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Jay Odom and the Freedom Tech Center: A Celebration of Patriotism and Progress

By "DOC DOUG" STAUFFER

In a grand display of patriotism and community spirit, Jay Odom, a true local success story, presided over the flag-raising ceremony at the Freedom Tech Center. This momentous event marked a significant milestone for Okaloosa County and Fort Walton Beach, bringing together community members, local officials and military personnel to celebrate the realization of a transformative vision.

"We Fly as One"

The ceremony featured raising one of Florida's largest American flags, measuring an impressive 105 feet by 70 feet, on a towering 200-foot pole. The flag, visible from as far away as the Shalimar Bridge, symbolizes the unity and strength of the community under the motto, "We Fly as One."

Jay Odom, known for his remarkable contributions to the area, including the development of Raider Village



at Northwest Florida State College, expressed his deep love for his community, the Free State of Florida, and the nation. His heartfelt speech resonated with the crowd, showcasing his unwavering patriotism and commitment to his hometown.

A Vision for the Future

The Freedom Tech Center, master-planned by The Jay Odom Group under a long-term land lease with the U.S. Air Force, spans 50 acres and promises to transform the north side of Fort Walton Beach into a bustling commerce center. This mixed-use development will bring jobs, housing, hotels, meeting spaces, restaurants, Class A office space, and a 4-acre recreational park to the local community.

The project includes 312 luxury apartment homes, a leasing office, a pool, seven

FREEDOM TECH

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Your Vote Matters

The election season is upon us; are you registered to vote? Primary Elections are August 20.

Political Party Affiliation

When completing the Florida Voter Registration Application Form, one of the fields is Party Affiliation. In this field, you have several options. You can choose from one of the major political parties (Florida Democratic Party or Republican Party of Florida), one of the minor political parties, you can select no party affiliation (NPA), or you can leave the field blank. If you leave this field blank on the application form, you will be reg-

YOUR VOTE

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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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THURSDAYS



6:30pm-8:30pm

 Community

New Pilot Program Addresses Opioid Crisis in Fort Walton Beach

By “DOC DOUG” STAUFFER

Did you know Florida Panhandle counties have the number one per capita drug overdose death rate? So, something needed to be done to intercede on behalf of those caught up in the cycle of addiction.

Now, a collaborative effort to combat the opioid epidemic is underway in Fort Walton Beach with the launch of the Post Overdose Support Team (POST) pilot program. Initiated on June 17, the program aims to provide immediate and ongoing support to individuals who have recently survived an overdose.

The POST team, comprised of representatives from the Fort Walton Beach Police Department (FWBPD), Okaloosa County EMS and a clinician from Bridgeway Center, reaches out to overdose survivors within 24 to 72 hours. This initiative offers a critical time window to engage individuals and connect them with essential resources and treatment options.

Police Chief Robert Bage emphasized the importance of this timely intervention, noting, “The quicker we can provide services to peo-

ple in need, the more likely they are to take these services from us.” He also made a profound assertion: “(We) initially came to save their lives (and) now to save their futures.”

Since its inception, the POST program has already made a significant impact. In just a few weeks, the team has met with more than 20 individuals, six of whom have decided to seek treatment. This early success is promising, demonstrating the program’s potential to break the cycle of addiction.

Chief Bage highlighted the local nature of the opioid crisis during a recent press conference, stating, “About 60 percent of our overdoses came from local residents, people with a Fort Walton Beach zip code. This is a local issue affecting your neighbors, people you work with, people you know.”

The POST initiative is part of the broader Coordinated Opioid Recovery (CORE) Network in Okaloosa County. CORE is a collaborative effort involving Okaloosa County, Bridgeway Center, and the Okaloosa County Health Improve-



ment Partnership (OCHIP). The program is funded through Okaloosa County Opioid Settlement allocations and is supplemented by the Florida Department of Health in Okaloosa County via the Overdose Data to Action grant.

Captain Greg Cain, Section Commander of Okaloosa County EMS, praised the program’s collaborative nature, stating, “This joint effort of multiple agencies within Okaloosa County and the State of Florida is a targeted approach

to helping people help themselves.”

In addition to direct intervention, the POST team will also conduct community outreach to educate the public on available resources for opioid addiction. This includes promoting the availability of naloxone (NARCAN®) kits, which can reverse the effects of an opioid overdose, and emphasizing the importance of having these kits accessible.

Amanda Colwell, Assistant Director at the Florida Depart-

ment of Health in Okaloosa County, stressed the importance of comprehensive emergency kits, which include naloxone and CPR supplies. “Do not wait until someone overdoses; reach out to these resources to help them,” she urged.

The POST program is set to expand county-wide this month, with additional support from the Okaloosa County Sheriff’s Office. This expansion aims to reach even more individuals in need and further reduce the incidence of opioid overdoses in the region. Okaloosa County will be the first county-wide program in the state.

Individuals can contact the Okaloosa County Health Department for more information on the POST program and related resources or to receive a naloxone kit. County residents are encouraged to support and engage with these vital initiatives, helping to ensure a safer and healthier future for all residents. Remember, “One Pill Can Kill,” and the one it kills could be someone you know and love.

YOUR VOTE

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istered with no party affiliation (NPA) by default.

Registration & Party Change Deadline

You can update your voter registration record at any time. However, the registration deadline for new registrations

in Florida and party changes is typically 29 days before an election. Any new registrations or party changes received during the registration book closing period will not take effect until after the election.

Primary Elections

Florida is a closed primary state, which means that in most cases only voters who are affil-



ated with or registered members of political parties may vote for their respective party’s candidates for an office in a Primary Election

(For example: only registered Republicans can vote in a Republican Primary contest and only Democrats can vote in a Democratic Primary contest.)

However, there are times when all registered voters can vote in a Primary Election contest, regardless of party affiliation:

If all the candidates for an office have the same party af-

filiation and there is no opposition in the general election (no write-in or no party affiliation candidates have qualified), then all registered voters can vote for any of the candidates for that office in the primary election, and the winner is decided in the primary election. This is called a Universal Primary Contest.

If contests for nonpartisan offices (such as judicial and school board seats), nonpartisan special districts, or ballot issue questions (amendments/referendums) are on the primary election ballot, then all registered voters are entitled to vote in those races on the ballot.

There are certain contests that will be decided in the primary election and will never make it to the general election ballot. Therefore, missing a primary election could mean missing out on voting in some contests altogether.

General Elections

At a General Election, all registered voters within the

same precinct area receive the same ballot with the same contests and may vote for any candidate or question on the ballot. Winners from the closed primary contests will move on and will be on the general election ballot. In addition, minor party candidates, candidates with no party affiliation, and qualified write-in candidates will proceed to the general election. In a general election, a write-in line will be on the ballot ONLY if there is a qualified write-in candidate for a contest. Write-in candidate names do NOT appear on the ballot. Only votes for qualified write-in candidates are valid.

Let your voice be heard; The deadline to register or change party affiliation for the 2024 Primary Election was July 22, 2024. The deadline to register for the 2024 General Election is October 7, 2024.

To register to vote or for more information, visit www.votekaloosa.gov.

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Marler Park Restored!

BY CAROLYN NEWCOMER KETCHEL

Each month, I highlight a project within Okaloosa County. Many of you have visited Marler Park over the decades. It is a popular park on Choctawhatchee Bay next to the Destin-Ft. Walton Beach Convention Center. (Please see map.) It is situated next to a public boat ramp and features picnic table pavilions, restrooms and a worn-out playground.

As you have read recently, a bike path will be constructed on the south side of Hwy. 98. We have interconnecting trails throughout Veteran's Park, a living shoreline will shortly be added



and the entire area is becoming user friendly for pedestrians, especially as we watch the new Brooks Bridge come into focus.

Along with the other changes and improvements to Okaloosa Island, the county has been working to design and develop a

new playground at Marler Park. Many locals and tourists visit the park each year. This heavily used park has old playground equipment, much of which has been removed, piece by piece, over the years as it was deemed unsafe. The rubber flooring



needs to be replaced.

The Okaloosa Board of County Commissioners have voted to make Marler Park a one-of-a-kind destination in South Okaloosa that will be inviting for children of all ages. The updated and brand-new playground equipment will be a joy to use. Safe, up-to-date playground equipment featuring sea creatures such as Red Snapper, Turtles, Grouper and other nicely designed play equipment, will be installed, and the entire park will receive a general overhaul. Work will begin later this summer and should be completed prior to Spring Break 2025. Children love splash pads on a hot summer day, and we hope to eventually install one in Marler Park.

The county will use \$1,237,213.08 from Tourism Development dollars (also known as bed tax money) for playground structures, safety surfacing, sail shades, installation, benches and coastal coating. Though many other projects, such as road repair, need funding, Tourism Development funds can be used for parks and marketing in the county only.

It is nice to see the changes that are coming to this area, beginning in Ft. Walton Beach, traveling over Brooks Bridge to the Destin Bridge. Locals and visitor alike will enjoy the amenities found on Okaloosa Island, such as kayak boat launches and the access ways to our public beaches. Tourism Development dollars continue to make a difference in these and other projects, such as the new photo-luminescent Bridge-to-Bridge Bike Path being built along the dune line, the lovely trails in Veterans Park with views of statues of heroic women who have served the U.S. since our beginning, and the planned living shoreline that will revitalize and protect the bay-side beach. We continue to preserve our area with amenities that are military and family friendly.

Take a look at the video link below and enjoy the beautiful plans to restore Marler Park. (Note: Given the sensitivity towards sharks in the Gulf of Mexico, the shark featured in the video has been removed in favor of a friendly, large fish.)

<https://bit.ly/NewMarler-Playground>

One final note: We are working to reopen East Pass Park (on the south side of Destin Bridge) with the cooperation of our military partners at Eglin AFB. It will be much improved, but that will be the subject of another column.

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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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.

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Hometown Heroes Promoted to Glory

By KELLY MURPHY-REDD

“Promoted to Glory” was the subject line emailed by the men’s lunch group leader announcing my Dad, Larry Murphy, went to heaven February 18, 2024. Everyone said he was the youngest 89-year-old they had ever seen. He strove to walk a mile every day and ride his three-wheeled electric bike around the neighborhood. Neighbors I don’t know emailed condolences. Known for riding his “trike,” one lady said her four-year-old would always wave to her “friend” when Dad rode by.

Lawrence Murphy was born in Antigo, Wisconsin. A West Point Grad, he served the U.S. Air Force for 29 years. Molly Murphy was born in Springer, N.M. She and Dad met in Phoenix, Ariz., during Dad’s training in the F-86 Saber Jet at Williams AFB.

Married in 1959, Mom and Dad had a three-day honeymoon in Tulsa, Okla. Dad was stationed four years at Vance AFB teaching U.S. and foreign students to fly jets.

Newly married, without much money, a day out was driving into Tulsa to buy a tube of toothpaste. Mom talked about how they lived in an “adorable converted chicken coup” for a while. I came along, and with me in tow, they moved back to Arizona, where Dad trained in the F-100 Super Saber fighter at Luke AFB.

Eleven months after I was born, my brother Patrick arrived. In 1964, the four of us went to RAF Lakenheath, United Kingdom. While stationed there, Dad flew F-100 training flights throughout Western Europe. His primary wartime mission was to drop a nuclear bomb should the Soviet Union start World War III. Nick and



Bob, a couple who took care of American military families, took care of us when Mom and Dad would travel around Europe. Mom’s hobbies were making brass rubbings in cathedrals and playing bridge.

In 1967, Dad volunteered to fly F-100 missions in Vietnam. I have an early memory of walking into the living room seeing Mom sitting on Dad’s lap. They were crying. Patrick remembers being at the airport saying goodbye. Mom was crying, I was crying, so Patrick started crying. After two weeks of jungle survival training, Dad was stationed at Phan Rang Air Base.

During his 320 days, Dad flew 306 combat missions.

He was awarded two Distinguished Flying Crosses, one pinned on by General Benjamin Davis. I found them, among other medals, in the attic. One of the citations reads as follows:

“Captain Lawrence J. Mur-



phy distinguished himself by extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight as an F-100 tactical fighter pilot near Binh Thuy, Republic of Vietnam on 4 November 1967. On that date Captain Murphy came to the aid of friendly units who were heavily engaged with a large hostile force while trying to evacuate a group of friendly dead and wounded. The singularly brilliant ordinance deliveries in close proximity to friendly units while under heavy automatic weapons fire were directly responsible for the relief of the friendly troops and the evacuation of their dead and wounded. The professional competence, aerial skill, and devotion to duty displayed by Captain Murphy

reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.”

He was a hero at age 33. Finding medals in the attic tells you something about Dad. He told great stories about his life and career, but didn’t boast about medals.

He and Mom sent tape recordings and letters to each other while he was in Vietnam.

The stacks of letters, also found in the attic, contain wide-ranging subjects: Dad counted the days until seeing Mom and us again, expressed his love, described sitting alert and flying missions. Mom sent notes from us and gave Dad the latest news. Dad wrote about learning Kennedy was assassinated. He chronicled spending four hours with an artist in Taiwan and buying two paintings from him. He described paneling the pilots “lounge” with mahogany and serving fondue out of nose cones of napalm cans. There were struggles when leadership wanted pilots to sand vehicles and clean latrines instead of getting the sleep needed before flying.

When Dad came back from Vietnam he presented Mom with a plaque that reads:

“In Recognition of Outstanding Performance Awarded to Molly M. Murphy For Her Perseverance and Devotion to Duty in Maintaining Home and Family During Her Husband’s Tour of Duty in Vietnam from Aug. 67 to Aug. 68.

Presented by Her Loving and Grateful Husband, Larry.”

Then followed a brief three-month training for Dad in Panama City, Fla., where we lived in a trailer. Dad told us he would give us a prize for memorizing the Lord’s Prayer. I still have “The Night Before Christmas”

book I received as my prize. I

remember singing “Shout to the Highest Mountain” standing beside Dad in church. We had family nights, and one night, Mom and Dad took us to see lighted boats in the harbor. I guess we didn’t seem too excited. So, next time, they took us to a store to choose a small toy. I chose a little doll. Even then, I felt kind of sad we didn’t appreciate the lights enough, and Mom and Dad felt they had to buy us a toy. I still have that little doll.

In 1968, Laredo, Texas, Patrick and I rode bikes everywhere, made mud pies, built forts, had dirt clod fights with kids and played in wardrobe boxes on the driveway until it started to hail. I remember sitting on the couch with Mom while she taught me to sing “Silver Bells.” I can remember how it felt sitting next to her while she rubbed my earlobe. Dad taught students to fly again and Mom was involved with the Officer’s Wives Club. She continued to be an avid bridge player.

Dad was transferred to the Pentagon in 1970 and we lived in Fairfax, Va., during Watergate. Moving forward, Dad’s career was at staff or executive level within “aircrew flight simulator acquisition and testing” agencies in various command headquarters. Mom started working part-time during these years. She worked for doctors and achieved higher positions without any formal training. Fairfax is where she became a Washington Redskins fan. She was a huge sports enthusiast.

In 1974, dad was stationed at Langley AFB in Virginia.

Continued on page 8

There’s a lot to **LOVE** about Fort Walton Beach!

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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.

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

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ELECTION DAY IS AUGUST 20




Community

HEROES

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He was selected as one of 12 Air Force officers designated as "USAF Advance Agent for Presidential Travel." Conducting ground support for Air Force One and all other aircraft associated with President Gerald Ford's travel, Dad made numerous state-side and overseas trips during 1975 and 1976.

We moved from Yorktown, Va., to Albuquerque, N.M. in 1977 where Dad was stationed at Kirtland AFB. Dad's last assignment was Eglin AFB where he retired.

Everywhere we lived, Mom and Dad had tons of friends. Living in Indian Bayou in Destin for 18 years, Mom would organize a monthly golf tournament everyone called "The Molly Murphy Invitational." She organized funny talent shows. They loved to sail and play golf. Mom was a fabulous cook. Christmas was always special. We made my paternal grandmother's secret recipe Christmas cookies and Mom made her mother's fruitcake.

They built a house Dad designed on the water in Dolphin



Cove. They moved and built another house on Lake Oconee in Eatonton, Ga. Their grandchild Carson was the catalyst to move to Henderson, Nev. She spent every day after school with Mom and Dad. Mom played "Barbies" with Carson and Dad made "parachutes" dropping them from the top of the step ladder.

Mom battled a form of Muscular Dystrophy for several years. By the end, she couldn't swallow or walk, and suffered terrible pain. She never complained. She was the strongest person I've ever known. Dad

made sure to take care of her at home. Mom went to heaven on January 21, 2018. They were married 58 years.

Dad moved back to Niceville. We had six years together and suddenly he wasn't O.K. We fought for a month-and-a-half. We lost.

I know we all lose our parents, but, somehow, I wasn't supposed to ever lose mine. I am heartbroken. My parents always kept us safe, took care of us, made sure we had a childhood and always, always made our lives better. They were always there for us. I'd have to write a

book to do justice to their life story and what they did for us. Patrick always says Mom and Dad did the right things. My husband Stuart says Mom and Dad were the most generous people on the planet. Losing his own Dad in 1992, he felt my Dad was like a second father. Mom and Dad were both heroes, and people who worked hard, made a difference in lives and made this country great.

I want people to know Larry and Molly Murphy existed and remember their names. In honor of them, on their behalf, and BECAUSE of them, I was

honored to present a check to One Hopeful Place and Fisher House for \$10,000.00 each at the Fort Walton Chamber First Friday Coffee.

If you still have parents, hug them as soon as you can, as often as you can, and never let a day go by without saying I love you.

I love you Mom and Dad. You were both promoted to glory!



Kelly Murphy-Redd

Writer/Marketing Consultant
 Certified Economic Developer
 Florida Real Estate Broker

*Official Storyteller of the
 Fort Walton Beach
 Chamber of Commerce*

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ELECT  **ANDREW RENCICH**

for Okaloosa County Commissioner, District 3

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- ★ Military
- ★ Tourism
- ★ Industry Growth

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Paid by Andrew Rencich, Republican, for Okaloosa County Commissioner

VOTE ANDREW RENCICH ON TUESDAY, AUGUST 20TH

ANDREW'S PRIORITIES:

- ✓ Improve Our Roads and Reduce Traffic
- ✓ Increase High Speed Internet Availability
- ✓ Fund Our Law Enforcement and Public Safety First!
- ✓ Strengthen Military Mission
- ✓ Stabilize the Housing Market
- ✓ Ensure the Next Generation Has High-Paying Jobs Locally
- ✓ Keep Taxes Low and Spend Wisely!

A LIFETIME OF SERVICE:

- Enlisted in the U.S. Army in 2004 as an Infantry soldier and elevated to Sergeant First Class Special Forces Intel SGT also known as a U.S. Army Green Beret
- Relocated to Crestview, FL in 2011 after 3RD combat deployment
- Sergeant first class within the Army National Guard
- Small Businesses Owner: AA Tactical (Firearms Retail) and Aerohead Inc. (Aerospace & Defense Manufacturing)



WHY I AM RUNNING:

I've served my country as a U.S. Army Green Beret, now I want to serve my county as one of your Commissioners. Our community and local economy are strong, but we can't rest on our laurels.

I want to keep taxes low, make government work for we the people, focus on a strong economy and our strong Panhandle values.



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Endorsements: Congressman Matt Gaetz, State Rep. Joel Rudman, State Rep. Frank White, Former Sen. Pres. Don Gaetz, Okaloosa County Commissioner Col. Graham W. Fountain, Okaloosa County Commissioner Carolyn Ketchel, Superintendent of Schools Marcus Chambers, Crestview Mayor JB Whitten, Crestview Councilman Doug Capps. Steve Colson-Colson Electrical, Jonathan Holloway-Holloway Law Firm P.A., Robyn & Scott Helt-Elite Const. & Electrical//Elite Reality, Shane & Leicee Braneff-Ohana Heating & Air, Steve Daher-Daher Contracting Inc., Jason & April O'daniel's-Mainstreet Auto//Local Drip, Daniel (Gus) & Samantha Gusoff-Harley Davidson//BigGus Tractor, Randy Wise-Randy Wise Homes, Catherine Pittman-The Property Group 85, Charles Reynolds-The Lawn Barber. Crestview Professional Firefighter Association L2680

Community

HCA Florida Fort Walton-Destin Hospital Celebrates 50 Years!

HCA Florida Fort Walton-Destin Hospital recently commemorated a half-century of service to our community with a grand celebration marking its 50th anniversary! Since its founding in 1974, the hospital has provided optimal healthcare services while evolving alongside the vibrant community it serves.

Zach McCluskey, chief executive officer at HCA Florida Fort Walton-Destin Hospital, welcomed hospital and community leaders, care team members and other guests to the milestone event. McCluskey expressed gratitude to colleagues, physicians, volunteers, community members and partners for their unwavering support throughout the hospital's five journey. "In 1974, a group of visionary physicians joined forces to establish what was then the General Hospital of Fort Walton Beach," McCluskey said. "Their pioneering spirit laid the foundation for our enduring commitment to the care and improvement of human life."



From its early days with 42 physicians and 172 employees, the hospital has grown exponentially. Today, it employs over 1,200 dedicated care and support team members, including more than 400 skilled physicians, and a comprehensive range of services including two freestanding emergency rooms, an inpatient rehabilitation facility.

During the celebration, Chaplain Ray Sansom led a prayer and blessing, reflecting on the hospital's journey and its future.

Mayor Dick Rynearson of Fort Walton Beach presented a proclamation highlighting the hospital's contributions to the community. "HCA Florida Fort Walton-Destin Hospital has been a cornerstone of our city, providing exceptional care and service for 50 years," Mayor Rynearson remarked.

In recognition of the hospital's 50th anniversary, and in support of education and future healthcare professionals, the hospital has pledged \$50,000 to Northwest Florida State College (NWFSC) for health sci-

ences scholarships over the next five years. The hospital recently made the first installment of this pledge, donating \$10,000 to the radiology program and \$10,000 to nursing program scholarships.

"Northwest Florida State College is dedicated to equipping our students for essential roles in local healthcare," said Dr. Cristie Kedroski, Interim President of NWFSC. "We couldn't achieve this without the generous support of HCA Florida Fort Walton-Destin Hospital, which has provided scholarships

and program assistance for many years. This partnership helps remove financial barriers for our nursing and radiography students, ensuring we can serve our community's needs effectively."

The State of Florida has established a grant program entitled Linking Industry to Nursing Education, or L.I.N.E. Grant. This grant provides matching funds to NWFSC for gifts from healthcare providers to their nursing program which means that the \$10,000 gift will become \$20,000 worth of scholarships for nursing students.

McCluskey concluded the event, stating, "From all of us at HCA Florida Fort Walton-Destin Hospital, thank you for contributing to this extraordinary journey. Here's to the next 50 years of excellence, compassion, and quality care."

For more information about HCA Florida Fort Walton-Destin Hospital and its services, visit HCAFloridaHealthcare.com.



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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).

Changes for Homebuyers Due to NAR Settlement



BY MELISSA FORTE-LITSCHER,
NEXTHOME CORNERSTONE
REALTY

The National Association of Realtors (NAR) settlement with the Department of Justice will

and always has been, negotiable. Florida has been one of 11 states that didn't require a buyer to sign an agreement with an agent to enlist their services in purchasing a home. Now, nationwide, buyers will need to sign a brokerage agreement before an agent can show the buyer any property listed in the MLS.

As a buyer, you must sign a written agreement with a broker/agent before touring a home, whether in person or virtually. This agreement should include the services and value that will be provided to you, and the cost of those services, thus securing your agent to work solely on your behalf as a buyer. Once you have reached an agreement and begin your home search, your agent will be working with you

and they must have clear and transparent discussions with you about compensation. At NextHome Cornerstone Realty, our brokerage has been closely following how these developments have unfolded over the past two years.

Because of this, our leadership is uniquely positioned to guide our agents to successfully navigate these changes in the real estate industry.

Agents who are Realtors are here to help you navigate the process of buying a home and are ethically obligated to work in your best interest. Their compensation remains fully negotiable, they must abide by the REALTOR® Code of Ethics,

and they must have clear and transparent discussions with you about compensation. At NextHome Cornerstone Realty, our brokerage has been closely following how these developments have unfolded over the past two years.

You have a wide range of

choices when it comes to one of the largest financial decisions in your life. Make sure to enlist the assistance of a trusted professional to help you understand the full range of these choices when purchasing a home. As an experienced Accredited Buyer's Representative and a Certified Residential Specialist, I have the skills to help guide you through this process, and as always, I'm at your service.



come into effect nationwide on August 17, 2024. Our local association, the Emerald Coast Association of Realtors, will implement the changes on August 12, 2024. This settlement introduces changes to how real estate agents' compensations are handled in the MLS (Multiple Listing Services) and in real estate transactions.

One of the main changes is that buyer's agent compensation will no longer be listed in the MLS. While there are some differences in how things are processed, an agent's compensation on both sides of a transaction is,

to secure your dream home. After you find a home that you like and want to make an offer, your agent will negotiate the best offer which meets your financial situation. That can include asking the seller to pay some or all of the compensation due to your agent, which is permitted. But, the offer cannot be shared on a MLS. Also, the amount your agent receives cannot exceed the amount you agreed to in your brokerage agreement. You do not need a written agreement if you are just speaking to an agent at an open house or asking them about their services. You can still accept con-

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Events Around Town

SOF MISSIONS Hosts 8th Annual GALA to Empower and Heal Our Nation's Heroes

Shield of Faith (SOF) Missions proudly presents the 8th Annual Emerald Coast Gala, scheduled for Sept. 13, 2024, at

the prestigious Destin-Ft. Walton Beach Convention Center. This gala serves as a beacon of hope, dedicated to empowering and fostering resilience among our Nation's warriors.

With an unwavering commitment to combatting the tragic

epidemic of suicide among our Nation's warriors, the nonprofit team at SOF Missions has tirelessly worked to provide essential care. To date, SOF Missions has allocated over \$8.1 million in support to more than 3,000 warriors, ensuring they receive

the care they deserve.

All Gala proceeds go directly to aiding active-duty personnel, Veterans, and first responders nationwide who face mental and physical injuries, enabling Be Resilient Clinics to offer free, comprehensive care plans, ensuring our Nation's warriors receive the support they need, regardless of their financial situation.

The evening will be filled with celebration and inspiration from our incredible warrior guest speaker, John Arroyo, a retired Special Forces Green Beret with an incredible story you won't want to miss.

Our theme this year is swing! Get creative with your 40s swing attire and have fun! You can look forward to live entertainment from the HashTag Swing Band and audience instruction from the Luna Ballroom team! You will also enjoy an exquisite meal based on the swing era, as well as the excitement of both silent and live auctions.

We invite you to join us, standing united with the SOF Missions team and our community at one of the most impactful fundraising events of the year. With your generous support, together, we can provide the crucial aid needed to foster hope and facilitate healing for our nation's heroes.

Visit www.sofmissions.org/gala for tickets or information. Sponsorship opportunities are also available.

Tickets: \$100 per person (Price includes dinner, dessert and one free drink. Guest speaker, silent auction, swing dancing.) Attire: 40s Swing Theme (have fun and get creative).

TMF Hosts 3rd Annual 9/11 Heroes Run Sept. 8

The Travis Manion Foundation (TMF), one of the nation's leading veteran service organizations, will host the Destin 9/11 Heroes Run 5K Run/Walk/or Ruck Race on Sunday, Sept. 8, at 9 a.m. at Legendary Marine in Destin. The annual race will unite the community to remember the lives lost on September 11 and in the wars since, and honor the veterans, military service members and first re-



sponders who serve our country and our communities. The 5K course is out and back through beautiful Regatta Bay.

Proceeds benefit the Travis Manion Foundation which empowers veterans and families of fallen heroes to develop character in future generations. Sponsored nationally by USAA, the 9/11 Heroes Run national race series will be held in 70 communities globally.

The 9/11 Heroes Run was inspired by Marine 1st Lt. Travis Manion who was killed by a sniper in Iraq in April 2007 as he selflessly protected his battalion. Before his final deployment, Travis visited Rescue One in NYC—a group known for losing almost all its men on 9/11. Travis returned from this visit with a deeper understanding of his reasons for fighting in Iraq. At its heart, the 9/11 Heroes Run is a tribute to a personal commitment to never forget the heroes of that day.

“Each year on the anniversary of September 11, we pause to remember the heroes who made the ultimate sacrifice on that day and those who lost their lives in the wars since,” said Ryan Manion, CEO, Travis Manion Foundation. “The growth of the 9/11 Heroes Run 5K series over the last 17 years demonstrates a shared commitment in communities nationwide to never forget the sacrifices of first responders and military service members like my brother, Travis, and countless others.”

Through 9/11 Heroes Runs around the world, Travis Manion Foundation invests back into the local race communities to support military service members, veterans, first responders and their families. For more information about the race series visit 911heroesrun.org.



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Happenings Around FWB

2024 EVENTS

AUGUST 10-31

- 10** | All Ages Paint Party: Bubblegum Animals
12 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB
- 11** | Live Music: Meg Phillips
6 pm | AI's Beach Club & Burger Bar | Okaloosa Island
- 13** | Live Music: Carlie Seagar
4 pm | AI's Beach Club & Burger Bar | Okaloosa Island
- 14** | sciPad featuring SMALLab
1 pm | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB
Center for lifelong learning (FWB)
Meet & Greet / Welcome Back Social
6 pm | UWF - FWB Campus, Rm 126 | FWB
Paint Party: Autumn Bouquet
6:30 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB
- 15** | Greater FWB Chamber
Business After Hours
5:30 pm | The Island Resort | Okaloosa Island
Home Defense Fundamentals Class
5:30 pm | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso
Planetarium Night
6 pm | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB
- 16** | Creature Feature
11:30 am | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB
Paint Party: Dusk Thunderstorm
5:30 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB
Football Game:
FWB Vikings vs Walton Braves
7 pm | FWB High School | FWB
- 16-31** | Fall Lawn Games
5 pm | Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach
- 17** | Concealed Carry Weapons Class
10 am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso
- 18** | Paint Your Pet
1 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB
Live Music: Robbie Paynter
6 pm | AI's Beach Club & Burger Bar | Okaloosa Island
- 19** | Center for lifelong learning (FWB)
Fall Online Registration Opens
9 am | cil-fwblife.org | UWF - FWB Campus, Rm 461 | FWB
- 20** | Election Day!
7 am - 7 pm | Okaloosa County
- 21** | Live Music: Parker & Ivoree
6 pm | AI's Beach Club & Burger Bar | Okaloosa Island
- 22** | Creature Feature
11:30 am | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB
Game Night
5 pm | The Sound Cafe + Enlightened Studios | FWB

- 23** | Chemistry Corner
11:30 am | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB
ADSO Gallery Show Reception: 3-D Show
6 pm | Arts & Design Society (ADSO) | FWB
Football Game:
FWB Vikings vs Tate Aggies
7 pm | Fort Walton Beach High School | FWB
- 24** | Summer of Seltzer Fest
1 pm | The Island Resort | Okaloosa Island
Paint Party: Tropical Sunset
6 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB
- 26** | Dungeons & Dragons
6 pm | The Sound Cafe + Enlightened Studios | FWB
- 28** | Live Music: Michael Howard
6 pm | AI's Beach Club & Burger Bar | Okaloosa Island
- 29** | Creature Feature
11:30 am | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB
Spill the Tea: Open Poetry Night
7:30 pm | The Sound Cafe + Enlightened Studios | FWB
- 30** | Planetarium Special Feature: Norse Mythology
6 pm | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB
Football Game:
FWB Vikings vs South Walton Seahawks
7 pm | Fort Walton Beach High School | FWB
- 31** | Paint Party: Seaside Sunset
2 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB

SEPTEMBER 01-08

- 01** | Women's Climbing Circle
5 pm | Rock Out Climbing Gym | Destin
Live Music: Rockstarfish
6 pm | AI's Beach Club & Burger Bar | Okaloosa Island
- 04** | Live Music: Parker & Ivoree
6 pm | AI's Beach Club & Burger Bar | Okaloosa Island
- 06** | Greater FWB Chamber
First Friday Coffee
7 am | Destin-FWB Convention Center | FWB
- 07** | Bring Hope Dragon Boat Races & Festival
All Day | The Gulf | Okaloosa Island
Concealed Carry Weapons Class
10 am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso
- 08** | Live Music: Meg Phillips
6 pm | AI's Beach Club & Burger Bar | Okaloosa Island

ONGOING EVENTS

VFW Post 7674 - Sunday Breakfasts
8 am | Sun | 231 Carol Ave | FWB

SINGO Music Bingo Nights
6 pm | Tues | The Island Resort | FWB

Open Mic Night
7 pm | Weds | The Sound Cafe + Enlightened Studios | FWB

Live Trivia Nights
6 pm | Thurs | The Island Resort | FWB

Live Trivia Nights
6:30 pm | Thurs | AJ's on the Bayou | FWB

FARMERS MARKETS

Okaloosa County
Saturdays | 7 am - 2 pm
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Downtown FWB
2nd & 4th Saturdays | 8 am - 1 pm
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Saturdays | 9 am - 1 pm
Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach

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Five Things to Do Before a Storm



By JULIE A. MARTIN,
LICENSED AGENT FL

It's the middle of summer, and you just heard on the radio that a Category 4 storm is about to hit in your area. What should you do to prepare? Stocking up on non-perishable food and bottled water is a given and also batteries. Those are both good preventative measures. But, what will you do if the storm hits your house? How can you minimize damage to your home and to your other possessions?

The first thing you should do is call your insurance agent

and ask for a copy of both your declarations page and your policy jacket. You should do this both for your home and for your vehicles. If you have boats, motorcycles, an RV or any other contrivance or dwellings, get all of your policy documents together in one place. Familiarize yourself with your deductibles, coverages and any exclusions or limitations. You should do this regularly anyway, because once a storm is in the box, no coverage can be changed, altered or reinstated. If there is a payment due, pay it. You might be unable to do so later, if the timing of the storm coincides with a cancellation or the expiration of your policy.

The second thing you should do is take pictures and videos of the inside and outside of your home and email them to yourself. This is to show what your house looked like BEFORE anything happened. If you recently purchased big ticket items like new furniture or an entertainment center, email yourself any receipts you might have for the more expensive items in your home. In the event of a loss, receipts, photos and videos will aid the adjusters in processing your claim in a fair and timely manner.

The third thing to do is go out into your yard, front and back, and think about anything that can become a projectile. Winds upwards of 120 miles per hour can turn even a 6 oz. can of soup into a weapon. The more things that you can bring into the garage or a shed, the



less they will be likely to fly into one of your windows or the side of your house. The things that you are unable to bring into your garage, lay them on their side as close to the back of the house as possible, or the shed. Try to tie them down with rope so it is less likely to fly away and either damage your home or hurt someone. Anything on your patio? Bring it into the house or into your garage, if you have one.

If you have hurricane shutters or windows, you are already ahead of the game. But, if you do not, boarding up your windows is a good close second. You might need to go to Home Depot or Lowe's where they have both the lumber and the clips/screws to board up the windows tightly. Do some research before you do this, because there is a right and wrong way to board up your house against the possibility of storm damage.

The last thing to do is make sure you have a battery-operated charger for your phone, so that in the event you do get hit, you can communicate with your family, and call the agent and insurance company for help in putting in your claim. Get gas before the storm. Don't just top it off. If you have three vehicles, take them to the station one by one and fill them all up. The first thing that happens after a hurricane is a localized shortage of goods, and you don't want to have to scramble around at the last minute and go without. If you prepare yourself, your home and your vehicles well in advance of the upcoming storm, you can breathe a sigh of relief that even if the storm hits, you have done everything you can to prevent against further loss.

less they will be likely to fly into one of your windows or the side of your house. The things that you are unable to bring into your garage, lay them on their side as close to the back of the house as possible, or the shed. Try to tie them down with rope so it is less likely to fly away and either damage your home or hurt someone. Anything on your patio? Bring it into the house or into your garage, if you have one.

If you have hurricane shutters or windows, you are already ahead of the game. But, if you do not, boarding up your windows is a good close second. You might need to go to Home

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AFSOC Demonstrates ACE with Historic Landing

BY MASTER SGT. RYAN CONROY,
1ST SPECIAL OPERATIONS WING

In a historic first, Air Force Special Operations Command successfully landed an AC-130J Ghost Rider Gunship on Highway 63 in Bono, Arkansas, on August 4, 2024. This operation was part of a broader exercise, Emerald Warrior Field Training Exercise II, designed to showcase AFSOC's Agile Combat Employment capabilities.

The exercise provided an opportunity for participating units to refine their skills and advance ongoing pathfinding and experimentation efforts within AFSOC.

"This exercise serves as a significant milestone for AFSOC, demonstrating our ability to

operate in diverse and austere environments," said Tech. Sgt. Robert Gallagher, lead planner for the highway landings, assigned to the AFSOC Air Commando Development Center. "By leveraging ACE concepts, we enhance our operational flexibility and resilience."

Throughout the morning, Special Tactics Airmen from the 1st Special Operations Wing established and secured a landing zone on the highway.

Shortly after, a C-146A Wolfhound and an MC-130J Commando II from the 492nd Special Operations Wing landed on the five-lane highway.

The MC-130J crew then set up a Forward Arming and Refueling Point (FARP), as the



U.S. AIR FORCE PHOTO BY AIRMAN 1ST CLASS SAISHA CORNETT

A U.S. Air Force MC-130J Commando II, assigned to the 492nd Special Operations Wing, lands on Highway 63 during Emerald Warrior 24 FTX II in Bono, Arkansas, August 4, 2024. The objective of the operation was to train aircrews on runway-agnostic operations to enable Air Commandos to effectively work in contested spaces where traditional airfields may be unavailable or under threat.

AC-130J assigned to the 1st Special Operations Wing at Hurlburt Field, Florida, made its approach, landed, refueled, rearmed and took off again.

The primary objective of this exercise was to validate AFSOC's capability to operate in austere environments with minimal infrastructure. Key tasks included securing the landing zone and performing FARP operations, both critical elements of the ACE framework.

"Emerald Warrior FTX II demonstrates to our adversaries that we can meet them anytime, any place, anywhere, without the need for traditional runways to project air power," said Col. Patrick Dierig, 1 SOW commander. "By landing an AC-

130J on a highway and conducting FARP, we're proving our ability to operate in austere and unique environments. It shows our commitment to maintain operational flexibility and readiness, ensuring we can deliver decisive airpower whenever and wherever it's needed."

The successful execution of this exercise underscores AFSOC's commitment to evolving its capabilities and adapting to emerging threats. By continuing to refine and operationalize ACE concepts, AFSOC ensures it remains at the forefront of innovative and agile combat operations.



AFEV Purchases U.S. Air Force Land for Victory Village!

The Air Force Enlisted Village (AFEV) has purchased 80 acres of land from the U.S. Air Force with a Deed Signing Ceremony on July 12, 2024. The former Eglin AFB land in Shalimar will be used to build Victory Village, a nonprofit retirement community with a specialized lifestyle for aging wounded warriors and their caregivers. Victory Village will be a continuum of care retirement community for wounded warriors, their caregivers and enlisted surviving spouses and married couples of all military branches.

Over 200 people attended the event which featured special guest speakers Gen. James C. Slife, Vice Chief of Staff of the U.S. Air Force, and the Honorable Dr. Ravi Chaudhary, Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Air Force for Energy, Installations, and Environment.

AFEV President and CEO Brooke McLean described meeting with board members, community leaders, and elected officials seven years ago with the idea of how to create this joint base community for enlisted military members.

"In the 50-plus years that this organization has been in existence, we have seen thousands of Air Force widows and retired couples. And today, Air Force Enlisted Village has about 600



residents here," McLean said. "I started thinking about the opportunity to help wounded warriors and the caregivers as they go through the aging process. And they're going to go through an aging process that's not going to be like any of the rest of us."

Victory Village will be located adjacent to the Air Force Enlisted Village (AFEV). Plans for the community include multiple neighborhoods for 800 people to reside, a community center, a multi-denominational chapel, a fitness center, a swimming pool, walking paths, retail services, and an EMS substation to serve the Poquito Bayou neighborhood.

"Words can't describe what our wounded warriors and the families have meant to our nation. But to do something this tangible, this impactful for them cannot be understated," Chaudhary, said.

Slife mentioned most people in the serving and veteran com-

munity miss the camaraderie. "When you think about what Victory Village will be for the communities that it serves, it provides that sense of purpose and a community of shared values," Slife said.

Victory Village will also be home to surviving spouses of retired enlisted service members

and retired enlisted couples of all military branches of service with plans to offer a continuum of care complete with on-site skilled nursing. The community will be constructed in increments and will take ten to fifteen years to complete.

Also participating in the event: Eglin AFB Honor Guard

presented the colors, AFEV COO Cory Olson served as MC, Bob Hope Village resident Ernest Tucker sang the National Anthem, and Dolores Hope All-Faiths Chapel Chaplain Bethel Bateson provided the invocation.

A video of the ceremony is available on YouTube.

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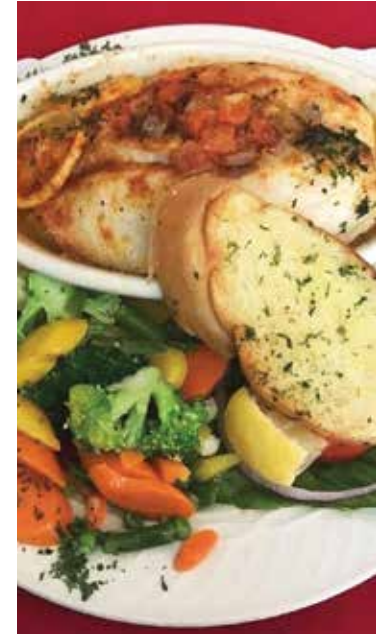
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Gulfarium C.A.R.E. Center Celebrates Historic Release of Adult Male Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle!

BY MARY FOMBY, MARKETING MANAGER, GULFARIUM MARINE ADVENTURE PARK

A jubilant gathering of locals, tourists, and sea turtle advocates witnessed a landmark moment in marine conservation as the Gulfarium C.A.R.E. Center released seven rehabilitated sea turtles back into the Gulf of Mexico at Topsail Hill State Preserve. Organized by the Gul-

time the C.A.R.E. Center has rehabilitated and released an adult male of this species.

In a monumental step for conservation, the United States Geological Survey (USGS) representatives applied a satellite tag to Landon to provide valuable data on long-distance movements and behaviors. Acoustic tags were also applied to the remaining turtles released

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.



farium C.A.R.E. Center Foundation, the event showcased the successful rehabilitation efforts and ongoing commitment to protecting marine wildlife.

The highlight of the release was the introduction of Landon, an adult male Kemp's Ridley sea turtle weighing 62 lbs. Landon's journey to recovery began after he was hooked at Pensacola Beach Fishing Pier on June 30, 2024. Kemp's Ridley sea turtles are critically endangered, with only an estimated 22,000 individuals remaining in the wild. The significance of Landon's release cannot be overstated, as it marks the first

today, allowing researchers to assess fine-scale movements and habitat use around fishing piers. The USGS hopes to compare the movement patterns of rehabilitated turtles to wild caught sea turtles aiding in conservation efforts to reduce the number of sea turtles hooked and entangled in fishing gear.

The Gulfarium C.A.R.E. Center Foundation extends its appreciation to the community, volunteers, and partner organizations whose support makes these releases possible.

If you see a sea turtle in distress, injured, or deceased please report it to the Florida Fish and

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 Off the Hook

Fishing News

New Name, Same Fish: Largemouth Bass Are Now Florida Bass

Genetics studies confirmed what many anglers and biologists have believed for a long time – Florida bass are special! Florida's most popular freshwater game fish has a new name. The American Fisheries Society established the Florida bass as a separate species from the largemouth bass. This means that in most of Florida (except



the western Panhandle) what was known as a largemouth bass is now called a Florida bass.

This name change will affect how the fish is referred to in reg-

ulations and other communications. However, it will not affect anglers fishing for this iconic freshwater sport fish.

According to the recent re-



search publication by Yale University, the study used advanced genetic analysis and determined Florida bass to be its own species. The research also identified the range of Florida bass to be larger than once believed, including not only Florida, but also parts of Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina.

The scientific names of these two bass also changed. Largemouth bass, previously *Micropterus salmoides*, is now the scientific name for Florida bass. Largemouth bass are now *Micropterus nigricans*.

Understanding and conserving fish species is crucial for sustainable recreational fishing and biodiversity preservation. The classification of species plays a key role in these efforts. Black basses (*Micropterus* spp.) are well-known freshwater fish and highly popular for recreational fishing. This new understanding of black bass diversity, distribution and classification provides a critical foundation for better managing and conserving these important and iconic fish. It will aid in ensuring their continued conservation and sustainable use for future generations.

To learn more about the Florida bass name change, visit MyFWC.com, click on "Freshwater Fishing," select "Black Bass Management" and click on "Florida Bass."

Be On The Lookout For Divers-Down Flags

Boaters and divers: practice safe boating and diving habits by maintaining 360-degree awareness and adhering to all divers-down flag regulations.

Divers-down flags and buoys are crucial warning devices used by divers and dive vessels to signal the presence of divers in the water. These devices must feature a divers-down symbol — a red rectangle or square with a white diagonal stripe — and must be prominently displayed whenever divers are wholly or partially submerged and using a face mask, snorkel or underwa-

ter breathing apparatus.

"When navigating near a divers-down flag, boaters must operate at idle speed within 300 feet in open water or within 100 feet on rivers, inlets or navigational channels," said Maj. Bill Holcomb, FWC Boating and Waterways Section Leader. "And divers need to stay within 300 feet of their properly displayed flags on open water and 100 feet on rivers, inlets or navigational channels."

The divers-down symbol must measure at least 12 x 12 inches when displayed from the water, and at least 20 x 24 inches when displayed from a vessel, positioned at the highest point to maximize visibility. Flags must be constructed to remain fully unfurled, even in calm conditions, while buoys must display the symbol on each of their flat sides.

"In the summertime there is a lot going on out there and these regulations are important for divers to remember whether they are diving for scallops in north Florida, lobster in south Florida or recreationally throughout the state," said Col. Brian Smith, Director of the FWC Division of Law Enforcement. "Vessel operators should be aware of what is going on around them at all times and be on the lookout for divers-down flags nearby. It's also good to remember to take the dive flag down and wear a life jacket while underway. This is not just responsible boating and ensuring the safety of divers and the boating public - it's also the law."

Every year, the FWC responds to incidents where a diver was struck, injured or killed by a vessel. Working together, vessel operators and divers can each play a part in preventing tragedy on the water this summer.

For more information, visit MyFWC.com/boating, click on "Boating Regulations," and select "Divers-down Warning Devices."

Boating violations may be reported anonymously to the Wildlife Alert Hotline at 888-404-FWCC (888-404-3922) or text 847411 (Tip411) with keyword "FWC" and information about the location and violation.





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Growing the Game: The Annual Emerald Coast Junior Golf Tour



BY BARBARA PALMGREN

Every year, junior golfers look forward to this prestigious event. This year, on July 10 and 11, the 45th Marvin DeBolt Daily News Junior Challenge was held at Fort Walton Beach Golf Club. This was a special occasion as Marvin's sons, Doug and Jeff DeBolt, presented the Girls and Boys overall winners with individual trophies and having their names listed with other winners on a large trophy. This impressive trophy had names inscribed from past winners who have gone on to win on the PGA Tour, such as Bubba Watson and Heath Slocum.

The tournament format was stroke play. Boys and girls 8-9 and 10-11 played two days of nine holes each. Older divisions played 18 holes for two days. There were first and second place winners in each division: Boys and Girls 8-9; Boys and Girls 10-11; Girls 12-14; Girls 15-18; Boys 12-13; Boys 14-15; Boys 16-18. In stroke play, shooting a low score wins after two days of 36 holes of golf.

Tournament director, Dennis Attaway (ECJGY) showed me the huge trophy filled with names of the women and men overall winners over the years. Each golfer this year received a tee shirt with all of those names listed on the back of the shirt. Impressive, to say the least!

The tournament began in 1980, started by the Daily News publisher, Marvin DeBolt and sponsored by the newspaper and the City of Fort Walton Beach. This tournament is also part of a golf course summer series where courses in several counties host these young golfers. The



next leg of the series in Okaloosa County will be held at Rocky Bayou County Club, July 24 and 25. The title of the series is the "Gulf Coast Summer Slam."

The overall Girls Champi-

on with a two-day score of 154 was Mckazlyn Payne. The overall Boys Champion was Baylor Touchstone with a two-day score of 144.

Congratulations to all these

young golfers as they enjoy the game and continue participating in golf tournaments in our area. Who knows? The next names on the trophy will be winners on the pro tour!



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 Wellness

Navigating a Trip With Your CPAP Machine

By KELLY STALNAKER

Are you a CPAP user that's planning an upcoming trip? Perhaps there's a late summer getaway in your near future; or a visit to family/friends out of town for a wedding or other special occasion? Traveling with your CPAP machine and supplies may seem daunting, but there are things you can do to make it easier!

Packing for your trip is obviously of the utmost importance; you need to remember everything from medications to personal hygiene items to extra underwear. But, when you have a CPAP, you also have to remember your machine, masks, cushions, tubing and more. And since you're already gathering all of the necessities, experts recommend including a few extra essentials. Our favorite tip is to pack a paper copy of your prescription with you. Nearly every single day we have pa-

tients visiting our area that have forgotten (or broken) pertinent CPAP pieces. Fortunately, we can help. But, often we do need a prescription to get them what they need. Save yourself the hassle of trying to contact your doctor while you're on vacation, and bring your prescription with you. Just keep it in your bag!

Another often overlooked component is the power supply. It is either left behind (still plugged into the wall) or not compatible with electrical outlets (if traveling outside of the U.S.). Creating a thorough checklist prior to starting the packing process can help alleviate some of these travel woes.

Depending on the specifics of your trip, you might want to consider packing a battery backup. Suppose you're going camping and will be away from a source of electricity for an extended amount of time. Or maybe you'll be traveling to

a location that is forecasted to have severe weather with possible power outages. In these situations, a battery backup would be the only option for securing a good night's sleep. At J&B Medical we carry the popular Portable Outlet for these types of situations. But even if you're not traveling under these conditions, the Portable Outlet is handy to have around anytime as you never know when you'll lose electricity, especially during hurricane season!

If just the thought of lugging around your bulky CPAP machine through airports and hotels feels like too much, then consider downsizing to a travel CPAP machine! Lightweight and portable, these machines offer the same features but in a more compact size. We carry one about the size of a baseball! But whether you are traveling with a portable or standard machine, the protocol at security



in most airports remains the same; prior to entering the security line, remove your device from its bag and send it through the x-ray machine like any other electronic item. Labeling the bag with a "medical equipment luggage tag" is also advised for more efficiency at the airport.

At J&B Medical, we have a

variety of travel machines and accessories to help make your CPAP journey more comfortable and convenient. Stop by and see us anytime Monday through Friday from 9 until 5 at 540 E John Sims Pkwy. in Niceville. Or call 850-729-2559 and see how we can help you with your CPAP needs!

From Rescue to Rehab: One Dog's Mission to Bring Harmony to Healthcare

An exuberant, reddish-brown puppy found herself living on the street in northwest Florida. Originally thought to be male, she was called Cleo by Animal Control. She was taken to two different animal rescue agencies before finding her place, the second of which determined she was, in fact, a girl, and changed her name to Chloe. When she was ready to be adopted into a "forever" home, Chloe was dressed up in cute costumes to disguise her large size, strength, and likely pit bull heritage, and

she even appeared on the local news.

After more than six months at the shelter, a new volunteer who did not intend to adopt a dog appeared. It was love at first sight and the would-be volunteer immediately dropped to the ground to greet Chloe, who excitedly kissed her face. The volunteer took Chloe home on a trial basis and the pair began working diligently on training with Nancy Bown, CPDT-KA of Dog-Harmony.

Chloe gradually gained con-

fidence and overcame her fear of garbage trucks and plastic bags. Bown, an evaluator for Intermountain Therapy Animals, recognized that Chloe had the right personality to become a therapy dog and encouraged the pair to become evaluated. In 2023 at age six, Chloe and her mom became a certified therapy dog team with Dog-Harmony. They now volunteer at HCA Florida Healthcare's Northwest Florida Rehabilitation Center in Destin.

Each week, Chloe brings 65

pounds of love and joy to staff and patients - and the occasional tears to patients who miss their dogs. Her favorite place to visit at the rehab center is the physical therapy (PT) gym, where she can interact with the PT patients. She is a great aid, assisting with repetitive arm movements as a command to sit, stay, or play

fetch. One day, Chloe almost fell asleep standing up as she received an excellent massage from a patient, who she distracted from blood pressure measurements before the patient began her work in the gym. The

Continued on next page



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FROM RESCUE

continued from previous page

patient's blood pressure visually dropped on the device's screen as she patted Chloe.

A fellow volunteer at the rehab center, Sue Marks, said of Chloe: "The staff have to give Chloe a hug, pet, or scratch and they tell us which patients in specific rooms would love a visit from Chloe each week. We have learned so many pet names and breeds belonging to the staff

In an inpatient rehabilitation unit of John Hopkins University's School of Medicine, doctors realized "patients who participated in animal therapy were able to meet goals faster by involving the animals - standing for longer periods while patting a dog, for instance."

Dog-Harmony is experiencing an overwhelming demand for qualified therapy dog teams in healthcare and a significant shortage of qualified therapy dog teams in northwest Florida.



and patients. A smile after a visit from Chloe goes a long way. She is so well-behaved. She takes treats nicely. She makes my day on Fridays, too."

The staff at the rehab center awarded Chloe the prestigious honor of Employee of the Month in February 2024 in appreciation of her visits.

Today, roughly 50% of American households (approximately 65 million) have a dog at home. Nearly all pet owners in the U.S. (97%) consider their companion animals family members. Living with dogs at home reduces stress and anxiety, lowers blood pressure, and improves the mood of humans.

Medical studies have shown that patients interacting with qualified therapy dog teams have been able to heal and recover faster. After only a few minutes of interaction, it is evident how profoundly therapy dog teams affect patients and staff as they benefit from a "bit of home" in a difficult clinical setting.

The 501(c)3 non-profit provides complimentary, ongoing training for therapy dog teams, coordinates their placement in healthcare facilities, accompanies team visits, and provides management and oversight for its healthcare partners. Dog-Harmony spends an average of 10 hours of training, which is provided at no cost to the teams, and is required for each team after the evaluation resulting in certification.

Because of Dog-Harmony's significant experience and multiple relationships with national pet therapy organizations (i.e., Intermountain Therapy Animals, Therapy Pet Connections, Pet Partners, etc.), the non-profit can manage and assign qualified dog therapy teams based on abilities, temperaments, and clinical requirements. The non-profit also spends a significant number of hours on continued monitoring of team performance and ongoing therapy dog team training specific to animal-assisted therapy in healthcare.

According to Dog-Harmony's regionally-focused survey of 895 respondents in 2023, 31% of people think animal-assisted therapy is "very important" and most responded with interest in helping to support by volunteering their time, skills, and knowledge. Dog-Harmony also needs financial support to sustain the hospital therapy dog program, which is provided at no cost;

and for interested therapy dog partners to start the certification program required to volunteer at regional healthcare facilities.

To support Dog-Harmony's therapy dog program, currently managed for HCA Florida Destin-Fort Walton Beach and Twin Cities hospitals, and expand its reach to additional healthcare institutions in the area, visit www.dog-harmony.org/donate

or vote for Chloe in the 'Bark in Style' photo contest running through August 1, 2024.

To learn more about becoming a team with Dog-Harmony's therapy dog program, visit www.dog-harmony.org/therapy or follow Dog-Harmony on Facebook to keep abreast of the next therapy dog team evaluation at the end of October.

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Wellness



By KAY LEAMAN, HEALTH ARCHITECT, HEALTHYDAY HEALTHYLIFE

It sounds like a western. However, these don't carry guns, ride horses or fight outlaws. These dirty dozen do, however, have an effect on our health.

The Dirty Dozen

Every year, the Environmental Working Group (EWG) releases its Dirty Dozen and Clean 15 list. This list is based on thorough testing of many fruits and vegetables. For 2024, here are a few results from EWG (ewg.org).

More than 90% of samples of strawberries, apples, cherries, spinach, nectarines and grapes tested positive for residues of two or more pesticides. A total of 209 pesticides were found. There are 13-23 pesticides in at least one sample of each item tested.

More than 50 different pesticides were detected on every type of crop on the list except cherries (part of the dirty dozen).

Some of these pesticides and chemicals can be linked to cancer, reproductive damage and are also banned in Europe and the European Union.

In order of toxicity the Dirty Dozen items are:

- Strawberries
- Spinach
- Kale, collard and mustard greens
- Grapes
- Peaches
- Pears
- Nectarines
- Apples
- Bell and Hot peppers
- Cherries
- Blueberries

Green Beans (tested positive for a pesticide the EPA banned over 10 years ago)

The Clean 15 have the lowest counts of these residues:

- Carrots
- Sweet Potatoes
- Mangoes
- Mushrooms
- Watermelon
- Cabbage
- Kiwi
- Honeydew melon
- Asparagus
- Sweet peas (frozen)
- Papaya (Can be produced from genetically modified seeds)
- Onions
- Pineapple
- Sweet Corn (Can be produced from genetically modified seeds)
- Avocados

With the dirty dozen, buying organic should be our first choice. We can also find alternatives like blackberries, oranges, bananas, etc. It doesn't mean these are totally clean, but their testing results places them in between the dirty and the clean.

The small label on produce tells us how it was grown. A 4-digit code beginning with a 3 or 4 is conventionally grown. The 5-digit code starting with 9



is organic and the 5 digit code starting with 8 is genetically modified.

There is also a new label showing up on fruits and vegetables: Apeel touts itself as natural and safe; a plant-derived food additive. It creates a thin layer or skin on the vegetable and cannot be washed off. The description is a food additive, mono and diglycerides, by-products of fat and oil processing, classified as 'emulsifiers' and contain trans fats.

If you'd like to take a deep dive, nutritionwithjudy.com/meet-apeel is a good place to start.

As we start making changes, buying more organic of certain items, the stores will take notice and offer more organic options. I understand, especially in today's world, paying more for organic can be a hard choice. Focus on the clean 15 and substitutions. It's about starting new habits and making wise choices.

Here's to Health!

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Business

FREEDOM TECH

continued from page 1

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Community and Military Connection

The Eglin Air Force Base Color Guard graced the event, which raised the massive American flag, and a flyover added to the patriotic atmosphere. Florida Department of Commerce Secretary Alex Kelly and Jay Odom delivered inspiring remarks, highlighting the project's significance for the local community and its strong ties to the military.



Emerald Coast Home & Boat Show!

Sept. 21 & 22 | Destin-FWB Convention Center

The longest running Home and Boat Show in Northwest Florida - The Emerald Coast Home and Boat Show - will be celebrating its 25th Annual Silver Anniversary Edition at the Destin-FWB Convention Center on Saturday and Sunday, September 21 and 22, 2024. This event offers FREE ADMISSION to the public and will have 110 vendor booths with vendors offering super discounted Home and Boat Show specials, and giving away over \$20,000 in swag and door prizes. Other activities include The One Blood Bus to take your blood donation, Kitchencraft with a live cooking show, and an on-site Dog and Cat Rescue and Adoption area. And don't be surprised to see some special surprise celebrity guests who will be there to meet and greet the public. The event features Home Show and general businesses offering information and discounts on Insur-

ance, Roofing, AC, Plumbing, Mortgages, Homes, Interior Designs, Flooring, Pools and Spas, Shutters, Leaf Guards, Furniture, Generators, Vacations, Siding, Heating and AC, Restorations and Remodeling, Electric Bikes, Door Locks, Water, Closets, Bath Remodeling, Painting, Windows and Doors, Computers, Cell Phones, Solar, Lumber and Boat Lifts, Fencing, Advertising and much more. Plus, there will be health care and business vendors from Scent-sy, Chiropractic, Hearing, Massage Therapy and other Health Fields. Legendary Marine and Captains Choice Boats will also have a Spectacular Boat Show and Sale with awesome End-of the-Year DISCOUNTED SPECIALS.

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Secretary Kelly, speaking on behalf of Governor Ron DeSantis, emphasized the importance of military-based communities to Florida's economy and identity. He noted that the military and defense sector has become the state's second-largest industry, surpassing agriculture and creating almost a million jobs.

A True American Patriot

Jay Odom, a lifelong resident of the area, reflected on his childhood experiences near Eglin Air Force Base and how they shaped his understanding of freedom and the military's role in preserving it. He described the Freedom Tech Center as a "centerpiece of the community" and envisioned it becoming the "epicenter of the region for living, working, playing and eating." The flag, he said, is a beacon of freedom.

Odom's journey from a young boy in Shalimar to a successful developer is a testament to the power of community-focused development. He praised the collaborative effort required

to bring the project to life, recognizing the support from various stakeholders, including the Air Force, Fort Walton Beach, Okaloosa County and the state of Florida.

A Bright Future Ahead

The Freedom Tech Center's grand opening marks a new chapter for Fort Walton Beach and the surrounding area. With its mix of residential, commercial, and recreational spaces, the project aims to create a vibrant community hub that honors the region's strong military ties while fostering economic growth and enhancing the quality of life for residents and visitors alike.

Praise from the Community

President and CEO of the Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce, Ted Corcoran, lauded the project, saying, "Jay Odom does everything top-of-the-line. The Freedom Tech Center is an amazing addition to our community. This development expands our business base from downtown to midtown to upper Fort Wal-

ton Beach, creating another vibrant city quadrant."

Corcoran added, "Jay has structured the property to allow people to stay, work, and play here, creating a community that feels like a downtown WITHOUT THE TRAFFIC. It's a great walkable area with lodging and dining options, making it a fantastic place for locals and visitors."

Jay Odom's dedication to his hometown and his visionary leadership have paved the way for a brighter future for Okaloosa County. The massive American flag waves proudly over the Freedom Tech Center, symbolizing this remarkable community's unity, strength and patriotism.

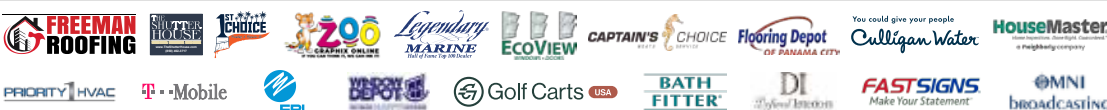
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BY PASTOR DOUG STAUFFER

A Pastor's Ponderings: The Duty and Moral Obligation of Voting

abysmal at best. Remember, your vote is a powerful tool that shapes the future of our nation, state, counties, and cities. Your vote is not just a mere checkmark; it is a voice that influences the future course of societies.

The scriptures remind us of the importance of active community participation. **Proverbs 29:2** states, "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn." This verse highlights the significance of righteous leadership and the voters' collective responsibility in choosing those who govern. Too many people do not realize that elected representatives holding office at a local level affect them daily more than those holding office at the federal level. We must ensure we choose leaders who align with the principles of the Declaration of Independence: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

In a democratic republic (the founders' original design), voting was the primary means of influencing the direction of our

country—nationally and locally. **Romans 13:1a** says, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers." While this verse refers to subjection to authority, the context mentioned in the first paragraph above stresses the type of rulers God intended the electoral process to produce. It also vindicates those who choose not to subject themselves to usurped authority that is not God-ordained (whether in 1776 or today).

By voting scripturally, we are establishing leaders who align with biblical values because the right "rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil." Romans also describes the actions of the God-ordained rulers: "do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same." (**Romans 13:3**) Unfortunately, too many elected representatives focus more on personal agendas than servant leadership. Voting is the primary means of aligning leadership with the Bible when an informed electorate votes.

As American citizens, we are blessed with the freedom to



vote—a right many worldwide still struggle to attain. A right neglected in this country by far too many, far too often! Voting is a crucial way to serve and protect the values we cherish. Let's not take this privilege for granted but use it wisely. Remember that you are not electing a saint or a savior but a servant you desire for God to influence and direct. Choose candidates whose policies align with biblical values.

As we prepare for the upcoming elections, let us remember that our vote is more than a mark

on the ballot—it is an expression of our faith, our values, and our commitment to the well-being of our fellow compatriots. Let us pray for wisdom and discernment and exercise our right to vote with a heart dedicated to God's will and the common good. **PRAY AND VOTE! MAKE A DIFFERENCE!**

May God bless America and guide us in this important civic duty and responsibility. The primary election is on August 20th, with early voting the week before (August 10th to the 17th). You can view a list of candidates at www.govote-okaloosa.com. Look closely; you might find my name—"DocDoug"—on the ballot for State Committeeman!

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.



Douglas "Doc Doug" Stauffer for State Committeeman



Judy and "Doc Doug" Stauffer



Primary Election August 20, 2024 | Early Voting August 10-17, 2024

PD. POL. ADV. Doug "Doc Doug" Stauffer, 1512 John Sims Parkway, Suite 346, Niceville, FL 32578.



Musing

Sean of the South



By SEAN DIETRICH

Kansas City International Airport. I was standing in a long, LONG line, waiting to board my plane. We were like cattle, clogging up the chute. Nobody was happy.

Namely, because yesterday the whole world underwent a historic global internet outage,

which delayed and canceled nearly 3,000 American flights. And on this particular historic day in human civilization, I happened to be flying.

You could see boiling anger and frustration on every face in the airport.

The young man in line ahead of me was with his mother. He



was maybe 15. He had Down syndrome. He was shouting hellos to people in line. He was a natural comedian. He was Mister Personality.

And you couldn't help but smile when the kid landed his miracle gaze on you.

"Hello!" the boy shouted to a businessman in line. "How are you today?!"

The businessman was on the phone, having a heated conversation at the time.

"Uh, I don't know," the guy says.

Then the boy hugged the man. "Does this help!?" he said.

The businessman tentatively hugged back. Until, finally, he broke a smile, ended up terminating the phone call, and he said to the boy, midhug, "I guess I'm good, how are you?"

"It's not 'good,'" the boy said. "You never say 'I'm good,' it's bad grammar. It's WELL. You should have told me, you're doing WELL!"

Everyone laughed at that. All the people in line, in foul moods, some of whom had been living in KCI for the past 20 hours, surviving on vending machine food, actually began chuckling.

The businessman was laughing too, when he said, "Okay, then I am doing WELL, and how are you today?"

"I'm good," the boy said.

More laughter.

Then the boy addressed another woman in line. She was playing on her phone. She was mid-forties. She looked like she'd just sucked a lemon.

"Hi," the kid said.

She looked up from her phone.

"Um. Hi?" she replied.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Laura."

"Can I give you a hug, Laura?"

Laura looked around. "Um. I don't think so."

He hugged her anyway. He even closed his eyes. Laura was taken off guard. She put her phone away and committed to the hug.

"You smell good," the kid said.

"Thanks," she said.

"What about me?" he said. "Do I smell good too?"

Laura looked around again. "Sure."

This made her laugh. Which was exactly what the boy was aiming for, of course.

The kid approached several others in line. I watched people's rancid attitudes fade, one by one. And I watched a few hundred delayed airline passengers start to smile.

When it was time to board the plane, the kid stepped back in line. His comedy routine was over. He was with his mom once again. He was quiet.

"That's one remarkable boy," I whispered to his mother.

She smiled.

"He has a gift," she said. "He can make anyone smile. And I mean ANYONE."

"He must inherit that gift from you?" I said.

She laughed. "Lord, no. His biological parents left him in a dumpster as a baby, behind a restaurant." She used a pinky to dab away a tear. "I was just the one who was lucky enough to find him."

Some folks get all the luck.

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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The Northwest Florida Ballet Announces Season 55

A celebration of 55 years of performing arts excellence on the Emerald Coast

The Northwest Florida Ballet (NFB) announces Season 55, a celebration of five and a half decades of excellence in performing arts, which includes Lightwire Theater's *Dino Light* at Grand Boulevard and *The Nutcracker* and *Cinderella* at the Mattie Kelly Arts Center featuring live music by the Northwest Florida Symphony Orchestra (NFSO).

The 2024-2025 season begins with Lightwire Theater's *Dino Light*, sponsored by Grand Boulevard's Coastal Culture Art, Entertainment and Events on Sat., Oct. 5 at 7:30 p.m. at Grand Boulevard in North Park. Free and open to the public, this original story features a famous scientist with magic powers who brings a friendly dinosaur to life. Internationally recognized for their signature brand of electroluminescent artistry and poignant storytelling, Lightwire Theater has been featured as the winner of Tru TV's *Fake Off* first season and semi-finalists on America's *Got Talent* and ABC's *Game of Talents*.

Next, NFB makes its way to the Mattie Kelly Arts Center for the 45th annual productions of *The Nutcracker* on Fri. and Sat., Nov. 22 and 23 at 7:30 p.m. and Sun., Nov. 24 at 2:30 p.m. As the only full-length version of this delightful holiday fairytale in the area, NFB's *The Nutcracker* features a cast of more than 140 performers, including international guest artists and over 100 local children. The NFSO, led by NFB music director and conductor David Ott, will provide live musical accompaniment for all public performances.

In the Spring, NFB returns to the Mattie Kelly Arts Center to conclude the season on Sat., March 8, at 7:30 p.m. and Sun., March 9, at 2:30 p.m. with *Cinderella*. With live music by the NFSO led by Ott, this beloved classic features the acclaimed choreography of NFB Artistic Director Todd Eric Allen and the beautiful music of Serge Prokofiev. NFB's *Cinderella* is presented in three acts and brings to life a cavalcade of enchanting characters, brilliant dancing, vibrant costumes and magical scenery sure to hold you under its spell.



"With the support of our board of directors, staff, patrons and community partners, NFB is committed to our legacy of outstanding programming despite the significant budget cuts announced by our Governor last month. It is my sincere hope that the residents of our community and visitors to the Emerald Coast join us as we celebrate our 55th season," said NFB Artistic Director and CEO

Todd Eric Allen. Season subscriptions will be available beginning Thurs., Aug. 1, and include tickets to *The Nutcracker* and *Cinderella* for \$80 per adult and \$37 per child (12 and under), a savings of more than 15% compared to box office prices. Season subscribers can also purchase VIP party tickets held after the opening night of *The Nutcracker* and *Cinderella* for \$25 each

and receive a 10% discount for additional performance tickets. Individuals and families may also support NFB by purchasing memberships, which start at \$250 and include benefits ranging from dress rehearsal invitations to season subscriptions.

Visit www.NFBallet.org and NFB's Facebook page for subscription packages, individual ticket sales announcements and

membership purchases. NFB is supported by Season Production Sponsor, the Mattie Kelly Arts Center; Season Signature Sponsors NFBJS Foot & Ankle Surgeon Dr. Sonya Ahmed, Bay Life (Life Media), Emerald Coast Magazine and Scarlett Magazine as well as Performance Co-Sponsor HCA Twin Cities Hospital.

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NORTHWEST FLORIDA BALLET

Celebrating 55 Years of Excellence

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October 5
Grand Boulevard North Park

The Nutcracker
November 22-24
Mattie Kelly Arts Center

Cinderella
March 8-9
Mattie Kelly Arts Center

24/25 Season Subscriptions On Sale Now!

Season Sponsors:

NFBallet.org

Arts & Music

ECTC Opens Registration for Fall Programs

Programs Available in Miramar Beach, Freeport and DeFuniak Springs

Emerald Coast Theatre Company's (ECTC) 2024 Fall Educational Theatre programs are bigger and better than ever. These programs provide creative and engaging classes designed especially for young thespians from elementary to high school, as well as adult classes. ECTC offers classes for Mini Players (5yrs.-1st), Little Players (2nd-3rd grade), Big Players (4th-5th grade), teens, and adults. This year, ECTC is offering Shrek

the Musical, Show Choir (4th - 12th), Acting for Musical Theatre, Movie Magic Mondays, Tap for Teens and Adults, Jazz and Dance for teens and adults, Homeschool Classes, Beginner and Intermediate Ballet, ECTC Thespian Troupe, ECTC Teen Company (9th-12th), and Individual Coaching Sessions for Jr Thespians/Jr Company, and a Senior Drama Club. The full schedule of class dates and times along with tuition and regis-



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tration rates can be found at www.emeraldcoasttheatre.org/youthclasses.

"ECTC is elevating the game this fall. We have new classes, old favorites, and a show our students have been begging for - Shrek the Musical! This semester is going to be magic! We hope to see everyone on stage with us!" - Heath Carroll, Director of Education

Shrek the Musical, the Tony Award-winning musical features your favorite Ogre and all of his fairytale friends as they fight the evil Lord Farquard to regain their homes. Students will work as a cast to act, dance, and sing throughout this high-energy, fast paced production. There's a reason Shrek has become a cultural phenomenon. Join us and be a part of the action!

Fall Youth and Adult Educa-

tion Classes are held from August 10 - November 16, 2024. Payment plans and Scholarships are available. *Tuition price includes a \$30 non-refundable registration fee. Class locations include ECTC's main space at 560 Grand BLVD, Suite 200 in Miramar Beach, FL as well as Florida Chautauqua Theatre (FCT) at 848 Baldwin Avenue in Defuniak Springs, FL and at the Freeport Elementary School in Freeport, FL.

"Theatre arts allow children to express themselves in a comfortable environment with other children, without judgement. We are overjoyed to be able to continue these programs here at ECTC and surrounding communities," says ECTC co-founder and producing artistic director Nathanael Fisher.

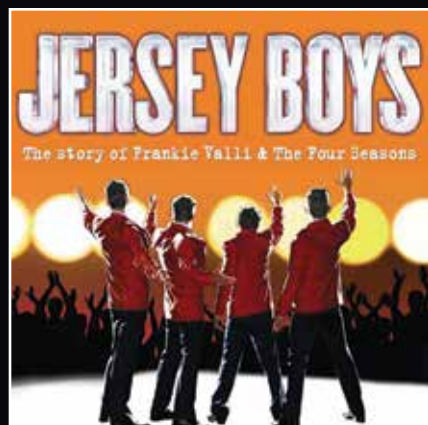
ECTC's 2024-2025 season is

made possible with support from Grand Boulevard at Sandestin, St. Joe Community Foundation, Howard Group, and the South Walton Tourist Development Council. Thank you to our Education Program Sponsors - Shoreline Title, Barker Williams, PLLC, Jennifer Crawford's Own At The Beach Team with Keller Williams, Heritage Oak Wealth Advisors

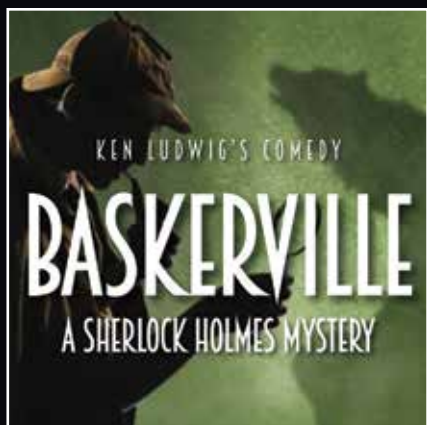
To register for ECTC 2024 Fall Theatre Education classes, visit <https://www.emeraldcoasttheatre.org/youthclasses>.

To make a tax-deductible donation, volunteer or learn more about Emerald Coast Theatre Company, find them on Facebook, follow the ECTC YouTube channel, call (850) 684-0323 and visit www.emeraldcoasttheatre.org.

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Sept. 20 - Oct. 13



Oct. 24 - Nov. 3



Dec. 6-22



emerald coast theatre company

**Season 12
Coming Soon**

More Info and Tickets:

www.emeraldcoasttheatre.org

MKAF Awarded \$30,000 National Grant by Emeril Lagasse Foundation

Northwest Florida's champion of the arts for all abilities was awarded \$30,000 (one of four national grants totaling \$127,000) recently from the Emeril Lagasse Foundation.

Founded in 2002 by Chef Emeril Lagasse and his wife Alden, Emeril Lagasse Foundation is a 501(c)(3) public charity headquartered in New Orleans. The Foundation's mission is to create opportunities to inspire, mentor, and enable youth to reach their full potential. Since its inception, Emeril Lagasse Foundation has granted more than \$20 million to children's charities to support culinary, nutrition, and arts programs with a focus on life skills development.

"Alden and I started this foundation to support youth and provide them with opportunities they would not otherwise have," said Chef Emeril Lagasse. "While we continue to nurture our roots here at home in New Orleans, we are excited that the reach of the foundation is growing across the country."

Other recipients of a Spring 2024 grant include: Second Harvest Food Bank's Summer Feeding and Kids Café Program (New Orleans), The Ingram Lee Foundation (Houston, Texas), Orange County School of the Arts Foundation's Culinary Arts & Hospitality Conservatory (Orange County, Calif.).

"We're honored Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation's ArtsReach efforts in Northwest Florida have been recognized by such a respected organization as the Emeril Lagasse Foundation in such a profound way," said MKAF CEO Demetrius Fuller. "We are approaching our 30th year and this is a great way to start the celebration ... by making the arts accessible to even more youth in our community."

In 2024, MKAF presented around 140 ArtsReach programs — a record and 71 percent increase over the previous year. Since it was established in 1995, MKAF estimates its outreach has impacted more than 400,000 in the local Northwest



Florida community.

Arts for All Abilities initiative is unique in the area. MKAF is the only arts organization that has a specific program initiative to deliver arts to people of all abilities. Arts Empower is MKAF's effort to reach K-12 students through dynamic creative learning opportunities presented by professional art partners such as live theater performances, music sessions, hands-on art workshops and more.

MKAF's community outreach initiatives provide cultural outreach programs through ArtsReach serving K-12 students, adults and children with special needs, at-risk youth, and through MKAF's Warrior Arts program serving active/veteran military.

For more information about becoming an MKAF member, sponsoring, volunteering to attending MKAF events, visit MKAF.org or call (850) 650-2226.



Celebrate the Arts with *Festive Fall Events*

Best of the Emerald Coast *MKAF is the 2024 Charity Beneficiary

OCT 10 | 6 PM | Grand Boulevard at Sandestin

An Evening with Wendy Rodrigue

OCT 11 | 6 PM | The Dugas Estate | Santa Rosa Beach

Arty Kick Off Party & 29th Annual Festival of the Arts

OCT 25 | 6 PM | Henderson Beach Resort | Destin

OCT 26 | 9 AM - 5 PM & OCT 27 | 10 AM - 4 PM | Dugas Pavilion Green in Destin

mkaf
mattie kelly
arts foundation

[Purchase Tickets at MKAF.org/Events](http://MKAF.org/Events)

Proceeds from all events benefit MKAF and its ArtsReach education and community engagement initiatives.

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Arts & Music

SOCKS Announces Meowsterpieces Art Show



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RENÉ MEOWG

Save Our Cats and Kittens (SOCKS), a nonprofit, no-kill, free-roaming cat shelter in Fort Walton Beach, Florida, is pleased to announce their first Meowsterpieces art show and competition.

The show's theme is feline, a celebration of all things cat, from their beauty and agility to their independence and playfulness. The great Leonardo da Vinci once said, "the smallest

feline is a masterpiece."

Works will be displayed from Sept. 3, 2024, to Sept. 21, 2024, in the SOCKS event building, with awards presentation and reception from 2 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. Sept. 21.

We invite all art styles, including painting, sculpture, photography, design, craft, video, sound art, kinetic art, and performance.

There are three age categories:

child (ages 12 and younger), teen (ages 13-17) and adult (18 and older).

There will be two judging methods: A guest juror and People's Choice.

We are honored to have J. Wren Supak as the guest juror. Supak is the Director & Curator of Mattie Kelly Art Center Galleries at Northwest Florida State College.

People's Choice winners will

be determined by an online pay-to-vote system. \$1 = 1 vote.

Trophies will be awarded to first, second, and third-place finishers in each age category and judging method. There will be nine winners determined by the guest juror, and nine winners in People's Choice. The same work may win in both judging methods.

All art styles are accepted, but the work must be the artist's

own. The entry fee is a non-refundable \$25 for up to three pieces. The limit is three works per artist. The entry fee supports the reception, artist awards and the SOCKS shelter.

Submitted art will be auctioned after the exhibition, with proceeds benefiting SOCKS.

For more details and to enter, visit <https://www.saveourcatsandkittens.com/meowsterpieces-art-show>.

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SINFONIA GULF COAST
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An Evening with Alysha Umphress

Tuesday, Sept. 17 | 5:30 PM
Seagar's Prime Steaks & Seafood
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The evening includes valet, champagne reception, multi-course dinner, wine, gratuity and performance.

Join us for a spectacular evening with award-winning Broadway star and television actress Alysha Umphress. With impeccable vocals, magnetic storytelling, and contagious charisma, Umphress captivates. Her undeniable talent has been showcased in *On the Town* (Tony nomination), *American Idiot* (Grammy Award), *Smokey Joe's Café* (Chita Rivera Award), and the world premiere of *Beaches* (Helen Hayes nomination). Come and experience the magic of Alysha Umphress live on stage!

Proceeds benefit Sinfonia Gulf Coast and its music education and community engagement initiatives throughout Northwest Florida.

PRESENTED BY:



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Around Town

United Way Emerald Coast Celebrates!

United Way Emerald Coast (UWEC) successfully concluded its Annual Meeting on July 30th at The Place on Beal in Fort Walton Beach. The sold-out event brought together more than 120 stakeholders including donors, volunteers, board members, elected officials, community leaders and partners. It also served as a platform to celebrate UWEC's accomplishments over the past year and engage with supporters. "Eglin Federal Credit Union is a proud supporter and partner of the United Way Emerald Coast," said VP Membership and Community Development Neko Stubblefield. "The credit union movement was founded on people helping people, and we embrace that same philosophy. People are at the heart of all that we do. As we embark on our 70th anniversary, we continue to move forward and keep giving back. There are so many ways to participate with the UWEC, large and small, and I encourage others to continue to serve with us."



UWEC presented an overview of its achievements from the past year including coordinating 13,869 volunteer hours, serving 82,467 clients and investing in 66 grants to local, vetted non-profit organizations. The organization announced its \$2.39 million impact on Okaloosa and Walton counties, which was an increase of more than \$400,000 over the prior year. "One of the things that I love most about UWEC is that our dollars are raised in Okaloosa and Walton counties and stay here," said UWEC President & CEO Kelly Jasen. "Our Annual Meeting allowed us to celebrate our tremendous impact among a room of leaders who share a common goal of improving lives and building

a stronger, healthier, and more equitable community. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to everyone who contributed to our success and look forward to continuing our important work together."

Several awards were presented including the President's Circle, which recognizes the most

generous partners of the year, and was awarded to Publix Super Markets, Florida Blue/Florida Blue Foundation, and CHELCO/CHELCO Foundation. Additionally, three outstanding volunteers were bestowed the prestigious title of Board Member Emeritus and honored for their legacy and impact on UWEC's Board of Directors. Those recipients were Dr. Alexis Tibbetts (Walton County School

District, retired), Alan Gieseman (White-Wilson Medical Center, retired), and Bernard Johnson (FPL).

Visit www.united-way.org or follow @uwemeraldcoast.

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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