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# SOWAL Life

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Postal Customer Local

## You're Always Welcome at The Open Door Food Pantry

BY HEATHER BENNETT EYE

Just south of Chat Holly on the west side of Highway 331 down a tree-lined drive sits The Church at the Bay, formerly the South Walton Baptist Church. This church has been home to The Open Door Food Pantry since 2018. Every Saturday, 9:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m., volunteers from The Church at the Bay and other churches, alongside volunteers who simply feel a calling to serve, join together to distribute food.

The Open Door Food Pantry have grown since its opening, and so have the needs of our community. What began as a small distribution center in the church's fellowship hall quickly grew to fill the classroom pods behind the church, and in 2023 they moved into their current building that provides them with 1950 square feet with a second-floor loft, and the space to house 15 freezers and two walk-in coolers.

When COVID hit in 2020, the amount of people in need



increased, but has since doubled. This year, The Open Door Food Pantry fed 80,996 people compared to 46,324

people in 2020. Several factors play a role - an increase in food prices; grandparents on a fixed income who are now

taking care of their grandkids; job loss or reduced income; and unexpected expenses such as medical emergencies or repairs. Sometimes the refrigerator goes out and the food loss is more than your budget can cover.

Filling these needs is the mission of The Open Door Food Pantry. "This is a Christian mission. This is not a business. We're not here to judge, we're here to serve," said Assistant Manager Carole Bishop. There's no limit on how many times people can come to receive food. If your neighbor, family, or friends have needs, you to pick up on their behalf, and there's no limit on that either. If you can't make the pickup time, you can arrange for a volunteer to meet you when you're available. If you're unable to drive, a volunteer can deliver food to you. "It's not a handout, it's a hand up. We don't look down on people at all," stated CEO Bill Howell.

**OPEN DOOR**  
*continued on page 2*

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## Alaqua Animal Refuge Seeks Public Support for Animals Displaced by Hurricane Milton Despite National Assistance

Alaqua Animal Refuge is urgently seeking public support to continue providing life-saving care for animals displaced by Hurricane Milton. While national animal welfare organizations have stepped in with emergency grants, food, and bedding, Alaqua remains in critical need of

**ALAQUA**  
*continued on page 6*




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 Community
**OPEN DOOR***continued from page 1*

Volunteers at The Open Door Food Pantry also won't ask for ID or take any personal information. By not accepting any government assistance, they aren't required to keep documentation on those they assist. Your need is completely anonymous. "Jesus didn't ask for an ID when he fed the 5,000, why should we?" asked Carole. "We

don't want to intrude in their lives." Volunteers are available to pray with those who come through the line and ask, but it's not a requirement. They also have a bilingual volunteer who can offer prayer in Spanish if needed.

Without government assistance or solicitation, The Open Door Food Pantry relies on The Church at the Bay to provide their location, electricity, water and insurance. Donations from local businesses

and the community provide food. They've had a long-standing contract with Destin Harvest and have received grants from St. Joe and donations from other local businesses. "We've been blessed," stated Bill. "Many businesses donate. It's the only way we have the money to continue."

From week to week, they don't know what kind of items they will have, but they strive to give away as much as they can. So far this year,

they've donated 595,846 pounds of food. "God has been so good in providing us so much food. He is the miracle. He provides us the miracle every week," stated Carole.

Just as the ebb and flow of needs varies week to week, as food insecurity rises in Walton County, The Open Door Food Pantry will strive to continue to grow and meet the needs of the community. Many people wouldn't have been able to

make it without them, but they are also in need of volunteers to make sure they can serve as many people as they can. If you are interested in volunteering at The Open Door Food Pantry, please visit their website for more information <https://thechurchatthebayandopendoor-foodpantry.com> or contact Bill Howell at (850) 217-6991.



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## The Marshmallow Experiment

BY RANDY LOCKLIER, PRESIDENT OF GULF FINANCIAL

Don't we all love smore's? I do! On a recent mountain trip, we enjoyed them by the firepit. Melting chocolate and marshmallow oozing over a warm graham cracker is so delicious. Could you resist?

In 1972, an experiment was conducted at Stanford University. Children were brought into a room one at a time and sat down at a table. On the table was a marshmallow. The researcher told the children that he was leaving the room for 15 minutes and that if they did not eat the marshmallow, they would get a second one upon his return. A simple choice: one treat now or two later. Only 1 in 3 could wait. The really interesting part came later. Stanford researchers studied these children for 40 years (That's right!) and made an amazing discovery. Over and over again, by any measure, the children who waited succeeded in life at a much higher rate than those who didn't wait. Higher SAT Scores, graduation rates, income, job performance, net worth as well as overall life and relationship satisfaction were the norm in this group. Is there a message here for us?

True happiness, said Aristotle (c. 300 BC) is about developing daily spiritual habits and surrounding yourself with people who grow your soul. At the center of the spiritual life is the concept of delayed gratification. Delayed gratification is an essential element of self-control. When you disavow immediate pleasure to seek a long-term higher value goal, you are practicing delayed gratification. It is here that we will move toward our greatest potential in this life. Studies have shown, like the Marshmallow Experiment, that deferred gratification is one of the most effective personal traits of highly successful, happy people. People who learn to manage their need to be satisfied in the moment thrive more in their

careers, relationships, and finances than people who give in to it.

This seems to be proof of a path to an abundant and fulfilling life in this earthly realm. What of the spiritual realm? One must have faith. Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen. It is this Faith, this hope for the future that gives us the strength to deny ourselves, pick up the cross daily and walk in the will of our Maker. A life aligned with the will of God creates real joy that keeps our happiness meter on high!

Just think for a moment about some of the things in life that bring us immediate pleasure but can impose upon our physical, spiritual, and mental health. Food, drugs, gambling, alcohol (ever had a hangover?), sex, screaming in anger, or overusing our credit cards. These things don't necessarily bring out the best in us, they just ease our discomfort or satisfy our desires

for a moment. Our modern society is one in which instant gratification is glorified and obtainable, becoming a barrier to many seeking the spiritual life. To some, these temptations open the door to turmoil, addiction, and death.

Jesus teaches us not to store up treasures on earth, but to store up our treasures in heaven. For where our treasure is there will our hearts be also. A person will never be successful on a spiritual walk without knowing how to say no to temptation and the pleasures of this world. Delay a little gratification and you will draw close to God. Say no to sin and temptation and they will flee from us. Believe that the promises of Christ are true and the promises will come to pass in our own lives and the next.

That's Good News for us all!

Great to be with you again. Until next time be happy, be safe, and be blessed.

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# ALAQUA ANIMAL REFUGE

## ALAQUA

*continued from page 1*

monetary donations, volunteers, fosters, and adopters to sustain the ongoing care for these animals.

As the designated emergency shelter for Hurricane Milton, Alaqua quickly mobilized to meet the needs of displaced animals, even before state supplies could arrive. The refuge sourced kennels, food, and medical supplies from a three-hour radius, ensuring every incoming animal had the shelter and care they needed.

Thanks to the generosity of national and local organizations, Alaqua received emergency grants and supplies. However, the sheer volume of animals—many of them in dire condition—has placed an enormous strain on the refuge’s resources. The animals are currently housed in two large emergency arenas, and many are suffering from severe health conditions, including heartworm disease, malnutrition, untreated injuries, broken bones, and behavioral trauma from the storm.

“We’re incredibly grateful for the national support we’ve received, but the reality is we still need significant help from our community,” said Laurie Hood, Founder and CEO of Alaqua Animal Refuge. “The animals need long-term care, and for that, we need monetary donations, more volunteers to assist with daily care, foster homes, and adopters willing to take in these special animals.”



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cal treatments, food, and operational costs. Donate at [www.alaqua.org](http://www.alaqua.org)

**Volunteer:** Help with animal care, feeding, and support at our emergency facilities.

**Foster or Adopt:** We need foster homes to relieve the overcrowding and give animals a loving environment to recover.

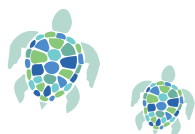
**Spread the Word:** Share Alaqua’s story on social media and encourage others to get involved.

“These animals have been through so much, and while we’ve made strides in stabilizing them, we need the community’s support to continue their care and find them forever homes,” Hood added.

For more information on how to donate, volunteer, foster, or adopt, visit [www.alaqua.org](http://www.alaqua.org) or contact Alaqua Animal Refuge at (850) 880-6399.

### How You Can Help:

**Monetary Donations:** These are our most pressing need to cover ongoing medi-



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Community

# Walton County School District Designated as an Academically High-Performing School District for 2023-2024

We are proud to announce that the Walton County School District has again been designated an Academically High-Performing School District for the sixth consecutive year by the Florida Department of Education. This prestigious recognition for the 2023-2024 school year is based on school and district grades, class size compliance,

and strong financial stewardship. The Walton County School District is committed to fostering a culture of **EPIC** learning, where **Excellence, Professionalism, Innovation, and Collaboration** remain the cornerstones of student achievement. This recognition would not have been possible without the collaboration and commit-



Superintendent A. Russell Hughes

several of our schools have also been designated as Schools of Excellence, per the Florida Department of Education's Schools of Excellence Program. This program rewards schools that consistently perform in the top 80th percentile of their grade groupings. The Schools of Excellence designation offers a range of administrative flexibilities designed to empower both instructional personnel and administrative staff to focus on student learning.

and the passion and persistence of our teachers. Congratulations to all on this prestigious accomplishment."

**About Walton County School District:**

The Walton County School District is committed to providing a world-class education that prepares the whole child for a life of success. Under the leadership of Superintendent A. Russell Hughes, the District has risen from 35th in the state to third regarding academic testing and graduation rate. WCSD continues to pursue excellence in all areas of education while embracing innovation and collaboration to meet the unique needs of our students and community.

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ment of our students, teachers, support staff, school board, and community. Their ongoing dedication and unwavering commitment to an EPIC learning environment have been vital in achieving this success.

As part of this recognition,

Superintendent A. Russell Hughes expressed his excitement for this achievement:

"I am elated to once again highlight the EPIC work of our students, teachers, staff, school board, and community. These accolades showcase the dedication and tenacity of our students

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# Coastal Seniors Update for November



**Chair Yoga Classes at the Blake in Miramar Beach** - Tuesdays, November 5, 19 and December 3 at 9:45 a.m. at the Blake, 90 Ponce De Leon St. in Miramar Beach. RSVP at (850) 650-5000 to register.

**Monthly Meeting** - Coastal Seniors Membership Appreciation Event takes place at Watersound Fountains, 65 Origins Parkway on Friday, November 15th from 4-6 p.m. R.S.V.P. by calling (850) 280-5342 or email: coastalseniorsofsouthwalton@gmail.com.

**Exercise Classes** - Angela Gibson will lead classes on Tuesdays, November 5, 19 and December 3 at 10:00 a.m. and on Thursdays, November 7, 14, 21, and December 5 at 10:00 a.m., at 70 Logan Lane in Grayton Beach. Cost is \$5 per session. Reservations suggested. Call (850) 280-5342 or email: coastalseniorsofsouthwalton@gmail.com.

**Christmas Decorating** - Eden Gardens State Park Wesley House room decorating on Tuesday, November 12 from 9-noon. Call (850) 280-5342 or email: coastalseniorsofsouthwalton@gmail.com for more information.

**Pickleball** - Beginner Pickleball 101 at Walton Sports Complex courts on Wednesday, November 20 at 6:00 p.m. Registration required. Register at www.waltonrec.com. Open to Walton County residents only. Email Sandy Gulak at sowal-pickleball@gmail.com for more

info and with questions. Also join us at the Boys and Girls Club on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays from 9:30 am - 12:30 pm. Cost is \$5 per day and an initial \$35 waiver fee. Please join the SoWal 30A Pickleball Association on Facebook for more information and weekly updates and check the CSSW calendar at www.coastalseniorsofsouthwalton.org.

**Art Classes - Watercolor Painting Class** - Karen Peterson will have classes on Friday, November 1, 8, 22 and December 6 from 8:45 a.m. - Noon. Classes held at 70 Logan Lane in Grayton Beach. Cost is \$15 for CSSW members and \$30 for non-members. Space is limited so call 850-280-5342 to reserve your spot, or email: coastalseniorsofsouthwalton@gmail.com. All supplies are included.

Seniors 50 years of age and up residing in or visiting Walton County are invited to join CSSW. Membership is \$30 for individuals, \$40 for family, and \$75 for businesses (your business will be listed on our home webpage and our Facebook page). You can become a member via email at coastalseniorsofsouthwalton@gmail.com, or on the website at www.coastalseniorsofsouthwalton.org. Also, follow us on Facebook at Coastal Se-

niors of South Walton. Coastal Seniors of South Walton, Inc. is a non-profit 501© (3) organization for active adults and we are looking for dedicated, enthusiastic persons to join our Board of

Directors. Media Contact: Jim Wilson, Director, Coastal Seniors of South Walton, Inc. T: 404-432-6037 Email: jim\_wilson@bellsouth.net



 Community

# Surf Brigade: Empowering Veterans Through Surf Therapy

Surf Brigade just wrapped up its fall class in the heart of Santa Rosa Beach, Florida, where a team of veterans spent five weeks learning to surf together. Surf Brigade, a non-profit organization founded by veterans for veterans, harnesses the healing powers of the ocean and the camaraderie of surfing to address the unique challenges faced by those who have served. Through its 5-week evidence-based surf therapy program, Surf Brigade is helping veterans redefine their purpose, write their narratives, and build a supportive community along the stunning Emerald Coast.

## The Program: More Than Just Surfing

Surf Brigade's program is not solely about riding the waves; it encompasses a holistic approach to mental health and well-being. Each week, veterans participate in group discussions facilitated by licensed professional counselors, focusing on three critical challenges:

- 1. Defining Your Purpose:** Transitioning from military to

civilian life can leave veterans feeling adrift. Through guided conversations, participants explore their passions and values, helping them reconnect with their sense of purpose.

- 2. Writing Your Narrative:**

Every veteran has a unique story, often filled with experiences that can be difficult to articulate. The program encourages veterans to share their journeys, fostering self-reflection and personal growth while reinforcing the importance of their experiences.

- 3. Finding Your Community:**

Isolation is a common struggle for many veterans. Surf Brigade aims to cultivate a sense of belonging by connecting participants with others who understand their journey. This community aspect is crucial for ongoing support and camaraderie.

### Surf Therapy: A Unique Healing Approach

At the core of Surf Brigade's program is the weekly surf therapy session. Participants receive instruction from professional



surf coaches on the picturesque beaches of the Gulf Coast. The act of surfing not only provides physical benefits but also offers a unique therapeutic experience. The ocean's rhythm and the exhilaration of riding waves help veterans release pent-up stress and anxiety.

Research supports the therapeutic benefits of surf therapy, linking it to improved mental health outcomes. The combination of physical activity, exposure to nature, and the thrill of learning a new skill contributes to a sense of accomplishment and

boosts self-esteem. For many veterans, the ocean becomes a place of healing and reflection, where they can leave behind the weight of their service.

### A Community Built on Shared Experiences

One of the most powerful aspects of Surf Brigade is its emphasis on building a community among participants. Graduating from the program means not only gaining a new sense of purpose and confidence but also forming lasting friendships with fellow veterans. Surfing together fosters a sense of belonging and

shared experience, creating a network of support that extends beyond the program itself. Surf Brigade is committed to making this life-changing experience accessible to all veterans. There is no cost to participate, and no prior surf experience is required. All necessary equipment is provided, ensuring that anyone can join in and benefit from the program.

### Join the Movement

Surf Brigade is more than just a surf therapy program; it's a lifeline for veterans seeking connection and purpose. By blending the therapeutic qualities of surfing with meaningful dialogue, the organization empowers veterans to embrace their stories, redefine their paths, and foster a sense of community that lasts a lifetime.

For more information about Surf Brigade and how to get involved, visit [surfbrigade.com](http://surfbrigade.com). Whether you're a veteran looking for support or someone wanting to contribute to this noble cause, Surf Brigade welcomes you to ride the wave of healing together.



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# Co-Creating with ECTC: From Casting to Curtain Call

BY NATHANAEL AND ANNA FISHER

After shows like *Jersey Boys*, *Million Dollar Quartet* and *The Marvelous Wonderettes*, we often receive questions such as, “How long has this cast toured together?” and “Where are they going next?” Anna and I always smile when we get these questions, because it speaks to the quality of the show. But, the reality is that all the mainstage shows at Emerald Coast Theatre Company (ECTC) are auditioned, produced and directed by ECTC staff. It’s a year-long process that begins right after we settle on a season.

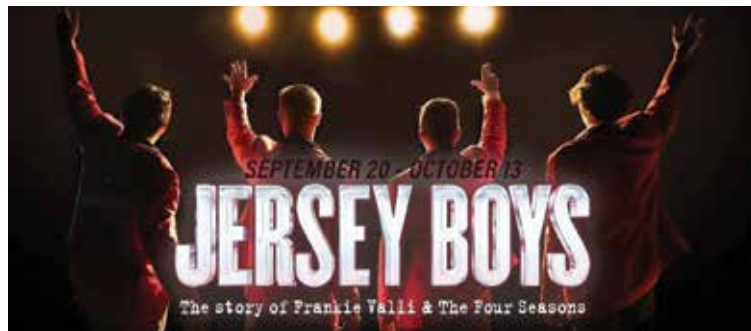
After a season is chosen and we procure the production rights from the publishing companies, the work begins. Take *Season 12 Shows: Jersey Boys*, *Baskerville: A Sherlock Holmes Mystery*, *All is Calm*, *Every Brilliant Thing*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Always a Bridesmaid* and *Legally Blonde the Musical*—to produce all of those shows plus our Family Theatre production of *Go Dog Go*, we have to find and hire more than 60 actors to fill those character roles.

Our first step as a casting team (Anna, Emily, Trenton and Nathanael) is to consider our local actors and then start compiling a list of roles for actors that we know we will have to audition and cast from out of town. Take *Jersey Boys* for example: We were pretty sure we didn’t have any local young men who could sing falsetto like Keenan Lyons, the actor who plays Frankie Valli. Once we have a clear idea of what roles we need to cast for, we begin the auditioning process.

Each February, the Unified Professional Theatre Auditions, otherwise known as “UPTAs,” takes place in Memphis, Tenn. This is where over 100 theatre representatives and more than 800 actors come together for four days of auditions. In sports terms, this is where we “scout” for talent. We’ll keep our list of prospects until we are ready to start casting later in the year. For *Jersey Boys*, we brought in six guys from all over the country. Each actor was hired for his specific look and skill set, including vocal range, dance experience, character choice and believability.

Over the summer, the in-

credible production team begins working on the first few shows of the season. This includes production design meetings with the



director to discuss the overall vision of the show and how each designer will execute their part of it. Beca drafts the set design; Taylor begins researching and building costumes; Emily starts choreographing the dances; and Ora engineers props. This all takes place simultaneously while our summer EDU programs are in full swing!

In July, we will hold our first round of local auditions for the season. Then, later in the year, we focus on casting the other shows. Our focus in casting *Jersey Boys*, for example, was to find a group of four young men who looked the part, could sing the part and could act well—four guys that looked like best friends and would cohesively tell the story of Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons.

A huge thanks is due to partners like the Howard Group (with the Grand Boulevard Hotels), Ocean Reef Resorts, and a few generous patrons, who provide accommodations for our out of town actors during rehearsals and performances. This partnership allows us to specifically cast each role with the right actor, no matter where they are from.

Now comes the work! We have 15 rehearsal days to bring our entire cast of *Jersey Boys* together to create a cohesive, well-executed show. Keep in mind that many of the cast members have never met each other before. The six actors brought in from out of town are not a traveling troupe like many assume. They meet on the first day of rehearsal along with the rest of the cast. The next 15 days are packed! Prior to rehearsals, the cast receives the script and music, so they can essentially have lines and music memorized at the beginning of

the rehearsal process—what we call “off book.” On the first day of rehearsals Tom Baroco, our Music Director extraordinaire,

starts working with the cast on all of the music, including those beautiful harmonies. Emily Bainbridge, our top-notch choreographer, starts teaching the choreography that she has created and worked on for hours ahead of time in preparation for rehearsals. At the second rehearsal, Trenton (Assistant Director) shares with the cast how they can expect to collaborate with us and our expectations of them, then I share my vision of the show from a storytelling perspective.

Anna and I have recently been discussing the idea of “Co-Creation.” It is amazing that we can take a formless idea of a show that has no set, no props, no costumes, no actors, and no choreography, to a collaboration with our production team and cast that creates an unforgettable live experience. Along the way, the director and the production team are answering questions like: How is the cast interacting with the set and props? Are the costumes cohesive to the storytelling of the show? Where does the cast need more work in learning music or choreography? Are we remaining authentic in our storytelling throughout the show? The last four or five days before opening are simply called “tech week” where we are focused on technical elements like lights, sound, costumes and scene transitions. The polishing touches are put on the show during this time and everything comes together in a seamless final product—a “co-creation” that every cast member along with the production and tech crew has contributed to and brought to life.

All of this work culminates in OPENING NIGHT! We had a stellar, sold out opening night performance of *Jersey Boys*.

It was a live phenomenon that happened in real time and will never happen the same way again—truly unique and truly epic!

Recently, a gentleman came up to me after the show and started to speak, but couldn’t get the words out as he became emotional. I could see in his eyes the memories, the joy, the special experience he had watching our show. He wanted to say more, but all he could manage as he grabbed my hand with his two hands and held it securely was, “Thank you, just thank you!” I’ve been really digging into Hebrew text recently and discovered the word “Tohu wa-

bohu,” meaning “without form and void.” It’s very gratifying to think about how *Jersey Boys* was “without form and void.” It was a piece of paper, a thought, a dream. Over the course of the months of preparation and planning, the weeks of rehearsals with our staff, creative team and many incredible performers, we co-created a work of art that left a man speechless. I would be remiss if I didn’t mention the most important part of that co-creation—you. We don’t exist without you, without our audience. That’s truly why we always say “The heart of ECTC is you.”



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Community

# A Conversation with The Conductor

Discover how Sinfonia Gulf Coast is redefining the symphony experience in its 2024-2025 season — with powerhouse performances, innovative concerts and can't-miss events — in this exclusive Q&A.

BY ZANDRA WOLFGRAM

For the 19th season you are once again “redefining the symphony experience” with fresh offerings. Tell us about the first concert of the season, *Luminescence: Catalyst by Candlelight* on November 7.

Sinfonia is no stranger to unique performance offerings and, in fact, staged “candlelight” concerts over 10 seasons ago when we were performing

4x4in Rosemary Beach Town Hall. We had the opportunity to perform in the charming Seaside Chapel and the only thing that could illuminate the musicianship and pedigree of Grammy Award-winning Catalyst Quartet is candles. It is the perfect back drop to do this type of presentation in a proper space. It is always important to present this type of concert with the highest caliber of musicians and venue. This sets Sinfonia apart from more recent concerts of others touting the same experience.

Often musicians and vocalists taking the Sinfonia stage are not just performers, they are longtime friends

of yours. Singer/songwriter Morgan James returns for Big Band Holiday Toast 'n Jam on December 8. Tell us why she's so special to you and why this concert will get us in the spirit.

Isn't that great? I have been so fortunate to meet and forge friendships with so many incredible people over the last 25 years! It makes it more fun when you have that connection and almost always, even if I am working with an artist for the first time, we leave the concert experience as friends. Morgan, I can write a novel on Morgan James. A really good one. We met by mistake. She was a last-minute replacement for a vocalist for our holiday pops in 2012. She blew the roof off that evening, and we never looked back. She has become one of my best friends, sounding board and collaborator. There is not another voice on this planet that can match Morgan James. It is a very special instrument that is so versatile from coloratura opera to Broadway to pop to soul to jazz to R&B and I can go on. She is presenting her holiday themed big band concert that she debuted at Joe's Pub in NYC last year. It is FUN!

Two words. The Grinch. Your innovative Film in Concert series has become one of the most popular offerings with families. Why should we not miss this December 14 concert?

Two Words: The Grinch.



Three words: Sinfonia Gulf Coast. Three more words: Live in Concert. Aside from being a classic holiday movie, and with all due respect to Jim Carrey, Sinfonia's orchestra steals the show in these films in concert, but I may be slightly biased. Sinfonia's Film in Concert series is a great way for families and everyone really, to enjoy live music paired with iconic films. Nostalgia, excitement, joy—all of the emotions can be described as part of the experience.

Bette, Babs & Beyond sounds like a siren call for everyone who loves the music of legends like Bette Midler, Barbra Streisand, Dolly Parton, Adele and Cher. Sounds like January 17 is a party in the making. Tell us more.

We honored Music of the Knights last year with the tribute to Sirs Paul McCartney, Elton

John and Andrew Lloyd Webber. So, it was appropriate to flip the switch and pay tribute to the amazing female voices of our time and this set list is non-stop hit after hit that will feature amazing vocalists, including the return of Jessica Hendy from Music of the Knights and the full orchestra.

February is the season of love and with Crescendo! 2025 Vintner Dinners kicking off February 28 and the Main Event on March 2, we understand Sinfonia will be Painting the Town Red starting with the January 30 Kick Off event. What can we expect this year?

Crescendo! is Sinfonia's most important event each season because it raises the funds to keep all of our educational outreach and community engagement initiatives free to the school districts that we serve. This includes our Link Up partnership with Carnegie Hall, guest artists in schools, ensembles in residence that provide services throughout our community and our annual Paint the Music program in partnership with Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation. That aside, it is a blast and sets the social scene for the spring and summer. What not to like about incredible vintners paired with celebrity chefs and a big blowout main event all to raise funds for these important initiatives?

Sinfonia's commitment to music is seen in its support of new works. You have commissioned Howard Levy to create a new concerto for harmonica and piano, which will be a U.S. Southeast premier. Why is it important to support new music and what can you tell us about your Classical Connections collaboration set for April 4?

Talk about friends in the biz. I first worked with Howard in 2003 in Cincinnati where he and pianist Anthony Molinaro were

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**SINFONIA**  
continued on page 11



# Rise of the "Bro-tique": Redefining Men's Retail Experience in South Walton

The world of men's fashion has witnessed a significant transformation in recent years, and with it, a new term has emerged to describe a unique breed of stores: the "Brotique." Combining the words "bro" and "boutique," this catchy nickname perfectly encapsulates the essence of a new era in men's retail. These establishments are not merely stores; they are immersive spaces that cater to the modern man's evolving needs, preferences, and sense of style.

Gone are the days when men's shopping was limited to a few basic options. The emergence of the "brotique" concept marks a departure from the traditional and paves the way for an elevated and personalized shopping experience. These stores have become synonymous with a fresh take on men's fashion, grooming, and lifestyle, providing a haven where men can explore their individuality without compromise. So, what sets Captured Clothing apart

from conventional men's stores? It starts with the ambiance. Step into this brotique, and you'll find yourself in an atmosphere carefully crafted to radiate style, sophistication and masculine energy. The decor, lighting, and overall aesthetic are designed to create an inviting space that appeals to the sensibilities, making you right at home.

The selection of merchandise in Captured is equally distinctive. Curated with experience for the latest trends and timeless classics, offering a range of high-quality clothing, accessories, grooming products, and lifestyle essentials. Every item is handpicked to reflect the desires and aspirations of the discerning gentleman, ensuring that he can find everything he needs to express his unique style and personality.

Perhaps one of the most appealing aspects of the "brotique" phenomenon is the personalized attention provided to customers. Unlike their mass-market



counterparts, these stores prioritize individualized service, with knowledgeable staff members who are passionate about being able to help customers. The

"brotique" is more than just a place to buy clothes or grooming products; it has become a destination for men seeking inspiration, community, and a sense of

belonging. Many of these stores host events, workshops, and collaborations, creating a platform for men to connect, network, and share their experiences and interests. As the popularity of the "brotique" continues to rise, it has become a game-changer in the retail industry. Its success can be attributed to its ability to adapt to the changing demands and expectations of the modern man, individualized service, and a vibrant community atmosphere.

Here at Captured Clothing we are excited and proud to embrace this new era of mens retail and known as 30A's Bro-tique!

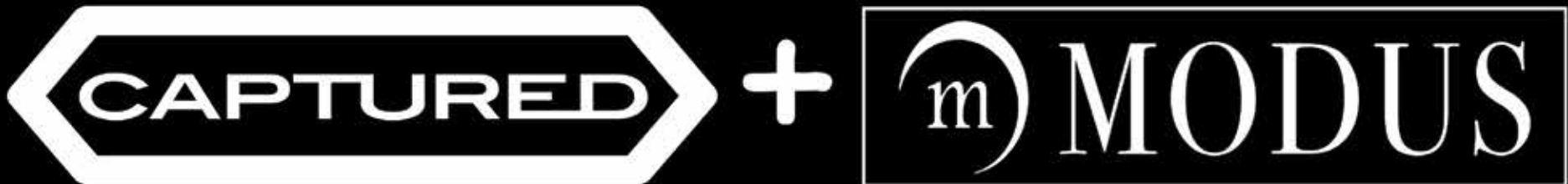
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SINFONIA continued from page 42





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### SINFONIA

*continued from page 8*

guests on a series that I curated for the Cincinnati Contemporary Art Museum. Sinfonia performed the Southeast U.S. premiere of his first concerto for harmonica and when he asked if I was interested in being involved with his newest offering, I could not refuse. Howard is one of those rare musicians that come along too infrequently, whose skills on harmonica are unparalleled in this universe, but to add piano, for which he is also scarily gifted on, it was a no brainer. Sinfonia will perform the world premiere of this new work for harmonica and piano with Howard performing.

New music and commissions and orchestrations of other existing works is critical to the survival of the orchestra art form. Sinfonia has always been on the forefront of this. While I would love to participate more in this realm, we are limited to the

number of concerts we do each season; however, it is always important to support new artists, new works and collaboration is key!

*Sinfonia has a history of surprising and delighting its audience with bold, innovative offerings. Composer Steve Hackman is known for his unexpected music pairings. Tell us how you plan to cap the Main Event season on May 18?*

Relevance. That is a big word being tossed around these days. Why do orchestras who only offer classical music suffer from declining ticket sales ... they are not relevant. Sinfonia has always been one-stop shopping for the entire genre of orchestral offerings to include masterworks, pops, chamber orchestra, chamber music and unique events incorporating other musical and art forms.

Sinfonia's season concludes with Tchaikovsky X Drake. Whether you are familiar with either name, it is a concert that you can attend and thoroughly enjoy from the sheer vantage point that

it is an incredible concert experience. Steve Hackman is an impresario of the mash up. Like his presentation of Beethoven X Coldplay that Sinfonia performed several seasons back, this takes Tchaikovsky's epic 5th symphony and weaves elements of Drake's music and lyrics in an ingenious manner. You have to experience it to understand how brilliant it is from the pure orchestral joy that radiates from Tchaikovsky to the vocalists and rap artist that correspond to Drake's offerings, it is like nothing else you have witnessed.

*You have expanded Sinfonia's Music Education program this year by offering even more string programs, which are not offered in schools. As a musician, why should parents consider Sinfonia's programs for their kids?*

Sinfonia continues to fill a void by providing incredible and much-needed education offerings to our community, primarily in our Okaloosa and Walton County school districts. Our expanded beginning strings pro-

grams and youth orchestra programs have hit record enrollment numbers this school year and it is a program that is not offered by either district. In some cases, our Link Up curriculum is the only arts education several schools have. It is important to continue to develop these programs and the support of our patrons enables this. In fact, we have hired two additional instructors for the strings and youth orchestra programs and will need several more if the trajectory of expansion continues. It is very rewarding to know that your organization is making an important difference in the community and enlightening young minds.

*This year, the state of Florida cut \$32 million from the cultural arts budget impacting organizations statewide. What can music lovers do to support Sinfonia Gulf Coast?*

To be clear: the state of Florida did not cut these funds, Gov. Ron DeSantis singlehandedly vetoed this line item from the state budget, directly going against

the work of his state colleagues who, for months, diligently collaborated to approve funding for all of the arts organizations in Florida. Politics aside, this was a very short-sighted endeavor that has impacted 600 organizations and Florida's economy considering cultural tourism provides nearly \$6 billion to the economy each year.

There are many ways to play your part. Beyond donating funds, you can show support by attending our concerts and events, or by sponsoring a single event or the entire season, whether as an individual or business owner. We also welcome volunteers and inquiries about joining our music education social group, the Treble Makers, or exploring leadership opportunities on our Board of Directors. Visit our website (SinfoniaGulfCoast.org) and follow us on Facebook and Instagram to get to know us and learn more.

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Community

# Seniors Gamble, Dine, and Explore Biloxi on Memorable Trip

Members of Watersound Fountains, a local senior living community, recently embarked on a three-day getaway to Biloxi, Mississippi where they dined, gambled and explored the coastal town. The group of five women were accompanied by Community Life Director Michelle Graves, who helped execute their vision for the extraordinary outing.

The seniors, who have formed a close-knit group within the community, planned the trip themselves, from selecting ac-

tivities to choosing restaurants. Graves served as their travel agent, booking accommodations and even driving them more than 200 miles each way to visit Biloxi.

"This trip was their brainchild, and I was thrilled to be along for the ride and see them experience the joy of it becoming a reality," said Graves. "It's been a privilege walking alongside our members as they experience new things and live out their dreams in retirement. This outing was the first of many for our members at Watersound Fountains."



The group's itinerary included visits to local landmarks like the Biloxi Lighthouse and Ocean Springs, a charming town known for its art galleries, boutiques, and restaurants. They also spent time at the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino, enjoying the thrill of gambling and the complimentary drinks.

A highlight of the trip was a stop at Buccee's, a popular gas station and convenience store in Foley, Alabama. Many of the seniors experienced their first-ever gas station lunch, savoring the famous pulled pork sandwiches.

Eda Ruth, one of the attendees, expressed her gratitude for the opportunity. "I know this is my final chapter," she said. "I'm so glad I got to do this."

The seniors' trip to Biloxi was a testament to their spirit of adventure and their ability to create meaningful experiences. As they continue to plan future outings, including a trip to New Orleans to visit The National WWII Museum, it's clear that their bond will only grow stronger.

# Green Thumb Garden Club Holiday Bazaar and Season of Giving Fundraisers Will Support Walton County Scholarships and Charities

By KATHLEEN EDGE, PUBLICITY CHAIR

"Where Every Day is a Celebration" was the theme of the fourth annual Green Thumb Garden Club Holiday Bazaar that showcased unique seasonal décor and other items made by members and other local artists. Special thanks to Cantina Laredo for allowing the Club to have the event, held on November 2, at their Grand Boulevard



location

The Bazaar's net proceeds will fund the 2025 Mercer Scholarship. This is awarded to deserving Walton County horticulture college students every year as well as youths participating in

Timpochee 4H Youth Camp and E.O. Wilson Biophilia Naturalists Outdoor Program. Westonwood Ranch has been added as a GTGC scholarship recipient for 2025.

Caring & Sharing of South

Walton is receiving monetary and food donations prior to the Thanksgiving holiday. Walton County Sheriff's Santa Patrol will receive donated gifts and gift cards for young children and teenagers at the GTGC Holiday Party on December 12, 2024, at The Venue at the Royal Palm Grille.

The Club chose a well-deserving Walton County family, a mom and four children, as their 2024 Habitat for Human-

ity holiday family. The family will receive monetary donations and gifts to help ensure a great holiday season for everyone. The gifts will be delivered to the family in mid-December.

Fundraisers and distribution of donations will continue in 2025. Please visit the Green Thumb Garden Club website to learn about our charitable mission, how to join and details on meetings, activities, and events. The website address is greenthumbgardenclubinc.org or send an email to greenthumbgardenclubinc@gmail.com.



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# Finding Florida: Nature and History Come Together at the Tallahassee Museum

In a peaceful 52-acre forest of oak, pine, and cypress at the edge of Florida's capital, the quiet is broken by a pair of honking geese, a snorting horse, and the kinds of woody sounds you'd expect of such a sylvan location. Here at Tallahassee Museum, however, there's more on offer than animal noises and an introduction to the region's heritage. A startling rustle in the tree canopy overhead and an exhilarated scream breaks the calm. It trails off into the foliage as someone flies past overhead, harnessed to a very high cable threading through the treetops, all part of the museum's Tallahassee Tree-to-Tree Adventures zipline courses. It becomes quickly clear this isn't your ordinary non-profit. Yes, you'll find a visit to this cultural gem educational and even inspiring, but you also have the opportunity to get up close and personal with Florida at heights hitherto unexperienced (and possibly scare yourself just a little in the process).

Established in 1957, this museum offers a glimpse into the area's history, showcasing structures that date back to the 19th century. One of the museum's highlights is the historic farm,

with authentically restored buildings. Each structure is meticulously preserved, allowing visitors to imagine life in early Florida when water was pumped by hand, everyone shared one bedroom, and hurricanes hit without warning.

Russell Daws, President/CEO of the Tallahassee Museum, highlights the Museum's unique appeal, which stems from its expansive outdoor campus. The Museum integrates a biodiverse natural landscape with historic buildings, living exhibits of Florida's native wildlife, and a variety of history, natural science, and art displays. Each visit offers an immersive experience, inviting guests of all ages to explore, learn about, and connect with Florida's rich history and natural wonders.

The newest attraction at Tallahassee Museum isn't an old building but the enclosure hosting four red foxes rescued from a fur farm through an organization near Jacksonville, OtterSpace Wildlife, aka the Ark Wildlife Care and Sanctuary, working with the Save a Fox Foundation. Of these four, only one, the lone male, Boots, looks like a red fox. The rest are white with gray,



the result of a breeding process that targets the eight genes controlling fur coloration, explains Suzie Buzzo, the Museum's animal curator. Now, with space to move, these foxes, including two sisters, are finding their new normal. Buzzo feeds them different types of food - they ignore the bananas and dislike peanuts so much they take them away and bury them, but seem to be fond of hot dogs. One of the females cautiously takes a hot dog morsel from my fingers before ducking back into the foliage. It becomes clear that each fox has its own temperament. Boots is a pacer, uneasy around people, but the females appear more interested



in human interaction. When one fur farmer who'd been passing on the misfit foxes deemed unsuitable for furs went to visit the

refuge where they were being housed, he was so taken enough

## FINDING FLORIDA

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Community

# Spotlight On

# Elizabeth Erin Designs

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When I founded Elizabeth Erin Designs, my mission was clear: to exceed expectations and be a trusted partner throughout the design process. From luxury vacation rentals in Florida to commercial spaces in New York, our nationwide and local clientele count on us to deliver high-end designs that perfectly reflect their goals. Acting as the crucial bridge between you and your contractor, we ensure every aspect of your project is executed with precision, care, and excellence – down to the smallest detail, including stunning 3-D walkthroughs and documentation that rival HGTV.



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Experience Trust, Integrity, and Lasting Design – Locally and Beyond. With over two decades of experience and projects spanning from coast to coast, we've earned a reputation for trust, integrity, and extraordinary design. As featured in [Insert Major Publication], our trendsetting designs continue to push the boundaries of what's possible. At Elizabeth Erin Designs, it's not just about creating beautiful spaces – it's about building lasting relationships. When you choose us, you're not just hiring a design firm – you're gaining a lifelong partner dedicated to making your current and future projects truly unforgettable.



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**FINDING FLORIDA**

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with their friendliness and personality that he shuttered his farm. Currently, there are still 250 fur farms in 21 U.S. states, but these lucky foxes have a better future ahead. Tallahassee Museum will be housing them temporarily while a gentleman in Jacksonville finishes building enclosures to provide safe haven for 89 rescued foxes.

In addition to fox-watching, leave time for a leisurely meander along peaceful trails traversing the museum grounds. Stop to spot the turtle hiding under a submerged log in the new alligator enclosure but don't linger so long you miss the bald eagles, the black bear snoozing in a sunny spot, or the endangered red wolves taking a break from parenting their pups to enjoy some fresh air and exercise.

Though these animal visits

are special, it's hard to match the adrenaline rush of the high-octane zipline experience. While anyone with a serious fear of heights might opt to stick to terra firma, the adventurous won't want to miss this tree-top tour. Obstacles are interspersed between "zips" and even though you're safely latched in throughout, stepping off the edge into the ether takes some getting used to. Once you do though, you'll be making exhilarated noises of your own.

If there's yet time for more, supplementing these zoological experiences are a range of educational programs. Additionally, the museum hosts special events throughout the year, including nature walks, historical reenactments, and their popular annual arts and crafts market, Market Days. For a current schedule and more information visit [tallahassee-museum.org](http://tallahassee-museum.org)

**The Walton County Snowbirds are Back**

The Walton County Snowbirds (WCS) will be kicking off their 2024-2025 Season on December 5, 2024. We have a great season planned!!

The WCS are a collection of fun-loving, caring and sharing seniors who enjoy the wonderful communities of South Walton County during the winter months. This season they will continue their social, educational, recreational, and charitable pursuits on the Emerald Coast. You must be a registered WCS to take part in their activities and social events. Membership cost for the season is \$20 per person. You can register at any of the scheduled registrations or an hour before any Snowbird gathering.

It is hard not to stay active with the WCS. For those who love the outdoors and/or exercise, we offer golf, basketball, pickleball, bowling, aerobics, line dancing, biking, tennis, and ballroom dancing. Interested in music and art? We have two ukulele groups, an art group,

a creative writing group, and a crafts group. Our card and game groups include bridge, hand and foot, poker, euchre, and mah-jongg. The book club, discussion group, and investment group are also popular and well-attended. This season we have added a Panhellenic group so the ladies can enjoy sisterhood and fellowship time. No doubt, there is something for everyone!

Our December social events include:

- Thursday, December 5, 2024 – 8:30-10:30 a.m. – Registration Faith Assembly Church Hall, 306 S. Geronimo, Miramar Beach, FL
- Thursday, December 5, 2024 - 3:00-5:00 p.m. - TGI Thursday with Entertainment Auston's Oyster Bar and Grill, 125 Poinciana Boulevard, Mira-



mar Beach, FL  
 • Monday, December 9, 2024 - 10:00-12:00 noon – Snowbird Gathering

St. Andrews by The Sea Episcopal Church, 307 US-98 W, Destin, FL

For more information on registration and all the activities and social events the club offers, check out the website [www.waltoncountysnowbirds.com](http://www.waltoncountysnowbirds.com) or join the Facebook page "Walton County Snowbirds." The WCS club hopes to see many snowbirds join this season where you will have fun and meet new friends from all over the US and Canada!



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# First Step Toward World's Largest Artificial Reef?

The Okaloosa County Board of County Commissioners recently approved a contingent contract to acquire the SS United States that could see the historic ocean liner converted into the world's largest artificial reef, in an announcement from Destin-Fort Walton Beach and the SS United States Conservancy. Part of the deal would also include funding from the county to support the Conservancy's establishment of an innovative land-based museum that will provide divers, local residents and visitors an opportunity to learn about the legacy of America's Flagship.

Launched in 1951, the SS United States still holds the transatlantic speed record, achieved on her maiden voyage using only two-thirds of her power. She transported presidents, stars of stage and screen, heads of state, tourists, members of the armed forces and immigrants until the advent of the jet age forced her retirement in 1969. Notable passengers included four U.S. Presidents (Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower, John Kennedy, and a young Bill Clinton), plus Mar-

lon Brando, Coco Chanel, Sean Connery, Duke Ellington, Salvador Dali, Walt Disney, Judy Garland, Cary Grant, Bob Hope, Marilyn Monroe and John Wayne. (To learn more about the ship's historical importance, visit <https://www.ssusc.org/history-the-glory-years>.)

Designed as a top-secret, convertible troop carrier and Cold War weapon, she could transport 14,000 troops 10,000 miles without refueling. The vessel is widely considered the pinnacle of American post-war maritime engineering and a soaring symbol of her namesake nation. The SS United States Conservancy has kept the famous ocean liner safely afloat since acquiring her in 2011.

Once deployed off Destin-Fort Walton Beach, at nearly 1,000-feet long, the SS United States will be a home for a diverse range of marine life and attract divers and anglers from around the world and will continue the growth of Destin-Fort Walton Beach's robust artificial reef program, the most active, and one of the largest vessel ar-

tificial reef collections in the U.S.

The deal to acquire the vessel from the Conservancy is contingent upon the conclusion of the current U.S. District Court-imposed mediation. The vessel would then be moved from Philadelphia after initial preparations and a towing plan are completed. A conservative allocation of up to \$10.1 million is estimated for the acquisition, remediation, transport and deployment of the historic ocean liner, as well as partial funding to help establish the Conservancy's land-based museum and immersive experience.

"Having the title of the World's Largest Artificial Reef continues to elevate Destin-Fort Walton Beach as a premier destination to visit for scuba diving and fishing. The SS United States will be an exciting addition to the many artificial reefs and wrecks available in Destin-Fort Walton Beach for divers to



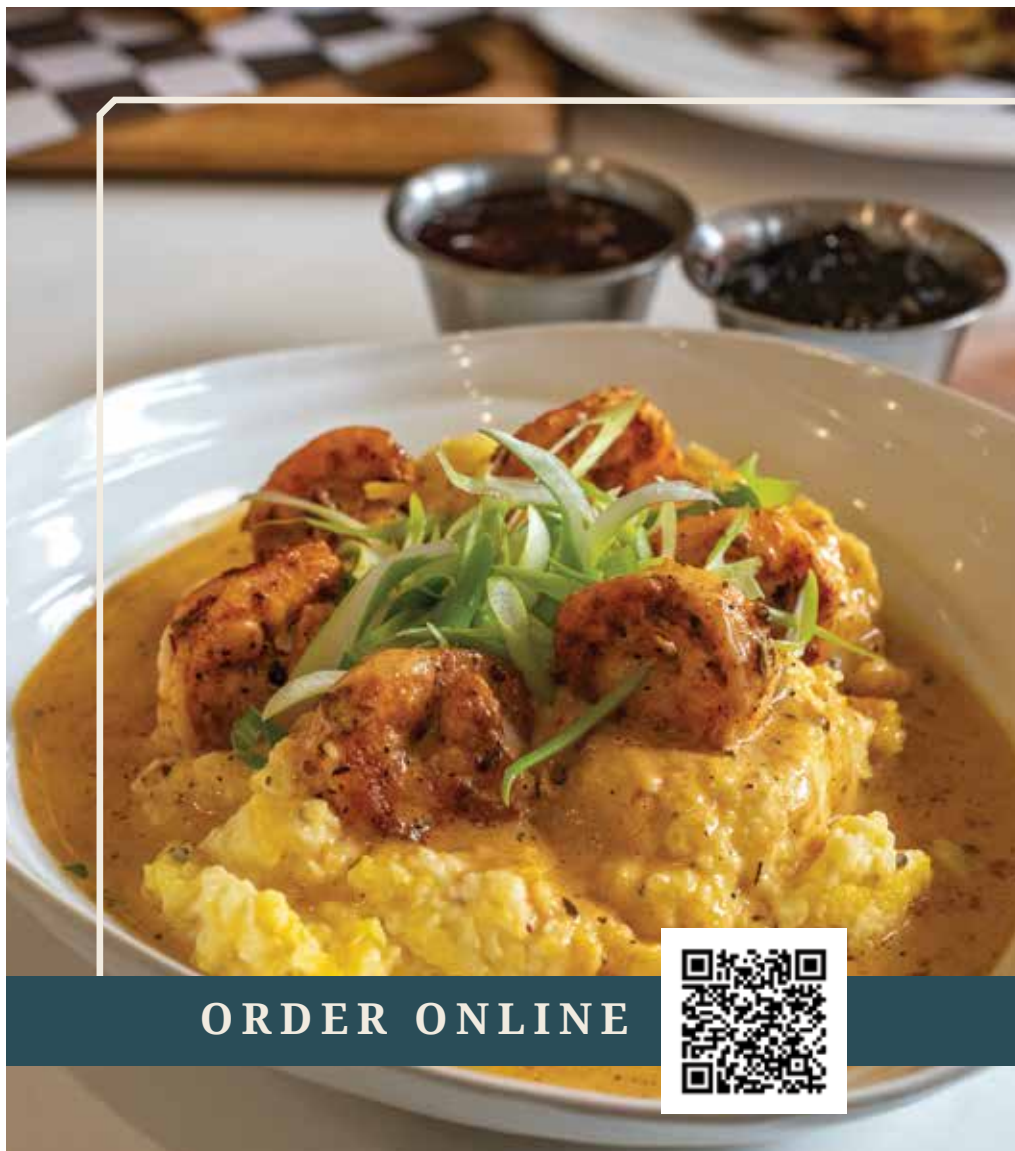
"The SS United States has inspired millions the world over as a symbol of American pride and excellence. Should the ship be converted into an artificial reef, she will become a unique historic attraction above and below the waterline. A land-based museum and immersive experience utilizing the latest technology will showcase

her unique story and proud history. Converting the world's fastest ship into the world's largest artificial reef will write a new chapter for the SS United States as a world class destination," stated Conservancy President Susan Gibbs.

For more information on Destin-Fort Walton Beach's extensive artificial reef program, including coordinates and 3-D mapping, visit <https://www.destinfb.com/explore/ecotourism/artificial-reefs/>. To learn more about the history of America's Flagship, visit <https://www.ssusc.org/>.

explore while providing essential habitat for the fishery that our fleet is so dependent on," said Jennifer Adams, Tourism Director.

According to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, for every dollar spent on artificial reefs in the Florida Panhandle, the conservative overall economic benefit of the artificial reef system over its life span is \$138, a 13,800% return on investment. This includes job creation in the construction and maintenance of reefs and increased economic activity in related sectors such as retail.



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# Insights for Investors

## Consistently Good or Occasionally Great?

BY MAURICE STOUSE



On a recent visit to Raymond James' headquarters in St Petersburg, Fla., the Asset Management Services team pointed out its approach to the planning they offer to Financial Advisors and their clients. We found that to be somewhat thought-provoking, particularly if you look at certain stocks or sectors in the recent past.

Some of the most common questions we hear from investors are anything from, is the market overvalued at the top? When is the best time to invest?

We have noted before that timing the market is next to impossible. It is time in the market vs. timing the market that tends to lead to consistently good performance to occasionally great performance.

What about asset selection? Why not just invest in an index fund and not worry about individual security selection or fund selection? An S&P 500 index fund will represent 80% of the value of the U.S. stock market. Many would find it hard to argue with utilizing this approach. What about the risk of the S&P 500 index today vs. years past?

To put that into perspective, we did a little research and found some interesting contrasts for the market today vs. say 30 years ago. The top 5 stocks in 1994 were GE, Exxon, Coca Cola, Merck and IBM. Today, the top five are Apple, Nvidia, Microsoft, Amazon and Meta (Facebook).

The top 5 stocks 30 years ago accounted for about 10% of the value of the market (based upon the S&P 500). Today, the top five account for about 30% of the market.

Thirty years ago, the top sectors were industrials, energy and consumer staples. Today the top three are technology, health care and financials.

So, the way we see it, the market today is much more heavily weighted with fewer stocks and

the top sector (technology) accounts for about a third of the market's value. Thirty years ago, the top sector was 8-10%.

So, what is a growth-oriented investor to do? We think that once someone has confirmed the big three: Investment objective, risk tolerance and time frame, asset selection should not be heavily weighted toward any one stock or sector, and to take a more value-oriented approach. By that, we mean to look at a variety of the metrics that are available (through your own research or with the help of a financial advisor) to determine if a stock is undervalued, valued fairly or overly valued.

While there is always the risk of being overly weighted, such as today's market, there is also the risk of being too spread out, in other words, overly diversified.

Is there a "right" number of stocks in a portfolio? That is difficult to answer; but, one rule of thumb would be approximately 20 or fewer. The alternative approach would be to invest in to mutual funds and we conclude, from observation, that that number is five or fewer.

The focus, to get to consistently good vs. occasionally great, takes consistency, time and patience. It also means to ensure that your portfolio does not grow out of the intended balance over time. To that end, periodic review, in line with the

big three might help you experience the results you want and desire.

*Maurice Stouse is a Financial Advisor and the branch manager of The First Wealth Management/ Raymond James. Main office located at The First Bank, 2000 98 Palms Blvd., Destin, 32451. Phone 850.654.8124. Raymond James advisors do not offer tax advice. Please see your tax professionals. Email: Maurice.stouse@raymondjames.com.*

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# Walton County Celebrates Tourism's Success in 2023

Walton County Tourism celebrated the destination's strong tourism economy in 2023 at its annual meeting on Oct. 24 at Hotel Effie Sandestin.

"Because of the hard work and dedication of our industry partners and workforce, Walton County continues to shine as a vacation destination," Tourism Director Matt Algarin said to the event attendees, who included tourism partners, county officials, leadership and staff.

Walton County welcomed more than 5.1 million visitors in 2023 who spent more than \$4.7 billion, contributing to an economic impact of \$6.8 billion for the county. More than \$60 million in Tourist Development Tax was collected in 2023.

These spending numbers also helped lower county residents' taxes, on average, by \$2,082 per household, and supported more than 41,000 jobs, both directly and indirectly. This effect generated \$1.2 billion in salaries and wages.

"Knowing that our efforts, in a small way, help provide jobs to our residents and support families is incredibly rewarding," Algarin said.

Algarin emphasized the tourism department leading visitation efforts forward and touched on two main points – normalization of tourism and travel and sustainable tourism.

"There is a delicate balance between the tourism industry and our residents," he said. "Neither can be successful without a great partnership that benefits both. We are working every day to make sure that happens.

"We'll continue to balance

the needs of our tourism industry, economy and residents in everything we do in the Walton County Tourism Department," Algarin said.

Brian Kellenberger, director of Beach Operations, thanked his staff, industry partners and county leadership for their support of his work maintaining the pristine beaches, facilities and landscaping around Walton County.

"I really enjoy creating and maintaining public space, and I really enjoy doing it here in South Walton with all of our industry partners and public officials, and all of the people who help us do it," said Kellenberger.

Winners of the Artist of the Year and the Van Ness Butler, Jr. Hospitality awards were also announced. Accepting the Artist of the Year award was Sarah Page, whose murals can be found in Walton County locations such as Grand Boulevard, the newly opened Inlet Beach Underpass, and the Walton County Fairgrounds.

The Van Ness Butler, Jr. Hospitality Award went to Amy Wise-Coble, general manager of Homeowner's Collection and Tourist Development Council member.

To view a video of Walton County Tourism's 2023 Year in Review, visit [youtube.com/watch?v=rOcVQ1WO4tA](https://youtube.com/watch?v=rOcVQ1WO4tA). For more information about the impact of tourism in Walton County, visit [waltoncountyfltourism.com/annual-reports](https://waltoncountyfltourism.com/annual-reports).

For more information on the Artist of the Year program, visit [waltoncountyfltourism.com/artist-year](https://waltoncountyfltourism.com/artist-year).

For more information on the Van Ness Butler, Jr. Hospitality

Awards, visit [waltoncountyfltourism.com/van-ness-butler-jr-award](https://waltoncountyfltourism.com/van-ness-butler-jr-award).

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# A Journey Into Sound

The REP Theatre is thrilled to announce the return of esteemed pianist Joshua A. Thompson performing in concert as part of The Sock Joplin Trio

The REP Theatre is pleased to announce a special event added to its 2024 Fall Season featuring The Sock Joplin Trio! An exciting addition to

The REP's already impressive lineup of live music, The Sock Joplin Trio will present their



concert entitled "A Journey Into Sound" on Friday, November 15, and Saturday, November 16.

Rhodes on drums, promising a dynamic and diverse performance.

Based in Indianapolis, The Sock Joplin Trio is led by pianist Joshua "Sock Joplin" Thompson and includes Psy-Wrn Simone on vocals and Jared Thompson on saxophone. Accompanying the trio, The REP Theatre is pleased to welcome local musicians Joe Murphy on bass, Jim Ward on guitar, and DJ



In January, Joshua A. Thompson delivered a captivating solo performance at The REP as part of his month-long Artist Residency with Escape To Create. His sold-out concert, a dazzling showcase of classical masterworks by African American composers, showcased Joshua's exceptional talent and magnetic stage presence, leaving a lasting impression on all fortunate enough to attend.

This November, Joshua Thompson will continue to leave his indelible mark on the 30A community with The Sock Joplin Trio. Thompson welcomes his twin brother, Jared Thompson, a composer, saxophonist, and bandleader of the multi-album-producing band Premium Blend. Powerhouse vocalist Psy-Wrn Simone will join the duo. Together, the combined talents of these acclaimed and national touring artists promise to ignite the stage and give audiences a musical experience that explores Black music's rich and intertwined histories.

"A Journey Into Sound" is a unique experience for the area and showcases the enduring legacy of Black music and its powerful impact on the world. In addition to the two-night concert event, The REP and The Sock



Joplin Trio will host free film screenings and provide music workshops to local schools. This lineup of enriching arts programming fosters cultural engagement along 30A and illustrates The REP's fierce commitment to the community.

The Sock Joplin Trio performs "A Journey Into Sound" on Friday, November 15th, and Saturday, November 16th, at 7:30 pm at The REP Theatre. Tickets are \$60 and \$48 for REP Members. For tickets and more information on The REP's Fall Season, visit LoveTheREP.com.

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# Cultural Arts Alliance Advocacy Alert

By JENNIFER STEELE, CAA PRESIDENT & CEO

In the past, the Florida Division of Arts & Culture (DAC) grants received regular funding through state budget approvals. For the FY25 budget, the state legislature recommended \$32 million for two of the DAC's four grant programs. However, the governor vetoed this funding, leaving hundreds of arts and cultural organizations like ours that provide education, enrichment, and economic impact in our communities without state support for the year—a first in state history.

For FY26, arts advocates are closely watching the budget process. The Department of State submitted a legislative budget recommending zero funding for DAC grants, although this isn't yet the governor's final decision. This is all especially disappointing because the state's investment has shown a 9:1 return year after year.

Importantly, this isn't the governor's official budget recommendation, and the governor's budget has not been published yet. But this is a recommendation for the governor to consider.

In Walton County, the arts & culture sector generated \$57.3 million in economic activity during 2022—\$8.6 million in spending by arts and culture organizations and an additional \$48.6 million in event-related expenditures by their audiences. That economic activity supported 652 jobs, provided \$23.9 million in personal income to residents, and generated \$8.1 million in tax

revenue to local, state, and federal governments. To learn more about these important findings, visit our website.

We are at the beginning of the budgeting process, where advocacy can make a big difference. For now, I ask that you write our state representative and senator. Make them aware of this situation and ask them to reinstate the arts & culture recommendation to include funding for the FY26 Division of Arts & Culture grants (DAC). A letter template from the Florida Cultural Alliance is at <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1eNUhh4mQHf5Eaxl9aR3usS-D3seu9iAehGcdAbihagY>, ready for you to insert your programming and share your impact. For individuals, please remove any section which may not be applicable.

Contacts for Walton County legislators are below.

Representative Shane Abbott: [Shane.Abbott@myfloridahouse.gov](mailto:Shane.Abbott@myfloridahouse.gov)

Samantha Sullivan, Aide: [Samantha.Sullivan@myfloridahouse.gov](mailto:Samantha.Sullivan@myfloridahouse.gov)

Senator Jay Trumbull: [Trumbull.Jay@flsenate.gov](mailto:Trumbull.Jay@flsenate.gov)

Andrea Gainey, Aide: [Gainey. Andrea@flsenate.gov](mailto:Andrea@flsenate.gov)

We remain in close communication with The Florida Cultural Alliance and other Local Arts Agencies throughout the state working towards and hoping for a positive outcome. The legislative session in March 2025 offers time for advocates to meet with lawmakers and highlight the arts' value in the state and we plan to attend once again.

# Tickets Now on Sale for Taste of the Race with Headliner The Velcro Pygmies

Tickets are officially on sale for one of the most anticipated events along 30A, Taste of the Race, presented by Publix! Set for Friday, February 14, 2025, this culinary celebration will kick off the Seaside School™ Half Marathon + 5K Race Weekend, presented by Frankie's Bike Shop, at the iconic Seaside® Lyceum in Seaside, FL with a night of incredible food, entertainment, and community spirit.

This year's Taste of the Race will be headlined by The Velcro Pygmies, the high-energy rock band known for bringing 80s hair band flair to fan favorites across rock, dance, and country genres. Emceed by DJ Telemetry, the event will feature live performances from The Velcro Pygmies, as well as a special performance by the Seaside Neighborhood School™ Performance Band, setting the tone for a truly unforgettable night.

"Taste of the Race is not only a wonderful evening filled with delicious food and incredible music but also a critical fundraiser that benefits the Seaside School Foundation™," said Teresa Hor-

ton, Executive Director of the Seaside School Foundation™. "The funds raised directly support vital academic and extracurricular programs at Seaside Neighborhood School™, including our growing Culinary Program, which we're thrilled to highlight as part of Race Weekend."

Guests at Taste of the Race will enjoy tastings from over a dozen Gulf Coast top chefs and restaurants, who will be competing for coveted awards including People's Choice, Judges' Choice, and Chef's Choice. Paired with complimentary fine wines, craft cocktails, and local brews, the evening promises a delectable culinary journey like no other.

VIP ticket holders are invited to elevate their experience with early entry at 6 PM, exclusive VIP gift bags, and access to an exciting live auction featuring extraordinary experiences, such as a golf trip with Charles Kelley of Lady A, a stay at the Manzanita House on Spring Mountain for three couples, and an unforgettable trip to the Academy of Country Music Awards in Dallas.

Publix Super Markets, the event's Presenting Sponsor, expressed its commitment to the community: "Publix is proud



to support Taste of the Race, an event that brings people together to celebrate food and music while giving back to local students. Supporting education and investing in our communities is an important part of our mission," said Hannah Herring, Publix media relations manager.

Proceeds from Taste of the Race support the Seaside School Foundation™, benefiting programs that enhance academic and extracurricular opportunities for students at Seaside Neighborhood School™ and Seacoast Collegiate High School. This year's proceeds will further the mission of the school by funding key programs, including the school's Culinary Program.

To learn more about the Seaside School™ Half Marathon + 5K Race Weekend and to purchase tickets to Taste of the Race, visit [RunSeasideFL.com](http://RunSeasideFL.com). If you are a local chef or restaurant and interested in participating in Taste of the Race, please email Teresa Horton at [teresa@seasideschoolfoundation.org](mailto:teresa@seasideschoolfoundation.org).

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# SEASIDE Institute™ Announces Speaker Lineup for SEASIDE Prize™ Weekend

SEASIDE Institute™ has announced speakers for the 2025 SEASIDE Prize™. These dynamic individuals will join us February 7-9, 2025, as we honor the career achievements of Ellen Dunham-Jones and June Williamson.

### Dolores Hayden

Dolores Hayden is professor emerita of architecture, urbanism, and American studies at Yale University. She is the author of many award-winning books including *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000* (Pantheon, 2003), *A Field Guide to Sprawl* (W.W. Norton, 2004), and *Redesigning the American Dream: Gender, Housing, and Family Life* (W.W. Norton, 2002).

### Devaki Kesh

Devaki Kesh is an architect and urban designer who is passionate about vernacular and local architecture, public space design, conservation, and form-based codes. She is an Associate

at Principle, an award-winning planning, urban design, and development firm committed to creating authentic places for human-oriented environments. She received a master's degree in urban design from Georgia Tech and a bachelor's degree in architecture from RV College of Architecture.

### Marina Khoury

Marina Khoury is an expert in sustainable urban redevelopment, regional and master planning, transit-oriented developments, and form-based codes. Khoury has worked on the design and implementation of projects in the US, Canada, Australia, Europe and the Middle East including ground-breaking new codes around the world that mandate resilient urbanism. Marina serves on the Expert Committee of Global Forum on Human Settlements (UNEP-GFHS) International Green Model City (IGMC) Initiative, under the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).



### Becky Nicolaides

Becky Nicolaides is a historian specializing in American cities, suburbs, and metro areas. She earned her doctorate in American history at Columbia University, then served on the faculties at Arizona State University West and UC San Diego.

She is the author of *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (Chicago 2002), *The Suburb Reader* (Routledge, 2006/2016), and *The New Suburbia: How Diversity Remade Suburban Life in Los Angeles After 1945* (Oxford, January 2024).

### Veronica Rivas Plaza

Veronica Rivas Plaza has a background in architecture, urban design, placemaking, and sustainability with over 8 years of experience. She currently works at Street Plans and is focused on the design, plan, and execution of multiple tactical urbanism projects. Some of these include the streetscape improvement plan for the Meatpacking District in New York City and the placemaking efforts to activate open spaces at Lincoln Heights and Richardson Dwellings Housing Projects in Washington, DC.

### Galina Tachieva

Galina Tachieva is the managing partner of DPZ CoDESIGN, directing the work of the firm in the US and around the world. With more than 25 years of expertise in sustainable planning, urban redevelopment and form-based codes, she is the author of the "Sprawl Repair Manual", an award-winning publication by Island Press, which focuses on the retrofit of auto-centric suburban

places into complete walkable communities.

### Emily Talen

Emily Talen is Professor of Urbanism at the University of Chicago, where she teaches urban design and directs the Urbanism Lab. She holds a PhD in urban geography from the University of California, Santa Barbara and a master's in city planning from Ohio State. She is a Fellow of the American Institute of Certified Planners, and the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship.

Talen has published over 70 peer-reviewed articles and four books (*New Urbanism and American Planning*, *Design for Diversity*, *Urban Design Reclaimed*, and *City Rules*). Her forthcoming book is titled *Neighborhood* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

Registration for the weekend is available at [seasideinstitute.org](http://seasideinstitute.org). If interested in sponsorship or member opportunities, contact us at [admin@seasideinstitute.org](mailto:admin@seasideinstitute.org).

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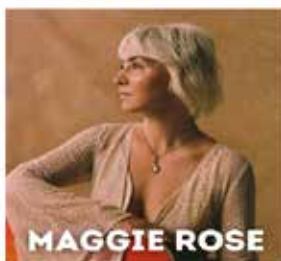




# 2025 30A Songwriters Festival Headliners Announced

30A Songwriters Festival will celebrate its 16th year with performances on the main stage at presenting partner Grand Boulevard's Town Center in Miramar Beach with headline performances by renowned artists Melissa Etheridge, Amos Lee, The Jayhawks, The Devon Allman Project, Maggie Rose, and Secret Sisters.

The festival welcomes for the first time to 30A Charlie Starr & Benji Shanks (Blackberry Smoke), Natalie Hemby, Brandy Clark, Chuck Prophet & His Cumbia Shoes, Lindsay Lou (Band), Brett Dennen, The Stews, Langhorne Slim, Chris Knight, Josh Joplin Group, Willi Carlisle, Bee Taylor (Band), Jonathan Willis, Josh Rouse, Paul McDonald & The Mourning Doves, Tyler Ramsey, Andrea



So, David Ryan Harris, Chris Stills, Emerson Hart, John Driskell Hopkins, Adam Hood, Abe Partridge, Chastity Brown, Cousin Curtis, Will Hoge, Ryanhood, with more to come.

We are pleased to announce the following additional confirmed artists: Sarah Clanton, Jack Barksdale, Eliot Bronson, Mike Kinnebrew, Liz Longley, Grayson Capps, Cat Ridgeway, Lilly Winwood, Caitlin Cannon, Bradley Cole Smith & Nelson Nolan, Jennifer Lynn Simpson, Sara Hells, The Sand Ole Opry with Mike Whitty, and many more.

Many more artists will be announced over the next few weeks—stay tuned.

Von Kampen, Jill Sobule, Burris, Kyle Davis, Jada Cato, Beth Bombara, Mallory Johnson, Jessica Sharman, David Borné, Anna Grace.

Returning to perform two

shows each throughout the weekend are songwriting legends Darrell Scott, Livingston Taylor, Will Kimbrough, Ellis Paul, Shawn Mullins, Vicki Peterson & John Cowsill, John

Susan Werner, Chuck Cannon, Jeff Black, Dan Bern, Griffin House, Charlie Mars, Randall Bramblett, Jeffrey Steele, Steve Poltz, Kelly Willis, Bob Schneider, Mary Gauthier, Certainly



Life Media digital marketing staff member, Paul Willms, fully recovered from prostate stage 4 cancer this past year, growing a mustache supporting men's health in the month of November.

## A Haiku for the Boys

*A Mo Bro's crowing  
Alighted rooks lips tending  
Shoo'd away; shaven!*  
- by J.H. Douglas

A haiku is a traditional Japanese poetry form characterized by three unrhymed lines with a

specific syllable pattern: 5 syllables in the first line, 7 in the second line, and 5 in the third line. Typically, haikus capture a brief moment in time, often related to nature, and aim to evoke a subtle emotional or sensory impression.

Here's a classic haiku by the famous Japanese poet Matsuo Bashō translated by Robert Hass:

*Autumn moonlight—  
a worm digs silently  
into the chestnut.*

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Events

# Santa's Coming to Town and More!

### Baytowne On Ice Now - Feb. 8

Dust off those skates and get in the winter spirit at The Village of Baytowne Wharf's Baytowne on Ice. For those visitors who miss the cold and ice, our seasonal ice rink is the perfect opportunity to share some of your favorite holiday traditions. The ice rink is open now through February 8. Hours vary daily. Skaters must be at least 3 years of age and fit into appropriately sized skates. Children under the age of 6 must be accompanied by a parent or adult family member. baytownewharf.com

### Grand Boulevard Hometown Holiday Parade And Coastal White Christmas Holiday Celebration Nov. 22

Thousands upon thousands of brilliant white lights and an expansive celebratory parade featuring the South Walton High School Marching Band, Emerald Coast Theatre Company, Destin High School, Dog-Harmony, Santa Claus and more. The fun starts at 5 p.m. grandboulevard.com

### Santa's Arrival and Tree Lighting at Destin Commons Nov. 22

A magical holiday celebration for all ages from 6-8 p.m., with face painting, a complimentary photo booth, balloon sculpting, Santa's sleigh, and a fireworks finale. destincommons.com

### Northwest Florida Ballet's "The Nutcracker" Nov. 22-24

The 45th annual production of the classic seasonal fairytale, and the only full-length version presented on the Emerald Coast. Tickets are \$48 for adults and \$22 for children ages 12 and under. Located at the Mattie Kelly Arts Center in Niceville. Showtimes 7:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday; 2:30 p.m. Sunday. Purchase tickets online. nfballet.org

### Rosemary Beach Tree Lighting Ceremony Nov. 24

Don't miss the excitement as we "turn on the town!" starting at 6 p.m. Enjoy musical performances by the Charles Dickens Carolers; see Santa's big arrival and the lighting of the tree. Then enjoy a

carriage ride throughout the festive town. rosemarybeachfl.org

### Alys in Winter Wonderland Nov. 29

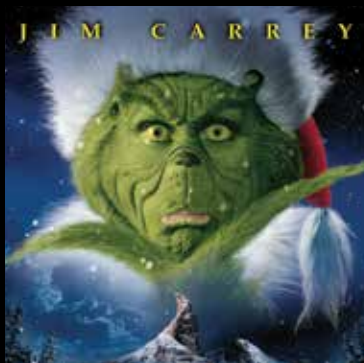
Embrace the magic of the season at Alys in Winter Wonderland! Bring the whole family to the Alys Beach Amphitheatre 4-8 p.m. to enjoy holiday-themed activities like cookie decorating, face painting, and airbrush tattoos (some activities may include costs). Children can write letters to Santa and pose for photos with him, making lasting holiday memories. Bring a blanket or low-back chair to settle in for a special holiday concert and the lighting of Alys Beach's magnificent Christmas tree. alysbeach.com

### Seaside Holiday Parade & Turn on the Town Nov. 30

Kick off the holiday season with Seaside's joyful Holiday Parade! Starting at 3 p.m. in Seagrove Plaza, the parade will make its merry way down 30A, spreading cheer as it heads toward Central Square. Gather along the route to watch as festive floats, jolly performers, and a special guest from the North



Pole light up the afternoon. Join us for this beloved tradition, and celebrate the spirit of the season in the heart of Seaside. Stay for the magic that follows — at 5 p.m. as the Turn on the Town ceremony



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takes place as Santa himself lights up SEASIDE®, illuminating the square and town with dazzling holiday lights. Don't miss this heartwarming tradition. [seasidefl.com](http://seasidefl.com)

### Here Comes Santa Claus at The Village of Baytowne Wharf Nov. 30

Here comes Santa Claus right down Baytowne Lane! Cheer Santa on 6-9 p.m. as he makes his way to the Event Plaza Lawn to light up the Village Christmas Tree! Enjoy face painting, kids crafts, and a beautiful fireworks display. [baytownewharf.com](http://baytownewharf.com)

### Santa's Arrival at Harborwalk Village Nov. 30

Mr. Ho-ho-ho hits the Destin Harbor, with a parade at 12:30 p.m., followed by visits with the kiddos and a special holiday performance from 1 to 4 p.m. [emeraldgrande.com](http://emeraldgrande.com)

### Kick-Off for Grand Boulevard Festival of Trees Benefiting Local Charities Dec. 3

Join in the fun from 4-6:30 p.m. for The Festival of Trees Kick-Off, where 18 non-profit organizations will decorate trees and compete to win cash prizes totaling \$8,500, including Best of Show and People's Choice. The People's Choice winner will be voted on and announced along with Best of Show, Second and Third Place winners. Held on National Day of Giving, join the fun and vote for your favorite tree to win the People's

Choice Award. The trees will remain on display in Grand Park through Christmas for all to enjoy! [grandboulevard.com](http://grandboulevard.com)

### Village of Baytowne Wharf Holiday Concert Series and Visits with Santa Dec. 4-18

Visit with St. Nick and share your holiday wishlist! Visit Baytowne December 4, 11, and 18 from 6-8 p.m. for a Holiday Concert and Visits with Santa. PLUS, Visit with Santa from 5-7 p.m. during Tuba Christmas Dec. 14! [baytownewharf.com](http://baytownewharf.com)

### "Rock Around The Christmas Tree" Music Revue! Photos With Santa! Dec. 6-28

Town Center, Grand Boulevard at Sandestin, Miramar Beach. Enjoy complimentary carriage rides while soaking in the Coastal White



Christmas Lights and Festival of Trees display. Seasonal sounds provided by Emerald Coast Theatre Company. [grandboulevard.com](http://grandboulevard.com)

### Grand Boulevard Holiday Open House and Walkabout Dec. 7

Enjoy holiday specials and promotions from Grand Boulevard merchants and restaurants while vying for "Taste of Grand Boulevard" prize baskets valued at more than \$1,000 a pop. [grandboulevard.com](http://grandboulevard.com)

### Emerald Coast Theatre Company Presents "All Is Calm: The Christmas Truce Of 1914" Dec. 8-22

Christmas 1914. All quiet on the Western Front, then a song, kicking off an extraordinary night of camaraderie, music and peace.

This is the true story of soldiers laying down their weapons to celebrate Christmas together, based on firsthand accounts from the sol-

diers who lived through it. Located at 560 Grand Boulevard, Miramar Beach. Showtimes 7 p.m. Thursday-Saturday, 2 p.m. Sundays, and 6 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 22, Field Trips Friday, Dec. 6, at 6 p.m. Tickets are available for purchase online. [emeraldcoasttheatre.org](http://emeraldcoasttheatre.org)

### Photos with Santa in Seaside Dec. 13-19

Capture the magic of the season with Photos with Santa 4-6 p.m. in Seaside's enchanting Christmas Village (Pop-Up District) for a festive, picture-perfect experience where Santa himself will be waiting to hear your holiday wishes. The photos are complimentary, so bring the whole family and create lasting memories in our winter wonderland. Don't miss this joyful holiday tradition in Seaside! [seasidefl.com](http://seasidefl.com)

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Wellness

# A Race for Wellness: Slow, Steady and Intentional Healing



By DR. KAREN DEVORE

At the Tortoise Clinic, we embrace the philosophy of the tortoise: steady, intentional and focused on the journey. I often reflect on the story of the tortoise and the hare, where the tortoise wins not by speed, but by staying the course with quiet determination. It's a lesson that I've seen echoed time and time again in my patients' wellness journeys. Health isn't something that can be rushed. True, lasting wellness is a marathon, not a sprint.

When I first began practicing medicine, I saw a gap in how we approached health—one that

overlooked the wisdom of ancient healing methods in favor of fast, superficial treatments. But, I also saw the potential in blending the best of both worlds: the deep, holistic roots of Eastern medicine with the advancements of modern Western science. That's how the Tortoise Clinic came to be, an integrative health center where the patient's entire well-being is considered—not just the symptoms they present with, but the root causes beneath.

We offer a wide range of services, from acupuncture to massage therapy and holistic health consultations, each tailored to the individual's unique needs. Our Chinese Herb dispensary, the largest in Northwest Florida, is one of the cornerstones of our practice. We create customized raw herbal prescriptions, combining the wisdom of ancient medicine with medical-grade supplements and formulas designed to support the body's natural healing process.

One of the things I'm most passionate about is empowering our patients to take charge of their own health journeys. I love



helping people connect the dots between their lifestyle, environment and diet, and how these factors play into their overall wellness. At the Tortoise Clinic,

it's not about treating a headache or a sore back in isolation. It's about understanding why that pain exists in the first place and working together to create sustainable solutions. That's where the beauty of integration—Eastern and Western medicine—comes into play.

We are also incredibly fortunate to have Dr. Lisa Forsythe on our team, offering Neuro-Acupuncture, a cutting-edge technique that combines traditional Chinese needling with the latest in neurological science. As

the only Neuro-Acupuncture specialist within 300 miles, Lisa provides life-changing care for patients recovering from strokes, managing nerve pain or dealing with other central nervous system disorders. Her work is a powerful reminder of why combining these two worlds of medicine is so essential for holistic healing.

At the Tortoise Clinic, we don't believe in rushing toward a finish line. We believe in walking alongside our patients, step by step, on a path toward lasting vitality. Like the tortoise, we know that the journey to wellness is slow and steady, but ultimately, it's the most rewarding one you can take.

If you're ready to take that journey with us, I invite you to visit our clinic. Whether you're seeking relief from chronic pain, support with your overall health or just a deeper connection to your body's natural healing abilities, we're here to guide you. Because in the race for health, it's not about how fast you go—it's about how well you get there.



## WELLNESS IS A MARATHON,

*not a sprint.*

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BY KAY LEAMAN, HEALTH ARCHITECT, HEALTHYDAY HEALTHYLIFE

Happy Thanksgiving! The season is about to officially start. In lieu of our to do list growing, our calendar filling up with gatherings, or the all too quiet solitude for those without family, be sure to schedule in a massage or two. Reaping the benefits of a good massage can make this season more fruitful in many ways.

Many consider massage a treat. It helps us to relax and we feel pampered and calm afterward. Recently, however, health professionals are viewing it as an important tool in promoting mental and physical well-being.

Massage consists of pressing, rubbing or manipulating the skin, muscles, tendons and ligaments to produce certain results. There are 12 main types:

**Swedish** - soft tissue (Research shows less muscle and joint pain as well as lower heart rates, blood pressure and anxiety levels.)

**Deep Tissue** - deep layers and intense pressure. (I had several of these years ago. He taught me how to scream to release the pain as he worked my shoulder. I was bruised after the treatments

but I have not had that specific issue with my shoulder since. It was so worth it.)

**Hot Stone** - improved blood flow and reduced muscle tension

**Sports** - focus is on specific muscles used most frequently in one's sport or for those who exercise frequently. Can reduce muscle soreness.

**Shiatsu** - Japanese massage based on traditional Chinese medicine and involves using acupressure (These are acupuncture points.) Recent studies showed benefits for children and teens with autism spectrum disorders (reduces aggressive behavior, relieves trauma symptoms and improves focus).

**Thai Massage** - combination of acupressure and yoga. This is an active form of massage with several benefits such as lowering back pain, improving the immune system and flexibility.

**Prenatal** - focuses on issues related to pregnancy (It's not recommended during the first trimester.)

**Craniosacral Therapy** - sacral massage or cranial osteopathy. Aids in neck, back and pelvic issues.

**Reflexology** - developed in ancient Egypt, China and India. It can also be called regional or zone therapy. It's performed on the feet and hands using acupressure points. (Can reduce symptoms associated with multiple sclerosis.)

**Lymphatic Drainage** - rhythmic light touch with tapping and circular strokes. The lymph system plays a critical role

in immune system processes. Its benefits include lowering lymphedema, one's O2 saturation, lowering your blood pressure and heart rate and promotes wound healing.

**Aromatherapy** - Use of essential oils with massage

**Chakra Balancing** - (Reiki Energy) Japanese treatment in-

volving light touch or holding hands just over the body to manipulate energy. (Chakras stem from Ayurvedic medicine in India.) There are 7 body chakras: Crown, 3rd eye, throat, heart, solar plexus, sacral, root.

The physical benefits of massage include improved circulation, decreased muscle stiffness,

less joint inflammation, improved quality of sleep, quicker recovery between workouts, improved flexibility, less pain and soreness, strengthened immune system.

Mental benefits include reduction in stress levels, greater relaxation, improved moods, less

**MASSAGE**  
*continued on page 29*

# How Massage Can Benefit Us



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 Wellness



By JAMIE C. WILLIAMSON, PhD

You can be “right”, or you can stay happily married.

That doesn’t mean that if you want to stay happily married, you

# Want to Be Right? Or Happily Married?

must be a doormat.

Instead, you must learn to accept that there is no objective reality in a relationship. There are two subjective realities – in your reality, you’re right and in your partner’s reality, they’re right.

To stay happily married, you need to find a solution that works for both of you. You can do that by following my Home Team Approach to conflict resolution.

Consider these common conflict examples:

## Example #1: Who Started It?

Jason and Ashley are eating at the bar of their favorite local restaurant. Jason is flirting with a female acquaintance next to him and Ashley is talking to her sister on her phone. Once their food arrived, they turned toward each other. After their initial harsh “I can’t believe you...” comments they barely spoke until they got into the car and their “who

started it” fight broke out.

Ashley argued that Jason started it. She would not have called her sister if he had not been flirting.

Jason argued that Ashley started it. He only flirted because she was on the phone.

They will never be able to agree on who is right in this circular conflict. And, to stay happily married, they shouldn’t even try.

Relationship communication is a series of continuous transactions. There is no clearly identifiable beginning or ending to any communication episode. When people think back over a stream of communication, they “punctuate” it by breaking it into smaller pieces and labeling some of the pieces causes and the other effects.

Punctuation allows people to identify the beginning and end of a communication event as a convenient way to understand and/or explain what happened first, second, and so on.

And people punctuate interaction in self-serving ways that reflect better on themselves and are consistent with their self-image.

## The Home Team Approach to Conflict Resolution

Jason and Ashley could settle this issue by following the Four Steps in the Home Team Approach:

Internally accept that they both experienced the event differently.

Validate the other’s reality.

Acknowledge their own role in what went wrong and apologize.

Commit to not letting something similar happen again.

Ashley: You must have felt so left out. I was having such a good conversation with my sister that I didn’t realize how rude I was being to you. I’m so sorry.

Jason: You must have felt like I was trying to make you jealous. I just hadn’t seen her in a while and wanted to catch up. I didn’t think about how it might look to you. I’m sorry, too.

Ashley: Well, what a waste of a date night for us. We know better.

Jason: Let’s never let it happen again.

## Example #2: No, you didn’t. Yes, I did.

Gabe and Maria drove separate cars to their cabin in North Georgia. Maria asked Gabe to stay close to her because she was nervous about driving through Atlanta at night. Gabe promised he would. Gabe led and kept Maria’s car in his rearview. But when he moved across lanes a car often got in between them. Maria felt panicky because she had difficulty identifying Gabe’s car in the dark.

When they arrived, Maria initiated a fight, accusing Gabe of breaking his promise and causing her to feel unsafe. Gabe said she was being dramatic. He did not break his promise. He stayed close and could see her car the whole time. They replayed this “no, you didn’t, yes I did” argument the entire weekend.

## The Home Team Approach Alternative

Gabe: You must have been nervous. I didn’t realize that you couldn’t identify my car among the others at night. I’m so sorry. I always want you to know that I’m looking out for you.

Maria: No wonder you think I’m overreaching. I didn’t realize you had your eye on me the whole time. Instead of fuming, I should have just called to say I couldn’t find you in the traffic.

Gabe: I should have done more to ensure there were no cars between us.

Maria: Let’s not waste another minute of our weekend on this. We’ll do better next time.

People who care more about winning an argument and being “right” than repairing their relationship, often end up divorced. People who accept that in relationships there is no objective “right” or “wrong”, can learn to maximize their “home team” advantage and stay happily married.

## Let me know how I can help.

Jamie C. Williamson, PhD is a FL Supreme Court Certified Family Mediator and Couples Counselor who is part of the Gottman Referral Network. She is an owner and partner at Amity Mediation Workshop, a mediation practice specializing in “friendly divorce” mediation and psycho-educational counseling for couples. Dr. Jamie speaks frequently on relationship topics and authors the blog “Work it Out”. You can find her online at amitymediationworkshop.com.



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# Book Review: The Gifts of Imperfection by Brené Brown

BY MICHAEL MCMANUS LCSW

This is a wonderful book that I often recommend to clients struggling with perfectionism, worthiness, and self-acceptance. In "The Gifts of Imperfection," Brené Brown offers a profound exploration of the importance of embracing our imperfections and cultivating a life rooted in authenticity and self-acceptance. This transformative book serves as a guide for individuals seeking to overcome the societal pressures of perfectionism and to live wholeheartedly.

Brown's writing is both relatable and insightful, drawing from her extensive research on vulnerability, shame, and resilience. She introduces the concept of "wholehearted living," which encourages

readers to let go of the relentless pursuit of perfection and instead embrace their true selves, flaws and all. Through a series of ten guideposts, she outlines practical strategies to foster self-compassion, gratitude, and resilience.

One of the book's most powerful messages is that imperfection is not something to be ashamed of; rather, it is a fundamental aspect of being human. Brown's candid anecdotes and relatable examples resonate deeply, allowing readers to reflect on their own struggles with self-worth and the desire for acceptance.

"The Gifts of Imperfection" is not just a self-help book; it is a heartfelt invitation to embrace vulnerability and to recognize that our imperfections can lead us to deeper connections and a

more meaningful life. Brown's warm and empathetic voice encourages readers to step into their authenticity and cultivate a sense of belonging—both to themselves and within their communities.

In conclusion, "The Gifts of Imperfection" is an essential read for anyone looking to break free from the shackles of perfectionism and to live a more authentic life. Brené Brown's insights are both empowering and transformative, making this book a valuable resource for personal growth and self-discovery.

*Michael McManus LCSW is a psychotherapist in private practice in Santa Rosa Beach, Florida and can be reached at (850) 837-0123 or at Psychotherapy30A.com.*

## MASSAGE

continued from page 27

anxiety, more energy and an improved sense of wellness.

Many of these benefits can be found in several modalities such as relaxation, improved moods and lower anxiety levels. Be sure to ask questions when looking for

a specialist. Are they licensed, certified and/or registered? What is their training and experience? How many sessions are needed to see results for a specific condition? Finding a good therapist is important. I won a massage once so I took advantage of a "free" massage. 3 weeks later I under-

went a couple acupuncture treatments to reverse the damage that was done. I've learned over the years that it matters who is working on your body.

From doctors to therapists and other health professionals, what have we taken the time to learn about them before putting our health into their care?

The more we know.... Here's to Health!

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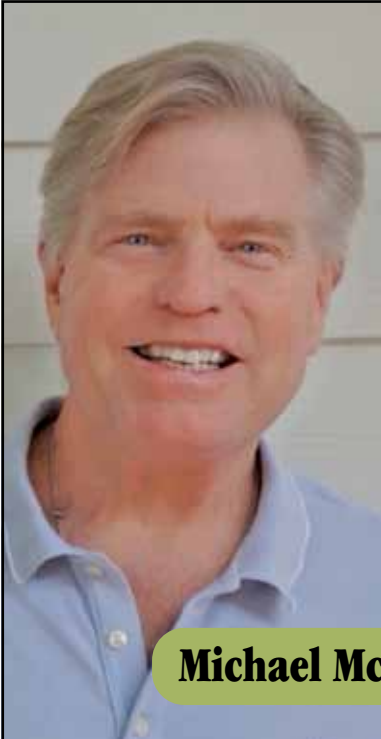
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 Wellness



BY STEPHENIE CRAIG,  
JOURNEY BRAVELY

Do you ever find yourself feeling nervous because you don't

# Meaningful Conversations

know what to say in conversation? Maybe you fear you will say the wrong thing, you don't have anything interesting to say, or you don't know how to keep a conversation going. Maybe you have anxiety because you fear everyone is looking at you and waiting for you to say something stupid. Maybe you worry that someone will ask you a question you don't know how or don't want to answer.

Social situations can feel intimidating and stressful if you don't have practiced conversation

skills. You might assume people are looking for highly intellectual conversation, expert advice, or experienced problem solving. These assumptions can leave you feeling inadequate and anxious. In reality, people mostly want to feel seen and understood. And, surprisingly, you can be excellent at seeing and understanding people without needing all of the answers.

So, how do you approach conversations in ways that feel meaningful and authentic to yourself and others?

## 8 Ways to Create and Sustain Meaningful Conversation

Remember most people enjoy talking about themselves. Inviting others to talk about their life experience often gets conversation started including questions like: What gets you really excited about your work? What fun plans do you have coming up? What do you love about your favorite hobby? Tell me about how school has been going.

Identify an area of passion and ask follow up questions. What do you love about aviation? What is your favorite plane? What museums have you visited? What got you started learning golf? Where is your favorite golf course?

Follow up, follow up, follow up questions. Often when we ask a question, the other person answers and then we let the conversation drop. Instead, try asking additional questions about something they said. What trips do you have coming up? We are going to Disney World in a couple of months. What parks are you going to? What are you most looking forward to about Disney? What made you decide to go on the trip?

Ask open ended questions. Instead of asking a yes or no question, try asking questions that begin with words like what or how. What do you hope will happen in your work meeting? How will you feel if you get the award? How will you handle it if you aren't invited to the party? What would feel supportive to you right now?

Reflect back what you heard including some emotion. It sounds like you studied really hard for that exam and it sounds like you are disappointed with the grade you received.

Validate. Validating is simply letting the other person know their feelings and experience are valid.

All people have feelings and their experience is valid even if you don't agree. It sounds like your feelings were hurt when you were left out of the friend gathering. Being left out feels really hard and hurtful. I can see how you would be feeling upset.

Avoid advice giving unless asked directly and it seems helpful. Most people don't take advice from others even when they ask for it. Then, when you give advice and the other person does not take the advice, it introduces awkward dynamics into the relationship. When others ask for advice, try saying, "I'm really not sure what you should do. What are you thinking about doing?" This helps the other person process their own ideas which they are more likely to use.

Engage boundaries directly. As others ask you questions in conversation, answer as you feel comfortable. If someone asks you a question you'd rather not answer, feel free to say so directly and kindly. I'm not comfortable talking about my complicated relationship with my parents, however, I really appreciate you taking an interest in my life. Then continue the conversation in another direction if you wish to stay engaged.

These conversation tools apply to friendships, family members, new and old relationships. Try practicing some as you enter into the holiday season with parties and gatherings. Remember, people most deeply want to feel seen and understood more than they want you to prove you have something important to say. As always, be patient and gracious with yourself as you learn and try new skills until you feel confident in them. Connect with us for counseling and coaching support along your journey at Journeybravely.com.

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# October Surprise Revisited



BY CHRISTIAN REGALADO

Last month was the beginning of the Annual Enrollment Period (AEP). Those on Medicare Advantage plans and Prescription drug plans could make a change for 2025. Most plans changed usually with a reduction of dental benefits (this is the surprise). Normally most people just allowed their Advantage Plans to automatically renew, this year, they searched for a better plan.

The reason for changes was due to the Inflation Protection Act which required insurance companies to reduce their out-of-pocket maximum for Medicare drugs from \$8000 to \$2000. The "Hole in the Donut" also went away which was a period where the cost of drugs went up until you went into the catastrophic phase.

This change is wonderful news for those on expensive drugs. About 10% of Medicare recipients will qualify. I had a client come in and after I listed all her prescriptions, it showed that the cost was over \$4000 per month. Under the new rule, she will be capped at \$2000, and she can request a payment plan from her insurance carrier and spread the cost over the year paying \$167 per month. That is the good news.

Because the insurance carriers will be absorbing the balance

of these costs, they have spread them to the other 90%. This is being done by increasing costs of PDPs or prescription drug plans and making changes to formularies and drug deductibles. In many cases, those with stand-alone drug plans have seen their premiums double. I've also found many name-brand drugs have been removed from formularies and have been replaced by generics. That is the bad news.

For those on Advantage plans that include prescription drugs, the costs can be absorbed by reducing benefits such as dental. Other benefits have also been deleted or reduced. This will vary from carrier to carrier and plan to plan but all

insurance companies had to make adjustments.

One bright spot is a focus on Part B Rebate plans. Most Advantage carriers offer them and for those that don't use medical benefits very often, you can find a plan that will make payments toward your Social Security Part B premium. Some rebates are as low as \$5 and others are over \$150 per month.

After looking at alternative plans, most folks will stay where they are if their plan is working for them. Others that really want a stronger drug or dental benefit may move to a plan that offers better benefits.

If for some reason you don't

make a change by the December 7 deadline, you can make one change from January to March which is the Open Enrollment Period.

Lastly, you have probably seen the many Medicare advertisements pitched by famous folks. Be careful! They will try to collect your personal information which is sold to other telemarketers.

My recommendation is to deal with a reputable broker that won't disappear after the sale and who

will continue to work on your behalf.

Please remember that our services are free, and we can do consultations over the phone or at your home, but I also welcome clients to visit my office in Santa Rosa Beach. I am certified with many different insurance carriers, and I am happy to answer your questions and assist any way I can.

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# Change vs. Values



BY KIRK MCCARLEY

During my years working as an executive in large organizations I observed that those most impacted by change were almost always the ones most resistant to it.

Let me explain.

In 2008 the organization I was with at the time embarked on one such journey of change by transitioning from a legacy information system to an enterprise resource

planning (ERP) environment. Virtually every information-oriented process would be impacted: payroll, accounting, customer relations, work order management, and many other reporting procedures as well. At the outset, most employees embraced the idea: the new system promised to be nimbler and quicker. Early in the implementation, however, it became apparent that the transition would not only require significant effort but there would be a steep learning curve that would actually slow processes for a time.

Some employees became incensed. "Why didn't we know what was involved? We would never have signed on." I watched as many of these workers who resisted the transition, eventually rendered themselves obsolete. Others may have grumbled at first, but then quietly reconciled

to the new process. Eventually, their job performance not only met, but then exceeded their former output. In addition, many became champions of the new system, some emerging as organizational leaders.

Change brings about anxiety. Further, not all change is good and there can be times that resistance may be merited. How do you know?

Start with your values. Identifying personal values is an exercise that I assign to most of my coaching clients. Values may include characteristics such as integrity, congeniality, compassion, determination, and selflessness, among a host of other attributes. Measure the tasks asked of you against your values.

I see values played out against change time and again:

- University of Virginia head

basketball coach Tony Bennett recently resigned from his position. The requirements for a head coach in an environment now emphasizing business savvy and fundraising expertise over coaching compromised the values he subscribed to as a leader in amateur athletics.

- Changes brought about through political elections may or may not align with our values. We choose how we respond. I know of a doctor so impacted by the result of a presidential election that his bedside manner suffered to the point of almost being censured by a medical board. Regardless of an outcome, we are expected to maintain our decorum and professionalism.

My own son was a victim of a reduction in force at his job. I believe he was more devastated than he let on; this assignment

was one he expected would be long-term. Rather than wallow in self-pity, though, he immediately contacted a former employer and "hustled" up some contract work to support his family and try to meet his financial obligations. Though it's not what he wants to be doing I admire and am proud of his professionalism, tenacity, and resiliency in navigating a difficult time.

How do you adapt to change? Is it a condition that you resist and view as something that was "done" to you, or are you one who is more prone to dust yourself off and get back up? How do your personal values factor into your response?

During the 18th century in New England, a town was overcome by complete darkness on an otherwise clear and sunlit day. Many panicked and prepared for what they believed was Armageddon.

In Connecticut, a member of the Governor's council, Abraham Davenport, became most famous for his response to his colleagues' fears that it was the Day of Judgment:

"I am against adjournment. The day of judgment is either approaching, or it is not. If it is not, there is no cause for an adjournment; if it is, I choose to be found doing my duty. I wish therefore that candles may be brought."

What was later discovered to be an environmental phenomenon caused by a combination of fog, cloud cover, and smoke from wildfires, finally dissipated. After a fearful night, the sun came up the next day.

Davenport stood up to the fears brought about by change. In uncertain times he adhered to his values.

*A graduate of the University of North Texas, Kirk McCarley is a Certified Professional Coach as well as a Professional in Human Resources (PHR) and SHRM-CP Certified. He also is a Production Assistant for both college football and basketball for ESPN and leads group cycling classes as a Certified Spinning instructor. Contact [kirk@theseedsovercoach.com](mailto:kirk@theseedsovercoach.com), [theseedsovercoach.com](http://theseedsovercoach.com), or call 314-677-8779.*



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# Glory Road



BY REV. PETE HYDE

I turned out of the sub-division onto the crowded, school-

ready for fall – or maybe I’m just ready for a change.

The gravelly voice of bal-ladeer Neil Diamond was playing on a CD in the car. It was an old song that was not one his many hits of the ‘70s and ‘80s titled “Glory Road.” The ballad is about a hobo with all his earthly belongings in a sack on his back headed somewhere where dreams would come true and life would be better. “Friend do you know the Glory Road? Friend have you seen the Glory Road? Friend I have found the Glory Road!” The lines of the

a better situation? I know I have, and still do from time to time.

I wonder about all those who are led by the lines of headlights and followed by rows of tail-lights. Aren’t we all searching for the Glory Road? Perhaps the vision of a place where dreams come true and life is better has been pushed aside because our self-made obligations and routines burden us with self-imposed realities that no longer allow for such dreams and wishes. “Friend have you seen the Glory Road? Friend have you seen the Glory Road? Friend have you seen the Glory Road?”

My Bible opens to Psalm 40. “I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet upon a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God....Many, Lord my God, are the wonders you have done, the things you planned for me. None can compare with you; were I to speak and tell of your deeds, they would be too many to declare.” (V1-3, 5; NIV)

Another verse comes to mind:

““For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,” declares the Lord.” (Jeremiah 29: 11-14a)

“Friends I have found the Glory Road.”

I hope and pray you have too.  
*Rev. Pete Hyde serves as chaplain with the South Walton Fire District*



traffic-clogged main road. Though it had been dark when I awoke, the sky had brightened from gray to pink and now to yellow as the sun floated above the eastern horizon. I turned east on the highway headed to the church to pick up from yesterday afternoon’s start on the leftovers from the Sunday busyness and get a start on the week. Lines of cars in both directions signaled the beginning of another work week for the nameless, faceless hundreds going about their usual business. The yellow sphere of the sun hung high above the towering forest of pines, baking them in unusual summer heat in the middle of September. Another week of unseasonably hot and dry weather is in store. I’m

song roll through my mind over and over. Oh, to just point the car to the horizon with no agendas (mine or agendas others have for me) and little responsibilities. Oh, yes, the Glory Road. But, alas, utopia does not exist.

Have we not all searched for the “Glory Road” at one time or another in our lives? Have we not all sought that place where dreams would come true and life would be better even when we admit to ourselves that we have it pretty good and that we are blessed beyond measure? Have we not all searched for the Glory Road and wished, dreamed and prayed we could journey on it? Have we not all searched with a bit of wanderlust in our hearts for a better place, a better time,

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 Musing

# Road to Redemption: Stephanie McMinn – Learning in the Leaning

By VICTORIA OSTROSKY

Tragedy is always an unwelcome visitor. Typically unexpected, and not requested; but often the catalyst for experiencing an intimate, soul-changing participation in God’s infinite love. All through the Bible – both the Old and New Testaments, God continuously reveals His love, His desire for relationship and His holiness. From Abraham, the Friend of God; Moses, with whom God spoke face to face; to David, a man after God’s own heart, and Daniel, a man dearly loved, and bridging to the New Testament - John, the Beloved Disciple; Peter, the Rock; Paul, ‘the chiefest of sinners’, and today, you and me.

When Jesus gave the invitation, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest,” (Matthew 11:28) He meant it. He tenderly cares for His sheep, leading them safely and binding up their wounds.

Stephanie McMinn can attest to the pain of tragedy and balm



of healing, as she explains, “In loss is when we discover who God is – His presence and realness. It’s hard to consider it loss when you gain so much in the middle of it.”

Back in 2011, Chance, Stephanie’s husband, was drawn back into addiction. Their blended family of 5 children was falling apart. While partying one night with friends, he fell from a fourth story balcony,

ending up with a traumatic brain injury and extensive broken bones. Stephanie brought elders from her church to the hospital room where his doctors expressed little hope. There they laid hands on him and prayed. “I remember kneeling beside his bed and asking God – ‘what can I do with this?’ He gave me a vision of Jesus who said – ‘I need you to do what I did and forgive.’ I learned from the One who went before us and set an example. I forgave Chance in the moment and my interior world changed.”

Stephanie learned a vitally important lesson that is so difficult – that forgiveness is a key. “I needed that unlocked within me. I had a decision to make fulfilling my vow. God allowed me to see Him as my everything. Me in Him and Him

in me. I gained so much.”

Not too many years later, tragedy walked back into her life and this time the pain was excruciating. Her son, Gage, a follower of Jesus who had struggled with addiction over the years, was given Percocet laced with a fatal dose of Fentanyl. She decided to head to the morgue, lay hands on her son, and believe that God would raise him up. “Interesting, I remember, it was a holiday weekend and I went to Pensacola to the morgue and it was closed.” A Medical Examiner, though, was in the building and let Stephanie and her interceding friends in. “I told her, just go back there and say the name ‘Jesus’ and He can raise him up. I had three days to pray and believe for him to be raised up like Lazarus. I got the phone call that Tuesday morning.” The

Medical Examiner told her, “I’m so sorry that I can’t tell you what you want to hear.”

For Stephanie, God has taught her over the years that “grief is actually a gift. Grieving is almost an invitation to the Comforter and Counselor to come and help my heart.” We can easily forget in the dark well of our grief, that Jesus not only understands and cares, but that He is sufficiently able to render the aid we need in full.

As Stephanie so beautifully says, “Press in to your Heavenly Father. There’s learning in the leaning.”

Stephanie is the Founder and Executive Director of BeGenerous, a non-profit, Christ-honoring organization reaching out to men and women coming out of substance abuse and sexual exploitation. You can find out more by visiting [BeGenerousInc.org](http://BeGenerousInc.org).

You can also hear Stephanie McMinn’s entire remarkable interview, and listen to many other incredible stories on the weekly Road to Redemption radio show and podcast at [www.rtrdestiny.com](http://www.rtrdestiny.com).





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BY SEAN DIETRICH

It was late. I pulled into the campus after seven o'clock to attend my last class of the semester. My last college class. Ever. It was a night class.

In America, most self-respecting people my age were finishing supper, settling down to watch "Wheel of Fortune." But I was in school.

I had been attending community college for 11 years. I had been taking a lot of night courses. Which meant that I had perfected the art of eating supper in my truck, on the way to class. I

I enrolled as an adult, and my life changed. I became alumni at Okaloosa-Walton Community College.

I completed high-school equivalency courses. I finished the collegiate coursework. It took me eleven years. I worked hard. And I count every year I spent at OWCC as a blessing.

I don't care what you've heard, community college is the beating heart of America. Your big, fancy schools are well and good. But show me a community college, and I'll show you the vascular system of this nation.

America is not built on the shoulders of Harvard or Yale graduates. America's internal organs are made up of men and women who know the difference between good and bad tamales.

That night, our classroom consisted of a commercial

greeting cards. She kissed our foreheads.

They don't kiss your foreheads at Yale.

The Hooters waitress and I stood shoulder to shoulder. The teacher made a big deal about how we were all such important people. She told the Hooters waitress that she was going to be

a big-time nurse someday. The waitress blushed.

Then the professor told the classroom that she believed I would become a writer one day. I wanted to bury my face from embarrassment.

But the old woman touched my cheek and said, "You are so beautiful, Sean. I know God is

going to use your past to make a marvelous future." Then she kissed my forehead again.

If there was a dry eye in the classroom it belonged to a sewing needle.

And anyway, this goat butt will forever be a proud community college graduate.



drove with my knees, ate with my hands, and controlled the radio with my big toe.

Supper often consisted of foil-wrapped tamales, purchased from Carmela, a middle-aged Mexican woman who visited our construction jobsites. Carmela traveled in a battered '84 Nissan Maxima that looked like a roving salvage yard.

Every time I'd buy a tamale, Carmela would pat my cheek and say, "Joo are very sweet boy, but joo need a bath, joo smell like goat butt."

So parked my truck. I rushed into class, smelling like the fundamentals of a horned barnyard animal.

Eleven years it had taken me to finish school. Me. A middle-school dropout. My formal education ended in seventh grade, after my father took his own life with a hunting rifle. I simply quit going to school. I was a rural child. It wasn't a big deal. Nobody seemed to care what rural dropouts did.

I got my first job hanging dry-wall at age 14. I started working in bars, playing music shortly thereafter. I had a lot of jobs. I hung gutter. I worked as an ice-cream-scoop. I was a telemarketer. I was a nobody. I was white trash.

Until I enrolled in community college.

plumber, an electrician's assistant, a few GIs, and a Hooters waitress who looked as though she had come directly from work. And me, a degenerate bar musician/tile-layer.

Our literature teacher arrived. Soon, we were discussing what was known to our class as "TKAM." "To Kill a Mockingbird." And everyone in our classroom had something to say about TKAM.

Namely, because this book was not just literature to us. It was a taste of home. The book took place in Monroe County, Alabama. We were one-point-five counties away from Monroe County.

We all talked about deeper meanings within the book. We spoke of metaphors and hyperboles and allegories and a bunch of other five-dollar words nobody understood except the Hooters waitress. And it was a great night.

And when class was finished, our teacher got this tear-stained look in her eyes and said, "I'm going to miss you all."

She said, "A few of you are going to graduate this year, and I wanted to do something special for you to mark this occasion."

She invited the graduates to the front of the room. We all shyly walked forward. She gave us tiny potted begonias and



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 Dining

# A Local Favorite: VUE on 30a Offers Impeccable Fine Dining with a Majestic “Vue”

BY LORI LEATH SMITH

I had dined here before. But, this was different. Fresh. Exhilarating yet peaceful. Familiar yet new at the same time. Already well-known for its upscale ambiance, inventive menu and uninterrupted view of the emerald green waters, Vue on 30A is a favorite for locals and visitors alike seeking a memorable culinary escape surrounded by its magical view.

From the moment we walked through its front door, we were greeted by the vast, sparkling expanse of the Gulf, stretching out just beyond the windows. And while the sight alone is invigorating, the ambiance manages to remain serene, blending excitement with tranquility.

We sat indoors in front of the expansive windows that allowed us the breathtaking backdrop of the waves meeting the shore—it never gets old, and absolutely enhanced our dining experience.

With two new chefs at the helm, Executive Chef Christopher Mayhue and Sous Chef Dalbert Hughes, the Vue’s revised menu embraces a farm-to-table philosophy, sourcing ingredients from local providers that highlight our region’s rich, fresh flavors. However, it also includes items and ingredients influenced by the chefs’ own heritages and favorites for a diverse menu that reflects both the region’s southern roots as well as

international influences that create a blend of American, French and Italian cuisine.

Throughout our casual lunch, every detail felt thoughtfully curated. I found some tried and true staples combined with unique ingredients you wouldn’t normally think to combine. Throughout our meal, I just kept thinking, somehow, these chefs know how to take American favorites, make them their own and even better.

To get started, we enjoyed signature appetizers and local favorites: House Smoked Tuna Dip (did I say wow?) and Seared Tuna Tabasco. (Seared tuna is something I order a lot and this was beyond amazing.)

For the main course, I had one of Chef Mayhue’s favorites—NOLA Style BBQ Shrimp, his Cajun-inspired dish with a Gulf Coast flare, served with melt-in-your-mouth garlic cheddar biscuits. It did indeed remind me of New Orleans, but with Chef Mayhue’s magical twist!

For those who are more into “southern comfort” foods, we also tried the “Niceville Hot” Chicken Sandwich, a quite tantalizing modern update.

Another must-try starter is the Ahi Tuna Nachos—the crispy wontons provided a unique twist on the classic nacho concept, and were topped with sushi-grade tuna, avocado and a tangy wasabi cream. The Blue Crab Bisque was smooth and fla-



vorful exemplifying the kitchen’s attention to seafood craftsmanship. And the filet mignon was impressive, melting in my mouth it was so tender!

It seems each dish tells a story of the local landscape with drops of the chefs’ personalities enhancing the flavor of every bite, while tailored to complement the natural beauty that surrounds the Vue on 30A.

Even the dessert menu provides memorable options such as one of my favorites, the classic Key Lime Pie, each bite tangy and sweet.

Of course, there is an impressive drink menu, from craft cocktails to a well-curated wine list. Signature cocktails, such as the Sunset Margarita or the Seaside Mule, pair wonderfully with the coastal cuisine. For wine enthusiasts, the wine list spans regions and varieties, featuring everything from crisp whites ideal for seafood pairings to full-bodied reds for heartier fare.

And don’t worry; the waitstaff is well-versed in the menu and wine pairings.

Stepping into Vue on 30a felt like revisiting an old friend who’s picked up just the right touch of intrigue. Familiar and approachable, yet renewed, this tantalizing sensory experience left me enchanted all over again...one that still lingers. Visit [vueon30a.net](http://vueon30a.net).

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### Tradition With A Twist

The first tiki in the lineup is a traditional guardian, designed to stand as a sentinel at the entrance to Fudpucker's, welcoming guests and giving a nod to Polynesian tiki culture's rich history. "Guardian Tikis" are believed to offer protection, setting a tone of hospitality and warmth. But the artistry of Aaron DeLuca takes a playful, modern turn from this initial guardian. Each of the remaining tikis is inspired by different aspects of Fudpucker's Beachside Bar & Grill, capturing the essence of the restaurant's eclectic personality.

From this traditional starting point, DeLuca's imagination runs wild. The second tiki in the series celebrates Fudpucker's famous alligators, a homage to the resident reptiles who have become beloved mascots for visitors and locals alike. This tiki is lively, detailed, and represents the spirit of adventure that visitors experience at Fudpucker's. "Working on this piece was fun because it lets people see the quirky, adventurous side of Fudpucker's before they even step inside," says DeLuca.

Another tiki, known as the "Mad Chef," speaks to the vibrant energy in Fudpucker's kitchen and its culinary artistry. With exaggerated expressions and a chef's hat, this tiki embodies the passion behind the grill and the enthusiasm of Fudpucker's food culture.

### The "Beer Can Tiki"

One of the most visually striking of DeLuca's tikis is the "Beer Can Tiki." This sculpture is inspired by Fudpucker's famous collection of vintage beer cans, which lines nine walls of

the restaurant. The can collection is a hit among guests, a display of nostalgia and dedication to curating a quirky, memorable atmosphere. DeLuca's "Beer Can Tiki" captures the playfulness and devotion to unique decor that defines Fudpucker's interior.

"Fudpucker's is known for its extensive collection of memorabilia, and we wanted to incorporate that spirit into the artwork. The 'Beer Can Tiki' reflects the restaurant's homage to pop culture and its sense of humor," DeLuca shares. Guests can experience the nostalgia woven into Fudpucker's design, now brought to life outdoors as a carved piece of history.

### What's In A Name

A particularly meaningful addition to the series is the tiki that celebrates Fudpucker's origins and namesake. DeLuca created a scene in which two fishermen are depicted angling for triggerfish, a tribute to the fishing culture and coastal spirit that inspired Fudpucker's founders. This tiki is an ode to the restaurant's roots, offering a nostalgic look at Fudpucker's backstory while connecting the tiki series to the Destin community's fishing traditions.

"Working on this tiki was like writing a love letter to Fudpucker's roots," DeLuca explains. "It's important to honor the history and the coastal vibe that makes this place unique."

### The Heart Of The Palm

Tiki carving requires ongoing care, as DeLuca encountered with Fudpucker's older palms, which still release moisture long after carving. "Some of these tikis are nearly 40 years old, and water in the palm heart continues to sweat out," he explains.

To keep the tikis vibrant, DeLuca will return in December for touch-ups, applying sealant to protect against coastal weather. "Outdoor art requires regular maintenance to stay fresh," he notes, reflecting both Fudpucker's and DeLuca's dedication to preserving these unique pieces.

### Spellbound Father Fud

As the new tikis took shape,



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even Fudpucker's founder and local personality, Father Fud, couldn't help but marvel at DeLuca's work. Known for his sense of humor and larger-than-life personality, Father Fud was famously overheard mumbling, "...how much fud could a Fudpucker puck if a Fudpucker could puck fud?" when he first took in the sight of these sculptures. This light-hearted remark has quickly become a local catchphrase, capturing the fun and whimsy that defines the spirit of Fudpucker's Beachside Bar & Grill.

### Must-See Experience

Visitors and locals alike are invited to experience these remarkable tikis firsthand. From the guardian that greets you at the entrance to the Mad Chef, the Beer Can Tiki, and the triggerfish fishermen, each piece offers a unique way to engage with Fudpucker's eclectic atmosphere. The tikis are more than just carvings; they are a testament to the creativity, humor, and community spirit that make Fudpucker's a beloved staple in Destin.

For art lovers, tiki enthusiasts, and those simply looking

for an extraordinary experience, Fudpucker's new tiki sculptures bring an exciting new dimension to the Destin community. Each tiki tells a story, crafted to celebrate both the traditional roots of tiki art and the playful, vibrant personality of Fudpucker's Beachside Bar & Grill.

**So, stop by and discover the hidden story within each tiki!**

Visit Us in Destin.  
20001 Emerald Coast Pkwy.  
Destin, FL 32541  
www.Fudpucker.com



Dining

# Redd's Pub Finds New Home on U.S. Hwy 98

Redd's Pub, a beloved local institution known for its vibrant "Dive Bar" atmosphere, the unforgettable performances of Redd the Singing Bartender, and Live Bands, is being forced to relocate from its current location at 2320 W. Hwy 30A. Recent new owners informed Redd of an impending renovation, with just three weeks' notice.

There is a silver lining: Redd's Pub will soon be opening a new chapter in the Emerald Coast Plaza at 3906 US Hwy 98 W, Unit 1, Santa Rosa Beach, with an anticipated opening date in mid November.

After more than a decade at its iconic location, Redd's Pub has become a cornerstone of the community since its opening in 2013. The restaurant's unique blend of great food, lively entertainment, and the unmistakable charm of its owner, Redd, has made it a favorite among locals and visitors alike.



The untimely requirement to relocate came as a shock, but the team at Redd's is excited about the opportunity to bring their signature experience to a new venue that promises to be even more accessible and enjoy-

able for all. Now through Labor Day weekend, is the time to visit Redd's on 30A and grab a piece of history.

Redd, who has poured her heart and soul into the restaurant, shared her mixed feelings

about the move: "Leaving the tight knit community on 30A is bittersweet. This place has been the backdrop for so many memories and friendships, but change is part of life, and we're

embracing this opportunity with open arms. We can't wait to welcome everyone to our new location nearby, where the spirit of Redd's will continue to thrive. I hope to recreate the current vibe with some terrific upgrades."

The new venue on US Hwy 98 will offer the same warm hospitality, delicious food, and lively entertainment that Redd's has become known for, in a setting that promises to be as inviting as ever.

As the community eagerly awaits the reopening, Redd and her team are hard at work ensuring that the new location will be ready to continue the legacy that began a little more than eleven years ago. Redd looks forward to celebrating this new chapter with both longtime patrons and new friends when the doors open later this fall.

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# We the People: The Battle for Heirloom's Sweet Dreams

In the heart of Santa Rosa Beach, at 38 Thompson Road #1, a dream sits waiting to bloom. Heirloom Donuts, the brainchild of proprietor Mallory Fields, promised to bring a fresh concept to South Walton County: build-your-own donuts, artisanal donut bouquets, and a warm community gathering space. But what should have been a July celebration of sweet beginnings has turned bitter in the face of bureaucratic resistance.



authentic artistic expression, created to enhance a local business and reflect our community's vibrant culture, be dismissed as something that would "sully" our beloved coastline?

This isn't just about donuts. It's about a gathering place designed for all of us—a space where 75 seats await, offering the comfort of booth and diner-style seating, cozy couches, and a dedicated children's area where young ones can play while parents unwind. It's about family trivia nights and karaoke sessions that would bring our community together.

Now is the time for the people of South Walton County to make their voices heard. Throughout November, we invite you to share your opinions with the Planning and Building Department by emailing [paul@lifemediagr.com](mailto:paul@lifemediagr.com). Your support matters, and Heirloom Donuts is sweetening the deal:

First Prize: A dozen donuts monthly for a full year

Second Prize: A half-dozen donuts monthly for a full year

The people of South Walton County have always stood for creativity, community, and local enterprise. Today, we must rise up once again. Let's show our support

for businesses that dare to be different, that seek to make our community not just more delicious, but more beautiful too.

We the people of South Walton County believe in preserving not just our scenic corridors, but also the creative spirit that makes

our community unique. Stand with Heirloom Donuts. Stand for artistic expression. Stand for community.

Rise up, South Walton. The future of our local business culture depends on it.

The latest hurdle? A clash between creativity and regulation that strikes at the very soul of local entrepreneurship. The South Walton County Building and Planning Department has deemed Heirloom's wall art—a stunning mural that captures the spirit of our community—as mere "graffiti." They claim this piece of artistic expression would somehow tarnish the

scenic beauty of the 30A corridor, making its removal a condition for opening permits.

We ask: Since when did beauty become a blemish? How can au-

## AJ's Feeds the Community this Thanksgiving!



For the 5th year, AJ's Grayton Beach will host a free Thanksgiving Day meal from 12 p.m. till 5 p.m. to serve Thanksgiving dinner, then host family Karaoke starting at 6 p.m. "We open up our doors to everyone, to ensure that no one is alone or hungry for the holiday," says Keith Waters, Director of Operations for AJ's.

AJ's Thanksgiving feast will feature time-honored classics such as turkey, ham, stuffing, turkey gravy, mashed potatoes, sweet potato casserole, green bean casserole, cranberry relish, garden salad, dinner rolls and an assortment of pies.

"We are open to everyone, and invite the community to join our AJ's family on this day, to give thanks. While there is absolutely no charge, donations will be accepted from those capable of making them," adds Waters.

Alan Laird, owner of AJ's says, "We want to give back to those that may not have the means to celebrate Thanksgiv-

ing. We also want to provide a gathering place for those who don't have anyone with which to share the holiday meal or for those who simply want to celebrate with their neighbors. This is our way to thank the community that provides for us and our families, each and every day."

No reservations are accepted, and diners will be served on a first come basis. All donations received from both Thanksgiving feasts will benefit Kids on the Coast Foundation. Donations will be used to assist local high school youth this upcoming holiday season. Kids on the Coast is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that supports various charities which provide assistance and offer support to local children and youth. For more information, contact the Special Events and Promotions department: Rachael Green at [info@ajs-destin.com](mailto:info@ajs-destin.com) or 850-259-2057.

Learn more at: [ajsgrayton.com](http://ajsgrayton.com).



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Music

# South Walton Live Music Scene

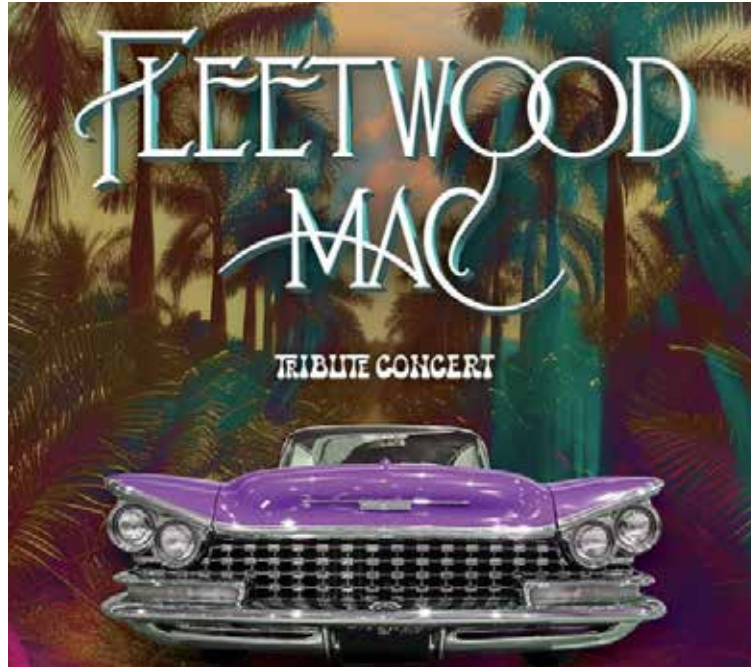
## Fleetwood Mac Tribute Concert @ The REP Nov. 19

The Seaside REP Theatre presents its annual tribute concert at 7 p.m. Nov. 19. Join for an electrifying evening filled with soulful vocals, timeless hits, and legendary guitar riffs as the area's most talented musicians guide you on a musical journey through Fleetwood Mac's greatest hits. Doors open at 6:30 p.m., music starts at 7 p.m. Visit

LoveTheREP.com for tickets. Tickets are \$100 per person.

## Old Florida Fish House Weekdays

For over a decade, Old Florida Fish House has proudly featured local live music. Catch artists playing inside the coveted bar and lounge area as well as in the large outdoor dining space situated among the palm and oak trees under the twinkling lights



next to Eastern Lake. Visit www.oldfloridafishhouse.com.

live music. Visit foow30a.com.

## FOOW Live Music Fridays and Sunday Brunch

Enjoy live music on Fridays and for Sunday Brunch at FOOW - Fish Out of Water. The Gulf front restaurant invites you to delicious dining paired with

## AJ's Grayton Brunch, Live Music & Sunday Funday

AJ's is the place to be to celebrate all things Sunday Funday in Grayton Beach! Come for brunch, stay for the music and dancing. Every Sunday from 11 a.m. til 3 p.m., AJ's brunch is

not to be missed. Complete your meal with a mimosa or go all in with their famous Build Your Own Bloody Mary bar. Enjoy live music with Will & Linda 12-4 p.m. and Pickled Pickers on the Main Stage at 5 p.m. Check ajs-grayton.com for other live music throughout the week.

## Shunk Gulley

Shunk Gulley is a premier location on 30A for live music, bringing in artists from around the Gulf coast and beyond. Whether you just want to relax to indie guitar players or upbeat party songs, the talented musicians know the vibe of the area. Visit www.shungulley.com.

## The Bay

Come out to The Bay with family and friends every Wednesday night starting at 5 p.m. for dinner, cold drinks and a bonfire with various musicians on the beach of the Choctawhatchee Bay. It's a midweek tradition in South Walton. Sunday Pickin' @ The Bay features The Sand Ole' Opry with Mike Whitty & Friends on stage from 4-8 p.m. Mike brings in new musicians to play every week. Wednesday nights:

- Nov. 13: Sugarcane Jane
- Nov. 20: Martin Lane
- Nov. 27: Jared Herzog

## Sounds of Seaside Concert Series

Enjoy an evening of live music in the Seaside Amphitheater on Wednesdays. Sounds of SEASIDE features musicians ready to entertain the whole family. Bring a chair or blanket, snacks and drinks, and enjoy the show. Free and open to all ages. Visit seasidefl.com for more details.

- Nov. 13: MECO (Chris Alvarado)
- Nov. 20: Max McCann
- Nov. 27: Boukou Groove

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# Meet Studio 237 Music Teacher: Kimberly Burke

We'd like to introduce to you our new voice teacher at Studio 237 Music Lessons, Kimberly Burke, a singer/songwriter from Tennessee and a Nashville recording artist who recently relocated to Santa Rosa Beach, Florida. She is a classically trained musician with a degree in voice performance and also plays the acoustic guitar.

She has many years of experience and is currently performing as a solo artist covering country, classic rock, beach town favorites, and some old R&B. Kimberly has enjoyed performing in country, rock, bluegrass, blues, jazz, and funk bands. She currently has original music out on many platforms. Kimberly's new single is came out in October entitled "The Girl I Was Before." She is a regular performer at songwriter nights in Nashville.

Kimberly loves teaching and has instructed students of all ages and abilities. As a classically trained vocalist, she encourages

emphasis on technique and breath support, teaching her students to sing in a way that will strengthen their voices, empowering them to improve in their skills, range, and confidence. Kimberly's approach is a custom-tailored program for each student, always stimulating fun and enjoyment. She takes a lot of time helping her students find material they are excited to learn. She loves children and enjoys inspiring them to make music a part of their lives. "Music is such a valuable emotional outlet. It's a language of its own that we can all identify with. I love helping young people and adults discover the gift of music," she explains.



performance, and experience of music.

Studio 237 Music Lessons' location in East Point Washington, Florida at 237 Dawson Road is only 21 minutes or 15 miles going West on Highway 98 from the Publix Supermarket in Ocean Park Pavilion, Panama City Beach. We are also 13 miles and 20 minutes south of the Publix supermarket in Freeport, Florida on Highway 331.

If traveling from the Grand Boulevard Publix Supermarket in Miramar Beach, Florida, to Studio 237, it is only 11 miles east on Highway 98 or 20 minutes to our location at 237 Dawson Road in the East Point Washington area of the Santa Rosa Beach community.

January 2025 will begin our 15th year as a place for music teachers to teach and for music students to learn.

Kimberly is available to give lessons of any vocal genre including but not limited to country, rock, blues, soul, jazz, music theater and classical. Whether you just want to sing for fun or need some guidance preparing for an audition, she is happy to help. In addition to vocal training as a singer/songwriter she also teaches songwriting and can assist students with learn-

ing to accompany themselves with some basic guitar. As a teacher with experience teaching music appreciation and a student of music history and ethnomusicology (the study of the music of different cultures), she's also available to teach an independent curriculum for homeschooled students or for any student wishing to delve deeper into the subject, of per-

We have been blessed with seven outstanding teachers and students, which has produced some great musicians and many happy parents. To contact us, visit our website at [Studio237Music.com/registration](http://Studio237Music.com/registration) and we will contact you. Visit our list of teachers at [Studio237Music.com/all-teachers-listing](http://Studio237Music.com/all-teachers-listing) or call (850) 231-3199 or text (850) 797-3546 and ask for Ray.



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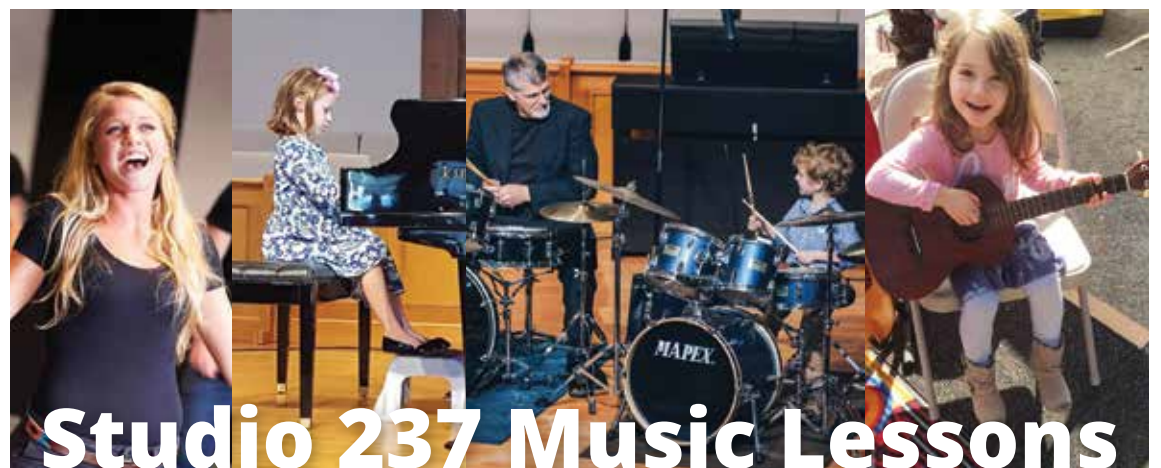
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# What's New at ECES

## ENERGY TIPS

by Emerald Coast Energy Solutions



BY CHRIS BALZER

At ECES (Emerald Coast Energy Solutions) we are excited to announce we have partnered with SunPro products out of Bradenton, FL, a top manufacturer of motorized awnings and screens. I'm not a very excitable person, however, when it comes to increasing comfort, I get excited. At some point, you might consider expanding your outdoor living spaces but don't know where to start. We can help. I personally have gone through several of those big box 10-foot hand crank umbrellas in my backyard. They are expensive, take up space and when it comes to finding the right color, forget it. We have a solution. Our motorized awnings have hundreds of Sunbrella fabrics to match any design and several custom lengths to fit any lifestyle. We also include built-in dimmable LED lights to enhance the outdoor nightlife, and integrated cassette housing (I call it the garage), which protects the awning fabric from weather damage extending the life of the fabric, and it looks



sleek when retracted. Each awning comes with a wireless remote and built-in wind sensors. Once triggered, the wind sensor retracts the awning automatically, ensuring the awning and your home stay protected. With a touch of a button, you

will be enjoying your outdoor space day or night. There are also many add-on options available, but most customers enjoy the features that are already included in our packages.

Another option to create an outdoor escape is a motorized screen. A custom motorized screen can increase your comfort and style, indoors and out. Lifestyle options include insect and weather protection while creating an attractive defense against the elements without hindering the view or ventilation. If your home is located on a golf course or close to your neighbor and you want to enjoy relaxing in your pool or backyard without the world watching, with just a click of a button you can have instant privacy. Or if you want to upgrade that garage space with a motorized

screen that allows that breeze to come in and creates privacy, again, just a click of a button. Wouldn't that be incredible? So if you are looking to create or enhance your outdoor escape with a custom motorized awning or screen, give us a call and we can explore the options together.

*Chris Balzer is Founder and President of Emerald Coast Energy Solutions which is a Smile Provider Company. We provide smiles to our customers after installing our high energy efficient products, increasing comfort and lowering energy bills. For more information on how to save and become energy efficient, schedule an appointment by calling (850) 588-2870, visit www.trusteces.com or email wecare@trusteces.com and Beat the Heat.*

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# Tis' the Season to Protect Your Treasures



By JULIE A. MARTIN

In the upcoming holiday season, many beautiful baubles will be bought, beautifully wrapped and gifted to loved ones to smile, ooh and ah over. Rings and earrings, bracelets and necklaces, Oh My! So, once you have these beautiful gems, gold and silver, too, how do you insure these beautiful treasures?

There are two ways to insure your new valuables. One is to schedule your new jewelry onto your existing home insurance policy for its specifically appraised value. It will be necessary for you to have the item or set appraised by a licensed or certified jewelry appraiser prior to insuring them. Many insurance companies allow appraisals up to 36 months old, while some require new appraisals every 12 months. Please review the terms of your policy to find out what the rules require.

The other way to insure your

valuables is on an Inland Marine Floater policy. These policies typically cover for the perils of theft, breakage or mysterious disappearance, but are not tied to your home insurance.

One advantage of having an Inland Marine Floater policy over scheduling on your home insurance is that, if there is a claim, it won't count against your home insurance policy itself. It will still count as a claim, but not the same way.

There are 12 categories of personal property that are typically classified as Scheduled Items:

- Jewelry, goldware, silverware, pewterware
- Furs
- Sports equipment
- Firearms
- Artwork
- Antiques/collectibles
- Stamps
- Coins
- Rare books and Manuscripts

The rating basis of the item or items in question has to do with the current value of the item or set, where it is kept, either in the home or in a safe, as well as the condition of the item.

In the event of loss by theft or mysterious disappearance, there would need to be a police report filed as well as the claim itself.

Many carriers offer discounts for the scheduling multiple items on one policy. For example, if



you have a 10K ring and your husband has a Rolex, scheduling them together under one policy would reduce the premiums for both, as it would make more sense than to have a separate policy for each item.

For any older yet still valuable items that fall into this category, please make sure to keep appraisals current to get full value in the event of a claim. If your last appraisal showed a value of 15K, but the current value is 20K, you will not be able to collect on the difference, if you have an old appraisal that is outside the bounds of the underwriting guidelines.

You may also add other items to the same policy such as rare books, antique firearms or other valuable items from the list, provided they have been appraised within the timeframe of the carrier's rules, usually either 12 months, or sometimes up to 36

months, depending on the carrier.

Your treasures carry more than monetary value; to you they would mean the world. So, protecting them to the fullest extent possible is a logical next step, and will be much less ex-

pensive than you think.

It's a good idea to sit down with your Independent Insurance Agent to talk about your options, and outline a good plan to protect your treasures in a way that makes you feel comfortable.

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# AI Gone Wrong: The Terrifying Risks of Unchecked Automation

BY JENNIFER HALE

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is reshaping how businesses operate by enabling automation, predictive analytics, and even decision-making. From customer service chatbots to advanced data processing, AI is helping companies scale their operations faster than ever before. However, the rapid adoption of AI comes with significant challenges.

Businesses need to be aware of key AI safety concerns as they integrate this powerful technology into their operations.

## AI Safety Concerns: The Elephant in the Room

One of the most pressing is-

ssues facing businesses today is AI safety concerns. AI systems can process vast amounts of data, but they often lack transparency in how decisions are made.

### This lack of transparency leads to several safety issues, such as:

**AI Bias:** AI systems can unintentionally discriminate based on race, gender, or other factors if trained on biased data (Built In). This can lead to unequal outcomes in hiring processes, financial decisions, and even customer service.

**Erroneous Decision-Making:** In high-stakes scenarios, relying solely on AI to make

critical decisions can be dangerous. Imagine an autonomous vehicle or a healthcare diagnostic tool making the wrong call—errors like this can have severe consequences (Tech.co).

**Over-Reliance on AI:** While automation can save time and reduce human error, over-reliance on AI can lead to complacency. Businesses may assume AI will make the “right” decision without realizing the need for constant human oversight (MIT Sloan Review).

### AI Security Risks: Keeping Data Safe

AI has transformed cybersecurity, helping businesses identify potential vulnerabilities faster. But paradoxically, AI security risks have also emerged as a growing concern. AI systems are vulnerable to attacks such as:

**Data Poisoning:** Cyber-

criminals can introduce malicious data into AI training sets, leading to flawed outputs and compromising the system’s integrity (World Economic Forum).

**Model Hacking:** Hackers can manipulate AI algorithms to behave in unintended ways, which can cause AI-driven systems to malfunction, potentially exposing sensitive business data (MIT Sloan Review).

**Automation Exploits:** As businesses automate processes, cybercriminals can exploit AI systems to carry out large-scale attacks, targeting everything from customer data to financial records (Built In).

Addressing these risks requires companies to invest in robust cybersecurity measures tailored to AI-driven systems. This includes regular audits, secure data-handling practices, and a focus on

protecting the algorithms themselves from external threats.

### AI-Related Business Challenges

Beyond safety and security, businesses face a range of AI-related business challenges as they strive to implement AI effectively. Some include:

**Skill Gaps:** Many businesses lack the internal expertise required to manage AI technologies. Hiring or training talent to handle AI infrastructure can be both time-consuming and costly (MIT CSAIL).

**Ethical Dilemmas:** For instance, should an AI system prioritize efficiency over fairness? These ethical decisions are increasingly falling on business leaders who may not have the background to address them appropriately (World Economic Forum).

**Integration Issues:** Implementing AI isn’t as simple as flipping a switch. Legacy systems and existing infrastructure often require significant updates to integrate with AI solutions, creating operational challenges (MIT Sloan Review).

### Fun Twist: How AI Helped Develop This Article

Part of this very article was crafted with the assistance of AI! AI was used to analyze and pull together relevant data on AI risks in business and AI safety concerns, research keywords, source statistics and categorize data. While it certainly sped up the research process, I (an actual human!) reviewed and fine-tuned every word to ensure it was accurate, comprehensive and aligned with the latest industry insights. It’s an example of how AI can enhance, not replace, human creativity and oversight.

### Mitigating AI Risks in Your Business

While AI offers countless benefits, at the end of the day, AI is a tool—and like all tools, it needs to be handled with care. By maintaining human oversight and ensuring rigorous risk management practices, businesses can unlock the full potential of AI while safeguarding their operations.

*Ready to take control of your AI integration? Visit [www.snhtech.com/AI](http://www.snhtech.com/AI) to learn about employing AI securely.*

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