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FWB Life



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Saving Lives at Both Ends of the Leash

BY HEATHER BENNETT EYE

The Emerald Coast is home to numerous military bases and we are proud of the service members who call our community home. We deeply appreciate these brave men and women who have chosen a path of service and sacrifice. As we express our gratitude for their dedication, let's not forget the challenges many veterans face.

Statistics reveal that 11-20% of veterans who served in Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom suffer from PTSD, and around 12% of Gulf War veterans are affected by the same condition. Mental health issues extend beyond PTSD with nearly 30% of veterans reporting symptoms of depression and anxiety. Tragically, these challenges contribute to a high rate of suicide among veterans with 22 veterans taking their own lives each day.

Healing Paws for Warriors, Inc. is a veteran-founded, veteran-led 501(c)(3) in Fort Walton Beach that works to bring awareness to veteran suicide and reduce these statistics by



rescuing and training service dogs to pair with combat veterans faced with PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), TBI (Traumatic Brain Injury) and MST (Military Sexual Trauma) along Northwest Florida from Panama City to Pensacola. Through reducing the number of dogs in shelters and empowering veterans, Healing Paws for Warriors is working to "help save lives at both ends of the leash."

Trainer Lisa Russell finds dogs from local shelters that

have the potential to make great service dogs. The dogs undergo 12 weeks of training. This training includes learning to pick up items like credit cards and keys, and the ability to stabilize someone who needs to stand. Once the dogs are trained, veterans are paired with a dog and the two of them, as a team, undergo 8-10 weeks of training at their own pace. "It takes some time," said volunteer and Interim Executive Director Dennis Krebs. "They

have to get used to each other, they have to know each other, and how they act and react." Sometimes initial pairings don't work, and they'll find the veteran another dog. "The big key for us is we're trying to set veterans up for success."

Studies have shown that veterans with service dogs reported a 22% higher reduction in PTSD symptoms compared to those without,

SAVING LIVES
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The Miracle at Seacrest Beach

America Responds

BY RICK KARLE

It was June 8th, and the 15-year-old looked up at her parents following surgery.

A day earlier she had been rushed to Ascension Sacred Heart Hospital in Pensacola.

It was the day after the shark attack.

"I made it," the teenager whispered.

America saved a life on June 7th, 2024.

In fact, America saved the lives of three good folks who simply sought a fun day at the beach.

Lulu Gribbin, McRay Faust and Elisabeth Foley (who lost her hand in a separate attack four miles away) are alive today because of our neighbors who stepped up.

Hardworking, kind people who deserve a shout out—the same people who took part in "The Miracle At Seacrest Beach."

"I haven't stopped thinking about it," Matt Lidle told me days ago.

MIRACLE
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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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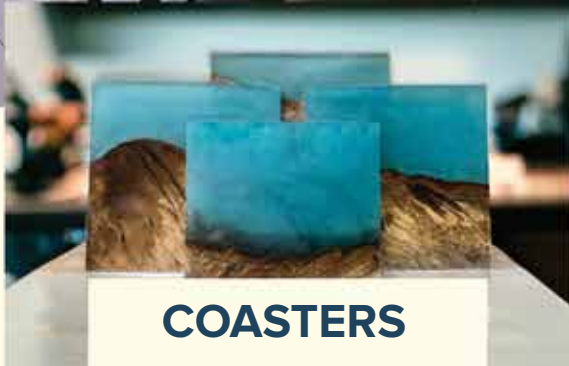
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SAVING LIVES

continued from page 1

and 82% of veterans reported a decrease in suicidal thoughts after getting a service dog. Some have reported improved sleep patterns, increased social interactions, and shown significant improvements in quality of life.

The service dog program through Healing Paws for Warriors, Inc. is completely free to veterans who qualify. Veterans can apply directly on their website. There are basic criteria that applicants must meet, but those who qualify won't be turned away. If a dog cannot be found immediately, they will keep looking for a perfect match. Additionally, if a dog paired with a previous graduate terms out of their service abilities, the veteran will be invited back to train with a new dog and the old dog can become a comfort/emotional support animal.

If you've ever been interested in fostering a dog, this would be a great opportunity for you to honor veterans. "The great thing about our foster program is we provide the food, the crate, dog toys, and a 24/7 connection in case there's a problem with



the dog, so the trainer can be notified," said Dennis. "If we have the right amount of fosters, for the amount of dogs we have, that saves us money from having to pay for kenneling them, so it can go back into the program."

Dogs usually need a foster home from one to three months, and everything they need is provided. If the foster needs to go on vacation or a weekend off, they will go to another foster home while they are away. While the fosters are not responsible for training the dog, it

is recommended that they continue with basic commands and reinforce positive behaviors.

Another way you can help Healing Paws for Warriors, Inc. is through volunteering. "We have so many events, and we need volunteers all the time," said Dennis. Outreach in the community is typically military-oriented, such as hosting events at the American Legion. Volunteers are needed to hand out brochures and merchandise and discuss the application process.



Graduation for this round of veterans and service dogs was on June 22 at the Air Force Armament Museum. Volunteers are always needed to assist with the coordination of graduates and guests and photography of the ceremony. Graduations are open to the public.

Healing Paws for Warriors, Inc. is also reaching out to other organizations such as One Hopeful Place, a local homeless shelter, in order to pay it forward. "The community has been so supportive of us," stated

Dennis. "We all need to support each other. It's a great community that we live in and we can do so much by pooling our resources together. We're starting to reach out to other organizations to assist them."

If you are interested in the application process, fostering, volunteering or donating, please visit the Healing Paws for Warriors, Inc. website at <https://www.healingpawsforwarriors.org>.

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Groundbreaking of the Bridge-to-Bridge Bike Path

BY CAROLYN NEWCOMER KETCHEL

On Monday, July 8th, the county broke ground on a Bike Path at Beasley Park. The ceremony was brief compared to the work and effort that has gone into getting us to this point.

The 12' wide path will go across Brooks Bridge and end at Destin (Marler) Bridge. The path will be on the South side running along the sand dunes. Construction costs will be paid with bed tax dollars, money from our State Legislature and a private donation.

Several constituents advocated for this project, including Kathy Foster and David Hancock, as they watched folks die on bicycles or while trying to exercise on what seemed like a straight road with clear visibility. The issue is that drivers pick up speed on that stretch and are often not paying attention to a cyclist or pedestrian. Statistics on crashes between motor vehicles and cyclists or pedestrians for Okaloosa and Walton Counties over the five-year period between 2019 and 2023 are as follows:

- 730 crashes involved serious injuries or fatalities of vulnerable road users, including bicyclists and pedestrians
- 17% of all pedestrian crashes resulted in fatality
- 18% of all pedestrian crashes resulted in serious injury
- 4% of all bicycle crashes resulted in fatality
- 11% of all bicycle crashes resulted in serious injury

Eglin owns the property on which the bike path will be built. I began work on this effort with Eglin Air Force Base five years ago. That was three Command-



ers ago. COVID intervened and disrupted our ability to work out solutions, but the military has been a wonderful partner in bringing it to fruition. Air Force personnel as well as residents and tourists will enjoy this four-and-a-half-mile path when it is finished.

The path will be far from the roadway, but will not touch or harm the dune line. The current parking that is enjoyed on the gulf side will also be improved during this process. Once the work is underway, completion, (a.k.a. the Ribbon Cutting) is expected by the beginning of spring 2025, barring any weather delays. No motor vehicles will be allowed on the path. It is the

hope that this path will be expanded further East and West in time.

A special thanks to Jason Autry, Okaloosa County Public Works Director, Dale Marks, Executive Director, 86th Test Wing, and Stephen Blalock, Design Engineering Project Manager who designed the path. HDR Engineering also deserves praise for the designed project expertise.

It is an honor and privilege to serve as your commissioner.

Carolyn Ketchel is Okaloosa County Commissioner, District 2.

She can be reached at CKetchel@myokaloosa.com or 850-651-7105

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Re-Elect Eric Aden for Okaloosa County Sheriff

Transparency • Accountability • Tough on Crime!

By MICHELLE RUSCHMAN

When someone deliberately puts themselves at risk for the sake of others, that career goes beyond a job—it's a calling. Sheriff Eric Aden not only answered that call to law enforcement 29 years ago, but his experience reflects his dedication to reducing crime in Okaloosa County. In 2019, Sheriff Aden attended the prestigious FBI National Academy and ran unopposed in the 2020 election where he has served honorably since January 1, 2021. Through this calling, he has stepped into a role that makes him responsible for the safety and well-being of nearly 220,000 residents in addition to 7.8 million annual visitors (2023), and he does so while overseeing nearly 500 employees. His experience in private-sector finance also allows him to manage a budget of over \$60,000,000 while being fiscally conservative to safeguard tax dollars, manage resources and acquire new technology. On August 20, 2024, Sheriff Aden is

asking for our vote to make him Sheriff again.

Eric Aden was born on Eglin Air Force Base in 1971. Mainly residing in Shalimar, he has been a lifelong resident of Okaloosa County, fostering respect not only for the military community, but also for the citizens who grow up in our area.

His father started as a young Air Force pilot and later became an aerospace engineer. His mother spent 25 years as a teacher. Eric grew up playing football, basketball and baseball during his school years, graduated from Choctaw High School and attended Florida State University where he studied Criminology. While at FSU, he interned with the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office (OCSO) in 1993 and upon graduation in 1994, returned home to complete the



law enforcement academy in Niceville. His career began in January 1995. Eric is now married with four daughters, one son and one granddaughter.

In the years leading up to serving as Sheriff, Aden has regularly been recognized as a leader in law enforcement. In 2008 he was recruited for a leadership position with the Walton County Sheriff's Office where he was quickly promoted to Lieutenant over Judicial Services, Civil Process, Warrants, Court Security

and Team Leader for the U.S. Marshal Fugitive Task Force. In 2010, he was again hand-selected for leadership in Okaloosa County to oversee Judicial Services/Court Security, Booking and Detention. Since then, he has also led Criminal Investigations, Evidence, Crime Scene and Criminal Analysts as well as Watch Commanders, part-time/Reserve Deputies, Airport Security Units and Pose Liaisons. Sheriff Aden's experience truly encompasses all facets of law enforcement.

During his recent first term as Sheriff, Aden's leadership was proven through programs such as Real-Time Crime Center and License Plate Readers. These initiatives, along with intensive, deputy training and other measures, reduced violent crime by an astonishing 26% and overall

reported crimes by 8%.

The new Real-Time Crime Center monitors License Plate Readers as well as video surveillance of schools and many local businesses. This has allowed information to be disseminated to patrols and investigations when minutes are critical in the success of open cases. It has led, also, to the arrest of suspects in critical areas such as homicide, robbery, shooting, carjacking and kidnapping.

Sheriff Eric Aden has a proven track record of being committed to full transparency, accountability and a force for good in our community. With our vote, he will continue the work he was created for.


Sheriff Aden's numerous endorsements include Rick Scott U.S. Senator FL, Matt Gaetz U.S. Congressman FL District 1, Patt Maney FL State Representative District 4, Marcus Chambers Superintendent Okaloosa School District and many, many more. For a full list and additional information, visit VoteAden.com.

RE-ELECT
ADEN
SHERIFF

Beating Down Crime, Making Okaloosa Safer.
Violent Crime Rate Down 26%

Sheriff Eric Aden is a proven crimefighter with over 25 years of experience and a distinguished record serving Okaloosa County.

VoteAden.com
ELECTION DAY IS AUGUST 20




Community

MIRACLE

continued from page 1

Matt made good on his promise to chat with me after I called him.

“I wanted to speak to Lulu and her parents first,” Matt said.

The Memphis resident who was on a beach vacation with his wife, Rachel, and his son, Harrison, can’t get the scene out of his mind.

Sterling Duncan works at Seacrest Beach, Fla. Sterling is a Jackson, Tenn., native who on June 7th was at his job working the beach chairs at La Dolce Vita Beach Rentals. “The incident is weighing heavy on me, but I am so appreciative of how many people stepped up,” said Sterling.

I could sense that it’s going to take a while for Sterling to erase the memory of helping get Lulu out of the ocean.

“We had just arrived at Seacrest Beach,” Cole Booker of Brandon, Miss., told me. “My wife and I were just getting settled on our vacation, and I heard the screams. I ran to the ocean.”

Stephen and Kathy Beene share time between Seacrest Beach and Baton Rouge, La.

June 7th was going to be another relaxing day at the beach. It would be anything but.

Cathy Dougherty is an ER nurse from Louisville, Ky.

Cathy and her husband, Joe Sparks, were on vacation, their beach chairs held together by a ratchet strap Joe had purchased before their trip south. Remember the ratchet strap.

“My family members were enjoying the water,” Dr. Ryan Forbess told me from Orange Beach Family Medicine.

Dr. Forbess and his good friend—Dr. Moh Ali—and their



PHOTO COURTESY ANN BLAIR GRIBBIN
Dr. Ryan Forbess and Lulu Gribbin

families, vacation together every year in the Seacrest Beach area.

Right place, right time.

The doctors were enjoying boogie boarding with their kids on June 7th; little did the doctors know how much they would be relied on.

“It had to be a God thing putting all those people at the place they were needed,” Shari Woody, an employee at Orange Beach Family Medicine told me.

There were laughs and giggles from the young teenagers as they frolicked in the surf. It was last Friday afternoon, and the mother-daughter beach trip was in full swing. The good friends from the Mountain Brook, Ala., area were near the sand bar, diving for sand dollars.

That’s when the shark attacked.

“I heard people yell, ‘Shark!’,” Matt Lidle told me.

“I turned and ran into the water toward the girl’s screams and I saw a sea of blood,” Matt told me. Stephen Beene had just pulled the girl away from the shark.

“I was the man who pulled Lulu from the shark,” Beene texted me. “Hand me the girl,”

Lidle said to Beene, as they both tended to Lulu. “We need to get her to shore!”

Matt cradled Lulu Gribbin and ran through the water as fast as his lungs would allow. “She was conscious—she was looking up at me,” said Matt. “I was very concerned, because she had stopped bleeding,” he whispered.

Cole Booker had reached Matt and Lulu just as Matt was tiring. “Help me carry her,” Matt yelled to Cole. “Matt was getting tired. I wanted to grab the girl by the legs,” Cole told me, his voice softening. “I grabbed her by the waist instead,” Cole said.

Lulu’s mother Ann Blair and other moms were hundreds of yards away, strolling on the beach. They ran to the girls that were brought to the beach by Matt, Sterling, Cole and others. (McCray Faust suffered a deep gash on a lower extremity.)

“I saw the wounds on Lulu’s leg and started to scream,” Ann Blair Gribbin wrote on Caring Bridge about seeing her daughter. “The wound on Lulu’s leg, or all that was left of her leg, was something out of a movie. I finally made it back to her and held her hand and she saw me, and I told her I was there. Her eyes were open,” Ann Blair wrote.

America went to work saving Lulu, and America had some help from above, as several of the beachgoers just happened to work in the medical field. “It was amazing,” Dr. Forbess told me. “So many of the people who gathered around Lulu knew medicine.”

Dr. Forbess and Dr. Ali huddled over Lulu.

An EMT who was visiting the beach made tourniquets.

An ER nurse from Louisville



PHOTO COURTESY CARINGBRIDGE
Lulu Gribbin

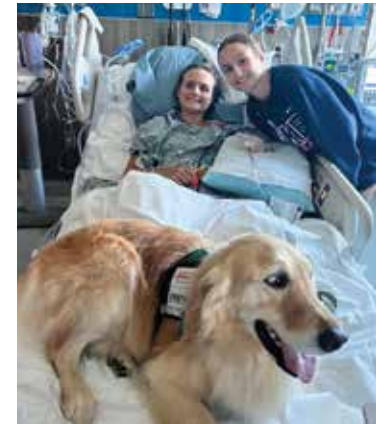


PHOTO COURTESY ANN BLAIR GRIBBIN
Lulu Gribbin and twin sister Ellie

was on vacation and assisted Drs. Forbess and Ali.

An anesthesiologist told the doctors that she was available to help.

Cathy Dougherty put her ER nurse experience to good use. Cathy held up Lulu’s head, placing two fingers on Lulu’s carotid artery and her other hand on Lulu’s chest. She was ready to perform CPR if Lulu stopped breathing.

Cathy’s husband, Joe, is a former lifeguard. Joe threw his ratchet strap to the doctors as he watched his wife hold Lulu’s head. It was the same ratchet strap that was purchased on a whim. It was the strap that would be used as a tourniquet on Lulu’s leg.

The beach patrol was soon on the scene. Experts from the

Continued on page 12

June 7: The Facts

South Walton Fire District (SWFD) and Walton County Sheriff’s Office (WCSO) responded to two shark related incidents, just four miles apart, Friday afternoon, June 7. Two people were critically injured and one other person suffered minor injuries.

The first incident originated around 1:20 p.m. when multiple 911 callers reported an approximately 45-year-old woman was bitten by a shark as she was swimming past the first sandbar near WaterSound Beach. Bystanders began rendering care to the woman before SWFD lifeguards and WCSO deputies arrived on-scene.

Once they arrived on-scene, they found the woman sustained critical injuries on her hip and lower left arm. They initiated treatment, then SWFD firefighters continued care and transported the patient to Walton Air Rescue. The patient was airlifted to the trauma facility at HCA Florida Fort Walton-Destin Hospital to receive further treatment for her injuries, which, later resulted in the amputation of the lower portion of her arm.

About an hour and a half later, a second incident took

place near Seacrest Beach at approximately 2:55 p.m., four miles east of the first incident. It involved two female patients who were approximately 15 years old. According to bystanders, the individuals were in waist deep water with a group of friends when the incident occurred.

When lifeguards and deputies arrived on-scene, they found one of the females had significant injuries to the upper leg and one hand. The other female had minor injuries on one foot. The patient with significant injuries was treated on-scene, then transported by SWFD firefighters to Okaloosa MedFlight. She was then airlifted to the trauma facility at Ascension Sacred Heart of Pensacola for further treatment. SWFD also transported the second patient to the hospital.

Following the incidents, beach flags were changed to double red to indicate the water was closed for swimming that day out of an abundance of caution.

These are the first reported shark attacks in Walton County within the last five years. The last fatal attack was in 2005.

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David Schmidt for Okaloosa County School Board

A Passion for Students, Education and Local Workforce

By MICHELLE RUSCHMAN

Two characteristics of an invested candidate for the Okaloosa County School Board include someone who has gone through the system he wants to lead, and another is that the candidate has children who will be affected by the decisions he will make. David Schmidt, candidate for District 2, fits both criteria. He and his wife, Shannon, are not only esteemed graduates of Okaloosa County, but David has the future vision that his five children, Neyland, Bennett, Malachi, Ramsey and Sawyer will also have the opportunity to thrive in their education.



“My five children will be among 35,000 students in the Okaloosa County School District,” says David. “If elected, I’ll be the only candidate to serve my term while still having children enrolled in the district. I think it’s important to have a boots-on-the-ground mentality in this area of service because not only will I get to apply my professional expertise as an educator, but I’ll also come with my experiences gained from being a parent. This should give voting parents the confidence that I will be acting in their best interest, as well as their children’s.”

There are two areas that David is especially passionate about when it comes to a plan that will positively impact the education of our children. The first one has to do with financial management and accountability. With so many new buildings needed, and so many needing repair, David supports the millions of tax dollars that will create more space and make it safer for our kids to go to school. However, what is needed is a master plan to be approved by the school board and there currently isn’t one, short-term or long-term. Why is that important?

“Master plans help to identify important ‘needs’ in the district and help eliminate simple ‘wants.’ This ensures your tax dollars are being spent wisely with the highest level of Return on Investment (ROI) in mind,” David says.

If elected, David’s goal is to have plans in place, not only for current projects but also to pro-

vide a template to ensure that future projects will keep up with the predicted growth for the district, especially in the north end of the county.

The second area that David is impassioned by is the vision of ALL Okaloosa students graduating with a marketable skill set. “We want our Okaloosa graduates to have the option of living and staying in our community, but we have to equip them with the necessary skills,” he says. “Approximately half of our students will enter college after graduation, where roughly half those will actually finish college. That means one out of four of our high school students will get a college diploma. The research and data also show that only 4% of students will graduate from Okaloosa Schools and enroll into a Technical College. There is a significant number of Okaloosa County students who are going straight into the workforce, many without the necessary skill sets needed to be able to stay and live in our community. We need to make sure they’re ready.”

If elected, David will begin work immediately on a plan to audit all current programs to ensure the tax dollars are being spent on courses that give students the best chance to be marketable to local employers. David’s goal is to increase the long-term professional benefits to the students without having to request new sources of funding. For example, “Eliminating courses with low overall value and diverting the dollars from these courses over to courses with a higher marketability standard is a way to increase student marketability without requesting new sources of funding.”

In 2013, David and Shan-

non established a non-profit organization called “Financial Storehouse.” Through Financial Storehouse they’re able to mentor individuals, groups and students on financial literacy. As

a result, these transformative experiences are not only an investment in the individual, but they are looking at the positive long-term impact on our community. David is looking forward to

servicing the Okaloosa County School Board in the same way: For each student to know their purpose and as a result, for their families to thrive and move forward together.

Vote
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Happenings Around FWB

2024
EVENTS

JULY

- 01** | **Paint Party: Vibrant Flowers**
6:30 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB
- 02** | **STEAM Machine**
10:30 am | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB
Live Music: Bryan Bielanski
5 pm | The Sound Cafe + Enlightened Studios | FWB
Movies on the Beach: Strange World
8 pm | Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar | FWB
- 03** | **sciPad featuring SMALLab**
1 pm | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB
8th Annual Stars & Stripes Celebration
1 pm | AJ's on the Bayou | FWB
Fireworks Show
9 pm | The Boardwalk on Okaloosa Island | FWB
- 04** | **Concerts at the Landing: Scratch 2020**
6 pm | Fort Walton Beach Landing | FWB
Fourth of July Pops! with Sinfonia Gulf Coast
7 pm | Seaside Amphitheater | Seaside
- 05** | **Creature Feature**
1:30 pm | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB
Paint Party: Cotton Candy Moon
5:30 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB
- 06** | **Concealed Carry Weapons Class**
10 am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso
Live Music: Matthew Curry
7 pm | The Sound Cafe + Enlightened Studios | FWB
- 07** | **Live Music: Tim Nowell**
1 pm | Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar | FWB
Women's Climbing Circle
5 pm | Rock Out Climbing Gym | Destin
- 08** | **Kids Camp: Rainbow Sea Creatures**
10 am | Painting with a Twist | FWB
- 09** | **Movies on the Beach: Super Mario Bros**
8 pm | Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar | FWB
- 10-11** | **Step One Subaru FWB Hosts Breast Cancer Screenings**
9:30 am | Step One Subaru | FWB
- 11** | **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
- 12** | **Greater FWB Chamber First Friday Coffee**
7 am | Christian Life Center at FBC | FWB
Chemistry Corner
11:30 am | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB
- 13** | **All Ages Paint Party: Turtle Heading Home**
12 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB

- 16** | **Home Defense Fundamentals**
5:30 pm | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso

Movies on the Beach: Aladdin
8 pm | Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar | FWB
- 18** | **Creature Feature**
11:30 am | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB
Greater FWB Chamber Business After Hours
5:30 pm | Big Gus Tractor & Equipment | Mary Esther
- 19** | **Downtown FWB Ladies Night**
5 pm | TASTE | Fort Walton Beach
75th Celebration with Tacos and Tennis
6 pm | FWB Tennis Center | FWB
Live Music: Maude Caillat Quartet
7 pm | The Sound Cafe + Enlightened Studios | FWB
- 20** | **Concealed Carry Weapons Class**
10 am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso
Sip & Science: Lost in Space
6 pm | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB
- 23** | **Movies on the Beach: The Lego Movie**
8 pm | Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar | FWB
- 24** | **STEAM Machine**
10:30 am | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB
- 25** | **Kids Camp: Neon Safari**
10 am | Painting with a Twist | FWB
- 26** | **Chemistry Corner**
11:30 am | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB
ADSO Gallery Show Reception: Celebrate the Emerald Coast
6 pm | Arts & Design Society (ADS0) | FWB
- 27** | **Paint Party: Purple Mountain Galaxy**
6 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB
- 30** | **Fast Connections - Speed Networking**
12 pm | Beachworx | FWB
Movies on the Beach: Paws of Fury: The Legend of Hank
8 pm | Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar | FWB
- 31** | **Creature Feature**
11:30 am | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB

- ONGOING EVENTS**
- Summer Lawn Games in Grand Park**
5 pm | Daily | Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach
 - VFW Post 7674 - Sunday Breakfasts**
8 am | Sun | 231 Carol Ave | FWB
 - Magical Variety Show**
6 pm & 7:30 pm | Sun | Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar | FWB
 - Pirate Show**
5 pm | Mon | Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar | FWB
 - SINGO Music Bingo Nights**
6 pm | Tues | The Island Resort | FWB
 - Open Mic Night**
7 pm | Weds | The Sound Cafe + Enlightened Studios | FWB
 - Fireworks Show**
9 pm | Weds | The Boardwalk | Okaloosa Island
 - Live Trivia Nights**
6 pm | Thurs | The Island Resort | FWB
 - Live Trivia Nights**
6:30 pm | Thurs | AJ's on the Bayou | FWB
 - Broadway on the Boulevard**
7:30 pm | Thurs | Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach



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	1954 Lewis Turner Blvd FWB	FWB Landing Park	Grand Boulevard Miramar Beach

Mary Anne Windes for County Commissioner, District 5: Knowledge • Experience • Trust

By MICHELLE RUSCHMAN

You don't live in Okaloosa County as a life-long resident and entrepreneur without gaining the perspective of a student, parent, business person, consumer and citizen. This is the experience Mary Anne Windes will be bringing to our community as she puts in her bid to be voted for County Commissioner, District 5, in the August elections.

Mary Anne grew up in Fort Walton Beach, graduating from

you need as a real estate agent, it's the ability to help people. You have to dig to find out what the real motivation is behind why they are doing what they are doing, and if there's a better way, you bring that to their attention."

It's this practice of finding a better way that Mary Anne wants to bring Okaloosa County as the District 5 Commissioner. "Okaloosa County has been good to my family and me, and I've always wanted to give back.

Realtors, she successfully advocated for real estate agents to receive compensation for losses incurred during the BP oil spill. This was done after it had been decided that real estate agents were not to be compensated.

In addition, she has proven her leadership capabilities by serving as Chairman of the Mid-Bay Bridge twice, as Chairman of the Destin Fishing Rodeo as well as Chairman of the Destin Chamber of Commerce Board

of Directors.

These are the kinds of results Mary Anne wants to bring to Okaloosa County! She's asking for our vote so she can get to work.



Mary Anne wants to be someone her grandchildren can look up to.

Fort Walton Beach High School, and getting her Associate of Arts degree in Business when North West Florida State College was still Okaloosa County Community College. She went on to get her Bachelor of Arts degree in Accounting from the University of West Florida and has since lived in Destin for 40 years.

Over the years, Mary Anne has demonstrated a knowledge and love for both the opportunities on land and in the water. As a student she was riding, training, showing horses and teaching riding lessons. Mary Anne is also married to Commissioner Kelly Windes, a third generation Destin fisherman for 40 years. With Captain Kelly fishing seven days a week from March to October for 12 hours a day, Mary Anne became a real estate agent for the flexibility in raising their two children, owning her own brokerage firm for 30 years. It was during that time she learned critical lessons about how she wanted to serve the people who relied on her expertise. "I would talk as many people out of selling real estate as I would take the listing. The ability to sell is not something

I've reached the top in real estate, and I feel like everything in my life has led me to this decision. My auditing background (where I audited condominiums and counties that gave me a well-rounded understanding of the county operations), real estate background, my ability to get things done, work ethic and my integrity puts me in a unique position to be an asset to our Board of County Commissioners."

If elected, Mary Anne's goals include keeping taxes low, keeping the public safe in the wake of open borders, working on attainable housing for all citizens and partnering with the Early Learning Coalition to address the child care crisis. Mary Anne also plans to put her accounting background to good use with her understanding of how spending and inflation impacts both the public and government. Infrastructure will also be a point of focus as well as roads, county services and maintaining county assets.

Mary Anne demonstrated her tenacity in taking care of those she served when, in 2010 as the President of the Emerald Coast Association of

- Knowledge
- Experience
- Trust



Let Mary Anne put her unique set of skills to work for Okaloosa County!




VOTE FOR MARY ANNE

WINDES

REPUBLICAN

FOR OKALOOSA COUNTY COMMISSIONER

DISTRICT 5

Political advertisement paid for and approved by Mary Anne Windes, Republican, for Okaloosa County Commissioner, District 5.

Property Insurance Questions and Answers



By JULIE A. MARTIN, LICENSED AGENT AT ABORA INSURANCE GROUP LLC

Dear readers, storm season is

again upon us, and with the first breath of stormy winds comes confusion when it comes to our insurance options. Why are the rates so high? Why are my premiums higher than my neighbor's when we have the same size house? Why am I being non-renewed for not providing flood insurance when I am not in a flood zone?

All good questions, and we have some answers. First to the question of flood insurance. Citizens and Peoples Trust both enacted rules in accordance with the State of Florida that require flood insurance for properties in flood zones, whether or not your property has a mortgage requiring you to carry it. In addition, Citizens is in the midst of a four-

year plan to get all of their policyholders to carry flood insurance on their homes regardless of flood zone.

Currently, owners of homes with dwelling coverage 600K are required to carry flood insurance on their properties regardless of flood zone in order to maintain a property policy with Citizens Property Corp., the state backed insurer.

Next year, owners of homes with 500K and up will be required to carry flood insurance regardless of zone. By 2027, all homes insured with Citizens will be required to carry flood insurance in order to maintain property insurance with Citizens.

For the readers who are curious to know why two houses on

the same block, with the same square footage, and quality of interior and exterior features would be insured for different amounts, and even have drastically different premiums, there are over 300 different rating factors that determine the pricing structure of a home.

Wind mitigation features are key here. Let's suppose that although both homes were built in 2004, and both have been re roofed with permits, if your neighbor has a Hip shaped roof, which is a roof that slopes on all four sides like a pyramid, and you both have Roof Deck Attachment C, and Clips, and you both have A1 Opening protection, that Hip Roof shape credit could generate an additional 15% premium discount to his home insurance premium. If your neighbor has Hip Roof and opening protection credit, and you do not, there will be a marked difference in the way his home is rated versus the way your home is rated.

Also, comparison of properties needs to consider are the type of property insurance form both homes are covered under. Maybe your neighbor rents his

home out to a long-term tenant, and so his policy would be DP3, which does not require a high level of personal property contents; whereas, your owner occupied HO3 policy requires at least 25% of the dwelling in contents coverage, as is standard under Florida home insurance package policies.

There are eight new carriers in Florida that have recently become authorized to transact new business for property insurance in the state of Florida, within the last few months, which include Orion 180 Select Insurance, Orange Insurance Exchange, Mainsail Insurance and Tailrow Insurance, to name a few. It will take time for the Florida property insurance industry to spread the risk around more evenly in the next year or so for the rates to come down. But, eight new carriers means that there will soon be some relief, even if it might take a year or more for us to see it.

Stay tuned, dear readers. More good news might be just around the corner, but let's be prepared for an active storm season.

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Residential and Commercial

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Updated Health Records: Be sure to have a copy (both physical and digital) of your pet's veterinary records on hand in addition to a recent photo of your pet and the contact information for their vet.

Daily Needs: While it's likely you already have some of this around the house, have an extra stash of their daily needs ready to go in case of evacuation, power outages, or property damage, including food, medications, bowls, leash and collar, and a crate or pet carrier.

Comfort & Entertainment: There is a chance you'll be in an unfamiliar situation for your pet, so keep some comfort items on hand,



too, like calming treats, enrichment toys, and extra blankets or towels.

Founded in 2015 by professional dog trainer Nancy Bown, CPDT-KA, Dog-Harmony is a non-profit 501(c)3 charitable organization dedicated to enhancing the relationship between dogs and humans through ongoing community education. Simply put, they help dogs rescue people!

To learn more or make a donation, visit dog-harmony.org.

Florida Laws Helping Homeowners



BY MELISSA FORTE-LITSCHER,
NEXTHOME CORNERSTONE
REALTY

New laws affecting homeowners have been passed recently by the Florida legislature that went into effect Jul 1, 2024. As a homeowner, or potential homeowner, these laws are intended to help Floridians save money on home purchasing and home maintenance.

First, to help first-time homebuyers, the **Hometown Heroes Housing Program** has received an additional \$100 million. It's an extension of last year's Live Local Act, which encourages private investments in affordable housing. There is grant money available to help with down payment assistance and to cover some closing costs. The new funds will also help clarify local zoning, height and density regulations to ensure that counties and cities have the necessary guidance to create more affordable housing options in their areas. This law provides significant financial support and regulatory clarity to boost affordable housing, making it easier for first-time homebuyers to enter the market.

Lawmakers have also allocated \$408 million to support state and local affordable housing initiatives. This includes \$174 million for the **State Housing Initiatives Partnership (SHIP)**, which provides down payment and closing cost assistance, and \$234 million for the State Apartment Incentive Loan program (SAIL) to help build affordable rental housing. This substantial funding boost aims to increase affordable housing availability through direct financial assistance and incentives for building rental properties.

To help with maintenance and storm protection, the **My Safe Florida Home** program has had an additional \$200 million added to it to help more Floridians protect their homes from storms and reduce their insurance premiums. The bill also allows for home inspections without needing to apply for a grant and enables low-income homeowners to receive up to \$10,000 without having to match the amount. The program administrator is also required to streamline the grant process, prioritizing reviews based on income and age. This law aims to make homes safer from storms while helping homeowners save on insurance costs, especially benefiting low-income households, and providing our seniors priority applications. This program has been expanded to include condominiums, with \$30 million allocated to help condos within 15 miles of the coast strengthen their roofs and openings against storms. This expansion helps en-

sure that condominiums near the coast are better protected from storm damage.

The **Property Insurance Cost Reductions Act** includes a one-year relief for residential property insurance policyholders, covering the cost of insurance premium tax for a 12-month period to give homestead property owners a deduction on their residential property insurance premiums in the amount of 1.75% of the policyholder's total premium. It applies to policies with coverage for a 12-month period. This is a measure taken to bridge the gap as earlier policy reforms are working, but haven't reached the masses of Floridians yet.

Lastly, **Protecting Private Property Rights** is a law which addresses issues with squatters by allowing property owners or their agents to request the immediate removal of people unlawfully occupying residential properties. It provides property owners with a quicker legal process to remove squatters from their properties, some of whom sometimes contribute to neighborhood nuisance, proper-



ty damage and deterioration.

Owning a home has many benefits and building financial stability is one of the most important ones. Of course, there are costs associated with it, and our Florida Association of Realtors and our legislature are working hard to protect the rights and financial interests of our citizens.

These policies are examples

of positive changes recently enacted. If you would like information on these programs and how to apply for them, contact your favorite Realtor and ask.

Remember, I'm at your service. Call or text me at (850) 496-7444 or email Melissa@NextHomeCornerstone.com.

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Community

MIRACLE

continued from page 6

South Walton Fire District and the Walton County Sheriff's Office arrived within minutes—still, it was touch and go.

"She was going in and out of consciousness," Dr. Forbess said. "Luckily, Dr. Ali is an expert in radiology. He knew exactly where to apply pressure to the femoral artery. It was all about ABC: Artery, Blood, Circulation," he told me.

Lulu was rushed to Ascension Sacred Heart Pensacola, where talented doctors and nurses took over lifesaving procedures.

Lulu Gribbin lost her left hand. She later had her right leg amputated between the knee and the hip.

But a community came together and helped save a life, and Lulu's mother, Ann Blair, is grateful, writing on Caring Bridge:

"I am eternally grateful for the 3 surgeons and all the nursing staff and doctors here who saved Lulu. I am grateful for the doctors and nurses on the beach that day. I am grateful for the EMT's on the beach and the crew in the air. I am grateful for the individuals who pulled her out of the water."

Stephen Beene, the first person to reach Lulu as the shark attacked is thankful that Lulu is doing well. "My family's



PHOTO COURTESY SHARI WOODY
Dr. Ryan Forbess



PHOTO COURTESY SHARI WOODY
Dr. Moh Ali



PHOTO COURTESY JANE BEENE
Stephen Beene



PHOTO COURTESY COLE BOOKER
Cole Booker



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Sterling Duncan



PHOTO COURTESY MATT LIDLE
Matt Lidle



PHOTO COURTESY AMY DOUGHERTY HIRBY
Cathy Dougherty

thoughts and prayers continue to be with Lulu and her family. She is a special girl and one tough cookie," he texted.

Matt Lidle is back in Mem-

phis, and still can't seem to get Lulu off his mind. "I have spoken with Lulu and the family and they seem to be doing as good as can be," he told me.

ful community, America came together and saved a life.

While Lulu Gribbin faces a long road ahead, she's forging on. She is amazing and strong and fierce and beautiful, and she's smiling more often these days.

Because Lulu has made it.

Thanks to "The Miracle at Seacrest Beach."

Birmingham's Rick Karle is a 43-year TV news veteran and a 25-time Emmy winner. His "good news" stories can be found on Facebook at Rick Karle Good News. You can email Rick your story ideas at RickKarleGoodNews@gmail.com

From the Publisher

As have many of you, FWB Life has been following the accounts of the recent, rare shark attacks that happened in our area June 7. We are all saddened to hear of these tragic events regarding all three victims. However, we are grateful for the heroes (ordinary people accomplishing extraordinary feats) in the water and on the beach that day, as well as the Walton Co. Sheriff's Office, South Walton Fire District, local doctors, nurses, flight crews, hospital staff and many others. We want to recognize you and thank you! We know God was there; and was working through these brave men and women to save lives. Thank you also, Rick Karle, for telling this story so eloquently and allowing us to print it.

Lulu is progressing miraculously each day; you can follow her progress through her mom, Ann Blair Gribbin, on Caring-Bridge.org. Search Lulu Gribbin.

To help support Lulu, you can contribute to the Caring For Lulu fund at Oakworth Capital Bank through Zelle, Caringforlulu@gmail.com. Or mail a check made out to Richard Littrell and Stephen Faust FBO Lulu Gribbin: Oakworth Capital Bank. Attn: Richard Littrell FBO Lulu Gribbin, 850 Shades Creek Pkwy., Suite 200, Birmingham, AL 35209. Cards can be sent to Lulu Strong, P.O. Box 660257, Birmingham, AL 35266-0257.

You can support Elizabeth Foley through GiveSendGo.com, "Supporting Elizabeth Foley & The Foley Family."

~ Lori Leath Smith

ATTENTION!

Go Register to Vote by July 22, 2024

Go Vote in the Okaloosa Primary August 20, 2024

The nine contested offices up for election (incumbent listed):

Federal:

U.S. House of Representatives, District 1 (Matt Gaetz)

County Offices:

Sheriff (Eric Aden)

Board of County Commissioners, District 1, 3, & 5 (1—Paul Mixon)

School Board, District 2

Municipal:

Crestview City Council, Group 1

Mary Esther City Council

Destin City Council (Destin, Hebert, King, Schmidt)

Party Offices:

Republican State Committeewoman (Sherri Cox)

Republican State Committeeman

BE A RESPONSIBLE PATRIOT—GO VOTE!

- Doug "Doc Doug" Stauffer

(pictured with Teddy Roosevelt during the Billy Bowlegs Parade)

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Teddy Roosevelt

Doug "Doc Doug" Stauffer

Education News

Okaloosa Continues Top 10 Tradition!

The Florida Department of Education has released this year's results for the Florida Assessment of Student Thinking (FAST) and End of Course Exams. Each year, students are required to take statewide assessments in ELA grades 3-10, Mathematics grades 3-8, Algebra, Geometry, Science grades 5 and 8, Biology, Civics, and U.S. History. A combined analysis of all test results show Okaloosa Schools continue to rank in the top 10 school districts out of 67 in the state of Florida for the 2023-24 school year. Specifically, Okaloosa ranked 10th overall, while excelling in areas such as 5th, 7th, and 8th grade Reading, as well as 7th and 8th grade Mathematics, and 8th grade Science, which all ranked in the top six in the state. Additionally, the overall middle school test results shined as some of the best in the state with our students ranking 3rd in Math, 4th in Science, and 6th in ELA.

The results of these assessments, along with other academ-

ic indicators, are used to produce school grades, which are anticipated to be released in August. For more information on assessment results, visit <https://www.fldoe.org/accountability/assessments/k-12-student-assessment/results/2024.stml>.



NWFSC Selects Dr. Cristie Kedroski to Serve as Interim President

Northwest Florida State College (NWFSC) has selected Dr. Cristie Kedroski as Interim President and was effective July 6, 2024. Dr. Kedroski's selection by the Board of Trustees was

unanimous, reflecting the confidence and trust placed in her ability to lead with integrity, vision and a deep understanding of the college's mission.

Dr. Kedroski brings with her more than 20 years of community, economic and higher education experience. Her background demonstrates significant achievements in academic administration, student services, grant management and community outreach. Dr. Kedroski has been instrumental in developing innovative academic programs and spearheading initiatives that enhanced student retention and graduation rates as well as overseeing enrollment management strategies that have led the college to seven consecutive semesters of increased enrollment.

Visit www.nwfsc.edu.

NWFSC Bestows President Emeritus Title on Dr. Devin Stephenson

The Northwest Florida State College (NWFSC) Board of Trustees has conferred the prestigious title of President Emeritus on Dr. Devin Stephenson,



recognizing his exemplary service and leadership over the past 7.5 years as president.

In accepting the honor, Dr. Stephenson expressed his gratitude and reflected on his tenure, Dr. Stephenson's leadership

at Northwest Florida State College has been marked by a steadfast commitment to academic excellence, community engagement and student success. Under his guidance, the Collegiate High School is on a path to en-

roll over 500 students. The college has secured more than \$73 million in grant awards, and Raider Athletics has won three additional national championships. Dr. Stephenson also oversaw the opening of the Aviation Center of Excellence and the completion of the Raider Village student housing initiative. Additionally, the NWFSC Foundation's net assets increased by

Continued on page 16





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Northwest Florida State College is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) to award associate and baccalaureate degrees. Degree-granting institutions also may offer credentials such as certificates and diplomas at approved degree levels. Questions about the accreditation of Northwest Florida State College may be directed in writing to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges at 1866 Southern Lane, Decatur, GA 30033-4097, by calling (404) 679-4500, or by using information available on SACSCOC's website (www.sacscoc.org).



Brig. Gen. Mark A. Massaro Takes Command of the 96th Test Wing at Eglin Air Force Base

By DOUG STAUFFER

In a ceremony rich with tradition, Brig. Gen. Mark A. Massaro assumed command of the 96th Test Wing from Brig. Gen. Jeffrey T. Geraghty on July 3, 2024. Despite the rainy weather outside, the McKinley Climatic Laboratory provided a perfectly climate-controlled environment for the event, which was presided over by Maj. Gen. Evan C. Dertien, Air Force Test Center commander. "I'm so happy to return to Eglin," Massaro expressed in his remarks. "While it's fantastic to return as a previous member of the test wing, and it's comforting to be back as a Florida native, even in July, what causes me to smile the most is getting to contribute to this mission again."

Brig. Gen. Massaro, a seasoned command pilot with over 2,200 combat hours, began his test pilot career in 2007 with Eglin's 40th Flight Test Squadron.

His extensive experience includes deployments supporting Allied Force, Southern Watch, Iraqi Freedom, and Enduring Freedom operations. As the new commander, he leads over 10,000 military personnel, civilians, and contractors. The wing is responsible for the developmental testing and evaluation of conventional munitions, command and control systems, aircraft avionics and guidance systems, and radar cross-section measurements. Additionally, Massaro will oversee a 120,000 square mile over-water test range and facilities in six states and all base operating support, infrastructure and services support for Eglin.

Maj. Gen. Dertien highlighted the significance of Eglin Air Force Base and its role in developing joint capabilities to support national objectives. "Eglin is on the leading edge of forging new technologies into fielded



Left to right: Okaloosa County Commissioner Mel Ponder, Becky Massaro and Brig. Gen. Mark A. Massaro

capabilities and supporting a diverse array of joint activities," Dertien said.

Brig. Gen. Massaro's extensive background includes commanding the 412 Operations Support Squadron and the 495th Fighter Group. He has flown over 100 combat hours in the F-16, commanded a classified assignment and served as the 495th Operations Group commander at Shaw Air Force

Base, South Carolina.

In his first address as commander, Massaro emphasized his excitement about returning to Eglin after 15 years. "I'm humbled to be here today as the commander of the 96th Test Wing," he said. Massaro out-

lined his priorities: executing the mission, caring for people, and partnering for success. He emphasized the wing's role in advancing the Air Force's operational imperatives, including strengthening the nation's air-delivered arsenal, enhancing navigation and guidance systems, and developing joint all-domain command and control systems.

Massaro also stressed the im-

portance of partnerships within Team Eglin and with the local community. "I am committed to continuing the strong relationships that have been built up over these past years as we partner for success," he said.

The ceremony included several traditional elements, such as the passing of the unit guidon to symbolize the transfer of command. The 96th Test Wing Honor Guard presented the colors, and General Geraghty's daughter sang the national anthem. An F-16 aircraft bearing Massaro's name was unveiled as part of the welcome for the new commander.

As Brig. Gen. Massaro takes the helm, he brings a wealth of experience and a deep commitment to the mission and people of the 96th Test Wing. The change of command ceremony underscored the critical role of

Continued on next page

5

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Lt. Gen. Michael Conley Takes the Helm at Hurlburt Field

By DOUG STAUFFER

In a significant ceremony at Hurlburt Field Air Force Base, Lt. Gen. Tony Bauernfeind passed the special operations wings flag to the incoming commander, Lt. Gen. Michael Conley, marking a pivotal moment for the Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC). The event, attended by Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. David W. Allvin, underscores the importance of this transition for the more than 24,000 people living and working at the base in Okaloosa County.

Lt. Gen. Michael E. Conley now leads AFSOC, the Air Force component of U.S. Special Operations Command. This command comprises approximately 20,800 active-duty, Reserve, Air National Guard and civilian professionals, providing specialized operations forces for global deployment and assignment to unified combatant commanders. Lt. Gen. Conley brings extensive experience and a decorated career to his new role.

Having received his commission through the United States Air Force Academy in 1996, Lt. Gen. Conley completed pilot training in 1998. His operational experience spans flying the UH-1N, MH-53, and CV-22,

with most of his assignments in special operations aviation. Conley's career includes multiple staff assignments, such as serving on the Joint Staff as Special Assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and at Headquarters Air Force. He has commanded a squadron, wing, and multiple deployed special operations air components. Most recently, Conley served as the Director of Operations at AFSOC headquarters.

At the ceremony held on July 2 inside Freedom Hangar, Gen. Allvin emphasized the evolving nature of global threats and the critical role of AFSOC in national security. "There are aspiring great powers developing capabilities and demonstrating the will to use them in ways that threaten our national security. The character of war is changing," Allvin remarked, highlighting the importance of readiness and adaptability in current and future conflicts.

Lt. Gen. Bauernfeind, reflecting on his tenure, commended his command for navigating the changing landscape of the Air Force. "You've brought forward capabilities like the Theater Air Operations Squadrons, focusing on our regional adversaries with exceptional intel teams, mission planners, and air advisors.

tions forces and other specialized units.

The event concluded with the Air Force song, marking the official transfer of leadership. Brig. Gen. Massaro now leads the wing's efforts in testing and evaluating systems critical to U.S. military capabilities in an era of great power competition.



Building relationships with our allies and partners is crucial for our collective security," Bauernfeind said.

Taking command, Lt. Gen. Conley outlined his vision for

AFSOC's future, emphasizing innovation and resilience. "It will take all of us rowing together to ensure we're ready. 'Any place, anytime, anywhere' isn't just our motto. It's our way of life," Conley stated. He expressed his readiness to lead and work alongside the elite combat force at Hurlburt Field, assuring that all current policies and directives remain in effect.

Lt. Gen. Conley has a distinguished record, with over 2,400 flight hours across several special operations aircraft. His leadership roles at Hurlburt Field include serving as the 1st Special Operations Wing commander from June 2018 to

2020. Addressing the air commandos in formation, Conley reinforced the command's mission. "We exist to do what others are unable to do or unwilling to attempt. We must remain ready to fight tonight, just like our teammates currently in the fight downrange," he said.

The ceremony, attended by base officials, airmen, and elected leaders, including U.S. Rep. Matt Gaetz, marked the beginning of a new chapter for AFSOC under Lt. Gen. Conley's leadership. His experience, dedication, and vision set a promising course for the future of the command and its critical role in national defense.



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Magnolia Grill

In 2001, Magnolia Grill in Fort Walton Beach opened its doors after a renovation that

took 18 months—and it's been thriving since. A local's favorite dubbed "The Museum That Serves Food," you'll find equal parts museum and dining establishment. Its second floor contains artifacts from World War II, Vietnam and other segments of American history. And downstairs—is where 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 Sauce and Filet Tips Florentina. But there's also steaks, seafood "Camp Walton style" and even a kids' menu.

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

magnoliagrillfwb.com
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EDUCATION NEWS

continued from page 13

40%, reaching over \$65 million.

Dr. Stephenson has been selected as the next president of Florida Polytechnic University in Lakeland, Fla., and began July 7, 2024

FWBHS Digital Video Students Win KinderVision/ The Greatest Save Teen PSA Competition in the Technical Category

Three Fort Walton Beach High School (FWBHS) students, Maverick Hendley, Michael Dixon and Kiera Stover, clinched victory for the sub-

mission of their video called "Poison" as the 2024 Teen PSA Contest Technical Winner. Poison will be the Teen PSA entry into the After-School Film Institute's Film Festival in Miami in January 2025. Reflecting on the win, Maverick Hendley shared, "This award is my first bit of recognition, and the experience I learned from making this video and being in this contest was my first step to true acknowledgment and experience

in this industry. I wish now to learn more and get better." FWBHS Digital Video Instructor, Ivan McMillin, proudly states, "Winning the National TEEN PSA Technical Video Award is a testament to the impact of our school's Career and Technical Education (CTE) program. It not only showcases our student's talent and commitment to film, but also reflects the high standards and effectiveness of our CTE program. This should in-

still confidence in all students to pursue their passions with dedication."

The KinderVision Foundation, a 501c-3 nonprofit organization, was established in 1991. The Teen PSA Program: Peer-to-Peer Prevention Education aims to empower children and teens through peer-to-peer education to prevent victimization. FWBHS has submitted entries for this competition since 2013 and has won State awards twice, but "Poison" is the first National award the school has received. In addition, 2024 is the first year the Technical Category has been included in the competition. For more information about the Teen PSA program and to view the video "Poison," please visit <https://teenpsa.org>.

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Dive into Summer Fun and More at Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park!

By MARY FOMBY

Splash 'N Play with Dolphins in This Unique Encounter!

Are you looking for a memorable experience for the whole family this summer? Look no further than the Splash 'N Play encounter at the Gulfarium! Join us for an interactive and educational water adventure that will leave you smiling from ear to ear.

During this unique encoun-

ter led by one of our expert Marine Mammal trainers, guests ages eight and up will have the opportunity to get waist-deep in the water with a member of our playful dolphin family, touching, feeding and learning all about this magnificent species.

Whether you're a lifelong dolphin enthusiast or experiencing the magic for the first time, the Splash 'N Play encounter promises an experience you'll never forget. Book your encounter at Gulfarium.com today to ensure your spot in the water!



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Whether you're a lifelong dolphin enthusiast or experiencing the magic for the first time, the Splash 'N Play encounter promises an experience you'll never forget. Book your encounter at Gulfarium.com today to ensure your spot in the water!

Gulfarium Invites Kids to Sunset Camp for an Unforgettable Experience

Get ready for an adventure like no other! The Gulfarium is thrilled to announce this year's Sunset Camp dates, where kids can dive into the wonders of marine life and create memories to last a lifetime. On select evenings throughout the summer, children aged 6-14 are invited to join us for an immersive evening-long camp experience.

During Sunset Camp, young

explorers will have the opportunity to engage with our incredible dolphin pod in a dockside encounter, learn from our expert trainers and education specialists, enjoy an exploratory venture along the Emerald Coast beach at dusk, eat dinner next to our pinniped friends at Seal Harbor, and participate in hands-on activities designed to inspire a love for conservation and marine life.

Spaces are limited. So, be sure to reserve your child's spot today for an unforgettable Sunset Camp experience at the Gulfarium!

Manatees, Coming This Fall

All information regarding dates, tickets and requirements can be found at Gulfarium.com. Patrick Berry, CEO of Gulfarium, announced recently a multi-million dollar renovation of the original 300,000-gallon dolphin habitat to accommodate manatee rehabilitation patients as part of the Manatee Rescue and Rehabilitation Part-



nership (MRP). This initiative underscores Gulfarium's dedication to marine life conservation, with plans to welcome manatees in need beginning fall of 2024.

Follow Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park and Gulfarium C.A.R.E. Center on Facebook and Instagram for event updates and marine conservation news.

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 Off the Hook

Dorothy and Friends Are Headed Home!

Gulfarium C.A.R.E. Center Releases Five More Sea Turtles Back to the Gulf

Amidst a gathering of locals, tourists and passionate sea turtle advocates in June, five rehabilitated sea turtle patients were joyously returned to their natural habitat in the Gulf of Mexico. The event, held at Topsail Hill State Preserve, marked a significant milestone for these remarkable animals and the dedicated team at the Gulfarium C.A.R.E. Center who tirelessly worked to-

wards their recovery.

Lapinta, a subadult loggerhead sea turtle, was accidentally foul-hooked at Okaloosa Fishing Pier on June 7, 2024. She had no other hooks or injuries and received supportive care at the C.A.R.E. Center. Lapinta was named by Kim through his donation at the inaugural "C.A.R.E. on the Coast" fundraising event held in May.

Weighing 103 lbs., Lapinta excitedly returned home to the Gulf.

Dorothy, hooked in the mouth at Navarre Beach Fishing Pier, had one internal hook in her GI, but thankfully it passed naturally. Weighing 84 lbs., Dorothy returned to her natural environment with a promising future ahead.

Charlotte, an adult Kemp's




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ridley weighing 60.5 lbs., was foul hooked at Okaloosa Island Fishing Pier on June 12, 2024. Charlotte was medically cleared for release by the Gulfarium C.A.R.E. Center veterinary staff and eagerly made her way back to the emerald waters.

Rallis, a subadult loggerhead who weighs 136 lbs., was hooked in the front left flipper with a tarpon jig at the Pensacola Beach fishing pier. The care provided to Rallis and all the sea turtles that come through the Gulfarium C.A.R.E. Center is funded by the gracious donations of the community. Rallis braved the waves to return to his home.

Finally, Lilith, an adult Kemp's ridley was hooked at Navarre Beach Fishing Pier on June 11, 2024. Weighing 60 lbs., luckily, she suffered from no internal hooks so once she received a clean bill of health

from staff, she was ready to return to the Gulf.

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

Follow the C.A.R.E. Center on Facebook to learn more about sea turtles and the center's rehabilitation efforts. The C.A.R.E. Center and its patients can be visited as part of a general admission ticket to Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park.

The Gulfarium CARE Foundation, a 501(c)(3) non-profit, is proud to act as a beacon for coastal conservation through marine animal rescue and rehabilitation.

Donations are tax-deductible and can be made online on the C.A.R.E. Center's webpage or through their Amazon Wishlist.

Growing the Game: The Emerald Coast Golf Tour

By BARBARA PALMGREN

When your goal is to compete in the PGA Tour and win thousands of dollars playing a game you love, where do you start?

It might begin when you are young, competing first at the youth, high school and college level. And then? You navigate professional tours like this one, invest in Q-School in the fall and their qualifying tournaments and vie for the “golden ticket” for a few invitational slots each year to the PGA. If



you aren't one of the top players to earn entry into the PGA, you hope you have acquired enough points to earn entry to the Korn



Ferry Tour. This organization is similar to the minor leagues in baseball and players can win



money with top players advancing also to the PGA. There are also other rare opportunities to be selected as a member of

the PGA or Korn Ferry Tours as well. The goal, however, remains the same. To be one of the top professional golfers in the world!

But, the weekend of June 7-9 at Shalimar Pointe Golf Club, 12 touring professional golfers, dreaming this PGA dream, teed off with amateur golfers who paid an entry fee to be part of a four-person team led by a touring professional in a two day two-ball tournament. After two

Continued on page 21

Run With It!

Locally owned and operated Run With It in Fort Walton Beach has been supplying our community with high quality running and walking gear since 2008. Run With It supplies top of the line technical running and walking shoes, apparel and accessories for any running or walking need.

Comments from happy customers:

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for running shoes. Good selection for men and women. They have the ability to analyze your personal running style and are extremely friendly and knowledgeable about their products. They take the time to describe each shoe and what to expect running in it. We'll continue to give them our business.”

“Came in here to find some running shoes. I have a very small foot (I wear a 3.5 in chil-

dren's shoes), so I was so excited to find shoes here that I could actually try on before purchasing. The lady helping me was very sweet. I love that I got to run on the treadmill before purchasing as well! I also got some really wonderful socks and flip flops.”

“Great running apparel/accessories/shoe store (and they've got lots of Pickleball apparel/accessories as well). The

staff can get you in the right pair of shoes for your gait/biomechanics for running (or walking). There is a large assortment of shoes, and a nice selection of apparel for the runner/athlete or someone who just likes athleisure apparel for everyday wear. The owners are sweet folks who support the community. The store also organizes several local races (5Ks, 10Ks, and Half marathons) during the

year as well as supports the local track club and other groups with races those groups sponsor. Stop in for some new shoes, an outfit, or a neat accessory (GPS watch, hydration bottle, running fuel, electrolyte supplement, sunglasses, or to register for an upcoming local run). RWI is my running home.”



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Area Marine Biologist's Shark Insights and Safety Tips

BY JOE MOORE, FOUNDER, 30A SEALIFE DISCOVERY CENTER AND APPLSEED EXPEDITIONS

Hello, my name is Joe Moore. I hold a master's degree in Fishery Science from the University of West Florida and have extensive experience teaching marine biology in Hawaii, the Galapagos, California, and Florida. As the founder of the 30A Sealife Discovery Center and Appleseed Expeditions, as well as a Walton County resident, I'd like to share my perspective on the recent shark attacks along 30A in the Florida Panhandle.

I recently conducted an aerial survey using my paraglider over the region where the incidents occurred to investigate potential threats or anomalies in the ocean waters. Here are my findings:

Factors Contributing to Shark Presence

June Grass Proliferation: I observed extensive June grass along the shoreline. This phenomenon attracts baitfish, sea turtles, and other marine wildlife closer to the shore, creating a rich feeding ground for predators.

Abundance of Bait Fish: I noted an unusually high number of baitfish near the shore and around artificial reefs. This dense population of prey attracts small sharks, likely blacktip and sandbar sharks, which I identified from the air due to their sleek bodies and pointy snouts.

Early Arrival of Tarpon: Typically, tarpon migrate north in May and June, peaking in August and September. However, this year, they arrived early and in larger numbers, feeding on baitfish near the shore.



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Goliath Groupers and Devil Rays: I spotted large goliath groupers under the piers and numerous devil rays feeding on plankton. The presence of these rays indicates a significant amount of plankton in the water, further enriching the food web.

Loggerhead Sea Turtles: I observed many large loggerhead sea turtles offshore. June marks the peak nesting season for these gentle giants. Large sharks often wait in shallow waters to ambush these turtles, making the waters near shore more susceptible to shark interaction.

Shark Behavior and Human Interaction

The combination of abundant baitfish, plankton, and sea turtles has drawn more sharks, including potentially dangerous bull sharks, closer to shore. The increase in marine activity has also coincided with a peak tourist season, increasing the chances of shark encounters.

Safety Tips for Enjoying the Emerald Coast

To ensure a safe and enjoyable experience at the beach, here are some important precautions:

Swim in Groups: Sharks are less likely to approach groups of people.

Avoid Dawn and Dusk: These are peak feeding times for sharks. Stay out of the water during these times.

Stay Out of Murky Waters: Sharks may bite out of curiosity when visibility is low.

Our waters along the Emerald Coast are usually clear, so avoid swimming when the water is churned up.

Avoid Night Swimming: Sharks are more active at night.

Stay Clear of Fishing Areas: Avoid swimming where bait is present in the water, as this attracts sharks.

By following these guidelines, you can greatly reduce the risk of a shark encounter and enjoy the beauty of our white sandy beaches safely.

Enhancing Marine Science Education

As the founder of the 30A Sealife Discovery Center and Appleseed Expeditions, I am dedicated to educating students about marine science. We offer school marine science trips and school trips focused on studying sharks and other marine life. These programs provide hands-on learning experiences, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of our oceans.

If you are interested in learning more about marine biology, shark behavior and ocean conservation, consider joining one of our educational trips. Together, we can enhance our knowledge and contribute to the preservation of our precious marine ecosystems.

Stay safe, enjoy the beach, and remember to respect the ocean and its inhabitants.

For more information, visit appleseedexpeditions.com or on Facebook at Appleseed Expeditions.

Helping Older Adults Prepare for Emergency Situations

By KIM WONSICK,
J&B MEDICAL, INC.

It's officially hurricane season. Are you prepared? Preparation for a major weather event (or any type of emergency) can look different for each family. For example, preparations in a household with babies or young children will likely look very different than in a household with just a couple of young adults. This applies all the way across the board from households with pets to individuals with special needs and everyone in between. An often overlooked demographic that might need additional consideration is the older adult community. Older adults may have specific needs after a disaster, and without proper planning, those needs could go unmet.

According to FEMA, the best way to start planning is to assess your needs. In this area,

hurricanes are a major concern for several months out of the year. So, having access to severe weather forecasts and updates is crucial. Sign up for weather alerts on your phone, or secure a weather radio. Then consider your dietary, medication and mobility needs if you were to be displaced from your home for an extended period of time. Develop an evacuation plan with a trusted friend or resources within the community, taking into account necessary accommodations for transportation, service animals, and medical equipment.

Once you've assessed your needs, start making the necessary arrangements. This starts with an adequate emergency kit to include the basics such as flashlights, water, batteries, non-perishable foods, etc. in the event you are able to shelter in place during the storm.



Also, having your medications or medical devices in a portable container will allow for quick and handy access. Keeping everything close by during the event will prevent you from having to navigate a potentially dark home during a power outage. Also, keep all pertinent documents in one central location that can be quickly accessed in case an emergency evacuation is necessary. This includes (but is not limited to) insurance cards,

a will, a power of attorney and a list of emergency phone numbers and contact information for family, friends and your doctors.

Finally, share your detailed plans with a trusted friend, family member or neighbor. Also, consider sharing a key to your home with this person and arrange for them to check on you before, during (if possible) and after the storm. Utilize your support network and community resources to help you

navigate through the planning process and the potential aftermath of any emergency situations. For more comprehensive information, visit <https://www.ready.gov/older-adults>. And to register for a local special needs shelter visit: <https://bit.ly/OC-SpNS>

We here at J&B Medical can also lend a hand with your preparations! We have portable outlets that support a CPAP machine for up to 14 hours in between charges. It's perfect to have on hand not only during hurricane season, but all year long as power outages can occur at any time. We also have first aid kits and other items useful in your emergency kits. And last, we have community resource information from the Florida Department of Health and Okaloosa County. Stop by and see how we can help!

GOLF TOUR

continued from page 19

days, the touring professional golfers spent a final day to decide who would win the three-day Emerald Coast Golf Tour Tournament.

The Emerald Coast Golf Tour is owned and directed by Geno Celano. Geno organized this tour 30 years ago. Geno was a professional golfer, participating in tours like Korn Ferry.

Back then, the names for these tours include Nike, Ben Hogan, etc. Like Korn Ferry, these tours were the entry points into the PGA tour. Gino grew up in Okaloosa County, attending Choctawhatchee High School and playing on the golf team. He also competed for college teams at Florida State and Alabama. Golf was in his DNA and he toured in competitions like this one all over the country, especially in Orlando. But

there was nothing available in the Panhandle.

Yes, Geno made the decision to organize the Emerald Coast Golf Tour in our area. Geno put professional golf on the map for us.

Participants in the ECGT tournament in June at Shalimar Pointe Golf Club registered from all over the south: Alabama, Louisiana, Georgia, and Florida. The weather was warm and the course was challenging. Geno made hotel and meal arrangements for the touring professionals as well as planning the tournament itself. Enthusiastic golfers from the tri-county area were invited to register and join

a team. Each team was led by one of the touring professionals. For the amateur golfer, the opportunity to play with a touring professional was an opportunity to have the golf experience of a life-time.

After two days, **the first-place winning team with a net score of 262 was the team of professional golfer Josh Edgar and amateurs Bart Walker, John Slingerland, and Adam Bogdon.** I interviewed Josh Edgar who hails from Australia, lived in Alabama and coaches at Georgia State. His goal is to earn entry to the PGA Tour. I'll definitely be rooting for this young man from

“down-under” as he pursues his goals.

In addition, **a new course record was set at Shalimar Pointe Golf Course.** Jacob Harper, from Valley, Alabama, shot a score of 66 on the first day of the tournament. The previous low score was 67. His score card will be displayed at the Shalimar Pointe Golf Course, replacing the old winner with a score of 67.

In addition, after three days of competitive play, Jacob Harper won first place with scores over the three days of 66, 67 and 71. Congratulations, Jacob!



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Laughter Improves Our Health



By KAY LEAMAN, HEALTH ARCHITECT, HEALTHYDAY HEALTHYLIFE

LAUGH: To express certain emotions, especially mirth or delight, by a series of spontaneous, usually unarticulated sounds often accompanied by corresponding facial and bodily movements.

People bring laughter into their lives in various ways. From watching comedy, to animal videos, telling jokes, listening to songs, reading, etc. The newest trend is laughing yoga. If you haven't tried it, I recommend you consider it. You can grab a Youtube video or find a class.

My mom had a large and wicked sense of humor. Our home experienced a plethora of jokes and comedy television shows. If we fell, mom would say 'Are you ok?' and then proceed with laughter. It helped and hurt all at the same time. As I've gotten older, I've learned

to appreciate good humor. It lessens the load and reminds me that life is better and a bit easier when laughter is taken regularly.

What happens during a laughing spell? Your brain releases endorphins (feel good chemicals), reducing stress and bringing on feelings of happiness and well-being. It causes us to take deeper breaths, bringing increased oxygen to the brain, heart, lungs and muscles.

A good laugh offers the short-term effects of lightening our mental load (stress) and abating anger. (It's hard to be angry when you're laughing.) It also stimulates many organs by enhancing our intake of oxygen-rich air.

Hearty laughter fires up and cools down the stress response, raising and lowering our heart rate and blood pressure. It brings on a good relaxing feeling, soothes tension and stimulates circulations and muscle relaxation.

Long term benefits include:

An improved immune system due to the increase of immune cells and antibodies. Negative thoughts manifest chemical reactions that can affect body by raising stress & lowering immunity. Positive thoughts release neuropeptides that help to fight



laugh only about 15 times. I wonder what our yearly check-ups would look like if we worked on maintaining our childlike laughter. We can start by learning to laugh at ourselves again. A study in Norway found people with a strong sense of humor outlived those who didn't laugh as much. The difference was particularly notable for those battling cancer.

Are you someone who doesn't laugh very often? Did you know that humor can be learned? Attend laughing yoga regularly or get around jovial people, read a funny book, etc. and discover the benefits of laughter.

It's never too late to start a new habit. Make laughter a habit worth laughing over. Here's to Health!

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stress & potentially more serious illnesses.

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If you can laugh 10-15 minutes per day, you can burn up to 40 calories, equaling a loss of

3-4 lbs./year. Maybe I should create a laughter diet. hehehe:-)

Research shows that children laugh about 400 times a day, whereas adults, on average,

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Growing Through Disruption



BY STEPHENIE CRAIG

After three years of talking about moving to Florida, we listed our house thinking it might sell in six months to a year.

Twelve days later we were thrust into disruption when the house sold and the reality of a cross country move set in. In some ways, talking about the possibility of a move for three years instead of taking meaningful action was a way of avoiding the inevitable disruption of a location change.

On some level, humans are designed to avoid change, discomfort and emotional turmoil. Disruption presents itself with feeling emotionally and physically stirred up. You might ex-



change the discomfort of disruption. But, the invitation to grow is present if you know to seek it. So, how do we shift from viewing disruption as something to be avoided to seeing disruption as an invitation to grow?

Seven Ways to Grow Through Disruption

Notice your personal signs of

disruption. Notice irritability, tightness in your chest, low energy, controlling behavior, changes in sleep, busy thoughts, physical ailments and notice if these discomforts are related to a disruptive circumstance, thought or feeling.

Identify the origin of disruption. When did the disrupted feelings begin? Can you connect the disrupted feeling to an event, circumstance or relationship?

Validate your experience. “What I’m dealing with is stressful and it makes sense I am emotionally and physically disrupted.”

Identify growth opportunities. “How can I understand something new about myself?” “How can I take responsibility for myself instead of blaming others?” “How can I increase my life skills and understanding of others?” “How can I cope in healthy ways in the midst of disruption?” Consistently be on the lookout for ways to grow through your struggle.

However, if you look back in your life, you will likely see that times of disruption and struggle have often been openings for tremendous growth, change and maturing in wisdom. When things get shaken up, you can often find an opportunity to examine and adjust your approach to life. The growth does not

Engage intentionally in growth activities. See that therapist, find a mentor, develop spiritual disciplines, read an instructive book about relationships, listen to a podcast related to your struggle, spend time with healthy people, deepen healthy relationships.

Apply and sustain learning. Try new, healthier coping strategies, new ways of communicating, new ways of problem solving, new ways of relating to others. Keep the new ways of doing things in front of mind for six weeks with post it notes and phone reminders until they have become healthier habits.

Notice change and celebrate. Look back over a six month to one-year arc of time to notice how you have grown and changed. Express gratitude for the changes and sustained growth in your life.

After about six months of significant disruption and discomfort around our move, we settled into Santa Rosa Beach and have built a life we love. On the other side of disruption has been learning to take healthy risks, learning to chase a dream, learning to plant ourselves in a new community and learning to face fears. The result has been something new and beautiful and gratitude-worthy. Disruption can be very uncomfortable and avoidance is tempting. But, when you engage disruption as a tool of growth, beautiful and life changing things can happen.

Connect with us along your journey of growth at Journeybravely.com for counseling and coaching.

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Therapist
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Be prepared! Okaloosa County has 2024 Hurricane Guides available. You can read or download a pdf version at myokaloosa.com/sites/default/files/HurricaneGuide2024-v2.pdf.

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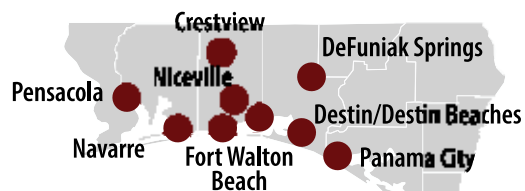


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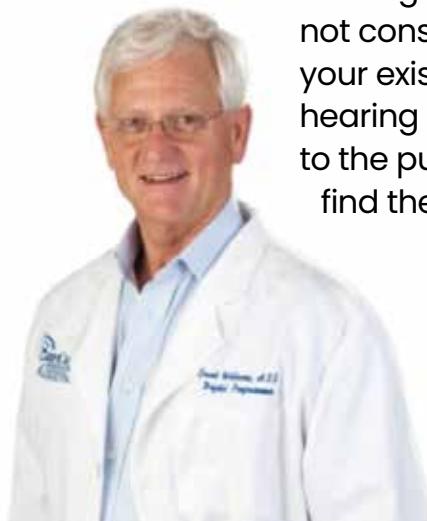
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Musing



By SEAN DIETRICH

A television is playing in a Birmingham bar. The talking head is shouting politics. Most folks in this joint are below thirty, and aren't even watching TV. They're transfixed with the opiate glows of their smartphones.

The bartender looks thirteen. He stares at the television screen and says something under his breath. Something sad.

"This country sucks, man."

I know he probably doesn't mean it. He's just upset. But it stings just the same, and I wish he wouldn't say such things.

Still, maybe it's not his fault. I don't know what his story is, I don't know what his beliefs are, but perhaps this boy has missed a few uniquely American blessings in his accumulated years of harrowed wisdom.

Maybe if he could see a few wondrous things in this country he'd change his opinion about us.

Perhaps he's never seen things like big, neon-pink azaleas bright enough to give you trouble breathing. Those don't suck.

Neither do the Waffle Houses lining the interstates. The shoebox buildings with the canary-yellow tops and the interior globe lights over the faux-wood tables. Nothing sucks about those. I've neither had a bad meal at such an establishment, nor bad service. And no matter which season I visit a Waffle House, it is always cold enough inside to hang meat.

The Everglades at sunrise, no sucking there. The Suwannee River definitely doesn't suck. The fat-bottomed cypress trees, swollen with bayou water. Spanish moss—which, as it turns out, is neither moss, nor Spanish.

My bartender needs to see these things. They would bless his heart.

If you ask me, the boy needs to ride a riverboat on the Mighty Missouri at dusk, watch the shrimp trawlers combing Lake



Pontchartrain. Or listen to stories from the roughnecks who raised beef in Ottawa County, Oklahoma. He should meet the roughnecks who farmed the oyster beds of the Apalachicola Bay.

And he needs smoked ribs from Kendall's Barbecue in Georgiana, Alabama. Food that comes out of that tin shack is worth crying over.

He needs to witness Charleston at sunrise. Yellowstone at sundown. He deserves the right

to see the outerbanks of The Old North State.

What the kid needs is county fairs, livestock exhibitions, and children with prize-winning show hogs.

A porterhouse in Kansas City. The Copper Art Museum in Clarkdale, Arizona. A hot-air balloon flight over the Appalachians. A ballgame at Fenway. The little horserace they do each year at Churchill Downs.

String bands, playing be-

neath festival tents. Gospel music with Hammond organs. Music from the bayou played on button accordions by men with white hair.

Jazz.

The kid needs to hold a butter-yellow Case XX knife in his hand. And he ought to own at least one Stetson to keep the sun out of his eyes. He needs to taste chicken and dumplings

prepared by a woman who has raised seven kids without the support of a husband.

He needs to meet the Walmart greeter named Phillip. The hospice chaplain named Marge. The family therapist named Jason. He deserves to meet the truck drivers, the pipefitters, the songwriters, the storytellers, the novelists, the oil painters, the shipbuilders, the dentists, the hair stylists, the

Continued on next page



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BY PASTOR DOUG STAUFFER

Every celebrated Independence Day finds patriot hearts swelling with pride and gratitude for our freedoms enjoyed in this great nation. Even after the fireworks, parades and family gatherings, let us take a moment to reflect on the true essence of freedom as expressed in the Holy Scriptures. The Bible provides timeless wisdom that guides our understanding of liberty and the responsibilities that come with it.

We are reminded in **Galatians 5:1**, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” This verse encapsulates our spiritual freedom in Christ, a freedom that surpasses all earthly liberties. As believers, our greatest independence was won on the cross, liberating

us from the bondage of sin and death.

The conservative voices of our past have often echoed the sentiments of biblical freedom. Patrick Henry, a devout Christian and fervent advocate for American independence, wrote in his will: This is all the Inheritance I can give to my dear family, The religion of Christ can give them one which will make them rich indeed.” Henry’s declaration underscores the integral role that faith played in the founding of our nation.

In **Psalm 33:12a**, the Psalmist declares, “Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD.” This blessing is not merely a promise but a conditional statement. Our nation’s prosperity and continued blessings are contingent upon our recognition of and submission to God’s authority.

As we reflect on the foundations of our nation, it is vital to remember the words of another conservative stalwart, President Ronald Reagan, who said, “If we ever forget that we are One Na-

tion Under God, then we will be a nation gone under.” Reagan’s warning is not just a cautionary tale, but a call to action for us to maintain our spiritual vigilance. It is our responsibility to ensure that our freedoms are not just anchored in our faith in God, but also nurtured and protected by it.

The Apostle Paul in **2 Corinthians 3:17** states, “Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” True liberty is found where the Spirit of the Lord resides. This Independence Day, let us invite God back into our communities and homes, praying for a revival that will sweep our nation, restoring us to a people under God’s guidance and grace.

Our founding fathers envisioned a nation where freedom and faith coexisted harmoniously. John Adams, another key figure in our nation’s birth, wrote to the Massachusetts Militia on October 11, 1798: “Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious People. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.” Ad-



ams recognized that the sustainability of our freedoms hinges on our collective moral and spiritual integrity. As the nation declines spiritually, so will the effectiveness of our governing principles.

As we again celebrate our nation’s independence, let us not forget the source of our ultimate freedom. The Bible and the wisdom of conservative voices from our past remind us that our liberties are both a gift and a responsibility. May we stand firm in our faith, cherish our freedoms and

commit to living as a people truly blessed by the Lord. My prayer: **“Happy Independence Day, and may God bless America! God help us to deserve this happiness and strive for this blessing.”**

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.

I HEART AMERICA

continued from previous page

brewmasters, and the small-town principals named Barbara.

I wish I could take this kid to a Church of God chapel in Senoia, Georgia. Or perhaps a Catholic Mass in Valentine, Nebraska. Or a synagogue in Yonkers. Or the Green Cove Missionary Baptist Church in Damascus, Virginia. Or the Thai temple in Fort Walton Beach, Florida.

I wish I could take him to any church house that backs up to a hayfield. The quintessential American rural congregational house. The kinds of assemblies that pepper this country from Missoula to Uvalde.

And I’d like to carry the kid to an American funeral. Like my grandmother’s service. Wherein a string of a million-and-three cars drove with their headlights on. I’d like the boy to attend an honest-to-goodness repast, and eat the food of grieving people.

I’d like him to receive a hug from an elderly Norwegian woman in Minnesota. I’d like him to taste pierogies in Lancaster County. Chilaquiles verdes

in Taos. Crab cakes in Baltimore.

I don’t care what the suits on television say, kid. Don’t believe them. Yes, we have problems in this nation. Yes, we have haters. Yes, we’re a gigantic dysfunctional family fit for an episode of Jerry Springer. Yes, we have division.

But we also have pediatric oncologists, Fort Bragg, national park rangers, historic sod cabins, longleaf forests, Pikes Peak and James Brown. The sandstone arches of Moab. The beach bun-

galows of O’ahu. The 960,000 acres of remaining American prairieland. We have nurses, EMTs, special-ed teachers, janitors, meat-packers, cab drivers and bartenders. That’s us.

America doesn’t suck.
Your television does.

Sean Dietrich is a writer, humorist, novelist, and biscuit connoisseur, known for his commentary and stories on life in the American South.

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Arts & Music

A Year-End ECTC Celebration!

A gathering of theatre students came together recently at Emerald Coast Theatre Company (ECTC) to celebrate the close of their 11th Season, induct Jr. Thespians and commemorate the end of a fruitful season of children's educational theatre. This event allowed ECTC's students and parents to come together with food and fellowship for middle school level Jr. Thespians, as well as their high school aged Teen Company counterparts.

The 2024 Inductees included: Ashlynn Aigret, Campbell Carter, Alice Heller, John Kerrigan, Maggie Kerrigan and

Noah Modinger. They were joined by their fellow Jr. Thespians: Lucca Bucalo, Hailey Estrada, Jordyn Fowler, Jenna King, Mackenzie Krout, Clara Petersik, and Preston Smith.

In partnership with the Seaside Neighborhood School, ECTC's Junior Thespian Troupe (No. 89447) is a part of District 10 and a chartered member of the Educational Theatre Association's Junior Thespians. The troupe competes in regional and state competitions and focuses on specialized training, acting techniques and implementing those techniques into performance.



2024 Jr. Thespian inductees:

Ms. Darla, Noah Modinger, Alice Heller, Maggie Kerrigan, John Kerrigan, Campbell Carter, Lucca Bulaco, Mr. Heath

2024 Jr. Thespian Jr. Company Ed Students:

Back Row: Ms Darla, Preston Smith, Noah Modinger, Jenna King, Hailey Estrada, Alice Heller, Campbell Carter, Tabitha Sheldon, Mr Heath, Caden Gray, Ben Bathula, Leya Bathula, Maggie Bingham

Middle Row: Maggie Kerri-

gan, Mackenzie Krout, Clara Petersik, Jordyn Fowler, Mercie Taylor, Alex Koehler

Bottom Row: Zoe Fisher, John Kerrigan, Lucca Bucalo, Teddy Petersik

2024 Jr. Thespians:

Ms Darla, Preston Smith, Noah Modinger, Jenna King, Hailey Estrada, Alice Heller, Maggie Kerrigan, Campbell Carter, Mackenzie Krout, Lucca Bucalo, Mr Heath, Clara Petersik, Jordyn Fowler

2024 Best Thespian: John Kerrigan



ECTC Announces Broadway's Lulu Picart for Musical Theatre Intensive in July

Emerald Coast Theatre Company (ECTC) is proud to announce Broadway's Lulu Picart will serve as Musical Director for the Musical Theatre Intensive: Disney's High School Musical for Teens July 8 - 28, 2024. This three-week camp will stretch students' theatre skills and grow them as performers. Students work on acting, vocals and dance while receiving high quality instruction and direction from ECTC professionals and former Broadway performer Lulu Picart, an acting and creativity coach. Her work in musicals and on-stage direction includes Norwegian Cruise Lines, Walt Disney World, Orlando Shakespeare Theatre, Universal Orlando, The Choir of Man. As a performer, Lulu has appeared on Broadway (1776), off-Broadway (Disenchanted!, Lortel nominated), around the world on tour (1776, R+H Cinderella, Madagascar Live!), and at many theaters and theme parks. Lulu is also an adjunct faculty member at Pace University. Follow Lulu - @lulupicart

Students can register for the Musical Theatre Intensive at emeraldcoasttheatre.org/summer-camps.



"Baggage" Live On Stage

Kingdom Over Castles returns to the stage with a NEW soul-gripping Illustrated Sermon, Baggage on Friday and Sunday, July 26th and 28th, 7 p.m., from the Fort Walton Beach Civic Auditorium.

Journey with us through the lives of various characters and witness the unpacking of lies, drug addiction, scandal, jealousy, gossip, unforgiveness, dark secrets, murder and more! This WILD ride is sure to bring you to tears, open your mind, challenge your

perspectives and, most importantly, celebrate the goodness of God.

Prepare your hearts and minds as this live production is a safe space to do the internal work. No more games. No more hiding. It's time to be FREE! It's time for another Illustrated Sermon.

Visit www.kingdomovercastles.com for tickets and email admin@kingdomovercastles.com for special group rates and more information.

Jason Hedden

Come for an uproarious night of laughs!
ECTC presents some of the Southeast's most hilarious comedians. Hosted by resident funny guy Jason Hedden.

July 19

More Info and Tickets:
www.emeraldcoasttheatre.org

Winners of the Kids Tag Art Program

It was a full house at an Okaloosa County School Board meeting in June as Tax Collector Ben Anderson and Sheriff Eric Aden presented certificates to the Award of Distinction winners of the Kids Tag Art Program. Along with Superintendent Marcus Chambers, Anderson and Aden recognized two winners from each participating school.

The Kids Tag Art program has two functions: one as an art contest for the 5th graders, and the other as a fundraiser that gives students a chance to design their own specialty license plate to use as art or on the front of

a vehicle. As a fundraiser, those student-created, custom plates can be purchased by family members. Proceeds from school sales stay in that school.

This program is a partnership with the Tax Collector's Office and the School District that started in 2013. In recent years, the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office has become a program sponsor given their Community Partnership with the School District in providing Resource Officers to schools in Okaloosa County for the safety and welfare of all students.

Combining in-school sales and local sponsorships, the

Kids Tag Art program earned \$18,124.00 this school year. Tax Collector Ben Anderson points out, "This is non-tax generated revenue and comes at a time when the art curriculum in schools could benefit the most." He continues, "Each school that participated received checks via the Public Education Foundation for \$800.00." Since 2013 the Kids Tag Art program has generated \$155,167 for school arts programs in Okaloosa County.

To be a sponsor, please contact Shari Flowers Bruns at 850-651-7669.



Music, Comedy and Fun at Mattie Kelly Arts Center this Summer!

Finish Mattie Kelly Arts Center's summer series with Tom Papa comedian, Friday, July 19, 7 p.m., who will have you laughing in the aisles. With more than 20 years as a stand-up comedian, Tom Papa is one of the top come-

dic voices in the country, finding success as an actor, host, and author, in film, TV, radio and podcasts as well as on the live stage. Purchase July event tickets at mattiekellyartscenter.org or call the box office at 850-729-6000.

This year's winners are:

- Bluewater:** Claire Paiz, Elayna Feddon
- Bob Sikes:** Karlie Sanchez, Anna Dickelman
- Edge:** Riley Sharpe, Gracelyn Perschke
- Elliott Point:** Dallis Gallagher, Axel Palma
- Kenwood:** Sabine McBride, Parker Sims
- Northwood:** Angelique Guzman, Stephanie Antunez Penaloza

- Plew:** Dasha Medvedeva, Lilyana Wight
- Shalimar:** Jayceon Gainer, Paris McQueen
- Silver Sands:** Jacob Huggins, Charlotte Sullivan
- Southside Primary:** Lailah Garcia

- Walker:** Joseph Avanes, Blake Moyers
- Tax Collector's Choice:** Ava Auter (Bluewater)
- Sheriff's Choice:** Aayla Powell (Bob Sikes)
- Superintendent's Choice:** Macy Phillips (Plew)



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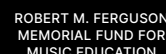


Educational outreach remains at the forefront of Sinfonia's mission. Since it was established in 2007, Sinfonia Gulf Coast has introduced music to more than 200,000 children in Okaloosa, Walton, and Bay Counties.

Your support is instrumental to our success. Donate today to help Sinfonia bring music, education, and the arts to our schools. SinfoniaGulfCoast.org | 850.460.8800



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Around Town



It's Official!

Congratulations to this year's new Captain Billy Bowlegs LXIX Michael Castleberry and his Queen Zabrina Horne! Each year a new Captain Billy Bowlegs and his queen are selected to sail the Blackhawk and the Krewe into uncharted seas. The new Billy is selected by the current year's Captain after receiving the secret nominations from a committee of the last seven Billys. The new Billy remains a secret for several months as

he prepares for his year and his many decisions; he will choose the colors, and create a logo and theme to represent his vision for the new year.

U.S. 98 Traffic Shift Near Brooks Bridge on Okaloosa Island

The U.S. 98 travel lanes between Brooks Bridge and Pier Road, on Okaloosa Island, have shifted south onto temporary travel lanes. This configuration is providing space for crews to construct the new westbound Brooks Bridge structure. Two U.S. 98 travel lanes will remain open in each direction. Drivers are reminded that U.S. 98 intermittent lane closures, from Ferry Road to Pier Road, may occur between 9 p.m. and 5:30 a.m. Sunday through Thursday.

This work is part of the \$171 million Brooks Bridge Replacement Project that includes constructing two new, parallel bridges that will increase capacity to six travel lanes from the current

four-lane bridge that opened in 1966. Project completion is estimated for summer 2027. All activities are weather dependent and might be delayed or rescheduled in the event of inclement weather. Drivers are reminded to use caution, especially at night, when traveling through a work zone and to watch for construction workers and equipment entering and exiting the roadway. For more information, visit www.nwflroads.com or on Facebook at MyBrooksBridge.

Marcus Chambers Appointed to FHSAA Board

Recently, Governor Ron DeSantis announced the appointment of Marcus Chambers, Superintendent of Schools for Okaloosa County, to the Florida High School Athletic Association Board of Directors. With more than 26 years of experience in education, Chambers received the First Year Teacher of the Year Award for Ruckel Middle School in 1999, the Okaloosa County Reading Leader of the Year Award in 2010 and the Martin Luther King Jr. Academic Achievement Award in 2013. Chambers also currently serves as Chairman of the Florida School Labor Relations Service Board of Directors and is a member of the Florida Association of District School Superintendents, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development and the Okaloosa County Association of School Administrators. This appointment is subject to confirmation by the Florida Senate.

Okaloosa County's New Agriculture Learning Center

Okaloosa County is excited to begin construction on a new Agriculture Extension Office near Miss Ruth's Farmers Market at the Northwest Florida Fairgrounds. The new building is replacing a storm-damaged building in south Okaloosa County. It will allow the professional staff within Okaloosa County's University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Services (UF IFAS) Extension to offer a variety of courses, programs, workshops, and meetings. These courses will feature agriculture, family and consumer scienc-

es, commercial and residential horticulture, natural resources, and 4-H Youth Development program areas. The 3,000-sq.-ft. building will feature accommodation for large groups, a full teaching kitchen, a small laboratory, storage, and office space. Construction is expected to be completed in the summer of 2025.

EC Rider Bus Service Makes Modifications

Okaloosa County's bus service, EC Rider (ECRider.org), has made an exciting modification to one of its routes between Destin and Fort Walton Beach, which includes the elimination of a transfer and also gives riders better frequency between destinations on the route. This service modification includes:

- Destin Route 30 will operate an hourly service between Elder Service, Publix – (Fort Walton Beach), Publix (Shoppes at Paradise Pointe), and Target/Winn Dixie.
- Providing connection from The City of Destin to Okaloosa Island - Boardwalk (Okaloosa Route 20 and Destin Route 30). 1. Connection will be made at the top of each hour.
- Providing increased frequency between Fort Walton Beach and Okaloosa Island, as well as Okaloosa Route 20.
- Provide connection with Destin Route 32, at Winn Dixie

(98 Palm Plaza). Connection will be made at the bottom of each hour.

- Provide local service within The City of Destin to key destinations, including Target, Winn Dixie, and Destin Harbor.

- The cost is \$2 one way

Okaloosa County BOCC D/b/a EC RIDER assures non-discrimination in adheres with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the American with Disabilities Act. For additional information, call 850-833-9168 or visit www.ecrider.org

New My H2O Web Portal Allows City Water Customers to Track Usage in Real Time

City contractor, VEPO Metering, is nearly halfway through a project to replace the city's approximately 10,000 water meters. The new water meters feature Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) technology that provides more accurate readings and real-time data.

As part of this project, we're launching the My H2O website portal. My H2O works with the new meters to allow water customers to view their daily water usage and create alerts to help them detect leaks earlier.

Some of the other benefits of the My H2O portal:

- View and export usage and

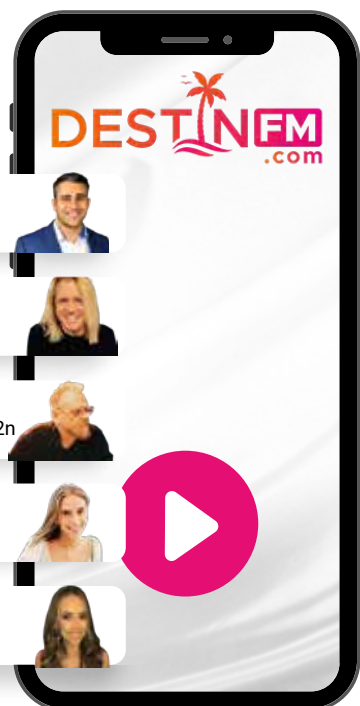
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▶ Dan Collins
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▶ Ellie Adair
Weekends



▶ @The850Foodie Joanna Davis
Foodie Friday 7a, 8a, 9a



FWB Community Chorus Begins 50th Year! Open Call for Singers!

Have you been looking for a local chorus to sing with where fun is the priority and music selections are varied and interesting?

The Fort Walton Beach Community Chorus kicks off of its 50th year on August 20. The chorus is a mixed voice adult chorus that presents two programs annually in Fort Walton Beach. Rehearsals begin on August 20 for its Christmas shows, which will be held December 13, 14, and 15 at the Fort Walton Beach Civic Center.

The Chorus, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, is a dynamic group of adults of all ages who love to sing! Its mission is to make music, enrich



lives and bring our community together, one scholarship at a time. As a beacon of creativity and community spirit, they're dedicated to nurturing aspiring musicians through scholarship, ensuring a vibrant future for music and unity.

The chorus rehearses Tuesday evenings, 7 p.m., at First Christian Church, 201 St. Mary Ave SW, Fort Walton Beach, 32548.

For more information, call 850.585.3980 or email mbjhammock@cox.net.

Around Town

trends on a daily, weekly, yearly, and billing-cycle basis

- Greater understanding of usage and costs through real-time monitoring and alerts
- Set custom alerts and avoid billing surprises
- View peer comparisons to better gauge normal usage
- Remotely monitor rental and vacation properties
- Modify water usage to save money
- Multiple addresses/accounts can be added to the same MyH2O account

The portal can be accessed from a desktop computer, tablet or mobile phone. To learn more or get started, visit: <https://my-fwbl.sensus-analytics.com/login.html#/signin>.

Downtown Design Guidelines Project Holds First Public Meeting

About 50 people turned out for the City of Fort Walton Beach's Downtown Design Guidelines Community Engagement Workshop at the Gulfview Center in June. Representatives from consulting firm Kimley-Horn described the project and presented a slideshow representing different styles of streets, building architecture, parks, and open spaces. Participants used a scorecard to rank each photo on whether or not it represented what they thought the downtown district should look like. After that slideshow survey, attendees met in small groups with Kimley-Horn staff to share their ideas and sketch out on existing maps some of the ways that the downtown area could be made more pedestrian-friendly. This meeting was the first of several being held for this project, which, when completed, will establish a "toolbox" of architectural components that will achieve a vision of downtown that residents and business owners want while providing flexibility to existing property owners and new developers.

For more information: <https://www.fwb.org/550/Downtown-Design-Guidelines-Project>.

School Summer Food Service Program

Okaloosa County Schools are participating in the Summer

Food Service Program. Summer Break Spot offers balanced breakfasts and lunches at no cost for kids 18 and under. Meals are served on site at no cost. A list of sites and service times is available at: <https://www2.okaloosaschools.com/article/1616150>.

TalkingParents/Bit-Wizards Both Make Inc.'s Annual List of Best Workplaces for 2024

Local companies TalkingParents and Bit-Wizards (eighth year) have been named to Inc.'s annual Best Workplaces list. Prominently featured on Inc.com, the list is the result of a comprehensive measurement of American companies that have excelled in creating exceptional workplaces and company cultures, whether operating in a physical or a virtual facility.

After collecting data from thousands of submissions, Inc. selected 543 honorees this year. Each company that was nominated took part in an employee survey conducted by Quantum Workplace, which included topics such as management effectiveness, perks, fostering employee growth, and overall company culture. The organization's benefits were also audited to determine the overall score and ranking.

TalkingParents was founded to empower co-parents worldwide on their shared parenting journey, no matter their situation. A culture of support and empowerment at the company is essential to ensure the team fulfills its promise to the co-parents who depend on the service to help them focus on what matters most – their kids.

"Creating and maintaining a thriving company culture is done deliberately by design with conscientious effort and buy-in from everyone on the team. You can feel a company's culture when you walk in the front door and with every interaction. It starts with living the company's core values while owning a shared mission and vision. Our T-Parenters live it and make it part of everything they do. The team at TalkingParents is excited to receive national recognition as a 2024 Inc. Best Workplaces Honoree. Thank you to the team at Inc. Magazine for

recognizing TalkingParents."

-Vince Mayfield, Chief Executive Officer

"Winning Inc 5000's Best Places to Work for the eighth year in a row is a reflection of the incredible dedication, collaboration, and passion of our team. Our company thrives because we prioritize our people, creating a culture where everyone can excel and feel valued."

-Louis Erickson, Chief Operating Officer

Waste Management Recycling

Waste Management provides recycling services for residents in unincorporated Okaloosa

County and they will soon be using its new MRF (Mixed Recycling Facility) in Fort Walton. To maintain low recycling rates, we encourage residents to follow these guidelines to keep the contamination in their bin low.

Please remember to be mindful of what you are putting in your curbside bin. If you're in doubt, **throw it out.**

Below are the items that belong in your curbside bin:

- Glass; any color
- Paper newspaper & Inserts
- Cardboard
- Boxboard (cereal, cake & cracker boxes, etc.)
- Plastic bottles
- Plastics No. 1 & 2

- Plastic Milk Jugs; 2-Liters
- Aluminum Cans & Lids
- Tin and Steel Cans & Lids
- Metal Pots, Pans & Cookie Sheets
- Pet food cans (no plastic liner)

Main causes of load contaminations, are incorrect items being tossed in the recycling bin. High contamination rates can lead to 100% rejection of truck loads at the recycling facility.

We must work together to educate and spread awareness, as well as recycle items in the correct manner to truly make a difference. Visit: <https://myokaloosa.com/pw/environmental/recycling>.

Local Coupons

J & B MEDICAL, INC.
\$100 OFF
ANY LIFT CHAIR PURCHASE
 WITH COUPON
 Offer expires 8/15/24
 540 E John Sims Parkway, Niceville
 850-729-255

NICEVILLE SLABS & COOKIES
10% OFF
 YOUR NEXT PURCHASE
 Offer expires 8/15/24
 207 B Kelly Rd., Niceville | 850-897-0038
 NicevilleSlabsAndCookies.com

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 8/15/24
 850-269-3246
 destinoverheaddoor.com

BEACHSIDE SLIDING GLASS DOOR MAINTENANCE, LLC
\$25 OFF SLIDING DOOR TRACK REPAIR WITH ROLLER REPLACEMENT
 FREE ESTIMATES
 Offer expires 8/15/24
 BeachsideSlide.com
 850-98-SLIDE (850-987-5433)

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- 05.28 **piano man**
a tribute to billy joel
- 06.04 **80s & 90s street party**
with doc roc & dj boom
- 06.11 **US**
a tribute to 80s party rock
- 06.18 **80s & 90s street party**
with doc roc & dj boom
- 06.25 **still standing**
a tribute to elton john
- 07.02 **80s & 90s street party**
with doc roc & dj boom
- 07.09 **the acoustic hits**
a tribute to garth brooks
- 07.16 **80s & 90s street party**
with doc roc & dj boom
- 07.23 **formation experience**
a beyoncé tribute show
- 07.30 **modern eldorados**
a tribute to classic country
- 08.06 **80s & 90s street party**
with doc roc & dj boom



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