



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

Postal Customer Local

Lyrics and Music Meet Sand and Sun at the Inaugural Destin Songwriter Festival

By WILL ESTELL

If you're a beach lover from near or afar and consider yourself a fan of music and the men and women that make it happen, you're going to want to make plans to attend Destin's first ever songwriter fest.

This October 10 and 11th, the white sands and emerald waters of the World's Luckiest Fishing Village will also serve as the picturesque backdrop for the inaugural Destin Songwriter Festival, bringing together an array of talented songwriters and performers for a weekend of meaningful lyrics, great music and fun-loving music fans converging along the beautiful coastline.

Situated along Destin Harbor, the festival will feature everything from intimate acoustic sets to unforgettable headliner performances and offer a first-hand glimpse into the stories behind the songs. Fans will have the opportunity to feel every lyric and the weight each song carries in its journey to become a musical story.

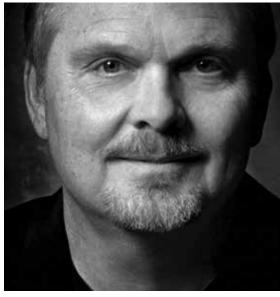


James Otto

In my two decades of covering festivals and writing feature cover story interviews on well knowns from Alan Jackson and Brian Kelley to Kenney Chesney, Darius Rucker, and the late great Jimmy Buffett, I've often said that to sing is one thing, but to write and breathe lyrical life into a song is quite another. Remarkably, the Destin Songwriter Festival

offer attendees the opportunity to experience both. Whether you're a lifelong music devotee, a casual festivalgoer or simply a beach lover looking for a soundtrack to paradise, this is where the art of songwriting meets the beauty of Destin.

I talked with organizer and Destin Songwriter Festival CEO, Matthew Pennings, who



Kent Blazy

gave me a little insight into the festival and how the two-day event would run.

"Throughout the festival, music lovers can enjoy free performances at multiple popular venues along Destin Harbor, coupled with paid ticketholders being able to ac-

SONGWRITER continued on page 2



Answering the Call with Emerald Coast United

By Heather Bennett Eye

The past year for Justine and Joey Sauvageau has been one of both heartache and reward. They started their nonprofit, Emerald Coast United, last year to assist with search and rescue, and disaster relief efforts along the Panhandle and in nearby states. While they've been a blessing to many, the organization was created out of personal loss.

Their close friend and diver, Jeremy Carmical, went missing September 22, 2024, while spearfishing

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Magnolia Grill

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

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SONGWRITER

continued from page 1

cess the mainstage, and feature acts, just up the hill at 314 Harbor Blvd. These waterfront stages include popular Destin venues like Boat House, Sky Bar at Edge Seafood and Harbor Tavern. All of the shows in those venues will be free to attend, while the mainstage will be a ticketed, patrons-only area."

The festival's Main Stage at 314 Harbor Blvd. is where the weekend crescendos, with both general admission and VIP tickets available. Here fans will get up close with a premium production setup complete with drink and food vendors, along with world-class performances by such renowned writers and performers such as James Otto, Kent Blazy, and Andy Griggs.

Lyrics on the Harbor: **Destin's First** Songwriter Festival October 10-11, 2025 |

Heron Harbor

Tickets & Details

- GA 2-Day Pass: \$60
- GA Friday or Saturday:
- VIP Table (2-Day): \$1,000

Main Stage shows require GA or VIP tickets; side stages are free.

The three aforementioned not only for their stage presence, but for their hit songs gracing country radio and streaming playlists around the globe.

Supporting artists performing on the Destin Songwriter Festival Main Stage include Justin Holmes, Matt Wynn, Justin Andrews and Nashville recording artist, Jessie G — who also happens to be festival founder Matthew Pennings' lovely and talented wife.

I asked my friend and fellow music lover, Destin Mayor Bobby Wagner, what the new songwriter festival means to him, and he gave it a resounding thumbs up.

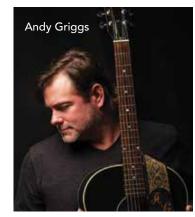
"Our harbor area has always been the heart of Destin, and welcoming songwriters alongside our own local talent can really turn it into a stage that celebrates community and culture. As someone who loves music, just like you do, I see this festival as more than entertainment. It's a chance for our locals to share their voices, and for our visitors and vacationers to experience the spirit of Destin through both song and the beautiful backdrops you mentioned," said Mayor Wagner.

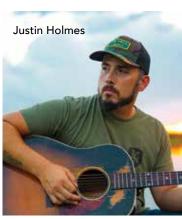
Pennings, also reminded me that while the festival is about music, it's also about giving back. As such, a portion of proceeds will benefit Operation Song, a 501(c)(3) dedicated to helping veterans, active-duty service members, and their families tell their stories through songwriting. The organization will take center stage on Friday, October 10, leading the headlining round and reminding audiences of the powerful connection between music and healing.

With free harbor performances, ticketed headliner shows and one of the most stunning destinations in the South, the inaugural Destin Songwriter Festival promises a weekend that pairs perfectly with a cold drink, good company and great stories set to music.

Music lovers can **visit www.** destinsongwriterfestival. **com** for the latest updates, ticket information, artist announcements and insider travel tips for making the most of your festival

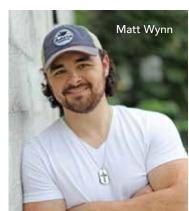
Will Estell is a writer, editor, and media entrepreneur with more than 750 published articles in regional and national magazines covering tourism, real estate, automobiles, golf, food, music, and celebrity cover-story interviews. As chief creative officer of Estell Hussey Media LLC, he has





helped launch 12 magazine titles from concept to market and served as editor in chief for several others. His latest project—a men's lifestyle magazine blending Esquire, GQ, fitness, outdoors and auto-debuts nationwide in 2026. A Mississippi native, Will is the father of three who now lives in Destin and Navarre Beach with his wife, WEAR ABC 3 news anchor Laura Hussev-Estell.







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EC UNITED

continued from page 1

in Destin. With Hurricane He-

lene closing in on the Gulf, and Destin still in the range of impact zones, every minute in the search counted. Once Justine

and Joey found out Jeremy was missing, they were able to assist in organizing search and rescue efforts. A collective group rallied approximately 45 boats together over the span of the two-day search and they became points of contact for the United Cajun

Volunteers were able to recover Jeremy two days later, just before Hurricane Helene made landfall in the Big Bend area, east of Destin. Although it wasn't the outcome they hoped for, Justine and Joey felt peace knowing they could help bring closure to Jeremy's family. "The community supported us in ways I never thought possible," said Justine. "I'm extremely thankful."

After assisting in the rescue efforts for Jeremy, and working closely with Justine and Joey, the United Cajun Navy urged them to start their own nonprofit to assist in future efforts along the panhandle. Jeremy's mother, Michelle Carmical, also encouraged them to follow their calling to help others.





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Life Inside the Fort Walton Beach Chamber:

Where Business Meets Community





By Sherry Jones

For the past four years, I've had the privilege of officing inside the Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce, where I've seen firsthand what makes this place so special. I also serve as the Community and Public Relations Director for One Hopeful Place, a role that keeps me deeply connected to the needs of our community. Being here day in and day out, I get to witness how the Chamber touches not only businesses, but lives — and that's why writing about the Chamber feels personal to me.

If you've ever walked into the Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce, you know right away — this isn't your average Chamber. You'll probably hear laughter before you hear business talk. Ted Corcoran might be cracking a joke, the staff will greet you like you've known them forever, and if you hang around long enough, someone will tease you about "drinking the Chamber Kool-Aid." And here's the funny thing: once you do, you really don't want to leave.

That's the charm of this Chamber. Yes, it's about business. But it's also about people, history, community pride, and having a little fun while getting things done.

The Big Picture: The Chamber doesn't shy away from big things. It has honored the ODA 595 Horse Soldiers, the first Green Berets on the ground after 9/11. It proudly celebrated the 75th Anniversary of the U.S. Air Force, reminding us



how closely tied Fort Walton Beach is to Eglin and Hurlburt. It hosted the unforgettable Doolittle Raiders Final Goblet Ceremony, ensuring the heroism of 80 brave airmen from World War II is never forgotten. And it looks ahead, too, with projects like the Round the Mound, which will not only ease traffic but open new doors for growth.

That's the kind of balance the Chamber strikes so well: honoring our legacy while planning for the future.

The People Who Keep It Moving: But here's the best part—the Chamber is powered

by people, and what a team it is. Rachelle Graves, Director of Special Events, is the one who makes it all happen — coordinating, organizing, and pulling every detail together so Chamber events run flawlessly and members feel celebrated. Seth Luttrell, Director of Operations, is the steady hand who keeps logistics and big-picture projects running seamlessly. Dayna Stinebiser, Information Specialist, has a gift for finding the answer to just about any question. She's the go-to problem solver, always pointing people in the right direction and making sure

no one ever leaves without the help they need. Debbie Dodge, Membership Specialist, provides the warm welcome that turns new members into long-term friends of the Chamber. And Chrissy Flanigan, Accountant, makes sure every bold idea rests on a solid financial foundation.

Here's the kicker: every single one of them has been here for ten years or more. That's not just impressive — it's almost unheard of. Longevity like that speaks volumes about their dedication and about Ted's leadership. Together, they're not just co-workers — they're family.

And then there's Ted Corcoran, President and CEO. Ted is more than a leader; he's the personality that makes the Chamber pulse with energy. He's funny, quick-witted, and completely devoted to this community. Spend five minutes with him, and you'll understand why

Continued on page 13





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. who Kadan. starred in the movie Dark Skies with award winning Keri actress Russell 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 long-term 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: USATour-Tickets.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.Para-disePromotionsFL.com.



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The Palms of Destin Resort & Conference Center 4201 Indian Bayou Trail, Destin, FL

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Happenings Around FWB

2025

EVENTS

SEPTEMBER

10 | Paint Night with the Traveling Painter 6 pm | Soundside Waterfront Bar | Downtown FWB

Mini Makers and Experimenters Lab

11 | 10:30 am | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB Greater FWB Chamber Nothing But Networking

11:30 am | The Crab Trap at The Boardwalk | Okaloosa Island

Football Game: FWB High School vs. Booker T. Washington 7 pm | FWB High School | FWB

12 | Whiskey Wine Paint Party 6 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB

> Football Game: Choctawhatchee High School vs. Pine Forest High School 7 pm | Choctawhatchee High School | FWB

Book Signing with Author Helen Gillespie 13 | 10 am | FWB Public Library | FWB

> Garnier Beach Garden Club 10 am | FWB Public Library | FWB

SOF Missions Gala

6 pm | Destin-FWB Convention Center | Okaloosa Island

- 2nd Annual Okinawa Festival 12 pm | FWB Faigrounds | FWB
- 15 **GSSF Indoor League** 10 am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso

General Trivia Night 6 pm | Soundside Waterfront Bar | Downtown FWB

Lunch N Learn: Creating Emotional Resilience **During Stressful Times** 11:30 am | Greater FWB Chamber of Commerce | FWB

Live Music: Kimmi Bitter

8 pm | Docie's Dock | Downtown FWB

Book Lovers Workshop: Relics of Violence 6 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB

Live Music: Halfway to St. Patty's Day featuring

8 pm | Docie's Dock | Downtown FWB

Greater FWB Chamber Business After Hours 18 l 5:30 pm | Renasant Bank | FWB

Planetarium Nights

6 pm | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB

Florida Concealed Carry Weapons Class 10 am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso 4th Annual PAR 4 PATRIOTS

20 5th Annual Burgers, Bourbon, & Beer Festival

12 pm | Destin Harbor | Destin

Octoberfest

11am-4 pm | Fort Walton Elks Lodge 1795

Beer

Games Club 1 pm | FWB Public Library | FWB

- 23-Northwest Florida Fair
- 5 pm | Northwest Florida Fair Association | FWB 26
- Farmhouse Pumpkins Paint Party 25 6 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB
- 26-**Destin Seafood Festival** 28 Times Vary | Destin Harbor
- Mattie Kelly Family Bay Day 10 am | Fred Gannon Rocky Bayou State Park | Niceville Simple and Elegant Sewing 10 am | FWB Public Library | FWB

Women's Expo

11 am | The Island Resort | FWB

Northwest Florida Fair

2 pm | Northwest Florida Fair Association | FWB

Reduce, Reuse, Refashion Show 4:30 pm | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB

Shrek, The Musical Jr. presented by The Pyramid Players

7 pm | FWB Civic Auditorium | FWB

29 | Frightful Forest Friends Paint Party 6 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB

General Trivia Night

6 pm | Soundside Waterfront Bar | Downtown FWB

Live Music: Wheatus Acoustic with Gabrielle Sterbenz

8 pm | Docie's Dock | Downtown FWB

Women in Science Conference presented by **Emerald Coast Science Center** 5:30 pm | The Place on Beal | FWB

OCTOBER

02 | Coffee with the City Manager 8 am | FWB Public Library | FWB

> Mystery by the Book Club 12 pm | FWB Public Library | FWB

Sinfonia Gulf Coast Cabaret at Seagar's: An Evening with Bernadette Peters

5:30 pm | Seagar's Prime Steaks & Seafood | Miramar Beach

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

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

Football Game: FWB High School vs. Wakulla 7 pm | FWB High School | FWB

Dog Daze presented by Friendship 04 Veterinary Hospital

9 am | The Landing | Downtown FWB

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

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

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

- 05 Toast on the Coast 12-2:3 pm | Henderson Beach Resort | Destin
- **FWB Library Friends Meeting** 6 pm | FWB Public Library | FWB
- Best of the Emerald Coast Winners Soiree 09 6 pm | Grand Boulevard at Sandestin | Miramar Beach Mini Makers and Experimenters Lab 10:30 am | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB
- 10-Baytowne Beer Festival
- 11 Fri. 6-8 pm | Sat. 2-5 pm | Baytowne Wharf Sandestin
- Bloody Mary Festival 11 am-2 pm | The Market Shops Miramar Beach
- Harvest Wine & Food Festival
- 19 Times Vary | Cerulean Park | Watercolor
- Cornhole Tournament 10 am-1:30 pm | United Fidelity Bank | FWB

ONGOINGEVENTS

VFW Post 7674 - Sunday Breakfasts 8 - 11:30 am | Sun | 231 Carol Ave | FWB SINGO Music Bingo Nights

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

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

FARMERSMARKETS

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

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



10:30 am | FWB Golf Club | FWB









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Tequila Lesson 101

By Larry McCrary, President, Agazul USA

You have probably noticed that whiskey bottles often list the actual age of the whiskey. Unlike whiskey (and some other spirits), tequila doesn't list the year on its bottles. Instead, you'll see terms such as **Blanco**, **Reposado**, **Añejo**, **Extra Añejo**, **Cristalino** and more.

Blanco (also known as silver) is often unaged and bottled directly after distillation; but it can be aged in wood for as long as 30 days and stainless steel for up to two months.

Reposado is the next level. It can mature as long as a full year. This tequila is versatile and a top choice for premium margaritas.

Next is añejo. When it comes to sipping tequilas, añejo is the sweet spot. This is the tequila variety for fans of bourbon and single malt Scotch whisky. It's complex, nuanced and perfect for sipping neat or on the rocks. añejo tequila is defined by being aged for one to three years. It



gets its name from the Spanish word for "old."

Extra añejo is aged for a minimum of three years, making it the smoothest and most refined type of tequila. Cristalino is a newer style of tequila, made by filtering aged tequila to remove color and impurities.

Tequila is usually aged in barrels made of oak. While there are other barrels used, they are most often American or French oak. Additionally, a number of tequilas are aged in barrels previously used for bourbon or other American whiskeys. The barrel used will impart different aromas and flavors.

In general,

In general, tequila aged in bourbon barrels will have flavors and aromas such as charred oak, sticky toffee, toasted va-

nilla beans, pipe tobacco, roasted agave, honey, cinnamon, cracked black pepper, dried fruits, caramelized sugar and more.

Añejo may be the most versatile tequila. Aged for at least one year, and sometimes longer, this tequila is appropriate for drinking neat, over ice, or with water. At the same time, if you buy a reasonably-priced bottle of añejo tequila, you'll still feel comfortable mixing with it. If you're a tequila drinker, you can elevate your favorite whiskey-based cocktails by swapping out bourbon, blended Scotch whisky and other types of whiskey with añejo tequila. You can also use añejo tequila as the base for classic tequila-driven drinks like the Paloma or Margarita to add depth and flavor.

You can step up your cocktail by using extra añejo Try a classic Old Fashioned with extra añejo tequila instead of the usual rye or bourbon for a unique, roasted agave take. The same goes with the Manhattan.

Whiskey drinkers who would like to branch out into tequila, añejo is the right choice for you. You should stock up on a bottle or two for sipping neat or on the rocks. As a bonus, añejo is an excellent choice for mixing. It can be used as a base for tequila beverages or as an alternative ingredient in drinks that are typically made with whiskey.



Where to Buy Agazul Tequila Locally

You don't have to travel far to enjoy Agazul — bottles are available right here in our area:

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Cash's - Destin

Cash's - Bluewater Bay

Cash's - Freeport

Cash's – DeFuniak Springs Cheers Wine & Liquor – Bluewater Bay (Niceville), next to Pepito's

Restaurants:

Nick's Seafood Restaurant – Freeport

Tuscany Italian Bistro – Miramar Beach

CJ's Hangout - Destin

Visit **AgazulTequila.com**. For additional information, contact Gina at gina@agazulusa. com or 256-627-2685.





Calm the Chaos: Understanding Cortisol and How to Take Back Control of Your Health

By Dr. KAREN DeVore

Let's talk

about cortisol. You've probably heard it called "the stress hormone"—and while that's true. it's also a bit of an oversimplification. Cortisol is one of the most essential hormones in your body, playing a key role in everything from your energy levels and metabolism to your mood and immune system.

But like anything in the body, balance is everything. When cortisol is too high or too low for too long, it can wreak havoc on your health.

I see this every day—patients who are feeling tired, wired, inflamed, anxious, or burnt out, but whose lab work comes back "normal." Often, the missing piece of the puzzle is cortisol imbalance.

So, What Exactly Is **Cortisol?**

Cortisol is a hormone produced by your adrenal glands, two small glands that sit on top of your kidneys, and acts like a built-in alarm system. Its job is to help your body respond to stress—physical, emotional, or environmental. It also plays a role in blood sugar regulation, blood pressure, circadian rhythm (your sleep-wake cycle), and inflammation control.

When your body perceives a threat—whether it's a traffic jam or a tough meeting—your brain sends a signal to your adrenals to release cortisol. In the short term, this is a good thing. It sharpens your focus, gives you a burst of energy, and helps you respond quickly.

But here's the problem most of us are living in a state of chronic stress. And your body doesn't always know the difference between an actual emergency and an overflowing inbox or constant worry. In a healthy rhythm, cortisol rises in the morning to wake you up and drops in the evening to help you sleep. This natural rise and fall is what keeps your energy, focus, and mood stable.

Signs Your Cortisol Might Be Out of Balance

When cortisol levels stay ele-

vated for too long (or crash too low after prolonged stress), your body begins to show signs. Common symptoms include:

- Fatigue that doesn't improve with rest
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Anxiety, irritability, or feeling "on edge"
- · Weight gain, especially around the abdomen
- Brain fog or poor memory
- Low libido or irregular cycles
- Frequent illness or slow recov-
- · Cravings for sugar, salt, or caffeine

Sound familiar? You're not alone. Cortisol dysregulation is incredibly common—but it's



often overlooked or misunderstood in conventional medicine.

Why Conventional **Approaches Often Miss** the Mark

In a traditional medical model, symptoms like these are often treated individually: fatigue gets a stimulant, mood gets a prescription, sleep gets a sedative. But those approaches rarely look at the bigger picture.

Instead, we ask: What's going on beneath the surface? Why is your body stuck in survival mode? How can we help it shift into healing mode?

That's where integrative care—and a deeper understanding of cortisol—can make all the difference.

How We Help: An Integrative Approach to Cortisol Health

We begin by mapping your body's stress response through advanced testing. This often includes saliva-based cortisol panels or the DUTCH test, which track your hormone rhythms over the course of the day. From there, we create a personalized plan that supports your whole system—mind and body.

True healing takes a wholebody approach. Here's how we support cortisol health with integrative strategies:

Nervous System Sup- moting resilience over time. **port:** Acupuncture is one of the most powerful tools we have for regulating the nervous system. It helps shift the body out of "fight or flight" and into "rest and digest," lowering cortisol and pro-

Herbal & Nutritional **Therapy:** Adaptogenic herbs like ashwagandha, rhodiola, and holy basil can help regulate

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WOMEN'S WELLNESS REIMAGINED

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

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Join us for a spectacular evening as we join forces to end SUICIDE and PTSD among our Nations Heroes. Emerald Coast GALA SATURDAY | SEPT 13, 2025 \$100 Per Guest Attire RED! (Table Sponsorships Available) Evening will include dinner, entertainment, and More info contact: Kristi Beckman-kristi@sofmissions.org

By Carolyn Newcomer Ketchel

I often have constituents ask me how can we spend money repairing a park or buying an office building but not repair Eglin Parkway between Shalimar bridge and Hwy 98? I will attempt to answer this question.

First let me write that your county commission is as frustrated as you with the deplorable condition of Eglin Parkway. This project is the sole responsibility of the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT). If the roadway was under the authority of the county, we would have re-paved Eglin Parkway long ago. Our voices have been heard at FDOT. This state road can only be repaired by FDOT. If you are as concerned as we are about this project, I ask you to Please contact: Ian Satter, Public Information Director for FDOT, 850-330-1205, with your concerns.

One of the first things you learn about being a County Commissioner is that there are over 100 different revenue funds within the county budget. However, each fund has its own set of rules designated by Federal, State or Local Law, and, generally, one cannot be co-mingled with another. Let's consider the Tourism Development Tax.

The Tourist Development Tax is payable at a rate of 6% (six pennies per dollar) on all overnight stays in short-term rentals (six months or less) in Okaloosa County. Short-term overnight

rentals include hotels, motels, resort motels, apartments, apartment motels, rooming houses, mobile home parks, recreational vehicle parks, condominiums, condominium hotels, timeshare resorts, residential dwellings or campgrounds.

Okaloosa County has benefited from the "Bed Tax" in so many ways. Marler Park, Turtle Patrol, Lifeguards, beach sweeping, east pass inlet dredging, Women Veterans Park and the new underwater camera at the Okaloosa Pier (visit https://bit. ly/LiveOkaloosaPierCam) are wonderful examples, as well as the Bridge-to-Bridge Path on Highway 98 between Brooks Bridge and Destin Bridge. The county has bought several beach front properties in Destin for public use, as well as waterfront properties in Mary Esther, Shalimar, Cinco Bayou and Fort Walton Beach. The county has also purchased larger regional acreage in the north Crestview, Baker and Dorcus communities, and we are renovating the Fairgrounds (not known as Rigdon Center) with these funds.

The Florida Statute 125.0104 permits the Board of County Commissioners of Okaloosa County to levy Tourist Development Tax (TDT), and Chapter 20 Article II, Sections 71-78 of the Okaloosa County Ordinances created the Tourist Development Council, established the initial tax rate collection, and identified the special taxing districts within Okaloosa County.

Each penny of the six pennies collected is designated by Florida Statue and can only be spent on the areas designated within the statue.

Let's examine the use and designation and use of each penny known as the Bed Tax:

First through third pennies

Revenues from the first three cents of the TDT can be used for the following purposes:

Facility construction and operation: Acquiring, building, or maintaining publicly owned and operated convention centers, stadiums, arenas, auditoriums, aquariums, and museums. This may also include zoological parks.

Tourism promotion and advertising: Funding the promotion and advertisement of tourism, including funding for convention bureaus and tourist information centers.

Beach and shoreline maintenance: Financing beach improvement, maintenance, erosion control, and re-nourishment.

Fourth penny

An additional one-cent tax may be levied for specific purposes, often related to special projects. These funds can be used for:

Professional sports facilities: Paying the debt on bonds used for professional sports facil-

Continued on page 14



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Fill It and Fix It: How Immigration Changes Could Affect the Real Area Estate Market



By Paul Domenech

In 2024, Florida's increased immigration enforcement has already reshaped housing landscapes in Miami and Central Florida. Now, in just the last month, these changes are reaching Okaloosa and Walton County. The "fill it and fix it" idea is straightforward: as workers who fill crucial labor roles are removed, rental units open up, and landlords may choose to sell

Many of these individuals

have long been the backbone of the local labor force, taking on jobs that others often avoid. They keep things running and, importantly, they fill many rental homes. Now that enforcement is affecting Okaloosa and Walton County, we're starting to see vacancies rise. Landlords with empty rentals might decide it's time to sell, adding more inventory to a market that's already got its share of listings.

For buyers, this shift means a real opportunity. More homes on the market can translate into better chances to find a property, fix it up and make it your own. But it's not just about buying, if you're a seller, this is a crucial moment to work with an agent who truly understands our local market dynamics. With the right guidance, you can stay ahead of the curve and position your property strategically to get the best possible outcome.

In short, what started in Miami and Central Florida is now at our doorstep. Whether you're



looking to buy a home in this new wave of inventory or sell your property before the market shifts further, now is the time to act. Connect with an experienced agent who can help you navigate these changes and understands the opportunities in Okaloosa and Walton County.

With both buying and selling in mind, having the right guidance can make all the difference. We are here to help you stay ahead of the curve and turn these evolving circumstances into your advantage, whether that means finding your next home or successfully selling your current property, we are ready to advise and serve our community.

Check us out at Thedomenechgroup.com, contact me directly at 850-543-1418 or Paul@thedomenechgroup.com or contact your trusted real estate advisor.

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Events Around Town

SOF Missions Gala Honors Heroes Sept. 13

Saturday, Sept. 13, 2025 | **Destin-Fort Walton Beach** Convention Center

Shield of Faith (SOF) Missions hosts its 9th Annual Emerald Coast Gala. This year's theme, Military Code: RED-Resilience, Empowerment, Determination—honors warriors including veterans, active-duty service members and first responders. Guests will enjoy a

formal red-themed evening with dinner, dessert, live music by Thin Ice, auctions and a keynote address from a distinguished warrior guest. Proceeds benefit SOF's Be Resilient Clinics and Warrior Retreats, which provide no-cost, comprehensive care for those struggling with suicide and mental health challenges. Tickets are \$100 and include dinner, dessert and one drink. Sponsorships available. Formal red attire encouraged. Tickets

THEALICE



and further details: sofmissions. org/gala

Wine & Fries Returns with a Carnival Twist

Sept. 19, 6-9 p.m. | Hotel Effie Sandestin Rooftop, Miramar Beach

Ronald McDonald House Charities of Northwest Florida and McDonald's bring back Wine & Fries, presented by Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast—an elevated evening pairing favorite wines with McDonald's French fries. Enjoy rooftop views, a DJ-led dance floor, a silent auction and "Classic Carnival" charm, plus a moving story from a family served by RMHC. Proceeds support RMHC's "home away from home" for families with children receiving medical care. Tickets: \$115 at rmhc-nwfl.org (available until one hour before start). Details: Allie Moore, 850-477-2273; allie@rmhc-nwfl.org

Support the Fall Silent Auction Benefiting Emerald Coast Food Rescue

Friday, Oct. 24 | 6-9:30 p.m. | Local Market, Des-

Emerald Coast Food Rescue (ECFR) invites the community to its Annual Fall Silent Auction—an evening of giving, good food and meaningful impact raising vital funds to support ECFR's mission of rescuing food surplus and redirecting it to those facing hunger in Okaloosa and Walton counties. Inkind donations for the auction will directly help fund operations that deliver over 250,000 pounds of food each month—at no cost—to 43 local programs, including food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, after-school programs and subsidized clinics. Your support ensures that food doesn't go to waste-and families don't go hungry.

To donate or learn more, vis-

it Emerald Coast Food Rescue or email info@emeraldcoastfoodrescue.org.

Fore Her 13th Annual **Golf Outing - Swing for a** Cause

Friday, Sept. 26 | 9 a.m. | The Links Golf Club, Sand-

Fore Her invites golfers of all levels to tee off for a very "pink" cause at its 13th Annual Golf Outing, presented by Emerald Coast Hospice Care. Proceeds help local breast cancer patients cover living expenses, utilities, and transportation costs during treatment.

The four-person scramble includes on-course food and drink, a catered lunch by Evie Mae's BBQ, the fan-favorite "Dress Like a Lady" hole, and an after-party with prizes, raffles, and giveaways. Info, registration, and sponsorships: Fore-Her.org/golfouting

10th Annual Bloody Mary Festival - A Decade of **Delicious!**

Saturday, Oct. 11 | 11 a.m.-2 p.m. | The Market Shops, Miramar Beach

Get ready to Eat, Drink, and B MARY! Celebrate 10 years of bold flavors and brunch vibes at the 10th Annual Bloody Mary Festival, powered by Step One Automotive Group. Sample un-

Continued on next page

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LadyWorld Festival -Pop Culture, Podcasts & Power Vibes

Sept. 26–28 | Seascape Resort, Miramar Beach

LadyWorld 2025—an immersive weekend escape of pop culture, comedy, music, and inspiration. Presented by e.l.f. Cosmetics and produced with Topeka, the three-day retreat brings powerhouse podcasters, comedians, musicians, and TV personalities to the Emerald

This year's lineup includes Giggly Squad's Hannah Berner: Girls Gotta Eat duo Ashlev Hesseltine and Rayna Greenberg; Dancing with the Stars champion Kaitlyn Bristowe; Vanderpump Villa's Stassi

The LadyGang is back with Schroeder; former Bachelorette Rachel Lindsay; E! News host Justin Sylvester; comedian Gina Brillon; and Ria and Fran from Chicks in the Office. Each night caps off with concerts featuring Ryan Cabrera, The Maine, Mark McGrath of Sugar Ray, Chris Kirkpatrick of *NSYNC, O-Town, LFO, and BBMak.

> By day, festivalgoers can choose from beachside workouts, pickleball, yoga and sound baths, wellness and selfcare classes, sip-and-sing socials, creative workshops, and the always-bustling Vendor

Village. "Think summer camp grown women—bonfires, crafts, friendships, and fun," said LadyGang's Keltie Knight.

Weekend passes start at \$300, with new \$145 day passes offering flexibility for single-day guests. VIP tiers include exclusive merch and access perks.

Grab your girlfriends, dive into glam workshops, signature cocktails, live podcasts, and plenty of Instagrammable moments. Tickets and full details are available at ladyworld.

EVENTS

continued from previous page

limited creative bloody marys from the area's best restaurants and bars—loaded with overthe-top garnishes from grilled cheese to sushi.

Also enjoy craft brews, bubbly, food vendors, live music, a cigar bar, and SEC football on the big screen. 21+ only. Proceeds benefit Habitat for Humanity – Walton County.

Info and tickets: TheMarket-Shops.com/Bloody-Mary-Festival

Sip, Savor & Support! Harvest Wine & Food Festival | Oct. 16–19 | Water-Color

Raise your glass to four days of epicurean delight at WaterColor's acclaimed Harvest Wine & Food Festivalone of the Southeast's finest wine-and-food celebrations and a meaningful fundraiser for our local children's charities. Held in beautiful Cerulean Park, this year's lineup delivers worldclass experiences throughout the weekend: intimate wine dinners, Friday's sultry Harvest After Dark evening, Saturday's legendary Grand Tasting or go VIP for enhanced lounge access



and live music; and elegant Sunday brunches such as Brunch de Blanc.

Want more? Multi-day bundles let you combine favorites such as Harvest After Dark and Grand Tasting or VIP combo—while taking advantage of some savings. Tickets are on sale now—rain or shine—and proceeds benefit the Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation's efforts supporting our children throughout Northwest Florida.

Fort Walton Elks Lodge Oktoberfest

Saturday, Sept. 20 | 11 a.m.-4 p.m. | Fort Walton Elks Lodge 1795

Raise a stein and celebrate at the 4th Annual Oktoberfest, hosted by Fort Walton Elks Lodge 1795! This family-friendly festival brings together great food, cold drinks, lively music, and dancing in true Bavarian style. Enjoy an afternoon of fellowship and fun while supporting local and children's charities. Don your dirndl or lederhosen and come hungry!

3rd Annual Sandy Bags Cornhole Tournament Sept. 20 | 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. | Lulu's

Join the Destin Sunset Rotary Club for the 3rd Annual Sandy Bags Cornhole Tournament—a day of tossing bags, friendly competition, and community spirit. Benefiting Healing Paws for Warriors, a nonprofit pairing rescue dogs with veterans, the event features doubles bracket play with prizes for top teams, plus food, drinks, music, raffles and a silent auction. Proceeds help save two lives at a time. Spots are limited, so register today and join your friends at Lulu's on the Bay for a cause that matters! See ad on p. 4 to sign up for a team!

Toast on the Coast Sunday, Oct. 5 | 12–2:30 p.m. | Henderson Beach Resort

Raise your glass at the 3rd Annual Toast on the Coast Food & Beverage Festival, hosted by the Junior League of the Emerald Coast. Savor an afternoon of coastal cuisine, craft beverages, and lively company at the beautiful Henderson Beach Resort. General admission is \$60; VIP tickets are \$110 and include special perks plus early entry at 11 a.m. Proceeds support JLEC's mission of empowering women and serving the local community.

Tickets available at JLEC. org.

Cornhole Tournament Fundraiser

Saturday, Oct. 18 | 10 a.m.-1:30 p.m. | United Fidelity Bank, Fort Walton Beach

Toss some bags for a cause at the Cornhole Tournament Fundraiser, supporting the Emerald Coast Science Center. Team entry is \$25 for adults and \$15 for kids, with cash prizes for adults (\$300, \$200, \$100) and fun baskets plus Science Center tickets for kids' winners. Enjoy food, drinks, beer, a DJ, raffle auction, vendor booths, and kid activities.

For details, contact Amber Carpenter at 850-974-1820.

5th Annual BrunchFest - Pensacola

Sunday, Oct. 26 | 11 a.m.-2 p.m. | Seville Square, Downtown Pensacola

Savor the best brunch bites in town while supporting a great cause at the 5th Annual Brunch-Fest, benefiting the Boys & Girls Club of the Emerald Coast. Top local restaurants and chefs will serve up creative dishes alongside beverages in this fan-favorite foodie event.

All proceeds support Boys & Girls Club programs focused on academic success, character and healthy lifestyles for local youth. Tickets are on sale now and expected to sell out quickly.

Info & tickets: zeffy.com/ ticketing/5th-annual-brunchfest | Sponsorship/vendor info: cmayes@bgcec.com





EC UNITED

continued from page 2

Along with Justine and Joey, Emerald Coast United is led by Shelby Harkins, John Brown, Cara Teeter and Jana Ramsey. They bridge a gap between law enforcement and volunteers and are an asset to the United Cajun Navy and other out-oftown volunteers, helping them navigate the area. They have a strong working relationship with the United Cajun Navy, who assists them in searches when they need more resources. "It's nice that it's not up to one organization. It nice to have the collaboration and access to resources as needed," stated Justine.

Emerald Coast United has assisted with several search and rescue efforts in the area. Bret Valona, a U.S. Marine veteran, went missing in the Blue Mountain Beach/Point Washington State Forest area after being dropped off at the Eastern Lake Trailhead, where he planned to spend several weeks in the forest. Although extensive canvassing of the area was carried out, his location remains unknown. Early March is when his phone was last known to be in

service. He was last seen wearing a plaid shirt, cargo pants, a yellow raincoat, brown hiker boots, and carrying two backpacks. If you have any information, please contact the Walton County Sheriff's Office at (850) 892-8111.

Their most recent search and rescue effort was for Trinity Eslinger, a search that greatly affected the entire Florida Panhandle and surrounding areas. The United Cajun Navy assisted in the search effort, bringing in resources such as search and recovery K9s, helicopters, boats, search spotter aircraft that fly above the spotter choppers, and drones that fly lower, scanning the water, looking under docks. Their resources provided multi-layered details to the search area.

Emerald Coast United and the United Cajun Navy continued to search for Trinity after the Okaloosa Sheriff's office and Coast Guard made the decision to scale back their resources. As long as Mother Nature is cooperative and they have resources, Emerald Coast United will continue search efforts when local officials need to pull back. "It took a village to help look for Trinity. Unfortunately, we came up empty-handed, but it wasn't for lack of effort," said Justine. "I wish we were able to provide that closure for the family."

Accidents happen to even the most prepared and knowledgeable people on the water, as Jeremy's friends and family know too well, but continuing to educate and remind people could make a big difference. Justine suggests that locals and tourists alike pay attention to the water conditions and educate themselves on water safety. "People don't realize how dangerous the water is," stated Justine.

One suggestion is that more information be available for those coming in from out of town. "The biggest thing we need to do as a community is we need to teach people what a rip tide looks like and what to do during a rip tide," said Justine. "If every property management company around here could have a laminated flyer in their houses, it would be beneficial for our area to get them in the hands of all these wonderful people visiting."

Other safety resources include looking at surf conditions on local beach cams, or texting one of the beach alert system numbers (Panama City Beach - Text "PCB-FLAGS" to 888777, Destin/Fort Walton Beach/ Okaloosa Island - Text "BEACH" to 44144, Walton County - Text "SAFE-TY" to 31279). In response to recent water emergencies, Bailey Brooks started the new nonprofit, Safe on the Emerald Coast. On their Facebook page, you can find water safety tips and other relatable content.

In addition to search and rescue on the water. Emerald Coast United and the United Cajun Navy also helped with post-hurricane disaster relief. Immediately after Hurricane Helene and Hurricane Milton, they began organizing donation stations with fire departments and volunteers across the panhandle and were able to fill 10 semis full of essential items to send to storm victims throughout the affected areas. The United Cajun Navy was able to assist in rescue operations in the affected areas and help with the distribution of donations and essential supplies.

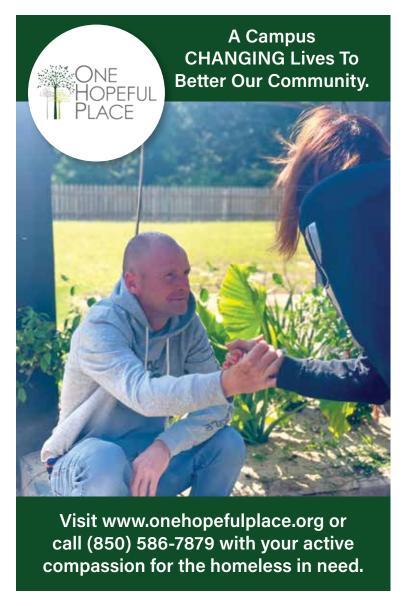
Emerald Coast United is gearing up for hurricane season



again, preparing to be ready to assist with post-storm recovery and assistance as needed. Getting essential items to storm victims is a vital part of recovery efforts.

They hope to continue gaining volunteers and expanding beyond the region to help as many people in need as they can. "I hope to continue to grow and get more volunteers willing to work with us," said Justine. "We only want to grow and get bigger."

If you are interested in volunteering or donating to Emerald Coast United, you can reach them at (850) 312-3303 or ECUnited850@gmail.com. You can follow them on Facebook for more up-to-date information.





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LIFE INSIDE

continued from page 3

people stick around.

Backing them all is a strong Board of Directors made up of prominent leaders and business owners in Fort Walton Beach. Their vision and expertise shape the Chamber's direction, ensuring it remains both a champion for local businesses and a driving force for community growth.

Ambassadors and Committees: Of course, the Chamber wouldn't be complete without its Ambassadors. These friendly faces are the ones cheering at ribbon cuttings, greeting new members, and making sure businesses feel celebrated from the very beginning. They're the welcome committee you didn't know you needed.

Then there are the committees, and there's something for everyone: FWB Young Professionals, Military Affairs, Health Care, the Business Success Group, Women Connect, the Multi-Cultural Business Committee, Hospitality and Tourism, the Non-Profit Committee, and even new groups like Introvert Advantage and the Emerging Entrepreneurs Group. Whether you're a networker, a doer, or someone who prefers to make an impact quietly, there's a space for you to plug in.

First Friday Coffee: If you





really want to feel the Chamber's heartbeat, come to First Friday Coffee. It's our monthly sunrise tradition where hundreds of members pack the room to swap ideas, welcome new businesses, celebrate milestones, and hear what's happening around town. It's fast-paced, upbeat, and a little bit like a family reunion





— with caffeine. Between the laughter, the door prizes, and the standing ovations for local wins, you can't help but leave energized and better connected.

A Place for Hope: The Chamber's heart for community also runs deeper than business. One Hopeful Place — the emergency shelter and transi-



tional housing campus I now proudly serve — actually began as an idea inside these walls. With encouragement from Ted, Chamber members, and local elected officials, it grew from a conversation into a reality that now provides safety and hope for people who need it most. To me, that's the Chamber at its best: turning vision into action, and action into impact.

Yes, the Kool-Aid: And then... there's the Kool-Aid. It's become our running joke that once you've "drunk the Chamber Kool-Aid," you'll never want to leave. Honestly, it's not far from the truth. There's something contagious about the joy and energy here. Cartoonist Rob Smith Jr. captured that spirit perfectly in caricatures that hang proudly on the Chamber's walls — a reminder that while the work we do is serious, the



atmosphere never forgets to stay lighthearted.

And the walls don't stop there. They're filled with memorabilia that tells the Chamber's story — a collection of history, humor, and community pride all in one place. If you haven't stopped by to see it, you really should. It's as much a reflection of our community as the people who fill the building every day.

Why I Love It Here: Being part of the Fort Walton Beach Chamber has shown me just how much can happen when people come together with passion and purpose. It's where history is honored, businesses are celebrated, challenges are faced head-on, and friendships are formed that last a lifetime.

For me, the Fort Walton Beach Chamber is more than an organization. It's family. It's community. It's home.

CALM

continued from page 7

stress response and support adrenal function. We also assess your nutrition and supplement needs to ensure you have the raw materials (like magnesium and B vitamins) to make and regulate cortisol.

Sleep & Circadian

Rhythm Repair: We address sleep habits and may use gentle support like melatonin or phosphatidylserine to help reset your rhythm. A good night's sleep is one of the most powerful cortisol regulators.

Lifestyle Coaching: Sometimes, the biggest breakthroughs come from the smallest shifts: boundaries, breathwork,

journaling, or simply learning how to say no. We partner with you to identify and reduce your unique stress triggers.

Your Body Isn't Broken-It's Communicating

If you've been feeling off, tired, anxious, or just not like yourself, your cortisol levels could be part of the story. At the

Tortoise Clinic, we believe that symptoms are signals—not failures. When you give your body the right support, it knows how to heal.

Whether you're in the early stages of stress overload or feeling the long-term effects of burnout, we're here to help you find your balance again—slowly, steadily, and intentionally.

Ready to rebalance your stress response? Schedule your consultation at TortoiseClinic. com or call 850.267.5611 to learn how integrative care can support your cortisol and your overall well-being. Because wellness isn't a sprint—it's a marathon. Let's walk it together.

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

TO SEE WHAT IS HAPPENING

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Advanced Sacred Hope Academy Expands in FWB to Serve Growing Autistic Student Population

School Launches Sponsorship Opportunities to Equip New Classrooms and Build Sensory-Friendly Playground

Advanced Sacred Hope Academy (ASHA), an Okaloosa County private school for autistic children has expanded into a larger, state-of-the-art facility at 106 Racetrack Rd. NE, Fort Walton Beach, marking a transformative leap from its modest start of just seven students in 2018 to 75 students registered for the 2025-2026 school year.

This growth reflects both the increasing demand for specialized education tailored to the unique learning profiles of neurodiverse children and ASHA's proven success in preparing students to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. The new campus is designed with

these needs in mind, featuring adaptive classrooms, dedicated therapy spaces, and plans for an inclusive, sensory-friendly playground.

"As we move into this next chapter, we are building more than a school. We are creating a comprehensive environment where our students can grow, learn, and develop skills that prepare them for meaningful engagement in their families, communities, and future workplaces," said Robert Hruska, Director of Operations at ASHA. "But we can't do it alone. Community support has been the backbone of our journey from the very beginning."

To help bring this vision to

full realization, ASHA is seeking Classroom Sponsors and Playground Sponsors to partner in creating spaces that foster growth, exploration, and confidence in autistic students. Sponsorship opportunities provide local businesses, civic groups, and individuals a meaningful way to invest in education, inclusion, and the future of children in our region.

Sponsorship benefits include naming rights, permanent recognition on campus, and visibility in ASHA's ongoing community outreach and events.

For those interested in sponsoring a classroom, contributing to the sensory-friendly playground, or learning more about ASHA's mission, please contact Robert Hruska at roberthruska. abhatherapy@gmail.com or visit https://advancedsacredhopeacademy.org.

Founded in 2018, Advanced Sacred Hope Academy is a private nonprofit school based in Fort Walton Beach, Florida, dedicated to serving autistic and neurodiverse students. ASHA provides individualized education programs, therapeutic support, and structured socialization, guiding students toward academic achievement and life readiness in a supportive, nurturing environment.



BED TAX

continued from page 8

ities or spring training facilities.

Convention center operations: Covering operating costs for convention centers that were financed with tourist tax revenue

Tourism advertising: Promoting and advertising tourism.

Fifth penny

This additional penny is often used for the following:

Professional sports facilities: Paying the debt on bonds used for constructing professional sports facilities or spring training facilities.

Convention centers: Paying the debt service on bonds for a convention center.

Tourism promotion: Advertising and promoting tourism.

Sixth penny

A county with a high tourism impact (generally with over \$600 million in TDT sales) may impose a sixth cent with referendum approval. This penny can be used for purposes similar to the first three cents, including:

High tourism impact uses: Supporting projects related to a high tourism impact county, as specified in the statute

Professional sports or spring training facility debt: Paying debt service on bonds for a new professional sports franchise facility or a retained spring training facility.

General tourism: Funding general tourism promotion and facilities.

Recent legislative changes

Recent legislation (effective July 1, 2025) has eliminated the requirement that at least 40% of tourist development tax reve-

nue for capital projects be spent specifically on tourism marketing. This change allows counties greater flexibility in allocating TDT funds while still maintaining the focus on tourism-related infrastructure and promotion.

As you can see, there are many uses for the Bed Tax, but the pots of money cannot be co-mingled. One more important point for Okaloosa County. Since we are a coastal county that borders the Gulf, we can use up to 10% of our TDT revenue for public safety services.

Public Safety: In coastal counties, this revenue can reimburse expenses for law enforcement and emergency medical services needed to address increased tourism.

Lifeguards: Coastal counties often use these funds specifically for beach safety programs, including paying beach lifeguards.

I hope you have found this information to be helpful. These are the restrictions on one source of revenue, but there are many other sources in county government that are designated for a certain purpose and the Board of County Commissioners are restricted in their uses.

It is an honor to serve as your Okaloosa County Commissioner, District
2. Carolyn Ketchel, Vice-Chairman
2024-2025. Contact Commissioner
Ketchel at CKetchel@myokaloosa.com
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Birkenstock: Centuries of Comfort, Now at Blue Bay Lifestyle Co.

By Liesel Schmidt

Look down at your feet. What shoes are you wearing? How long have you been wearing them, and what roads have those shoes travelled?

If you're like most of us, you don't give much thought to your shoes beyond how they'll serve you—if they look good, if they feel good, how well they'll navigate the terrain ahead. And sure, your shoes have a personal history attached to you: where they've taken you, where you've taken them, the memories you've made in them (some good, some bad, some best left in the dust behind you). But, here's something you probably never think about when you pull those shoes out of the closet: They have a history all their own.

Interestingly, some of the oldest shoe companies are hundreds of years old—and the name Birkenstock ranks near the top of the pile. And no, they weren't invented for the free-love-giving, Woodstock-bound hippie era of the late '60s and '70s. Get a cup

of coffee and settle in—it's story time at Blue Bay Lifestyle Co.

This one actually begins in 1774, with a cobbler in the small German village of Langen-Bergheim named Johann Adam Birkenstock. Yep. That Birkenstock. Over the next hundred years, Johann and the men of his family mastered their craft of shoe making, passing down techniques to generation after generation of fathers to sons.

And then something incredible happened. In 1896, Konrad Birkenstock created something that, for the times, was pretty profound: a flexible footbed. It was kind of unheard of—shoes of the era were rigid, narrow and conformed to the dictates of fashion, making them stylish, but decidedly uncomfortable and unsupportive. Konrad's groundbreaking idea was that footwear should conform to the human foot—not the other way around. To bring his vision to life, he began producing contoured insoles, essentially revolutionizing the shoe industry



around the world.

By 1902, Konrad's first design had been refined into the first contoured arch support. Of course, it wasn't anything glamorous—and it was sold mainly to shoemakers who put them into custom footwear. But it addressed a problem that, during the industrial age, was becoming more of an issue. Factory workers who stood for hours at a machine or spent their days on cobblestone streets needed relief from the pain caused by stiff,

nonconforming shoes. Birkenstock's arch supports offered it.

In the 1930s, Birkenstock's footbeds had found their way into medical use. Orthopedists, podiatrists and even soldiers realized the benefits of proper foot support, but the product was still only considered a medical tool. It was still decades away from becoming a fashion statement.

Birkenstock's time to shine came in 1963, when Karl Birkenstock launched the company's first sandal—complete with a deep, anatomically designed footbed. Marketed as a fitness sandal, the Madrid was touted to strengthen leg muscles and promote natural gait. But here's the kicker: Birkenstock had finally stepped into the limelight and was no longer hidden inside a shoe.

By the 1970s, Birkenstocks had become part of the uniform of American counterculture. College students, artists and free thinkers embraced them as a symbol of nonconformity—they were authentic, comfortable

and flew in the face of fashion norms. Hippies wore them to festivals and protests, while professors wore them in the lecture halls of colleges and universities. Without having to utter a word, the sandal's signature wide straps and unpretentious cork soles spoke the language of a lifestyle that was all about simplicity and questioning authority.

That representation of the counterculture remained for decades, and Birkenstock continued as a niche non-fashion fashion statement until the 1990s and early 2000s, when minimalism came back into vogue and comfort became chic. Designers began collaborating with Birkenstock, sending its sandals down Paris and New York runways, and even celebrities began wearing them.

Nearly 250 years after it began, Birkenstock is more than a shoe brand—it's a cultural touchstone that straddles the line of so many categories: medical,

Continued on page 22







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Crush your fitness goals—big or small—with Run With It. From running and walking to court sports and pickleball, we've got the shoes, insoles, apparel and gear to keep you moving. Plus, join our Tuesday night runs or sign up for local racing events and discover a community that moves with you.

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- Community Vibes: Join our public racing events and Tuesday Night Group Runs.
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Hire for Safety: What Every Homeowner and Business Should Know



By Danica LaFaire

Picture this: a ladder leaning against your siding, a roofer balancing in the breeze, or a housekeeper stretching to dust a transom no one's touched since hurricane season. Most home projects look routine — until they aren't. The difference between a close call and a catastrophe is rarely luck. It's preparation: safety training, the right equipment, and the right kind of insurance carried by a company that takes responsibility for its people.

Why safety training matters

Falls remain the leading cause of death in construction. OSHA reported more than 400 fatal falls in 2023 alone — trag-

edies that experts say are almost always preventable with proper training and equipment. That's why OSHA requires fall protection at as little as four feet in many industries, and specific ladder and stairway training for anyone who climbs them.

And here's something most people don't realize: it doesn't take a rooftop fall for things to go wrong. Even a tumble from a simple step ladder — the kind most of us keep in the garage can cause life-changing injuries. The CDC reports that falls are the most common cause of traumatic brain injury nationwide, and many of those happen from heights under ten feet. A bump to the head on concrete or tile might not sound dramatic, but it can lead to concussions, fractures, or worse. That's why proper training and safe practices matter at every height, not just on high roofs.

If a company can't show you how it trains its crews, that's a red flag.

The insurance side homeowners can't ignore

In Florida, workers' compensation (WC) isn't optional — it's the law. Construction employers must carry coverage with one or

more employees, and non-construction companies must carry it with four or more. Homeowners can verify coverage through Florida's state-run "Proof of Coverage" database.

Why this matters: if someone is injured on your property and the company doesn't carry WC, the fallout can get complicated. Coverage generally protects the worker and the company — but without it, a worker may turn to the homeowner for damages.

And here's the tricky part: in construction, even "1099 independent contractors" are usually treated as employees unless they've filed a legal exemption. That means the hiring contractor is liable for their coverage. Companies that rely on loosely defined 1099 labor often leave both workers and homeowners exposed.

For businesses, the stakes are even higher. If you're a shop owner, property manager, or office leader, hiring uninsured or untrained contractors doesn't just put workers at risk — it puts your business at risk of lawsuits, downtime, and reputational damage. One accident on your property can disrupt operations, lead to costly claims, or even draw OSHA's attention if em-

ployees are present. Choosing vendors with verified workers' comp coverage and strong safety training isn't just about compliance — it's smart business risk management.

Spotting the companies that put safety first

So, how can you tell if a contractor truly values safety? Here are a few signs you can see right away:

Uniforms and PPE: Do crews arrive in company gear, using harnesses, gloves, or goggles where needed? If not, ask why.

Well-maintained equipment: Ladders, cones, and safety gear should look caredfor and ready to use, not thrown together.

Clear insurance answers: A reputable company will gladly show you proof of coverage and point you to the state website to double-check.

Direct employees: When workers are W-2 employees, coverage and training are consistent. Ask if the crew is inhouse or all 1099 subcontractors.

Visible safety habits: Look for small routines — ladders tied off, walkways cleared, teammates spotting each other. Safety is a culture, not a checklist.

For commercial jobs, these signs are even more important. Look for vendors who provide site-specific safety plans, use signage or cones to protect customer walkways, and communicate clearly about when and how work will be done. These habits show they're thinking beyond

their crew — they're protecting your employees, customers, and reputation too.

Five safety questions to ask any contractor

- Want a quick gut-check before you sign? Try these:
- Do you carry workers' comp, and can I verify it through the state?
- Are the people coming to my home or business W-2 employees or subcontractors?
- What safety training do your crews receive?
- How often do you update or inspect your equipment?
- Can I see your written safety policy or plan for my project?

The bottom line

Whether it's your family home or your business store-front, the principle is the same: safety is good stewardship. For homeowners, it protects your household. For businesses, it protects your people, your customers, and your livelihood. Choosing companies that invest in training, carry the right insurance, and employ people they're proud to call their own makes all the difference.

At Fish Window Cleaning in Northwest Florida, safety isn't an afterthought — it's the very first measure on our scorecard. We believe the most important part of every job is that our team members return home safely at the end of the day. Clean windows may shine, but nothing matters more than protecting the people who make it possible.

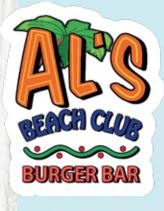












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Best Places to Watch Your Favorite Teams

AJ's Seafood & Oyster Bar

Attention all die hard football fans, AJ's boasts the one and only Jumbotron on the Destin Harbor, where you can watch your favorite games on the BIG, BIG screen surrounded by the energy and beauty of the Destin Harbor. AJ's serves up delicious daily specials, mouth-watering drinks plus entertaining live music all month, too. Don't miss any of the action!

For 40 years, AJ's Seafood and Oyster Bar has been serving cold Gulf Coast ovsters and cool libations. What began as a popular local hang out known for fresh oysters and cold beer has grown into one of the most iconic "hot spots" on the Destin Harbor. From its humble beginning shucking oysters off the deck behind a small trailer on the Destin Harbor, it has grown to four locations along our Emerald Coast, serving fresh seafood, live music and exciting water activities in the Destin area. Come on down to AJ's Seafood and Oyster Bar all season long.

AJ's on the Bayou

ajsdestin.com

(850) 837-1913

116 Harbor Blvd.

Located at the base of the Cinco Bayou Bridge in Fort Walton Beach, AJ's on the Bayou offers a beautiful waterfront setting with both indoor seating and an open-air deck overlooking the bayou. It's the perfect spot to catch a football game outdoors while sipping a mi-



mosa and enjoying a bite to eat. AJ's serves brunch with bottomless mimosas for just \$10.95 with food purchase, plus daily weekday lunch specials for \$12.95 including iced tea. Add in live music or entertainment every day, and you've got one lively destination where the food, fun, and football never stop.

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

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 10 oz. 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 us 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

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

FUBAR Pizza Bar

Looking for a favorite place to watch your favorite football teams? 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

The Boardwalk On **Okaloosa Island**

As us locals know, The Boardwalk is a popular destination. With its ideal location on the Gulf, convenient parking and wide range of activities, it's the perfect place to shop, savor various flavors of cuisine, and take in the incredible views of the Emerald Coast. Want to watch football? Then head to restaurants like Rockin Tacos, The Crab Trap, Floyd's Shrimp

Shack or Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar, where you can watch your favorite teams with breathtaking views and breaks for walks on the beach! Sandy toes and salty swim suits are welcome.

The Boardwalk is an official county park with public beach access, along with free parking, pavilions, picnic tables, public restrooms and outdoor showers for beachgoers.

The Boardwalk hosts community events such as the Emerald Coast Motorcycle Challenge, coastal beach cleanups, "Tricks and Treasures" Halloween event and the New Year's Day pelican plunge. It is also home of two legendary volleyball tournaments: Emerald Coast Volleyball Week in the spring, and the Emerald Coast Fall Classic.

(850) 301-0959 1450 Miracle Strip Pkwy SE, the board walkoi.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.

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



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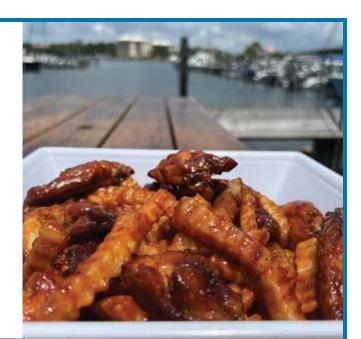


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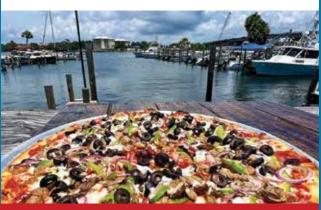
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Fort Walton Beach

- 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.

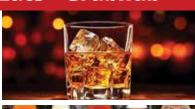
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SEC Football Schedule

| SEC | Aug 30 | Sept 6 | Sept 13 | Sept 20 | Sept 27 | Oct 4 | Oct 11 | Oct 18 | Oct 25 | Nov 1 | Nov 8 | Nov 15 | Nov 22 | Nov 29 |
|-----------|----------------|----------------|--------------|-------------------|-------------|------------|---------------|-----------|-----------|------------|-------------|---------------|------------------|--------------|
| BAMA | @ FSU | UL-Monroe | Wisconsin | Open | @ UGA | VANDY | @ MIZZ | TENN | @ SCAR | Open | LSU | OKLA | Eastern Illinois | @ AUB |
| ARK | ALA A&M | ARK State | @ OLE MISS | @ Memphis | Notre Dame | Open | @ TENN | TEXAS A&M | AUB | MISS ST | Open | @ LSU | @ TEXAS | MIZZ |
| AUBURN | @ Baylor | Ball State | South ALA | @ OKLA | @TEXAS A&M | Open | UGA | MIZZ | @ ARK | UK | @ VANDY | Open | Mercer | BAMA |
| FLA | Long Island | South FLA | @ LSU | @ Miami | Open | TEXAS | @TEXAS A&M | MISS ST | Open | vs UGA | @ UK | @ OLE MISS | TENN | FSU |
| UGA | Marshall | Austin Peay | @ TENN | Open | BAMA | UK | @ AUB | OLE MISS | Open | vs FLA | @ MISS ST | TEXAS | Charlotte | GA Tech |
| UK | Toledo | OLE MISS | Eastern Mich | Open | @ S CAR | @ UGA | Open | TEXAS | TENN | @ AUB | FLA | TENN Tech | @ VANDY | @ Louisville |
| LSU | @ Clemson | Louisiana Tech | FLA | So. Louisiana | @ OLE MISS | Open | SCAR | @ VANDY | TEXAS A&M | Open | @ BAMA | ARK | Western UK | @ OKLA |
| MISS ST | @ So Miss | Arizona State | Alcorn State | Northern Illinois | TENN | @TEXAS A&M | Open | @ FLA | TEXAS | @ ARK | UGA | @ MIZZ | Open | OLE MISS |
| MIZZ | Central ARK | Kansas | Louisiana | SCAR | U Mass | Open | BAMA | @ AUB | @ VANDY | Open | TEXAS A&M | MISS ST | @ OKLA | @ ARK |
| OLE MISS | UGA State | @ UK | ARK | Tulane | LSU | Open | Washington St | @ UGA | @ OKLA | SCAR | The Citadel | FLA | Open | @ MISS ST |
| OKLA | Illinois State | Michigan | @ Temple | AUB | Open | Kent State | TEXAS | @ S CAR | OLE MISS | @ TENN | Open | @ BAMA | MIZZ | LSU |
| S CAR | Virginia Tech | S CAR St | VANDY | @ MIZZ | UK | Open | @ LSU | OKLA | BAMA | @ OLE MISS | Open | @TEXAS A&M | Coastal Car | Clemson |
| TENN | Syracuse | East TENN St | UGA | UAB | @ MISS ST | Open | ARK | @ BAMA | @ UK | OKLA | Open | New Mexico St | @ FLA | VANDY |
| TEXAS | @ Ohio State | San Jose State | UTEP | Open | Sam Houston | @ FLA | vs OKLA | @ UK | @ MISS ST | VANDY | Open | @ UGA | ARK | TEXAS A&M |
| Texas A&M | UTSA | Utah State | @ Notre Dame | Open | AUB | MISS ST | FLA | @ ARK | @ LSU | Open | @ MIZZ | SCAR | Samford | @ TEXAS |
| VANDY | Charleston So | @Virginia Tech | @ S CAR | GA State | Utah State | @ BAMA | Open | LSU | MIZZ | @ TEXAS | AUB | Open | UK | @ TENN |

September 2025 Pro Football Schedule

WEEK 2

Thursday, Sept. 11

Washington Comma nders at Green Bay Packers, 7:15 p.m., Prime Video

Jacksonville Jaquars at Cincinnati Bengals, Noon, CBS Buffalo Bills at New York Jets, Noon, CBS

Celebrating One Year Renovation

HALIMAR

New England Patriots at Miami Dolphins, Noon, CBS Los Angeles Rams at Tennessee Titans, Noon, CBS Cleveland Browns at Baltimore Ravens, Noon, CBS

San Francisco 49ers at New Orleans Saints, Noon,

New York Giants at Dallas Cowboys, Noon, Fox Seattle Seahawks at Pittsburgh Steelers, Noon, Fox Chicago Bears at Detroit Lions, Noon, Fox Denver Broncos at Indianapolis Colts, 3:05 p.m., CBS Carolina Panthers at Arizona Cardinals, 3:05 p.m., CBS

Philadelphia Eagles at Kansas City Chiefs, 3:25 p.m., Fox

Atlanta Falcons at Minnesota Vikings, 7:20 p.m., NBC

Monday, Sept. 15

Tampa Bay Buccaneers at Houston Texans, 7 p.m.,

Los Angeles Chargers at Las Vegas Raiders, 9 p.m., ESPN

Thursday, Sept. 17

Miami Dolphins at Buffalo Bills, 7:15 p.m., Prime

Sunday, Sept. 21

Steelers at New England Patriots, Noon, CBS

Houston Texans at Jacksonville Jaguars, Noon, CBS Indianapolis Colts at Tennessee Titans, Noon, CBS Cincinnati Bengals at Minnesota Vikings, Noon, CBS New York Jets at Tampa Bay Buccaneers, Noon, Fox Green Bay Packers at Cleveland Browns, Noon, Fox Las Vegas Raiders at Washington Commanders, Noon, Fox

Atlanta Falcons at Carolina Panthers, Noon, Fox Los Angeles Rams at Philadelphia Eagles, Noon, Fox New Orleans Saints at Seattle Seahawks, 3:05 p.m.,

Denver Broncos at Los Angeles Chargers, 3:05 p.m., CBS

Dallas Cowboys at Chicago Bears, 3:25 p.m., Fox Arizona Cardinals at San Francisco 49ers, 3:25

p.m., Fox Kansas City Chiefs at New York Giants, 7:15 p.m.,

Monday, Sept. 22

Detroit Lions at Baltimore Ravens, 7:15 p.m., ESPN/

WEEK 4

Thursday, Sept. 25

Seattle Seahawks at Arizona Cardinals, 7:15 p.m., Prime Video

Sunday, Sept. 27

Minnesota Vikings at Pittsburgh Steelers (Dublin). 8:30 a m NFI Network New Orleans Saints at Buffalo Bills, Noon, CBS

Washington Commanders at Atlanta Falcons, Noon,

Los Angeles Chargers at New York Giants, Noon, CBS

Tennessee Titans at Houston Texans, Noon, CBS Cleveland Browns at Detroit Lions, Noon, Fox Carolina Panthers at New England Patriots, Noon, Fox

Philadelphia Eagles at Tampa Bay Buccaneers, Noon, Fox

Jacksonville Jaguars at San Francisco 49ers, 3:05 p.m., Fox

Indianapolis Colts at Los Angeles Rams 3:05 p.m., Fox

Baltimore Ravens at Kansas City Chiefs, 3:25 p.m., CBS

Chicago Bears at Las Vegas Raiders, 3:25 p.m., CBS Green Bay Packers at Dallas Cowboys, 7:20 p.m.,

Monday, Sept. 29

New York Jets at Miami Dolphins, 7:15 p.m., ESPN Cincinnati Bengals at Denver Broncos, 7:15 p.m., ΔRC

WEEK 5

Thursday, Oct. 2

San Francisco 49ers at Los Angeles Rams, 7:15 p.m., Prime Video

Sunday, Oct. 5

Minnesota Vikings at Cleveland Browns (Tottenham), 8:30 a.m., NFL Network

New York Giants at New Orleans Saints, Noon, CBS Denver Broncos at Philadelphia Eagles, Noon, CBS Houston Texans at Baltimore Ravens, Noon, CBS Dallas Cowboys at New York Jets, Noon, Fox Las Vegas Raiders at Indianapolis Colts, Noon, Fox Miami Dolphins at Carolina Panthers, Noon, Fox Tennessee Titans at Arizona Cardinals, 3:05 p.m.,

Tampa Bay Buccaneers at Seattle Seahawks, 3:05 p.m., CBS

Washington Commanders at Los Angeles Chargers

3:25 p.m., Fox
Detroit Lions at Cincinnati Bengals, 3:25 p.m., Fox New England Patriots at Buffalo Bills, 7:20 p.m., NBC Monday, Oct. 6

Kansas City Chiefs at Jacksonville Jaguars, 7:15 p.m., ESPN

Bye week: Atlanta Falcons, Chicago Bears, Green Bay Packers, Pittsburgh Steelers

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Fort Walton Beach Vikings: Head Coach: Josh Pulliam (1st Year)

Kickoff – 7 p.m.

9/11 - vs. Washingtor

9/19 - at Walton

9/26 – at Rickards *

10/3 – vs. Wakulla

10/10 - vs. Arnold

10/17 - Open Week

10/24 – vs. Choctawhatchee *

10/31 - at Crestview

2025 High School Football Schedule **Choctawhatchee Indians:**

Head Coach: Frank Beasley

Kickoff - 7 p.m.

9/12 – vs. Pine Forest

9/19 - at Niceville

9/26 – at Arnold *

10/3 - at South Walton

10/10 - vs. Rickards *

10/24 – at Fort Walton Beach *

10/30 – vs. Enterprise (AL) * Denotes District Game

Off the Hook

Learning, Laughs, and Conservation Await this September at the Gulfarium!

By Mary Fomby, Gulfarium

The weather may be cooling down, but things are heating up at Gulfarium this September with programs designed to educate, inspire, and connect families with marine life like never before.

Dive into Learning: Homeschool Week Returns!

We're excited for Monday, September 8 – Friday, September 12, because Homeschool Week at the Gulfarium is back and better than ever! Families can enjoy exclusive discounted admission—just \$14 for students ages 3–17 and \$22 for one parent or chaperone per group. Plus, students receive 20% off animal encounters throughout the week.

Each morning kicks off with Daily Storytime in the Living Sea Aquarium at 10:20am, followed by a hands-on guided experience at 11:20 a.m. From helping feed turtles at Turtle



Creek to getting up close with horseshoe crabs in the Tidepool, every day brings a new adventure in learning. Homeschool Week is the perfect mix of education and excitement that your budding marine biologist won't want to miss!

PBS Kids Day at the Gulfarium!

Get ready for a family day full of fun and imagination! On Saturday, September 13th, the Gulfarium is thrilled to welcome Carl the Collector and Clifford the Big Red Dog for a special PBS Kids Day celebration.

Kids can dive into PBS KIDS—themed arts & crafts, explore the park through a scavenger hunt, and, of course, enjoy meet-and-greet time with their favorite characters. Combine that with all the excitement of marine life encounters, and you've got the perfect recipe for an unforgettable family outing!



CAREing for Turtles: A Behind-the-Scenes Experience

Don't miss the last opportunities of the season to take part in the CAREing for Turtles program—an after-hours, behind-the-scenes look at our Gulfarium CARE Center. Guests are invited to tour the rehabilitation facility, meet current patients, and even practice a mock sea turtle intake to see firsthand how our team responds to rescue calls.

In partnership with Des-

tin-Fort Walton Beach, the program highlights the importance of protecting nesting beaches and the tireless work being done to rescue and rehabilitate sea turtles right here on the Emerald Coast.

Since opening in 2015, the CARE Center has successfully released hundreds of turtles back into the Gulf. Your participation not only supports conservation but also helps spread awareness about the challenges these incredible animals face in the wild.





Make Plans to Attend Emerald Coast Classic Basketball Tournament Thanksgiving Week

Since its debut in 2014, the Emerald Coast Classic has become the premier sporting event in the area, drawing top college basketball programs from around the country. The tournament also shines a national spotlight on Northwest Florida State College, showcasing its facilities and vibrant campus life.

For the first time, fans will be able to watch some of the nation's best men's and women's basketball teams compete within a six-day span. Tickets for both tournaments are on sale now at www.emeraldcoastclassic.com.

Held every Thanksgiving week at Northwest Florida State College, the men's tournament has earned a reputation as one of the NCAA's best, regularly attracting NBA scouts and national media coverage. CBS Sports Network will televise both the semifinal and championship rounds.

The men's tournament will be played Nov. 28-29 at Raider Arena.

- Friday, Nov. 28: DePaul vs. Georgia Tech at 6 p.m.; Drake vs. LSU at 8:30 p.m.
- Saturday, Nov. 29: Thirdplace game at 3 p.m.; championship at 6 p.m.

LSU returns for its second appearance, having won the 2021 title over Wake Forest, 75-61. Head coach Matt McMahon, now in his fourth year, welcomes a transfer class ranked No. 16



nationally by 247Sports. Drake is coming off a program-record 31-4 season, sweeping the Missouri Valley Conference titles and reaching the second round of the 2025 NCAA Tournament. The Bulldogs, now led by first-year head coach Eric Henderson, have advanced to three straight NCAA Tournaments.

Georgia Tech, under thirdyear coach Damon Stoudamire, finished 17-17 last season and advanced to the NIT. DePaul, led by first-year head coach Chris Holtmann, reached the 2025 College Basketball Crown—the Blue Demons' first postseason appearance since 2019. Holtmann previously guided Ohio State to the 2023 Emerald Coast Classic championship.

The women's tournament will feature eight teams Nov. 24-25, divided into the Bay and Beach Brackets.

Bay Bracket (Nov. 24-25):

- Semifinals: Providence vs. Middle Tennessee State, 11 a.m.; Mississippi State vs. Alcorn State, 1:30 p.m.
 - Tuesday, Nov. 25: Third-

place game, 11 a.m.; champion-ship, 1:30 p.m.

Beach Bracket (Nov. 24-25):

- Semifinals: Nebraska vs. Purdue Fort Wayne, 5 p.m.; Virginia vs. Northwestern State, 7:30 p.m.
- Tuesday, Nov. 25: Third-place game, 5 p.m.; champion-ship, 7:30 p.m.

Mississippi State went 22-12 last season, advancing to the second round of the 2025 NCAA Tournament. Nebraska finished 21-12 and also made the NCAA field. Middle Tennessee State posted a 26-8 record in 2024-25 and competed in the 2025 WBIT. Tickets: emeraldcoast-classic.com.

BIRKENSTOCK

continued from page 15

practical, fashionable, sustainable. It's the best of all worlds. And here's something we love: Birkenstock still proudly manufactures in Germany, still uses

its original cork-latex formula, still maintains its focus on foot health.

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er it's your first or your 50th, come into Blue Bay and check out our selection of Birkenstock Arizona sandals, in great colors for the fall season ahead. Pair your new Birkenstocks with some of the other pieces we love at Blue Bay—like versatile Liv-

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You never know where your

shoes will take you—or what history they'll make with you while they're on your feet. Follow us on Instagram at @bluebaylifestyle and share a pic of yours with us. Show us where your Birks have been!



Two years ago, a German girl walked into CRYO850 asking if I would work with her with EMS technology. New to town (and the U.S.), she needed someone to buy into her training system that used electricity to create contractions, allowing for muscle building without heavy weights.

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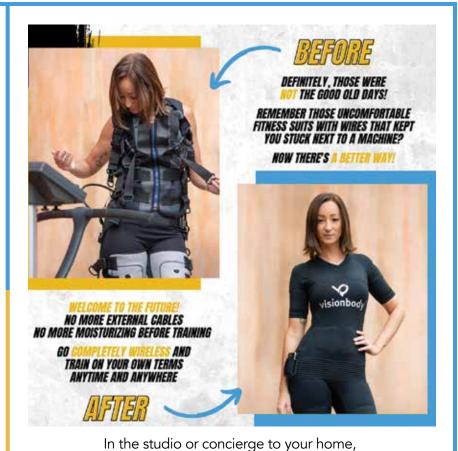
I loved the idea of offering this technology to my customers. So, I rented the space next door and began remodeling it to build her a studio. The project stalled when my dear friend and contractor tragically passed. She decided she no longer wanted the studio, and I was left with an empty space and no clue how to fill it. A time of horrible loss and sadness was topped off with what seemed like a financial disaster.

BUT GOD HAS A PLAN & THERE IS ALWAYS A SILVER LINING!

After deliberating with staff, I decided to stick with the original plan. I researched EMS and found a newer and more advanced version that would also work for athletes looking to gain a competitive edge.

While traditional EMS requires the user to be wet and tethered to a machine (think Dolph Lungren on the treadmill in Rocky), **Vision Body EMS** uses a dry suit with bluetooth capability allowing users full freedom of movement and no wetsuit. In the end, I traded the flip phone for an Apple 16 and now can serve a broader clientele! With the help of Gina Loya and Bonnie Bee, we launched the new program, and everyone has seen amazing results. I'm excited to announce with our new partnership with Personal Trainer, Susie Rodriguez, **Vision Body Next Level EMS Training** is taking the Emerald Coast by storm! We are now helping clients to ENGAGE 10 muscle groups at a time to ENHANCE strength, performance and recovery with the most EFFICIENT technology on the fitness market today! Whether you want to go deeper into muscle fibers to gain a competitive edge, need to build muscle without heavy weight, or just need to double the workout in half the time, we've got you.

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Creating Health in the Home



By Kay Leaman, Health Architect

When we think about health we normally think of our bodies; what we put on them and especially what we put in them. On the inside we watch what we eat, continually making better choices as we learn new things. We do the same thing on the outside of our body, choosing healthier lotions, potions, deodorants, makeup, hair products, etc. We add exercise and increase our water intake. But then....

We spend time in our homes where we feel comfortable and safe. The place of our favorite things and people. But how safe are our homes, really?

Some time back, a study was done on the air in downtown Los Angeles vs. the air in the homes around the area. Would you have guessed that the air in downtown LA was healthier than the air in their homes? It was.

Here is another interesting find. I watched a video in a training on fires. They set up two rooms with identical furniture, drapes, lamps, etc. One room was from my grandmother's time and the other one was from modern time. An ignition was set in the exact same spot in each room. Once ignited, in less than three minutes, the modern room reached the flash point. In the other room, the couch arm and part of the drapes were burning. Everything else was fine. The difference? Grandma's room was made with all-natural materials such as cotton, wool, etc. The modern room was made up of polyester, nylon, foam, etc. Many of these materials have a petroleum base in their manufacturing. Manmade versus natural.

We nestle into our favorite toxic chair or couch. Sleep in our non-wrinkled sheets. Slip into our favorite synthetic fabrics and breathe the off gases from all of it. In the morning we head into the bathroom with all our products to dress for the day. (By the way, the bathroom is usually the most toxic room in our house.)

It's time to stretch our health goals to the home. This is not an easy task. If you thought buying organic was expensive, try pricing out a natural fiber couch or mattress. However, there are steps we can take to offset what we are breathing and absorbing through our skin. Small changes can make a big difference.

Looking for a new rug? Focus on natural fibers such as cotton, wool, jute, hemp, silk, linen, etc. These are also the choices for clothing, curtains, drapes, etc. We have vinyl flooring so I don't walk around the house barefoot. Slippers and socks are my choice for lessening the exposure load. Another good habit is to open your windows whenever possible to allow the gases from the products to escape and let the fresh air in. Even if it's only for 20 minutes early in the morning and longer when the weather is cooler can improve the health of our home. Take your car as an example. The windows always get that film on it after awhile. I used to wonder why they got like that since I wasn't a smoker. Then I learned that it was the off gassing of all the materials.

Our homes are no different. To minimize harmful substances entering your home take your shoes off at the door. You would be amazed what we track in from parking lots and yards.

It's a bit harder when it comes to the bedroom. The clothes we wear, the mattress we sleep on and the products in the bathroom if it's connected to the bedroom are filled with manufactured materials and chemicals. We spend about 9-10 hours daily sleeping or dressing. Start off small. Update the pillows and sheets with natural materials. Wear natural fiber sleepwear. Switch out products as they need to be replaced.

When it comes to the kitchen, consider switching dishwasher and dishwashing liquid for a more natural option. The other items to consider replacing are aluminum cookware, plastic storage containers and glasses. Best choices are stainless steel, ceramic, cast iron or glass.

Food-grade silicone, stainless steel or wood is a better choice vs. plastic utensils.

Lastly, check the cleaners you use. More natural options are Borax, baking soda and vinegar. If you opt to stick with certain cleaners, such as for toilets, take precautions to prevent breathing in the fumes and wear gloves.

Spend some time looking around your home. Read the labels on your towels, products, clothes, etc. A little at a time can make a big difference. Be sure to open the windows for a while as often as possible (Do this for

your vehicle as well.). Here's to Health!

~ HealthyDay HealthyLife, succeed.hdhl@gmail.com



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Caregiving for a Loved One with Alzheimer's:

Tips for a Compassionate Journey

By Nicole Lesson

Brook Batson and her family recently moved to Freeport, FL from Tennessee to help take care of her Father-in-law who has Alzheimer's.

They moved in with her mother-in-law to assist her in taking care of her husband.

"He is mobile but gets very confused," Batson said. "Thankfully, he does remember myself, my husband, Danny and my kids. Once we knew what was going on, we wanted to come before there was a crisis."

Baton shares what she wants people to know about Alzheimer's and other dementia.

"This is a disease, not just age appropriate behavior, yes some behaviors are age appropriate but if they can't manage a majority of their daily activities on

their own, it's more than aging," Baton said.

According to research from the Alzheimer's Association International Conference, more than 1,500 Walton County residents age 65 and up are living with the disease. Florida has the second highest prevalence of Alzheimer's in the U.S, with more than 580,000 Floridians living with the disease supported by 870,000 unpaid caregivers.

For more than 17 years Brook worked in senior care, both assisted living and memory care. Her passion for helping families through their journey with dementia has now hit her own family. She offers this advice.

"Find a support group, go to the alz.org website, call an assisted living facility as some have memory care daycare, surround yourself with those who understand what you are going through," she said. "Manage it as a family, as it takes a village."

For many, caregiving can be overwhelming and individuals in the role often report experiencing higher rates of stress. According to the Alzheimer's Association 2025 Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures report, 66% of Florida caregivers reported at least one chronic health condition, 29% reported having depression and 14% reported being in poor physical

Practicing self-care is vital to ensure both the caregiver and the person being cared for can have the best quality of life. Services like respite care, adult day care, and support groups can ease the challenges of caregiving. Many of these are available at low or no cost to Floridians through state and local programs. For more information, call the Alzheimer's Association free, 24/7 Helpline at 800.272.3900.

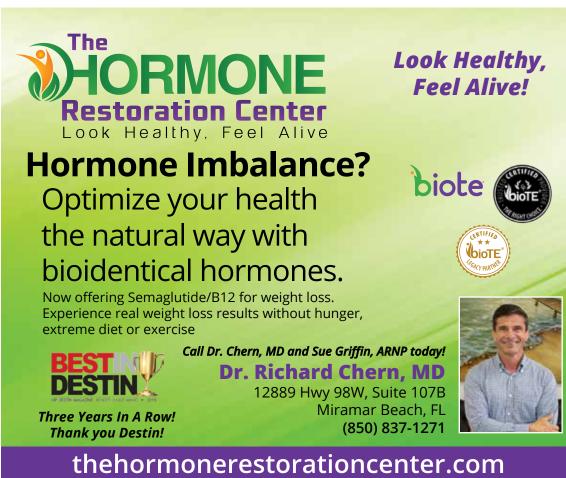
Walk to End Alzheimer's®, an event held across Florida to raise awareness and funds for Alzheimer's, has been a place of support for Batson. She is the

new Community Engagement Chair for the Walk to End Alzheimer's Emerald Coast-Okaloosa County.

"At the Walk you will meet people, companies and vendors that understand exactly what you are dealing with," she said. "You are going to walk away with information you didn't have."

Join others impacted by Alzheimer's for the 2025 Walk to End Alzheimer's Emerald Coast Okaloosa County on Saturday, November 1 at Northwest Florida State College in Niceville. Registration starts at 9 am with the ceremony at 10 am, followed by the Walk. Register your team today at Alz.org/EmeraldCoastOCWalk.





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plimentary Market Price Analysis can provide insight into what your business may command in today's market.

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Confidential Marketing: It's important to attract qualified buyers while protecting sensitive information.

Plan Ahead: Even if you are not ready to sell now, laying the groundwork early can help maximize your eventual sale price.

For many owners, selling a business is a once-in-a-lifetime decision, and the right preparation and guidance can ensure the process is both smoother and more successful.

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5 Benefits of Outsourcing Your Business IT

By BIT-WIZARDS

Outsourcing IT services offers substantial advantages for businesses of all sizes and industries. Technology is the backbone of most operations today, and just like partnering with an accounting firm for financial needs, companies can turn to a third-party IT provider, or Managed Service Provider (MSP), to handle their technological infrastructure.

Outsourced IT services generally fall into three categories: fully managed IT, co-managed IT, and special projects.

Fully managed IT is ideal for companies with little to no in-house IT support, providing complete oversight of your network and infrastructure.

Co-managed IT is perfect for organizations with an internal IT team that needs to offload specific tasks or gain additional expertise.

Special projects are best suited for businesses with targeted initiatives but limited resources, such as cloud migration or cybersecurity upgrades.

Here are five key benefits of outsourcing your business IT:

1. Manage Technical Expenses: Relying on a small IT team can limit your ability to respond to problems—especially when staff are unavailable. Additionally, technology costs can be unpredictable and expensive. Outsourcing IT helps bring consistency to your budget. Most MSPs offer fixed, predictable pricing based on the number of users or devices, making it easier to plan expenses and avoid surprises.

2. Improve Flexibility and Scalability: Businesses

often experience fluctuating demands. Whether you're scaling back during slower seasons or ramping up to meet increased customer needs, internal IT teams can struggle to keep pace. Outsourced IT services offer the agility to scale support up or down as needed, helping your business stay ahead of demand without the cost or delays of hiring and training new staff.

3. Boost Cybersecurity Measures: Cyber threats are more frequent and sophisticated than ever. Without the right tools and expertise, your business could be vulnerable to attacks that compromise sensitive data and disrupt operations. MSPs specialize in implementing robust cybersecurity practices, including monitoring, threat detection, firewalls, and data backups. Whether fully or co-managed, outsourced IT services give you access to enterprise-level security without having to build it yourself.

4. Leverage a Team of Experts: Filling skill gaps within your IT team can be time-consuming and costly. Hiring, onboarding, and retaining top talent is increasingly difficult in today's competitive job market. Outsourcing provides immediate access to a team of IT professionals with a wide range of skills and certifications. Instead of relying on one or two individuals, your business benefits from the collective knowledge of an entire team.

5. Minimize Operational Disruptions: Downtime can be expensive and damaging to your reputation. If your IT staff is overloaded or lacks the tools to resolve issues

quickly, even minor disruptions can grow into major problems. MSPs are equipped with redundant systems and dedicated support teams to address issues promptly. By outsourcing help desk support, routine tech hiccups are handled quickly—

freeing up your team to focus on more strategic work.



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Level Up Sept 25-27: Chris Cumby Brings Faith and Business Together on the Emerald Coast

By RICH SANDERS

Chris Cumby grew up in a rough-and-tumble neighborhood in Toronto, Canada, but has become an important part of the Emerald Coast community during the last decade. Through inspirational leadership, coaching and networking in churches and Bible studies, Chris has developed a role that he describes as a "super-connector of people," culminating each year in a business conference called Level Up. This year's Level Up Emerald Coast conference will break out at the

Oceans Church in Destin from September 25-27th and host more than 400 entrepreneurs!

Before he came to this beautiful part of the world, Chris was had two successful careers in different industries: soft drinks and energy. First, he learned the basics of corporate life with a variety of roles with Pepsi in Toronto. After seven years with Pepsi, Chris became a powerful force in the energy business.

In describing his role with a start-up company in the energy business, Chris describes an early surge: "We did 12 million in profit in the first 18 months!" By helping large consumers of energy, such as hotel chains, manage their risk in consuming electricity, Chris' company likewise became energized. This put him in an environment of abundance.

It also taught him important lessons about life and wealth. As he started to travel and experience more of the world, Chris says: "I've seen the richest, and I've seen the poor." All that experience led him to Jesus, and he was born again through baptism last year on March 16th!

Now, as a follower of Jesus, Chris has developed an incredible level of discipline. Early each day, he awakens to read the Bible, calls his father (his parents still live in Canada and have been married nearly 60 years), then heads to the gym for strenuous exercise. After all that morning preparation, he's ready to be the super-connector! "Every day I seek walking with Jesus in my heart and looking for opportunity from a perspective of helping people. I've just always been a helper, a servant."

That servant leadership inspired Level Up. "I truly believe you have to interact, go with

intention, and be full of faith," Cumby says. "Because when you are, people, places, events, and circumstances show up."

This year's conference, he

says, is more than a business event. "Level Up Emerald Coast isn't just an event it's a movement. It's where faith meets action, leaders rise, and vision turns into reality. This is the room where breakthroughs are born!"

Registration is open at levelupemeraldcoast.com. Cumby also recently shared his story on Episode 21 of the Christian Capitalist podcast, available at SouthWalton.life.

As host of the podcast, I'm excited to share inspirational stories of hard work

and generous giving to the poor and needy in the name of Jesus Christ, such as Chris Cumby's and the Level Up Conference!



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Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Even though this name has been so misused, misapplied, and misappropriated throughout history.

I mean, what even is your actual name? People in various countries call you different things. There have been wars over which is the correct name.

How many people have been slaughtered in, quote-unquote, "Your Name?" We humans are still fighting about what, exactly, that name is.

The American evangelicals, ironically, choose a Middle English translation of a Latinized version of a Greek iteration of a Hebrew nickname, that was officially sanctioned by King

Sean of the South: Our Father

James I, who most historians believe was bisexual. I'll bet the evangelicals love that.

Still, other people use other words for Your name. But the Jewish culture, in my humble opinion, gets it right. Because they won't even say your name. It's too holy. Plus, once you use someone's name, you've already kind of boxed that someone in. But you can't be boxed in.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Because heaven knows sometimes it sucks down here.

Even so, there's got to be a plan to this mess we call life. There are all these coincidences happening. People call these instances different things: Grace, providence, karma, synchronicity, God winks. Whatever you call them, they happen. Every moment. And there seems to be a reason for it.

Give us this day our daily bread. Us. Not just me. Us. Collective. Personally, I have never known hunger, I was raised in a food secure household. But there are many other people included in "us." People who are



starving. People who don't have what they need. And it's not just bread.

There are people lying in hospitals, prisons, nursing homes, or crack houses. They are drunk, and homeless, living from dumpsters. They have needs. And it doesn't seem fair that I sit on my duff, eating Fri-

tos while others go without.

And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Why is it that we humans have no problem asking a great invisible omnipotent being for forgiveness. But we'd rather burn in hell before saying "I'm sorry" to our loved ones? I have questions, Lord.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Because, let's face it, when left to our own devices we screw ev-

erything up.

There was a scientific experiment done with laboratory rats recently. The rats were put into a cage with an electrical device that would shock them, giving them immense pain. The rats were held in the cage with nothing to entertain them.

In less than 24 hours the rats

became so bored they started shocking the crap out of themselves just for entertainment value. We aren't that different from rats.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory. Because it all belongs to you.

None of this is ours, even though we pretend like we own everything. We try to own land, we try to own people, we try to own everything. But man owns nothing.

We're just guests in your world. We're expressions of your beautiful nature. But we are not owners. The whole train-model set belongs to You, Lord. Everything and every-ONE.

After all, we're all your children. Believer and atheist. Clergy and inmate. Straight and gay. Republican and Democrat. Christian, Islamic, Jewish, Hindu, Native American. Everyone. Every race. Every tribe. Every creed. Every confused and lost idiot who tries to put words into your mouth. Sort of like I did here.

Amen.

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A Pastor's Ponderings: Home Field Advantage

By Pastor Doug Stauffer, Faith Independent Baptist Church

This is the time of year when many of us gather around the TV or head to the stadium to watch football or basket-

ball. Whether it's the roar of the crowd in college football's packed stadiums or the excitement of a basketball arena coming alive, one thing is clear: home field advantage is real. When a team has thousands of



fans cheering them on, momentum shifts, players push a little harder, and the energy of the crowd has a significant impact.

As a proud Penn State alumnus, my favorite game each year is the "Whiteout" at Beaver Stadium. Over 100,000 fans dressed in white fill the stands, waving towels, chanting in unison, and creating an atmosphere that opponents dread. The electricity is unmatched—a sight to behold. I sometimes imagine what it would look like if Christians showed that same level of excitement and unity about serving the Lord. What if we cheered for Christ with the same passion that fans cheer for their team? The impact would be eternal.

The Bible paints a similar picture of the Christian life. In Hebrews 12:1, we read: "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let



us run with patience the race that is set before us." The writer reminds us that we, too, have a kind of "home crowd" advantage. You cannot see them, but surrounding us are the faithful saints who have gone before—Abraham, Moses, David, the apostles, and countless unnamed believers who endured trials and remained faithful.

Like athletes on the field, Christians can become weary. Life's battles, temptations, and trials sometimes make us feel like we're not winning. But we're not alone. The testimony of those who endured before us encourages us: "Don't give up. Keep going. Stay faithful. The prize is worth it." Their voices remind us that the same God

who carried them through will carry us through.

There's also another aspect of this home-field advantage—our encouragement to one another in the present. The crowd in the stands doesn't just come from the past; it comes from today's church family. Just as teammates rally around each other when the game gets tough, we strengthen

one another through fellowship, prayer, and shared burdens. A word spoken in love, a simple prayer lifted up, or even showing up faithfully at church can encourage someone else to keep going.

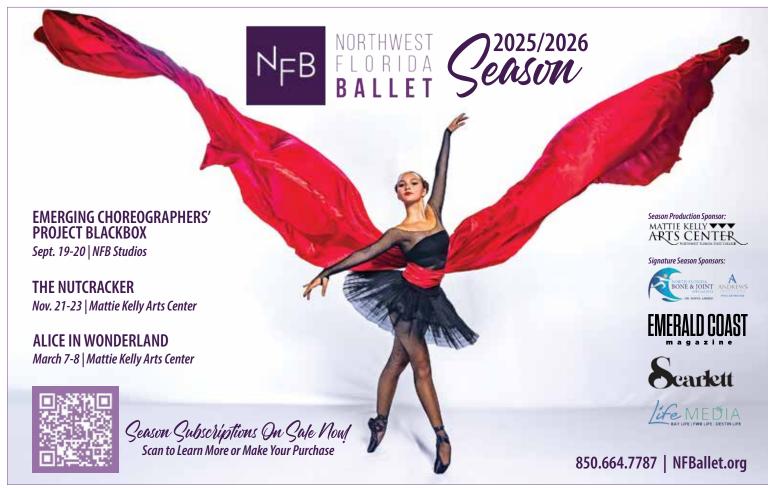
And most of all, we look to Jesus Himself, the One who secured the victory. Hebrews 12:2 continues: "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith." No matter how hostile the "away crowd" of this world might feel, the believer knows the outcome—Christ has already won. Our victory is guaranteed because of what He accomplished on the cross.

And while games may leave us biting our nails until the final whistle, our faith rests on a certainty already written. The book of Revelation reveals the outcome—Christ reigns victorious, Satan is defeated, and God's people dwell with Him forever. Unlike a football game, where the result is sometimes uncertain until the last play, our victory is settled from the beginning. That truth should give us courage and confidence, no matter how fierce the opposition feels today.

So, the next time you watch a game and see the crowd on their feet, cheering loudly for their team, let it be a reminder: we have the home-field advantage, too. Heaven's witnesses are cheering, the church is encouraging, and Christ is leading. Keep running your race. Victory is already ours in Him.

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.







From Palette Knife to Poster: Kathy Schumacher's Art Sets Sail for MKAF's 30th Festival

By Zandra Wolfgram

With bold strokes and vibrant color, Niceville artist Kathy Schumacher will set the tone for the Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation's 30th Annual Festival of the Arts as this year's official poster artist. This milestone event kicks off Friday, October 24 with the Arty Kickoff Party, followed by the festival weekend October 25-26 at the Mattie Kelly Cultural Arts Village in Destin.

Schumacher's winning piece, Sails in Symphony, is a vibrant 30 x 24-inch impasto oil painting bursting with jewel-toned sailboats poised for a magical coastal voyage. "It's inspired by Destin—by the water, by the coastal lifestyle—and it just feels like Mattie Kelly," says Schumacher. "I wanted it to be more colorful than my usual sailboat paintings so it would stand out on a poster. It reflects the beauty of our area and pairs perfectly with the festival's music and atmosphere."

While this is Schumacher's first time as the festival's featured poster artist, she is no stranger to the event. She first exhibited at the MKAF festival of the Arts in 2013, taking home the People's Choice Award her debut year, and has returned nearly every year since. "I love the festival," she says. "It offers such a wonderful variety of art—paintings, jewelry, pottery, and more—in a beautiful setting with live music, great food, and activities for all

From Wisconsin Fields to Florida's Gulf Coast

Schumacher's journey as an artist began later in life. Raised in Wisconsin's rolling farmlands, she developed an early appreciation for the natural world but didn't pick up a paintbrush until her 40s. At the time, she was a busy mom and military spouse, traveling the globe with her husband and raising two children. A casual acrylic painting class with friends sparked an instant

passion. "From day one, I loved it," she recalls. Encouraged by instructors impressed with her natural ability, she began exploring oil painting using traditional Old Masters techniques.

Her artistic path took a new turn during a move to New Mexico. With no job or kids at home, she immersed herself in classes at the New Mexico Art League, experimenting with pastel, watercolor, figurative work, and realism. The turning point came when she discovered the work of a Ukrainian palette knife artist. Captivated by the sculptural texture and bold color, Schumacher set out to master the technique herself, eventually developing her signature style: richly textured oils with luminous layers of color and an almost three-dimensional effect.

The Palette Knife Signature

Today, Schumacher paints exclusively with palette knives. Her process begins with toning



the canvas in underlying colors that peek through the top layers, adding depth and vibrancy. "I think that underpainting gives my work another dimension," she says. While many palette knife artists work in acrylics, she prefers the richness of oil pigments. Her subjects-often coastal landscapes, sailboats, marshes, wildflowers, and birds-reflect her deep connection to nature and her Niceville waterfront surroundings.

Nature, she says, is endlessly



inspiring. "Whether it's a quiet marsh, a burst of wildflowers, or the rhythm of the sea, I'm captivated by the way light, color, and space interact. My goal is always to create a moment of connection between the viewer and the natural world."

A Family Legacy in Art

Art is a family affair for Her Schumacher. daughter, Krista Schumacher, is an

Continued on page 31







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30A Songwriters Festival Returns for 17th Year!

For 17 years, the 30A Songwriters Festival has drawn thousands of music fans from around the world to Scenic Highway 30A, transforming the Gulf Coast into a mecca for original songwriters. The 2026 festival takes place January 16–19 with more than 125 artists performing over 300 shows across 30 unique venues, from intimate patios to 6,000-seat outdoor stages.

Presented by Grand Boulevard, this year's festival will feature headline performances at Grand Boulevard's Town Center main stage by Mavis Staples, Toad the Wet Sprocket, 10,000 Maniacs, I'm With Her, Nikki Lane, and Paul McDonald & the Mourning Doves. Additional artists will be announced this summer.

Venues throughout South Walton will once again be converted into state-of-the-art listening rooms, ranging from 100 to 1,000 seats. Amphitheaters, town halls, restaurants, bars, and theaters provide fans with

the rare opportunity to experience world-class songwriters in intimate settings. WMOT, based in Nashville, will again record select performances for its World Cafe sessions in partnership with WXPN Philadelphia.

Weekend passes and VIP tickets are available now. VIP packages include premium seating and complimentary gourmet food and drinks in the VIP tent during main stage shows, as well as full weekend transportation options for groups.

The festival is produced by the Cultural Arts Alliance of Walton County and Russell Carter Artist Management, presented by Grand Boulevard with support from Visit South Walton, WaterColor Inn & Resort, and ASCAP. Festival passes and details are available at 30ASongwritersFestival.com.

Sean Dietrich Releases New Novel Over Yonder Explores Family, Fatherhood and the Unexpected Roads of Redemption

Acclaimed Southern storyteller Sean Dietrich—known for

Art News



his warm reflections on family, faith, and finding joy in the ordinary—releases his newest novel, Over Yonder, on Oct. 7.

Part Southern road novel, part meditation on fatherhood, Over Yonder follows a defrocked priest just out of prison, a pregnant teen searching for a way forward, and an emotional support goldfish as they journey through the Deep South. Poignant and humorous, the story is Dietrich's tribute to second chances, flawed families, and the unexpected ways people find grace and connection.

"This book is a love letter to fatherhood," said Dietrich. "Fa-

thers, those misguided, flawed, beautifully imperfect humans who tried, failed, got everything wrong, and, in spite of themselves, somehow became our greatest teachers on the subject of love."

Laura Wheeler, senior acquisitions editor for Thomas Nelson Fiction, added: "Sean is an innately gifted storyteller—his voice can't be taught; it's simply who he is. His novels are emotional and redemptive, filled with cantankerous old men with big hearts, tongue-in-cheek humor, and flawed characters who remind us that forgiveness and kindness can be found in the most unlikely places."

Over Yonder will be available in bookstores nationwide Oct. 7. Learn more at tnzfiction.com/9781400235681/over-yonder/sean-dietrich.

Northwest Florida Ballet Unveils 2025-26 Season

Northwest Florida Ballet's upcoming season features three distinctive productions. It opens Sept. 19–20 with the Emerging Choreographers' Project

Blackbox at NFB Studios in downtown Fort Walton Beach. Showcasing the innovative choreography of selected members of the NFB company, this production features ballet and contemporary works set to a diverse range of music genres, accompanied by a visual art exhibition that offers audiences a compelling glimpse into the next generation of artists from the NFB Académie.

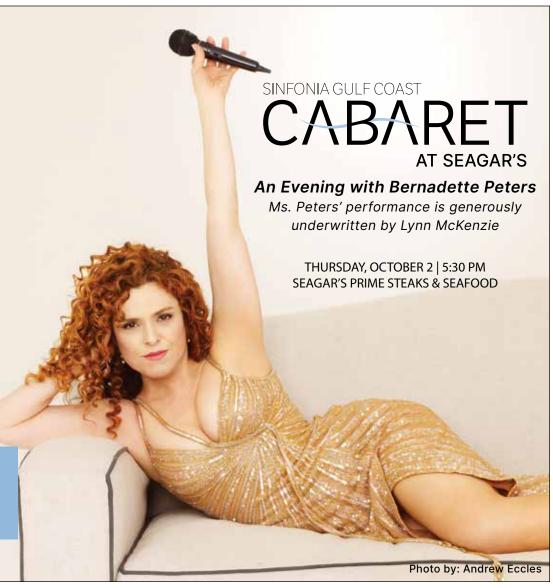
The beloved holiday classic Nutcracker returns Nov. 21–23 to the Mattie Kelly Arts Center, featuring more than 140 performers, including international guest artists and over 100 local children, with live music by the Northwest Florida Symphony Orchestra.

The season concludes March 7–8 with the company premiere of Jill Eathorne Bahr's Alice in Wonderland, a vibrant new adaptation blending neoclassical dance and imaginative storytelling.

Season subscriptions, which include tickets to The Nutcrack-

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Florida Artist Blacksmith Association Keeps Craft Alive

Blacksmithing may have been popularized in recent years by shows like Forged in Fire and Men at Arms, but in Florida the tradition has been thriving for decades thanks to the Florida Artist Blacksmith Association (FABA)

Founded in 1984, FABA has spent 40 years teaching the craft, preserving its history and setting up historical blacksmith shops across the state. Its mission is simple: "To teach - To preserve." The organization will mark its 40th anniversary with a threeday celebration in Gainesville, Oct. 10-12, featuring demonstrations and hands-on classes.

Monthly meetings are also

part of FABA's educational program, held at eight locations statewide. The Fort Walton Beach chapter-known as the Far West Panhandle Blacksmiths—is headquartered at Traditions Workshop, 418 Green Acres Road. Meetings often include demonstrations, open forges where attendees can try projects themselves, and a provided lunch with donations appreciat-

First-time visitors are welcome free of charge. Annual family memberships cost \$30 and include access to every FABA event statewide, discounts for the annual convention, and a digital copy of The Clinker Breaker, the group's monthly newsletter.

Upcoming events include:

Sept. 27, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. at Traditions Workshop: Final preparations for the conference, including completion of the gift exchange project "something that opens.'

Oct. 10-12: FABA CON 40 in Gainesville.

Nov. 8, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. at Timber Creek Distillery, 6451 Lake Ella Road, Crestview: Annual club-level competition with a fivehour pizza cutter challenge. Wood and tools for handles will be available, and participants can expect pizza from the stone oven, drinks from the distillery, and possibly axe throwing.

Dec.: No meeting due to holidays and festivals.

Jan. 24 and Feb. 28, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. at Traditions Workshop: Indoor winter meetings with a focus on Journeyman standards and ABANA Level 1 curriculum projects.

March 28, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. at John Butler's farm, 4112 Bell Lane, Pace: Make-andtake class crafting a Viking-era utility knife. Class cost is \$130, including lunch. Limited to 12 participants. Register at traditionsworkshop.com/classes.

Spring and summer meeting sites for April through June are



to be announced, and FABA is seeking host locations with room for a truck, trailer and 20-by-30-foot tent, plus access to 120v power and water.

For details, contact David at david@traditionsworkshop.com or call/text 850-974-1548. Safety glasses, solid shoes or boots, long trousers and long-sleeve shirts made of natural fabric are required for all events.

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er and Alice in Wonderland plus numerous subscriber perks and discounts, are now available at NFBallet.org-\$80 per adult and \$37 per child (12 and under), a savings of more than 15% compared to box office prices. You can also purchase season subscriptions, additional performance and event tickets, and membership packages.

SCHUMACHER

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award-winning palette knife artist based in San Diego, and the two occasionally collaborate on projects, including large-scale commercial installations. "It's been such a joy to share this journey with her," Kathy says. "Watching her develop her own style in the medium we both love has been a source of immense pride."

Meet the Artist at the Festival

Festivalgoers can meet Kathy Schumacher in person and view Sails in Symphony—alongside her other original works-in Tent No. 61 during the festival. As the official poster artist, her winning design will appear on the festival's poster, program guide, t-shirt, MKAF website, social media channels, and throughout the event's marketing campaign.

The Festival of the Arts will

feature more than 100 artists from across the U.S., competing for \$12,000 in cash prizes across 18 categories, including Best in Show and People's Choice. Visitors can enjoy live music, a collaborative art exhibit, hands-on children's activities, an art raffle, and a variety of local food trucks with beer and wine available. Admission is free, and proceeds benefit MKAF's ArtsReach initiatives serving K-12 students, individuals with special needs, and the military community.

Reflecting on her selection, Schumacher says, "This is truly such an honor. The festival has been such a big part of my journey as an artist, and I'm thrilled to help represent its 30th anniversary."

For more about Kathy Schumacher and her work, visit kathyschumacherart.com. For more information on the Festival of the Arts, visit MKAF.org.

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