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FWB Life

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Postal Customer Local

Vietnam Vets Ed Hubbard and Tom Moody: Heroes Among Us

BY KELLY MURPHY-REDD

Local resident **Ed Hubbard** joined the United States Air Force in 1955. He flew the RB66 Destroyer while stationed in England and spent nine months in France. One Saturday afternoon, he received orders to deploy to Thailand. Ed dropped off his family in the U.S. and went to the Philippines for three weeks of survival school. He was stationed at Takhli Air Base in Thailand flying into Vietnam. Thirty days later, he was shot down by a surface to air missile. Ed spent eight hours in the jungle before he was captured. He spent six years, seven months and 12 days in prison.

In prison, two Cuban interrogators controlled 10 Americans in one building. One day, guards threw a new American prisoner on the floor. He was comatose, couldn't speak or eat, and was beaten badly. After three days, they had to do something.

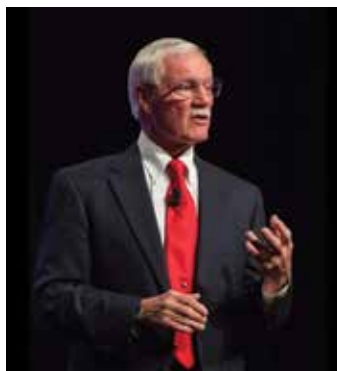
The group decided to

force-feed him twice a day. They did this for a year. At this time Ed had a broken jaw, lost 75 pounds, and boils all over his body. He was supposed to die. Feeding this comatose American taught him something. He cites a quote from the book, Man's Search for Meaning: "Life without a purpose is no life at all." Keeping this man alive kept Ed alive.

Feeding took one-and-a-half hours. Four people held him down. They held his nose shut and put a stick in his mouth. He had to swallow to breath. He regained consciousness one time and was almost normal, but in 1970, he died.

Ed was put in solitary confinement twice for 30 days each and once for 91 days. He wasn't cooperating with the indoctrination and wrote something the guards didn't like. He was beaten every day for 28 days.

In solitary, Ed paced the floor all day talking to himself,



Ed Hubbard

convincing himself he would be O.K. He decided if he changed the way he viewed the situation, he could change how he dealt with it. He tried to think of who had it worse than he did. His answer was orphans, because they don't know who their parents are. He decided 90% of people in the world had it worse than he did.

He promised himself he would survive no matter what. Ed says a pity trap is where you go to die. He vowed he would never feel sorry for himself again and would nev-



er have another bad day as long as he lived.

In January of 1973 the peace treaty ended his tour and he was released. He flew for 12 more years.

HEROES

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SSUS Begins Journey to Our Area to Become the World's Largest Artificial Reef!

America's Flagship, the SS United States (SSUS), has now begun her journey from Philadelphia, Pa., to our own Emerald Coast!

After Okaloosa County's Tourist Development Department, Destin-Fort Walton Beach completed the necessary safety requirements by local, state and federal agencies, the journey began to move the SSUS from her current docking area in south Philadelphia to a docking area in Mobile, Ala., where preparations to ready the ship to become the World's Largest Artificial Reef will continue.

The SSUS departed Philadelphia after 30 years, and, at the time of this printing, had arrived in Mobile, Ala., after being chap-

SSUS

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Magnolia Grill

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

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 Community

SSUS

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eroned by multiple tug boats making her way down the Delaware River and into the Atlantic Ocean. As with any project of this magnitude, the schedule is tentative with dates, times and other logistics subject to change, due to many factors.

The SSUS' amazing journey to Mobile took about two weeks. In Mobile, the vessel is continuing its rebirth into an artificial reef as contractors remove hazardous material, including non-metal parts and fuel to ensure this deployment is clean and not harmful to the environment it aims to benefit. Modifications are also being made to ensure that when the vessel is deployed, it will land upright underwater. The preparation process will take about 12 months.

The exact location along the Gulf Coast for the vessel's deployment has not been set, but it is expected to be about 20 nautical miles south of the Destin-Fort Walton Beach area.

As the World's Largest Artificial Reef, the story of the SSUS will be told to thousands of divers from around the world as they explore her unique design and features. She will also benefit her



surrounding ecosystem and become home to countless marine species that will thrive from the presence of her structure. Due to the size and the depth, she will be home to a wide variety of marine life from iconic reef fish such as red snapper to pelagic species of fish like wahoo. This new artificial reef will provide bountiful fishing and diving opportunities for the local, visiting and charter industries.

Okaloosa County will continue to partner with the SSUS



Conservancy as it pivots to develop a land-based museum in Destin-Fort Walton Beach that will celebrate and commemorate the nation's flagship. The County will provide the Conservancy with regular project updates and will support the museum planning process which will incorporate iconic features from the ship, including the funnels, radar mast, and other signature components, as well as the Conservancy's extensive curatorial and archival collection. This will preserve the ship's storied history and the memories that she has created for so many people over the years.

To follow the SSUS' journey via GPS tracking, visit // www.destinfwb.com/explore/eco-tourism/ssus.

Fun Facts About the SSUS:

- The design of the SSUS was so innovative that the details of her construction were kept top-secret. She was the first passenger liner to be built almost entirely in a graving dock – safe-

ly out of the public eye.

- The SSUS was designed to be just wide enough (101 feet) so it could pass through the locks of the Panama Canal with two feet of clearance on either side.

- Five days before her maiden voyage in July 1952, the SSUS was opened to the public at her berth in New York. Some 70,000 people turned out to see the dazzling new ship that day – more than a sellout crowd at Yankee Stadium! The line to go aboard stretched for 14 blocks.

- How fast was the SSUS? During her speed trials, she sliced through the waves at an astonishing 38.32 knots – 44 miles per hour!

- Four U.S. presidents sailed aboard the SSUS: Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower, John Kennedy and Bill Clinton. (The youthful Clinton, fresh out of Georgetown, was on his way to study at Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar.)

- For her maiden voyage, the SSUS stocked 7,935 quarts of ice cream and a whopping 500

pounds of caviar.

- The SSUS carried an impressive roster of luminaries on nearly every voyage. Famous passengers included Marlon Brando, Coco Chanel, Sean Connery, Gary Cooper, Walter Cronkite, Salvador Dali, Walt Disney, Duke Ellington, Judy Garland, Cary Grant, Charlton Heston, Bob Hope, Marilyn Monroe, Prince Rainier and Grace Kelly, Elizabeth Taylor, John Wayne, and the Duke and Duchess of Windsor.

- A famous passenger of a different sort sailed aboard the SSUS in 1963: the Mona Lisa. Leonardo Da Vinci's masterpiece was traveling to the U.S. for special exhibitions in Washington and New York. (She made it back to the Louvre in remarkably good shape for a 460-year-old woman.)

- The SSUS is 990 feet long – about five city blocks! If you stood her on end, she'd rise nearly as high as New York's Chrysler Building or Philadelphia's Comcast Center.

- You think the Titanic was huge? The SSUS is over 100 feet longer.

Continued on page 21

Save the Date

A Walk Down Magnolia Lane

An unforgettable evening benefitting Embrace Florida Kids





04+07+25

Let's celebrate the world's greatest golf tournament and support Florida Panhandle children in need.

The LakeHouse, Watercolor, FL
Cocktails at 5 PM | Activities at 6 PM

Sponsorship Opportunities Available

walkdownmagnolialane.org
ramsey.lawrence@embracefloridakids.org | (850) 533-9968 | embracefloridakids.org





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Embrace Florida Kids Tees Up for Second Golf Soiree

By CHRISTOPHER MANSON

Embrace Florida Kids is an offshoot of Embrace Alabama Kids, a faith-based organization that has been helping children and families since 1890. Director of Development and Community Relations Ramsey Lawrence has been speaking to churches and civic organizations and spreading the word about the nonprofit's Florida arm since 2020.

Embrace Florida Kids has four programs. "First, we teach people how to parent," says Lawrence. "People who are dealing with addiction and communication problems. It's one-on-one intense parenting intervention. We have a 96 percent success rate."

The nonprofit also licenses adults that wish to become foster parents. They offer residential homes, including one located in Milton for girls ages 12 to 18 "who have been in the foster care program, but have had too much trauma in their lives," says

Lawrence. And there is a higher education program for any child that has been in foster care or alternative living situations (with grandparents or other relatives, for example) and wishes to attend college. "We'll coach and tutor them and assist with tuition."

Lawrence says these programs benefit local children throughout Bay, Okaloosa, Walton, Santa Rosa and Escambia counties.

On Monday, April 7, join Embrace Florida Kids for its Second Annual A Walk Down Magnolia Lane at the WaterColor Lakehouse in Santa Rosa Beach. The golf-themed soiree will feature a tournament-themed menu, signature cocktails, live music from local favorite Jacob Mohr and a live Calcutta, during which tournament participants are "auctioned off" and money is collected in a prize fund. Dress is golf attire and smart casual; attendees are encouraged to don golf's



royal colors of green and yellow. Purchase tickets at walkdownmagnolialane.org.

Doors open for cocktails at 5 p.m., followed by golf activities at 6 and the live Calcutta at 7:15. This year's event sponsors include Good News Church, Shoreline Title, Peaceful Family Oklahoma, Hill Coleman LLC, Liufau McCall, Hancock Whitney and Review Harvest. Spon-

sorship opportunities are still available, and participants will receive badges to attend the event, recognition on promotional materials, and a number of additional benefits. If interested, email Lawrence at ramsey.lawrence@embraceflkids.org or call 850.533.9968.

According to Vie Magazine, 2024's inaugural event, held at Regatta Bay Golf & Yacht Club in Destin, raised over \$78,000. Musician Mohr, who returns following a successful appearance at last year's soiree, says, "I'm excited and proud to be a part of another Embrace Florida Kids event. This organization literally stands in the gap for children and families in crisis. It's easy for us to go about our lives with relatively few problems and forget there are young people bravely dealing with all sorts of trauma. I love that they focus on keeping fam-

ilies together. More and more, we see the disintegration of a family unit being the harbinger for multitudes of trouble."

He adds that last year's A Walk Down Magnolia Lane was "a veritable Who's Who of Destin and South Walton business people and philanthropists. The entertainment is decent, and the opportunity to help a great organization that does such important work will just make you feel good. I hope to see some old friends and make some new ones."

Embrace Florida Kids' Program Center is located at 5414 U.S. 90 in Pace, Florida. The nonprofit provides comfort and safety to abused, neglected and traumatized children, young mothers and struggling families through group homes, foster care programs and family preservation services throughout Northwest Florida and Alabama. Call 800.239.3575 or visit embracekids.org to learn more.

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Events Around Town

The Diary of Anne Frank - March 14-23

Step into history and witness the powerful true story of hope, courage and resilience. Stage Crafters presents, "The Diary of Anne Frank," March 14-23. Experience an unforgettable performance that brings Anne's words to life on stage. Don't miss this moving production that will stay with you long after the final curtain. Tickets: www.StageCraftersFWB.com or www.ticketor.com/stagecrafters.

Lucky Leprechaun 5K & 1-Mile Fun Run - March 15

Get ready to lace up your running shoes and kick off St. Paddy's Day weekend in style!

The Lucky Leprechaun 5K & 1-Mile Fun Run, organized by Run With It, Inc., takes place Saturday, March 15, at 8 AM at AJ's on the Bayou in Fort Walton Beach.

Race Highlights

- Fast & Flat 5K Course – Run through the scenic Beachview neighborhood
- Huge Afterparty – Celebrate at AJ's on the Bayou with food, brews, and live music
- One-of-a-Kind Finisher's Medal – Guaranteed to the first 400 registrants who finish
- Awards for Runners & Walkers – Including Overall, Masters, Grandmasters, and age group categories

Not a fan of running 5Ks?

No problem! The 1-Mile Fun Run offers a race T-shirt, finisher's medal, and entry to the afterparty, but no age group awards.

Supporting a Great Cause: Proceeds from the event will benefit the Northwest Florida Track Club Fund, helping to maintain a rubberized track in Okaloosa County.

How to Register:

- Online registration closes Thursday, March 13, at midnight. In-person sign-ups available during packet pickup:
- Friday, March 14, 4-6 PM at Run With It (21 Racetrack Rd. NE, Fort Walton Beach)
- Saturday, March 15, 6:30-7:30 AM at AJ's on the Bayou

This is a rain-or-shine event – no refunds!

So, grab your green gear, dress up in festive St. Paddy's Day costumes, and get ready for an exciting run, great company, and an unforgettable afterparty!

Sign Up Now & Join the Fun!

Location: AJ's on the Bayou, 200 Eglin Parkway NE, Fort Walton Beach

Start: 8 AM, Saturday, March 15, 2025

More Info & Registration: [Run With It website or event page]

Don't miss out—run, party, and celebrate like a true Lucky Leprechaun!

SeaLight Festival Continues!

Thursdays to Sundays, Now – April 13, 2025. Kaleido Entertainment presents a dazzling wonderland of light and Chinese culture, running January 30 through April 13, 5:30 p.m. - 9:30 p.m., with last entrance at 8:30 p.m. at Seascape Golf, Beach & Tennis Resort in Miramar Beach. Tickets start at \$24.99 for adults and \$17.99 for children ages 12 and under. Purchase at sealightfestival.com. For more information, visit www.sealightfestival.com/destin.

Get Lucky 10K & Half Marathon - March 16

Start your St. Paddy's Day celebrations with the 6th Annual Get Lucky Half Marathon & 10K on Sunday, March 16, at 7:30 AM at Ferry Park in Fort Walton Beach.

Race Highlights:

- Half Marathon & 10K Run/Walk – Scenic, fast & flat course through downtown Fort Walton Beach
- Aid Stations – 2 on the 10K course, 3 on the Half Marathon course
- Finisher's Medals – Guaranteed to the first 75 finishers in each race
- Afterparty at Ferry Park Pavilions – Food, beer & soft drinks for all registered runners
- Awards:
 - Runners: Overall Male & Female, Masters, Grandmasters, Senior Grandmasters, plus top 3 in 5-year age groups
 - Walkers: Top 3 Overall Male & Female



Packet Pickup:

- Friday, March 14, 4-6 PM at Run With It (21 Racetrack Rd NE, Fort Walton Beach)
 - Race Day, Sunday, March 16, 6-7:15 AM at Ferry Park
- Location: Ferry Park, 240 Hughes St NE, Fort Walton Beach
- Start: 7:30 AM, Sunday, March 16, 2025

Register early to secure your finisher's medal & race swag! Rain or shine event. No refunds.

Celebrate St. Paddy's Day in style—sign up now and Get Lucky!

Mac & Cheese Festival at Destin Commons March 16

Join us at the Mac & Cheese Festival on Sunday, March 16 from 12-3 p.m. benefiting the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Emerald Coast. This family-friendly event will feature gourmet, chef-inspired twists on the South's favorite comfort food. For more information and to purchase tickets, visit 7th Annual Mac & Cheese Festival. All proceeds from this event will go to the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Emerald Coast.

Sixth Annual Westonwood Ranch PCA Rodeo - March 28-29

Freeport Regional Sports Complex

Dust off your boots and get ready to rodeo! The 6th Annual Westonwood Ranch PCA Rodeo presented by Builders FirstSource returns to the City of Freeport Sports Complex March 28th –29th, 2025. Come watch some of the nation's top cowgirls and cowboys competing in the Professional Cowboy Association Circuit (PCA) – bring the family and friends for a fun-packed weekend!

Contestants will compete in

Continued on page 6

PIANO MAN

A Tribute to Billy Joel
Featuring Mark Kovaly

Mattie Kelly Arts Center
Saturday, May 10th at 7 p.m.

Piano Man: a Tribute to Billy Joel featuring Mark Kovaly has become one of the most highly respected and sought after tribute shows in the country. Unique attributes include Mark's ability to play additional instruments like the harmonica and accordion. This is truly a one-of-a-kind tribute to the iconic Piano Man himself.

Mark your calendars and grab your tickets now for a night filled with nostalgia, energy and pure musical bliss. Piano Man live in concert for one night only to ignite the stage with an electrifying performances and iconic songs.

Tickets: www.mattiekellytickets.com or call 850-706-5206
reserved tickets \$19.50-\$44

Happenings Around FWB

2025 EVENTS

MARCH

- 11** | ECPRO Lunch & Learn:
Amplify Your Voice, Share Your Story
11:30 am | Greater FWB Chamber of Commerce | FWB

All Ages Paint Party: Ocean Dreams
6 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB

City of FWB City Council Regular Meeting
6 pm | FWB City Council Chambers | FWB
- 12** | Knowledge by the Slice presented by
ASPIS Solutions Group
11:30 am | Greater FWB Chamber | FWB

Lego Club
3 pm | FWB Public Library | FWB
- 13** | Mini Makers and Experimenters Lab
10:30 am | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB

Greater FWB Chamber
Nothing But Networking
11:30 am | The Bavarian's Wirsthaus | FWB

A Full Share - The Fight for Women's Suffrage
6 pm | FWB Public Library | FWB
- 14** | ADSO Gallery Show Reception:
Color Explosion
6 pm | Arts & Design Society | FWB

Love You to the Moon and Back
6 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB

Live Music: The Social Divide Tour feat.
The Almas / Crashing Wayward
8 pm | Downtown Music Hall | FWB
- 14-15** | The Diary of Anne Frank
7:30 pm | FWB Civic Auditorium | FWB
- 15** | Run With It's 2025 Lucky Leprechaun 5K
8 am | AJ's on the Bayou | FWB

Concealed Carry Weapons Class
10 am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso

Northwest Florida Cinderella
Scholarship Pageant
11:30 am | Home2 Suites by Hilton | FWB
- 16** | Run With It's 2025 Get Lucky Half
Marathon and 10K
7:30 am | Ferry Park | FWB

Sunday Brunch Market
11 am | Soundside Waterfront Bar | FWB

7th Annual Mac and Cheese Festival
12 pm | Destin Commons | Destin

The Diary of Anne Frank
2 pm | FWB Civic Auditorium | FWB
- 17** | GSSF Indoor League
10 am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso
- 17-21** | Spring Break Workshops
10:30 am | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB



- 18** | Kids Camp: Chaos Hippo
10 am | Painting with a Twist | FWB
- 20** | Animal Tales
10 & 11:45 am | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB

Curiosity Club
4 pm | FWB Public Library | FWB

Planetarium Night
6 pm | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB
- 21** | VFW Post 7674 - Steak Night
5 pm | 231 Carol Ave | FWB

Adventures in Marriage Workshop
6 pm | FWB Public Library | FWB
- 21-22** | The Diary of Anne Frank
7:30 pm | FWB Civic Auditorium | FWB
- 22** | Adventures in Marriage Workshop
9 am | FWB Public Library | FWB

Lego Club
10 am | FWB Public Library | FWB

Introduction to AR
10 am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso
- 23** | Advanced Pistol Class
10 am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso

All Ages Paint Party:
FWBHS Colorguard Fundraiser
2 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB

The Diary of Anne Frank
2 pm | FWB Civic Auditorium | FWB
- 25** | City of FWB City Council Regular Meeting
6 pm | FWB City Council Chambers | FWB
- 27** | STEAM Kids
3 pm | FWB Public Library | FWB

Columbia Calls - War Posters and
Propaganda in the US During WWI
6 pm | FWB Public Library | FWB
- 29** | Dead Air Suppressor Demo Day
10 am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso

Barks and Blossom Spring Open House and
Adoption Event with PAWS
12 pm | Central Bark FWB | FWB
- 30** | Strength in Unity Conference
11 am-7 pm | The Island Resort | FWB

APRIL

- 04** | Greater FWB Chamber
First Friday Coffee
7 am | Christian Life Center at FBC | FWB

- 04 CONT** | Fort SK8 Homeschool Skate and Play
12 pm | Fort SK8 | FWB

Classical Connections:
Howard Levy, Harmonica + Piano
7:30 pm | Destin High School | Destin
- 05** | Kitty Hawk Kites - Fly Into Spring Kite
Festival
10 am | The Boardwalk | Okaloosa Island

Discover Science Saturday
10:30 am | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB
- 05-06** | FWB Repticon
9 am | Northwest Florida Fairgrounds | FWB
- 07** | A Walk Down Magnolia Lane
6 pm | The Lake House Watercolor | Santa Rosa Beach
- 08** | ECPRO Lunch & Learn:
Local News in Okaloosa County
11:30 am | Greater FWB Chamber | FWB
- 10** | Mini Makers and Experimenters Lab
10:30 am | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB

Greater FWB Chamber
Nothing But Networking
5 pm | The Venue at Beach Weekend | FWB

Concerts in the Village:
The Fabulous Thunderbirds
6 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation | Destin
- 12** | Sandestin Wine Festival Grand Tasting
1-4 pm | Village of Baytowne Wharf



ONGOING EVENTS

VFW Post 7674 - Sunday Breakfasts
8 - 11:30 am | Sundays | 231 Carol Ave | FWB

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

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

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

Karaoke Night
7 pm | Thurs | Soundside Waterfront Bar | FWB

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



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Community

EVENTS

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events including Bareback Riding, Calf Roping, Saddle Bronc Riding, Ranch Bronc Riding, Steer Wrestling, Breakaway Roping, Barrel Racing, Team Roping, and Bull Riding at the professionally sanctioned rodeo. Rodeo gates open at 6 p.m. with rodeo start at 7:30 p.m. each night. Spectators are encouraged to come early to enjoy pre-rodeo excitement including the kids' gold rush, food vendors, children's inflatable play area and more!

Westonwood Ranch is an organization whose mission and programs serve teens and young adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD). "We are so thankful for the partnership with Walton County Sheriff's Office, the City



of Freeport, our community sponsors that make it possible to raise funds that help support our programs. So many youths with developmental disabilities miss irreplaceable opportunities to gain critical life skills and job skills needed to lead an independent life. These special individuals want the same thing as we do — to be fully participating members of society,"

shared Lindy Wood, Founder of Westonwood Ranch.

Westonwood Ranch is located in Freeport and provides therapeutic programs designed to fill the transition gap from high school into adulthood by incorporating

functional learning opportunities in a therapeutic farm environment. All net proceeds from the event go to support Westonwood Ranch programs.

Tickets at the gate for the Westonwood Ranch PCA Rodeo are \$20 for adults and \$15 for children 12 years and younger. Free admission for children ages 2 and under. There will be no presale of tickets, so spectators are encouraged to arrive early. Westonwood Ranch is actively seeking additional local business sponsorships for this event. For more information about how to support the rodeo and Westonwood Ranch, email admin@westonwood.org or visit www.westonwood.org.

Emerald Coast Theatre Company: The Tortoise and the Hare: Fast Friends, Slow Foes March 29-30

Emerald Coast Theatre Company presents The Tortoise and the Hare: Fast Friends, Slow Foes at ECTC's space in Grand Boulevard Town Center. The show will run March 29th at 9 a.m. and 30th at 2 p.m. In this

madcap re-telling of The Tortoise and the Hare, the tortoise and hare just can't get along. They're constantly at odds and their feud becomes legendary among the woodland creatures. Can these two ever find common ground? Tickets and information can be found at www.emeraldcoasttheatre.org.

Strength in Unity Conference and Business Expo - March 30

Celebrate Women's History Month at Conexión Media Group's Annual Strength in Unity Conference & Business Expo on Sunday, March 30, from 11 a.m. – 7 p.m. at The Island Resort, Okaloosa Island (Maui & Capri Rooms). Join in for inspiring, motivational, national and regional speakers and breakout seminars and workshops! This event is FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC and Corporate Sponsors and vendor spots are available. Sessions on Entrepreneurship, Leadership, Financial planning multicultural entertainment will take place! Some proceeds from the event will be donated to a charity or non-profit that serves women!

For more information, contact David at 850-368-3505 or conexionflorida@gmail.com.

Sandestin Wine Festival April 10-13

The 38th Annual Sandestin Wine Festival at the Village of Baytowne Wharf at Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort will take place April 10-13. Topping area polls as a must-experience event, this beloved festival offers

four full days of unique events including wine dinners with celebrity chefs, yoga, live music, interactive experiences, culinary tents, and of course wine tastings. Tickets, schedule and lodging info: www.sandestinwinefestival.com.

Wine novices are able to learn more about wines and sample from a comprehensive selection in all varieties, styles, and price ranges. Wine aficionados enjoy meeting winemakers, asking detailed questions, and acquiring hard to get selections. Everyone gets to enjoy the live music, interactive experiences at the Culinary tents, and shops and dining of the Village of Baytowne Wharf.

DCWAF Celebrates 20 Years of Giving - April 25-26

The Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation (DCWAF) marks 20 years of fundraising with the 2025 Destin Charity Wine Auction, presented by the Jumonville Family, on April 25-26. Proceeds benefit 17 children's charities in Northwest Florida.

Patron packages are on sale now at dcwaf.org/tickets. Sponsorships available—contact info@dcwaf.org.

April 26 – Charity Wine Auction: A Reserve Tasting & Live Auction at Grand Boulevard Sandestin Town Center featuring world-class wines, gourmet cuisine, and high-energy bidding on rare wines, trips, and more.

The auction coincides with the South Walton Beaches Wine & Food Festival, offering hundreds of premium wines and culinary delights. Auction attendees receive access to the festival's Grand Tasting on April 27 at 1 p.m. Learn more at dcwaf.org/auction.

Grand Boulevard Lawn Games Fridays & Saturdays

Bring the entire family out to Grand Boulevard to enjoy some fun! Spring Lawn Games will take over Grand Park from 5-8:30 p.m. on Friday and Saturday through April 25. Grab some food and drinks from one of the many restaurants in Grand Boulevard before you settle in to a fun round of corn hole, giant lawn chess, checkers and more.

HEROES

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Ed had no problem adjusting to coming home. In fact, he went back to Hanoi on the 30th and 50th anniversaries of Vietnam. Walking out of the prison door, he looked around, and thought he would never have done all he has done in the last 50 years had he not been a POW.

He has been to 84 countries and spoken to four million people as a motivational speaker. He has no animosity towards the North Vietnamese. He saw many POWs who were filled with hate and they suffered. Ed says it up to us to decide how we want to live. He says you can't make him have a bad day and he hasn't had one since.

Tom Moody joined the United States Army out of high school. His dad wanted him to go to college and become a civil engineer. Tom decided college was not for him and went to the Navy recruiting office downtown. He wanted to be a pilot and the Navy told him he had to have a four-year degree. So, Tom went to the Army recruiter. They had an opening for military police. After some

time, Tom decided he didn't want to be a security guard and heard the 82nd Airborne needed paratroopers. He worked his way up and joined the 1st Army Aviation Battalion, was a part of the Rangers, went to jump school, and OCS school. He went through flight school and became a helicopter pilot. He was the only Sergeant who was Airborne Ranger qualified.

He was part of the Aviation Battalion at Ft. Bragg, renamed the 118th Air Assault Unit. This unit was first into Vietnam. Tom received the Soldiers Medal for Heroism in 1970 for the following incident.

Tom was flying the command and control helicopter above the landing zone on a mission to transport troops to a particular opening with jungle on both sides. One helicopter was there to disperse smoke to protect the troops from being seen and shot at. This helicopter ran into a tree, tipped over and caught fire. Tom landed his helicopter close to the wreckage. He ran into the fire, grabbed the pilot, and carried him 50 yards to his helicopter. He went back for the crew chief and carried him over his shoulder. He transported the



Tom Moody

pilot and crew chief to medivac and they survived.

Tom spent 39 months in Vietnam! After his first tour, the Army sent him back to the U.S. and told him he was going to Germany. Tom said he wanted to go back to Vietnam. After the second year, the Army sent him back to the U.S. and again told him he was going to Germany. Tom said he still didn't want to go to Germany and wanted to go back to Vietnam. That third tour was extended three months.

During his first tour, the helicopter door gunners, from the

25th Infantry out of Hawaii, only had M14 rifles. The next tour, the door gunners had machine guns. They often coordinated with the Air Force F100s for support. One time Tom was sent up north at Thanksgiving to rescue POWs but they had been moved.

He says they did what they were told to do, didn't ask questions, and didn't know the big picture. They were there to support their brothers. In retrospect, Tom thinks the U.S. government got us into a war we shouldn't have gotten into. We lost over 50 thousand men. Their hands were tied, because they couldn't shoot unless shot at.

Out of 7000 helicopters in Vietnam, 3000 were destroyed. Eleven hundred helicopter pilots lost their lives and 1,200 crew were killed. From start to end, 100,000 pilots and crew served in Vietnam.

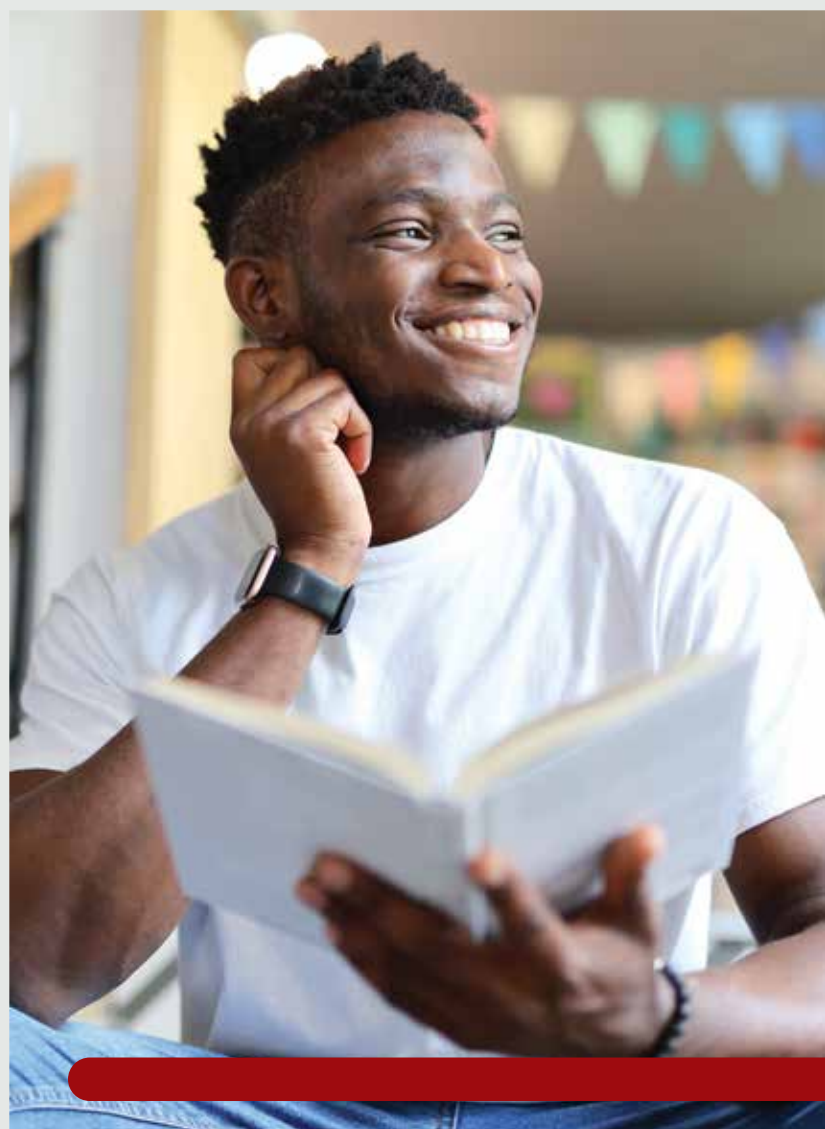
After Tom retired, he owned a well-known boating business in Destin. He is a humble and generous man who enthusiastically acknowledges the contribution and bravery of others. He has been named Crestview's Citizen of the Year.

This year the Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce will be hosting "Honoring Our Heroes," a tribute to our Vietnam veterans on the 50th anniversary of the end of the war. The April 28-30th event will be filled with historical presentations, panel discussions, and a banquet featuring distinguished speakers. The event is open to the public, with free admission to the educational programs on April 28-29. Ticket information for the Heroes' Tribute Banquet on April 30 is available online at FWB-chamber.org.



Kelly Murphy-Redd

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Scouting America Gulf Coast Council Celebrates 115 Years

Scouting America, formerly Boy Scouts of America, is the nation's foremost youth program, providing young people with unique opportunities focused on character development, leadership, fun and outdoor exploration. The non-profit's mission is to prepare young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes by instilling in them the values of the Scout Oath and Law. The Scout Law states that a Scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent. The Scout Oath states, "On my honor I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law; to help other people at all times; to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight."

Our own Gulf Coast Council serves more than 2,500 youth throughout eight counties in the Florida panhandle and three counties in Alabama.

On February 8, the organization celebrated its 115th birthday, marking a pivotal moment in its journey as it officially adopts its new name, Scouting America. The organization continues to adapt to meet the evolving needs of young people, ensuring that future generations will have the opportunity to benefit from this transformative program.

For more than a century, Scouting America's mission has remained the same: to prepare young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes by instilling in them the values of the Scout Oath and Law. Whether it's a camping trip, a pinewood derby car race, or a trail hike, every adventure encourages personal growth by teaching youth how to set goals and achieve them with determination. As we look to the future, Scouting America is dedicated to providing young people with the values, skills, and experiences they need to thrive in a rapidly



ly changing world.

"Scouting America has helped instill timeless values for multiple generations of Americans," said Roger Krone, Scouting America president and CEO. "In an increasingly complex and interconnected world,

the values and skills instilled by Scouting are more critical than ever, and the need for strong character, ethical decision-making, and effective leadership remains paramount. As we celebrate 115 years of service to our nation, we are reaffirming

our commitment to providing a safe and supportive environment where young people can develop these essential qualities, empowering them to reach their full potential and preparing them to become responsible and engaged citizens."

Scouting America has remained committed to providing youth with a safe environment where they can learn meaningful life skills, create lifelong memories, and grow into tomorrow's leaders. In fact, more than 130 million Americans have been through Scouting America programs since our founding in 1910. Currently, more than 1 million youth are served by 477,000 dedicated adult volunteers in local councils throughout the country.

"Scouting programs for young men and women ages 5-20 provide an exceptional opportunity for quality time for the families of the Emerald Coast," says Steve Williams, Gulf Coast Council Scout Executive and CEO. "Scouting allows families to experience the outdoors in a safe environment, where they can strengthen bonds and build lifelong memories. These programs provide the unique ability for families to grow together. Through Scouting, young people learn leadership skills, communication skills, civility, self-reliance, and teamwork. No other program can provide more well-rounded programming to improve schools, communities, and lives."

Scouting America invites families, individuals, and communities nationwide to join its mission. In our area, the Choctawhatchee District, part of the Gulf Coast Council, serves Okaloosa and Walton Counties. Meetings are held at Holy Name of Jesus Catholic Church in Niceville. For more information, visit <https://gulfcoastcouncil.org/council-information/lake-sands-district-2/> or contact district chairman Drew Bowman at drew.bowman@bit-wizards.com.

Perhaps you come from a family with a Scouting tradition or are considering Scouting for the first time. To learn more, visit www.BeAScout.org.



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A Celebration of Marine Life: Join Us for Gulfarium's 2nd Annual CARE on the Coast Fundraiser!

Get ready for an unforgettable evening of conservation, celebration, and coastal fun at Gulfarium's CARE on the Coast on April 26, 2025, at 3:30 PM! This annual festival brings together delicious food, refreshing drinks, live entertainment, and marine animal encounters for a one-of-a-kind event benefiting the Gulfarium CARE Center's mission to rescue and rehabilitate sea turtles.

As soon as you arrive, you'll be swept up in the excitement of this vibrant, festival-style event, complete with mouthwatering cuisine, cocktails, and lively music to set the mood. Whether you're mingling with fellow ocean enthusiasts, bidding on exclusive experiences in the silent auction, or enjoying a front-row seat at the dolphin presentation, there's no shortage of things to see and do.

For those eager to dive into marine conservation, CARE on the Coast offers a rare chance to go behind the scenes and learn



how Gulfarium's dedicated animal care team works to rehabilitate sick and injured sea turtles.

Hear inspiring success stories, get up close with some of our current patients, and discover how you can play a role in protecting these incredible creatures.

Kids and adults alike will love the interactive activities and hands-on experiences scattered throughout the park, including conservation-themed games, crafts, and fun challenge-

es designed to inspire the next generation of ocean advocates. Whether you're exploring these activities, sipping a cool drink under the Florida sunset, or dancing to live music, the night promises to be a true celebration of marine life.

Tickets are on sale now, and they're going fast! General admission grants access to all activities, entertainment, and be-

hind-the-scenes insights, while VIP packages offer exclusive perks like early entry, premium seating, and a special meet-and-greet with Gulfarium's animal care experts.

Don't miss out on this incredible evening of food, fun, and conservation for a cause. Visit our official event page at gulfarium.com/cotc to purchase your tickets today, and get ready for an unforgettable night at CARE on the Coast!

Tickets on Sale!
CARE on the COAST
 APRIL 26, 2025 | 3:30PM



Help us save our local sea turtles at this exciting, family-friendly event!

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- In-depth look at C.A.R.E. Center
- Dolphin presentation
- Silent auction and raffles

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Okaloosa County Continues to Amaze

BY CAROLYN NEWCOMER KETCHEL

Our area is known for its natural beauty and as one of the most military friendly communities in the nation, we are blessed to also have some stellar economic indicators regarding Okaloosa County.

- Okaloosa County's Dec 2024 unemployment rate of 2.8% was tied for the third lowest among Florida's 67 counties. It was also well below Florida's unemployment rate of 3.4% and the U.S. rate of 4.1%.

- Our metro area continues to be highly rated in terms of economic performance by the Milken Institute (non-partisan think tank that ranks communities each year).

- Highest ranked NW Florida metro on the Large City list (#46 Pensacola, # 85 Tallahassee)

- 2nd highest ranked Florida metro (#9 Melbourne)



- Ranked higher than Orlando (#17), Jacksonville (#22), Atlanta (#61), Miami (#64), San Diego (#71), Boston (3119)
 - Ranked 18th in Job Growth
 - Ranked 21st in Wage Growth last year
 - High Tech GDP ranked #19 over past five years
 - Housing Affordability improved from #108 to #80
- The last bullet point concerns me the most. Those who have

lived in Okaloosa County for many years are pleased that their property values have increased. However, especially in the south end of the county, the market has priced out many who must commute long distances for their employment.

We have begun to address the housing affordability difficulties in our county. The County hired its first Housing Program Manager in July 2024, focusing on developing community partnerships to encourage affordable housing development, through education campaigns and creating a developer's network for those interested in developing affordable housing in Okaloosa County. Community discussions

are ongoing regarding the operation of a Community Land Trust in Okaloosa County.

The County revised its Local Housing Assistance Plan to increase the maximum amount for first time homebuyer assistance in response to the current housing market, and plans to implement the program mid-2025.

The County completed an Orphan Parcels Master Plan which was accepted by the BCC at the January 7, 2025 meeting.

The plan can be viewed on the County's website by visiting: <https://myokaloosa.com/gm/home>

Okaloosa County will continue to work with community partners, Eglin Air Force Base leadership and the DOD to secure appropriate permissions to utilize orphan parcels for affordable housing and other community needs.

The County has allocated

Local Government Contribution (funding) for affordable housing developments in Crestview and Fort Walton Beach.

The County has assisted over 30 households with its Homeowner Rehabilitation Program, which aids homeowners in fixing structural or life-threatening issues such as roofs, doors, windows, HVAC and more.

The County will continue to identify funding opportunities and partnerships to further the development of affordable housing in Okaloosa County. Interested parties can reach out to our Housing Program by calling 850-651-7167 or emailing housing@myokaloosa.com.

It is an honor 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.

SCOUTING

continued from page 8

Register for the Gulf Coast Council's 5th Annual

Shooting for Scouts Series

Whether you're a clay-shooting ace or a big fan of supporting youth in the area, this event brings together shooters and

community members to benefit the Gulf Coast Council's efforts.

This year's series takes place on two separate days: one in Holt and another in Panama City Beach. Each event will include team-versus-team clay shooting competitions, with the top three places earning commemorative plaques. Youth competitors must be accompanied by a parent or guardian, and all participants must bring their own guns and ammo. Food will be prepared and served to

attendees by Scouts from Troop 78 based in Milton.

Individuals and teams are welcome to register, and those who want to attend both days can select the "Complete Series" to save 15% on registration costs. Businesses and local organizations are also invited to support the Gulf Coast Council through various sponsorship opportunities for each event.

When:

- Event 1 - April 5, 2025
- Event 2 - April 26, 2025

Where:

Event 1 - The Element Training Complex, 4418 Cooper Lane, Holt, FL 32564

Event 2 - Bay County Shooting Range, 10900 Steel Field Road, Panama City Beach, FL 32413

To Register:

Event 1 - <https://donations.scouting.org/#/council/773/event/627/register>

Event 2 - <https://donations.scouting.org/#/council/773/event/634/register>

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ATTRACTIONS SUBJECT TO CHANGE

The State of Real Estate: Tariffs, Immigration and the New Gold Rush



BY PAUL DOMENECH

Before diving into this article, I want to make it clear that I am A-political—this is simply my perspective on the policies set to take effect in the near future. As things evolve, so will the landscape of real estate. Enjoy the read, and I appreciate your support of my contribution to this publication.

How Will the New Immigration Policy Affect Real Estate?

One word: Labor. In states like Texas, a significant percent-

age of construction labor comes from immigrants who are not U.S. citizens. If this workforce is removed, new home construction will slow down, and labor costs will rise.

Is this good or bad?

For sellers of existing homes, this could initially be a positive, as reduced new construction may increase demand and drive up home prices.

For buyers, it's a different story—higher home prices and limited inventory could make affordability even more challenging, especially if interest rates remain high.

For builders, higher labor costs will make new construction projects more expensive, potentially leading to delays, reduced supply, and further price increases.

If mortgage rates stay elevated, affordability will remain a concern, and the market could slow more abruptly than the gradual price declines and ex-

tended days on market we're currently seeing.

Tariffs: The Cost of Doing Business

Tariffs on imported goods will increase prices across multiple industries, including construction. Building materials will become more expensive—at least temporarily—driving up the cost of new homes.

But here's the real question: Are we going to focus on short-term price hikes, or will we seize the opportunity to rebuild domestic manufacturing?

This is where I see the new Gold Rush. Instead of complaining about the cost of goods, Americans have the chance to innovate, create and manufacture right here in the U.S., making foreign products less competitive. That's the conversation we need to be having.

What Does This Mean for Real Estate?

With both labor and mate-

rial costs rising, homebuilders will struggle, while owners of existing homes might benefit—at least at first. But by 2026, if we fail to boost domestic production and interest rates remain high, the real estate market could face significant challenges.

Forget the outdated mantra of “date the rate, marry the house.” The real question is:

Can you afford the cost of homeownership today, regardless of where interest rates go? If rates drop, great—you refinance and save. But never bank on a future rate cut to justify a purchase.

Final Thoughts

We're entering a pivotal moment in the real estate market. Immigration policies may squeeze labor supply, tariffs



could drive up costs and uncertainty looms. But history shows that periods of disruption breed opportunity.

Yes, there will be some short-term pain. But for those willing to roll up their sleeves and fill in the gaps, this could be a defining moment. After the storm settles, what follows is usually strength.

So, let's stop waiting and start building. 2025 will be strong. Beyond that? The future is what we make it.

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Brooks Bridge Replacement Project Makes Progress on Multiple Fronts

By JARED WILLIAMS

Construction crews are making headway on multiple aspects of the Brooks Bridge replacement project, with work concentrated on the new westbound bridge structure across Santa Rosa Sound, according to recent Florida Department of Transportation updates.

Current activities include pile driving and pier construction in the Santa Rosa Sound, as well as the development of a mechanically stabilized earth (MSE) wall on Okaloosa Island.

The MSE wall will serve as the permanent foundation for the westbound approach to the new bridge, where U.S. 98 westbound

lanes will be elevated above Santa Rosa Boulevard, according to FDOT.

The wall consists of precisely layered, graded and compacted soil and subgrade material, reinforced with pre-cast concrete panels forming the sides. FDOT officials note that MSE walls are used in areas with limited space for gradual sloping embankment.

On Okaloosa Island, crews are constructing a new roadway called "North Connection" that will link U.S. 98 westbound and Santa Rosa Boulevard. Recent work includes the installation of concrete curb and sidewalk near the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center.



This recent aerial photo (taken north of Brooks Bridge looking toward Okaloosa Island) shows pile driving and pier construction progress in the Santa Rosa Sound. (FDOT)

To accommodate construction on the western side of the project, U.S. 98 traffic has been shifted south. The westbound bridge sidewalk is closed during construction, though pedestrians can still use the eastbound sidewalk.

The project, slated for completion in summer 2027, will replace the existing four-lane bridge that opened in 1966 with two new parallel bridges, expanding capacity to six travel lanes.

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Small Ways to Make Your Insurance Work for You



BY JULIE A. MARTIN

Dear Gentle Readers,

The mere mention of insurance is liable to put red spots in your cheeks and in your eyes, but have no fear, I am about to share some insider secrets on what you can do to your policies that make them more cost effective for you.

Are you ready?

Property Damage Liability in auto insurance is typically chosen with bodily injury liability in split limit increments such as 10/20//10 with the second 10K being the property damage liability limit. Most carriers offer other choices, such as 20K, 25K, or even 50K property damage liability with the 10/20 split limits. With 25/50 BI you may have options of 25K, 50K

or even 100K liability.

The price difference between limits in Property Damage Liability can be less than a case of soda, on a six month or annual basis. It is generally best to opt for the highest property damage limit you can get with your chosen liability limits, as it creates an extra buffer for you, and it is only slightly more expensive than you would have paid for your insurance anyway.

Comprehensive coverage is another area where you may opt to save yourself some money in case of a flood, hurricane, fire, vandalism or other event where your car might be damaged by an incident not involving collision. Most folks have \$500 deductibles on Comprehensive and Collision coverage, and that is what many would consider standard. But, I will share a secret with you.

Most of the time, you can decrease your Comprehensive deductible from \$500 to \$250, that's right, cut it right in half, for less than a double-blended Venti Frappuccino at Starbucks with extra drizzle.

Insurance is for you, so that you can be made whole again in the event something happens. To make it easier for you to be indemnified, making small ad-



justments to your existing coverage will help you feel better about the coverage you have.

Now let's talk about Uninsured Motorist Coverage. First, let me say that we do not have a requirement to carry Bodily Injury Liability in the State of Florida. The minimum required coverage in order to be "street legal" for most people, is 10K Property Damage Liability and 10K Personal Injury Protection.

Now, you're going to ask me, what if they hit someone?

THAT'S why we have uninsured motorist coverage, in case you get hurt in an accident that is not your fault.

Here's how this works in Florida. First, you go through

your 10K in Personal Injury Protection (PIP), which pays 80/20 medical expenses minus your deductible—say you have a \$500 deductible on PIP.

10K in medical expenses minus \$500 deductible (80/20) would equal \$7,500 in medical expenses.

What if you have \$30,000 in medical bills?

You have several choices when it comes to Uninsured Motorist (UM) coverage. Stacked and Unstacked equal to your current Bodily Injury Liability, or Stacked or Unstacked lower than your Bodily Injury Coverage.

Stacked UM means that you multiply the number of vehi-



cles on the policy by the limits. Stacked 100/300 X three vehicles would be 300K per person/900K per accident.

So, in the accident shown above, your Personal Injury Protection goes first, and then if you have medical payments coverage, that comes next, and then the at fault party's Bodily Injury Liability, and only then would it go to your Uninsured Motorist coverage, which is excess over all these other coverages.

If you do not have UM on your auto policy now, you might want to have your friendly licensed insurance agent offer a quote to find out how much it would cost to add to your policy.

It's important to know the different ways to make your insurance work for you, and help you gain peace of mind knowing you have the right coverage in the event something happens.

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Ode to Joy—A Grand Symphony of Unity and Joy!

Beethoven's Ninth Featuring World-Class Opera Stars

April 12, 2025 | 7 p.m. | Mattie Kelly Arts Center | Tickets: \$35

Join Northwest Florida Symphony Orchestra (NFSO) and Todd Craven Music Director and Conductor for the Season Finale: "Ode to Joy" – April 12 at 7 p.m. at the Mattie Kelly Arts Center in Niceville. "Ode to

Joy" is more than music—it is a resounding anthem of brotherhood, hope and the unbreakable bond of humanity. Beethoven's Ninth Symphony calls us together in a powerful celebration of unity, and now, this timeless

masterpiece comes to life in an unforgettable performance at the Mattie Kelly Arts Center!

The Northwest Florida Symphony Orchestra (NFSO), the NFSO Chorale and the Niceville High School Chorus join

forces to present this monumental work, featuring internationally renowned opera soloists:



Katherine Henry, soprano – A Metropolitan Opera rising star, American soprano Kathryn Henry is acclaimed for

her "clean coloratura and silvery voice." A native of Sheboygan, Wis., she earned her Master of Music from The Juilliard School and a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Henry has performed notable roles such as Lucy Harker in the world premiere of *The Lord of Cries* at The Santa Fe Opera, the title role in Janáček's *Jenůfa* at Lyric Opera of Chicago, and Arminda in Mozart's *La finta giardiniera* at Juilliard. She was a finalist in the 2015 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions.



Cierra Byrd, mezzo-soprano – A powerhouse artist fresh from her acclaimed performances at the Met and Houston

Grand Opera, American mezzo-soprano Cierra Byrd is a recent graduate of the Lindemann Young Artist Development Program at the Metropolitan Opera. In the 2024/25 season, she joined Chicago Opera Theater for the world premiere of *She Who Dared* and Opera Theater of St. Louis for their *New Works Collective*. She has performed at the Metropolitan Opera, Houston Grand Opera and Boston Lyric Opera, including roles in *Fire Shut Up in My Bones*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Omar* and *Dialogues des Carmélites*. A winner of the Duncan Williams Voice Competition, she holds degrees from Ohio State University and Peabody Conservatory.

Christopher Bozeka, tenor – A dynamic and expressive performer, lighting up opera houses across the country, Tenor Christopher Bozeka is gain-

ing recognition for his "expressively captivating" performances and "beautiful, piercing tone" (*San Francisco Chronicle*).

Recent highlights include Alfredo Germont (*La traviata*, Opera Las Vegas), Rodrigo (*Otello*, Central City Opera), and soloist appearances with the New Mexico Gay Men's Chorus. He has performed with the Metropolitan Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Sarasota Opera, and Opera Southwest, covering roles in *Nabucco*, *Le comte Ory*, *The Magic Flute*, and *Salome*. A Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions winner, he holds a master's degree from University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music.



William Guanbo Su, bass-baritone – A commanding presence on the world stage and a Grand Finals Winner of the

Met Opera National Council Auditions, Chinese bass William Guanbo Su is acclaimed for his "musical taste" and "solid voice" (*The New York Times*). A 2019 Grand Finals Winner of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, he has performed with Houston Grand Opera, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis and Boston Lyric Opera, portraying roles such as Zuniga in *Carmen*, Olin Blich in *Susannah* and Colline in *La bohème*. Su holds degrees from The Juilliard School and the Manhattan School of Music. In the 2024 season, he is set to debut as Masetto in *Don Giovanni* with The Santa Fe Opera.

Tickets: Call 850.729.6000 or visit MattieKellyArtsCenter.org. Adults: \$35; Youth: \$16. Military discount available.

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Spring Style Refresh

BY LIESEL SCHMIDT

Spring is in the air—or at least, it's on the way. While the official start of the season isn't until March 20th, this is the perfect time to refresh your wardrobe with pieces that blend comfort, style, and a little bit of that springtime magic we've all been craving after the unexpected Florida blizzard that left us all wondering who broke the thermostat. This year, we're loving fluttery dresses, flowy tops, versatile casual wear and thoughtfully chosen accessories that will take you from cool mornings to sun-soaked afternoons with ease—and Blue Bay Lifestyle Co. has everything you need to hit the reset button on your spring wardrobe.



friends ask where you got that outfit. *At Blue Bay Lifestyle, of course!*

This new season also means the return of dresses, and we're so excited about the romantic, fluttery dresses and flowy tops from Lost + Wander that are giving us all the feels right now. Think soft pastels, earthy neutrals, and playful floral prints that give off some

the inimitable Madame Chanel, "Accessories are what makes or marks a woman," and we at Blue Bay have just the right pieces for your spring restyle. Fran & Bel's handcrafted jewelry offers timeless, delicate pieces that wear beautifully, while Ellesee Women's polymer clay earrings add a fun pop of color and texture. If you love mixing metals and layering jewelry, Lizou's versatile stackable necklaces and bracelets will be your new go-to for nights out or get-togethers with your besties. When it comes to handbags, Hobo's soft, high-quality leather bags bring an effortlessly chic touch to any outfit, from crossbodies and clutches to satchels that hold it all.

er you're on the move or taking it easy. Flag & Anthem's lightweight button-downs, soft henleys and structured yet relaxed chinos are perfect for work-from-home days or weekend outings with your favorite person.

If you're planning on hiking, road-tripping, or just channeling that rugged, outdoorsy aesthetic, Rhythm and Roark have your back. Think lightweight jackets, breathable tees and quality-made shorts that transition effortlessly from wandering around town to full-on outdoor adventuring.

As the days grow longer (thank God) and the air starts to warm up, it's time to kick off the winter blues and embrace everything that spring fashion has to offer. Whether you're stocking up on fluttery dresses, relaxed casual wear or thoughtfully chosen accessories, this season is all about comfort, versatility, and effortless style. March 20th will be here before you know it, so get ready to greet spring with outfits that show off your style. We look forward to seeing you at Blue Bay Lifestyle Co.!

Ladies in Bloom: Breezy, Beautiful, and Effortless

Spring is the season of renewal and rebirth, so what better time to break out the soft silhouettes, easy layering, and lighter fabrics? This year's casual wear hits all the right notes, and Vuori's ultra-comfortable Sunday joggers, luscious tank tops

and lightweight performance hoodies make transitioning from your morning coffee run to an afternoon walk a snap. If you're looking for classically chic yet relaxed staples, Flag & Anthem and Liverpool's denim jackets, breezy tees and blouses, and stretch denim bottoms offer just the right balance of casual and put-together that will make your

serious spring vibes. Whether you're reaching for a relaxed boho-inspired maxi or a breezy blouse to pair with your favorite jeans, spring fashion celebrates movement, comfort, whimsy, and—of course—breaking free from all the heaviness of winter.

Of course, no look is complete without the perfect accessories to tie everything together. To quote

Male Call: Polished, Rugged, and Adventure-Ready

Men's spring fashion is all about relaxed-yet-refined layering—with a hint of adventure that might have been buried under all the winter sweats. Vuori's moisture-wicking, endlessly versatile Sunday joggers and hoodies keep you comfortable wheth-



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vate sections with the option of having a private bar as well. The outside deck can hold up to 300 people comfortably and can be sectioned off to fit your needs. In addition to the pizza and wings, FUBAR can customize a menu for you from Italian food to Prime Rib and everything in between. Open 7 days from 11 a.m.-2 a.m.

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In 2001, Magnolia Grill in Fort Walton Beach opened its doors after a renovation that took 18 months—and it's been thriving since. A local's favorite dubbed "The Museum That Serves Food," you'll find equal parts museum and dining establishment. Its second floor contains artifacts from World War II, Vietnam and other segments of American history. And downstairs—is where you'll find lunch favorites such as Meatloaf with Mashed Potatoes, Crab Cake with Fettuccine and Shrimp Alfredo Sauce, Red Beans and Rice and many types of burgers, sandwiches, soups and salads. For dinner, savor divine Italian dishes such as Italian Sausage and Peppers with Marinara Sauce and Filet Tips Florentina. But there's also steaks, seafood "Camp Walton style" and even a kids' menu. Hours: Lunch M-F 11-2; Dinner M-Th 5-8; F-Sat 5-9; Closed Sundays.

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Food, Fireworks and Family Fun on Okaloosa Island's Boardwalk

BY CHRISTOPHER MANSON WITH SHANTELE DEDICKE

Few attractions along the Emerald Coast offer a more striking view of the Gulf than The Boardwalk on Okaloosa

Island. Located right on the beach, The Boardwalk (Newman C. Brackin Wayside Park) is a vibrant community hub for locals and visitors alike, offering must-attend events for the

entire family and nationally recognized restaurants. For a real-time glimpse of the stunning shoreline, visit theboardwalkoi.com for the live "Beach Cam." The Boardwalk features free

parking, pavilions, picnic tables, public restrooms, and outdoor showers for returning beachgoers. Recurring events include weekly fireworks, coastal beach cleanups, the Kitty Hawk Kite Festival, the New Year's Day Pelican Plunge, and two popular volleyball tournaments—Emerald Coast Volleyball Week in the spring and the Emerald Coast Fall Classic.

Beginning May 28, seasonal fireworks will light up the night sky over the Gulf, blasting off from the pier every Wednesday at 9 p.m. through Aug. 6. Additional fireworks spectacles are scheduled for Sunday, May 25 (Memorial Day weekend), Labor Day weekend, and New Year's Eve. Other family-friendly events include tropical-themed luaus, outdoor movie screenings, and performances by award-winning local bands on the Al's Beach Club stage.

The Boardwalk is part of the Saltwater Restaurants family, a group known for delivering exceptional dining experiences with a commitment to quality, fresh ingredients, and "memorable coastal cuisine." In recent years, the company has built a vibrant dining scene on The Boardwalk and beyond while voicing support for beach safety efforts and organizations that protect and fight for the environment. Learn more at saltwaterrestaurants.com.

Dining Highlights

Floyd's Shrimp and Steak House: A longtime favorite along The Boardwalk, Floyd's specializes in fresh Gulf seafood, hand-cut steaks, and their famous "shrimptizers." Don't miss their "notorious all-you-can-eat fish and shrimp platters," as highlighted at floydsshrimphouse.com. Whether you crave surf, turf, or both, Floyd's offers unforgettable dining with spectacular sunset views.

Rockin' Tacos Grill & Tequila Bar: Located on The Boardwalk's upper level, Rockin' Tacos is bursting with atmosphere and colorful beachside



décor. Savor coastal-inspired tacos, over 75 tequilas and house-infused craft margaritas while enjoying live DJ music. The restaurant rolls out 1,000 made-from-scratch tortillas a day, and their footlong blackened shrimp burrito was featured on the Travel Channel. Discover more at rockintacos.com.

The Crab Trap: With its family-friendly, beachy vibe, The Crab Trap offers a menu full of fresh fish like grouper, snapper, mahi-mahi, cobia, wahoo, and amberjack, alongside crab, shrimp, and a variety of specialty drinks. For authentic Gulf flavor and atmosphere, look no further. The Crab Trap also has locations in Miramar Beach and Pensacola. Visit crabtrapflorida.com for details.

Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar: Reopened for the season on March 1, Al's offers build-your-own burgers, specialty sandwiches (including the popular Island Chicken Sandwich, a tuna burger, and a "Beyond" vegan burger), and a full bar. Family-friendly by day and lively at night, Al's is beloved for its custard shakes, handcrafted cocktails, and beachfront vibes. More at alsbeachclub.com.

The Boardwalk is a choice spot for dining, entertainment, and breathtaking views. Locals can enjoy a casual night out while visitors experience authentic coastal experience. Whether you're flying solo, out for a date night, or enjoying time with family, there's something for everyone.

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Hurlburt Field Air Commandos: Basketball's Impact on Service Members

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As the final seconds ticked away on the game clock, the crowd cheered, and teammates came off of the bench to congratulate one another.

The Hurlburt Field Air Commandos basketball team had clinched yet another win with a 76-68 win over the Eglin Eagles on Jan. 10.

This season, the Air Commandos basketball squad has added to their 11-year legacy of consistent home wins. But, victory isn't the only take away for the team.

"The whole point of varsity sports in the military is to build resiliency, fitness and mental health," said the Hurlburt Field Air Commandos coach. "It brings a lot of people from wherever together; it's like a second family."

An Airman assigned to the 1st Special Operations Wing, and starting forward for the team, said that for many service members in the Air Force, being an Airman is central to their identity. The mission is always a priority, but finding an outlet outside of work is essential.

"It 100% boosts my morale," the starting forward said. "I look forward to this a lot of days when I have a hard day at work. The Air Force definitely pushes that career-focused attitude but taking a break and doing some-

thing you love is just a way to relax and have fun."

The Hurlburt Field Air Commandos are currently ranked 2nd in the Military Basketball Association. They're also a part of the Atlantic Coastal Military Basketball Conference, which offers tryouts to any reservists, guardsmen, DoD civilians and contractors over the age of 18, regardless of branch.

"I don't feel disconnected even if we're different branches," said a Soldier playing as a guard for Hurlburt Field. "We're all the same people, and they don't treat me differently just because I'm in the Army. I learn a lot from the Airmen. Building connections and bonds with my fellow players has been a pleasure."

The team's diversity extends beyond service-specifics and job titles. According to the coach, the team has a wide demographic of different ages, religions, races and upbringings.

"We have a lot players from different backgrounds, but we do a lot of activities outside of the game to make our team feel whole," said the coach. "We be-

come a family."

Hurlburt Field is the only DoD basketball team that competes in multiple leagues: Southeastern Military Athletic Conference and the MBA's ACMBC. This schedule averages 70-80 games per season against every branch across the DoD.

"I think my team definitely helps me network," said Team Hurlburt's starting forward. "We play against and meet so many new people; we get together for charity and volunteer events, so we're making a bigger difference than just basketball."



While the court focuses on competition, the impact of these intramural sports extends far beyond the game itself. For the players, participating provides a sense of purpose outside of their daily duties, fostering connections that strengthen both professional and personal bonds,

added Hurlburt's guard. "For the people who watch, it gives you a way to come together and have something to look forward to," the starting forward explained. "It's cool to come home to family or friends and say 'Hey, let's get ready and go to the game.'"

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SSUS

continued from page 2

• The SS United States' designer, William Francis Gibbs, wanted his ship to be fireproof, so he insisted that no wood be used in her construction or fittings. One exception: the ship's grand pianos were made from fire-resistant mahogany. A Steinway piano was tested in

advance by dousing it with gasoline and lighting a match. (It didn't burn.)

• More aluminum was used in the SSUS than for any previous construction project in history. Why? To reduce her weight and make her the fastest ocean liner of all time.

• Thanks to her reduced weight and powerful engines, the SSUS could go almost as

fast in reverse as the Titanic could go forward.

• On her maiden voyage, the SSUS shattered the trans-Atlantic speed record in both directions. She was the first American ship in 100 years to capture the coveted Blue Riband (awarded to the fastest trans-Atlantic ocean liner). Amazingly, she still holds the record more than 60 years later.

• Built to be converted from luxury liner to troop transport in the event of war, the SSUS was able to carry 14,000 troops 10,000 miles without refueling.

• The galleys aboard the SSUS could turn out up to 9,000 individual meals a day!

• The SSUS was retired from active service in 1969. The age of the great ocean liners had come to a close, doomed by in-

creasingly fast and affordable trans-Atlantic airline flights.

• From 1996 to 2025, the SSUS was docked on the Delaware River in Philadelphia.

Source: ssusc.org

Learn more about Okaloosa County's artificial reef program at <https://www.destinfwb.com/explore/eco-tourism/artificial-reefs/>.

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Wellness



By KAY LEAMAN, HEALTH ARCHITECT, HEALTHYDAY HEALTHYLIFE

Blood Sugar: How's Yours?

I don't know of anyone who doesn't know someone who is either pre-diabetic or diagnosed with type II diabetes. I decided to write about it in hopes of equipping people to take charge of their health and be equipped to support those they know.

We have insulin receptors

throughout the body. Insulin, which is released by the pancreas, stimulates these cell receptors which allows glucose to leave the bloodstream and enter the cell. The receptors can be damaged by free radicals. These free radicals steal electrons from molecules of cells and tissues and this

includes the receptors. When this happens, it causes oxidative stress which results in inflammation.

Oxidative stress and inflammation are the underlying pathologies to nearly every chronic degenerative disease.

The lifestyle choices that can contribute to this cycle are smoking, lack of vitamin and mineral intake, environmental toxins, excessive sugar consumption and sedentary lifestyles.

Glucose is used as fuel by the mitochondria of the cells to give us energy. When we eat and/or drink, insulin is released in response to rising sugar levels. Think of insulin as the key and the receptors as the lock. Once this process happens the glucose is metabolized in the mitochondria and converted to ATP (adenosine triphosphate-energy currency molecule).

As inflammation grows and persists due to an overabundance of sugar intake the lock becomes deformed and can no longer hold its molecular shape. This prevents the key from being able to open the lock (receptor).

And it's not only the receptors which are damaged but the arterial walls and the LDL cholesterol. This cycle leads not only to type II diabetes but loss of kidney function, loss of circulation to extremities, stroke or heart attack are also of concern.

Type I diabetes happens when the beta cells are not producing enough insulin; the keys are missing. Type II diabetes occurs when the receptors become 'rusty';

they no longer have the correct molecular shape to receive insulin. This is insulin resistance.

To overcome this cycle, drugs are used to reduce blood sugar levels or insulin is given to overwhelm the receptors and force the glucose into the cells. However, any rapid rise of insulin, either artificially or naturally, occurring from eating high glycemic foods causes even more oxidative damage!

The cell continually makes new insulin receptors and IF the new ones are correctly shaped, they can be protected by a constant source of antioxidants so insulin sensitivity can prevail.

Here are the lifestyle choices to get and keep this important cycle in shape:

- Exercise 30-60 minutes daily
- Consume 30-40 grams of soluble and insoluble fiber daily
- Avoid trans fats
- Eat low glycemic foods
- Reduce stress
- Quality sleep -7-9 hours
- Supplementation

If you have compromised kidney function, you must be careful regarding mineral intake. It should be decreased, but can still offer benefits.

If you would like to view the supplemental protocol prescribed by a doctor you can reach out to me via email. Please put DIABETES in the subject line.

*Here's to Health!
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Aging Gracefully: A Guide to Longevity and Vitality



By DR. KAREN DEVORE

Aging is a privilege, but how we age is largely within our control. While genetics play a role, lifestyle choices and proactive health management significantly impact our vitality, mobility and overall well-being. The good news? You don't have to accept aches, fatigue and chronic diseases as inevitable. You can age on your own terms by implementing a few key strategies.

1. Annual Check-Ins & Lab Work: Stay Ahead of the Game

Prevention is the cornerstone of longevity. Annual health

check-ups allow you to track changes, address concerns and monitor key health markers before minor issues become major problems. Many conditions—such as metabolic disorders, cardiovascular disease and osteoporosis—develop silently over time, making regular lab work essential for early detection and intervention.

Too many people avoid these appointments due to frustration with dismissive healthcare providers. If your practitioner isn't listening to you or supporting your health goals, find a team that will. Healthcare should be a partnership, not a battle.

Key Lab Markers to Monitor:

- Inflammation & Metabolic Health: CRP, fasting insulin, A1C
- Hormonal Balance: Thyroid panel, testosterone, estrogen, progesterone, DHEA
- Nutrient Status: Vitamin D, B12, ferritin, magnesium
- Cardiovascular Health: Lipid panel, homocysteine, ApoB

2. Listen to Your Body: Symptoms Matter

Your body is always communicating with you. Fatigue, brain fog, unexplained weight changes and joint pain aren't just random annoyances—they're signals. Ignoring them doesn't make them disappear; it only allows problems to worsen over time.

Being proactive about your health doesn't mean dismissing symptoms in the name of "natural" healing. It means staying in tune with your body, recognizing patterns and addressing imbalances early. You know your body better than any textbook or algorithm—if something feels off, advocate for yourself.

3. Know Your Family's Aging Patterns

While lifestyle choices have the greatest impact on longevity, understanding your genetic predispositions can help you make informed decisions. Look at how your parents and siblings are aging. Are they dealing with cognitive decline, cardiovascular issues or bone loss?

Genetics don't determine your fate, but they do provide insight into potential vulnerabilities. By identifying patterns, you can take proactive steps to mitigate risks through targeted lifestyle and medical interventions.

4. The Fundamentals Never Get Old

Some health advice remains timeless because it works. If you want to age gracefully, these fundamentals are non-negotiable:

- Movement is medicine. If you don't use it, you lose it. Regular exercise supports mobility, cardiovascular health and cognitive function.
- Hydration matters. Dehydration contributes to fatigue, joint pain and poor circulation.
- Sleep is the ultimate reset. Quality sleep is essential for hormone balance, brain function and immune resilience.
- Laughter truly is the best medicine. Joy and social connection improve mental and emotional health while reducing stress and inflammation.
- You are what you eat. A

nutrient-dense, whole-food diet fuels longevity and vitality.

5. Muscle Mass: The Fountain of Youth

One of the most powerful predictors of longevity? Muscle mass. Research consistently links muscle maintenance with reduced mortality risk, improved metabolic health and greater resilience against age-related diseases such as osteoporosis, diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Why Muscle Matters:

- Improves metabolism and helps regulate blood sugar
- Reduces fall risk by supporting balance and coordination
- Strengthens bones through mechanical stress, helping prevent osteoporosis
- Supports cognitive health by enhancing blood flow and reducing inflammation

The takeaway? It's never too late to build muscle. Resistance training—even starting in your 70s or 80s—can lead to signifi-

Continued on page 28



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The Only Person You Can Change Is You



BY STEPHENIE CRAIG,
JOURNEY BRAVELY

Do you ever find yourself exhausted, irritated and resentful when a person in your life won't start or stop certain behavior? Maybe they don't take care of themselves as you think they should or they won't stop a habit you think is negative. Maybe you want them to study more, drink less, exercise more, be happier, be more punctual, focus better, work less, be less angry, be less critical, parent differently or relax more. Behavior of others that is not aligned with your life approach can create significant discomfort and can feel annoying or even infuriating.

How do you respond to difficult behavior? Common approaches include passive aggressive remarks, nagging, withdrawing or saying mean things. While these strategies give a momentary sense

of "taking action," none produce meaningful change. Often, your desire for change comes from a positive desire for the person to have a good life. Other times, the desire for change is motivated by you believing your way is the right way and everyone else should just get on board. Regardless of the motivation, you can't change other people. Period. Science and years of experience reveal humans change when the discomfort of their current behavior outweighs the inherent discomfort of change.

Change is an internal job. People change when they decide they are willing to do the uncomfortable and unfamiliar work of trying something new even when it is difficult. No amount of external pressure from you has the power to motivate change in another. While hard to accept, it is incredibly freeing to realize it has never been and will never be your job to get someone else to change. You can invest the energy you've been putting into changing others into your internal work of change and growth. So, how do you shift from trying to change others to engaging personal growth?

12 Ways to Engage Personal Growth and Stop Trying to Change Others

Notice. Notice frustrated, ir-



ritated, annoyed, angry, resentful energy you are feeling toward someone. Notice where you feel it in your body. Try being curious about the origin of the feelings. Notice patterns of irritated feelings and how they relate to a pattern of behavior in the other person.

Admit. Ask yourself if you are trying to control or change someone else's behavior. Am I trying to get someone to start or stop a behavior? If the answer is yes, admit to yourself you are trying to control something you can't control.

Remind. Remind yourself despite your best desires and efforts, you have never and will never have the power to change

another person.

Rest. Rest into the reality and freedom of not being responsible for changing others.

Decide. Decide how you will respond to difficult behavior. You are in charge of your response despite the behavior of someone else.

Discover. Look inside yourself to discover the deeper reasons the behavior is bothering you.

Do you have historical wounds around the behavior? Is the behavior a barrier to connection in your relationship? Does the behavior scare you? Does feeling out of control create feelings of insecurity for you? Do you hold a belief that bad things will happen if others don't do things the way you do?

Sort. Sort whether the difficult behavior is something you can let go. Every behavior does not need to change. Sometimes making space for the other person to be different than you without judgment is most helpful. If you determine the behavior is truly causing problems, reach for directness rather than nagging.

Communicate. If you've

identified the behavior as a true problem, calmly and directly communicate your concerns. Try going light on judgment and asking curious questions to understand the other person's perspective about the behavior.

Boundaries. Decide what you will do or not do if the behavior continues long-term. Follow through on boundaries over time.

Model. Model healthy behavior in your interactions with the other person. If you are asking them to relax more, prioritize relaxing. Try modeling with a joyful attitude rather than one of judgment.

Encourage. Verbally acknowledge positive change the other person makes regarding the difficult behavior.

Accept. If the other person chooses not to change the behavior, accept their choice. You can't make them choose differently. Instead, focus on how you will interact in the relationship.

Accepting you can't change anyone but yourself is uncomfortable, but freeing. Lean into the freedom and be gracious with yourself and others as you navigate letting go of trying to change others. Connect with us for counseling and coaching along your journey at Journeybravely.com.



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The Impact of Trauma and Chronic Stress on Our Well-Being

By MELANIE YOST

You are not healing just to handle trauma—you have already been doing that. You are healing to allow joy back into your life.

Resilience is the ability to prepare for, recover from and adapt to stress, challenges or adversity. It manifests across mental, emotional, physical and spiritual realms.

Think of resilience as the energy stored in an inner battery. The more charged the battery, the greater your capacity to remain calm, think clearly and regulate your emotions. When the battery is depleted, responding effectively to even minor stressors becomes difficult. Our bodies are complex energy systems capable of expanding and renewing energy, and learning how to do this consciously helps build resilience.

The Role of the Autonomic Nervous System

The autonomic nervous system (ANS) controls involuntary functions such as heart rate,

blood pressure, breathing, and digestion. It consists of two key components:

- The **sympathetic nervous system**, which activates the body's fight-or-flight response.

- The **parasympathetic nervous system**, which promotes rest, repair and recovery, but is also associated with the faint-or-freeze response.

The nervous system operates within an optimal range known as the Window of Tolerance, where it fluctuates between these two states to meet the demands of daily life. The sympathetic system enables activity—getting out of bed, driving, interacting with others, managing anger, frustration or anxiety—while the parasympathetic system allows for focus, rest, digestion and emotional processing, such as handling sadness or loneliness. A well-regulated nervous system moves fluidly between these states, helping us manage everyday life effectively.

The Effects of Chronic Stress and Trauma

When stress or trauma becomes chronic, the nervous system's ability to self-regulate is impaired, narrowing the Window of Tolerance. This dysregulation can cause individuals to become stuck in states of over-activation, under-activation or fluctuations between the two.

Symptoms of Over-Activation:

- Difficulty concentrating
- Trouble relaxing
- Hypervigilance
- Exaggerated startle response
- Anxiety or panic
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Emotional outbursts
- Chronic anger or rage
- Aggression or violence
- Racing thoughts or overthinking

Symptoms of Under-Activation:

- Brain fog or mental blankness
- Emotional numbness

- Apathy
- Depression
- Disconnection from self and others
- Dissociation
- Chronic fatigue or lethargy
- Inability to feel happiness or joy
- Social withdrawal and isolation

Repatterning the Nervous System and Expanding the Window of Tolerance

The HeartMath Institute has identified a technique called Heart-Focused Breathing, which helps regulate the nervous system by promoting coherence—a state where the heart, mind, and emotions are in sync. This method involves breathing at a slower, deeper rate, typically with a five-count inhale and a five-count exhale.

Engaging in Heart-Focused Breathing creates a coherent heart rhythm, sending signals to the brain that promote emotional stability and well-being. This coherence allows the immune, hormonal, and nervous systems to function optimally, enhancing

resilience and emotional regulation.

By consciously using techniques like Heart-Focused Breathing before, during, and after stressful situations, we can rewire the nervous system, expand our Window of Tolerance, and restore balance—allowing us to shift from merely surviving to truly thriving.

By understanding the science behind trauma and chronic stress, you've taken an important first step toward healing and resilience. But you don't have to do it alone. At Be Well Solutions, we specialize in guiding you through practices like Heart-Focused Breathing and other proven techniques to help restore balance and expand your Window of Tolerance. Call 850-786-2051.

Melanie Yost is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and owner of Be Well Solutions and Complete Ketamine Solutions in Destin. She has been in the healthcare field for over 35 years.

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Beyond the Base: Security Forces Prep for Emerging Threats

BY 1ST SPECIAL OPERATIONS WING, PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

In the dense brush covering the Florida forest landscape, Security Forces Airmen navigate their way through challenges and obstacles, every step a testament to their readiness.

Through rigorous Field Training Exercises, or FTX, these Airmen confront realistic threats that test their endurance, hone their skills and fortify their preparation for actual combat situations.

“We put them in the middle of a field under realistic conditions, which gives them real-world applications,” said the security forces training NCOIC assigned to the 1st Special Operations Wing. “It puts them in that warrior ethos mindset to keep their heads on a swivel and stay prepared for anything that could happen.”

The FTX is an essential part of the unit’s ongoing efforts to strengthen combat-ready forces. Airmen immerse themselves in realistic scenarios that build their warrior ethos and sharpen their skills for success at home and in deployed operations.

This quarter focused on land navigation, open-area crossings,

key leader engagements and securing high-value targets.

One participant described the exercises as physically and mentally demanding, requiring participants to

understand each team member’s role, apply rules of engagement and make quick decisions under pressure. “Staying on the same page is crucial,” said the FTX participant. “We have to



keep the squad together and ensure everyone knows what’s happening.”

The training NCOIC said the curriculum is constantly refined based on after-action reports, lessons learned from past events and real-world incidents.



“We adjust based on what’s happening in modern-day operations to keep our Airmen as prepared as possible,” the NCOIC said.

The consistent training leads to better performance and more comprehensive skill develop-

ment than occasional exercises, the NCOIC added.

“This training reinforced my confidence, especially since I’ll be deploying in the near future,” said the FTX

participant. “When I get downrange, if I’m called upon to do anything, I have complete confidence in myself that I can get the job done.”

These ongoing exercises play a vital role in Hurlburt Field’s commitment to mission readiness, strengthening the 1st

SOW’s ability to deter adversaries.

“I’ve seen vast improvement in both the younger Airmen and even some of the noncommissioned officers and senior NCOs,” said the training NCOIC.

Any questions can be directed to the 1st Special Operations Wing Public Affairs office at 850-884-7906 or 1sow.wpa1@us.af.mil.








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A Pastor's Ponderings: March - In Like a Lion, Out Like a Lamb?



BY PASTOR DOUG STAUFFER

March is a unique month. The saying “comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb” comes from 17th-century weather folklore, when observers noted that March usually begins with stormy conditions before becoming milder and calmer toward the end of the month.

This saying evokes a profound truth in Scripture—Jesus Christ is both the LION of Judah and the LAMB of God. He embodies strength and gentleness, power and sacrifice, justice and mercy. He is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.

In **Revelation 5:5-6**, the apostle John weeps because no one is found worthy of opening the book of judgment. John is then told, “Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book.” Yet when he looks, instead of seeing a lion, he sees “a Lamb as it had been slain.” Why the dichotomy? Jesus is both—the mighty King and the sacrificial Saviour.

The Strength of the Lion

The Lion of Judah represents Christ’s power, authority, and ultimate victory. We, as believers, are called to move forward in faith, trusting in His strength. **Philippians 3:13-14** reminds us to forget “those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark.” Life will bring challenges, but we must keep moving forward, knowing the victorious Lion leads us.

The lion symbolizes courage and boldness, traits we need to

help us stand firm in our convictions in an increasingly troubled world. Are you standing firm in your faith or shrinking back? The Lion of Judah goes before us, giving us the confidence to trust in His victory.

The Humility of the Lamb

Jesus came first as the Lamb of God, willingly laying down His life for our sins. His sacrifice calls us to a life of humility, repentance, and renewal. Just as spring is a time of cleaning and fresh starts, our spiritual lives need cleansing, too.

Psalm 51:10 says, “Create in



me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.” Just as we sweep away dust and clutter in our homes, we must sweep away sin, doubt, and distractions from our hearts. Are there burdens we need to surrender? Are there sins we need to confess? March is an excellent time for spiritual spring cleaning.

Living in the Balance

Jesus teaches us to be bold yet humble, strong yet surrendered—to live with the courage of a lion but the gentleness of a lamb. He is our example, leading us in every season of life.

As we enter another new season, let’s examine our hearts: Are we standing firm in faith like the Lion? Are we walking in grace and humility like the Lamb?

Whether March roars like a lion or quietly fades out like a lamb, we can rest in the truth that our Lord is both—and that He leads us through every storm AND every calm. After Snowmageddon in the Florida Panhandle, one thing we know: the

weather is unpredictable. Of course, when the temperature fluctuates, it’s just another day of climate change doing what climates do—change! Good news for those desiring stability:

Micah 3:6 says, “For I am the LORD, I change not.”

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.

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 Musing



By SEAN DIETRICH

“I started choking,” said Jennifer Yakubesan.

It was a typical evening, some years ago. The family was eating supper before church, somewhere in the wilds of Michigan. It was spaghetti. The flagship food of happy families.

“I looked at my husband and my son, and I started to make this kind of patting on my chest.”

Enter her son, Andrew. He was 13. A Scout.

Jennifer was about to lose consciousness when she felt her son’s arms wrap around her. He

wedged his fist below her sternum. He squeezed.

The Heimlich maneuver is not simple. It requires strength. The Heimlich didn’t work. So Andrew slapped his mother’s back. Someone taught him to do that.

Andrew was given the National Merit Award by the Scouts.

Which leads me to my next story, approximately six states away. Scout Troop 1299, of Allen, Texas, was on a bus trip to Wyoming.

They had a few days to kill in Yellowstone National Park.

“We were on our way to lunch,” said Brian, an adult volunteer. “We were passing by these falls, and we were like, ‘Let’s just stop real quick and let the adults take some pictures,’”

They parked. Deboarded. Everyone’s dad stretched his respective lumbar region. A

Sean of the South: Scouts



stranger ran up to the group and frantically asked if there was a doctor on the bus.

A doctor, no. Scouts, yes.

In moments, scouters found a woman having an emergency on the trail. She was lying in the dirt. It was cardiac arrest. An off-duty nurse was already performing chest compressions.

The Scouts fetched the automated external defibrillator (AED) from the bus.

Why did a bunch of average kids from Texas have a piece of expensive portable medical equipment on their bus? The

answer is: Because they were Scouts.

Today, the woman is alive and well.

Here’s another. In Claiborne County, Tennessee, Crystal Thacker took meds and had an allergic reaction. One minute she was fine; the next, she was on the floor, dying.

“It almost felt like when your foot’s asleep,” she remembers, “...it was very hard to breathe.”

Crystal’s 16-year-old son, Stewart, knew his mother was in anaphylactic shock. He also knew what to do while first re-

sponders were en route. This is because Stewart was a Scout and had over 200 hours of medical training.

“I took an old blanket,” said Stewart, “...and made sort of a sunroof shelter, and reapplied ice packs. And then the ambulance showed up.”

Stewart was presented with the National Certificate of Merit.

When I was a kid, there were roughly 5 million Boy Scouts on the planet. I was one. Twenty U.S. presidents were Scouts. John Wayne was a Scout. Neil Armstrong. Sam Walton. Hank Aaron. Martin Luther King Jr.

Today, however, there are approximately 1 millions Scouts left in the U.S. The reason for this sharp decline isn’t important. I’m not here to raise issues.

I do, however, want to deliver a message to any kids who are thinking about joining the Scouts but are unsure about it since their friends think Scouting is nerdy. Scouting is a lot more than building birdhouses and making wallets.

The Boy Scouts of America save lives.

AGING GRACEFULLY

continued from page 23

cant improvements in strength, mobility and longevity.

Aging on Your Own Terms

Aging gracefully isn’t about avoiding every wrinkle or pretending time isn’t passing. It’s about maintaining independence, vitality and quality of life for as long as possible. It’s about making informed choices, staying proactive with your health and surrounding yourself with a supportive healthcare team.

Longevity isn’t just about adding years to your life—it’s about adding life to your years. Take care of your body now, and it will take care of you in the decades to come.

I’d be honored to support you on your wellness journey. Let’s create a personalized plan that nurtures your unique body, helping you feel vibrant, strong and at ease as you age gracefully. Schedule a consultation with me at the Tortoise Clinic (850.267.5611)—because you deserve to feel your best, every step of the way.

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MKAF Announces 2025 Concerts in the Village!

The stellar, 10-concert, live-music series, Thursdays, April 10 – June 12, will feature premier musicians and bands performing everything from classic rock and yacht rock to soulful tributes and high-energy hits. From iconic blues rock to soulful Amy Winehouse tributes, danceable yacht rock and Def Leppard classics—plus a special performance of Journey’s album *Escape* from start to finish by Black Jacket Symphony—the 2025 Concerts in the Village presented by the Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation offers a dynamic lineup for every music lover.

The area’s longest-running live concert series is held each spring on Thursday evenings at the MKAF Dugas Pavilion in Destin. This year’s family-friendly series will run from April 10 to June 12, featuring premier regional and national musicians and bands performing everything from classic rock and rhythm & blues to modern pop and nostalgic tributes.

The series kicks off on Thursday, April 10, 2025, with an

electrifying performance by The Fabulous Thunderbirds, setting the stage for an unforgettable season.

“This is an exceptional lineup of live music in a beautiful outdoor venue at an affordable price for a great cause,” says MKAF CEO Demetrius Fuller. “When you purchase a concert ticket, you’re helping us provide high-quality arts education and community engagement across Northwest Florida. Whether you’re a regular or joining us for the first time, we promise an unforgettable experience.”

Gates open at 6 p.m., and concerts begin at 7 p.m. This come-as-you-are outdoor concert series encourages attendees to bring a lawn chair, picnic, or wine. Food and beverages also will be available for purchase from local food trucks on-site.

2025 Concerts in the Village Schedule:

April 10 – The Fabulous Thunderbirds Kick off the season with blues rock legends known for hits like *Tuff Enuff* and *Wrap It Up*.



April 17 – Journeyman: An Eric Clapton Tribute Celebrate Clapton’s timeless hits like *Layla* and *Wonderful Tonight* with stunning authenticity.

April 24 – Yacht Rock Revue Dance to soft rock classics from the ‘70s and ‘80s by artists like Christopher Cross and Hall & Oates.

May 1 – Black Jacket Symphony: Journey’s *Escape* Relive Journey’s iconic album *Escape*, featuring *Don’t Stop Believin’* and *Open Arms*.

May 8 – Dear Amy: Amy

Winehouse Tribute The official estate-approved band, pays tribute to Winehouse’s soulful legacy with hits like *Rehab* and *Back to Black*.

May 15 – Kickstand Jenny Experience a high-energy night with this dynamic rock ‘n’ roll band.

May 22 – The Molly Ringwalds Journey through the ‘80s with this ultimate tribute to the decade’s greatest hits.

May 29 – Petty Hearts Celebrate Tom Petty classics like *Free Fallin’* and *American Girl*.

June 5 – A1A: Jimmy Buffett Tribute Escape to Margaritaville with the original, Jimmy Buffett estate-approved tribute band.

June 12 – Adrenalize: Music of Def Leppard Rock out to Def Leppard’s biggest hits like *Pour Some Sugar on Me* and *Love Bites*.

General admission tickets are \$35 per person, plus a ticketing fee. Save \$5 by purchasing tickets in advance online at MKAF.org. Children under 12 attend for free. MKAF members enjoy early entry and free admission to every concert as well as discounted pricing for other MKAF events. A limited number of VIP tables (reserved for eight guests for the entire season) are available for \$3,000. To reserve a VIP table, call Deb Nissley at (850) 650-2226.

To purchase tickets, become an MKAF member, make a tax-deductible donation or provide a corporate sponsorship, visit www.MKAF.org or call (850) 650-2226. Follow MKAF on Facebook and Instagram for the latest updates.



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- April 24 | Yacht Rock Revue
- May 1 | Black Jacket Symphony: Journey’s *Escape*
- May 8 | Dear Amy: Amy Winehouse Tribute
- May 15 | Kickstand Jenny
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Arts & Music

Classical Chamber Music Festival Announces 5th Season Celebration

The Emerald Coast Chamber Music Festival has announced its lineup of concerts for the 2025 season. Festival co-Artistic Director and Artist Faculty member Jacob Clewell (viola) offered a summary of the season, saying, "This year's festival is centered around music the faculty love and have chosen themselves, and it ranges from music we grew up listening to from Beethoven and Mendelssohn to a couple more recently written pieces we simply adore. I really can't wait for the community to see what we have in store for this year's celebration." The festival will also be expanding its outreach activities, offering more casual performances outside of the formality of a concert hall.

Most concerts are presented by the festival's internationally acclaimed Artist Faculty, who travel to the area from across the United States and Canada for this event each year. These performers have appeared exten-

sively throughout North America and Europe, in such venues as Chicago's Symphony Hall, Toronto's Koerner Hall, and the holy grail of concert venues, Carnegie Hall in New York City. The festival also boasts a comprehensive Chamber Music Institute, at which approximately 40 students from the country's top music schools participate in two weeks of intensive study with ECCMF artist faculty and guest artist teachers.

As a special feature for the festival's fifth year of concerts, all ticket fees have been eliminated for the 2025 season. The team that organizes the annual festival is inviting the community to come and celebrate classical chamber music alongside the faculty and students of the ECCMF Chamber Music Institute without need to pay for a ticket. Admittance to guest artist masterclasses (where participants in the Chamber Music Institute perform for sought-after guest artist teachers) will remain paid,



with a festival pass giving access to every single masterclass.

Concerts at ECCMF 2025 run from May 17th to June 1st. Each concert takes place in the acoustically superb Tyler Recit-

al Hall in the Music Wing of the Mattie Kelly Arts Center on the Northwest Florida State College's beautiful campus. Free tickets to reserve a spot in the very limited seats at the concerts are available through the festival's website, with any remaining seats available on a first-come-first-served basis.

The Emerald Coast Chamber Music Festival was established as an annual celebration of classical chamber music, held in one of the United State's most visually stunning locales.

The annual Chamber Music Institute provides student participants with the highest quality musical education experience in an inspiring environment, while the Showcase Series features the festival's internationally renowned faculty in an artistically superb set of concerts serving the Northwest Florida area.

More information about ECCMF performers, concerts and festival activities is available at www.emeraldcoastchambermusicfestival.org.



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Fort Walton Beach High School Crowned 2025 Sunshine State Spirit Showdown Champion!

Fort Walton Beach High School has done it again! The Vikings have officially been crowned the 2025 Sunshine State Spirit Showdown Champions, proving once more that their energy, passion, and school spirit are truly unmatched. Taking down two other fierce competitors, Fort Walton Beach's student section brought the heat and showed the entire state what Viking pride is all about!

This highly coveted title, hosted annually by the Florida High School Athletic Association (FHSAA) since 2014, is all about celebrating sportsmanship, student engagement, and unwavering school spirit. And Fort Walton Beach brought their A-game.

The Power of the Student Section

A student section isn't just a cheering crowd—it's the heartbeat of a school's athletic program. Their chants, roars, and unwavering support fuel the athletes on the field, lift them through the tough moments, and amplify the victories. In this competition, it wasn't just

about being loud—it was about showing heart, unity, and school pride like never before.

Entries were judged by the FHSAA Student-Athlete Advisory Committee, scoring on sportsmanship, participation, organization of students and overall school spirit. Social media votes also played a crucial role, with fans rallying behind their schools to push them toward victory.

Craig Damon, Executive Director of the FHSAA, praised the incredible effort by all schools:

"The 2025 Sunshine Spirit Showdown was outstanding! FHSAA member schools went above and beyond to capture and showcase their school and community spirit with this year's submissions. Every school captured the creativity and passion of their students in their respective videos. Thank you to all member schools who participated in this annual event. Congratulations to Fort Walton Beach High School on winning the 2025 Sunshine State Spirit Showdown. Your exceptional school spirit and sportsmanship



have earned you this well-deserved title. As a previous champion in 2022, your continued dedication to fostering a vibrant and supportive community is truly inspiring."

Bringing the Title Back Home

As champions, Fort Walton Beach will receive a commemorative plaque and a personalized banner—a permanent reminder of the Viking spirit that conquered Florida. A special ceremony will be held to honor the students, fans, and faculty who made this victory possible.

Want to see the Vikings' electrifying winning submission? Check it out on the FHSAA's YouTube Channel, along with the incredible videos from the other finalists.

Stay Connected and Keep the Spirit Alive!

Follow @FHSAA on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat for more updates. Join the celebration using #FLSquad and show off your Viking pride!

For more details about the Sunshine State Spirit Showdown, visit fhsaa.com.

Congratulations, Fort Walton Beach High School—your spirit is unstoppable!

Local Coupons

<p>SUNSET LIQUORS / PARADISE LIQUORS</p> <p>\$5 OFF</p> <p>PURCHASE OF \$25 OR MORE <small>(NOT VALID WITH ANY OTHER PROMOTIONS)</small></p> <p>Offer expires 4/15/25 Offer good at all 10 Locations</p>	<p>TAILFINS TIKIS</p> <p>Tiki Boat Tours</p> <p>FREE Child Ticket</p> <p><small>*age 12 and under, limit one per group</small></p> <p>BOOK NOW</p> <p>Offer expires 4/15/25 172 Harbor Boulevard, Destin 850-650-1200</p>	<p>BROZINNI'S PIZZERIA</p> <p>BOGO 1/2 OFF</p> <p><small>EQUAL OR LESSER VALUE</small></p> <p>OR TWO 16" ONE TOPPING PIZZA \$29.99</p> <p>Offer expires 4/15/25 144 Palm Blvd N., Niceville 850-678-7778 www.brozinnispizza.com</p>	<p>BE WELL SOLUTIONS</p> <p>FREE CONSULTATIONS</p> <p><small>DISCOUNTED PACKAGES • SPECIAL GROUP DISCOUNTS</small></p> <p>25% OFF - VETERANS, MILITARY, FIRST RESPONDERS, STUDENT ATHLETES 35% OFF - DISABLED VETERANS</p> <p>Offer expires 4/15/25 4641 Gulf Starr Dr #105 • Destin 850-786-2051 • Completeketaminesolutions.com</p>
<p>BLUEWATER PLASTIC SURGERY</p> <p><small>PROFOUND (RF MICRO-NEEDLING, FOR SKIN TIGHTENING AND CELLULITE) \$500 OFF PROCEDURE WITH 50 UNITS OF COMPLIMENTARY BOTOX</small></p> <p>Offer expires 4/15/25 Niceville • Santa Rosa Beach • 850-530-6064 www.bluewaterplasticsurgery.com</p>	<p>BLUEWATER PLASTIC SURGERY</p> <p>10% OFF</p> <p>GIFT CERTIFICATE \$500 & UP <small>(EXCLUDES SURGICAL PROCEDURES)</small></p> <p>Offer expires 4/15/25 Niceville • Santa Rosa Beach • 850-530-6064 www.bluewaterplasticsurgery.com</p>	<p>FUBAR PIZZA BAR</p> <p>\$5 OFF</p> <p>PURCHASE OF \$25 OR MORE <small>(NOT VALID WITH ANY OTHER PROMOTIONS)</small></p> <p>Offer expires 4/15/25 114 Amberjack Drive • Fort Walton Beach 850-226-7084 www.fubarfwb.com</p>	<p>YOUR COUPON COULD BE HERE</p> <p>CALL 850-688-9886</p>
<p>YOUR COUPON COULD BE HERE</p> <p>CALL 850-688-9886</p>	<p>J & B MEDICAL, INC.</p> <p>\$100 OFF</p> <p>ANY LIFT CHAIR PURCHASE</p> <p><small>WITH COUPON</small></p> <p>Offer expires 4/15/25 540 E John Sims Parkway, Niceville 850-729-255</p>	<p>OVERHEAD DOOR</p> <p>\$100 OFF A NEW WI-FI DOOR OPERATOR AND FREE DECORATIVE DOOR HARDWARE</p> <p><small>WITH EACH DOOR PURCHASE. (NO OTHER DISCOUNTS APPLY) FINANCING AS LOW AS \$79/MO. W.A.C.</small></p> <p>Offer expires 4/15/25 850-269-3246 destinoverheaddoor.com</p>	<p>BEACHSIDE SLIDING GLASS DOOR MAINTENANCE, LLC</p> <p>\$25 OFF SLIDING DOOR TRACK REPAIR WITH ROLLER REPLACEMENT</p> <p><small>FREE ESTIMATES</small></p> <p>Offer expires 4/15/25 BeachsideSlide.com 850-98-SLIDE (850-987-5433)</p>



Sunday
BRUNCH
 10AM-3PM

AYCE
 ALL YOU CAN EAT
SHRIMP
 4PM-CLOSE TUESDAY

Trivia Night!
 6:30-8:30 THURSDAY

KIDS EAT FREE
 4PM-6PM
 TUESDAY-FRIDAY

KARAOKE
 5PM TUESDAY

PRIME RIB THURSDAYS
 STARTING 4PM

CRAWFISH BOIL
 12PM SATURDAY