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A Natural Treasure in Our Backyard: The E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center

BY LORI LEATH MILLER

For many local residents, it's easy to drive along State Road 20 in nearby Walton County's City of Freeport and not fully realize that just beyond the trees lies one of the most extraordinary environmental education centers in the country.

I had the special opportunity recently to visit the amazing E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center. And, believe me, it isn't just a place to visit — it's a point of pride for our local surrounding communities and a powerful example of how our area is helping lead the way in conservation, education and environmental stewardship.

Located on Freeport's Nokuse Plantation, the center opened in 2009 thanks to the vision of the late M.C. Davis, a Walton County conservationist who believed deeply that people protect what they love. His mission was simple, but profound: give children and families the opportunity



to experience nature firsthand, and they will grow up wanting to protect it.

That philosophy is rooted in the concept of "biophilia," a term coined by famed biologist Dr. E.O. Wilson, meaning a natural love for living things. It's a fitting name for a place that has quietly been changing lives in our own backyard for more than 15 years.

Today, the center operates as a nonprofit environmental education facility serving thousands of students each year, many from Walton and

Okaloosa counties. Fourth- and seventh-grade students regularly visit for immersive field experiences that go far beyond a typical field trip. Here, learning happens outside — in the woods, along trails, and through hands-on discovery.

"The E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center lets children and adults explore a unique ecosystem that inspires curiosity and play with the benefit of having a knowledgeable staff available to answer the questions that naturally arise when



engaging with nature. Sharing our passion for nature and conservation is our foundation," says Executive Director Nicole Schafer.

For local families, it's especially meaningful knowing that children in our own community have access to this kind of experience. Many students leave with not only new knowledge, but a genuine appreciation for the natural beauty that surrounds us ev-

BIOPHILIA
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1776 Meets 2026:

Okaloosa County Launches
America 250 Celebration in
Grand Style

BY LORI LEATH MILLER

As America approaches its 250th birthday, Okaloosa County is preparing to celebrate in a way that's both deeply patriotic and unmistakably local — with fireworks in the sky, colonial coats in the crowd and its continued, year-long effort designed to bring history to life for an entirely new generation.

And next up on that growing calendar of celebrations? A gala unlike anything our area has seen before.

On June 12, the Okaloosa Com-

AMERICA 250
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Magnolia Grill

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

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Community

BIOPHILIA

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ery day.

And that beauty is something special.

The Biophilia Center sits within the longleaf pine ecosystem, one of the most diverse and endangered habitats in North America. Thanks to restoration efforts on the Nokuse Plantation, millions of longleaf pines have been replanted, bringing this critical ecosystem back to life. It's a quiet but powerful success story happening right here at home.

Visitors to the center can encounter native wildlife, including birds, reptiles, pollinators and the beloved gopher tortoise — a keystone species that plays an important role in the health of the ecosystem. Inside, interactive exhibits and “animal ambassadors” help bring these lessons to life in a way that resonates with all ages.

Beyond its educational programs, the center also supports broader environmental initiatives, hosting researchers, educators and conservation leaders who are working to protect Florida's natural resources. Its sustainable practices — from conservation efforts to environmental programming — reflect the same values it teaches every day.

For those who haven't vis-



ited yet, the center is open to the public on select days and through special events and seasonal programs. It's a perfect outing for your family, grandparents (like me) with visiting grandchildren, or anyone looking to reconnect with nature just minutes from home.

Did you know? The Nokuse Plantation surrounding the center spans more than 50,000 acres, making it one of the largest private conservation efforts in the Southeast — and it's right here in Freeport.

In a fast-growing area where so much is changing, the E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center stands as something steady and lasting — a reminder of what makes this community so special.

It's not just a destination. It's part of who we are.



PHOTOS: JEFF TALBERT



Summer Kickoff

Mark your calendar for the public's first “non-event” opportunity to come in for the season—

E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center's Summer Kickoff on May 30 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. This family-friendly fundraiser will feature live music by Jennifer Alvarado, food trucks, bounce

houses, animal chats, raffles, and access to the Reptile Room. Admission is \$15 for ages 13 and up, \$10 for ages 4–12, and free for Bio-members. Guests are encouraged to bring a towel and spare clothes for water activities, and come ready to celebrate the start of summer surrounded by nature.

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Holly Harrison Moore

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Bonnie Barlow: Leading with Hope, Healing and Heart

Bonnie Barlow, Bridgeway Center CEO and 2026 Chair of the Board, Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce

Hope, healing and health are more than just words for Bonnie Barlow and her team at Bridgeway Center — they are the foundation of a mission that serves some of the community’s most vulnerable individuals every single day.

Barlow understands that nearly everyone has a family member, friend or loved one who has faced challenges related to mental health or substance use. It is a difficult reality that touches lives across every background and circumstance.

For nearly 60 years, Bridgeway Center has stood in the gap between those struggles and the people affected by them. Today, the Okaloosa County-based nonprofit operates 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, with a team of approximately 130 employees led by experienced professionals committed to helping others. Barlow herself has devoted her entire professional career to the organization, bringing more than 41 years of experience to the work.

Bridgeway Center provides resources and services for children, families and individuals of all ages. The organization supports people seeking detox treatment, individuals transitioning from jail or prison back into society, those needing psychiatric care or medication management, people experiencing homelessness and at-risk youth. Each situation requires compassion, individualized support and long-term solutions. “Stepping forward to ask for help takes courage,” Barlow explained. “People are often fearful of being vulnerable, especially when facing challenges connected to difficult life circumstances or personal choices. Our team is here to help without judgment.”

Stabilization is a key part of Bridgeway’s mission. Beyond medical and mental health services, many individuals also need housing, employment assistance, healthcare and a renewed sense of purpose. Funding those services is an ongoing challenge. The organization relies in part on federal, state and local grants, while community partnerships often help bridge critical gaps. “The work is too

important to give up. God has always provided,” Barlow said when reflecting on difficult financial seasons throughout the organization’s history.

Those partnerships continue to expand Bridgeway’s reach. A recent collaboration, for example, will help provide weekly healthcare clinic services for the homeless community.

Bridgeway’s work also addresses significant health disparities. Due to circumstances surrounding severe and persistent mental illness, many individuals served by the organization have life expectancies approximately 20 years shorter than the average American. Conditions such as smoking-related illness, uncontrolled diabetes, hypertension and heart disease are common. Dr. Eleanor McCain, Bridgeway Center’s Primary Care Medical Director, plays a vital role in helping patients receive appropriate medical care alongside mental health support.



In addition to serving as Bridgeway Center’s CEO, Barlow also serves as the 2026 Chair of the Board for the Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce. Her community involvement reflects her desire to ensure residents understand both Bridgeway’s presence and the broad scope of support the organization provides locally.

Barlow’s passion for her team



is immediately evident. She personally meets with each new hire, reminding them that their role is more than simply a job — it is a calling. “It can be the best and hardest work you will ever do,” she tells them.

Some days bring heartbreak. Others bring moments of profound purpose and hope. Through it all, Bridgeway’s guiding principles — includ-

ing “People Are Valuable” and “Keep Things in Perspective” — continue to shape the organization’s culture and mission.

Bridgeway Center serves all of Okaloosa County with locations in both Fort Walton Beach and Crestview. To learn more, visit bridgewaycenter.org or attend one of the organization’s upcoming community events.

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Community



The Menopause Conversation Every Woman Needs (But Rarely Gets)

By DR. KAREN DEVORE, TORTOISE CLINIC

What if I told you there would be a period in your life, one that could last up to 10 years, that would fundamentally shift how your body feels and functions?

Imagine a season marked by persistent fatigue, disrupted sleep, weight gain that no longer responds the way it once did, and emotional shifts that feel unfamiliar. And that you would be expected to carry all of this



while maintaining a career, supporting a family, and showing up for your community. For many women, this isn't theoretical. It is the reality of perimenopause and menopause.

For years, this transition was rarely discussed openly. That is changing, as it should. Many women are still navigating this blindly without understanding what is happening, what to expect, or what options they have to support themselves.

This is a natural progression, but it is not always easy, and most women are never taught how to navigate it. With the right understanding and guidance, this phase can shift from something reactive and uncertain to something far more stable and intentional.

Here's what I would share with every woman, regardless of where she is in her transition:

should not be either.

Support may include nutrition and lifestyle changes, targeted supplementation, hormone therapy when appropriate, and restorative therapies. The goal is not to push through symptoms. It is to understand them and respond appropriately. If something feels off, it is worth addressing.

Rethink How You Fuel Your Body

Hormonal shifts increase sensitivity to blood sugar fluctuations, driving energy instability, cravings, weight gain, and brain fog.

Focus on stability: prioritize protein and hydration, include healthy fats and limit highly processed carbohydrates. When blood sugar is stable, energy, mood, and metabolic function follow.

Build Your Team

You do not have to navigate this phase alone. When you understand what is happening in your body, your decisions, and your outcomes, improve. Your health deserves the same level of support as every other area of your life.

Build a team that will explore this transition with you—one that listens, collaborates, and individualizes your care. The right support shifts this experience from reactive to intentional.

Build Strength—Not Just Endurance

Muscle becomes increasingly important during this phase of life. Hormonal changes contribute to muscle loss, reduced bone density, and slower metabolic function. Resistance training is one of the most effective ways to counter this.

Build up to strength training 2-4 times per week. This not only preserves muscle, but it places necessary stress on long bones, helping maintain bone density and reduce the risk and progression of osteoporosis.

Explore Your Options

Menopause is not a uniform experience, and your care

Continued on page 28



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Community

Events at the Beach

Memorial Day weekend officially launches the summer entertainment season across Fort Walton Beach, Okaloosa Island and Destin, and 2026 is packed with concerts, fireworks, beach movies and family-friendly events. Here's a closer look at what's happening throughout Memorial Day weekend and June.

Concerts at the Landing 2026 Spring Series in Full Swing

The City of Fort Walton Beach is excited to announce the return of Concerts at the Landing to the newly renovated Fort Walton Beach Landing beginning Friday, May 8, 2026, and running through June 5, 2026.

Concerts are free and held Friday nights from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at the Fort Walton Beach Landing, located at 139 Brooks Street SE in the heart of downtown.

Here is the 2026 Spring Series lineup:

May 8: Miles Flatt (Country/Party rock variety)

May 15: Grace and Grit (Country/Southern rock)

May 22: Count The Years (Party rock variety)

May 29: Stormfolk (Alternative folk rock)

June 5: Emily Bass (Pop/Country)

The Concerts at the Landing series is brought to you by Dan Collins Entertainment, 102.1 The Wave radio station, and the City of Fort Walton Beach. For more information, visit the Concerts at The Landing Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/concertsatthelanding>



4th of July Fireworks at The Landing FWB

On Saturday, July 4, 2026, the City of Fort Walton Beach will host a special Fourth of July celebration at the Fort Walton Beach Landing, marking the nation's 250th birthday. The event will run from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. with a performance by the band Scratch 2020, followed by a fireworks show over Santa Rosa Sound.

Summer Fun Returns to The Boardwalk on Okaloosa Island

The Boardwalk on Okaloosa Island launches its full summer entertainment lineup Memorial Day weekend with recurring weekly events through the summer season.

Mondays: Pirate Show | 5-8 p.m. | Through Aug. 3

Tuesdays: Movies on the

Beach | 8 p.m. | Through Aug. 4

Wednesdays: Karaoke with KJ every week at 7 p.m., followed by fireworks at 9 p.m. | Through Aug. 5

Thursdays: Beach Luau Party | 5:30-8 p.m. | Through July 30

A special Memorial Day Weekend fireworks show is also planned Sunday, May 24, at 9 p.m. over the Gulf.

Sunset Concert Series Brings Live Music to Okaloosa Island

The Island Resort at Fort Walton Beach hosts its Sunset Concert Series and Fireworks on Wednesday evenings throughout the summer on the beach patio. Concerts begin at 6:30 p.m. with fireworks at 9 p.m.

Upcoming June performances include:



May 27 — Six Piece Suits

June 3 — Rockstar Fish

June 10 — The Aces Band

June 17 — Seven Ply

June 24 — Boukou Groove

The family-friendly evenings also feature food trucks, beach activities and waterfront views.

HarborWalk Village Kicks Off Summer Fireworks Season

HarborWalk Village begins its summer fireworks and entertainment schedule Memorial Day weekend with weekly Thursday-night fireworks throughout June and summer.

"All American Thursdays" begin June 3 and include:

- Hero Salute & Vintage Air Show — 6:30 p.m.

- Live entertainment throughout the evening

- Fireworks over Destin Harbor — 9 p.m.

- Fire-spinning performances following fireworks

HarborWalk also hosts live harborfront music and entertainment throughout Memorial Day weekend.

MKAF Concerts in the Village

Celebrate three decades of music under the stars as Mattie

Kelly Arts Foundation presents the 30th Anniversary season of

Concerts in the Village through June 11. Held each spring on Thursday evenings at the MKAF Dugas Pavilion in Destin, from chart-topping legends to the nation's best tribute acts, this year's concert series stages a lineup that offers something for every music lover.

May 21: Boogie Wonder Band

May 28: The Molly Ringwalds

June 4: The Return: A Beatles Tribute

June 11: A1A: The Official Jimmy Buffett Tribute Band

Magic & Comedy Returns — Bigger, Bolder and More Interactive

Ongoing Shows | The Palms Resort, Destin

It's back — and better than ever. Following a sold-out debut season, the Magic & Comedy Destin residency returns to The Palms Resort with an upgraded, high-energy show featuring up-close illusions, sharp comedy and immersive audience interaction.

Headliner Bart Rockett, a

Continued on page 8

70th Annual

Billy Bowlegs Festival

May 14	May 15	May 16	May 18
4pm-6pm Little Scallywags Pirate Walk	5pm-9pm Vendor Booths, Concerts at the Landing, Skirmish & Fireworks	10am-6pm Vendor Booths, Live Music by The Aces, Pirates Landing	7pm Torchlight Parade

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www.billybowlegspiratefestival.com

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HAPPENINGS AROUND FWB

2026 EVENTS

MAY

- 10**
Sunday Sessions featuring Rescue Me
1 pm | Alaqua Animal Refuge | Freeport
- 11**
Lawyers in Libraries
10 am | FWB Public Library | FWB
General Trivia Night
6 pm | Soundside Waterfront Bar | FWB
- 12**
Marketing Mania
9:30 am | Meridian at Westwood | FWB
Games Club
1 pm | FWB Public Library | FWB
Zen Den Bonsai Workshop
6 pm | Wood Foot Beer Co. | FWB
Spring Wood Workshop: You Are My Sunshine
6:30 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB

- 14**
Mini Makers & Experimenters Lab
10:30 am | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB
Concerts in the Village: Turnstiles
6 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation | Destin
- 15**
JAWS Film in Concert by Sinfonia Gulf Coast
7:30 pm | Destin-FWB Convention Center | FWB



- 15-16**
Bob Hope Memorial Charity Golf Classic
Various Times | FWB Golf Course | FWB
- 16**
40th Anniversary of Gate to Gate Memorial Run/Walk
7 am | Eglin Youth Center | Eglin AFB
Concealed Carry Weapons Class
10 am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso
R.E.A.D. - Reading Education Assistance Dogs
10:30 am | FWB Public Library | FWB
South Walton Boys & Girls Club's Spring Bash
11 am | South Walton Boys & Girls Club | SRB
- 17**
Sunday Sessions featuring Rescue Me
1 pm | Alaqua Animal Refuge | Freeport

- 17 Continued**
Painting with a Purpose: Girl Scout Fundraiser
2 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB
May Market at Soundside
4 pm | Soundside Waterfront Bar | FWB
- 18**
GSSF Indoor League Match
10 am | EC Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso
Music Trivia Night
6 pm | Soundside Waterfront Bar | FWB
70th Annual Billy Bowlegs Torchlight Parade
7 pm | FWB
- 19**
Canasta Club
1 pm | FWB Public Library | FWB
- 20**
Chunky Knit Blanket Workshop
6:30 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB
- 21**
Concerts in the Village: Boogie Wonderband
6 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation | Destin
Bands on the Boulevard: Summer Music Series
6 pm | Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach
Planetarium Night: STEAM Wars
6 pm | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB
- 22**
3rd Annual Ken Hair Charity Golf Classic
9 am | Shalimar Pointe Golf Club | Shalimar
Live Music: Duchess
7 pm | Soundside Waterfront Bar | FWB
- 23**
Word Waves Writing Conference
10 am | FWB Public Library | FWB
Construction Junction
10 am | Fort Walton Beach Parade Grounds | FWB
Celestial Moon
6 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB
- 24**
Sunday Sessions featuring Rescue Me
1 pm | Alaqua Animal Refuge | Freeport
Sinfonia Salutes: Memorial Day Concert and Drone Show
7:30 pm | Alys Beach Amphitheatre | Alys Beach
- 25**
General Trivia Night
6 pm | Soundside Waterfront Bar | FWB
- 26**
Games Club
1 pm | FWB Public Library | FWB

- 28**
Concerts in the Village: Molly Ringwalds
6 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation | Destin
Bands on the Boulevard: Summer Music Series
6 pm | Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach
- 29**
Trivia Night: Making Magic
6:30 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB
- 31**
Sunday Sessions featuring Rescue Me
1 pm | Alaqua Animal Refuge | Freeport

JUNE

- 04**
Concerts in the Village: The Return
6 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation | Destin
- Bands on the Boulevard: Summer Music Series**
6 pm | Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach
- 05**
Greater FWB Chamber First Friday Coffee
7 am | Christian Life Center at FBC | FWB
- 06**
Discover Science Saturday
10 am | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB



FARMERS MARKETS

- Okaloosa County Farmer's Market**
Saturdays | 7 am - 2 pm
1954 Lewis Turner Blvd | FWB
- Downtown FWB Farmer's Market**
2nd & 4th Saturdays | 8 am - 1 pm
FWB Landing Park | FWB
- Grand Boulevard**
Saturdays | 9 am - 1 pm
Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach

MONTHLY EVENTS

- VFW Post 7674 - Sunday Breakfasts**
8 - 11:30 am | Sun | 231 Carol Ave | FWB
- Brunch Buffet with Gone Coastal**
11 am | Sun | Soundside Waterfront Bar | FWB
- SINGO Music Bingo Nights**
6 pm | Tues | The Island Resort | FWB
- Downtown FWB Coffee Club (Mar - Dec)**
9 - 10 am | 2nd Thurs | The Florida Place Food Trucks | FWB
- Live Trivia Nights**
6:30 pm | Thurs | AJ's on the Bayou | FWB
- Karaoke Night**
7 pm | Thurs | Soundside Waterfront Bar | FWB



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Community

EVENTS

continued from page 6

globally recognized performer who has entertained in more than 90 countries and starred in his own nationally syndicated TV show, brings big-stage talent to an intimate coastal setting. His fast-paced performance blends magic, comedy and ventriloquism — with every show offering a unique, interactive experience. Adding to the excitement, Rockett's children, Kadan and Brooklyn, make special guest appearances throughout the season, bringing their own star power from film, television and viral media. Guests can enjoy all table seating with food and drinks delivered directly to their seats, creating a seamless, elevated night out. Arrive early or stay after to dine at the adjacent Blue Lagoon restaurant.

Showtimes include 7 p.m. evening performances and select 4 p.m. Sunday matinees. Seating is limited and shows often sell out, so advance reser-

vations are recommended. Free parking is available.

Tickets & info: MagicDestin.com.

Downtown Markets Continue Through Summer

The Downtown Saturday Market in Fort Walton Beach continues on the second and fourth Saturdays of each month near the Landing, featuring local produce, baked goods, handmade crafts and artisan vendors. June market dates include June 13 and June 27.

Seltzer Fest Rescheduled for June 6 at The Market Shops

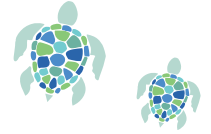
After being postponed due to weather, Seltzer Fest has been rescheduled for Saturday, June 6, 2026, beginning at 1 p.m. at The Market Shops in Miramar Beach. The lively afternoon event will feature seltzers from top national and regional brands, live music and a fun coastal atmosphere perfect for kicking off summer. Proceeds

from the event will benefit Opportunity Place of Fort Walton Beach, supporting local families and individuals in need. Guests are encouraged to enjoy tastings, entertainment and community fun while supporting a

meaningful cause.

From fireworks over the Gulf and harbor to free concerts and beachside luaus, the Emerald Coast's summer entertainment season is officially underway — giving locals and visitors plenty

of ways to celebrate throughout Memorial Day weekend and June 2026.



FWB Largest Cleanup Planned for Saturday, June 6

The City of Fort Walton Beach is teaming up with Ocean Hour Okaloosa and Keep Okaloosa Beautiful for the biggest cleanup yet as part of its Cleanest City on the Emerald Coast campaign.

"We'll be cleaning up the shoreline of Santa Rosa Sound and the sidewalk alongside U.S. Highway 98 from Liza Jackson Park east to the Fort Walton Beach Landing on Saturday, June 6, 2026, from 8 a.m. to 9 a.m.," says FWB Public Information Officer Devon Ravine.

How it works: Pick where you want to start. (There are three locations.)

- Liza Jackson Park (roadside or shoreline)
- Sound Park (roadside or shoreline)
- Fort Walton Beach Landing (roadside or shoreline)

Volunteers at Liza Jackson



Map of the cleanup area, showing the three starting locations and the directions of cleanup from each site.

Park will move east, volunteers at the Fort Walton Beach Landing will move west, and volunteers at Sound Park will move out in both directions. Then they'll meet in the middle after about a half-mile walk.

Multiple ways to volunteer:

- Have a kayak or paddleboard? Help clean up marine debris from the shoreline
- Prefer dry land? Clean up at one of the parks or along-

side U.S. Highway 98

• Is your business or home located on Santa Rosa Sound? Host your own cleanup!

Questions? Want to volunteer? Contact PIO Devon Ravine at 850-586-7855 or dravine@fwb.org.

You can read more about the FWB Cleanest City on the Emerald Coast campaign and sign up for the event by visiting fwblife.com/cleanestcity.



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The South Extension Building Is Finally Open!

BY CAROLYN NEWCOMER KETCHEL

On April 23, 2026, a passionate group of gardeners and community supporters gathered to “cut the ribbon” on the beautiful Sheila Dunning Agricultural Extension Office. The new office is named for employee Sheila Dunning, a beloved member of the team who passed away unexpectedly.

The new building is located across from the Fort Walton Beach Courthouse Annex Extension. It is visible on the right as you enter the courthouse parking lot driving toward the Rigdon Center Fairgrounds building and is directly behind Ruth’s Farmers Market. The offices are spacious and we invite you to stop in and take a look. There is plenty of parking.

In 2021, as chairman of the County Commissioners, I worked with Rep. Patt Maney and Gov. Ron DeSantis’ office to secure additional funding to build a new Okaloosa County Extension Office in the south end of the county. Some of you may remember the dilapidated old building on Hollywood Boulevard that served as the Extension Office. Hurricane Sally finished off what was already a sad building that flooded on a regular basis.

The University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agricul-



tural Sciences (UF/IFAS) is a federal, state and county partnership dedicated to developing knowledge in agriculture, human and natural resources and life sciences, and to making that knowledge accessible to sustain and enhance the quality of human life.

Many people associate the Extension Office with longtime employee Larry Williams. For many years, Larry wrote an informative column about lawn and pest control that was published in the Northwest Florida Daily News. His knowledge is extensive and his articles were widely appreciated.

However, the Okaloosa Sheila Dunning Agricultural Extension Office offers so much more than lawn care advice. Extension Services offers educational programming and volunteer opportunities in agriculture, coastal sciences, commercial

horticulture, family and consumer sciences, residential horticulture, natural resources and 4-H youth development.

How can Extension specifically serve you, the Okaloosa County community, at our new facility, the Sheila Dunning Extension Building in Fort Walton Beach?

Soil Analyses and Interpretation

- pH testing done in-house (free, plus explanation of results)
- Landscape and vegetable garden testing (\$10 per sample, sent to UF, plus explanation of results)
- Lawn testing (\$10-\$20 per sample, depending on needs, plus explanation of results)
- Producer testing (\$10 per sample, plus explanation of results)
- Pasture testing (Bahia, up to \$20 per sample depending on needs, plus explanation of results)

Explanation of results includes a printed analysis accompanied by verbal explanation from an Extension team member, if desired

- Basic water quality analyses (such as salinity, dissolved oxygen, algae identification

and nutrient ranges) and interpretation

- Aquatic management, including pond management
- Environmental resilience, including flood preparation and residential strategies
- Living shorelines
- Lawn and garden assistance, including lawn management and maintenance, garden planning and upkeep, planting, pruning, insects and diseases
- VITA program (tax preparation assistance; contact the office for more information)
- Healthy living classes, including Cooking Up Health and the Mediterranean Diet Course, which has been proven to reduce disease
- Food safety education
- Volunteer opportunities through the Master Gardener Volunteer Program, 4-H youth development, coastal science programming and natural resource programming
- Volunteers are especially needed to lead 4-H clubs at the new building

- Master Gardener Volunteer Program classes begin this fall

I have been a fan of the Extension Service long before I became a commissioner. My favorite class was on antique roses. I love roses and learned so much in the class. Did you know antique roses are the varieties that existed before the hybrid roses we commonly see today? They are often found in old cemeteries where they were planted beside loved ones. Some varieties date back to the Roman Empire.

There is so much to learn about our beautiful community. This is the place to volunteer if you share a passion for gardening, learning and the environment. Please call 850-689-5850 with any questions.

It is an honor to serve as your commissioner.

Carolyn Ketchel is an Okaloosa County commissioner representing District 2. She can be reached at CKetchel@myokaloosa.com or 850-651-7105.

FWB Chamber Celebrates 80-Year Legacy at Gulfarium

The Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce marked eight decades of community impact Thursday, April 23, welcoming more than 250 members to an 80th anniversary celebration at Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park in Fort Walton Beach.

Founded in 1946, the chamber has grown to represent more than 1,000 businesses and 2,400 active members across Okaloosa County. A milestone that served as both the backdrop and the inspiration for the evening’s celebration. “For 80 years, the Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce has done more than support local business; it’s helped build the



friendships that make doing business here unlike anywhere else,” said Ted Cocoran, president and CEO of The Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce. “We don’t just believe Okaloosa County is a great place to work. We believe it’s the greatest place in the world to live.”

Guests enjoyed heavy hors d’oeuvres, beer, wine, and live DJ entertainment. The evening was made possible

through the generous support of local sponsors: Live Oak Fiber, Saltwater Restaurants, Emerald Coast Vibe, Smallcakes FWB/Shalimar, Mills Heating & Air, Emerald Coast Entertainment Services, and photographer Adina Preston.

The Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce has served the business community of Fort Walton Beach and the surrounding Emerald Coast since 1946, providing advocacy, networking, and resources to support local economic growth.

To learn more about the FWB Chamber, upcoming events, or membership opportunities, visit <https://www.fwbchamber.org>.

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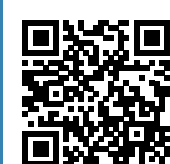
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News Around Town

Okaloosa's Brightest Scholars Recognized for 2026

Academic excellence was front and center as the Okaloosa County School District recognized some of its highest-achieving graduating seniors for 2026, led by Fort Walton Beach High School senior Brock Dugan, who earned the prestigious Peggy Gorday Bruner Award as the district's top academic scholar.

Dugan was selected from an elite group of finalists representing all six Okaloosa County high schools and finished with an impressive 4.8214 GPA. The Peggy Gorday Bruner Award honors the county's most out-



standing graduating senior scholar each year.

Other top finalists included Addison Overton of Baker School, Anthony Bernich of Choctawhatchee High School, Daniel Barnes of Crestview High School, Aiden King of Laurel Hill School and Zachary Ott of Niceville High School.

The district also celebrated its 2026 National Merit Finalists: Jolie Jimenez, Pippa Nettleba, Raymond Jiang, Danzel Chen, Chris Bankhead, Angelina Stidham, Hope Fahler and Lauren Kim.

Florida Prepaid Superintendent Scholarship recipients included Ainsley Bentley of Choctawhatchee High School, Jaivion Parks of Crestview High School and Caden Bell of Fort Walton Beach High School.

In addition, the Anne T. Mitchell Senior Honor Awards recognized 639 graduating seniors across Okaloosa County who achieved a weighted GPA of 3.75 or higher.

his continued leadership, service and dedication to the local community.

Dragon Boat Festival Raises Thousands for Mental Health



Bring Hope Now's 2026 Dragon Boat Race and Festival drew strong community support May 2 at the newly renovated Fort Walton Beach Landing Park, raising more than \$22,000 for youth mental health services and suicide prevention initiatives. Eglin Federal Credit Union served as a presenting sponsor for the fourth consecutive year, contributing more than \$17,000 through employee fundraising and corporate donations. Emerald Coast Okinawa captured the overall championship during the races, while Bridgeway VictOars earned honors for team spirit and costumes. Funds raised will support Bring Hope Now's future youth residential mental health care center and school-based CARE Crew programs.

ty through volunteer work at many places including Shalimar Methodist Church and Bridgeway Center.

Avid golfers as well, it was appropriate that they celebrated at Shalimar Point Golf Course on a "happy hour" Friday night where they hosted this private birthday party to include family from Ohio and friends from near and far.

Loving their country as they both do, the couple can be seen in red, white and blue on a special year where we all celebrate the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Inspirational patriotism for us all!

Zatitude Apartments Earn National Recognition

Zatitude Luxury Apartments at Freedom Tech Center in Fort Walton Beach has been named to the 2025 ORA® Elite 1% Power Ranking by J. Turner Research, placing the community among the top 1% of apartment communities nationwide for resident satisfaction and online reputation. The 312-unit community, developed by The Jay Odom Group and managed by RAM Partners, is the only apartment community in Fort Walton Beach to earn the distinction this year. Located near Eglin Air Force Base and Hurlburt Field, the development features resort-style amenities, coworking spaces, community programming and military-friendly housing incentives.

Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber Honors Peter Daniel



The Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce has named Peter Daniel of BELFOR Property Restoration of Fort Walton Beach as the recipient of its prestigious Above and Beyond Award, an honor presented only two to three times annually to individuals demonstrating exceptional service and commitment to the Chamber and community.

Daniel was recognized for his volunteer leadership and hands-on support of Chamber events, including Dog Daze, Military Family Appreciation Day and the Desert Storm 35th Anniversary commemoration. Chamber leaders praised his willingness to assist from event setup through final breakdown.

"Peter Daniel has been there alongside our team, staying until the very end," said Ted Corcoran, president and CEO of the Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce. "His commitment and volunteer spirit exemplify the intent of this award."

Daniel also founded the Chamber's Building and Trades Committee, now one of the organization's most highly attended committees in 2026. The Chamber thanked Daniel for


A Birthday Celebration and A Love for The Ages

By BARBARA PALMGREN



Two wonderful, young at heart and patriotic Shalimar residents enjoyed their joint birthdays as they celebrate the octogenarian years together. How unusual to have a husband and wife share the same day of birth...although a few years apart.

Dr. Keith Kulow and his bride, Elizabeth, have resided in Shalimar since Keith's retirement from the United States Air Force in the 1990's. Both remained busy giving back to their beloved Okaloosa Coun-



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It's Not Just the Crawfish: Why the Emerald Coast Keeps Getting Chosen



BY PAUL DOMENECH

It's the crawfish on the Emerald Coast.

If you've been here long enough, you know it's not just what's in the pot that brings people here.

I believe we're in for a busy summer. The emerald blue water, the sugary quartz sand beaches, the added carriers flying into our airport, and of course, the vibe. Once people experience it, it sticks. That combination is setting us up for a strong wave of tourism... and a fresh round of transplants.

But why? There are a lot of factors driving movement right now—taxes, politics, lifestyle shifts, but that's another article. What I'm focused on here is tourism and the quiet strategy behind it: people planning their exit before they ever make the move.

In recent months, I've received a large influx of calls for condos. And if you follow real estate at all, you know the condo market was basically at a standstill.

A few reasons for that. Interest rates were high. On top of that, the mandatory structural integrity studies due by 2025 created a big unknown. These studies require reserves to be fully funded, which often means assessments charged to owners. When buyers don't know what those numbers look like yet, they hesitate.

Then there were rentals. They weren't performing the way many expected. A lot of projections were built on peak



numbers, not real averages. And with the amount of competition from large vacation rental companies, some of those numbers started getting... let's just say, a little optimistic.

If the units aren't renting the way they were projected to, you can see how that affects everything, from pricing to confidence.

That was before. So, what's going on now? Timing is interesting. With conflict overseas, international travel isn't as appealing right now. And let's be real, there's never a good time for conflict. I love traveling the

world, but not today. Not until things settle down.

So, people are making a responsible decision: stay state-side.

And when they do that, they start looking for a place to visit... or revisit... or eventually land.

The Emerald Coast checks that box.

At the same time, we've seen a bit of stability return, ceasefire talks, the stock market responding, confidence creeping back in. And when that happens, people start moving money. Not just sitting on it, but placing it

somewhere they feel is solid.

Real estate. So now we're seeing movement again. Condos that were quiet are starting to get attention. Calls are picking up. People are asking questions again instead of waiting.

So be ready, because they're coming. And here's the part most people miss... this isn't just pressure. It's also fuel.

These condos filling back up means new money coming in. It means support for local businesses. It means improving what's already here instead of constantly pushing to build more.

The crawfish is good, but that's not the only thing cook'n on the Emerald Coast.

Stay grounded. Stay informed. And if you've been here a while, just smile a little when someone "discovers" what you've known the whole time.

It's simple.

This place isn't changing. It's being chosen.

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From the Choctaw Band Room to Juilliard: Trombonist Gamaliel Harris' Five-Year Journey

BY JARED WILLIAMS,
GETTHECOAST.COM

Five years after Get The Coast first profiled him balancing band and football, Gamaliel Harris has been accepted into Juilliard's Master of Music program.

In 2021, Gamaliel Harris was a Choctaw High School senior trying to balance varsity football, jazz band, honors classes and everything else that came with being a teenager on the Emerald Coast.

Five years later, he has been accepted into the Juilliard School's Master of Music program in jazz tenor trombone, one of only two trombonists selected nationwide for the 2026-27 academic year.

What makes the acceptance all the more remarkable is that Harris doesn't hold a bachelor's degree in music. He earned his undergraduate degree in pre-physical therapy from Florida A&M University. The trombone, for most of his college career, was something he did on the side. But, a series of pivotal moments and a refusal to let anyone talk him out of his ambitions carried him from a high school band room to an audition stage in New York City. "There were a lot of awesome things that led to this in those five years, since I started taking music seriously after the interview happened," Harris said.

That interview was a 2021 Get The Coast profile that explored how Harris juggled football and band at Choctaw. Shortly after it was published, his idol, New Orleans trombonist Troy "Trombone Shorty"



PHOTOS COURTESY OF GAMALIEL HARRIS / GET THE COAST
Harris stands outside the Juilliard School's Irene Diamond Building in New York City. Inset: Harris performing at Choctaw High School, where Get The Coast first profiled him in 2021.

Andrews, saw the video (thanks to the efforts of Guidance Counselor Katie White) and sent Harris a signed copy of his album "For True." It was the same album that made Harris want to play trombone in the first place.

On the signed album, Andrews wrote that he couldn't wait to hear Harris soon. It's a message Harris has carried with him ever since. "In the back of my mind, I'm always like, I'm gonna work hard, because I know that I will play with him at one point," he said.

His Father's Advice and A Two-Track Plan

After graduation, Harris told his father he wanted to pursue music full time. His dad encouraged him to consider a more stable career path. The two agreed on a compromise: Harris would study physical therapy and continue playing music on the side.

If something big happened musically, they'd revisit the plan.

Harris enrolled at Northwest Florida State College, where he spent two years earning his associate degree on the physical therapy track. But those two years also became the most formative of his musical life. He joined the college's jazz ensemble under Fred Domulot, landed his first professional gig at a wedding in Destin that left him nervous but eager for more, and began playing at a local church where he had to rely on his ear because he never knew the set list ahead of time.

During his first year at Northwest, Harris entered a Pensacola student jazz competition. At 18, he was competing against musicians from local universities. He won. "Those first two years were the most important music-wise," Harris said. "That's when I really started learning about improv and what it is and

just all the things that I didn't know."

Florida A&M and The Performance that Changed Everything

Harris transferred to FAMU in the fall of 2023, where he met Robert Griffin, the university's Director of Bands. Harris quickly became section leader of the jazz band and began performing at venues and events across Tallahassee and beyond: the state Capitol building, the governor's mansion, the Florida Black Caucus and the city's bicentennial celebration, where a photo of his quartet later ended up on street banners downtown.

He was selected for the HBCU All-Stars, traveling to Savannah, Georgia, to perform. He played alongside Delfeayo Marsalis in New Orleans. But the moment that redirected his life came at the Virginia Arts Festival in Norfolk, a competition hosted by Jazz at Lincoln Center that brings together the top HBCU jazz programs in the country.

FAMU was one of 12 bands selected. Harris won the Outstanding Trombone award, the Best Trombone Section award and the Adderley Brothers Outstanding Soloist Award, given to the top soloist from the entire festival. He then performed alongside Vincent Gardner, the trombonist from Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra and a FAMU alumnus.

After the performance, Wynton Marsalis told Harris he sounded "ready to go on the road." "I think it was that point where I really considered it,"

Harris said. "If Wynton's saying that, then I definitely have to change now, because we've got something here."

People at the festival began telling him he should apply to Juilliard. At the time, Harris was weeks away from finishing his bachelor's degree in pre-physical therapy. He had taken only a handful of music classes. But the message was clear. "All the good things that happened at that event made me realize that this is what God is trying to show me," he said. "Don't think you can't do it, because you have people that believe in you."

Preparing for The Audition of a Lifetime

After graduating from FAMU in the summer of 2025, Harris moved to Florida State University to take music theory and performance classes in preparation for a Juilliard audition. Despite holding a bachelor's degree, he was placed in undergraduate courses alongside freshmen. He didn't let it deter him. "Most of the stuff that they were talking about, I was already playing," Harris said. "Now I was just putting words to it."


The Juilliard application process took nearly a year. Harris had to record a prescreening video performing selections from a list of six to eight pieces, gather letters of recommendation and submit transcripts. Early in the process, he made a mistake, misunderstanding the submission requirements and sending videos of the wrong

Continued on page 37

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

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I  **FWB**

AMERICA 250

continued from page 1

mission 250 will host its highly anticipated “250th Birthday of America Gala & Drone Show” at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Rigdon Center, formerly known as the Northwest Florida Fairgrounds. The event will blend colonial-era pageantry with modern spectacle — creating what organizers hope will become one of the signature patriotic experiences of the year.

The evening, set for 6–10 p.m. with doors opening at 5:30 p.m., promises far more than a traditional dinner event. Guests can expect a colonial feast, live entertainment, 1776 reenactments, music, dancing and a patriotic drone show designed to illuminate the ideals of freedom, unity and resolve.

The invitation itself describes the experience as “1776 Meets 2026,” encouraging attendees to step into an evening “where the bold spirit of our nation’s founders meets the brilliance of modern America.” Guests are even encouraged to wear semi-formal or colonial attire — from tricorne hats and military uniforms to elegant gowns and

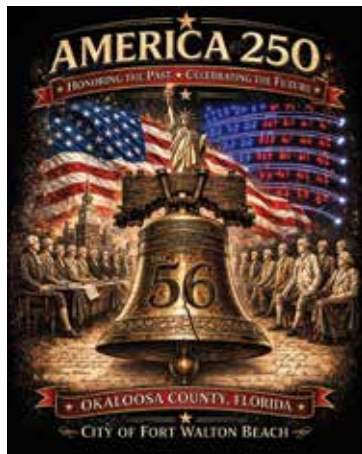
bonnets — helping transform the event into a living celebration of America’s founding era.

But beyond the gala’s grandeur is a much bigger story unfolding across Okaloosa County.

The America 250 movement marks the semiquincentennial — 250 years since the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776. While national celebrations are taking place across the country, Okaloosa County leaders wanted to ensure the local community had a meaningful role in commemorating the milestone.

That vision led the Okaloosa County Board of County Commissioners to establish the America 250 Commission earlier this year. Formed by county resolution on Jan. 20, 2026, the commission is tasked with organizing events throughout the year that honor America’s founding principles while educating, engaging and inspiring local residents and visitors alike.

The commission officially held its first organizational meeting Feb. 5 in Shalimar, launching what has quickly become one of the area’s most ambitious community-wide patriotic initiatives.



Leading the effort is Chairman Graham Fountain, president of the Sons of the American Revolution, alongside Vice Chairman Mitzi Henley of the Daughters of the American Revolution’s Choctawhatchee Bay Chapter. Together with 18 appointed commissioners and more than 50 volunteers, the group represents a wide cross-section of Okaloosa County leadership and civic life.

Participants include representatives from the Sons of the American Revolution, Daughters of the American Revolution (Choctawhatchee Bay Chapter), West Florida Daughters of the American Revolution, Tourist Development Department,

Okaloosa County School District, Florida State Historical Commission, chambers of commerce, the Okaloosa League of Cities, local military installations, Scouting America, first responders, the Billy Bowlegs organization, NAACP leadership and county-appointed at-large members.

In many ways, the structure mirrors the spirit of the original colonies themselves — diverse groups coming together around a shared purpose. “We have a rich history that deserves to be recognized both nationally and in Okaloosa County,” Fountain said during the commission’s inaugural meeting. “We can all come together, pause and reflect on the contributions made by our patriot ancestors who fought and died to create our great republic.”

Together, they will honor our Founding Fathers and their enduring principles, recognize our patriotic ancestors, commemorate the Revolutionary War era, and promote education and community awareness across Okaloosa County.

And while history is certainly central to the effort, organizers say they also want these events

to feel celebratory, interactive and fun.

Future America 250 events already in planning include expanded Fourth of July celebrations with local municipalities, a patriotic-focused “Remember 9/11” event organized by the Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber this fall and a full Veterans Day lineup Nov. 11 featuring ceremonies and a parade across the county.

Organizers are also encouraging local businesses, nonprofits and civic groups to participate by hosting their own themed events and partnering with the commission through social media and community promotions.

To have an event added to the Life Media calendar, organizers may contact Cali Hlavac at To Do in Destin at cali.hlavac@gmail.com and Shantelle at shantelle@francesroy.com. Organizers can also visit getthecoast.com/America250 for submissions.

Organizations are also encouraged to add @OkaloosaCountyAmerica250 as a co-host on Facebook to help

Continued on page 18

Next Cleanup Date
June 6, 2026
 Liza Jackson Park to Fort Walton Beach Landing

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fwb.org/572/Cleanest-City-on-the-Emerald-Coast

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Paws that Protect:

The Military Working Dogs Defending Hurlburt Field

By 2ND LT. RACHEL HECK,
1ST SPECIAL OPERATIONS WING
PUBLIC AFFAIRS

At 4:30 a.m., while most of Hurlburt Field is still dark and quiet, a security forces handler assigned to the 1st Special Operations Wing begins his shift. He checks his gear, reviews the night's incidents and prepares for a long day of patrol. But before he heads out, he makes sure his partner is ready.

That partner doesn't grab a radio or lace up boots. He waits patiently in a kennel, tail thumping against the gate.

"Me and you—it's time to get to work," the handler tells his four-legged companion.

Together, they are one of several military working dog teams assigned to the 1 SOW. This group of handlers and canines trained in patrol and detection work to enhance installation security, deter threats and provide an added layer of protection for Air Commandos and their families.

According to the handler, the value of MWDs lies in their unmatched senses and ability to detect subtle changes in an environment long before a human might notice.



"We're able to rely on their ability to think independently," the handler described. "They're going to catch what I don't catch."

Their tactical value relies on a unique partnership built on discipline and unwavering loyalty, he further explained.

"I protect him, but he also protects me," said the handler. "We're in this together."

The kennel houses German Shepherds and Belgian Malinois, each paired with a dedicated handler. While every dog

and handler qualifies in similar mission sets through their respective training programs at Lackland Air Force Base, each team builds its own dynamic and trust.

"You're trying to learn what makes them tick—what winds them up, what winds them down, what makes them shy away, what amps them up," the handler said.

For this handler, his MWD is more than a partner.

"I get to be a cop," the handler explained. "But I also get

my best friend as my ride along partner. It's the best of both worlds."

In the quiet parts of the day, their partnership looks a lot like any other bond between a man and his dog. Each MWD has a distinct personality ... some playful, some stubborn, some already eyeing retirement and the promise of a couch somewhere down the line, he noted.

"When I'm driving around,

he's relaxed in the back."

When the call comes in, however, affection gives way to focus.

"Play time's over. Let's get it done," the handler says to his partner.

In an instant, the same dog that was relaxed moments before is alert, disciplined and mission-ready, serving as a reminder that behind every wagging tail is a highly trained defender, always prepared to protect.

First of Its Kind: F-15E Strike Eagle Lands at Eglin Museum



The Air Force Armament Museum welcomed a historic addition April 10 with the dedication of an F-15E Strike Eagle — the first of its kind ever placed on public display.

Aircraft No. 86-184, a roughly 35-year-old jet, served its entire career as a developmental test aircraft with the 96th and 412th Test Wings at Eglin Air Force Base. It was also one of the oldest F-15Es in the active fleet before its retirement. "This Strike Eagle will take her rightful place here among the equally distinguished artifacts for the public to engage," said retired Brig. Gen. Fran Hendricks, president of the museum foundation.

The aircraft also honors those who flew and maintained it. Former Eglin commander Maj. Gen. Robert Chedister, who piloted 86-184, is commemorated with



his name displayed on the canopy. "His name on the canopy is a lasting salute to a man who gave so much to the country he loved both in and out of uniform," Hendricks said.

Weapons system officer Lt. Col. Rich Bailey and maintainers Master Sgt. Vik Maharaj, Staff Sgt. Robert Lawson and Staff Sgt. Benjamin Haag are also recognized on the aircraft. "This new and first-of-its-kind addition to our museum is both a tribute to all who have served at Eglin and an inspiration to those who will follow," Hendricks added.

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This Had Your Name All Over It

By LIESEL SCHMIDT

No matter our age, we all love a treasure. It's what makes a day of shopping feel worth it—that unexpected gem you might never have found anywhere else.

At Blue Bay Lifestyle Co., it's that sense of discovery drives everything we do. Because we, like you, are drawn to beautiful things that feel unique and personal—things that won't just sit on a shelf and collect dust, but mean something the moment you see them.

And sometimes, it's in the finding of something for someone else...When you're out wandering, not looking for anything in particular, and something catches your eye. So you pick it up, hold it for a moment, and think, *I have to get this*. Not because of any day on the calendar; not because you have an obligation to an occasion. Just because it reminds you of someone special, and you instinctively know: *They will love this*.

Those are the gifts that make an impression, the ones that don't get tucked away or graciously appreciated and promptly

ly forgotten. Or—worse—regifted at some random occasion down the line. Instead, they become part of that person's everyday—something that makes them laugh, softens the sharp edges of a long day, or simply makes them feel seen or understood.

And in a season like this—when calendars are filled to bursting with vacation plans, graduations, weddings and so many other things all demanding your time and attention—it's often those smaller, more personal gestures that matter most.

When you start paying attention, when you give inspiration room to step in, you'll find those things that unexpectedly make you think of someone you know.

Like the friend who says the quiet part out loud (but with better timing—*mostly*). They might not need anything at all—but you'll know it when you see it. A line that hits just right. A detail that feels a little bold, a little unfiltered—maybe even just a little bit unhinged, in just the right way—and is com-

pletely on brand for them. For these special people, our **Whiskey River Candles** are the perfect find, labeled with snarky names wrapped around scents so good you'll want to bury your face in them. Find just the right one-liners on tea towels and zip pouches from **Ellembee Gift**, or the insanely accurate punch of Drinks On Me's humorous cocktail napkins. It's a great way to show that one friend that you appreciate them—quirks included.

Then there's the one who notices everything—the way something sparkles, the stitching on a piece that others might overlook, the oh-so subtle scent of a room. For them, the understated and delicate beauty of **Bara Boheme** bracelets feel just right, the quiet luxury of the detailing on a Hobo bag speaks volumes, and the soft fragrance of Sweet Water Decor diffusers add the perfect scent level to their space.

Or the one who never grew up and loves to play, to meet up with friends for a little healthy competition. These are the ones you know are always up

for a game—whether they're sipping wine and playing Mahjong or dinking a pickleball over a net. They add sparkle to your life, and our themed beaded pouches, adorable keychains from **Influence & Inspire**, embroidered hats and convo-starting tees will show them just how much you love their playfulness.

And of course, the one who doesn't need a reason—the one who sees something, falls in love and decides it's coming home with them. The one who understands that sometimes the best gifts are the ones you give yourself on a random Tuesday, just because.

What makes these gifts special is that they aren't generic. They can't be found just anywhere, and they don't try to be everything to everyone. They're chosen because they *fit*—whether it's a personality, a moment or



a relationship. We're used to thinking of gifting as something tied to an event. A date on the calendar. A *reason* that justifies the purchase. But some of the most meaningful things we give—and receive—don't fit in that box. And, more often than not, the best gifts aren't planned; they're discovered. Come in and the pieces that feel like someone you know inside Blue Bay Lifestyle Co.






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"STYLE THAT FEELS LIKE A VACATION!"

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There's a New Bank in Town!

BY BARBARA PALMGREN

Banks, restaurants and shops, oh my! Our town is certainly thriving, and I'm excited to introduce another new addition to the community.

The American dream often begins with acquiring capital. And where does one often turn for that support? The friendly neighborhood bank, of course — and Okaloosa County is fortunate to have many strong financial institutions serving our area. Banks often become

recognizable through their logos, colors and commitment to the communities they serve, and this new bank is no exception.

Blue on blue, with a touch of silver perhaps? The accompanying photo from Origin Bank's grand opening featured blue balloons in the background and plenty of smiling faces from management, staff and community supporters.

As Mr. Rogers once said, "It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood." And for many local res-

idents and business owners, it certainly is. Origin Bank offers competitive rates and knowledgeable bankers ready to assist customers with both personal and business banking needs.

Stop by and visit the new location at 212 Racetrack Road in Fort Walton Beach. Like so many businesses in our growing community, Origin Bank hopes to support both small businesses and personal customers alike.



From left to right back row: Nate Sommer, Marques Ivy, Max Davenport, Edwin Watts, David Peacock, Steve Rockwell, Robin Stevens, Jennifer Miller. Front row: Kim Cox, Gwen Stephenson, Brianna Miller, Kelly Reynolds, Kristy Daniels, Lori Lavender, Robin Donlon.





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Nominate a Teacher for the Ultimate Summer Survival Basket

BY KRISTINA REED, FURNITURE DIRECT

Teachers give so much to our kids all year long—now it's our turn to give back in a big way. We're giving away a Teacher Summer Survival Basket valued at over \$1,000, filled with must-haves for rest, relaxation, and a little local fun.

This basket is packed with everything a hardworking teacher deserves after a long school year—think beach day essentials, cozy self-care items, and gift cards to some of our favorite local restaurants, coffee spots, and family-friendly businesses. It's the perfect way to help one amazing teacher recharge and enjoy their summer.

Here's how it works: for every \$500 spent in-store, customers will receive one teacher nomination entry. The more you shop, the more chances you have to nominate a deserving teacher in our community.

Know a teacher who goes above and beyond? The one who shows up early, stays late, and truly makes a difference?



This is your chance to recognize them in a meaningful way.

At the end of the month, we'll randomly draw one winning teacher from all nominations submitted.

Let's come together to celebrate the educators who pour into our kids every single day. Shop, nominate, and help us give one incredible teacher the summer break they truly deserve.

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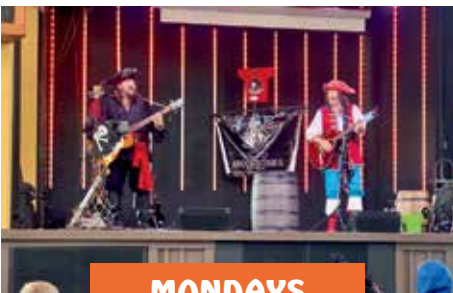
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TUESDAYS

MOVIES ON THE BEACH

March 10th - August 4th
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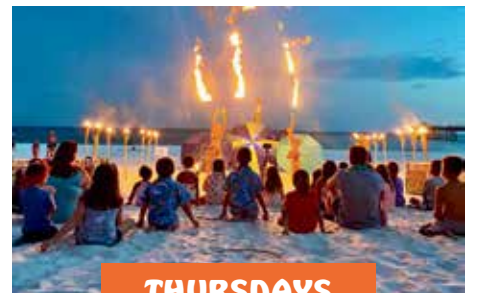


WEDNESDAYS

FIREWORKS

May 27th - August 5th
Front row seats to the 9pm fireworks show from the iconic Okaloosa Island pier.

Labor Day Weekend Show:
Sunday, September 6th



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BEACH LUAU PARTY

May 28th - July 30th
Aloha at Al's from 5:30-8pm with FREE facepainting, balloon animals, and an 8pm island inspired fire & dance performance!

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Smoothie King Blends Healthy Choices and Community Spirit in New FWB Location

After much anticipation, the new Smoothie King at 3 Eglin Parkway in Fort Walton Beach is now open!

The Brenan family has been waiting for this big day longer than anyone. For six years, they have been on the lookout for a drive-thru location in Fort Walton Beach and are excited to be part of the community. The project has centered on local contractors, local organizations and hiring locally.

Love for the healthy choice and a strong business model attracted them to the Smoothie King brand, and Fort Walton Beach is their third location to date. The current smoothie favorite for operations manager Tessie is the Hydration Pineapple Mango, which is a fantastic natural electrolyte source. She likes to add a Greek yogurt enhancer. The new shop would love to get to know you and hear your favorite on-the-go healthy



options, too. The menu now also includes bowls and toasts to satisfy hunger in a good way.

The fruits are sourced to include those at peak ripeness, fla-

vor and nutrients. The water and ice go through a strict, multifaceted filtration process. Protein is a buzzword in foods these days, and Smoothie King includes 16 types of protein, including vegan, keto-friendly and even “The Hulk” for bulking up. The choices are fun, creative and delicious.

Check out their loyalty programs, which include incentives to visit often. The BOGOs, freebies and other offers make this a positive stop for your health and

budget.

The SK team wants local first responders, military members and busy athletic community members to come learn about their offerings. There is always a discount for local first responders and military members at their store.

Plan to join in for the big grand opening event on Saturday, June 6! The overall theme is “Celebrating Our Local Heroes!”

Rick's Crab Trap Rebrands to RICK'S Seafood & Sports

If you've spent any time around Fort Walton Beach, you've likely ended up at Rick's Crab Trap at some point. It's a place people return to: familiar, easy and consistently good.

Now, after decades in the area, Rick's is stepping into its next chapter with a new name, RICK'S Seafood & Sports. The change comes alongside a full remodel, bringing a more modern coastal feel with a stronger sports bar presence while keeping the foundation people know.



The restaurant traces back to 1989, when Rick Pike opened the original location in Navarre. From there, it moved to Fort Walton Beach across from City Hall in 1996 before hurricane damage forced it to close. The restaurant reopened under

Brooks Bridge in 1999, remained there until 2009 and briefly operated in Miramar Beach before the oil spill. Within months, the current location was purchased and rebuilt into what it is today.

Through it all, the business stayed in the family. Chris and Jen Pike now carry it forward, building on what Rick started, with early influence from Sophia Pike and Ellen Galland, who helped run the restaurant in its early years and shaped much of what Rick's is known for today.

Some things were never up for discussion. “For me, it was the original tongue-and-groove pine planks sourced from the sawmill in Milton. My dad and I built those walls in the dining room together back in 2010,” Chris said.

The rebrand came alongside the remodel and a shift in how the space is used. “We were wanting to diversify our menu a bit and not feel like we had to commit a certain amount of space to the crustacean graphic,” Chris said. “We will forever be thankful to the crab, but it was

time to move forward.”

For Jen, the connection to Rick's is just as personal. “The Rick's under the bridge will always hold a special place in my heart. That is where Chris and I met,” she said. “We would rent out a couple of pontoon boats from that location, and as a bartender you were required to juggle rentals and bartending, so it was quite entertaining.”

The goal remains the same: a family-owned, generational staple, now with a refreshed space that reflects both its history and where it is headed.

178 EGLIN PKWY, FWB FL 32548



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AMERICA 250

continued from page 13

expand visibility and community engagement.

Businesses and event organizers interested in advertising America 250-related events may also contact Scott Miller at Scott@LifeMediaGrp.com for promotional opportunities through local media partnerships and community outreach campaigns.

One especially fascinating detail woven throughout the campaign is the commission's tribute to “The 56” — the 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence. Organizers point out that these founders represented nearly every profession imaginable: merchants, ministers, farmers, musicians, physicians, military leaders, printers, lawyers and scientists. In other words, America's founding wasn't built by one

type of person — but by ordinary citizens willing to step into extraordinary moments.

Perhaps that's part of what makes the America 250 celebration resonate so strongly here on the Emerald Coast.

In a community shaped by military service, patriotism, volunteerism and small-town pride, the celebration feels less like looking backward — and more like reconnecting with the ideals that still unite Americans today.

For questions, please email the Commission's Chairman, the Hon. Graham W. Fountain at america250@myokaloosa.com or call (850) 830-0002. Submit photos, flyers, logos and other assets for your event at <https://bit.ly/Okaloosa250Assets>. For gala information, tickets and schedule of events, visit Get The Coast America 250 or on Facebook at @OkaloosaCountyAmerica250.



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 • 1285 Eglin Pkwy.
 • 290 NE Eglin Pkwy.
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AJ's Seafood & Oyster Bar

Attention all foodies and sports 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 and fabulous food. AJ's serves up delicious daily specials, mouth-watering drinks plus entertaining live music all month, too. For 40 years, AJ's Seafood and Oyster Bar has been serving cold Gulf Coast oysters 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.

(850) 837-1913
116 Harbor Blvd.
ajsgdestin.com

AJ's on the Bayou

Located at the base of the Cinco Bayou Bridge in Fort Walton Beach, AJ's on the Bay-

ou 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 game with a view outdoors while sipping a mimosa 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 and fun 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

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

FUBAR Pizza Bar

Looking for a favorite place to watch your favorite sports 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. Head to restaurants like Rockin Tacos, The Crab Trap, Floyd's Shrimp Shack or Al's Beach Club & Burger Bar, all 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
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FWB
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Gulfarium CARE Center Raises Over \$155,000 at CARE on the Coast TurtleFest!

By MARY FOMBY

The Gulfarium CARE Center is proud to announce the tremendous success of its annual CARE on the Coast TurtleFest, held Saturday, April 18th, at Gulfarium. With more than 1,200 tickets sold, the event raised over \$155,000 to support local sea turtle rescue, rehabilitation, and release efforts.

Guests from across the Emerald Coast gathered for an afternoon of live entertainment, food and drinks from local vendors, animal meet & greets, educational activities, and conservation partner exhibits, all in support of the Gulfarium CARE Center's mission to protect and preserve marine life.

"TurtleFest is a celebration of both community and conservation," said Patrick Berry, President/CEO of Gulfarium. "Seeing over a thousand guests come together to enjoy the festival while directly supporting our life-saving work with sea turtles is incredibly meaningful. Every



dollar raised helps us continue rescuing, rehabilitating, and releasing these animals back into the Gulf."

Funds raised from the event directly benefit the Gulfarium

CARE Center, which has rescued and rehabilitated hundreds of sea turtles since 2015. These funds help cover the cost of medical care, food, and rehabilitation for injured and endan-



gered sea turtles along the Gulf Coast.

"This level of community support makes a real difference for every patient that comes through our doors," said Sarah Kamen, Stranding Coordinator for the Gulfarium CARE Center. "From hook and line injuries to cold stunning events, the CARE Center can respond quickly and provide critical care because of events like TurtleFest. We are so grateful to everyone who attended and contributed to our mission."

The Gulfarium CARE Center extends its sincere appreciation to the event's sponsors, including title sponsor Valparaiso Coca-Cola, as well as Salt-

water Restaurant Group, Omni-Broadcasting, Florida Power & Light, Eglin Federal Credit Union, Daher Contracting, Okaloosa Gas District, Cattywampus Aquatic Adventures, Cumulus Media, and Tito's Handmade Vodka, whose generous support helped make this impactful event possible.

The Gulfarium CARE Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, remains committed to marine animal rescue, rehabilitation, and conservation education along the Gulf Coast.

Follow the C.A.R.E. Center on Facebook to learn more about sea turtles and the center's rehabilitation efforts. The C.A.R.E. Center and its patients can be visited as part of a general admission ticket to Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park.

If you encounter a sea turtle in distress, please report it to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission at 1-888-404-FWCC (1-888-404-3922).

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www.gulfarium.com

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Gulfarium
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 Off the Hook

Nearby Norriego Point Reopens Just in Time for America's 250th

By LORI LEATH MILLER

For many in Fort Walton Beach, Norriego Point has long been more than just a spot across the bridge in Destin. It's been part of the rhythm of life along the Emerald Coast — a place locals have boated to, anchored

near, watched sunsets from and shared with visiting family and friends for generations.

It's where the harbor opens into the Gulf. Where dolphins often surface beside passing boats. Where children have chased hermit crabs along the

shoreline while parents sat quietly watching the water roll in through East Pass. And for many longtime locals, it's simply one of those places that reminds you why people fall in love with this area in the first place.

So, when Norriego Point of-

ficially reopened this spring — beautifully restored and reimagined just in time for America's upcoming 250th anniversary celebration — it felt like more than another ribbon cutting. It felt personal.

sions surrounding the future of Norriego Point sparked passionate conversations throughout the community. Residents voiced concerns about overdevelopment and emphasized the importance of preserving public access and maintaining the area's natural character.

Destin Mayor Bobby Wagner became one of the strongest advocates for keeping the project

A Landmark Shared Across the Emerald Coast

While Norriego Point sits in Destin, its significance stretches far beyond city limits. Boaters from Fort Walton Beach, Okaloosa Island, Niceville and throughout the surrounding area have long considered the point part of their own coastal experience.

Whether arriving by water for a sandbar afternoon, bringing out-of-town guests to see the pass or simply enjoying the view from the shoreline, generations of locals have created memories there.

And now, after years of planning and restoration, the beloved destination is once again fully open to the public.



aligned with community wishes. "My constituents are my bosses," Wagner said. "And if they're not part of the conversation, then we're doing government wrong."

He also emphasized what many locals throughout the Emerald Coast already feel: "No one comes to Florida because there's a concession stand on the beach. They come for the beach."

That mindset helped shape a project focused less on commercialization and more on conservation.

As communities across the country prepare to celebrate America's 250th anniversary, the reopening of Norriego Point feels symbolic in its own way.

Because preserving public spaces matters. Protecting access to natural beauty matters. And ensuring future generations can experience the same coastlines and waters that shaped so many local memories matters, too.

For Fort Walton Beach residents, Norriego Point may technically be "across the bridge," but for many, it has always felt like part of home.

And now, it's back — restored, protected and ready for the next generation of Emerald Coast memories.

Restored With Nature in Mind

The updated park includes improved beach access, ADA-accessible walkways, dune crossovers, shoreline stabilization and native vegetation restoration — all designed to better protect the fragile coastal environment while still allowing public enjoyment.

Funded in part through BP oil spill restoration dollars, the project reflects years of environmental planning and public input aimed at preserving the natural beauty that made the area special to begin with.

And perhaps that's what many residents appreciate most: despite the upgrades, Norriego Point still feels like Norriego Point.


The dunes remain protected. The open views remain untouched. The experience still centers on the water, the sand and the simple beauty of the coastline.

Preserving What Makes Our Area Special


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 See details for limitations and restrictions. Call Michelle 850-424-1119.

Learning at the E. O. Wilson Biophilia Center: **Snakes!**

BY HELEN PETRE

I volunteer at the E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center, helping Turtle Bob teach fourth and seventh-graders about snakes and turtles. When the students enter the Turtle Bob room, some are terrified. By the time the class is over, Turtle Bob has convinced even the most uneducated that snakes are our friends. All the snakes the students hold are non-venomous and accustomed to being held. We teach the students that they will encounter snakes in the wild if they go outside.



Turtle Bob and a gray rat snake, or oak snake (*Pantherophis spiloides*)

Most of our snakes in the Panhandle are non-venomous, but a few, like our common cottonmouth, are venomous. Even so, if you wear shoes and keep your hands where you can see them, you will be fine. Venomous snakes do not chase you down or attack you unless you try to kill them, step on them in bare feet, or pick them up. Like bears and bobcats, give them room, do not threaten them, and you will be fine. Any snake will bite if threatened. Any human probably will, too.

Eastern cottonmouth (*Agkistrodon piscivorus piscivorus*)

The cottonmouth is our most common venomous snake. It swims well, lives near water, and opens its mouth when threatened. Cottonmouths sometimes shake their tails when threatened, sort of like rattlesnakes. They are just trying to let you know they are there, and they hope you will go away. When cottonmouths are swimming, you can see their entire body on the surface of the water, unlike other water snakes.

Cottonmouths have big heads and skinny necks. They are very thick snakes with very thick tails. They look scary, but unless you step on them in bare feet or try to kill them, they will not bite. Venomous snakes use venom to subdue prey. You are not prey. You are way too big to swallow. Bites are last resorts to make you go away.

Contrary to public opinion, cottonmouths are not aggressive. I almost stepped on one wearing flip flops (which is not a good idea), and the snake just sat there with its mouth open. Yes, I was terrified, but it did not bite. Bites are very uncommon, and although they are not fun, they are very rarely fatal.

Cottonmouths are food for eagles, owls, herons, alligators, kingsnakes, and snapping turtles. They eat fish and frogs. They are important members of an ecosystem that we want to preserve.

Banded watersnake (*Nerodia fasciata*)

Some snakes look like venomous snakes, and they do that on purpose. The banded watersnake is a common snake that lives near water like the cottonmouth, but it is not venomous. The banded water snake hopes you will think it is a cottonmouth and leave it alone. Sometimes that works. The difference is that banded watersnakes have long, pointed heads (not triangular), round eyes, they do not open their mouths when threatened, and you cannot see their entire body when they swim, only their heads. They, and especially their tails, are much thinner than those of a cottonmouth. They also have dark, vertical lines on their heads that are visible in the photo below and can be seen from a safe distance.

When a banded watersnake is threatened, it flattens out its head, but don't be fooled. The head looks flat, not blocky like a cottonmouth.

Red rat snake (corn snake, oak snake) (*Pantherophis guttatus*)

Red and gray rat snakes are also called oak snakes and corn snakes. They look alike except some are red and some are gray, or brownish. Red corn snakes are expert climbers. Some people think they look like copperheads, but copperheads are rare in the Panhandle.

Red and gray rat snakes are constrictors, but have no fear, they are way too small to strangle you. They constrict around a mouse, or other rodent when

Fort Walton Beach Landing Reopens Following Major Waterfront Renovation

The City of Fort Walton Beach celebrated the completion of its multi-year Fort Walton Beach Landing renovation project with a ribbon-cutting ceremony held April 24, 2026, officially reopening the beloved waterfront park to the public.

The ceremony was incorporated into the opening day of the 2026 Musical Echoes Native American Flute Festival, the first major event held at the newly renovated Landing. Festival organizers partnered with the city to help commemorate the milestone occasion.

The extensive renovations, completed in three phases by Fort Walton Beach-based GLC Contracting Inc., transformed the park with significant infrastructure and waterfront improvements designed to enhance both public access and long-term resilience along Santa Rosa Sound.

Project upgrades included:

- A heavily reinforced seawall

spanning approximately 700 feet of waterfront

- A new concrete boardwalk with railings along Santa Rosa Sound
- A new covered circular performance stage
- Amphitheater-style seating tiers facing the stage
- Terraced seating areas on both the east and west sides of the park overlooking the water
- A new fishing pier on the west end of the park
- A “pocket beach” and kayak/paddleboard launch area on the eastern edge
- Expanded lighting and additional electrical access for vendors and events
- Additional sidewalks and new waterfront stair access
- A living shoreline featuring oyster shell and seagrass barriers to help prevent erosion
- An expanded east-side parking lot with 34 additional parking spaces
- Dedicated golf cart parking

Funding for the project came through a combination of sources, including the Fort Walton Beach Community Redevelopment Agency, Okaloosa County Tourist Development Tax funds, the Half-Cent Infrastructure Surtax and a Natural Resource Damage Assessment grant.

City officials thanked the public for its patience throughout the construction process and expressed appreciation to the many individuals, contractors and agencies involved in bringing the revitalized waterfront park to completion.

The renovated Landing is expected to continue serving as one of the city's premier gathering spaces for festivals, concerts and community celebrations throughout the year. Upcoming events at the venue include the Concerts at The Landing series, the Billy Bowlegs Pirate Festival and the city's annual Fourth of July celebration featuring live music and fireworks.

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 Sports


BY BARBARA PALMGREN

A Military Foundation Ensures Investment in Those Who Serve!

On a perfect day in April, Brittni Darbonnier, a tournament director for this TACP Foundation fundraiser, threw out a winning ball from the bucket of a Lift Truck to celebrate the finale of a golf tournament at Shalimar Pointe Golf Course.



This tournament was the dream of she and her husband, Shawn Kurtz, to raise money for the TACP foundation. This foundation supports three programs for Tactical Air Control Party Airmen: Gold Star families, Resilience and Restoration and Community Engagement. This urgent aid has a lasting impact to members and their families through direct financial aid, emergency assistance, and memorial support beyond the battlefield and their service to our country.

Over 100 golfers enjoyed 18 holes of a golf scramble with breakfast, lunch (box lunches provided during the rounds so play could not be interrupted,) and a catered lunch with appetizers and beverages so the party atmosphere continued through-

out the day. Silent auction items were on display and up for bid to add to funds raised for this worthy organization.

Changing lives and supporting military operations in this unique way is a tribute to Brittni and the managers of this organization, many who were at the event to witness the support of the community as well as active and retired members.

But Brittni, in that bucket lift, with a finale to this organization, well, she is by herself, a tribute beyond community service!

Shalimar Ladies Golf Association Supports Providing Beds for Children!

Who doesn't love an excuse to wear pajamas during the day? But, on the golf course? Keeping your head down to address the golf ball and seeing a pair of bedroom slippers staring back at you?

That's what the ladies golf group did on Tuesday, April 14, at Shalimar Pointe Golf Course, raising several hundred dollars for Sleep in Heavenly Peace, a nonprofit organization dedicated to building and delivering beds to children who don't have



a bed of their own.

Did you know that many children in our community sleep on the floor, on couches, or on piles of blankets? Every child should have a comfortable bed, mattress and bedding to sleep. Every child.

The pajama themed golf day was a fun way to raise funds to help children sleep comfortably and dream peacefully. If anyone is interested in learning more or helping, please attend the next local bed build on May 9 at the Shalimar Library and Thrift Shop. It's wonderful to live in a community that addresses problems like this and finds solutions to help future generations.



Fort Walton Beach Tennis Courts Reopened After Resurfacing

Seven courts at the Fort Walton Beach Tennis Center have officially reopened following a recent resurfacing project designed to improve playability and enhance the overall experience for local players and visitors.

The Fort Walton Beach Tennis Center, managed by USTA Florida in partnership with the City of Fort Walton Beach, celebrated the upgrades with a community ten-



nis event in April.

The center offers programs and activities for players of all ages and skill levels and is located at 45 W. Audrey Drive NW in Fort Walton Beach. For more information, visit Fort Walton Beach Tennis Center or call 850-344-0230.

From Fear to Fearless

BY DAVID DURMAN

Coastal Martial Arts & Fitness is helping women in Fort Walton Beach feel stronger, healthier and more confident through high-energy Fitness Kickboxing and practical self-defense training.

Founded by Shihan Dave Durman and Renshi Sally Durman, the school offers a welcoming, no-pressure environment where beginners can start at their own pace. The adult Fitness Kickboxing program is quickly becoming a favorite for women looking to lose weight, build strength and relieve stress — without needing any prior experience.

Classes combine boxing-style training, pad work and conditioning in a motivating group setting designed to challenge participants while

still being fun and supportive.

For families, Coastal Martial Arts & Fitness also offers Kempo Karate for children as young as 5, helping them develop confidence, focus and discipline. Many parents choose to train alongside their children, while others enjoy having their own time on the mats.

"We see so many women walk in unsure of themselves, and within weeks they're stronger, more confident and loving the training," says Sally Durman.

With a strong focus on community and personal growth, Coastal Martial Arts & Fitness is welcoming new members and currently offering limited Founding Member rates.

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Charlotte Brooks Rides to a National Title and Auburn University

By DOUGLAS “DOC” STAUFFER

At just 17 years old, local resident Charlotte Brooks has already accomplished what many young athletes only dream of — a national championship title and a collegiate athletic future at one of the nation’s premier equestrian programs.

The Okaloosa County native recently captured the coveted Congress Champion title in Youth Hunt Seat Equitation (age 15–18) at the prestigious All-American Quarter Horse Congress — widely recognized as the largest and most competitive single-breed horse show in the world. For those within the equestrian community, the title alone speaks volumes. For those unfamiliar, imagine winning a national championship on one of the sport’s biggest stages, against the very best riders from across the country.

And this fall, she will continue her journey at Auburn University, joining the nationally respected Auburn Tigers equestrian team.

But Charlotte’s story is about far more than trophies.

A Life in the Saddle

Charlotte did not stumble into the sport. She was raised in it. Horses have been part of her life from an early age, and she began competing seriously around age ten. What followed was not overnight success, but years of early mornings, long travel weekends, disciplined training sessions, and quiet perseverance.

Equestrian competition requires a rare blend of physical skill, technical precision,

and mental composure. Riders must communicate with a thousand-pound animal through subtle cues, balance, and trust. In Hunt Seat Equitation, judges evaluate the rider’s form, control, and effectiveness — not just speed or flash. It is a discipline that rewards poise under pressure.

Charlotte has learned to thrive in that pressure. Winning at the Quarter Horse Congress represents the culmination of years of refinement — hours in the arena, countless practice rounds, and the resilience to improve after setbacks. National titles are not handed out; they are earned stride by stride.

Balancing Excellence

Unlike many student-athletes who compete locally, Charlotte’s competition schedule has taken her across the country. To maintain both academic and athletic excellence, she enrolled in Florida Virtual School, which allowed her the flexibility to travel and train while staying on track academically.

That decision reflects maturity beyond her years. It takes discipline to manage studies independently while competing at a national level. Charlotte has demonstrated that excellence in athletics does not require sacrificing academic responsibility. Her ability to balance both speaks to strong family support, personal determination, and a clear sense of purpose.

The Next Chapter: Auburn

Charlotte’s next step brings her to Auburn’s equestrian program, one of the most respected

in collegiate competition. Auburn competes under the umbrella of the National Collegiate Equestrian Association, where varsity riders face elite talent from across the nation.

Auburn has a history of national championships and a culture built around discipline, teamwork, and competitive excellence. Charlotte will now test her skills at the highest collegiate level — representing not only her university, but her hometown of Laurel Hill and Okaloosa County. For a local athlete to step onto that stage is significant. For a national champion to do so is remarkable.

More Than a Title

While the headline reads “national champion,” those who know Charlotte would likely describe her differently: dedicated, humble, steady, and focused.

Champions are often defined by what happens in the spotlight. But true character is revealed in the unseen hours — the practice sessions when no one is watching, the moments of disappointment that require perseverance, and the quiet discipline of improvement. Charlotte’s journey reminds us that greatness is rarely dramatic. It is built patiently,



consistently, and faithfully.

In a world quick to celebrate viral fame and overnight success, her story stands as a refreshing testimony to sustained effort and earned achievement.

A Community to Cheer

As Charlotte prepares to ride for Auburn this fall, Okaloosa County has every reason to celebrate one of its own. Her suc-

cess is not only personal—it is shared. She carries with her the pride of a small community that values hard work and excellence.

When she enters the arena in Auburn colors, she will do so as a national champion — but also as a local young woman who never forgot where she started. And if her past is any indication, the best rides may still be ahead.

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BY KASSIA GARFIELD,
MAXSTRENGTH FITNESS

As people age, wrinkles and gray hair are expected. What often goes unnoticed, however, is a quieter change happening beneath the surface: the gradual loss of muscle mass, known medically as **sarcopenia**. This age-related condition affects millions of adults worldwide and plays a major role in declining strength, balance problems, and loss of independence later in life. Kassia Garfield, Owner of MaxStrength Fitness of Fort Walton, often talks about how quickly the changes happen. Garfield says, “I always feel like the bad guy, telling people walking isn’t enough. We have to add stress to the body, and “overload.” This is when we do more than normal, so the body adapts to new stress. This doesn’t happen with walking.”

Sarcopenia typically begins earlier than many realize. Research shows that adults start

Sarcopenia: The Silent Muscle Loss That Comes With Age — and Why Walking Is Not Enough

losing muscle mass as early as their 30s, with the rate of decline accelerating after age 60 to be 10% a decade. By the time someone reaches their 70s or 80s, significant muscle loss can make everyday activities—such as climbing stairs, carrying groceries, or getting up from a chair—far more difficult. In your 80s, **not losing** muscle is a win. But anyone who puts the time into heavy resistance training can build muscle, at ANY AGE!

Muscle loss is not simply cosmetic. Skeletal muscle is essential for mobility, posture, and joint protection. It also plays a key role in metabolism, helping regulate blood sugar and maintain healthy body weight. As muscle mass decreases, the risk of falls, fractures, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease increases. Many research studies show that increase in muscle mass has long term effects on longevity, but also speeds recovery from surgery or cancer.

Several factors contribute to sarcopenia. Hormonal changes that occur with aging reduce the body’s ability to build and

maintain muscle. Nerve signals that activate muscle fibers weaken over time. Chronic inflammation and inadequate protein intake also play a role. But, perhaps the most influential factor is lifestyle—particularly physical inactivity. For some people it is a lack of knowledge (this is when you need to seek out some help!).

A comparison of muscle mass across the lifespan shows a stark contrast between people who remain physically active and those who do not. Individuals who engage in regular strength training tend to maintain a much higher percentage of their muscle mass well into older age. While some decline is inevitable, the slope is far gentler. In contrast, people who avoid resistance exercise often experience a steep drop in muscle mass after midlife, leading to greater weakness and functional limitations.

The good news is that sarcopenia is not inevitable. Studies consistently show that **resistance training**—such as lifting weights, using resistance bands, or performing bodyweight exercises—can slow, stop, and even

partially reverse muscle loss at almost any age. Older adults who begin strength training see improvements in muscle size, strength, balance, and confidence, sometimes within just a few months. As a physical therapist Garfield says, “Please just do something! It’s not going to get easier later, a little bit can go a long way. Some studies show even one year of intense training can increase muscle mass for four years after!”

Nutrition also plays a critical role. Adequate protein intake provides the building blocks muscles need to repair and grow. Experts recommend spreading protein intake evenly throughout the day, with particular emphasis on meals following exercise.

Perhaps most importantly, it is never too late to start. While muscle loss accelerates with age, the body remains remarkably

adaptable. Even people in their 70s, 80s, and beyond can gain strength with the right training and guidance.

As awareness of sarcopenia grows, health professionals increasingly emphasize strength training as a cornerstone of healthy aging. The message is simple but powerful: while everyone loses some muscle over time, **we have a say in how much we lose and how fast it happens**. Staying active today can mean greater independence, mobility, and quality of life tomorrow.

If you are having a hard time fitting in a workout, try MaxStrength Fitness. We do effective, efficient and safe 20-minute workouts, just twice a week. We deliver results with a science backed program. Give us a call at 850-467-9729!

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May is National Stroke Awareness Month

Rebuilding Lives After a Stroke: The Power of Post-Acute Rehabilitation

BY TERESA HALVERSON, BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT/COMMUNITY RELATIONS DIRECTOR

Recovery after a stroke doesn't end when a patient leaves the hospital – in many ways, that's when the real work and recovery begin. Post-Acute stroke rehabilitation is critical because it helps survivors regain lost abilities, adapt to new challenges, and restore as much independence as possible. Through targeted physical, occupational, and speech therapy services, patients can rebound strength, improve coordination and mobility as well as communication skills. Just as importantly, post-acute rehabilitation supports emotional and cognitive healing, helping individuals cope with life changes a stroke can bring. Early and consistent therapy not only improves physical and cognitive recovery, but also helps reduce the risk of complications and hospital readmissions. For many stroke survivors, this phase of care is the bridge between survival and truly living again.

Guidance from the National Stroke Association emphasizes that recovery, after a stroke, is a long-term process that requires active participation from the patient and family/caregivers. One of the most important recommendations is to begin rehabilitation as early as possible and remain consistent with therapy, as early intervention is closely linked to better outcomes. (<https://www.stroke.org>)

Post-acute rehabilitation is not only vital for the patient's recovery, it also has a profound impact on family members and caregivers. For patients, this phase of care provides the structured support needed to regain as much independence as possible, preventing complications from falls, and rebuilds confidence in performing everyday activities. The ultimate goal of post-acute care is to assist the patient's best possible chances



of returning to their prior level of function.

For families, post-acute rehabilitation offers education, guidance, training and peace of mind during what is often an overwhelming time. Caregivers learn how to safely assist with daily tasks, manage medications, and recognize warning signs of any potential complications. This support reduces stress, prevents caregiver burnout, and fosters a more positive recovery environment at home. Effective post-acute care strengthens outcomes for both the patient and their support system, turning recovery into a shared, supported journey rather than an uncertain path.

Neurologists play a key role in monitoring the type and severity of the stroke, monitoring complications, and managing any underlying conditions. In collaboration with the post-acute clinical team and primary care physicians, neurologists help tailor rehabilitation plans based on the patient's neurological status and recovery potential. Their continued involvement ensures that care remains coordinated, proactive and responsive to any changes, giving patients and families greater confidence and support throughout the recovery journey.

The Manor at Blue Water Bay provides comprehensive in-patient post-acute and out-

patient rehabilitation services for stroke recovery, delivered by certified therapists specializing in neurological rehabilitation. Our team is dedicated to supporting recovery, independence and improved quality of life.

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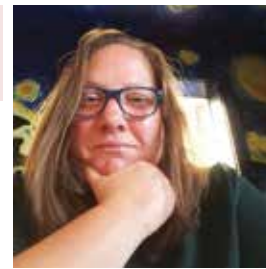
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Weekend Warrior Injuries: Why Your Elbow Is Usually the First to Go (And What to Do About It)

BY DR. JENNIFER M. TRENDT, RESET ROOM

You didn't plan to get hurt. It usually starts with something positive. The weather turns, your schedule opens up, and you decide it's time to get moving again—pickleball with friends, a few rounds of golf, gardening, or getting back into the gym after some time away.

Then a few days later, it shows up. A dull ache in your elbow. A sharp pull when you grip something. Suddenly, even simple movements like lifting a coffee cup or opening a jar don't feel quite right.

This is one of the most common patterns we see with weekend warrior injuries—and the elbow is often the first place it appears.

Why the Elbow Takes the Hit

The elbow is a connection point for the muscles that control your wrist and grip. Every swing, lift, or repetitive motion places stress on these tendons. When activity increases quickly, those tissues don't have time to adapt. That's when we start to see conditions like tennis elbow, golfer's elbow, and general tendon irritation. Despite the names, you don't have to play tennis or golf to develop them. These injuries are extremely common in active adults returning to activity too quickly.

Why It Keeps Coming Back

You rest it for a few days, maybe even a couple of weeks, and it starts to feel better. Then you return to the same activity



and the pain comes right back.

That's because elbow pain often isn't just inflammation—it's a tendon issue. Over time,

tendons can become irritated and less capable of handling stress. Without proper healing, the tissue temporarily settles down but never fully recovers.

Where SoftWave TRT Fits In

Traditional approaches often focus on masking symptoms, but SoftWave Therapy (TRT) works differently. It helps stimulate your body's natural healing response at the tissue level. Using targeted acoustic waves, SoftWave can increase circulation,

activate cells involved in tissue repair, support tendon healing, and reduce pain without injections or downtime. For tendon

injuries, this matters because tendons typically have limited blood flow and heal slowly on their own.

Many patients come in after trying rest, braces, or anti-inflammatory treatments without lasting relief. Often, what's missing isn't effort—it's the right stimulus to help the body repair itself more effectively.

If you're starting to feel that nagging elbow pain, don't ignore it and don't just push through it. That's usually what turns a small issue into a long-term problem. The goal isn't to stop being active—it's to stay active without paying for it later.

Staying active isn't the problem. Staying healthy while doing it—that's the goal.

MENOPAUSE

continued from page 4

Address Sleep Directly

Sleep disruption is common and often one of the most impactful symptoms. Difficulty falling asleep, waking during the night, and non-restorative sleep affect everything from mood to metabolism. Support sleep with

a consistent routine, a cool, dark environment, and mindful use of caffeine and alcohol.

For some women, declining progesterone may contribute to sleep disruption. In those cases, targeted support, including progesterone when clinically appropriate, can help restore more consistent, restful sleep. Quality sleep is a cornerstone of hor-

monal and cognitive health.

Support Your Nervous System

This transition affects both hormones and the brain. Increased anxiety, irritability, and emotional variability reflect real neurological shifts. Daily regulation, through movement, time outdoors, breathwork, or mean-

ingful connection, supports resilience and emotional stability.

These are not luxuries. They are essential tools for navigating this phase well.

Menopause is not the end of your vitality. It is a significant physiological transition that deserves attention and support, not dismissal. These changes

are not random. They are signals.

When you understand what your body is doing and respond accordingly, you move through this phase with greater stability, clarity, and long-term health in mind.

Feel Like Yourself Again

Pain doesn't have to sideline you.



At The Reset Room, we use advanced SoftWave TRT technology to stimulate your body's natural healing response—supporting circulation, improving tissue health, and helping restore function.

Before choosing injections, long-term discomfort, or sitting on the sidelines, ask yourself: Can your body heal with the right support?

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Jen's use of SoftWave therapy is a game-changer for pain relief and recovery. After just one session, I noticed a significant reduction in discomfort and improved mobility. The treatment was quick, non-invasive, and felt like a deep, healing pulse rather than anything painful. Within a few days, I could move more freely, and the lasting relief made it clear why so many other athletes and patients swear by it.”

- DR. CJ ALLEN, OLY
Paris 2024



It's Time to Exercise



KAY LEAMAN, HEALTH ARCHITECT, CERTIFIED NUTRITION ADVISOR

The word exercise triggers a range of definitions from 'it's work', I love it, I hate it, I should, I have to, I get to and the list goes on. The bottom line is we should all be moving. Back in the 'old days' we had to get off the couch to change the channel or turn the record over, kids played outside every day, we spent more time on our feet in the kitchen because we didn't have appliance garages, we had to push the manual lawn mower and clip the bushes by hand. We have so many things today that make our lives easier, not paying attention to the gradual move toward lethargy.

We all know we should be exercising but how do we start and what is our goal? Some of us have a home gym while others go to a gym and others use the internet for their gym. So, where do we start?

The first decision we need to make is what do we want to achieve. We then need to determine what our physical limits are. Our next decision is what type of exercise or exercises do we need and how much time are we willing to commit to it.

The Department of Health shows (Seems to be focused on cardio, but what about everything else?) 150 minutes of moderate intensity exercise (heart rate = 50-70% of our maximum) weekly.

OR

75 minutes of high intensity exercise (heart rate = 70-85% of our maximum) weekly.

PLUS

2 days of muscle strength exercises (30 minutes/5 days a week or 10 minutes/3 times daily).

AND

Always warm up with stretches before.

Now, let's take a look at our choices:

- **Aerobic:** walking, running, jogging, cycling, swimming, dancing

- **Strength:** free weights, body weight (does not use any appliance), resistance bands, Pilates (core muscles, posture, flexibility)
- **Flexibility and Stretching:** Yoga, static stretching, dynamic stretching (arm circles, leg swings, etc.)
- **Balance and Stability:** Tai Chi, single leg stands, heel to toe walking, ankle exercises, coordination routines
- **HIIT (high intensity interval training):** sprint intervals, circuit training, jump rope, R.I.P.P.E.D. (resistance, interval, power, plyometrics, endurance, diet).

Dancing is a great place to start. Put on music you love and just start moving! This will exercise your joints, muscles and cardiovascular system as well as lift your spirit and reduce stress. Another good way to start is to take a short walk after dinner. This helps with digestion, decreases stress and ends the day on a fresh air note.

If you have joint issues I encourage you to start with pool exercises. There are cardio, resistance and other options available. The water gives excellent support and cuts down on the whole sweat thing.

Some of the exercises cross categories. Advanced yoga includes body weight postures as well as balance. Pilates is also good for flexibility. Tai Chi exercises the brain.

Let's say you want to start a cardio program and have only been walking. Try this: walk for 10 steps, walk fast for 10 steps, run fast for 10 steps, repeat. How many times can you do this? You would be amazed how well this works.

Look up chair exercises. These are great during commercials or while you're sitting at your desk.

Are you someone who just doesn't have enough time in your day? If that's you then it's time to think outside of the box. Stop trying to find the closest parking spot at the store, power walk the isles of the grocery store, do squats when you're at the washer/dryer, stand on one leg when you're at the kitchen sink, do ankle exercises at the stoplight, or how about lunges walking between rooms. You can also have walking meetings



at work. The options are endless.

There are no excuses. Even

the most inactive person can find a place to start. Start with

10 minutes a day and build

from there. Oh, did I hear you say you want to increase muscle strength but can't afford weights? Use a one gallon container of milk or a couple large cans of beans. What about your laundry detergent bottle? Like Tom Bodett (Motel 6) once said, 'We don't have a gym but you can carry your luggage around the parking lot.'

It's not about what we can't do or don't have. It's about taking that first step every day and every step makes a difference.

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 Wellness

Finding Support Through Life's Changing Seasons

As the seasons begin to change, we first notice the subtle shifts around us. When families begin navigating the aging-at-home journey, the same is often true. Daily tasks that once felt simple can slowly become frustrating or challenging. So, what happens next?

Everything starts with the assessment. That first conversation with the person considering care and their family members helps determine whether there is a current need and what areas of daily life may be creating stress

within the home. Understanding where someone is in the aging journey — and what support may bring comfort and stability — is an important first step.

At **Home Companion**, flexibility is a priority. For some families, meals and laundry are the most important tasks to keep running smoothly. For others, companion care may simply mean sharing a conversation, running the vacuum, playing a game or adding a little spark and companionship to the day. Every situation is different, and care is



tailored to meet people where they are.

If support is not needed right away, or if care falls outside Home Companion's scope of services, guidance can still be provided. Sometimes a loved one only needs assistance one day a week for a few small tasks. In other situations, referrals to trusted care partners within the community may be the best fit. The ability to adapt as needs change over time often provides reassurance and peace of mind for families.

Home Companion also understands the importance of caring for the caregiver. Adult children and spouses often need time to run errands, enjoy coffee with a friend or simply take a quiet walk and recharge. During that time, Home Companion's in-home caregivers provide compassionate support and companionship, helping ease the stress and responsibility that caregiving can bring. Sometimes, simply knowing someone else is there to help can make all the difference. Call 850-218-5571.

The Body, Mind, Spirit Connection



BY STEPHENIE CRAIG, JOURNEY BRAVELY

Do you ever find yourself feeling a bit off and you can't figure out why? Maybe you've had seasons of trying to heal and feel better using different means. You might feel anxious and go to the doctor only to be told you check out fine and they recommend

going to counseling. Other times, you may have gone to counseling trying to resolve feeling low energy to be told you should try going to the doctor and get your blood work checked. Maybe you've prayed and gone to speak to a pastor about emotional pain and while that was helpful, they recommended you get some additional counseling.

It can become confusing trying to sort out the origin of issues you are having and where exactly to go for help. For a long time, humans were encouraged to view their bodies, minds, and spirits as separate without much overlap. If medical profession-

als didn't find a medical explanation, people were sometimes told "it's all in your head." As more research emerged, doctors started encouraging people to get mental health support to supplement medical help. For years, people went to counselors talking about problems believing that their mind and their physical experience were two completely separate things. As more research emerged, counselors began understanding the connection between emotions and how feelings are stored and experienced physically in the body. More therapists are now incorporating physical body exercises



mind, spirit connection in day to day life?

6 Ways to Embrace the Body, Mind, Spirit Connection

Evaluate historical messages. Notice messages you may be carrying from childhood or other times in life that make it hard for you to give credibility to your experiences in your body, mind, or spirit. Were you told that you shouldn't believe in counseling? Was faith modeled for you in harmful ways that create current confusion? Were you encouraged to ignore or skip what your physical body is trying to signal to you?

along with talk therapy with improved results. For many years, some churches discouraged people from trusting mental health support outside the church. Now, many churches encourage church members toward counseling alongside spiritual discipleship.

While it is complicated to sort and determine the next steps in pursuit of healing, what we are all learning is that the body, mind and spirit are deeply connected. You don't have to choose only one pathway of growing and healing. You can choose to address all three areas with a greater chance of feeling more healed and whole. So, what does it look like to embrace the body,

Get support to decide what you believe now. While historical messages can be powerful, you have the option to decide what you want to believe in the here and now. Try doing your own research to develop beliefs about how you want to seek mental or medical support.

Continued on next page





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Hormone Therapy for Stronger Bones



DR. RICHARD CHERN, MD

You're taking care of all of it — work, home, children or grandchildren, spouses, parents, your boss/clients/students/patients. Mother's Day is for the flowers, but every day you show up — lifting groceries, carrying kids, steadying loved ones — you're asking a lot from your bones. This Women's Health Week (May 10-16), let's celebrate all women (the nurturers, the bosses, and everyone in be-

tween) by protecting those quiet workhorses. At The Hormone Restoration Center, we use bi-identical pellets as our method of hormone therapy — here's how pellets can help keep your bones strong.

Why Pellets — And Why Hormones — Matter

Estrogen slows the breakdown of old bone and supports new bone formation. When estrogen drops around perimenopause and menopause, bone loss can speed up, making fractures more likely over time. Testosterone and progesterone help too, by supporting muscle and balance so you're less likely to fall. Pellet therapy delivers bi-identical hormones under the skin in a slow, steady stream — avoiding daily highs and lows — and gives



consistent support that helps preserve bone.

How Pellet Therapy Helps Bones

By keeping hormone levels steady, pellets can slow or even reverse bone loss for many women, especially when started near the time of menopause. Over time, the benefits of pellet therapy reveal themselves as improved bone density and, importantly, a lower risk of fractures. Pellets often also ease hot flashes and improve sleep and energy — ben-

efits that help with strength and fall prevention.

What The Pellet Process Looks Like

Consultation: We review your health, family fracture history, lifestyle, and order baseline labs.

Placement: A brief in-office procedure places small, sterile pellets under the skin. Minimal downtime and a small dressing afterward.

Steady delivery: Pellets release hormones continuously for about 3–6 months, depending on dose and metabolism. No daily dosing to remember.

Follow-up: We monitor symptoms and labs, adjust dosing as needed.

What To Expect

You won't "feel" bones

strengthening day-to-day, but many patients notice fewer menopausal symptoms, better sleep, and steadier energy within weeks.

Pellets are one tool in a practical plan: individualized HRT when appropriate, adequate calcium and vitamin D, resistance and balance exercise, fall-proofing your home, and regular bone checks.

You carry everyone else — let's help your skeleton keep up. If bone health is on your mind, call The Hormone Restoration Center. We'll review your history, run the right tests, and build a personalized pellet plan so you can keep lifting, hugging, and showing up for the people who matter most. Call (850) 837-1271 to schedule a consultation.

THE BODY

continued from previous page

Try talking to a spiritual mentor about spiritual struggles. Do the work to unblock what might be blocked related to how you grew up.

Notice. Start intentionally noticing the connection between what you think, how you feel, what sensations you are having in your body, and how your faith

experience is shaping you. All of these work best when you are open to noticing how they work together.

Try using body, mind, and spirit together to process life experiences. For example, notice that you are feeling angry and stressed. Notice the physical signs such as tension in your body and exhaustion. Notice the irritable thoughts and feelings. Notice how your anger

and stress are related to your relationship with God and how you are living out your faith.

Try engaging spirit, mind and body to address feeling better. Try talking openly with God and people in your spiritual community about your struggles. Engage spiritual disciplines to support yourself. Ask for help surrendering spiritually. Seek counseling to understand how historical messages, boundaries, and your internal

thoughts might be impacting your stress and anger. Try a stretching class, breathing exercises or other physical activities to engage your body in releasing anger and stress. Each of these can be helpful, however, all of them together work most effectively.

Practice and repeat. Use reminders in your phone and post it notes to notice how mind, spirit, and body are deeply connected and all important parts

of how you were created to be a person. Your brain rewires through repetition. The more you connect all three areas in your daily awareness, the more you will notice naturally how they are each at play every day.

Be kind and curious toward yourself as you ponder and practice the body, mind, spirit connection. Connect with us at Journeybravely.com along your journey for counseling and coaching support.

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- Do you dislike your smile in photographs?
- When you look through magazines, do you envy the models' smiles?
- Do you wish your teeth were whiter?
- Do you think you show too much or too little of your teeth when you smile?
- Would you like to change the way your teeth or gums are shaped?
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Business



What Is Your Business Actually Worth?

BY NATALIE KESSLER

If you've built a business from the ground up — a restaurant, a landscaping company, a retail shop, a service business — you probably have a number in your head. Maybe it's what you think you deserve after years of hard work. Maybe it's what your neighbor got when he sold his shop down the street. The truth

is, business valuation is more science than gut feeling, and understanding how buyers think about value can make a significant difference when the time comes to sell.

It Starts With Earnings, Not Revenue

One of the most common misconceptions among small business owners is that revenue drives value. Buyers don't buy revenue — they buy profit. The number that matters most is called ****Seller's Discretionary Earnings (SDE)****: your net profit plus your own salary, benefits, and any personal expenses you've run through the business. This figure represents the total finan-

cial benefit a new owner-operator would receive in your shoes.

For most Main Street businesses, value is expressed as a multiple of SDE. A business generating \$150,000 in SDE might sell for 2 to 3 times that amount — somewhere between \$300,000 and \$450,000. The multiple depends on a range of factors that buyers weigh carefully.

What Pushes the Multiple Up or Down

Not all businesses earning the same profit are worth the same price. Buyers pay a premium for businesses that feel stable and transferable. Here's what moves the needle:

Things that increase val-



ue: consistent revenue year over year, a loyal and diverse customer base, a strong team that isn't dependent on the owner, documented processes, and a long-term lease in a good location.

Things that decrease value: revenue concentrated in just one or two customers, books that are difficult to verify, heavy owner involvement in day-to-day operations, aging equipment, or declining trends in the financials.

A buyer is essentially asking: "If I write this check, will the business keep running without you?" The more confidently you can answer yes, the more your business is worth.

What Buyers Actually See

Here's something most owners don't realize until they're in the process: buyers will ask for three years of tax returns and financial statements. Not just the current year. They'll look for trends, inconsistencies, and anything that feels uncertain. Clean, consistent financials aren't just good accounting — they're a valuation tool.

The Bottom Line

Valuation isn't a single number — it's a range, shaped by your earnings, your business's stability, and current market conditions. Our office can provide a formal opinion of value at no cost, giving you a realistic picture of where you stand today and what steps might increase that number before you go to market.

Whether you're planning to sell next year or in a decade, knowing what your business is worth is simply good business.

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Beachworx Permanent Office Tenant: Mary Tinsley

Choosing where to open an office is a critical decision for any busy, purpose-driven business owner and active community member. Looking back, Mary Tinsley of Tinsley Wealth Management says choosing to hang her shingle at Beachworx FWB was one of the best decisions she could have made. After two years as part of the Beachworx family, she smiles as she reflects on how the story unfolded.

Brandon and Crystal Hillenburg, along with their daughters, show up each day to cheer on, support and equip every tenant. "We will do whatever we can to help these businesses grow or outgrow the shared workspace," Brandon Hillenburg said. Each permanent office space is designed to meet unique client needs while still allowing tenants to reflect their own business style and personality.

As a newly independent financial advisor, Mary knew she needed to find a special place



to run her business. From concierge greetings for clients to access to conference rooms and state-of-the-art equipment, she found a workplace she is proud to call home.

Mary also serves as the 2026 board president for Impact 100 of Northwest Florida. The nonprofit organization brings together women from across the community to fund transformational \$100,000 grants benefiting charitable organizations in Okaloosa and Walton counties. Those numbers are significant, and the \$500,000 awarded in

Continued on page 37

Executive Air Keeps the Emerald Coast Comfortable with Service Rooted in Community

Along the Emerald Coast, where summer heat and humidity can push air-conditioning systems to their limits, having a dependable HVAC company is more than a convenience — it is a necessity. For homeowners and businesses across Fort Walton Beach and surrounding communities, Executive Air Cooling, Heating & Refrigeration has become a trusted name built on reliability, professionalism and hometown service.

Known for prompt response times and experienced technicians, Executive Air has earned a strong reputation for helping customers stay comfortable year-round. From the intense Gulf Coast summer heat to the occasional winter cold snap, the company understands the unique climate challenges local residents face and works to keep systems operating efficiently in every season.

Executive Air offers a full range of HVAC services for both residential and commercial



customers, including installation, maintenance and repair. Whether a homeowner needs a high-efficiency air-conditioning upgrade or a business requires fast repairs to restore comfort, the company emphasizes quality

workmanship and long-term performance. Their technicians are trained to work with a wide variety of systems and brands, providing customers with confidence and peace of mind.

What truly sets Executive Air

apart, however, is its commitment to customer care. The company prioritizes honest communication, fair pricing and practical solutions rather than unnecessary upselling. Customers appreciate the team's willingness to explain issues in clear, understandable language and help them make informed decisions about their heating and cooling systems.

That customer-first approach has helped Executive Air build lasting relationships throughout the Emerald Coast, earning repeat business and positive word-of-mouth recommendations from families and business owners alike.

Beyond HVAC expertise, Executive Air Cooling, Heating & Refrigeration remains deeply

connected to the local community. The company's long-standing presence in Fort Walton Beach reflects a commitment not only to quality service, but also to supporting the people and businesses that make the area special.

As the Emerald Coast continues to grow, Executive Air remains focused on delivering dependable comfort solutions backed by experience, integrity and local pride.



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- "Hands down the best repair service I've ever received!"

Education News

From academic championships and national literacy honors to award-winning science projects and student art showcases, Okaloosa County schools continue to shine on the state and national stage. Across classrooms, campuses and competitions, students and educators are earning recognition for excellence, creativity and innovation — proving once again that education in Okaloosa County is about far more than test scores.

Brains Bring Home State Title

The Okaloosa County School District Academic Team captured first place in Division II at the prestigious Commissioner's Academic Challenge, earning statewide recognition for academic excellence and teamwork.

The championship team included State Team Members:

Captain: Colt Stevens, Rocky Bayou Christian School (Team Florida)
Co-Captain: Cole Rewis, Fort Walton Beach High School



Jeda Srichareon, Fort Walton Beach High School
Landon Weinberg, Niceville High School
Caden Veach, Destin High School
Asher Newcomer, Choctawhatchee High School
Hailey Nutt, Rocky Bayou Christian School
Rosemary Pace, Home School Coaches:
Lisa Nall, District Coordinator, Academic Team
Dr. Michael Mosley, Co-Coach
Julie Mosley, Co-Coach

Established in 1986, the Commissioner's Academic Challenge is a statewide competition that showcases student achievement across a wide range of disciplines, including language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, fine arts, world languages, physical edu-

cation, health, and technology. Each year, Florida's top academic teams compete in this rigorous event, making OCSD's first-place finish a remarkable accomplishment. level.

Pryor Teacher Earns National Literacy Honor



L to R: Read 180 Account Executive Michelle Smith, Principal Jason McClelland, Mrs. Luann Zant, Director Brooke Barron, and School Board Member Tim Bryant

Pryor Middle School Intensive Reading teacher Luann Zant was recognized nationally with the 2026 National 180 Educator Award for outstanding achievement in literacy instruction and student growth. Zant, who has taught at Pryor for nearly 11 years, was honored for innovative teaching practices and her commitment

to helping students gain confidence as readers. "One of the most rewarding parts of my job is witnessing those 'lightbulb' moments," Zant shared. District leaders praised her dedication to changing students' lives through literacy.

Student Scientists Score Big at State Fair



Okaloosa students earned top honors at the State Science and Engineering Fair in Lakeland, where more than 700 projects competed statewide. Brantley Lane of Okaloosa STEM Academy earned first place and was named a prestigious Ying Scholar Award recipient, while Benjamin Nusimow of Ruckel Middle School won first place in Biomedical & Health Sciences. Overall, 12 Okaloosa students earned 16 awards in categories ranging from engineering and environmental science to robotics and astronomy, highlighting the district's growing reputation for STEM excellence.

Category Awards

These awards were selected by subject area experts and professionals, honoring the top performers in each field:
Aimi Frasca, Northwest Florida Ballet Académie – 3rd place in Environmental Engineering
Arianna Lopez, Northwest Florida Ballet Académie – Recognition in Intelligent Machines, Robotics & Systems Software
Ian Allen, Niceville High School – Recognition in Physics & Astronomy
Anna Claire Belk, STEM Academy – Recognition in Biomedical & Health Sciences
Nolan Kirk, STEM Academy – Suwanee Valley Award and Recognition in Plant Sciences
Moira Reyenga, STEM Academy – 4th Place in Environmental Engineering

Special Awards

Alexis Cole, Niceville High School – Monroe Marine Conservation Award in Earth

and Environmental Sciences
Aviana Sheldon, Ruckel Middle School – Manatee Regional Award in Physics and Astronomy
Calvin Fortner, STEM Academy – Brevard South Award and Recognition in Engineering
Ryan Gregg, STEM Academy – Honorable Mention in Engineering

Young Artists Take Center Stage



More than 2,000 student artworks filled the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Rigdon Center during the 2026 K-12 Student Art Show, presented by the Okaloosa County School District and the Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation. The annual showcase featured work from elementary through high school students across the county and celebrated the creativity of young artists through awards, exhibits and a special reception featuring live jazz music. 2026 Best of Show & Superlative Winners:

Middle School 2D Best of Show – Hannah Leitheiser, Liza Jackson Preparatory School
Middle School 3D Best of Show – Olivia McClain, Lewis School
High School 2D Best of Show – Addie Kelly, Destin High School
High School 3D Best of Show – Sofia Perez, Crestview High School
2D Superlative – Ellie Aldrich, Niceville High School
3D Superlative – Lucia Schrand, Destin High School

L to R: Ms. Kim Moran (Fort Walton Beach High School Art Teacher, Hannah Leitheiser, Olivia McClain, Addie Kelly, Sofia Perez, Ellie Aldrich, Lucia Schrand, and Superintendent Marcus Chambers)

Surprise Gift Honors 31 Years in the Classroom

Mary Esther Elementary second-grade teacher Michelle Harris received an emotional

Continued on next page



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Sean of the South: You Can Tell a Lot About a Person



BY SEAN DIETRICH

My granddaddy said you can tell a lot about a person by the way they treat a dog. Someone who treats a dog badly, is a bad person. A person who treats a dog with regard and deference is a good egg.

Right now, my wife is holding our blind coonhound, Marigold. She holds our rescue adoptee like a baby. Not like a dog.

Marigold's face was struck with a blunt object. Her optic nerve scarred over. She lost her vision. The doctor removed one eye.

"What probably happened," the vet said, "is that someone paid a lot of money for this hunting dog, but Marigold turned out to be gun shy."

Her abuser wasn't happy about shelling out thousands of bucks for a dog who doesn't like noise. So he took his frustration out on the animal. He used a hard object. Perhaps the butt of a rifle.

My wife is softly humming

to Marigold. "I love you," she is quietly singing to the animal.

We've had our dog several years now. Life with a blind dog was tricky at first. Not like having a regular dog at all. When we feed Marigold treats, for example, you have to touch her to let her know you're near. Then, Marigold simply opens her mouth widely, gyrating her head back and forth.

"I don't know where you are," she's saying, "but I'm opening my mouth to make it easier for you."

Marigold's internal schedule is all screwed up, too, because blind dogs can't sense light or

Marigold barks with glee. Because there is nothing half as fun as 1 a.m.

But, we love this animal. Namely, because we don't have kids. As a result, my wife and I have a huge vacuum in our hearts. Which is why we sometimes fall deeply in love with other people's children. And it's embarrassing because they aren't ours, and people look at us funny.

Marigold is like our kid. Because this blind dog needs us for

everything. She can't do anything for herself.

She needs us for simple tasks like finding her food bowl, or walking through new places. We hold her when she has nightmares—which is common for blind animals. We talk to her, from whatever room we are in, just so she knows where we are in the house.

It's been the most rewarding animal relationship I've ever had. And whenever I see Marigold crawl onto my wife's lap,

when I see this woman speak softly to this wounded animal, when I see her stroke Marigold's fur and kiss her broken skull, I feel something profound.

Jamie Dietrich holds the animal like an infant. She kisses the mangled scars where Marigold's eye used to be.

"Oh, I love you so much," whispers my wife. She is a woman who is filled with compassion and goodwill. And she has proven to me that my grandfather was absolutely right



darkness. So they have no idea what time it is. Sometimes Marigold wakes up at 1 a.m. and starts licking my face. And I start cussing and I say, "Please go back to bed." Whereupon

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EDUCATION NEWS

continued from previous page



surprise during a faculty meeting when We Care A/C, Plumbing, and Electric gifted her a brand-new home HVAC system in recognition of her 31 years of service to Okaloosa students. Harris has spent nearly three decades at Mary Esther Elementary, where she has taught every elementary grade level.

Community leaders, district officials and faculty gathered to celebrate the beloved teacher's lifelong dedication to students and families.

Graduation Season Begins

Graduation ceremonies are just around the corner for Okaloosa County seniors. Choctawhatchee High School will hold commencement Thursday, May 21, at Joe Etheredge Stadium, followed by Fort Walton Beach High School's ceremony Friday, May 22, at Steve Riggs Stadium. Both ceremonies begin at 7:30 p.m. and will also be livestreamed online for family and friends unable to attend in person.

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A Pastor's Ponderings: When You've Been Wronged



BY PASTOR DOUG STAUFFER

Few things cut as deeply as being wronged. Whether it is betrayal, false accusation or simple unfair treatment, it touches something personal—our sense of justice, our pride and our desire to be vindicated. From childhood to adulthood, the cry is the same: “That’s not fair.”

And yet, Scripture calls us to respond in a way that rises above what feels natural.

Proverbs 24:17 *Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not*

thine heart be glad when he stumbleth.

Even when justice seems to come to those who have wronged us, God warns against allowing satisfaction to take root in our hearts. Why? Because bitterness can quietly replace righteousness, and we begin stepping into a place that belongs to God alone. Jesus raised the standard even higher:

Matthew 5:44 *But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;*

This is not easy—but it is Christlike. It is difficult to remain bitter toward someone for whom you are consistently praying. Prayer shifts our focus from the offense to God’s control and care and begins to soften what anger has hardened.

There are also times when doing right leads to suffering. Scripture does not ignore this reality:

1 Peter 4:16 *Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.*

There is a difference between suffering for wrongdoing and suffering for doing the right thing. One brings regret; the other brings reward. When we endure wrong for doing right, we have an opportunity to reflect Christ in a powerful way. Perhaps one of the most challenging truths in Scripture is found here:

1 Corinthians 6:7 *...Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?*

In a world that insists on defending every right, God sometimes calls His people to yield—not out of weakness, but out of strength. There are moments when preserving a Christlike testimony matters more than proving a point, demanding a response marked by grace rather than insistence.



King David modeled this spirit. Though wronged repeatedly by Saul, he refused to retaliate, choosing instead to leave judgment in God’s hands. Even more profoundly, Jesus Himself—reviled, mocked, and crucified—“reviled not again,” but committed all to the Father who judges righteously.

When life presses in, what comes out of us reveals what

is within us. The fruit of the Spirit—love, peace, longsuffering, gentleness—does not grow in comfort alone, but often through adversity.

So, when you are wronged, you face a choice: settle the score yourself, or trust God to do it. One leads to continued strife; the other leads to peace. In the end, we rest in this truth: God sees, God knows and God judges righteously.

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GAMALIEL HARRIS

continued from page 12

material. A Juilliard representative called him.

“Usually we don’t do this,” Harris recalled being told. But because he had submitted before anyone else, demonstrating his seriousness, they gave him a second chance. “It was that other shot that saved this whole thing,” he said. “Because if it was anybody else, they would’ve just looked past it.”

Harris was invited to audition in person. His audition date was March 3, the same date he had auditioned at FAMU years earlier.

He spent seven weeks preparing, practicing five hours a day on top of his coursework and gigs. The audition itself lasted an entire day: two rounds of performance before a panel of eight or nine judges, a music theory assessment and a sight-reading exercise written by Marsalis himself that stretched four pages long. “This was the most difficult piece of sight reading I’ve ever had in my entire life,” Harris said. He didn’t nail it, but he didn’t stop playing either. When he finished, the judges clapped.

Harris also submitted a creative project, an original composition called “When I Sleep”



Harris, center, poses with fellow musicians during his time at Northwest Florida State College, where he landed his first professional gigs and won a Pensacola student jazz competition at age 18.

PHOTO COURTESY OF GAMALIEL HARRIS

that featured him singing and playing over a New Orleans groove, recorded at FAMU. He wanted to show the faculty that even without a music degree, he could write.

Juilliard selected one trombonist for its master’s program this year. Harris was competing against an applicant who had already completed his bachelor’s at Juilliard.

March 31 in the Library

Harris was told decisions would come out April 1. On March 31, he was sitting in the FSU library checking his email when a message appeared: Juilliard application status update. “My heart just sank,” he said. “I read the letter. I could feel a little heartbeat come back, but I was still speechless. I was frozen

in time.”

The first person he called was his father, who was home with Harris’ sister. His dad put them on a joint call with his mother, who was driving. Harris could hear them going crazy on the other end. He spent the rest of the day calling mentors, teachers and family.

‘He Gave Me That Opportunity’

One of those calls went to Brad Parks, Harris’ former band director at Choctaw and the man Harris credits with giving him his first real chance. Harris told the story of an experience during his freshman year, when he was overlooked for a solo during a rehearsal with another instructor. When Parks later heard him play on a

piece called “Brooklyn,” he took notice. “He’s looking around, like, who’s this?” Harris said. “I just played the heck out of that song.”

Parks went on to help Harris navigate the demands of playing varsity football while staying in the band program, and he helped arrange the 2021 profile that led to the Trombone Shorty connection. “You can’t always count on teachers to give you the opportunity like that,” Harris said. “Because he took that chance on me, he’s always had a special place in my heart.”

When Parks answered the phone, Harris said, “He was just so proud of me and how it was amazing to see me grow into this person that I am now,” Harris said.

What Comes Next

Harris, now 22, will head to New York this fall to begin his two-year master’s program at Juilliard. He said he wants to build a performing career, tour and eventually become a recording and sponsored artist. Down the road, he hopes to return to Northwest Florida as a college-level professor and teach, thanks to his time helping at Grow Your Gift Conservatory of Music in Fort Walton Beach. “I feel like it all starts when I get up there in New York, because I have no idea what’s going to happen up there,” he said. “The sky’s the limit.”

Five years ago, Harris closed his first interview with a piece of advice: if you’re set on achieving a goal, don’t let anybody change your mind. Asked whether that philosophy still holds up, he didn’t hesitate. “When I told people I was looking at Juilliard, some of them tried to plant doubt,” he said. “Telling me New York is tough, telling me about other people who didn’t get in. Even friends. I just tuned all of that out.”

“If you keep your mind set on it, you can’t let anybody tell you differently. Just be comfortable in that unknown. If you just work knowing that your work won’t be in vain, then it makes it a little easier. It gives you a little more assurance and that courage to keep going.”

BEACHWORX

continued from page 32

2025 will go a long way toward supporting local nonprofits and the people they serve.

As part of the Beachworx FWB community, Mary was also able to host a fantastic after-hours event for the board of directors, helping kick off the year in the spacious, well-appointed workspace and kitchen area.

Making a difference in the lives of others is Tinsley’s passion and purpose. Through her leadership with Impact 100, she now has the opportunity to multiply that impact alongside other like-minded women and organizations. Having a safe, supportive and encouraging environment allows those goals and dreams to thrive.

If you are looking for a place to grow your business, whether through a pop-in desk or a permanent office, Beachworx could be just the place. Stop in and see for yourself at 105 Lewis St. in Fort Walton Beach.



Local, professional photographer specializing in families, weddings, and events. My passion lies in creating lasting memories through photographs, and I cherish the opportunity to be part of such meaningful moments!



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Arts & Music

Don't Miss Bayou Bliss!

The Arts and Design Society of Fort Walton Beach (ADSO) invites you to experience the Bayou Bliss Show—a celebration of the hidden beauty of the Emerald Coast.

Opening Reception

Friday, May 22 | 6–8 PM

Join ADSO for a vibrant evening of art, community, and creativity! This free, public reception is a wonderful opportunity to meet local artists and experience the unique perspec-

tives that bring our coastal landscapes to life.

Can't make the reception? The exhibit will be on display throughout the show dates—stop by during gallery hours to enjoy this inspiring collection at your convenience.

Exhibit Dates

May 19 – June 19, 2026

Gallery Hours: Tuesday–Friday, 12–4 PM | Saturday, 1–4 PM

Don't miss this beautiful showcase of local talent and coastal inspiration!

ADSO is located at 17 First Street SE, Fort Walton Beach, 32548.

Learn more: <https://artsdesignsociety.org>.



GULF COAST JAM

WHO ARE YOU MOST EXCITED TO SEE?

4 DAYS. 24 ARTISTS. 1 BEACH.
GET YOUR TICKETS AT www.GULFCOASTJAM.com

Sunday
POST MALONE
MUSCADINE BLOODLINE | 49 WINCHESTER
ELIZABETH NICHOLS | THEM DIRTY ROSES | SKEEZ

Saturday
RILEY GREEN
KOE WETZEL | OLE GO
JOSH ROSS | ASHLAND CRAFT | HANNAH MCFARLAND

Friday
CHRIS STAPLETON
MARCUS KING | JACKSON DEAN
BRENT COBB | COLE GOODWIN | HUESTON

Thursday
KEITH URBAN
TREATY OAK REVIVAL | WYATT FLORES
COOPER ALAN | WALKER MONTGOMERY | GANNON FREMIN

COMING TO BEAUTIFUL PANAMA CITY BEACH, FL
MAY 28 TO MAY 31, 2026

Gulf Coast Jam

May 28–31 | Frank Brown Park, PCB

One of the country's most popular beach music festivals returns May 28–31 as Gulf Coast Jam brings four days of live country music to Frank Brown Park in Panama City Beach. Headliners Post Malone, Chris Stapleton, Keith Urban and Riley Green lead a lineup of more than 20 artists performing throughout the high-energy Country On The Coast™ weekend.

Fans can enjoy multiple stages, food vendors, bars and interactive fan experiences while soaking in the coastal festival atmosphere that has

drawn sellout crowds of more than 30,000 in recent years. Pass options currently available include General Admission, Military, College and First Responder tickets, VIP experiences and lodging packages. Several premium viewing areas have already sold out.

Payment plans are available. Follow festival updates online. Visit GulfCoastJam.com.



JAWS IN CONCERT

SATURDAY, MAY 15 | 7:30 PM
DESTIN-FWB CONVENTION CENTER

Just when you thought it was safe to go back in the concert hall ... experience Academy Award-winning director Steven Spielberg's classic 1970s adventure thriller like never before. *Jaws in Concert* will keep you on the edge of your seat as Sinfonia Gulf Coast performs composer John Williams' iconic Academy Award-winning score live, perfectly synced to the film projected in HD on the big screen. Relive the suspense, the terror, and the unforgettable music that forever changed the way we view the ocean.

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DEMETRIUS FULLER
MUSIC & ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

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Museum Series: Emerald Coast Science Center

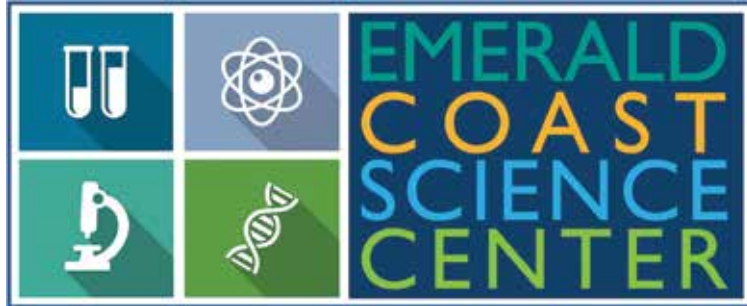
BY BARBARA PALMGREN

This month we visit another of the nine museums in Okaloosa County.

Founded in 1989 by the Junior League of the Emerald Coast, the Emerald Coast Science Center was located at the Landing in Fort Walton. The City of Fort Walton Beach owned the building and rented it to the museum. In 2001, the museum became its own non-profit and the Board of Directors looked at several property options for bringing science to life for residents and visitors. In 2014 the museum purchased the current building from the city. Now, entering the Science Center, located off Memorial Drive close to Highway 98, one encounters scientific exhibits, live animals, exploration opportunities and education that inspires.

Constant vigilance is required for the care of the rescued and exotic animals. Other museums feature timeless artifacts and artistic and historic treasures, but none of them have a living collection of reptiles and animals that daily must be fed, cages cleaned, etc. Over \$62,000 is spent annually for their support.

The museum is open Wednesday through Saturday



from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Admission for adults and children ages 3+ is \$15.00, Military and First Responders and residents in Okaloosa, Walton, and Santa Rosa get a 10% discount with a valid ID.

As you enter the museum the main room is filled with exciting science exhibits, many of which are hands-on. Bones, Legos, and robotics exhibits offer opportunities for children to create and understand science. My favorite is the hurricane machine where one can undergo winds gusts at a hurricane level 1 sustained wind speed. No danger of being lifted to the Land of Oz as this device keeps the participant inside the machine for a short but windy experience.

Outside adventures continue with boating exhibits and outside critters as well as a mural painted about the Florida Trail.

Imagine walking along the trail as a hiker, learning about plants and animals you might encounter.

Impact 100 awarded the museum twice. Once to fund the SciPad Room where a series of activities using wands let children play games and solve puzzles. More recently an Impact grant helped build the new planetarium. The museum can now truly “reach for the stars” and all the wonders the science of astronomy offers.

Diane Fraser, Executive Director, has served over eleven years at the museum, focusing on funding for day-to-day operations. With a Masters Degree in Forensic Science, Diane moved from the science lab to a business model with its challenges and opportunities to share science with the community. I met Diane nine years ago when



I was Chairman of the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida and developing a local museum coalition that would support and promote each other. We are now an official museum coalition known as “Explore Okaloosa.” We meet quarterly and discuss our events and possible funding opportunities. Diane is the president of the museum coalition and her leadership is ap-

preciated by all nine museums. I asked Diane about choosing her favorite animal friend. After careful thought, she chose Lucy, a Hog Island Boa Constrictor. Yes, snakes are her favorites! Of course, a picture is worth a thousand words so enjoy these two best friends smiling as they greet a group of excited school children on a tour of the museum.

Local Coupons

<p>FUBAR LIQUORS</p> <p>\$5 OFF PURCHASE OF \$25 OR MORE <small>(NOT VALID WITH ANY OTHER PROMOTIONS)</small></p> <p>Offer expires 6/30/26 Offer good at all 10 Locations</p>	<p>TAILFINS TIKIS</p> <p>Tiki Boat Tours FREE Child Ticket <small>*age 12 and under, limit one per group</small></p> <p> BOOK NOW</p> <p>Offer expires 6/30/26 172 Harbor Boulevard, Destin 850-650-1200</p>	<p>MAGIC + COMEDY</p> <p>1/2 PRICE TICKETS <small>for students ages 5-22</small></p> <p>Bart Rockett Magic & Comedy Show <small>Booking Code FWB3</small></p> <p>Offer expires 6/30/26 MagicDestin.com</p>	<p>ROOFPRO</p> <p>\$500 OFF FULL ROOF REPLACEMENT</p> <p>Offer expires 6/30/26 850-332-3330 Roofproroofting.com</p>
<p>BLUEWATER PLASTIC SURGERY</p> <p>\$100 OFF LASER PACKAGES <small>INCLUDES LASER HAIR REMOVAL, PHOTOFACIALS, AND PIGMENTATION TREATMENTS (EXCLUDES ULTRACLEAR). PLUS ENJOY A COMPLIMENTARY CONSULTATION WITH MICHELLE, NP.</small></p> <p>Offer expires 6/30/26 Niceville • Santa Rosa Beach • 850-530-6064 www.bluewaterplasticsurgery.com</p>	<p>BLUEWATER PLASTIC SURGERY</p> <p>20% OFF ANY FACIAL <small>PLUS A FREE SKIN CONSULTATION WITH OUR AESTHETICIAN, MAYA. NEW PATIENTS ONLY.</small></p> <p>Offer expires 6/30/26 Niceville • Santa Rosa Beach • 850-530-6064 www.bluewaterplasticsurgery.com</p>	<p>FUBAR PIZZA BAR</p> <p>BOGO: BUY ONE ENTRÉE, GET ONE OF EQUAL OR LESSER VALUE FREE <small>(DINE IN ONLY)</small></p> <p>Offer expires 6/30/26 114 Amberjack Drive • Fort Walton Beach 850-226-7084 www.fubarfwb.com</p>	<p>CULLIGAN WATER</p> <p>\$300 OFF WHEN YOU MENTION THIS AD/COUPON</p> <p>Offer expires 6/30/26 850-664-7771</p>
<p>TORTOISE CLINIC</p> <p>\$30 OFF NEW PATIENT OFFER <small>Present this coupon and receive \$30 off any service at the Tortoise Clinic. One coupon per person.</small></p> <p>Offer expires 6/30/26 2441 U.S. Hwy 98, Santa Rosa Beach TortoiseClinic.com 850.267.5611</p>	<p>BEACHSIDE SLIDING GLASS DOOR MAINTENANCE, LLC</p> <p>\$25 OFF SLIDING DOOR TRACK REPAIR WITH ROLLER REPLACEMENT FREE ESTIMATES</p> <p>Offer expires 6/30/26 BeachsideSlide.com 850-98-SLIDE (850-987-5433)</p>	<p>FUBAR LIQUORS</p> <p>\$5 OFF PURCHASE OF \$25 OR MORE <small>(NOT VALID WITH ANY OTHER PROMOTIONS)</small></p> <p>Offer expires 6/30/26 Offer good at all 10 Locations</p>	<p>DESTIN PRIVATE TIKI</p> <p>20% OFF Crab Island Express Ride</p> <p></p> <p>Offer expires 6/30/26 850-424-1119 www.DestinTiki.com</p>



Sunday
BRUNCH
10AM-3PM

AYCE
ALL YOU CAN EAT
SHRIMP
4PM-CLOSE TUESDAY

Trivia
Night!
6:30-8:30 THURSDAY

KIDS EAT
FREE
4PM-6PM
TUESDAY-FRIDAY

KARAOKE
5PM TUESDAY

PRIME RIB
THURSDAYS
STARTING 4PM

CRAWFISH
BOIL
12PM SATURDAY