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Chasing Perfection:

Inside the World of the Blue Angels

By WILL ESTELL

Soaring by on a high-speed pass, barely one hundred feet above the runway—at a speed I'm told at the time is in excess of 700 mph—I can literally smell the fuel and feel the jet wash, before I hear the powerful roar of the F/A -18 Super Hornet as it soars by then climbs steeply just ahead of us, disappearing into the clouds, before diving back down in a corkscrew then leveling out about a mile away. All of this happens in about 20 seconds before another pilot with cojones of steel, and the skills to match, flies by completely inverted, slightly further away, but still close enough to feel the change in the atmosphere from where I am standing on the tarmac.

What I am witnessing up close and personal today is the same magical breath of patriotism that fans see at airshows all over this great country each year. The only difference is, today I'm taking it all in from the Blue Angels commu-



nication cart, surrounded by a small team of just eight of the Blues support staff, along with my wingman for the day, Blue Angels Public Affairs Officer, Lt. Ben Bushong.

Since being established in 1946, the U.S. Navy Blue Angels hold the unique distinction of being the most well-known aerobatic team in the entire world. While they regularly wow crowds with breathtaking performances right here in our own backyard,



their mission extends far beyond dazzling crowds at airshows, as they aim to inspire future generations of patriotic Americans, by demonstrating the unmatched aptitude, attitude and professionalism of the men and women serving in the U.S. armed forces.

These aero superstars do so much more than simply entertain with a breathtaking aerial showcase. Their performances represent thousands of hours of precision flight, discipline, unshakable resolve and the unwavering spirit of naval aviation. For decades, they've captivated millions with gravity-defying maneuvers, embodying the excellence and teamwork that define the U.S. Navy Blue Angels—or as we affectionally refer to them along our beautiful Northwest Florida coastal communities, The Blues. I

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Unsinkable Rose:

A Titanic-Inspired Adventure

By Tamara L. Young, PhD, Public Information Director for the World's Luckiest Fishing Village

If you've seen the movie Titanic, you'll remember Rose DeWitt Bukater (portrayed by Kate Winslet) who falls in love with Leonardo Di-Caprio's character.

But this is Rose Skelton, and she was in love with Glen Richard Skelton. And the ship she was on is bigger than the Titanic; over 100 feet longer, in fact. It's the SSUS and, to this very day, she holds the Blue Riband for the fastest transatlantic crossing by an ocean liner.

Acquired by Okaloosa County with the Tourist Development Department leading the way, the SSUS is prepping her way to becoming the world's largest artificial reef, a habitat for marine life and attracting divers and anglers from all over the world.

But before that, she had a long, storied life. One of those stories includes Destin City Councilmember Terésa Hebert. She was a baby

ROSE

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Magnolia Grill

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

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Community

BLUE ANGELS

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had the opportunity to spend a day inside the world of The Blues, guided by LT. Bushong, and gained some firsthand insight into their headquarters at NAS Pensacola. Including observing a morning flight meeting, pre-flight preparations, and the behind-the-scenes maintenance and logistics performed by their team of 158 active-duty Sailors and Marines, that keep this elite squadron at peak performance.

Here are some Q&As from my behind-the-scenes day with LT. Ben Bushong and the Blue Angels team, part of a multi-publication media experience with The Blues:

What is the age range of the pilots and does age play a part in the selection process?

The age of our pilots usually range from early 30s to late 40s. Age isn't necessarily a factor when applying for the team. All pilots need to have a minimum number of flight hours and experience to be able to apply.

As popular as the Blue Angels are around the country, how do you and your team feel about the escalation of attention after last year's hit Amazon original, The Blue Angels?

The film definitely gives



viewers an inside look into what it means to be a part of the U.S. Navy's flight demonstration squadron, and it does it for an entire show season, including the selection process and intense training that the pilots endure to get to where they are. As a team we're happy about the depiction and think the movie can only help bring our fans closer and hopefully create more interest in our mission.

Do the pilots still get any sense of nervousness when they fly or is it such a welloiled repetitive motion, due to all the practice and shows, that it becomes like driving your vehicle from home to work and back?

Everything we do is based on safety and having absolute complete trust in one another. We absolutely all have to count on that up there and on the ground. So, during winter training, we incorporate the crawl, walk, run mentality to continue to work towards the tight formations. As a team, we are always chasing perfection, 100% of the time.

What criteria would you say does play the largest part in the pilot and support team selection?

With all team members, trust and personality are two big factors when selecting new team members. If your current command is letting you apply for this team, then that means you have already checked all the boxes on paper for the prerequisites. But we are looking for people who would make great ambassadors for the Navy and Marine Corps, and someone that you would potentially spend 300 days on the road with in a given season. Our Maintainers and Crew Chiefs perform all the preflight inspections on every aircraft, so the pilots can strap in and go! It takes complete trust in a person, to be able to strap in and fly without performing your own preflight inspection of the aircraft. We are a successful team. because everybody has complete trust that the person next to you is doing their job effectively and efficiently.

With such vicious sched-

ules between practices, social and event obligations, and traveling 300 days per year, how much sleep does the average pilot get?

Wait...we're supposed to be sleeping too? [laughs] Thursday morning we fly to our show site. The first flight at every city is our "circles" flight, where we fly over the airfield to find all the checkpoints for the show. Followed by a practice. Thursdays are typically the longest, because it's a three-flight day: Transit, Checkpoint Flight and Practice. Friday we perform community outreach, visiting local schools and hospitals, then perform a full practice. Saturday and Sunday are show days, then we transit back to Pensacola after the show. Monday our team gets our day off, then it's back to Tuesday and Wednesday practices here in Pensacola. Actually, not getting enough sleep is never really too much of a factor. We always perform in the afternoons, so there's typically not many early mornings on the road.

Any other closing insight you and the team would like readers to know about the mission you all are fulfilling?

The Blue Angels are direct representatives of the 800,000 men and women serving in the Navy and Marine Corps. All of us are from the fleet and will return to the fleet after our time here. By design, our Navy and Marine Corps is expeditionary in nature, meaning all our operations are happening overseas and out of sight. The Blue Angels were designed to showcase the teamwork and professionalism of the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps to the American public, and like we always say, "We're glad to be here!"

Will Estell is a seasoned writer, editor, and media entrepreneur with over 700 published articles spanning regional and national publications. His work covers coastal tourism, real estate, dining, automotive reviews, and celebrity interviews, earning him a strong reputation in Northwest Florida media. Currently the Chief Creative Officer of Estell Hussey Media, LLC, Will has co-founded 12 magazine titles and served as editor-in-chief for several others. Originally from Booneville, Miss., Will is a father of three and lives in Destin and Navarre with his wife, ABC 3 news anchor Laura Hussey-Estell.



Published Monthly Mailed FREE to the communities of Fort Walton Beach, Okaloosa Island, Ocean City, Shalimar & Cinco Bayou (32547, 32548 and 32549)

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ROSE

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when her mother, Rose Skelton, took her and two of her siblings across the ocean to London.

Coming full circle this month, Terésa met up with her sister Juliana Skelton and their mother, who is now in her 90s and lives with Juliana in Mississippi. The three met in Mobile, Alabama, where crews are working on the ship to get her ready for deployment.

"I was too young to remember any of it, so my mother being one of the travelers on this massive ship was a surprise to me up until a year ago," said Terésa. I sit on the Destin City Council, and my husband heard us talking about the future artificial reef at a meeting that was being livestreamed, and he mentioned he thought that was the ship my mother had taken. So, to go from that to then getting

a chance to visit the ship together was incredible. Being able to see her sitting outside the ship and talking about having to deal with the three tiny little people that we were, all by herself, for the five days crossing. It was so amazing!"

It was toward the end of 1961 when Rose's husband Glen requested his next assignment to be at an Air Force base in the United Kingdom. Part of the government budget cuts at the time were that all dependent travel was suspended. "Military members had the option to resubmit requests for orders, but they would be unaccompanied tours," recalled Rose. "He received orders for Weathersfield AFB to arrive by April 1962. I wrote to my mother who was living in London and told her he was coming, but I couldn't afford the plane tickets to England."

Continued on next page





ROSE

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The only option was to go a more affordable route — by sea. "As our household goods wouldn't be shipped for free, we figured we could take more needed household items if we went by sea. The car had to be shipped by sea out of New Jersey, and the USS United States was in New York. So, it was easy for us all to take a road trip from Maxwell AFB in Montgomery to New York."

They chose the last cruise in April to book, right before the pricier summer rates kicked in for travelers.

"My husband was able to help bring our bags and steamer trunk onto the ship and get us settled in," said Rose.

Rose elicited laughter from Terésa and Juliana recalling what happened just after she waved goodbye to her husband. "As the ship's horn blasted, my eldest son wet his pants."

Her other memories were equally spirited. "Our room must have been on the upper deck, because I remember going downstairs to the dining room. I also remember the bar was very

close to our cabin, probably 30 feet away." One late night Rose slipped away for a drink while the kids (Terésa and her two brothers Dominic and Anthony) were sleeping. Dominic woke up crying, and that woke up Anthony, and soon enough the noise was heard outside the cabin by the steward. He headed to the bar to find Rose.

"She remembered dad giving her permission to leave and have a glass of wine each night," said Terésa. "And then of course the one night she does, Dominic needed her!"

Rose was quick to chime in with what a good baby Terésa was. "She just ate and slept, so when I put her down, it was easy for me and the boys to go to the dining room where we could eat. I don't remember seeing a lot of people, and for a couple of days the weather was so rough that we preferred to stay in the room. When we did go out on rough days, we had to hold onto the ropes that were strewn from one side of the ship to the other. I had friends who told me that I would have plenty of help with taking care of three little ones. Well, that wasn't the case as most of the passengers were

dependent wives in the same boat as I was. No pun intended!"

There was also the added complication that there were not disposable diapers. All of Rose's three kids on board wore cloth diapers at night, so "there was a lot of washing diapers out in the morning and hanging them around the cabin."

Soon enough, they arrived on land and found a place close to base, with the towels, pots, cutlery and other items she'd packed. It also wasn't long before "the budget opened

up and dependents were able to travel again on the government dime."

But Rose wouldn't have had their experience any other way. She's a part of history, having cruised on the SSUS. Due to a bit of walking instability, she was unable to tour the ship alongside Terésa and Juliana on their recent visit. Instead, Rose stood on the concrete slab next to the ship, looking up and wav-



ing enthusiastically as she saw her daughters through an upper deck porthole.

They all wish Glen was here to be part of this (he passed away in 2015 at the age of 81), but Terésa is grateful to have this experience with her mother.

"It was mixed emotions of funny, inspiring, and just happy she's still alive to be able to see the ship up close 63 years later.

Rose plans to travel to our area for the ship's deployment,

which is scheduled to take place later in 2025. The exact location in the Gulf has not been set, but it is expected to be about 20 miles south of the Florida Panhandle region in the Destin-Fort Walton Beach area.

Unlike the tragedy of the unexpected sinking of the Titanic, Rose said she is excited for the purposeful sinking of the SSUS and knowing it will continue to serve a valuable purpose.



Around Town

Women of Honor Recognized

The Okaloosa Commission on the Status of Women honored 26 women during its annual "Women of Honor" ceremony in May. The "Women of Honor" was first established as "Wall of Honor" by the OC-CSW in 1997 as an idea of its members who thought it would be a nice way for someone to honor the women in their lives whose works might be unknown to most others. Each honoree's name is added to a plaque at

UWF Emerald Coast's library, celebrating local women who made a significant impact in their communities.

The 2025 Women of Honor recipients include a remarkable group of leaders, educators, entrepreneurs, and volunteers who





have made lasting contributions across Okaloosa County and beyond.

Photo 1-First Row:

- Kathy Alexander, VP of RWOF, professional mathematician and civil servant at Eglin AFB
- Dana Allen, advocate for women in the workplace
- Tierra Barclay, Area Mgr., Sport Clips; national/state award-winning trainer and mentor
- Annette Breton, children's ministry leader and choir member, Wright Baptist Church
- Dr. Betsy Christianson, educator and former Aerospace Education Foundation Teacher of the Year
- Vanessa d'Aquin, Nurse Practitioner and Clinical Services Dir., Crossroads Center

Photo 1-Second Row:

- Elizabeth "Libby" Hill, Pres., Niceville Women's Republican Club; charter member, National League of Families (POW/MIA Southeast Asia)
- Kiiya Hillsman, single mother and role model of resilience
- Maria Howell, Pres., Emerald Coast Assn. of Realtors; Owner/Broker, Rev Realty
- Theri Isaacs, banking/ mortgage lender and Boys & Girls Club volunteer
- Narissa Jenkins, Founder/ CEO, Healing Hoof Steps, equine-assisted mental health provider
- Carol Kelley, mission volunteer, Women's Missionary Union and International English School

• Carrie Knife, chef/owner, Knife's Edge Café & Catering at Bob Hope Village

Photo 1-Third Row:

- Bonnie Nabors Pittock (posthumously, represented by son Jimmy Nabors), led Downtown FWB revitalization in the 1990s
- Dr. Gail Shorter-Judson, Dress for Success Emerald Coast volunteer
- Dina Smith, Board-Certified Psychometrist, 492nd SOF Preservation of Force & Family, Hurlburt Field
- Lisa Smith, owner, Creative Web Solutions; tech-savvy and community-minded
- Ann Walther Sprague, founder, Crestview Area Shelter for the Homeless; pianist and elder, Community of Christ
- Candace Tanner, founder, Downtown FWB Coffee Club
- Julie Gracela Webb, ABA therapist and founder of Advanced Sacred Hope Academy for children with autism

Photo 2-Front Row:

- Karen Englert, Senior Home Health Specialist, CenterWell; health-focused radio
- Trisha Graham, founding member/past pres., Okaloosa FAWL; former chair, County Commission on Status of Women
- Helen Harris, Pres., ADSO; owner, HH Arts
- Sharon Herbison, longtime volunteer, Emerald Coast Mustang Club





Mattie Kelly Arts Center 100 College Blvd East, Niceville



Tickets: https://mattiekellyartscenter.org/events





Happenings Around FWB

2025 **EVENTS**

JUNE

Women Veterans Ceremony 8 am | Destin-FWB Convention Ctr | FWB

> Community Art Swap 10 am | FWB Public Library | FWB

Greater FWB Chamber Nothing But Networking 11:30 am | The Salvation Army | Mary Esther

Concerts in the Village: Adrenalize: Music of Def Leppard

7 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation | Destin



- Live Music: The Teague Brothers Band 8 pm | Docie's Dock | FWB
- Beer Olympics 1 pm | Salt Hop Brewing | FWB
- Sensory Play Day 15 10 am | Surge Adventure Park | Mary Esther

Father's Day Dinner Cruise 6:30 pm | SunQuest Cruises | Miramar Beach



The Traveling Painter 5:30 pm | LJ Schooners Restaurant | Niceville

> Tini Tuesday 4 pm | Soundside Waterfront Bar | FWB

- 18 | Fireworks Show 9 pm | The Boardwalk | Okaloosa Island
- Mr. Larry's Kaleidoscope of Magic 10:30 am | FWB Public Library | FWB

Live Music: Gunner 8 pm | Soundside Waterfront Bar | FWB 4th Annual FORE! The Love of Animals Golf Tournament benefiting Alaqua Animal Refuge 8:30 am | The Links Golf Club at Sandestin | Miramar Beach



Repticon

9 am | Destin FWB Fairgrounds & Events Center | FWB

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

Spring Sprouts Kids Clothing Pop Up Swap 10 am | The Place on Beal | FWB

Repticon

10 am | Destin FWB Fairgrounds & Events Center | FWB

Book Lovers Workshop: Shadows and Lightning

12 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB

- City of FWB City Council Meeting 4:30 pm | FWB City Council Chambers | FWB
- Fireworks Show 25 9 pm | The Boardwalk | Okaloosa Island
- Greater FWB Chamber Business After Hours 5:30 pm | Run With It | FWB
- Family Movie Night 7 pm | Native's Cove | Mary Esther
- June Jam 11 am | Boys & Girls Club of Pensacola | Pensacola



Sunset Shrimp Boil 29 5:30 pm | LJ Schooners Restaurant | Niceville

JULY

- 01 | Tini Tuesday 4 pm | Soundside Waterfront Bar | FWB
- The Boardwalk Fireworks Show! 9 pm | Boardwalk | Okaloosa Island
- AJ's Stars & Stripes Celebration! 03 ALL - DAY BBQ & LIVE MUSIC! 9 pm | Fireworks | AJ's on the Bayou | FWB

Lego Club 2 pm | FWB Public Library | FWB 4th of July Dinner Cruise

6 pm | SunQuest Cruises | Miramar Beach



FWB Library Friends Meeting 6 pm | FWB Public Library | FWB

ONGOING EVENTS

VFW Post 7674 - Sunday Breakfasts 8 - 11:30 am | Sun | 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

Island Concert Series

6 pm | Wed | The Island Resort | Okaloosa Island

Fireworks

9 pm | Wed | The Boardwalk | Okaloosa Island

Live Trivia Nights

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

Karaoke Night

7 pm | Thurs | Soundside Waterfront Bar | FWB

Sounds of the Summer! Live by **Emerald Coast Theatre Company** 7:30 pm | Thurs | Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach

FARMERS MARKETS

Okaloosa County

Saturdays | 7 am - 2 pm

1954 Lewis Turner Blvd | FWB

Downtown FWB

2nd & 4th Saturdays | 8 am - 1 pm

FWB Landing Park

Grand Boulevard

Saturdays | 9 am - 1 pm

Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach











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Billion Dollar Investment:

One million square foot high-volume aviation gas turbine engine manufacturing facility to be constructed at Shoal River Industrial Park in Okaloosa County

The State of Florida and Williams International have announced a major capital investment expected to total more than \$1 billion in Okaloosa County—easily placing the project among the largest in the history of the Northwest Florida region. This announcement follows a comprehensive, multi-state search initiated by aerospace and aviation manufacturer Williams International in 2023.

Williams International's planned high-volume aviation

gas turbine engine manufacturing facility will be constructed in three phases within the Shoal River Industrial Park. Numerous state, regional and local partners worked together to facilitate this major economic development success story for Northwest Florida.

In 2022, Gov. Ron DeSantis awarded \$3.2 million through the Florida Job Growth Grant Fund to expand manufacturing in Okaloosa County. FloridaCommerce partnered with several state and local organi-



zations including CareerSource Florida, Florida's Great Northwest, Space Florida, Okaloosa County and Triumph Gulf Coast on this major economic development win for Florida.

"This billion-dollar investment is a major win for the Free State of Florida and for Floridians," said Gov. DeSantis. "Williams International's investment in the Florida Panhandle will create more than 330 jobs, and is a success story of the Florida Job Growth Grant Fund in Northwest Florida."

"Under Gov. DeSantis' leadership, Florida continues to attract advanced manufacturing throughout the state-strengthening Florida's economy and creating opportunities for job seekers and job creators," said Secretary of Commerce J. Alex Kelly. "This is a win for Northwest Florida and was made possible through partnership with CareerSource Florida, Okaloosa County, One Okaloosa EDC, Space Florida and Triumph Gulf Coast—Williams International's investment in Florida will drive long-term economic growth and opportunity."

"We are very excited about starting our next phase of growth in Northwest Florida," said Gregg Williams, Chairman, President, and CEO of Williams International. "We are grateful to the Triumph board and for the strong, unified support from all of our Florida stakeholders that will enable us to create many high quality, high technology jobs pro-

ducing the world's best gas turbine engines."

"This is an exciting win for Northwest Florida's growing aviation industry sector, said Triumph Gulf Coast Chair Jay Trumbull, Sr. "Triumph is proud to continue its commitment to developing high paying jobs in the region. We are especially pleased to see this major manufacturer choose the Shoal River Industrial Park as its new home!"

"Northwest Florida is proving itself to be a rising hub for aerospace activity and an essential part of Florida's expanding aerospace ecosystem. Williams International's expansion in this community is a stellar example of how new opportunities for innovation and investment are being built in every corner of the state—reinforcing all of Florida as the global and interplanetary center for aerospace commerce," said Rob Long, president and CEO, Space Florida.

"This is a monumental project that will have a lasting impact on both Okaloosa County's economy and the entire region," said Commissioner Paul Mixon, Okaloosa County Board of County Commissioners. "We are fortunate to have been able to invest in the infrastructure at Shoal River Industrial Park to

attract an aerospace industry leader like Williams International, and I am thankful to One Okaloosa EDC and Florida Commerce for their hard work and support in this effort."

"Today's announcement is a true testament to the importance of preparation, partnerships and persistence. Without key partners like Gov. DeSantis, FloridaCommerce, Triumph Gulf Coast, Florida's Great Northwest and many others who consistently supported Okaloosa County's vision for Shoal River Industrial Park, our community would not be celebrating this tremendous success today," said Nathan Sparks, Executive Director, One Okaloosa EDC

The company's first 250,000 sq. ft. facility is slated to begin construction later this year, with completion scheduled for late 2026. Subsequent facilities will be constructed in 2028, with the final 500,000 sq. ft. planned for the 2035/2036 timeframe.

Headquartered in Pontiac, Mich., Williams International is the world leader in the design, manufacturing and support of aviation gas turbine engines. In addition to its world class reputation for customer support, Williams International is also well known for establishing highly integrated and automated manufacturing facilities in the world to support high-quality, high-volume production and on-schedule delivery of its rapidly growing family of commercial and military products. Visit www.Williams-Int.com.

Okaloosa County Honors Troop 544 for Locating Missing Child

Okaloosa County Board Chairman Paul Mixon recently presented a proclamation to Scouting America Troop 544 in recognition of their role in locating a missing 11-year-old autistic child in April.

While gathering for a weekly meeting near Ferry Park in Fort Walton Beach, the scouts were approached by law enforcement and quickly organized a search. Led by older scouts and an assistant scoutmaster, the troop found the child hiding in nearby bushes as the sun was setting. They stayed with him and kept him calm until authorities arrived, helping prevent a potentially dangerous situation.



"The actions of Troop 544 not only showcased their dedication to scouting principles but also emphasized the importance of community engagement and support in times of crisis," said Okaloosa County Board Chairman Paul Mixon.

Scouting helps youth build character, leadership, and confidence through service and adventure. Learn more at scouting.org.

There's a lot to LOVE about Fort Walton Beach!

TO SEE WHAT IS HAPPENING

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Recycling

By Carolyn Newcomer KETCHEL

Okaloosa County, in partnership with Waste Managementthe largest recycler in North America—is committed to recycling. Items like cardboard, cereal boxes and plastic bottles placed in your bin begin a recycling journey, transforming into new products such as clothing, shipping boxes, and playground equipment.

What else can recycled materials be turned into? A variety of new paper products such as carboard boxes, napkins and printer paper, pellets for packing, new cans for soda, fabrics and even carpet. Did you know that the carpet at VPS Airport is recycled fishing line? Check out blue carpet the next time you are in the Airport!

When visiting the local recycling facility on Ready Avenue in Fort Walton Beach recently, it was interesting that so much of the process is automated and



uses Artificial Intelligence (AI) to sort products. Thousands of tons of products are processed each day. To watch a quick video of the machines in action, type https://bit.ly/RecycleRightinOkaloosa into your search browser. It's amazing!

The drivers pick up your recyclables and take them to the plant to sort. The material is loaded into a drum feeder for the first stage of sorting. Optical Sensors use Aİ Technology that takes over to sort aluminum, glass, paper and plastics. After the materials are collected, sorted and baled, they are sold to manufacturers to be used again. This is crucial to advancing a circu-

lar economy where products can be used again and again. Waste Management is committed to insuring a more sustainable to-

help you recycle correctly:

- Recycle clean bottles, cans, paper, plastic containers (#1, #2, #5) and cardboard.
- Flatten all cardboard and paper board for recycling.
- · Keep batteries, propane tanks, liquids and food out of your recycling.
- Do not bag your recyclables. Plastic trash bags are a big issue at the plant. Please do not place plastic trash bags in your recycling nor use plastic bags to contain your recyclable materi-

The most important takeaway from this newsletter is this: please do not put anything into plastic trash bags or take-home grocery bags. Recyclables stuck inside plastic bags are at risk for never making it through the recycling process.

Things that should not go into your curbside recycling bin

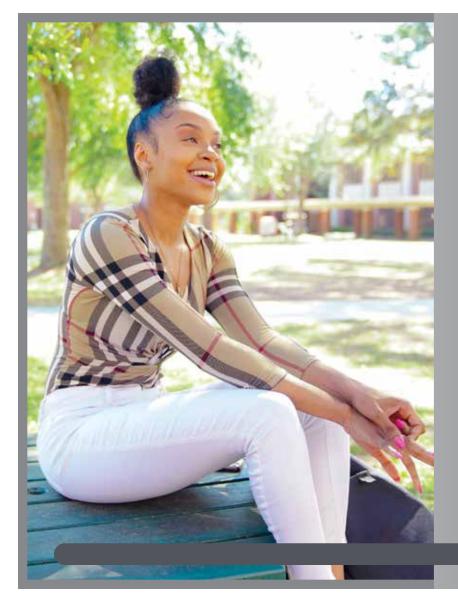
• Flexible packaging like chip Here are four simple tips to bags and juice or soup pouches

- Cups with plastic or waxed coatings - even the plastic lids should be trashed
- Polystyrene foam "to-go" containers and cups
- Tanglers or twists like old rope, cord, or water hoses can wrap around equipment, endanger workers and shut down entire recycling centers.
- · Clothing, textiles, shower curtains, mini-pools, fencing and
- Medical waste, car parts, scrap metal, tires, oil filters, propane cylinders and the like pose a safety hazard and should never go in curbside recycling or waste bins.

Remember, recycling works when we work together as a community!

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

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Forner Vietnam Refugees Celebrate **Historic Rescue of 1975**

By Barbara Palmgren

On Saturday, May 3, former refugees from across the nation gathered to reunite and share memories at the Vietnam Refugee Camp Exhibit created in their honor and staged in the 1,400 sq. foot new Exhibit Hall of the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida. Eglin AFB was one of three camps set up to house over 10,000 refugees fleeing after the fall of Saigon at the end of the long Vietnam War in

Museum trustees, management and volunteers spent days preparing for this historical event. Special archival gloves were used to view original documents. Elegantly decorated tables set for lunch invited guests to enjoy a delicious buffet lunch donated by Tom Rice of Magnolia Grill.

With retired military personnel and former camp volunteers, everyone viewed oral histories, editions of the Dot Moi newspaper written both in English and Vietnamese, and the expansive photos and newspaper articles enlarged and arranged chronologically on the walls of the room. The three phases were Phase One-The Buildup (April 27-May 23); Phase II-The Pipeline (May 24-June 25); Phase III- The Phasedown (June 29-September 19.)

Images in Phase One were part of a 2010 exhibit, symposium and regional initiative commemorating the 75th anniversary of Eglin AFB and next on display in the library at Northwest Florida State College. The images are part of the Vietnam Center and Archive at Texas Tech University from which the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida received permission to use the images for this current exhibit. The 2010 exhibit was curated by Michelle Jannazo, former Executive Director of the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida. Phase two and three were curated by Dr. Barbara Palmgren, Secretary and Exhibits Chair of the Heritage Museum, with digitized photos and copies of the Dot Moi daily papers from Col. Bill Keeler's private collection. Oral histories were videotaped by Mike Weaver, Trustee for the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida. The large tent exhibit was designed by Frank Berte, Destin Interactive. Trustee Jene McCraken and husband Bill Mc-Cracken digitized photos and articles preserved and now shared on a kiosk in the exhibit.

On Sunday, May 4, the re-

union continued with former refugees boarding a bus and visiting the actual camp site itself. Ken Walsh, Marketing Chair for the museum, accompanied the group to this site on Eglin Air Force Base and observed that all visitors were enthusiastic. He noted, "The older ones were excited to show their children and grandchildren this location and pointed out specific details although the original tent city had been removed." Kim Delevett shared, "I couldn't believe I was walking on the same ground as my two-year-old self."

Barbara Palmgren met refugee organizer, Kim Delevett, in 2021 when Kim visited to see photos and articles about the refugee camp. Kim was only two years old in 1975. Once Barbara knew the museum would build the new Exhibit Hall in 2024 from initial funds received through an Impact 100 grant and further contributions from over 80 people, she began working

on the exhibit. Barbara and Kim together prepared for this special reunion corresponding to the 50th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War.

One of the highlights of the event was a Zoom meeting with Col. Ray Beery now residing in Virginia. Col. Bill Keeler, appointed by General Lane to oversee the operation as Refugee Liaison Officer, attended the reunion with his wife and spoke to the group, sharing his congratulations and memories. He wanted to be sure that everyone in the camp received proper care in a stressful situatison. Suddenly leaving their homeland with little or no knowledge of the English language, classes were set up at the camp to begin a journey into citizenship in the United State of America.

One of the translators for the camp, Nghiep Tran Duy Qyoc, shared poignant memories with former refugees now living and speaking perfect English. He was on-site daily to help with cultural adjustments and his wife, Mary, was present at several births. Marriages, schools, recreation, food and helping with outside jobs, especially in the fishing industry, were part of the five-month experience. Former refugees shared their stories as well and several volunteers were



also be sent to the Vietnam Center and Archive at Texas Tech University. Several non-profit and church groups helped find sponsorships throughout the nation for each refugee. Both Col. Keeler and Col. Beery were proud of the job

accomplished in a short amount

of time. Everyone received a

sponsorship before hurricane

videotaped to be part of the oral

histories now collected by the

Heritage Museum of Northwest

Florida. These oral histories will

season in Northwest Florida. Amid a total disruption of their former lives, these former refugees had only praise and thanks for those who reached out to help them in a strange new environment. Tears flowed, hugs were constant, and grateful joy continued all morning. Jene McCraken, Collections Chair, handed out additional information as well for the former refugees to take with them.

What took years of planning and work between Kim and Barbara would soon be just a memory of a short stay in the tent city. What the former refugees left with was a reminder that friendships happen regardless of a language barrier. Friendships happen at the strangest times and for the best reasons. Friendships last forever.



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The Tide Is Going Out: Why Pricing, Timing and Mindset Matter Now More Than Ever



By Paul Domenech

If you're thinking about putting your home on the market, let me give it to you straight: the old rules don't apply anymore. Pricing is no longer about what your neighbor sold for last year or even last month — it's about what's active right now, what's sitting and where the market is heading.

We're in a shift. High inventory means more competition. More homes on the market = more pressure to stand out. And that means sellers need to take a "price is right" approach — not a "hope it works out" approach. Looking at past sales in today's market is like trying to drive forward while staring in the rearview mirror. It's not going to get you where you want to go.

The homes that are sitting are telling a story. Days on market are climbing. Price cuts are increasing. And when price reductions start showing up across the board, those past sales you've been banking on? They become irrelevant.

So how do you win?

You create separation — not participation.

Don't list your home at the same price as everyone else and hope for the best. List where the market is going — not where it's been. Price just ahead of the next wave of reductions, and you position your home as the deal buyers have been waiting for. You become the standout, not the one stuck waiting.

And let's talk presentation. If you want to maximize your val-



ue, focus on the details buyers don't want to deal with:

- Fresh paint
- Clean floors
- Pressure-washed exterior
- Fogged windows replaced
- Chipped paint handled
- Simple, neat landscaping

These aren't major renovations — they're high-impact touch-ups. Most buyers would rather roll that extra \$10,000 into a 30-year mortgage than come out of pocket after closing. Make it easy for them to say yes.

Now, for the buyers who are sitting on the sidelines, waiting for interest rates to drop — I

get it. But let's be honest: what you're really hoping for is that rates drop and everything else stays the same. That's not how this works.

When rates drop, buyer demand goes up. Competition spikes. And guess what? Home prices usually follow.

So, while you might save a few hundred bucks a month on interest, you may be paying tens of thousands more on the house — and fighting to win the offer.

Here's the truth: there's never a perfect time to buy. Anyone who says they timed it perfectly is just lucky, or lying. But if

you're buying a home for your life, not just your portfolio — it's never a bad time.

And if you want to find opportunity? Look at the homes that have been sitting. Be willing to do some work. That's where the real value lives. Add your touch, build equity and move forward knowing you made a decision based on your reality—not someone else's predictions.

Bottom line: Whether you're buying or selling, this market rewards clarity, not hesitation.

Do the work. Make the move. Control what you can.

Because the tide is going out — and those who act with strategy and intention won't get swept away.

What to talk more about the sale or purchase of a home reach out to your HOMEboy at Itspauly.com.

We'll never sell you anything — we just tell you the truth with a system that sells. Let's get to work.

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Eglin Federal Credit Union Celebrates Grand Opening of New Operations Center

By Laura Coale

Eglin Federal Credit Union (Eglin FCU) recently opened its state-of-the-art Operations Center, a milestone in the credit union's comprehensive growth and expansion project. The event was marked by a celebratory gathering attended by board members, volunteers,

team members and partners who supported the successful completion of this project.

Eglin FCU's President/ CEO, Cathie Staton, expressed her gratitude and excitement during the opening ceremony. "This Operations Center is a testament to our commitment to innovation and excellence," said Staton. "We believe that a well-designed space can inspire creativity and productivity, and we are thrilled to offer our employees a dynamic and inviting atmosphere that reflects our corporate values."

The new Operations Center, a four-story, 100,000-squarefoot building, includes an attached parking garage and is designed to accommodate up to 400 employees. It features energy-efficient windows, geothermal wells, charging stations for employees' electric vehicles, and flexible interior workspaces designed for employee comfort and efficiency. The bright and open workspaces foster

creativity, collaboration and communication, with various types of collaboration spaces, balconies and outdoor tables with shading.

The building also houses a state-of-the-art training center, an expanded call center with chat and text support, a growing Video Teller team and departments such as loan services, indirect lending, collections, Information Technology, Information Systems, mortgage services, facilities management and operations training and projects. Additionally, the Operations Center can serve as a disaster recovery site if needed.

Staton highlighted the collaborative efforts that made this project possible, recognizing key contributors including the board of directors, volunteers, President Emeritus Jerry Williams, former COO Kenny Girot and several team members who were involved from the beginning such as SVP/CTO



BUILDING PHOTO CREDIT: JOHN MAGNOSKI

Tim Farnsworth, SVP/CIO Rocky Magee, SVP/COO Kim Nauta, and Facilities Manager/ Security Officer Alan Campbell. Staton also acknowledged the La Macchia Group for its excellent work on the design and build of the Operations Center. "We embrace the credit union philosophy of people helping people, and we believe that when you lead with values and do the right things, good things happen," Staton added. "We are excited to continue to attract and retain new employees and members, while having room to grow and deliver fivestar service."

EFCU's new Operations Center marks a major milestone in its growth. Learn more at lamacchiagroup.com and visit eglinfcu.org for updates, financial education or career opportunities.



continued from page 4

Photo 2-Back Row:

- Dr. Eleanor McCain, Medical Dir., Bridgeway Center Health Clinic, advocate for underserved patients
- Linda McCooey, CEO, Natural Fuel Solution; Honorary Regent, Choctawhatchee Bay DAR
- Brianna O'Brien, owner, Destin Blowout Bar; founder, The Ground Up Project (autism support)

Visit OCCSW.com or call 850-685-8027.

Fort Walton Beach Viking Softball Makes History!

The Fort Walton Beach High School Softball Team captured its first-ever FHSAA 4A State Championship with a thrilling 7–6 win over American Heritage in Longwood, FL.

Capping off a standout 23–8 season, the Vikings showed grit and determination throughout the playoffs. Izzy Douglas dominated on the mound, going 7–0 in the postseason, while Anna Beyhl delivered the game-winning RBI in the sixth inning.

Congratulations, Vikings—you made history!

SMSgt Amber Burke Named 2025 AF/SF Outstanding Instructor of the Year

Fort Walton Beach High School proudly celebrates SMSgt Amber Burke, who has been named the 2025 Overall Air





Post-Acute Care and Long-Term Care -

The Choice is Yours

By Teresa Halverson, Area Director of Community Relations, Destination Health and Rehabilitation

Initiating discussions about long-term care is a vital step in ensuring the well-being and quality of life for your family members. We encourage families to consider the benefits of having these important conversations. It not only fosters understanding and collaboration among family members but also empowers them to navigate the complexities of long-term care with confidence. Evaluating short term post-acute and longterm care facilities for yourself or a loved one can be a challenging and emotional process. Long Term Care Facilities (aka Nursing Homes) are licensed by the State of Florida and are certified by Medicare and Medicaid.

Did you know that long-term care facilities also offer postacute short-term care rehabilitation services? After a hospital stay, an individual may be admitted for short term rehabilitation. Individualized therapy plans are designed to cater specifically to the patient, ensuring that he/she regains mobility and independence as swiftly and effectively as possible, allowing them to return home to their daily activities and loved ones.

By discussing long-term care options early on, families can explore the various services available, including specialized therapy programs that enhance rehabilitation and recovery. Our innovative approach to therapy focuses on individualized attention, ensuring that each resident receives the support they deserve to thrive.

At Destination Health and Rehabilitation, we understand how important it is to find a place that feels like home, where compassionate care and personalized attention are at the forefront. Here are some steps to guide you in your search:

1. Assess Your Needs: Begin by identifying the specific needs of your loved one. Consider their medical requirements, mobility limitations and personal preferences. Understanding these factors will help you narrow down your options and find a facility that can meet their unique needs.

- 2. Research Facilities: Look for long-term care facilities in your area, focusing on their services, reputation, and reviews. Websites, social media and word-of-mouth recommendations from friends or health-care providers can provide valuable insights.
- 3. Visit Potential Facilities: Schedule tours of the facilities you are considering. Pay attention to the environment, cleanliness, and staff interactions with residents. Trust your instincts—if a place feels welcoming and compassionate, that's a positive sign.
- 4. Inquire About Personalized Care Options: At Destination Health and Rehabilitation, we pride ourselves on offering specialized nursing and therapy services tailored to various conditions. Our dedicated clinical team is committed to assisting residents in their recovery and enhancing their overall quality of life. Ask about the types of therapy available and

how they can be customized for your loved one.

- **5. Evaluate Staff Qualifications:** It's essential to know that the staff is well-trained and compassionate. Ask about their qualifications, experience and the facility's staff-to-resident ratio to ensure your loved one will receive the attention they deserve.
- 6. Understand the Costs and Payment Options: Inquire about the costs associated with the facility and what payment options are available. Understanding the financial aspect will help you make an informed decision. Many may accept commercial insurance for post-acute care (short term Rehabilitation). Long term care is normally paid by Private Pay, LTC Insurance or Medicaid. Medicare does not cover long term care.
- 7. Get Feedback from Current Residents and Families: If possible, talk to current residents and their families to gather their perspectives on the quality of care and overall environment.

Destination Health and Rehabilitation Facility is a premier skilled nursing and rehab facility ready to assist you. We are here to support you in navigating this important decision. Our commitment to personalized care and specialized therapy services means that your loved one will receive the help they need to thrive. We invite you to reach out to us for guidance and to learn more about how we can assist you and your family through this journey. Our team provides compassionate support and expertise every step of the

If you have questions or would like to seek a consultation, we encourage you to reach out to us. We are excited to be a new provider in our area and look forward to meeting the needs of the community. For additional information, please call our admissions Department at 850-654-4588 for more information and to schedule a tour.

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2025 Okaloosa County Mosquito Control Schedule

FROM NICK TOMECEK, OKALOOSA COUNTY PIO

Okaloosa County Mosquito Control and the Florida Department of Health urge the public to remain diligent in their personal mosquito protection efforts. These should include remembering to "SWAT."

- Stay inside with screened doors and windows when mosquitoes are biting (dusk and dawn).
- When outside, wear clothing that covers skin.
- Apply mosquito repellant that includes DEET [N, N diethyl-m-toluamide] on your skin when you are outside
- · Turn over standing water where mosquitoes lay eggs or rid your outdoor area of standing water in which mosquitoes can lay their eggs.

Remember to apply all mosquito repellants in accordance with the recommended frequency and methods suggested by the manufacturer.

Okaloosa County Mosquito Control suggests the following steps to prevent mosquito-borne illnesses:

- DRAIN standing water to stop mosquitoes from multiplying: Drain water from garbage cans, house gutters, buckets, pool covers, coolers, children's toys, flower pots or any other containers where sprinkler or rain water has collected
- · Discard tires*, drums, bottles, cans, pots and pans, broken appliances and other items that aren't being used.
- Empty and clean birdbaths and pets water bowls at least once or twice a week.
- · Protect boats and vehicles from rain with tarps that don't accumulate water.
- Maintain swimming pools in good condition and appropriately chlorinated. Empty plastic swimming pools when not in use.
- * Waste tires can be dropped off FREE to residents at the South Okaloosa County Transfer Station and the Baker Landfill. Free waste tire drop-off is limited to passenger car and light truck tires, with a cap of five tires per household per month. Businesses are required to pay a small

COVER skin with clothing or repellent:

Clothing: Wear shoes, socks, and long pants and long-sleeves. This type of protection may be necessary for people who must work in areas where mosquitoes are present.

Repellent: Apply mosquito repellent to bare skin and clothing. Always use repellents according to the label. Repellents with DEET, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus and IR3535 are effective. Netting: Use mosquito netting to protect children vounger than two months old.

COVER doors and windows with screens to keep mosquitoes out of your house. Repair broken screening on windows, doors, porches, and patios.

The County Mosquito Control Program sprays throughout the county, excluding state and federal lands. Treatments typically begin an hour before sunset or after sunrise, aligning with peak mosquito activity, though spraying may occasionally occur outside these times. By law, all spraying must be justified using surveillance data and approved methods. Schedules may shift due to weather or equipment is-

Beyond spraying, the county runs a robust larviciding program, treating around 2,000 sites that are regularly monitored. In addition, over 750 ponds and spots with standing water are stocked with gambusia fish, which feed on mosquito larvae and reproduce quickly.

Residents are encouraged to vaccinate their outdoor animals against mosquito-borne diseases. Horses need protection against Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) through vaccination. While West Nile and EEE can pop up year-round, they peak in August, September, and October. Horses require two vaccine shots, spaced three to six weeks apart, followed by boosters every three to six months. Dog owners should also ensure their pets are treated for heartworms, as some mosquitoes in Okaloosa County can transmit this disease too.

The schedule for the Destin area is Mondays from the Wal-



ton County Line to Airport Rd., and Tuesdays from Airport Rd. to the Destin Bridge.

For the full mosquito spray schedule, preventative tips and other related information, visit https://www.myokaloosa.com/ pw/environmental/mosquito-control.

To view the interactive spray schedule map showing the general treatment areas organized by days of the week, visit https:// experience.arcgis.com/experience/78a38f77f8d94511ad1e-2ab55027a1c3. The Mosquito Control Division of Public Works is open Monday through Thursday from 8 a.m. until 4:30 p.m., (850) 651-7394 or (850) 689-5772.



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AROUND TOWN

continued from page 10

Force/Space Force Outstanding Instructor of the Year. She was also honored as the Region 2 winner—recognizing her as one of the nation's very best in Air Force Junior ROTC (AFJROTC).

A pillar of leadership, mentorship, and service, SMSgt Burke has left a profound mark on the Viking JROTC program, her students, and the broader community.

"This recognition is a testament to SMSgt Burke's unwavering commitment to excellence and service. She exemplifies leadership and inspires our students to reach their fullest potential. We are incredibly proud of her and grateful for the positive influence she has on our cadets and the school community." Principal Lindsey Smith echoed this sentiment, adding: "SMSgt Burke's dedication to her students and her leadership within our JROTC program is truly outstanding. She embodies the values of hard work, integrity, and mentorship, making a difference in the lives of so many. We are honored to have

her leading our Viking JROTC program."

Presented by the Department of the Air Force, the AFJROTC Outstanding Instructor Awards honor those who go above and beyond in shaping cadets. SMSgt Burke's dedication reflects the highest Air Force Core Valuesand continues to inspire all who know her.

FWBHS William Kiker Makes Debate History with Second National Title

Fort Walton Beach High School senior William Kiker has made history as the first student ever to win the Incubate Debate National Championship twice. His latest victory came at the 2025 championship in Sarasota, Fla., where he triumphed after two rigorous final rounds debating the future of the Department of Education and the Department of Government Efficiency.

The prestigious event brought together top student debaters from 10 states, including California, Washington, Georgia and South Carolina, covering key national topics such as immigration policy, NATO involvement and federal agency structure.

"Winning Nationals once



is hard. William Kiker has just done it twice—the first time in Incubate history," said Incubate Debate Founder James Fishback. "He's a brilliant young man with an incredible future ahead of him."

Superintendent Chambers added, "William's dedication to debate and his commitment to excellence are truly inspiring. His ability to think critically, articulate his ideas, and compete at the highest level sets an incredible example for students across our

Kiker's historic achievement reflects not only personal excellence, but the power of debate in shaping future leaders.

Learn more at incubatedebate.org.



Gulf Coast Prepared: Readying Your Property for Extreme Heat & Storms

By Todd Morris

I've lived and worked along Florida's Gulf Coast long enough to know how quickly things can change. One minute, the sun's out and the beach is calling—and the next, you're pulling out storm prep checklists and securing the shutters. The good news? A little maintenance ahead of time can save you a whole lot of trouble later.

As someone who's been part of this community for years—living here, working here and walking through plenty of job sites—I've seen how a little planning goes a long way. Folks who keep up with maintenance usually come through storms and long summers with fewer problems and a lot less stress. So, if you're like me—someone who'd rather be fixing things before they break—here's what you should know.

The Quiet Culprit — Heat and Salt Air: Living and working this close to the coast has its perks, but the salt air and summer heat can quietly wear things down. Salt particles in the air settle on your windows and frames, especially anything metal. Over time, they eat away at the finish and start corroding

anything they touch—including your window seals. Once those seals go, you're looking at foggy glass, less insulation and more strain on your air conditioning.

The heat doesn't help either. Hot days followed by cooler nights cause your windows to expand and contract constantly. That stress makes seals crack and eventually fail. Once moisture starts getting between the panes, you've got a problem that's only going to get worse.

Cleaning your windows regularly gets rid of the salt before it can do any real damage. And when your windows are clean and working like they should, your home stays cooler, your energy bills stay lower and you avoid costly replacements down the line.

Recognizing Warning Signs: Protecting Against Damage: Take a slow walk around your home or business and really look at each window. Run your hand along the edges. If anything feels soft, warped or drafty—make a note of it. A little attention now could save you a big repair bill later.

metal. Over time, they eat away at the finish and start corroding or signs of water leaks? Don't ig-



nore them. Are you seeing cloudiness between the panes? That's not dirt—it's usually a broken seal. These are early signs your window seals might be compromised. Rust on hinges or latches? That means salt and moisture are doing damage. Mildew or mold around the corners? Water might already be getting in.

Even small things—like a rise in your energy bill—can point to problems with your seals or insulation. If you don't address them, these issues can let water seep into your walls and framing, leading to rot, mold and major structural problems.

The sooner you catch these issues, the better. Keith Window Company is a great go-to for that kind of work.

Storm Readiness: Win-

dows, Doors and Shutters: Once you've checked for warning signs, a solid storm plan starts with a hands-on look at your windows and shutters. Check your window seals by looking for cracks in the caulking or feeling for any air leaks around the edges—especially on windy days.

When it comes to shutters, don't wait for a storm to see if they work. Open and close them a couple times each season to make sure the tracks are clear and everything locks in place like it should. Spray a little lubricant if they're sticking.

And don't overlook your yard. Make sure large tree limbs are trimmed back away from your home. Branches that hang near windows or doors can snap off in high winds and do serious damage.

Hurricane season's no joke. If windows are dirty, trapped grit and salt can scratch the glass when shutters go up—like sandpaper in high winds. A proper cleaning before storm prep helps avoid that.

While you're at it, give your doors, screens and storm shutters a once-over. I recommend calling Higgins Home Repair or Seaview Glass & Mirror if you need screen or patio door work.

For new windows, City Glass or G&S Glass are solid choices.

Also—don't leave outdoor furniture or signs unsecured. It doesn't take much wind to turn something small into a big problem. And check the weather-stripping and caulking on your windows and doors. If it's peeling or cracked, water's going to find a way in.

And here's the bigger picture: fixing these issues now doesn't just save you money—it strengthens your home or business before the next big storm. Solid seals, dry walls and windows that work like they should all add up to a structure that's ready to handle whatever weather rolls in.

Community Strength — **Your Local Experts:** We've got a strong community here on the Gulf Coast. At Fish Window Cleaning, we take pride in teaming up with other local pros to help you stay ready, safe and in control—no matter what the season brings.

If window care is on your list this season, we're always here to help. Fish Window Cleaning works across the Gulf Coast and can take one more task off your plate—so you can focus on enjoying all the good parts of coastal living, with fewer surprises.

Get the Smile You Deserve

Smile with Confidence Again

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

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







By Julie A. Martin

As we do every year, Bay Life is bringing readers up-to-date guidance on preparing for hurricane season—this time with the help of local expert Abora Insurance. With this year's storms predicted to be more frequent and intense and Hurricane Season beginning June 1, making sure your homeowner's and flood insurance policies are in order is more critical now than ever.

Here are the essential coverages every Florida homeowner should review now:

Hurricane & Wind Coverage

Most Florida policies (HO3, DP3, HO6, HO4) include hurricane, named storm or wind/hail coverage under a separate deductible. Ideally, your wind

Storm-Ready Starts with Coverage: What You Need to Know Before Hurricane Season

coverage should be included in your main home policy to avoid gaps. If your insurer doesn't offer wind in your area, you'll need a stand-alone wind policy—and must ensure coverage details match to avoid surprises.

Tip: "Hurricane" coverage typically offers the best protection, applying your larger deductible only to named hurricanes. Smaller deductibles would apply to other wind-related damage.

Coverage A (Dwelling Limit)

Make sure your home is insured for today's rebuild costs—not what it cost years ago. Data shows nearly 2 in 3 homes are underinsured. If disaster strikes, inadequate coverage could leave you paying thousands out of pocket.

Loss of Use (or Loss of Rents)

This coverage pays for temporary housing if your home is unlivable. For landlords, Loss of Rents ensures continued income during repairs. Not all rental policies include this—check with your agent. Remember, there needs to be direct physical



damage to trigger this coverage. Some rental policies don't include Loss of Rents so you will want to read your policy or call your insurance agent so you know for sure.

Law or Ordinance Coverage

Florida's building codes change often, especially after major storms. If your home needs to be rebuilt to new code, this coverage helps cover the added cost. Most carriers, if they have it available, offer either 10%, 25% or 50% coverage. This percentage is tied to your Dwelling Limit. If you have extensive hurricane damage, like we saw with Hurricane Michael, there may be new

building codes you must adhere to in order to rebuild. The additional Law or Ordinance coverage is crucial to your protection, since your policy is designed to rebuild your home as it was before the damage, with similar materials and quality, and not with more costly materials that could now be required by more stringent construction codes that may have come into play. After storms like Hurricane Michael, this protection proved essential.

Flood Insurance

Standard homeowners insurance does not cover flood damage—and floodwaters can result from both hurricanes and regular rain events. While some carriers offer limited flood endorsements, most homeowners need a separate flood policy. Although there are a few carriers who will add flood coverage as an endorsement to a home policy, it is infrequent.

You have two main options:

- NFIP (National Flood Insurance Program): For most insureds, your flood policy will be a separate policy written through the NFIP (National Flood Insurance Program), and, unless your lender requires the policy, or you're closing on a new purchase, there is a standard 30-day waiting period through the NFIP before your flood policy will become effective.
- Private Flood Insurance: Growing in availability, often with broader coverage and less waiting, Private flood insurance is an alternative. Many of the private markets in in the country, and especially in Florida, offer broader coverages than the NFIP and these should be considered as an alternative to maximize your protection.

Call (850) 424-6979 or visit www.getabora.com to review your policy before the next storm blows in.

Stay ready. Stay protected. We're here each year to help you do just that.

Abora Insurance has served Destin, Niceville, Fort Walton Beach, Miramar Beach, Freeport, Santa Rosa Beach (30A) and Inlet Beach for over a decade. They work with top-rated carriers to tailor coverage for home, auto and life insurance.

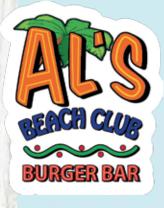












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potato and side salad, with au jus and horseradish cream sauce for \$22.95 every Thursday at 4 p.m. Key Lime Pie is available all day, every day! Join us for Karaoke every Wednesday night at 7 p.m. and live music all other nights! The most fun on the Island!

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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

In 2001, Magnolia Grill in

Fort Walton Beach opened its

Magnolia Grill

Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation Raises Record \$3.55M for Kids

The 20th Annual Destin Charity Wine Auction raised a record-breaking \$3.55 million to benefit 17 children's charities in Northwest Florida: Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast, Boys & Girls Clubs of the Emerald Coast, Caring & Sharing of South Walton, Children's Home Society of Florida, Children in Crisis, Inc., Children's Volunteer Health Network, Ellison Mc-Craney Ingram Foundation, Emerald Coast Autism Center, Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center, Habitat for Humanity of Walton County,

Mental Health Association of Okaloosa & Walton Counties, Opportunity, Inc., Point Washington Medical Clinic, Shelter House Domestic Violence Center, The Arc of the Emerald Coast, Westonwood Ranch and Youth Village. More than 600 guests attended the sold-out event. Funds will be distributed in August during a private check presentation at the Hilton Sandestin.

Since its founding, DCWAF has donated over \$35 million to improve the lives of over 100,000 children. Learn more at DCWAF.org.





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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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23rd Annual Emerald Coast Blue Marlin Classic Returns June 18–22

One of the most thrilling big-game fishing tournaments in the world is back! The 23rd Annual Emerald Coast Blue Marlin Classic (ECBC) returns to Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort® June 18–22, 2025—bringing high-stakes sportfishing, family-friendly fun and unforgettable summer energy to Northwest Florida's premier resort destination.

"The Emerald Coast Blue Marlin Classic has become a summertime tradition, and it's all thanks to our generous sponsors and the passion of our teams including South Walton, Pelagic, Galati Yacht Sales, and MarineMax," said Tournament Director Jason Draughn. "We're excited to welcome back our anglers, crews, and spectators for another incredible year."

With more than \$2 million in cash and prizes, top-tier teams from across the Gulf Coast and beyond will compete to land the biggest blue marlin—each fish must measure at least 110 inches from the lower jaw to the fork of the tail to qualify. In past tournaments, winners have reeled in marlin weighing more than 650 pounds.

Beyond the blue marlin divi-

sion, the tournament also features catch-and-release categories for blue marlin, white marlin, sailfish, and spearfish, as well as weighed competitions for tuna, wahoo, and dolphin (mahi-mahi)—scored one point per pound.

The tournament kicks off at noon on Thursday from the Destin Pass, with the

biggest spectacle unfolding each evening at Baytowne Marina. Official weigh-ins on Friday and Saturday nights draw thousands of spectators who gather to watch the scales in action—cheering on crews as massive catches are hoisted on stage. The energy is electric, with live music setting the perfect summer vibe, vendor exhibitions showcasing coastal treasures, and on Friday night, fireworks lighting up the sky over the marina

The ECBC is a qualifying event for the Florida Panhandle Billfish Series, InTheBite's Cap-



tain of the Year Program, and the Gulf Coast Triple Crown Championship. To register, contact Julia Brakhage at julia@ tournamentcontrol.com, call 910-264-3947, or visit fishecbc.

Also returning is the fan-favorite ECBC Golf Scramble, happening Wednesday, June 18, sponsored by Hancock Whitney Bank and Tito's Handmade Vodka. Open to tournament anglers and sponsors, this friendly competition requires pre-registration. Entry fees are cash only. Sign up at fishecbc.com/scramble.

"We're proud to host such a prestigious tournament that blends world-class sportfishing with the spirit of coastal camaraderie," said April Sarver, Director of Marketing and Communications at Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort. "Whether you're here to fish or simply soak up the excitement, this is a weekend you won't want to miss."

For full tournament details, registration, dockage, and the complete schedule of events, visit fishecbc.com.

Romeo Joins Other Rescued Manatees Lil Joe and Inigo

Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park has welcomed a special new resident: Romeo, the oldest known manatee at over 70 years old, is now calling Manatee Cove home.

Romeo's

rival is part of a statewide conservation effort led by the Manatee Rescue & Rehabilitation Partnership (MRP), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. After receiving over a year of critical care at Zoo Tampa's Manatee Critical Care Center, Romeo was deemed non-releasable due to his long history in managed care. Gulfarium was chosen for his permanent placement thanks to its specialized facilities and experienced animal care team. His placement at our Gulfarium enables acute care centers in other areas, central Florida, for example, to remain available for man-

"Helping to create space at critical care centers while giving permanent homes to conditionally non-releasable manatees is a vital part of the MRP's work, and we're honored to play a role in that

atees in need of urgent rescue

and rehabilitation.



mission," said Patrick Berry, CEO of Gulfarium. "Our dedicated animal care team is excited to provide Romeo with the support and enrichment he deserves."

Romeo now joins rescued manatees Lil Joe and Inigo in the 300,000-gallon Manatee Cove habitat, where he can thrive in a safe, enriching environment. Opened earlier this year, Manatee Cove features underwater and above-ground viewing areas, allowing guests to connect with these gentle giants while learning about manatee conservation.

Florida's manatees face ongoing threats from boat strikes, red tide, habitat loss and more. Romeo's story highlights the importance of coordinated care and public education in protecting this beloved species.

Visit Romeo daily at the Gulfarium. Learn more at www.gulfarium.com.



M Off the Hook

New Encounters and Old Friends:

A Summer to Remember at Gulfarium

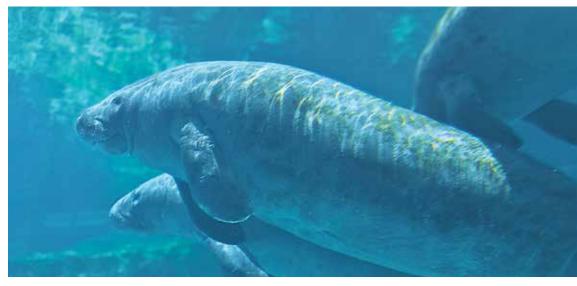
By Mary Fomby

Romeo Finds a Forever Home at Manatee Cove

A new chapter in manatee care has begun at the Gulfarium! We are proud to welcome Romeo, a rescued male manatee, to his forever home at Manatee Cove as part of a statewide initiative led by the Manatee Rescue & Rehabilitation Partnership (MRP) and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC).

At 68 years old and weighing in at 2,080 pounds, Romeo is the oldest living manatee under managed care. With his advanced age, Romeo required a long-term placement where he could receive expert care while continuing to socialize and exhibit natural behaviors. The MRP identified Gulfarium's newly renovated habitat as the ideal permanent home for this gentle giant.

Manatee Cove was transformed from a former dolphin habitat into a lush, 300,000-gal-



lon environment specifically designed for rescued manatees. Romeo will join fellow residents Lil Joe and Inigo, giving guests a rare opportunity to observe and learn about one of Florida's most iconic and endangered species.

Start Your Day with Dolphins: Rise and Shine Dolphin Package

Make your morning unfor-

gettable with our brand-new Rise and Shine: Dolphin Package! This exclusive experience gives guests early entry to the park before it opens to the public, a dockside dolphin encounter, and discounted general admission for the rest of the day.

Led by our expert marine mammal team, this intimate experience offers the chance to interact with one of our Atlantic bottlenose dolphins while learning all about their care, behaviors and personalities. It's the perfect way to beat the crowds and start your day with a splash!

Sunset Camp Returns for a Summer of Fun

Looking for a magical summer night activity just for kids? The Gulfarium's Sunset Camp is back and better than ever! This evening camp gives kids ages 6-14 a chance to explore



the park after hours, enjoy exclusive animal encounters and learn about marine life through hands-on fun.

While parents enjoy a night out, campers will dive into adventure with a dolphin dockside encounter, a reptile meet-and-greet, up-close time with our penguin colony, and dinner by Seal Harbor. They'll also join our education team for beachside learning activities to inspire conservation and curiosity.

Sunset Camp fills up quickly with limited dates throughout the summer, so don't wait! Visit Gulfarium.com to view camp dates and secure your child's spot today.





A Man for All Seasons:

Celebrating Stan Proffitt at 107 years old

By Barbara Palmgren

Every so often you meet an icon. Someone who inspires and leaves lessons for the ages. I had that distinct pleasure when I met with Stan to reminisce about a life well lived.

Stan lives with daughter Nancy Kilgore and husband Ray Kilgore in Shalimar Pointe in my neighborhood. Stan spends most sunny days sitting outside of the garage in his walker, available to greet an talk with anyone who passes by and needs a few words of wisdom, humor, or advice.

My husband, Lornie, had already stopped to present a few balloons in the morning to Stan and returned home with a few tears in his eye. When I visited Stan later in the day, he was busy on the phone. Lots of folks phoning to give birthday wishes.

With a smile on his face and agreeing to share special stories we talked for a long time. A few highlights of that interview are now shared.

Stan was born in a small town of Hulet, Virginia. He tried to find the little town years ago but could only locate a place where there was a cross in the road. Stan remembers growing

up on a 150 acre farm near Fredericksburg, Virginia. Stan never left the farm until he was in his 20's. With a large family of six children, Stan was busy working on a farm that raised all sorts of fruits and vegetables. He walked two miles to a one-room school house and his teacher walked even further. She would be seen going by the farm and every so often Stan's father would call out, "Boys aren't going to be in school today. They have work to do

At the onset of World War II, Stan and his younger brother went to enlist. The brother was recruited but Stan was rejected. At 24 years of age, Stan was almost blind. He had cataracts and a peripheral vision issue.

Undeterred and patriotic, Stan and several friends, boarded a train from the east



and headed to Detroit, Michigan to work in a factory manufacturing aircraft wings to be used on aircraft that would land on a navy carrier. He said the wings use to fold up. It was for him, an amazing adventure. Male workers were appreciated to help alongside women who were now part of the work force. We know about the "Rosie Riveters," needed to build necessary machines and equipment to win the

When peace returned, Stan was back in the Washington D.C. area living in a boarding house with his brother, Walt. Both sons went home to Virginia on Sundays to get a good meal from mother and visit mom and dad. One Sunday they met two women who had traveled by bus from the city to visit one of the lady's children. Stan's mother fostered over 65

children in her lifetime and this mother was visiting the farm to see her children. Both women worked at the Pentagon. The mother couldn't afford care for her children so Stan's mother helped her. The ladies were going to take the bus back to the city when Stan's brother offered them a ride back in a 1937 Chevy Coupe. Only problem, one lady would have to sit on his lap. You could seat three people across in the one long seat of the car.

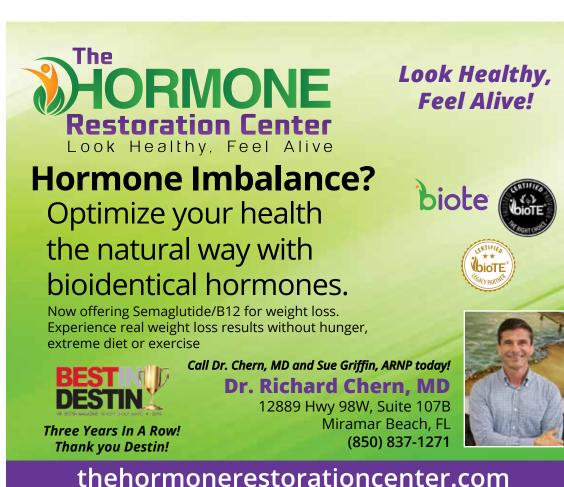
That ride back led to all four of them having dinner and eating chili at a nearby restaurant across from the Capitol. One woman, Virginia, gave Walt her phone number in case they wanted to see the Pentagon. Both ladies roomed at the YMCA. A few days later, Walt enlisted in the US Army and he gave Stan this phone number. Stan phoned and asked Virginia out on a date. This date later turned into a 65-year marriage.

Stan was so proud of Virginia. She had more education than Stan who did not attend high school. He said his father raised the boys to understand that "horses and hands" are what's needed to ensure success on the farm. Virginia, born in Illinois, graduated from high school, taking a Civil Service exam to work for the government. Virginia scored so high she was immediately hired and traveled after graduation for a job at the Pentagon.

Stan had various jobs in the Washington DC area and retired working for RL Polk, a printing plant that produced items such as city directories. He and Virginia traveled everywhere in an RV during retirement, visiting bother Walt in Central Florida and Ray and Nancy near US AirForce bases in California and Arizona.

So now, in 2025, after talking about all the changes in technology he had seen over his lifetime, I asked Stan what he thought the most valuable lesson in life should be shared with the younger generation. Stan answered immediately that "common sense and will power is what will do you the most good." Stan thought that all the education in the world doesn't help if someone has no common sense and will power.

How can you argue with that? I certainly marvel at a lesson learned for all of us.









By Dr. Karen DeVore

If there's one thing I wish more people understood about their health, it's this: you cannot out-supplement or out-caffeinate your way through poor sleep. Sleep is not a luxury or a badge of productivity to skip—it's foundational to healing, balance and long-term wellness. At the Tortoise Clinic, where we approach health through both integrative and holistic lenses, sleep is often the thread that ties it all together.

We live in a culture that applauds hustle, thrives on stimulation and often views rest as a weakness. Yet, as a practitioner, I've seen time and again that when sleep suffers, everything else starts to unravel—hormones become imbalanced, digestion slows, inflammation increases,

The Underrated Power of Sleep

cravings intensify and mental clarity disappears.

Why Sleep Is Your Body's Reset Button

During sleep, your body performs its most critical behind-the-scenes work. Cells repair. Muscles recover. Hormones reset. The brain processes and detoxifies. In fact, deep sleep is when your body releases growth hormone, which helps repair tissues and regulate metabolism. Your liver is busy detoxing. Your immune system recalibrates. And your nervous system has a rare moment to truly rest.

When sleep is disrupted or insufficient, the effects can be wide-ranging and sneaky. You might wake up exhausted despite getting "enough" hours. You might feel wired at night and sluggish in the morning. You might have trouble losing weight, staying focused, or regulating mood. And here's the kicker: traditional labs may show everything as "normal."

That's where a holistic approach makes all the difference.

The Integrative Approach to Sleep

In integrative medicine, we don't just ask how many hours are you sleeping? We ask:

- How do you feel when you wake up?
- Do you have trouble falling asleep—or staying asleep?
- Do you feel wired at night and wide awake at 2 a.m.?
- Are you struggling with anxiety, hormone shifts or night sweats?
- Are you using screens late at night? Eating late? Skipping morning sunlight?

We look at the entire picture—nervous system function, cortisol rhythms, melatonin production, hormone balance, stress exposure, nutrition, lifestyle and more.

What many people don't realize is that sleep disturbances are often not about the sleep itself—they're symptoms of deeper imbalances. At the Tortoise Clinic, we blend Western diagnostics and Eastern wisdom to get to the root. That might include looking at adrenal fatigue, estrogen/progesterone shifts, thyroid dysfunc-

tion, or gut inflammation—all of which can disrupt your rest.

Beyond the Sleep Aids

It's tempting to reach for sleep aids or melatonin when nights get restless. And while they can offer short-term relief, they rarely address the why.

We prefer to ask: What is your body trying to tell you?

Sometimes it's a stress response that needs rewiring. Other times it's low progesterone, blood sugar instability or even chronic inflammation. Instead of masking those signals, our job is to decode them—and guide your body back into balance.

That might mean incorporating acupuncture to calm the nervous system, adaptogenic herbs to support stress resilience, magnesium to relax tight muscles or simple lifestyle shifts like screenfree evenings and earlier meals.

Introducing: The Sleep Assessment

To better understand the sleep patterns and hormonal rhythms of our patients, I'm thrilled to share that we've launched a new, non-invasive sleep assessment at the Tortoise Clinic. This easy, athome saliva test measures your melatonin and cortisol levels at key times throughout the night, along with progesterone, giving us a clearer picture of what's happening behind the scenes.

Unlike standard tests that offer a snapshot in time, this assessment helps us understand how your sleep hormones fluctuate overnight, guiding more precise and personalized care—without the need for blood draws or guesswork.

If you're tired of feeling tired—or if sleep has quietly slipped out of your routine and left chaos in its place—know this: rest is not a weakness. It's your body's greatest tool for repair

And you deserve more than temporary fixes. You deserve answers, insight and support that meets you where you are.

At the Tortoise Clinic, we believe healing happens one steady, intentional step at a time—and sometimes, the first step is simply learning how to rest.



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The Impact of EMF Radiation

By Kay Leaman, HealthyDay HealthyLife

I have to admit upfront that I found myself wading through science when I jumped down the rabbit hole. Electromagnetic Fields are a part of modern life. But, that doesn't mean we should accept their potential risks without question. By understanding them and how they affect our bodies, we can take steps to minimize our exposure thus improving our health.

EM spectrum, EM waves, EM induction, EM energy, EM radiation (EMR), EM field, EM pulse and EM force are all parts of this field of study. We will be focusing on EM Spectrum (Classified electromagnetic waves on the basic of frequency or wave length). There are seven bands: Gamma Rays discovered in 1896, X-Rays discovered in 1895, Ultra Violet Rays discovered in 1801, Visible Rays (visible by people and contains seven colors), Infra-Red Waves produced by hot bodies or by excitation of atoms and molecules, Micro-Waves are oscillating electrons in a cavity or by special vacuum tubes and Radio-Waves which are the longest

to all waves produced by oscillating charge in the circuit.

Fun Facts:

EMR can travel through empty space.

Not all forms of EMR are harmful.

EMR, other than visible light, can be used to view an object. For example, bees use ultraviolet waves to help them see patterns on flowers.

We use EMF waves for seeing, talking (light) on phones and watching tv (radio waves), cooking (micro waves), staying warm (infrared) and getting sunlight (ultraviolet). Our lives are improved through new technology and health care. All EMFs transfer energy. When the energy is absorbed by matter, it is converted into heat which causes the particles to vibrate more rapidly. This is important, because all life, including humans, have different vibration levels, and when we interact with these invisible waves, there can be changes.

High energy radiation includes x-rays, gamma rays and some higher energy ultraviolet (UV) rays. This is called ionizing

radiation, meaning this energy can affect cells on the atomic level by removing an electron from an atom, or ionizing it. Ionizing radiation can damage the body's DNA and cells which may contribute to genetic mutations such as cancer.

Low energy frequency (ELF) radiation is non-ionizing radiation. It can move atoms around in the body or make them vibrate. But, most researchers agree that it's not enough to damage our DNA or cells. These frequencies include phones, smart meters, tablets, laptops and computers. It also includes radios, TV signals, radar, satellite stations and MRI machines. Note that non-ionizing EMFs in the radio frequency range, noted as Group B's, have the possibility to become a human carcinogen. This group includes cell phones, smart devices, tablets, etc.

When reading the above paragraph, you'll note the conflict in statements. That is because the danger is in the length of time the device is in close proximity to the body. People wear their phones, lap their laptops or hold their tablets, etc. Research has

links to glioma, a malignant type of brain cancer, increased risk of acute myeloid leukemia (AML) in adults and a 1.5 - 5% of childhood leukemia can be attributed to ELF EMFs.

In our homes we have televisions, wifi, routers, devices such as Apple TV, appliances, lighting, etc. Did you know that even when our lamps are off they still emit ELFs, that can be measured by a meter?

So, what can we do about it?

Workstations: Use wired internet connections vs. bluetooth. Keep routers and other EMF sources as far away as possible. Opt for incandescent or LED lights vs. fluorescent lighting which can emit harmful frequency waves.

Auto EMFs, a driving concern: Turn off bluetooth and WIFI when it's not needed. You can also disable this feature from your car's settings. Avoid using in-car entertainment systems for long periods of time. If you drive an electric car, consider getting a seat cover that blocks the EMFs coming from the battery you are sitting on.

Smart use of smart phones

and tablets: Use the speakerphone or wired headsets to keep the phone away from your head. Use a bag or purse instead of pockets to carry your phone. Switch your device to airplane mode when not in use, especially when you sleep. Cut down exposure by downloading content such as books, music and videos while on airplane mode.

Be aware of EMF sources in our environment and understand the symptoms of EMF sensitivity.

Make simple adjustments by implementing practical tips like turning off WIFI at night, use wired devices when available and keep all electronics out of the bedroom.

Focus on making your home a sanctuary to rest and rejuvenate, free from EMF intrusion.

Stay educated and up to date with the latest research and safety practices.

The more we know the better equipped we are to take charge of what we eat, drink and expose ourselves to. Here's to Health! succeed.hdhl@gmail.com



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Walk-Ins Immediate Care





By Stephenie Craig

Are you overscheduled? Perhaps you're rushing, exhausted and regretting your full calendar. Maybe commitments are positive like kid activities, time with friends, volunteer work, a celebration. However, when those events become the reality of your week and month, you want more time to just be with people, to be with yourself, to slow down and be present in the moment.

Saying too many yeses is tempting with many options and cultural encouragement to be involved or be left behind. Saying yes feels good and comes from a genuine place, but excessive yeses create feelings of regret and resentment regarding your time. Excessive yeses are a result of poor boundaries, guilt, fear of disappointing others, fear of being judged by others, obligation, proving your worth, fear of missing out, trying to earn approval, and attempting to keep yourself and others from experiencing uncomfortable feelings.

While saying no is healthy, it can be scary and hard. Saying no can upset people, result in missing out and creates uncomfortable feelings. However, learning to say no opens the pathway to your whole-hearted yes. Your whole-hearted yeses are commitments in alignment with your deep values and purpose. You can find your whole-hearted yeses by imagining you are at your life's end reflecting back on how you spent your time. What yeses feel worthwhile? What yeses might you regret? Will you feel good about doing 10 things with exhaustion and obligation? Will you feel better about doing three things with presence, connection and meaning?

Saying no and embracing your whole-hearted yeses allows you to release overwhelming stress. Your no's allow you to embrace simple joys and be present in your life. Saying no creates space to notice the vibrant color of the sky, the

Your Whole-Hearted Yes

squirrel in the yard, the unfiltered laugh of a child, the snuggle of a pet, the flirty smile of your significant other. Your no's create space to appreciate rest, creativity, nature, unrushed conversation and your spiritual life. No makes way for the beauty of your deep and profound yes. So, how do you begin the journey to your whole-hearted yes?

Five Ways to Find Your Whole-Hearted Yes

1. Evaluate your schedule. Look at your week/month. Notice how you feel. Are you exhausted? Do you have a sense of dread about commitments? Are you wishing for quality time for things that matter most to you? If yes, acknowledge it's time for a change.

2. Begin cutting longterm commitments. Think through how many commitments you'd like to have on any week/weekend to feel balanced. Discuss with your family. Determine which current commitments are keepers based on your values and desired number of healthy commitments. Decide which commitments go. Perhaps each child has a limit on extra-curricular activities. Maybe you don't renew your membership on a board or social group. Maybe you volunteer for one very important cause instead of five moderately important causes. This won't be easy and you will likely find sacrifice is required to create more mar-

3. Start saying no to short-term commitments. If you have decided you want no more than two weeknight commitments and two weekend commitments, once you've used up your whole-hearted yeses, no is the answer to other opportunities. Or swap one opportunity for another so you are holding your boundary on commitments.

4. Process your uncomfortable feelings. You might feel guilt, fear of missing out, fear of upsetting others. These feelings are normal and you can feel them and remember your whole-hearted yes to fewer high priority commitments is worth much more in the world than your exhausted, resentful half-hearted, over-committed yes. Also, remember you are the only person who can set bound-

aries for yourself in the pursuit of joy and purpose.

5. Unapologetically communicate your whole-hearted yeses and your healthy no's to others. People who don't respect your healthy no's are not respecting your boundaries. You have no reason to be ashamed of wanting to give whole-hearted yeses. People in your life can learn to hear, "Thank you so much for the invitation. I appreciate your thoughtfulness. I won't be able to join the event due to other commitments."

Embracing your no and your

whole-hearted yes can feel difficult at first. However, over time, it brings joy and flourishing to your life and relationships. Connect with us for counseling and coaching support along your journey at Journeybravely.com.

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98-Year-Old Pilot Sees Skyraider Legacy Live on in AFSOC's OA-1K Skyraider II

By Staff Sgt. Natalie Fiorilli, Air Force Special Operations Command

Editor Note: A testament to our area's commitment to its veterans and their families, Hawthorn House at the Air Force Enlisted Village in Shalimar quietly honors the legacy of service for retired enlisted members and their surviving spouses. This 64-apartment, assisted living home offers care and community helping them live with dignity, purpose and connection. The story that follows highlights one of those remarkable residents—a 98-year-old veteran whose life of service was recently honored in a moving ceremony. His journey is a powerful reminder of why Hawthorn House matters and what a profound impact compassionate care and community support have on the lives of our veterans and their

At 98 years old, retired U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Bill Buice never imagined he'd see another Skyraider take flight.

Looking ahead, he smiled as the hum of the aircraft's turboprop engine deepened as it drew closer.

Joined by his family and members of Air Force Special Operations Command, Buice watched as the first missionized OA-1K Skyraider II arrived at Hurlburt Field, April 3, 2025.

As the OA-1K Skyraider II taxied, Buice said the moment brought back a wave of memories. To him, this was more than a new aircraft—it was a tribute to the original A-1 Skyraider, the plane he piloted during the Vietnam War until the day he was shot down nearly 60 years ago.

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Rolling in for a pass to inspect the area below, Buice heard a sudden explosion.

It was July 9, 1968, and Buice, call sign "Firefly 16," and his wingman, "Firefly 17," were providing cover for a formation of American helicopters flying

in northern Laos, near the Vietnam border.

Looking through the canopy of his A-1 Skyraider, he spotted a fire on the left wing of his aircraft.

Buice dumped the hydraulic system pressure to extinguish the flames. It worked, but the wing had a gaping hole, and the magnesium casting continued to burn.

He pulled the aircraft into a climbing turn, looking for a place to land. His teammates warned him over the radio.

"Not in the valley, whatever you do," they urged, warning the enemy could be there.

Knowing he would soon lose complete control of the aircraft, he reversed his rudder controls, forcing the A-1 into a faster roll. Inverting the plane, he pulled the ejection handle as soon as he could see the sky through the canopy.

"The canopy disappeared with a bang," Buice recalled. "Then nothing."

He saw the jungle rushing up. His airspeed increased and altitude dropped. He pulled the handle again.

The rocket fired, pulling him from the cockpit. His parachute deployed, slowing his descent. He crashed through the jungle, hitting a tree and injuring his shoulder and quickly realized he couldn't move his right arm.

Hearing noise nearby, he used his left hand to reach for his pistol and call for help with his radio.

Moments later, an Air America helicopter arrived. Owned and operated by the CIA, Air America was a cargo and pas-

senger airline that provided air support for the U.S. and its allies during the Vietnam War.

A pilot came down to help Buice onto the lift, but as they ascended, the weight was too much.

"I insisted that he join me for the trip up, but it was too heavy," Buice recalled. "So I gave him my radio and pistol, and he stayed behind, hoping another chopper would get to him before the bad guys did."

Buice was airlifted to Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base, Thailand for urgent medical treatment. Ultimately, his shoulder injury would end his 20-year Air Force career.

For decades, Buice often thought about the man who had rescued him, wondering if he made it out alive.

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Sitting beside Buice at the OA-1K delivery ceremony was Phillip Jennings, a retired Air America helicopter pilot—the very man who had saved him



that day. Over the years, the two had reunited only a handful of times, making this moment even more special, Jennings noted.

"I knew from the moment I watched him get shot down that we would have to go get him," Jennings said. "I'm elated to be able to be here to see him be recognized and honored. He was the real hero that day, saving the Air America helicopters from landing in the deadly gunfire that shot his A-1 down."

Though the crash ended his flying career, Buice said he has always felt a connection to the A-1 Skyraider.

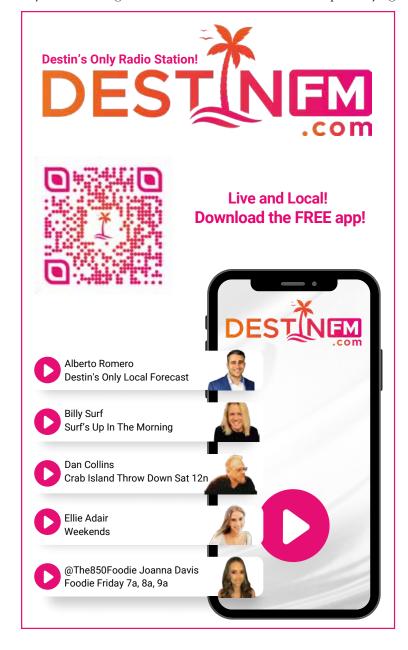
As a pilot, Buice liked the A-1 for its ability to fly for an extended period while also being able to carry a large payload of ammunition.

The OA-1K Skyraider II now carries on that role, equipped with advanced weapons systems for light attack and reconnaissance missions for AFSOC.

Taking a moment to look at the new aircraft, Buice reflected on what it meant for the next generation of Skyraider pilots.

"I hope they embrace the challenges, the accomplishments—even the fear and the adrenaline," he said. "There will be a day when they can no longer do this. Today is not that day."

Today, Buice lives at the Hawthorne House, an assisted living neighborhood in the Air Force Enlisted Village in nearby Shalimar. The Air Force Enlisted Village is a community for retired enlisted military members and their surviving spouses.







Eglin Welcomes New F-35 Test Force, **Expanding Role of Reserve Units in Fighter Innovation**

A new chapter in fighter jet innovation has officially taken off at Eglin Air Force Base. On May 1, 2025, the first-ever F-35 Lightning II Combined Test Force (CTF) was established as part of Eglin's expanding fighter test community—a significant milestone not just for the base, but for the Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve Command Test Center (AATC) as

This groundbreaking unit marks the first time the Air Reserve Component (ARC) has stood up a test force dedicated to fifth-generation fighter aircraft, solidifying its place in developmental and operational testing alongside the active-duty force.

AATC pilots have long been integrated into Eglin's test programs, regularly flying Developmental Test (DT) and Operational Test (OT) missions with aircraft from the 96th Test Wing and the 53rd Wing. Now, with the formal activation of the CTF, the ARC is moving from a supporting role to a leading one—shaping the future of air

combat capability.

"Coordinating and streamlining across the Total Force by tirelessly testing, evaluating, and extrapolating our capabilities is how we bring the future faster," said Maj. Gen. Duke Pirak, Air National Guard's acting direc-

Traditionally operating legacy aircraft, the ARC's expansion into F-35 testing reflects a broader mission evolution. The CTF now stands at the forefront of integrating cutting-edge technologies into combat-ready strategies.

"We are primarily accountable to the warfighter," said Col. Daniel J. Wittmer, AATC commander. "Our weapons and tactics process create a bottom-up approach to solving critical capability gaps for warfighters across all mission sets in all areas of responsibility. It is simply not possible to modernize as fast and effectively as AATC does without benchmark processes coupled with the best operators, analysts, and engineers."

This philosophy underpins



AATC's well-known model of 20% the cost"—targeting the

delivering "an 80% solution at most impactful upgrades with

streamlined efficiency.

Currently, CTF pilots are conducting test flights in F-35As supplied by the Alabama and Vermont Air National Guard units, representing a unified, cross-state commitment to advancing U.S. airpower.

With the stand-up of this new test force, Eglin continues to cement its status as a national leader in next-generation air dominance—where tradition meets innovation, and the future of flight is being forged today.

Troop 529 Removes 300 Pounds of Trash from Spectre Island

Scouting America Troop 529 (Shalimar) recently collected nearly 300 pounds of trash from Spectre Island in the Santa Rosa Sound during a conservation paddling trip. Eleven youth Scouts and seven adult leaders canoed to the island, where they removed litter from the shoreline and inland areas, finding everything from cans and shotgun shells to folding chairs and toys.

The outing also helped Scouts fulfill canoeing merit badge requirements, including deep-water swamping rescues. Canoes were provided by Troop 532 (Holt), with launch



support from several Hurlburt Field units, including the 1st Special Operations Wing, 1st Special Operations Security Forces Squadron-Outdoor Recreation Team, 1st Special Operations Force Sup-

Squadron and 505th Command and Control Wing. Canoes were supplied bv Troop 532 out of Holt. Efforts like these bring Scouts closer to earning the prestigious rank

of Eagle Scout while teaching leadership, confidence and community service.

Learn more at bsashalimar. org and watch the trip video at YouTube. Join at BeAScout.



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Is Your Business Prepared for Hurricane Season?

By BIT-WIZARDS

The 2025 Atlantic hurricane season has arrived, with experts anticipating above-average activity and over a dozen named storms this year. Our area is no stranger to the risks posed by hurricanes and how to prepare for them, especially when it comes to keeping people safe. At Bit-Wizards, we unfortunately

know that many local businesses fail to prepare and ensure their survival in the event of a hurricane or major storm.

If a hurricane strikes and your business IT isn't prepared, you could lose critical pieces of your company and suffer significant costs. While evacuating your employees and their loved ones can be done, physically taking any IT equipment that powers your business is logistically challenging and impractical. Even if you take the equipment with you, there's no guarantee you can make it work once you've relocated.

If you can't move everything, you'll then need to replace what's damaged. While losing a single piece of hardware can

be a more manageable cost, the scale of your business can make that price unaffordable. An even more costly loss than physical equipment is data loss. Everything you've built can disappear in an instant, and it can't always be restored. Even if you start from square one with new hardware, the loss of customer trust can mean the end of your business.

Unfortunately, too many business owners learn this lesson the hard way, with 25% of businesses closing their doors for good after a hurricane or other disaster. Hardware, data, and reputation losses can quickly accumulate and become too much to handle, so it's essential to act now. Even though hurricane season is already here, it's still not too late to do what you can to prevent catastrophic losses.

The best way to prepare your business for a hurricane is by developing a business continuity and disaster recovery (BCDR) plan to keep your operations running, avoid major disruptions, and prioritize the well-being of your employees. Your BCDR plan should outline every aspect of how your team should prepare for an incoming hurricane, from moving essential pieces of hardware to resuming operations after evacuating.

A thorough BCDR plan should prioritize two distinct goals that each focus on keeping your operations running during and after a disaster. The business continuity portion involves supporting the people and processes that fuel your company. Plans should be made to ensure your employees can evacuate safely while continuing to support critical customer services

and avoid major interruptions.

The disaster recovery component focuses heavily on preparing and recovering any IT systems that fuel your business. All efforts should minimize any potential downtime or impact on your operations from a technological standpoint. Both goals overlap and support each other considerably, ensuring every aspect of your business is ready for worst-case scenarios.

The most helpful thing you can include in your plan is how you'll shift your files and programs to the cloud. Switching to cloud-based operations and storage means you and your employees can access anything you need and stay connected wherever you are. Many cloud storage options also help you create and store backups, adding another layer of data loss prevention in the event a program quits, or a hurricane strikes.

Even if your office is in a hurricane's path, using the cloud and preparing your IT can help you minimize potential losses. If you want help creating a BCDR plan or making your operations more resilient through everyday outages or major disasters, Bit-Wizards can help. With our Managed IT Services (MITS), your business can prepare for the worst while striving for the best. Visit www.bitwizards.com/services/bcdr to learn more.

Business News

Leadership Northwest Florida Celebrates Graduates

Congratulations to seventeen community leaders who graduated from Florida's Great Northwest Foundation's Leadership Northwest Florida program on May 9. The seven-month initiative covers business, infrastructure, talent and regional collaboration. Applications for Class IV open this summer. Visit FGNW.org or contact Kasey Killebrew at 334-790-4557.

Academy Sports + Outdoors Opens First FWB Store

Academy Sports + Outdoors (Nasdaq: ASO), a leading sporting goods and outdoor retailer, has opened at 546 Mary Esther Cut Off NW. The 65,000-square-foot store offers a wide selection of gear for sports, outdoor adventures and backyard fun.

From footballs and volley-balls to tents, grills, and games, the store is a one-stop shop for all things active and outdoors. Free services include grill and bike assembly, scope mounting, bore sighting and line winding. Customers can also purchase hunting and fishing licenses on-site.

FPL Announces 2025 Reliability Upgrades for Okaloosa County

Florida Power & Light (FPL) has announced a series of infrastructure upgrades in Okaloosa County for 2025, aimed at reducing outages and speeding up power restoration during major storms.

Planned improvements include:

- Nine Storm Secure Underground Program (SSUP) projects, replacing overhead neighborhood lines with more resilient underground systems.
- 415 miles of power lines scheduled for inspection or vegetation trimming to address one of the top causes of outages.
- 9,154 power poles will be inspected, with repairs or replacements made as needed.
- Seven smart grid devices to be installed on main, neighborhood, and underground lines, helping detect outages and automatically reroute power.

Across Northwest Florida, FPL continues to strengthen the grid by replacing 32% of wooden transmission structures with steel and concrete, placing 90 miles of lines underground, and deploying 9,100 smart grid devices to improve response times. Advanced tech is also being used

to monitor and manage tree and debris contact with power lines.

"Our dedicated team is committed to providing customers in Okaloosa County with safe and reliable electric service all while keeping bills as low as possible," said Bernard Johnson, FPL's senior external affairs manager. "Although no energy grid is storm proof, these upgrades have improved service reliability by more than 63% since 2018 in Northwest Florida, enhancing reliability day-to-day and during hurricanes and severe weather for our customers."

A recent report filed with the Florida Public Service Commission shows FPL achieved its best reliability performance in company history in 2024, with customers experiencing the fewest average minutes of outages to date.

One Okaloosa EDC Launches New Website

One Okaloosa EDC has launched a new website, www. oneokaloosa.org, designed to better showcase the region's workforce, demographics and business resources. The update modernizes the site first launched in 2017 and supports the region's economic development efforts.

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Hurricane Season Is Here—Are You Prepared?

Essential Tips for Homeowners

By Byron Toups

As hurricane season approaches, it's more important than ever to ensure your family and home are ready for whatever Mother Nature may bring. Storms can be unpredictable, but with the right preparation and knowledge, you can minimize risks and protect what matters most. Here's a comprehensive guide to help you get started.

1. Plan Ahead: Your Family's Safety Comes First

- Create an Emergency Plan. Start by sitting down with your family to discuss what to do in case of a hurricane. Make sure everyone knows the emergency contacts, including fire, police, family, neighbors, friends, tree services, utility companies, and your insurance agent.
- Develop a Communication Strategy. Choose someone outside the danger zone as your central contact. Use text messages during the storm, as they often work even when calls don't. If all else fails, communicate through social media.
- Decide on Meeting Locations. Pick safe spots both inside and outside your neighborhood where you can meet if you get separated or if an evacuation order is issued.
- Prepare an Emergency Supply Kit. Stock up on essentials like water, non-perishable food, medications, flashlights, batteries, and first aid supplies.

Plan for at least three days' worth of supplies.

• Practice Your Plan. Run through your emergency plan with your family so everyone knows what to do and where to

2. Stay Informed: Knowledge Is Power

- Set Up Multiple Alert Systems. Don't rely on just one source for weather updates. Purchase a NOAA weather radio (preferably with a hand crank), enable wireless emergency alerts on your cell phone, and follow reliable weather apps or websites.
- Monitor Updates Regularly. Keep an eye on forecasts from the National Hurricane Center and your local National Weather Service office. Follow them on social media for real-time updates.
- Know Your Location. Familiarize yourself with your county and location on a map. This will help you understand evacuation routes and local warnings.

3. Review Insurance and Document Belongings.

- Check Your Insurance Coverage. Review your homeowner's insurance policy to understand what is and isn't covered. Keep your insurance agent's contact information in your phone and in a safe, accessible place offsite.
- Create a Home Inventory. Use your cell phone to video



each room of your house, including the contents of cabinets and closets. Make a detailed list of your belongings and store the video and list in the cloud for safekeeping.

• Why It Matters. A thorough home inventory can speed up the claims process and ensure you receive fair compensation if your home is damaged.

4. Inspect and Repair Your Roof.

- Hire a Licensed Professional. Have your roof inspected by a trusted and licensed roofing company. They will check for damaged or loose shingles, tiles, or panels, as well as issues with vents, skylights, and chimneys.
 - Look for Warning Signs.

Pay attention to curling, loose, missing, or torn shingles; cracked or unattached tiles; dents, loose screws, or rust on metal panels; and leaks around vents, skylights, and chimneys.

• Address Problems Promptly. Repairing minor issues now can prevent major damage during a storm.

5. Secure Soffits

- Use Stainless Steel Screws. Attach soffit material securely to the fascia and channels using stainless steel screws.
- Apply Sealant. Use polyurethane sealant over the screws and allow it to dry for 72 hours. This extra step helps protect your home from wind and water damage.

Why Choose a Fortified Roof? The Gold Standard in Storm Protection

RoofPro Roofing is proud to be the area's only provider of Fortified Roofing—a system designed to meet the strictest standards for wind and storm resistance.

Fortified roofs are built with enhanced features such as sealed roof decks, ring-shank nails and impact-resistant shingles, providing superior protection during hurricanes and severe weather.

The Science Behind Fortified Roofs: Proven Results

Recent research highlights the effectiveness of Fortified construction:

A groundbreaking study by the Center for Risk and Insurance Research (CRIR) at the University of Alabama examined over 40,000 properties affected by Hurricane Sally. The findings are clear: homes built to the IBHS FORTIFIED standard were 70% less likely to have an insurance claim compared to traditional construction.

Peer-reviewed and real-world tested, the study confirmed that FORTIFIED homes suffered significantly less damage and re-

Continued on next page



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Sean of the South



By Sean Dietrich

The radio was on. WSM 650 AM. It was a summer night. The crickets were out. The garage door was open.

Daddy was changing the oil. He was lying beneath the Ford. I was sitting there, watching him work. Because that's what kids did before TikTok.

The garage was peppered with posters of fighter jets, and model airplanes. My father was obsessed with planes. All kinds. He wanted to be a fighter pilot as a boy. But he was deaf in his left ear. So he became an ironworker.

His voice came from beneath the car. "Be a pal and get me another one from the fridge?"

He wasn't talking about Coca-Cola. He wanted another bottle of Weekend Lubricant. I didn't have far to walk. The fridge was beside his workbench. Our family's beer fridge was always kept in the garage



because we were Baptist.

I fetched another bottle. I handed it to my old man, who slid from beneath the car on one of those slider things with the wheels.

He was still wearing work clothes. Denim. Boots. He was still covered in soot from a day of welding column splices. It was Saturday. He had worked overtime, but still somehow had energy enough to cut the grass, paint the shed, and change the oil after work. Just how he was.

"Turn up the radio, Opie," he said.

He called me that because I had red hair. Although the truth was, I was pretty chubby and looked nothing like Ron Howard. In fact, I looked more like I had eaten Opie Taylor.

The radio was playing the Grand Ole Opry. The garage swelled with the sounds of steel guitars and twin fiddles.

My father discovered that I was a musical child from a young age. I was 4 when he marched me into the music minister's office and said, "My boy can sing. I want you to learn him to do it good." Daddy paid \$9 per week for voice lessons. That was a lot back then. The first song I learned was "Swing Low Sweet Chariot."

"Do you have regrets?" I asked my father.

"Huh?" came the voice beneath the four-wheeled piece of Dearborn Steel.

"Where'd you hear that word?"

Shrug.

He slid from beneath the car. He stared at me. "You mean do I wish I'd done anything different? Of course I do. Everyone has regrets."

"Like what?"

He was still lying on his back. Socket wrench resting on his chest. "Why do you ask?" Another shrug.

"Well," he said, "I wish I'd gone to college. That's Number One. Wish I'd made something of myself. Wish I didn't walk on iron beams all day. Lotta men die doing what I do."

"What else?"

He thought. "Oh, I wish I would've taken flying lessons. I always wanted to fly. But when they told me I'd never be a Navy pilot, on account of my dead ear, I cried for a whole year. I hated myself. Hated this gimp body God gave me. But I shouldn't have given up. Shoulda taken flying lessons. But I didn't. I regret that."

"Is it too late?"
"For flying lessons?"

Nod. He sighed and took a sip. He looked into the faroff. "I don't

The music of Loretta Lynn filled our garage. "But it doesn't matter, because you know what I've learned?"

"What?"

know. Maybe."

"When you were born, I learned that the most important thing I would ever do was be a daddy. I didn't care about me no more. I only cared about you. Cared about watching you succeed."

"Me?"

"Yessir. You shoulda seen yourself. You were pitiful. You

came out of your mama helpless and nekkid. You didn't even have a name. So I gave you mine.

"And when I held you that first time, I promised myself that anything I ever did, from that day on, would all be for you. That was my job. To look after you. Not to be a pilot. Not to be rich. Even after I die, so help me, I'll be looking out for you however I can. Because you're mine. And I'm your'n."

I am a middle-aged man now, older than my father was in my memory. But tomorrow night I will be performing at the Grand Ole Opry. And I wonder if he isn't the reason why.

HURRICANE

continued from previous page

quired fewer insurance claims. When a claim was filed on a FORTIFIED home, the average damage was 22% less severe than on a standard home.

The financial impact is equally impressive. The report estimates that if every affected home had been built to the FORTIFIED Roof standard, total damage would have been reduced by more than \$147 million—saving homeowners \$42 million and insurers \$105.6 million in losses.

Even more compelling: Homes with a FORTIFIED Roof designation outperformed homes roofed to building codes with very similar requirements by nearly 40%. This demonstrates the importance of the program's rigorous documentation and review process, ensuring that every Fortified Roof meets the highest standards.

Take Action Today: Protect Your Home and Family.

Don't wait until the storm is on the horizon. By planning ahead, staying informed, and investing in a Fortified Roof from RoofPro Roofing, you can enjoy peace of mind knowing your home is built to withstand even the toughest storms.

Ready to protect your home? Contact RoofPro Roofing today for a free estimate and learn more about Fortified Roofing solutions! Your family's safety and your home's resilience are worth it. Call 850-332-3330.





A Pastor's Ponderings: The God of the Ordinary Days



By Pastor Doug Stauffer

For many people, most days are spent in the familiar routines of life, without extravagance or pageantry. Not every day comes wrapped in the emotion of Easter or the celebration of Christmas. Many days can be relatively predictable and constant, and the month of June displays this characteristic. It doesn't boast the glory of Christ's birth or the deep reflection of His resurrection. Aside from Father's Day, it simply exists—quiet and unremarkably constant. Nevertheless, God is no less present during June's seemingly "humdrum" days.

Elijah discovered that God

shows up in ways that we least expect Him. Following a dramatic showdown on Mount Carmel, he fled in fear and discouragement. While hiding in a cave, he encountered God, not in the extreme, but in the stillness. The Bible tells us in 1 Kings 19:11, "And he said, 'Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord.' And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: 12 And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice."

The Bible says that the Lord was not in the wind, not in the earthquake and not in the fire, but He did show Himself to Elijah in a "still small voice." That whisper was more potent than all the noise and hoopla we expect from God. Elijah's encounter with God was personal, intimate and surely sufficient.

Many Christians find it easiest to sense God during the



highs and lows—at weddings and funerals, during revivals and tragedies. But what about on a Tuesday morning when the coffee has turned lukewarm and the to-do list seems never-ending? What about while folding laundry or sitting in traffic on Highway 85, trying to get through Crestview at 5 p.m.? Is He not there, too? Yes, God is the God of the ordinary days and the unremarkable events.

The Bible is filled with people who encountered God in quiet moments:

Ruth gleaned in a field and eventually met her redeemer (Ruth 2:3-4).

Moses was tending sheep when he saw the burning bush (Exodus 3:1-2).

A boy brought lunch that Jesus used to feed thousands (John 6:9-11).

A woman came to a well for water and met the Living Water (John 4:6-26).

In the Gospels, we read of Jesus during

seemingly routine times: walking, talking or dining with His disciples. He wasn't always performing miracles; sometimes, He was simply present—teaching, praying, or resting. Those ordinary moments prepared His followers for their extraordinary missions that would follow.

Perhaps we need that reminder this month. God is not waiting for us solely in a spirit-moving church service or during a life-altering crisis. He meets us in the mundane, speaks to us during our morning rou-

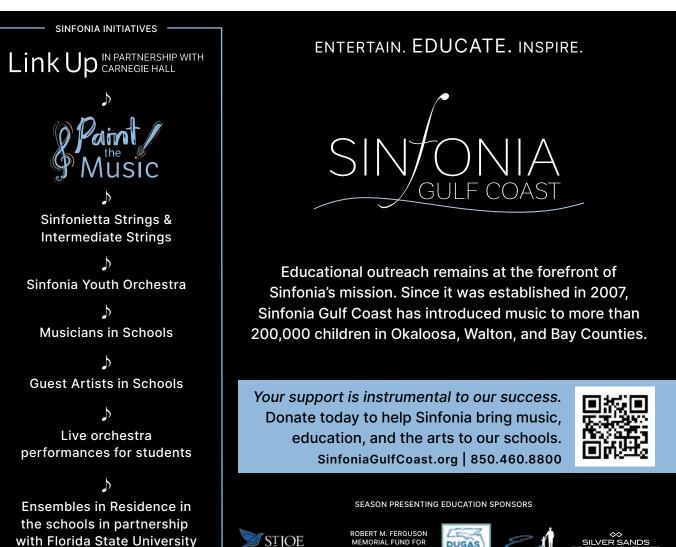
tine, and walks with us through every ordinary activity.

I have found that my spiritual strength is not built solely on mountaintop experiences. It is formed in the valleys, on the plains and through life's routine activities. When we pray without emergencies, read Scripture because we want to, or serve without applause, growth occurs exponentially.

Lamentations 3:22–23 tells us that God's mercies are "new every morning." Not just on holidays. Not just on Sundays. Every single day! So, this June, let's listen for the "still small voice." Let's choose to focus on God during the ordinary and not just the extraordinary days. We might discover that those are the moments He chooses to shape us the most.

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.





Christina Donahoe Wins Downtown FWB Sign Design Contest

\$5,000 Awarded for Paddleboard-Inspired Artwork to Welcome Visitor

By DEVON RAVINE, CITY OF **FWB PIO**

The City of Fort Walton Beach congratulates Christina Donahoe of Christina Custom Art on her winning design for a new Downtown Fort Walton Beach entrance sign. For her design efforts, Christina was presented with a check for \$5,000 during Tuesday night's Fort Walton Beach City Council meeting.

The entrance sign will be placed at the intersection of U.S. Hwy. 98 and Eglin Pkwy. SE, just west of the historic Gulfview Hotel Center, providing a visual welcome to the downtown district. The sign will be part of a larger beautification project that will include landscaping.

Christina's artwork depicts

a paddleboard and wave, reflecting the importance of the local area's waterways, and features a variety of visual elements, ranging from the 1200-yearold Indian Temple Mound to the fighter jets that fly our skies.

Christina's sign proposal was among a field of 46 entries in a competition organized and funded by the City of Fort Walton Beach's Community Redevelopment Agency.

"We had a lot of wonderful entries that were deserving of the award," said CRA Administrator Alisa Burleson. "We



thank all those who participated for their efforts and great ideas."

A committee of nine judges narrowed the field down to five entries before meeting in person in late April to select the winning design.

Christina is a prolific artist, and her murals can be found at



several locations in downtown Fort Walton Beach, including a large five-panel mural on the back of the Fort Walton Beach Library.

The city will soon be sending out an RFQ (Request for Qualifications) to identify a vendor to build the sign and install it in its new home.

Art News

Students Shine in 16th Annual OAA Poster Contest

The Okaloosa Arts Alliance (OAA) recently celebrated the winners of its 16th Annual Okaloosa County School Poster Contest, themed "Arts in Outer

Space." A total of 138 creative entries from students across the county were showcased at a public reception on Sunday, May 4, at the Emerald Coast Science Center. Attendees enjoyed live music from Grow Your Gift Conservatory of Music and refreshments from Twisted Grape.

Special thanks go to the Science Center for hosting the event and to Melissa Forte Litscher of NextHome Cornerstone Realty for sponsoring. Eglin Federal Credit Union provided gift cards for the winners,

while HH Arts, Arts & Design Society, and the Science Center donated art supply bags and tickets for first-place and Viewer's Choice recipients.

Participating schools included Rocky Bayou Christian School, Crestview High, Kenwood Elementary, Montessori Learning Center, Village Christian Academy, Risen Star Academy, St. Mary Catholic School, Meigs Middle and Ruckel Middle School.

Winners:

Elementary (K-4th)

- 1st: Christine Blatz, 1st grade - Montessori Learning
- 2nd: Rachel Ard, Kindergarten - Montessori Learning
- 3rd: Alexa Gonzalez, 4th grade – Kenwood Elementary Middle School (5th–8th)

• 1st: Aria Berry, 8th grade -Rocky Bayou Christian School

- 2nd: Ahymn Kim, 6th grade - Ruckel Middle School
- 3rd: Trinity Ricciardi, 6th grade - Rocky Bayou Christian School

High School (9th-12th)

- 1st: Jingxuan Lee Song, 10th grade - Crestview High School
- 2nd: Ryan Jaime, 11th grade - Crestview High School
- 3rd: Kennedy Glenn, 12th grade – Crestview High School

To view winning entries and photos, visit: okaloosaarts.org.

The OAA serves as Okaloosa County's official arts agency,



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Arts & Music

ART NEWS

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promoting the arts through advocacy, education and community engagement.

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, jewelry, and more. Artists benefit from amenities like free breakfast, booth sitters, and an awards dinner.

Applications, including four images, are due by June 30, $202\overline{5}$. Fees are \$30 to apply and \$350-\$700 for booth space. Proceeds support MKAF's arts outreach programs. Details at mkaf. org or call (850) 650-2226.

Fort Walton Rehab Wins Statewide Photo Contest

In celebration of National Skilled Nursing Care Week, the Florida Health Care Association (FHCA) has named Fort Walton Rehabilitation Center the firstplace winner of its 2025 Long Term Care Photo Contest.

The annual contest, themed "Inspiring Moments," drew over 200 entries from across Florida. Fort Walton Rehab's winning photo, "Seeing Without Vision," was taken by Certified Nursing Assistant Dorothy Conner and captures a joyful moment between a resident and her dog, Barney, during a pet therapy

The center received a \$500 award for a resident and staff social event, and Conner was gifted a \$50 card for her winning

Second and third place went to Cypress Palms in Largo and Unity Health and Rehabilitation Center in Miami, respectively. All winners received funding for social events and recognition during FHCA's annual events.

The contest, sponsored by Incite Strategic Partners, highlights meaningful moments in long-term care and promotes compassion, connection, and community. Winning entries are featured on FHCA's Facebook page and website.

Sinfonia Youth Orchestra Ends Season on a High Note

The Sinfonia Youth Orchestra (SYO) wrapped up its 2024-2025 season with a moving and out-of-this-world Spring Concert on May 4 at Destin High School. Nearly 100 student musicians filled the auditorium with spacethemed music, marking a joyful finale to a year of hard work, growth, and artistry.

The evening also celebratedstandout students with

heartfelt scholarship presentations. French horn player Kalle Guerrero, a homeschool student known for his leadership and compassion, received the prestigious Grace Fulcher Memorial Scholarship. Guerrero's impact reaches far beyond music—he's founded a homeschool co-op, mentored peers, and served individuals with disabilities.

Two new \$500 scholarships were awarded this year. Violinist Ava McCallister (South Walton High) earned the Exemplary Character Scholarship for her integrity and resilience, while tuba player Zaki Beckler (Gulf Breeze High) received the Talented Musician Scholarship for his creativity and excellence.

Nine seniors graduated from the program this year, represent-



ing schools across Okaloosa and Walton Counties. Since 2007, Sinfonia Gulf Coast has reached over 220,000 students through its music education efforts.

Auditions for the 2025-2026 SYO season open in June. For more information, contact Margaret Gordon at mgordon@sinfoniagulfcoast.org or (850) 460-

Comedy, Confusion, and **Opera Collide in Lend Me** a Tenor

Winner of three Tony Awards and four Drama Desk Awards, Lend Me a Tenor is a fast-paced farce set in 1934 at the Cleveland Grand Opera Company.

Chaos erupts when world-renowned tenor Tito Merelli-"Il Stupendo"-arrives late and accidentally takes a double dose of tranquilizers. Believing he's dead, opera manager Saunders convinces his assistant Max to don Tito's costume and go on in his place. Max stuns the audience, but when the real Tito wakes up and suits up to perform, the stage is set for outrageous confusion—two tenors, identical costumes and romantic mix-ups involving women in lingerie.

Don't miss this uproarious night of mistaken identity and nonstop laughs!

Tickets at stagecraftersfwb. com or ticketor.com/stagecraft-



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