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FWB Life

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ANNIVERSARY

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CrossCountry3: Helping Veterans Rediscover Purpose Through Service

“The transformative effects of building resiliency are life changing” — Bruce Duty

In our Fort Walton Beach community, military service is woven into the fabric of everyday life. From active-duty personnel at Eglin Air Force Base and Hurlburt Field to the thousands of veterans who call the Emerald Coast home, many have dedicated their lives to serving others. Yet, when military service ends, some find themselves searching for a renewed sense of purpose, identity and hope.

That need inspired the creation of CrossCountry3, a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping veterans rediscover purpose by empowering them to serve others in the fight against human trafficking.

At its heart, CrossCountry3 exists because many veterans possess unique skills, leadership abilities and a deep desire to continue making a difference. After years of serv-



ing their country, some veterans struggle to find a renewed sense of purpose once military service ends. The organization believes every veteran has tremendous value and untapped potential that can continue to positively impact society.

CrossCountry3 was created to help bridge that gap. Rather than focusing solely on

the challenges veterans face, the organization emphasizes opportunities for transformational growth. By connecting veterans with meaningful missions that combat human trafficking, CrossCountry3 provides a pathway for them to use their strengths, experiences and commitment to service in ways that directly benefit vulnerable individuals

and communities.

A key part of CrossCountry3's impact is the leadership and community engagement of its founder, Bruce Duty. Based locally, the organization serves a region with one of the nation's largest concentrations of military personnel,

CROSSCOUNTRY3
continued on page 2



'Time Is':
Remembering
Bruce Cheves



PHOTO KIRK AUSBURN

By LORI LEATH MILLER

The boats returned to the docks at A.J.'s Seafood & Oyster Bar just as they had thousands of times before. Captains tied off lines. Friends gathered along the harbor. Members of the fishing community exchanged hugs, stories, memories

BRUCE CHEVES
continued on page 24



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

CROSSCOUNTRY3

continued from page 1

veterans and military families, including those connected to Eglin Air Force Base, Hurlburt Field and the 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne).

Through years of relationship-building within the military and veteran community, Duty has helped create a mission that reflects the values of service, sacrifice and freedom deeply rooted throughout the Florida Panhandle. By fostering partnerships and encouraging veterans to engage in the fight against human trafficking, CrossCountry3 offers veterans a pathway to continue making a meaningful difference while helping protect some of society's most vulnerable individuals.

The organization's approach is built upon three core values: **faith, family and freedom.** Whether through workshops, retreats or individual training, CrossCountry3 remains committed to helping veterans build

resilience and discover renewed purpose.

Resilience training teaches veterans the importance of a positive self-identity, living with purpose and embracing a horizon of hope through serving the brokenhearted and vulnerable.

Faith serves as the foundation for hope and personal growth. CrossCountry3 encourages veterans to discover a deeper sense of purpose and meaning, helping them understand their lives and experiences continue to have significant value.

Family represents the importance of relationships, connection and community. Veterans often miss the camaraderie and brotherhood they experienced during military service. CrossCountry3 fosters a supportive environment where veterans can build meaningful connections, strengthen families and encourage one another.

Freedom is both a principle and a mission. Veterans have dedicated portions of their lives protecting freedom, and



CrossCountry3 extends that commitment by fighting human trafficking, one of the greatest assaults on human freedom. By engaging veterans in efforts that help protect and advocate for victims, the organization creates opportunities for continued service that align with the values many veterans have upheld throughout their lives.

Ultimately, CrossCountry3 exists because veterans deserve more than gratitude for their service — they deserve opportunities to continue living lives of significance and impact. By providing identity, meaning and hope through a mission-centered approach, the organization helps veterans write a new chapter of service.

In doing so, CrossCountry3 demonstrates that purpose does not end when military service concludes. Instead, it can evolve into a powerful force for good — helping veterans, families and victims of human trafficking move toward a future defined by hope, freedom and human dignity.

At CrossCountry3, building resilience in the face of adversity and experiencing restoration physically, mentally and spiritually remain at the core of the mission.

For more information, visit crosscountry3.com.

Bruce Duty, Maj. (Ret.), U.S. Army, is the founder and president of CrossCountry3. A retired Army chaplain with more than 22 years of active-duty military service, Duty served with the 3rd Infantry Division, 2nd Infantry Division and 10th Mountain Division, including two combat deployments to Iraq.

Prior to becoming an Army chap-



lain, Duty served nearly nine years as an enlisted service member before earning both a Bachelor of Arts and Master of Divinity degree. He also served as a pastor in Missouri and Florida before answering the call to military chaplaincy during the Iraq War surge in 2007.

Throughout his military career, Duty received numerous honors, including the Bronze Star Medal, Meritorious Service Medal, Meritorious Unit Commendation, Iraqi Campaign Medal and additional military awards and decorations. He is also certified in Master Resilience Training, Pathfinder Resilience Training, ASIST Suicide Intervention Training, Strong Bonds Family Training and several military medical and leadership programs.

Today, Duty uses both his military and civilian experience to help individuals and organizations build resilience, overcome adversity and pursue restoration physically, mentally and spiritually. He remains passionate about faith, family, freedom and helping others discover hope and purpose through service. Duty resides in Niceville.



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FWB Chamber Spotlight



STORYTELLER: Each month, we shine a spotlight on a Fort Walton Beach Chamber member whose story helps tell the story of our community.

From Blue Light Specials to Country Radio

How Bo Reynolds turned a childhood dream into a 42-year broadcasting career

BY DENISE DAVID

There are not many people who have a clear career path before reaching their teen years, but Bo Reynolds is an exception. His first seat behind a microphone came while announcing “blue light specials” at his hometown Kmart. There, he finally caught the attention of a station manager and landed his first real radio interview. What started as, “You’re that kid,” turned into a journey that has taken him through 13 radio markets across the country.

Another thing that sets Bo apart is his 42 years of experience in the radio industry. As a DJ, he has worked in nearly every format imaginable, including rock, yacht rock, Top 40 and now country music. With experience in markets of every size, from major cities to small towns, he has accumulated countless stories along the way. Meeting artists, attending concerts and



community events, and bringing those experiences to listeners has remained a constant throughout his career.

Since his journey began in the 1980s, the radio industry has experienced tremendous change. In the early days, Bo was spinning records by hand. Then came the 1990s and the rise of the internet, which dramatically transformed the industry. Through every shift and technological advancement, Bo has remained agile and adaptable. One thing that has not changed is the impact radio continues to have. Even today, radio remains one of the nation’s most acces-



sible and widely used sources of music and entertainment.

A surprise New Year’s Eve storm on Okaloosa Island in 2015 was how Bo first discovered what he now calls “my paradise.” Here, the morning commute begins before sunrise and people are already on the move. Being the voice that helps listeners start their day, whether heading to work or school, is something he takes seriously. Over the years, Bo has come to

appreciate the local community he serves and the country music that brightens listeners’ mornings on his JVC Broadcasting show. Highway 98.1 has become part of the fabric of life along the Emerald Coast.

Several causes hold special significance for Bo and the JVC team. One of those is the Special Olympics, which he proudly supports. He has also participated in Bikes or Bust for more than eight years. Each year, he spends five long nights atop Uptown Station in Fort Walton Beach collecting new bicycles, helmets, toys and monetary donations for Emerald Coast Toys for Tots.

When he is not on the air or supporting community events,

Bo can often be found on Okaloosa Island with a camera or drone in hand. Photography helps keep him active while allowing him to capture the beauty of the place he calls home. It is a hobby that reflects the same passion and curiosity that drove a seventh-grade boy to keep asking for his first radio opportunity. That determination still exists today. According to Bo, it took just six months at Highway 98.1 for Bo to help the station reach the No. 1 listener position.

For the past 10 years, Bo has served as the morning show host on JVC Broadcasting’s country station. You can find him on Highway 98.1 FM, or follow his work through several YouTube channels. And if you happen to run into him around town, it may be behind a camera lens instead of a microphone. Wherever you meet him, chances are he will greet you with a big smile.

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 Community


The Modern Men's Health Conversation

By DR. KAREN DEVORE

June is Men's Health Month, and it's time to broaden the conversation around what men's health actually means.

For years, it was almost expected that men would only seek care when something became impossible to ignore such as when symptoms disrupted

daily life or concern from others became unavoidable. That mindset is starting to shift.

More men are thinking about longevity, prevention, recovery, and performance. They're paying attention to sleep, nutrition, strength, and how their bodies function before a crisis happens. And that shift matters.

Because many of the issues men experience daily are common, closely tied to overall health, and often more manageable when addressed early.

I hear consistent themes from men across all stages of life and from the people who care about them.

“Why don't I feel like myself anymore?”

This concern rarely comes out directly. More often, it shows up as fatigue, low motivation, irritability, poor recovery, or unexplained weight gain.

While aging plays a role, what I often see is the cumulative effect of chronic stress, poor sleep, under-recovery, inconsistent nutrition, declining muscle mass, and sedentary work.

Modern life doesn't support physiology well. Many men are overstimulated, under-recovered, and running at a high level while quietly depleted. Over time, that catches up but the body is often highly responsive with consistent support.

“Why am I gaining weight around my stomach even though I'm trying?”

Abdominal weight gain isn't just cosmetic; it's often a metabolic signal.

As muscle declines and stress stays elevated, the body becomes more efficient at storing fat, especially around the midsection. Blood sugar becomes less stable, energy drops, recovery worsens, and cravings increase.

Many men feel like they're trying, but habits are often more inconsistent than they realize such as skipping meals, under-eating protein, relying on convenience foods, eating late, or cycling between restriction and overeating.

What works better is returning to fundamentals including prioritizing protein, maintaining muscle, walking regularly, strength training, improving sleep, eating consistently, and supporting recovery.

The goal isn't perfection; it's consistency and long-term metabolic resilience.

“Why am I exhausted but still sleeping poorly?”

Sleep disruption has become so normalized that many underestimate its impact.

Sleep affects metabolism, re-



covery, mood, cognition, inflammation, and hormone regulation. Yet many men operate in a chronically sleep-deprived state relying on caffeine, late-night stimulation, alcohol, and inconsistent schedules while expecting optimal performance.

Sometimes the issue is sleep apnea. Sometimes it's chronic stress or years of running in “go mode” without real recovery. Improving sleep often changes far more than expected.

“Why do I feel more anxious, irritable, or mentally checked out?”

These symptoms are often rooted in physiology as much as psychology.

Brain fog, low motivation, irritability, and anxiety frequently reflect an overloaded system including poor sleep, unstable blood sugar, chronic stress, and inflammation layered onto demanding lives.

Many men are balancing work, family, and responsibility while running on empty. This is where preventive care matters, not because every symptom is serious, but because early understanding can prevent years of unnecessary struggle.

“Why is this starting to matter more now?”

At some point, often in the late 30s, 40s, or 50s, health stops feeling theoretical. Energy changes become more noticeable, recovery slows, and small shifts become harder to ignore.

At the same time, many begin noticing changes in others like aging parents, friends facing health issues, or loved ones dealing with diagnoses that once felt distant.

What was once abstract becomes personal. For many men, this isn't about fear. It's about staying capable, present, and

Continued on page 28

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250 Years of Freedom, One Field of Gratitude

BY "DOC" DOUG STAUFFER

At the Air Force Armament Museum in Valparaiso, the Niceville Exchange Club's Field of Flags honors the service, sacrifice, and enduring spirit that have preserved American liberty since 1776.

As America prepares to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, few communities are more closely connected to the defense of freedom than Okaloosa County.

Home to Eglin Air Force Base, Hurlburt Field, Duke Field, the 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne), and thousands of veterans, active-duty service members, and military families, our community understands better than most that freedom has never been free. It has always been bought with sacrifice, defended with courage, and preserved by generations willing to answer the call of duty.

This summer, the Niceville Exchange Club invites the community to pause, reflect, and celebrate at its Salute to America 250 Field of Flags at the Air Force Armament Museum.

Situated on the edge of Eglin Air Force Base at 100 Museum Drive in Valparaiso, the museum is easily accessible just off State Road 85, approximately seven miles north of downtown Fort Walton Beach. The display will be open from June 30 through July 11 and will feature hundreds of American flags flying proudly against the backdrop of one of the nation's premier military museums. The opening ceremony will be held on July 3, as the community gathers to commemorate the 250th anniversary of our nation's founding and to honor those who have served to preserve the freedoms declared on July 4, 1776.

While Independence Day is often celebrated with fireworks, cookouts, and family gatherings, the Exchange Club hopes this field of flags will remind visitors of the celebration's deeper meaning.

Every American Flag Tells a Story

It tells the story of patriots who pledged their lives, fortunes, and sacred honor to establish a new nation. It tells the story of soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, Guardians, and



Coast Guardsmen who have stood watch in every generation since. It tells the story of first responders, community servants, and ordinary citizens who have helped make America the greatest nation in human history.

The display also builds on a tradition familiar to many residents. For nearly a decade, the Niceville Exchange Club's Field of Valor displayed more than 380 flags at the Mullet Festi-

val grounds, honoring Florida service members who lost their lives in Iraq and Afghanistan after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. Each sponsored flag included information about a fallen hero, creating a powerful visual reminder of the cost of freedom.

In recent years, the event moved to the Air Force Armament Museum, where its visi-

Continued on page 35

7th Special Forces Group Holds Inaugural Memorial Day Ceremony

Soldiers assigned to the 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) gathered at Camp "Bull" Simons on May 21 for the unit's inaugural Memorial Day ceremony, honoring fallen service members and those who gave their lives in defense of the United States.

Held during U.S. Army Special Operations Command's Remembrance Week, the ceremony brought together Soldiers, leaders and family members to reflect on the sacrifices of fallen comrades and honor their enduring legacy. This year's observance focused on the themes "Remembrance: Victory and Valor" and "Special Operations



Forces Contribution to America 250," recognizing the role special operations forces have played in defending the nation for nearly 250 years.

The ceremony included ceremonial honors and remarks emphasizing remembrance, service and commitment to the Special Forces Regiment.

"We honor the fallen not just

with our words today, but with our actions every day," said Col. Leitner, commander of the 7th SFG(A). "Our dedication to readiness is the highest tribute we can pay

to those soldiers who consistently demonstrated their resolve to defend freedom, and who gave their last full measure of devotion."

Soldiers observed moments of reflection throughout the ceremony to honor fallen service members and their sacrifices.

"Memorial Day is a reminder of the sacrifices made

by those who came before us," said Staff Sgt. Jacob Bradford. "Their legacy continues to inspire our commitment to duty, service and the defense of others."

USASOC Remembrance Week honors fallen service members and the resilience of Gold Star families, ensuring their legacy endures. For the 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne), the ceremony reinforced the unit's commitment to remembering the cost of freedom and preserving the legacy of victory, valor and sacrifice.

(Source: U.S. Army article by Sgt. Elijah Florence)

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Community

Events at the Beach

Island Summer Concert Series Returns to Okaloosa Island

Wednesdays Through July 29 | 6:30–9:30 p.m. | The Island Resort at Fort Walton Beach

The Island Resort brings back its popular Island Summer Concert Series with free beachfront live music every Wednesday evening through July 29. The family-friendly series features live bands, food trucks, cocktails and a fireworks finale over the Gulf.

This year's lineup includes Rockstar Fish on June 3, The Aces Band on June 10, Seven Ply on June 17, Boukou Groove on June 24, Shenanigans on July 1, Tribe Zion on July 8, Lex and the Luthors on July 15, Below Alabama on July 22 and Jones & Company on July 29. Enjoy food and drinks from The Frosty Palm, Sizzle & Smash and The Beach Bar while relaxing on the resort's beachside patio.

Concerts are FREE to attend, with food and beverages available for purchase. For more information, visit www.theislandfl.com.

Grand Boulevard Summer Entertainment Series

Thursdays through July 2 | Grand Park at Grand Boulevard, Miramar Beach

Grand Boulevard is turning up the summer fun with two free weekly entertainment series



in Grand Park.

Bands on the BLVD returns Thursdays from 6–8 p.m. with live outdoor performances from local and regional artists. The summer lineup includes Casey Kearney on June 4, Xcetricks on June 11, The Wildlife Specials on June 18, Cadillac Willy on June 25 and "America Salutes | A Musical Celebration of 250 Years of Freedom," presented by Emerald Coast Theatre Company (ECTC), on July 2.

The all-new Big BLVD Bash debuts Tuesdays from May 26 through June 30 from 6–8 p.m. Hosted by ECTC, the open-air DJ dance party series offers family-friendly music and entertainment in Grand Park. Bring lawn chairs or blankets and enjoy dinner from Grand Boulevard restaurants before the festivities. Free.

Emerald Coast Blue Marlin Classic June 17–21 | Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort

The 24th Annual Emerald Coast Blue Marlin Classic returns June 17–21 at Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort. Timed with the Gulf Coast's peak blue marlin season, the tournament attracts anglers from across the region for world-class sport-fishing competition and nightly weigh-ins open to the public at Baytowne Marina..

Peach Festival Brings Sweet Summer Fun to our Area

June 19–21 | Props Brewery at The Windmills, Freeport

Props Brewery at The Windmills will host its Peach Festival June 19–21 at 1799 Great Hammock Bend in Freeport. Festi-

val hours are 3–9 p.m. June 19 and 12–6 p.m. June 20–21. The family-friendly event will feature local vendors, food trucks, a petting zoo and craft brews from the brewery. Vendor applications: forms.gle/fB37dY1QP-WXhud937.

Celebrating America 250: Where to Watch Fireworks Around the Emerald Coast

The 250th anniversary, often referred to as America 250, com-

memorates the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. Throughout the year, local communities have participated in special events, exhibits, educational programs and celebrations recognizing the nation's semiquincentennial. The Fourth of July provides one of the most visible opportunities for residents to join in the historic celebration.

HarborWalk Village July 3 & July 4 | Destin Harbor

Destin city officials have been discussing the possibility of incorporating a drone show into Destin Independence Day festivities. While no official announcement had been made at press time regarding a July 4 drone show, residents can watch for updates from the City of Destin as the holiday approaches.

Visitors can enjoy live entertainment, waterfront dining, harbor views and family-friendly activities before fireworks or drone show illuminates the sky

Continued on page 8

Veteran Leadership Inspires Mission of Service

After serving 22 years in the U.S. Army, including two combat deployments to Iraq with the 3rd Infantry Division and 10th Mountain Division, retired Major Bruce Duty witnessed firsthand the challenges many veterans face when transitioning to civilian life. His distinguished military career earned numerous honors, including the Bronze Star Medal and Meritorious Service Medal.



Inspired by those experiences, Duty founded CrossCountry3, a nonprofit dedicated to helping veterans rediscover purpose, resilience and hope through mentorship, training, retreats and opportunities to serve others. The organization also supports efforts to combat human trafficking and assist vulnerable communities.

Learn more about the mission during America 250: Compassion in Action, a fundraiser benefiting CrossCountry3, set for June 25 from 5–8 p.m. at the Hilton Garden Inn in Miramar Beach. The event will celebrate service, patriotism and the power of making a difference in the lives of others.

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Compassion in Action

★★★★★
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HAPPENINGS AROUND FWB

2026 EVENTS

JUNE

- 10**
Early Learning Coalition Workshop
10 am | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB
- Lego Club**
3 pm | FWB Public Library | FWB
- Music Bingo**
6 pm | Soundside Waterfront Bar | FWB
- 11**
Medicare 101
10:30 am | FWB Public Library | FWB
- Greater FWB Chamber Nothing But Networking**
11:30 am | Harvey F. Eckhoff VFW | FWB
- Concerts in the Village: A1A - Jimmy Buffett Tribute**
6 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation | Destin
- Bands on the Boulevard: Xcetricks**
6 pm | Grand Boulevard at Sandestin | Miramar Beach
- 12**
Open House
5:30 pm | Children in Crisis | FWB
- Moonlit Shores**
6:30 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB
- 13**
Kids Free Self Defense Class
9 am | Emerald Coast Martial Arts | FWB
- R.E.A.D. - Reading Education Assistance Dogs**
10:30 am | FWB Public Library | FWB
- All Ages: Ghostly Summer**
12 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB
- 14**
Sunday Sessions featuring Rescue Me
1 pm | Alaqua Animal Refuge | Freeport
- 15**
Family Fun: Dream Castle + Glitter/Gems
10 am | Painting with a Twist | FWB
- Crafts and Chats**
1 pm | FWB Public Library | FWB
- General Trivia**
6 pm | Soundside Waterfront Bar | FWB
- 15 - 19**
NRA Basics of Pistol Shooting Youth Camp
10 am | Emerald Coast Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso
- 17**
Family Fun: Heroes or Princesses + Glitter/Gems
10 am | Painting with a Twist | FWB
- 18**
Unearth a Story of Bones and Beasts with ECSC
3 pm | FWB Public Library | FWB
- Greater FWB Chamber Business After Hours**
5:30 pm | Emerald Coast Harley-Davidson | FWB
- Bands on the Boulevard: The Wildlife Specials**
6 pm | Grand Boulevard at Sandestin | Miramar Beach
- 19**
Family Fun: Up and Away
10 am | Painting with a Twist | FWB

- 19 Continued**
Mr. Larry's Magic - Can You Dig It?
10:30 am | FWB Public Library | FWB
- 19 - 21**
FWB GEM Show
10 am | Destin-FWB Rigdon Center | FWB
- 20**
Concealed Carry Weapons Class
10 am | Emerald Coast Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso
- Early Learning Coalition Workshop**
10 am | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB
- FWB GEM Show**
10 am | Destin-FWB Rigdon Center | FWB
- 21**
FWB GEM Show
10 am | Destin-FWB Rigdon Center | FWB
- Father's Day Brunch Cruise**
11:30 am | Sunquest Cruises - Solaris Yacht | Miramar Beach
- Sunday Sessions featuring Rescue Me**
1 pm | Alaqua Animal Refuge | Freeport
- Paint Your Pet**
3 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB
- Soundside Market**
4 pm | Soundside Waterfront Bar | FWB
- 22**
All Visual Trivia
6 pm | Soundside Waterfront Bar | FWB
- 23**
Games Club
1 pm | FWB Public Library | FWB
- 24**
Word Waves Writers
5 pm | FWB Public Library | FWB
- Book Lovers Paint Night: Personalized Bookshelf**
6:30 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB
- 25**
Bands on the Boulevard: Cadillac Willy
6 pm | Grand Boulevard at Sandestin | Miramar Beach
- 27**
Early Learning Coalition Workshop
10 am | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB
- Dinosaur Experience**
1:30 pm | FWB Public Library | FWB
- 28**
Sunday Sessions featuring Rescue Me
1 pm | Alaqua Animal Refuge | Freeport
- 29**
Family Fun Kpop Camp: Hunters + Glitter/Gems
10 am | Painting with a Twist | FWB
- General Trivia**
6 pm | Soundside Waterfront Bar | FWB
- 30**
Celestial Tarot
6:30 pm | Painting with a Twist | FWB

JULY

- 02**
Coffee with the City Manager
8 am | FWB Public Library | FWB
- Bands on the Boulevard: America Salutes | A Musical Celebration of 250 Years of Freedom**
6 pm | Grand Boulevard at Sandestin | Miramar Beach
- 04**
4th of July Celebration & Fireworks
5 pm | FWB Landing | FWB
- 4th of July Dinner Cruise**
6 pm | Sunquest Cruises - Solaris Yacht | Miramar Beach
- 05**
Women's Climbing Circle
5 pm | Rock Out Climbing Gym | Destin
- 06**
Family Fun Blacklight: Glowing Axolotls
10 am | Painting with a Twist | FWB
- FWB Library Friends Meeting**
6 pm | FWB Public Library | FWB
- Marvel Trivia**
6 pm | Soundside Waterfront Bar | FWB
- 08**
Lego Club
3 pm | FWB Public Library | FWB
- Music Bingo**
6 pm | Soundside Waterfront Bar | 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
- Free Pirate Show**
5 pm | Mon | The Boardwalk | FWB
- SINGO Music Bingo Nights**
6 pm | Tues | The Island Resort | FWB
- The Big BLVD Bash - DJ Dance Party Series**
6 pm | Tues | Grand Boulevard at Sandestin | Miramar Beach
- Okaloosa Island Fireworks**
9 pm | Wed | The Boardwalk | FWB
- Downtown FWB Coffee Club (Mar - Dec)**
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July 3 | Destin Commons

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July 4 | Fort Walton Beach Landing

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This is Another Great Paradise Promotion

A Revolutionary Year: Heritage Museum Brings America 250 to Life

From the Publisher: As the United States approaches its 250th birthday, communities across the country are beginning to reflect on the people, ideals and sacrifices that shaped the nation. Here in our piece of paradise, that reflection is taking on a uniquely local flavor — one rooted in family, patriotism, storytelling and community connection.

While major cities may host massive fireworks displays and national ceremonies, Northwest Florida's America 250 celebrations are becoming something far more personal: an invitation for neighbors, families and children to rediscover history together.

One of the strongest examples of that effort is unfolding right here in our area at the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida in Valparaiso, where a yearlong "Celebrate America 250!" series is bringing Revolutionary-era history to life through exhibits, lectures, reenactments, educational programs and family-friendly events throughout 2026.

For residents of Fort Walton Beach, the series offers a nearby opportunity to participate in the nation's semiquincentennial celebration even as local America 250 planning efforts continue. This year's Heritage Museum's programming goes far beyond traditional exhibits. Organizers are creating immersive experiences designed to make history feel tangible and relevant to modern audiences—ones like the following:

History Lesson on Historic Date Thrills Audience

BY BARBARA PALMGREN

On April 18, 2026, retired Colonel Karl Eschmann, shared a history lesson surrounding two famous battles influencing the decision to formally revolt from Great Britain and form a new nation. This formal document was the Declaration of Independence.

We know and remember so little of these battles, but hear the words of Longfellow's famous poem echoing in our heads:

"Listen, my children, and you shall hear



Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere,

On the eighteenth of April in Seventy-Five,

Hardly a man is now alive,

Who remembers that famous day and year."

We also remember the description of the signal lanterns in the Old North Church ("one if by land and two if by sea") and the cry of "The British are Coming!" although the poem used more poetic language as this cry alerted farmers to prepare to fight. There was no trained, standing colonial army as this was only the beginning of a war that would lead to our victory and independence as a new nation, the United States of America. According to Karl, after that battle, the patriots considered themselves Americans.

So, imagine you are stationed on active duty in the late 20th century at Hanscom Air Force Base in Massachusetts, a base bordering the towns of Bedford, Lincoln, Concord and Lexington. The towns featured prominently in the first battle of the American Revolution. Would you be as intrigued as Karl was, to learn more about this crucial period in our nation's beginning?

That's what happened for Karl and Charlotte Eschmann. Karl devoted time to research the first two battles of the revolution, the battles of Lexington and Concord. Karl graduated from Texas A&M University in

1971 with a Bachelor's Degree in Aerospace Engineering followed by a Master's Degree from the Air Force Institute of Technology in Logistics Management in 1989. Karl is also a distinguished graduate of the Air Command and Staff College, the Air War College, and the Naval War College.

Karl is considered a subject matter expert on these two battles and shared this knowledge free of charge for the public at the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida on Saturday, April 18, 2026—250

years after the historic event itself. Truly, a history lesson to be celebrated! Karl is also a member of the museum's 250th committee of "Celebrate America 250! American Revolution" that established the new exhibit to honor the U.S. celebration of 250 years.

One of the history panels, "First Battles of the American Revolution," documents these two battles. The entire exhibit of people, places and events leading to the signing of the Declaration of Independence can be viewed this entire year at the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida, 115 Westview Ave, Valparaiso. Museum hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday. Special events for this celebration can be found periodically by visiting heritage-museum.org.

Save the date of July 4 to attend an official community ribbon-cutting at 1 p.m. with a reenactment "shot fired around the world" by Travis Souther in colonial uniform with a flintlock fowling piece, a smoothbore .62 caliber used for self-defense and hunting purposes. No fear, it is not rifled and no live ammunition will be used. Only black powder put down the barrel and all safety standards and regulations for historic black powder weapons will be followed. Travis will then share a presentation titled "Life, Liberty, and Hard Rations."

Karl will be on-site in the exhibit hall to answer questions

about the two famous battles after Travis presents his program. At noon, Tom McKnight will present a special "History Sandwiched In" lecture to explain "Colonial Paper Currency" using his prestigious donation of that currency beautifully mounted on the exhibit wall next to the famous Trumbell painting of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.


What an exciting opportunity during the day on July 4 to hear about unique aspects of a day we celebrate this year as the 250th anniversary of the birth of our nation. And, at night, throughout the county, fire-

works will complete the evening with displays of red, white and blue lighting up the skies.

A special day, a special night for a special year!


Throughout the year, the museum's "History Sandwiched-In" lecture series is exploring pivotal Revolutionary War moments and founding-era stories, including the Battles of Lexington and Concord, the drafting of the Declaration of Independence, George Washington's leadership and the role women played during the Revolution.

Continued on next page



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Charters of Freedom

BY CAROLYN NEWCOMER KETCHEL

Just in time for the celebration of Independence Day, Okaloosa County recently received an unusual donation — a package that includes seven large monument-style stainless steel and bronze plaques, each measuring approximately four feet tall.

These plaques display four of our nation's most important documents:

- The Declaration of Independence
- The United States Constitution
- The Bill of Rights
- The Civil Rights Amendments

I have been privileged to



visit the National Archives in Washington, D.C., and view the original documents. As someone who is deeply patriotic and whose family was part of the founding of this country, I was moved to tears.

When Vance and Mary Jo Patterson viewed the documents in Washington, D.C., they decided to create Foundation Forward Inc. Officially formed in 2013, the nonprofit educational organization promotes civics education and the preservation of

American history. Its goal is to place a set of these plaques in each of Florida's 67 counties.

The plaques are intended to be displayed in locations

where citizens have easy access to view these important documents. The only cost to Okaloosa County is the construction of the monument display itself. Typically, displays have been constructed with concrete bases and brick veneers, although some communities have chosen granite or other upgraded finishes.

Okaloosa County is a patriotic military community, and the Board of County Commissioners jumped at the opportunity to

accept this gift. The most challenging part of the decision was determining where to install the monuments. Some communities have placed their displays at courthouses, museums or other memorial sites.

Okaloosa County had two obvious choices: the Crestview Courthouse and Women's Veterans Park on Okaloosa Island. During a Board of County Commissioners meeting, I remarked that we needed another set. Chairman Trey Goodwin quickly responded that we should pursue a second installation.

The good news is that we now have two sets.

One will be placed at the county seat in Crestview, and the second will be unveiled on Veterans Day, Nov. 11, 2026, at 8:30 a.m. at Women's Veterans Park.

To learn more about this re-

markable gift and its significance as our nation approaches America's 250th anniversary, type the following link into your browser and watch the short video:

<https://youtu.be/z5iuLCsv8kU>

In a community such as ours, very few people need to be reminded that freedom is not free. As we celebrate Independence Day, I especially want to honor the men and women who have served and continue to serve our nation. Because of their sacrifice, we enjoy the privilege of living in the United States of America.

It is an honor to serve as your commissioner.

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

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continued from previous page

Additional programming includes:

- an "America in 1776" student poster contest
- a "Spirit of '76" Book Club
- a theatrical "Night at the Museum" event in October
- and "Yule of Yesteryear: Christmas in the Colonies" during the holiday season

For Fort Walton Beach, the anniversary also offers an opportunity to reflect on local identity and heritage at a time of continued growth and change across Northwest Florida. While the area has evolved significantly over the years, many residents remain deeply connected to the values that have long defined these communities — faith, family, patriotism, military service and a strong sense of community. I believe that is part of what

makes the America 250 milestone resonate so strongly here.

At its heart, America's 250th anniversary is not simply about looking backward. It is about asking what kind of legacy communities hope to leave for the next generation.

More information about the Heritage Museum's America 250 programming can be found at heritage-museum.org and Florida's statewide initiative at america250fl.com.

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Florida Built Different: The Push to Eliminate Property Taxes



BY PAUL A. DOMENECH

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis announced a proposal that could significantly reduce — and eventually eliminate — property taxes on homesteaded homes in Florida.

The proposal comes as Florida's budget has grown from approximately \$32 billion in 2019 to nearly \$60 billion today. According to DeSantis, the increase in revenue gives the state the ability to provide homeowner relief while continuing to fund schools, police departments, fire departments, infrastructure and

other essential services.

The proposal is called “Save Our Homes from Excessive Property Taxes.”

The first phase of the plan would create a proposed \$250,000 homestead exemption. According to projections tied to the proposal, that exemption could eliminate property taxes for roughly 60% of Florida homeowners immediately. The long-term goal would be to phase out property taxes on primary residences completely.

During the announcement, DeSantis addressed concerns about how local governments would continue operating without relying as heavily on residential property taxes. He pointed to Florida's budget growth over the last several years and stated that the state already has the resources to help offset those costs if needed.

Part of the proposal includes creating a state trust fund that would issue grants to local governments to support essential

services such as schools, police departments and emergency response agencies.

Other parts of the proposal include the following:

- A five-year residency requirement before homeowners qualify for the full benefits.
- Limits on local government spending focused on core services.
- Assessment caps for businesses.
- Potentially shifting more of the tax burden toward commercial properties and non-homesteaded or out-of-state-owned properties.

The proposal is designed specifically around homesteaded primary residences, meaning full-time Florida homeowners would receive the largest benefits. Commercial properties, investment properties, vacation homes and out-of-state-owned properties could see higher tax responsibility to help balance funding needs for local governments.

If approved by lawmakers, the proposal would appear on the 2026 Florida ballot and would require 60% voter approval to pass.

According to projections discussed alongside the proposal, if the homestead exemption eventually expands toward \$500,000, up to 92% of Florida homesteaders could potentially pay zero property taxes on their primary residence.

Property taxes currently serve as one of the largest funding sources for local governments throughout Florida. Those funds help pay for public schools, infrastructure projects, emergency services, parks and local operations.

The proposal has already created major conversations across the state surrounding housing affordability, long-term homeownership costs, government spending and how Florida funds



local services moving forward.

Florida has continued seeing strong population growth over the last several years as residents relocate from higher-tax states. At the same time, rising insurance costs, home prices and overall affordability have become major topics across the state.

Keep looking out for updates on this proposal and continue educating yourself on both sides of the discussion so, when it's time to vote, you can make an informed decision based on facts, details and long-term impact.

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 Community

Hurricane Season Is Here: Let's Get Ready Together

BY LORI LEATH MILLER

Living along the Emerald Coast comes with plenty of perks—beautiful beaches, stunning sunsets and a lifestyle many people dream about. But, those of us who call Fort Walton Beach home also know that hurricane season is simply part of life here.

That's why a recent stop in Destin by U.S. Sen. Rick Scott as part of his annual Hurricane Preparedness Tour caught my attention. Joined by U.S. Rep. Jimmy Patronis, local emergency officials and representatives from the American Red Cross, Scott's message was straightforward: Don't wait until a storm is in the Gulf to get prepared.

As someone who lives here, too, I know how easy it is to put hurricane preparations on tomorrow's to-do list. Life gets busy. But every year, we are reminded that it only takes one storm to change everything.

And while no one knows exactly what this season will bring, forecasters are once again predicting an active Atlantic hurricane season. An average Atlantic hurricane season produces 14 named storms, seven hurricanes and three major hurricanes, according to long-term climate averages from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The 2025 season was another active year across the Atlantic Basin and Gulf Coast, continuing a trend of above-average tropical activity and serving as a reminder that coastal communities like ours cannot afford to be complacent.

The 2026 Atlantic hurricane season officially began June 1 and runs through Nov. 30. Early forecasts from NOAA and



the National Hurricane Center project between 13 and 19 named storms this year, with six to 10 expected to become hurricanes and three to five potentially reaching major hurricane status at Category 3 strength or higher.

The good news is that preparedness works. The more time we spend getting ready before a storm forms, the more time we can spend focusing on what matters most when one approaches. "Hurricane Season is almost here, and the time to prepare is today—not tomorrow, not next week," Scott said during the event at Dewey Destin's Seafood Restaurant. "It only takes one storm, and having your disaster plans set and preparedness kits stocked will save lives."

While we all hope for a quiet season, preparedness isn't about fear. It's about peace of mind. And I want that for my family, friends and neighbors. Now is the perfect time to take care of the things you'll be grateful you handled early if a storm threatens our area.

Start with the basics. Do you have enough water, nonperishable food, medications and pet supplies to last at least a week?

Are your flashlights working? Do you know where important documents are stored? Have you checked your batteries, portable chargers and first-aid supplies?

Next, talk with your family. Discuss what evacuation zone you're in, where you would go if an evacuation became necessary, how you would stay in touch and what your plan would be if cell service or power were interrupted. If you have elderly family members, neighbors who may need assistance or loved ones with medical needs, now is the time to make those plans—not when tropical storm watches begin appearing on television.

For those of us living near the water, it's also important to remember that flooding and storm surge often create some of the greatest dangers during hurricanes. Understanding your flood risk and knowing evacuation routes ahead of time can make all the difference.

Another task many people overlook is reviewing insurance coverage. Standard homeowners insurance policies typically do not cover flood damage. A quick conversation with your insurance agent today could save significant headaches later.

Preparation also means look-



ing outside your home. Trim overhanging tree limbs, secure outdoor furniture, inspect generators and check on neighbors who may need a helping hand. One of the things I love most about our community is how people come together before, during and after storms. Taking care of one another is part of what makes Fort Walton Beach special.

Another important step is staying informed. Residents are encouraged to sign up for emergency notifications through Alert Okaloosa and follow trusted sources such as Okaloosa County Emergency Management, the National Hurricane Center and local governments for timely updates, evacuation information and emergency announcements throughout the season.

Scott also shared an important reminder that emergency responders cannot always reach residents once conditions become dangerous. "If you're not prepared, there's nothing law enforcement or the fire department can do for you in the

middle of the storm," he said. "Everyone needs to take this seriously and prepare now."

The good news is that preparedness works. A few hours spent planning today can help protect your family, reduce stress and make recovery easier if a storm comes our way.

Let's all hope for a quiet hurricane season. But, let's also be ready if it's not.

Helpful Resources

2026 Okaloosa County Hurricane Guide

<https://myokaloosa.com/sites/default/files/Users/piouser/HurricaneGuide2026-small-er.pdf>

Alert Okaloosa Emergency Notifications

AlertOkaloosa.com

Okaloosa County Updates

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


Sen. Rick Scott Hurricane Preparedness Resources

www.rickscott.senate.gov/hurricane-preparedness

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What Happens When Steve Doocy Comes to Town?

When the cameras aren't rolling, a conversation about pirates, positive news, grandchildren and why America's stories still start locally

BY LORI LEATH MILLER

The first thing I learned about Steve Doocy is that he can carry on a full interview while jumping out of a vehicle, walking into Publix and searching for bottled water.

The second thing I learned is that despite spending decades on national television, the long-time FOX & Friends co-host is exactly what viewers see every morning: warm, approachable, genuinely curious and surprisingly funny.

I caught up with Doocy shortly after he landed in Northwest Florida as part of FOX & Friends' nationwide America 250 tour, which recently brought the popular morning show to Fudpucker's Beachside Bar & Grill in Destin.

Before discussing television, politics or ratings, we found ourselves talking about weather—specifically, what us locals affectionately call the “Destin Bubble.” After I explained our theory that somehow storms seem to part around Destin while sunshine magically appears, Doocy laughed. “That’s great. I love it,” he said. When I mentioned that some locals credit the Gulf’s unique weather patterns for helping create the phenomenon, he quickly connected it to another local tradition. “Well, that’s why the pirates came, I guess,” he joked.

As it turns out, Doocy had already been reading up on the Billy Bowlegs Pirate Festival and was preparing to be escorted by pirate ship during his visit to Fort Walton Beach. That could only happen on the Emerald Coast.

While the FOX & Friends team travels extensively, Doocy said Destin stood out as a natural stop for the show’s America 250 tour, which highlights communities, businesses and traditions that helped shape the nation. “As we travel America for America 250, we’re trying to highlight all these amazing towns and amazing places,” Doocy said. “The Panhandle was just one of those places we haven’t been to for a while, and it’s one of those places where people have heard about it, they’ve wanted to visit it, and we thought, ‘We should go there.’”

Part of the appeal was the location itself. “Fudpucker’s is legendary,” he said with a laugh.

“You’ve got gators, you’ve got pirates, you’ve got a lot of happy people who need coffee. That’s a pretty good recipe for first thing in the morning.”

It wasn’t his first visit to the area. Long before arriving as a television host, Doocy first visited Destin as a college student making the trek from the University of Kansas in search of a Florida beach vacation. “It was the closest beach in Florida from Kansas,” he said.

Years later, he and his wife returned to explore the area as a potential second-home destination. “We absolutely loved it,” he told me. “We spent a couple of days looking around and thought it was just very, very nice.”

Like many visitors, he was particularly drawn to the communities along Scenic Highway 30A. During that trip, he even spent time exploring the area with former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, who maintained a home in South Walton for many years. Had he purchased property back then, he joked, he probably would have quadrupled his investment by now.

The conversation eventually turned to food — not surprising considering Doocy and his wife, Kathy, have authored several cookbooks together. When asked about memorable local dining experiences, he immediately recalled enjoying smoked fish dip while watching the sunset at Bud & Alley’s in Seaside. “It’s another iconic place,” he said. “Everybody has to go there.”

As our conversation continued, one theme surfaced repeatedly: the power of local stories. Although Doocy works in national media, he believes the stories that resonate most with viewers are often rooted in hometown communities. “When I was a reporter in Washington, D.C., every national story was a local story,” he said.

In today’s media landscape, he argues that local storytelling might be more important than ever. “Every national story starts somewhere locally,” he said. “And thanks to social media and all the different platforms we have now, a local story can become a national story overnight.”

That philosophy is at the heart of what we do. As pub-

lishers of all-positive community newspapers across Northwest Florida, we often hear readers say they appreciate stories that celebrate people, businesses and communities making a difference. It turns out Doocy hears much of the same feedback from FOX & Friends viewers.

“I think people love the segments because they’re positive,” he said. “There’s a lot of news on, and a lot of it is not great news. What I hear when I travel around the country is that people appreciate hearing stories about communities, businesses and people doing good things.”

One recent example came after a Route 66 broadcast. Doocy recalled a woman approaching him after the series aired. “She said, ‘I just wanted to tell you how much I loved that series,’” he remembered. “‘There’s just not enough good news out there.’” He paused and smiled while recounting the moment. “That’s a good report card.”

Those positive stories often create real-world impacts as well. Doocy shared how small businesses featured during FOX & Friends road trips sometimes see visitors arrive from across the country months or even years later. Recalling one Florida restaurant owner in par-

ticular, Doocy said one of the most rewarding aspects of the road trips is seeing the lasting impact on small businesses. “People would come in and say, ‘I saw you on TV,’” he said.

After more than three decades of commuting into New York television studios, Doocy said life on the road still brings a sense of adventure.

“When you’re driving into New York every day for 30 years, you know exactly how it’s going to go,” he said. “Out here, you never know what’s going to happen. You’re going to meet interesting people, hear some great stories and probably have a few surprises along the way.” That unpredictability is part of what keeps the broadcasts fresh.

Doocy said one of the things he looks forward to most when the show travels is the enthusiasm of local viewers. “They’re so excited when we first walk in with the cameras rolling,” he said. “And the excitement really doesn’t diminish.”

That enthusiasm was amplified by FOX & Friends’ nationwide America’s 250 RV giveaway, which had generated enormous local interest. “Ev-



erybody wants to win it,” Doocy said. “I don’t blame them. It’s a really nice vehicle.”

Perhaps nowhere was Doocy’s pride more evident than when discussing his son, Peter Doocy, now one of the most recognizable White House correspondents in America. When I asked how it feels watching his son follow in his footsteps, his voice immediately softened. “We’re really proud of him,” Doocy said. “In the beginning, we never pushed him into this business because it’s a complicated industry. But he’s worked hard, he’s done a great job and it’s exciting watching him succeed.” At the time of our interview, Peter was traveling internationally with the president.

Continued on page 27

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 Community

Rotary Clubs Partner to Expand Rescue Tube Project Across Okaloosa County

By LORI LEATH MILLER

The Rotary Club of Destin has expanded its Public Rescue Tube (PRT) Project across additional Okaloosa County beaches following the program's successful launch at Destin beach accesses in 2025.

The countywide expansion, completed in partnership with the Rotary Club of Fort Walton Beach, resulted in the installation of 17 new rescue tubes at public beach access points on Okaloosa Island.

Through partnerships with local businesses, each \$500 sponsorship covered the cost of the rescue tube, installation and five years of maintenance. Sponsors also received recognition on the rescue tube signage through the inclusion of their company name or logo. Because the effort became a joint project between the Destin and Fort Walton Beach Rotary clubs, a new sign logo incorporating both clubs was created for the expansion. "These res-

cue tubes have already proven to be a valuable safety resource at Destin beach accesses," said Rotary project co-chair Dion Moniz. "We were proud to expand the program into more areas of Okaloosa County and help make our beaches safer for both residents and visitors."

The Rotary Club of Destin and the Rotary Club of Fort Walton Beach also plan to install the remaining nine rescue tubes at James Lee Park in mid-June, bringing the countywide total to 26 new public rescue tubes.

To read the facts behind rescue tubes, please see Destin Life, October 2025, here: <https://destin.lifemediagr.com/rotary-club-of-destin-expands-rescue-tube-project-across-okaloosa-county/>.

The local initiative is part of a larger regional effort led by Rotary Clubs and partners to protect swimmers across Northwest Florida. Rescue tubes have already been installed or approved in the following areas:

Navarre, Perdido Key, Pensacola Beach, Panama City Beach, Bay County, Destin, Freeport, Eglin AFB and Walton County. With Okaloosa County's 26 new installations, the Emerald Coast is quickly becoming one of the most rescue-ready beach regions in the country.

While each PRT station costs roughly \$245 to install (tube, signage, post, hardware), the \$500 sponsorship fee ensures long-term sustainability. Rotary members and volunteers inspect the stations every 4-6 weeks, before peak tourist seasons and after major storms. Annual community "work parties" handle larger repairs, and signage includes a public phone number for reporting damage or missing equipment.

Sponsorships are still available for future expansion. "This is a hands-on way to save lives in our community," Moniz said. "We encourage local businesses and individuals to join us in this important effort." For more in-



formation or to sponsor a Rescue Tube, please contact Dion Moniz with the Rotary Club of Destin at dmoniz@handfirm.com or (850) 814-3598.

Publisher's Note: Rescue tubes have become an increasingly important tool in beach safety efforts across North America. More than 700 Rescue Tube stations are now installed throughout the United States and Canada, and the devices have been credited with more than 400 documented

rescues. According to program data, every known rescue involving a Rescue Tube has been successful, and notably, no rescuer has ever been injured while using one. Designed to provide flotation support in emergency situations, rescue tubes allow bystanders to assist swimmers in distress without placing themselves at the same level of risk as a direct water rescue. Their proven track record has made them a valuable addition to public beach safety programs and drowning prevention initiatives nationwide.

2026 Okaloosa County Mosquito Control Schedule FWB

The Okaloosa County Mosquito Control Program's schedule for broadcast pesticide spraying, aimed at controlling adult mosquito populations, is outlined below. You'll also find weblinks to maps showing the general treatment areas or-

ganized by days of the week. Spraying takes place in the evening and, per State Law, must be justified. Justification is accomplished through mosquito population surveillance data and others State approved methods. The schedule may shift due to

weather conditions or equipment problems. Treatments are set to start at sunset.

Map Link for FWB area:
South Okaloosa County – Fort Walton Beach Area <https://myokaloosa.com/sites/default/>

[files/users/pwuser/SouthCountyFWBArea2.pdf](https://myokaloosa.com/sites/default/files/users/pwuser/SouthCountyFWBArea2.pdf)

Mondays:
Wynnehaven Beach, Florosa and Valparaiso

Tuesdays:
Airport Rd to Destin Bridge, Mary Esther/Fort Walton Beach and Bluewater Bay

Wednesdays:
Streets off of Lewis Turner Blvd to Carmel Dr, Rocky Bayou, Fort Walton Beach from Brooks Bridge to Memorial Pkwy

Thursdays:
Shalimar, Ocean City, Mooney Rd area and Niceville

Protect Yourself From Mosquitoes
Okaloosa County Mosquito Control and the Florida Department of Health encourage residents to remember SWAT to reduce mosquito bites and mosquito-borne illnesses:
• Stay inside during peak mosquito activity, especially at

- dawn and dusk.
- Wear protective clothing such as long sleeves, pants and socks when outdoors.
- Apply insect repellent containing DEET, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus or IR3535.
- Turn over standing water where mosquitoes breed.

Residents should regularly drain water from gutters, buckets, flower pots, birdbaths, pet bowls, pool covers and other containers that collect rainwater.

Okaloosa County Mosquito Control also conducts countywide spraying and larvicide treatments to reduce mosquito populations. Horse owners should keep vaccinations current for mosquito-borne diseases such as Eastern Equine Encephalitis, and dog owners should maintain heartworm prevention.

For mosquito spray schedules, prevention tips and more information, contact Okaloosa County Mosquito Control at 850-651-7394 or visit the county website.





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Where Art, Craftsmanship and Community Come Together: **Every Gift Has a Story at Artesano**

By NIKKI VIA

In the heart of downtown Fort Walton Beach, Artesano has spent the last 16 years deeply rooted in our local creative community. We feature handmade pottery, jewelry, paintings, fine woodworking, handmade knives, glass art and much more. We take great pride in showcasing artisan works created by more than 50 local and regional artists.

Our dedication to curating a beautiful, unique shopping experience has earned Artesano recognition in Southern Living magazine as one of the Best Boutiques in the South. We have also received local honors such as Best Art Gallery and Best Women's Accessories. The true reward, however, has been the community we have built through supporting our vibrant community, including local artists through events, art classes and ongoing donations to local nonprofits. Artesano serves as a vital bridge connecting artists,



customers and the community.

If you are looking for a gift with a story, Artesano has estab-

lished itself as a destination for one-of-a-kind giving. We pride ourselves on offering thought-

ful, handmade items for every occasion. Right now, we are highlighting our collection of Father's Day gifts, including gorgeous hand-turned spalted sycamore bowls fractured with 12,000 volts of electricity and stabilized with crushed turquoise, as well as rugged Damascus steel and black palm camping knives.

Stop in and explore our artists' latest creations in a calm,

relaxing shopping environment. We hope to become your go-to destination for unique gifts, local art and memorable experiences every time you visit Fort Walton Beach.

"A hidden treasure in FWB! You should make this a destination when in the area. Absolutely gorgeous jewelry, art and pottery. One of my favorite spots."

— Lina, visiting from Kansas



The Patriotic Fire Hydrant Painting Project, a City of Fort Walton Beach Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) Project, is almost finished!

Local Artist Andrew Wargo won the City's "Call for Artists," and since that time, Andrew has painted the 25 FWB Fire Hydrants in his bid.

See if you can find all 25 newly painted Patriotic Fire Hydrants, ready in time for the 250th Celebration in July!



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 Lifestyle

Summer Getaways Start Here!

BY LIESEL SCHMIDT

Summer has officially arrived, bringing with it longer days, vacation plans and the irresistible urge to get away for a while. Whether you're headed to the mountains, the beach or somewhere that requires a boarding pass, make sure you have your travel essentials.

From a quick weekend escape to a multi-stop adventure across the country, packing tends to fall near the bottom of the list of things we look forward to. Luckily, a few thoughtfully chosen pieces will set you up for an easy, effortless trip. Consider this your guide to packing smarter and more efficiently, brought to you by the friendly and well-traveled staff at Blue Bay Lifestyle Co.

Foundational Pieces

Every great suitcase starts with a strong foundation: the versatile staples that make getting dressed feel easy, no matter where the day leads. For cooler mornings or breezy evenings, a pair of well-cut Liverpool jeans offers polish as well as comfort, while soft Vuori joggers and an

easy hoodie bring a relaxed, put-together feel to travel days. Paired with a simple tank or classic tee, these pieces carry you effortlessly through shifting temperatures as the day unfolds.

If warmer destinations are in your travel plans, breathable fabrics and easy silhouettes—think tailored Liverpool shorts or a relaxed sundress—keep things light without sacrificing style. Coverups like the cute, lightweight linen dresses from Charlie B transition seamlessly from beachside afternoons to casual dinners, making them an easy addition to any suitcase. Toss in a Free Fly romper (super packable), and you've got an instant ensemble that's easily dressed up or down, depending on your accessories and shoes.

In-Transit Rituals

Most people (even you) have rituals that go along with travel. Whether it's the scent you wear on every plane trip or a playlist you use as miles of road disappear under your tires, favorite stops on the route or in the airport...It's all ritual.



And often, it starts with a scent. We love the freshness of Coast + Salt fragrances—and, best of all, they come in compact, packable, TSA-friendly rollerball vials. Inspired by days spent on the sun-warmed sands of incredible beaches like Rio and Ibiza, each is light, feminine, and perfect for making your signature scent. Pop it into your purse or carry-on for a post-flight refresh.

From there, it's about passing

the time. Don't forget to pack whatever is on your TBR list or a journal. Let your mind wander or escape into another world, far away from security lines and filtered airplane air.

When it's time to unwind, sleep can be a struggle on flights. We recommend silk eye masks and neck pillows, plus a well-curated selection of podcasts, audiobooks, or playlist music. Whatever you do to wind down at home, try to emulate that—even if you are hovering at 30,000 feet.

Beauty & Wellness, Reimagined

See that stockpile of beauty, skincare, and haircare products glutting up your bathroom counter? Repeat after me: This is not packable. Even if you somehow magically make it all fit, do you really need six different serums?

Skip generic toiletries—go intentional. Think multi-use skincare like BB or CC creams with SPF (they hydrate, cover,

and protect); makeup sticks that work for eyes, lips, and cheeks; and 2-in-1 moisturizers that negate the need for a serum and a lotion. Also, try and find alternate forms of cleansers: shampoo, conditioner, and body bars and dissolvable facewash strips. Each is super simple for packing and won't count toward your liquid limit.

The "Always Packed" Items

We know you'd be lost without your techy gadgets and all the accompanying charging cables, so make yourself a checklist of all the screens you need (phone, tablet, laptop, and watch) and don't forget to add the accoutrements. Pack them all into a small, zippered bag (think beaded bags with fun designs or canvas Ellembee Gift zip pouches with snarky sayings that are so you) to keep them organized.

Cash, cards, IDs, and passports are also a must. Some places you go may have credit

Continued on page 39



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• 1285 Eglin Pkwy.
- Crestview**
• 297B James Lee Blvd.

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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.
ajsdestin.com

AJ's on the Bayou

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

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
1450 Miracle Strip Pkwy SE,
FWB
theboardwalkoi.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.

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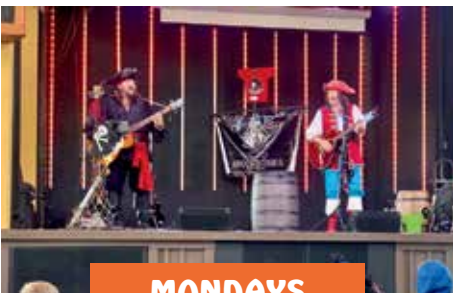
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FREE EVENTS



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TUESDAYS

MOVIES ON THE BEACH

March 10th - August 4th
Grab a beach towel & a spot on the sand for a new featured movie each week at 8pm on the giant inflatable beachfront screen.

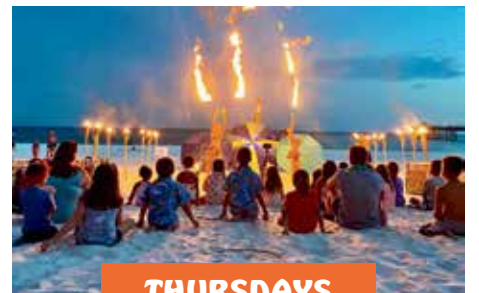


WEDNESDAYS

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



THURSDAYS

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!

ENTERTAINMENT, FOOD & FUN FOR EVERYONE!

theboardwalkoi.com

FOX & Friends Brings National Spotlight to Our Area

By "DOC" DOUG STAUFFER

Before sunrise touched the emerald waters of the Gulf, excitement had already begun in Destin. Long lines wrapped around Fudpucker's Beachside Bar & Grill as people gathered hours before dawn to welcome the nationally televised morning show FOX & Friends and one of its most recognizable personalities, Steve Doocy.

For many in attendance, the event was far more than a television broadcast. It became a celebration of community, patriotism, military pride, and the distinctive spirit that defines the Florida Panhandle.

The May 15 stop in Destin was part of the show's "For All America" road trip, celebrating America's upcoming 250th anniversary. Yet, as cameras rolled live, it quickly became clear that the story was not just about a television show coming to town. It was about the energy of the people who arrived long before daylight, simply to be part of something memorable.

The crowd was jubilant from the start. Some arrived before 3 a.m., and by the time the broadcast began, the atmosphere inside and outside was electric. Red, white, and blue clothing filled the venue, while local families, veterans, community leaders, and supporters of the show

packed every available space.

One of the highlights of the morning was watching Steve Doocy interact with the crowd. While many television personalities keep their distance once the cameras stop rolling, Doocy seemed to thrive on personal connections. Between live segments, he moved through the crowd, taking selfies, shaking hands, telling jokes, and making everyone feel included.

At one point, Doocy laughed about how many people mistakenly called him "Peter," referencing his son, senior White House correspondent and fellow FOX host Peter Doocy. The audience loved it, and his humor immediately made the event feel personal rather than staged.

Perhaps the biggest crowd-pleasing moment came when Doocy decided to crowd surf through the audience. After a single practice, he confidently launched himself into the cheering crowd, where people, including myself and Life Media's own Scott Miller, held him above their heads during the live broadcast. The moment perfectly captured the morning's relaxed, fun-loving atmosphere and instantly became one of the event's most talked-about memories.

The 70th-anniversary celebration of Billy Bowlegs also

added a distinctly local flavor to the broadcast. Pirates from the Krewe of Bowlegs arrived in full force, bringing their pirate ship, cannons, costumes, and enthusiasm. The pirate-themed entrance to Fudpucker's became one of the show's visual centerpieces and showcased the traditions that make the Emerald Coast unique.

For many locals, seeing our area highlighted on national television sparked a sense of pride. Throughout the morning, people received text messages and calls from friends and family across the country, each saying they had seen Destin live on television.

That may have been one of the most meaningful parts of the broadcast. Beyond the entertainment and excitement, the event reminded viewers nationwide that communities like Destin still embody something deeply American — patriotism, hospitality, faith, military appreciation, family values, and genuine friendliness.

The Fort Walton Beach High School Stars Dance Team added excitement and energy to the early-morning broadcast as they lined the entrance to Fudpucker's, waving pom-poms and cheering on the crowd. Despite the pre-dawn start, their enthusiasm helped create the electric



atmosphere that defined the event.

For three hours, Destin became America's front porch, and those present experienced far more than a television show. They experienced a celebration of community that many will not soon forget.



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New Encounters and Old Friends: A Summer to Remember at Gulfarium

By MARY FOMBY

Manatee Cove Brings Guests Face to Face with Florida's Gentle Giants

Discover one of Gulfarium's newest and most inspiring experiences at Manatee Cove, a state of the art habitat dedicated to rescued manatees and the conservation efforts helping protect this endangered species. Home to rescued residents Romeo, Lil Joe, and Inigo, Manatee Cove gives guests the opportunity to observe these incredible animals from multiple viewing levels while learning each of their unique stories.

Romeo, recently earned global recognition from Guinness World Records as the world's oldest living manatee under human care. Estimated to be more than 71 years old, Romeo has become a guest favorite at Gulfarium.

Designed specifically for rescued manatees in need of long term care, the expansive habitat



features underwater viewing areas, natural resting spaces, and specialized care facilities that support the health and wellbeing of its residents while creating unforgettable educational experiences for guests of all ages.

Start Your Day with Dolphins: Rise and Shine Dolphin Package

Make your morning unforgettable with our brand-new Rise and Shine: Dolphin Pack-

age! This exclusive experience gives guests early entry to the park before it opens to the public, a dockside dolphin encounter, and discounted general admission for the rest of the day.

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



Sunset Camp Returns for a Summer of Fun

Looking for a magical summer night activity just for kids? The Gulfarium's Sunset Camp is back and better than ever! This evening camp gives kids ages 6-14 a chance to explore the park after hours, enjoy exclusive animal encounters, and learn about marine life through hands-on fun.

While parents enjoy a night out, campers will dive into adventure with a dolphin dockside

encounter, a reptile meet-and-greet, up-close time with our penguin colony, and dinner by Seal Harbor. They'll also join our education team for beachside learning activities to inspire conservation and curiosity.

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

Open Daily at 9am

850-243-9046
www.gulfarium.com

Located in Destin-Fort Walton Beach



Gulfarium
Marine Adventure Park

Off the Hook

Crab Island Express Helps Locals Rediscover Crab Island

Ask most locals about Crab Island and you'll usually hear one of two responses:

"I used to go all the time."
Or: "It's been years."

Life gets busy. Boats get sold. Weekends fill up. Yet, Crab Island remains one of our area's most iconic destinations.

That's why **Destin Private Tiki's Crab Island Express**

is attracting attention from both locals and visitors looking for a fun way to spend a few hours on the water.

Operating from Heron Harbor Marina, the locally owned company offers private tiki charters as well as shared excursions to Crab Island. Guests board a custom tiki boat, cruise through Destin Harbor and spend time



enjoying the emerald-green waters and laid-back atmosphere



Another popular offering is the company's **Locals Only Unlimited Access Pass**, designed specifically for area residents who want to spend more time enjoying the harbor and Crab Island throughout the season.

Whether introducing out-of-town guests to Crab Island for the first time or returning

after years away, Destin Private Tiki offers a reminder of why so many people fell in love with Destin's waters in the first place.

For visitors, it's a memorable way to experience one of Destin's most popular attractions. For locals, it's a chance to revisit a favorite destination without planning an entire day on the water.

Private charters are also available for birthdays, reunions, bachelorette parties, family outings and other special occasions.

that have made Crab Island famous.

Destin Private Tiki operates from Heron Harbor Marina, 314 Harbor Blvd. in Destin. For information or reservations, call (850) 424-1119, email DestinPrivateTiki@gmail.com or visit DestinPrivateTiki.com. Ask about the **Locals Only Unlimited Access Pass**.

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DESTIN PRIVATE TIKI

New Service - Crab Island Express

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When the sun is out, and the water is pretty, hop on a pink tiki boat for a crab island adventure with family and friends. See 20% discount coupon in back of paper.

2 hr Open Party trip, max of 14 passengers • Mondays / Wednesdays / Thursdays / Sundays
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Offered by Destin Private Tiki
 Located on the Destin Harbor Boardwalk, at Heron Harbor Marina, 314 Harbor Blvd, Destin
Ph: 850-424-1119 | www.DestinTiki.com

Locals: Ask about the Locals Only Unlimited Access Pass
Only \$40 / mo plus taxes and fees x 12 mo.
 You and free guest. Available exclusively to residents of Okaloosa and Walton Counties.
 See details for limitations and restrictions. Call Michelle 850-424-1119.

Emerald Coast Blue Marlin Classic Returns June 17-21

The 24th Annual Emerald Coast Blue Marlin Classic (ECBC) returns to Baytowne Marina at Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort June 17-21, bringing one of the Gulf Coast's premier sportfishing tournaments back during peak blue marlin season. Recognized as one of the Gulf's richest offshore fishing tournaments, the 2026 event is expected to award more than \$2 million in cash prizes and attract elite anglers and teams from across the country.

Tournament competition includes blue marlin, tuna, wahoo and dolphin (mahi-mahi) divisions, along with a modified-release format that awards points for billfish releases including blue marlin, white marlin, sailfish and spearfish.

While the fishing action takes place offshore, spectators can enjoy a lively, family-friendly atmosphere at Baytowne Marina and The Village of Baytowne Wharf. Public activities include nightly weigh-ins, live music, fire-

works, a Vendor Village and opportunities to view some of the Gulf's most impressive sportfishing vessels. Friday night's festivities traditionally conclude with a fireworks display over the marina.

One of the most popular spectator events is the public weigh-in. Fans can watch crews bring in giant blue marlin and other prized gamefish as tournament standings unfold in real time. The event has become a summer tradition for both anglers and visitors along the Emerald Coast.

Know Before You Go

June 17-21, 2026

- Baytowne Marina, Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort
- Public weigh-ins expected Friday and Saturday evenings
- Live music, vendor exhibits and fireworks
- Admission to spectator activities is free

For tournament information and schedules, visit www.FishECBC.com or www.EmeraldCoastBlueMarlinClassic.com.

Ready for Red Snapper Season

Red snapper season is finally here, and 2026 is shaping up to be one of the best years in recent memory for Gulf Coast fishermen.

The federal red snapper season for federally permitted charter boats and head boats opened June 1 and will remain open through Oct. 26, giving anglers a 147-day season — the longest federal for-hire season since 2006. The season is 19 days longer than last year's federal season.

Florida's private recreational red snapper season opened May 22 and runs daily through July 31. Additional fishing opportunities begin Sept. 1, with a combination of daily openings, weekends and holiday periods extending through Jan. 4, 2027. Florida's 2026 season spans 140 days, making it the longest Gulf red snapper season since the state assumed management of the fishery.

For many families in our area, red snapper season is one of the most anticipated times of the year. Destin's charter fleet and private anglers alike

look forward to harvesting one of the Gulf's most popular and best-tasting reef fish.

Current regulations for private recreational anglers include a two-fish daily bag limit and a 16-inch minimum size limit in Gulf waters. Anglers should always verify current regulations before heading offshore, as rules can change.

One area that often creates confusion is the difference between state and federal waters. In the Gulf, Florida state waters extend nine nautical miles offshore. Federal waters begin beyond that boundary. Depending on where you fish and what type of vessel you are fishing from, different seasons and regulations might apply.

Private recreational anglers may harvest red snapper in state waters during Florida's season and in federal waters when federal regulations allow. However, special rules apply when traveling through state waters with fish caught offshore.

State-licensed guide boats that do not carry a federal reef fish permit must follow state



regulations and generally cannot harvest federally managed species such as red snapper in federal waters. A federal permit is required. Federally permitted charter boats and head boats operate under a separate set of federal regulations and may only harvest federally regulated species during federally established seasons.

The differing seasons exist largely because the needs of anglers vary. Charter operators typically prefer long, consecutive seasons that allow visitors to plan

vacations and fishing trips well in advance. Many local, private boat owners, meanwhile, favor weekends and holiday openings that fit their work schedules.

Fortunately, improved data collection and management have helped create longer fishing opportunities for everyone. State officials credit enhanced harvest tracking and Florida's management program for expanding angler access while maintaining conservation goals.

For anglers unsure of current regulations, the Fish Rules app remains one of the easiest tools available. Users can select saltwater or freshwater fishing, enter their location and instantly view current regulations for most species.

Whether you're heading offshore on a private boat or booking a trip with one of Destin's many charter captains, the 2026 season offers plenty of opportunities to enjoy one of the Gulf's signature fishing experiences.

Know Before You Go

Before heading offshore, anglers should verify current

regulations, season dates and size limits, as rules can change throughout the year.

Helpful Resources:

- Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission: www.MyFWC.com
- Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council: www.GulfCouncil.org
- NOAA Fisheries: www.Fisheries.NOAA.gov
- Fish Rules App: Available free for Apple and Android devices

2026 Gulf Red Snapper Regulations

- Private Recreational Season: May 22-July 31, plus additional fall and holiday openings beginning Sept. 1
- Federal Charter/Headboat Season: June 1-Oct. 26
- Daily Bag Limit: Two fish per person
- Minimum Size Limit: 16 inches total length

For the latest red snapper season dates and regulations, search "Red Snapper" at MyFWC.com.



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 Off the Hook
BRUCE CHEVES*continued from page 1*

and some tried-n-true AJ's barbecue. But this time, something was missing.

For the first time in more than four decades, the familiar voice that had become synonymous with the Destin Fishing Rodeo was not there to greet them.

On May 30, family, friends, anglers and longtime Rodeo supporters gathered at AJ's to celebrate the life of Bruce Cheves, the beloved Destin Fishing Rodeo weighmaster who passed away April 30 following a battle with cancer. As the sun began to set over the Destin Harbor and boats set out, the community came together to honor a man whose voice, humor and larger-than-life personality helped define generations of fishing memories.

For many, Bruce wasn't simply the Rodeo's weighmaster. He was the Rodeo.

The evening served not only as a celebration of Bruce's life, but also as a reflection of the deep connections he built throughout our communities. Family members expressed

gratitude to AJ's Seafood & Oyster Bar for its hospitality and support, to the crew of the American Spirit Party Boat for providing a meaningful burial at sea and to Father Mike Hesse for offering heartfelt prayers and words of comfort during the ceremony.

Throughout the evening, friends and family shared stories, laughter and memories that reflected the impact Bruce had on generations of captains, anglers and residents. The gathering drew a large crowd from across the fishing community, a testament to how deeply Bruce was loved and respected.

For those who attended, the evening felt fitting for a man who spent much of his life bringing people together. In many ways, the celebration reflected the same sense of community that Bruce helped create throughout his decades at the Destin Fishing Rodeo.

The Voice of the Destin Fishing Rodeo

Born Feb. 21, 1951, in Monterey, Ca., Bruce grew up surrounded by coastal waters and developed a lifelong love for fishing and the sea.



PHOTO AJ'S

That passion eventually brought him to Northwest Florida in 1977. After arriving in Crestview, he found his way to Kelly Docks and immersed himself in the traditions and culture of Destin's fishing fleet.

Guided by local captains and inspired by the words of Capt. Bruce Marler — "If you pay attention, you will learn something every day." — Bruce devoted himself to learning every aspect of the sport, from weather patterns and moon phases to the instincts and knowledge passed down through generations of Gulf fishermen.

In 1984, Bruce began working alongside legendary Rodeo weighmaster Bill Sherman, learning the art and precision of official fish weigh-ins long before



PHOTO KIRK AUSBURN

digital scales became common. What began as an opportunity to help soon became a calling.

Over the next 42 years, Bruce transformed the role of weighmaster into something uniquely his own. With trademark sayings that became part of local folklore, he entertained crowds while preserving the traditions of one of our area's most cherished events. Generations of anglers can still hear his familiar introduction: "From guppies to Godzilla, caught in a bathtub or a battleship ... bring me a fish and I'll make you famous." And when it came time to officially record a catch, the harbor would fall silent as Bruce delivered the words that became his signature: "Time is!"

Throughout his career, Bruce announced more than 20 world-record catches, including an 8.9-pound pompano, a 39-pound red grouper and a 54-pound kitty mitchell. He also witnessed and announced every Destin Fishing Rodeo record catch since 1984, including a 70.2-pound grouper, a 111.6-pound amberjack and a massive 358.8-pound warsaw grouper.

Yet, statistics and records tell only part of the story. Bruce possessed a rare gift for making every angler feel important, whether they brought in a world-class catch or a small fish caught by an excited child experiencing the Rodeo for the first time.

More Than a Weighmaster

Bruce was a storyteller, historian, mentor and ambassador for Destin's fishing heritage.

He loved sharing tales from local waters and adventures around the world. He encouraged young anglers, celebrated longtime captains and helped preserve the stories that shaped Destin into the "World's Luckiest Fishing Village."

Every Oct. 16 at 5 p.m., Bruce led a memorial ceremony at the Rodeo weigh-in barge be-

hind AJ's to honor captains, anglers and friends who had passed away. The tradition became so meaningful that the City of Destin officially proclaimed Oct. 16 as Bruce Cheves Day in 2010.

His contributions extended far beyond the harbor. Bruce received the University of West Florida Presidential Medal of Honor for his decades of public service, philanthropy and dedication to preserving our area's maritime history.

To countless residents and visitors, however, his greatest contribution was something less tangible. He made people feel welcome. Whether standing behind the scales, swapping stories on the docks or encouraging a young fisherman with a first catch, Bruce embodied the spirit of the fishing community.

While Bruce's voice became familiar to generations of Rodeo participants, those closest to him knew him simply as family and friend. He leaves behind his daughter, Brianna Cheves; sisters Sharon Ralston and Linda Hughes (Bruce Bishop); nephews Franklin Vaughn (Stephanie), Tyler Dunn, Evan Dunn, Zack Dunn (Patricia) and Ian Dunn; niece Cat Grey and great-niece CJ, as well as many dear friends who became family over the years.

A lifetime auxiliary member of Crestview VFW Post 5450, Bruce often said the Destin Fishing Rodeo community was an extension of his family. The hundreds of anglers, captains, volunteers and friends who gathered to celebrate his life would likely have said the same about him.

A Community Reflects

Since news of Bruce's passing spread throughout our communities, tributes have poured in from friends, family members and fellow fishermen whose lives he touched over the decades.

Mary Anne Windes shared a favorite memory from 1998 when her son, Capt. Trey Windes, dressed as Bruce for Halloween. "We shopped for days trying to find the perfect belt and shorts as Trey wouldn't settle for 'close enough,'" Mary Anne recalled. "Bruce was tickled pink. Rest in peace, Bruce! We love you, man!"

Richard Drago found comfort in one of Bruce's most fa-

Continued on next page



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Emerald Coast Open Removes More Than 20,000 Lionfish

The Gulf waters surrounding Destin-Fort Walton Beach are a little healthier this month thanks to more than 100 divers from across the country who participated in the 2026 Emerald Coast Open — now recognized as the world’s largest lionfish tournament.

This year’s tournament removed an impressive 20,752 invasive lionfish from Gulf waters surrounding the region’s extensive artificial reef system.

The annual event paired conservation efforts with family-friendly entertainment during the Lionfish Festival at HarborWalk Village and a popular Restaurant Week featuring creative lionfish-inspired cuisine throughout the area.

“This free family-friendly event has brought divers from across the country to our amazing area since 2019,” said Okaloosa County Board Chairman Trey Goodwin. “What our natural resources staff and partners have been able to do is remarkable. They have created a festive event for the community that also gives back to our marine ecosystem.”

The tournament included



a pre-event competition that yielded 5,734 lionfish, followed by the main two-day tournament earlier this month that added another 15,018 to the final total.

Behind AJ’s Seafood and Oyster Bar at HarborWalk Village, divers lined up to have their catches measured and weighed as festivalgoers watched the action unfold throughout the weekend.

Teams competed for more than \$100,000 in cash and gear prizes in categories including largest lionfish, smallest lionfish and most lionfish harvested.

Top winners included:

- Most Lionfish — DWM Off the Deep End with 2,641 lionfish
- Largest Lionfish — Lady Ray at 461 mm
- Smallest Lionfish — Nole

Mercy Spearfishing at 56 mm

- Restaurant Week Winner — La Paz Restaurante & Cantina for the fourth consecutive year

One lucky attendee, Trenlon Harris, also won the “Guess How Many Lionfish Will Be Caught?” contest by guessing 15,014 — just four fish shy of the official tournament total of 15,018 during the main event.

Lionfish remain one of the Gulf’s most problematic invasive species because they reproduce rapidly and have few natural predators in local waters. Divers armed with spears remain the most effective method for removing them from the ecosystem.

Complete standings and additional information can be found at www.emerald-coastopen.com.

Learn more about Destin-Fort Walton Beach natural resource initiatives at www.destinfwb.com/explore/eco-tourism.

BRUCE CHEVES
continued from previous page

mous phrases. “I can imagine God, upon calling him home, said the same words we heard Bruce announce to the Rodeo crowd to mark the catch official: ‘Time Is,’” he wrote. “We know you were a big enough catch for heaven’s net to scoop you right up, my friend.”

R.J. Shelley remembered meeting Bruce shortly after Hurricane Opal in 1995. “I was a snot-nosed kid running around the docks most of my younger years,” she wrote. “I listened to countless stories and could listen for hours. Him and Ms. Helen Wren always kept a watchful eye on me.”

Longtime friend Jim Roberson reflected on the dedication many never saw behind the scenes. “Many don’t know of the many days over the many years that he stood in the rain, heat, worked around Hurricane Opal and performed with an unbelievable level of dedication to the Rodeo, the city and the sport he loved so much,” Jim wrote. “Too many stories to share here, but I pray his legacy lives on.”

Chester Kroeger recalled working with Bruce on a “Legends of Destin” T-shirt years ago featuring Bruce and the blue marlin he famously caught while traveling alone to Bimini in heavy seas. “Bruce truly is a legend in this community and his legacy will live forever,” Chester wrote.

For his nephew, Franklin Vaughn, the loss is both personal and deeply felt throughout

the fishing community. “He was not only the weighmaster of the Rodeo, but a true icon of Destin,” Franklin wrote. “He is what made the Rodeo what it is today — a place where anyone can be made famous from guppies to Godzilla. It didn’t matter if you brought him a fish; he would weigh it, no questions asked. Destin will not be the same without him.”

Marina Point native Zach Vagias remembered Bruce as part of the fabric of the harbor itself. “He wasn’t just a weighmaster; he was an entertainer,” Zach wrote. “The best decision the Destin Fishing Rodeo ever made was naming Bruce Cheves as their weighmaster. He brought a color and personality it had needed for years.”

“Time Is”

The fishing community will undoubtedly continue gathering each October to remember the captains and anglers who have gone before them. This year, however, one more name will be added to that list.

The man who spent decades honoring others will now be remembered alongside them.

And somewhere in the hearts and memories of those standing along the docks, the familiar words that echoed across Destin Harbor for more than 40 years will remain forever: “Time is.”

Publisher’s Note: Bruce’s family has requested any donations be made to the Destin History & Fishing Museum to help establish a permanent tribute by renaming the Rodeo Room the “Bruce Cheves Rodeo Room.”

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Meet Our Hometown Hero: Mia Manganello

A Proud Olympian Honored by Okaloosa County America 250 Commission

By BARBARA PALMGREN

There is an old adage that “in each life, some rain must fall.” On May 9, after careful planning for a memorable parade in Crestview to honor the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the predicted rains did just that and soaked all of Okaloosa County.

The City of Crestview made

the postponement decision on Wednesday, May 6, and Chairman Graham W. Fountain announced the postponement after the decision was affirmed by a unanimous vote of the present members of the Okaloosa County America 250 Commission on Thursday, May 7. The parade will be rescheduled for the fall.

That being said, Mia Man-

ganello, the parade’s grand marshal, was still going to be celebrated—in a drier location, of course. Mia, who lives in Salt Lake City, Utah, was in town to join the anniversary celebration. At 11 a.m. at The Loft on Main Street in Crestview, Mia was recognized for her Olympic achievements, her loyalty to Crestview and for being an inspiration to area youth.



One photo shows Mia with officers of the America 250 Commission: J.D. Peacock II, Graham W. Fountain and Mitzie Henley. Another photo includes Crestview Mayor J.B. Whitten.

Mia grew up in Crestview. Her parents, Dominic and Karen, owned an Italian restaurant named after her, Mia’s Italian Restaurant. While attending Walker Elementary School, she began inline skating at age 8. When her feet first touched ice, Mia knew what her goal would be. Her loving and motivated parents were ready for the challenge as well. In 2002, following the Salt Lake City Winter Olympics, her father drove her to Utah to attend an ice speed skating camp.

And the rest is — yes, there is more to the story. Even after taking a break from skating and competing internationally as a professional cyclist, her love for the ice drew her back to speed skating. In 2016, at the U.S. National Championships, she won the 3,000-meter race with a personal best and a national title.

In 2018, the City of Crestview held a ceremony at War-

riors Hall and declared “Mia Manganello Day,” presenting her with a key to the city.

Six years after that day at Warriors Hall, Mia, at 36 years old, won the bronze medal in the mass start speed skating event at the Winter Olympics in Milan-Cortina. Mia is the first American to win an Olympic medal in the mass start event. She is a three-time Olympian and a two-time bronze medalist in long-track speed skating.

Team USA, the City of Crestview and Okaloosa County can all be proud of this outstanding athlete. During this anniversary year of the Declaration of Independence, the county and the nation once again extend thanks and honor to Mia Manganello — an inspiration to us all.

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Golf Series: Children In Crisis Tournament at Shalimar Pointe Golf Course Know its "Fore the Kids"



BY BARBARA PALMGREN

For over 19 years, Children in Crisis, a non-profit organization, has hosted a golf tourna-

ment to support a program that provides emergency shelter services for children who have been removed from their homes from the Department of Children and Families due to abuse, neglect, or other emergencies. The dedicated staff offer emergency shelter, housing, educational support and tutoring as well as counseling and emotional support.

This organization is committed to keeping brothers and sisters together, providing foster care for abused, neglected, and



abandoned children. They work to recruit and support foster parents in the four-county area of Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa and Walton counties.

Renamed the Ken Hair Charity Golf Classic for former

CEO, Ken Hair, the shot-gun start for a four-person team, began on Friday, May 22 at 9 a.m. with a scramble format. This means only one person on the team has to hit a perfect drive off the team, or a second shot, a putt, etc. Your partner hits an errant shot into the woods? No problem. You won't use that golf shot for sure!

Brunch, a golf shirt, a silent auction, and an awards party awaited all golfers upon return to the clubhouse. The weather was perfect in late spring with

cloud cover and a slight breeze. So, no excuses for not hitting golf shots straight, or having balls find their way inside that ever so tiny hole on the putting green.

The winners were:

First place: David Schneeberger, Ken Isham, Bobby Massingill, Fred Wantland.

Second place: Bob Holbrook, George Wall, Julius Turner, Bob Sivill

Third place: John Lewis, Hap Meadows, Sam Carelly, John Hargather

Choosing the Right Martial Arts School in FWB

BY SHIHAN DAVE DURMAN, COASTAL MARTIAL ARTS & FITNESS

Type "karate classes near me" into Google and you'll get plenty of results.

Karate schools. Taekwondo schools. Kung Fu schools. Kickboxing gyms. Self-defense programs. Most people searching for karate don't actually know what karate is.

That's not criticism. It's a very common misunderstanding that we've all been taught.

In America, the word "ka-



rate" has gradually become a catch-all phrase for almost every Asian striking martial art. Kung Fu, Taekwondo, Kempo, Muay Thai, and several others often get grouped together under the same label.

Even Hollywood seems com-

fortable with it. The latest two Karate Kid movies featured Kung Fu, and most people never gave it a second thought.

The reality is that most people aren't searching for a style. They're searching for a result.

Parents are looking for confidence, discipline, focus, and resilience for their children. Adults are often looking for fitness, self-defense, stress relief, or simply a new challenge.

Once you step into the martial arts world, you'll discover

dozens of systems and hundreds of variations, each with its own history and training methods. But for beginners, understanding every style isn't nearly as important as finding the right place to train.

A good martial arts school should challenge you while making you feel welcome. It should help you grow physically, mentally, and emotionally.

At Coastal Martial Arts & Fitness in Fort Walton Beach, we teach Kempo, a system influ-

enced by both traditional Karate and Chinese Kung Fu, with a heavy layer of self defense. But regardless of style, the most important thing is finding a school where you feel comfortable, supported, and inspired to improve.

Because when most people search for karate, they're not really looking for karate. They're looking for a better version of themselves.

If articles like this interest you, check out our Blog on coastalmartialarts.com.

DOOCY

continued from page 13

Like any parent, Steve watches closely.

Like any grandparent, he was equally happy discussing his grandchildren. A grandfather for only a few years, he smiled while talking about his young grandchildren and admitted there is nothing quite like the experience.

For all the excitement surrounding national television, RV giveaways and coast-to-coast broadcasts, those moments may have revealed the most about who Steve Doocy really is. By the end of our conversation, I found myself hoping this wouldn't be Steve Doocy's last visit to the Emerald Coast.

What was scheduled to be a short interview stretched into a much longer conversation about family, food, local communities, television and the stories that connect us. In a profession where interviews can sometimes feel

rushed, scripted or transactional, our conversation felt more like catching up with an old friend who happened to have spent the last three decades on national television. It was one of the most enjoyable and genuinely pleasant interviews I've conducted. And I think he had fun, too!

Before ending our conversation, I asked if there was anything he wanted local readers to know. His answer was simple. "Thank you for the wonderful welcome and the great rollout," he said. "We really appreciate it."

By the end of our conversation, Doocy wasn't talking about ratings, television production or celebrity. He was talking about communities. About local businesses. About people gathering together. About stories worth telling. "Every story is local," he said.

And in a place like "our neck of the woods," that's a story worth telling.

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Wellness

Beyond Comfort: The Hidden Health Benefits of Power Lift Recliners

By KELLY STALNAKER

A powered lift chair isn't just a recliner; it's a helping hand when you need it most. By smoothly raising you to a standing position and easing you back down, these chairs significantly reduce physical strain and improve daily safety. For those managing chronic pain, surgical recovery, or mobility challenges, it is a simple home upgrade that makes a big difference.

Falling at home is a top concern for seniors, and surprisingly, the struggle often begins at the edge of a seat. Standard recliners frequently rely on jerky

manual levers that can cause sudden, disorienting movements. Combined with natural muscle weakness or a sudden bout of vertigo, the simple act of sitting or standing can be the riskiest part of the day. Avoid these dangers with equipment that moves as smoothly as you do.

A quality lift chair isn't always just about comfort; it's about staying on your feet and maintaining independence. Golden Technologies lift chairs provide the perfect combination of medical-grade safety and living-room luxury. Available

in dozens of fabrics and colors with a wide array of features, it's easy to forget these are sophisticated medical devices.

In addition to the super cozy exterior, these chairs are equipped with a motorized feature that lifts the chair up and tilts it forward for assistance into a standing position. For anyone seeking next level wellness, several premium upgrades are available. The Twilight feature gives the user the ability to recline into the Trendelenburg position (also known as weightlessness or zero gravity, elevating the feet and legs of the patient



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above the level of the heart) to improve circulation and reduce swelling. Some chairs come equipped with micro-adjustment controls in the seated and reclined positions to improve posture and allow for optimal comfort. Additionally, heat and Swedish air massage are also available.

Golden lift chairs are built with pride by American workers in Old Forge, Pa. They are practical, luxurious, and incredibly comfortable to sleep in (especially for those who need elevation while resting). If you or your loved one has a difficult time sitting down or rising to a standing position, a Golden lift chair could be a game changer allowing for more independence. At Baywind Medical, we

have Golden lift chairs available for sale and rent. A rental chair is perfect for someone just needing a little extra assistance during recovery from a surgery or injury.

Stop by and check out all of the chairs we have in stock, Monday through Friday from 9-5 at 540 E. John Sims Pkwy. in Niceville. We have several chairs available for you to try before you buy. We are also able to order in-stock chairs from Golden and even help you build your own custom, dream recliner. Our knowledgeable team can help ensure you get the right chair, in the right size, with all the features you need to maximize your comfort, health, and safety.

MODERN MEN

continued from page 4

well for the people who depend on them.

“How do I know if something is actually wrong?”

The body often signals change long before disease becomes obvious through shifts in energy, sleep, weight, recovery, and lab markers.

That doesn't mean every symptom is dangerous. But it also doesn't mean it should be ignored. Paying attention to your health is a practical way to protect long-term quality of life.

The Bigger Picture

Men's health isn't about quick fixes or single solutions. It's about staying strong, protecting metabolic and cardiovascular health, maintaining

clarity, preserving muscle and mobility, improving resilience, and building sustainable habits.

It requires a more comprehensive approach looking at how systems interact rather than treating issues in isolation.

Health optimization isn't just for athletes or people in crisis. It's for everyday men who want to feel well, function well, and stay ahead of preventable decline.

You don't need perfection.

You don't need extremes.

And you don't need to wait until something breaks.

It starts with awareness, followed by consistent action and the right support to understand what your body is telling you.

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The Wonder of Labels



BY KAY LEAMAN, HEALTH ARCHITECT, CERTIFIED NUTRITION ADVISOR, HEALTHYDAY HEALTHYLIFE

Ah, the joy of reading a label; it can truly make us wonder what all the names we can't pronounce are and if they're safe. Learning to use the information contained on a label for our benefit can cut our shopping time and improve our health.

Let's start with the label itself. It is broken up into six categories.

- **Servings** - The label is based on a serving, so knowing how many servings are in the container is important. Here is an example of a popular soda drink: Serving size 12 oz., calories 150, sodium 55, carbohydrates 40, protein 0, servings per container 6. If you plan to consume 24 oz., multiply the above numbers by 2.

Tool Chest: Total carbohydrates divided by 4 = total teaspoons of sugar. In this scenario, you would be consuming 20 tsp. of sugar. A single serving of a tasty yogurt has 6.25 tsp. of sugar.

- **Calories** - Important if you are watching how many you eat.

- **Carbohydrates** - There are good and bad carbohydrates.

Tool Chest: Focus on carbs from nature and cut back on the carbs from factories.

- **Fats** - Choose olive or avocado oil and cut back on processed oils. Do your due diligence on olive oil, as many of them are mixed with other oils and currently don't need to note it on the label. Also consider using real butter versus fake butter (better known as Vaseline). Natural will always be a better choice.

- **Protein** - Needs to be a quality protein to count toward daily intake.

- **Nutrients** - **Tool Chest:** The percentage listed is the recommended dietary allowance. This amount is the minimum the body needs to prevent a deficiency disease such as scurvy. It is not the optimal amount the body needs to function at its best.

Now, for some ingredients. Ingredients are listed in order of percentage from most to least. This category is an ongoing struggle due to the lack of strict guidelines. The corn industry has invested millions of dollars in defense of High Fructose Corn Syrup. With their help, this ingredient is now disguised under these syrup names as well: corn, maize, glucose, tapioca, fruit, crystalline, isoglucose, dahlia or invert sugar. And there are others.

Sugar has more than 65 different names, and often there are several sugars in a product. Rather than trying to remember them, use the carbohydrate equation above and then determine if you are willing to consume that amount.

Dyes are next on the list. These are chemical substances used to enhance the appearance of foods. They are normally reds, blues and yellows. They can be found in candy, sports drinks, frosting and baked goods, popsicles, condiments, cereal, sauces, preserved fruits, ice cream, packaged soups, snacks and canned peas. I buy my pickles from the international aisle. They are the only ones I've found that don't have yellow dye added.

BHA (butylated hydroxyanisole) and **BHT** (butylated hydroxytoluene) are antioxidants, synthetic preservatives made from petroleum and used in the food and manufacturing industries. They are found in food and cosmetics. They are prohibited in the EU and listed as known carcinogens. Canada Chemical Management states they are harmful to the environment. They are potential endocrine disruptors. I have found them listed just below the ingredients.

Tool Chest: A great place to start when reading ingredients is to pick a couple of labels of what you need and compare the number of ingredients. The longer list goes back on the shelf. Next, look for dyes and preservatives. After that, look for the hidden names for High Fructose Corn Syrup.

Changing out your "go-to" brands can be daunting, so pick



a couple of things each time you go to the store and take some time to find your new healthier brand. I have found healthier options in the international aisle for some products. Many canned goods have sugar, but there are labels that don't.

Every choice we make can affect our health. This journey can be frustrating at times, but it's important to remember that little changes can make a big difference. Be patient and kind to yourself and enjoy the wonder of labels.

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Reclaiming Your Edge: Precision Performance and Long-Term Health



DR. RICHARD CHERN, MD

You're at the gym, pushing for that final set, but the explosive power just isn't there. Back at the office, you're staring at the same report for the tenth time, your focus drifting as a familiar cloud of irritability settles in. By 2:13 a.m., you're staring at the ceiling, heart racing, replaying the day's endless list while a thin layer of sweat cools on your skin.

It's easy to shrug this off as "just getting older," but this slow erosion of muscle, mood, and mental sharpness is often a biological decline, not an inevitable part of aging. While national health trends often highlight mental health and sleep during specific awareness months, maintaining your peak performance is a year-round commitment to your biology.



Precision Performance, Not a Rollercoaster

At The Hormone Restoration Center, we use bio-identical pellets to optimize hormone levels so your body stops sabotaging your efforts. Unlike messy gels that can rub off on your family or weekly injections that cause emotional "spikes and crashes," pellets provide a

steady, consistent release that mimics your body's natural rhythm.

How Pellet Therapy Restores Your Foundation:

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support GABA—the calming brain chemical—and keep serotonin steady, sharpening your focus and eliminating the irritability that can strain your professional and personal life.

- **Tactical Recovery & Sleep:** When testosterone is low, sleep becomes "fragile". Pellets help your body optimize melatonin and lower nighttime cortisol so you aren't wide awake at 3 a.m. They stabilize your internal thermostat, meaning you wake up recharged rather than restless.

- **Muscle Retention & Physical Power:** Your physical foundation depends on testosterone as the primary driver of protein synthesis. Optimized levels prevent your body from breaking down muscle for energy, helping you regain the strength, lean muscle mass, and recovery speed you need to perform at your best.

- **Long-Term Preventive Health:** Beyond immediate performance, optimization is an investment in your future. Maintaining healthy hormone levels has a protective effect on heart health and supports bone density, reducing the long-term risk of chronic decline.

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Most men feel the "lifting of the veil" within the first two weeks, with reliable peak performance by week six. We don't "set it and forget it"—we check labs after insertion to ensure your levels are dialed in perfectly for your specific goals.

A Practical Plan for Results

We combine hormone therapy with lifestyle guidance so the changes stick. Don't let another day pass feeling like a shadow of yourself. Whether you want to hit a new personal best or simply want the energy to be the man your family relies on, we are here to help.

Reclaim your vitality and get back in the game. Call The Hormone Restoration Center at (850) 837-1271 to schedule your consultation and blood work.

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By KASSIA GARFIELD,
MAXSTRENGTH FITNESS

Why Strength Training May Be One of the Best Treatments for Arthritis

Arthritis is one of the most common causes of pain and disability in adults, especially as people age. Many people assume that painful joints mean they should avoid exercise and “take it easy.” While rest can help during severe flare-ups, research consistently shows that one of the best long-term treatments for arthritis is strength training. Building muscle not only improves movement and function, but also helps reduce inflammation throughout the body.

Inflammation is a major driver of arthritis pain. In conditions like osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis, the joints become irritated, swollen and stiff. This inflammation can slowly dam-

age cartilage, weaken surrounding tissues and make everyday tasks more difficult. Strength training helps combat this process in several important ways.

First, strength training improves the support system around joints. Muscles act like shock absorbers for the body. When muscles are weak, more stress is placed directly on the joints themselves. Stronger muscles around the knees, hips, shoulders and spine help distribute force more evenly and reduce wear and tear. For example, stronger quadriceps muscles reduce pressure on the knees during walking, stair climbing and standing up from a chair. This often leads to less pain and improved mobility for people with arthritis.

Second, strength training directly lowers inflammation inside the body. Muscle tissue is now recognized as an active organ that releases beneficial substances called myokines during exercise. These compounds help

regulate the immune system and reduce chronic inflammation. Regular resistance training has been shown to decrease inflammatory markers such as C-reactive protein and inflammatory cytokines. In simple terms, building muscle changes the body’s chemistry in a positive way.

Strength training also improves body composition, which further reduces inflammation. Excess body fat — especially abdominal fat — produces inflammatory chemicals that can worsen arthritis symptoms. Resistance exercise helps preserve and build lean muscle while reducing fat mass. Even modest improvements in muscle mass and body composition can significantly decrease stress on joints and lower systemic inflammation.

Another major benefit is improved joint stability and balance. Arthritis often causes people to move less because they fear pain or injury. Unfortunately, inactivity leads to muscle loss, stiffness and weaker bones, which can worsen symptoms over time. Strength training reverses this cycle. Stronger muscles improve coordination

and joint control, helping people move more confidently and safely. This can reduce falls, improve independence and make daily life easier.

Importantly, strength training does not need to be extreme to be effective. People with arthritis can benefit from controlled resistance exercises using body weight, resistance bands, machines or light free weights. The key is gradual progression and consistency. Exercises should challenge the muscles without excessively irritating the joints.

Many people are surprised that regular strengthening actually decreases pain rather than increasing it. Much of the stiffness people feel in the morning comes from inflammation increasing overnight without movement. This is why movement often feels good. It helps move fluid around the joints. That stiffness is often caused by increased fluid buildup, which takes up joint space and makes movement more difficult. The stronger a person becomes, the less stress placed on the joints, which can decrease swelling and inflammation over time. Over the course of six to eight weeks

of adding strength training, many people notice a significant reduction in stiffness.

The benefits extend beyond the joints themselves. Strength training improves energy levels, sleep quality, mood and overall health. Chronic inflammation is linked not only to arthritis, but also to heart disease, diabetes and many other chronic conditions. By improving strength, people often improve their entire health profile.

Ultimately, arthritis is not simply a joint problem. It is strongly influenced by inflammation, muscle weakness and reduced physical function. Strength training addresses all of these factors at once. Stronger muscles protect the joints, reduce inflammation, improve movement and help people maintain an active and independent life.

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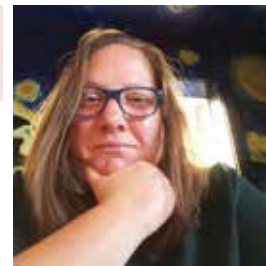


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What Is Chiropractic?

Understanding the Connection Between Your Spine, Nervous System, and Overall Health

By DR. JENNIFER M. TRENDT,
RESET ROOM

More Than Back Pain

When most people think about chiropractic care, they think about back pain, neck pain, or headaches. While chiropractors certainly help people with these common complaints, chiropractic is about much more than pain relief.

At its core, chiropractic is focused on the nervous system—the master control system of the body.

Every thought, movement, sensation, heartbeat, breath, and healing process is coordinated through communication between the brain and the body. This communication occurs through the nervous system, which is protected by the spine. When that communication is clear and efficient, the body has the greatest opportunity to function, adapt, and heal the way it was designed to.

For more than 125 years, chiropractors have recognized that the relationship between the spine and nervous system plays a critical role in overall health and human performance. While our understanding of neuroscience has advanced significantly, that foundational principle re-



mains the same today.

Your Brain Needs Accurate Information

One of the most important jobs of the nervous system is gathering information from

the body and sending it to the brain. The brain then uses that information to coordinate movement, posture, balance, and countless other functions, including recovery.

The joints of the spine con-

tain thousands of specialized nerve receptors that constantly send information to the brain. When spinal joints lose healthy movement due to physical stress, repetitive motions, poor posture, injury, or daily wear and tear, the quality of information reaching the brain may be altered.

Think of it like a GPS receiving incomplete data. The system still works, but it may not work as efficiently as it was designed to.

Research suggests that chiropractic adjustments help restore motion to spinal joints and influence the way the brain receives and processes sensory information from the body. In other words, adjustments help improve communication between the brain and body.

Chiropractic and Nervous System Regulation

Today's world places tremendous demands on the nervous system. Physical stress, emotional stress, long hours sitting, technology use, repetitive movement patterns, and previous injuries can all affect how the body adapts to daily life.

One of the goals of chiropractic care is to help restore healthy movement and reduce unnecessary stress within the body so the nervous system can function and adapt more efficiently. While many people initially seek care for pain or tension, they often notice improvements in sleep quality, en-

ergy, mobility, recovery, focus, and overall well-being.

Why?

Because when the brain receives better information from the body, it is often better equipped to regulate and coordinate the systems it controls.

More Than Pain Relief

Chiropractic is not simply about helping people feel better. It is about helping people function better.

Just as exercise supports the muscular system and proper nutrition supports the body's internal systems, chiropractic care supports the communication system that coordinates them all. Many people choose regular chiropractic care not because they are in pain, but because they value maintaining optimal function and adaptability.

Health is more than the absence of symptoms. It is the ability of the body to adapt to physical, chemical, and emotional stressors while continuing to function at a high level.

When communication between the brain and body improves, every system has the opportunity to perform more efficiently.

That is why chiropractic care remains one of the most powerful and natural ways to support overall health, resilience, and human potential.

For help, contact Dr. Trendt at (850) 822-3375 or visit theresetroomec.com.

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What Business Buyers Are Really Looking For



BY NATALIE KESSLER, LICENSED REAL ESTATE BROKER

You've spent years building your business. But when a buyer walks through the door, they don't see what you see. They see risks and rewards — and one underlying question driving everything they do: Will this still work without the current owner?

That's the lens. Here's what they're actually evaluating.

Clean Books Signal a Clean Business

Before a buyer gets excited about your concept or location, they'll dig into three years of financials. Messy or inconsistent books don't just complicate due diligence — they make buyers

nervous. Nervous buyers lower their offers or walk away. A business with clean, auditable financials will often command a higher multiple than one earning the same amount with books that require explanation. If you've been running personal expenses through the business, start separating them now.

Owner Dependency Is the #1 Dealbreaker

If you took two weeks completely off the grid tomorrow, would the business run? Buyers aren't looking to purchase a 70-hour-a-week job. They're buying a system — employees who know their roles, documented processes, supplier relationships that aren't tied to your personal contacts, and customers loyal to the business rather than to you. The more the business runs on structure rather than heroics, the more it's worth.

Customer Concentration Is a Hidden Risk

If one client represents 30-40% of your revenue, buy-



ers will price that risk into their offer — or walk. No single customer should represent more than 15-20% of total sales. The same logic applies to key suppliers, lease terms, and indispen-

able employees. Single points of failure make buyers nervous.

What Gets Buyers to Act

In our experience, buyers move fast when they feel three

things: that the numbers are real, that the business can survive a transition, and that they're not the only one looking. The deals that drag on for months — or fall apart — usually involve one of those three elements missing.

If you're thinking about selling in the next one to three years, the window to improve these fundamentals is now — not the week you decide to list.

Our office works with business owners at every stage of that process. Whether you want a free opinion of value today or a roadmap for getting ready to sell, we're happy to have that conversation. Call 850.588.1025 or email nataie.kessler@fcbb.com.

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Paws and Pages:

Dog-Harmony Brings Animal-Assisted Children's Literacy Program to FWB

This summer, children across Okaloosa and Walton counties have a new way to build reading confidence — with the help of some four-legged friends. Dog-Harmony's animal-assisted literacy program, Paws and Pages, is now offering monthly reading sessions at four public libraries, including the Fort Walton Beach Library. Additional participating locations include libraries in Freeport, Niceville and Crestview.

The program pairs children with registered therapy dog teams trained through READING Paws, an affiliate of R.E.A.D.® (Reading Education Assistance Dogs®), the nation's first comprehensive animal-assisted literacy program. Sessions are open to children of all reading levels and are designed to create a calm, encouraging environment where young readers can thrive.

"Paws and Pages is about more than just books — it's about the connection between the child and the dog that opens

the door to a lifelong love of reading," said Nancy Brown, founder of Dog-Harmony. "We see children who were once hesitant to read aloud suddenly blossom when they have a dog by their side."

Research shows four key elements help encourage children to read: a sense of self-efficacy, motivation, viewing reading as a social activity and having a calm environment. Therapy dogs naturally help create that atmosphere. Their nonjudgmental presence can reduce stress and anxiety while encouraging children to read aloud with greater confidence and joy.

One Okaloosa County teacher shared that her student's participation in Dog-Harmony's READING Paws program improved both his confidence and reading abilities. "His state testing score went up a level, and I believe reading with a dog helped him achieve this goal!" she said. "The help they gave him in building a good reading foundation and raising his read-

ing confidence will be with him throughout his education!"

Families are invited to register for individual reading time slots directly through the participating libraries. Current schedules include:

Fort Walton Beach Library: Every third Saturday morning

Niceville Public Library: Every first Saturday morning

Freeport Public Library: Every first and third Wednesday afternoon

Crestview Public Library: Every second Saturday morning

Dog-Harmony also plans to introduce Paws and Pages programs at Walton-DeFuniak Library and Coastal Branch Library by the fall.

Founded in 2015 by certified professional dog trainer Nancy Brown, CPDT-KA, Dog-Harmony is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to strengthening the bond between dogs and humans through education and community out-



reach. The organization's mission is simple: helping dogs rescue people. Its programs include therapy dog team support services, youth education and well-being initiatives, Keeping Dogs in Homes and pet bereavement counseling. These efforts are made possible through grants, donations and dedicated volunteers.

READING Paws, also a nonprofit 501(c)(3), is an affiliate of R.E.A.D.® (Reading Education Assistance Dogs®), a program launched in 1999 by Intermountain Therapy Ani-

mals® in Salt Lake City, Utah. Today, READING Paws teams serve schools, libraries and community programs across Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Nevada and Tennessee. All therapy animal-handler teams undergo national criminal background checks and meet strict health, safety and temperament standards.

For more information about Dog-Harmony and participating libraries, visit Dog-Harmony or READING Paws Program Information.



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Sean of the South: Letter from a 4th Grader – Dad



BY SEAN DIETRICH

I get a lot of letters from kids. Such as the letter that came yesterday, via snail mail. It was penned in a childish hand.

“My teacher reads your stories to our class sometimes and I wanted to know, can you write about me? If it’s not too much trouble for you to do?”

“I am in fourth grade. I don’t really have anything cool about me. I have red hair. But you can probably come up with something cool. My dad died this year the same way yours did, so my teacher said you are the same as me. It’s okay if you can’t write back.”

To the little boy who wrote to me: Red is the most prestigious hair color in the world. That is not an opinion.

Fifty years ago, experts estimated that redheads made up approximately 8 percent of the earth’s population. But the percentage of redheads sharply decreases each year.

This year, the percentage is at an all-time low. About 1 percent of the world’s population have red hair. Ours is the rarest hair color in the solar system. So welcome to the club, friend.

Our red hair is caused by a gene called the MC1R gene. Genes are microscopic very scientific things in the human body. They float around in your bloodstream, wearing little lab coats and carrying around tiny clipboards and pocket protectors.

A gene is something your parents carry around with them, all the time. Sort of like auto insurance, only more dependable.

So if both your parents had the MC1R gene, this means that you have a 25 percent chance of being born with red hair.

Congratulations, your parents both had the MC1R gene. You’re a ginger. May God have mercy on your soul.

I got my red hair, personally,

from my dad. My dad had the MC1R gene. He was a redhead. He came from a long line of redheads. Although when he got older, his hair became more auburn.

That’s something they don’t tell you about red hair. The pigment changes throughout your lifetime. In fact, red hair will never go gray. The pigment will only fade over time and appear white, or even blond. My hair has change shades thrice in my lifetime.

Of course, my father didn’t live long enough to find out what his hair would do.

My dad was very special. Everyone liked him. He was a good man who loved baseball, old movies and jokes. He had a prodigious memory when it came to jokes. He had a million of them.

“Yesterday, I went to buy camo hunting pants, I couldn’t find any.”

“When life gives you melons, you might be dyslexic.”

“Adam was a Southern Baptist, because only a Baptist could stand next to a naked woman and be tempted by fruit.”

“What’s the difference between ignorance and apathy? I don’t know and I don’t care.”

My old man would have my little friends rolling on the ground. He was pretty great.

My dad coached our Little



League team. He showed up to every practice with a World-War-II era duffel bag, filled with bats and balls and gloves. Our team was made up of a bunch of underprivileged kids. My father sought these unfortunate boys out.

Daddy would recruit kids from the sticks, boys who came from families without squat. Each year, our team would hold fundraisers so that every underprivileged boy had a nice, brand new uniform. My father gave them all free baseball gloves and free bats for Christmas.

This kind of thing was important to my father because he, too, grew up underprivileged. He knew what it meant to have nothing.

Before every practice, my father would drive his Ford all over town, picking up youngsters from squalid homes that

featured blue tarps on the rooftops.

We boys rode in the bed of his F-100, happy as larks. Afterward, we all ate ice cream from Dairy Queen. Daddy paid for the ice cream. Because that’s the kind of guy my paw was.

I’ll bet your dad was pretty great, too.

So don’t remember your father by the way he died. Don’t let your dad’s life be defined by the word “suicide.” Your father was much more than an ugly word. Your father was a great man.

Today, your father lives with God himself. Just like mine. Your daddy was awesome. He carried some pretty great genes, too. We know this to be true because he helped make you.

250 YEARS

continued from page 5

bility, accessibility, and military significance have allowed even more visitors to experience the tribute.

That Spirit of Gratitude Continues This Year

As America begins its year-long celebration of 250 years of independence, the Field of Flags serves as a powerful reminder that freedom is not merely a historical achievement. It is a living inheritance passed from one generation to the next.

In what many consider the most veteran-friendly state in America and one of the nation’s most military-supportive communities, the sight of hundreds of American flags waving in the Florida breeze will offer more than a patriotic display.

It will stand as a visible expression of remembrance, gratitude, and hope.

Two hundred and fifty years after our Founders signed the Declaration of Independence, the message remains the same: America endures because Americans continue to serve, sacrifice, and believe in the ideals on which this nation was founded.





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Musing

A Pastor's Ponderings: "Give Me This Mountain"



BY PASTOR DOUG STAUFFER

One of the most pervasive lies people come to believe as they grow older is this: "My useful years are behind me." Society constantly glorifies youth, speed, and strength while quietly implying that age means slowing down, stepping aside, and fading into the background. Yet the Bible offers us a very different picture.

At eighty-five years old, Caleb stood before Joshua and declared, "Now therefore give me this mountain" (Joshua 14:12).

Caleb was not asking for comfort. He was not asking for

retirement. He was not asking for the easiest place in the land. Caleb wanted the mountain where the giants still lived and where battles still needed to be fought. That statement reveals a remarkable spirit.

Forty-five years earlier, Caleb had been one of the twelve spies sent into the Promised Land. Ten spies saw giants and convinced the nation of certain defeat. Caleb saw God and proclaimed future victory. Decades passed. An entire generation died in the wilderness because the majority spread defeatism and unbelief. Yet Caleb never lost his faith, his vision, or his desire to serve the Lord. That is one of life's great lessons:

Growing older does not have to mean growing weaker spiritually.

Some people grow bitter, discouraged, and cynical as they age. Others grow older, becoming stronger in faith, wiser, and more determined to finish well. The difference is not physical strength—it is their spiritual per-

spective, nurtured over years of faithfulness.

Caleb understood something many people forget: as long as God gives breath, He still gives purpose. You may retire from a profession or even from a specific position of ministry, but you never retire from serving God.

There is no retirement from: prayer, encouragement, witnessing, loving others, mentoring younger believers, or being a godly example.

Some of the greatest ministries occur in later years. Moses was eighty when God used him to lead Israel out of Egypt. Anna faithfully served God in the temple into her eighties. The Apostle John, in his later years, was still being led by God to pen the scriptures.

Modern culture often worships youth, but the Bible honors faithfulness. Proverbs 16:31 says, "The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness." The "hoary head" refers to those who have aged.



There is something powerful about a believer who has walked with God through burdens, disappointments, heartbreaks, victories, answered prayers, and trials—and who continues to serve faithfully.

Many people today feel discouraged because life did not unfold as they expected. Dreams were delayed. Opportunities were lost. Health may have become fragile. Difficult seasons came unexpectedly. Caleb understood those feelings better than most. He waited forty-five years to receive what God had promised him. Yet he never gave up believing. Delayed circumstances do not mean God's

promises have failed. God had not forgotten Caleb, and God has not forgotten you.

The greatest danger in life is not aging—it is quitting before life ends. The enemy would love nothing more than to convince believers that

their usefulness has reached its end. Yet some of the most influential people in any church are faithful older saints who pray, encourage, offer wisdom, and quietly strengthen others.

Psalm 92:14 declares of the righteous, "They shall still bring forth fruit in old age." What a promise. Do not surrender your mountain. Do not lose your vision. Do not let discouragement silence you.

There are still prayers to pray, people to influence, souls to reach, and mountains to climb. As long as God gives strength, may our hearts continue to cry out like Caleb: "Lord...give me this mountain."

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Education News: From Aerospace to Academic Champions, OCSD Students Reach New Heights

Free Summer Career Camps Available

The Okaloosa Public Schools Foundation is offering free Career and Technical Education summer camps for rising sixth-through ninth-grade students.

Camp offerings include AI Masterminds at Fort Walton Beach High School, NextGen Engineers at Niceville High School, Builder Academy at Meigs Middle School, Justice Leaders at Baker School, Web Explorers at Shoal River Middle School, Creative Coders at Davidson Middle School and two Emergency Medical Responder camps at Crestview High School.

All camps are free and run from 9 a.m. to noon. Transportation is not provided, and registration is first-come, first-served.

Register early due to limited space. For information, camp registration links and program details, visit the district's Career and Technical Education webpage or contact Morena Mannucci at Morena.Mannucci@OkaloosaSchools.com.

Space Florida and OCSD Launch Aerospace Career Initiative

Space Florida and the Okaloosa County School District recently launched the Space Florida Academy Program, highlighted by a Memorandum of Understanding signed by Space Florida President and CEO Rob Long and Superintendent Marcus Chambers during the recent 9th annual Technology Coast Manufacturing & Engineering Network (TeCMEN) Industry Day.

The program helps students earn industry-recognized credentials and develop skills for high-demand careers in aerospace and related fields. In partnership with industry leaders and state agencies, the initiative focuses on career pathways in aviation and aerospace, advanced manufacturing, construction, cybersecurity and IT, logistics and semiconductors.

District leaders said the program will help connect students to high-wage career opportunities while strengthening the future workforce in Okaloosa County.



Superintendent Marcus Chambers and Space Florida President/CEO Rob Long sign the agreement surrounded by Okaloosa County students.

For more information, visit www.spaceflorida.gov/workforce-initiatives.

Academic Team Wins State Championship



The Okaloosa County School District Academic Team captured the 2026 Commissioner's Academic Challenge Division II state championship, defeating top teams from across Florida.

Team members included Captain Colt Stevens and Hailey Nutt of Rocky Bayou Chris-

tian School; Cole Rewis and Jeda Srichareon of Fort Walton Beach High School; Landon Weinberg of Niceville High School; Caden Veach of Destin High School; Asher Newcomer of Choctawhatchee High School; and Rosemary Pace, who is homeschooled. Coaches were Lisa Nall, Dr. Michael Mosley and Julie Mosley.

The statewide competition

tests students in language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, fine arts, world languages, physical education, health and technology.

Project SEARCH Graduates Celebrated



The Okaloosa County School District honored Project SEARCH graduates Hailey Eubank of Niceville High School, Antonio Latimer of Fort Walton Beach High School, Isaiah Parish of Choctawhatchee High School, Jessica Parker of Crestview High School and David

Wahl of Baker School during a May 20 ceremony at the Hilton Garden Inn on Okaloosa Island.

Project SEARCH provides workplace and career training for young adults with disabilities through a partnership with Innisfree Hotels.

Okaloosa UP Graduates Recognized



Okaloosa Technical College celebrated Okaloosa UP graduates Raj Mulwani, Kaitlyn

Continued on next page

Register Now for Kindergarten

Registration is open for the 2026-27 school year in the Okaloosa County School District.

Children who turn 5 on or before Sept. 1, 2026, are eligible for kindergarten. Early registration helps schools plan staffing, classroom assignments

and student resources before the start of the school year.

New students and incoming kindergarteners may register online through the district's FOCUS system at <https://www.okaloosaschools.com/ocsd/page/registration>.

Parents can also learn more

about the district's kindergarten program by viewing the district overview video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=728HaUx5I74>.

Returning students already enrolled in OCSD do not need to register again.



REGISTER NOW!

26/27 Classes & Summer Workshop





REGISTER NOW FOR OUR 26/27 CLASSES!

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- ✓ Pre-School Ballet Classes: Register for Aug.-Dec & Jan.-May
- ✓ Adult Classes: Register for Aug.-May

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 Education

America 250 Through Young Eyes

The Okaloosa County School District announced that two middle school students earned top honors in the Plank Schlitt Middle School United States History Writing Contest, part of the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida's America 250 celebration commemorating the 250th anniversary of the

signing of the Declaration of Independence.

The contest invited students to explore the enduring significance of the Declaration of Independence and reflect on its impact on life in the United States today. It is named in honor of two longtime Okaloosa County U.S. history teachers

who continued supporting the Heritage Museum after retiring from Niceville High School.

Lilly Lopez of Destin Middle School earned first place, while Aisha Ramirez of Pryor Middle School earned second place, demonstrating exceptional writing, historical understanding and creativity. "We are incredi-



(From left) Lilly Lopez of Destin Middle School and Aisha Ramirez of Pryor Middle School are pictured with representatives from the Okaloosa County School District and the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida.

bly proud of Lilly and Aisha for this outstanding achievement," said Superintendent Marcus Chambers. "Their hard work, thoughtful writing, and passion for history reflect the excellence we see in our students across Okaloosa County. These young ladies represented their schools and our district exceptionally well."

Destin Middle School Principal Mandy Lopez shared both professional and personal pride in Lilly's accomplishment. "At DMS, we are proud to develop students who can think critically, write with purpose, and communicate their ideas effectively. Lilly's accomplishment reflects the strong work happening in our classrooms each day and the dedication of our teachers who continue to challenge and support student learning. And while I'm incredibly proud as principal, it is a little more special that I also get to be her mom."

Pryor Middle School Principal Jason McClelland also praised Aisha's achievement. "Aisha's dedication and creativity demonstrate the bright future ahead for our students. We are proud of her for using her voice and talents to honor our nation's history."

The winning essays will be featured in the Heritage Museum's "Celebrate America 250! The Revolution" exhibit on July 4 at 11 a.m., giving the community an opportunity to view the students' work as part of the museum's Independence Day celebration.

The district congratulated Lilly Lopez and Aisha Ramirez and thanked the Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida for providing meaningful opportunities for students to engage with American history.



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EDUCATION NEWS

continued from previous page

McCarthy and Nerea "Rea" Agnew.

The postsecondary program helps adults with intellectual disabilities build career, workplace and life skills through hands-on training and real-world experiences.

Summer Feeding Program Returns

The Okaloosa County School District will participate in the 2026 Summer Food Service Program, providing free breakfasts and lunches to all children under age 18 through

the Summer Break Spot initiative.

Meals must be eaten on-site at participating schools in accordance with updated USDA and Florida Department of Agriculture guidelines. Grab-and-go meal options are no longer available.

Meals will not be served on weekends or July 4. Site locations, schedules and availability may change throughout the summer.

For participating schools, meal service times and program updates, visit <https://www.okaloosaschools.com/article/2943106>.

Around Town

Four Appointed to NWFSC Board

Gov. Ron DeSantis appointed Todd Jackson and Jonathan Ochs and reappointed Megan Harrison and Dr. Jon Ward to the Northwest Florida State College District Board of Trustees.

Jackson serves as CEO of HCA Florida Twin Cities Hospital. Ochs is Coastal Region President of Gulf Coast Bank & Trust Company. Harrison is president and CEO of the Walton Area Chamber of Commerce and owner of TailGrayton Beach Outfitters. Ward is a dermatologist with Dermatology Specialists of Florida.

The appointments are subject to confirmation by the Florida Senate.

Billy Bowlegs Parade Winners Announced

The Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce announced the winners of the 70th annual Billy Bowlegs Torchlight Parade held May 18 in Fort Walton Beach, marking a milestone year for one of the Emerald Coast's longest-running community traditions.

Winners included The 5 Ride, Inc. (Truck/Car/Van), 850 So-



Life Media's Denise David served as judge liaison for the 70th annual Billy Bowlegs Torchlight Parade, helping celebrate one of the Emerald Coast's most cherished traditions.

cial Babes (Float), Krewe of Dominique Youx (Krewe) and Panhandle United Roller Derby (Walkers).

Life Media's Denise David served as judge liaison during the parade at the Fort Walton Beach Landing, helping coordinate the judging process and celebrate the

creativity and community spirit on display throughout the evening. "One of my favorite parts was seeing generations of families lining the streets together and cheering on the participants," Denise said. "You could really feel the pride, tradition and sense of community that make Billy Bowlegs so special. It was such an honor to help celebrate a tradition that has brought people together for generations."

Record-Breaking Weekend Benefits Local Children

There was no shortage of excitement, generosity or celebration during the 21st Annual Destin Charity Wine Auction presented by the Jumonville Family.

From spirited bidding wars and flowing wines to heartfelt conversations about the causes being supported, the sold-out event brought together more than 600 guests in April for a weekend dedicated to helping children throughout Northwest Florida. By the end of the weekend, that generosity translated into a record-breaking \$4 million raised for local children in need — surpassing last year's total by \$550,000 and setting a new fund-

raising record in Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation history.

Throughout the weekend, guests enjoyed patron dinners, exclusive wines, unique experiences and spirited live-auction bidding, all while supporting children and families across the region. One of the evening's biggest moments came when a nine-night guided trip to Italy sold for an unprecedented \$400,000 — the highest single lot sale in the event's history. Two additional auction packages topped \$100,000, marking the first time three individual lots have reached six figures in the same year.

While the auction's headline numbers were impressive, the true beneficiaries are the thousands of children served by DCWAF's 16 partner charities: Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast, Boys & Girls Clubs of the Emerald Coast, Caring & Sharing of South Walton, Children's Home Society of Florida, Children in Crisis, Children's Volunteer Health Network, Ellison McCraney Ingram Foundation, Emerald Coast Autism Center, Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center, Habitat for Humanity of Walton County, Mental

Health Association of Okaloosa and Walton Counties, Northwest Florida Guardian ad Litem, Opportunity Inc., Point Washington Medical Clinic, Westonwood Ranch and Youth Village.

For more information, visit DCWAF.org.

SUMMER GETAWAY

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card fees or simply not take card payments at all, so always have a stash of cash on hand. Also, be aware of people around you as your travel—both in-transit and when you arrive at your destination. Nothing ruins a vacay like a picked pocket. Birdie personal alarms are a great secret weapon (and completely TSA approved), and FlipBelts pull extra duty as not only a running belt, but also for keeping cards, cash, and IDs hidden.

Keep it simple, keep it intentional, and leave a little room for whatever the journey brings your way. Find your packing-list essentials at Blue Bay Lifestyle Co., 27 Racetrack Road NE, Fort Walton Beach; 850-374-8236; bluebaylifestyle.com.

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 7/31/26 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 7/31/26 172 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 7/31/26 MagicDestin.com</p>	<p>ROOFPRO</p> <p>\$500 OFF FULL ROOF REPLACEMENT</p> <p>Offer expires 7/31/26 850-332-3330 Roofproroofing.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 7/31/26 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 7/31/26 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 7/31/26 114 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 7/31/26 850-664-7771</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 7/31/26 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 7/31/26 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 7/31/26 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 7/31/26 850-424-1119 www.DestinTiki.com</p>



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