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FWB Life

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The Art of Healing

Ten years after its founding, MKAF's groundbreaking Warrior Arts program continues to create connection, calm and community through creativity.

BY ZANDRA WOLFGRAH

A pen touches paper. A line becomes a curve, the curve becomes a pattern, and before long, a small square of paper has become something intricate, personal and entirely unexpected.

For participants in Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation's Warrior Arts program, however, what happens while creating the art can matter as much as the finished piece.

This year, MKAF celebrates the 10th anniversary of Warrior Arts, a groundbreaking component of its ArtsReach program founded in 2016 by Melanie Moore, MKAF's director of education and community engagement. Warrior Arts connects active-duty military service members, veterans and their families with the transformative power of art, particularly those living with traumatic brain injuries, post-traumatic stress and other visible and invisible injuries.

Through tailored work-



shops and art experiences, Warrior Arts uses creative expression as a therapeutic tool to promote mindfulness, resilience and connection while addressing some of the unique challenges military personnel and their families face. At its heart is a simple but powerful idea: Art can offer a pathway to communication, creative expression and recovery.

A Legacy of Access

The idea is deeply rooted in MKAF's history. Found-

ed in 1995, the nonprofit organization carries the name and spirit of Destin matriarch Mattie Kelly, a lifelong patron of the arts who wrote poetry, played piano and organ, composed music and supported cultural organizations. Kelly and her husband, Coleman, moved to Destin in 1935 and became prominent business owners and philanthropists in the growing fishing community.

Today, MKAF carries that legacy forward with a mis-

sion "to champion access to the arts for all in Northwest Florida." Its concerts, Festival of the Arts and other public programs help support ArtsReach, the foundation's community education umbrella serving K-12 students, children and adults with special needs, and the military community.

The numbers tell part of the story: ArtsReach now

WARRIOR ARTS

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Meet Our
Hometown Hero:
Bernard Johnson
A Lifetime of
Showing Up

BY DOUG STAUFFER

Plenty of laughter filled Bernard Johnson's October 1 "retirement" reception. Ted Corcoran, president and CEO of the Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce, served as emcee and opened with a gentle roast, complete with a meme casting Bernard as FPL's virtual assistant. Familiar sayings and affectionate stories kept everyone smiling.

BERNARD JOHNSON

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Magnolia Grill

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

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 Community
BERNARD JOHNSON*continued from page 1*

As the evening unfolded, the tributes grew more personal. Those who had worked alongside Bernard wanted him to know how much he is loved.

Bernard is one of the kindest, gentlest souls I know. He is quick-witted, has a wonderful sense of humor, and brings warmth to every occasion. If there is an important event in Okaloosa County, you can expect to find him involved. At this gathering, the man who so often helps recognize others was the honored guest.

When Bernard finally took the microphone, his first thought was of his wife, Lisa. He recog-

nized her and presented her with flowers before mentioning his own career. After an evening devoted to honoring him, Bernard began by honoring her.

Bernard then quoted two Scriptures that helped explain the kind of man we had gathered to honor. The first was about a good name: Proverbs 22:1 "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold."

Those words carried weight in that room. We had heard from people representing businesses, military organizations, education, and community service. A good name develops through the way a person conducts himself, keeps his commitments, and



treats others. The evening gave us an opportunity to hear what Bernard's name meant to the people who knew him best.

The second Scripture concerned friendship: Proverbs 18:24a "A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly..."

Bernard has certainly shown himself friendly. His approachable manner and ready humor

make people glad to see him. Nathan Sparks of One Okaloosa Economic Development Council spoke about his positive attitude and constant smile. That friendliness has helped him build relationships across our county.

Tony Mallini, who was Gulf Power's general manager when Bernard was hired, offered a memorable compliment. He joked that when his wife wished he were more like someone else, he answered, "I wish I was more like Bernard." Coming from someone who had known Bernard's work for so many years, that was a remarkable expression of respect.

Mallini described Bernard's priorities as his Lord and Saviour first, then his family, and then

his customers. He also shared a saying that suited Bernard's approach to work: "Think like a customer and act like an owner." The Scriptures Bernard quoted and the flowers he presented to Lisa reflected those priorities. Bernard also reminded us that God has a plan for all things.

Of course, an evening honoring Bernard would have been incomplete without his familiar phrases. Patt Maney brought up one that many people have heard when Bernard offers to help: "I know a guy." Those few words capture his knack for knowing whom to call and connecting people with someone who can help.

*Continued on page 14***WARRIOR ARTS***continued from page 1*

presents more than 150 programs annually, reaches more than 25,000 participants each year and has served more than 420,000 people through more than 100 schools and partner agencies since 1995.

Moore joined MKAF in 2015 and created Warrior Arts the following year. Under her leadership, ArtsReach has grown from a handful of outreach programs into a robust initiative reaching communities throughout Northwest Florida.

MKAF CEO Demetrius

Fuller credits Moore with helping make outreach central to the foundation's identity. "We're so fortunate to have somebody of Melanie's education and arts pedigree to lead the charge for us on outreach, which is essentially the product of Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation," Fuller said.

When You "Tangle Up," You Power Down

Warrior Arts has grown to more than 100 programs annually, incorporating visual art, painting, improv and other creative practices. One of its most successful offerings is Zentangle, an easy-to-learn method of cre-

ating images from structured patterns, or "tangles."

Moore, a Certified Zentangle Teacher, describes the focused drawing process as an active form of meditation. "When you tangle up, you power down," she said. "The act of focused drawing becomes a form of meditation and mindfulness that supports recovery and relaxation." There are no mistakes — only "mis-tangles." There is no prescribed finished product. Participants simply begin drawing, one line at a time. That low-pressure approach can be especially meaningful for people accustomed to high-

stakes environments demanding precision and control. Moore has seen participants leave sessions calmer, carrying not only a finished piece of original art but a sense of accomplishment.

Few people understand that transformation better than retired Army Chief Warrant Officer 3 Charles Burkett. A 2004 helicopter crash left Burkett with a traumatic brain injury, extensive nerve damage and severely limited fine motor skills on his dominant right side. He incorporated Zentangle into his physical rehabilitation, first learning to write with his left hand and eventually retraining

his right. Within months, he had regained 80% of his fine motor

Continued on page 30

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Leaving It Better Than He Found It

By DENISE DAVID

Long before Patt Maney became a general, judge or state representative, he was one of seven children growing up in Kentucky, learning lessons from his parents that would follow him throughout his life.

His father was an engineer, and problem-solving was part of the household. His parents also instilled in their children a simple responsibility: Leave the place better than you found it.

Both his father and grandfather had a way with pithy language, conveying deep meaning and truth in just a few words. Many of those succinct statements have become guiding lights throughout Maney's education, career and years of public service.

That problem-solving mindset remains part of how he approaches the community he serves today. Representative Maney is active in that community on purpose. He genuinely loves people, and remaining approachable and ready to hear from them is a high priority. Listening and understanding a problem before seeking a solution are important to him.

Many of the concerns he has encountered while serving in the Army, sitting as an Okaloosa County judge and now serving as a Florida state representative are multifaceted. One of those memorable sayings from his younger years still fits: "Never undertake a vast project with a half vast idea."

For Maney, that means considering the entire circumstance, possible solutions and unintended consequences before arriving at an answer. "A retired U.S. Army Brigadier General and former Okaloosa County Judge, I know what it means to lead from the front and prioritize service above self. Unequivocally, I am purpose-driven to honorably represent my Panhandle community." — From T. Patt Maney's official state representative page.

With a résumé that includes general, judge and representative, one might wonder how to address him. Apparently, some of his colleagues have wondered the same thing.

Senior in both years and experience, Maney laughs when asked about titles. "I am not big on titles." G.J.R. — short for

General, Judge, Representative — Maney seems to be the preferred moniker.

Maney has served in the Florida House of Representatives since 2020. He has found the diversity in backgrounds and ages among his colleagues to be a fascinating ingredient of the role. Serving shoulder to shoulder with former teachers, farmers, business owners, medical professionals and attorneys, as well as other veterans, provides what he calls a valuable resource as together they seek to shape policy for the vastly varied state of Florida.

Finding harmony within that sea of voices can prove daunting. At the same time, those varied perspectives provide proverbial guardrails, encouraging members to proceed with caution and recognize that what they discuss and vote on really matters.

As a veteran, father, retired judge and longtime resident of Okaloosa County, Maney still sees problems he wants to help solve. During his six-year tenure in the Florida House, he counts 33 1/3 bills among those he has sponsored. The unusual one-third represents a portion of one of his bills that could not get heard, so he amended that portion onto someone else's bill. He also had responsibility for the subcommittee's budget bill and implementing legislation as subcommittee chairman. Routine "co-sponsored" bills are not included in that number.

During his tenure, Maney has also worked to secure \$95 million for local county initiatives, and there is more he hopes to accomplish.

With term limits in sight, when asked what he most wants to see resolved should he be re-elected in the coming term, there was a ready response. As appointed chair of the Justice Budget Subcommittee, conditions for employees working inside the corrections system and mental health issues both stand out.

He also believes tax reform conversations should take into consideration non-metro communities such as those within Okaloosa County, weighing potential changes against the services local residents have come to expect. For Maney, it is never a "Just Do Something"



approach, but rather an effort to understand the problem and make a positive difference.

Perhaps that brings his story back to where it began: Listen. Understand the problem. Consider the consequences. Look for a solution. And, whenever possible, leave the place better than you found it.

Representative Maney is happy to hear your thoughts or questions. He can be reached at Patt.Maney@flhouse.gov or through his district office in downtown Fort Walton Beach at 850-904-1020. He also has a Capitol office in Tallahassee.

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Celebrating All Veterans at Women Veterans Park

By CAROLYN NEWCOMER KETCHEL

As many of you know, the County has been adding new pathways to Women Veterans Park. The newest statues and benches are being placed, and we also have a new feature on the plaza known as the Charters of Freedom. The latest additions to the park will be unveiled on Veterans Day, Nov. 11, 2026. There will be an inspirational program inside the Convention Center allowing the community to celebrate all veterans. Please plan to arrive by 8 a.m. The program will begin promptly at 8:30 a.m. before transitioning to the Service Plaza immediately following the indoor ceremony.

Charters of Freedom

The Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution and the Bill of Rights — along with the Civil Rights Amendments — are our country's founding documents. They represent who we are and what we believe, as a country, to the rest of the world. These amazing documents can be viewed in the National Archives in Washington, D.C. Unfortunately, not everyone has the ability to make such a trip.

Following a moving trip to the National Archives in 2011, Vance and Mary Jo Patterson formed Foundation Forward Inc. as a nonprofit educational project to promote civics, education and the preservation of American history. Part of their mission is to provide stainless steel replicas of our founding documents to each county in the United States. Okaloosa County received its set on Monday, April 27, 2026.

Most communities placed their Charter displays in or near their seats of government, but Okaloosa County is a bifurcated

county with two main population areas. Making a decision about the display location was difficult because we wanted them in the north and the south ends. We decided to reach out to the Foundation and request a second set — and they said yes! Our north end residents have easy access to view these historic documents at the Courthouse in Crestview. For folks in the south end, they can be found on the Plaza at Women Veterans Park.

Pathway Expansion

In March 2024, we began the process of expanding the walking trails at Women Veterans Park by adding an additional one-quarter mile of pathways. Infrastructure projects are complex, involving everything from budgeting and site evaluations to design work and bidding procedures. And then there is the weather! Mother Nature does not always have the same timeline we have. However, after months of hard work on the part of our dedicated Okaloosa County staff and contractors, the expanded, fully handicap-accessible pathway is nearing completion and will be ready for visitors by the end of the month.

Four New Statues

So, what will we see on this new, expanded pathway? I am glad you asked! On Women Veterans Day 2025, we unveiled statues of Linda Bray and Florence Finch. On Veterans Day 2025, we unveiled Nicole Gee and an Iroquois Warrior. These four ladies will be placed along the newly completed pathways.

Capt. Linda Bray, U.S. Army (Ret.), was the commanding officer of the 988th Military Police Company at Fort Benning when her unit deployed to Panama during Operation Just Cause. What began as a mission

to secure an area escalated into a three-hour firefight involving grenades, machine-gun fire and rifle fire. Although military police were primarily expected to perform a combat-support role, the situation deteriorated to the point that Bray and her soldiers had to respond to the hostile fire. At the time, women were restricted from assignment to certain combat roles, making Bray's leadership during the engagement particularly significant. For her actions during the firefight, Bray received the Army Commendation Medal, which was later upgraded to the Bronze Star Medal with the "V" device on Dec. 8, 2023.

Loring May Ebersole, later known as Florence, was born in 1915 to a Filipino mother and an American father. After high school, she took a job as a stenographer with U.S. Army Intelligence Headquarters in Manila, where she met and married Charles Smith. Six months later, she was widowed.

Being half Filipino, she was able to hide her American sympathies from her new employer, the Japanese-controlled Philippine Liquid Fuel Distributing Union. Working with the Philippine underground, she diverted fuel and other critical items to the resistance. Soon she became part of a network of private citizens smuggling food, medical supplies and clean clothes to POWs. Her activity was eventually discovered, and she was arrested in October 1944. She was imprisoned and tortured until her release in February 1945, having never betrayed the resistance. After her liberation, she moved to New York, where she joined the Coast Guard in July 1945.

When her U.S.C.G. superiors learned of her work in the Philippines, she was awarded the Asiat-

ic-Pacific Campaign Ribbon and later the Medal of Freedom.

Sgt. Nicole L. Gee, 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit, a maintenance technician by specialty, also served a vital role in the evacuation of Kabul by communicating with and facilitating support for Afghan women and children.

On Aug. 26, 2021, Sgt. Gee was assisting with the evacuation of Kabul when a suicide bomber killed 13 U.S. service members, including Sgt. Gee.

"In Afghanistan Sergeant Gee would work multiple shifts a day just to be around the children and families being evacuated. She was the most loving and caring individual I've ever met, she was the 'mom' of any group she was a part of and had a knack for brightening anyone's day." — Sgt. Landon Workman, teammate

Representative example of a female Iroquois Warrior circa 1812. They Also Served: American Indian Women in the War of 1812, an article published in NMAI Magazine, discussed evidence of the enlistment of Six Nations women in American military service. At least five Native women received military pensions for officially serving as "cooks": Polly Cooper, Susan Jacob, Dinah John, Julia John and Dolly Schenandoah. These women enlisted in regiments of Indian volunteers and served honorably. Though officially labeled as "cooks" in pension records, many served in combat alongside their husbands as a matter of necessity.

Granite Benches

Several Okaloosa County lineage and philanthropic groups have stepped forward to enhance the enjoyment of Women Veterans Park by placing commemo-

rative granite benches throughout the space. Choctawhatchee Bay Chapter Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) placed the first of 13 benches. That donation was quickly followed by gifts from West Florida DAR, Emerald Coast Sons of the American Revolution, Snowden Horne Society Children of the American Revolution, Euchee-anna Chapter Daughters of the Colonists and Old Spanish Trail Daughters of 1812. This collaborative effort to honor history also includes deep community backing from veteran groups and civic organizations alike, such as the Air Force Enlisted Village Women Veterans Group, VFW Post 7674, Fort Walton Beach Woman's Club, Center for Lifelong Learning, Gregg Chapel AME, Okaloosa Island Garden Club and Republican Women of Okaloosa Federated. To maintain visual harmony, the granite benches feature a uniform design. Each is engraved with the logo, emblem or graphic image representing the donating group as well as an inscription of the group's name. Placement in the vicinity of the park's statues provides a peaceful setting for rest and contemplation.

What Else Is Here

Beyond its monuments, the park is a thriving ecological sanctuary. The Audubon Society has identified over 240 species of migratory birds, alongside a bustling rookery that holds 35 pairs of nesting herons. Other local wildlife species include turtles, bears, foxes and two recently discovered small alligators. Autumn is a wonderful time to visit, as the park sits directly within the southern migration path of the Monarch butterflies. With so much vibrant natural life to experience, fall offers the perfect opportunity to visit, walk the trails and enjoy everything Women Veterans Park has to offer.

It is an honor to serve as your Commissioner.

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



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*Thank you, Emerald Coast Real Producers,
for the recognition.*



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 Community

Events at the Beach

Emerald Coast Hispanic Heritage Festival **Sunday, Oct. 18 | Noon-9 p.m. | The Landing | FWB**

Celebrate the sights, sounds and flavors of Hispanic culture at the Emerald Coast Hispanic Heritage Festival! This vibrant, family-friendly celebration features live Latin music, colorful dance performances, authentic cuisine, local artisan vendors, cultural exhibits and hands-on activities for all ages. Experience the rich traditions and contributions of Hispanic communities while enjoying a day of food, entertainment and cultural connection along the waterfront. Free and open to the public. Visit Elevate-Next.com/events.

Destin Fishing Rodeo **Throughout October | Destin Harbor | Weigh-ins behind AJ's Seafood & Oyster Bar**

The legendary Destin Fishing Rodeo returns throughout October, bringing anglers, locals and visitors together in the heart of "The World's Luckiest Fishing Village." Watch the excitement at the month-long, daily weigh-ins behind AJ's Seafood & Oyster Bar as anglers bring in everything from grouper and tuna to red snapper and

other impressive catches. This year's Rodeo also honors longtime weighmaster Bruce Chaves, who passed away in April, with a rotating lineup of area personalities taking the weighmaster duties.

Whether you fish the Rodeo or simply head to the docks to watch the catches come in, it's a monthlong area tradition celebrating the fishing community at its heart.

Visit DestinFishingRodeo.org for details.

Destin Songwriter Festival **Oct. 24-25 | Destin Harbor & The Alice**

Hear the hits — and the stories behind them — as the second annual Destin Songwriter Festival presented by Patriot Spirit Vodka brings familiar hits performed by the songwriters who created them to rising Nashville talent for two days of intimate performances and songwriter rounds. Headliner Jeffrey Steele joins Terri Jo Box, Carolyn Dawn Johnson, Bridgette Tatum and more. Free performances will take place throughout the weekend at Boathouse Oyster Bar, SkyBar at The Edge and The Edge Seafood Restaurant. Saturday's ticketed Main Stage runs from



4 to 8 p.m. in front of SkyBar at The Edge. Enjoy an intimate Sunday VIP experience at The Alice Destin. General admission is \$30, with premium group tables available.

Complete lineup, schedule and tickets: DestinSongwriterFestival.com.

10th Annual Harvest Wine & Food Festival **Oct. 15-18 | WaterColor**

Sip, savor and celebrate exceptional wine and cuisine at Northwest Florida Children's Foundation's Harvest Wine & Food Festival. Friday's Harvest After Dark brings elevated wines, unexpected pairings and culinary creations to Cerulean Park. Saturday features the signature Grand Tasting, followed by a spirited Jazz Cocktail Brunch on Sunday. Visit dcwaf.org/harvestfestival.

Emerald Coast Rodeo **Friday-Saturday, Nov. 6-7 | 5:30-9:30 p.m. | Northwest Florida State College | Niceville**

Bring the family to the fourth annual Emerald Coast Rodeo. Gates open at 5:30 p.m., mutton bustin' begins at 6:30 p.m. and rodeo action starts at 7:30 p.m. Visit emeraldcoastrodeo.com.

38th Annual Thunderbird Intertribal Powwow **Nov. 6-8 | Twin Oaks Park (Mullet Festival Grounds) | Niceville**

This three-day celebration features traditional dancing, drumming, storytelling, flute performances, authentic Native American crafts, cultural exhibits and food. Highlights include Friday's Children's Day from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., Saturday's dance competitions and evening Grand Entry, and Sunday's performances and competition awards. Held in recognition of National American Indian Heritage Month, this family-friendly event celebrates Native American heritage while promoting cultural understanding. Admission is \$7 for adults, \$4 for ages 4-12 and free for children 3 and younger. Children's Day admission is \$3. Visit ThunderbirdPowwow.org or call 850-279-1931.



Eggs on the Beach **Saturday, Nov. 7 | 10 a.m.-1 p.m. | Seascape Resort, Miramar Beach**

Fire up your appetite for the 12th annual Eggs on the Beach Big Green Egg Cooking Competition! Hosted by Bay Breeze Patio, this popular culinary event brings together nonprofit organizations, backyard grill masters and restaurant teams serving up creative bite-sized dishes cooked on Big Green Eggs. Tasters sample the creations and vote for their favorites, while honorary judges award top honors for taste, presentation and creativity. Best of all, participating nonprofit teams earn cash donations based on taster votes. Advance tickets are \$60 for adults, \$21 for ages 11-17 and free for children 10 and younger.

Tickets and information: EggsOnTheBeach.com or 850-269-4666.

Walk to End Alzheimer's - Emerald Coast **Nov. 7 | Registration 9:30 a.m. | Ceremony 10:30 a.m. | Walk 10:45 a.m. Grand Boulevard | Miramar Beach**

Participants of all ages and abilities are invited to walk in honor or memory of someone impacted by Alzheimer's or another dementia. The morning includes the moving Promise Garden ceremony, with colored flowers representing each participant's personal connection to the disease. Registration is free. Participants are encouraged to raise funds to support the Alzheimer's Association's mission. Register at alz.org/EmeraldCoastWalk.



38th Annual THUNDERBIRD INTERTRIBAL POWWOW
NOVEMBER 6, 7 & 8 2026
TWIN OAKS PARK
Corner of FL Highway 85N & College Boulevard
Niceville, Florida

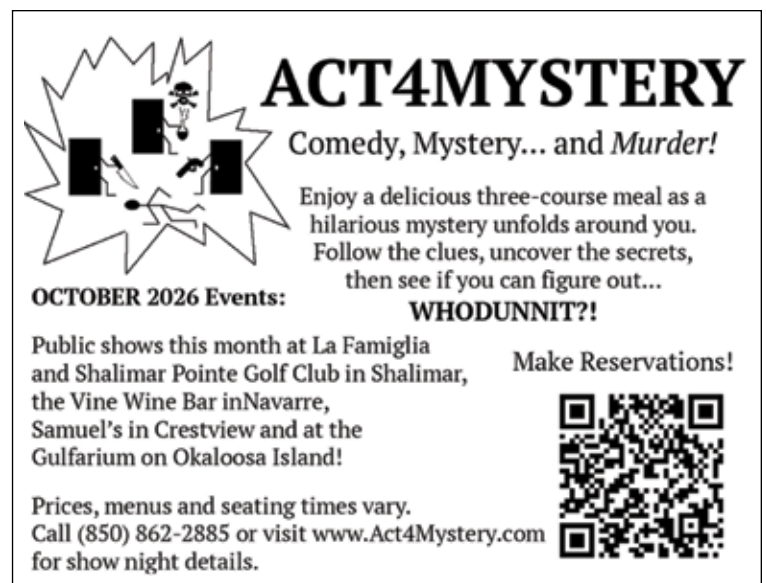
Spend the day with craft makers, singers, dancers, flute players, storytellers, and exhibits.

• Traditional Drumming & Singing • Native Craft Vendors • Competition & Intertribal Dancing • All Ages • All Tribes • Everyone Welcome!

Sponsored by: The Thunderbird Intertribal Council, Inc (A 501 c 3 Tax Charitable Organization). For more information, call/text: Chairman Kirby Locklear: 850-279-1931 or Vice Chairman Crystal Kresen: 850-396-3775. Email: committee@thunderbirdpowwow.org.

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OCTOBER 2026 Events:
Public shows this month at La Famiglia and Shalimar Pointe Golf Club in Shalimar, the Vine Wine Bar in Navarre, Samuel's in Crestview and at the Gulfarium on Okaloosa Island!

Prices, menus and seating times vary. Call (850) 862-2885 or visit www.Act4Mystery.com for show night details.

Make Reservations!





HAPPENINGS AROUND FWB

OCTOBER

12-17
Walton County Fair
5-9 pm Monday-Thursday; 5-10 pm Friday; noon-9 pm Saturday

15
Greater FWB Chamber Business After Hours, sponsored by the Business Success Group at the Air Force Armament Museum
5:30 pm | Air Force Armament Museum | Eglin AFB

15-25
Emerald Coast Theatre Co.'s The 39 Steps
Times vary | Grand Boulevard at Sandestin | Miramar Beach

16
Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation Harvest After Dark
7 pm | Cerulean Park | WaterColor

ADSO's Celebrate Autumn Art Exhibition Opening Reception
6 pm | Arts and Design Society, 17 First Street SE | FWB
Exhibition Dates | Oct. 13-Nov.7 | Tues-Fri: 12-4 pm; Sat: 1-4 pm

A Gulfarium Murder Mystery Dinner
6 pm | Gulfarium Marine Adventure | FWB

16-17
Baytowne Wharf Beer Festival
Times vary | Village of Baytowne Wharf | Sandestin

17
Pilates with Dolphins
7:30 am | Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park | FWB

Dog Daze
9 am | The Landing | FWB

Concealed Carry Weapons Class
10 am | Emerald Coast Indoor Shooting & Sport | Valparaiso

First Responders Appreciation Lunch
11 am | International Community Church | FWB

Porktoberfest
11 am | Post 235 Fort Walton Beach American Legion | FWB

Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation Harvest Grand Tasting
1 pm | Cerulean Park | WaterColor

Rocktober Concert Series
5 pm | Harborwalk Village

Act4Mystery's Murder at the Monster Bash
5:30 pm | Shalimar Pointe

Black Cat Ball
6 pm | Elks Lodge | Okaloosa Island

Sip and Science: Wizarding World
6 pm | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB

Sinfonia Gulf Coast Film in Concert: The Wizard of Oz
7:30 pm | Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation Dugas Pavilion | Destin

18
Hispanic Heritage Festival
12 pm | The Landing | FWB

20
First Responders Appreciation Lunch by A Superior
11:30 am | Niceville Community Center, 204 Partin Drive N. | Niceville

22
Planetarium Special Feature: Spooky Secrets of the Stars
6 pm | Emerald Coast Science Center | FWB

All-Sports Association Casino Night
5:30 pm | Legendary Marine Showroom

23
Greater FWB Chamber Lunch N Learn; Executive Air; Get Ready for Heating Season
11:30 am | FWB Chamber | FWB

23 Continued
Grand Boulevard Barktober Fest
5 pm | Grand Boulevard | Sandestin

Rockstarfish in Concert
6 pm | The Landing

23-25
Shinedown's Lunatic Ball Beach Weekend
3 pm daily | Seascape Resort | Miramar Beach

24
Choctawhatchee Audubon Bird Walk
FWB Rec Center

Halloween Spooktacular
3 pm | Harborwalk Village

Emerald Coast Autism Center' Fleets & Eats
4 pm | The Edge Restaurant & Skybar | Destin Harbor

Jeepalooza Parade Invasion 2026
5 pm | John Beasley Park | Okaloosa Island

Movies on the Lawn: Fall Edition
6 pm | Harborwalk Village

24-25
31st Annual Festival of the Arts
Times vary | Dugas Pavilion green, Cultural Arts Village | Destin

Destin Songwriter Festival
Times vary | Multiple locations at Destin Harbor & The Alice

25
Boys and Girls Club of the Emerald Coast Brunchfest
11 am | 130 E Government St | Pensacola

3rd Annual OKI Fest
11 am | 1958 Lewis Turner Blvd | FWB

Halloween Haunt
6 pm | Destin Commons

Oct. 26-Nov. 1
Mosaic Theatre Co.'s Rocky Horror Picture Show
Times vary | Suds N Cinema | FWB

26
Greater FWB Chamber Lunch N Learn; Estate Planning Essentials
11:30 am | FWB Chamber | FWB

The Next Big Thing Conference
8 am | Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort and Spa | Miramar Beach

28
Pilates with Dolphins
7:30 am | Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park

Greater FWB Chamber Lunch N Learn "Steady & Strong: Metabolic Health for the Season Ahead"
11:30 am | FWB Chamber | FWB

30
Dog-Harmony's 11th Annual Barktoberfest
4:30 pm | Grand Park, Grand Boulevard at Sandestin | Miramar Beach

31
Pilates with Dolphins
7:30 am | Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park

Halloween on the BOOlevard
4 pm | Grand Boulevard | Sandestin

8th Annual Tricks and Treasures at The Boardwalk!
6 pm | The Boardwalk | FWB

2026 EVENTS

NOVEMBER

06
Greater FWB Chamber of Commerce's First Friday Coffee
7 am | First Baptist Church | FWB

Greater FWB Chamber Lunch N Learn: Primerica Financial Services; "How Money Works, A Primer on Personal Finance
11:30 am | FWB Chamber | FWB

06-08
Thunderbird Intertribal Powwow
Twin Oaks Park | Niceville

07
12th Annual Eggs on the Beach
10 am | Seascape Resort | Miramar Beach

Opportunity Place's Harlem Nights Casino
6 pm | Home2Suites by Hilton | FWB

12
Greater FWB Chamber Nothing But Networking with Vibe Productions at The Place on Beal
11:30 am | The Place on Beal | FWB

14
Cruisin The Beaches Car Show
10 am | De'France Indoor Fleamarket Antiques & Collectibles | FWB

Bluegrass Barn Jam & Fall Fest
11 am | Alaqua Animal Refuge | Freeport

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 | Miramar Beach

Okaloosa Island Fireworks
9 pm | Wed | The Boardwalk | FWB

Downtown FWB Coffee Club (March - December)
9 - 10 am | 2nd Thurs | The Florida Place Food Trucks | FWB

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

Karaoke Night
7 pm | Thurs | Soundside Waterfront Bar | FWB

Alzheimer's Association Caregiver Support Group
1 pm | 2nd Thurs | Trinity UMC | 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
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Community

Fall Into Community:

The People Who Make Fort Walton Beach Strong



BY SHERRY OLNEY

October may say “fall” on the calendar, even if the temperatures along the Emerald Coast haven’t gotten the message yet. But a new season gives us an opportunity to look around, reconnect and think about what makes the place we call home so special. So this October, let’s fall into community.

Fort Walton Beach has beautiful beaches, a proud military heritage, thriving businesses and organizations doing remarkable work. But people are what really make a community strong — those who build something and stay, bring a fresh idea to town, turn a personal challenge into a mission to help someone else, discover that service doesn’t end when the uniform comes off or simply keep showing up, sometimes for decades.

Bob Hudgens, Justice Jones, Gelin Ducati, Shane Weddle and Paul Singleton are five very different people at different places in their lives and careers. Yet each represents something

important about the character of Fort Walton Beach.

Bob Hudgens: A Legacy That Lasts



There is something special about a family business that becomes part of a community’s history.

For the Hudgens family, that history is intertwined with another important part of our area’s story — the United States military.

Bob Hudgens’ parents, Bob and Edna Hudgens, opened Coastal Realty Services in 1973. His father had been an Air Force pilot and engineer stationed at Eglin Air Force Base and retired after 20 years of military service. Bob and his sister, Denise Hudgens Bavarian, grew up around the family business and later carried that legacy forward.

More than five decades later, Coastal Realty Services remains part of the Fort Walton Beach community. Bob’s involvement in real estate has extended beyond Northwest Florida through years of leadership and service at the local, state and national levels.

A business survives for decades because people trust it. A community remembers businesses that support local causes, participate in civic life and understand that their responsibility

doesn’t necessarily end when the workday does. Bob represents legacy — the kind built one relationship, one handshake and one year at a time.

Justice Jones: A New Generation Finds Its Community



If Bob represents deep roots, Justice Jones represents new growth — and sometimes community starts with a social media post.

Justice is the founder of 850 Social Babes, a growing local community that has connected thousands of women through social media, events, collaborations and shared experiences. Pickleball and social events may be part of the fun, but underneath it is something more important: Connection.

We live in a time when we can have hundreds — or thousands — of online “friends” and still feel disconnected from people living right down the street. Justice has turned online connections into real-world relationships while creating opportunities for women to support local businesses, meet new people and become more connected to their community.

As a member of the Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce, Justice also represents a bridge between

generations of networking. The Chamber has spent decades bringing people together face-to-face, while Justice is showing how technology can open that door in a different way. The platform may have changed, but the need to belong hasn’t.

Gelin Ducati: When Compassion Becomes a Calling



Some community organizations begin with a business plan. Others begin with a life experience. For

Gelin Ducati, it was personal.

Gelin is the mother of Trey, who has a rare disability. Like so many parents raising a child with special needs, she found herself navigating questions, resources, advocacy and challenges. She turned that experience outward, founding Beyond Disabilities to advocate for and support families of children with disabilities through education, resources and community.

At the heart of that work is something every parent understands: The desire to know your child matters and that you aren’t walking the road alone.

Gelin’s involvement doesn’t stop with the cause closest to her heart. She continues to volunteer throughout the Fort Walton Beach community, including serving as a judge for the local Miss West Florida competition within the Miss America program.

Gelin represents compassion in action. She took something deeply personal and used it to make another family’s journey a little less difficult, helping others know, “I see you, and you’re not alone.”

Shane Weddle: A Veteran Who Never Stopped Serving



In Fort Walton Beach, military service is part of our DNA. Eglin Air Force Base and

Hurlburt Field aren’t simply in- stallations near our community. The men and women who serve there — and the veterans who remain here — are part of its heart.

Shane Weddle understands service firsthand. He served on active duty in the U.S. Navy and later in the National Guard. That experience helped shape the leadership, discipline and commitment to service he carried into civilian life and business ownership.

Today, Shane owns FAST-SIGNS of Fort Walton Beach/Destin, where his military connection remains personal: His business supports and employs military-connected people, including veterans, reservists and military spouses.

His service reaches beyond his business. Shane became involved with the Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce soon after arriving in the community, serving on the Chamber board and in military-focused leadership. He has also participated in mentoring programs for the next generation of local professionals.

I have seen that generosity firsthand through my work with One Hopeful Place. Shane has donated to and supported our mission of helping individuals experiencing homelessness move toward stability, independence and permanent housing. For a nonprofit, those community partnerships matter tremendously. Our work cannot happen in isolation. Someone has to care enough to help, and Shane does. The uniform may change, but the mission continues.

Paul Singleton: The Man Who Keeps Showing Up

And then there is Paul Singleton. If you’ve spent much time around the Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce, chances are you’ve seen him. At 93 years old, Paul reached an extraordinary milestone in June 2026 — his 2,000th Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber event, part of a remarkable streak that began in 1976.

But that number doesn’t begin to tell his story. Paul is a retired Air Force lieutenant col-

Continued on page 29

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Five Things to Review During Medicare Open Enrollment for 2027

Medicare Open Enrollment runs October 15 through December 7.

If you live in Okaloosa or Walton County, here are five things to review before deciding whether to keep your coverage for 2027.

By Max Zlobin, Founder and Licensed Insurance Agent, SwitchBlue Insurance Agency

Medicare Open Enrollment runs from October 15 through December 7, 2026. Changes made during this period generally take effect January 1, 2027. You can change Medicare Advantage plans, change prescription drug coverage, or move between Medicare Advantage and Original Medicare.

Even if your current plan worked well this year, take a few minutes to see what is changing before deciding to keep it.

1 Read your Annual Notice of Change

If you have a Medicare Advantage or Part D plan, your plan sends an Annual Notice of Change, or ANOC, each fall. It outlines changes for the following year, including premiums, deductibles, copays, drug coverage and provider networks.

Start with the things that affect you most: your doctors, hospital, pharmacy and prescriptions.

2 Check your doctors, pharmacies and prescriptions

Networks and drug formularies can change each year. Confirm that your doctors, specialists, hospitals and pharmacy will still be covered in 2027.

For each prescription, check that it remains covered, review its formulary tier, and see whether your plan uses preferred pharmacies with lower copays.

3 Look beyond the monthly premium

A \$0 plan premium does not mean there will be no out-of-pocket costs.

Review what you may pay for doctor visits, hospital stays, outpatient care, prescriptions and deductibles. Also check the plan's annual maximum out-of-pocket amount for covered medical services. This shows the most you could pay for covered Part A and Part B services during the year. Prescription drug costs follow separate Part D rules.



Primary-care and specialist visits



Hospital stays and outpatient care



Prescription drugs



Deductibles, co-payments and coinsurance



The plan's annual maximum out-of-pocket limit

IMPORTANT: We do not offer every plan available in your area. Currently we represent eight organizations which offer 30 products in your area. Please contact Medicare.gov or 1-800-MEDICARE to get information on all of your options.

4 Understand Medigap and TRICARE rules

If you are considering moving from Medicare Advantage to Original Medicare, you may also want a Medicare Supplement, or Medigap, policy to help pay costs Original Medicare does not cover.

Florida has certain protected enrollment situations in which you may have guaranteed-issue rights for a Medigap policy. Outside those situations, an insurer may ask health questions, use medical underwriting, and may decline an application. Florida does not have a broad annual "birthday rule" that lets people switch Medigap plans each year without underwriting.

Florida Medigap policies are issue-age rated. Your premium is based on your age when you buy the policy and does not increase simply because you get older. Premiums can still increase for other reasons, including medical costs, claims experience or rate changes affecting a group of policyholders.

If you have TRICARE For Life, you generally need Medicare Parts A and B to keep that coverage. Medicare generally pays first for covered services, and TRICARE For Life generally pays after Medicare. TFL includes prescription drug coverage, so you do not need Medicare Part D to have prescription coverage. In some cases, however, Part D may provide coverage for drugs TFL does not cover. Check with TRICARE before making a Medicare Advantage or Part D change.

5 Start early

Do not wait until December. Gather your current plan information, medication list, doctors' names, hospital preferences and pharmacy information so you have time to review what is changing.

If you are enrolled in Medicare Advantage, you also have a Medicare Advantage Open Enrollment Period from January 1 through March 31. During that time, you may switch to another Medicare Advantage plan or return to Original Medicare. If you return to Original Medicare, you may also be able to join a separate drug plan.

Max Zlobin is the founder of SwitchBlue Insurance Agency, an independent agency that helps beneficiaries compare coverage without charging a separate fee. The agency is compensated by the carriers it represents. This article is for educational purposes and is not a recommendation of any specific plan.

*This is a solicitation for insurance. Not affiliated with the U. S. government or federal Medicare program.

MEDICARE QUESTIONS? We can help you navigate Medicare with confidence.

Medicare isn't one-size-fits-all. Your doctors, prescriptions, budget and priorities matter.



Max Zlobin,
Licensed Insurance Agent
NPN:17325304
SwitchBlue Insurance Agency
Independent Medicare Guidance

Scan for your local Medicare guidance.



Community



By DR. KAREN DEVORE

October is the season for haunted houses, bubbling cauldrons and things designed to make us shiver. Yet for many people, nothing sounds quite as intimidating as voluntarily ly-

ing down while someone places needles in their body. Add herbs, glass cups and perhaps even a flame, and I can understand the hesitation.

Fortunately, acupuncture is usually far gentler than the an-

ticipation. The needles are remarkably thin, and most patients are surprised by how comfortable—and often deeply relaxing—the experience can be.

But the needle is only the beginning of the story.

Acupuncture exists within a much broader Eastern medicine tradition that considers patterns, relationships and the interplay between structure, function, energy and environment. Traditional acupuncture, neuroacupuncture and facial rejuvenation acupuncture can use the same tiny needle in very different ways. Herbal medicine, cupping and other complementary techniques expand the possibilities even further.

So, in the spirit of October, let's make the needles, herbs and fire a little less mysterious.

Traditional Acupuncture: Much Bigger Than You Think

If your idea of acupuncture begins and ends with back pain, you are seeing only a small part of the picture.

People explore traditional acupuncture for headaches, sleep, stress, digestive concerns, fertility, hormonal transitions, musculoskeletal complaints, neuropathy and chronic or complex pain. For one person, it may complement physical therapy or medical treatment. For another, it may be part of preparing for pregnancy, navigating perimenopause or staying active as the body changes with age.

Eastern medicine has also long valued prevention—paying attention to changes in sleep, digestion, energy, tension and recovery before they become impossible to ignore.

Acupuncture is about more than placing a needle where something hurts. Research continues to explore its relationship with pain modulation, sensory signaling and nervous system activity, while the traditional framework considers the individual's larger pattern of function and balance. That versa-



tility allows it to be restorative or proactive, highly focused or whole-person, and able to stand alone or complement other care.

Neuroacupuncture: When the Nervous System is Part of the Story

Neuroacupuncture takes acupuncture into remarkably complex territory. This specialized approach incorporates carefully selected scalp and body acupuncture around neurological and functional goals involving the brain, spinal cord, peripheral nerves, movement, sensation, balance and coordination.

This is where neuroplasticity becomes particularly interesting. The brain and nervous system retain an ability to adapt and reorganize in response to stimulation, learning, injury and rehabilitation—even in adulthood.

Neuroacupuncture may be incorporated as supportive care during stroke recovery or for people living with Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis, neuropathy, neuralgia, tremors, weakness or certain forms of paralysis. It may also be explored around specific symptoms or functional goals for people with PTSD, anxiety or autism, as well as neurological symptoms associated with complex chronic illnesses.

Treatment is individualized around the person, their neurological presentation and their goals. Neuroacupuncture does not replace appropriate neuro-

Continued on page 31

Needles, Fire and Herbs: The Not-So-Scary Side of Acupuncture



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A Story Rooted in Family

Care becomes personal when it touches someone you love. For Todd Harrell, helping care for his grandfather brought first-hand understanding of the responsibilities families carry. The practical tasks mattered, but so did patience, trust, and knowing that someone cared.

That perspective remains part of the story of Home Instead in Fort Walton Beach. Since opening in March 2002, the local office has focused on helping older adults receive support in the place they call home.

Meet Todd and Carly

Todd and Carly Harrell are Florida State University graduates and parents of three sons: Brody, Wade, and Jack. Todd studied criminal justice and played baseball; Carly earned a marketing degree.

Carly joined the business in 2003, contributing across marketing, staffing, training, and administration. Their experiences



as a family and as local business owners shape a shared commitment to care that recognizes the individual behind every request for help.

What Personal Care Means

Personalized support begins with everyday details. How does someone like to start the morning? Which activities bring enjoyment? What feels difficult, and what would they prefer to continue doing themselves?

Home Instead offers companionship, personal care, meal preparation, light housekeeping, and respite for family caregivers. The conversation starts with listening, so assistance can reflect the older adult's routines, preferences, and needs.

Grateful for Your Trust

We are grateful to the local families who have welcomed Home Instead into their homes. Their trust inspires us to listen closely, honor familiar routines, and build caring relationships through everyday acts of kindness.

For Todd, Carly, and the local Home Instead team, the purpose remains personal: helping older adults feel supported and families feel heard. If your family is beginning to explore care, we would welcome the chance to learn your story and talk about what home means to you.





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Community



BY TERESA HALVERSON,
BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT/
COMMUNITY RELATIONS
DIRECTOR, THE MANOR AT
BLUE WATER BAY
Skilled Nursing and Rehabil-

Skilled Nursing and Rehabilitation Facilities: What to Expect

itation facilities provide a wide range of medical and rehabilitative services for individuals who are recovering from an illness, injury or surgery. The goal of the stay is to help a patient regain strength and independence, so they can safely return home. Choosing a skilled nursing facility (SNF) is often a decision made after a hospital stay when a patient needs more intensive medical care and reha-

bilitation than can be provided at home. The primary purpose is to bridge the gap between a hospital stay and a patient's home, helping them recover fully and regain independence. This constant supervision is crucial for patients needing post-acute (hospital) care and requires monitoring to watch for complications and manage pain after surgery.

What type of conditions and services are normally available?

Surgery: Especially joint replacement surgeries (hips, knees, shoulders) or other major procedures to include back surgery.

Acute Illness: Pneumonia, infections or complications from chronic conditions like heart failure or COPD.

Injury or Fall: For patients who need to regain mobility and strength after an accident.

Stroke or other Brain Injuries: Skilled nursing facilities have a strong focus on neurological rehabilitation.

Wound Care: Complex or Chronic wound management including dressing changes and monitoring for infection. Some SNFs now utilize the Vaporox wound care system that greatly enhances the healing of wounds.

IV Therapy: Includes the administering of medications or fluids intravenously.

Medication Management: Supervising and administering a patient's medication regimen, which is very important for complex cases.

Pain Management: Licensed staff are trained to monitor and assess a patient's pain levels and implement a plan to manage it. These discussions are held with the patient's physician.

Medical Monitoring: Includes the continuous monitoring of vital signs and other health conditions.

Catheter and Colostomy Care: Specialized care for patients with these specific needs.

Respiratory Care: Management of conditions such as COPD and other lung problems.

Chronic Condition Management: While many stays are temporary, SNFs can also provide long-term care for individuals with chronic conditions who require a higher level of medical support. This may include specialized units for conditions like:

Dementia and Memory Care: Providing a safe a structured environment with specialized programs.

Hospice and Palliative Care: Focusing on comfort and quality of life for patients with

serious illnesses. These services are provided on-site, allowing patients to focus on their recovery without the stress of arranging multiple appointments and transportation.

Rehabilitative Services:

A core component of a skilled nursing facility is rehabilitation. These services are designed to help patients restore function and improve their quality of life. The therapy teams include:

Physical Therapy (PT): Physical therapists help patients improve mobility, strength, balance, and gait. They may work on tasks to include learning to use a walker or climbing stairs.

Occupational Therapy (OT): Occupational therapists focus on regaining the skills a patient needs for activities of daily living (ADLs) such as dressing, bathing, and eating. They also help patients adapt to their environment and use assistive devices if necessary.

Speech-Language Pathology (SLP): Speech Therapists address a variety of issues including communications difficulties, cognitive impairments, and swallowing disorders (Dysphagia) which can be common after a stroke or with certain condition of dementia.

What to expect:

Assessment: Upon admission, a team of specialists will assess the patient's needs and create a personalized care plan.

Therapy Services

Clinical Nursing and Medical Supervision: Physicians and nurses will monitor the patient's progress and manage any medications or medical needs.

Social and Recreational Activities: Most facilities offer social events, recreational activities, and spiritual care to support overall well-being.

Transitioning home: A Focus on Returning Home Safely:

While skilled nursing and rehabilitation facilities offer Long-term residential living, the focus

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Continued on next page

Executive Air: Cooling, Heating and Caring for Our Community

BY LYNN FEHR, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SPECIALIST

At Executive Air, ensuring homes remain comfortable is just part of our mission; being an active and supportive member of the community is equally important. This week, our dedicated team had the pleasure of hosting a Lunch and Learn at the Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce, where we served a Halloween-themed meal to local business owners and residents. Our goal was to provide practical advice on reducing the costs of maintaining air conditioning and heating systems.

During our presentation, titled “Preventive Maintenance: Your Ticket to a Warm Winter and Cool Savings,” we shared essential habits that homeowners can adopt to save money and prepare for the colder months ahead. We emphasized the importance of keeping drain lines clear, as clogs are a leading cause of water damage and unexpected air conditioning breakdowns. Regularly changing filters, we noted not only enhances air quality but also helps systems run efficiently and last longer. Our team offered tips on reducing household dust, which keeps

homes cleaner and minimizes the workload on HVAC units. A little preventive maintenance now can prevent costly repairs later and help families stay comfortable throughout the winter without surprise bills.

In addition to our commitment to education, we are thrilled to announce that Executive Air is sponsoring the second annual Chili Cook-Off on November 1 at Lou’s Tavern, from 11 AM to 2 PM. Fourteen of the area’s best chili cooks will compete for the title, and tickets are available for just \$10. All proceeds from this event will benefit One Hopeful

Place, a local homeless shelter dedicated to making a real difference in the lives of those in need within our community.

Whether we’re teaching neighbors how to protect their homes or rallying support for a worthy cause, our mission remains the same: to serve the community that has continually supported us. At Executive Air, we cherish our community, and every opportunity to give back is treasured.

Join us on November 1—come hungry and ready to support local talent. We hope to see you there.



SKILLED NURSING
continued from previous page

of rehab is to set goals to help patients recover enough to return to their own home or an assisted living facility. Staff members work as teams with patients and family members to create a personalized care plan that focuses on achieving this goal.

The focus on “transitional care” can lead to a faster and more complete recovery, reducing the risk of complications and hospital readmissions. Nurses, Physicians, therapists and other team members work together, share information and adjust the patient’s care plan as needed. This integrated and holistic approach ensures that all of the patient’s

needs—from medical to emotional — are being addressed. The goal is to help patients return home safely with the skills and confidence to manage their daily lives. This may involve training in assistive devices, home modifications or arranging for home health services.

The Manor at Blue water Bay is the only locally owned and operated skilled nursing rehabilitation facility in the area. A 5-Star, CMS rated facility with over 32 years of experience serving our community’s healthcare needs, we have built a strong foundation of trust and expertise. This long-standing commitment allows us to provide reliable, compassionate care that truly understands and address-

es the unique needs of the people we serve. We are proud to have been a consistent and dedicated partner in the well-being of our community for more than three decades. Questions? We are here to help. Please contact our Admission’s Team at 850-897-5592 or email: wecare@manoratlwb.com for more information and how we can assist you in your future health care needs.

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See Foxy Boutique for Your Fall and Festive Apparel!

Have you checked the calendar lately? Be ready for all the fall happenings, swiftly followed by the season of festivities. This season demands a feel-good, look-great look.

So, now is the time to put some spice into your attire with a stop at Foxy Boutique.

Whether you are craving a pumpkin-spiced, toasty sweater for cooler temperatures or something more dazzling, it is your place to browse. If a champagne-toast evening look is the must-have outfit, Foxy's got that, too. The staff has curated a selection of looks ready for



the holiday season right here in downtown Fort Walton Beach.

Find that cute and cozy top for girls' night out. Find that out-for-the-evening dress plus accessories. Need a gift for the ladies in your life? All these and so much more for that fall-to-holiday wardrobe upgrade at Foxy!

Once customers find this fun shop, they return over and over again. And tell all their friends.

Stop in to browse and say, "Hi!" at 148 Miracle Strip Parkway SE, FWB, or at foxyboutiquefwb.com. Note that fall and winter hours are Wednesday through Sunday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

BERNARD JOHNSON

continued from page 2

Maney's advice was affectionate and practical: "Stay around, stay involved, or at least give us the list." The joke worked because so many people understood it. Bernard's relationships have helped organizations accomplish their work, and his willingness to make a connection has been a service in itself.

Gordon King, CEO of Okaloosa Gas, added another chapter to the story. He recalled persuading Bernard to convert his home to gas appliances, an amusing accomplishment given Bernard's employer for almost four decades. Even the story of a fireplace that stopped working

brought us back to the familiar "I know a guy." King ended by joking that Bernard would move in with Okaloosa Gas now that he was retired from the power company.

Neko Stubblefield of Eglin Federal Credit Union found humor in another part of Bernard's communication style. She said she used Claude, an artificial (super) intelligence assistant, to interpret his text-message lingo. If even Neko—who is every bit as well connected in Okaloosa County as Bernard—needed help deciphering his texts, the rest of us never stood a chance.

The gifts were memorable too. A flag presentation took a comic turn when the flag measured just two by three inches

rather than one that flew over the Capitol in Washington. The Chamber presented socks bearing Bernard's face. Sam and Gus from Harley-Davidson gave him a jacket and welcomed him into the Harley-Davidson family. The all-too-familiar Vince Mayfield of Bit Wizards presented this. Those presentations had plenty of personality.

Behind the laughter was a career that began much more modestly. Bernard recalled moving here in 1984 and working in Kmart's garden ("flower") shop. It took two years to get hired at Gulf Power. He started on a line crew and worked his way through other responsibilities, including engineering. His career with Gulf Power and Flori-

da Power & Light spanned nearly forty years, with experience in customer service, marketing, and operations.

His last day with FPL was September 30, 2026. For about two decades, he was a principal contact for Gulf Power and later FPL, building relationships with elected officials and military leaders. As regional manager of external affairs, he worked with many of the people and organizations who gathered to thank him.

Bernard also recalled beginning his board service in 1992, with the Boys and Girls Club among his earliest commitments. That involvement grew to include dozens of boards. He is reported to be among the

few people who have served on the board of every chamber of commerce in Okaloosa County. If a board is doing important work, Bernard is often involved, frequently as chairman or president.

Northwest Florida State College President Mel Ponder and Foundation Executive Director Chris Stowers helped recognize his service to the college and foundation. Chamber Chair Bonnie Barlow of Bridgeway Center also joined an evening that reflected the breadth of his relationships. Representatives from Warren Averett also joined in the appreciation. His involvement with the All Sports Asso-

Continued on page 30



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Sweater Weather...Sort Of



BY LIESEL SCHMIDT

If you've spent any time in Florida, you know that fall here bears no resemblance to a New England postcard. You know the ones—with the winding roads flanked by trees dressed in various shades of yellow, red and orange, with air so crisp you can almost feel it through the photo. Here, the leaves don't so much change color as hang on for dear life, and the cooler temps? Well, they mostly play Hide and Seek.

But the feeling is still there... The wind-down as we approach the end of the year, the crisp mornings (yes, they do happen—even if the inevitable heat

of afternoon makes us question the veracity of our memories), the pumpkin-spice EVERYTHING that scents the air.

And while we may live in a state that seems to have a loose definition of seasons, we still revel in the idea of getting to pull out our boots, sweaters, jeans and coats—even if it's more for your own satisfaction than necessity.

We at **Blue Bay Lifestyle Co.** love fall—the fashions, the festivals, the feeling. And we're all for making the most of it, whether or not the thermometer chooses to cooperate.

Picture those mornings when the air has a little snap: slipping into your favorite **Vuori** athleisure and taking the scenic route through the neighborhood—solo or, even better, with a friend. No stopwatch, no personal best to beat—just a chance to stretch your legs, clear your head and enjoy the cool morning air on your skin before Florida remembers it's...well, Florida. Sounds nice, doesn't it?

Afterward, why not head to a coffee meet-up in a cozy-yet-ca-



sual short-sleeved sweater and denim trouser-style bottoms from **Charlie B.** in your fave fall colors. It's the perfect way to perk up your look for the day—especially paired with a stylish suede sneaker from **Aetrex** and polarized **Sunski** sunglasses (you know, for those mornings and afternoon when the lowered fall sun seems to be in just the wrong spot).

Then there are the more re-

laxed ways to find pleasure in the season—especially as daylight collapses into early darkness: curling up with a good book, a mug of hot cocoa within reach and a scented **Whiskey River** candle flickering nearby as you snuggle under a blanket. What's not to love? Sure, might you need to crank the air conditioning to fully appreciate the cozy atmosphere—but we're here for it.

And who could forget the many reasons that fall gives us to come together? We're loving the idea of café lights strung around a back porch, glowing against the gathering dark of evening as everyone sits around the mahjong table. It's the satisfying sound of tiles being shuffled, a little friendly competition and the kind of conversation that always makes you lose track of time. At Blue Bay, we've got a great selection of **mahjong-themed** tees, mugs, keychains and tea towels—great for gifting “just

because” or as prizes for any game night. Add snacks (pumpkin spice flavoring optional), invite your favorite people and let “one more game” become the evening's unofficial motto.

When Halloween rolls around, embrace the opportunity to play—yes, we all know you're an adult, but live a little! Whether your party plans call for a full costume or just a festive touch like a **fun graphic tee**, there's something undeniably fantastic about an evening devoted to a little make-believe—and seeing which of your friends really goes all-in.

Enjoy the weather, the season, the chance to tuck in and get cozy. Let it inspire you to get outside a little more, gather with friends and just enjoy the scenery—especially now that the sweat isn't pouring down your face and into your eyes. Pull out your sweaters and boots—or, better yet, come into Blue Bay and check out our selection—and find your seasonal faves. Sure, we may be in Florida, but it's fall, y'all!



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 Fort Walton Beach, FL 32548



LaFamiglia

La Famiglia's new Shalimar location brings the welcoming spirit and rich flavors of an Italian family table to the Fort Walton Beach area. Begin with fresh Burrata La Famiglia, homemade meatballs over whipped ricotta or an Italian board filled with imported meats and cheeses. Then explore an enticing selection of handmade pasta, risotto, pizza, seafood and traditional entrées. Favorites include Mezze Maniche Carbonara, Lasagna Della Nonna, Lobster Ravioli, Osso Buco and Cioppino, along with distinctive pizzas topped with ingredients such as truffle cream, prosciutto, burrata and imported mortadella. A kids' menu makes it easy to bring the whole family. La Famiglia also offers online ordering, catering and private-party packages for gatherings of all sizes. Reservations are available, and walk-in guests are always welcome. Hours: M-Sat 11-9; Closed Sundays.

850-279-4527

1281 Eglin Parkway, Shalimar
lafamigliaitalianshalimar.com

Magnolia Grill

In 2001, Magnolia Grill in Fort Walton Beach opened its doors after a renovation that took 18 months—and it's been thriving since. A local's favorite

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

(850) 812-5761

157 Brooks Street SE, FWB
magnoliagrillfwb.com

Smoothie King

Smoothie King in downtown Fort Walton Beach serves convenient, health-focused choices through its drive-through window. The locally owned franchise offers fruit-and-vegie smoothies, protein-packed fitness blends and hydrating favorites such as the Pineapple Mango—delicious with a Greek yogurt enhancer. Guests can also enjoy açai bowls, avocado or peanut butter toast and satisfying chicken flatbreads. Ingredients are selected for peak ripeness, flavor and nutrients, while water and ice undergo a multifaceted filtration process. With 16 protein options—including vegan, keto-friendly and muscle-building blends—there's something for nearly every lifestyle. Join the loyalty program for BOGOs, freebies and other rewards. Hours: M-F 7-9; Sat 8-9; Sun 10-8.

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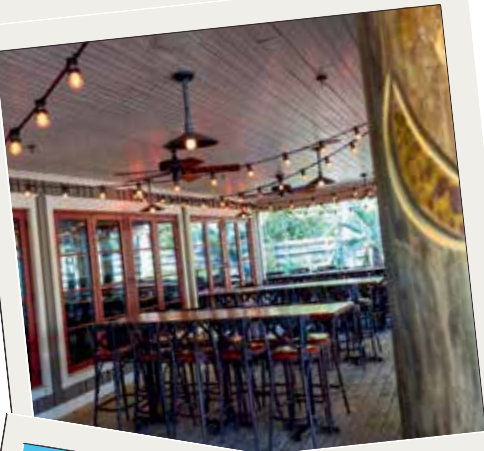
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Football. Food. Fun. Fans. Let the Games Begin...

Local Fan Favorites



By SCOTT MILLER

September college football can seem like the preseason as the powerhouse teams often get to beat up on the not so mighty. October football has a different feel to it. Now, it's time for teams to prove whether they truly belong in the top 10. As of October 1, the rankings look like this:

Texas, Georgia, Notre Dame, Miami (FL), Ohio State, Indiana, Alabama, Florida, Ole Miss and BYU. It's always fun to watch how this plays out. So, fans, let the October games begin!

And, there's no better place to watch the action than Destin. Some of the best sports bars and restaurants anywhere are

right here in our own back yard. They're ready to welcome us in, serve up some really great food, cold beer and delicious specialty drinks, and make every game feel like a championship. Here are a few of my favorites. So, grab your crew, claim your spot and get in on the action—I'll see you there!

activities in the Destin area, and AJ's has everything you need for a winning football season.

116 Harbor Blvd. | Destin
850-837-1913
ajsdestin.com

AJ's Oyster Shanty – Okaloosa Island

Bring your appetite and your game-day crew to AJ's Oyster Shanty on Okaloosa Island. A dozen for me, a dozen for you—and plenty of football-season fun for everyone! The Shanty serves fresh, cold oysters and seafood alongside some of the best live music on the island.

Thursday football pairs perfectly with the Prime Rib Dinner Special, available every Thursday beginning at 4 p.m. Enjoy a 10-ounce cut of prime rib with a baked potato, side salad, au jus and horseradish cream sauce for \$22.95. Save room for Key lime pie, served all day, every day.

Join the fun with karaoke every Wednesday at 7 p.m. and live music every other night. With food, entertainment and island energy, AJ's Oyster Shanty is ready for football season.

108 Santa Rosa Blvd. | FWB
850-226-8108
ajsoystershanty.com

AJ's on the Bayou

Kick back by the water and cheer on your team at AJ's on the Bayou, located at the base of the Cinco Bayou Bridge in Fort Walton Beach. With indoor seating and an open-air deck overlooking the bayou, AJ's lets fans pair football with a beautiful waterfront view, a refreshing mimosa and something delicious to eat.

Make a weekend game even better with brunch and bottomless mimosas for just \$10.95 with a food purchase. AJ's also serves \$12.95 weekday lunch specials that include iced tea. With live music or entertainment every day, it's a lively destination where football, food and fun come together.

200 NE Eglin Parkway | FWB
850-226-7579
ajsonthebayou.com

AJ's Seafood & Oyster Bar

Go big on game day at AJ's Seafood & Oyster Bar, home to the one and only Jumbotron on the Destin Harbor. Watch your favorite football teams on the big, big screen while taking in the energy and beauty of the harbor, enjoying fabulous food and sipping a game-day drink.

For 40 years, AJ's has been serving fresh Gulf Coast oysters and cool libations. What began as a popular local hangout for fresh oysters and cold beer—shucked from the deck behind a small trailer on the harbor—has grown into one of Destin's most iconic hot spots with four locations along the Emerald Coast. Add daily specials, mouthwatering drinks, live music throughout the month and exciting water

FUBAR Pizza Bar

Pizza, wings, football and a waterfront view—FUBAR Pizza Bar has the game-day lineup covered. Nestled on Okaloosa Island, this locally owned, family-friendly favorite carries all sports games and offers live entertainment, impeccable service and an inviting place to cheer on your team.

FUBAR is known for its almost-famous pizza and wings, but the fun goes well beyond the menu. Kids can enjoy an assortment of games, while adults can challenge friends to pool, cornhole or darts. Boaters can pull into one of FUBAR's slips after

Continued on page 20

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LaFamigliaItalianShalimar.com

2026 High School Football Schedules

Fort Walton Beach Vikings

Aug 13: vs. Niceville (Kickoff Classic)
Aug 21: vs. Pensacola
Aug 28: vs. South Walton
Sep 4: at West Florida Tech
Sep 11: vs. Milton*
Sep 18: vs. Walton
Sep 25: at Gulf Breeze*
Oct 2: at Navarre
Oct 9: at Choctawhatchee*
Oct 16: vs. Escambia*
Oct 23: at Booker T. Washington*
Oct 30: Open Week
* Denotes District Game.

Choctawhatchee Indians

Aug. 14: vs. Bay (KO Classic)
Aug. 20: at Mosley
Aug. 28: vs. Auburn (AL)
Sept. 4: at Pace
Sept. 11: at Escambia (District Game)
Sept. 18: vs. Niceville
Sept. 25: at Milton (District Game)
Oct. 9: vs. Fort Walton Beach (District Game)
Oct. 16: vs. Booker T. Washington (District Game)
Oct. 23: vs. Gulf Breeze (District Game)
Oct. 30: at Thompson (AL)

All games 7 p.m.



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Mary Esther
• 251 Mary Esther Blvd.

Pensacola
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Fort Walton Beach
• 901 Beal Pkwy NW
• 1285 Eglin Pkwy.

Crestview
• 297B James Lee
Blvd.

Panama City
• 1360 West 15th St

Callaway
• 809/807 N. Tyndall
Pkwy.

Pensacola
• 4600 Mobile Hwy.



SEC Football Schedule

SEC	Oct 10	Oct 17	Oct 24	Oct 31	Nov 7	Nov 14	Nov 21	Nov 28
Alabama	UGA	@TENN	A&M	OPEN	@LSU	@VANDY	UTC	AUBURN
Arkansas	TENN	@VANDY	OPEN	MIZZOU	@AUB	S CAR	@TEX	LSU
Auburn	OPEN	@UGA	LSU	@OLE MISS	ARK	@MISS ST	SAMFORD	@BAMA
Florida	S CAR	@TEX	OPEN	UGA (ATL)	OKLA	@UK	VANDY	@FSU
Georgia	@BAMA	AUB	OPEN	FLA (ATL)	@OLE MISS	MIZZOU	@S CAR	GA TECH
Kentucky	LSU	@OKLA	VANDY	OPEN	@TENN	FLA	@MIZZOU	LOUISVILLE
LSU	@KU	MISS ST	@AUB	OPEN	BAMA	TEXAS	@TENN	@ARK
Ole Miss	@VANDY	MIZZOU	@TEXAS	AUB	UGA	@OKLA	WOFFORD	MISS ST
Miss St	OPEN	@LSU	OKLA	@TEX	VANDY	AUB	TENN TECH	@OLE MISS
Missouri	A&M	@OLE MISS	OPEN	@ARK	TEX	@UGA	KU	OKLA
Oklahoma	TEX (DAL)	KU	@MISS ST	S CAR	FLA	OLE MISS	A&M	MIZZOU
S Carolina	@FLA	OPEN	TENN	@OKLA	A&M	@ARK	UGA	@CLEMSON
Tennessee	@ARK	BAMA	@S CAR	OPEN	UK	@A&M	LSU	@VANDY
Tex A&M	@MIZZOU	CITADEL	@BAMA	OPEN	@S. CAR	TENN	@OKLA	TEX (11/27)
Texas	OKLA (DAL)	FLA	OLE MISS	MISS ST	@MIZZOU	@LSU	ARK	A&M (11/27)
Vanderbilt	OLE MISS	ARK	@KU	OPEN	@MISS ST	BAMA	@FLA	TENN

FAN FAVORITES

continued from page 18

a day on the water, and furry friends are welcome to join the party on the patio.

Planning your own football

gathering, party or special event? FUBAR offers several private sections with the option of a private bar. Its outdoor deck can comfortably accommodate up to 300 guests and can be divided to suit your needs. Customized menus

can feature everything from Italian favorites to prime rib.

Open seven days a week from 11 a.m. to 2 a.m.

114 Amberjack Drive | Okaloosa Island 850-226-7084 fubarfwb.com

The Boardwalk on Okaloosa Island

Turn game day into a day at the beach at The Boardwalk on Okaloosa Island. With its prime Gulf-front location, convenient parking and variety of dining, shopping and entertainment options, The Boardwalk offers football fans plenty of ways to watch their favorite teams while enjoying the sights and flavors of the Emerald Coast.

Grab a table at Rockin Tacos, The Crab Trap, Floyd’s Shrimp House or Al’s Beach Club & Burger Bar, then enjoy a halftime walk along the shore. The breathtaking views are always on the menu, and sandy toes and salty swimsuits are welcome.

The Boardwalk is also an official county park with public beach access, free parking, pavilions, picnic tables, public restrooms and outdoor showers. Throughout the year, it hosts community favorites such as the Emerald Coast Motorcycle Challenge, coastal beach cleanups, the “Tricks and Treasures” Halloween event and the New Year’s Day Pelican Plunge. It is also home to two legendary volleyball tournaments: Emerald Coast Volleyball Week in the spring and the Emerald Coast Fall Classic.

1450 Miracle Strip Parkway SE, FWB 850-301-0959 theboardwalkoi.com



Pro Football Schedule

WEEK 6 (OCT. 15-19)
Thursday, Oct. 15: Seattle Seahawks at Denver Broncos — 7:15 pm, Prime Video
Sunday, Oct. 18: Houston Texans vs. Jacksonville Jaguars (London) — 8:30 am, NFL Network
Chicago Bears at Atlanta Falcons — Noon, FOX
Baltimore Ravens at Cleveland Browns — Noon, CBS
Tennessee Titans at Indianapolis Colts — Noon, CBS
New York Jets at New England Patriots — Noon, CBS
New Orleans Saints at New York Giants — Noon, FOX
Carolina Panthers at Philadelphia Eagles — Noon, FOX
Pittsburgh Steelers at Tampa Bay Buccaneers — Noon, CBS
Arizona Cardinals at Los Angeles Rams — 3:05 pm, FOX
Los Angeles Chargers at Kansas City Chiefs — 3:25 pm, CBS
Buffalo Bills at Las Vegas Raiders — 3:25 pm, CBS
Dallas Cowboys at Green Bay Packers — 7:20 pm, NBC
Monday, Oct. 19: Washington Commanders at San Francisco 49ers — 7:15 pm, ESPN/ABC
Byes: Cincinnati Bengals, Detroit Lions, Miami Dolphins, Minnesota Vikings

WEEK 7 (OCT. 22-26)
Thursday, Oct. 22: New England Patriots at Chicago Bears — 7:15 pm, Prime Video
Sunday, Oct. 25: Pittsburgh Steelers vs. New Orleans Saints (Paris) — 8:30 am, NFL Network
San Francisco 49ers at Atlanta Falcons — Noon, FOX
Cincinnati Bengals at Baltimore Ravens — Noon, CBS
Tampa Bay Buccaneers at Carolina Panthers — Noon, FOX
New York Giants at Houston Texans — Noon, FOX
Indianapolis Colts at Minnesota Vikings — Noon, CBS
Miami Dolphins at New York Jets — Noon, CBS
Cleveland Browns at Tennessee Titans — Noon, CBS
Denver Broncos at Arizona Cardinals — 3:05 pm, CBS
Green Bay Packers at Detroit Lions — 3:25 pm, FOX
Los Angeles Rams at Las Vegas Raiders — 3:25 pm, FOX
Kansas City Chiefs at Seattle Seahawks — 7:20 pm, NBC
Monday, Oct. 26: Dallas Cowboys at Philadelphia Eagles — 7:15 pm, ESPN
Byes: Buffalo Bills, Jacksonville Jaguars, Los Angeles Chargers, Washington Commanders

WEEK 8 (OCT. 29-NOV. 2)
Thursday, Oct. 29: Carolina Panthers at Green Bay Packers — 7:15 pm, Prime Video
Sunday, Nov. 1: Baltimore Ravens at Buffalo Bills — Noon, CBS
Tennessee Titans at Cincinnati Bengals — Noon, CBS
Atlanta Falcons at Tampa Bay Buccaneers — Noon, FOX
Minnesota Vikings at Detroit Lions — Noon, FOX
Indianapolis Colts at Jacksonville Jaguars — Noon, CBS
Las Vegas Raiders at New York Jets — Noon, FOX
Cleveland Browns at Pittsburgh Steelers — Noon, CBS
Arizona Cardinals at Dallas Cowboys — Noon, FOX
Los Angeles Chargers at Los Angeles Rams — 3:05 pm, FOX
Kansas City Chiefs at Denver Broncos — 3:25 pm, CBS
New England Patriots at Miami Dolphins — 3:25 pm, CBS
Philadelphia Eagles at Washington Commanders — 7:20 pm, NBC
Monday, Nov. 2: Chicago Bears at Seattle Seahawks — 7:15 pm, ESPN
Byes: Houston Texans, New Orleans Saints, New York Giants, San Francisco 49ers

WEEK 9 (NOV. 5-9)
Thursday, Nov. 5: Jacksonville Jaguars at Baltimore Ravens — 7:15 pm, Prime Video
Sunday, Nov. 8: Cincinnati Bengals vs. Atlanta Falcons (Madrid) — 8:30 am, NFL Network
Denver Broncos at Carolina Panthers — Noon, CBS/FOX regional
Dallas Cowboys at Indianapolis Colts — Noon, CBS/FOX regional
New York Jets at Kansas City Chiefs — Noon, CBS/FOX regional
Detroit Lions at Miami Dolphins — Noon, CBS/FOX regional
Cleveland Browns at New Orleans Saints — Noon, CBS/FOX regional
New York Giants at Philadelphia Eagles — Noon, CBS/FOX regional
Los Angeles Rams at Washington Commanders — Noon, CBS/FOX regional
Houston Texans at Los Angeles Chargers — 3:05 pm, CBS/FOX regional
Las Vegas Raiders at San Francisco 49ers — 3:05 pm, CBS/FOX regional
Green Bay Packers at New England Patriots — 3:25 pm, CBS/FOX regional
Arizona Cardinals at Seattle Seahawks — 3:25 pm, CBS/FOX regional
Tampa Bay Buccaneers at Chicago Bears — 7:20 pm, NBC
Monday, Nov. 9: Buffalo Bills at Minnesota Vikings — 7:15 pm, ESPN/ABC
Byes: Pittsburgh Steelers, Tennessee Titans



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Tequila Lesson 201

By LARRY McCrary, President, AGAZUL USA

Mexico manages to make a massive amount of tequila due to the popularity of the drink. It currently produces more than 500 million liters per year, or more than 650 million bottles' worth. While not all of that would be 100% agave tequila, that is still around 100 million agave plants' worth. Considering that most agave for tequila is harvested by hand, it puts into context the massive amount of work it takes to get a bottle to your local liquor store. And all that comes from one very special Blue Weber agave plant.

Unless you've had the opportunity to stand in a field of agave plants in Mexico, you aren't prepared for just how big they are. By law in Mexico, tequila can be made only from Blue Weber agave. That's because, like Champagne in France, Prosciutto di Parma in Italy and other historically significant products, tequila is governed by strict laws to protect the purity of its origins and flavors. Blue Weber was the agave first used



to distill the spirit in the town of Tequila hundreds of years ago and gives a unique taste due to a level of sweetness well above most other agave plants.

The wide range of tequila yields from a single Blue Weber agave plant comes from the range of sizes they can grow to. Blue Weber can grow leaves that reach heights of up to 6 feet, but what really matters to tequila yield is the piña. This is the center ball of the agave plant

that the spiky leaves grow from, and it gets that name because, once it's trimmed for tequila, it resembles a massive pineapple.

On average, it takes five to seven years for one to mature to the point of making good tequila. And there are also limits on where tequila can be made. Not only can tequila be legally produced only in Mexico, but the country limits production to five states. Jalisco, Guanajuato, Tamaulipas, Michoacán and Nayarit are the five tequila-producing

states, although Jalisco is by far the dominant one. The area of production is limited because, just like wine grapes, the taste of tequila is highly tied to the type of geographic region it's produced in, such as highland and lowland tequila, so only proper growing conditions produce proper tequila.

The piña, or the heart, represents about 50% of the mass of the whole agave plant, and at harvest time, it can weigh

anywhere from 20 to more than 200 pounds. The piña must be cooked to concentrate the sap into sugars, which can then be extracted for fermentation and distillation. The way piñas are roasted can also determine the final flavors of the tequila. While agave syrup is obviously sweet, it isn't that concentrated in the piña, so even those massive yields produce only a moderate amount of juice. By law, tequila is only required to be made with a minimum of 51% agave, and many more affordable tequila brands are filled out with things like corn syrup or cane sugar. That means the amount of tequila they can squeeze out of a plant is theoretically higher, but if you are sticking with the 100% version, and ideally the additive-free options that many people consider true tequila, a half-dozen bottles is standard.

In the end, it takes around 7 kilograms, or 15 pounds, of piña to produce a liter of tequila. A typical 750-milliliter bottle takes only around 5 kilograms, or 11 pounds, to produce.

Visit **Agazultequila.com**.

Where to Buy Agazul Tequila Locally

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

Retailers:

- Total Wine – Destin and all across Florida
- Cash's – Okaloosa Island
- Cash's – Destin
- Cash's – Bluewater Bay
- Cash's – Freeport
- Cash's – DeFuniak Springs
- Cheers Wine & Liquor – Bluewater Bay (Niceville), next to Pepito's
- Cheers Wine & Liquor – Pensacola

Restaurants:

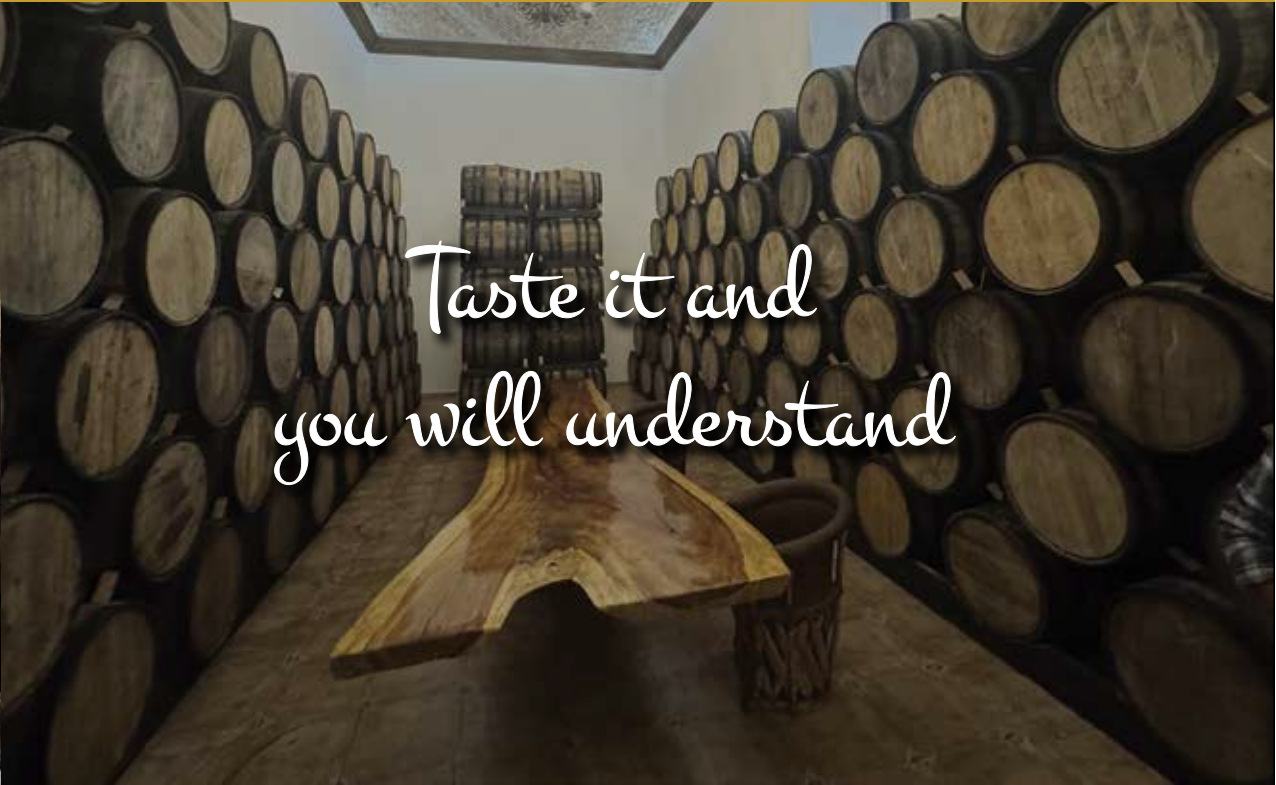
- Nick's Seafood Restaurant – Freeport
- Cajun Corner Sports Bar & Grill – Santa Rosa Beach
- Mambos Restaurant – FWB
- G.I. Jade Tiki Bar & Bistro – FWB
- Downtown Music Hall – FWB
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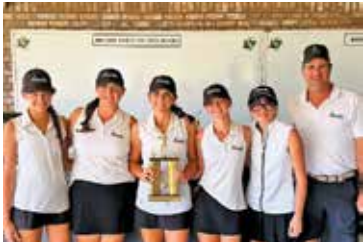


By BARBARA PALMGREN

Every autumn the top high school girls' golf teams compete at the Fort Walton Municipal Golf Course in this age honored tournament. This year, with beautiful weather, girls grade

9-12 from area schools around the Florida Panhandle, competed for top honors as a team and as an individual. Participating schools included: Niceville, Fort Walton, Choctawhatchee, South Walton (Santa Rosa Beach), Chiles (Tallahassee), Rocky Bayou, Navarre, Mosely (Lynn Haven), Pensacola, Crestview, North Bay Haven (Panama City), Bay (Panama City), and West Florida (Pensacola.)

Tournament Director, Justin



Reid, teacher and golf coach from Meigs Middle School, organized the event. Justin has done this for the past four years at the Pines course. A graduate

of Choctawhatchee High School with a Masters in Ed Leadership from the University of West Florida, Justin lives and loves this area of Florida. Checking on pace of play and encouraging all the golfers, Justin enjoyed the competition and the determination of these young teens as they pitched errant shots out of sand traps and learned how to get out of trouble when a tee shot didn't land in the fairway. Sometimes golf balls just don't

listen as they should. At the end of the day the Class A, Region 1 honors for the top girls' golf team went to Niceville High School with a total score of 344 for 18 holes. Top individual golfer was a tie! Tenley Sharron and Rayna Perkin of South Walton (Santa Rosa Beach) both scored 76 for eighteen holes. Congratulations to all the young ladies that are enjoying golf and bringing honor to their school.

Confidence Is Built in Small Wins

By DAVE DURMAN

By October, the school year

has found its rhythm. Families are juggling homework, activities and busy evenings. It is a good time to ask what we want children to learn from the things we make room for.

Confidence is often high on that list. But telling a child to "be confident" does not give them much to work with. A manageable challenge, patient instruction and the chance to try again offer something more useful: evidence that they can improve.

That is one of the most valuable parts of martial arts training. A beginner does not need to arrive knowing how to stand,

move or remember a combination. Those are things we teach. The willingness to have a go is enough to begin.

For a young child, progress might mean listening to an instruction and following it, keeping balance during a kick, or waiting patiently for a turn. For an older student, it might mean working with a new partner or accepting a correction without giving up.

Our Principles of Black Belt guide that growth: modesty, courtesy, integrity, perseverance, courage and indomitable



and adults a place to develop martial arts skills. Fitness Kickboxing gives fourteen and up another way to get moving and learn striking fundamentals.

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spirit. Practicing courtesy earns respect. Perseverance turns setbacks into progress. Courage helps us take the next step, even when it feels difficult. Each small win builds confidence.

The same principle applies to adults. You do not have to get fit before you start, and feeling awkward while learning something new is perfectly normal. Being a beginner is a stage of learning, whatever your age.

At Coastal Martial Arts & Fitness, our Dragonites program gives children ages five to seven an age-appropriate introduction to training. Kempo offers children eight and up, teens

For families choosing an activity this fall, look beyond the belt or the workout. Look for a place where questions are welcome, effort matters and beginners have room to grow.

Confidence is built one small step at a time. Every small achievement gives a student another reason to believe, "I can do it."

Dave Durman is the Head Instructor at Coastal Martial Arts & Fitness in Fort Walton Beach. He has more than 40 years of martial arts experience and has been teaching martial arts for over 25 years.

Crunch Fitness Brings Boutique Fitness Studios All Under One Roof in Fort Walton Beach

The new \$5 million, 37,000-square-foot club combines specialty fitness studios, a full-service gym and recovery amenities in one membership.

Pilates one day. Strength training the next. Hot yoga, HIIT or group fitness in between. Hydro-Massage when it's time to recover.

Fort Walton Beach residents will soon be able to find it all under one roof.

Crunch Fitness is transforming the former retail space at 546 Mary Esther Cut Off NW in Longhorn Plaza into a \$5 million, 37,000-square-foot fitness destination that combines the energy, coaching and community of boutique fitness studios with everything members expect from a full-service gym.

Expected to open this winter, Crunch Fort Walton Beach will serve Fort Walton Beach, Mary Esther, Destin and communities around Choctawhatchee Bay, including residents connected to Hurlburt Field and Eglin Air Force Base.

Two of the biggest additions

will be Crunch's latest boutique-style fitness concepts. The Crunch Reform Pilates™ Studio will combine instructor-led coaching with integrated digital guidance for a modern reformer Pilates experience, bringing one of today's most popular boutique workouts into a full-service gym without the premium price tag.

The club will also be one of the first to feature the new Crunch Pump™ Strength Studio, a dedicated space for progressive strength training through structured, coach-led programming with integrated digital guidance. Members can build strength, track progress and train in a focused, motivating environment. Both studios are included with Peak Results memberships.

Classes offer more than a great workout. Training alongside others can create community, accountability and commitment. There is an instructor leading the way, people working alongside you and a reason to keep showing up.

It is the kind of experience

people often seek from individual boutique studios, but Crunch is bringing multiple ways to train together in one place, without the serious prices that can come with joining several different studios. And the membership doesn't stop at the studio door.

Members will also have access to expansive cardio, strength and functional training areas, Olympic lifting platforms, indoor turf, TRX®, advanced HIIT classes, Power Half Hour circuit training, personal training and Crunch's signature group fitness classes. The Hot Studio will offer heated classes including Hot Yoga, Hot Pilates and other hot fitness formats.

"The Crunch experience is a natural fit for the area's active coastal lifestyle and strong, family-friendly, military-connected community," said Mike Goodsell, Chief Officer for Fit Fusion, the Crunch Fitness franchisee opening the club. "We're bringing together so many different ways to work out, but what makes classes special is the community that

forms around them. People motivate each other, hold each other accountable and have fun while getting stronger."

Recovery is part of the experience, too. Crunch's Relax & Recover® area will feature HydroMassage® beds, red light therapy and cryotherapy. Members will also find tanning, a sauna, full-service locker rooms with showers and Kid's Crunch babysitting. The club will be open and staffed 24 hours a day, providing flexibility for military members, shift workers, busy parents and anyone with a nontraditional schedule.

Memberships start at \$9.99 per month, and Crunch Fort Walton Beach will offer an exclusive, limited-time promotion for founding members. The first 500 members can join for only \$1 and receive their first month free, a limited-edition founding member T-shirt and free Crunch swag. To become part of the Founding 500, reserve your rate at info.crunch.com. Prospective members can also enter to win one of

10 free one-year memberships.

Local businesses can get involved, too. Crunch's Corporate Membership and Perks Partner programs offer employee discounts and opportunities for local businesses to reach Crunch members through the Crunch app, in-club events, gym TVs and social media. Learn more about Crunch partnerships.

Think Crunch sounds like a great place to work? Explore career opportunities with Fit Fusion.

For Fort Walton Beach, the new Crunch will bring Pilates, strength training, hot classes, HIIT, group fitness, a full gym and recovery together in one place, giving the community more ways to find a workout they love, people to do it with and a reason to keep coming back.

To learn more visit: CrunchFortWaltonBeach.com

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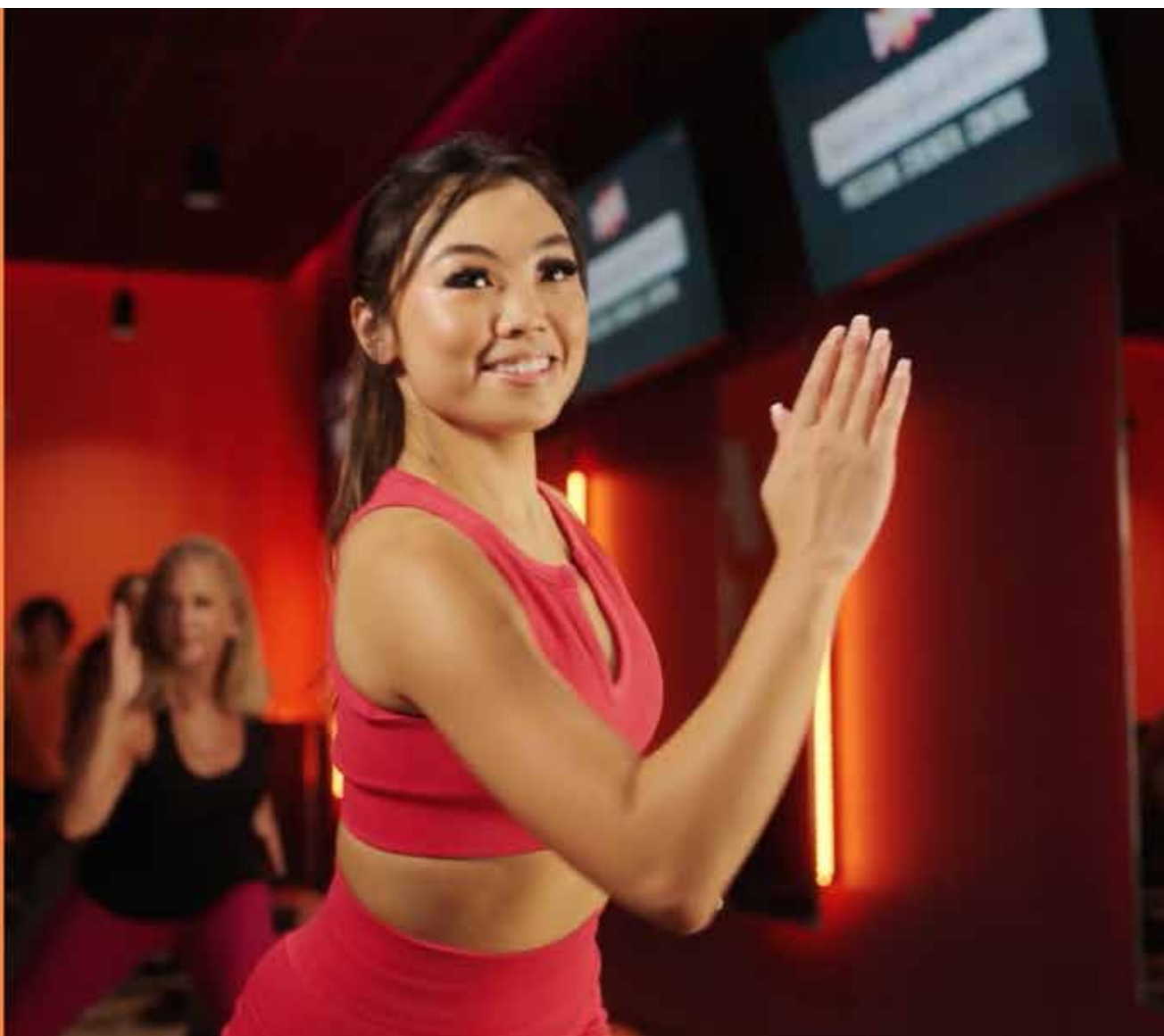


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 Wellness


BY KASSIA GARFIELD, OWNER,
MAXSTRENGTH FITNESS

Many people begin an exercise program with one goal in mind: losing weight. While weight loss can be beneficial for some individuals, focusing solely on the number on the scale often misses a much more important measure of health and fitness — body composition.

Body composition refers to the proportion of muscle, fat, bone and other tissues that make up your body. Two people can weigh exactly the same but have dramatically different body compositions and health outcomes. This is where muscle becomes incredibly important.

Muscle tissue is metabolically active, meaning it requires energy to maintain itself. Every muscle cell contains thousands of mitochondria, often called the “powerhouses” of the cell. These mitochondria continuously use oxygen and nutrients to produce energy, even when

you’re resting. While muscle doesn’t burn hundreds of calories per pound as some fitness myths suggest, having more muscle does increase resting metabolic rate and total daily energy expenditure.

However, the relationship between muscle and metabolism is often oversimplified. While adding a few pounds of muscle will not suddenly double your calorie burn, it does create a measurable increase in resting metabolic rate. More importantly, muscle improves the body’s ability to process carbohydrates, regulate blood sugar, store glycogen and utilize fat as fuel. These metabolic improvements can have a significant impact on long-term health and weight management.

The process begins when strength training challenges muscle fibers. The body responds by increasing protein synthesis, repairing damaged fibers and building new contractile proteins. Over time, this leads to larger and stronger muscles. Maintaining this additional tissue requires energy 24 hours a day, creating a higher metabolic demand compared to fat tissue. Building muscle also



creates a phenomenon known as muscle protein turnover. Muscle tissue is constantly being broken down and rebuilt, even when you are not exercising. This continuous cycle requires energy and contributes to overall metabolic activity. In addition, strength training sessions stimulate muscle protein synthesis for up to 24-72 hours after exercise, temporarily increasing energy expenditure as the body repairs and strengthens muscle fibers.

Building muscle and changing metabolism are not overnight processes. Early strength gains during the first four to eight weeks of training are primarily due to improvements in

the nervous system. Your brain becomes better at recruiting muscle fibers, coordinating movement and producing force. Significant increases in muscle mass typically become more noticeable after eight to 12 weeks of consistent training, though this varies based on age, nutrition, training intensity and genetics.

As muscle mass increases over months and years, metabolism gradually changes as well. In addition to the direct energy cost of maintaining muscle tissue, strength training improves insulin sensitivity, enhances glucose uptake into muscles and increases the body’s ability to utilize nutrients efficiently. These physiological adaptations help support long-term weight management and metabolic health.

This is why many people become discouraged when the scale doesn’t change despite exercising consistently. A person may lose several pounds of fat while simultaneously gaining muscle. Because muscle is denser than fat, their weight may stay the same even though their waist circumference decreases, their clothes fit better and their overall health improves.

The goal should not always be to weigh less. In many cases, the better goal is to improve body composition by increasing muscle mass and reducing excess body fat. A stronger body burns more energy, moves more efficiently, tolerates physical stress better and remains more functional with age.

Instead of asking, “How much weight have I lost?” consider asking, “How much stronger have I become?” The answer to that question often provides a far more meaningful measure of progress. Over time, increased strength, greater muscle mass and improved body composition can lead to a healthier metabolism and a healthier life — even if the number on the scale changes very little.

If you are having a hard time fitting in a workout, feel like you don’t know where to start or just need some help, try MaxStrength Fitness. We do effective, efficient and safe 20-minute workouts, just twice a week. We deliver results with a science-backed program. Give us a call at 850-373-4450 (Niceville) or 850-467-9729 (Fort Walton Beach)!

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For many people, the ideal physician knows them well, takes time to listen, and partners with them to achieve long-term health. That vision is at the heart of the new MDVIP-affiliated practice led by Dr. Chris Pappas and Dr. John Loudermilk, two highly respected family physicians who have served the Destin community since 2012 and 2021, respectively. They're accepting new patients.

Located in the heart of Destin, we built the practice on a simple but powerful philosophy: healthcare should be personal, proactive and focused on prevention. We're limiting our practice size so we can spend more time with each patient and provide individualized attention, which is difficult to achieve in a traditional primary care setting.

For Dr. John Loudermilk, helping people pursue lifelong wellness has always been a driving force in his medical career. His approach centers on building meaningful relationships with patients and understanding each person's unique health goals.

"My mission is to partner with you to help you build a foundation of lifelong wellness, not just help you address sickness." — Dr. John Loudermilk

Dr. Loudermilk has a special interest in adult and geriatric medicine, chronic disease management, sports medicine and chronic pain. He believes prevention should be the cornerstone of care, helping patients identify health risks early and take meaningful steps toward healthier, longer lives.

Dr. Chris Pappas brings a wealth of experience to the community, including board certifications in family medicine and primary care sports medicine, as well as service in the U.S. Army. His philosophy is rooted in restoring what he believes is the true essence of medicine: a compassionate relationship between doctor and patient.

"I consider myself your personal medical advisor, with a responsibility to educate you and partner with you on medical decision-making. I believe one size most definitely does not fit all." — Dr. Chris Pappas

Together, Drs. Pappas and Loudermilk are creating a practice environment where everyone can focus on wellness and disease prevention. Patients benefit from the MDVIP Wellness Program, which includes advanced screenings, diagnostic testing and personalized wellness planning designed to detect potential health concerns earlier.

As added conveniences, members enjoy unhurried same- or next-day appointments with minimal waiting. You can also reach the doctors after hours for urgent needs. Our goal is to provide a healthcare experience that is both highly personal and deeply responsive.

The practice offers residents of Destin, Fort Walton Beach and surrounding communities the opportunity to develop a closer, more collaborative relationship with a physician committed to helping patients thrive at every stage of life.

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Drs. Pappas and Loudermilk are currently accepting new patients. They accept Medicare, Tricare For Life, and most major health insurance carriers. Learn more by visiting mdvip.com/PappasMD or mdvip.com/LoudermilkMD.

Better Sleep with Bioidentical Hormone Pellets



By Dr. Richard Chern

Getting enough quality sleep is essential for physical health, emotional well-being, memory, and daily energy. Yet, sleep problems become increasingly common as men and women age, particularly when natural hormone levels begin to change. Bioidentical hormone therapy (BHRT) helps improve sleep by addressing hormonal imbalances and symptoms that interfere with restful sleep.

Bioidentical hormones are designed to have a molecular

structure identical or very similar to hormones naturally produced by the body. Depending on an individual's needs, hormone therapy may involve estrogen, progesterone, testosterone, or a combination of hormones. Treatment should be individualized based on symptoms, medical history, laboratory blood testing, and an assessment of potential risks and benefits.

How Hormones Affect Sleep

Hormones play an important role in regulating the body's sleep-wake cycle. Changes in hormone levels can contribute to nighttime awakenings, difficulty falling asleep, reduced sleep quality, and daytime fatigue.

For women, declining estrogen and progesterone during perimenopause and menopause can contribute to hot flashes, night sweats, anxiety, and other symptoms that disrupt sleep.

Continued on next page

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More Than a Smile: Why Oral Health Matters



BY KAY LEAMAN, HEALTH ARCHITECT, CERTIFIED NUTRITION AND SKIN ADVISOR

The oral cavity, aka the mouth, is a crucial part of the body's health system. Most of us enjoy going to the dentist (a white lie). It is recommended to go every six months for a cleaning and checkup. The results of these checkups reveal how well we have done our part in keeping our mouths healthy.

Let's look at some facts:

We swallow about 140 billion bacteria daily, which seeds our gastrointestinal tract. We carry around trillions of microscopic bugs that live in and on our bodies, including the skin, gastrointestinal tract and mouth. The mouth is the primary entrance to the digestive system. Our oral microbiome in-

fluences health and disease in many other body systems. The mouth is home to the second most diverse population of microbes in the body, and the health of these microbes is linked to heart disease, joint health, diabetes and digestive disorders. Because of the world we live in and what we eat, our mouths are exposed to potentially harmful bacteria every day. If our mouths are healthy (microbes in good balance), they help us form a strong defense against infection and illness. When our mouths aren't up to par, they can allow potentially harmful bacteria into the bloodstream and are commonly associated with cavities, bad breath, gingivitis and periodontal disease. Note: Oral pathogens can colonize for life, leak into blood vessels and circulate throughout the body. This can result in many systemic diseases elsewhere in the body. Back in the day (way back), I was a Certified Dental Assistant with expanded duties. We would see patients who had been sent to us by their doctors to bring their oral cavities back to a healthy state. However, unless the patient takes responsibility for their part, their results will be short-lived. Most of us know what we should be doing, but do we

- know what we should be avoiding? Let's take a look:
- I recommend avoiding antibacterial toothpaste as well as those containing fluoride, as I believe these can disrupt the balance of our microbiome system.
 - Mouthwashes can destroy our beneficial microbes.
 - Work on not breathing through your mouth. Many of us unconsciously breathe through our mouths when we are winded, stressed, etc.
 - Begin moving to natural oral health products.
 - Consume probiotic-rich foods: plain yogurt (unsweetened), sauerkraut, pickles that are naturally fermented, etc.

A healthy lifestyle also contributes to oral health. This includes avoiding processed sugars, fast food, etc. Include a diet rich in fiber and veggies, as they are high in prebiotics (food for your beneficial microbes). Yes, we need to feed the good bacteria, and our guts are not the only area that needs our attention. Lastly, take time to floss and brush (soft bristles) properly each morning and evening. Be sure to brush your gums as well as your teeth. Don't use a



lot of pressure, as this can harm your gums and wear the tooth enamel. If you see blood when you floss, this is a sign that your gums need extra attention. Did you know that your teeth are not attached to bone but are attached via ligaments? If your gums remain in an unhealthy state, these ligaments can be destroyed, causing the need for extractions. AND, if you don't own a tongue scraper, you can pick one up at Walmart. You will be amazed at what hides in the spaces of your tongue. That is why dentists check your tongue, as it gives them clues

into the health of your oral cavity. Start from the back of your tongue and scrape toward the tip. Another thing you can add during the day is a G-U-M brush. This will help remove food between the teeth and aid in keeping your gums clean between brushings. We normally think of our smiles when it comes to our mouths. It's time to work at making your gut smile, too.

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BETTER SLEEP

continued from previous page

Estrogen therapy reduces hot flashes and night sweats, potentially allowing women to sleep more consistently. Progesterone may also have calming effects on the nervous system and has been studied for its potential influence on sleep. Men can experience changes in testosterone levels as they age. Low testosterone may be associated with fatigue, changes in mood, reduced energy, and other symptoms that can affect overall sleep and quality of life. For men with clinically confirmed testosterone deficiency, testosterone replacement therapy improves certain symptoms and, in some cases, sleep-related quality of life.

An Individualized Approach

For individuals whose sleep difficulties are related to changing hormone levels, properly managed hormone therapy may be one part of a comprehensive approach to better sleep. Combining appropriate medical treatment with healthy sleep habits, regular physical activity, stress management, and evaluation for sleep disorders can provide a more complete strategy for improving restorative sleep. If you're ready to stop feeling like you're just getting by and start feeling like yourself again, schedule a consultation with The Hormone Restoration Center and call (850) 837-1271 to schedule a consultation. Together, we'll determine whether bioidentical hormone pellet therapy is the right solution to help you look, feel, and live your best.



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Summer's Over, Now What?



By TIPP SPRADLIN

In Florida, we don't measure the year by the weather, we measure it by who is visiting. The holiday season is the brief window between Black Friday and New Year's Eve. Snowbird season is when northern license plates migrate south for the winter. Spring Break season is March Madness without the brackets. Memorial Day to Labor Day is when we welcome the masses and quietly remind ourselves they're helping pay the bills. Each of these seasons brings a different type of buyer to the counter and a different challenge for local businesses. But summer is the big one. By September, most locals are enjoying lighter traffic and shorter wait times at their favorite restaurants. I can't help but think of The Wizard of Oz when Glinda gently coaxes the Munchkins out of hiding and tells them the Wicked Witch is gone. And they all rejoice. But before we put another summer behind us, it's worth figuring out what we learned

from it. Grab the people who survived the summer with you, order some lunch, and start there. **Where did the business struggle?** What worked perfectly well in February but fell apart when July hit? Maybe it was staffing, scheduling, inventory, equipment or communication. Your employees are the best source of intel. They dealt with problems you never saw and probably came up with workarounds you don't know about. Ask nicely, bribe them if you have to, but get their feedback while everyone still remembers what happened. **What did your customers tell you?** Think about what customers repeatedly asked for, complained about or couldn't get. Maybe they wanted different hours, a product you don't carry, online ordering or a service you don't offer. Pay attention to patterns. You don't have to chase every suggestion, but repeated requests or complaints are free market research. **How did this summer actually compare to last summer?** Memory is a terrible accounting system and napkins aren't general ledgers. A packed parking lot, ringing phones and exhausted employees can make a season feel successful, but being busy doesn't always equal profitability. Pull up your Profit & Loss statement and find out if it actually was.



Compare the same months year over year. Look at revenue, payroll, cost of goods and other major expenses. Did you make more money? Did it cost considerably more to make it? Where did margins improve or shrink? Too many small businesses wait until the end of the year to really look at their books. By then, you can see what happened, but you may not remem-

ber why. Worse, a problem that showed up during Spring Break could quietly eat into profits all summer before anyone notices it in December. **What are you keeping, fixing or changing?** Maybe a new process worked beautifully. Document and standardize it. Maybe staffing was a constant struggle. Is there something you could do differently next season, or do you need to plan around the reality that finding enough people will continue to be difficult? Maybe customers kept asking for something you don't offer. Is

it worth exploring or is it just another TikTok fad? Maybe the numbers showed that your busiest month wasn't actually your most profitable one. That's worth understanding. Not every problem has an easy fix, and some may not have a fix at all. The point is to know which challenges you can control, which ones you need to plan around, and which opportunities are worth pursuing. Pick a few things worth acting on, write them down and make sure they don't get forgotten before the next busy season. Do this after every season that matters to your business.

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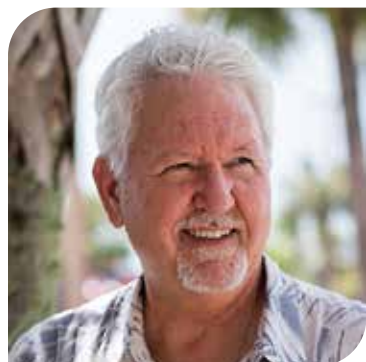


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BY PASTOR DAVE HOLLAND

A Pastor's Ponderings: Who Gets the Glory?

"David calls him 'Lord.' How then can he be his son?" Luke 20:44 (NIV)

What does this passage tell us about Jesus? What does it say about me?

The Jewish people knew the Messiah would come from David's family line. Throughout the Gospels, desperate people cried out to Jesus, "Son of David," pleading for healing and mercy.

But, Jesus wanted them to look higher.

The religious leaders knew their Scriptures. They understood theology and could debate doctrine. Yet, all that knowledge did not enable them to recognize the One standing directly in front of them. They saw a teacher from Nazareth. Jesus wanted them to see the Lord.

Christ pointed them to Psalm 110, where David wrote, "The Lord said to my lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'"

Then Jesus asked the obvious question: If David calls the Messiah "Lord," how can the Messiah merely be David's son? Jesus is David's son—and David's Lord. He is fully human and fully divine. He walked dusty roads, became hungry, grew tired, and wept. Yet He is also the eternal King who sits at the right hand of the Father.

Luke's Gentile readers lived beneath the shadow of Rome, where Caesar claimed enormous authority. But Jesus was a different kind of King.

Caesar could command an army. Jesus commanded the wind.

Caesar could occupy a nation. Jesus could forgive sins.

Caesar demanded allegiance. Jesus transformed human hearts.

And that brings this passage painfully close to home.

I remember the rude awakening I experienced as a young believer when I discovered Jesus was not only my Savior from sin—He was also my present Lord. I liked the Savior part. The Lord part was more challenging. I wanted Jesus to forgive me, bless me, protect me, and eventually take me to heaven. But Jesus wanted something more. He wanted me.

He wanted to lead my decisions, shape my behavior, govern my relationships, redirect my ambitions, and confront the attitudes nobody else could see. Following Jesus meant more than believing something about Him. It meant surrendering myself to Him.

Over 55 years have passed since I first trusted Christ. I've earned seminary degrees and spent about forty years in pastoral ministry. I've preached sermons, led churches, studied Scripture, and accumulated a lifetime of Christian experience. And, I have discovered something uncomfortable: I can still make it about me.

That is why Jesus' warning about the teachers of the law troubles me. They enjoyed respectful greetings, important seats, and being recognized as spiritual men.

I don't wear flowing robes. But I understand the temptation. I enjoy being respected. I appreciate someone remembering a sermon or telling me something I

did helped them. There is nothing wrong with encouragement. The danger begins when I start needing it.

Serving Jesus can quietly become wanting people to notice me serving Jesus. The ministry becomes my ministry. The accomplishment becomes my accomplishment. The story becomes my story. Almost without noticing, the servant moves toward the center while Jesus moves toward the edge. That is spiritual pride.

Perhaps the temptation becomes even more subtle as we grow older. We have accumulated accomplishments, titles, possessions, relationships, disappointments, and memories. We worked hard, raised families, built careers, served churches, survived losses, and learned some things the hard way. We have a history. And history can become either an altar where we thank God for His faithfulness—or a trophy case where we admire ourselves.

Jesus reminds me I am not the main character of my story. He is. My life has never really been about what I accomplished for Jesus. It is about what Jesus, in His mercy, has done in and through me. That changes the way I want to finish my life.

I don't need a better seat at the banquet. I want to sit closer to Jesus. I don't need people to remember my name. I want my children and grandchildren to remember His. I don't need another title. I want to hear Him say, "Well done."

The scribes wanted people looking at them. Jesus tells us to look higher—past the titles, accomplishments, applause and ourselves.

There, seated at the right hand of the Father, is the Son of David—the Lord of David and the Lord of us all.

The longer I walk with Him, the more I want my life to say one simple thing: Less of me. More of Jesus.

Dave Holland pastored churches for thirty-eight years before retiring in Destin, Florida. His new book, Resurrection Jesus, is now available. You can get a copy of his books from his website, DaveHolland.org, or at Amazon.com. Pastor Dave is available to preach and teach at churches and conferences. Contact him at DavidHolland54@gmail.com.

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BY SEAN DIETRICH

Right now, the news media is in an uproar over AI. The headlines are bleak. Experts are saying our cherished way of life is in danger. Pretty soon, if things keep going this direction, they say we will lose basic human abilities, such as empathy, sustained focus, and the ability to spel without autocorrek.

And while I know I'm supposed to be terrified of AI, I'm not worried. Namely, because right now, I'm busy watching "The Dog House."

"The Dog House" is a TV series about people who adopt pets in Godmanchester, England. The show documents stories of animal rescues from the Wood Green Pets Charity, and it is crack for dog lovers.

After a few moments of watching, you're rooting for

families, for rescues, for the rescue staff, and you've finished two bags of Chili Cheese Fritos.

This show is nearly perfect. On the "International Sean Dietrich Adorable-TV Scale," a scale ranging from 1 to 10 (with 10 being, say, "Lilo & Stitch," and one being "A Clockwork Orange"), "The Dog House" receives a score of 632,348.

This is because the show is positive.

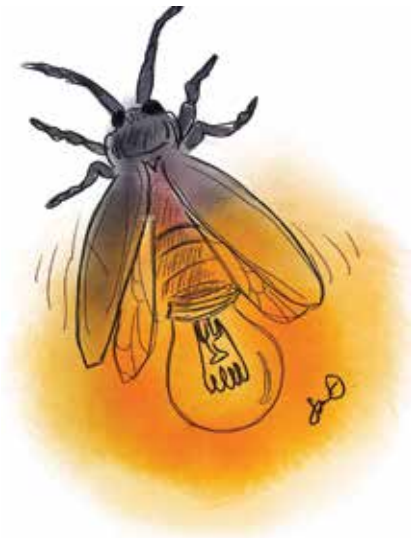
Have you ever tried practicing positivity? Have you ever actively been positive for a full 24 hours?

Yes. I know. Some see positivity as willful ignorance. Others see positivity as pure stupidity. But personally, I have always seen positivity as a five-syllable word.

Even so, positivity is not just ANY five-syllable word such as "geometrical," "vegetarian," or "Lithuania." Those are regular five-syllable words. No, positivity is real.

Everything in this world is made of energy. If you were to magnify any object to the atomic level, you'd see only waves or particles. Many particles carry an electrical charge.

Sean of the South: AI



That chair in the corner is really just energy. The phone you're holding: Energy. The crumpled Frito-Lay bag lying next to you on the sofa: Also energy.

So, in electrical terms, "positivity" actually means something different than you might think.

Let's go back to high-school physics class for a moment. Quit doodling in your history textbook and altering that image of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, you pervert. Let's talk about electrical circuits.

Recall that an electrical circuit

won't work if each point carries the same voltage. Take your house. Light and power only happen in your home when there is a potential difference between high points (positives) and low points (negatives).

Now apply this to life in general.

Daily life is filled with high and low points. A high point in your day might be finding \$50 in your coat pocket, whereas a low point would be, for example, undergoing an IRS audit that lasts about as long as dental school—not that this has ever happened to me.

Positive thinking isn't about pretending low points don't exist. Hardship, frustration, grief, disaster—those things happen. But in electrical terms, these low points offer low electrical potential.

You CAN'T get an electrical current flowing if you're not positively charging your circuit.

So, once again, sticking with electrical jargon:

If you deal with the low points, but actively aim for the high points, you will generate a

current. The current will start small. But it will build. Because that's what energy does. It grows.

The more positivity you build, the more positive the people around you will become. One electrical current can spread across the world. Across the universe. Across time and space. Touching nearly every human on the planet.

If, however, you only focus on low points, you're—electrically speaking—dead. Like a dead electrical outlet. Or a dead toaster oven.

Over time, your body and mind will become so lethargic you'll require energy from external sources to survive. Other people in your life can feed you positive energy for a little while, but not forever.

Ultimately, you'll drain your loved ones until their batteries are almost dead, too. Pretty soon, THEY'LL become negatively charged. Your negativity will alter them. Their negativity will alter THEIR loved ones. And the negativity loop will get bigger and bigger, affecting more and more people, until there's nothing left on this Earth but AI.

THE PEOPLE

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onel whose lifetime of service continued long after his military career. His civic involvement has touched organizations and causes throughout the community, including Kiwanis, the YMCA, the American Heart Association, his church and the Chamber.

He also served as president of the Guidance Clinic, the organization that would eventually become Bridgeway Center — a connection particularly meaningful to me because of Bridgeway's relationship with One Hopeful Place. His generosity has reached beyond Fort Walton Beach as well, including support for military-connected students pursuing higher education.

The Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber even renamed its Above and Beyond Award in his honor — the Paul Singleton Above and Beyond Award. It is fitting for a man who has spent much of his life doing exactly that. Yet perhaps the most remarkable thing about Paul isn't

a title, an award or even 2,000 Chamber events. It's that he keeps showing up, year after year and decade after decade, no spotlight required.

What Makes Fort Walton Beach Strong?

Five people with five different stories. Bob Hudgens shows us the power of legacy. Justice Jones shows us the power of connection and new ideas. Gelin Ducati shows us what happens when compassion becomes action. Shane Weddle reminds us that service can become a way of life, and Paul Singleton shows us the extraordinary impact of simply showing up.

Through my work with One Hopeful Place and involvement with the Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce, I have had the privilege of seeing people like these throughout our community. And here's what I've learned: Strong communities don't just happen. People build them when they volunteer, mentor someone, support a nonprofit or local business, join a civic organization, advo-

cate for someone who needs a voice or welcome someone new. They build them when they give the one thing money can't buy: Their time.

You don't need to own a business that's been here for decades, have thousands of social media followers, start a non-

profit, chair a board or attend 2,000 Chamber events. You just need to find your place. Maybe you've been waiting for an invitation. Consider this one.

As we head into a new season, find one way to become a little more connected to the place you call home. Volunteer.

Join. Give. Mentor. Support. Advocate. Or simply show up. This October, fall into community, because Fort Walton Beach isn't strong because of any one of us. It's strong because of all of us.





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Arts & Music

WARRIOR ARTS

continued from page 2

skills; by year’s end, he had regained full control of his right arm, hand and fingers. In 2022, MKAF sponsored Burkett’s training to become a Certified

Zentangle Teacher, allowing a veteran who experienced its benefits firsthand to teach other military members as a peer.

See Warrior Arts in Action

The public can experience that spirit of creativity and con-

nection during MKAF’s 31st annual Festival of the Arts, Oct. 24-25 at the Mattie Kelly Cultural Arts Village in Destin. Throughout the weekend, visitors can stop by the Warrior Arts Tent, meet participants and instructors, view artwork

created by veterans and service members and try tangling themselves. On Saturday at 2 p.m., Moore and Burkett will take the Dugas Pavilion Stage for “Tangle Time with Melanie & Chief,” a live Zentangle demonstration.

The free festival features more than 100 artists, live entertainment, demonstrations,

children’s activities, food and more. Proceeds support Arts-Reach. For MKAF, that creates a fitting circle: Come for the art. Discover what art can do. Then help make it accessible to someone else. Attend the Festival, become a member, volunteer or make a gift. After all, your support keeps the Arts FUNded.

Experience Warrior Arts

Warrior Arts Tent
Saturday, Oct. 24,
9 a.m.-5 p.m.
Sunday, Oct. 25,
10 a.m.-4 p.m.

Meet Warrior Arts participants and instructors, explore artwork created by veterans and service members, and try your hand at Zentangle during

interactive lessons.

Tangle Time with Melanie & Chief
Saturday, Oct. 24 | 2 p.m.
Dugas Pavilion Stage

Certified Zentangle Teachers Melanie Moore and Chief Charles Burkett demonstrate how simple lines and patterns

can become an engaging mindfulness practice.

31st Annual Festival of the Arts
Mattie Kelly Cultural Arts Village, Destin

Admission and parking are free.

Learn more at MKAF.org.

BERNARD JOHNSON

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ciation and the Taylor Haugen Foundation further illustrates his interest in serving young people.

Major General Leslie Hadley of Air Force Special Operations Command offered some remarkable details. Colonel Chris Keithley, Base Commander, 96th Test Wing, called Bernard a “mover and shaker.” Their remarks reflected the relationships Bernard has built with the military community throughout his career.

The Destin Chamber had already honored him on September 11 with its Lifetime Membership Award. At the retirement reception, it was easy to understand why organizations wanted to recognize him. His work and his community involvement had become closely connected. When people needed an answer or help getting something done, they called Bernard.

Bernard also kept the evening in perspective. “The graveyard is full of indispensable people,” he said. It was a reminder about humility from a man whose accomplishments had been celebrated all night. Then he offered a practical rule that helps explain how he gets so much done: “If something takes two minutes or less, do it now.”

We finally heard Bernard’s beehive story, which had given

his friends plenty of material for the evening’s gentle roast. He explained that civic programs such as honorary commander bring people “inside the hive,” where they can see how relationships are built and decisions get made. From outside, people may wonder how it all happens. His explanation had the room laughing, but the point came through: Bernard has spent years opening doors, making connections, and helping people get into the hive.

His next chapter is already taking shape. Bernard announced that he will join the Jay Odom Group in mid-October, another respected organization deeply involved in our community. The sun has set on his FPL career, but a new opportunity is already rising. Apparently, Bernard’s retirement will last about two weeks, so we can expect him to keep showing up.

Ted returned to the stage for the final moment. “Jay Odom owns the mic,” he said, encouraging Bernard to drop it and walk off. After some good-natured prodding, Bernard finally dropped the microphone and left the stage. It was a fitting ending to a wonderful evening honoring a man whose kindness has made so many people glad to see him walk into a room. Here’s to you, Bernard. We’ll always save you a seat at the table—unless you get there first and save one for us.

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ACUPUNCTURE

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logical, medical, psychological or rehabilitative care. Instead, it offers another potential tool within a thoughtful, coordinated plan.

Facial Rejuvenation
Acupuncture: A Different Approach to Aging Well

Needles in the face may sound particularly appropriate for October, but these needles are tiny, remarkably fine and meticulously placed.

Facial rejuvenation acupuncture is considerably more sophisticated than placing a few needles around a wrinkle. Precise needling creates controlled stimulation within the tissues, supporting local circulation and the body’s normal tissue-repair response. Research continues to explore its potential influence on skin elasticity and other features associated with facial aging.

This is typically a progressive approach, with sessions building upon one another as the practitioner monitors the response over time. It may appeal to someone noticing that stress, hormonal changes and time are showing differently in the mirror—or someone interested in complementing an established aesthetic or skin-health routine.

Eastern medicine brings an interesting perspective to aesthetics: the face does not exist independently from the person attached to it. Sleep, chronic stress, hormonal transitions, nutrition and overall health eventually show up in how we look and feel. The goal is not to make someone look like a different person, but to support the face while still paying attention to the whole person.

Herbal Medicine: More Than “Natural”

No October discussion of Eastern medicine would be complete without a few herbs.

Botanical medicine has deep roots across Eastern traditions, where plants may be used individually or combined into carefully constructed formulas. Plants contain biologically active compounds, which is precisely why species, preparation, sourcing, formulation and dose matter.

Herbal medicine may provide additional support alongside conventional care or offer another avenue when certain options are limited or poorly tolerated. That does not mean ignoring pathology. Good integrative care respects diagnosis, appropriate testing and conventional treatment while continuing to ask what else may reason-

ably support the individual. At Tortoise Clinic, our in-house dispensary includes raw Chinese herbs, carefully selected formulas, professional-grade supplements and targeted nutrients. It supports individualized patient protocols and is also open to the public.

Cupping: An Old Practice with Modern Appeal

Cupping has been used for centuries and has found a modern audience in sports, physical recovery and wellness settings.

Traditional fire cupping may be dramatic to watch, but the flame is removed before the glass cup is placed on the body and never touches the skin. Contemporary methods create a similar lifting effect without fire.

Unlike the downward pressure of massage, cupping lifts the tissues and may be incorporated for muscular tension, mobility, restriction, discomfort or recovery after physical activity. Whether it is a golfer maintaining shoulder mobility, a runner recovering from training or someone carrying years of tension through the neck and back, cupping offers another tool within a broader approach to movement and recovery.

Eastern medicine can appear mysterious from the outside. There are needles, unfamiliar

herbs, glass cups and occasionally even fire. Behind them is a long history of observation, individualized care and an evolving body of research.

For me, the interesting part is not choosing between Eastern and Western medicine. It is understanding where each has something meaningful to offer and when they can complement one another.

So, this October, save the fear for the haunted houses and scary movies. The needles are tiny.

Fire is optional. And the herbs are far more sophisticated than a bubbling cauldron might suggest.

Dr. Karen DeVore is the owner of Tortoise Clinic in Santa Rosa Beach, a multidisciplinary clinic bridging Eastern and Western perspectives and providing the North Florida community with thoughtful, individualized, whole-person care.



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