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SOWAL Life

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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 woodsy sounds you'd expect of such a sylvan location. Here at the 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 pre-

served, allowing visitors to imagine life in early Florida

MUSEUM
continued on page 2

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Alaqua Animal Refuge Seeks Support for Animals Displaced by Hurricane

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 monetary donations, vol-

ALAUQA
continued on page 2



**Shrek
The Musical Jr.
Nov. 7-23**



**All is Calm
Dec. 6-22**



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www.emeraldcoasttheatre.org





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Community

MUSEUM

continued from page 1

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 the 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 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.

ALAUQA

continued from page 1

unteers, fosters and adopters to sustain the ongoing care for these animals.

As the designated emergency shelter for Hurricane Milton, Alauqa 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, Alauqa 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.

You can help with monetary donations by visiting www.alauqa.org; volunteer with animal care, feeding and support; foster or adopt to relieve the overcrowding and give animals a loving environment to recover; and share Alauqa's story on social media encouraging others to get involved. For more information, donate or volunteer, visit www.alauqa.org or call 850-880-6399.

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Santa Clause is 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.

ille. 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 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

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

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

Here comes Santa Claus right

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

Continued on next page



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Community

Santa Clause is Coming to Town and More!

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

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

"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

Emerald Coast Theatre Company Presents "All Is Calm: The Christmas Truce Of 1914" Dec. 6-22

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 soldiers 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 at emeraldcoasttheatre.org.

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

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), Jontavious Willis, Josh Rouse, Paul McDonald & The Mourning Doves, Tyler Ramsey, Andrea 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

Paul White, Tommy Prine, Ruthie Foster, Hayes Carll, Holly Williams, John Fullbright, Black Opry Revue, Lilly Hiatt, 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 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 con-



firmed 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.

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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 grand-

kids; 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.

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://thechurchatthebayandopendoorfoodpantry.com> or contact Bill Howell at (850) 217-6991.

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Community

30TH ANNIVERSARY! Harbor Docks Restaurant Annual Thanksgiving Dinner

In what has become a local Thanksgiving tradition like no other, Harbor Docks Restaurant will provide complimentary meals to locals and out-of-towners for the 30th consecutive year this November 28th, Thanksgiving Day.

The restaurant will have its sit-down dinners inside the restaurant serving hundreds of people a traditional Thanksgiving meal including turkey, ham, dessert, beverages and all the "fixins." There is no charge for the meal, but donations are accepted benefitting Habitat For Humanity of Okaloosa County and Destin Harvest. All of the volunteers for the Thanksgiving feast are provided by Habitat For Humanity Okaloosa, from the cooks to servers and everyone in-between. The volunteer staff will include homeowners who will benefit from the fundraiser!

Credit cards will be accepted for donations and alcoholic beverages can be purchased at



the bar separately, but not included with the meals. Large family groups of 10 or more are encouraged and asked to please call the restaurant ahead of time, so that a table can be re-

served to avoid long waits. Call (850) 837-2506.

Harbor Docks will begin seating at 11 a.m. and will take the last sitting at 4:30 p.m. Please note that food will be served

while it lasts. The serving is not buffet style, but served individually to patrons. Parking will be available across the street from the restaurant with plenty of parking signage and handicap

parking available also.

Harbor Docks Restaurant is a Destin institution located in the "Heart of Destin" at 538 Harbor Boulevard.

HABITAT FOR HUMANITY OKALOOSA

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30th Annual Harbor Docks Thanksgiving Complimentary Sit Down Dinner



Thursday, November 28th 11:00 – 4:30 (Thanksgiving Day)

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Community

Surf Brigade: Empowering Veterans Through Surf Therapy

BY KEVIN LALIBERTE, SURF BRIGADE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In the heart of Santa Rosa Beach, a transformative initiative is making waves for military veterans. 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. With a dedicated 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.



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.

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.

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. 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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Walton County School District Designated as an Academically High-Performing School District



Superintendent A. Russell Hughes

We are proud to announce that the Walton County School District has again been designat-

ed 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 commitment 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, 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 of-

fers a range of administrative flexibilities designed to empower both instructional personnel and administrative staff to focus on student learning.

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 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.

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/1eNUhh4mQH-f5Eaxl9aR3usS-D3seu9iAeh-GcdAbihagY>, 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 Ab-

bott: Shane.Abbott@myflorida-house.gov

Samantha Sullivan, Aide: Samantha.Sullivan@myflorida-house.gov

Senator Jay Trumbull: Trumbull.Jay@flsenate.gov

Andrea Gainey, Aide: Gainey.Andrea@flsenate.gov

We remain in close communication with The Florida Cultural Alliance and other Local Arts Agencies throughout the state working towards and hop-

ing 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.



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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 fam-



ilies 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 ben-

efits 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. For more information about the impact of tourism in Walton County, visit waltoncountyftourism.com/annual-reports.

For more information on the Artist of the Year program, visit waltoncountyftourism.com/artist-year.

For more information on the Van Ness Butler, Jr. Hospitality Awards, visit waltoncountyftourism.com/van-ness-butler-jr-award.

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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 Marlon 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-foot 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 artificial 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 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.

"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/eco-tourism/artificial-reefs/>. To learn more about the history of America's Flagship, visit <https://www.ssusc.org/>.

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Destin Life readers can get a FREE copy of the book, for a limited time, by emailing Brian@BeOnTheCoast.com or give him a call at (850) 739-3800.

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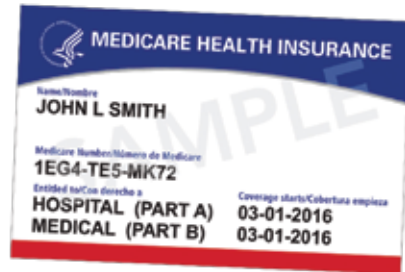


By CHRISTIAN REGALADO

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 certi-

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Meaningful Conversations



BY STEPHENIE CRAIG,
JOURNEY BRAVELY

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



versation 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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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

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.





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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 empower-



ing 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.



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Where East Meets West

WHOLISTIC HEALTH • ACUPUNCTURE • MASSAGE • APOTHECARY





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 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 drywall 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.

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 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."

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.

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

They don't kiss your foreheads at Yale.

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Musing

A Pastor's Ponderings: **Glory Road**



BY REV. PETE HYDE

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



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 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

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, 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 taillights. 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?"

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

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

The gravelly voice of balladeer 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

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

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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-hon-

oring organization reaching out to men and women coming out of substance abuse and sexual exploitation. You can find out more by visiting 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.

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 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 U.S. 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 enjoyable 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.

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 or 850-259-2057.

Learn more at: ajsgrayton.com.



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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 flavorful 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 pro-

vides 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 wait-staff 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.

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 Dining

Seven Tikis, One Fudpucker's

Bringing Wild Tiki Art to The Emerald Coast

Tiki, Tiki, Everywhere

In a delightful blend of art and culture, Fudpucker's Beachside Bar & Grill has added a tropical flourish to its popular Destin location with the unveiling of seven new custom-carved tikis by Aaron DeLuca, master carver and founder of Fat Boy Tiki. With each tiki representing a unique aspect of Fudpucker's character and community, DeLuca's latest creations offer a lively, immersive experience for visitors and tiki enthusiasts alike.

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 fa-

mous 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.



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Spellbound Father Fud

As the new tikis took shape, 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!

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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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Arts & Music

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 WOLFGAM

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 in 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 in-

strument 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.

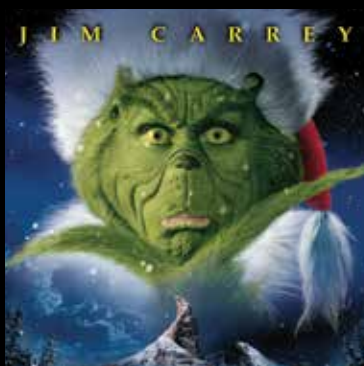
We honored Music of the Knights last year with the tribute to Sirs Paul McCartney, Elton John and Andrew Lloyd Webber. So, it was appropriate to flip the switch and pay tribute to the amazing female voices of our time and this set list is non-stop hit after hit that will feature amazing vocalists, including 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

Continued on next page



FILM IN CONCERT
The Grinch in Concert
Saturday, Dec. 14 | 7:30 PM
Destin-FWB Convention Center
TICKETS: FROM \$40 PER PERSON

Bring the whole family to experience *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* live with Sinfonia Gulf Coast performing the film score as the movie unfolds on screen. Relive this beloved holiday classic about The Mean One and rediscover the true spirit of the season.



BIG BAND HOLIDAY
Toast 'n JAM
SESSION
feat. **Morgan James**
Sunday, Dec. 8 | 10:30 AM
Henderson Beach Resort
TICKETS: FROM \$125 PER PERSON

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24
25
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CONVERSATION

continued from previous page

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 guests on a series that I curat-

ed 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 noth-

ing 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 programs 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 bud-

get 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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 Arts & Music

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.

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 learning 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 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. 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 and we will contact you. Visit our list of teachers at Studio237Music.com/all-teachers-listing or call (850) 231-3199 or text (850) 797-3546 and ask for Ray.



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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@raymond-james.com.

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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 insur-

ance 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 poli-



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 expensive 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.

cies 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.

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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, Fla., which is 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, we may have considered expanding our outdoor living spaces, but didn'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 it is hard to find that perfect color.

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 dimma-

ble LED lights to enhance the outdoor nightlife, integrated cassette housing, I call it the garage, which protects the awning fabric from weather damage, extending the life of the fabric and looks sleek when retracted. Each awning comes with a wireless remote and built-in wind sensors. Wind sensors are a necessity, because we never know when that gust of wind will appear. 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 simply enjoy the features which are included in our packages.

Another option to create an outdoor escape are motorized screens. With a custom, motor-

ized screen, you can increase your comfort and style, indoor and out. Lifestyle options include insect protection which prevents pesky insects from invading your space. Weather protection, creating an attractive defense to the elements, without hindering your view. Privacy protection, increasing privacy when you need it, while maintaining superior ventilation, outward visibility and the ability to retract the screens with the touch of a button. 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, just a click of a button, instant privacy. Or, if you wanted to upgrade that garage space with a motorized screen which allows that breeze to come in and creates privacy, 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 Solu-

tions, 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.trustees.com or email wecare@trustees.com and Beat the Heat!

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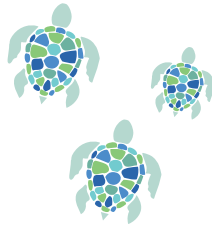
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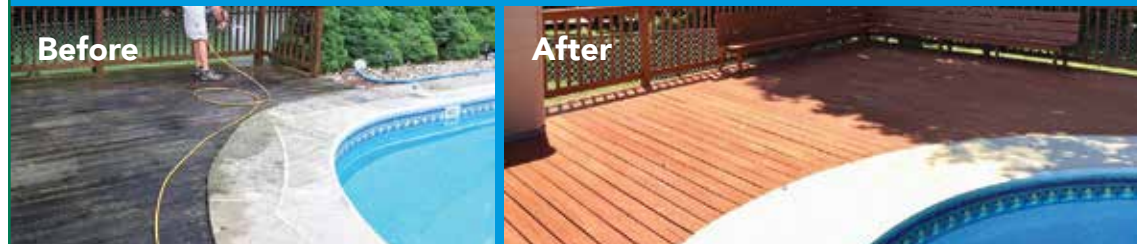
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