



PRSRT STD ECRWSS - EDDM U.S. POSTAGE PAID Santa Rosa Beach, FL PERMIT NO. #11

Postal Customer Local

Bowlegs 70!

Meet the New Captain Billy and Krewe

By Christopher Manson

The 70th Annual Billy Bowlegs Coronation Pageant was held Saturday, June 14, at Niceville's Mattie Kelly Arts Center. The free public event unveiled the tightly-guarded identity of Captain Billy 70, Rique Gwin, along with his Queen, his First Mate and Mistress, his 10-couple Honor Guard, and the theme for the new Bowlegs year. The first half of the event bid a hearty farewell to Captain Billy 69 Michael Castleberry and the Bottoms Up Krewe.

Keeping the new Captain Billy's identity a secret involves a lot of planning carried out through anonymous emails starting in the eight or so months leading up to the Coronation Pageant.

The criteria for selecting Bowlegs and the rest of the key players/pirates is very specific, but boils down to candidates' experience in the Krewe. "The previous Captains get together and decide who should lead the crew," says Gwin/Billy.



Queen of Bowlegs 70 Debbie Fisher, Captain Billy 70 Rique Gwin, First Mistress Mollie Grindland, First Mate Mark Grindland, Kelly Gwin and J. Mark Fisher.

"Captain Billy picks everyone else in their Top 26. The First Mate and Mistress have been our friends for years. When I was First Mate, the new Queen was on the honor guard. It was a natural selection that just made sense. It's a huge undertaking. They really have to want to be involved."

In addition, rising high school seniors are invited to

take part as Princesses and Privateers. And younger children are encouraged to serve as Children of the Court. "This year, we have 11 Children of the Court ranging in ages from one to nine years old." Gwin's two grown children served as Princesses in previous years while attending high school.

Gwin has been involved with the Krewe for 14 years.



The Krewe of Bowlegs Children of the Court.

"One of our friends from church invited us to attend some social events, and the Bowlegs people were so friendly and supportive." The Gwins are originally from Alabama— Rique is a Birmingham transplant, and his wife Kelly was born in Fort Rucker. They are

BOWLEGS 70 continued on page 2

374 Combat Missions, One Local Hero's Legacy:

Wayne Warner's Story of Service and Survival

By Michelle Ruschman

When veteran, attorney and author Wayne Warner thinks about the beginning of his love for military service, he remembers that he was only age four as World War II was drawing to a close. He wore child-sized versions of military uniforms, and growing up in Lexington, Ky., his family served proudly. One uncle had fought in World War II, with an aunt serving with the Women's Army Corps, his cousin had been wounded in Iwo Jima, and later, another uncle fought in Korea. Even in elementary school, Wayne loved military history. By junior high, he knew he wanted an education that would move him toward the military career he desired. His heart was set on being a pilot. But, at the time, West Point

WAYNE WARNER

continued on page 2



Magnolia Grill

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

STEAKS • SEAFOOD • ITALIAN

157 Brooks Street SE• Fort Walton Beach (850) 302-0266 • magnoliagrillfwb.com



Community

BOWLEGS 70

 $continued\ from\ page\ 1$

both retired Air Force. Gwin was First Mate during the Covid outbreak, which, if you count that, would make this year 71. So, we're not counting it.

Captain Billy 70 will be planning out the year's numerous events—including travel and costumes—with the Queen, Debbie Fisher, and her husband, J. Mark Fisher; and the First Mate and Mistress.

The Billy Bowlegs Pirate

Festival originated in 1954. Through the years, the Krewe has swash buckled at the center of it all-civic-minded, volunteer-driven, and devoted to fun and service. "The original thing for the crew 70 years ago was to attract tourism, which is still one of our main goals," says Gwin. "We travel as far north as Minnesota and as far south as Sarastota, building relationships with other Krewes. They do variations similar to our festival, some as long as two weeks and some a couple of hours. Our goal is ambassadorship for the city of Fort Walton Beach.

"Every year, costumes are custom made, funded by the Krewe out of our own pockets. This year D and D Creations, one of the Mardi Gras houses in New Orleans, made them. The colors have a lot of significance—since I'm an aviator, I picked blue and silver as our colors, for the sky and lightning storm effect. Our new logo will reflect that symbolism as well."

The theme for Year 70 is Doolittle's Raiders, in honor of

the courageous men who participated in America's 1942 bombing mission against Tokyo. The Raiders have strong ties to our local military community.

"I absolutely love this Krewe, the area and the patriotic spirit we have here," says Gwin. "I'll do anything I can to improve the relationship between the Krewe and the community. One of the major themes this year is honoring not only our history as a Krewe, but also the history of the community."

Set sail for more pirate fun at



PHOTOS COURTESY OF KREWE OF BOWLEGS

Queen of Bowlegs 70

Debbie Fisher and Captain Billy 70

Rique Gwin.

kreweofbowlegs.com.

WAYNE WARNER

continued from page 1

was the only option. In 1954, however, Congress decided they would create the United States Air Force Academy, and at 17, that's where Wayne began his years in college. His class was the first to spend all four years at the permanent site in Colorado Springs. At graduation, the commencement speaker was John F. Kennedy.

Wayne then went to Craig Air Force Base in Selma, Ala., for pilot training. "The only airplanes that were available to



us that were in Vietnam were

White the state of the state of

Pacific Air Forces C-130s," said Wayne. "I knew that the supplies were getting into Vietnam by C-130 Hercules, so that's what I applied for. I reported into the 21st Troop Carrier Squadron at Naha, Okinawa, in February of 65. So, my first landing in Vietnam was in March of 1965."

For the next year and a half, Wayne flew C-130s and would serve the Air Force over the next four years until March 1969. In those four years, Wayne also flew the F-105 Thunderchief and the A-1 Skyraider, a plane that had rescued many of his friends from the jungle. In these three aircraft, Wayne flew 374 combat missions, which included 169 missions over North Vietnam and 84 blind bat night missions. His C-130 crew would come to be known as the Kool-Aid Kids when their commander, a Lieutenant Colonel decided to fly with them, and while looking for coffee with a crew who didn't like coffee, accidentally drank the fruit juice from the thermos that was handed to him.

"I flew my 100th F-105 mission over North Vietnam on June 8th, 1968. I was slated to become an instructor, teaching foreign students how to deliver

ordnance. I wanted to keep flying in Southeast Asia, though, so the Air Force granted my request to do search and rescue missions. That's when I went to Hurlburt to train on the A-1. In 1969, I reported to Thailand and flew 12 combat missions in that aircraft."

Among the many awards and distinctions, Wayne was awarded the Silver Star when his efforts delayed a North Vietnamese takeover of a special forces camp in South Vietnam. Thanks to his flight, the assault was destroyed, and everyone was rescued from the camp.

In March of 1969, Wayne experienced two catastrophic engine failures, the first resulting in a bailout and subsequent pickup by a Jolly Green helicopter, and the second being the last time he'd fly for the Air Force.

"I had engine and instrument failure on takeoff and crashed and burned. I was trapped in the cockpit with a full load of personnel ordinance and AVgas. I watched the legs and sleeves burn off my flight suit, but I couldn't undo my harness. Fortunately, a Jolly Green (helicopter) was taking off and saw the problem I was having. He hovered over me so his rotor wash

could blow the flames down. I managed to finally kick myself out of the cockpit, but I was still tangled in my harness. It so happened that there was a PJ (para jumper) who was out jogging, and another pilot who saw me. So, they ran to cut me off the side of the airplane. They loaded me on the Jolly Green that would fly me to the front door of the dispensary to get medical attention. My first flight to Vietnam was in March of '65, and this flight was in March of '69."

After being medically retired from the Air Force in September of 1969, Wayne earned his law degree. With fond memories of childhood vacations in Fort Walton Beach and then spending his honeymoon there with his wife, Vickie, they were excited for Wayne to eventually get hired at Eglin Air Force Base as a civilian attorney acquiring weapon systems. He worked for Eglin for 28 years.

Wayne has also written a book, One Trip Too Many: A Pilot's Memoirs of 38 Months in Combat over Laos and Vietnam, not only as a legacy piece for his family and fellow veterans, but to record what it was like firsthand to serve in Vietnam. It can be found at Amazon.com.

All these years later, Wayne continues to love the military and the camaraderie that it inspired among those he had the privilege to serve with. To those who are currently on active duty, Wayne offers these words of encouragement: "Believe in what you're doing and keep the faith of your comrades. Your military service is a benefit to everyone."

If you would like to reach out to Wayne directly, he can be contacted at wwarner83@gmail.com.



Christine & Brett Kaufman of Illume: Bright Lights in Our Business Community

By Kelly Murphy-Redd

Illume is a branding and design firm created by Christine Kaufman in 2019. Christine comes from Missouri where she worked for an ad agency in Kansas City after earning her degree in graphic design, later becoming a freelance graphic designer. Brett Kaufman moved here from Finland where he worked for Nokia after 10 years in graduate engineering programs. He moved to Okaloosa County with a suitcase and \$200 to take over renovating a family home. He began work for a government contractor in weapons design until the contract was cancelled due to Covid.

They could have met each other in Missouri when they were both there in the early 2000s, but didn't meet until they were in Okaloosa County. Christine and Brett fell in love and planned to elope to Croatia. Brett says Croatia is beautiful, cheap and safe. That was 2020 and Covid changed their plans.

They decided get married legally at a UPS store in town. A lady walked in when the marriage was taking place. She excitedly asked, "Are you guys getting married? I got married in a UPS store too." She ended up being their witness.

Christine and Brett then eloped to New York. Christine's wedding dress was custom designed by Olia Zavozina, an Illume client and wedding gown designer, recognized for red-carpet fashion worn by country music stars. They celebrated in a fancy restaurant. The couple hired a photographer they found on Instagram to create beautiful memories they could eventually pass on to their three children.

Christine is the only artist to come from her family of doctors and engineers. She loved being a creative director, but didn't like the business side of things. She asked Brett to take over business management for Illume, including finances, taxes,



contracts, invoicing, payroll and overall project management.

Many people say it's hard for a husband and wife to work together. Christine and Brett wondered if that would be the case for them. However, they have found working together to be a fulfilling experience. Working from home allows Brett the freedom to coach all of his children's sports teams. He gets to travel on field trips. All of his children's friends call him "Isi" which is Finnish for "Dad."

Illume does more than graphic design. Christine and her team of designers get to know their clients, discover what makes them different and help develop strategies for branding identity and future growth. Being clear on what makes a business different is the guiding "north star."

Illume lists as their specialties: custom logo design, websites, business cards, fliers, catalogues, packaging, signage, merchandise, menus, email newsletters, social media, presentations and more.

Illume's client roster includes start-ups, small businesses, large corporations and even other agencies needing additional support. The types of clients they serve include:

- National & international sports organizations
- Ivy-league universities

- Pharmaceutical companies
- Innovative global chemical and agricultural companies
- IT companies
- AI software start-ups
- Food & restaurant businesses
- Luxury gifting companies
- Inspirational & public speakers
- Fashion designers
- Financial & legal institutions
- Elected political officials
- Non-profit organizations
- Health & wellness practices
- Technical consulting companies

A great product will not sell itself. Christine often says a business needs to look and feel like the leader of its industry. She illustrates that philosophy by the old saying: Dress for the job you want—not the job you have.

Brett hastens to add that a business should not be just a paycheck. Companies need to set themselves up for retirement, succession or selling when the time comes.

Continued on page 8







Palms Resort Brings Dinner, Drinks, Live Magic & Comedy to Destin!

An action-packed live show featuring World-Class Magic Comedy and Ventriloquism is now open with nightly shows at the newly renovated Palms Destin Resort Showroom.

Interactive magic takes place just inches away in an intimate showroom that offers excellent table seating. The performance

features sophisticated magic & smart comedy targeting adults but is family-friendly and appropriate for all ages. The show is headlined by Bart Rockett who hosted his own nationally syndicated television show for three seasons, had a co-starring role on the former NBC Drama Parenthood and headlined his own 1,000-seat theater in the tourist mecca of Branson, Missouri for nine seasons. He has appeared in 85 countries around the globe and headlined for most every major cruise line.

Rockett, who started at the age of 10, trained under Jeff Dunham and is recognized for his excellent comedy ventriloquism which is featured in the show. After growing up in the South, Rockett moved to Hollywood, California where his management team is located. He produced his teens to the finals of NBC's America's Got Talent and they have gone on to do major Hollywood projects over the years. Kadan, who starred in the movie Dark Skies with award winning actress Keri Russell and on CBS's rush hour combines forces with his Sister, Brooklyn to make guest appearances in Rockett's Destin show.

Brooklyn is well known for

her viral Super Bowl commercial that currently has nearly 800 million views on YouTube and most recently played Hollywood superstar Bradley Cooper's daughter in a project with Steven Spielberg and Martin Scorsese.

This talented family has been vacationing in Destin for many years and now that Rockett's kids are almost grown, he is excited to be back for a longterm residency in the place his Grandparents first introduced him to as a child. Rockett shared, "For me, coming back here feels like coming home. Some of my greatest childhood memories happened on these beaches and it's my desire to bring something unique to the area that is a fun experience for families to attend & make their own amazing memories."

Nightly shows happen at



7:30 p.m. with 5 p.m. early seatings offered on Sunday's and select dates. A variety of alcoholic & non-alcoholic beverages are available as well as a full menu of food and dessert offerings before or after the show. Parking is plentiful and free in The Palms Destin Resort multi-level parking garage, that is attached to the showroom.

Advance reservations are required and can be made at the official ticketing site: USATourTickets.LIVE.

26th Annual Emerald Coast Home & Boat Show Coming to Destin-FWB Convention Center

Wes Fell, a longtime resident of Destin/Fort Walton Beach and the promoter of the Emerald Coast Home & Boat Show, invites the community to the 26th Annual event on Saturday and Sunday, September 20–21, 2025, at the Destin-FWB Convention Center, 1250 Miracle Strip Parkway, FWB.

This exciting two-day event—now in its 26th consecutive year-will feature over 100 Home Show and general business vendors. Attendees can explore information and discounts on:

- Insurance, Roofing, A/C, Plumbing, Mortgages, Homes
- Interior Design, Flooring, Pools, Spas, Shutters, Leaf Guards
 - Furniture, Generators,

Siding, Heating & AC, Solar, Painting, and Remodeling

- · Closets, Bath & Kitchen Remodeling, Windows, Doors and more
- Electronics, Computers, Cell Phones, Vacations
- Plus, health and wellness vendors including Chiropractic, Hearing, Massage Therapy, and Skin Care

Emerald Coast Marine will also host a Super Boat Show and Sale with discounted boat show specials.

To register for booth space or for more info, contact Wes Fell at 850-353-2832 or email wesfell@cox net

Mention LIFE MEDIA and receive a 10% discount on booth space!

Learn more at www.ParadisePromotionsFL.com.





Featurings





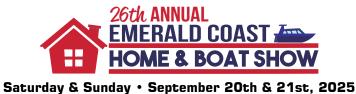
"Brilliant, incredible magic, & fantastic showmanship!" - Simon Cowell



Now Appearing (and Disappearing) Nightly The Palms of Destin Resort & Conference Center 4201 Indian Bayou Trail, Destin, FL FREE PARKING

BOOTH SPACE SELLING OUT FAST

for the Largest and Best TWO-DAY Business Event in NorthWest Florida



at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center



CLICK HERE TO REGISTER OR FOR MORE INFO

SPONSORED BY



AND THE FOLLOWING AWESOME BUSINESS OWNERS

Mention You Saw This Ad in Life Media and Receive A 10% DISCOUNT on Your Booth Space



































To Become a Vendor or Sponsor in This Great Event - Contact Wes Fell (Event Promoter) at 850-353-2832 or WesFell@Cox.Net More Info & Registration Form at www.ParadisePromotionsfl.com

This is Another Great Paradise Promotion

Happenings Around FWB

2025

EVENTS

JULY

July 2025

- 11 | Greater FWB Chamber First Friday Coffee 7 am | Christian Life Center at FBC | FWB
- Pokemon Day 12 | 10 am | FWB Public Library | FWB Live Music: Blue Mother Tupelo 8 pm | Docie's Dock | FWB
- Okaloosa Sea Oats Painting 1 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB
- Youth Camp Training: NRA Basics of 14- | Pistol Shooting 18 10 am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso



- 14 | Lawyers in Libraries 10 am | FWB Public Library | FWB
- Lunch N Learn How To Invest in Real Estate 15 l 11:30 am | Greater FWB Chamber of Commerce| FWB

Tini Tuesday 4 pm | Soundside Waterfront Bar | FWB

- 16 | Spongy Jellyfish Painting (All Ages) 10 am | Painting with a Twist | FWB
- Lego Club 17 I

2 pm | FWB Public Library | FWB

Greater FWB Chamber Business After Hours 5:30 pm | Big Gues Tractor & Equipment | Mary Esther

RADBAR Beach Cleanup 19 9 am | Shalimar Bridge | FWB

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

Youth Camp Training: NRA Basics of 21-Rifle Shooting 25 10 am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso



- 22 | Games Club 1 pm | FWB Public Library | FWB
- Lunch N Learn Brand Smart: Tools, Trust, 23 & Online Tactics

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

Fireworks & Waterfront Views 9 pm | Soundside Waterfront Bar | FWB

- 24 | Beachy Twilight Moon Painting 6 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB Live Music: Dallas Moore 8 pm | Docie's Dock | FWB
- Kids Fishing Clinic 26 9 am | MarineMax | FWB

2nd Anniversary Celebration 10 am | DeFrance Boutique | FWB

Ride For Hope 10 am | Emerald Coast Harley-Davidson | FWB

Sea Ray Sunset Cruise 5 pm | MarineMax | FWB

Sip & Science: Lost in Space 5:45 pm | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB

Augustana Summer Tour 8 pm | Docie's Dock | FWB

- Cosmic Lake Forest Painting 28 6 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB
- **Book Lovers Event: Crescent Moon City** 6 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB

AUGUST

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

> ADSO Sanctuary Gallery Show Reception 6 pm | Arts & Design Society (ADSO) | FWB

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

> Always Above Planetarium Shows 10:30 am | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB

> Discover Science Saturday 10:30 am | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB

- Women's Climbing Circle 5 pm | Rock Out Climbing Gym | Destin
- **FWB Library Friends Meeting** 6 pm | FWB Public Library | FWB

- Safe Connections Fundraiser 4 pm | Task Force Pizza Co. | FWB
- Business Entrepreneur Night 5 pm | Soundside Waterfront Bar | FWB
- Coffee with the City Manager 8 am | 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

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

















Governor DeSantis Signs New Law Restoring Public Beach Access in Panhandle

By Douglas D. Stauffer

Governor Ron DeSantis signed landmark legislation in Walton County recently that restores public beach access and returns local authority to communities across Florida's Gulf Coast. The bill, Senate Bill 1622, repeals restrictive provisions from a 2018 law that had limited customary use access to dry sand areas of privately owned beaches, creating years of controversy and confusion, especially in Walton County.

Speaking before a crowd of lawmakers, local officials, and beachgoers at Shunk Gulley Oyster Bar in Santa Rosa Beach, DeSantis emphasized that the new law will "put the power back in the hands of local governments and their citizens."

"This bill is about restoring local control, cutting the legal red tape, and putting our residents first," DeSantis said. "The people of this area have fought long and hard to regain the access they've traditionally en-

joyed. Today, we're making that a reality."

Reversing a Controversial Law

The legislation repeals part of the 2018 law that required local governments to get court approval before enforcing customary use, an unwritten public right to access dry sand areas of beaches that has been traditionally practiced in many parts of Florida. The 2018 change forced counties to initiate costly, parcel-by-parcel legal battles, sparking widespread opposition in coastal communities.

State Senator Jay Trumbull, a sponsor of the bill, remembered how the 2018 legislation caught many residents off guard.

"Overnight, people who had walked the same stretch of beach for generations were being told that they were trespassing," Senator Trumbull said. "This law fixes that."

The new bill allows counties and municipalities to pass

local customary use ordinances without first obtaining court judgments, reasserting the right of the public to access Florida's beaches for walking, fishing, swimming, and sunbathing.

Accelerating Beach Restoration

Beyond public access, SB 1622 also simplifies the process for beach renourishment projects in smaller Gulf Coast counties like Walton. Under the law, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) can now establish erosion control boundaries using the state's existing mean high-water line instead of conducting lengthy surveys or requiring separate approvals.

This change is expected to save time and money while enabling faster responses to severe beach erosion, a growing concern in the region. DEP Secretary Alexis Lambert noted nearly 19 of Walton County's 26 miles of coastline are critically eroded.

"Beach nourishment isn't



just about tourism," said Representative Shane Abbott, who co-sponsored the bill. "It's about protecting our coastline, preserving property, and ensuring that locals and visitors alike can enjoy these beaches for years to come."

Local Impact and Funding

Florida has invested over \$550 million in beach restoration efforts since 2019, with an additional \$53 million allocated in this year's state budget. In Walton County, nearly \$60 million in state funds have been committed to local projects, and another \$60 million is expected in federal matching funds.

DEP Secretary Alex Lambert emphasized the significance of the new process: "This legislation simplifies how we set erosion control lines, allowing vital beach nourishment projects to move forward more efficiently."

Coastal Communities

A Victory for

The signing of SB 1622 marks a significant victory for coastal communities and public access advocates across the state. Local leaders praised the decision as a return to common sense and a reaffirmation of Florida's longstanding tradition

of beach enjoyment for every-

"This is a great day for Walton County and the entire Panhandle," said Commissioner Danny Glidewell. "Our residents have been waiting for this for years, and I thank Governor DeSantis for listening and taking action." The bill takes effect immediately.



VISIT MYFWBLIFE.COM

Community

Forget the Sprint: Real Healing Happens in the Marathon!

At The Tortoise Clinic, personalized care and patience lead to powerful, lifelong wellness



By Dr. Karen DeVore

If you know the story of the tortoise and the hare, you already understand one of the most important lessons we can apply to health: slow and steady wins the race.

In a world where we're constantly bombarded with quickfix solutions—miracle diets, instant detoxes, and one-pill answers—it's easy to lose sight of the long game. But with integrative healthcare practitioners, that's exactly what we focus on: your long-term, sustainable wellness. Not the shortcut, not the sprint—but the journey that leads to resilience, balance, and vitality for years to come.

What Is Integrative Health?

Integrative health is an approach to care that puts you, the whole person, at the center. It draws from both conventional Western medicine and evidence-based Eastern traditions to treat not just symptoms, but root causes.

This model acknowledges the value of modern diagnostic tools, lab testing, and pharmacology, while also embracing the centuries-old wisdom of acupuncture, herbal medicine, nutrition, and lifestyle medicine. At its core, integrative health is collaborative, personalized, and preventative.

Instead of asking, "What drug treats this disease?" we ask, "Why is this symptom happening—and what's the best way to restore balance?" That might include medication, but it may also include herbs, dietary changes, movement, sleep support, or acupuncture. The goal is not to replace one system with another, but to combine the best of both to offer more comprehensive, compassionate care.

How The Tortoise Clinic Blends East and West

At the Tortoise Clinic, we live and breathe this philosophy. We've served the communities of North Florida for over 30 years, building a practice that reflects the needs of our patients and the realities of modern life.

A typical visit here might include lab testing to evaluate hormones, inflammation, or nutrient deficiencies, followed by acupuncture to support ner-



vous system regulation and pain relief. A patient might receive customized herbal formulations from our Chinese herb dispensary – the largest in Northwest Florida, paired with guidance on nutrition and daily habits to support their health goals.

Because we're not bound by one medical model, we have more flexibility—and more tools—to help you feel your best.

How Is This Different From Traditional Medicine?

Traditional, Western medicine has done incredible things. It excels in acute care, emergency response, and surgical interventions. But when it comes to chronic illness, long-term prevention, and quality of life, many patients are left wanting

I hear it often:

"My labs are normal, but I still don't feel well."

"My doctor told me it's just part of getting older."

"I was given medication, but no one asked about my diet or stress levels."

Integrative medicine fills those gaps.

We take time to listen. We look at patterns, history, and lifestyle. We ask about your sleep, digestion, energy, and emotional well-being—not because it's "extra," but because it all matters. Our goal isn't just to mask symptoms, but to understand create a care plan that's tailored to your unique biology, goals, and life circumstances.

The Power of **Personalized Wellness**

No two bodies are the same.

the story behind them and to You are not your neighbor, your parent, or your coworker. What works for one person may not work for another—and that's why personalized care matters.

When you work with an integrative provider, you're not handed a one-size-fits-all solution. You're invited into a partnership, where we co-create a wellness plan that evolves with you. Whether you're working on hormone balance, fertility, digestion, chronic stress, weight loss,

Continued on next page

WOMEN'S WELLNESS REIMAGINED

What if your story mattered as much as your labs?

What if "normal" isn't optimal for you?

What if your fatigue, bloating, or anxiety isn't just stress - but a sign your body needs support?





WOMEN'S WELLNESS PROVIDER

Scan the OR code to schedule your in-person or virtual consultation today!





2441 U.S. Hwy 98 Santa Rosa Beach, FL 32459 TortoiseClinic.com | 850.267.5611

NEW PATIENT OFFER

Brooks Bridge Replacement Project Continues Progress

Major Upgrades Promise Smoother Travel, Safer Pedestrian Access and Scenic Views

Drivers and residents in Fort Walton Beach and Okaloosa Island can expect significant changes in the coming years as the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) continues work on the long-anticipated Brooks Bridge Replacement Project.

One of the key features of the \$171 million project is the reconstruction of Santa Rosa Boulevard, which will pass under the new bridge. To maintain access and improve traffic flow between U.S. 98 and Santa Rosa Boulevard, two new connector roads are being built:

• East Connection: A new four-lane road linking Santa Rosa Boulevard to U.S. 98 eastbound. Westbound drivers



on U.S. 98 will also be able to turn left onto East Connection to reach Santa Rosa Boulevard.

• North Connection: This new road will feature a ramp to U.S. 98 westbound, providing access to Brooks Bridge. It will also include a dedicated right-turn lane for reaching Santa Rosa Boulevard north of U.S. 98.

Recent construction photos show curb and sidewalk installation underway, with asphalt now being laid on the new lanes.

When

complete, the new Brooks Bridge will feature two parallel spans—each carrying three lanes of traffic in either direction. This expansion will replace the existing four-lane bridge, which dates back to 1966. The new bridge will stretch 2,111 feet—nearly 800 feet longer than the current structure—and offer 65 feet of vertical clearance, meet-

ing updated U.S. Coast Guard requirements.

Pedestrians and cyclists will also benefit. Each bridge will include a 12-foot-wide shareduse path with scenic overlooks, shade structures and protective barrier walls to separate foot traffic from vehicles.

Additional improvements include:

- Intersection upgrades from Perry Avenue to Pier Road
- Elimination of the traffic signal at U.S. 98/Santa Rosa Blvd. for improved flow
- ADA-compliant pedestrian access at surrounding intersections
- New drainage systems and storm water retention ponds

The project spans from Eglin Parkway to Pier Road and

is expected to be completed by summer 2027.

Stay updated:

Visit nwflroads.com/projects/415474-2N

Follow Facebook.com/My-BrooksBridge, or email info@mybrooksbridge.com.

FWB/ife

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

P.O. Box 1424 Santa Rosa Beach, FL 32459

Executive Editor & Publisher

Lori Leath Smith Lori@LifeMediaGrp.com

Director,

Advertising Sales Scott Miller

Scott@LifeMediaGrp.com

Art Director Kim Harper

Contributing Writers

Paul Bonette
Heather Bennett Eye
Mary Fomby
Sherry Jones
Christopher Manson
Allison McDowell
Barbara Palmgren
Helen Petre
Michelle Ruschman
Doug Stauffer

To Advertise 850.688.9886

FWB Life assumes no financial liability for errors or omissions in printed advertising and reserves the right to reject/edit advertising or editorial submissions.

© Copyright 2025 FWB Life

CHRISTINE & BRETT

 $continued\ from\ page\ 3$

Illume has been a member of the Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce for three years. Christine and Brett are co-chairs of the Young Professionals group. Brett says networking within the chamber has been of benefit. Many of the professional services they use, such as mortgage companies and home insurance, have come from relationships cultivated through the chamber.

Christine emphasizes Illume is not "just a design firm," but has become a "business therapist" for many clients. Illume works to find solutions and the deliverables come out of that process. A passion for helping businesses succeed and creating

more beauty in the world drives Christine every day.

Contact them at (850) 499-9129 or visit illumesc.com.



Chamber of Commerce

REAL HEALING

continued from page 7

or simply optimizing your energy, our role is to guide and support your process with the right blend of tools.

Sometimes, that's acupuncture. Sometimes, it's a dietary shift, a carefully selected supplement, or lab-guided medical intervention. Often, it's all of the above.

The Tortoise Mentality

Health is not a destination. It's not a number on a scale or a perfect lab result. It's a relationship with your body, and like any relationship, it requires time, trust and patience.

True wellness isn't about

"fixing" what's wrong—it's about learning what your body needs to thrive and honoring that through intentional, steady steps. That's what we mean when we say, "Wellness is a marathon, not a sprint."

As an integrative team, we walk beside you for the long haul—not racing to the finish, but pacing with purpose. With every visit, every conversation, and every personalized plan, we aim to help you move closer to the healthiest version of yourself.

So, whether you're just starting your health journey or looking for a deeper, more connected approach to care, I invite you to embrace the pace of the tortoise—and discover the kind of health that lasts a lifetime.

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

TO SEE WHAT IS HAPPENING

VISIT ILOVEFWB.COM



May God Continue to Bless America

By Carolyn Newcomer Ketchel

The United States stands on the eve of a grand anniversary on July 4th, 2026. It will be the 250th Anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. It's officially known as the Semiquincentennial Celebration—quite a mouthful! But get used to hearing it as we turn our focus to the birth of our nation. Many national and local activities are already underway as we look forward to a full year of patriotic celebrations.

I am so grateful that I was fortunate enough to be born into the United States of America. Many of you know that I am a proud member of the Daughters of the American Revolution. Membership means you can prove direct lineage to someone who fought, served or aided the American Revolution. The members of the society are engaged in historic preservation, education and patriotic activities. We honor the legacy of those who sacrificed everything to form this nation.

George Washington was a

courageous and charismatic leader who inspired his troops in the most difficult circumstances. He was a private man about his Anglican faith, but, throughout his time in leadership, he encouraged days of prayer and fasting as a means to seek divine assistance in perilous situations. His proclamations at Thanksgiving, Christmas and his Farewell address sought divine guidance from God. He and his officers were known to lead church services during the French and Indian Wars that proceeded the American Revolution. He believed deeply in freedom of Religion. And God indeed blessed this nation.

One of the most famous scenes of the Revolutionary War was the crossing of the Delaware River at Trenton. Temperatures for the crossing ranged from 29-33 degrees. The drizzle turned to driving rain which became a howling nor'easter. One soldier recorded that it "blew a perfect hurricane." This weather event of snow and sleet hid their crossing from the paid mercenary sol-



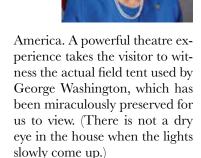
diers, the Hessians. The mission was successful for, on Christmas morning, the Hessians were taken by surprise by the bedraggled, shoeless, ill-clad, tired and hungry Revolutionary Soldiers.

My 5th great grandfather, Nicholas Bieber, was among the soldiers who took part in the Christmas surprise. He went on to fight with General George Washington for eight years as a Private. What was it about this General Washington that motivated his men to continue under these conditions? Was it his unique ability to lead and

inspire or was it that most knew what was at stake if they failed?

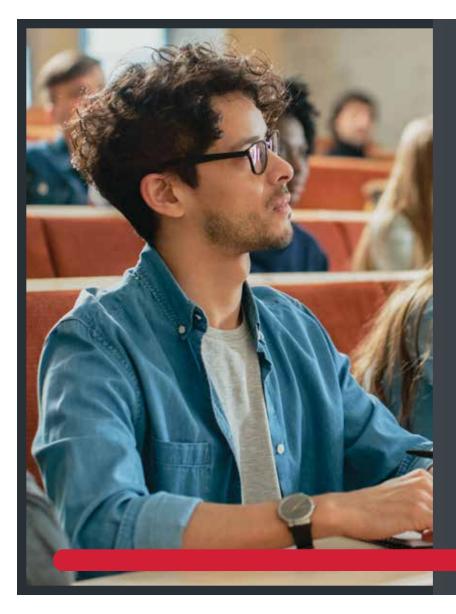
Our Founding Fathers e.g. John Adams, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin and Patrick Henry, John Hamilton, John Jay and James Madison to name a few, left behind rich and complex writings as to how they envisioned this new form of government. Their ideas represented diverse viewpoints and many of the same ideas that are still controversial today. Immerse yourself this year in Madison's writings, The Adam's family letters, Ben Franklin's letters written under the pseudonym "Silence Dogood" or the Federalist Papers. They provide valuable insights into the challenges of creating documents that will form a new nation based on principles of liberty and the rule of law, unheard of by the European monarchies of that day.

Sometime, I hope you make it an intention to visit the Museum of the American Revolution in Philadelphia. It is a collection of compelling stories of the diverse people that have become



My prayer for you and this wonderful country is, however we celebrate the birth of the United States, that we pause to thank God for our citizenship birthright and for those who made it possible for us to live in the land of the free and the home of the brave, including all those who served and continue to serve. In the words of John Adams, "You will never know how much it cost the present generation to preserve your freedom! I hope you will make good use of it."

It is an honor and privilege to serve as your commissioner. Carolyn Ketchel is Okaloosa County Commissioner, District 2, Vice-Chairman 2024-2025. She can be reached at CKetchel@myokaloosa.com or 850-651-7105.





REGISTER NOW!

FALL 2025 CLASSES BEGIN AUGUST 18

NWFSC.EDU • 850.502.2895

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



Around Town

Chief Bage Elected President of Florida Police Chiefs Association



FWB Police Chief Robert Bage was officially sworn in as President of the Florida Police Chiefs Association (FPCA) in June, one of the largest state police chief associations in the U.S., representing more than 1,000 members from municipal, airport, university, tribal, and other law enforcement agencies across Florida.

Chief Bage, who was first elected as 3rd Vice President in 2022, has served in multiple leadership roles on the FPCA Executive Board. His appointment as

President reflects his long-standing commitment to law enforcement excellence statewide.

As FPCA President, Bage plans to focus on expanding wellness programs, strengthening leadership training, and enhancing the association's public image through positive engagement. He is also committed to continuing programs like the New Chiefs Training Program, which equips new police chiefs with essential leadership tools.

Bage also plans to guide the FPCA through what he calls the Era of Accountability and Innovation, with an emphasis on transparency, public trust, and responsible integration of technologies such as artificial intelligence.

"Policing is more than laws and patrols," Chief Bage said. "It is the intricate relationships and interactions that determine whether our citizens feel secure or vulnerable, respected or disregarded. Through the FPCA's strategic leadership, community engagement, and a bold vision for the future, we will elevate the profession and the people who serve."

A Miami native, Bage graduated from North Miami Senior High School in 1994. After serving in the U.S. Navy and U.S. Border Patrol, he began a 20-year career with the North Miami Police Department, rising to Assistant Chief. In 2019, he was selected as Chief of Police for Fort Walton Beach following a nationwide search. Under his leadership, the department restored accreditation and launched new Traffic Safety and Community Policing units.

In addition to his role as Chief, Bage serves with organizations such as the Okaloosa Health Department, Advanced Sacred Hope Academy, and the FWB Rotary. He is also a Commissioner on the Florida Criminal Justice Standards and Training Commission, a member of the State of Florida's Immigration Council, and a board member of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP). He is a graduate of both the FBI National Academy and the Police Executive Research Forum's Senior Management Institute for Policing.

City Honors Retiring Fire Chief Jeremy Morgan; Welcomes Chief Thearon Shipman





Jeremy Morgan, left, and Thearon Shipman, right

The City of Fort Walton Beach extends its heartfelt thanks to Fire Chief Jeremy Morgan for nearly 25 years of dedicated service. Chief Morgan officially retired on July 1 after a career marked by leadership, advancement, and community impact.

Morgan began his journey with the department in 1999, following his graduation from the Pensacola Junior College fire academy. He steadily rose through the ranks—from Driver/Engineer in 2008 to Captain in 2012, Battalion Chief in 2017,

Deputy Fire Chief in 2021, and ultimately Fire Chief in 2022.

Throughout his career, Morgan earned multiple fire science degrees and a bachelor's in emergency management. He also served in Okaloosa County's Special Operations Unit, specializing in rope rescue and hazardous materials response, and has been a certified paramedic since 2003.

Deputy Chief Thearon Shipman will succeed Morgan as the department's new Fire Chief. A 22-year veteran of the Fort Walton Beach Fire Department, Shipman will make history as the first African American fire chief of a civilian fire department in Okaloosa County.

Shipman began his career in August 2002 and has held numerous leadership roles, including Engineer (2008), Captain (2015), Battalion Chief (2025), and Deputy Chief (February 2025). His commitment to firefighter development has been instrumental—serving as EMS coordinator, working closely with county EMS, and instructing CPR, Advanced Cardiac Life Support, and Pediatric Advanced Life Support as an American Heart Association instructor

A change of command ceremony will take place at 4 p.m., Friday, July 18, 2025, at Fire Station 6 on Hollywood Boulevard.

The City thanks Chief Morgan for his extraordinary service and proudly congratulates Chief Shipman on his well-earned promotion.

New Totem Pole Honors 70+ Years of Choctaw Tradition

A new 11-foot, 250-pound polyresin totem pole now stands proudly at the entrance of Choctawhatchee High School, paying tribute to more than 70 years of school history. Designed by alum Mark Forsman and crafted by Icon Poly in Nebraska, the new structure replaces the original wooden totem pole that stood from 1997 until its removal due to age and damage.

"Choctaw is built on tradition, and our new Totem Pole was so carefully designed to tell our 73-year-old story," said Principal Michelle Heck. "I'm so grateful as well as proud of our

FREE ADMISSION
to the top attractions along
the Emerald Coast

·KINGDOM SPLASH FEST ·SKYWHEEL
·KARTONA ELECTRIC SPEEDWAY

·SWAMPY JACKS WONGO ADVENTURE
·MAN IN SEA MUSEUM ·VR REALITY

·EMERALD COAST SCIENCE MUSEUM

·EMERALD COAST ZOO ·URBAN AIR
·UNCLE BUCKS FISH BOWL ·FORT SKATE

·GULFARIUM MARINE ADVENTURE PARK

WHILPOGOPASS.COM/
EMERALD-COAST
CODE: FUNLIFE

ONLY \$49.99



Continued on page 31



You Will Lose Money If You Sell Today, Hmmm.

Why Selling and Buying in the Same Market Isn't a Loss — It's Leverage



By Paul Domenech, Mindset Coach, Realtor, Team Leader, The Domenech Group

"If I sell for that much, I won't have enough to buy what we really want."

I hear this all the time — usually right before fear stalls action. It's the same mindset as: "We're waiting for interest rates to drop before we buy."

Here's the truth:

That's not strategy. That's wishful thinking.

And the market doesn't re-

ward hope — it rewards clarity, timing, and execution.

The Market Moves as One

If prices are adjusting in your neighborhood, they're adjusting in the one you're buying into too. Like the tide, it all moves together.

So no — you're not losing money when you sell. You're staying in step with the market.

Dollar for dollar, you're making a fair trade.

The Perfect Time? It Doesn't Exist

Waiting for lower interest rates? Be careful what you wish for

When rates drop, buyer demand spikes, inventory shrinks, competition heats up, and yes — home prices climb.

That "better deal" could end up costing you more in bidding wars and price jumps than you ever saved in interest.

You didn't wait — you missed.

Price Smart, Win Bigger

If you price correctly today, you sell faster and buy smarter.

With a solid plan, you might even land your next home with money left in your pocket.

It's not about timing the market — it's about moving with intention.

What Actually Hurts Sellers?

Only two things: condition and price.

Today's buyers care about value and presentation. That means fresh paint, clean floors, fog-free windows, a pressure-washed exterior, simple landscaping, and small repairs handled.

These aren't renovations — they're trust signals. They say, "This home is move-in ready."

And that confidence? It closes deals.

The Bottom Line

There's no perfect time to sell. There's just your time.

If it's time to go, go with a

plan — not with fear.

Done right, this market still holds gold for sellers ready to move.

That's the truth.

That's **Dollar for Dollar.**

Need help making the right move — not just any move?

We have the system, strategy,

and network to help you prep, price, and present your home — with possible repairs and updates at no upfront cost.

Call Pauly at 850-543-1418. Visit thedomenechgroup.com

We won't sell you anything. We just tell the truth — backed by a system that sells.

A House Sold Name



DOMENECH

Emerald Coast Real Estate

KELLERVA/ILLIAMS REALTY

Paul A. Domenech

Paul@TheDomenechGroup.com (850) 543-1418

thedomenechgroup.com



ECP Announces Art Escape, A Cultural Initiative Featuring Regional Artists

Work from select area artists to be showcased in the airport's concourse

Northwest Florida Beaches International Airport (ECP), together with Life Media Publications, announces a new cultural initiative, Art Escape, which showcases contemporary work by local artists in the airport's concourse. The inaugural exhibit "Where am I Going?" opened July 1, with a plan for rotating works to cycle through the space over the next five months. Comprised of artists from across the region, this project brings together dynamic regional voices with the intent of enhancing the airport experience for those traveling to and from the Emerald Coast. Welcoming nearly 1.9 million passengers in 2024, ECP acts as a gateway to the cultural attractions of surrounding counties, which, beyond airport doors, include art galleries, world-class live music, documentary film festivals, stand-up comedy, and much more.

"Where am I Going?" includes the work of artists Francisco Adaro, Christon Anderson, Mark Little, Chandler Williams, Mandy Yourick, and Jamie Zimchek in mediums that range from painting to photography and installation.

"ECP is a gateway to both beautiful beaches and a region rich in culture. We're honored to enhance the passenger experience by sharing a little of that culture (with a touch of beach) at our facility," stated Parker McClellan, ECP Executive Director.

"We see this as a unique opportunity to bring the more contemporary work of local artists to an unconventional space," said Jamie Zimchek, who helped launch this endeavor. "Though visitors can get a glimpse of these working artists in galleries throughout the region, this show offers them the opportunity to present work that's a little more experimental and boundary pushing while working around a theme that relates to ideas about personhood, place, and, of course, travel."

About the Artists

Francisco Adaro, a Walton County-based artist originally from Buenos Aires, Argentina, blends whimsical charm with refined technique. From a young age, he dreamed of a life in art, studying at La Salle and painting murals while selling sketches on the streets. A chance encounter

with his now wife and Florida native Brooke, led him to 30A, where they opened Adaro Art Gallery. His vibrant oil paintings feature playful, stylized figures both human and animal—capturing moments of joy, curiosity, and tenderness. Inspired by his wife, children, and a lively menagerie of rescue animals, Adaro's work is a celebration of life's magic, infused with humor, warmth, and storytelling. His unique visual language invites viewers to see the world through a more joyful lens.

Christon Anderson is a selftaught Bay County artist out of Panama City. Anderson cultivates work that bridges the gap between poverty and privilege. Both bold and subtle mixed with abstraction and realism, Anderson's work acknowledges the duality in every singular subject.

Mark Little is a Walton County-based photographer whose work considers the connections that bring us together. Little's images bring into focus these connections, both with one another and the environments we inhabit; his photographs capture energy unfolding, offering a glimpse of the way it all intertwines. His

1YR WARRANTY

honeydoservice.com



Chandler Williams,
"Rising From the Ashes"

work can be found in a variety of national spaces as well as 30A and greater Walton County.

Chandler Williams, a local photographer, was Walton County's artist of the year in 2021. His work has allowed him to experience life in many countries and interact with many amazing people along a multi-decade journey. Williams is assisted by an experienced crew in tune with his working style and has a fine art photography gallery in Grayton Beach.

Mandy Yourick is an artist and educator whose work includes drawing, collage, and installation. Her work engages with broader themes of creative placemaking and ecology, often reflecting on how we inhabit public and private spaces. She studies structures and shelters, as well as individual and collective agency as they relate to environments and change. Mandy earned her MFA in Visual Arts from Vermont College of Fine Arts and has completed artist residencies in Gijipo, South Korea, Madison, Wisconsin, and Skopelos, Greece. Her sculpture, Hometown, is part of the collection at the Underwater Museum of Art in Grayton Beach.

Jamie Zimchek is a multi-disciplinary artist with a background in painting and photography. Zimchek's work revolves around an exploration of popular narratives promulgated by power systems in private and public domains. She is particularly interested in the ways these



Jamie Zimchek, detail from "Connect the Dots"

systems use calculated storylines and absurd social constructs to shore up deeply entrenched self-interests. She has an MA in Mediterranean Studies from King's College London and an MFA in Visual Art from Vermont College of Fine Arts. Zimchek is co-founder of the I I I Artist Fund and an instructor in the art department at Gulf Coast State College.

About Northwest Florida Beaches International Airport

Northwest Florida Beaches International Airport (ECP) offers service from American Airlines, Delta Air Lines, Southwest Airlines, and United Airlines, and provides daily flights to worldwide destinations, including daily and seasonal nonstop flights to Atlanta (ATL), Austin (AUS), Baltimore (BWI), Charlotte (CLT), Chicago (MDW/ORD), Dallas (DAL/ DFW), Denver (DEN), Houston (HOU/IAH), Indianapolis (IND), Kansas City (MCI), Nashville (BNA), New York City (LGA), Philadelphia (PHL), St. Louis (STL) and Washington DC (DCA). ECP provides Northwest Florida communities with first-class facilities and was strategically developed for major economic development opportunities. ECP is the gateway to visitors seeking Northwest Florida's famous beaches.





Through My Clear Eyes

By A Window
I stand in silence, day by day,
a frame for all I see —
from blush of dawn to starstrewn night,
the world leaks back at me

the world looks back at me.
I watch the sun climb from the gulf,

its warmth against my face. I cradle morning's gentle light and watch the world awaken, bright.

When I am clean, oh what a

the world shines brighter than before.

Colors sharpen, sky expands, each view a living grace.

I catch the waves of waving hands,

the press of small, wide eyes.
Their chalked rainbows,
smudged and sweet,
become my best disguise.
I watch the people passing by;
I hope they'll pause and look

inside

to see the welcome waiting there, the space where smiles reside.

Through My Clear Eyes
by A Window

I cradle morning's gentle
light, and watch the world
a gift—the world shines
brighter than before.

And then the clouds come
The downpour fades;

And then the clouds come gathering near,

the sky turns steel and gray.

The rain taps gently, cool and clear —

a storm is on its way. The downpour fades; the light

and bathes all I embrace.

The world feels fresh, the air is

the sun resumes its place.
So here I stand — both shield and frame —

to share what's all around, grateful to help you see each day

the Émerald Coast's great town.

When your windows are clean, the world truly does shine brighter, just as these verses reveal. Fish Window Cleaning understands the importance of a clear view — not just for beauty, but for connecting you to the vibrant life outside. Let's bring that brilliant clarity to

your home and business, so you, too, can fully embrace every moment, every view, every impression and every day on the Emerald Coast.

Fish Window Cleaning 850.842.2162 fishwindowcleaning.com/3249





11275 U.S. Hwy. 98 #7 | Miramar Beach, FL 32550

www.GetAbora.com

VISIT MYDESTINLIFE.COM



LAWN & LANDSCAPE LOCATION

1440 Live Oak Street, Niceville
Open Monday-Friday 7:30-4

850-897-9060 • office@baldwinturfniceville.com

www.baldwinturfniceville.com | [6] f baldwinturf

Okaloosa County Strengthens Hurricane Preparedness **Amid Active 2025 Forecast**

By Lori Leath Smith

With the 2025 Atlantic hurricane season commencing on June 1, Okaloosa County has intensifyed its preparedness efforts and wants to ensure locals are well-prepared for potential storms in response to forecasts predicting above-average storm activity. Colorado State University anticipates 17 named storms, including nine

hurricanes and four major hurricanes, exceeding the 30-year average of 14 named storms, seven hurricanes and three major hurricanes.

At May's "Florida's Greatest Hurricane Preparedness Party" in Shalimar, residents received valuable insights from two top experts: Patrick Maddox, Okaloosa County Director of Public Safety, and Jason Beaman, Meteorologist-in-Charge at the National Weather Service in

During the event, they unveiled the comprehensive 2025 Hurricane Guide, packed with essential information on evacuation zones, emergency contacts, shelter locations and post-storm recovery resources. Download the guide at myokaloosa.com/ emergency-management.

To stay informed during severe weather, sign up for emergency alerts at AlertOkaloosa. com or text "OKALOOSAFL" to 888777.

For additional resources, updates, and safety tips, visit MyOkaloosa.com or follow Okaloosa Emergency Management on social media.

Overall Quick Hurricane Safety Tips:

- Stay in your safe place -Get to high ground if flooding is a risk and shelter during high
- Check weather updates Enable Wireless Emergency

Alerts and monitor changing conditions.

- Watch for flooding Never drive through floodwaters. Just 1 foot can sweep a car away!
- Listen to local officials -Follow evacuation orders and stick to recommended routes.

Key Hurricane Preparedness Steps:

- Know Your Evacuation Zone: Determine your evacuation zone and route. Okaloosa County provides detailed maps and information at https:// myokaloosa.com/gm/evacuation-zones.
- Assemble an Emergency Supply Kit: Include essentials such as non-perishable food, water, medications, flashlights, batteries, chargers and important documents. Crank your generator monthly to keep it in good shape. A comprehensive checklist is available at https:// www.floridadisaster.org/ planprepare/hurricane-supply-checklist/.
- Sign Up for Emergency Alerts: Stay informed by registering for local emergency notifications through AlertOkaloosa or by texting "OKALOOSA-FL" to 888777.
- Prepare Your Home: Secure loose outdoor items, install hurricane shutters, trim trees, clear debris, make sure gutters drain properly and ensure your home is in good repair to withstand high winds.

- Plan for Pets: Make arrangements for your pets in case of evacuation, including food, water and shelter.
- Review Insurance Policies: Ensure your homeowner's insurance covers hurricane-related damages and understand the claims process. Review your policy for gaps, document your belongings, and save important files on a thumb drive or in waterproof/fireproof containers.

For more information and resources, visit:

Okaloosa County Emergency Management at https:// myokaloosa.com/emergency-management

• Evacuation Zones Information & Routes:

https://myokaloosa.com/ gm/evacuation-zones;

- Road Closures and Delays: https://fl511.com (Statewide real-time traffic info)
- Pet Shelter Information During an Emergency:

https://myokaloosa.com/ emergency-management/pets;

- Shelter in Place Guidelines: https://myokaloosa.com/ emergency-management/shelter-place
- Shelter Locations and Updates (Okaloosa County):

https://myokaloosa.com/ emergency-management/shel-

• Special Needs Registration: https://snr.flhealthresponse.

Sliding Glass Doors Hard to Open? Dont Replace It, We Can Fix It!



Fast and Affordable Repairs FREE ESTIMATES! Fully Insured

- Roller Replacement
- Track Maintenance
- Locks & Handles
- Highest Quality Parts

850-987-5433

www.BeachsideSlide.com BEACHSIDE SLIDING GLASS DOOR MAINTENANCE, LLC.

DECK BRADLEY DUKE DAUM

35 Yrs. Experience

DECK DESIGN • REPAIR • CONSTRUCTION Beach Access Repairs

Call 850-974-3984

NF-31546088







Scan this QR for a 5% discount

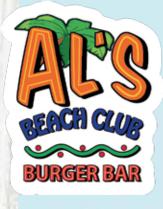
(850) 332-3330











FREE EVENTS

MONDAYS

PIRATE SHOW

WEDNESDAYS

FIREWORKS SERIES

TUESDAYS

MOUIES ON THE BEACH

THURSDAYS

BEACH LUAU PARTY

RIBS & **COMBOS**

STARTING AT



AYCE SPECIAL:

EVERY DAY 4-6PM

theboardwalkoi.com

+LANDING+

boathouselanding.com

11:00 am - 2:00 pm

SUNDAY 10:00 am - 2:00 pm

EARLY EVENING 4:00-6:00 pm | 13.99





Support Bites for Backpacks - Nourish a Child in Need

We're proud to support Food for Thought Outreach, an organization dedicated to fighting childhood hunger in our community. Through Bites for Backpacks, every Lobster Bite appetizer purchased helps provide meals to food-insecure children across Okaloosa and Walton counties.

\$1 from each appetizer goes directly to filling backpacks with nutritious food, ensuring that local students have access to meals outside of school.









AJ's on the Bayou

Located at the Base of Cinco Bayou Bridge in Fort Walton Beach. AI's on the Bayou is in a beautiful setting offering indoor as well as outdoor seating on the open-air deck overlooking the Cinco Bayou. AJ's on the Bayou serves brunch and bottomless mimosas with food purchase for \$10.95. Serving up daily weekday lunch specials for \$12.95 with ice tea, entertainment or live music everyday.

ajsonthebayou.com 200 NE Eglin Pkwy., FWB (850) 226-7579

AJ's Oyster Shanty -**Okaloosa Island**

A dozen for me; a dozen for you! Located on Okaloosa Island, AJ's Oyster Shanty serves up fresh, cold oysters, fresh seafood and the best live music on the Island. Don't miss the Thursday Prime Rib Dinner Special - enjoy a 10oz cut of prime rib served with baked 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 AJ's for Karaoke every Wednesday night at 7 p.m. and live music all other nights! The most fun on the Island!

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

Brozinni Pizzeria

Brozinni Pizzeria's family-friendly pizza place offers you a taste of New York right here in Niceville. Featuring the Big Apple's signature crust, its famous buttery garlic knuckles will leave you wanting more, including appetizers such as buttery garlic knuckles, bread sticks, homemade stuffed pepperoni or sausage sticks, cheese



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

(850) 678-7778 144 Palm Blvd N., Niceville brozinnispizza.com

FUBAR Pizza Bar

Looking for a sports bar to call home? Welcome to FUBAR pizza bar nestled on Okaloosa Island. Locally owned and family friendly, Fubar is known for its almost-famous pizza and wings and carries all sports games and live entertainment, along with impeccable service. You can enjoy all that while enjoying the waterfront view.

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

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

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

Magnolia Grill

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

magnoliagrillfwb.com 157 Brooks Street SE, FWB (850) 812-5761







Family Priendly Pizza Place

Monday: One 20" Specialty Pizza \$21.99 **Tuesday:** Two Calzones \$20

Wednesday: Family Size Chicken, Alfredo or Spaghetti & Meatballs, Family Salad, 6 Breadsticks, 2l/Gal Tea \$40

Thursday: Buy One Pizza, Get Another 1/2 Price

Friday: Two 16" 1 Topping Pizzas \$29.99 Saturday: Family Night XI 20" Pepperoni, 1/2 Cheese Bread, 6 Wings, Tea/2l \$40

Dine-In - Pickup - Delivery • Call to Order or Order Online

850-678-7778 • 144 Palm Blvd N., Niceville • www.brozinnispizza.com

SLICE SPECIALS

Slice \$5.99 Slice + drink \$8.99 Slice + drink + salad + bread stick \$10.50 Slice + drink + wings + bread stick \$14.99 2 slices + drink \$13.99

Open Monday – Thursday 11am-8pm and Friday -Saturday 11am-9pm



FREE PIZZA SLICES

Always saying thank you!

Military Monday from 6-9 PM

Enjoy a few slices on us!





Catch All the Action Here!

Family-Friendly Game Rooms
- 37 Games

Freedom- Flavor - FUBAR - Fun Fourth of July and Every Day!

Come by Boat -

8 Docks Available for Customers





pizza bar

114 Amberjack Drive Fort Walton Beach 850-226-7084 www.fubarfwb.com

BOGO:

Buy one entrée, get one of equal or lesser value FREE (Dine in Only)

10% off for Military and First Responders 7 days a week!

FAMOUS MUCK

Choose your favorite world-class delicious flavor

\$.49 Cent Wings

Monday & Wednesday

Daily Lunch Special

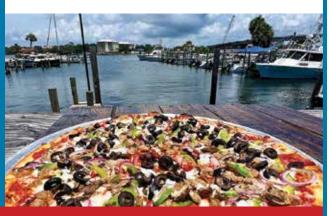
11am-2pm

Happy Hour

7 Days a Week 3-7pm

Service Industry Night

(SIN Night) Every Night



FUBAR and Paradise/Sunset Liquors DELIVERY: Door Dash • Uber Eats • Grubhub

Welcome to Paradise Liquors and Sunset Liquors

Large Selection of Beer, Wine & Spirits • Same Day Delivery



Niceville

• 1106 John Sims Pkwy.

Mary Esther

• 251 Mary Esther Blvd.

Pensacola

• 4051 Barrancas Ave.

Sunset

Fort Walton Beach

- 901 Beal Pkwy NW
- 1285 Eglin Pkwy.
- 290 NE Eglin Pkwy.

Crestview

• 297B James Lee Blvd.

Panama City

• 1360 West 15th St

Callaway

• 809/807 N. Tyndall Pkwy.

Pensacola

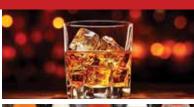
• 4600 Mobile Hwy.

\$5 OFF purchase of \$25 or more

(One per person/visit. Not valid with any other promotions.)

10% off for Military and First Responders
7 days a week!

Like us on Facebook get 10% off in store!





www.850liquors.com

Local Entrepreneur Brings D1 Training to Our Area

Former Coach and Father of Three Opens State-of-the-Art Fitness Facility for Youth and Adult Athletes

D1 Training, a leading fitness enrichment concept utilizing the five core tenets of athletic-based training, has opened a new location in Niceville at 4544 Hwy. 20 E. on 12 May 2025. The new group fitness facility employs a sports-science backed training regimen led by certified trainers to help people of all ages achieve their sport and fitness goals.

Steven Killebrew will join a roster of impressive existing franchisees, including professional athletes such as Kylie Fitts and Jordan Gay. Additional franchise partners include notable figures such as Super Bowl MVP Von Miller, Tim Tebow and Michael Oher.

Killebrew, a University of Florida graduate, began his career at Elgin Air Force base before spending two years in Africa as a missionary with Youth

For Christ. After returning, he became a math teacher and soccer coach at Niceville High School, blending his passion for education with athletics. Later, he moved into franchising, joining his wife and the rest of the Costa Family in McDonald's, where he honed his business skills. When considering his next venture, Killebrew wanted to



align his career with his lifelong passion for sports and youth development. Seeing how dedicated his three active children are in athletics, Killebrew was especially drawn to D1 Training's commitment to helping young athletes reach their potential, making it the perfect next chapter.

"When I started thinking

about what was next, I knew I wanted to own a business where people could come together to support their physical, mental, and spiritual well-being," said Killebrew. "With D1, athletes

not only have the opportunity to train toward their athletic goals, but they also build the confidence needed to succeed in all aspects of life beyond sports." D1 Niceville opened in May with close to 200 members of adults and youth. "I love the sense of community and team that has already developed in the adult and youth classes," said Killebrew. Speaking of his staff, he stated "People are ultimately what make the D1 experience come to life. I am so grateful for the level of knowledge and talent here on the D1 Niceville team led by General Manager Dennis Ealy and Head Coach Cotten who will positively impact every adult and youth athlete that comes through the doors."

D1 Training offers four age-based programs including Rookie (ages 7-11), Developmental (ages 12-14), Prep (ages 15-18) and D1 Adult. Each fitness program is based on the five athletic-based tenets: dynamic warm-up, performance, strength program, core and conditioning and cool down.

Outside of group workouts, D1 Training offers team training, semi-private and one-on-one training with world-class coaches. The goal is simple: to continue to train athletes who are dedicated to their sport or fitness goals, regardless of age or athletic background.

"Steven is the ideal candidate to bring the D1 Training experience to Niceville," said the brand's Chief Operating Officer, Dan Murphy. "We're thrilled to welcome him to the D1 family and are confident in his ability to show the Niceville area what they've been missing out on. D1 is a one-of-akind fitness experience that's built around the individual and meant to help people meet their athletic goals. Our strong network of franchisees embodies our core values to bring the D1 Training vision to life, and we know Steven will do just that in Niceville and its surrounding communities."

Strategically expanding across the nation through franchising, D1 Training has more than 100 performance centers open with over 250 additional locations in various stages of development.

For more information, visit https://www.dltraining.com/niceville/or call (850) 605-8431.

TRAIN LIKE @d1niceville D1 Training Niceville AN ATHLETE 4544 Hwy 20 E, Niceville 850-650-8431 Training for Youth and Adults. **Modeled after Division 1** Strength & Conditioning You pick the principles, ensuring elitegoal. We help you get level training methodologies there. The Place for The Athlete



Tifeagle Greens • Updated Irrigation System • Bunker Renovations
Tree Removal For Enhanced Turf Conditioning • Cart Path Restoration
Tee Boxes Added • New Fleet of Carts

EXPERIENCE THE FINGER DYE COURSE DESIGN ON THE SHORES
OF CHOCTAWHATCHEE BAY WHERE EVERYONE IS TREATED LIKE A CHAMPION!

Special Seasonal Rates and Memberships Available for All Ages With NO Initiation Fee Clubhouse Available for Parties Too!

Call for a Reservation 850-651-1416

Golf Series: The Emerald Coast Golf Tour Rolls On!

By Barbara Palmgren

Summer is here and golfers are teeing up their shots and hoping for a hole-in-one, a low round, a 50-ft. putt and/or all the bragging rights that can be shared on the 19th hole. If you are a low handicap golfer and dreaming of making it to the Korn Ferry Tour and ultimately to the PGA tour, you begin with winning on tours such as the Emerald Coast Golf Tour.

For most of these tournaments, the three-day event begins with a Pro-Am tournament on the first day followed by tournament play for the next two days. June 4-6, 2025, found golf hopefuls at Shalimar

Pointe Golf Course. On July 15-17, they will enter another tournament at Kelly Plantation followed by competition in August at Aroostook Golf Course in Montgomery, Ala., and Quail Hollow Golf Club in McComb,

The Emerald Coast Golf Tour is owned and directed by Geno Celano from Destin who organized these tournaments over 30 years ago. A professional golfer, Geno knew that competition like this needs to be offered in the Panhandle area and nearby states.

The winning team during the

Continued on page 20

Off the Hook

Shell-ebrations and Splashy Starts: **Summer at Gulfarium**

By Mary Fomby, Gulfarium

Wake Up with Dolphins: Rise and Shine Dolphin Package

There's no better way to start your day than with dolphins! The Gulfarium's new Rise and Shine: Dolphin Package offers guests early access to the park and an exclusive dockside encounter with one of our Atlantic bottlenose dolphins—all before the gates open to the public.

Your morning begins with a guided walking tour of the park, offering a behind-the-scenes look at the animals and exhibits before the crowds arrive. Then, you'll head to the dolphin habitat for a memorable dockside encounter with one of our playful dolphins. After the experience, enjoy full general admission and explore the park at your own pace—it's the ultimate way to start your Gulfarium adventure.

Sea Turtle Release Season is in Full Swing

It's officially sea turtle release



season at the Gulfarium CARE Center, and we're off to a strong start! With four successful releases already this summer, including a mix of quick-recovery patients and long-term rehabilitations, the CARE team is working hard to return as many sea turtles as possible to their ocean home.

For those hoping to witness one of these inspiring moments, the best way to stay informed is by following the CARE Center on social media. Release events are free to attend, but due to weather and permitting, they are often announced only a few days in advance—so keep your



eyes on our pages for the next one!

Sunset Camp: A Nighttime Adventure Just for Kids

Looking for a unique evening activity for your child this summer? Sunset Camp is the perfect mix of fun, education, and after-hours excitement at the Gulfarium. This special camp invites kids ages 6–14 to explore the park after it closes to the public, with exclusive animal

encounters, hands-on learning, and dinner included!

Campers will enjoy dockside dolphin time, a meet-and-greet with our penguin colony, and a chance to get up close with reptiles and other animals. Add in beachside activities with our education team and a night under the stars—it's a summer memory in the making. Space is limited, so visit gulfarium.com to secure your child's spot!





It's Turtle Time!

By Heather Bennett Eye

Sea turtle nesting season has officially begun! From now until Halloween, our beaches become a vital nesting ground for several species of sea turtles, many of which are threatened or endangered. Whether you're a local or just visiting, your actions can make a big difference during this critical period, and this means keeping the beaches clean, dark and flat.

Each summer, female sea tur-

tles return to our shores, often the very beach where they were born, to lay their eggs. In our area, nesting typically occurs in the dry sand above the high tide line, closer to the dunes. Turtle Watch volunteers survey the beaches daily, looking for turtle tracks to identify and mark nests, protecting them from accidental damage by people, pets, or vehicles. They monitor the nests throughout the incubation period. After about 50 to 60 days, hatchlings begin to emerge, usually under the cover of darkness. These tiny turtles instinctively look for the brightest horizon, which under natural conditions is the reflection of the moonlight on the ocean. From there, they begin their treacherous journey to the water, dodging

predators and battling the surf.

To give these hatchlings the

best possible chance of survival, you can help keep our beaches clean, dark, and flat:

Clean: Remove all trash, leftover food, beach toys, and especially beach furniture at the end of each day. Items left behind can become barriers or traps for hatchlings trying to reach the water.



Dark: Turn off any artificial lights that face the beach at night. Bright lights from homes, businesses, and flashlights can disorient hatchlings, leading them away from the ocean. If lighting is necessary, use turtle-safe options like red or amber LED bulbs.

Flat: Before leaving the beach, fill in all holes and knock down sandcastles. Deep holes and uneven sand can trap baby

turtles or redirect them off course.

Please respect nest markers and avoid walking through dune areas. If you see a hatchling struggling, don't touch it. Instead, contact the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission at (888) 404-3922 or the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office at (850) 651-7400.

Sea turtles have been making this journey for millions of years, but their survival now depends more than ever on human awareness and cooperation. By keeping our beaches clean, dark, and flat, you're playing a vital role in protecting one of nature's most awe-inspiring creatures. Please help educate others. The sea turtles are counting on us!

CBA's "State of the Basin":

How Oyster Gardening Is Reviving Choctawhatchee Bay

By Allison McDowell, CBA

Along the shores of Choctawhatchee Bay, a quiet but powerful movement is taking place – one oyster at a time. Families, retirees, and students are rolling up their sleeves to take part in a unique conservation effort led by the Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance (CBA). Their mission? To rebuild the bay's critical oyster reefs through an innovative and community-driven initiative: the Oyster Gardening program.

Now entering its 2025 season, this hands-on program invites

local volunteers to help restore the bay's ecosystem by growing young oysters at their homes or designated dock locations. It's a project where science meets stewardship, turning everyday citizens into environmental champions.

A Simple Solution with a Big Impact

Each oyster grown through the program can filter up to 50 gallons of water daily, making them natural purifiers for Choctawhatchee Bay. Beyond water quality, these tiny powerhouses also create habitat for fish and crabs and help stabilize shorelines

The program has supported habitat restoration efforts at multiple sites around the bay, an impressive achievement that's benefiting marine life and bolstering the overall health of the ecosystem. It's a grassroots effort with ripple effects far beyond the shoreline.

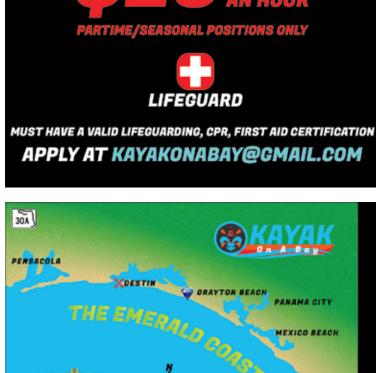
Science Comes to Life

One of the most inspiring aspects of the Oyster Gardening program is its educational value. Whether it's a retiree tracking oyster growth or a middle schooler observing changes in the water, participants are engaged in real-world marine science. The program transforms conservation into a fun, local, and impactful experience, nurturing the next generation of environmental stewards in the process.

Get Involved

With the 2025 season underway, CBA is calling on new volunteers to help make waves. No experience is needed, just a love for the water and a willingness to learn.

For more information or to get involved, visit www.basinal-liance.org or email reynol59@nwfsc.edu.



NOW HIRING

CERTIFIED LIFE GUARDS



Environment

Animals at the Beach

By Helen Petre

The beach is a hard place to live. It is constantly bombarded by wind and waves. There is no place to hide except in the sand because there are no plants and there is little to eat. Yet, organisms are successful at living there. Coquina and sand fleas, or mole crabs, are common in the swash zone on Walton County beaches, as shown in the Florida Fish and Wildlife photo. Coquina are clams, and a significant food source for sandpipers and plovers. Sand fleas are crustaceans, like crabs and lobsters. They do not bite. They eat decaying matter and are excellent bait for pompano. Coquina and mole crabs are indicators of healthy beaches.

Ghost crabs (Ocypode quadrata) dig burrows four feet deep in order to reach the water table and keep their gills wet. Their white color blends in with the white quartz sand, and they are amazingly fast. Ghost crabs come out at night to eat dead things the tide has washed in. They also eat sea turtle eggs. They would drown in the surf.

Pinfish, (Lagodon rhomboides) are the most common bait fish caught in seines or dip nets in sea grass beds along the coast. E.O. Wilson lost the vision in



Pinfish. Wikipedia.



Female crab with wide apron like the dome of the United States Capitol.



Male crab with skinny, pointy apron, like the Washington Monument.

All these animals can be easily seen on the beach or in the surf.

The beach is a great place to visit, but to many animals, it is home.

Helen Petre is a retired USDA biologist and college biology professor. She spends her time volunteering, teaching and writing science articles to share her interests with future generations.



Virginia Institute of Marine Science. Ghost crab.

Blue crab (Callinectes sapidus) is a

native swimming crab, unlike the

ghost crab, which lives on the sand

and would drown in the surf.



Florida Fish and Wildlife photo



Emerita talpoida (sand fleas).

his right eye at the age of seven when a pinfish he caught jumped up and hit him in the eye.

Blue crabs turn red when cooked. Besides humans, crabs are food for sharks, rays, and large fish. They eat small fish, like pinfish, and other crustaceans, like mole crabs, and clams, like coquina. They even eat detritus, plants, and animal waste.



of Donax variables (coquina) and





Know your options

RIP CURREN

Rip currents are powerful currents of water moving away from shore. They can sweep even the strongest swimmer away from shore.

If at all possible, swim near a lifeguard.



COCONUTPALMREALESTATE.COM

GOLF SERIES

continued from page 18

first day of the Pro-Am competition was the team of Jacob hill, Chris Iron, John Sykes and Joe Frye. They posted a -6 score to leave with bragging rights. In this event with a four-person team, where the top two scores for each team were entered for scoring.

The next two days, the game got even more serious at this challenging golf course. Players from as far as Canada and Tennessee were focused on winning first place and a large pay-out. At the end of a very warm twoday grind, the top three players emerged victorious:

- 1st Place: Mitchell Bowen from Tennessee with a score of 229 (+4)
- 2nd Place: Gary Glassman from Alabama with a score of 221 (+5)
- 3rd Place: Marco Trstenjak from Winnipeg Canada with



a score of 225 (+9)

Congratulations, gentlemen! Hunting low scores is a lure that continues to draw players to competition with other golfers and the golf course itself.

A Position of Strength: Why Health and Fitness Are the Ultimate Signs of Strength in Leadership



By Kassia Garfield

In today's fast-paced, high-pressure world, leadership is often associated with intellect, strategy and vision. But one of the most underappreciated – yet incredibly powerful – ways a leader can demonstrate strength is by promoting health and embodying fitness. Being physically and mentally healthy doesn't just benefit the individual; it sets

the tone for an entire organization or team. When leaders prioritize wellness, they send a clear, lasting message: strength starts from within. Prioritizing wellness is not just sending out emails about health, stretching during the workday or trying to start step count competitions. It is allowing your staff to be healthy DURING the day. This means 2-3 hours a week of time during the day to walk, work out or go to a fitness class. This is putting the money where the priority is. As a company, showing and demonstrating health, is just as important as allowing staff to be healthy.

Health is the Foundation of Performance.

Leadership requires stamina – not just mental, but physical.

Long hours, tough decisions and high-stakes situations demand resilience, and that resilience is rooted in physical well-being. A healthy leader can show up consistently, think clearly under pressure and maintain energy throughout the day. It's not about having a six-pack or running marathons (though that's impressive); it's about having the capacity to lead with clarity, focus and presence.

When leaders take care of their bodies - through regular exercise, proper nutrition, and rest – they perform better. They're more alert in meetings, more composed during crises and more able to handle the emotional weight of leadership. That kind of endurance communicates true strength, not just in words, but in action. This is setting the example, but if a more focused and healthier work force increases productivity, job satisfaction and workforce retention, creating the time during the day for your employees really shows that dedication and investment in their health just as much as your own.

Actions Speak Louder than Words.

People follow what leaders and Confidence.



do, not just what they say. If you want a culture of well-being, you must live it. Leaders who prioritize their health inspire others to do the same. It's easy to tell a team to manage stress less or to take care of themselves, but when employees see their leader hitting the gym, taking walking meetings or setting boundaries for work-life balance, it becomes part of the culture.

Healthy leaders also tend to create healthier workplaces. They encourage work environments that don't glorify burnout. They model balance and productivity, showing that it's possible to succeed without sacrificing personal well-being. This, in turn, increases team morale, engagement and retention.

Fitness Fuels Discipline

One of the core traits of effective leadership is discipline. Fitness builds that. Whether it's committing to a daily workout, waking up early to train or pushing through discomfort during a tough session, those

habits translate directly into professional leadership. They demonstrate commitment, follow-through, and perseverance – qualities any great leader needs.

Plus, there's a psychological edge to being in shape. A fit leader often walks into the room with more confidence, not just because of how they look, but because they know they've earned that strength. That quiet confidence is contagious. It radiates competence, self-control and presence — qualities that followers respect and gravitate toward.

Strong Position: Strong Leaders are Healthy Leaders.

Leadership isn't just about making the right calls - it's about inspiring others to bring their best selves to the table. A healthy leader sets the example, creating a ripple effect that influences team culture, energy and productivity. Fitness is more than a personal goal; it's a leadership tool. And leadership can look different in the work place than just being a CEO, a manager or a supervisor. Leadership is helping your friend, training a new employee, understanding what a coworker needs without asking for it. So, even if you are not in a formal position of leadership, that doesn't mean people do not see the strength in people around them. One never knows who they might inspire. In a world that needs more strength, clarity and resilience, the healthiest leaders will always stand out. They don't just talk about strength – they live it.

At MaxStrength Fitness we cater to busy professionals. In just 20 minutes, twice a week, we can jump start your transformation and help start healthy goals today. Give us a call at 850-373-4450 for a free consultation and demo workout.





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.





Where Freedom Meets Recovery: **Bridgeway Center Lights the Way**

A Star-Spangled Salute to One of Our Region's Brightest Forces for Good

By Sherry Jones

Not all fireworks burst in the sky.

Some ignite in the silence — when a man battling anxiety walks into his first therapy session. Some flicker in the courage of a woman leaving a life of addiction and fear behind. And some burn brightest in the quiet commitment of a team that never stops showing up for others.

In Northwest Florida, that spark has a name: Bridgeway Center, Inc.

As we reflect on what freedom means this month, we celebrate not just our nation's history, but the people and places who are helping others reclaim their personal independence every single day. For over 60 years, Bridgeway Center has been on the frontlines of healing — providing hope, dignity and direction to individuals facing the hardest battles of their lives.

Nationally accredited by CARF - Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities; Nonprofit Best of the Emerald Coast 2024; 3rd year in a row as a Florida Trend Best Place to Work; In 2025, BCI is set to receive the prestigious National Mental Health Association Gold Bell Seal

Walk into their Fort Walton Beach location on any given day, and you'll see what that looks like. A mother with tear-stained cheeks waits quietly for a family therapist. A young man, barely out of high school, nervously clutches intake paperwork for outpatient recovery. A veteran sits in the lobby, shoulders square, but eyes weary, waiting to speak to someone who won't judge what he's seen—or what he's lost.

Bridgeway meets them all where they are, and community workers are out in our community.

Serving communities throughout Okaloosa County and beyond, Bridgeway delivers a full spectrum of care: mental health counseling, psychiatric support, substance use treatment, crisis intervention, outpatient recovery, primary care for the uninsured, housing special needs and working with the homeless. They help people weather mental illness, grief, trauma and poverty-sometimes all at once. They serve individuals, couples, families, children, seniors and veterans.

Among their essential services is a Pre-trial Forensic Unit-a 90-day program for people who have been arrested because of their mental illness. At the conclusion, clients gain mental health stability, jobs and hope for their future.

Other services include:

- Primary care
- Anger management
- Case management for children and adults
- $\bullet \ Detoxification \ unit \ (outpatient)$
- Outpatient mental health therapy
- Outpatient substance use counseling
- HUD-permanent supportive housing
- Post-overdose support team And, they do it with grace.

This work isn't glamorous — but it's life-changing. It happens behind closed doors, in counseling offices, homeless camps, people's homes, case management meetings, anywhere in the community and late-night crisis calls. It happens when someone finally says, "I need help," and someone else answers, "We've got you."

At the heart of this mission is Bonnie R. Barlow, SHRM-SCP. SPHR, a woman whose leadership is rooted in both purpose and persistence. With over 40 years of service to Bridgeway, Bonnie has walked the halls, listened to the stories and shaped a culture of integrity, compassion and accountability. From her early days as a probation officer and DUI administrator to her current role as President and CEO, she has been a driving force behind Bridgeway's growth and transformation.

In 2025, BCI was honored as one of the TOP 100 Women-led Businesses in Florida.

Bonnie holds dual national certifications in human resources, serves as Chair-Elect of the Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce, and serves as treasurer of One Okaloosa EDC, Healthy Start, and the Northwest Florida Health Council. In 2023, she was inducted into the Okaloosa County Women's Hall of Fame, and



in 2025, she was appointed to the Florida Rehabilitation Council by Governor Ron DeSantis. "People deserve to be seen, heard, and helped — and we're here to say yes whenever we can."

Bonnie's leadership style is approachable but strategic — she's the kind of executive who knows her staff by name and her clients by heart. She doesn't hide behind a desk. She shows up, advocates fiercely and is never afraid to say the hard things in rooms that need to hear them.

Under her guidance, Bridgeway has continued to evolve—adding more wraparound services, expanding partnerships and responding to emerging issues like the opioid epidemic, youth suicide and the growing need for affordable mental health care in our region.

One of Bridgeway's most impactful collaborations is with One

Hopeful Place, the region's only shelter and transitional housing for single homeless adults. While OHP offers immediate shelter and stability, Bridgeway provides the long-term support — including on-site mental health evaluations, therapy, recovery programs, case management, and connections to critical health services.

Together, they're not just housing people. They're helping them build a new life.

And the impact doesn't end when someone walks out Bridgeway's doors. It spreads — to families reunited, to employers welcoming people back into the workforce, to children who finally get to grow up with healthy, present parents. It shows up in classrooms, in churches and in neighborhoods once written off.

Bridgeway isn't just saving lives — they're restoring com-



munity. They're proving what's possible when care is consistent, leadership is compassionate and no one is ever treated as a lost cause.

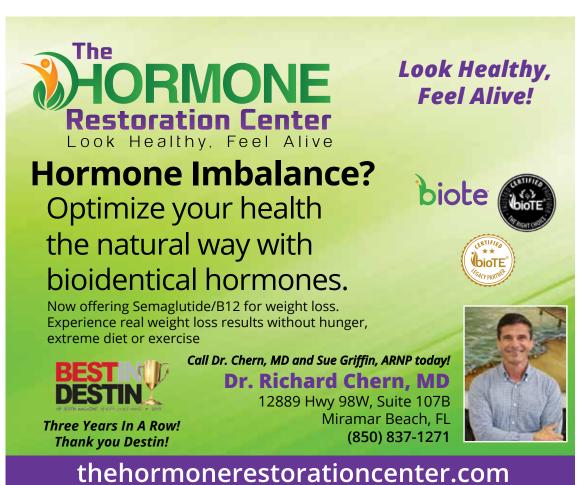
Freedom from addiction, trauma, homelessness, mental illness, and hopelessness.

That kind of change doesn't happen overnight. It happens because people like Bonnie Barlow — and the incredible team at Bridgeway Center — refuse to give up on anyone.

Thank you, Bridgeway Center. Thank you, Bonnie Barlow.

Because of them, freedom isn't just something we celebrate. It's something we get to live.

If you need help at Bridgeway, contact 850-833-7500 or visit https://bridgewaycenter.org.







By Kay Leaman, HealthyDay HealthyLife

Life Osteoporosis happens when bones become weak and brittle. The most important thing to note that doctors don't tell you is that we cannot only prevent it, but it can be reversed. In some cases, it may be more difficult reversing it if the remodeling process isn't functioning.

Did you know that bones are living tissue (living, breathing, functioning cells) that remodel, rejuvenate and recycle continuously? We have the ability to keep them strong and healthy despite the aging process. With this in mind, let's dive in.

First, the statistics:

- 1 in 2 women after 50 will break a bone
- 1 in 5 men after 50 will break a bone

• 1 in 5 women can break a bone three or more times before being diagnosed

- Women reach peak bone mass between ages 20-35
- 10 million Americans have osteoporosis
- 44 million people have low bone density in over half of adults over 50 globally
- 25% of people with hip fractures end up in long term care. The loss of independence and mobility is often irreversible.
- Osteoporosis and it' effects are costlier than breast cancer, heart attacks and strokes.
- 39% of the population are deficient in calcium
- \bullet 95% of the population are deficient in vitamin D
- Women who strength train can increase spinal bone density by 13% in 6 months (Tufts University).

Bones are made up of osteocytes (bone cells), osteoblasts which build up and form new bone cells continuously, osteogenic cells are stem cells and osteoclasts which kind of reabsorb or break down the bone cells.

Muscles and bones work hand-in-hand. There needs to

Unbreakable Bones

be a 'push and pull' on the bones to ensure the remodeling process actually takes place. Hence, resistance training can help your bones in the remodeling process. Six exercises that aid in strengthening bones are squats, walking, lunges, push-ups, jumping jacks and planks.

After menopause women experience increased bone loss primarily due to the decline in estrogen production. The decline in estrogen increases the risk of developing osteoporosis. As a side note, with men it's testosterone that declines, and for both men and women it's progesterone.

Risk factors we can control are sedentary lifestyles, poor calcium and vitamin D intake, smoking, alcohol, certain medications or medical conditions, hormonal imbalances and posture. Posture is critical. If you slouch when you sit or bend slightly when standing or walking, you limit the amount of oxygen coming in. Our bones need oxygen! Practice keeping your shoulder back and down. The ribcage needs to expand for quality oxygen to nourish our

hones

Risk factors we can't control are age, gender, family history, body frame size and ethnicity.

Calcium rich foods (Eat a variety of foods every week.):

- Vegetables: collards, broccoli, spinach, okra, kale, bok choy Beans: white, red, green, chickpeas, lentils
- Dairy: cheese, almond milk, yogurt, milkshakes, whole milk
- Nuts and Seeds: sunflower, sesame, chia, almonds, hazel, walnuts Fruit: oranges, raisins, dried figs, currants, apricots, kiwi
- Other: eggs, tofu, seaweed, sardines, shrimp

Five Holistic Strategies:

Nutrition: Cellular nutrients (antioxidants, core minerals) including calcium, vitamin D, magnesium and vitamin K are important for healthy bones.

- Exercise: Weight bearing, resistance, and impact
- Hormonal Balance: estrogen, testosterone, DHEA Supplement: We can't get what we need in food alone
- Lifestyle: Diet, sleep, activity **Preventative Measures:**Create meal plans incorporat-

ing many foods. Incorporate strength training 30 minutes three times per week. Maintain a consistent supplement routine. Get regular health assessments including a bone density test (DEXA).

Lastly, consider a collagen supplement, adequate protein intake (70 grams/day for women), natural hormone therapy, a weighted vest and utilize vibratory training (With whole-body vibration, you stand, sit or lie on a machine with a vibrating platform. As the machine vibrates, it transmits energy to your body, forcing your muscles to contract and relax dozens of times each second. The activity may cause you to feel as if you're exerting yourself.). You can also purchase a vibration plate that you stand

Making too many changes at once can be overwhelming. Start with one to three things and build up from there. Let's get stronger together.

Here's to Health! succeed.hdhl@gmail.com

WHITE-WILSON MEDICAL CENTER, P.A.

QUALITY CARE Au Under One Poof



Scan the QR Code or Call to Schedule **Pediatric, Family Medicine and Internal Medicine**

850.314.6194

white-wilson.com 1005 Mar Walt Drive Fort Walton Beach, FL 32547









Accepting New Patient







Walk-Ins Immediate Care





By Stephenie Craig, Journey Bravely

Remember a time someone else's behavior really got under your skin. Maybe your partner's emotional reaction stirred you up. Perhaps your child's behavior or attitude upset you.

A friend may have responded to you in a way that felt unsupportive. A stranger may have been unkind for seemingly no reason. Think about how you felt in that moment and how you instinctually wanted to respond or did respond. Did you call them out for their behavior? Did you withdraw and become silent and emotionally disengaged? Did you have big emotions and freeze and try to pretend everything was okay without engaging in a conversation?

We all have emotional triggers that cause our nervous system to move into emergency mode. Our brain is prepared to engage in one of four behaviors to protect us when it determines we might be physically or emotionally unsafe including fight, flight, freeze or fawn. The fight instinct tells you to move toward danger and confront. The flight instinct tells you to physically flee the situation. The freeze instinct tells you doing and saying nothing will keep you safe. The fawn instinct tells you to move toward danger and appease or placate the threat to find safety. When you are in emergency mode, your rational thinking goes off line and becomes unavailable to you. Your brain's primary concern is survival and safety.

When someone's behavior triggers an emergency response, you are likely to respond to the other person from a place of self-defensiveness, judgement, shame, blame, avoidance, fear or attack. These emergency driven responses lead to disconnection and eventual escalation in relationship problems. If you stay prolonged in emergency mode, you will begin to make up negative stories in your head about others that will make it difficult

to repair and rebuild trust. The negative stories begin to feel true and you see yourself as a victim and others as villains. Your brain searches for negative examples to reinforce the negative story and begins filtering out the positive. And, before you know it, the relationship as a whole has become negative in your mind.

Both you and others will inevitably have big feelings and emotional triggers. Often, people are responding to one another's big feelings and triggers more than to the heart of the person.

When triggered, most people respond better to compassion and connection than they do to shame and judgement. So, if you don't want your relationships to feel negative and you want to respond to others on a compassionate, heart level, what can you do?

7 Ways to Navigate Your Emotional Triggers

- 1. Notice your brain moved into emergency mode. Notice body changes like tension, stomach and chest sensations, jaw grinding, heart rate increase. Notice changes in thoughts focused on fear, anger, self-defense, and blame. Notice thoughts related to gathering negative evidence.
- 2. Take steps to regulate your nervous system. Try taking deep breaths, taking a restroom break, stepping outside for fresh air, take off your shoes and feel the floor/ground, eat sour candy or a strong mint, splash cold water on hands or face.
- 3. When calmer, check the negative story in your head. Remind yourself the other person is a whole person with strengths, weaknesses, and big feelings too.
- 4. Release judgement to embrace curiosity. Instead of, "You're being so rude and I didn't do anything to deserve it." try, "You seem overwhelmed. What's happening for you right now? How can I support you." Or try saying, "Are you okay?" "What do you need right now?
- 5. Move toward with compassion instead of withdrawing in punishment. Sit near quietly and take deep breaths. Ask the person if a hug would be helpful. Try validating their emotional experience instead of shaming it. "That does seem overwhelming. I can see why you're feeling emotional right now."
 - 6. Let go of winning and pur-

Emotional Triggers

sue connection. "I'm here with you while you have big feelings. I want to be supportive. I'm also working hard to manage my feelings about your big feelings so I can be here for you."

7. When both parties are calm, try talking about the big feelings that happened and what

you can each do to support one another when big feelings happen.

These strategies are not meant for relationships with emotionally or physically abusive dynamics. In those cases, distance is more appropriate. Next time you are feeling triggered by someone's behavior or big feelings, try something new and notice how it shifts the interaction. Connect with us for counseling or coaching along your journey at Journeybravely.

Bluewater

PLASTIC SURGERY

Steven J. Clark, MD, DMD, FACS

Board Certified Plastic Surgeon

Michelle Sasala MSN, APRN, FNP-BC

Nurse Practitioner/Aesthetic Injector

OFFERING



The world's first cold, ablative fractional fiber laser for anti-aging of all skin types.



Non-Surgical

- Botox Bar
- Facial Fillers
- Laser Hair Removal
- Skin Care Solutions
- Laser Treatments for Pigmentation & Wrinkles
- UltraClear® Laser
- Profound (RF Microneedling)

Surgical

- Breast Augmentation & Lift
- Tummy Tuck Mommy Makeover
- Liposuction (Vaser, 360° Body Contouring)
- Facelift & Necklift
- Eyelid Lift (Blepharoplasty)
- Gynecomastia Surgery
- Post-Weight Loss Body Contouring

Niceville • Santa Rosa Beach (850) 530-6064



www.bluewaterplasticsurgery.com | 👩 bluewaterplasticsurgery

Twenty-Five Years of Bit-Wizardry

By Christopher Manson

"Business is a force for good if you build it that way."

- Vince Mayfield

Twenty-five years ago, with the 21st century and the third millennium on the horizon, widespread anxiety about something called "Y2K" reared its worry-making head. Also, in 2000, America Online purchased Time Warner for a cool 162 billion. The final Peanuts comic strip by the late great Charles M. Schulz was published in something called "newspapers"—after a glorious 50-year run, Charlie Brown never got to kick that football, nor did Pig Pen get himself

cleaned up.

And a pair of military veterans, Vince Mayfield and Louis Erickson, founded Bit-Wizards, a company that has displayed exceptional growth and positive community impact in a quarter century.

Bit-Wizards CEO Mayfield says the company is already outgrowing the 25,000 square-foot building in Fort Walton Beach's Industrial Park it has occupied for the last three-and-a-half years. A move to an even larger building at Freedom Tech Center—over 50,000 square feet—is planned for late 2026. Bit-Wizards has upped its number of team members from 50 in 2020 to around 95 at this writing.



The Bit-Wizards family celebrates 25 years.

Some of the services initially

development—have

offered by Bit-Wizards—notably

been transferred to Mayfield's

other company, TalkingParents. The product-oriented

TalkingParents provides a soft-

ware communications platform

"for divorced people who are

co-parenting," says Mayfield,

while Bit-Wizards' focus is on

ards, Mayfield and Erickson

wrote custom software while

working for various defense con-

tractors. "When the dot-com

boom was happening, we want-

ed to go off on our own into a

commercial venture," says May-

field. "At my niece's birthday

party at Chuck E. Cheese, we

started sketching out ideas on a

year and relocated to Austin,

Tex., while Mayfield went to

work for another company. Not

long after that, Erickson reached

out to Mayfield about contract-

ing for building commercial

software. "Look, we're single

and we don't have any kids, now

is the time to do this' he said

to me," remembers Mayfield.

Since the domain name for Bit-

Erickson lost his sister that

Before they founded Bit-Wiz-

managed IT services.

software

napkin."

against my house, and we borrowed 25K from my father at 14 percent interest."

Bit-Wizards hired its first employee in 2003, and the business has been blowing up ever since. TalkingParents, the company Mayfield and Erickson founded in 2012 with Stephen Nixon, is also "growing super well.

"We've created a great place to work, and we've watched a lot of people come in and grow their careers," Mayfield adds. "Some have gone off to start their own companies, and some have gone on to work for companies like Microsoft."

In the last 25 years, Bit-Wizards has chalked up 15 mentions in Florida Trend's Best Places to Work in Florida. Inc. magazine named the company one of the best places to work for the past eight years. Bit-Wizards also appeared on Inc.'s fasted growing companies list five times, four of which were in consecutive years. In addition, it has been recognized by former Florida Governors Jeb Bush and Rick Scott for its continued growth and for employing veterans.

"We've been heavily involved in community things," says Mayfield. He and Erickson have both served on the board of the Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce, and they started Be the Magic Foundation, an organization "committed to helping the Northwest Florida community through time, talent and money."

"My business partner and I



PHOTOS COURTESY OF NATALIE EWING Bit-Wizards Founders Vince Mayfield and Louis Erickson.

both grew up here, and we have a pretty strong drive to give back to the local community," says Mayfield. "I grew up in Shalimar and graduated from Choctawhatchee High School. Louis graduated from Fort Walton Beach High School. We've known each other since we were in junior high school at Meigs, and both of our dads were in the Air Force."

Bit-Wizards started out specializing in custom software, then added digital marketing and infrastructure to its services. "We'll continue to grow the companies and flourish," says Mayfield. "In the Bit-Wizards realm, we've decided to focus on managed IT services that a lot of small and medium-sized businesses need. These days, every company is an IT company no matter what you do." The TalkingParents user base is over half a million and continues to increase.

Earlier this year, Bit-Wizards held its annual awards dinner, and other "mini celebrations" will continue throughout the remainder of 2025. Mayfield publishes monthly articles about his business experiences and lessons learned on LinkedIn.

"Most technology businesses fail within three years, and the fact that we're still thriving 25 years later is pretty monumental," says Mayfield.

Discover more at bitwizards. com, bethemagicfoundation.org and talkingparents.com.

Sawy Leigh PHOTO

PACKAGES

Engagement / Couples

\$315

Up to an hour

No limit on edited photos

Family Session

\$375 1 hour

No limit on edited photos

Senior Session / Professional headshots

\$175

45 minutes

No limit on edited photos

Newborn / Lifestyle

Up to an how

No limit on edited photos

WWW.SAVVYLEIGHPHOTO.COM



wise—the company's original moniker—wasn't available, the guys went with Bit-Wizards, wand, magic smoke and all.

"We spent our first year in Austin then moved back here in 2001. Then 9/11 happened, and we were able to scrape by taking a SBA business loan

Ignite your success with a Rocket Fuel Coach!



Stuck? Frustrated? Tired of conflict? Need accountability? Visit rocketfuelcoach.com to get started today!

(850) 855-3430

Email: Bill@rocketfuelcoach.com



Musing

Sean of the South: Get a Life



By Sean Dietrich

The electricity went out. I don't know why it happened. It wasn't storming. The weather was nice. All I know is I was watching TV when the lamps suddenly flickered and died.

And that was that.

The house fell silent. The refrigerator quit vibrating. The A/C compressor was no longer humming. My dog stared at the ceiling fan slowing down. The power must have affected cell towers, too. I had no phone service.

For a few minutes I just sat in my living room, watching my dog dutifully perform an act of intimate hygiene.

Panic set in. What was I going to do? No electricity? No internet? No phone service? How would I contact a loved one in an emergency? How would I dial 911? How was I going to

order cat food on Amazon?

I was becoming dangerously isolated from humanity, and fast. As an American, I am obligated by the Bill of Rights to keep current with essential news headlines at all times.

But without vital electronic devices, I had no idea what key events were happening in the global community. I was missing out.

What if something was happening in North Korea I needed to know about? How about Quebec? What if I missed vital updates on court hearings? Or the baby monkey kidnappings in Panama? Or the videoed rescue of the runaway zebra in Murfreesboro, Tennessee?

How was I supposed to live without constant head-lines about various billionaires' sex scandals? What about my 24-hour footage of violent demonstrations in Third World countries, massive explosions, terrorist bombs, bodies lying in streets, or "Live with Kelly and Mark?"

No more TV means no more rich dudes in courtrooms talking about rappers' prostitution rings. No more news anchors gleefully saying the words "Harvey Weinstein." No more commercials urging me to purchase gold, Colonial Life insurance, or



("Zelabubracil may cause

kidney failure, brain bleeding,

rare forms of eyeball fungi, in-

ability to form sentences with-

out spontaneously soiling your

underwear, depressive disorders,

suicidal thoughts, sudden inter-

And what about my phone?

est in C-Span...")

any other valuable service Joe Namath provides.

Also, no more fast food commercials advertising plasticized meat-like "products," injected with industrial-grade cholesterolized gelatine before being served upon "buns" that aren't actually—in the legal sense—bread. This is usually followed by weight-loss commercial.

No more pharmaceutical ads about breakthrough drugs with vaguely Star-Trekky names that can (a) improve your life, and (b) kill you. No more lengthy drug company disclaimers which last about as long as law school: No text conversations with family members that are purely based on sharing memes? No more spam marketers texting information about my auto warranty?

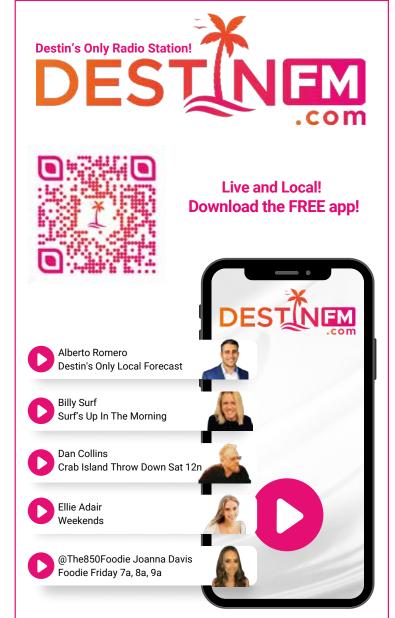
No more robo-calls from pre-recorded machines offering me critical information about debt consolidation services, urgent health insurance opportunities, or scams about fundraisers for upcoming congressmen's balls. Everyone knows congressmen don't have those.

No. Without electricity there was nothingness.

I felt lost and disconnected. Where was I going to get my excitement? How was I going to adequately feel afraid? How in the WORLD was I going to defend my principles on social media by engaging with people whom I've never met and subsequently calling them buttholes? What in the world was I going to do with myself?

Wait. I know. Maybe it's time I lived my life.





Musing



By Pastor Doug Stauffer

As our nation prepares to celebrate its 250th birthday next year (1776-2026), every American should take a moment to reflect on the spiritual foundation laid by our forefathers. Their timeless words echo the eternal truths found in the Bible. These were not idle musings; they were convictions shaped by a profound reverence for God and His Holy Word.

Patrick Henry once declared. "It cannot be emphasized too strongly or too often that this great nation was founded, not by religionists, but by Christians." This truth resonates directly with Scripture: "Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance" (Psalm 33:12). The health of America has always depended

A Pastor's Pondering:

A Heritage Worth Preserving (July 4, 2025)

upon the spiritual heartbeat of the faithful. The Bible declares, "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14:34). When Christ is central in any society, righteousness exalts that nation.

Washington af-George firmed, "It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible." Without the guidance (the light) of Scripture, a nation loses its direction and forfeits its God-given blessings. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105). Washington understood that leadership without God's guidance is like a ship without a rudder. The Bible provides the moral clarity and divine direction that every leader and citizen needs. America's problem today is clear: God and the Bible have been pushed out of public discourse, and efforts intensify to silence those who still unapologetically proclaim His truth.

John Adams, our second president, wrote, "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other." Morality without the Word of God is like building on shifting sand. The Bible says, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding" (Proverbs 9:10). Laws alone cannot restrain a corrupt heart. Only hearts transformed by God's truth will consistently uphold liberty.

Noah Webster, known as the father of American education, once said, "The Bible is the chief moral cause of all that is good, and the best book for regulating the concerns of men." The Bible declares, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). Webster believed the Bible was not merely informative but truly transformative. Education without the Word of God lacks the power to shape intellect and form godly character. The founders recognized these truths. And let us be reminded: Education without sal-



vation ensures eternal damnation. Knowledge alone cannot redeem a soul—only Christ can do that. "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36).

America's founding was not perfect because flawed men built it, but most of the founders were grounded in a perfect Savior. They acknowledged divine providence and sought wisdom from above. As we approach

our nation's 250th anniversary, let us recommit ourselves to the faith that shaped our past and must guide our future—if it is to be bright and blessed.

Let us never forget the words of our first President: "The foundations of our national policy will be laid in the pure and immutable principles of private morality." Washington's thoughts were undoubtedly rooted in Scripture. "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" (Psalm 11:3).

May we do what the righteous can do-pray, proclaim, and persevere. These United States are worth the sacrifice and commitment. Our heritage is not only American; it is also spiritual, and America is worth saving with the help of Almighty God.

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.



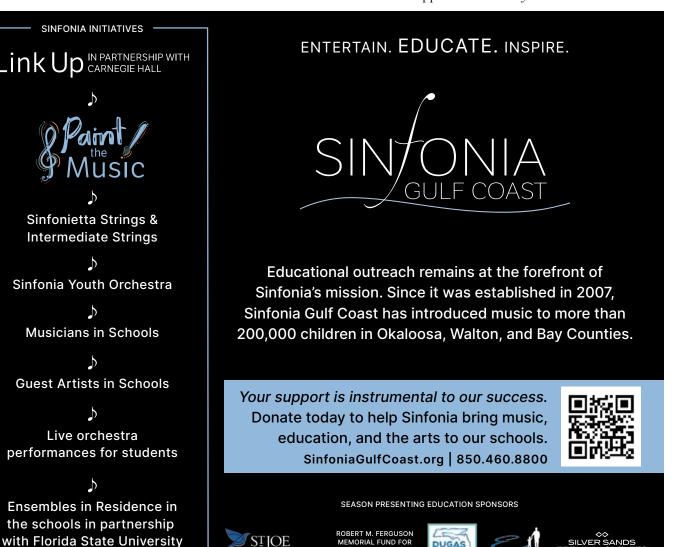








Ensembles in Residence in the schools in partnership





Gulf Coast Jam:

Twelve Years of Bringing Country to the Coast

By Paul Bonnette

For over twelve years, despite stormy weather conditions, pandemics, and hurricanes, Gulf Coast Jam has been bringing "Country to the Coast." This multi-day country music festival has seen its fair share of challenges, but has weathered them to become a staple event on the Emerald Coast. This year, thousands of fans from all 50 states packed into Frank Brown Park as headliners such as Sam Hunt. Blake Shelton, Tyler Childers and Lainey Wilson took to the stage for four nights of legendary country music. Whether it is shopping at the numerous vendors, enjoying food and fun or just coming to enjoy world-class country music, this event seems to offer something that brings out residents and visitors alike as tens of thousands of fans make this event a must-do.

However, it wasn't always the

massive music festival it is now. Gulf Coast Jam began in 2013 as headliners such as Toby Keith, The Charlie Daniel's Band and Trace Adkins took to the stage and played to a crowd of 6,000. According to Executive Producer Rendy Lovelady, seeing the growth of the festival to what it is now is something he holds close to his heart.

"We've walked this path and seen it grow from the first year with 6,000 people being in October...the talent has grown, the crowd capacity has grown, the pull of the festival is in all fifty states now, just the overall texture of the festival has grown," says

According to Lovelady, they are always looking at new ways to grow and provide extra experiences. As part of the ten-year anniversary, Gulf Coast Jam added a fourth night to the already stacked festival as well as unique



experiences, including the now popular Ferris Wheel ride.

Gulf Coast Jam continues to grow and expand, and next year looks to be the biggest event in its history. For the first time in the event's history, Lovelady took to the stage on the first night to announce the full lineup for Gulf Jam 2026, which features legendary performers such as Chris Stapleton, Riley Green, Keith Urban and Post Malone. In addition to the headliners, Gulf Coast Jam 2026 will also feature performances by Koe Wetzel, Muscadine Bloodline, Marcus King, Treaty Oak Revival and many others.

Tickets have already been

selling out for many of the tiers as fans eagerly await next year's

For Rendy Lovelady, despite the challenges, Gulf Coast Jam is an event that he hopes and plans will be around for a long time to come.

"I think Gulf Coast Jam is always going to be a staple for Panama City Beach. We have

a long-term agreement with the city and it's in the top ten country events in the country. It draws from all fifty states, CMT covers it, so it has national television on it. It has become a real staple and I see it being very much a part of the future and hopefully it never goes away. I believe that Gulf Coast Jam is going to be here forever."

Coordinator - Photographer - Music Flowers 850.217.5710 CelebrationsbytheSea.com **CELEBRATIONS BY THE SEA** Zoran Entertainment DJ Zoran, Event Coordinator ADJPro DJ / Emcee Celebrations by The Sea

2026 Gulf Coast Jam Lineup Revealed

Post Malone, Chris Stapleton, Keith Urban and Riley Green to Headline May 28-31 in PCB

nual Gulf Coast Jam Presented by Jim Beam surprised fans by unveiling the full 2026 artist lineup on opening night of this year's festival in Panama City Beach—a first in the event's history

Headliners Post Malone, Chris Stapleton, Keith Urban and Riley Green will be joined by more than 20 acts over four days at Frank Brown Park, May 28-31, 2026.

"Our four headliners are some of the most high-profile, in-demand artists we've ever had in our lineup," said Executive Producer Rendy Lovelady. "I mean, Keith Urban was presented the Triple Crown Award, Chris Stapleton won Male Artist of the Year, Riley Green won Single of the Year, and Post Malone is one of the biggest artists in music, period. We're beyond excited about 2026!"

The festival has drawn more than 30,000 attendees annually in recent years and

Organizers of the 13th An- continues to earn national recognition. Billboard called it one of "The 10 Best Country Music Festivals," and Music Festival Wizard named it the #1 Festival in the World (2024, Voter's Choice) and a top pick among Best Beach Music Festivals (2025).

> COO Mark Sheldon added, "To have our full lineup in place and announced this early is testament to our Jammers giving us amazing feedback and to the incredible work our team puts in year after year to make this one of the top festivals in the country at one of the most beautiful beaches in the world. We love showing off our home, Panama City

> Tickets for 2026 are on sale now at www.GulfCoastJam. com, including General Admission, Military, College and First Responder passes, VIP options, hotel packages and payment plans. But they're going fast-get yours before they

Season 13 Coming this Fall!



Sept. 18 - Oct. 12



Oct. 23 - Nov. 2



Nov. 28 - Dec. 31



More Info and Tickets:

www.emeraldcoasttheatre.org



Dolly Parton Welcomes Guests to Pirates Voyage Grand Opening

By Paul Bonnette

It was with heavy anticipation that guests waited for the doors to finally open for Pirates Voyage Dinner and Show on Panama City Beach. For months, construction crews worked diligently building the 60,000 square foot theater from the ground up. It was worth the wait as Dolly Parton walked out on stage arm in arm with Crimson Captain Red Scarlett and Sapphire Captain Doubloon to welcome everyone to the grand opening of Pirates Voyage.

But let's go back to the beginning. On a chilly morning in February of last year, the first shovels of dirt broke ground in Pier Park on the brand-new 1,000-seat entertainment venue. From that point on, it was almost impossible not to steal a peek at the progress of the building as many drove by the area. Locals and visitors were not the only ones who were excited to start building. Dolly Parton was quoted as saying, "How exciting that we're breaking ground for my



Pirates Voyage Dinner & Show in Panama City Beach. When we open this spring, there will be pirates, mermaids, exciting acrobatics, pyrotechnics, and even a few songs that I wrote – it's a show everyone in the family is going to love. Everyone knows I dream big, so we are definitely going 'overboard' with the details as we get started!"

The excitement continued on in the summer with a "topping out ceremony" as construction crews placed the final steel beam atop the building, an age-old construction tradition that signifies the finishing of the last major aspect of the building's exterior profile. As summer came to a close, construction began on the interior of "Buccaneer Bay," excavating approximately 5,500 tons of sand and soil to create a 15-foot, 600,000-gallon la-

goon pool complete with two pirate ships.

As construction continued this year, excitement continued to build as locals and visitors alike eagerly anticipated the grand opening, until at last the day had arrived. Having witnessed the building of this 60 million dollar investment from the ground breaking to the topping out ceremony, it exceeded all expectations. From the moment you enter, it's impossible not to become instantly immersed in the world

of scallywags with a pre-show area with live entertainment, pirate-themed drinks and snacks, and a gift shop—or join the crew with pirate and mermaid makeovers. All this, before it's even time to enter Buccaneer Bay.

The main show dazzles and shines with acrobats, mermaids, sea lions, sword fighting, and even a spooky visit from the ghost of Davy Jones. The show is only rivaled by the food, which has proven to be just as big of a hit with their four-course feast including Half O' Roasted Chicken, Me Hearties Pulled Pork, Cob O' Buttery Corn, Matey's Mashed Potatoes and of course the famous Buccaneer Biscuit and Voyager Creamy Vegetable Soup. Exceptional food, exciting action, and mesmerizing mermaids, what more could you want, except perhaps a visit from a very special guest?

As we took our seats, overwhelmed by Buccaneer Bay, a very familiar voice sang out, welcoming us to the show. "I bet you've never seen a pirate like me, right?" As Dolly walked out on stage at Buccaneer Bay, she went on to welcome everyone to the opening of the show.

"We want to invite all of you to Panama City Beach and to the brand new Pirates Voyage Dinner Show and it's going to be opening up for all the great folks that live around here and for all the great folks that come here on vacation....It's the perfect place to bring my next pirate crew and everybody here on Panama City Beach has been amazing."

Dolly closed out by thanking everyone and of course, adding a nod to one of her famous songs.

"You have fun, just know I love you, I will always love you, and thank you so much."

Whether you come for the exciting adventure with swash-buckling pirates and mermaids or perhaps the famous cuisine that Dolly Parton's show are known for, one thing is certain. This is sure to be an Arrrr'esome time for the entire family.



Around Town

AROUND TOWN

continued from page 10

alumni who served on the design committee and felt so passionate about the Choctawhatchee standard of excellence with Academics, Athletics, Music and Arts."

"It's a symbol of 70+ years of tradition," added School Board Member Linda Evanchyk. Superintendent Marcus Chambers praised the alumni-led effort, calling the installation "absolutely beautiful."

United Fidelity Bank Names Shaun Foster New Business Development Officer



United Fidelity Bank has appointed Shaun Foster as Assistant Vice President and Business Devel-

opment Officer for the Destin/FWB market. A Choctawhatchee High School graduate and long-time local, Foster brings 18 years of banking experience and a passion for building client relationships.

"We're so excited to have Shaun's experience and dedication here in the Fort Walton Beach area," the bank stated. "If you're looking for someone who is committed to understanding your individual banking needs... Shaun is your guy!"

A Fort Walton Beach native, Foster earned degrees from Northwest State College and Troy University. Currently residing in Niceville with his wife and two children, Shaun actively volunteers with A Bed 4 Me and serves on the boards of ECF and CALM.

United Fidelity Bank operates banking centers in both Fort Walton Beach and Destin. For more info, visit www.unitedfidelity.com.

PenAir Breaks Ground on New Fort Walton Beach Branch

PenAir Credit Union celebrated a major milestone with the ceremonial groundbreaking of its new Fort Walton Beach branch, set to open in early 2026 at 80 Elgin Parkway.

"This groundbreaking is about more than a new building—it's about building relationships, trust and a stronger financial future for the people of Fort Walton," said CEO Lee Morgan.

Ted Corcoran of the FWB Chamber added, "Fort Walton Beach has been waiting 90 years for PenAir to come across the bridge—and we couldn't be more excited to welcome them. PenAir's reputation for giving back and investing in the communities it serves is exactly the

kind of partnership this city values. We're grateful to Lee Morgan and the entire PenAir team for bringing their mission and momentum to Fort Walton."

The branch will feature modern banking tech and community-inspired design. Visit PenAir. org to learn more.

Downtown Museums Open and Free During Construction

While the Indian Temple Mound Museum undergoes construction of a new 4,800-square-foot addition, the rest of Fort Walton Beach's Heritage Park and Cultural Center remains open—and admission is free!

Visit the Camp Walton Schoolhouse Museum, Garnier Post Office Museum, and Civil War Exhibit Building Tuesday— Saturday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Stop by 139 Miracle Strip Parkway SE or call 850-833-9595 for more information. You can also visit fwb.org/museum.

Scouts Hit a Home Run at Blue Wahoos Scout Night

The Gulf Coast Council and Pensacola Blue Wahoos knocked it out of the park once again with their annual Scout Night, which hosted 318 Scouts from across Northwest Florida. Now in its 10th season, this cherished event saw Scouts step up to the plate



in various ways - assisting with the flag presentation during the National Anthem and starting the game with some first pitches that would make any major leaguer proud. But the real MVP moment came after the final out, when the outfield was transformed into a camping paradise, pitching tents under the lights for a unique overnight adventure. "It's been super exciting for us to be able to grow our partnership with the Scouts over the past decade," said Emily Mann, Group Sales and Community Relations Manager for the Blue Wahoos. This annual tradition remains a favorite for both organizations, bringing together America's favorite pastime with the timeless spirit of Scouting.

ECCAC Launches Backto-School Drive for Local Students

The Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Centers (EC-CAC) have kicked off their annual back-to-school supply drive across Okaloosa and Walton Counties, running through August 4

"We are asking people to support our communities by helping ECCAC fill the backpacks with donations of school supplies," said CEO Julie Porterfield. "We have many drop off locations for the supplies at our Centers, as well as area businesses and churches in Destin, Niceville, Ft. Walton Beach, Crestview and DeFuniak Springs. We also need volunteers to help us sort and distribute the supplies to ensure they will reach the students who need it the most to thrive in the classroom."

Donations can be dropped off at ECCAC centers, local businesses and churches. An Amazon Wishlist is also available. Supplies can be shipped directly to the Centers, or dropped off in person to the Centers or designated community partner drop off locations. Visit https://eccac. org/back-to-school-campaign/ for more information, a link to the Amazon Wishlist page, drop off locations or to donate. All donated items will be distributed to local schools and community centers before the start of the 2025-2026 school year. Visit eccac.org for info or to donate.

To volunteer, contact Kate McDougall-Mason, 530-392-0802, or kate@eccac.org. If abuse is suspected, report it by calling the anonymous Florida Abuse Hotline at 1-800-96-ABUSE.

Local Coupons

SUNSET LIQUORS / PARADISE LIQUORS \$5 OFF

PURCHASE OF \$25 OR MORE

Offer expires 8/15/25

Offer expires 8/15/25
Offer good at all 10 Locations

TAILFINS TIKIS

Tiki Boat Tours FREE Child Ticket



BOOK NOW

Offer expires 8/15/25 172 Harbor Boulevard, Destin 850-650-1200

BROZINNI'S PIZZERIA BOGO ½ OFF

FOLIAL OR LESSER VALLIE

OR TWO 16" ONE TOPPING PIZZA \$29.99

Offer expires 8/15/25 144 Palm Blvd N., Niceville | 850-678-7778 www.brozinnispizza.com

\$200 OFF INITIAL KETAMINE SERIES

Offer expires 8/15/25 4641 Gulf Starr Dr #105 • Destin 850-786-2051 • Completeketaminesolutions.com

KAYAK ON A BAY

33% OFF PROMO CODE: DESTINLOCAL

15% OFF PROMO CODE: OKALOOSALOCAL

20% OFF MILITARY PROMO CODE: WESALUTEYOU

Offer expires 8/15/25

BLUEWATER PLASTIC SURGERY

PROFOUND (RF MICRO-NEEDLING, FOR SKIN TIGHTENING AND CELLULITE) \$500 OFF PROCEDURE
WITH 50 UNITS OF COMPLIMENTARY BOTOX

Offer expires 8/15/25 Niceville • Santa Rosa Beach • 850-530-6064 www.bluewaterplasticsurgery.com

SURGERY 10% OFF

GIFT CERTFICATE \$500 & UP (EXCLUDES SURGICAL PROCEDURES)

FUBAR PIZZA BAR BOGO:

BUY ONE ENTRÉE, GET ONE OF EQUAL OR LESSER VALUE FREE

(DINE IN ONLY)

Offer expires 8/15/25 114 Amberjack Drive • Fort Walton Beach 850-226-7084 | www.fubarfwb.com

SUNSET LIQUORS / PARADISE LIQUORS

\$5 OFF

PURCHASE OF \$25 OR MORE

Offer expires 8/15/25
Offer good at all 10 Locations

MAGIC + COMEDY

USE BOOKING CODE TO SAVE MONEY
Reserve at least 24 hours in advance and

SAVE \$3 PER TICKET
BART ROCKETT MAGIC & COMEDY SHOW

Booking Code FWB3

Offer expires 8/15/25 207 B Kelly Rd., Niceville, FL | 850-897-0038 www.nicevilleslabsandcookies.com

TORTOISE CLINIC

\$30 OFF

PURCHASE OF \$25 OR MORE

Offer expires 8/15/25 114 Amberjack Drive • Fort Walton Beach 850-226-7084 | www.fubarfwb.com

Offer expires 8/15/25 Niceville • Santa Rosa Beach • 850-530-6064 www.bluewaterplasticsurgery.com

BEACHSIDE SLIDING GLASS DOOR MAINTENANCE, LLC

\$25 OFF SLIDING DOOR TRACK REPAIR WITH ROLLER REPLACEMENT

FREE ESTIMATES

Offer expires 8/15/25 BeachsideSlide.com 850-98-SLIDE (850-987-5433)



200 EGLIN PKWY NE, FT. WALTON BEACH, FL 32547 • 850-226-7579 • AJSONTHEBAYOU.COM