountain and Anse Chastanet resorts on St. Lucia; and Rosewood Hotels & Resorts' Inn of the Anasazi in Santa Fe, New Mexico; among others.

Ovide's new dinner menu is available Friday through Saturday, from 5 - 10 p.m., and Sunday through Thursday, from 5 - 9 p.m. including choices from the raw oyster bar and delicious desserts.

Off the Hook: Spring Fishing!



BY CALI HLAVAC,
TO DO IN DESTIN

As the vibrant colors of spring emerge, fishermen and families flock to our piece of paradise, Fort Walton Beach and the “World’s Luckiest Fishing Village,” for a spring fishing adventure. With the warming temperatures and inviting waters, springtime in Fort Walton Beach offers anglers an unparalleled experience filled with a variety of species and thrilling catches.

One of the most appealing aspects of spring fishing in our area is the weather. During this time of the year, temperatures range from the comfortable mid-60s to the mid-80s, creating an ideal environment for both fish and anglers alike.

Spring brings the arrival of various species to the waters off our coast, presenting anglers with a plethora of opportunities. Among the prized catches during this season are Cobia, King Mackerel, Spanish Mackerel, Sheepshead and Mahi-Mahi. These species thrive in the



Gulf of Mexico’s nutrient-rich waters, making them abundant targets for eager fishermen.

To reel in these coveted catches, anglers employ a variety of tried-and-tested techniques tailored to each species. For red snapper, bottom fishing near natural reefs, wrecks and ledges proves highly effective. Using live bait such as cigar minnows, pinfish or squid can entice these elusive creatures to bite.

King mackerel and Spanish mackerel, known for their speed and agility, are commonly targeted using trolling techniques.

Anglers troll various lures and baits behind boats at different depths, mimicking the movement of baitfish to attract these predatory species.

Mahi-mahi, with their vibrant colors and acrobatic displays, are often encountered near floating debris, weed lines, and temperature breaks. Anglers cast live bait or brightly colored lures to entice these

majestic fish, which are known for their willingness to strike aggressively.

Spring fishing offers an unforgettable experience for anglers of all skill levels. Whether you’re seeking the thrill of battling a trophy fish or simply enjoying a day on the water amidst stunning natural surroundings, Fort Walton Beach’s Emerald Coast waters never disappoint.

In conclusion, as spring breathes new life into the world,

it also kicks off the beginning of an exciting fishing season in our area. With its beautiful weather, abundant species, and versatile techniques, Fort Walton Beach remains a premier destination for anglers seeking adventure and unforgettable fishing experiences. So, grab your gear, chart your course, and embark on a memorable spring fishing excursion in the jewel of Florida’s Emerald Coast.

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Exercise With Your Child



BY LISA LEATH TURPIN, HEALTH AND WELLNESS COACH

Good health should be a family affair. Children learn and develop from what they see their parents do. When parents practice a healthy lifestyle, the children are more likely to follow. The key to developing life-long healthy fitness habits is to start young. Your children can also get a head start on sports and Physical Education if they already understand and have good exercise habits. Being active is important for proper bone growth, muscle development and brain function. Exercise strengthens the heart, keeps arteries and veins clear, strengthens the lungs, reduc-

es blood sugar levels, controls weight, and helps give a better outlook on life. Exercising together is the ultimate bonding activity for families especially in a world where electronics and technology cause disconnect and isolation.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and prevention, about one-third of American children ages 10-17 are overweight or obese, and fewer than 25% of children get the recommended 60 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity per day recommended by the American Medical Association.

The American Council on Exercise (ACE) beautifully names the top 10 reasons why children should exercise (acefitness.org/education-and-resources). I have combined into five reasons:

- Children who are active 60 minutes per day demonstrate lower rates of obesity.
- Greater rates of activity in children have been associated with higher test scores in reading and math. Frequent physical activity is also associated with improved behavior in the class-



room and beyond.

- Physical (body) and cognitive (brain) development go hand-in-hand. While this continues for life, this relationship is most critical at a young age. When kids are active, their brains develop, allowing for new types of activity. Aerobic activity is shown to increase the size

of essential brain structures and number of neural connections.

- Frequent activities requiring a high degree of balance and coordination have been associated with improved emotional response.
- Frequent exercise decreases symptoms of depression and anxiety in children. Regular exercise with children promotes self-efficacy with regard to health and self-image.
- A family that exercises together stays together! This

spring, put down the iPad and iPhone, hop on a bike or put on your hiking boots and get going. If your kid is old enough, go to the gym together. Here in our area, join beach boot camps or utilize our pristine Bay and Gulf to go paddle-boarding or surfing. The benefits are priceless!

Be Active 850! Have a fitness question for Lisa? Email BeActive850@gmail.com.

Lisa Leath Turpin is a degreed and certified health and fitness lifestyle coach and consultant who has devoted her life to motivating and strengthening the body and mind of others. With almost 30 years' experience, Lisa has a B.S. degree in Sports & Fitness Management from the University of Alabama, developed and managed the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Health & Wellness Facility and programs in Huntsville, Ala., is board certified by the National Board of Fitness Examiners and possesses certifications from AFAA, Polestar/Balanced Body, Reebok U, SCW Fitness and American Heart Association. She is currently a group exercise leader at Destin Health & Fitness and an independent personal trainer in the Destin area, diversely and extensively trained in classical and modern Pilates, lifestyle management, personal training, group exercise and post-rehabilitation.

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Wellness

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By KELLY STALNAKER

Are you a Type 1 or Type 2 diabetic patient that is tired of constant finger sticks? Then it might be time to consider a continuous glucose monitor. A continuous glucose monitor (or CGM, for short) is a device that automatically tracks your blood sugar level 24/7, with fewer finger sticks. Instead of lancets, a tiny sensor is inserted under the skin with a sticky patch to help keep it in place. There might be some discomfort during insertion, but once in place, the testing is completely painless. And the monitor delivers readings instantly.

With this wearable sensor, you'll have quick and convenient access to real time blood sugar data to help you make better food, activity and medication decisions in the moment. You can also review how your blood sugar level changes over a few hours or days, or after certain meals, to spot trends. And many sensors now offer the ability to sound an alarm when levels are dangerously high or low. Con-



stant and accurate monitoring can help you keep your blood sugar level in target range to reduce the chances of developing other health problems caused by diabetes. CGM's are so easy to

use that they're perfect for patients of all ages. A quick glance at your smartphone or CGM receiver will provide accurate blood sugar readings day or night. Also, the sensor is water-



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Sacred Heart Emerald Coast is adding five new neonatal specialists to provide 24/7 coverage for sick and well newborns. Guests will enjoy live musical entertainment and are encouraged to wear emerald shades. Tickets are \$150 which includes reserved seating, a curated dinner and two drink tickets. For more information, tickets or sponsorship, contact Lisa Wainwright at lisa.wainwright@ascension.org or call (850) 278-3702. sacredheartemerald.com.



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Hypo and Hyper Thyroidism



BY KAY LEAMAN,
HEALTHYDAY HEALTHYLIFE

The thyroid is located at the base of the neck just below the Adam's apple. Hormones produced by the thyroid control energy, metabolism, heart rate, protein synthesis, cholesterol and triglyceride metabolism, bone metabolism, sleep, brain functions and more. It is not uncommon for a misdiagnosis to be given (hypo) as there are other issues that cause the thyroid to be compromised. That being said let's look at the two main issues:

HYPERthyroidism, also called overactive thyroid, occurs when there is an overproduction of the thyroid hormone call thyroxine (T4). Symptoms include unexpected weight loss, tachycardia (rapid heartbeat) nervousness, anxiety/irritability, fatigue or muscle weakness, plus up to 10 other symptoms.

Treatments depend on the cause. One treatment is radioactive iodine which is used to slow production. Some caus-

es allow for the thyroid issues to improve without treatment. Supplementation does not affect this disease.

A few causes are:

- Grave's disease: autoimmune disorder which causes the immune system to attack the thyroid.
- Thyroiditis: the gland becomes inflamed; the reasons are unclear. This can cause extra thyroid hormones being stored to leak into the bloodstream causing symptoms of hyperthyroidism.
- Complications: Heart: atrial fibrillation and congestive heart failure, brittle bones, vision problems, discolored or swollen skin

HYPOthyroidism is a deficiency in the secretion of thyroid hormones resulting in a reduction of normal functions if not all of the body's cells and tissues. When this gland is under-active, cells can't properly take in macro & micro nutrients nor receive adequate oxygen. It also causes cellular toxic waste not to be eliminated efficiently. Less than 50% of the population suffers with some degree of hypothyroidism and affects women more than men.

Possible symptoms which can be confused with normal aging is a long list (To request this list, email me with Thyroid Symptoms in the Subject line.).

Thyroid hormones are T3, T4 and Calcitonin (regulation

of blood calcium and bone metabolism). T3 has 3 iodine atoms; T4 has 4.

Other causes are:

1. Inflammatory disorder - autoimmune disorder - Hashimoto's thyroiditis most common in developed nations (otherwise it's iron deficiency) and may be triggered by a hyper-permeable intestinal lining known as leaky gut syndrome
2. Leaky Gut
3. Genetics
4. Poor diet
5. Hormone imbalances
6. Pregnancy
7. Psychological stress
8. Inactivity

For a complete picture of thyroid activity, request these six tests:

- TSH (reference ranges .3-3.0 NOT .5-5.0)
- Free T3
- Free T4
- Reverse T#
- Thyroid antibodies (TPO Ab)
- Thyroglobulin Antibodies (Tg AB)

Natural support:

• Grape Seed extract and other polyphenolic antioxidants (essential component of the protocol for autoimmune and inflammatory diseases as these



have oxidative damage in its pathogenesis).

- Probiotics
- Iodine: 250-300 micrograms cause a significant improvement in alleviating hypothyroidism. Because many of us have moved from iodized salt to more natural salts (sea salt), supplementing with a quality iodine can cause significant improvement in alleviating hypothyroidism.

• Foundation of vitamins minerals and omega-3 fatty acids

As with any ailment, we are all at risk of developing a thyroid disorder. Continuing to develop a healthy lifestyle and improving it as we learn will continue to offer us many benefits.

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 Wellness

Emotionally Charged Conversations



By STEPHENIE CRAIG

Are you ever moving through life and find yourself feeling very angry or hurt by someone? Maybe you are experiencing anger or hurt at a level 10 intensity and you are noticing the situation intensity level seems to be

much lower than your feeling. You might then realize you're making up a story in your head about the negative, insensitive intentions of the other person. As a result, you may find yourself withdrawing, putting up walls or being confrontational in ways that compromise connection.

Emotionally charged conversations are complex to navigate and often result in people not showing up as their best version of self. Intense feelings can fuel reactivity, shutting down, harsh words, judgment, unkindness, shame and condescending tone. While you know it feels bad to

experience someone's emotional reaction, you may still find yourself reacting at times. Intense emotions are inevitable but, with practice, you can create a healthy pattern of working through your own and others' reactions.

10 Ways to Approach Emotionally Charged Conversations

1. Notice when you are triggered. Pay attention to your feelings and your body. Notice changes in body temperature, stomach, chest, feeling shaky, clenching fists, grinding teeth, tears, change in heart rate. Name feelings if you are able. "I feel embarrassed, ashamed, humiliated, angry, hurt, sad, unsafe."

2. Calm your nervous system. Take 10-20 deep breaths, step away from the situation, journal, take a walk, nurture your pet. Engage in healthy calming skills to help your body move out of fight, flight or freeze so you can think more clearly.

3. Notice the negative intention story you are making up in your head. She didn't text me back because I'm not important. He didn't make eye contact so he must not care. My child is selfish, disrespectful and trying to irritate me. Challenge the story in your head. Is it possible their behavior has another meaning than intent to hurt you?

4. Sort past and present feelings. Intense feelings are



often a sign that the present situation has triggered past wounds. Reflect on whether you are bringing memories from past interactions into the current situation. Acknowledge and allow past feelings to exist in a space separate from the current situation/relationship.

5. Remember the humanity of and your history with the person. Try remembering you do not have negative intentions toward others when you emotionally react. You also do not intentionally emotionally react. Perhaps the other person had a difficult emotional moment and did not have negative intentions toward you. Remember the ongoing character of your relationship with this person. Are their intentions and behavior toward you typically positive?

6. Approach with compassionate curiosity instead of shame. Instead of, "You don't get to talk to me that way and you are being so rude and out of line," try, "You seem really overwhelmed. What's

happening for you right now?" People often feel bad inside about reacting poorly. What helps them move forward is compassionate understanding rather than judgmental correction. When people feel understood with compassion, they will often apologize and move toward change.

7. Validate and support. Communicate understanding of the other's emotional state. Ask what support might be helpful on your end.

8. Own your part. Humbly seek to understand whether you contributed an unhelpful part in the relationship dynamic. Take responsibility by naming and apologizing for your part.

9. Address boundaries with vulnerability. Communicate kindly and directly how you were hurt and what would work better for you in the future. "When you snapped at me, that hurt my feelings and felt like you were blaming me. Now that we've talked, I understand that you were snapping because you were overwhelmed and it was not about me. I get overwhelmed, too. When you are getting overwhelmed, it would help me if you would let me know what you need rather than snapping at me. I will be able to support you better and that will help us stay connected."

10. Listen and repeat. Listen with an open mind to the other person's experience and repeat this process regularly when you feel triggered in relationships.

Emotionally charged conversations are difficult and can also be some of our most connecting and trust building moments when navigated with intention. Try practicing these tools and connect with us along your journey for counseling and coaching at Journeybravely.com.



Stephanie Craig, LCSW
Therapist
918-221-9987 | stepheniecraig@journeybravely.com

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- Do you ever put your hand up to cover your smile?
- Do you dislike your smile in photographs?
- When you look through magazines, do you envy the models' smiles?
- Do you wish your teeth were whiter?
- Do you think you show too much or too little of your teeth when you smile?
- Would you like to change the way your teeth or gums are shaped?
- Do you have gaps or spaces in between your teeth?

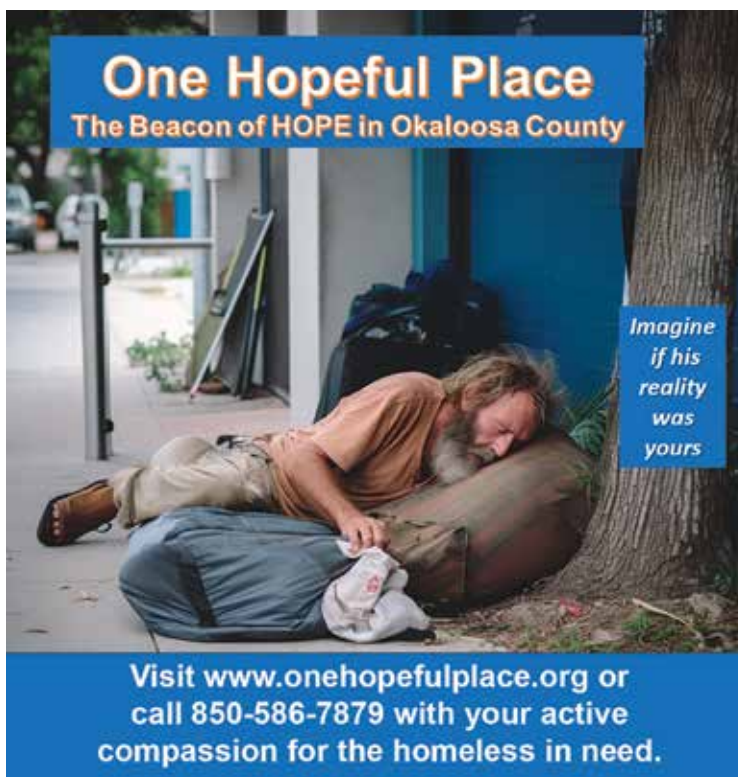
If the answer is "yes" to any of these questions, you may be a good candidate for **A Smile Makeover**.



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Meet Local Pros Trevor and Tina Kasten of Beachside Sliding Glass Door Maintenance

By MICHELLE RUSCHMAN

If you are struggling with a sliding glass door, then you need Beachside Sliding Glass Door Maintenance, LLC. Starting in October 2023, it's owned and operated by long-time Destin residents and high school sweethearts, Trevor and Tina Kasten. "We have learned to work very well together in handling all business responsibilities and balance each other out. Our daughter, Samantha, even helps with the creative and social media aspects of the business and we have a great crew that helps us with the larger projects."

Having been in the automotive restoration business for more than 30 years, Trevor has become an expert in metal repair. Wanting to retire from the fumes and chemicals, however, opened new opportunities. "I decided after all these years, it was the perfect time to make a change. My childhood friend owns and operates a very successful business similar to ours in central Florida. We immediately saw the need for this service in our area. I went down



and trained with him, learned the business and the rest is history."

So, what is it about our area that makes this business so valuable? "Most people don't realize that sliding glass doors require routine maintenance, especially in our coastal area. Sand, salt water, salty air and chlorine cause excessive corrosion to the wheel system underneath the door. The doors have to be lifted off and the bottom panels removed to see this damage.

Sliding doors are very heavy doors. They sit on a roller system that consists of a set of wheels that sit on a track. This system is designed to balance the weight of the doors and make them glide smoothly and easily. When this system starts to fail, the doors start to feel heavy.

Over time the wheels and bearings go bad and need to be changed. Once this occurs, almost everyone assumes they need new doors. The doors just keep getting heavier and harder to open with time. This progression eventually breaks handles and damages the track the rollers sit on. There are different levels of track damage, but the longer you let it go the more extensive and expensive the re-

pairs can get.

We get stuck, noisy, difficult-to-open sliding glass doors rolling open like new again. This includes roller replacement, track repair, door handles, security locks, alignment, and lubrication of the door."

During a time when everything has gone up in price, including brand-new sliding glass doors, repairs are a much more cost-effective alternative.

Trevor and Tina have lived in the same neighborhood in Destin for over 25 years and have seen a lot of changes. They know and love our coastal beach towns and feel privileged to serve a community that gives so much. "Our neighbors look out for each other, and we love to be

a part of that through our business as well. We've partnered with some fantastic property managers who immediately saw the value and skill in the work we provide."

Since opening, what has been the best part of starting their business? "We love the surprise homeowners experience once they see the functionality of their doors. You will be amazed by the peace you feel just by being able to stop fighting with your door daily."

Beachside Sliding Glass Door Maintenance currently offers services from Panama City to Pensacola. You can schedule a free estimate at www.beachside-slide.com or call 850-987-5433.

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The Urgent Need for Cybersecurity in Small to Medium Businesses: Protecting Your Assets in an Evolving Threat Landscape

In today's digital age, the significance of cybersecurity cannot be emphasized enough. The alarming surge in cyber insurance costs, coupled with the prevalence of ransomware attacks targeting small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs), underscores the critical need for prioritizing cybersecurity measures.

Consider the latest insights from The 13th edition of the NetDiligence® Cyber Claims Study, which revealed that the cost of cyber insurance in the U.S. spiked by a staggering 79% in the second quarter of 2022

alone. Shockingly, ransomware attacks accounted for a whopping 88% of cyber insurance claims among SMBs during the period of 2022-2033. Moreover, the average financial toll of a cyber incident borne by an insurance carrier stood at a staggering \$865,000 for SMBs, highlighting the substantial financial risks at stake.

Despite these alarming statistics, only a mere 14% of SMBs are adequately prepared to confront such cyber threats. While larger corporations typically allocate significant resources to cybersecurity, SMBs often

lag behind in implementing robust cybersecurity measures. Many SMBs have yet to develop comprehensive cybersecurity solutions to safeguard their operations, particularly in regions with stringent data privacy laws and regulations governing the collection and storage of personal identifiable information (PII).

Several factors contribute to SMBs neglecting cybersecurity:

Lack of Awareness: Many SMB owners and managers underestimate the importance of

cybersecurity or the potential risks they face, erroneously assuming that cybercriminals target only larger enterprises. However, studies reveal that 63% of SMBs have experienced cyberattacks in the past two years, with data breaches costing an average of \$3.31 million per incident.

Overreliance on Managed Service Providers (MSPs):

While MSPs play a crucial role in supporting software and applications, they often lack the expertise required to navigate the complexities of cybersecurity response and insurance coverage. Additionally, they may overlook the diverse legal and regulatory frameworks governing cybersecurity across different states and industries.

Dependence on Third-Party Applications:

SMBs frequently rely on third-party cloud applications, assuming that these vendors bear sole responsibility for cybersecurity. However, cybersecurity is a shared responsibility, necessitating proactive measures from both the business and its vendors.

Cost Concerns: SMBs often view investing in cybersecurity solutions as financially burdensome. However, the costs associated with recovering from a cyberattack far outweigh the initial investment in preventive measures.

Perceived Complexity:

The intricacies of cybersecurity can appear daunting to SMBs, who may lack the necessary expertise to implement comprehensive cybersecurity solutions effectively.

Misconceptions about Cyber Insurance Coverage:

SMBs may erroneously believe that their cyber insurance policy provides blanket coverage, failing to grasp the nuances of regulatory compliance and the importance of tailored policies and procedures.



Addressing these challenges requires proactive measures:

Education and Awareness: SMBs must prioritize cybersecurity education and awareness programs to understand the evolving threat landscape and their vulnerabilities.

Strategic Partnerships: Collaborating with a company that has expertise in cybersecurity solutions and insurers can help SMBs develop tailored solutions that align with their budget and requirements.

Compliance and Risk Management: SMBs must stay abreast of regulatory requirements and implement robust policies and procedures to mitigate risks effectively.

Integration of Cybersecurity and Insurance: Integrating cybersecurity solutions with insurance expertise can provide SMBs with comprehensive coverage and peace of mind.

In conclusion, the imperative for small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) to prioritize cybersecurity measures has never been clearer. With cyber insurance costs surging and ransomware attacks on the rise, SMBs face significant financial risks and operational disruptions. Despite the alarming statistics revealing the prevalence of cyber threats, many SMBs remain ill-prepared due to factors such as lack of awareness, reliance on third-party providers,

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Continued on page 28



BY SEAN DIETRICH

Easter Sunday. An Episcopal church in Birmingham. Vaulted ceilings. Ornate masonry. A pipe organ. A choir dressed in lacework cottas. Individual stained-glass windows that cost more than tactical government helicopters. The whole works.

My wife and I arrived late. The place was loaded with parishioners in pastel colors. There were no available seats in the back.

“We have room on the front row,” said the usher.

“The front row?” I said. “Isn’t there anywhere else? Somewhere less... Frontal?”

He shook his head. “Full house today, sir.”

I am not a front pew guy. I come from mild, soft-spoken fundamentalist people who hug each other sideways; we prefer to fill up the sanctuary from the back to the front.

He guided us to the front pew so that we were practically sitting in the priest’s lap. The whole church was looking at us.

Service began. The organ bellowed. People stood.

Before we sang the first song, a kid in the pew behind me started making flatulent sounds with his mouth. I could not concentrate.

As a former little boy, I am qualified to tell you that these were not just your run-of-the-mill mouth-based sound effects. These were long, juicy, squirry sounds that, if I hadn’t known better, sounded like minor digestive issues.

And he never quit. During the communal singing, the kid made this noise. During the call to worship: The Noise. During the Lord’s Prayer: nuclear blasts.

Spittle was flying onto the back of my neck as the boy’s sustained raspberry sounds reverberated off the stone walls. I was certain someone would tell the boy to knock it off, but it never happened.

So I turned around to give the child a stern look.

He might have been 3 years old. The kid was blond, plump, dressed festively in a seersucker jumpsuit adorned with lace.

His mother smiled. I grinned back, hoping she’d get my drift and put an end to her son’s newfound talent. But she didn’t.

So I tried to deal with it. Throughout the service, the kid made even louder sounds and I made greater attempts to ignore him. But it was difficult, inasmuch as I could feel the wind-speeds from his mouth-trombone moving the hair on the back of my head.

Occasionally, I would look around at other parishioners to gauge their reactions, but nobody was paying attention to the kid. It was incredible. Even though this boy’s sphincter-like tones were rattling the windows, I was the only one in the West-

Sean of the South



ern Hemisphere who noticed this child.

When the choir stood for the offertory song, I tried to tune the kid out completely. I focused on the music. I closed my eyes. I listened to the a capella choral arrangement, bowing my head, reflecting on spiritual matters, when all of a sudden...

Somebody ripped one.

At least that’s what it sounded like. The kid had upped the ante this time. He wasn’t just making basic mouth sounds anymore. He was raspberrying the national anthem. The back of my neck was painted in a fine spray of toddler saliva.

I leaned over to my wife. “I can’t concentrate,” I said.

“Hmmm?” she said.

“That kid. He’s making noise.”

“What kid?”

“What kid? Junior the Incredible Tooting Toddler. Don’t you hear him?”

“Just don’t pay attention to him.”

“He’s spitting on me.”

Someone across the aisle shushed me.

Finally, it was time for communion. Several hundred of us filed toward the altar, and who do you think was standing behind me? That’s right. Toot-Zilla.

The kid was making his lip noises while standing in line, bouncing on his mother’s hip.

I’d had enough. I was just about to say something to the kid’s mother when she spoke first. She told me she didn’t have a free hand for receiving communion. So she asked if I would watch her son for a moment while she approached the

altar and took the Sacrament. I said sure.

So she left him with me for a moment. He stood beside my leg and looked up at me with tap-water blue eyes. And I have to admit, this child was cute.

“You shouldn’t be making those sounds in church,” I told him.

“Raah baah baah waah,” he said.

“That’s no excuse.”

“Aaagghhh.”

“People are trying to be reverent here.”

“Waaah daah haah baah faaah.”

“You’re not even sorry, are you?”

He drooled on himself.

When his mother finished receiving the Eucharist, she came back to us and lifted her son into her arms. I wished her a happy Easter. She returned the favor. Then I wished the kid a happy Easter and his little face erupted in a smile.

“Haaappah eeeee-saaaah!” he shouted.

My heart officially melted. I pinched his nose, and the kid responded by making that familiar loud sound again.

Only this time his lips didn’t move.

I hope you had a happy Easter. I know he did.



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A Pastor's Ponderings: The Power of Decision Courage, Conviction and Consequences



BY PASTOR DOUG STAUFFER

Life's journey is guided by the decisions we make, shaping our path and defining our future. The Bible offers invaluable advice on making wise choices. James 1:5-8 stresses the importance of seeking God's wisdom before making a decision. The book of James also says that God promises to give wisdom generously to those who ask. In the same context, James 4:2 says, "Ye have not, because ye ask not." We have all the tools at our immediate disposal.

The book of James also warns against the peril of wavering indecision, likening it to a ship tossed upon the stormy seas. Double-minded people are unstable in all their ways, highlighting the importance of making decisions with faith and conviction. We need to learn to be decisive and avoid being wishy-washy.



Every decision we make has consequences. The story of Christ's crucifixion illustrates the weight of choices. Pilate, swayed by the clamoring crowd, opted to release Barabbas, a guilty man, instead of Jesus, the innocent Son of God. This decision, driven by fear of others, led to the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. Herod's choice had profound consequences. Our decisions impact us and those around us. We must heed the warnings of scripture and choose wisely, mindful of the unexpected consequences.

Anne Frank's decision to document her experiences while hiding from the Nazis during the Holocaust has provided a powerful testament to the human spirit and resilience in the face of adversity. Her diary has become one of the most widely read books in the world, inspiring generations to stand against injustices. Because of her wise decision, Anne Frank continues to speak through the written page.

Proverbs provides crucial insights into decision-making, stressing the significance of

knowledge, wisdom, and correction. Knowledge lights our path, wisdom guides our steps, and correction fosters our growth. These elements serve as pillars supporting us through both successes and setbacks from every decision we make.

Despite facing opposition from his family, Moses remained steadfast in his commitment to God. Similarly, we may encounter difficult choices that test our allegiance to the Almighty. Like Moses, we must trust in God's guidance, even when doing so requires us to stand alone.

Ruth's journey, marked by unwavering trust and obedience, bears witness to the boundless blessings awaiting those who walk in righteousness. Ruth followed Naomi and embraced her God. Her faithfulness was rewarded with blessings beyond measure as she became part of the lineage of Christ. We must emulate Ruth's unwavering faith, trusting that God will always lead us on the path of righteousness.

The political landscape, too, offers glimpses of decisive leadership that leave indelible marks upon society. Margaret Thatcher, the "Iron Lady," reshaped the fabric of Britain with her unwavering commitment to conserva-

tive principles, leaving a legacy in the annals of history. Her conservative policies, including privatization, deregulation and free-market reforms, reshaped the British economy and society during her tenure from 1979 to 1990.

As we journey through life, let's seek God's wisdom and trust in His guidance. Let our decisions be anchored in faith, knowing God will grant us the necessary wisdom if we only ask. May we draw lessons from scripture and the lives of faithful individuals, making wise choices and walking in the light of God's truth. I pray we will all consider Him as we make our decisions.

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.

CYBERSECURITY

continued from page 26

cost concerns, and misconceptions about insurance coverage.

However, by taking proactive steps to educate themselves, forge strategic partnerships, adhere to compliance requirements and integrate cybersecurity with insurance solutions, SMBs can effectively mitigate risks and safeguard their assets in an ever-evolving threat landscape. It is imperative for SMBs to recognize the importance of cybersecurity as a fundamental aspect of their business operations and take decisive action to protect themselves against cyber threats.

At Abora Insurance Group, we specialize in bridging the gap between cybersecurity solutions and insurance policies, offering affordable comprehensive solutions tailored to SMBs' needs. By fostering transparent communication and leveraging our network of insurers and cybersecurity solution providers, we empower SMBs to navigate the complexities of cybersecurity and secure their digital assets effectively. Protect your business today to safeguard against the growing threats of tomorrow.



2024-2025 Academic Year Auditions

Incoming 3rd Grade Student Auditions:

April 20 - 10am to 2pm

April 21 - 2:30pm to 4:30pm

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April 20 - 2:30 pm to 4:00pm

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NFBallet.org/Auditions
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It's Almost Time for the Wildly Popular Concerts In The Village!

The 10-concert live music series on Thursdays, April 4 to June 6, will feature premier musicians and bands performing everything from classic rock, disco and modern pop to full-length Grammy Award-winning iconic albums.

Hear the entire Grammy Award-winning Purple Rain album performed live, reminisce with Fleetwood Mac classics, dance to funky disco beats and discover new pop vocalists from The Voice — all in the diverse lineup of the 2024 Concerts presented by Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation, offering something for every music lover.

The area's first live concert series is held each spring on Thursday evenings at the MKAF Dugas Pavilion in Destin. This year's 29th annual family-friendly series will run from April 4 to June 6. The 10-concert live music series will feature premier regional and national musicians and bands performing everything from classic rock, rhythm & blues, and disco to modern pop.

The series kicks off on Thursday, April 4, 2024, with must-not-miss entertainers Post Modern Jukebox promising an unforgettable trip back in time to celebrate vintage music and pop culture.

The highly anticipated season

features a range of local, regional and national musicians and bands including rhythm & blues sensation Wendy Moten from The Voice, full-length rendition of Prince's iconic album Purple Rain by Black Jacket Symphony and the chill sounds of Yacht Rock Revue. Kicking off May are local fan favorites The Mulligans, the Fleetwood Mac tribute band Rumours ATL, party starters Gotta Groove Band, rock god Mitch Malloy and gifted pop/jazz/blues and soul songstress Haley Reinhart. The series caps on Thursday, June 6 with crowd pleasing Adam Ezra Group, sure to fuse rock energy and soul power.

"This is a great lineup of live music performed in a beautiful venue at an affordable price for a great cause" says MKAF CEO Demetrius Fuller. "When you purchase a concert ticket, you are enabling us to provide the highest quality of arts education and community engagement throughout Okaloosa, Walton and Bay Counties. If you are a MKAF regular, welcome back, if you're not yet a MKAF member, please consider joining. We have a great time and as we like to say, your support keeps the arts FUN-ded."

Gates open at 6 p.m. with concerts beginning at 7 p.m. for this come-as-you-are family-friendly

outdoor concert series. Bring a lawn chair, picnic, wine, or purchase food and beverages on-site prepared by featured restaurants and food trucks.

The 2024 Concerts in the Village schedule is as follows:

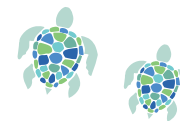
- Thursday, April 4 | Post Modern Jukebox
- Thursday, April 11 | Wendy Moten
- Thursday, April 18 | Black Jacket Symphony presents Prince's Purple Rain
- Thursday, April 25 | Yacht Rock Revue
- Thursday, May 2 | The Mulligans
- Thursday, May 9 | Rumours ATL: A Tribute to Fleetwood Mac

- Thursday, May 16 | Gotta Groove Band
- Thursday, May 23 | Mitch Malloy
- Thursday, May 30 | Haley Reinhart
- Thursday, June 6 | Adam Ezra Group

General admission varies per concert. Prices range from \$20 to \$35 for adults. Discounts offered for active-duty military (must show ID). Purchase tickets in advance of concert day and save \$5 per ticket at the door. Children (12 and under) are free. A limited number of VIP tables (reserved table for eight guests for the entire season) are available for \$2,250. Purchase tickets online at MKAF.org/events. MKAF members enjoy ear-

ly entry and free admission to every concert as well as discounted pricing to other MKAF events. For more information on MKAF membership, visit MKAF.org.

Concert lineup is subject to change. All sales are final; sorry, no refunds. Pets, tables larger than two feet, and drones are not permitted. Children 17 and under must be accompanied by a parent or guardian. To learn more about sponsoring the 2024 MKAF season, call (850) 650-2226. For the latest news and information, visit www.MKAF.org, and follow the Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation Facebook and Instagram pages for dates, information, and inspiring arts and culture-related posts.



ECTC Presents La Vie En Rouge

Thursday, March 28 | 6-9PM

Immerse yourself in the glamour of 19th-century Parisian cabaret at La Vie En Rouge, presented by Emerald Coast Theatre Company on Thursday, March 28th at 6 p.m. This exclusive signature event will feature exhilarating live performances, dazzling costumes and a vibrant atmosphere for guests 21+.

Get ready to indulge yourself in an evening of elegance, as you're transported to the iconic Moulin Rouge for a night of delightful cuisine, dancing, cocktails entertainment, silent auction, and many more unforgettable moments. A plethora of local restaurants and caterers including AJs 30A, Amavida Coffee,

Marrow Private Chefs, Ruby Slipper Cafe, Swiftly Catered, Tommy Bahamas, and more will be serving heavy, gourmet hors d'oeuvres throughout the evening along with an open bar filled with libations from local purveyors to toast to the evening! Cozy into the cabaret or get up and dance to the surprise performances throughout the evening. Tickets and sponsorships are on sale now — don't miss out on an exciting night supporting ECTC and the local arts in our community!

\$150 Per Person | \$300 Per Couple

To purchase tickets, visit emeraldcoasttheatre.org.

 Arts & Music

LAKESIDE

continued from page 1

Bryan White on May 3rd.

Each artist brings their own distinct style and expertise, promising an array of musical genres and captivating tunes. As the first in the series, Craig Campbell is a renowned country singer and songwriter from Georgia known for his distinctive voice and heartfelt lyrics. Developing a passion for music at an early age and influenced by classic country legends, his career spans over two decades and Craig has established himself as a talented artist with a genuine connection to his audience. His debut self-titled album, "Craig Campbell," released in 2011, features hit singles like "Family Man" and "Fish," earning him recognition and praise within the country music community.

Craig's music is characterized by its authenticity, often drawing inspiration from personal experiences and relatable themes. He has a knack for crafting songs that resonate with listeners, blending traditional country sounds with a modern twist. In addition to his success as a solo artist, Craig has also

contributed his songwriting talents by penning hits for other artists. Whether performing on the Grand Ole Opry stage or connecting with audiences during live shows, he continues to leave a lasting impression with his soulful performances and relatable storytelling.

On March 29th, Keith Stegall and Bradley Gaskin take the stage. Keith is a Grammy award winning producer and writer of multiple #1 hits including "I hate everything" by George Strait, "Don't Rock The Jukebox" by Alan Jackson, and "I Do (Cherish You)" by 98 Degrees. Keith Stegall is one of Nashville's most celebrated men behind the scenes. As Alan Jackson's longtime producer, the pairing has sold over 60 million records. With the Zac Brown band, Stegall produced the group's first three albums, resulting in the group's first nine singles to reach #1 on the country charts. Stegall is currently president of Dreamlined Entertainment Group, a Nashville-based production and publishing company specializing in songwriter/artist development.

Singer-songwriter Bradley Gaskin signed with Columbia



Nashville in 2010 and released his debut single, "Mr. Bartender," which he wrote solely by himself. Bradley's single charted on country radio for 20 weeks that led him to a Top 40 country hit. Soon after his immediate

success, Sony shelved the artist along with the rest of the music. The spotlight for Bradley slowly faded, so he decided to take a break and focus on other options for a career. The artist put down his Gibson J45 and went back to a life he'd known before his music stardom, being a normal working man. He filled his days hanging sheetrock and later worked as a full-time janitor at an elementary school. Bradley could have settled into a normal life, but he knew that wasn't what he was supposed to do. There were plenty of others cheering him on when Jack Cole, a seasoned friend, offered him a deal of a lifetime. "Why don't we record the music you want to write?" Jack said. Jack started 30A Life Records sealing the deal with Bradley Gaskin as his very first signed artist. Bradley is currently tracking his first full-length record in over a decade with Grammy Award winning producer Keith Stegall. The first single will be released this summer.

The Lakeside Songwriters Concert Series not only offers an exceptional musical experience, but also provides an opportunity for attendees to indulge in a de-

lectable dining experience. For those looking to enhance their evening, the Dinner and Show VIP Package offers premium seating, a delicious five-course dinner during the show, and a glass of beer, wine or champagne.

Tickets are available for purchase at www.oldflfishhouse.com/lakesidesongwritersconcert. Early booking is recommended to secure the best seats for this highly anticipated event. The artist meet and greet will begin at 6 p.m., with the show starting at 7 p.m.

Located at 33 Heron's Watch Way in Santa Rosa Beach, Old Florida Fish House is a renowned dining and entertainment destination offering exceptional food, live music and unique experiences in Santa Rosa Beach. With a commitment to providing unforgettable moments for guests, Old Florida Fish House continues to be the go-to destination for food and entertainment enthusiasts on 30A and the Emerald Coast. For more information, visit OldFloridaFishHouse.com.



 **CLASSICAL CONNECTIONS**
feat. **Steven Banks**



Saturday, March 23 | 7:30 pm
Destin-FWB Convention Center

Recipient of the prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant and Sinfonia Gulf Coast's Young Concert Artist prize, saxophonist Steven Banks pushes boundaries, expanding the instrument's repertoire while showcasing its vast capabilities. Hear this newly commissioned work for saxophone and orchestra by award-winning composer Billy Childs: *Diaspora*, *Motherland* and *If We Must Die* — three compelling pieces inspired by African American poems that chronicle the black American journey from mournful suppression to joyful empowerment. Mussorgsky's riveting *Pictures at an Exhibition* completes this compelling program.

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Around Town



Cindy Addison and Sheila Dunning

DAR Conservation Award

The Choctawhatchee Bay Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, has honored Okaloosa County UF/IFAS Extension Services Agent Sheila Dunning with the prestigious DAR Conservation Award. The award recognizes volunteers with distinguished conservation efforts which include sustained accomplishments that improve the environment and educate the public on conservation issues while exceeding job expectations. The award was presented by Florida's State Regent, Mrs. Cindy Addison, at the Chapter's February meeting.

Children of the American Revolution Receive Awards

The Snowden-Horne Society currently has 36 members, eight of whom are Dual DAR/C.A.R. or

SAR/C.A.R. members. The E.S.C.A.R. State Conference, held in February, found the Snowden-Horne Society leading the way, not only locally, but also at the state level:

E.S.C.A.R. 2024 STATE CONFERENCE AWARDS SNOWDEN-HORNE SOCIETY

1st Place Most Life Members

2nd Place American Heritage Best Program

2nd Place Best Newsletter

2nd Place Best Newsletter Article

2nd Place Best Government Studies Program

2nd Place Best Kids Helping Kids Program

2nd Place Most State Life Members

3rd Place Conservation Best Program

Honorable Mention Best American History Program

Honorable Mention Best American Indian Program

Any young person under 22 is eligible for membership in The National Society of the Children of the American Revolution. Members range in age from birth to their 23rd birthday.

Membership in C.A.R. provides a wonderful opportunity for children to participate in historical, educational and patriotic activities. All children who can prove lineage to a patriot of the American Revolution are welcome. Children may join the National Society by invitation of a local society or as a member-at-large and becomes a member upon verification of the application. If you have children or grandchildren who would be interested in joining or would like to learn more about the Children of the American Revolution, email Snowden-Horne Senior Society Registrar, Linda McCooey, at mccooeys@bellsouth.net

FWB Collects Pop Tabs for Congenital Heart Disease

The City of Fort Walton Beach implemented a Pop Tab collection program for the Ronald McDonald House Charities of Northwest Florida in honor of Congenital Heart Disease Awareness during the month of February. Fort Walton Beach Mayor Dick Rynearson declared February as Congenital Heart Disease Awareness Month and invited local city mayors and county commissioners to join him in the campaign. "This is a passion project of Logan Browning, one of our staff members, whose child has congenital heart disease, and we are honored to support him and his family." You can listen to Logan's story on the Let's Talk podcast, brought to you by Omni Broadcasting: Let's Talk (240208) – Raising Awareness: Congenital Heart Defect Month – Freedom 94.3 (talkfreedom.net) Pop Tabs for Ronald McDonald House is a charitable program where communities collect pop tabs and share them with RM House who recycles them and receives money that goes towards funding families in need of assistance while their child is in the hospital. The families never pay for their stay. You

can learn more here: Ronald McDonald House Charities of Northwest Florida (rmhc-nwfl.org)

First Ever Viking Voyage Career Fair

FWBHS hosted its first annual Viking Voyage Career Fair March 1. The mission was to provide valuable opportunities to network, explore and empower students to bridge school and work in various career pathways while connecting learning to the real world. Over 1500 students (grades 9th-12th) had the opportunity to talk and connect with businesses, learn job requirements and explore future job opportunities.

New Airline at VPS

Avelo Airlines recently announced exclusive nonstop service between the Florida Panhandle's Destin-Fort Walton Beach Airport (VPS) and Southern Connecticut's most convenient airport – Tweed-New Haven Airport (HVN—the first and only airline offering nonstop service between Florida's Emerald Coast and Southern Connecticut. Avelo will operate this route twice weekly on Thursdays and Sundays, with a special Friday inaugural flight on May 1. Avelo will operate Boeing Next-Generation 737 aircraft on this route. Introductory low one-way fares between VPS and HVN start at \$79*.

Customers can make reservations at AveloAir.com.

FP&L Awards \$200K in Grants to Help 28 Nonprofits

Florida Power & Light (FPL) recently announced it helped support a variety of needs in the community through 28 nonprofits in Walton, Okaloosa, Santa Rosa and Escambia counties with grants totaling \$210,435. NextEra Energy Foundation, a charitable arm of FPL's parent company, awarded the grants to the Northwest Florida nonprofits each quarter through 2023, with the last ones announced in December. The money will support their programs well into 2024. Foundation grants are focused on education, food insecurity, senior citizen support and child advocacy, as well as grants focused on environmental conservation and protection.

Upcoming Choctawhatchee Audubon Events

March 16, Birding to the Wright Landfill and the Okaloosa Holding Ponds. Leader Malcolm Swan 210.452.4899 (texting encouraged). Meet at 7:30 a.m. at the left side of Roberts Road, 200 feet N. of Helen Back Pizza, 1826 Lewis Turner Blvd. Looking for late ducks, early waders, quick hawks and songbirds. Wear long pants, sturdy closed-toe shoes and hat.

Bring a camera and/or binoculars.

March 23, Field Trip to Conservation Park with Bay County Audubon, near Panama City Beach. Leader Ron Houser 850:774:9733. Meet at 7:30 a.m. in the Park's Parking lot 1/3 mile beyond the north end of Griffin Blvd., the south end, one mile NW from the intersection of US 98 and Hwy 79. This is an open area so be prepared for little shade and cool, windy conditions. Bring your binoculars and/or camera.

Nominations now open for 2024 Women of Honor!

Honor a special woman in your life that has made a positive impact, whether it is recognizing mom, a cherished friend, co-worker or community/organization leader—this is a great gift! Honorees will have a permanent name plate at the UWF Library. Complete your nomination online at www.OCCSW.org. Deadline for entry is Monday, April 8, and \$100 donation to the OCSW, Inc. Foundation can be paid online via PayPal. The recognition ceremony and reception will be held on Thursday, May 2, at the University of West Florida, FWB Campus.



Local Coupons

TAILFINS
FREE SHRIMP CEVICHE APPETIZER
WITH PURCHASE OF ENTREE (LIMIT ONE PER TABLE)
 Offer expires 4/15/24
 172 Harbor Boulevard, Destin
 850-650-1200

SAVVY LEIGH PHOTO
\$25 OFF
FAMILY PHOTO SESSION
MENTION COUPON UPON BOOKING
 Offer expires 4/15/24
www.SavvyLeighPhoto.com | (205) 567-2779
[Instagram.com/SavvyLeighPhoto](https://www.instagram.com/SavvyLeighPhoto)

OVERHEAD DOOR
\$100 OFF A NEW WI-FI DOOR OPERATOR AND FREE DECORATIVE DOOR HARDWARE
WITH EACH DOOR PURCHASE. (NO OTHER DISCOUNTS APPLY.) FINANCING AS LOW AS \$79/MO. W.A.C.
 Offer expires 4/15/24
 850-269-3246
destinoverheaddoor.com

BEACHSIDE SLIDING GLASS DOOR MAINTENANCE, LLC
\$25 OFF SLIDING DOOR TRACK REPAIR WITH ROLLER REPLACEMENT
FREE ESTIMATES
 Offer expires 4/15/24
BeachsideSlide.com
 850-98-SLIDE (850-987-5433)



Sunday
BRUNCH
10AM-3PM

PRIME RIB
THURSDAYS
STARTING 4PM

KIDS EAT
FREE
4PM-6PM
TUESDAY-FRIDAY

KARAOKE
5PM TUESDAY

trivia
night
6:30-8:30 THURSDAY

Ladies'
NIGHT
6PM WEDNESDAY
9PM FRIDAY & SATURDAY

CRAW
FISH
BOIL
SATURDAYS 12PM