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Postal Customer Local

# **Our Area's Deeper Purpose:**

# Faith, Community and the Sea

Destin's Week of Blessings Returns May 26–29





By Lori Leath Smith

We all have our reasons for calling this area home. Some come for the beauty, others for the lifestyle—but many of us feel we were drawn here for something greater. Yes, to the outside world the little fishing village next door is a beach destination. But long before the tourists and high-rises, it was a humble fishing town—a place where hard work met the sea, and

faith anchored the community.

Known proudly as the "World's Luckiest Fishing Village," I believe Destin's blessings go far beyond its natural beauty. Every year, we gather to bless our boats, our Harbor, our children, our leaders and our people. Could it be that this annual act of faith and unity brings favor to our city? That beneath the sparkle of our shoreline lies something

even more powerful: a shared purpose and a spirit that keeps our little paradise thriving? Many area fisherman, locals and professionals alike will tell you they believe their success rides on blessings.

Destin's beloved Week of Blessings returns May 26– 29, 2025. Organized by the Church of Destin, Inc., this cherished tradition brings together neighbors, businesses, fishermen and faith leaders for a heartfelt week of prayer, unity and gratitude that includes a series of faith-focused, family-oriented activities leading up to Ascension Day, 40 days after Easter, with the Blessing of the Fleet.

On Thursday, May 29, is the highlight of Destin's Week of Blessings—the 68th Annual Blessing of the Fleet,

#### **DEEPER PURPOSE**

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# No Child Should Carry Their Life in a Trash Bag:

Kay's Carry-On Gives Foster Kids Hope on Wheels

By Michelle Ruschman

When children in foster care are forced to leave their homes because of dire circumstances or because they've aged out, they are provided with garbage bags to transport their personal items. What's also used to hold food scraps, used tissue and discarded mail will now carry the clothes, toiletries and personal treasures of children who have already endured so much. No person should feel their things are being treated like trash, especially a child who has already experienced the unpredictability of fear, trauma and displacement. Area local, Dr. Kay Kizer, veteran, author and founder of Kay's Carry-On, has made it her mission to help children in foster care have more dignity, hope and respect. "When a child is removed from a home, they are provided with two black trash bags to transport their belongings. To me, that's

#### **KAY'S CARRY-ON**

continued on page 2





# 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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#### **DEEPER PURPOSE**

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Destin's second oldest, annual tradition that pays homage to our city's deep-rooted maritime heritage and is held behind Brotula's Seafood House & Steamer. (The oldest is our annual Fishing Rodeo first held in 1948.)

This time-honored tradition got started when more than a half century ago, Destin's Immanuel Anglican Church began blessing a tiny fleet of perhaps four to five boats. From this handful of small boats, the fleet has grown and prospered into the largest fishing fleet in North America, with more than 125 charter-fishing boats. Captains fly the small blue cross-and-dove Blessing of the Fleet flag to indicate they and their vessels have been blessed.

The festivities commence at 4 p.m. with a Captain's Testimony and Worship Service under the tent, open to all. At 5:15 p.m., the Blessing of the Vessels begins, where clergy from various local churches will bless each commercial boat one-by-one that makes its living on the sea, praying for safety and prosperity in the upcoming season. In 2024, over 158 vessels participated in this important procession.

Following the blessings, attendees are invited to a community fish feast provided by Brotula's, with donations appreciated. Free parking is available at Brotula's and the City of Destin's harbor district lots.

For those not in a vessel, the event can be viewed from various vantage points around the harbor. Additionally, SkyBar at Edge Seafood is hosting a Blessing of the Fleet Watch Party starting at 4 p.m., featuring live music by The Six Piece Suits at 6 p.m. and a firework display at 9 p.m.

Captains wishing to have their vessels blessed can register by emailing immanuel@ iacdestin.org with their vessel's name, captain's name, business contact information and mailing

Though the Blessing of the Fleet is the focal component of the extended week of events, the Week of Blessings is now a 20-year tradition that brings together faith, family and the workplace alongside the fishing community.

For example, at the Blessing of the Marketplace, local pas-



tors gather to pray over business owners, first responders and industry leaders seeking guidance and prosperity for their businesses and the community.

Organized by the Church of Destin, Inc., the Week of Blessings reflects our city's deep-rooted connection to the sea and its enduring faith through all facets of life. Several pastors make up the 'Church of Destin' formed 20 years ago as a symbol of unity, crossing denominational barriers. As the Blessing of the Fleet grew, so did the hundreds of people, families and businesses in the area who also wanted to be blessed. And before you knew it, the vision expanded into a full "Week of Blessings." That's how the Blessing of the Marketplace was born, enabling the "blessing" to impact further to other locals, professionals and visitors,

"This week is a reminder of what makes Destin truly special," said one of the event organizers. "We're a fishing village, yes-but we're also a faith-filled community that supports one another through every season."

God continues to richly bless our "Little Fishing Village" and we shall continue to call upon Him to bless, preserve and protect those who make their living from our bountiful seas.

For more information, contact Immanuel Anglican Church www.iacdestin.org, 850-837-6324 or the Church of Destin at info@iacdestin.org.

#### **Schedule of Events**

#### Blessing of the Marketplace - Monday, May 26, 11:30 a.m.

The week begins with the Blessing of the Marketplace luncheon at Brotula's Seafood House & Steamer. Local clergy will offer prayers over business owners, first responders, civic leaders, and workers across all industries. The luncheon is free and open to the public, with food provided and a spirit of encouragement offered to all who

#### Blessing of the Youth -Tuesday, May 27, 6 p.m.

Held at Destin United Meth-

odist Church, this service lifts up local students, educators and youth ministries. The evening includes worship music, student testimonies and words of encouragement for the next generation.

#### Blessing of the Land -Wednesday, May 28, 6 p.m.

This outdoor event, hosted at Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation's Dugas Pavilion, honors farmers, builders and stewards of the land. Guests can enjoy live music and a message focused on restoration and growth.

#### Blessing of the Fleet -Thursday, May 29, beginning at 4 p.m.

Festivities begin at 4 p.m. with a Captain's Testimony and Worship Service under the tent behind Brotula's. At 5:15 p.m., boats of all sizes will line the harbor to receive blessings from local pastors as prayers are lifted for safety, abundance and calm seas in the season ahead. Immediately following the fleet blessing, all are invited to a community fish fry-an evening of fellowship, food, and music on the waterfront. Donations are welcome.

#### KAY'S CARRY-ON

continued from page 1

just so demeaning, and I know that from personal experience. I grew up in the foster care system and I have been a foster mom."

Dr. Kizer believes it was divine inspiration that Kay's Carry-On became Dr. Kizer's mission. "The Lord was specific about it being rolling luggage. It means even a five-year-old can handle their luggage, because the wheels help them pull easily. Whether they have to get into a case worker's car or arrive at a bus terminal, train station or airport, they're ready with luggage and not just trash bags. It's making sure that they have

some sense of comfort that their belongings are secure and don't look like something that is being thrown away.

Dr. Kizer's goal is to have a carry-on program in every state, so that others will grow this idea wherever they live. "All they have to do is have someone be in charge of collecting. It's a wonderful thing to help children this way and it can get a community excited to do this together."

Not only does Dr. Kizer encourage the collection of carry-ons, but she also hopes these children can get some essentials, especially those who age out of the system at age 18. "For the young ones, stuffed animals are always a source of comfort. But,



at any age, blankets, toothbrushes and toothpaste, towels and face cloths, and Bibles are also needed. I've even given a child their favorite cereal with their name on it so they had some sense of ownership and familiarity."

Dr. Kizer also hopes that having a rolling carry-on will provide more security. "Foster children can go through multiple moves, and each time there is the possibility of theft or loss in the displacement. If a child has to move in the middle of the night, they know that luggage is theirs and their belongings can be secured with a simple lock. A trash bag can't provide that."

Donated luggage is given to foster homes, shelters and foster parent agencies. With this in mind, Dr. Kizer is grateful for every donation, but encourages people who are thinking of donating luggage, to bring "like new," if not brand new. "Of course, each donation that

is given is wonderful. But, we want to make sure that each piece of luggage that is presented to a child reflects that they are valuable, not just something second-hand. In a moment of upheaval, the hope is that it will be seen as a gift that reflects that they're cherished."

To partner with her organization or donate to Kay's Carry-On, visit www.kayscarryon. org. If you have any questions, or you're an author who would like to contribute to her anthology series, The Faces of Foster Care (found on Amazon), contact Dr. Kizer by emailing kaykizer3@gmail.com or calling 936-240-8762.



# Billy Bowlegs Festival

MAY 15: SITTLE SCALLYWAGS PIRATE WALK

MAY 16: (PONCERTS AT THE SANDING, SKIRMISH & FIREWORKS

MAY 17: VENDOR BOOTHS. SIVE MUSIC, PIRATES SANDING

MAY 19: TORCHLIGHT PARADE

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# Guardians of Hope: **The Women Behind the Warm Welcome at One Hopeful Place**

By Sherry Jones

May is a month known for blooming flowers, warmer days and a pause to honor the women who nurture, guide and hold others up. But not all maternal care happens inside a family. Sometimes, it takes place behind the quiet walls of a shelter, where love shows up in the form of two remarkable women named Donna and Liz.

When someone arrives at One Hopeful Place in Fort Walton Beach, they're usually carrying more than a bag. They carry a story-one filled with hardship, fear and uncertainty. But before they're handed a meal or shown to a bed, they're met with something far more powerful: compassion. And more often than not, it comes from Donna or Liz.

These two women are the heartbeat of the shelter. You won't see them chasing recognition. Their work is quiet, tireless and deeply personal-from the intake desk where someone finally exhales to the living quarters where a weary soul finds safety and sleep.

Donna leads with heart. She brings a calming presence to the day-to-day, managing operations with patience and quiet strength. Liz is sharp, quick on her feet, and deeply intuitive-able to read people and situations in a matter of moments. Together, they've built something rare: a partnership rooted in mutual respect, shared mission and the unshakable belief that every life has value.

"I don't see 'homeless," Liz told me. "I see someone's son, someone's daughter—someone who just needs a break."

That belief guides every moment. Whether it's helping someone get a state ID, preparing a resume, setting up job interviews or working with local landlords to secure housing, Donna and Liz are fully committed to helping every person who comes through the door find a pathway forward. Their



top priority is to connect residents to employment opportunities and permanent housing-because survival is only the first step. Thriving is the goal.

"Our goal is to meet people where they are," Donna said. "We can't fix everything overnight, but we can give

them a safe place to start over-and sometimes, that's all someone needs." I always tell them, "Never doubt in the darkness what you learned in the light." We try to be their first light of hope.

And sometimes, being there

means giving more than time.

When a rare and bitter cold snap gripped the Panhandle this past winter, bringing freezing temperatures and icy conditions, Donna and Liz didn't go home. They stayed at the shelter for several days straight,

sleeping in shifts, keeping the facility warm, serving meals and making sure not one person was left out in the cold. While others bundled up indoors, they chose to be right there, beside those who needed them most.

That's the kind of leadership you don't teach. That's love in action.

Every day, they support people facing addiction, trauma, mental health challenges and overwhelming odds. They don't turn away. They lean in-with grace, grit and compassion.

In a world that can feel harsh

and hurried, Donna and Liz remind us that kindness still lives here. The mission of One Hopeful Place is to provide shelter and stability, but it's Donna and Liz who give it soul.

This Mother's Day month, let's take a moment to honor women like Donna and – women who care fiercely, lead with compassion and offer comfort without conditions. Whether through the love they give their own families or the selfless care they extend to others, their impact reaches far beyond the walls of the shelter. Fort Walton Beach is better because they choose to serve here.

If you're looking for a way to make a difference, consider supporting One Hopeful Place. Whether through donations, volunteer hours or a simple thank-you card addressed to two extraordinary women, you'll be helping keep that door of hope wide open.



# **Events Around Town**

#### Get Your Pirate on at the Billy Bowlegs Festival May 15-19

The 69th Annual Billy Bowlegs Pirate Festival will take place in Fort Walton Beach from May 15 to May 19, 2025. Festivities begin Thursday evening

with a Pre-Invasion meet-andgreet downtown. On Friday, May 16, the Landing hosts a Pirate Skirmish starting at 5 p.m., featuring live music and fireworks. Saturday, May 17, brings the main event at Fort Walton Beach Landing (131 Brooks St.



SE), running from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., with vendor booths, food trucks, live music, and the Pirate Landing at 3 p.m. The celebration concludes Monday, May 19, with the Torchlight Parade along Eglin Parkway beginning at 7 p.m. For more details, visit billybowlegsfestival.com.

# May Concerts at the Landing are Here!

**May 16:** Thin Ice – Rock/Blues

**May 23:** True Soul – R&B/Funk/Soul and Dance

**May 30:** Miles Flatt – Country/Party Rock variety

Concerts are free and are held Friday nights from 6 to 8 p.m. at the Fort Walton Beach Landing park, 139 Brooks St SE, Fort Walton Beach.

## **Bacardi Beach Bash Kicks Off Sunset Concert Series**

Mark your calendar for the Bacardi Beach Bash on Wednesday, May 28, 2025, from 6-9 p.m. at The Island Resort—the official kickoff to the Sunset Concert Series. Dance barefoot in the sand to live 80s and 90s rock covers by local favorite Shenanigans, sip Bacardi cocktail specials, and enjoy a shrimp boil with Southern fixings (ticket required). For extra fun, hop on the Bacardi Blender Bike and pedal your way to a frozen drink. The evening wraps with a dazzling Emerald Coast fireworks show-making it the ultimate start to summer.

Details: theislandfl.com/ experience/events/sunset-concert-series

Women United presents Empowered Minds, Stronger Communities, Thursday, May 22, 6-7 p.m. at the Fort Walton Beach Library. RSVP at https:// okaloosa.librarycalendar.com/ event/women-united-importance-mental-health-51149. As part of the Fort Walton Beach Library Lecture Series, we invite you to join Deborah Lawson from United Way for an engaging discussion on the importance of mental health and the work Women United is doing to support our community.

#### **Memorial Day Weekend**

Celebrate Memorial Day Weekend with these exciting events honoring our nation's he-



roes. Enjoy live music, fireworks and community gatherings. All events are free and open to the public unless otherwise noted.

#### • Fort Walton Beach Worship at the Park & Church Picnic, Sunday, May 25 | Time TBA | Liza Jackson Park

Join the community for a day of worship and fellowship at Liza Jackson Park. The event includes a church service followed by a picnic. Bring your own chairs and blankets. Free admission.

#### • Okaloosa Island – The Boardwalk

**Memorial Day Weekend Fireworks Show,** Sunday,
May 26 | 9 p.m. | The Boardwalk, 1450 Miracle Strip Pkwy
SE

Experience a spectacular fireworks display over the Gulf of Mexico. Arrive early to enjoy dining and shopping at The Boardwalk. Free diffraction glasses will be distributed while supplies last.

## • Destin Harbor – HarborWalk Village

**Memorial Day Weekend Celebration, Saturday,** May 25 | 7–9 p.m., Sunday, May 26 | 5:30–9 p.m., Monday, May 27 | 7–9 p.m.

Kick off summer with live music on the Main Stage all weekend long. Sunday features a vintage air show at 5:40 p.m., followed by a concert and a fireworks display at 9 p.m. Free admission.

#### • The Village of Baytowne Wharf

**Memorial Day Celebration,** Saturday, May 24 | 7–9 p.m., Sunday, May 25 | 6–9 p.m.

Enjoy live music from Forrest Williams Band on Saturday and Saltwater Revival on Sunday. Sunday also includes kids' activities and a fireworks show at 9 p.m. Free admission.





Mattie Kelly Arts Center 100 College Blvd East, Niceville



Tickets: https://mattiekellyartscenter.org/events





# Happenings Around FWB

#### 2025

#### **EVENTS**

#### MAY

- Paint Party: Butterfly Kisses 1 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB
- ECPRO Lunch & Learn: Intentional Communications Across Generations 11:30 am | Greater FWB Chamber of Commerce | FWB Book Club Event: Brave the Dark 6 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB
- Curiosity Club 4 pm | FWB Public Library | FWB

Billy Bowlegs Pirate Festival Little Skallywags Pirate Walk

4 pm | Downtown FWB

Greater FWB Chamber Business After Hours 5:30 pm | Step One Volkswagen | FWB

Planetarium Night: Billy Bowlegs 6 pm | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB

Concerts in the Village: Kickstand Jenny 7 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation | Destin



- Billy Bowlegs Pirate Festival 5 pm | The Landing | FWB
- Billy Bowlegs Pirate Festival 10 am | The Landing | FWB

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

Spring Home & Boat Show 10 am-5 pm | Northwest Florida Fairgrounds | FWB

Tchaikovsky x Drake 7:30 pm | Destin-FWB Convention Center | FWB

- Sensory Play Sunday 10 am | Surge Adventure Park | Mary Esther 2025 Craftathon Beer Festival 11 am | FWB Landing Park | Downtown FWB
- Lionfish Festival Destin Harbor Boardwalk
- GSSF Indoor League 10 am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso

69th Annual Billy Bowlegs 19 Torchlight Parade 7 pm | FWB



City of FWB City Council Regular Meeting 20 6 pm | FWB City Council Chambers | FWB

10 am | FWB Public Library | FWB

Emerald Coast Crime Stoppers Crawfish Boil 11 am | Uptown Station | FWB

3:30 pm | Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park | FWB

- All Ages Paint Party: Wizard Workshop 6 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB
- STEAM Kids 22 3 pm | FWB Public Library | FWB Concerts in the Village: Molly Ringwalds
- All Ages Paint Party: A Monarch Spring 12 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB Disguise Night

7 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation | Destin

7 pm | Soundside | FWB

- Sinfonia Goes Pops! 25 7:30 pm | Alys Beach
- 68th Annual Blessing of the Fleet 4 pm | Behind Brotula's on the Destin Harbor

Concerts in the Village: Petty Hearts 7 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation | Destin

Mad Science Mess Fest 31 10:30 am | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB

> All Ages Blacklight Paint Party: Neon Dolphin and Turtle 12 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB

#### JUNE

- Sensory Play Sunday 10 am | Surge Adventure Park | Mary Esther
- Smr STEAM Workshop: Jungle Journeys Part 1 9 am | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB FWB Library Friends Meeting

Okaloosa County Saturdays | 7 am - 2 pm 1954 Lewis Turner Blvd | FWB

6 pm | FWB Public Library | FWB

Downtown FWB 2nd & 4th Saturdays | 8 am - 1 pm FWB Landing Park

**Grand Boulevard** Saturdays | 9 am - 1 pm Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach

- Smr STEAM Workshop: Jungle Journeys Part 2 9 am | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB
- Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park Sunset Camp 05 4 pm | Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park | FWB Concerts in the Village: A1A: Jimmy Buffett

7 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation | Destin

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

> Reception for Gallery Show: Let's Go Fishing 6 pm | Arts & Design Society (ADSO) | FWB

- 08 | Okaloosa Island Beach Cleanup 9 am | The Boardwalk | FWB
- Smr STEAM Workshop: Innovative Inventors 09 9 am | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB
- Smr STEAM Workshop: Innovative Inventors 10

9 am | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB

ECPRO Lunch & Learn: Grow Your Brand with Instagram Reels

11:30 am | Greater FWB Chamber of Commerce | FWB

Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park Sunset Camp 4 pm | Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park | FWB

City of FWB City Council Regular Meeting 6 pm | FWB City Council Chambers | FWB

#### ONGOING EVENTS

Summer Lawn Games in Grand Park 5 pm | Daily | Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach

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

Free Pirate Show

5 pm | Mon | Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar | FWB

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

Movies on the Beach

7:30 pm | Tues | Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar | 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 | Thursdays | Soundside Waterfront Bar | FWB









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# **Around Town**

#### **Fort Walton Beach Welcomes New City** Manager

The City of Fort Walton Beach has named Jason Davis, currently Deputy County Administrator for St. Lucie County, as its new City Manager. Davis, who brings two decades of public service experience, will step into the role on June 2. He holds a doctorate in organizational leadership from Nova Southeastern University, along with an MBA and a bachelor's in criminology from Florida State University. Davis succeeds interim City Manager Dennis Reeves, who has been leading the city during the search process.

#### **Two Local Veterans Nominated for Florida Veterans Hall of Fame**

With great pride, the Veterans Tribute Tower Committee announces the nomination of former U.S. Navy Yeoman Terry James Jenrich and U.S. Air Force Captain Reuben Manasco for the Florida Veterans Hall of Fame Class of 2025.

Established in 2011 by the

Florida Legislature, the Hall of Fame honors veterans who have made lasting civic, business, and public service contributions to the State of Florida.

Yeoman Terry Jenrich has been a guiding force behind the Veterans Tribute Tower Committee, playing a key role in the creation of the Veterans Memorial at Beal Memorial Cemetery. Her tireless advocacy extends to the Eglin Fisher House, where she led the charge on founding fundraising efforts for this 12-bedroom support home for military families. Terry's dedication has been recognized by the Salvation Army, the American Legion, and Wreaths Across America for her remarkable volunteer work.

Captain Reuben Manasco has spent decades serving his community, raising millions through the Emerald Coast All Sports Association to benefit youth programs, including the Boys & Girls Clubs, Special Olympics of Okaloosa County, and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. Named to the All Sports Association Hall of Fame

in 2008, Reuben is fondly known as "coach" by countless local youth whose lives he has touched through sports and mentorship.

Nominees will be considered by the Governor and Florida Cabinet, with induction ceremonies held this Veterans Day. If selected, Jenrich and Manasco will join nine other distinguished Okaloosa County honorees in the Florida Veterans Hall of

#### **Sinfonia Gulf Coast's Demetrius Fuller Accepted; Takes Leadership Role in Music Education**

Demetrius Fuller, Founder and Music & Artistic Director of Sinfonia Gulf Coast, has been named a Professional Member of the Florida Chapter of the Recording Academy—currently the ONLY professional member from Northwest Florida. He has also been appointed to the chapter's Education Committee, helping guide statewide music education and scholarship initiatives supported by MusiCares.

Fuller founded Sinfonia in



2004 at just 24 and joined the Academy in 2024. His appointment comes as Sinfonia prepares to celebrate its 20th anniversary season in 2025–2026.

"Joining the Florida Chapter of the Recording Academy is an honor that places Sinfonia Gulf Coast within an influential global network of music industry professionals," said Fuller. "This affiliation aligns perfectly with our mission to redefine the symphony experience while supporting music education and professional growth in our community and beyond."

also Demetrius mentors through GRAMMY U, connecting music professionals with college students pursuing careers in the music industry. He has commissioned and premiered numerous works, helping shape

both regional and international music culture.

The Recording Academy's Florida Chapter, founded in 1995, represents artists and professionals throughout Florida and Puerto Rico and includes icons like Gloria Estefan, DJ Khaled and Bad Bunny, reflecting Florida's rich musical heritage and dynamic contemporary scene. SinfoniaGulfCoast.org.

#### **New Speed Cameras Record More Than 3,000 Violations During 30-Day Trial Period**

The City of Fort Walton Beach has partnered with Red-Speed USA to implement photo enforcement in school speed zones at nine schools throughout the city. During a recent 30-day warning period, school zone safety cameras recorded more than 3,000 speeding violations -with some drivers exceeding 60mph in 15/20mph school zones.

Citations began being issued May 7 in accordance with Florida State Statute 316.1896, which permits automated enforcement of school zone speed limits.

















#### THURSDAY NIGHT CONCERTS **APRIL 10 - JUNE 12**

Annual Thursday evening concert live music series featuring family-friendly premier musicians and bands performing everything from classic rock, reggae and disco to modern pop.

April 10 | The Fabulous Thunderbirds

April 17 | Journeyman: An Eric Clapton Tribute

April 24 | Yacht Rock Revue

May 1 | Black Jacket Symphony: Journey's Escape

May 8 | Dear Amy: Amy Winehouse Tribute

May 15 | Kickstand Jenny

May 22 | Molly Ringwalds

May 29 | Petty Hearts

June 5 | A1A: Jimmy Buffet Tribute

June 12 | Adrenalize: Music of Def Leppard

#### Purchase Tickets at MKAF.org/Events











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



# From Manatee Cove to CARE on the Coast:

## Dive into the Latest at the Gulfarium

By Mary Fomby

#### CARE on the Coast Raises Support and Awareness for Sea Turtles

The Gulfarium CARE Center recently hosted its second annual CARE on the Coast fundraiser, and thanks to the incredible support of our community, it was a wave of success for sea turtle conservation! Held on April 26 at the Gulfarium, the event welcomed hundreds of guests for an evening of live music, delicious food, animal presentations, and conservation-focused activities.

The highlight of the night

thing new! Gulfarium is proud to welcome guests to Manatee Cove, our newly renovated habitat dedicated to rescued manatees in need of long-term care. This first-of-its-kind exhibit in the Florida Panhandle is now home to Lil Joe and Inigo, two gentle giants who are inspiring a new wave of manatee conservation.

Formerly a dolphin habitat, the 300,000-gallon space has been transformed with manatee-focused features like resting ledges, specialized life support systems, and an on-site medical area. As part of the Manatee Rescue and Rehabilitation Partexpert trainers and education specialists, enjoy an exploratory venture along the Emerald Coast beach at dusk, eat dinner next to our pinniped friends at Seal Harbor, and participate in hands-on activities designed to

inspire a love for conservation and marine life.

Spaces are limited, so be sure to reserve your child's spot today for an unforgettable Sunset Camp experience at the Gulfarjum! All information regarding dates, tickets and requirements can be found at Gulfarium.com.







was the chance to celebrate the rescue and rehabilitation work being done year-round by the CARE Center team. Guests met local sea turtle experts, bid in a silent auction, and enjoyed special presentations that underscored the importance of protecting endangered marine life. All proceeds from the event go directly toward the care of injured sea turtles brought to the Center throughout the year.

We are incredibly grateful to our sponsors, vendors, and supporters who helped make CARE on the Coast such a memorable night. To learn more about the CARE Center or how you can contribute, visit Gulfarium. com/carecenter.

# Meet Lil Joe and Inigo at Manatee Cove-Now Open!

Get ready to float into some-

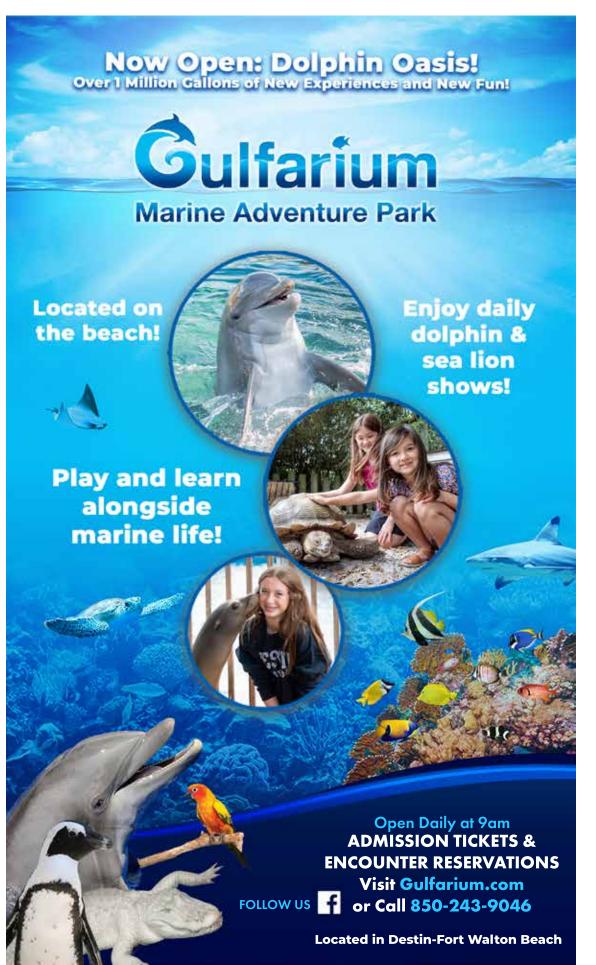


nership, the Gulfarium is helping relieve pressure on critical care facilities and offering these threatened marine mammals a second chance at recovery.

Guests can visit Manatee Cove during their trip to the Gulfarium, where daily educational chats and interactive displays highlight the threats manatees face in the wild—and how each of us can help protect them. Don't miss your chance to meet Lil Joe and Inigo and learn their incredible stories of resilience and hope.

#### Gulfarium Invites Kids to Sunset Camp for an Unforgettable Experience

During Sunset Camp, young explorers will have the opportunity to engage with our incredible dolphin pod in a dockside encounter, learn from our





# **Celebrating Mom!**

By Christopher Manson

It was the day before my birthday, and I was talking to my mother (Pauline Manson, nee Weekley) about the legendary movie star Charles Bronson. Mom expressed her dismay at the lack of Bronson movies being shown on broadcast television these days.

Good son that I am, I introduced her to Tubi, the greatest free streaming service in the world. We spent the afternoon watching Death Wish 4: The Crackdown, which she had somehow missed during its brief theatrical run in 1987. It was all I could do not to recite the dialogue out loud, as I'd seen this Cannon Films classic dozens of times.

Thanks, Mom, for letting me share one of my favorite movies with you. And for not complaining about all the commercial breaks

In honor of Mother's Day, FWB Life reached out to friends, family and even a few strangers to share how their lives have been—and continue to be—blessed by their mothers. While the official day may have passed, it's never too late to celebrate the love, strength and influence of moms in our lives.

My mother taught us by example the importance of being



gracious and kind. Always full of Southern colloquialisms, she was quick to remind us "You catch more flies with honey than with vinegar" and "If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all." I've never heard her disparage anyone or pass judgment on poor choices.

When my mother says "Bless her heart," she actually means it. "It's not my favorite" is the most she will ever say to show distaste. Her voice stays in my head as I navigate relationships, children, and my career, and I strive to stay gracious and kind. If I can be half the woman she is, I am truly blessed. Happy Mother's Day, Callie!

-Amy Milligan, Cryo850

My mother Artie passed away when I was 36. My father had already been gone 18 years. She met my husband and my first-born, which I count among my greatest blessings. One of the most profound gifts she gave me was permission—permission to protect my peace, even if that

meant distancing myself from negative people, including family if necessary. She gave me the freedom to be present on my own terms. She never expected attendance at holidays or gatherings out of obligation; she wanted you there because you wanted to be.

And, perhaps most meaningfully, she gave me permission to choose my family. If I felt deeply connected to friends, she believed they could be considered family too. Having left my hometown in my twenties and living away from relatives ever since, this perspective was a powerful and lasting blessing.

- Zandra Wolfgram, Director of Marketing and Communications, Sinfonia Gulf Coast

I didn't fully understand the depth of a mother's love until I became one myself. It was then I realized that my mother had made that same choice every day-to put someone else before herself. She gave of herself completely, without hesitation. Though she's been gone for years, I still miss her deeply. She was my biggest cheerleader and my quiet strength. A gifted artist, writer, designer and true professional—she created beauty in everything she touched, long before technology made things easy, such as page layout on a computer.

She loved God, her family, and her husband deeply. And her friendships? Many of them are still mine today. She left me with the best of who she was—her legacy. Her wisdom, creativity, and faith continue to guide and inspire me in both my work and my life. I carry her with me, always.

-Lori Leath Smith, Publisher and Executive Editor, Life Media



My mother was a good old gal from Texas. She believed in hard work and perseverance. "Try, try again" was her battle cry. My mom definitely taught me to never give up.

- Paula Hilton, act4mystery.com



My mother's strength, resilience and classic elegance have

always set the standard. She taught me to hold my head high, stay sharp, and

- Sherry Jones, One Hopeful Place



My stay-at-home mom demonstrated sacrifice by taking on work to send us to Germany after college, giving us the priceless gift of heritage, family connection, and a remarkable cultural experience.

- Dr. Doug Stauffer, bibledoug.com



My mother-in-law, Carol Palmgren, died over 13 years ago. I had lost my mother to cancer in the 1980s, and when I married Lornie Palmgren, who was an only child, Carol shared with me that because of health complications she had been unable to bring more children into the world. She had always wished for another child, especially a daughter.

Upon hearing that, I made it my mission to spoil her on a consistent basis. We had one "Mother-Daughter Day" each Sunday and made a bucket list of things she had never done—Broadway shows, a cruise, trips to different cities. So much fun together. I treasure these moments and am grateful I had two moms in my life.

- Barbara Palmgren

Carol, my mom, was a blessing in so many ways. She was compassionate and loving yet firm. She instilled in me to be a gentleman, to always give my best and to never quit.

-Scott Miller, Director of Advertising/Sales, Life Media





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# Local Nonprofit Celebrates 10 Years With Olympic Gold Medalist

By Wendy Rudman

The Emerald Coast Fitness Foundation (ECFF), a nonprofit formed around a kitchen table 10 years ago, is celebrating hitting a key milestone. The foundation operates two facilities in Fort Walton Beach and an aquatic center in Destin – all of which are open to the public.

Over the years, the organization has welcomed more than 5,000 swimmers of all ages to its pools, teaching some to swim and giving others opportunities to train and compete.

To commemorate 10 years of bringing pools back to local communities, ECFF is holding Splash of Gold May 17, which will feature Olympian swim clinics, a giant pool party and an evening cocktail social. Gold medalist Olympic swimmer, Cody Miller, will be teaching the youth clinics, signing autographs at the pool party and speaking at the evening cocktail social. The event will be held at the Taj Renee Community Aquatic Center at 4345 Commons Drive W. in Destin.

"I'm excited for our keynote participant, Cody Miller," said ECFF Board President Kevin Leibold. "I'm looking forward to watching him bring his expertise to local swimmers and to hearing how he relates his professional swimming career to them."

Kathi Heapy, one of the founders of the foundation, reached out to Miller early this year after enjoying his swimming YouTube videos for years. Miller is a prolific YouTuber, as well as an Olympic gold medal-



ist at the 2016 Rio Olympics in the 4 X 100 medley relay.

Both swam for Indiana University, which makes them family, she said.

"I emailed him, mentioned that I was also an Indiana swimmer, and told him what our foundation is doing here," Heapy said. "Next thing, I got a text. 'Hi, this is Cody Miller. Let's set up a time to talk."

Heapy said Miller was compelled by the foundation's mission, which is to bring aquatic opportunities to all. Ten middle school teams, six high school teams, two summer leagues and one year-round team practice or compete at ECFF pools. Additionally, more than 1,000 children and adults take lessons in foundation pools each year. In 2024, the foundation added adaptive swim lessons and its second pool in Fort Walton Beach to expand these unique offerings.

"The foundation is growing," Heapy said, adding that when they started 10 years ago, they assumed a larger entity would take up their mission of operating local pools. That never happened, but support from businesses like Tim Smith Acura, which has contributed generously to a large spring fundraiser for the last several years, has helped the foundation to succeed and thrive.

This year for the first time, the spring fundraising event will also include an online auction, which will wrap up on

May 17th. Items include beachfront stays, vacations, charter boat trips, premium bourbon baskets, and Olympic gold medalist memorabilia.

The foundation is a 501(c)3 organization, which is funded by memberships, business sponsorships, and fundraisers like Splash of Gold.

The May 17 events include:

• Morning youth swimming clinics with Cody Miller. Tickets are \$100 each, with a discount for siblings. Register here: https://www.eventbrite.com/e/breakout-swim-clinic-with-olympian-cody-miller-tick-ets-1253076719199?aff=oddtdtcreator

• An afternoon Pool Party from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m., which includes family splash time in our pool, demonstrations, sweet treats, and a chance to meet Olympian Cody Miller. \$25 admission for the family.

• An evening Cocktail Social from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m., where ECFF will unveil the 2025 Okaloosa Swim and Dive Hall of Fame inductees and Cody Miller will share some of his experiences. Heavy appetizers and cold drinks included. \$62 per individual or \$100 per couple.

Purchase tickets at https://ecfitnessfoundation.org/fund-raiser.

# Spring into Savings at the Northwest Florida Spring Home & Boat Show!

Saturday, May 17, 2025 this dynamic event will feature 50+ vendors showcasing everything you need to upgrade your home and lifestyle—with

Get ready, Northwest Florida! One of the most anticipated events of the season is sailing your way—the Northwest Florida Spring Home & Boat Show is coming to the Northwest Florida Fairgrounds for one exciting day only on Saturday, May 17, 2025—and admission is completely FREE! Presented by Paradise Promotions and powered by sponsors Life Media (Destin Life, Bay Life, FWB Life), Ecoview Windows, Defined Interiors, JVC Broadcasting, Fast Signs, Peaden AC, Zoo Graphics, and The Honey Do Service,

this dynamic event will feature 50+ vendors showcasing everything you need to upgrade your home and lifestyle—with exclusive show-only discounts and giveaways. Expect to find the best deals on everything from roofing, remodeling, and restoration services to flooring, furniture, pools, spas, windows and doors.

Plus, explore innovations in solar energy, tech gadgets, closets, kitchens, bathrooms, and more—all under one roof! And that's not all—Emerald Coast Marine will be on-site hosting a Super Spring Boat Show & Sale, offering fantastic boat deals you won't want to miss. Whether you're dreaming of hitting the water or refreshing

your home, this show has it all.

On top of that, there will be over \$10,000 in swag and door prizes up for grabs! And with vendors from health and wellness to tech and travel—including Scentsy, chiropractic care, massage therapy, and more—there's something here for everyone.

Don't miss this chance to connect with local experts, score unbeatable deals, and get inspired for your next home or boating adventure. Want to be a vendor? Visit www.Paradise-Promotions-FL.com to register your booth space today!

It's all happening Saturday, May 17—one big day, one fantastic event. See you at the fair-grounds!

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# Honoring Heroes:

# Women Veterans Ceremony Set for June 12

By Carolyn Newcomer Ketchel

Each year on June 12, Florida honors the service and sacrifice of women in the military with Women Veterans Recognition Day, established by Governor Ron DeSantis. This day commemorates the anniversary of the signing of the 1948 Women's Armed Services Integration Act, which granted women an opportunity for a career in our nation's military.

Many of you have attended this ceremony at the Convention Center in years past, and it has become a beloved tradition in Okaloosa County. This year's speaker is Col. Kristen N. Wood, Commander of the 1st Special Operations Mission Support Group, Hurlburt Field.



A dynamic leader, Col. Wood brings inspiring insight into women's contributions to our military.

The event is open to the public—all ages welcome. The Snowden-Horne Chapter of the Children of the American Revolution will lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

After the program, we will process to the Dedication Plaza to lay wreaths in honor of women who have served our nation.

This will be an excellent time to tour the beautifully laid-out park and to view the statues of women patriots. The statues are placed on a winding path beginning with the Revolutionary War and continuing to our latest theatres.

As you walk through the Women Veterans Monuments you will notice the work to create a living shoreline being done near the banks of Choctawhatchee Bay. A living shoreline provides vegetation to stabilize the area and prevent erosion from future storms. This living shoreline will be 2000 ft. long. Combination grants from National Fish and Wildlife, Restore Act and Tourism Development Dollars are being used to fund

this project to restore damage done during Hurricane Sally in September 2020.

This beautiful 20-acre parcel is home to 248 bird species identified by the Audubon Society. It features a heron rookery where the birds nest each spring, and serves as a vital stopover for monarch butterflies during their fall migration to winter habitats in Mexico. The area also supports a wide variety of other animals and wildlife, making it a rich and diverse ecosystem.

This year, two new statues will be unveiled:

• Capt. Linda Bray, the first woman to lead U.S. troops in combat during Operation Just Cause (Panama, 1989). She took action when a routine operation became a three-hour fire fight with the enemy.

• Florence Finch, WWII Coast Guard veteran and resistance member. Before enlisting in the Coast Guard, Ms. Finch was a part of a network of private citizens smuggling food, medical supplies and clean clothes to POWs in the Philippines during WWII.

Please plan to attend this hour-long ceremony. It will become a treasured tradition to honor our military serve women who have contributed so much the history of our nation.

Carolyn Ketchel is Okaloosa County Commissioner, District 2, Vice-Chairman 2024-2025, CKetchel@myokaloosa.com or 850-651-7105.

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# Truth Be Sold: The Hidden Costs of Rate 2/1 Buydowns and Flawed Advice in Real Estate



By Paul Domenech

#### Truth be sold:

2/1 rate buydowns might sound attractive, but they can cost you more in the long run, especially if you're not prepared for what happens next.

#### Here's the deal:

You're told you can "buy down" your interest rate and save \$240 a month in your first year. Sounds great, right? Until year two hits, and your payment jumps from \$1,700 to \$1,950.

Meanwhile, if you had negotiated that same buy-down cost off the purchase price instead, your mortgage would've been \$1,880, every year, consistently. Predictable. Budgetable.

That's not just a math lesson; it's a mindset warning.

You've probably heard the saying: "Marry the house, date the rate." Cute, but terrible advice if you ask me. You wouldn't run a household like a casual relationship. If you're planning to buy a home, arguably the biggest financial commitment of your life, you need to approach it like a responsible, long-term investment, not a temporary fling.

The reality? Many people who were sold on rate buydowns or the hope of refinancing in 2024 are now stuck. Rates didn't drop the way they were promised. Equity hasn't climbed the way it used to. And that "refi later" strategy? It's left a lot of folks feeling trapped, stressed, and financially stretched.



Then there's the tax hit no one talks about. If you bought with the plan to "get in now and sell when things are better," and end up selling in under two years—boom, you could be facing capital gains taxes. Because you didn't live in the home long enough to qualify for the exclusion.

And that's not all. Watch out for lender fees buried in flashy "first-time buyer" or "veteran programs." There's no magic lender out there just for veterans. Some are veteran-owned, yes, but that doesn't always mean better terms. Sometimes that lower rate comes with padded closing costs. A great lender is someone who answers the phone, charges no junk fees, and offers solid options with full transparency,no matter who you are.

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# Is Your Storefront Silently Sending Customers Away This Season?



By Danica LaFaire

In the heart of Northwest Florida, from the streets of Destin to the shops in Fort Walton Beach and the growing businesses of Walton County, local pride runs deep—and so does the importance of first impressions. While quality products and top-tier service are the backbone of any successful business, many owners overlook a simple but powerful factor: how your business looks from the outside. A clean, well-maintained exterior-clear windows, swept walkways and fresh signage—is key to turning foot traffic into revenue.

And why does this focus on a pristine exterior hold such significance here in the heart of Northwest Florida? It's because we understand the fabric of our



community. Our businesses aren't just storefronts, but integral parts of the local landscape, reflecting the pride we collectively hold for our beautiful surroundings.

Think about it: visitors flock to our stunning beaches and charming towns seeking an escape, a breath of fresh air. When they encounter businesses that mirror this beauty and care through their clean and welcoming exteriors, they reinforce their positive impression of our entire region. It signals that we, as local business owners, are custodians of this beauty, extending the same level of care to our establishments as we do to our natural treasures.

Customers often decide where to shop, dine or do business in a matter of seconds. And in that brief moment, appearances matter. Multiple studies show that people are more likely to trust and spend money with businesses that look clean, organized and professional. This sends a quiet but powerful message: "We care about the details."

On the flip side, a cluttered or dirty storefront can turn people away—sometimes for good. In fact, many consumers admit to avoiding businesses with poorly maintained exteriors or negative cleanliness reviews. In today's connected world, word travels fast, and a single bad impression can impact your reputation more than you might expect.

But here's the good news: making your business stand out doesn't have to be complicated or expensive. Often, it's the simple things—like sparkling windows or a tidy entrance—that create the most welcoming atmosphere. These small touches not only draw people in, but also show that you're ready and eager to serve.

Let's not forget, in a close-knit community like ours, word-of-mouth also travels quickly. A business that presents itself with pride and attention to detail earns the trust and loyalty of locals who are the lifeblood of our economy year-round. A clean exterior isn't just about attracting tourists; it's about fostering

a sense of community pride and mutual respect among neighbors. It says, 'We care about our business, and we care about our community.'

Interestingly, customers tend to be more forgiving of small service hiccups when they feel like they're in a clean, cared-for space. It builds trust, which is at the heart of every lasting customer relationship.

Investing in a clean exterior is more than just good business sense; it's an investment in the very essence of what makes Northwest Florida, and especially our corner, so special. It's about contributing to the overall appeal of our region, strengthening our local economy, and showcasing the pride we all share in calling this beautiful place home. And that, ultimately, is why a clear view from the outside can lead to a clearer path to success on the inside.

Whether you're looking to attract foot traffic, earn repeat business, or simply reflect the pride you take in your work, keeping your exterior clean is a smart and lasting investment.

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# **Niceville Slabs and Cookies:**

# Our Roots Run Deep—and Wide

By Genevieve Burgess

Tucked just behind a gate off Kelly Road—marked by a bold blue "B" and the faint scent of sawdust in the air—you'll find one of the best-kept secrets on the Emerald Coast: Niceville Slabs and Cookies, also known as "Your Emerald Coast Wood Source." But if you're imagining an old-school lumber yard? Think again.

What started as a garage passion project has grown into a dynamic, community-driven woodworking hub with a mission: connect people to truly remarkable wood and help them bring their creative visions to life

From the very beginning, NSC wasn't built on big-box ideas—it was built on relationships, craftsmanship, and a deep respect for the story each tree tells. Whether you're a first-time DIYer, a professional maker, or someone who just fell in love with the perfect slab for a dining table, you'll find more than just wood here. You'll find people who get it.

And now, NSC is leveling up. The business is in the midst of restructuring into three distinct branches designed to serve the growing community of makers, artists, and legacy builders across the Gulf Coast:

#### The Wood Shed at NSC

- The heart of the operation. Stocked with over 50 domestic and exotic hardwood species—many milled and kiln-dried on site—The Wood Shed offers raw slabs, cookies, dimensional lumber, and milling services for everyone from hobbyists to highend builders.

#### The Legacy Line at NSC

- Where heirloom meets heart. Specializing in handcrafted custom work, this division brings meaningful builds to life—whether you're dreaming of a show-stopping dining table, a statement mantel, or floating shelves that feel like they were always meant to be there.

NSC serves both residential and commercial clients, with standout projects including a stunning full interior build at Eagle Eye Vision in Niceville, and a cozy custom library featuring a built-in daybed for a local homeowner. The team works

regularly with trusted names like Randy Wise Homes, Rominger Construction, and other respected contractors throughout the Panhandle.

Each project under The Legacy Line is grounded in craftsmanship, intention, and a deep respect for the material—turning slabs with character into pieces with soul.

#### The Shop Shelf at NSC

- Home to all things finished, polished, and wildly giftable. From epoxy charcuterie boards and stabilized pen blanks to hand-finished home goods, this retail space celebrates the creative talent that flows through NSC—and makes it accessible to anyone walking through the door.

And behind all of it? A crew of hardworking, hands-on, sawdust-covered humans who proudly refer to themselves as Wood Dealers.

There's Mike—owner, sawmill master, and the quiet force behind the big machines. Kathleen—the in-house accountant with a woodworking obsession and a love for clean cuts and clean ledgers. Aaron-yard expert and lumber wrangler, likely to be your first point of contact when you pull through the gate. And Genevieve—creative director, chaos coordinator, class instructor, and one of NSC's founding voices, often found giving shop tours or promoting epoxy classes to the next wave of makers.

Together, they're not just selling wood—they're building a movement.

NSC regularly hosts woodworking and epoxy classes, live demos, and collaborative workshops with local artists, florists, and small businesses. They also lend their talents and time to causes that matter, donating builds and support to nonprofits like Emerald Coast Autism Center, PAWS, Freedom House, and CALM.

"Our goal has always been to make quality wood more accessible—and to show people what's possible once they get their hands on the right piece," Genevieve says. "We're here to help people create. Whether it's a massive dining table or a simple epoxy cheese board, it



all starts with the right piece of wood—and the right people to help."

So the next time you're nearby, stop in. Browse the slab wall. Ask questions. Get inspired.

Because at NSC, we don't just sell wood—we deal in possibility.

Visit us at 207 B Kelly Rd., Niceville. Phone 850.897.0038. On the web: NicevilleSlabsAnd-Cookies.com.





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Fashion

# What Moms Really Want: A Gift Guide That Actually Gets It

By Liesel Schmidt

Let's be honest—whether you're a husband who needs constant Google alerts on the family calendar or the son or daughter of a mom who never misses a chance to remind you how many hours she spent in labor, finding the perfect gift for Mom can sneak up on you. One minute you're staring at Easter bunnies hopping everywhere, and the next you realize it's time to treat her-without resorting to a last-minute grab from the "impulse gift" aisle. News flash: No one actually uses a neck fan. Whether it's to say thank you, celebrate her, or just make her day a little brighter, a thoughtful gift goes a long way—any time of year. But this year? We're making it easy, because Mom deserves better than a generic greeting card and convenience store flowers.

Whether she's the queen of cozy, someone who loves to laugh, a spa-day dreamer who doesn't take the time for herself or a style maven, we at Blue Bay Lifestyle Co. have thoughtfully (because we're that nice) curated a list of original gifts that show her you really get her—and maybe know her better than she even knows herself.

## Part Zen Master, Part Candle Hoarder

Start with scent. As Proust so famously said in Remembrance of Things Past, smell is an incredible trigger of memory. It's a way to imprint the brain, and it's also a great way to set the tone in a room or an entire home.

What's better than a great scent? We'd say...A great scent with personality.

Candles from Whiskey River Soap Co. say what she's thinking (we personally love "Smells like Day Drinking" and a few other tongue-in-cheek scents that appeal to anyone with a snarky sense of humor), while Sweet Water Decor's more refined blends, like Driftwood + Mahogany or Wildflower + Salt,



create a spa-like atmosphere for her to relax.

## Style, Sass, the Sense of Humor

Moms are many things. And yes, sometimes that includes hilarious, sarcastic, irreverent and wildly relatable.

For the woman who loves a good laugh, Ellembee Gifts nails it with snarky, bypass-the-filter and say-it-out-loud tea towels and makeup bags (think: "I keep hearing it takes a village to raise a child. Do they just show up? Or is there like, a number to call?"). Add one to a gift basket with an adorably designed and useful tea towel from Avery's Home, and you've got something that's both

cute and clever. Who doesn't love that?

Want to win major style points? Cue the accessories. Ellesee Women's polymer clay earrings are handmade, bold, and lightweight—perfect for any mom who likes her accessories to make a statement without weighing her down. For something classic and layerable, check out our selection from Lizou Jewelry, which blends French flair with effortless charm that everyone will gush over. And if she's a leather lover, Hobo's buttery-soft handbags are the kind of gift she'll use every day and still swoon carry five years from

# Sporty, Stylish, or Adventure-Ready

If she's more about joggers than jewelry, don't worry—we've got you.

Vuori's casual wear is ultra-soft and made for real life—you know, running errands, taking walks, going on coffee runs,

and everything else that moms do. Their crossbody bags are equally versatile: chic enough for brunch, tough enough for travel. And we do adore a multi-tasker.

While you're at it, don't forget the details. A pair of Sunski or Maui Jim polarized sunglasses or a Sunday Afternoons UPF hat will keep her protected from the sun's harmful rays and stylish, whether she's beachside or just basking in her own backvard.

## **Give Her Something That Feels Like Her**

Whether it's a fun candle or a cozy top, these gifts are thoughtful without being over-the-top. They feel intentional, not obligatory. And honestly, isn't that the best kind of gift?

If you're still not sure what to get, there's no shame in the gift card game. A Blue Bay Lifestyle Co. gift card lets her pick her own adventure—and you get full credit for being the world's most thoughtful child. Win-win.



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

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Cocoons Famous smoked tuna dip, and crackers/pita chips. There are also salads, build your own pizza, specialty pizzas, pasta/spaghetti, calzones, drinks and desserts. Every ingredient used has been hand-selected. Call to Order or Order Online at bronzinnis.revelup.online and have your mouth-watering fare delivered!

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Looking for a sports bar to call home? Welcome to FUBAR pizza bar nestled on Okaloosa Island. Locally owned and family friendly, Fubar is known for its almost-famous pizza and wings and carries all sports games and

live entertainment, along with impeccable service. You can enjoy all that while enjoying the waterfront view.

FUBAR has plenty of games for the kids along with pool tables, corn hole, dart boards and more. When out on the water all day, come dock your boat on one of FUBAR'S boat slips and enjoy the incredible view. Feel free to bring along your furry friends to join you on the patio.

Need the perfect space to host a party or event? FUBAR is equipped with numerous private 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.

850-226-7084 114 Amberjack Dr., Okaloosa Island fubarfwb.com

#### **Magnolia Grill**

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

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# Governor DeSantis Champions State-Led Conservation Success and Announces Record-Breaking 126-Day Red Snapper Season

By Doug "Doc" Stauffer

In a bold testament to the success of state-led conservation, Governor Ron DeSantis announced Florida's longest-ever Gulf red snapper recreational season—an unprecedented 126 days—during a recent press conference at Legendary Marine in Destin. With the sparkling waters of Choctawhatchee Bay behind him, DeSantis declared, "This is the longest combined season that's been available for anglers in Florida history since state management began."

The record-setting 2025 season surpasses last year's 103-day stretch and is a shining example of what can be achieved when state governments, rather than Washington bureaucrats, manage their natural resources. The extended season includes a summer run from Memorial Day weekend (May 24-26) through July 31, followed by a daily fall window from Sept. 1-14, and

three-day weekends through the end of the year, including Veterans Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas.

The announcement drew numerous cheers from business leaders, anglers, and conservationists who gathered to celebrate economic and environmental implications. Todd Royall of Legendary Marine called the move "priceless," and Clint Rogers of Saltwater Restaurant Group praised the governor for boosting tourism and the local dining industries. "This gives our TDC more marketing ammunition to bring families to our area," Rogers said.

By contrast, the federally managed Atlantic red snapper season remains abysmally short, just two days last year, despite a growing population of Red Snapper. DeSantis didn't shy away from highlighting the stark difference in outcomes. "We've asked the President himself. Let us manage the red snapper in the Atlantic," DeSantis said. "We will do a good job. We will have accurate data, and we're going to be able to expand opportunities for a lot of people."

DeSantis has proven himself a trusted leader in ecological stewardship by blending science with the somewhat uncommon common sense. Under his leadership, Florida has prioritized angler-reported data through programs like the State Reef Fish Survey, resulting in better-informed policy and more robust fish populations. Florida now leads the nation with over 920,000 boat registrations, 4 million licensed anglers, and an annual \$31 billion boating and fishing economic impact—figures that dwarf federal performance metrics.

While Washington's red tape continues to stifle opportunity on the Atlantic coast, Florida's Gulf coast is flourishing thanks to state control. DeSantis's firm commitment to states' rights starkly contrasts with the onesize-fits-all failures of federal agencies like NOAA and the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council. "We stand ready, willing, and able," DeSantis emphasized. "Florida's proven it knows how to balance access and conservation—let us do the same for the Atlantic."

In an era when federal mismanagement too often limits economic growth and outdoor access, Governor Ron DeSantis offers a successful alternative: empowered local governance that delivers ecological protection and freedom for Floridians and those who vacation here.

# **2025 Gulf Red Snapper Season Schedule:**

**Memorial Day Weekend:** May 24-26

**Summer Season:** 

June 1 – July 31

Fall Daily Season:

September 1–14

Weekend/Holiday Access:

Sept. 19–21, 26–28

Oct. 3-5, 10-12, 17-19, 24-26, 31-Nov. 2

Nov. 7–9, 11 (Veterans Day), 14–16, 21–23, 27–30 (Thanksgiving)

Dec. 5–7, 12–14, 19–21, 25–28 (Christmas)

As the Florida Gulf Coast experiences another record year under state stewardship, one thing is clear—when it comes to natural resources, the Sunshine State shines brightest when the federal government steps aside. Those who love fishing and those dependent upon tourism should applaud the Governor's successful leadership.





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# A Legend at 100: The Primrose

By Christopher Manson

In 1925, the Jazz Age was in full swing, The New Yorker magazine published its first issue, and here on the Emerald Coast, a revolutionary fishing boat was about to launch.

On Saturday, May 3, the Destin History & Fishing Museum commemorated the 100th anniversary of the Primrose seine fishing boat. Locals and visitors got a look at the restored Primrose while the kids enjoyed cake, a bounce house and activities with the Emerald Coast Science Center.

The museum offered some historic games from the 1920s and there's now new Primrose merchandise – hats and stickers – in the gift shop. They also raffled off a two-night "staycation" from Ocean Reef Vacation Rentals & Real Estate and a museum merchandise basket that includes the aforementioned Primrose swag.

"She was the last seine boat built in Destin and the first of her kind to have a motor in-





stalled," says Destin History & Fishing Museum Executive Director Vivienne Williams of the Primrose's significance. The Primrose functioned as a fishing boat until 1968, enabling local fishermen to hone their skills and serving as a bridge between traditional and modern methods of fishing.

"We have a volunteer at the museum who used to help tie

fishing nets together." The seine nets are five feet tall and 100 feet long.

The previous Primrose restoration happened in 2015, and the museum invited several of the people involved to the anniversary event, along with members of the Destin City Council.

Over a century ago, the Primrose was the brainchild of Captain John W. Melvin Sr., one of Destin's local fishermen. His experience and know-how planted the idea of a bigger and better fishing boat.

Captain Melvin approached John George Maltezo in 1922. Maltezo knew his way around boats, but was unsure exactly how to build a craft like the Primrose. Melvin and Maltezo worked tirelessly for days designing and planning every detail of the Primrose's length of 56 feet.

The Primrose was completed in 1925 and fitted with a Palmer Marine engine. It was the last seine boat to be built in Destin.

The 2015 restoration involved the participation of at least 10 groups, says Williams. The Primrose was then moved from the Destin Community Center to the museum where a "pole barn" was added to protect the vessel from the elements. Other groups, such as the Destin Chamber of Commerce's Destin Forward classes, have helped with preservation projects over the years.

"I love being part of the community and its very rich history," she says. "I like being able to maintain it and share it with everyone that comes to visit."

In addition to the Primrose centennial, the museum hosted a Night at the Museum event in March to mark its 20th anniversary. "We had live music, a custom martini bar and raffles, and several area restaurants donated appetizers," says Williams. "Food, drink and fun." The "true" celebration is set for October and is still in the planning stages.

She adds: "We'll be celebrating all year long."

The Destin History & Fishing Museum is located at 108 Stahlman Ave. Learn more at destinhistoryandfishingmuseum.org, and follow the museum's Facebook page.

# Protect the Basin:

# A Call to Action for Our Waterway

By Alison McDowell, Executive Director, Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance

The Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance (CBA) is proud to launch the Protect the Basin campaign—an initiative designed to empower residents, businesses, and visitors to become everyday stewards of the Choctawhatchee Bay and its surrounding waterways.

At its heart, Protect the Basin is about transformation: turning awareness into action and concern into commitment. The campaign outlines four key steps that anyone can take to make a meaningful impact on the health of our waterways:

**1. Prevent Pollution -** Our watershed starts in our back-yards. We can stop pollution before it begins by reducing consumption, reusing and recycling, properly disposing of waste, and keeping harmful chemi-



cals out of storm drains.

2. Safeguard Habitat & Wildlife - Healthy ecosystems depend on mindful behavior. Good boating behavior includes respecting slow-speed zones, steering clear of sensitive seagrass beds, and using designated fishing line bins to help protect the diverse species that call our waterways home.

# **3. Plant for Resilience** - Nature knows best. Planting native vegetation along shorelines supports erosion control, filters runoff, and enhances water quality, creating a stronger, more re-

Continued on next page



Monday, May 26th

Day Of Prayer And Fasting

Pray for your neighbors, your community, the leaders of our nation and our world.

Wednesday, May 28th
Blessing of the Marketplace

The business community is invited to worship together and be blessed.

Lunch provided by Big Red Truck

11:30 – 1:30 at Destin Methodist Church | 200 Beach Drive, Destin.

Blessing of the Youth

The Youth Pastors welcome Middle & High School students for worship and blessings.

6pm – 8pm at Harborwalk Village.

Free parking at Harborwalk for those attending the event.

Thursday, May 29th 68th Annual Blessing Of The Fleet

Prayer and worship service beginning at 4 PM on the Harbor behind Brotula's Seafood and Steamer 210 Harbor Blvd. Destin. Boat Blessing and Fish Fry to immediately follow. Boats used to earn a living on the sea may be register by calling: 850-837-6324

Friday, May 30th
Practice Random Acts Of Kindness

Share the love of Jesus by practicing random acts of kindness throughout our community. Leave big tips, lend a helping hand, give generously of your time and resources - However your heart leads.



THE CHURCH OF DESTIN is a community organization presenting a unified voice for all churches in the greater Destin area. Its mission is to unify the body of Christ in Destin, Florida, through fellowship and prayer, recognizing one church, many congregations





# Golf Series: Shalimar Pointe Golf Club Hosts First Prestigious AJGA Preview Presented by Destin-Fort Walton Beach

By Barbara Palmgren

The American Junior Golf Association (AJGA) Preview was brought to this area by Destin-Fort Walton Beach. They sponsored this outstanding preview of male and female golfers of the future. This 36-hole stroke play event was challenging and exciting.

The 78 young golfers, age 12-19, began competition on Friday, April 11, in the Qualifying Round at beautiful and challenging Shalimar Pointe Golf Course. Yardage for boys was 6.620 yards and for girls was 5634 yards for 18 holes of golf. In the field itself, 19 states were represented including 36 young players from Florida. Seven countries were represented with three players already receiving college letters of intent. After the Qualifier Round on Friday, tournament rounds began Saturday with the majority of golfers continuing. Maximum score to con-

tinue for the weekend was 77 for the boys and 76 for the girls.

The American Junior Golf Association national headquarters is located in Braselton, Ga., close to Atlanta. Past winners that became pro golfers included memorable names of Phil Mickelson, Scottie Scheffler, Jordan Spieth and Tiger Woods.

The Tournament Director, Harlie Valinho, worked with a staff of eight interns and one assistant. She coordinated a flawless registration and organization of the day requirements. Regional Director Matt Emmi shared more information with me about the organization itself, the point system players collect and the trophies that are awarded. Matt grew up in a golfing family, inspired by his father who was a head golf professional. Matt is now the Regional Director of Florida for the AJGA working in the Tourist Bureau of Affairs Department at the

national headquarters.

Impressed with Shalimar Pointe Golf Course and the warm welcome of staff and golf members who opened their homes to house 10 staff members, Matt also thanked Destin-Fort Walton Beach for the sponsorship of this event. Ron Schumard of the Okaloosa County Tourist Development Department worked with Matt to bring this tournament, one of a few nationwide, to the Florida Panhandle. Shalimar Pointe Golf Course Manager John Jenkins and course employees and staff created perfect course conditions and excellent restaurant service throughout the threeday tournament.

On Sunday, April 13, trophies were presented to the top men and women golfers. In first place, from Jacksonville, Fla., was Ethan Gossman with a twoday score of 149. Ethan won in a playoff with Charlie Hipp of St.



Johns, Fla. Tied for 3rd place was Hugh Michael Hollingsworth from Milton, Ga., Henry Hurley from Atlanta, Ga., and Nathan Peji from Dunwoody, Ga., with a score of 153.

Winners for the Girls division included Emily Storm from Lakewood Ranch, Fla., with a score of 151. Tied for second place was Meredith Finger from Wilmington, Del., Payton Haugen from Brookfield, Wis., and Olivia Hodges, from Duluth, Ga., with a score of 152.

The weather was perfect for the game of golf and these





young players are ones to watch in the future. This golf reporter with newspaper publisher, Scott Miller, enjoyed helping with the trophy presentation on Sunday afternoon. Just another golf day in paradise in Northwest Flori-

#### PROTECT THE BASIN

continued from previous page

silient environment.

4. Be Water-Wise - Small habits add up. Conserving water, minimizing fertilizer use, and capturing rainwater can dramatically reduce our impact on the basin's delicate ecosystems.

"Protecting our waterways is a shared responsibility," said Alison McDowell, Executive Director of CBA. "This campaign is about turning awareness into action because every small choice we make impacts the health of the Choctawhatchee Bay."

The Choctawhatchee Basin is vital to our local environment,

**Celebrating One Year Renovation** 

economy, recreation, and overall quality of life. Whether you're a lifelong resident or a first-time visitor, you have a role in preserving this natural treasure.

We invite you to join the movement. Visit basinalliance. org/protect-the-basin to explore resources, find volunteer opportunities, and learn simple,

practical steps to make a lasting difference.

Together, we can protect the

basin—one action at a time.

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- Do you wish your teeth were whiter?
- Do you think you show too much or too little of your teeth when vou smile?
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- Do you have gaps or spaces in between your teeth?

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Wellness

# Beyond Routine: Innovative Testing for Proactive Health



By Dr. Karen DeVore

Healthcare should be proactive, not just reactive. You shouldn't have to wait until something is "wrong" to start paying attention to your body. This is the foundation of our integrative approach—focusing on prevention, understanding the root cause of symptoms and delivering care that's personalized to you.

Although often a great first step, conventional lab work often doesn't tell the full story. Maybe you've been told your results are "normal," but you still don't feel like yourself. Fatigue, brain fog, bloating, mood swings or trouble sleeping—these aren't just in of aggressive cancer—many your head. They're signals from your body that deserve to be explored, not dismissed.

That's why we offer a deeper level of testing at the Tortoise Clinic. Our specialty diagnostics are designed to find answers, target care more effectively, and give you the insights you need to feel empowered on your wellness journey.

#### **Precision Testing for Personalized Care**

Specialty testing goes beyond the basics. It helps us detect hidden imbalances, identify early warning signs, and tailor a treatment plan specifically for you. This isn't about chasing symptoms-it's about uncovering what's really going on beneath the surface so we can support your health in a meaningful, lasting way.

Here are a few of the impactful tests we use to support your whole-body wellness:

#### • Galleri® Multi-Cancer **Early Detection Test**

This groundbreaking blood test screens for over 50 types of which don't have routine screening options. It detects tiny fragments of tumor DNA in your blood before symptoms ever appear. It's a great option for those with a family history of cancer, unexplained symptoms, or anyone who wants to take a proactive approach.

#### • Genova GI Effects® **Comprehensive Stool Anal-**

Your gut tells a bigger story than you might think. This test looks at digestion, inflammation, your microbiome (the bacteria living in your gut), and even signs of infection. Because your gut health is connected to your immune system, mood, energy levels, and more, this test can be a game-changer if you're struggling with things like bloating, fatigue, skin issues, or autoimmune concerns.

#### • Hormone Testing (Serum & DUTCH)

We offer both traditional blood work and the more advanced DUTCH test, to give us a fuller picture of your hormone patterns. DUTCH helps us see

#### how your body makes, uses, and clears hormones like cortisol, estrogen, and testosterone. It's especially useful for symptoms like low energy, irregular cycles, sleep issues, and mood swings.

# • Food Sensitivity Test-

Unlike allergy tests, which check for immediate reactions, this test looks at delayed immune responses that can cause chronic inflammation. That includes symptoms like brain fog, joint pain, headaches, or breakouts—often tied to foods you'd never suspect. Knowing your sensitivities helps us craft a dietary strategy that truly supports vour body.

#### • Methylation & Genetic **Wellness Testing**

This test looks at the genes that affect detox, hormone balance, mood, and how your body uses nutrients. A common example is the MTHFR gene, which plays a role in how you process folate and B vitamins. With this info, we can fine-tune your supplements and lifestyle to work with your genetics, not against them.

#### Functional Lab Panels

Continued on page 29



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Wellness



By Kay Leaman, Healthy Day HEALTHYLIFE

As I write this, summer is starting to sneak its way in. A new morning to start fresh, make a change, do something different and up-level my health journey so I can do more, enjoy more and encourage others to do the same.

Here are some headlines:

Wall Street Journal: Your Healthspan Is as Important as Your Lifespan-and It's Declining The U.S. Diet is Deadly.

**Health News:** Six in 10 Americans Have Unhealthy Pro-Inflammatory Diets. Less Than 3 Percent of Americans Have a Healthy Lifestyle.

New York Times: Three-Quarters of U.S. Americans Are Now Overweight or Obese.

Comment and Health: Why is the U.S. still in such poor health, despite its wealth? Why Is American Food So Unhealthy?

# Why We Should Care



everybody else - we need supplements."

When choosing a vitamin, do we know if they have industry leading certifications such as USP, GMP, NSF TGA, ISO, HACCP, etc. Are they manufactured in a FDA registered facility? What rigorous trials have they gone through using 3rd party research?

When we look at all the information above and think about what questions to ask regarding our food supply as well, it becomes overwhelming. However, there are steps we can take to impact our own health in a positive way. Being proactive in understanding food labels is a good start. We can decrease the number of inner isle products we normally purchase. Many canned vegetables contain sugar and other preservatives. An example of this is canned tomatoes. Pomi's ingredients are tomatoes. Check the other options

and you'll notice a trend. I have found more natural (less ingredients) in the international isle. I avoid any item containing sugar or coloring. Why they need to add yellow coloring to pickles is beyond me!

Supplements are a whole other issue. Because they are not regulated by the FDA, there are many both in stores and online that are not what they claim to be or have (They can be added to the sport supplement quotes above.). Several years ago, I attended a training on taking a product to an online platform. The short version; create a label, find a manufacturing company that can produce the product

and attach your label to it. The product they were focused onvitamins. The bottom line of the entire training: the money, not quality, purity, efficacy or safety.

If you are interested in a couple of short videos regarding where my husband and I redirected our supplement spending, send me an email with 'I care' in the subject line. I am also available to discuss labels or other questions you might have via a phone call. Please use the same subject line in your email.

It's about learning and sharing what we learn with others that can impact the health of our communities. Here's to Health.

succeed.hdhl@gmail.com

### **ECCAC Observes National** Child Abuse Prevention Month

By Kay Phelan

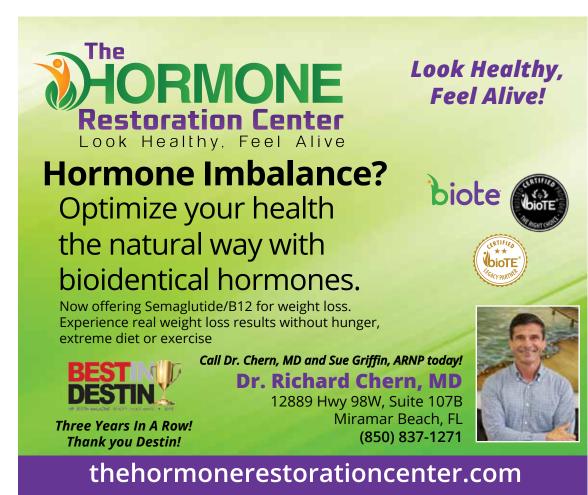
The Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center (EC-CAC) recognized National Child Abuse Prevention Month throughout April, highlighting the importance of families, communities and organizations working together to prevent abuse and neglect.

As part of a national network of 959 Children's Advocacy Centers, ECCAC served 1,480 children through intervention programs and educated 17,367 students in Walton and Okaloosa counties last year—at no cost to families.

"Our ECCAC team undertook a number of initiatives throughout April to bring attention to National Child Abuse Awareness Month," commented ECCAC CEO, Julie Porterfield. "With the color blue representing the initiative, we lined our sidewalks with blue pinwheels and balloons. We also participated in Lauren's Kids Walk with Florida Attorney General James Uthmeier in Niceville for a 10-mile trek as a part of their 1,500-mile journey across Florida. The walk was for Lauren's Kids and the 42 million survivors of child abuse in America and for the children we see every day at our Centers. We're already creating our strategic plan for next year." ECCAC also hosted proclamation ceremonies with Okaloosa and Walton County Sheriff's Offices.

Now celebrating over 25 years of service, ECCAC remains committed to its mission to prevent abuse, protect children, and restore young lives. With 1 in 3 girls and 1 in 5 boys experiencing sexual abuse before high school graduation, ECCAC stresses that 95% of child sexual abuse is preventable through education and awareness.

Learn more at ECCAC. org. To report suspected abuse, call the Florida Abuse Hotline at 1-800-96-ABUSE.



trace of their key ingredients.

come nations, new report says.

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dients. 40% of Sports Supple-

ments Don't Contain Ingredi-

ents On The Label, U.S. Study

supplements contained unap-

proved drug ingredients, study

ments filled with fake ingredi-

ents, investigators find.

CBS News: Herbal supple-

Dr. Mark Hyman M.D. (Doc-

tors Pharmacy Podcast) states:

"Since the nutrient density of

our diet has declined over time,

we all need supplements. Unless

you're hunting and gathering

and foraging all your own wild

food, unless you're drinking pure

clean water, you have no expo-

sure to environmental toxins,

you have no chronic stress, you

go to bed with the sun and wake

up with the sun, you sleep nine

hours a night — if that's you,

you don't need supplements; but

CNN: Nearly 800 dietary

Finds.







By Stephenie Craig

You know that feeling when it's time to have a conversation about something important but you aren't sure how to approach it? You feel the urgency to speak but your hands get sweaty, your chest gets tight, and you tell yourself it's not really a big enough issue to discuss resulting in avoidance. Or, you feel anger bubbling up and you speak up with aggression, anger and intensity that turn the conversation in an unintended direction.

Avoiding important conver-

sations may keep the peace in the short term, however, in the long-term avoidance creates unresolved tension, lack of change, feeling unseen, resentment and bitterness. Approaching important conversations with anger and aggression most often results in defensiveness, not being heard, escalation, alienation and seeing the other person as a villain. What if there was another way to talk about things that are important to you? What if there was a way to be calm, clear, direct, and curious, while also being heard?

# 7 Healthy Ways to Have Important Conversations

- 1. Notice your emotional activation. When are you feeling upset, bothered or emotionally reactive? Notice big feelings, body tension, irritability, headaches, stomachaches, exhaustion, anxiety, depression.
- 2. Regulate yourself. Use intentional calming skills to move

your brain from emergency, overwhelmed mode to rational mode. Breathe slowly for 2 minutes, take a brief walk, journal, yell into your pillow, punch a punching bag, etc. Use coping skills that don't hurt yourself, others, or property.

- 3. Engage internal sorting. Notice if past emotion about previous situations/relationships is intermingled with the present. Determine the real issue in the present moment separate from other emotional situations.
- 4. Own your part. Remember that while you may feel upset with someone, you are not a victim. You have power and self-control. You have a voice and it is healthy to use it. Notice when you are being defensive or making up negative stories in your head (we all make up negative stories that aren't ac-

curate). Determine and clarify what negative contribution you might be making to the situation at hand. Determine how you can communicate your willingness to take responsibility for your part.

5. Reach for vulnerability in-

stead of blame and finger pointing. Notice if you are feeling hurt, misunderstood, invalidated, rejected, afraid, unsupported, insecure, unappreciated, or unseen. Look underneath anger as vulnerable feelings often hide beneath.

6. Outline your approach to the conversation. Start by asking the other person if they would be willing to take a few undistracted minutes to talk about something important to you. Then use "I" statements and feeling words to describe what is feeling difficult for you. Follow up by communicating a clear alternative that would feel better to you. "I feel hurt and dismissed when I tell you I am overwhelmed in parenting and you respond by telling me I just need to get more organized. What I'm really needing in those moments is some validation that parenting can be hard. I'm also needing to know you understand my feelings and can be curious about support I might be needing."

**Important Conversations** 

7. Practice your outline, then gather your courage or calm and initiate the conversation.

Remember to regulate yourself before and during the conversation with calm breathing. Your approach will influence the tone of the discussion. Also, try to listen to the other person with curiosity rather than defensiveness when they respond to your thoughts. The other person may or may not respond the way you are hoping. However, it feels empowering to know you handled your side of the

conversation well. Practice is needed much more than perfection when it comes to learning new communication skills. Keep working at it consistently and it will become more natural. Connect with us along your journey for counseling at coaching at Journeybravely.com.

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# What You Should Do Right After An Auto Accident



By Julie A. Martin *Publisher's Note:* 

Recently, my daughter was involved in a rear-end collision, and the experience opened my eyes to just how overwhelming and confusing the aftermath of an auto accident can be. The article that follows offers essential steps to take after an accident—information that proved incredibly

helpful to my family during a stressful time. I felt it was important to share it again, in hopes that it may serve you as well, should you ever find yourself in a similar situation.

It can be scary to be driving along one minute, and the next, either you've been run off the road, or spun out into the intersection, or even into a ditch. You or your passenger might even be injured, and need medical attention. Here is the short version of how to handle auto accidents so that you know you handled everything correctly and your stress level can come down

Pull over safely to the side of the road and call 911. Calling for help is the first essential step in making sure that any injuries are treated in a timely fashion, as well as making sure the police arrive to do a full accident report.



Take photos of the other vehicle(s) involved including the drivers, as the position of the vehicles, for your insurance company, so that there is photo evidence of all damage as well as an accurate representation of who was in which car, as well who was driving.

Make sure you have your license, registration and insurance information on hand. I recommend keeping a copy of your declarations page, your

auto id cards and your registration in your glove box.

If your vehicle is not drivable after the accident, you have two choices. If you have AAA, you can have them pick up your vehicle and drop it off at your preferred auto repair shop. If you have towing on your auto policy, and the site of your accident is less than five miles away from your repair shop, you can potentially use the towing coverage on your policy for this accident.

If you are injured, go to the hospital to get checked out or your primary care physician, if your injuries are not serious. Personal Injury Protection in the state of Florida pays 80% of your \$10,000 coverage, minus the deductible. This includes hospital bills, medical bills relating to your accident injuries, physical therapy, casts, crutches, etc. If you have medical payments on your policy as well, they will start where the Personal Injury Protection ends. If the at fault driver is not you, and they either have no bodily injury liability coverage, or not enough to cover your injuries, this is where uninsured/underinsured motorist coverage comes in. You insure for those times that you get hit, you're hurt, but the person who causes the accident does not have enough coverage to cover your medical expenses.

If you have not already called your insurance company to put in the claim, do so now, calling your agent and explaining to them what happened.

Answer their questions and do not guess if you do not know the answer. Let them know that the police have been on the scene. Give them the case number the police give you and they will get the accident report when it becomes available. Write down the claim number and any other instructions the claims representative, and your agent give you for the accident.

Dear reader, we all get into a scrape from time to time, and hopefully this list is helpful when you need to know what to do. Call 850-424-6979.

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# Nine Local JROTC & ROTC Cadets Earn Scholarships from the NWFMOA

By Dave Parisot, NWFMOA Scholarship Fund

Eight JROTC cadets and one ROTC cadet from seven local schools were honored on May 1 with a total of \$55,000 in prestigious scholarships from the Northwest Florida Military Officers Association (NWFMOA) via their Scholarship Fund.

The scholarships were presented at NWFMOA's annual scholarship luncheon at the Fort Walton Yacht Club, recognizing JROTC cadets from Baker, Choctaw, Crestview, Fort Walton Beach, Navarre and Niceville High Schools, and one local ROTC cadet at the University of West Florida Air Force ROTC unit. Factors in selecting the scholarship awardees were academic excellence, leadership, community service, and service to their schools. Attendees at this recognition luncheon included JROTC instructors form each of the cadets' high schools, business leaders of local businesses who have contributed financially to fund scholarships, the parents of awardees, and members of NWFMOA. The Color Guard for Presentation of the Colors was provided by the Baker School Army JROTC (Cadets Zachary Pena, Bella Gibson, Gunner Walters, and Alex Pena).

## The JROTC scholarship recipients are:

Cadet Bella Gibson of Baker School – Florida Power & Light Scholarship of \$6,000.

Cadet Heidi Edwards of Crestview High School – Mrs. Joan Gibson Griffin Bush Scholarship of \$6.000.

Cadet Layth Atrakchi of Choctawhatchee High School – Dr. Fred and Mrs. Janet Westfall Scholarship of \$6,000.

Cadet Chriscelle Pardillo of Fort Walton Beach High School – Mrs. Eileen Arpke Memorial Scholarship of \$6,000.

Cadet Madelyn Burdick of Navarre High School – Dr. Howard and Mrs. Irene Fisher Scholarship of \$6,000.

Cadet Hope Apfelbach of Navarre High School – Mrs. Chong (Kim) Parisot Memorial Scholarship of \$6,000.



Cadet Caleb McDevitt of Navarre High School – Lt. Col. Jim and Mrs. Una Heavener Memorial Scholarship of \$9,000.

Cadet Penelope Ashby of Niceville High School – Col. Karl and Mrs. Charlotte Eschmann Scholarship of \$6,000.

Cadet Lincoln Dooley of Niceville High School – First Alternate

Cadet Owen Clift of Niceville High School – second Alternate

NWFMOA's ROTC scholarship of \$4,000, the Major General Richard Secord Memorial Scholarship, was awarded to Cadet Mark Almazan of the UWF Air Force ROTC. Mark is a 2023 graduate of the Fort Walton Beach IROTC.

In addition to these scholarships the NWFMOA also recognized four local graduating high school

seniors who have received appointments to our nation's military academies. **Those recognized are:** 

Max Diehl of Niceville High School – United States Naval Academy.

Jackson Hamman of Niceville High School – United States Air Force Academy.

JROTC Cadet Jack Mashburn of Navarre High School – United States Merchant Marine Academy.

JROTC Cadet Lauren Mavity of Navarre High School – United States Merchant Marine Academy.

"These cadets are prime examples of leadership, service, academic excellence and community service that define our local JROTC and ROTC programs," said Brig. Gen. Fran Hendricks, USAF Ret., and president of the NWFMOA chapter. "We are incredibly proud of these local students and thankful to be able to invest in their futures, hopefully leading to a commission in one of our armed forces branches. These young men and women represent the very best of Okaloosa and Santa Rosa Counties." The JROTC scholarships will be paid to the respective colleges of attendance over a two-year period. Scholarship recipients are required to participate in their college's ROTC program.

The NWFMOA Scholarship Fund provides scholarship funds annually to local JROTC and ROTC cadets who exhibit superior academic achievement, leadership, and community service performance. For more information and photos, go to https://nwfmoa.org/files/sf25/album/index.html or http://nwfmoa.org.

# Remembering Operation Eagle Claw

By 1st Special Operations Wing Public Affairs

In the heart of the Iranian desert, the sound of approaching helicopters broke the stillness, kicking up clouds of sand as they landed.

U.S. Air Commandos and other military forces ventured into the unknown. Even through uncertainty, a sense of determination drove them to bring their fellow countrymen home.

Operation Eagle Claw, conducted April 24, 1980, was a joint-services mission to rescue Americans who were being held hostage by militants in Tehran, Iran, since Nov. 4, 1979.

As U.S. forces prepared to withdraw from the staging area known as Desert One, a helicopter crashed into a transport aircraft being used to carry servicemen and jet fuel. The resulting fire destroyed both aircraft and killed eight servicemen, including five Air Commandos from Hurlburt Field's 1st Special Operations Wing.

Forty-five years after Oper-

ation Eagle Claw, its memories and lessons are still recognized during an annual ceremony held at the Hurlburt Field Memorial Air Park.

Today, leaders and members of Air Force Special Operations Command and the 1st Special Operations Wing joined retired service members, veterans of Operation Eagle Claw, and family members of the eight service members who lost their lives that day to commemorate the event that shaped special operations.

"Today, we remember the events at Desert One not just as a moment of loss, but as an inflection point forged by those who had the guts to try," said U.S. Air Force Lt. Gen. Michael Conley, commander of Air Force Special Operations Command. "We honor their sacrifice, and we recognize the

legacy they left behind. Many of the missions our Air Commandos regularly execute today, were first attempted by the incredible crews of Operation Eagle Claw." Conley reflected not only on the warrior ethos of those involved, but also on the impact of their sacrifice. He explained

Continued on next page





# Spring Into Style: Create Your Perfect Outdoor Oasis at The Shop at Baldwin Turf

By Jenny Herndon, Owner

Spring has officially arrived, and there's no better time to refresh your outdoor spaces! At The Shop at Baldwin Turf, we've been proudly serving the community for over a year with a carefully curated selection of quality outdoor furniture, vibrant plants, thoughtful gift items and premium fertilizers. We've got everything you need to create the perfect backyard escape.

May is one of the best times to shop for outdoor furniture not only is the weather perfect for planning and setting up your space, but shopping early in the season means the best selection of styles, colors, and sets before summer is in full swing. Whether you're prepping for backyard BBQs, casual evenings by the fire pit, or peaceful mornings on the porch, now's the time to create the outdoor retreat you've been dreaming about. But before you dive into decorating, here are a few quick tips on choosing outdoor furniture that fits your space—and your lifestyle:

1. Consider Your Space and Purpose - Are you furnishing a spacious deck or a small balcony? Think about how you'll use the area—dining, lounging, entertaining, or all of the above. Sectionals and dining sets work great for larger areas,



while bistro tables and compact chairs are ideal for cozier spots.

**2. Pick Durable, Weather-Friendly Materials -** Our Florida weather can be tough

on furniture, so look for pieces made with weather-resistant materials like recycled plastic, teak, aluminum, or all-weather wicker. We carry plenty of stylish options built to last.

**3. Comfort is Key**- A great-looking chair isn't much good if it's not comfortable. Be sure to try out seating before you buy, and go for cushions made with

fade-resistant, quick-dry fabrics to keep things fresh season after season

**4. Match Your Style -** Whether your vibe is coastal,

rustic, or modern, your outdoor space should feel like an extension of your home. Add personal touches with planters, throw pillows, and outdoor lighting.

5. Visit Us in Person - Come see what's new at The Shop at Baldwin Turf, where you can browse our curated collection in person, get inspired, and let our team help you bring your vision to life. Follow along on social media @baldwinturf for updates on new items and events!

The Shop at Baldwin Turf @baldwinturf

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#### **EAGLE CLAW**

continued from previous page

how their courage under impossible circumstances became a catalyst and inspiration for change – that fundamentally reshaped our armed forces and resulted in a permanent, profes-

sional Special Operations Force that is ready to respond at a moment's notice.

"The Air Commando motto, 'Any Time, Any Place,' isn't just a statement on letterhead, it's a way of life," said retired Chief Master Sgt. Bill Walter, a guest at the ceremony.

Walter noted that the participants in Operation Eagle Claw forged the Air Commando legacy by accepting a high-risk, complex mission to rescue American hostages. Today, AFSOC and U.S. Special Operations Command have the most capable special operations forces in the world and continue to add to the legacy of the original Air Commando's of WWII.

Lessons learned from Desert One and Operation Eagle Claw laid the foundation for the creation of USSOCOM in 1987 and the establishment of AFSOC in 1990. The mindset of those service members nearly five decades ago is now ingrained in the spirit of Hurlburt



Field and continues to shape the training of today's special operators.

"As we look the future, we remember the eight men who lost their lives in a heroic attempt, and who demonstrated that America will not sit idly by while its citizens are in peril. We strive to emulate their agility and adaptability. AFSOC exists to accomplish the missions others

can't do, or won't attempt to do."

That night in the desert set an example for future generations of Air Commandos. Their legacy, one forged in adversity and sharpened with reflection, is carried forward by the service members who now wear the AFSOC patch.

"[Their sacrifice] reminds us of the cost of readiness, the courage it takes to lead from the front and the responsibility we bear to honor their legacy through excellence in everything we do," Conley explained. "Their legacy calls us to be ready—anytime, anywhere—because the mission and the people we serve demand nothing less."



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# Sean of the South: Memorial Day Weekend



By Sean Dietrich

Memorial Day is the unofficial start to summer, and summer was in full bloom in America. The nation experienced mostly beautiful weather.

The Midwest had highs in the 80s, The Southeast experienced temps even higher. Temperatures in the Florida panhandle exceeded approximately 173 degrees.

But it's important to remember that it wasn't a great Memorial Day weekend for everyone.

Yesterday in Saint Louis, for example, a man named Phillip was playing baseball with his kids while his wife, Lindsey, was making potato salad inside. The day was going swimmingly.

"Guys in my family have always played baseball on Memorial Day weekend," Philip wrote to me this morning in an email. "It's a longstanding tradition for us." Phillip was pitching. His 11-year-old son, Austin, was at the plate. Phillip delivered an easy pitch underhand. His son swung the bat like the baseball had personally insulted his mother. The bat connected.

PING!

The good news is that Phillip's son hit a line drive. The bad news is: it was a line drive which struck a part of Phillip's anatomy most often associated with procreation.

The ball nailed Phillip. He howled in pain. He went down under the power. His kids all gathered around him and asked if he was okay. All Phillip could utter was, "Go get your mom, please."

It bears mentioning, Phillip's son was using an aluminum bat not a wooden bat. Which might not sound like an important detail to this story except that the exit velocity of a ball hit by an aluminum bat is a LOT higher than that of one hit by a wooden bat.

A ball hit by a wooden bat has an average velocity of 60 to 80 mph. Whereas a ball hit by an aluminum bat is capable of breaking the sonic barrier.

Phillip's wife approached her husband and asked her children what had happened.

Her 4-year-old son re-



marked, "Austin hit daddy in the Twinkie."

His wife had to excuse herself for a moment. When she returned, her face was red and she looked like she'd been laughing.

"I wasn't laughing," said Phillip's wife. "It's allergies."

Then, his wife single-handedly loaded Phillip into their SUV. She placed him in the cargo hold because Phillip was incapable of sitting. Phillip laid on on his side throughout the long ride to the hospital and tried to remind himself to breathe.

Occasionally, he heard a cackling sound coming from the front seat, but his wife swears that her allergies get so bad this time of year.

"My wife doesn't even have allergies," Phillip writes.

At the hospital, a doctor

checked him out. The nurse removed Phillip's trousers and the medical professionals inspected the bruising. The doctor asked how it happened.

Phillip's 4-year-old spoke again. "My brother hit my daddy in the Twinkie."

The doctor nodded, covered his mouth, then excused himself briefly. The medical man left the exam room and Phillip swears he heard the sound of the doctor's allergies acting up.

When the doctor returned, he was out of breath and he had four other male medical colleagues with him who were available to offer their expertise. Also, the janitor said he wanted to see, too.

One of the veteran ER doctors, male, inspected the bruising and wore a grave face. Whereupon he looked Phillip square in the eye and said, "Son, I'm afraid we're going to have to remove it."

At which point, all medical staffers excused themselves again and Phillip heard more allergies in the hallway.

"What kind of world is this we live in," Phillip wrote to me,

"when doctors and nurses can't even act professionally?"

Thankfully, as it turns out, Phillip will make a full recovery. The main advice the doctor gave Phillip was to use frozen vegetables—either corn or peas work best—to de-inflame the affected netherregions. Once the bruising goes away, the doctor recommends that Phillip retire his jersey and quit baseball altogether.

Phillip spent most of today in the supine position, lying on his sofa. All day, Philip's friends have been stopping by to wish him well.

"They've been bringing me a lot of Hostess products," said Phillip.

He hopes that by sharing his story he can warn fathers out there to take the proper protective measures when playing backyard sports.

"I just don't wanna see this happen to someone else," he added. "I think it's time we talked openly about this painfully sensitive subject."

Now if you'll excuse me, my allergies are acting up.



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# A Pastor's Ponderings May Day: A Cry for Help and a Call to Hope



By Pastor Doug Stauffer

May Day. For some, the term evokes images of children dancing around a pole adorned with flowers to celebrate spring. For others, it conjures images of international labor protests or even Cold War military parades in distant lands. And then there's the urgent distress call: "Mayday! Mayday!"—a plea for rescue when things go wrong. In many ways, all these meanings

can resonate powerfully within our current cultural and spiritual climate.

Historically, May Day originated as a spring festival, marking the upcoming harvest's renewal, growth and promise. As the Earth warmed and flowers bloomed, communities gathered to celebrate life and beauty. It was a time of hope—a season of sowing, both literally and symbolically. Over time, especially in the 20th century, May Day became associated with labor movements and political ideologies, particularly in communist and socialist nations, where it was used to exalt the state over the individual and government over God. America seemed poised to repeat these same mistakes.

Here in America, we often shy away from the May Day connotations, choosing instead to honor our workers on Labor Day in September. Never-



theless, May remains a time of transition—from spring to sum-

mer, from planting to preparing for harvest.

As Christians, May Day presents an opportunity to pause and reflect on what we're sowing in our lives, homes, and country. The Bible states, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7). May is an ideal time for self-examination. Are we sowing righteousness, kindness, truth, and grace? Are we planting seeds of faith in the hearts of our children and the community around us?

And then there's that haunting cry: "Mayday! Mayday!" Our nation, our churches, and many of our families are in distress. We have strayed from our

And then there's that haunting cry: "Mayday! Mayday!" Our nation, our churches, and many of our families are in distress. We have strayed from our biblical foundation, exchanging truth for tolerance and conviction for convenience. Perhaps this May Day, we should heed the spiritual distress signal echoing across the land—not with despair, but as a call to action.

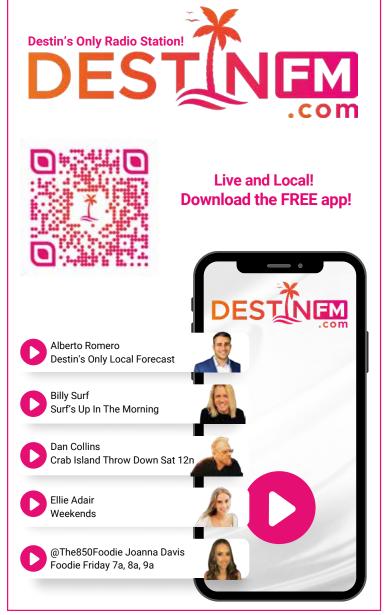
The good news is that when we cry out, God listens. Psalm 34:17 reminds us, "The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles." Our national restoration will not come through politics alone, programs, or protests. It begins when God's people humble themselves, pray, seek His face, and turn from their wicked ways (2 Chronicles 7:14); Israel's promise can also be ours.

This May, let us reclaim May Day—not as a political statement or a pagan ritual, but as a personal and collective turning point. Let it remind us that now is the time to plant seeds of revival, to call out in faith, and to renew our commitment to the Lord

May our cry be not just "Mayday! Mayday!" in desperation, but "Lord, have Your way! Have it today" in devotion to the Almighty.

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.

# VISIT **MYFWBLIFE.COM**TO READ OUR LATEST ISSUE





#### Arts & Music

# 2025 Graduation Ceremonies!



Congratulations Class of 2025! Below is the Okaloosa County School District's (OCSD) schedule. All ceremonies will be streamed live, allowing family and friends to participate virtually in this momentous

**Baker School** – Friday, May 22, at 7:30 pm - Doug Griffith Stadium https://youtube.com/ live/gkc47ypT8Kw

Choctawhatchee High **School** – Thursday, May 22, at 7:30 pm - Joe Etheridge Stadium https://youtube.com/live/ uvnW8zf1EPY

Crestview High School

- Friday, May 23, at 7:00 pm - Jack Foster Stadium https:// youtube.com/live/7JXg46l-Gxyk

Fort Walton Beach High **School** – Friday, May 23, at 7:30 pm - Steve Riggs Stadium https://youtube.com/live/ IkCNZ-n3SZA

Laurel Hill School - Tuesday, May 20, at 6:00 pm - Laurel Hill Gym https://youtube. com/live/gFjZ9XwkCxc

Niceville High School Thursday, May 22, at 7:00 pm - Niceville Eagle Stadium https://youtube.com/live/ ejyk7TtNx3Q

Congratulations to all graduates as they take the next step toward their futures!

#### **BEYOND**

continued from page 21

We also look at standard labs—like vitamins, minerals, cholesterol and inflammatory markers—through a functional lens. That means we're not just checking if you're in a "normal" range; we're asking, is this optimal for you? These panels help us assess your metabolic health, nutrient levels, and inflammation in more meaningful

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your body's unique rhythms and needs, we can create a plan that's truly tailored to you. Whether you're managing symptoms or staying ahead of potential issues, we're here to guide you with clarity and care.

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# **Artists Invited to Apply for 30th Annual Festival of the Arts!**

The Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation (MKAF) is now accepting artist applications for the 30th Annual Festival of the Arts, set for October 25-26, 2025, at the Dugas Pavilion in Destin.

This juried show features over 100 artists and awards more than \$12,000 in prizes! Mediums include painting, sculpture, photography, jew-



elry, and more. Artists benefit from amenities like free

breakfast, booth sitters, and an awards dinner.

Applications, including four images, are due by June 30, 2025. Fees are \$30 to apply and \$350-\$700 for booth

Proceeds support MKAF's arts outreach programs. Details at mkaf.org or call (850) 650-2226.



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Family Session

\$375 1 hour

No limit on edited photos

Senior Session / Professional headshots

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45 minutes

No limit on edited photos

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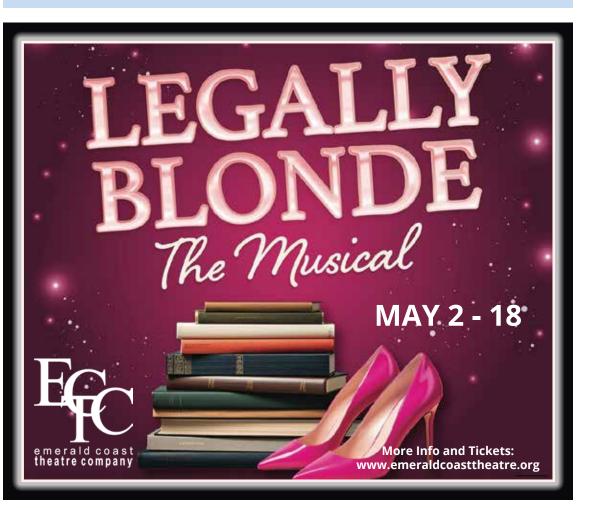
\$300

Up to an hour

No limit on edited photos

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# Summer Camps 2025: A Local Guide for Families

FWB Life has curated a recommended list of a variety of summer camps to keep your kids engaged this summer! From STEM and environmental education to creative arts, leadership, theater and dance to basketball and classic outdoor adventures, there is a variety of options from which to choose.

# **General Enrichment & Academic Camps**

- Kids on Campus Northwest Florida State College (Niceville): Open to students entering grades 3–7, with classes in science, music, art, athletics and more. Sessions run June 23–27 and July 7–11, full- or half-day options available. Register: nwfsc.edu/kidson-campus-2
- Youth Village Summer Program (FWB): For ages 2–14, this full-day camp includes STEM activities, field trips, arts and crafts and more. Weekly rates range from \$140 to \$190. Register: ouryouthvillage.
- Camp Forager The Barrett School (Destin): For children ages 3–12, weekly

themed camps run June 2–July 25, with options like "Bee" Creative, "Bee"ach Days, and "Bee" Mad Scientists. Standard day (8:30 a.m.–3 p.m.) is \$400/ week; extended day (7:45 a.m.–4:30 p.m.) is \$450/week. Register: thebarrettschoolfl.org/camp

- RoboQuest STEM Workshops The Barrett School (Destin): Designed for ages 10–15, these workshops run June 10–July 26, Monday–Friday, 8:30 a.m.–3:00 p.m., at \$350/week. thebarrettschoolfl. org/roboquest
- **Abadie Academy (Santa Rosa Beach):** For ages 5–12, week-long camps run June 3–July 12, 8:30 a.m.–3:30 p.m., at \$350/week. Themes include "Under the Sea" and "Happy Campers." abadieacademy.com

## **Arts & Performing Arts Camps**

• Emerald Coast Theatre Company (Miramar Beach): Offers various theater camps for ages 5–14, including Mini Player Camps (ages 5–7) and Camp Broadway sessions (grades 2–5). Dates and tuition



vary. Register: emeraldcoasttheatre.org/summer-camps

- studio6twenty5 (Destin): This boutique classical ballet studio offers summer camps for children ages 2–9, following the American Ballet Theatre® National Training Curriculum. Programs include Pre-Primary and Primary levels, focusing on foundational movement, musicality, and imaginative exploration. Camps are held at 625 Harbor Blvd., Destin. Register: studio6twenty5.com
- Drama Kids of Northwest Florida: Designed for children aged 6–12, this camp focuses on building confidence through theater activities. Camp Hollywood runs June 2–6, Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Cost is \$250

per week. Register: dramakids. com/destin-fort-walton-beach-niceville-fl

- NFB Summer Dance Camp (FWB): Designed for children entering Kindergarten through 2nd grade, this camp introduces young dancers to the fundamentals of ballet in a fun and engaging setting. Sessions run Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. Tuition is \$150 per week. Register: nfballet.org/community-classes
- NFB Pre-Ballet Classes (FWB): Classes (once a week) are tailored for preschool-aged children, focusing on basic ballet movements and coordination. Various time slots available. Tuition \$75 for 4-week session. Register: nfballet.org/community-classes.

- NFB Summer Workshop Intensive (FWB): Aimed at dancers entering 3rd grade and up, this intensive workshop focuses on advanced ballet techniques, including pointe work and variations. Sessions run Monday Friday, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tuition is \$300 per week. Register: nfballet.org/community-classes.
- Compass Rose Academy Summer Enrichment (Santa Rosa Beach): Offering programs for ages 3–12, this camp includes activities in art, music and dance. Half-day and full-day options available June 2 August 1; weekly rates range from \$180 to \$440. Register: compassroseacademy.org or call (850) 660-1110

## **Sports & Recreation Camps**

• Emerald Coast Rush Youth Development Program (Niceville, Valparaiso, Destin, FWB): For ages 6–12, this soccer camp develops skills in a fun, structured environment led by licensed coach-

Continued on next page



#### Arts & Music

#### **SUMMER CAMPS**

continued from previous page

es. Register: emeraldcoastrush.

- Destin Community Center Summer Day **Camp:** For ages 5–12, this halfday camp runs June 2 to August 1, Monday-Friday, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Activities include games, crafts and swim days. \$85/week for Destin residents; \$115 for non-residents. Register: (850) 654-5184 or cityofdestin.com
- Raider **Basketball** Camp (Niceville): Held at the NWFSC Raider Arena, this coed camp is open to students entering grades 2-8. Week 1 runs June 2-5; Week 2 is July 28-31. Includes instruction, T-shirt and lunch. Register: nwfsc.edu/ k12/sports-camp.
- Challenger International Soccer Camp (Free**port):** A soccer camp for boys and girls, offering skill development and fun games. Dates and specific details for 2025 are to be announced. challengersports. com.

#### STEM, Science & **Innovation Camps**

 Camp Invention (Niceville): A nationally recognized, STEM-based camp for kids entering grades K-6, focusing on hands-on STEM activities. Ses-

sions are scheduled for June 2–5 in Santa Rosa Beach and June 9-13 in Niceville, with fees between \$275 and \$295. Register:

- Summer STEAM Work**shops (FWB):** For ages 5-12, these themed hands-on science workshops include engineering, physics and biology. Emerald Coast Science Center Fort Walton Beach. Sessions are limited to 20 students. Register: ecscience.org
- Barrett School Robo-Quest STEM Workshops (**Destin**): Targeting ages 10-15, this program offers robotics and coding workshops from June 10 to July 26. Weekly fee is \$350. Register: barrettschool.
- HSU Foundation STEM Program via Youth Village (FWB): Selects 12 girls aged 8-12 for a two-week STEM experience with Lego Robotics, Coding and Drones. Register: ouryouthvillage.org
- Ohana Day School (Miramar Beach & Inlet Beach): Themed camps for ages 3-5 run weekly from June 10-July 19, featuring themes like "Under the Sea" and "At the Carnival." (850) 608-2081. ohanadayschool.org



#### **Outdoors, Wildlife and Environment Camps**

- Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park (Okaloosa Island): Sunset Camps for ages 6-14 include dolphin encounters, beach exploration and dinner. Select dates in June-August, 4-9 p.m., at \$89 for the first child, with discounts for additional siblings. gulfarium.com
- E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center - Wednesday Summer Day Camps (Free**port):** Designed for children aged 5-12, these camps focus on nature exploration, animal encounters and environmental education. Sessions are held on Wednesdays from June 4 to July 30, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. \$55 per camper. Register: (850) 835-1824.

 Camp Longleaf at E.O. Wilson **Biophilia** Center (Freeport): Camp Longleaf provides week-long overnight camps for children aged 9-14. Campers engage in traditional outdoor activities combined with hands-on nature education, including animal encounters. nahikes ture and

team-building exercises. Cabins are air-conditioned. Dates TBD. eowilsoncenter.org

- Creature Features & Special Programs (FWB): Interactive wildlife programs and science demos are held throughout summer and included with general admission. Emerald Coast Science Center. More info: ecscience.org
- 4-H Camp Timpoochee (Niceville): This beloved overnight and day camp experience offers marine science, outdoor adventure and environmental education. Day camps are for ages 6–12; overnight options available for ages 8–16. Sessions run throughout summer. Register: florida4h.ifas.ufl.edu.
- Childcare Network **WonderQuest** Summer

**Camp:** Held at multiple locations, this themed adventure camp is open to children ages 5-12. Register: childcarenet-

#### **Variety & Specialty Camps**

- City of Destin Summer Camps: Various camps for children ages 5-12, including Half-Day Summer Camp (June 2-August 1), Cooking and Serving Classes, Soccer Camps and more. Fees and dates vary. Register: cityofdestin.com/reconline
- Boys & Girls Clubs of the Emerald Coast: From June 2 to August 6, the program serves children K-12 with educational, recreational and leadership-building activities. Register: emeraldcoastbgc.org
- Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida (Valparaiso): Children aged 5–12 can embark on a week-long journey through time at the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida's summer camp. Campers will engage in handson activities, games and crafts that bring history to life. The camp runs Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 12 p.m., with sessions available in July. \$75 for non-members; \$70 for museum members. Register: (850) 678-2615 or visit heritage-museum.

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